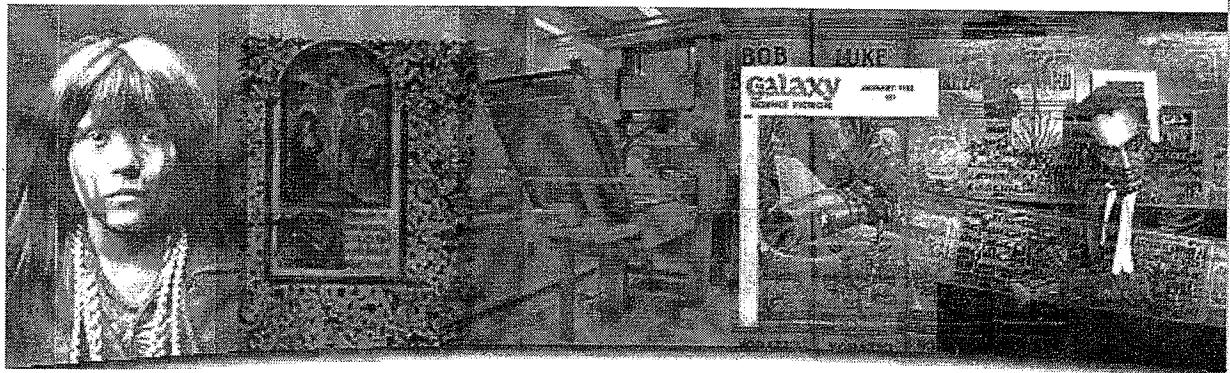


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## Who Shall Win: A Story of School Life by Horatio Alger, Jr.

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"Young gentlemen," said Doctor Folio, Principal of the Oakland Classical Academy, "I am desirous of encouraging the study of English composition among you, and with this object in view I offer a prize of ten dollars for the best essay handed in by any of your number, during the present term, upon the subject which I am about to announce."

There was a hush of expectation as the doctor paused.

"The subject will be, 'The lessons to be learned from the life and character of George Washington.' I have made this selection because you are all familiar with the career and characteristics of this great man, and will, therefore, work on an equal footing."

Doctor Folio proceeded to announce the required length of the essays, and the date at which they must be handed in. He concluded thus:

"Your manuscripts must be neatly written, and free from blots. A slovenly manuscript will fail to receive the prize, whatever its literary merits."

This announcement was received with profound interest by the fifty pupils of the academy. All considered the prize well worth trying for. To a school-boy ten dollars represent a large sum. Then, again, the honor of carrying it off would be great, and confer an honorable distinction upon the lucky winner. Of course, all the boys spoke of the prize-offer at home.

One of the boys most interested was Julian Holmes, son of a prominent lawyer in Oakland.

"It is an excellent thought of Doctor Folio," said Mr. Holmes, in a tone of approval. "I take it for granted, Julian, that you will compete."

"I certainly shall, father," said Julian.

"Your chance ought to be a good one. You are a very good writer for a boy."

"Yes, father, I think my chance is good. I only wish I felt sure of it. The successful writer is to read his essay aloud at the exhibition on the last day of the term."

Julian's face flushed as he said this, for he was very ambitious, and had a large share of approbateness. That is, he enjoyed the esteem and respect of his fellow-pupils and his friends.

It would be very gratifying to me, Julian, if you should win the prize," his father said.

"I will do my best, father."

"A father is naturally proud of the success of his children," continued Mr. Holmes. "I am so desirous that you should win this prize that I will make you an additional offer."

Julian listened eagerly.

"You have often asked me to buy you a row-boat, Julian."

"Yes, father."

"Should you carry off this prize, I will buy you one that you may feel proud of."

"Oh, thank you, father!" said Julian, his eyes sparkling with pleasure. "How kind you are! There is nothing I should like so well."

"Don't thank me yet, Julian," returned his father, with a smile. "Bear in mind that you haven't won the prize, or got the boat yet."

"But I mean to have both, father," said Julian, confidently.

"I hope you may, my boy. You may be sure that I shall have great pleasure in carrying out my part of the contract."

There was no fear now but that Julian would exert himself to the utmost. That his chances were excellent, all his schoolmates were agreed. Indeed, it was generally thought that the prize lay between him and Harry Carter, a boy of about his own age.

There was a great deal of difference between the two rivals in social position, though as regards scholarship and talent they were on an equality.

Julian, as I have said, was the son of a prominent lawyer, whose large professional income enabled him to live in handsome style; while Harry was the son of a poor widow, and paid his tuition by sweeping out the academy, and acting as janitor. He received a small weekly sum in addition to his tuition.

