

Castlemon Harry

A Struggle for a Fortune



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CHAPTER I.

About Money

It was in a little log cabin with a dirt floor and a stick chimney which occupied almost the whole of one side of it, situated a few miles from Pond Post Office, a small hamlet located somewhere in the wilds of Missouri, that the opening scene of this story took place. There were four occupants of the cabin, sitting around in various attitudes, and they all seemed to be looking at a fifth person, Jonas Keeler by name, who was standing in the middle of the floor with a whip in his hand and a fierce frown on his face. Something was evidently troubling this man Jonas, and, if we listen to a few scraps of the conversation that passed between him and his wife, perhaps we can ascertain what it was.

“And is there any thing else that you want?” inquired Jonas, in a tone that was fully as fierce as his frown. “It beats the world how many things I have to get when I go to town. It is coffee here, and flour there, until I have to have a memory as long as this whip-stock for fear that I will forget some of them.”

“But, father, we have got to live somehow,” said his wife, who was seated on a rickety chair. “We can’t grow fat on air.”

“To be sure you can’t, but it seems to me that you might make things last longer. We wasn’t in this fix before the war. Then we had a house and something that was fit to eat; but ever since the rebs and the Yanks have got in here and burned us out, things is all mussed up and I don’t know which way to turn.”

“Why, father, you have money now,” said his wife.

“Where did I get money? Not much I ain’t. It has been this way ever since that old man Nickerson came here to board. I didn’t agree to take him for nothing, and I would not have done it if you hadn’t showed signs of getting up on your ear.”

“I know you didn’t. He gave you one thousand dollars when he first came here, and you said it would be more than enough to keep him as long as he lived.”

“But I did not suppose he was going to last forever, did I? He has chawed that up in tobacco long ago; and every time I go to town I am getting him a plug out of my own pocket.”

“Do you mean to say that he has used up a thousand dollars in three years?” asked Mrs. Keeler, in a tone of astonishment.

“Now look at you. You seem to think that amount of money will last forever. He has chawed that up and more, too. He must have had more than a thousand dollars when he came here. The folks down to Manchester used to say he was worth ten thousand dollars. What did you do with all that money, old man?”

This question, addressed in no very amiable tone of voice, was spoken to a person who was seated in a remote corner of the cabin as if he was anxious to get out of reach of the speaker. He was a very aged man, with white locks that came down upon his shoulders and hands that trembled in spite of all he could do to prevent it, and there was something in his eyes and face which he turned toward Jonas that would have appealed to any heart except the heart of Jonas Keeler. The old man was not in his right mind. He had worked hard and laboriously, his hands showed that, for the little money he possessed – Jonas said it was more than a thousand dollars – but those days were passed now. Something, no one could have told exactly what it was, had operated on his mind until he

hardly knew what he was doing. But there was one thing he did know and that was that during the last year his supply of tobacco had been extremely limited. What Jonas did with the thousand dollars that he gave him when he first came to his cabin and took up his abode with him, no one ever knew. Some believed that he had invested it in a mortgage while others thought he had it stowed away so that he could draw on it whenever necessity required it. At any rate his money went somewhere, and Jonas never got him a thing when he went to town without finding fault about it.

There had been a time when this Mr. Nickerson who lived a short distance from Manchester, was thought to be the richest person in all that county. Every thing he had about him went to show it. His horses were the fattest, his beef cattle brought the most money and his farm was nicely kept up. But the war broke out about this time, and Mrs. Keeler often wondered what had become of old man Nickerson who lived twenty miles away. He had been the husband of her sister, but since her death he had lived alone on his farm. He often said that he would not go into either army, he had no hand in bringing on the war and those who were to blame for it could settle the matter among themselves, and the consequence was he was robbed by both Union and Confederates. Every thing he had in sight was gone except one thousand dollars, which he finally gave into the hands of Jonas Keeler with the understanding that the amount was to support him while he lived.

"I don't much like the idea of giving up my money," said Mr. Nickerson, after he had taken a long time to think the matter over. "If I keep it with me I can get tobacco and other little things that I need; but now that I have let Jonas have it, – I don't know; I don't know. The first thing I know that thousand dollars will all be gone, and then what will I do? We'll see what sort of a man Jonas is to live up to his word."

Jonas Keeler did not believe in war either, and he tried by every means in his power to keep out of it. He hid in the woods when either army came near him, and of course he lost everything he had. The Confederates stole his horses and cattle, and the Union fellows said if he were not a rebel he ought to be, and burned his house over his head. But Jonas had the thousand dollars to go on and with this he was remarkably content. He kept along until the war closed and then he was ready to set out and make his living over again; but he found that it was a hard thing to do. It was tiresome work to get up where he was before, he never grew any richer, and Jonas, from being a quiet and peaceable man, became sullen and morose, did not like to hear anybody talk of spending money, even though he knew he must spend some in order to live, and finally got so that his family were afraid of him. There was one thing that he never could get through his head: Mr. Nickerson had never said anything about what had become of the rest of his money, and Jonas finally came to the conclusion that it was concealed somewhere, and he wanted to know where it was.

"You need not talk to me about that sum being all the old man had," said he, when he had held one of his long arguments with his wife. "He had more money than that and I know it. What did he do when Daddy Price took him off into the army? He buried it; that's what he did with it."

"But the rebels must have got it," said Mrs. Keeler. "You know they went all over his house and took everything there was in it."

"But they never got any money," said Jonas. "The old man hangs onto a dollar until the eagle hollers before he will give it up, and if they had found anything he would not fail to say so. He has got that money hidden somewhere, and I wish I knew where it was. He makes me so mad when he denies it, that I have half a mind to take him by the scurf of the neck and throw him out of doors."

"Don't do that, Jonas; don't do that," said Mrs. Keeler in alarm. "The old gentleman is getting feeble, I can see that plainly enough, and the only way you can do is to treat him kindly."

"Good gracious! Ain't that what I have been doing ever since he has been here?" demanded Jonas in a heat. "I tell you that his tobacco money is pretty near gone, and when it is *all* gone he will not get any more. It is high time he was quitting that bad habit."

Mrs. Keeler made no remark when she heard this. The idea that a man ninety years old could cease a habit that he had been accustomed to all his life, was absurd. Jonas himself really delighted

in a good smoke. How would he feel if he were deprived of that privilege? Furthermore, his wife did not believe that all Mr. Nickerson's money was gone. She was certain that Jonas could find a good deal of it if he looked around and tried.

This conversation took place some time previous to the beginning of our story. Mr. Nickerson's thousand dollars were nearly gone, at least Jonas said so, and at the time we introduce them to the reader it was all gone, and the old man did not know what he would do next. He had not a bit of that staff of life, as he regarded it, remaining, and now Jonas wanted to know where he had hidden the rest of his money. He had held a long talk with the old man down to the stable but could not get any thing out of him. That was one thing that put him in such bad humor.

