

Only a Farm Boy

Or

Dan Hardy's Rise in Life

BY

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“I’LL GET HIM NOW!” CRIED DAN.—

ONLY A FARM BOY

CHAPTER I

AN ANGRY FARMER

“HEY there, Dan Hardy, what ye doin’ now?”

“I’m oiling the corn sheller, Mr. Savage. It needed it.”

“Huh! Guess ye wanted t’ take a rest, an’ that was your excuse fer it. Git t’ work now, an’ don’t let me see you loafin’ agin. What do ye s’pose I keep ye fer, anyhow?”

“I’m trying to do the best I can,” replied Dan, speaking respectfully but firmly to the miserly old farmer for whom he worked for his board and clothes.

“Th’ best ye can, eh? Wa’ll, some folks’ best ain’t very good, t’ my way of thinkin’. Here ye’ve been most all th’ mornin’ shellin’ a few bushels of corn, an’ there’s lots of other chores t’ be done. Ye’ve go t’ git a hustle on ye, ef ye stay ’round here, an’ th’ sooner ye git that notion inter yer head th’ better it’ll be fer ye,” and the mean farmer shook his fist in the boy’s face.

“I know I have to work for you, Mr. Savage,” answered Dan, as he again began to turn the heavy wheel of the corn sheller, and feed the yellow ears into the chute. “I did not stop to rest, as you suppose, but the sheller needed oiling. It was not working right.”

“Guess ye thought it’d be a leetle easier if ye put some grease on it, that’s what ye mean. An’ I don’t want ye wastin’ my oil, nuther. Oil costs money, I’d have ye know, and money is mighty skurse these days.”

“I guess it is, as far as I’m concerned,” murmured Dan to himself, as he bent his back to his work. “I haven’t seen any money of my own in so long that I don’t believe I’d recognize it if a quarter of a dollar spoke to me,” and he smiled a bit, in spite of the mean words of his employer.

“Now mind what I told ye,” went on the farmer, as he started to leave the barn. “Don’t let me catch ye loafin’ any more, or ye won’t git off so easy.”

“What do you mean, Mr. Savage?”

“Never mind what I mean. Don’t you talk back to me! Keep on turnin’ that sheller.”

Dan had stopped a moment in his work, while he asked the question, and this seemed to further anger Mr. Savage.

“Now mind,” concluded the man, as he left the barn, “Lively’s the word on this farm, an’ ef I catch any of my hired men loafin’ I’ll take it out of their wages, that’s what I’ll do.”

“He’d have hard work taking it out of mine,” thought Dan, as his employer left him. “He’ll have to cut off the tails of some of the old coats he gives me, or shorten my trousers, or wear down the old shoes so the soles are a little thinner. That’s all the wages I get, except what I eat, and goodness knows, if he begins to cut down on that, I’ll be in a bad way.”

Mr. Savage, while one of the wealthiest farmers in that locality, was considered by his neighbors as a miserly sort of a man, and they were not far from it. He owned over a hundred acres of good farm and grazing land, with some timber, a large house and substantial barns. His main farm was about two miles from the

village, though he owned pastures and lots here and there throughout the township. Some of this land he had come into possession of by foreclosing mortgages in a most peremptory manner.

Dan continued to work the corn sheller, a machine built to take the kernels of corn from the cob. He turned a big wheel with one hand, and fed the ears into the chute with the other. From a spout the yellow grains fell into a bushel basket, while the cobs were tossed out on the other side into a heap.

“I wonder what he meant, when he said I wouldn’t get off so easy,” reflected Dan. “Could he mean that he’ll whip me? I don’t believe I’d stand that. I think I’d run away, though where I could go, with no money, and only a few ragged clothes, is more than I know. Oh, dear, I wish mother was alive,” and in spite of himself tears came into Dan’s eyes, for his mother had only been dead about a year.

Mrs. Hardy had been a widow, and, with her only son Dan, had lived just outside the village of Hayden, in one of our Eastern states. Her husband had left her a little money but she had had to spend most of it for doctor’s bills, as her health was very poor. Dan could not earn much in the village, and they had had barely enough to live on. When Mrs. Hardy died it took what little money was left for the funeral, and Dan found himself without a dollar in the world, and no friend or relative to aid him. The place he had in the general store of Hank Lee, where he earned a mere pittance, had been filled by another boy when Dan had to stay home to take care of his mother in her final illness.

It looked as if he would have to go to the poorhouse, but, almost at the last moment, Peter Savage had agreed to take the lad and give him board and clothes in exchange for work. To this Dan had agreed, but he had no idea how hard he would have to toil.

He was continually kept busy doing “chores” about the farm from early dawn until dark, and, even then he was not through, for Susan Savage, Peter’s wife, used to make Dan help with the housework,—drying the dishes, blackening the stove, and even doing the sweeping. She found out Dan could do these things, as he had often helped his mother.

