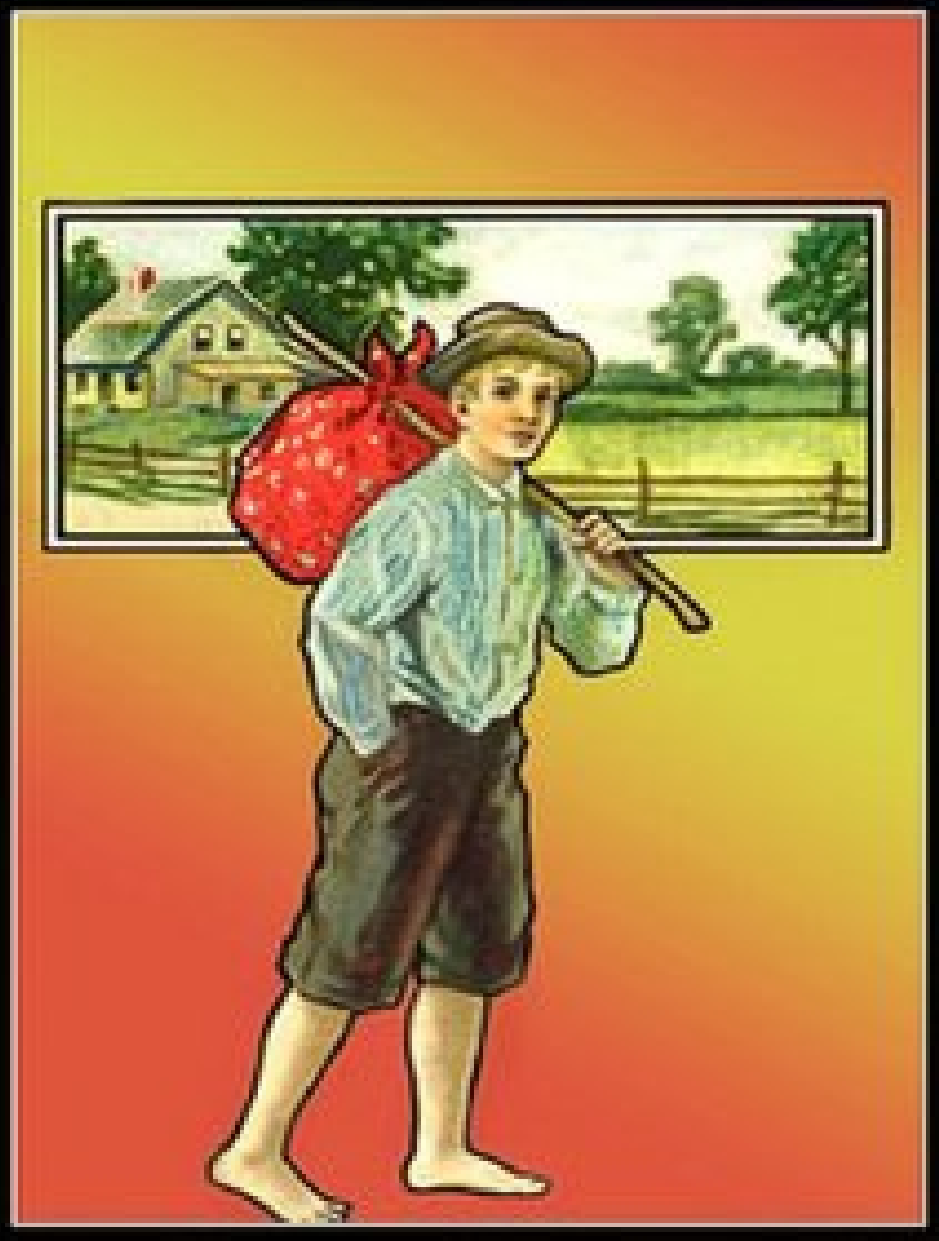

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Horatio Alger

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FROM FARM TO FORTUNE

Or, Nat Nason's Strange Experience

BY HORATIO ALGER, JR.

AUTHOR OF "LOST AT SEA," "NELSON THE NEWSBOY," "OUT FOR BUSINESS," "THE YOUNG BOOK AGENT," "RAGGED DICK SERIES," ETC.

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HE FELT SOMEBODY CATCH HIM BY THE ARM, AND TURNING HE BEHELD NAT.

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PREFACE

Nat Nason was a poor country boy with a strong desire to better his

condition. Life on the farm was unusually hard for him, and after a quarrel with his miserly uncle, with whom he resided, he resolved to strike out for himself.

Nat was poor and it was a struggle to reach the great city, where the youth trusted that fame and fortune awaited him.

The boy obtained, by accident, a fair sum of money and with this he resolved to go into a business of some kind. But a sharper quickly relieved him of his wealth, and opened Nat's eyes to the fact that he was not as shrewd as he had thought himself to be.

The lesson proved a valuable one, and from that moment the country boy did his best to not alone win success but to deserve it. He worked hard, often in the midst of great difficulties, and what the outcome of his struggle was, will be found in the pages which follow.

In penning this tale the author has endeavored to show the difference between life in a quiet country place and in a great bustling city, and especially as that difference shows itself to the eyes of a country boy. Many country lads imagine that to go to the city and win success there is easy; perhaps they will not think it so easy after they have read of what happened to Nat Nason. More than once, in spite of his grit and courage, Nat came close to making a complete failure of what he had started out to do, and his success in the end was perhaps after all not as great as he had anticipated when first striking out.

FROM FARM TO FORTUNE

CHAPTER I

NAT ON THE FARM

"Nat, where have you been?"

"Been fishing," answered the boy addressed, a sturdy youth of sixteen, with clear blue eyes and sandy hair.

"Fishin'? And who said you could go fishin'?" demanded Abner Balberry, in his high, nervous voice.

"Nobody said I could go," answered the boy, firmly. "But I thought you'd all like to have some fish for supper, so I went."

"Humph! I suppose you thought as how them taters would hoe themselves, eh?" sneered Abner Balberry, who was not only Nat's uncle, but also his guardian.

"I hoed the potatoes," was the boy's answer. "Got through at half-past two o'clock."

"If you got through so soon you didn't half do the job," grumbled the man. "I ain't goin' to have you wastin' your time on no fishin', understand?"

"Can't I go fishing at all?"

"Not when there is work to do on this farm."

"But I did my work, Uncle Abner."

"An' I say it couldn't have been done right if ye didn't take proper time fer it, Nat Nason! I know you! You are gittin' lazy!"

"I'm not lazy!" cried the boy, indignantly. "I work as hard as anybody around here."

"Don't you talk back to me!" ejaculated Abner Balberry. "I say you are lazy, an' I know. How many fish did ye catch?"

"I only got two. They didn't bite very well to-day."

"Humph! A-wastin' three hours an' more jest to catch two little fish! If I let you go your own way, Nat Nason, you'll be in the poorhouse before you die."

"I don't think I'll ever get to the poorhouse, Uncle Abner."

"Oh, don't talk back! Take your fish to the kitchen an' then git down to the barnyard as quick as you can. You've got to help me milk to-night. An' don't you dare to go fishin' ag'in, unless I give ye permission," added Abner Balberry, as he strode off towards the barn.

A sharp answer arose to Nat Nason's lips, but he checked it and turned toward the kitchen of the farmhouse.

"What luck did you have, Nat?" questioned the did woman who was Abner Balberry's housekeeper.

"Not much luck, Mrs. Felton. They didn't bite very well to-day."

"What was Mr. Balberry saying to you?" went on Mrs. Felton, who had been housekeeper at the place since the death of Mrs. Balberry, two years before.

"He was mad because I went fishing."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Uncle Abner never wants me to have any sport."

"He's a hard-working man, and always was, Nat. He doesn't believe in wasting time."

"But a fellow ought to have a little time off."

"That may be true."

"Don't you think I work pretty hard for a boy of my age?"

"I do, Nat."

"Uncle Abner wants to make a regular slave out of a fellow."

"Didn't he say you were to help him milk to-night?"

"Yes, and I might as well get at it right away. If I don't, he'll give me another jawing," answered the boy, and placing his fish on a bench, he strode off toward the barnyard.

Nat Nason was an orphan, the only child of Mr. William Nason, who had been a brother to the late Mrs. Balberry. The boy's father had been killed in a runaway and his mother had never gotten over the shock of the sudden death.

When the youth found himself an orphan he was taken in by his Aunt Mary, who did what she could for him. The Nasons had not been rich, so there was little or no money coming to Nat. From the start he was told that he must earn his own living, and this he proceeded to do to the best of his ability.

The death of his Aunt Mary was almost as much of a blow to the lad as the loss of his mother, for it left him under the entire charge of his uncle, Abner Balberry. The latter had no children of his own and he made Nat work as hard as if he were a full-grown man.

The Balberry farm was located in Ohio, not far from the town of Caswell. It consisted of one hundred acres of good land, with a house and several

outbuildings. Among his neighbors Abner Balberry was considered the meanest man in the district. Abner himself thought he was a pretty good man and he counted himself a real "pillow" of the church, as he expressed it.

For two years life on the Balberry farm had been one continual grind to Nat Nason. He was expected to work from morning to night, and such a thing as a whole day off was utterly unknown to him. He received next to nothing in the way of spending money.

"I'll save the money fer ye," Abner Balberry would say, when questioned on the subject. "'Tain't good fer boys to have too much cash on hand. It makes 'em reckless."

"But you never give me anything," had been Nat's answer.

"Never mind—I'm a-givin' you a good home an' good eatin'," was the answer.

The good home and good fare were something to be questioned. Nat's room was a small one under the roof, his clothing usually made over from the garments worn by Mr. Balberry, and such a thing as an elaborate table was unknown on the farm. Many times Mrs. Felton had wished to cook more, or make some fancy dishes, but Abner Balberry had always stopped her from doing such a thing.

"Plain fare is good enough," he would say. "An' if ye eat too much it only brings on the dyspepsy." More than once Nat went to bed feeling positively hungry.

When Nat reached the barnyard he found his uncle already there with the milk pails and milking an old white cow called Sukey.

"Go on down the lane and drive up Jule," cried Abner Balberry, without stopping his milking. "She just went down that way."

"All right," answered Nat, and passing through the barnyard he hurried down

"All right," answered Nat, and passing through the barnyard he hurried down the lane mentioned.

Jule was a new cow that the farmer had purchased a week before. She did not seem inclined to herd with the other animals and Nat had had quite a good deal of trouble with her before.

At the end of the lane was an orchard and here he found the cow, contentedly eating the fresh grass. She tried to get away from him, but he was too quick for the creature and soon had her turned around and headed up the lane. Then he stopped to get an apple, for his fishing trip had made him hungry and he knew that supper was still a good hour off.

"I wish I had some other kind of a job," he murmured, with a sigh. "Somehow, farming doesn't seem to be just the right thing for me. Wish I was in some big city."

"Hurry up with that cow!" cried Abner Balberry. "Do you think I'm going to stop here all night fer milkin'?"

"I'm coming!" sang out Nat. "Get along, Jule, you old slow poke!"

He gave the cow a slap on the side, and away she flew up the lane. The boy followed, finishing the apple as he went.

As it happened several cows were bunched up near the entrance to the lane and as the new cow appeared, driven by Nat, the bunch scattered. Then Jule ran directly into the barnyard.

"Hi! hi! stop!" yelled Abner Balberry. "Drat the beast! Stop!"

But the new cow did not stop, and a moment later she stepped into a pailful of milk, and tipped it over. Then she ran against another cow that the farmer was milking. This cow swerved around, and in a twinkling Abner Balberry was thrown on his back and the milk was sent flying over him.

CHAPTER II

A QUARREL IN THE BARNYARD

The sight of Abner Balberry flat on his back, and with the milk flowing over him, was a comical one, and for the instant Nat had to laugh out-right.

"Hi! hi!" roared the farmer. "Git away! Drat the beasts! Now, Nat Nason, jest see what you've done!"

He struggled to his feet, and Nat at once became sober, for he realized that trouble was at hand.

"It's too bad, Uncle Abner——" began the youth.

"Too bad? I should say it was too bad!" cried the farmer. "An' all your fault, too!"

"I can't see how it was my fault. You told me to drive the cow up here."

"Don't tell me, Nat Nason! It's your fault. An' all that fresh milk gone to waste!" Abner Balberry gave a groan. "I don't know most what I'm a-goin' to do with you fer this."

"I can't see how it's my fault."

"You made the cows git frightened."

"No, I didn't."

"Don't tell me! Don't you know that milk is worth money?"

"Yes, but——"

"You scart thet cow out o' her wits," went on the farmer, his rage growing as he looked at the spilt milk. "Nat Nason, I tell you, you're a bad boy!"

To this the youth made no reply.

"I'm a-goin' to teach ye a lesson fer it!"

"Shall I milk Jule?"

"Yes, an' mind ye don't spill a drop nuther!"

Silently Nat went to work, and milked not only the new cow but also two of the others. By this time milking was over, and the lacteal fluid was carried to the spring-house to cool. Then the cows were allowed to wander down to the pasture for the night.

When Nat approached the kitchen again an appetizing odor of frying fish filled the air. The boy's uncle followed him.

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Felton, cheerfully. "You had some trouble with the cows, didn't you?" she continued.

"It was Nat's fault," grumbled Abner Balberry. "He made them run around an' upset everything. Nat, I said as how I was going to teach ye a lesson. You wash up an' go to bed at once."

"Go to bed?" queried the boy.

"Thet's what I said, didn't I?"

"Do you mean right after supper?"

"No, I mean before supper," snarled Abner Balberry.

"No, I mean before supper," snarled Abner Balberry.

"Oh, isn't he to have his supper first?" put in the housekeeper, timidly.

"No, he ain't."

After this abrupt declaration there was an awkward pause.

"Do you want me to go to bed without my supper?" asked Nat, slowly.

"That's what I said."

"It isn't fair."

"Ain't it?"

"No, it isn't. It wasn't my fault that the milk was spilt, so there!"

"You say much more to me an' I'll tan yer hide well fer ye!" stormed Abner Balberry.

"Don't you want him to have none of the fish he brought in?" asked the housekeeper.

"The fish ain't worth much."

"Maybe you'd like to have all the fish yourself?" put in Nat, tartly, before he had stopped to think.

Angered at this remark the farmer turned around and caught the youth by the collar and began to shake him.

"I'll teach ye to talk back to me!" he snarled. "I'll teach ye! Now go to bed, an' be quick about it."

"I want my supper!" came doggedly from Nat. He felt that he had earned the meal and he needed it.

"Not a mouthful."

"If you don't give me my supper I won't work for you any more, Uncle Abner!"

"Wot! Goin' to talk to me like this!" screamed the farmer, and caught the boy once again. "Up to your room with ye, before I trounce ye well!"

He shook Nat fiercely, and a struggle ensued between the pair which came to an end when a chair was overturned and then a side table on which rested some of the things for supper.

"Oh, the eating!" screamed the housekeeper, in alarm. "And the teapot is smashed!" she added, sadly.

"It's all Nat's fault," came from Abner Balberry. "He is a good-fer-nuthin', he is! Off to bed with ye, before I git my horsewhip!"

He opened the door leading to the enclosed stairs, and fearful of another attack Nat retreated. As soon as he was on the stairs, the farmer slammed the door shut and bolted it. A minute later he and Mrs. Felton heard the youth ascend the stairs to his own room.

"It was kind of hard on the boy to make him go to bed without his supper," remarked the housekeeper, as she gathered up the things on the floor.

"It's his own fault," snorted the farmer. "He's got to be took down, he has!"

"He hasn't had a mouthful since noon, and we had a light dinner, too."

"I can't help that, Mrs. Felton. I'm goin' to teach him a lesson."

"Nat is a high-spirited boy, Mr. Balberry. Maybe he won't stand for it."

"He has got to stand fer it," was the answer, from the sink, where the farmer was washing his face and hands.

"But if he won't?"

"Wot can he do, I'd like to know?"

"I'm sure I don't know—but he may do something that you least expect."

"He won't do nuthin'," said the farmer, and sank down in his seat at the table. "He can't do nuthin'. I give him a good home, but he don't seem to a'preciate it nohow."

To this Mrs. Felton did not reply, but set the food on the table. The fish had not been spoilt, and the farmer ate all he wished of the dish.

"Why don't you eat?" he asked of the housekeeper, seeing that she had abstained from touching the fish.

"I—I don't care for it," she answered. She had in mind to save what was left and give it to Nat for his breakfast.

"That boy is gittin' too big fer his boots," went on Abner Balberry. "He acts like he was of age, an' he is only sixteen. Last week he wanted to know how soon I was goin' to pay him reg'lar wages."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Told him I'd pay him wages when he was wuth it an' not before."

"He does almost a man's work now, doesn't he?"

"Not much! Besides, don't I feed an' clothe him an' give him a comfortable home? He's got too high-falutin' notions, he has!"

"But don't you think he ought to have some money?" went on Mrs. Felton, who could be a trifle independent herself at times.

"No. Money is the ruination o' young folks. Week before last he wanted a

quarter to go to the circus with, but he didn't git it."

"Almost all of the boys in this district went to the circus. Tom Bradley told me it was very good, too."

"Humph! That Bradley boy is going to the dogs as fast as he can go."

"Deacon Slide thinks he is a very good boy."

"Well, the deacon don't know everything. I'm goin' to make Nat toe the mark until he is twenty-one. After that I'll wash my hands o' him."

The farmer finished his supper and then went out to see that everything was all right around the farm for the night. A little later he took a lamp and went upstairs. Tiptoeing his way through an upper hall he came to a pause in front of Nat's room.

"Asleep, jest as I thought," he told himself, after listening to the boy's breathing. Then he peeped into the room, to behold Nat lying under the cover of the bed, with his face turned to the wall.

"I'll give him another talkin' to in the mornin'," the farmer told himself, and then retired, with no thought of what was going to happen before the sun arose upon another day.

CHAPTER III

NAT LEAVES THE FARM

Farmer Balberry was mistaken; Nat was not asleep, nor was there any thought of sleep in the boy's mind.

The youth had not even gone to bed. He had been sitting on a chair by the open window when he had heard his uncle coming upstairs, and to deceive his relative had jumped into bed and pulled the blanket up over him.

When Nat was thrust up the stairs his mind was in a tumult. He felt that his uncle was not treating him fairly—and he wanted his supper very much.

It is bad enough to have a real grievance of any kind—it is worse when one must bear it on an empty stomach. As he made his way to his room the boy was in a savage humor and fit to do almost any deed.

"Uncle Abner is getting worse every day!" he muttered to himself. "He treats me worse than I would treat a dog!"

Sitting by the open window Nat thought of many things—of the death of his parents, and of the taking off of his aunt—and of how his miserly uncle had treated him ever since.

"It's not fair!" he told himself, over and over again. "Uncle Abner doesn't believe in giving a boy a fair show. I wish I lived with somebody else."

The more he thought over the situation the more he felt that he ought not to stand such treatment. He felt that he was entitled to his supper, and also to some spending money if not to regular wages. At the present time he had not a cent in the world.

"If I had a few dollars I might strike out for myself," he reasoned. "But I haven't even a few cents. Wonder how I could raise a few dollars?"

As said before Nat's worldly possessions were few. In his room he had some trinkets from home and also an old silver watch which had belonged to his father.

"I might sell the watch," he thought, but then decided that it would be best to keep the heirloom.

Then he thought of Jennie, the white and brown cow. As a calf she had been given to Nat by his mother, and she was now a part of the herd on the Balberry farm.

"Jennie ought to be worth twenty or twenty-five dollars," he said to himself. "That's a pile of money, for a start. Wonder how I could manage to sell her?"

Thus speculating, Nat gradually drifted around to the point where he decided that he would leave the farm at once. He had told his uncle that he wanted his supper or he would not work for the man any more, and he meant to keep his word.

By the time all was quiet around the house and he was certain both the housekeeper and his uncle had retired, Nat had settled just what he was going to do.

Making no noise, he slipped off his working clothes and put on his best suit—something just a trifle better than the others. He also donned a clean shirt and collar and necktie and got out his best hat and shoes. Then, with his other possessions wrapped in a small bundle, and with his shoes under his arm, he tiptoed his way out of the bedchamber, along the hall, and down to the lower floor of the farmhouse.

Nat knew exactly where Mrs. Felton kept the things to eat, so it was not necessary for him to light a lamp. The use of a match revealed as much as he wanted to know, and in a short time he was devouring what was left of the fish and also some bread and butter and a generous quarter of a cherry pie, which the housekeeper had insisted upon baking the day before, somewhat against Abner Balberry's will, for the farmer would rather have sold the cherries at the store.

His meal finished, Nat hesitated for a moment, and then got out an old newspaper. Into this he wrapped half a dozen slices of bread and butter, along with a bit of cheese and two rather stale doughnuts.

"They'll come in handy for breakfast, along with an apple or two," was the way he reasoned. "Especially if I don't happen to sell the cow."

The boy's next move was to leave the house, which he did after tying his clothes and the lunch into one bundle, which he slung on a stick over his shoulder. Once outside, he put on his shoes and then made his way from the house to the barnyard, and then along the lane leading to the pasture.

The late moon was showing over the hills and the heavens were bright with stars, so it was by no means dark. As he entered the lane Nat looked back, to see if his departure from the house had been discovered.

A sight met his gaze which caused his heart to jump. A man was crossing the dooryard and coming toward the barn!

"It must be Uncle Abner!" he thought. "Perhaps he heard me leave after all!"

He looked back again, but could not see the man now, and then broke into a run. Soon a row of trees in the orchard hid both the barn and the house from view. He continued to run, however, and did not slacken his pace until he reached the pasture where the cows were at rest.

Jennie did not relish having her rest disturbed and had to be prodded several times before she would arise and move in the direction he desired. Some of the other cows wished to follow, but he drove them back.

"I only want my own," he murmured half aloud. "I don't want a thing that belongs to Uncle Abner."

Nat had expected to take to the highway which ran directly beside the house.

But he was afraid that his uncle was watching for him from the barn, and so he drove Jennie along a back road, leading to another highway which was but little traveled and which had along it only a handful of farmhouses.

"He shan't catch me if I can help it," the boy told himself. "Now I've left I'm going to stay away."

Nat was still very much agitated in his mind, so no thought of sleep came to him as he trudged along, mile after mile, driving the tired cow before him. He met not a soul; and thus he progressed until three o'clock in the morning.

Boy and cow had now been on the road six hours and Jennie refused to go further. Seeing this, he turned into a small patch of woods and there tied the creature to a tree. Then, finding a sheltered nook, he threw himself down to rest and was soon fast asleep.

"Hullo, there, what are you doing here?"

Such was the demand which aroused Nat several hours later, and he sprang up to find himself confronted by a farmer boy of about his own age.

"Hullo, Sam," he answered. "I—I was driving the cow to market and I got so tired I thought I'd take a nap."

"Going to sell the cow?" asked Sam Price.

"Yes, if I can."

"Where?"

"Over to Brookville, if anybody will buy her."

"Jackson the butcher was after cows only day before yesterday."

"Then maybe I'll go and see him."

"You must have got an early start," went on Sam Price.

"I did. But I must hurry along," continued Nat, not caring to answer too many questions. "I slept too long."

"You'd better hurry. Your uncle ain't the one to let you play, is he?"

"You're right, Sam."

"What does he want you to get for the cow?"

"It isn't his cow. She belongs to me. I had her from the time she was a little calf, and I've a right to sell her."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. Well, I hope you get a good price for her."

"I'll get as much as I can."

"Want me to go along?"

"You can go along if you wish."

"All right, I haven't anything else to do for a while."

"But I want to tell you one thing, Sam. Can you keep a secret?"

"Can I? Try me and see."

"You won't tell a soul?"

"I'll give you my word. But what's up?"

"I'm not coming back."

"What!"

"It's a fact."

"Do you mean that you are going to run away?"

"That's the plain English of it, Sam. I'm tired of living with my uncle. He doesn't treat me fairly."

"I believe that. My father thinks he is the meanest man in the State of Ohio."

"Well, I don't know about that, but he is pretty mean, I can tell you that. I'm not going to stand it any longer."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know yet. Most likely to one of the big cities. Somehow, I think I could do better in a city than on a farm."

"Do you? Now I think a country boy has no show in a big city. He don't know the ways, and he is sure to get cheated out of his eyes—so my father says."

"They won't cheat me," said Nat, decidedly.

"Father says every big city is full of sharpers, on the watch for greenies."

"Well, they shan't catch me for a greeny," answered Nat.

Alas for poor Nat! Little did he dream of what was in store for him, and of the little trap into which he was to fall as soon as he arrived in New York City.

CHAPTER IV

ABNER BALBERRY'S DISCOVERY

"Nat!"

"Nat!"

Abner Balberry uttered the name in a loud, clear voice and waited fully a minute for an answer.

"Nat!" he repeated. "I want you to answer me, do you hear? Nat!"

Still there was no reply, and now, in some alarm, Abner Balberry turned back into his bedchamber and donned part of his clothing.

"If that boy is moving around this house I'm goin' to know it," he murmured to himself, as he felt his way toward Nat's room. Coming to the door, he threw it open and took a step toward the bed.

As we already know, it was empty. The discovery was something of a shock to the farmer and for the moment he stood stock-still, gazing at the bed and feeling under the covers to make certain that his nephew was not really there.

"Gone!" he muttered at last. "He must be downstairs. More'n likely he went down to git somethin' to eat. Wait till I catch him! I'll tan him well!"

Hoping to catch Nat unawares, he tiptoed his way down the stairs and entered the living room. Then he passed to the kitchen and the shed, and came back to peer into the parlor. Not a trace of the lad was to be found anywhere.

"I certainly heard him," he reasoned. "I certainly did."

"Mr. Balberry!" The call came from the housekeeper. "Are you up?"

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, all right."

"But it ain't all right! Nat's up too."

"Is he down there with you?"

"No, I don't know at all where he is. I'm a-lookin' for him."

"No, I don't know at all where he is. I'm a-lookin' fer him."

By this time Mrs. Felton's curiosity was aroused and she lost no time in slipping on her wrapper. When she came down she brought with her a lamp.

"Where do you suppose he went?" she asked.

"How do I know?" snarled Abner Balberry.

The housekeeper happened to glance into the pantry. She was about to utter an exclamation, but checked herself.

"What did you say, Mrs. Felton?"

"I—I didn't say anything."

"He ain't in there, is he?"

"No."

"Has he been at the victuals?"

"Not—not very much," stammered the housekeeper.

"Humph! I guess he ate as much as he wanted. Jest wait till I catch him—I'll tan him harder than he was ever tanned before!"

"Maybe he went to bed again."

"No, I jest looked into his room."

