

FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL

TED'S CONTRACT

BY HENRY GARDNER HUNTING

TED, would you like to go to Chicago with father?"

Mr. Bronson stood in the dining-room looking at his small son, who was finishing the last vestige of a second piece of strawberry shortcake.

Ted jumped as though a fire-cracker had been let off beside his ear, and looked questioningly at his mother, who had come in and who was smiling at him. Chicago? Would he like to go? With father? Well, most assuredly! "Yes, sir," he said hastily aloud, slipping promptly off his chair, and making a not altogether successful attempt to use and fold his napkin at the same time.

"We have just half an hour to catch the train for Grand Haven, Elinor, and we'll get the boat there," said Mr. Bronson to his wife. "We'll be in the city early in the morning. I'll see Wyatt at once, and close the contract, I hope."

"Oh, John, I hope so."

Mrs. Bronson's eyes were shining with pleasure, and even Ted could see the unusual flush in his father's face, and knew that something of moment had occurred—something which made his parents both happy and anxious.

"You will be father's private secretary, Ted," said his mother, laughing. "You must show what a good business man you are, for this trip means a great deal to us all. If father gets this contract it will mean—"

"Don't anticipate, dear," said Mr. Bronson. "We won't count our chickens yet. We'll just hope and try hard to win. Ted will help father to get there on time. We mustn't miss any trains or boats, or we'll be too late and spoil it all."

Ted could dress rapidly—on occasion. That morning he had taken half an hour to put on his school clothes, anticipating only an ordinary day. That noon, with a lake trip to Chicago in prospect, it required but ten minutes for him to get into his best little blue serge suit, to have his tie properly bowed, and his hair parted straight. When he waved his hand in farewell to his mother from the seat in the car bound for the station, she laughed aloud at the quick time he had made.

The trip from Grand Rapids to Grand Haven by train was not new to Ted, who had gone so far on little journeys with his father before. But the steamer trip across Lake Michigan to the big city, of which every Western boy thinks with much admiration, curiosity, or wonder, would be a delightful thing. Besides, this hurried, important business trip was exciting and interesting, and Mr. Bronson told Ted all about it on the train.

"It's the plans they want to see," he said, patting a big paper-wrapped roll which lay beside his grip. "They're for a big building in the city, and I hope to get the contract at the directors' meeting, which is to be held to-morrow in Chicago. Of course there are many other architects after it, and that's why it is so important that my plans should get there in time."

"Who is Wyatt, father?" asked Ted, who had remembered the odd name.

"Mr. Wyatt? He is a friend of mine who is a director in the company which is to own the building, and he has seen the plans. He favors my cause, you see, and will do everything he can to help me. He has an office in the Masonic Temple."

Ted was no stranger to city life. His own home town was a lively and bustling place, where street traffic was heavy, and buildings rose to what seemed to him huge proportions. He was familiar with rushing cars and cabs and the clanging gongs of fire-engines, police patrols, and ambulances. Boy-like, too, he loved it all, the turmoil and the din, and it was anticipation of a greater degree of all this in the great metropolis, with many wonders added, which made his heart beat with happy excitement.

The night boats which cross Lake Michigan from Grand Haven to Chicago start from Muskegon, farther up the Michigan shore, and on this particular night the boat Mr. Bronson had expected to take was delayed at the former place. Further cause for delay arose in connection with freight-loading after Ted and his father went on board, and as the hour grew late, Ted, in preparation for the morrow, climbed into his berth and went to sleep while the steamer was still at the wharf in Grand Haven. The last thing he heard before he entered the land of dreams was the closing of the state-room door by his father, who again went out on deck.

It was daylight when Ted awoke, a foggy gray daylight indeed, but unmistakably day. The first thing he noted when he opened his eyes was the dim glimmer at his port-hole, which made him wonder where his big, home bedroom window was. Then he felt the pounding throb of the steamer's engines, and heard the rattle of some loose bit of metal somewhere in the state-room.

His eyes brightened and widened as he turned over on his side, looking curiously about and listening eagerly. It was very still all about, except for the engine's pounding and a delicious hiss and

splash of water outside, which instantly brought to his mind a vivid picture of the racing waves and the plowing steamer. He could feel the rise and fall and roll of the vessel, and a sudden exultant pleasure in it all made him sit up and laugh aloud.

The sound of his own laugh seemed very noisy to Ted. He dropped down upon the pillow again, wondering if he had disturbed any other sleepers. He listened to note whether he could hear his father's breathing in the lower berth, and then he crept to the edge of his bunk and peered over and down into the bed below.

