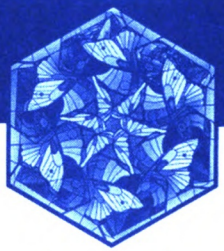
QUINBY *and* SON

WILLIAM HEYLIGER



QUINBY AND SON

By WILLIAM HEYLIGER

QUINBY AND SON
THE SPIRIT OF THE LEADER
DAN'S TOMORROW
HIGH BENTON
HIGH BENTON—WORKER

Fairview Series

CAPTAIN FAIR AND SQUARE
THE COUNTY PENNANT
FIGHTING FOR FAIRVIEW

St. Mary's Series

BARTLEY, FRESHMAN PITCHER
BUCKING THE LINE
STRIKE THREE!
THE CAPTAIN OF THE NINE
AGAINST ODDS
OFF SIDE

Boy Scouts Series

DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL
DON STRONG, PATROL LEADER
DON STRONG, AMERICAN

Lansing Series

QUARTERBACK RECKLESS
BATTER UP
FIVE YARDS TO GO
THE WINNING HIT
FAIR PLAY
STRAIGHT AHEAD

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
New York · London

MR. QUINBY GAVE THE ACCORDIAN AN EXTRA FLOURISH. "HOW'S THAT?"

[page 38]

QUINBY AND SON

BY

WILLIAM HEYLIGER

AUTHOR OF "HIGH BENTON,"
"DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: 1925 :: LONDON

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

IN RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION OF THOSE QUALITIES THAT MAKE HIM A MAN AMONG MEN, A SURGEON AMONG SURGEONS AND A FRIEND AMONG FRIENDS, THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

GORDON K. DICKINSON, M.D.

QUINBY AND SON

CHAPTER I

SPRING lay gently and softly over Springham. The town was fresh with green and fragrant grass, and the scent of early flowers filled the air. The season meant the beginning of warm and settled weather—barefooted time. But Springham, having passed out of the era of dirt sidewalks, had at the same time grown away from bare feet; and Bill Harrison, squirming hot toes within their confines of hot leather, leaned forlornly across a picket gate.

"'Lo, Herbie," he called.

Herbert Quinby, his back propped against the support of a porch pillar, raised one hand to his mouth and went through the motions of swallowing something from a glass.

Bill brightened. "'Nother party?"

Herbert nodded, and Bill pushed open the gate and came up the cinder walk. Whenever the Woman's Improvement Association gathered at Mrs. Quinby's home, there were always lemonade and cake left over. Bill dropped down upon the porch.

"What kind of cake?"

"Almond."

"Last time we had two pieces each. Think we'll get two pieces to-day?"

Herbert rose, leaned across the porch railing and peered through the curtained window. "One piece and a half, anyway," he said, and came back to his place. "Mrs. Busher's inside."

Bill Harrison sighed. A spider hung from a thread at one corner of the porch, and he fished through his pockets, found the stump of a pencil, and began to sketch the dangling insect on the porch floor. "She more than likes almond cake, doesn't she?"

"I don't know why you're always trying to draw bugs," Herbert complained.

A murmur of voices, a low laugh, came from the house.

"Pretty babies," said Mrs. Quinby with mock gravity in her voice, "always make me think of the time when people used to stop me on the street, and look inside the carriage at Herbie and tell me what a pretty baby *he* was."

A grin spread across Bill Harrison's face. "Herbie," he drawled, "they'd have a hard time proving that on you now."

Herbie shrugged his shoulders against the pillar. At fourteen his face ran mostly to freckles. His hair, thick and clustering, was honestly red, and his neck seemed to have stretched out a little

too fast for his body, so that his head looked like a great, flaming knob stuck upon a spindle.

"Can you imagine Herbie as a pretty baby?" Mrs. Quinby said with amusement.

"Ah, let's take a walk," Herbie said sulkily.

It was not that his mother's talk bothered him. He had all of a fourteen-year-old boy's contempt for looks. But the name "Herbie" had begun to rankle. It sometimes sent a shadow to his eyes and a droop to his mouth. More than once, of late, he had found himself picturing his companions addressing him as "Red." That would have had a manly, real-fellow sound. But Herbie. . . . He kicked a pebble from his path and trudged down the walk.

They walked through the warm spring sunshine, turning corners aimlessly, until their wandering steps carried them to Washington Avenue, the main street of the town. A burst of laughter drew their attention to a group of boys clustered halfway up the block. Bill's eyes lighted.

"Something's up," he said with satisfaction, "and we're just in time to see it."

They pushed forward, reached the fringe of the crowd and craned their necks.

A great, tawny man, his beard and head a wild tangle of hair, sat in a chair that was tilted back against the wall of a building. A crutch lay across his lap, and a stump—all that was left of his left leg—stood out stiff and straight.

"How about the time, Peg," one of the boys cried, "that you put the kerosene down Mr. Perriwinkle's well?"

Peg Scudder threw back his head and the thick muscles of his neck shook with his mirth. His rough bursts of merriment, the uncertain qualities of his temper, had more than once been told in Herbie's hearing; and so, though Bill Harrison pressed forward through the gathering, he himself held back.

"Blast me, but that was a lark," Peg cried. "Perriwinkle hopped about like a sparrow. 'You're a rowdy,' he said. 'And, mark me, you'll come to no good end.' 'Go on, you,' I said, 'or I'll drop you down the well, too.' He went tearing around to my house and told my Old Man."

"Did you get a hiding, Peg?"

"Oh, he was a hard one, was my Old Man," Peg answered in accents of admiration. "He lambasted me with the buckle end of a strap. That was the night before he got killed, and he lammed me good. 'That will hold you until I get back in the morning,' he said, but he never came back. Blast me, but that was a joke on the Old Man. And this Perriwinkle—his name was Herbie—stopped me on the street and said, 'Well, I suppose you'll go to the devil now.' Oh, he was a sweet one, this Herbie Perriwinkle. All he needed was a petticoat and ribbons in his hair. Regular little ninny."

Bill Harrison and the others were laughing, but Herbie drew back with a shudder. The brutality of the man's speech chilled his blood. He walked away. "Bill," he called once; but his chum did not hear him. He moved on. Another thought had taken possession of his mind. Herbie! Petticoats! Ribbons! His walk became a dispirited slouch.

A group of girls of his class, coming toward him on the other side of the street surveyed his slow progress and the patent dissatisfaction that sat upon him. Moved by some imp of mischief they began to chant in chorus:

"Herbie, Herbie—o! Herbie, Herbie—o!"

The treble of their united voices galled him. Cried thus aloud in the streets his name sounded unmistakably girlish. He quickened his steps; the shameful sing-song followed him. He ran, timing his steps and making each one a leap, as though this were some new game.

On fire with mortification he at last reached home. The visitors were gone. Evidently Mrs. Busher's appetite had failed her; there was more cake left than he had anticipated.

"Herbie," his mother called from the kitchen, "there's cake and lemonade there for you and Bill Harrison."

Herbie stared gloomily at the pitcher and the platter. His silence, with such a treat at hand, was unusual. Mrs. Quinby came to the doorway.

"Why, Herbie, what is the matter?"

"I hate it."

"You hate what?"

"My name."

"Herbie! What has happened to you? You were named after your uncle, and he was governor. . . ."

"Why wasn't I named after somebody who had a decent name?" he demanded recklessly.

The good humor left Mrs. Quinby's face. "Herbie Quinby, I don't know what in the world has been coming over you of late. You had better attend to the garden until your father comes home. We'll see what he has to say about this."

Gone was the prospect of lemonade and cake. Even while he was taking the gardening tools from the cellar he heard Bill Harrison whistling at the front gate, but gave no sign that the sound reached his ears. Through the hours that were left of the afternoon he hoed among the vegetables, working doggedly, not because the labor held a charm, but because the exercise gave an outlet to his tumult of emotions. The sun went down behind Camel-back Hill. The shadows of the growing crops lengthened toward the east. And then a step sounded behind him, and a longer, broader shadow stood beside his own.

"What's this Mother's been telling me, Herbie?"

Bitterness welled into his voice as he answered

and passionately recited his wrongs. Yet even as he spoke he felt that his father would say, "Nonsense, nonsense; there must be no more of this."

There was an interval of silence after he had finished.

"About those girls calling after you . . ." Mr. Quinby began.

The tone caused him to lift his head.

"I wouldn't give it a thought, Bert. That's just girl stuff. A fellow never pays any attention to girls."

"Bert!" The sound of it was sweet. There and then his father became a gorgeous personage, a king among men, and the seeds of hero worship were sown in the boy's soul.

In the days that followed a rich and fine intimacy sprang up between them. He learned things that were new, strange and romantic. His father had once been a baseball pitcher of great skill; there were newspaper clippings, yellow with age, in a scrapbook to prove it. Bert read these clippings time and again, and then took them out to Bill Harrison and to Dolf Muller.

"Your father was some pitcher," Dolf said admiringly, and found a remnant of a cracker in his pocket and ate it.

Bert's heart was filled with a glowing pride. When school reopened in September and he entered the eighth grade, a new world seemed at the same time to open to him. As soon as the study

lamp was lighted and his father would open the evening newspaper, he would bring his books to the same table. Together they would sit there, and often the paper would be laid aside so that the man could help him through his problems—mostly problems in arithmetic.

That winter some miracle of transformation worked its spell upon him. Suddenly his shoulders broadened, and he shot up a good two inches and graduated into long trousers. Yet, for the most part, he was unmindful of his growth; nor was he aware that the little town of Springham was spreading out and stretching its limbs. The weekly newspaper was sold by its aged proprietor to younger men, and blossomed as a four-page daily. The trolley line, long promised, at last came through from the big city twenty miles to the west. A power plant lifted a high, sooty smoke-stack over by the swift rush of the Springham River. The feeble street lamps at the corners gave place to electric lights. The railroad established a junction point and a roundhouse on the Camel-back Hill plateau. A contractor bought a block of ground on Washington Avenue and began to build brick stores.

And then came a time when the stretching growth of the town reached out and touched the boy's own hearthstone. No longer now did his father relax and scan the evening newspaper. The evenings were given over to letter writing, and

each day the mail man left letters and packages at the door. Bert felt obscurely that some change was impending. Night after night he went to sleep lulled by the indistinct murmur of his father's and his mother's voices from downstairs; and twice, in the morning, he found the dining-room table littered with papers closely covered with figures. Once he studied one of the sheets. Here and there, all over it, were dollar signs.

"Mother," he asked, "what's this?"

His mother took the papers and informed him, jestingly, that curiosity had once killed a cat. But he noticed that she put the papers away carefully. Something was afoot, and he was being barred from the secret. He resented it.

That night a problem in algebra baffled him. He appealed to his father for help.

"I'm busy," Mr. Quinby said absently. "You'll have to paddle your own canoe to-night, Bert."

There was no reason for him to be hurt; yet this was the first time he had come for help and had failed to find it. First, secrets from which he was barred, and now—this. A stubborn line formed around his mouth. He went back to his chair, closed his book and pushed it aside. The man, frowning over a letter he was writing, did not observe what the boy had done. Bert went sullenly to bed.

For two days the sullen mood marked him for its own. Then at the breakfast table, he found

that his father was to go into business for himself.

The boy sat up straight. "Going to open a store, Dad?"

"Yes. I've leased one of those new Washington Avenue places; I'll open as a men's furnisher. I've sold goods for other people long enough. I'm going to try my hand at selling for myself."

The announcement had an important sound, and the boy forgot the hurt he had been nursing. He had always envied boys whose fathers owned stores. Dolf Muller's father conducted a bakery, and Dolf's crumby pockets were always filled with cakes that he dispensed lavishly. Bill Harrison's father ran a grocery, and Bill never lacked for apples, and raisins, and prunes. Once they had all looked at a raw prune through a magnifying glass, and the glass had revealed walking things hidden from the naked eye. They had eaten prunes that day with the feeling that they were doing a desperate and hazardous deed. He remembered, too, the respect that had gone out to Bill the day he had taken them behind the counter and had let them dip their hands into the brine of the pickle barrel and fish about for the largest pickles. These things had the mark of power and affluence.

And now his own father was to open a store! He gave the news to Bill and to Dolf.

"I wish my father had a clothing store," Dolf

said enviously. "Then I would always have new ties, and new shirts, and new suits."

Bill Harrison grinned. "Wouldn't make much difference in you, Dolf. You'd still look like a bursting barrel."

"I don't look like a half-starved chicken," Dolf cried indignantly.

Bill's smile broadened. "Neither do I. I lack the feathers."

Bert experienced a greater sense of the importance of the undertaking. Washington Avenue began to see more of him than it had ever seen before. Flanked by Dolf and Bill he critically inspected the workmanship of the sign-painter who lettered "H. V. Quinby, Men's Outfitter," on the store windows. He counted the boards the carpenters built into shelves, and saw them fashion the chestnut rods for the clothes hangers. And he saw, too, through a window across the street, the moonish, inscrutable face of Old Man Clud surveying every step of the progress that was made.

"What's he so interested in?" Bert wanted to know.

Bill Harrison glanced at the window. "Who? Old Man Clud? Maybe he thinks your father'll be coming to him for money sometime."

The remark made no impression on Bert; he was absorbed in watching expressmen carry in the glass-topped show cases. In fact, he knew nothing of the man across the street save that people

said he slept in his office so that he would save the rent of lodgings and that sometimes, for weeks at a time, he was not seen at all.

He was still watching the expressmen when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Dolf and Bill nudge each other and draw away a step. A panting, asthmatic voice spoke at his elbow.

"Hello, boys. I see you're watching the creation of a new enterprise. That is good. Always be interested in business. The more business, the more prosperity. Everybody wants prosperity."

Bert looked around and saw Old Man Clud—it was the only name the town as a whole gave him. He was short and amazingly fat, and his skin had the sick yellow color that one sees on sour cream. His face was a tremendously smooth circle of smooth flesh—no mustache, no sign of a beard, no eyebrows; and though the day was chilly and raw, he was sweating an unhealthy sweat.

"Your father's business, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

The man wheezed an exclamation of pleasure. "I like to see a lad 'sir' his elders. It's a sign of politeness. Show me a polite lad and I'll show you one who will go far. It is easy seen that your manners have been taken care of. And might I inquire when this store will be opened?"

"In about ten days."

"Business," he panted, "is the life blood of a community. It is good to see it flowing so ener-

getically. No business, no money; no money, no progress. Let me see churches and business. Then you know that everything is all right. Men's souls and men's pocketbooks are being taken care of."

As abruptly as he had begun the conversation he ended it, and waddled across the roadway to the other side of the street. Bert saw him pass into the doorway of a frame building. A few minutes later he appeared at one of the windows. One fat hand reached out and drew down the shade.

"I wonder what he wanted?" Bert asked suspiciously.

"He gives me the creeps," Dolf shivered. "My father says that he's seen him on the coldest winter days and that he's always sweating. I guess he's got a lot of money."

"What business is he in?" Bert demanded. "There's no sign on his window."

"He lends money," Bill answered.

"My father says that people who lend money never need signs," Dolf said wisely. "There's always a lot of people trying to borrow."

Next day stock began to arrive in bewildering array, and Bert forgot Old Man Clud in the excitement of showing the treasure to his friends. They clambered about the store prying into boxes, cases and bales. His father, forever sorting, checking and counting, more than once had to

order them out of the way. And then Bill Harrison, stumbling, lurched into a carefully dressed dummy destined for one of the windows and sent it crashing to the floor.

"Bert," his father said sharply, "I'll have to ask you to do your playing in the street."

Bert reddened, and after a moment walked out of the store with Dolf at his heels. Bill, before following them, brushed the dummy with a whisk broom.

"I don't blame your father for getting sore," he told Bert.

"Your father doesn't get sore when we're in his store."

"N—no," Bill admitted honestly; "but we don't go running around knocking things over."

Bert's sensitive nature was not salved. He had been censured before his friends. He went home. At supper that night his father said:

"You'll have to stop fooling around the store, Bert. It doesn't look businesslike."

Fooling! And he had been so proud to display its wonders to Dolf and to Bill. He scowled down at his plate. Later, when his father had gone back to business, his mother tried to soothe him.

"Dad is having unaccustomed worries just now, Bert. You should be more considerate."

"He needn't have any worries about me," the boy said sourly. "I'll keep away. I know when I'm not wanted."

His mother tousled his hair. "Don't be a mule, Bert," she counseled.

Nevertheless, he did not go back; and Mr. Quinby, absorbed in the work, did not seem to miss him. The days passed and finally came the time when the store was to open. Leather souvenirs were to be given away that night, and Bert had promised Dolf and Bill that they should each have one. Early in the evening they came looking for him.

"Going down to Washington Avenue?" Dolf asked.

"No," Bert said shortly. He hoped they would not mention the souvenirs and was relieved when they avoided the subject. Yet, after they were gone, he felt that he had been belittled in their eyes.

Night came, and he rebelliously choked his natural desire to see the store in the glory of its new lights. Long after he should have been in bed he sat up in his darkened room, waiting. Between 10 and 11 o'clock his father came in.

"How was business?" his mother asked anxiously.

"Not what I expected." His father's voice was tired. "I wonder if I opened this store before the town was ready for it?"

The boy experienced a queer, baffling sense of satisfaction. "That's what he gets for chasing me," he told himself, and went to bed.

He was young, and moody—and he did not understand.

CHAPTER II

TIME moves rapidly and changes many conceptions—even in so small a place as Springham. Before two months had passed Bert was aware that he had suffered no personal tragedy because his friends could not make a lounging place of his father's store. The business did not hold the romantic possibilities of a grocery shop or a bakery. It could offer neither crackers nor pickles, cake nor cheese. The men's furnishing trade was bleak and barren to young and glowing imaginations. It was devoid of savory odors and barren to perpetually empty stomachs. There was something monotonous and prosaic, after the first novelty had worn off, in collars, and socks, and garters. Dolf and Bill soon lost interest, and he did not have to hold them off from coming to the place. Thus was his pride salved and saved.

He had vowed, with impetuous anger, that he would have nothing more to do with the store—but that, too, was subject to revision. The store had not disowned him. Now and then people would buy while on their way to the trains, and ask to have the packages sent home. His father

called upon him to make these deliveries. He felt awkward and cheap carrying small parcels through the streets.

"I don't see why we can't have an automobile delivery wagon," he grumbled.

"I can't afford it," his father explained. "I must watch pennies. There's enough worry to putting a business on its feet without adding the worry of paying for a car."

The boy was glum. "It takes a long time to walk around with packages."

"How about your bicycle? Say, Bert, why didn't we think of this before? I'll have a carrying tray fitted to the frame. That will help a lot."

Bert was sorry he had spoken. The bicycle had been his very own. Now the tray, to his mind, heralded it as no longer his, but part of a business that was advertising its cheapness. And then he saw the old town cobbler pedaling a bicycle and delivering his jobs, the shoes tied together by their laces and hanging over his shoulders. He took the tray from the bicycle.

"What's the matter?" his father demanded. "Are you ashamed to carry goods for me? You never come near the store unless I ask you to."

His father had noticed—at last. Contentment spread genially through Bert's veins. So he had made his father miss his presence. He felt that he had scored a triumph. His sky brightened. In the satisfaction of the moment he put the carrier

back on the bicycle and whistled as he tightened the nuts.

His father went back into the house. "I guess I was a bit rough on him," he said uncomfortably, "but he *has* been avoiding the place."

Mrs. Quinby's mind dwelt, for an instant, on the evening Bert had been told to stop fooling around the store. She had tried to smooth out the situation then; she said nothing about it now. Instead:

"Why don't you try paying him a dollar a week for making his deliveries?" she asked.

Mr. Quinby turned quickly. "Pay my own son for—"

Her hand fell with soft pressure on his arm. "Not in that spirit—just to make him feel that he has an interest in the business, that he's part of it. When I was a girl dad always gave the boys so much a month for their chores. He said it was part of the farm profits that they had earned. It gave them a feeling that the farm was theirs. Perhaps that is the reason why, with so many country boys going to the city, they have stuck to the old place and made it pay."

"Well," Mr. Quinby said doubtfully, "we'll try it—though there won't be any profits to speak of along Washington Avenue for a while."

Next morning Bert learned of the arrangement. He had a shrewd idea that his mother had had a hand in it; but this thought was swallowed up in

the contemplation of one whole dollar a week. Under the inspiration of this good news, his interest in the store was suddenly and rapturously quickened. He saw himself, after a time, receiving two dollars a week, then five dollars, then ten dollars. He built castles in the air with all the reckless ardor of an imaginative boy.

But he learned, before another week was out, that it was one thing to plan a reawakening of interest, and another thing to live it. By the time his first dollar had been earned and paid, the store had again become an uninspiring and dry exhibit of ties on their racks, shirts under polished glass cases, and collars in neatly stacked wooden boxes. The day the dummy had been knocked over something spontaneous had gone from him and could not be called back. He had grown accustomed to being out of the place, and the old charm of family possession could not be revived.

And he had grown accustomed to spending his evenings with Dolf and Bill, and no longer missed his father. Nights when there was nothing to deliver he and his friends would roam the town, speaking boastfully of the things that they would do when they were men, keeping to the dark or the lighted streets as the spirit moved them. Sometimes they went out to Camel-back Hill and saw the construction gangs, the pick and shovel men, rushing the work of laying the network of tracks that would form the spider web of a rail-

road junction yard. Under the white glare and the black shadows of the arc lights, the workmen seemed gigantic and unreal. Work cars, behind puffing engines, rolled up and down the grade, and brakemen, waving their lanterns, lightly swung on and off while the wheels were in motion.

"I'll bet we could do that," Bert said suddenly.

Dolf was doubtful. "Getting on might not be so hard, but how about swinging off?"

"The engine always slows down before it gets to the top of the hill. It scarcely crawls. That's the time to swing off."

Bill Harrison cocked his head to one side and surveyed the scene. "I'm going to try that some night," he drawled.

They knew that he was fooling. And yet, as the days passed, they began to speak about it, conjuring up the sensation of swinging aboard, feeling the air sweep past them as they clung to the step and the hand rods, imagining themselves dropping off with the ease of the trainmen. The risk began to wear the garb of enticing adventure.

Snow came about this time, sixteen inches of it in one fall. The spreading railroad yard was buried under a soggy blanket, and the boys ceased to go there and ceased to talk about the prospect of riding the cars. The weather left little to do, and Bert turned to his school books. In truth, they had been neglected of late and the monthly report he brought home that same week ran

mostly to 70's and 75's. His father studied it and was frankly displeased.

"This is bad," he said without preamble.

The boy thought that the wisest course was to say nothing.

"You had been getting around 90 in everything. Now you're just missing the line of failure. What's the trouble?"

Bert saw that he would have to make a defense. "Well, you used to help. . . ."

"That's a poor excuse," his father interrupted. "It's a sign of weakness. If I were the richest man in the world I could buy you houses, motor cars, yachts, jewelry, clothes, the watchful care of servants, but there would be one thing my money could not get you—knowledge. You've got to dig that out for yourself. Don't tell me you failed because I did not help you. You haven't been studying. Isn't that right?"

"I. . . . Yes," said the boy. He had suddenly decided to tell the truth about studying, anyway. Yet he felt that there was another angle over which he had had no control. If the evenings around the reading lamp had continued. . . .

"Why couldn't Bert bring his books to the store now and then?" his mother asked.

He flashed her a glance and knew, instinctively, that she understood.

"No reason in the world why he can't," said his father.

Yet other interests called—Bill Harrison was erecting a wireless—and four nights passed before he took some of his books down to Washington Avenue. His father, intently reading a trade paper, lifted absorbed eyes as the door opened, nodded a greeting as he saw who entered, and promptly went back to the printed page. Bert waited. By and by a customer came in, and on his heels a second. They held his father in conversation until almost nine o'clock. After that Mr. Quinby busied himself with checking up the day's sales.

Bert walked down to the door and stood there staring out moodily at the street. Across the way a light was burning in Old Man Clud's office, and a huge figure was blackly outlined on the drawn shade. But Bert was not thinking of the lender of money. His father had forgotten the nature of his errand. He might have reasoned that his father's mind had been centered on something else; it would have been simple to have called his attention to the lapse. Instead, with a sort of hurt obstinacy common to boys, Bert elected to remain silent and to view himself as one who had been wronged.

"Time to close up," said his father's voice.

They walked home together. The man was still held by some sober problem of his business and did not notice his son's silence. In the house Mrs. Quinby asked in a low voice:

"Did your father find time to help you?"

Bert gave her a glance and went up to his room.

He still held to his impression of martyrdom. Half undressed, he suddenly paused and got out his books, stubbornly resolved to fight his way without help. "I'll show them," he vowed, and plunged into the work. It gave him a sort of perverse satisfaction, a sorrow for himself, to think that he had to labor thus. It was long after eleven o'clock when he finished and went to bed.

That night's work gave him a sense of independence that was new and intoxicating. The winter was on in earnest, there was cold comfort in roaming the streets, and he turned to his own room as a haven. He deserted the family quarters downstairs. With the door closed the place was his castle and he was its king, even though its possessions of bed, chair, dresser, table and wall pictures were scarcely regal. Here he studied alone. The four walls took on a glamour and a personality he had never noticed before and began to reflect his moods and his humors. If he were gay, the place seemed to enclose happiness. Were he morose, the room grew gray. He reveled in its isolation and its impregnability.

From the start he had saved most of his dollar a week. The time came when he walked into the Springham Savings Bank and opened an account, duly impressed by the importance of the

moment. It was characteristic that he should display the bank book to Dolf and to Bill, but should show it to nobody at home.

The day he made his second deposit, Old Man Clud was just ahead of him in the line that ran to the receiving teller's window. The lender's overcoat was buttoned about him, he seemed cold, and yet an almost imperceptible dew of perspiration was faintly beaded on his fat cheeks. He handed in his pass book, and Bert saw the bills on top of it were many. The man's eyes never left the money while the teller counted it. Afterwards he walked as far as the bank lobby, paused, and drew a red memorandum book from his pocket. Into this he copied something from his bank record. It was as though he did not entirely trust the bank, but must have some private reckoning of his own. He was slipping the bank book into a pocket when Bert came along on his way to the street.

"Good afternoon, my young friend," Old Man Clud wheezed. "I see you are following the path of wisdom. The man with money ahead can snap his fingers at the world. He does not go to his bed at night worrying about what will happen in the morning. You may have heard people call me a miser?" Old Man Clud's glance was shrewd.

Bert shook his head. "No, sir."

The man laughed a silent laugh that shook his

rolls of soft flesh. "You'll hear it in time. I've noticed that those who call me names are usually the first to come around and whine for loans. The thrifty man is always held up to ridicule, but I have noticed that he has bread in his cupboard when others go hungry. Think of that every time you put away a dollar. And how is your good father's business progressing?"

"All right, sir."

"I rejoice to see industry win its reward. Work brings money; money brings security; security brings respect. People may not want to give you their respect, but they have to. You hold the whip hand. And may I ask how long you have been saving money?"

"Since my father began to pay me for delivering orders."

"Wise youth. He starts to save money the moment he begins to earn. You will go far. I said it the day I spoke to you in front of your father's store. I say it again. Believe me, my young friend, it is a wise course to pay proper respect to a dollar. Good day to you," and the money lender waddled away, all wrapped up in his greatcoat.

Bert was subtly flattered by the attention that had been paid him. Old Man Clud was a rich man —that, to the boy's idea, was established by the greenbacks that had gone through the teller's window. To be treated on terms of equality by a rich man was an experience not calculated to

make a boy think any the less of himself. Bert began to picture his fortune growing until in time it would compare favorably with the hoard of the lender. Nevertheless he was not above a boy's penchant for the odds and ends of attractive bargains. When he heard that a school companion had an accordion that could be bought for seventy-five cents, he set out to find the treasure, and viewed it with envious eyes. His fingers itched to hold it and play along its keys. In the end he bought it and took it home, and carried it up to his room. There, with the door closed and locked, he sat with a chair tilted back against the wall and surrendered himself blissfully to the instrument, and made the night hideous with tortured sounds.

By springtime he was able to play the accordion passably well. Then, as abruptly as it had ensnared his interest, its charm was gone. The nights were once more warm, and he, and Dolf, and Bill Harrison resumed their walks and turned their steps toward the railroad yard. It had grown tremendously in size over the winter. Long strings of freight cars ran up to, and down from, Camel-back Hill, and brakemen's lanterns made mysterious signals in the darkness.

"I said last fall that I'd have a go at those trains," Bill drawled. "I've been thinking it over. The last step of the last car is the place to make your try. If you miss there's no car behind to give you fits."

Dolf moved away a step. "Let's get back to town."

"Let's try it," Bill said suddenly. The lazy drawl was gone from his voice.

The challenge sent a thrill along Bert's spine. His blood quickened, and even the hesitating Dolf was stirred. Yet they both held back, eager to try the adventure, lured by the element of danger, daunted by the unaccustomed risk.

"Who'll do it second if I do it first?" Bill demanded.

The challenge could not be ignored. "I will," Bert said recklessly.

Dolf felt that they were looking at him and weighing his courage. His heart sank. "I will, too," he said, and wondered if they guessed how much he was afraid.

The headlight of an advancing locomotive sent silver ribbons of light ahead of it along the steel rails.

"Here comes my chariot," said Bill. He stepped out across the intervening tracks. They saw the engine pass him, saw his body lost in the darker background of the trains, saw the last car of the string approach—and then saw a form swaying on the step and holding to the handrails as the car went past.

"He did it," cried Dolf.

The hazard had been conquered and made to seem easy. Their fears were swept away and they

were eager to do the trick themselves, to stand squarely on accomplishment with their companion. Impatiently they waited for another train and for Bill. Bill came first, looming up out of the dark with quick strides.

"Shucks!" he said; "that was easy. You just catch the hand rods, reach for the step with your foot and swing up with the motion of the train. It's no trouble getting off at the top—the train almost comes to a stop. You're next, Bert. I'll ride up with you."

"There's only one last step," said Bert.

"I'm an experienced rider," Bill said whimsically. "I'll grab one of the middle cars. You get the car after me, Bert, and give Dolf the end. Here comes another chariot. We're off. No bumping into each other."

Bert was conscious of Bill above him and Dolf below. The clatter of the train appalled him of a sudden; the speed was greater than he had expected. Yet, as Bill began to run with the train, he ran, too. A car end overtook him. His hands found their grips. His foot got the step. For one dizzy instant he hung suspended; then he was up, hanging on with a desperate clutch, conscious that he was bumping and swaying, in danger of falling off, and conscious also of the intoxicating sweep of night wind across his face.