Abner Balberry unlocked the kitchen door and stepped out into the dooryard. As he did this he caught sight of somebody running swiftly down the road.

"Hi! Stop!" he yelled. "Stop, Nat, do you hear?"

To this there was no answer, and the fleeing individual merely ran the faster.

"Was it Nat?" asked the housekeeper.

"Was it Nat?" asked the housekeeper.

"To be sure it was. Oh, wait till I lay my hands on him!" And the farmer shook his fist at the figure that was fast disappearing in the gloom.

"What's that light in the barn?" demanded Mrs. Felton, an instant later.

"Light? Where?"

"Up in the haymow."

Abner Balberry gave a glance toward the structure.

"The barn's afire!" he screamed. "Thet good-fer-nuthin' boy has set the place on fire!"

"Oh! oh!" screamed the housekeeper, and began to tremble from head to feet, for to her mind a fire was the most dreadful thing that could happen.

"I've got to git thet fire out," said the farmer, and ran toward the barn with all speed.

"Be careful, or you'll be burnt up!" screamed Mrs. Felton.

"Go on an' git the water pails!" said the farmer. "Fill everything with water. An' bring a rag carpet, an' I'll soak thet too!"

He already had an old patch of carpet used at the doorstep in his hand, and this he soused in the watering trough as he passed. Then he ran into the open barn and mounted to the loft.

The fire was in a patch of hay at one end of the loft, close to an open window. Regardless of his personal safety, Abner Balberry leaped in and threw part of the hay out of the window. Then he began to beat out the fire with the water-soaked carpet.

"Here's some water," came timidly from below, and Mrs. Felton appeared

with two pails full to the brim. He took these upstairs and dashed them on the flames.

"You look out or you'll be burnt up!" cried the housekeeper. She was trembling to such a degree that she could scarcely stand.

"Git some more water," was Abner Balberry's only reply. The thought that his barn might be totally destroyed filled him with dread, for there was no insurance on the structure—he being too miserly to pay the premium demanded by the insurance company.

More water was procured by Mrs. Felton, and at last it was apparent that the farmer was getting the best of the fire. He worked hard and did not seem to mind the fact that his eyebrows were singed and his hands slightly blistered.

"There! now I've got it!" he sighed at last.

"Are you sure?" asked the housekeeper in a faint voice.

"Yes, but I'm a-goin' to hunt around fer sparks. Git some more water."

Additional water was soon at hand, and Abner Balberry began a minute search of the whole loft, on the lookout for stray sparks. A few were found and extinguished, and then the excitement came to an end.

"How thankful I am that the barn didn't burn down," said the housekeeper, as the farmer came below and began to bathe his face and hands.

"It was hot work."

"Are you burnt much?"

"More'n I want to be. Jest wait till I catch Nat!"

"Do you think——" began the housekeeper.

"O' course I do!" snorted Abner Balberry. "Didn't I see him a-runnin' away from the barn?"

"I never thought Nat would be wicked enough to set a barn on fire."

"He was mad because I wouldn't give him no supper. He's a young rascal, he is!"

"But to burn a barn!"

"Thet boy has got to be taken in hand, Mrs. Felton. I've let him have his own way too much. I'm goin' to lay down the law good an' hard after this."

"Maybe he won't come back," suggested the housekeeper.

This thought startled the farmer and he lost no time in finishing his washing.

"I'm goin' after him," he announced. "If he thinks to run away I'll put a spoke in his wheel putty quick."

Taking another look around, to make certain that the fire was really out, Abner Balberry brought out one of his horses and hitched the animal to a buckboard, in the meantime sending the housekeeper back to the house to get his hat and coat.

"Where do you suppose you'll find him?" asked Mrs. Felton.

"Somewhere along the road most likely."

"Maybe he'll hide on you."

"He had better not. If he does that, I'll call on the squire about him."

"Can you do that?"

"O' course I can. Didn't he try to burn down the barn? The squire can make out a warrant for his arrest."

"It would be awful to have him arrested."

"Well, he brought it on himself," answered Abner Balberry, doggedly. "He had no right to try to set the barn afire. Next thing you know, Mrs. Felton, he'll be a-trying to burn us up in our beds."

"Oh, I don't think Nat would be as bad as that."

"You don't know thet boy as well as I do. He's sly an' stubborn, and he'll do 'most anything when he's crossed. But I'll fix him! Jest you wait an' see!"

"How far will you follow him?"

"As far as it's necessary. If he thinks he can git away from me he'll find out, sooner or later, he is mistaken."

"You don't know when you'll be back?"

"No. It may be I'll have to wait in town till the squire opens his office—that is, if I can't find Nat."

"But you are going to look for him yourself first?"

"Yes."

With this answer Abner Balberry drove off in the darkness. Mrs. Felton watched him and heaved a long and deep sigh.

"Too bad!" she murmured. "If he catches Nat it will surely go hard with that boy. Well, I didn't think he was bad enough to set fire to a barn!"

CHAPTER V

THE SALE OF A COW

Totally unconscious of what had taken place at the farm after his departure, Nat, in company with his friend, Sam Price, proceeded on his way to Brookville.

On the journey Nat told his friend of many things that had happened to him and of his uncle's meanness.

"I don't wonder you want a change," said Sam. "I'd want a change myself."

At last they came in sight of Brookville, and Nat drove the cow to the yard of Jackson the butcher.

The butcher was a fat, good-natured man of middle age. But he was a shrewd business man and first-class at driving a bargain.

"What do you want, boy?" he asked of Nat.

"Do you want to buy a cow, Mr. Jackson? Sam says you were out looking for cows day before yesterday."

"I did want cows then, but I've got nearly all I want now."

"Oh, then I'll go elsewhere," answered Nat.

"Hold on, not so fast. What do you want for your cow?"

"Thirty dollars."

"Phew! you don't want much."

"She's worth it. You can milk her or use her for meat, just as you choose."

"Whose cow is she?"

"Mine."

"Yours?" And the butcher gazed at Nat curiously.

"Yes. I've owned her ever since she was a little calf."

"And now you are tired of her?"

"Not exactly that, but I want to use the money. Will you buy her?"

"Yes, but not for thirty dollars."

"How much will you give?"

"Twenty dollars."

"I don't care to sell for twenty dollars."

"That's the best I can do."

"Then I'll have to go elsewhere. Come, Jennie," and Nat turned to drive the cow from the butcher's yard again.

"Hold on!" cried the meat man. "I'll give you twenty-two dollars."

"Make it twenty-five and I'll accept. I can't take less. I ought to get thirty dollars."

There was some more talk, and in the end, the butcher agreed to pay twenty-five dollars and did so. He wanted a receipt, and Nat wrote it out for him.

"So you are Nat Nason," said the butcher. "I used to know your father. A very nice man."

"He was a nice man."

"Live with your uncle now, don't you?"

"I have been living with him, yes. Good-day, and much obliged," returned the boy, and to avoid being questioned further he left the yard at once, followed by Sam.

"You made a good bargain on the cow," said Sam. "I reckon you got every cent she was worth."

"She was a good cow, Sam. I'm rather sorry to part with her. She was almost like a friend."

"What are you going to do next?"

"Strike out for the city."

"I wish you luck."

"You won't tell my uncle?"

"Not a word. But, say."

"Well?"

"When you get to the city write and tell me how you like it."

"I will, Sam, and you must tell me the news from home, and how my uncle gets along without me."

So it was arranged; and a few minutes later the two lads separated, and Sam Price started for home.

Brookville was on a small branch railroad running to Cleveland, and by consulting a time-table Nat learned that a train for Cleveland would leave in ten minutes. He lost no time in purchasing a ticket, and spent the rest of the time in eating some of the lunch he had brought along. With over twenty-three

dollars still in his pocket he felt rich, and bought some peanuts and a cake of sweet chocolate.

When the train came along there were scarcely any passengers aboard, so he had little difficulty in getting the seat he wanted. He sat down by a window, with his bundle beside him, and gave himself up to thinking and to looking at the scenery as it whirled past.

Nat had traveled but little on the cars, so the ride to Cleveland was intensely enjoyable. The different places passed were so interesting that he soon forgot to think about his prospects, or of what he was to do when he arrived at the city on the lake.

"Next stop is Cleveland!" cried the conductor, standing at the open doorway. "All change, for trains east and west!"

A moment later the train rolled into the smoky station, and bundle in hand, Nat left the car and stepped onto the platform. From there he walked to the street, where he gazed in some bewilderment at the crowds of people and the swiftly moving street cars.

"Paper!" cried a newsboy. "Morning paper?"

"No, I don't want any paper," answered Nat.

"All about the big fire in Chicago, boss. Take a paper?"

"Yes, I'll take one," said Nat, and passed over the necessary change. Off darted the newsboy, to be lost in the crowd on the other side of the street. Nat gazed at the paper, to find that a tenement had burned out in Chicago, with the loss of one life.

"That's not such a terrible thing—for a big city like Chicago," he mused, and then noticed that the newspaper was two days old.

"That boy stuck me!" he muttered, and a cloud crossed his face. "I wonder where he is?"

The boy could not be found, and in a moment Nat concluded it would be a waste of time to look for him.

"He caught me for a greeny, true enough," he thought. "I've got to keep my eyes open after this."

From one street Nat passed to another, gazing into the shop windows, and wondering what he had best do next. He had at first calculated to go to New York without delay, but now thought it would do no harm to remain in Cleveland a day or two.

"Perhaps I'll never get here again," he reasoned. "And I might as well see all there is to see."

Noon found him on one of the main streets. He was now hungry again, and coming to a modest-looking restaurant, he entered and sat down at a side table.

"What will you have?" asked the waiter, coming up to him.

"Give me a regular dinner," said Nat, seeing the sign on the wall:

Regular Dinner, 11 to 2. 30 cents.

The waiter walked off, and presently returned with some bread and butter.

"Pea or tomato soup?" he asked.

"What's that?" questioned the boy.

"Pea or tomato soup?"

"I don't want any soup—I want a regular dinner."

At this the waiter smiled, for he saw that Nat was green.

"We serve soup first—if the customer wants it."

"And what do you serve after that?"

"One kind of meat, vegetables, coffee or milk, and pie or pudding."

"Oh! Well bring me the meat and other stuff. I never cared for soup anyway."

"Roast beef or lamb?"

"Roast beef."

The waiter went off, and presently Nat was supplied with all he cared to eat. The food was good, and he took his time, finishing off with a piece of lemon meringue pie, a dainty of which he was exceedingly fond, but which Mrs. Felton had seldom dared to make.

"Thirty cents, but I guess it was worth it," he thought, as he left the restaurant.

Nat had never seen Lake Erie, and toward the middle of the afternoon he walked down in the direction of the water. The shipping interested him greatly, and it was dark before he realized that the day was gone without anything definite being accomplished.

"Gracious, how time flies when one is in the city!" he thought. "To-morrow, I must make up my mind what to do next. If I don't, I'll have my money spent, and no job, either."

As it grew darker the boy felt the necessity of looking for accommodations for the night. Seeing a sign on a house, Furnished Rooms by the Day, Week, or Month, he ascended the stoop, and rang the bell. A young Irish girl answered his summons.

"Can I get a bed for to-night?" asked Nat.

"I guess yez can—I'll call Mrs. O'Hara," said the girl.

The landlady soon showed herself, and said she could let Nat have a hall room for fifty cents. To the boy's notion this seemed rather high.

"I can't take less," said Mrs. O'Hara, firmly.

"Very well; I'll take the room for to-night," answered Nat. "Can I put my bundle up there now?"

"To be sure."

Fortunately for Nat, the room proved clean and well-kept, and the bed was better than the one he had used at the farm. Tired out, the boy slept soundly until seven o'clock, when he lost no time in dressing and going below.

"Will you want the room again to-night, Mr. Nason?" asked the landlady.

"I don't think so," answered Nat. It made him feel a foot taller to be addressed as Mr. Nason. "If I want it, I'll let you know by supper time."

"Very well."

With his bundle under his arm, Nat left the house, and walked down the street toward one of the main thoroughfares of Cleveland. Then he stopped at a restaurant for breakfast.

"Now, I've got to make up my mind what to do," he told himself. "Maybe I had better go back to the depot and see about a train and the fare to New York."

After making several false turns, the boy found his way to the depot, and there hunted up the ticket office, and procured a time-table. He was just looking into the time-table when he felt a heavy hand placed on his shoulder.

"So I've found you, have I?" came harshly from Abner Balberry. "You young

rascal, what do you mean by runnin' away?"

CHAPTER VI

NAT ON LAKE ERIE

Nat was so completely astonished by the unexpected appearance of his uncle and guardian, that for the moment he did not know what to say or do.

"Thought you was goin' to run away, didn't you?" continued Abner Balberry, with a gleam of triumph in his small eyes.

"Let go of me," answered Nat, trying to pull away.

"I ain't a-goin' to, Nat Nason. You're a-goin' back with me, an' on the next train."

"I'm not going back, Uncle Abner."

"What!"

"I said I'm not going back, so there," repeated Nat, desperately. "You don't treat me half decently, and I'm going to strike out for myself."

"Jest to hear the boy! You are a-goin' back. Nice doin's, I must say! What did you mean by trying to burn down the barn?"

"Burn down the barn?"

"That's wot I said."

"That's wot I said."

"I never burned down any barn. Is the barn burned down?"

"No; because I put out the fire."

"When was this?"

"You know well enough."

"I don't know a word about it, Uncle Abner."

"You set the barn afire."

"Never!"

"You did! An' you've got to go back."

"Uncle Abner, I never set fire to a thing," gasped Nat. "I left because you worked me to death, and because you wouldn't let me have my supper. After this, I'm going to earn my own living in my own way."

"You're goin' back," snarled the farmer.

For answer, Nat gave a sudden jerk and pulled himself from his uncle's grasp. Then he started to run from the depot at his best speed.

"Hi! stop!" yelled the farmer. "Stop thet boy. I'm his guardian, and he is runnin' away from me."

The cry was taken up on all sides, and soon a crowd of a dozen men and boys were in pursuit of Nat, who by this time had reached the street.

Nat had always been fleet of foot, and now a new fear lent strength to his flying feet. He was accused of setting fire to the barn! Perhaps his uncle would have him arrested and sent to prison.

"He shan't do it," he muttered. "I must get away, somehow."

Down one street after another went poor Nat, with the crowd behind him growing steadily larger. Some thought they were after a thief, and some a murderer, and soon two policemen joined in the chase.

Coming to an alley way, Nat darted through it to a side street, and then around a corner to a thoroughfare leading down to the docks. This threw the crowd off the trail for a moment, and gave him a brief breathing spell.

Reaching the docks fronting the lake, the boy came to a halt. Not far off was a steamboat, getting ready to cast off.

"Where does that boat go to?" he asked of a man standing near.

"That's the boat for Buffalo," was the answer.

"And when does she leave?"

"She is getting ready to leave now."

"Then that's the boat I want," came from Nat, and he rushed to the end of the dock, and up the gangplank with all speed. A moment later the gangplank was withdrawn, and the steamboat started on her trip down Lake Erie.

Trembling with excitement, Nat entered the cabin, and from the window looked back to the dock they had just left. It was not long before he beheld Abner Balberry and several others, on the dock, gazing up and down in perplexity. They did not know whether the boy was on the boat, or in hiding close by.

"What a narrow escape!" thought Nat, when the dock had faded from view. "In another minute Uncle Abner would have collared me, sure."

"Had to run pretty hard to catch the boat, didn't you?" remarked a man sitting beside him.

"Yes," answered Nat.

"Bound for Buffalo, I suppose."

"Yes."

"First visit to that city?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a fine city to visit, I can tell you. Of course you'll run up to look at Niagara Falls?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"It's not very far away, you know. The trolley cars run from Buffalo to the Falls and back."

"Then I'll certainly have to go up and look at the Falls," answered the boy.

He was too excited to make up his mind just what to do next, and so walked away from the man. Finding a secluded corner of the deck, he sat down on a camp stool to think the situation over.

The fact that his uncle believed he had tried to burn down the barn filled him with alarm. Certainly, the building must have been set on fire, but who had done the base deed?

"Perhaps that man I took to be Uncle Abner!" he cried to himself. Up to the present time he had forgotten about seeing that individual in the semi-darkness while on the way to get the cow.

The weather was warm and pleasant, and had Nat been less disturbed in mind he would have enjoyed the trip on Lake Erie thoroughly. Even as it was, he gazed at the great lake in wonder.

"If this is only a lake, what must the ocean be!" he mused. "When I get to New York, I'll have to take a trip to Coney Island, or some other ocean beach."

The boat Nat was on carried more freight than passengers, and made half a dozen landings before Buffalo was reached. But the boy thought the craft one of the best on the lake, and wandered over her from end to end with great interest. At noon he purchased a light lunch, and at supper time a sandwich and a glass of milk.

"They charge pretty stiff prices on a boat," he thought, after paying over his money. "I've got to live cheaper after this, or I'll be a beggar before I settle down and find something to do."

It was dark when Buffalo was reached, and here Nat was more bewildered than he had been on arriving at Cleveland. He followed the crowd up from the dock to one of the main streets, and then stood on a corner, not knowing which way to turn, or what to do next.

"What a terrible lot of people and cars!" was his mental comment. "It's enough to make a fellow's head swim."

He felt that it would be useless to try to do anything that night, and so looked around for a cheap lodging house. Soon he found a place where beds could be had for twenty-five cents a night, and he entered.

"I'll take a bed," he said to the clerk at the desk.

"All right; twenty-five cents." And as the money was passed over, the clerk continued: "Leave your valuables at the desk."

"Valuables?" repeated Nat. "You mean my watch?"

"You may leave it if you wish, and your money too."

"No; I'll keep them on me," answered the boy.

"No, I'll keep them on me," answered the boy.

He was conducted to an elevator, and soon found himself on the fifth story of the building. Here was a big room containing twenty cots, ten on each side.

"Here you are; No. 134," said the attendant, and left him.

On several of the cots some men were already sleeping. They were not pleasant-appearing individuals, and a few of them smelt strongly of liquor.

"This isn't so nice," thought Nat. "But it's cheap, and that's something."

Before retiring, he placed his bundle and his clothing under his pillow, and stowed away his watch and money on his person.

Nat's actions were closely watched by a man who occupied the next cot on the left. He was a seedy individual, with a face that was horribly pockmarked.

"Reckon he's got a dollar or two," thought this man, who was known among his associates by the name of Checkers.

Despite his surroundings, Nat slept soundly throughout the night, and continued to sleep long after the sun came up.

While it was still early, Bob Checkers arose, dressed himself, and slipped over to the sleeping boy's side. Making certain that nobody was watching him, the fellow began a rapid search of Nat's clothing, and afterwards of the lad's person.

Soon he came in contact with a small roll of bills, which Nat, in the belief that they would be quite secure, had placed in a pocket of his shirt. A thrill of delight shot through the fellow as his hand touched them.

"Dis is de best yet!" he murmured to himself, and placing the bills in his own pocket, he left the lodging house almost on a run.

CHAPTER VII

AN ADVENTURE AT NIAGARA FALLS

When Nat awoke it was so late that he leaped up and dressed with all possible speed.

"I've got to get a hustle on me, if I mean to do anything," he told himself. "It won't do to dream away one day after another."

He was anxious to get to New York, to try his luck, but being so close to Niagara Falls, he decided to run up to that great wonder, and look at it before striking out for the metropolis.

He had some loose change in his pocket, and did not immediately miss the roll of bills which the sneak thief had so cleverly abstracted from his person.

Leaving the lodging house, he looked up a cheap restaurant, where he obtained a cup of coffee and some rolls for ten cents. Then, seeing a car marked Niagara Falls, he jumped on board.

"Do you go to the Falls?" he asked of the conductor.

"Certainly."

Trolley riding was new to him, and he thoroughly enjoyed the trip, which lasted the best part of two hours. The car landed him on the main street of Niagara Falls, and he was told that the Falls themselves were just beyond the public park. Listening, he could readily hear the thunder of the waters—a

thunder that goes on day and night, and has for ages.

Feeling dry, he treated himself to a glass of soda, and then asked permission to leave his bundle in the shop where he made the purchase.

"All right," said the proprietor. "Leave it there, with your name on it," and Nat did as requested.

He was soon down in the public park, and then went out on Goat Island. The great falls were a revelation to him—just as they are to all visitors—and he remained for a long time in one spot, gazing first at the American Falls, and then at the Horseshoe or Canadian Falls.

"What an awful mass of water!" was his thought. "How grand! How very grand!"

From Goat Island, Nat walked over to the Three Sisters. On the last of the Three Sisters he sat down on a great rock to look at the rushing and swirling rapids—a sight which to many is as grand as that of the Falls themselves.

"No boat could ever live in that river," he thought, and he was right.

Sitting on a rock he got to thinking of his financial affairs, and felt in his clothing for his bills, to count them over.

When he realized that the money was gone, a sudden cold sweat came out on his brow. He looked around him, and gave a groan.

"I must have dropped the bills somewhere," he muttered. "But where?" Never once did he imagine that he had been robbed, and it may be added here, he never learned the truth.

To look for the money would have been a hopeless task, and Nat did not attempt it. Having gazed around on the rocks, he sat down to review the situation.

"Just twenty-two cents left," he mused, as he counted over his change. "That won't do more than buy a dinner. And what am I to do after it is gone? What a fool I was not to take care of my money. I'm a regular greeny, after all!"

Nat was greatly depressed in spirits, and he gave a sigh that seemed to come from his very soul. Then, gazing up once more, he gave a quick cry of alarm.

A fashionably dressed young man had appeared before him, wearing a button-hole bouquet, and light tan gloves. The fellow had a wild look in his eyes, and was on the point of throwing himself headlong into the swiftly flowing rapids.

"Don't!" screamed Nat, and with one mighty leap, he caught the fashionably dressed young man by the arm, and forcibly hauled him backwards.

"Let—let me go!" was the frightened return. "I—I—let me go!"

"You shan't throw yourself in the rapids!" said Nat. He held the young man tightly. "It's death to do that! Don't you know it?"

"Yes, I know it," was the unsteady answer. Then of a sudden the young man sank down in a heap on the rocks. "Great Heavens! what a narrow escape!"

He was close to fainting, and Nat supported him until he appeared to grow calmer. The wild look left his eyes, and they filled instead with tears.

"I—I was going to—to——" He did not finish. "You—you saved me!"

"You mustn't do anything like that," said Nat. "It's awful to even think about it."

"But I haven't got anything to live for," was the jerked-out answer.

"Oh, yes, you have." And Nat glanced at the well-dressed fellow, with his gold watch and chain, and his large diamond stud. "You're not poor like I am."

"Are you poor?"

"Am I? Wouldn't you think a fellow with only twenty-two cents was poor?"

"Is that all you have?"

"Yes. I had some bank bills, but I lost them. Twenty-two cents is all I've got, but I wasn't going to commit suicide on that account."

The fashionably dressed young man gave a shiver.

"Don't mention it," he whispered. "I must have been clean crazy for the minute. Let us go away from the river and the falls."

"I'm willing," answered Nat, and walked from the islands to the shore park. Here they seated themselves on a bench, some distance away from the water.

"What is your name, if I may ask?"

"Nat Nason. What's yours?"

"Paul Hampton. So you've only got twenty-two cents to your name? Well, you are worse off than I am, after all. I've got money a-plenty."

"What made you dream of doing such a thing?" asked Nat, curiously.

"Would you like to hear my story? Well, it won't do any harm to tell it to you, an utter stranger, and it will relieve my mind. Maybe you can give me some advice."

"If I can I certainly will," answered Nat, promptly.

"Well, to start with," began Paul Hampton, "I am a graduate of Yale University, and a lawyer by profession. I suppose you don't think I look much like a lawyer."

"I don't know much about lawyers," answered Nat, cautiously.

"I practice in Niagara Falls, and also in Buffalo. I have not paid as much attention to the profession in the past as I intend to pay in the future."

"Maybe you don't need the money."

"That is one reason. But there is another, Nat. I fell desperately in love. The fever is at an end now. You drove it out of me, when you stopped me from jumping into the rapids."

Paul Hampton paused long enough to light a cigar. Then he leaned back, and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"I was a big fool. I can realize it now," he went on. "I should have passed Grace by long ago."

"Was that the name of the girl?"

"Yes. Her father is well-to-do, and gives her everything her heart desires. Consequently, she has been leading me around like a puppy dog tied to a string."

"I see. That is not very pleasant."

"I thought I loved her, but I fancy now that I was too good for her," continued the fashionably dressed young man. "But let me tell you the whole story.

"I called on Grace for over a month, and finally told her that I loved her. She said she thought her father would never consent to our marriage. Then I asked her if she was willing to elope with me.

"I believe that angered her, but she didn't show it. She said she would think it over, and the next day sent a note saying she would be ready any time I fixed. Oh, what a fool I was to believe her!"

"And she wouldn't elope?" asked Nat.

"It was arranged that she should be in readiness the next morning at four o'clock, and that I should procure a carriage and call for her. We would drive to a minister in the next town, and be married, and then ask her father's forgiveness."

"And she backed out?"

"The morning dawned dark and misty. I had obtained from a livery stable the night before a carriage with a span of horses. At half-past three I drove within a few yards of the house, when, according to agreement, I saw a white handkerchief waving from a window.

"Very soon Grace made her appearance at the door. She was heavily cloaked and veiled, and refused to speak while I hurried her into the carriage. Off we went at a trot towards the next town. We drew up at the door of the leading minister of the place, and I tried to assist my companion to alight from the carriage, when she fell and hurt her ankle on the curb."

"Well, that was too bad," said Nat, sympathetically.

"I asked her if she was hurt, when to my amazement she broke out into a rich Irish brogue: 'It's almost kilt I am!' said she."

"Was she Irish?"

"Irish? No! It was not Grace at all, but her cook. She had put up a cruel joke on me. And that wasn't the worst of it. Grace had told Biddy that I was in love with her, and the ignorant cook believed it."

"And what did you do then?"

"What could I do? I told Biddy it was a trick, and I had to give her ten dollars to keep from making a complaint to the police. Wasn't it dreadful?"

"Yes, it was, but if I were you, Mr. Hampton, I'd consider myself lucky to get

"Yes, it was, but if I were you, Mr. Hampton, I'd consider myself lucky to get rid of such a girl. Supposing she had married you? You would most likely be miserable all your life with her."

At these words, Paul Hampton stared at Nat.

"You are right," he answered, presently. "I was a big fool. After this I shall drop her entirely and stick to my law business."

"Perhaps some day she'll be sorry she treated you so unfairly—when she sees how you are rising in your profession."

"Hope she does. But I don't want any more to do with her," went on Paul Hampton, decidedly. "Let us talk about something else," he added, after a pause. "Did you tell me you were worth only twenty-two cents?"

