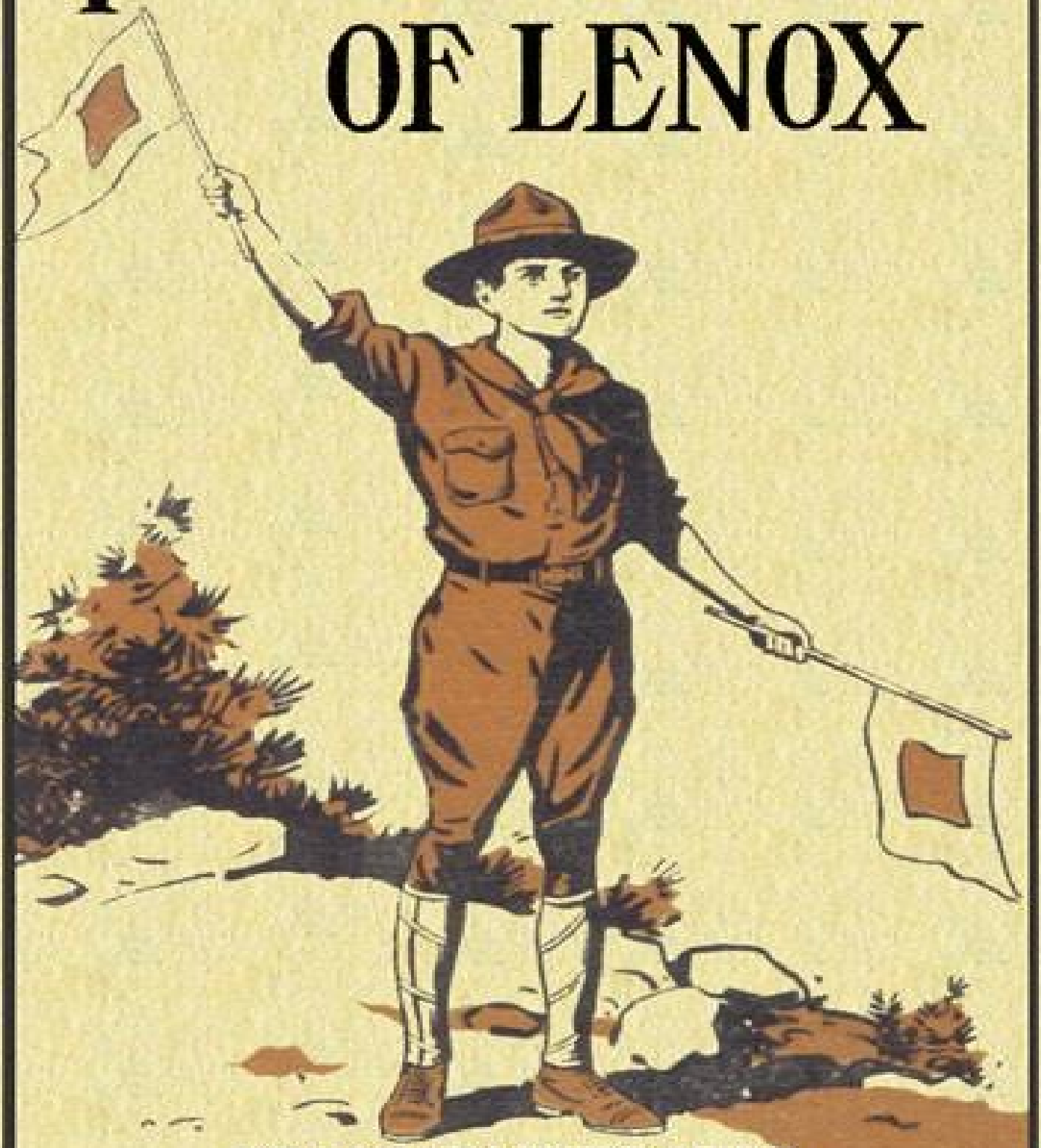
# THE BOY SCOUTS OF LENOX



FRANK V. WEBSTER

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**THEY HOISTED HIM TO THE LIMB, WHERE HE CLUNG WATCHING THE NEXT RESCUE.** ***Page 202.***

# THE BOY SCOUTS OF LENOX

Or

## The Hike Over Big Bear Mountain

BY


## FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF “ONLY A FARM BOY,” “BEN HARDY’S FLYING
MACHINE,” “THE BOY FROM THE RANCH,” ETC.


ILLUSTRATED

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By FRANK V. WEBSTER
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*Cupples & Leon Co., Publishers, New York*



THE BOY SCOUTS OF LENOX

# C O N T E N T S

# CHAPTER I

## WHEN THE SEED TOOK ROOT

“I move we go into it, fellows!”

“It strikes me as a cracking good idea, all right, and I’m glad Tom stirred us up after he came back from visiting his cousins over in Freeport!”