He got a firmer grip, a firmer foothold. His heart had ceased to thump. He looked ahead and

saw Bill riding on his perch. Behind, Dolf was hanging on and his coat was flapping. They had all made it. Bert gave a shout of exultation and rode up Camel-back like a voyager come to his own.

Bill had told them the truth—at the top the train's speed was down to a crawl. They dropped off and gathered in an eager group. Bert was the first to speak.

"That's what I call sport." His voice shook with excitement. "Are we going to do it again to-morrow night?"

"I am," said Bill. "Some day when I'm president of this railroad you fellows can write a book about how I got my start hanging on to freight cars up Camel-back Hill."

"We want to be quiet about this," Dolf cautioned. "If my father knew about this he'd hammer the tar out of me."

Bill grinned. "I guess I'd get dusted off a bit myself. Make it half-past seven to-morrow night."

They came down the hill and across the tracks. At the yard limits a bulky form blocked their path. Bert caught a faint gleam of brass buttons.

"What you fellows been up to?" demanded a voice of authority.

They had run foul of Patrolman Glynn of the Springham police. Dolf tried to melt into the

night and get away, but the same stern voice bid him halt. A flashlight snapped and shot forth a shaft of radiance. The gleam went across their hands, stained with the rust that gathers on iron and steel left exposed to the weather—hand rods, for instance.

"Hooking train rides," said the policeman. They made no denial. The light moved to their faces. They knew that he was identifying them; marking them for future notice. Bert shivered with the dread of possible arrest.

"What's the matter with you kids?" Policeman Glynn demanded. "Lost your senses? Want to get shipped to the undertaker's? Let me catch you down here again and I'll run you in."

So he wasn't going to arrest them, at any rate. Bert swallowed the lump that had tightened his throat and edged away. The light snapped out. He took to his heels and heard the patter of Bill's and Dolf's feet in his rear.

Not until they were safely back in town did they check their pace. For a block or two they walked in silence.

"I guess that ends our rides," Dolf said at last.

"I guess it doesn't," Bill Harrison retorted.

"But he said he'd lock us. . . ."

"Sure; if he catches us. How about going into the yard at a different place and coming out at that place? Shucks, he can't be everywhere at once, can he? He's got only two feet. We don't

want to stop just when we've learned how to do this, do we? We'll go down there to-morrow night, and if everything is all right we'll have some more fun."

"Suits me," said Bert, fortified by Bill's logic; and Dolf, after a moment of hesitation, threw in his lot with the others.

Somehow, in the light of another day, Bert found that his faith in Bill Harrison's reasoning was not so strong. Policeman Glynn's brass buttons had an ally known as "The Law." Bert's knowledge of this partnership was vague; but he knew that the law had a long, mysterious, far-reaching arm that nipped evildoers and lodged them in prison cells. He remembered hearing his father say that the law never slept. The more he pondered this the more disturbed he became. He had plenty of time to ponder for this was the day for his mother to entertain the Woman's Improvement Association, and he was glued to the porch with the uncertainty of how much of the layer cake Mrs. Busher might leave uneaten. Even apprehension could not disturb his healthy appetite.

Gladly, now, would he have postponed the night's adventure until sure that Policeman Glynn had ceased to keep a watchful eye on the railroad yards. Yet, in his boyish pride, he would have suffered martyrdom rather than admit that he feared to run the risk. The day shortened; the

women left the house. Moodily, after they were gone, he ate almond cake and swallowed lemonade.

"Bert," his mother asked, as the third slice disappeared, "where do you put it all? You'll be so stuffed that you'll have to swallow your supper with the aid of a shoehorn."

Nevertheless, he did ample justice to the evening meal. After his father had gone back to the store he climbed the stairs to his room, took down the accordion, and played it aimlessly with one ear cocked to catch the chime of the parlor clock downstairs. Presently the gong sounded half-past seven, and he put the accordion away.

"I'm going out, Mom," he called.

"Be in by nine," his mother called from the kitchen.

"Yes'm." Out on the porch he adjusted his cap; his hands were cold. And then he saw his father coming hurriedly down the street. One look at his father's face and he was seized with forebodings.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Quinby demanded.

"Out," Bert answered vaguely.

"Out where?"

"With the fellows."

"With the same fellows, I guess, that Officer Glynn saw you with last night. Were you going to the railroad yards? I thought so. Well,

you're going in and you're going to stay there." His voice suddenly changed. "Have you gone crazy? Do you want to get killed? Are you trying to worry your mother and me to death?"

Bert squeezed his way back through the door and made for the sanctuary of his room. Downstairs he heard the pitch of his father's voice, his mother's one cry of alarm, and his father's exasperated: "I don't know what's got into the boy. He was never like this before. I ought to flog it out of him." What his mother said in reply to this he could not catch. After an interval his father's step sounded in the lower hall. He held his breath. But the step went on to the porch, creaked on the wooden steps, and died in the distance of the street. So intently did he listen that he did not catch a lighter step behind him. His mother's voice startled him.

"Why did you do it, Bert? Didn't you know the danger?"

He tried to explain how easy it had been, but the look on his mother's face halted him.

"If it is so easy, Bert, why are so many railroad brakemen killed? Didn't you stop to realize how much this might worry us? Why did you do it?"

"I guess we just wanted to have some fun."

"Fun! Bert! Did you think it would be fun for us if anything happened to you?"

Her voice stabbed him with a realization of the folly of his escapade. "I . . . I won't do it

again," he said huskily. "Honest, Mom; I won't, I won't even go down to the yards."

He was a chastened boy when his mother left him. Outdoors a gentle spring rain had begun to fall, and he sat at the window and listened to its soft drumming on the porch roof. Almost imperceptibly, a melancholy mood settled over him. He reached for the accordion again, and from its stops drew forth a succession of weird and mournful notes.

A long time he played these aimless whimperings, and then the patter of the rain was drowned by a harsher sound. Somebody was running along the street. A sense of intuition told him that this was a call for him. Before he could reach the stairs his mother, with a catch in her voice, was calling up to him:

"Bert! Bert!"

He took the stairs by twos and by threes. Dolf, his clothing glistening with rain, stood in the hall. He was shivering and his hat quivered in his hands. Suddenly he began to cry.

"Run over, run over," he sobbed. "I was right there and I couldn't do a thing for him. Right over one leg. He lay there alongside the track and didn't say a word."

Twice Bert's lips moved before words came. "How did it happen?"

"The rain. The step was slippery. He was just pulling himself up when . . . when he fell.

Then I began to shout, and railroad men came, and they picked him up."

"Where is he now?" Mrs. Quinby asked. She was holding a handkerchief to her mouth, and shaking her head, and murmuring broken words.

"They sent for Dr. Elman, and when the doctor came Bill was put on a flat car, and the doctor got up with him, and then they started for the hospital in the city."

Run over! Those two words kept pounding through Bert's stunned mind. Maybe Bill might die. He knew that Dolf was going, still crying, still shivering, and that his mother had put his raincoat about the wet, miserable boy. But these things made little impressions upon him. Run over! His shocked mind tried to straighten out the confusion of a horrified thought. Then his mother, having piloted Dolf on his way, came back from the door.

"You see it now, Bert?" she asked.

He could only nod.

"Who first suggested this train riding?"

His face went white. "I don't know."

But he did know. He had been the first to suggest the possibility. When he got to his room he threw himself across the bed, and gripped the coverlet with his hands, and stared, wide-eyed, across the room. Bill Harrison with one leg, hobbling through life on a crutch.

"Just like Peg Scudder," Bert whispered hoarsely; "just like Peg Scudder."

CHAPTER III

USUALLY Mr. Quinby came home from the store by half-past nine. To-night the clock was almost at eleven before his latchkey sounded in the lock. Mrs. Quinby, who had been waiting in the dining room, went forward to meet him.

There were tired lines about the man's face, and stern lines about his mouth. "Does Bert know about Bill Harrison?" he asked.

"Yes. Dolf Muller came here. Dolf was almost hysterical."

"Humph! Too late for that now. I waited until Dr. Elman got back. Bill's leg is off above the knee. Elman says he stood the shock well. And if Glynn hadn't told me to-night what was going on, it might just as well have been Bert instead of Bill. I'm going to talk to that young man."

"Harry." Her hand stayed him. "Don't be harsh with Bert. He's promised me that he'll never go to the yards again."

"Humph! Ready to promise anything after the damage is done."

"No," said Mrs. Quinby. "He promised me before he knew that Bill had been hurt."

"That changes things a bit," Mr. Quinby said after a moment. The lines about his mouth had lost their iron. "That's the worst of kids; they never see the next minute or the next hour. That boy in the hospital is handicapped for life. Is Bert still up?"

"I don't know."

"I'll see."

Bert, still lying across the bed, started upright as the door opened and his father came into the room. His eyes asked a bleak question: "What are you going to do to me?" Something deep in the man softened at the boy's stricken attitude.

"Bert," he said gently, "I'm not going to scold. I guess you've learned your lesson. Thank God, you didn't have to learn it as Bill learned his."

The worry that had weighed down the boy for hours broke from him in confession, drawn out by his father's unexpected sympathy.

"It's my fault," he choked, "that Bill's leg is gone. I was the one to talk of jumping trains. He'd never have thought of it if it wasn't for me."

In an instant Mr. Quinby had his hand on the boy's knee. "You mustn't let this prey on your mind. Blaming yourself won't give Bill back his leg. None of you stopped to count the cost—and Bill paid. It might just as well have been you or

Dolf. After this, whenever you start on a new adventure, ask yourself: 'Is this wise, and would I tell about it at home?' That sort of questioning will keep you out of a lot of trouble."

Yet the boy's face remained glum. The man saw that he must rouse him from his depression. The accordion was where Bert had laid it at Dolf's coming. Mr. Quinby picked it up and inserted his hands in the straps.

"I used to be able to tease one of these things," he announced. "Didn't know that, did you? What will you have? Call your tune."

Bert showed a spark of interest. "Can you play 'Turkey in the Straw?' "

"I could—once," said the man, and began to pick out the melody.

"Must have been a long time ago," said Bert, and gave a half-hearted grin.

Mr. Quinby settled back and warmed up to his work. His fingers began to find the keys. Mrs. Quinby came upstairs and stood in the doorway.

"It's late," she reminded him. "You'll have the neighbors throwing shoes in the window."

"Not if they know good music," Mr. Quinby chuckled.

"Huh!" said Bert. "Call that music?"

Mr. Quinby gave the accordion an extra flourish. "How's that?"

"Fierce," said the boy.

His father threw back his head and sang:

Turkey in the straw,
Turkey in the straw;
Funniest thing I ever saw,
They just played the same old time and danced
Turkey in the straw.

"It sounds better when you just play the music," Bert said, and laughed at his father's look of comic dismay. As for Mr. Quinby, he had succeeded in arousing the boy's spirits and he put the instrument down. Bert walked over to the window. The rain had ceased, the stars were out, and the night seemed to hold a greater peace.

All the boy's interests for the next five days centered on a doctor's house set down among towering maple trees in the heart of the town. He found that each morning Dr. Elman motored to the hospital. Leaning against the trunk of one of the trees he would watch the road and wait; sometimes on a rising tide of hope, sometimes in the cold clutch of a great fear. Usually, about noon, the doctor's dusty car would roll up to the curb and stop. Bert, edging away from the tree, would grip his courage as the man came up the walk.

"How's Bill?" he would ask.

"He's holding his own," the doctor would answer. He was a gruff man, not given to wasting words.

On the sixth day the report varied.

"He'll pull through," Dr. Elman said. "Youth —good constitution."

"He'll pull through!" Then all those other reports had meant that there was danger that Bill, the whimsical, the droll, would sink away into the Great Silence. Bert stood there motionless near the tree for many minutes.

A week later his father brought home momentous news.

"If you and Dolf want to see Bill, Dr. Elman will take you to the hospital to-morrow. Be at his office no later than nine o'clock."

Bert was waiting at his old tree twenty minutes before the time, and Dolf arrived shortly afterwards, looking as though he had been squeezed and pushed into his carefully brushed clothes. They stood around and watched the house. By and by Dr. Elman appeared, opened the garage doors, and backed the car down toward them.

"Rear seat," he said. "Don't touch that bag on the floor. Valuable instruments."

On any other occasion they would have enjoyed this ride through a fair country blooming under the touch of spring. They talked in hushed tones until they came to the city, and then their voices ceased entirely. Through a traffic maze of lurching trucks, clanging trolleys and speeding automobiles Dr. Elman wormed his car until at last it swung up a wide concrete driveway to a cool-looking building of gray stone.

"The hospital," Dolf said in an awed whisper.

They followed the doctor inside, walking close

together as though seeking mutual courage. Their nostrils quivered to a combined odor of ether and iodoform—an odor that, once inhaled, is forever afterwards known as the hospital smell. Nurses in crisp, starched uniforms swished past them on noiseless feet. An attendant wheeled a stretcher bed down a corridor. They looked about them with apprehensive attention and kept at Dr. Elman's heels, up to the second floor and into a room.

"Hello, Bill," said the doctor; and now, all at once, his voice was gentle as a woman's.

A head moved on a pillow. Tired eyes lighted with a spark of interest.

"Hello, fellows," said a wan voice.

So this was Bill—this white, pinched face. Bert stared at the bed in fearsome fascination. The coverlet showed the outline of one full leg, and another outline that ended with awful suddenness.

"Come," said Dr. Elman; "let Bill get a good look at you. Sit down."

"Better not do it, Dolf," Bill said with just a trace of the old drawl. "You'll burst something sure."

Dolf grinned sheepishly. Bert felt the doctor's elbow in his ribs, saw the man's exasperated frown, and tore his eyes away from the bed and its mute story.

The conversation ran in spurts. Bill did not

say much; he seemed too weary for the effort of sustained talk. But he was enjoying their visit. Shadows of smiles ran across his mouth at some of Dolf's recitals of what was going on in Springham. When Bert spoke of their class in the school, and of the coming graduation, he looked at him but did not seem to see him. A nurse came in, busied herself with his pulse and temperature, called him "Old Warrior," smoothed his pillow and departed. Dr. Elman looked at his watch.

"Got to go, Bill," he said, with the same gentleness. "You're not the only chap in the world calling for a doctor."

They stood up to leave. Dolf and the man went through the doorway, and Bert took a quick step back toward the bed.

"I didn't quit that night," he said. "Policeman Glynn told my father. I was kept in."

Bill stared steadily up at the ceiling. "I wish I had been," he answered.

Bert went away with the feeling that, at the last moment, he had said the wrong thing.

The ride back to Springham was as silent as the ride out had been. Dr. Elman had some town visits to make, and they left his car on a Washington Avenue corner. Peg Scudder, sunning himself in his sidewalk chair, stuck a crutch under one armpit, pulled himself erect, and hobbled toward them.

"Hey, you!" he roared. "Blast your hides,

what's your hurry? Been up to the hospital to see that fellow that got clipped?"

Bert was a year older and had lost much of his fear of that powerful body and tawny head. Yet he shrank away as the man came too close.

"We just got back," said Dolf.

"When you go back again, just pass him the word to come and see Peg Scudder. Us one-leggers ought to stick together."

"I'll tell him, Mr. Scudder," said Dolf, and Peg leered through his tangle of hair. It wasn't every day in the week that some one honored him with the title of mister.

A month later Bill Harrison came back to Springham. Bert had prepared himself for the crutch; but the sight of his friend pegging along the street was a hard shock. Examination days came and went, and Bert learned that he had passed and had qualified for the Springham High School. The afternoon of graduation day he spent with Bill.

"I'll have to take my eighth grade over again," Bill said listlessly, and moved his stump of leg. "That's one year this thing has cost me already."

All during the graduation exercises Bert sat on the auditorium platform and thought of a boy who should have been there. But next day and in the days that followed, this thought was dulled. There was much to be done that summer. His father's business, after a disappointing start, and

months of uncertainty, was at last coming into its own. This dawn of prosperity was reflected in many ways. More stock came in; there were orders to deliver. He was kept, it seemed, in a ferment of industry—polishing the glass of the show cases, dusting the shelves, and from day to day unpacking shipments and putting them away. Every so often he went to the bank, and the sum of his money on deposit grew. From time to time he caught glimpses of Old Man Clud, but their paths did not cross and they held no speech.

After a month the work began to pall on him, and he chafed at the periods that confined him to the store. Dolf Muller worked only on Saturdays in his father's shop. Bill Harrison, with his one leg, was loafing away the summer. Bert began to feel cheated out of good times. Turning his complaint in his mind, he decided that his weekly allowance was too small.

"One dollar doesn't seem so much when you've worked all week for it," he told his father the next Saturday.

Mr. Quinby, busy, missed the shot, and the boy went home with the dollar in his pocket. For the first time it seemed an insignificant sum.

The incident lingered in his mind. He took to muttering to himself, and his thoughts grew sulky and obstinate. And then the same accordion that had brought him and his father so close the night

of Bill's accident, sent them as far apart as they had been before.

Why Bert brought the instrument to the store he did not know. Perhaps he had some random feeling that it would soothe tedious hours; perhaps an unconscious wish for some of the glamour he had found at home behind the locked door of his room. Mr. Quinby, with a note falling due, went across the street to the bank, and Bert was left alone.

His father's absence grew prolonged; no customers came, and the boy began to yawn. In this idle moment he took the instrument out from under a counter and began to toy with its keys. At first the melody he essayed was subdued. Gradually, under the spell of enchantment, he lost all sense of time and of place. The notes grew clearer, louder. He closed one eye, cocked his head to one side, and surrendered himself to rhythm and played with happy abandon.

A voice of steel brought him back to earth.

"Bert!"

His father, striding into the store through a knot of small boys who blocked the entrance, brought the music to an abrupt end. The small boys lingered, hoping the entertainment would be renewed.

"I thought I could step out for a moment without having you turn the place into a side show," Mr. Quinby said abruptly. "How do you think

it looks to have a boy sawing away on an accordion in a first-class store and congregating a crowd of dirty-faced children? Do you think it's businesslike?"

Bert had reddened. "I . . . I just got playing, and then I forgot."

"Forgetting doesn't help a business. Put that thing away. I'll take it home to-night."

"I'll take it home now," Bert said. He ate a moody supper. He did not tell his mother what had happened, but she, accustomed to his mercurial spells of good temper and bad, knew that something had gone amiss. That night she questioned her husband.

"Bert has a bee buzzing him," she said, "and by all the signs I think it's stinging. Did anything happen at the store?"

Mr. Quinby explained the transgression and was surprised to find that, after a few hours, it had lost a bit of its heinous aspect. Mrs. Quinby looked thoughtful.

"Of course he didn't think," she said. "You can't put an old head on fifteen-year-old shoulders. When Bert explained that he had forgotten, it was his way of saying he was sorry. You know Bert. If he thinks he's making amends and is rebuffed, up bobs that distressing pig-headedness and you can't move him."

"I guess you're right," the man said ruefully. "I seem to have a genius for rubbing that lad the

wrong way. I was angry. You'd have been angry, too."

"I know." She was silent a moment. "He's worked hard this summer."

Mr. Quinby nodded. "Maybe I ought to jump his allowance. That would cheer him up."

"Perhaps. . . ." Mrs. Quinby hesitated. "Perhaps it would be better if you gave him a hint that you didn't mean to be so sharp. . . ."

"Good Heavens! Do I have to apologize to my own son? It isn't as bad as that, is it?" Mr. Quinby laughed. "He'll be the happiest kid in Springham when he gets two dollars next Saturday instead of the one he expects."

But Bert showed no particular emotion. He counted the money, counted it again to make sure he had not made a mistake, said a short "Thank you," and was gone. A week ago the increase would have fluttered his heart.

"I can't make head nor tail of that boy," Mr. Quinby complained to his wife that night. "At his age I'd have thought twenty-five cents a fortune. He took the two dollars as casually as though he could pick notes off the sidewalk any time he wanted to bend his head. What's getting into the boys of to-day?"

Mrs. Quinby said nothing. She felt that a word of regret would have accomplished more. She knew the boy.

And so the summer ran to its end, and the

school reopened, and Bert went off with Dolf one fine morning to begin his life at Springham High. Bill Harrison, so expert now that he needed only one crutch, tapped his way to the grammar school to once more begin the eighth grade.

For Bert high school opened the doors to a new and a wondrous world. Study periods wore the gloss of novelty and had an enticing appeal, particularly as they promised to shorten the hours he would need to spend with his books at home. Reporting to different rooms for different periods gave him a sense of importance and a feeling of maturity; nor was this new dignity lessened by the first mass meeting of students in the auditorium where the faculty coach and the captains of the baseball, football and basket ball teams all made speeches. He joined the Athletic Association and found that there were many school clubs and societies that promised companionship and diversion. High school, he decided, was going to be distinctly worth while.

And then it occurred to him that, though he might enroll himself with many school organizations, he could never be sure of free time in which to attend the meetings. He still had his tasks at the store, and his hours were uncertain. Some afternoons there was much to do; some afternoons there was nothing. As a matter of fact scarcely one of the societies interested him—high school life was too new for him to have yet se-

lected avenues of fancy—but he figured himself barred and was correspondingly resentful. He grew to hate the sight of bundles and packages.

"I'm a slave," he confided darkly to Bill Harrison.

"Oh, rats!" Bill said impatiently. "You've got two legs and Peg Scudder doesn't pester you every time he meets you."

Bert had football, too, had he stopped to count his assets. Not that he turned out for the football team—he was too young and too light. But here time was elastic. If he came to the field at three-thirty o'clock, practice or game was ready to start. If he did not arrive until four o'clock or later, practice or game was still here. In spite of his gloomy view of his situation he enjoyed many rousing afternoons, and even achieved two trips with the eleven to see it play out-of-town games.

Winter came, held Springham in bonds of ice, and by and by began to release the cold strangle of its grip. On a day of thaw when melting ice dripped steadily from every tree and bush and house roof, and when running snow water slushed in the street gutters, Dolf met Bert in the main corridor of the school.

"The moving picture screen is up in the auditorium," he announced.

Bert made a wry face. "Another lecture. Don't they ever get tired having a lot of old windbags tell us how to clean our teeth, and how to

cross the street safely, and how to stand straight?"

"This fellow's going to talk about butterflies."

Butterflies! It couldn't be worse. Bert threw up his hands in a gesture of tragic resignation and went along the corridor to his first period room.

An hour later an alarm of bells in the halls summoned the students to the auditorium. Bert went in with his class, settled into his seat, and gazed at the stage with an air that said, "You can't make me like this talk." In front of the screen a man whom he had never seen before sat talking to the principal. He was a tall man, loosely hung together, and he wore heavy, prominent, shell-rimmed glasses.

"I know that kind," Bert decided. "He talks through his nose."

The last of the students entered, the doors were closed, the orchestra leader tapped twice with his baton, and the music ceased. The principal stood up, and began to talk, but Bert paid no heed. He heard the name "Thomas Woods," a burst of applause, and then the stranger was on his feet walking down to the footlights, looking even more awkward now than when he had been seated.

"They call me," he said, " 'the Butterfly Man.' Some of you may be wondering why a fellow as big as I am doesn't tackle somebody his size, and not be pestering a little butterfly. Well, that goes to show that you don't know much about butter-

flies. You go chasing one of those beauties, and the first thing you know he has you in the brush, and then you get into some briars, and after a while you come out and look at yourself and you wonder whether you dressed yourself that morning or whether that was all the trousers you had on when you started out. Many a time I've felt like taking a handkerchief out of my pocket, and waving it at a butterfly, and telling him that I'd sign a peace treaty if he'd only show me how to get out of there."

At least, Bert admitted grudgingly, this Butterfly Man did not talk through his nose. The auditorium was laughing; it had been won; but Bert refused to unbend. He began to whisper to Dolf.

"Shut up," Dolf said shortly. "I want to hear this."

Bert retired into himself and refused to pay attention to the address. Presently the lights snapped out, a moving picture machine began to grind with a soft whirr, and a butterfly, fluttering gorgeous wings, appeared upon the screen. This, at least, was interesting, and for fifteen minutes Bert watched pictures of the insects come and go. Then the lights were on again, the pictures were done, and the talk was ended. At that moment Bert began to suspect that he had cheated himself out of something good—but it was too late. His mother would have understood. She

had a shrewd knowledge of his mulish moments.

Spring came on the heels of the Butterfly Man's visit, and spring brought baseball. Bert turned out for the nine, and, in what time was at his disposal, practiced faithfully. Weight did not count for so much in baseball, and he thought that he might have a chance. But after a few weeks he saw that he would not make it. Day by day he got less and less of the work—more valuable material claimed the coach's attention—and at last the time came when he was not called forth at all.

It was then that class teams were organized, and he was assigned to play second base for the freshmen. This was his moment of glory, and he depended on his bicycle to make sure that the moment did not fade. Each day he brought the wheel to the school and left it at the rear of the building. As soon as classes were over for the day he made haste to reach the store, and the orders awaiting delivery were peddled madly about the town. His one thought was to finish and get back to the athletic field.

Luck was with him. Four times his team took the field to win or lose, and four times he was there to start the game. At the end of those four contests, the freshmen and the juniors were tied for first place, each team having won three games and lost one.

"And next week we play the juniors," Dolf said.

"You certainly won't catch me missing that game."

Bert did not wish to miss it, either. The fate of the freshmen nine loomed in his imagination as of more importance than the success or failure of the school team. For to the school team he was a nobody, not even an unlikely substitute; while to the freshman nine he was a vital, necessary and stimulating cog. There was talk in the school that the game might settle the Class League Championship. Bert began to dream of a second-baseman who forever stood over his bag and tagged out daring runners.

His constant hope was that, when the game came, he would find the afternoon free. But the luck that had sponsored him all season deserted him that day. A crowd was gathering on the athletic field even as classes were dismissed. He raced from the school to the store. There were no packages waiting on the far end of the counter. His heart grew light.

"Anything for me?" he called. It was merely a perfunctory question, a part of each afternoon's procedure.

"That you, Bert?" Mr. Quinby came from behind a partition at the rear of the store. "There's a suit of clothes to go to Mrs. Busher's. You know the place, on Fairmount Avenue."

Bert's face fell. Fairmount Avenue was some distance from the field. "Couldn't I deliver it before supper? We have a game to-day. . . ."

"He wants to wear it to-night; they're going into the city on the five-fifty train. Mrs. Busher telephoned that she'd wait in until you brought it."

Well, if he had to deliver it, the quicker the better. "Which one?" he asked. He was impatient to be gone.

"The tailor at the corner has it. Coat had to be pressed and the trousers shortened. He won't hold you up. He promised it for three o'clock."

Bert rode to the corner, left his wheel propped by one pedal against the curbstone, and bolted into the shop.

"You got a suit here for Mr. Quinby," he announced.

The tailor, working in his shirt sleeves, with a tape measure end falling over each shoulder, had a mild eye and an unhurried manner. "Working on it now," he said. "You're not in a hurry, are you?"

Bert groaned. A clock, ticking noisily on the wall, said twenty minutes past three. The game was to start at half-past. Of course, there was usually some delay. . . .

"I'm in a terrible hurry," he said. "Got to get back to the school. Rush it, won't you?"

"Sure, sure. Why didn't somebody say this was a rush job?"

"It was marked for three o'clock."

"It isn't much after three. Don't crowd me

now; it makes me nervous. I'll rush it, but don't crowd me."

Yet, for all the tailor's protestations of speed, his motions were leisurely, for he was a man not given to the excitement of haste. The hands of the clock crept around—twenty-five after, half-past, twenty-five minutes of four.

"There," said the tailor, "that's done, and no thanks to your fidgeting. Now to wrap paper around it and tie it. . . . Hey! It isn't tied. You'll be losing the vest or something and. . . ."

But Bert was gone. One instant of getting set in the saddle, and then he was off, dodging recklessly through the traffic of Washington Avenue. Twice he turned corners at a pace that held the bicycle at a perilous angle. Arrived at his Fairmount Avenue destination he did not bother this time to prop the wheel against the curb, but let it fall as he stepped from it. He ran up the walk to the house, and pressed hard on the button of the electric bell.

No answer. Time was flying. He rang the bell again, and then hastened to the rear of the house. There was no bell here, so he rapped with his knuckles against the glass of a kitchen window.

"Boy! Boy!"

He located the call. It came from a woman leaning out an upstairs window of a house two doors above.

"Are you looking for Mrs. Busher?"

"Yes'm."

"I saw her go out about half an hour ago."

So this time that he had had to give had been wasted, after all. A tide of anger rose in him and the hot fever of it dried and choked his throat. He righted the bicycle, kicked a toe-clip into place, and rode back to the store. A clock in a jeweler's window told him that it was five minutes past four. His father was out on the sidewalk scanning the street.

"You'll have to go back," he said. "Mrs. Busher just 'phoned. She said she had stepped out for a moment."

Bert looked straight ahead with a hard stare.

"Can't be helped," his father said. "I'm sorry; it's one of the things that thoughtless persons inflict upon business men. Hurry and you may be in time for your game. You needn't come back here. Go right to the field."

So the boy rode again to Fairmount Avenue. He rang the bell, and then rang again, holding his finger on the button. Footsteps sounded within the house. Even his inexperienced ears, reading the sound, could tell that it indicated outraged dignity. The door was thrown open and he was confronted by Mrs. Busher.

"Must you tear down my house," she demanded, "because I do not drop everything and run when you ring? What do you mean by such conduct?"

"I was here before and nobody answered," he said darkly.

"Oh, you were?" Her tone was sarcastic. "And must I ask every tradesman's boy whether I can step out of my own house? If I were not a friend of your mother's I would march that suit right back. How dare you be impertinent? Your father will hear of this. Mark me!"

Bert gave not the slightest thought to her threat as he rode out of Fairmount Avenue. When he reached the field the fifth inning was on, the juniors led, 8 runs to 5, and another boy was playing in his place. He found Dolf and Bill Harrison together and sat down beside them. He was full of his grievance and explained the run of circumstances that had barred him from the game.

"Mrs. Busher!" said Bill, and shook his head. "She deals at our store. She's a Tartar."

Bert sat and watched the progress of the game. The juniors continued to score, and the contest lost interest. A magazine stuck out of Dolf's pocket, and he reached for it. The magazine was devoted to business, and in one column he found a short article that caught his wandering attention:

SELLING UMBRELLAS

The Star Dry Goods Company hung an open umbrella in a show window, played water over it from a stationary hose, and demonstrated the

rain-shedding qualities of the article. Umbrella sales showed a 200 per cent increase that week.

The game ended, the victorious juniors cheered the crestfallen freshmen, and the crowd broke up. Bert gave the magazine back to Dolf. A picture of the umbrella, hanging with the water cascading from it, lingered in his imagination. It had the thrilling qualities of a stunt, and he wondered how the spectacle would look in his father's window.

