

“**WANTED**”
& OTHER STORIES
BY
JAMES OTIS





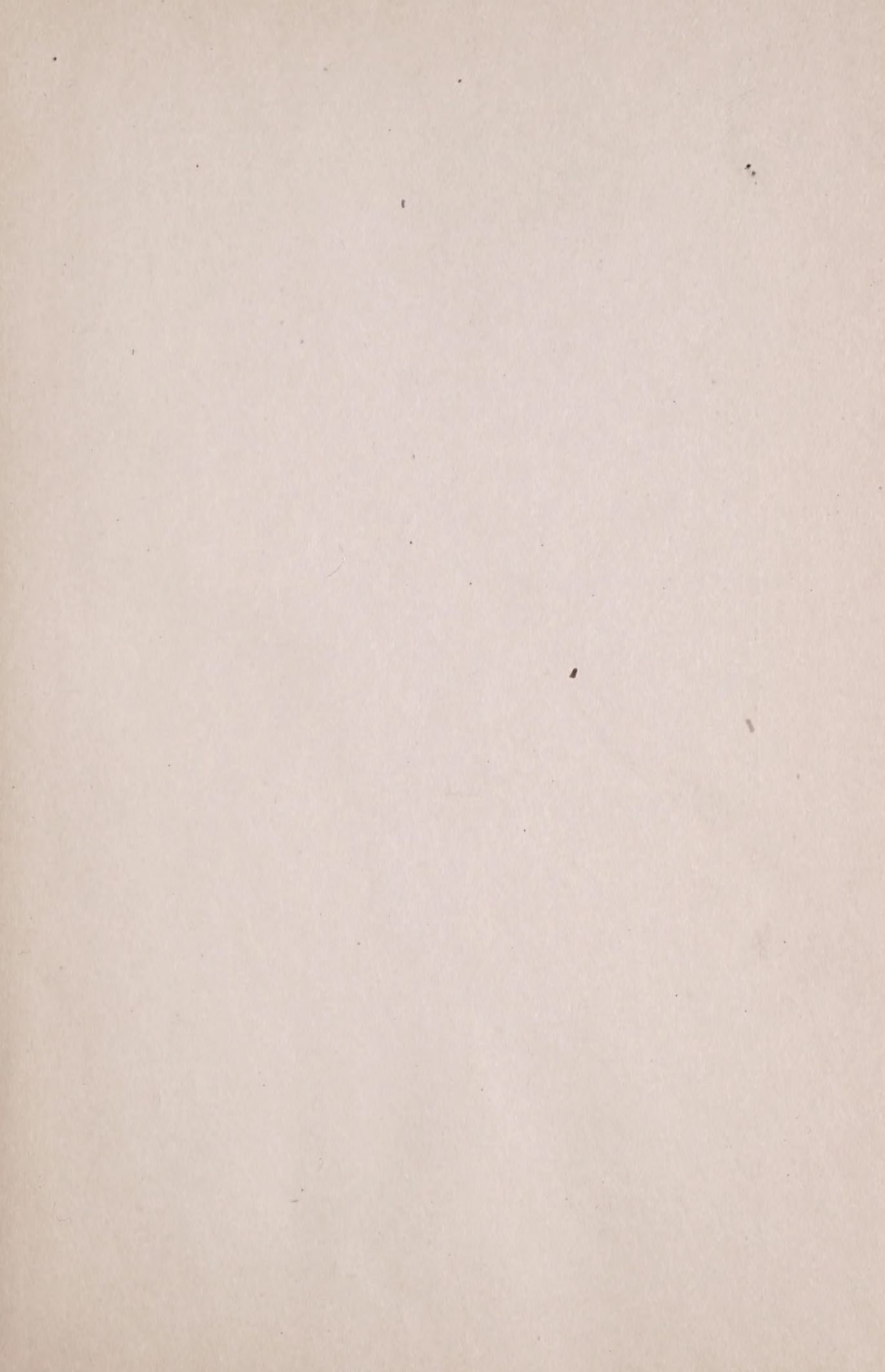
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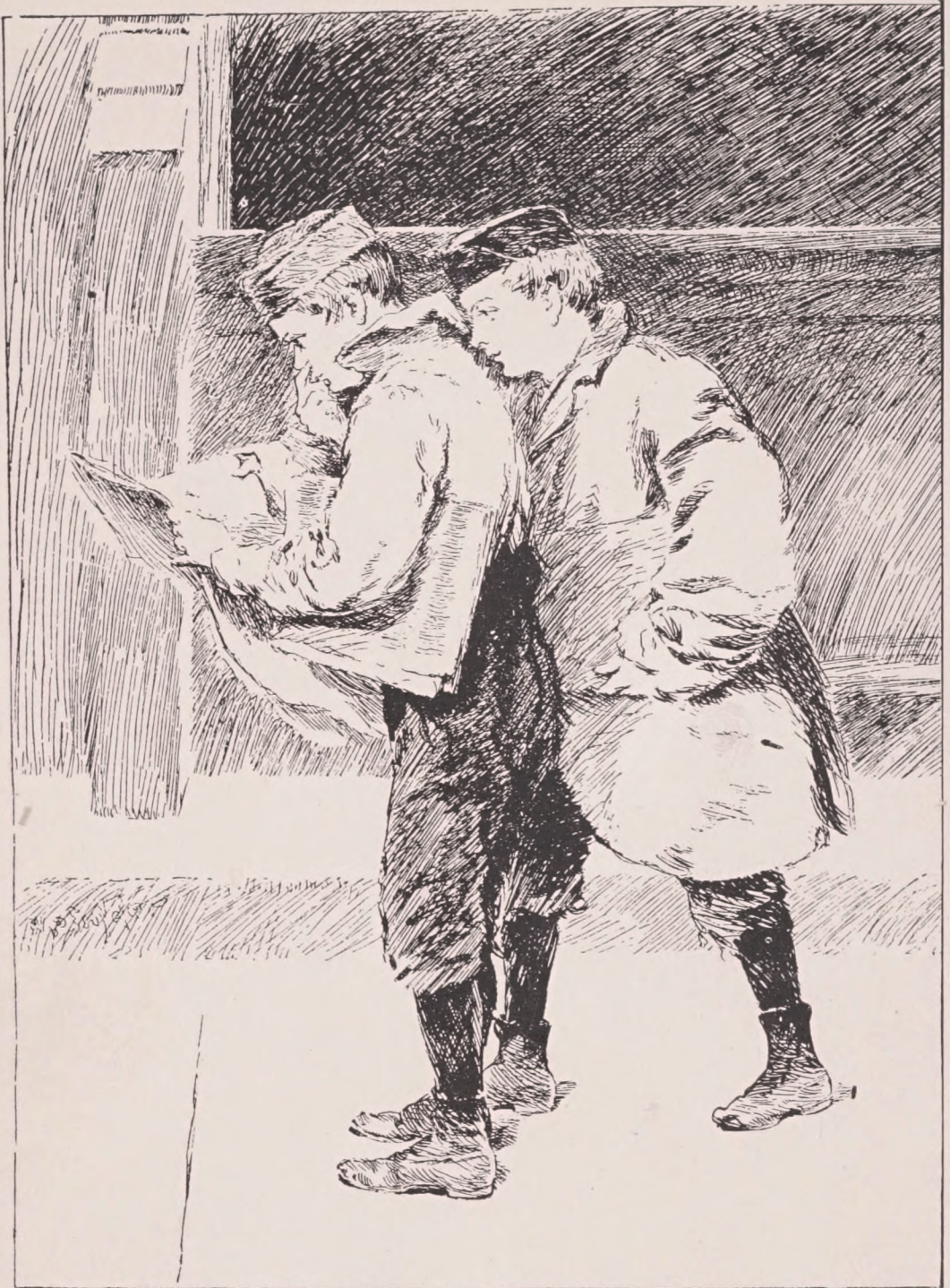
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DICKEY RUBBED THE END OF HIS NOSE IN A REFLECTIVE WAY

“WANTED”

AND
OTHER STORIES

BY

JAMES OTIS *Kaler*

AUTHOR OF

“TOBY TYLER” “MR. STUBBS'S BROTHER”
“OLD BEN” ETC.

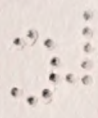
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I

I, Dickey! Dickey Jones! Come here quick.”

It was a very small boy in a coat so large that he looked like a visiting-card in a government envelope who was thus earnestly demanding a comrade's attention. His shrill voice could be heard distinctly above the roar and clatter of the vehicles, as he stood in front of a newspaper-office on Park Row, gazing alternately at a printed page and at a friend who was engaged in trying to cross the crowded street as rapidly as the summons seemed to require.

It was indeed a difficult undertaking that Master Jones was engaged in, with the horses, carts, and drivers all posing as his enemies; but he issued from it, after several narrow escapes, with no other injury than that done to his

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temper, and this mark of the fray could plainly be seen on his face as he said, impatiently, when he stood before his friend: “What’s the matter now, Sam Tucker? I haven’t sold more’n half my papers yet, an’ I’ll get stuck on some of ’em if I keep runnin’ every time you holler.”

Sam paid no attention to his friend’s ill-natured remark. Holding in front of him the paper he had been reading, he cried excitedly, as he pointed to an advertisement which he had found in the paper, “Spell that out.”

Dickey rubbed the end of his nose in a reflective way, as if trying to decide whether he could afford to spend the time necessary for the labor involved in such a task, when Sam repeated the demand yet more impatiently and peremptorily.

With a sigh Master Jones took the paper, and after no slight amount of hard work in the way of puzzling over some of the longer words, while the perspiration ran down his face, he read the following:

“INFORMATION WANTED regarding a boy bearing the name of Isaac Dunham, who is supposed to be living in this city. He is about eleven years old, with light hair and blue eyes,

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and may call himself Watts. A liberal reward will be paid for any particulars, however slight, regarding him.

“Address MOORE & HARDY, Attorneys at Law, Dooner Buildings, Broadway.”

“Well, what d’ye think of it?” Sam asked, as his friend completed the task and looked at him with an air of relief.

“I suppose it’s all right.”

“Can’t you see who it is they’re after?”

“It says Isaac— Why, do you suppose that means our Ikey?”

“Of course it does. Ain’t his name Dunham, an’ didn’t he live with old Granny Watts?”

“But why do they want him?”

“That’s jest what I hollered to you for,” Sam replied, excitedly. “Don’t you see he’s been doin’ somethin’, an’ they’re tryin’ to catch him? I tell you, Ikey Dunham is in a pretty bad scrape when folks are willing to pay money jest for finding him.”

“You—you don’t suppose he’s been tryin’ to kill somebody, do you?” Dickey asked, while every feature of his face showed extreme agitation.

“It’s something pretty bad, an’ if we don’t

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want to see him locked up in jail we must look out for him.”

“But what can we do?” And if Dickey’s face had not been quite so dirty one could have seen that he had suddenly grown pale.

“That’s what I don’t know. We’ve got to meet him first, an’ then we can think up something. Ikey’s a good fellow, an’ he’s helped both of us out when we got in a hole, so we’ll have to turn about now. Let’s find Tim Sawyer, so’s we can get him to sell our papers.”

It was not a difficult matter to meet Mr. Timothy Sawyer, news merchant. Owing to the fact of his having but one leg, he was not much inclined to roam, and his business acquaintances were quite certain of seeing him at the corner of Beekman Street at any time during the day. Messrs. Jones and Tucker found him at the “old stand,” as usual, and soon made a bargain with him whereby their stock in trade was to be disposed of if possible.

After this had been done there was nothing to prevent the friends of the unfortunate Ikey from setting out in search of him, which they did at once, faltering not in the quest until they found him at the corner of Church and Chambers streets, where he had been having an

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unusually flourishing trade in the boot-blackening business.

“Hello, fellows!” he cried, in a voice that had no sound of fear in it, as might have been supposed would be the case when his friends appeared in view. “Have you knocked off work as soon as this?”

Neither Sam nor Dickey had any reply to make to their friend’s cheery greeting. That he could smile after having committed a crime surprised them, and yet Ikey did not look like a particularly wicked lad. He was not so large as boys of his age usually are, and his golden hair, although it had had no recent acquaintance with a comb, gave an expression of innocence to his features. That he was cleanly inclined could have been told by his face, which actually shone from a vigorous application of soap and water. In his blue eyes there was no look of guilt, and had the cleverest detective been searching for a murderer he would have passed Ikey by with never a thought of apprehending him.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, in a tone of mingled surprise and alarm as his friends stood gazing at him in silent sorrow.

“Come round the corner a minute,” Sam

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said, as he led the party toward a convenient hallway. Slinging his box over his shoulder, Ikey followed, wondering what could have happened to give his friends such a strong resemblance to story-book conspirators.

“Have you seen the morning papers?” Dickey asked, before they had really come to a halt within the shadow of the passage.

“No; is there any big news?”

“Of course not,” Sam replied, sternly. “The police have got a notice out about wantin’ to find you.”

“The police — wantin’ to find me — what for?” And Ikey looked thoroughly bewildered.

In the fewest possible words Sam told of what he had seen in the newspaper, concluding by asking in such a tone as a deceived friend would naturally use, “Now what have you bin a-doin’, Ikey? Me an’ Dickey will help you out o’ the scrape; but we want to know jest what’s up.”

Master Dunham could make no reply. Although positive he had not wittingly done anything against the law, it seemed as if he must unconsciously have committed some crime, otherwise why should a reward be offered for information concerning him? He was at

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once plunged into such a state of alarm that speech was impossible.

“You’ve got to leave this town or they’ll nab you before night,” Sam added, sternly, winking at Dickey as if to say the signs of guilt were written so plainly on Master Dunham’s face that there was no longer any chance he could be innocent, and the supposed culprit did not attempt to make a denial.

“What shall I do?” he asked, in a trembling voice. “Why do they want to catch me?”

“That last part of it is jest what we don’t know”; and Sam spoke in a tone of mingled reproof and reproach. “Me and Dickey are chums of yours, so we’re bound to help you out o’ the scrape. Do you know of a place to hide till we get things fixed to carry you away?”

“I might sneak down on the Battery where all them stones an’ timbers are,” Ikey replied, in a voice choked with sobs.

“Then go there quick an’ don’t so much as show the end of your nose till we come. I’ll take the box, for you wouldn’t want that even if they carried you off to jail, an’ when it’s dark we’ll come to help you get clear.”

If the proverb that innocence and bravery go hand in hand be true, then Ikey was a guilty

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boy beyond a doubt, for no sooner had Sam spoken than he started at full speed toward the proposed hiding-place, dropping his box by Dickey's side as if time was too precious to admit of his delivering it in a proper manner.

For two or three minutes after he had disappeared amid the throng of men, horses, carriages, and carts his two friends stood looking sadly at each other. They may possibly have hoped he could prove his innocence of wrongdoing by at least stoutly insisting that there was no reason why he should run away; but, on the contrary, he had embraced the first opportunity to flee, giving the most palpable evidences of fear, and there was no longer a doubt in their minds but that he was guilty of some grave crime.

“Let's go back an' see what Tim thinks of it,” Sam said, after a painful silence. “If we've got to keep him hid some of the other fellows will have to help us, an' the sooner we tell 'em the better.”

Under the strictest pledges of secrecy the boys told their most intimate friends of the culprit's flight; and while there were many ready to blame there was not one unwilling to do all in his power to aid the unhappy boy in

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making his escape from the minions of the law. As a matter of course, there were many speculations as to what crime he had committed, but there was only one opinion as to what should be done.

Ikey was to be kept in hiding until the vigilance of the officers should be relaxed—that all were agreed upon; but to decide upon the location of his exile was not so simple. Tim Sawyer thought it best to send him to Canada by the next train, but as he could not suggest how the fare was to be paid Ikey's guardians gave little heed to the proposition. Billy Davis believed the fugitive ought to be provided with several bowie-knives and revolvers, in order that he might make his way to the Far West, where he could pass his time agreeably killing Indians; but this idea was not even entertained by the others, for it was well known that the supposed criminal was so little disposed toward bloodthirstiness that he would not even aid in tying a tin can to a dog's tail when he had the opportunity, and Sam said, decidedly, after each one had made some weak or wild suggestion:

“I don't b'lieve he'd be willing to go very far away, 'cause, you see, he's an awful lone-

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some fellow when he's by himself. I know where there's an old canal-boat up in the Erie Basin, an' if we take him there he can stay for a year without anybody's knowin' anything about it.”

“It can be done easy enough,” Tim cried, enthusiastically. “I'll borrow a big bag from Skillins, the junk-dealer, an' if it's pulled down over his head a perliceman would be mighty smart to guess who he was.”

“That 'll be jest the thing,” Sam said, approvingly. “You git it an' all hands of us will lug him over. I know where we can hire a boat.”

Every one of the supposed criminal's business acquaintances was not only willing, but eager, to aid him in escaping from the strong arm of the law, and in an hour from the time Ikey's crime had become known the entire party were near the Barge Office, ready to carry him to some place of concealment.

The officer on duty at the Battery on this particular afternoon may have been, and probably was, very much surprised at seeing so many boys loitering around with newspapers under their arms, or boot-blackening outfits over their shoulders, when they should have been at busi-

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ness; but even if the policeman's suspicions were aroused, he could see nothing to warrant him in making an arrest.

Believing that every officer in the city was watching for the culprit, the boys were careful not to call him from his hiding-place while there was a blue coat or a brass button to be seen in either direction, and this satisfactory condition of affairs was not brought about until some time after nightfall.

When three of the party had been stationed at as many different points from which the return of the policeman might be observed and signaled, the others approached a loosely piled quantity of timbers, in the midst of which they believed that the criminal was hidden. Then Sam called in a hoarse whisper:

“Ikey! You can come out now; but be quick about it.”

In another instant a fluff of yellow hair, surmounting the most woebegone-looking face imaginable, could be seen rising slowly from the very center of the lumber-pile, and Ikey stood as nearly revealed to view as was possible in the gloom of the night.

“Come on lively,” Sam said, in the same cautious tone, and then he added to Billy Davis

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and Dickey, “Be ready the minute he’s out, for it won’t be safe to fool round any.”

Master Dunham glanced backward over his shoulder apprehensively several times, despite the assurance of his friends that the coast was clear, and when he was fairly out of his hiding-place Billy and Dickey rushed upon him as if intent on inflicting some bodily harm.