"I did."

"Do your folks live around here?"

"My parents are dead."

"Oh! Well, I want to reward you for what you did for me."

"I don't ask any reward."

"Nevertheless, you must accept something," answered the fashionably dressed young man.

CHAPTER VIII

A FRESH START IN LIFE

Nat and his newly-found friend sat in the Niagara Falls Park until nearly one o'clock, talking their affairs over. Then Paul Hampton asked the boy to go with him for dinner.

"I want to prove to you that I am not as crazy as I seemed," said the young man. "That was a sudden fit, that's all."

"Well, take my advice and don't get any more such fits," answered our hero.

Paul Hampton led the way to one of the leading hotels of the town, and showed Nat where he could wash and brush up before dining. Then the two entered the dining hall, and the youth was treated to the finest spread he had ever tasted.

"I didn't expect this, Mr. Hampton," said he, when the repast was over.

"Oh, that is not much. Do you smoke?"

"No, sir."

"I am glad to hear it. I think I smoke too much. Now, to get to business. Where are you going to from here?"

"I am going to try my luck in New York, if I can manage to get there."

"I see. Well, I'll buy you a railroad ticket. How does that strike you?"

"You are very kind."

"When do you want to start?"

"I am not particular."

"Then supposing you make it to-morrow morning? You can spend the balance

of the day and the night with me. I want to do something more for you."

Nat demurred, but the young man would not listen, and in the end our hero agreed to remain in Niagara Falls until the next morning. A railroad ticket was purchased, and handed to the boy, and with it Paul Hampton passed over a five-dollar bill.

"That is for running expenses," he said. "No, don't try to refuse it, or I shall be angry with you."

As Nat's shoes were worn, the young man insisted upon purchasing another pair, and then purchased the boy some collars and a necktie, and also a new hat.

"There, now you are fixed to go to New York," said he, "and I wish you the best of luck when you get there."

"Thank you very much."

"If you have time, write to me and let me know how you are making out."

"I will."

The night was spent in a hotel close to the railroad station, and early in the morning Paul Hampton saw Nat on the train. All of the boy's possessions had been put in a neat dress-suit case, also a present from the young man.

"Here is a letter I want you to read after you are well on your way," said Paul Hampton, on parting, and he handed the missive over. "Be careful of it, for I think it contains some advice that will do you good."

"Thank you; I'll take care of it, and give it a good reading," answered Nat, and in a moment more the train started, and the long journey to New York City was begun.

Our hero sank back in his seat with a good deal of satisfaction. His passage

was paid through, and he had exactly four dollars and seventy-five cents in his pocket.

"I ought to get something to do before I spend that amount," he told himself. "Of course, it's not as much as if I had that roll of bills I lost, but there is no use in crying over spilt milk."

The run down to Buffalo was quickly made, and then the train started on its long journey to Albany and the great metropolis. After looking out of the window for a while, our hero took the letter Paul Hampton had given him, from his pocket and opened it. Inside was another envelope, also sealed, and a bit of paper on which was written:

> "My Dear Friend:
>
> "Do not be discouraged, no matter what happens, when you arrive in New York. Try your best to get some good position. If you run short of funds inside of the next two months, open the envelope enclosed with this. It contains something that will help you on your way. Do not lose the envelope.
>
> "Ever your friend,
> "Paul Hampton."

"That's certainly an odd letter," thought Nat, as he read it over a second time. "Wonder what that other envelope contains?"

His curiosity was great, but he was a thoroughly conscientious lad, and after a while he put the sealed envelope in an inside pocket, and pinned it there, so that it might not drop out.

"He was a curious fellow, and this is one of his odd ways of doing things," he reasoned. "Well, the envelope will give me some hope, if nothing else."

Nat had a map of the route in his possession, and he spent nearly the whole

day in watching the towns and villages through which the train passed. At Albany came a long wait, and he walked out on the platform to stretch his legs. Then the train went on its way down the shore of the Hudson River, and about nine o'clock in the evening rolled into the Grand Central Depot, at Forty-second Street, New York City.

The great station was a revelation to Nat, and when he got out on the street, the lines of cabs, cars, and elevated trains made him stop short in utter bewilderment.

"This is ten times worse than Cleveland or Buffalo," was his comment. "What a racket on all sides! I wonder where all these folks are going?"

"Cab! coupé?" bawled a line of hackmen standing near. "Carry your baggage?" came from a boy, and he caught hold of Nat's dress-suit case.

"Here, let go of that!" cried our hero, and shoved the boy to one side.

"Carry it for you anywhere you want to go," went on the street urchin.

"I can carry it myself."

After a struggle Nat found himself out of the crowd and on a distant street corner. It was late, but the many street and shop lights made the scene almost as bright as day.

He did not know where to go, and so continued to walk along until he came to Sixth Avenue. Here he came to another halt.

"There is no sense in my walking myself to death to-night," he thought. "I had better wait till morning for that—when I go in search of a job."

At that moment a boy of almost his own age stepped up to him with a bundle of newspapers under his arm.

"Sporting extra?" he asked, holding out two evening papers. "All the latest

"Sporting extra?" he asked, holding out two evening papers. "All the latest baseball and racing news."

"I don't want any paper," answered Nat. "But I wish you'd do me a favor."

"What do you want?" demanded the other boy, promptly.

"I want to find a cheap but good boarding house. Do you know of any around here?"

The New York boy looked Nat over critically. The examination, brief as it was, appeared to satisfy him.

"Just come to the city?"

"Yes."

"Looking for work?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want to pay for board?"

"Not any more than I have to," answered Nat with a grin. "I'm not rich."

"I see. Well, mother takes boarders. It might be she would take you."

"For how much?"

"Four or five dollars a week."

"Oh, I can't pay that much! Why, where I come from you can get good board for three dollars a week."

"That's the country, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, New York City ain't the country. You have to pay more for things

"Well, New York City ain't the country. You have to pay more for things here."

"I suppose that is true."

"Come on over and talk to mother. What's your handle? Mine is Dick Talcott."

"Nat Nason. I am glad to know you." And our hero shook hands, which made the newsboy grin all over.

With his papers under his arm, Dick Talcott hurried down a side street, and around a corner. He stopped in front of a four-story brick house.

"We live on the third floor," said he. "Come on up," and he led the way up the somewhat narrow stairs. It was pitch-dark, and Nat kept close behind, so as not to run into anything.

"Mother, here is a boy who wants board," announced Dick, as he threw open a door. Then the pair entered a living room, where a middle-aged woman sat by a table, mending some underwear.

The woman arose and came forward, and Nat saw that she was rather pleasant looking. She was a widow, her husband having died only the year previous.

"So you wish board?" she said. "I will show you what rooms I have."

"He don't want to pay much, mother," put in the son. "He's just arrived in New York from the country, and he wants work."

"I can let you have a small hall room, with breakfast and supper, for three dollars and a half," said Mrs. Talcott. "That is the best I can do. Of course, you'll want to take lunch along to your work, unless you get work near here. Where do you come from?"

"Ohio."

"Is that so! The late Mr. Talcott came from Ohio."

"I think I had better take the room, at least for a week," said Nat. The manner of the lady pleased him. She was evidently poor, but of good breeding.

"Very well. Do you want the room to-night?"

"Yes."

"Have you had supper?"

"Yes, I had a bite on the train."

"Very well, I'll get the room ready for you."

"And I'll go out and finish selling my papers," said Dick Talcott, and ran out of the room and down the stairs, two steps at a time.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST DAYS IN NEW YORK

Having paid for his room for one week in advance, Nat sat down to talk to Mrs. Talcott. He found her a very pleasant woman, whose experiences in life had been much varied.

"Dick is the only person left to me," said she. "He had both a brother and a sister, but they died when they were young."

"Does he sell papers every day?"

"Oh, yes, and he has a morning route besides, which he carries for a stationer on the Avenue."

"I suppose he makes quite some money, doesn't he? Excuse me for asking, but you know, I've got to make my living too."

"The route pays him a dollar and a quarter a week, and he makes three or four dollars besides."

"Well, five dollars a week is better than nothing."

"The stationer says he will give Dick a place this fall. That will pay six or seven dollars a week."

"I wish I had a job at six or seven dollars a week."

"Have you anything in view?"

"Not a thing. I am going out in the morning to look for work."

"You may find it very hard to get an opening."

"Oh, I guess I can find something," answered Nat, confidently.

"I trust you are not disappointed. So many come in from the country and find it impossible to get an opening."

"I wish I had a map of New York City. I could study it, and locate the streets."

"I have such a map," was the answer, and the lady brought it forth. "I will put it on the table just as it should be. This is east and this is west, and here is where this house is located, and here is the Grand Central Depot. Now, you can do your best to fix the rest of it in your head."

Nat pored over the map for a good hour, and during that time located Broadway, and a number of other important thoroughfares.

"It's certainly a tremendously big city," said he. "One could get lost without half trying."

"You can carry that map around this week, if you wish," said Mrs. Talcott. "It may help you a great deal."

Nat went to bed with his head in something of a whirl from the long train ride and from studying the map. It was a long while ere he could close his eyes in sleep.

"I'm up against it now," he mused. "It's sink or swim, and nothing else."

He resolved to arise early, and as soon as he heard Dick Talcott get up, he dressed and went into the dining room to meet the newsboy.

"Hullo, how did you sleep?" asked Dick.

"Fairly good, considering. Are you going out on your route now?"

"Yes."

"I want to buy some papers that have advertisements of Help Wanted in them. Which are the best papers?"

Dick named them. "You needn't buy them unless you wish. I'll let you look over my bunch, if you want to come with me."

"Thank you, Dick."

The two procured a hasty breakfast, and set out, and soon the newsboy had his package of morning newspapers. He showed Nat where to look for the advertisements, and our hero sat down on a stoop, while Dick ran his route.

"Well, did you find anything worth looking up?" asked the newsboy, on returning.

"A dozen or more," cried Nat, gleefully. "It will be an easy matter to get work, I'm thinking."

At this the New York boy grinned broadly.

"Don't you fool yourself, Nat."

"But here are the advertisements."

"Yes, and a hundred young fellows after every one."

At this Nat's face fell.

"You are sure of this?"

"Go on, and find out for yourself. A good job isn't open more than an hour in this city."

"Then, I'd better hurry along."

Nat had written down about a dozen addresses on a slip of paper, and the newsboy showed him how he could get around from one place to the next with the least walking. Nat started off at a swift gait. Dick watched him out of sight with a thoughtful expression on his face.

"That boy means well," he murmured. "But he has got a whole lot to learn!"

The distance to the first place on Nat's list was almost half a mile. It was a shirt factory, where an assistant packer was desired, at eight dollars per week. Arriving there, Nat found about twenty young men and boys assembled, waiting to get into the office.

"Dick was right, a place here doesn't go begging long," thought the boy from

the country.

It was some time before Nat could get into the office. He faced a tall, sharp-eyed man, who was in his shirt sleeves.

"Want the job, eh?" said the man. "Had any experience as a packer?"

"No, sir, but——"

"Can't use you. Next!"

Nat stared at the man in bewilderment.

"Won't you please try——"

"No." The man shook his head vigorously. "Next!" And our hero was elbowed toward the door by some others who wanted the position. In a moment more he found himself on the street again.

"Well, of all the mean men!" he began, and stopped short. "All right, he can keep his job. I'll try the next place."

The next was in a hat store, and the place was filled. Then came a clothing establishment, a hardware store, and a wholesale rubber factory. At none of these places was he wanted. By this time it was nearly noon, and he was getting just a little discouraged.

"It's going to be up-hill work, that's certain!" he told himself with a sigh.

The next place he visited was a seed store. Here a very elderly man came forward to greet him.

"So you want a place?" said he slowly. "Have you had any experience as an errand boy?"

"No, sir, but I am willing to learn."

"So they all say, but many boys don't seem to learn very fast. You look like a country lad." And the elderly man peered at Nat closely through his spectacles.

"I am a country boy. But if you'll give me a chance, I'll do my best."

"We can't pay you very much at the start."

"How much?"

"Two dollars and a half a week."

"I can't live on that. I've got to pay my board."

The elderly man shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess you had better look elsewhere then."

"Couldn't you pay me a little more? I am willing to work hard."

"Well, we might give you three dollars a week after the first month, but that is our limit for an errand boy."

"I can't take it," answered Nat. "I've got to earn more," and after a little additional talking he left the seed store.

He had a lunch in a bit of newspaper, and as it was nearly one o'clock, he sat down on a box on the sidewalk and ate it, washing it down with a drink of water from a cooler in a railroad ticket office. Then he went on his way once more, but at sundown had to give it up. He was so tired, and his feet were so sore from the pavements, that he could scarcely walk to his boarding house.

"I trust you found something," said Mrs. Talcott, as he entered.

"No," he answered, soberly. "I could have had one position, but it only paid two dollars and a half a week, so I didn't take it."

"I am sorry."

"I shall go out to-morrow again. I am bound to strike something sooner or later."

Being tremendously hungry Nat ate the supper provided with a relish. There were two other boarders—girls who worked in a large department store—and they were quite interested in him.

"You might get work at our place," said one of the girls. "They advertised to-day for wrappers."

"Yes, but they want experienced wrappers," said the other girl.

"I'll try them, anyway," said Nat. "And I am much obliged to you for telling me about it," he added.

On the following morning he was up as before and got the list from the papers again. Fortune was now with him, and at noon he found a position in a wholesale paper house. One of the clerks was going to visit some relatives down south, and Nat was hired to fill his place, at seven dollars per week.

"You've struck luck!" cried Dick Talcott, on hearing the news. "I hope the job lasts."

"So do I," answered Nat. "But even if it doesn't, it is better than nothing."

Nat went to work the next day. He found his duties rather simple and wondered how the firm could afford to pay him seven dollars for the little he was called on to do. Everybody treated him nicely, and he considered himself lucky to have made the connection with the firm.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF WORK ONCE MORE

During the time that he worked in the wholesale paper establishment Nat wrote a long letter to Sam Price, telling his friend of his adventures since leaving home, and asking for news from the farm. A few days later an answer came back, which ran as follows:

> "I got your letter and found it very interesting. I hope you make your fortune in the city. It's certainly a fine place to go to, and maybe I'll try it myself some day. Country life is awful slow, and work is mighty hard. I have been hoeing corn to-day till my back aches ready to fall apart.
>
> "Your uncle was awful mad to think you had run away, and madder still when he found you had sold the cow. He thought you were hiding in Cleveland, and he stayed in that city three days before he gave up the search. He claims that the cow belonged to him—that he took it for board and clothing for you, and he also sticks to it that you tried to burn down his barn. He says he is going to make it hot for you if he ever finds you. You can make sure I shan't tell him where you are."

Nat read the letter with keen interest, not once but several times, and shook his head slowly over the communication.

"I suppose Uncle Abner will always think I set fire to the barn," he thought. "Wish I could catch the person who really did do it. Must have been some tramp who was sleeping there and using a pipe."

At the end of the third week's work Nat had seven dollars saved, of which amount he was reasonably proud. But now came a setback for which he was not prepared.

"We have sold this concern to another party," said one of the proprietors to him. "After Saturday your services will be no longer required."

"Won't the new bosses need me?"

"No, for they have all the help of their own that they can use. Only our head bookkeeper will remain."

This was on Thursday, and during the balance of the week our hero looked around in his spare hours for another position, but without success. Monday morning found him doing nothing.

"As you said, it is not so easy to get a hold," said he to Dick. "Still, I don't feel quite so green as when I first reached New York. I at least know something about the streets and the stores."

Nat lost no time in looking for another place. But nothing turned up Monday or Tuesday, and Wednesday it rained so hard that he did not go out until after noon. Then he visited a fashionable wholesale jewelry establishment. Here he was asked to wait, while one of the proprietors interviewed a young man who had come in ahead of our hero.

The young man was dressed as a perfect dude, with a light checked suit, and very light gloves. He spoke with a drawl, and Nat heard every word that he said.

"What is your business, sir?" asked the jeweler.

"I believe, sir," said the young gentleman, "that you advertised for a—aw—a secretary."

"A clerk, yes, sir."

"Aw, all the same. Well, sir—aw—if we can agree upon terms, I should be—aw—flattered to proffer my services."

"Ah, indeed!" And the jeweler raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Yes, sir. You will be pleased to learn that all my connections—aw—move in the first circles."

"Undoubtedly that is very gratifying. But you mentioned terms. May I ask you what you expect?"

"Well, sir, perhaps a couple of thousand or so, a year. Then, I should wish to make certain stipulations—aw—as to the time I'm employed."

"Go on."

"For example, I never—aw—get up very early. I think it injures the health. But I think I could manage to get to the office by ten in the morning."

"I see."

"Then, I should want—aw—to have Saturday afternoons to myself, both in winter and summer. I always go to the theater matinées—so many—aw—pretty girls there," continued the dude.

"And what else?"

"I should not want to work later than five in the afternoon. Excessive labor is injurious to the health."

"Perhaps that is true."

"Then I should—aw—wish it understood that I could have five or six weeks off in the summer, so that I can visit the springs or the seashore," continued the dude. "Is that satisfactory?"

dude. "Is that satisfactory?

"I suppose it would be, to you," answered the jeweler.

"I think so."

"It wouldn't satisfy us at all."

"Really! That is too bad!"

"We want a man here who can work, and who is not afraid of long hours, and who doesn't set quite such a high figure on his services. You'll never fill the bill in the wide world. Good-day!"

"Really!" murmured the dude, and after staring at the jeweler, he turned on his heel and left in utter disgust. Several who had overheard the interview laughed out-right.

"What a perfect fool!" thought Nat. "I wonder if anybody will ever give him anything to do?"

"What can I do for you, young man?" asked the jeweler, turning to the boy.

"I am looking for work, sir."

"Are your expectations as high as those of the chap who just left?"

"No, sir. I am willing to work hard and I am not afraid of long hours."

"Then you are not a dude?"

"No, sir. Do I look like one?"

"You look like a country lad."

"I came from the country about a month ago. I've been working for Trumbull & Davison, the paper dealers. But they have sold out to another firm and don't need me any longer."

"I see. Well, I am sorry for you, for you look bright and honest. But I need somebody with experience in the jewelry line."

"Then you haven't any place that I can fill?"

"No, I—but hold on. I'll tell you what I might do. Do you know anything about horses?"

"Yes, sir."

"And about a garden?"

"Yes, sir. I was brought up on a farm."

"I need a man around my country home in New Jersey. I might try you there, at twelve dollars a month and your board."

Again Nat's face fell.

"Thank you, but I want to get something to do in the city," said he. "I am tired of farm life."

"Then I can't give you anything," and the jeweler turned away.

During the remainder of the day Nat visited several other stores and offices. But everywhere he received the same answer—that he was too late and the position advertised was already filled.

"Perhaps I did wrong not to take that position over in New Jersey," he thought, on his way to his boarding house. "But I don't want to go back to farm work if I can help it."

Two additional days passed, and still Nat found nothing to do, although he tramped from Forty-second Street clear down to the Battery several times. Then he obtained a job which lasted three days and paid him but two dollars.

"This isn't earning a living," he reasoned. "Unless I do better I'll have to try selling papers or blacking boots."

One morning he did try selling papers, under the tutorship of Dick, but the effort was not a success. By noon he had earned exactly nineteen cents and had sixteen papers still on hand.

"I guess you wasn't cut out for a newsboy," said Dick, frankly. "What you want to do is, to get a steady job in a store or office."

"Yes, but the jobs are mighty scarce," answered Nat.

A week passed, and the country boy could find nothing more to do that was steady. One day he helped a man distribute bills, and on another occasion he carried out packages for a florist, and the two jobs brought him in just a dollar. By this time the soles were worn from his shoes and he had to have them mended.

"Making one's way in the city isn't so easy after all," he thought one night, as he sat in his little room, on the edge of the bed. He had been counting up his money and found that he had but a little over four dollars left.

"I'll have to give Mrs. Talcott three and a half of that," he continued, "and that will leave me sixty-five cents. I've got to hustle or I'll be high and dry by next week."

Nat hustled all of the next week, but without results. In one store the proprietor was unusually harsh to him, and he came back to Mrs. Talcott's house more downcast than ever.

"I guess they don't want me in New York after all," he mused. "If I can't get something to do I can't stay here, for Mrs. Talcott can't afford to keep me. I'll have to starve!"

He was so disheartened that he did not feel like eating. Immediately after the

He was so disheartened that he did not feel like eating. Immediately after the meal he went to his little room. Then, of a sudden he thought of the letter Paul Hampton had given him.

"I may as well open that," he reasoned. "Goodness knows I am short enough of funds, and pretty well discouraged too."

The letter was in his pocket, still pinned fast, and he brought it forth and gazed at it speculatively.

"It would be just like him to put a five-dollar bill in it," he thought.

With his penknife he slit the envelope open, and looked inside. It contained a slip of paper and another slip, of a green color.

"A bill, as sure as I'm in this room!" he ejaculated. "I don't suppose it's less than a five, and maybe it's a ten. If he—well I declare!"

Nat rushed to the window to look at the bill, and then with a gasp he sank back on the only chair which the little bedroom contained. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

The bank bill was one for a hundred dollars.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT A HUNDRED DOLLARS DID

Nat continued to gaze at the bill like one in a dream. He had never seen a greenback that was worth a hundred dollars before, but he had no doubt of its

greenback that was worth a hundred dollars before, but he had no doubt of its genuineness.

"A hundred dollars!" he repeated several times. "Why, it's a small fortune!"

Then he began to wonder if Paul Hampton had not made a mistake, and turned to the slip of paper, upon which he found written:

> "I give you this hundred dollars for what you did for me at Niagara Falls. Don't be discouraged. If you ever need a friend, write or come and see me. I sincerely hope the money will bring you good fortune."

"What a kind man," murmured Nat, and read the note again. "It was a mighty lucky thing for me that I went to the Falls."

When he went to bed he felt rich, and he came to the breakfast table whistling merrily.

"Hullo," cried Dick, "have you struck luck at last?"

"I'm in luck in one way," answered our hero. "Look at that," and he showed the bank bill.

"Why, it's a hundred dollars, Nat!" And the newsboy's eyes opened widely.

"Exactly."

"Where on earth did you get the money?"

"A gentleman gave it to me."

"What for?"

"For saving his life. But I didn't know I had it until I went to bed last night."

"You're talking in riddles."

"I'll explain," and then our hero told as much of the Niagara Falls episode as he deemed necessary.

"Here is the note," he concluded, showing the slip of paper, which was unsigned. "I don't feel at liberty to mention the gentleman's name. I don't think it would be just right."

"A rich man like that would be a fool to commit suicide," said Dick, bluntly. "What are you going to do with all that money?"

"I don't know. But I shan't squander it, I can tell you that."

"You can go into business for yourself on that amount."

"Maybe, but I guess I had better keep on hunting for a job. I can go into business for myself when I know more about New York."

"That's where you are sensible. You might lose your money in double-quick time in your own business."

Nat put the bill away very carefully, and then went out to look for a position as before. But the week passed and nothing turned up.

On Sunday the country boy attended a church in the vicinity of his boarding house, and in the afternoon he took a walk to Central Park. In the evening he stayed at home and read a paper which Dick brought in.

As was natural Nat read over the want advertisements very carefully. It was not long before he came to one which excited his curiosity. The advertisement was as follows:

> "WANTED—A clerk, to whom a liberal salary will be paid. One preferred who comes from the country and is not too old. References expected. Must deposit $100 as security, for which interest will be paid. Inquire Room 24, Dallax Building,

Broadway."

"That ought to strike me," mused Nat, as he laid down the paper. "Just the thing, and no mistake. I'll go and see about it."

Our hero had acquired sufficient knowledge of New York to find the place indicated in the advertisement without much trouble. It was a four-story stone building, and he walked up two flights of stairs until he reached Room 24. On the door was the sign:

Hamilton Dart
Brokerage and Commissions

Entering the office he found it plainly but neatly furnished with two desks and several chairs. In front of one of the desks sat a middle-aged man, well dressed, and smoking a cigar.

"Is this Mr. Dart?" questioned Nat, taking off his hat.

"That is my name," responded Hamilton Dart, with a keen glance at our hero.

"Did you advertise for a clerk. I saw an advertisement——"

"Oh, yes!" interrupted the man. "Pray be seated," and he motioned to one of the chairs. "You came to see about the place, did you?"

"Yes, sir. You advertised that you would like somebody from the country, and that hits me."

"You came from the country to try your luck?"

"Yes, sir. I got tired of the farm."

Hamilton Dart smiled good-naturedly, and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling of his office.

"I don't blame you. I got tired of the farm myself when I was about your age.

"I don't blame you. I got tired of the farm myself when I was about your age, and came here with less than a hundred dollars in my pocket."

"Well, I came with just a little more than that," answered Nat, innocently.

"Indeed! Then you are better off than I was. But I shan't complain, for I have made money right along. But what do you think I am worth now?"

"I don't know, I am sure—five or ten thousand dollars maybe."

"Nearly fifty thousand dollars," and Hamilton Dart looked at Nat, coolly and innocently.

"Fifty thousand!" cried the boy. "You've certainly been lucky. I wish I could make that much."

"You have the same opportunities that I had. Let me see, what did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say. It is Nat Nason."

"I am glad to know you. You have a bright and honest face, and faces count a good deal with me."

This was gratifying to Nat, and he could not help but think that Mr. Dart was a pleasant gentleman with whom to deal.

"I advertised for a country young man because I was that myself once, and I like to help country young men along," continued Hamilton Dart. "You are out of work at present?"

"Yes, sir. I worked for a firm, but they sold out to another firm."

"I see. Have you any recommendations? Not that they are strictly necessary from one who looks so honest."

"I can refer you to the firm I worked for."

"That will be satisfactory, although I don't mind telling you that I am very particular in the selection of my clerks. So far I have rejected seventeen who applied."

"I should try my best to do what was right," answered Nat, modestly.

"That is the way I like to hear a person talk."

"Then you will take me?"

"We haven't agreed on terms yet. What do you expect in the way of salary?"

"I guess I'll leave that to you," answered Nat, after some hesitation.

"What did you get at your last place?"

"Seven dollars a week."

"Humph! Your employer was not very liberal. A clerk that is worth anything to me is worth ten dollars a week at least."

The mentioning of ten dollars made Nat's heart jump.

"If you'll pay me ten dollars a week, Mr. Dart, I'll do my level best to earn it."

"Do you write a fair hand?"

"Here is my handwriting," answered the boy, and wrote his name on a piece of paper.

"That is quite good—for a boy. I think you will improve by practice. Here you will have quite some writing to do, and bills to sort out. But the work will not be difficult, for the summer is our dull season."

"I see."