“He says they’ve got a dandy troop, with three full patrols, over there.”

“No reason, Felix, why Lenox should be left out in the cold when it comes to Boy Scout activities. Let’s keep the ball rolling until it’s a sure thing.”

“I say the same, Josh. Why, we can count about enough noses for a full patrol right among ourselves. There’s Tom Chesney to begin with; George Cooper here, who ought to make a pretty fair scout even if he is always finding fault; Carl Oskamp, also present, if we can only tear him away from his hobby of raising homing pigeons long enough to study up what scouts have to know; yourself, Josh Kingsley; and a fellow by the name of Felix Robbins, which happens to be me.”

“That’s five to begin with; and I might mention Billy Button; yes, and Walter Douglass, though I guess he’d take the premium for a tenderfoot, because he knows next to nothing about outdoor life.”

“But he’s willing to learn, because he told me so, Josh; and that counts a lot, you know. That makes seven doesn’t it? Well, to complete the roster of the patrol we might coax Horace Herkimer Crapsey to cast in his lot with us!”

The boy named Josh laughed uproariously at the suggestion, and his merriment was shared to some extent by the other two, Carl Oskamp and George Cooper. Felix shook his head at them disapprovingly.

“Just go slow there, fellows,” he told them. “Because Horace has always been so afraid of his soft white hands that he wears gloves most of the time isn’t any reason why he shouldn’t be made to see the error of his ways.”

“Oh! Felix means that if only we can coax Horace to join, we *might* reform him!” exclaimed Josh, who was a thin and tall boy, with what might be called a hatchet face, typically Yankee.

“By the same token,” chuckled Felix in turn, “a few of us might drop some of our bad habits if once we subscribed to the rules of the scouts, because I’ve read the same in a newspaper. They rub it into fellows who find fault with things instead of being cheerful.”

“Oh! is that so, Felix?” burst out George Cooper, who took that thrust to himself. “How about others who are lazy, and always wanting to put things off to another day? Do those same rules say ‘procrastination is the thief of time?’”

“Well boys,” remarked Carl Oskamp, pouring oil on the troubled water as was his habit, “we’ve all got our faults, and it might be a good thing if joining the scouts made us change our ways more or less. There comes Tom, now, let’s get him to tell us something more about the chance for starting a troop in Lenox right away.”

“He said he believed he knew a young man who might consent to act as scout master,” observed Felix. “It’s Mr. Robert Witherspoon, the civil engineer and surveyor.”

“Why, yes, I believe he used to be a scout master in the town he came from!”

declared Carl. “I hope Tom is bringing us some good news right now.”

“If that look on his face counts for anything, he’s going to give us a chance to let out a few cheers,” asserted Felix, as the fifth boy drew near.

It was a Friday afternoon near the close of winter when this conversation took place. School was over for the week, and as there was an unmistakable feeling of coming spring in the air the snow on the ground seemed to be in haste to melt and disappear.

Every now and then one of the boys would be overcome by an irresistible temptation to stoop, gather up enough of the soft clinging snow to make a hard ball, which was thrown with more or less success at some tree or other object.

The town of Lenox was just one of many in the eastern section of the great United States, and boasted a few thousand inhabitants, some industries, a high school, and various churches. In Lenox the boys were no different from those to be found in every like community. They had a baseball club that vied with rival schools in spirited contests, a football organization, and in fact almost every element that might be expected to thrive in the midst of a lively community.

There was, however, one thing in which the boys of Lenox seemed to have been lacking, and this had been brought home to them when Tom Chesney came back from his recent visit to Freeport, some twenty miles away.

Somehow the growing fever among boys to organize scout troops had not broken out very early in Lenox; but if late in coming it bade fair to make up for lost time by its fierce burning.

The boy who now joined the four whose chatter we have just recorded was a healthy looking chap. There was something positive about Tom Chesney that had always made him a leader with his comrades. At the same time he was never

known to assume any airs or to dictate; which was all the more reason why his chums loved him.

“What luck, Tom?” demanded Josh, as soon as the newcomer joined the others.

“It’s all fixed,” was the quick answer given by Tom, who evidently did not believe in beating about the bush.

“Good for you!” cried Felix. “Then Mr. Witherspoon is willing to organize the Lenox Troop of Boy Scouts, is he, Tom?”

“He said he would be glad to have a hand in it,” replied the other, “his only regret being that as he is often called out of town he might not be able to give the matter all the attention he would like.”

“That’s great news anyhow, Tom!” declared Josh, beaming with satisfaction. “We’ve just been figuring things out, and believe we can find eight fellows who would be willing to make up the first patrol.”

“We would need that many for a starter,” commented Tom; “because according to the rules he tells me there must be at least one full patrol before a troop can be started. And I’m glad you can figure on enough. It’s going to make it a success from the start.”