It was empty! The covers were smoothly laid. It had not been slept in!

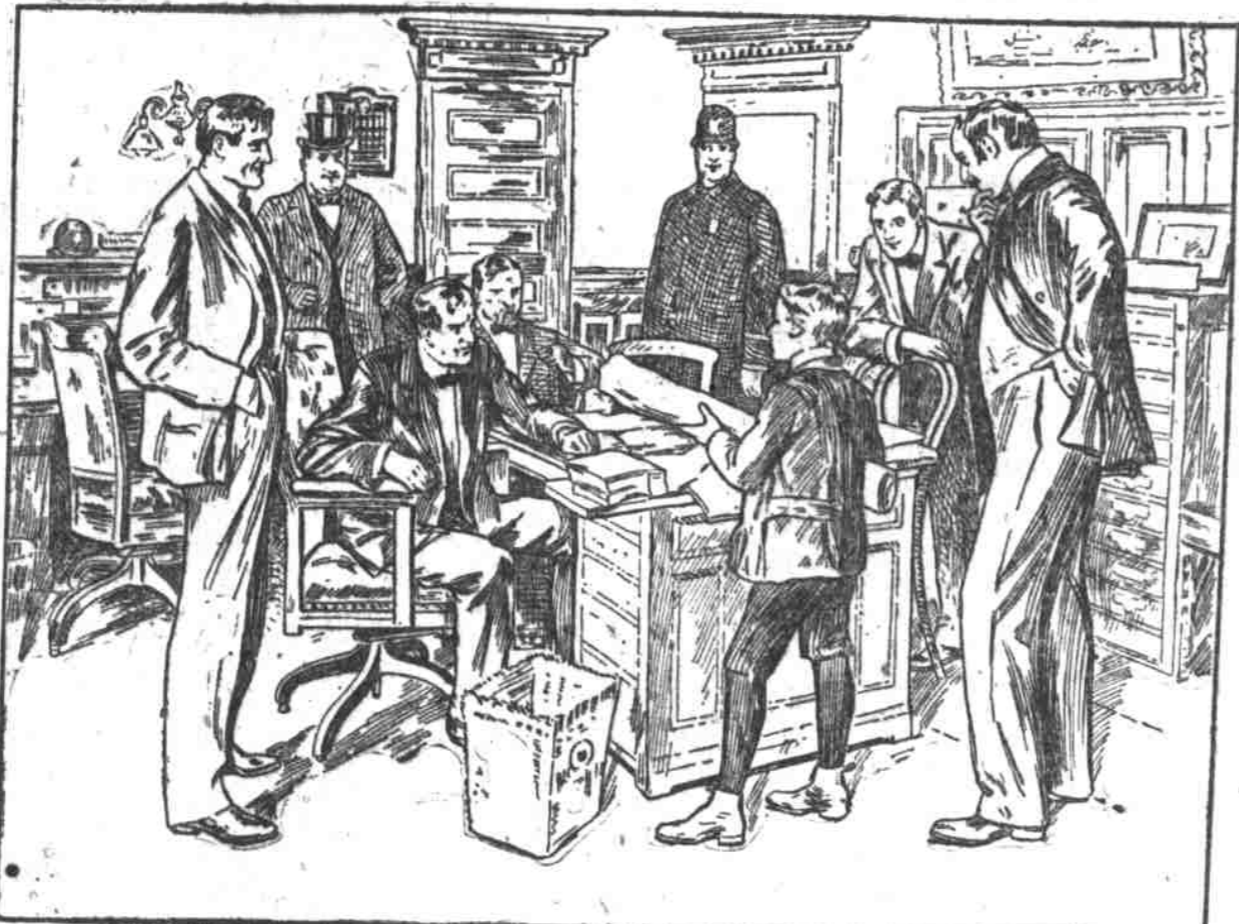
Ted's eyes opened wide in wonder. What was this? Where was his father? Had he slept alone in the state-room all night? If so, what did that mean? Surely his father would not sit out on deck all night. He clambered over the edge of his berth and dropped to the floor. The rough rug felt strange to his bare feet, and seemed to add to a sudden growing feeling of loneliness which was coming over him. He reached for his clothes and began hustling into them at his fastest pace. When he was dressed, he opened the state-room door timidly and peered out.

He sat up very straight on the edge of the berth, and stared at the roll of plans, while he thought intently. Then he suddenly slid off the bed and went on deck.

