

Chapman Allen

Bound to Succeed: or, Mail Order Frank's Chances



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CHAPTER I WAKING UP

“Mother, I must do something, and that right quickly.”

It was Frank Newton who was talking. His voice was composed, but determined. His face was calm, but there was a resolute look in his eyes. It told that under the surface some unusual emotion was stirring Frank.

“I don’t see how you can do any more than you are doing now,” responded his mother with an anxious sigh. “Of course it seems hard to get along with so little when we have been used to having so much. But, oh, Frank, when I think of what was once – you away, I knew not where, and my heart breaking to find out – I am grateful and happy, and so very proud of you, my dear, dear boy.”

Frank’s lip quivered at the fervent words spoken. They inspired him with their eloquence. His hand trembled as it rested on his mother’s arm gently and lovingly.

“It’s worth everything to have you talk that way, mother,” he said in quite a husky voice, “and kind words and good opinion just makes me the more resolved to better things.”

“Don’t be ungrateful or complaining, my boy.”

“It’s never that, mother.”

“And don’t be too ambitious, or too reckless. We have a roof to shield us and food to eat, thanks to your busy endeavors. The lawyer gives us hopes that we may recover something from the wreck of our lost fortune. I don’t know of any better outlook for the present, than to wait patiently and see what turns up in the way of an improvement in affairs.”

Frank shook his head, and paced up and down the floor of the best room of the cozy little cottage that was their present home.

“It’s no use, mother,” he said finally. “The lost fortune is a dream, a bubble. We may just as well get down to that. Mr. Beach, the lawyer, gives us hopes, but they are not based on much. At the same time, he takes his fees. We can’t stand that any longer. I told him so, yesterday. I don’t believe there is the least show in the world for our claim. I am sure that Mr. Beach shares my opinion now. No,” continued Frank definitely, “what future there is for us must be worked out by our own independent exertions.”

“It is a bitter wrong then,” spoke his mother. “When your father, Mr. Newton, died, he left me his town property here. When I married a second time, and Mr. Ismond became your stepfather, I had implicit confidence in him at first. He got me to sign the property over to him. Then I saw my mistake. When his tyrannical ways drove you away from home I lost all regard for him.”

“He certainly was very cruel and unjust to me,” murmured Frank, recalling many dark days of his young life.

“When he died,” resumed Frank’s mother, “I was amazed to find that all my rights to the estate were forfeited. It looked very much as though Mr. Ismond had been planning to rob us of everything when death overtook him. A man named Purnell, Gideon Purnell, held the title to our property under mortgage and sale. He sold it to Abner Dorsett, who now holds it. The law says Dorsett was an innocent purchaser, and therefore cannot be disturbed.”

“Innocent!” flashed out Frank. “Oh, what a shame! Why, we know better than that, mother. We are sure that Purnell was his tool and partner. Anyhow, we cannot hold Dorsett to make any

restitution. I hope some day, though, to run across this Purnell. If I ever do, I'll not lose sight of him till I know the truth of the wicked plot that made us paupers. He, and he only, holds the key to the situation."

"Mr. Dorsett is a bad man," said the widow. "His actions show he is not just. Else, why does he care to put obstacles in your way when you seek work? I wish we could leave Greenville, Frank. That man terrifies me. He may get you into some trouble. I have seen him prowling around here often. Then, the other day, our poor, faithful dog, Christmas, disappeared. That same night I saw Dorsett crouching under the window yonder. It looks as if he fears something we may know or do, and is lurking around eavesdropping to find out what it is."

"He will find a trap set for him the next time he comes nosing around here," declared Frank with a grim-set lip. "Mother, don't worry your mind any further, I am determined to get steady work and earn more money. I wish, too, we could leave Greenville. If it was any use I would stay and fight Dorsett to the last ditch. It's no use, and I know it. Let us get out of the sight and memory of the old life. I'm going to strike out new."

"But how, what at?" inquired Mrs. Ismond doubtfully.

"I don't know yet, I will before another sun rises, though," asserted Frank, staunchly. "That is, if good hard thinking can suggest the right way to go about it."

Frank took up his cap and walked from the house. He paused to place a silver fifty cent piece on the kitchen dresser. He had earned it before breakfast, cutting a lawn and trimming hedges up at Judge Bascom's place.

Frank had been doing such odd jobs about town for the past four months. He was courteous, accommodating and energetic. Everybody he worked for liked him, and he never shirked an honest task.

He made out fairly well as a general utility boy about the village. The worst of it was, however, that his good luck came in streaks. One very busy week Frank made over ten dollars. Then the next week all he could get to do was chopping wood at fifty cents a day.

"There is something better in me than that," Frank resolved. "I've got the problem to solve what it is, and I feel that it is up to me to figure it out right now."

Frank's face clouded slightly as he crossed the yard and his eye fell on an empty dog house. It made Frank feel lonesome and worried to realize that its former tenant, the dog, Christmas, was missing.

The faithful animal, a veritable chum to Frank, had disappeared one night. Frank had spent two days looking for him with no results.

Christmas was a connecting link between the present and a very vivid section of the past in Frank Newton's experience. The thought of this instantly sent Frank's mind drifting among the vital and exciting incidents in that career.

Frank was a peculiar boy. He had great sturdiness of character, what some people call "nerve," and up to two years before our story begins had led a happy, joyous existence. He had been an active spirit, and always a leader in boyish sports and fun.

It had been a black day for Frank when his mother had married Ismond. Too late Mrs. Newton had learned that she had wedded a fortune-hunter. Too soon Frank discovered that the miserable schemer planned to drive him away from home, so he might more easily rob the lad's mother of her fortune.

Frank stood Ismond's abuse just as long as he could. Then he ran away from home.

At first he followed a circus, tired of it, and got a job tending a lemonade stand at an ocean resort. He made all sorts of acquaintances, good and bad. The latter did not demoralize him, but they did harden him. He grew to be a cynical, unhappy boy.

In his wanderings Frank brought up at a town called Pleasantville. This was the home of Bart Stirling, the hero of another volume of this series, "Bart Stirling's Road to Success," and of Darry

and Bob Haven, whose stirring careers my former readers have followed in the volume entitled, "Working Hard to Win."

Frank arrived at Pleasantville in the company of two men, who had devised a great fraud upon the meanest but richest man in the place, Colonel Harrington. In disgust of their swindling ways, Frank destroyed the papers they hoped to impose upon the colonel. In escaping from them he was severely crippled and laid up for several weeks.

Soon his money gave out. He was turned away from the village hotel for not paying his board.

He proved a boy of ready resources, however. Bob Haven formed his acquaintance in the midst of one of his original and daring schemes for raising money quickly.

