ALGER HORATIO JR.

TATTERED TOM

Horatio Alger
Tattered Tom

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Tattered Tom / or The Story of a Street Arab:

Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
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PREFACE

When, three years since, the author published “Ragged Dick,” he was far from anticipating the flattering welcome it would receive, or the degree of interest which would be excited by his pictures of street life in New York. The six volumes which comprised his original design are completed, but the subject is not exhausted. There are yet other phases of street life to be described, and other classes of street Arabs, whose fortunes deserve to be chronicled.

“Tattered Tom” is therefore presented to the public as the initial volume of a new series of six stories, which may be regarded as a continuation of the “Ragged Dick Series.” Some surprise may be felt at the discovery that Tom is a girl; but I beg to assure my readers that she is not one of the conventional kind. Though not without her good points, she will be found to differ very widely in tastes and manners from the young ladies of twelve usually to be met in society. I venture to hope that she will become a favorite in spite of her numerous faults, and that

no less interest will be felt in her fortunes than in those of the heroes of earlier volumes.

New York, April, 1871.

CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCES TATTERED TOM

Mr. Frederic Pelham, a young gentleman very daintily dressed, with exquisitely fitting kids and highly polished boots, stood at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Streets, surveying with some dismay the dirty crossing, and speculating as to his chances of getting over without marring the polish of his boots.

He started at length, and had taken two steps, when a dirty hand was thrust out, and he was saluted by the request, "Gi' me a penny, sir?"

"Out of my way, you bundle of rags!" he answered.

"You're another!" was the prompt reply.

Frederic Pelham stared at the creature who had dared to imply that he—a leader of fashion—was a bundle of rags.

The street-sweeper was apparently about twelve years of age. It was not quite easy to determine whether it was a boy or girl. The head was surmounted by a boy's cap, the hair was cut short, it wore a boy's jacket, but underneath was a girl's dress. Jacket and dress were both in a state of extreme raggedness. The child's face was very dark and, as might be expected, dirty; but it was redeemed by a pair of brilliant black eyes, which were fixed upon the young exquisite in an expression half-humorous, half-defiant, as the owner promptly retorted, "You're another!"

"Clear out, you little nuisance!" said the dandy, stopping short from necessity, for the little sweep had planted herself directly in his path; and to step out on either side would have soiled his boots irretrievably.

"Gi' me a penny, then?"

"I'll hand you to the police, you little wretch!"

"I aint done nothin'. Gi' me a penny?"

Mr. Pelham, provoked, raised his cane threateningly.

But Tom (for, in spite of her being a girl, this was the name by which she was universally known; indeed she scarcely knew any other) was wary. She dodged the blow, and by an adroit sweep of her broom managed to scatter some mud on Mr. Pelham's boots.

"You little brat, you've muddied my boots!" he exclaimed, with vexation.

"Then why did you go for to strike me?" said Tom, defiantly.

He did not stop to answer, but hurried across the street. His pace was accelerated by an approaching vehicle, and the instinct of self-preservation, more powerful than even the dictates of fashion, compelled him to make a détour through the mud, greatly to the injury of his no longer immaculate boots. But there was a remedy for the disaster on the other side.

"Shine your boots, sir?" asked a boot-black, who had stationed himself at the other side of the crossing.

Frederic Pelham looked at his boots. Their glory had departed. Their virgin gloss had been dimmed by plebeian mud. He grudged the boot-black's fee, for he was thoroughly mean,

though he had plenty of money at his command. But it was impossible to walk up Broadway in such boots. Suppose he should meet any of his fashionable friends, especially if ladies, his fashionable reputation would be endangered.

"Go ahead, boy!" he said. "Do your best."

"All right, sir."

"It's the second time I've had my boots blacked this morning. If it hadn't been for that dirty sweep I should have got across safely."

The boy laughed—to himself. He knew Tom well enough, and he had been an interested spectator of her encounter with his present customer, having an eye to business. But he didn't think it prudent to make known his thoughts.

The boots were at length polished, and Mr. Pelham saw with satisfaction that no signs of the street mire remained.

"How much do you want, boy?" he asked.

"Ten cents."

"I thought five cents was the price."

"Can't afford to work on no such terms."

Mr. Pelham might have disputed the fee, but he saw an acquaintance approaching, and did not care to be caught chaffering with a boot-black. He therefore reluctantly drew out a dime, and handed it to the boy, who at once deposited it in the pocket of a ragged vest.

He stood on the sidewalk on the lookout for another customer, when Tom marched across the street, broom in hand.

"I say, Joe, how much did he give you?"

"Ten cents."

"How much yer goin' to give me?"

"Nothin'!"

"You wouldn't have got him if I hadn't muddied his boots."

"Did you do it a-purpose?"

Tom nodded.

"What for?"

"He called me names. That's one reason. Besides, I wanted to give you a job."

Joe seemed struck by this view, and, being alive to his own interest, did not disregard the application.

"Here's a penny," he said.

"Gi' me two."

He hesitated a moment, then diving once more into his pocket, brought up another penny, which Tom transferred with satisfaction to the pocket of her dress.

"Shall I do it ag'in?" she asked.

"Yes," said Joe. "I say, Tom, you're a smart un."

"I'd ought to be. Granny makes me smart whenever she gets a chance."

Tom returned to the other end of the crossing, and began to sweep diligently. Her labors did not extend far from the curbstone, as the stream of vehicles now rapidly passing would have made it dangerous. However, it was all one to Tom where she swept. The cleanness of the crossing was to her a matter of

comparative indifference. Indeed, considering her own disregard of neatness, it could hardly have been expected that she should feel very solicitous on that point. Like some of her elders who were engaged in municipal labors, she regarded street-sweeping as a "job," out of which she was to make money, and her interest began and ended with the money she earned.

There were not so many to cross Broadway at this point as lower down, and only a few of these seemed impressed by a sense of the pecuniary value of Tom's services.

"Gi' me a penny, sir," she said to a stout gentleman.

He tossed a coin into the mud.

Tom darted upon it, and fished it up, wiping her fingers afterwards upon her dress.

"Aint you afraid of soiling your dress?" asked the philanthropist, smiling.

"What's the odds?" said Tom, coolly.

"You're a philosopher," said the stout gentleman.

"Don't you go to callin' me names!" said Tom; "'cause if you do I'll muddy up your boots."

