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The HIDING-PLACES

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THE HIDING-PLACES

A NOVEL

BY

ALLEN FRENCH

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1917

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THE HIDING-PLACES

CHAPTER I

"WHY, Binney!" cried Gertrude, "what is the matter?"

She and Margery and I had been sitting on the wide stone wall that runs above the South Farm's lower mowing. It is a very old wall, with its original central portion buttressed and widened by the stone ploughed out of the adjoining fields. Sitting on one side of it, with the girls on the other, while we were chatting I had carelessly pried up a broad flat stone that lay in the middle, between us three. Then, almost grown man as I was, my heart began to beat wildly, I panted for breath, and I felt my eyes straining at my find. For there, in a little cavity carefully made beneath the stone, lay the Flat Oblong Box.

It could be nothing else. The Thick Oblong had been found in 1839, the Flat Oval in '47, the Flat Round in '54. There were left the Cubical, the Thick Oval, the Flat Oblong—and beyond a doubt I had found the latter.

It was flat, scarcely more than an inch in thickness. It was oblong, about four inches by eight. Its dull lead had no gleam or glint whatever, but

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I felt that I could look within it, and could see the flash of diamonds, the glow of rubies. Though the sweat started out on my forehead, I was not hot. I was cold all over.

The girls must have been watching me as I stared down into the wall. Gertrude repeated her question. With an instinctive attempt to answer, I found that my lips were dry, and I began with difficulty to moisten them. Then Margery laid her hand upon my arm.

"Binney," she asked, "are you ill?"

God forgive me! When I thought of her it was with alarm; when I looked at her it was with suspicion. And her sensitive, sweet face first flushed and then paled as she drew away from me.

"Why, Binney!" she gasped.

Gertrude suddenly looked down into the wall. "Why, look here! He's found—" Her hand went out.

I seized her wrist, and drew her jewelled hand away. Though she cried out upon me, I held her until with my other hand—trying vainly to cover the box with my palm and fingers—I had taken out the treasure and stuffed it into my pocket.

"You are rough!" cried Gertrude indignantly. "You hurt me. And your hand is cold as ice!" She began rubbing her wrist.

"I beg your pardon, Gertrude," I said. But my real attention was on Margery, and Margery had seen. Her eyes grew big with astonishment, and then her face flushed again.

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"The Flat Oblong!" She scarcely breathed the words, but I heard them.

"Well," I demanded with hardihood, "what of it?"

"It's—it's years," she gasped, "since the last was found."

"Forty years last March," I said. "Seventy years since this was put here." I was willing to show my knowledge, but I was watching Margery carefully.

Gertrude had been prying down into the wall. "The sweetest little chamber!" she cried. "Like a tiny dome. Binney just lifted the cupola off, and there it was!"

I inspected the cavity. It had been made with care, of small stones fitted neatly together. Nothing more was inside, except a little leaf-mould in the corners. And there for seventy years, with but a loose flat stone to keep it safe, had lain the leaden box!

Our visitor began again to rub her wrist. "I don't see that it's yours," she complained. "We're on her father's land."

"Makes no difference," I asserted curtly. "In these cases findings are havings."

"What do you mean by these cases?" she demanded. "Are cigarette-boxes hidden all over the farm?"

Cigarette-boxes! "I tell you," I scoffed, "it's been there at least since 1824. A tin box would rust away in five years."

Gertrude, her eyes suddenly snapping with ex-

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citement, sat upright and looked at me. "It's the family mystery!" she cried. "The pirate hoard! The diamonds!" She looked from me to my cousin, and read confirmation in Margery's face. Swiftly turning to me again, she began to beg: "Oh, show it to me!"

But a sound took away my interest in Gertrude's soft eyes and her pretty mouth. I heard the tramp of approaching horses, of the big pair that belonged to my cousin Lon, Margery's father. In a moment he would be resting them close by, at the top of the rise. I heard the rare sound of his harsh voice, encouraging the horses; in imagination I saw the pale face above the sparse black beard, and the gray eyes whose meaning, since first I began to puzzle about them in my childhood, I had never been able to read. I realized that I did not wish to meet him. Then I wondered how to get away.

I was on Cousin Lon's land with a vengeance; it was at least two hundred yards to the boundary, with a thick belt of scrub woodland to cross. How could I be sure that he would respect the old buccaneer's will? If he did not, how could I resist him? I had considerable conceit in my own strength; but Cousin Lon, in spite of his unhealthy pallor, was the strongest man in Petersham.

I felt a little tremor as, for the first time in my life, I knew what it was to meet a possible enemy. A word from Margery, and Cousin Lon would know. I looked at her while, with a hand carefully

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guarding my pocket, I got down from the wall and stood at the edge of the farm road. Margery did not need to be told what I was thinking. I saw her lip quiver.

"Well," I remarked, as carelessly as I could, "I must be going." I saw the horses' heads nodding up the rise.

Gertrude sprang from the wall in disgust. "Aren't you going to show it to me?"

"To-morrow, perhaps," I answered, as easily as I could. I was too proud to cut and run, but how I wanted to! I edged into the road.

Cousin Lon and his horses were close at hand. "Whoa!" he called, stopping them. "Thar—and a good haul, too!" Over their drooping heads, as he sat on the wagon seat, he looked at us good-naturedly.

It was not Margery that spoke to him, but Gertrude. She pointed at me. "He's found a box in the wall."

Cousin Lon's relaxed body stiffened. He did not speak, but glared at me.

"An oblong box," supplemented Gertrude.

I could hear my cousin gasp. "The Flat Oblong!" Suddenly he cast the reins on the horses' backs, and stood up.

I had always been in awe of Cousin Lon, and habit was too strong. I found myself backing across the road and faltering out his name. Though I made an effort to recover my dignity, it was fruitless. He leaped from the wagon—and I scooted.

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For a moment a boyish fright almost mastered me, yet I found a little self-possession. I knew where to go, and I knew that I could run. In three strides I was in the scrub. Then, though I heard him crashing behind me, and harshly calling, I set my suppler body to the task of avoiding the trees, and in no time left him well behind.

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CHAPTER II

WHEN I had crossed our wall and, listening, knew that I had distanced Cousin Lon, I dropped into a sullen walk. I was twenty, and I had run away! Moreover, Gertrude had seen me. Before Margery I had as yet no shame in showing my true meanness; but this comparative stranger, this pretty girl from the city, I wanted to stand well with. Gertrude's daintiness had roused my ambition. When she rode to the Hill to see us, as since her first uninvited coming she had done half a dozen times, she had both made me feel my clumsiness and roused in me a desire to rise. Looking always out upon the world with curiosity, I saw in Gertrude a type of what its men struggled for. I had known that I was not entirely unconcerned in the struggle, had felt that if ever I was to emerge from the farm, it must be soon. Not that I wanted Gertrude for myself, at least not yet. But I wanted to watch her, to know her better than this broken acquaintance had permitted me to do. Of course, I wanted her to think well of me—and before her eyes I had run away!

Reaching the spring, I threw myself down on the rock by its side, and raged at myself. It wasn't a mere indiscretion that I had committed: I had

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betrayed my own manhood. Then a sound caused me a fierce joy in the hope of retrieving myself.

I heard the thunder of hoofs. A horse was galloping, and I had not a doubt that Cousin Lon had unhitched one of his pair, and was hurrying to intercept me. I took three strides into the middle of our farm track, and waited. He should see that I was not afraid of him. The horse came dashing around the bend not fifty yards away, and I saw that my pursuer was Gertrude.

She was storming after me, intent on the pursuit. Her supple poise and her eager, snapping eyes made her wonderfully attractive. Gertrude was but nineteen, with every advantage that her youth could give to an intense, wilful spirit. Her cheeks were red, her white teeth gleamed, and the rush of her joyous, masterful presence quite blew away all my pugnacity. When she stopped her horse and looked down at me she was laughing.

"Safely away!" she cried.

Reminded, I frowned. "Where is he?"

"He gave it up," she answered. "In a minute he came back, and such angry looks! Why does he talk so little? He makes me uncomfortable, and so I came away."

She looked around her, first in front at the great shape of the double pine rising above the woods, then down at the spring. These were the two beauties of our farm, the latter all our own and private, the former a landmark known for miles.

"Why Binney," she said, pointing down at the

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spring, and speaking in a quiet little voice, "this is where I first met you!"

Yes. From opposite sides of the pool we had stared at each other in the surprise of that discovery. I had knelt to drink of the water, when into my mirrored vision glided the figure of this girl, like that of a hamadryad of the wood. Reflected in the quiet water, she had seemed mysterious and unreal; but when I raised my head the lovely truth was there. And we had looked, absorbed, until suddenly Gertrude's blush roused my own. I had felt it burning from my neck to my forehead.

Now I blushed at my next recollection. Gertrude smiled mischievously. "And you asked me, do you remember, what I was doing there?"

"Gertrude," I pleaded, "I was taken by surprise. I didn't mean it to sound as badly as that."

"You were quite right," she told me. "You were guarding your treasure—and, after all, it was a real one."

Then she slipped her knee loose from her saddle, dropped the reins, and held out her hands to me. Skilled by her training, I lifted her down. The horse, left free, at once began cropping the bushes. Gertrude came very close. Her head she cocked at me like a bright bird; her hand she put on my sleeve. "Binney," she said in the most winsome voice, "I want you to tell me all the old story."

She radiated comradeship, and her voice thrilled low with it. No one could resist Gertrude in that mood. Every bit of surliness fell away from me.

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Eagerly I led her down to the rock, and we sat by the spring side by side.

"You know," I began, "that these two farms are called Diamond Hill, and every field of them is posted against trespass." She knew. The head-strong desire to know what lay within the forbidden precincts had first led her to invade our solitude. Her smile drew mine; then I went on: "It's been so for three generations. We keep the trespass signs in repair, if we let everything else go to ruin."

"It all goes back to the old buccaneer," cried Gertrude, moving excitedly. "Tell me about him, Binney."

"He came home after the War of 1812," I told her. "The two farms were one place then, and had belonged to his brother, who was dead. The two sons were boys, the mother was sickly, and there was no order and no money. He bought the farm —it's remarkable how many sea-captains have set-tled in the towns roundabout—and lived here with the family. He put a lot of money into repairing and rebuilding: all these wonderful stone walls— they say he loved to have them built. When the older nephew married, the uncle built for him the house that Cousin Lon now lives in. And when the old pirate died, in 1824, he divided the land and the money between the brothers."

"His money, yes," agreed Gertrude. "But the treasure?"

"You know the story as well as I," I reproached her.

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"I know only what they tell in the village," she answered. "But you all, even Margery, are so close-mouthed."

It was, as a matter of fact, the first time that I had ever told the story to any one. But my new, warm glow of possession, now just beginning to steal over me, and doubtless Gertrude's winsomeness, loosened my tongue. "He had a lot of precious stones——"

"Was he really a pirate?" interrupted Gertrude.

"Pirate, buccaneer, privateer—nobody knew."

"And the stones were diamonds?" asked Gertrude.

"Mostly. But there were rubies and emeralds also. Maybe other kinds. Only they were very high-grade stones." It sounded as if we were discussing fertilizers. "Nobody knew he had them, for he never showed them. But his will told of them."

"And then people hunted everywhere?"

"No," I answered. "Nobody understood their value, and so no search was made. It was fourteen years before my great-grandfather found the Thick Oblong. He ploughed it out of the north meadow, and even though the ploughshare ripped the box open he didn't realize what he had till his wife remembered the will and sent for a jeweller. None of us ever crosses the north meadow without studying the ground for shiny stones. My great-grandfather went back and picked up half a dozen."

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"And they were valuable?" demanded Gertrude.

"Very," I answered with the largeness of ignorance.

Gertrude commented shrewdly. "I don't see that either of your families is very rich."

"Well," I admitted, somewhat abashed, "we've never been able to keep what we've got, and that's a fact. At any rate, after that first find both the farms were posted with signs. We don't like strangers on our lands."

"But you don't keep each other off."

"That," I explained, "was a condition of the old fellow's will. We may go where we please on each other's lands, and findings are havings, no matter which of us gets them."

"There were other finds?" Gertrude pursued.

I told her of the other two finds in the next fifteen years, the old knowledge that there were three more boxes to be found. Then Gertrude seized my arm.

"Binney," she wheedled, "let me see it."

I was itching to have the box in my hands. "Very well," I agreed. "But don't touch!" And I drew the box out of my pocket.

It had been roughly shaped out of thick sheet lead, and was heavy to hold. I saw the hammer-marks, doubtless the handiwork of the old buccaneer. Crude but effective soldering held the lapped edges. And the strange thing lay in my hands colorless, lifeless, forbidding. The patina of its seventy years' hiding invested it with a sinis-

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ter stoniness. With my imagination excited, I felt a little dread of what this thing might mean to me. Then I saw Gertrude's little hand stealing toward the box.

Very firmly, with a boy's whole-hearted selfishness, I put her hand away. "Gertrude," I said severely, "this is not for you."

"Open it!" she begged. "Cut open a corner, and let's see what's inside."

But the old family secretiveness was reasserting itself. "Open it here?" I scoffed. "If we dropped a diamond in these leaves or in the spring we'd never find it."

"In the road," she suggested. I shook my head. "Rattle it, then," she directed. "Let's hear the sound of diamonds knocking against rubies!"

Standing up, I shook the box, but could hear nothing, and told her so. "Let me listen, selfish!" And seizing my wrist, she shook the box close to her ear. But her eager face fell.

"I don't believe," she cried, "that there's anything in it!"

"Aha!" said I wisely, and pocketed the box.

She caught at my jacket. "Pig!"

But with entire indifference, making no allowance for natural feminine weakness, I twitched my coat away, and frowned down at her. "Gertrude," I notified her, "you don't belong in this at all."

"But I must see them!" she exclaimed.

"Come around to-morrow, then," I answered indifferently.

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"Oh, very well!" she said, tossing her head. Then with a sudden change of manner: "Aren't you going to help me on my horse?"

I caught the beast for her, held her foot, and lifted her into the saddle. She was not very light —in spite of the poets, no healthy girl is—but I was proud of my strength. When she was safely in the saddle, and I was gathering her reins for her, she said softly: "Binney, you really will show me?"

I looked up. Gertrude wore her most dazzling smile. She knew its effect, and I—I felt it. "Of course I'll show you," I promised and, quite forgetting my box, watched her out of sight.

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CHAPTER III

No sooner was Gertrude gone than I thought of my parents and hurried home. As I went my feeling of good fortune, the glow of possession, grew until, when I reached the barnyard, I was ready to shout with exultation. My good father, who had indulgently allowed me to leave my chores, and now was doing them for me, was coming from the barn with two brimming pails of milk. I rushed at him.

"Guess what I've got!"

"Easy, boy," he warned me.

But I thumped him on the chest. "Who cares for milk?" I demanded. And drawing out my prize, I held it under his nose.

It was so close to him that he wrinkled his forehead and drew away in order to see it. And then —down fell the milk! One pail, after splashing a jet high up on his trousers, remained upright; the other spilled its gushing contents over our boots. But father, heedless, seized the box.

"The Flat Oblong!" he gasped. He said no more, but turned the box over and over in his hands.

My mother came running from the house. "The milk!" she cried, and hastily set upright the spilled pail. But there wasn't a gill left in it. "Whatever has come over you?" she demanded.

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As a rejoinder my father put the box into her hands. The first sight of it stopped her reproaches. She looked from one of us to the other.

"It can't be—real," she stammered.

"But, mother," I protested, "I found it in Cousin Lon's wall."

"That's it," she asserted. "He's trying to fool us." Her frightened eyes still scanned us both.

I was not quick enough to think of a good answer, and her fear infected me. As for father, he was fairly seized with panic, and stuttered without saying a word. Then I whipped out my jackknife, opened it, and offered it to him. He received it with shaking hands, took the box from mother, and at the first attempt to cut the lead, gashed his finger. I took both knife and box and, while we all stood in the puddle of milk, began to cut.

So hard was the crust of the lead that it turned the blade, and the first thrust nearly wounded me. But I tried again and again until I had made an opening, where the bright edges of shining metal rewarded me. Hacking eagerly, rapidly dropping down the little bright shavings, I cut away at a corner until I had a respectable section of it nearly severed. Then in my haste I dropped the knife, bent the piece once back and forth, and fairly tore it away.

My mother held out her two hands like a cup, and I tilted the box over them. Out rolled a downy, yellowish ball, and another and another, cascading down until the hands were heaping full. We two

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males groaned in dismay. These were not stones. But my mother, looking close, cried, "Sewed in buckskin!" and scurried for the house and her scissors.

We came upon her in the kitchen, where she had dumped her handful on the table and was already at work, cutting open the first ball that she had again snatched up. Leaning close, I saw that it—a little lump about the bigness of a large marble—was indeed made of some dingy yellow undressed leather, caught together by neat stitches of unwaxed cobbler's thread. It was at these that mother was working. In a moment they yielded; she unrolled the leather, and displayed on her palm a little object, scarcely bigger than a big pea. It was angular and dimly white, like a worn bit of quartz.

We three looked at it and felt our fear was justified. This a diamond, or a ruby? Merely such a stone as could be picked up anywhere. My mother laughed harshly.

"And that good pail of milk!"

"Dern it!" growled father, taking the stone and looking at it. "Can it be—anything? Doesn't feel—" He passed it to me.

It felt soapy, almost greasy. It wasn't like any stone I ever saw. With some difficulty I opened my dry lips. "Open another."

Mother took a little larger ball and quickly was unrolling its skin cover. She held her hand in the light from the window, and the deep red gleam from

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the stone in her palm caused us to cry out in delight.

The shining thing was cut with many glittering facets.

Then the gleam dimmed as the light from the window was cut off. Mother closed her hand with a start, father clapped his hat upon the little heap of buckskin balls, and we all looked at the window. A man was peering in.

"Hi!" he called impatiently. "Where are you all, anyway?"

He rapped sharply, and I recognized him more by his manner than by anything that I could see of him, for his face was in heavy shadow. It was Mr. Worthen, banker, broker, Gertrude's father. Then behind him I saw a horse, two horses, and Gertrude on one of them. She had met her father and brought him with her.