Frank paid up his debts and hung around Pleasantville, living upon his surplus. He was at a stage of his career where he was sick of change and adventures. He longed for home. In the friendship of the Haven boys and Bart Stirling, he began slowly to feel his way back to a natural boyhood plane.

One night a terrible fire burned down the Pleasantville Hotel. It needed just such an incident to rouse up in Frank the latent chivalry and courage of his fine soul. At the risk of his life he saved fourteen inmates penned up in the burning attic of the hotel, by helping them across a plank leading into an adjoining building. He braved death again by going back into the roaring flames to save a little sleeping child.

Frank rescued the child, but at fearful cost. He was dreadfully burned, almost blinded. For weeks he lay at the town hospital, hovering betwixt life and death. When he finally recovered, it was to learn that the town had gone wild over his heroism. In the paper they owned called the *Pleasantville Weekly Herald*, the Haven boys had given him "a write up" that had thrilled the community.

More than that, Frank's friends had learned that the name they had known him by, Percy St. Clair, was an assumed one. They accidentally discovered his real name, sent word to his native town, and when the injured hero awoke to health again it was to find his devoted mother at his side, nursing him.

Frank now learned that he was some good in the world, after all. The ovation of the grateful and enthusiastic town folks, the loyal, hearty friendship of such comrades as Bart Stirling and Darry and Bob Haven warmed his heart to some of its old-time cheer and courage. The day he left Pleasantville with his mother for their home at Greenville, Frank Newton stepped over the threshold of a new life.

An episode of Frank's departure was the acquisition of Christmas. This faithful canine Bart Stirling had adopted when he was homeless. Haven Brothers had later employed him to run the pony press in their amateur job printing office. Frank loved dogs, and Christmas had taken a great fancy to him.

The animal whined and ran after Frank when he set out for the train. Frank drove Christmas back, but it was only to find the loyal dog hidden under the car seat, twenty miles on the homeward trip.

When they reached Greenville, Frank wrote about Christmas to his Pleasantville friends. His letter, however, showed his half-hidden reluctance towards giving up the faithful old dog. Haven Brothers made Frank a present of Christmas by return mail.

Of all this Frank now thought as he made his way towards the business centre of Greenville.

"Hey there, Frank Newton, the very fellow!"

Frank looked up quickly. A rapid voice had interrupted his reverie. Its owner was a Mr. Buckner, a local insurance agent and real estate man.

Mr. Buckner's office sided on the street where Frank was walking. From its open window the proprietor beckoned animatedly.

"Want me?" called up Frank.

“Sure, if you can hustle,” retorted Mr. Buckner.

“I can always do that if there’s anything in it,” was the laughing rejoinder.

Frank crossed the street at a bound, darted around to the front of the building, and was up the stairs four steps at a time.

CHAPTER II

A FIVE-DOLLAR JOB

Frank found Mr. Buckner at his desk, tearing out a freshly-written slip from his check book.

“Good – sit down,” said the business man. “Ready in a second. Now then,” he added a minute later, after filling out a receipt blank, “want to make five dollars?”

“A week?” smiled Frank.

“A day – an hour, if you can get the action on this job that quick,” responded Buckner briskly. “See here, Frank,” he continued, consulting his watch, “a certain individual started down that south road yonder in his buggy for Riverton half-an-hour ago.”

“Yes, sir,” nodded Frank.

“How soon can he get there?”

“Horse any good?” questioned Frank.

“No, common every-day hack.”

“Well,” calculated Frank, “it’s fifteen miles around by that road. Taking it fairly easy, he’d get to Riverton in about two hours and a-half.”

“Very good,” said Buckner. “Can you do it in less time?”

“On foot?”

“Any way, so you get there.”

“Sure,” said Frank confidently. “I can make it in an hour by crossing the flats.”

“Aha!” observed Buckner, “I see.”

“Direct across the swamp stretch it is barely six miles to Riverton,” went on Frank.

“But there’s no road?”

“Except the trail us boys have blazed out from time to time,” explained Frank, his eyes brightening at the memory of many a famous camping out experience in “the Big Woods.” “I can bike it four miles, wade one, and there’s only an easy mile stretch to come after that.”

“U-um,” muttered Mr. Buckner in a musing tone, half to himself. “I’d rather not excite the suspicions of a certain person already on the road, so your suggestion strikes me very good, Frank. Will you guarantee to get to Riverton first?”

“I will – with time to spare,” promised Frank, readily.

“I rely on you, then. It is quite an important matter. Here is a check for two hundred dollars. It is made payable to James Pryor. He is a fire insurance adjuster at Riverton, with an office over the bank there. You find him out, hand him that check, get him to sign this receipt, and your work is done.”

“That’s easy,” said Frank with a pleasant smile. “It isn’t worth five dollars, though.”

“I’m doing this hiring,” retorted Buckner with a quizzical laugh. “Client’s money, see? By the way, too, do this little commission up trim and neat, and there will be some more work for you from the same party.”

Frank was mightily pleased at his task and the prospects. He stowed the check and receipt in a safe pocket, and started to leave the office.

“My client wants to buy up some salvage from a fire at Riverton,” Mr. Buckner explained.

“I see,” nodded Frank.

“A certain party here has been juggling with the situation. He put in a lot of dummy bids. We learned what his best bid was, and offered the same amount. Just now we got a letter – as he did also – accepting first payment from either of us. By the way, too,” continued Mr. Buckner, with a queer twinkle in his eye, “when you come to find who it is you have helped to outwit, you may experience a decided personal pleasure in the discovery. Report soon as you get back to Greenville, Frank.”

“That will be one o’clock at the latest,” pledged the boy.

He glanced at the clock, and was down the stairs quicker than he had come up them. Frank was back home in a jiffy. He made a brief explanation to his mother. Getting out his bicycle he tied to the handles a pair of long rubber boots. Soon he was sailing down the road to the south.

The Big Woods formed a long six-mile barrier between Greenville and Riverton direct. Its centre was practically impassible during wet seasons. It was a dismal, slushy waste. For this reason the only road to Riverton wound in a semi-circle many miles out of the natural course.

Frank entered the woods at a familiar opening near the edge of the town. For two miles there was a hard trodden path, and he made good time on his wheel. For two more, he had to pick a straggling course. Many times he had to dismount from the bicycle and run it past obstacles. However, it was not long before he reached the edge of the flats.

“Capital!” said Frank, after an eager survey of the swampy stretch. “I couldn’t strike it drier. Now then, for a wade.”