"So you don't want to be called a philosopher?" said the gentleman.

"No, I don't," said Tom, eying him suspiciously.

"Then I must make amends."

He took a dime from his pocket, and handed it to the astonished Tom.

"Is this for me?" she asked.

"Yes."

Tom's eyes glistened; for ten cents was a nugget when compared with her usual penny receipts. She stood in a brown study till her patron was half across the street, then, seized with a sudden idea, she darted after him, and tugged at his coat-tail.

"What's wanted?" he asked, turning round in some surprise.

"I say," said Tom, "you may call me that name ag'in for five cents more."

The ludicrous character of the proposal struck him, and he laughed with amusement.

"Well," he said, "that's a good offer. What's your name?"

"Tom."

"Which are you,—a boy or a girl?"

"I'm a girl, but I wish I was a boy."

"What for?"

"'Cause boys are stronger than girls, and can fight better."

"Do you ever fight?"

"Sometimes."

"Whom do you fight with?"

"Sometimes I fight with the boys, and sometimes with granny."

"What makes you fight with your granny?"

"She gets drunk and fires things at my head; then I pitch into her."

The cool, matter-of-fact manner in which Tom spoke seemed to amuse her questioner.

"I was right," he said; "you're a philosopher,—a practical philosopher."

"That's more'n you said before," said Tom; "I want ten cents for that."

The ten cents were produced. Tom pocketed them in a business-like manner, and went back to her employment. She wondered, slightly, whether a philosopher was something very bad; but, as there was no means of determining, sensibly dismissed the inquiry, and kept on with her work.

CHAPTER II
TOM GETS A SQUARE MEAL

About twelve o'clock Tom began to feel the pangs of hunger. The exercise which she had taken, together with the fresh air, had stimulated her appetite. It was about the time when she was expected to go home, and accordingly she thrust her hand into her pocket, and proceeded to count the money she had received.

"Forty-two cents!" she said, at last, in a tone of satisfaction. "I don't generally get more'n twenty. I wish that man would come round and call me names every day."

Tom knew that she was expected to go home and carry the result of her morning's work to her granny; but the unusual amount suggested to her another idea. Her mid-day meal was usually of the plainest and scantiest,—a crust of dry bread, or a cold sausage on days of plenty,—and Tom sometimes did long for something better. But generally it would have been dangerous to appropriate a sufficient sum from her receipts, as the deficit would have been discovered, and quick retribution would have followed from her incensed granny, who was a vicious old woman with a pretty vigorous arm. Now, however, she could appropriate twenty cents without danger of discovery.

"I can get a square meal for twenty cents," Tom reflected, "and I'll do it."

But she must go home first, as delay would be dangerous, and have disagreeable consequences.

She prepared for the visit by dividing her morning's receipts into two parcels. The two ten-cent scrips she hid away in the lining of her tattered jacket. The pennies, including one five-cent scrip, she put in the pocket of her dress. This last was intended for her granny. She then started homewards, dragging her broom after her.

She walked to Centre Street, turned after a while into Leonard, and went on, turning once or twice, until she came to one of the most wretched tenement houses to be found in that not very choice locality. She passed through an archway leading into an inner court, on which fronted a rear house more shabby, if possible, than the front dwelling. The court was redolent of odors far from savory; children pallid, dirty, and unhealthy-looking, were playing about, filling the air with shrill cries, mingled with profanity; clothes were hanging from some of the windows; miserable and besotted faces were seen at others.

Tom looked up to a window in the fourth story. She could descry a woman, with a pipe in her mouth.

"Granny's home," she said to herself.

She went up three flights, and, turning at the top, went to the door and opened it.

It was a wretched room, containing two chairs and a table, nothing more. On one of the chairs was seated a large woman, of about sixty, with a clay pipe in her mouth. The room was redolent

of the vilest tobacco-smoke.

This was granny.

If granny had ever been beautiful, there were no traces of that dangerous gift in the mottled and wrinkled face, with bleared eyes, which turned towards the door as Tom entered.

"Why didn't you come afore, Tom?" she demanded.

"I'm on time," said Tom. "Clock aint but just struck."

"How much have you got?"

Tom pulled out her stock of pennies and placed them in the woman's outstretched palm.

"There's twenty-two," she said.

"Umph!" said granny. "Where's the rest?"

"That's all."

"Come here."

Tom advanced, not reluctantly, for she felt sure that granny would not think of searching her jacket, especially as she had brought home as much as usual.

The old woman thrust her hand into the child's pocket, and turned it inside-out with her claw-like fingers, but not another penny was to be found.

"Umph!" she grunted, apparently satisfied with her scrutiny.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Tom.

Granny rose from her chair, and going to a shelf took down a piece of bread, which had become dry and hard.

"There's your dinner," said she.

"Gi' me a penny to buy an apple," said Tom,—rather by way

of keeping up appearances than because she wanted one. Visions of a more satisfactory repast filled her imagination.

"You don't want no apple. Bread's enough," said granny.

Tom was not much disappointed. She knew pretty well beforehand how her application would fare. Frequently she made sure of success by buying the apple and eating it before handing the proceeds of her morning's work to the old woman. To-day she had other views, which she was in a hurry to carry out.

She took the bread, and ate a mouthful. Then she slipped it into her pocket, and said, "I'll eat it as I go along, granny."

To this the old woman made no objection, and Tom went out.

In the court-yard below she took out her crust, and handed it to a hungry-looking boy of ten, the unlucky offspring of drunken parents, who oftentimes was unable to command even such fare as Tom obtained.

"Here, Tim," she said, "eat that; I aint hungry."

It was one of Tim's frequent fast days, and even the hard crust was acceptable to him. He took it readily, and began to eat it ravenously. Tom looked on with benevolent interest, feeling the satisfaction of having done a charitable act. The satisfaction might have been heightened by the thought that she was going to get something better herself.

"So you're hungry, Tim," she said.

"I'm always hungry," said Tim.

"Did you have any breakfast?"

"Only an apple I picked up in the street."

"He's worse off than me," thought Tom; but she had no time to reflect on the superior privileges of her own position, for she was beginning to feel hungry herself.

There was a cheap restaurant near by, only a few blocks away.