"By the way, I suppose you know I require a deposit of one hundred dollars

"By the way, I suppose you know I require a deposit of one hundred dollars from each of my clerks," went on Hamilton Dart, with assumed carelessness. "Sometimes my clerks have quite some money to handle for me."

"I can make that deposit," answered Nat. "Will I get a receipt for it?"

"To be sure, and I will also pay you six per cent. interest on the money. You can have it back whenever you leave my service. When can you make the deposit?"

"Right now, if you say so."

"Very well; I'll make out the receipt."

Hamilton Dart wrote out a receipt for a hundred dollars, and signed his name with a flourish. He passed it to Nat, and the boy handed him the hundred-dollar bill.

"You don't believe in carrying small bills," said the man, with an assumed smile.

"That is the only big bill I ever owned," was the answer.

Hamilton Dart pocketed the bill, and looked out of the window as if in deep thought.

"I was thinking you might go to work to-day, but perhaps it will be as well to go to work to-morrow," he said, after a pause. "Come at nine o'clock sharp."

"I will, sir."

"Then that is all for the present. I am sure we will get along very well together. To-morrow another clerk will be here to help you along."

Hamilton Dart turned to his desk, and began to write. Feeling himself dismissed, Nat said "good-morning," and bowed himself out. The man listened to his footsteps as he descended the stairs, and then gave a low chuckle.

to his footsteps as he descended the stairs, and then gave a low chuckle.

"That was easy, Nick," he muttered. "Two so far. I wonder how many more fools I'll catch before the game plays out?"

CHAPTER XII

ON THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

"Well, I've struck luck again," said Nat, when he arrived at his boarding place, and met Dick Talcott.

"Got a job?" questioned the newsboy.

"Yes."

"I hope you're going to get pretty good wages?"

"Ten dollars per week," answered Nat, with just a trace of pride in his voice.

"Ten dollars. That is luck. What at?"

"I'm in a broker's office, and I'm to do writing and sorting out bills."

"Where is the place?"

"Down on Broadway."

"I'm glad to hear of this, Nat," said the newsboy. "Wish I could strike something like that."

"Perhaps you will some day, Dick."

"Perhaps you will some day, Dick."

"The trouble is I can't write very well. I never had much schooling."

"If you wish, I'll teach you how to write. It always came easy to me."

"Will you teach me? I'll do my best to learn. We can go at it nights."

Early on the following morning, Nat presented himself at the office on Broadway. He had shined his shoes and brushed his clothes, and presented a very neat appearance. He found Hamilton Dart at his desk, and smoking as before.

"I wish you to go to the post office for me," said the man, as soon as he entered. "Go to the general delivery window and ask for letters for Samuel Barrows. That is my sick brother-in-law who is visiting me from Michigan."

"Yes, sir."

"Of course you know where the post office is?"

"Oh, yes. I've been past there several times."

"You needn't be in a hurry. Wait until they sort the eleven-o'clock mail."

"Yes, sir."

The distance to the post office was a considerable one. But Nat was a good walker, and found it was only half-past nine when he got there. To while away the time he determined to walk out on the Brooklyn Bridge and take in the sights from that elevated structure.

Making his way through the crowd on Park Row, he was soon out on the bridge, and walking in the direction of Brooklyn. There was a stiff breeze blowing, and several times his hat was almost lifted from his head.

Suddenly he heard a shout, and saw a stout man running wildly after some

papers which the wind was carrying along the walk on the bridge. The man secured one of the papers, but two others were fast blowing beyond his reach, when Nat rushed up and secured them just as they were on the point of being carried into the river.

"Have—you—got them?" puffed the man, as Nat came towards him.

"Yes, sir. Here you are," and Nat held out the papers.

"Good! I was afraid they were lost to me!" And the stranger heaved a heavy sigh of relief.

"Were they valuable?" asked our hero, curiously.

"Quite so. They are the legal documents in an important real estate case now before the courts. It was very kind of you to pick them up for me."

"Oh, it wasn't so much to do," answered Nat.

"Nevertheless, I am much obliged," added the stout man, warmly. "I shouldn't have come out on the bridge with them. But I love to get the breeze. I think it does me good. Much obliged;" and then he passed on.

"I guess he's a lawyer, or a real estate dealer," thought Nat. "Well, he ought to walk. It may take some of the fat off of him."

Nat walked half-way to Brooklyn, and then back again. Shortly after eleven o'clock he presented himself at the proper window of the post office.

"Has the eleven o'clock mail been sorted yet?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Have you any letters for Samuel Barrows?"

The clerk looked through one of the boxes beside him.

"Nothing," he answered, briefly.

"Nothing at all?"

The post office clerk shook his head. Seeing this Nat walked away, and started back for the office.

He did not suspect that his employer had sent him to the post office merely to get him out of the office, yet such was the fact. Hamilton Dart had no brother-in-law named Samuel Barrows.

As a matter of fact, Hamilton Dart—that was not his real name, but let us use it for the present, nevertheless—was nothing but a swindler. He was worth only a few hundred dollars, and his brokerage and commission business was such in name only.

While Nat was on his post office errand, Hamilton Dart had two other callers. The first was a bright young man, hailing from Newark, New Jersey.

"I am sure you will suit me," said Hamilton Dart, after questioning the young man. "I am very much pleased with your appearance."

"Thank you," was the brief answer.

"You may go to work to-morrow at twelve dollars per week. Will that suit?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will, of course, put up one hundred dollars as security," added the assumed broker.

"What security will you give?" demanded the bright young man from Newark.

"Oh, I'll give you my personal note," answered Hamilton Dart, carelessly.

"Well, I'll think it over."

"Eh? I thought you wanted to accept on the spot?" demanded the swindler.

"No, sir," answered the young man. He intended to make some inquiries into Hamilton Dart's financial standing before investing his cash. "I'll come around again to-morrow morning."

"I shall give the place to somebody else before that time," was the cold response.

"If you do, I'll be out of it," was the equally cold answer of the young Jerseyman, and he walked out of the office.

"One fish I didn't land," muttered Hamilton Dart to himself. "Better luck next time."

Hardly had the young man left than a sickly-looking middle-aged man appeared. He had been in the hospital for two months, and out of work for twice that length of time.

"You advertised for a clerk," he said, sitting down on a chair.

"Yes."

"I am a bookkeeper, and an all-round office man," added the sick man. "I am willing to work hard for low wages."

"I am always willing to pay good wages to the right man," answered Hamilton Dart, smoothly.

At this the face of the sick man brightened.

"I have been sick," he went on, apologetically. "But I am getting stronger every day."

"Well, the work here is not very hard."

"What could you pay me?"

"Twelve dollars per week."

"That would suit me nicely."

"Then you can come to work to-morrow. But you will have to put up one hundred dollars as security. On that I will allow you six per cent. interest."

At this announcement the face of the sick man fell.

"I am very sorry, sir, but I haven't the money. My sickness has reduced me almost to my last dollar."

"Then I can't hire you," said Hamilton Dart, harshly.

"I can give you some excellent references, sir."

"No, I don't care for references. My clerks have to furnish cash security. I employ no others. You had better see if you can't raise the money."

"I don't know how I can do it."

"Haven't you any friends or relatives?"

"I have a sister in Brooklyn. She might possibly loan the amount."

"Then you had better see her. I will keep the place open for you for a couple of days."

The sick man pleaded to be taken on, but Hamilton Dart was obdurate, and at last the visitor left the office.

"Hang the luck; he must take me for a charity association," muttered the swindler. 'Two lost! This business isn't paying as well as I hoped it would."

When Nat came back he was somewhat tired from his long tramp. He asked

his employer what he should do next.

"Go and get your lunch, and be back in an hour," was the answer.

Hardly had Nat left the office than a young fellow named Harry Bray appeared. He had been in to see Hamilton Dart before and carried a hundred dollars in his vest pocket.

"I will take the position," he said, and handed over his money, which the swindler pocketed with alacrity.

"When shall I go to work?" asked Harry Bray.

"After lunch. You will have another new clerk to help you, a fellow named Nat Nason," answered Hamilton Dart.

CHAPTER XIII

A SWINDLE EXPOSED

When Nat came back from lunch he was introduced to Harry Bray, and Hamilton Dart brought forth several packages of old bills and letters and also a couple of cheap blank books.

"I want these things sorted out," said he. "Enter all names in the books, and file them away according to date."

This seemed easy work, and both of the young clerks said they understood what was wanted. Then Hamilton Dart put on his hat and left the office.

"I won't be back this afternoon," he said. "Lock up at five o'clock, and you, Bray, can take the key."

"Yes, sir," answered Harry Bray.

"This isn't very hard," was Nat's comment, when he was left alone with his fellow clerk.

"It is about as easy a job as I ever struck," answered Harry Bray.

"It's queer there are no customers coming in," said Nat, an hour later. "Mr. Dart must do most of his business outside."

"A good many brokers do, Nat. They have to hustle for business or they don't get any."

The afternoon passed, and at the proper time Nat left the office and went home.

"You've certainly struck a soft snap," said Dick, when the country boy had related his experience. "Wish I could strike a snap like that."

"Perhaps you will some day," answered Nat. "Come, I'll give you a lesson in writing and figures to-night," and he did. Dick was a bright scholar, so it proved a pleasure more than a task to teach him.

Promptly on time the following morning, Nat went to the office. At the door he met Harry Bray, who had just come in from his home on Staten Island. They opened up the office together, one doing the sweeping and the other the dusting.

"In most places like this, the office boy or the janitor does such work," said Harry.

"I don't mind it in the least," answered Nat.

"Oh, neither do I."

They began on their work where they had left off, and about an hour later their employer put in an appearance.

"Hard at it, eh?" he said, cheerily. "That's the way I like to see things move. Nat, I want you to go to the post office again."

"Yes, sir."

In a few minutes our hero had departed, and then Hamilton Dart turned to Harry Bray.

"Bray, here is an important document to deliver to a party living near Central Park," said he. "Deliver it, and get a receipt."

"I will, sir," answered Harry Bray, and in a minute more he, too, was gone.

An hour later there was a knock on the door, and the sick man, who had called the day before, came in.

"Is that situation still open?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Why do you ask?" demanded Hamilton Dart, abruptly.

"I was going to say that I borrowed that money from my sister."

"Oh! Have you it with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, if you wish the job, you can take it right now. Another man is coming to see me about it in an hour."

"I'll take the job," said Oliver Ripple, quickly, and brought forth his money. Hamilton Dart took it, and gave his usual receipt.

"What interest do I get on this?" asked the new clerk, anxiously.

"Six per cent."

"Thank you. I told my sister I thought as much. She had the money in the bank, but that only paid her three per cent. Six per cent. will be twice as good."

"You may come to work to-morrow morning at nine," said Hamilton Dart.

"I'll go to work to-day, if you say so, Mr. Dart."

"No, my other clerks can take care of the work to-day. Both of them are now out on errands."

When Oliver Ripple was gone, Hamilton Dart smiled broadly to himself.

"Three of them," he murmured. "That's not so bad, after all. I wonder if that chap who was to come at half-past ten will show up?"

When Nat left the post office he found no letters for Samuel Barrows.

"Mr. Dart will be disappointed again," he thought. "But it is not my fault."

The afternoon passed quietly. Only one man called at the office, and when he found Hamilton Dart was not in he disappeared immediately.

That evening Nat gave Dick another lesson, for which the newsboy was very grateful.

"No wonder you got that job," said Dick. "You can figure like lightning, and write fine, too."

"I don't have to figure much at the office."

"How do you like your boss?"

"I haven't really seen enough of him to make up my mind."

"He must be full of business."

"I suppose that is so."

When Nat went to the office on the following day he again met Harry Bray at the entrance. They went upstairs together, and found two men standing in the hallway, near the door of the office. As soon as they entered the place the men followed them.

"Neither of these young chaps is the man," said one of the newcomers, in a low voice.

"Where is Mr. Hamilton Dart?" asked the other.

"I can't say, sir," answered Harry Bray. "He may be here shortly."

"Are you a partner in this concern?"

"No, sir. I am a clerk."

"Are you a clerk, too?" asked the man, turning to Nat.

"Yes, sir. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"Don't know as there is, young man," was the short answer. "We'll wait here for Mr. Dart."

A half-hour passed and Oliver Ripple put in an appearance.

"Where is Mr. Dart?" he asked, gazing around.

"He is not here yet," answered Nat.

"I am his new clerk. He engaged me yesterday, and told me to come to work this morning."

At this speech the two men who had come in gazed at the sick man curiously.

"So you were engaged yesterday?" asked one in a low tone.

"Yes."

"Excuse me, but I'd like to know if you put up any money as security?"

"I did—a hundred dollars."

"Ah!" And each of the two men looked at his companion significantly.

"Do you know Mr. Dart?" asked the sick man.

"We know of him."

"He does quite a business, doesn't he?"

"He does—in his own way," was the suggestive answer.

At that moment came a tramping on the stairs. Then the office door was thrown open, and Hamilton Dart appeared.

"There he is!" cried one of the men. "Just as I thought!"

He started for the doorway, but Hamilton Dart was too quick for him. He backed away, leaped for the stairs, and went down flight after flight, four and five steps at a time. Both men gave chase, but by the time they reached the sidewalk the swindler had disappeared.

"Hullo! what can this mean?" cried Nat, in quick alarm. "I must say I don't like this."

"Those men are after Mr. Dart," came from Harry Bray.

"You mind the office—I'll see what is up," went on Nat, and followed down the stairs.

"He is gone, Parsons," said one of the men.

"You are sure it was our man?"

"Yes, confound the luck. He got away like a slippery eel."

"Did Mr. Dart run away from you?" asked Nat.

"That's what he did, young man."

"What did he run for?"

"Perhaps you know as well as I do."

"No, I don't."

"How long have you worked for that man?"

"Only a few days."

"What about that other chap upstairs?"

"He came to work about the time I did."

"And that pale-looking man, too?"

"I don't know any more about him than you do."

"Did you place any money in your employer's hands?"

"Yes, a hundred dollars. And Harry Bray, the other clerk, put up the same amount."

"Humph! I reckon you've seen the last of your cash."

"What!" cried Nat, aghast. "Do you mean that?"

"I sure do."

"But—but——" Our hero was so staggered he could not continue for the moment.

"This Hamilton Dart—or whatever he calls himself—is a first-class swindler."

"A swindler!" Nat fell up against the doorway. "I—I—then my money is gone?"

"More than likely."

"Oh, what a fool I've been! And I thought he was such a gentleman."

"He has fooled lots of folks besides you, young man," said one of the men, kindly, for he saw that Nat was hard hit.

"He isn't a business man at all?"

"He is a confidence man from Chicago."

By this time, feeling certain something was wrong, Harry Bray and Oliver Ripple came below.

"What do you mean by confidence man?" asked Nat, doubtfully.

"He is a swindler; one of the kind that can tell a good story in order to get your money."

"Who is a swindler?" demanded Harry Bray.

"Our employer," cried Nat. "He has run away with our money."

"Has Mr. Dart run away?" asked the sick man, nervously.

"Yes."

"Oh! And to think I borrowed that money from my poor sister!" came with a cry of anguish, and then the sick man sank on the hallway stairs, thoroughly

cry of anguish, and then the sick man sank on the hallway stairs, thoroughly overcome.

CHAPTER XIV

NAT OBTAINS ANOTHER SITUATION

"How is it that you know so much about this man?" asked Nat, after he had collected his thoughts.

"I am a police official from Chicago," answered one of the two men who had tried to catch Hamilton Dart. "We have been on this rascal's trail for some time."

"Is Hamilton Dart his real name?"

"No; his real name is Nick Smithers. He is a sly rogue."

"Do you think there is any chance of catching him?" asked Harry Bray. "I cannot afford to lose my money."

"Nor I," added our hero.

"I must have my money back!" groaned the sick man. "What will my sister say? She got it out of the bank only yesterday!"

"I wish I could help you," said the Chicago police official. "We'll do what we can."

All went back to the office, and the janitor of the building was called in.

"Sure, an' Mr. Dart has had the office only about a week," said the janitor. "He hasn't paid the rent yet. He said he was in the habit of payin' in the middle of the month."

"Then the owner of this building is out of pocket, too," said one of the men from the West.

An examination was made of the desk used by the swindler, but nothing of value was found. The letters and bills were of no consequence, and the blank books were not worth twenty-five cents each.

"Let us go to the police station," said the men, and they went off, followed by the sick man.

"This is the worst yet," remarked Nat, as he dropped into the one easy chair of which the office boasted. "And I thought I was so smart. I'm a regular greeny, if ever there was one!" And he shook his head bitterly.

"I'm in the same boat," responded his fellow victim. "My father will be pretty mad when he hears of this. He lent me the money, and I assured him it would be perfectly safe."

"I used my own money, but it was almost the last dollar I had," said our hero, soberly. At that moment his heart felt like a lump of lead in his bosom.

"What do you suppose we can do about it?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Do you know where this Hamilton Dart, alias Nick Smithers, lived?"

"No."

"To look for him in a big city like this will be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"More than likely he won't stay in this city. He may be miles away already. He didn't want to see those men from Chicago."

They talked the matter over for an hour, at the end of which time a detective from headquarters came to interview them. The detective took charge of the office, and that seemed to be the end of the affair.

"Give me your addresses," said the detective to Nat and his fellow clerk. "If we hear anything we will let you know," and so it was arranged.

Nat felt very much downcast when he arrived at his boarding house that evening. Mrs. Talcott was not long in noticing it.

"You seem to be in trouble, Nat," said she kindly, for she had taken quite a fancy to the country lad. "Can I help you in any way?"

"I don't know," he answered, bluntly. "I've gone and made a big fool of myself."

"In what way?" asked she in astonishment.

"I thought I was smart, but I'm a regular country greeny. I let a man swindle me out of nearly every dollar I possessed."

"That is certainly too bad, Nat. How did it happen?"

For answer our hero made a clean breast of the whole matter. While he was telling his tale, Dick came in, and he was likewise told.

"And you mean to say that you lost the whole hundred dollars!" ejaculated the newsboy. "That's awful, Nat!"

"I wish I could get hold of that Nick Smithers. I'd—I'd wring his neck for him!"

"It won't do any good to look for him. I know his kind. He's here to-day and

"It won't do any good to look for him. I know his kind. He's here to-day and gone to-morrow. Those chaps work their schemes all over the States."

Nat was in no humor to eat supper, and scarcely touched a mouthful. Mrs. Talcott and Dick did all they could to cheer him up.

"Make the best of it," said the newsboy. "You'll be sure to strike something good sooner or later."

"I guess I'm too much of a greeny to do that," answered Nat.

That night when our hero went to bed he could not sleep. His ready money was running low, and how to turn he did not know. Bitterly he upbraided himself for having trusted Nick Smithers, but this did no good. His money was gone, and it was doubtful if he would ever see a cent of it again.

"I ought to go back on the farm where I belong," he muttered. "I'm not smart enough to get along in a city like New York."

But by morning his thoughts took a turn, and at breakfast his eyes were as bright and expectant as ever.

"I'm going out and get something to do," he said firmly. "And I'm not going to let anybody get the best of me again."

"Do not worry," said Mrs. Talcott. "You can stay here, even if you don't get anything right away. I'll trust you for the board."

"You are very kind," answered Nat, gratefully. "But I can't stand it to do nothing."

All of that day he tramped up one street and down another looking for a situation, but without success.

He could have had one job as an errand boy, but the wages offered were but two dollars per week.

"I can't take that," he said. "I've got to support myself even if I can't do better."

On the next day it rained, but he went out, nevertheless, with an umbrella which Mrs. Talcott loaned him.

He had several advertisements, taken from the morning papers, and lost no time in applying at first one place and then another.

The third place offered on his list was in a big office building down near the corner of Broadway and Park Row. When Nat arrived there he found half a dozen young fellows ahead of him.

"You will all have to wait until Mr. Garwell arrives," said a clerk to the crowd. "I expect him any moment."

"Hope he don't keep us too long," grumbled one of those who were waiting. "I don't want to lose the chance of another job if I can't get this."

"You need not wait at all if you don't care to," said the clerk.

Two others came in, and the outer office was comfortably filled, when a stout gentleman walked in quickly, and gave a glance around.

"Hum!" said he, when his eyes fell upon Nat, and he looked at our hero more closely. Nat at once recognized the newcomer as the gentleman he had met on the Brooklyn Bridge.

"How are you, young man," said the gentleman.

"Very well, sir," answered Nat.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see about the position that was advertised."

"Ah, indeed!" The gentleman gave Nat another look. "Come inside."

"Yes, sir," and our hero quickly followed him to an inner office. Here the gentleman hung up his hat, and sank down in an easy chair at a desk. "Take a seat. I suppose you remember meeting me?" This was said with a little smile.

"Oh, yes, sir; on the bridge."

"You did me a good turn, and I've not forgotten it. So you want a job, eh? What's your name, and where are you from?"

Nat told him, and also told the gentleman some of his experiences since arriving in the metropolis. John Garwell listened with interest.

"I fancy I can give you an opening," said he. "Here, write a few lines on this sheet of paper." Nat did so. "A very good hand. How much do you want to start on?"

"Enough to support myself, Mr. Garwell."

"That's a fair answer. Can you live on seven dollars a week?"

"I can live on less than that."

"Some young men want a fortune to start on. Yesterday a young man called here for an opening. He had had no experience, yet he wanted not less than twenty dollars a week."

"I guess you didn't engage him," said Nat, with a smile.

"I did not. Well, I'll give you a trial, at seven dollars a week. If you prove satisfactory I'll give you eight dollars at the end of three months, and ten dollars at the end of the first year."

"Thank you, very much."

"You can go to work at once." Mr. Garwell touched a push button on his

"You can go to work at once." Mr. Garwell touched a push-button on his desk, and a clerk appeared. "Wilson, this is the new clerk, Nat Nason. You can show him his duties. And tell those others that are waiting that the position is filled."

"Yes, sir."

"Wait a minute, Nason. Wilson, you can go."

The clerk disappeared, closing the door behind him.

"I just wished to say a word about what you did for me the other day."

"Oh, that's all right."

"Here is a five-dollar bill for a reward."

"But I don't want any reward, Mr. Garwell. It was nice of you to give me the position."

"Didn't you just own up that you were short of funds?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"That's all right. Take the money. And now let me tell you something as a friend."

"Yes, sir."

"I like my clerks to look neat and clean at all times. It pays to look that way. Never come down to the office with a dirty collar, or with dirty shoes."

"I'll remember that."

"I don't ask you to dress in the topmost style, or be a dude. But keep yourself neat and clean."

"I will, sir."

"Then that is all. If anything doesn't go right in the office don't hesitate to let me know."

CHAPTER XV

ABNER AND THE WIDOW GUFF

It was with a light heart that Nat went to work for Mr. John Garwell. He felt that his employer was a man to be trusted, and one who would do the best he could for those under him.

"It was a lucky thing for me that I took that walk on the Brooklyn Bridge," he reasoned. "Perhaps I shouldn't have gotten the job otherwise."

The clerk, Wilson, proved kind and considerate, and under him our hero learned rapidly.

"Didn't I tell you that you'd strike luck," said Dick. "Now, all you've got to do is to nurse that job carefully, and you'll be at the top of the firm some day."

"Well, I am going to nurse it as carefully as I can," laughed Nat.

When our hero had time he went to the police headquarters to see if anything had been learned of Nick Smithers.

"Nothing yet," said the officer in charge. "But I think he'll be run down sooner or later."

"I'd like to run him down myself."

"I've no doubt you would."

Nat had been working for Mr. Garwell about a week when he received another letter from Sam Price. Sam wrote, in part, as follows:

"Since I sent my last letter, there have been great changes at your uncle's farm. He has discharged the housekeeper, and some say he is courting the Widow Guff. For all I know they'll be married pretty soon. More than that, I heard somebody say that he was thinking of coming to New York to look for you."

Nat read this communication with close attention. He knew the Widow Guff as a person who took boarders in the town where he had sold his cow. She had three children, and had the reputation of being a rather tart and self-willed woman.

"I shouldn't think Uncle Abner would want to marry that widow," thought Nat. "Wonder what put it into his head? And what put it into his head to come to New York to look for me? I'd rather he would keep his distance."

Nat did not know that for the past few months the Widow Guff had had a hard time of it with a number of her boarders, and could scarcely make both ends meet, yet such was a fact.

One day the widow called on a friend, and from this friend learned that Abner Balberry had discharged his housekeeper, and was keeping house by himself.

"It's a shame for him to be all alone," thought the widow. "And with that nephew of his away, too! Some good woman ought to be keeping house for him."

The widow had long had her eye on Abner Balberry, whom she knew fairly well. She knew Abner was well-to-do, and keeping a boarding house seemed of a sudden a great burden to her.

"Wish I could make Abner propose," she said to herself. "He just ought to have a wife."

So the widow kept on thinking, and by and by her face brightened. She had

an idea, which she resolved to put into execution the very first opportunity.

"Fred," said she to her son, a tall gawk of a boy, "I want you to go to Mr. Abner Balberry's house, and ask him if he will stop in and see me the first time he comes to town."

"Wot do yer want, ma?" drawled Fred.

"Never mind, Fred. Just ask him to call. Say I'd like a little advice from him."

Fred shuffled off on his errand, and found Nat's uncle down in the henhouse, searching for eggs.

"Ma wants you to come and see her," said the youth.

"Wants me to come an' see her?" queried Nat's uncle.

"Yep."

"What for?"

"Dunno. Said she'd like some advice."

"All right; I'll come," said Abner.

That afternoon, after milking, he arrayed himself in his best, and drove over to the widow's boarding house. He was glad to make the visit, for since discharging his housekeeper he had found life on the farm rather lonely.

The widow greeted him warmly, and asked him into her parlor, closing the doors, so that nobody might interrupt them. She seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Fred told me that you would like to see me," commenced Nat's uncle.

"Yes, Abner, I do; but I'm afraid you'll think it strange of me—at least of what I have to say to you."

"Oh, that's all right, Lucy; you know you kin trust me," he replied.

"Suppose,"—the widow cast down her eyes,—"mind, I am only supposing a case—suppose a person should find a pot full of gold pieces in an old well, would the law have a right to touch it, or would it belong to the finder?"

At the mention of a pot of gold, Abner Balberry became exceedingly interested. As we know, he was very miserly, and he realized that a pot of gold would be worth a good deal of money.

"A pot of gold, Lucy," he said. "Why, unquestionably, the law would have nothing to do with it."

"Could the one who had owned the house years before, or lived in the place, come forward and claim it?"

"No, Lucy; I think not."

"Thank you, very much, Abner, for your advice. The—er—question just came into my—er—mind, and I wanted to satisfy myself; that's all."