"What did you do with all that money, old man?" repeated Jonas, when Mr. Nickerson looked up at him with a sickly smile on his face.

"What money?" inquired the old gentleman, as if he had never heard of the subject before.

"Aw! what money!" said Jonas; and when he got into conversation on this matter he nearly always forgot himself and shouted out the words as if the man he was addressing were a mile away. "I mean the money you had stowed away in your pocket-book where the soldiers could not find it; the money we were talking about down to the barn. Where did you put it?"

"I gave you every cent I had left," was the reply. "If there was any more the rebels have got it. Say, Jonas, are you going to get me a plug of tobacco when you go down town?"

"There it is again. No, I ain't. Your money is all gone, and you will have to do without it from this time on."

Jonas started toward the door as if he were in a hurry to get out, but before he had made many steps he suddenly paused in his walk, gazed steadily at the dirt floor and then turned to Mr. Nickerson again.

"Don't you remember where a dollar or two of that money went?" said he; and he tried to make his voice as pleading as he knew how. "If you could remember that, I might find you a plug or two of tobacco while I am down town."

"There was no more of it in the purse other than the money I gave you," said the old man, once more resting his forehead on his hands and his elbows on his knees. "That was all I had left to give you. You saw the inside of the purse as plainly as I did."

"But you must have some other that was not in the purse," said Jonas. "Where did you put that?"

"All I had was there in my pocket and you have got that. I want a plug of tobacco, too."

"Well, you don't get it out of me this trip," shouted Jonas. "If you won't tell where your money is you can go without tobacco."

Jonas went out, climbed into his wagon and drove off while the old man raised his head from his hands, tottered to the door and watched him as he was whirled away down the road. Then he came back and seated himself on the chair again.

"Jonas still sticks to it that I had more money in that purse than I gave him," whined Mr. Nickerson. "I hid it under the doorstep before Price took me away to the army. He knew that I was not able to do anything toward driving the mules, I was too old; but he took me along just to let me see that the Confederates ruled this State instead of the Union people. He set me to getting the mules out of the mud holes they got into, but in a few days he saw that I was not of any use at that, so he discharged me where I was all of one hundred miles from home, and left me to get there the best I could. I made it after awhile, although I suffered severely while I was doing it, found my thousand dollars right where I had left it and came up here and gave it to Jonas, consarn my picture. He said it would be enough to get me all the tobacco and clothes I needed, and now it is all gone. What I am going to do beats me."

"I have not got a cent, Mr. Nickerson," said Mrs. Keeler. "If I had I would give it to you in a minute. I have not seen the color of any body's money since the war."

“I know you haven’t, Mandy,” said Mr. Nickerson. “I have not any kith nor kin of my own, but you have always been good to me, and some day –”

The old man started as if he had been shot, looked all around him, his gaze resting on the faces of the two boys who stood near the door listening to what he had to say, and then hid his face in his hands and burst into a loud cough, doubling himself up as if he were almost strangled. Perhaps the boys were taken by surprise – and perhaps they were not; but Jonas’s wife was really alarmed.

“Why, Mr. Nickerson, what is the matter?” she inquired.

“Oh, it is nothing. It will pass off in a few minutes. I get to coughing that way once in a while.”

“Especially when you are going to say something you don’t want to,” murmured one of the boys under his breath. “And some day you are going to pay mother for her goodness to you. I wish I knew what you meant by that.”

The boys turned and left the cabin, but they did not go in company with each other. In fact, they tried to get as far apart as possible. There was something wrong with them – a person could see that at a glance. What these young fellows had to make them enemies, living there in the wilderness with not another house in sight, shall be told further on.

CHAPTER II.

A Friend In Need

“Nat, what do you reckon he meant by that?”

“Meant by what?”

“Why he said that mother had always been good to him, and that some day – then he went off coughing and didn’t say the rest.”

“I don’t know, I am sure.”

“I reckon he has got some money stowed away somewhere, as pap always said he had, and that when he is gone mother will come into it. By gracious! I wish I could find it.”

“Would you take it away from your mother?”

“Yes, sir, I would. I would take it away from any body. I need some clothes, don’t I?”

“You would have to go down to Manchester if you got any money, and that is a long ways from here.”

“I don’t care; I would find it if I was there. Are you going to get him any tobacco?”

“Me? What have I got to buy him tobacco with? You talk as if I had lots of money hidden away somewhere.”

“Cause if I see you slipping away any where and I can’t find you, I will tell pap of it when he comes home. You know what you will get if I do that?”

“Well, you keep your eyes on me and see if I slip away any where except down to the potato patch,” said Nat, indignantly. “That is where I am going now.”

The two boys separated and went off in different directions, Nat wending his way to the potato patch and the other going toward the miserable hovel they called a barn to finish his task of shelling corn.

“What a mean fellow that Nat Wood is,” said Caleb Keeler, as he turned and gave his departing companion a farewell look. “That boy has got as much as four or five dollars hidden away about this place somewhere, and I tell you I am going to find it some day. Then won’t I have some clothes to wear? I’ve got a pair of nice shoes which pap made him give me, but I will have more if I find that money. Dog-gone him, he has no business to keep things hidden away from us.”

These two boys, Caleb Keeler and Nat Wood, cherished the most undying hatred to one another, and as far as Nat was concerned, there was reason for it. It was all on account of his lost shoes, and they had been taken away from him a year ago. The weather was getting cold, every morning the grass and leaves were wet and it was as much as a bare-footed boy wanted to do to run around in them, and Nat had prepared for it by going down to the store one evening and purchasing a pair of brogans and two pairs of stockings. He fully expected to get into trouble on account of them, and sure enough he did. The next morning he came out with them on, and his appearance was enough to create astonishment on Caleb’s part who stood and looked at him with mouth and eyes wide open.

“Well, if you haven’t got a pair of shoes I never want to see daylight again,” said Caleb, as soon as he had recovered from his amazement. “Where did you get them?”

“I bought them,” said Nat.

“Where did you buy them?”

“Down to the store.”

“Where did you get your money?”

“I earned it.”

“You did, eh? Well, you ain’t been a doing any thing about here to earn any money,” declared Caleb, after he had fairly taken in the situation. “If you have money to buy a pair of shoes you can get a pair for me too. How much did they cost you?”

“Two dollars.”

“Have you got any more of them bills?”

“Not another bill,” said Nat; and to prove it he turned his pockets inside out. There was nothing in them except a worn jack-knife with all the blades broken which nobody would steal if he had the chance.