Frank ran his bicycle to cover, and drew on the long rubber boots. For a distance of a quarter-of-a-mile he made ready progress by stepping from one dried-up clump of grass or reeds to another. He had to pick his course more particularly, however, as he got to the wet spots. Wading was not difficult, as the water was not deep. Only once did Frank sink above the knees.

“Whew! that was a hot tug,” panted the youth, as he reached the west slope of the flats.

Frank threw himself flat on dry ground and rested for five minutes. Then he arose and removed the rubber boots. He hid these among some bushes and resumed his travels at a lively gait.

Presently Frank was passing the vicinity of a board fence. It reached up fully fifteen feet, and its top was studded with sharp-pointed nails. Frank was not near enough to observe it more than casually. He had no time to make a closer inspection, and, past a reach of timber, it was shut out entirely from his view.

“Hello!” again he exclaimed a few minutes later, and paused this time to look across a ditch. An object of decided curiosity and interest held Frank’s attention. This was a little ragged urchin curled up fast asleep against a clump of dry weeds.

He was barefooted, and up to the knees he was spattered and caked with dry mud. His face was dust-covered, tired-looking and tear-stained. Frank’s sympathy was easily aroused. He voted the little fellow some wretched, homeless lad on a tramp.

By the side of the boy was quite a large bundle. It was enclosed in a newspaper. The breeze blew the sheets aside and the contents were disclosed quite readily to Frank’s view.

“Well!” said Frank, his eyes opening wide, “he’s not a vegetarian, that’s sure.”

The remark was called forth by a sight of a mass of cold cooked meat that might well make Frank stare, on account of its volume and variety. It looked as if the young wayfarer had gathered up a lunch for many days. There were parts of mutton chops, chunks of roast beef, and cuts of pork, flanked by bones and remnants of hash and sausages.

“Hope he’s here when I come back this way,” said Frank. “Looks pretty forelorn. I’d be glad to give him a lift.”

Frank hurried forward now. He soon reached the outskirts of Riverton. Within ten minutes he gained the business centre of the little town. Frank located the bank. He was soon at the door of an office over it bearing the words in gilt letters:

James Pryor, Fire Insurance.

The door was open. Seated behind a wire railing at a desk was a cross-looking old man writing in a book. Frank approached him with the question.

“Is Mr. Pryor in?”

“Eleven,” snapped out the man without looking up from his work.

“You mean he will be here at eleven o’clock?” pursued Frank.

“Yes.”

“I’ll wait for him then,” said Frank, selecting a chair. He felt a trifle disappointed and worried. The “certain other party” was on the road to Riverton. It was part of Frank’s contract to see Pryor before his arrival.

Several people came in and inquired for the insurance man during the next half-hour. Some of them went away saying they would return at eleven o’clock. Some others sat down like Frank, and waited. Frank heard the old clerk explain to one caller that Mr. Pryor was in his private room, but engaged in a most important consultation with a client.

Frank grew restless. He approached the cross-grained clerk again.

“Excuse me,” he said politely, “but I understand that Mr. Pryor is in his private room.”

“What of it? Can’t be disturbed,” snapped out his representative.

Frank retreated. He managed to endure a further tedious wait of a quarter-of-an-hour. Finally he strolled to the window looking down on the street.

“That ‘other party’ is on his way here,” mused Frank anxiously. “Suppose he gets here before eleven o’clock? That gives him an even chance with myself. Oh, the mischief!” exclaimed Frank suddenly. “Now the pot’s in the fire, sure!”

Frank gave a great start, and stared fixedly at a horse and gig that came clattering to a stop just then in front of the bank.

Frank recognized the vehicle and its driver. As he did so, he as quickly guessed that this new arrival must be the “certain party” alluded to by Mr. Buckner.

The new comer was Abner Dorsett, the man who had helped to swindle Frank’s mother out of her fortune.

CHAPTER III

A BUSINESS CALL

Frank watched Dorsett dismount from the gig and tie his horse. He realized that he would be up into the insurance man's office in a few minutes.

"I must do something, and quickly," thought Frank. "The second that man sees me he will suspect my mission here. He is a person of substance, and will carry weight. I shall be left if he gets into action first."

Frank reflected rapidly. The old clerk, as he had already found out, was unapproachable. Frank was seized with a wild impulse to leap over the wire railing and rush past the clerk to the door of Mr. Pryor's private office.

"Maybe it's locked, though," said Frank. "No, I won't do that. I don't see that I can do much of anything, except to wait and take my chance of getting the check into Mr. Pryor's hands before Mr. Dorsett guesses what's up."

Frank glanced at the clock. It showed ten minutes to eleven. He went out into the hall and drew back into the shelter of a big fuel box there.

Dorsett came up the stairs, buggy whip in hand. He bustled into the office in his usual self-important way. Frank noticed that the old clerk sat down on him promptly. He was not one bit impressed with the bombastic visitor from Greenville.

Dorsett scowled as the clerk pointed to the clock, and impatiently fumbling the whip, sat down with the others in the office to await the royal pleasure of its closeted proprietor.

Frank did a lot of thinking. He planned all kinds of wild dashes when the door of that private office should open. Then, happening to stroll down the hall, a new idea was suggested to him.

"Would it win?" Frank breathlessly asked himself.

He had come out on a little landing. This was that platform of stairs running down into the rear of the lot that the bank and the insurance office occupied.

Six feet away from it to the left were two windows. They were both open. The low hum of voices reached Frank's ears. Judging from the situation of the apartment beyond, Frank was sure that he had located the insurance man's private room.

"I wonder if I dare?" he challenged himself. "I wonder if it would work?"

His eyes snapped and his fingers tingled. Then Frank studied the outlook more carefully. He calculated first his chances of getting to the first window. He also planned just what he would say in the way of explanation and apology once he reached it.

Two feet away from the platform a lightning rod ran straight up the building. Frank seized this. He fearlessly swung himself free of the platform, bracing his toes on a protending joint of the rod.

At the side of the nearest window, top and bottom, were two hinge standards. They had been imbedded in the solid masonry when the place was built to hold iron shutters, if such were ever needed. The bank floor below was guarded with these, but none had been put in place on the upper story.

Frank swung one hand free, and bending to a rather risky angle hooked a forefinger around the upper one of these standards. At the same time he gave his body a swing clear of his footing.

He aimed to land his feet on the sill of the nearest window. In this Frank succeeded. There was no time, however, to chance losing the foothold thus gained. He promptly slid his free hand down under the frame of the raised window. He got a firm clutch. Relaxing his hold of the hinge standard, he stooped.

The next moment, on a decidedly reckless and awkward balance, Frank tumbled rather than dropped inside of the room that was his objective point of assault.

"Hello! what's this?" instantly hailed him.