"Certainly, widow, certainly," answered Nat's uncle. He wanted to ask some questions, but did not dare.

"Now you are here, you must take supper with me," went on the Widow Guff.

"Thank you, Lucy, you are very kind——"

"I know you haven't any housekeeper any more, and nobody to cook for you. Yes, stay by all means."

The widow was a fairly good cook, and Nat's uncle ate with a relish all that was offered to him, ending with a piece of berry pie which was particularly fine. He spent a social hour after the meal, and then drove home in a thoughtful mood.

"Is it possible that the widow really found a pot of gold in the well?" he thought. "She didn't really say so, but it was mighty odd for her to ask me such questions. I'll have to look into this a bit." And then he got to thinking that the widow was not such a bad-looking woman after all, and a wife with a pot of gold would be a very nice thing to possess.

About a week later Abner Balberry had occasion to go to town, to draw a little money from the bank, with which to pay for a cow he had purchased. He was passing the widow's home when she came out on the piazza and nodded to him.

"Good-morning," she said.

"Good-morning," he returned, and stopped for a chat. During the course of the conversation he mentioned his errand, and she said she was going to the bank too. He asked her to ride to the institution, and she accepted the invitation. When they arrived there he told her he would wait until she was through. Then he went around to a side window of the bank, where he might hear what took place.

The widow tripped up to the window.

"Can you give me change for a ten-dollar gold piece?" she asked.

"With pleasure, Mrs. Guff," was the answer, and the change for the gold piece was immediately forthcoming.

"By the way," went on the widow, "the bank is in quite a flourishing condition, is it not?"

"We are doing finely, yes."

"And you receive deposits, do you not?"

"Of course."

"Of course."

"Do you receive as high as—as five thousand dollars?"

"No," answered the cashier, in some surprise. "Three thousand dollars from one depositor is our limit. Do you know of anybody who——"

"It's of no consequence," interrupted the widow, hurriedly. "I only asked out of curiosity. How much interest do you pay?"

"Four per cent. on the first thousand and three per cent. on the remainder."

"Thank you, and much obliged for the change. Good-morning," and the Widow Guff tripped out lightly and hurried up the street.

Abner Balberry had overheard every word and his face was a study as he went into the bank to draw what he wanted, thirty dollars.

"Jest had the Widow Guff here, didn't you?" he said, lightly.

"Yes, Mr. Balberry." The cashier paused. "Do you know if anybody has left her money lately?" he continued.

"Not that I know on? Why?"

"Oh, she was asking what rate of interest we paid, and if we took as high as five thousand dollars."

"I see. Well, I don't know nothin' about it," and Abner Balberry pocketed his money and his bank book, and walked out after the widow.

If he had been in deep thought before he was more so now. Was it possible that the widow had found five thousand dollars?

"She changed a ten-dollar piece," he reasoned. "I reckon I kin see through a millstone when there's a hole through it. Tell ye what, a widder with five thousand in gold ain't to be sneezed at! I wonder if anybody else knows o'

this? Hope they don't!"

That evening the farmer sat up till late, thinking the situation over. He did not wish for a wife so much, but he did wish to get his hands on that pot of gold.

"If I want her I'll have to propose before some other feller hears o' this," he told himself.

The farmer made it his business to go to town two days later, and drove past the widow's house very slowly. She saw him from a window, and nodded and smiled.

This was encouraging, and on returning from his errand, he tied up in front of the place, and rang the bell.

"Oh, Abner, I am delighted to see you!" said the widow, on coming to the door. "Come in."

"Thank you, Lucy," he answered, and entered the parlor.

"It was so good of you to come," she simpered. "I wanted somebody to talk to."

"Anything special?" he asked, curiously.

"I have received notice to leave this house. I guess Mr. Haskell, the owner, wishes it for himself." She did not add that her rent was about due, and she did not know how to meet the payment.

"Where do you think of going, widow?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Abner. I haven't a single place. You know I'm all alone in the world."

She looked at him fondly, and he at once fell into the trap.

"Better come an' live with me, Lucy."

"Oh, Abner! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I think a heap o' you, Lucy, an' I'd like you fer my wife. I know as how we could git along fine together," answered Nat's uncle, earnestly. Just then that pot of gold seemed almost within his reach.

The widow blushed, and pretended to be greatly surprised.

"I—I never dreamed of this, Abner!" she whispered. "It's—it's so sudden."

"But you ain't goin' to say no, are you?"

"Well, I—I——" She blushed again. "I must say I like you a great deal, Abner."

"Then say yes."

"Well, I will," declared the widow, and then she allowed him to kiss her. Abner felt very happy, and asked her to set the day at once.

"Bein' as you're to git out o' this house, you might as well give up the boarders, an' come to my house at once," he said.

The widow consented, and said she would marry him in ten days. He drove home almost in a dream, and at once had the house put in order, and actually bought himself a new suit of clothes and a new hat.

"It's a good bit o' money to spend," he reasoned. "But I've got to do the proper thing, or she won't feel like lettin' go o' that gold."

When the time came, they were married in the local church, and then he drove her home. Her furniture had already arrived. She at once took possession of the place, and began to set things to rights.

"I won't ask her about that pot o' gold jest yet," mused Abner. "I'll have to

wait a few days at least."

CHAPTER XVI

ABNER VISITS NEW YORK

Several days passed, and Nat's uncle did all in his power to please his new wife. He found her very tart at times, and inclined to have her own way, but she was a good cook and general housekeeper, and that counted for a great deal.

"It won't do to cross her," he told himself. "I've got to find out about thet gold first."

At last he could stand the suspense no longer and so, one day, while at the dinner table, he told the story of a rich find of money by a lady in Philadelphia.

"It was in the weekly paper," said he, "and by the way," he went on, "what about the pot of gold you found?"

"The pot of gold I found?" she repeated, blankly.

"Yes, the one you found in the well. What did you do with it?"

"Why, I never found any pot of gold in a well, Abner! What put that in your head?"

He shoved back his chair in horror, and gazed at her blankly.

"Didn't you tell me you had found a pot of gold in a well, Lucy?" he demanded.

"Never!"

"Certainly, you did. You asked me if you could keep it or if the law could take it from you. I told you the law couldn't touch it."

"Oh, I remember now!" she answered, sweetly. "I read about such a find in a story magazine, and I was wondering if the finder could keep it, or if it would have to be turned over to the person who owned the property on which the well was located. But I certainly never said anything about my finding a pot of gold."

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Didn't you go to the bank an' ask 'em if they would take five thousand dollars?"

"Oh, I was only curious to know how much they would take, that was all, Abner." And she smiled again.

Abner could not endure that smile, and pushing back his chair still further, he arose and left the house. Once in the barn he shook his fist viciously at an imaginary enemy.

"Of all the fools!" he muttered. "I've been tuk in clean an' clear! She ain't got no pot o' gold, an' never did have! If this ain't jest the worst yet. Abner Balberry, you ought to be kicked full o' holes, and ducked in the pond besides!"

He felt in no mental condition to go back to the house, and so did not return until it was time for supper. He found a good meal awaiting him, and his wife on hand as pert as ever.

"What made you run off?" she demanded. "It wasn't a nice way to do."

"You fooled me about that pot o' gold," he answered, bluntly.

"You fooled me about that pot o' gold," he answered, bluntly.

"I never did, and I want you to stop talking about it, Abner Balberry."

This was said so sharply it fairly made him jump.

"Eh?"

"Did you marry me simply for my money?" she demanded, coming up to him with her hands on her hips.

"N—no!" he stammered.

"Well, then, stop talking about a pot o' gold. I haven't any, and neither have you."

"Ain't you got no money o' your own, Lucy?"

"If I have I'm going to keep it to myself," she answered. "Come to supper."

He sat down and ate in silence. The next day he wanted to speak about money again, but she cut him short.

"I don't want to hear about it," she said, tartly. "I'm your wife, and I am going to do my share, keeping house and helping around. And you have got to do your share, and treat me fairly. I once heard that the first Mrs. Balberry didn't get all that was coming to her—that she had to wear the same dress and bonnet for years. Now, I want to say, right now, that isn't my style. When I want a new dress I want it, and you are going to give it to me."

"Am I?" he said, slowly.

"Yes, you are, Abner Balberry, and if I want spending money you have got to give me that, too. If you don't, I'll quit work and won't do a blessed thing around the house. So there!"

She spoke with such vigor that it made him groan. He felt it in his bones that

she meant to have her way.

"I am a-goin' to do my duty," he said, humbly.

"You'd better. If you don't——" and she ended with a shake of her head that meant a great deal.

"She's bound to have her way," he told himself later. "I've got to git used to it, I suppose. Drat the luck, anyway. I wish I had never heard o' thet pot o' gold!"

In a roundabout fashion Abner Balberry had heard that Nat had gone to Buffalo, and then he learned through a man who had been to New York that his nephew was in the metropolis. Abner had often longed to visit New York, and here he saw his opportunity to do so.

"I'm a-goin' to New York," he announced one day, shortly after the pot of gold incident.

"What are you going to do there?" asked his wife.

"I'm a-goin' to look fer Nat. I've heard he's down there, an' I want to save him from goin' to destruction."

"Better leave him where he is," said the new wife, who did not fancy another of her husband's people around the farm.

"No, I'm a-goin' to hunt him up. I feel it's my duty to do it."

"Then, if you go to New York, you have got to take me along, Abner."

"Take you along, Lucy?"

"Yes. I've always wanted to go to New York. Fred can take care of the farm while we are gone." Fred and the other Guff children had been installed on the place, but none of them had proved of much assistance. Fred, himself, was

decidedly lazy—not half as willing as Nat, so Abner himself admitted.

"I don't see how I can take you, Lucy. It costs a heap to go to New York."

"Well, if you can spend the money on yourself, you can spend it on me, too," she answered, calmly.

"But it's my duty to go—to save Nat from goin' to the dogs."

"You didn't bother about Nat when you were courting me."

"I didn't know where he was, exactly."

"Pooh! Well, if you go you must take me. If you don't, you won't find me or the things when you get back."

This rather alarmed the miserly farmer, and he was half afraid she might sell off all his belongings, and clear out.

"All right, you shall go," he said, at last. "But it's goin' to cost a terrible sight o' money," he added, with a long sigh.

It was decided that they should start for New York on the following Monday morning. Mrs. Balberry had relatives at Rochester, and they made arrangements to stop over at that point for one night, for neither the farmer or his spouse wished to take a berth in a sleeping car.

"It's money thrown away," said Abner, "an', besides, who kin sleep with a car runnin' fifty miles an hour? If there was an accident a feller would be killed before he woke up!"

Mrs. Balberry's son, Fred, grumbled greatly at having to run the farm during their absence, and the mother had to promise the lad fifty cents a day for the extra work.

"It's an outrage," declared Abner, when he heard of this. "He ain't worth his

keep!"

"He is my son, and you have no right to abuse him!" declared the new wife, and then the farmer found it best to say no more. He was discovering that his wife had a sharp tongue, and could use it on the slightest provocation.

Not to go to the expense of buying meals on the train, they provided themselves with a basket full of food, and set off bright and early at the time appointed. The run to Rochester was without incident, and Mrs. Balberry's relatives there treated them kindly. Then, on Tuesday, they took another train for New York, and late in the afternoon found themselves at the Grand Central Depot.

"It's a fearfully crowded place," was Abner Balberry's comment, as he gazed around.

"Which way are we to go, Abner?" asked his wife, and now she clung to him, for the bustle and noise frightened her.

"Let's git out on the street, where I kin have a look around," he answered, and pulled her along through the crowd. A boy wanted to take his carpet bag, but he shook the urchin off.

Fortunately, while at Rochester, the farmer had heard of a hotel which I shall call the Callac House, located but a few blocks from the station. A policeman directed the pair to this place, and here Abner Balberry succeeded in getting a room for a dollar and a half a night.

"Steep, ain't it?" he remarked, when he and his wife had been taken to the room, on the seventh floor.

"Steep? I should say it was, Abner—the seventh story! It's dreadful! I know I shan't sleep—thinking of what to do in case of a fire!"

"I meant the price. I don't care how high up it is."

"Will they give us meals for that, too?"

"No, the meals is extry."

"It's 'most a waste of money, I must say."

"Well, I had to pay it, an' so there ain't no use to talk about it. Let's go to bed, an' git our money's worth, an' in the mornin' I'll look fer Nat."

CHAPTER XVII

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

On the day that Abner Balberry started for New York to look for Nat, our hero was called into Mr. Garwell's private office.

"Nat, how would you like to take a run down to Trenton with me?" asked the gentleman, pleasantly.

"I'd like it first-rate, Mr. Garwell," was the prompt answer.

"Very well, we'll go in half an hour. I wish to look up certain records concerning some property."

"When will we be back, Mr. Garwell?"

"Oh, some time this evening," answered the gentleman.

It may be mentioned here that John Garwell was a real estate broker. He

handled only high-class properties, and chiefly those used for business purposes. He had started years before in a modest way, but was now fairly well-to-do, and his business was steadily increasing. He had taken a great fancy to Nat, and was wondering if he could not use the lad as a private secretary.

"I'd do it in a minute if the boy knew shorthand and typewriting," he told himself. "Perhaps I can get him to learn those branches."

At the appointed time our hero was ready for the trip to Trenton. His employer had stuffed a valise full of legal papers, and Nat took possession of the bag.

"Be careful of that valise," cautioned Mr. Garwell. "The contents are very valuable."

"I'll look out for it," was the answer.

They walked to the ferry, and there took a boat to Jersey City, and then boarded a train bound for the capital city of New Jersey. Mr. Garwell had obtained seats in a parlor car, and the elegant furnishings impressed Nat deeply.

"These cars are like palaces," he said.

"They are certainly comfortable," was his employer's response.

On the trip to Trenton Mr. Garwell asked Nat much about himself, and at last the boy told his tale from beginning to end.

"I don't suppose you care to go back to the farm," said Mr. Garwell, with a quiet smile.

"No, sir, I want to stay in New York. I believe there is more of a future here for me than on the farm."

"Possibly that is true. You had positively nothing to do with that fire at your uncle's barn?"

"No, sir—I didn't even have a light around the place."

"But you saw somebody near by."

"Yes, sir. I thought it was my uncle."

"It must have been a tramp."

"Just what I think, Mr. Garwell."

"And you think your uncle is coming to New York to look for you?"

"He'll come, if the carfare doesn't scare him off. He is a very close man."

"Hum!" The real estate broker mused for a moment. "Well, if he comes, supposing you let me know? Maybe I can persuade him to allow you to remain in the city."

At this Nat's face brightened.

"Oh, Mr. Garwell, will you do that? I suppose, as my guardian, he has a legal right to order me back to the farm."

"We'll have to see about that. But he hasn't found you yet."

"That is true."

"You ought to let him know that you are well, and have a position. You need not give him your address."

"I'll write the letter to-morrow."

"Was your father a farmer?"

"Yes, sir, although when he was a young fellow like myself he lived in Brooklyn. His father and his grandfather were both born in New York."

"I see. Then you have city blood in your veins. That may account for your liking New York so much."

In a short time after the conversation came to an end, Trenton was reached, and calling a cab, Mr. Garwell had himself and Nat driven to one of the public buildings.

Here both spent some time in looking over legal records, and one of the records Nat had to copy off in pencil for his employer. After this, came a visit to a lawyer's office, and Nat was sent on a short errand.

When the business in Trenton was over, both found they had two hours to wait before they could get a train for home.

"Let us go and get a lunch," said Mr. Garwell, and led the way to a fine restaurant in that vicinity.

The real estate broker was on the point of entering the eating place when a child of five ran up to him, exclaiming:

"Papa, I want you to buy me some candy, please."

Now, as it happened, Mr. Garwell was a bachelor, so he was taken much by surprise, and so was our hero.

"Did you speak to me, my dear?" he asked, kindly.

"Why, yes, papa," answered the little one, readily.

"But I am not your father, child," and the real estate broker began to flush up.

"Oh, yes, you are!" came from the child.

"No. What is your name?"

At this the child laughed heartily.

"What a funny papa you are, to ask me my name. But won't you buy me the candy? Please, do," went on the little one, pleadingly.

"What a funny mistake," said Mr. Garwell to Nat.

"Don't you know the little girl?"

"Not in the least."

"Get the candy!" cried the child, petulantly.

"All right, I'll get you some candy, only don't call me papa," answered the real estate broker. And he slipped into a candy shop, and purchased some chocolates. He had just passed the confectionery over, when a middle-aged lady hurried up.

"Oh, mamma, see the candy papa bought me!" cried the little girl, gleefully.

"You shouldn't have bought her so much candy, Horace," said the lady to Mr. Garwell, severely. "Chocolates make Lulu sick."

Being thus addressed, John Garwell turned redder than ever.

"Excuse me, madam," he stammered. "I—er—this is a mistake. My name is not Horace."

"Not Horace. The idea!"

"My name is John—John Garwell, and I am from New York."

At this answer the lady looked perplexed, and then indignant.

"Horace, quit your fooling!" she said, coldly.

"I am not fooling, madam."

"I am not fooling, madam."

"Oh, such a man! Perhaps you'll say next that I am not your wife!" continued the lady, with a black look.

"You certainly are not my wife, for I am a bachelor, madam," and now Mr. Garwell began to grow more embarrassed than ever, while Nat was completely mystified.

"Not my husband? Oh, you wretch, to say such a thing!" The lady turned to the child. "Lulu, who is this?"

"Why, that's papa," answered the little girl, promptly.

"Now, Horace, do you hear that?"

"I—I heard what she said," answered the real estate broker, feebly. "But—but ____"

"If you are not her father, why did you buy her candy?"

"Just to keep her from calling me papa."

"Indeed! Did you want to bribe her? Oh, Horace, this is infamous! I—I—have you lost your mind?"

"No, but I think you and this child have."

At this the lady stared, and gave a gasp. She fainted, and would have fallen to the pavement had not Nat caught and supported her. Instantly a crowd began to collect.

"What's the trouble here?" asked one.

"The gentleman's wife has fainted," answered another.

"Excuse me, but she is not my wife," said John Garwell. "I don't know her."

"Certainly, she is your wife," cried a bystander. "I've seen you together lots of times, Mr. Mann."

"Wait," put in Nat. "Did you call this gentleman Mr. Mann?"

"Yes, and that's his name."

"You are mistaken. This gentleman is Mr. John Garwell."

"Go on with you, I know Mr. Mann too well to believe such a yarn."

"I don't care what you say, this gentleman is Mr. John Garwell, and he is from New York City."

"Then he has been playing a part here in Trenton, where he is known as Horace Q. Mann," said the bystander.

By this time the lady was coming to her senses. She clutched at the real estate broker.

"Take me home!" she murmured. "Oh, this is too much!"

"Better take her home," said several.

"I don't even know where she lives," answered John Garwell, blankly.

"She lives at 19 Hallock Street," said a boy in the crowd. "I'll show you the place, mister."

"Why not take her and the little girl home?" suggested Nat. "Perhaps you can clear up this mystery there?"

"All right, I will," answered his employer. "Nat, call a coach. I'm going to see this affair through. It's the oddest thing I ever had happen to me."

The coach was called, and the lady and the girl got in, and John Garwell and Nat followed.

Nat followed.

"I knew you were coming home to-day from that trip to Washington," said the lady, with a tearful look in her face, "but I never dreamed you would act this way, Horace."

"Madam, will you answer me one question. Have you a husband who went to Washington?"

"Oh, Horace!"

Seeing he could make no headway, Mr. Garwell became silent. Inside of ten minutes they reached 19 Hallock Street, and the coach came to a halt. A servant let them into the mansion. As she did this she stared at the real estate broker and gave a low cry of surprise.

"Why, I—er—I thought Mr. Mann was in the library!" she stammered. "I didn't know he went out to meet you, Mrs. Mann."

"Let us go to the library," said John Garwell.

The lady of the house was willing, and hurried hither, followed by her daughter, the real estate broker, and Nat. As they entered, a gentleman who had been seated in an arm-chair, reading a book, arose to meet them.

"Well, Clara, I'm back," he said, cheerily.

"Oh!" screamed the lady, and fainted again, and not without good reason, for before her stood a gentleman who was almost the exact facsimile of Mr. Garwell in face, form, and general appearance.

"Why, which one of you is my papa?" cried little Lulu.

"I'm your papa!" answered the gentleman of the house. "Why—er—who—who is this?" he stammered, looking at John Garwell.

"Let us attend to your wife first," was the answer, and soon the lady of the

"Let us attend to your wife first," was the answer, and soon the lady of the house was restored to her senses. Then began a series of explanations.

"It was dreadful of me to make such a mistake," said Mrs. Mann, hysterically. "But—but——"

"I don't wonder at it—now," answered John Garwell. "Your husband could pass for my twin brother."

"I can hardly tell one from the other, myself," said Nat.

"Never mind; he bought me some candy," put in little Lulu, and this made all laugh.

"I am going to ask you to do something," said John Garwell, to Horace Mann. "I think you owe it to me to walk down town, so that your fellow citizens can see that there are really two of us."

"Yes, Horace," pleaded his wife. "I made a lot of trouble for Mr. Garwell."

Horace Mann agreed readily, and soon he and the real estate broker and Nat left the residence. On the main streets of Trenton many stopped to stare after them. Among the number was the man who had spoken to Mr. Garwell, and insisted that the real estate broker was Mr. Mann.

"I apologize," said the man, promptly. "But I reckon you'll admit the resemblance is simply wonderful."

"I do admit it," was the answer. "Still, that doesn't make me anybody but myself."

Horace Mann insisted upon taking John Garwell and Nat to dinner, and treated them to the best the restaurant afforded.

"After this I'm going to wear a badge, so my wife will know me," said the Trenton man. "And I'll never dare to come to New York, for fear of being

taken for you."

CHAPTER XVIII

NAT MEETS HIS UNCLE

"Nat, if you wish to do me a favor, do not mention this affair to anybody in New York," said John Garwell, when the pair were on the train, bound for the metropolis.

"I won't say a word, sir."

"There was nothing wrong about it, but I don't want my friends to make a laughing stock of me," added the bachelor.

"I shall never mention it to anybody," returned our hero, and it may be added here that he never did. The matter was also hushed up in Trenton, so nothing more was heard of it.

Our hero was kept very busy for a day or two after his trip into New Jersey. Part of his time was spent over some books, and the balance was used up in running errands, and delivering important papers and documents.

Once again he visited police headquarters, to learn if anything had been heard of Nick Smithers.

"We have learned that he visited Jersey City not long ago," said an official. "But before we could get the authorities to lay their hands on him, he disappeared. We rather think he is in New York again, and if so, we shall do

all we can to round him up."

On the following day Nat was sent on an errand up to Forty-second Street. He had to deliver some real estate documents, and this done, he stopped for a moment to look at the Grand Central Depot.

"Thank fortune, I am not quite so green as I was when I landed," he mused.

He was just leaving the vicinity of the station, when, chancing to look down a side street, he saw a sight that filled him with astonishment.

"Uncle Abner, and the Widow Guff!" he murmured. "What are they doing, talking to that seedy-looking fellow?"

Our hero was right. There, near the entrance to a big building, stood Abner Balberry and his bride, and a sharp-eyed but shabbily dressed stranger was talking to them very earnestly.

"Uncle Abner must have married the widow," thought Nat. "More than likely they are on their wedding tour. Wonder what that other fellow wants of uncle?"

Nat's first inclination was to leave the spot, so that his relative might not discover him. But he did not like the looks of the stranger, and so drew closer, to learn, if possible, what the interview meant.

The man had just come past Abner and his wife, and had pretended to pick up a pocketbook.

"Say, did you drop your pocketbook?" he asked, of Abner.

"I—I guess not!" stammered the farmer, and felt to make certain that his own wallet was safe.

"Queer, who did drop this," went on the stranger. "Pretty well filled, too," he added, opening the pocketbook and looking into it.

added, opening the pocketbook and looking into it.

"Did you jest pick it up?" queried Abner, falling into the trap.

"Sure, right down there. Say, this is a find, ain't it?" and the man smiled broadly.

"That's what it is," said the farmer.

"I wish I could find a pocketbook," sighed Mrs. Balberry.

"I'd like to return this to the owner," went on the stranger. "I don't want to keep anybody's money."

"'Tain't everybody would say thet," was Abner's comment. He wished he had made the find.

"I suppose not, but I believe in being honest." The stranger scratched his head. "Hang me, if I know what to do," he continued.

"What do you mean?"

"I've got to go out of town soon—train leaves in ten minutes. I don't want to take this with me. It don't seem just right."

"I see."

"Can't you find the owner—I'm sure he would pay us a reward."

"Me find the owner?" stammered the farmer.

"Yes. You might advertise. The pocketbook has got at least a hundred dollars in it. The owner ought to give you twenty-five for returning it."

"Maybe he would."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the stranger, earnestly. "You take the pocketbook, and give me ten dollars. If you can find the owner, you can claim

twenty-five dollars reward."

"An' supposin' I can't find the owner?"

"Then you can keep the pocketbook."

The temptation was strong, and Abner looked at his newly-made wife.

"Might as well take it, Abner," she said, promptly. "I guess we can find the owner quick enough," and she pinched his arm suggestively.

The farmer drew forth his wallet, and began to count out ten dollars. At the same time the stranger gazed again into the other wallet.

"Must be about a hundred and fifty dollars in this," he said. "I'll trust you to do the square thing by the owner."

"Oh, you kin trust me," said Abner, quickly.

He was about to pass over his ten dollars, when he felt somebody catch him by the arm, and turning, he beheld Nat.

"Nat!" he gasped.

"Not so fast, Uncle Abner!" cried our hero. "You had better keep your money."

"Wh—what?"

"Put your money away."

"See here, what do you mean by interfering?" said the stranger, roughly.

"If he gives up the pocketbook take the ten dollars out of that," went on Nat. "My idea is, there isn't a dollar in the pocketbook."

"Nat!"

"That's right, uncle. This is an old game. I heard all about it only a few days ago."

"Oh, you go to grass!" cried the stranger, with a malicious look at Nat, and then he hurried away with all speed.

"Where did you spring from, Nat?"

"I was in this neighborhood on an errand, Uncle Abner. How do you do, Mrs. Guff."

"I'm not Mrs. Guff any more," said the lady. "I'm Mrs. Balberry, your new aunt."

"Oh, so you're married, Uncle Abner."

"Yes," was the answer. "But see here, Nat, I don't understand about thet pocketbook," said the farmer.

"It's simple enough. As I said before, the game is an old one. That fellow had the pocketbook all the time. It was stuffed with old paper, with a dollar bill wrapped on the outside. He wanted to get your money, and if he had gotten it he would have left you with a pocketbook worth about a quarter, with nothing but old paper and a dollar bill in it, and maybe he would have taken the dollar bill out, too."

