

Horatio Alger Jr.

**Bernard Brooks' Adventures:
The Experience of
a Plucky Boy**



Horatio Alger

**Bernard Brooks' Adventures:
The Experience of a Plucky Boy**

«Public Domain»

Alger H.

Bernard Brooks' Adventures: The Experience of a Plucky Boy /
H. Alger — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I. BERNARD BROOKS	5
CHAPTER II. BERNARD'S BOLDNESS	8
CHAPTER III. BROUGHT TO BAY	11
CHAPTER IV. A ROAD SIDE ACQUAINTANCE	15
CHAPTER V. MR. PENROSE'S SECRET	18
CHAPTER VI. BERNARD'S DANGER	21
CHAPTER VII. AN UNEXPECTED CHAMPION	24
CHAPTER VIII. THE CONSPIRATORS ARE FOILED	27
CHAPTER IX. ON THE HUDSON RIVER BOAT	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	33

Bernard Brooks' Adventures: The Experience of a Plucky Boy

CHAPTER I. BERNARD BROOKS

You're a bad lot, Bernard Brooks. I don't think I ever knew a wuss boy."

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Snowdon. Let me suggest, however, that *wuss* is hardly correct English."

The speaker was fifteen years of age, but as tall as most boys of seventeen. He had a bold, aggressive manner, which he only assumed with those he thought were hostile or unfriendly.

He could be a devoted friend, and a loyal subordinate to one who gained his good will. Mr. Snowdon he did not look upon as a friend, though he had been placed in his charge two months before by a cousin of his deceased father.

Ezekiel Snowdon, a man of perhaps sixty, tall and with stooping shoulders, colored with anger at the boy's sarcastic words.

He claimed to have been educated at a small Western college, and on the strength of it had established himself in the country and advertised for private pupils at a low rate.

These were mostly young, and not competent to see his deficiencies, but Bernard was old enough and well enough educated to perceive and comment on them. This greatly annoyed Mr. Snowdon, who felt that the boy did not treat him with proper respect.

"Quit your impudence!" said Snowdon with a vicious look in his greenish lived eyes. "I don't need no criticisms from a whipper snapper like you."

"I intended it for your benefit, Mr. Snowdon," said Bernard demurely. "Besides, you criticise me. You called me a bad lot."

"And so you are. A wuss – a worse boy I never seen."

"Saw would be more correct, Mr. Snowdon."

"Young man, you'd better look out. I won't submit to your aggravating impudence. Besides, you are ignorant of the fact that Chaucer and Spenser use seen for saw. They are my favorite poets, so it is not strange that I should occasionally make use of their diction."

"Thank you for the information, Mr. Snowdon. I did not know that you had such high authority. I have read a little of Chaucer and Spenser, and I never observed the word you mention."

"Perhaps you have not read the same works as I," said Mr. Snowdon.

"Very likely," remarked Bernard, struggling to suppress a smile.

"It might be well another time to be sure of your ground before you try to criticise your elders."

"Yes, sir," said Bernard, with a meekness which the twinkle in his eye belied.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," remarked Mr. Snowdon with dignity.

"I am sure you are a good judge on that point, Mr. Snowdon," said Bernard with demure face, so that his elder did not catch the covert sarcasm.

"I am glad you give me credit for something," rejoined the teacher. "Now you hear what I say. I won't have you goin' round with that Nat Barclay, as you did last evening."

"What's the matter with Nat Barclay?"

"He was once a pupil of mine, and he defied my authority, so I had to discharge him."

"That isn't what he says, Mr. Snowdon."

"What does he say?"

“He says that he found out you didn’t know enough to teach him, and got his father to take him away from your school.”

“Then the boy lied,” said Mr. Snowdon, coloring deeply. “I’d like to thrash him.”

“I dare say you would, Mr. Snowdon, but I don’t think it would be exactly safe. Nat wouldn’t stand it.”

“He’d have to stand it, if I took it into my head to chastise him.”

“If you had a scrimmage, I’d bet on Nat,” said the bold pupil.

“Do you consider *scrimmage* a classical word?” asked Mr. Snowdon with a sneer.

“Well, not exactly. I suppose you know that Dryden uses it,” said Bernard with a bold flight of imagination.

Now Mr. Snowdon was not sufficiently versed in English classical writers to know whether this statement was correct or not. So he equivocated to conceal his ignorance.

“Dryden is not always a correct writer,” he added. “I never advise my pupils to imitate him. But that is neither here nor there. I have told you that I don’t want you to go round with Nat Barclay.”

“Why not? I am sure he is of good family. His father is a clergyman.”

“It is from respect to his father that I did not chastise him when he was in my school.”

“He says his father does not think much of your scholarship.”

“It is because he has poisoned his father’s mind against me by false and mendacious charges and statements. I can afford to look upon these with contempt since my alma mater bestowed upon me the honorary degree of P. D. at the last commencement.”

“What does P. D. stand for?”

“Doctor of Philosophy,” answered Mr. Snowdon in a lofty tone.

“Oh, I thought it might mean something else.”

“What?” asked Mr. Snowdon suspiciously.

“Oh, it isn’t material. I don’t want to display my ignorance,” said Bernard meekly.

“I am glad you are becoming sensible.”

Mr. Snowdon did not press the question, as he conjectured that P. D., as understood by Bernard, would stand for something far from complimentary.

“I am going to the post-office, Mr. Snowdon. Can I do anything for you?”

“You may inquire if there are any letters for me.”

“All right, sir.”

Bernard was about to leave the room, when he turned as if struck by a sudden thought.

“May I inquire, Mr. Snowdon,” he asked, “what authority you have for calling me ‘a bad lot’?”

“I have the authority of Cornelius McCracken, your guardian.”

“Does he say I am a bad lot?” asked Bernard, his brow contracting.

“Yes, he did.”

“When did he say it?”

“In a letter I received last week.”

“May I see the letter, Mr. Snowdon?”

“Yes,” answered the teacher, “if it will give you any satisfaction.”

“It will give me satisfaction to know exactly how he expresses himself in speaking of me.”

Ezekiel Snowdon opened his desk, and took out a letter postmarked New York.

“There is the letter,” he said, handing it to Bernard with a malicious smile. “Out of regard for your feelings I had not intended to show it to you, but since you desire it, I feel that I shall not be responsible for any wound your pride may receive.” Bernard did not answer this speech, but taking the letter tendered him, opened and hastily read it. This was the letter:

“Ezekiel Snowdon, Esq.:

“Dear Sir – I am in receipt of your letter, complaining of my ward, Bernard Brooks. You say you find him disrespectful and insubordinate, and upon this ground you ask me to increase the price

I pay for his education. I am quite aware that he is a bad lot. You will do me the justice to remember that in placing him under your charge I did not seek to extenuate the boy's faults. I told you that he was obstinate, independent, and headstrong. You told me that you had had great success in managing refractory boys, and were willing to undertake him. Under these circumstances I cannot feel that I am called upon to increase the remuneration agreed upon between us in the first place. Should you find him impudent, I shall not object to your inflicting upon him such punishment – even castigation – as in your opinion he may require. More money, however, I cannot pay you, as it draws heavily upon my resources to pay the amount already agreed upon.

“Yours respectfully,

“Cornelius McCracken.”

“Now I hope you are satisfied,” said Mr. Snowdon, as he received the letter back.

“I am satisfied that you have not misrepresented Mr. McCracken.”

“You see he gives me complete authority over you.”

“I see he does,” returned Bernard in a peculiar tone.

“May I ask, Mr. Snowdon,” he added, after a thoughtful pause, “whether my guardian ever told you about how I was situated?”

“In what way?”

“As to money matters. Did he tell you whether or not I had any fortune?”

“He said you had not.”

“Did he tell you that I was wholly dependent upon his charity?”

“He gave me that impression. You ought to feel very grateful to him for his great-hearted liberality in thus defraying the expenses of a destitute orphan.”

“Probably I am as grateful as the occasion requires,” rejoined Bernard gravely. “I will inquire for letters for you.”

As the boy went out Mr. Snowdon looked after him thoughtfully.

“I hate that boy!” he murmured to himself. “It would do me good to flog him. His guardian has given me leave, and I think that I will soon find an opportunity to avail myself of it.”

CHAPTER II. BERNARD'S BOLDNESS

On his way to the post-office Bernard met Nat Barclay.

"Where are you bound, Bernard?" he asked.

"To the post-office."

"How are you getting on with Ezekiel?"

