

ALGER

HORATIO JR.

THE STORE BOY

Horatio Alger
The Store Boy

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The Store Boy:

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Jr. Horatio Alger

The Store Boy

CHAPTER I BEN BARCLAY MEETS A TRAMP

"Give me a ride?"

Ben Barclay checked the horse he was driving and looked attentively at the speaker. He was a stout-built, dark-complexioned man, with a beard of a week's growth, wearing an old and dirty suit, which would have reduced any tailor to despair if taken to him for cleaning and repairs. A loose hat, with a torn crown, surmounted a singularly ill-favored visage.

"A tramp, and a hard looking one!" said Ben to himself.

He hesitated about answering, being naturally reluctant to have such a traveling companion.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded the tramp rather impatiently.

"There's plenty of room on that seat, and I'm dead tired."

"Where are you going?" asked Ben.

"Same way you are—to Pentonville."

"You can ride," said Ben, in a tone by means cordial, and he halted his horse till his unsavory companion climbed into the

wagon.

They were two miles from Pentonville, and Ben had a prospect of a longer ride than he desired under the circumstances. His companion pulled out a dirty clay pipe from his pocket, and filled it with tobacco, and then explored another pocket for a match. A muttered oath showed that he failed to find one.

"Got a match, boy?" he asked.

"No," answered Ben, glad to have escaped the offensive fumes of the pipe.

"Just my luck!" growled the tramp, putting back the pipe with a look of disappointment. "If you had a match now, I wouldn't mind letting you have a whiff or two.

"I don't smoke," answered Ben, hardly able to repress a look of disgust.

"So you're a good boy, eh? One of the Sunday school kids that want to be an angel, hey? Pah!" and the tramp exhibited the disgust which the idea gave him.

"Yes, I go to Sunday school," said Ben coldly, feeling more and more repelled by his companion.

"I never went to Sunday school," said his companion. "And I wouldn't.

It's only good for milksops and hypocrites."

"Do you think you're any better for not going?" Ben couldn't help asking.

"I haven't been so prosperous, if that's what you mean. I'm a straightforward man, I am. You always know where to find me.

There ain't no piety about me. What are you laughin' at?"

"No offense," said Ben. "I believe every word you say."

"You'd better. I don't allow no man to doubt my word, nor no boy, either. Have you got a quarter about you?"

"No."

"Nor a dime? A dime'll do."

"I have no money to spare."

"I'd pay yer to-morrer."

"You'll have to borrow elsewhere; I am working in a store for a very small salary, and that I pay over to my mother."

"Whose store?"

"Simon Crawford's; but you won't know any better for my telling you that, unless you are acquainted in Pentonville"

"I've been through there. Crawford keeps the grocery store."

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Ben Barclay," answered our hero, feeling rather annoyed at what he considered intrusive curiosity.

"Barclay?" replied the tramp quickly. "Not John Barclay's son?"

It was Ben's turn to be surprised. He was the son of John Barclay, deceased, but how could his ill-favored traveling companion know that?

"Did you know my father?" asked the boy, astonished.

"I've heerd his name," answered the tramp, in an evasive tone.

"What is your name?" asked Ben, feeling that he had a right

to be as curious as his companion.

"I haven't got any visitin' cards with me," answered the tramp dryly.

"Nor I; but I told you my name."

"All right; I'll tell you mine. You can call me Jack Frost."

"I gave you my real name," said Ben significantly.

"I've almost forgotten what my real name is," said the tramp. "If you don't like Jack Frost, you can call me George Washington."

Ben laughed.

"I don't think that name would suit, he said. George Washington never told a lie."

"What d'ye mean by that?" demanded the tramp, his brow darkening.

"I was joking," answered Ben, who did not care to get into difficulty with such a man.

"I'm going to joke a little myself," growled the tramp, as, looking quickly about him, he observed that they were riding over a lonely section of the road lined with woods. "Have you got any money about you?"

Ben, taken by surprise, would have been glad to answer "No," but he was a boy of truth, and could not say so truly, though he might have felt justified in doing so under the circumstances.

"Come, I see you have. Give it to me right off or it'll be worse for you."

Now it happened that Ben had not less than twenty-five dollars

about him. He had carried some groceries to a remote part of the town, and collected two bills on the way. All this money he had in a wallet in the pocket on the other side from the tramp. But the money was not his; it belonged to his employer, and he was not disposed to give it up without a struggle; though he knew that in point of strength he was not an equal match for the man beside him.

"You will get no money from me," he answered in a firm tone, though he felt far from comfortable.

"I won't, hey!" growled the tramp. "D'ye think I'm goin' to let a boy like you get the best of me?"

He clutched Ben by the arm, and seemed in a fair way to overcome opposition by superior strength, when a fortunate idea struck Ben. In his vest pocket was a silver dollar, which had been taken at the store, but proving to be counterfeit, had been given to Ben by Mr. Crawford as a curiosity.

This Ben extracted from his pocket, and flung out by the roadside.

"If you want it, you'll have to get out and get it," he said.

The tramp saw the coin glistening upon the ground, and had no suspicion of its not being genuine. It was not much—only a dollar—but he was "dead broke," and it was worth picking up. He had not expected that Ben had much, and so was not disappointed.

"Curse you!" he said, relinquishing his hold upon Ben. "Why couldn't you give it to me instead of throwing it out there?"

"Because," answered Ben boldly, "I didn't want you to have

it."

"Get out and get it for me!"

"I won't!" answered Ben firmly.

"Then stop the horse and give me a chance to get out."

"I'll do that."

Ben brought the horse to a halt, and his unwelcome passenger descended, much to his relief. He had to walk around the wagon to get at the coin. Our hero brought down the whip with emphasis on the horse's back and the animal dashed off at a good rate of speed.

"Stop!" exclaimed the tramp, but Ben had no mind to heed his call.

"No, my friend, you don't get another chance to ride with me," he said to himself.

The tramp picked up the coin, and his practiced eye detected that it was bogus.

"The young villain!" he muttered angrily. "I'd like to wring his neck. It's a bad one after all." He looked after the receding team and was half disposed to follow, but he changed his mind, reflecting, "I can pass it anyhow."

Instead of pursuing his journey, he made his way into the woods, and, stretching himself out among the underbrush, went to sleep.

Half a mile before reaching the store, Ben overtook Rose Gardiner, who had the reputation of being the prettiest girl in Pendleton—at any rate, such was Ben's opinion. She looked up

and smiled pleasantly at Ben as he took off his hat.

