

THE  
MISSING  
TIN BOX  
WINFIELD



# THE MISSING TIN BOX

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

DORRINE

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# **THE MISSING TIN BOX**

**OR**

# THE STOLEN RAILROAD BONDS.

BY ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

*Author of "Schooldays of Fred Harley," "Poor but Plucky," "By Pluck, Not Luck," Etc., etc.*

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# **THE MISSING TIN BOX.**



## CHAPTER I.

### AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

"What are the bonds worth, Allen?"

"Close on to eighty thousand dollars, Hardwick."

"Phew! as much as that?"

"Yes. The market has been going up since the first of December."

"How did he happen to get hold of them?"

"I don't know the particulars. Mr. Mason was an old friend of the family, and I presume he thought he could leave them in no better hands."

"And where are they now?"

"In his private safe."

"Humph!"

The conversation recorded above took place one evening on a Pennsylvania Railroad ferry-boat while the craft was making the trip from Jersey City to New York.

It was carried on between two men, both well dressed. He, called Allen, was a tall, sharp-nosed individual, probably fifty years of age. The other was a short, heavy-set fellow, wearing a black mustache, and having a peculiar scowl on his face.

They sat in the forward part of the gentlemen's cabin, which was but partly filled with passengers. Two seats on one side of them were vacant. On the other side sat a shabbily-dressed boy of sixteen, his hands clasped on his lap and his eyes closed.

"The safe is often left open during the day," resumed Allen, after a brief pause, during which Hardwick had offered his companion a cigar and lit one himself.

"That won't do," replied Hardwick, shortly.

"Why not?"

"Because it won't."

"But we can make it appear——"

"Hush!" The heavy-set man, who sat next to the vacant seats, nudged his companion in the side. "That boy may hear you," he continued, in a whisper.

The man addressed glanced sharply at the youth.

"No, he won't," he returned.

"Why not?"

"He's fast asleep."

"Don't be too sure." The heavy-set man arose. "Let us go out on the forward deck, and talk it over."

"It's too cold, and, besides, it's beginning to——"

"Wrap yourself up in that overcoat of yours, and you will be all right. We don't want to run any chances, Allen."

"Some one may hear us out there just as well as in here," growled the elderly man.

Nevertheless, he pulled up his coat collar and followed his companion through the heavy swinging doors.

As the two walked outside, the eyes of the boy opened, and he glanced sharply after the pair.

"That was a queer conversation they held," he muttered to himself. "I am half of the opinion that they are up to no good. If I were a policeman I believe I would follow them and find out who they are."

Hal Carson hesitated for a moment, and then arose and walked to the doors.

Stepping outside, he saw the two men, standing in the gangway for horses, in deep conversation.



"They are hatching out some scheme," thought Hal, as he watched the pair.

But it was bitter cold outside for one without an overcoat, and the youth soon returned to his seat in the cabin, leaving the two men to themselves.

Hal was a poor-house boy, having lived at the Fairham poor-house ever since he could remember. Who his parents were he did not know, nor could Joel Daggett, the keeper of the institution, give him any definite information on the subject.

"You were picked up in front of Onders' carpenter shop on one Fourth o' July night," Daggett had said more than once. "They found out some strange man was responsible, but who he was, nobuddy knows, or leastwise they won't tell, and that amounts to the same thing."

There had been a peculiar golden locket about Hal's neck when he was found, but this had never led to the establishing of his identity, and after the boy was at the poor-house a year the facts concerning his being found were almost forgotten.

But Hal had clung fast to that locket as a sort of birthright, and it was at this moment safe in his trousers pocket.

Two days before the opening of this story the trustees of the Fairham Poor-house had decided to bind Hal out to Daniel Scrogg, one of the most miserly farmers in the county.

Hal had protested, stating he could make more in the town, where a lawyer named Gibson was willing to take the youth into his office on a salary of three dollars a week and found. The trustees were obdurate, and the upshot of the matter was that the youth quietly packed his clothing into a bundle and ran away.

He left a note behind for Joel Daggett, telling what he had done, and stating that as soon as he was in position to do so he would reimburse the trustees for all they had paid out for his keep for the past fifteen years; a big undertaking for any boy, but Hal was plucky, and meant what he said.

Hal's destination was New York. Once in the great metropolis, he felt certain he would find something to do. To be sure, his capital was less than a dollar, but he was used to being without any money, and consequently this did not bother him.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and as the man Allen had said, it was just beginning to snow, the first fall of the season. Hal looked out of the window

as the flakes glittered in the electric light and fell into the waters of the river.

Presently there came a bump, and the ferry-boat veered to one side. The slip had been reached, and, pulling shut the rather thin jacket he wore, and bringing his cap further down over his forehead, Hal mingled with the crowd outside, and a minute later went ashore.

Once on West Street, Hal stood still, undecided what to do next. He did not know a soul in New York, did not know one street from another, but understood very well that it would be next to useless to try to obtain employment at this late hour.

As Hal stood meditating, the two men mentioned above brushed past him. The boy noticed them, and then almost mechanically followed the pair.

The men passed up Cortlandt Street until they came to the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railroad. Hal saw them mount the stairs on the opposite side of the street, and a minute after knew they had taken an uptown train.

"I suppose I'll never see them again," thought the youth.

But Hal was mistaken. The two men were to play a most important part in the youth's future life in the great metropolis.

Hal walked along under the elevated road until he came to Barclay Street. He passed several fruit stands and a queer little booth where coffee and cakes were sold.

The sight of the latter made him remember how hungry he was. He had not had anything to eat since early morning, and although he was accustomed to a very scanty fare at the poor-house, his stomach rebelled at this unusually long fast.

He counted up his money, and resolved to invest fifteen cents of it in a plate of pork and beans and some buttered cakes.

He entered a restaurant near the corner, and was soon served.

While Hal was eating he became interested in the conversation of several young men who stood near the counter, smoking.

"You say Nathan wants more help?" he heard one of the young men say.

"Yes."

"Thought he took on two new hands yesterday."

"So he did, but the holiday trade is very heavy this year."

"Then I'll send Billy around to see him. I suppose he could do the work."

"Anybody could who is strong and willing," was the reply. "Nathan wants three young fellows."

At these words Hal's eyes brightened.

He arose and touched the speaker on the arm.

"Excuse me, sir," he began.

"What is it?" asked the man, rather abruptly.

"I heard you telling your friend that somebody wanted help. I am looking for work."

The man looked Hal over, and gave a short laugh.

"I'm afraid you ain't strong enough, my boy," he said.

"I was brought up to hard work," replied Hal, earnestly.

"Well, that makes a difference."

"If you will tell me where that place is——"

"Certainly. It is the first warehouse this side——"

The man got no further. There was a commotion on the street, and two or three rushed outside.

"Brady's place just below here is on fire!" shouted some one.

"Brady's place?" ejaculated the man. "By George! I wonder how that happened?"

He seemed to forget all about Hal, and making a rush for the door, disappeared down the street.

The youth started after him. He had eaten and paid for his meal, and he did not wish to miss the opportunity of questioning the fellow further.

On the street all was commotion. Wagons were scattering right and left to make

way for the steam engines, hose carts and hook and ladder trucks which came dashing up to the spot.

Hal soon found himself surrounded by a crowd. The man had disappeared, apparently for good, and with a sigh the youth walked away, there being no signs of a fire, so far as he could see.

The youth started to cross the street. He was directly behind an elderly gentleman, and was about to pass the man when there came a warning cry:

"Get out of the way there! Here comes another engine!"

Hal looked up and saw that the engine, pulled by three fiery horses, was close at hand. He started to return to the curb. As he did so the elderly gentleman slipped and went down flat on his back.

"He'll be killed!" cried half a dozen, who saw the accident.

Hal's heart seemed to leap into his throat. The horses were not over ten feet away. A moment more and the elderly gentleman would be crushed to death.

The youth leaped forward, and caught the man by the arm. Then he gave a sudden jerk backward, and both he and the gentleman went rolling into the gutter, while the engine went thundering by.



## CHAPTER II.

### A BRAVE YOUTH'S REWARD.

A cheer arose from the by-standers.

"Good for the boy!"

"That's what I call a genuine hero!"

"He deserves a medal."

Paying no attention to what was said, Hal assisted the elderly gentleman to his feet.

"Are you hurt, sir?" he asked kindly.

"I—I think not," was the labored reply. "That was a narrow escape, young man." The last with a gasp.

"You are right, sir. How did you happen to go down?"

"The snow made a slippery spot on the ice, I believe. My wind is almost gone."

"Wait till I brush you off," said Hal, and taking off his cap he commenced to strike off the snow and dirt from the gentleman's clothing.

"Oh, never mind that," was the comment. "Come along with me. I don't like crowds."

The gentleman caught the youth by the arm, and walked him toward Broadway.

"You did me a great service," he went on, as the two stood on the corner, opposite the post-office.

"I didn't do much," replied Hal, modestly.

"Don't you call saving my life much?" asked the man, with a smile.

"Oh, I don't mean that, sir. But any one would have done what I did."

"I'm not so sure about that. In New York it is every one for himself. What is your name?"

"Hal Carson."

"You live here, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Where then, if I may ask?"

"I just came to New York not over half an hour ago. I intend to stay here."

The elderly gentleman looked puzzled.

"I don't quite understand you," he said.

"I came from a small place in Pennsylvania, sir, and I intend to try my luck here."

"Ah! Are you alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any friends here?"

"No, sir."

"Yes, you have."

"I have?"

"Yes—myself." The elderly gentleman laughed at his little joke. "No one shall say he saved my life and I didn't appreciate it. So your name is Hal Carson. Parents living?"

"I don't know, sir." Hal blushed in spite of himself. "I was brought up at the poor-house."

"Humph! Well, you are a manly looking chap and a brave one. Have you any idea where you are going to obtain employment?"

"No, sir. I intend to hunt around until I strike something."

"You'll find that rather up-hill work, I fancy."

"I didn't expect any snap, Mr.—"

"My name is Horace Sumner. I am a broker, and have an office on Wall Street, near Broad. I am just returning from a visit to my sister, who lives in Morristown. Have you any sort of an education?"

"I can read and write, and figure pretty well, and I've read all the books I could get hold of."

"The reason I ask is because I think I may be able to help you to obtain employment. I won't offer you money as a reward—I don't believe in such things."

"I would not accept your money. But I would like work."

Horace Sumner meditated for a moment.

"Supposing you stop at my office to-morrow morning," he said.

"I will, sir. What time?"

"Ten o'clock."

"And what number, please?"

"Here is my card." Horace Sumner handed it to him. "Do you know where you are going to stop over night?"

"I shall hunt up some cheap hotel."

Mr. Sumner was about to say something to the effect that Hal could accompany him to his house and sleep in one of the rooms over the barn, but he changed his mind.

"Let the boy hoe his own row. It will do him good," he thought to himself.

Horace Sumner was a self-made man, and he knew that self reliance is one of the best traits a boy can cultivate.

"I am going over to the Third Avenue elevated now," he said. "Remember, I expect to see you at ten sharp."

"I will be on hand, sir," returned Hal.

"Then good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Sumner, and much obliged."

Hal watched the gentleman cross City Hall Park, and then started up Broadway.

The brilliant holiday display in the show windows charmed him, and he spent fully two hours in looking at all that was to be seen.

"Who knows but what I may go to work to-morrow, and then I won't get much chance to look around," he reasoned to himself.

He was accustomed to work at the poor-house from six in the morning until eight or nine at night, and he did not know but what he would have to do more in such a bustling city as New York.

By ten o'clock Hal found himself tired out. The snow was now six inches deep and was still coming down.

He turned from Broadway through Grand Street and presently found himself well over on the east side.

"Good Beds for 25 Cents per Night."

This was the announcement on a banner strung over the sidewalk, and after reading it, Hal glanced at the building.

It was rather a dingy affair, but to the youth direct from the Fairham poor-house it appeared quite comfortable. He entered the office, and approached the clerk at the desk.

"I would like a room for to-night," he said.

"A room or a bed?" asked the clerk.

"I mean a twenty-five cent place."

"Oh, all right. Pay in advance."

Hal handed out a quarter. Then he was conducted to a long, narrow apartment on the third floor. There were eight beds in the room, six of which were already occupied.

To a person used to good accommodations this apartment would have almost disgusted him. But quarters at the poor-house had been but little better, and Hal did not complain. He managed to get a bed in one corner, and, as the window



was slightly open, he slept very well.

He was up and dressed at six o'clock and out on the street. The snow was now all of a foot deep, and Hal was much interested in the snow-plows on the car tracks.

As he passed down the street a snow-ball whizzed past the youth's ear. Another followed, striking him in the head. He turned, and saw a boy slightly taller than himself standing close at hand and laughing heartily.

Instead of getting angry, Hal laughed in return. Then he picked up some snow, made it into a hard ball, and let fly.

The snow-ball took the other boy in the chest, and in his effort to dodge he went over head first into a drift near the gutter. Hal burst out laughing, and then ran back and helped the stranger up.

"Say, wot did yer do dat fer?" demanded the other boy, as soon as he was once more on his feet.

"Tit for tat, you know," returned Hal. "I guess you're not hurt, are you?"

The stranger stared at Hal. He had never met with such a kindly answer before.

"Hurt! o' course I ain't hurt," he returned, slowly.

"You threw at me first, didn't you?"

"Wot if I did?"

"Nothing, only that's why I threw back."

The stranger stared at Hal for a moment.

"Who are you?" he asked, abruptly.

"My name is Hal Carson. What's yours?"

"Jack McCabe."

Hal held out his hand.

"I'm glad to know you. I just came to New York, and I only know one person here."

"Git out! is dat so?" Jack McCabe shook hands rather gingerly. "Den yer ain't

one o' der boys, is yer?"

"What boys?"

"Der fellers around town."

"Hardly."

"Got work here?"

"I expect to get work from a man in Wall Street."

"Goin' ter be a broker, hey?" grinned Jack.

"Here, get to work there, you lazy dog!" shouted a man from the inside of a nearby store, and Jack dropped his conversation and began to clean off the sidewalk with vigor.

Hal walked on. He did not know under what exciting circumstances he was to meet Jack McCabe again.

Promptly at ten o'clock Hal presented himself at the number given him on Wall Street. The sign over the door read Sumner, Allen & Co., Brokers.

He opened the door and entered. There was a small place in the front partitioned from the rear office by a counter and a brass grating.

A man sat writing at a desk in the rear. He glanced at Hal, and seeing it was only a boy, went on with his work.

Five minutes passed. Then the man swung around leisurely, got down from his stool, and came forward.

As soon as Hal caught sight of the man's face he was astonished.

It was Hardwick, the fellow whose conversation he had overheard on the ferry boat the evening before.



## CHAPTER III.

### A SERIOUS CHARGE.

"What do you want?" asked Hardwick abruptly.

"Is Mr. Sumner in?" returned Hal.

"No."

"Then I'll wait till he comes."

Hardwick stared at Hal.

"Won't I do?" he asked sharply.

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"What do you want to see him about?"

"He asked me to call," replied the youth. He was not particularly pleased with Hardwick's manner.

"I am the book-keeper here, and I generally transact business during Mr. Sumner's absence."

"Mr. Sumner asked me to meet him here at ten o'clock."

"Oh! You know him, then?"

"Not very well."

"I thought not." Hardwick glanced at Hal's shabby clothes. "Well, you had better wait outside until he comes. We don't allow loungers about the office."

"I will," said Hal, and he turned to leave.

It was bitter cold outside, but he would have preferred being on the sidewalk than being in the way, especially when such a man as Felix Hardwick was around.

But, as he turned to leave, a coach drove up to the door, and Mr. Sumner alighted. His face lit up with a smile when he caught sight of Hal.

"Well, my young friend, I see you are on time," he said, catching Hal by the shoulder, and turning him back into the office.

"Yes, sir."

"That's right." Mr. Sumner turned to Hardwick. "Where is Dick?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," returned the book-keeper.

"Hasn't he been here this morning?"

"I think not."

"The sidewalk ought to be cleaned. That boy evidently doesn't want work."

"I will clean the walk, if you wish me to," put in Hal.

"I have an office boy who is expected to do such things," replied Mr. Sumner. "That is, when the janitor of the building doesn't get at it in time. But he is getting more negligent every day. Yes, you might as well do the job, and then come into the back office and have a talk with me."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Hardwick, just show Carson where the shovel and broom are."

The book-keeper scowled.

"This way," he said, and led the boy to a small closet under a stairs.

Just as Hal was about to leave the office with the broom and the shovel, a tall, well dressed boy entered.

He was whistling at a lively rate, but stopped short on seeing Mr. Sumner.

"Well, Ferris, this is a pretty time to come around," said the broker, sharply.

"I couldn't help it," returned the boy, who was considerably older than Hal, and had coarse features and fiery red hair.

"Why not?"

"My aunt forgot to call me."

"That is a poor excuse."

Dick Ferris began to drum on the railing with his flat hands.

"Didn't I tell you to be here every morning at nine o'clock?" went on the broker.  
"I am sure that is not very early for any one."

"'Tain't my fault when it snows like this," returned the boy. "My aunt ought to call me."

"Did you arrange that file of papers yesterday afternoon after I left?" continued Mr. Sumner.

"I was going to do that this morning."

"I told you to do it yesterday. You had plenty of time."

"I ain't got nothing to do this morning."

"There are a great number of things to do, Ferris, but evidently you are not the boy who cares to do them. I warned you only a week ago that you must mend your ways. I think hereafter we will dispense with your service. Mr. Hardwick, please pay him his wages in full for the week. We will get some one else to fill his position."

Mr. Sumner turned to the rear office.

"I don't care," muttered Ferris. "Hand over the stuff," he said to Hardwick.

Having received his money, he calmly lit a cigarette, puffed away upon it for a minute, and then went out slamming the door as hard as possible after him.

Hal was already at work, clearing away the snow at a lively rate. Ferris approached him.

"Say, are you the fellow that did me out of my job?" he asked, savagely.

"I haven't done any one out of a job," returned Hal. "Do you work here?"

"I did, but I don't any more."

"Why not?"

"Because old Sumner expects the earth from me and he can't get it; see?" Ferris winked one eye. "I'm too smart to allow myself to be stepped onto, I am. You had better quit working; he won't pay you much for your trouble."

"I'll risk it," replied Hal.

"If I find you played me foul, I'll break you all up," went on Ferris. And with this threat he hurried off.

Hal looked after the boy for an instant and then continued his work. The sidewalk was soon cleaned, and he returned to the office.

Hardwick let him in behind the railing, giving him a sharp look as he passed.

"I've seen him somewhere before," he muttered to himself, as he continued at his books. "But where I can't remember."

"What! done already?" exclaimed Mr. Sumner to Hal.

"Yes, sir."

"It didn't take long."

"It wasn't much of a job, sir."

"Ferris would have taken all of the morning."

"Was that the boy who just left?"

"Yes."

"He said he would whip me if I played him foul."

"Humph! He is a bad boy. You must be careful, and not get into any trouble."

"I will, sir. But I am not afraid of him."

"No; you look as if you could take care of yourself." Mr. Sumner rubbed his chin. "So you say you have no prospects ahead?"

"No, sir, but I am not afraid——"

"Let me see your handwriting."

The broker shoved a pad toward Hal, and handed him a pen filled with ink.

Hal put down a sentence or two, and added his own name.

"That will do very well. You say you can figure fairly?"

"I have been through the common school arithmetic."

"What would my commission be on six thousand dollars' worth of bonds, sold at one hundred and fifteen, commission one-quarter of one per cent?"

Hal figured for a moment.

"Seventeen dollars and twenty-five cents," he said.

Mr. Sumner gave him several other sums. The youth answered all of them quickly and correctly.

"That will do first-class," said the broker. "Now to come to business. Would you mind telling me why you left Fairham?"

"Not at all, Mr. Sumner," replied Hal.

And, sitting down, he told how the trustees had intended to use him, and of his determination to do for himself.

"And I will not go back, no matter what happens," he concluded, decidedly.

"Well, I cannot say as I blame you," was the slow reply. "Of course, you owe them something, but perhaps you can pay them back quicker in the way you have undertaken. Have you any idea in regard to salary?"

"I intended to take what I could get, and then look around for something better."

"How would you like to work for me?"

"First-rate, sir."

"I need an office boy to take Ferris' place, and also somebody to help copy contracts and make out bills and statements. If you could combine the two I would give you seven dollars a week at the start, and increase the amount as you become more valuable."

Hal's heart beat fast. Seven dollars a week! It was more than twice what he could have earned at Lawyer Gibson's office in Fairham.

"Oh, thank you!" he cried. "I did not expect so much."

"I expect you to earn the money," replied the broker. He made this remark, but, nevertheless, he had not forgotten that Hal had saved his life. "Have you any money with you?"

"Fifty cents, sir."

"Then let me advance you a month's salary. Half of it I would advise you to invest in an overcoat and a stout pair of shoes. The remainder you will probably have to pay out for your board. Mr. Hardwick."

The book-keeper came forward.

"Just give Carson twenty-eight dollars for four weeks' salary in advance. He will take Ferris' place, and also help you on the copying."

"Yes, sir."

Hardwick gave Hal a contemptuous look, and then going to a large safe in the forward part of the main office, brought out the cash and handed it over.

"You may go to work at once," said Mr. Sumner. "I would advise you to hunt up a boarding-house after business hours, three o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

And so Hal was installed at Sumner, Allen & Co.'s place of business. He cleaned up the place, and then started in on the copying Hardwick brought him.

Mr. Sumner was well pleased with the boy's work for the day, and so expressed himself.

After business hours Hal bought the overcoat and the pair of shoes. Then he started out for a boarding-house, and at last found one on Tenth Street, kept by Mrs. Amanda Ricket, where he obtained a room on the top floor, with breakfast and supper, for five dollars a week.

On the second day at the office Hal was astonished to learn that the Mr. Allen of the firm was the man he had seen in company with Mr. Hardwick on the Pennsylvania ferry-boat. Mr. Allen did not recognize him, and the youth thought it just as well not to mention the meeting. During the afternoon Mr. Sumner and Mr. Allen went out together. They were hardly gone when Hardwick put on his hat and coat and followed, leaving the youth in sole charge.



Five minutes later a stranger entered and asked for Mr. Allen. Finding the broker out, he said he would wait, and sat down inside the railing, near the stove.

He had hardly seated himself, when a snow-ball crashed against the plate-glass window. Fearful that the glass might be broken, Hal hurried out. Two boys had been snow-balling each other, and both ran away as fast as they could.

Hardly had Hal returned to the office than Hardwick came in. He had been paying a visit to a near-by wine-room, and his face was slightly flushed. He nodded to the man who was waiting.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"I want to see Mr. Allen."

"Gone away for the day, sir."

The stranger at once arose and left. Hardwick saw him to the door, and then sat down near a desk in the rear.

Hal bent over the writing he was doing. He proceeded with great care, as it was new work to him and he did not wish to make any errors.

Just before three o'clock Mr. Sumner returned. He walked to the rear office, gave a turn to the knob of the door of his private safe, and then addressed Hardwick:

"Anything new?"

"No, sir."

"Then we might as well close up."

Five minutes later the main safe was locked up, the rolled-top desks closed, and work was over for the day.

Hal spent the evening at his room in the boarding-house, writing to Lawyer Gibson, his only friend in Fairham. The letter finished, he walked to the corner and posted it, and then returned and went to bed.

The next morning he was the first at the office. He was engaged in cleaning up when Hardwick entered. The book-keeper had been out the greater part of the night, and his face plainly showed the effects of his dissipation.

"Come, get at the books!" he growled. "The place is clean enough."

"I will just as soon as I have dusted the rear office," replied Hal.

"Do as I told you!" stormed Hardwick.

At that moment Mr. Sumner entered, and with a hasty good-morning passed to the back. Hal heard him at his safe, and then came a sharp cry.

"The safe has been robbed!"

"What's that?" asked Hardwick, walking to the rear, while Hal followed.

"The safe has been robbed!" gasped Mr. Sumner. "There are seventy-nine thousand dollars' worth of bonds missing."

"You are sure?" asked the book-keeper, while Hal's heart seemed to fairly stop beating.

"Yes, they are gone."

"When did you leave them?"

"Yesterday before I went out with Mr. Allen." Mr. Sumner gave a groan. "This will ruin me! Who could have robbed the safe?"

"Was it broken open?"

"No. Look for yourself."

Hardwick glanced toward the iron box. Then he turned and faced Hal.

"You were here alone yesterday afternoon," he said, sternly.

"Did you leave him here alone?" cried Mr. Sumner.

"I am sorry to say I did, but it was only for a few minutes," replied the book-keeper. "I called around to Mack & Heath's for that Rock Island circular."

Hal grew red in the face.

"Mr. Sumner," he began, "I hope you do not think——"

"I think that boy robbed the safe," interrupted Hardwick, pointing to Hal. "I thought it was a mistake to take such a stranger into the place."

At these words Hal's eyes flashed fire.

"That is a falsehood!" he cried, indignantly. "I never went near the safe, excepting to dust the outside."

Mr. Sumner clasped and unclasped his hands nervously. The ring in the youth's voice made him hesitate as to how to proceed.

"You robbed the safe," went on Hardwick. "You know you are guilty."

"I know no such thing," returned Hal, in a peculiar, strained tone of voice. "But there is one thing I do know."

"And what is that?" asked Mr. Sumner, eagerly.

"I know Mr. Hardwick contemplated robbing that safe, and I feel certain in my mind that he is the one who did it."

Hal had hardly spoken before the book-keeper sprang upon him, forcing him over backward against the safe door.

"I'm the thief, am I?" he cried in Hal's ear. "Take that back, or I'll make you!"



## CHAPTER IV.

### HAL STANDS UP FOR HIMSELF.

Hal now found himself in a tight situation. Felix Hardwick had him by the throat, and was slowly but surely choking him.

"Don't! don't!" cried Mr. Sumner, in great alarm.

"The miserable tramp!" cried Hardwick. "I'll teach him to call a gentleman a thief."

He continued his choking process, paying no attention to his employer's efforts to haul him away.

But by this time Hal began to realize that Hardwick was in earnest. He began to kick, and presently landed a blow in the book-keeper's stomach that completely winded the man.

Hardwick relaxed his hold, and Hal sprang away.

"Stop! stop!" ordered Mr. Sumner. "I will not have such disgraceful scenes in this office."

"But he intimated I was a thief," said Hardwick, trying to catch his wind.

"And he said the same of me," retorted Hal.

"So you are!"

"I never stole a thing in my life, Mr. Sumner." Hal turned to the broker. "And I am not a tramp."

"Then supposing we make it a poor-house beggar," returned Hardwick, with a short laugh.

Hal turned red. The shot was a cruel one.

"Hush! Hardwick," cried Mr. Sumner. "There is no necessity for such language."

The broker turned to Hal.

"You just made a strange statement, Carson," he said. "How do you know Mr. Hardwick contemplated robbing the safe?"

"Because I do."

"That is no answer."

"I overheard him and Mr. Allen talking about the bonds being in the safe."

"When?"

"The evening I came to New York."

"What was said?"

"I can't repeat the words, but they said the bonds were worth nearly eighty thousand dollars, and that the safe was often left open during the day."