Tom knew it well, for she had often paused before the door and inhaled enviously the appetizing odor of the dishes which were there vended to patrons not over-fastidious, at prices accommodated to scantily lined pocket-books. Tom had never entered, but had been compelled to remain outside, wishing that a more propitious fortune had placed it in her power to dine there every day. Now, however, first thrusting her fingers into the lining of her jacket to make sure that the money was there, she boldly entered the restaurant and took a seat at one of the tables.

The room was not large, there being only eight tables, each of which might accommodate four persons. The floor was sanded, the tables were some of them bare, others covered with old newspapers, which had become greasy, and were rather worse than no table-cloth at all. The guests, of whom perhaps a dozen were seated at the table, were undoubtedly plebeian. Men in shirt-sleeves, rough-bearded sailors and 'long-shore men, composed the company, with one ragged boot-black, who had his blacking-box on the seat beside him.

It was an acquaintance of Tom, and she went and sat beside him.

"Do you get dinner here, Jim?" she asked.

"Yes, Tom; what brings you here?"

"I'm hungry."

"Don't you live along of your granny?"

"Yes; but I thought I'd come here to-day. What have you got?"

"Roast beef."

"Is it good?"

"Bully!"

"I'll have some, then. How much is it?"

"Ten cents."

Ten cents was the standard price in this economical restaurant for a plate of meat of whatever kind. Perhaps, considering the quality and amount given, it could not be regarded as very cheap; still the sum was small, and came within Tom's means.

A plate of beef was brought and placed before Tom. Her eyes dilated with pleasure as they rested on the delicious morsel. There was a potato besides; and a triangular slice of bread, with an infinitesimal dab of butter,—all for ten cents. But Tom's ambition soared higher.

"Bring me a cup o' coffee," she said to the waiter.

It was brought,—a very dark, muddy, suspicious-looking beverage,—a base libel upon the fragrant berry whose name it took; but such a thought did not disturb Tom. She never doubted that it was what it purported to be. She stirred it vigorously with the spoon, and sipped it as if it had been nectar.

"Aint it prime just?" she exclaimed, smacking her lips.

Then ensued a vigorous onslaught upon the roast beef. It was the first meat Tom had tasted for weeks, with the exception of

occasional cold sausage; and she was in the seventh heaven of delight as she hurriedly ate it. When she had finished, the plate was literally and entirely empty. Tom did not believe in leaving anything behind. She was almost tempted to "lick the platter clean," but observed that none of the other guests did so, and refrained.

"Bring me a piece of apple pie," said Tom, determined for once to have what she denominated a "good square meal." The price of the pie being five cents, this would just exhaust her funds. Payment was demanded when the pie was brought, the prudent waiter having some fears that his customer was eating beyond her means.

Tom paid the money, and, vigorously attacking the pie, had almost finished it, when, chancing to lift her eyes to the window, she saw a sight that made her blood curdle.

Looking through the pane with a stony glare that meant mischief was her granny, whom she had supposed safe at home.

CHAPTER III
CAUGHT IN THE ACT

It was Tom's ill luck that brought granny upon the scene, contrary to every reasonable expectation. After smoking out her pipe, she made up her mind to try another smoke, when she found that her stock of tobacco was exhausted. Being constitutionally lazy, it was some minutes before she made up her mind to go out and lay in a fresh supply. Finally she decided, and made her way downstairs to the court, and thence to the street.

Tim saw her, and volunteered the information, "Tom gave me some bread."

"When?" demanded granny.

"When she come out just now."

"What did she do that for?"

"She said she wasn't hungry."

The old woman was puzzled. Tom's appetite was usually quite equal to the supply of food which she got. Could Tom have secreted some money to buy apples? This was hardly likely, since she had carefully searched her. Besides, Tom had returned the usual amount. Still, granny's suspicions were awakened, and she determined to question Tom when she returned at the close of the afternoon.

The tobacco shop where granny obtained her tobacco was two

doors beyond the restaurant where Tom was then enjoying her cheap dinner with a zest which the guests at Delmonico's do not often bring to the discussion of their more aristocratic viands. It was only a chance that led granny, as she passed, to look in; but that glance took in all who were seated at the tables, including Tom.

Had granny received an invitation to preside at a meeting in the Cooper Institute, she would hardly have been more surprised than at the sight of Tom, perfidiously enjoying a meal out of money from which she had doubtless been defrauded.

"The owdacious young reprobate!" muttered the old woman, glaring fiercely at her unconscious victim.

But Tom just then happened to look up, as we have seen. Her heart gave a sudden thump, and she said to herself, "I'm in for a lickin', that's so. Granny's mad as blazes."

The old woman did not long leave her in doubt as to the state of her feelings.

She strode into the eating-house, and, advancing to the table, seized Tom by the arm.

"What are you here for?" she growled, in a hoarse voice.

"To get some dinner," said Tom.

By this time she had recovered from her temporary panic. She had courage and pluck, and was toughened by the hard life she had led into a stoical endurance of the evils from which she could not escape.

"What business had you to come?"

"I was hungry."

"Didn't I give you a piece of bread?"

"I didn't like it."

"What did you buy?"

"A plate of beef, a cup o' coffee, and some pie. Better buy some, granny. They're bully."

"You're a reg'lar bad un. You'll fetch up on the gallus," said granny, provoked at Tom's coolness.

So saying, she seized Tom by the shoulder roughly. But by this time the keeper of the restaurant thought fit to interfere.

"We can't have any disturbance here, ma'am," he said. "You must leave the room."

"She had no right to get dinner here," said granny. "I won't let her pay for it."

"She has paid for it already."

"Is that so?" demanded the old woman, disappointed.

Tom nodded, glad to have outwitted her guardian.

"It was my money. You stole it."

"No it wa'n't. A gentleman give it to me for callin' me names."

"Come out of here!" said granny, jerking Tom from her chair. "Don't you let her have no more to eat here," she added, turning to the keeper of the restaurant.

"She can eat here whenever she's got money to pay for it."

Rather disgusted at her failure to impress the keeper of the restaurant with her views in the matter, granny emerged into the street with Tom in her clutches.

She gave her a vigorous shaking up on the sidewalk.

"How do you like that?" she demanded.

"I wish I was as big as you!" said Tom, indignantly.

"Well, what if you was?" demanded the old woman, pausing in her punishment, and glaring at Tom.

"I'd make your nose bleed," said Tom, doubling up her fist.