It was a strange sight that met his eyes. There lay the great city directly before them, only a little distance away. It was very, very big. It stretched far, far away in each direction. But oh, how different from what Ted had expected! How dark it was! Fog and smoke and steam everywhere hung in great masses above it. Tall buildings stretched themselves up into the mist till their tops were lost in it. The lake shore to the north and south faded away under its shadow, and the streets were only dimly discernible through the murk.

As they drew nearer, the cloud seemed to settle down more and more closely. When they entered the mouth of the river, it was as though the whole morning sky had been shut out and the air was hot and sultry and stifling.

Ted's anxiety deepened despite the new strange scenes and atmosphere, perhaps because of them. Almost a hundred miles of water lay behind him—between him and his father, his mother. Here he was alone, friendless, unknown and unknown, without a place to go, entering a big, strange city, where he must—



"I'VE BROUGHT THE PLANS" SAID TED.

A very big man in a blue uniform, with gold bands on cap and sleeves, was just passing. "Hello there, early bird!" he said to Ted, with a jovial wink which suited his round, red, jolly sort of face.

"Do you know where my father is?" asked Ted, promptly taking courage.

"Your father, youngster?" asked the purser, stopping. "I don't. Maybe I have n't the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"He didn't sleep here last night," said Ted, backing into his room and pointing to the berth.

The purser glanced inside, and then he looked at the boy questioningly. "What does your father look like, son?" he asked gently.

"He's big, with a brown beard," replied Ted, watching the officer's face anxiously.

The purser extended his hand to the boy. "Come on," he said. "We'll look for him."

They did look. First the purser sent Ted running to various likely places; then the officer himself took up the search. After that, as the quest had been fruitless, the steward was called in, and cabin-boys and waiters were summoned, questioned, and then they joined the hunt. Of course it did not take long to search the steamer thoroughly. But no one found Mr. Bronson.

The purser told Ted in as cheery a manner as he could, explaining that the father must have gone ashore and been left behind, and he treated the matter as a joke for Ted to laugh at. But Ted's heart, which had been steadily sinking, seemed to go into the very soles of his shoes. Though he could see the reasonableness of the purser's theory, he could not quiet his own fright and anxiety, and certainly he could not laugh. When the search was over, he went back to his state-room, and sat down on the edge of the lower berth in misery greater than he had ever known before, despite the purser's promise to take care of him. He was too thoroughly alarmed to cry, even if he would have allowed himself that indulgence at all. What should he do? What had happened to his father? Where should he go in the city till his father could come for him? How was he to get anything to eat?

The questions raced through his brain in helter-skelter fashion, and received no reasonable reply. Then suddenly one question rose in his mind which shut out all the rest so quickly that he forgot them instantly.

What about the plans? Those precious plans! There they were at the foot of the berth, just where his father had put them. They were to have gone this morning to the man with the queer name in the Masonic Temple who was to get the contract for his father.

Ted's heart almost stood still. He remembered his mother's shining eyes, his father's flushed face, when they had spoken of the hope for this contract. He remembered what his father had said about the importance of being on time for the directors' meeting.

A roaring whistle which deafened him and seemed almost to lift him from his feet with its tremendous vibrations burst out upon the air behind him. The buildings on either side sent back bellowing echoes, till he clapped his hands to his ears to shut out the painful blows the sound-waves seemed to strike. They were in the river now. Other whistles were blowing, bridges were swinging, tugs were scudding about, rooting up the dirty, greasy surface of the stream with their black noses like so many little pigs in a mud-puddle. The big steamer swung up to her dock amid a babel of shouts and the noise of hawsers sliding over decks; there was a rattle of chains, and the hollow bump of the gang-plank; and Ted brought up his grip and the roll of plans, and went to the purser.

A tall policeman was the first person to cross the plank when it was run out, and he crossed from shore to steamer. In his hand he held a yellow sheet, and the moment he saw Ted with the purser he came directly up to them.

"You've a runaway kid here, purser," he said, looking hard at Ted and handing the telegram to the boat officer.

Ted stared. The purser took the telegram and read it aloud:

"Chief of Police, Chicago: Find boy on steamer 'Queen,' of line from Grand Haven, arriving Chicago 9 a. m. Has small grip and papers. Hold boy at headquarters till I arrive by day-boat. John Bronson."

"That puts a different light on it," said the purser, looking sharply at Ted. "What did you run away for, son?"