"There is no love lost between us. He says I am a bad lot. In fact, he says he never knew a wuss boy."

Both boys laughed.

"What bad things do you do?"

"Associate with you, for one thing."

"Has Ezekiel forbidden it?"

"Yes."

"Then perhaps I had better leave you?"

"By no means. I don't propose to obey Mr. Snowdon in that."

"Thank you, but I don't want you to get into trouble."

"What trouble can I get into?"

"He may undertake to flog you."

"Let him try it," said Bernard in a significant tone. "What do you think I would be doing? Did he ever undertake to chastise you?"

"No. He knew my father would not permit it."

"If he would whip his own son it might do him good. Septimus is a young imp."

"There he is now! I wonder what he is up to." Septimus Snowdon was an ill-favored boy of fifteen with red hair and freckles seeming like extensive patches upon a face in which even the most partial eyes could not have seen a redeeming feature. He was standing a little distance ahead, looking up into the branches of a tree in which a terrified kitten had taken refuge. Standing beside him was a young boy of twelve who seemed to be concerned for the safety of the kitten.

Septimus raised a large stone, and taking aim, sent it through the air, aiming at the cat. It came very near hitting her.

"Don't stone my kitty," remonstrated Frank Fisk, the young boy.

"Stop your noise!" said Septimus roughly. "I shall stone her all I want to."

As he spoke he threw another stone, which just grazed the kitten's face and elicited a terrified cry.

"There, you bad boy, you hit my kitty."

"Who calls me a bad boy?" demanded Septimus, with an ugly look on his face.

"I did, and you are one, or you wouldn't throw stones at my kitten."

"I'll throw stones at you if you like it any better."

"You wouldn't dare to. I'd tell my father, and he'd –"

"What would he do?"

"He'd stop you."

"We'll see if he will."

Septimus took a strong cord from his pocket, and seizing the boy's hands, prepared to tie them together in spite of his cries.

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank in a tone of apprehension.

"I am going to give you a lesson," answered Septimus coolly.

Frank struggled to free himself, but Septimus was too strong for him.

Nat Barclay turned to Bernard.

"Shall we let him hurt little Frank?" he asked.

“Not much.”

As Bernard spoke he strode towards Septimus, who thus far had not observed him.

“Stop that, you young brute!” he said in an imperious tone. “Do you hear me?”

Septimus turned quickly, and his scowl became deeper when he saw who had spoken to him; for if there was any boy he hated it was Bernard, who had interfered with him more than once.

“Yes,” he said. “I hear and I won’t do it.”

“You won’t, eh?”

“No, I won’t, and you’d better be careful what you say or do, or I’ll tell pa, and then – ”

“And then what?”

“You’ll get a flogging.”

“That doesn’t frighten me much. Are you going to stop?”

“No, I’m not.” and Septimus gave an extra twist that made Frank cry out.

Bernard concluded that the time for remonstrance was past. He sprang forward, and seizing Septimus in his powerful grasp, tore him from his young victim.

“I’ll pay you up for this!” shrieked Septimus, as he flung himself upon Bernard.

Bernard laid him on his back in less than a minute.

“Do you want any more?” he asked, rather contemptuously.

Just at this moment the kitten saw a favorable opportunity to escape, and ran down the trunk of the tree. As she was running away Septimus caught sight of her, and his cruel instincts were aroused. He seized a rock and flung it at her. Had it struck the kitten she would have been seriously hurt.

Bernard was fond of pets, and his soul revolted at cruelty in any form.

“I see you can’t be trusted, Septimus,” he said composedly. “Nat, come here and help secure him.”

“What shall I do?” asked Nat.

“Hold his hands.”

Nat Barclay complied with his request, and Bernard taking the cord which Septimus had used on Frank, quickly and securely tied the hands of the young tyrant.

Septimus struggled and threatened, but without effect. In less than a minute he was securely bound.

“There,” said Bernard, “you are safe for a short time.”

“Untie my hands, or I’ll get my father to flog you!” screamed Septimus.

“Perhaps you’d better,” said Nat Barclay in a low voice. He was afraid his friend would get into trouble.

“No, I won’t. Septimus needs the lesson. You needn’t worry about me. Now we’ll go to the post-office.”

The two boys kept on their way, and Septimus, his hands tied, with wrath in his heart, started for home.

Mr. Snowdon was just coming out of the front door, when to his astonished gaze was revealed his son and heir walking towards the house, with his hands close together, like a prisoner in handcuffs.

“What does all this mean?” he asked in surprise. “What have you been tying your hands for?”

“I didn’t tie my hands,” said Septimus sullenly. “Do you think I am a fool?”

“Septimus, you should not speak to your father like this. If you did not tie your hands, who did?”

“Who did? That young loafer Bernard Brooks. I want you to flog him within an inch of his life.”

“Bernard Brooks tied your hands?”

“Didn’t I say so?”

“But why did you let him do it?”

“How could I help it, when he had Nat Barclay with him?”

“So Nat Barclay was with him?”

“Yes, he was.”

"I forbade him to associate with that Barclay."

"Much he cares for your orders. When I told him you would flog him, he laughed!"

"Oh, he laughed, did he?" said Mr. Snowdon, much incensed.

"Yes, he doesn't care for you," said Septimus, craftily fanning his father's wrath.

"I'll learn him," said Mr. Snowdon, shaking his head vigorously. "He'll see that I am not to be trifled with. But what did he tie your hands for?"

"Just cut the cord and I'll tell you. It hurts like all possessed."

Mr. Snowdon drew a jack knife from his pocket and severed the cord. Septimus breathed a sigh of relief.

"See how very red my wrists are?" he said. "Pa, do me a favor."

"Well, what is it?"

"Keep this cord, and let me tie Bernard's hands with it."

"A good idea, Septimus. Now tell me what he tied your hands for \"

"For just nothing at all."

"There must have been something."

"Well, you see Frank Fisk's kitten was up in a tree, and I was shying stones at it. Frank made such a fuss that I took out a cord and thought I would tie his hands just to give him a lesson. Just then those two loafers came along, and had the impudence to tell me to stop, just as if they had any authority over me. Of course I told them it was none of their business, and defied them."

"Very proper, Septimus. You are only responsible for your conduct to me."

"Then Bernard Brooks made a savage attack upon me, and getting Nat Barclay to hold my hands, he tied them. What do you say to that, pa?"

"What do I say? That it was a high-handed and outrageous proceeding."

"Bully for you, pa! You express my sentiments. Now what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I shall call the Brooks boy to account. He forgets that he is under my charge."

"He seems to think I am under his charge. Say, pa, you won't allow your son to be insulted and trod upon, will you?"

"No, I won't, Septimus. For some time I have been thinking that it would be necessary to flog Bernard Brooks, and now I have made up my mind to do it."

"Good, pa! You'll let me see you tackle him, won't you?"

"Yes, Septimus, I will. I can understand the gratification it will give you."

"If you do that will pay me for what he did to me."

"But perhaps he won't come back," said Mr. Snowdon in an apprehensive tone. "In that case I shall lose the quarterly sum his guardian pays me."

"You don't think he'll run away?" asked Septimus.

Half an hour later this question was answered. Bernard was seen approaching the house, his manner cool and composed, while he looked neither troubled nor flurried.

CHAPTER III. BROUGHT TO BAY

When Bernard saw Septimus Snowdon and his father standing in front of the house he understood at once, from the expression of their faces, that trouble was in store for him.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Snowdon curtly, "so you have come home at last?"

"Yes, sir. There was no letter for you."

"Ahem! I shall have to write a letter to your guardian."

Bernard shrugged his shoulders, but did not think it necessary to say anything, rather to the disappointment of Ezekiel, who wished to draw him out, "I find," he said, "that you have made an outrageous assault on my innocent boy. What have you to say in extenuation of your conduct?"

"Only that your innocent boy was stoning a kitten, and bullying a young boy."

"Even if he were, what business was it of yours?"

"It will always be my business to protect children and animals from being abused," said Bernard warmly.

"You are a very impudent boy! Are you aware that the boy you assaulted is my son?"

"I ought to be aware of it. There isn't another boy in town who would be guilty of such brutal conduct."

"Are you goin' to stand that, pa?" asked Septimus, anxious to precipitate a conflict between Bernard and his father.

"No, I am not," said Mr. Snowdon, compressing his lips. "Get me the horsewhip."

No command could have been more pleasant to Septimus. He ran into the house, and soon reappeared with an ordinary horsewhip with which his father was in the habit of punishing the pupils under his charge.

