

Horatio Alger



Mark the Match Boy

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Chapter 1: Richard Hunter at Home

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"Fosdick," said Richard Hunter, "what was the name of the man who owed your father two thousand dollars, which he never paid him?"

"Hiram Bates," answered Fosdick, in some surprise. "What made you think of him?"

"I thought I remembered the name. He moved out West, didn't he?"

"So I heard at the time."

"Do you happen to remember where? Out West is a very large place."

"I do not know exactly, but I think it was Milwaukie."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Richard Hunter, in visible excitement. "Well, Fosdick, why don't you try to get the debt paid?"

"Of what use would it be? How do I know he is living in Milwaukie now? If I should write him a letter, there isn't much of my ever getting an answer."

"Call and see him."

"What, go out to Milwaukie on such a wild-goose chase as that? I can't think what you are driving at, Dick."

"Then I'll tell you, Fosdick. Hiram Bates is now in New York."

"How do you know?" asked Fosdick, with an expression of mingled amazement and incredulity.

"I'll show you."

Richard Hunter pointed to the list of hotel arrivals in the "Evening Express," which he held in his hand. Among the

arrivals at the Astor House occurred the name of Hiram Bates, from Milwaukie.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "that is the name of your father's debtor."

"I don't know but you are right," said Fosdick, thoughtfully.

"He must be prosperous if he stops at a high-priced hotel like the Astor."

"Yes, I suppose so. How much good that money would have done my poor father," he added, with a sigh.

"How much good it will do you, Fosdick."

Fosdick shook his head. "I would sell out my chance of getting it for ten dollars," he said.

"I would buy it at that price if I wanted to make money out of you; but I don't. I advise you to attend to this matter at once."

"What can I do?" asked Fosdick, who seemed at a loss to understand his companion's meaning.

"There is only one thing to do," said Dick, promptly. Call on Mr. Bates this evening at the hotel. Tell him who you are, and hint that you should like the money."

"I haven't got your confidence, Dick. I shouldn't know how to go about it. Do you think it would do any good? He might think I was impertinent."

"Impertinent to ask payment of a just debt! I don't see it in that light. I think I shall have to go with you."

"I wish you would,--that is, if you really think there is any use in going."

"You mustn't be bashful if you want to get on in the world, Fosdick. As long as there is a chance of getting even

a part of it, I advise you to make the attempt."

"Well, Dick, I'll be guided by your advice."

"Two thousand dollars would be a pretty good wind-fall for you."

"That's true enough, considering that I only get eight dollars week."

"I wish you got more."

"So do I, for one particular reason."

"What is that?"

"I don't feel satisfied to have you pay ten dollars a week towards our board, while I pay only six."

"Didn't you promise not to say anything more about that?" said Dick, reproachfully.

"But I can't help thinking about it. If we had stayed at our old boarding house in Bleeker street, I could have paid my full share."

"But this is a nicer room."

"Much nicer, if I only paid my half, I should be glad of the chance."

"Well, I'll promise you one thing. If Mr. Bates pays you the two thousand dollars, you may pay your half of the expenses."

"Not much chance of that, Dick."

"We can tell better after calling at the Astor House. Get on your coat and we'll start."

While the boys,--for the elder of the two is but eighteen--are making preparations to go out, a few explanations may be required by the reader. Those who have read "Ragged Dick" and "Fame and Fortune,"--the preceding volumes of this series,--will understand that less than three years

before Richard Hunter was an ignorant and ragged bootblack about the streets, and Fosdick, though possessing a better education, was in the same business. By a series of upward steps, partly due to good fortune, but largely to his own determination to improve, and hopeful energy, Dick had now become a bookkeeper in the establishment of Rockwell & Cooper, on Pearl Street, and possessed the confidence and good wishes of the firm in a high degree.

Fosdick was two years younger, and, though an excellent boy, was less confident, and not so well fitted as his friend to contend with the difficulties of life, and fight his way upward. He was employed in Henderson's hat and cap store on Broadway, and was at present earning a salary of eight dollars a week. As the two paid sixteen dollars weekly for their board, Fosdick would have had nothing left if he had paid his full share. But Richard Hunter at first insisted on paying eleven dollars out of the sixteen, leaving his friend but five to pay. To this Fosdick would not agree, and was with difficulty prevailed upon at last to allow Richard to pay ten; but he has always felt a delicacy about this, although he well knew how gladly his friend did it.

