

several decaying bananas. A great slab of cheese neighbored some cakes of toilet soap. A half-pint measure, a razor-strop, three or four glass tumblers, a garden trowel, a box of fancy stationery, several assorted bottles of patent medicine, a number of china nest-eggs and a bag of salt—these were some of the things Aunt Rhoda found in one corner. She had no heart to look farther.

She carefully extracted the cheese and the bananas and carried them at arm's length to the swill-barrel. Then she called her husband and gave him a glimpse of the contents of the trunk.

'Frederick must have stole something every time we sent him to the store,' Aunt Rhoda said. The thought shamed and distressed her inexpressibly. There were tears in her mild blue eyes. 'Why did he do it, Elkanah? We'd 'a' given him money to buy anything he wanted—and he knew it.'

Elkanah combed his beard and meditated. 'This takin' things like bananas and cheese and leavin' 'em to spile is what gits me,' he observed at last. 'Looks 'most as though he couldn't help stealin', as though it was in his blood. What say?'

Aunt Rhoda had nothing to say. The two old people sat down on the side of Frederick's bed and were speechless for a while. It was the woman who first found her voice.

'I feel a responsibility for Frederick,' she said. 'I couldn't content myself to see him go to the reform school or any such place—he's such a little feller! You better talk to him, Elkanah. It ain't in reason that he understands. If he did I'm sure he wouldn't do it. You'll have to talk to him, real solemn, after supper. He'll mind it more comin' from a man.'

Elkanah sighed, and went heavily away. His wife did not see him again that afternoon. He was very silent at supper-time, and ate little. But when the meal was ended he pushed back his chair and began abruptly, as if to make the most of his courage. 'See here, sonny boy!' he said.

Frederick showed a grave and attentive face.

'Your Aunt Rhoda and I happened on to your trunk this afternoon, Frederick,' Elkanah went on. 'We found things that—that surprised us. Did you steal 'em?'

Frederick stared solidly into a far corner of the room. 'I took some of 'em,' he owned, after a little consideration.

'What for?'

The question seemed to puzzle the boy. He locked his long, slim fingers in a peculiar fashion he had, and peered into his hands as if he expected to read an answer in the palms.

'My folks said it was smart to get things,' he muttered. 'They used to lick me when I didn't.'

'We didn't ever tell ye to get anything that didn't belong to ye, did we?'

'No.'

'Well, we'd rather ye wouldn't. We aim to send ye to school, and bring ye up to be useful and do well by ye every way; but if ye want us to do that, ye'll have to live our fashion. If you'd rather live Galvin's Alley way,' Elkanah ended, 'I s'pose we could send ye back there. I'd hate to do that, though. I think before I'd do that I'd put ye in the reform school, to stay till you was twenty-one.'

Frederick involuntarily shuddered.

'No, we wouldn't want to do that, ei-

ther,' the farmer hastened to add. 'We wouldn't do it unless you drove us to it. So you just think it over,' Frederick,' he concluded, more cheerfully. 'And now you go down and ask the storekeeper to run over this evenin'. He'll tell me what the things are worth, and I'll pay for 'em, and you'll tell him you took 'em and you're sorry for it—and so we'll all start square again.'

It promised to be a severe and effectual lesson, for, as Mrs. Watson might have expressed it, Frederick was a 'high-feelin'' youth. He admired his own achievements, and greatly disliked to admit he was in the wrong, and the confession to the storekeeper was probably the bitterest penance his short life had known. Yet he went through with it manfully, and then, after a few days of depression, settled back into his old self—the same boy except, as the Watsons fondly hoped, for one desired change.

Thus the months passed until September came again. Great events were due to happen in September or the Watson place. It was just a year since Frederick had arrived. There was always Mr. Watson's birthday, too, a fixed festival. For those simple old people made much of each other's birthdays, which gave occasion for little gifts and abundant rejoicing.

Frederick was very thoughtful when he heard of the birthday; but the week before it came Mr. Watson took him to a neighboring town, to the circus, and after that he cheered up and seemed as mysteriously expectant as Aunt Rhoda herself.