He handed it to his father with a malicious smile.

"There it is, pa!" he said. "Lay it on heavy."

Mr. Snowdon did not immediately proceed to make use of the whip. Considering Bernard to be in his power, he was disposed to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse of whom it is preparing to make a victim.

"Do you know what I am going to do, Bernard Brooks?" he demanded sternly.

"Suppose you tell me," said Bernard quietly.

"I am going to flog you."

"What for?"

"For assaulting my boy."

"Why don't you let him do it?"

"Septimus, do you wish to chastise Bernard with this whip, and so punish him for his attack upon you?"

There was nothing that Septimus would have liked better, but there was something in Bernard's steady look that made him think it would not be prudent.

"I guess you'd better flog him, pa," he said, after a pause.

"Very well, my son, I will."

Whip in hand, Ezekiel Snowdon advanced upon his refractory pupil. Bernard did not wait meekly to receive the punishment, neither did he care to get into a fight with the teacher. He turned and ran through the back yard and down a lane leading to a tract of marsh which belonged to the Snowdon farm. "He'll get away, pa!" said Septimus.

"Try to head him off, my son!"

Septimus, who was in the path, tried to do so, but a swinging blow from Bernard nearly prostrated him, and the fugitive kept on. Mr. Snowdon's blood was up. Brandishing the whip in his

long and sinewy arms, he kept his thin legs in motion, and pursued Bernard with as great speed as he was capable of.

But Bernard had several rods the start, and he was a good runner. He kept on, occasionally looking back to see what progress his pursuer was making.

“What does, the boy mean by running to the marsh?” thought Mr. Snowdon. “He is a fool. I shall catch him there to a certainty.”

Bernard probably had views of his own. Indeed, it is quite certain that he had a plan by which he hoped to bring discomfiture upon his dignified preceptor. He made straight for the marsh, till he found his progress barred by a wide ditch about half full of slimy water.

“Aha! the ditch will stop him,” reflected Mr. Snowdon.

But no! Bernard poised himself for an instant on the brink, and then lightly leaped over, landing in safety on the opposite side. Close behind him was Mr. Snowdon. That gentleman felt impelled by the impetus acquired in running to follow Bernard’s example. But the ditch was quite six feet across, and Mr. Snowdon, though not overburdened with flesh, was stiffer in his joints than he had been twenty years before, and this operated against him. Besides, it was slippery where he started to jump, and the result was that he landed in the middle of the ditch where he floundered in the miry water in a woeful condition.

Septimus came up directly, for he was third in the race.

“Where are you, pa?” he asked.

“Don’t you see where I am?” demanded Mr. Snowdon sharply. “Help me out of this quagmire!” Rather reluctantly Septimus extended his hand, for his father’s hand as well as his clothes were bedabbled with mire, and Mr. Snowdon nearly pulled him in, in his efforts to extricate himself from the ditch.

“You’re all over mud, pa!” said Septimus, surveying the sorry plight of his sire.

Just across the ditch stood Bernard, he had come to a halt, and calmly eyed his would-be captor.

“It’s your fault, you young scoundrel!” cried Mr. Snowdon in a fury, his wrath increased by the knowledge that Bernard was as neat and clean as when he started. “If it hadn’t been for you I shouldn’t have been in this plight.”

“I don’t see how I could help it, sir. You shouldn’t have tried to jump over the ditch.”

“Why did you do it?”

“I wanted to get away from you.”

“Jump back at once!”

A smile stole over Bernard’s face.

“I shouldn’t dare to,” he answered. “I might fall in as you have.”

“And serve you right! I order you to jump.”

“Suppose I do, and get safe over?”

“I will flog you within an inch of your life,” said Mr. Snowdon rather imprudently.

“That isn’t inducement enough,” said Bernard. “I guess I had better stay where I am.”

“You needn’t think you will escape the whipping. You may put it off, but you’ll have to take it sooner or later.”

Evidently Mr. Snowdon thought it best to put off punishing Bernard for the present. He was so bespattered with mud that it was necessary to go home and change his clothing. Septimus was very sorry for this decision, as he had been looking forward with pleasant anticipation to seeing Bernard flogged.

“You ain’t goin’ to let him off, pa, are you?” he asked.

“No,” answered Mr. Snowdon, with a vengeful look. “The longer it’s put off, the harder I’ll lay it on when the time comes.”

Satisfied with this assurance Septimus followed his father home. As from time to time he glanced at the figure of his parent he could not help reflecting that Mr. Snowdon was not a father to

be proud of. He never looked attractive, but under present circumstances he looked more unsavory than usual.

Left alone Bernard did not leap back across the ditch, but taking a course to the right emerged into the main road about half a mile from Mr. Snowdon's house.

He took a short cut to the home of his friend Nat Barclay, whom he made acquainted with the catastrophe that had befallen Mr. Snowdon.

Nat laughed – he could hardly help it – as he pictured to himself the miry and bedraggled condition of his old teacher.

“I am afraid he'll try to get even with you, Bernard,” he said apprehensively.

“No doubt he would if he got a chance.”

“But he can't help having plenty of chances as you live in his house.”

“But I am not going to live there any longer, Nat.”

“What do you mean?”

“I shall run away.”

“You won't do that, will you, Bernard? What will your guardian say? You have no one else to depend upon.”

“I don't know.”

“But this is serious, Bernard.”

“I have myself.”

“But what can a boy of fifteen do?”

“He can support himself. At any rate, he can try. The fact is, Nat, I don't think Mr. McCracken a friend of mine. I may go to him, and ask if he will make any other arrangements for me. If he won't, I will make them for myself.”

“What will you do to-night, Bernard?”

“I will go back to Mr. Snowdon's – creep up to my room, if I have a chance, get out a bundle of clothes, and sleep in the barn. In the morning I can start early, and – ”

“Where will you go?”

“I don't know yet.”

Mr. Snowdon was in the habit of retiring early, and so were his family. Generally at nine o'clock they were in bed. When nine o'clock came he told Septimus to lock the door.

“But suppose Bernard comes back?”

“He can sleep out of doors for one night. It will teach him a lesson.”

He didn't know that Bernard had already visited the house, made up a bundle of clothing, and withdrawn to the barn, where he had found a comfortable resting place on one of the lofts of hay.

It was Bernard's intention to get up early in the morning and make his escape before Mr. Snowdon or any of his family were astir.

But a healthy boy, who is a good sleeper, cannot always fix the time of awaking. For some reason Bernard slept on till half-past seven o'clock. Septimus had occasion to go to the barn, and discovered him still asleep. He ran into the house in great excitement.

“Pa,” he said, “Bernard is asleep in the barn. I seed him.”

Occasionally Septimus, though the son of a teacher, made grammatical mistakes.

“Is he asleep?” asked Mr. Snowdon in a tone of interest.

“Yes, pa.”

“The Lord has delivered him into my hands. I will not neglect the opportunity to chastise him.”

“He may wake up when you are getting up.”

“I will take you with me to hold the ladder.”

“He might stick me with the pitchfork,” said Septimus, who was a coward at heart.

“Then I will take Bridget.”

Bridget was the kitchen drudge. She was rather a stupid girl, who stood in fear of her employer.

They went to the barn together. Mr. Snowdon went up the ladder, whip in hand, Bridget holding the ladder. He mounted the opposite scaffold, and prepared to cross to the other, when Bernard, who had been aroused by the sound of voices, made his appearance, cap in hand, and asked composedly: "What are you after, Mr. Snowdon?"

"I'm after you, Bernard Brooks," answered Mr. Snowdon grimly.

CHAPTER IV. A ROAD SIDE ACQUAINTANCE

The position was critical. Bernard was tall and muscular for his age, but of course he was not a match for the teacher.

He was, however, cool and collected, and not at all nervous. He maintained his ground till Mr. Snowdon, with slow and cautious steps, had crossed the narrow bridge, and then ran to the back part of the loft.

The schoolmaster followed him as well as he could, but in his impetuosity he lost his balance and fell on the hay.

Bernard made a dash for the plank. Seeing him coming, Bridget was seized with a panic and hastily dismounted from the ladder.

Bernard took advantage of this, and descending to the barn floor, seized the ladder and carried it out of doors, leaving Professor Snowdon a prisoner in the barn loft.

Septimus, who was prudently standing just outside, called out, in alarm, "Where's my pa? What have you done to him?"