"Shall you attend Prof. Harrington's entertainment at the Town Hall this evening, Ben?" she asked, after they had interchanged greetings.

"I should like to go," answered Ben, "but I am afraid I can't be spared from the store. Shall you go?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything. I hope I shall see you there."

"I shall want to go all the more then." answered Ben gallantly.

"You say that to flatter me," said the young lady, with an arch smile.

"No, I don't," said Ben earnestly. "Won't you get in and ride as far as the store?"

"Would it be proper?" asked Miss Rose demurely.

"Of course it would."

"Then I'll venture."

Ben jumped from the wagon, assisted the young lady in, and the two drove into the village together. He liked his second passenger considerably better than the first.

CHAPTER II BEN AND HIS MOTHER

Ben Barclay, after taking leave of the tramp, lost no time in driving to the grocery store where he was employed. It was a large country store, devoted not to groceries alone, but supplies of dry-goods, boots and shoes, and the leading articles required in the community. There were two other clerks besides Ben, one the son, another the nephew, of Simon Crawford, the proprietor.

"Did you collect any money, Ben?" asked Simon, who chanced to be standing at the door when our hero drove up.

"Yes, sir; I collected twenty-five dollars, but came near losing it on the way home."

"How was that? I hope you were not careless."

"No, except in taking a stranger as a passenger. When we got to that piece of woods a mile back, he asked me for all the money I had."

"A highwayman, and so near Pentonville!" ejaculated Simon Crawford.

"What was he like?"

"A regular tramp."

"Yet you say you have the money. How did you manage to keep it from him?"

Ben detailed the stratagem of which he made use.

"You did well," said the storekeeper approvingly. "I must give you a dollar for the one you sacrificed."

"But sir, it was bad money. I couldn't have passed it."

"That does not matter. You are entitled to some reward for the courage and quick wit you displayed. Here is a dollar, and—let me see, there is an entertainment at the Town Hall this evening, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir. Prof. Harrington, the magician, gives an entertainment," said Ben eagerly.

"At what time does it commence?"

"At eight o'clock."

"You may leave the store at half-past seven. That will give you enough time to get there."

"Thank you, sir. I wanted to go to the entertainment, but did not like to ask for the evening."

"You have earned it. Here is the dollar," and Mr. Crawford handed the money to his young clerk, who received it gratefully.

A magical entertainment may be a very common affair to my young readers in the city, but in a country village it is an event. Pentonville was too small to have any regular place of amusement, and its citizens were obliged to depend upon traveling performers, who, from time to time, engaged the Town Hall. Some time had elapsed since there had been any such entertainment, and Prof. Harrington was the more likely to be well patronized. Ben, who had the love of amusement common to boys of his age, had been regretting the necessity of remaining

in the store till nine o'clock, and therefore losing his share of amusement when, as we have seen, an opportunity suddenly offered.

"I am glad I met the tramp, after all," he said to himself. "He has brought me luck."

At supper he told his mother what had befallen him, but she took a more serious view of it than he did.

"He might have murdered you, Ben," she said with a shudder.

"Oh, no; he wouldn't do that. He might have stolen Mr. Crawford's money; that was the most that was likely to happen."

"I didn't think there were highwaymen about here. Now I shall be worrying about you."

"Don't do that mother; I don't feel in any danger. Still, if you think it best, I will carry a pistol."

"No, no, Ben! it might go off and kill you. I would rather run the risk of a highwayman. I wonder if the man is prowling about in the neighborhood yet?"

"I don't think my bogus dollar will carry him very far. By the way, mother, I must tell you one strange thing. He asked me if I was John Barclay's son."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Barclay, in a tone of great surprise. "Did he know your name was Barclay?"

"Not till I told him. Then it was he asked if I was the son of John Barclay."

"Did he say he knew your father?"

"I asked him, but he answered evasively."

"He might have seen some resemblance—that is, if he had ever met your father. Ah! it was a sad day for us all when your poor father died. We should have been in a very different position," the widow sighed.

"Yes, mother," said Ben; "but when I get older I will try to supply my father's place, and relieve you from care and trouble."

"You are doing that in a measure now, my dear boy," said Mrs. Barclay affectionately. "You are a great comfort to me."

Ben's answer was to go up to his mother and kiss her. Some boys of his age are ashamed to show their love for the mother who is devoted to them, but it a false shame, that does them no credit.

"Still, mother, you work too hard," said Ben. "Wait till I am a man, and you shall not need to work at all."

Mrs. Barclay had been a widow for five years. Her husband had been a commercial traveler, but had contracted a fever at Chicago, and died after a brief illness, without his wife having the satisfaction of ministering to him in his last days. A small sum due him from his employers was paid over to his family, but no property was discovered, though his wife had been under the impression that her husband possessed some. He had never been in the habit of confiding his business affairs to her, and so, if he had investments of any kind, she could not learn anything about them. She found herself, therefore, with no property except a small cottage, worth, with its quarter acre of land, perhaps fifteen hundred dollars. As Ben was too

small to earn anything, she had been compelled to raise about seven hundred dollars on mortgage, which by this time had been expended for living. Now, Ben was earning four dollars a week, and, with her own earnings, she was able to make both ends meet without further encroachments upon her scanty property; but the mortgage was a source of anxiety to her, especially as it was held by Squire Davenport, a lawyer of considerable means, who was not overscrupulous about the methods by which he strove to increase his hoards. Should he at any time take it into his head to foreclose, there was no one to whom Mrs. Barclay could apply to assume the mortgage, and she was likely to be compelled to sacrifice her home. He had more than once hinted that he might need the money but as yet had gone no further.

Mrs. Barclay had one comfort, however, and a great one. This was a good son. Ben was always kind to his mother—a bright, popular, promising boy—and though at present he was unable to earn much, in a few years he would be able to earn a good income, and then his mother knew that she would be well provided for. So she did not allow herself to borrow trouble but looked forward hopefully, thanking God for what He had given her.

"Won't you go up to the Town Hall with me, mother?" asked Ben. I am sure you would enjoy it."

"Thank you, Ben, for wishing me to have a share in your amusements," his mother replied, "but I have a little headache this evening, and I shall be better off at home."

"It isn't on account of the expense you decline, mother, is it? You know Mr. Crawford gave me a dollar, and the tickets are but twenty-five cents."

"No, it isn't that, Ben. If it were a concert I might be tempted to go in spite of my headache, but a magical entertainment would not amuse me as much as it will you."

"Just as you think best, mother; but I should like to have you go."

