

Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

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(Continued.)

'Bout thirty mile up,' responded Rasmus vaguely. 'Our house was carried off in the night, nice little two-story wooden house, with all my furniture in it. Didn't see nothing of it, did you?'

'We saw a roof, and a bedstead, and some people pulling in a bureau, about fifteen miles below,' said the clerk.

'She's broke up,' sighed Rasmus, 'as pretty a house as one would wish to live in! Well, I've got my fortin to make over again, that's all. Made it quick, and lost it quick.'

'Did you lose any of your folks?' inquired a passenger.

'No, we two are all the folks there was—but, I lost a boat—as tidy a craft! Didn't see nothing of her, I reckon? Lost her just about daybreak. I wouldn't have taken any money for her.'

The captain had not seen this crown-jewel of boats.

'Good luck to whomsoever gets her,' said Rasmus virtuously, deeply impressing the bystanders with his resignation.

The captain left his guests to themselves, and Rasmus smoothly asked Rod: 'How did them remarks please you, brother?'

'You said it was your house and furniture,' replied Rod, in disgust.

'Well, brother, I puts it to you. Didn't you say to me, "Take 'em all—I don't care?" Wasn't them words of yours being owner, a making over all that property to me for owner, so they was mine on the spot, hammer down?'

'But you said you had a boat—lost a boat,' said Rod, shifting his accusation.

'Brother, what's a boat? I asks you as a two-legged dictionary.'

'A boat,' said Rod, 'well, a boat is a craft, a water craft, an open vessel, a thing to go on water.'

'There, now! Wasn't what I had the very moral of a boat? Wasn't it an open vessel? A thing going on water, and going proper well, too? Wasn't it the moral of a sailing craft—strong, trim, convenient? Oh, I vow, there's some folks so scrup'ulous that they'll say things what ain't so, for the sake of showing up other folks wrong. But I'm not quarrelling with you, brother.'

Presently the captain came back.

'What are you going to do, now; all your things are lost?'

'We are going to New York, to our relations,' said Rasmus. 'We meant to go about this time, anyway. We was meaning to sell out. The boy is a smart boy, and he has to be put to school. He's going to be college ed-dictated if I'm not,' added Rasmus, with aplomb.

'I will carry you as far as Pittsburg,' said the captain. He felt sorry for their losses, and then Rod was a pretty boy, while there was an irresistible good-nature in the rubicund countenance of Rasmus, a buoyancy in his loud, ready talk, that would beguile into a kindly act a far less generous and hospitable being than a Western steamboat captain. Rasmus accepted the captain's proffer as readily as he had accepted Rod's gift of all that was his; but he did not feel quite at home among what he called the 'high-fliers on the top deck'; so, taking Rod by the elbow, he went below. Rod sat on a coil of rope, his head on his hands, vaguely watching the yellow current and the devastated shores, under the laughing April sky. Whether he thought of the scene, or of his own fortunes, the tramp could not tell. While the boy watched the water, Rasmus watched the boy. He was greatly taken with him. Whether it was his floating light hair, or his clear gray eyes, or his innocent fourteen years, or his aloneness, or the softness of one side of his own nature, the heart of Rasmus clave to this salvage

which he had made on the turbid Ohio. He was a social being, but the comrades who were naturally offered him in his roving life were not to his taste. He could imagine nothing more enchanting than to ramble on, over a summer world, with this young comrade. But after all summers, winters fall, and in winters are required shelter and means of support. The boy offered an objective point for the tramp's life; he could wander through the summer with him, and when the autumn frosts came, with prophecies of winter, he and the boy could drop with the autumn fruits into the hands of the rich uncle, and Rasmus could make much of his exploits in rescuing the boy from drowning, bringing him safe along the dangers of the way—and what then could the rich uncle do but reward him bountifully?

'If he is half a man,' said Rasmus, 'he'll give me as much as a hundred dollars. It's worth a hundred to resky a boy like that. I've heard that Vanderbilt, and some of them rich fellows, don't make more of a hundred dollars than I do of a cent.'

After a while, Rodney turned his head.

'How am I to get to New York? Will five dollars buy my ticket? That is all I have.'

'I reckon it would take as much as three fives to buy it.'

'And I've nothing to sell, except the watch.'

'But, pardner, you don't want a ticket. There's nothing more risky than riding on the cars. There's sure to be accidents. What does any one want of tickets, when they've got legs? I've walked between here and New York dozens of times. That's no great of a walk.'

'Why, how long would it take?'

Rasmus eyed his interlocutor carefully, calculating how far he might venture to deceive him.