“There’s yourself to begin with,” remarked Josh, counting with his fingers; “Felix, Walter Douglass, George here, Billy Button, Horace Crapsey, Carl and myself, making the eight we need for a patrol.”

“I’m glad you’re all anxious to join,” said Tom, glancing from one eager face to the other, as they walked slowly down the street in a group.

“Why, so far as that goes, Tom,” ventured Felix Robbins, “most of us are counting the days before we can be wearing our khaki suits and climbing up out

of the tenderfoot bunch to that of second-class scout. Only Carl here seems to be kind of holding back; though none of us can see why he should want to go and leave his old chums in the lurch."

At that Tom gave Carl another look a little more searching than his first. He was immediately struck by the fact that Carl did not seem as happy as usual. He and Tom had been close chums for years. That fact made Tom wonder why the other had not taken him into his confidence, if there was anything wrong.

Carl must have known that the eyes of his chum were upon him for he flushed, and then looked hastily up.

"Oh! it isn't that I wouldn't be mighty glad of the chance to go into this thing with the rest of you," he hastened to say; "don't believe that I'm getting tired of my old chums. It isn't that at all. But something has happened to make me think I may be kept so busy that I'd have no time to give to studying up scout laws and attending meetings."

"Oh! forget it all, Carl, and come in with us," urged Josh, laying a hand affectionately on the other's shoulder. "If it's anything where we can help, you know as well as you do your own name that there isn't a fellow but would lay himself out to stand back of you. Isn't that so, boys?"

Three other voices instantly joined in to declare that they would only be glad of the opportunity to show Carl how much they appreciated him. It always touches a boy to find out how much his chums think of him. There was a suspicious moisture about Carl's eyes as he smiled and nodded his head when replying.

"That's nice of you, fellows. But after all perhaps I may see my way clear to joining the troop. I hope so, anyway, and I'll try my best to make the riffle. Now Tom, tell us all Mr. Witherspoon said."

“Yes, we want to know what we’d have to do the first thing,” added Josh, who was about as quick to start things as Felix Robbins was slow. “I sent off and got a scout manual. It came last night, and I’m soaking up the contents at a great rate.”

“That was why I saw a light over in your room late last night, was it?” George Cooper demanded. “Burning the midnight oil. Must have been interesting reading, seems to me, Josh.”

“I could hardly tear myself away from the book,” responded the other boy. “After to-night I’ll loan it to the rest of you, though I guess Tom must have got one from Mr. Witherspoon, for I see something bulging in his pocket.”

Tom laughed at that.

“Josh,” he said, “it’s very plain to me that you will make a pretty clever scout, because you’ve got the habit of observing things down to a fine point. And if you’ve read as much as you say, of course you know that one of the first things a tenderfoot has to do is to remember to keep his eyes about him, and see things.”

“Yes,” added Josh, eagerly, “one test is for each boy to stand in front of a store window for just two minutes, making a mental map of the same, and then go off to jot down as many objects as he can remember to have seen there.”

“That’s quite a stunt,” remarked Felix thoughtfully; “and I reckon the one who can figure out the biggest number of articles goes up head in the class. I must remember and practice that game. It strikes me as worth while.”

“Listen to the row up there, will you?” burst out George Cooper just then. “Why, that lot of boys seems to be having a snowball fight, don’t they? Hello! it isn’t a battle after all, but they’re pelting somebody or other. See how the balls fly like a flock of pigeons from Carl’s coop!”

“It looks like a man they’re bombarding!” ejaculated Felix.

“You’re right about that, and an old man in the bargain,” added Tom as he quickened his steps involuntarily; “I can see that bully Tony Pollock leading the lot; yes, and the other fellows must be his cronies, Wedge McGuffey and Asa Green.”

“See the poor old fellow try to dodge the balls!” exclaimed Josh. “They’re making them like ice too, and I wouldn’t put it past that lot to pack a stone in each snowball in the bargain. They’d be equal to anything.”

“Are we going to stand by and see that sport go on, boys?” asked Carl as he shut his jaws tight together, and the light of indignation shone in his eyes.

“We wouldn’t be fit to wear the khaki of scouts if we did, fellows!” cried Tom Chesney. “Come on, and let’s give them a taste of their own medicine,” and with loud shouts the five comrades started to gather up the snow as they chased pell-mell toward the scene of excitement.

Contents

# CHAPTER II

## THE MAN WHO LOVED NATURE

“Give it to them, boys!” Josh was shouting as he started to send his first ball straight at the group of busy tormentors who were showering the helpless old man with their icy balls that must have stung almost as much as so many rocks.

He seemed to be lame, for while he tried to advance toward the young rascals waving his stout cane wildly, they had no difficulty in keeping a safe distance off, and continuing the cruel bombardment.