I am glad to say that Harry was none the less respected by his school-fellows because he performed these menial duties. He was a frank, manly boy, and as popular as Julian. In fact, the two boys were excellent friends, although they were rivals—a fact which was creditable to both.

Some poor boys are disagreeably envious of their more fortunate companions, and some rich boys are mean enough to look down upon those who occupy a lower social position.

Harry Carter was quite as much interested as Julian in the announcement which the principal had made. He was honorably ambitious of the distinction which would accrue to the winner of the prize; and, moreover, the ten dollars would be a material help to his mother.

It was certain to go to her, if won; for Harry had no idea of appropriating the money selfishly. He knew what a hard struggle with the world his mother had, and he was anxious to help her in every way.

"I shall be a happy boy if I win that prize, mother," he said, when he returned home from school. "Think how much good ten dollars will do us."

"That is true, Harry; but there is something more. I shall be proud of you if you succeed."

"So shall I, mother," said Harry, frankly, laughing as he spoke.

"Your chance ought to be good, Harry," said his mother.

"It is good. The boys seem to think it will be between Julian Holmes and myself."

"Then Julian is a good writer?" inquired Mrs. Carter, anxiously.

"Excellent! I think, mother, honestly, that he stands rather a better chance than I."

"That is because you are modest, Harry," said Mrs. Carter, who, like most mothers, was a little inclined to over-estimate her boy.

"No, mother, I am not particularly modest, but in calculating the chances I can't help feeling that Julian stands fully as good a chance as I, and perhaps better."

Harry needed no other incentive to exertion, but one was added. A day or two later, he carried the quarter's rent to Mr. Delano, a dealer in books and stationery, who owned the small cottage tenanted by Mrs. Carter. He, too, had a son enrolled among the students at the academy.

"Well, Harry," said Mr. Delano, pleasantly, "are you going to win the prize Doctor Folio has offered?"

"I am going to try, sir."

"My son tells me that you are one of the leading competitors."

"I think I have a fair chance, sir," said Harry, modestly.

"Whom do you fear most?"

"Julian Holmes."

"So he is your chief rival? I hope it don't disturb your friendship."

"Not at all, sir. Julian is a splendid fellow; and, if I can't win, I hope he will."

"That is the right spirit, my boy. I am glad you are free from envy and jealousy. I know Julian, and agree with you that he is an excellent boy. Yet I hope you may win, because you need it more."

"Julian will do his best. His father has promised to buy him a handsome row-boat if he succeeds."

"And what extra inducement have you?"

"Nothing, sir, beyond the ten dollars. That sum will be very useful to mother. She will be very much pleased with my success; but she cannot afford to offer me anything."

"Of course, not, Harry; but I can."

Harry looked at the bookseller with surprise. What could he mean?

"I feel very friendly to you and your mother," the bookseller went on. "Your father was a schoolmate of mine. Now for my proposal. If you win this prize, I will take you into my store at a salary of five dollars a week—that is, if you care to come."

Harry's eyes sparkled with pleasure. He felt as if a fortune were promised him.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Delano!" he said. "There is nothing I should like better. It would make us very comfortable."

"Then do your best to earn the place, my boy."

"You may be sure I shall do my best, sir; but I will ask one favor."

"What is that, Harry?"

"Don't let my mother hear of your kind offer."

"Why not?" asked the bookseller, looking puzzled.

"Because, sir, she will be so much more disappointed if I fail. If I succeed, I should like to have the pleasure of telling her myself."

"You are very considerate, Harry. It shall be as you say."

So it chanced that both Julian and Harry had every inducement to labor hard for the prize.

Both began early, and, three days before the time when the essays were to be handed in, each had completed his task.

They were walking home from school together, when Julian said:

"I have a proposal to make to you, Harry."

"What is it?"

"It seems to be thought that the prize is likely to come to one of us."

"Yes."

"I would like to read yours. Suppose you come up to my house this evening. I have a room where we shall not be disturbed. We will read our essays aloud, and compare sides. Of course we will leave them unchanged, and send them in as they are."

Harry accepted the invitation with alacrity. He was anxious to learn how good an essay his competitor had written.

At eight o'clock he rung the bell, and was admitted by Julian himself, who ushered him into his pleasant little study.

The two boys sat down, and Harry produced his essay.

"Read yours first, Harry," said Julian.

Harry did so. The essay was well-conceived and well-expressed, and did the young writer credit.

Yet Julian could not help secretly thinking that his own was a little superior.

"Your essay is excellent," he said, and said it honestly.

"Now for yours, Julian," said Harry.

Julian read his essay. As he proceeded, Harry's face began to lengthen. He was not blinded by partiality for his own composition, and he could not help recognizing the superiority of his friend's.