"It's an infamous story!" put in Hardwick, his face growing red. "Mr. Sumner, don't you believe the beggar."

"I am telling the truth," said Hal, as calmly as he could.

"Hush, Hardwick!"

"But, sir——" began the book-keeper.

"One story at a time. I will hear what you have to say later."

"Do you mean to say you would take that boy's word against mine?" demanded Hardwick, haughtily.

"I intend to listen to his story without further interruption from you," responded the broker, sternly. "So please keep silent until your turn comes."

Hardwick pulled at the ends of his mustache, but he did not dare to reply after this.

"Now go on, Carson," said Mr. Sumner to Hal.

"I haven't much to tell, sir," replied the youth.

And he related all he could remember of the fragment of a conversation which he had overheard.

The broker listened attentively, but his face fell when Hal had finished.

"And is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Sumner shook his head, and then turned to Hardwick.

"Is his story true?" he asked.

"It is true we spoke of the bonds," replied the book-keeper. "But nothing was said about stealing them. Why, Mr. Sumner—why should your own partner and trusted book-keeper conspire to rob you? It is preposterous! I have an idea."

"What is this?"

"That he heard us speaking of your careless habit, and endeavored to form some scheme to get into the office and get hold of the bonds."

"Hardly. It was I told him to come here; he did not come of himself."

"Then he formed his plan after he got here."

"I know nothing of railroad bonds," put in Hal. "I wouldn't know what to do with them, if I had them."

At that moment Mr. Allen arrived. He saw that something unusual had taken place.

"What's up?" he asked.

"The tin box containing the Mason railroad bonds is missing," replied Mr. Sumner.

"Missing!" ejaculated Mr. Allen.

"Exactly."

"And all the bonds?"

"Yes."

"Phew!" Mr. Allen gave a low whistle. "How did it happen?"

Mr. Sumner related the particulars.

"And this boy means to say we concocted a scheme to steal them," added Hardwick, pointing to Hal.

"We steal them!" ejaculated Mr. Allen.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Allen turned and caught Hal by the arm.

"Boy, are you crazy?" he demanded.

"That's what I would like to know," said Hardwick.

"No, I am not crazy," replied the youth, stoutly.

"He overheard part of our conversation on the ferry-boat the other night," went on the book-keeper, hastily, "and from that he judged we must be plotting to rob Mr. Sumner."

"Well, that's rich!" Mr. Allen broke into a laugh. "Excuse me, Sumner, but I can't help it. Of course, you don't think any such thing."

"No, I can't say that I do," replied the elderly broker, slowly. "But"—he turned to the safe—"the tin box is gone and I would like to know what has become of it."

"Better call in the police," suggested Hardwick. "And in the meantime keep an eye on this boy."

"And also on that man," added Hal, pointing to the book-keeper.

Mr. Sumner was in deep perplexity. He ran his hand through his hair.

"Let us talk this matter over first," he said. "You say, Hardwick, you left Carson alone in the office yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long?"

"Not more than ten minutes."

"When was this?"

"A few minutes after you and Mr. Allen went out."

"When you came back what was Carson doing?"

"He was at the desk, pretending to write."

"Was there anybody else here?"

"By Jove! yes," exclaimed Hardwick, suddenly.

"Ah! who?"

"I don't know, sir."

"A man?"

"Yes. Rather a common-looking fellow, about thirty-five years of age."

"What did he want?"

"He asked for Mr. Allen, and when I said he wouldn't be back during the rest of the day he went off."

Mr. Sumner turned to Hal. The youth stood staring at the wall.

"What have you to say about this stranger?"

"He came in directly after Mr. Hardwick went out," returned the youth.

"What was his business?"

"He wished to see Mr. Allen."

"Did he go back to the safe?"

"I—I don't think so."

"You are not sure?"

"Not positive, sir. I was busy writing, and did not notice him closely."

"Did the man give any name?"

"No, sir."

"I suppose you didn't know him?"

Hal shook his head. He was beginning to believe he had made a big mistake by



not watching the stranger during the time he was in the office back of the railing.

"I believe I saw the man wink at this boy as he went out," put in Hardwick. "I am pretty certain the two knew each other."

"That is not true," burst out Hal.

For some reason, this insinuation made him think more than ever that the book-keeper was guilty.

"Which way did the man go?" went on the elderly broker.

"Toward Broadway," replied Hal.

"Did he have anything under his arm?"

"He had a small bundle, but he had that when he came in."

"About how large?"

Hal illustrated with his hands.

"Probably that was an empty box, or something of that sort," ventured Mr. Allen. "He placed the tin box into it."

"Quite likely," returned Mr. Sumner.

"And the only question in my mind," went on his partner, "is whether or not this boy here was in with the fellow. If you will take my advice, Sumner, you will have him arrested without delay."



## CHAPTER V.

### HAL DETERMINES TO ACT.

As Mr. Allen spoke he caught Hal by the shoulder.

"You had better own up, Carson," he said, harshly.

"Let go of me!" retorted Hal, trying to break away.

"Not much! Do you think I am going to give you the chance to slide out of the door?"

"I have nothing to own up to, and I don't intend to run away," panted the youth.

He broke away, and placed himself beside Mr. Sumner, who looked at him earnestly.

"I believe the boy speaks the truth," he said, firmly.

"You do?" cried Hardwick and Allen, in concert.

"I mean in so far as he says he is innocent," added the elderly broker, hastily. "Of course, I believe he is mistaken in supposing that either of you had anything to do with this robbery."

"Oh!" returned Mr. Allen.

"That's different," said Hardwick.

Both of them looked relieved.

"I wish he had watched this stranger."

"I wish that myself, Mr. Sumner," cried Hal. "If he stole the tin box, then I am mostly responsible, although I supposed the man was some business man around here, and was to be trusted."

"I don't understand one thing," said the elderly broker. "I am almost sure I locked the safe when I went away yesterday afternoon."

"So you did," said Mr. Allen. "I saw you do it."

"Then, how could the stranger have opened it?"

"Didn't Carson know the combination?" asked Hardwick, who seemed determined to convict Hal.

"I think not."

"Indeed I did not!" cried the youth. "I never worked a safe combination in my life."

"I saw him watching you open the door yesterday morning," went on the book-keeper. "Do you dare deny it?" he continued, turning to Hal.

"I certainly do deny it," retorted Hal. "I might have been looking that way, but I did not watch him, and I do not know how it was done."

"You did not notice if the door was open after I was gone, did you?" said Mr. Sumner, turning to the book-keeper.

"It was closed," replied Hardwick, promptly.

"You are certain?"

"Yes, sir. When I left Carson here alone I saw to it that both safes and the main desks were closed."

"Why did you do that?" put in Mr. Allen, knowing well what the answer would be.

"I saw no necessity for trusting Carson, who was totally unknown to us."

"That was right, Hardwick." Mr. Allen turned to his partner. "I believe, Sumner, you took in Carson without recommendations."

"I admit I did, Allen, but his face——"

"Faces are very deceitful, very. It was poor business policy, Sumner. It would never have happened while I was around."

"Well, I am the loser, not you," replied Mr. Sumner, rather sharply. He did not like the way Mr. Allen criticised his action.

"Yes, but still, it might have been——"

"But it was not," interrupted Mr. Sumner, dryly. "And as we are to separate on the first of the year, Allen, the least said on that score the better."

"Well, just as you say," returned Mr. Allen, stiffly. "I hope you get your bonds back, that's all."

"So do I," added Hardwick. "I don't want the least shadow hanging over my name."

Mr. Sumner began to walk up and down the office uneasily. He was in a terrible state of mind. The loss of the bonds might mean utter ruin.

He hesitated and looked at Hal. The youth noticed it, and springing forward, caught him by the arm.

"Mr. Sumner, tell me you do not believe me guilty," he cried, with a curious lump rising in his throat.

"Hal, I believe you innocent," returned the elderly broker.

In after years the man looked back at those words. What had led him to utter them? Let the reader wait, and perhaps he will be able to reason the matter out.

Mr. Allen sneered at the words, and Hardwick's lip curled.

The youth noticed neither of them. The tears stood in his eyes, as he replied:

"Thank you for saying that, Mr. Sumner," he returned, in a low voice. "I may be nothing but a poor-house boy, but I am honest, and will help you get back your bonds, and prove my innocence to the world."

Again Mr. Allen's sneer was heard, and Hardwick's lip curled, even more than before. Neither Mr. Sumner nor Hal paid any attention to either of them. The broker stepped to the telephone.

"Who are you going to summon?" asked Mr. Allen.

"The chief of the police department."

"That's right."

The proper connection was obtained, and a long conversation ensued over the wires. At length Mr. Sumner closed the instrument.

"A couple of detectives will be here in ten minutes," he said. "The chief says they are now with him and have nothing on hand to do."

Hal listened to this statement with interest. He had often heard of detectives, but had never seen such a personage.

Mr. Sumner continued to walk up and down. Hal watched him, the youth's heart beating rapidly.

The clock hands moved slowly, but at last twelve minutes had passed.

Then two young men entered. They were very ordinary looking individuals, and Hal was somewhat disappointed in their appearance.

"We were sent here by the chief," explained one as he entered. "My name is Harry Parker. This is Ralph Hamington."

"I am glad to see you," replied Mr. Sumner.

"You have been robbed?" questioned Harry Parker, coming at once to the point.

"Yes. A tin box, containing seventy-nine thousand dollars' worth of railroad bonds, has been stolen from that safe."

Both detectives elevated their eyebrows at this statement.

"Was the safe broken open?" continued Parker.

"No."

"Door left open?"

"I think not."

"When did you see the box last?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"What time?"

"A little before two."

"You locked it up at that time?"

"I am under that impression."

"I see. When did you discover your loss?"

"Not over half an hour ago."

"Did any one beside yourself have the combination of the safe?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"No one in the office?"

"I know nothing of it," replied Allen.

"Who are you?"

"Caleb Allen, Mr. Sumner's partner."

"Oh!"

"Neither do I," added Hardwick. "I am the book-keeper," he explained.

"Who is this boy?"

"He belongs in the office," replied Mr. Sumner.

"I know nothing about the safe," said Hal, speaking up for himself. He began to believe detectives were very much like other men.

"Please give me a list of the people who might have got at the safe during your absence," continued Parker, while his companion prepared to write down the names.

"These gentlemen," began the elderly broker.

"Yes."

"The janitor of the building."

"What is his name?"

"Daniel McCabe."

Hal started and wondered if the janitor could be any relation to Jack McCabe, his acquaintance of the previous day.

"Go on," continued the detective.

"A strange man was in yesterday."

"Ah! tell us of him."

Mr. Sumner told what he knew. Parker turned to Hal.

"Would you know this fellow again, if you saw him?" he asked.

"I believe I would."

"Please describe him as closely as you can."

The youth started and gave a pretty accurate description of his visitor. Both detectives listened attentively.

"Perhaps it was Larkett," suggested Hamington, in an undertone.

"Did the fellow have a cast in his eye?" asked Parker.

"How would the boy know that?" asked Hardwick, nervously. "He says he hardly glanced at the man."

"Answer me," said Parker, paying no attention to the interruption.

Hal was doing his best to think. Had that fellow really had something the matter with his left eye?

"I—I can't really say," he returned, slowly. "Was it the left eye?"

"Yes."

"He might have had. It runs in my mind so, but I am not positive."

Parker exchanged glances with his companion.

"More than likely he was the guilty party," he said to Mr. Sumner. "If he is the man we imagine, he is an old offender, and it will not be a very difficult matter to run him down."

"If you recover the bonds I will give you five thousand dollars as a reward," said the elderly broker.

"We will do what we can, Mr. Sumner."

"The quicker you get to work the better it will suit me."

"We shall start on our hunt at once, eh, Hamington?"

"Certainly. But let us take a look around the office first. And, Mr. Sumner?"

"Well?"

"It might be just as well to keep this matter a secret for a few days. Of course, information will be sent out from headquarters, but the general public need not know of it."

"That will suit me," returned the elderly broker, with a groan. "If the word gets out it will all but ruin me. I only held the bonds in trust, and will be expected to make the loss good in case they are not recovered."

"You will give us a list of the paper?"

"Certainly." Mr. Sumner took out a memorandum book. "Here you are. Anything else?"

"We will take a look around the premises."

And the two detectives started on a tour of investigation, in which Hal took a lively interest.

The door to the safe was carefully examined. Not a mark was found upon it.

"Either left open or opened by some one who had the combination," said Parker.

He got down on his knees and examined the carpet.

"Anything?" asked Hamington, briefly.

Parker shook his head.

In the rear of the office was a window opening upon a narrow court. The two detectives glanced at the fastening of the window.

Suddenly Parker gave a cry.

"This fastening was forced not long ago."

"How do you know?" asked Mr. Sumner, while Hal pricked up his ears.

"Here are the marks made by a knife blade. They are quite fresh."



"Here are the marks of foot-prints upon the window-sill," added Hamington. "See, they lead toward that door yonder. Where does that door lead to?"

"An alley-way," replied Mr. Allen.

"Opening on the next street?"

"Yes."

"Then these marks add a new feature to the case," said Parker. "Has anybody been through the window to your knowledge?"

Every one shook his head.

"Queer," said Mr. Sumner. "If the thief came through the window how did he know the combination of the safe?"

"I have it," said Hamington. "You often opened the safe during the daytime, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then the would-be thief watched you from the window. By looking from the left side he could easily see you work the combination without being seen himself. He watched you until he was sure he had the combination down fine, and last night he opened the window, stepped inside, opened the safe and took out the tin box, closed the door again, and escaped as he had come."



## CHAPTER VI.

### A BLOW IN THE DARK.

Was Hamington's explanation the correct one?

"By Jove! I believe that's the straight of it!" exclaimed Hardwick.

"So do I," said Mr. Allen. "It is the only way to account for the marks on the window-frame and the sash."

Mr. Sumner said nothing. Indeed, to tell the truth, his loss had set his mind in a whirl.

Parker turned to Hal.

"Did you open the office this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You opened the window when you cleaned up?"

"Yes."

"Was it locked?"

Hal tried to think.

"I believe it was."

"You are not sure?"

"No, sir."

"He ought to be," broke in Mr. Allen. "I would know, if I was in his place."

"See, if you cannot think, Hal," said Mr. Sumner.

"If anything, I think the window was locked," said the youth, candidly.

"You do?" said Parker.

"Yes, for I believe I had some trouble to unfasten it."

The two detectives looked at each other.

"If that is so, it alters the case," said Hamington. "But I believe the boy is mistaken."

"So do I," added Hardwick, promptly.

Parker opened the window again, and leaping out, made his way to the alley. Hamington went after him. Then several customers came in, and Mr. Allen and Hardwick went forward to wait upon them.

It was a quarter of an hour before the detectives came back, and then they had very little to say, excepting that they would report the particulars at headquarters and endeavor to run down the criminal.

Mr. Sumner was broken down by his loss. He sat in his private office nearly all of the remainder of the day, his head resting in his hands. Mr. Allen went off on business, and Hardwick stuck to his books as if his life depended on it.

Hal resumed his duties with a heavy weight on his heart. For some reason he had expected to be discharged, but nothing was said about his leaving.

Hardwick scowled at the youth every time their eyes met, and kept piling the work upon Hal. The book-keeper was nervous, and the youth did not fail to notice this, and it set him to thinking.

If only he had listened more attentively to what had been said on the ferry-boat that night! Hal was sure if he had done this he would have known if Hardwick and Allen were guilty or not.

Then Hal began to speculate on the foot-marks on the window-sill. If the thief had entered the office that way, why were not some of the same marks visible on the carpet in front of the safe?

When Hardwick went out to lunch, Hal watched him from the office window. At the corner he saw the book-keeper joined by Dick Ferris, and the two seemed to be in earnest conversation as they walked along.

When Hardwick came back Hal was given a half hour. The boy put on his hat and coat and went out. He did not feel like eating, and he walked up to the corner and around to the back street, intending to pay a visit to the alley through

which the robber was supposed to have escaped.

Just as he was about to turn into the narrow place, now piled high with snow, somebody caught him by the shoulder. Turning, he found himself confronted by Dick Ferris.

"Hullo, there!" said the tall boy.

"How are you?" returned Hal coldly.

"I hear you've got my place," went on Ferris.

"What if I have?" asked Hal, abruptly.

"I thought you were hanging around trying to do me out of it."

"I didn't try to do you out of it. Mr. Sumner asked me to call at his office and I went. Then he offered me the place and I took it."

"Did he know you?"

"May I ask what business that is of yours?"

"Shut up, you little street tramp, you!" retorted Ferris. "Do you know what I've a good mind to do?"

"I must admit I do not."

"Give you a mighty good thrashing."

"Two can play at that game," replied Hal, with a nervous little laugh.

"What, do you mean to say you can stand up against me?" demanded Ferris. "Maybe you don't know I am an athlete."

"And perhaps you are not aware that I am perfectly able to take care of myself," returned Hal.

"Take that!" cried Ferris.

He hauled off and aimed a wicked blow at the youth's nose. Had it struck Hal it would have injured him considerably.

But the youth dodged; and the next instant Dick Ferris received a crack fairly between the eyes that made him see stars, and caused him to stagger up against

the side of a building.

"What—what——" he gasped.

"That for attacking me," replied Hal. "Don't you try any such game again."

"I'll fix you!" roared Ferris. He was boiling with rage. "You miserable street cur!"

He sprang at Hal and caught him by both arms, intending to trip the youth up.

But Hal stood his ground, and by a sudden twist freed himself.

"Let me alone, Ferris," he commanded.

"Oh, of course I will!" replied the tall boy, sarcastically.

"If you don't, you'll regret it."

"Will I? Take that, and that!"

Ferris struck out twice. Hal parried the first blow, but the second just grazed his lip, causing that member to bleed slightly.

"Told you I'd fix you!" roared Ferris.

He had hardly spoken the words before Hal pulled himself together and went at him. The youth's arms shot out right and left, and before he was aware of what was taking place, Ferris received a stinging blow on the forehead, and then came one on the chin that sent him rolling over in the snow.

"Dat's right, give it ter him!" shouted a newsboy who stood by, grinning from ear to ear. "Do him up in one round!"

Ferris got upon his feet slowly. His head felt dizzy from the shock he had received.

"Want any more?" demanded Hal, facing him with clenched fists.

"Cheese it! here comes der cops!" put in the newsboy.

Hal looked up, and saw a policeman bearing toward the spot. Ferris also gave a glance, and he muttered something under his breath.

"What did you say?" demanded Hal.

"I'll settle with you another time," replied Ferris.

And picking up his hat, which had landed in a near-by drift, he placed it on his head, and sneaked down the street at a rapid gait.

In a minute the policeman arrived at the spot.

"What is the trouble here?" he demanded.

"A fellow attacked me," replied Hal.

"I see your lip's cut. Why did he do it?"

"I got a job he used to have, and he's angry over it."

"Oh!" The policeman tossed his head. "Did you hit back?"

"I defended myself," replied Hal, briefly.

He was half afraid he might be called on to make some sort of a charge, a thing he did not wish to do now the encounter was over.

"He did der feller fer keeps!" put in the newsboy.

"Go on with you!" cried the policeman, and the newsboy ran off, while Hal started on his way back to the office.

"What's the matter with your lip?" inquired Hardwick, as the youth entered.

"I cut it," replied Hal.

The book-keeper turned and smiled to himself.

"I guess Ferris kept his word," he muttered. "He said he was going to fix the boy. I wish he had killed the tramp."

That afternoon dragged heavily, but at last it was time to close up. Mr. Sumner hardly spoke to either when they bade him good-evening.

Hardwick walked up Wall Street, and then turned into Nassau, instead of continuing to Broadway.

Suddenly an idea entered Hal's head to follow Hardwick.

Despite all the evidence pointing in other directions, the youth thought Hardwick

either guilty of the robbery or else that the book-keeper knew much concerning it.

Hardwick continued up Nassau Street until he reached Park Row.

Hal kept out of sight behind the man, and presently Hardwick continued up Park Row until he came to one of the side streets just beyond the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge.

He turned into this street, piled high on either side with dirty snow, and then entered one of the worst thoroughfares in New York City.

By this time it was quite dark, and Hal had to keep close, for fear of losing sight of his man. He was now thoroughly interested, for he knew Hardwick boarded somewhere uptown, and it must be some special business that would bring the book-keeper to this part of the city on such a disagreeable evening.

At length Hardwick paused and glanced behind him. As soon as he saw the movement the boy stepped behind a bill-board out of sight.

Presently Hardwick continued on his way, walking faster than ever. The youth increased his speed.

"Hi! look sharp there!"

Hal was just about to cross a street when he almost ran into a heavy truck. He stepped back, and allowed the truck to pass. When he reached the opposite curb Hardwick had disappeared.

"He must have gone on straight ahead," thought the youth. "I will soon catch up to him again."

But though he continued onward for more than a block, he saw nothing of the book-keeper.

He looked up and down the side streets, and tried to peep into the curtained windows of several saloons that were close at hand.

"He must have gone in somewhere, that's certain," said Hal to himself. "I wonder if he discovered that I was following him?"

This last thought disturbed the youth not a little. His experience with Hardwick in the office had convinced him that the book-keeper was an evil man when

aroused.

Slowly he retraced his steps, not certain if he could find his way back to Park Row, a spot he had got to know fairly well since his coming to the metropolis.

He was just passing a place where a new building was in the course of construction when a peculiar noise to one side of him attracted his attention. By instinct he jumped toward the gutter. The next instant a mass of bricks came tumbling down. One struck him on the head, and this knocked him insensible.





## CHAPTER VII.

### HAL DETERMINES TO INVESTIGATE.

When Hal came to his senses he found himself in the arms of a boy slightly taller than himself, who was doing all in his power to restore consciousness by the application of snow to Hal's forehead.

"What—what——" he began.

"Good! yer come around at last, have yer?" cried the boy. "Blessed if I didn't think yer was a goner."

Hal put his hand up to his head.

"Where am I?" he asked, faintly.

"Yer all right; don't worry," replied the tall boy. "Don't yer remember me?"

Hal pulled himself together, and looked at the speaker.

"Jack McCabe!" he cried.

"Yer struck it fust clip. Say, wot was der matter wid yer? Yer couldn't have been froze, coz it wasn't cold enough."

"I was struck on the head."

"Gee crickety! Who struck yer?"

"I—I—nobody, I think. It was some bricks from that building."

"Oh, dat's it. How do yer feel now?"

"Awfully light-headed," responded Hal, telling the exact truth.

"Kin yer walk about a block? I only live jest around dat corner."

Hal started at these words.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, is your father janitor of a building down in Wall Street?"

"O' course not. Didn't I tell yer we lived here?"

Hal looked relieved.

"What has that got to do with it?" he asked, curiously.

"Why, dem janitors all lives in der buildin's da takes care of," explained Jack.

"The reason I ask is because there is a Daniel McCabe janitor of the building I work in."

"I t'ink dat's me uncle. Better now?"

Hal took a deep breath and straightened up.

"Yes, a good deal better."

"Yer got a lump on yer forehead as big as an egg."

"It feels twice that size to me," laughed Hal. "Jack, you have done me a good turn I won't forget in a hurry."

The street boy blushed.

"Ah! go on, dat wasn't nuthin'," he replied. "I kinder like you, tell der truth."

"And I like you, Jack," replied Hal, giving his hand a tight squeeze.

"Did yer git dat job?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"What do you mean?"

"Wot do da pay yer!"

"Seven dollars a week."

Jack McCabe's eyes opened like saucers.

"Yer foolin'."

"It's true, Jack."

"Gee crickety! but yer struck a snap. Say, if dere's enny more o' dem jobs layin' around put in a word fer me, will yer."

"I certainly shall," replied Hal.

"I only git t'ree dollars where I am, an' have ter work like a horse. I've jest been home ter grub, an' now I've got ter go back an' work till nine o'clock."

"Then don't let me keep you," returned Hal, "or you may be late."

"I've got ten minutes yet."

"By the way, how long were you with me before I came to?"

"About ten minutes. I dragged yer inter der buildin', an' I was jest gittin' ready ter call der cop an' have yer tuk to der hospital when yer give a gulp an' opened yer eyes."

"While you were sitting here did you notice anybody leave the building?"

Jack scratched his head.

"I t'ink I did."

"What kind of a person was it?"

"A man."

"Heavy sort of a chap?"

"I t'ink he was. I didn't pay much attention ter him on account o' havin' you on my hands."

"Where did the man come from?"

"Der back o' der building."

"You didn't notice which way he went?"

"Up toward der East River."

"That way?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Don't let me keep you any longer. Maybe I'll be up to see you soon."

"Glad ter have yer, 'specially if ye git dat seven dollar job fer me."

And with a broad laugh Jack McCabe hurried on.

Hal turned into the building, and walked toward the rear. A ladder stood lashed to the back wall. The youth hesitated, and then mounted to the floor above.

A near-by electric light cast its rays full into the open front. Over the beams were placed a number of loose boards, and on these the snow, which had been swept in by the wind, lay to the depth of several inches.

Taking care that he should not slip through an opening, Hal examined the surface of the snow with great care.

It was not long before he came to a number of foot-prints leading to a pile of bricks close to the front.

The foot-prints was fresh, and looked as if they had been made by a man's boot.

The last of them were at a spot that commanded a good view of the sidewalk below. Hal looked down, and then shuddered.

Was it possible that Hardwick had pushed those bricks down upon him?

"It looked so," murmured Hal to himself. "I must be more cautious in the future. He must have seen me when I started to hide behind the bill-board."

Hal descended the ladder, and was soon upon the street once more.

He thought over the situation, and then started for his boarding-house, satisfied that it would do no good to search farther for the book-keeper that night.

As has been mentioned, the boarding-house was up in Tenth Street. Hal soon walked the distance, and, getting out his night-key, he let himself in.

He was about to ascend to his room, and wash up a bit before going to supper, when the sounds of voices broke upon his ear, coming from the parlor.

"And he has your place, Dick?" he heard Mrs. Ricket, the boarding mistress say.

"Yes, he has, Aunt Amanda," returned the voice of Dick Ferris.

"It's too bad."

"How did you come to allow the tramp in the house?"

"He paid in advance, Dick, and he appeared to be a very nice young fellow."

"Nice!"

"Yes. What is wrong about him?"

"He was brought up in a poor-house."

"Who said so?"

"Never mind, I know it for a fact."

"Well, even that wouldn't make him a bad boy."

"But you don't want any tramps around here, do you?"

"He isn't a tramp so long as he works and pays his board."

"You say he paid in advance?"

"Yes, for one week. He said he would pay two, if I wished it."

"Then you can make sure there is something wrong about him. Better look out for your silverware."

Mrs. Ricket laughed.

"A robber would never make much out of what little I possess, Dick," she replied.

"Still, you wouldn't want to lose it."

"I'll trust Carson."

"Well, have your own way. He's a tramp, and I don't want anything to do with him."

"What makes you so down on him?"

"Didn't I tell you he took my place away from me?"

"How could he do that? I am sure Mr. Sumner would have kept you at work, if you had done right."

"Didn't I do right?" blustered Dick Ferris.

"Hardly."

"What was wrong?"

"You wouldn't get up the day before yesterday, although I called you twice."