Bernard was not called upon to answer, as there was an angry roar from inside the barn.

"Bring back the ladder, you audacious young ruffian!"

Bridget had fled to the house, and Septimus, who was far from courageous, ran out behind the barn.

"I think the place is too hot to hold me," thought Bernard, and he struck for the road on a half run.

He had managed to catch up his bundle of clothes when fleeing from the angry teacher, and there was nothing to prevent his bidding a final farewell to the Snowdon Institute.

Meanwhile Professor Snowdon found himself in a quandary. He was in the hay loft, unable to descend to the barn floor.

He could indeed walk across the plank to the opposite scaffold, but that would not help him. It was certainly very aggravating. Bernard, he had no doubt, was in full flight, while he was unable to follow him.

"Bridget!" he cried. "What has become of the ladder?"

But Bridget had already returned to the house.

"Drat that girl," he muttered angrily. "Has she left me in the lurch?"

Then he bethought himself of his son.

"Septimus!" he cried, or rather roared.

"What is it, pa?" asked Septimus, who had gathered enough courage to return to the barn.

"Where is Bernard Brooks?"

"He's ran away."

"Has he taken the ladder with him?"

"He took it out of the barn."

"He won't carry it far. Go and bring it here."

"I dassn't. He'll come back and lick me."

"Do as I tell you at once. If you don't I will flog you."

Septimus thought it prudent to heed his father's appeal, especially as it was evident that Bernard had got away.

He lugged the ladder into the barn.

"Now put it up against the scaffold so that I can get down."

Septimus did so, but he did not see that the ladder had a secure footing, so that when his father was part way down it fell, and the learned pedagogue tumbled sprawling on the barn floor, receiving some painful contusions, which did not improve his temper.

"It's your fault, you young booby!" he exclaimed furiously, and springing for Septimus he lashed him across the legs.

"Ouch!" yelled Septimus. "Are you crazy, pa? I ain't Bernard."

"I'd like to flog that boy within an inch of his life!" exclaimed Ezekiel Snowdon, excited to fury by the sound of Bernard's name.

"Then you'd better try to catch him instead of licking me."

"Come into the house, Septimus," said his father more calmly. "Look down the road and see if you can see him."

Septimus shaded his eyes, and looked down the road, but no runaway boy was visible.

"I can't see him, pa. He may be hiding somewhere."

"Go and ask Mr. Sweetland if he will lend me his horse. I'll go after him."

"There's Leslie Sweetland now. I'll ask him." Leslie Sweetland, a boy of sixteen, well and strongly built, was walking by.

"I say, Leslie," called out Septimus, "do you think your father will lend us his horse?"

Leslie stopped short. He had very little friendship for Septimus, and disliked the elder Snowdon.

"What do you want him for?" he asked.

"Bernard Brooks has run away, and pa and I want to catch him."

"Has Bernard run away?" asked Leslie, immediately interested.

"Yes."

"What did he run away for?"

"Pa went to the barn to horsewhip him for his owdacious conduct. He carried off the ladder and left pa in the hay loft, and now he's run away."

Leslie burst into a fit of laughter.

"Well, that's a good joke!" he said.

"I don't see where the joke comes in," growled Ezekiel.

"I don't blame him for running away," said Leslie, with spirit.

"I've a great mind to horsewhip you," cried the amiable Snowdon.

"You'd find you'd tackled the wrong boy," retorted Leslie. "You can't have our horse."

"That's for your father to say."

"He won't help you to catch Bernard. I'll tell him not to."

"The impudence of the boys in this village is positively terrible," said Mr. Snowdon. "Septimus, go over to Mr. Bacon, and see if he will lend us his horse."

Septimus did as ordered, but he found Mr. Bacon's horse in use, and upon his return Mr. Snowdon felt that it was too late to make other arrangements.

"I'll write to the boy's guardian," he said, "and probably he will send him back without expense to me. If he does I'll make the boy howl."

Meanwhile Bernard was making the best of his time. He ran half a mile without stopping. He passed a covered buggy, and as he did so turned back to look at it.

It was occupied by a man of perhaps forty, who seemed to be in trouble. He held the reins loose in his hands, his eyes were partly closed, and his body swayed from side to side of the carriage.

"He needs help," thought Bernard.

He ran to the horse, seized him by the bridle, and stopped him.

The driver did not seem to be aware of his interference.

Bernard, after a moment's hesitation, climbed into the carriage, and seating himself beside the gentleman, took the reins from his unresisting fingers.

"Are you sick, sir?" he said.

The gentleman opened his eyes and looked at Bernard.

"Yes," he said. "I came near fainting away."

"Shan't I drive for you?"

“Yes, I wish you would. Who are you?”

“My name is Bernard Brooks.”

“All right! I don’t know you, but you seem like a good boy.”

“Where shall I drive you?”

“To the next town.”

“Poplar Plains?”

“Yes.”

This suited Bernard very well. Poplar Plains was five miles away, and here there was a station on the nearest railroad.

He drove on, while his companion leaned back in the carriage and closed his eyes. Bernard took a side glance and noted his appearance.

He was a man with dark hair and eyes, and his complexion was also dark. He looked to be in good health but for the pallor occasioned by his present attack.

He roused up when they came within a mile of Poplar Plains.

“Are you feeling better?” asked Bernard.

“Yes; a little. You haven’t any hartshorn about you?”

“No, sir; but there is a drug store at the Plains. I can get some for you.”

“Do so.”

“Shall I drive you to any particular place?”

“Yes. Drive to the hotel. Do you know where it is?”

“Yes, sir.”

In a very few minutes Bernard halted in front of the Poplar Plains Hotel. A servant came out to receive the expected guest.

“Is your father going to stop with us?” he asked. “He isn’t my father, but he will stop. He is feeling unwell, and I will get you to help him out.” Assisted by Bernard and the hotel porter, the gentleman descended from the buggy and went into the hotel.

“Sit down here a moment, sir, and I will get you the ammonia,” Bernard said. “The drug store is close by.”

“Wait a moment. You will want some money. Here is a dollar.”

He drew a dollar bill from his vest pocket and handed it to Bernard, who returned in five minutes with a small bottle.

The gentleman, removing the cork, applied the bottle to his nose. He sneezed, but seemed revived.

“I feel better,” he said. “Go and take a room for me and help me up to it.”

“What name shall I put down on the register?”

“William Penrose.”

“Where from?”

“Buffalo.”

Bernard did as requested. Mr. Penrose was assigned to a room on the second floor. Then Bernard, taking out some silver, offered it to his companion.

“The hartshorn only cost ten cents,” he said. “Here is the change.”

“Keep it,” said Mr. Penrose.

“Thank you, sir. It will be very acceptable. Now I will bid you good-by.”

“No, don’t go. Stay with me, unless you have to go home. I may need you.”

“I have no home, sir. I can stay as well as not.”

“Then go down and put your name on the register. There is another bed in the room. You can sleep there.”

CHAPTER V. MR. PENROSE'S SECRET

Bernard was by no means loath to accept the invitation he had received. His stock of ready money was very small, and would soon be exhausted. While he remained with Mr. Penrose he would be taken care of.

"I shall be glad to accept your invitation, Mr. Penrose," he said.

"I hope I am not interfering with any of your plans."

"No, sir. I have not formed any plans yet."

"That is singular," observed Mr. Penrose, with a mild curiosity.

"I haven't had time to form any plans yet," explained Bernard. "I only started in for myself this morning."

"You excite my curiosity. Do you mind throwing light on the mystery?"

"Not at all, sir. I ran away this morning from a boarding school in the next town."

"You ran away from school? That doesn't sound well."

"I dare say not, but if you knew Mr. Ezekiel Snowdon, you wouldn't be surprised at my running away."

"Ezekiel Snowdon? Why, I once went to school to a teacher of that name. Describe him."

Bernard did so.

"It must be the same man."

"Where was he teaching?"

"He came to Springfield, Illinois, and was engaged to teach. That was my native town, and I was a lad of thirteen at the time."

"Did you like him?"

"No; I think he was the most unpopular teacher we ever had. He taught just six weeks. At the end of that time the bigger boys formed a combination and rode him on a rail out of town. He was an ignoramus, and was continually flogging the boys. If he couldn't find a pretext for punishment he invented one. But he received his deserts. After his ride on a rail he never ventured to come back to Springfield." Bernard laughed. "I think it must be the same man," he said.

"I have often wondered what the old fellow was doing," said Mr. Penrose. "It seems he has stuck to the business of a pedagogue. Now tell me your experience with him."