Father went to the door and threw it open. "In here, sir," he responded.

My good father never had any dignity or force. Here was this stranger demanding entrance, and because he had a hearty way with him, an air of command, and social prestige—which we country folk recognized rather as knowledge of the world—my father was ready at once to admit him to this private matter of ours. But mother frowned, and in response to her gesture I swept all the gems into father's hat, and thence transferred them to my pocket. The leaden box lay neglected on the table.

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"Yes, sir," father was saying at the door. His tone was bright and eager, quite as much like a boy's as ever was my own. "Yes, sir, another find. I think they're jewels. Won't you come and see?"

Mother wagged her head at me in resignation as Mr. Worthen, with Gertrude following, came into the room. As for me, I sulked. I resented the intrusion—and I hated to have Gertrude come into our dingy kitchen. For our family of three did everything about our place: we were plasterers, painters, carpenters, farmers. No man ever came there to work for us, no woman to help about the house. What we could not find time to do simply remained undone. And so the kitchen plaster was black with the smoke of a generation; no scrubbing of mother's could get it clean. It was waiting till we men-folk could get time to paint, and to refinish the ceiling. Gertrude's bright presence made the room seem dark, and I made a vow which remained unfulfilled—oh, for so many months!

She saw my surliness, and made up to me at once. "You need father," she said. "You'll get cheated if he doesn't help you. Isn't it lucky I found him?"

A wonderful girl, Gertrude. Of course, to such a country boy as I a city girl would be a marvel; but this lass had not only beauty and daintiness, and an experience far wider than my own, but also the knowledge of the way to use all these in gaining her point. Nor did I fail to recognize her kindness in taking trouble with me, who twice within the

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hour had been rude to her. In just a moment we were smiling together.

Then she saw the box on the table and snatched it up; but in the moment of exultation her face fell. "You've emptied it!"

"Where are the stones, Hartwell?" asked her father briskly.

My father looked about him. "There were a whitish and a reddish one."

Mother produced them both. We had all given way: there was some sense, indeed perhaps there was wisdom, in consulting with Mr. Worthen. For what did such folk as we know of diamonds and rubies? In a minute the little heap was once more upon the table; and we three sat anxiously, Gertrude (with our first ruby in her hand) sat excitedly watching the banker while, with inscrutable face, he cut open each little ball.

There were thirty of them, and I think his features never twitched while, going from the smallest to the largest, he examined them one by one. Some were like the first we had found, dull, unpromising things. But most were far different, being cut gems that sparkled or glowed marvellously. Nine were red, one green, one deep blue. The rest were colorless, except for a faint tone of yellow that suggested a distantly human warmth, or of blue that gave them the uncanniness of the devil. Mr. Worthen at last laid them all out before him in a square and regarded them, balancing back on his chair.

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My father ventured to speak. "Are they worth anything, sir?"

Mr. Worthen nodded slowly, his eyes still on the stones. "I know something about these things; I buy them occasionally." I thought of the jewels which Gertrude, girl though she was, wore on her fingers, and made my first acquaintance with this strange passion.

"Well?" asked father tremulously.

"Thirty of them," counted Mr. Worthen. He looked at father with a sudden emphatic gleam. "I should say they'd average a thousand apiece."

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CHAPTER IV

We three sat perfectly still and looked at each other. Thirty thousand dollars. Thirty thousand dollars! My brain was jarred. Father looked at mother with his mouth wide open; and mother, returning his look, was slowly flushing a deep red.

Gertrude broke out excitedly. "Oh, how fine! And now Binney can get new riding things, and you can—" She looked around her at the dingy room, her thought plainly written on her face, but, suddenly recollecting her training, stopped.

"Here," said Mr. Worthen to me. "Roll up these things and pack them in the box again."

"Let me help," begged Gertrude. We fell to work. Gertrude caused delay by insisting on handling each stone, weighing it, feeling it, looking at it in various lights. She was constantly exclaiming at their beauty. As for me, I felt a strong but different pleasure. The strange feel of the uncut diamond I shall never forget. And that I could hold in my hand a thousand, two thousand, six, eight thousand dollars—it was intoxicating!

I was recalled to the others by hearing a question by Mr. Worthen. "There's never been any further division of the farms?"

"Never since they were first set apart by my great-granduncle," answered my father. "You

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see, for three generations there's been only one child in each family. And except for Margery, always sons."

"Your family arrangements would have gone to smash if ever one of the farms had been divided," remarked Mr. Worthen. "Especially if one of the heirs sold out his share to a stranger. You'd be warning each other off the farms."

But father met him there. "Oh, no, we shouldn't. For if you close your farm against your neighbor, he closes his against you. And then where are your chances? Human natur' couldn't stand it. Supposing that boy hadn't been on Lon's land to-day!"

"I was coming to that," answered Mr. Worthen. "Why aren't these stones Lon Hartwell's? Oh, I know all about the conditions of the will, but were they—are they—legal? Can't your cousin sue and get the stones?"

"No," returned father confidently. "For then I could sue him for the value of the stones in the Flat Round which his grandfather found on my side of the fence."

"Forty years back!" objected Mr. Worthen. But he said no more and sat thinking. I had been tying up the box in brown paper, a clumsy, undignified parcel. Yet thirty thousand dollars!

"Well," demanded Mr. Worthen suddenly, "what are you going to do with them?"

We three were puzzled, and again we looked at one another. I think Gertrude opened her mouth

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to speak; indeed she must have, for her father repressed her.

"Gertrude, be quiet!"

In my father's face I saw bewilderment, in my mother's something of alarm. All this property in gems, here in a New England farmhouse, eighty miles from Boston and two hundred from New York, the nearest markets for such merchandise. What could we country folk do? What value were they to us at all?

Mr. Worthen rose and went to the stove, to which he turned his back as to a fireplace, straddling oracularly. "Hartwell, if you should take those stones down to the city, you'd be a child in the hands of the jewellers."

My father nodded his assent. The very thought of the city alarmed him, as I well knew.

"Up here the things are in danger," Mr. Worthen pointed out. "They could easily be stolen. They would be ruined if your house burns. You ought to get them into safety."

He stood and watched us while we worried over the situation. I was impressed by his insight and much burdened by his solid figure while he stood and waited for us to decide. His bald crown nodded positively toward us; his side-whiskers bristled confidence; his small eye gleamed dogmatically; and his firm mouth showed that he was right.

Opposite him my father puzzled apprehensively. The soft hair was all awry; the chestnut beard was tremulous with the uncertain movements of his

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mouth. Uneasily he glanced from mother to Mr. Worthen.

"I'll tell you what," said the banker suddenly. "I'm going down to Boston to-morrow. I know where your stuff ought to be sold. If you say so, I'll dispose of it for you."

I felt relief. The keeping of a mere leaden box had seemed a simple matter; but now that the box had disgorged gems of such a price, the responsibility seemed greater than all of us could bear. But what were thirty thousand dollars to Mr. Worthen? I was glad that he had come.

"Of course I can guarantee nothing," he objected to father's confused thanks. "If I lose them, or if I'm wrong about the valuation—it may be only twenty thousand for the lot—why, I can't be responsible. But I can do better with them for you than you can do for yourself."

My father, very willingly and thankfully, took the box and put it in his hands.

The state of mind into which the new prospect put us was, at least for my father and me, indescribably elated. Out in the barnyard, when I went to fetch the horses, I found Gertrude's mare just finishing the milk, while my dog Jones sat by and licked his whiskers. All I could do was to laugh; and the best that I could think of when I had put Gertrude on her horse, was to tell her of it, and grin absurdly. At the same time my father, with a slightly fatuous expression, was listening to Mr. Worthen's warnings.

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"Now don't talk of this, Hartwell. Just keep your own counsel, answer no questions, and warn people off the place as usual. If it all gets out, you'll have treasure-seekers here by the dozen."

As for our secret, it was already spreading; for, though we did not know it, Gertrude had told her father the news in the presence of others. But father earnestly promised to keep off all comers. Then the beginning of a smile corrupted his seriousness.

Mr. Worthen leaned and slapped him on the shoulder. "Goes to the head, doesn't it? I remember the same when I made my first big hit."

He and Gertrude trotted away, down our stony roadway, where the rain had gullied the track into something like the dried bed of a brook. Gertrude flashed at me a last smile as they turned the corner; the clatter died away. Then father and I were able to grin at each other openly.

It was mother who could not rise to the height of our bliss. She discovered the empty pail, chased away the complacent dog, and mourned.

"No milk till to-morrow!"

"Rejoice, woman!" cried my father. "What is a pail of milk to us now? Aren't we rich?"

"Rich!" scoffed my mother. "And I cannot make bread to-night!" She turned her back and went into the house.

I, who knew her better, I sometimes think, than ever did my father, divined that she was concealing the conflict of her feelings. But my father was of a different mind.

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"Isn't that like a woman?" he demanded. "A very good woman she is, Binney; but the best of them get so set in their ways that even a change for the better is a calamity. Now you and I will make some profit out of this."

He began to sketch the changes that he had in mind. There should be a little machine-shop equipped; it would save time and labor in mending our tools. And we should have one of the new-fangled disk-harrows, and one of those hot-air pumping-engines. Then, with enterprise unspeakable, he began talking about buying a large stave silo, which he and I could set up.

As I listened I learned something about my father. I knew that he never wasted time in regretting his lack of possessions, nor the wastefulness of his forebears in frittering away the benefits of old-time treasure. Nevertheless, here was revealed a secret occupation of building air-castles. For I saw that his ideas did not spring from the inspiration of the occasion. The whole of the present structure had not only been planned already, filling our needs so exactly—it had been erected before, and now rose again with the greater ease that its joints had been accurately fitted.

But father was perfectly normal in one particular: in his paradise-farm he did not include servants. No maid must help at the house, no hired man must work about the place. Labor-saving devices, yes; but none of us would ever admit to the farm any one with the eye to recognize a find, and the

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cunning to conceal it. All helpers were thus ruled out of our count; no change of fortune, short of the discovery of the last two boxes, could make it possible to admit folk to the place. The ancient, half-crippled creature who used to live at Cousin Lon's while Margery was a child, was the only outsider who had ever been admitted to residence among us, and she had had neither the sense nor the courage to steal. Similarly, we on our farm looked for no enlargement of the household, and expected hard labor all our days.

Marvelling somewhat at my father's revealed day-dreams, I slipped away to find my mother. She sat by the kitchen-table, her chin on her hand, gazing abstractedly at the wall.

"Well, mother," I said, my hand on her shoulder. Mother looked up. She was a woman of large frame; I take my size from her. But even at forty, even in spite of her laborious life, her face was unwrinkled, and her skin clear. She looked at me out of her deep gray eyes, and I saw that she was suffering.

"I hoped," she said, "that it never would happen."

"Why, mother," I exclaimed, "when I was a boy we used to dream of it!"

"And now that you are almost a man I have dreaded it," she rejoined. "We live very much by ourselves, but at least we have been safe."

"And why shan't we always be safe?" I demanded.

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"There will be changes," answered mother.

"Of course," I returned, feeling, I admit, a boy's impatience with the caution of his elders. "Father is planning for an engine and a silo. You shall have a new stove, new cream-pans, dresses—everything!"

She smiled at the idea that she could be so easily satisfied. "These new people will take you away with them."

In spite of myself I felt a thrill. To go away, out into life! But I stammered a protest.

Mother smiled at my childishness, and rising, set about getting supper without milk.

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CHAPTER V

THAT mother was right in one particular I learned on the following day. Father sent me to the upper pasture to salt our young stock, and I took with me Jones, who always enjoyed such expeditions. But at the time when I unexpectedly found need of him Jones had lagged behind, having business with a woodchuck who seemed to be at home. I had come out into the lower pasture when I saw in front of me, about fifty yards away, four big boys busy at the stone wall. Now our walls are very broad, and carefully built of heavy stones, but the lads had already thrown down a rod of it.

I smothered my impulse to shout, and stepping behind a bush, looked back for Jones. The delay gave time to think. I was exceedingly alarmed. A few bands of such marauders, and we shouldn't have a tight fence on the farm. I wondered how to meet the situation.

Presently Jones came hurrying from his conquest. He was a big mongrel terrier, brindled and bristly, and at the moment a most unpleasant sight, with dirt to his eyes, and a bloody slobber at his jaw. He had met one enemy, and was ready for another. At my word he became attentive and very businesslike.

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When the four treasure-seekers discovered me close to them they howled, and turned to flee. But seeing Jones, they froze. He was so plainly disappointed at not having an excuse to pin one of them that they rolled their eyes at me in terror.

I named them one by one: of very respectable families they came; one of them the son of a deacon. But I was not angry with them; I could not afford to be. If any of us five had a real terror of the future, it was I. The labor of repairing the damage of a few such raids rose sickeningly before me.

"Now," said I, "you all have gone to Sunday-school, and understand the Golden Rule. I don't want this fence torn down; I want it built up. So do as you would be done by."

They looked ruefully at the stretch of fence, of which but a course or two was still in place. But without whining they fell to. A three-foot fence, four feet broad, is no easy thing to build, but they went at it manfully. I sat and watched; Jones, by occasionally sniffing at their ankles, helped on the good work. As the sun rose higher the lads shed their garments; but in spite of this they dripped water, and after nearly an hour visibly tired. At last the deacon's son turned on me bitterly:

"Consarn you, Binney Hartwell! If I were bigger, I'd lick you!"

"You don't understand, Jimmy Foss," I returned. "If you were bigger I'd lick you. But rest a while, all of you, and let me say something." They sat

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sulkily on the half-finished wall, while Jones sat in front, regarding them wistfully.

"I suppose I know why you're here," I said, "though how you know the story beats me."

"Everybody knows it," said one of them.

I winced at the thought that even now other raiders might be at work elsewhere. "You young idiots," I said, using language suitable to their comprehension, "haven't you heard that no two of our finds are ever in the same kind of hiding-place? The old pirate put it down in his will, and it's perfectly true. The first was buried in an open field, the second laid up on a rafter in a barn, the third lying in the middle of a blackberry-patch that later happened to be burned over. There won't be another box found in a stone wall, no matter if you tear down every one on both these farms."

They were looking at each other in shame, not of their present difficulty, but of their stupidity. "Aw," muttered Jimmy, "I'd forgotten."

"Forgetfulness doesn't pay," I remarked. But I was not satisfied. This new shame of theirs might be quite enough to keep them from telling this story—and I wanted it told, as a warning to others. I puzzled at the problem in vain. "Do you suppose," I demanded at length in disgust, "that I can wait here all day for you to finish that wall?"

Jones, taking the hint from my tone, sprang up eagerly. The boys, stiffly clambering down, set again to work. They were doing the job properly,

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for all had worked at wall building; and so, taking my bag of salt and leaving them to Jones, I wandered away a little. I was aching to scout for more mischief-makers; therefore, slipping behind a bush, I watched my captives through the screen of leaves. The boys looked after me, and when they thought that I was gone, tried the probity of their other jailer. Jimmy picked up his coat, and offered Jones something from a pocket. The dog growled so fiercely that Jimmy leaped to the wall again; and the others, who had hopefully watched the experiment, fell to work earnestly. I was free to do my scouting.

Quickly climbing farther up the hill, I found the colts in a corner of the pasture, and before them scattered my salt, all except enough for my favorite, Peter, a three-year-old that I had myself broken to the saddle. Him I now mounted, having for a bridle nothing more than a piece of string which I tied, Indian fashion, around his lower jaw. Once on his back, I soon persuaded him away from his companions, and then for half an hour I rode the farther boundaries of the farm, feeling sure that if trespassers came at all, they would come from that side. Finding no one—and much relieved I was—I brought the colt back, gave him the rest of my salt, and started for Jones and his prisoners. Once more the problem of getting their story told in the village began to puzzle me. And while I was thinking upon it I came upon more trespassers.

Clad in quiet colors, so as not to be conspicuous,

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two women were wandering across the field. I watched them with joy. In the rocky pasture scattered clumps of trees and bushes grew sparsely, and from one to another went these prospectors. Their parasols were disguised implements, for with their points they pried among the knotty roots, dug moss from crevices, and endeavored to turn the stones. Just as I approached the women from behind, one of them snapped her point.

"Drat it!" she exclaimed, holding up the ruined gewgaw. "Look at that!"

"Too bad, Mrs. Foss," said I.

They jumped and squealed, and fastening their startled eyes on mine, faltered a greeting. They were farmers' wives, sisters; one of them had come at least four miles. Even now her son was working at my wall.

"You've lost your way," I said, being buoyed to an unknown degree of suavity by my mastery of the situation. "You're at least a mile from the highway. Let me show you."

"Oh," said one of them hastily, "we came to call on your mother."

"Even then you're out of your way," I rejoined. "The track is just below here. I'll show you. Beautiful day, Mrs. Foss."

"Beautiful," she answered fervently. But she wiped her brow, and her sister's face was shiny with moisture. They doggedly produced commonplaces on the weather and the season until, dropping behind them at a narrow way between two

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thickets, I ushered them into the open space across which were Jones and his fatigue-party.

Jones, hearing voices, turned, saw the women, saw not his discreetly hidden master, and charged. Too long his spirit had been vexed by boys whom discipline forbade him to bite, but here was fair game. He came like a race-horse, and his snarl was terrifying. Two anguished souls cried aloud for help, and I succored them. Disappointed, Jones could but sniff hungrily at their skirts, while I led the bewildered pair up to the group at the fence.

Jimmy saw his mother, and his hair rose on his head. I knew that he wished that he had risked everything and had fled while Jones's back was turned. But it was too late. Mrs. Foss relieved her feelings by the glare that she cast on her son.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Working for me," I interposed. "Jimmy and his friends were picnicking, I suppose, and the wall fell down. But they're making it all right again."

Mrs. Foss's feelings must have been inexpressible, for she tried to speak and failed. I could not interpret the emotions of her maternal heart, but I detected in Jimmy the signs of fresh dismay. Yet for the other boys, and for Mrs. Foss's sister, the situation was much relieved. I saw the three boys slyly glancing at one another, and surprised a gleam of amusement on the woman's face. And I knew that my problem was solved, and that a journey to town for telling tales was spared me. The four boys, when freed, might have been able

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to keep their adventure to themselves. The two women would have been certain to hold their tongues. But the tale of Jimmy Foss and his mother, caught in the same pickle, was too good to keep. It would travel all through the town by night.