If there had been any loungers in the vicinity they would have heard a faint, smothered squeak immediately following the dash forward, and then perhaps could have seen a short but sharp struggle, which was ended in a few seconds, after which Ikey’s friends stood around him while he lay upon the ground unable to speak, almost unable to breathe, with a thick sack fastened securely over the upper portion of his body.

“Take him right along,” Sam said, hurriedly. “Me an’ Jim Brown will skip on ahead up to Pier 10, where the boat is, an’ we’ll have her ready by the time you fellers git him there. Never mind if he fusses, but make him go the best he knows how.”

Then Sam and his friend ran up the street at full speed, leaving the others to conduct the unwilling fugitive as best they might, and

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every member of the party was confident the bag was the only and most complete disguise needed.

Dickey and his companions were careful to carry out Master Tucker's instructions to the letter in regard to the disposition of the unfortunate Ikey. With one on either side holding him firmly by the arm, and another behind to prevent him from lagging, he was forced along so rapidly that he could hardly have spoken even if his head had not been so closely enveloped.

Once a policeman came in sight on the opposite side of the street, and Billy showed himself to be a good tactician by tumbling Ikey over near the bulkhead, after which every member of the party seated himself on the prostrate body, thus giving Master Dunham the appearance of a bundle of rags, rather than a living being.

The officer passed on, however, without paying any attention to the little group on the bulkhead, and the journey was resumed without regard to the fugitive's comfort or desires.

Dickey was too much excited to think that possibly Ikey might be suffering, and on he ran at full speed, dragging the boy with him, paus-

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ing not until Pier No. 10 was reached, where Sam and Jim were already waiting in the boat.

“Now, Ikey,” Billy said, speaking to his friend for the first time since they left the Battery, “we’ve got to take the bag off long enough for you to shin into the boat; but we’ll put it on again when you’re aboard. Hurry up, ’cause somebody might come before you’re fixed.”

As Master Davis said this he began to unfasten the rope which was wound many times around the supposed criminal’s waist, and when finally the coarse covering was removed it was possible to understand how much Ikey had suffered during the short journey. His face, flushed to a deep crimson, was covered with dust which had been converted by the perspiration into a sort of paste; he was literally gasping for breath, and it was several moments before he could make any effort to get into the boat.

“Hurry up or a policeman will be along an’ nab you,” Dickey whispered, excitedly; and from the boat Sam cried, in a hoarse tone:

“What are you foolin’ round for? D’yer want to be snaked off to jail?”

“I’d rather go there forty times over than be put in that bag again,” Ikey said, in as

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desperate a tone as one can use when the words are broken because of excessive panting. “I don’t know what I’m runnin’ away for; I haven’t done anything.”

“Pick him right up an’ throw him down if he won’t come any other way,” Sam cried, impatiently.

By this time Ikey’s friends were more anxious regarding his safety than he was. Dickey and Billy were apparently about to obey Sam’s harsh command when, recognizing the folly of making a resistance, Master Dunham clambered down the wet, slippery timbers into the boat.

“Don’t put me in the bag again,” he said, imploringly, as he seated himself in the stern-sheets. “It’s so hot I can’t stand it.”

“You’ll have to be covered over so’s the police on the steamers can’t see your face”; and Dickey and Billy, regardless of the fugitive’s struggles, drew the rough bag down over his head, thus cutting short all remonstrances.

“You fellers stay there till we come back,” Sam called to his friends on the pier; and then he and Jim bent to the oars with a will, sending the clumsy boat ahead with a great splashing of water, but at no very remarkable rate of speed.

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It is a long distance from Pier No. 10 to the Erie Basin, and the neighboring clocks had struck the hour of nine when the square-bowed craft was pulled past the stern of an ancient and battered canal-boat.

“This is the place,” Sam said, in the faintest of whispers. “Take Ikey out o’ the bag, an’ let him shin in the window.”

The supposed criminal was uncovered once more, but yet he made no move toward leaving the boat.

“Go on,” Dickey whispered. “You mustn’t fool round outside here or somebody ’ll see you.”

“What am I to do?” Ikey asked, in a tone of despair.

In the fewest words possible Sam explained that he was to remain on the canal-boat until his friends could take further steps toward providing for his safety, and concluded by saying, “Shin up quick, so’s we can git back.”

“Have I got to stay here all night alone?”

“Of course you have. It’s better’n a jail, anyway.”

Perhaps Ikey was about to insist that he was innocent of any wrong-doing and knew of no reason why he should skulk around like a crim-

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inal, but his friends did not allow him even this poor consolation. They lifted him from the thwart as if he had been simply a package of merchandise and literally threw him through the window, Sam calling out cautiously as the unfortunate boy disappeared in the gloom, “We’ll be back to-morrow an’ bring you some-
thin’ to eat.”

Then Master Dunham’s friends pulled swiftly out into the river, as if the entire police force of both cities were in hot pursuit, and not a word was spoken until an hour later, when they rejoined the other members of the party.

II

THE young gentlemen who claimed to be the friends of Ikey Dunham did but little business on the day after he had been spirited away. Fortunately the trade in news was not remarkably brisk. Nothing unusual had occurred to create any very great demand for papers; but even if the reverse had been true they would have neglected their work in the excitement caused by the misfortunes which had nearly overtaken the boot-black.

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As might be expected, the first duty of all, after the morning's stock had been purchased, was to look among the advertisements, where they saw a similar notice to that which had made Ikey a fugitive. The wording of it was substantially the same as the first, but it sounded more imperative because of the fact that one hundred dollars was offered as a reward for information of the boy.

“I suppose one of us ought to go over and carry him somethin' to eat,” Sam said, when a large number of his brother merchants had gathered in front of the Post Office to discuss for at least the twentieth time the details of the sad affair. “It's 'most ten o'clock, an' I don't reckon he's had a bite since he first heard about the advertisement.”

“Let's chip in and send him a whole lot of stuff,” Tim Sawyer generously suggested. “Here's five cents, and if every fellow 'll give as much Sam can buy enough to last two or three days.”

There was no necessity of making any lengthy appeal, for immediately the nickels came from out the tattered trousers as freely as if they did not represent a considerable portion of the day's profits.

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“Sam’s the one to carry the stuff over to him,” Dickey said, as he contributed his share toward the general fund; “an’ he must tell Ikey that every one of us will stick by him, no matter how long he has to stay away.”

“He needn’t worry while we’ve got a cent,” Tim said, as he turned to take up once more the cares of business; “an’ if Sam has got to run round much we’ll turn to an’ sell his papers, ’cause it ain’t fair for him to lose all his time.”

With but one exception this view of the case was entertained by the others, and the solitary boy who did not appear disposed to give freely was Joe Dent, a fellow who had on very many occasions profited by his companions’ generosity. Joe had contributed five cents, but when Tim suggested that Sam might also stand in need of assistance he looked far from cheerful.

“Buy him plenty of good things,” Billy said, as he started off in search of customers, “’cause he won’t have anything to do but eat, an’ we ought to keep him filled up pretty full.”

Sam proposed that a committee be appointed to see how the fund was expended; but as no one would listen to a suggestion which implied

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a doubt as to his honesty, he set out alone to first get the supplies and then carry them to the fugitive.

As soon as he had gone the meeting was adjourned, in order that business might be resumed, and Joe Dent walked away by himself as if he had something more important on hand than the mere selling of papers. He seemed trying to avoid his late companions as he went swiftly toward Center Street, and that this really was the case could be seen when he met Bart Murray near the Tombs and whispered to him:

“Sneak round to Canal Street; I’ve got something to tell you.”

Bart was to all appearances a gentleman of leisure. He had at one time been an unsuccessful merchant in the newspaper line, but the work proving too hard, and his parents not unwilling to encourage him in idleness, he spent his time doing nothing—a condition of affairs which was Joe’s idea of happiness.

To walk over to Canal Street was quite a laborious undertaking, according to Master Murray’s ideas; but Joe appeared so excited that curiosity overpowered indolence, and he “sneaked” away, as had been suggested, the

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two meeting a few moments later behind a pile of packing-boxes, which lent an appearance of privacy to the interview.

Joe broached the subject by telling of Ikey's hurried flight and the reason which had seemed to make such a course imperative, concluding by pointing out the advertisement which had so much disturbed Dickey.

Bart freely admitted that it would take him too long to spell the printed words and proposed that this portion of it be “skipped,” but Joe insisted on making everything plain; therefore he read the lines with great emphasis, asking, as he finished, “There! what do you think of it?”

“It looks like he'd got himself in a hole. What has he been doin'?”

“That's just what none of us knows; but I can put my hand on him any minute.”

“Well, what if you can?” Bart asked, indolently.

“Not much; only the fellow what blows on him will get a hundred whole dollars.”

Bart was looking decidedly interested now, for he began to understand why he had been invited to the interview. “Are you sure you know where he is?”

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“Of course I am. Didn’t Sam Tucker tell all about it?”

“Perhaps they’ll lug him off to another place,” Bart suggested.

“If they do I’ll know it when Sam comes, for he can’t help telling me after I’ve put up as much money as anybody else.”

Bart remained plunged in deepest thought for several moments, and then he whispered: “We’ll wait till you see Sam again. I’ll stay on Center Street the rest of the day.”

“Then I’ll go back so’s the other fellows won’t think anything’s wrong,” Joe said, as he started off at full speed, with apparently not the least remorse of conscience because he was about to betray a friend.

Meanwhile Sam was doing what he considered his duty toward Ikey in the most painstaking manner. He expended the money as if for himself, and was even more careful to see that he got good weight or measure than if he alone was to be benefited by it. The stores consisted of a quart of peanuts, four “sour balls,” five cakes plentifully covered with icing, two apples, three pears, one loaf of bread, two pounds of Bologna sausages, and a candle. It was sufficient to form several feasts for one

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boy, and Sam thought he would be perfectly willing to become a fugitive from justice, a day or two at least, if by so doing he could revel amid all the luxuries he was carrying to Master Dunham.

The unfortunate boy who was being hunted down was not of the same opinion, however.

When Sam, after crossing the river on the ferry-boat like any other honest citizen, arrived at the Basin he approached Ikey's hiding-place as if he expected to see a host of officers spring out from some ambush. First he made a careful survey of all the surroundings; then he advanced in such a manner that the most casual observer would have mistrusted something was wrong; and when within a dozen yards of the craft he started at full speed and entered the noisome cabin after the fashion of a small whirlwind.

“It's all right, Ikey; nobody saw me come here,” he said, in a hoarse whisper; and a few seconds later Master Dunham appeared from his hiding-place under the floor.

The once prosperous boot-black presented the most woeful appearance. His hair was even more matted and comb-hungry than usual, there were deep circles around his eyes, his face was

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ghastly pale, and an artist would have been delighted at having him as a model for a murderer stricken with remorse.

“What’s the matter, old man?” Sam asked, surprised at seeing such a change in his usually jolly friend. “Have you been in any fuss?”

“Nothin’ more’n what you told me about yesterday,” Ikey replied, in a tearful tone. “It’s awful to stay alone, Sam; an’ what’s more, there are any quantity of ghosts all around here.”

“Now you’re foolin’,” Master Tucker said, in what he intended should be a most derisive tone.

“Do you suppose I could do much foolin’ while I have to stay in a place like this with folks huntin’ for me?” Ikey asked, impressively. “I’ve heard terrible noises, an’ there was a lot of ghosts here last night, for I saw six or seven—they kept comin’ an’ goin’ till pretty near morning. I wouldn’t be here alone after dark again, not if I was put into a jail a hundred times.”

Sam felt decidedly uneasy at this information, but he attempted to speak lightly in order to cheer his friend.

“Of course that’s foolish talk, Ikey, an’

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you'll stay right here, 'cause you don't want to give the police a chance to pull you in.”

“I don't care what's done to me, I won't stay,” and Master Dunham spoke so emphatically there could be no doubt of his sincerity. “You come over to-night, an' if you don't leave before mornin' I'll agree to stop a year.”

“I'll come,” Sam replied, promptly. “I'll bring Dickey an' some candles an' have a high old time.”

Poor Ikey did not look as if he was capable of having a very “high” time, but his face brightened considerably as he learned that he was to have company in his enforced retirement.

“Here's some things the boys bought so's you wouldn't be hungry,” Sam said, as he brought out first one package and then another from the many pockets and hiding-places in his clothes, and while Ikey was examining the different articles he turned to leave the cabin.

“Where are you goin'?” the fugitive asked, quickly, seizing his friend by the arm.

“I've got to get back so's to fix it with Dickey.”

“How long will you be away?”

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“I’ll come just as soon as I find him. It won’t be more’n two or three hours.”

Then Sam literally tore himself from Ikey’s detaining grasp, and when he arrived in New York the first acquaintance he met was Joe Dent, who appeared very inquisitive regarding the whereabouts and condition of the exile.

Sam gave the fullest information, told of the fugitive’s fears, of his desire for companionship, and, in fact, everything he could think of that might be interesting.

Acting a treacherous part himself, Joe was suspicious that Sam was not telling him the truth, and he said, in what he intended should be a careless tone, “I haven’t got anything to do till mornin’, so suppose I go with you?”

“I don’t believe it would be safe,” Sam replied, hesitatingly. “If there was too many we might make a noise, an’ then the jig would be up for sure. Me an’ Dickey will go to-night an’ then you and Billy can stay with him to-morrow.”

Such an arrangement did not please Master Dent, and he insisted very strongly on being allowed to aid in cheering the unfortunate boot-black; but Sam was determined that no unnecessary risks should be run, therefore he

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turned a deaf ear to every argument and entreaty.

“You an’ Billy can go to-morrow,” was all he would say; and Joe, doubting whether he really knew where Ikey was concealed, left his busy friend in order to take counsel with Mr. Bartholomew Murray.

With never a thought that this sudden desire to aid the fugitive covered any treachery, Sam began to make his arrangements for spending the night on the canal-boat. It was not difficult to find Dickey, and the question of paying the fugitive a social visit was speedily settled.

Sam thought it necessary, for the benefit of inquiring friends, to explain to Tim the cause of his absence, and then, after buying three candles and five cents’ worth of stale candy, he was ready to return to the boy who he believed was being so ruthlessly hunted down.

“You ain’t goin’ across the ferry?” Dickey asked.

“Why not?”

“The detectives that are huntin’ for Ikey would be sure to suspect something if they saw you goin’ on the ferry-boat so often.”

Sam did not stop to question how a detective would fancy there was any connection between

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him and the fugitive; the idea seemed so probable that he nearly turned pale as he thought perhaps he had already betrayed the secret of his friend's hiding-place; and, halting suddenly, he asked, helplessly:

“What can we do?”

“Borrow the same boat we had last night, an' then we can come back before daylight, when nobody 'll see us.”

The suggestion was a good one, in Sam's opinion, and arrangements were made for this private conveyance.

The clumsy-bowed clipper was not in great demand even by her owner, because of the labor necessary to force her through the water, and they had no difficulty in negotiating for her use until the following morning.

It is not to be supposed that boys so professedly skilful in eluding detectives would set out boldly for their destination. They preferred first to row down toward Staten Island, and then skulk up the Long Island shore until they arrived at the Basin after three hours of fatiguing labor.

“A policeman would have to be extra sharp if he followed us this time,” Dickey whispered, with a chuckle of triumph, as the bow of the

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unwieldy craft was run between Ikey's hiding-place and the bulkhead.

His words must have been overheard by the fugitive, for his haggard-looking face immediately appeared at the stern window, and from the expression of it one could understand how sadly he was in need of companionship.

“Go back!” Sam whispered, hoarsely. “If you knowed what a time we've had gettin' here you wouldn't so much as poke your nose outside.”

The face disappeared as suddenly as if its owner had been upset by some one in the rear, and after the two boys had satisfied themselves that there was no spy in the vicinity they clambered noiselessly through the wide opening into the gloomy place which Ikey would persist in calling a prison.

The victim of an advertisement was standing expectantly in the middle of the room, looking as if afraid his friends might excuse themselves from remaining all night; but he was restored to something like his usual cheerfulness when Dickey said, as he laid his package of candles and candy carefully in one corner:

“There, old man; we're here for a reg'lar

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out-an'-out good time, an' we'll have it if we eat all the stuff Sam brought this mornin'."

"You won't think much about that after it gets dark," Ikey said, as he glanced over his shoulder. "This is an awful place, fellows; an' if you hadn't come I wouldn't 'a' stayed another day."

"Now don't be foolish," Sam said, reprovingly; but the shade of anxiety which came over his face told that he was not perfectly easy in mind regarding the mysterious sights which the fugitive spoke of in such an awe-stricken tone. "Ghosts wouldn't dare to come loafin' round a boat."

"Wait an' see," Master Dunham replied, with a mournful shake of the head, and Dickey, who was growing decidedly nervous, tried to change the subject of conversation by proposing that they "pitch in an' have supper."

Without thought that the supply would soon be exhausted, they lighted all four of the candles, and during this brief illumination their surroundings were comparatively pleasant. When, however, the last flame had expired, they began to fancy all sorts of horrible things, until they were in a very uncomfortable frame of mind.

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“Me an’ Dickey will go for more candles,” Sam whispered, after a short but painful silence. “We can’t stay here without some kind of a light.”

“Then I’ll go too,” Ikey replied, in a trembling voice.

“That wouldn’t do at all, ’cause somebody might see you.”

“I don’t care. If there were a thousand policemen on the w’arf I’d rather let every one of ’em carry me off to jail than stay here alone.”

Sam hesitated while a fierce conflict between friendship and fear was being waged in his mind. Firmly believing that detectives were searching for Ikey, capture seemed certain if the hunted boy ventured outside the shelter of the boat, and yet it was almost impossible to remain in the darkness where the fugitive claimed to have seen such terrible sights.

“I suppose we might put him in the bag ag’in,” he said, half to himself. “That would be better than stayin’ here without any candles. What do you think, Dickey?”