This Bernard did. He explained that Mr. Snowdon was now at the head of the Snowdon Institute in the neighboring town of Doncaster.

"Has he many pupils?"

"About eight or ten, but they are boarding pupils."

"Who placed you there?"

"My guardian, Mr. Cornelius McCracken of New York. I think Mr. Snowdon's low terms influenced him in the selection of the school. I soon found out that he wasn't much of a scholar. Besides, he is a tyrant, and tried to bully me.

"He has a son, Septimus, who is a very disagreeable boy, and is continually instigating his father to punish the boys. They are mostly small, and unable to resist injustice. Finally he tackled me, and threatened to horsewhip me."

"You naturally objected," said Mr. Penrose, with a smile.

"Yes; I had no idea of allowing myself to be treated in that way. Yesterday I made up my mind to run away. I stopped over night in the barn, and meant to get off early this morning, but was surprised by Septimus, who let his father know where I was. Soon the old man appeared with a horsewhip, and climbed up to the scaffold where I was sleeping on the hay. I woke up in time, and managed to escape, carrying off the ladder, and leaving Mr. Snowdon a prisoner in the hay loft."

"That was clever in you. And then you took leg bail?"

"Yes, sir. In ten or fifteen minutes I overtook your carriage, and seeing that you were in trouble, I climbed in and took the reins."

"Luckily for me. The horse might have run away with me."

"It was lucky for me, also, that I fell in with you," added Bernard.

"I have a great mind to tell you a secret," said Mr. Penrose, after a pause.

"It will be safe with me, sir."

He was not surprised to hear that his companion had a secret, and was curious to learn what it might be.

"I ought to feel considerable sympathy with you," went on Mr. Penrose, "for I am placed in a similar position. I, too, am running away."

Bernard looked startled. Could it be, he asked himself, that his companion was a fugitive from justice? He could hardly believe it, for Mr. Penrose's appearance was very much in his favor.

His companion went on with a smile, "Don't suppose that I am a defaulter or a thief on my way to Canada," he said. "My case is a peculiar one. I happen to be a rich man."

"I don't see why you should run away, then."

"I have a cousin, an unprincipled man, who is anxious to get possession of my property."

"But how can he do it? The law will protect you in your rights."

"It ought to, certainly, but my cousin is a cunning schemer. He's trying to have me adjudged insane, and get an appointment as my guardian. Do you think I look insane?"

"No, sir."

"I am as sane as my cousin himself, but I am subject to occasional fits, such as the one I had just now. If I were seen in one of these I might be thought to be of unsound mind."

"Are you often taken that way, Mr. Penrose?"

"Not often, but I have been subject occasionally to fits since I was a boy. My cousin cunningly waited till I was suffering an attack, when he hastily summoned two quacks, and got them to certify that I was insane. I got over the fit before the certificate was made out, but I realized my danger, and I fled from Buffalo, fearing that I might be taken to an asylum during the next seizure."

"What a scoundrel your cousin must be! He must be worse than Mr. Snowdon."

"He is a villain of a different type, and certainly quite as bad. In order to enjoy my property, he would coolly doom me to life imprisonment in a madhouse."

"Where are you intending to go, Mr. Penrose?"

"I may take a voyage somewhere. On the sea I should be safe."

"Do you think your cousin is in pursuit of you?"

"Probably he is."

"What is his name?"

"Lawrence Atwood."

"Is the buggy you were driving your own?"

"No, and that reminds me, I ought to return it to the stable from which I hired it."

"Where is that, sir?"

"Brooks' stable, in Doncaster."

"I suppose you could get a man from the hotel to drive it back – by paying him, of course."

"That is a good suggestion. I would ask you to take it back, but it might lead to your being captured by Mr. Snowdon."

"Yes, sir; that would be my only objection."

"Very well! Go down-stairs and see what arrangement you can make."

Going down-stairs Bernard had the good luck to find a young man from Doncaster, Freedom Wentworth, who was about to start back.

"Hello, Bernard!" exclaimed the young man, in surprise. "When did you come here?"

"Half an hour ago. I say, Freed, when do you go back to Doncaster?"

"I am just starting back. I wish I could meet somebody going that way, as I don't like the idea of walking."

"I can fix you out. There is a gentleman up-stairs who wants to send back a buggy to Brooks' stable. If you will take charge of it he will pay you for your trouble."

"I'm in luck. Tell him I shall be very glad to oblige him."

Bernard went up-stairs and reported to Mr. Penrose.

"Do you know this young man Wentworth?" asked Penrose.

"Yes, sir. He is a very reliable young man."

"Then I accept his offer. Take this five-dollar bill, and ask him to pay Brooks out of it and keep the balance himself."

"I will, sir."

Bernard delivered his commission, and Freedom Wentworth started on his drive.

After he had got off Bernard bethought himself of a mistake he had made.

"I ought to have told Freed not to mention his meeting me. If it gets to the ears of Mr. Snowdon, he may take it into his head to come after me."

It was certainly a pity that Bernard had not bethought himself of this prudent precaution, as it proved.

Septimus Snowdon was standing in front of Brooks' stable as Wentworth drove up.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"From Poplar Plains."

"Did you see anything of Bernard Brooks on the way?"

"Yes, he is at the Poplar Plains Hotel. Did your father send him there?"

"Aha!" soliloquized Septimus in exultation. "I'll tell pa, and we'll go after him."

"I hope I haven't done Bernard any harm," thought Freedom. "He's worth half a dozen boys like Septimus Snowdon."

CHAPTER VI. BERNARD'S DANGER

By the way," said Mr. Penrose suddenly, "it has just occurred to me that I have had no breakfast."

"It is the same case with me," returned Bernard, smiling.

"Bless my soul! How hungry you must be!"

"Don't you feel hungry, Mr. Penrose?"

"Yes, but my appetite isn't equal to that of a growing boy. What time is it?"

"I have no watch, Mr. Penrose."

"Then I will look at my own. It is nine o'clock. Won't you go down stairs, Bernard, and ask if breakfast is over."

Bernard returned with the information that the regular breakfast was over, but that a special breakfast for the two guests would be ready in half an hour.

"That will be satisfactory."

Bernard thought it would be satisfactory to him also, for he felt, to use an expression of his own, "as hungry as a bear."

It is needless to say that both enjoyed their breakfast.

"I suppose," said Mr. Penrose, smiling, "that important business prevented your breakfasting with my old teacher, Mr. Snowdon."

"Yes, sir; very important business."

"Does he provide a liberal table?"

"Very far from it, sir."

"So I imagined; though when I was his pupil, he had no boarding pupils. Suppose we take a walk about the town. I have never been in Poplar Plains before."

"All right, sir."

It was two hours before they returned. They had sauntered to the river and taken a seat on the bank under some old trees that afforded a grateful shelter. Mr. Penrose found himself more and more attracted by the frank, open nature of his boy companion.

"Really, Bernard," he said, "I find you a very agreeable comrade. I am glad I fell in with you."

"I shouldn't think you would be, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because Mr. Snowdon says I am a bad lot."

"I am disposed to think that Mr. Snowdon himself is a bad lot."

Finally they rose and made their way back to the hotel.

In front of it was a rusty-looking chaise drawn by a rawboned horse, whose skin was worn away in several places.

Bernard started in dismay.

"Mr. Snowdon has come after me," he said quickly.

"What makes you think so?"

"That horse and carriage is one that he always hires. He gets it because he can hire it for half the price of a stable team."

"But there is no one in the carriage."

"He is probably in the hotel. I don't know what to do."

"How could he have got track of you?"

"Freed Wentworth must have told him I was here. You see, I forgot to tell Freed not to speak of seeing me. Do you think he can carry me back?"

"I'll tell you what to do, Bernard. Go back to the river side, and I will go forward and meet him. When the coast is clear I will go and find you."

“Thank you, sir.”

Mr. Snowdon and Septimus had driven up five minutes before. They left the horse standing in front of the hotel and entered.

“How do you do, Mr. Snowdon?” said the landlord. “What brings you here?”

“I am after a runaway boy – one of my pupils. I heard he was here.”

“There is one boy staying here, but he came with a gentleman whom I took for his guardian.”

“What’s his name? Let me look at your book.” Ezekiel Snowdon ran down the page with his lean forefinger. Finally he came to the following entries:

William Penrose, Buffalo.

Bernard Brooks.

Bernard had not registered himself from any place in particular, feeling that as yet he had no special local habitation.