As Julian concluded, Harry said, sadly:

"You will get the prize, Julian."

"Don't be too sure of that, Harry," said Julian, his face flushed nevertheless with pleasure at this confirmation of his own judgment. "Yours is a very good one."

"But not so good as yours."

Julian could not help noticing the sadness of Harry's tone, and his generous heart was touched.

"Harry," he said, "will you promise not to be offended at what I have to propose?"

"You would propose nothing at which I could take offense, Julian."

"Then if I win the prize, will you let me put the money in your hands, and content myself with the honor?"

"Your offer is a generous one, but I ought not to accept it."

"There is no good reason why you shouldn't, Harry. The fact is, I don't care for the money. I should like the honor, and the row-boat which my father will buy me, if I win."

"Nor do I care so much for ten dollars, Julian. A good deal more depends on my success."

"How is that?" asked Julian, surprised.

"Mr. Delano has offered to give me a place at five dollars a week if I succeed."

Julian whistled.

"Then I don't wonder you want to win, Harry," he said.

"It would be a great thing for us if I could get that place."

"Cheer up, Harry. You may win, after all. I don't feel at all sure that I shall succeed."

"I do; but we won't think any more of it this evening. I brought over my books, and, if you like, we will get our

morning's lesson together."

"Just what I should like."

At ten o'clock, Harry went home.

"Mother" he said, "I have read Julian's essay, and I think it is better than mine. I have given up all thoughts of the prize."

"My dear Harry, you are too modest. Your essay is a beautiful one. I am sure you will succeed."

Harry smiled faintly. He knew that his mother was influenced by partiality.

When Julian was left alone, he looked very sober.

"It would be a great shame that Harry should lose his prize when so much depends upon it. Can I give it up? It will be very hard, but it is the only way in which I can help poor Harry."

There was a long struggle in Julian's mind. He had set his heart upon the row-boat, and he craved the distinction of reading his prize essay at the exhibition. But he had a generous heart, and selfishness was subdued.

He deliberately dipped his pen deep in the ink, and dropped a large blot on the first page of his neatly-written essay.

"There," he said, with a sigh, "that spoils my chances."

He replaced the disfigured manuscript in his desk, and went to bed.

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Exhibition day came. It was the day on which public announcement was to be made of the winner of the English prize, and there was great excitement in the school.

What puzzled the other scholars was the sober faces of the two leading competitors, and their indisposition to talk of the matter.

"They are afraid of each other," was the general verdict. "Both are feeling anxious."

It was not till the close of the exercises that Doctor Folio proceeded to award the prize.

"Young gentlemen," he said, "of the essays presented in competition for the prize which I offered some weeks since, all are creditable. There are two which are manifestly superior to the rest. These are the essays offered by Julian Holmes and Harry Carter. The former is, on the whole, the better of the two, and would be entitled to the prize but for one fatal objection. It is disfigured by a blot, and this bars it out. I therefore adjudge the prize to Harry Carter, who will come forward and receive it."

During this speech Julian sat with downcast face, but at the close he returned Harry's benevolent look with such a friendly and cordial smile that no one would have suspected his disappointment.

Harry read his essay, and was greeted with prolonged cheers.

When the exercises were over, his friends pressed forward with congratulations. Among them was Julian.

"Dear Harry," he said, "I congratulate you heartily on your success."

"Julian," said Harry, in a low voice, "I think I understand it. You spoiled your essay to help me."

"Hush!" said Julian, smiling. "I have nothing to regret."

"I will tell Doctor Folio. You ought to have the credit of it."

"So I have. Didn't he say mine was a little better. No, Harry, let matters stand as they are."

"If it were not so important for me to win, I would not accept your sacrifice."

"You mustn't find an apology for my carelessness," said Julian, at this moment better satisfied than if the prize were his.

"I will never forget your generous kindness, dear Julian!"

And Harry pressed his hand warmly.

"What does this mean, Julian?" asked his father, angrily, when they reached home. "How could you be so inexcusably careless? You know how much I wished you to succeed."

"Let me explain, father. I don't think you will blame me after you have heard all."

Julian told the story briefly, acknowledging the hard struggle he had with himself before he could make up his mind to sacrifice his ambition on the altar of friendship.

"My dear boy," said the lawyer, his face radiant with pleasure, "I am far prouder of you than if you had won the prize. You have shown a noble heart, and you shall lose nothing by it. The row-boat shall be yours, and you shall have a better one even than I intended to give you."

So Julian obtained his boat and Harry his place, and they became warmer friends than ever. The rivalry which might have alienated less generous natures only riveted them more strongly together.