The smashing of that ball flung by Josh, who was pitcher on the Lenox baseball team, and a fine shot, was the first intimation the three tormentors of the old man had that the tables had been turned.

“Hey! look here what’s on to us!” shrilled one of the trio, as he felt the sudden shock caused by the first snowball striking the back of his head.

Upon that the bully of the town and his two allies were forced to turn and try to defend themselves against this assault from the rear. They fought desperately for a very short time, but their hands were already half frozen, and five against three proved too great odds for their valor.

Besides, every time Josh let fly he managed to land on some part of the person of Tony Pollock or one of his cronies. And those hard balls when driven by the sturdy arm of the baseball pitcher stung mercilessly.

The old man stood and watched, with something like a smile on his face. He

seemed to have forgotten all about his own recent predicament in seeing these young rowdies receiving their just dues. If he had not been old and lame possibly he might have insisted on joining in the fray, and adding to the punishment being meted out to the three cowardly boys.

Once a retreat was begun, it quickly merged into a regular panic. Tom stayed to talk to the old man while his comrades pursued the fleeing trio, and peppered them good and hard. When finally they felt that they had amply vindicated their right to be reckoned worthy candidates for scout membership they came back, laughing heartily among themselves, to where Tom and the old man were standing.

“Why, I’ve seen that old fellow before,” Josh remarked in a low tone as he and Carl, George and Felix drew near. “His name is Larry Henderson, and they say he’s something of a hermit, living away up in the woods beyond Bear Mountain.”

“Sure thing,” added Felix, instantly; “I’ve heard my folks talking about him lots of times. He does a little trapping, they say, but spends most of his time studying animated nature. He knows every animal that ever lived on this continent, and the birds and insects too, I reckon. He’s as smart as they make ’em, and used to be a college professor some people say, even if he does talk a little rough now.”

For some reason all of them were feeling more or less interest in the man who walked with a cane. Perhaps this arose from the fact that of late they had become enthusiastic over everything connected with woodcraft. And the fact that Mr. Henderson was acquainted with a thousand secrets about the interesting things to be discovered in the Great Outdoors appealed strongly to them.

“These are my chums, Mr. Henderson,” said Tom, when the others came up; and as the name of each one was mentioned the hermit of Bear Mountain grasped his

hand, giving a squeeze that made some of the boys wince.

“I’m glad to meet you all,” he said, heartily. “It was worth being attacked by that lot of rowdies just to get acquainted with such a fine lot of boys. And I want to say that you gave them all the punishment they deserved. I counted hits until I lost all track of the number.”

“Yes,” said Felix, with a grin on his freckled face; “they’re rubbing many a sore spot right now, I reckon. Josh here, who’s our star pitcher on the nine, never wasted a single ball. And I could hear the same fairly whistle through the air.”

“Gosh all hemlock! Felix,” objected the boy mentioned, “you’re stretching things pretty wide, aren’t you? Now I guess the rest of you did your share in the good work, just as much as I.”

“All the same I’m thankful for your coming to my assistance,” said Mr. Henderson. “My rheumatism kept me from being as spry in dodging their cannonade as I might have been some years ago. And one ball that broke against that tree had a stone inside it, I’m sorry to say. We would have called that unsportsmanlike in my young days.”

“Only the meanest kind of a fellow would descend to such a trick!” exclaimed the indignant Josh; “but then Tony Pollock and his crowd are ready to do anything low-down and crooked. They’ll never be able to join our scout troop, after we get it started.”

“What’s that you are saying?” asked the old man, showing sudden interest.

“Why, you see, sir,” explained Josh, always ready to do his share of talking if given half a chance, “our chum here, Tom Chesney, was visiting his cousins over in Freeport, and got interested in their scout troop. So we’ve taken the thing up, and expect to start the ball rolling right away.”

“It happens,” Tom went on, “that there is a young man in town who once served as scout master in a troop, and I’ve just had him promise to come around to-night and tell us what we’ve got to do to get the necessary charter from scout headquarters.”

“You interest me very much, boys,” said Mr. Henderson, his eyes sparkling as he spoke. “I have read considerable about the wonderful progress this new movement is making all over the land; and I want to say that I like the principles it advocates. Boys have known too little in the past of how to take care of themselves at all times, and also be ready to lend a helping hand to others.”

“The camping out, and finding all sorts of queer things in the woods is what makes me want to join a troop!” said Josh; “because I always did love to fish and hunt, and get off in the mountains away from everybody.”

“That’s a good foundation to start on,” remarked the hermit, with kindling eyes, as he looked from one eager face to another; “but I imagine that after you’ve been a scout for a short time your ideas will begin to change considerably.”

“How, sir?” asked Josh, looking unconvinced.

“Well,” continued the old man, softly, “you’ll find such enjoyment in *observing* the habits of all the little woods folks that by degrees the fierce desire you have now to slay them will grow colder. In the end most of you will consider it ten times better to sit and watch them at their labors or play than to slaughter them in sport, or even to kill them for food.”

