

"Bring Urchin here, Tom," he ordered.

Urchin was a bear the landlord had received from the West a short time previous. Young as the specimen was, he had a vicious streak, and when in the past the boys had tormented him it was at a safe distance from the end of the rope that secured him in the rear yard at the inn.

The hostler came leading young Urchin, not half the size of the trick bear, around to the spot where the boys were congregated.

Neither the old nor the young bear discerned one another until they had been led face to face.

The trick bear stared placidly at Urchin, and then lifted his huge paw caressingly.

The latter crouched back. The sight of one of his kind, unseen since his baby days, strange and unfamiliar, seemed to awaken the wildest terror.

With a roar that resembled the yelp of a whipped cur, he tugged violently at the strap that held him in check, tore it suddenly from the hostler's hand, and made a rapid bee-line for the nearest thicket.

"Catch him, stop him!" yelled the innkeeper wildly. "I'll give a dollar to the boy who catches him!"

"And I'll win it!" cried Ned, boiling over with excitement.

He darted nimbly after Urchin as he spoke. His swift departure had been preceded by a roar of laughter. Ralph Warden, when the young bear broke loose, had been directly in bruin's path.

His instincts of courage seemed to be very defective at that moment, for his own cry of terror, as he sprang aside, resembled that of the bear, and his rapid gait, as he took to his heels, made him the target of many unmerciful jokes on his cowardice for many a day afterwards.

Plucky Ned out-distanced the hostler, who, at last, breathless and exhausted, was compelled to abandon the chase.

He found some difficulty in overtaking or even getting near the scampering runaway.

Urchin's long imprisonment seemed to make freedom worth fighting for, and fright lent an additional impetus to his dash for liberty.

The bear entered a thicket by the roadside just as Ned climbed a fence near by, under which the former had darted rapidly.

"I'll tire him out," panted Ned. "There he goes through the bushes. I've caught you, my beauty!"

His hand had indeed grasped the trailing strap, but it was torn from his fingers a moment later, and bruin, with redoubled pace, darted toward an opening skirted by a path leading to the academy.

Some pitfall caused Urchin to stumble and flounder for an instant of time ere he reached his objective point of flight--the open country.

Ned saw his opportunity, and hastened to take advantage of it. He flung himself forward, clasped both arms around bruin's neck, and held him momentarily a captive.

Urchin struggled and howled, backed and crouched and kicked. His captor never knew how he did it, but suddenly the bear drew back, and then with a lunge forward, flung Ned sheer over his head into a clump of bushes.

The discomfited boy saw Urchin resume his flight. Not ten feet away ran the path. About to continue the pursuit, Ned Darrow paused and, with a curious feeling of mingled awe and enjoyment, witnessed a ludicrous denouement to his wild chase of the fugitive animal.

For, in the path, conversing, were two gentlemen whom Ned recognized at a glance. The one was Ralph Warden's father, the other, Professor Ballentine. The

two, engaged in some animated conversation, found their colloquy suddenly and startlingly interrupted.

Urchin, blindly dashing across the road, was making swift time, and did not turn aside for trifling obstacles. He darted straight ahead, caught the Professor between the knees, slipped through, and sent the amazed object of his assault head over heels into the middle of the road.

"Gracious me! what was that?" said Professor Ballentine, as, seated in the dust, his hat rolling into the ditch, his glasses flung to the ground at his side, he stared in wild dismay at the flying Urchin.

Mr. Warden, convulsed with merriment, endeavoured to speak collectedly. "The innkeeper's bear, if I don't mistake. This is an accident, Professor!"

"Extraordinary!" gasped Professor Ballentine, as he struggled to his feet and, with his companion's assistance, recovered his hat and spectacles, and dusted and arranged his disordered apparel.

"They'll think it some trick of mine, if I show myself," murmured Ned, with a rueful glance after the fast disappearing bear.

He drew out of sight of the path, behind a tree, and regarded the bewildered Professor's plight silently.

"Are you hurt, Professor Ballentine?" inquired Mr. Warden, solicitously.

"Not a bit, only strangely startled. The bear took me clear off my balance. Don't mind the trifle. As I was saying, when I sat down, about this expedition, the boys will have a vacation that will eclipse all other years."

The kind-hearted old Professor rubbed his hands together enjoyably, forgetful of his own recent discomfiture amid the happy anticipation of pleasure for his students.

"It will, indeed," assented Mr. Warden.

"Not one of them, unless it is your son, has ever seen the ocean," continued the first speaker. "Think of it, sir!--a land journey and a sea cruise. They won't be able to contain themselves, when I tell them."

"The ocean!" muttered Ned tumultuously. "He can't mean it. Oh! won't it be grand?"

He had unawares stumbled over the cherished surprise the Professor had held in store for his scholars. Its magnitude amazed him, yet a moment later he flushed guiltily.

"An eavesdropper!" he said, deprecatingly. "I won't listen any more. I wouldn't have even heard what I have if it wasn't by accident."

He managed to draw back unperceived into the thicket, and the voices of the two men faded from his hearing.

Ned's return tramp from the pursuit of bruin was a leisurely one, and it was growing dusk when he entered the last clump of trees between himself and the village inn.

"I'll cut through the thicket to the academy again," decided Ned, and he retraced his steps along the boundary fence.

He had proceeded but a short distance when he encountered a slight mishap, and a stumble over a grass-covered log sent him headlong to the ground.

He came down with hands outspread. As he became conscious that one hand clasped what seemed to be a tied-up bundle, and the other a soft, woolly surface, he wondered if he had not stumbled over bruin, by some rapid detour come to this spot.

But even in the gathering twilight of the forest he instantly discovered his error.

It was certainly some living object he had fallen against, however, for his hand had touched a woolly