Frank nimbly gained an upright position. He faced two men who, seated at a table covered with papers, began to push back their chairs in a somewhat startled way. They stared hard at the intruder.

Frank promptly doffed his cap. He made his most courteous bow.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said in a rather flustered way, "but which is Mr. Pryor, please?"

"I am Pryor," answered one of the twain, and Frank saw from the gathering frown on the speaker's face that a storm was brewing unless he headed it off summarily.

"I must beg your pardon, Mr. Pryor," said Frank, "but it is a matter of some business importance. I have been waiting for over an hour to see you. It won't take but a moment, sir," and Frank swiftly produced the check and the receipt entrusted to him by Mr. Buckner. Before Pryor realized it, they were thrust into his hands and he was looking at them.

"Oh, this can wait," he said pettishly. "I don't like this kind of an intrusion, young man."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Pryor," interrupted Frank in a gentle, polite tone, "but I am only a paid messenger, and I promised Mr. Buckner to be back with that receipt at a certain time."

"So you seized the bull by the horns," broke in Pryor's companion with a great chuckle. "And outwitted old Grumper, the clerk, ha! ha! Pryor, nail the boy on a year's contract. He's got the making in him of a first-class insurance solicitor, in his originality, daring and –"

"Cheek," muttered Pryor. "Well, well – here's your receipt."

Frank seized the paper that Pryor signed with a swift scrawl of the pen, with an eagerness that was a kind of delighted rapture.

"Oh, thank you, sir," he said, "and a thousand apologies for my rude intrusion."

"Hold on," ordered Pryor, as Frank returned towards the window.

"Yes, unless you carry extra accident insurance," put in Pryor's companion. "You might not find it so easy getting out of that window as you did getting in, young fellow."

Mr. Pryor had gone to the clouded glass door, which Frank knew opened into the main office. He slipped its catch and opened it. Frank understood that he was to pass out that way. He started forward, making a deferential bow to his host.

"Hi, I say, Pryor – one minute!" sounded a voice in the outer office, and Frank wondered what was about to happen as he recognized the tones as belonging to Dorsett.

"In a few minutes," responded Pryor, with an impatient wave of his hand.

"All right. It's about the salvage business, you know," went on Dorsett from behind the wire grating. "Want to pay you the money and close up the deal."

"Oh, that?" spoke Pryor, with a sudden glance at Frank and a grim twinkle in his eyes. "You young schemer!" he said to Frank in an undertone, with a slight chuckle. "I understand your peculiar tactics, now. You'll do, decidedly, young man!"

Frank tried to look all due humility, but he could not entirely suppress a satisfied smile. As he passed out Pryor said to Dorsett: "You are too late on that matter. I have just closed the salvage business with Buckner of Greenville."

"You've what?" howled Dorsett, with a violent start. "Why, I'm here first. No one passed me on the road. I – er, hum" – Dorsett turned white as his eye fell on Frank. He glared and shook his driving whip.

The animated and interested friend of Pryor stuck his head past the open doorway.

"I say, youngster," he asked guardedly, his face all a-grin, "how did you circumvent the old chap?"

"Well, I nearly swam part of the way," explained Frank. "Thank you, Mr. Pryor," he added, as the latter opened the wire gate for him to pass out.

The old clerk had sprung to his feet, gaping in consternation at him. Pryor's friend was convulsed with internal mirth. Pryor himself did not look altogether displeased at the situation.

Frank thought that Dorsett would actually leap upon him and strike him with the whip. The latter, however, with a hoarse growl in his throat, allowed Frank to proceed on his way unhindered.

"We shall hear from this of course – my mother and I," said the youth to himself as he gained the street. "Mr. Dorsett will store this up against me, hard. All right – I've done my simple duty and I'll stand by the results."

A minute later, looking back the way he had come, Frank saw Dorsett come threshing out into the street. He kicked a dog out of his path, rudely jostled a pedestrian, jumped into the gig and went tearing down the homeward road plying the whip and venting his cruel rage on the poor animal in the shafts.

Frank started back towards Greenville the way he had come. He was greatly pleased at his success, and cheerily anticipated the good the five dollars would do his mother and himself.

As Frank passed the spot where he had noticed the barefooted, mud-bespattered urchin lying asleep by the side of the ditch, he could find no trace of the lad.

A little farther on Frank came in sight of the high board fence he had so curiously observed on his way to Riverton.

The wind was his way, and as he approached the queer barrier he was somewhat astonished at a great babel of canine barking and howls that greeted his ears.

"Sounds like a kennel," he reflected, "but's a big one. Why, if there isn't the little fellow with the package of meat."

Frank wonderingly regarded a tattered, forlorn figure at a distance seeming to be glued right up face forward against the fence.

The boy had piled two or three big boulders on top of one another. These he had surmounted, and was peering through a high up crack or knot hole in the fence.

On one arm he carried the newspaper package Frank had noticed. Bit by bit he poised its contents, hurling them over the fence.

A loud clamor of yelps and barkings would greet this shower of food. Frank drew nearer, mightily interested.

The little fellow would throw over a bone and peer inside the enclosure.

"Get it, Fido!" Frank heard him shout. "They won't let him – those big ones," he wailed. "Oh, you dear, big fellow, help him, help him. No, they won't let him. Fido, Fido, Oh, my! oh my!"

The little fellow slipped down to a seat on the boulders now and began to cry as if his heart would break. Frank approached and pulled at his arm.

"Hi, youngster," he challenged, "what in the world are you up to, anyhow?"

CHAPTER IV

A BREAK FOR LIBERTY

The little ragamuffin addressed by Frank raised his dirt-creased, tear-stained face pathetically. He looked at his questioner for a moment and then went on crying harder than ever.

“Well,” said Frank, “this is a queer go. Come, little son, brace up and tell what is the matter with you. Who is Fido – a dog?”

“Sure. He’s in there, he’s been in there for two days now, and I cannot get him out.”

“There appears to be a good many dogs in there, judging from the racket,” said Frank. “What kind of a place is this, anyhow?”

“It’s the pound,” explained the urchin. “Belongs to Riverton, but Sile Stoggs runs it. Know Stoggs?”

“I don’t,” answered Frank.

“He’s a brute – Oh, what a brute!” cried the little fellow. “Was a constable – the mean kind. Turned a poor woman out of her house in the cold last winter. She died, and her two big brothers met Stoggs one dark night and nearly kicked the life out of him. He had to give up business, for they crippled him.”

“Go ahead,” encouraged Frank.

“He had some pol – politicattle friends, I think they call it. One of them was a sharp lawyer. He raked up a lot of old ord – ordinants.”

“Ordinances, I suppose you mean?” suggested Frank.