"Well, I was to a sparring match the night before, and I was tired out."

"You should have stayed at home, Dick."

"Huh! you don't want a fellow to have any fun!" growled the boy.

"Oh, yes I do, but not the kind that is going to lose you your place. What do you intend to do, now?"

"Oh, I'll find something else to do," replied Ferris, in a careless fashion.

"I cannot support you in idleness, even if you are my dead sister's son," went on Mrs. Ricket. "You haven't paid me any board now in eight weeks."

"Only six, Aunt Amanda."

"No, it is eight. I have it on my account book. I don't see why you let it run, it is so little, only three dollars a week. That Carson pays me five, and he has not so good a room."

"There goes that Carson again," stormed Dick Ferris. "I don't want to hear a word more. He's a tramp and a thief and you'll be sorry you took him in before a great while."

With this speech on his lips, Dick Ferris walked across the parlor, threw open the door—and confronted Hal.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### FELIX HARDWICK IS ASTONISHED.

Dick Ferris started back on catching sight of Hal, who stood on the bottom step of the stairs.

"You!"

"Yes, Dick Ferris," returned Hal, coolly. "And let me say that I overheard your conversation with Mrs. Ricket, your aunt."

Ferris changed color.

"Been playing the spy, eh?" he sneered.

"No; I just came in and overheard you speaking about me, and stopped to learn what you would have to say."

"It's the same thing——"

"I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Carson," broke in Mrs. Ricket, who was blushing furiously. "I—I don't approve of what Dick said."

"I know you do not, Mrs. Ricket. If I thought you did I would pack up and leave at once."

"It would be a good job done," put in Ferris.

"Stop, Dick. I will not have you insult one of my boarders," cried the woman, sharply.

"All right, have your own way," returned Ferris, insolently. "If you want to take in any tramp that comes along, why, go ahead and do it."

He had on his hat and coat, and now he started for the door.

Hal caught him by the arm.

"Stop!" he cried. "I am not a tramp, and I won't be called one by you or anybody else!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"If you insist in indulging in such language in the future I will give you even a worse whipping than I gave you this noon."

"What, did you fight?" cried Mrs. Ricket.

"He attacked me and I defended myself," replied Hal. "He is down on me for taking the situation from which he was discharged."

"I know that."

"If I had known he was boarding here I would not have applied to you——"

"You bet he wouldn't," put in Ferris.

"Not that I am afraid of your nephew," went on Hal. "But I do not wish to cause any trouble."

"You have caused no trouble, Mr. Carson," returned Mrs. Ricket.

"That's what I call cool," exclaimed her nephew.

"It is Dick is the cause of it all. You know you are, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she added, turning to the boy.

"That's right, go right against me; you always do," howled Dick Ferris, "There ain't no use for me to stay here any longer."

And he marched out of the front door, and down the street to his favorite hanging-out place, the corner pool-room.

Mrs. Ricket was profuse in her apologies to Hal after Ferris had gone.

"He's a good enough boy," she said. "But he has got into bad company, and I can't do anything with him."

"Aren't his parents living?" asked Hal.

"Only his father, and he is a sea captain and ain't home more than three or four times a year. I wish he would take Dick along with him some time, it might do



him good."

"So it might," replied Hal. "By the way, Mrs. Ricket, do you know a man by the name of Hardwick?"

"The book-keeper for the firm where Dick used to work?"

"Yes."

"I saw him once, when he was here to see Dick."

"Oh, did he come here?"

"Yes, about a week ago."

"He came to see your nephew, did he?"

"Yes. Dick took him up to his room, and the gentleman stayed about an hour or more."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"On East Twenty-third Street, near Third Avenue."

"The Third Avenue elevated runs close to it, then?"

"Yes. Why do you want to know?"

"I may have to go up on business sometime. I didn't care to ask your nephew for the directions."

"I see."

Mrs. Ricket passed to the rear of the hall, and Hal continued on his to his room.

"So the two are friends," he said to himself, as he was washing himself and combing his hair. "And both of them are my enemies. This is getting interesting, to say the least." He paused for a second. "I have half a mind to do it. It won't do any harm. I will."

He hurried down to supper, which was being served in the basement, and as soon as it was over, donned his coat and cap once more and made his way over to Third Avenue.

An elevated train was just entering the station, and, paying his nickel, he

dropped his ticket in the box, and rushed aboard.

The Fourteenth and Eighteenth Street stations were soon passed. Then came Twenty-third Street, and here Hal alighted.

It had begun to snow again, and the youth was compelled to pull his coat-collar well up around his ears, and his cap far down over his eyes, to protect himself from the elements.

He walked down East Twenty-third Street slowly, scanning the buildings closely as he passed. It was now about half-past eight o'clock, and he knew it would probably be some time before Hardwick would make his appearance.

Having walked several blocks, Hal retraced his steps, and then took up a position in a sheltering door-way.

He had hardly done so before a well-known form passed by.

"Dick Ferris!" cried Hal to himself. "What can he be doing here?"

There could be but one answer to that question. Ferris must have come to see Hardwick.

He kept his eye on the tall boy, and as soon as Ferris was a short distance ahead Hal left the door-way and followed him.

Ferris walked along for the space of two blocks. Then he came to an elegant brown-stone front mansion, the parlor of which was brilliantly illuminated.

Ascending the steps, he rang the bell, and the door was opened almost immediately.

Hal, who stood near the area-way below, heard him ask for Hardwick.

"Yes, sir, he just came in."

"May I see him?"

"Yes, sir. Please step into the parlor."

Ferris stepped inside, and the door was immediately closed.

Hal drew a deep breath. If only he could find out Ferris' mission. He felt certain the meeting between the book-keeper and the former office-boy was to be an

important one.

He looked at the windows. Every one of them were tightly closed.

"Too bad it isn't summer time," muttered Hal to himself.

On either side of the mansion were others, so there was no way to get to the rear, excepting through the door below, and this was tightly barred.

"I would like to know what a detective would do in a case of this kind," thought Hal. "I suppose he would find some way to effect an entrance."

He was just about to give up trying to form some plan, when the door opened and Hardwick and Ferris came out. Hal crouched near the foot of the steps, and the pair passed within three feet of him.

"It isn't safe to talk over private matters in a house like that," remarked Hardwick. "I know a place where we will be far more at liberty to discuss the thing I have in mind."

"Where is it?" asked Ferris.

"A private club-room just up the avenue."

"That will just suit me," replied Ferris.

The two passed on. Hal raised himself from his cramped position, and made after them.

Once around the corner of Sixth Avenue, Hardwick led the way into an open hall-way, lit up with a single gas-jet. The pair commenced to ascend the stairs, which had several sharp turns. Hal was not far behind.

"I'll find out what they are up to, if I die for it," he said, and clenched his hands.

Several sentences were spoken which the youth did not catch, and then came a cry from Hardwick.

"What is that you say?" he demanded. "You saw this Carson just before you left your aunt's house?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Why should it be!" asked Ferris.

Hardwick did not reply.

"I was right," thought Hal, with a shudder. "He threw those bricks on me, and thought I was either dead or next door to it. He is a thorough villain, and no mistake."

"Why shouldn't I see Carson at the house?" went on Ferris.

"Why—I thought he wasn't going home till late," stammered Hardwick.

"Did he say so?"

"I believe he said something about it. I didn't pay much attention." Hardwick was beginning to recover from his shock. "So you saw him?"

"Yes."

"You two don't get along very well, do you?"

"I'd like to thrash him," growled Ferris.

"Why?"

Hal did not hear the reply. The two passed into a room on the third floor, and the door was closed behind them.

For an instant the youth hesitated. Then he mounted to the door and applied his eye to the key-hole.

There was a brilliant light inside, but no one appeared to be present.

Having satisfied himself on this point, Hal tried the knob of the door.

It turned, and he pushed the door open cautiously. He knew he was treading on dangerous ground and was running a great risk. Yet a strange courage seemed to have come over him, and he was not one bit nervous.

Once inside the room, he saw that it was a club apartment. Papers were scattered over the table, and cards and other games rested on a side stand.

To the left was another door, having a curtain strung over it.

From beyond the curtain came the voices of Hardwick and Ferris, and Hal knew

they had seated themselves and were taking it easy.

Approaching the outer door he locked it.

"Now I cannot be surprised in that direction," he thought. "And if Hardwick or Ferris try to leave I can hide in the closet."

Having made these preparations against being discovered, Hal approached the curtain to listen to whatever might be said.

"You say you wish you could fix Carson?" he heard Hardwick say.

"I do," returned Ferris. "I hate him, and I would do almost anything to get square."

"Then I'll tell you of a little plan that you can work, Dick. I don't like the fellow myself, and it will delight me to see you get the best of him."

"How does the beggar do the office work?"

"I must say first class."

"Humph! It didn't suit me, Hardwick. If there hadn't been other money——"

"Hush!" cried the book-keeper, in alarm. "That matter must remain a secret, never to be mentioned."



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PLOT AGAINST HAL.

Hal Carson was sure that he had just missed a most important statement.

"I wish Ferris had finished what he intended to say," he thought.

He waited breathlessly for the two to go on.

"What makes you so scared?" asked Ferris. "Can anybody hear us here?"

"I think not. Still we want to be careful."

"Yes, but——"

"Not another word on that point, Dick." Hardwick's voice grew stern. "I am a man, while you are a boy, and I know what is best for both of us."

"Well, have your own way."

"I think it will be a wise plan for you to get Carson out of the way. He is altogether too smart a fellow to have around," continued the book-keeper.

"I don't think he looks very smart," sneered Ferris, who could not stand hearing Hal praised.

"He's smarter than you or most people think. That yarn about his being brought up in the poor-house may be true, but I have my doubts."

"Why?" asked Ferris, in high curiosity.

"I can't explain now." There was a brief pause. "Here, take a cigar. Those nasty cigarettes make me sick."

There was the striking of matches, and then another pause.

"Are you going to continue as book-keeper when Allen leaves?" asked Ferris.

"Certainly."

"I thought you were to go with Allen in his new venture."

"I will—later on."

"Has he made any definite plans yet?"

"No."

"The reason I asked is because I want you to put in a word for me."

Hardwick laughed.

"Dick, you are getting to be a pretty big boy."

"Didn't I do what you wished of me?" demanded Ferris.

"I must say you did."

"Then you ought to be willing——"

"All right, it shall be as you say."

At this instant came a heavy hand on the door-knob outside.

"Who's that?" cried Ferris.

"Must be Churchley or Wister," replied Hardwick.

As the door was locked, the person outside began to knock.

"I must have locked the door," added the book-keeper. "Wait till I open it."

As soon as the noise outside reached his ears, Hal made for the closet, which stood in one corner of the room. He found the door unlocked, and the interior empty, save for a broom and a duster and several similar things.

He entered the closet, transferring the key to the inside as he did so, and locked the door behind him.

A second later Hardwick entered from the inner room, and opened the door leading to the hall.

"Hullo, Churchley!" Hal heard him exclaim.

"How are you, Hardwick?" returned the new-comer. "Locked me out, did you?"

"I must have turned the key without thinking," replied the book-keeper.

"All alone?"

"No, there is a young fellow with me."

"Who?"

"Ferris."

"Don't know him."

"I just brought him around to show him the place, and have a quiet smoke. He is in the other room."

"Then don't let me disturb you," replied Churchley. "I just want to look over the news-papers and find out how that prize-fight over in Hoboken came off."

Hal heard the man drop into a seat by the table, and after a few more words concerning the prize-fight Churchley had mentioned, Hardwick rejoined Ferris in the other apartment.

"Who is it?" asked Ferris.

"A man named Churchley," replied Hardwick, in a low tone, so that he might not be overheard.

"One of the club members?"

"Yes."

"Will he overhear us?"

"I guess not. He is reading about the prize-fight, and when Churchley gets on to anything of that kind he gets completely absorbed."

"Then we can go on with our talk?"

"Yes, but not too loud."

"I want to know about this plan against Carson," said Ferris, in a whisper.

"Are you willing to go in against him?"

"Didn't I say I was?"



"But I mean seriously?"

Ferris changed color.

"Of course I don't want to kill him," he faltered.

"I understand. But you are willing to get him into serious trouble."

"I am."

"Then listen to me. Can you get into his room at your aunt's house?"

"I think I can."

"I mean without being seen."

"I have the whole run of the place."

"Then supposing somethings belonging to the others were found in Carson's trunk——"

"He has no trunk," interrupted Ferris.

"So much the better, for you can merely hide the stuff in among his things."

"Do you mean for me to take them?"

"Some of them."

"Some of them?" questioned Ferris.

"Yes, those from your aunt's boarders. At the same time I will give you several articles belonging to the office that you can place with the others. Is there any one of the boarders you know well?"

"I know Saunders pretty well."

"Then let Saunders lose most of the stuff, and put a flea in his ear to the effect that you think Carson is the guilty party. This will cause the fellow's room to be searched and the stuff will be found. You must be on hand to identify the office stuff; see?"

"I do."

"Carson will be arrested, and you will have your revenge."

"That's a boss plan!" exclaimed Ferris. "When will you furnish me with stuff from the office?"

"To-morrow noon, if you will meet me at the corner of Wall and Nassau."

"I'll be on hand. It made me sick the way my aunt stuck up for Carson. Of course, I wouldn't go into the thing, only I know the tramp's a bad egg," returned Ferris, trying to excuse his willingness to enter into such an outrageous plot.

"Of course he is a bad egg, and it is our duty to get him out of the way," replied Hardwick. "You will be on hand sure to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And when will you put the things in his room?"

"Sometime during the afternoon. That will bring matters to a head as soon as Saunders and the others get home."

"You must expose Carson while he is in his room, if possible."

"Oh, he'll be home with the rest."

"Then that's all right. Of course, there is no necessity to caution you to be careful."

"Wasn't I careful before?"

"Hush!"

"Then don't talk that way. Say, do you know these cigars are mighty strong?"

Hardwick laughed.

"That's because you are not used to them, Dick. Now, I generally smoke them twice as strong."

Just at this instant, the two heard Churchley jump to his feet.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"What's the matter with Churchley?" said Hardwick.

"He's talking to somebody," replied Ferris.

"Hullo! the door's locked," they heard Churchley continue.

"What's up, Churchley?" called out Hardwick, walking toward the other room.

"There is somebody in this closet," was the startling reply. "I heard a noise half a dozen times."



## **CHAPTER X.**

### **HAL IS ACCUSED.**

When Hal Carson locked himself into the closet of the club-room, he realized that he was in a perilous position.

Supposing somebody undertook to open the door? They might suppose it very strange to find the door locked, and think it necessary to open it, in which case he would be discovered in short order.

He remained perfectly quiet for a long while and heard Churchley admitted, and heard the man seat himself at the center table, and rustle the paper he was perusing.

Of the conversation carried on by Ferris and Hardwick, he heard nothing further, and he was, consequently, totally in the dark concerning the nefarious plot that had been formed to get him into serious trouble.

Ten minutes passed, and the youth began to wonder how long he would have to remain a self-made prisoner.

Then all became quiet in the room beyond, and he wondered if Churchley had not joined the two in the adjoining apartment.

He peered through the key-hole, but could see nothing but a portion of the wall opposite.

Growing bolder, he turned the key in the lock, and cautiously opened the door for the space of several inches. Looking out, he saw that Churchley still sat at the table, which was but a few feet away.

At that instant the man moved and gave a deep breath. Hal thought he intended to look around, and hastily closed the door once more.

The youth's movement was so quick that the door made a sharp sound as the catch clicked. This was followed by the sound made by the key in the lock as Hal once more imprisoned himself.

Hal almost held his breath as he heard Churchley jump up.

"Who's there?" called the man.

Hal made no reply.

Then Churchley came and tried the door.

"Hullo! the door's locked!"

At that moment Hardwick entered, followed by Ferris.

"Somebody in the closet?" cried Hardwick.

"There seems to be."

"Open the door."

"I can't. It's locked."

"Who is in there?" called the book-keeper.

Of course, Hal did not answer.

"Perhaps it was a rat," suggested Ferris.

"Might have been," grumbled Churchley. "I know there are plenty of them in the building, because I once ran across one in the hall-way."

"Where is the key?" asked Hardwick. "We'll soon find out."

"I don't know."

"It ought to be in the lock."

"Perhaps Jackson carted it off. He's an odd sort of a coon."

Hardwick looked around on the mantel and in several other places.

"It's gone."

He came over and shook the door.

"See if the key is on the inside of the lock," suggested Ferris.

At these words Hal put down his hand and felt to make sure that the key was

turned to one side.

"I can't see anything," said Hardwick, after an examination.

"Then Jackson must have put it in his pocket," said Churchley.

"Perhaps it was nothing but a rat after all," said Ferris.

"I have half a mind to run up and ask Jackson," said Hardwick. "He lives right on the floor above."

"Oh, don't bother!" returned Churchley. "If it's a rat you may be sure he has gone back to his hole long ago."

A little more conversation followed, to which Hal listened intently, and then the youth heard Hardwick and Ferris go out.

Churchley continued to read the papers, and during that time the youth hardly dared to move for fear the man might re-commence his investigation.

But at the end of the hour Churchley gave a yawn and arose. Then two more men entered the room, and the trio adjourned to the other apartment.

Making sure that the coast was clear this time, Hal unlocked the door and let himself out. Then he locked the door again, and threw the key under the table.

"That will tend to stop suspicion," he reasoned. "And I must be sharp in dealing with these rascals."

He tiptoed his way to the door leading to the hall-way, and was soon outside.

Hardwick and Ferris had gone long before, and below all looked deserted. It was still snowing heavily, and Hal made up his mind that the best thing he could do would be to return to his boarding-house.

He was soon on the elevated train and riding downtown.

Happening to glance toward the other end of the car in which he was seated, he saw Dick Ferris sitting in the corner, apparently absorbed in thought.

"I'm glad I spotted him," thought Hal. "I must take care he does not see me."

East Tenth Street was soon reached. In making for the house Hal crossed over the street, and ran ahead. By this means he managed to get inside and up to his

room before Dick Ferris put his key in the door.

To tell the truth, Hal did not sleep much that night. His mind seemed to be in a whirl. What was the plot Hardwick and Dick Ferris had hatched out against him?

He was up early on the following morning. At the breakfast table he had a pleasant word with Saunders, who was a clerk in a dry-goods store, and a pretty good sort of a fellow. Ferris did not appear, but this was not strange, as he had not been down early since his discharge from Sumner, Allen & Co.'s establishment.

Hal was the first to appear at the office in Wall Street. He opened up as usual, and after cleaning and dusting, began copying from the point at which he had left off on the previous day.

At quarter past nine Hardwick hurried in. The book-keeper's face was very red, but whether from the cold or from drink it was hard to determine.

Mr. Allen soon followed Hardwick, and the two entered into a low and earnest conversation in the rear. Hal did not dare to approach them, but he strained his ears to their utmost, and caught the words "he must be watched," and "the detectives will learn nothing," and these set him to thinking deeply.

Presently Mr. Sumner arrived. The elderly broker's face showed deep lines of care and anxiety. He had been up to the police headquarters to see if the detectives could give him any words of encouragement, but he had been disappointed.

"We shall have every one about your establishment watched, Mr. Sumner," the superintendent had said. "And I would advise you to go on with business as if nothing had happened."

And to this the elderly broker had agreed.

Hal watched Hardwick narrowly, and the book-keeper showed plainly that he did not appreciate the attention. Once he put his hand on Hal's arm and glared at him.

"What are you looking at me for?" he demanded, in a low tone, so that Mr. Sumner might not hear.

"Was I looking at you?" asked Hal, innocently.

"Yes, you were, and I don't like it."

Hal bowed, and turned away. Nevertheless, he still kept watch on the sly.

Presently, just before the time that Hardwick usually went out for lunch, he saw something which he thought rather odd, although of no great importance.

On a small shelf over one of the desks rested two new inkstands and several boxes of pens. Going to the desk, Hardwick pretended to be busy examining some papers. While thus engaged, Hal saw the book-keeper transfer the inkstands and the boxes of pens to his overcoat pocket.

"Now, what is he up to?" thought the youth.

Having transferred the articles to his clothes, Hardwick put down the papers and walked to where Mr. Sumner sat, busily engaged over his correspondence.

"Shall I go to lunch now, Mr. Sumner?" he asked.

The elderly broker glanced at the clock.

"Yes."

Hardwick at once went out, and presently Mr. Allen followed. Mr. Sumner continued to write for a minute, and then called Hal.

"You may mail these letters, and then get your lunch also," he said.

"Yes, sir," replied the youth.

Then he hesitated as he took up the letters.

"Well, what is it, Hal?" asked the broker.

"Nothing much, Mr. Sumner. I wished to ask you about those inkstands and the pens that were on the shelf over there."

"What of them? You may use whatever you find necessary."

"It isn't that, sir. I just saw Mr. Hardwick slip the things into his pocket."

"Indeed!" Mr. Sumner looked surprised. "Did he say what he intended to do with them?"

"No, sir."



"I will ask him when he comes in."

Hal hesitated.

"I wish you would not, Mr. Sumner," he said.

The elderly broker looked surprised.

"Why not?"

"Because I think Mr. Hardwick is hatching up some plot against me, and I wish to find out what it is."

"A plot?"

"Yes, sir. He is on friendly terms with Dick Ferris, your former office-boy, and both of them hate me."

"This is certainly news. I knew Hardwick did not like you because you suspected him, but I thought that had passed over."

"No, sir. He is down on me worse than ever, and I feel certain he is up to something to get me into trouble."

"And you think the inkstands and pens have something to do with the matter?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps he'll say I stole them."

"I can't think Hardwick so bad," mused Mr. Sumner. "Why, if he would do that, he would steal the tin box."

Hal said nothing to this. He preferred to discover more than he had before making any revelation.

"You saw them this morning, didn't you?" went on the youth.

"Yes, I got a pen only ten minutes ago."

"Then you know I didn't take them."

"Yes."

"And you will keep silent—that is, for the present?"

"If you wish it, Hal."

And Mr. Sumner turned away and heaved a sigh. It is terrible to have around you somebody you cannot trust.

Five minutes later Hal went out to lunch—a light affair, as the youth had spent ten cents more than intended in following Hardwick the previous evening, and he knew he must be sparing of his capital.

He was just about returning to the office, when, chancing to glance up the street, he saw Hardwick and Ferris just separating at the corner.

He entered the office, and a minute later Hardwick followed. Neither spoke, and but little was said all the afternoon, excepting such as pertained to the business on hand.

Although his thoughts were busy on other matters, Hal paid strict attention to his work, and Mr. Sumner was well pleased with all the youth did.

"A good, manly fellow," he muttered to himself. "He could never have had anything to do with the robbery of the bonds. I would rather suspect my own son were he still alive. But poor Howard is gone."

Sudden tears sprang into the broker's eyes, which he as suddenly brushed away, afraid that some customer might drop in and see his weakness.

Hal did not leave the office until after four o'clock, there being a number of things to be written up before he could go. Hardwick had gone an hour before, and Hal did not know in what direction.

There being nothing else to do, Hal proceeded leisurely up to his boarding-house, never dreaming of the surprise in store for him. The streets were filled with snow, and he enjoyed the jingle of the sleigh-bells and the bustle of metropolitan life around him. Several times he was strongly tempted to follow the newsboys and bootblacks into the street and catch a ride.

When he entered Mrs. Ricket's house he found Saunders and several others already there. Dick Ferris was in the group in the front parlor, and at a glance Hal saw that something unusual was going on.

He nodded pleasantly, and was about to pass up the stairs when Mrs. Ricket called him back.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Saunders' room has been robbed!" burst out the woman.

"What!" exclaimed Hal. "Was there much taken?"

"A pair of cuff-buttons, a gold watch-chain and my pocket-book with fourteen dollars in it," replied Saunders.

"It's too bad," sobbed Mrs. Ricket. "I would not have had that happen in my house for a hundred dollars. I wonder who could have done it?"

Suddenly Dick Ferris pulled Saunders aside, and whispered something into his ear.

The dry-goods clerk looked astonished.

"You don't mean it!" he gasped.

"I do," replied Ferris.

Saunders advanced toward Hal.

"Were you in my room this morning after I left?" he asked, sharply.

"Me?" returned Hal, with a start. "No."

"Dick says you were, and he thinks you are the thief," continued Saunders.



## CHAPTER XI.

### FOR AND AGAINST.

Saunders was excited or he would not have spoken so hastily or so bluntly.

Hal grew very pale, and clenched his hands.

"You say I entered Mr. Saunders' room?" he demanded, turning to Ferris.

"I do," replied the tall boy.

He had hardly spoken, when Hal strode over with such a determined air that Ferris was forced to beat a retreat until he backed up against a side table.

"You know you are saying what isn't so," said Hal, in a low voice. "And I want you to take it back."

"I—I am telling the truth," stammered Ferris.

"It is false. It is more likely that you entered Mr. Saunders' room yourself."

"When did you see Carson enter my room?" put in the dry-goods clerk.

"Just as I was getting ready to come down."

"Why didn't you speak of it before?" asked Mrs. Ricket.

"I thought he had gone in to see Tom."

"There is not a word of truth in what he says, and he knows it," said Hal, calmly.

"It is merely a scheme to get me into trouble because he does not like me."

"No scheme about it," blustered Ferris. "If I were you I'd search his room."

"If the stolen things are there, Ferris put them there," added Hal, quickly.

"Mean to say I'm a thief?" roared Ferris, turning red in the face.

"I do."

"Take care, or I'll give you a sound thrashing."

"Similar to the one you gave me the other day, I presume," replied Hal. "I am ready for you at any time."

"We don't want any fighting in the house," cried Mrs. Ricket. "This affair is bad enough without making it worse. Mr. Carson, do you object to me and Mr. Saunders going up to your room?"

"Not at all. Come on."

Hal led the way, followed by the others. Dick Ferris smiled darkly to himself as he came on behind.

"He'll find out he can't insult me for nothing," he muttered to himself.

The room reached, Hal threw open the door, and allowed Mrs. Ricket to pass him.

"You had better make the search," he said. "That will be fair all around."

"I will. Oh, what a trouble all this is." And crying softly to herself, the landlady began her investigation.

Nothing was found in the closet nor in the drawer of the table. Then Hal's meager possessions were hauled over, and still nothing came to light.

"Look in the bureau drawer," suggested Saunders, anxiously.

Mrs. Ricket did so. From the rear the woman brought forth a large flat box, rolled up in a newspaper.

The newspaper was cast aside, and the box opened. Out came a pair of cuff-buttons, a gold watch-chain, a flat pocket-book, two inkstands, and several boxes of pens.

The instant Hal saw the articles he understood the trick that had been practiced upon him.

Saunders gave a cry.

"Those are mine! Let me see if the money is safe." He opened the pocket-book. "Gone, every dollar of it!"

He turned upon Hal.

"Give me that fourteen dollars, or I will have you locked up at once!"

"Mr. Saunders, I never took these things," replied Hal, as calmly as he could.

"Yes, but——" the dry-goods clerk was so angry he could hardly speak.

"I know it looks black against me, but perhaps I can clear myself," went on the youth.

"Yes, you can," sneered Ferris. "Look here," he pointed to the inkstands and the pens. "Aunt Amanda, do you know who those things belong to?"

