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Jack's Ward

Horatio Alger

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JACK'S WARD
OR THE BOY GUARDIAN
BY HORATIO ALGER, JR.

1910

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BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Horatio Alger, Jr., an author who lived among and for boys and himself remained a boy in heart and association till death, was born at Revere, Mass., January 13, 1834. He was the son of a clergyman; was graduated at Harvard College in 1852, and at its Divinity School in 1860; and was pastor of the Unitarian Church at Brewster, Mass., in 1862-66.

In the latter year he settled in New York and began drawing public attention to the condition and needs of street boys. He mingled with them, gained their confidence, showed a personal concern in their affairs, and stimulated them to honest and useful living. With his first story he won the hearts of all red-blooded boys everywhere, and of the seventy or more that followed over a million copies were sold during the author's lifetime.

In his later life he was in appearance a short, stout, bald-headed man, with cordial manners and whimsical views of things that amused all who met him. He died at Natick, Mass., July 18, 1899.

Mr. Alger's stories are as popular now as when first published, because they treat of real live boys who were always up and about—just like the boys found everywhere to-day. They are pure in tone and inspiring in influence, and many reforms in the juvenile life of New York may be traced to them. Among the best known are:

Strong and Steady; Strive and Succeed; Try and Trust; Bound to Rise; Risen from the Ranks; Herbert Carter's Legacy; Brave and Bold; Jack's Ward; Shifting for Himself; Wait and Hope; Paul the Peddler; Phil the Fiddler; Slow and Sure; Julius the Street Boy; Tom the Bootblack; Struggling Upward; Facing the World; The Cash Boy; Making His Way; Tony the Tramp; Joe's Luck; Do and Dare; Only an Irish Boy; Sink or Swim; A Cousin's Conspiracy; Andy Gordon; Bob Burton; Harry Vane; Hector's Inheritance; Mark Mason's Triumph; Sam's Chance; The Telegraph Boy; The Young Adventurer; The Young Outlaw; The Young Salesman, and Luke Walton.

JACK'S WARD

CHAPTER I

JACK HARDING GETS A JOB

"Look here, boy, can you hold my horse a few minutes?" asked a gentleman, as he jumped from his carriage in one of the lower streets in New York.

The boy addressed was apparently about twelve, with a bright face and laughing eyes, but dressed in clothes of coarse material. This was Jack Harding, who is to be our hero.

"Yes, sir," said Jack, with alacrity, hastening to the horse's head; "I'll hold him as long as you like."

"All right! I'm going in at No. 39; I won't be long."

"That's what I call good luck," said Jack to himself. "No boy wants a job more than I do. Father's out of work, rent's most due, and Aunt Rachel's worrying our lives out with predicting that we'll all be in the poorhouse inside of three months. It's enough to make a fellow feel blue, listenin' to her complainin' and groanin' all the time. Wonder whether she was always so. Mother says she was disappointed in love when she was young. I guess that's the reason."

"Have you set up a carriage, Jack?" asked a boy acquaintance, coming up and recognizing Jack.

"Yes," said Jack, "but it ain't for long. I shall set down again pretty soon."

"I thought your grandmother had left you a fortune, and you had set up a team."

"No such good news. It belongs to a gentleman that's inside."

"Inside the carriage?"

"No, in No. 39."

"How long's he going to stay?"

"I don't know."

"If it was half an hour, we might take a ride, and be back in time."

Jack shook his head.

"That ain't my style," he said. "I'll stay here till he comes out."

"Well, I must be going along. Are you coming to school tomorrow?"

"Yes, if I can't get anything to do."

"Are you trying for that?"

"I'd like to get a place. Father's out of work, and anything I can earn comes in handy."

"My father's got plenty of money," said Frank Nelson, complacently. "There isn't any need of my working."

"Then your father's lucky."

"And so am I."

"I don't know about that. I'd just as lieve work as not."

"Well, I wouldn't. I'd rather be my own master, and have my time to myself. But I must be going home."

"You're lazy, Frank."

"Very likely. I've a right to be."

Frank Nelson went off, and Jack was left alone. Half an hour passed, and still the gentleman, who had entered No. 39, didn't appear. The horse showed signs of impatience, shook his head, and eyed Jack in an unfriendly manner.

"He thinks it time to be going," thought Jack. "So do I. I wonder what the man's up to. Perhaps he's spending the day."

Fifteen minutes more passed, but then relief came. The owner of the carriage came out.

"Did you get tired of waiting for me?" he asked.

"No," said Jack, shrewdly. "I knew the longer the job, the bigger the pay."

"I suppose that is a hint," said the gentleman, not offended.

"Perhaps so," said Jack, and he smiled too.

"Tell me, now, what are you going to do with the money I give you—buy candy?"

"No," answered Jack, "I shall carry it home to my mother."

"That's well. Does your mother need the money?"

"Yes, sir. Father's out of work, and we've got to live all the same."

"What's your father's business?"

"He's a cooper."

"So he's out of work?"

"Yes, sir, and has been for six weeks. It's on account of the panic, I suppose."

"Very likely. He has plenty of company just now."

It may be remarked that our story opens in the year 1867, memorable for its panic, and the business depression which followed. Nearly every branch of industry suffered, and thousands of men were thrown out of work, and utterly unable to find employment of any kind. Among them was Timothy Harding, the father of our hero. He was a sober, steady man, and industrious; but his wages had never been large, and he had been unable to save up a reserve fund, on which to draw in time of need. He had an excellent wife, and but one child—our present hero; but there was another, and by no means unimportant member of the family. This was Rachel Harding, a spinster of melancholy temperament, who belonged to that unhappy class who are always prophesying evil, and expecting the worst. She had been "disappointed" in early life, and this had something to do with her gloomy views, but probably she was somewhat inclined by nature to despondency.