"You would, would you?" said granny, fiercely. "Then it's lucky you aint;" and she gave her another shake.

"Where are you going to take me?" asked Tom.

"Home. I'll lock you up for a week, and give you nothin' to eat but bread once a day."

"All right!" said Tom. "If I'm locked up at home, I can't bring you any money."

This consideration had not at first suggested itself to the vindictive old woman. It would cut off all her revenue to punish Tom as she proposed; and this would be far from convenient. But anger was more powerful just then than policy; and she determined at all events to convey Tom home, and give her a flogging, before sending her out into the street to resume her labors.

She strode along, dragging Tom by the arm; and not another word was spoken till they reached the rear tenement house.

"What's the matter with the child?" asked Mrs. Murphy, who had just come down into the court after one of her own children.

"She stole my money," said granny; "and was eatin' a mighty fine dinner out of it."

"It was my money, Mrs. Murphy," said Tom. "I gave granny twenty-two cents when I came home."

"I hope you won't go to hurt the child," said kind-hearted Mrs. Murphy.

"I'll be much obliged to you, Mrs. Murphy, if you'll mind your own business," said granny, loftily. "When I want your advice, mum, I'll come and ask it; begging your pardon, mum."

"She's a tough craythur," said Mrs. Murphy to herself. "She beats that poor child too bad entirely."

Granny drew Tom into the room with no gentle hand.

"Now you're goin' to catch it," said she, grimly.

Tom was of the same opinion, and meant to defend herself as well as she knew how. She had all her wits about her, and had already planned out her campaign.

On the chair was a stout stick which granny was accustomed to use on such occasions as the present. When wielded by a vigorous arm, it was capable of inflicting considerable pain, as Tom very well knew. That stick she determined to have.

Accordingly when granny temporarily released her hold of her, as she entered the room, Tom sprang for the chair, seized the stick, and sent it flying out of the window.

"What did you do that for?" said granny, fiercely.

"I don't want to be licked," said Tom, briefly.

"You're going to be, then."

"Not with the stick."

"We'll see."

Granny poked her head out of the window, and saw Tim down in the court.

"Bring up that stick," she said; "that's a good boy."

Tim picked up the stick, and was about to obey the old woman's request, when he heard another voice—Tom's—from the other window.

"Don't you do it, Tim. Granny wants to lick me."

That was enough. Tim didn't like the old woman,—no one in the building did,—and he did like Tom, who, in spite of being a tough customer, was good-natured and obliging, unless her temper was aroused by the old woman's oppression. So Tim dropped the stick.

"Bring it right up," said granny, angrily.

"Are you goin' to lick Tom?"

"None of your business! Bring it up, or I'll lick you too."

"No, you don't!" answered Tim. "You must come for it yourself if you want it."

Granny began to find that she must do her own errands. It was an undertaking to go down three flights of stairs to the court and return again, especially for one so indolent as herself; but there seemed to be no other way. She inwardly resolved to wreak additional vengeance upon Tom, and so get what satisfaction she could in this way. Muttering imprecations which I do not care to repeat, she started downstairs, determined to try the stick first upon Tim. But when she reached the court Tim had disappeared. He had divined her benevolent intentions, and thought it would

be altogether wiser for him to be out of the way.

Granny picked up the stick, and, after a sharp glance around the court, commenced the ascent. She did not stop to rest, being spurred on by the anticipated pleasure of flogging Tom. So, in a briefer space of time than could have been expected, she once more arrived at her own door.

But Tom had not been idle.

No sooner was the door closed than Tom turned the key in the lock, making herself a voluntary prisoner, but having in the key the means of deliverance.

Granny tried the door, and, to her inexpressible wrath, discovered Tom's new audacity.

"Open the door, you trollop!" she screamed.

"You'll lick me," said Tom.

"I'll give you the wust lickin' you ever had."

"Then I shan't let you in," said Tom, defiantly.

CHAPTER IV
THE SIEGE

"Open the door," screamed granny, beside herself with rage, "or I'll kill you."

"You can't get at me," said Tom, triumphantly.

The old woman grasped the knob of the door and shook it vigorously. But the lock resisted her efforts. Tom's spirit was up, and she rather enjoyed it.

"Shake away, granny," she called through the key-hole.

"If I could only get at you!" muttered granny.

"I won't let you in till you promise not to touch me."

"I'll skin you alive."

"Then you can't come in."

The old woman began alternately to pound and kick upon the door. Tom sat down coolly upon a chair, her dark eyes flashing exultingly. She knew her power, and meant to keep it. She had not reflected how it was to end. She supposed that in the end she would get a "lickin'," as she had often done before. But in the mean while she would have the pleasure of defying and keeping the old woman at bay for an indefinite time. So she sat in placid enjoyment in her stronghold until she heard something that suggested a speedy raising of the siege.

"I'm goin' for a hatchet," said granny, through the key-hole.

"If you break the door, you'll have to pay for it."

"Never you mind!" said the old woman. "I know what I'm about."

She heard the retreating steps of granny, and, knowing only too well her terrible temper, made up her mind that she was in earnest. If so, the door must soon succumb. A hatchet would soon accomplish what neither kicks nor pounding had been able to effect.

"What shall I do?" thought Tom.

She was afraid of something more than a lickin' now. In her rage at having been so long baffled, the old woman might attack her with the hatchet. She knew very well that on previous occasions she had flung at her head anything she could lay hold of. Tom, brave and stout-hearted as she was, shrunk from this new danger, and set herself to devise a way of escape. She looked out of the window; but she was on the fourth floor, and it was a long distance to the court below. If it had been on the second floor she would have swung off.

There was another thing she could do. Granny had gone down below to borrow a hatchet. She might unlock the door, and run out upon the landing; but there was no place for hiding herself, and no way of getting downstairs without running the risk of rushing into granny's clutches. In her perplexity her eyes fell upon a long coil of rope in one corner. It was a desperate expedient, but she resolved to swing out of the window, high as it was. She managed to fasten one end securely, and let the other drop from

the window. As it hung, it fell short of reaching the ground by at least ten feet. But Tom was strong and active, and never hesitated a moment on this account. She was incited to extra speed, for she already heard the old woman ascending the stairs, probably provided with a hatchet.