"I did n't run away," said Ted. Surprise, then indignation, rose within him. The hot tears started to his eyes. How could they so interpret the message? It did not say he had run away. He started to protest, but the policeman reached down and took the grip which Ted was holding, and then took his hand firmly.

Ted's whole soul rose in resentment. He had not run away. He had done nothing in any way reprehensible. He would not be taken in hand thus as a truant. His father had certainly not intended it.

But the policeman's grip was strong, and to attempt escape was as useless as though his big hand were a steel trap. Ted waited, thinking rapidly.

One consideration was more important than all others. If the delivery of the plans to Mr. Wyatt were so important as to cause his father to plan this sudden rush to Chicago, and to justify the look of hope and anxiety which his mother's face had shown, Ted was certain that those plans ought to be delivered. He suddenly remembered his mother's little joke about his being father's private secretary. Here he was in Chicago, alone, to be sure, but not entirely helpless—and here were the plans. He would deliver them.

The consciousness of new responsibility assumed caused him to straighten his shoulders as he walked up from the wharf beside the officer. Presently he stopped and tugged at the policeman's hand. "I must go on an errand for my father," he said.

"Is that so?" said the officer, turning and grinning down at him. "I s'pose ye come across the lake fer that, did ye?"

"I did," asserted Ted. "Father started with me, but got left by the boat."

"Humph!" The policeman laughed. "You're goin' to headquarters," he replied.

"I won't!" cried Ted. He made a sudden wrench to free himself; but the officer's giant hand closed upon his fingers with such a crushing force that he cried aloud with pain.

"Now be good, will ye?" said the officer. "I did n't mean to hurt ye, but you're goin' with me."

Ted quieted down. He had plenty of good sense, and, though he was rebellious enough, he knew that he must change his tactics.

They passed up through a street that was full of heavy traffic—big three-horse teams laboriously pulling wide trucks loaded with immense burdens of barrels and boxes. The wheels made unceasing clatter over the paving-stones. A block ahead Ted could see the huge iron trestle of an elevated road, and trains were driving in both directions around the curve which led from a cross-street, the straining wheels pulling a ringing note from the rails, like the prolonged tone of a brazen bell. The roar of the streets began to awe him. It was different from what he had expected. The noise was ceaseless; the stream of people and of vehicles was continuous. Pushing, bustling, driving—all that he had looked for; but there was a sudden sense of loneliness upon him, a feeling that he had no friend in all the great throng, which was quite new to him. The policeman he considered only an enemy. At the corners the truck-drivers seemed to be trying to ride him down. People brushed against him, and passed on without looking. The motormen of the cable cars jangled their harsh, dull-sounding gongs, and drove their three-car trains around the curves with what appeared reckless disregard of the people, who seemed barely to escape each time.

Ted's heart sank lower. Everything about him was utterly strange—so different from his home in the Michigan city; and everything was wholly against him. How was he to accomplish his object, to find Mr. Wyatt, to deliver the plans on time?

He bit his lip to keep down the tears. He must. He alone could help his father now. He would—he would! Nothing should stop him. He would deliver the plans to Mr. Wyatt, and do all he could to forward his father's interests in this crisis. He would not be a baby or a coward. He would fight it out, and no one should prevent him. He set his teeth again to crush out the desperate sense of failure, and to hold his oozing courage. His head ached, and he was sick with excitement and anxiety, and hungry now, for he had had no breakfast. He looked about him with a last unhappy effort.

"Where is the Masonic Temple?" he asked abruptly of the officer.

The policeman grinned, turned, and pointed across the street, where Ted saw a big brown building, in and out of the doors of which the people were swarming like bees at a hive.

"Take me over there," said the boy, with quick pleading. "It's only a step. Take me there, and you'll find a man who will know I'm telling you the truth. I did n't run away; but I must take these plans to Mr. Wyatt this morning, or it will be too late. Oh, I must! I must! Don't refuse me, please—please! I'll do anything—go to jail—anything afterward. Take me over there."

Ted's voice was very earnest, and his eyes shone with a light which affected the big officer more than his words.

"Sure, you're a little duffer to run away," he muttered half above his breath. "Plans, is it? Who? Wyatt? Well, it's just across there. Well, well, don't cry, you know."

He looked across at the Temple building and considered. "Who is your pa, young un?" he asked, after a moment.

"He's Mr. John Bronson, of Grand Rapids, Michigan. He's an architect; he makes plans for buildings."

"Oh!" said the officer. "Well, it can't harm ye to go there, I s'pose." He was looking down at the

boy with quizzical amusement in his eyes, but with a certain approval of the little fellow's persistence, too, and—was it sympathy?