"You won't feel lonely, will you?"

"I am used to being alone till nine o'clock, when you are at the store."

This conversation took place at the supper table. Ben went directly from the store to the Town Hall, where he enjoyed himself as much as he anticipated. If he could have foreseen how his mother was to pass that evening, it would have destroyed all his enjoyment.

CHAPTER III MRS. BARCLAY'S CALLERS

About half-past eight o'clock Mrs. Barclay sat with her work in her hand. Her headache was better, but she did not regret not having accompanied Ben to the Town Hall.

"I am glad Ben is enjoying himself," she thought, "but I would rather stay quietly at home. Poor boy! he works hard enough, and needs recreation now and then."

Just then a knock was heard at the outside door.

"I wonder who it can be?" thought the widow. "I supposed everybody would be at the Town Hall. It may be Mrs. Perkins come to borrow something."

Mrs. Perkins was a neighbor much addicted to borrowing, which was rather disagreeable, but might have been more easily tolerated but that she seldom returned the articles lent.

Mrs. Barclay went to the door and opened it, fully expecting to see her borrowing neighbor. A very different person met her view. The ragged hat, the ill-looking face, the neglected attire, led her to recognize the tramp whom Ben had described to her as having attempted to rob him in the afternoon. Terrified, Mrs. Barclay's first impulse was to shut the door and bolt it. But her unwelcome visitor was too quick for her. Thrusting his foot into the doorway, he interposed an effectual obstacle in the way of

shutting the door.

"No, you don't, ma'am!" he said, with a laugh. "I understand your little game. You want to shut me out."

"What do you want?" asked the widow apprehensively.

"What do I want?" returned the tramp. "Well, to begin with, I want something to eat—and drink," he added, after a pause.

"Why don't you go to the tavern?" asked Mrs. Barclay, anxious for him to depart.

"Well, I can't afford it. All the money I've got is a bogus dollar your rogue of a son gave me this afternoon."

"You stole it from him," said the widow indignantly.

"What's the odds if I did. It ain't of no value. Come, haven't you anything to eat in the house? I'm hungry as a wolf."

"And you look like one!" thought Mrs. Barclay, glancing at his unattractive features; but she did not dare to say it.

There seemed no way of refusing, and she was glad to comply with his request, if by so doing she could soon get rid of him.

"Stay here," she said, "and I'll bring you some bread and butter and cold meat."

"Thank you, I'd rather come in," said the tramp, and he pushed his way through the partly open door.

She led the way uneasily into the kitchen just in the rear of the sitting room where she had been seated.

"I wish Ben was here," she said to herself, with sinking heart.

The tramp seated himself at the kitchen table, while Mrs. Barclay, going to the pantry, brought out part of a loaf of bread,

and butter, and a few slices of cold beef, which she set before him. Without ceremony he attacked the viands and ate as if half famished. When about half through, he turned to the widow, and asked:

"Haven't you some whisky in the house?"

"I never keep any," answered Mrs. Barclay.

"Rum or gin, then?" I ain't partic'lar. I want something to warm me up."

"I keep no liquor of any kind. I don't approve of drink, or want Ben to touch it."

"Oh, you belong to the cold water army, do you?" said the tramp with a sneer. "Give me some coffee, then."

"I have no fire, and cannot prepare any."

"What have you got, then?" demanded than unwelcome guest impatiently.

"I can give you a glass of excellent well water."

"[illegible] Do you want to choke me?" returned the tramp in disgust.

"Suppose I mix you some molasses and water," suggested the widow, anxious to propitiate her dangerous guest.

"Humph! Well, that will do, if you've got nothing better. Be quick about it, for my throat is parched."

As soon as possible the drink was prepared and set beside his plate. He drained it at a draught, and called for a second glass, which was supplied him. Presently, for all things must have an end, the tramp's appetite seemed to be satisfied. He threw

himself back in his chair, stretched his legs, and, with his hands in his pockets, fixed his eyes on the widow.

"I feel better," he said.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Barclay. "Now, if you'll be kind enough, leave the house, for I expect Ben back before long."

"And you don't want him to get hurt," laughed the tramp. "Well, I do owe him a flogging for a trick he played on me."

"Oh, pray, go away!" said Mrs. Barclay, apprehensively. "I have given you some supper, and that ought to satisfy you."

"I can't go away till I've talked to you a little on business."

"Business! What business can you have with me?"

"More than you think. You are the widow of John Barclay, ain't you?"

"Yes; did you know my husband?"

"Yes; that is, I saw something of him just before he died."

"Can you tell me anything about his last moments?" asked the widow, forgetting the character of her visitor, and only thinking of her husband.

"No, that isn't in my line. I ain't a doctor nor yet a minister. I say, did he leave any money?"

"Not that we have been able to find out. He owned this hone, but left no other property."

"That you know of," said the tramp, significantly.

"Do you know of any?" asked Mrs. Barclay eagerly. "How did you happen to know him?"

"I was the barkeeper in the hotel where he died. It was a small

house, not one of your first-class hotels."

"My husband was always careful of his expenses. He did not spend money unnecessarily. With his prudence we all thought he must have some investments, but we could discover none."

"Have you got any money in the house?" asked the tramp, with seeming abruptness.

"Why do you ask?" returned the widow, alarmed. "Surely, you would not rob me?"

"No, I don't want to rob you. I want to sell you something."

"I don't care to buy. It takes all our money for necessary expenses."

"You don't ask what I have to sell."

"No, because I cannot buy it, whatever it may be."

"It is—a secret," said the tramp.

"A secret!" repeated Mrs. Barclay, bewildered.

"Yes, and a secret worth buying. Your husband wasn't so poor as you think. He left stock and papers representing three thousand dollars, and I am the only man who can put you in the way of getting it."

Mrs. Barclay was about to express her surprise, when a loud knock was heard at the outer door.

"Who's that?" demanded the tramp quickly. "Is it the boy?"

"No, he would not knock."

"Then, let me get out of this," he said, leaping to his feet. "Isn't there a back door?"

"Yes, there it is."

He hurried to the door, unbolted it, and made his escape into the open beyond the house, just as the knock was repeated.

Confused by what she had heard, and the strange conduct of her visitor, the widow took the lamp and went to the door. To her surprise she found on opening it, two visitors, in one of whom she recognized Squire Davenport, already referred to as holding a mortgage on her house. The other was a short, dark-complexioned man, who looked like a mechanic.

"Excuse me the lateness of my call, Mrs. Barclay," said the squire smoothly. "I come on important business. This is Mr. Kirk, a cousin of my wife."