“But Mr. Henderson,” said Josh, boldly, “I’ve heard that you trap animals for their pelts; and I guess you must knock a few over when you feel like having game for dinner, don’t you?”

“Occasionally I go out and get a rabbit or a partridge, though not often,”

admitted the old man; “and as for my trapping, I only try to take such animals or vermin as are cruel in their nature and seem to be a pest to the innocent things I’m so fond of having around me. I wish you boys could visit my cabin some time or other, and make the acquaintance of my innumerable pets. They look on me as their best friend, and I would never dream of raising a hand to injure them. Kindness to animals, I believe, is one of the cardinal principles of a true scout.”

“Yes, sir, that’s what it is,” responded Josh, eagerly. “I’ve got the whole twelve points of scout law on the tip of my tongue right now. Here’s what they are: A scout has got to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.”

“Whew! that’s going some!” declared Felix, who being prone to put things off to a more convenient season could readily see that he was sure to run up against a good many snags if he tried to keep the scout law.

“Then you can easily understand,” continued Mr. Henderson, “what a treasure-house the woods is going to be to every observing boy who spends some time there, and becomes interested in seeing all that is going on around him.”

“I’m sure of that, sir,” responded Tom, earnestly. “I know for one that I’ve never paid a quarter of the attention to such things as I ought to have done.”

“No, you are right there, my lad,” the hermit continued, being evidently on a favorite subject, “the average boy can walk through a mile of forest and hardly notice anything around him. In fact, he may even decide that it’s only a gloomy place, and outside the cawing of the crows or perhaps an occasional squirrel at which he shies a stone he has heard and seen nothing.”

“Then it’s different with a scout, is it, sir?” asked George Cooper.

“If he has been aroused to take a keen interest in nature the same woods will be

alive with interesting things," the other told them. "He will see the shy little denizens peeping curiously out at him from a cover of leaves, and hear their low excited chattering as they tell each other what they think of him. Every tree and moss-covered stone and swinging wild grape-vine will tell a story; and afterwards that boy is going to wonder how he ever could have been content to remain in such dense ignorance as he did for years."

"Mr. Henderson do you expect to remain in town over night?" asked Tom, suddenly.

"Why yes, I shall have to stay until to-morrow," came the reply; "I am stopping with my old friend, Judge Stone. We attended the same red school house on the hill a great many years ago. My stock of provisions ran short sooner than I had counted on, and this compelled me to come down earlier than usual. As a rule I deal over in Fairmount, but this time it was more convenient to come here. Why do you ask, Tom?"

"I was wondering whether you could be coaxed to come around to-night, and meet the rest of the boys," the boy told him. "We expect to have a dozen present, and when Mr. Witherspoon is explaining what a scout must subscribe to in joining a troop, it might influence some of the fellows if you would tell them a few things like those you were just describing to us."

The old naturalist looked at the eager faces of the five lads, and a smile came over his own countenance. Undoubtedly he was a lover of and believer in boys, no matter whether he had ever had any of his own or not.

"I shall be only too pleased to come around, Tom; if Judge Stone can run his car by moonlight. Tell me where the meeting is to take place."

"The deacons of the church have promised to let us have a room in the basement, which has a stove in it. The meeting will be at eight o'clock, sir," Tom informed

him.

“I hope to be there and listen to what goes on,” said the hermit. “And after all I’m not sorry those vicious boys thought to bombard me the way they did, since it has given me the opportunity to get acquainted with such a fine lot of lads. But I see my friend, the Judge, coming with his car, and I’ll say good-bye to you all for the present.”

He waved his hand to them as he rode away beside the white-bearded judge, who was one of the most highly respected citizens of Lenox.

“Well, he’s a mighty fine sort of an old party, for a fact!” declared George, as they looked after the receding car; nor did he mean the slightest disrespect in speaking in this fashion of the interesting old man they had met in such a strange way.

“I’d give something if only I could visit Mr. Henderson at his cabin,” remarked Felix; “I reckon he must have a heap of things worth seeing in his collection.”

“Who knows,” said Tom, cheerily, “but what some good luck might take us up that way one of these fine days.”

“Let’s hope so,” added Josh, as they once more started toward home.

Contents

# CHAPTER III

## A CLOUD OVER THE OSKAMP HOME

Tom and Carl walked along together after the other three boys had dropped off at various stages, taking short-cuts for their homes, as supper-time was approaching.

“What’s gone wrong, Carl?” asked Tom, as he flung an arm across the shoulders of his closest chum.

“I was meaning to tell you about it, Tom,” explained the other, quickly; “but somehow I kept holding back. It seemed as if I ought to find a way of solving that queer mystery myself. But only this morning I decided to ask you to help me.”

His words aroused the curiosity of the other boy more than ever.