Tom got on the window-sill, and, grasping the rope, let herself down rapidly hand over hand, till she reached the end of the rope. Then she dropped. It was rather hard to her feet, and she fell over. But she quickly recovered herself.

Tim, the recipient of her dinner, was in the court, and surveyed her descent with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Where'd you come from, Tom?" he asked.

"Can't you see?" said Tom.

"Why didn't you come downstairs?"

"'Cause granny's there waitin' to lick me. I must be goin' before she finds out where I am. Don't you tell of me, Tim."

"No, I won't," said Tim; and he was sure to keep his promise.

Tom sped through the arched passage to the street, and did not rest till she had got a mile away from the home which had so few attractions for her.

Beyond the chance of immediate danger, the young Arab conjured up the vision of granny's disappointment when she should break open the door, and find her gone; and she sat down on the curbstone and laughed heartily.

"What are you laughing at?" asked a boy, looking curiously at the strange figure before him.

"Oh, it's too rich!" said Tom, pausing a little, and then breaking out anew.

"What's too rich?"

"I've run away from granny. She wanted to lick me, and now she can't."

"You've been cutting up, I suppose."

"No, it's granny that's been cuttin' up. She's at it all the time."

"But you'll catch it when you do go home, you know."

"Maybe I won't go home."

It was not a street-boy that addressed her; but a boy with a comfortable home, who had a place in a store near by. He did not know, practically, what sort of a thing it was to wander about the streets, friendless and homeless; but it struck him vaguely that it must be decidedly uncomfortable. There was something in this strange creature—half boy in appearance—that excited his interest and curiosity, and he continued the conversation.

"What sort of a woman is your granny, as you call her?" he asked.

"She's an awful old woman," was the answer.

"I shouldn't think you would like to speak so of your grandmother."

"I don't believe she is my grandmother. I only call her so."

"What's your name?"

"Tom."

"Tom!" repeated the boy, in surprise. "Aint you a girl?"

"Yes; I expect so."

"It's hard to tell from your clothes, you know;" and he scanned Tom's queer figure attentively.

Tom was sitting on a low step with her knees nearly on a level with her chin, and her hands clasped around them. She had on her cap of the morning, and her jacket, which, by the way, had been given to granny when on a begging expedition, and appropriated to Tom's use, without special reference to her sex. Tom didn't care much. It made little difference to her whether she was in the fashion or not; and if the street boys chaffed her, she was abundantly able to give them back as good as they sent.

"What's the matter with my clothes?" said Tom.

"You've got on a boy's cap and jacket."

"I like it well enough. As long as it keeps a feller warm I don't mind."

"Do you call yourself a feller?"

"Yes."

"Then you're a queer feller."

"Don't you call me names, 'cause I won't stand it;" and Tom raised a pair of sharp, black eyes.

"I won't call you names, at least not any bad ones. Have you had any dinner?"

"Yes," said Tom, smacking her lips, as she recalled her delicious repast, "I had a square meal."

"What do you call a square meal?"

"Roast beef, cup o' coffee, and pie."

The boy was rather surprised, for such a dinner seemed

beyond Tom's probable resources.

"Your granny don't treat you so badly, after all. That's just the kind of dinner I had."

"Granny didn't give it to me. I bought it. That's what she wants to lick me for. All she give me was a piece of hard bread."

"Where did you get the money? Was it hers?"

"That's what she says. But if a feller works all the mornin' for some money, hasn't she got a right to keep some of it?"

"I should think so."

"So should I," said Tom, decidedly.

"Have you got any money?"

"No, I spent it all for dinner."

"Then here's some."

The boy drew from his vest-pocket twenty-five cents, and offered it to Tom.

The young Arab felt no delicacy in accepting the pecuniary aid thus tendered.

"Thank you," said she. "You can call me names if you want to."

"What should I want to call you names for?" asked the boy, puzzled.

"There was a gent called me names this mornin', and give me twenty cents for doin' it."

"What did he call you?"

"I dunno; but it must have been something awful bad, it was so long."

"You're a strange girl, Tom."

"Am I? Well, I reckon I am. What's your name?"

"John Goodwin."

"John Goodwin?" repeated Tom, by way of fixing it in her memory.

"Yes; haven't you got any other name than Tom?"

"I dunno. I think granny called me Jane once. But it's a good while ago. Everybody calls me Tom, now."

"Well, Tom, I must be getting back to the store. Good-by. I hope you'll get along."

"All right!" said Tom. "I'm goin' into business with that money you give me."

CHAPTER V
TOM GAINS A VICTORY

Granny mounted the stairs two at a time; so eager was she to force a surrender on the part of the rebellious Tom. She was a little out of breath when she reached the fourth landing, and paused an instant to recover it. Tom was at that moment half-way down the rope; but this she did not suspect.

Recovering her breath, she strode to the door. Before making an assault with the hatchet, she decided to summon Tom to a surrender.

"Tom!" she called out.

Of course there was no answer.

"Why don't you answer?" demanded granny, provoked.

She listened for a reply, but Tom remained obstinately silent, as she interpreted it.

"If you don't speak, it'll be the wuss for ye," growled granny.

Again no answer.

"I'll find a way to make you speak. Come and open the door, or I'll break it down. I've got a hatchet."

But the old woman had the conversation all to herself.

Quite beside herself now with anger, she no longer hesitated; but with all her force dealt a blow which buried the hatchet deep in the door.

"Jest wait till I get in!" she muttered. "Will ye open it now?"

But there was no response.

While she was still battering at the door one of the neighbors came up from below.

"What are you doin', Mrs. Walsh?" for such was granny's name.

"I'm tryin' to get in."

"Why don't you open the door?"

"Tom's locked it. She won't let me in," said granny, finishing the sentence with a string of profane words which had best be omitted.

"You'll have a good bill to pay to the landlord, Mrs. Walsh."

"I don't care," said granny. "I'm goin' to get at that trollop, and beat her within an inch of her life."

Another vigorous blow broke the lock, and the door flew open.

Granny rushed in, after the manner of a devouring lion ready to pounce upon her prey. But she stopped short in dismay. Tom was not visible!

Thinking she might be in the closet, the old woman flung open the door: but again she was balked.

"What has 'come of the child?" she exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"She got out of the window," said the neighbor, who had caught sight of the rope dangling from the open casement.

Granny hastened to the window, and the truth flashed upon her. Her prey had escaped her!

