

Jack the Runaway

Or

On the Road with a Circus

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

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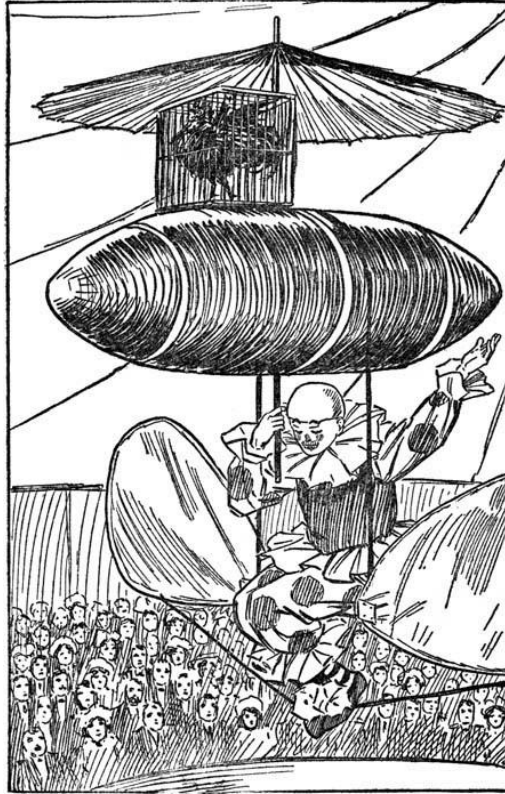
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JACK THE RUNAWAY



“Jack excelled himself”

CHAPTER I

JACK WANTS A DOLLAR

“PROFESSOR, will you please give me a dollar?” asked Jack Allen, of the elderly man who sat reading a book in the library.

“A dollar, Jack?” and Professor Simonedes Klopper, who had retired from the position of mathematical instructor in a large college, to devote his declining years to study, looked over the rims of his big glasses at the boy before him. “A dollar? Why, what in the world do you want of a dollar, Jack?”

“I—I want to go to a show,” and Jack rather hesitated for he was doubtful over the outcome of his request.

“A show?” and the professor’s eyes opened so wide that, seen through the powerful lenses of his glasses, they reminded Jack of the orbs of a cuttlefish.

“Yes, professor. There’s going to be a show in town to-night, and I’d like to go. All the boys will be there.”

“Does it cost a dollar to go to a—er—a performance?”

“No; not exactly. The tickets are fifty cents, but I wanted a little extra to treat some of my chums with.”

“Treat? Ah, yes, I presume you mean to furnish some sort of refreshment for your youthful companions.”

“Yes, sir. Can I have the money? I haven’t drawn all my allowance this month.”

“No; you are correct there. There is still a balance of two dollars and thirteen cents in your allowance account for this month, computing the interest at six per cent. But I shall not give you the dollar.”

“Why not?”

“Why not? Because I don’t choose to.”

“My father would, if he was here.”

“Well, he isn’t here, and I’m in charge of you, and the money your parents left for your care and support while they are away. I most certainly shall not give you a dollar to waste on any such foolishness as what you term a ‘show’ by which I apprehend that you mean a performance of some character.”

“It’s a vaudeville show,” went on Jack. “It’s real funny.”

“Funny!” ejaculated the professor with a snort. “Fun is a very poor substitute for knowledge, young man. If you have an evening to spare you should spend it on your books. You are very backward in your Latin and mathematics. When I was your age I used to devote my entire evening to working out problems in algebra or geometry.”

“Will you give me fifty cents?” asked Jack desperately, not wishing to let the professor get too deep into the matter of study.

“Fifty cents? What for?”

“Well, I can go to the show for that, but I wanted some to treat the boys with. They’ve bought sodas for me several times, now, and I want to pay them back.”

“Humph! That is all the rising generation thinks of! Having a good time, and eating! No, Jack, I shall not give you a dollar for any such purpose. And I will not give you fifty cents. Do you know that one dollar, put out at six per cent, will, if the interest be compounded, amount in one hundred years, to three hundred and forty dollars? Think of it! Three hundred and forty dollars!”

“But I don’t expect to live a hundred years, professor. Besides, it’s my money,” spoke Jack, with just the least bit of defiance in his tone.