Before Master Jones could reply a noise, such as might have been made by a number of per-

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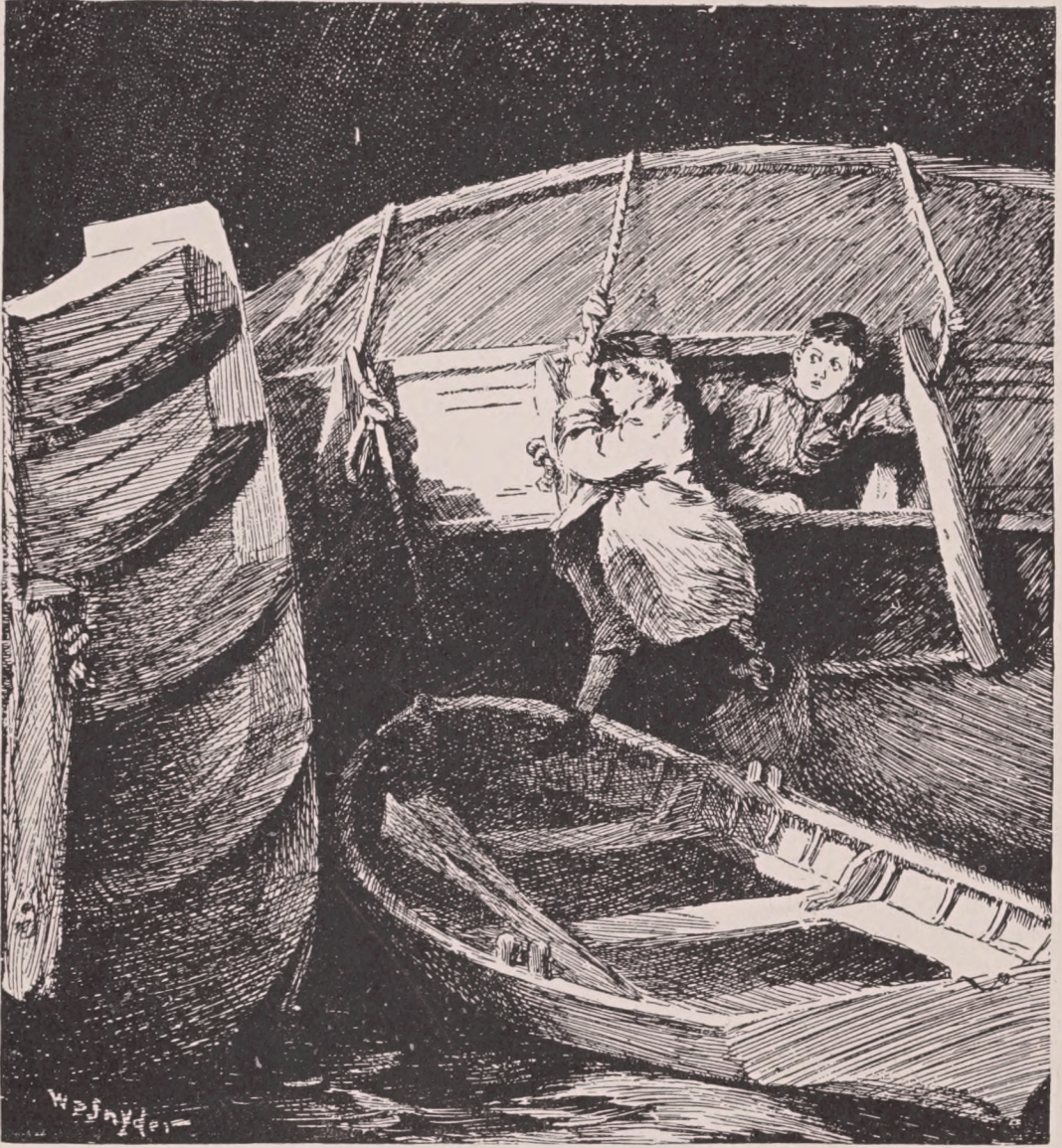
sons leaping onto the deck, caused the boys to retreat to the darkest corner of the cabin. They were in that frame of mind when the most commonplace sound seems strange, and neither questioned but that Ikey's ghosts had come to pay their regular nightly visit.

“It commenced the same way before,” the trembling exile whispered, faintly. “If you look through the cracks on the other side of the cabin you can see 'em.”

It was fully fifteen minutes before any one ventured to peer in at the supposed supernatural visitors, and then Sam, determined to make one effort to solve the mystery, tiptoed his way across the room.

Had he not been so thoroughly frightened he would have been able at least partially to understand the meaning of the scene which the hold of the canal-boat presented; but as it was his terror overpowered his common sense. He gazed, expecting to see ghosts, and imagination colored the picture.

The forward portion of the boat was dimly lighted by a dull glow, which did not appear to come either from blazing wood or a lamp, and Sam looked in vain to discover the cause. Flitting noiselessly to and fro across the faint



THE CLUMSY-BOWED BOAT WAS FLOATING JUST BENEATH THE
CABIN WINDOW

“WANTED”

rays of light were dark figures, the shape of which could not be determined in the gloom, while every now and then a clinking sound could be heard.

Master Tucker did not gaze upon the weird scene many seconds. He believed something worse than death would befall him if the strange beings in the hold should discover that he was watching them, and his only idea was of immediate flight. The clumsy-bowed boat was floating just beneath the cabin window, and without even stopping to acquaint the others of his intentions he clambered into it, hardly daring to breathe lest he should make a noise.

There was no possibility that Ikey and Dickey would be left behind. The cabin was not so dark but that they could follow the movements of their friend, and when his form was outlined in the window-frame they darted forward, each fearing lest he should be forced to bring up the rear.

Dickey was the last to leave the haunted place; but so active was he that Sam had not begun to unfasten the painter before he was cowering in the stern-sheets, while Ikey lay at full length upon the bottom of the boat.

Master Tucker was the only one who pre-

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served even a semblance of composure, and his heart was thumping so loudly that it seemed to him as if a man with but one ear must be able to hear it many yards away.

When the unwieldy craft was set adrift he pushed her softly past the ghost-ridden hulk and then crouched low in the bow until the wind should waft them toward the river, where it would be safe to use the oars.

III

WHEN Sam refused Joe Dent permission to go with him to Ikey's hiding-place, his reason simply was that he feared the suspicions of the detectives might be aroused if three prominent Broadway merchants should be seen loitering around the Erie Basin. Joe, however, believed he was prevented from going lest he should learn that which Master Dunham's guardians intended to keep secret. He was now in doubt as to whether any portion of the story told by the boys was true, for he judged the others by himself, and in his perplexity he sought his partner.

Bart, who never took more exercise than was

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absolutely necessary, remained patiently at the rendezvous, as if inaction was his greatest pleasure, and his friend found him without difficulty.

“I don’t know what to think of it now,” Joe said, after repeating the conversation he had had with Sam. “It looks a good deal as if the fellows had lied all the way through, and I’m afraid we stand a poor chance of getting the money.”

Bart thought over the matter in his usual leisurely manner, and after fully ten minutes of mental labor he said, with an air of superior wisdom: “I shouldn’t wonder if Sam Tucker was tellin’ the square thing, an’ perhaps the only reason why he didn’t want you to go with him was just what he said. How much money have you got?”

Joe was surprised at this unexpected question, but he looked up to Bart as his master in villainy and began to reckon up his wealth.

“Thirteen cents,” he replied, after counting the money several times to be certain he had made no mistake.

“That’s enough. Them fellows are goin’ to stay with Ikey till mornin’, an’ when it grows dark all we’ve got to do is to skip over an’

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know whether Sam was lyin' or not. If they sleep there we'll be sure to find him at the same place in the mornin', and we can go after our money about ten o'clock. You get down-town so's to see what the other fellows have heard, an' I'll meet you at the ferry after supper.”

“You'll be sure to go?” Joe asked, as he turned to obey the command given by his partner.

“Of course I will,” Bart cried, angrily. “D'ye s'pose I'd put up a job an' not help work it when there's a hundred dollars to be made?”

This was more convincing than the most solemn oath he could have taken, and Joe started down-town at full speed, bent on delivering Ikey into the hands of his enemies in order that he might thus treacherously gain a few dollars.

During the remainder of the day he made it his business to talk with every boy who had contributed to the fugitive's relief fund; but no one knew any more regarding the hiding-place than what Sam had told, and Joe went toward the ferry thinking perhaps he had been too suspicious.

His partner was waiting for him, and then he

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learned why the question regarding the amount of his capital had been asked. Bart was perfectly willing to embark in an enterprise which promised such rich returns, but he could not bear his share of the expenses and did not hesitate to make the fact known.

Joe bought two tickets, and the traitors went on board the boat at about the same time Ikey and his friends so hurriedly left the place of refuge.

On the previous evening Sam had given the most minute description of the craft in which the fugitive was concealed; therefore, they had no difficulty in finding it after arriving at the Basin.

Both leaped on board and began to call loudly for Dickey and Sam, as if anxious to prove by the greatest possible amount of noise that their visit was purely of a friendly nature.

“Go into the cabin,” Joe said, as no reply was made. “Perhaps they don’t dare to come out for fear the police may be around.”

Master Murray descended the shaky stairs without thought of danger, still continuing to call the names of the fugitive’s guardians, and when Joe stood beside him lighted a match.

The remnants of the feast, the tallow on the

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floor, and bits of wrapping-paper scattered around told plainly that Ikey had been concealed in the noisome place, and Bart said, impatiently, as the match burned so closely to his fingers that he was forced to drop it: “They’ve sneaked off just as I was afraid they would. After Sam told you fellows about this place he got frightened an’ lugged Ikey away. If I had— Hello! Say, stop that!”

The last four words were screamed rather than spoken, for at that instant Bart was seized roughly from behind and dragged up onto the deck, while the same unpleasant attention was bestowed upon Joe.

“What are you young villains doin’ here?” Bart’s captor asked, as he turned the boy around to look at him, and Master Murray saw that both he and his partner were held by two very disagreeable-looking men.

“We—we—we wasn’t doin’ anything,” Joe whimpered. “We only come over to see some fellows what have been livin’ here.”

“None of that. Tell me the truth or I’ll break every bone in your body,” and the man emphasized his words by shaking Joe until it seemed to the boy as if the threat was to be carried into execution then and there.

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“That’s just the truth,” Master Dent cried, tearfully.

“Oh, throw ’em overboard,” the second man said, impatiently. “We can’t fool all night with a couple of cubs.”

“Don’t kill us! Oh, please don’t kill us!” Joe cried, in an agony of fear lest they were to be ruthlessly cut off in the very bloom of their treachery.

“Hand me your stick while I dress this fellow down properly, an’ if they ever come here again we’ll drown ’em sure,” the man who was holding Joe said to his companion; and then began a performance which was extremely painful to those who would have earned a hundred dollars by betraying a friend. When the exercise was concluded the boys were literally flung on shore.

All this had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that it was some time after the painful landing before they made any attempt to solve the mystery; and then Joe asked, as he rubbed his aching back and arms, “Why do you suppose them men gave it to us so hot?”

“I don’t know nothin’ about it,” Bart snarled.

“But Ikey *had* been there,” Joe continued,

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all unconscious of the anger which was rising against him in his companion's heart. “I wouldn't wonder if them brutes had thrown all three overboard, like they was goin' to us at the start.”

“I hope they did, an' I wish they'd served you the same way.”

“Why—why, what's the matter?” Master Dent asked, in surprise. “Didn't I get it worse'n you, 'cause the man that beat me had a stick? You don't think I knew anything about pirates bein' there, do you?”

“All I know or think is that if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have been in the scrape, for Ikey might 'a' run away a hundred times without me hearin' of it. You're a duffer, Joe Dent, an' it would be the right thing to give you another beatin'.”

“You're a nice fellow to come out on a job an' kick when things don't go jest right,” Joe retorted, angrily, and before he could speak another word his companion leaped upon him.

Over and over on the ground the two traitors rolled, pounding each other to the best of their ability, regardless of the fact that both had been soundly whipped but a few moments previous,

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while their late captors stood surveying the scene with evident enjoyment.

It was ten minutes before the partners had enough of this kind of sport, and when they arose to their feet it would have been difficult to decide which had received the most severe punishment.

“If you go across the river to-night you’ll have to walk, for you won’t touch any of my money,” Joe shouted, as he started at his best pace in the direction opposite to the one taken by his companion, and an instant later he repented having made the threat.

Bart had not realized before that he was penniless, with a broad expanse of water separating him from home, and on being thus reminded of the unpleasant fact he decided that it was absolutely necessary to reduce the already well-flogged Joe to subjection.

After a short but not very swift race, owing to the fact that neither of the boys was feeling particularly fresh, the senior member of the firm overtook his partner and another struggle ensued, with one of the public thoroughfares as the battle-field.

Among the spectators to this last conflict was a policeman, and he took an active part in the

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affair by marching both the young gentlemen to the station-house, thus settling for the time being the question of crossing the river.

During the walk, when they were escorted by a crowd of jeering boys and held in the uncomfortably firm grasp of the officer, the culprits had plenty of time for reflection; but they failed to realize that all the trouble had been brought about by themselves. Both appeared to think Ikey was the one who should be punished for their misdeeds, and on being taken before the sergeant at the station-house they were eager to tell of the supposed greater criminal.

The officer listened attentively to the story, which was told in such a way as to make it appear that they had been trying to apprehend the criminal only in the interest of justice, not from a desire to gain the reward, and when it was concluded Messrs. Murray and Dent were conducted to a cell, where they were to remain until brought before the court, charged with disorderly conduct.

Meanwhile the supposed criminal and his friends were doing their utmost to escape from the fancied horrors of Ikey's prison-boat, and at the same time screen the fugitive from view

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of those who were probably searching for him. To this end they rowed up the river, after the wind had carried them so far out of the Basin that the oars could be used in safety; but in the darkness it was impossible to find such a hiding-place as they believed would afford a secure retreat until morning.

It surely seemed as if at least half the inhabitants of both cities were on the water that evening; the red, green, and yellow lights of sailing-vessels and steamers twinkled confusedly in every direction; the long swell from ferry-boats or tugs caused it to appear as if the square-bowed clipper was continually ascending a steep hill, while the hum of conversation from those on the piers gave the fugitive and his friends the impression that a very large number of people were searching for them.

“We’ll have to try farther down the river,” Sam said, as he stopped to wipe the perspiration from his face, after they had rowed nearly an hour steadily and silently. “There must be plenty of good places round here to hide in, but I don’t dare to run too near the shore.”

Ikey made no protest. The fear caused by the advertisement and the terrors of the canal-boat had deprived him of the power to reason

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intelligently, and his only idea was to get as far as possible from those who might be in pursuit of him.

In about two hours after their hurried departure from the Basin the clumsy craft had made the useless trip up the river, and was nearly opposite the Pavonia Ferry slip on her return, when a light boat, in which were two men, shot out past the shadow of the pier as if in pursuit.

“There’s some of the policemen now,” Dickey said, in a low, frightened tone, which must have been heard by the occupants of the other craft, for one of them cried, peremptorily, “Stop rowing while we come alongside!”

“What ’ll we do?” Dickey whispered, in a voice trembling with fear.

“We’ve got to do what they say,” Sam replied, despondently, “for they could row all around us in two minutes.”

Ikey was silent. Crouching in the stern-sheets, with his eyes fixed upon the rapidly approaching boat, he neither moved nor spoke, but waited in an attitude of utter despair for—he knew not what.

As Dickey had fancied, the pursuers were policemen, and one of them asked, as he seized

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the gunwale of the square-bowed craft, “Which of you is Isaac Dunham?”

“I—I—I am,” came in faltering tones from the figure in the stern.

“The sergeant wants to see you.”

Ikey was very certain this was the usual manner of making an arrest, and he suffered himself to be half pulled, half assisted from one boat to the other, speaking no word until the officers had begun to row toward the shore, when he cried, in a voice nearly choked by sobs: “Good-by, fellows! Good-by!”

And from over the black rolling waters came the tearful reply: “Good-by, old man! We’re awful sorry for you!”

When the police court was opened on the following morning, among the first to enter was a large delegation of New York newsboys and boot-blacks who had suspended business, for that day at least, in order to learn what terrible crime Ikey Dunham had committed.

The surprise of these merchants was great when they saw Bart Murray and Joe Dent in the dock and heard them sentenced to pay a fine of five dollars each for disorderly conduct, but they were completely mystified by the absence of Ikey. He had not been brought into

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the building, and neither had the clerk nor the judge spoken his name, and the boys returned to New York in a state of perfect bewilderment.

Business among Ikey's acquaintances was at a standstill during the afternoon; each felt that it was impossible to do anything save discuss the strange disappearance of the supposed criminal, and many were the wild ideas advanced as all tried to solve the mystery. The policemen stationed near or around the Post Office were forced to clear the sidewalk several times of these newsboys who had grown so excited they gave no heed to the fact that they were causing a great deal of annoyance to pedestrians, and perhaps some of the party might have been arrested if Sam had not wisely suggested that they “go over to City Hall Park, where they'd have plenty of room to talk.”

The meeting had but just adjourned to this locality so much more favorable to freedom of speech, and some of the party were yet crossing the narrow street directly in the rear of the Post Office, when Dickey Jones screamed in his shrillest tone, as he pointed with a very dirty finger to a small boy who was on the opposite side of Park Row: “*Will* you look there! It's

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Ikey Dunham; but what *has* he been a-doin' to himself?”

Then the boys were treated to a surprise even greater than that caused by the sudden disappearance of their friend and associate.

Ikey was coming toward them as fast as the throng of vehicles would permit, but so changed in appearance! He had on a suit of new clothes, a new hat, new shoes, and something which looked very like a watch-chain glittered on his vest.

In silent amazement the boys watched him as he approached, and it was not until he had begun to tell a very wonderful story that any of them recovered sufficiently to be able to speak.

When he had been taken from the boat he was allowed to spend the night at the station-house in a very comfortable room, instead of a cell, as he had expected, and early in the morning was escorted to the office of Messrs. Moore and Hardy, the attorneys who had caused the advertisement to be inserted. There, after considerable difficulty, he had been made to understand that he was not wanted because of any offense against the law, but to meet his father's brother, an uncle of whom he had never

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heard and who had just returned from the Far West after an absence of many years.

Less than an hour later Ikey met his uncle, who was, as he expressed it, “a swell old man, with white hair an’ lots of money.” An immediate change was made in Master Dunham’s costume; he was presented with a “real silver” watch and chain and then allowed to go in search of his friends, that he might tell them of his good-fortune, as well as to say adieu, for he was to go West with his new-found relative on the following day.

“I’ve brought a two-dollar bill for every fellow,” Ikey said, as he concluded his story and produced a number of crisp bank-notes. “Uncle William said you should each have one, an’ if there ain’t enough here to go around he’ll send more.”

If the movements and conversation of that party during the following three hours could be accurately described and recorded it would be very interesting, as the reader may readily imagine. They inspected Ikey’s new clothes critically, very many tried on his coat to see how they looked in such a garment, and every one examined the timepiece with the air of a professional watchmaker.