He was the most excited one of the three when Elkanah lifted his plate on the looked-for morning, and revealed the mittens Aunt Rhoda had knitted for him, the collars and cuffs their married daughter had sent him, and—something else. Frederick held his breath, and gripped the edge of the table as Elkanah slowly unwrapped the—something else.

It was a gold watch, large, heavy, and so enameled in color that one might have recognized it across a street; a 'loud' and vulgar watch, yet evidently a costly one. And attached to this masterpiece was a short and slender nickel chain, worth, at the outside, about fifty cents.

The farmer laid the combination on his plate and studied it intently. He would not meet his wife's eyes.

After a moment he turned to Frederick and smiled, a somewhat ghastly smile. 'Did you give me this, sonny boy?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'I thank ye.' And with that Elkanah dropped the watch into his waistcoat pocket, and fastened the chain to a buttonhole. For some reason this action seemed not to meet with Frederick's approval.

'I thought you'd like to hang such a pretty watch over the mantelpiece—where it wouldn't get lost—and keep it to look at,' he suggested.

'Oh, no, sonny boy.' The farmer glanced at his wife now. 'I'm goin' to wear it all the time, and show it, and brag about it to everybody I meet.'

It was observable that Frederick suddenly lost his appetite.

He was in very low spirits that afternoon when, following a conference with Aunt Rhoda, Elkanah blithely told him to put on his best clothes, for they two were going to town. Nor did the drive inspirit him. It generally happened that

in the course of such a trip the boy found much to look at and talk about; but today he kept his eyes fixed on the floor of the buggy and, when Elkanah spoke to him, replied in monosyllables.

Elkanah, on the contrary, seemed even absurdly cheerful—probably because it was his birthday. The birthday presents were conspicuous, the watch especially. It popped out of his pocket as often as they met anybody, and Elkanah consulted it, ostentatiously, twenty times to the mile.

Curiously enough, whenever it flashed in the sunlight Frederick, crouching in his corner of the seat, appeared to shrink and shrivel. He looked a very small boy indeed by the time they reached town—although his face was lined and gray, like that of an old man.

Elkanah drove to an unfamiliar livery-stable, that nearest the circus-ground, and put up the team. He took occasion to show the watch here, also. To the diminished Frederick it seemed that the light of recognition shone in the liveryman's eye. Be that as it might, he made no remark, and the boy and the man walked on to the square.

Elkanah stopped in front of a jeweller's shop. A window-dial here showed the correct time, and Elkanah once more extracted the birthday watch and held it in his hand for interminable minutes. Once or twice, for no obvious reason, he turned and faced the square and the passers-by—he had the watch.

And then all at once the catastrophe occurred. A policeman elbowed his way toward them, gathered the watch deftly into his own hand, and laid the other hand on Elkanah's shoulder.

'I want you,' the policeman said, in a very decided tone.

'Hey? What's that?' Elkanah spoke as if surprised; and yet, somehow—

'We've been lookin' for this,' the officer explained, mainly for the benefit of the bystanders. 'It was lifted circus day.'

'I didn't steal it.'

The policeman tightened his grip. 'Tell that to the judge. I'll have to lock you up, just the same.'

Frederick had drifted toward the outer edge of the crowd. His first impulse, an inheritance from his old life of vagabondage, had been to run, to hide.

But Elkanah's mild and sorrowful eyes had sought him out and held him. And when he heard that threat to imprison his friend and benefactor, shut him with the little city's scum and ruffraff, and fasten an indelible stain upon his name, the newer Frederick came to the front. He rushed back to the officer.

'Say, you,' the boy cried, 'don't you dare arrest him! He don't know anything about the watch. I stole it—so I could have somethin' nice to give him for his birthday. I bought the chain with my own money. You hear me? I stole the watch, I tell you!'

Strange, the boy thought even in that frenzied moment, that Elkanah should look so pleased and so well content! He did not speak, however. The policeman grinned as if he found something distinctly humorous in the situation.

'Well,' he said, jovially, in reply to Frederick's outburst, 'seem's you're bound to have it so, young feller, I'll take you along, too, and then I'll be sure I've caught enough for a mess!'

I have never asked Elkanah what influ-