“It is, to a certain extent,” answered the crusty old professor, “but I am the treasurer and your guardian. I shall certainly not permit you to waste your substance in riotous living.”

“I don’t call it riotous living to go to a vaudeville show once in a while, and buy an ice cream soda,” retorted Jack.

“You know nothing about it; nothing whatever. Now if you had asked me for a dollar, to buy some book, that would impart to you useful knowledge, I would have complied at once. More than this, I would have helped you select the book. I have a list of several good ones, that can be purchased for a dollar.”

“I don’t want any books,” murmured Jack.

“You shall have no dollar to spend foolishly.”

“I don’t think it’s foolish,” insisted Jack. “Look here, professor, I’ve been studying hard, lately. I haven’t had any fun in a good while. This is the first chance I’ve had to go to a show, and I think you might let me go. Dad would if he was here.”

“You shall not go. I think I know what is best for you.”

“Then I’m going anyhow!” burst out Jack. “I’m not going to stay shut up in the house all the while! I want a little recreation. If you don’t give me the dollar, I’ll——”

“What will you do?” asked the professor quickly, shutting his book, and standing up. “Don’t you dare to threaten me, young man! What will you do if I don’t give you the dollar? I shall write to your father. The postal authorities must have located him and your mother by this time, even if they are in China.”

“Haven’t you had any word yet?” asked Jack, a new turn being given to his thoughts.

“No; and it is very strange. All trace of them seems to be lost after they left Hong Kong, but the letters will finally reach them. I shall inform Mr. Allen of your conduct.”

“I think he’d say I was right,” murmured Jack.

“That would make no difference to me,” declared the professor. “I know my duty and I am going to do it. But you have not answered my question. What did you threaten to do if I did not give you the dollar?”

“I didn’t threaten anything.”

“You were going to.”

“I was going to say if you didn’t give me the dollar I’d go to the show anyhow.”

“How can you go if you have no money?”

“I’ll find a way. Please, Professor Klopper, advance me a dollar from my allowance that dad left with you for me.”

“Not one penny for such a frivolous use as that,” replied the professor firmly. “Now let me hear no more about it.”

“Well, I’m going!” fired back Jack. “I’m bound to see that show, and have a good time once in a while.”

“That will do!” cried the professor so sharply that Jack was startled. “Go to your room at once. I will deal with you later. I never inflict any punishment when I am angry, and you have very nearly made me so. I will attend to your case later. Go to your room at once!”

There was no choice but to obey. Slowly Jack left the library, and mounted the stairs to his own apartment. His heart was bitter, and he was not a little worried concerning his father and mother, for, since Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester Allen had reached China, on their trip around the world, news had been received that there had been serious uprisings against the “foreign devils” as the Mongolians call people not of their race.

Jack Allen, who was a bright, sturdy youth, of about sixteen years, lived in the town of Westville, in one of our Eastern States. He was an only child, and his parents were well off.

Mr. Allen was very fond of travel, and so was his wife, but they had had little chance to gratify their tastes. A short time before this story opens Mr. Allen’s firm had some business to transact abroad, in several countries. Mr. Allen was offered the chance to go, and, as it was a long-awaited opportunity he decided to take his wife, and, while they were about it, make a tour of the world.

Jack begged hard to be allowed to go, but, as it would have broken up his schooling, and as his father wanted him to become an electrical engineer, he was, much against his will, left at home.

Jack attended the Westville Academy, and was one of the best students in that institution. When his parents decided to make their long trip, they discussed several plans of having their son taken care of while they were away. Finally they decided to send him to live with a former college instructor, Professor Klopper, who was an eminent authority on many subjects.

The professor was a bachelor, and, with an elderly sister, lived in a somewhat gloomy house on the outskirts of Westville.

There Jack had been for about a year, attending school in the meanwhile.

He had never liked Professor Klopper, for the aged man was crabbed and dictatorial, and very stern when it came to lessons. He made Jack study more than any other boy who went to the academy, and was continually examining him at home, on what he had learned in school. This, undoubtedly, was good for Jack's scholarship, but the boy did not like it.

Mr. Allen had arranged that the professor should have complete charge of Jack, and a goodly sum had been left with the scientist for the keep of the boy.