"Walk in, gentlemen," said Mrs. Barclay.

"This is night of surprises," she thought to herself.

CHAPTER IV

UNPLEASANT BUSINESS

It was now nine o'clock, rather a late hour for callers in the country, and Mrs. Barclay waited not without curiosity to hear the nature of the business which had brought her two visitors at that time.

"Take seats, gentlemen," she said, with the courtesy habitual to her.

Squire Davenport, who was disposed to consider that he had a right to the best of everything, seated himself in the rocking-chair, and signed his companion to a cane chair beside him.

"Mr. Kirk," he commenced, "is thinking of coming to Pentonville to live."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Barclay politely. Perhaps she would not have said this if she had known what was coming next.

"He is a carpenter," continued the squire, "and, as we have none in the village except old Mr. Wade, who is superannuated, I think he will find enough to do to keep him busy."

"I should think so," assented the widow.

"If he does not, I can employ him a part of the time on my land."

"What has all this to do with me?" thought Mrs. Barclay. She soon learned.

"Of course he will need a house," pursued the squire, "and as his family is small, he thinks this house will just suit him."

"But I don't wish to sell," said the widow hurriedly. "I need this house for Ben and myself."

"You could doubtless find other accommodations. I dare say you could hire a couple of rooms from Elnathan Perkins."

"I wouldn't live in that old shell," said Mrs. Barclay rather indignantly, "and I am sure Ben wouldn't."

"I apprehend Benjamin will have no voice in the matter," said Squire Davenport stiffly. "He is only a boy."

"He is my main support, and my main adviser," said Mrs. Barclay, with spirit, "and I shall not take any step which is disagreeable to him."

Mr. Kirk looked disappointed, but the squire gave him an assuring look, as the widow could see.

"Perhaps you may change your mind," said the squire significantly. "I am under the impression that I hold a mortgage on this property."

"Yes, sir," assented Mrs. Barclay apprehensively.

"For the sum of seven hundred dollars, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall have need of this money for other purposes, and will trouble you to take it up."

"I was to have three months' notice," said the widow, with a troubled look.

"I will give you three months' notice to-night," said the squire.

"I don't know where to raise the money," faltered Mrs. Barclay.

"Then you had better sell to my friend here. He will assume the mortgage and pay you three hundred dollars."

"But that will be only a thousand dollars for the place."

"A very fair price, in my opinion, Mrs. Barclay."

"I have always considered it worth fifteen hundred dollars," said the widow, very much disturbed.

"A fancy price, my dear madam; quite an absurd price, I assure you.

What do you say, Kirk?"

"I quite agree with you, squire," said Kirk, in a strong, nasal tone.

"But then, women don't know anything of business."

"I know that you and your cousin are trying to take advantage of my poverty," said Mrs. Barclay bitterly. "If you are a carpenter, why don't you build a house for yourself, instead of trying to deprive me of mine?"

"That's my business," said Kirk rudely.

"Mr. Kirk cannot spare the time to build at present," said the squire.

"Then why doesn't he hire rooms from Elnathan Perkins, as you just recommended to me?"

"They wouldn't suit him," said the squire curtly. "He has set his mind on this house."

"Squire Davenport," said Mrs. Barclay, in a softened voice,

"I am sure you cannot understand what you ask of me when you seek to take my home and turn me adrift. Here I lived with my poor husband; here my boy was born. During my married life I have had no other home. It is a humble dwelling, but it has associations and charms for me which it can never have for no one else. Let Mr. Kirk see some other house and leave me undisturbed in mine."

"Humph!" said the squire, shrugging his shoulders; "you look upon the matter from a sentimental point of view. That is unwise. It is simply a matter of business. You speak of the house as yours. In reality, it is more mine than yours, for I have a major interest in it. Think over my proposal coolly, and you will see that you are unreasonable. Mr. Kirk may be induced to give you a little more—say three hundred and fifty dollars—over and above the mortgage, which, as I said before, he is willing assume."

"How does it happen that you are willing to let the mortgage remain, if he buys, when you want the money for other purposes?" asked the widow keenly.

"He is a near relative of my wife, and that makes the difference, I apprehend."

"Well, madam, what do you say?" asked Kirk briskly.

"I say this, that I will keep the house if I can."

"You needn't expect that I will relent," said the squire hastily.

"I do not, for I see there is no consideration in your heart for a poor widow; but I cannot help thinking that Providence will raise up some kind friend who will buy the mortgage, or in some other

way will enable me to save my home."

You are acting very foolishly, Mrs. Barclay, as you will realize in time. I give you a week in which to change your mind. Till then my friend Kirk's offer stands good. After that I cannot promise. If the property sold at auction I shouldn't be surprised if it did not fetch more than the amount of my lien upon it."

"I will trust in Providence, Squire Davenport."

"Providence won't pay off your mortgage, ma'am," said Kirk, with a coarse laugh.

Mrs. Barclay did not answer. She saw that he was a man of coarse fiber and did not care to notice him.

"Come along, Kirk," said the squire. "I apprehend she will be all right after a while. Mrs. Barclay will see her own interest when she comes to reflect."

"Good-evening, ma'am," said Kirk.

Mrs. Barclay inclined her head slowly, but did not reply.

When the two had left the house she sank into a chair and gave herself to painful thoughts. She had known that Squire Davenport had the right to dispossess her, but had not supposed he would do so as long as she paid the interest regularly. In order to do this, she and Ben had made earnest efforts, and denied themselves all but the barest necessities. Thus far she had succeeded. The interest on seven hundred dollars at six per cent. had amounted to forty-two dollars, and this was a large sum to pay, but thus far they had always had it ready. That Squire Davenport, with his own handsome mansion, would fix covetous eyes on her little home,

she had not anticipated, but it had come to pass.

As to raising seven hundred dollars to pay off the mortgage, or induce any capitalist to furnish it, she feared it would be quite impossible.

She anxiously waited for Ben's return from the Town Hall in order to consult with him.

CHAPTER V PROFESSOR HARRINGTON'S ENTERTAINMENT

Meanwhile Ben Barclay was enjoying himself at Professor Harrington's entertainment. He was at the Town Hall fifteen minutes before the time, and secured a seat very near the stage, or, perhaps it will be more correct to say, the platform. He had scarcely taken his seat when, to his gratification, Rose Gardiner entered the hall and sat down beside him.

"Good-evening, Ben," she said pleasantly. "So you came, after all."