“What’s this you’re talking about?” he exclaimed. “A mystery is there now, Carl? Why, I thought it might all be about that coming around so often of Mr. Amasa Culpepper, who not only keeps the grocery store but is a sort of shyster lawyer, and a money lender as well. Everybody says he’s smitten with your mother, and wants to be a second father to you and your sisters and brothers.”

“Well that used to worry me a whole lot,” admitted Carl, frankly, “until I asked my mother if she cared any for Amasa. She laughed at me, and said that if he was the last man on earth she would never dream of marrying him. In fact, she never expected to stop being John Oskamp’s widow. So since then I only laugh when I see old Amasa coming around and fetching big bouquets of flowers from

his garden, which he must hate to pull, he's so miserly."

"Then what else has cropped up to bother you, Carl?" asked Tom.

The other heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"My mother is worried half sick over it!" he explained; "she's hunted every bit of the house over several times; and I've scoured the garden again and again, but we don't seem to be able to locate it at all. It's the queerest thing where it could have disappeared to so suddenly."

"Yes, but you haven't told me what it is?" remarked Tom.

"A paper, Tom, a most valuable paper that my mother carelessly left on the table in the sitting room day before yesterday."

"What kind of a paper was it?" asked Tom, who always liked to get at the gist of things in the start.

"Why, it was a paper that meant considerable to my mother," explained Carl. "My father once invested in some shares of oil stock. The certificate of stock was in the safe keeping of Amasa Culpepper, who had given a receipt for the same, and a promise to hand over the original certificate when this paper was produced."

"And you say the receipt disappeared from the table in your sitting room, without anybody knowing what became of it?" asked Tom.

"Yes," replied Carl. "This is how it came about. Lately we received word that the company had struck some gushers in the way of wells, and that the stock my father had bought for a few cents a share is worth a mint of money now. It was through Amasa Culpepper my mother first learned about this, and she wrote to the company to find out."

“Oh! I see,” chuckled Tom, “and when Mr. Culpepper learned that there was a chance of your mother becoming rich, his unwelcome attentions became more pronounced than ever; isn’t that so, Carl?”

“I think you’re right, Tom,” said the other boy, but without smiling, for he carried too heavy a load on his mind to feel merry. “You see my mother had hunted up this precious receipt, and had it handy, meaning to go over to Mr. Culpepper’s office in the forenoon and ask for the certificate of stock he has in his safe.”

“So she laid it on the table, did she?” pursued Tom, shaking his head. “Don’t you think that it was a little careless, Carl, in your mother, to do that?”

“She can’t forgive herself for doing it,” replied his chum, sadly. “She says that it just shows how few women have any business qualities about them, and that she misses my father more and more every day that she lives. But none of the other children touched the paper. Angus, Elsie and Dot have told her so straight; and it’s a puzzle to know what did become of it.”

“You spoke of hunting in the garden and around the outside of the house; why should you do that?”

“It happened that one of the sitting room windows was open half a foot that day. The weather had grown mild you remember,” explained the other.

“And you kind of had an idea the paper might have blown out through that open window, was that it?”

“It looked like it to me,” answered the widow’s son, frowning; “but if that was what happened the wind carried it over the fence and far away, because I’ve not been able to find anything of it.”

“How long was it between the time your mother laid the paper on the table and the moment she missed it?” continued Tom Chesney.

“Just one full hour. She went from the breakfast table and got the paper out of her trunk. Then when she had seen the children off to school, and dressed to go out it was gone. She said that was just a quarter to ten.”

“She’s sure of that, is she?” demanded Tom.

“Yes,” replied Carl, “because the grocer’s boy always comes along at just a quarter after nine for his orders, and he had been gone more than twenty minutes.”

At that the other boy stopped still and looked fixedly at Carl.

“That grocer’s boy is a fellow by the name of Dock Phillips, isn’t he?” was what Tom asked, as though with a purpose.

“Yes,” Carl replied.

“And he works for Mr. Amasa Culpepper, too!” continued Tom, placing such a decided emphasis on these words that his companion started and stared in his face.

“That’s all true enough, Tom, but tell me what you mean by saying that in the way you did? What could Mr. Culpepper have to do with the vanishing of that paper?”

“Oh! perhaps nothing at all,” pursued the other, “but all the same he has more interest in its disappearance than any other person I can think of just now.”

“Because his name was signed at the bottom, you mean, Tom?” cried the startled Carl.

“Just what it was,” continued Tom. “Suppose your mother could never produce that receipt, Mr. Culpepper would be under no necessity of handing over any papers. I don’t pretend to know much about such things, and so I can’t tell just how he could profit by holding them. But even if he couldn’t get them made over in his own name, he might keep your mother from becoming rich unless she agreed to marry him!”

Carl was so taken aback by this bold statement that he lost his breath for a brief period of time.

