

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

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(Continued.)

'I'm careful about my eating,' he remarked. 'I like fodder kept in good sweet air. I don't take to cellars nor yet to refrigerators. They give grub a taste that isn't natural—a kind of mixedness not fit for humans.' Then being comfortably established on his carpet-bag, Rasmus continued to hold forth. A man's health, brother, depends on what he puts into his mouth. If he puts in too little, he's weakly in the back and legs; if he puts in too much he's likely to die of 'plexy. If he puts in unhealthy truck, he'll turn on unhealthy himself, which ain't to be indulged in by a tramping man. A man with a home, good bed, money in the bank, and somebody to wait on him, may allow himself to get sick, and call it a kind of a winter picnic; but a tramping man belongs nowhere. If he falls ill he has to go to the hospital or the poor-hus'; and which ever it is takes him in begrudges him as not belonging to their district.'

'You don't look as if ever you'd be ill,' said the boy, openly admiring the herculean build of Rasmus.

'I'm rarely healthy,' admitted the tramp.

'Mr. Andrews used to say that stout health was the salary given by a good conscience,' said the boy.

'Sounds well,' said Rasmus, 'but wot's conscience agin?'

'Conscience? Why, don't you know what conscience is? Conscience is—doing what you ought to do—I mean, it's knowing what's proper, and then doing it.'

This boy was not born for a mental philosopher: he was shockingly bad at definition. Rasmus was more prompt, if no clearer. He retorted: 'Why, now, pardner, I call that my grit!'

The boy began to muse, perhaps on this definition of conscience, perhaps on the rising of the river. His handsome, delicate face took a mournful expression, and Rasmus honestly bent on cheering him, went on. 'Now, this is what I call comfortable. Plenty to eat, plenty to drink, good fresh air; nobody to interfere with you. How do you find yourself, pal?'

'How ever are you to get off this?' cried the boy, dolefully.

'Why, lad! we've just got on! Variety is the seasoning of life, and I've had a cheerful variety this morning—a yacht, a house, and a sycamore tree. We are as comfortable as crows in a corn-field.'

'How can you be so jolly?' snapped his comrade.

'I let lodgings to fun in my upper story,' said the tramp, genially; 'if I hadn't I'd been dead long ago. I think I'll tie this red kercher as far out on the limb as I can get it for a kind of flag of distress, for if we sit here all night you're liable to spill yourself into the drink. Chirk up, brother, and tell me your name. I've observed most folks gets more cheerful when they begins to talk about themselves, even if they're telling their misfortunes. I've seen old ladies sit an' tell over their miseries, an' cry over 'em, till they got as lively as crickets. What's your name?'

'Red Harris. What's yours?'

'Rasmus.'

'Is that your given name, or your surname?'

'Reckon it's my only name, seein' I ain't got no other; but look here, lad, if you go to chaffin' me with hints that I keep several aliases to get away from the bobbies, I'll tumble you into this creek, quick as wink.'

'Why, I never thought a thing of the kind!'

'O, all right, then. You come pretty near making me mad. When folks don't say nothing to make me mad, I don't get mad; but when I'm riled, I'm a reg'lar tearer—I'm a whole menagerie!'

Rasmus proffered this information in a drawling tone, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his open palms, his countenance round, red, and placable, as a 'full moon in the seventh night.'

'You see, I've got two names,' said Rod Harris.

'Well, I'm no high-flier. One's all the sail I can carry, and I'll eat my head if I know where I got that one. Now, pardner, you says your folks is all buried, and now your goods and home are all drowned, what are you going to do about it?'

'I meant to sell my goods and get money to get to New York.'

'What to do in New York, brother? I notice boys takes to the city, as flies takes to a candle, and like them, they are apt to get burnt. You don't consider yourself over and above safe sittin' up here on a tree limb, over this boomin' river, but what with a dive on one side the street, and a grog-hole at every corner, I tell you, you are most miraculous safe here, to what you are in the city.'

'I was going to find my uncle. I've got a rich uncle there, I think. He was there six or eight years ago. I've got a letter he wrote my mother—Mr. Andrews gave it to me the day he died, and said I'd better go to him.'

'An' the letter and your bag is all your fortune?'

'And a five-dollar bill, and this watch.'

Rod pulled out a huge open-faced silver watch, of a turnip shape. Rasmus regarded the relic with respect.

'I had some money once,' said Rod, 'a thousand dollars, about; but Mr. Andrews said he was very sorry, but he'd lost it all in mines.'

'Now, brother,' said the philosophical Rasmus, 'which is it better, to be me, as never had nothing, or to be you, as lost all you had?'