"Who?"

"They belong to Sumner, Allen & Co.," replied Ferris, triumphantly.

"You are sure?" asked Saunders.

"I am, unless Carson will stick out for it that the firm gave them to him," returned Ferris.

"Is that so?" questioned Mrs. Ricket.

"They were not given to me," replied Hal, promptly. "But I know who brought them into the house."

"Who?"

"Your nephew, Mrs. Ricket. I am sorry for you, but I am telling the truth."

"Dick a thief!"

"See here, do you know what you are saying?" blustered Ferris, taken aback by this statement.

"I do."

"I won't have you talking to me in this fashion."

"Then you had better own up to what you have done," replied Hal, calmly.

"How could I get the things?" demanded Ferris. "The firm knows they were there after I left."

"I know they do," returned Hal, significantly. "And they know more than that."

Dick Ferris grew almost white at these last words. He seemed about to say something in return, but suddenly changed his mind.

"Carson, this is a serious matter," said Saunders. "I hate to say much about it, but the stuff has been found here, and I don't see how I can do otherwise than look to you for that fourteen dollars."

"Mr. Saunders, I didn't take the things, and I don't know anything about your money."

"Easy enough to say, but——" and Saunders finished with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Of course, I can't prove what I say, but I can give you my word of honor that I am telling the truth."

"That's all very well, but it doesn't restore my money, which I can't afford to lose," replied Saunders, sharply.

Hal looked around in perplexity. What was he to do?

"I can't believe you guilty," said Mrs. Ricket. "But if you have the money you had better return it."

"Of course, he's got the money," put in Ferris, who had somewhat recovered from the effects of Hal's last words to him.

Hal picked up the newspaper which had been around the box and crumpled it nervously. Suddenly a peculiar look lit up his features.

"I guess I had better send for a policeman," said Saunders, after a moment of silence.

"Just wait a moment," said Hal.

"What for?"

"I wish to ask a few questions."

"Better see that he doesn't escape," suggested Ferris.

"Let that remark apply to Ferris as well as myself," said Hal.

Saunders walked to the door, and locked it, putting the key in his pocket.

"When did you miss your things?" asked Hal.

"About an hour ago."

"At five o'clock?"

"A little before. I got off early to visit my uncle in Nyack. But I can't go without my money."

"Were you home to dinner?"

"Yes."

"Did Dick Ferris come home?"

"No."

"When did your nephew come home?" asked Hal, turning to Mrs. Ricket.

"Don't answer him, aunt," cried Ferris. He was beginning to get alarmed again.

"What harm will it do?" questioned the woman. "If you are innocent, Dick, it won't matter."

"He wants to get me into trouble."

"Please answer my question," said Hal, decidedly.

"Dick came home about two o'clock."

"Has he been home ever since?"

"I believe so."

"Now, Mrs. Ricket, where were you all the afternoon?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

"I hope you don't suspect me!" cried the landlady, in alarm.

"No, I do not. But please answer me."

"After dinner I cleaned all the halls from top to bottom, and then saw to it that Katie cleaned the front stoop and the windows."



"Then you were in the halls and around the front door most of the time?"

"I was."

"Did I come in at any time during the afternoon?"

"I didn't see you?"

"Wouldn't you have seen me if I had?"

"I suppose I would," admitted the woman.

"What does all this talk amount to?" put in Ferris.

"Shut up!" cried Hal, sharply. "I am not addressing you."

He turned to Saunders.

"You hear what Mrs. Ricket says. I was not here to steal your things."

"Humph! They might have been stolen this morning!" exclaimed Ferris.

"Or last night," added Saunders. "The last I saw of the cuff-buttons was last night, and the pocket-book yesterday noon."

"I don't see how that can be possible," replied Hal, quietly.

"It's easy enough," exclaimed Ferris. "Just because I was home during the afternoon, and you were not, doesn't prove that you didn't take the things."

"No, that doesn't, but something else does," replied Hal.

"What?"

"This newspaper, which was wrapped around the box."

At these words Ferris grew white, and trembled from head to foot.

"What about the paper?" asked Saunders, curiously.

"It is an afternoon paper, dated to-day. It could not possibly have been put around the box before one o'clock this afternoon."



## CHAPTER XII.

### HAL IN A FEARFUL SITUATION.

Every one in the room was surprised at Hal Carson's unexpected statement.

"Let me see the paper!" cried Saunders.

Hal handed it over, and the dry-goods clerk scanned it eagerly.

"You are right," he muttered, and shook his head.

"That can't be the same paper that was around the box," put in Dick Ferris, very red in the face.

"It certainly is," replied Hal.

"Yes, I saw Carson pick it up from the spot where I threw it," returned Saunders. "This puts a new face on the matter," he added, with a sharp look at Ferris.

Mrs. Ricket also looked at her nephew.

"Dick, come here," she commanded.

"What do you want?" he demanded, doggedly.

"I want you to return Mr. Saunders' fourteen dollars."

"I haven't got it."

"I know better."

"What, Aunt Amanda, are you going back on me, too?" cried Ferris, in a pretended reproachful tone.

"I tried to believe all along against my better judgment that you were innocent," said the landlady. "But I can't believe it any longer, and when you try to throw the blame on somebody who is innocent, I've got to speak my mind." Mrs. Ricket's voice began to grow stern. "Give up the money, and ask Mr. Saunders to forgive you before he sends for a policeman and has you arrested."

This was a long speech for Mrs. Ricket, and she almost gasped for breath after she had finished.

Dick Ferris' face grew black as he listened to the words.

"You're a nice aunt to me!" he stormed. "Just wait till I tell dad about it when he comes home next time."

But now Saunders had the fellow by the collar.

"Which is it, the money or the station-house?" he asked, shortly.

Dick Ferris looked into the determined black eyes, and then his courage oozed away.

"Will you promise not to do anything, if I give you fourteen dollars?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then here you are." He brought forth his pocket-book, and took out a roll of bills. "I didn't take your money, but it's no fun to be hauled up."

"Why, Dick, where did you get so much money?" cried Mrs. Ricket, in amazement.

"I earned it," replied the fellow, coolly. "Here you are, Saunders. Now, unlock the door and let me out."

Saunders took the fourteen dollars, counted them over, and then did as requested. Without another word Ferris hurried out and down the stairs.

"I hope you are satisfied," said Hal, to the dry-goods clerk.

"I am sorry I suspected you," returned Saunders. "What a mean dog Ferris is."

"He is down on me because I am filling the position he was discharged from," explained Hal.

"Unless he takes a turn for the better I shall tell him to leave the house," cried Mrs. Ricket, trying to dry away her tears. "Ever since he came, two years ago, he has been a torment to me. I only keep him for my poor dead sister's sake."

"How about this stuff?" questioned Saunders, pointing to the inkstands and the boxes of pens.

"I shall return them to Sumner, Allen & Co."

"Queer how that boy got hold of those things," said Mrs. Ricket.

Hal pretended not to hear the remark, and a moment later Saunders and the landlady left the room.

"So that was the plot against me," muttered Hal, as he fixed up to go to supper. "I wonder what Hardwick will say when he hears how it turned out?"

The youth was compelled to smile to himself. The book-keeper would, no doubt, be very angry.

"It was lucky I looked at the newspaper," Hal went on. "It was that saved me, and nothing else. Ferris overreached himself. I wish I could gain such an important point in that bond matter. It would be a great feather in my cap to recover the tin box and its contents."

A little later Hal went down to supper. Ferris did not appear, and nothing was said about the recent happening upstairs.

"Please keep it quiet," whispered Mrs. Ricket to him, as he was about to leave the room. "It will only hurt my reputation to say anything."

The next morning, when Hal arrived at the office, he found Mr. Sumner already there. This was most unusual, and the youth could not help but show his surprise.

The elderly broker was pouring over the books, but as soon as Hal appeared he put them away.

Hal had the inkstands and the pens in his overcoat pocket, and he at once handed them over, much to Mr. Sumner's astonishment.

"Where did they come from?" he asked.

"I will explain later," replied Hal. "Please put them out of sight now, for Mr. Hardwick is coming, and I wish he wouldn't see them."

Mr. Sumner promptly swept the things into his desk, and began to write a letter.

When the book-keeper entered he was astonished to see Hal at work cleaning up. He had fully expected that the youth would be arrested for the robbery at Mrs. Ricket's, and that Hal was now in jail.

Then he looked back and saw Mr. Sumner at his desk, and his astonishment increased.

"Why, really, Mr. Sumner——" he began.

"I'm early this morning, eh?" returned the broker. "Well, I wanted to get this correspondence off my hands, and I seem to be able to do better work early in the morning."

"You are a hard worker," commented Hardwick, and that was all he said.

When Hal was dusting near the rear Mr. Sumner looked up to see that the book-keeper was not noticing, and then motioned to the youth.

"Don't say anything about my being at the books," whispered the broker, in a low tone.

Hal nodded; and then he went on as if nothing had been said. But the words set him to thinking deeply.

At the end of an hour Mr. Sumner arose.

"I am going out for a couple of hours," he said. "If Mr. Allen comes in tell him to let that Wabash matter rest until to-morrow."

"I will," replied Hardwick.

"You may continue on that copying, Carson," went on the broker. "Mr. Hardwick will direct you."

"Yes, sir," replied the youth.

Mr. Sumner quitted the place, and hurried up the street.

Dick Ferris stood on the opposite side near the corner. He then waved his hand to Hardwick.

The book-keeper at once put on his hat and coat, and went out. Hal did not see the man join Ferris.

Hal did his best to concentrate his thoughts upon his work, but found it almost impossible to do so.

A half-hour dragged by slowly.

Then the door burst open, and Hardwick rushed in. He was pale and terribly excited. Rushing up to Hal he caught the youth roughly by the arm.

"See here, I want to have a talk with you!" he cried.

"What about?" asked Hal, as coolly as he could.

"You know well enough, you miserable sneak!" hissed Hardwick. "Tell me at once all you know."

"Know about what?" asked Hal, trying to stand his ground.

Hardwick glared at him for an instant. He seemed to be in a fearful rage. Suddenly he caught Hal by the throat with one hand, and picked up a heavy brass-bound ruler with the other.

"Now, Carson, are you going to speak up or not?" he demanded.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### HAL SHOWS HIS METTLE.

Hal understood perfectly well that a crisis had come. Hardwick had him by the throat, and unless he acceded to the book-keeper's demand he would be in immediate danger of being choked to death.

"Let—let go of me," he gasped.

"Not until you do as I say," replied Hardwick. "I want you to understand that you can't get the best of me."

Hal tried to push Hardwick away, but the book-keeper made a pass at him with the heavy ruler.

"Keep quiet, if you value your head!" roared Hardwick.

"Let me go!"

"Not until you have told me what you mean by your doings."

"What doings?"

"Your doings up to Mrs. Ricket's."

"Who told you about what happened up there?"

"Never mind; I know all about it."

"Then Ferris saw you last night."

"No, he didn't."

"Or this morning."

"Shut up. You implicated me."

"Did Dick Ferris say I did?" asked Hal.

"Never mind who said so. I want to know what you mean by such work?"



Hal did not reply. He was trying to think. What was Ferris' object in telling Hardwick he had been mentioned in connection with the matter?

Clearly there could be but one reason. Ferris knew Hardwick already disliked Hal, and he wished to put the book-keeper against the youth, so as to get Hal into more difficulties.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Hardwick, giving Hal an extra squeeze on the throat.

"I do," gulped Hal. "Let—go—of me."

"Not until you have answered."

Hal commenced to struggle. Seeing this, Hardwick tried to strike him with the ruler, which, on account of its brass-bound edge, was an ugly weapon. The ruler came down twice, the second time cutting a gash on the youth's neck, from which the blood flowed copiously.

This last blow aroused all the lion in Hal's nature. As the reader knows, he was a well-built boy, and strong for his age. He gave a sudden wrench and broke away.

"Stand back!" he cried. "Don't you dare to touch me again!"

Hardwick glanced toward the door, to see that no one was coming.

"I'll show you!" he hissed, passionately.

He rushed at Hal again. The youth saw him coming, and, drawing back his arm, he planted a blow on Hardwick's nose that sent the blood spurting in all directions.

Hardwick was more surprised than hurt. Had that poor house chap dared to hit him? He turned first red and then white.

"I'll fix you!" he cried.

"Stand back, I tell you!" commanded Hal; he was getting excited himself.

But Hardwick would not stand back, and, as a consequence, he received a blow on the forehead that almost stunned him.

"You beggar, you've got muscle, haven't you?" he cried. "We'll try a different method with you."

He ran toward his desk, and opened it. An instant later Hal saw a revolver in his hand.

"Now we will see who is on top here," said Hardwick.

It would be useless to deny that Hal was frightened at the sight of the shining barrel. He backed several feet.

"I thought that would bring you to terms," said Hardwick. "Now, will you answer my question?"

"You will not dare to shoot me," returned the youth, as calmly as he could.

"Don't be too sure. I intend that you shall answer me."

Hal looked about him. He had backed toward the rear of the office. The window was unlocked. Could he leap through it?

Hardwick followed the youth's look and understood it.

"No, you don't," he said, and, moving toward the window, he locked it.

The only way that now remained to escape was by the street door. Hardwick placed himself in front of this.

"Give me the key to this door," he demanded.

The key hung on a nail close to where Hal was standing.

Instead of complying, Hal took down the key, and placed it in his pocket.

"Did you hear me?" went on the book-keeper.

"I did."

"You are playing with fire, young man."

"Am I?"

"You are. You think I haven't nerve enough to go ahead, but you'll find out your mistake. I'll give you just ten seconds in which to hand me that key."

Hal made no reply.

"Did you hear?"

"I did."

"Are you going to mind?"

"No."

Hardwick aimed the pistol at Hal's head. Whether or not he would have fired cannot be told, for at that instant the door opened, and Mr. Sumner stepped in.

"I forgot my——" he began, and then stopped short in amazement.

"Mr. Sumner!" cried Hal. "I am glad you have come."

"What is the meaning of this?" gasped the elderly broker.

He looked at Hardwick and then at the pistol.

The book-keeper dropped back, unable for the moment to say a word.

"He intended to shoot me," said Hal.

"That is a falsehood!" exclaimed Hardwick.

"It's the truth," retorted the youth.

"No such thing! The young tramp pulled this pistol, and I just snatched it away from him."

Hal was amazed at this deliberate falsehood. Mr. Sumner turned to him.

"Did you have that pistol first?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"I say he did," put in Hardwick.

"I never owned a pistol," added Hal.

"Then he must have stolen it," sneered Hardwick. "I tell you, Mr. Sumner, he is a bad egg, and he ought to be discharged."

"Perhaps," responded the elderly broker, dryly. "Just hand the weapon to me."

Hardwick did so, and Mr. Sumner examined it.

"Do you carry such a weapon?" he asked, shortly.

"No, sir."

"Don't own one, I presume?"

"I must say I do not."

"Humph! So you say Carson drew it on you?"

"He did."

"Mr. Sumner——" began Hal.

"Stop, Carson, until I get through with Mr. Hardwick. What was the cause of this quarrel?"

"The boy got impudent, and I threatened to report him and have him discharged."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. He is an unmannerly dog."

"I didn't think so when I hired him."

"He is, Mr. Sumner."

The elderly broker examined the pistol again.

"I wish you would explain one thing to me, Mr. Hardwick," he said slowly.

"What is that, sir?"

"It is this: If you do not own a pistol how does it happen that I saw this very weapon in your desk over a week ago?"

The book-keeper started back and changed color.

"What—what do you mean?" he faltered.

"Just what I say. About a week ago I had occasion to go to your desk for a certain paper, and I saw this very weapon lying in one corner."

"There—there must be some mistake."

"None, sir. This is your pistol, and I believe you pulled it upon this boy."

Hal's face beamed. The cloud that had gathered so suddenly seemed to be breaking away.

"Why should I draw it on the young cub?" growled Hardwick, not knowing exactly what to say.

"Because you have a spite against Carson, and you wish to get him into trouble. I used to think you a fair and square man, Hardwick, but I find I am mistaken."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### HAL EXPRESSED HIS OPINION.

The perspiration was standing out upon Mr. Sumner's forehead. He took out his handkerchief and mopped himself. Hardwick shot an angry glance at him.

"I don't see what you find so interesting in the boy," he muttered.

"I am interested in him because he saved my life."

"Saved your life?"

"Exactly. It is true that he came from the poor-house, but he is a young hero, and I will not have him imposed on, especially when he is doing his best to get along."

"Well, every one to his taste," returned Hardwick.

"I want none of your impudence," cried the broker. "You were not as much of a man as this boy when I took you in, eight years ago."

"Thanks," returned Hardwick, coolly. "Perhaps you would just as soon I would quit your service?"

"I would."

"Then I will quit on the first of the year."

"You will quit to-day, and without recommendations."

"Without recommendations!"

"Yes. Let me tell you something. All last evening and this morning early I spent the time examining your books. I find you have made false entries, how many I do not know, and that you are a defaulter in the sum of several thousands of dollars."

Hal was almost as much surprised at Mr. Sumner's statement as Hardwick.

"You—have—examined—the—books?" said the book-keeper, slowly.

"I have."

Hardwick breathed hard. It was a terrible blow Mr. Sumner had dealt him. He had supposed his little crooked actions in the office well hidden from prying eyes.

"You may have to prove what you say," he exclaimed, haughtily.

"I can easily do so," returned Mr. Sumner, coolly. "Shall I send for an officer to take charge of you in the meanwhile?"

At the mention of an officer, Hardwick grew white, and his lips trembled.

"N-no!" he cried. "There must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake whatever. Do you deny that you have appropriated the bank funds of the firm——"

"Mr. Allen gave me the right to——"

"Mr. Allen had no rights, as you are aware. Our partnership is a limited one, and I shall settle with Mr. Allen later."

"You can't hold me accountable for that money."

"I can, but I won't, for I imagine the greater part of it has been spent. How much have you in your pocket now?"

"Sir!"

"You heard my question; answer me."

"I will not! I'm no fool!"

"Very well. Hal, will you call a policeman?"

Hal started for the door. Hardwick caught him by the arm, and shoved him back.

"Stay here! There is my pocket-book."

"Hal, you may remain." Mr. Sumner took the pocket-book and counted the money in it. "A hundred and eighty dollars," he went on. "Have you any more with you?"

"No."

"Is that a genuine diamond you are wearing?"

"Yes."

"What is it worth?"

"It cost seventy-five dollars."

"Then listen to me; I have found out that you are a pretty high liver, Hardwick, and you have probably squandered nearly all of what you have stolen——"

"Look here, I——"

"Stop, or Hal shall go at once for the officer. Now, what I propose to do is this: I will keep this money and that pin and the one hundred and twenty-five dollars of salary coming to you and let the matter drop, so far as that crookedness in the books is concerned."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then Hal shall go for an officer, and you can stand trial."

Hardwick muttered something under his breath, not at all complimentary to his employer. He felt that he was in a tight place.

"There is no alternative?" he asked.

"None."

"And you will let this matter rest?"

"Yes. I wish to give you a chance to turn over a new leaf, if there is any turn over in you."

Hardwick hesitated for a moment.

"I accept," he said, doggedly.

"Very well, hand over the pin."

The diamond scarf pin was transferred to the broker's hand.

"Here is your pocket-book and ten dollars. I don't wish to see you go away without a cent."



"Keep the money; you might as well rob me of all of it," exclaimed Hardwick. He reached for his hat and coat. "You will rue this day, Horace Sumner; mark my word for it. And you, you young tramp!"—Hardwick turned to Hal—"I will get square, and don't you forget it."

He went out, slamming the door behind him. Hal watched him from the window, and saw him turn down Broad Street.

Mr. Sumner gave a long sigh.

"I am glad I am rid of that man," he said.

"So am I," responded Hal. "He is a worse villain than you think, Mr. Sumner."

The elderly broker smiled faintly.

"You still think him connected with the disappearance of the tin box, I suppose."

"I do."

"The police are almost certain they are on the right track of the criminal. I cannot give you the details, but the party is not Hardwick."

"The police don't know everything. Hardwick is thoroughly bad, and he is in league with Dick Ferris and Mr. Allen."

"You speak very positively, Hal."

"Because I know what I am speaking about, sir."

"You say Hardwick is in with Dick Ferris?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because they formed a plot to have me arrested. But that is not the worst of it. Hardwick made an attempt on my life because I followed him."

"Is it possible?" Mr. Sumner was now thoroughly interested. "Why did you not tell me of this before?"

"Because I wished to follow out the matter on my own hook, and, besides, I am almost a stranger to you, and you might think I was making up a yarn."

"No, Hal, I trust you thoroughly. I don't know why, but you have something about you that seems perfectly honest."

"Thank you." The youth was blushing. "I will never deceive you, Mr. Sumner, and you may depend on it."

"Tell me about this attempt on your life?" said the broker.

Standing by Mr. Sumner's desk, Hal related very nearly all that had occurred since his first appearance at the office. The broker listened with eager attention.

"You are right," he said, when Hal had concluded. "And apparently Ferris is as bad a villain as Hardwick. But how do you account for Mr. Allen being in with them?"

"On account of that conversation I overheard on the ferry-boat that night. They may try to explain it away as they please, I am convinced that they were talking of robbing your private safe."

"But Mr. Allen comes of very fine connections——" began the broker.

"That may be, but didn't you just say he didn't do just right?"

"So I did, and it is true. But that might be put down to a mere matter of sharp business practice, legally right if not morally so. But this other——"

And the elderly broker shook his head.

"If a man will cheat legally, I don't think he will stop at cheating any other way," replied Hal. "He may for a while, but his conscience soon gets blunted, and that's the end of it. You say the police think somebody else is guilty?"

"Yes."

"Do they think the thief came through the window?"

"Yes."

"That the man who came in while I was here had nothing to do with it?"

"That is their theory."

"But that doesn't explain one point."

"And what is that?"

"Why the marks on the window-sill, which are very plain and made by dirt and ashes, did not extend to the safe."

"Didn't they?"

"No."

"Humph! Who discovered that?"

"I did."

"When?"

"The day the two detectives were here."

"Did you say anything about it?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because, as I said before, I wished to sift the matter myself, if I could. I know I am nothing but a boy, but I intend to do all I can toward getting back your bonds."

"Well, you are smart, Hal, there is no denying that. What is your opinion of the marks?"

"I think they were only a blind."

"Put there to form a wrong impression?"

"Exactly, sir. That robbery was committed by somebody who came in through the office, and who knew the combination of the safe."

"Possibly. But that doesn't fasten the crime on Hardwick."

"It does not. But I look at it in this light. As one of the detectives said, it is possible that somebody stood outside of the rear window and saw you work the combination, but I doubt very much if they could learn the process in that way. There is a glare of light on the window that renders it very difficult to see at all."

"Yes, but——"

"Now wait a moment, please," Hal was growing enthusiastic. "Do you keep the

combination written down anywhere?"

"I do not. I gave it to my daughter, Laura, in case something happened to me, and I suppose she has it down, but I do not know."

"Then it isn't likely any one could get the combination unless they watched you?"

"I suppose not."

"Very well. Now, the only persons employed in the office were you, Mr. Allen, Hardwick, Ferris and myself. I know you and I are innocent. Now, who knew of the bonds being in the tin box?"

Mr. Sumner started.

"By Jove! I never thought of that!"

"Please answer me."

"We all knew of it."

"Did any outsider know?"

"I think not."

"Was the tin box locked?"

"Yes."

"After you placed the bonds in it no outsider heard of their being there?"

"Not unless the others told them."

"Which they would not likely do. Now, tell me, was anything else taken?"

"Not a thing."

"Not even placed out of position?"

"As far as I could see, no."

"Was there any trace of the tin box having been opened?"

Mr. Sumner shook his head.

"Doesn't it seem probable that if the thieves had not been certain of what was in the box they would have opened it, and if they were ordinary fellows that they would have taken something else of value?"

"Hal, you ought to be a detective!" cried the broker, in admiration of the body's logical reasoning.

"I tell you that robbery was committed by somebody who knew all about your private affairs, and was here to obtain the combination of your safe, and *that* somebody was either Hardwick, Mr. Allen, Ferris, or else the three of them."



## CHAPTER XV.

### HAL DEFENDS A GIRL.

Hal Carson's face glowed with earnestness as he spoke.

It was easy to see that he was fully convinced of the truth of what he had just said.

"It would seem as if you must be right," replied Mr. Sumner, after rather a long pause.

"You may depend on it I am, sir."

"But to think that of Allen!"

"Many a man in a high position has fallen before now. Did you ever inquire into his financial standing—that is, outside of your business relationships?"

"No."

"Then he may not be as well fixed as you think. Could he use the bonds, if he had them?"

"Yes. They were not registered, and there are several ways in which they might have been worked off."

"You are to dissolve partnership on New Year's Day, I believe?"

"Yes. I am not satisfied with the way matters are running, and I intend to run the place alone as I used to."

"Perhaps the dissolution may bring other matters to light, sir."

"Ha! I never thought of that."

"That is, if Mr. Allen doesn't wipe them out in the meantime."

Mr. Sumner jumped to his feet, and began to walk up and down nervously.

"I understand what you are driving at, Hal," he cried. "Where do you get such

keen wit? I never saw your equal in a boy."

"I don't know, sir, unless it may be because I take such a strong personal interest in the matter—a thing that most detectives do not."

"It must be that I must have the books investigated by an expert; I am too old to go over them myself and do the work as it ought to be done."

"I think that would be best, but I would not let Mr. Allen know of it."

"I will not."

"Not even if you find he has been robbing you."

"What!"

"No."

"But he ought to be arrested——"

"Not until you have your bonds back, Mr. Sumner."

"I see."

"If you arrest him that won't bring your bonds back. I have a plan to propose, if you will let me carry it out."

"What is it?"

"That while I nominally remain here as clerk and office-boy you allow me to watch him, as well as Hardwick and Dick Ferris."

"You may get into trouble. See how Hardwick threatened you and attacked you in the dark."

"I am not afraid, sir."

"I would not have you go on such a mission for me and get hurt for all the bonds on the street."

"I would be very careful, sir."

"Well, supposing I let you do that, what would you do first?"

"That will depend on circumstances. Where is Mr. Allen now?"

"Gone to Philadelphia on business."

"For the firm?"

"No, for himself."

"Then you are not sure if he has gone there or not?"

"I only know what he said."

"When do you expect him back?"

"Not until to-morrow."

"Will you tell me where he lives?"

"On Fifty-third Street. The number is on the card over there."

Hal took it down.

"Is there anything special to do just now?"

"I must have those papers written up that Hardwick was at work on. The books I can write up myself."

"Then, with your permission, I'll write up the papers and then begin my hunt."

"Very well. But mind and keep out of trouble."

Hal smiled, and turned at once to the desk. A strange feeling filled his breast. He was really going to turn detective—he, a country boy, and that, too, in New York.

"It sounds like the wildest kind of a romance," he thought to himself. "But it isn't; it's sober truth, and I may find it a mighty hard truth before I get through."

He fairly flew at the work, and by two o'clock it was finished. He handed it to Mr. Sumner.

"That is excellent," said the broker, glancing over the written pages. "And now I suppose you are ready to go?"