“Yes, sir, that sounds more like it, – anyway, village laws, see? They said Riverton should have a pound. They worked it so that Stoggs got the job of poundmaster. The town pays him a big rent for these old barracks. Used to be a trotting park. He drives around in a little dog cart, and picks up all the stray horses and cows he can catch. Then the owners have to pay two dollars to get them out of the pound. Stoggs gets half. Wish that was Stogg,” and the boy kicked a dirt clump so hard that he stubbed his toe and winced.

“And what about the dogs?” asked Frank.

“That’s a new wrinkle. About a month ago Stoggs’ lawyer fished up another old law about dog license, or tax, or something of that kind. Since then he’s been capturing all the dogs he could find for miles around. It wouldn’t matter, if he was kind to them,” went on the lad, “but he isn’t. He starves them. He beats them, too awfully. And you’d ought to see the dirty old water trough where he makes them drink. Mother is poor. We can’t pay any two dollars to get Fido out. But I come here every day and bring all the meat I can gather up, and feed the poor things. The trouble is, though, there is so many of them in there, and they are so hungry, and poor Fido is so small, he hardly ever gets a nibble. There’s a grand, big dog in there looks out for him when he can, and divides a bone with him, but the rough dogs get most of the food.”

“Have you tried to get this Stoggs to let you have Fido back?” inquired Frank.

“Yes, but he only abused me, laughed at me, and drove me away. Yesterday he caught me trying to dig that board loose near the boulders. He kicked me, and struck me twice with his club. Wish I had a shovel. It would be safe to dig a bit now. A big balloon went over here a little while ago. I saw Stoggs in his cart driving over to the hill to get a better sight of it.”

“H’m,” mused Frank. “Quite an interesting situation. I’ll take a look inside there, I guess. Hey, hello, why – Christmas!”

Frank, in mingled pleasure and astonishment, fairly shouted out this name. The minute he had mounted the boulders and peered in through the crack in the fence, he made out his own missing canine among a motley group of over forty dogs.

Slam! came an instantaneous bound against the fence that made it quiver and creak. Slam – slam! right up to the spot where Frank had uttered the name, Christmas sprang repeatedly. He was mad with joy and excitement at recognizing his young master's voice.

Frank was now quite as much stirred up as his youthful companion. He had to call to Christmas to reassure and quiet the animal. The dog was tearing at the fence barrier in such a frenzied manner that Frank feared he would severely injure himself.

"How did Christmas ever get this far away from home?" he reflected, getting off the boulders and onto the ground again. "Say, if that Stoggs has gone deliberately out of his territory and caught him at Greenville, I'll get the boys to come here and tar and feather him. Easy, old fellow," called Frank to Christmas, who, yelping frantically, could still be heard throwing himself against the boards of the fence.

"My goodness!" shouted Frank's companion, suddenly. "Look at that, now."

His eyes goggled as a great snap sounded out.

"The mischief!" exclaimed Frank. "This won't do."

Christmas, it seemed, had flung his body with terrific force against the very plank where the owner of Fido had been digging. Its ground end was soaked and rotted by the damp earth that had surrounded it. It gave, vibrating, and Christmas forced his head and shoulders through the aperture. He wriggled and howled, for the board closed on him like a wedge. Then, making a desperate lunge, the dog bore the board outwards. There was a sharp snap. Obliquely the timber ripped four feet up its length.

Bursting the slivered section fully apart, Christmas, with a joyous howl, sprang free. He bounded upon his master in frantic delight, with such impetuosity that he bore Frank flat to the ground.

"Here, behave, old fellow. Well, I'm glad, too," said Frank. "For mercy's sake!"

With difficulty restraining the wild caresses of his loyal dumb friend, Frank regained his feet to stare about him in consternation.

Christmas had blazed the way to freedom, and a vast concourse was following his lead. It was like bees pouring out from a bee hive. Through the break in the fence there came bounding what seemed to be an endless procession. There were big dogs and little dogs, mastiffs, fox terriers and collies. One magnificent St. Bernard got wedged in the fence break. Those behind fairly pushed him through, letting loose a stream of canines like corn from a spout.

Out bounded the released animals, fairly crazy with delight at finding their freedom. Nearly all of them instantly made for a near ditch filled with clear water. They lapped it up luxuriously, they rolled and wallowed in the pure, cool element. Then, like diverging spokes from one central source, they streaked it homewards as instinct told them their proper compass point.

The little ragged urchin Frank found seated on the ground, fondling and crying over the tiniest, silken-haired poodle he had ever seen. Its own affectionate antics were fairly affecting. Beside the pair, limping on three legs, a forlorn little fox-terrier looked homelessly and friendlessly longing, as if begging for a share of attention.

"Yes, I'll take you, too!" cried the ragged youngster, putting Fido under one arm and gathering up the crippled canine in the other. "Say," he shouted to Frank, "you're a brick! Oh, but you've done a good day's work. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Only, get now – don't wait. If Stoggs catches us, he'll send us to jail for life. Why," continued the urchin with a start, staring hard at Christmas, "is that your dog?"

"It is," nodded Frank.

The little fellow stooped and deliberately kissed Christmas, his eyes full of grateful tears, purring out fond terms of endearment.

"You're two grand fellows!" he blubbered. "That's the dog that was such a good friend to Fido," and Fido, whimpering, struck out his head and rubbed noses with Christmas, who frolicked around all hands as if some great jubilee was going on.

"Yes, I fancy we had better be moving on," said Frank, with a glance into the enclosure to find it entirely deserted by its recent inmates.

"About your dog, though," said his companion, hurriedly. "I can tell you something about him."

"Can you, indeed?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir. I was here the day a man drove up in a gig from Riverton-way with your dog."

"In a gig?" repeated Frank, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, I was hanging around near the house at the front of the pound. The man called Stoggs out. He had your dog tied behind the axle. He made a bargain with Stoggs for five dollars to get rid of the animal – send him away somewhere. He was a man with reddish side-whiskers and a cast in one eye."

Frank's own good eyes flamed. He drew his breath with an angry catch in it.

"Dorsett," he said. "The villain did it, eh? I wondered how poor Christmas came to be cooped up here, so far away from home. The mean sneak! He did it so he could snoop around the house and spy on us without interruption. Going? Good-bye. I hope you will keep Fido safe and sound from the dogcatchers this time."

"You bet I will," cried the little fellow, bolting off with his double canine burden. "And you're a brick!"

Frank turned his face in the direction of home. He soon got out of sight of the pound with no indication of his having been seen or pursued. Christmas bounded over the fresh turf, cutting up all kinds of antics and barking joyously.