"What's the matter?" Bill Harrison asked. "You don't look so much like a sour pickle now."

"Oh, what difference does it make if I missed the game?" Bert answered. It was one of the sudden transformations of mood that happen to boys. Umbrella and hose! And maybe twenty-five pounds of sugar under the umbrella to show that no water was coming through. He was sure that *that* would make people stop and stare. It had the appeal of a circus.

He was upstairs, washing, when his father came home for the evening meal. A word reached his ears, and he paused with his face half-dried. That word had been "Busher."

"Sure," he muttered. "She can make me go back twice, but it's a crime if I ring her bell so she'll hurry." He snapped the towel back on its rack and came downstairs with smoldering eyes.

"What happened at Mrs. Busher's to-day?" his father asked with ominous quietness.

"She gave me fits."

"For pounding at her bell?"

"I didn't pound. I just rang it so she'd hurry."

"She says you were impertinent."

"I wasn't." Bert's denial was made indignantly. "She lit into me and I said she wasn't there when I came before. Maybe she wouldn't be there the second time. How was I to know? Anyway, she's always grouching about something. . . ."

"That will do," his father cried. "Don't you know, haven't you learned, that a business man must please his customers? He's got to give service; if he doesn't give it somebody else does. Mrs. Busher told me she was of a mind to take her trade elsewhere. Do you imagine that customers are so easy to get that I can afford to throw away the ones I have? I've been watching you, Bert. I don't like the way you come to the store and sulk if there's anything for you to do. How do I know how many people you've treated as you've treated Mrs. Busher to-day? I see now that there's only one thing for me to do. I'll put an ad in the paper to-morrow and advertise for a clerk. I suppose I'll have to pay him fifteen a week, but that shouldn't worry you . . . and it probably will not. You'll have your afternoons free for your games."

Part of the climax of that speech startled Bert. He said the most unfortunate thing he could have said.

"Fifteen dollars a week! Why, I got only two dollars."

"Must I pay my own son dollar for dollar to help me as though he were a stranger?" Mr. Quinby asked bitterly.

Supper that night was something of a strained meal, with Mrs. Quinby trying to maintain a flow of conversation and Bert silent in his chair. The boy had not meant to imply that he should have been paid more, but that fifteen dollars was too much for a clerk. Ordinarily, if he were misjudged, he sulked into injured dignity; but the thought of the fifteen dollars appalled him and urged him to make clear his position. Twice he prepared to speak, but each time a look at his father's face stopped him. His father was in no mood for explanations.

"Mother," he said that night when they were alone, "I didn't mean it that way." He felt confidence in speaking to her.

"Why didn't you say so?" she asked.

He looked down at the floor and made no answer.

"Your father has worries, Bert, that you know nothing of," she said gently. "He'll realize when he thinks it over that you didn't mean it that way."

The boy was comforted. Later, working in his room on his studies, he suddenly sat bolt upright. The umbrellas! If he told his father about that idea wouldn't it show that his thoughts had not

been as selfish as his father had believed? He pictured his triumphant telling of the plan, visioned his father's face alight with interest, and forgot his books entirely in his happy anticipation of the climax.

He did not speak of the subject until morning. After breakfast he followed his father out into the hall.

"I read something in a magazine about a dandy way to sell umbrellas," he began eagerly. "You hang an umbrella in the window, and have water from a hose pouring over it. And you can put sugar under the umbrella to show how dry the umbrella keeps things, and. . . ."

"Becoming suddenly interested in the business, aren't you?" Mr. Quinby broke in.

"Why . . . why. . . ." Bert had not expected such a question. His mind, set on the tale he had to tell, could not shift with adroitness to explanation.

"Humph! Beginning to worry about the two dollars you'll miss each Saturday," his father said and took his hat and went out. He was a man disappointed in his son, and his disappointment had blinded him. He did not understand,

CHAPTER IV

THE new clerk's name was Samuel Sickles. Saturday week the five-forty train from the city dropped him off at the Springham station—a neat, well-brushed, alert young man of nineteen who was labeled "strictly business." He came to the store, introduced himself to Mr. Quinby, and set out forthwith to find lodgings. By nine o'clock he had engaged room and board with a family living not far from Washington Avenue, and had left a notice at the station to have his trunk delivered. That much accomplished, he came back to the store and immediately began to look over the shelves and locate the stock.

Mr. Quinby surveyed him with something of curiosity. "Sickles," he said at length, "how did you learn that I was in need of a clerk?"

"I wrote to several wholesale houses and asked if they knew of a small, growing store in a small, growing town that might be able to use my services."

"Humph! I had an idea that you hadn't seen my ad in the Springham paper. Ordinarily the small town boy goes to the city. You left the city

to come to a small town. How much were they paying you there?"

"Twenty dollars."

"And you came here for fifteen dollars. Why?"

"I can live as well here on fifteen dollars as I could in the city on twenty. I figured that this would be a better place for advancement. In the city a clerk is a small potato. In the small town he can be a real person and grow with the town. What time do we open in the morning?"

"Quarter to eight."

"Would you mind giving me a key? I'll be around about seven o'clock. If you want to get ahead you've got to get an early start. I can have everything cleaned up for the day by opening time."

Mr. Quinby gave him a key to the front door. Monday morning he swept the floor, dusted the show cases, and swept the sidewalk. When Mr. Quinby arrived he was standing with alert attention behind the counter, business from the top of his carefully brushed hair to the soles of his feet.

"Were you in the habit of sweeping the sidewalk where you worked in the city?" Mr. Quinby asked.

"No, sir." Sam seemed surprised at the question. "But I read Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. He tells how he was not above wheeling his supplies through the street and so got a reputa-

tion for industry. If people see us sweeping the sidewalk every morning they'll think our store must be pretty clean inside if it's so clean outside. That's good advertising."

"Who told you it was good advertising?"

"I've been reading some advertising books."

Mr. Quinby looked the clerk over with an astounded gaze. He had never before met anybody just like him. The lad had a viewpoint beyond his years. He was like some young owl that had grown abnormally grave and prematurely wise.

He had, it developed, made one sale that morning. A man who had left home without a handkerchief had stopped to purchase one, and had departed with two.

"I sold him," Sam explained to Mr. Quinby, "on the theory that if he forgets a handkerchief one morning he'll forget one another. So I sold him one to carry to-day, and one to leave in his desk for the next time he forgot. And while I was sweeping the sidewalk a fat man from across the street came over to talk to me. He seemed to be very curious about how I came to hold this situation. He didn't get much information out of me. People who tell all they know don't get very far in the world."

"That was Old Man Clud," Mr. Quinby said.

"What's his business?"

"He's a money lender."

Sam's tones when he answered were decisive. "He and I won't do any business. I neither lend nor borrow." When his luncheon hour came he retired to the rear of the store with a box of crackers and a bottle of milk and brought out a book. Its title was *The Secrets of Business Success.*

That night, at the supper table, Mr. Quinby extolled the new clerk. He was impressed with Sam's good qualities. The fifteen dollars a week no longer worried him, for he was convinced that the remarkable young man would be worth the money. And as he ceased to fret about the fifteen dollars his feelings toward his son underwent a sudden change.

"To-day I sent Sam to deliver two shirts. What do you think he did? Took along several ties and convinced the man's wife that her husband ought to wear ties that harmonized with the shirts. Gave her a neat talk on style. Sold her two. He has the best business head I've seen on a young fellow in a long time. You ought to make it a point, Bert, to get acquainted with him."

Bert made no promises. He resented the praise, probably because his own work had never been highly regarded. His imagination pictured Sam Sickles as a smirking, fawning figure with the art of draping itself ingratiatingly over a counter.

"Regular ninny," he decided, and gave the de-

tails of the newcomer to Bill Harrison and to Dolf.

"I'd keep away from him, too," Dolf agreed. "He must be a pill. My father wouldn't have a clerk like that in the bakery for five minutes."

"I don't know about that," Bill drawled. "I never heard of anybody getting fired for showing up early in the morning. Usually it's the other way around. Anyway, Dolf, your father's put up with you around, and you're no lily. You left us the wrong cake the last two Saturdays."

"Ah, you're always knocking," Dolf said resentfully. "I wouldn't go near him, Bert."

Bert didn't. The days passed in a luxury of freedom. He weathered the storm of freshman examinations and after that there were no tasks to claim his time. The hours were his. The tray had again been taken from his bicycle, and he pedaled where he would, sometimes alone, sometimes with Dolf, and sometimes with both Dolf and Bill. For Bill had learned to propel his bicycle with one leg and to carry his crutch laid across the handle bar. Now and then they brought packages of food with them and built a fire along the roadside and cooked their noonday meal, and watched Bill try to draw every insect that crossed his path. This, Bert announced, was better than working in any store.

"You bet," said Dolf, and stuffed his mouth with cake.

Bill worked the tip of his crutch into the ground. "Well," he said, "this is all right just for now, but I wouldn't want to do it as a steady thing. It would get mighty tiresome."

"What would you want to do?" Dolf asked suspiciously.

"I'd want a job. You get tired of loafing. I found that out in the hospital."

However, for the present, Bert was well-content to drink his fill from the cup of leisure. There came a day when, with the tide of adventure running strongly in his veins, he set out for the big city. It was twenty miles there, twenty miles back, but the distance did not awe him. The whole day stretched ahead. He left Springham behind and rode the wide sweep of the county highway. A summer breeze murmured past his ears; the miles came and went on his speedometer. Once he halted to rest, and then was a-wheel and on again. It seemed a pity to linger when he could be in motion.

Twelve miles out he came to a crossroads that he had never noticed before. The same itch for adventure that had urged him forth, now painted this new road with alluring possibilities. He forgot his original intention and turned into it. Travel had packed down the dirt and the going was not bad.

"If it gets bumpy," he told himself philosophically, "I can turn back and no harm done."

The road came up to the full measure of his hopes and expectations. Trees stretched out their branches to form a green dome and through this dome the sunlight fell in flickering splashes. Sumac, wild berries and sweet ferns grew along the sides. For the first mile he chanced upon no other wayfarer, and the hands that gripped the handle bars relaxed their pressure. A great and drowsy contentment settled over his mind.

From this he awoke with startled suddenness as something crashed violently through the roadside hedge. The wheel swerved as his startled senses sought to readjust themselves. One moment he had a vision of a something, large and grotesque, crossing his path; the next he was into it, and his wheel was shocked from under him, and he was tumbling in the road.

The fall did not hurt him and, as he righted himself, he saw a man sitting squat in a cloud of dust and ruefully surveying a butterfly that was leisurely disappearing behind a spread of quivering aspen branches.

"Missed him," the man said with a sigh.

Bert was indignant. "Well, you didn't miss me."

The man forgot the butterfly and stared at the boy. They made a ludicrous pair, sitting there in the road, the one dignified and grave, the other flushed and resentful. The man began to chuckle in a deep bass voice.

"Come to think of it, I didn't miss you, did I? Hurt? And by the way, you didn't miss me. We certainly made a mess of each other, didn't we? Wait until I find my glasses and I'll have a look at you."

The glasses were lying in the dust. He rescued them, polished the lens, and placed them on his nose. And then Bert knew him.

"You're the Butterfly Man," he said impulsively. "You gave a talk at our school."

"Did I? I've spouted my piece at a lot of schools. Which one is yours?"

"Springham High."

"Oh, yes. I did talk there. Is that why you ran into me and knocked me down?"

"You ran into me," Bert defended.

The man's face wreathed in a large, friendly smile. "Now, don't be shying away from your honors. Considering that I'm not the stoutest person in the world it ought to be quite a feat to hit me. However, let's see what's happened to your bicycle."

They found the wheel lying at the foot of a tree. One handlebar was bent far out of its original shape. Tom Woods surveyed the bar appreciatively.

"That," he said, "is what I call a successful wreck. If you tried it again you couldn't mash things up so well. Got a tool kit with you?"

"No, sir."

"Too bad. I feel that I ought to make amends for not having blown my horn when I came out. If you care to walk over to my place I'll see if I can make this worse than it is. It's only about half a mile. Come along. If you refuse I'll think you're still sore about that high school speech."

Bert found himself being won over completely by this likable man with the queer way of expressing himself. He felt the need of denying antagonism.

"The pictures were good," he said.

"That means the lecture was not. Well, I've suspected it for a long time. However, we've got to get this wheel fixed. I'll push it. I'm taller than you, and if it starts to get wobbly I can fall on it and fight it into submission. You never knew that a bicycle is a terrible weapon, did you? Neither did I until you assaulted me with this one."

By this time Bert had awakened to the fact that much of what the Butterfly Man said was whimsical fun. He followed him down the road until they reached a trail that ran to the right. Into this Tom Woods went, and when the trail grew rutted he stuck his shoulder through the frame of the bicycle, lifted it from the ground, and carried it. All at once the path widened, and in a cleared space Bert saw a sight that drew an involuntary cry of admiration from his lips.

"I thought that would get you," Tom Woods

said, and in his voice was that which shows a man proud of his work.

Bert saw before him a cozy cabin built compactly of logs, and joined to it a florist's house of glass. But it was not alone the flowers and the shrubs under that glass that had drawn the cry from him. The glass house seemed full of butterflies, thousands of them, fluttering on graceful, gaudy, iridescent wings, a fairyland of rainbow colors in motion.

The Butterfly Man threw open the door of the cabin, and they entered. A massive stone fireplace was at one end, bookshelves stretched along a wall, and wide, roomy chairs, thrown around in a sort of orderly confusion, invited rest and serene contemplation. A center table was littered with pipes, papers, matches and ashes. Between two windows stood a small work bench, and around this stood case after case of mounted insects, their wings spread, looking for all the world as though they would come to life in a moment, break away from the pins that held them, and waft themselves about the room.

Bert wanted to linger at those cases. But Tom Woods took a handful of wrenches from the work bench, came outdoors again, and sat on the doorstep with his back against the sill. He seemed to know exactly what to do as he began to bend the handlebar back into shape. The angle was a difficult one, and half a dozen times one of the

wrenches slipped. The man went on unruffled with the work.

"You don't get mad when it goes wrong, do you?" Bert asked.

The Butterfly Man shook his head. "What's the use? I've seen men curse and rant when a wrench continued to slip. There's no use in cursing at your tools. They'll do what you want them to do if you handle them correctly. You're not given to cursing, are you?"

Bert flushed. "No, sir."

"Right. Man's the only living thing in the world that does. Stupid, isn't it? Ah, now we're getting it. Another minute, sonny, and we'll have this thing right. By the way, I haven't heard your name."

"Bert Quinby."

"All right, Bert, there's your engine of destruction. Where you bound for now?"

Bert didn't know. The turn of the day's adventure had routed lesser considerations.

"Is that your lunch in that package? Some jelly sandwiches? I like homemade jelly sandwiches. Suppose you stay and eat with me. You put in your sandwiches, and I'll make coffee, broil some ham and open a can of beans. Fair enough. Now, while I'm cooking, suppose you run in to my butterfly farm and look it over. Careful of the doors. We've got to keep the beauties in their place. I like them, but not in my food."

And so Bert passed into the house of glass. It had been breath-taking as seen from the outside; it was glorious within. It seemed to him that every known butterfly in the world must be there. He was filled with a fear of hurting them, and stood motionless and feasted his eyes. Never for a moment did the movement of wings in some part of the glass house cease. The languor of their flight, the grace of their motion, the silent mystery of their flutterings from flower to flower, fascinated him and held him spellbound. Nor did he move until Tom Woods called to him from the cabin.

He found a table set for two, and the aromatic smell of coffee in the air. But it was of the butterflies the man spoke.

"Like 'em?"

"They're great," Bert said, at a loss for other words. "Do you know all about them—their names and what they like to eat—and all that?"

"I have to; it's my business." And then at the wonder reflected in the boy's face: "Every person ought to be master of something. It's his excuse for living."

They took places at the table, and the man began to serve the meal.

"You live alone, don't you?" Bert asked.

"Yes; I do," Tom Woods answered ruefully. "Isn't a man a fool to live alone?" He poured the coffee and smiled. "But I like it, and I'm never

really alone when I have my pets out there. I find them good company."

They sat long at the table, for when the meal was done the Butterfly Man lighted his pipe, and leaned back in his chair, and spoke of strange things. A clock on the fireplace mantel eventually told Bert that it was time to start for home. Tom Woods walked with him as far as the road.

"Now that you've found me," he said, "come often, but don't try to kill me."

"I have a couple of friends who'd like to see this," Bert said with a question in his voice.

The man scratched his ear. "Sometimes I'm out of flour, and sometimes it's sugar, and sometimes it's coffee. I'm a bad housekeeper. I feed my butterflies better than I feed myself. How about these chaps—do they like ham and beans?"

"One of them is Dolf Muller. He's always hungry. He'll eat anything."

"Well, that simplifies things. I always manage to have ham and beans. Who's the other chap?"

"Bill Harrison. He's got only one leg."

The man's voice changed. "Handicapped before he's really started. Bring 'em around. If I'm not at home camp on the doorstep until I get back. It's a good doorstep for loafing. I've tried it."

Bert rode back to Springham the bearer of momentous tidings. Suddenly in a world of commonplace events he had found an oasis of enchant-

ment dominated by a man whose quizzical utterances piqued his interest and flamed his curiosity. Supper was already under way when he reached home. His mother asked him anxiously where he had been, and his father reproved him sharply for his tardiness. He slid into his seat, and busied himself with knife and fork, and within the hour was out of the house again to hunt up Dolf and Bill.

He found them and related a breathless story of the day's events. Their reactions were characteristic.

"I hope he gives us something good to eat the day we go there," said Dolf.

Bill Harrison's smile was a bit dreamy. "I'd like to meet that Butterfly Man," he said.

Five days later they rode slowly out of Springham, their rate of progress stayed by the necessity of holding back for Bill. The morning was hot and sultry, and after five miles Dolf began to grumble and to ask if they were ever going to get there.

"Perhaps," Bill said, "if Dolf speaks about it the Butterfly Man will move his place nearer town. It's a darn shame to ask Dolf to work himself into a sweat."

"Ah, shut up!" Dolf growled; but thereafter he rode without complaint.

They came at last to the dirt road, and turned in. Soon they were at the trail. The three dis-

mounted and Bert saw that Bill's leg, as he stood beside his wheel, trembled with weariness.

"Where is this place?" Dolf asked impatiently.

"Another two minutes," Bert said, and took Bill's bicycle. "I can push both yours and mine." Bill flashed him a smile, stuck the crutch under his arm, and hobbled along the trail.

And so they came out into the clearing and advanced toward the cabin and the house of glass. Tom Woods sat on the doorstep smoking his pipe and mending a butterfly net. He took the pipe from his mouth and waved it above his head.

"Welcome!" he called. "The assassin arrives with his fellow conspirators. Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

"This fellow's Dolf Muller," said Bert.

The Butterfly Man held out his hand in greeting; but his eyes were on a boy and his crutch.

"My name's Bill Harrison," said the boy.

This time the handshake lasted for almost a full minute.

"Making the grade?" the man asked. It was a cryptic question, but Bill seemed to understand it.

"Trying to carry the ball," he answered.

The ghost of a smile came into the man's eyes. "Bill," he said softly, "I think you and I are going to hit it off."

He led the way into the cabin, and set down the butterfly net in a corner. Bill stopped at the

specimen cases, but Dolf's eye was caught by the net. He picked it up, felt its weight, swung it at an imaginary insect and almost knocked a picture from the wall. After that he put it down, abashed, and stuck his hands in his pockets, and began to walk restlessly about the room.

"Oh, come on," he said to Bill. "What are you staring at those things for? They're only dead butterflies."

"Go 'way," Bill said absently. There were some papers scattered on the center table, and he took one, and half laid it on the case, and took a pencil from his pocket, and began to sketch. A shadow fell across him but, absorbed, he did not notice it.

"Don't mind him, Mr. Woods," came Dolf's voice. "Bill's always drawing things. He thinks he's an artist."

Bill, recalled to life, started to thrust the paper out of sight. The Butterfly Man caught his hand.

"I didn't know you could do that," he said.

"I don't know as I can," Bill said frankly. "I just do it for fun. I like to draw little things—butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, flies, spiders."

"Oh, I knew I was going to hit it off with you," said the Butterfly Man, and thrust Bill's sketch into his pocket.

Ten minutes later the boys were in the house of glass. When Bert had entered it on his last trip he had come alone; but now Tom Woods was with

them, and when he spoke he seemed to speak, in some strange way, particularly to Bill Harrison. He would reach out a gentle hand, capture a butterfly, tell something about it, and then release it, unharmed, to go its way. In this manner they learned that butterflies must drink, and that little shallow pans were in several places for their convenience.

"I remember," Tom Woods said, "coming upon a stream in which were hundreds of drowned butterflies. They were thirsty, and that was the only water, and they lighted on it and couldn't fly up again. Some butterflies will eat and drink after the fashion of the dragon-fly, holding itself poised above its food by the beat of its wings, but most of them must alight to feed. I think they show good sense. Personally I'd hate to have to eat my lunch by running around the block with a cup of coffee in one hand and a sandwich in the other. Now, over here, you see, I have water dripping slowly over some plants. See those caterpillars feeding on the leaves? Those chaps are funny jiggers. So long as their food is moist they'll live together in harmony; but if their food dries up they'll turn cannibal and eat each other. I'm a peaceful citizen and want no revolutions around here, so I keep them happy."

Dolf snickered. "That's funny."

"No funnier than us humans," the Butterfly Man said gravely. "There would have been no

French Revolution if the French people had had bread."

Dolf found the illusion rather foggy. At his birth the fairies who deal out imagination had not bothered to measure him out any at all. He had done very little reading and had but a hazy background of history. He saw that Bert was nodding understandingly and that Bill's eyes were alight with interest. Plainly, at the moment, he was the small end of the party. He fixed his eyes on a point of the roof of the butterfly house and stared at it with a preoccupied expression.

"Ah!" Tom Woods was saying, "there's the Purple Emperor. Pretty thing, isn't he—but a queer taste when it comes to grub. He likes meat that's a bit ancient—bad, to be frank. There's no accounting for tastes. Some persons become preachers and some become bandits. Got any idea what you're going to do when you grow up?" He shot the question at Bill.

Bill shook his head, and held out his finger, and thrilled as a butterfly alighted upon it with curiously clutching feet.

Dolf came out of his self-imposed abstraction. "Bill's going to be a butterfly charmer," he giggled.

Bill looked at him a moment, and then his gaze went back to the fragile bit of splendor upon his finger. "I might do worse," he said slowly and thoughtfully.

Dolf's jest, in some way, had fallen flat—his wit usually did fail. He cheered up when something was said about dinner, and made haste to lead the way back to the cabin. However, his high hopes of a feast were doomed to disappointment, for, though Tom Woods opened cans with a speed that was appetizing, his interest wandered from the stove once the food was on the fire. Bill Harrison was at the butterfly cases again, and soon the man was over beside him, and had brought out other cases filled with specimens from far corners of the globe.

"Frail," he said, "but powerful. Here I am with more leg length than I know what to do with, and yet those little things can put me to shame. I run a mile and feel that I'd give a dollar if a blacksmith would happen along and pump some air into me with a bellows. But we have instances where butterflies had been found flying in swarms one thousand miles from the nearest land. Did you ever walk twenty-five miles? I did. All I can say is that those peewees must be hard up for a journey."

The boy's eyes were wide. "You're not fooling me?"

The man's voice changed. "Bill," he said, "I never josh anybody who comes looking for the real thing."

Bill's direct gaze challenged him. "Well, I'm looking," he said.

And then Dolf's voice wailed a cry of dire distress. "Gee! Something's burning."

The Butterfly Man had ridiculed his long legs, but they served to carry him to the stove in two jumps. One side of the bacon was burned; and while he was scooping the meat out of the pan the beans began to scorch. All in all it was not much of a meal, and Dolf, who had come in mouth-watering anticipation, was plainly disgusted. But to one of the party, at least, the fare was spiced with the flavor of the gods. In all his life Bill Harrison would ask nothing better than what this day had brought.

There were books on the built-in shelves of the cabin, and after dinner he found them. Presently he was back at the butterfly cases again, comparing the colored plates with the specimens under the glass, unaware of a man who smoked contemplatively and studied him. Bert, stretched off on the ground outside, was content to stare up at the summer sky; but Dolf, whose day had gone badly, was impatient to be off. Thrice he called the time. The fourth summons brought Bert sitting upright.

"Late as that?" he demanded. "I'll call Bill."

"I'll get him," said the Butterfly Man, and went inside. The minutes passed. Dolf kicked at the toe clip of one pedal.

"Why didn't Bill bring a bed?" he demanded.

And then Bill appeared, bright-eyed, with two books under one arm. Bert caught Tom Woods'

glance, and promptly took the books and strapped them to the frame of his own wheel.

"The latchstring will always be out for you fellows," the Butterfly Man said, and added, ruefully, that the grub would usually be a mess. "I've eaten so many burned meals," he confided, "that sometimes I feel that inside I must look like a piece of charcoal."

Dolf accepted this in silence.

"I'll take good care of the books," Bill called.

"Take care of yourself," Tom Woods answered.

Out of earshot of the cabin Dolf spoke. "What's the idea of the books? Trying to make up to him by playing wise?"

Bill shook his head. "No. I've done a lot of thinking since . . . I guess there wouldn't be much future for me in my father's store. I'd make a fine clerk in a rush, wouldn't I, stumping about on one leg? Whatever kind of living I make I've got to make it with my brain."

Dolf broke into a derisive giggle.

"Oh, I guess there's room in me for some brains," Bill said placidly. "I'm not all stomach."

All the way back to Springham Dolf rode in advance of the others and spoke not a word, a picture of fat dignity nursing outraged feelings.

Bert was late for supper again. His mother knew where he had gone and had not worried, but

his father was put out at this second exhibition of tardiness.

"What puzzles me," he said, "is how you can go shinning up the wrong tree so often. First you go down to the railroad yards for a good time, and then I have to drop you out of the store, and now you take up with some freak character."

"He's not a freak," Bert protested. "He knows a lot."

"About what? Butterflies?"

"He makes a business of catching and raising them."

"Fine job for a grown man," Mr. Quinby said scornfully. After a moment a smile touched his lips. "I can picture Sam Sickles wasting time on him. I suggested that Sam ought to mix in with some of the town societies and get to know folks. 'Mr. Quinby,' he said, 'it's a mistake to waste time on people who cannot boost you up the ladder of success. I'll wait until Springham organizes a Board of Trade and I'll join that.' No, I don't think Sam would care much for your Butterfly Man."

Bert was nettled. "Maybe the Butterfly Man wouldn't care much for Sam Sickles," he said.

Mr. Quinby was plainly unprepared for the answer. He stared at his son in frowning perplexity, and then a flush of annoyance spread over his face. "Evidently," he said with fine sarcasm, "you take more stock in the judgment of this man

who fools around with little bugs than you do in mine."

This time it was Bert who flushed. "I don't mean it that way," he said uncomfortably. "But you've never met Mr. Woods and . . ."

"Oh, let it go at that," his father said. "You're sore at Sam because he's making a better stab at things than you made. If you wanted the job why didn't you take care of it?"

Later, as the boy went up to his room, the scene struck him with a sense of tragedy. Why was it, he wondered miserably, that you could have such a good time with a man who was practically a stranger, and then come home and have things rub wrong with your own father? Perhaps the contentment of the Butterfly Man's cabin had given him a new conception . . . at any rate his mind was off along a channel of thought he had never before explored. From time to time, in his memory, boys not very much older than he had disappeared from Springham, and he had heard vague stories that they "could not get along at home." He was suddenly frightened.

His mother, coming to his room, found him with his face in his hands staring down at the floor.

"Why don't you go down to the store and meet Sam?" she asked. "You can't blame your father for thinking you're nursing a grouch. You haven't been near the store since this clerk was hired. You know, Bert, that *does* look queer."

The boy did not lift his head.

"Bert!" His mother's hand was on his shoulder. "Are you sore about him being there?"

"No," he said after a moment; "I'm not sore about *that*. But all this praise he gets. . . . It looks as though dad was just saying things to get a crack in at me. That did get me riled. I made up my mind I wouldn't go near this fellow."

"Same old mule," said his mother, but she said it in a tone that took the sting from her words. "There's two sides to this. Look at it straight, Bert. Your father has every reason to think you're playing dog in the manger. You'd think the same thing if you were in his place. You ought to go down and get acquainted with Sam if only to show that you're fair and above board."

The boy shifted his ground. "Father hasn't any right to say things about the Butterfly Man when he doesn't know. . . ."

"Come, come; no steering up side roads. You ought to go to the store. Show your father that you're too big a chap to be small."

"All right," Bert said suddenly; "I'll go. But," he added positively, "I won't like him."

Three mornings later he awoke to find Springham soaking in a steady, persistent downpour of rain. Mr. Quinby, looking out the parlor window at the gray and dismal sky, decided that there would be little business that day and that he might as well run in to the city and see what the jobbers

could offer him in the way of stock. The nine-twenty train carried him out of town, and a half-hour later Bert, hunched under an umbrella, was sloshing through the puddles along Washington Avenue.

He entered the store with a queer feeling of strangeness—he who should have looked upon this place almost as a birthright. The first glance showed him that the hand of change had been at work. The shelves were arranged differently, the show cases were more inviting, and a new three-sided mirror stood where the purchaser of a suit of clothes could view himself from various angles. In front of the mirror was a young man industriously rubbing the glass.

"Good morning," he said, and put down his polishing cloth, and went behind a show case. "Something in collars to-day? We have a soft collar that's all the rage among high school fellows and college men. Let me see, you'd wear about a fourteen and a half, wouldn't you?"

Bert had been staggered by the smoothness of the clerk's manner and by his flow of words. "I didn't come in to buy," he half stammered.

"We're glad to have you come in if only for a visit," the clerk smiled. "While you're here I might as well show you the collars. You'll need collars sometime and . . ."

"But I don't have to pay for my collars. I'm Bert Quinby."

"Oh!" This time it was the clerk who was taken back. "I've heard your father speak of you, but I got the idea you were a little shaver. I suppose you know my name—Samuel Sickles." He held out his hand.

Bert took it. The pressure behind it was firm and muscular. He had built up in his own mind a mental picture of a clerk who was feminine and foppish. Some of his surprise must have revealed itself in his expression, for Sam gave a pleased smile.

"I'll have a better grip than that in a year," he said confidently. "Did you ever read *The Secrets of Business Success?*"

Bert shook his head.