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Ikey promised to write often from his new home, and in case he saw a good opportunity for an enterprising boot-black or newsboy to get rich suddenly, was to telegraph his friends at the earliest moment, regardless of expense.

Before Master Dunham felt obliged to return to the hotel where his uncle awaited him the mystery of the canal-boat was explained. The evening papers contained long accounts of the arrest of five men who had been making counterfeit money on an old hulk lying in the Erie Basin, and the boys at once understood that the supposed ghosts were counterfeiters who had done their unlawful work in the night on the same craft which had served Ikey as a hiding-place.

Why Bart Murray and Joe Dent went to the Basin on that particular night none of the boys ever knew, for those young gentlemen were careful not to tell any one that they had betrayed Ikey to the officers. While trying to do him an injury they had been the remote cause of freeing him from all his trouble, much to their own disappointment and confusion.

Did Ikey go West with his uncle? Certainly he did, and on the very next day. Every one of his friends was at the depot to bid him


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good-by, and in a few days more they will be at the same place again to welcome him back, for he is coming to New York on a visit, having been away nearly two years.

It is rumored in the business circles of which he was once a member that Sam Tucker and Dickey Jones are to accompany him when he returns to his home, “Uncle William” having promised to give them employment on his cattle-ranch.

A GREAT SPECULATION

I

ON'T you s'pose I know whether a horse is good or not, Ben Tucker?" and Teddy Marlowe spoke in a tone of mingled sarcasm and severity.

"How should you? You never owned one."

"But I've seen thousands an' heard Amos Grant tell everything about 'em by jest lookin' in their mouths."

"But you can't do that."

"How do you know? Ever since old Jack Douglass said he'd sell his I've been studyin' this thing up. I walked all around the horse last night when he was in front of Mansfield's an' believe he's the biggest kind of a bargain."

"But s'posin' we raise the five dollars, what would you do with him?"

"Almost everything. Why couldn't we run

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an express-wagon, or get him fat an' learn him circus tricks? When a fellow can buy a horse like that for only five dollars it's jest the same as findin' money.”

“But if he's worth so much, what makes old Jack sell him? He needs money as bad as anybody, an' I should think he'd want to keep him.”

“I s'pose he hasn't got sense enough to see how much could be made if he was put into good condition. It ain't likely he gets a great deal to eat, an' how can you expect a horse to show all his points if he's hungry most of the time?”

Ben was willing to admit that there was considerable common sense in this remark and began to think it might be a good idea to examine the property.

“Yes,” he replied, answering a question asked by Teddy during the earlier stages of the conversation, “I have got a little over two dollars an' a half; but, you see, I was savin' it for the Fourth.”

“Jest think how we could celebrate if we had a horse!” Teddy exclaimed, as he conjured up visions of the future. “The older fellers would let up into the Fantastics if we owned a team,

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an' we'd get up the funniest kind of a rig with Miss Washburn's two-wheeled shay!"

"That's a fact!" And now Ben's face brightened as he began to understand that by making this investment in horse-flesh he would also be providing for the national holiday in a most becoming fashion.

Teddy had proposed that the two buy the aged animal in partnership, each to pay an equal sum, and then indulge in such business or pleasure as would promise the largest pecuniary returns.

"S'pose we go out an' see the horse?" Teddy suggested. "When folks know old Jack has got ready to sell him, I wouldn't wonder if there'd be more'n a hundred tryin' to make a trade."

Ben had no very important business on hand to prevent him from spending the afternoon in such work, and the two started at once for Mr. Douglass's home, about a mile from the village.

The owner of the horse was an old darky, who earned a livelihood by sawing wood, "putterin' 'roun' gardens," as he expressed it, and on certain occasions playing the violin when the country boys arranged an economical dance.

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It was in this last-mentioned manner that Uncle Jack was most satisfactory to himself. “It don’t make er bit er diff’ence, honey, how long you keeps her goin’,” the old fellow would say, when the terms of payment for his services were being arranged, “I’s willin’ ter scrape des er long as you kin foot it.”

The prospective purchasers of the horse found Uncle Jack sitting in the doorway of his two-roomed house, with his eyes half closed, fiddling lazily, and presenting a perfect picture of content.

Not until he had brought the tune to a conclusion satisfactory to himself did the old man give any heed to his visitors, and then he said, laying the violin carefully on the floor beside him: “Well, honey, I s’pecks yer hab come fer to git de ole man to wuk; but it carn be done. I’s pow’ful busy dis yere afternoon, an’ you’s boun’ to ’scuse me.”

“What are you working at, Uncle Jack?” Teddy asked, looking around for some signs of the labor which prevented the old man from earning an honest penny. “I don’t see that there’s so very much to be done here.”

“It wasn’t de wuk ob de han’s, honey, dat I was er speakin’ ob, but de head. My ole brain

A GREAT SPECULATION

is des whirlin' roun' an' roun' wid de strain I's puttin' on it."

"What are you trying to do?"

"I's figgerin' out what I's gwine ter do wid dat yere wuffless hoss ob mine when de snow flies. 'Pears like he warn' good fer nuffin' 'cept to eat, an' de older he grows de hungrier he gits."

"We came out to talk about buying him, Uncle Jack," Teddy said, winking at Ben to assure him that the old man was ignorant regarding the true worth of the animal, otherwise he would not have talked so disparagingly concerning him.

"Hab yer, honey? Well, now, I's s'prised; I is fer a fac'. Does yer know I valles dat 'ar hoss at five dollars?"

"That's what I heard you say up at Mr. Grant's last night."

"Well, it am de trufe. Dat's a mons'rous fine hoss, chillun, an' I s'pecks he's ready to do a power ob wuk yet afore he dies."

"How old is he?"

"Now, honey, I carn rightly say; but he ain' so very fer along, kase I didn' own him more'n dese 'lev'n years, an' he warn' berry ole den. Mons'rous fine beas' ef he had er leetle

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bitter more meat on his bones. You see, honey, I doesn' hab de time fer to go moonin' roun' feedin' him, an' de grass is mighty short out dis yere way.”

“How long would it take to fat him up if we gave him all he wanted to eat?”

“Well, you see, honey, it's boun' ter be like dis: he wouldn' pick up berry great de firs' week, kase he'd be so s'prised at gittin' so much dat I reckon it 'd kinder worry de flesh offen him; but when he done foun' it was er reg'lar thing, den he'd puff right out wid pride.”

“Do you s'pose he'd make a good circus hoss, Uncle Jack?”

“Now, honey, dat's jes' where you'se hittin' dat animile right. I's seen him fall down an' pick hissself up sprier dan any hoss 'roun' dese yere diggin's. He's terruble spry for a creeter so ole, an' I 'lows he'd make his mark arter he got used to all dem fuss an' fedders what de circus people carries roun' wid 'em.”

“Will he bite or kick?” Ben asked, anxiously.

“Bress yer heart, honey, he won' hardly lif' up his foot when dar's flies on him. You needn' nebber be 'fraid ob dat 'ar animile hurtin' yer.”

At that moment the “animile” in question

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came from the rear of the house in his search for grass, and the most timid could hardly have been afraid of him.

His original color was white; but there was now so much mud on him that it would have been a difficult matter for a stranger to decide as to the true shade of his coat, and his ribs stood out so prominently as to suggest the possibility of their being braces of some kind, used for the purpose of holding the body together.

"He'd look a good deal better if he was cleaned up some," Teddy suggested, as he surveyed the animal with the air of a connoisseur.

"'Deed he would, honey; I's been so pow'ful busy dat I don' hab de time dat a hoss like him needs. I reckon you des wouldn' know dat creeter ef he was spruced up like Amos Grant keeps his brack pair."

"What's the lowest you'll take for him, cash down?" Teddy asked, fearing lest they would discuss the animal's good qualities until some less inquisitive person stepped in suddenly and deprived them of the opportunity for making such a wonderfully good bargain.

"I's boun' to stick to five dollars, kase dat's wot I said down to Amos Grant's; but it's des like gibbin' him away, honey, des de same."

'WANTED'

Teddy beckoned for Ben to follow him around the corner of the building, where the matter could be discussed privately, and Uncle Jack took up his violin, as if music, not trading, was the important thing to him.

"What do you say?" Teddy asked, eagerly, when he and Ben were comparatively alone. "Shall we buy him?"

Master Tucker hesitated an instant and then replied, slowly:

"If you think we can make any money out of him I'll put in my half, but you know we can't afford to keep a horse jest for the fun of it."

"I'll 'tend to that part of the business. Leave it to me, an' when he's fat the cash will roll right in to us. I've got my share of the money in my pocket; where's yours?"

"At home."

"Go an' git it. I'll hang 'round to make sure Uncle Jack don't back out of the trade or let anybody else have him."

"But see here, Teddy, how are we goin' to keep the horse? I don't know of any stable where they'd let us put him."

"Go get your money an' I'll see to all that. Don't you s'pose I've been thinkin' this thing

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over ever since the first minute I made up my mind to buy him?"

Ben would have waited to make further inquiries, but Teddy, eager to be half owner of the wonderful animal, hurried him away, that the bargain might be concluded without loss of time.

Uncle Jack paid no attention to his visitor, who came back to the doorstep with an assumption of carelessness after Ben started at a rapid pace on his homeward journey for the money.

Teddy remained silent, listening to the music, until the horrible thought came into his mind that perhaps the old darky was already repenting having offered the valuable steed at such a low figure, and he asked, anxiously: "I s'pose you'll hold to the bargain till Ben can get back with his share of the money? It won't take him more'n ten minutes."

"I's boun' ter gib him to yer at dat figger, honey, kase I done 'lowed dat's what he'd gotter fetch 'fore I'd let de ole feller go outen my 'session; but it's pow'ful cheap fer dat kin' ob a hoss. Kin you git de five dollars?"

"Ben's gone after his half an' here's mine," Teddy replied, taking from his pocket a hand-

“WANTED”

ful of coins and extending them to Uncle Jack. “Count it an’ you’ll find two dollars an’ a half in that pile.”

Uncle Jack allowed the money to be left in front of him, but a long-drawn sigh told how deeply he regretted having promised to part with the horse for such a paltry consideration.

“It’s all dar, suah enouf, honey, an’ I’ll des keep dese yere pieces twell Ben gits back, so none ob ’em kin runned away.”

Teddy was satisfied when the old man swept the coins from the doorstep into one hand and transferred them to his pocket, for now that a portion of the purchase-money had been paid it was not probable he would attempt to draw back from the agreement.

So eager was Teddy to have the transaction completed that the time passed very slowly, although Uncle Jack played some of his liveliest tunes for the benefit of his intending customer, and it seemed as if Ben had been absent at least half an hour, when he returned, breathing like one who has traveled rapidly but looking triumphant.

“Here’s my share,” he said, giving the old darky a handful of silver and copper.

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"I've paid mine already," Teddy added, springing to his feet, "an' now the horse is ours."

"I reckon he am, honey," Uncle Jack replied, after assuring himself the amount was correct and putting it in his pocket with an air of satisfaction. "Yer wants ter treat dat creeter well, kase it's feed what' keeps him up to his wuk, an' he ain' been habin' any too much ob it lately."

"Have you got a halter so we can lead him home?" Teddy asked.

"I has, honey, an' I's gwine ter frow it inter de barg'in, so's to show dat yer old Uncle Jack knows when he's tradin' like a gen'leman. I 'lows yer don' wan' a harness an' waggin? I's got a mons'rous fine lot ob stuff what would come in handy when yer puts dat creeter on de race-track."

"Of course we've got to have such things some time, but we've spent all our money now an' will have to wait till we can earn more," Teddy replied, as he took the halter of rope and went cautiously toward his newly acquired property.

The horse did not attempt to run away, probably because that would have been too much

“WANTED”

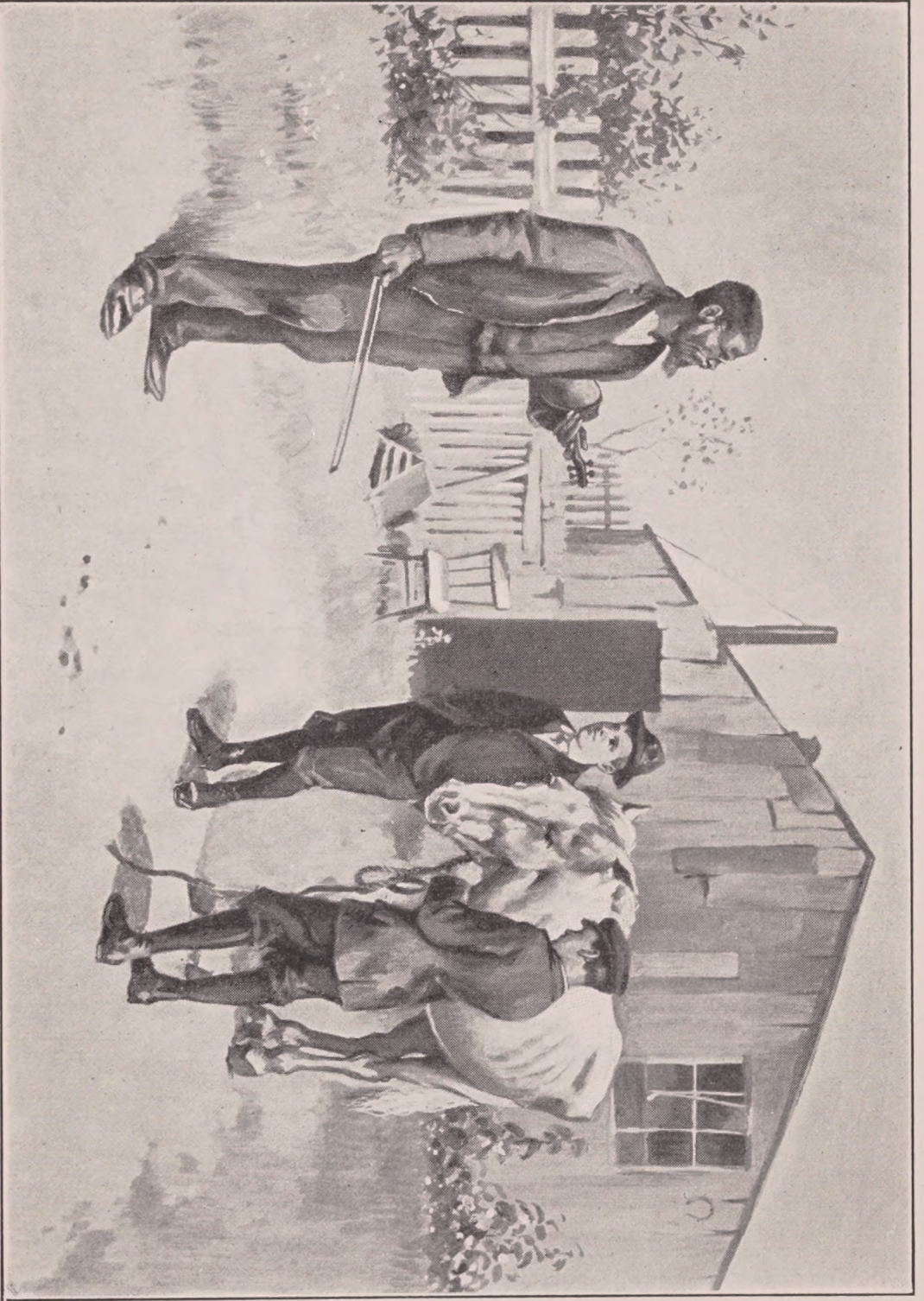
exertion, and the boys had no trouble in making him ready for the journey home.

“I don’ ’low he’s gwine ter play any pranks yit er while,” the old darky said, with a chuckle, as the purchasers started down the road with their bargain in horse-flesh hanging obstinately back on the halter; “but look out, chillun, when he begin ter feel his oats.”

Then, with the air of one who is satisfied with the world in general, and himself in particular, Uncle Jack resumed his leisurely occupation with the fiddle.

The new owners of the white horse pulled him along as rapidly as possible until Uncle Jack’s cabin was hidden from view by a bend in the road, and then both stopped as if by mutual consent, although not a word had been spoken, to examine their prize.

“He ain’t so awful handsome,” Teddy said, reflectively, as he examined each of the horse’s feet in turn; “but jest wait till he’s in decent shape, an’ then I reckon folks’ eyes will stick out. We must get him as fat as a seal, an’ I believe it would do his mane an’ tail good to rub them with sage-tea, such as grandmother uses. She says that’s terrible nice for makin’ the hair grow.”



THE BOYS HAD NO TROUBLE IN MAKING HIM READY FOR THE JOURNEY HOME

A GREAT SPECULATION

"I wish there wasn't so many bunches on his legs," Ben added, by way of a reply.

"They don't 'mount to anything. We can keep 'em tied up in a cloth till they're squeezed down smooth. You'll soon find out that I know how to take care of a horse."

"Where are we goin' to keep him?"

"That's what we've got to settle on. How much d'yer s'pose Amos Grant would charge to let him stay there?"

"But I thought you said you'd figgered out the whole thing?"

"I hadn't made up my mind where he was to live. It took a deal of thinkin' to fix so's we could buy him."

"You said you'd 'tended to everything, didn't you?"

"So I will if you give me time enough." And Teddy spoke just a trifle impatiently. "I'm goin' to talk with Mr. Grant as soon as we get back to the village."

This explanation was not entirely satisfactory to Ben, for it seemed as if Teddy had made at least one false assertion; but the horse had been purchased and it would be foolish to quarrel over what might have been only a slip of the tongue.

“WANTED”

“I wish we hadn’t bought him so soon,” he said, after a short pause.

And Teddy replied, scornfully: “When a feller has a chance to make such a trade as we have there must be somethin’ wrong with him if he gits sorry. Jest wait, Ben Tucker, till we begin to make money outer him an’ then see how you’ll feel.”

“But it’s goin’ to be a bother to take care of him. I’m certain father won’t let me have him around our house.”

“Don’t fuss about that. I’ll ’tend to this whole job. See how he lifts his feet. I tell you, Ben, this horse is a stepper, an’ by the time we get him into good shape Uncle Jack will be sick thinkin’ how cheap he sold him.”

Ben noted carefully this newly discovered good point in the partnership property, and grew more cheerful under his companion’s predictions of future prosperity for the firm.