"If you are willing, sir."

"There is nothing more to be done to-day. To-morrow I shall get a first-class



book-keeper whom I happen to know, to take Hardwick's place."

In a minute more Hal was off. He knew not exactly in what direction to go, but thought he would cross Broadway and take the Sixth Avenue elevated cars to Fifty-third Street.

As he stepped on the sidewalk in front of Trinity Church, which stands at the beginning of Wall Street, he happened to glance up, and not far away saw Hardwick.

The ex-book-keeper was smoking a cigar and scowling. He did not see Hal, and the youth soon put himself where he was not likely to be seen.

Five minutes passed. Then Hardwick began to move slowly up Broadway, casting sharp glances to his right and left. Hal slowly followed, keeping several people between himself and the man he was shadowing.

At length Hardwick stopped at the corner of Cedar Street. Here he was joined by Dick Ferris, and the two at once began an animated conversation, which Hal managed to overhear.

"Got the bounce?" were the first words he heard. "Well, that's rich, Hardwick."

"I don't see the point," growled the ex-book-keeper. "I wish I had fixed the young tramp!"

"He seems to be worrying us pretty bad," said Ferris. "But, say, how about that money I was to have?"

"I can't give it to you now."

"Why not?"

"I haven't got it."

"Tell that to your grandmother!"

"It's a fact. Old Sumner made me fork over every cent I had about me."

"What for?"

"He claims I have been getting in on him."

"I'll bet he's right, too."

"Well, he isn't."

"No, of course not," returned Ferris, sarcastically. "A fellow who would——"

"Shut up, you monkey!" cried Hardwick, getting angry. "You know too much."

"Well, when am I to have that money?"

"To-morrow."

"Sure?"

"Yes. I'll get it for you."

"What will you do—bleed old Allen?"

"Never mind, I'll get it, and that's enough. By the way, I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Deliver a letter to Tommy Macklin. I have got an engagement to-night, and I want Tommy to get the letter before morning."

"All right. Hand it over. Where are you going now?"

"Home to get shaved and fixed up and have a nap. I was up all night, and I feel it."

"You're going it pretty strong."

"Don't preach, Dicky, my boy. For your age, I think you go it pretty well yourself."

Ferris laughed and stuffed the letter Hardwick handed him into his pocket. Then the two separated.

Hal pondered for a moment, and then concluded to follow Dick Ferris. Hardwick was going home, "I wish I knew what was in that letter," thought Hal, as he shadowed Ferris up Broadway to Park Row. "It may be something that has to do with the missing tin box."

Ferris passed the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, and then turned into a side street.

"I'll wager he's going to the same place Hardwick visited the other night," exclaimed Hal to himself.

With increased interest he followed Ferris, until the latter came to a narrow and dirty alley-way, piled high on one side with empty boxes and barrels.

Here a number of children were playing, some making snow-men and others coasting on home-made "bread-shovel" sleds.

Ferris tried to walk between them, and in doing so got directly in the way of a small sled upon which was seated a ragged girl not over ten years of age.

The sled brushed against Ferris' leg and angered him.

"What do you mean by doing that, you dirty thing?" he exclaimed. "Take that, and learn better manners."

He hauled off and struck the girl in the face. It was a heavy blow, and it caused her nose to bleed and her cheek to swell.

"You—you brute!" sobbed the girl.

"What's that?" howled Ferris. "A brute, am I? There's another for you!"

He stepped back to hit the girl again. But now there was a rush from the rear, and on the instant the bully found himself in the strong grasp of Hal Carson.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### HAL ON THE WATCH.

"Let up there, you brute!"

Dick Ferris looked around with a startled air.

When he caught sight of Hal his face fell, and he released the girl.

"What, you!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly. What do you mean by treating this girl so rudely?"

"You are following me," went on Ferris, ignoring the question which had been put to him.

"What if I am?"

"You think you're smart, don't you?" sneered Ferris.

"He's a mean, ugly thing!" put in the girl, between her sobs. "I wish he was arrested."

"Shut up!" roared Ferris, turning to her. "You ran into me on purpose."

"I didn't. We've got a right to coast in this alley; mamma said so."

"You ought to be arrested for striking the little girl," said Hal. "I am awfully glad I arrived in the nick of time to save her from more punishment."

"Good fer you, mister!" cried a small youth standing near. "Give him one in der eye!"

"Yes, do him up, mister," cried several others.

Ferris turned upon them like a savage animal.

"Get out of here, every one of you," he howled, "unless you want to be hammered to death."

"Don't you move," said Hal. "You evidently have more right here than he has."

"Indeed!" said Ferris, turning to Hal. "I wish you would keep your nose out of my affairs."

"Don't let him sass you, mister," put in one of the urchins. "He didn't have no cause ter hit Katie."

Ferris pounced upon the boy at once, and cuffed him right and left. In the midst of the castigation, however, Hal caught the bully by the arm, and a second later Dick Ferris measured his length in the gutter.

A shout went up from the boys and girls.

"Dat's der way ter do it!"

"Ain't der gent got muckle, dough?"

Then somebody threw a snow-ball, and in a trice the entire crowd were snow-balling Ferris as furiously as they could.

Hal looked on, and he was compelled to laugh. Then a sudden idea struck him. Like a flash he darted out of sight behind the pile of empty boxes and barrels.

Muttering something under his breath, Dick Ferris struggled to his feet. As soon as he did this the street children took to their legs, dragging their sleds after them. Ferris made after one or two of them, but was unable to effect a capture.

"Run off wid yerself!"

"We ain't got no use fer bullies!"

Spat!

A snow-ball took Ferris right in the ear, and caused him to utter a sharp cry of pain.

Then another took him in the face, and in trying to dodge he slipped and went into a snow-drift.

He was quickly on his feet, and this time ran after the crowd so fast that he caught one of the boys.

"Lemme go!" howled the youngster.

"Not much, you rat! Take that!"

Ferris struck the boy in the mouth, and the little fellow let out a yell.

Hal was just about to dart to his assistance when a policeman came along and touched Ferris on the shoulder.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded.

Ferris turned savagely, but his manner changed when he beheld the officer of the law.

"This chap is a rascal," he explained.

"In what way?"

"He fired a snow-ball at me and hit me in the ear."

"I didn't," howled the urchin. "It was anudder fellow wot fired dat snow-ball."

And he began to cry bitterly.

"It was only done in fun, I suppose," said the officer.

"Fun!" fumed Ferris. "Look at my clothes!"

The officer did so. Ferris was covered with snow and dirt, principally the latter.

"The snow-ball couldn't have done that," said the policeman.

He was in sympathy with the small boy, whom he knew as the son of one of his friends.

"I know. But this boy and a lot of his chums got to throwing at me, and in trying to dodge I went down."

The policeman paused for a moment, and then turned to the urchin.

"See here, bubby, if I let you go will you promise not to throw any more snow-balls?"

"Yes, sir," came in one breath, and very eagerly.

"Then run."

"What! ain't you going to arrest him?" cried Dick Ferris, in some excitement.

"I think not."

"But he ought to be."

"I fancy I know my own business best," was the short reply.

"But he is a little imp, and——"

"Better let it go. I dare say you throw snow-balls yourself once in a while."

And with this remark the policeman moved on.

"Well, that's a fine way to treat a fellow," muttered Ferris to himself. "I suppose that policeman would let the whole ward pounce on me without doing anything toward helping me. I wonder where that Hal Carson is?"

The tall youth brushed off his clothing hastily, and returned to the entrance to the alley. He looked around carefully, but Hal kept well hidden.

Dick Ferris was undecided what to do. Should he deliver the letter intrusted to him by Hardwick? He hesitated and then continued up the alley-way, upon which a number of dirty, dingy tenement houses were situated.

Arriving at the very last of these, he ascended the front stoop and knocked loudly upon the door. There was no reply, and while he was waiting for some one to answer his summons, Hal managed to skulk up behind the other buildings and approach within hearing distance.

At last Ferris got tired of waiting, and he tried the door. It was unlocked, and, pushing it open, the tall boy entered.

Hal waited for a moment, and then, mounting the stoop, peered in at the door, which Ferris had left partly open.

As the youth had surmised, the hall-way was quite dark. He heard Ferris mounting the rickety stairs, and like a shadow he followed, fairly holding his breath, lest some sound might betray his presence.

Ferris mounted almost to the top of the tenement, and then hammered on a door in the rear.

"Come!" cried a voice from inside, and Ferris entered.

No sooner was the door closed than Hal approached it and applied his eye to the

key-hole. He saw a small apartment, scantily furnished with a small cook-stove, a table, three chairs, and some kitchen utensils.

A man sat before the stove, smoking a short briar pipe. He was unshaved, but his face bore evidence of former gentility and manhood, in spite of the fact that it was now dissipated.

"Hullo, Ferris!" he exclaimed.

"How are you, Macklin?" returned the tall boy.

"Not very well, I can tell you," returned Macklin, removing his pipe and spitting into the stove. "I've got rheumatism, yer know."

"Rheumatism!" laughed Ferris. "More likely it's rumatism, Tommy."

"Don't give me any o' yer jokes, Ferris. Wot brings yer?"

"I've got a letter for you."

"From Hardwick?"

Ferris nodded.

"I thought I would hear from him before long. Hand it over."

Ferris did so. Macklin tore open the epistle and began to peruse it hastily. As he did so Ferris tried to glance over his shoulder.

"Here! none o' dat!" cried Macklin, savagely. "Wot's my business is my business."

He finished reading the letter and put it in his coat pocket. Then he pulled away on his pipe for a moment.

"Well?" said Ferris, by way of inquiry.

"Tell him it's all right if he doubles the figger."

"Makes the amount twice as large?"

"Dat's it. It's a ticklish piece o' business."

"What is the work, Macklin?" questioned Ferris, sitting down on the opposite side of the stove.



The man closed one eye.

"Hardwick knows," he replied, shortly.

"I know that," replied Ferris. "And I know something about this new deal, too."

"Wot do yer know?"

"Never mind. I know."

"Dat's all put on, Ferris; yer don't know a t'ing, see?" cried Macklin, with a laugh that sounded more like a croak.

Dick Ferris colored slightly.

"Hardwick said there was something new on," he explained, lamely.

"Yes, but he didn't tell yer wot it was."

Ferris arose, thinking that further attempts at pumping would be useless.

"Say, don't be in no hurry," went on Macklin. "Sit down an' git warmed up."

"I ain't cold."

Ferris started for the door, but the man pulled him back.

"How did yer make out wid Hardwick on dat last deal?" he asked.

"All right," responded the tall boy, hurriedly.

"Wot do you call all right?"

"That's my affair, Tommy."

"Don't git on yer high horse, Ferris."

"I can keep as mum as you can, Tommy, and don't you forget it."

"Did he give you more dan a hundred?"

"Is that what you got out of it?"

"Naw! I didn't git half o' dat."

"Hardwick is a close one."

"Dat's so. But some day he'll have ter pony up, yer see if he don't."

"I suppose it will be you who will squeeze him," said Ferris, with another laugh.

"You bet."

"He ought to be squeezed a little," said Ferris, reflectively. "He makes a small fortune alongside of what we get out of it."

"Yes, but der trouble is, yer can't corner him," responded Macklin. "If yer try, yer git yerself in trouble. But before long——" he did not finish in words, but bobbed his head vigorously.

"Where's your wife?" asked Ferris, glancing around.

"Der old woman's gone to der market."

"Ain't any one else here, is there?"

Ferris glanced around suspiciously. "No."

"Then supposing we come to an understanding?" went on Ferris, in a low tone. "We both do work for Hardwick, and we ought to get more money for it."

"Well?"

"Unless we get together we can't do anything. But when he finds we are both of a mind he may listen to us, and both of us will make by it."

Hal listened to every word of this conversation with deep interest. From it he discovered that Macklin was a tool of Hardwick as well as Ferris and both were in the habit of doing underhand work for the ex-book-keeper.

"If either of them would only mention something definite," he thought. "The tin box robbery for instance. Then I would be certain I was on the right track."

"That's an idea, Ferris," replied Macklin. "It ain't fair fer Hardwick ter be rollin' in money an' me livin' here."

"That's it."

"I uster be jest as fine a liver as him, Ferris, in the flush days. An' when old Sumner took Hardwick in an' bounced me——"

Macklin did not finish. There was a racket in the hall-way, and then came the

tones of an excited Irishwoman.

"Phot's this? Phot be yez doin' here, young mon, sn'akin' along like a thafe?  
Tommy Macklin, cum here!"

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### NEAR TO DEATH.

The Irishwoman had come up behind Hal so softly—she wore rubbers—that the youth did not hear her, and he was, therefore, thoroughly startled when she made the exclamation quoted at the end of the preceding chapter.

Ferris and Macklin jumped to their feet and both rushed out in the hall.

"What's the row, Mary?" cried the latter.

"Sure an' that's phot Oi want to know," replied the woman. "Oi found this fellow pakin' in the kay-hole of your dure, so Oi did."

"It's Hal Carson!" exclaimed Ferris. "So this is the way you followed me, eh?" he continued.

"Who is Hal Carson?" asked Macklin, grasping the youth by the arm.

"Old Sumner's new clerk and office boy," replied Ferris. "Don't let him get away."

Macklin gave a whistle.

"Dat's kinder serious, if he follered yer here. Wot have yer got ter say fer yerself?" he demanded, turning to Hal.

"Let go of my arm," returned Hal. "Are you the only one who lives in this building?"

"No."

"Then I presume I have a right to enter the hall-way, haven't I?"

"That won't wash, Carson!" exclaimed Ferris. "You are doing nothing but following me, and you know it."

"Just you step inside, do you hear?" commanded Macklin. "That's all right, Mary, I'll take care o' him," he added to the woman.

"Oi wondher if he was up in me apartment," she said, suspiciously. "Oi'll go up an' see if there is anything missing."

The woman departed, and Macklin tried to shove Hal into the room.

"Stop that!" ordered the youth.

"Don't pay no attention to him," cried Ferris. "He's a regular spy, and he's trying his best to get us all into trouble."

Macklin caught Hal by the arm. The next instant Hal received a terrible blow behind the right ear that almost stunned him.

"Now I think yer will come in an' mind," howled Macklin. "Take hold o' him, Ferris."

The tall boy came out, and before Hal could recover he was dragged into the apartment and the door was closed and locked.

When he came to realize what had happened he found himself confronted by the angry pair.

"That's what you get for spying on us," said Ferris.

"Tain't no healthy business fer a feller ter be in around here," added Macklin, with a coarse laugh.

"I want you to open the door," returned Hal, as calmly as he could.

"That's right!" laughed Ferris. "I suppose you think you can command us to do anything, don't you?"

Hal walked toward the door and shook it. It was strongly built, and to break it down was out of the question.

"Give me the key," he said.

Another laugh followed this speech.

Hal glanced out of the window. It was tightly closed, and the distance to the court below was fully twenty feet.

The youth looked at Macklin, who had resumed his smoking.

"What do you propose to do with me?" he asked.

"That is hard ter tell," replied the tough. "It all depends on wot Ferris is got ter say."

"You have the key of the door?"

"I kinder think it's in my pocket."

"Give it to me."

Macklin chuckled.

"Don't waste yer breath; yer may need it."

He had hardly spoken when Hal sprang upon him. The youth was thoroughly aroused, and a well directed blow sent Macklin sprawling in one corner, while his pipe went flying in another.

The tough uttered a howl as he went down, and Ferris gave a cry of consternation.

"Now will you give me the key?" demanded Hal.

"Git orf of me!" spluttered Macklin.

"Let up there," put in Ferris.

"Stand back, Ferris," cried Hal. "I am not to be trifled with."

"Pull him orf!" roared Macklin.

Ferris advanced, but rather gingerly.

He knew Hal's strength, and he had a great horror of being struck.

Macklin tried to rise, but Hal hit once more and he went down a second time. Then Hal sat down on his body.

"Hand over the key."

Hal had an idea the key was in Macklin's outer pocket, and into this he inserted his hand.

It soon came in contact with what he was searching for. He tried to withdraw the key, but now Macklin began to squirm worse than ever, and he had hard work to master the fellow.

"Help me, Ferris!" howled the tough.

"Don't you dare come near," said Hal.

"Don't mind him—help me," said Macklin again.

Ferris hesitated, but at last approached and caught Hal by the arm.

"Let Macklin up," he said.

Instead of replying Hal sprang to his feet. In one hand he held the key, and with the other he shoved Ferris up against the wall.

"Now let me pass!"

"Don't do it!" howled Macklin.

"I won't," replied Ferris.

He caught Hal by the coat tail. This compelled the youth to turn once more. He aimed a blow at Ferris' head, and the fellow went down over the table.

Hal now thought he saw his way clear to escape. He bounded toward the door, and was just inserting the key into the lock when Macklin sprang up.

Beside the stove lay a heavy billet of wood, which the man had intended to split up for kindlings. Macklin caught up the stick, and jumping behind Hal, hit the youth a fearful blow directly on the top of the head.

With a low cry, Hal sank down in a heap. Macklin gave a sudden gasp, and Ferris straightened up.

"Have you—killed him?" asked Ferris in a tone, of horror.

"I don't know," replied the tough. "Dat was a kinder heavy crack, wasn't it?"

Ferris shuddered. A thin stream of blood was issuing from Hal's head, and this made the tall boy sick. He approached and gazed at Hal's pallid face and motionless form.

"I'm afraid you have killed him, Macklin," he said.

"Me killed him?" cried the tough. "I kinder think you had as much ter do wid it as me."

Ferris had a sudden chill dart down his back-bone at these words. If anything was wrong it was certain Macklin did not intend to shoulder the blame.

"What made you hit him so hard?" he asked.

"I couldn't help it. Let's see how bad he is."

Macklin approached Hal and turned over the limp body. Then he placed his hand over the youth's heart.

"He ain't dead yet. Dat was a hard crack, but he's got a strong constitution, dat feller has. Say?"

"Well?"

Macklin came up close to Dick Ferris, who was now as white as a sheet.

"We is good friends, Ferris, ain't we?"

"Ye-as."

"Den let me do sum'thin' fer yer."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell yer. Yer see der feller ain't——"

Macklin broke off short, as a footstep sounded in the hall-way.

"It's der old woman comin' back," he muttered.

"Your wife?"

"Yes."

"Oh, what shall we do with the—the body?" cried Ferris, in alarm.

As he spoke the door-knob was turned, and then came the tones of a woman's voice:

"Let me in, Tommy!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HAL IN A TIGHT SITUATION.

Before Dick Ferris could say a word or move, Macklin clapped his hand over the tall boy's mouth.

"Hush!" he muttered. "I'll fix it all right."

A square table stood in one corner of the room, and under it was a quantity of old bagging.

Macklin seized hold of Hal's body and dragged it toward the table.

Then he shoved the motionless form under the piece of furniture and covered it with the loose bagging.

The key to the door lay on the floor, and picking it up, Macklin inserted it in the lock and gave it a turn.

In a second the door was opened and a stout and harsh-looking woman appeared.

It was Tommy Macklin's wife.

She was a heavy drinker, but she was not a really bad woman at heart.

Had she been as unscrupulous as Macklin himself, the tough would never have pursued the course he did.

Before the woman could enter the room he met her and cut her short.

"I want you to go upstairs," he said, taking the market basket she carried from her.

She looked surprised.

"What for?"

"There was a sneak-thief around, and I want you to see if Mary lost anything."

"A thief? Did he get——"

"No, I didn't give him the chance."

The woman at once turned and went up the flight of stairs leading to the top floor. She had not seen Ferris, and the tall boy breathed a sigh of relief as he turned to listen to what Macklin had to say.

"We've got a good chance ter git him out o' der way."

"Out of the way?" whispered Ferris.

"Dat's wot I said."

"You don't mean——"

Ferris stopped short.

"Yes, I do. You say he's an enemy ter you an' Hardwick?"

"He is that."

"Den I'd git him outer der way."

Ferris' lip twitched.

"What would you do with him?"

"I'll show yer." Macklin scratched his matted hair. "Give me dat potato bag in der closet."

Ferris hesitated, and then, opening the closet in the corner, brought forth an unusually long potato sack.

Raising up the top part of Hal's body, Macklin slipped the sack over head and shoulders. Then he tied the string of the sack fast around Hal's waist.

The tough opened the door and passed out into the hall way.

No one was in sight. Macklin returned to the room.

"Quick, catch him by der legs," he said to Ferris. "I'll take him by der shoulders, an' we'll have him outer sight in a jiffy."

"Where—where will you take him?" faltered Ferris. His teeth were chattering, and his face was as pale as death.

"I'll show yer. Catch hold."

Macklin's tones were angry ones, and Ferris complied. With the body of Hal between them, the pair passed down one flight of stairs, and then to a narrow stairway in the rear leading to a dirty wash-shed.

"Wait here wid him till I come back," said Macklin, and he darted out of the wash-shed door.

Ferris stood beside Hal's body. Presently he thought he heard a low moan, and he imagined that Hal moved one arm. His teeth chattered worse than ever, and it was all he could do to keep from rushing away.

At length, after what seemed to be an age, but which was really less than five minutes, Macklin reappeared.

"We've got der boss chance!" he exclaimed, in a low tone. "Chuck dat piece of rag carpet over him. Dat's it. Now pick him up ag'in."

Once more the two took up Hal's body. Their course was now through the court and into a narrow lane. Here the snow was piled high, but neither seemed to mind it.

"Here we are."

It was Macklin who spoke. He stood at the basement door of an old stone structure which in years gone by had been a vinegar and pickle factory. Pushing open the door, he motioned to Ferris, and Hal's body was taken inside and the door once more closed.

"Wait till I strike a light," said Macklin.

"What is this place?" asked Ferris.

"It's a factory wot ain't in use," was the reply. "His body won't be found here for two or t'ree months, if da finds it at all."

Macklin struck a match and lit a bit of dirty tallow candle which he carried.

"See dat big hole in der floor over dare?" he asked.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Sum kind of a vat, I t'ink. Dat's der place. Hold der glim, will yer?"

Ferris took the candle. His hand shook so that the tallow dropped all over it.

"Wot's der matter wid yer nerves?" asked Macklin, sarcastically.

"Nothing," returned the tall boy, briefly.

"Yer shakin' like a leaf."

"I am cold."

And for once Ferris told the truth. An icy chill seemed to have struck his heart.

Catching hold of Hal's body, Macklin dragged it to the edge of the vat. There was a slight scraping sound as the body was pushed over the edge of the hole, and then all became quiet.

"Dat settles it," said Macklin. "Come on back."

And Hal was left to his fate.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### A NARROW ESCAPE.

Hal came to himself with a shiver. Where was he, and what had happened?

For a moment he could not collect his scattered senses. Then the cold water in the vat reached his mouth and nose, and he gave a gulp.

He put out his hands. They were tight in the sack. With a struggle he stood up. The water in the vat reached his waist, and it was icy cold.

Presently the string of the sack gave way, and he pulled the article off of him. Then he realized what had happened up in the tenement, and felt the blood trickling over his forehead.

"They have put me here thinking I was dead," he thought. "I wonder what sort of a place this is?"

He stepped around in the water, and applied some of it to his head. This stopped the flow of blood, and appeared to clear his brain.

It was semi-dark in the vat, but presently his eyes grew accustomed to this, and he saw where he was.

He gave a shiver. The top of the vat was fully three feet above his reach. What if he could not get out? He would soon perish from the extreme cold.

The vat was some ten or twelve feet in diameter, and Hal walked around the bottom in hopes of finding some spot higher than that upon which he was standing.

In this he was disappointed. The bottom of the vat was perfectly level. By the time he had discovered this fact, he was shivering so he could hardly stand upright.

He jumped up several times in hopes of getting out by that means. But though his hands once touched the upper edge of the vat, he could gain no hold, and immediately slipped back again.

"Help! help!" he cried.

Then he listened. There was no reply. Macklin and Ferris had returned to the tenement.

"I'm all alone," he muttered to himself. "I will die here, and no one will ever know what became of me."

This thought filled Hal with despair, and he again cried out, louder than before.

The cry went echoing through the vast and gloomy building, but there was no response.

"This will never do," thought the youth. "Must I die like a rat in a trap?"

The very thought was maddening, and again he essayed to reach the top of the vat.

It was utterly useless.

"The building must be deserted," he said to himself. "And I suppose it is too far to the street for any one to hear my call."

Five minutes passed. Hal was getting weaker fast. Oh, how his head ached!

Filled with something akin to desperation, Hal cried out again, this time at the very top of his lungs. A deep and profound silence followed.

"It's no use," he thought. "This is some old building that no one will visit all winter. I suppose Ferris and that Macklin think——"

He held his breath. What was that sound overhead?

He strained his ears. Yes, it was footsteps!

"Help! help! Come down in the cellar!" he cried.

Again and again his voice rang out, and the footsteps came closer. Then his heart seemed to stop beating. Supposing it should be Ferris or Macklin returning?

"What's the trouble?" suddenly cried a voice from the stairs in the corner.

"Help me out of the vat!" replied Hal. "Quick! I am freezing to death!"

"Wall, I swan!" ejaculated the voice.

Then came more footsteps, and an elderly man, carrying a lantern, appeared at the edge of the vat.

"Give me your hand," he said, setting down the lantern. "This is a nice fix ter git into."

He leaned down, and Hal held up his hand. The new-comer grasped the youth's wrist, and in a moment Hal was upon the cellar floor.

"Oh, thank you!" chattered Hal. "I—I—couldn't have stood it another minute."

"Most froze, be you?" returned the man. "Here, strip off that coat of yourn and put on mine. That's a most all-fired cold bath. How did you git in?"

"I was pushed in," replied Hal. He tried to pull off his coat, but had not the strength. "Will you help me?"

"Of course." In a twinkle the man had the coat off, and his own on Hal's shivering form. "Belong around here?"

"No."

"Then come with me. I live right across the way, and I'll soon warm you up. It's lucky I came over to see if everything was all right. I'm looking after the place till spring."

The man took up his lantern once more and led the way up stairs and across the street. The two entered a neat-looking tenement, and the man took Hal to a set of rooms on the second floor.

A hot fire was blazing in the kitchen, and drawing up a chair the man motioned for Hal to sit down.

"Maybe the old woman kin lend you some clothes," said the man. "But I allow as how you may be better off, if you let the wet ones dry onto you. It may save you from a spell of sickness."

"I am doing very nicely now," replied Hal. "I am used to some pretty tough knocks," he added, and he spoke the truth, for life at the Fairham poor-house had been anything but easy.

At that moment, the door opened, and a girl rushed in. She looked at Hal, and then gave a cry of surprise.

"Hullo! What brings you here?" she asked.

"What's that?" put in the man.

"He saved me from getting a beating," said the girl. "Didn't you?"

Hal turned and looked at the girl. It was the same that Ferris had attacked at the entrance to the alley.

He smiled and nodded.

"It was awful good of you," she went on. "He's a brave man, pop."

"Who was going to beat you?"

The girl gave her version of the affair. The man listened attentively, and then turned to Hal.

"I'm doubly glad I did you that service," he said. "Katie is my only girl, and I don't want her abused. May I ask your name?"

"Hal Carson."

"Mine is McCabe."