When they reached the flats Frank secured his rubber boots and was soon in the midst of the morass. Christmas led the way, making grand fun of leaps and dousings, and they reached the woods beyond with no mishap.

Frank drew his bicycle from the spot where he had hidden it, secured his rubber boots to the machine, and was speedily threading the path he had traversed in the opposite direction earlier in the day.

Passing down a gentle declivity in an open space, Christmas set up a sudden bark. Frank turned, to observe the dog halted and looking aloft.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, also glancing skywards. "That must be the balloon the little fellow at the pound was telling about."

The balloon was about two miles distant, and was instantly obscured from view by some tall trees.

Frank had kept on going without looking ahead. The momentary distraction had its result.

Too late he turned the handle bars of the bicycle and set the brake.

Bump! the machine struck a jagged tree stump, and Frank Newton took a header.

CHAPTER V

THE BALLOONIST'S RESCUE

There was a sharp bang as the bicycle struck the tree stump. Frank righted himself readily and ran to the machine where it had fallen.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "tire punctured and the wheel a pretty bad wreck generally."

This was true. A jagged sliver had ripped a hole in both the outer and inner tubes of the front wheel. The hard bang against the tree stump had twisted several spokes out of place and set a rim wobbling.

Frank had started in such a hurry from Riverton that morning that he had not thought of taking his mending kit along. He debated what he should do without further loss of time.

"I might carry it," he reflected. "If I try to run it, I will loosen it up more and lose some of the parts. Guess I'll leave it here, get my message to Mr. Buckner, stop at the house for my tool kit, and fix the machine up right here. This way, my staunch and trusty friend," he hailed to Christmas. "Watch it, old fellow, watch it," said Frank to the dog, placing his hand on the wheel.

Christmas looked longingly after his young master as Frank started on foot for Greenville. However, the animal posed right alongside the bicycle. Frank knew that it would take a loaded cannon to drive the trusty canine from the vicinity of his charge until he himself reappeared and gave the word.

It was just one o'clock when Frank, a trifle dusty and footsore, entered the office of Mr. Buckner.

"Well, well, good for you, Frank," commended the insurance man, as he glanced at the clock and then at his visitor's beaming face. "Of course you succeeded?"

"I did," admitted Frank, a little proudly, "but there was a tangle."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes, sir. Dorsett was on the spot. There is the receipt. I had to climb for it."

"What do you mean?"

Frank told of the circumstances of his exploit at Mr. Pryor's office at Riverton. Mr. Buckner lay back in his chair chuckling and laughing. Then he got up and clapped Frank approvingly on the shoulder with one hand, and with the other extended a crisp new five-dollar bill.

"I am glad to get this," said Frank, "but I have hardly earned so much, I think."

"What! when you saved the day by your nimbleness and square common sense? See here, Frank, I'm mightily pleased with you, and if you will drop in here to-morrow I think I can put you in the way of earning a few more of those precious notes."

Frank bowed his thanks and left the office with a light heart. He went straight home, entered the house quietly, and actually startled his mother by silently dropping the five-dollar bill on the book in her lap.

Mrs. Ismond shared her son's pleasure when Frank recited his brisk experiences of the morning. He ate a good lunch with appetizing vigor, secured his bicycle repair kit, and was soon down the road, whistling cheerily all the way to the big woods.

As Frank neared the spot where he had left Christmas and the bicycle, he was greeted with loud and repeated barking.

"That's strange," he mused. "Christmas isn't given to such demonstrations when on duty. Some one must have come in sight or hearing. Hey, old fellow, what's all this rumpus?" questioned Frank, as, emerging from a copse, he came in full view of the dog.

Christmas was running up and down in front of the bicycle. He would face in a certain direction and pose and bark. He even ran up to his master as Frank approached, and seizing his coat in his teeth gently but resolutely pulled him in the direction he had pointed.

"He means something by all this," declared Frank. "Go ahead," he ordered.

Christmas, thus advised, bounded forward among some big trees. Frank, coming up with him after a jaunt of about three hundred feet, found him squatted on his haunches under a giant oak tree, looking up among its branches. Frank looked up, too. A moving object attracted his attention.

"Why," said Frank, staring fixedly, "it's a balloon."

This he discerned beyond question. He could plainly make out its slack rigging. An ungainly, half-distended gas bag was wobbling about in the topmost branches of the tree. Lower down, turned sideways and partly smashed in, was a big wicker basket.

"It must be the balloon that little ragged fellow told about, the same one that I saw when I took that header from the bicycle," decided Frank. "There couldn't have been any one in it. Oh, say – but there was, Mercy!" and Frank gave a violent start and quick gasp. He stood transfixed with a sudden thrilling emotion akin to terror.

His eye sweeping the tree expanse keenly, he now made out, lying across two limbs about thirty feet from the ground, a human figure.

This form was motionless, and bent the branches considerably. As the breeze stirred them, they rocked like a cradle.

Frank guessed out the situation instantly. The balloon had driven or dropped into the tree top, shattering the cage and tipping out its pilot.

The latter had sustained a twenty-foot fall, striking some big branches with enough force to stun him. He had landed on his present frail perch. Frank's heart almost stood still as he realized that a single waking moment, a treacherous shifting of the wind, might precipitate the imperilled balloonist to the ground with a broken neck.

Frank's nerves were on a hard strain, but he grew composed as he decided what he would do. He motioned the dog to silence, and at once started to climb the tree.

He kept his eye on the swaying figure overhead all the time. At length Frank reached a big crotched branch shooting out from the main trunk not four feet under that which sustained the unconscious balloonist.

Frank braced his feet across the crotch. He took a great, long breath of relief and satisfaction, for he found himself now so situated that if the man should stir or slip from his insecure resting place, he could retard his fall.

Frank had, upon leaving home, placed a long coil of rope in his coat pocket. This he intended to use to tie up the bicycle in case he found it necessary to take it home to repair it. He now used this to form a criss-cross sort of a hammock directly under the two branches supporting the balloonist.

"There," said Frank finally, feeling he had the man in right shape at last. "If he drops, that contrivance will hold him like a net."

The youth rested for a few minutes, for it had been no easy task to slip the rope around the two branches and secure it stoutly. When he again stood up, he moved along his footing so that his face was on a level with the strange bed of the balloonist.

The latter lay sunk down among bending twigs like a person in a hammock. His face was bloodless, and over one temple was a great lump. That was probably where a heavy branch had struck and stunned him.

The stranger was fairly well-dressed, and he had intelligent features. For all this, however, there was a careless, easy-going look about him. He did not at all suggest to Frank the quick-witted, nerve-strained typical aeronaut.

Frank made his footing very sure, braced firmly, and with one hand took a stout grasp under the sleeper's collar.