When they arrived at the outskirts of the village, however, it was necessary to refer once more to the minor details of the business.

“Are you goin’ to lead him all around town while you look for a stable?” Ben asked.

“No; I don’t want the fellers to know we’ve got him till there’s more fat on his sides. I’ll

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tell you what we'll do," Teddy added, as a sudden thought occurred to him. "S'pose we put him down in my cellar till we get things fixed?"

"Will your mother let you?"

"She won't find out anything about it. You take him back of Miss Doak's house while I unlock the big door that leads into the orchard, an' then we'll sneak through without a soul's hearin' us."

"But s'pose somebody comes down an' sees him?"

"We won't leave him there more'n half an hour, an' the folks will all be up-stairs."

If Teddy was positive there would be no trouble, Ben thought it foolish for him to raise any objection, therefore the matter was allowed to drop until they arrived within a few yards of Master Marlowe's home.

"Lead him back of Doak's barn till I get things fixed, an' then we'll bring him up through the orchard," Teddy said, as he halted a moment.

"I think you'd better ask your mother about it first," Ben suggested, feebly, more to ease his own conscience than because he thought it absolutely necessary.

"What's the use? It would only fuss her

“WANTED”

for nothin', 'cause he won't be there long enough to have it count.”

As he ceased speaking Teddy hurried away to make preparations for the reception of the horse, and Ben led the weary-looking steed to the proposed hiding-place.

Ten minutes later Master Marlowe was in his father's orchard, pulling boards from the fence to make an entrance for the partnership property.

“What kept you so long?” Ben asked, in a petulant tone. “I thought you was never comin', an' Miss Doak has been here more'n a dozen times to find out what I was doin' in her yard with a horse.”

“It took me quite a while to get the door open, 'cause we don't use it very often, an' then I had to bring in some wood. It's all right now, though. Mother's gettin' ready to make some calls, an' we'll have our trotter in a reg'lar stable before she comes back.”

After the boards had been removed it was necessary to tear away the upper length of joist to which they had been fastened, and, as may be supposed, this was not done in a workman-like manner.

It was finally in such a condition, however,

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that the ancient steed could pass through, and this, in Teddy's opinion, was the only really important portion of the affair.

The animal seemed willing to go wherever his new owners wished and entered the cellar without hesitation.

If horses have reasoning powers, he must have wondered not a little at the snug quarters in which he found himself, contrasting them with the dilapidated barn on Uncle Jack's half-acre farm.

Potatoes in bins, apples in barrels, and cabbages in one corner must all have been seen by him, and perhaps he said to himself that he would sample these dainties at the earliest possible moment.

Teddy looked around for something to serve as a hitching-post, and the only thing available for that purpose was one of the supports to the "hanging shelf."

"That's jest the thing," he said, in a tone of satisfaction, "for it 'll keep his head up so high he can't get into mischief."

It would have been better, judging from subsequent events, if Teddy had understood making a knot which would not slip. He contented himself with fastening the halter after his own

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careless manner, and then the two went in search of more suitable quarters in which to stable their rare specimen of horse-flesh.

II

AMOS GRANT, the proprietor of the livery-stable, refused to listen a single moment to Teddy's proposition that he be allowed to hire a stall there for a few days.

“I wouldn't have that rack of bones around at any price,” he said, emphatically, “so there's no use spending your time here.”

Mr. Treat, who had three stalls without occupants, declared that he had “no room” for another horse, and Captain Toby Thompson flew into a terrible rage when Teddy politely proposed that the Uncle Jack horse be allowed to make his home there for a short time.

“I won't have my barn disgraced in such a way,” he cried, in his gruff voice, which at this particular time sounded to the boys very much like distant thunder. “It has just been painted an' looks pretty decent, but I feel as though I'd be insulting the painter to let that old scarecrow walk past the green door.”

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"He'll look different after we've fattened him up a little," Teddy ventured to say.

"It doesn't make any difference how much grain you give him, there'll never be any improvement in that old veteran. Why, Jack Douglass has had him ever since I can remember, and he was too far along in years to work when he bought him. The darky has made a good trade if he turned him over to you as a gift."

"We paid him five dollars for the horse," Ben said, with a little sob.

"Then it's a clear case of fools and their money being soon parted. I venture to say Teddy's father will raise a fine storm when he sees the new member of the family."

"I own only half of him," and now Teddy was beginning to think that perhaps they had not secured such a wonderfully good bargain, after all.

"So much the better for you. I'd feel richer if I hadn't any interest in him whatever," and the fat captain indulged in one of his chuckling laughs which sounded unusually aggravating to Teddy.

"What 're we goin' to do with the old beast?" Ben asked, petulantly, when they were

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on the sidewalk once more, beyond sound of Captain Toby's mirth.

“I'm sure I don't know. Let's go home an' talk the thing over. There must be some place in town where we can get him in.”

“It doesn't look so just now,” Ben replied, with a sigh, as he thought of the two hundred and fifty pennies he had hoarded so long.

It was not Teddy's intention to go into the house when he reached his home, but to “skin round” through the orchard to the cellar. An unkind and malignant fate seemed to be lying in wait for the new owners of the horse. When they turned down the side street to gain the orchard Mrs. Marlowe called to her son.

“I thought you said she was goin' out?” Ben growled.

“That was what she told me. Now how 're we to get the horse away without her seein' him?”

“That don't trouble me half so much as to know where we'll take him after we get him out er the cellar.”

“I've struck it now!” Teddy cried, as a sudden and what seemed like a happy thought occurred to him. “What's the matter with Miss Washburn's barn?”

A GREAT SPECULATION

"It's pretty nigh tumbled down; that's all the matter I know."

"I mean what's to prevent our takin' the horse there? I'm very sure she'll let us put him into one corner," and Teddy was his old careless self once more.

"We'll go right up there!" Ben cried.

"Wait till we find out what mother wants. It won't be dark for a long while yet, an' we've got plenty of time."

Mrs. Marlowe wanted her son to assist her in the store-room, and Teddy had experience enough in such matters to understand that the task set him could not be finished, even with Ben's aid, in less than an hour; but he whispered, cheerfully:

"We'll hustle round an' get this job done in no time. Then mother won't care where I am, an' we'll soon have the horse fixed in great style."

"What I'm afraid of is that your mother 'll go down-stairs, an' if she finds him there, I expect we'll have an awful row."

"It ain't likely she'll do anything of the kind before night, an' what's the use of worryin'? Take hold an' help me, so's we'll get through quick."

“WANTED”

Mrs. Marlowe evinced no intention of descending the cellar stairs, and Ben was growing more confident that they would be able to take their prize away without his visit having been known, when suddenly a great crash was heard, as if from beneath their feet, followed by a sound as of heavy pounding.

“Mercy on us! what can be the matter?” Mrs. Marlowe screamed as she started toward the door.

Teddy and Ben looked at each other in speechless dismay. Mr. Marlowe entered the house almost at the same moment his wife opened the door, and he also had heard the din.

“What is going on in here?” he asked, excitedly.

“I am sure I don’t know,” his wife replied, gasping in terror. “It sounded as if the noise came from the cellar.” Teddy’s knees literally knocked together as his father opened the cellar door and descended the stairs.

“We’d better foller him,” Ben whispered, “or he may turn the horse loose.” Since he must “face the music” sooner or later, Teddy realized that no real good could come from deferring the evil hour, and with Ben close behind he followed his father.

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No lengthy survey of the scene was necessary in order to understand the cause of the noise. The white horse, straining at his halter in order to get at the potatoes, had succeeded in slipping the carelessly tied knot, and was feasting on the good things to be found on every side. Tiring of potatoes, he had attempted to help himself to apples, and in order to do this it was necessary to pass under the hanging-shelf.

Unfortunately, it was not quite high enough, and, intent only on the proposed feast, the old fellow had forced it from its fastenings, bringing down on his back a miscellaneous collection of pies, preserves, cold meat, and crullers.

His mud-stained hide was covered with sweets and fragments of pastry, until one would have said he had been rolling in the contents of a bakery, and hanging around one ear was a cruller, which lent a most peculiar appearance to the old fellow's face.

At first Mr. Marlowe was thoroughly surprised; but after one glance at the cellar doors, which were secured on the inside, he asked, sternly, "Teddy, do you know how this horse came here?"

"Yes, sir," Master Marlowe replied, in a faint voice. "Ben an' me bought him from

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Uncle Jack Douglass this afternoon with the money we'd been savin' for the Fourth, an' we left him here till we could find a stable for him.”

There was an ominous silence during fully a minute, and then Mr. Marlowe said: “Take him away at once, and when you have found some person who will take him off your hands, come back, but not before. I shall talk with you about this matter later.”

Teddy shivered as if the temperature had suddenly fallen to zero. He knew from past experience that his father never forgot to keep such appointments, and there was a look of sadness on his face as he pulled the aged steed away from the apple-barrel, where the old fellow had been indulging in a most unusual feast without regard to the serious conversation regarding himself.

“We oughter talked with our fathers before we spent the money,” Ben said, as he aided in pulling the white horse in the direction of Mrs. Washburn's barn. “It wasn't right to pitch in so steep until we knew what they thought about it.”

“Now don't go to sayin' what we oughter done,” Teddy cried, angrily. “That isn't goin'

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to do us any good. We've put ourselves into a scrape, an' I'm the worst off 'cause I've got to see father when I come back. I've a good mind to turn the old horse adrift an' let him go back to Jack Douglass."

"I won't agree to that," Ben replied, emphatically. "There's two dollars an' a half of my money invested in him an' I want to get it out."

"I'd be willin' to lose the whole of mine if we hadn't put him in the cellar."

"I haven't got anything to do with that," said Ben.

"I don't s'pose you care how hot I get it so long as you're out of the scrape."

"Of course I feel sorry, Teddy; but you can't expect I'm goin' to take on so dreadfully, unless my father raises a row because I bought half the horse."

This last remark served to arouse Teddy's wrath, for it seemed to him as if Ben had assumed a patronizing manner toward him when his heart was bowed down with such a weight of woe. He succeeded in keeping his temper within bounds, however, understanding that it would only make bad matters worse if he had a quarrel with his partner at this critical time,

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and the two walked in silence to Mrs. Washburn's.

Fortunately, so far as their plans were concerned, the old lady was at home, and on opening the door in response to Ben's knock was confronted by the two boys and the horse.

“Goodness me! what are you children doing with that animal in this yard? I believe he's standing directly on my marigold-bed.”

“Indeed he ain't, Miss Washburn,” Teddy replied, quickly. “Ben an' I jest bought this horse, an' we're goin' to make a trotter out of him.”

“He doesn't appear to be much more than a skeleton. Why don't you give him something to eat?”

“He's had a good deal this afternoon,” Teddy replied, woefully, as he thought of the inroads the old fellow had made upon the store of potatoes and apples.

“I'm glad to hear that, for a merciful man is merciful to his beast, and children can't learn too early to treat animals kindly. But why did you bring him here? I don't set any great favor on horses, an' would rather see a good cow any time.”

“We came to ask if you'd let us use a corner

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of your barn till we can fix up some kind of a stable for him."

"Why, bless your heart, child, the old building wouldn't even shelter him from the wind, and the floor is in a terrible condition."

"We only want to keep him there a little while, an' anything is better than lettin' him stay outdoors. You wouldn't like to think if it rained to-night that he had to take it, would you?"

"No, I don't suppose I should; but perhaps a wetting wouldn't hurt him as much as if he broke through the floor, and that's what I expect he will do if you try to put him in the barn."

"We can fix it up a little," Ben suggested.

Mrs. Washburn looked at the eager faces before her, and even the horse appeared to be pleading for a shelter.

"I don't know as I ought to turn you away," she said, musingly; "but it does seem dangerous to have you go into such a ramshackle building."

"We'll take all the risks," Teddy added, quickly.

Mrs. Washburn thought the matter over a moment longer and finally said: "I will let

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you boys use the stable to-night if you promise to sit up with the horse. I couldn't think of him roaming around there alone, and I am not willing to have his blood on my head.”

“There wouldn't be anything like that happen,” Teddy replied, confidently, “for no matter how much he might hurt himself the blood couldn't spurt 'way over here.”

“I didn't mean that literally, my child. What I should have said was that I wouldn't run the risk of having what may be a valuable animal killed on my premises.”

“But can we use the stable if we sit up with him?” Ben asked, impatiently.

“Yes; under those conditions I can't make any objections, but I'm afraid you boys will catch your deaths in such a damp place.”

“We'll look out for that part of it,” Ben cried, cheerily, as he began to pull the aged steed toward the barn. “Teddy, go home an' see if your folks are willin' for you to stay all night, an' I'll wait here.”

“Don't you remember what father said?”

“Of course; but you've got to get through with that fuss some time, and it may as well be now. I won't stay here alone, an' must go ask mother about it as soon as you come back.”

A GREAT SPECULATION

Teddy felt quite positive he would not have spoken to Ben regarding a painful interview which must be held sooner or later in such a businesslike tone. It was absolutely necessary that he see his father, however, and he walked slowly away, looking like a fellow who has lost every friend.

The old horse had been half led, half dragged to the barn-yard, and there he was well content to remain as long as his new owners should permit, for the grass grew luxuriantly in that vicinity and would serve as a pleasing dessert to his feast of potatoes and apples.

An hour passed, during which Ben whittled, performed acrobatic tricks, or speculated upon the prospect of earning money with the aid of the aged horse. The shadows of night were beginning to lengthen when Teddy finally returned, and his tear-stained face told that the interview with his father had been held.

“Did you get it pretty hot?” Ben asked, with the same absence of sympathy Teddy had noted an hour previous.

“Don’t you mind how I got it!” was the angry reply. “It’s over now, an’ I’m up here to stay all night.”

“What did he do?”

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“Look here, Ben Tucker, I never bothered you when things wasn’t all right at your house, an’ you’d better let me alone. Go home an’ see if you can sleep here. Mother gave me a lunch, an’ you must get all you can. It would be mighty nice if we could have a lantern.”

Ben would have insisted on knowing what had transpired during Teddy’s absence; but the expression on the latter’s face warned him that it might not be exactly safe to evince too much curiosity, and he said as he went slowly out of the yard: “I reckon that horse oughter have some water by this time. He hasn’t done anything but eat ever since you went home.”

“An’ that’s about all he did in the cellar, ’cordin’ to the looks of things,” Teddy replied, grimly. “Go on, an’ I’ll see to him.”

During Ben’s absence Teddy worked in one corner of the barn making ready a place where the horse might spend the night without danger of breaking through the decaying planks.

By removing boards from other portions of the building, and laying them over the weakest portion of the floor, he succeeded in making a reasonably secure stall, and by the time this had been done Ben returned.

Apparently he was not in so cheerful a frame

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of mind as when he left his partner, and Teddy was puzzled to understand why this should be, since he bought, in addition to a generous luncheon, the desired lantern.

“Now we can fix things in great shape,” Master Marlowe said, in a tone of satisfaction, as he inspected the food with a view to ascertaining if there would be sufficient for their wants until morning. “We’ll be snug as bugs in a rug, an’ I ain’t sure but I’m glad Miss Washburn made us stay here to look out for the horse.”

“Have we got to sit up every night watchin’ him?” Ben asked, with a sob that at once attracted Teddy’s attention.

“What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothin’.”

“You act as if you’d been cryin’.”

“Well, s’posen I have? It’s nothin’ more’n what you did a little while ago.”

“Did your folks raise a fuss?”

“Mother scolded me for spendin’ my money without askin’ her, an’ father says I sha’n’t own a share in such a horse as this. He seems to think it’s a disgrace to have anything to do with him.”

“That’s pretty near what my father said,

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though he was willin' for me to keep him till I could get my money back.”

“ Oh, I can do as much as that; but I don't know who'd want to buy him.”

“ It seems a pity to let such a horse go for only five dollars when we could make so much money by trainin' him,” Teddy said, reflectively, as he patted the aged steed to prove his gentleness.

“ But folks don't think he's worth anything.”

“ That's 'cause they haven't examined him. You won't know that horse when he's fat. If my father or yours would look him all over, same's I did, they'd sing a different tune.”

“ I'm 'fraid we can't get 'em to do anything of the kind. But say, we mustn't stand here talkin' when there's so much to be done. Where are we goin' to stay?”

“ 'Side of the horse. There's a little hay left on the mow, an' I'll pitch it down while you light the lantern.”

It was a very comfortable bed which Teddy made after ten minutes' work, and by the time his labors were concluded the night had shrouded the village in darkness.

After giving him a plentiful supply of water the boys led their prize into the dilapidated

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stable, and there offered him still more food by placing in front of him a quantity of the hay.

That the horse was willing to devour anything could be seen by the avidity with which he ate this last course, although he had done nothing but eat since his arrival in the village.

“You can see now that he’s been ’most starved,” Teddy said as he hung the lantern where it would best illumine that portion of the barn they proposed to occupy, “and if our folks will only let us keep him a couple of weeks he’ll look slick as grease.”

“We shall have to hold onto him if we can’t find anybody who wants to buy a horse.”

“An’ we won’t try very hard,” Teddy replied, with an expressive wink.

The stable-doors were carefully closed and locked, despite the fact that there were so many boards missing from the sides of the building that an intruder could have entered at almost any point, and then the boys settled down for the night by eating supper.

The supply of provisions was more than sufficient for all their wants, and when it became necessary to conclude the meal, because both were filled to repletion, Teddy said:

“WANTED”

“We must try not to get sleepy, an’ I s’pose the best way is to keep talkin’ all the time.”

“Have we got to stay awake till mornin’?”

“If we didn’t, what would be the sense of stoppin’ here? I s’pose Miss Washburn expects us to keep our eyes on him every minute.”

“It ’ll come pretty tough before daylight,” Ben said, with a sigh, and then both boys relapsed into silence as they began to realize that there were trials and hardships which must come even to the owners of a valuable horse.

III

It was quite natural the boys should be gloomy during the first half-hour of their vigil. Each had unpleasant recollections of the interview so lately held with his father, and in addition to this cause for a depression of spirits was the sense of responsibility such as one might well fancy would come to the owners of a valuable animal under similar circumstances.

As the time wore on, however, the surroundings appeared to grow more cheerful.

The noise made by the horse as he munched his hay sounded almost homelike, and the rays

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of light cast by the lantern seemed friendly. Save for the apertures in the building, the boys would have enjoyed this "camping out"; but there were so many boards missing that even though the doors were securely locked they could not feel safe against intrusion.

