

Horatio Alger



*Driven
from Home*

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Driven from Home



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [Chapter I: Driven from Home](#)
- [Chapter II: A Friend Worth Having](#)
- [Chapter III: Introduces Peter Cook](#)
- [Chapter IV: An Important Conference](#)
- [Chapter V: Carl's Stepmother](#)
- [Chapter VI: Mrs. Crawford's Letter](#)
- [Chapter VII: Ends in a Tragedy.](#)
- [Chapter VIII: Carl Falls Under Suspicion](#)
- [Chapter IX: A Plausible Stranger](#)
- [Chapter X: The Counterfeit Bill](#)
- [Chapter XI: The Archery Prize](#)
- [Chapter XII: An Odd Acquaintance](#)
- [Chapter XIII: An Unequal Contest](#)
- [Chapter XIV: Carl Arrives in Milford](#)
- [Chapter XV: Mr. Jennings at Home](#)
- [Chapter XVI: Carl Gets a Place](#)
- [Chapter XVII: Carl Enters the Factory.](#)
- [Chapter XVIII: Leonard's Temptation](#)
- [Chapter XIX: An Artful Scheme](#)
- [Chapter XX: Reveals a Mystery.](#)
- [Chapter XXI: An Unwelcome Guest](#)
- [Chapter XXII: Mr. Stark Is Recognized](#)
- [Chapter XXIII: Preparing for the Burglar](#)
- [Chapter XXIV: The Burglary.](#)
- [Chapter XXV: Stark's Disappointment](#)
- [Chapter XXVI: A Disagreeable Surprise](#)

[Chapter XXVII: Brought to Bay](#)

[Chapter XXVIII: After a Year](#)

[Chapter XXIX: The Lost Bank Book](#)

[Chapter XXX: An Eccentric Woman](#)

[Chapter XXXI: Carl Takes Supper with Miss Norris](#)

[Chapter XXXII: A Startling Discovery](#)

[Chapter XXXIII: From Albany to Niagara](#)

[Chapter XXXIV: Carl Makes the Acquaintance of an English Lord](#)

[Chapter XXXV: What Carl Learned in Chicago](#)

[Chapter XXXVI: Making a Will](#)

[Chapter XXXVII: Peter Lets out a Secret](#)

[Chapter XXXVIII: Dr. Crawford Is Taken to Task](#)

[Chapter XXXIX: A Man of Energy](#)

[Chapter XL: Conclusion](#)

Chapter I: Driven from Home

Table of Contents

A boy of sixteen, with a small gripsack in his hand, trudged along the country road. He was of good height for his age, strongly built, and had a frank, attractive face. He was naturally of a cheerful temperament, but at present his face was grave, and not without a shade of anxiety. This can hardly be a matter of surprise when we consider that he was thrown upon his own resources, and that his available capital consisted of thirty-seven cents in money, in addition to a good education and a rather unusual amount of physical strength. These last two items were certainly valuable, but they cannot always be exchanged for the necessaries and comforts of life.

For some time his steps had been lagging, and from time to time he had to wipe the moisture from his brow with a fine linen handkerchief, which latter seemed hardly compatible with his almost destitute condition.

I hasten to introduce my hero, for such he is to be, as Carl Crawford, son of Dr. Paul Crawford, of Edgewood Center. Why he had set out to conquer fortune single-handed will soon appear.

A few rods ahead Carl's attention was drawn to a wide-spreading oak tree, with a carpet of verdure under its sturdy boughs.

"I will rest here for a little while," he said to himself, and suiting the action to the word, threw down his gripsack and flung himself on the turf.

"This is refreshing," he murmured, as, lying upon his back, he looked up through the leafy rifts to the sky above. "I don't know when I have ever been so tired. It's no joke walking a dozen miles under a hot sun, with a heavy gripsack in your hand. It's a good introduction to a life of labor, which I have reason to believe is before me. I wonder how I am coming out--at the big or the little end of the horn?"

He paused, and his face grew grave, for he understood well that for him life had become a serious matter. In his absorption he did not observe the rapid approach of a boy some- what younger than himself, mounted on a bicycle.

The boy stopped short in surprise, and leaped from his iron steed.

"Why, Carl Crawford, is this you? Where in the world are you going with that gripsack?"

Carl looked up quickly.

"Going to seek my fortune," he answered, soberly.

"Well, I hope you'll find it. Don't chaff, though, but tell the honest truth."

"I have told you the truth, Gilbert."

With a puzzled look, Gilbert, first leaning his bicycle against the tree, seated himself on the ground by Carl's side.