“I don’t care for what you have in your pockets,” exclaimed Caleb, who grew angry in a moment. “You have got more hidden around in the bushes somewhere. You want to get two dollars between this time and the time we get through breakfast, now I tell you. I will go down to the store with you.”

“Well, I won’t do it,” said Nat.

“If you don’t do it I will tell pap.”

“You can run and tell him as soon as you please. If you want shoes, go to work and earn the money.”

Caleb waited to hear no more. He dropped the milk bucket as if it were a coal of fire and walked as straight toward the house as he could go. He slammed the door behind him but in two minutes he reappeared, accompanied by his father. Things began to look dark for Nat.

“There, sir, I have lost my shoes,” said he. “If Uncle Jonas takes these away from me he will be the meanest man I ever saw. They are mine and I don’t see why I can not be allowed to keep them.”

When Jonas came up he did not appear so cross as he usually did. In fact he tried to smile, but Nat knew there was something back of it.

“Hallo, where did you get them shoes, Natty?” was the way in which he began the conversation.

“I got them down to the store,” was the reply, “and Caleb wants me to buy him a pair; but I have not got the money to do it.”

“Don’t you reckon you could find two extry dollars somewhere?” said Jonas.

“No, nor one dollar. I will tell you what I will do,” said Nat, seeing that the smile of his uncle’s face speedily gave way to his usual fierce frown. “I will tell you right where my money is hidden and then Caleb can go and find it.”

“Well, that’s business,” said Caleb, smiling all over.

“If you will do that then me and you won’t have any trouble about them shoes,” chimed in Jonas, once more calling the smile to his face. “Where have you got it? How many years have you been here, Natty?” continued Jonas, for just then an idea occurred to him. “You have been here just eleven years – you are fourteen now – and you have kept that money hidden out there in the brush all this while. Now why did you do that?”

It was right on the point of Nat’s tongue to tell Jonas that he did not have the money when he came there, but he knew that by so doing he would bring some body else into trouble; so he said nothing.

“I was older than you and knew more, and you ought to have given me the money to keep for you,” continued Jonas. “If you had done that you could have come to me any time that you wanted a pair of shoes, and you could have got them without the least trouble.”

“Won’t you take what there is left in my bag after you see it?” asked Nat, hopefully.

“That depends. I want first to see how much you have in that bag. Where is it?”

“Caleb, you know where that old fallen log is beside the branch near the place where we get water?” said Nat. “Well, go on the off side of that and you will see leaves pushed against the log. Brush aside the leaves and there you will find the bag.”

Caleb at once posted off and Jonas, after looking in vain for a seat, turned the milk bucket upside down, perched himself upon it and resumed his mild lecture to Nat over keeping his money hidden from him for so many years. He was the oldest and knew more about money than Nat did, he was a little fellow when he came there – when Jonas reached this point in his lecture he stopped and looked steadily at the floor. Nat was only three years old when he came to take up his abode under the roof of Jonas Keeler, to be abused worse than any dog that ever lived, both by Jonas and his son Caleb, and how could he at that tender age hide away his money so that Jonas could not find it?

“Wh-o-o-p!” yelled Jonas, speaking out before he knew what he was doing.

“What is the matter?” inquired Nat.

“Nothing much,” replied Jonas. “I was just a-thinking; that’s all. If Nat was only three years old when he came here to live with me,” he added to himself, “he couldn’t have had that money. Somebody has given it to him since, and it was not so very long ago, either. Whoop!” and it was all he could do to keep from uttering the words out loud. “He has got it from the old man; there’s where he got it from. And didn’t I say that the old man had something hidden out all these years? He didn’t give me a quarter of what he saved from the rebels. Now he has got to give me that money or there’s going to be a fracas in this house. I won’t keep him no longer. You can bet on that.”

At this point in his meditations Jonas was interrupted by the return of his son who was coming along as though he had nothing to live for, swinging his hand with the bag in it to let his father believe that there was nothing in it that he cared to save.

“What’s the matter?” inquired Jonas.

“I have found the bag but there is nothing in it, dog-gone the luck,” sputtered Caleb. “There is just a ‘shinplaster’ in it and it calls for two bits. Where is the rest of your money?” he added, turning fiercely upon Nat.

“That is all I have,” replied Nat. “It was in that bag, wasn’t it? Then I have no more to give you.”

Jonas took the bag, glanced at the shinplaster and put it into his pocket. The smile had now given away to the frown.

“Say, pap, ain’t you going to give that to me!” asked Caleb, who began to see that the interest he had taken in unearthing Nat’s money was not going to help very much.

“No; you can’t get no shoes with that money. I will take it and get some coffee with it the next time I go to town. Is this all the money you have left, Nat?”

“Every cent; and now you are going to take that away from me, too?”

“Of course; for I think it is the properest thing to do. You don’t ever go to church – ”

“And what is the reason I don’t? It is because I have not got any clothes to wear,” said Nat, who plainly saw what was coming next.

“That’s neither here nor there,” said Jonas. “Caleb goes to church, and he would go every Sunday if he had the proper things.”

“You bet I would,” said Caleb.

“So I think that if you don’t go to church and Caleb does, you had better take off them shoes. Take them off and give them to Caleb.”

“Now, Uncle Jonas, you are not going to make me go bare-footed this cold weather,” said Nat, anxiously. “If Caleb wants shoes let him go to work and earn them.”

“I can’t go to work about here,” said Caleb. “There’s nobody will hire me to do a thing.”

“Because you are too lazy; that’s what’s the matter with you,” said Nat, under his breath.

“Take off them shoes,” said Jonas.

Nat hesitated, but it was only for an instant. Jonas was not the man to allow his orders to be disobeyed with impunity, so he arose from his seat on the milk bucket with alacrity, disappeared in a little room where he kept a switch which he had often used on the boys when they did anything

that Jonas considered out of the way, and when he brought it out with him he found Nat on the floor taking off his shoes.

“You have come to time, have you?” said the man with a grin. “So you are going to take them off and give them to Caleb, are you?”

“I am going to take them off because I can’t well help myself,” said Nat, boldly. “If I was as big as you are I would not take them off.”

“None of that sort of talk to me,” said Jonas, lifting the switch as if he were about to let it fall upon Nat’s shoulders. “You would take them off if you were as big as a mountain.”

When he had removed his shoes Caleb picked them up and in company with his father started toward the house. He wanted to put them where they would be safe, and Nat stood there in his bare feet watching him until he closed the door behind him.