"If we have to set up with him many nights it will be a good idea to fix this barn," Teddy said, thoughtfully, as he pulled the hay closer around him to serve as a barricade against the wind which came in freely on the back of his head.

"It couldn't be done. More'n half the boards are gone, an' where 'd we find lumber enough to close up even one side of the place?"

"Something's got to be arranged, for it won't do to have the horse stand here in a rain-storm. The water would come in on him an' most likely he'd get cold."

"But we don't count on keepin' him here all the time."

"It must be done till we can hire another stable, an' that looks like a pretty hard job, the folks are down on him so bad."

"I ain't much of a hand at carpentering," Ben replied, for labor in any form was particularly disagreeable to him.

“WANTED”

“There ’ll be a chance to get your hand in to-morrow. Father saw we had pulled some of the fence away an’ says it must be put into proper shape before noon.”

“That isn’t any of my business. You said she’d got to come down, an’ I only did what you wanted.”

“Are you goin’ to back out er your share of the work?” Teddy asked in surprise, raising himself on one elbow to look sternly at his companion.

“Why shouldn’t I? When you talked about buyin’ the horse you allowed the whole thing was figgered out right, an’ I wouldn’t have gone into the business if I’d thought we’d got to skin round the way we’ve been doin’ since he belonged to us.”

“You haven’t had any bother.”

“Oh, I haven’t? You weren’t down at my house when I told the folks we’d bought a horse.”

“No, but I had to see my father an’ will bet I got more’n my share,” Teddy replied, emphatically.

This rather unpleasant conversation was interrupted by a noise from the outside which caused the boys to gaze at each other in fear,

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and the white horse even stopped eating as he raised his head inquiringly.

In the daytime either of the boys would have laughed at the idea that there might be anything in or around Washburn's barn to cause them alarm; but now night had come the case seemed different, and both were decidedly frightened, until a familiar voice was heard saying:

"There they are, asleep, I reckon."

"It's Bud Hayes, an' I'll bet Sim Bowser is with him," Teddy said, in a tone of relief, and an instant later the visitors entered the barn.

"We've been lookin' all round the town for you," Bud said as he went where he could inspect the horse. "What set you out to buy this plug?"

"You'd better look a little closer before you call him names," Teddy replied, indignantly. "Some fellers don't know anything about a horse an' never 'll learn."

"I reckon you're pretty well posted," Bud said, sarcastically.

"P'rhaps so. I've been keepin' my eyes open a good while, listenin' while Amos an' Enoch Grant was talkin', an' I made up my mind to

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buy this feller when Uncle Jack got ready to let him go.”

“What d’yer count on doin’ with him?”

“We’ll run a express at first an’ then train him for a circus horse,” Teddy replied, in a matter-of-fact tone, much as if there was no doubt in his mind regarding the possibility of doing exactly as he had said.

“Goin’ into the circus business, eh?” And a shade of envy was apparent in Sim’s tone.

“We thought some of it.”

“Got a cart or harness yet?” Bud asked.

“No; there’s plenty of time for those things. You see, we didn’t buy the horse till this noon, an’ have got to fix up a stable first of all.”

“That shed of father’s down on the meadow would be a good place for him.”

“You’re right, Bud. Can we use it?”

“I dunno yet. You see, I was some thinkin’ of buyin’ a hoss myself an’ then I’d want it.”

In the excitement caused by the belief that the vexed question of a stable had been settled Teddy rose to his feet, and now stood gazing at Master Hayes in surprise.

“You buy a horse?” he repeated.

“Why not? I reckon it wouldn’t be very

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hard for Sim an' me to raise the money if we tried."

"Well, I s'pose you could; but I don't see what you want to do with one."

"P'rhaps we might be thinkin' 'bout goin' into the circus business too," Bud replied, and then began to examine the aged steed more critically. "I'm afraid this feller's legs ain't small enough to do much jumpin' in a ring."

"I'll squeeze them down jest as soon as I have the time."

"How many oats do you give him?"

"He hasn't had any yet. You see, Ben an' me have got to earn some money before we can buy much. It took all we had to make up the five dollars."

"There's no mistake but that he oughter have oats," Bud said, with an ominous shake of the head. "It don't take long to spoil the best hoss that ever walked if he ain't fed right."

Ben looked alarmed, and even Teddy was a trifle disconcerted as he replied, impatiently:

"I told you we'd got to wait till the money was earned before he could have anything but grass."

"Then you oughter shin round mighty lively," and Bud gazed pityingly at the aged ani-

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mal, as if expecting each instant to see him fall because of lack of grain. He walked slowly around him twice and then added, with an assumption of carelessness, “Why not sell out half of him an’ there’d be money enough to get all he needed.”

“Do you know of anybody who wants to buy him?” Ben asked, quickly, hoping it might be possible for him to dispose of a property which had already caused him considerable sorrow.

“Sim an’ I might go into the speculation if we could get a share right, but I’m ’fraid you fellers paid more’n he’s worth.”

“That shows you don’t know very much ’bout horses,” Teddy cried. “Jest look at him an’ then see how big a figger five dollars cuts alongside of what he’ll be when he’s fat.”

“Yes, there’s considerable in that,” Bud replied, reflectively, as if he had just seen some good points in the animal which had previously remained undiscovered. “Still, there’s allers a big risk in hoss-flesh, you know, for nobody can ever tell when somethin’s goin’ to happen to ’em.”

“Have you got the money to buy him if we could make a trade?” Ben asked, fearful lest the conversation should drift away from

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the subject he was most anxious to hear discussed.

“Sim an’ me kinder ’lowed we’d be willin’ to take half of him if you fellers thought it was too much trouble to own the whole, and we’ve got enough to do that. A hoss is a sight of care an’ it costs a good deal to keep him in shape. Of course it wouldn’t ’mount to so very much if there was four in the speculation. Besides, if I should be one of the owners, we could keep him in father’s shed.”

This last argument in favor of his purchasing an interest in the aged animal was the strongest Bud could have made, and Teddy looked inquiringly at his partner as he asked:

“What do you think about it, Ben?”

“I’m willin’ to sell half of my share for a dollar ’n’ a quarter.”

“But that’s the same price you paid!” Bud cried, as if in surprise.

“Of course it is. D’yer think we’d sell for any less after fillin’ him up with almost everything this afternoon?”

“It don’t seem as if we oughter give quite so much,” Bud replied, slowly; and Teddy cried, impatiently:

“That would be a great way to do business,

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wouldn't it? We got a big bargain, an' it's mighty lucky for you fellers if we let you into it without chargin' any profit.”

“I don't know about that; but I won't say we ain't willin' to pay the price. Come outside a minute, Sim, an' we'll make up our minds what to do.”

Master Bowser obeyed by stepping through one of the apertures in the side of the barn, and when Bud had followed him Ben whispered to his partner:

“I think we'd better sell half the horse, Teddy, an' then if there's any more of this watchin' to be done they can help. Besides, we'll have a stable without runnin' all over the country to get it.”

“I'm agreed to let 'em in, but they mustn't think we'll take less 'n we paid.”

“Of course not.”

The conversation was interrupted by the re-entrance of the proposed purchasers. They had remained outside only a few seconds, and Bud's private interview with Sim seemed nothing more than an attempt to convince the owners of the horse that he was not really very eager to make a trade.

“We'll give you fellers a dollar apiece,” he

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said, examining the animal once more. "If you wasn't kinder chums of ours I ain't sure as we'd offer so much, 'cause there's no knowin' how he'll turn out."

"It's got to be a dollar twenty-five or nothin'," Teddy replied, in a tone of determination.

Bud walked around the horse once more, held a brief whispered consultation with Sim, and then, crouching by the lantern, counted out two dollars and fifty cents.

"Here's your stuff," he said, pushing the money toward Teddy. "Sim put in half an' you fellers can divide it up to suit yourselves. Now each of us owns a quarter of the hoss, eh?"

Not until Teddy had given Ben his share did he make any reply, and then it was to say:

"Yes, each feller owns the same. Now, if you think he oughter have oats, we'll take up a collection."

"P'rhaps it 'll be jest as well to wait a while. Come to look him over ag'in, I've kinder made up my mind that he can stand it on grass quite a spell. You see, we need a wagon an' harness, an' what money is raised oughter go toward payin' for them."

It seemed strange to Teddy that Bud should have changed his mind so suddenly, but he made

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no comment upon the fact because there were more important matters occupying his attention.

“When can we take the horse up to your father’s shed?” he asked.

“The first thing in the mornin’.”

“Ben an’ me have got to mend a fence before we do anything else, but if you fellers help us we’ll be ready to go pretty early.”

Before binding himself to assist in the labor Bud insisted on knowing exactly how much was to be done, and after learning that the task was not likely to be either long or difficult promised to do his share.

“Now can’t you fellers stay here with us tonight? It won’t seem so lonesome if there’s a crowd.”

This was exactly what Bud and Sim were eager to do, and the former at once set about pitching down more hay from the loft in order to increase the size of the bed.

It was yet early in the evening when the preparations for the night were completed, and then the four partners began laying plans for the future.

It was definitely decided, and with but little discussion, that the horse should be educated for a circus life.

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It seemed to his owners that more money could be made in such a manner than by running an express-wagon; but they agreed to do the latter work for the purpose of increasing the capital necessary to train the animal thoroughly in case any good opportunities offered.

“We won’t drive him all over the country for nothin’,” Bud said, decidedly. “If folks want us to carry stuff they must pay a good big price. There ain’t so many teams ’round here but that we can charge pretty high.”

In order to guard against a possible accident, Mrs. Washburn had insisted that the boys should remain with the horse until morning.

Doubtless she supposed at least one of them would be on watch during the hours of darkness, otherwise this precaution was useless; but even when the number of the party had been doubled her object was not gained.

After deciding in what manner the aged steed could best bring in a large income, the boys discussed plans for converting the shed on the meadow into a stable, and when this was concluded one by one yielded to the desire for sleep.

The white horse munched the musty hay as he watched his new owners, and the night passed

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without mishap to the occupants of Mrs. Washburn's barn.

When the first rays of the rising sun found their way through the many apertures of the building Bud Hayes aroused his companions, and from that moment showed he did not intend to be a silent partner in the horse business.

He directed that the old fellow should be turned into the stable-yard, where was an abundance of grass to satisfy all his wants, and when it had been done said, peremptorily:

“Now every feller must go home an' get his breakfast. Then we'll meet at Teddy's house an' fix the fence. Afterward we can go out to the meadow an' take the hoss with us.”

Teddy was disposed to feel aggrieved because Master Hayes assumed such a dictatorial tone. He had conceived the idea of buying the horse, carried it into successful execution, and even suffered in the cause, therefore it was but natural he should consider himself entitled to the position of head of the firm.

Teddy was, fortunately, not quick-tempered, and instead of making any disagreeable remarks he followed Bud's lead, thinking soft words would serve his purpose better until the fence had been repaired.

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“D’yer s’pose it’s safe to leave him here alone?” Sim asked as the animal began his breakfast eagerly, regardless of the fact that he had been eating industriously during the entire night.

“Of course it is,” Bud replied. “I know more ’bout hosses than all the rest of you fellers put together, so you needn’t be afraid to do jest as I say.”

“It don’t seem as if he’d want to get away from a place where the grass is so thick,” Teddy suggested, meekly.

“Of course he won’t. Now all hands must get home, so’s to have breakfast over as soon as possible, an’ them as can had better raise some grub to carry out to the meadow, ’cause we may want to stay there till night.”

The partners separated, each to go his own way, and an hour later they met again in Mr. Marlowe’s orchard.

The originators of the scheme did not appear to be as cheerful as those who had come into the firm later, and Ben whispered to Teddy:

“Did your father say anything this mornin’?”

“A good deal, an’ I begin to wish I hadn’t started the thing.”

“So do I,” was the honest confession, and

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thus was established a yet firmer bond of sympathy between the two who were suffering through their love for horses.

Bud Hayes may have encroached upon Teddy's rights when he took upon himself the position of head of the firm, but he certainly made a very efficient manager.

He at once assumed charge of the fence-repairing brigade, and under his leadership the work was well and quickly done, considering all the disadvantages, so far as lack of tools was concerned, under which they labored.

Two hours from the time the first blow had been struck the task was completed, and Bud said, in a tone of satisfaction:

“It's better than before you pulled it down, Teddy, an' I'm sure your father won't kick when he sees the job. Now who's brought grub for dinner?”

Himself and Sim were the only partners who had attended to this important duty.

Matters were not so pleasant at Ben's home as to give him courage to ask for a lunch, and Teddy was in doubt regarding the wisdom of broaching such a matter to his mother, until Bud said, quite sharply:

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“Us two didn’t bring enough for four, an’ you’ll have to see what can be done.”

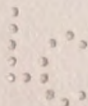
Very unwillingly Teddy went into the house, but he emerged a few moments later looking decidedly pleased.

“It’s all right,” he cried, holding up a capacious basket. “This is pretty nigh full, an’ mother says if I want to I can stay out on the meadow until the mornin’.”

“Then let’s get right along. Sim, us fellows will go to Washburn’s barn an’ you skin ’round for some nails an’ a hammer,” Bud said, authoritatively, as he borrowed Mr. Marlowe’s saw without the formality of asking the owner’s consent.

Sim was always ready to obey the slightest order coming from Bud, whom he considered a paragon of wisdom, therefore he started for home at full speed, while the remainder of the party walked rapidly toward the Washburn stable.

Not until they were directly in front of the bars was it possible to gain a full view of the yard where the aged horse had been left owing to the numerous buildings, and then, to the dismay of all, the animal was nowhere to be seen.



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“What *has* become of him?” Ben asked, with quivering lips, for now there was a possibility of his having been stolen the horse rapidly increased in value in Master Tucker’s mind.

Teddy leaped over the bars and walked from one end of the yard to the other, as if thinking the animal might be concealed among the weeds, but Bud directed his attention to the outside.

“Crickey! Now we *are* in a scrape!” he cried a few seconds later, pointing toward Deacon Ladd’s patch of early peas. “How *do* you s’pose he got over there?”

“It won’t pay to spend much time tryin’ to find that out,” Teddy cried as he ran in the direction of the truant. “There’ll be a terrible row if we don’t get him away before the deacon comes.”

This was exactly what they did not succeed in doing.

It so chanced that Mrs. Ladd wanted green peas that morning, and the deacon was walking slowly through the patch gathering them at the very moment the boys discovered the horse’s whereabouts.

Although the old gentleman was obliged to wear glasses at times, his eyes were sufficiently good to permit of his seeing the white horse as

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quickly as the partners did, and he entirely forgot that "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty."

"Hi, there, you boys!" he shouted, in an angry voice; "whose horse is that?"

During fully an instant no one replied; each looked at the other in fear, and then as the question was repeated Ben cried in the thinnest and shrillest of voices:

"All three of us fellers own him, deacon."

"Oh, you do, eh? Well, I'll put him in the pound and show you little rascals that you can't turn things like him loose in a respectable neighborhood!"

"If he does that our jig is up," Bud whispered, in alarm. "We shall have to pay for all the peas he's ate, an' I'm thinkin' it 'll be a mighty big bill."

"Can't we get the old fellow out before the deacon catches him?" Teddy asked, nervously, fearing that the deacon would put his threat into execution.

"S'posen we try it; but we must make b'lieve we're only goin' to pen him in one corner."

"Here!" the deacon cried, sharply, as Bud began to clamber over the fence, "I'll take care of him an' you needn't trouble yourselves. You

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boys shall have a lesson that won't be forgotten very soon.”

“But we want help catch him before he does any more mischief,” Bud replied, innocently. “There'll be enough for us to pay as it is, an' we're bound to stop this thing as soon as possible.”

The deacon would probably have insisted that the boys keep off his land if at that moment the old horse had not started at a really respectable gallop through the most flourishing part of the garden.

IV

It was now a case of allowing the owners of the animal to assist in the capture or of seeing the vegetables in which he had taken so much pride destroyed; and, much against his inclination, the deacon permitted the boys to scale the fence.

“I want to catch him!” the old gentleman cried, angrily. “It doesn't make any difference how much you help me, he's got to go to the pound!”

“We'll send him up toward the deacon's house,” Bud whispered to Teddy. “The gate

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is open and it won't be much of a job to keep him in a gallop by usin' plenty of stones."

While the deacon ran one way to head the horse off the boys kept directly behind their property, and by skilful stone-throwing succeeded in sending him between the rows of peas at full speed.

"Don't let him get out!" the angry owner of the garden shouted, and an instant later the horse darted through the gate to the highway.

"That's exactly what you little rascals were trying to do all the time!" And the deacon shook his fist in impotent rage. "But you needn't think it 'll be possible to escape paying for the destruction of this property. I know every one of you, and your fathers shall settle the bill as sure's my name is Ezra Ladd."

"An' he'll do just what he threatens," Bud said to Teddy as they ran up the road in pursuit of the horse. "I reckon we've got ourselves into a scrape, for I don't know how it 'll ever be possible to pay for the peas."

"It seems as if that horse was bound to keep me in a fuss all the time," and Teddy was on the verge of crying through anxiety and vexation. "I wish I'd never seen him!"

"There's no use talkin' like that now. We've

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got into the row an' must crawl out the best we know how. Let's try to corner the horse in the alders an' lead him through Chick's common to father's meadow.”

“The deacon will be out there after him.”

“I reckon that's a fact,” and Bud halted in dismay. “S'posin' we take him into the woods till the thing is fixed up somehow?”

Any scheme seemed better than facing the deacon while he was in such an angry mood, and the boys continued to urge their property on until he was concealed in the friendly shelter of Merrill's grove.

“We've got our work cut out for this day,” Bud said as he wiped the perspiration from his face and fanned himself with a hat which had lost the greater portion of its brim. “Say! Where's the grub?”

“In Washburn's barn-yard, I reckon. There's where I left mine,” and Teddy threw himself down beside a log within a few yards of the aged steed, who was cropping the rank herbage eagerly.

“Then somebody must go after it right away. I've got to shinny 'round an' see how we can fix things to quiet the deacon, so I can't 'tend to it.”

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“Let Ben do that an’ I’ll stay here with the horse,” Teddy said. “If father should see me, an’ know what’s been done, he’d make me stay at home.”

The two had not been absent more than ten minutes when Sim arrived with the hammer and nails.