"Has your father lost his property?" he asked, abruptly.

"No."

"Has he disinherited you?"

"Not exactly."

"Have you left home for good?"

"I have left home--I hope for good."

"Have you quarreled with the governor?"

"I hardly know what to say to that. There is a difference between us."

"He doesn't seem like a Roman father--one who rules his family with a rod of iron."

"No; he is quite the reverse. He hasn't backbone enough."

"So it seemed to me when I saw him at the exhibition of the academy. You ought to be able to get along with a father like that, Carl."

"So I could but for one thing."

"What is that?"

"I have a stepmother!" said Carl, with a significant glance at his companion.

"So have I, but she is the soul of kindness, and makes our home the dearest place in the world."

"Are there such stepmothers? I shouldn't have judged so from my own experience."

"I think I love her as much as if she were my own mother."

"You are lucky," said Carl, sighing.

"Tell me about yours."

"She was married to my father five years ago. Up to the time of her marriage I thought her amiable and sweet-tempered. But soon after the wedding she threw off the mask, and made it clear that she disliked me. One reason is that she has a son of her own about my age, a mean, sneaking fellow, who is the apple of her eye. She has been jealous of me, and tried to supplant me in the affection of my father, wishing Peter to be the favored son."

"How has she succeeded?"

"I don't think my father feels any love for Peter, but through my stepmother's influence he generally fares better than I do."

"Why wasn't he sent to school with you?"

"Because he is lazy and doesn't like study. Besides, his mother prefers to have him at home. During my absence she worked upon my father, by telling all sorts of malicious stories about me, till he became estranged from me, and little by little Peter has usurped my place as the favorite."

"Why didn't you deny the stories?" asked Gilbert.

"I did, but no credit was given to my denials. My stepmother was continually poisoning my father's mind against me."

"Did you give her cause? Did you behave disrespectfully to her?"

"No," answered Carl, warmly. "I was prepared to give her a warm welcome, and treat her as a friend, but my advances were so coldly received that my heart was chilled."

"Poor Carl! How long has this been so?"

"From the beginning--ever since Mrs. Crawford came into the house."

"What are your relations with your step-brother--what's his name?"

"Peter Cook. I despise the boy, for he is mean, and tyrannical where he dares to be."

"I don't think it would be safe for him to bully you, Carl."

"He tried it, and got a good thrashing. You can imagine what followed. He ran, crying to his mother, and his version

of the story was believed. I was confined to my room for a week, and forced to live on bread and water."

"I shouldn't think your father was a man to inflict such a punishment."

"It wasn't he--it was my stepmother. She insisted upon it, and he yielded. I heard afterwards from one of the servants that he wanted me released at the end of twenty-four hours, but she would not consent."

"How long ago was this?"

"It happened when I was twelve."

"Was it ever repeated?"

"Yes, a month later; but the punishment lasted only for two days."

"And you submitted to it?"

"I had to, but as soon as I was released I gave Peter such a flogging, with the promise to repeat it, if I was ever punished in that manner again, that the boy himself was panic-stricken, and objected to my being imprisoned again."

"He must be a charming fellow!"

"You would think so if you should see him. He has small, insignificant features, a turn-up nose, and an ugly scowl that appears whenever he is out of humor."

"And yet your father likes him?"

"I don't think he does, though Peter, by his mother's orders, pays all sorts of small attentions-- bringing him his slippers, running on errands, and so on, not because he likes it, but because he wants to supplant me, as he has succeeded in doing."

"You have finally broken away, then?"

"Yes; I couldn't stand it any longer. Home had become intolerable."

"Pardon the question, but hasn't your father got considerable property?"

"I have every reason to think so."

"Won't your leaving home give your step-mother and Peter the inside track, and lead, perhaps, to your disinheritance?"

"I suppose so," answered Carl, wearily; "but no matter what happens, I can't bear to stay at home any longer."

"You're badly fixed--that's a fact!" said Gilbert, in a tone of sympathy. "What are your plans?"

"I don't know. I haven't had time to think."

Chapter II: A Friend Worth Having

Table of Contents

Gilbert wrinkled up his forehead and set about trying to form some plans for Carl.

"It will be hard for you to support yourself," he said, after a pause; "that is, without help."

"There is no one to help me. I expect no help."

"I thought your father might be induced to give you an allowance, so that with what you can earn, you may get along comfortably."

"I think father would be willing to do this, but my stepmother would prevent him."

"Then she has a great deal of influence over him?"

