

Thinking over the occurrence he unconsciously fell into a deep reverie, and then glided into a light slumber, his head drooping on his breast. How long he slumbered he knew not. He awoke suddenly with a start and that indefinable feeling of bewilderment and apprehension which seems an intuitive warning of danger being near. The lights in the corridor burned very dimly. Ned struggled to his feet, and, trying to divine what had awakened him, endeavoured to analyze his vague emotions of fear.

He bent his ear to catch the echo of a sudden jarring sound. It proceeded from one of the bed-rooms. As he was about to proceed to investigate its cause, a key clicked in the lock, and the door of the apartment occupied by Mr. James was slowly and cautiously opened.

The watching Ned Darrow could scarcely repress a cry of excitement as his glance met the evil, bearded face of John Markham. He was secreting some object resembling a pocket-book in his outer coat pocket. He did not notice Ned, but after a quick survey of the corridor, stole silently towards the staircase. There was a subtle volatile odour like chloroform in the air as he started down the stairway.

Ned hurried after him. He determined to raise an alarm, but waited until they could reach a lower floor of the hotel and nearer the attachés of the place. He saw Markham draw back as some one came up the stairs, and dart down a side corridor.

"I will not lose sight of him," muttered Ned, grimly, and he did not.

Markham had entered a room leading off from the hall. Ned reached the door and looked in. At that instant Markham's fierce glance swept his pursuer's face. With a muttered ejaculation of dismay, he reached the gas jet over a table and turned it out. He did not plunge the room in darkness, until Ned had seen that the apartment was a small supper room. There was a slight crash as Markham, running against the table un-awares in the dark, sent the castor to the floor.

"Help!"

Ned Darrow deemed it time to raise an alarm at last, but the word gurgled in his throat. Markham, about to raise a window and trust to the balconies or fire-escape for safety, turned and caught his pursuer by the throat.

"I'll choke the life out of you if you don't keep quiet," he breathed, savagely.

He flung Ned to the floor roughly. The brave lad was not daunted. His hand seized one of the bottles of the castor. Grasping it firmly, he sprang after Markham, and struck at him wildly, shouting for help as he did so.

Markham raised his fist to deal Ned a blow. The bottle was hurled in his face, as Ned saw that unless assistance came quickly the ruffian would escape.

"Oh, you have blinded me!"

Markham staggered back, and began to scream and yell as if in uncontrollable agony. He writhed and twisted, and groped his way around, clasping his eyes. Hurrying footsteps in the corridor without told of coming aid. The watchman of the hotel and a night clerk burst into the room. When they lighted the gas they found John Markham lying on the floor, groaning in terrible pain.

It seemed that the bottle from the castor had contained cayenne pepper, and the final blow from Ned had driven its contents into the face and eyes of the night marauder.

In a few brief words Ned related all that had occurred. Ten minutes later John Markham was being removed to the nearest police station. In his coat pocket they found

a large pocket book. A later investigation proved that it belonged to Mr. James, and that it contained the money the under-master had received on the Sandy Flat property the day previous.

A visit to the room of the under-master showed Mr. James just recovering from the effects of chloroform. It seemed that Markham had certainly been aware of the sale of the chrome property, and had determined to despoil Mr. James of his money. He had surreptitiously entered the hotel, and, by creeping along a balcony, had reached the windows of Mr. James' sleeping apartment. Gaining an entrance, he had quietly drugged its sleeping occupant, and was making off with the pocket-book when he was discovered by Ned Darrow.

This episode delayed the departure for the east until John Markham was tried in court. He could not but plead guilty, and was sentenced to a long term in the penitentiary.

His connection with the heartless swindle against Ned's brother, William Darrow, had its due effect on the jury, and he was justly punished for his many crimes.

Ned Darrow had come to the Pacific coast a poor boy. He left it rich in moneyed possessions and in valuable experience.

Two weeks after the Aldine arrived in San Francisco harbour, the railroad train, bearing the grammar school castaways homewards, steamed into the little depôt at Ridgeland.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

It was like a triumphal march to the academy from the depôt. All Ridgeland turned out to welcome back Professor Ballentine and his scholars. They had been mown as dead, and were alive, and returned to the old grammar school, of which one old man asserted -

"I've gone out of my way so as not to see the gloomy old place. I tell you, Ridgeland wouldn't be much without the boys to liven it up."

There were rapturous parents at the depôt, who unfolded their sons in loving embraces, and wept tears of joy at their recovery. The average village boy was silent with wonder as the story of the adventures of the castaways became public property. And not one of the students was there who did not feel grateful and happy as they once more entered the pleasant dormitories that night.

Ned Darrow was lionized by the school and the public despite himself. And when Mr. James related the true story of the study episode, and Professor Ballentine exonerated Ned's fair name from this one suspicion of evil, Ned's noble sacrifice in behalf of the under-master made him a hero in popular estimation. His bravery under trying circumstances had been noted and admired by the observant Professor Ballentine, but this was not all that endeared him to the old tutor.

He had noticed that Ned had succeeded in rooting out all the old rivalry and ill-feeling that was wont to exist with the Ralph Warden faction. The island experience that had developed noble characteristics of self-reliance and sacrifice in Ned, had extended a like influence over his companions.

Perfect harmony existed in the study-room and on the play-ground. Mutual dangers had brought the boys as near together as brothers. And the old Professor beamed with delight as he noted day by day his scholars grow more manly and earnest.

One year from the day when the grammar school boys had started on the expedition which had held so many strange adventures for them, the same coterie were