The room they now occupied was situated in St. Mark's Place, which forms the eastern portion of Eighth Street. It was a front room on the third floor, and was handsomely furnished. There was a thick carpet, of tasteful figure, on the floor. Between the two front windows was a handsome bureau, surmounted by a large mirror. There was a comfortable sofa, chairs covered with hair-cloth, a centre-table covered with books, crimson curtains, which gave a warm and cosey look to the room when lighted up in the

evening, and all the accessories of a well-furnished room which is used at the same time as parlor and chamber. This, with an excellent table, afforded a very agreeable home to the boys,--a home which, in those days, would cost considerably more, but for which, at the time of which I write, sixteen dollars was a fair price.

It may be thought that, considering how recently Richard Hunter had been a ragged bootblack, content to sleep in boxes and sheltered doorways, and live at the cheapest restaurants, he had become very luxurious in his tastes. Why did he not get a cheaper boarding-place, and save up the difference in price? No doubt this consideration will readily suggest itself to the minds of some of my young readers.

As Richard Hunter had a philosophy of his own on this subject, I may as well explain it here. He had observed that those young men who out of economy contented themselves with small and cheerless rooms, in which there was no provision for a fire, were driven in the evening to the streets, theaters, and hotels, for the comfort which they could not find at home. Here they felt obliged to spend money to an extent of which they probably were not themselves fully aware, and in the end wasted considerably more than the two or three dollars a week extra which would have provided them with a comfortable home. But this was not all. In the roamings spent outside many laid the foundation of wrong habits, which eventually led to ruin or shortened their lives. They lost all the chances of improvement which they might have secured by study at home in the long winter evenings, and which in the end

might have qualified them for posts of higher responsibility, and with a larger compensation.

Richard Hunter was ambitious. He wanted to rise to an honorable place in the community, and he meant to earn it by hard study. So Fosdick and he were in the habit of spending a portion every evening in improving reading or study. Occasionally he went to some place of amusement, but he enjoyed thoroughly the many evenings when, before a cheerful fire, with books in their hands, his roommate and himself were adding to their stock of knowledge. The boys had for over a year taken lessons in French and mathematics, and were now able to read the French language with considerable ease.

"What's the use of moping every evening in your room?" asked a young clerk who occupied a hall bed-room adjoining.

"I don't call it moping. I enjoy it," was the reply.

"You don't go to a place of amusement once a month."

"I go as often as I like."

"Well, you're a queer chap. You pay such a thundering price for board. You could go to the theater four times a week without it costing you any more, if you would take a room like mine."

"I know it; but I'd rather have a nice, comfortable room to come home to."

"Are you studying for a college professor?" asked the other, with a sneer.

"I don't know," said Dick, good-humoredly; "but I'm open to proposals, as the oyster remarked. If you know any first-

class institution that would like a dignified professor, of extensive acquirements, just mention me, will you?"

So Richard Hunter kept on his way, indifferent to the criticisms which his conduct excited in the minds of young men of his own age. He looked farther than they and knew that if he wanted to succeed in life, and win the respect of his fellow-men, he must do something else than attend theaters, and, spend his evenings in billard saloons. Fosdick, who was a quiet, studious boy, fully agreed with his friend in his views of life, and by his companionship did much to strengthen and confirm Richard in his resolution. He was less ambitious than Dick, and perhaps loved study more for its own sake.

With these explanations we shall now be able to start fairly in our story.

Chapter 2: At the Astor House

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The two friends started from their room about seven o'clock, and walked up to Third Avenue, where they jumped on board a horse-car, and within half an hour were landed at the foot of the City Hall Park, opposite Beekman Street. From this point it was necessary only to cross the street to the Astor House.

The Astor house is massive pile of gray stone, and has a solid look, as is it might stand for hundreds of years. When it was first erected, a little more than thirty years since, it was considered far up town, but now it is far down town, so rapid has been the growth of the city.

Richard Hunter ascended the stone steps with a firm step, but Henry Fosdick lingered behind.

"Do you think we had better go up, Dick?" he said irresolutely.

"Why not?"

"I feel awkward about it."

"There is no reason why you should. The money belongs to you rightfully, as the representative of your father, and it is worth trying for."

"I suppose you are right, but I shan't know what to say."

"I'll help you along if I find you need it. Come along."

Those who possess energy and a strong will generally gain their point, and it was so with Richard Hunter. They entered the hotel, and, ascending some stone steps, found themselves on the main floor, where the reading-room, clerk's office, and dining room are located.

