

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## Hal's Winter Suit.

(Rose Willis Johnson, in 'Youth's Companion'.)

Hal was fourteen years old, one of the band of six Hathaways—Teddy, Dick, Brent, Phil and little Kitty. They lived in a ruinous log cabin at what was known as Flower Point, although only by hard work and persistent coaxing could any flower be induced to grow in its rocky soil. In place of blossoms the yard was daily snowed over with drying clothes.

Below them, on the slope of the hill, gleamed the white stones of the village graveyard, and there the father had been sleeping for five years.

It had been a hard matter to keep the wolf from the door—there were so many mouths to feed, and the mother's hands were weak. But Mrs. Hathaway did not sit down to idle tears. She showed what a plucky woman can do in the teeth of adverse circumstances. Hal came by his courage honestly.

Although not uneducated, she was not fitted to teach, and she knew nothing of painting or music. She must make a hand-to-hand fight with poverty, and she set her teeth together and advanced on the enemy boldly. Hers was the courage of desperation.

'Willingness to do anything rather than part from my children' was the source of her energy.

She could wash, so she asked for washing to do. We all admire 'pluck.' She soon had all the work she could attend to. And she sewed. Often, when the steam of the suds had died away from her aching arms, her lamp burned through half the night as she plied her needle.

And she 'worked out' during the fruit season, or on occasions of special festivities. Her silent, swift way of working made her much in demand. Occasionally she was employed as a nurse. When sickness was abroad, Doctor Martin, as a final prescription, said, 'Get Mrs. Hathaway.'

The little family managed to keep out of debt and have enough to eat, but it was often a serious matter to keep the restless, active children properly clothed. It often happened that their clothes were fashioned from half-worn garments given them. While they were small this did not much matter, but with growing years came the growing pride. Hal, especially, looked at his shabby coat and trousers with a swelling throat.

'Mother,' he said, one morning, 'how I wish I could have one good suit of clothes—like the other boys!'

Mrs. Hathaway paused a moment and stood wiping the soap-suds from her arms, a flush on her comely face. 'Dear,' she said, at last, 'I wish I could dress you better! You are a good boy, and deserve it. Perhaps we shall see better days some time! If your father had lived—'

'No, mother,' Hal demonstrated, 'you know I didn't mean that! You are the best mother in the world—a brick! What I've been thinking is, I'm going to have a new suit next winter like Bert Upton's.'

His mother looked at him with a faint smile. He was sitting on an upturned tub, whittling a piece of pine board. Whenever Hal did anything he did it as if the

fate of nations hung on his action. Just now the important thing was the new suit. If the pine board had been cloth, the suit would soon have been cut out.

His freckled face and candid blue eyes shone with determination. His cap was set well back on a crop of curls which his mother called golden, and everybody else red. After you had looked into his earnest face a while he ceased to be homely; if you looked long enough, he grew handsome.

'How are you going to get it, Hal?' she asked. 'Perhaps I shall not be able to afford it.'

'Earn it!' replied the boy. 'If you can spare me a little time. Brent and Ted can cook as well as I can, almost, and I'll help with the work just the same. All a fellow needs is a chance!'

'I don't see what you can do,' Mrs. Hathaway answered, 'in a little village like this, where everyone does his own chores. You can't sell papers or black boots, and the factory has shut down. Besides, you boys must garden and raise all you can—as you always do. You are good boys, and a great comfort to me.'

Hal paid no attention to the compliment, but whittled away resolutely. 'All a fellow wants is a chance!' he reiterated. 'I'll find a way!'

'You shall have your "chance," Hal. And now please gather up your shavings and get off that tub. I want it.'

Hal looked at the litter at his feet as if conscious for the first time of its presence. Then he got up cheerfully. 'All right, mother! Do you want rinse water?' and catching up a bucket, he started down the hill.

The next morning Hal was ready for business. He rose early, and before the other children were astir had carried up enough water for the day's work, and split a double allowance of wood. After breakfast he looked at his mother.

'I'd take my chance, mother,' he said, with shining eyes.

'Take it, my boy, and good luck to you!'

He was soon trudging toward the village, a spade swung over his shoulder. He had a possible job in view, and lost no time in making the application. Mr. Errenbach, the grocer, was noted in a small way for his careful gardening. He had been laid up for six weeks with rheumatism, and it was well on in the spring.

'It is my first trial,' Hal thought, his heart beating quicker as he knocked at the kitchen door. 'If I can only make a good start!'

An old lady answered him—an old lady as neat and comfortable-looking as the kitchen she invited him to enter.

'I want to spade up your garden, sir,' he began at once to the old gentleman lying on a lounge. 'I'll do it cheap and well, and be very grateful for the job.'

'And who may you be, young sir?' was the answer.

'Halbert Hathaway, sir.'

He had taken off his cap on entering. His face and hands were clean, and the doubtful curls carefully combed. All this was noted by the couple, who looked approval at each other.

'And what do you want of a job?' was the next question.

'If you please, sir,'—and the bright eyes looked up fearlessly,—'my mother is a widow, and we are poor.'

'Well, and what will you do it for?'

'Hal looked at the old man soberly. 'I'll tell you, sir. Let me do it, then pay me what it is worth.'

'You are honest if not smart!' the old gentleman chuckled. 'Very good. Go to work, and we'll see what's in you. And mind you spade it deep. Mother, give Halbert a glass of milk; his muscles don't look overlarge.'

Hal went to work and spaded as he had whittled—with all his might. He spaded deep and powdered the clods carefully. The garden was large, and he soon felt the effects of heat and fatigue, but he stuck to his task manfully.

Mr. Errenbach watched him from the kitchen window, and an occasional chuckle escaped him. It was late in the afternoon when the boy completed the task to his own satisfaction. He had partaken of a good dinner, and his modest dignity at the table completed the capture of the old man's heart.

'I had a youngster like you,' he said, slipping a dollar into Hal's hand. 'He's dead. You needn't tell mother I gave you so much.'

'Thank you, sir!' Hal said, turning over the coin, which looked so large in his palm. 'But I don't think I earned all that, did I?'

'Mebbe so, mebbe not. If you want to come back to-morrow and split up that stove-wood, you may even it up, eh?'

'I'll be very sure to come, if mother can spare me. If not to-morrow, next day, for sure!'

'I wonder if he will?' the old man mused, wistfully. 'Willie would have been just such a boy.'

That wonderful dollar! It nerved Hal to attempt all things. He felt he had now grown to the stature of a man, and the world looked bright and beautiful to him. He went back the next day and split the wood, and would accept nothing for it. He earned something better than mere money, however, the friendship of a good old man.

Hal found several small jobs about the town, none so profitable as the first, but he won a few dimes and much advice. Then his success seemed to stop. But he carefully hoarded his 'start,' as he called it, and waited his opportunity. When the berry season began he was alert.

'Mother,' he said, 'you have a great many quart cans you never use; can I buy them of you cheap?'

'In the name of common sense, Hal, what do you want of them? To smash them up?'

'No, ma'am; to do orders.'

'"Do orders?"'

'I can't make it pay to sell raw berries. So, if you don't care, I'll can 'em.'

'Hal,' Mrs. Hathaway said, gravely, 'my hard times are about over. You may have the cans if you can make the experiment pay.'

So the next morning Hal, with Phil and Brent, to whom he offered good pay for their help, explored the berry pastures, leaving Teddy to be housekeeper. They returned at nightfall with brimming pails and the appetites of young wolves. Af-