

Dick, a Street Boy.

Dick was a tall, thin, starved-looking boy, with a little jacket, the sleeves of which crept half way up his arms, and a hat that was nothing but a brim; and when she first saw him he was eating a crust from a gutter. She was only a poor old woman, who kept a little shop for candy and trimmings, and poor enough herself; but as she said, he looked a little like what Tom might have been if he had grown up and been neglected, and she couldn't stand it. She called to him: "Come here, sonny," said she, and the boy came. Before she could speak, he said: "I didn't do it. I'll take my oath on anything I didn't do it."

"I didn't do it," said the old woman. "Break your window," said the boy. "Why I broke that myself with my shutter last night," said the old woman. "I am not strong enough to lift them," she continued. "If I'm about here when you shut up I'll come and do it for you," said the boy. "What was it that you wanted me for?" "I want to know what you ate that dry crust out of the gutter for?" said she. "Hungry," said he; "I've tried to get a job all day. I'm going to sleep in an area over there after it gets too dark for the policeman to see, and you can't have a good night's sleep without some supper."

"I'll give you some that's cleaner," said the old woman. "That will be begging," said he. "No," said she; "you can sweep the shop and the pavement, and put up the shutters for it." "Very well," said he. "Thankee then. If I sweep first I'll feel better." She brought him a broom, and he did his work well. Afterwards he ate his supper with a relish. That night he slept, not in the area, but under the old woman's counter. He told her his story. His name was Dick; he was 12 years old, and his father, whom he had never seen sober, was in prison for killing his mother. The next morning the old woman engaged a clerk for her small establishment. The terms were simple—"his living and a bed under the counter."

When the neighbors heard of it they were shocked. "A street boy—a boy whom no one knew! Did Mrs. Boggs really wish to be murdered in her bed! But Mrs. Boggs felt quite safe. She had so much time now that she was going to take in sewing. Dick attended to the shop altogether. He kept it in fine order and increased the business. Pennies came in as they never came in before, since he had painted signs in red and blue ink to the effect that the real old sugar candy was to be got there, and that this was the place for nuts. And in the evening after the shop was shut up, the old woman began to take him into her confidence. The dream of her life was to buy herself into a home for the aged. It would cost her \$100. She was saving for it. She had saved three years and had \$15 of it. But it cost so much to live, with tea so dear and loaves so small; and she had been sick, and there was the doctor, and Mrs. Jones' Martha Jane to be paid for minding the shop. After this Dick took the greatest interest in the savings, and the winter months increased them as though he had brought a blessing. One night in Spring they took the bag from under her pillow, and counted what it held. It was \$30. "And I'll begin to make kites to-morrow, Mrs. Boggs," said the boy, "and you'll see the custom they will bring. If a little shaver sees the kites, he'll spend all he has on them, and then coax his mother for more."

"You're a clever boy yourself," said the old woman, and patted his hand. It was a plumper hand than it had been when it picked the crust from the gutter, and he wore clean, whole garments, though they were very coarse. "How wrong the neighbors were!" she said—"that boy is the comfort of my life." So she went to bed with her money under her pillow and slept. Far on in the night she woke. The room was quite dark—there was not a ray of light—but she hears a step on the floor. "Who is there?" she cried. "There was no answer, but she felt that some one was leaning over her bed. Then a hand clasped her throat and held her down, and dragged out the bag of money, and she was released. Half suffocated, she for a moment found herself motionless and bewildered, conscious only of a draught of air from an open door, and of some strange noises. She hurried into the shop. "Dick! Dick!" she cried. "Dick! Dick! Help! Wake up! I'm robbed!" But there was no answer; the door into the street was wide open; and by the moonlight that poured through it, she saw, as she peered under the counter, that Dick's bed was empty. The boy was gone! "Gone! gone! Oh, that was the worst to poor Granny Boggs than even the loss of the money; for she had trusted him, and he had abused her love. The neighbors were right; she was a fool to trust a strange street boy, and had robbed her."

When the dawn broke the wise neighbors called into poor Granny's shop to find her crying and rocking to and fro; and they told her they had told her so, and she only shook her head. The shop took care of itself that day. Life had lost its interest for her. Her "occupation was gone," but not with her savings. Money was by money after all; he had come to be the only thing she loved, and Dick had robbed her! It was ten o'clock. Granny sat moaning by the empty hearth. Good natured Mrs. Jones from up stairs was "seeing to things," and trying to cheer her up, when, suddenly there came a rap at the door, and a policeman looked in. "Mrs. Boggs," he said. "Here she is," said Mrs. Jones. "Some one wants to see you at headquar-

ters," said the policeman. "There is a boy there and some money." "Dick!" cried Mrs. Boggs. "Oh, I can't bear to look at him!" But Mrs. Jones had already tied on her bonnet, and wrapped her in a shawl, and taken her by the arm was hurrying her off. "The wretch!" Mrs. Jones said. "I'm glad he is caught. You'll get your money back." And she led Mrs. Boggs along—poor Mrs. Boggs, who cried all the way, and cared nothing for the money! And soon they were at the police station, and then, and not before, the policeman said to the old woman: "He's pretty bad; they'll take him to the hospital in an hour. I suppose you are prepared for that. He's nearly beaten to death, you know." "Did you beat him, you cruel wretch!" said the old lady. "I wouldn't had that done for twice the money." "I beat him!" said the man. "Well, women have the stupidest heads. Why if I hadn't got there when I did, he'd have been dead. He held the bag of money tight, and thief was pummeling him with a loaded stick; and the pluck he had for a little shaver—I tell you I never saw the like! 'You shan't take Granny's money from her,' says he, and fought like a little tiger. If it's your money, old lady, he's given his life for it, for all I know." Then old Mrs. Boggs clasped her hands and cried: "Oh, Dick! Dick! I knew you were good. I must have been crazy to doubt you!" And then she wrung her hands and cried, "Oh, Dick! for such a paltry bit of money!" And she knelt beside the pale face on the pillow, and kissed it, and called it tender names. And Dick, never guessing her suspicions of him, whispered: "I was afraid he'd get off with it if he killed me, granny, and you in such hopes last night." He did not know what she meant by begging him to forgive her. It would have killed him if had, for he was very near death. But Dick did not die. He got well at last, and came back to the little shop, and though Granny Boggs had her savings, she never went to the home, for long before she died Dick was a prosperous merchant in the city, and his home was hers, and she was very happy in it.

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