A moment later they had threaded their way across the roaring street and entered the great corridor. An inquiry from the elevator-starter, and a moment later the boy was rushing up in one of the semicircle of cars toward an upper floor, scarcely able to realize the sudden change in his fortunes.

The room was full of men when Ted opened the door to which he had been directed, and he was very much embarrassed when they all stopped talking and look at him. The big officer filled the doorway behind him and cut off his retreat, if he had thought of retreat; but he did n't, even in the face of wondering, curious looks.

"Mr. Wyatt?" he asked, flushing painfully, but holding his head up bravely.

A little man with very bright brown eyes turned from a chair by a desk. "Right here," he said, smiling.

"I've brought the plans which the new building is going to be built from," said Ted, his heart beating till it hurt him.

Mr. Wyatt looked at him in surprise. Then suddenly one of the other gentlemen laughed, and a moment later all the rest joined in heartily. Even Ted's policeman grinned.

"You've got ahead of us, son," said one very fat gentleman in a high silk hat. "We were still dissatisfied with all the plans we have so far. But what is your name, and where do you come from with such news?"

The other men laughed again, but Ted told them his name and his story straight out. They laughed again, more than once; but when Mr. Wyatt had told them who Ted's father was, the fat man, who was called Captain Clarke, and who seemed to be a very important personage, suddenly slapped his knee and said good-humoredly: "Maybe he's right. Maybe he's right. Perhaps these are the plans we'll build from. Let's have 'em, son. You're just in time; and if these plans are as good as Wyatt says, we'll give your father the contract; and he deserves it, if we may judge by his boy."

A great deal that Ted did n't understand followed—an argument of several minutes, through which he sat by a window, watching the street below, and wondering if he would get anything to eat that day.

Then at last Mr. Wyatt came to him, and taking him by the hand, asked him if he was hungry; and then, after having the officer telephone to headquarters for permission to leave the boy with Mr. Wyatt, with the understanding that that gentleman would be responsible to the police department, and produce him if necessary, he took the boy to a little delicious early luncheon at a big restaurant, where Ted lost his headache and became happier. And then he went back to Mr. Wyatt's office, where he stretched out on a big leather couch in an inner room and slept the long afternoon through.

Mr. Wyatt took him to the docks that night to meet the boat and his father; and when the big steamer made her landing, Mr. Bronson clasped a very happy though tearful little son in his arms, while he himself was so glad to find the boy safe that he forgot all about the plans and the failure, to which he had been trying to reconcile himself, while he told Ted with much self-blame how he had been left by the steamer through having gone ashore on an errand and having mistaken the time for returning.

And then Mr. Bronson turned, supposing a police officer had brought Ted to the dock; but, instead, he found Mr. Wyatt, who put out his hand and said quickly: "Congratulations, Bronson! The boy has won the day for you. Your plans were approved and accepted."

"How—what?" exclaimed Mr. Bronson.

And then Mr. Wyatt told the whole tale. Of course we liked the plans, you know," he said at the end, "but the boy cinched the decision; for Captain Clarke took an immense fancy to his having come away over here alone, and having the nerve to deliver the plans even in spite of the officer—in spite of his fright and going all morning without any breakfast. He really likes the plans; but he likes the boy, too, and he says it's the boy's contract."

"Well, I guess it is, Wyatt," said Mr. Bronson, holding his little son's hand tightly. "I guess it's Ted's contract, for I would have missed it, sure."



Down beneath the rolling ocean,
At the bottom of the sea,
Lived a Shrimp who had a notion
That a perfect shrimp was he.
He was bright and he was pretty,
Clever, too, and rather witty;
He was jimp, distinctly jimp,
Was this pleasing little Shrimp;
So, of course, as you may see,
He was all a shrimp should be.

As the Shrimp one day was sitting
Here and there and all around,
He beheld a Cockle sitting
On a little sandy mound.
And he said, "O Cockle deary,
You look rather sad and weary;

I will sing to you a song,
Not too short and not too long;
And I'm sure you will agree
It is all a song should be,
It is all a song should be."

Then the Shrimp, with smiles of pleasure,
Took his banjo on his knee,
And he played a merry measure
Like a Carol or a Glee;
And he sang a catch so jolly,
All of frolic, fun, and folly,
All of merriment and play,
All of mirth and laughter gay;
And I'm sure you'll all agree
That is all a catch should be,
That is all a catch should be.