“There it is!” said Mr. Snowdon triumphantly. “That’s the boy – Bernard Brooks.”

“And he is one of your pupils?”

“Yes, he ran away from my school – the Snowdon Institute – this morning.”

“He seemed to be traveling with Mr. Penrose. He came with him in a carriage.”

“I can’t help that. The man must have abducted him.”

“Don’t you think they had met before? They seemed to be well acquainted.”

“I don’t know about that. Now, Mr. Wilson, I want that boy given up to me. I want to take him home.”

“I have no authority over him, Mr. Snowdon. I can’t deliver him into your hands. I can’t take any responsibility.”

“I’ll take the responsibility,” said Mr. Snowdon impatiently. “Just show me to his room.”

“He isn’t in his room.”

“Where is he, then?”

“He went out to walk with Mr. Penrose directly after breakfast.”

“Is that a good while since?”

“About two hours.”

“Then I will wait for him. He can’t be out much longer.”

“That’s right, pa,” said Septimus. “You’d ought to take him back with you. If he makes any trouble, I’ll help you.”

The landlord regarded Septimus with a glance by no means flattering.

“Who is that boy, Mr. Snowdon?” he asked. “Is he one of your pupils?”

“That is my son, Septimus Snowdon,” answered Ezekiel, with an inflection of pride. It is strange that any one should be proud of such an unfledged cub as Septimus, but Mr. Snowdon was influenced by parental partiality.

Finally the landlord, whose eyes commanded the road outside, saw through the door the approach of Mr. Penrose.

“There’s Mr. Penrose,” he said, “the gentleman your pupil came with, but he is alone.”

“Alone!” repeated Snowdon. “Isn’t the boy with him?”

“No, it seems not. However, he will be here in a minute and you can talk with him.”

Mr. Snowdon advanced to the door, and met Mr. Penrose half way.

“Is this Mr. Penrose?” he asked stiffly.

“The same, Mr. Snowdon.”

“Ha, you know my name?”

“Yes, and I know you. I was once a pupil of yours.”

“Is that so? Where?”

“Out in a town in Illinois. You remember that the big boys rode you out of town on a rail.”

"Is that so, pa?" gasped Septimus in horror-struck amazement, "I don't remember anything of the kind," said Mr. Snowdon, disconcerted. "You must have mistaken the person."

"Not at all. No one who had once met you would be likely to forget you, Mr. Snowdon."

"We will drop this subject, if you please," said Snowdon peevishly. "Where is the boy that went out with you this morning?"

"I really cannot say."

"That answer is not satisfactory. Do you know who that boy is?"

"He says his name is Bernard Brooks."

"That is true, and he is a pupil of mine."

"Was a pupil of yours, like myself?"

"He is still my pupil. He was placed with me by his guardian. I charge you with abducting him, Mr. Penrose."

"Really, this is amusing."

"You won't find it an amusing matter. I demand, where is the boy?"

"He went out to walk, and he left me."

"Is he coming back to the hotel soon?"

"I can't say. I have no authority over him."

"Can't you give me a clue as to his whereabouts?"

"I might, but I don't choose to."

"Mr. Wilson, you hear this? You understand that this gentleman is conniving at the escape of my pupil."

"I have nothing to do with the matter," said the landlord.

"By the way, Mr. Snowdon," asked Mr. Penrose, "why did the boy Bernard run away from you?"

"Because he's a bad lot."

"Did you treat him kindly?"

"I always treat my pupils kindly," answered Mr. Snowdon stiffly.

"You didn't when I was a pupil of yours, five and twenty years ago. However, the boys didn't treat you kindly. It makes me laugh whenever I think of you being ridden out of town on a rail."

"Septimus, go outside!" said Mr. Snowdon, who felt sensitive about having this unpleasant episode in his early life made known to his son and heir.

"I want to stay here, pa."

"Go out at once or I'll horsewhip you."

Much against his will, Septimus left the room. He was very curious to learn more about his father's adventure with the big boys.

Mr. Snowdon waited an hour in the hope that Bernard would appear, but in vain. Finally he summoned Septimus reluctantly and started for home. He had ridden about two miles when he met an open carriage holding three gentlemen. They stopped their carriage and hailed Mr. Snowdon.

"Have you seen anything of a man about five feet eight inches in height, rather slender," began one, and continued with an accurate description of Mr. Penrose.

"Is his name Penrose?" asked Ezekiel.

"Yes."

"What do you want him for?"

"He is crazy. We want to take him to an asylum."

"He is at the hotel in Poplar Plains," answered Mr. Snowdon eagerly. "He has abducted a pupil of mine. I will go back with you. We shall get Bernard after all, Septimus."

Both carriages started at a good rate of speed for Poplar Plains, Mr. Snowdon's face wreathed with triumphant smiles.

CHAPTER VII. AN UNEXPECTED CHAMPION

Bernard posted himself at a point where he could watch the hotel. When he saw the departure of Septimus and his father he made his way back and rejoined Mr. Penrose.

"The coast is clear," said his elder companion, with a smile. "Thanks to you I have had an interview with my old teacher."

"Did he remember you?"

"No; and he seemed very touchy on the subject of his experiences in Illinois."

"Do you think he will come after me again?"

"I don't know, but he certainly appeared very desirous of getting you back. His son seemed to sympathize with him. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Septimus loves me like a brother," laughed Bernard. "He was very anxious to have his father give me a horsewhipping. I shall feel glad to get a little farther away from Doncaster and Snowdon Institute."

"We will go to-morrow morning. I should like to rest here one day."

The two were seated on the piazza when Bernard, chancing to look up, exclaimed in alarm, "There's Mr. Snowdon coming back. He is nearly here. There is another carriage behind."

Mr. Penrose looked up quickly, and Bernard saw that he turned pale.

"The carriage behind," he said, "contains my cousin, the man who is trying to have me adjudged insane, and the two men with him are doubtless doctors, medical quacks, whom he has hired to certify to my insanity."

"Good heavens! Then, you are in as great danger as I."

"Greater," answered Mr. Penrose, in a low, suppressed tone.

"Can they take you?"

"Not legally, but they will try."

"Let us escape while we can."

"No; it would seem to bear out their charges. Besides, they are too near. I will stand my ground. You can get away if you like."

"No; I will stand by you, Mr. Penrose," said Bernard firmly.

The two remained seated till the carriage halted in front of the hotel.

"Aha!" said the cousin triumphantly, "we have run our fugitive to earth."

He jumped out of the carriage, and advanced to the piazza.

"So you are here?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Penrose calmly.

"You escaped my vigilance, and fled from Buffalo."

"Stop there, James Roque! You speak as if I were not a free agent."

"You are not. You are insane, and you know it."

"I know why you want to make me out insane. You want to get possession of my property."

"It is unsafe in your hands. A lunatic isn't fit to manage property."

"I am no lunatic, nor would you try to prove me so, if I were poor. Why did you pursue me?"

"Because you are not fit to be at large."

"I am as sane as you are. Your unprincipled attempt to deprive me of my liberty shows that you ought to be locked up."

"Of course I may be wrong, but I am willing to abide by the verdict of experts. I have brought with me two distinguished physicians, who will examine you, and decide whether you are or are not in your right mind. Dr. Brown and Dr. Jones, will you kindly approach and give your opinion as to the condition of my unfortunate cousin?"

The two doctors descended from the carriage and approached the piazza. They were dressed in shabby black, and eyed Penrose furtively. Brown was the first to speak.

"Your cousin," he said, "affords every indication of insanity. What say you, Dr. Jones?"

"I fully agree with you," replied Dr. Jones, in a nasal tone.

"I see, gentlemen, you have got the whole thing cut and dried," said William Penrose, in a tone of agitation. "These tools of yours have learned their part well. All they need is to look at me to pronounce me insane. Even a renowned doctor would hardly venture to come to so quick a decision merely from a momentary inspection."

"They have both been connected with establishments for the insane. I have called them as experts who cannot be deceived."

"What do you pay them for aiding and abetting you in this villainy?"

By this time Mr. Wilson, the landlord, appeared upon the scene. He looked from one to the other in surprise.

"What does all this mean?" he asked.

"Merely that you have been harboring a lunatic," said James Roque.

"Who is a lunatic?"

"William Penrose."

"I cannot believe it."

"It is hard to believe. Like all of his class he is very cunning. Why, should you keep him here, he might set fire to your house during the night."