"Give him a little spending money," Mr. Allen had said to the professor, "and see that he does not waste it."

The trouble was that the mathematical mind of the professor and the more liberal one of Jack's father differed as to what a "little spending money" was, and what was meant by "wasting" it.

The consequence was that Jack led a very miserable life with the professor, but he was too manly a lad to complain, so his letters to

his parents said nothing about the disagreeable side of his sojourn with the former college teacher.

But, of late, there had come no letters from Mr. and Mrs. Allen. Jack's boyish epistles had not been replied to, and the professor's long effusions, containing precise reports as to his ward's progress, were not answered.

All trace of Mr. and Mrs. Allen was lost when they got to China, though up to now Jack had not worried about them, as he realized that mail in some foreign countries is not as certain as it is in the United States.

"Professor Klopper is the meanest old codger that ever lived!" exclaimed Jack, as he mounted the stairs to his room. "I wish dad and mother would come back. It's been a long time since I've seen them, and things are getting worse here instead of better. The idea of not giving me a dollar!

"All the fellows are saying sneering things about me, too," he went on, "because I don't treat oftener. How can I treat when I don't get any money? I've a good notion to write to dad, and tell him about it. If I only knew his exact address I would, but I'll have to ask old Klopper, and then he'll catch on. No, I suppose I've got to stand it. But I wish I could see that show to-night. I wonder if I couldn't raise the money somehow? I might borrow it—no, that wouldn't do. I don't know when I could pay it back. If I had something I could sell——"

He thought a moment, and then an idea came to him.

“My catching glove!” he exclaimed. “It’s a good one yet, and Tom Berwick will give me a dollar for it. If I play shortstop this summer I’ll not need it. I’ll sell that.”

Jack, who had been rather downhearted, felt better after he had reached this decision. He began rummaging in a closet that contained various articles, more or less intimately connected with boyish sports, and presently withdrew a large, padded catching glove.

“It cost seven dollars, just before dad went away,” he remarked. “It’s worth three now, but I’ll let Tom have it for a dollar. That will give me enough to go to the show and treat the crowd I owe sodas to. I’ll do it. I’ll go to the show, no matter what Klopper says. But I’ve got to sneak out, for if he sees me he’ll stop me. Most likely he’ll be reading in the library this evening.”

Jack knew his temporary guardian would not make him remain in his room without supper, for the professor was not needlessly cruel. As the June afternoon was drawing to a close, Miss Klopper, the professor’s sister, came to Jack’s door.

“Here is your supper,” she said, handing in a tray, none too well filled. “My brother says you are to remain in your room until tomorrow morning, when he hopes you will have repented. I hope you will, too. Boys are such perverse creatures.”

Jack said nothing. He took the tray, for he was very hungry. But he did not intend to remain in his room all that evening, when there was a vaudeville show in town.

“It won’t be the first time I’ve gotten out of the window,” thought Jack, when Miss Klopper had closed the door.

CHAPTER II

AT THE SHOW

JACK knew there was little fear of detection, for, on several other occasions, when he had been denied the privilege of going out on an evening, he had climbed from the window of his room, out on the roof of a low shed, and, by means of the lightning rod, to the ground. He intended doing it this time.

He finished his supper, and wished it had been larger. But he consoled himself with the reflection that he could fill the void in his stomach later with an ice cream soda.

“Now to get out,” said Jack, as he went to the door and listened, to see if the professor or his sister was about. He heard nothing.

It was a small matter for the boy to get out of the window. He had wrapped the big catching glove up in a paper, and he dropped it out of the casement, so that he might have both hands free with which to climb down.

“So far, so good,” he murmured, as he picked up the glove, and started down a rear path to get beyond the house, when he would strike out for the village. But, just as he thought he was safe, he heard some one moving on the other side of a large lilac bush, and, before he could get out of the way, he was confronted by Miss Klopper. She had been out to feed a late supper to a hen and some little chickens in the lower part of the garden.

“Does my brother know you have left your room?” asked the lady of the house.

“I don’t know,” replied Jack.

That was truthful enough, for Mr. Klopper had a habit of sneaking up to Jack’s room, to look through the keyhole, on such occasions as he sent the lad to his apartment for punishment, and the crabbed old man might, even now, have discovered the absence of his ward.