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Balberry. "Did you ever hear of such a swindle!"

"They play all sorts of games in a big city like this. You've got to keep your eyes open."

"I know it," groaned Abner Balberry. "Yesterday, a cabman cheated me out o' fifty cents, an' a boy got a quarter from me by a bogus telegram. I thought something had happened to hum, and when I opened the telegram it had nuthin but a sheet o' blank paper inside!"

"That was too bad."

There was an awkward pause. Now that the farmer had found Nat he hardly knew what to say. He had expected to upbraid his nephew for running away, but the pocketbook episode rather flustered him.

"So you come to New York, didn't you?" he said, slowly.

"Yes."

"Are you working?"

"Yes, and I've got a pretty good job, too."

"What at?"

"I'm in an office downtown."

"How much do you git?"

"What do you think, Uncle Abner?"

"About two or three dollars a week."

"I get seven dollars a week."

"Seven dollars a week—fer a boy!"

"You have been very lucky," put in Mrs. Balberry. "I wish Fred could strike a job like that."

"I'm to have a raise later on," added Nat.

"It wasn't right fer you to run away, Nat," continued his uncle.

"There are two ways of looking at it."

"An' you had no right to set fire to the barn."

"I never did that, Uncle Abner. I wouldn't be so mean."

"And you sold thet cow."

"She was my cow."

"No, she wasn't!"

"I say she was, and I can prove it!"

"Well, we won't quarrel about the cow. What I want to know is, are you behavin' yourself here in the city?"

"I am. I work every day, and I board with some very nice people."

"Ain't squanderin' your earnin's on theaters an' sech?"

"No, I have never seen the inside of a theater."

"Maybe you ain't seen the inside of a church either," came from Mrs. Balberry.

"Yes, I go to church every Sunday."

"Then you don't want to go back to the farm?" came from Abner Balberry.

"No, I am never going back there."

"Don't you know that I am your guardeen?"

"That may be so, Uncle Abner, but I am not going back to the farm."

"You'll go if I say so!"

"No, I won't!" and Nat's eyes flashed fire. "I'm going to support myself, and all I ask is to be let alone."

"Oh, leave him stay, Abner," broke in Mrs. Balberry. "You don't want him, now you have Fred."

The farmer was on the point of saying that Nat as a worker was worth two Freds, but he thought it best to keep silent on that point.

"I'd like to make certain you are stopping with decent folks," said he, after another pause.

"And you won't bother me if I can prove that?" cried our hero, eagerly.

"I guess so, Nat. But you mustn't come down on me fer board an' clothes, later on."

"I won't."

The matter was talked over for a few minutes longer, and in the end Nat led the way to his boarding house and introduced his uncle and Mrs. Balberry to Mrs. Talcott. The surroundings rather pleased Abner Balberry, and he ended by arranging to stay with Mrs. Talcott for several days.

"It's better'n them hotels," said the farmer. "It's more like hum, ain't it, Lucy?"

"Yes, but it ain't quite so high-toned," said the bride, who was inclined to cut a dash whenever the opportunity afforded.

CHAPTER XIX

NAT BECOMES A PRIVATE CLERK

Abner Balberry and his bride remained in New York four days longer, and during that time Nat did all in his power to make their visit a pleasant one. He received Mr. Garwell's permission to remain away from work one day, and took his uncle and aunt to Central Park, and to the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Statue of Liberty. They were greatly pleased, and were frank enough to tell Nat so.

"I guess you are more cut out for the city than for the farm," said Abner to his nephew. "I hope you do well. You must write to us often, an' some day you must pay us a visit."

"I certainly will do that, Uncle Abner," said Nat, and then, to please the bride, he purchased for her a souvenir book, containing many illustrations of the metropolis. This book Mrs. Balberry prized highly, and from that moment she began to like Nat.

"He ain't half so bad as I was led to expect," she said, on the way home. "He seems to know what he is doing."

"He certainly is gettin' along," responded Abner. "Shouldn't wonder but what he'll be a regular business man some day."

"Do you think it would pay to send Fred down to the city?"

"No, he better stay on the farm. Fred ain't got the way about him thet Nat's got."

"He's just as smart," said the youth's mother, quickly.

"Maybe, but he ain't got the knack o' it."

"He would do just as well if he had the chance," continued Mrs. Balberry. As was perhaps natural she thought her own son as good as any boy.

On the day after Nat's uncle left New York John Garwell called the boy into his private office.

"Did you arrange matters with Mr. Balberry?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Yes, sir. He is going to leave me alone after this," and our hero smiled.

"I am glad to hear it, Nat. Then there is nothing in the way of your continuing here."

"No, sir."

"In that case I want to ask you a question. How would you like to take up stenography and typewriting?"

"I'd like it first-rate, if I thought I could do anything with them after I had learned them."

"I would like to have a private secretary who understood stenography, and the use of the typewriter."

"Oh, Mr. Garwell, do you think I would do?"

"Perhaps. You are bright, and I feel that I can trust you."

"If you want me to, I'll go at stenography and typewriting at once."

"You'll have to have some time for it."

"I can go at night. There are several evening schools I know of."

"Very well, then, you may start in at once, and I will pay your tuition fees."

"I can pay those out of my savings."

"No, bring the bills to me, Nat. And after this week your duties will be wholly as my private clerk," added John Garwell.

This made quite a change for our hero. But it was an agreeable one, and he went at his new duties with vigor. A good school was selected, which Nat attended five nights in the week.

"This kind of knocks me out," said Dick, when our hero told him of the change.

"No, it don't," said Nat, quickly. "I've made arrangements for you, Dick."

"Me? How?"

"You are to come three nights a week, for lessons in arithmetic and penmanship."

"Do they give the lessons free?"

"No, I am going to settle that."

"How much will you pay?"

"Three dollars a month."

"I ought to pay that."

"No, I am going to do it," said Nat, firmly, and he kept his word.

As John Garwell's private clerk, Nat received ten dollars per week, and as he had no school bills to pay for himself he found it easy to pay for Dick. The newsboy was making rapid progress, and this not only pleased his mother, but also the man who had promised to give Dick a position in his stationery store.

"I'm going to have a job in the store next month," said the newsboy one day. "Mr. Andrews' clerk is going to leave, and I am to take his place."

"And how much will Mr. Andrews give you?" asked Mrs. Talcott.

"Six dollars a week to start on, and he says he will give me eight dollars as

soon as I can help on the books."

"I am glad to hear it, Dick."

"I guess I've got Nat to thank for the job," said the newsboy. "I had to do some writing for Mr. Andrews, and he said the writing was all right."

"Yes, you can certainly thank Nat," said Mrs. Talcott.

The days passed swiftly for Nat. He made good progress at the evening school, and Mr. Garwell was correspondingly pleased. Every day the real estate broker trusted Nat more and more, until the lad occupied a truly responsible position.

One day Nat was sent to Brooklyn, to have a certain document signed by a lady of wealth.

"You must get Mrs. Parloe's signature to this, Nat," said his employer, "and get somebody to witness the signature, and sign here," he added.

"Yes, sir."

"The paper is valuable, and I don't want you to let it go out of your sight," went on John Garwell.

"I'll take care to keep my eye on it," answered Nat.

He was soon on his way, and after crossing the Brooklyn Bridge, took a street car to the address given him. It was a fine brownstone house, with elegant lace curtains at the windows.

"Does Mrs. Parloe live here?" he asked of the girl who came to the door.

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to see her on business," and Nat handed out a card on which

was printed:

John Wilbur Garwell,
Real Estate Broker.

Represented by
NATHANIEL M. NASON.

The girl told Nat to take a seat, and went off with the card. He waited for fully five minutes, during which he heard a low murmur of voices in a back room. Then a tall, dark-eyed man came forward.

"What do you wish of Mrs. Parloe?" he questioned, abruptly.

"Excuse me, but my business is with the lady," answered Nat, politely. He had been told to transact business with Mrs. Parloe and with nobody else.

"Oh! I suppose you came about that property," went on the dark-eyed man, surlily. "If you did, let me tell you, it won't do any good."

To this our hero made no reply.

"Mrs. Parloe will see you upstairs," said the girl, returning, and showed Nat the way up. The dark-eyed man started to follow, but the girl called him back.

"Mrs. Parloe wished you to remain below, Mr. Cameron," she said.

At this the man uttered something under his breath which Nat could not catch. Evidently, he was very angry, and he went into a side room, slamming the door after him.

Nat found Mrs. Parloe sitting in an easy chair by a front window. She was something of an invalid and rather old.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Nason," said she. "Take a seat."

"Thank you," returned Nat. "Here is a note for you from Mr. Garwell," and he passed it over.

The old lady read the communication carefully, nodding to herself as she did so. Then she turned again to our hero.

"Have you the document with you?"

"Yes, ma'am," and Nat brought it forth. "You will have to have somebody as a witness. Can I call somebody for you?"

The old lady mused for a moment.

"I don't believe Rufus will do it," she said, half aloud.

"Do you mean the gentleman I met downstairs?"

"Yes, my nephew, Rufus Cameron. He does not wish me to transact business with Mr. Garwell. You may call John, my hired man. He is quite intelligent."

"Where will I find him?"

"You will—but never mind, Mary can call him."

Mrs. Parloe touched a bell, and soon Mary appeared, and went off to find the hired man. In the meantime, Nat fixed a reading stand so it could be used as a writing table, and brought out a stylographic pen his employer had given him.

Soon the hired man appeared. He was fairly well educated, and showed it in his face and manner.

"I am going to sign this document, John," said the old lady. "I wish you to witness my signature."

"Yes, ma'am."

Not without something of an effort, Mrs. Parloe affixed her signature to the

paper. Then Nat handed the document to John, and told him where to place his own name in full, and also his address. In a minute the matter was concluded, and Mrs. Parloe told the hired man to go, and he did so.

"I trust Mr. Garwell has no further difficulty in this matter," said the old lady, as Nat stowed the document away in his pocket.

"He told me to say that he is going to put it through just as soon as he can," answered Nat. "I don't know anything more about it than that."

"Are you one of his clerks?"

"Yes, ma'am—his private clerk."

"You are rather young for such a position."

"I suppose I am, but Mr. Garwell seems to like me, and I am doing what I can to please him."

"Mr. Garwell is a good man," said the old lady, and there the interview came to an end, and Nat left the room. He was just going to leave the house when the dark-eyed man stepped into the lower hallway, and caught him by the arm.

CHAPTER XX

RUFUS CAMERON'S BOLD MOVE

"What do you want?" demanded our hero. He did not like the idea of being

detained, now that his business was concluded.

"I want to talk to you a minute," said the man. "Come into the parlor."

"I am in something of a hurry, Mr.——"

"My name is Rufus Cameron. Mrs. Parloe is my aunt. I must talk to you. Come in."

Rufus Cameron caught a firm hold of our hero and almost forced him into the parlor. Then he shut the door tightly and stood in front of it.

"What do you want?" demanded Nat. He did not like the looks of Rufus Cameron. The fellow's face was dissipated.

"You got my aunt to sign a certain document, didn't you?"

"What if I did?"

"I want to see that paper."

"If you do, you'll have to see my employer about it."

"You've got the paper right here. Why can't you show it to me?"

"Because I have no authority for so doing," answered our hero, firmly.

"Humph! It won't hurt you to let me look over the paper," growled Rufus Cameron.

"I have my orders."

"Did John Garwell tell you not to show me the paper?"

"He told me to have it signed, and to bring it right back."

"Well, I want to see it, and I'm going to do it before you leave this house."

"Are you going to take the paper away from me!" cried Nat, in alarm.

"I only want to look at it. As soon as I've read it, I'll give it back to you."

"I can't allow the paper to go out of my possession, Mr. Cameron."

"Mrs. Parloe isn't entirely responsible for what she does. I must see to it that everything is all right."

"Well, you had better call on Mr. Garwell."

"No, I must see the document while you have it here. Come! hand it over."

"I will not."

Nat had scarcely spoken when Rufus Cameron caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"Look here, boy, I am not a man to be trifled with!" he whispered, fiercely. "Let me see the paper, and it will be all right. But if you won't, I'll make a whole lot of trouble for you."

"Let go of me!" and Nat tried to pull himself away.

"You stole this ring while you were upstairs," said Rufus Cameron, quickly, and, putting his hand in Nat's side pocket, he brought it out again with a diamond ring.

"I—I never saw that ring before," gasped Nat.

"You stole it, I say, and unless you behave yourself, I'll have you arrested," went on Rufus Cameron, coldly.

Nat was dumfounded, but like a flash he saw through the trick that the man wanted to play on him.

"You can't fool me, Mr. Rufus Cameron," said he, sharply. "Let me go, or I'll

have you hauled up in court for this. Your dirty trick won't work with me."

Rufus Cameron fell back, crestfallen. He had not anticipated such bravery on our hero's part. He was a coward at heart, and too much liquor had somewhat muddled his brain.

"Then you won't show me the document?" he muttered.

"No."

As Nat uttered the word, Rufus Cameron picked up a sea shell lying on a mantelshelf, and swung it behind his head.

"If you don't let me see that——" he began.

Nat rushed at him, and pushed him to one side. Then our hero made for the door. He was just opening it when the seashell was sent whizzing forward. It hit Nat on the head, and the boy dropped unconscious across an easy chair.

For the instant Rufus Cameron was startled. Then rushing to the door, he locked it, and also locked some folding doors leading to a rear apartment.

"I hope I didn't hurt him much," he muttered. "What a young fool he was not to let me see the paper."

He propped Nat up in the easy chair, and placed his hand in the boy's inside pocket. Soon he had the document in his possession, and was looking over it rapidly.

"Just as I thought. I'm glad I got it. Now, we'll see if Shanley and I can't outwit Mr. John Garwell."

Nat was already coming to his senses, and Rufus Cameron lost no time in hurrying to the library of the house. Here he obtained an old document of no consequence, but which still bore his aunt's signature. Rushing back, he placed this in the envelope which had held the other paper of importance.

this in the envelope which had held the other paper of importance.

Nat was just returning to his senses when he found himself being taken out of the house by Rufus Cameron. The man supported him as far as the corner and there placed him on a stone step leading to a church.

"Wha—what did you hit me for?" stammered our hero, feebly.

"I didn't mean to do that; really I didn't," said Rufus Cameron, smoothly. "The shell slipped. I am very sorry—very sorry, indeed."

"It was a mean thing to do."

"It was an accident, I give you my word on it."

Nat felt in his pocket to learn if the document was still there.

"Did you look at that paper?" he questioned.

"No, I didn't. On second thought I have concluded to let my aunt do just as she pleases in this matter."

Nat felt in no condition to argue. He took out the document, glanced at it, and shoved it back into the envelope and then in his pocket.

"I'm sorry this happened. I was excited for the minute. Come and have a drink with me. It will do you good," went on Rufus Cameron.

"I don't drink."

"Shall I show you to the car then?"

"Yes."

When Nat got up the rascal supported him, and thus they made their way to the car line running to the Bridge. Here, our hero boarded a car, and Rufus Cameron watched him ride out of sight.

"That was easy after all," muttered Rufus Cameron to himself. "I only hope it don't make too much trouble in the future. I'll have to let Shanley have this document without delay, and I'd better get out of sight until the affair blows over."

Making his way to a neighboring café, Rufus Cameron treated himself to a drink of strong liquor and a black-looking cigar. Then he returned to his aunt's home. He lived with her, and was doing his best to get certain of her properties away from her.

"Aunt Jane, what did that young man want?" he asked, as he entered her room.

"He came to see me on private business, Rufus," was the quiet answer. Mrs. Parloe did not fancy her nephew's habits, and had often warned him that he must reform.

"Was there anything I could do for you?"

"No, Rufus."

"Do you know, Aunt Jane, I've been thinking of taking a trip to the West," he went on, after a pause.

"So you said before."

"I'd go in a minute if I had the money."

"How much do you want?"

"Two or three hundred dollars at least."

"Is the money gone that I let you have last month?"

"Yes, I had to pay some back bills with that."

"You are very extravagant, Rufus."

"Oh, a young man must spend something."

"But not as much as you spend."

"I don't spend any more than the rest of the fellows in my set. I have got to keep up appearances, you know."

"Your set is altogether too fast a one to suit me."

"Will you let me have the money?"

"How long do you expect to be gone?"

"That depends upon what you will give me. If you'll let me have five hundred dollars, I'll make a trip of two or three months."

Mrs. Parloe thought for a moment, and at last consented to give her nephew the five hundred. She had her check book handy, and soon the check was passed over to the nephew.

"When shall you start?" she asked.

"I don't know. I've a good notion to start to-night. But if you want me to do anything for you before I go——"

"There is nothing, Rufus. Only, if you want to please me, don't get into any bad habits while you are gone."

"Oh, I'm going to turn over a new leaf when I leave Brooklyn," said the hypocrite. "Then, I can leave to-night?"

"Yes."

"In that case, I'll pack my trunk at once," said Rufus Cameron; and a little later he did so. Then he had the trunk taken away, bid his aunt good-by, and was

off.

"That was easy," he said to himself, when away from the house. "Now to see Shanley and to arrange for keeping out of sight, in case John Garwell kicks up a fuss."

CHAPTER XXI

A MISSING DOCUMENT OF VALUE

As soon as Nat returned to the office he sought out Mr. Garwell, and handed him the document in the envelope.

"Did you have any trouble getting Mrs. Parloe's signature?" asked the real estate broker.

"I had no trouble getting the signature, but I had trouble getting away from the house," answered Nat.

"Trouble getting away? What do you mean?"

"I was stopped by her nephew, a man named Rufus Cameron. He handled me rather roughly."

"Did he try to get the document away from you?" And now John Garwell was all attention.

"He hauled me in the parlor, and demanded that I let him look at the paper. I refused, and then he threatened me."

"And what happened after that?"

"He put his hand in my pocket and brought out a diamond ring. He said I had stolen it."

"Of course you hadn't, Nat?"

"I had never seen the ring before. But that wasn't the worst of it. He picked up a sea shell and hit me with it and knocked me senseless."

After that our hero told his story in detail, relating also what Rufus Cameron had said on assisting him to the street car. The real estate broker listened with keen interest.

"That man is a scoundrel!" he exclaimed, when Nat had concluded his story. "I pity Mrs. Parloe. He is doing his best to get all her money from her."

"It was a mean trick to say I took the ring," declared Nat.

"He did that thinking to get you in his power, my boy. Are you sure he didn't look at the document?"

"I can't say what he did while I was senseless, Mr. Garwell."

"I'll take a look at the paper and see if he made any alterations in the text."

John Garwell looked at the document and began to read it.

"Why, this is not the paper I gave you, Nat," he ejaculated.

"Not the same?"

"No. It's some old thing that I know nothing about."

"If that's the case, Mr. Cameron substituted this paper for the real one!" exclaimed our hero. "He could easily have done that during the time I was knocked out."

knocked out.

"I'll see about this without delay," said John Garwell, decisively. "I will show that fellow that he can't carry matters with quite such a high hand."

"What can he do with that paper, Mr. Garwell?"

"He can cause me a great deal of trouble. The paper refers to a piece of property in which Mrs. Parloe held an interest. I have been trying to get a free and clear title to the land for a client of mine, and another real estate dealer named Andrew Shanley has been trying to get the land for another party. It is a mixed-up affair, but I hoped the signing of that paper would help to straighten out matters."

The real estate broker was as good as his word, but he was exceedingly busy, and it was not until two in the afternoon that he could get away. Then he went to Brooklyn, taking Nat with him.

"I would like to see Mr. Cameron," said he to the girl at Mrs. Parloe's home.

"Mr. Cameron has gone away, sir," was the unexpected answer.

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"I'll ask Mrs. Parloe," said the girl.

She went upstairs, leaving them in the parlor below. Soon she came back.

"He has gone out west, Mrs. Parloe says, and she doesn't expect him back for two or three months."

"Gone west," cried Nat. "When did he go?"

"He went away about noon."

"Did he take any baggage?" asked John Garwell.

"Yes, sir, a dress-suit case, and he sent an expressman around for his trunk, too."

"Then I won't bother you any more," said the real estate broker, and left the house, followed by Nat.

"Don't you want to ask Mrs. Parloe about this?" queried our hero.

"It would be useless to do so, Nat. It would only upset the old lady."

"She might be able to tell us just where her nephew had gone to?"

"It is not likely. He intends to keep out of the way, that is certain."

"Maybe he didn't go west at all!" said our hero, suddenly.

"Such a thing is possible."

"Did you say he was in league with this other real estate broker?"

"I don't know about that, although I know he and this Shanley are friends."

"I wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea for me to watch around this Shanley's office for him?"

"Ha! That is an idea." John Garwell smiled broadly. "Nat, you are growing clever."

"Even if I couldn't get the paper, I could prove that he had not gone west, as he told his aunt, and I could follow him, and find out where he was stopping."

"Well, you can do the watching if you wish. I will give you Andrew V. Shanley's address. His place of business is between here and the Bridge."

"Shall I go there at once?"

"If you wish."

The address was written on a slip of paper, and a little later Nat and his employer separated. John Garwell gazed after our hero curiously.

"He is improving wonderfully," he mused. "He isn't half as green as when I first met him."

Nat had been told what car to take, and ten minutes sufficed to bring him to the block upon which Andrew Shanley's office was located, on the third floor of a large office building. He went upstairs, and managed to get a peep into the office, and found Rufus Cameron was not there.

"Of course he may have been here already," he told himself. "But I've got to take my chances about that. I'll stay here until the place shuts up."

Going below again, he took a station across the street and began to wait patiently for the appearance of Rufus Cameron.

As luck would have it, he had waited less than half an hour when he saw Mrs. Parloe's nephew step from a car at the corner, and approach the office building.

"Mr. Cameron, I want to see you!" he exclaimed, coming forward, and confronting the man.

Rufus Cameron had not expected to meet Nat again so soon, and for the moment he was dumfounded.

"Wha—what do you want?" he stammered, halting.

"You know well enough what I want," answered our hero, sharply. "I want that document you stole from me."

"Stole from you!"

"That is what I said, Rufus Cameron."

"I—I don't know what you are talking about."

"You do know, and unless you give up the paper I am going to have you arrested right now."

At these words Rufus Cameron turned pale. As said before, he was a good deal of a coward, and being caught so unexpectedly threw him somewhat from his mental balance.

"You—you can't have me arrested!"

"Yes, I can."

"How did you come to look for me here?"

"Mr. Garwell sent me here. He is up to your tricks."

"Did he tell you to—to have me arrested?"

"Never mind what he told me. I want that paper, and I want it right now."

"I—I haven't got any paper. I—I don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, you have got that paper. You took it from me after you knocked me down in your aunt's parlor. Isn't that so?"

As Nat finished he nodded, as if talking to somebody behind Rufus Cameron. At once the guilty fellow turned his head to learn who was listening to the conversation. As he did this, Nat thrust his hand in the rascal's breast pocket, and brought forth the document which had caused all the trouble.

CHAPTER XXII

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE ELEVATED STATION

"Hi, stop that!" roared Rufus Cameron, making a clutch for the document. But before he could reach it Nat was at a safe distance. Our hero glanced at the paper, to make certain that it was the right one, and then put it in his pocket, and buttoned up his jacket.

"Now, Mr. Rufus Cameron, I guess we are square," said Nat, in something a tone of triumph.

"You young thief, give me back that document," cried the man, savagely.

"Not much! I am going to give it to Mr. Garwell."

"That isn't his document."

"Yes, it is."

"I say it isn't. If you don't give me the paper, I'll call a policeman."

"Do it, and I'll have you arrested for knocking me over with the sea shell and robbing me."

Rufus Cameron glared at our hero. He was baffled and did not know what to do next. Presently a crafty look came into his eyes.

"See here, you're a pretty smart boy," he said, in a calmer tone.

"Thank you for nothing."

"What is John Garwell going to give you for getting that paper?"

"Nothing—at least I don't expect anything."

"You're a fool to work for nothing," sneered Rufus Cameron. "You'll never get rich doing that."

"If I don't it will be my own affair."

"Do you understand this business at all, boy?"

"I understand some of it."

"Don't you know that John Garwell is trying to defraud my aunt out of a lot of money?"

"I certainly know nothing of the kind."

"It's a fact. I am only trying to protect my aunt's interests. She is rather queer in her head at times, and doesn't know what she is doing."

"She wasn't queer when she signed this paper."

"Yes, she was. But we will let that pass. Give me the paper, and I'll pay you handsomely for it. You can tell Garwell that you couldn't locate me."

"How much will you give?" asked Nat, although he had no intention of accepting the rascal's offer.

"I'll give you—five dollars."

"That isn't much. The paper is worth more."

"No, it isn't."

"I won't give it up for five dollars."

"Well, we'll make it ten dollars. Come, hand the paper over. It's easy money for you."

"The paper is worth every bit of a hundred dollars," said our hero, just to

draw the rascal out, and learn if possible how valuable Rufus Cameron really considered the document.

"A hundred dollars! Nonsense! But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm sorry I knocked you down at my aunt's house. I'll give you twenty-five dollars."

"When will you pay me?"

"Now," and Rufus Cameron brought forth a roll of bills.

"You can keep your money, Rufus Cameron."

"Eh?"

"I wouldn't touch a penny of it. Do you know what I think? I think you are a first-class scoundrel."

"What! This to me?" stormed the fellow, shoving his money back into his pocket.

"Yes, that to you. I am sorry Mrs. Parloe has such a rascal for a relative. Now, I am going to bid you good-day." And Nat began to move away.

"Come back here, you young villain!" cried Rufus Cameron.

He made a dash for our hero, but Nat was too quick for him. The boy ran across the street and around a corner, and in a moment more was out of sight. Rufus Cameron shook his fist in impotent rage.

"The jig's up!" he muttered. "What a mess! I thought I'd get a thousand dollars out of Shanley for that paper!"

Nat did not slacken his pace until he had reached the river. Then he ran aboard a ferry boat, and journeyed thus to New York, thinking that possibly his enemy would watch the cars.

When our hero reached the office he found that the regular force of clerks had

already left, but his employer was still at his desk, finishing up some business of importance.

"Hullo! you are back quickly," exclaimed John Garwell.

"Yes, sir, and there's the document," answered Nat, and placed the paper on the desk.

John Garwell stared in amazement.

"Why, how did this happen?" he queried.

"It was blind luck, I guess," said Nat, and sitting down, he told his tale.

"You certainly were lucky. So that rascal wanted to bribe you?"

"Yes. I half felt like knocking him down for it." And Nat's eyes flashed.

"It would have served him right." The real estate broker looked the document over. "Yes, this is all right." He opened the sheet. "Hullo, here is a memorandum of some kind."

