

**ONLY
THIS
ONCE**



CHARACTER BUILDING STORIES

"I'll be in again very soon, mother; I am only going round the corner to see the new billiard rooms;" and, cap in hand, Harry was closing the parlor door when his mother called him back.



"I cannot consent to your going there, my dear," she said; "you must know that both your father and myself disapprove of all such places."

"But I don't intend to play, mother; only to look on; the boys say the tables are splendid; and besides, what could I tell Jim Ward after promising to go with him? He is waiting outside for me. Please say 'yes' only this once."

"Tell Jim that we would prefer you should not go, and ask him to walk in and spend the evening," said Harry's father, as he looked up from the paper.

"Oh, I know he won't do that!" and Harry stood turning the door-handle, till, finding that his parents did not intend to say anything more, he walked slowly to the front step.

"Why don't you hurry along," called Jim, "and not keep a fellow standing all night in the cold?"

"I am not going. Won't you come in?" said Harry.

"Not going! Your mother surely doesn't object to your looking at a billiard table."

"She would prefer I should not go," said Harry, and Jim's only reply was a very significant whistle, as he walked off.

"He'll be sure to tell all the boys!" said Harry, half aloud as he shut the front door with rather more force than was necessary. "I don't see what does make father and mother so particular." Then, entering the parlor, he took the first book that



came to hand from the table, and, taking a seat very far from the light, looked exceedingly unamiable.

His father laid aside the paper, and without seeming to notice Harry's mood, said pleasantly, "I wonder if my son feels himself too old for a story; if not I have one to tell him about only this once," The book Harry had taken up, and which chanced to be one of his father's on civil engineering, was returned to the table; but he still kept thinking of what the boys would say when Jim told an exaggerated story, and his countenance remained unchanged.

"When I was about your age, Harry, we lived next door to Mr. Allen, a very wealthy gentleman, who had one son. As Frank was a good natured, merry boy, and had his two beautiful ponies, several dogs, and a large playground, he soon made friends. Many an afternoon did



we spend together, riding the ponies, or playing ball on the playground, and one summer afternoon in particular, I never expect to forget, for it seems to me now, looking back upon it, as the turning point of Frank's life; but we little thought of such a thing at the time.

It only seemed to us a very warm afternoon; and, becoming tired of playing ball, we had stopped to rest on the piazza, when he proposed that we should take the ponies to a plank road, a few miles from the house, and race them. I was certain that his

father would disapprove of this, and, besides, it; would have been most cruel work on such a warm afternoon, so I tried to make Frank, think of something else he would like to do instead; but all in vain.

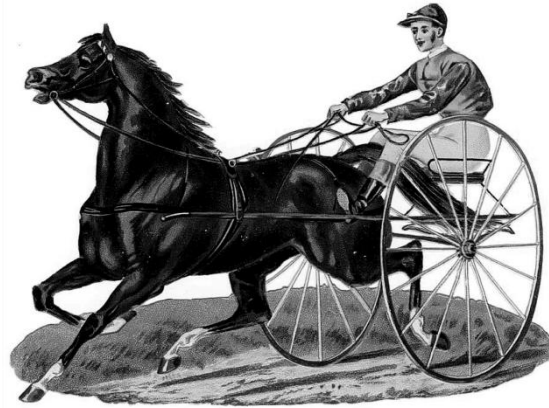
" 'I think you might go, Charlie,' he said "What's the harm of doing it; only this once? I just want to see if either of my ponies is likely to be a fast trotter.'

"For one moment I hesitated, but in the next came the thought of my father's displeasure, and I shook my head.

"Very well, just as you please, Mr. Good Boy! I know plenty who will be glad of the chance to ride Jet;' and so saying he walked off.

"Frank did find a boy who was delighted to go with him, and enjoyed the race so much that, notwithstanding his father's reprimand, he managed to pursue the same sport more times than only that once.

"As soon as the summer was ended, Mr. Allen went to Europe for his health, and I did not see his son again for three years, till I left the country and entered the same college with him. Frank commenced studying very earnestly; but before the first year was ended the earnestness had passed away. Friends would induce him to spend his evenings at their rooms, or at



some public place of amusement, and each time Frank would try to satisfy his conscience with, 'It will be only this once.' Thus by degrees his lessons were neglected, and, as study became irksome, his love for excitement and gaiety increased, till one day I overheard a gentleman, who knew him well, remark that he feared Frank's 'only this once' would prove his ruin.

"But a few years before, Frank would have been shocked with the thought of spending the afternoons in racing, and evenings in billiard saloons and such places, nor did he, at one time, ever really intend to go to the latter more than once," just to see for himself; but there are very few who ever stop in the course of wrong doing at only this once.

"When the tidings of his father's death reached Frank, he seemed more thoughtful for a time; but in an hour of temptation he yielded.



Before long his old companions surrounded him again, and of them he soon learned how to spend, in a most reckless manner, the large fortune left him by his father.

"In vain his true friends tried to stop him in his wild career; and, five years ago, Harry, Frank died a drunkard."

"Oh, father, how dreadful!" and Harry shuddered as he thought the story over.

"Yes, it is dreadful, my son; but there are countless untold stories as dreadful

as this one. If we were to visit a prison, and ask the wretched inmates how it was that they were first led into crime, we should find that 'only this once' brought most of them there. One took something which did not belong to him, never intending to do it more than that once; but the crime soon grew into a habit. Another was once tempted to gamble, and only that one game was the foundation of all his crimes.

"Learn, my son, to dread those three little words, and when tempted to use them think of all they may lead to, and ask for strength to resist the temptation; and, Harry, do you wonder now at our refusing to let you, even once, visit the billiard room?"

"No, father; I see now that you were right, and I was wrong in supposing that it could not possibly do me any harm to go only this once; and if Jim does tell the boys some silly story to make them laugh at me, I can tell them about Frank Allen, and that will sober them soon."

Dear young reader, do you think it is a trifling thing to do wrong "*only this once?*" If so, stop and think of the countless stories many wretched ones could tell you of its ruining power. Stop and pray that God will change that careless heart of yours ; and then determine solemnly, with his aid, to resist unto death temptations to do wrong "only this once."

Word Glossary

Billiard-- a type of cue sport (Pool is a type of cue sport or billiard)

Gaiety-- merrymaking

Inmates-- people confined to a prison or hospital

Irksome-- wearisome, burdensome

Piazza--A veranda or covered porch

Reprimand--rebuke

Trifling-- of little importance

Unamiable-- not friendly