

to-morrow, but in any event, an hour's inquiry at the hotels will enable me to learn where he is."

"And shall I go with you?"

"No; I would prefer to see the Professor alone first;" replied Mr. James, gravely. "You stay around the dock here, and I will return as soon as I find my brother or learn where he is."

Musing idly and dreaming of the voyage down the coast and the welcome and surprise of the boys, Ned suddenly started.

A familiar voice spoke his name, a rough hand grasped his arm.

"Ah! I've found you again, eh? You've led me a pretty chase, my hearty."

Ned uttered a dismayed cry as he turned and recognized the speaker.

There could be no mistake. The same cruel eyes and sinister face looked down upon him; the man before him was the mysterious visitor at Ridgeland—the man with the black, bushy beard.

CHAPTER IX.

IN BAD HANDS.

Abel Morgan, as the stranger called himself, did not wait for Ned to recover from his surprise, but led, or rather, dragged him some distance down the wharf.

A little sail-boat lay under the shadow of a large brig, and before Ned could realize what had occurred, Morgan lifted him over the edge of the dock, and dropped him into the boat. Then he sprang into it himself.

The entire episode had consumed only a moment of time. Ned had been amazed at the rapidity of the man's actions. Now he was absolutely startled, as he tried to regain the wharf, and Morgan spoke.

"You sit down there!" he ordered, with a deep scowl.

"No, I won't. You let me pass. What right have you——"

Ned spoke boldly, and attempted to clasp the wharf, but Morgan pushed him violently backwards so that Ned fell into the bottom of the boat.

Morgan loosened the boat, and pushed out from the wharf. He set the sail, drove the boat down the harbour, and, reaching the open bay, secured the sail-rope, and faced Ned.

"Now then, my hearty, I'm ready for you. I tried to see you in Ridgeland, but you wouldn't have it, so I hurried after you to 'Frisco. I suppose you remember me?"

"Yes; you are the man calling himself Abel Morgan."

"Precisely. And do you know why I have taken all this trouble?"

"No. For no good purpose, I imagine, judging from the way you act."

Morgan only jeered at Ned's bold speech.

"We'll let the boat run down the coast, while I tell you. I wrote to your guardian about some land a short time since, and got no reply."

"I know you did."

"You're well-posted, my friend. Well, that land I want. You have the say about it, but that noodle-headed James thinks there's some fabulous value in it, I suppose."

"Maybe he's right."

"No. It's a waste piece of ground, not worth a dollar an acre."

"And you offer——"

"Five hundred dollars!" cried Morgan, eagerly. "Will you take it?"

"Not until we've seen it."

"See here, don't be a fool. I've gone to terrible trouble to benefit you, and here I've followed you from description clear from the east. The land suits me because it adjoins on to a ranch I have, and no one else will buy it. Now, I want a promise from you."

"What promise?" he asked.

"That you and the teacher will make the land over to me."

"I won't promise that nor anything else to you. You are trying to deceive me. There is some value to that land, and we are going to find out about it."

"You young jackanapes! Do you mean to tell me I'm lying to you?" shouted Morgan.

"I won't promise."

"You shall!"

The boat was running ahead at a lively rate of speed, but Ned edged towards the stern as Morgan made a movement to come towards him.

"Well, I won't."

"Then, as sure as my name's John Markham, I'll make you repent it."

"John Markham!" ejaculated Ned. "I knew you were deceiving us. You are not Abel Morgan, then, but Markham, the cruel cousin who swindled my brother out of his money and broke his spirit. I'll have you arrested! I'll call for help!"

Ned was wildly excited. The truth had dawned upon him at last, and he knew that he faced the unprincipled scoundrel who had robbed his brother, William Darrow.

He sprang to his feet, and shouted for help across the watery waste.

At that moment, by accident or design, the sail flapped to windward.

It swept Ned Darrow off his feet, and as he sank like a shot beneath the waves, the sail-boat sped rapidly on its way.

CHAPTER X.

MR. JAMES' MISHAPS.

Two hours after Ned Darrow had left the vicinity of the schooner Neptune, Mr. James came hurrying down to the wharf.

He had learned that his brother, Professor Ballentine, would return to the city that evening, and he came to communicate the intelligence to Ned.

But, to his surprise, Ned was not to be found in the vicinity of the ship, and a long search failed to reveal a trace of him.

"He can't have lost himself," muttered Mr. James. "Maybe he's got tired of waiting for me, and has gone back to the lodging-house."

The under-master slowly retraced his steps as he spoke. He did not notice that he was followed. Even if he had observed the skulking figure that shadowed his footsteps, it is doubtful, amid his pre-occupation of mind, if he would have recognized Abel Morgan.

Mr. James went straight to the lodging-house and reappeared about an hour later, carrying the satchel that contained Ned's effects and his own.

Markham kept close at his heels. Suddenly, as Mr. James passed a deserted row of buildings on a lonely street, the former crowded to his side. With a push he sent the unsuspecting under-master down a pair of rickety area stairs.