"That's the book that put me on the track. Shake hands as though you meant it; a fishy handshake is like a whining voice. Be strong; it takes a strong body to battle the world. I never miss my exercises morring and night. I take a cold plunge every morning. You've got to keep fit if you want to climb in the world. You've got to feel peppy if you want to put pep into your work. Do you take regular exercise and watch your diet?"

Diet? Bert thought diets were only for old persons who were sick.

"You ought to," Sam said earnestly. "I'll have to lend you that book, but you can't keep it long. I try to read something from it every day. You

can live only once; live for success. I picked out that sentence last night. A couple of years of living for efficiency and you'd be in shape to go out and twist the world around."

The clerk commanded an air of worldly wisdom and radiated an atmosphere of sure confidence that Bert had not found in any of the Springham boys he knew. It pleased him to be told that he wore the earmarks of success.

"You've made some changes here," he said, unbending. "The store looks good."

"Oh, your father did that. I've taken some of the detail off his hands and that's given him more time to plan. Without vision and plan, two-thirds of all work is waste motion. I got that out of the book, too. You look ahead, don't you?"

"Well . . ." Bert was doubtful of what looking ahead might signify, but he did not want to display his ignorance. Sam misconstrued his hesitation.

"Of course," the clerk admitted, "you don't have to look ahead in some ways. This business will be yours some day. It's been made for you. But I've got to depend upon myself. Ever hear of James Hill? He was a railroad man—an empire builder. He said he didn't care what you earned, if you didn't save money success was not in you. I've saved something every week since I went to work."

Bert found a place where he could show to advantage, and was quick to seize the opportunity.

"I save money. I've got quite a bit in the bank across the street," he said, and could see at once that his stock had gone up in Sam's estimation.

"I don't propose to let *my* money stay in the bank," the clerk said. "Make money work for you . . . invest it. Get a big profit. I'm just waiting around to find an opening for my capital, and then I'll blossom out as a business man."

"I've been thinking of that myself," Bert nodded. He had not thought of anything of the kind, but it sounded important to make the assertion.

Sam smiled. The idea of a schoolboy talking of investing capital! "You couldn't do it on just a few dollars," he warned good-naturedly.

"I've got more than that—about three hundred dollars. Some of it I saved, and some of it is Christmas and birthday money sent to me by my grandfather, and my uncle and my two aunts."

Sam's smile was succeeded by a look of respect. "Looking around for any particular business?"

"Anything that promises a good return," Bert answered. He had heard his father use the phrase.

"You'll find it," Sam admitted. "If a man's wise enough to save money he's wise enough to find a way to use it."

The clerk, during this dialogue, had not neg-

lected his work. He finished the mirrors. He polished the show cases. He wiped invisible dust from the shelves. Three customers came in and he attended them with the air of one who found it a pleasure to serve their wants. Noon came, and Bert prepared to go home through the rain.

"If I let you have the book," Sam asked, "can you have it back to me by to-morrow?"

Bert promised.

"Better put it under your coat. It cost me a dollar. I don't want to get it wet."

Bert hid the book and was off. The clerk stood in the doorway and watched him make his way down the rain-spattered street.

"Sam," he mused, "you surely do fall into the luckiest straits. As soon as you discover an opportunity in this town I think you can put your hands on a partner with some capital to invest."

CHAPTER V

CURLED up in a chair in his room Bert spent what was left of that rainy day trying to extract wisdom from *The Secrets of Business Success*. The book was the work of an energetic, noisy man who shouted, and banged, and tromboned his message. There were no quiet pages of contemplation. Every word was a bullet, every sentence a volley, and every paragraph a crash of artillery.

When the boy closed the book at last he stared at the covers doubtfully. He had a vague feeling that very little of it had left a clear impression. The clamor and the tumult had deafened him and bewildered him as well. But of this much he was certain: if business was as many-sided a puzzle as the book said it was, and if Sam Sickles understood all the thunderous advice that was within these pages, then Sam Sickles was a person worthy of all respect and admiration.

At six o'clock Mr. Quinby came home in jovial good humor. He had stopped at the store on his way from the train to the house.

"So Sam lent you the book." He was plainly

pleased. "I didn't think he'd part with it unless he was chloroformed. You must have charmed him. How much of it did you read?"

"All of it," Bert answered.

His father was surprised. "Like it?"

"Y . . . yes; but there's a lot of it I don't understand."

"You didn't expect to pry the cover off business and find the answer right under the lid, did you? What do you think of Sam?"

"He's all right. Does he talk about nothing but business?"

Mr. Quinby's voice grew a trifle sharp. "Did you find business talk tiresome?"

"No; I just wondered. He's not like most fellows."

"That's why he's got a business head," Mr. Quinby said decisively. "He likes you. I'm glad to find you two getting together. Run down to the store to-morrow and pick out a couple of ties."

"I'd sooner have the new collars."

"Ho! So that's it! Was Sam talking those new collars to you?"

"Before he knew who I was."

"I have an idea he'd be able to sell that collar to a man without a neck. Well, select the ties and take half a dozen of the collars, too. Perhaps you had better go down and pick them out to-night. Sam will worry about that book until he gets it back."

So Bert went back to the store through the persistent rain, and Sam counted out the collars and wisely aided him in selecting his ties. Then the clerk took the book and held it in loving, caressing hands.

"Do you think success thoughts?" he asked.

Bert had never yet found any momentous occasion demanding the chartering of the channels of his mind. The question, popped at him suddenly and unexpectedly, left his memory groping for something it could not quite grasp.

"Was . . . wasn't there a chapter. . . ." he began.

"Sure; the fifth chapter. You remember 'Think defeat and you're licked. Think success and you're over the line with the ball.' It's true. Every time a man walks in here I say to myself, 'I'm going to sell you something more than just what you came in for.' I make myself believe it. When I start to make that sale I'm full of confidence. The customer hesitates. He's undecided. All the confidence is on my side, and I make the sale. What did it? A success thought."

Bert's imagination applied the idea another way. "If I go out for the nine next spring and believe I'll make. . . ."

"Absolutely!" Sam said. "Believe in yourself and you force the other fellow to believe in you."

Mr. Quinby came in, announced that the rain was about over, and went to the rear to dispose

of the umbrella he carried. Bert and Sam walked down to the door.

"I'll be around to-morrow," said Bert.

Sam looked ill at ease. "Of course, this is your father's store and you can come and go as you please, but I wish you wouldn't. Didn't you read what was in the eighth chapter? 'Guard against too much conversation; talk is the thief of time. Time is money.' I've got my way to make in the world and I can't afford to waste time. Why can't you meet me on Sunday morning when I'm free?"

Bert was huffed. "I guess I can get along without talking to you at all if it hurts you that much."

"I guess you didn't pay much attention to the eighth chapter," Sam said. "I'll tell you what . . . let's meet Sunday morning and take a walk around the town. I always walk around Sundays and see if I can find any business opportunities."

Bert was surprised to find himself appeased and interested. "What time Sunday? I must first go to church."

"Make it afternoon, then. You meet me halfway on what I want; I meet you halfway on what you want. That's one of the big principles of success—compromise. Remember that passage in the early part of the book? A business man must not allow his ideas to get into a rut. He must keep an open mind and be ready to shift his posi-

tion if necessary. I can see you've got a good business head."

All the way home an amused thought kept running in Bert's mind. A wide grin was still on his face as he entered the house.

"What's the joke?" Mrs. Quinby asked.

"Sam says I've got a good business head."

"And what's funny about a business head, Bert?"

"Oh, nothing." The grin grew wider. "I was just wondering what dad would say to that."

However, all thought of business was wiped from his mind when he came down to breakfast late in the morning and learned that Bill Harrison had called for him while he had been asleep.

"Did he say what he wanted, Mom?"

"He said he was going out to that Butterfly Man's place."

Bert hurried his breakfast and went in search of Dolf. He found him carrying trays of freshly baked coffee cake to the bakery counter.

"Want to come out and see Tom Woods?" Bert asked.

Dolf shook his head with decision. "And get another mess of burned stuff? I guess not. I can get better grub than that at home. Anyway, I don't like the way he talks of things, just showing off how much he knows, and making a fuss over Bill, and insulting everybody else."

"I didn't hear him insult anybody," Bert said in surprise.

"Some people don't know when they're insulted,"said Dolf, "but I'm not one of them. You can go out there as often as you like, but don't count on me."

So Bert rode out alone to the cabin and the house of glass. The day was fresh and sparkling after the rain, the road had been washed clean, and the tire treads swished and whirred as they griped the surface of the highway. To-day he did not have Bill along to hold him back, and the speedometer recorded a swift succession of the miles. Before noon he pushed through the path, where the brush was still wet, and came to his destination.

There was about the clearing an atmosphere of emptiness and desertion. No sound broke the stillness. It seemed that it must have been days since a human was here . . . and yet, in the soft ground, Bert found the marks of Bill's tires and the puncture of Bill's crutch.

The door of the cabin was open a bare two inches. Bert leaned his bicycle against the wall, so gently that he did not disturb the hush of the place. After that he sat in the doorway. The Butterfly Man had guaranteed this as a good loafing spot. Staring off into the distance, Bert found a drowsy peace taking possession of his being. Time ceased to have any importance.

Probably Bill and the Butterfly Man had gone off together. They might be back in an hour or they might not be back in six. He did not care how long they stayed away.

And then, of a sudden, his eyes popped open. Bill's bicycle was leaning against a tree at the side of the clearing. Now that his wits were sharpened he noticed that the marks of Bill's crutch punctured the soft ground and led to the cabin and did not lead forth again. For the first time the stillness, the absence of all sound, seemed uncanny. The flesh along his spine began to prickle with goose flesh.

A voice broke the silence. "How are you making out, Bill?"

The reply was a suppressed grunt.

Relief shot through Bert, and he sprang to his feet. "Hello! Everybody asleep?"

"It's Bert," cried Bill's voice, not suppressed this time. A chair scraped along the floor and the door was thrown open. There stood Tom Woods, an open book in one hand and a black and battered pipe in the other.

"Hooks and sinkers," he said, "but you'd make a fine burglar! What do you wear, gum shoes? Why all the stealth? How long have you been prowling around out here?"

"I don't know; about fifteen minutes."

"The door was open. Why didn't you come in?"

Bert gave him a look of surprise. "You can't just walk into somebody's house."

The Butterfly Man reached out, and caught his arm, and dragged him inside. "I might have known you'd have some such thought," he chuckled. "Where's the fat little fellow you had with you last time, Dolf somebody or other."

"He wouldn't come."

"So he washes his hands of me. I don't blame him. He had a nasty look in his eyes when he saw the burned ham. Oh, Bill! What kind of stunts are you trying to spring on us? You let out a roar when you heard Bert's voice and now you won't even get up and say hallo to him."

"Too busy," said Bill. He had a brush in one hand, a smear of yellow and a smear of blue across one cheek, and was bent over a square of bristol board laid down alongside a specimen butterfly case. He made a touch with the brush, and drew back his head to view the result, and gave a little chuckle of pleasure. "Getting it," he called, and dabbed at something on the other side of the specimen case.

Bert walked over and looked. The something was a box of water colors.

"Mr. Woods gave them to me," Bill explained gleefully. "He said if I wanted to draw butterflies I might as well get them in their true colors."

"You might as well waste time that way as any other," the Butterfly Man observed.

Bill's head came up. "You didn't tell me that. You said that some day I might be able to paint the pictures for books and magazine articles you might write."

The Butterfly Man threw up his hands in a comic gesture of dismay. "There you go, spilling the beans and letting out our secrets. And we were going to keep all this under cover until we were ready to be famous."

Bill's eyes, direct, burning, were on his face. "You meant it, didn't you?"

"I meant it," Tom Woods said in a changed voice. "We both like butterflies. If you can make the grade drawing them, and if I can make the grade writing about them, we ought to come through. But it means years."

"What's years?" Bill demanded, and bent over his drawing.

Bert's gaze had gone from the man, to the boy, and back to the man again. What's years! The light from the window fell upon Bill absorbed in what he was doing . . . and upon the stump that had once been a whole leg. Something in Bert stirred. He realized then, in a sort of sudden intuition, that Tom Woods, with the instinct of a great heart, was going out of his way to kindle ambition and purpose before a boy's soul could grow sick with the knowledge of its handicap.

To-day the man, unaided, cooked the meal, for Bert was glued to the back of Bill's chair watch-

ing every motion of the brushes. In the end Tom Woods had to drag them both to the table; and even there Bill talked of nothing but the difficulty of shading from one to the other of the brilliant colors of his model. And the Butterfly Man listened, and nodded, and smiled a smile that was both whimsical and grave.

Bert would have preferred to go back to the chair and watch, but the soiled dishes could not be ignored. The man washed, and he wiped the china and put it away. The water pails were empty, and they could not be ignored, either. He began to work the pump at the sink.

"Not that way." Tom Woods stopped him. "That's all right for winter. In open weather I like to go down to the spring, and dip in, and see the water come up clear and cool."

Bert followed at his heels, carrying one of the pails. Outdoors they fell into step.

"Bill's doing great, isn't he?" Bert asked.

The Butterfly Man was silent a moment. "You're a friend of his, aren't you?" he asked.

"I'd like to hear anybody say I'm not."

"You wouldn't want to hurt him? Don't look at me like that; I know you wouldn't. I've seen a lot of young fellows ruined by too much praise."

Bert digested this while they filled the pails and carried them back. Bill had finished a painting, and had propped it up and was stumping about viewing it from various angles.

"What do you think of it?" he asked impulsively.

Bert half closed his eyes and studied it in a silence that grew prolonged.

"I knew I didn't have it," Bill said in disappointment. "It doesn't look real; it looks just painted. All right; I'll get it some day. You'll see." He went back to his chair, and the Butterfly Man began to whistle.

"Years, Bill," he said.

"Sure," said Bill; "I forgot. Trying to kick the ball before I had it." And then he was bent over a fresh piece of board.

All through the afternoon the Butterfly Man wrote letters to butterfly men in scattered parts of the world . . . and all through the afternoon Bert hovered over Bill's chair and never seemed to weary of watching the busy brushes at work. By and by it grew darker, but neither of the boys seemed to notice the gathering gloom. Tom Woods, at the table, began to find writing difficult.

"Run up that window shade," he called. "I'm not an owl."

"It is up," Bert answered, and looked at the sky. A tumble of angry clouds was coming out of the southwest in a smolder of black and dirty gray. A faint peal of thunder reached his ears.

"Look here, Bill," he said in concern, "we'd better be hopping along."

Bill glanced up languidly, stared, and began to put paints and brushes away.

Tom Woods joined them. "You fellows can't leave now. This rain would be on you in twenty minutes. If I'm any judge of weather it's going to pour cats and codfish. You'd be drenched. You'd better wait until it's over."

"Suits me," said Bill, but went on packing away his materials. The lowering day made further painting impossible. Standing in the open doorway they watched the tempest approach—first a scurrying of wind-whipped clouds, and then the storm center itself. The growl of the thunder was louder now, and ribbons of lightning danced on the horizon. Trees began to bend and sway with a wild rustling of leaves. Suddenly the wind had a wet, cold smell. The day grew black, and the rain was upon them, a rushing sheet of water that slashed against the cabin and drove across the threshold of the room.

"Close it," Tom Woods cried, and the door was pushed shut against the pressure of the wind and bolted. The man felt his way across the floor and lighted a lamp.

"Where would you have been if you had started?" he asked.

"About drowned," said Bert.

"I wasn't thinking about that," Bill spoke up. "I was thinking about my paint box."

Bert gave a start. In the steady drip of two

days ago Sam Sickles had thought only of his book.

The cabin drummed under the stinging volleys of driven rain. After an hour they sensed that the fury of the storm was spent. They opened the door. It was still raining, but the sky was growing brighter and the fag end of the day was making feeble claim of its own. Grass and flowers had been beaten flat, and the trees were drooped and forlorn. Yet the smell from the ground was fresh, and earthy, and sweet.

Bert gave a groan. "We left our bikes out. Look at them now."

It was Tom Woods who carried them in, queerly frescoed with streaks and blotches of wet mud. Bert wiped them dry with cloths. The rain had dwindled to an intermittent drizzle, but the clock said twenty minutes past seven.

"How are you going to get home?" the Butterfly Man asked. "It will be dark soon."

"If we ride fast. . . ." Bert began.

"I guess you're forgetting me," said Bill.

Bert had forgotten that his friend would not be able to hold the pace. He glanced doubtfully out of doors. "They'll be expecting us home. . . ."

"Telephone them," said Tom Woods. "Tell them you're going to spend the night with me. I don't like this thing of riding a bicycle after dark on the county highway. An automobile might swing around a curve and crash you."

So Bert telephoned, and rejoiced that it was his mother's, and not his father's, voice that answered. It was plain from the expression of his face, that his explanation and the plan had not been received with enthusiasm. For a minute or two he kept repeating a patient, resigned, "Yes, Mom; yes, Mom," and then hung up the receiver with an audible sigh of relief.

"Mom says she'll telephone your house, Bill."

Bill nodded. "I'll bet you got rats."

"Well. . . ." Bert hesitated.

"Another case of being judged by the company you keep," the Butterfly Man said with a grimace. "Your mother thinks I'm a bad egg or I wouldn't be associating with two such wildcats. Of course you got rats. First, you should have started home earlier. Second, are you sure you're not wet? Third, you have no right to impose upon somebody who's almost a stranger. Fourth, don't sit up too late."

Bert's eyes had widened. "How did you know?"

"I had a mother . . . once," Tom Woods said wistfully. "Any other instructions?"

"Yes; I'm not to miss church in the morning."

"You won't."

They had a wonderful supper that night—tomato omelette, mashed potatoes, peas, hot biscuits and apple butter. After the dishes had been put away, Tom Woods brought out a banjo, and

leaned with the back of his chair against the wall, and twanged the strings and sang them stirring songs. Two of the melodies they knew, "The Miner's Daughter" and "Solomon Levi," and roared the words with a gusto that shook the lamp. Tiring of singing, Tom Woods put the banjo away; and Bert told of Sam Sickles and spoke of the clerk with frank admiration. The Butterfly Man smoked and nodded.

"I've heard of that type before," he said. "Single-track minds—think of nothing but getting ahead. They usually make good, but anybody who stands in their way gets hurt. How long has he been working in the store?"

"About a couple of months."

"You had the job, didn't you? How did you come to get out?"

"Oh," said Bert, "the old man and I couldn't get along."

"The what?" Tom Woods asked mildly.

"I mean my father," Bert said, and squirmed uncomfortably.

Tom Woods knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Your father is older than you, son, and he knows more. Don't fool yourself about that. Usually fathers think a lot about their sons, and usually sons think mainly of themselves. Well, how about bed? I'll have to knock together a shake-down for you fellows."

But it was a long time before Bert dropped off

to sleep. Tom Woods had started an uncomfortable train of thought running through his mind.

In the morning, after breakfast, they went with the man to a country church; and afterwards they bid him good-by and started back toward Springham, Bill with his precious box of paints and brushes lashed to the frame of his bicycle. Twice the box slipped, and they had to stop and secure it anew. As a result of these delays it was long past noon when Bert reached home. His father had dozed off in a chair and his mother was reading; but she put down the book and set him out food that she had kept warm against the time of his arrival. While he ate she asked him many questions dealing with his visit, and at last seemed to be satisfied. He went up to his room, got out the old accordion, and tried some of the melodies that Tom Woods had twanged on the banjo.

"Hush, Bert," his mother admonished him guardedly from the hall.

"Oh, let him play," his father's voice called. "I'm awake, anyway. Bring it down, Bert, and give us a tune."

Bert brought the musical relic downstairs and played "The Washington Post." His father admitted that it was not bad and, proud of his achievement, he played the march again. When he began the piece the third time Mr. Quinby yawned.

"Is that the only thing you know?" he asked.

However, it was a good-humored question, and Bert laughed. Strangely, he had no desire that afternoon to fare from the house and seek outside amusement.

At the supper table his father said:

"Bert, I was all out of patience with you when you left the store, but I should have had a clerk long ago. I see that now. Sam takes a lot of bothersome details off my hands and I don't feel so dragged at the end of the week. You know, that business will be yours some day. The bigger I can make it, the bigger it will be when you get it."

Bert was on the point of saying he had no yearning for men's furnishings, but the memory of Tom Woods' words came back to still his tongue.

The same quiet contentment that had been part of him all afternoon remained during the evening. When he started for bed, his father followed him out into the hall.

"Have a good time last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was lonesome here. First time you've been away from home over night." His hand fell on the boy's shoulder. "I guess I've been too busy to pay much attention to you. We've sort of fallen away from each other. We'll have to remedy that and have some more of the good times. Right?"

"Right!" said Bert. He was light of heart as he went up to bed . . . and only then did he

realize that this was the day he was to have met Sam Sickles and to have accompanied the clerk as he strolled about Springham looking for opportunities.

On the morrow he fell into one of those nervous streaks of industry that sometimes attack boys even in the most languid days of August. The morning was given over to scraping soot from the inside of the furnace fire box, and he came up from his labors as begrimed as any chimney sweep. The coolness of the bathtub was inviting, and he splashed there until his mother warned him for the third time that she would not keep his luncheon waiting all day. The meal over, he debated the afternoon's course of action. There would be no use in hunting up Bill Harrison; Bill would be engaged with his paints and would prove indifferent company. He felt no desire to see Dolf Muller. In the end he brought out a book, dropped into a chair, and read until his father came home to supper.

"I'm going to lodge meeting to-night," Mr. Quinby said. "Sam will be alone at the store. Why not run down?"

Bert hesitated. "He doesn't like to talk when there's work to do. He says conversation is the thief of time."

"Does he?" Mr. Quinby chuckled. "Well, we'll make this one exception. I told him you

might be along. I think he's anxious to see you about something."

So Bert went down to Washington Avenue. The visit was destined to have far-reaching consequences.

Sam Sickles, attending to a customer's wants, gave him the briefest of nods and thereafter paid strict attention to the sale. But when the transaction was completed and the customer gone, the clerk turned eagerly to his visitor.

"I thought you were going to meet me yesterday morning, Bert."

"I was at the Butterfly Man's. I went there Saturday, and the storm came up and I couldn't get home."

"The Butterfly Man? Oh, yes; your father told me about that fellow." Sam's tone showed that, whatever the impression he held of Tom Woods, it was not of the highest. "You should have been with me yesterday. I found it."

"Your opportunity?" Bert asked breathlessly.

"My opportunity," Sam said, and uttered the words with something of the air of a captain of finance.

If Sam's wisdom had loomed admirably before, at this moment it was colossal. In Bert's eyes the clerk took on an added stature and seemed invested with romantic and dynamic possibilities.

"A business plan," Sam went on earnestly, "must be sound and safe . . . and original.

Woolworth made a fortune because he was the first man to think of the five-and-ten-cent store. Where do most of the people in this town spend their money . . . I mean for furniture, and jewelry, and clothing?"

Bert considered this. "In the city, I guess."

"Why? Because the big stores have big stocks to select from. When a woman wants to buy a rug, or a coat, how does she know what store to go to? What does your mother do?"

"She looks up the ads in the city newspaper."

"I knew it," Sam cried in triumph, "and that's my opportunity. Four papers are published in the city. Some stores advertise in one paper and not in another. I've been looking it up. If a woman wants to be sure of getting the bargains, she's got to see what's advertised in all papers. How many newspapers do you take at home?"

"One; the *Herald*."

"Almost everybody buys only one. That means they don't know what's in the other papers and they won't spend twelve cents to buy four papers every day. Now, suppose they could see all four papers and never have to buy one? Wouldn't that be worth fifty cents a month?"

Bert nodded. "I guess so."

"I'm going to organize The Shoppers' Service and hire a small store. A woman pays fifty cents a month for membership, and what does she get? Every morning three copies of each paper come

to the store. I cut up one, cut out every ad and then put all bed ads in one group, rug ads in another group, silk waist ads in another group, and so on. If a woman is going shopping, she comes to the store before train time and looks through all the papers. If she's rushed, she telephones and says, 'What rug ads are running to-day?' and I read her each rug ad. Why, there's never been anything like this idea. It's original."

But Bert's eyes were beginning to draw together.

"I struck a rock, though," Sam confessed, "and for a while it had me stumped. Store rent, and telephone hire, and newspapers, and light . . . it takes a lot of half-dollars."

"That's what I was thinking," said Bert.

Sam gave him a glance of respect. "You'll have a business head some day. But look here! Maybe thirty or forty women will come in every day to read the papers. They'll come in when they don't want to shop just to get a line on prices. They sit down at a nice table. They begin to talk back and forth. It's a sort of social group, and that's the time to sell them a cup of tea, or a sandwich, or a piece of cake, or some ice cream. I'll put in a little gas stove and then I'll be all set to serve little luncheons. Women will get used to meeting in there. On a cold day they'll come in for a hot drink, and on a hot day for a cold drink. It will get to be a sort of woman's club. I ought

to be able to sell about five hundred dollars' worth of food a month—that's only about fifteen dollars a day. Then I have the fifty-cent memberships, and I can take subscriptions for magazines, and perhaps handle theater tickets for the city shows. It's a gold mine."

Bert's doubts had been swept away. There seemed to be so many different ways in which such a business could take in money!

"When are you going to start?" he asked.

"I don't know. I need about $800, and I don't care to put in more than $400 of my own money. I don't figure I can afford to risk more than $400. It will cost a lot for tables, and table cloths, and dishes and a few flowers every day. If I can find somebody with a little money to put into this I'll sell him a one-third share and start business."

"That shouldn't be hard. You ought to be able to find a man who'll go into that."

"Man or boy," said Sam, "it's all the same if he has the money."

Bert, on the instant, saw a prize within his grasp. "I could put in $300," he said eagerly.

Sam hesitated. "I don't know whether that would be enough. I'd like to have you; in fact I had you in mind because I knew you had some money. I don't know about $300, though. You couldn't get any more, could you? Well, give me a day to figure it out. I'll let you know."

Bert came away that night doubly anxious to be

part of the enterprise because the chance gave promise of slipping through his fingers.

"Only one way to start in business," Sam told his reflection as he turned out the store lights. "Get somebody else to go in with you. Then, if the business fails, somebody else has to stand part of the loss."

CHAPTER VI

HEALTHY youth, as a rule, does not carry much of its worries to bed. Bert slept as soundly that night as though an El Dorado, a magic carpet of business adventure, a golden key to fortune, did not wait upon Sam's decision. But in the morning he was keenly awake to hope and to fear the moment his eyes opened. He reviewed words, phrases, sentences of the night before, and his heart sank. He had merely dreamed a dream. Why should the brilliant Sam seek the partnership of a boy whose business experience had been confined to carrying orders through the town?

He waited all day for news of the decision, and no word came. At the supper table he asked his father, trying to speak casually:

"Did Sam say anything about wanting to see me?"

"I doubt if Sam gave you a thought," Mr. Quinby answered. "We were hard at it rearranging some of the stock. He's strictly business when there's business to be done. He sticks right to it."

Bert wondered what his father would say if he knew that Sam was spreading his wings and preparing to fly.

Another day and no word of the verdict. That night Bert, unable to restrain longer his impatience, went down to Washington Avenue and waited until the lights went out and Sam and his father came away, separating outside the store. Watching Sam's approach, he suddenly thought it might be better to meet the clerk as though the encounter were by chance. Whistling, he sauntered up the avenue, his gaze turned toward the shop windows as though their varied displays were new and captivating to his eyes.

"Hello, there," said Sam.

The start of surprise he gave was well-acted. "Hello, Sam. What are you doing here? I thought the store had closed long ago."

"We've been dressing up stock. It takes time. A business that never spruces up is like a man who always wears the same suit. I thought you'd be around to see me."

"Oh," Bert said carelessly, "I wanted to give you a couple of more days to think it over."

"I've come to a decision," said Sam.

Bert waited; but the clerk, his brows knit, seemed lost in a last aspect of the enterprise. And at that all Bert's assumed ease fled and left him with only a stricken thought that the judgment had gone against him.

"You're going to let me in, aren't you?" he asked in alarm.

"That depends," Sam said. "A business man must weigh everything, and view it from every angle. Never leap overboard; business waters run deep. If you want to put in nothing but money I'm afraid it's no go."

"What else do you want?"

"You—your time—your energy. How did Carnegie build up his fortune in steel? He surrounded himself with eager, ambitious men. When school is out in the afternoon will you come into the store and hustle to make it prosperous? Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Then you're in," Sam said with satisfaction. "The Shoppers' Service has been born. Let's go into the ice cream store and draw up an agreement. I've been looking up those things; I know how to draw one. I'm not treating. We'll each pay for our own. I've got to hold on to my capital."

They went to a table in the rear of the sweet shop, and Sam drew paper and fountain pen from his pocket. Bert, looking over his shoulder, read as he wrote:

I, Samuel Sickles, and I, Herbert Quinby, do hereby agree to become partners in a business to be known as The Shoppers' Service;
I, Samuel Sickles, will put $500 into the business, and I, Herbert Quinby, will put in $300;

I, Samuel Sickles, will take two-thirds of the profits, and
I, Herbert Quinby, will take one-third;
All monies shall be put into the bank in both our names.

"There!" Sam announced. "That's a binding document."

It looked legal and imposing to Bert, but his eyes had clouded. "Why do I get only one-third?" he asked.

"Isn't an idea worth something?" Sam demanded. "One-third to me for my money, one-third to you for your money, and the other one-third to me for the idea. When a man invents something, that's only an idea, but he gets a royalty on it. That's business."

Bert was half convinced. But one-third seemed so small. . . .

"No use wasting time," Sam said irritably, and reached for the agreement. "We sign this or I tear it up."

Bert clutched at the opportunity that seemed to be slipping. "I'll sign," he said, and another copy of the agreement was written. That night Bert slept with his copy under his pillow.

A tinge of that desire for secrecy that comes, at some time, to every boy, was now his. He cherished a vision of future prosperity, of taking the town by the ears and of being pointed out as a young man who would go far. He did not tell his mother what lay in store for him, nor did he so much as hint at the plan to his father. To let

another into the secret would have seemed, somehow, to make the whole affair commonplace and public.

And yet, he wanted to confide in the Butterfly Man.

Why this should be so he did not stop to analyze. Perhaps, in the back of his mind, was the fear that those at home would ridicule his aspirations. And so, as many another boy had done before, he set out to open his secret heart to a stranger, secure in his belief that some magic part of the stranger would understand and would give him a vague something he was not sure he would find at home.

It was noon when he reached the cabin in the clearing. Tom Woods was cooking the noonday meal, and took another plate from the closet and spun it across the table.

"Smells good in here," said Bert, and sniffed with appreciation.

"Ought to," the man drawled. "Chickens stewed with noodles. I had a hunch that you or Bill would be along, and I wanted to do myself proud. Bill isn't plugging along behind you, is he?"