"Yes, she can twist him round her little finger."

"I can't understand it."

"You see, father is an invalid, and is very nervous. If he were in perfect health he would have more force of character and firmness. He is under the impression that he has heart disease, and it makes him timid and vacillating."

"Still he ought to do something for you."

"I suppose he ought. Still, Gilbert, I think I can earn my living."

"What can you do?"

"Well, I have a fair education. I could be an entry clerk, or a salesman in some store, or, if the worst came to the worst, I could work on a farm. I believe farmers give boys who work for them their board and clothes."

"I don't think the clothes would suit you."

"I am pretty well supplied with clothing."

Gilbert looked significantly at the gripsack.

"Do you carry it all in there?" he asked, doubtfully.

Carl laughed.

"Well, no," he answered. "I have a trunkful of clothes at home, though."

"Why didn't you bring them with you?"

"I would if I were an elephant. Being only a boy, I would find it burdensome carrying a trunk with me. The gripsack is all I can very well manage."

"I tell you what," said Gilbert. "Come round to our house and stay overnight. We live only a mile from here, you know. The folks will be glad to see you, and while you are there I will go to your house, see the governor, and arrange for an allowance for you that will make you comparatively independent."

"Thank you, Gilbert; but I don't feel like asking favors from those who have ill-treated me."

"Nor would I--of strangers; but Dr. Crawford is your father. It isn't right that Peter, your stepbrother, should be supported in ease and luxury, while you, the real son, should be subjected to privation and want."

"I don't know but you are right," admitted Carl, slowly.

"Of course I am right. Now, will you make me your minister plenipotentiary, armed with full powers?"

"Yes, I believe I will."

"That's right. That shows you are a boy of sense. Now, as you are subject to my directions, just get on that bicycle and I will carry your gripsack, and we will seek Vance Villa, as we call it when we want to be high-toned, by the most direct route."

"No, no, Gilbert; I will carry my own gripsack. I won't burden you with it," said Carl, rising from his recumbent position.

"Look here, Carl, how far have you walked with it this morning?"

"About twelve miles."

"Then, of course, you're tired, and require rest. Just jump on that bicycle, and I'll take the gripsack. If you have carried it twelve miles, I can surely carry it one."

"You are very kind, Gilbert."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"But it is imposing up on your good nature."

But Gilbert had turned his head in a backward direction, and nodded in a satisfied way as he saw a light, open buggy rapidly approaching.

"There's my sister in that carriage," he said. "She comes in good time. I will put you and your gripsack in with her, and I'll take to my bicycle again."

"Your sister may not like such an arrangement."

"Won't she though! She's very fond of beaux, and she will receive you very graciously."

"You make me feel bashful, Gilbert."

"You won't be long. Julia will chat away to you as if she'd known you for fifty years."

"I was very young fifty years ago," said Carl, smiling.

"Hi, there, Jule!" called Gilbert, waving his hand.

Julia Vance stopped the horse, and looked inquiringly and rather admiringly at Carl, who was a boy of fine appearance.

"Let me introduce you to my friend and schoolmate, Carl Crawford."

Carl took off his hat politely.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Crawford," said Julia, demurely; "I have often heard Gilbert speak of you."

"I hope he said nothing bad about me, Miss Vance."

"You may be sure he didn't. If he should now-- I wouldn't believe him."

"You've made a favorable impression, Carl," said Gilbert, smiling.

"I am naturally prejudiced against boys-- having such a brother," said Julia; "but it is not fair to judge all boys by him."

"That is outrageous injustice!" said Gilbert; "but then, sisters seldom appreciate their brothers."

"Some other fellows' sisters may," said Carl.

"They do, they do!"

"Did you ever see such a vain, conceited boy, Mr. Crawford?"

"Of course you know him better than I do."

"Come, Carl; it's too bad for you, too, to join against me. However, I will forget and forgive. Jule, my friend, Carl, has accepted my invitation to make us a visit."

"I am very glad, I am sure," said Julia, sincerely.

"And I want you to take him in, bag and baggage, and convey him to our palace, while I speed thither on my wheel."

"To be sure I will, and with great pleasure."

"Can't you get out and assist him into the carriage, Jule?"

"Thank you," said Carl; "but though I am somewhat old and quite infirm, I think I can get in without troubling your

sister. Are you sure, Miss Vance, you won't be incommoded by my gripsack?"

"Not at all."

"Then I will accept your kind offer."

In a trice Carl was seated next to Julia, with his valise at his feet.

"Won't you drive, Mr. Crawford?" said the young lady.