"Mother will be glad to see you," said I, offering to lead the way. The tension was broken, and while the women passed on, the boys turned again to the wall. I thought I saw appealing glances cast by Jimmy at his friends, but they paid no attention.

As for the farmers' wives, I led them to the lane, and pointed the way down-hill. "You can't miss the house now," I told them. "Mother will be at work somewhere. She won't be dressed for callers at this time of day, but I'm sure you won't mind that. And perhaps, Mrs. Foss, she has glue for your parasol."

They went on, and paid a very fidgety and brief call at the farmhouse. Mother was mystified by it until I told her my part of the story. The parasol had not been produced.

As for me, going back to where the boys were just finishing their job, I surveyed and approved it.

"You didn't think, of course, to turn the weathered faces out. But never mind, boys. It will take a dozen years to weather this bit like the rest of the wall, and all that time it will remind me of you."

Jimmy Foss, who at first would have been glad to get rid of me at any price, now took his dismissal

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surlily. If there had been a convenient hiding-place, I think he would have stayed. To face his mother when he got home, and to wait until the tale reached his father, was not a good outlook for James. But the other boys found in his plight, and in the contemplation of the lost face of the Foss family, balm for their own wounds. They kept together as they walked; Jimmy went by himself in a parallel line. And not one of them hurled back a reproach at me.

That afternoon I took another tour of the place, to see what I could discover. Jones, who was with me, ranged the bushes as if he regretted his lost opportunities of the morning. Luckily I was with him when he discovered the next prospector.

This was a summer person, a vacationer. His white flannel trousers were correctly turned up; he sported a straw hat of proper shape, and a pair of spectacles. He wore the pointed beard of the young college professor, and he carried a cane. With this he was gingerly poking at a hole in a tree. This was absurd, for the tree was not over forty years old.

Jones came ramping from the bushes, and the prospector promptly ascended the tree. The hole made an excellent foot-rest on the way up. Then solemnly he looked down at me.

"You may come down," I said, subduing Jones. "There's really nothing to be alarmed at."

"Your dog is dangerous," he complained when he stood at my own level.

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I saw no harm in trying to enhance Jones's reputation. "He is enthusiastic about strangers," I said. "He loves to bring home samples of trouserings. But when I'm with him he's perfectly safe."

"He oughtn't to go at large," said the stranger severely.

"He has an odd prejudice," I admitted, "against people who pay no attention to trespass signs. Perhaps you were not thinking when you passed ours."

The stranger reddened, and had nothing definite to say.

"If you take the shortest way down the hill," said I, "I am sure that you will reach the highroad in fifteen minutes. For that length of time I'm willing to keep the dog with me. Good day."

Mother laughed much at my description of his ambling departure, and I took much pride in my management of my three affairs. Maybe time has magnified my memory of my own cleverness, but I still think I did fairly well. But it was the last pleasure that I took out of inquisitive strangers. Our next visitor was a different sort of person.

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CHAPTER VI

It was the third day after the finding of the box, and I had begun to relax my vigilance in patrolling the farm. Signs of trespassing I had seen here and there, in occasional places where rocks had been overturned, or in the excitement of Jones over what appeared to be a trail of some kind. But no one had been so stupid as to pull down any more walls.

As to our attitude toward the two remaining deposits of jewels, it was very simple. One of our forebears—my great-grandfather, to be exact—had spent the remainder of his days, after the discovery in '54, in search of the other boxes. It had exasperated him to have the jewels taken from under his nose, on his own land, by his cousin from over the wall; and he tried to make good the unfairness of fortune. For sixteen years, day after day, the old man wandered over the Hill, and if ever we could be justified in having a ghost, it would be his. He went to his grave at last, and since his time never a Hartwell, on either side of the wall, had given a single unbroken hour to the search for treasure.

It wasn't that we never thought of it, for we did. To be sure, days would sometimes go by when, in the routine of the farm, I never turned my mind to

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anything beyond the duties of the hour. And yet such periods were rare. I believe that I am fortunate to have had, throughout my boyhood, the continual hope of better things, the dream of a fortune that might some day raise me above the farm. It turned me to speculation concerning life in the outer world, visions which might some day become reality. It turned me to books, to the cultivation of my speech, to the observation of dress and manner. Yet the drudgery of work with my hands made the outlook on these things a very sober one. I learned, perhaps by the influence of my mother working almost imperceptibly, that much of my hope was hollow, that the future could never bring me all of my dream—yet at the same time I continued to hope and to dream.

Father was less—a little less—practical than I. But we were both of us practical in one thing, the looking into any hiding-place that might contain a box as big as one's fist. I suppose the hardest thing was, having looked once, not to look a second time. There was a certain crevice in a big boulder that lay not far from the entrance of the east woodlot, on the way to the double pine. Once, thinking that I had not sufficiently explored the farther end of this crevice, I left the wood-wagon as it jolted along, and dug for a moment among the dead leaves. When I returned to my father he smiled with a cynicism born of his experience.

"You did that a year ago," he said. "I've done it three times myself. Pure waste, Binney."

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Thus I learned the uselessness of ever exploring a hole or a corner for even the second time. Once it was scraped out to the original rock, or bared to the old wood, no hiding-place was worth another thought. But the fact remained that somewhere the old pirate's remaining caches were waiting for us. None of us ever entertained the idea that some stranger had stumbled on one of the boxes, and had stolen with it away. And so I and my parents, and I make no doubt Cousin Lon and Margery, never passed a newly suspected spot without a moment's pause to investigate. And we were always looking out for new possibilities. For that reason there were on our farms, away from the homesteads, no footpaths whatever—always excepting the well-worn way between the two houses. We were too fond of varying our track, forever with an eye out for some new sign. And each of us menfolk carried a favorite tool. Mine was a very heavy clasp-knife, with a four-inch blade which was good for digging or prying. Its point and edge were always dull, but its sides bright from frequent use.

It was wonderful what numbers of possible hiding-places there were. Near the house, of course, everything had been ransacked. I never felt on rafters, nor under eaves. Ancestral hands had been before me; and my own childish fingers had explored every dark crevice in house, or barn, or shed. The barnyard was barren, as we well knew. But the further we went from the centre of our life, the

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nearer we came to romance. Up in the pasture, over in the wood-lot, along the fields, no boulder showed itself, no gray stone outcropped, without provoking us to speculation or momentary examination. It would be, perhaps, but for a single minute in the day that we turned aside from work and communed with hope. Nor did we ever deliberately go far roundabout in search of a find. That we knew would be foolishness. There was a fatalism in our feeling concerning the treasure. Maybe we passed it daily; if so, we could not help it. At the proper time it would be revealed.

Well, on this third morning I was going down the road on my way to the village. Jones was with me, and was close at heel when we met a man coming up the hill. The dog knew that strangers had a right to the road; nevertheless, he growled.

The man came steadily on. He was not one of our townsmen; I had never seen him before. Nor was he a city man, at least of good type. His clothes, though not shabby, fitted poorly, and were badly wrinkled. He was of medium height, of medium breadth, of medium complexion. Nothing about him was striking except his eye, which he fixed on me with a gripping gaze that roused in me a sudden resentment. And from the resentment sprang an immediate dislike.

I looked at him more closely as we neared each other. His hat was thrust back, and I saw that his forehead was low. His lank hair was echoed, as it were, by a scrubby chin beard, of the same non-

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descript color, that vainly tried to lengthen his short jaw. His cheeks were hollow and pale, his forehead projecting, but his eyebrows almost lacking. Under those strange knuckly brows were deep sockets whence his eyes, red-lidded, glowered as upon a hostile world. He photographed himself, as it were, upon my mind; and after the first long glance I felt that I could never forget him.

Involuntarily I stopped, but he walked on until within a yard of me. "Is that dog dangerous?" he demanded.

"Not if you keep on the road," I answered.

"Hmf!" he sniffed. "In the village they are scared to death of him."

His voice was harsh and his intonation scornful. Evidently he had no fear of the dog, nor of me either. He looked me over as if he were measuring an ox, and with the same scorn. After a moment he demanded:

"Where's your father?"

"He's at the barn," I said. "I'll show you."

"Don't trouble yourself," he responded, pushing by. "I know the way."

Nevertheless, I turned back. Not liking the man, I wanted to keep an eye on him. So I followed in silence.

He snapped over his shoulder: "I said I should not need you."

"I heard you," I answered, still following.

Abruptly he stopped, turned, and looked me over a second time. It seemed as if he were asking him-

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self: "*Is* this an ox?" But the result was the same as before, for with a sniff he turned and went on. Growing angry, I followed. No one had ever looked at me so before, nor scorned me to my face. Without more words we walked on until in the barnyard we found my father. The man went directly to him.

"Hullo, Melvin," he said.

"Why," answered my father, after a moment's scrutiny, "it's Al Stidger! Come up from Athol, eh? What brings ye?"

At the answer, "I came from Lon," ideas began to come to me. This man was Cousin Lon's wife's cousin, and lived within ten miles of us, a notary public and self-taught lawyer.

"Did Lon send for ye?" asked my father.

Stidger made no answer, but looked my father over, much as he had studied me. "Yokel!" he seemed to say to himself at the end. He lacked either hypocrisy or politeness.

"I want to talk with you," he said aloud.

"Well," said my father. He turned and led the way to the wall, against which he leaned. Stidger, following, was waved to a seat beside him. I approached, and stood close by; and Jones, silent but still bristling, kept his eye on our visitor while he clambered on the wall. Then Jones sat down, adjusted his jaw by a snap at nothing, and seemed to wait.

Stidger cast at me a lowering look, but that did not trouble me. It seemed to me that something

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was going forward that I needed to be in touch with. Father, I knew, was too sketchy to report accurately. So, with Jones, I constituted myself audience, and waited.

With a final glare at me, Stidger turned to father. "You've had a find," he said, with his almost explosive suddenness.

Father rubbed his hands. "Something of the kind," he agreed. "Lon's told ye about it?"

"Precious little," grumbled Stidger. "He's mad about it."

"Can't see why," remarked father. "Sent you here?"

"I came," returned Stidger darkly. "I want to be informed. What was in the box?"

"The usual thing," answered father. "Stones."

Stidger glowered. "Oh, of course. But what kind, and how many?"

Father, showing in his face compunction for his attempt at evasion, was about to reply, and I was startled. Surely there was no need of telling. I demanded: "Why do you ask?"

Stidger tossed his head impatiently, yet answered as if father had spoken. "I'm looking after Lon's interests."

"What interest," I persisted, "has Cousin Lon in this?"

"See here," said Stidger, still speaking to father, "have you a copy of that old will? I want to see it."

"Why, yes," answered father, "I've got a copy, surely. But why don't you look at Lon's?"

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"'Cause his is lost," snapped Stidger. "He tells me it ain't been seen for nearly forty year. He remembers hearin' his father complaining it was lost."

"But why," I demanded, "should we show you ours?"

"I want you to save me the trouble of going to Worcester," Stidger answered querulously. "I could go down to the Registry o' Deeds an' get a look at the original any day. Every one's got a right to that. I'm just askin' you to save me my time." He was speaking to me now resentfully.

I looked at father. If this was true, I didn't quite see what to say. The question why the man wanted to see the will neither of us thought of pushing. Father nodded thoughtfully. "Certainly. I ain't anxious to put you to all that trouble. Come in the house."

We followed into the kitchen, where mother was at work. The sight of our visitor surprised her. "Why, Al Stidger!"

"Yes, yes," he said with a kind of impatience. "It's me, Sarah, sure enough. I want a look at that old will."

"Sit down," said father. "I'll get it." I expected him to leave the room, but to my dismay he turned about and opened the door of the Dutch oven, a higher construction than was common, built into the old chimney about six feet from the floor. From it he took a few papers.

"We haven't so many documents," said he,

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"that we can't find the one we want. Here's the thing you mean, I guess."

And he unfolded, from among the papers, a piece of unmistakable parchment, yellow and soiled, which crinkled noisily as it opened. Stidger grasped at it.

"That's it," he said, at first glance. "Yes—Lamon Hartwell, 1824." He began studying the will.

Moving to his side, I also began reading this document which I had not seen since I was a child. Though I could not understand all the legal jargon, the purport of the will was clear. The farms, as divided, were given and bequeathed; the cash was to be shared equally; the right to come and go freely, except within dwellings, and with due accountability for damages, was never to be denied by the owner of one place to the family of the owner of the other.

"He meant," snarled Stidger, "that neither of the places should go out of the family. Precious good means he took to make sure."

If my great-great-great-uncle had had this in mind, he had succeeded. Until the last box was found, no owner of either place would consent to sell his property. And here was the description of the boxes.

"Two Oval Boxes, of lead, one flat, one thick.

"Two Oblong Boxes, also of lead, one flat, one thick.

"One Round Box, ditto, flat.

"One Leaden Box in the shape of a cube.

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"None of these boxes are set deeper than the mould, nor above fifteen feet from the ground.

"No two of them are in hiding-places of the same kind.

"I leave the finding of them to chance, or to God, whichever my nephews choose, the finder of a box, so he be of my blood, to be the owner thereof, and of its contents, upon whosesoever land it be found."

Stidger read and reread these conditions so slowly and carefully that by the time he had finished I had almost memorized them. When finally he looked up at my father he said:

"I want to get a copy of this."

"Very well," answered my father readily. "Come any day."

"No, no," answered Stidger impatiently. "My handwriting is too poor. I want to take it to be typewritten."

Father, rubbing his chin, seemed about to yield. "No," said I positively. "There's no reason it should ever leave this place. Bring your typewriter up here."

Stidger protested. "One of them machines is valuable, and it's delicate. It might get hurt."

"Same with this document," I retorted stubbornly. For the more I thought of the matter, the less I was willing to trust the will, copy though it was, to this man.

He growled a sour and grudging submission. "It'll have to be copied by hand, then. Either

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I'll come myself some other day, or I'll send a clerk."

Mother had been so quiet that now I was surprised to hear her speak. "I'll copy it for you myself."

The suggestion seemed to fluster Stidger rather than to please him. "No," he answered hurriedly. "It's got to be by a lawyer, or a trained copyist. Some little slip, even a wrong comma——"

"Oh, she'll be careful," my father assured him. "She won't leave a dot out of place. And her handwriting is perfect."

But Stidger persisted. "I'd not feel easy unless it were done by some one whose work I know."

"What is the need of such accuracy?" I demanded. "What do you need a copy for, anyway?"

He paid no attention to me, but looked at father. The will, folded, he held in his hand as if ready to put in his inside pocket. "Come," he said, in a tone as nearly conciliatory as seemed possible to him, "let me take it down to Athol with me today. You shall have it Monday."

I believe that father wavered. At any rate, mother spoke as if to forestall his consent. "No, it must stay here."

And I, taking the paper, which Stidger gave unresistingly into my hand, put it once more into the high Dutch oven. Then I looked at him to see if he were angry, but he was looking at the oven door.

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"Well," he said slowly, "some day next week. And now, Mel, let me see them stones."

"Oh!" replied father, taken by surprise. "The fact is, they're gone."

"Gone?" rasped Stidger. "You've—you've—!" Suddenly he sprang up and, coming quickly where father was sitting, thrust his face almost into his.

"You've gin 'em to that man Worthen!"

Father, blinking, drew away. "Well?" he asked uneasily.

"Don't you know he's a crook?" demanded Stidger. "He's a promoter, a bucket-shop man, a curb-broker!"

"I don't know what you mean," stammered father. "He's a banker, folks say."

"Calls himself one," sneered Stidger. "Puts on all that front just to take people in. Don't you never read the papers? He's always mixin' in with wildcat schemes."

Father looked at mother with something of dismay. Did we read the papers? A local journal came to us once a week. It gave, in separate columns, the news of the various towns for some ten miles about; it told of nominations and elections, of the deaths of kings, of distant wars; it printed anecdotes, household receipts, and a weekly thriller. What did we know of the affairs of the money market, or even the great defalcations? Yet we had knowledge that such things were.

"You've given them to him, have ye?" snapped Stidger.

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"Yes," admitted father.

"You idiot," snarled Stidger angrily. "You could have had the best of advice and assistance not ten miles from home, and you give yourself into the hands of an outsider. If the stones aren't lost out of his pocket, or stolen from his bag, at least he'll tell you they're paste, and offer you ten dollars for the lot."

We were all very much upset. I saw alarm in my father's eyes, perplexity in mother's. I perceived the horrid possibility that Stidger was right, and that this city man might have imposed on us merely by good clothes, a hearty manner, and an air of confidence. Stidger, looking around on us as we sat with open mouths, snapped his fingers aloft.

"Yah!" he sneered, and moved to the door. He gave at us one final gesture of sweeping disgust and stamped away. Jones was the only one of us with the politeness to escort him out of the yard.

We three remained looking at one another. Mother was the least disturbed; to her the find had been unwelcome. Yet even she was unwilling to be cheated; and as for father and me, we were plain scared. Our thirty thousand dollars!

But we had scarcely recovered enough to begin to put our feelings into words, when out in the yard we heard the clatter of hoofs. Then I heard Gertrude's high, clear voice.

"Binney, where are you?"

I rushed out. There was she on horseback, there behind her was her father, and both were smiling.

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Father, pushing by me, went to Mr. Worthen. "Back so soon?"

"Gone and come again," was the answer.

"Well?" asked father.

"You wouldn't have me bellow the news out here?" laughed Mr. Worthen. "We'll go in." He prepared to dismount.

Gertrude had already slipped her foot out of the stirrup, and now stretched out her arms to me. "Binney, take me down."

When I was lifting her down, and in the moment when her face was nearest mine, she whispered: "It's good news!"

The great load was lifted from my heart. Like two children, nodding and smiling at each other, we followed our parents into the kitchen, where Mr. Worthen sat down by the table and drew some papers from his pockets. Very deliberately he took out a pair of glasses, adjusted them on his nose, and began.