"Is this true?" asked the landlord, who was a timid man.

"It is a base lie!" exclaimed Penrose indignantly. "Don't believe him. He wants to have me adjudged insane that he may get control of my property."

The landlord looked bewildered.

"Is that true?" he repeated doubtfully.

"No, it is a lie. My poor cousin has no property. He is dependent upon me. I am willing to pay his expenses in an asylum, and this is his return."

"Heaven give me patience!" ejaculated Penrose. "This black villain is lying in an infamous manner. He is himself a man of no means, and wants to get possession of my fortune."

"Dr. Brown, is this true?" asked James Roque, turning to his subservient tool.

"No," answered Brown, shaking his head.

"The man doesn't know me," said Mr. Penrose in a tone of contempt. "I never saw him before."

"I used to go to school with him," retorted Brown, unabashed.

"I see you are determined to lie it out."

"I appeal to my distinguished brother, Dr. Jones."

"You are quite right, Dr. Brown. We both know Mr. Penrose."

"You will bear me out in my statement," interposed Roque, "that he escaped from the asylum in Buffalo where I recently placed him?"

"Certainly."

"I was never in an asylum!" said William Penrose.

"Really, gentlemen –" put in the landlord.

"My dear sir, I will see that your bill is paid," said James Roque, "but I depend upon you not to interfere with me, now that I have succeeded in overtaking my unfortunate cousin."

"Of course, if what you say is true –"

"Don't these eminent physicians substantiate my statement?"

"To be sure," said the landlord, who was greatly influenced by the assurance that his bill would be paid.

"I see you take a sensible view. William Penrose, you must go back with us."

"Never!" exclaimed Penrose vehemently.

“You see his excitement. Can there be any clearer indication of insanity? Dr. Brown and Dr. Jones, give me your assistance, and we will secure my unfortunate cousin. Bring the cord from the carriage.”

Dr. Brown produced a stout cord which the party had brought with them, and the precious trio approached their unfortunate victim.

“Mr. Wilson,” exclaimed Penrose, “will you stand by and allow such an outrage to be enacted under your own roof?”

“I think you had better go with your cousin,” said the landlord soothingly. “As you are crazy, it will be better for you.”

“But I am not crazy.”

“Undoubtedly the man is crazy,” broke in Mr. Snowdon. “I have had an interview with him in which he claimed to be a former pupil of mine, and told an absurd story of my being ridden on a rail.”

“I see you are a sensible man,” said James Roque. “I might have known as much from your intelligent appearance.”

“Moreover he has aided and abetted a pupil of mine to escape from my rightful authority.”

“The case seems to be pretty clear,” said Roque, with a malicious smile. “Cousin Penrose, you may as well resign yourself to circumstances. You must go back with us. I trust you will not compel us to use force. Come, gentlemen, whatever is to be done must be done quickly.”

“Stop a minute, gentlemen!” said the landlord. “You promised to pay my bill.”

“I will do it as soon as my cousin is secured. You don’t want me to leave him here to burn down the house about your ears?”

“No, no!” said the landlord hastily.

“Come along, gentlemen!”

The three closed in about William Penrose, and producing the cord were about to tie him when he called out in desperation, “Will no one save me from these villains?”

“I will help you!” said Bernard, kicking Dr. Brown in the shins with such force that he dropped the cord, and yelled with pain.

“And I, too!” added a new voice.

All eyes were turned upon a long, wiry, loose-jointed man, an unmistakable Yankee, dressed as a Western miner, who had been sitting on the piazza, and had been an interested witness of what had been going on.

CHAPTER VIII. THE CONSPIRATORS ARE FOILED

Roque and the doctors loosened their hold of William Penrose when they heard the new voice. Then Roque in a supercilious tone said, "You had better attend to your business if you have any."

He clutched his cousin once more.

"Let us lose no time," he whispered to the doctors.

"Look here!" said the miner, striding to the group, "you're trying to kidnap an inoffensive man, and are going clear against the law. This is a free country, and it can't be done."

"Sir," said Roque, "this is an escaped lunatic, and I propose to carry him back to the asylum. I don't owe you any explanation, but I don't mind telling you that. Now, get out of the way!"

"He's no more a lunatic than I am."

"Thank you, sir," said Penrose, with reviving hope. "It is a cruel attempt at abduction. Save me from a fate worse than death."

"I will!" responded the Yankee miner resolutely.

"No man is going to be abducted when Josh Stackpole is around."

"Clear out!" said James Roque, incensed.

"Clear out, or –"

"Or what?"

"I'll have you arrested."

"And I'd have you lynched if you were out in Colorado."

"You are officious and impertinent."

"Call me all the hard names you like, squire. It won't do me any harm."

"I will do you harm. Landlord, are you going to permit this impertinent person to interfere with me?"

"Really, gentlemen, I don't know what to say," answered the landlord, who was a weak and vacillating man. "If I knew the law –"

"I'll tell you what the law is," said the miner. "Before I went out West I spent a year in a law office at Burlington, Vermont. These men haven't shown any papers – they haven't proved this gentleman to be out of his mind. It's just a high-handed violation of the law they are trying."

"In that case, I guess you'd better stop," said the landlord. "This gentleman is probably right, and –"

"He's a fool!" interposed Roque angrily.

"Haven't these eminent physicians declared my cousin to be a lunatic?"

"They look more like tramps than eminent physicians," remarked Joshua Stackpole.

"We have wasted time enough with this fool," said Roque. "Dr. Brown, take one arm, and you, Dr. Jones, take the other, and we will soon put an end to this foolery."

"Do it at your peril!" exclaimed Joshua Stackpole sternly.

The doctors looked somewhat apprehensive, but at a nod from James Roque, and confident in the realization that they were three to one, they proceeded to obey orders. Then something unexpected happened.

Joshua Stackpole sprang upon James Roque and pitched him headlong from the piazza. Then he started for Dr. Brown, and that luckless physician followed his principal.

The miner was about to turn his attention to Dr. Jones when the latter threw up his hands and begged for mercy.

"This is an outrage!" exclaimed Mr. Snowdon, much disconcerted. "Isn't there a constable at hand, landlord, to arrest this bold ruffian? Bernard Brooks, I want you."

"Aha!" said Stackpole, "what do you want him for? Is he another lunatic?"

"No; but he is my pupil, who has rebelled against my lawful authority, and run away from his happy home at Snowdon Institute."

"How is that, sonny?" asked Joshua Stackpole.

"He tried to horsewhip me," said Bernard.

"And I will do it yet," cried Mr. Snowdon, with more anger than prudence.

"Ha! It seems there is more work for me to do. You are an old man, and I don't want to hurt you, but if you don't get into your wagon and hurry home, I'll – "

Joshua Stackpole looked so determined that Mr. Snowdon was alarmed.

"Come, Septimus," he said; "we'd better be going. I'll go to a magistrate and get a warrant for this man's arrest."

By this time James Roque had risen from his recumbent position.

"Dr. Brown and Dr. Jones," he exclaimed in a passion, "are we to be worsted by a single man? Seize William Penrose."

"Excuse me!" said Dr. Brown, rubbing his shins.

"And me, too!" added Dr. Jones, with an apprehensive look at Joshua Stackpole.

"Sir," said James Roque, addressing Mr. Snowdon, "as I can get no help from these cowards, will you lend me your co-operation?"

"I wish you success, sir," replied Snowdon hurriedly, "but I ought to return to Snowdon Institute, where my presence is imperatively required."

"I think, squire, you'd better give it up for a bad job," said Stackpole. "If you make another attempt to abduct this man I'll treat you worse than before."

With a look of baffled rage James Roque entered his carriage, followed by the two doctors.

"You have escaped this time," he said to William Penrose, "but I will have you yet."

Penrose shuddered as he saw the evil look on his cousin's face.

"I've got something to say to that, squire," remarked

Joshua Stackpole coolly. "Do you see that?" and he displayed a revolver.

"Don't shoot!" exclaimed James Roque, falling back, his face assuming a sickly pallor.

"I don't intend to – now," said Stackpole composedly, "but I can't answer for what I would do if I heard of your trying to abduct your cousin."

"I should like to lock you up in an insane asylum," said Roque, with an ugly look.

"So you think me insane, do you?"

"You are stark, staring mad!"

"Thank you, squire. If I should happen to shoot you accidentally, that'll let me off."

James Roque did not think it wise to reply, but drove off hurriedly.

"My friend," said Penrose, offering his hand, "you have done me a great favor. But for you that man would have carried me to an asylum."