"Don't let me take the reins from you."

"I don't think it looks well for a lady to drive when a gentleman is sitting beside her."

Carl was glad to take the reins, for he liked driving.

"Now for a race!" said Gilbert, who was mounted on his bicycle.

"All right!" replied Carl. "Look out for us!"

They started, and the two kept neck and neck till they entered the driveway leading up to a handsome country mansion.

Carl followed them into the house, and was cordially received by Mr. and Mrs. Vance, who were very kind and hospitable, and were favorably impressed by the gentlemanly appearance of their son's friend.

Half an hour later dinner was announced, and Carl, having removed the stains of travel in his schoolmate's room, descended to the dining-room, and, it must be confessed, did ample justice to the bounteous repast spread before him.

In the afternoon Julia, Gilbert and he played tennis, and had a trial at archery. The hours glided away very rapidly, and six o'clock came before they were aware.

"Gilbert," said Carl, as they were preparing for tea, "you have a charming home."

"You have a nice house, too, Carl."

"True; but it isn't a home--to me. There is no love there."

"That makes a great difference."

"If I had a father and mother like yours I should be happy."

"You must stay here till day after tomorrow, and I will devote to-morrow to a visit in your interest to your home. I will beard the lion in his den--that is, your stepmother. Do you consent?"

"Yes, I consent; but it won't do any good."

"We will see."

Chapter III: Introduces Peter Cook

Table of Contents

Gilbert took the morning train to the town of Edgewood Center, the residence of the Crawfords. He had been there before, and knew that Carl's home was nearly a mile distant from the station. Though there was a hack in waiting, he preferred to walk, as it would give him a chance to think over what he proposed to say to Dr. Crawford in Carl's behalf.

He was within a quarter of a mile of his destination when his attention was drawn to a boy of about his own age, who was amusing himself and a smaller companion by firing stones at a cat that had taken refuge in a tree. Just as Gilbert came up, a stone took effect, and the poor cat moaned in affright, but did not dare to come down from her perch, as this would put her in the power of her assailant.

"That must be Carl's stepbrother, Peter," Gilbert decided, as he noted the boy's mean face and turn-up nose. "Stoning cats seems to be his idea of amusement. I shall take the liberty of interfering."

Peter Cook laughed heartily at his successful aim.

"I hit her, Simon," he said. "Doesn't she look seared?"

"You must have hurt her."

"I expect I did. I'll take a bigger stone next time."

He suited the action to the word, and picked up a rock which, should it hit the poor cat, would in all probability kill her, and prepared to fire.

"Put down that rock!" said Gilbert, indignantly.

Peter turned quickly, and eyed Gilbert insolently.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"No matter who I am. Put down that rock!"

"What business is it of yours?"

"I shall make it my business to protect that cat from your cruelty."

Peter, who was a natural coward, took courage from having a companion to back him up, and retorted: "You'd better clear out of here, or I may fire at you."

"Do it if you dare!" said Gilbert, quietly.

Peter concluded that it would be wiser not to carry out his threat, but was resolved to keep to his original purpose. He raised his arm again, and took aim; but Gilbert rushed in, and striking his arm forcibly, compelled him to drop it.

"What do you mean by that, you loafer?" demanded Peter, his eyes blazing with anger.

"To stop your fun, if that's what you call it."

"I've a good mind to give you a thrashing."

Gilbert put himself in a position of defense.

"Sail in, if you want to!" he responded.

"Help me, Simon!" said Peter. "You grab his legs, and I'll upset him."

Simon, who, though younger, was braver than Peter, without hesitation followed directions. He threw himself on the ground and grasped Gilbert by the legs, while Peter, doubling up his fists, made a rush at his enemy. But Gilbert, swiftly eluding Simon, struck out with his right arm, and Peter, unprepared for so forcible a defense, tumbled over on his back, and Simon ran to his assistance.

Gilbert put himself on guard, expecting a second attack; but Peter apparently thought it wiser to fight with his

tongue.

"You rascal!" he shrieked, almost foaming at the mouth; "I'll have you arrested."

"What for?" asked Gilbert, coolly.

"For flying at me like a--a tiger, and trying to kill me."

Gilbert laughed at this curious version of things.

"I thought it was you who flew at me," he said.

"What business had you to interfere with me?"

"I'll do it again unless you give up firing stones at the cat."

"I'll do it as long as I like."

"She's gone!" said Simon.

The boys looked up into the tree, and could see nothing of puss. She had taken the opportunity, when her assailant was otherwise occupied, to make good her escape.