“Wake up – wake up,” he called directly in his ear.

The man stirred faintly, only. Frank continued to call out to him. He also with his other hand slapped his chest, his cheeks, his outstretched palms.

Finally with a deep groan the man opened his eyes wide suddenly. He stared and mumbled and tried to start up, but Frank held him flat.

“Easy, mister, now,” warned Frank gently. “Take time to find out the fix you are in. Then let me help you to the ground.”

“Help me – why, ginger! I understand,” exclaimed the balloonist.

He lay back weakly, staring at Frank, then all about him, and finally up at the gas bag flopping about in the upper branches of the tree top.

“I remember now,” he went on in a drawling, reminiscent tone. “It was a quick drop. Valve blew out. A regular smash when we landed. She’s a wreck, isn’t she? And say,” and the man glancing sideways downward shuddered, “if I had gone the full header it would have been all day with me, eh?”

Frank nodded. Briefly he explained how he had come to discover the refugee’s plight. He helped the man to sit up, guiding and assisting him. The latter came slowly out of his maze of bewilderment, and looked grateful.

“You’ve saved me, I guess,” he observed. “One move or slip, and I’d have gone shooting down the rest of the way.”

“When you are ready, let me help you to the ground,” suggested Frank.

“Oh, I’m all right now. Just a little shaking up,” assured the man. “No, no, don’t you worry. I’m at home among trapezes.”

The balloonist extricated himself successfully from the swaying branches and poised in a crotch nearer to the main trunk of the tree.

“Just a minute,” he said, deftly going up the tree, clambering over the shattered basket and reaching up.

There was a great hiss and a dense taint of escaping gas in the air as he operated some valve in the mechanism of the balloon. The gas bag dropped gracefully to a mass of silken and rubber folds.

Then the man started to descend, Frank preceding him. Both reached the ground in safety. The balloonist took an approving look at Frank, patted Christmas and began arranging his disordered attire.

“What are you going to do next?” asked Frank, after his companion had walked around the tree two or three times, viewing its top speculatively the while, and whistling softly to himself.

“Well, the bag is safe for a time. I guess I’d better get to the nearest town and telegraph the boss. It will be a job getting the balloon out of that fix without further damage.”

“If you will rest a bit till I fix up a broken bicycle I have over yonder, I will pilot you to Greenville,” said Frank.

“Good for you,” commended the man, and he followed Frank to the spot where the wheel lay.

Frank set at work on the damaged bicycle. He now had the necessary tools and material at hand to fix it up. At the end of ten minutes he had the wheel in safe shape to roll it home, where he could repair it more permanently.

Meantime his companion rattled on volubly. He told Frank his name was Park Gregson. He was a sort of a “knockaround.” He had been with a circus, had fought Indians, had been major in the South African War, had circumnavigated the globe twice, in fact, a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none for over fifteen years.

“That balloon,” he explained, “belongs to a professional aeronaut. He hired me to help him. She’s a new one, that yonder. I was making a trial cruise. Professor Balmer, who owns her, is at Circleville. As I say, I must wire him to come and get her on her feet again.”

“You mean her wings?” suggested Frank.

“Exactly. Ready? No, you needn’t help me, I’m only a trifle bruised and stiff.”

Frank led the way townwards. He stopped at the house to put his bicycle away. Then he accompanied his companion to the railroad depot. Here Park Gregson wrote out a telegram and handed it to the operator.

“Expect an answer,” he observed. “I’ll call for it. No, send it to me. I say, Newton,” he addressed Frank with friendly familiarity, “where’s the best place to put up till the professor reports himself?”

“There’s a fairly good hotel here,” said Frank.

Gregson looked a trifle embarrassed for an instant. Then he laughed, saying.

“They’ll have to take me in penniless till the professor arrives.”

“That will be all right,” declared Frank. “I’ll vouch for you. But say, if you would be our guest at home, you will be very welcome.”

“And I will be very delighted to have your most entertaining company,” instantly replied Gregson. “I’ll make it all right when the boss comes.”

Frank was glad to offer this hospitality to his new chance acquaintance. The man interested him. Everything he talked about he covered in a vivid way that made his descriptions instructive. Already he had suggested some points to Frank that had set the latter thinking in new directions. The wide experience of the man was suggestive and valuable to Frank.

Park Gregson asked the telegraph operator to send any reply to his message to the Newton home, and accompanied Frank there.

As they neared the cottage a man in a gig came driving down the road. It was Dorsett.

He glared fiercely at Frank, and then bestowed an inquisitive, suspicious look upon the stranger.

Frank introduced Gregson to his mother, who prepared a lunch for him. Gregson was more shaken up than he had expressed, and was glad to lie down and rest in the neatly-furnished spare room of the cottage.

Frank had some odd chores to do about the village. When he came home again about six o’clock he found Gregson refreshed-looking and comfortably seated in the parlor reading a book.

They had a pleasant time at the supper table. Then they adjourned to the cozy little sitting-room. Christmas was allowed to stay in the house, and seemed to enjoy the animated ways of the balloonist as much as the others.

Park Gregson fairly fascinated them with the story of his travels and adventures in many countries.

“You see, I have been quite a rolling stone, Mrs. Ismond,” he said. “A harmless one, though.”

“Have you never thought of settling down to some regular occupation, sir?” suggested Frank’s mother.

“It’s not in me, madam, I fear,” declared the knockaround. “I did try it once, for a fact. Yes, I actually went into business.”

“What was the line, Mr. Gregson?” asked Frank.

“Mail order business.”

Frank showed by the expression of his face that the balloonist had struck a theme of great interest to him.

“I had a partner,” went on Gregson. “We advertised and sold sets of rubber finger tips to protect the hands of housewives when working about the house.”

“Was it a success?” inquired Frank.

“It was great – famous. The orders just rolled in. We made money hand over fist and spent it like water. One day, though, there came a stop to it all. A lawyer served an injunction on us. It seemed that the device was a French invention patented in this country. My partner sloped with most of the funds, leaving me stranded. All the same, it’s a great business – the mail order line.”

For over an hour Frank kept their guest busy answering a hundred earnest questions as to all the details of the mail order business.

When Gregson had retired for the night Frank sat silent and thoughtful in the company of his mother. Finally he said.

“Mother, Mr. Gregson’s talk has done me a lot of good.”

“I saw you were very much interested,” remarked Mrs. Ismond.

“Interested!” repeated Frank with vim, unable to control his restless spirit and getting up and pacing the room to and fro – “I am simply wild to go deeper into this mail order business. Why, it looks plain as day to me – the way to begin it – the way to exploit it – the way to make a great big success of it. He says that little metal novelties of the household kind take the best. I was just thinking: there’s a hardware novelties factory right on the spot at Pleasantville, and – Down, Christmas, down!”