“He’s almost as good as a hired girl,” Susan confided to her husband, “and it’s cheaper to have him than it is a girl.”

“Then make him work, Susan,” said Peter. “Work is good fer boys. None of ’em gits half enough.”

And so poor Dan worked until nearly every night he was so tired he could hardly sleep.

Dan had an ambition to be something more than a mere farm-hand. He was better educated than most boys in his circumstances, for his father had been a school teacher in a neighboring village, until failing health had caused him to resign his position.

Mr. Hardy had instructed his son in several branches, and the boy had a real love for learning, though his opportunities were small.

Among his choicest possessions, and, in fact, one of his very few left after the debts were paid for his mother’s funeral, was a small case of books of instruction.

When Dan went to work for Mr. Savage, the boy thought he would have a chance to study, but the miserly farmer was afraid Dan would waste time over the volumes, and would not consent to allow him any hour of leisure in which to advance his lessons. Dan was thus forced to pore over the books at night, and he had to be careful even in this, as, had Mr. Savage or his wife caught him at it, they would have scolded him for burning kerosene oil.

Still Dan determined to educate himself, but it was hard work. The other boys in the village used to laugh at him for trying to use correct language, but Dan did not mind that. He hoped, some day, to take a higher position in life than that of “hired man” and he wanted to be ready for it when the opportunity came. So he took good care of his little case of books, though Mr. Savage sneered at him, and often threatened to throw them out if he caught Dan “wasting” his time over them.

“I should like to run away from him,” thought the boy, as he kept on with the tiresome labor of shelling the corn, “only I’m afraid he’d make me come back. I suppose he has some sort of a claim on me until I’m of age, and that won’t be for five years. Well, there’s no use kicking. I’ve got to stand it.”

Dan was a well built, strong lad, and he was healthy, which counts for a good deal. Consequently his gloomy thoughts did not bother him long. Still he did wish he could have it a little easier in life. He would have liked to go fishing once in a while, or take a long tramp through the woods. But the only time he did not have to work all day long was Sunday, and then his employer, who was very strict as regards church, would not hear of any one taking innocent pleasures on that day.

As Dan continued to turn the corn sheller, a shadow fell across the broad patch of sunlight that streamed in the open barn door. It was the shadow of a man, and Dan glanced up, expecting to see the angry face of Mr. Savage. Instead he beheld a stranger.

“Good morning, my lad,” spoke the man, in a rather pleasant voice. “I see you are hard at work.”

“Yes, I’ve got to get all this corn shelled to-day.”

“Are you acquainted in these parts?” inquired the man, as he took a seat on an upturned peck measure.

“Yes, sir. I’ve lived here all my life.”

“Then I guess you could tell me how far it is to the village.”

“Yes, sir; it’s about two miles by the main road.”

“Do you know all the people in the village?” and the man looked sharply at Dan, who had stopped his turning of the heavy wheel to answer the questions.

“Well, hardly all of them; I know the names of most of them.”

“And where they live too, I suppose?”

“I guess I could find almost any house.”

Dan was wondering why the man was asking so many questions, and had about made up his mind that the stranger was a book agent, for occasionally such men visited the farm, though they usually went to the house instead of the barn.

“Who keeps the general store in the village—let’s see, it’s called Strawdon, isn’t it?”

“No, sir, but that’s pretty near it. The name of the town is Hayden.”

“Oh, yes, Hayden. I remember now.”

“Well,” replied Dan, “it’s not very large. There are probably five hundred persons in it. It contains a bank, several stores, a grist mill, and just outside of it is a box factory. Then there is a town hall, where the selectmen meet once a month, and a small library, but I don’t get much chance to go there.”

“Why not?”

“Well, Mr. Savage doesn’t approve of books.”

“Do you like them?”

“I am fond of reading and study, but I don’t get much opportunity.”

“That’s too bad. Who did you say kept the general store in the village?”

“I didn’t say,” replied Dan with a smile, “but Hank Lee keeps it.”

“Do you know him?”

“I used to work for him.”

“He has a brother; hasn’t he?”

“I believe he has, but I never saw him. He does not live in this part of the country.”

“What’s his name; do you know?”

“Simon, I believe. I am not sure, but I think I have heard Mr. Lee refer to him by that name. He seldom spoke of him.”

“Do you know why?”

“No, sir,” and Dan must have shown some surprise at the number of questions the man was asking, for the latter added:

“Please don’t think I am too inquisitive. I’m a stranger around here, and I’m looking for some friends. I thought the storekeeper would be the best man to inform me, and I should like to know a little about him, before I call on him.”

“I can’t tell you very much about him,” replied Dan, “as, even though I worked for him for a time, he never told me much about himself or his brother.”

“Oh, I don’t care about his brother,” said the stranger quickly. “I only asked out of curiosity. I suppose there is a doctor in the village?”

“Yes, sir, Dr. Maxwell.”

“Where is his house?”

“It’s a big red one, just off the road that goes to Flagtown.”