"I'm glad of it!" said Gilbert. "Good-morning, boys! When we meet again, I hope you will be more creditably employed."

"You don't get off so easy, you loafer," said Peter, who saw the village constable approaching. "Here, Mr. Rogers, I want you to arrest this boy."

Constable Rogers, who was a stout, broad-shouldered man, nearly six feet in height, turned from one to the other, and asked: "What has he done?"

"He knocked me over. I want him arrested for assault and battery."

"And what did you do?"

"I? I didn't do anything."

"That is rather strange. Young man, what is your name?"

"Gilbert Vance."

"You don't live in this town?"

"No; I live in Warren."

"What made you attack Peter?"

"Because he flew at me, and I had to defend myself."

"Is this so, Simon? You saw all that happened."

"Ye--es," admitted Simon, unwillingly.

"That puts a different face on the matter. I don't see how I can arrest this boy. He had a right to defend himself."

"He came up and abused me--the loafer," said Peter.

"That was the reason you went at him?"

"Yes."

"Have you anything to say?" asked the constable, addressing Gilbert.

"Yes, sir; when I came up I saw this boy firing stones at a cat, who had taken refuge in that tree over there. He had just hit her, and had picked up a larger stone to fire when I ordered him to drop it."

"It was no business of yours," muttered Peter.

"I made it my business, and will again."

"Did the cat have a white spot on her forehead?" asked the constable.

"Yes, sir."

"And was mouse colored?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, it's my little girl's cat. She would be heartbroken if the cat were seriously hurt. You young rascal!" he continued, turning suddenly upon Peter, and shaking him vigorously. "Let me catch you at this business again, and I'll give you such a warming that you'll never want to touch another cat."

"Let me go!" cried the terrified boy. "I didn't know it was your cat."

"It would have been just as bad if it had been somebody else's cat. I've a great mind to put you in the lockup."

"Oh, don't, please don't, Mr. Rogers!" implored Peter, quite panic-stricken.

"Will you promise never to stone another cat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go about your business."

Peter lost no time, but scuttled up the street with his companion.

"I am much obliged to you for protecting Flora's cat," then said the constable to Gilbert.

"You are quite welcome, sir. I won't see any animal abused if I can help it."

"You are right there."

"Wasn't that boy Peter Cook?"

"Yes. Don't you know him?"

"No; but I know his stepbrother, Carl."

"A different sort of boy! Have you come to visit him?"

"No; he is visiting me. In fact, he has left home, because he could not stand his step-mother's ill-treatment, and I have come to see his father in his behalf."

"He has had an uncomfortable home. Dr. Crawford is an invalid, and very much under the influence of his wife, who seems to have a spite against Carl, and is devoted to that young cub to whom you have given a lesson. Does Carl want to come back?"

"No; he wants to strike out for himself, but I told him it was no more than right that he should receive some help

from his father."

"That is true enough. For nearly all the doctor's money came to him through Carl's mother."

"I am afraid Peter and his mother won't give me a very cordial welcome after what has happened this morning. I wish I could see the doctor alone."

"So you can, for there he is coming up the street."

Gilbert looked in the direction indicated, and his glance fell on a thin, fragile-looking man, evidently an invalid, with a weak, undecided face, who was slowly approaching.

The boy advanced to meet him, and, taking off his hat, asked politely: "Is this Dr. Crawford?"

Chapter IV: An Important Conference

Table of Contents

Dr. Crawford stopped short, and eyed Gilbert attentively.

"I don't know you," he said, in a querulous tone.

"I am a schoolmate of your son, Carl. My name is Gilbert Vance."

"If you have come to see my son you will be disappointed. He has treated me in a shameful manner. He left home yesterday morning, and I don't know where he is."

"I can tell you, sir. He is staying--for a day or two--at my father's house."

"Where is that?" asked Dr. Crawford, his manner showing that he was confused.

"In Warren, thirteen miles from here."

"I know the town. What induced him to go to your house? Have you encouraged him to leave home?" inquired Dr. Crawford, with a look of displeasure.

"No, sir. It was only by chance that I met him a mile from our home. I induced him to stay overnight."

"Did you bring me any message from him?" "No, sir, except that he is going to strike out for himself, as he thinks his home an unhappy one."

"That is his own fault. He has had enough to eat and enough to wear. He has had as comfortable a home as yourself."

"I don't doubt that, but he complains that his stepmother is continually finding fault with him, and scolding him."

"He provokes her to do it. He is a headstrong, obstinate boy."