“Yes, I know all about it,” he said, interrupting Teddy as he was beginning to tell the story of the mishap. “Heard the whole yarn at the village; the deacon’s down to Haley’s store goin’ on awful an’ says he’ll have us arrested. I shouldn’t wonder if he would, for he thought a mighty big lot of that pea-patch.”

“What do the rest of the folks say?”

“Your father advised him to shoot the horse or else sell him to pay for the damage. I reckon you’ll ketch it hot when you go home.”

Ben returned half an hour later with the baskets of food, but had no additional information to impart. Fearing lest he should meet his father, he had not ventured any nearer the village than Mrs. Washburn’s barn, and, having secured the provisions, retraced his steps with all possible speed.

“If we’ve *got* to have a hoss we’d better make

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some arrangements for stayin' out of town while we own him,” he said, petulantly. “It's been nothin' but a row ever since we bought that rack of bones, an' I wish Jack Douglass had him stuck under his black nose.”

“There's no use gettin' down to the heel over this thing,” Teddy said, in what he intended should be a cheerful tone, but the future looked so dark that he could not divest his voice of a certain tone of sadness. “I reckon it 'll come out right after a while.”

“P'rhaps it will,” Ben replied, with what sounded suspiciously like a sob; “but what er we goin' to do while it's bein' straightened? If I go home now I'm pretty certain of gettin' a whippin', an' if I try to sneak over to grandfather's the deacon will have me arrested. I 'spect he's layin' for us mighty sharp.”

“He'll have hard work to find us here,” Sim suggested.

“That may be; but who wants to stay in the woods all the rest of his life?”

“Now don't bother so much!” Teddy cried, impatiently, for Ben's forebodings had a most depressing effect upon his own spirits. “Bud is down to the village fixin' things, an' when he gets back we'll be all right.”

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Sim, who was always disposed to let matters take their natural course without any attempt on his part to interfere, had begun building a camp of boughs, and in reply to Teddy's question why he was spending his time in "such a foolish manner" replied, "If things are so hot in the village that we've got to stay out here two or three weeks something like this will come in mighty handy, and if Bud straightens matters I've only kept my hands busy, which, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', is a good deal better than groanin' over what can't be cured, as you an' Ben are doin'."

Until this moment Teddy had looked upon Master Bowser as a boy who could not boast of a particularly brilliant intellect, but now his opinion was changed. He did not join in the labor, however, and Sim worked alone, while Ben alternately moaned over his ill-fortune and scolded because he had been induced to purchase the horse.

Two long hours elapsed before Bud returned, and the expression on his face told that he had not been successful in his mission.

"There's no gettin' out of the fact that we're in a nice mess," he said, mournfully. "The deacon says at least three dollars' worth of peas

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have been destroyed, an' he's bound to make us pay for them.”

“How can he if we haven't a cent?” Teddy asked, angrily.

“You an' Ben have got a dollar 'n' a quarter apiece, an' I s'pose Sim an' me could scare up the other fifty cents when it come to a pinch,” Bud replied, moodily.

“Then we'd be puttin' in almost twice as much as you, an' the horse would stand us eight dollars!” Teddy cried, springing to his feet excitedly.

“Well, what of that? The thing must be settled somehow, an' us two fellows haven't as much money as you.”

“I'll pay my share of the deacon's bill, but no more, Bud Hayes.”

“An' I won't put out a cent, no matter what happens,” Ben added, sulkily. “Father says I've got to sell the old hoss, an' I don't b'lieve he 'mounts to very much, anyway. We can't run an express till we earn money enough to buy a wagon an' harness, an' what's the use of tryin' to learn him circus tricks before we know whether folks would want to buy him after he could perform?”

“But we've got to settle with the deacon

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somehow," Bud replied. "Your father is mighty cross about it, an' Teddy's asked me if I knew where he was."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said you were goin' over to the meadow to patch up the shed, so's we could keep the horse there; and he told me to tell you not to come back to the house so long as you owned any part of old whitey."

"But how am I goin' to sell him?" Teddy asked, in despair. "Do you want to buy my share, Bud?"

"Not much. In the first place, I haven't the money to pay for him; an' then, again, how could I settle with the deacon? If I hadn't made the trade with you fellers last night I'd have my cash in my pocket, an' that's where I wish it was this minute. I don't see why you an' Ben didn't talk with your fathers before startin' in such a foolish business."

"Did you say anything to your folks?" Teddy asked, petulantly.

"No, for after you fellers owned him I s'posed it was all right."

"I'd never thought of buyin' the old rack of bones if it hadn't been for Teddy," Ben whined. "He just the same as made me go into the

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scheme; 'lowed he knew where he could keep the horse an' all that kind of talk.”

Fortunately, Teddy checked the angry reply that rose to his lips, but only after the greatest effort, and then plunged into the thickest portion of the grove, that he might be alone with his sorrow and remorse. He realized that he had deceived Ben to a certain extent when the animal was purchased; but Bud could make no such complaint, and he entirely lost sight of his own fault while thinking of the injustice done him by the new partner.

Not until noon was the party reunited, and then the boys made a silent and unsatisfactory meal from the contents of the lunch-baskets. The food cheered them in a certain degree, and when hunger had been satisfied matters did not look so desperate.

“We've got to decide on somethin',” Teddy said, when it was no longer possible for him to eat any more. “Of course we can't stay here forever.”

“But we'll have to keep out of sight till we can settle with the deacon,” Bud suggested.

“I'd rather lose the whole of my dollar 'n' a quarter than try to go on this way,” Ben said, mournfully. “Besides, I can't show up at

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home till I've sold out my share. Will either of you fellows give me half what I paid?"

"I'm willin' to give my whole interest in the old beast away rather than have things run like this," Teddy replied; "an' if you three fellows pay the deacon, I'll step down an' say nothin' 'bout the money I've put in. I don't b'lieve he'll make any great shakes of a circus horse, anyhow."

No one took advantage of this tempting offer.

"We've done ourselves out of Fourth-of-July money an' have got more to pay, but there's no use makin' such a fuss about it," Sim said, philosophically. "I own as much as the rest of you fellows an' will have to come up with my share of the deacon's bill; but I must earn it first, an' the question is whether he'll wait."

"I don't b'lieve he will, 'cordin' to the way he talked when I saw him," Bud replied. "Look here, fellows, there's no use my sayin' I'll pay my share of the pea money, for it comes to 'most a dollar an' I couldn't rake that much together in a month. Don't you s'pose Uncle Jack will buy the horse back? He hasn't even been harnessed an' has had plenty to eat."

Strange as it may seem, neither of the other partners had thought of that way out of their

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difficulties, but now that Bud suggested it all were eager to learn what might be done.

“Let’s go over there this very minute an’ take the old rack of bones with us,” Teddy cried. “If we could get him off er our hands I’d feel like a different fellow.”

“It ’ll be a case of losin’ pretty nigh all we put in it, for I don’t s’pose Uncle Jack will give us more’n four dollars an’ we’ll have to pay the deacon three of that,” Bud suggested.

“I don’t care if we lose every cent, providin’ we can get out o’ the scrape.”

“Come on, then, an’ I’ll have the satisfaction of ridin’ the only hoss I ever owned once, if no more.”

Bud leaped on the back of the aged steed and headed a mournful procession through the grove to the old darky’s home. Uncle Jack was seated on the threshold of his cabin playing the same tune the boys heard while the supposedly valuable animal was being led away, and he paid no attention to the new-comers until they halted in front of him. Then, continuing to move the bow back and forth across the strings gently, the old fellow greeted his visitors.

“Mawnin’, chillun, mawnin’. Goodness me,

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but you hab begun ter fat de ole hoss up fur a fac'! I 'clar', it don' seem pussible dat ar' animile could er growed so fas' in one night."

"If apples, potatoes, and green peas, to say nothing of hay an' grass, could do anything, he oughter be fat as a porpoise by this time," Teddy said, grimly. "We haven't asked him to do anything but eat, an' he's been willin' enough to do that. See here, Uncle Jack, our ownin' this horse has kicked up an awful fuss an' we want you to buy him back."

"Now you's foolin' fur suah, honey."

"Not a bit of it. We've got into a scrape an' the only way out is to sell him."

Then Teddy told of the damage done the deacon's peas, and the amount it would be necessary to pay in order to settle the matter.

"You s'prise me, I 'clar' you s'prise me!" the old man said, in well-counterfeited astonishment. "I nebber knowed dat ar' hoss ter cut up dat way afore. It des seems ter me like you chillun mus' er been puttin' mischief inter his head."

"How could we do anything of the kind?" Bud asked, impatiently. "He saw the peas and went after 'em. Now the deacon is after us an' we've got to sell out."

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“It des seems ter me as if you chillun had been puttin’ dat ar hoss up to tricks,” the old man repeated, paying no attention to Bud’s remark. “Wha’ you’s been er-doin’ ter him? Looks like he’s bin drove mos’ ter def.”

“We haven’t had a harness on him, because we didn’t have any, an’ all he’s done has been to eat,” Teddy interrupted.

“It des looks like he’d bin drove mos’ ter def. Dat ain’ de same kin’ ob a hoss I done sol’ you.”

“Now you’re talkin’ foolishly,” Teddy cried, impatiently. “If the deacon comes along this way you’ll soon know whether it’s the same horse or not. What will you give us for him?”

“How’s a ole man like me gwine ter keep a hoss when de winter comes? Tell me dat, honey.”

“You got through last season with him, an’ from the way you talked when we bought him he’s worth a good deal more’n we paid.”

“Dat might er bin yeste’day, honey; but des look at de po’ beas’ now.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“He acts like he’s done gone used out. I nebber seen him so ’scouraged afore.”

“Now that’s nonsense, Uncle Jack, an’ you

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know it. It isn't five minutes since you was surprised at seein' him so fat."

"Dat was erfore I'd got er good look at him, honey. Now he's sad in de eye, same's ef he didn't hab a bite ter eat sence Crismus."

"What will you give us for him?" Bud asked, his patience being rapidly exhausted by the old darky's talk and a fear in his heart that the deacon might come up the road before the aged steed changed owners again.

"I don' see my way ter buy hosses dis year," the old man replied, with an emphatic shake of the head, and then, as if believing the matter was finally settled, he began to fiddle vigorously.

The boys were discouraged.

"Give us four dollars an' you may have him," Teddy cried, eager now to dispose of the property which a few hours previous had seemed so valuable.

"I don' 'low he's wuf dat much, honey."

"But we gave you five for him yesterday."

"Dat am a fac', but I done 'member de aige ob dat animile sence I sol' him an' he's mighty ole. I 'low he like to die any day now."

"Then you don't want him at any price?" Bud cried, seizing the halter as if to lead the horse away.

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"I didn' say, chillun, dat I wouldn' hab him ef he cum at my figger; but I's a po' ole man an' carn' 'ford ter pay much fur sich luxuries as a hoss. Now ef yer wants two dollars fur dat skelinton take off de halter an' yer Uncle Jack is boun' ter han' de money ober."

"But we gave you five and have yet to pay the deacon three dollars for what peas he ate."

"It's a drefful mistake ter feed er ole hoss like that on green peas at dis time ob de year. Grass is good enuf fur him an' it's er mighty sight cheaper."

"Of course it is," Bud said, impatiently. "You don't s'pose we wanted him to have the peas, do you? If two dollars is all you'll give we may as well drag him away, for his hide an' bones are worth three."

"Only des two fifty, honey. I done fin' dat out when I wanted ter 'spose of him las' year."

"Well, will you give us that much?"

"I s'pose I's boun' ter; but it am hard ter make this yere kin' ob a trade whar dere's no show ob a profit."

"You'd be gettin' all he's worth simply for allowing us a chance to feed him if he comes back at that price, but I don't know whether

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the other fellows will be ready to part with him at sich a low figure."

"I'll take anything, but would like enough to square up with the deacon," Ben said, quickly, and Teddy added, emphatically:

"My quarter of the old horse goes at the offer, an' I shall be mighty lucky to get him off my hands."

Since all were of the same opinion the halter was removed from the animal's neck, the money paid by Uncle Jack, and the speculators who had gone into business without first counting the cost went toward the town to make some kind of a bargain with the deacon for the damage done his garden.

"Well," Teddy said, in a tone of relief, when they were where it was no longer possible to hear the old darky's violin, "we have got out of the scrape at last, and now, if every feller will come up with twelve cents, I'll give fourteen, an' that 'll pay the deacon."

"Yes, we're out o' the scrape an' I'd never got in it if it hadn't been for you," Ben said, with a sigh. "The next time you think there's a big chance to make money don't come where I am."

"I reckon I've had enough of horse trades,"

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Bud added as he counted out twelve cents from his small hoard. “A dollar 'n' thirty-seven cents for the chance to set up with an old plug one night is comin' it a little too rich for my blood.”

Sim made no comment as he contributed his share toward satisfying the deacon's demands, but there was an expression on his face which told that he had permanently retired from speculations in horses.

Perhaps Teddy received full value for his money, inasmuch as he had learned that which he promised himself should never be forgotten.

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I

T'S no use, boys; I can't stand it any longer"; and Tom Gibson leaned against the fence in front of four of his most intimate friends, assuming such an attitude as he believed should be taken by a very badly abused boy.

"What is it now?" asked little Dwight Holden, in a very unsympathetic tone, much as if he did not believe Tom's troubles to be so very severe.

"It's the same thing every day till I'm all worn out," and Tom wiped his dry eyes with his jacket-sleeve, more to show how heavy his heart was than from any necessity. "I have to 'tend that ugly baby every time when there's a good game of ball or I spy going on; an' if it does happen that I get out for a day's fun, I

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have to lug wood an' water after I get home till my arms are just ready to drop off. But I'm through now an' that's all there is to it.”

“What 'll you do?” and Kirk Masters continued to eat a very small and very green apple in a way that showed how much more intent he was upon his limited feast than upon his friend's wrongs.

“I know what I *can* do,” said Tom, with a shake of his head that was intended should convey the idea of great mystery, and in this attempt he was remarkably successful. His friends had heard of his troubles before and it was an old story, but the fact that he had formed some plan which he intended should be kept a secret was sufficient to arouse all their curiosity. Dwight was as eager as he had been apathetic, Kirk's apple seemed suddenly to have lost its flavor, and the entire group of boys gathered around Tom very closely, as if fearful lest they should lose some portion of the wonderful secret they were certain he was about to tell them.

“I am not sure that I dare to tell you,” said Tom, in a mysterious whisper, and the boys knew at once that he was ready to tell them all. “You see, if my folks should know

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what I'm going to do, that would spoil everything."

"But what *are* you going to do?" persisted Kirk, whose interest in his apple was now wholly gone.

"Promise that you won't ever tell."

In an instant every boy had vowed that he would keep the secret, and, after assuring himself that there was no other person near who might hear him, Tom began:

"I'm going to run away."

The little circle of listeners gazed at the bold boy in almost breathless astonishment, and Tom, fully enjoying the sensation he had caused, continued his story after first pausing sufficiently long to note the effect which his announcement had upon his hearers.

"Yes, I'm going, and you just better believe that I'll go so far away that nobody 'll ever find me. I've stood this working around home just as long as I can, and I'll show my folks what it is to treat a boy the way they've treated me."

"But where are you going, Tom?"

"That part of it I'm not going to tell," said Tom, with a decided shake of the head, preferring to seem cruel rather than confess that he had no idea as to where he should go to escape

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the tyranny of his parents. “I’ll leave here some night, hide under the bridge at Rankin’s brook till morning, and then go to some place where none of the folks around here will ever find me.”

“But what makes you hide under Rankin’s bridge all night?” asked Dwight Holden, curiously.

“So’s I’ll be all ready to start just as soon’s it’s daylight, of course.”

“I don’t see what you want to do that for,” persisted Dwight. “You could sleep at home all night and then start from there as early as you wanted to. Nobody would think of stopping you, for they’d believe you were just going to the pasture.”

Tom was puzzled, just for an instant, as to how he should answer the question, and then realizing that it would never do for a boy who was about to run away from home to confess that he did not fully understand his own plans he answered, with a great show of dignity:

“Don’t you bother. I think I know what I’m about. I’ve got to sleep under Rankin’s bridge the night I run away or else the thing wouldn’t work.”

The vagueness of the plan gave it a greater

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charm in the eyes of Tom's friends. If it had been a simple scheme of running away, and they had understood it in all its details, it would have seemed dull and commonplace compared to what it was when it was so essential that Tom should sleep under the bridge the night previous to his leaving home forever.

Tom Gibson thoroughly enjoyed the sensation he was causing, and was by no means disposed to leave his friends before whom he was posing as a hero. He did his best to be mysterious both in speech and action, and would have continued to throw out vague hints as to his plans all the afternoon had not one of his oppressors — his mother — called him into the house to perform some one of the many tasks which he believed was wearing his young life away.

It is quite possible, if the whole truth could be known, that Tom had not fully made up his mind to run away from his comfortable home when he first broached the subject to his friends; but they had looked upon him as such a hero from the first moment he mentioned it that he decided it was necessary for him to go.

“ I'll keep on doing what she tells me to, so

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that folks will see how hard I have to work,” he muttered to himself as he left the boys and went toward the house, “and then when I’m off so far that nobody knows where I am mother ’ll be sorry she made me work so hard.”

As a matter of course, whenever Tom’s friends met him, after he had announced his determination of leaving home, they made inquiries as to the carrying out of his plan, and this was so pleasant to the dissatisfied and abused young man that he put off taking the final step as long as possible. In fact, he delayed so long that Dwight Holden plainly said one day that he did not believe Tom had ever intended to run away, but that he had said so simply for the purpose of “making himself look big.”

From that day he set about making his preparations for departure in earnest, telling his friends that on the following Tuesday he would disappear, never to be seen in Sedgwick again, unless he should decide, many years later, to come back as a wealthy gentleman, to see how much the town had suffered by his absence.

Since he would be obliged to walk a good portion of the distance to the place where his fortune was to be made, he was forced to leave

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out of the bundle he was making up many of his valuables because of their size and weight. A toy engine, a glass pen and holder, two rubber balls, a large collection of marbles (agates and alleys), a folding kite frame, three odd skates, a lodestone, and two mouth harmonicas made up the list of treasures that could be carried, and these were carefully packed in an old army blanket. He had saved cookies, gingerbread, and choice pieces of pie until he had as much as he believed would suffice as food for a week, and this he intended to carry in a paper parcel in his hand.