The dog had interrupted Frank with a low growl. Then, before Frank could deter him, the animal flew at the open window of the sitting-room.

Frank seized Christmas by the collar, just as the animal was aiming to leap clear through it to the garden outside.

“Why, what is the matter, Christmas?” spoke Mrs. Ismond, arising to her feet in some surprise.

Just then a frightful shriek rang out from under the open window, accompanied by the frantic words:

“Help, murder, help – I’m nearly killed!”

CHAPTER VI

“MAIL ORDER FRANK”

At the outcry from beyond the window of the little sitting-room, the dog, Christmas, became fairly frantic. Seizing him by the collar, however, Frank gave him a stern word. Wont to obey, the animal retreated to one side of the room, but still growling, and his fur bristling.

Frank instantly caught up the lamp from the table and carried it to the window. His mother peered out in a startled way at the scene now illuminated without.

“Why, it is Mr. Dorsett!” she exclaimed.

“As I expected,” said Frank, quietly.

“Frank,” murmured his mother, anxiously, “what have you been doing?”

“Preparing for eavesdroppers – and sneaks. Caught one first set of the trap, it seems,” responded Frank in clear, loud tones.

The captured lurker was indeed Dorsett. He was panting and infuriated. One foot was held imprisoned in a wooden spring clamp chained to a log in a hole in the ground. This aperture had been covered with light pieces of sod which Dorsett was pushing aside with his cane, while he continued to groan with pain.

The lamplight enabled him to discern more clearly the trap that had caught him. He managed to pull one side of the contrivance loose and got his foot free.

Wincing with pain and limping, he came closer to the window, boiling with rage.

“So you did it, and boast of it, do you?” he howled at Frank.

“I did and do,” answered Frank calmly. “This is our home, Mr. Dorsett, not a public highway.”

Dorsett uttered a terrific snort of rage. He brandished his cane, struck out with it, and its end went through the panes of both the upper and the raised lower sash.

Frank receded a step, unhurt, with the words:

“Very well. You will pay for that damage, I suppose you know. You will get no further rent until you repair it.”

“Rent!” roared the frenzied Dorsett. “You’ll never pay me rent again. I’ll show you. Tenants at will, ha! Can’t stroll around my own property, hey? Why, I’ll – I’ll crush you.”

“Mr. Dorsett,” spoke up the widow in a dignified tone, “it is true this is your property, but you have no right to spy upon us. You took away our dog – ”

“Who says so – who says so?” shouted the infuriated man.

“Christmas himself will say so in an unmistakable manner if I let him loose at you,” answered Frank. “The poundmaster at Riverton might be a credible witness, also.”

“You’ll pay for this, oh, but you’ll pay for this!” snarled the wretched old man as he limped away to the street.

Mrs. Ismond sank to a chair, quite pale and agitated over the disturbing incident of the moment.

“Frank,” she said in a fluttering tone, “that man alarms me. It makes me uneasy to think he is lurking about us all the time. I am unhappy to think we are subject to his caprices, where once he owned the property.”

“We own it yet, by rights,” declared Frank. “Some day I may prove it to Dorsett. But do not worry, mother. You must have guessed from my interest in what Mr. Gregson said to-night, that I believe there is something for me in this mail order idea. I have not yet formed my plans, but I am going to get into business for myself.”

The boy heard their guest stirring about up stairs, probably aroused by the window smashing. He reassured Gregson and went to bed himself.

Frank lay awake until nearly midnight thinking over all that Gregson had told him. He went mentally through every phase of the mail order idea that he knew anything about.

When Frank finally fell asleep it was to dream of starting in business for himself. At broad daylight he was in a big factory which his own endeavors had built up. Around him were his busy employes nailing up great boxes of merchandise ordered from all parts of the country.

The sound of the hammers seemed still echoing in his ears as he was aroused by the voice of his mother from her own room.

“Frank! Frank!” she called.

“Yes, mother,” he answered, springing out of bed.

“Some one is knocking at the front door.”

“Knocking?” repeated Frank, hurrying into his clothes. “That’s no knocking, it sounds more like hammering.”

Christmas was barking furiously. The hammering had ceased by the time Frank had got down the stairs and to the front door. He unlocked it quickly.

At the end of the graveled walk, just turning into the street was old Dorsett. He waved a hammer in his hand malignantly as he noticed Frank.

“We’ll see if I am to have free range of my own premises,” he shouted. “Young man, you get your traps out of here within the time limit of the law, or I’ll throw you into the street, bag and baggage.”

Frank saw that Dorsett had just nailed a square white sheet of paper across the door panel. He stood reading it over as his mother came out onto the porch.

“Was that Mr. Dorsett, Frank?” she inquired.

“Yes, some more of his friendly work.”

“What is it, Frank?”

“A five-days’ notice to quit,” answered Frank.

Mrs. Ismond scanned the legal document with a pale and troubled face. Frank affected unconcern and indifference.

“Don’t let that worry you, mother,” he said, leading her back into the house.

“But, Frank, he can put us out!”

“If we stay to let him, probably. The law he has invoked to rob us, may also enable him to evict us, mother, but he won’t win in the end. You say you dislike the place. Very well, we will move.”

“But where to, Frank?”

“This isn’t the only house in Greenville, is it, mother?” asked Frank, smiling reassuringly. “What’s more, Greenville isn’t the only town in creation. Stop your fretting, now. I’ve got a grand plan, and I am sure to carry it out. Just leave everything to me. My head is just bursting with all the ideas that interesting balloonist has put into it. Why, mother, if I can only get a start, if I can get hold of a few novelties and do a little advertising – ”

“Oh, Frank, it takes money to do all that!”

“And brains. Mostly brains and industry, Mr. Gregson says. Mother, now or soon, here, at Greenville or somewhere else, I am determined to give the mail order idea a trial.”

“Mail order, Frank?”

“Capital! excellent!” cried Frank with enthusiasm. “Why, mother, you have suggested the very catchy name. I will use to advertise by – ‘Mail Order Frank’!”

CHAPTER VII

STRICTLY BUSINESS

The balloonist, Park Gregson, needed rest after his strenuous experience of the previous day, so Frank did not disturb him. He and his mother had their breakfast together, then Frank started out on his usual daily round of duties.

He did his chores about the house. Then he went down to the eight o'clock train to get a bundle of daily newspapers from the city. These he delivered to his regular customers. At nine o'clock he went to the office of Mr. Beach, the lawyer.

Frank was informed by the attorney's clerk that Mr. Beach had left Greenville to see a distant client. He would not be back for two days.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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