“Are there any houses near it?”

“No, the nearest one is about an eighth of a mile away.”

“Well, you seem to know this locality pretty well. I wonder—”

What the stranger was about to remark he did not state, as, at that moment another shadow moved across the sunlit patch, and the man jumped up quickly, looking nervously about him. It was Mr.

Savage who suddenly appeared, and, for a moment he did not notice the stranger.

“Wa'all, ye good-fer-nothin' lazy boy, loafin' ag'in, are ye!” exclaimed Mr. Savage in an angry voice. “I caught ye at it! That's what I git fer savin' ye from th' poorhouse! I'll teach ye t' waste my valuable time! I'll—”

“Mr. Savage, I only stopped for a few moments to answer some questions this gentleman was asking me,” said Dan boldly, motioning to the well dressed stranger. “I could not talk and shell corn at the same time, for he could not hear what I said. I'm sorry—”

“It's all my fault,” broke in the stranger. “I was making some inquiries of the lad, and I regret if he has incurred your displeasure. I'm sure I'll willingly pay for his time, as the information he gave was worth it,” and the man took out a well-filled wallet. At the sight of the money it contained, and at the mention of the word “pay” a change came over the face of Mr. Savage.

CHAPTER II

THE DANGEROUS BULL

“WHY, of course,” began Mr. Savage, while he scraped some mud off his boots with a stick, “ye know this corn has all got t’ be shelled t’ day, an’ when Dan stops, th’ work ain’t goin’ on. Work is money, an’ when he don’t work I lose jest so much money.”

“I understand,” replied the stranger quickly. “I am a business man myself, and I’m willing to pay for whatever time I kept this young man from his work. I guess we can figure it out. We’ll say I took up about ten minutes of his time. That’s one sixth of an hour. Now how much do you pay him by the hour?”

“I don’t pay him by the hour,” replied Mr. Savage, a little confused.

“Well, by the day, then.”

“I don’t pay him by th’ day, nuther.”

“Oh, I see. You hire him by the week.”

“No, sir, not exactly. Dan, git on with that shellin’. There ain’t no call fer ye t’ stand loafin’ now. Me an’ this gentleman kin settle our business between ourselves.”

The truth was he did not want Dan to hear what was said, as Mr. Savage was just a little bit ashamed of himself. Dan began feeding the yellow ears into the chute, but the noise of the sheller did not prevent him hearing what was said further.

“Then if you’ll tell me what his week’s wages are, I think I can figure out what I owe you,” and the stranger took out pencil and paper.

“Wa’al, he don’t exactly work by the week nuther.”

“That’s so, I’d forgotten. Farm hands generally work for so much a month and their board. What are his monthly wages?”

“Look a-here!” exclaimed Mr. Savage. “That’s my affair. What right ye got t’ come around here, askin’ me my business?”

“No right,” replied the stranger coolly, “only I wanted to make up for the time I kept this boy from his work.”

“Wa’al, I guess ef ye give me a quarter we’ll call it square.”

“I’m satisfied if you are,” replied the stranger, passing over the money. “Twenty-five cents for ten minutes, is at the rate of a dollar and a half an hour. In ten hours, which, I believe, is the farm day, he earns fifteen dollars. That’s very good wages for a boy like him.”

“Look a-here!” blustered Mr. Savage. “I don’t pay him no fifteen dollars a day, an’ ye know it. No farm-hand gits that much; I don’t myself. But if ye come around here, stickin’ yer nose in my business, ye got t’ pay fer it, that’s all. Now ye’d better git away from here fer I might charge ye rent,” and he grinned in a malicious manner.

“Thank you, I’m just about to leave,” said the man, as he walked out of the barn.

“Wa’al, ye’d better.”

The stranger smiled as he walked away, and Dan, watching him, saw him take a little red book out of his pocket, and write something in it.

“Do ye know that man?” asked Mr. Savage, turning to Dan, when the stranger was out of sight down the road, which ran in front of the barn.

“No, sir. He came in here and began asking me questions.”

“What kind?”

“About the people and houses in the village.”

“Humph! Some pesky book agent, I’ll bet half a cooky.”

“I don’t know what he was,” replied Dan. “He said he was looking for a friend, and he wanted to know about Mr. Lee’s brother, Simon.”

“That good-for-nothing? Wa’al, ef he’s a friend of Simon Lee, I ain’t got no use fer him. Now you git on with yer work, an’ don’t stand talkin’ here all day. Ye’ve got t’ shell that corn before night, or ye’ll have t’ do it after ye help Mrs. Savage with th’ house work.”

Dan again bent his back to the task, turning the big wheel faster to make up for the time he had lost through no fault of his own. Mr. Savage pocketed the quarter the man had given him, first biting it to see that it was not a lead one.

“When ye git done here I want ye t’ go down t’ th’ south pasture, an’ let th’ old black bull out, an’ inter the upper lot,” he called to Dan, raising his voice to be heard above the noise of the corn

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