'I don't think he ought to have gone fooling with my money in mines,' said Rod, 'but I suppose he meant no harm.'

'If you don't lay up nothing agin him, I don't,' said Rasmus, cheerfully.

'And he taught me a great many things. What I'm going to my uncle for is, to get him to send me to college.'

'Kind of a mill, ain't that, where they grind out sense instead of flour?' inquired Rasmus. 'There's some folks as can't live without book-learning. I can; I don't know one letter from another. Eddication was neglected when I was a small shaver. You see your old man did better by you.'

'And so he ought—especially after losing all my money,' said Rod—secretly angered at losing what seemed to him a great fortune, but of which he had known nothing until his late guardian told him of it, in the last hour of his life. 'I don't think he had any right to fool away what didn't belong to him. Folks said he was forever speculating, and never had luck. It looks to me kind of like stealing—it was mine, and it's gone—all through him.'

'Well, hold hard there, he's dead,' said Rasmus, who, if he knew no Latin, yet held firmly to the precept, 'de mortuis nihil nisi bonum.' 'Now, I never say no harm of them as is gone where they can't do better, nor answer back. If any one had any call to fault one, I had to fault my old man—but I seldom does, and when I mentions any part of his doings, as a bit of my 'periences, I don't mention as it is my father I'm talking of and so nail him up in view, like a bat on a barn-door, but I merely says, "I knowed a man." No more do I lay any of his doings to him in partic'lar, but to what he had a habit of layin' in as cargo. When a boat carries a load of powder, as blows up and sends her kiting, I s'pose it's more the powder's fault than hers. So, if I might lay evil to my dad's door, I don't. I lays it to whiskey. I mind when I was a

little chap he had a way of going to beer gardens Sunday, and taking mammy and me along. The first baby I remembers was my little sister, the neatest little mite in a pink dotted long gown. Well, when we was coming home from a garden one Sunday afternoon, he would carry her—it was his way when rather drunk, and I 'member he dropped her crash on the walk! Well, he picked her up, and she cried a little—and I mind going home, and mammy putting me an' the baby to bed in a corner—and in the morning when I woke up, she lay staring, her blue eyes wide open—and never paid no attention to me when I played with her—and then if the poor little thing wasn't dead! Now there is a thing that I might lay up against him, if I would. That was worse than fooling some money in mines.'

At this moment Rasmus fixed his eyes on distance, and stood up, shouting 'Whoop! whoop!' in great excitement. Rodney cried out:

'Is some one coming to take us off?'

'No! We'll get off when the river goes down. Hurray! The red-bud's out. I see a red-bud in blossom: the dogwood will come next, hooray!'

'What of that,' said Rod, crossly; 'what good will red-bud do us when we are up a tree?'

'O, you get,' retorted Rasmus, 'red-bud and dogwood mean spring, and summer—days all sun and birds, and flowers, and life outdoors! Warm streams to swim in: green roadsides to walk on. Red-bug means living, brother.'

'But this river means drowning! See the water comes up, higher and higher,' cried Rodney.

Rasmus looked, and his countenance fell. The water was whirling up with increased velocity, and down the tossing current came hemlock trees and logs. The southern affluents of the Ohio had not spent their fury, and the head-waters of the Allegheny had now come down upon them. Rasmus saw the danger.

'The rivers have all broke loose at once. I thought it was as high as it could get, for it is sixty-two feet, if it is an inch, and here's the Allegheny. I know by the hemlock. I say, brother, much more of this will dig out our tree. If a boat don't come along, we're done for.'

There was a sudden roaring in Rod's head, as if the entire Ohio flowed through his ears, and he seemed to reel between flood and sky.

### CHAPTER II.

#### RASMUS' REMINISCENCES.

'Stately prows are rising and boring,  
Shouts of mariners winnow the air,  
And level sands for banks endowing  
The tiny green ribbon that showed so fair.'

It was past noon; the river had surmounted the high-water mark of sixty-five feet, reached in the inundation of 1832. The angry waters surged within a yard of the dangling feet of the prisoners in the tree, and most of the wreckage that had been stayed by the sycamores, had gone down-stream. Rod had recovered from his momentary faintness. He was accustoming himself to the situation, and taking heart of grace from his plucky comrade.

'We'll eat our dinner,' said Rasmus; 'there's nothing like a square meal to keep a man's danger up.'

While they were eating, they heard a heavy panting and snorting, as of some mighty beast, and saw beyond a bend in the river a plume of white smoke drifting south.

'There's a steamer!' cried Rasmus, in high excitement: 'she's climbing up stream, and