Dick, to adopt the familiar by which his companion addressed him, stepped up to the desk, and drew towards him the book of arrivals. After a brief search he found the name of "Hiram Bates, Milwaukie, Wis.," toward the top of the left-hand page.

"Is Mr. Bates in?" he inquired of the clerk, pointing to the name.

"I will send and inquire, if you will write your name on this card."

Dick thought it would be best to send his own name, as that of Fosdick might lead Mr. Bates to guess the business on which they had come.

He accordingly wrote his name,

RICHARD HUNTER

in his handsomest handwriting, and handed it to the clerk.

That functionary touched a bell. The summons was answered by a servant.

"James, go to No. 147, and see if Mr. Bates is in. If he is, give him this card."

The messenger departed at once, and returned quickly.

"The gentleman is in, and would be glad to have Mr. Hunter walk up."

"Come along, Fosdick," said Dick, in a low voice.

Fosdick obeyed, feeling very nervous. Following the servant upstairs, they soon stood before No. 147.

James knocked.

"Come in," was heard from inside, and the two friends entered.

They found themselves in a comfortable furnished room. A man of fifty-five, rather stout in build, and with iron-gray hair, rose from his chair before the fire, and looked rather inquiringly. He seemed rather surprised to find that there were two visitors, as well as at the evident youth of both.

"Mr. Hunter?" he said, inquiringly, looking from one to the other.

"That is my name," said Dick, promptly.

"Have I met you before? If so, my memory is at fault."

"No, sir, we have never met."

"I presume you have business with me. Be seated, if you please."

"First," said Dick, "let me introduce Henry Fosdick."

"Fosdick!" repeated Hiram Bates, with a slight tinge of color.

"I think you knew my father," said Fosdick, nervously.

"Your father was a printer,--was he not?" inquired Mr. Bates.

"Yes, sir."

"I do remember him. Do you come from him?"

Fosdick shook his head.

"He has been dead for two years," he said sadly.

"Dead!" repeated Hiram Bates, as if shocked. "Indeed I am sorry to hear it."

He spoke with evident regret, and Henry Fosdick, whose feelings toward his father's debtor had not been very friendly, noticed this, and was softened by it.

"Did he die in poverty, may I ask?" inquired Mr. Bates, after a pause.

"He was poor," said Fosdick; "that is, he had nothing laid-up; but his wages were enough to support him and myself comfortably."

"Did he have any other family?"

"No, sir; my mother died six years since, and I had no brothers or sisters."

"He left no property then?"

"No, sir."

"Then I suppose he was able to make no provision for you?"

"No, sir."

"But you probably had some relatives who came forward and provided for you?"

"No, sir; I had no relatives in New York."

"What then did you do? Excuse my questions, but I have a motive in asking."

"My father died suddenly, having fallen from a Brooklyn ferry-boat and drowned. He left nothing, and I knew of nothing better to do than to go into the streets as a boot-black."

"Surely you are not in that business now?" said Mr. Bates, glancing at Fosdick's neat dress.

"No, sir; I was fortunate enough to find a friend,"-- here Fosdick glanced at Dick,--"who helped me along, and encouraged me to apply for a place in a Broadway store. I have been there for a year and a half."

"What wages do you get? Excuse my curiosity, but your story interests me."

"Eight dollars a week."

"And do you find you can live comfortable on that?"

"Yes, sir; that is, with the assistance of my friend here."

"I am glad you have a friend who is able and willing to help you."

"It is not worth mentioning," said Dick, modestly. "I have received as much help from him as he has from me."

"I see at any rate that you are good friends, and a good friend is worth having. May I ask, Mr. Fosdick, whether you ever heard your father refer to me in any way?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware, then, that there were some money arrangements between us?"

"I have heard him say that you had two thousand dollars of his, but that you failed, and that it was lost."

"He informed you rightly. I will tell you the particulars, if you are not already aware of them."

"I should be very glad to hear them, sir. My father died so suddenly that I never knew anything more than that you owed him two thousand dollars."

"Five years since," commenced Mr. Bates, "I was a broker in Wall Street. As from my business, I was expected to know the best investments, some persons brought me money to keep for them, and I either agreed to pay them a certain rate of interest, or gave them an interest in my speculations. Among the persons was your father. The way in which I got acquainted with him was this: Having occasion to get some prospectuses of a new company printed, I went to the office with which he was connected. There was some error in the printing, and he was sent to my office to speak with me about it. When our business was concluded, he waited a moment, and then said, 'Mr. Bates,

I have saved up two thousand dollars in the last ten years, but I don't know much about investments, and I should consider it a favor if you would advise me.'