Ben's face flushed with pleasure, for Rose Gardiner was, as we have said, the prettiest girl in Pentonville, and for this reason, as well as for her agreeable manners, was an object of attraction to the boys, who, while too young to be in love, were not insensible to the charms of a pretty face. I may add that Rose was the niece of the Rev. Mr. Gardiner, the minister of the leading church in the village.

"Good-evening, Rose," responded Ben, who was too well acquainted with the young lady to address her more formally; "I am glad to be in such company."

"I wish I could return the compliment," answered Rose, with a saucy smile.

"Don't be too severe," said Ben, "or you will hurt my feelings."

"That would be a pity, surely; but how do do you happen to get off this evening? I thought you spent your evenings at the store."

"So I do, generally, but I was excused this evening for a special reason," and then he told of his adventure with the tramp.

Rose listened with eager attention.

"Weren't you terribly frightened?" she asked.

"No," answered Ben, adding, with a smile: "Even if I had been, I shouldn't like to confess it."

"I should have been so frightened that I would have screamed," continued the young lady.

"I didn't think of that," said Ben, amused. "I'll remember it next time."

"Oh, now I know you are laughing at me. Tell me truly, weren't you frightened?"

"I was only afraid I would lose Mr. Crawford's money. The tramp was stronger than I, and could have taken it from me if he had known I had it."

"You tricked him nicely. Where did he go? Do you think he is still in town?"

"He went into the woods. I don't think he is in the village. He would be afraid of being arrested."

At that very moment the tramp was in Ben's kitchen, but of that Ben had no idea.

"I don't know what I should do if I met him," said Rose. "You see I came alone. Aunt couldn't come with me, and uncle, being

a minister, doesn't care for such things."

"Then I hope you'll let me see you home," said Ben gallantly.

"I wouldn't like to trouble you," said Rose, with a spice of coquetry.

"It will take you out of your way."

"I don't mind that," said Ben eagerly.

"Besides there won't be any need. You say the tramp isn't in the village."

"On second thoughts, I think it very likely he is," said Ben.

"If you really think so—" commenced Rose, with cunning hesitation.

"I feel quite sure of it. He's a terrible looking fellow."

Rose smiled to herself. She meant all the time to accept Ben's escort, for he was a bright, attractive boy, and she liked his society.

"Then perhaps I had better accept your offer, but I am sorry to give you so much trouble."

"No trouble at all," said Ben promptly.

Just then Prof. Harrington came forward and made his introductory speech.

"For my first experiment, ladies and gentlemen," he said, when this was over, "I should like a pocket handkerchief."

A countrified-looking young man on the front seat, anxious to share in the glory of the coming trick, produced a flaming red bandanna from his pocket and tendered it with outstretched hand.

"You are very kind," said the professor, "but this will hardly answer my purpose. I should prefer a linen handkerchief. Will some young lady oblige me?"

"Let him have yours, Rose," suggested Ben.

Rose had no objection, and it was passed to the professor.

"The young lady will give me leave to do what I please with the handkerchief?" asked the professor.

Rose nodded assent.

"Then," said the professor, "I will see if it is proof against fire."

He deliberately unfolded it, crushed it in his hand, and then held it in the flame of a candle.

Rose uttered a low ejaculation.

"That's the last of your handkerchief, Rose," said Ben.

"You made me give it to him. You must buy me another," said the young lady.

"So I will, if you don't get it back safe."

"How can I?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the professor does," answered Ben.

"Really," said the professor, contemplating the handkerchief regretfully. "I am afraid I have destroyed the handkerchief; I hope the young lady will pardon me."

He looked at Rose, but she made no sign. She felt a little disturbed, for it was a fine handkerchief, given her by her aunt.

"I see the young lady is annoyed," continued the magician. "In that case I must try to repair damages. I made a little mistake

in supposing the handkerchief to be noncombustible. However, perhaps matters are not so bad as they seem."

He tossed the handkerchief behind a screen, and moved forward to a table on which was a neat box. Taking a small key from his pocket, he unlocked it and drew forth before the astonished eyes of his audience the handkerchief intact.

"I believe this is your handkerchief, is it not?" he asked, stepping down from the platform and handing it back to Rose.

"Yes," answered Rose, in amazement, examining it carefully, and unable to detect any injury.

"And it is in as good condition as when you gave it to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"So much the better. Then I shall not be at the expense of buying a new one. Young man, have you any objections to lending me your hat?"

This question was addressed to Ben.

"No, sir."

"Thank you. I will promise not to burn it, as I did the young lady's handkerchief. You are sure there is nothing in it?"

"Yes, sir."

By this time the magician had reached the platform.

"I am sorry to doubt the young gentleman's word," said the professor, "but I will charitably believe he is mistaken. Perhaps he forgot these articles when he said it was empty," and he drew forth a couple of potatoes and half a dozen onions from the hat and laid them on the table.

There was a roar of laughter from the audience, and Ben looked rather confused, especially when Rose turned to him and, laughing, said:

"You've been robbing Mr. Crawford, I am afraid, Ben."

"The young gentleman evidently uses his hat for a market-basket," proceeded the professor. "Rather a strange taste, but this is a free country. But what have we here?"

Out came a pair of stockings, a napkin and a necktie.

"Very convenient to carry your wardrobe about with you," said the professor, "though it is rather curious taste to put them with vegetables. But here is something else," and the magician produced a small kitten, who regarded the audience with startled eyes and uttered a timid moan.

"Oh, Ben! let me have that pretty kitten," said Rose.

"It's none of mine!" said Ben, half annoyed, half amused.

"I believe there is nothing more," said the professor.

He carried back the hat to Ben, and gave it to him with the remark:

"Young man, you may call for your vegetables and other articles after the entertainment."

"You are welcome to them," said Ben.

"Thank you; you are very liberal."

When at length the performance was over, Ben and Rose moved toward the door. As Rose reached the outer door, a boy about Ben's age, but considerably better dressed, stepped up to her and said, with a consequential air:

"I will see you home, Miss Gardiner."

"Much obliged, Mr. Davenport," said Rose, "but I have accepted Ben's escort."

CHAPTER VI TWO

YOUNG RIVALS

Tom Davenport, for it was the son of Squire Davenport who had offered his escort to Rose, glanced superciliously at our hero.

"I congratulate you on having secured a grocer's boy as escort," he said in a tone of annoyance.

Ben's fist contracted, and he longed to give the pretentious aristocrat a lesson, but he had the good sense to wait for the young lady's reply.

"I accept your congratulations, Mr. Davenport," said Rose coldly. "I have no desire to change my escort."

