

Not the least of his troubles was the fact that, whereas in other days he might have called all the boys in town together and told them the story of his effort to purify the State Government, and delighted his soul over this enjoyment of it, he could now tell it only to Matt, who, while a very true friend, had not as keen a sense of the ludicrous as Jack could have desired. Still, one hearer would be better than none, and Jack wondered whether it might not yet be early enough for him to hurry to Matt's house and impart the delicious story, when suddenly to his great delight, he met Matt himself.

'Where have you been?' asked Matt, 'I've been over by your house whistling for you for the past hour. And the loveliest thing—oh, my! Will Pinkshaw has learned a new game of cards—poker they call it, and it's splendid. Gamblers play it for money, but it's just as much fun to bet buttons, or beans, or corn-grains, or anything. Will and I have been playing it in the moonlight, by your side fence, ever since dark, and we must have played a hundred games.'

'It isn't too late for me to learn, is it?' said Jack. 'The moon will shine all night.'

'Oh, somebody might come along,' protested Matt. 'The constables prowl around after ten o'clock, you know.'

'Then let's go into the stable and get on the hay under the big window,' said Jack. 'The moon shines in there—nice soft seat out of sight—everything.'

'But we haven't any cards,' said Matt.

'Then borrow Will Pinkshaw's,' said Jack. 'You bring 'em up to the stable—you know the way—and I'll have a handful of corn ready, and we'll have a jolly quiet game for a little while.'

Matt was nothing loth to act upon this suggestion, for new games with cards—or anything else—have a way of utterly entralling the juvenile mind. Within ten minutes he was back with the cards, but their owner had refused to loan the precious pasteboards unless they were accompanied by himself, and Jack experienced a great though 'secret joy that without his own direct agency he was brought into company with a boy other than Matt, and at a place somewhat different from the Sunday School where alone he had fraternized with boys during the month. The *modus operandi* of the game was speedily made known to Jack, the corn was scrupulously divided into three equal portions, and the play began. Jack had not read Hoyle, so perhaps it was the devil, who is said to be particularly encouraging to green players, that decided nearly every game in Jack's favour.

Matt was soon 'busted,' and meekly borrowed twenty grains of corn from the winner, but the Pinkshaw twin, who had bet no more carefully than Matt, remained financially equal to his engagements.

Jack began to wonder whether the Pinkshaw twin might not have sold his soul to the devil, like some gambler he had read of whose money was magically reproduced as he lost it. The thought caused him to fix eyes upon the Pinkshaw twin as he had been fascinated by him, and soon he discovered that the arch-adversary of souls operated from the heart of the owner of the unfailing pile, for the Pinkshaw twin, who had been pre-informed of the currency to be used, was seen to slyly take some corn from his pocket and lay it upon his pile.

In an instant a sharp quarrel ensued, the Pinkshaw twin lying most industriously and displaying an empty pocket in evidence, but a careful examination of Jack's winning showed that many grains of sweet corn were among them, whereas there was no such grain in the bin from which Jack had supplied the general exchequer. So the Pinkshaw twin sullenly confessed, and pleaded that playing for corn-grains was no fun, anyhow, for a fellow couldn't do anything with them if he had won them; he therefore proposed that the party should play for buttons.

'Where will we get them?' asked Matt.

'Cut off the suspender buttons on our trousers,' suggested the Pinkshaw twin. 'Neither of you fellows wear galluses, do you?'

The suggestion was acted upon, and the volume of currency being somewhat limited, the betting proceeded quite cautiously. But luck was still against the Pinkshaw twin, so, desperately remarking that his jacket was an old one, he removed the buttons from them also. And still he lost, so he attacked his shirt front, although Matt suggested that shirt buttons were hardly big enough to bet with. These same went the way of the others, and then the Pinkshaw twin, realizing that no one would see him on his way home, denuded his trousers of all the remaining buttons, and tied a string around his waist to hold the garments up. Losing these, he pledged his pocket knife to Jack for ten buttons, with the privilege of redemption within twenty-four hours. Then, when he wanted to 'raise' handsomely on 'two pair,' he had nothing to do it with. Jack declining to lend anything whatever on the miserable security of a dirty handkerchief, so he offered to bet his pack of cards as fifty buttons, and Jack agreed, and calmly displayed 'three of a