"No."

"Sorry. Sort of wish that keg of gunpowder would breeze in and let me get a look at his drawings. Well, you'll have to eat your share and Bill's. I can't give you any aid. When you're forty you

can't pinch-hit for somebody else at a feed. A forty-year-old stomach won't stand for it."

Bert ate. Now that he was here, he found something holding back what it had been on his tongue to tell. He was reluctant to break the splendor of the dream that was all his. Gorged to the limit at last, he leaned back in his chair and stared blissfully across the table. The Butterfly Man, who had already lighted his pipe, stared back with gravity in his eyes.

"Get rid of it," he said pleasantly. "You'll feel better."

Bert was startled. "Get rid of what?"

"What you came out here to tell me. What have you done, robbed a bank? Set fire to a hospital? What's the crime? Learned to play a ukulele?"

Bert shook his head. "No; I'm going into business."

"Who are you going to work for?"

"It's my own business—a partnership."

The Butterfly Man, with a sudden motion, took the pipe out of his mouth. "With that smart-Alec clerk in your father's store? What a noodle-head I'm becoming! I might have known, the way he had you wrapped up in him, that there was a hook in it somewhere. How far have you gone? Have you put in any money?"

"Not yet; but I've signed a contract. We signed it last night."

"Let's see it."

Bert took the paper from his pocket and handed it across the table. The man read it, once, twice, three times, and his pipe smoldered and went out.

"Two-thirds for Sam," he observed at last. "I'm not surprised. He reminds me of a chap I knew years ago. Great fisherman. Always got the most fish. If he was one of a boat party, and somebody pulled in a couple of good ones, he'd be right over with his line. No such thing as respecting anybody else's place. He was out to get two-thirds of the fish and I guess he got them, but he left a mighty bad taste in the mouth. What is this Shoppers' Service?"

Bert explained. Not a muscle in the man's face moved, but once he shook his head ever so slightly.

"You don't like it?" Bert asked, disappointed.

"Never mind that now. Why does Sam get two-thirds of the profits?"

"Why, it's his plan. He's going to put in the experience and the knowledge. That's worth something."

"Yes; if he can deliver. But how do you know he has this knowledge?"

"He's read books about business. . . ."

"I've read books about health, but I'm not a doctor. How do you know he has this knowledge? How did he prove it to you?"

Bert was silent. Abruptly the Butterfly Man

stood up and began to clear the table. After a moment the boy left his chair to help. The man's argument had stumped him; yet, with something of his old doggedness, he clung to his original belief. Hadn't his father praised Sam? Hadn't the clerk been held up to him as a model after whom it might be well to pattern?

The Butterfly Man put the last dish away. "What does your father think of this?"

"I haven't told him yet."

"Why not; afraid?"

"N . . . no." Bert made a vague gesture with his hands. "You know how fathers are."

The man made no comment. "You've got to tell him."

"I will."

"When?"

"Soon."

"That won't do, old man. You've got to tell him to-day."

Bert looked up quickly. "Why?"

"Well . . . Let's look at it this way: Your father thinks a lot of this Sam chap. He's spent time to train him. Sam fills a niche in the store, takes a certain amount of work on his shoulders and makes himself valuable. When he leaves. . . ."

"Leaves?" Bert echoed.

"Why, certainly. When this new business starts he's got to leave your father. Your father can't

find a new clerk in a day. You can't tell him at the last minute."

"I never thought of that," Bert said weakly.

"That's the trouble, Bert," the Butterfly Man sighed. "Fellows of your age forget so many things."

Here was a complication as disastrous as it was unexpected. The boy pictured in his mind the interview that had to be, and did not find it to his liking. He had not given a thought to how this might affect his father's fortunes . . . he had been too much concerned with the rosy promise of his own chance. Why, this was just like . . . just like stealing a clerk out of the store.

Contrition smote him. He had not been much of a help to the business, but even his going had been felt. The loss of Sam Sickles would be a calamity. Since the evening he had brought his accordion downstairs he and his father had had many fine hours . . . but he nursed no false conceptions of what to-night would bring. His father's face would darken and then a wrath of words would pour down upon his head. It wasn't a pleasant thing to think about.

The shadow of it lay over him all the way back to Springham. The mellow chimes of a church bell announced six o'clock as he rode into town. While yet some distance from the house, he dismounted from his wheel and pushed it before him; and instead of leaving the bicycle propped against

the porch and going in the front way, he entered the house by the kitchen. His movements were furtive, and sharp eyes would have read in him something of guilt.

But his mother was busy preparing to carry a roast of lamb to the dining room. "Hurry, Bert," she said. "You'll just have time to wash."

His father and his mother were at the table when he came downstairs. The lamb, tender and juicy, was as dry straw on his tongue. He fidgeted in his chair. His mother could observe him now, and slowly a shadow spread over her face.

"I'm . . . I'm taking all my money out of the bank," the boy said suddenly and explosively.

Mr. Quinby laid down his fork. "What for?"

"I'm going in business."

Slowly a twinkle of amusement grew in the man's eyes. He began to chuckle. "Sam's been talking to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"That fellow could talk business ambition into a brass monkey." To the man the thing was a joke. He was amused at the thought of a boy adventuring into the realm of man's work. "I suppose this is going to be a real up-and-going concern?"

"Yes, sir."

"Going to rent an office or a store?" The tone was jocular.

"A store."

"A store? Great Scott, I didn't think it was that serious. You mean you're honestly thinking of renting a store?"

"We've got to have a store."

"We?" This time the man's tone was sharp. "Who's in the thing with you?"

"Sam."

It was out at last, and Bert felt that a load was lifted from his heart. The effect was electrical. Mrs. Quinby gave a nervous start and upset her cup of tea. Mr. Quinby, after an exclamation of anger, pushed away his plate and sat there black and glowering. Several seconds passed before he spoke.

"Tell me what crack-brained plan you're up to now," he said grimly.

Bert told the story of the Shoppers' Service, and for the second time that day brought the agreement from his pocket. His father, seeming to read it at a glance, folded it and threw it on the table.

"Another clerk to hire and break in just when I've got one trained," he said bitterly. "Do you realize that this takes Sam away from me?"

"I know it now."

"That means you didn't think of it at first?"

"No, sir; I didn't think of it until to-day."

"I suppose I should thank you for thinking of it at all. There's just one thing I want to know. Whose plan was this, yours or Sam's?"

"Sam's. He told me a month ago he was looking around for an opening."

Mr. Quinby gave a short, hard laugh, stood up, and left the room. Another moment and the front door closed. The boy knew that he was gone.

"Bert!" his mother said. "What will you do next?"

He flushed hotly. "Why does pop always think I do things just to hurt him?"

"Why do you always hurt him?" she asked.

The question stung him. He took refuge in his old sanctuary—his room—and there gave himself up to bitter reflections. No matter what he did, it seemed, he did wrong. Here he was with his big chance, but what difference did that make? Was he supposed to be able to think of everything? After Sam left, if the new clerk didn't do everything just so, the blame would be his. He'd hear about it, all right; oh, yes, he'd hear about it. He threw up his hands with an impatient motion that, had he known it, was an exact copy of his father's.

"I suppose the only thing for me to do," he scowled, "is to back out. Then everybody will be happy." In spite of his depression, the idea gave him the painful-pleasurable emotion of a martyr.

He came down the stairs on tiptoe, let himself out of the house, and went over to Washington Avenue. A glance through the window showed

him that Sam was alone. He went into the store.

"Well, you did spill the beans, didn't you?" Sam demanded in disgust. "Why did you tell your father? I didn't want him to know this until *I* was ready to quit. Now I'll be out a couple of weeks' wages. I ought to collect that from our profits."

Up to this point Sam had dominated the enterprise. But Bert had met trouble that day and was in no mood for genial compromises. His reply, short and peppery, gave testimony that the Shoppers' Service was going to be no strictly one-man affair.

"Show it to me in our agreement," he said.

Sam became blandly argumentative. "This thing has come up later. You shouldn't expect me to lose. . . ."

"You're putting up five-eighths the money and getting two-thirds of the profits. That ought to be enough."

Sam gave him a startled glance and said no more.

Bert walked restlessly back and forth in front of the show cases that held the shirts and underwear. He had already dismissed from his mind the spat with Sam . . . his father's anger was of far more moment.

"Did my father pitch into you?" he demanded suddenly.

"He asked me if I was dissatisfied here," the

clerk answered. "I told him no, but that I wanted to improve my position. He went right out. He didn't say much."

That fact had begun to worry Bert. He was used to lengthy scoldings, and the way his father was acting moved him to anxiety. His father had left the table and had walked out of the house, and had then asked Sam a question and had walked out of the store. A storm of words ran itself out, vented its anger and announced its position, and was done. Silence might mean anything.

"There isn't any chance of any mistake in the business, is there?" he asked abruptly. He didn't say whose business he meant, but Sam understood.

"In financial matters," the clerk said wisely, "you check up everything. Figures do not lie. I've gone over the number of subscribers we will get, and the stuff we are sure to sell in the store. We'll surely clear three hundred dollars a month."

Bert divided the sum in his mind. One hundred to him—two hundred to Sam. The thing was a gold mine. And then he sighed. If he expected to have any peace at home he'd have to step out and let the chance go by.

Mr. Quinby returned to the store. There was that in his bearing that said that he had fought out a question with himself and had come to a

decision. He hung up his hat in the rear, remained there a while, and finally came out.

"That sale on boys' sport stockings starts tomorrow," he said to Sam. "Did you get them out and sort them by sizes?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'd better dress a window with those stockings to-night. There's a box of a dozen collars to be delivered before you go home." The voice was impersonal. And in the past he had always spoken to the clerk with the warmth of a co-worker.

Sam went forward to clear out one of the two windows. Bert took a step toward his father and stopped, for his father's eyes were regarding him fixedly.

"I . . . I never thought about Sam leaving here. I guess we had better drop this Shoppers' Service."

But his father, in a way that was new to him, would have none of this surrender. "Bert, you'd always blame me if you didn't go through with this; you'd always figure that you would have made a success of it if I had not stood in your way. You didn't come and ask my advice; you came and told me what you intended to do."

"But I can't take Sam; the store needs him."

"I don't want Sam, now. He isn't interested in my business to the exclusion of everything else. He wants to try something else. He says so. I've

already told him he could finish here Saturday week."

Bert did not argue . . . there was a finality about his father that forbade. At any rate, he told himself, he had tried to back out. He had the virtuous feeling that, after all, he had been practically forced into the venture that was to bring him a golden profit of one hundred dollars every month.

He was not sorry.

CHAPTER VII

"MEET me in the ice cream parlor," Sam had whispered as Bert had passed out of the store. Time, moving forward with its exact and inexorable measure, may sometimes seem to race; but as the boy sat in the sweet shop with his eyes fastened impatiently on a wall clock, the minutes seemed to limp and to drag as though they had sore feet. At a quarter past nine Sam came in.

"We'll have to meet here every night," he said. "Your father buys my time and I can't do my own work when I'm paid to do his. What are you going to have?"

"Lemon soda," said Bert.

"That's fifteen cents. Fifteen cents a night is ninety cents a week . . . we can walk around and talk on Sundays. Haven't they any five-cent drinks? Fifteen cents is too much. A man who throws away his money soon throws away his business."

It developed that he could buy an unpalatable, chemical orange phosphate for ten cents. With the unwholesome drink before him he leaned across the table.

"Let's get this thing started," he said. "First, we must find a store that we can afford to rent. Second, we must get tables, and chairs, and some pictures for the walls, and paper table cloths and napkins. I know a place in the city where you can buy second-hand furniture. If they have a catalogue we can select from that. Then we want a small icebox for ice cream. We've got to have plates, and cups and saucers, and knives, forks and spoons. It's going to be a job getting all this stuff together."

Bert was appalled.

"There you go," Sam said impatiently, "getting cold feet. Running a business isn't a picnic. Look what Woolworth went through before his five-and-ten-cent stores were a success. We've simply got to buckle down and get things done. I'll write to these furniture people to-night. You scout around and see if you can find a vacant store. It's got to be on Washington Avenue. I heard to-day that the Italian who runs the bootblack and hat cleaning place is going to get out. It is a small store, but it would be big enough for us. Look that up to-morrow."

"Suppose we can't find a store?" Bert asked anxiously.

Sam's voice had the earnest tone of a prophet who has seen a vision. "Never admit defeat. To think of failure is to fail."

Bert felt that the clerk was quoting from the

book. It sounded good, but he didn't see how it solved the problem of finding a place in which to establish and rear a young and promising industry.

As he opened the door of his home, a murmur of voices ceased in the dining room. He knew, instinctively, that his father and mother had been talking about him. When he entered the dining room his father was reading a newspaper—a stern man who did not invite conversation. Bert lingered a while, uncomfortable and constrained, and went off to bed. After a few minutes his mother followed him upstairs.

"Bert, are you sure this thing you have planned to do is a wise move?"

"Pop's been talking to you," he challenged.

"Well, it does seem a little improbable."

"Pop always claimed that Sam had a good business head. Didn't he? If he had a good head yesterday he ought to have a good head to-day."

"But this is different. Walking straight in the path that somebody else has cleared is one thing; clearing your own, solving all your own troubles, is another. What your father really meant was that Sam showed great promise."

"Funny he never said it that way, though, until now."

Mrs. Quinby sighed. "There's no use arguing with you, Bert. You always did give more heed to what somebody outside told you." She was si-

lent a moment. "Be careful," she said, and started downstairs.

"Mom!" He called her back. "Is pop very mad?"

"Yes," she said, and was gone.

"Wait until he sees me getting my twenty-five dollars every week," Bert reflected optimistically, and dropped into slumber.

In the morning, thoroughly alive to the responsibility and importance of his errand, he set out to find an acceptable store. He had an idea that he would ask the bootblack if he were really to quit business, but it was not necessary to ask. A sign, freshly pasted on the window, announced to all and sundry that the place was to let, and carried the invitation to "see F. L. Plecktoff, real estate and insurance."

A girl in the real estate office told Bert that Mr. Plecktoff had gone to the city and would not be back until four o'clock. At the appointed hour he returned to the office.

"Mr. Plecktoff just telephoned," the girl told him. "He has been detained. He won't be here until seven o'clock."

At seven o'clock Bert was back again. This time Mr. Plecktoff was there, a thin little wisp of man, bald and bilious, with a habit of leaning back in his chair and drumming his fingers on his legs. If he was surprised at a boy asking the rental of a store he did not show it . . . many strange

things come under the observation of a real estate agent.

"Twenty-five dollars a month," he said. "The present tenant will move out in about five days. You can have what amounts to immediate possession. I'll accept a deposit now."

Bert had less than one dollar in his pocket. It seemed to him, even in his inexperience, that to admit to such a fact would make this visit ludicrous.

"I'll have to talk to my partner," he said.

"The store may be taken when you get back," Mr. Plecktoff said, and saw that the shot went home. "A man was in to see me about the place early this morning. I'm expecting him back any moment. You had better take it quickly if you want it."

Bert grew cold with the thought of losing this opportunity and for a moment played with the wild idea of offering the dollar for an option until nine o'clock. But the smallness of the sum held him back.

"I'll have to see my partner," he repeated.

"You won't find another small store along Washington Avenue," Mr. Plecktoff prodded, pressing his advantage. "If I had only five dollars," Bert thought, and left abruptly lest he be tempted, if he stayed, to reveal the meagerness of his immediate resources.

No candy store meeting to-night; time was too

precious. He waited near his father's place. Would that other man reach Mr. Plecktoff's before he and Sam had a chance to get there? What would they do if the store was taken? Would they be able to find another place in which to establish themselves? Twice he walked back to the real estate office, and sighed with relief to find nobody there. At nine o'clock he was still keeping his vigil for Sam, and when the clerk appeared he caught his arm.

"Hurry," he said. "I've found our store, but somebody else is hot after it and we may be too late."

Sam quickened his pace. "I saw Plecktoff's sign in the window at noon. Went around to see him, but he wasn't there. Who told you somebody else was after it?"

"Mr. Plecktoff."'

"Oh!" Sam's stride lessened. "I told his clerk I was interested; I'm the other man. That's an old game with real estate men, trying to rush you into biting on what they have. Did he tell you the rent?"

"Twenty-five dollars a month."

"Huh! Well, we'll see. Maybe we can do better than that. Pay as little as you can and sell for all you can get. That's business."

They came to the real estate office, and Sam led the way inside. Mr. Plecktoff gave Bert an unemotional glance. He seemed to pick Sam as

the leader of the expedition, and gave that young man his attention.

"My partner has been telling me about the store," Sam began boldly. "It isn't exactly what we want, but we might be able to use it. If we take the place, when does the rent start?"

"The day the store becomes vacant." Mr. Plecktoff was watching him narrowly.

"But we won't be able to start business for three weeks. We'll pay rent from the first of next month."

The real estate agent's fingers tapped his knees faster. "Impossible! I can't have one of my properties bringing in no revenue. I must pay taxes and I must make a living."

"And we can't pay rent for a store until it brings *us* a revenue. We haven't the capital," Sam said bluntly. "Do we pay from the first of next month?"

"I cannot do it."

"Then we can't do business. We'll look around for something else. If we can find a better bargain we'll take that. If not, we'll come back here just before we're ready to open."

"A man was in to-day inquiring about that store. If you wait you'll lose it."

"Oh, no, I won't," said Sam. "I was the one who was asking about it. I wasn't sure whether my partner would be in to see you."

Mr. Plecktoff's expression showed that some of

the wind had been knocked from his sails. And yet he still had one trump card.

"You won't find another store on Washington Avenue," he said with thin triumph.

"We may decide to take a couple of rooms above a store," Sam said carelessly.

Mr. Plecktoff's fingers began to beat a furious rhythm, showing that he was agitated. It might be that these queer visitors might rent rooms. And then what? He had known of stores on the avenue to remain idle a year at a stretch. Better a loss of three weeks than a loss of twelve months.

"My friend," he said with forced cordiality, "on second thought I agree to your proposition. We must make concessions to those who, just starting, have their way before them. We will make a contract for one year, at twenty-five dollars a month. . . ."

"Twenty-five?" Sam broke in, and swung around to Bert. "You told me twenty." Then, without waiting for a reply, he was back again facing Mr. Plecktoff. "We can't afford any twenty-five dollars."

Bert, for a moment bewildered, suddenly began to see light. Sam, by devious wiles and pretensions, was trying to beat down the price. The game was new to Bert, and not at all to his liking. To his boyishly clean nature it smacked a bit of fraud. Sam, in appealing to him, had made him a

party to it. Yet he lacked the courage to object, afraid that objection might sum him up as a weak and pitiful being lacking in daring.

He listened, fascinated for all his squeamishness, to the boldness of Sam's attack; and presently a tinge of admiration for the clerk's shrewdness grew upon him. For it was apparent that Sam was holding his own with this real estate man who was probably a veteran of hundreds of such conflicts. Mr. Plecktoff scoffed and cajoled, sneered and argued, grew cold and became wheedling, but all to no purpose. Suddenly Sam shifted the battle ground.

"How about a coat of paint?" he demanded.

Mr. Plecktoff bristled. "What about it?"

"It has to be freshened with a coat of paint. Who's going to pay for that?"

"The tenant."

"Not *this* tenant. We're renting something we can use, not something we've got to doctor. Here; I'll meet you halfway. You paint the store and we'll pay you twenty-two dollars and a half a month."

"Twenty-four," said Mr. Plecktoff.

"Twenty-three," said Sam. "I can't stand here all night. Take it or leave it." He turned toward the door.

"No wonder," Mr. Plecktoff said feelingly, "that landlords die in poorhouses. Twenty-three dollars, then, and a deposit now. If you want the

place give me no promises, but put something down. Money talks."

"Put it in writing," said Sam.

The paper was prepared and signed. The partners of The Shoppers' Service came out into a Washington Avenue that was dark and deserted, for most of the stores were closed.

"Well," Sam said with satisfaction, "that saves us some money. I was sure we'd pay twenty-five dollars, and I expected we'd have to paint the place ourselves. You got to play a sharp hand to get anything out of those fellows."

Bert had an idea that "sharpness" was not the right word, but he did not argue the point.

"How did I do it?" the clerk asked; "good?" Abruptly struck by another thought he changed the conversation without waiting for an answer. "Don't forget that the company owes me the five dollars I paid as a deposit."

The morrow brought, not the catalogue Sam had written for, but several mimeographed sheets describing goods and prices. Sitting in the ice cream parlor, they checked the list, and their faces fell.

"Is it going to cost that much?" Bert asked faintly.

As usual, it was Sam who saw the way out. "We won't order six tables," he said; "we'll get four. Then we'll need only eight chairs instead of twelve. If we find business good we can easily

order more. It's time we put up our money. I'll meet you during my lunch hour to-morrow and we'll go to the bank."

So next day Bert withdrew his funds, and then he and Sam filled out a new account card and pushed it through a grilled window to a cashier who viewed them curiously.

"Shoppers' Service," he read, and looked at them again. "What is it?"

"A business," Sam said shortly.

The cashier frowned. "You realize that no money can be withdrawn unless you both sign?"

"That's how I want it," said Sam.

The cashier proceeded to enter their account. When they came out of the bank Bert asked:

"Who's going to mind the bank book?"

"You take it," said Sam. "I won't have to worry. You can't draw anything without my signature. That's business."

It might be business, but the more Bert thought about the remark the queerer it seemed.

Every day there was something to buy, and everything cost more than they had expected to pay. The bootblack moved out, the painters came in, stayed a while and went their way, and then crates, and packages and bundles began to arrive. Bert scrubbed the floor boards, found two small rugs in the attic, begged them from his mother, and brought them to the store. Sam picked up a small counter in the town, and bought

a second-hand gas stove that he saw advertised in the local newspaper. When the tables and chairs were set out on the rugs the place began to assume dimensions and proportions.

A curtain was stretched across the store three-quarters way back, and behind this they placed the stove, and the ice box, and the dishes. The curtain was an extra expense . . . they had not expected to buy one. But even Bert could see that the proprieties demanded that the operation of cooking be hidden from the front of the store.

"When do we begin to get our members," he asked, "at fifty cents each?" The money was going out so fast that he had begun to worry. He wanted to see some cash begin to come in.

The question brought to light the fact that there was still more money to spend.

"We've got to let the public know we're in business and what our business is," Sam said. "We've got to have a sign man put our name on the window, and we've got to see that a letter gets to every house in the good part of town. Then, when we go out asking for subscribers, we won't have to explain the whole business at every door."

Sam wrote the copy for the letter and delivered it to a local printer. After grave discussion they decided that mailing the letters would be too expensive.

"We'll put each letter in an envelope that will command attention," Sam said, "and shove them

under doorways or drop them in letter boxes."

"Maybe they won't read them," Bert observed dubiously.

"Put something on the envelope that will catch their eyes," said Sam. He took a piece of paper from his pocket, thought a moment, and wrote:

IF YOU ARE A SHOPPER
SAVE MONEY THROUGH
THE SHOPPERS' SERVICE

"All women are shoppers," he stated, "and they all want to save money. This will get them."

The printing was delivered, and for six hours Bert opened gates and climbed porch steps with The Shoppers' Service first appeal. That day he discovered that there were more miles of highway in Springham than he had ever dreamed existed. Footsore and weary he came back to the store to find Bill Harrison and Dolf Muller waiting on the sidewalk.

"You're not starting a business, are you?" Bill demanded.

Bert, completely absorbed in his new occupation, had dropped away from his friends. "Who told you?" he wanted to know.

"Tom Woods. I was out there yesterday."

Bert did not answer at once. It was apparent that to these two, at least, he had stepped out of the ordinary groove of accepted fact and conduct, that he was a person apart, and he gloried in his

moment of conquest. Dolf misinterpreted his silence.

"I knew it was a lie," he said triumphantly.

"It's true," Bert said; "we open the store Saturday week."

Dolf's face fell. Bert took a key from his pocket, turned it in the lock, and let them into the store. Bill, after a quick survey, stood leaning against the counter, grave and silent. Dolf went about poking into corners.

"What are you going to sell?" he asked at last.

Bert told them of Sam's idea, showed them the printed letters, and enlarged upon his hopes. Bill read a letter gravely, folded it, and put it back in its envelope. Dolf was frankly scornful.

"It's a punk idea," he sniffed. "The only thing to sell is something people have to have—clothes, and bread and cake, and meat and groceries. We buy one paper every day. Why should we pay fifty cents a month to look at other papers? Why, often my father has time only to look at the funny page. If we had three papers they'd be scattered all over the house and my mother'd be throwing them out."

"We don't deliver the papers," Bert said; "we keep them here."

"That's worse," Dolf said positively. "Catch my mother getting all dressed up just to come out and look at a newspaper."

"Dolf," Bill drawled, "you really ought to come

out next year and try for the athletic team."

"Eh?" Dolf started, and squirmed his fat neck out of the tight clutch of his collar. "Why?"

"Because you could beat everybody at the cold-water throw. You must have practiced it a lot."

Dolf sniffed, sulked, and soon departed. It was the usual order of his going whenever the barb of criticism touched him.

Bert turned to the friend who remained. "What do you think of it, Bill?"

"I don't know. Dolf is right in a way . . . you're not selling something that people must have. You're selling what I think is called service. People can't get along without telephones any more—telephone service is too convenient. Maybe, if people find what you have is a big help, they'll never want to be without that, either."

"That's what Sam says," Bert cried, and felt his spirits soar. "How are you coming on with your drawing?"

Bill's eyes glowed. "Tom Woods sent some of my things to an artist in Philadelphia and asked him what he thought of them. The artist says they're promising: that I'm not a bad draughtsman and that I've got a sense of color values. Oh, I'll be doing the pictures for Tom Woods' books some day."

"That's great," said Bert, and meant it. "How do your folks feel about it?"

"All right now. At first my father didn't think

much of it, but he's changed around. I think he went out and had a talk with Tom Woods. I'm not sure, but I think so."

After Bill had gone, Bert stood in thought beside the counter. Well, *he* wasn't getting any encouragement at home. Between him and his father there was a sort of formal neutrality. From his mother he had learned that a new clerk had been engaged. The clerk's name was Matthew Kirby and, putting two and two together, the boy had arrived at the conclusion that no surprising gifts were expected of the newcomer. Matthew Kirby had been accepted, in a sort of resignation, as the best that the moment offered. Bert was sorry for that; his own short experience had given him a taste of some of business's sharp difficulties. But he was sorrier still that, at the supper table, prudence closed his lips upon matters that lay close to his heart. It would have meant so much if he could have talked over his problems as he had once discussed the rocks and reefs of his school books.

"Oh, well," he said, rousing himself, "I won't be the first fellow who has had to fight his own way out." The thought, at least, gave him a sense of independence. "To-morrow Sam finishes with my father and then we'll make things hum."

That night the partners decided not to begin the canvas for members until Monday.

"If they join The Shoppers' Service too soon,"

Sam said thoughtfully, "they'll have a chance to forget it before we open. We can cover all our territory in four days. We've got to get our name on the window, but that can be done any time next week."

So there would be nothing to hold Bert to the store to-morrow. Suddenly he found himself glad of the respite. The work of preparing for the opening had fallen largely on his shoulders. . . . Sam could not get away during the day . . . and he was tired. He did not ask himself what he would do with this unexpected holiday. He knew. Something deep within him urged him to ride out in the country and see the Butterfly Man.

He planned an early start, but the plan miscarried. As he mounted his bicycle at the curb in front of his house and pushed away, the bellowing voice of Peg Scudder halted his progress.

"Hey! Blast you, there, you Quinby, where's your ears?"

Bert halted. "What do you want?"

"I got a letter for you from the other fellow. And don't give me any snippy talk. I'm a hard man when I get going, and I might take a notion to larrup you."

Bert had come to learn that Peg's talk was largely bluster. "Give me the letter," he said, and broke the seal and read:

BERT: I got wind this morning that Mr. Scudder does window lettering. The regular sign painter wants twelve

dollars, but Mr. Scudder will do it for five dollars. It may not be a perfect job, but it will save us seven dollars. Let him do the job at once, and then it's out of the way.

SAM.

Bert viewed, with equal disfavor, both the letter and its bearer. His desire to ride out into the country became doubly keen now that his plan had been set aside. Yet seven dollars. . . . He remembered having heard his father say that a business man was a slave to his business. There was some truth to it. He crumpled the letter impatiently.

"When can you start?" he asked.

Peg shifted his crutch. "Where's the place? That little hole in the wall on the avenue?"

"That's our store."

"Blast me, but you're getting stuck-up, ain't you? I've seen kids like you before. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Peg was as good as his word. He came stumping down the avenue to the minute, a can of paint swinging at his side, brushes in his hip pocket, his wide open shirt showing his suspenders, and his tawny beard rioting in fierce disorder. He wasted little time chalking in the letters, and then set to work with the brushes. At ten o'clock he halted.

"Hey, you!" he called.

Bert came to the door.

"I want two dollars now."

"What do you want it for?"

"Blast me, but you're a nosey kid! What difference does it make what I want it for? Do I have to tell you my private affairs? Maybe I want it to buy a ticket to London and maybe I don't. Just pony up two dollars and ask no questions, and don't forget there'll be three dollars more coming to me when I finish."

Bert was not sure about the ethics of paying for a job before it was finished, but he paid rather than argue. Peg laid his brush across the can and hobbled down the street. Twenty minutes later he was back, a suspicious odor on his breath and a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth. Whatever had transpired while he was away had evidently put him in a bad humor, for he growled and grumbled as he plied his brush.

The hands of Bert's watch crawled past eleven o'clock. It was apparent that Peg was nearing the end of his labors. Bert walked out into the street, studied the lettering and made a grimace. Well, it saved seven dollars, anyway.

"What's the matter with you?" Peg demanded truculently. "Don't you like it?"

"It will do. What time will you finish?"

"About noon. So it will do! What did you expect for five dollars, an oil painting? Maybe you'd like it in gold leaf. Give a kid a few dollars and he thinks he's quality and sasses his betters. Blast me, in my day a youngster knew his place and kept it."

Bert went into the store. If he could be off by noon he could be at the Butterfly Man's at two o'clock and the day would be saved. When the job was finished he gave Peg the remaining three dollars, demanded a receipt, stuck it in his pocket and locked the store door. Ten minutes later he had left Springham behind.

He found Tom Woods at his bench mounting specimens for a high school museum in another part of the state. There was a constraint about the meeting, and Bert grew ill at ease. In the past he had been content in this room to sit back relaxed, his body at ease, his soul tranquil under the atmosphere of peace and understanding. Today he stirred restlessly. The Butterfly Man finished, stood two boards of mounted insects against the wall, and absently filled his pipe.