Tom Davenport laughed derisively, and walked away.

"I'd like to box his ears," said Ben, reddening.

"He doesn't deserve your notice, Ben," said Rose, taking his arm.

But Ben was not easily appeased.

"Just because his father is a rich man," he resumed.

"He presumes upon it," interrupted Rose, good-naturedly. "Well, let him. That's his chief claim to consideration, and it is natural for him to make the most of it."

"At any rate, I hope that can't be said of me," returned Ben, his brow clearing. "If I had nothing but money to be proud of, I should be very poorly off."

"You wouldn't object to it, though."

"No, I hope, for mother's sake, some day to be rich."

"Most of our rich men were once poor boys," said Rose quietly. "I have a book of biographies at home, and I find that not only rich men, but men distinguished in other ways, generally commenced in poverty."

"I wish you'd lend me that book," said Ben. "Sometimes I get despondent and that will give me courage."

"You shall have it whenever you call at the house. But you mustn't think too much of getting money."

"I don't mean to; but I should like to make my mother comfortable. I don't see much chance of it while I remain a 'grocer's boy,' as Tom Davenport calls me."

"Better be a grocer's boy than spend your time in idleness, as Tom does."

"Tom thinks it beneath him to work."

"If his father had been of the sane mind when he was a boy, he would never have become a rich man."

"Was Squire Davenport a poor boy?"

"Yes, so uncle told me the other day. When he was a boy he worked on a farm. I don't know how he made his money, but I presume he laid the foundation of his wealth by hard work. So, Tom hasn't any right to look down upon those who are beginning now as his father began."

They had by this time traversed half the distance from the Town Hall to the young lady's home. The subject of

conversation was changed and they began to talk about the evening's entertainment. At length they reached the minister's house.

"Won't you come in, Ben?" asked Rose.

"Isn't it too late?"

"No, uncle always sits up late reading, and will be glad to see you."

"Then I will come in for a few minutes."

Ben's few minutes extended to three-quarters of an hour. When he came out, the moon was obscured and it was quite dark. Ben had not gone far when he heard steps behind him, and presently a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Hello, boy!" said a rough voice.

Ben started, and turning suddenly, recognized in spite of the darkness, the tramp who had attempted to rob him during the day. He paused, uncertain whether he was not going to be attacked, but the tramp laughed reassuringly.

"Don't be afraid, boy," he said. "I owe you some money, and here it is."

He pressed into the hand of the astonished Ben the dollar which our hero had given him.

"I don't think it will do me any good," he said. "I've given it back, and now you can't say I robbed you."

"You are a strange man," said Ben.

"I'm not so bad as I look," said the tramp. "Some day I may do you a service. I'm goin' out of town to-night, and you'll hear

from me again some time."

He turned swiftly, and Ben lost sight of him.

CHAPTER VII THE TRAMP MAKES ANOTHER CALL

My readers will naturally be surprised at the tramp's restitution of a coin, which, though counterfeit, he would probably have managed to pass, but this chapter will throw some light on his mysterious conduct.

When he made a sudden exit from Mrs. Barclay's house, upon the appearance of the squire and his friend, he did not leave the premises, but posted himself at a window, slightly open, of the room in which the widow received her new visitors. He listened with a smile to the squire's attempt to force Mrs. Barclay to sell her house.

"He's a sly old rascal!" thought the tramp. "I'll put a spoke in his wheel."

When the squire and his wife's cousin left the house, the tramp followed at a little distance. Not far from the squire's handsome residence Kirk left him, and the tramp then came boldly forward.

"Good-evenin'," he said familiarly.

Squire Davenport turned sharply, and as his eye fell on the unprepossessing figure, he instinctively put his hand in the pocket in which he kept his wallet.

"Who are you?" he demanded apprehensively.

"I ain't a thief, and you needn't fear for your wallet," was the

reply.

"Let me pass, fellow! I can do nothing for you."

"We'll see about that!"

"Do you threaten me?" asked Squire Davenport, in alarm.

"Not at all; but I've got some business with you—some important business."

"Then call to-morrow forenoon," said Davenport, anxious to get rid of his ill-looking acquaintance.

"That won't do; I want to leave town tonight."

"That's nothing to me."

"It may be," said the tramp significantly. "I want to speak to you about the husband of the woman you called on to-night."

"The husband of Mrs. Barclay! Why, he is dead!" ejaculated the squire, in surprise.

"That is true. Do you know whether he left any property?"

"No, I believe not."

"That's what I want to talk about. You'd better see me to-night."

There was significance in the tone of the tramp, and Squire Davenport looked at him searchingly.

"Why don't you go and see Mrs. Barclay about this matter?" he asked.

"I may, but I think you'd better see me first."

By this time they had reached the Squire's gate.

"Come in," he said briefly.

The squire led the way into a comfortable sitting room, and his

rough visitor followed him. By the light of an astral lamp Squire Davenport looked at him.

"Did I ever see you before?" he asked.

"Probably not."

"Then I don't see what business we can have together. I am tired, and wish to go to bed."

"I'll come to business at once, then. When John Barclay died in Chicago, a wallet was found in his pocket, and in that wallet was a promissory note for a thousand dollars, signed by you. I suppose you have paid that sum to the widow?"

Squire Davenport was the picture of dismay. He had meanly ignored the note, with the intention of cheating Mrs. Barclay. He had supposed it was lost, yet here, after some years, appeared a man who knew of it. As Mr. Barclay had been reticent about his business affairs, he had never told his wife about having deposited this sum with Squire Davenport, and of this fact the squire had meanly taken advantage.

"What proof have you of this strange and improbable story?" asked the squire, after a nervous pause.

"The best of proof," answered the tramp promptly. "The note was found and is now in existence."

"Who holds it—that is, admitting for a moment the truth of your story?"

"I do; it is in my pocket at this moment."

At this moment Tom Davenport opened the door of the apartment, and stared in open-eyed amazement at his father's

singular visitor.

"Leave the room, Tom," said his father hastily. "This man is consulting me on business."

"Is that your son, squire?" asked the tramp, with a familiar nod.

"He's quite a young swell."

"What business can my father have with such a cad?" thought Tom, disgusted.

Tom was pleased, nevertheless, at being taken for "a young swell."

CHAPTER VIII SQUIRE DAVENPORT'S FINANCIAL OPERATION

Squire Davenport was a thoroughly respectable man in the estimation of the community. That such a man was capable of defrauding a poor widow, counting on her ignorance, would have plunged all his friends and acquaintances into the profoundest amazement.