We have not referred to the relationship which Nat bore to Jonas Keeler, but no doubt those into whose hands this story falls will be surprised to hear it. Jonas was his uncle, and, by the way, Mr. Nickerson was no relation to any body under that roof. Nat’s father and mother were dead; his father was killed in the rebel army. Jonas found him in Manchester and brought him home “to keep him safe and sound;” at least that was what he said; but those who knew Jonas thought that the reason was because he suspected that Nat was heir to some money which would some day turn up in his favor. He did not see where the money was to come from, but he believed it, and that was enough. The truth of the matter was, Nat did not have a cent. After he had been there for some years Jonas began to think so too, and from that time his treatment of Nat was anything but what it ought to be. It was only when Mr. Nickerson began to take an interest in him that Nat had anything that he could call his own. He did not like the way Nat was abused – he was in his right mind then and hale and hearty in spite of his years – and took pity on him and determined to help him. That was where Nat’s money came from, and the way he happened to get it was this:

One day, when Jonas went to town, Mr. Nickerson watched his opportunity and followed him out to the field where he was at work alone. Nat greeted him very cordially for he was always glad to see him. Mr. Nickerson was the only one except Mrs. Keeler, who had a kind word to say to him, and Nat remembered him for it.

“Do you know what I would do if Jonas abused me as badly as he does you?” said he.

“No, sir, I don’t,” replied Nat.

“I would sit down and rest. He has gone away to town now, and when he comes home he can’t tell whether you have been at work or not.”

The boy leaned on his plow handles – he was eight years old and ought not to have been required to do that sort of work – and looked at Mr. Nickerson without speaking. He wanted to see if the man was in earnest.

“Jonas knows just how much I ought to have done, and when he comes home and finds that I have not got it all done, he will use that switch on me.”

Mr. Nickerson saw that there was some sense in this reasoning, and after kicking some clods out of his way and looking toward the house to make sure that there was no one watching him, he went on to say —

“Jonas uses you pretty rough, does he not?”

“Well, I will be a man some day, and then I will take it out of him, I bet you,” said Nat; and when he uttered the words he clenched his hands and his eyes flashed as if there were plenty of spirit in him.

“But that is going to be a long time for you to wait. If you had money do you think you could hide it where Jonas and Caleb could not find it?”

“But I haven’t got any,” said Nat.

“But I say supposing you had some; could you keep it out of their reach?” said Mr. Nickerson, when he saw Nat’s eyes brighten when he thought of all the fine things that money would buy for him. “If you don’t keep it out of their way you will get me into trouble.”

“Were you going to give me some money?” stammered Nat.

“I had thought some of it,” said the man, lowering his voice almost to a whisper and glancing again toward the house. “I have some money but I dare not keep it. Last night while I was awake, I saw Jonas come in very quietly and go through my trousers’ pocket; but he did not find any money there. If he had looked under the head of my bed close to the wall, he would have found two hundred dollars.”

While Mr. Nickerson spoke he had drawn a well-filled book from his pocket, opened it and showed to the astonished boy a whole lot of greenbacks which he had stowed away there.

CHAPTER III. “*Mental Reservation.*”

Nat had never seen so much money before in his life. He thought if he were worth that much that he would drop the plow handles then and there and take to the woods.

“Where did you get so much?” he stammered at length.

“I worked for it, and that’s the way Jonas will have to get every cent he makes,” said Mr. Nickerson. “What would you do if you had all this money?”

“I would go down to the store and buy some new over-alls,” replied Nat, pushing out one leg so that Mr. Nickerson could see the gaping rent in his knee. “They haven’t been mended since I put them on.”

“Yes; and then when Jonas comes home he would see the new over-alls and would want to know where you got them. That plan would not work at all, for the first thing you know you would get me into trouble as well as yourself. Now I am going to give you half of this, because I think you are too smart a boy to let it fall into the hands of any body else.”

“But what shall I do with it? If you think Jonas will notice my new clothes when he comes home, I can’t buy any.”

“I don’t give it to you to buy good clothes with. In fact you had better let them alone. But when I was of your age I liked to have something to eat when I went to town of a Saturday afternoon – some candy and nuts and such like things.”

“Were you ever a boy?” said Nat, in surprise. The idea that that old, gray-headed man could remember so long ago as that fairly took his breath away.

“Oh, yes; I can remember when I was a boy, and it don’t seem so very far off, either. I was a young boy, bare-footed as yourself, but I always had money. My father let me have it all, and I never thought of running away from him to get a chance to spend it. You don’t get much candy, I suppose?”

“No, I don’t. I hardly know what it tastes like.”

“Well, you go down town and ask the grocery man to change one of these bills for you. You see they are all fives, and if you don’t spend more than ten cents at a time and keep the rest hidden away, it will be long before any body finds out that you have got any money.”

As Mr. Nickerson spoke he glanced toward the house again, looked all around to make sure that there was nobody in sight, and placed a handful of bills in Nat’s grasp, reaching down by the side of him so that no one could see him do it.

“Oh, Mr. Nickerson, you don’t know how much I thank you for – ”

“Yes, I understand all about that. But there is something else that I want to talk to you about. I want you to get me some tobacco with that money.”

“I’ll do it, and Jonas and Caleb won’t know a thing about it. I will hide it where they will never think of looking for it.”

“That is what I wanted,” said Mr. Nickerson, with a pleased smile on his face. “But you must be very careful. Don’t take but one bill at a time, and then if anybody should see you and take it away from you, they won’t get all the money.”

Mr. Nickerson turned abruptly away from him and walked toward the house, and Nat, feeling as he had never felt before, seized the plow handles and went on with his work. He glanced up and down the field and toward the house to satisfy himself that Caleb was not in sight, and when he went by a little clump of bushes that grew at the lower end of the lot he dropped the plow, took the reins off his neck and ran toward a fence corner and took his bills from his pocket.

"I guess this place will do until I can find a better one," he muttered, as he scraped away the leaves and placed his treasure within it. "By gracious! It is always darkest just before day-light. And how do you suppose that Mr. Nickerson knew that I was planning to run away from Jonas? Now I tell you that he had better keep a civil tongue in his head or the first thing he knows when he calls me in the morning, and comes to my bed to use that switch on me because I don't get up, I won't be there. But then I can't go as long as Mr. Nickerson lasts. He will want me to get some tobacco for him."

Nat laid ninety-five dollars in the hole which he had dug for it, placed a chunk over it so that the leaves would not blow off and with a five-dollar bill safe in his pocket he returned to his work. He wanted to yell, he felt so happy; but when he raised his eyes as he turned his horse about, he saw Caleb standing in the upper end of the clump of bushes, regarding him intently. How long had Caleb been there and what had he seen? There was one thing about it: If he knew, the secret of that money he would have the hardest fight of his life before he placed his hands upon it.

"What's the matter with you?" said Caleb, who did not fail to notice the look that came upon Nat's face.