"There's only one man I'd take a business of this kind to. In New York the dealers are only so-so; short of Amsterdam, we have in Boston as good a diamond-buyer as there is to be found. Very keen, and not afraid to pay for a good stone. Knows me, too, and that means there is no fooling. Hart-well, he could have pulled the wool over your eyes."

He looked over his glasses at my father, who nervously agreed. Mr. Worthen shuffled his papers.

"The list," he said, "is perhaps rather hard

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for you to follow. Number one: India diamond, yellow tinge, old cushion cutting."

Father interrupted. "The single stones I don't remember. Were you able to sell them? What's the total?"

"I sold them," answered Mr. Worthen. "The money is deposited to your order in my bank. And the total?—Thirty-two thousand five hundred!"

It was true! The reaction almost overcame me. Though Gertrude was clutching at my sleeve, clamoring for a word of joy from me, I was speechless. So were we all three, as we sat silently staring at the bringer of good fortune.

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CHAPTER VII

"By the way," asked Mr. Worthen when at last we had found voice, and congratulations had exhausted themselves, "who was that person whom we passed in your road, a kind of seedy Shylock?"

"A curious critter," said my father, and proceeded to add a little to my store of knowledge concerning Stidger. He was about forty-five, a widower with one child, unsuccessful as a real-estate agent—how could such a man fail to fail at that business?—and picking up a doubtful living as lawyer or lawyer's clerk. He drew wills or deeds, took notes in court, examined titles. "Soured," said my father in conclusion.

"I should think so," laughed Gertrude. "The 'we-shall-meet-again' look that he threw at us made me hope that it wouldn't be on a dark night."

"What did he want here?" asked Mr. Worthen.

Father told him, and the banker lifted his brows. "Saw the will, did he? Then perhaps I may have a look at it."

He read it in a quarter of the time that Stidger had spent over it. "Amusing," he said as he returned the parchment. "A decidedly quaint old document. Keep it carefully."

"Has it any value?" I inquired.

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"Since it's only a copy, no," he replied. "But any of these ancestral things are precious. And so the will has never been tested! That comes of living in a community without lawyers. Your farm mortgaged?"

"Mortgaged?" cried father, his pride in arms. "Neither this one nor the other. Never!"

"Trust a man to know his interest," chuckled Mr. Worthen. "Now see here, Hartwell. What am I to do with this money of yours?"

"Come," whispered Gertrude to me. "They're going to talk business. Let's go and look for another box."

So I followed her out into the sunlight, and we strolled about the yard. Gertrude pounced at a crevice in the wall, and thrust in her prettily gloved hand. Then she smiled back at me.

"Not there," I said.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Every Hartwell born in three generations, every visitor since 1839, has explored that hole. Guess again."

"Oh, you clever one!" she cried. And so we loitered about, and for the first time Gertrude began to flirt with me.

"You're changed," she told me suddenly.

"Changed?" I inquired, surprised, but greatly interested.

"You're older," she declared. "Older since I saw you last."

"Three days!" I scoffed.

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Gertrude shook her head seriously. "You've grown up."

I wondered if I had. The idea flattered me greatly, and I made her explain. I was more serious, I carried myself differently, my very shoulders. She could not be more definite, but it was enough. I saw myself as a tower, standing four-square to the winds of heaven. And Gertrude, I now discovered, was grown up already. The toss of her head, the glance of her eye, were not what they used to be. Naturally, as I now understand, for if I had changed, so instinctively had she.

We talked until we heard her father shouting: "Gertrude, we must get home before the storm." I looked at the southwest and saw a thunder-cloud just mounting over the hill. We hurried to the hitch-posts, where Mr. Worthen had already mounted, but was still talking with my father. After I had put Gertrude on her horse I waited for a word with him.

"Understand, Hartwell," he was saying, "the wisest of us can't foretell the changes in the market. I'll do my best, but the risk is yours."

"If you do as well as this time, I'll take the risk," said my father.

"Mr. Worthen," said I, seizing a moment's pause, "you must have a place where that old will of ours would be secure."

"Of course," he answered; "my safe."

"Father," I went on, "I don't like the idea of Mr. Stidger's knowing where it is. And if he wants

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a copy of it, then Mr. Worthen can have it done in the best fashion."

"The boy is right," agreed Mr. Worthen. "A clever son, Hartwell. You'd better let me keep the will for you." Father went into the house for it, and Mr. Worthen turned to me.

"Binney, are you going to stay here always?"

"No!" cried Gertrude suddenly.

And I, quite thrilled by the spontaneousness of her cry, knew that I was not going to be content where I was. The world had opened to me. So I boldly echoed her "No!"

"Well," said the banker, "when you are ready to come out of your shell, let me help you."

Mother had heard. When the two were gone, she came to me sadly. "I told you so," she murmured.

Then father called me to help him get the tools under cover and the cows in, and we all three hurried to our different tasks. In half an hour the storm was on us; through the open barn-door, as we sat and milked, father and I watched the downpour and, on account of a three-weeks' drought, were glad of the rain. There was but little thunder; instead, the rain promised to continue all night.

At bedtime it was raining with still greater vigor. From time to time the gusts rose to squalls that lasted for minutes, actually shaking the solid old house. Occasionally, too, came cracks of thunder that made very nervous that otherwise heroic personality, Jones. Nothing less than thunder could

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shake his courage; but now he was so apprehensive that I decided to take him to my bedroom. Here I tied him to the jamb-hook, laid a rug for him, and went to bed. The thunder came less frequently, the dog quieted, and I went to sleep.

When the dog woke me it was some hours later. This I had no means of knowing accurately, except for a feeling that the time was after midnight. I heard the rain still drumming on the roof, and supposed that the dog had waked me on account of more thunder.

"Quiet, Jones," I said.

But instead of whining, the dog growled low. I sat upright. This was a warning. "What is it?" I asked.

He growled again, then whimpered eagerly. Though I listened for some cause for his excitement, I could hear nothing. Then for a third time the dog growled.

At that I felt that some intruder was in the house below. And as always with me in any sudden excitement, my heart began beating rapidly. It was useless to try to listen further; my pulse was making too great a pounding in my ears, and again, Jones's low and cautious growling began to be louder. I was vexed with myself.

"All right," I said. "Jones, we'll investigate."

As I fumbled with the knot of the leash the dog acted as if we were hunting together. He could not quite repress his excitement, and his little whimperings and abortive growlings came like erup-

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tions of forces under pressure. But he did his best to be quiet. When I had untied the leash the dog tugged me eagerly toward the door. This I had shut, in order to keep Jones, in case he worked himself loose, from roaming restlessly about. Slowly I opened it, and the dog, whose eager tail had been wagging against my bare shins, drew me out upon the landing. There we both stood still, and listened. My nerves were steadier now, from the relief of action, and my pulse was quiet.

My parents were asleep, as I knew from heavy breathing from their room. Stooping over the stair, I listened for sounds from the kitchen. At once I heard the rain pouring from the front eaves into the puddles beneath, and I knew that the outer door was open. Next I smelled candle smoke. All this was wrong, and my heart began jumping again.

Suddenly Jones, with a snort, strained to get away. I heard a step in the kitchen, and let go the leash. Scratching, pounding down the stairs, the dog gave one short, challenging bark before he dashed into the kitchen. I heard the slam of the front door, the thump of the dog's body against it, and then the whole house was filled with furious, disappointed barking.

I leaped down the stairs, stumbled into the kitchen, and tried to look around. The place was pitchy dark, but the candle smell was strong. I groped my way to the door, where Jones was scratching angrily, growling, barking, and whining together. As he heard me coming the dog grew

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more excited, leaping and snapping at the door. In the darkness he got in my way, and nearly knocked me over as I reached for the latch. Even when I had lifted it the eager beast prevented my opening the door till I had fairly kicked him out of the way. Then with a yelp of delight he squeezed through the opening. I heard his defiant bark, the plash of his feet in the puddles, before the pouring rain drowned the sound of his pursuit.

I strained my eyes into the darkness, but could see nothing. There was no moon behind the clouds; everything was pitch black. Town-dwellers never realize, I think, the darkness of the country night; for them there is always some glint of light, however distant the source. But for me there was no street-lamp, no faint gleam from a neighbor's window; and as I stood there my eyes might have been shut for all that I could see. Unless I could hear Jones pinning his man, pursuit for me was hopeless.

But behind me in the house I heard my father calling. I went to the foot of the stairs and looked up to where he was standing, with a candle in his hand.

"Some one's been here, father," I said.

Down-stairs he came, sputtering questions, my quiet mother gliding behind. As he held the candle over his head I looked at the high oven. The door stood open, and from where I stood I could see that the cavity was empty.

But beneath it on the floor was a litter of papers.

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They seemed to have been dropped in a bundle, and to have spread out fan-shape, as they fell. Above them, on the mantel, stood a stub of candle, which I quickly took down. The wax in the wick-cup was still soft.

"See," I said, and showed it to my parents.

Mother looked at it, at the papers, and at the open oven. "Stidger!" she remarked.

"No!" protested father.

I think we argued it for five minutes, father and I in our absurd night-shirts, mother in her decent wrapper, but all oblivious of time and place and costume. In the warm, steamy night we forgot the open door. Mother and I felt sure that no one but Stidger would have come and searched the hiding-place. Of course he had come for the copy of the will. Father had one objection: the man hadn't the boldness. But remembering his dogged courage as he faced me and Jones in the lane, I thought that he had it in him to do the thing. We were still arguing fruitlessly when suddenly mother asked:

"What ails the cat?"

One of our numerous felines was acting strangely in the middle of the kitchen floor. It was staggering aimlessly, crying faintly. As we watched, it fell; and it needed only a look, after I had picked up the little beast, to know that it was dead.

"Drat 'em!" said father, who hated cats even while he acknowledged the need of them. "That's one gone, anyway."

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"But why should she die?" asked mother.

The cat had come from under the table. Examining, I found there a piece of meat, much too great for the cat to dispose of.

Then Jones came in at the door, dirty of foot, and with his hair laid flat by the rain. Straight to me he came, and began his explanation. He whined, he growled, he whimpered, he all but spoke. As I took off the soaked and muddy leash, I patted his head.

"Of course," I soothed. "I know you did your best. It's too dark to see, and in this rain you couldn't follow the scent."

It pleased him, and after one long final complicated sentence he subsided. Then I tried an experiment. Holding the dog by the collar, I showed him the meat. He opened his mouth, then hesitated, sniffed, growled, and turned away.

I put the meat in the stove, where the morning's fire would burn it up. "I suppose our visitor chucked the meat in, and waited a while for it to finish Jones."

Mother shuddered. "Shut the door and lock it!" she cried.

And so, for the first time in many years, our door was locked.

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CHAPTER VIII

WHEN we discussed our burglary at breakfast, there seemed to be nothing to do concerning it. Besides the candle and the meat our visitor had left no trace. There should, of course, have been his muddy footprints on the floor and his tracks in the soft earth outside; but when we thought to look for them it was too late. Mother had already wiped up the floor; and outside, when we came to look, the tracks of the dog were the only ones to be found. Over by the wall I thought I discovered a heel-print, but even on that the dog had set his paw.

I admit that I was in favor of finding Stidger and charging him with the act. But my father cooled my ardor.

"Will you have him arrested for it?" he asked.

"Why, no," I answered. "I can't prove it."

"Then let him alone," advised father, "or he'll put the law on you."

Such was also Mr. Worthen's advice. He rode over that morning to see father, and we poured out the story to him. After rendering his decision, he asked another question.

"What should he do it for?"

All I could bring forward was that Stidger had wanted to take the will away and copy it.

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"But the thing itself is merely a copy," was Mr. Worthen's rejoinder. "Perhaps he expected to find valuables in the oven."

"Everybody knows I've got none," father objected. "And Stidger's no common thief, though I admit I never liked him. Some one may have come prowlin' after pickin's."

It seemed to me very unlikely that any one should expect to find burglary profitable in our neighborhood, or anywhere else in rural New England for that matter, when the towns offered so much more. We never expected anything of the sort; our forms of dishonesty were different.

"But how could any one get in?" asked Mr. Worthen.

"Right through the doorway," answered father, surprised.

"Do you mean," demanded Mr. Worthen, "that you never lock the house?"

"Why should we?" returned father. "No one ever does."

"Well," said the banker shrewdly, "you'll lock up after this."

"Oh, yes!" agreed mother almost fervently.

I gave up all thought of accusing Stidger, but as I went about my work I puzzled about my night adventure. Burglars weren't in the habit of roaming our hills; Stidger knew of the use of the oven as a hiding-place; he had tried to borrow the will. But why he should want to steal it I could not see, and at this point my chain of evidence snapped.

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By nightfall I was able to laugh at his disappointment—but I did wish that Jones and I had been a little quicker.

And now began to prey on me a trouble that for three days I had been suppressing. Since the excitements appeared to be over, I had leisure to think of Margery. At the time of finding the box I had shown myself at my worst, frankly, horribly selfish. Gertrude had evidently forgiven my roughness in seizing her wrist when she reached for the box; but with Margery, against whom I had turned but a glance of mistrust, I believed that the wound had been deeper. I was not one to analyze and make clear the difference between the two girls; but I recognized Margery's greater sensitiveness. Now that the thought really gained a firm hold on me, it began to torment me. On the next day I was so bothered by it that after supper I told father and mother that I was going over to Cousin Lon's.

Father, taking the pipe from his mouth, remarked: "He won't be overglad to see you."

"Why not?" I asked. "Is he angry?"

"He hasn't been to the village since the box was found. Every one s'poses he's mad."

"Well," I said, "I'm going anyway."

"If Cousin Lon speaks sharp," warned mother, "don't answer back. Remember how vexing it must have been to see you carry off the box from under his nose."

With this advice I departed, and made my way to the other farmhouse. I had nearly reached it

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when, looking back, I saw that Jones was sneaking after me. As soon as he saw that he was discovered, he rushed, all wrigglings and apologies, to express his delight that we were together. I was half minded to send him back; but since Cousin Lon had never objected to the dog, I finally allowed Jones to follow.

By the barnyard wall I paused to reconnoitre. No one was visible. I crossed the wall, approached the house, and was about to whistle for Margery, when out of an upper window was thrust Cousin Lon's head.

"Stay whar ye be!" he said darkly, and withdrew.

Idly, while I waited, I studied the front of the old house. Until I had been properly taught, I never appreciated the design of a house as a whole; but there did now creep upon me, for the first time, a sense of the oddity of this one. Our own dwelling was a plain New England farmhouse, and was, with its two stories and gabled attic, its decently generous windows, and the wide front door with its two flanking apertures, by which one could look in as well as out, upstanding and frank. Cousin Lon's house was quite the opposite. Its stud was low, and I believed that from the ground I could almost reach to the tops of the lower windows. The door had no openings beside it; moreover all the windows (and there were but few) were small. The roof overhung heavily, shading the upper windows. Whereas our house was painted a cheerful

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red, with trim in white, this house, trim and all, was leaden in hue. I could well believe that the old buccaneer had designed it himself, for it seemed like his own soul, secret and forbidding. And feeling all this, rather than thinking, it suddenly came into my dull head to wonder why I was kept waiting outside this door, which had always been so free to me.

But when the door opened there came out not only Cousin Lon, but also Stidger. The first, long, large-framed, and gaunt, with his strange pallor contrasting with his black locks and broad beard, which grew up into the hollows of his cheeks, did not look at me as he turned aside and let the other pass. Stidger opened on me immediately.

"What do you want here?"

"I came to see Margery," I answered.

"To have a look around, you mean," he sneered. "To look for more boxes."

His manner was so snarly, so unnecessarily aggressive, that it came over me that he wanted to anger me. The suspicion at once put me into my smoothest mood.

"My dear Mr. Stidger," said I, "this yard is the last place to search for treasure, as perhaps by this time you have discovered."

His mottled skin took on a somewhat deeper tinge, and I hoped I had struck home. "You've no right to go in the house," he said.

"Certainly," I agreed. "But what have you to do with it?"

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His attitude was at once brisk and hopeful. "I'm your cousin's legal adviser," he stated.

"I wonder," I said, surveying him, "if he needs you as much as you need him."

In a moment he was deeply red, and stood sputtering, not able to reply. Then Jones, who in the meantime had been sniffing insolently about the somewhat frayed bottoms of Stidger's trousers, gave a growl.

Stidger, in default of an answer to me, drew back his foot as if to kick the dog. Jones squatted, snarling wickedly, his ears flat. In some alarm, I cried: "Don't!"

"Why?" snapped Stidger. But he paused.

"The dog has never bitten anybody," I said. "But I think he's perfectly willing to begin with you."

"I warn you to take him off the place!" he cried, drawing back.

"If you're speaking as a lawyer," I retorted, "put that in writing." Had I not been getting the better of him, he might have made me as angry as I made him. As it was, I disliked him intensely. His untidiness, his churlishness, his bloodshotness—I hated his little red eyes!—were very repugnant. I was very glad to turn away from him, to quiet Jones, and to address myself, though with some anxiety, to Cousin Lon. He had stood with face averted, but plainly listening.

"Cousin Lon," I asked, "mayn't I see Margery?"

He looked at the ground, and began digging with

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his boot, but he made no answer. "Why Cousin Lon," I cried, disturbed, "aren't you going to speak to me?"

To my amazement, Cousin Lon began to steal away from me, even while I was talking. In a moment, still looking shamefacedly at the ground, as if he rather than I was at fault, he had slipped around the corner of the house.

With much dismay I saw him go. To be sure, Cousin Lon had never been a companionable man, like my father. He spoke little, smiled seldom, laughed never, and in the last few years had not appeared to notice that Margery and I had grown out of childhood. While we chatted during my visits he usually sat silent, apparently thinking of higher or deeper matters than our concerns. But in his way he had always been kind, offered me his pears or his apples, and allowed me to feel that I was welcome to his house. Because, like all of us Hartwells, I went seldom to the village, and had no intimates off the farm, Cousin Lon was important in my life. I saw him go, therefore, with surprise and great unhappiness.

Then I heard behind me Stidger's harsh voice. "You see you ain't very welcome here."

