

THE STORY OF A BAD BOY

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The Story of a Bad Boy by Thomas Bailey Aldrich

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THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

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OF A BAD BOY**

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By
THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

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THE STORY OF A BAD BOY

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I INTRODUCE MYSELF

THIS is the Story of a Bad Boy. Well, not such a very bad, but a pretty bad boy; and I ought to know, for I am, or rather I was, that boy myself.

Lest the title should mislead the reader, I hasten to assure him here that I have no dark confessions to make. I call my story the story of a bad boy, partly to distinguish myself from those faultless young gentlemen who generally figure in narratives of this kind, and partly because I really was *not* a cherub. I may truthfully say I was an amiable, impulsive lad, blessed with fine digestive powers, and no hypocrite. I did not want to be an angel and with the angels stand; I did not think the missionary tracts presented to me by the Rev. Wibird Hawkins were half so nice as Robinson Crusoe; and I failed to send my little pocket-

money to the natives of the Feejee Islands, but spent it royally in peppermint-drops and taffy candy. In short, I was a real human boy, such as you may meet anywhere in New England, and no more like the impossible boy in a story-book than a sound orange is like one that has been sucked dry. But let us begin at the beginning.

Whenever a new scholar came to our school, I used to confront him at recess with the following words: "My name's Tom Bailey; what's your name?" If the name struck me favorably, I shook hands with the new pupil cordially; but if it did not, I would turn on my heel, for I was particular on this point. Such names as Higgins, Wiggins, and Spriggins were deadly affronts to my ear; while Langdon, Wallace, Blake, and the like, were passwords to my confidence and esteem.

Ah me! some of those dear fellows are rather elderly boys by this time—lawyers, merchants, sea-captains, soldiers, authors, what not? Phil Adams (a special good name that Adams) is consul at Shanghai, where I picture him to myself with his head closely shaved—he never had too much hair—and a long pig-tail hanging down behind. He is married, I hear; and I hope he and she that was Miss Wang Wang are very happy together, sitting

cross-legged over their diminutive cups of tea in a sky-blue tower hung with bells. It is so I think of him; to me he is henceforth a jewelled mandarin, talking nothing but broken China. Whitcomb is a judge, sedate and wise, with spectacles balanced on the bridge of that remarkable nose which, in former days, was so plentifully sprinkled with freckles that the boys christened him Pepper Whitcomb. Just to think of little Pepper Whitcomb being a judge! What would he do to me now, I wonder, if I were to sing out "Pepper!" some day in court? Fred Langdon is in California, in the native-wine business—he used to make the best licorice-water I ever tasted! Binny Wallace sleeps in the Old South Burying-Ground; and Jack Harris, too, is dead—Harris, who commanded us boys, of old, in the famous snowball battles of Slatter's Hill. Was it yesterday I saw him at the head of his regiment on its way to join the shattered Army of the Potomac? Not yesterday, but six years ago. It was at the battle of the Seven Pines. Gallant Jack Harris, that never drew rein until he had dashed into the Rebel battery! So they found him—lying across the enemy's guns.

How we have parted, and wandered, and married, and died! I wonder what has be-