"There is nothing the matter with me," said Nat. "I don't see why I should do all the work and you sitting around and doing nothing."

"What was old man Nickerson doing out here so long with you?" asked Caleb, who did not think it worth while to go into an argument about the work that Nat had spoken of. "He was here with you for half an hour, and you had all this piece of ground to be plowed up before pap came home. And you stayed here and listened to him, too."

"Where were you?" asked Nat.

"I was around in the barn where I could see everything you did," replied Caleb, with a knowing shake of his head.

"What did you see him do?"

"I saw him talking to you; that's what I saw him do. You wasted fully half an hour with him."

Nat drew a long breath of relief and felt considerably more at ease when he heard this, for if that was all that Caleb had seen, the secret of his money was safe. He had not seen Mr. Nickerson when he passed his hand down by his side and placed the bills safe in Nat's hands.

"What was he talking to you about?" demanded Caleb.

"About certain things that happened when he was a boy," returned Nat. "If you wanted to hear what he said you ought to have come out and listened. But I must go on or I will not get this piece plowed by the time your father comes back. Get up here, you ugly man's horse."

"Now you just wait and see if I don't tell pap of that," said Caleb, who grew angry in a moment. "I learn you to call pap's horse ugly."

"I didn't say he was ugly. I said he belonged to an ugly man; and if your father did not look mad when he went to town, just because Mr. Nickerson wanted some tobacco, I don't want a cent."

The horse, after being persuaded by the lines, reluctantly resumed his work and Caleb was left there standing alone. There was something about Nat that did not look right to him. He always was independent, and acted as though he did not care whether Caleb spoke to him or not, but just now he seemed to be more so than ever.

"I wish I knew what was up between that boy Nat and old man Nickerson," said he, as he started out toward the barn. "Every move that old man makes I think he has got some money hidden somewhere about here. Pap thinks so and so do I. I just keep a watch of Nat more closely than I have heretofore, and if I can find his money – whoop-pe!"

Jonas did not find any fault when he came home that night, for Nat, by keeping the horses almost in a trot, had got the field plowed, the team unharnessed and fed before he returned. He found fault with him and brought his switch into play more than once on other matters, but during the five years that elapsed he never said "money" to him once. During these five years he always

kept his money concealed, and every time he went to town he always bought a goodly store of tobacco for the old man. And nobody ever suspected him or Mr. Nickerson, either. Of course, during this time, Jonas became more sullen and ugly than ever, and worse than all, Nat could see that there was something having an affect upon his old friend, Mr. Nickerson. Either it was his age or the treatment he received that had a gloomy impression upon him, but at any rate Mr. Nickerson was losing his mind. He no longer talked with Nat the way he used to, but was continually finding fault with his money and where it went to so suddenly that he could not get any more tobacco to chew to help him while away the hours. Jonas encouraged him to talk this way for somehow he got it into his head that Mr. Nickerson would some day forget himself, and that he would tell where he had hidden his money; but not a thing did he get out of him. The old gentleman was apparently as innocent of any thing he had concealed as though he had never heard any thing about it.

“You may as well give that up,” said his wife, after Jonas had tried for a long time to induce him to say something. “If he had any money when the war broke out, the rebels have got it.”

“Not much I won’t give it up,” declared Jonas, turning fiercely upon Mrs. Keeler. “If this old place could talk it would tell a heap. I have hunted it over and over time and again, but I can’t find any thing. I tell you I am going to get rid of him some day. I will send him to the poor house; and there’s where he ought to be.”

When Nat heard Jonas talk in this way it always made him uneasy. As soon as it came dark he would go to the place where he had hidden his tobacco and money and take them out and conceal them somewhere else, carefully noting the spot and telling the old man about it.

At the end of five years his money was all gone, and then Nat was in a fever of suspense because he did not know where he was going to get some more tobacco for Mr. Nickerson and candy for himself; and when he was asked for more he was obliged to say that his tobacco money had all been exhausted.

“Well, I expected it,” said Mr. Nickerson. “But it has lasted you a good while, has it not? There’s some difference between you and Jonas. I gave him all of a thousand dollars when I came here – ”

Nat fairly gasped for breath. He wondered what Jonas could have done with all that money.

“It is a fact,” said the old man. “He told me that it would keep me in spending money as long as I lived, and now it has been gone for several years. You had a hundred dollars, and it has lasted until now. You go out to the barn and in about half an hour I will be out there.”

Like one in a dream Nat made his way to the tumble-down building that afforded the cattle a place of refuge in stormy weather, and looked around for something to do while he awaited Mr. Nickerson’s return. If we were to say that he was surprised we would not have expressed it. Was the old man made of money? It certainly looked that way, for when a hundred dollars was gone he simply said “he had expected it” and went out to find more. In a few minutes he returned and placed another package of bills in Nat’s pocket.

“Do you know you told a lie to Jonas every time he asked you about this money?” said Nat.

“No, I did not,” said Mr. Nickerson, earnestly. “I told him that I did not have any more money for him; and I didn’t have, either. I have not got a cent about me.”

Nat was not old enough to remember the form of oath administered by the United States government to all its employees – “do you solemnly promise without any mental reservation” – for if he had been he would have seen how Mr. Nickerson got around it. Jonas did not administer this form of oath, Mr. Nickerson had a “mental reservation” that he had some money hidden but he did not say anything about it. He supposed that he was living up to the truth.

“I did not have a cent,” repeated the old “He could have searched me all over and not found any. When he asked me if I had man. any more concealed somewhere in the bushes, I found some way to avoid it. It is all right. I have not lied to him.”

With a hundred extra dollars in his pocket Nat thought he was able to buy himself a pair of shoes when the weather became cold. He bought them and as we have seen they were taken away from him and given to Caleb, because Caleb went to church and Nat did not. He had to wait a long time before Jonas bought him some foot-wearing apparel out of some of Mr. Nickerson's money, and then he invested in them because he was fearful that his neighbors would have something to say about the boy's condition, going about in all that sloppy weather with nothing to wear on his bare feet. This brings us down to the time when our story begins, when Jonas got into his wagon and drove toward town and Nat went to the potato patch to finish picking and digging and Caleb to the barn to complete his task of shelling corn.

We left Mr. Nickerson sitting in company with Jonas's wife, bemoaning his loss of tobacco and trembling for fear of something he had said in regard to what he would do with his money in case he were done with it.

"I wish I had some money so that I could give you some of it when I am gone," whined the old man. "For I shall not last much longer."

"Oh, yes you will," returned Mrs. Keeler. "You will last many years yet. There is Mr. Bolton who is almost a hundred years old."

