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CHAPTER I.

BY FRANCES A. SCHNEIDER.

I'll be glad when Mr. Hilliard comes back. I feel awful lonesome without him. And often I sit at the window and look down into the churchyard opposite for hours at a time, without anything to do or anyone to talk to—just waiting for Mr. Johnson, that's Mr. Hilliard's partner—to send me on some errand. There ain't much for an office boy—that's what I am—to do in an architect's office, seems to me; and Mr. Johnson don't show me anything about drawing "plans," like Mr. Hilliard does, when he's here. And I get tired reading.

I've read two histories and a book on ancient architecture and an autobiography, right through in the last three weeks. It was the autobiography that set me to thinking I'd write something about myself. I s'pose I haven't begun just right, and ought to have started out something like this: "When my great-great-grandfather stepped off the Mayflower onto Plymouth Rock," etc., but I don't know much about my great-great-grandfather, and if he did come over on the Mayflower, it's so long ago that nobody remembers anything about it. I won't go back any further than my mother. She's Mrs. Mary Howard, widow, as they say in the directory. She has three other children besides me, but as they don't have anything to do with the part of my autobiography that I'm going to tell about, I'll leave them out altogether.

My name's Jack, and I'm thirteen years old. My mother took me away from school and put me in this office, because she couldn't afford to keep me home any longer without my earning anything. Mr. Hilliard's teaching me to draw, and by-and-by I'll be a draughtsman, I s'pose.

Mr. Hilliard's been awful kind to me. So's Mr. Johnson, only he's different and I don't like him so well. I've never quite trusted him since the day he got so raging mad because I put four match heads under the legs of his chair and made him jump when he sat down. He don't take things like that the way Mr. Hilliard does.

Everything I know about architecture, Mr. Hilliard taught me, and he thinks I'm getting to draw real well. Sometimes we'd go for long walks together after office hours, and he'd take me to a restaurant and give me a splendid dinner. Once he told me about his girl and showed me her picture. My! but it was stunning. I knew he had a girl, because he always got letters from her twice a week; and I'd posted letters for him directed to Miss Stella Waldron, St. Paul's Street, B.—I used to hear him and Mr. Johnson talking about her; and my mother knew Mr. Hilliard's mother a long time ago. She's an invalid and Miss Waldron has lived with her ever since she was a little girl. She ain't a real relative, but she's just like a daughter to Mrs. Hilliard.

Mr. Hilliard only used to go home once in a great while, because it's a long way from here and he was busy most of the time and didn't like to leave his work. I used to watch him on the days when he'd get a letter from Miss Waldron. He always read it through three

times—then he'd put it into his breast pocket, looking as pleased as Punch. I looked out for those letters as much as he did, and was glad when the postman brought an extra fat one.

One Saturday morning—it was the first of June, I remember—I got down here very early and was setting everything nice and straight in the office, when the postman came; it was Miss Waldron's letter day, and sure enough there was one from her. I laid it on Mr. Hilliard's table with his other mail and went on with my dusting. When I'd got through, I went over and sat down at the table. There was a five-cent Columbian stamp on Miss Waldron's letter and I took it up to look at it. I save all the Columbian stamps I can get hold of and sell 'em—Mr. Hilliard always gives me his—and five centers are worth a good deal. I noticed that among the other letters there was one in a black-edged envelope, and all of a sudden, I began to wonder how Miss Waldron's would look if the edges were black. I've often made black-edged envelopes and you can do it awful easy with India ink—so you never can tell them from real ones. I thought it would be fun to fool Mr. Hilliard, so I just ruled the envelope about half an inch from the edges and then put on the India ink as thick as I could with a brush—ever so many coats of it. When I'd finished, it looked just perfect, and no one could have told it wasn't a mourning letter.

Mr. Hilliard came down before Mr. Johnson that morning, and he'd no sooner got into the office than he sent me off on an errand, so I couldn't see him when he got the letter. I was awful disappointed, but I had to go. When I got back he was sitting at the desk with the letter in his hand. He hadn't touched his other letters, and was reading this one over and over again. He looked kind of mad and pale, and when I came to tell him what Mr. Brown, the gentleman he'd sent me to, had said, he looked at me quite sharply as I'd never seen him look before, but when he spoke, his voice was just the same as it always is. After awhile he folded up the letter, but instead of putting it into a pigeon-hole of his desk.

That afternoon he gave me a letter to post to Miss Waldron. It was so slim, it most slipped through my fingers as I was carrying it. It was a long time before he got an answer, and when one did come, it was as thin as thin could be. He just read it once and then laid it down—and he got as pale and as queer-looking as I don't know what. Then he called me—and he said:

"Jack, can you remember anything about the letters that came for me last Saturday?"

I remembered Saturday, not because of what I'd done to Mr. Hilliard, but because I'd got down early and had found a ten-cent piece in the hall, and had fooled the

elevator boy so he threatened to break my head; but when Mr. Hilliard spoke of his letters, I remembered the trick I'd played on him, and all of a sudden, I thought that perhaps somehow that had something to do with the thinness of Miss Waldron's letter—and I was afraid I'd gone and done it.

I felt myself get awful red, but Mr. Hilliard was looking out of the window and didn't see my face; so I said, yes, I remembered about his letters. He'd got six in the morning and four in the afternoon.

Then he said: "You know Miss Waldron's writing, don't you Jack? Do you remember how her letter looked that day?"

"Yes," said I, feeling awful guilty and as if I'd like to sink through the floor. "I saw you pick it up; it was in a black-edged envelope."

He gave a sort of sigh and said: "That's all, Jack."

I thought I'd tell him and began: "Oh, Mr. Hilliard, I—" But he said:

"After awhile, Jack; I'm busy now, my boy."

Just then Mr. Johnson came in, and as soon as he saw Mr. Hilliard, he said:

"Why, what's the matter, Hilliard? You look as if you'd lost your best friend."

And Mr. Hilliard said he felt as if he had.

I was sitting over at my little table here, and couldn't help hearing all they said—and I didn't try to help it either, but they never minded me. And Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Hilliard if he'd had bad news from home, and Mr. Hilliard said, yes, he had, and then he said:

"Curse that mourning envelope!"

"What mourning envelope do you mean?" said Mr. Johnson.

Then Mr. Hilliard said: "Oh, I forgot, Johnson, you don't know what I'm talking about."

Then he told Mr. Johnson that the week before Miss Waldron had written to him, telling of his mother's severe illness and saying she felt awful uneasy, but that the doctor said there was no immediate danger, and that he mustn't worry nor think of coming on, because his mother had begged her not to mention to him that she was worse. Only if she didn't improve very soon, Miss Waldron said she'd send him word at once. Three days afterward he got a letter from Miss Waldron enclosed in a mourning envelope. It gave him an awful shock, and the letter said that Mrs. Hilliard was much better; but Miss Waldron didn't explain why she'd used the mourning envelope. And he was awful mad because he thought it was a heartless trick, and he wrote and told her that he was relieved to hear that his mother was better, but he couldn't understand why she'd "seen fit to announce it in the way he had," and a whole lot more about "thoughtlessness on her part" and his feelings being hurt.

TO BE CONTINUED.



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