"McCabe!" cried Hal. "Are you Jack McCabe's father?"

"I am. Do you know my boy?"

"Do I? He saved my life only the other night."

"So it was you he saved?" exclaimed McCabe.

"Yes."

"He told me about it. It seems you have enemies."

"Yes."

"And they are the ones who pushed you into the vat?"

"One of them did, aided by a chum."

"You have been struck on the head. Here, let me bind it up. I suppose you are in no hurry to go?"



"No, sir."

McCabe brought out a handkerchief and a strip of cloth, and bound up the wound, which was but a slight one.

"You ought to have the pair of them arrested," he said.

"I have my reasons for not doing so," replied Hal. "But you may rest assured their time will come."

"They must be villains."

"They are. But, Mr. McCabe, let me thank you for what you have done."

"Oh, don't say a word!"

"I shall never forget it. But for you I might at this moment be dead."

"I only hope you down the rascals, every one of them. Now, I must go and finish looking after the place. Come along, Katie. We'll be back in quarter of an hour. You had better take off your shoes and warm your feet in the oven."

"Thank you."

McCabe and his daughter departed. After they were gone, Hal locked the door and took off part of his clothing, and also did as the man had advised.

The roaring fire soon dried the clothing and warmed Hal through and through. As soon as he heard McCabe's footsteps on the stairs he rearranged his toilet.

"Katie says she saw the fellow that wanted to hit her down in the street just now," said McCabe.

Hal jumped up.

"Which way did he go?"

"Over toward Park Row."

The youth thought for a moment.

"Mr. McCabe."

"What is it, Mr. Carson?"

"Will you do me a great favor?"

"Let's hear what it is."

"Please keep the fact that you saved me a secret."

"A secret?" cried the old watchman, in considerable astonishment.

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

"I have my reasons for it."

"The villains that attacked you ought to be punished. They ought to be in the hands of the police this blessed minute."

"You are right, ordinarily speaking, but I have work to do before I have them locked up."

"Well, I'll do as you say."

"You see, I want to have them believe that I am really done for."

"I see."

"If they think that, I can follow them up wherever they go quite easily."

"I don't see how. If they see yer——"

"I will be disguised."

"Oh! Goin' ter play a kind of detective part, be you?"

"That is what it amounts to, I suppose."

"It's a great plan, Mr. Carson. You have a long head on yer shoulders."

And the old man chuckled.

"Thank you. Then I can depend on you to——"

"I won't say a blessed word."

"And please caution Katie."

"All right. I will, sir."

"Thank you."

"But when you get through I'll expect to learn how you come out," said McCabe, hastily.

"You can rest assured that I will let you know the full particulars. And I am not going to forget what you have done for me, either."

"Shoo! that's all right. And say——"

At that moment Katie came flying into the apartment, her tangled hair floating in all directions.

"He's downstairs and coming up!" she cried, shrilly.

"Who?" questioned her father, while Hal stood still in wonder.

"The tall boy who hit me."

"Dick Ferris!" muttered Hal under his breath. "What can he want here?"

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## CHAPTER XX.

### FOLLOWING ALLEN.

Hal was astonished to learn from Katie McCabe that Dick Ferris was coming up the tenement stairs.

"He can't be coming here!" exclaimed the youth.

"What shall we do if he does?" asked McCabe.

"I don't know. Perhaps I had better hide. He may——"

At that instant came a knock on the door.

"It's him!" whispered Katie.

Andy McCabe, the father, pointed to a closet. Hal tiptoed his way to it, and motioned for Katie to follow. The door was closed, and then Andy McCabe answered the summons.

Ferris stood at the door, his hair disheveled and his lips trembling.

"May I ask who lives here?" he asked.

"My name is McCabe."

"Isn't there a man by the name of Macklin living here?" went on Ferris.

"Macklin?" repeated McCabe, slowly.

"Yes, Tommy Macklin."

"Not as I know on. What does he do?"

"I don't know. I have a letter to deliver to him. So you don't know where he lives?"

"No, sir."

"It's too bad. Will you please tell me what time it is?"

Andy McCabe glanced at the alarm clock that stood on the mantel-shelf.

"Quarter to six."

"As late as that!" cried Ferris. "I must hurry and catch him before six. Only quarter of an hour. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day."

In a moment Ferris was gone. McCabe closed the door, and Hal came out of the closet followed by Katie.

"What does he mean?" questioned the man.

"I'll tell you what it means," said Hal. "He is trying to prove an alibi, in case a body was found in the vat. He thinks you can remember he was here looking for Macklin at quarter to six. If that was true, how could he have helped Macklin at five o'clock?"

"Well, well! he's a smart villain, so he is!" exclaimed Andy McCabe. "I wonder what he would have done if you had stepped out of the closet?"

"I was strongly tempted to do that," laughed Hal. "But now I must be off, Mr. McCabe. Please keep quiet, as I told you."

"I will, Mr. Carson. But where be you going?"

"To follow Ferris. Say, have you an old slouch hat you will exchange for this cap of mine?"

"Here is one of Jack's."

"That will do first-rate."

Hal put on the hat and drew it down over his brow.

"Going to turn spy, be you?" remarked Andy McCabe.

"Yes."

"Well, I wish you luck."

Hal was soon out of the house. Once in the street, he looked up and down.

Ferris was not in view, but he soon caught sight of the fellow coming out of a

tenement across the way. He crossed over and followed Ferris toward Park Row, and then to the boarding house.

Here Hal heard the youth say something to his aunt about changing his clothing, and the boy slipped into the house unobserved by anyone, and did likewise. Ferris then left again, followed by Hal.

"I suppose he thinks he has laid good ground-work for his alibi," thought Hal. "Well, let him think so, he will be surprised before long to learn the truth."

At Fourteenth Street Dick Ferris turned and walked toward Broadway. Hal followed close behind, but in the crowd at the corner he lost track of the fellow he was after.

He looked this way and that, and into the restaurants, but Ferris had disappeared.

What was to do next? It was past supper-time, but Hal was in no humor for eating.

Suddenly somebody brushed him rudely. It was a man wearing a heavy cape coat. Hal glanced at the individual sharply, and was astonished to see it was Mr. Caleb Allen.

Allen had not seen Hal, and the boy at once placed himself where he was not likely to be noticed.

"I wonder if he and Ferris met?" thought Hal. "It isn't likely, but yet it may be so. The three of them are into this, and so is that fellow Macklin. I must be careful, and keep my eyes wide open."

Allen passed up Union Square on the west side, and Hal made it a point to follow close behind.

Arriving at Seventeenth Street, Allen turned down toward the North River. He passed over several blocks, and finally ascended the steps of a small mansion on the left.

The front of the mansion was totally dark, but when the door was opened Hal saw that the interior was brilliantly illuminated.

As soon as Allen passed in the door was closed, and all became as dark as before, Hal hesitated, and then ascending the steps, looked for a door-plate.

There was the number in bright silver numerals, but nothing was to be seen of any name.

"Most of them have a name," he said to himself. "I wonder who lives here?"

Hal descended again to the street, and walked on to the end of the block.

Here was a small stand with a flaring gasoline torch, at which an old German was selling apples and other fruit.

Hal entered into conversation with the proprietor of the stand, and at length asked if he knew who lived at the place, mentioning the number.

"Dot blace?" The man gave a low laugh. "I dinks me nopody vos lif dere."

"Nobody?"

"Nein."

"But there must be somebody," urged Hal. "I saw a man go in."

"Dot's so, too." The German laughed again. "But da don't vos lif dere."

"Well, what are they doing there, then?"

The apple man put his long finger up beside his nose.

"Dot vos a blace ver dere rich fool vos plow in his money; see?"

"A gambling-place?"

"Oxactly."

"Who runs it?"

"Dot I don't vos know. I dinks me a fellow named Ditson."

"Do many men go there?"

"Yah. Somedimes so many as two dozen by von night."

"And they do nothing there but gamble?"

The German nodded. "Of you got some money you don't vont to kept dot's der blace to lose it."

"Thank you, but I need all I have," laughed Hal.

"Den you don't better keep away, ain't it?"

"I think that would be best."

"Dake mine vort it vos."

"Did you see many men go in to-night?"

"Vot you ask dot for, hey?"

"I'm looking for a man I know."

"I seen nine or ten men go in by dere front door. I don't vos know how many go py der pack."

"Then there is a back door?"

"Yah, on der next street."

"I see. Well, I guess I won't wait for the man."

Hal walked back slowly, and passed the house. What should he do next? Would it be worth while to track Allen farther at present?

Suddenly an idea popped into his mind. Farther up the street he had passed a costumers' establishment, where everything in the shape of a make-up for detective or actor was to be had.

He walked back to the place, and entered it. Back of the counter stood a young who came up and asked what was wished.

"Can I get a small, black mustache cheap?" asked Hal.

"We have them for twenty-five cents."

"Will they stay on?"

"Yes, if you adjust them properly."

"Then let me have one."

The clerk brought forth the false mustache, and helped Hal to put it on. The youth looked in a mirror at the effect.



"Changes me completely," he said.

"It does, sir. Makes you look five years older, too."

"Here is your money."

The clerk took Hal's quarter, and the boy walked forth from the place without taking the trouble to remove the mustache. Once outside he could not help but laugh.

"I am certainly going into the detective business, and no mistake," he thought. "I trust I am successful in what I undertake to do."

Hal walked back toward the gambling-house, and after some hesitation ascended the stone steps and rang the bell.

A negro answered his summons.

"Is Mr. Arnold here?" asked the lad, as coolly as he could.

"Mr. Arnold?" The negro shook his head.

"But he must be," persisted Hal. "He said he was coming here."

"Don't t'ink I see him, sah. What kind ob a lookin' gen'men he is?"

"About medium built, with a dark mustache," replied Hal. "I have important news for him. He said he was going to try his luck here to-night."

"I see, sah. Den you knows dis place, sah."

"Oh, yes!"

"Come in, sah."

Hal entered, and the door was closed and locked behind him.

"Now you kin go upstairs an' see if de gen'men am here," said the negro. "He might be, yo' know, an' I not know his name, sah."

"All right; I'll take a look around," replied Hal.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### IN A DANGEROUS PLACE.

Hal felt that his situation was a delicate one, and that he must go slow. Were it discovered that he had entered the den of vice merely for the purpose of spying, it might go hard with him.

The negro waved his hand toward the thickly carpeted stairway, and Hal ascended to the second floor of the mansion.

He looked behind to see if the negro had followed, but that burly individual had disappeared.

The upper hall-way was as dark as below, but from under several doors a bright light was streaming.

Hal approached the first one he came to, and, removing his hat, tried the handle.

The door came open, and Hal peered into the apartment.

No one was present, but a young man asleep in an arm-chair, and Hal stepped inside.

The room was gorgeously furnished, costly rugs covering the floor, and heavy curtains hanging over the doors. On the walls were beautiful paintings, and on a stand to one side of the room rested a remarkable piece of statuary representing three jolly gamblers at the gaming-table.

"It must be some sort of a waiting-room," thought Hal. "I wonder who the fellow asleep in the chair is?"

He gave a slight cough, and the young man slowly opened his eyes.

"Did anybody call me?" he asked, in a heavy tone.

"Where is the playing-room, please?" asked Hal.

"Eh? playing-room?" repeated the young man. "Go right in the next room."

He pointed with his finger, and bowing, Hal did as directed.

The sight that met Hal's eyes as he opened the door filled the youth with wonder. He had often heard of such places, but he had never dreamed of them being as they are. He saw a long hall, brilliantly lighted. Crowded about the table, some standing and some sitting, were young men and old, all intent on the games that were going on.

The table was piled with money, which seemed to change hands rapidly, for the resort was a well-known one among club men.

"What do you make it?"

"A twenty, Charley."

Hal recognized the last voice. It was that of Mr. Caleb Allen!

The boy looked at the man. There was an excited appearance upon the broker's features.

"He looks as if he has been losing," thought Hal. "I wonder how much he has staked?"

No one appeared to notice his coming, and he stood just back of the crowd, taking in everything so far as it concerned Allen.

The game went on, and Allen lost. Then the broker played once more, and lost again.

"A hundred this time," he said.

The broker played with extreme caution, as indeed did all of the others. In consequence the game lasted fully quarter of an hour.

Hal saw by the broker's actions that the game was going against the man, and he was not surprised, when the play ended, to hear that Allen had lost.

Allen turned away from the table. As he did so he came face to face with Hal. He started back, and gave the youth a keen look.

"Where have I met that fellow before?" he muttered to himself.

He had not recognized Hal with the false mustache.

The game went on, but Allen took no more interest, and soon disappeared from the room.

Hal was about to follow, when a tall man stepped up to him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I want to have a talk with you, my friend," he said, in a low tone. "Come this way, please."

Somewhat astonished, the youth followed the man into a side apartment.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I want to know what your game is," was the cool response. "You haven't put up a cent, and that mustache of yours is false. I have an idea you are a spy."



## CHAPTER XXII.

### HAL MEETS LAURA SUMNER.

Hal was somewhat taken aback by the statement made to him by one of the proprietors of the resort he had entered, but he quickly recovered.

"It is true the mustache is false, but it is not true that I am spying upon you," he said.

And this was true, for he cared nothing as to what took place in the resort so long as it did not appertain to Mr. Allen or Hardwick.

"That's easy enough to say, but how can you prove it?" was the short reply.

"Is it necessary to prove it?" returned Hal, just as quickly.

"Well, the case is just here, we don't want spies around here."

Hal could not help but smile.

"Do you know how I learned of this resort?" he asked.

"One of the dudes who didn't know how to keep his mouth shut told you, I suppose."

"No. An old apple-stand fellow told me."

"Is that true?"

"It is. So if the police wanted to stop you they could easily do so."

The proprietor muttered something under his breath.

"Well, you are sure you don't intend to give us away, then?"

"I do not."

"What brought you?"

"Curiosity concerning a fellow who played here."

"What fellow?"

"Mr. Caleb Allen."

"What! the man who just left?"

"Yes."

"Are you spotting him?"

"Excuse me, but that's my business. He has gone, and with your permission I will follow him."

The man looked at Hal for a second in silence.

"I'll trust you, for you have the right kind of eyes. You are following Allen for a purpose, but that's none of my affair. When you go just forget all about this place, unless you want to come in some time and try a hand."

"Thank you, I don't gamble," and without another word Hal left the room and hurried down stairs.

A hasty look into the various rooms convinced him that Allen had left the building, and then Hal lost no time in doing likewise.

What he had seen disgusted him beyond measure.

"How men can stay up all night and gamble in a place like that I can't understand," he murmured to himself. "I would rather be in bed and asleep. And it stands to reason the proprietors have the best of it, otherwise how could they run such a gorgeous house?"

Hal was soon on the snow-covered pavement.

He looked up and down, but Allen was nowhere in sight.

"It is no use to try to follow him any farther to-night," thought the youth. "I may as well get home and get some sleep—but, no, I can't do that. I must find a new boarding house, and go under a different name for the present. One thing is sure. Mr. Allen can't gamble in that fashion with what he makes honestly. He and Hardwick are a couple of deep rogues, and that's all there is to it, and Dick Ferris and that Macklin are their tools."

It was now too late to hunt up a regular boarding place, and upon second thought

Hal resolved for the present to put up at one of the cheap hotels.

This he did, and slept soundly until morning.

When he slouched into the office at ten o'clock, still wearing the false mustache and Jack McCabe's hat, Mr. Sumner did not at first recognize him.

"What do you want?" he asked, from the book-keeper's desk, where he was busy instructing the new man in his work.

"I wish to see you in private, sir," was Hal's reply, and he winked.

For a second Mr. Sumner was puzzled. Then he smiled and led the way to his private office.

"Hal, I hardly knew you!" he burst out, the instant the door was closed.

"I hardly know myself, Mr. Sumner," was the youth's reply.

"The mustache is almost a complete disguise."

"I have news for you. Mr. Allen was not in Philadelphia yesterday."

"No? Where, then?"

"He spent a great part of the time in the evening in a gambling-house uptown."

"You are certain?"

"Yes, sir. I followed him into the place and watched him play."

"Humph! Did he win?"

"No, sir, he lost heavily."

Horace Sumner gave something like a groan.

"I am being deceived on all sides," he said. "If a man is a gambler he is often something worse. How about Hardwick?"

"I have reason to believe he went home last night. He gave a note to Dick Ferris and I followed Ferris. It nearly cost me my life."

And Hal related the particulars. Horace Sumner listened with keen interest. When he learned how Hal had been struck down, and afterward found himself in

the icy vat, he shuddered.

"That will never do," he cried. "Hal, you must give up running such risks. I would not have you lose your life for all the bonds in New York. We will call in one of the regular detectives and——"

"No, Mr. Sumner, I started on my theory and I wish to finish the work. I did not know how desperate the men were with whom I have to deal, but in the future I shall be prepared for them. And I wish to ask a favor."

"What is it?"

"Will you advance me a little money? I may need it in traveling around, and my disguises may cost——"

"You shall have what you please, Hal. You are the only one I have in the office to depend on, and you are doing a remarkable work for one so young."

"If you will let me have, say ten or fifteen dollars——"

"Here are fifty," returned Mr. Sumner, handing over five crisp ten-dollar bills. "When you need more let me know."

"But—but I won't want this much!" gasped Hal.

"Yes, you will, if you are determined to go ahead. Don't let dollars stand in the way. Why, I have already spent one hundred and fifty dollars on the detectives, and they have done absolutely nothing."

Without another word Hal pocketed the bills. As he did so there was a knock on the door, then it was flung open and a girl rushed in.

She was apparently a year or two younger than Hal, and had blue eyes, light hair, and a remarkably pretty face. She rushed up to Mr. Sumner and kissed him.

"Oh, papa, why didn't you tell me?" she burst out, with something like a sob in her voice.

"Tell you what, pet?" asked Mr. Sumner with a shadow on his face.

"About all those bonds being gone. Lucy Cavaler mentioned it to me this morning when I called on her to go shopping. Have you got them back?"

"Not yet, pet."



"And who stole them?"

"I don't know. This young man and I have just been trying to find out."

The girl turned to Hal, who took off his hat, bowed, and then blushed furiously.

"This is Mr. Hal Carson, one of my employees," went on Mr. Sumner. "Hal, this is my daughter, Laura."

Laura Sumner extended her hand, and Hal took it. Their eyes met, and from that instant the two were friends.

"You are trying to help papa find the stolen bonds?" she said.

"Yes, Miss Sumner."

"He has done some excellent work on the case," said Mr. Sumner. "He is disguised now, as you can see," he added, with a faint smile, which made poor Hal blush again.

"Oh, I trust you get the bonds back for papa," cried Laura. "If you do, I'll be friends with you for life."

"It's a whack—I mean a bargain," returned Hal, and then both laughed.

"But you haven't told me why you did not mention the matter to me, papa," went on Laura, turning to Horace Sumner.

"I did not wish to worry you, pet. Since your mother died you have had enough on your shoulders running the household."

"And haven't you had more than your share, papa, with troubles in the office, and trying to find a trace of baby Howard?"

"I have given up all hopes of ever learning of the fate of my little boy," sighed Mr. Sumner, and as he spoke a tear stole down his cheek, which he hastily brushed away.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HAL'S BOLD SCHEME.

Hal could not help but feel a keen interest in the conversation between Mr. Sumner and his daughter. Evidently there was some deep family sorrow behind the words that had been uttered.

He stood respectfully by until Laura turned to him suddenly.

"Excuse me, but I suppose I interrupted you when I came in."

"No, I had about finished," replied Hal. "You have no further instructions?" he continued, turning to Mr. Sumner.

"No, save that you must keep from trouble, Hal."

"I will keep my eyes open, sir."

"Then that is all."

"For the present, you will get along without me in the office, I hope."

"Yes. The new book-keeper is a very rapid man, and we shall not attempt to do anything more until Mr. Allen and I dissolve partnership."

"Then I will go. Good-day, Miss Sumner," and with a deep bow Hal withdrew.

"What a nice young man!" murmured Laura, as the outer door closed.

"He is little more than a boy, pet," said her father. "That mustache he wears is a false one."

"Why, papa?"

"He is playing a part. He is a very smart young man."

"I am glad to hear it. Where did you meet him?"

"It was he who saved my life the night I told you of."

"Indeed! That was grand of him. But, papa," Laura's voice grew serious, "these missing bonds—are they going—going to ruin you?"

Horace Sumner turned away.

"If they are not recovered, yes," he answered, in a low tone.

"My poor papa!"

"They are worth seventy-nine thousand dollars, and that, coupled with some bad investments made through Allen, will send me to the wall."

"Can nothing be done to get the bonds back?"

"I am doing everything I can. Besides Carson, there are two regular detectives from the department on the case, and a private man from the agency."

"Then all together ought to bring in a good result."

"We will hope for the best, Laura," said the old broker, bravely.

"If you do not recover the bonds, cannot you get outside help to tide over the crisis?"

"I could have done so years ago. But I find that I made a big mistake in going into partnership with Caleb Allen. While many are willing to help me individually, they do not trust Allen, and therefore will not now assist me."

"Is Mr. Allen, then, such a bad man?"

"I don't know how bad he is. He is in with Hardwick, so Carson says, and Hardwick is a villain."

At the mention of the ex-book-keeper's name, Laura drew herself up.

"I never liked him, papa, and I am glad to find that you have discovered his true character."

Horace Sumner looked in surprise at his daughter.

"Why, pet, I do not understand you."

"Then let me tell you something. For the past two months Mr. Hardwick has been paying his addresses to me, and—"

"Laura!"

"Yes, it's so. I did not mention it to you, because I did not wish to humiliate him. I told him there was no hope for him, and asked him to drop the matter."

"And has the villain done so?"

"Partly, but he frequently follows me about when he gets the chance, and I do not like it."

"If he does so in the future I'll cowhide him," cried Horace Sumner. "But I have discovered his true character, and sent him off, and in the future I imagine he will not dare approach you."

"If he does not, I will be thankful, papa."

Horace Sumner passed his hand over his brow, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Everything seems to go wrong of late years," he said. "The disappearance of little Howard has undermined my whole prosperity."

"And you have given up looking for him?" questioned Laura.

"Yes. What is the use? I have had detectives on the case for years, and it has cost me thousands of dollars."

"And they have learned nothing?"

"Nothing further than that a man took the child to Philadelphia."

"They could not trace him in that city?"

"No. The half-decomposed body of a man was found, a month later, in the Schuylkill River, and the detectives thought it must be his remains."

"But there was no child with him?"

"No, nor had the police seen anything of the little one."

"Howard must be dead," said Laura, softly, and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"I am afraid so," returned the father; and then the subject changed.

Meanwhile Hal had left the outer office and hurried up Nassau Street in the direction of Park Row. On a previous visit to this vicinity he had noticed a first-

class costumer's establishment, where everything in the shape of a disguise could be bought.

At the door he hesitated for a moment, and then entered with a brisk step.

A fat, pleasant-looking man came to wait on him.

"I wish to obtain a perfect disguise," Hal explained. "Something for my face, besides some clothing."

"Yes, sir. What sort of a character?"

"A young business man."

"Please step this way."

Hal stepped to the rear of the establishment. Here fully half an hour was spent in selecting this thing and that, and trying the effect before the mirror.

At last the business was finished, and Hal came forth looking for all the world like a spruce clerk of twenty or twenty-two. He wore a silken mustache and small mutton-chop whiskers, and the color of his skin was several shades paler than was natural.

The cheap suit and overcoat he had worn were cast aside, and a nobby check outfit took their place.

"Gracious! I hardly know myself!" he murmured. "This ought to deceive almost anybody."

Hal had only rented the things. He was to pay two dollars a day for them, besides leaving a deposit of forty dollars for their safe return.

When this transaction was finished the youth visited a hardware store, and there bought a pistol and some cartridges.

"Now, I imagine I am ready for them," he said to himself. "Although I sincerely hope I will not have occasion to draw the pistol."

Once out on the sidewalk Hal did not know exactly how to proceed. He was about to take an elevated train to Allen's house uptown, when looking toward the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, he caught sight of Dick Ferris standing at the foot of the elevated railroad stairs, smoking his usual cigarette.

Hal approached him, and then passed by. Ferris looked at him, but not the faintest gleam of recognition passed over his features.

"He is deceived, at any rate," thought Hal. "I wonder if he is waiting for somebody, or merely hanging around? I think I will remain for a while and find out."

Hal crossed Park Row, and took up a stand by the railing to City Hall Park. A gang of men were clearing off the snow, and the street-cars and wagons were running in all directions, making the scene a lively one.

Presently an elevated train rolled in at the station, and in a moment a stream of people came down the stairs on both sides of the street.

Hal saw Ferris straighten up, and keep his eyes on the crowd.

"That settles it; he is looking for somebody," was Hal's mental conclusion. "Now, I'll wait and see if it isn't Hardwick."

The crowd passed by. Ferris had met no one, and he resumed his old stand, and puffed away as before.

Presently another train rolled in. Again Ferris watched out. In a moment he had halted a man wrapped up in an immense ulster, and with his hat pulled far down over his eyes.

Hal once more crossed the street. He passed Ferris, and saw that the man the tall boy had stopped was Caleb Allen.

Hal was surprised at this. He was under the impression that Allen used the Sixth Avenue elevated to come down from his home. Had the broker spent the night away from home, instead of going to that place after leaving the gambling den?

Standing not over fifteen feet away, Hal saw Ferris talk earnestly to Allen for fully five minutes. Then the broker put his hand in his vest pocket, and passed over several bank bills. This was followed by a small package from his overcoat pocket, which the tall boy quickly placed in his breast.

"I wonder what that package contains?" mused Hal, as the two separated.

Allen continued on the way downtown, calling a cab for that purpose. Hal felt certain the broker was going to the office, so there was no use of following him for the present.

He turned to Ferris and saw the tall youth stride up Park Row, and then turn into a side street.

"Is it possible he is going to see Macklin again?" was Hal's comment.

Such seemed to be Ferris' purpose, and it left Hal in perplexity as to whether he should follow or not.

Then he thought of his mission, and a bold plan came into his mind.

"I will follow," he said to himself. "The only way to get at the bottom of the tin box mystery is to learn of all the plans this band of evil-doers form."



## **CHAPTER XXIV.**

### **HAL IN A NEW ROLE.**

Instead of continuing toward the East River, Dick Ferris soon turned northward and presently reached Grand Street.

This neighborhood was entirely new to Hal, and he was at once satisfied that the tall boy was not going to pay a visit to Tommy Macklin.

Passing down Grand Street, Ferris presently came to a tall, white building, with a large open hall-way, the entrance to which was covered on either side with signs.

Entering the hall-way, Ferris mounted the stairs to the third floor, and then passed to a small office in the rear.

Hal was not far behind, and he had no difficulty in locating the apartment Ferris entered.

The upper part of the office door contained a ground-glass panel, upon which was painted in black letters:



ROBERT E. HAMILTON,  
FINE LAW AND BLANK PRINTING.

For a second Hal studied how to get into the place, but soon an idea struck him, and he lost no time in entering.

He saw Ferris in earnest conversation at a small counter, which ran across the office, which was narrow but quite deep. Hal edged up and listened to what passed between the tall youth and a man in charge.