It was a deep disappointment to the vindictive old woman, whose hand itched to exercise itself in punishing Tom.

"She's a bold un," said the neighbor, with some admiration of Tom's pluck.

Granny answered with a strain of invective, which gave partial vent to the rage and disappointment she felt.

"If I could only get at her!" she muttered between her teeth; "I'd give her half-a-dozen lickin's in one. She'd wish she hadn't done it."

Not a doubt entered granny's mind that Tom would return. It never occurred to her that her young servant had become tired of her bondage, and had already made up her mind to break her chains. She knew Tom pretty well, but not wholly. She did not realize that the days of her rule were at an end; and that by her tyranny she had driven from her the girl whose earnings she had found so convenient.

If there had been much chance of meeting Tom outside, granny would have gone out into the streets and hunted for her. But to search for her among the numerous streets, lanes, and alleys in the lower part of the city would have been like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Then, even if she found her, she could not very well whip her in the street. Tom would probably come home at night as usual, bringing money, and she could defer the punishment till then.

Fatigued with her exercise and excitement, the old woman threw herself down on her rude pallet, first drawing the contents

of a jug which stood in the closet, and was soon in a drunken sleep. Leaving her thus, we go back to Tom.

She had made up her mind not to go back to sweeping the streets; partly, indeed, because she no longer had her broom with her. Moreover, she thought that she would in that case be more likely to fall into the clutches of the enemy she so much dreaded. With the capital for which she was indebted to her new boy acquaintance she decided to lay in a supply of evening papers, and try to dispose of them. It was not a new trade to her; for there was scarcely one of the street trades in which the young Arab had not more or less experience.

She bought ten copies of the "Express," and selected the corner of two streets for the disposal of her stock in trade.

"Here's the 'Express,'—latest news from the seat of war!" cried Tom; catching the cry from a boy engaged in the same business up on Broadway.

"What's the news?" asked one of two young men who were passing.

"The news is that you're drafted," said Tom, promptly. "Buy the paper, and you'll find out all about it."

It was in the midst of the draft excitement in New York; and as it so happened that the young man had actually been drafted, his companion laughed.

"You must buy a paper for that, Jack," he said.

"I believe I will," said the first, laughing. "Here's ten cents. Never mind about the change."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Come round to-morrow, and I'll sell you another."

"You'll have me drafted again, I am afraid. Perhaps you will go as my substitute?"

"I would if I was old enough," said Tom.

"You're a girl,—aint you? Girls can't fight."

"Try me and see," said Tom. "I can fight any boy of my size."

The two young men passed on, laughing.

Tom soon had an opportunity to test her prowess. The corner where she had stationed herself was usually occupied by a boy somewhat larger than Tom, who considered that it belonged to him by right. He came up rather late, having a chance to carry a carpet-bag for a guest at French's Hotel to the Hudson River station. Tom had disposed of half her papers when he came blustering up:—

"Clear out of here!" he said, imperiously.

"Who was you speakin' to?" asked Tom, coolly.

"To you. Just clear out!"

"What for?" asked Tom.

"You've got my stand."

"Have I?" said Tom, not offering to move.

"Yes, you have."

"Then I'm goin' to keep it. 'Ere's the 'Express,'—latest news from the seat of war."

"Look here!" said the newsboy, menacingly, "if you don't clear out, I'll make you."

"Will you?" said Tom, independently, taking his measure, and deciding that she could fight him. "I aint afraid of you!"

Her rival advanced, and gave her a push which nearly thrust her from the sidewalk into the street. But he was rather astonished the next moment at receiving a blow in the face from Tom's fist.

"If you want to fight, come on!" said Tom, dropping her papers and squaring off.

He was not slow in accepting the defiance, being provoked by the unexpected blow, and aimed a blow at Tom's nose. But Tom, who had some rudimental ideas of boxing, while her opponent knew nothing of it, fended off the blow, and succeeded in getting in another.

"Ho! ho!" laughed another boy, who had just come up; "you're licked by a gal."

Bob, for this was the newsboy's name, felt all the disgrace of the situation. His face reddened, and he pitched in promiscuously, delivering blow after blow wildly. This gave a decided advantage to Tom, who inflicted considerably more damage than she received.

The fight would have gone on longer if a gentleman had not come up, and spoken authoritatively: "What is all this fighting about? Are you not ashamed to fight with a girl?"

"No, I aint," said Bob, sullenly. "She took my place, and wouldn't give it up."

"Is that true?" turning to Tom.

"I've got as much right to it as he," said Tom. "I'll give it to him if I am a gal."

"Don't you know it is wrong to fight?" asked the gentleman, this time addressing Tom.

"No, I don't," said Tom. "Wouldn't you fight if a feller pitched into you?"

This was rather an embarrassing question, but the gentleman said, "It would be better to go away than to get into a fight."

"He fit me."

"It is bad enough for boys to fight, but it is worse for girls."

"Don't see it," said Tom.

Had Tom been in a higher social position, it might have been suggested to her that to fight was not ladylike; but there was such an incongruity between Tom's appearance and anything lady-like, that such an appeal would have been out of place. The fact is, Tom claimed no immunity or privilege on the score of sex, but regarded herself, to all intents and purposes, as a boy, and strongly wished that she were one.

The gentleman looked at her, rather puzzled, and walked away, satisfied with having stopped the fight.

Bob did not seem inclined to renew hostilities, but crossed the street, and took his stand there. Tom, by right of conquest, held her place until she had sold out her whole stock of papers.

CHAPTER VI
AN UNFASHIONABLE HOTEL

Tom found at the end of the afternoon that her capital had increased from twenty-five to fifty cents.

"Granny won't get none of this," she soliloquized, complacently. "It's all mine."

Sitting on a doorstep she counted over the money with an entirely different feeling from what she had experienced when it was to be transferred to granny. Now it was all her own, and, though but fifty cents, it made her feel rich.

"What shall I do with it?" thought Tom.

She had a square meal in the middle of the day; but several hours had passed since then, and she felt hungry again; Tom did not see any necessity for remaining hungry, with fifty cents in her possession. She made her way, therefore, to another eating-house, where the prices were the same with those at the one before mentioned, and partook of another square meal, leaving out the pie. This reduced her capital to thirty cents. She felt that she ought to save this, to start in business upon in the morning. As a street-sweeper she required no capital except her broom; but though Tom was not troubled with pride, she preferred to sell papers, or take up some other street vocation. Besides, she knew that as a street-sweeper on Broadway, she would be more likely

to be discovered by the old woman whom she was now anxious to avoid.