" 'I will do so with pleasure,' I said. 'If you desire it I will take charge of it for you, and either allow you six per cent. interest, or give you a share from the profits I may make from investing it.'

"Your father said that he should be glad to have me take the money for him, but he would prefer regular interest to uncertain profits. The next day he brought the money, and put it in my hands. To confess the truth I was glad to have him do so, for I was engaged in extensive speculations, and thought I could make use of it to advantage. For a year I paid him the interest regularly. Then there came a great catastrophe, and I found my brilliant speculations were but bubbles, which broke and left me but a mere pittance, instead of the hundred thousand dollars which I considered myself worth. Of course those who had placed money in my hands suffered, and among them your father. I confess that I regretted his loss as much as that of any one, for I liked his straightforward manner, and was touched by his evident confidence in me."

Mr. Bates paused a moment and then resumed:--

"I left New York, and went to Milwaukie. Here I was obliged to begin life anew, or nearly so, for I only carried a thousand dollars out with me. But I have been greatly prospered since then. I took warning by my past failures, and have succeeded, by care and good fortune, in accumulating nearly as large a fortune as the one of which I once thought myself possessed. When fortune began to

smile upon me I thought of your father, and tried through an agent to find him out. But he reported to me that his name was not to be found either in the New York or Brooklyn Directory, and I was too busily engaged to come on myself, and make inquiries. But I am glad to find that his son is living, and that I yet have it in my power to make restitution."

Fosdick could hardly believe his ears. Was he after all to receive the money which he had supposed irrevocably lost?

As for Dick is is not too much to say that he felt even more pleased at the prospective good fortune of his friend than if it had fallen to himself.

Chapter 3: Fosdick's Fortune

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Mr. Bates took from his pocket a memorandum book, and jotted down a few figures in it.

"As nearly as I can remember," he said, "it is four years since I ceased paying interest on the money which your father entrusted to me. The rate I agreed to pay was six per cent. How much will that amount to?"

"Principal and interest two thousand four hundred and eighty dollars," said Dick, promptly.

Fosdick's breath was almost taken away as he heard this sum mentioned. Could it be possible that Mr. Bates intended to pay him as much as this? Why, it would be a fortune.

"Your figures would be quite correct, Mr. Hunter," said Mr. Bates, "but for one consideration. You forget that your friend is entitled to compounded interest, as no interest has been paid for four years. Now, as you are no doubt used to figures, I will leave you to make the necessary correction."

Mr. Bates tore a leaf from his memorandum book as he spoke, and handed it with a pencil to Richard Hunter.

Dick made a rapid calculation, and reported two thousand five hundred and twenty-four dollars.

"It seems, then, Mr. Fosdick," said Mr. Bates, "that I am your debtor to a very considerable amount."

"You are very kind, sir," said Fosdick; "but I shall be quite satisfied with the two thousand dollars without any interest."

"Thank you for offering to relinquish the interest; but it is only right that I should pay it. I have had the use of the

money, and I certainly would not wish to defraud you out of a penny of the sum which it took your father ten years of industry to accumulate. I wish he were living now to see justice done his son."

"So do I," said Fosdick, earnestly. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, after a moment's pause.

"Why?" asked Mr. Bates in a tone of surprise.

"Because," said Fosdick, "I have done you injustice, I thought you failed in order to make money, and intended to cheat my father out of his savings. That made me feel hard towards you."

"You were justified in feeling so," said Mr. Bates. "Such cases are so common that I am not surprised at your opinion of me. I ought to have explained my position to your father, and promised to make restitution whenever it should be in my power. But at the time I was discouraged, and could not foresee the favorable turn which my affairs have since taken. Now," he added, with a change of voice, "we will arrange about the payment of this money."

"Do not pay it until it is convenient, Mr. Bates," said Fosdick.

"Your proposal is kind, but scarcely business-like, Mr. Fosdick," said Mr. Bates. "Fortunately it will occasion me no inconvenience to pay you at once. I have not the money with me as you may suppose, but I will give you a cheque for the amount upon the Broadway Bank, with which I have an account; and it will be duly honored on the presentation tomorrow. You may in return make out a receipt in full for the debt and interest. Wait a moment. I will ring for writing materials."