Ferris had a number of slips in his hand, and these the proprietor was examining with great care.

"You wish all of them duplicated?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Dick Ferris.

"It's a nice piece of work."

"I suppose it is, but the firm is willing to pay for it."

"Who are the blanks for?"

"Mr. Albert Schwartz. But I am to call for them."

"I do not know the gentleman."

"I will leave a deposit on the work," replied Ferris, promptly.

"Oh, all right! And how many of each of these blanks do you want?"

"Twenty of each."

"What! No more?"

"No. Next year we are going to have an entirely new set. If you do these right, Mr. Schwartz says he may give you the new work."

"I'll do them in the best style. How soon do you want them?"

"As soon as possible. We are in a great hurry for them."

"In two days do?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well. They will cost thirty-six dollars."

"As much as that?"

"Yes. I will have to take my workmen from another job, and we always charge a little more for a rush."

"How much of a deposit shall I leave?"

"Five dollars will do."

"Then here you are."

Dick Ferris pulled a five-dollar bill from his pocket, and, after receiving his receipt, walked out of the office.

He glanced at Hal as he passed, but our hero's back was turned to him, and Hal seemed to be interested in some prints which hung upon the wall.

"Now, sir, what can I do for you?" questioned the proprietor, turning to Hal.

He left the slips Ferris had brought lying upon the counter.

"I would like to know how much you charge for printing wedding invitations," replied Hal, approaching the counter where the slips lay.

"Wedding invitations, eh?" The proprietor smiled. "Here is a young man about to get married," he thought. "By his looks, I think, he wants something rather nice."

"Yes, sir," said Hal.

"With an engraved plate, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"I'll show you our book of specimens."

The man turned away to where a number of books were lying upon a side desk. As he did so, Hal carelessly picked up the slips Ferris had left and examined them.

He could make nothing of them, excepting that one had the words: "Bonds of the Second Class, receivable," printed across its face, and another, "Sumner, Allen &

Co. Transfer Slip of Limited Calls, December."

"Here you are," said the man, coming up with one of the books, and he gathered up the slips and put them away with a memorandum.

Hal looked over the book, and noted down the prices of several styles of invitations.

"I do not want to order," he said. "I merely wanted the prices."

"Very well. Glad to see you at any time," returned the man.

Once down in the street again, Hal looked up and down, but could see nothing of Ferris.

But when the youth reached Grand Street he beheld Ferris making for downtown as rapidly as his long legs would carry him.

"I suppose he is going to stand outside and meet Mr. Allen when he comes out," thought Hal. "I will follow him, and see what turns up next."

Dick Ferris walked up Grand Street until he came to Broadway. Here he stood upon the corner, and presently waved his hand toward a passing horse-car.

Immediately a man descended from the car, and came toward the tall youth. It was Hardwick.

"Hullo! This can't be a chance meeting," said Hal to himself. "No wonder Ferris hurried to the corner. He almost missed his man."

As Hardwick stepped from the street to the sidewalk, he glanced toward where Hal was standing, gazing into a shop window. Then he turned to Ferris, and the two began an earnest conversation.

Hal passed the pair, but did not catch a word of what was said. Nor did the young watcher notice Dick Ferris' quick, nervous look in his direction.

A few minutes later, Hardwick and Ferris walked back down Grand Street. Reaching Chrystie, they turned into it, and walked along several blocks until they came to a narrow alley leading to a lumber-yard.

Both passed into the lumber-yard and out of Hal's sight. Wondering what had become of them, the boy passed the place.

No one was in sight.

"That's queer. I wonder if they entered that building in the rear?"

For fully ten minutes Hal hung around, but neither Hardwick nor Ferris put in an appearance.

A wagon was leading up on one side of the yard, but presently this drove off, and then all became quiet.

Watching his chance, when he thought no one was observing him, Hal entered the gate of the lumber-yard and hurried down to the building in the rear.

There was a window beside the door to the place, and Hal gazed inside.

An elderly man was present. He was seated beside a hot stove, toasting his shins and reading a morning paper.

"They didn't enter the office, that's certain," said Hal to himself. "Now, where did they go?"

Suddenly he stopped short. Was it possible that Hardwick and Ferris had discovered that they were being followed, and had slipped through the lumber-yard merely to throw him off the scent?

"It certainly looks like it," thought Hal. "I'll sneak around the back way, and see what I can discover."

Back of the office were great piles of lumber, all thickly covered with snow. Among them could plainly be seen the footsteps of two people. The marks were fresh, and led along the back fence and then to the right.

Hal followed the marks among the piles of lumber until he came to a spot where all became mixed, as if some one had retraced his steps.

As he paused, examining the tracks, he heard a noise behind him, and, turning, he found himself confronted by Hardwick.

"I want to know what you are following me about for?" demanded the man, savagely.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### HAL'S ESCAPE FROM HARDWICK.

Hal could not help but shrink back as Hardwick advanced.

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded the man, after a second of silence.

"I did," replied Hal, in a disguised voice. He did not know whether or not Hardwick had discovered his real identity, and he intended to run no risk in the matter.

"Then answer me."

"Supposing I refuse to do so?"

"It won't help you," fumed Hardwick. "I know perfectly well who you are."

"You do?" cried Hal, and he was taken aback by the ex-book-keeper's words.

"Exactly. You are one of those mighty smart detectives old Sumner has employed to shadow me."

Hal could not help but breathe a sigh of relief. His identity was still a secret.

"Ain't I right?" went on Hardwick, seeing the youth did not reply.

"I decline to answer," replied Hal, firmly.

"Oh, you do?" sneered Hardwick.

"I do."

"Then you understand I've got you in a corner."

"I understand nothing of the sort."

"Supposing I should pull out my pistol?"

"You won't dare to do so."

"And pray why? How do I know but what you are not a footpad?" cried

Hardwick, getting angry at Hal's apparent coolness.

"Because a shot might bring others to the spot," said the youth, bravely.

"No one is around."

"You forget that in New York detectives often travel in pairs."

It was a random remark, but it told. Hardwick turned pale, and shifted uneasily.

"You're a cool customer," he said, eyeing Hal sharply.

"Detectives have to be cool."

"You won't gain anything by following me."

"I haven't said that I was following you."

"But you have admitted that you are a detective, and that amounts to the same thing."

"Perhaps it does and perhaps it doesn't."

As Hal spoke, he looked around for Dick Ferris. The tall youth was nowhere to be seen.

"What are you looking for?"

"That's my business."

"Come, don't get cheeky."

"Then don't question me."

Hardwick's eyes flashed fire. A dark look of hatred came into his face, and he made a spring forward.

"I'll teach you a lesson," he hissed.

"Stand back!" cried Hal. "Stand back, or take the consequence!"

Hardly had Hal spoken the words when a sudden shadow caused him to glance upward.

It was well that he did so.

On a large pile of lumber stood Dick Ferris, and in his hands he held a heavy beam, which he was just on the point of letting fall upon Hal's head.

The boy had barely time enough to spring to one side when with a boom the beam came down and buried itself in the snow.

"You mean coward!" cried the youth. "Wait till I catch you!"

He made a dash to the side of the pile, which was arranged like steps, intending to mount to where Ferris stood.

As he did so, Hardwick shouted something to the tall boy, and then leaped the fence of the lumber-yard, and ran out on the side street.

Ferris could not see Hal now, but he understood what Hardwick said, and as Hal mounted to the top of the pile the tall boy got down and let himself drop off the edge.

He landed in the deep snow, and was not hurt in the least. Before Hal could discover his flight, he was over the fence and on his way to join Hardwick.

It took Hal but a minute to learn of the direction the two escaping evil-doers had taken, and then he made after them with all possible speed.

But the pursuit was a useless one, and at the end of several blocks Hal gave it up, and dropped into a walk.

What was best to do next? Hal revolved the question in his mind a number of times, and then, without wasting time, made his way back to the costumer's establishment.

"I wish my disguise changed," he said.

"What, already?" said the proprietor, in astonishment.

"Yes, something has happened since I was here, and now I wish you to fix me up differently."

"But the same sort of a character?"

"Yes."

"Then supposing I give you a different colored mustache and a beard for those side whiskers?"

"That will do, if you will also change this suit and overcoat."

"Certainly."

The exchange was quickly made, and, looking like an entirely different person, Hal left the costumer's and hurried down to Wall Street.

Making sure that no one but the new book-keeper and Mr. Sumner were about the place, he entered.

"That's a splendid disguise," said the old broker, when the two were alone.

"It's the second I've had to-day," said Hal.

"The second?"

"Yes. Since I saw you last I've had quite a few adventures."

"Of what nature, Hal? I trust you had no more trouble?"

"It didn't amount to much."

And, sitting down, Hal related all that had occurred.

"Dick Ferris must be a very wicked boy," remarked the broker, when Hal had finished. "But about these slips that he is going to have printed. Are you positive Mr. Allen gave them to him?"

"No, sir. But I think he did. He gave Ferris something and some money, and Ferris lost no time in getting to the printing establishment."

"Humph!" Mr. Sumner mused for a moment. "I can hardly believe it, even though the evidence seems plain enough."

"What are the slips?" asked Hal, with considerable curiosity.

"They are of the kind which we use in our daily business. Since Mr. Allen and myself agreed to end our limited partnership, I have kept the regular slips in my safe. Formerly they were in Hardwick's charge, where both of us could have easy access to them, but now—well, to be plain, I allow no business to be conducted unless under my supervision."

"And that is right, Mr. Sumner."

"Now, if Mr. Allen is really having these extra slips printed, it would seem as if



he—he——"

"Intended to make use of them without consulting you," finished Hal, bluntly.

"Yes."

"He is none too good for that, sir. But wasn't he here this morning?"

"Yes. We had a very stormy interview. He is angry because I discharged Hardwick, and would not believe me when I said Hardwick was a defaulter."

"That's part of his plan."

"You may be right, Hal. You are a wonderful boy. As I was saying, we had a stormy interview, and I doubt if he spends a great deal of time here during the remaining days of our partnership."

"The partnership ends on New Year's day, doesn't it?"

"That was the day set, but by mutual agreement we have made the date the twentieth of December."

"Why, that is day after to-morrow."

"Yes."

"The day the slips are to be finished."

"So it is."

"No wonder Ferris wished them as soon as possible."

Horace Sumner arose, and walked up and down the office.

"If there is to be any crooked work in the matter of the slips, I will take good care to head it off. I might be swindled out of thousands of dollars in that way."

"You will look over the genuine slips, I suppose?"

"I will, in the presence of the new book-keeper and another witness. There shall be no under-handed work in the matter. I believe you are altogether right, Hal. I have been surrounded by villains, and they would pluck me to the end if I but gave them the chance."



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HAL OBTAINS ANOTHER SITUATION.

For a moment there was silence, and then Horace Sumner stopped short before Hal.

"There is another matter I might mention," he said. "Caleb Allen is going, or rather, has gone, into business for himself."

"What kind of business?" asked the youth, in surprise.

"A brokerage and loan office."

"Near here?"

"Yes, right around the corner of Broad Street, not five minutes, walk. He hired the place from the first, and I understand he and another man are already doing business there."

"Who is the other man?"

"A fellow named Parsons."

"Has he a good reputation?"

"Far from it. He was arrested for forgery five years ago, but his friends hushed the matter up."

"Have you the number of the place?"

"Yes, here it is. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know. I'll take a look at the place. That will do no harm. Perhaps Hardwick will call on Mr. Allen."

After a few words more Hal left the private office, and passed out on Wall Street.

He soon turned the corner into Broad Street, the second great money center of New York, and presently came to the building in which was situated the offices now occupied by the firm of Allen & Parsons.

The offices were down three steps, and as Hal passed on the pavement above, a small sign pasted in the corner of the window attracted his attention:

YOUNG MAN WANTED. RAPID WRITER.

Stopping short, Hal descended the steps, and peered into the window. A middle-aged man stood at the front desk, smoking a cigar and writing.

"That must be either Mr. Parsons or a book-keeper," thought Hal.

Then a sudden determination sprang up in his mind. Without a second thought he entered the office and walked up to the desk.

The man looked up, and laid down his cigar.

"Well, sir, what is it?" he asked, in a pleasant voice.

"Is this one of the proprietors?"

"Yes, I am Mr. Parsons."

"I see you want a young man, sir."

"We do." Most of the pleasantness vanished, and a sharp look came to the man's face. "You are looking for a situation?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you a good writer?"

"I will show you my hand, sir?"

"All right. Here is paper and ink. Write a sheetful as rapidly as you can do so in good style."

Hal took up the pen. He was really a rapid writer, and in five minutes the job was done. Parsons looked at the work.

"That might do. Have you any recommendations?"

"No, sir. I am a stranger in New York."

"Ah, a stranger." A certain pleased look came into the broker's eyes. "What's your idea of salary?"

"I hardly know. I must support myself."

"All alone?"

"Yes, sir."

Parsons appeared better pleased than ever.

"Just the kind of a fellow Allen and I want," he muttered to himself.

"I will give you a trial on seven dollars a week, and, if you suit, I will raise you to eight."

"Thank you, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Frank Hallen," replied Hal, using the cognomen of one of his poor-house associates.

"Very well, Hallen. Are you ready to go to work at once?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then come inside."

Hal walked behind the railing, and Parsons showed him where to place his coat and hat.

"Here is a copy of a letter I wish duplicated ten times. You can go to work at this second desk. At one o'clock you can take half an hour for lunch."

"Yes, sir."

Hal gathered his material about him, and went to work as if his very life depended on it.

"He seems to be an awfully shrewd man," he thought, meaning Parsons. "I wonder what he would say if he knew I had taken the job merely as a blind?"

He could not help but smile to himself, and Parsons saw the smile, but misinterpreted it.

"He feels good over dropping into a situation, I suppose," he muttered. "Well, if he's a stranger in New York and alone, he is probably just the fellow for Allen's

work. It won't do to have a chap around who is too well acquainted."

Hal had made four copies of the letter when the front door opened, and Caleb Allen entered.

The broker looked rather surprised when he saw Hal, but he did not recognize the youth, and Hal drew a deep sigh of relief.

"Got a clerk, eh?" said Allen, to his new partner.

"Yes," replied Parsons. "Hallen, this is Mr. Allen, your other employer."

Hal bowed. Then Allen turned to an office in the rear, and Parsons immediately followed him.

The door, which was partly of ground glass, was tightly closed.

Hal waited for an instant, and then, leaving the desk, tiptoed his way to the rear.

By listening intently, he could just catch what was said.

"You say he is a stranger in New York?" were the first words he heard, coming from Allen.

"Yes."

"Humph! He will have a job finding his way around, I'm thinking."

"He looks bright enough. I thought it would be better than to hire somebody who knew too much about financial matters here," returned Parsons.

"That's so!" cried Allen. "A good idea. Has Samuels called yet?"

"No."

"He ought to be here by this time."

"Samuels is always slow. But tell me, how did you make out over at the old place?"

"We had a deuce of a racket," exclaimed Allen, savagely. "Since Hardwick was found out Sumner has watched me like a cat."

"Of course, you didn't give him any satisfaction."

"Not much! But I can tell you I had to talk mighty smooth to keep things down."

"How about dissolving?"

"The affair comes off on the twentieth."

"What! Can you get ready by that time?"

"Luckily, yes."

"Are you going to do as I suggested about those slips?"

"Yes. I was just after the boy who ordered them for me, and he says they are to be done in two days, sure. It won't take an hour to fix them up after I get them."

"Nothing like being a slick penman, Caleb."

And Parsons chuckled.

"Hush! That new man might hear you."

"That's so. But I fancy he's rather green, in spite of the fact that he wants to appear like a New Yorker."

"If he's green, so much the better. Now, about this business with Samuels. Do you think he can be trusted?"

"Yes. I know Samuels thoroughly, and, besides, I have a hold on him."

"A good hold?"

"I could send him to prison if I wished."

"And he will undertake to work off the bonds in Chicago?"

"I believe so. But he wants big pay."

"How much?"

"Twenty per cent."

"Twenty per cent.!" cried Allen. "Is he crazy?"

"He says he will run a big risk."

"Any more than Hardwick and I ran in obtaining them?"

"No, indeed. Perhaps you can make him come down."

"I certainly shall. Hardwick hasn't shown up, has he?"

"No. Do you expect him?"

"Yes."

"Is it prudent? Old Sumner may have his detectives around."

"I thought of that, and wrote to Hardwick about it. Hereafter he will disguise himself, and——"

Hal heard no more. The front door opened, and a stranger hurried in.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### HAL PLAYS A DARING PART.

Hal lost no time in confronting the new-comer.

"Is Mr. Parsons in?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him Mr. Samuels is here."

"I will, sir."

Hal walked back, and knocked on the rear office door.

"Come!" said Allen.

"A Mr. Samuels to see Mr. Parsons," said the youth.

"Show him in."

Mr. Samuels was conducted to the rear office, and once more the door was tightly closed.

Hal was slightly disturbed. Had the new-comer caught him listening in the back, or had he taken no notice?

The only way to learn was to remain where he had been before, and this the youth did.

"Well, Samuels, on hand I see," said Parsons. "Mr. Allen just came in."

"Then we can come to business without delay," replied Samuels.

He was a small-faced Jew, with eyes that appeared to be more than half closed. As he spoke, he drew up a chair close to where the other two were sitting.

"Say," he went on. "Who is the young fellow outside?"

"Our new clerk."



"Can you trust him?"

"I think so. Why?"

"He might overhear what was said."

"He won't if you don't talk too loud."

"Very well."

"Hold on," put in Allen. "Parsons, send him off to mail some letters."

The junior partner at once walked outside, and, taking up a bunch of letters, handed them to Hal.

"Mail these," he said. "And then you can go to lunch."

"Yes, sir."

Hal at once put on his overcoat and hat, and walked out with the letters. He wished he could have remained in the office, for he felt certain the conversation about to ensue would be a most important one.

He dropped the letters into the nearest box, and then stood undecided what to do next.

"Mr. Allen has those bonds, that's certain," he said to himself. "I wonder if it would do any good to notify the police?"

But this plan did not appear to be just the right one. If arrested, Allen would, of course, deny any knowledge of the stolen property and all the proof Hal had was his own word, and that might not go very far in a court of law.

"No, the only thing to do is to find those bonds and get them back myself," he muttered. "Perhaps Allen only has part of them, and Hardwick the other part. Besides, I have not yet learned what Macklin and Ferris have to do with the case."

He knew there was a window in the back of the rear office; this was tightly closed, so it would be of no use to attempt to hear anything from that direction.

At last Hal took his stand opposite the entrance to the office. He had hardly done so when Parsons and Samuels came out, and hurried up the street at the top of their walking powers.

"Something is up," thought Hal. "Shall I follow them, or remain behind with Allen?"

He knew if he wished to keep his place as clerk, he ought to go back soon. He hesitated, and then decided to remain. So, procuring a sandwich and an apple, he munched them down, and then walked in.

Caleb Allen looked at him darkly as he entered, but said nothing, and, hanging up his coat and hat, Hal resumed the copying of the letter.

Half an hour later, a tall man came in. He was well dressed, and wore a heavy black mustache and beard.

He glanced at Hal, and then walked over to where Allen sat at a desk, writing a letter.

"I want to see you in private," he said, in a low tone.

The voice of the stranger sounded strangely familiar to Hal. Where had he heard it before?

Allen looked perplexed for an instant, and then seemed to comprehend the situation. He at once led the way to the office in the rear. The stranger entered, and the door was once more tightly closed.

Our young hero at once left off writing, and tiptoed his way back. An idea had struck him concerning the stranger's identity, and the first words from behind the thin partition proved that he was correct.

"So you have donned the disguise, Hardwick," were Allen's words.

"Yes, deuce take the luck, I was forced to do it."

"You got my letter advising it?"

"I did. But that wasn't what brought me to it. I was followed by one of old Sumner's detectives."

"Ha! Did he discover anything?"

"Not from me. But I'm afraid he did in another direction."

Allen turned pale, and shifted uneasily.

"What way?" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"I am pretty well satisfied the same fellow followed Ferris to the establishment where you are having those bogus bills printed."

"And what did he learn?"

"I am not sure he really followed, and, of course, I don't know how much he learned."

"Too bad! Did you come face to face with the man?"

"I did, but he got away from us."

"Who do you mean—was Ferris with you?"

"Yes. He thought he recognized the man as one who followed him to the printing office."

"I see. We must be careful, Hardwick, very careful."

"If it hadn't been for that Carson it would be all right," growled the ex-bookkeeper. "I would like to wring that boy's neck."

"So would I. But what has become of him? He was not at the office this morning when I was there."

"I don't know. He boarded with Ferris' aunt, but he has left there, too."

"That's queer."

"I have an idea he isn't so much of a boy as we think," said Hardwick, with a shake of his head.

"What do you mean?"

"I believe if he isn't a regular detective, he is next door to it, and was hired by Sumner to spot me. That scene in the office when I accused him was a put-up job on his part and Sumner's. See how easily Sumner sided with him in every instance."

"By Jove! you may be right," cried Allen. "We must be more than careful, or \_\_\_\_\_"

Hal did not catch the words that followed, for the door of the office opened and a

slouching figure entered. It was Tommy Macklin.

Veiling his astonishment as best he could, Hal approached the tough.

"What is it?" he asked, briefly.

"Is der boss in?" asked Macklin.

"Do you mean Mr. Allen or Mr. Parsons?" asked Hal, although he knew very well.

"Mr. Allen."

"I will see. What name?"

"Wot's dat?"

"What is your name?"

"Me name ain't got nothin' ter do wid it. Tell him a gent from der east side wants ter talk ter him a few minits."

"I will."

Hal rapped on the door. It was quickly opened by Mr. Allen.

"Here is a man wants to see you, sir," said Hal. "He says he's from the east side, and won't give any name."

Allen looked out toward Macklin. He looked disturbed when he recognized the tough.

"Step this way," he called out, and Macklin entered the office.

"Now, what brings you?" demanded Allen, as soon as the door was shut.

Instead of replying, Macklin looked at Hardwick, who had taken off part of his disguise.

"Wot! You here?" he faltered.

"Yes, Tommy, you didn't expect it, did you?" returned Hardwick, with a short laugh.

"No, I didn't."

"What brought you?"

"I want money," said the tough, coming forward and putting on a bold front. "I want money from both of yer; see?"

"How much?" asked Allen.

"A t'ousand dollars."

"You are crazy!" cried the broker.

"No I ain't. I mean just wot I say, Allen. I want five hundred from you, an' der udder from Hardwick."

"Supposing we won't pay it?"

"Den I'll tell der police wot I know; I ain't doin' yer work fer nothin'."

And the tough poked his nose close to that of Caleb Allen.

"Nonsense, Tommy!" put in Hardwick. "I agreed to give you a hundred dollars for keeping quiet about what you know, and that's all you'll get."

"Den I'll—wot's dat?"

A loud noise in the outer office startled Macklin. Hal, listening at the door, suddenly found himself in the hands of Parsons and Samuels.

"A spy, as I thought," cried Samuels. "Hardwick! Allen!"

The two called, rushed out, and Hal was surrounded.

"A spy, is he?" cried Allen. "Who can——"

"That beard is false!" exclaimed Hardwick, tearing it as well as the mustache from our hero's face. "Hal Carson! Boys, lock the front door! If he escapes, we shall be ruined!"



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### HAL IS EXPOSED.

The moment that Hardwick made his announcement, Parsons sprang to the front door and locked it.

"Carson!" muttered Allen. "Hardwick, you were right, he is nothing more nor less than a spy."

When Tommy Macklin saw the face of Hal he grew pale as death.

"Carson!" he gasped, falling back.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Hardwick.

"Dat's der chap wot followed Ferris ter my house."

"Followed Ferris. When?"

"Der night he brung me dat letter from you about dat bus'ness over to der—you know."

"You are sure?"

"Sure," repeated Macklin, in deep disgust. "I t'ink I am."

"How did you happen to catch him?"

"He was spyin' at der door, same as here. We collared him, and knocked him down. I t'ought he was dead, an' me an' Ferris chucked him in a vat in der cellar of der old pickle factory."

"Ferris said nothing of this to me," said Hardwick.

"He was most scared stiff, dat feller was," replied Macklin, disdainfully. "I guess he t'ought he would not say nuthin' ter nobody."

During this time Hal had not said a word, but now he spoke up.

"What do you intend to do with me?" he asked.

"You'll see fast enough," replied Hardwick. "We have got you fast this time. Do you know what I think? I think you are the same fellow that I met in the lumber-yard."

"And if I am, Hardwick, what of it?"

"It will go so much the harder with you."

"Let us bind him so he cannot escape," said Allen. "He is a dangerous young man to have loose."

"There is a rope in the closet," said Parsons. "Bind him with that, if you want to."

The rope was speedily brought forth, and Hal was bound hands and feet. There was no use trying to escape, and consequently he did not undertake to do so.

"Put him in the closet," ordered the broker, when the job of binding Hal was completed.

"Gag him first," cautioned Hardwick. "We don't want him to raise the roof, if he's left alone. We'll fix him later."

The gag was inserted in Hal's mouth, and then he was lifted up by Macklin and the others and dumped into the corner of the closet, and the door was closed and locked upon him.

From the closet, which was damp and cold, he could hear the confused murmur of voices, but could not make out a word of what was being said. The murmur continued fully half an hour, and then all became as silent as the grave.

Hal was all but suffocated by the rude gag which had been forced into his mouth. All was dark, and his position was a painful one, not only mentally, but bodily as well.

What the rogues intended to do with him he did not know. If only he could free himself and get away!

With might and main he tugged at the rope which bound his hands. At first it remained tight, but at last it loosened sufficiently to allow him to slip out his right hand.

The left soon followed; and Hal's next work was to remove the gag from his

mouth. What a relief it was to once more close his mouth!

His feet freed, the boy looked about for some means by which to escape from the closet. The door was locked, as has been mentioned, but it was a poor affair, and Hal knew he could easily force it open with his shoulder.

Before proceeding to this extremity, he listened intently. It must be near three o'clock, and he wondered if all the others had left.

Suddenly voices broke upon his ear, and he heard Hardwick and Macklin enter the rear office. By applying his ear to the key-hole Hal heard what was said. If they opened the closet door, he determined to make a bold dash for liberty.

"How much is der in dis new ob?" Macklin asked.

"Two hundred dollars, if he never comes back."

"Den pass over der cash."

"I'll pay you after the job is done, Tommy."

"No yer don't. Dis is a cash-in-advance job."

"Can't you trust me?"

"I kin, but I ain't goin' ter."

"It's to your interest as much as ours to have him out of the way."

"Dat's all right, too, but its pay or no job, Hardwick."

"If I pay you now you may make a balk as you did before."

"No, dis will be a sure t'ing, I'll give yer me word."

"Then here you are."

A silence followed.

"Is that right?" asked Hardwick.

"Yes. But, remember, dis ain't part of dat t'ousand I'm ter have fer dat udder work."

"I understand. Now, go for the coach, and I'll stay till you come back. It's getting



dark, and the street is almost deserted."

"I will. Better lock der door, and don't unlock it again till yer hear four knocks; see?"

"Yes."

Macklin at once went off, and Hal heard Hardwick lock the door after him as agreed, but the key was left in the lock.