The memorandum was on a sheet of plain white paper. It contained a name and address and some figures.

"Eureka!" almost shouted the real estate broker. "This is luck, truly."

"What have you found, Mr. Garwell?"

"An address I have been hunting for for over a year. Now I can put that real estate deal through without further trouble. I knew Shanley or this Cameron had that address, but, of course, they wouldn't give it to me."

"I'm glad I got it for you."

"I imagine Rufus Cameron will be very angry when he learns that he has lost this address."

this address."

"It's his own fault."

There was nothing more for Nat to do that day, so he went home, and in the evening attended the night school where he had taken up shorthand and typewriting. He was making rapid progress, and he applied himself diligently.

On the following day, John Garwell was away from the office until the middle of the afternoon, and he also went off the next morning. On his return, his face wore a satisfied look.

"Well, that thing is settled," he said, on dropping into his chair. "And what a row I did have with Mr. Andrew V. Shanley!"

"You mean about that property?" queried Nat, looking up from his work at a side desk.

"Yes. I have sold the property and got my commissions, amounting to four thousand dollars in all. Shanley was as mad as a hornet."

"Did he mention Rufus Cameron?"

"No, but I did, and told him just what a dirty sneak the fellow was. After that Shanley shut up pretty quick."

"Do you suppose Rufus Cameron can do anything more in the matter?"

"No. But he will have it in for you, Nat, I am afraid."

"Oh, I guess I can take care of myself," answered our hero, calmly.

"This Shanley has tried to trip me up several times," went on John Garwell, leaning back in his office chair. "He tries to find out what I am doing, and then he does his best to steal the business away from me."

"Maybe this will teach him a lesson."

"Possibly; but I am afraid not, Nat."

Several days passed, and Nat kept at work steadily. During that time he received a letter from his uncle, in which Abner Balberry stated that he had arrived home once more, and found everything on the farm all right.

"Uncle Abner isn't such a bad sort after all," thought Nat, "Only he ought to drop some of his miserly habits. Perhaps, now that he is married again, he will."

One day our hero had to go up to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street on an errand.

"Take an elevated train," said his employer, and handed him the necessary carfare.

It did not take Nat long to reach the elevated station. Purchasing a ticket, he dropped it in the box, and walked out on the platform.

Only a few people were present, for it was the quiet hour of the morning. Among the number was a thick-set, trampish-looking fellow, who was smoking a short clay pipe. The man was more than half intoxicated, and lurched from side to side as he walked along the platform.

"That fellow had better look out for himself," thought our hero. "If he isn't careful, he may fall out on the tracks and get hurt."

As our hero had some time to wait for a train, he passed the man several times. The face of the fellow looked familiar, and Nat wondered where he had seen him before.

"I've certainly met him somewhere," thought the boy. "But where? I don't think it was in New York."

Presently the elevated train came into sight and those on the platform prepared

to get aboard when it should stop for them.

The man lurched forward as before, and of a sudden fell sprawling directly in front of the train.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOM NOLAN'S CONFESSION

A cry of horror went up from those who saw the mishap, and some women present turned their heads away, expecting that the semi-intoxicated individual would be killed.

Nat's heart leaped into his throat, but he did not lose his presence of mind. He was but a few feet from the man, and as quick as a flash he jumped forward, caught the fellow up, and dragged him out of harm's way.

"Wha—what yer doin'?" stammered the fellow, gazing unsteadily at our hero.

"Do you want to be killed?" asked Nat, sharply.

"They won't—won't dare to kill me," said the fellow. "I'm a—a—good citizen."

"He ought to be locked up," said a man standing near.

"It was a brave deed," said one of the ladies.

"Who's goin' to lock me up?" demanded the tramp, for he was nothing less.

And he began to show fight, at which the majority of the crowd turned away, and hurried to board the train. Nat hesitated for a second, and then concluded to let the train go on and take the next one.

"Say, you pulled me from the track, didn't you?" said the man, after another look at Nat.

"I did."

"Noble boy. I ought to reward you."

"I don't want any reward."

"Humph! Don't worry, my dear friend—Tom Nolan ain't got no money to reward you with." And the semi-drunken man indulged in a senseless chuckle.

"See here, haven't I met you before?" demanded Nat, looking at the man more closely than ever.

"Maybe yer have, an' maybe yer haven't."

"Where do you come from?"

"Me? I'm an Ohio man, I am, and I ain't ashamed to own it. Ohio's best State in the Union."

"So you are from Ohio. Were you ever in and around Brookville and Caswell?" went on our hero, suddenly.

"Sure. I spent two months in that district not very long ago. But I had to git out, I did." And the tramp chuckled again.

"What made you get out?" And now Nat was all attention.

"Folks didn't like me around."

"Didn't you treat them fairly?"

"Sure I did, but they thought their barns was too good for Tom Nolan to sleep in."

"And that's why they chased you away, eh?"

"Thet's it, my young friend. It was this way—to tell the plain truth. One night I went to sleep in a barn with my pipe in my mouth. Fust thing I knowed some hay got afire. A man came runnin' to put the fire out, and I had to leg it to git away."

"Was that up between Caswell and Brookville?"

"You've struck it, but—but—what's this to you, anyway?" and now Tom Nolan began to look disturbed.

"It's a good deal to me. That was my uncle's barn, and I was accused of setting it on fire."

"Gee shoo! Yer don't say! Say, I've put my foot into it, ain't I?"

"You certainly have."

"But, say, honest, I—I didn't mean to set the shebang afire—not on my life, I didn't."

"You were smoking, and fell asleep."

"Thet's the honest truth o' the matter, my young friend. I'm a tramp, an' down on my luck, but I ain't no barn burner, not me!"

"Well, you had better come with me," said Nat, decidedly.

"What are yer goin' to do?"

"I want a witness to what you just said."

"Goin' to have me—me locked up?"

"No, it's not worth it. I only want to prove to my uncle that I am not guilty, that's all."

The tramp followed Nat down into the street and then over to John Garwell's office.

"Why, what does this mean, Nat?" demanded his employer, in astonishment, for visits from tramps were unusual.

Our hero lost no time in telling his story.

"I want my uncle Abner to know that I am innocent, that's all," he continued. "It won't do any good to hold this chap, for the barn wasn't hurt much, anyway."

"I'll settle this," said Mr. Garwell, and called in a stenographer, who took down what the tramp had to say. Then the confession was typewritten, and Tom Nolan signed it, and John Garwell added his signature as a witness.

"There, Nat, that is all right now," said the real estate broker. "You can send that to your uncle when you please, and we can keep a copy."

"This is all I want," said our hero to the tramp. "You may go now."

"Don't want no more o' me?" asked Tom Nolan.

"Nothing whatever."

"Say, ain't this confession good fer a quarter?"

"I'll give you a quarter if you'll promise not to spend it for drink."

"I'll promise," said the tramp, and Nat handed him twenty-five cents. Tom Nolan thanked him, and shuffled off; and that was the last our hero saw or heard of him.

"I'm sorry I lost so much time," said Nat to his employer. "But I wanted to square myself with Uncle Abner if I could."

"I don't blame you, Nat. I have no doubt it is a great worry off your mind."

"It is. Now, Uncle Abner will know I told him the plain truth."

That night Nat wrote Abner Balberry a long letter, telling of his meeting with the tramp. He enclosed the signed confession, and he had the letter registered, so that it might not get lost in the mails. A few days later came a reply, in which Nat's uncle said he remembered seeing the tramp around on the day of the fire, and stating that he was very sorry that he had ever thought his nephew guilty.

Nat's work frequently took him out of town, and on one occasion he had to go to Albany, a trip which he enjoyed thoroughly, as it gave him a chance to visit the State Capitol.

"Nat," said John Garwell one day, "didn't you once tell me, that your father and grandfather had come from New York and Brooklyn?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was your grandfather ever interested in some property around Central Park?"

"I don't know but what he was. But he got rid of his belongings, so I was told, when he moved away."

"Did you ever see any of the papers?"

"Yes, sir, some years ago. They were in a trunk up in my uncle Abner's garret."

"What was your grandfather's full name?"

"Chester Stout Nason. His mother was a Stout."

"And your father's full name?"

"William Henry Nason."

"Did he have any brothers?"

"No, sir—only a sister, who was Uncle Abner's first wife."

"I see. Are those papers still in the trunk you just mentioned?"

"They ought to be. They were packed away with some old account books—bad debts, I once heard father call them. Father had an idea he could collect some of the debts some day. But I guess they are outlawed."

"More than likely. I'd like to see those papers regarding that land near Central Park."

"Why, Mr. Garwell? Do you think there is anything in it for me?" cried our hero, quickly.

"I'm not prepared to say that until I see the papers. I am looking up six parcels of land, which a certain company want for the purpose of putting up a big hotel. Some of the old deeds mention a Chester S. Nason as holding a half-interest in one of the plots of ground—the interest being assigned to him in payment of a claim he had on one Maurice LeRoy. Did you ever hear of such a man?"

"No, sir."

"Well, supposing you get those papers for me, and let me examine them."

"Shall I send to Uncle Abner for them?"

"I think it might be better for you to go home and sort out the papers yourself

I'll explain just what I am after. Besides, if the papers are valuable, you had better not trust them to the mails. I'll pay your railroad fares."

"All right, I'll go home for them whenever you say, Mr. Garwell. I hope the papers do prove valuable," and Nat smiled broadly.

"Don't raise false hopes, Nat. There may be nothing in it. But there is nothing like being sure."

"Is the tract of land valuable?"

"Very. It is located in the most fashionable territory around Central Park."

"When do you want me to go home?"

"You can start to-morrow if you wish. There is no rush of business on just at present. I presume you will be back within four or five days?"

"I'll come back as soon as possible."

"Take your time. A couple of days on the farm will do you good. It will be like a touch of old times."

"That is true," answered Nat.

The opportunity to go back to the farm pleased him. He packed his dress-suit case that night, and left on the ten-o'clock train in the morning. He was dressed in his best and had quite a city air about him. Certainly he could no longer be called a "greeny."

Nat spent the night at Cleveland, and took the train to Brookville in the morning. Almost the first person he met in the town was Sam Price.

"Hullo, are you back?" cried the country boy, shaking hands.

"Back for a few days, Sam."

"You look fine, Nat."

"I feel fine. How are you getting along?"

"Pretty good. Life on the farm is rather slow. Somebody told me you were tired of the city."

"It isn't true, Sam."

"Fred Guff says he wants to go to the city, too, but his mother won't let him."

"I suppose Fred helps my uncle Abner?"

"Yes, but your uncle don't get along with him very well. Fred's too slow for him."

Sam had driven to town with his buckboard, and he readily agreed to give Nat a ride over to Abner Balberry's farm. They were soon on the way, and less than an hour brought them in sight of the place.

"Some young man is coming, ma!" cried Fred, who was sitting on the doorstep, munching an apple. "Sam Price is driving him."

"Wonder what he wants here?" said Mrs. Balberry, shading her eyes with her hands. "Mercy sakes! It's Nat!"

"Nat!" repeated the boy. "Huh! if it's him I guess he's sick of the city. I thought he wouldn't make a go of it."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said the mother, shortly. "Nat has more ginger in him than you have."

By this time Nat was at the horseblock. He leaped off the buckboard, and advanced to greet Mrs. Balberry and her son.

"How do you do?" he cried, cheerily. "Aren't you surprised to see me?"

"I certainly am," answered Mrs. Balberry, as she shook hands.

"Got tired of the city, eh?" came from Fred. "I knew it wouldn't last."

"Do you think you could do anything in the city?" demanded our hero, sharply.

"Of course I could."

"It's hard work to get along in New York."

"I don't care—I wouldn't make a failure of it if I went. I guess you wasn't smart enough for them New Yorkers," added Fred, maliciously.

"What makes you think that, Fred?"

"If it wasn't so you wouldn't be back."

"Have you given up your place with Mr. Garwell?" asked Mrs. Balberry.

"No, I'm home on a vacation of a couple of days, that's all."

"Oh, then you are going back?" came from Fred, and his face fell.

"Certainly I am. I have a first-class position, with a promise of advancement, so it would be sheer foolishness for me to give it up."

"Ma said you were with a real estate man."

"Yes."

"That can't pay much."

"It pays very well."

"How much?"

"Ten dollars a week, at present. But I am to get more soon."

"You don't mean to say they pay you ten dollars a week," cried Fred.

"That is my regular salary."

"Then I'm going to the city to-morrow," said Fred, decidedly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PAPERS IN THE TRUNK

Nat now asked for his uncle and was told that his relative was at the barn. Placing his dress-suit case in the house, he walked down to the barn. In the meantime Sam Price had driven off.

"Uncle Abner, where are you?"

"Who's thet a-callin' me?" came from the farmer, as he looked forth from one of the horse stalls.

"I've come to ask you for a job," went on Nat, lightly.

"Nat! How be you?" Abner came and shook hands. "Want a job? Is it all up in New York?"

"No, uncle, I was only fooling. I came home for a vacation of a couple of days, that's all."

"Well, you're welcome, Nat. But it must cost money to travel so far for jest two days' vacation."

"I came for another purpose, too. Do you remember those old papers in the trunk in the garret?"

"Those thet belonged to your father an' grandfather?"

"Yes. Well, I am going to look them over and see if they are of any value."

"Ain't nuthin' of any use, Nat. I looked over 'em myself, one rainy day when I didn't have nuthin' else to do."

"Mr. Garwell thinks some of them might be valuable."

"Does he know about 'em?"

"He only knows what I told him."

"The old debts is all outlawed."

"But there are other papers—something about some land grandfather had an interest in."

"I don't know nuthin' about that. It's so long ago, I don't believe they are worth a cent."

"Well, it won't do any harm to look them over, and show them to Mr. Garwell," returned our hero.

It was approaching the noon hour, and in honor of Nat's arrival, Mrs. Balberry prepared an extra good dinner, of which the boy partook freely. It was plainly to be seen that the former widow was the ruler of the house, and that she compelled Abner Balberry to be far more liberal than had been his habit in years gone by.

"Have another piece of pie, Nat," said the lady of the house, graciously.

"Thank you, but I've had enough," answered Nat.

"Better save what's left for to-morrow," suggested Abner Balberry.

"If Nat wants another piece, he shall have it," was the lady's quick answer.

"Oh, certainly! certainly!"

"Ma, I want another piece," came promptly from Fred.

"You've had two pieces already, Fred."

"I want another."

"Not to-day."

"Just a little piece!"

"Not another mouthful!" And Mrs. Balberry placed the remainder of the pie in the cupboard.

"I can't never have nothing!" cried Fred, kicking the leg of the table.

"You'll have a box on the ears, Fred Guff, if you don't behave yourself," answered his mother, and then there was silence.

After dinner, Nat talked with his uncle for a while, and then putting on an old coat, went up into the dusty garret, and hauled out the old trunk. It was strapped, but not locked, so he had no trouble in opening it.

"What are you going to do?" asked Fred, who had followed him.

"Look over some papers," answered our hero, briefly.

"Want me to help you?"

"No."

"What are you going to do with the papers?"

"Take some of them to the city with me."

"Are they yours?"

"Yes."

"Say, don't you think it would be a good plan for me to go to the city and git a job at ten dollars a week?" went on Fred, sitting down on the top garret step.

"Yes, if you could get the ten-dollar job."

"Why can't I git it? You got it."

"I was lucky, that's all, Fred. Before I got it I might have starved to death."

"Huh! Couldn't you git me a job with your boss?"

"I don't think so."

"I'm just as smart as you are, Nat Nason."

To this our hero made no reply. He had brought out some of the papers, and was looking them over with much interest.

"If you don't want to help me git a job, I'll git one on my own hook," continued Fred, who was as dull as he considered himself bright.

"Well, you have a right to do as you please," said Nat. "But please leave me alone now, Fred; I want to read these very carefully."

"Huh! I'm going to stay in the garret as long as I please."

Nat said no more, and Fred began to kick the step upon which he was sitting. Then, he began to thump on the rafters of the garret, bringing down some dirt on Nat's head.

"Stop that, Fred!" cried our hero, sharply. "Stop it, I say!"

"I ain't goin' to stop."

"If you don't stop, I'll put you downstairs, first thing you know."

"You can't do it."

"Yes, I can."

"Do you want to fight?" demanded Fred, rising and squaring off.

"No, but I want you to leave me alone."

"I ain't touched you."

"No, but you were knocking the dirt down on me. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"I've got as much right in this garret as you have, that's why."

"You are mean."

"Don't you call me mean!" blustered Fred, and coming closer, he hit Nat on the shoulder. At once our hero hit back, and Fred received a thump in the mouth that caused him to topple backwards.

"Don't!" he screamed. "Don't—don't hit me again."

"Now, are you going to leave me alone?" demanded Nat.

"I'll tell my ma on you."

"If you do, I shall tell her how you annoyed me," answered Nat.

"Come down in the barnyard and I'll fight with you," said Fred, but, as he spoke, he retreated down the stairs.

"Don't be a fool, Fred. Behave yourself, and we'll get along all right," said Nat,

and then Fred passed to the lower floor, banging the stairway door after him. There was a hook on the door, and this he fastened after him.

"Now, Nat can stay in the garret till I let him out," he muttered to himself.

When left to himself, Nat dragged the old trunk to one of the windows of the garret, and then began a systematic investigation of all the papers the box contained. He soon learned that the majority of the documents were of no importance, but there were half a dozen which looked of possible value, and these he placed in his pocket. Two of the sheets referred directly to the land in New York City.

"I hope these are what Mr. Garwell is looking for," he said to himself.

Having put the trunk back where it belonged, Nat started to go below, only to find the door hooked fast from the other side.

"Fred!" he called out loudly. "Fred, open the door!"

"Ha! ha! Nat Nason, how do you like being a prisoner?" came from Fred, who had been resting on a bed in a nearby room.

"I want you to open the door."

"What will you give me if I do?"

"I'll tell you what I'll give you if you don't!" cried Nat, angrily.

"What?"

"A good thrashing."

"You can't do it."

"Are you going to open the door?"

"No."

Fred had scarcely spoken when Nat pressed on the door, and the hook flew from its fastening. As the door burst open, Nat leaped from the stairway and caught the other boy by the collar.

"Now, then, that for locking me in," he cried, and boxed Fred's ears soundly.

"Stop!" roared Fred. "Stop, Nat Nason."

"Will you behave yourself after this, and leave me alone?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Then, see that you do," went on Nat, and flung the other boy from him. Fred picked himself up in a hurry, and ran below. He vowed he would get square, but during Nat's stay at the farm he could not muster up courage to do so.

CHAPTER XXV

BACK TO THE CITY

On the following day Nat arose at five o'clock, and put on an old suit of clothes. Slipping downstairs he hurried to the barn, where he fed the horses and then milked the cows. He was just finishing up when his uncle appeared.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Abner Balberry. "Right back into harness ag'in, eh?"

"Yes, Uncle Abner; I thought I'd like a little taste of old times."

"You've done putty good to get through so quick, Nat. I wish Fred was such good help."

"Doesn't he help at all?"

"Not unless you drive him all the time. His mother gits after him, an' so do I, but it don't appear to do no good."

"He wants to go to the city and try his luck."

"Humph! He'd starve to death."

"Perhaps it might teach him a lesson."

"Well, he's got to do somethin' putty soon. I ain't goin' to support him if he won't work."

For the balance of the day Nat helped his uncle around the farm. It was rather hard work, but he did not complain, and Abner was greatly pleased.

"Nat, if you git tired o' the city, you come back here," said his uncle, on parting. "Remember, I'll make it right with you."

"I'll remember, Uncle Abner," responded Nat.

"Somehow, I guess I didn't use to understand you. You're a putty good boy after all."

"It's kind to say so."

"An' it wasn't right fer me to say you sot the barn afire," added Abner, earnestly.

"We'll let bygones be bygones," answered Nat, and then he shook hands with his uncle.

When Nat started back for New York, his Uncle Abner drove him to the

When Nat started back for New York, his Uncle Abner drove him to the railroad station at Brookville. Fred wanted to go for the ride, but his mother told him he must stay at the farm.

"You go and cut the wood," said she, sharply. "If you don't you'll get no supper to-night."

"I ain't goin' to cut no wood," growled Fred.

"Yes, you are—and do it right now, too."

"Hang the wood," muttered Fred, savagely. "I ain't going to stay on the farm. I'm going to New York, same as Nat."

At the depot Nat and his uncle parted on the best of terms.

"If you kin git off at Christmas, come an' see us," said Abner Balberry. "We'll have a good fat turkey for dinner, with all the fixin's."

"Thank you very much," said Nat. "Perhaps I'll come—if I can get away."

The run to Cleveland was quickly made, and here our hero found that he would have an hour to wait before the arrival of the train for New York. As his dress-suit case had been checked, he felt at liberty to walk around, to see the sights.

"How different matters are from when I first struck this city," he thought, as he walked along one of the streets. "Then I was a real greeny, but I didn't know it."

Nat was returning to the railroad station when he suddenly heard his name called, and turning, found himself confronted by Paul Hampton.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hampton?" he cried, and shook hands. "I am real glad to see you."

"And I am glad to see you," answered the young man. "But how comes it you

"And I am glad to see you," answered the young man. "But how comes it you are in Cleveland. I thought you were in New York."

"I've been back to the farm for a couple of days—on business and pleasure combined. Aren't you in Buffalo and Niagara Falls any more?"

"Oh, yes, a law case brought me here. How are you doing?"

"Very well indeed."

"I am glad to hear it."

"You were awfully good to give me that hundred dollars," continued Nat, earnestly, "I never expected it."

"I hope it did you lots of good, Nat."

"It did and it didn't."

"What do you mean?"

"The money was stolen from me—or rather I was swindled out of it. That opened my eyes to the fact that I was not as smart as I had imagined myself to be." And then our hero related the experience he had had with Nick Smithers, alias Hamilton Dart.

"That was too bad," said Paul Hampton. "I trust you locate this Smithers some day."

"So do I."

"What are you doing?"

"I am with a real estate broker. I am learning shorthand and typewriting, and I am to become his private secretary."

"Then you are on the right road, and I congratulate you. The real estate

business is an excellent one, especially in a large city like New York."

Paul Hampton walked to the depot with Nat and saw him on the cars. Soon our hero was off. The trip back to the metropolis was made without anything out of the ordinary happening.

"So you are back," said John Garwell, when our hero presented himself at the office. "I hope you enjoyed the trip."

"I did, very much, Mr. Garwell."

"How did your uncle treat you?"

"Finely, sir."

"Did you find any papers of value?" went on the real estate broker.

"I found half a dozen which I wish you would look over." And Nat brought forth the documents.

"I am anxious to close that real estate deal," went on John Garwell. "Others are getting wind of it, including that fellow Shanley from Brooklyn. He is doing his best to make me lose on the deal."

"Is Rufus Cameron in with him?"

"I believe he is. Both of them are very bitter."

"I suppose they are bitter against me too," observed Nat soberly.

"It is more than likely. But that can't be helped, Nat. In business a man is bound to make more or less of enemies."

John Garwell was very busy, and said he would look over the documents the next day. But on the following morning he was called out of town, so the documents were not examined until some days later.

As soon as he returned to the office, Nat went to work with vigor for over a week, to make up for the lost time. He had a great deal of writing on hand, and one evening he remained at the place until after nine o'clock.

As Nat had been indoors nearly all day, he resolved to walk home, just for the physical exercise and to get the fresh air. He started up Broadway, and was soon as far as Tenth Street. Here he attempted to cross the thoroughfare, but was stopped by a jam of cars and other vehicles.

"Let me alone!" he heard a boy not far off say. "Let me alone! I won't give you my money!"

"You've got to pay for the papers, country!" cried another boy. "Come, fork over the fifteen cents."

"It's all I've got."

"I don't care. Fork over, or I'll—I'll mash you!"

The voice of one of the boys sounded familiar, and stepping to a dark doorway, from whence the voices proceeded, Nat was amazed to find Fred Guff, and a New York newsboy who was a stranger.

"Fred!"

"Why, if it ain't Nat!" cried the farm boy. "Where did you spring from?"

"I think I had better ask you that question."

"I want me money!" came from the newsboy.

"Help me, Nat. He wants to get my money from me. It's the last fifteen cents I've got!" pleaded Fred.

"What do you want of the money?" demanded Nat, of the newsboy.

"Oh, it ain't none o' your business."

"Oh, it ain't none o' your business."

"I tried to help him sell papers," said Fred. "But I couldn't sell those he gave me, and now he wants me to pay for them, anyway."

"Did you agree to pay for them?"

"I said I'd pay for them if I sold them."

"Then you don't get any money," said Nat, sharply, to the newsboy. "Now let this boy alone, do you hear?"

"Ah! wait till I catch him alone," muttered the newsboy, and ran off around the corner.

CHAPTER XXVI

FRED GIVES UP CITY LIFE

"Now then, Fred, tell me how it is that you are in New York," said Nat, when the newsboy had departed.

"I—I ran away from home."

"Did you have the carfare to this city?"

"No, I stole a ride to Cleveland on a freight train, and then I stole another ride on two trains to New York. I was kicked off of one train."

"And what have you been doing since you landed here?"

"Selling papers, and doing odd jobs. I couldn't get anything steady."

"Did you try to find me?"

"No," and the gawk of a boy hung his head.

"Why not?"

"Because I—I wanted to make my own way, same as you are doing. But, oh, Nat, it's awfully hard."

"Where have you been staying nights?"

"One night I slept in a doorway, and last night I slept in a park until a policeman came and chased me away."

Fred looked so forlorn and hungry that Nat could not help but pity him. Coming to the city to earn his living had evidently hit Fred hard.

"Had any supper?" he asked, kindly.

"I had a—a bun."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"How much money have you?"

"Fifteen cents, and I wanted to make that last just as long as I could."

"Come with me, and I'll get you something to eat," said our hero.

Fred was willing enough, and seated at a table in a restaurant he fairly devoured the beef and beans, bread and coffee set before him.

"Have a piece of lemon pie?" asked Nat.

"Can you afford it, Nat?"

"I guess so," and our hero ordered the pie, and also ate a piece, and drank a glass of milk, to keep Fred company.

"It costs a terrible pile to live in the city," sighed Fred. "You've got to pay for everything. When I landed, a man made me pay ten cents for crossing a torn-up street."

"He swindled you, Fred."

"Maybe he did. I know he ran off as soon as he got the money."

"Where were you going to stop to-night?"

"I—I don't know."

"You had better come with me."

"I—I can't pay for regular lodging," and again the boy from the farm hung his head.

"Well, I'll do the paying."

"Will you?" Fred's face brightened. "Say, Nat, you're real good! I'm sorry I treated you so meanly when you paid us a visit."

"We'll let that pass. Now, you are here, the question is, what are you going to do?"