Yet this was precisely what the squire had done.

Mr. Barclay, who had prospered beyond his wife's knowledge, found himself seven years before in possession of a thousand dollars in hard cash. Knowing that the squire had a better knowledge of suitable investments than he, he went to him one day and asked advice. Now, the squire was fond of money. When he saw the ample roll of bank notes which his neighbor took from his wallet, he felt a desire to possess them. They would not be his, to be sure, but merely to have them under his control seemed pleasant. So he said:

"Friend Barclay, I should need time to consider that question. Are you in a hurry?"

"I should like to get the money out of my possession. I might lose it or have it stolen. Besides, I don't want my wife to discover that I have it."

"It might make her extravagant, perhaps," suggested the squire.

"No, I am not afraid of that; but I want some day to surprise her by letting her see that I am a richer man than she thinks."

"Very judicious! Then no one knows that you have the money?"

"No one; I keep my business to myself."

"You are a wise man. I'll tell you what I will do, friend Barclay. While I am not prepared to recommend any particular investment, I will take the money and give you my note for it, agreeing to pay six per cent. interest. Of course I shall invest it in some way, and I may gain or I may lose, but even if I do lose you will be safe, for you will have my note, and will receive interest semi-annually."

The proposal struck Mr. Barclay quite favorably.

"I suppose I can have the money when I want it again?" he inquired.

"Oh, certainly! I may require a month's notice to realize on securities; but if I have the money in bank I won't even ask that."

"Then take the money, squire, and give me the note."

So, in less than five minutes, the money found its way into Squire Davenport's strong box, and Mr. Barclay left the squire's presence well satisfied with his note of hand in place of his roll of greenbacks.

Nearly two years passed. Interest was paid punctually three times, and another payment was all but due when the unfortunate

creditor died in Chicago. Then it was that a terrible temptation assailed Squire Davenport. No one knew of the trust his neighbor had reposed in him—not even his wife. Of course, if the note was found in his pocket, all would be known. But perhaps it would not be known. In that case, the thousand dollars and thirty dollars interest might be retained without anyone being the wiser.

It is only fair to say that Squire Davenport's face flushed with shame as the unworthy thought came to him, but still he did not banish it. He thought the matter over, and the more he thought the more unwilling he was to give up this sum, which all at once had become dearer to him than all the rest of his possessions.

"I'll wait to see whether the note is found," he said to himself. "Of course, if it is, I will pay it—" That is, he would pay it if he were obliged to do it.

Poor Barclay was buried in Chicago—it would have been too expensive to bring on the body—and pretty soon it transpired that he had left no property, except the modest cottage in which his widow and son continued to live.

Poor Mrs. Barclay! Everybody pitied her, and lamented her straitened circumstances. Squire Davenport kept silence, and thought, with guilty joy, "They haven't found the note; I can keep the money, and no one will be the wiser!"

How a rich man could have been guilty of such consummate meanness I will not undertake to explain, but "the love of money is the root of evil," and Squire Davenport had love of money in no common measure.

Five years passed. Mrs. Barclay was obliged to mortgage her house to obtain the means of living, and the very man who supplied her with the money was the very man whom her husband had blindly trusted. She little dreamed that it was her own money he was doling out to her.

In fact, Squire Davenport himself had almost forgotten it. He had come to consider the thousand dollars and interest fully and absolutely his own, and had no apprehension that his mean fraud would ever be discovered. Like a thunderbolt, then, came to him the declaration of his unsavory visitor that the note was in existence, and was in the hands of a man who meant to use it. Smitten with sudden panic, he stared in the face of the tramp. But he was not going to give up without a struggle.

"You are evidently trying to impose upon me," he said, mentally bracing up. "You wish to extort money from me."

"So I do," said the tramp quietly.

"Ha! you admit it?" exclaimed the squire.

"Certainly; I wouldn't have taken the trouble to come here at great expense and inconvenience if I hadn't been expecting to make some money."

"Then you have come to the wrong person; I repeat it, you've come to the wrong person!" said the squire, straightening his back and eying his companion sternly.

"I begin to think I have," assented the visitor.

"Ha! he weakens!" thought Squire Davenport. "My good man, I recommend you to turn over a new leaf, and seek to earn

an honest living, instead of trying to levy blackmail on men of means."

"An honest living!" repeated the tramp, with a laugh. "This advice comes well from you."

Once more the squire felt uncomfortable and apprehensive.

"I don't understand you," he said irritably. "However, as you yourself admit, you have come to the wrong person."

"Just so," said the visitor, rising. "I now go to the right person."

"What do you mean?" asked Squire Davenport, in alarm.

"I mean that I ought to have gone to Mrs. Barclay."

"Sit down, sit down!" said the squire nervously. "You mustn't do that."

"Why not?" demanded the tramp, looking him calmly in the face.

"Because it would disturb her mind, and excite erroneous thoughts and expectations."

"She would probably be willing to give me a good sum for bringing it to her, say, the overdue interest. That alone, in five years and a half, would amount to over three hundred dollars, even without compounding."

Squire Davenport groaned in spirit. It was indeed true! He must pay away over thirteen hundred dollars, and his loss in reputation would be even greater than his loss of money.

"Can't we compromise this thing?" he stammered. "I don't admit the genuineness of the note, but if such a claim were made, it would seriously annoy me. I am willing to give you, say, fifty

dollars, if you will deliver up the pretended note."

"It won't do, squire. Fifty dollars won't do! I won't take a cent less than two hundred, and that is only about half the interest you would have to pay."

"You speak as if the note were genuine," said the squire uncomfortably.

"You know whether it is or not," said the tramp significantly. "At any rate, we won't talk about that. You know my terms."

In the end Squire Davenport paid over two hundred dollars, and received back the note, which after a hasty examination, he threw into the fire.

"Now," he said roughly, "get out of my house, you—forger."

"Good-evening, squire," said the tramp, laughing and nodding to the discomfited squire. "We may meet again, some time."

"If you come here again, I will set the dog on you."

"So much the worse for the dog! Well, good-night! I have enjoyed my interview—hope you have."

"Impudent scoundrel!" said the squire to himself. "I hope he will swing some day!"

But, as he thought over what had happened, he found comfort in the thought that the secret was at last safe. The note was burned, and could never reappear in judgment against him. Certainly, he got off cheap.

"Well," thought the tramp as he strode away from the squire's mansion, "this has been a profitable evening. I have two hundred dollars in my pocket, and—I still have a hold on the rascal. If

he had only examined the note before burning it, he might have made a discovery!"