By the conversation Hal knew it must be later than he had supposed. Under cover of the darkness Macklin was going to bring a coach to the place. For what purpose?

In spite of his naturally brave spirit, Hal shivered. He was in the power of a desperate set of men, and he had learned enough of their secrets to convict every one of them. They would not hesitate to do anything to escape their just deserts.

"I must fight for it," he muttered to himself, "and now is the best time to do it."

He opened the closet door cautiously, and peeped out. Hardwick sat in an easy-chair, smoking savagely, as if he were out of humor. No one else was in the place.

The office was heavily carpeted, so Hal made no noise as he stepped out of the closet. He had to pass within five feet of Hardwick, who sat with his back half turned to the boy.

Hardly daring to breathe, Hal tiptoed his way past Hardwick and into the outer office, the door to which stood wide open. Here it was quite dark, and the boy saw through the window that it was again snowing heavily.

At last the door was reached, and his hand was upon the key, ready to turn it in the lock.

Suddenly, as if struck by an idea, Hardwick jumped to his feet and came out. His intention was to examine something on one of the outer desks, and when he beheld Hal he stared at the youth in blank amazement.

"Where—where—" he began.

Without saying a word, Hal turned the key and caught hold of the latch of the door. Then, with something that sounded like the growl of a wild animal,

Hardwick pounced upon him.

"No, you don't!" he hissed. "You sha'n't escape this time. Come back here!"

He caught Hal by the coat collar. The youth struggled, and then struck out with all force.

The blow landed on Hardwick's chin, and knocked his head back with such force that for the instant he let slip his grasp and Hal was free.

But before the plucky youth could open the door the man had him fast again, and was punching him with all his might.

"I'll teach you a lesson!" he cried. "Take that! and that! You are smart, but you are not smart enough for me!"

"Let go!" cried Hal.

But Hardwick continued to pound him. Then, in sheer desperation, Hal closed in and fought tooth and nail, as if his very life depended on it.

Hardwick was a heavy-built man, but he was no match for the youth, who all his life had been used to hard labor, and whose muscles, consequently, were like steel. He struck Hal many times, but the youth squirmed and twisted, and suddenly hit him a crack between the eyes that made him see stars.

"Oh!" he howled, and dropped back, while Hal, taking advantage of this stroke of good luck, made another dash for the front door.

He opened the door, and was half-way out when Hardwick, realizing what escape meant, leaped forward and caught him by the coat.

"Let go!" cried Hal, and with a jerk he tore away and started up the steps leading to the street.

He had scarcely taken half a dozen steps when he ran full tilt into Macklin, who had just driven up on the box of a closed coach.

"Wot's dis?" cried the tough. "Carson! no yer don't!"

He carried his whip in his hand, and as he spoke he brought the butt down on Hal's head with full force.

There was a strange flash of fire through Hal's brain, and then all became a dark

blank.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### HAL MAKES A LIVELY MOVE.

When Hal came to his senses he found himself bound and gagged as before, but instead of being in a closet he was now in a coach that was whirling along as fast as the deep snow would permit.

The curtains of the vehicle were tightly drawn, so the youth had no chance of seeing where he was being taken.

His head ached fearfully from the blow Tommy Macklin had administered, and for several minutes he could hardly collect himself.

"Missed it!" he groaned to himself. "And now those villains have me completely in their power."

It was not a pleasant thought, and therefore Hal did not allow his mind to dwell upon it.

He wondered if he could get open one of the doors of the coach, and leap, or rather tumble, to the ground. It would be a dangerous experiment, considering how he was tied up, but Hal was willing to assume desperate risks just now.

He fumbled around with his bound hands for fully five minutes, and at last succeeded in turning the handle to one of the coach doors, which immediately swung open.

Hal looked out. They were on an almost deserted road. It was quite dark, and still snowing.

"If I drop out here I may be frozen to death before I can free myself," he thought. "I will wait until we pass a house of some sort."

Hal had hardly reached this conclusion before the coach rolled past an elegant road-house, brilliantly illuminated from top to bottom.

"Now is my chance," he thought. "There ought to be somebody around to pick me up."

Losing no time, for they had now passed several rods beyond the road-house, the plucky boy wriggled his body toward the open door of the coach.

Watching for what he thought a favorable opportunity, Hal gave himself a lurch forward and tumbled out into the snow. But as he did so one of the rear wheels of the coach struck him on the side of the head, and the blow rendered him unconscious.

His body lay where it had fallen for several minutes. Then two young men in a cutter came driving from the road-house.

"Hullo, Ike, what's that?" cried one of them, pulling up.

"Looks like a tramp in the snow," replied the other. "Let's drive out of the way."

"We can't leave him here. He'll be frozen to death."

"By Jove, Will, you're right. Wait, I'll jump out and investigate."

The speaker leaped out into the snow, and bent over the motionless form.

"By Jove! It isn't a tramp at all!" he burst out. "It's a well-dressed young man. Go back and get help. He's hurt on the head."

The young fellow remaining in the cutter at once did as directed, and returned with a negro and a white man.

Hal's body was lifted up, and he was carried to the road-house and placed on a lounge in the waiting-room.

Restoratives were applied, and presently Hal gave a gasp and sat up, the cords with which he had been bound having been cut.

"Where—where am I?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"You're safe indoors," was the reply. "What was the matter. How came you to be bound?"

"I was trapped, and a man was carrying me off in a coach."

"What! A regular abduction, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's the matter? Did the fellow want to get your money?"

"No. I know too much, and he, or rather the men who employ him, want to get me out of the way."

"Humph! They ought to be locked up! We don't want any such work as that around New York City."

"Where am I?" asked Hal, again.

"You are at the half-way house on the Jerome Avenue road."

"How far is that from downtown?"

"Quite a few miles, young man."

"Which is the nearest way down?"

"There is a station on the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad not far from here. But there won't be a train down until half-past ten."

"And what time is it now?"

"Quarter past nine."

"Then I think I'll wait."

"You had better. That crack on the head is an ugly one."

"I must have gotten it when I jumped from the coach."

"It was a desperate leap. Who was the fellow who was carrying you off?"

"A tough from the east side."

"Maybe he'll be coming back looking for you."

"That's so," cried Hal. "Is there a police officer around?"

"I'll find out."

"Macy is down by the stable," put in a man present.

"Call him, please," said Hal.

The policeman was summoned, and to him and the proprietor of the place the youth told his story, omitting all details that were not necessary.

"We might follow him in one of the rigs here," said the policeman. "But it's more than likely he'll be back."

"Will you arrest him for me?"

"Sure."

A few minutes passed. Then the door opened, and the negro who had helped to pick Hal up came in.

"A feller wid an empty coach jess drove up," he said, somewhat excitedly.

"It must be Macklin!" exclaimed Hal. "Where is he?"

"Jess gitting ready ter cum in, I reckon, sah."

"We'll go down and meet him," said the policeman, and he led the way.

The door leading to the bar-room was partly of glass. Beaching it, the policeman pointed to a man standing at the bar, gulping down a glass of liquor.

"Is that the chap?" he asked.

Hal gave a look.

"Yes, that's Macklin. Don't let him get away!"

"No fear. I've dealt with many a tough customer, and I know how to handle them."

"I will step in first, and give him a surprise," said the youth, and he opened the door.

Macklin's back was turned at the time, and he did not see our hero until Hal tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, Macklin, were you looking for me?"

The tough turned quickly. Then he grew pale, and the glass almost dropped from his hand.

"Wot—where——" he stammered.

"You didn't expect to meet me here, did you?" went on Hal, pleasantly.

"No—dat is—where did yer cum from?"

"From your coach, Macklin. I got tired of riding in such a cramped fashion."

The tough shifted uneasily. Hal beckoned to the policeman.

"Here, officer, is the rascal."

Macklin wheeled about, and gave the policeman a single glance, when, muttering something, he made a dash for the door.

But both Hal and the policeman were after him, and our hero caught him by the arm, and held him until the officer had slipped a pair of hand-cuffs onto him.

"I'll fix yer fer dis!" hissed Macklin in Hal's ear.

"Your days for fixing people are about over, Macklin," replied the youth. "You and the others have overreached yourselves for once."

"I didn't do nuthin'."

"We will see about that later. Where are Hardwick and Allen?"

"I don't know dem," replied the tough, sullenly.

"All right; then you want to take the whole responsibility of this matter on your own shoulders!"

At this the tough winced. It was putting the matter in a different light.

"Say, supposin' I put you on to dere game, will yer be easy wid me?"

"That depends on how much you have to tell," said Hal.

"I knows more dan da t'inks I do."

"About what?"

"About dem—never mind. I know wot you are after, an' don't fergit it!"

"The tin box?"

Macklin nodded

"Who has it, Hardwick or Allen?"



"I ain't sayin' anyt'ing."

"All right, officer, take him to the station-house, and I will go along and make a charge."

"No, no!" cried Macklin. "I wasn't goin' ter do yer, I was only goin' ter take yer to an old house up der river, an' Hardwick and Allen was goin' ter settle wid yer in der mornin'."

"Where is the old house?"

"Der Flack mansion."

"I know the place," said the policeman. "It has been unoccupied for years."

"What time were they coming up?"

"Hardwick said at eight o'clock sharp," replied Macklin. He seemed anxious now to inform on his companions in villainy.

"Very well, we will see what happens at that time," returned Hal, briefly.

His words meant a good deal.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE MISSING TIN BOX.

Less than an hour later Macklin was taken to the police station in his own coach and locked up.

As soon as this was accomplished Hal lost no time in making his way to Horace Sumner's elegant mansion.

It was now quite late, and only a single light gleamed out from the mansion, and that from the library, where the old broker sat, busy with his accounts.

His face was furrowed with care, and just before Hal rang the bell he heaved a deep sigh.

"Unless the tin box containing the stolen bonds is recovered I will be a ruined man!" he groaned. "It is impossible to cover the loss. Allen has ruined me, and even though he tries to use those slips, and I have him arrested, it will do no good."

The ring at the bell aroused him, and, as the servants had retired, he answered the summons himself.

"What, Hal!" he cried. "You must have important news, or you would not come at this hour of the night."

"I have important news, Mr. Sumner," replied the youth. "And I came because I want your assistance the first thing in the morning."

"You shall have it, Hal. But what news do you bring? Come into the library and tell me."

The two passed into the sumptuously-furnished apartment, and, seated by the open grate fire, the youth told of all that had occurred since he had obtained employment at Allen & Parsons'.

"You have had several narrow escapes, my boy," cried the old broker, shuddering. "You must be more careful, really you must."

"I think we have about reached the end of the matter," returned Hal.

"Why, what do you mean? The tin box——"

"I have an idea Hardwick, Allen, and the others intend to come to some sort of a settlement to-morrow, either at the old house, or at the office in Broad Street. This Samuels is about to take some of the bonds to Chicago, and we must be on hand to stop the scheme."

"You are right, Hal, and mighty smart. What do you propose? You have done so well thus far I must really allow you to go on."

"I propose we go to the old house, accompanied by a couple of officers, and lay low for Hardwick and Allen. When they come I can appear before them with my hands and feet bound, and accuse them of the crime. They will not know that Macklin has been arrested—I have taken care of that—and they may give themselves away."

"A good plan. What rogues they are, and how blind I have been! Hal, I shall not forget all you have done for me."

A little more conversation ensued, and then the youth arose.

"Where are you going, now?"

"To the hotel to get some sleep."

"No need of going to the hotel. I will call up one of the servants, and she can show you to a room."

"You are very kind, Mr. Sumner——"

"It is nothing, Hal, in comparison to what you have done for me. I shall reward you well if the missing box is recovered."

Quarter of an hour later Hal was shown to a bedroom on the second floor. It was quite the finest apartment of the kind he had ever entered. The servant opened the bed and drew the curtains, and then retired.

"Gracious, this is style!" murmured the youth, as he began to disrobe. "I wonder if I will ever own anything as nice?"

On the walls were a number of steel engravings and etchings, and on the mantel rested a large photograph of a handsome, middle-aged lady.

Hal gazed at the portrait for fully five minutes. The features were so motherly they appealed to his heart.

"It must be a picture of the late Mrs. Sumner," he thought. "What a good woman she must have been! No wonder Mr. Sumner and Miss Laura miss her."

And then, as he thought of his own condition—that of a mere poor-house foundling—his eyes grew moist.

"How I wish I had known a mother, and that she was like her," was his soliloquy. "Or that I had a father like kind Mr. Sumner—and such a girl like Miss Laura for a sister," he added, suddenly, and then he blushed.

His mind presently turned back to the missing tin box, and thinking over this, he soon fell asleep.

He was up bright and early. When he went down to the library he found Laura Sumner there, and the old broker soon joined them.

A hasty breakfast was had, livened by the bright conversation of Laura, who was of a vivacious turn of mind, and then Mr. Sumner and Hal hurried off to police headquarters.

Their quest was soon explained to the officer in charge, and two men were detailed to accompany them to the old mansion up on the Jerome Avenue road.

It had stopped snowing, and the early morning sun made everything glisten. A large sleigh was procured, and one of the policemen and Hal mounted the box and off they drove.

It was twenty minutes to eight when the vicinity of the old Flack mansion was reached. The sleigh was driven around a bend and into a clump of trees, and then the party dismounted.

"I'll go ahead, and see if anybody is around," said Hal. "If it's all right I'll wave a handkerchief from one of the windows."

The youth was somewhat excited. Supposing Macklin had made up the story of the meeting between Hardwick and Allen? Such a thing was possible.

"But no, he wouldn't dare," thought Hal. "He is thoroughly scared, and wants to gain our good graces by giving the others away."

The deserted mansion was in a dilapidated condition. More than half the shutters were gone, and the front door stood wide open.

Sneaking up along an old hedge, Hal gained the half-tumbled-down piazza and glided swiftly into the hall, now more than quarter filled with snow, which the sharp wind had driven in.

"Certainly a cheerless place," he thought. "But I suppose they thought no one would come here, and so they would be free from interruption."

He entered the parlor of the house, and then walked through to the dining-room, the library, and then the kitchen. Nothing was disturbed, and the smooth snow, wherever it had drifted in, did not show the first sign of a footstep.

"Good! I am in plenty of time," said Hal to himself. "I must tramp around a bit, and then bind myself up as best I can."

He waved his handkerchief out of one of the windows and then proceeded to tie his feet together.

He had just finished the work, when Horace Sumner and two officers rushed in.

"They are coming!" exclaimed the old broker. "There are Allen, Hardwick, and two strangers."

"The strangers must be Parsons and Samuels," said Hal. "Here, bind my hands, and shove me into the closet, and then hide."

This was done, and less than a minute later a stamping was heard, and Allen, Hardwick, Parsons, and Samuels entered the parlor.

"Hullo, Macklin, where are you?" cried Hardwick.

Of course, there was no reply.

"Must have gone off to get his breakfast," said Allen. "Wonder what he did with the boy?"

"Boy!" cried Hardwick. "Better say man. Carson is altogether too smart to be called a boy."

"We must get him out of the way, and then finish this bond matter," went on Allen.

"Yes, and hurry up," put in Samuels. "I want to catch, the twelve o'clock train to Chicago, and you might as well give me the bonds to take along. The sooner they are worked off the better."

"That's an easy matter to settle," said Hardwick. "I have the tin box right here with me. I didn't dare leave it behind, for fear old Sumner might get a search warrant and go through my house."

As the ex-book-keeper spoke, he unbuttoned his great coat, and brought forth the missing tin box for which Hal and the others had been so long searching.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### HARDWICK'S DASH FOR LIBERTY.

Hal and the others listened with keen interest to Hardwick's words. The ex-book-keeper had the missing railroad bonds with him, and he intended to transfer them to Samuels, to be disposed of to the best advantage.

"Now is the time to capture the gang," thought Hal. "I wish my hands were free."

"Let us see what has become of Carson first," said Allen, nervously. "Somehow I don't feel safe as long as that boy is within possible hearing."

"Don't get afraid," replied Parsons. "Tommy Macklin has probably done him up, or you would hear something from him."

"Macklin tried to remove him once before," returned Allen, with a shake of his head. "That boy beats all for shrewdness."

"I would like to settle him myself," growled Hardwick. "We would never have had the least bit of trouble if it hadn't been for him. Like as not I would still have been Sumner's head and confidential clerk," he added, with a sarcastic laugh.

"Yes, and I could have made life bitterness itself for Horace Sumner," cried Allen. "I wanted to do more than ruin him."

"What makes you so bitter against Sumner?" asked Parsons.

"That's my affair," replied Allen, shortly.

"It's because Sumner married the girl Allen wanted," put in Samuels. "Allen was clean gone on her, and when she married Sumner it broke him all up."

"Shut up, Samuels!" exclaimed Allen, evidently angry at having the matter mentioned. "There are but few know of it, and I don't want it to reach Horace Sumner's ears, or——"

"It won't reach him through me, Allen, and he will never suspect that you had anything to do with his son's——"

"Will you shut up!" roared Allen, turning white with rage. "One would think, by the way your tongue rattles, that you had been drinking."

"Only had a couple of glasses," returned Samuels, coolly. "So don't get worked up, Allen."

Hal listened to this conversation with deep interest. It revealed why Allen was so bitter against Horace Sumner, and so willing to cheat his partner.

"But I don't understand about that child business yet," muttered Hal to himself.

While the others were talking Hardwick had been examining the closets, and he now came to the one in which the others had placed Hal.

"Hullo! here he is!" he shouted. "Well, how do you feel, you beggar?" the last to the boy.

"Not very well," replied Hal coolly. His hands were now loose, but he kept them behind him.

"You'll feel a sight worse before we are done with you," returned Hardwick, grimly.

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"You'll see soon enough," said the ex-book-keeper.

He turned to the others, and as he did so Hal bent down and freed his feet.

"By Jove! he's loose!" cried Parsons, glancing around.

"Yes, and I intend to stay so," cried Hal, stepping into the room. "Hardwick, I want that tin box."

"Ho! ho! hear him talk!" exclaimed Hardwick. "Jump on him, boys!"

"Stand back, every one of you!" cried Hal. "I am not alone here. There is plenty of help!"

He uttered the last word loudly, and on the instant the doors leading to the dining-room, and the one from the library opened, and Horace Sumner stepped into the parlor, followed by the two officers.

"Trapped!" howled Allen. "Macklin has either been outwitted or he has played



us false!"

The two officers held pistols in their hands, and they lost no time in coming to the front.

"Surrender, all of you!" cried one of them.

"Never!" cried Allen. "Do you think I am to be caught like a rat in a trap?"

He made a dash for the hall-way, and was quickly followed by Samuels.

But the two policemen were too quick for the pair, and they were speedily overtaken, and then a desperate struggle ensued.

In the meantime Parsons tried to jump through the door-way leading to the library. In order to do this he had to pass Horace Sumner, and putting out his foot the old broker sent the man sprawling to the floor, and then ended his struggles by sitting down on him so suddenly that Parsons' wind was knocked completely out of him.

Hal still confronted Hardwick, whose eyes were fairly blazing with passion.

"Give me the box!" commanded Hal. "Quick! I mean what I say."

Instead of complying Hardwick made a vicious blow for Hal's head. The boy dodged, but in doing so slipped and went down on his back.

Before he could recover, Hardwick sprang for one of the open windows, and leaped through, carrying part of the long sash with him.

He had hardly disappeared when Hal was on his feet again. Without hesitation the youth followed through the broken window. Hardwick was making for the road, where stood a team of horses attached to a fine sleigh.

"If he gets away in that he and the tin box are goners!" was Hal's rapid conclusion. "I must stop him at all hazards."

Hardwick had a good start, but Hal made quick time after him, and when the ex-book-keeper reached the sleigh the boy was not a dozen yards behind.

"Stop, Hardwick!" he cried.

"Not much, Carson! Take that!"

Hardwick pulled out his weapon. There were two reports in rapid succession. Hal was struck in the side, and Hardwick stumbled down.

Hal was quite badly hurt, but he braced up and staggered to where Hardwick lay.

"Now give up the tin box," he ordered, in as steady a voice as he could.

"Never to you!" roared Hardwick. "You have been the cause of all my trouble. Take that!"

He fired. One bullet grazed Hal's shoulder, the others flew wide of their mark. Then the boy took the butt of his own weapon and with one blow on Hardwick's head knocked the villain unconscious.

The mist was swimming before his eyes as he gathered up the tin box and its precious contents, and staggered toward the house. The policemen had made prisoners of the gang, and Horace Sumner ran out to meet the youth.

"You are shot, Hal?" he cried, in quick alarm.

"Yes, Mr. Sumner—I—I am shot," was the low reply. "But here is the tin box and—the—bonds—safe."

And with these words Hal pitched over insensible into the broker's arms.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A SURPRISING REVELATION.

Horace Sumner was terribly alarmed. Paying no attention to the tin box, he knelt down and raised Hal up on his knee.

"Shot in the shoulder and in the side," he murmured after a brief examination. "Oh, I trust it be not serious!"

All of the prisoners had been handcuffed, and one of the officers followed Mr. Sumner out.

"Hullo! is he shot?" he cried.

"Yes."

"Where is the fellow with the tin box?"

"The box is here, safe. There lies the fellow. Arrest him, and fix it so he cannot get away."

The policeman at once hurried to Hardwick's side, and before the ex-book-keeper had fully recovered consciousness he was handcuffed and then placed in a room with the other prisoners.

"What are you going to do with us?" he demanded of the policeman who stood guard at the door, pistol in hand.

"You will see later. Not another word now."

And Hardwick was forced to keep silent, as were also the others.

There was another house not far distant, and getting the sleigh, Mr. Sumner placed Hal's form into it, and drove him around to the door.

Matters were quickly explained, and as the broker showed that he was a wealthy man, and well able to pay for accommodations, Hal was at once lifted into the house and placed on a comfortable bed in one of the upper rooms.

"Send for the nearest doctor, please," said Horace Sumner. "And tell him he must come at once, no matter what the expense. Tell him I am Horace Sumner, the broker, of Wall Street."

The man about the place at once hurried off, and placing the tin box, which he had picked up out of the snow, on the table, Horace Sumner bent over Hal's motionless form, and sought by every means in his power to restore him to consciousness.

In working over Hal's clothing the golden locket the youth considered his birthright came to light. For the moment Horace Sumner paid no attention to it, but placed it on top of the tin box.

At last Hal opened his eyes and stared around him.

"Hal, how do you feel?" questioned the old broker, with real anxiety in his tones.

"Mr. Sumner! the box—did you——"

"It is safe, Hal."

"I am so glad," and a smile came over the pallid face.

"But, my poor boy, you are hurt—Hardwick shot you. Can't you feel it?"

"Yes, in my side and my shoulder, but I don't think it's very bad, and I'll soon \_\_\_\_\_"

Before Hal could finish he fainted away. Less than ten minutes later the man about the place returned with an experienced physician.

"Not dangerously wounded," was his opinion, after a thorough examination. "He will be as sound as a dollar in a couple of months. But he ought not to be moved for several weeks."

"He shall not be," said Horace Sumner.

And he at once made arrangements with the owner of the house to have the use of that room and the next for the entire time mentioned with board and care for a nurse and Hal.

An hour later Hal was resting easier, and then Horace Sumner arose to leave and find out what the officers had done with the captured criminals.

As he turned to pick up the tin box he noticed the golden locket. He took it up rather carelessly, but suddenly a peculiar look stole into his eyes, and dropping the tin box he hurriedly opened the locket.

"My heavens!" he ejaculated.

The exclamation was so pronounced that it awoke Hal, and the youth opened his eyes wide, and stared at the man.

"Where—where did you get this locket?" demanded Horace Sumner, in a voice husky with emotion.

"It is my birthright—or at least all I have of one," replied the youth.

"Your birthright?"

"That's what I call it, sir. It was around my neck when I was found on the streets of Fairham."

"Can this be true? When was this?"

"About sixteen years ago. But what—what—"

"Stop! what part of the year, Hal? answer me quickly."

"It was one Fourth of July night."

Horace Sumner staggered back.

"Fourth of July," he muttered to himself. "And little Howard disappeared on the twenty-seventh of June. Can it be——"

"You say you do not know anything about yourself?" he asked of Hal.

"No, sir. The people at Fairham tried to find out, but they didn't make a very great effort, I'm thinking, and so I—I—well, you can see how it is."

"You are not to blame, Hal. A better or more noble boy never lived—and—and I thank God that is so, for it—I will explain later. I must see Caleb Allen without delay."

And with his tin box under his arm, Horace Sumner rushed from the house, taking the golden locket with him.

When he appeared at the station-house he seemed almost like a crazy man, so

eager was he to interview Allen. A private meeting between the two was speedily arranged.

"Allen, I have come on an important mission," began Horace Sumner.

"Have you? I thought you had your bonds," returned the swindler, as coolly as he could.

"I am not referring to the bonds. This matter is far more important."

"Indeed!"

"When you and the others were at the old Flack mansion Samuels mentioned a subject that lies close to my heart."

"Samuels didn't know what he was saying," growled Allen, turning pale.

"He did, Allen. I have been blind, but my eyes are now wide open. Caleb Allen, years ago you stole my son, my little baby boy."

"It's not true!" almost shouted Allen, but he trembled from head to foot.

"It is true. I have the evidence to prove it. Do you deny that you took the little one first to Philadelphia and then to the village of Fairham, and on the night of the Fourth of July——"

Caleb Allen jumped up as if shot.

"So Tommy Macklin has been blabbing, had he?" he screamed. "But it won't do you any good, Horace Sumner. The boy is lost to you—you will never hear of him again."

"So?" The old broker pulled the golden locket from his pocket. "Look at this. It was around his neck when he was stolen, and it has been the connecting link to prove his identity. He is found, and my little boy Howard is—Hal Carson, the youth who helped to bring you to justice."

Here we must bring our tale to a close.

What Horace Sumner had said was true. Hal Carson was really his son, who had been stolen by Caleb Allen and Tommy Macklin, the latter having, even in those days, been a ready tool of the swindler.

Even after having robbed Sumner of his only son, Allen's hatred was not

satisfied, and he entered into the limited partnership only for the purpose of ruining the man.

Allen had fallen in with Hardwick at a gambling house uptown, and the two soon became firm friends. At that time Dick Ferris was a great admirer of Hardwick, who found the tall boy a fellow without scruples of any kind.

Hal was amazed when he learned the truth concerning himself. At first he could not believe it, but when it came home to him he was overjoyed. He speedily recovered from the wounds Hardwick had inflicted, and one fine day in the early part of the following year Horace Sumner and Laura took him to the elegant mansion which was in future to be his home as well as theirs.

Hardwick, Allen, Macklin, and Samuels were all tried, and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Parsons escaped, and went to England.

When the police started to find Dick Ferris they found that the tall boy had shipped on a three years, whaling voyage. To this day he has not returned to New York.

The recovery of the tin box containing the railroad bonds saved Horace Sumner from ruin. He and his son are now in partnership on Wall Street, and trusty Jack McCabe is their office boy. Hal, or Howard, as he is now called, is rich, and is surrounded by friends, but it is not likely that he will ever forget the time he came to New York a poor boy, and solved the mystery of the Missing Tin Box.

## **THE END**

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