"Whose fault is it?" I demanded, whirling about. "What have you been doing here these three or four days?"

"Mindin' my business," he answered tartly.

"Yours rather than his!" I retorted.

It was on his lips to brag or threaten; at any

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rate, I have seldom seen speech so ready to burst out, yet so securely repressed. As if corking a bottle, he closed his mouth, and I felt that what he had to say I should never know. Then he nodded to me ironically and, turning, went into the house and closed the door.

I was angry enough to whistle for Margery in order to spite him, but the remembrance of Cousin Lon restrained me. If he did not want me on the place, then I ought to go. I was both hurt and sorrowful; my anger was entirely gone as, after one look at Margery's window, I turned from the house.

I had nearly crossed the yard before I heard her voice. There by the cow-pasture lane she stood, well-rounded yet girlish, dressed with a simplicity which somehow was neither prim nor severe. At first glance I saw restraint in her attitude, and paused before going to her. But she smiled, and I went to her quickly. It was not till long afterward that I reflected that never before had there been either constraint or encouragement between us. But I had never yet come to study either Margery's face or her character. The strength in the poise of the head, the firmness in the rounded chin, the self-control in the occasional straightness of the line of the mouth, I missed entirely. What I depended on was the frankness and the warm friendship in the brown eyes.

"Margery," I said eagerly, "come away and let me talk with you."

"No," she answered. "Stand right here with

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me, Binney, where any one can see. I mustn't appear to be doing anything underhanded."

The idea, connected with her, made me laugh; but then I quickly traced it to its source. "Margery, what is that man Stidger doing here?"

Margery's clear eyes clouded, but they met mine. "He says that father's got a clear case against you."

"A clear case?" I was puzzled.

"Why," she explained, "you found the box on father's land. It ought to be father's."

The idea made me laugh. It was like assailing the Constitution or the law of gravity. "That's nonsense!"

"I hope so," she agreed. "But remember that I told you."

"Why," I asserted, "Stidger's nothing but a shyster. He's working up the case just to get employment for himself. And meanwhile he's snooping round, I suppose, trying to find a box for himself."

"If he is," answered Margery, smiling, "he gets very little chance. Father hasn't yet let him out of his sight."

"Does he go out at night?" I inquired, thinking of our late visitor.

Margery shook her head. "He goes to bed when we do."

"What do he and your father do?"

Again her eyes were clouded. "I don't know. All I can say is that he's making father very gloomy."

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"I wish I hadn't found the old box!" I cried. "I don't believe it will do us any good, and it seems to do you people harm. Margery, you ought to have found it yourself! Why didn't you lift the stone, and not I?"

The cloud on her face gave way to brightness. "I just didn't. Don't worry about it, Binney."

Then I recollected what I came to say, and studied her face to see how she would take it. Margery's most prominent quality was honesty, and just now it was shining in her eyes. Quite satisfied, I spoke abruptly:

"I was very unkind to you the other day."

She flushed at once, but did not pretend not to understand. "It was nothing," she murmured.

"When I saw that box," I hurried on, "it seemed to make a brute of me. I knew what the thing was; I was ready, like a dog, to fight for it. I wouldn't let Gertrude touch it, and was afraid that you might take it first."

"Yes," said Margery. "It wasn't like you, Binney."

"It was," I cried. "It showed what a poor thing I am at bottom. Don't forget it, Margery."

She smiled. "I won't forget that you came to apologize."

"I do apologize," I said. "And don't you want to know what was in the box?"

"No," she said quickly and earnestly. "Don't tell me. They'll be sure to ask me." And she nodded, very slightly, toward the house. I looked.

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Two heads were visible at the windows, but at once they vanished.

"There," said Margery, somewhat bitterly. "You see what sort of people we have become."

"Can't you get rid of Stidger?" I asked.

"Soon, I hope," she answered. "And now, Binney," she spoke very gently, "I think you'd better go."

Surprised and a little hurt, I turned to her quickly. Her glance held me. Besides dignity and confidence I saw in her, for the first time, a sweet little air of command.

There was sense in her dismissal. If she was to be questioned, the longer I stayed the more uncomfortable it would be for her. So I said good-by and went. I told it all to mother and father, and we were troubled for Margery—not yet for ourselves.

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CHAPTER IX

"AND now," said father, "to spend money!"

I am glad that he had that delight. For it is a delight to feel that the pleasant chinking of the outflowing cash need not immediately stop. After my acquaintance with it, I know that to be perfect the experience needs its limitations: to spend without thinking is only dissipation. But to decide that a certain purchase shall be the best of its kind, or to resolve that for a certain period, whether for a month or a day, the thing shall be properly done—that is exhilaration. Whatever other cares there may be, one is satisfied with oneself on the score of expense; the world assumes an aspect of peace; into the waiting palms the coins drop ungrudgingly. And that father had his share, however brief, of this pleasure, is one of my satisfactions.

First of all, he bought for mother: A new pump, new pans, tubs, stove. He bought blankets, sheets, an easy chair; would have kept on buying diligently unless mother had stopped him. He insisted, however, on new clothes and bonnet; and after the arrival of the new dress took great pride in driving her to church—whither I could not follow, lest the place be left alone.

Then father bought for the farm. A little engine, cumbrous beside those of to-day; a lathe with all

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possible attachments; various farm tools; and then the silo! It was a busy week while we were erecting it, when every hour my mother came out and noted the progress of the work. Then we had to have a cutter and a blower for it, and much, much paint.

Mother looked on it all with a good deal of amusement, even though with occasional fits of sadness. As the weather-beaten buildings grew spick and span she occasionally sighed, thus rousing father's indignation. What, weren't the house and barn much better for new paint? But she, and I too, had a feeling for things as they were, though I could not follow her in her apprehension that soon everything was to be changed. After all, the bright paint would soon tone down.

One thing mother insisted on: that, if she was to have new clothes, so should we. A little amusing, I thought, to see father in a new suit, making him so spruce and neat, except for one particular. Mother asked what I giggled at, but abated her indignation at my answer and, getting out her scissors, trimmed his beard. Father growled when he looked in the glass, yet with a furtive smile for the man he found there.

My clothes caused dissension. I would get them, but not yet. Indeed! And why not now? Well, I wasn't sure what I wanted. When I knew what was the style—the style! Hear the boy! But I thought that my parents, even mother herself, were pleased at my caution. So I got a new pair

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of riding-gaiters, ordered a new saddle and bridle, and was content.

And then I rode to the village to see Gertrude. She had occasionally ridden up to look on at our new enterprises, and once she had walked over with Margery from the other farm. But mostly I had had to be contented with thinking of her among the summer folk at the village. It was into this colony that I wished to pry. Of its existence I was well aware; our butter and eggs had long gone to supply it, while its dribbles of cash were important to us. Its outward aspect I knew well enough—the big, shingled hotel, the scattered residences, the white-clad maidens and the blazered men, and the distant activity of the game of tennis. But not once had I trod the piazzas, nor, except at the store, had I come face to face with the denizens of this other world. It was, therefore, with much interest that I cantered down to my first visit at the hotel.

A haughty youngster came out to see what I wanted, and showed amusement when I inquired for Miss Worthen. His tail drooped, however, when I dismounted and gave him my bridle to hold, with a caution that Peter was skittish. For all that I got the best of him, I was not happy under his superciliousness, nor did I feel comfortable as I began to thread my way among the piazza chairs, most of them occupied, in the direction that he indicated. I was at first very conscious of my bulk as I encountered glances raised from books or turned from chatting groups; but when I heard an

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old lady's loud cackle, "That's the young man!" I remembered all the talk there must have been about the box, and became very hot about the forehead and collar. Around the corner I found to my relief a quiet nook, in which I saw Gertrude.

She jumped up—no, she rose. Gertrude's manner varied with her company, as I was to learn, and her demureness was new to me. I glimpsed the reason when she turned to introduce me to her companion.

"Mr. Collester."

Never before in my life had I been "introduced" to a man. According to my memory I came to the ceremony as to the opening of a wrestling-bout, with doubt and caution. I see now that he could have greatly bothered me by formality; even at the time I had a wincing fear that he might stand off and bow—for bow I could not. I liked him, therefore, for coming forward with hand outstretched.

His hand was small and compact, not hard like mine, of course, yet very firm. He looked at me squarely, with a keen and unwavering eye that gave me all its attention and held all of mine. Once in a great while I meet an eye like that and find its owner worth knowing.

"Well," laughed Gertrude, "say something, do!"

Then I became aware that neither of us had said a word. Not knowing what social law I had transgressed, I stammered incoherently. But Mr. Collester laughed.

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"There was nothing to say," he answered. "Mr. Hartwell knows I am glad to meet him."

I did know it, but what more struck me was that I was glad to meet him. For I had been disappointed to realize that Gertrude was not alone, and now I felt a sudden, unpleasant surprise to hear her address her companion as "John." I had wished to see the hotel and its people, but I had more wished to see Gertrude. How could I see her when there was a John? Yet, after all, he was the first young man of Gertrude's world that I had met, he interested me, and I was glad to see him.

My recollection of our words and even of our actions are very faint; apparently what we said and did was of little importance. But as we sat conversation did not flag; and then we rode for a couple of hours. Gertrude managed her two men with skill, so that neither of us, I believe, felt that he had any advantage over the other. But we watched each other, for I am sure that Collester observed me, while I studied him. And two things concerning him I learned.

The first was his personality. He was smaller than I, but compact and firm, like his hand, and firm in his countenance also. His whole face, from his eyes to his straight mouth and his well-set chin, showed a composure that it would have been difficult to shake. Not that he was grave, for he smiled readily and joked conventionally; but he appeared to be naturally detached, and analytical of what was passing. An observant man, in other words,

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who was engaged in finding reasons, or in classifying. And he was classifying me. Nevertheless, he was polite about it.

And then I studied his costume. On the piazza I was somewhat taken aback by a strange bagginess about the hips, descending nearly to the knees, where the trousers were suddenly constricted almost to a skin tightness. Below were leather gaiters, which were no handsomer than my own. But I was from the first aware that Collester dressed fashionably; and I knew that my own nether garments, folded within my gaiters, were as different from his (mysteriously ending, I divined, not far below the gaiter top) as was the farm from the city. An odd figure he made on foot, where I might even suppose that in grace I had the best of him; but when we were on horseback, then the neatness of his knees caused me much doubt. He was the swell, I the plough-boy.

On my way home, those trousers of his worried me acutely. I desired the like—but could I wear them? Father's broad humor would soon spend itself; mother would even be a little proud of them; but could I outface my friends in the town? I found myself practising a cool stare at post-office wits.

Well, I must have such a suit, that was all there was to it. When I got home I did extra chores, carried in plenty of wood, pitched hay near the feeding chutes, greased the wagons, oiled the harness, turned the manure. At half past eight father

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ordered me out of the manure-pit, where I had been chuckling to myself at the thought of what Gertrude would say if she saw me there. But it was so dark that no one could have seen me unless the darkness had come upon him gradually.

"What ails you?" demanded father. "Such a hog for work I never saw."

I explained. "Just getting ahead of the chores. I want to-morrow off."

"Take it," he replied. "You've earned it. But what for?"

I could not bring myself to tell, and my parents refrained from urging me. My scheme I was scarcely willing to admit to myself. I knew what I was contemplating, but even within my mind it did not take the form of words. When in the morning I saw Athol below me in the valley, and felt within my pocket the lump that constituted my savings for the year, I was still unwilling to voice the wildness of my scheme.

I put up the horse in Warren's stable, and taking off my gaiters, hung them in the office. At my trousers I looked ruefully. They were horribly wrinkled and practically shapeless, yet until then they had been my best. As I wondered if a tailor would be able to restore their freshness, I felt the burden of clothes.

Mr. Warren, asking when I should want the horse, forced me to face the future. I bluffed it. "Maybe in an hour, maybe not till afternoon." And lingering on the edge of a great adventure,

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in duty bound I sought a ready-made clothing shop.

The clerk who waited on me was scarcely older than myself, but his friendly manner made me afraid of him. Fearing that he would sell me something in spite of myself, I would not admit what I came for. I looked over the piles of garments, varying from overalls to waistcoats. For years, at wide intervals, I had fitted myself out at this place; it had always seemed to me entirely adequate, and now for the first time I found it unsatisfactory. I compared these clothes with the suit that Collester had worn. Even as they lay in ordered piles, I thought them clumsy. Their materials looked cheap. Well, they were cheap. I asked a question.

"And what have you in riding-clothes?"

The clerk stared. "Riding-clothes?" He did not know what I meant. I got myself away.

Round the corner I had observed a tailor's shop, with bolts of cloth in the window, draped to represent trousers. I went into the place and, not to waste time, boldly asked my question.

"Ah," smiled the tailor. "Riding-clothes? Just a minute."

He rummaged among illustrated sheets so long that finally I became interested in his search. Groups of smiling young men, in very varied costumes, smirked at each other or at the beholder, from lawns or terraces. Although spick and span, they seemed very happy without the society of ladies.

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"Just a minute," repeated the tailor, seeing me observing him. "I saw it just the other day. Ah!"

From among the sheets he drew out the oldest of all, brown and spotted. "Here, sir," he said, and pointed to a self-conscious effigy in one corner. It was wearing a riding-suit.

"This was published three or four years ago," remarked the man. "But I think I could get the pattern."

I looked down at him, a little Jew. "Oh, you send for the pattern?"

"From New York; yes, sir. It will take only three days."

"But if it's no longer in style?"

"Oh, I'll have the newest sent on."

Suspicions grew in me. "Have you ever made a riding-suit?"

He became racial. "Hondreds of dimes. Ven I was in New York."

I shook my head and departed.

My feet took me to the station. Common sense said: "Foolishness!" But even common sense gave way as I perceived a train drawing in ahead of me, its cowcatcher pointing east. I was a little out of breath when I accosted its conductor.

"Where does this train go?"

He looked as if lunatic yokels bored him. "Among other places, Boston." Then he addressed the ether. "Abooooard!"

I mounted the steps. Guilt whispered: "Don't look back." With pride I turned to face any ac-

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cusing forefingers. But no one of my acquaintance was on the station platform except the Petersham stage-driver, who paid me no attention whatever. I found a seat, and occupied it in defiance of the opinion of all my little world. Out the window, Athol sped backward by me.

And I was off for Boston! It was a ride into the world. The train swept me into the twisting valley of Miller's River, past Baldwinsville, past Royalston, and in five minutes more I was farther from home than I had ever yet been. "Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits." That justifies some of my stupidity; but how could any of us ever go far from home, with but three to do the work? When I saw Gardner, I looked on a bigger town than I had yet seen; and when we drew into Fitchburg I was highly impressed.

I felt the impulse to get off. Surely such a city could supply me with riding-breeches. But no! There was romance at Boston, while Fitchburg was but Fitchburg after all. So I merely secured a sandwich and a banana, and rode on. I saw the country change character, though God be praised that in New England we are never out of sight of a hill. We went through Concord, and I gawked at it, wondering where the battlefield was. Walden I saw without interest, though some one near me mentioned its name. No one had ever spoken to me of Thoreau: Waltham I recognized as another city, and after it were more woods, but not many. I saw a wonderful stretch of market-gardens, and

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then the houses grew thicker and thicker. Surely this was Boston. But everybody sat quiet while we sped through an area more thickly settled than forty Athols. Then we shot out upon trestles over water, and off to the left I saw a great spike which I knew to be Bunker Hill monument. My history books had told me that this was just across the river from Boston. I was first at the door to get off.

And this great roaring thing was a city! If mother could but see it! She had been, as a girl, to Worcester and Springfield to visit relatives, but never since she married. Father had been here half a dozen times, but those were great events, as these were to me. Nevertheless, I remembered Benjamin Franklin and his rolls, and made up my mind not to make a fool of myself. I kept my mouth shut as I looked around, and seeing in five minutes a dozen men as countrified as I was, decided that I could escape notice. I began to hunt for a tailor.

I wandered far before I found my man. There were ready-made stores in plenty, and of considerable dignity too; but with them I had done. I saw tailor's signs also, and even tailor's windows, but none of them looked as if they had any acquaintance with riding-clothes. And then I came out on a great open space, where lofty elms grew, where there were wide stretches of green lawn, and where at a little distance I saw the glimmer of water. Boston Common! Looking on it, I felt the heat and dust and noise of the streets press heavily on me, and I longed for the grass beneath my feet.

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But there, up the hill to the right, rose a great building with a golden dome—the hub of the universe! And forgetting everything else I began to climb toward it. It was my strong desire to wander in and lose myself in its cool historic depths; but half-way up the hill I stopped. I had come for tailors.

As I glanced uncertainly about me, my eye fell on cloth in a window at the level of my shoulders. Just a bolt of cloth, lying carelessly on the window-seat: what was it doing in a private house? But that was a store alongside, as its sign showed; and there were other rolls of cloth in the recess behind this glass. This was the shop of a tailor; and surely a tailor who did not require the aid of at least a brass sign must be a man of mark. I entered the place of measurements.

The man who met me might well have been got up for a stroll on the Common. He wore a long coat with silk facings, which somehow suggested formality; he had a flower in his buttonhole, and he wore a tie which was neither white nor gray, but most elegant. His beard was exquisitely barbered. He and his costume reminded me of the Prince of Wales, as made familiar on cigar-boxes in the store and in the public prints. But I knew that this was the owner of the shop. He smiled at me inquiringly. I wonder if I looked more like a customer or an errand boy. An inspiration seized me.

"I want," said I, "some riding togs."

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The last word placed me in the buying class. The tailor smiled with understanding. "Exactly," he said.

His first question or two confused me, and I almost lost courage. He was still not sure of me—eccentric, or really a rustic? But his eye looked human, and on an impulse I put myself into his hands.

"Look here," I blurted. "I'm from the country, and I know I look it. But there are city folk near us, and I like to ride with them, and I've seen a fellow in clothes that look to me all right. Only, for heaven's sake, don't make me look like a fool, all fussed up in duds that don't belong to me!"

And now it appeared that this tailor was a man. His eye gleamed, and I felt the pressure of his hand upon my shoulder. "I came from the country myself," he said. "Leave it to me."