CHAPTER IX A

PROSPECT OF TROUBLE

When Ben returned home from the Town Hall he discovered, at the first glance, that his mother was in trouble.

"Are you disturbed because I came home so late?" asked Ben. "I would have been here sooner, but I went home with Rose Gardiner. I ought to have remembered that you might feel lonely."

Mrs. Barclay smiled faintly.

"I had no occasion to feel lonely," she said. "I had three callers. The last did not go away till after nine o'clock."

"I am glad you were not alone, mother," said Ben, thinking some of his mother's neighbors might have called.

"I should rather have been alone, Ben. They brought bad news—that is, one of them did."

"Who was it, mother? Who called on you?"

"The first one was the same man who took your money in the woods."

"What, the tramp!" exclaimed Ben hastily. "Did he frighten you?"

"A little, at first, but he did me no harm. He asked for some supper, and I gave it to him."

"What bad news did he bring?"

"None. It was not he. On the other hand, what he hinted would be good news if it were true. He said that your father left property, and that he was the only man that possessed the secret."

"Do you think this can be so?" said Ben, looking at his mother in surprise.

"I don't know what to think. He said he was a barkeeper in the hotel where your poor father died, and was about to say more when a knock was heard at the door, and he hurried away, as if in fear of encountering somebody."

"And he did not come back?"

"No."

"That is strange," said Ben thoughtfully. "Do you know, mother, I met him on my way home, or rather, he came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Barclay eagerly.

"He gave me back the bogus dollar he took from me saying, with a laugh, that it would be of no use to him. Then he said he might do me a service sometime, and I would some day hear from him."

"Ben, I think that man took the papers from the pocket of your dying father, and has them now in his possession. He promised to sell me a secret for money, but I told him I had none to give."

"I wish we could see him again, but he said he should leave town to-night. But, mother, what was the bad news you spoke of?"

"Ben, I am afraid we are going to lose our home," said the

widow, the look of trouble returning to her face.

"What do you mean, mother?"

"You know that Squire Davenport has a mortgage on the place for seven hundred dollars; he was here to-night with a man named Kirk, some connection of his wife. It seems Kirk is coming to Pentonville to live, and wants this house."

"He will have to want it, mother," said Ben stoutly.

"Not if the squire backs him as he does; he threatens to foreclose the mortgage if I don't sell."

Ben comprehended the situation now, and appreciated its gravity.

"What does he offer, Mother?"

"A thousand dollars only—perhaps a little more."

"Why that would be downright robbery."

"Not in the eye of the law. Ben, we are in the power of Squire Davenport, and he is a hard man."

"I would like to give him a piece of my mind, mother. He might be in better business than robbing you of your house."

"Do nothing hastily, Ben. There is only one thing that we can do to save the house, and that is, to induce someone to advance the money necessary to take up the mortgage."

"Can you think of anybody who would do it?"

Mrs. Barclay shook her head.

"There is no one in Pentonville who would be willing, and has the money," she said. "I have a rich cousin in New York, but I have not met him since I was married; he thought a great deal

of me once, but I suppose he scarcely remembers me now. He lived, when I last heard of him, on Lexington Avenue, and his name is Absalom Peters."

"And he is rich?"

"Yes, very rich, I believe."

"I have a great mind to ask for a day's vacation from Mr. Crawford, and go to New York to see him."

"I am afraid it would do no good."

"It would do no harm, except that it would cost something for traveling expenses. But I would go as economically as possible. Have I your permission, mother?"

"You can do as you like, Ben; I won't forbid you, though I have little hope of its doing any good."

"Then I will try and get away Monday. To-morrow is Saturday, and I can't be spared at the store; there is always more doing, you know, on Saturday than any other day."

"I don't feel like giving any advice, Ben. Do as you please."

The next day, on his way home to dinner, Ben met his young rival of the evening previous, Tom Davenport.

"How are you, Tom?" said Ben, nodding.

"I want to speak to you, Ben Barclay," said the young aristocrat, pausing in his walk.

"Go ahead! I'm listening," said Ben.

Tom was rather annoyed at the want of respect which, in his opinion, Ben showed him, but hardly knew how to express his objections, so he came at once to the business in hand.

"You'd better not hang around Rose Gardiner so much," he said superciliously.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Ben quickly.

"You forced your attentions on her last evening at the Town Hall."

"Who told you so?"

"I saw it for myself."

"I thought Rose didn't tell you so."

"It must be disagreeable to her family to have a common grocer's boy seen with her."

"It seems to me you take a great deal of interest in the matter, Tom Davenport. You talk as if you were the guardian of the young lady. I believe you wanted to go home with her yourself."

"It would have been far more suitable, but you had made her promise to go with you."

"I would have released her from her promise at once, if she had expressed a wish to that effect. Now, I want to give you a piece of advice."

"I don't want any of your advice," said Tom loftily. "I don't want any advice from a store boy."

"I'll give it to you all the same. You can make money by minding your own business."

"You are impudent!" said Tom, flushing with anger. "I've got something more to tell you. You'll be out on the sidewalk before three months are over. Father is going to foreclose the mortgage on your house."

"That remains to be seen!" said Ben, but his heart sank within him as he realized that the words would probably prove true.

CHAPTER X BEN GOES TO NEW YORK

Pentonville was thirty-five miles distant from New York, and the fare was a dollar, but an excursion ticket, carrying a passenger both ways, was only a dollar and a half. Ben calculated that his extra expenses, including dinner, might amount to fifty cents, thus making the cost of the trip two dollars. This sum, small as it was, appeared large both to Ben and his mother. Some doubts about the expediency of the journey suggested themselves to Mrs. Barclay.

"Do you think you had better go, Ben?" she said doubtfully. "Two dollars would buy you some new stockings and handkerchiefs."

"I will do without them, mother. Something has got to be done, or we shall be turned into the street when three months are up. Squire Davenport is a very selfish man, and he will care nothing for our comfort or convenience."

"That is true," said the widow, with a sigh. "If I thought your going to New York would do any good, I would not grudge you the money—"

"Something will turn up, or I will turn up something," said Ben confidently.

When he asked Mr. Crawford for a day off, the latter

responded: "Yes, Ben, I think I can spare you, as Monday is not a very busy day. Would you be willing to do an errand for me?"

"Certainly Mr. Crawford, with pleasure."

"I need a new supply of prints. Go to Stackpole & Rogers, No. – White Street, and select me some attractive patterns. I shall rely upon your taste."

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