Every arrangement had been made. The day Tom had set for his departure came so quickly that it seemed as if there must have been some mistake in the almanac, and two or three days had been lost. Tom met his friends, acted the part of a hero before them until it was so late that each one had been obliged to go home, and then he, having bidden each one in turn a solemn good-by, was compelled to carry out the plan he had laid.

It is certain that at the moment his friends left him Tom was thoroughly sorry he had ever said anything about running away. He had suddenly come to understand what it was to

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be alone, and he by no means fancied the sensation. At that moment his troubles which were obliging him to leave home did not seem to be nearly so great as they had been a few days before; his home had never appeared so cheerful as now when he was leaving it, and he actually began to hope that some insurmountable obstacle would occur to prevent his running away.

The tears filled his eyes as he crept softly up the back stairs, wishing so much that he could kiss his mother and sister good-by, wishing that he had never thought of going, but fully believing that it would be unmanly not to do so, and that his schoolmates would laugh at him if he should abandon the scheme before he had even attempted to carry it into execution.

He hoped the stairs would creak so loudly that his mother would come to see what the matter was and discover him leaving the house with his bundles, but when he came down there was hardly a sound. He was out of the house without, apparently, having been discovered, and his heart was very heavy as he walked slowly around the yard to the gate, with a long, lonely journey before him and with no idea as to where would be the end.

He had opened the gate and was taking a

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farewell look at the house, when, to his great delight, the front door was opened and he saw his mother. He would surely be called back now, he thought, and his friends could not accuse him of having been afraid to carry out his plans.

“So you are really going to run away, are you, Tommy?” said his mother, who did not appear in the least surprised by his intended departure.

“Yes'm,” replied Tom, in a *very* low tone, feeling foolish and at the same time wondering whether his secret had been betrayed by his friends.

“Well,” continued Mrs. Gibson, speaking in a matter-of-fact way and as if the subject was an indifferent one to her, “if you feel that you must go, I see no reason why you should not have left the house in the daytime; but of course you know best. I noticed that you did not pack any of your clothes, so I put the most of them in this satchel, which I think you will find more convenient than that bundle.”

Tom didn't want to accept the satchel his mother held out to him; but there seemed to be no other course to pursue, and he took it, feeling as he did so that if his mother had loved him very dearly she would have boxed his ears

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severely, ordering him at the same time to come back into the house.

“Your father said he heard that Captain Harrison was ready to sail, and knowing that you have decided to sleep under Rankin’s bridge we concluded that you were going with him, since the vessel is in the river just below there.”

Tommy’s heart was so full that he could not speak. Instead of being told to come into the house and behave himself, as he would have been only too glad to do, here was his mother actually helping him to run away, and talking as if she thought it was the best course he could pursue.

“I suppose you are in a hurry, Tommy,” said Mrs. Gibson, kindly, “so I won’t detain you. We shall be glad to see you if you should conclude to come back here. Good-by. I hope you will enjoy yourself better than you ever could at home.”

The door was closed, and the almost broken-hearted runaway could do no less than continue his flight, out of which all the romance had been taken.

II

As Tom walked from the house he was in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. He felt

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that his mother had been unkind in allowing him to do as he had at first wanted to do, and that if she had really loved him she would have obliged him to come back. He felt as if he had been wronged because he had not been punished severely, and he was fully convinced that he had made a mistake when he had decided that the only thing he could do was to run away.

There was no possible excuse for him to return. If his mother had not seen him, he believed he would have sneaked back into the house and have borne all the jeers of his schoolmates because he had "backed out." But he decided that he could not even do that now, and that it was absolutely necessary for him to go on as he had begun.

"How I wish I hadn't started!" he said to himself as he trudged along toward Rankin's brook, his bundles growing heavier each moment. "She told me about Captain Harrison's going away to-morrow, so that I could go with him and that she'd know where I was. But I won't do anything like that. I'll go 'way off where she won't ever see me again, and then she'll be sorry she was so willing to let me run away."

Tommy was being severely punished for

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wanting to leave his home and he knew it, but he had not suffered enough to cause him to be willing to admit his fault and to ask his mother to forgive him; therefore the discouraged run-away very unwillingly continued his decidedly desolate course.

By some singular chance he met no one on his way. If he could have done so he felt that he might in some slight degree revenge himself, for he would have sent word to his mother that he did not intend to go with Captain Harrison and that she should never hear from him again.

But he did not meet any one from the time he left his home until he arrived at the bridge, and then he realized that if the scheme had not been entirely a success neither had the details been perfect. To sleep under Rankin's bridge, when he thought of it in the daytime, and with his schoolmates around him, was nothing more than a pleasant little adventure; but when it came to carrying the plan into execution it was quite a different matter. The night was dark; the brook gurgled and sang in a most ghostly fashion; the air under the stone arches felt damp; and he could find no place where he could lie down with any prospect of comfort.

“It's no use. I can't fix any kind of a bed

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here, so I've got to sit up all night—that's all there is to it."

Tom was reckless by this time, and without any care as to a selection of the spot where he was to spend the night he sat down in about as uncomfortable a place as he could have found, confident that the time would seem very short.

He tried to make up his mind as to where he would go when the morning should come; then he felt about for a softer seat, very nearly falling into the water in the attempt. He thought of his mother's sorrow, which was to be his revenge, and then again he changed his position. He wondered if his schoolmates were snugly tucked up in bed asleep; and then he began to doze, leaning his head against the granite sides of the arch.

Suddenly he awoke with a start that gave him a very uncomfortable twinge in his neck, while every portion of his body was stiff and lame. He thought that he had slept a long time, and he looked out from under the bridge, fully expecting to see the sun. It was as dark as when he first sought this very uncomfortable sleeping-place.

"The sun hasn't come up," he said as he

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settled back on the rock in a very awkward manner, as if it hurt him to move around much; “but I know it must be morning, because I feel as if I’d been asleep ten or twelve hours. I’ll start up the road a little.”

Just at that moment the village clock began to strike and Tom counted:

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, *eleven!*”

Only eleven o’clock, and he had thought it was time for the sun to rise!

Tom tried to lie down first in one place and then in another, but the sharp-pointed rocks prevented him from assuming anything like a reclining position. Then he thought of his own nice bed; but he knew he could not enjoy it, at least not without too great a sacrifice of manly dignity.

He thought of Captain Harrison’s schooner, which was to sail on the following morning. He might go on board of her; but if he should do so, how could he revenge himself on his mother?

“I can’t stay here all night if it’s going to last as long as this hour has. I don’t want to walk up the road, because I can’t see where I’m going. Mother won’t know for certain that I’ve

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gone on the *Swiftsure*, and she'll feel bad enough to-morrow morning when I don't come home to breakfast, so I'll go on board where I can get some sleep."

Tom knew exactly where the clumsy old schooner was moored, for many a time had he and his friends been up to look at her when she was in port and laughed at the name of *Swiftsure*, which it seemed must have been painted on her stern in mockery.

With his bundles in his hands he stumbled down through the pasture, following the course of the brook, until he arrived at a little stone pier, at the head of which could be seen the old schooner which had been made ready for a fishing cruise down the coast.

Tom scrambled on board as softly as was possible in the darkness; but he might have saved himself the trouble of taking precautions to prevent any one from hearing him, for the old schooner was deserted and looked quite as lonesome as *he* felt. The cabin-doors were locked, the hatches were fastened down too securely for him to raise them unaided, and it seemed very much as if even the *Swiftsure* denied him the shelter he so sadly needed.

On the deck lay an upturned dory. He might

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crawl under that, and although it would be but poor shelter it was surely better than trying to lie on the sharp rocks under the bridge. Tom was not nearly as particular where he slept as he would have been at home, and he counted himself very fortunate in finding under the boat a quantity of old nets that made him quite a soft bed, so soft, in fact, that he was asleep in less than five minutes after he had found shelter.

Everything had contributed to make Tom very tired on the day when he ran away, and he slept on the fishing-nets quite as soundly as if he had been at home. He did not even hear Captain Harrison and his crew when they came on board at a very early hour in the morning. The bustle and confusion attendant upon getting the *Swiftsure* under way failed to awaken him. When, however, the *Swiftsure* was on the open sea, tumbling about on the waves in her own clumsy fashion, he came to understand where he was, and he gained this information in quite a sensational manner.

Shortly after the old schooner had left the dock the wind freshened until it was blowing quite half a gale, and Captain Harrison began to fear that the crazy old sails would be blown

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away. In order to prevent such a catastrophe, the schooner was hove to and all hands set to work reefing sail.

As a matter of course the clumsy old *Swiftsure* was wallowing in the trough of the sea, tossing and tumbling about in a most provoking manner. Captain Harrison was helping his crew of fishermen "shorten" the foresail, when, just as all hands were standing amidships trying to reef without pulling the very reef-points out of the decayed canvas, a queer-looking bundle rolled from under the dory, capsizing one or two of the sailors as it struck them and then rolling into the lee scuppers, where it lay uttering cries of pain.

The crew were absolutely frightened, first at seeing this queer-looking parcel and then at hearing it make a noise, while those who had been knocked down actually fled forward in alarm. Captain Harrison started aft, but on looking back he stopped short, gazed for an instant, first at the dory and then at the bundle in the scuppers, and said, as he gave his hat a forcible blow, as if to prevent it from flying off his head in surprise, "I'm blowed if it ain't a boy!"

Tom looked up as if amazed that he should

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have been mistaken for other than what he was, and then the rolling of the vessel threw him back again toward the dory, tossing him from one side to the other much as if he had been a rubber ball.

“Where did you come from?” roared Captain Harrison, angry now because he had shown what looked to be fear.

“He come out of the dory,” replied one of the men, for Tom was too much engaged in rolling about the deck to be able to make any reply.

It was impossible for all hands to stand staring at Tom when the foresail needed immediate attention, and the sick runaway was allowed to roll up and down the deck at his own sweet will, or, rather, at the will of the wind, until the *Swiftsure* was on her course again with reduced canvas. Then Captain Harrison shouted, “Somebody catch that boy before he breaks himself all to pieces and bring him aft here to me.”

In a few moments, but not without considerable difficulty, the captain’s orders were obeyed, and Tom, looking pale and thoroughly wretched, was held up in front of the *Swiftsure’s* commander.



“WHY, YOU’RE TOM GIBSON!”

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"Why, you're Tom Gibson!" exclaimed that gentleman, in surprise.

Tom nodded his head; he could not trust himself to speak.

"How came you on board? Been running away, eh?"

Again Tom nodded his head, and Captain Harrison began to understand that his passenger was in no mood for conversation.

"Take him below; I'll dress him down after he gets a little better."

Tom was led below into a cabin that smelled like fish, oil, stale vegetables, and, in fact, everything that is disagreeable. And there, amid this combination of terrible odors, poor, sick, runaway Tom could hear the creaking and grinding of the timbers of the crazy old hulk, while all he could do was to moan and groan in unison.

III

IF at any time during the twenty-four hours following Tom Gibson's appearance among the startled crew of the *Swiftsure* that young gentleman had been asked if the old schooner was in any danger, he would have answered that she

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would surely sink within an hour and that all on board would perish with her.

No one asked Tom such a question; but he fully believed that it was impossible for the old craft to live much longer in the gale, and although he knew he was in even a more dangerous position than any one else, owing to the fact that he was below, he felt so sick that he paid but little attention to the supposed danger.

At the end of twenty-four hours, however, matters presented a decidedly different appearance. The wind having subsided, the clumsy old schooner no longer tumbled and tossed about; the sun was shining brightly, and, what was of more importance to Tom, he had so nearly recovered from his illness as to have eaten a very hearty breakfast in spite of the mixture of bad odors that had been so disagreeable to him.

Tom went on deck, almost enjoying the motion of the vessel which, a few hours before, had been so uncomfortable, and was beginning to think that there was some pleasure to be had by running away, when Captain Harrison said, in anything but a pleasant tone of voice:

“Well, Tom, you’ve come on board my vessel and eaten my food without so much as asking

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my permission, so now s'posin' me an' you have some kind of a settlement."

Poor Tom! All idea of enjoyment vanished at once, and again he understood that the boy who runs away is obliged to pay a very high price for what is a continual pain, rather than a pleasure.

"Why don't you say something?" demanded Captain Harrison. "Do you think I keep this schooner jest to accommodate boys who want to run away from home?"

"No, sir," faltered Tom; "but I don't know what to say, because, you see, I don't know how we can have a settlement, unless you should take the things I brought on board to pay you."

"I've seen what you brought with you," thundered Captain Harrison, acting as if he was very angry, although if any one had been observing him closely a twinkle of mirth could have been seen in his eyes. "All the traps you've got wouldn't pay for your breakfast. Now listen to me and take care that you don't forget what I say. You've seen fit to come aboard this schooner, which is bound on a fishing cruise, consequently you've got to pay my price for your fun. You'll have to do your share of the work without grumbling, and I tell

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you candidly that it 'll be more than you ever dreamed of, coddled by your mother as you have been.”

It was pretty hard for a boy who had run away from home because he had been obliged to work too hard to be told that he would have so much to do that what he had been obliged to submit to at home was hardly more than petting. But he *had* run away, and he was obliged to pay the price. He did not even dare to offer any objections, for he understood only too well that he was in the captain's power.

“Why don't you go to work?” shouted Captain Harrison, after he had given Tom plenty of time in which to think the matter over.

“I don't know what to do.”

“Go forward and you'll soon find plenty to keep you out of mischief.”

Tom did as he was directed, and he learned that the captain had said no more than was strictly true. Every one on board appeared to think that he had a perfect right to set a task for the stowaway and there was no hesitation about doing so. If the cook wanted wood split, the pots and pans scoured, vegetables pared, or any other disagreeable work done Tom was called upon, and he soon learned that it was

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dangerous to refuse. If any of the crew wanted an assistant at any time or on any piece of work, Tom was that assistant, and at the slightest hesitation a blow was given to remind him that in no sense was he his own master. He was the boy-of-all-work and with no opportunity to play.

Compared with his condition on the *Swiftsure*, Tom had lived a life of luxurious ease at home, and there was hardly a moment, when he was awake, during which he did not regret that he had ever been so foolish as to run away.

Before the fishing-grounds were reached the *Swiftsure* put into a harbor for supplies, and there Tom decided upon a bold step. He asked one of the men who had treated him with more consideration than the others had done to lend him two cents with which to buy a postage stamp, and on a dirty piece of paper he wrote the following letter to his mother:

“DEAR MAMA,—I was wicked to want to run away, and I want to come back terribly. If I had any money I would try to get back from here; but I haven't, so I shall have to stay till this old vessel comes home. You'll let me come, won't you, mother? I won't say a word, no

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matter how hard you whip me for running away, and I won't ever grumble when you want me to do anything. My hands are all covered with blisters; but they don't begin to be as sore as my heart is when I have to get into these dirty berths at night, knowing that I can't even speak to you. Don't be angry with me any more, but *please* let me in when I come home.

“Yours truly,

“THOMAS GIBSON.”

Captain Harrison, who had seen Tom writing, and who suspected at once to whom the letter was to be sent, gave the boy an envelope and allowed him to go on shore in order to mail it.

Tom felt better after this, even though his condition was in no wise improved. His mother would know that he was sorry for what he had done, and even though but a short time before he had looked upon her as a hard-hearted parent, it seemed as if her forgiveness was the one thing he wanted above all others.

If, during the voyage to the fishing-grounds, Tom thought he had worked as hard as was possible, he learned that he had been mistaken when the real labor of the cruise was com-

TOM'S TROUBLES

menced. All day he was obliged to fish with twenty or thirty fathoms of line, to which was attached a heavy sinker of lead that required nearly all his strength to pull up, and when the catch had been large he was compelled to remain up half the night helping the men dress the fish. His hands, which had been covered with blisters, as he wrote his mother, were cut and bleeding, while many times the pain was so great that he could not go to sleep even when he had the opportunity.

In this work Tom could not say that he was obliged to do more than any one else; all hands worked to the best of their ability, and it but serves to show that Tom was getting to be quite a sensible boy when it is said that he felt he was doing no more than was right under the circumstances. But nevertheless his heart was quite as sore and his homesickness as severe as when he wrote the letter to his mother. The only time when he was in the slightest degree contented was when he was fishing. He knew that the sooner the old schooner was loaded, the sooner would she be headed toward home, and he counted each fish he caught as another step toward his getting home to Sedgwick and to mother.

“WANTED”

The time finally came, six weeks after Tom had started to pass the night under Rankin's bridge, when Captain Harrison said:

“We won't ‘dress down’ to-night, boys; but try to carry back fresh what we catch to-day.”

“What does he mean by that?” Tom asked of one of the crew.

“It means that we shall start for home after the fish are done biting to-day.”

Tom could hardly realize his good-fortune, and he worked in a dazed sort of way, but kept repeating to himself each moment: “I'm going home, I'm going home. And what's better, I'll stay when I get there.”

At an early hour that afternoon the bow of the old *Swiftsure* was turned toward Sedgwick, and as she rose and fell heavily on the waves, sending clouds of spray fore and aft, Tom could hardly refrain from giving vent to his joy by at least three hearty cheers.

The trip home was by no means as speedy as Tom could have desired. It seemed to him as if the old vessel was sailing more slowly than she had ever sailed before and as if the winds were really trying to delay him.

Then came the day when he could see the spire of the church in Sedgwick, and just at the

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time when he knew that his father and mother were sitting down to supper Tom leaped on shore. He waited for nothing, but ran home at full speed, and it was not until he had kissed his mother and father again and again and heard them assure him of their forgiveness that he could breathe freely.

As may be expected, Tom had not been home more than an hour before the friends to whom he had confided his purpose of running away called to see him and to learn how much of his fortune he had made.

“I tell you what it is, fellows,” he said, in reply to their questions, “I’m not as big a fool as I was before I ran away. I thought I was having a mighty hard time of it here, but I soon found out my mistake. All I can say is that I pity fellows that haven’t got any homes to go to when they get as homesick as I was.”

“Then you don’t think of running away again very soon?” suggested Dwight Holden, laughingly.

“Boys”—and Tom spoke very solemnly now—“when I was on the *Swiftsure* I found out how lonesome a boy can be without his mother; I never knew before. Just as long as I can I shall stay where I can see my mother and

“WANTED”

“speak to her; and if at any time any one of you thinks that his mother isn't the best and dearest friend a boy can have, just do as I did and it won't take you very long to find out that you are mistaken.”

THE END

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