"But he gets different treatment from what I do," said Mr. Nickerson. "He has tobacco every day in the week, if he is a mind to ask for it. And he did not give his son one thousand dollars to keep him while he lived."

"Well, I can't help that," said Mrs. Keeler, with a sigh. "Your money is all gone, at least Jonas says so, and I don't see what else you can do."

"I don't either," said the old man; and as he spoke he got upon his feet and staggered toward the door. "Thank goodness I have a little money left," he added to himself. "I must go and get me some tobacco. I have to be all by myself when Jonas is here, or else he would see me chewing it and would want to know where I got it. I hate to be so sly about everything I do."

Mr. Nickerson left the house without any hat on, he was so wrapped up in his troubles that he forgot that he had a hat, and tottered toward the barn where Caleb was at work shelling corn. Caleb looked up when he heard his footsteps but when he saw who it was he went on with his work, paying no heed to him. The old man went by and just then an idea occurred to Caleb.

"I wonder if old Nickerson is going after some tobacco?" said he, laying down his ear of corn and rising hastily to his feet. "He thinks I am blind and Nat does, too; but I have seen him chewing tobacco plenty of times when he has asked father to get him some and he would not do it. I guess I'll keep an eye on him."

That was easy enough to do, for Mr. Nickerson did not pay much attention to what was going on near him. He stepped hastily out of the barn and followed along after him until he saw him enter the little clump of bushes at the lower end of the potato patch. He did not dare go any farther for fear the rustling of the bushes would attract the old man's attention, but kept on around the clump until he reached a place where he could see the whole of the field without being seen himself. Mr. Nickerson presently appeared, kept on to a certain fence corner in which he was lost to view.

"Dog-gone my buttons! He has got some money there," whispered Caleb, so excited that he could scarcely stand still. "If he hasn't got money he has some tobacco, and I will just take it when he goes."

While he was wondering how he was going to work to find out what Mr. Nickerson had found there, he cast his eyes toward the upper end of the field and saw that Nat had ceased his work, was standing with his hands resting on his hips and closely watching Mr. Nickerson. He made no attempt to stop him, and according to Caleb's way of looking at it, that was all the evidence he wanted to prove that Nat was in some way interested in what was hidden there.

"Now what is to be done?" said Caleb to himself. "Nat must know what is concealed there. I declare I have two fellows to fight now."

CHAPTER IV.

A Keepsake

Caleb stood and thought about it. He could not go to the fence corner where the old man was while Nat was in plain sight, and he must think up some way of getting him away from there. It is true that he might have waited until darkness came to conceal his movements, but Caleb was a boy who did not believe in doing business that way. He wanted to find out what was in that fence corner, and he must find it out now. He could not afford to wait until night came.

"You must come away from there, Mister Nat," said he, as he crouched down behind the bushes and made his way toward the house. "You must come away in five minutes, for I am not going to run any risk of your slipping up and hiding that thing, whatever it is, that the old man has found."

In a few minutes he reached the house and went directly to the water-pail in order to quench his thirst; but there was no water there.

"Mother, send Nat down to the branch after some water," said he.

"Suppose you go yourself," was the reply. "Nat is busy digging potatoes."

"I can't go. I am busy getting that corn ready for pap to take to mill tomorrow. I am so thirsty I can't speak the truth. Nat can go as well as not."

"Bessie, go out and call Nat to get some water," said Mrs. Keeler. "I suppose he will have to go."

Bessie went, and as soon as she was clear of the house Caleb bent his steps toward the barn and from the barn to the bushes, where he arrived just in time to see Mr. Nickerson come out of the fence corner, biting a plug of tobacco as he came.

"That's all the tobacco you will get out of that pile," chuckled Caleb, as he rubbed his hands together. "I will take it all and give it to pap."

Presently Bessie was heard calling Nat. The latter threw his hoe spitefully down and went to obey the order, and as soon as he was out of sight Caleb arose from the bushes and ran for the fence corner. He had taken particular pains to mark the corner, and in fact there was little need of it, for the old man's marks were plainly visible there. He found the leaves raked to one side, a little hollow exposed but there was nothing in it. Caleb threw himself on his knees and made the cavity larger, but there was not a thing that rewarded his search.

"There was just one plug of tobacco left and he got it," said Caleb, who was very much disappointed. "And there's no money in it either. Now had I better tell pap or not? There is a heap of skirmishing going on here, the first thing you know, and if I keep watch perhaps I can find some money. I guess I'll think about that for awhile."

Being anxious to reach the cover of the bushes before Nat should return, Caleb did not stop long in the fence corner, but made all haste to get out of sight. And he was none too soon. The bushes had hardly closed up behind him before Nat came into view.

When darkness came the boys began to do their chores and Jonas returned from town. One could always tell Jonas when he was half a mile away because he shouted at his horses as though they were hard of hearing. Mr. Nickerson heard him coming and went down to the barn to meet him.

"Did you get any tobacco for me, Jonas?" said he, in a whining voice which had of late years become habitual with him.

"No, I did not," roared Jonas. "You won't tell me where your money is, and you can go without tobacco. I wish there was something else you liked as well as you do that weed, and I would shut down on that too."

"I shall not be with you long," began Mr. Nickerson. "I feel that I am going –"

“Aw! Get along with, that,” interrupted Jonas, who hung one of his harnesses on its peg and then turned savagely upon the speaker. “You have always got something the matter with you when you don’t get any tobacco.”

“I have a keepsake for you up at the house,” continued the old man. “If you will come up there when you get through I will give it to you.”

Jonas began to prick up his ears at this. He wished now that he had brought the old gentleman some tobacco; but as he had not done it, he made all haste to smooth matters over as well as he could.

“I didn’t mean anything, Mr. Nickerson,” said he, coming forward to shake him by the hand. “But I met with a heap of bother while I was down town to-day, and I absolutely forgot all about your tobacco. Never mind; I will send Nat down after it.”

“Thank you. Thank you,” said the old man. “It will be a heap of comfort to me. You don’t know how long the time seems without it.”

“Yes, I know. I like a smoke pretty well, and I would not give it up to please anybody. Now you run along to the house and in a few minutes I will be there. A keepsake,” he muttered to himself. “It is money, I know. I believe I took the right course when I shut down on that man’s weed.”

It was astonishing what that word “keepsake” made in Jonas’s feelings. He had but two expressions which came to his face – the smile and the frown. No one to have seen him as he finished putting out his team, would have thought that a frown ever came on his countenance. He was all smiles, and once or twice he forgot himself so as to try to strike up a whistle. This attracted the attention of Caleb who was amazed at it.

“What’s the matter with you, pap?” said he.

“There is nothing the matter with me,” replied Jonas, cheerfully. “When a man does right he always feels happy. That’s the kind of opinion you want to grow up with. If you make everybody around you jovial, of course you are jovial yourself.”

