

had run out into the darkness, crying that he had killed his little baby

"Would I have been straight like other boys if he hadn't done it?"

She told him it was the fall—told it gently as she could, for the boy's eyes were blazing feverishly and his claw-like fingers clutched her dress.

"I hate him" he cried. "I'd kill him if I could, mother. Why didn't some of them catch him and kill him? I'm no good for games now, nor-nor-anything."

There was a step on the floor within, and the baggage master called out, "Where are you folks?" Then he caught sight of them in the doorway, and came out too. He laid his hand on Neb's red hair, saying, "And how's my grand boy, to-night?"

"I'm feeling pretty well, thanks, sir."

Neb always said that. His mother had taught him to: never a day passed that the old man didn't ask him how he felt, and there was always the same cheery answer.

Once more Neb asked his mother a question. It was when they were saying good night.

"Which way do you think father will come back?"

"On the down train," she made answer, only half seriously.

"Was he tall?" he pursued.

"No, just middlin," she said, "and his hair was just the same color as yours."

After that Neb spent most of his time watching the down trains. The train hands came to know him. The newsboy often threw him an orange or a banana, as he stood there bare-headed. He was always bare-headed, as the train passed him. His rather long, red hair was disordered by the rush of air, as he leaned forward on his crutches, peered into the coaches, and scanned the steps.

"Father'd likely get off there, mother, wouldn't he?" he said one day. "He'd not like to go on to the station, and you know the train always slows up there, and I guess he'd know me if our hair is alike."

One evening Neb went up the track as usual. A man who came down the concession saw him bending over something on the rails. The train came around the curve. It stopped with a jar. The people hurried out. A shabbily dressed man was standing beside the track; his pallid face was terror-stricken; his tongue trembled behind his lips. One foot was bare, the ankle black and swollen, and yonder, where everyone was hurrying—yonder, among the bushes, was a little huddled heap that moaned. It was Neb. The man had been lying partly over the rails, drunk. His foot was caught. Brave little Neb loosed the shoe, and rolled him down the embankment. He could remember that much, and then, besides, there was the foot sprained and grazed, while down the track they found the shabby shoe with the string drawn out.

They carried little Neb over into the cottage. His mother came up from the stoop, and the neighbors crowded in. He came, too,—the man whose life had been saved,—sober now, with eyes that were red with weeping. Once, Neb spoke. He reached up his hand and said, "Father." The man bowed his head, and the neighbors noticed that the mingled hair was the same in color, and they began to whisper. He heard them and raised his face, but it was a stranger's face. No one had ever seen it before. A woman plucked his sleeve. "His father's been away for years," she said, "and the boy kep' lookin' for him home. He could'n't tell who to watch for, except that he'd red hair, and he thought you was his father."

The man started up wildly. "My life wasn't worth the boy's," he cried. "Pray, some of you to let me go and save him. I'm no good I tell you." A strange awe became felt in the circle. The watchers turned away from the bed. The mother sobbed aloud. No one heeded the man for a moment, and then the woman beside him said, "Hush; he's dead."