The family lived in a humble tenement, which, however, was neatly kept, and would have been a cheerful home but for the gloomy presence of Aunt Rachel, who, since her brother had been thrown out of employment, was gloomier than ever.

But all this while we have left Jack and the stranger standing in the street.

"You seem to be a good boy," said the latter, "and, under the circumstances, I will pay you more than I intended."

He drew from his vest pocket a dollar bill, and handed it to Jack.

"What! is all this for me?" asked Jack, joyfully.

"Yes, on the condition that you carry it home, and give it to your mother."

"That I will, sir; she'll be glad enough to get it."

"Well, good-by, my boy. I hope your father'll find work soon."

"He's a trump!" ejaculated Jack. "Wasn't it lucky I was here just as he wanted a boy to hold his horse. I wonder what Aunt Rachel will have to say to that? Very likely she'll say the bill is bad."

Jack made the best of his way home. It was already late in the afternoon, and he knew he would be expected. It was with a lighter heart than usual that he bent his steps homeward, for he knew that the dollar would be heartily welcome.

We will precede him, and give a brief description of his home.

There were only five rooms, and these were furnished in the plainest manner. In the sitting room were his mother and aunt. Mrs. Harding was a motherly-looking woman, with a pleasant face, the prevailing expression of which was a serene cheerfulness, though of late it had been harder than usual to preserve this, in the straits to which the family had been reduced. She was setting the table for tea.

Aunt Rachel sat in a rocking-chair at the window. She was engaged in knitting. Her face was long and thin, and, as Jack expressed it, she looked as if she hadn't a friend in the world. Her voice harmonized with her mournful expression, and was equally doleful.

"I wonder why Jack don't come home?" said Mrs. Harding, looking at the clock. "He's generally here at this time."

"Perhaps somethin's happened," suggested her sister-in-law.

"What do you mean, Rachel?"

"I was reading in the *Sun* this morning about a boy being run over out West somewhere."

"You don't think Jack has been run over!"

"Who knows?" said Rachel, gloomily. "You know how careless boys are, and Jack's very careless."

"I don't see how you can look for such things, Rachel."

"Accidents are always happening; you know that yourself, Martha. I don't say Jack's run over. Perhaps he's been down to the wharves, and tumbled over into the water and got drowned."

"I wish you wouldn't say such things, Rachel. They make me feel uncomfortable."

"We may as well be prepared for the worst," said Rachel, severely.

"Not this time, Rachel," said Mrs. Harding, brightly, "for that's Jack's step outside. He isn't drowned or run over, thank God!"

"I hear him," said Rachel, dismally. "Anybody might know by the noise who it is. He always comes stamping along as if he was paid for makin' a noise. Anybody ought to have a cast-iron head that lives anywhere within his hearing."

Here Jack entered, rather boisterously, it must be admitted, in his eagerness slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER II

THE EVENTS OF AN EVENING

"I am glad you've come, Jack," said his mother. "Rachel was just predicting that you were run over or drowned."

"I hope you're not very much disappointed to see me safe and well, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, merrily. "I don't think I've been drowned."

"There's things worse than drowning," replied Rachel, severely.

"Such as what?"

"A man that's born to be hanged is safe from drowning."

"Thank you for the compliment, Aunt Rachel, if you mean me. But, mother, I didn't tell you of my good luck. See this," and he displayed the dollar bill.

"How did you get it?" asked his mother.

"Holding horses. Here, take it, mother; I warrant you'll find a use for it."

"It comes in good time," said Mrs. Harding. "We're out of flour, and I had no money to buy any. Before you take off your boots, Jack, I wish you'd run over to the grocery store, and buy half a dozen pounds. You may get a pound of sugar, and quarter of a pound of tea also."

"You see the Lord hasn't forgotten us," she remarked, as Jack started on his errand.

"What's a dollar?" said Rachel, gloomily. "Will it carry us through the winter?"

"It will carry us through to-night, and perhaps Timothy will have work to-morrow. Hark, that's his step."

At this moment the outer door opened, and Timothy Harding entered, not with the quick, elastic step of one who brings good tidings, but slowly and deliberately, with a quiet gravity of demeanor in which his wife could read only too well that he had failed in his efforts to procure work.

Reading all this in his manner, she had the delicacy to forbear intruding upon him questions to which she saw it would only give him pain to reply.

Not so Aunt Rachel.

"I needn't ask," she began, "whether you've got work, Timothy. I knew beforehand you wouldn't. There ain't no use in tryin'! The times is awful dull, and mark my words, they'll be wuss before they're better. We mayn't live to see 'em. I don't expect we shall. Folks can't live without money; and if we can't get that, we shall have to starve."

"Not so bad as that, Rachel," said the cooper, trying to look cheerful; "I don't talk about starving till the time comes. Anyhow," glancing at the table, on which was spread a good plain meal, "we needn't talk about starving till to-morrow with that before us. Where's Jack?"

"Gone after some flour," replied his wife.

"On credit?" asked the cooper.

"No, he's got money enough to pay for a few pounds," said Mrs. Harding, smiling with an air of mystery.

"Where did it come from?" asked Timothy, who was puzzled, as his wife anticipated. "I didn't know you had any money in the house."

"No more we had; but he earned it himself, holding horses, this afternoon."

"Come, that's good," said the cooper, cheerfully. "We ain't so bad off as we might be, you see, Rachel."

"Very likely the bill's bad," she said, with the air of one who rather hoped it was.

"Now, Rachel, what's the use of anticipating evil?" said Mrs. Harding. "You see you're wrong, for here's Jack with the flour."

The family sat down to supper.