He muttered to himself, "Sack coat—Harris cloth," and other phrases from a strange vocabulary. Then he called his minions, who puttered around me with tape and square and called out numbers which were echoed from behind a partition. One man came for the trousers alone, and to my surprise the sole business of another was to measure for the vest.

"If I might suggest," murmured my friend in my ear, "an extra pair of trousers, of ordinary cut, for other occasions."

"Good!" I agreed.

He showed me the cloth that he advised, a rough

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fabric that caused me to doubt. The colors were odd. But he insisted that he was right, and I had given my individuality into his hands.

"And for—best?" he asked. "Say one more suit, of this?"

It was a wonderful dark blue, and I fell in love with it. But a dreadful thought intervened. "The price?" I faltered.

He looked at me with sinister meaning. "Did any one send you to me?"

"No," I explained. "I just saw your window."

He became thoughtful. "You pay cash?"

"Yes," I answered.

He was kindly. "I will give it to you cheap," he stated, and named a sum which made me gasp. And the riding-suit was just as much? More! I turned bitterly to the window.

He murmured behind me. "I was afraid you didn't know. I made it as low as I could."

I wrestled in spirit. It was shocking extravagance. I had no right to buy the one suit, let alone two. But I wanted them. And it was I who found the box. Father would back me. Recklessly I turned and gave the order.

He nodded approval. "You go back to-day?"

"Oh, I must," I assured him. "Five o'clock at latest."

"Come at four for a fitting."

Some one, a foreman, I supposed, gasped in a corner. I turned to go out. My tailor followed me.

"If I may suggest," he said on the steps, "the

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clothes will look better if you also have the correct thing in the rest of your dress."

More cost? But I recognized the truth, even though I gazed at him imploringly.

He was firm, and named my needs. "Hat, collars, ties, shirts, shoes. Indispensable." And he told me where to buy them.

Seven hours later, as my horse climbed the long hill that led to Petersham, I looked in the darkness off to the eastward. There was a dull gleam on the horizon that showed where Gardner lay; but Boston, the city of dreams, was beyond my ken. Yet I knew that I had seen it, its crowded streets, its green Common, its ancient edifices, its kind tailor. I had a faint impression of its noise and its heat, but mostly it shifted like a kaleidoscope before my eyes. And I was eager for the future, and for the two new suits of clothes.

When the box arrived I allowed mother to open it. Uppermost lay the homespun, and her face fell at the sight. Good cloth, of course; but to go riding with Gertrude in—! The blue serge she fell in love with, however, and so was satisfied.

But father's amusement when I first appeared in the riding-breeches was uproarious. I swelled out in the middle like a squash, he declared—or like a clown; exactly like a clown. He knew what the boys in the village would say.

So did I, and they said it, and it vexed me. I dismounted at the post-office to go in with a basket of eggs (mother never thought of sparing me), and

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my new dimensions attracted the eyes of the loafers. Binney Hartwell's pillow-cases were, from that time, bywords. I felt that my grin was a very feeble one; and I never used my haughty stare at all. Yet, to my satisfaction, the men in the store were indulgent and shut the boys up. It struck me that since the finding of the box the men had looked at me differently.

On the hotel piazza I found Gertrude, alone. She danced toward me. "Binney! What lovely—what scrumptious—what awfully good-looking clothes!"

"Indeed?" I asked as if amused.

"And the fit!" she cried.

"Just ran over to Lunnon," said I. For all her teasing, I would not tell her where I got them.

The approval that I most wanted, however, was Collester's. I watched him when he came; I kept my eye on him during the first five minutes. I saw that he took notice of me, and was satisfied with his signs of courteous interest; but when Gertrude left us for a moment he turned to me directly.

He took my sleeve between his thumb and forefinger. "Boston?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Dorset's, on Park Street?"

"Yes," I said again, surprised.

"Upon my word!" was his sole remark. But I was satisfied.

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CHAPTER X

I SPECULATED as to what Mr. Collester was. To begin with, he was older than I by some years, though I could not tell how many. The composure of his manner showed experience; his frame, though still athletic, had lost its spring; and while his cheeks were round and full as a boy's, and were fresh as an apple, there were little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Thirty, going on thirty-five, was where I classed him, with a little thought (I still have it) that perhaps he was older yet. He rode with the precision and formality of the riding-school, but I took some lessons of him. My seat was firmer than his, yet I learned, by watching him, to keep my elbows in, my hands down, my toes straight forward. A little good, honest jealousy is a wonderful stimulant.

And a little jealousy I felt. What this man was doing here; why he seemed to belong to Gertrude, and must ride with her and me; if really, she being but a girl, and he a man grown, he meant business: all this I wanted to know. Gertrude was scarcely nineteen; I was only twenty; and surely there was plenty of time before we thought deeply of life. If this man insisted on lugging seriousness into our good times, it would be very disturbing. I recog-

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nized that I might have to make up my mind before I wanted to—which thought, as I look at it now, was more than presuming, there being such a difference between the farm boy and the city girl. But my confidence was supreme.

We went this morning to Cousin Lon's, Gertrude intending that Collester should see where the box had been found. I noticed that my Peter contrasted with the other two horses. Gertrude's was her own, with all the paces, though she most used the single-foot. The action of mine was free and natural; his gaits were but the run, a canter, and a loose and rangy, although uneven, trot. A hard beast to ride, I think, for any one not used to him. Collester's mount was a medium-sized chestnut, a formal and machine-like trotter, that nevertheless showed some enthusiasm when it came to a race. Collester backed him well, and it struck me that the two were well suited.

"Surely not a Petersham horse," I remarked.

"Surely not," laughed Gertrude. "Mr. Collester uses none but his own. He rode this one up from Boston."

So, I inferred, Collester kept more than one horse for mere pleasure, and doubtless had an income according. I grudged it him.

We clattered up the road to Cousin Lon's, as gullied and stony as my father's own. Gertrude dashed ahead into the yard, and I let Collester go second, since I wished not to take any liberties there. I felt sure that Stidger had gone; we saw neither

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him nor Cousin Lon, but Margery was coming from the barn as we burst in. We left our horses tied to the rails, and went out with her to view the place where I had found the box.

To me Margery was a welcome addition, since she gave me Gertrude to myself. Collester took to Margery at once; every one does; she was as neat as if expecting us, and she smiled on him very kindly. "The men like her," said Gertrude as the other two walked ahead of us across the fields. "But she doesn't flirt, as I do."

Thus, having provoked me to declare that she did not flirt, Gertrude began to flirt with me.

We went and looked down into the tiny hiding-place, one of the few reminders, besides a little wealth, that still speaks of the old buccaneer. He must have made the cavity himself, very curiously and neatly; folk come nowadays to find it, and remove the cover, and put their hands down into it, and wish. I found that the wall at that point was based on an outcropping of ledge, so that no frost could heave it. Collester looked at the hiding-place with great interest, and bowed to me.

"You are the only person I know that belongs in a real romance."

"Margery, too," corrected Gertrude. "She may yet find the other two boxes." And she put her arms around Margery, as if defending her, which was very pretty and effective, though a trifle artificial—which I didn't recognize at the time, though I suspect Margery and Collester did. Collester

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begged pardon, and included Margery in his statement.

"It's her turn," I agreed. "And on my land, too, I hope. It would be only fair."

On the way back the two girls walked together. Collester put a question or two to me, concerning the pirate and his jewels. "Curious," he said, "that this will isn't better known. Such a provision would have led to lawsuits in most families, years ago. But you seem to even matters up in the long run. At the same time there seems to be no permanent advantage from these stones."

"This time there will be," I said confidently. "We've put in a lot of improvements already."

He looked at me, I think, as an older man does at a younger, when politely gauging the depth of his ignorance. "I meant," he said, "saving the capital. You will invest it, perhaps?"

"Oh," I said, "father has arranged all that with Mr. Worthen."

I must have spoken a little loftily, for he begged my pardon. At first he seemed still to be studying me; but when I looked at him he was gazing elsewhere and was whistling softly. We said nothing more.

Margery asked us into the house. "You're not proposing to give us tea!" protested Gertrude.

"No," laughed Margery. "But I've milk, and cookies that Mr. Collester may like."

"Cookies!" exclaimed he. "Oo!" And they smiled at each other frankly. Here was an instinctive friendship.

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"Confound him!" I thought. "Both my girls!" I went in sulkily, and would not take any food. Both my girls, and he a man of thirty, thirty-five, forty for all that I knew. I had not made up my mind to dislike him, but I was ready to. He was too calm. If he had but shown a little jealousy—anything!—it would have cheered me up.

We three rode away to the main road and turned south, intending to take the Templeton road and circle around to the southeast until we reached home again. But, not being cheerful as yet, I fell behind the other two as they cantered on, and so came to an adventure which at first I did not recognize as such.

In the hollow of the road there sat on a stone a figure that rose as we approached and turned a pale face up to us. The face struck me, for in spite of white lips and a forehead streaked with the dust of the road, there was a smile of admiration on it. But the smile was wistful, too, as if it said: "Oh, knights and ladies, a word of guidance for the beggar-man!" So, being quite willing to lag, I reined up and looked down on the lank figure and the upturned visage.

He was a weedy stripling, so wabbly from the mere outgrowing of his strength that he seemed to stand unsteadily. Looking on him, I became compassionately conscious of my own thews.

"Can I direct you?" I asked.

The face lighted up with a timid pleasure. There was something very humble in the gratitude of the

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brown eyes and the smile that trembled at the sensitive lips. But the cheeks were hollow as well as pale, and I wondered if it were not physical weakness that made the mouth so tremulous.

"I was looking," he answered, "for Mr. Alonzo Hartwell's." And he half drew a letter from his pocket.

His voice had a deep and pleasant ring; it was oddly mature for his age, which I took to be perhaps a year less than my own. Its mellowness contrasted, too, with his appearance, so little was it underfed. And as I used the word, I realized how well it fitted him. He looked as empty as an envelope.

It occurred to me that he must have come from Stidger. No one else, whether for secrecy or for safety, would have refrained from trusting the letter to the mail. "Didn't Mr. Stidger," I asked, "give you a breakfast before sending you off?"

He was startled, but answered quickly: "Oh, I had some breakfast."

I knew that he could not be planning to remain at Cousin Lon's. "And you are going to walk all the way back to Athol?"

"Of course," he answered bravely.

"You have overshot your mark," I told him. "The house is nearly a mile back, on the first road to the left. Now, will you do something for me?"

His face, in which I had at first seen no distinction, lighted winsomely. "Certainly."

I found a scrap of paper and scribbled a note to

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Margery. "Give him the milk and cookies that I did not take." Folding it, I gave it to him. His hand was long and thin and shapely.

"My cousin is at the house," I said. "Give that to her. And one more thing——"

"Yes?" he said willingly.

I paused before I ventured. But I had liked him on sight, I felt protective toward him, as to a luckless dog that I wanted to harbor, and I believed that he would not resent a kindly offer.

"Don't walk back," I said. "You know the Petersham stage?" He nodded. "It goes by to Athol some time after four. Wait for it by the road, make the driver take you in, and tell him it's my treat."

His eyes shone up at me gratefully and without pride. He nodded. "Binney Hartwell's treat."

"Why, yes," I admitted. "How did you know my first name?"

"I knew you," he said simply, with a kind of shy contentment.

"And you'll do it?" I demanded.

"I'll do it," he answered. He pointed along the road. "And they're waiting for you."

So they were, and I had forgotten them. Waving him a good-by, I hurried to where the other two stood at the top of the next rise. They were talking interestedly, asked for no explanation, and we rode on together; but this time I was cheerful again, and kept pace with them.

We turned down the Templeton road and wan-

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dered on our circuit. It was an hour before we faced home again and saw a thunder-storm coming. That was a summer for storms; we had a full dozen of them in July and August alone. Gertrude did not like the outlook; nor, to be frank, did I. Valor is wonderfully tempered by discretion for one's clothes. So we raced willingly to the village, which we reached in plenty of time. She and Collester invited me into the hotel, but I shook my head, and shouted, "Chores!" as I made off in a clap of thunder.

The storm overhung me as I rode for more than a mile, but no rain came down. Great swirling clouds drove over my head, and from them came great peals. Three times I saw the lightning leap, but only from cloud to cloud; and as I hurried along the high ridge there was as yet no rain driving from the west. But as I set the horse to the hill that led downward past the Diamond farms, over in the distance Orange was blotted out. I felt the first gust of the chill that preceded the downpour, and shook the reins on Peter's neck. "Now, old boy, for the sake of my suit!" Exhilaration seized me at the vigor of his response. We reached the curve, swept around it—and Peter swerved to the right so suddenly as almost to throw me.

Some one, rising from the grass, had stepped out into the road at the sound of our coming. So much I guessed, as I saw him turn to leap back again. I would not have checked Peter, even though I recognized Stidger's messenger, had I not

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seen him trip, twist, and fall. I heard his scream of pain, stopped Peter with a great scattering of pebbles, and went back. The boy lay upon the grass, and turned up to me his white face.

"My leg!" Then he fainted.

Surely enough, the leg, strangely twisted, seemed broken above the ankle. And there the lad lay, while beyond our hill the rain was sweeping nearer. I knew the stage had not yet left the village, and no one at all was in sight.

There was nothing else to do than to take him home with me. I could scarcely drop him on Margery's hands, and our house was the next nearest. It would have been a long, hard ride to the village; it was hard enough as it was. With difficulty I got his dead weight across the saddle before me. I hoped that the jolting would not rouse the lad as I carried him up our farm road and to the house. With a scared face, mother met me at the door. I got him under cover as the storm broke, and together we put him on a bed. Then, with a poncho to cover my good suit, in the driving rain I hurried for the doctor.

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CHAPTER XI

It was a whole month later when, on a fine September day, I sat with Margery on the door-step and watched Joe Rodey limp about the orchard, managing his cane with one hand while he picked up apples with the other.

"He's almost well," said Margery.

"Favors his leg," I pointed out. "He needs another week before he can give up the stick."

"And not a word from Mr. Stidger all this time," she remarked.

It was just as well, I thought. I wanted nothing to do with him. Margery sighed.

"Does he still come to your place?" I asked.

"He writes to father," she explained. "Every week at least. I don't know what the letters say, but they make father moody."

"Burn them before he gets them," I suggested.

She smiled. "He burns them afterward. I'm only glad that he doesn't keep them to read over again. It's bad enough as it is."

I murmured my regret that I had found the box. Yet I did not really mean it, not yet, although regretful that Margery was distressed in consequence. And just now, idly watching Joe, my attention was called by the fact that something had disturbed him.

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He stood half crouching, looking over the wall and down the lane. Then, limping in haste, he made for us.

"What is wrong with him?" asked Margery.

"There can be only one thing," I reasoned. "We have been speaking of the devil. Stidger's coming."

And he was. Joe, coming to us with clouded face, his eye shifting toward the road, murmured: "Mr. Stidger!"

I am ashamed that in those days I considered him a boy, myself a man. So, seeing his apprehension, I laid it to childishness, rather than to ignorance of his own rights and the habit of obedience through three years of ill-nourished drudgery. Nor had I yet learned that the nervous dread of a conflict of wills, in persons who understand the issues of such conflicts, is quite as much to be respected as the happy-go-lucky blundering of such men as myself, whose chief dependence is physical strength. But with a good-natured impatience, I saw that Joe was trembling.

"He won't eat you," I said. "Sit down, be comfortable, and ask him why he hasn't paid you some attention before." These being quite impossible for Joe, I had to think of something else to do.

The grindstone stood close by, and I placed a chair beside it. "Now," I said, "turn that stone either with your hand or your good leg. Whenever I tell you to turn, turn!" And for want of something better to sharpen, I took out the old knife with which I hunted for boxes. From the

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can that stood at hand I soused some water into the trough, and we began to sharpen the knife. The employment steadied Joe and made Margery smile. Out of the corner of my eye I looked for Stidger.

He strammed into the yard with his usual scowl, and marched up to us truculently. At sight of Margery he made a dab at his hat; at me he glowered; at the boy he sneered.

"So," he said. "Just loafing here, are you?"

Joe flushed blotchily. "They won't let me go yet," he explained.

Stidger turned on me. "So you're keeping my clerk here, while I have to do his work!"

"I hope you intend to pay him, just the same," I said.

"Pay him!" scoffed Stidger. "The feller that broke his leg can pay him, and board and lodge him, too." He turned again to Joe. "When are you coming back?"

"Perhaps another week."

"No, ye don't!" Stidger snapped. "You come at once or not at all. There's work that I've got to be helped with, and if you don't come I won't keep the place open for you any more."

I had listened with much interest, while pretending that my sole interest was in grinding the knife. Stidger's selfish eagerness to get the boy again was natural; not so the contempt that was so plain in his manner. Now that I can look on the man with better understanding, and with a little pity, I can feel some admiration for the perverted cour-

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age that made him snarl where he would not truckle, and snatch where he could not persuade. But I had no sympathy for him then. Joe gasped, the wheel stopped turning, and looking up, I found Joe pale with dismay.

"I'll come to-morrow," he stammered.

"You'll turn the wheel," I commanded. "And you won't go back to Athol till I let you."

Joe began to turn again, weakly. I saw Stidger's feet move nearer to me. "What business is it of yours?"

"Why," I answered, grinding carefully, "you've just told me yourself. If I'm responsible for his broken leg, I'm responsible for healing it. Faster, Joe."

"He's well," asserted Stidger impatiently. "Just look at him. Been growing fat."

"That's because he's well fed," I retorted.

"If he can sit here and grind," insisted Stidger, "he can sit at a desk and write." I felt the wheel slow down.

"Faster," I urged. "Yes, Mr. Stidger, that's all very well; but how soon will you send him on another fourteen-mile walk with only a glass of blue milk for breakfast?"

I had guessed at the blueness of the milk, but Stidger did not raise the point. "There was bread," he snapped.

"Offered, but not given," I retorted. "No, he doesn't leave me till he's well. Another week at least, the doctor says."

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"Leave off that grinding!" exclaimed Stidger, exasperated. "It ain't so important."