“Didn’t he tell you to stay in your room?” went on Miss Klopper.

“He did, but I don’t want to. It’s too nice out,” and Jack took in deep breaths of the air, laden with the sweet scent of roses.

“You must go back at once,” went on the spinster.

“I’m not going to,” replied Jack. “I’m going to have a good time for once in my life.”

“I shall tell my brother of your insubordinate conduct.”

“I don’t care,” fired back Jack, as he hurried on.

“What have you in that bundle?” demanded Miss Klopper, as she saw the package the youth carried.

“Something of my own.”

“I demand to know what it is!”

“And I’m not going to tell you. It’s mine, and I have a perfect right to do as I please with my own things. Suffering cats!” exclaimed Jack softly. “I wish dad and mom was home,” and, not caring to have any further discussion with Miss Klopper, he passed on, before she would have a chance to summon the professor.

Jack was a good boy at heart, and he never would do a mean act, but the professor and his sister had treated him so harshly, though perhaps they did not appreciate it, that his spirit rose in rebellion.

Life at the professor's house was becoming intolerable for Jack. How he wished his parents would come home. Yet it seemed now, with no news arriving from them, that it would be several months more before he could hope to be released from the guardianship of Mr. Klopfer.

Jack made all haste to the town, from which the professor's house was distant about a mile. He wanted to find Tom, and dispose of the glove in time to see the show from the start. He knew Tom would buy the mitt, for he had often expressed a wish to purchase it, and Tom usually had plenty of spending money.

Passing through the village streets Jack met several boys he knew.

"Going to the show?" was the question nearly every one of them asked of him.

"Sure," he replied, as though he had several dollars in his pockets, with which to buy tickets. "I'll meet you there. Seen Tom Berwick?" he went on.

"Yep. He's down in Newton's drug store buying sodas."

Jack turned his steps thither, and met Tom coming from the place. Tom was wiping his mouth in a suggestive manner.

"Why didn't you see me a minute sooner?" he asked. "I'd have bought you a soda," for Tom was a most generous lad.

"Wish you had," replied Jack. "Say, Tom, want to buy my catching glove?"

“What’s the matter with it?” asked Tom quickly, for he had several times before offered to purchase the big mitt, only to be met with a refusal. “Ain’t it any good?”

“Sure, it’s good!”

“Then what you want to sell for?”

“Well, I’m going to play short this season, and I don’t need a catching glove. It’s a dandy. Look at it,” and Jack handed it to Tom, having taken off the paper wrapping when he was out of sight of the professor’s house.

“It’s all right,” acknowledged Tom, after a critical inspection. “How much?”

“Give me two dollars?”

Jack had his own ideas about finance.

“Go on. I will not.”

“It cost seven.”

“Yes; two seasons ago. I can get a new one for three dollars.”

“Not like that.”

“Well, maybe not, but good enough.”

“I’ll let you have it for a dollar and a half,” went on Jack. “That’s cheap enough.”

“Give you a dollar,” replied Tom quickly, who knew how to bargain.

“All right,” and Jack sighed a little. He had hoped to get enough to put aside some cash for future emergencies.

Tom passed over the dollar. Then he tried on the glove. It certainly was a good one.

“Come on in and I’ll treat you to a soda,” he proposed generously, for he decided that he had obtained a bargain, and could afford to treat.

“Going to the show?” asked Tom, as the two came out of the drug store.

“Sure. That’s what I sold the glove for.”

“What’s the matter? Don’t your dad send you any money?”

“Yes, he left some for me, but it’s like pulling teeth to get it from old Klopper. He wouldn’t give me even fifty cents to-night, and he sent me to my room. But I sneaked out, and I’m going to have some fun.”

“That’s the way to talk! He’s a regular hard-shell, ain’t he?”

“I should say yes! But come on, or maybe we won’t get a good seat.”

“Oh, I got my ticket,” replied Tom. “Besides, I want to take this glove home. I’ll see you there.”

Jack hastened to the town auditorium, where, occasionally, traveling theatrical shows played a one-night stand. There was quite a throng in front of the box office, and Jack was afraid he would not get a seat, but he managed to secure one well down in front.

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