"Bill Harrison was out yesterday," he said.

Bert, in a flash of vision, saw what lay behind the sentence. Bill had told of his visit to the store. A nameless urge had sent him on this visit, but the store was the one topic he wished to avoid. He tried to steer the subject into safer channels.

"Bill was telling me about that letter from the artist!"

The man's voice brightened. "Good ol' Bill. I was scared stiff after it came; afraid I had made a mistake in showing it to him. But I wanted to give him something to hang a hope on. I was afraid he'd get puffed up. 'I suppose you think

you're an artist,' I said, watching to see how he'd take it. 'Yes,' he said, 'just the way a drop of water thinks it's a river.' Oh, there's something solid about Bill. Nobody's going to stampede him."

Bert nodded, and sat there silent. That strange restlessness was on him again. The man fell to whistling a tune, and broke it off abruptly.

"Bill tells me, Bert, that you're in this thing."

"Yes, sir. The store opens a week from to-day."

"What does your father think of it?"

"He's sore."

"I thought he would be," said the Butterfly Man, and silence came again.

Never had a visit to this place of enchantment gone so dismally. Bert said, after a time, that he thought he had better make a break for home. The Butterfly Man roused himself.

"I think I'll run in to Springham and see how much the town has grown. I'll get the car and drive you in. We can put your bicycle in the rear."

Bert gave a feeble grin. The plot was transparent. He was not surprised when, as they ran into the town, the man said:

"Suppose you give me a look at your store. It may be an age before I come to Springham again, and I'd like to get a look at it while I'm here."

So Bert unlocked the door and turned on the

lights. Dolf Muller had pried and poked into every corner; Tom Woods merely sat on the counter and let his eyes rove. His face was inscrutable.

"Rather cozy," he said, and made no other comment. Bert was disappointed and nettled. With clouded face he saw Tom Woods swing down from the counter. He followed him out to the car. The man started the engine and let it idle.

"Bert."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you make me a promise?"

The boy stared at him.

"If anything queer turns up in your business will you promise me to go to your father?"

"Yes, sir."

The man held out his hand. "Shake on it. Good luck."

Those last two words took the sting out of the whole day.

Monday the great adventure started. Instead of struggling alone, Bert found a co-worker at his elbow: and the companionship was warm and stimulating. He had thought that, early in the morning, they would begin the siege of the town in search of members for the Service. But Sam had not read his book of business success for nothing.

"The first thing," he said, "is to lay out a strong, sure-fire selling talk. We can't go out and

babble; we must say something. When we ring the bell and a woman opens the door, we must interest her before she can close it. Once her interest is caught the rest should be easy. 'Madam,' we say, 'I am here to save you money.' Money is a magic word. She'll listen, and then we'll tell her how it's done."

All morning they rehearsed imaginary front-door interviews. At noon Bert was sure that he would neither stammer nor falter. He hastened home, ate a hurried meal, and was off to storm the citadel.

The first doorbell he rang brought no immediate response. He rang again. The door opened.

"Madam—" he began.

A child, not a woman, stood within the hall. He was not prepared to be greeted by little girls and his set talk was utterly routed from his mind.

"Mother," the child piped, "says she has all the soaps, and mops, and peeling knives she needs." The door closed.

Bert went down the steps with flushed cheeks. He had been taken for a peddlar—he who had come with a soaring idea of selling a useful service. His pride suffered a fall from which it did not recover all the afternoon.

By five o'clock he found that women were beginning to prepare the evening meal and had no time to waste on salesmen. He came back to the

office discouraged and disillusioned. Sam was there, writing names into a book.

"What luck?" he asked.

"Only three."

"I got twelve. I didn't figure you were going to get many the first day. You've got to learn salesmanship. To-morrow you'll do better."

Bert's heart warmed toward his partner. But Sam was not showing a rare magnanimity. The business book had warned him not to expect too much from new men and not to discourage a beginner with sharp criticism. He had read that in the chapter headed "How the Executive Can Get the Most Out of His Force."

Sam's prediction proved true. On the morrow Bert did better but his total for the day was only five. It was nothing to boast about. By Friday night the entire town had been canvassed, and seventy-eight customers were on the books. That meant a membership fee of $39 a month.

It wasn't much. Even Sam admitted that. But the clerk insisted stoutly that it was a start.

"We can't expect a paying business over night," he said. "The public doesn't really know us yet. We must make our service so good that one woman will tell another. And don't forget we're going to sell food at those tables, and we're going to sell it to-morrow."

Bert was encouraged. "I'll be down early in the morning."

"We'll both be down early," said Sam. "Some of these women may be going down on early trains and we want to be here when they stop to see the advertisements."

But it was ten o'clock next day before the first woman came in to see what the Shoppers' Service had to offer, and Bert had a sneaking idea that she came in out of curiosity.

At noon, when he came home to eat, his mother studied his face.

"How did it go, Bert?"

"Not so good. Sam says we can't expect much at the start."

"Your father's opening day was a disappointment." It was the first word of encouragement that he had received at home, and he looked at his mother gratefully.

A sprinkle of patrons came in during the afternoon, and he copied Sam's manner of cordiality and confidence. Once there were four women in the place at once, and his heart began to flutter with the hope that the rush had started at last. But this sudden burst of trade was only a flurry, and half an hour later the tables were vacant again. He wanted to count the money in the drawer behind the counter, but that would have seemed like a sign of weakness. He restrained his impatience.

"What's that Mr. Clud doing around here?" Sam asked suddenly.

Bert, taking a soiled cloth from a table, swung around. "Where? I haven't seen him."

"He just walked away. That's the third time he's been looking in our window. What's the matter with him?"

Bert did not know. Bill Harrison had told him that Mr. Clud had been snooping around the doorway. He was mystified.

"He can't have much business to attend to," Sam said irritably, "if he's got to come around trying to mind ours. The next time he does it I'll ask him what he wants."

But Old Man Clud did not appear at the window again.

The day grew dark and they turned on the lights.

"Going home for supper?" Sam asked.

"Sure." Bert looked at him in surprise. "Why?"

"There's some of this stuff we won't sell today. It may not keep over Sunday. We might as well eat it ourself."

Not wishing to be at a table should a customer enter, they ate in the rear, setting their plates on the three-burner gas stove. Bert washed the dishes, put them away and came down to the door. Washington Avenue was filled with Saturday night shoppers. Back and forth they went along the sidewalk, each one a potential spender of cash. Now and then somebody came in, but the waits in

between grew dismal. At eight o'clock the tide of trade was at its height. By nine o'clock it had dwindled perceptibly. Half an hour later some of the stores began to turn out rear lights.

"Might as well call it a day," said Sam.

They counted the receipts—ten dollars and five cents—and entered the amount in a ledger. Probably not more than three dollars of it was profit. And against that meager sum stood rent, light, telephone, the cost of the newspapers and magazines that they would have to buy. Bert felt a stab of discouragement that sickened him. It was Sam who locked the door.

"We've got to find a way to get more interest into this," he said. It was his first confession of failure. "I'll think about it over Sunday. If every business that didn't make a ten-strike right at the start gave up there wouldn't be any business at all."

Bert walked toward home alone. Before he had gone half a block he was conscious of short, quick footsteps in his rear, the wheeze of an asthmatic breathing and a panting call of his name.

"Mr. Quinby! Just a moment, if you please, Mr. Quinby."

It was Old Man Clud, sweating profusely, his coat buttoned tight to his fat, colorless throat though the night was hot. Bert waited.

"So you have gone in business, my young friend.

Following in your worthy father's footsteps. You are a fine, bright lad; I always said so. I can see success weaving a web around you. Oh, I have been watching; I am a busy man but I have eyes. From early morning until late at night I have seen you at your labors and I have said to myself, 'There is a young man who will go far.' Believe me, I have your interest at heart, and if you ever need a friend do not hesitate to come to me. There is such a thing, in business, as needing a friend."

He pressed something into Bert's hand and was gone, wheezing and panting and sweating his unhealthy sweat.

Bert looked at his hand and found a card there. He read it:

P. M. CLUD
Confidential Loans

CHAPTER VIII

THE realization came to Bert, with overwhelming poignancy, that this was not the home-coming he had visioned. His imagination had pictured a long day of busy trade, a jubilant counting of receipts, and a triumphant departure from the scene of victory.

In contrast his present bearing was leaden and dull. After Mr. Clud had left him, he went slowly along the avenue. He was too discouraged to think. He dared not think. For, stifle it though he tried, an inner voice kept whispering that perhaps, after all, he had made a mistake, that Tom Woods and his father had been right.

And so he came to that part of the thoroughfare occupied by his father's store. Mr. Quinby, his back turned to the street, was just locking the door. Bert could have slipped past. He half made the motion, only to stop. And then his father faced around, and saw him, and paused before slipping the key into his pocket.

"Hello," he said half-doubtfully. Then, because the moment plainly demanded something more than this: "Been waiting?"

"No, sir; I just came along."

"Oh!" They walked on together, father and son by the blood tie, but as far apart as the poles in their understanding of each other.

This meeting, too, was far from the pattern of Bert's dreams. As he had seen it in imagination, his was to be the part of one who had conquered and had proven his case, and his father's that of one who was forced to give honest credit and admiration. He sighed.

"Tired?" Mr. Quinby asked without warmth.

"Yes, sir."

"A night's sleep will fix you up. How was business?"

"Good." The boy would have bitten off his tongue before he would have confessed otherwise.

His father glanced at him sharply, but the darkness hid whatever of the bitter truth his face would have shown. They came to the house, and were almost at the door, before Mr. Quinby spoke again.

"Who's holding the money?"

"Why, it's in the bank."

"I know that; the bank teller told me— I mean who's holding the book?"

"I am. We can't draw money unless we both sign."

"That was Sam's idea."

"Yes, sir."

"Careful Sam," said the man, and passed inside. As Bert undressed he thought that he had

never before heard his father speak of his former clerk in just that tone.

The morning brought him a return of courage. After all, fortune was too much to expect at one stroke. He attended church, went for a long walk, and came back to dinner in a more cheerful frame of mind. There were signs that he had learned to read, and one of these was his father's face. Just now his father's mouth told him that something was again amiss. After dinner Mr. Quinby followed him out of the dining room.

"Bert, what's this? I found it in the hall upstairs."

It was Old Man Clud's card.

"He gave it to me last night," the boy said.

"Why did he give it to you?"

"I don't know; he forced it into my hand."

"Have you done any business with this man?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quinby, with an angry twist of his hands, tore the card into pieces. "The vultures gather before the feast," he exclaimed.

Bert, from his reading, knew something of the habits of vultures. His cheeks flushed. "You're not very encouraging," he said.

This time it was the man who flushed. "I shouldn't have said that, Bert. But keep away from Clud. Mind that. Take a word of advice for once in your life. Keep away from Clud."

Next day, when Bert reached the store, Sam

was there ahead of him, a new scheme bubbling in his fertile brain.

"Every great business success in America," he said wisely, "has been built out of the ashes of a failure or a near-failure. In most cases the original plan was good . . . all it needed was one more touch to put it across. The eye that sees tomorrow is always a jump ahead of the eye that sees only to-day. What did you do yesterday?"

"I took a walk."

"I sat home and tried to find ways to improve the business. We can't wait for people to come in here and look over our newspaper files. We've got to bring the papers to them."

"Deliver papers to everybody?" Bert cried, aghast. "That would cost more than fifty cents a week for each subscriber."

"No; no. I'm going to go out to-day and tomorrow and call on everybody we've signed up. I'm going to ask every woman if there's anything she's particularly interested in buying. Suppose some one wants a dining room table. I make a note of that. I get here early in the morning and go through the papers. If there are any dining room table bargains I telephone her and tell her what is offered, the store and the price. What's going to happen after we do that once or twice?"

Bert shook his head.

"Oh, use your imagination," Sam said impatiently. "She's going to be so tickled she'll tell all

her friends, and they'll send in their half-dollars a month for a Service membership. It isn't all a question of what you sell. It's how you sell it."

It needed no argument to convince Bert that the plan was good. The complexion of his fortunes changed, and he dusted the tables and polished the counter with a light heart. That day he was all alone in the store and, though trade was distressingly dull, his courage never once fell from its high notch.

Noon was on him before he knew it. He did not want to close the store lest some customer, arriving and finding the door locked, would depart dissatisfied and irritated. He telephoned his mother that he would not be home for dinner, opened a can of sardines, and ate once more with the gas stove as his table. At two o'clock Bill Harrison stumped in and presented him with a painting of a Purple Emperor on the wing.

"I thought you'd like to have it hang in your bedroom," Bill said shyly.

Bert was astounded at the progress his friend had made. The picture was unmistakably boyish, but the drawing was boldly executed and the coloring did not suggest indecision or uncertainty. The thing had life.

"I'm going to frame it," Bert said impulsively. "And some day, when you're famous, it will be the best picture in the house."

Bill grinned. "Rave on," he said. "You're

looking years ahead, but I like to hear you say it. Tom Woods came to my house after he left here Saturday. He asked me to give you a message. He wants you to write him and let him know how things are going."

Bert wrote that afternoon.

We didn't have much of an opening day. I guess I expected too much. Sam says it takes time to build up a business. I don't mean that Saturday was a total failure. We took in over ten dollars, but I had been hoping for about fifty dollars. Sam's a wonderful fellow for ideas. He bobbed up with a new one this morning, and is out now seeing our customers to find out if there's anything they want to buy at once. We'll telephone them every day and let them know what's advertised. That ought to help the business a lot. They'll know we're trying to please them and give them good service.

At five o'clock Sam came back to the store, jubilant.

"It went over big," he reported. "I signed up five new ones. I landed an old friend of yours."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Busher."

Bert made a grimace.

"She put you on the fire," Sam continued, "and roasted you to a turn. She said you were an impertinent young whipper-snapper. I had a job smoothing her out and getting her subscription. She's got one of those high-and-mighty ways of talking that would get under anybody's skin; but when you're in business you've got to smile and give soft answers. You can't insult a person to-

day and have him give you his trade to-morrow."

"I'd like to tell her a few things," Bert said hotly.

"Here, now," Sam cried in alarm; "none of that. If she ever calls up and you answer the telephone, be as sweet as honey. She's one of our subscribers and her half-dollar is as good as anybody else's."

"I guess I've got sense enough to try to hold our trade," Bert said stiffly. For the first time, he thought, he had seen an assumption of superiority on Sam's part, and he did not like it. He was willing to admit, to himself, that Sam was the strength of the partnership, but he objected to Sam rubbing that truth in.

Saturday night, when they balanced the books for the second time, the complete receipts for the week ran fifty-two dollars, and their expenses had been forty dollars. Bert gave a gurgle of delight.

"Twelve dollars profit. Not so bad, Sam. We're off now, aren't we?"

Sam looked at him queerly. "Profit? There's no profit. Where are you leaving our drawing accounts? Your father takes so much out of his business every week to live on, doesn't he?"

"Why . . . I suppose so."

"Do you think I can live on air? I've got to have a drawing account. I've got to pay board, and laundry bills, and restaurant checks, and my clothes won't last forever. Where's the money

coming from if it doesn't come out of the work I do? Even if your father's business wasn't profitable he'd have to draw out money every week to support his family."

The logic of the situation was all with Sam. "How much are you going to draw?" Bert asked weakly.

"Ten dollars a week. That means you draw five dollars every Saturday. Two-thirds of the weekly account for me; one-third for you."

Bert paid Sam his money and took his own share. The amount to be deposited on Monday had shrunk to thirty-seven dollars.

"We . . . we lost money on the week's business," he said.

"We'll be showing a profit within two more weeks," Sam said confidently.

But, as the weeks passed, each Monday morning saw less money deposited than had been spent the week before. Slowly, but inexorably, the account of The Shoppers' Service at the bank grew slimmer and slimmer.

In September the high school reopened, and Bert went back for his second year. The call went out for football candidates, but he did not respond —he had no time for athletics. Sam was coming to the store very early each morning, going through the newspapers and telephoning prices to customers so that they might take an early train to the city. In the afternoon, as soon as classes

were over, Bert hurried over to Washington Avenue and relieved him. And then Sam went home, sometimes to catch up with needed sleep, sometimes to rack his brain for new ways in which to make the business prosper.

He was working with a fervor and a concentration worthy of a better cause. Eleven hours a day in the store was no uncommon occurrence, nor was it unusual for him to telephone to thirty subscribers during the course of the morning. Twice he went to the city and tried to induce the big department stores to send him copies of their advertisements before publication so that he would have advance information to give his clients. That the plan failed left him no whit discouraged. The book that had been his business Gospel had pounded into him the philosophy that most men struggle desperately to achieve their business salvation. He was steeled to go on in daily expectation of the turning of the tide. Was he not industrious? Was he not gracious in his dealings with customers? Was he not always awake to catch at opportunity? Did not the book pledge him that these things would bring their reward?

In one way, spending his afternoons and part of each evening at the store shaped Bert's hours to a useful end. The ice cream, coffee and sandwich trade was never brisk and he had never been one to take kindly to dawdling about with his hands in his pockets. And so, to speed the dragging min-

utes, he burrowed into his school books and achieved a standing above that which he had ever known before. He had a shrewd suspicion that his father was waiting for a sight of his first monthly report; and it was not without an inward glow of satisfaction that he brought it home. He had scored over ninety in every subject.

"Good work," Mr. Quinby said briefly, and signed the card and gave it back to him.

The boy frowned. It seemed to him that his father had been expecting a bad record and was all set to lay it against the time given to the Washington Avenue partnership. He said as much to his mother.

"Bert," his mother sighed, "sometimes I think you've got a few broken corners in your brain. You can see so many things from the wrong angle."

"If I had brought home a rotten report I'd have heard more than two words."

"Many more," his mother admitted cheerfully. "What do you do to your bicycle when it is running perfectly?"

"Nothing; I let it alone."

"Certainly; you tinker with it only when it gets out of order."

He felt that he had been worsted in this fling at logic. However, it was not in his stubborn nature to surrender gracefully.

"It looks funny, anyway," he said, and went

back to Sam and the store . . . and to his books.

But the time came when he sat before an open page and took no meaning from what was printed there. Tragedy brooded in his eyes. The bank balance had almost reached the vanishing point. Day by day he and Sam had gone deeper into a hole that seemed to have no bottom. As though to mock him, the business had always been on the point of gaining enough to be self-supporting, and had always been failing of the mark. A few more weeks, he knew, and there would be nothing left in the bank, nothing left in the cash drawer. And then. . . .

The picture froze him. The store closed, its little stock of furniture sold, the end of a dream. To be pointed out through the town as one who had had his chance and who could not seize its promise. To have Dolf Muller cry the dashing of his hopes through the corridors of the high school. To have his father tell him that he had done a foolish thing and, like all fools, had lost his money.

To a boy, whose world is just a succession of to-days, a disaster of the moment seems to bear the imprint of a calamity that will never lift. After the things that had happened to have to confess to his father that he had failed. . . . His face settled into a scowl, his jaw set, and suddenly he slammed shut the book and sat there with his fist upon it. He wouldn't give up.

Events had made their mark even upon Sam. All at once he had become a bit silent, a bit preoccupied. To-night, after coming back to the store, he stood down near the window looking out at the people passing in the street. After a time he turned and came back slowly to where Bert leaned against the counter.

"Bert," he said frankly, "we're in a bad way. I don't believe in yelling quits before you're licked, but there's such a thing as not trying to fool yourself. We're pretty nearly at our finish."

Bert's heart thumped. "You mean you want to quit?"

"No. I don't mean that. This wouldn't be the time to quit. In two weeks we have Thanksgiving. A month after that we have Christmas, the biggest shopping season of the year. Why, everybody will be searching for bargains then. It's our time to clean up, to establish ourselves, to put the business on a paying basis. You know what the Christmas rush means all during December. Christmas shopping, Christmas crowds. We've got to get through the Christmas season into clear water."

Bert took the bank book from his pocket and opened it.

"I know." Sam pushed it away with an impatient movement of his hand. "There isn't enough there to carry us three more weeks."

"Then what's the idea of talking about lasting

until Christmas? You have some kind of plan, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"We might. . . ." Sam looked down at the floor and suddenly lifted his head. "We might borrow."

Slowly Bert closed the bank book and slipped it back into the pocket of his coat. A shiver had trembled through him . . . and had given place to a burning recklessness. Christmas! The crowd . . . everybody spending. If Christmas boomed their business they would be safe. No need to confess failure to anybody. The hope of that swept every other consideration from his mind.

"Every business borrows," Sam was saying. "Your father has notes over at the bank. I helped to keep his books. I know what I'm talking about."

"Could . . . could we get money at the bank?" Bert asked.

"No. You've got to show a bank you're making money; you've got to be what they call 'a safe risk.' I know that, too. I drew up a couple of statements for your father when he went over to borrow. We couldn't possibly show them any profits."

"Where could we get it?"

"Well. . . ." Sam looked down at the floor

again. "I've seen you talking to Old Man Clud. He seems to have taken a shine to you."

Back to Bert's vision flashed the night when the money lender had pressed a card into his hand. And his father had said: "Keep away from Clud." But his father had borrowed money, too; Sam was authority for that. If it was all right for his father to risk a loan, why wasn't it all right for him? And the Christmas trade would sweep away the last of their difficulties and bring them into the sunshine of prosperity.

"If we can only get to Christmas we're safe," Sam murmured.

"I'll see Mr. Clud to-night," Bert said with decision.

There was no reason why he should have tried to hide himself in the stream of people eddying through Washington Avenue. Yet he watched the tide of faces apprehensively lest he meet a familiar countenance. Coming opposite the place where Mr. Clud had his office, he paused at the curb. Above the street, the yellow shade of one window was luminous with light save where a dark patch reflected the outline of a fat, squat figure.

With a studied air of indifference, after the fashion of one who wanders with aimless feet, he crossed the roadway. The door that gave in upon the stairway leading up to Mr. Clud's office was ajar. The boy halted and kicked at an imaginary

object on the sidewalk. Side-eyed, he glanced up and down the thoroughfare. No one was in sight who might recognize him. With a quick movement he thrust open the door, closed it, and stood within the hall. For a while he remained there motionless as though half-expecting some one to follow him in. But the minutes passed, and no inquisitive person came to inquire into his motives, and his fast-beating heart grew quiet.

His footsteps echoed hollowly as he mounted the stairs. On the first landing he paused. A gas jet cast a pallid illumination; and as the feeble flame flickered the hallway swelled and shrank with moving shadows. Had it been necessary for him to search, he might have found it hard to read the tenants' names. But only one transom showed a light. He walked toward it and knocked.

"Come in, Mr. Quinby," wheezed Mr. Clud's voice.

The invitation gave him a start. Could Old Man Clud see through solid wood? Then common sense came to his rescue. The man must have observed him crossing the street and must have seen him enter the building. The feeling that he had been watched sent a cold thrill along his spine. He turned the knob and pushed open the door.

The room that he entered was almost as bare as a prison cell. Not so much as a mat upon the floor; not a picture upon the faded walls. Up near the window Old Man Clud sat before a small,

unpainted table that held two pens, a bottle of ink and a ledger. One other chair stood close beside his own. An old safe stood in a corner. It was a dismal place; and at any other moment, Bert might have thought that he had come upon a dismal errand.

"It is a pleasure to see you," the man said, and caught his breath between the words. Abroad in the daytime his face, his bald dome of head, his folds of fat, seemed gray and unhealthy; here, in the night, they were ghastly with pallor. "How often have I said to myself, 'There goes one I should like to know better.' I had begun to fear you would never pay me a social visit."

"This is a business visit," said Bert.

"Is it, indeed? I'm glad to have you come in regardless of the reason. And how, might I ask, is your business venture progressing?"

"It . . . it's almost all right, but not quite."

Old Man Clud spread apart his pudgy hands with a gesture of sympathy. "How often have I observed that sometimes the most industrious have the hardest time? But courage, my friend. I have heard something of your business. It only needs a firm hand to hold on until the tide turns."

"That's the reason I came to see you," Bert broke in eagerly. "We want to borrow some money."

The money lender beamed. "You have come to the right place. You may recall that I once

gave you one of my cards. Why did I do it? Because, my young friend, it gives me pleasure to help the deserving, to succor them in their time of need, to be able to say to myself, when their time of trial is over, 'There is a business I helped to success.' It is a wonderful privilege to be able to aid young men on their way to their goals."

Whatever misgivings Bert had brought with him into the room vanished. Here was treatment as whole-souled, as generous and as spontaneous, as he could ask.

"I was afraid," he said in a burst of confidence, "that perhaps you might not lend me the money."

"You have misjudged me," Old Man Clud wheezed; "but I am used to being misjudged. Every man who goes far in the world has his defamers. If I should tell you the names of men in this town that I have helped you would sit there and look at me in astonishment. But to me a loan is a matter of sacred confidence, and I never reveal secrets. What I lend and what you borrow is nobody's business but ours. Am I not right?"

"Yes, sir."

"There! I always judged you for a young man of understanding. I am a shrewd judge of character. And how much might this sick business of yours need to make it well?"

"About one hundred and fifty dollars," said Bert.

"You have it already," said Old Man Clud.

He stood up and pushed back the chair and, breathing hard, went over to the safe. For several seconds he tinkered with the combination before he swung open the small, heavy door. From a compartment he took bills—fives, and tens and twenties—and counted out a small pile. These he brought back to the table and set before Bert. And then he mopped his face, and sat down, and seemed to have to wait to recover his breath before he could speak again.

"There, my young friend, is your hundred and fifty dollars, and may your business enjoy the prosperity it deserves. Please count it and tell me if the amount is right. Even the best of us make mistakes. And now that you have your money, it becomes a duty to draw up some papers that will be a record of our transaction. Between you and me there would need to be no paper, but life is uncertain. You might die or I might die, and without writing between us, who would there be to say what money had passed between us to-night? I want to be protected, you want to be protected. Is that not right?"

"Yes, sir. My partner and I signed papers before we started our business."

"A fair proceeding, and one that speaks you credit. If you will bear with me just a moment." He opened the ledger, and took out a loose, printed form, and began to fill it in. By and by it was finished, and he pushed it across the table.

"And now, my young friend, if you will sign that our negotiations will be at an end."

Bert read the paper haltingly, stumbling over its wordy, legal phraseology. Two of its statements stood out from everything else. One was that the note was payable in sixty days. The other was that he was signing a receipt for $175.

"But you gave me only $150," he cried. "This is wrong."

"No; no. I'm afraid you misunderstand. In a transaction of this kind there is always a bonus—a purchase price, you might say, of the loan. I assure you it is all quite customary."

"But the bank would only charge me interest."

"Then why do you not go to the bank? Ah, my friend, now we are getting at the kernel of the matter. You do not go to the bank because you have no security on which they would advance you anything. That means that, in lending to you, I run a risk. I take a chance. Is it not so? And is it not right that, taking such a chance, I should receive some extra return for the risk I run? Fair, my friend; be fair."

Bert was doing some rapid mental arithmetic. Considering that the loan was to be paid back within two months, Old Man Clud was charging him in excess of 100 per cent interest per annum. The lender seemed to read what was passing in his thoughts.

"Observe," he said, and laid his hand over

Bert's. The palm was hot and sweaty. "I could deduct my bonus from you now. I could have you sign the note for $150 and then give you only $125. But I am too much aboveboard for that. You asked for $150 and $150 you are getting. I ask you to pay nothing now; my profit must wait. First I give you your opportunity to win that success that your industry so richly deserves, and after your pockets are full of rich plums, then I take my share. Think of what it means to you: success, prosperity, the placing of your career upon a firm foundation. Is that not something to be weighed against a mere bonus of $25?"

Bert continued to stare at the note. Abruptly Old Man Clud's manner changed and he reached for the money.

"Come; my time is valuable and you delay. You need not take it."

Bert was quick to stay him. "I'll take it," he said huskily.

He signed the note; and while he folded the bills and stowed them safely in his pocket, Old Man Clud brought forth a little red memorandum book, held it close to his chest, and entered a notation of the transaction. There was something uncomfortably furtive and secret about the way he did it. Suddenly Bert remembered having seen that book before—that day in the bank when Old Man Clud had turned away from the teller's window jotting down a record of his deposit. And

that day, too, he had held it almost concealed against his chest.

"My young friend," the lender said, "I wish you every business blessing. I expect you to go far. And do not forget that this little note of ours comes due on January 18."

Bert went out, and down the stairs; and only then did he remember that he had promised Tom Woods to go to his father should anything queer turn up in the affairs of The Shoppers' Service.

Sam was standing in the doorway, waiting and watching, when he came back. "How did it go?" the clerk asked eagerly.

Bert laid the money on the counter.

"He gave it to you? Now we can breathe again. This is a life-saver. You signed a note, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"When is it due?"

"In sixty days."

"He wants his money back fast enough, doesn't he? Well, the Christmas trade will take care of that."

"He made me sign a note for $175," said Bert.

Sam gave a cry of indignation. "He did? The blood-sucker! And he's always been calling you 'my fine young friend.' That's friendship, isn't it?" The clerk began to pace the store in agitation, and to scratch his head, and to mutter to himself. Presently his steps slowed. "Anyway,"

he said more cheerfully, "it's probably the best bargain we could have made. The bank wouldn't have advanced us a single penny."

Bert paid practically no attention to Sam's change of viewpoint. "How about an afternoon off?" he demanded abruptly. "Can you stick it out alone to-morrow?"

"All day?"

"No; I'll be in in the evening."

"Got something important on?"

"I want to take a trip. We have only geometry, gym and a study period to-morrow afternoon. I think I could get excused from geometry . . . I'm pretty well up in that."

"You want to visit that bug hunter, I bet." Sam shook his head. "It beats me what you see in that fellow. All right; go along. You were a rescuer to-day; that's worth an afternoon off. Don't forget to put that $150 in the bank."

In the morning Bert deposited the money and hurried to the high school to interview the teacher who taught geometry. He won his excuse, and before one o'clock was on his way to the cabin and the house of glass. Snow would come any day now; something told him that this would be his last visit of the winter.

The trip was his response to another nameless urge. The partnership had secured needed funds, the Christmas season was sure to be their salvation, and yet a vague uneasiness had begun to mas-

ter his spirit. Tom Woods had said to go to his father. Had Tom Woods foreseen the coming of yesterday's event? A dozen questions he could not answer crowded into his brain. He intended to tell the Butterfly Man nothing, to ask him nothing. He just wanted to see him. In some strange way he seemed to know that he would find a sustaining strength merely by sitting in the company of his friend.