I looked up at him. "A very important knife," I explained. "A four-inch blade, and very strong. I've given it a good point for the first time in years. It's what I look for boxes with."

He had been getting finely angry, but now at the word he controlled himself. His face remained red, but he closed his mouth firmly, and with the action seemed to swallow his wrath. "Then," he asked slowly: "I'm to understand you won't let the boy go?"

"It wouldn't be right," I answered, myself sobered a little by the change in him. For though his anger was repressed, I felt that it was just as strong within him, and the more dangerous because under control.

"Very well," he said. "Joe, you needn't look for more work from me." He turned to go.

"Where are you going?" I demanded. For he was making for the wall, at the place where we commonly crossed to go to Cousin Lon's.

"Where I please," he flung back at me.

"If you're going to the other farm," I told his back, for he was marching on, "the way is down the road."

He stopped with his hand on the wall. "But that's a mile farther."

"I can't help it if it's ten," I answered. "Nobody crosses our land."

He showed his yellow teeth as he looked back at

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me, in a grin that reminded me of a rat's. Slowly his foot came up and found a crevice in the stones. Shutting my knife, I rose and went over to him, while he waited in the same position. He looked yet more like a rat as I drew nearer, with his little red eyes gleaming sharper. But he was small and scrawny, and I did not wish to quarrel with him.

"You know," I said, "that you ought not to cross that wall."

He looked away and set both hands on the top of the wall, as if to spring over it. That was enough for me.

"If you do," I said, "I'll throw you back again—and that's a legal warning, Mr. Stidger."

Slowly he turned and faced me; then suddenly, overcome by exasperation, he ground his teeth at me. I had never heard the sound before; it was full of passion, and involuntarily I stepped back. Then with a gesture of both hands, as if throwing from his breast the whole load of his anger at me, he turned and walked away. Very soberly, taken aback by his strange action, I went and sat down by the others.

"What did he mean by that?" asked Margery in a low voice.

I could not tell. If I had felt myself a man before, I knew myself now to be but a boy, oppressed by the undeniable advantage which the mere weight of years gives to an adult. I felt inexperienced, unstable; I wondered if he could do something which I could not prevent.

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"Oh," Joe broke out suddenly in a trembling voice: "He is a hateful man, a revengeful man! I ought to have gone back with him."

He restored my courage. "You ought not," I declared. "You never shall have anything more to do with him."

"How shall I live, then?"

I would have said, "Live here"; but, though we had come to like Joe for his humility and responsiveness, that was impossible. "There are plenty of places for a fellow like you," I stated confidently. "Don't fret about the future, Joe. Don't worry about anything at all. There, you've got grease on your hand. Go in and wash it off."

"He thinks the world of you," said Margery when he had gone. "He will talk about you by the hour."

"What he hasn't made clear," I remarked, "is how he happens to have known me by sight. He seems to have been in the habit of watching for me in Athol streets."

Margery explained. "You have attracted him by the quality he hasn't got, your strength. He goes to watch you every year, pitching in the game against Athol. He and Bertie Stidger."

"Bertie Stidger?" I asked, surprised. "Who is he?"

"Bertha is her real name," explained Margery. "Mr. Stidger's daughter, a frail little wisp, not yet ten. Twice they have slipped off to the game together."

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"She, too?" I asked. "I wish they would impart a little of their feeling to her papa. Margery, how shall I find work for Joe?"

"I should ask Mr. Collester," answered Margery promptly.

"Collester?" I asked. "But he lives in Boston."

"Joe has no ties, no relatives at all," she reasoned. Joe, we had found, was a poorhouse child. "He will be willing to go to Boston—especially if you go there."

"If I go there," I mused. "Hm!"

It was a pleasant subject for musing on. We had all hinted at it, but as yet indefinitely. I felt as if I were on the threshold of change, were on my way to becoming, or doing, something.

"Gertrude," said Margery, "is coming up this morning to see you about it. She ought to be here now."

"Upon my word!" I exclaimed. So that was why Margery had come over in working hours, when she knew, too, that mother would be at the village. I did not feel quite flattered. What scheme did they have on foot for managing me? But I had no time to ask questions, for here came Gertrude, tumultuously charging into the yard, her favorite entrance. Collester, more sober, was behind, so that I had the privilege of taking Gertrude from her horse.

"Oh," she broke out when we were all seated, "I have seen that man again. His fists were

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clinched, and I know he was muttering, and he scowled at me so! What was he doing here?"

I told her, and she fluttered with the prettiest interest. "He looks so dangerous. How could you?"

"Do you mean," asked Collester, interested, "that you really refused to let him cross your land?"

"We let nobody cross," I answered. "All the land is posted."

"And if I wanted to wander about?"

"Mr. Collester," I laughed, "I will go with you anywhere."

"Most interesting," he murmured.

"And most natural," I claimed. He agreed. I asked him my question, what to do with Joe.

"What work has he done?" he inquired.

We called Joe from the house and made him give an account of his work with Stidger. "Copying and errands," summarized Collester. "I can put you in the way of something better." His eye lingered over Joe, as if he liked him.

Joe had a winsome shyness, like a girl's, that called blushes to his cheeks, and made his plain face seem almost handsome. He thanked Collester, but turned a hesitating eye on me. Should he go?

"Boston is a big place," remarked Gertrude demurely. "Binney, why don't you go and take care of him?"

"I should like to," I agreed readily.

"You know," went on Gertrude, "your father has been speaking to my father about your going to

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Boston after the crops are in, and spending the winter in business. Isn't it a good plan?"

It was. I wanted the city. I was eager to go.

"Mr. Collester," said Gertrude, "probably could make room for you, too."

I was—stumped. It was meant as an offer; she had come to make it. And Collester, looking up at me, nodded. Margery was watching me eagerly. "But," I stammered, "my father had some idea that Mr. Worthen—" I stopped. I couldn't claim a similar offer from the banker, but I had hoped for it.

"But, Binney," remonstrated Gertrude earnestly. "Oh, come and talk with me!"

She took me away from the others, and I leaned by the wall where I had threatened Stidger. Gertrude stood in front of me; she was flushed and embarrassed.

"You want to go to the city," she said. "What sort of thing should you care to do?"

"Money interests me," I told her. "Investments, now that we have capital to invest. Broking or banking, I suppose."

Her face fell. "Don't you care for the law, Binney?"

I divined that Collester was a lawyer. "But," I objected, "that would mean years of study first."

"Some good lawyers," she argued, "never go to law school at all."

"They study all the harder, then, outside," I returned. "And I'm nothing of a student, Gertrude."

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"Mr. Collester handles money," she said, trying again. "I know he does. We can ask him, if you like."

Involuntarily I looked over to the door-step, where Margery and Collester, seeing the action, hastily became absorbed in gazing at the orchard. I felt exasperated, as a man does when he discovers that his womenfolk, plotting to influence him, have called in the aid of an excellent but somewhat superior friend. But Collester was not my friend—not yet. And like a young prince, instead of marvelling that this fine creature, still so much of a stranger to me, our acquaintance being almost accidental, our ties of the flimsiest, should trouble herself with me for a moment, I stood doubtful and suspicious of her purpose.

"But why not go to a real broker?" I demanded.

Gertrude shifted her ground to meet me. "You can. Mr. Collester can perhaps tell you where to go."

I was getting vexed by this determined blocking from my own purpose. "Why not ask your father?" I inquired shortly.

Herself vexed, she was equally short. "Father will take you into his own office."

Relieved, I was ready to smile. "Oh, I was afraid he wouldn't."

"But, Binney," she cried, with a change as swift as mine, "you must—you must—" In embarrassment she clutched at my sleeve. "You must promise me to refuse it."

"Refuse it!" I exclaimed.

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"Ask Mr. Collester," she suggested, "if you won't do better elsewhere."

"No," I said coldly. "I don't see any reason for consulting him."

Gertrude's hands fluttered at my shoulder. "Binney!" she pleaded. I was a fool not to yield to her genuine distress. Instead, I demanded reasons.

"Tell me why I shouldn't go with your father."

Stupid of me! How could she speak plainly on such a subject? Gertrude drew herself up, and showed me a glimpse of a side of her character which I had never yet seen. I had felt that she was purposeful, and that her playfulness and whimsies might easily hide her determination to have her own way. But until she stood and stared at me, as now, I had never suspected her capable of cold anger against a trespasser on ground which a man of sense should know was forbidden. And even now I pressed forward so hastily that I did not clearly see my offense. For I thought I had an idea.

"Do you think I'll bother you too much?" I asked jealously.

She looked at me in haughty silence, then turned and went back to the others. I followed her stiffly. Margery studied our faces, first anxiously, next with disappointment. Thanking Mr. Collester, I said that I could probably not accept his offer. Then, with perfect lightness, Gertrude began to laugh about Stidger and his gloomy aspect. And so it all passed over.

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Or appeared to. But Gertrude's chill disgust had impressed me. I was embarrassed and gloomy, and was glad when the visitors went. And though, failing entirely to understand my own offense, I reasoned that the girl had asked too much of me, I was nevertheless troubled until evening.

After supper Mr. Worthen, alone, rode up to call. Interested and conscious, I lingered at a little distance until father called me to the door-step where my three elders sat. Mr. Worthen glanced at me with a quizzical smile, father looked at me proudly, mother a little sadly.

"There, Mr. Worthen," said father. "There's the boy that found the box. His mother and I want to make of him all we can. He's earned it. Hasn't he, mother?"

I took no special heed that mother smiled patiently, and made no other answer. Mr. Worthen had my real attention, and now he fixed me with his eye.

"Binney," he said, "your father has asked for my advice. Do you want to hear it?" I nodded breathlessly. "It's to put you at work with me. Will you come?"

"Oh, I will!" I cried.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You ought to understand what the work is." He leaned forward, his gray eye piercing me. "My business is complicated. Let me warn you of that. I'm a broker, my boy, the biggest in Boston. I have half a dozen branches to my work—stocks, bonds, flotations,

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banking, and so on. Don't you dream for a minute that you can learn it all in a day. But I can give you such a chance as nobody else can. I'll keep my eye on you. I'll bring you forward. You've the makings of a clever man in you. I'll build you up. Will you come?"

He was all bluffness and kindness, and his praise uplifted me. Of course, I gasped out my delight. It was arranged that in November, as soon as father could spare me, I should travel to the city. A little timidly I spoke of Joe.

Mr. Worthen shook his head very decidedly. "No weaklings in my office."

Regretful, yet the prouder, I said no more. Joe would have to be satisfied with Mr. Collester.

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CHAPTER XII

THERE was a natural heartlessness in my readiness to go to the city. Natural, because I was obeying the impulse which drives men to the attempt to better themselves. Besides, I was young. So, when the time came, I went with complete forgetfulness of the feelings of the others. I scarcely considered that at the farms we were a little community cut off from the world, where mother and Margery had no intimates, and where the habit of the men was to stay at home and attend strictly to business. The disappearance of one from such a small circle would make such a gap that even Cousin Lon was sure to miss me.

But I never thought it out then, nor did any of them tell me. Margery, for example, was quite inscrutable when I made my absurd farewell, at the thought of which I still grow uncomfortable. I went to see her, and took her with me on my return to our farm, walking on our only beaten path, the way between our two houses. I was excited as I thought of my future, my plans for which satisfied me so completely that I was very generous to those whom I was leaving behind.

"You must find the other two boxes," I said to her in perfect seriousness. "Finding this one has given me all the start I need. You and Cousin Lon

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ought to have the rest of the treasure. So keep an extra-sharp lookout for it."

I wonder that she did not laugh in my face. Instead, she answered that she would be sure to; and when we stood at the pool she listened to what further I had to say.

"This is where I met Gertrude," I reminded her. "Do you know, I like this better than the double pine." We looked at the old giant where he towered at a distance, then down at the silver bottom of the spring. "I think these dancing sands, which always have their movement even in midsummer, and the overflow that keeps the pool clear of every leaf and twig that falls in, are more permanent than anything else on both our farms, even though the pine was well grown when the old pirate set this stone rim. Margery, you must meet me here when I come back, and I'll tell you all about my luck."

She promised that she would.

"And you must write me often," I continued, with my big-cousinly certainty. "No matter how busy I am, I'll answer every letter."

And she, who knew me so much better than I knew myself, never made me a prophecy of my indifference and forgetfulness! Instead, she offered to run over frequently to see mother, which I had not even thought of asking.

"Margery," I said, a little disturbed by this revelation of my thoughtlessness, yet still loftily kind, "you're a dear girl. And now, good-by."

Margery's hand was short and compact; it re-

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turned my grip with its own frank pressure. And as her clear eyes looked kindly into mine, I felt the sudden knowledge that this was an event. The realization that this day finished my country life brought with it a doubt of the future, and a regret of the present, which for a moment surprised even my confidence, taking me aback. But any unwillingness to leave this sweet cousin, to venture from the shelter of the farm, was for myself alone, and so I quickly mastered it. With a manly voice I finished my farewell. Margery remained and looked after me, ready, each time I looked back, to smile and wave her hand.

Every man knows some woman who has seen his weakness. Lucky if she is as kind to him as Margery was to me.

Arguing (against knowledge) that, since father wanted me to go, my mother must do the same, and putting out of mind her dread of change, I took my leave of her very easily. In this I was aided by the slight vexation which I felt whenever she spoke of the city or of Gertrude. She seemed to think that they were harmful, whereas I knew that they were not.

So I went, smothering the knowledge that I left sore hearts behind me, and satisfying myself with resolutions to write often, and frequently to "run up" and see the family. The first resolve I kept badly, the second not at all. As any older man could have told me, and as I am able to assure all comers, regret repairs nothing.

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Thanks to the Worthens, not only my living but also my acquaintance was prepared for me. For I had received a missive from Gertrude. It was an engraved invitation to a Mrs. So-and-So's dance upon an evening within a week of my arrival, and some strange hand had written in my name; but Gertrude had directed it to me, and on the lower margin had scribbled: "Best jeans, Binney, with all the fixings." Mother had explained to me the meaning of the letters R. S. V. P. In the same mail by which I wrote to Mrs. So-and-So I had also written to my good friend Mr. Dorset, begging him to have an evening suit ready for me to try on at my arrival. This was on suggestion of my mother, who added, out of her private hoard, funds for an overcoat. My burning eagerness to look well is shown by the fact that I went for my fitting straight from the train, even before I had looked up the lodgings to which Mr. Worthen had directed me.

As to my looks when once I got used to wearing the things, Gertrude later, in one of her captivating enthusiasms, told me that I carried my dress clothes well. I should have doubted this when in my room I wore them for the first time before the glass. The staring black-and-whiteness of the suit seemed to emphasize my bulk, especially since its snugness at the waist and hips made my shoulders unduly broad. There was a sleekness to it, also, which was strange to me. But most I was troubled by its utter absurdity, both in the absolute ridiculousness of its shape, and in its foreignness to the over-

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alls which till just now had been my most familiar garment. And so sheepishly I turned away: there would be laughter at the countryman.

In the elegance and discomfort of this new toggery I went to Gertrude's. The house was on Commonwealth Avenue, that street which I had heard of as the very centre of fashion. The soft-footed butler admitted me to the hall, and after respectfully memorizing my name, went away and left me staring at the amazing splendor of my surroundings. Rugs of rich coloring, such as I had read of but never seen, soft to the foot and delightful to the eye, lay on the floor of polished oak. Hangings at each door, pictures on the walls, gilt, glitter, warm and glowing colors everywhere—I was fairly dazzled for a moment.

A little laugh—and there was Gertrude peeping at me from between the curtains. She thrust out her pretty head. "I got ready ahead of time," she cried. "Do you know what that means, you miracle of promptitude? I wanted to see you when you saw this place. It's different from the country, Binney."

Different! A vision of our smudgy and low-ceiled kitchen, of its bare walls and floor, of the narrow and steep stair that led from it, rose in pitiful contrast to all this splendor. Here the wide flight gently mounted upward to a landing, then divided to the right and left, so that one might reach the upper story by either way. A soft and heavy carpet ran up the middle of the stairs. Fac-

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ing me from above the landing was a great portrait of Mr. Worthen, at full length, frock-coated, carrying cane and gloves and silk hat, a burly black figure before a gorgeous red curtain. And at home our portraits were photographs or tintypes, taken at the Athol fair!

Then Gertrude emerged and overwhelmed me—her most brilliant self. For I saw her, for the first time, in all the splendor of her ball dress, and in spite of the brightness of her eyes, my gaze ran up and down her dazzling figure. A dress of pale green, draped with some shimmering tinsel, and belted with gold, yet with a narrow edging of dark fur at hem and at bust. Below, the dress trailed away in indescribable grace; above, there rose out of the rich fur the glory of her shoulders. Never before had I seen any one so costumed. Had she been a mere girl I must have admired; but she was Gertrude! The youthful curves of her shoulders and her throat, the hinted beauty of her bosom, the blushing satin skin—I drew a long breath. The witch had prepared this surprise for me, and was watching for its effect; but at the sight of my face the color came flooding to her very eyes. And some restraint, some barrier, broke between us. Our glances met and seemed to cling together. She was breathing quickly, and I knew that I was panting with the shock.

I might have stood long, stupidly staring; but she fumbled for words. "See," she stammered, feeling at her throat, where hung, on a threadlike

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chain, a fiery jewel. "See—look. Do you remember, do you recognize this?" And she held it for me to see.

Obedient, I wrenched my glance from hers, and tried to bend it on the stone, a single ruby, simply set. "No," I answered. "Have I seen it before?" My eyes came back to hers.

"It was yours," she answered. "It is the stone you three were looking at when father and I came to your house, after you had opened the box. I loved it at once, the best stone of them all, and made father buy it for me. Doesn't it look well on me?"

She tried to be arch, but was still too much moved to speak airily. Her challenge faltered, and her gaze fell. And I rough, I impetuous, answered almost fiercely:

"*You* look well! You are beautiful! Gertrude, how wonderful you are!"