"What is his object?"

"Unfortunately I am rich and he is poor. As a near relative, he wants to get control of my property. Your brave interference has saved me."

"Don't mention it! There wasn't anything brave about it. The whole pack of them are cowards. Have those doctors ever seen you before?"

"Never."

"Yet after a mere glance they are ready to pronounce you insane. I don't believe they are doctors at all."

"Nor I. They are tools of my cousin. But nothing is easier than to throw a sane man into an asylum on the evidence of such creatures."

"They'd have a lively time making out me to be insane."

"James Roque says you are stark, staring mad," said Penrose, with a smile.

“He’d have reason to think so if I got hold of him,” returned Stackpole grimly. “And now, my friend. I am going to give you a piece of advice.”

“What is it?”

“Get out of this as soon as you can. There’s an ugly look about your cousin’s face, and he may make you trouble yet. Of course, he has no legal right to interfere with you, but that won’t stop a man like him. He hasn’t got hold of your property yet?”

“No.”

“Then if you have money at command, go off where he will not be able to track you. Why not go to Europe, or to Colorado, my State? If he tried any of his tricks there, we’d soon stop him with a rope.”

“Your advice is good and I will follow it. But I don’t like to leave my young friend here. He, too, is in a tight place.”

“Don’t trouble about him. I’ll look after him for a time. It will be better for you to part, as your cousin will probably describe you as traveling in his company.”

“All right! I will make my way at once to New York and take passage for Europe. I have long intended to go there, and this is a favorable opportunity. But I must first show my good will to Bernard by offering him this.”

He drew a ten-dollar bill from his pocketbook and handed it to Bernard.

“Ought I to take so much, Mr. Penrose?” asked Bernard, in a tone of hesitation.

“I am rich. I can spare it,” said William Penrose. “You need not hesitate.”

“Then, I will take it with thanks, for I have got to make my own way, and I have no one to depend upon. My guardian will be angry when he learns that I have run away from Mr. Snowdon.”

“You can adopt me for your guardian for a short time,” said Mr. Stackpole. “And now I move that we get away from Poplar Plains as soon as possible.” A carriage was secured, and within fifteen minutes the three were on their way to the nearest railroad station.

CHAPTER IX. ON THE HUDSON RIVER BOAT

William Penrose kept on his way to New York, but Bernard and Mr. Stackpole stopped at Albany.

"I have a little business to attend to here," said Mr. Stackpole, "so if you don't mind, we'll stay over here a day."

"All right, sir; I have no pressing business to hurry me on. I have never been in Albany, and shall be glad to go about and see the city."

The next morning they took the day boat down the Hudson. The great steamer was a floating palace, and had every accommodation that could be desired.

Just before going aboard Bernard bought from a newsboy a copy of the Albany *Argus*. He glanced rapidly over the contents of the paper, and his attention was arrested by the account of the mysterious disappearance of a package of government bonds – five thousand dollars – from the banking house of Murdock & Co.

"The loss was not discovered till about the close of business," said the account. "No one in the office could throw any light upon the matter. Whether it was an employee or an outside party is uncertain. Mr. Murdock remembers seeing the package on a desk, but assuming that the clerk was preparing to put it in the safe, gave no more thought to it till it was found to be missing. Detectives have the matter in charge, and it is hoped that the thief will be captured within twenty-four hours."

Bernard read the account with languid interest. He knew none of the parties, and had no special reason to dwell on the paragraph.

"Will you allow me to look at your paper?" asked a young man of twenty-five, dressed in showy style, and carrying a small satchel in his hand.

"Certainly, sir," answered Bernard politely.

"Anything interesting in it?" asked the young man languidly.

"There is an account of the theft of some government bonds from Murdock & Co."

"Ah, that is a prominent house!"

"I don't know anything about Albany firms," said Bernard.

"Then you don't live in Albany?"

"I never saw the city till yesterday."

The young man read the paragraph.

"Rather a clever robbery," he said, in a tone of indifference.

"I think any robbery is foolish," responded Bernard.

"Yes, of course; that is the proper view to take of it. I suppose you attend Sunday school?"

There was a lurking sneer in the young man's tone, as Bernard thought.

"I am not connected with a Sunday school at present," he said.

"I don't think Sunday school boys are better than any other."

"They ought to be."

"True, but we have to consider facts. Won't you go down-stairs and drink a glass of beer?"

"No, thank you."

"Oh, I forgot that you were a Sunday school boy. Well, ta, ta! I'll see you again."

There was something peculiar about the young man. Though it was a warm day he wore an ulster, which he never took off. Then he carried round his portmanteau with him all the time.

During the next two or three hours Bernard saw him several times.

There was something else also that drew his attention to the young man. He scanned his fellow passengers attentively, rather as if he was afraid of meeting some objectionable person. He seemed very restless also. He would seldom stay more than fifteen minutes in one spot.

Bernard had asked him his destination, but he evaded a straightforward reply.

"I am going wherever the boat does," he said, with a smile. "How is it with you?"

"I suppose I shall land in New York."

"Do you know any one there?"

"Yes, I know Mr. Cornelius McCracken."

"Never heard of him. Is he an uncle of yours?"

"No, he is my guardian."

"Your guardian?" repeated the young man, with interest. "Then you have property?"

"I don't think so. Mr. McCracken says I have none."

"Then what is the use of a guardian?"

"Not much. Probably he will throw me off."

"Why?"

"Because I have run away from a school where he placed me."

"Humph! Why did you do that?"

"I was not well treated. The teacher wanted to whip me."

"And you objected?" said the young man, laughing.

"Yes."

"I can't blame you. I should have acted in the same way probably. Who is that man I have seen with you – he looks like a Yankee."

"He is an acquaintance I made yesterday."

"Are you traveling with him?"

"Yes."

"He has a Western look."

"I think he has been a miner in Colorado."

"So. Has he much money, do you think?" Bernard began to think his companion too inquisitive, and he answered shortly, "I don't know."

"Hasn't told you, I suppose. Well, I shouldn't mind going out West myself and trying mining."

"What business are you in?" asked Bernard, thinking he had a right to ask questions also.

"I am a traveling man," answered the young man, after a slight hesitation.

They passed Newburg early in the afternoon. Shortly after reaching this place, as Bernard was sitting on a bench on the upper deck, his friend in the ulster came up to him hurriedly.

"Please take charge of my portmanteau a few minutes," he said, "if it won't be too much trouble."

"No trouble at all," replied Bernard politely.

The portmanteau was a small one, and it was hard to conjecture from its appearance what it might contain. Upon this point, however, Bernard was not curious.

"It can't contain anything very valuable," he reflected, "or the owner would hardly trust a stranger with it."

They reached Newburg, and remained some time. Bernard thought of going down to the lower deck, but it occurred to him that the owner of the portmanteau might come back for it and be unable to find him. This was rather embarrassing and he felt sorry that he had been so obliging as to assume charge of property not his own.

As they left Newburg he went to the rear part of the boat, and took a look at the place. He knew from the history he studied in school that Washington had at one time had his headquarters here. If there had been time he would have liked to have gone on shore. But even then he could hardly have done so with the portmanteau in charge.

He fixed his eyes carelessly upon the historic town, not expecting to see anything of special interest.

He was destined to a great surprise. There on the pier stood the young man in the ulster. He could not mistake him. Not alone the ulster, but the scanty yellowish mustache and pallid complexion betrayed him.

“He must have been left behind!” thought Bernard, “and I have his portmanteau!”

He took another look at the young man in the ulster. Certainly he betrayed no signs of having been left against his will. He stood in a careless position with a quiet and composed face, looking at the great steamer as it steadily widened the distance between him and his late companion.

Bernard was very much puzzled.

“He doesn’t seem to care. Does he remember that I have his portmanteau?” he asked himself.

He tried to attract the young man’s attention, but in vain.

“What shall I do?” he asked himself. “I don’t know the name of the man who intrusted me with the valise. I wonder if there is any name on it.”

He examined it, but found nothing to indicate the identity of the owner.

“I must ask Mr. Stackpole what to do,” thought Bernard. “It is certainly a queer position to be in. I may find it necessary to open the portmanteau, and ascertain the contents.”

He looked around the boat in search of Mr. Stackpole; but the steamer was large and quite crowded. Then there were so many divisions to it that somehow he missed seeing his mining friend. There was nothing now to interfere with his going where he liked, as there was no chance of the young man in the ulster looking for him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.