“But Tom, Amasa Culpepper wasn’t in our house that morning?” he objected.

“Perhaps not, but Dock Phillips was, and he’s a boy I’d hate to trust any further than I could see him,” Tom agreed.

“Do you think Mr. Culpepper could have hired Dock to *steal* the paper?” continued the sorely-puzzled Carl.

“Well, hardly that. If Dock took it he did the job on his own responsibility. Perhaps he had a chance to glance at the paper and find out what it stood for, and in his cunning way figured that he might hold his employer up for a good sum if he gave him to understand he could produce that receipt.”

“Yes, yes, I’m following you now, go on,” implored the deeply interested Carl.

“Here we are at your house, Carl; suppose you ask me in. I’d like to find out if Dock was left alone in the sitting room for even a minute that morning.”

“Done!” cried the other, vehemently, as he pushed open the white gate, and led the way quickly along the snow-cleaned walk up to the front door.

Mrs. Oskamp was surprised as she stood over the stove in the neat kitchen of her little cottage home when her oldest boy and his chum, Tom Chesney, whom she

liked very much indeed, entered. Their manner told her immediately that it was design and not accident that had brought them in together.

“I’ve been telling Tom, mother,” said Carl, after looking around and making certain that none of the other children were within earshot; “and he’s struck what promises to be a clue that may explain the mystery we’ve been worrying over.”

“I’m pleased to hear you say so, son,” the little woman with the rosy cheeks and the bright eyes told Carl; “and if I can do anything to assist you please call on me without hesitation, Tom.”

“What we want you to tell us, mother,” continued Carl, “is how long you left that Dock Phillips alone in the sitting room when he called for grocery orders on the morning that paper disappeared.”

Mrs. Oskamp looked wonderingly at them both.

“I don’t remember saying anything of that sort to you, Carl,” she presently remarked, slowly and with a puzzled expression on her pretty plump face.

“But you *did* leave him alone there, didn’t you?” the boy persisted, as though something in her manner convinced him that he was on the track of a valuable clue.

“Well, yes, but it was not for more than two minutes,” she replied. “There was a mistake in my last weekly bill, and I wanted Dock to take it back to the store with him for correction. Then I found I had left it in the pocket of the dress I wore the afternoon before, and so I went upstairs to get it.”

“Two minutes would be plenty of time, wouldn’t it, Tom?” Carl continued, turning on his chum.

“He may have stepped up to the table to see what the paper was,” Tom theorized;

“and discovering the name of Amasa Culpepper signed to it, considered it worth stealing. That may be wronging Dock; but he has a bad reputation, you know, Mrs. Oskamp. My folks say they are surprised at Mr. Culpepper’s employing him; but everybody knows he hates to pay out money, and I suppose he can get Dock cheaper than he could most boys.”

“But what would the boy want to do with that paper?” asked the lady, helplessly.

“Why, mother,” said Carl, with a shrug of his shoulders as he looked toward his chum; “don’t you see he may have thought he could tell Mr. Culpepper about it, and offer to hand over, or destroy the paper, for a certain amount of cash.”

“But that would be very wicked, son!” expostulated Mrs. Oskamp.

“Oh well, a little thing like that wouldn’t bother Tony Pollock or Dock Phillips; and they’re both of the same stripe. Haven’t we hunted high and low for that paper, and wondered where under the sun it could have gone? Well, Dock got it, I’m as sure now as that my name’s Carl Oskamp. The only question that bothers me now is how can I make him give it up, or tell what he did with it.”

“If he took it, and has already handed it over to Mr. Culpepper, there’s not a single chance in ten you’ll ever see it again,” Tom asserted; “but we’ve got one thing in our favor.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Tom,” the little lady told him, for she had a great respect for the opinion of her son’s chum; “tell us what it is, won’t you?”

“Everybody knows how Amasa Culpepper is getting more and more stingy every year he lives,” Tom explained. “He hates to let a dollar go without squeezing it until it squeals, they say. Well, if Dock holds out for a fairly decent sum I expect Amasa will keep putting him off, and try to make him come down in his price. That’s our best chance of ever getting the paper back.”

“Tom, I want you to go with me to-night and face Dock Phillips,” said Carl.

“Just as you say; we can look him up on our way to the meeting.”

Contents

# CHAPTER IV

## THE DEFIANCE OF DOCK PHILLIPS

Remembering his promise, Tom called early for his chum. Carl lived in a pretty little cottage with his mother, and three other children. There was Angus, a little chap of five, Dot just three, and Elsie well turned seven.

Everybody liked to visit the Oskamp home, there was such an air of contentment and happiness about the entire family, despite the fact that they missed the presence of the one who had long been their guide and protector.

Tom was an especial favorite with the three youngsters, and they were always ready for a romp with him when he came to spend an evening with his chum. On this occasion however Tom did not get inside the house, for Carl was on the lookout and hurried out of the door as soon as he heard the gate shut.