His feelings with respect to Old Man Clud were mixed. There had been a subtle type of warning in the lender's last words reminding him of the date when payment of the loan would be due. Sometimes he thought that a velvet threat lay under the wheezed and gasped syllables; sometimes he reasoned that it was only natural that a man who had lent money should impress the time of its return upon the borrower. The bonus was another stumbling block. Had Old Man Clud driven a hard, grasping, covetous bargain, or had he done only what anybody would do who took a risk that a bank would refuse? Oh, if he had a mere fraction of his father's business knowledge! And yet his father was the last person in the world to whom he would have taken his doubts and his fears at this moment.

He was aroused from his reverie by sounds that had been growing upon him as he rode along. His ears caught a pounding as of wood upon wood, and a man's deep and throaty voice, rising

and falling in the sonorous style of country oratory. He pushed down harder on the pedals, rounded a slight turn, and came upon a scene that caused him to apply his brake. The bicycle slowed down, and he swung out of the saddle.

A crowd was gathered in front of a farmhouse set back from the road. The man of sonorous voice was standing on the porch pounding with a gavel against the porch railing. Here and there on the brown autumn lawn were pieces of furniture. It was a nondescript collection gathered from parlor, kitchen and bedrooms; and alien hands pawed it over, and hauled it about, and commented unfeelingly on its value. These things Bert observed in a glance; his interest was fastened on a man and a woman standing dejectedly and forlornly in the doorway of the house.

"Only seventy-five cents for this kitchen table?" the sonorous voice was demanding. "You can't mean it. Why, ladies and gentlemen, this table is as good as new. Not a scratch, not a break, not a loose hinge. Come up and look it over. This table cost seven dollars if it cost a penny, and you offer me seventy-five cents. Who'll make it a dollar. A dollar; a dollar. Do I hear a dollar?"

"Eighty-five," said a voice.

"Eighty-five; eighty-five. Am I offered a dollar? Don't go home regretting that you let a bargain pass you. Am I offered a dollar?"

"A dollar," came from the rear of the crowd.

"A dollar; a dollar. Who'll make it a dollar ten. Going at a dollar. Once! Twice! Last call. Sold to the gentleman for a dollar."

The woman in the doorway dropped her head, and turned, and went into the house.

Bert walked over to where two young farmhands stood together. "Why are they auctioning the stuff?" he asked.

One of the two spat a stream of tobacco juice. "They got hard up and went down to Springham and borrowed some money from a fellow. They couldn't make the payments and the fellow from Springham is selling them out."

To Bert, at the moment, it came as mighty uncomfortable news. His mouth went dry.

"Any place I can get a drink around here?" he asked.

"There's a well in back of the house."

He went toward the rear, skirting the crowd and passing the porch where the auctioneer was now offering an ice box. A step or two more, and then he stopped with a jerk. Old Man Clud, his coat buttoned to the throat, stood leaning against a tree writing in a little red memorandum book held close to his chest.

CHAPTER IX

BERT had started out with the intention of telling the Butterfly Man nothing . . . but now he knew he would have to tell him all. For the fear that had arisen in him all in a moment demanded immediate counsel and advice.

Old Man Clud, absorbed in the secrets of the little red book, had not seen him. Noiselessly he backed away, past the porch, out among the crowd. His bicycle was where he had left it. With the auctioneer's clamor for a higher bid in his ears he rode away, and his tires sang a higher note of speed than they had ever sung before to the gritty surface of the county highway.

To-day it was not necessary for him to ride all the way to the cabin. Scarcely had he left the highway for the dirt road than he saw a tall figure ahead striding along with legs that seemed to annihilate distance. Bert sounded his horn once, twice, three times. The man swung around and then hastily scrambled for the side of the road.

"Nothing doing," he shouted. "You had one chance at me out here and failed. Be a gentleman and let well enough alone."

There was no answering laughter in Bert's eyes, and the man's face sobered. The boy swung off the wheel.

"I'm in trouble," he said abruptly.

"Home, school or business?"

"Business. Do you know a man in Springham named Clud?"

"I've heard of him. Sweet individual with a fat, warm body and a cold, thin heart. He'd sell a man's soul for a dollar. He's a shark, a buzzard and a polecat all rolled into one. Talks like a honeybee and stings like a snake. He's a trickster and a schemer, a liar and a cheat, a rascal and a rogue. If he got his just deserts he'd be down in State's Prison in a convict's cell. Every time I pass him in the street I come home and take a strong bath. The night he dies the angels will have to hold their noses. The church they take him into—if they take him into one—will have to be disinfected. Yes; I've heard of him. Why?"

The whimsical Tom Woods, full of dry humor and homely wisdom, was gone, and in his place was a man breathing fire and indignation. Every word of the unexpected denunciation thrust Bert through and through. The fears that had overwhelmed him at the farmhouse, then, were substantial and real. His last hope that he might be mistaken was gone. He sank down, and put his back against the trunk of a tree, and stared at the ground.

Light broke in upon the Butterfly Man. He gave an exclamation, and caught the boy's arm. "Bert! He hasn't got you, has he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Christopher!" After that one explosive outburst the man was silent. He seemed to be fighting down his wrath, bringing his mind back to its customary state of calm and disciplined control. He sat down beside the boy. Methodically he drew out the ever ready pipe and filled it with a deliberate measurement of tobacco from a pouch.

"When did you borrow the money?" he asked.

"Yesterday."

"You weren't afraid of Clud then. Why are you afraid of him now?"

Bert told of what he had seen at the farmhouse.

"That's Clud," Tom Woods said grimly. "It isn't the first time it's happened to people through here. How much did you borrow?"

"One hundred and fifty dollars."

"And you gave him a note for about $175. Is that right?"

Bert lifted his head and nodded, and looked at the man with mingled respect and surprise. "How did you know?"

"It's an old dodge," Tom Woods said. "Every skinflint of a loan shark practices it. That's how they beat the law which says that no interest above six per cent must be charged. On the face of that

note Clud is getting only legal interest. You can't prove he put the screws on you for $25 interest."

"But he did."

"You can't prove it. The note says he gave you $175. You signed to that effect. He's got your signature to it. He's got you hooked."

"Suppose we can't pay it?"

"He'll sell you out as he sold out the farmer."

And then the business would be gone! Bert drew a long breath.

"I should have come to you first."

"You should have gone to your father," the man said quietly. "You promised me you would."

The silence that followed ran on for many minutes. When Bert spoke again his utterance showed that he had been thinking.

"Old Man Clud will never get $175 for the things in our store. How is he going to get the balance?"

"Clud usually knows how to protect himself. By the way, who signed that note? You and Sam together, or you alone?"

"I signed it alone."

Tom Woods bit hard on his pipe stem. One hand found its way to Bert's shoulder.

"Does that make it worse for me?" the boy demanded.

"I'm afraid it does," the Butterfly Man said quietly. "Here! There's a way out of this. Let

me lend you $175 and go down and pay off Clud."

In that moment the current of the boy's life was changed. The first vital, definite spark of manhood was struck from his fiber, hammered out —after the fashion of such sparks—on the hard anvil of adversity. He sprang to his feet.

"I got myself into this mess," he cried passionately, "and I'm not going to use a friend to climb out. How do I know how long you'd have to wait to get your money back? Anyway, you were against this business from the start. Why should you get mixed up in it? If I've got a licking coming to me out of this I'll take it."

Tom Woods' grip on his pipe relaxed. He was conscious, all at once, that this was a November day, and that the ground was damp, and that he was rapidly becoming chilled. He scrambled to his feet.

"You're not sore at me?" Bert asked. His tone said that, sore or not, his mind was fixed.

"Sore?" The Butterfly Man laughed to himself. "Bert, they may get you down on your back, and you may have a tough time of it, but they'll never lick you."

The boy's face seemed older, more mature, as he rode back to Springham. The crowd was gone from in front of the farmhouse; the auction was over. Reaching the store he went in and, bluntly and concisely, told Sam the story of what he had seen that day.

Sam was thoughtful. "If anything should go wrong. . . . Mind, I'm not saying it will; I think the Christmas trade will make us a big winner. But if anything should go wrong, and Clud sells these few things in the store, where's he going to get the balance of his $175?"

"Tom Woods said he knew where he could get it or he'd never have let us have the money."

Sam digested this. "Going home to supper?" he asked.

"No; I'll telephone my mother."

"All right. I'll get a breath of air. I want to think this over."

An hour later Sam was back. There was about him a triumphant air of cunning and craft, a pride in his own astuteness, an atmosphere of triumphant foxiness that Bert had never quite noticed before.

"Look here," Sam began, "you've been saving most of your five dollars a week, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"And I've got a little private bank account of my own. I didn't put everything I had into this business. I guess Clud knows that; he's got to have a way of finding out things in his game. He figures that when the time comes he'll get what's coming to him by going after what we have in the bank in our own private accounts. Well, I'm going to fool him. I'm going to take my money out of this bank and go to the city and put it in a

bank there. Then he won't know where it is. You had better do the same."

Bert shook his head. "I'm not going to play any shady tricks."

"Shady!" Sam cried indignantly. "That's not shady; that's a business precaution. Clud's the one who's done the shady trick. Didn't he squeeze us for $25 and then cover it up by making us sign a note for more than we got?"

"But I agreed to it," said Bert, "and signed it."

"You're a fool," Sam said impatiently, and gave him up as hopeless.

That night Bert began to have misgivings of the partnership, but it was something other than failure he was thinking of.

Thanksgiving came and went, and made no appreciable change in the fortunes of The Shoppers' Service. Directly after the holiday winter came on with a rush of intense cold and deep snow. For three days Springham shivered in the teeth of icy blasts and dug itself out. Then the tide of trade began once more to move through frozen Washington Avenue; and Bert, figuring the slimmest week's receipts the partnership had ever known, could again write down a loss instead of a gain.

Because his hopes for December had been so high, the result was doubly disappointing. Hour after hour the Christmas shoppers flowed past his door, buying, buying, buying, but not from him. The ice cream sale fell to nothing. There was a

day when coffee and sandwiches netted only ninety cents. Bert became silent and glum. At home he had very little to say. Twice his father and mother, sitting in the dining room, heard him pacing the floor of his bedroom overhead.

"Things are going bad with him," Mrs. Quinby said with an ache of sympathy in her voice.

"He brought it on himself," said the man.

"Oh!" she said in reproach.

The man got up from his chair and his worried footsteps echoed those of his son. "Oh, I know! I know! I'd give a hundred dollars this minute if I could get him out of it. Of course things are going the wrong way; they couldn't go any other way. He's carrying too big a load for a boy. It was a crack-brained scheme to start with. He's got to learn his lesson. If I jumped into this thing and got him off with a whole skin, he'd forget the experience in a year. He'd always have a feeling in the back of his head that no matter how big a fool he made of himself, he could always count on me to get him out. He's got to come to me and ask for help. He's got to admit that he was wrong. When he does that I'll wind up that business of his and save him every dollar I can. But he's got to swallow his medicine and admit that he was wrong."

Mrs. Quinby had a mental picture of her son's sullen eyes and stubborn chin. "He's not the kind to admit failure," she sighed. She did not know

that he had already admitted far more than that to the Butterfly Man.

In the morning, while Bert ate, she sat across from him at the breakfast table. Mr. Quinby had already left the house.

"Were you expecting big things this month?" she asked.

The boy nodded.

"It couldn't be, Bert. Christmas shopping is very trying. People just go around in a sort of frenzy. Half the time they don't know what they want. They don't pay much attention to ads. They go from store to store, roaming through the aisles in the hope of finding something that will make a gift for somebody they've got to remember. A lot of people put off shopping until the last minute, and that makes it worse. They're in such a hurry to reach the city in the morning that there's no time to step into your place and look at newspapers, and when they come home in the afternoon they're too tired. Didn't you think of that?"

"Neither of us did," said Bert. There was no need to question his mother's reasoning. Hadn't he seen the restless stream passing and repassing the store day after day? Only a few months ago Sam, spouting second-hand opinions he had formed from a book, had seemed to him to be an oracle. That was past.

"You'll have to wait until after Christmas for

people to get interested in *your* business again, Bert."

"Next month?" He was on the point of saying that next month would be too late, but checked himself and went off to school. That day he flunked in every subject.

Two days before Christmas Bill Harrison came to the store, bought a plate of ice cream, and ate it as though he had something on his mind. "I got a letter to-day from Tom Woods," he said at length. "He asked me to find out how you're making it. I'm going to write an answer to-night."

That the Butterfly Man had sent Bill on this errand meant that Bill knew the facts. Bert spread his hands in a sweep that took in the whole place. "You're the first customer in two hours," he said.

Bill pushed his plate across the counter. "Another," he said. With the refilled dish before him, he toyed with his spoon. "Sam certainly ran you up a fine alley, didn't he?"

"Sam's losing his money, too," said Bert.

Bill looked at him shrewdly. "As much as you?"

"N . . . no. He's been drawing out two dollars to my one."

"Why?"

"Well, it was his idea. . . ."

"He's certainly been getting paid pretty liberally for a bum idea," Bill drawled, and finished

his cream. "Just what shall I tell Tom Woods?"

Bert took the dish and began to wash it. Bill leaned across the counter.

"If you're going to tell him anything, Bert, tell him the truth."

"I've always told Tom Woods the truth," Bert said in a low voice. "Tell him it's worse than he thought it would be."

The admission seemed to break down in him the last barrier of pretense and false hope. The end was in sight. He knew it. Yet it was not in him to surrender until the ball had been taken from him on downs.

Every dollar he had in the bank would probably be swept away in the crash. As the daring adventurer, facing death, makes his final gesture of disdain, Bert now had his wild moment of bravado, his defiance of Fate. Even though next Christmas might find him without a penny, this Christmas he could be gloriously lavish. It did not occur to him that, facing a debt he could not meet in full, he was bound by a moral obligation to hold fast to every dollar of his funds. To spend now was, in effect, to take money that rightfully belonged to his creditors. But what he did not know did not worry him.

He drew $20 from the bank and went shopping along Washington Avenue. Eight dollars secured him a box of good cigars for his father. The other $12 bought a handbag for his mother. He

carried the gifts home under his coat and secreted them in his bedroom.

Christmas morning he brought them downstairs. His father, appraising the cigars, opened his eyes wide in surprise. Bert felt no elation, but what a difference it would have made had that look been testimonial to secure success instead of to a dying gasp!

"Bert," his mother whispered, holding the bag, "it's beautiful, but you shouldn't have spent so much money."

"What's the difference," he said; "I wanted you to have it."

Something in the words told her the whole story.

His own gifts scarcely moved him. He brightened at dinner, and ate his share of the good things, only to fall silent after the meal. He tried to read, but the book held no interest. He went out for a walk, found himself heading toward the store, and abruptly returned to the house. There was a new calendar in the hall showing the January page. The date, 18th, seemed to stare at him. He went into the living room, and sat at a window, and looked out at the street. January 18!

Mr. Quinby, studying him from the dining room, suddenly stood up and walked toward his chair.

"Bert, haven't you had enough yet of this confounded foolishness?"

Had the question been put in any other form, the boy would have melted. But he read the words as holding accusation instead of sympathy and they rasped along an old wound. His spine stiffened.

"You haven't heard me complain," he said.

"Oh!" The man drew back, baffled, helpless, thwarted. His expression said plainly, "I can't understand you," but Bert was not looking at his face. The boy himself was conscious, the next moment, that his reply had been foolish and headstrong. The right word then would have saved them both. Neither seemed able to say it.

The day after Christmas The Shoppers' Service reopened. The Christmas school vacation meant no classes, and at nine o'clock Bert came down to Washington Avenue. Sam was in the rear of the store cleaning one of the burners of the gas stove. A newspaper lay on the counter opened at the help wanted page. Two of the ads, calling for the services of an experienced clerk, had been checked in lead pencil. Bert was standing with the newspaper in his hand when Sam emerged from the kitchen.

"Running away?" the boy demanded bitterly.

Sam took the question calmly. "You know where we stand."

"I'm going to stick it out to the finish."

"That's all you can do," Sam observed practically.

"There's Clud's note to meet."

"Oh, I suppose I'll be around until then; jobs don't grow on bushes." The clerk through force of habit, began to dust the counter even though he knew there was little likelihood of any one coming in and demanding attention. "There's more than Clud to think of. You've forgotten something."

"Forgotten what?"

"The lease on this store. We hired it for a year. Even if we close up the rent has to be paid every month until the lease runs out."

The newspaper dropped from Bert's hands. His mind made a half-blind but wholly accurate calculation. After January the lease would have six months to run, and at $22.50 a month that meant $135. Added to the $175 due on Old Man Clud's note the firm would face an indebtedness of $310.

"How are we going to pay it?" Bert asked with an effort.

Instead of answering Sam took a penknife from his pocket and cut the two ads from the newspaper. Later Bert saw him writing letters at one of the tables.

Early January ushered in mid-year examinations. The goodly promise with which Bert had started the term had not been fulfilled. Business worries had played havoc with his lessons; and the examination papers wrought destruction to what was left of his peace of mind. When the ordeal

was over, he hoped for the best but feared the worst.

Sam's days were now given over to an intensive search for another job. Right and left the props were being kicked out from under the business. Customers were beginning to give up the Service, and Sam made no attempt to fill their places. And so January ran on toward the fatal eighteenth.

The sixteenth fell on a Saturday. The cold wave had broken, a south wind had brought a warm rain, and the hard snow that had lain in the streets piled high near the curb ran in dirt-colored torrents toward corner catch basins. It was the last Saturday The Shoppers' Service would be in existence, and Bert lay late in bed watching the rain blow in gusts across the windowpanes. His father, too, seemed in no hurry to be off that morning, and was still at home when the postman's whistle blew at the door. The whistle aroused the boy and he began to dress.

"Bert!" His father's voice came up sharply from the lower hall.

"Yes, sir."

"Get down here at once."

The summons admitted of no delay. Bert drew on a bath robe and descended the stairs. Mr. Quinby, a letter in his hand, was pacing the dining room with wrathful steps.

"I have a notice here from your school," he said grimly.

Bert gulped.

"You failed in four examination subjects. Is there to be no limit to the trouble you cause me? Have you no sense of responsibility? Other fellows, at your age, are reporting at seven o'clock each morning to a factory and putting in a day of hard work. I give you four years of high school, and you throw it away. I've submitted to your whims and fancies long enough. This is the end. You're going to quit this so-called business of yours and you're going to quit it at once. I give you five days to wind up your affairs with Sam Sickles and get out. After that you'll either do your school work or you'll leave school and do real work. I won't put up with having you waste your time and my money. That's final."

To Bert it was better than final—it was salvation. Now The Shoppers' Service could close its doors without an open confession of failure. Now he could quit and still save his face. The news was so good that later, as he dressed, he began to whistle and abruptly choked off the melody. He had a fear that it would sound distinctly out of place to his father.

The jeweler's big clock stood at eleven as he came sloshing through Washington Avenue in the rain. The store was locked. That was surprising. He opened the door and passed inside. A note lay open on the counter:

BERT: I've been offered a job in the city and I'm taking it. There's no use in hanging around until Monday. I'll see you later.

SAM.

Bert sank into a chair. The note, to his mind, could mean only one thing. Sam had already departed from Springham and had left him to assume the firm's debts.

How long he sat there sunk in gloom he did not know. The door opened. He heard a cough, a sound as of a strangling breath, and then another cough. He swung around.

"My friend," Old Man Clud wheezed, "I envy you your excellent health. A little hot coffee, if I may trouble you. These damp days chill me to the marrow."

Bert, in silence, prepared the drink.

"Excellent," said the lender of money, and smacked his lips. "Springham should be delighted to support an establishment that provides such truly splendid coffee. A gift for the gods, I assure you. And might I ask how your enterprise has been coming on?"

Bert was wiser than he had been at Thanksgiving. "It hasn't been coming on," he said bluntly, "and you know it."

Old Man Clud peered at him with sharp eyes. "Softly! Softly! I have regarded you highly as a young man who knew his place and wagged a civil tongue. And if I have kept my own tabulations, is that to my discredit? Consider! Some

of my money is invested in this business. Is it not natural for me to have some curiosity as to how I was to be paid? And that brings us to a matter that will soon be pressing for attention. Monday the note I hold falls due. May I inquire if you are prepared to meet it?"

"Not . . . not in full," Bert found himself saying. The voice did not seem to be his.

Old Man Clud showed neither surprise nor consternation. "The fortunes of business, my friend. Man cannot always order things as he would have them. And we, who lend money, must take that fact into consideration. Where there is a willingness to pay, there must be a willingness, on our part, to give the debtor needed time. We might be compared to doctors: the doctor ministers to the sick body, we minister to a sick business. Is it not a just comparison? Come, come; there is nothing to worry about. You will find me easy to deal with. How much, might I ask, do you feel that you can pay me on Monday?"

"About $100."

"That would leave a $75 balance. A trifle. Another little note that nobody knows about but you and me, and the thing is done."

"For how much?"

"The note? A fair question, but bear with me a moment. When first you came we agreed upon a slight bonus. It was necessary, because your outlook was uncertain. The fact that you cannot

pay as you agreed to pay makes the second note even more uncertain. It raises a question of your ability. . . ."

"How much?" Bert cut in.

"There, there!" the man wheezed soothingly. "I do not mean to criticize you. I have always spoken of you favorably. But business is business and. . . ."

"Mr. Clud, what note must I sign?"

The man leaned across the table. "I must insist upon a note for $125."

The thing was robbery—extortion. Bert sprang to his feet. "I won't sign it."

The man spread his hands in a smooth gesture of benevolence. "Then I must ask you to pay me in full."

"I can't. I've told you that. I'll give you $100, and you can auction off the goods here for the balance."

"My friend, the goods here do not interest me in the least. At auction they would not bring so much as a pocketful of silver coins. Believe me, I have had experience in such things and I know."

"Then all you get is $100. I haven't the money and you can't get it. That's all."

Old Man Clud stood up, and not an ounce of fat on his pale, hairless face gave any hint that he was disturbed. "Oh, but that is not all. You misjudge my astuteness. Did it never occur to you that I would not lend my money to one of your age

unless I knew of a certainty that there was a means by which I could get it back? Your father happens to be one of Springham's leading merchants. He has a reputation to sustain and protect. Is it not possible that he would rather pay the note, were it called to his attention, than to have his son known through the town as one who had defaulted on a business promise involving credit?"

Bert, of a sudden, went cold.

"If you are of a mind to be reasonable, you will find it wise to continue to do business with me. Do not act rashly. Take time to think. Either you pay me in full, or else pay me $100 cash and give me your note for $125 . . . or I go to your father. See, I hold the door open for you to save yourself from an embarrassing position. And now, my friend, I will bid you good day. I will be in on the eighteenth for your answer."

He was gone, and Bert stood there staring straight ahead. The threat to tell his father had left him with a still and icy calm more dangerous than anger. Sam had run away and left him to face all this alone! His lips twitched. Absently he carried the cup and saucer behind the counter and began to wash them. And then the door opened and Sam came in, carrying a traveling bag.

A cry broke from Bert. "You haven't gone! I thought you had left me to buck everything."

"Well, I will be gone soon," Sam said hurriedly. "There's ten dollars coming to me for this week.

That's what I came in to get. I'm going away on the one o'clock train."

"Ten dollars! We need every dollar to square things."

"Ten dollars! You heard me. I've worked this week, and I've earned it."

"But how about the lease? We've got to go on paying $22.50 a month for six more months."

"They won't collect it from me," Sam said, with conviction. "Springham won't see me again after one o'clock. I think I've lost enough fooling around here since August."

"Are you leaving me to pay it all?" The cup was in Bert's hand and he was drying it without being conscious of the act.

"I'm not asking you to pay anything, am I? All I know is that this business has got all it's going to get out of me."

"How about Old Man Clud's note?" Bert demanded desperately. "He was in here a little while ago. He says he'll go to my father. You've got to pay half of that now. It comes due Monday. This is a partnership."

A look of sly craft came down like a veil over Sam's features. "Partnership? Yes; in some things. But not on that note."

"Why not?"

"Because that's not a partnership note. You signed it alone. That makes it a personal note. I have nothing to do with it. Just the same I'll do

something for you. I didn't think you'd give me that ten dollars; I came in on a chance. Keep the ten dollars and put it toward the note money. That's as far as I'll go."

He swung the handbag out of the way of his knees and turned to go. The ice in Bert was beginning to change to the rage of one who finds himself miserably tricked, deftly hoodwinked, shamelessly swindled.

"You had that in your mind all the time," he said thickly.

"I didn't. I ran across that in the book the other night in the chapter on partnership agreements. You ought to read up more about business."

"But you know it was understood that *we* were to pay that note!"

"Show it to me in writing. You can't. In business nothing counts but written agreements unless you have witnesses to a verbal contract."

"You mean . . ." Bert found the words choking in his throat. "You mean you're going to play the skunk and skin out of this?"

"What a sucker I'd be," Sam said in scorn, "to hand over money when I don't have to. You want to wake up. It isn't my fault you left me out of that note, but I'd be a fool not to take advantage of it. Well, I've got to hustle along or I'll miss my train."

Something violent broke loose in Bert at the

cold-blooded treachery. The cup was still in his hand. Without a clear realization of what he did, without a thought as to consequences, he hurled it at the head going through the doorway.

The cup found its mark. Sam's hat flew upward, and the bag dropped from his hand. His knees sagged, his step stumbled. A moment he stood swaying; then he sprawled forward and lay on his face out in Washington Avenue in the rain.

CHAPTER X

A MOMENT after throwing the cup Bert would have given all he possessed in the world to have stopped it in its flight. With Sam lying in the street, sanity came back and drove the violence from his blood. There was a rear door to the store . . . another boy might have run. But though a trembling fear was fast overwhelming him he held his ground. There was in him, in some ways, what Tom Woods would have called "the courage to take his medicine."

A moment before Sam staggered out through the doorway, Washington Avenue was a deserted, rain-swept thoroughfare; a moment later a crowd was beginning to gather. They came running, giving tongue to a weird, low murmur of excitement. Bert heard voices: "What happened to him? His head is cut. Who hit him? Stand back, there, and give him air!" There was a sudden movement at one edge of the crowd, and it broke and fell away. Policeman Glynn pushed his way through.

Bert, forcing himself to move, went down to the door. Had he hurt Sam badly? It didn't seem

possible that a cup could do much damage. The door was still open. He laid one hand on the knob, and clutched it, and stood there at the edge of the gathering.

The coming of the policeman had brought order out of confusion. Two men bent down and lifted the clerk to his feet. His eyes opened, and he came back to consciousness, and struggled to find his balance. Bert, from his heart, breathed a prayer of relief.

"What happened to you?" Policeman Glynn asked. "Did you fall?"

"I was hit," Sam said weakly.

"By what?"

"I don't know."

"Who hit you?"

Sam's eyes roved about the circle of faces. "He did," he said, and pointed to Bert in the doorway.

"You," said Policeman Glynn, and shook his head. "Bad business. I always thought you were one of the nice, easy lads who would never give a peep of trouble. I'll have to take you in if this gentleman's going to make a complaint."

Sam was rapidly recovering. "You can bet I'm going to make a complaint. He assaulted me. I hadn't done anything to him. I was walking out and he hit me with something."

The policeman stooped and picked up half of the cup. "This it?" he asked Bert. The boy

nodded, and the officer stuck the fragment in his pocket and began to give businesslike directions. "You get to a doctor and have your head looked after. It may need a bandage. After that come down to the station and sign a complaint."

Half a dozen sympathetic voices in the crowd spoke up and offered to take Sam to Dr. Elman's office. When he moved off, walking a bit unsteadily, a few of the bystanders went with him. The majority remained to watch the next act of the drama. Arrests were few and far between in peaceful Springham. They did not want to miss this one.

Policeman Glynn beckoned to Bert. "You'll have to come with me."

Bert got his hat and coat and locked the door. As he stepped away he saw Bill Harrison on the outside of the crowd. Bill swung around and hobbled away as fast as he could on his crutch.

The distance to the police station in the municipal building was four blocks, and the group that followed policeman and prisoner grew as it went along. At the second corner Peg Scudder joined the escort. Clamoring voices told him the nature of the trouble. Peg made haste to come abreast of Bert.

"So you beaned him with a cup, did you?"

Bert made no answer.

"Blast me, but I didn't think you had spunk enough for such a trick. What did he do, give you

some fresh lip? Why didn't you bend a chair over his knob? That would have rattled him up some. My old man was a great hand at cleaning up a gang with a chair."

Bert's eyes besought the guardian of the law, and Policeman Glynn stuck his club persuasively into Peg's ribs.

"Run along," he commanded. "Nobody sent for you. When we want your advice we'll ask for it."

Peg made haste to drop back among the crowd. The incident was not without its effect on Bert. Bill Harrison had shunned him. Peg Scudder, town bully and loafer, drunkard and general no-account, saw in his arrest a claim to brotherhood.

A vision of a barred cell came to Bert as he entered the municipal building. Policeman Glynn led him down a small corridor and turned in through a door to the left. A sergeant in uniform was behind a long high desk down at one end and along one wall was a board heavily tacked with circulars advertising the features and histories of criminals wanted in different parts of the country. Bert hastily turned his eyes away from the board.

The sergeant, writing in a big book, lifted his head. "What's the charge, Officer?"

"Assault and battery," said Policeman Glynn.

The words had a sinister sound. Bert hung his head; but not before the sergeant had peered over the top of the high desk and had noted him.

"Are you Mr. Quinby's boy? Nice mess you've got yourself into. What was it, street fight?"

"He let go a cup at that fellow who was running the store with him," said the policeman. "Somebody took the lad to Dr. Elman's to get fixed up."

The sergeant reached for a telephone and gave a number. "Dr. Elman? Sergeant Rockwell speaking. How is that fellow who came in to get his head dressed? Doesn't amount to much? Thank you."

"You're a lucky boy," Policeman Glynn said in an undertone.

The sergeant caught the words. "Lucky is right. Suppose you had fractured his skull? That would be nice, wouldn't it? How now, Officer? Is that fellow going to come over from the doctor's office and sign a complaint? All right. Here, Quinby; sit over there on that bench. How about Mr. Quinby, Officer? Does he know anything about this? You'd better go down and tell him."

Bert wet his lips, and walked over to the bench and sat down. His father! A cell lost its terror. He would rather go to a cell than face the meeting that must soon come.

By and by there was a shuffle of feet along the corridor. He steeled himself. But it was Sam, his head bandaged, accompanied by two of the men who had gone with him to Dr. Elman's. The clerk signed a paper. Bert knew it was the com-

plaint. There was some talk up at the big desk; he did not hear it. Then Sam went out without looking at him, and he was left alone upon his bench.

A clock on the wall ticked with noisy emphasis. He shifted his position. A shadow seemed to fall across the floor. He looked up. His father, stern and rigid, stood before him.

