

NED DARROW;  
OR,  
THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS.

CHAPTER II.

THE RUNAWAY BEAR.

"AND the letter you spoke of told this?" inquired Ned.

"Yes, and with it was the deed conveying the sandy land to me. In the letter he made me your guardian, in a manner, directing me to sell the land if the opportunity offered, and to give you a voice in the disposition of the same. To the last, I think, he imagined there might be some value in it."

"And there was not?"

"I don't say that," he replied, evasively. "There was a bottle containing a sample of the soil among your brother's effects. My brother analyzed it."

"And found no trace of gold?"

"None. But, Ned, I have been experimenting with it. It's strange soil, and I've sometimes thought—but never mind. Wait till I'm through experimenting with it and I'll tell you. Now you know the truth."

"And am glad I do," replied Ned, heartily. "Mr. James, I have no false pride in this matter. The land is no dependence. When school begins again—"

"My brother and I will arrange for the future. Don't think of it now, Ned. The long vacation is before you. Enjoy yourself, and when fall comes you will find willing friends to help the best scholar in the academy."

"Have I a right to go on the excursion they are talking of?" began Ned.

"Right!" cried Mr. James. "Who has a better one? Have you not been a student for the past year, and does not the endowment of the academy provide for a yearly free excursion for the scholars?"

Ned experienced a sense of positive relief as he returned to the school-grounds. He knew the truth, but was not dismayed at the prospect of the future. "I can and will work," he murmured, in a determined tone. "The boys shall know the truth. If they shrink from me because I am poor, they are no friends."

He found the play-ground deserted, and, glancing towards the village, saw a knot of several of his companions gathered before the village inn, and among them was Ralph Warden. No one referred to the recent encounter of the two, however, and Ernest Blake greeted him with a cry of excitement and pleasure.

"Quick, Ned!" he said. "They've got a trick bear here."

He pulled Ned towards the circle as he spoke. A man, who was a travelling mountebank, had a huge bear and a pole, and was exhibiting the brute's sagacity in various ways.

The boys enjoyed the exhibition hugely, and Ned, engrossed in the same, had forgotten his present troubles. The excitement grew intense as a new element of diversification was introduced by the innkeeper himself.

He paid the mountebank a liberal sum for his clever exhibition, and called the hostler.



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