"Can't I find a job? I'm willing to do anything."

"We'll see about that."

They walked to Mrs. Talcott's place, and here Nat explained the situation, and Fred was placed in a room that chanced to be vacant. He was exceedingly tired and dropped to sleep almost instantly.

"I'm going to telegraph to Brookville that you are here and safe," said Nat, the next morning. "I don't want your mother to worry about you." And the telegram was sent off before our hero went to the office. Nat gave Fred a dollar, and told him to try his best that day to find something to do.

"I'll get something," said Fred, but that night he came back greatly disheartened.

"I couldn't get a thing," he declared. "I tried about fifty places. In one place a man kicked me out, and in another place a lot of boys called me 'Hayseed,' and threw lumps of dirt at me. I—I guess I'll go back to the farm."

"Don't you want to try it for another day?" asked Nat. "I'll pay your way." He knew the experience would do Fred good. The boy from the country consented; but at night he returned more discouraged than ever.

"I was a big fool to leave the farm," he sighed. "The city is no place for me. The noise makes my head ache, and I get lost every time I turn a corner. I wish I was back to Brookville."

"Very well, you shall start back to-morrow," answered Nat.

"But I ain't got the carfare, and I hate to try riding on the freight cars again."

"I'll get you a railroad ticket," answered Nat, and he did so, and also gave Fred some change for his meals. Fred was more than thankful, and actually cried on parting.

"You're the best boy in the world, Nat," he sobbed. "The very best! Just wait till you come back to the farm! I'll show you how I can treat you!" And then he was off for home, a sadder but a wiser youth.

"To go back to the farm was the best thing that fellow could do," was Dick's comment. "Why, he wouldn't amount to shucks here, even if he stayed a

year."

"We can't all be city folks," said Mrs. Talcott. "Some men must remain farmers."

"The trouble with Fred is, he doesn't like to work," said Nat. "But this may teach him a lesson."

On the day that Fred left, Nat was called to the office by John Garwell.

"Nat, I want you to go to Springfield, Massachusetts, immediately," said the real estate broker. "See when you can catch a train."

"A train leaves the Grand Central Depot at eleven-thirty," was our hero's answer, after consulting a time-table.

"Then you have plenty of time. Take this document and turn it over to Mr. Perry Robertson."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't give it to anybody else."

"Shall I wait for Mr. Robertson, if he isn't in when I call?"

"Yes."

"All right, sir."

No more was said, and Nat prepared for the trip without further delay. He wished to ask his employer about the documents found in the trunk, but saw that Mr. Garwell was too busy to be interrupted.

Nat was getting used to taking short trips to various cities, so the ride to Springfield was no great novelty. He put in part of his time at reading a newspaper, and the balance at studying shorthand from a book which he carried with him.

carried with him.

Arriving at Springfield, Nat found he would have to wait until evening before he could see Mr. Perry Robertson. This made him stay in the city overnight, and he did not arrange to go back to New York until ten o'clock the next morning.

He had just paid his bill at the hotel, and was passing the smoking room, when he saw a man who looked familiar, get up from reading a newspaper, and walk toward him.

"Hamilton Dart!" gasped our hero, and rushing forward he caught the swindler by the arm.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SCENE AT THE HOTEL

The fellow who had posed as a broker and commission merchant was taken completely by surprise when confronted by Nat, and for the moment did not know what to say.

"I guess you didn't expect to see me again," said our hero, after a pause, during which Nick Smithers—to use his real name—glared fiercely at the youth.

"Excuse me, boy, but I don't know you!" said the swindler, at last. "You have made a strange mistake."

"Oh, no, I haven't," answered Nat. "You are Hamilton Dart, alias Nick Smithers."

"My dear young friend you are in error. My name is Josiah Garfield, and I am from Concord, Massachusetts."

"I am not mistaken. You are Nick Smithers, and you are the rascal who swindled me in New York City."

"Boy, you must be mad!" burst out Nick Smithers, in assumed indignation. "I a swindler! Preposterous!"

"It's the plain truth, and there is no use of your denying it."

By this time a small crowd was gathering around. Soon a clerk of the hotel came up hastily.

"What's the trouble here?" he questioned, anxiously.

"This boy is crazy," said Nick Smithers.

"No, I am not. This man is a swindler, and I want him arrested," came from Nat. He made up his mind, come what might, he would stand up for his rights.

"I am an honest man—well-known in Concord, where I keep a jewelry establishment," puffed Nick Smithers. "This is an insult to me." He turned to the hotel clerk. "I shall hold your hotel responsible for this."

"I—this looks as if you were making a mistake," said the clerk to Nat. "This gentleman has been stopping here for over a week. He is registered on our book as Josiah Garfield."

"He has half a dozen names," said Nat. "I tell you he is a swindler."

"And I say the boy is crazy. Boy, if you say another word, I'll have you locked up."

Nick Smithers thought Nat was so green that he would back down, but for once he made a mistake.

"Call a policeman, please," he said to the clerk. "We can talk this over when we get to the police headquarters."

"Are you sure of what you are doing?" asked the clerk.

"Yes, I am sure of it. I can prove beyond any doubt whatever that this fellow is a confidence man and a swindler. He swindled me out of a hundred dollars in New York, and he swindled several others out of the same amount. Just help me to lock him up and I'll get all the witnesses necessary."

"That's straight talk," came from a commercial traveler standing nearby. "If the boy can prove what he says this man ought to be arrested by all means."

"He can't prove a thing," answered Nick Smithers, but he began to grow hot and cold, for he realized that Nat meant business and was not to be overawed as easily as he had imagined.

"I'll call a cop!" piped in a newsboy who had drifted into the room. "I see one on de corner a minit ago," and away he ran to execute his errand.

"The police will have to settle this," said the hotel clerk. "If you are making a mistake it will cost you dear," he added, to Nat.

"I am making no mistake," answered our hero, firmly.

This reply set Nick Smithers to thinking. To try to bluff Nat was one thing; to prove his innocence at the police station might be quite another.

"I can't bother to go to the station—I've got to get a train for Boston!" he cried, and ran from the room with all of his speed.

"Stop him!" yelled Nat, and, began to give chase. "Stop him!"

The cry was taken up by several others, and all began to run after Nick Smithers.

"Keep my valise—I'll catch him if I can!" said Nat, to the hotel clerk, and off he sped, and was soon ahead of the others who had joined in the chase.

If there was one thing that Nick Smithers could do well, it was to run, and now he made the best possible use of his rather long legs. He darted out of a side door of the hotel, down the square, and around a corner leading into a back street lined with small shops and dwellings.

"The young fool!" he muttered, as he sped along. "Who would have dreamed of his turning up in such a place as this?"

At last the swindler turned into another street. A car was passing and he hopped aboard this. Not to be seen, he dropped into a seat and crouched down. He rode on the car a distance of a dozen squares and then left, and hurried to a small house setting far back, in a rather neglected garden. The house was to let, and he pretended to be looking it over, and thus passed to a back porch and out of sight.

Nat continued the hunt for the swindler for a good hour and then gave it up.

"Well, how did you make out?" asked the hotel clerk, upon his return.

"He got away from me."

"He put on a pretty good front, if he was a swindler."

"Yes—that's how he came to swindle me and several others," answered our hero.

"Did you report the case to the police?"

"There is no use of doing that."

"Why not? They'll help you all they can."

"That may be true. But by the time my report is in, that rascal will be miles and miles away."

Nevertheless, Nat was persuaded to report to the city authorities before he went to the railroad station. He had missed his train and so had to lay over until three hours later.

This was fortunate for him, for a little later came a telegram from John Garwell, which ran as follows:

"Go to Albany at once and get papers from Caswick & Sampson."

This made Nat change his plans, and he at once found out when a train could be had for Albany. Half an hour later he was aboard of the cars, little dreaming of the surprise in store for him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A SUDDEN PROPOSAL

After the excitement of the chase was at an end, Nick Smithers had a chance to think matters over, and he concluded to get out of Springfield without delay.

He was much upset because of Nat's unexpected appearance, and the fact that his satchel and belongings were still at the hotel did not tend to add to his good humor.

"I can't go for those things, or send for them," he reasoned. "Confound that boy! Who would ever have dreamed that he would make such trouble for me? I took him for a regular country greeny. But he's as sharp as a razor!"

For a long time matters had been going illy with Nicholas Smithers, alias Hamilton Dart, alias half a dozen other names. He had tried to work one of his swindling schemes in Springfield, but nobody had taken his bait, and his ready funds were consequently running low. When he had money he lived

extravagantly, so that his ill-gotten gains never lasted him any great length of time.

"Something must be done, and that pretty soon," he reasoned. "Wonder where I had best go next?"

Before going to Springfield he had had in mind to try Albany, and now he resolved to go to the latter-named city by the first train. This train was the very one upon which Nat was riding, but the swindler did not immediately discover this.

Some miles out of Springfield the train stopped at a small station. The only person in waiting was a young lady handsomely dressed, who did not appear to have any baggage. She got in, and as chance would have it, took a seat close to the swindler.

Nick Smithers had always interested himself in those around him, and he looked the young lady over carefully. She was certainly beautiful, and she appeared to be rich.

"Traveling all alone, eh?" mused the swindler. "And no doubt she has money. Wonder if I could get anything out of her?"

He watched his chance, and when she happened to drop her handkerchief, he promptly picked it up.

"Charming day," said he, with a smile.

"It is indeed beautiful," said the young lady, turning her dark, brilliant eyes full upon the rascal.

"Do you enjoy riding in the cars?" he went on, with another smile.

"I? Well—I—I—What will you say to me when I tell you that now, for the first time, I find myself in the cars?"

"For the first time?" repeated Nick Smithers, in astonishment.

"It is even so," said the young lady. "I do not wonder that you are surprised. I —I presume there are few cases like mine." And she heaved a long sigh.

"Here is certainly a mystery!" thought the confidence man. "Can she have lived all her life in the backwoods, or what? I must investigate this."

"You are surprised?" she said, softly.

"I must confess that I am, madam. Perhaps you have a dislike to cars?"

"No, not in the least."

"Then——" And Nick Smithers paused questioningly.

"I—I—perhaps I had better tell my story," faltered the young lady. "I need a confidant, and I need advice. Can I trust you, sir?"

"You assuredly can," said the swindler, instantly. "If I can be of any service whatever to you, command me."

The young lady glanced around shyly, to see that no other passengers were near.

"I presume I shall have to tell my whole story," went on the young lady. "It is rather long."

"Never mind—we have plenty of time," answered Nick Smithers.

"My father died when I, his only child, was very young. My mother was already dead. My father left a large fortune, estimated at that time, at about a hundred thousand dollars."

"That's some money," thought the swindler. "I hope she has some of it with her."

"Of course, it was necessary to leave me in charge of someone. For this trust my father's brother was selected. He was poor, never having met with the worldly success that crowned my father's efforts. The allowance he received for caring for me and my inheritance was liberal. Shortly after my father died my uncle moved to the town where I boarded the train, living in a house which was a part of my father's estate."

"I understand," said the swindler, nodding. "Go on."

"According to the terms of my father's will my uncle was to have sole charge of my property until I was twenty-five, unless I should before that time get—get married." The young lady blushed. "It was a stupid provision, in one way, for it made my uncle take me to that out-of-the-way place, and practically keep me buried alive, for fear I would get married before I was twenty-five."

"He wanted to hang on to a good thing," said Nick Smithers, with a laugh. "But please proceed."

"At first I did not understand my uncle's motive, but as I grew older my eyes were opened, and at last I resolved to—to—well, to get out of his power."

"And so you ran away, is that it?"

"Yes. This morning I succeeded in eluding my uncle's vigil, and here I am. I came away in such a hurry that I brought with me no extra baggage. No doubt you were surprised to see me enter without so much as an extra wrap."

"I thought you might be going only a short distance."

"I scarcely know where I am going."

"Then you have formed no plans?"

"None whatever. I have not had time, and I know so little of the world. All I care for now is, not to fall into the hands of my uncle until—until——"

"You are twenty-five or married," finished the swindler.

"Exactly."

"May I presume to ask you your present age?"

"Yesterday I was twenty-one."

"Then, legally, you ought to be your own mistress."

"So I thought. That is one thing which gave me the courage to run away."

There was a short spell of silence, during which Nick Smithers did some rapid thinking. He felt that here was a chance to make a round sum of money. If this young lady was rich, it would be a stroke of luck to get her in his power.

So far the swindler had never married. He had once proposed to a fine girl, but she had read him thoroughly, and rejected him. It might not be a bad scheme to propose to the girl before him. He could see that she was very romantic, and he was willing to do almost anything for money.

"I feel honored that you have taken me into your confidence," said he. "Permit me to introduce myself, Lancelot Powers, from Boston. I am traveling for my health."

"I am pleased to know you, Mr. Powers. My name is Clara Rosemead, and my father was Colonel Rosemead, of the International Cable Company."

"I shall consider it my duty to do all I can for you," went on Nick Smithers. "You—you—well, to tell the strict truth, you interest me mightily. In fact, Miss Rosemead, I can't help but love you."

"Oh!"

"I trust that you are not offended?" said the swindler, hastily.

"Oh, no, Mr. Powers. But—I didn't quite expect this. But I—I well, I like you, too." And again the girl bent her dark brilliant eyes on him.

"If you'd marry me you'd make me the happiest man in America!" went on Nick Smithers. "It would be so romantic!" he whispered. "Think of how we met on the cars, and fell in love at sight!"

"It would be romantic!" she clasped her hands together. "I'll do it!"

"Good! It will be a fine thing to outwit this uncle of yours."

"Yes! yes! We must outwit him by all means. If he should learn of what I am doing——"

"He can learn the truth—after we are married, Clara." And then Nick Smithers gave the girl's hand a tight squeeze. Had they been in a more secluded place he would have kissed her.

"I—I—am happy!" she said, softly.

"What do you say to getting married when we reach Albany?" went on the swindler. "Then we can return to your home and demand that your uncle make a settlement."

"I shall do as you think best, Lancelot. I know I can trust you," she answered.

"This is the safest snap yet!" thought Nick Smithers. "Once I get hold of her money I can hold her right under my thumb. She has been kept in such seclusion that she knows absolutely nothing of the world at large. And such a beauty, too! Nick, for once you have certainly struck it rich!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CAPTURE OF NICK SMITHERS

During the next half-hour Nick Smithers and the young lady became very confidential. She stated that she had just fifty dollars with her, but did not show the money.

"My uncle is a strange man in some things," she said. "He keeps not less than ten thousand dollars of my money in the house, and all in dollar bills!"

"He certainly must be strange," said Nick Smithers. "Well, it will be an easy matter for him to turn over the bills to you."

"Yes, Lancelot; but you will have to take care of the money for me."

"I'll certainly do that," was the swindler's quick reply, and then he smiled to himself, over the glorious prospect ahead.

There was a dining-car attached to the train, and not long after the conversation recorded above, the swindler asked his bride-to-be if she would not take lunch with him.

"Why, yes," she answered. "I am very hungry, for I have not eaten anything since yesterday."

"Then come at once," was the answer, and Nick Smithers led the way into the dining car. He passed Nat, who was busy devouring a sandwich and a piece of pie, but strange to say neither saw the other.

Nick Smithers and the young lady had just ordered an elaborate lunch, when of a sudden the damsel gave a cry.

"Oh!"

"Oh!"

"What is the trouble?" questioned the swindler.

"Do you see that man?" And the young lady pointed to a small individual who had just entered the dining car.

"Yes. What of him?"

"He is my—my uncle!"

"Is it possible? Then he must be following you."

"He is!"

"Well, I shall protect you, so do not fear," whispered Nick Smithers. "Remember, we are to be married to-day. He shall not stop you. He can't do it, for you are twenty-one."

"Oh, Lancelot, I—I am so afraid!"

By this time the small man had reached the table at which the couple were seated. He stared in amazement.

"Hullo, Miss Jacobotson, what are you doing here?" he cried.

"Don't touch me!" screamed the young lady, wildly. "Don't touch me."

"This young lady is under my protection," came loftily from Nick Smithers.

"Really?" said the small man. "Since when?"

"Never mind since when. She is under my protection, and I do not want you to molest her."

"Say, do you know who she is?" asked the little man, curiously.

"I do."

"Well, she has got to go back to the asylum, and that is all there is to it."

"Asylum?" gasped Nick Smithers.

"That is what I said."

"I'll not go back!" screamed the young lady. "Lancelot, protect me!" and she clutched the swindler around the neck.

"Do you mean to tell me she belongs in an asylum?" came faintly from Nick Smithers.

"She does. She escaped from the lunatic asylum at Sarville yesterday."

"Wha—what is her name?"

"Mary Jacobotson. Her mind was turned years ago by reading romantic novels, and she imagines she has an uncle who is keeping her money away from her."

"Is she under the charge of an uncle?"

"No. Her father had her placed in the asylum, for he couldn't keep her at home. Her father is a well-to-do builder of Hartford."

All this time the young lady, who was indeed insane, was clinging tightly to Nick Smithers' neck.

"Don't leave me!" she implored. "I love you! Don't leave me, and you shall have a million dollars and a rubber doll! Don't leave me, Augustus! I implore thee, by the light of yonder stars!" And now she began to rave.

"I—I reckon I made a mistake," said the swindler, much crestfallen. "Let go of me!" And now he pushed the raving girl from him. The train had stopped at a station, and in another moment the asylum keeper had the patient on the platform, where she continued to rave. Then the train moved on.

platform, where she continued to rave. Then the train moved on.

Sinking back in his seat at the dining-car table, the swindler mopped the beads of perspiration from his forehead with his handkerchief. He was utterly disgusted.

"That is where I certainly put my foot in it," he muttered. "But I can be thankful I didn't marry the girl!"

"Sorry, sar, but you'll have to settle for this lunch," said the waiter.

"If so, I reckon I'll eat it," answered Nick Smithers, and proceeded to do so.

Nat had watched the whole scene with interest. At first he was inclined to confront the swindler without delay, but then reconsidered the matter.

"I must go slow," he mused. "If I'm not careful he'll get away again."

When Nick Smithers left the dining car Nat followed him to the smoker and saw the swindler settle down for a comfortable smoke.

"He isn't going to leave the train just yet," thought our hero. "I shouldn't be surprised if he is bound for Albany. If that's so, I had better wait until we arrive there. Then we'll be in New York State, where the offense was committed."

The train rattled on, and at the proper time rolled into the big station at Albany. Nat kept close behind Nick Smithers and at the same time looked around anxiously to see if he could find a policeman.

It was not long before our hero sighted an officer of the law, gazing curiously at the crowd leaving the train. At once he beckoned the policeman to come to him.

"What's wanted?" asked the officer, anxiously.

"Do you see that man?"

"Yes."

"He is a swindler, who is wanted in New York City for swindling several men and myself. I want him arrested. Be careful how you handle him, for he ran away from me in Springfield."

"You are sure of this?"

"I am positive. But be careful, or he will get away."

"He won't get away from me," said the policeman.

Nick Smithers was hurrying for the street when Nat and the officer of the law came up to him.

"Stop, Nick Smithers!" cried our hero, and caught him by the arm.

The swindler swung around, stared at Nat, and his face fell.

"This is the time you don't get away so easily," went on Nat. "Officer, do your duty."

"You'll have to consider yourself under arrest," said the policeman. "This young man makes a charge against you."

"Why, that young man is a lunatic!" cried Nick Smithers, thinking of his experience on the train. "They let him out of the asylum only day before yesterday."

"Don't you believe a word of it," said Nat. "This rascal is one of the slickest swindlers in the world. Take him to headquarters, and I'll go along and prove every word I say."

"You'll have to come along," said the officer.

"All right, I'll go," answered Nick Smithers, but an instant later he started to

"All right, I'll go," answered Nick Smithers, but an instant later he started to run away through the crowd. Nat, however, was on guard, and putting out a foot, he sent the rascal pitching headlong on the depot platform.

"Hi! what did you do that for?" demanded Nick Smithers, on arising. And he glared at our hero as if to eat him up.

"You'll come along with me!" came angrily from the policeman, and without more ceremony he marched the swindler to the police station, with our hero following.

CHAPTER XXX

NAT COMES INTO HIS OWN

Once at the police station, Nat made a charge against Nick Smithers, and then the swindler was asked what he had to say for himself.

"This is all a mistake," he said. "I am not the person."

"He is wanted in Chicago as well as in New York City," went on our hero.

In the meantime another officer had been looking up Nick Smithers' picture in the rogues' gallery.

"I don't think the young man is mistaken," he said. "Wait till I telephone to New York for more particulars."

This was done, and inside of an hour the rascal's identity was fully established. Then Nick Smithers broke down

Then Nick Smithers broke down.

"It's all up with me, and I may as well confess," he said, scowling at Nat. "But I must say, I never thought a country boy would run me down."

"Well, you see, I am not quite as green as I used to be," answered Nat, with a faint smile.

"But you missed it by not coming to me on the quiet," went on Nick Smithers. "Had you done so, you might have gotten your hundred dollars back. As it is, you'll not get a cent."

"That remains to be seen," answered our hero.

When Nat could get away from the police station he hurried at once to the law offices of Messrs. Caswick & Sampson, as directed by Mr. Garwell.

"So you are the young man John Garwell telegraphed about," said Mr. Sampson, shaking hands. "I am glad to meet you. The business on hand concerns you personally as well as it concerns your employer."

"Concerns me?" ejaculated Nat, in wonder. "How is that?"

"I am interested in a piece of property located in New York City, near Central Park. By some papers which you turned over to Mr. Garwell it would seem that you are likewise interested in the land."

"Through my grandfather?"

"Yes."

"Then he really owned a share of the land?"

"He did, and so far as Mr. Garwell and I can ascertain he never sold out his claim."

"What is the claim worth?"

"You will have to ask Mr. Garwell about that. He wanted me to sign certain documents, and let you take them to New York to-night. Can you do that?"

"I think I can. But the police may wish to detain me." And then our hero told of the arrest of Nick Smithers. Mr. Sampson became interested, and in the end went to the station with Nat. He knew some of the officials, so our hero had no more trouble.

"We shall send the rascal to New York as soon as the officers down there want him," said one of the police officials; and, later on, this was done.

Not to lose time, our hero took the night train for the metropolis. He had a berth in the sleeper, but it was a long while before he could get to sleep. There were many things to think about, and the question of property near Central Park was an absorbing one.

Arriving in New York, he went to his boarding house for breakfast, and then hurried down to the office. It was not until ten o'clock that John Garwell appeared.

"Did you get the papers from Mr. Sampson?" was his employer's first question.

"Yes, sir."

"And fix up those matters at Springfield, too?"

"Yes, Mr. Garwell, and I did some other things, too," added Nat. "I had that rascal, Hamilton Dart, alias Nick Smithers, arrested."

"Is it possible! Tell me the particulars," and Nat did so. "We must do what we can to get your money back. This chap may have some property somewhere."

"Well, even if I don't get the money back, it's a satisfaction to put him where he belongs," said our hero.

"Perhaps you'll not be so anxious to get that hundred dollars after you've heard what I have to tell, Nat," went on John Garwell, with a quiet smile.

"What have you to tell, Mr. Garwell?"

"It's about that property in which your grandfather and your father were interested."

"Is there a share coming to me?"

"Yes."

"What is it worth?"

"That remains to be learned. The hotel folks want all that tract of land, as I told you. I shall advise you to hold out for sixty thousand dollars."

"Sixty thousand dollars!" gasped Nat, thinking he had not heard aright.

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say that you think my share in that property is worth sixty thousand dollars?"

"Either that or pretty close to it. I would not take a cent less than fifty-five thousand dollars."

"It's a—a fortune!"

"It certainly is a neat sum of money for any lad to fall heir to. I trust, if you do get it, that you invest it wisely."

"I'll do my best to do that, Mr. Garwell. But this—stumps me! Sixty thousand dollars! What will Uncle Abner say when he hears of it!"

"I'm afraid he will be a bit jealous. I'm jealous myself," added the real estate

broker, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I know you are not," answered Nat, honestly. "Just the same, sir, if I get that money, you are going to have your full share for helping me get it."

"Well, I shan't object to my regular commission."

"And you are going to have more," added Nat, firmly.

"The way matters have turned out will make that Shanley of Brooklyn sick," continued John Garwell. "And it will make Rufus Cameron sick, too. The business will be transacted entirely through me, and they will not get a cent in commissions."

"Well, I'm glad to get back at Rufus Cameron," answered Nat. "I haven't forgotten how he treated me."

"His aunt will have nothing more to do with him. He has got to support himself."

"I hope it makes a man of him," said our hero.

The next three weeks were busy ones for Nat. He had to appear against Nick Smithers, who was brought to New York, tried, and sentenced to several years in prison. It was found that there was money coming to the swindler, and through this our hero and the others who had put up their money for positions with "Hamilton Dart," received what was coming to them.

"It was great of you to run him down," said the sick man to Nat. "This return of money will please my sister."

"And I am thankful too," added Harry Bray.

The day after Nick Smithers was convicted the deal concerning the property near Central Park was closed. It was shown that a part of the property really belonged to Nat, and the sum of sixty thousand dollars was eventually turned

belonged to Nat, and the sum of sixty thousand dollars was eventually turned over to the youth for this. But this was not until he was of age.

"Nat's a rich man now," said Abner Balberry, when the youth became twenty-one. "He's got a reg'lar fortune."

"You shall have something of this, Uncle Abner," said our hero, and he gave his uncle five thousand dollars in cash. He also gave the same amount to John Garwell.

In the meantime our hero had stuck close to the real-estate business, and learned it thoroughly. He was still John Garwell's private clerk.

"Are you going to leave me, now you have your fortune?" questioned the real estate broker, anxiously.

"Do you want me to leave?"

"No, indeed!"

"How would you like to take me in as a partner, Mr. Garwell?"

"I'd like it first-rate, Nat—in fact, I was going to mention that myself."

"Then let us form a partnership," and this was done without delay. The new firm, prospered from the very start, much to the satisfaction of all concerned.

In the meantime, Nat did not forget his old friends the Talcotts. Although he no longer lived with them, he visited them often. He learned through the widow that her son was anxious to buy out the store in which he worked. The price was twelve hundred dollars, and one day Nat bought it, and had the transfer made out in Dick's name.

"You deserve this, Dick," said he. "When I was a stranger and mighty green you did your best by me."

"Well, you've paid me back," said Dick, with a grin. "You're a gentleman, Nat

"Well, you've paid me back," said Dick, with a grin. "You're a gentleman, Nat, you are."

"And how about being green?"

"You're not green any more. You're as smart as they make 'em!"

Since then the years have rolled on. Nat is still in business and is doing well. He has married and settled down in New York City; and here we will leave him.

THE END

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