After eating supper Tom went out into the streets, not knowing exactly how to spend her time. Usually, she had gone down into the court, or the street, and played with the children of her own and neighboring tenement houses. But now she did not care to venture back into the old locality.

So she strolled about the streets aimlessly, until she felt sleepy, and began to consider whereabouts to bestow herself for the night. She might have gone to the "Girls' Lodging House," if she had known of such an institution; but she had never heard of it. Chance brought her to a basement, on which was the sign,—

"LODGINGS—FIVE CENTS."

This attracted Tom's attention. If it had not been a cold night, she would have been willing to sleep out, which would have been cheaper; but it was a damp and chilly evening, and her dress was thin.

"Five cents won't bust me!" thought Tom. "I'll go in."

She went down some steps, and opened a door into a room very low-studded, and very dirty.

A stout woman, in a dirty calico loose-gown, was sitting in a chair, with a fat, unhealthy-looking baby in her lap.

"What you want, little gal?" she asked.

"Where's your lodgin'?" asked Tom.

"In back," answered the woman, pointing to an inner room, partially revealed through a half-open door. It was dark, having

no windows, and dirtier, if possible, than the front room. The floor was covered with straw, for beds and bedsteads were looked upon as unnecessary luxuries in this economical lodging-house.

"Is that the place?" asked Tom.

"Yes. Do you want to stop here to-night?"

Tom had not been accustomed to first-class hotels, still the accommodations at granny's were rather better than this. However, the young Arab did not mind. She had no doubt she could sleep comfortably on the straw, and intimated her intention of stopping.

"Where's your money?" asked the woman.

The invariable rule in this establishment was payment in advance, and, perhaps, considering the character of the customers, it was the safest rule that could be adopted.

Tom took out her money, and counted out five cents into the woman's palm. She then put back the remainder in her pocket. If she had been less sleepy, she might have noticed the woman's covetous glance, and been led to doubt the safety of her small fortune. But Tom was sleepy, and her main idea was to go to bed as soon as possible.

"Lay down anywhere," said the landlady, dropping the five cents into her pocket.

Tom's preparation for bed did not take long. No undressing was required, for it was the custom here to sleep with the day's clothes on. Tom stowed herself away in a corner, and in five minutes was asleep.

It was but little after eight o'clock, and she was, at present, the only lodger.

No sooner did her deep, regular breathing indicate slumber, than the landlady began to indulge in various suspicious movements. She first put down her baby, and then taking a lantern,—the only light which could safely be carried into the lodging-room, on account of the straw upon the floor,—crept quietly into the inner room.

"She's fast asleep," she muttered.

She approached Tom with cautious step. She need not have been afraid to awaken her. Tom was a good sleeper, and not likely to wake up, unless roughly awakened, until morning.

Tom was lying on her side, with her face resting on one hand.

The woman stooped down, and began to look for the pocket in which she kept her money; but it was in that part of her dress upon which she was lying. This embarrassed the woman somewhat, but an idea occurred to her. She took up a straw, and, bending over, gently tickled Tom's ear. Tom shook her head, as a cat would under similar circumstances, and on its being repeated turned over, muttering, "Don't, granny!"

This was what her dishonest landlady wanted. She thrust her hand into Tom's pocket, and drew out the poor girl's entire worldly treasure. Tom, unconscious of the robbery, slept on; and the woman went back to the front room to wait for more lodgers. They began to come in about ten, and by twelve the room was full. It was a motley collection, and would have been a curious,

though sad study, to any humane observer. They were most of them in the last stages of ill-fortune, yet among them was more than one who had once filled a respectable position in society. Here was a man of thirty-five, who ten years before had filled a good place, with a fair salary, in a city bank. But in an evil hour he helped himself to some of the funds of the bank. He lost his situation, and, though he escaped imprisonment, found his prospects blasted. So he had gone down hill, until at length he found himself reduced to such a lodging-house as this, fortunate if he could command the small sum needful to keep him from a night in the streets.

Next him was stretched a man who was deserving still more pity, since his misfortunes sprang rather from a want of judgment than from his own fault. He was a scholar, with a fair knowledge of Latin and Greek, and some ability as a writer. He was an Englishman who had come to the city in the hope of making his acquisitions available, but had met with very poor encouragement. He found that both among teachers and writers the demand exceeded the supply, at least for those of moderate qualifications; and, having no influential friends, had sought for employment almost in vain. His small stock of money dwindled, his suit became shabby, until he found himself, to his deep mortification and disgust, compelled to resort to such lodging-houses as this, where he was obliged to herd with the lowest and most abandoned class.

Next to him lay a mechanic, once in profitable employment.

But drink had been his ruin; and now he was a vagabond, spending the little money he earned, at rum-shops, except what was absolutely necessary for food.

There is no need of cataloguing the remainder of Meg Morely's lodgers. Her low rates generally secured her a room-full, and a dozen, sometimes more, were usually packed away on the floor. On the whole she found it a paying business, though her charges were low. Sixty cents a day was quite a respectable addition to her income, and she had occupied the same place for two years already. Tom's experience will show that she had other, and not quite so lawful, ways of swelling her receipts, but she was cautious not to put them in practice, unless she considered it prudent, as in the present instance.

It was seven o'clock when Tom awoke. She looked around her in bewilderment, thinking at first she must be in granny's room. But a glance at the prostrate forms around her brought back the events of the day before, and gave her a realizing sense of her present situation.

"I've had a good sleep," said Tom to herself, stretching, by way of relief from her constrained position. "I guess it's time to get up."

She rubbed her eyes, and shook back her hair, and then rising, went into the front room. Her landlady was already up and getting breakfast.

"What time is it?" asked Tom.

"It's just gone seven," said Meg, looking sharply at Tom to

see if she had discovered the loss of her money. “How did you sleep?”

“Tip-top.”

“Come ag’in.”

“All right!” said Tom. “Maybe I will.”

She climbed up the basement stairs to the street above, and began to think of what the day had in store for her. Her prospects were not brilliant certainly; but Tom on the whole felt in good spirits. She had thrown off the yoke of slavery. She was her own mistress now, and granny’s power was broken. Tom felt that she could get along somehow. She had confidence in herself, and was sure something would turn up for her.