“Are you happy because you didn’t get the old man what he wanted?” continued Caleb, who would have given everything he had to know what had brought about that wonderful change in his father’s appearance. Caleb knew that he could bring the frown back to his face in short order. He had but to mention that the old man had a plug of tobacco in his pocket, and that he had seen him dig it out of the fence corner; but something told him that he had better keep quiet. He was going to keep close watch of Nat and Mr. Nickerson now – he did not know how he was going to do it, for he kept close watch of them already – and perhaps they would lead him to the place where they had concealed some money.

“Yes, sir, that is a point that I want you to remember all your life,” Jonas went on. “I forgot all about Mr. Nickerson’s tobacco, and that was the reason I didn’t bring it. But I will make up for it after supper. Have you milked, Caleb? Then pick up your pail and let’s go up to the house. A keepsake,” Jonas kept saying to himself, as he walked along. “He knows that I want money worse than anything else, and that was what he meant. The idea that he should keep money in that house so long, and I was looking everywhere for it!”

Jonas was in a hurry, anybody could have seen that and he kept Caleb in a trot to keep pace with him. When he opened the door he greeted his wife with a cheerful “hello!” and picked up his youngest child and kissed him. Mrs. Keeler was as much amazed at his actions as Caleb was. She stood in the middle of the floor with her arms down by her side and her mouth open, seemingly at a loss to comprehend his movements.

“Now, then, where is Mr. Nickerson?” said Jonas, pulling an empty chair toward him.

“Mr. Nickerson,” said Caleb to himself. “There is something in the wind there. He never called him Mr. Nickerson before unless he had something to make out of him. He was always ‘that old man’ or ‘that inspired idiot’ when he wanted him to do errands for him. What’s up, I wonder?”

"I forgot all about his tobacco," said Jonas, seating himself and repeating what he had said to Caleb. "I had a heap of trouble down town, but I will send Nat down after it as soon as we get a bite to eat. Ah, Mr. Nickerson, you are on hand, I see. What's this?"

The old man had in his hand the "keepsake" which he intended to give to Jonas. It was a book bound in cloth. It had been well-read evidently, for some of the leaves were loose and one cover was nearly off. But the leaves were all there, and there was *something* in it that Jonas did not know anything about; if he had known it he would have received it very differently.

"What is that?" asked Jonas.

"It is the keepsake I promised you," said Mr. Nickerson. "Take it, read every word of it and you will find something in it before you get through that will make you open your eyes and bless your lucky stars that you have been so good to me."

Jonas took the book and ran his thumb over the leaves. He turned the back of the book toward him and read the name "Baxter's Saints' Rest" on it in gilt type. The expression of intense disgust that came upon his face when he looked at the book set Caleb to snickering, and even Nat, who was leaning against the door post a little distance away, smiled in spite of himself.

"And is this the only keepsake you have got to give me?" shouted Jonas.

"It is the only one," said Mr. Nickerson. "Read it carefully, every word of it, and you will thank me for giving it to you."

"Where's the money?" exclaimed Jonas, who could not get that thing out of his mind.

"You have got all the money I have to give you. I gave you a thousand dollars –"

Jonas became furious all on a sudden. With a muttered exclamation under his breath, he drew back the book with the intention of throwing at the old man's head; but he stayed his hand in time. Then he turned it upon Caleb; but the boy had rushed out of the door and was safe. But Nat stood there, he had not moved at all, and instantly the book left Jonas's hand and flew with terrific force at the boy's head. It struck the door post and bounded out of doors, and Nat slowly straightened up and went after it. It was a work of some difficulty to pick it up, for the leaves were scattered in every direction, but Nat got it done at last and went away with it.

"Jonas, Jonas, you will be sorry for that," said Mr. Nickerson, who covered his face with his hands.

"Get out of here! Get out, you inspired idiot!" roared Jonas, striding up and down the cabin as if he were demented. "Don't you dare come into this house again."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Keeler.

"Shut up your yawp, old woman," said Jonas, turning upon her. "That was the keepsake he had to give to me, was it? I thought it was money, dog-gone it, and here he comes and presents me with a *book*! He shan't stay in my house no longer."

Mr. Nickerson went out and tottered to the barn, and when Nat found him there a few minutes later he was doubled up with his elbows on his knees, but his jaws were working vigorously. If there was nothing else which could comfort him, he found it in his tobacco.

"Here's your book, Mr. Nickerson," said Nat, who, if he had been big enough, would have resented the way the old man had been treated. "Shall I take it back and put it among your things?"

"No; never mind that now. Jonas has told me that I can not go into his house again, and he may rest assured that I will never do it."

"He did not mean what he said," exclaimed Nat. "He is all over his passion by this time."

"It is too late. He will never see a cent of my money. Did you put those leaves all in just as you found them?"

"I tried, but I reckon I did not succeed very well."

"Did you find anything that did not belong there?"

"I found two leaves that were pasted together," said Nat, and he grew excited at once when he saw the expression that came upon Mr. Nickerson's face. "Did you know about those two leaves?"

“Have you brought them with you?”

“I have. I would have left the whole book behind before I would them, for I knew they meant something,” said Nat, producing them from his pocket the leaves of which he had spoken. “Now, by holding it up to the light this way,” he added, “in order to see what was in them, I can see through the leaves, and I can see a third piece of paper in there.”

“Yes; and there is something on that paper, too,” said the old man rising to his feet and going toward the door. “We must first make sure that there is nobody coming; for you have a fortune right there in your hands.”

“A fortune?” gasped Nat.

“It was the money I had in the bank at the time the war broke out,” said Mr. Nickerson, who, having looked up and down the place and toward the house to satisfy himself that he and Nat were safe from intrusion, returned to his seat. “It is all in gold, too.”

“How-how much is there of it?” said Nat, who did not know whether to believe the story or not.

“As much as three or four thousand dollars; perhaps more; I did not count it. You see I drew this money at different times, and as fast as I got it, I hid it. When the rebels came there and took me away, they searched the house high and low for some money that they supposed I had, but it was not in the house; It was out in the field. You see this black line?” he continued, taking the two leaves and pointing with his shivering finger to one of the marks on the inclosed paper. “By the way, you don’t want to take this out until you are already to go to work, for fear that somebody may steal it from you. Well, you go to the house – ”

“But how can I tell where it is?” cried Nat. “Those men cleaned you out. They thought they would get something by doing that.”