'Two weeks or so,' he suggested. 'From here to Harrisburg—from there to Allentown—then over to Jersey City—and across the ferry to New York. Easy as wink.'

'You're good in geography,' said Rodney.

'What's that agin? I'm talkin' about what I know. I've been over it. There don't need no geography to tell me. I've legged it.'

'But the nights, and the meals, and the bad weather, and the long, long way,' suggested Rodney.

'That five dollars is oceans for the lodgings and grub, and I've got hundreds of friends all along the road, and there isn't any bad weather, and one never gets tired along the road,' asserted Rasmus boldly. He sat on the coil of rope beside Rodney, and went on with enthusiasm. 'Tired! You couldn't get tired. You find yourself more every day. Oh, that's living along the roads, and no mistake. The roadsides is so soft and springy, it's like walking on Injy-rubber; every breath you swallow tastes clean and good; there's sun, if you feel chilly, and shade if you get too warm; and beds of pine needles, or dry leaves, or hay, to lie on, if you feel tired, and each one smells sweeter than t'other; and the woods are full of birds. I could tell you all their names and calls, from a crow to a chippy; and every day has new flowers; and you can tell the time by the sun, and by the opening and shutting of the flowers; and the lay o' the land by the bark on the trees, and the moss on the fences. Why, I can't see a colt, or a cow, or a sheep in a field, or horses leaning their heads over a rail fence, but I want to stop and make friends with 'em! Many is the time I thought if I had only found my Robin, how happy I would have been, roamin' all over the country with him. But then, if I had found him, I wouldn't have roamed.'

'Who was your Robin?'

'He was my little brother.' The tramp gave

a great sigh, and Rodney began to feel sympathetic.

'I don't mind telling you,' said Rasmus. 'When I looked in your window, and see your yellow hair lying over your pillow, my heart gave a great lift, and I says, "Have I got him, now?" For just so, his yellow hair used to lay, poor little chap, and I've looked for him up and down the world, for ten long years.'

Was this the rollicking Rasmus? His voice had fallen from its hearty shout, and his jolly moon of a face had darkened, as when clouds drift across the bright night sky, and his twinkling eyes were full of gloom.

A colored waiter came up with two mugs of coffee.

'Here's suffin the stewa'd sent you, and ef you'd like stronger, you kin get treated at the bar.'

'It wouldn't be healthy for us at the bar,' said Rasmus nonchalantly, taking the coffee with a profound bow. 'Make my respects to the steward.'

'Jes as you like, sah; but ef I gets asked to the bar, I don't wait for two askin's. Keep you from gettin' col' after being out over the water so long, to have a mint julep or a toddy hot.'

'I've lost too much along of julep an' toddy,' said Rasmus.

'Ef you've los' more by them than you has by water, you has been powerful onlucky,' said the negro.

'I lost more valyable things,' said Rasmus, sedately. 'A house can be built, and a boat can be bought, and so can furniture, and good clothes; but along of bars I lost what can't be had back.'

'As what, sah?' said the waiter, with interest, while Rodney and Rasmus took mouthfuls of coffee.

'I lost, first place, a little, blue-eyed sister—pretty as you make 'em,' said Rasmus, gloomily.

'That was a loss, sah; overdose of gin, now, for colic?'

'Skull cracked by a fall—let drop,' said Rasmus.

The negro shook his woolly pate. 'Mighty pity, sah!'

'And a father. He had in him the makings of a very good dad—big, strong, jolly; but he took to drink, and so good-bye any use of him; and finally killed he was.'

'You've been blamed onlucky,' said the waiter.

'And a mother,' said Rasmus, continuing his enumeration of losses. 'A good one she was, but so worn down and distracted, and broke up, by what whiskey did for her family, an' she died heart-broke.'

'There's a raft of women goes that way,' said the negro, 'white women 'specially. They're kind of tender like.'

'And a brother,' said Rasmus, finishing his coffee, in a very gloomy frame of mind. 'As handsome, sweet-natured, bright a little chap—him I lost too, all on the same account; and here I am alone in the world—me and the boy,' he added hastily correcting himself.

The negro took the empty mugs. 'There's a state-room for you, and if you'll come I'll show it to you.'

'I'll eat my head,' said Rasmus, when escorted to his room, 'if here isn't a flowered carpet, and lace curtains, and a looking-glass with gilt all round, and up here among the quality! The cap'n's been doing right handsome by us. Now, brother, you can have the first-story bed, and I'll have the second-story, the first-story being best.'

Rodney saw nothing strange in the surrender of the best to himself. Mr. Andrews had been neither kind nor cross to him. He had lived apart from other people, and knew lit-