“Now, what’ll I do first?” thought Tom.

With twenty-five cents in her pocket, and a good appetite, breakfast naturally suggested itself.

She dove her hand into her pocket, but the face of the little Arab almost instantly expressed deep dismay.

Her money was gone!

CHAPTER VII.
TOM MAKES A FRIEND

Twenty-five cents is not a large sum, but it was Tom's entire fortune. It was all she had, not only to buy breakfast with, but also to start in business. She had an excellent appetite, but now there was no hope of satisfying it until she could earn some more money.

Tom hurried back to the lodging, and entered, looking excited.

"Well, what's wanted?" asked Meg, who knew well enough without asking.

"I've lost some money."

"Suppose you did," said the woman, defiantly, "you don't mean to say I took it."

"No," said Tom, "but I had it when I laid down."

"Where was it?"

"In my pocket."

"Might have tumbled out among the straw," suggested Meg.

This struck Tom as not improbable, and she went back into the bedroom, and, getting down on her hands and knees, commenced poking about for it. But even if it had been there, any of my readers who has ever lost money in this way knows that it is very difficult to find under such circumstances.

Tom persevered in her search until her next-door neighbor

growled out that he wished she would clear out. At length she was obliged to give it up.

"Have you found it?" asked Meg.

"No," said Tom, soberly.

"How much was it?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"That aint much."

"It's enough to bust me. I don't believe it's in the straw."

"What do you believe?" demanded Meg, whose guilty conscience made her scent an accusation.

"I think some of them took it while I was asleep," said Tom, indicating the other lodgers by a jerk of her finger.

"Likely they did," said Meg, glad to have suspicion diverted elsewhere.

"I wish I knew," said Tom.

"What'ud you do?"

"I'd get it back again," said Tom, her black eyes snapping with resolution.

"No, you wouldn't. You're nothin' but a babby. You couldn't do nothin'!"

"Couldn't I?" returned Tom. "I'd let 'em know whether I was a baby."

"Well, you go along now," said Meg. "Your money's gone, and you can't get it back. Next time give it to me to keep, and it'll be safe."

Being penniless, Tom was in considerable uncertainty when

she would again be mistress of so large a sum. At present she felt in no particular dread of being robbed. She left the lodgings, realizing that the money was indeed gone beyond hope of recovery.

There is some comfort in beginning the day with a good breakfast. It warms one up, and inspires hope and confidence. As a general rule people are good-natured and cheerful after a hearty breakfast. For ten cents Tom might have got a cup of coffee, or what passed for such, and a plate of tea-biscuit. With the other fifteen she could have bought a few morning papers, and easily earned enough to pay for a square meal in the middle of the day. Now she must go to work without capital, and on an empty stomach, which was rather discouraging. She would have fared better than this at granny's, though not much, her breakfast there usually consisting of a piece of stale bread, with perhaps a fragment of cold sausage. Coffee, granny never indulged in, believing whiskey to be more healthful. Occasionally, in moments of extreme good nature, she had given Tom a sip of whiskey; but the young Arab had never got to like it, fortunately for herself, though she had accepted it as a variation of her usual beverage, cold water.

In considering what she should do for the day, Tom decided to go to some of the railway stations or steamboat landings, and try to get a chance to carry a carpet-bag. "Baggage-smashing" required no capital, and this was available in her present circumstances.

Tom made her way to the pier where the steamers of the Fall River line arrive. Ordinarily it would have been too late, but it had been a windy night, the sound was rough, and the steamer was late, so that Tom arrived just in the nick of time.

Tom took her place among the hackmen, and the men and boys who, like her, were bent on turning an honest penny by carrying baggage.

"Clear out of the way here, little gal!" said a stout, overgrown boy. "Smash your baggage, sir?"

"Clear out yourself!" said Tom, boldly. "I've got as much right here as you."

Her little, sharp eyes darted this way and that in search of a possible customer. The boy who had been rude to her got a job, and this gave Tom a better chance. She offered her services to a lady, who stared at her with curiosity and returned no answer. Tom began to think she should not get a job. There seemed a popular sentiment in favor of employing boys, and Tom, like others of her sex, found herself shut out from an employment for which she considered herself fitted. But, at length, she saw approaching a big, burly six-footer, with a good-natured face. There was something about him which inspired Tom with confidence, and, pressing forward, she said, "Carry your bag, sir?"

He stopped short and looked down at the queer figure of our heroine. Then, glancing at his carpet-bag, which was of unusual size and weight, the idea of his walking through the streets with

Tom bending beneath the weight of his baggage, struck him in so ludicrous a manner that he burst into a hearty laugh.

"What's up?" demanded Tom, suspiciously. "Who are you laughin' at?"

"So you want to carry my carpet-bag?" he asked, laughing again.

"Yes," said Tom.

"Why, I could put you in it," said the tall man, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

"No, you couldn't," said Tom.

"Do you think you could carry it?"

"Let me try."

He set it down, and Tom lifted it from the ground; but it was obviously too much for her strength.

"You see you can't do it. Have you found anything to do this morning?"

"No," said Tom.

"Business isn't good, hey?"

"No," said Tom, "but I wouldn't mind so much if I hadn't had my money stole. I'm bust!"

"How's that? Did the bank break or have you been speculating?"

"Oh, you're gasin'! I aint got nothing to do with banks. Somebody stole two shillin's I had, so I've had no breakfast."

"Come, that's bad. I guess I must give you a job, after all. You can't carry my bag, but you can carry this."

He had under his arm something wrapped in a paper, making a small bundle. He handed it to Tom, and she trudged along with it after him.

"You couldn't guess what that is, I suppose?" said her companion, sociably.

"No," said Tom; "it feels soft."

"It's a large wax doll, for my little niece," said her patron. "You haven't got any dolls, I suppose?"

"I had one once," said Tom. "It was made of rags. But granny threw it into the fire."

"I suppose you were sorry."

"I was then; but I'm too old for dolls now."

"How old are you?"

"I aint sure. Somewheres about twelve."

"You live with your granny, then?"

"No, I don't,—not now."

"Why not?"

"She wanted to lick me, so I run away."

"Then where do you live now?"

"Nowhere."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.