“They didn’t, so they might as well have left me my house. However, it don’t matter much now. I shall never live in it again. You can tell where the house stood, even if it isn’t there now, can’t you? You go to the corner of that house nearest the woods, hold this paper before you and follow as straight a course as you can down the hill and across the break until you come to a brier patch. It is made up entirely of briars, for I cut them down and put them there. Then leave that to your right and go thirty yards and you will strike a stone, as big as you can lift, which does not look as though it had ever been touched. But it has been, and you can pry it up if you want to. When you get that stone out of its place, you dig down about two feet, and there you will find it.”

Nat listened with all his ears, but there was one thing that did not look right about it: The old man talked about the place and the way to find it as though there had never been anything the matter with him at all. If there was something wrong about his mind, Nat failed to see what it was. He talked as though he were reading from a book.

“But what makes you give all this to me?” said Nat at length. “You don’t act as though you had any interest in it at all.”

“I am not going to last long, and I know it,” said Mr. Nickerson. “I have neither kith nor kin in this land, or in any other so far as I know, and since Jonas does not want the money, why you can have it. I know enough about law to know that there is nobody can take it away from you. If you could, I say if you could without too much trouble, call and see Jonas’s wife after you get the money, and give her one thousand dollars, I could rest easy. Could you do that much for me?”

“Of course I can. I will give it all to her if you say so.”

“No, I don’t want you to do that. I know you would give it all to her, because you are an honest boy. You have been good to me during the years I have been here, never had anything cross to say to me, you don’t like Jonas, and neither do I. Mandy has been good to me, too, but you see if I give her this money Jonas will have a chance to take it. I don’t want him to see a cent of it.”

“But Mr. Nickerson, what was your object in pasting your description in the book this way? The book might have been stolen.”

“But it was not stolen. As many as fifty soldiers, Union and Confederate, have had that book in their hands, and when they came to turn it up and see what the title was, they threw it aside. No soldier wants to read a book like that. It is growing late and I must lie down somewhere.”

“Come into my room and turn into my bunk,” said Nat. “You will sleep well there.”

“Jonas has turned me out of his house and I am going to stay out,” said Mr. Nickerson, with more spirit than he usually exhibited. “I will lie down here and die in his barn.”

“Don’t talk that way, Mr. Nickerson,” said Nat; and some way or other he could not get it out of his head that the old man was in earnest. “If you are going to stay here I will go up and get a couple of blankets and a pillow for you. I will see you all right in the morning.”

He laid the book beside the old man, folded up the two leaves and put them into his pocket and hurried toward the house. Somehow he did not feel exactly right about Mr. Nickerson.

CHAPTER V.

Jonas Tries to Make Amends

It is hard to tell what Jonas Keeler's feelings were as he paced back and forth in his narrow cabin, his eyes flashing, his hands clenched and his lips framing to himself words that he dared not utter aloud. He was disappointed – sorely disappointed because Mr. Nickerson, who knew that he wanted money, that he thought of nothing else, had presumed to present him a book for a keepsake. Sometimes he felt so angry at him that he had half a mind to go out, find the old man and throw him over the bars. His wife said nothing for some minutes, but seeing that Jonas was getting madder instead of better natured, she ventured to put in a word or two.

"Father, you didn't do right in talking to the old man the way you did," said she, hardly knowing how her words would be received.

"The old fool!" hissed Jonas, throwing his hat into one corner and burying both of his hands in his hair. "What did he want to give me a book for when he knows how badly I need money? I am sorry that I was so good natured with him afterward."

"But father, there was something in the book," continued Mrs. Keeler, a sudden idea occurring to her.

Jonas stopped quickly and faced her, a queer expression on his face.

"There may have been something in the book that told you where his money was. That is if he has got any money; which I don't believe."

Jonas began to see the matter in a different light now. He pulled a chair close to his wife's side and sat down in it.

"Do you think there was money in the book?" he almost whispered.

"No, I don't. You threw the book with force enough to tear it all to pieces; but there may have been a paper or something else in the leaves which told where his money was hidden. But between you and me, I would not put the least faith in it."

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Because the old gentleman is not in his right mind. You have talked about money, money and nothing but money ever since he has been here, and you have finally got him in the way of believing that he has some."

"Well, I don't know about that. The old fellow talks plainly enough sometimes, and then again he rattles on and you can't make head or tail of what he says. But I wonder if there was anything in that book? If there was anything there, it must have been put in years ago, when the old man was right in his top story."

"It would not do any harm for you to find out. You can tell him that you did not mean anything by what you had said –"

"That depends upon whether I do or not," said Jonas hastily. "I will wait until I see what is in that book first. If there is a plan in there which tells where to go to find the money, but you say he hasn't got any, why then I will be kinder good natured with him; but if there is nothing there, he can just keep out of my house; and that's all there is about it."

Jonas thought that by this time Mr. Nickerson had gone to bed, so he went out and started toward a little lean-to, it could scarcely have been called any thing better, which was the place where the old man slept. There were leaks in the roof and sundry cracks through which the severe winds could seek entrance, but that was not the kind of sleeping place Jonas had in the cabin. There everything was tight, and there were a few articles of furniture scattered around, such as a table and chairs and a wash stand. In place of a shake-down he had a regular bed-stead and the blankets and quilts on it were abundant to keep him warm in the coldest weather. It was dark in the lean-

to, but Jonas knew the way. He groped his way up to the shake-down but there was nobody in it. In fact the bed had not been slept in at all.

“By George! I reckon the old fool took me at my word,” said Jonas, as he turned toward the door. “I did not think the fellow had so much pluck. I wonder where he is!”

He bent his steps this time toward the lean-to which Nat called his room. It was a little better than Mr. Nickerson’s and but a very little better. It was tight but there was no furniture in it; the dirt floor did duty as chairs and washstand. Whenever Nat got up in the morning and desired to perform his ablutions, there was the branch handy, and it was but little trouble to go down there. It was dark in here, too, but a slight feeling among the bed clothes showed Jonas that somebody had been there. The pillow was gone, and so were the quilts that Nat usually spread over him.

“This beats my time all hollow,” said Jonas, pulling off his hat and wiping his forehead. “If he should go out among the neighbors – but then he can’t have gone that far. Nat is going to make him up a bed somewhere.”

Jonas’s next trip was to the barn, and there he found Mr. Nickerson stretched out on a rude bed which Nat had made for him, and a lighted lantern throwing a dim light over the scene. Jonas first impulse was to find out what had become of that book. It was there, lying on the pillow close beside Mr. Nickerson’s head. Nat was seated on the floor a little ways from him, but he did not say anything when Jonas came in.

“Hello!” said the new-comer, with an attempt to appear cheerful. “What you laying down out here for? Why don’t you get up and go to your own room?”

“You have told me once that I need not come into your house any more,” said the old man, in his usual whining tone, “and I am going to take you at your word. I shall never go into your house again.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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