The language, though so tumultuous, was familiar enough to restore her to herself. "Oho! And we pretend to be a farmer, and to know nothing of compliments? Indeed!" So she fought away from me, and recovered herself, and rang for her carriage, and talked brilliantly until it came. One moment there was, when she gave me the wrap which I was to put upon her shoulders, when I thought her gaze again faltered before mine. But she turned to be invested, and her confusion passed. As for me, I was so dazzled by this vision of her, so drugged by her very atmosphere, that I fairly

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stumbled after her to the carriage, and had not the wit to help her into it.

But oh, that first ball, and oh that first breath of the life that Gertrude lived! I had learned to labor through the waltz, mother and Margery having drilled me in the art. That was my only qualification for the party, beyond the fact that I was a curiosity, as the ploughboy who had found a fortune in a stone wall. My host and hostess received me with the frankest inquisitiveness, as one of whom they had heard and were anxious to see. I was introduced to many, and I doubt if there was a person in the room to whom I was not pointed out in the course of the evening. Gertrude managed some of the introductions to older people, and took note of the invitations that ensued. "There," she said to me toward the close of the evening, "three more parties, Binney. And do you know what every one is saying? That you don't look like a farmer. That's because of your straight back."

I think myself that it was because of her. So was I uplifted by her that I came triumphantly through the embarrassments of such an experience among strangers. Everything centred upon her. The music, the handsome people, the showy dresses, all served but to set off the liveliest, the gayest creature of them all. Not wine, but anger and women are likest to intoxicate me. That night Gertrude set a fire in my veins.

Few incidents remain to me from that confusion of shifting partners, scarcely a word to remember

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and set down. But Gertrude? Never before, as seldom since, was Gertrude timid before me. And this I know, that the blush which flooded her cheek that night whenever called by the glances of our eyes, she could never counterfeit, nor could any woman. The quickened breath and heightened pulse which the dance itself did not summon—for like the others of her set, she was trained like an athlete—came and went in my presence. The spell was on us both.

It was not strong enough. "Let us walk home," said Gertrude, when in the early morning we went down the steps together. "It is only a few blocks." So I sent the carriage away, and off we went together in the moonlight, she with her bright uncovered head winsome above the white fur that enveloped her. There were others walking in our direction, and carriages streaming past, to which we called good-bys, so that I scarcely had a minute's talk with her until we stood together at the foot of her steps. I have wondered if she arranged it so that we should not be alone together in the carriage. But it was not the conventions that troubled her; she was one of those rare creatures that break them without blame.

She may well have been tired with the gayety, or she may have been simply afraid. Twice I have seen Gertrude lose herself before a situation, and—looking back—I know she doubted herself now. Certainly when I urged: "Let me come in with you a few minutes—just a few!" she laughed

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a little breathlessly, awkwardly cried, "No, no!" and, waving her white-gloved hand, ran up the steps. She pulled the bell and disappeared in the vestibule.

But she blushed once more as she ran. I wonder what would have happened had I followed before the butler reached the door to let her in. Peering back through the frosted glass of the outer door, was she disappointed or relieved to see me still standing, dully looking up until I heard the inner door open and then close? For I was green and countrified, and had no courage to make the attempt. Bewildered, I took myself away, and so closed that thrilling experience.

Neither of us ever forgot it. Neither shall we ever forget that we shrank back from the height of our emotion. More credit to my courage, to her wisdom, had we trod bravely on together. But it was not love, not the true inspiration. For though I walked the streets for hours before I would go to my room, by day I found myself incredulous. And in the afternoon I went to see Gertrude, suspicious of her power over me, and curious to see if I could rouse her again. I found her on her guard, not defiant but unbelieving and cool.

From my first glance at her brisk manner as she came down-stairs, I learned that she was mistress of herself. Like the male brute that I was, I felt disappointment. "I am glad that you came," she said. "You don't begin with father till to-morrow?"

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"No," I answered. "He said he had directors' meetings to-day."

She took me into the parlor. I came to know it well. The age of stuffed upholsteries was passing, but this room was reminiscent of it. There was a "suite" of sofa and chairs, there was a couple of odd fuddy-duddy stools, all more or less fringed and puffed. On the walls, above a panelled dado, was heavily embossed bright-patterned leather, on which hung pictures in shiny gold frames, mostly figure studies of folk in costume. The floor was covered by a vast pale rug, in the middle of which we stood facing. Gertrude's rich coloring was as striking as ever, but she was dressed very simply.

"Do you remember," she asked abruptly—and for the second time I saw the hint of purpose beneath her constant airiness of manner—"that in Petersham I asked you not to work for father?"

This was not what I expected. Heaven knows what I wanted, but it was not this. I must have thrown up my head like a skittish colt as I saw that she was deliberately returning to the subject.

"But, Gertrude!" I expostulated.

She came a little nearer. Her expression, though not as brilliant as the night before, was sweeter than I had ever seen it. Gertrude was doing this against her will. I could not see this then; I failed to recognize it as a proof of her kindness toward me that she overlooked my earlier stupidity, and asked her favor twice. She said:

"I ask it again. And I can't explain myself, Binney."

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Never had she been gentler to me than then. And I thought she had forgotten the emotions of the previous night! That she might be thinking of my welfare did not occur to me. The big fact was that she was interfering with my management of my affairs. Between disappointment and resentment I flushed and stiffened.

"I have promised your father," I said.

"He will get over the disappointment," answered Gertrude a little dryly. Then, when I scowled, she hastened to say: "Binney, leave it to me to manage him." And in apology she touched my hand.

With shame I remember that I turned away and went to the window. Outside I saw nothing, for my mind was self-centred. "I mean to keep my promise," I replied.

"Won't you oblige me?" she asked.

I stated the bald terms of the proposition. "Oblige you by breaking my promise!"

"Then make me a promise," she required.

I turned: "What is it?"

"If anything goes wrong between you and father, you will come to me before you break with him."

This seemed to me highly unreasonable, for I did not perceive that she intended, in such a case, to manage him rather than me. "How can I be sure?" I asked petulantly.

"Then," said Gertrude, quietly persistent, "at least promise to consider consulting me. I might be able to help."

"Of course I'll promise that," I agreed, though

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not with the best of grace. "Though why you expect——"

She came a little closer, interrupting by raising a forefinger. "Girls are strange, aren't they?"

We tailed off into small talk, and presently she had me in a good humor.

I know now that she had tested me, and I see how I failed. And so our great stirring of emotion, to which I look back with tenderness, and which showed Gertrude to me this day at her best, brought us nowhere but to the avoidance of a quarrel. I have wondered that Gertrude did not at once abandon me, yet after all there was now a bond between us. There never passed away from between us the memory of that divine evening. I represented something from which her nature was unwilling to part.

Our relations slipped back into flirting at the worst, mere comradeship at best. Under Gertrude's guidance I had stepped into the midst of a giddy whirl which soon became familiar. Curiosity kept folk interested in me until, since I did nothing absurd or disgraceful, I had established myself. A few more clothes, careful study of the men I met, a fairly close mouth, and some coaching by Gertrude, made me decently at home. Gertrude's training was done whole-heartedly, not always flatteringly.

"You don't enter a room right," she assured me frankly one day. "Yesterday at the Herrick's you had one hand in your pocket. You smiled too much."

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"I was rattled," I pleaded.

"Get over it," she directed. "The whole room was not looking at you. And, instead of going directly to Mrs. Herrick, you came first to me."

"Irresistible attraction," I murmured, hoping to flatter.

But Gertrude frowned. "You don't suppose a girl wants to be made conspicuous, do you? Nor is pleased to have her friends show themselves countrymen?"

I felt like a mob of farmers, and swore to do better. This at least I can say of myself: She never needed to give me the same hint twice.

It was a wonderful world that she opened to me. People who had ballrooms, and carriages, and a bewildering profusion of money, speedily became, for me, the most important part of the population of Boston. There were girls in numbers; and I was drawn, willingly, into their gayeties. Before a month was over, my looking-glass showed a substantial decoration of invitations, and I knew my way to a dozen parlors. I could behave myself at a dinner, at the theatre, at a dance—I the farmer! I used to feel proud at my adroitness. Yet how often they must have laughed at me!

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CHAPTER XIII

When I reported at Mr. Worthen's according to appointment, I waited first in the outer office, and gawked about me on the sights and noises. Here were things entirely new. The little ticking glass-domed machines, always with their readers of the strips of paper that intermittently reeled themselves out into the baskets; the papers filed on hooks against the wall, with restless seekers flitting from one to another; men at desks sitting with their hats on, while other men talked with them in mysterious confidences; questions and answers in a strange vocabulary called across the office—all these filled me with curiosity and a pleasant anticipation. I looked with interest on those who seemed at home here; they might some day be intimates of mine.

Then I was called into Mr. Worthen's handsome private room, apart from the hum of the outer office. Here the walls were panelled with bright oak, the desks and chairs were of the same finish, the rug was of a strong red, the fireplace tiles were patterned in yellow and purple, and the gas-fixtures were very shiny. It all seems showy as I look back on it now, but to me it was sumptuous then.

Mr. Worthen, rising from behind his roll-top desk, shook hands with me, and then stood in front of the

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fire. His bulky figure seemed very massive in its snug cutaway; his linen was very white, his narrow necktie brilliant blue, and his rings, as he shook out a faintly perfumed handkerchief, flashed red and green. Without loss of dignity he blew a blast of welcome.

"So here you are, Binney," he said as he looked me over. "Very sensible to wear good clothes. All my young men do."

I was a bit startled. The young men in the outer office certainly had put some thought into their attire; indeed, every one in the office, young or old, was noticeably neat, except for one man. But they all appeared to me rather flashy. My ideas, imbibed from Collester and my tailor, were (except in riding-togs) all for modesty. Had not Mr. Worthen seen the difference?

"In fact," he went on, "I require it of them. Makes a good impression. Goes quite a way in the sort of thing that I want you to do. For I have a special field in view for you, Binney."

I was pleased, and said so. He nodded at me.

"Can't start you as a beginner," he said. "You're too proud, and you're really too good for it. You can't go on the curb; your dignity would never let you succeed there. I doubt if correspondence is your line, or desk-work of any kind. No, I must have you under my own wing. But first old Laycock must put you through his mill."

He reached out and touched a bell. "Yes, old Laycock hasn't had a beginner for some time; he's

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generally too busy. But he must give his attention to you." A stenographer appeared. "Mr. Denny," said Mr. Worthen. "And then ask Mr. Laycock to come here." She went out.

"The young man whom I want you to meet first," said Mr. Worthen, "is one of my sharpest. You won't pattern yourself on him, because your minds work differently. He's the best curb operator in town, whereas you never could be half good at that. But he can show you things that Mr. Laycock, being married, would never think of." Mr. Worthen smiled knowingly. "Restaurants, Binney, and the theatres, and the way to a good time. You've got to know your way round."

This young man, appearing, proved to be some few years older than myself, tall, lean, smooth-shaven, and lantern-jawed. His clothes were light in color, almost summery in their effect; I found it to be his habit to wear a scarlet necktie and a malachite pin. The warmth of his welcome flattered me. He wound his long, thin fingers around my hand, and turned the hand sideways as he vigorously shook it. His head, too, was on one side for the ceremony.

"Boston is honored," said he. "A man who can pick diamonds out of stone walls is new to us."

Mr. Laycock came next, grizzled, bent, and sour. He was that sole member of the staff who was threadbare and a bit untidy. On being told that I was to be under his care he lowered at me as if the fault were mine. "I had hoped," he said, address-

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ing me directly in a rasping voice, "that Mr. Worthen had stopped giving newcomers to me."

Denny, winking at me as my embarrassed eye wandered from the cold little orbs in Mr. Laycock's wrinkled face, tried to convey to me that the old fellow was more amusing than embarrassing. But Mr. Worthen, with much impressiveness, came and laid his hand upon my shoulder. "Laycock," he said, "this young man is a beginner, sure enough. But he's the most promising beginner that I ever had—so much so that I propose soon to take him in hand myself. You won't have him long; he's quick enough, I can tell you. So do your best with him."

Denny, losing his grin, seemed quite as much struck as I was confused by the formality and force of these statements. But Mr. Laycock did not lose his fixed acidity. "Well," he said, after a moment's scrutiny of his employer, "I hope the young man is willing to apply himself."

I assured him that I was. He took me out and sat me down at a desk in a recess, where he also was quartered, and whence I could see little that went on in the big office. There he gave me a newspaper article to read and digest, then set me to floundering amid figures. My absolute lack of preparation for the work being evident to him before half an hour was over, I believe that he went to Mr. Worthen and remonstrated, for I saw him go indignantly to the private room, and return disgusted. He never took any pains to conceal his

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feelings. But Mr. Laycock's trials were no greater than my own. I was quite miserably confused. At lunch time, however, Denny came and carried me off, to refresh me.

"Of course it's really a big advantage to you, your being with old Laycock." This he assured me when we were seated in a restaurant painted with scrolls and German lettering. It was my first restaurant, and I was innocently interested in it. "Laycock is the plodder, and keeps us all straight. Any mistakes that's found he sets to rights. If he takes to you he'll show you a good deal that it would take you years to learn anywhere else. Only," and Denny's yawn seemed roused by his subject, "it's mighty dull with him. He's so dry and precise. You're lucky to have the boss undertake to finish you off himself." Denny looked at me respectfully. "It's very unusual."

"He's so busy," I said.

"It's more than that!" and the clerk leaned forward impressively. "There are plenty of men that are busy—I'm busy. But there aren't many men that are big! Do you know how much money Worthen handles in the course of a month? Millions!"

"So much?" I was astonished.

"He's the biggest trader in Boston," cried Denny. "More shares are bought and sold through our office than anywhere else. And an operator! He takes his toll of everything that's going on. The others are afraid of him." Suddenly he paused

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and scanned me carefully, his eager eyes suspicious. "You've heard some of the talk against him?"

"No," I answered, "nothing."

"Well, there is talk," admitted Denny defiantly. "But whose talk, and what kind? Envious slanders! Men are wrecked all the time, everywhere; you know that. Fools come to grief every day, through any office. So, of course, there are some that get smashed in ours. But that's their doing, not Worthen's. It's because people envy him his success that they talk against him."

"Human nature," I explained, out of my large knowledge. "He is successful?"

"Enormously," answered Denny. "Of course, it's a mighty expensive office to maintain. We advertise very freely, for one thing. Mr. Worthen writes big bulletins for the public almost daily; takes the public into his confidence, you know. Then our circulars, our mailing department, our travelling men, our telephone and ticker service. Yes, it's expensive. But it pays. Mr. Worthen goes after all the business there is—but I tell you he gets it!"

Denny's enthusiasm was striking. "You believe in him?" I asked, warmly sympathetic. I believed in Mr. Worthen myself, for reasons that this man could not know.

"He'll have nobody in the office that doesn't believe in him," answered Denny. "If you can't agree with him, make up your mind he'll find it out. Then out you go! He's masterful, he is. Don't

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get to setting yourself up to know more than he does."

There was, I said, no fear of that. And growing confidential, I told Denny of the selling of our diamonds. He wagged his head, but was not at all surprised. His comment was: "If it's business, he'll buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest, for himself or his friends."

That afternoon, before I left the office, Mr. Worthen called me to him again. "Of course, you don't yet know whether you'll like it or not, but I hope the beginning was not too bad."

It had been perplexing and sudden, but I valiantly assured him that I should like the work.

"Binney," he said, "I haven't asked you what pay you want."

"Why," I stammered, "what I'm worth. What you'll give me."

He smiled indulgently. "You don't know your own value yet. Well, I'll set the price to begin with. Let's see how soon you come asking for a raise. What do you say to a hundred a month?"

For a boy who had earned, from his hens and his vegetables, a scant net hundred a year, the salary was princely. After deducting rent, board, and clothes, I should have endless spending money. Quite overcome, I suggested that the pay was too high. Hadn't he better wait till I had begun to earn?

Rising from his chair, Mr. Worthen slapped my shoulder. "Of course it's too high. I never started

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a clerk at that salary before, and I never intend to again. You don't realize, Binney, that I expect you to be one of the cleverest salesmen I've ever had." I murmured that I could not see what made him think that. "Oh, never mind. But I'm not going to insult you by small pay. You'll be earning soon enough. There, drive away with Laycock for a few weeks, and I'll give you something worth doing."

I went away exalted. Such kindness, such pay, such a future, all combined to make me very happy. I thought the world of my employer—and then naturally began to think well of myself. Putting aside my wonderment at what he could see in me, I considered that he ought to know how to choose his men at a glance. And I was to be one of them —one of the best of them!

It was early in November when I began at the office, and for three weeks I worked hard with Mr. Laycock. Every morning we went over the stock-market reports carefully, studying especially the unlisted securities. Into the subjects which I studied I now know we did not go very deep, but the surface knowledge I gained very rapidly. He drilled me carefully in many little tasks, and so loaded me with my vocabulary, that in working hours I thought in no other. I was glib with the lingo of the street, so that Mr. Worthen, after testing me once or twice, commended me. It was not yet Thanksgiving when he took me out of Mr. Laycock's hands. I was delighted when, calling me to the office, he told me of his intention.

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"After this you are to work for me, and me only. I intend to use you as a special messenger—my personal messenger. Do you know what that is?"

"After a fashion," I answered a little doubtfully. "Is it to carry securities here in the city?"

"No," he answered, and made me sit down. "I want to talk it out with you, my boy. I believe you're fitted for the work. But you shall judge for yourself."

He told me that all over New England, not only in the cities and towns but even in the villages, he had a good many scattered clients, forming a class of trade which he kept entirely in his own hands, not leaving it to others in the office. These clients were attracted by his advertisements, were mostly men of small means, and were after good securities. The certificates Mr. Worthen usually sent them by special messenger. Not that mail or express would not be safe enough, but there were two reasons for preferring the personal method. The first (and Mr. Worthen laughed good-naturedly as he told me) was that it made the purchasers seem a little more important in their own eyes.

"You can easily understand it," he explained. "When a good-looking, spruce young man delivers a package of certificates, it seems like a personal attention—makes the papers seem more valuable and the buyer feel a little more important, don't you see? Then the second reason. When a buyer is in that frame of mind he is likely to order something more, to prove his importance, especially if the young man is clever in soliciting."

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