"Arrested," Mr. Quinby said as though talking to himself. "You've done it this time, haven't you? One thing after another, and now this. A prisoner in a police station. They tell me Sam was lying senseless in the street. Did you do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carted through the streets by a policeman with the rabble of the town following." Abruptly the man walked over to the desk and spoke to Sergeant Rockwell. Justice of the Peace Manning, it developed, would sit at eight o'clock that night, and the case would then go to a hearing.

"I'll release him in your custody, Mr. Quinby," the sergeant offered, "if you'll have him here again at that hour."

"Let him stay here," Mr. Quinby said shortly, "and learn his lesson." On the way out he paused an instant before his son. "A nice story to take home to your mother, isn't it?"

There came to Bert, as the minutes passed, the most lonesome feeling that can overwhelm either man or boy—the feeling of having been discarded

and deserted. Policeman Glynn came back, made a report at the desk, and paused beside the bench.

"Had any dinner?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Got any money? I'll send you in a cup of coffee and a sandwich, and you can pay the man when he brings it."

Bert said he was not hungry. Something in Policeman Glynn's gruff bearing told him of the officer's unspoken sympathy. "Will . . . will they send me to jail?" he asked.

"Well, now, I'm not saying you don't deserve it, but I don't see the use of worrying a kid who's plainly sorry for what he's done. The Judge doesn't usually send boys to the county jail."

Some of the load left Bert's heart. The clock said half-past four, and the short winter twilight was turning to night. Three and a half more hours to wait! He fell to thinking of his mother, and for the first time felt the sting of a tear. So that the sergeant might not see this sign of emotion he turned his head away.

And then a familiar voice fell upon his ear.

"Good evening, Sergeant. Have you a boy here named Quin . . ."

Bert jumped to his feet. "Mr. Woods."

The Butterfly Man crossed the room with half a dozen quick strides. "Bert, old man, I'm sorry to see you in a fix like this. I didn't think things would go this far. Bill Harrison saw you ar-

rested, and legged it for a telephone to let me know. I was out at the time; he kept after me until I answered. I got the car and came right down."

So that was why Bill had stumped away. "I might have known he wasn't running away from me," Bert said.

"Who? Bill? Bill would never run out on a friend. Now, let's get at the bottom of this. Is Sam seriously hurt?"

"Only a cut on the head."

"That's good to begin with. How did it happen?"

Bert told him the story, beginning with the visit and the proposals of Old Man Clud, and ending with the attack on Sam.

The Butterfly Man's face was grave. "Sam was on his way out of the store?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you hit him from behind."

Bert sighed and, after a moment, dropped his head.

"There, there!" the man said gently. "Forgive me, Bert; but hitting from behind always has a bad ring. I guess you didn't think."

"I didn't think of anything," the boy answered, "except that he was walking out free and leaving me to face everything. It made me wild, and I threw what was in my hand."

"Does your father know?"

A nod.

"Has he been in to see you?"

Another nod.

"Wouldn't they let him give bail for you until you have a hearing?"

"He said I could stay here and learn my lesson." Something sullen crept into his words, and their purport was to accuse his father of a grievous crime. Up to this point he had been a penitent, sorry for what he had done, a-tremble as to the outcome, accepting his father's action as no more than he could expect. But Tom Woods' presence, the fact that the man had ridden far to reach him, made the contrast of his father's desertion a bitter and resentful pill. Self-pity, always quick to flower in a boy, pictured him as a martyr to outrageous fortune.

The Butterfly Man, apparently, paid no heed. He fumbled through his pockets and found his pipe and tobacco.

"Bert," he asked quietly, "did it ever dawn on you that it might be a mighty good thing for you to learn the lesson? You've been hit pretty hard, but you had it coming to you. You've been riding on the edge of a volcano, and at last the volcano has spat fire and you're looking for someone to bind your wounds and tell you you're a poor, abused lamb. This is no time for honey and molasses; this is a time for plain, straight talk. You've been up to your eyes in trouble for months.

Why? You think because luck was against you. That's only half the story. You've been in trouble because you threw your father overboard. You're sitting in a police station to-night with a charge over your head because you told the captain of the ship he didn't know the landmarks. You took the wheel and tried to be your own pilot, and you've landed on the rocks."

Coming from Tom Woods, staunch friend and whimsical comrade, the attack was staggering. Bert's confidence of consolation gave way to dismay. Shaken and jarred, he could only stare and try in his bewilderment to reason what had happened. "You're turning against me, too," he said miserably.

"Bosh!" said Tom Woods. "That's baby talk: Nobody went out and dug a hole for you and invited you to fall in. You dug the hole yourself. And you've been a long time digging it. Let's go back to the beginning. When you and Sam started out together, what was in your mind? You saw success. For whom? For yourself. You were going to show people what a great fellow you were. And what were your father's thoughts when he started his business? Did you ever stop to think about that? He was looking years ahead. He was seeing the day when, instead of battling the world for a foothold, you'd find a pinnacle waiting, a tower of success built by his hands all ready for you. Every time he looked

at his sign he was thinking of the day when it would read 'Quinby and Son' and he and you would be in there working, planning and achieving together. What did that mean to you? Nothing. You thought so little of it that you wouldn't put your shoulder to the wheel and push when you were needed. He had to fire you and hire an outsider in your place. Did you ever stop to think how he must have felt about that? Sam's desertion angered you so much that you knocked him senseless. Yet you deserted your father. What right have you to whine if he deserts you now?"

Bert, smarting, was stung to angry speech. "Is this what you came to Springham for?"

"You came to me for advice several times. Are you one of those soft fellows that wants only talk that runs their way? Buck up and do some straight thinking. You've come to a point where you've got to think straight. You brought me your troubles; and yet I might move away from here to-morrow and in six weeks forget all about you. You pinned your faith on Sam, and Sam played you for a fool. And the one man who'll be with you all his life, who'll always make your troubles his, who'd risk his life to-morrow to drag you out of danger, was never consulted. That man was your father. In all the world what other man will you find who'll care for you as he cares? And what kind of consideration have you given him?"

The boy was silent.

"Who would have a greater desire to see you succeed? Yet, when Sam broached this service idea, what did you do? One question, one request for advice, and your father could have saved you all the worry you've been through. Of course he knew you were riding toward disaster. I knew it. Even Bill Harrison knew it. But then it was too late. You had closed the door and had shut out your best friend. You told him he wasn't wanted. You ordered him out of your affairs. You told him, in effect, that you valued the judgment of Sam more than all the counsel he could give you. And now you find that Sam's judgment was just about the rottenest egg in the basket. Don't you wish you had gone to your father at the start?"

The boy's lips quivered.

"That wasn't the only time you threw him down, Bert. The day I stepped in to see the store I read a quick finish. What would happen then I didn't know, but I knew you'd need somebody strong enough for you to lean on. I made you promise to go to your father if anything queer turned up. Instead you pushed him aside again and went to Clud. One suggestion then of what was in your mind and he'd have moved heaven and earth to have saved you from the hands of that shark. Ignoring him completely, turning your back upon the salvation he could have brought you, you went out and contracted a debt

that he might be called upon to pay. If you had asked him, out of his wisdom he could have steered you into safe channels. You should have asked him. But you didn't do it. You cast aside his protecting arm, and to-night Clud has you in his clutches. To-night you're waiting to stand trial in a police court. To-night your father's at home eating out his heart in grief and disappointment. Don't you wish now that you had gone to him at the start?"

"Yes," said the boy in a shaky whisper.

"Then you've got to go to him the first chance you get and make a manful confession that you've been a fool. You've got to square things and stand right in his eyes. You've got to make him feel that all through the future he'll be able to depend upon you."

"He . . . he'll think I'm saying it just because. . . ."

"Bert," the Butterfly Man broke in gently, "you don't know much about fathers."

"I guess," the boy faltered, "I don't know much about anything."

"If you know that much," Tom Woods said with a return of his old humor, "you're beginning to know a lot. How old are you?"

Bert told him.

"You're in luck. I was thirty before I realized I didn't know anything, and then there was nobody to go to. My dad was gone. Yours is still here.

Think that over. I've got an errand or two that will keep me busy for a while."

"You'll be here when. . . ."

"When you face the scratch? Yes; I'll be here. I want to see how certain things are going to break."

Out in Washington Avenue the man turned down the street as though he knew exactly where he was going. He made one pause . . . at a men's furnishing store temporarily in charge of a placid, uninspiring, but dependable clerk. Ten minutes later he mounted a stoop and rang the door-bell of a house. A woman opened the door.

"Mrs. Quinby?" he asked.

"Yes." It was plain that she wondered who he might be.

"We are both interested," he said gravely, "in a very fine boy who finds himself in trouble. My name is Thomas Woods. May I come in?"

She held the door wide for him in quick welcome, for his praise of Bert had reached her troubled heart. Up the hall, near the dining room doorway, a harassed man stood and surveyed him.

"Tom Woods! Are you the man who deals in butterflies?"

"Yes. Rather queer business, isn't it?"

"Rather," Mr. Quinby agreed coldly. "Bert has spent quite a bit of time out at your place. Were you one of those who encouraged him in the mad things he's done?"

"Don't you think," Tom Woods said, "that you're a little bit late asking that question? You don't know me from the King of Denmark. If I walked into your store to-night and requested you to sell me a suit of clothes on credit, what would you do?"

"I'd demand references. I'd want to know something about you."

"Exactly. But you permitted Bert to stay over night at my place and never inquired what caliber of man I was. I couldn't have one of your suits, but I could have your boy. Isn't it rather late to probe into what my influence over him has been?"

A flush of anger was rising in Mr. Quinby's cheeks. "Do you know anything about what caused this thing to-day?"

"Yes; do you?"

"No."

"You saw him at the police station."

"He didn't tell me. He reserves his confidences for those outside the family."

"Did you," Tom Woods said sharply, "bother to ask him? Great Christopher, don't you know your own son? Is there anything about him that would stamp him as a thug? Something must have happened to fire him enough to commit an assault. What was it? You don't know? You didn't even take the trouble to get his side of the story. You've condemned him without a hearing."

"Mary." Mr. Quinby's voice was of ice. "Will you please open the door for the gentleman? He wants to go."

"Just a moment," Tom Woods said quietly. "I do not want to go, but I will go if you insist. I have nothing to gain by this interview. I have always thought that the greatest tragedy in the world is for mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, to drift apart. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred it's such a ghastly, unnecessary blunder. Bert, without meaning to, has let me read a lot between the lines. I knew that you and he were pulling in opposite directions. Often, when the chance arose, I asked him to come to you. He didn't; and the fact that he didn't means that there was something wrong. Who was wrong, you or he? Do you want this thing to go on? My liking for the boy is sincere. There's wonderful stuff in him. I want to see him what he ought to be—his father's pal. But if his father objects to hearing me I can only go my way and wonder why men are sometimes so blind in dealing with the persons they love the most."

All the time he had been speaking Mrs. Quinby's eyes had never left his face. Still looking at him she went down the hall and put out a hand and found her husband's arm.

"Harry!" she said. "He is Bert's friend."

"Stay," said Mr. Quinby after a moment of silence, and led the way into the dining room.

There he sat and stared with fixed gaze across the table.

"How did this thing happen?" he asked at last.

"The business had failed," Tom Woods answered. "They were at the end of their rope. Last November they were up against the wall; but Sam said that the Christmas season would put them on their feet and Bert believed him. All they needed, Sam said, was money to tide them over. Bert went out and got the money; but instead of borrowing in the name of the firm, he unthinkingly borrowed in his own name. To-day Sam refused to bear his share of the loss. Sam was on his way out of the store to take a train for the city when Bert, furious at the treachery, threw what he had in his hand. It happened to be a cup."

"You said Bert borrowed money. Whom did he borrow it from?"

"Clud."

"Clud!" Mr. Quinby sprang to his feet. "I told him not to go near Clud. I warned him. And instead of listening to me. . . . It's been that way for months. He's ignored every word I've spoken to him and done as he pleased. I wash my hands of him. Let him take his medicine. Next time, perhaps, he'll heed my words."

"Next time?" The Butterfly Man shook his head. "If you desert him now there may never

be a next time. If you fail him now, he may never seek you out again. Can't you see that to-night, sitting in that police station among the utter ruin of his hopes, he's at a crossroads of his life?"

"I see it," said Mrs. Quinby.

Mr. Quinby, after a moment, sighed and sat down. "It seems," he said bitterly, "that a father is not supposed to have any feelings."

"Feelings?" Tom Woods leaned across the table. "He must have feeling and understanding, sympathy and wisdom, patience and faith. There isn't a bigger job in the world than being a father, and there isn't a job that is so often slighted. If a man has a business that's going bad he'll sit up all night with it, plan and scheme for ways and means to put it on its feet, stick to it through years of discouragement, and call no effort too great that offers a chance for success. But let his boy kick over the traces and his patience evaporates, his faith wabbles, his sympathy dies, his understanding clouds, and he says, 'I wash my hands of you.' He doesn't say this to his business; yet if his business failed he might resurrect it. But failure with his son might be failure forever.

"Great Christopher! what have you been thinking of? Father and son live in different worlds. The man sees life through the dearly-bought wisdom of experience; the boy sees only a fairyland in which everything is honest, and true, and pos-

sible. The father expects the boy to come over to his world, and the boy can't do it. It is the father who must go to the boy's world. He must make himself part of it and try to understand it. And yet how many do it? Did you?"

"Didn't I?" Mr. Quinby asked.

"You did not. Were you ever a boy? Can't you go back to your own boyhood and marvel at some of the wild ideas that came to you? This idea of business came to Bert, and he followed it. And what then? Did you stop to think that, after all, his was only a boy's brain? No; you expected him to see the situation just as you saw it. Instead of sitting down with an air of man to man and showing him in black and white, with pencil and paper, how impossible it all was, you adopted an air of injured dignity and drove him into a shell of silence and distrust. Even after he was committed to the plan, after the store was open, he was still your son—the most precious thing you own in the world. A chasm had formed between you. Did you try to bridge it? No. You never went into his place, never showed any interest in it, never gave any sign of good will, never prepared for the day when, the timbers of the crazy, flimsy, mistaken structure down about his ears, he would be glad to come to you as to a haven.

"And when the day of disaster came, he didn't come to you. You had predicted failure, and had

sat back and had waited for it so that you could prove to him that you had known what was best. A man matching his wisdom against that of a boy! Put yourself in his place. Failure was the last thing he wanted to own up to. You had fashioned things in his mind so that he felt he could not come to you with a manly admission that he had made a mistake, but had to come with none of his pride left. He was too sensitive, stubborn and high-spirited for that. He took a chance on winning out and went to Clud, and Clud squeezed him. When the crash came he found that Clud had used him for an easy mark, and that Sam had played him false. And to-night, sitting alone in the police station, he hasn't even got you.

"You should be there with him. Did you ever read the parable of the Prodigal Son? It's a father's job to stand by, to help a boy over the rough places, to follow him afar if he wanders, to keep a guiding hand on the elbow even when the elbow is pulled away, to bind up his wounds when he's hurt. Of course he's going to make mistakes. He's going to aggravate you and get your blood boiling; and there will be times you'll feel that you'd like to beat sense into him with a club, and that you've failed at every turn, and that the whole game isn't worth the candle. A tough job? Yes. A thankless job? Often. But you've got to stay with it until some day you lead him to sanity and wisdom, until some day you can take

your hand away and let him walk alone secure in the knowledge that his head is level and his thinking straight. That is the hour of reward, for in that hour he knows what your help has meant.

"And you talk of washing your hands of him. Have you ever heard boys say 'My old man has no use for me?' Great Christopher, man, suppose he washes his hands of you?"

The room fell into silence. A heightened color had come into Mrs. Quinby's cheeks. Her lips were moving without sound. When her husband glanced at her, a look of thoughtfulness deepened on his face.

"When does that Clud note fall due?" he asked at last.

"Monday," Tom Woods told him.

"Has Clud been to see Bert?"

"To-day."

"Did Clud threaten him?"

"Yes."

Mr. Quinby's hands opened and closed as though they itched to crush something. "How big is the note?"

"One hundred and seventy-five dollars."

The man took a check book from his pocket and wrote out a check for the amount. "Woods," he asked, "will you do me a favor? Will you see that Clud gets this? If I go into his office, I'm liable to do him harm." He arose, leaned over his wife's shoulder, and kissed her on the

cheek. "Everything's all right," he said; "I'm going to Bert."

"Good luck," said the Butterfly Man.

Mr. Quinby smiled an uncertain smile. "Thanks to you," he said, "I think it will be good luck . . . now."

CHAPTER XI

IT would have been an insult to the hair-splitting technicalities of law to have called Justice of the Peace Manning a judge. Yet "Judge" was the title Springham gave him. However, the town suffered no illusions. It never believed that he knew much law, and still less did he believe it himself. A dignified jurist, sitting on the bench of a county or a district court, would have been amazed at his processes. He was not above eating an apple while a case was undergoing trial, and often he sat in his shirt sleeves and called complainants and defendants by their given names. Occasionally, when pompous lawyers from the city came before him to defend some one who had enough money to engage high-priced legal talent, the visiting lights gnashed their teeth and groaned in impotent fury at the way he swept aside legal formalities and got down to bedrock. For Judge Manning was interested only in getting at the truth, and it made no difference to him how he got at it. Springham was satisfied with his methods, and reëlected him time and again with monotonous regularity.

At half-past seven the judge came to the municipal building and entered the room, across the hall from the police station, where he held court. He was followed by a motley collection of idlers, loiterers and curiosity seekers, eager for whatever excitement the night's trials might produce. Peg Scudder brought up the rear, wet from the rain but apparently unmindful of discomfort. He saw Bert on his bench, put his tawny head in through the doorway, took note of the sergeant, and withdrew across the hall to the court room.

Bert's heart began to throb with apprehension. In another half-hour the charge against him would be read, and he would have to face it. The Butterfly Man had said that he would be back. The boy glanced at the clock. Twenty-five of eight! A nervous dread shook him. Suppose Tom Woods was delayed.

The sergeant, gathering up a batch of papers, stepped across the hallway to the court room and left him alone. He was cramped from his long confinement on the bench, and the tremor in his nerves made him restless. The windows at the front end of the station looked down upon the street, and he walked the length of the room and stood gazing at the wet pavement. At any other time he might have thought the dripping January scene dreary; but now the outdoors represented a freedom from which the law had torn him and held him pending judgment.

A man, shielded under an umbrella, came down the street and mounted the municipal building steps.

"Tom Woods," Bert said in relief. Then the umbrella came down and revealed his father's face.

This time all fear of meeting his father was engulfed by a more powerful emotion. A feeling that he had never known before—a desire to tell his faults in a torrent of words and throw himself upon his father's strength and mercy, swept over him. He was already halfway down the room toward the door when Mr. Quinby came into the station.

"Dad!" he said. "Dad, I. . . ."

"There, Bert." His father had him by the hand. "Everything's going to be straightened out. I know. We're going to wipe the slate clean and start afresh, and nothing like this will ever happen again."

He had not expected to be met like this; but the Butterfly Man had said, "You don't know fathers." The comfort of it ran through him and gave him strength.

"Being arrested is only part of it, Dad. You don't know it all. I went to Mr. Clud. . . ."

"And borrowed $175. I know all about that. You can forget Clud. He's been paid. That's done."

"You paid him," Bert said, and stared as

though seeing his father in a light that had never shone over him before.

"Are you surprised?" the man asked. "Did you think I'd leave you in a trap like that and not come to your aid? We must have gone far off the road, Bert, to have come to such a pass."

"I was the one who got off the road," the boy protested miserably. "It was all my fault. I should have gone to you. . . ."

"It was both our faults. We saw things from different angles. I probably expected too much from you; you didn't have the courage to expect enough from me, and I couldn't have given it to you, probably, because I didn't understand. Tomorrow, the next day, every day, I want you to know that you can always come to me if you need help or advice."

"And if I begin to make a fool of myself," Bert choked, "you just grab me and put me right."

"I'll try to," said Mr. Quinby. "With Clud out of the way, how do you stand? Any other debts?"

"Oh!" Bert had forgotten, and dismay seized him. "We signed a year's lease on the store and it had six more months to run."

"At how much a month?"

"Twenty-two dollars and a half."

"That makes $135." The man winced a bit and then, remembering, caught himself. "We'll charge it up to experience. I've learned some-

thing to-day, and so have you. It's cheap at the price."

Bert, speaking with respect and finality, refused to recognize any such bargain. "You pulled me out," he said, "but it isn't fair to make you stand it all. I've got to pay you back. I'll come to the store on Saturdays and help around. I'll work there all during vacation. Whatever I'm worth can go toward Mr. Clud and the lease money."

"It isn't necessary, Bert. I told you a moment ago some things are cheap at the price. I'm not a Clud."

"It was my mistake," Bert said with a new gravity, "and I ought to make good."

"Half, then," Mr. Quinby said suddenly. "This is a partnership, and I demand a partner's right. We'll split it."

Partnership! Bert thrilled. That was different. Quinby and Son! "Half, then," he agreed.

At that moment Sergeant Rockwell appeared in the doorway and told them that Judge Manning was ready to hold court.

Walking side by side, father and son crossed the hall. Bert was conscious of a sea of faces staring at him from the spectators' benches. Then the mass of faces faded out and only two remained—Bill Harrison, back toward the rear, plainly concerned, and Tom Woods in about the middle of the court room. The Butterfly Man

gave him a quick, almost imperceptible, nod of encouragement.

Bert found a vacant place on the first bench and slid into a seat. Back of him arose a quick murmur of voices; his ears burned. Seated behind a high desk, Judge Manning held an animated discussion with Policeman Glynn. Promptly at eight o'clock the judge rapped sharply with a gavel, and as though by magic the murmur of voices ceased.

"This court," the judge announced, "is now in session."

The first case had to do with a man who had not cleaned snow and ice from his sidewalk.

"Any excuse?" the judge demanded.

The man had none.

"Two dollars fine. After this hire a boy to shovel your walk for seventy-five cents. It's cheaper, and may save somebody a broken leg. Next case, the State against Fred Ralston, charge reckless driving. Officer Glynn, you made the arrest. Be sworn."

Officer Glynn took oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Ralston, it appeared, had driven his automobile up on the sidewalk, and had narrowly missed hitting a woman and a child.

"Well, Fred," said the judge, "how about this? Was the road so narrow you couldn't see it?"

"No, Judge. A fellow called to me and I turned my head to see who he was. Next thing I knew I was climbing over the curb."

"How long have you been driving a car?"

"Two years."

"And don't know enough yet to watch the road? How long were you looking the other way?"

"Not more than five seconds."

"Then I'm afraid we'll have to make it two dollars a second. A fine of ten dollars may make you more careful in the future. Next case, Samuel Sickles against Herbert Quinby, charge assault and battery."

Bert stood up and found that his knees were seized with a strange fit of trembling. It was only a few steps from his bench to the railing in front of the judge's desk, but the distance seemed to sap him and to leave him weak. A sweat broke out along his forehead; the shuffling of the spectators seemed to come to his ears as from a great distance. And then he felt an arm pressed against his—his father's arm.

Judge Manning stared down from his seat of power and looked at the complaint in doubt. "How about this, Harry," he said. "You're not mentioned in these papers. Are you mixed up in this case?"

"No, your Honor," Mr. Quinby answered. "My boy is in trouble and I'm here to see him through it."

"Well, where's the complainant? Samuel Sickles!"

No answer.

"Sickles, step forward."

But no one came forward in answer to the summons.

Judge Manning ran an irritable hand through his straggly wisp of beard. "Who took this complaint? You, Sergeant? Did the complainant know he was to be here at eight o'clock? Did you tell him?"

"I told him the time," Sergeant Rockwell answered, "and he repeated it after me."

"Judge," piped a voice; "he won't be here tonight. He's gone away."

The judge adjusted his glasses and peered down the court room. "Who said that? Stand up and let me get a look at you."

A man stood up, a bit abashed by this sudden prominence into which he had been thrust.

"Oh! It's you, Dave Webb. What do you know about this Sickles?"

"Judge, I was at the station and saw him get on the 7:09 train for the city. He was carrying two suit cases."

Judge Manning slapped the desk with a show of impatience. "What do people mean by making complaints and not coming here when they're wanted? You're sure you know this Sickles, Dave?"

"Yes, Judge. I bought things in Mr. Quinby's store when he was clerking there."

In any formal court of law a scene such as this would have been impossible. But Springham was used to Judge Manning's methods. Arraignments in his court were something of family affairs, and information was accepted from whatever source it could be obtained. The judge leaned forward and surveyed the boy who stood before the bar of justice.

"Bert, this fellow was a partner of yours, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir." The surprising turn of events had bewildered the boy. "We were in business together."

"And you had a row. Huh! Strikes me that a lad of your age could be better employed helping his father than in trying to go it on his own. The complainant not having appeared there is nothing for me to do but to dismiss the case."

"Come, Bert," said his father.

It was the man who led the way from the court room. Bert's hand clung to his sleeve. Free! It seemed too much of a miracle to be true. Every worry swept aside! A wave of intoxicating relief ran through his veins. His father pushed open the municipal building door, and the night air, rain-soaked and fresh, came gratefully to his nostrils. Never had he known that the outdoors could smell so sweet.

The Butterfly Man came hurrying out after them. "Bert," he said, "I'm glad it turned out this way for your sake. I imagine Sam got thinking it over, figured he'd cut a sorry figure when the whole story came out, and decided to drop the complaint. As a matter of fact the person who should have had to face trial to-night is Clud."

"Did you see him?" Mr. Quinby asked.

The Butterfly Man's eyelids drooped a bit. "I saw him. I doubt if he has a soul, but if he has I think I blistered it. I had him squirming, anyway."

Bert, astounded, stared at his father. "Do you know Mr. Woods?"

"Know him?" Mr. Quinby smiled. "We're old friends. In fact I think he's coming to Springham in a couple of Sundays to have dinner with us."

"Glad to," the Butterfly Man answered promptly. "By the way, Bert, does your mother burn what she cooks?"

"No, sir."

"That's fine. That will be a real treat. I'm getting so I burn my food every day. And then, in the spring, your father and your mother are coming out to see my collection of beauties."

"They'll see something worth while," Bert said loyally. Yet he was puzzled. There was something queer some place. Of course, if his father said Mr. Woods was an old friend. . . . He

shook his head. The problem was too deep for him. He was content to accept the situation as it stood.

Five minutes later the Butterfly Man was on his way back to the cabin, and Bert and his father went on to the store. Mr. Quinby telephoned home the result of the trial. He was at the instrument a long time, and when he came away he was humming under his breath. It was a long time since Bert had heard him sing to himself.

"You know," he said, "I'm hungry. I didn't have any supper to-night."

The mention of food made Bert conscious of an internal hollow. "Gosh! I haven't eaten since morning."

"You haven't? Why. . . . Oh! Too worried to eat. Wait around a few minutes. I haven't been in here much this afternoon; I want to see how things have been running. We'll go up the street to the chop house and have a bite . . . sort of party all our own."

The boy walked down toward the front of the store. Bill Harrison's face was pressed against the window, and the hand not needed for the crutch waved a frantic summons. Bert hurried out to him.

"It was all right, wasn't it," Bill asked, "to send for Tom Woods?"

"It was the best thing that ever happened," Bert told him. "I don't know what would have

popped if he hadn't come. He made me see things."

"Oh, Tom Woods can always do that. I was on my way to the store to tell you something when I saw Sam come tumbling out."

"What were you going to tell me?"

"I've sold one."

"Sold one? One what?"

"A drawing. I sent a butterfly picture to a little nature magazine and this morning the editor sent me a check for a dollar. He wants me to send him some more."

Bill's face was radiant with happiness. His door had opened and had given him a glimpse of a promised land. Bert was no less pleased and thrilled.

"That makes you a real artist, doesn't it, Bill?"

"Well. . . ." Bill's voice came down to its humorous drawl. "I wouldn't say exactly that." All at once the drawl was gone. "But I'm coming," he said; "I'm coming."

The words, the tone in which they were uttered, had a heroic ring. After Bill had left Bert stood there on Washington Avenue unaware that the rain had ceased and that the storm was over. Coming! That was it. Working in the right channels, gaining a step each day, playing fair with those who had your interests at heart, winning a reputation as one who held his head and could not be stampeded.

Mr. Quinby came from the store. "Ready, Bert?"

"Coming," he said, with the same ring in his voice that had been in Bill's, and went forward, his head up, to meet his father.

THE END

BY WILLIAM HEYLIGER

Boy Scout Stories

Don Strong of the Wolf Patrol

Don Strong doesn't believe in the Boy Scout movement. How he becomes a member and an enthusiast and how he strives to live up to the laws of the Scouts, make this tale one of the best Mr. Heyliger has ever written.

Don Strong, Patrol Leader

Don Strong has the never-say-quit spirit of the best scouts and when his patrol seems to be on the point of disaster because of one unloyal member, he settles matters in a quick fashion and wins over the untrue comrade.

Fairview High School Stories

County Pennant

Schuyler Arch is continually praising the rival team and his Captain decides to make a loyal player of him at any cost.

Captain Fair and Square

Buddy Jones resigns when the Captain of the High School nine refuses to sign a pledge for clean athletics. How the team nearly goes under and how the day is saved will thrill you from start to finish.

Fighting for Fairview

The Captain of the Fairview nine resigns because he thinks that the team needs a new leader. His sacrifice is the cause of great happenings and the story proves that the honest fellow always wins.

These Are Appleton Books

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, New York

BY WILLIAM HEYLIGER

St. Mary's Series

Bartley, Freshman Pitcher

Bartley, unknown freshman, is given preference over Kennedy, the school's star pitcher, and the story shows how Kennedy's hatred breaks down before the better impulse of loyalty to the school.

Bucking the Line

In this book Bartley becomes editor of the college paper. Written criticism of the coach gets him into trouble. The story tells how the excitement is straightened out.

Captain of the Nine

Bartley, who is elected captain of the nine in this story, has trouble with a defeated candidate for the position, but before the story ends, Bartley gives the other fellow good reason to get over his grudge.

Strike Three

Another story of St. Mary's school, with the popular Bartley as hero. The title will tell boy readers what the chief interest of the book is.

Against Odds

"Slats" Corridon is the butt of the boys' jokes, but Bartley takes an interest in him. When the baseball season opens, "Slats" proves to be a find, and shows what a plucky boy can do in the face of opposition.

Off Side

Young Price persuades his uncle to let him give up school and go into business. After many exciting months as a newspaper reporter, he discovers his real talent and then he starts to work in a big way.

These Are Appleton Books

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, New York