“Hello! seems to me you’re in a big hurry to-night,” laughed Tom, when he saw the other slip out of the house and come down the path to meet him; “what’s all the rush about, Carl?”

“Why, you see I knew we meant to drop in at Dock Phillips’ place, and we wouldn’t want to be too late at the meeting if we happened to be held up there,” was the explanation Carl gave.

As they hurried along they talked together, and of course much of their conversation was connected with this visit to Dock. Carl seemed hopeful of good results, but to tell the truth Tom had his doubts.

In the first place he was a better judge of human nature than his chum, and he knew that the Phillips boy was stubborn, as well as vicious. If he were really guilty of having taken the paper he would be likely to deny it vehemently through thick and thin.

Knowing how apt Carl was to become discouraged if things went against him very strongly, Tom felt it was his duty to prepare the other for disappointment.

“Even if Dock denies that he ever saw the paper, we mustn’t let ourselves feel that this is the end of it, you know, Carl,” he started to say.

“I’ll be terribly disappointed, though, Tom,” admitted the other boy, with a sigh that told how he had lain awake much the last two nights trying to solve the puzzle that seemed to have no answer.

“Oh! that would only be natural,” his chum told him, cheerily; “but you know if we expect to become scouts we must figure out what they would do under the same conditions, and act that way.”

“That’s right, Tom,” agreed the other, bracing up. “Tell me what a true-blue scout would figure out as his line of duty in case he ran up against a snag when his whole heart was set on doing a thing.”

“He’d just remember that old motto we used to write in our copybooks at school, and take it to heart—‘if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!’ And Carl, a scout would keep on trying right along. He’d set his teeth together as firm as iron and say he’d solve that problem, or know the reason why.”

“Tom, you know how to brace a weak-kneed fellow up all right.”

“But you’re not that kind, Carl. Only in this case there’s so much at stake you hardly do yourself justice. Remember how Grant went at it, and when he found

that Lee met all of his tactics so cleverly he got his back up and said he'd fight it out on that line if it took all summer."

"I see what you mean, and I'm game enough to say the same thing!" declared the other, with a ring of resolution in his voice.

Tom felt wonderfully relieved. He knew that Carl was capable of great things if only he succeeded in conquering his one little failing of seeing the gloomy side of passing events.

"Well, here we are at Dock's place. It's not a particularly lovely home for any fellow, is it? But then his father is known to be a hard drinker, and the mother finds it a tough job to keep her family in clothes and food. My folks feel sorry for her, and do what they can at times to help her out, though she's too proud to ask for assistance."

"Dock promises to be as bad as his father, I'm afraid, only so far he hasn't taken to drinking," remarked Carl.

"There's some hope for him if only he keeps away from that," ventured Tom. "But let's knock on the door."

No sooner had his knuckles come in contact with the panel than there was a furious barking within. Like most poor families the Phillips evidently kept several dogs; indeed, Dock had always been a great lover of animals, and liked to be strutting along the main street of Lenox with a string of dogs tagging at his heels.

A harsh voice was heard scolding the dogs, who relapsed into a grumbling and whining state of obedience.

"That's Dock himself," said Carl. "They mind him all right, you see. I hope he

opens the door for us, and not his father."

Just then the Phillips door was drawn back.

"Hello! Carl, and you too Tom; what's up?"

Although Dock tried to say this with extreme indifference Tom saw that he was more or less startled at seeing them. In fact he immediately slipped outside, and closed the door behind him, as though he did not want his mother or any one else to overhear what might be said.

This action was positive evidence to the mind of Tom Chesney that Dock was guilty. His fears caused him to act without thinking. At the same time such evidence is never accepted in a court of law as circumstantial.

If either of the two boys had ever called at the Phillips' house before it must have been on account of some errand, and at the request of their mothers. Dock might therefore be filled with curiosity to know why he had been honored with a visit.

"We dropped around to have a few words with you, Dock," said Tom, who had made arrangements with his chum to manage the little interview, and had his plan of campaign all laid out in advance.

"Oh is that so?" sneered the other, now having had time to recover from the little shock which their sudden appearance had given him. "Well, here I am, so hurry up with what you've got to say. I came home late from the store and I'm not done my supper yet."

"We'll keep you only a few minutes at the most, Dock," continued Tom; "you take the orders for groceries for the store, don't you?"

"What, me? Why, course I do. Ain't you seen me a-goin' around with that bob-tail racer of Old Culpepper's that could make a mile in seventeen minutes if you

kept the whip a-waggin' over his back? What if I do take orders; want to leave one with me for a commission, hey?"

Dock tried to throw all the sarcasm he could into his voice. He had an object no doubt in doing this; which was to impress these two boys as to his contempt for them and their errand, whatever it might be.

"We came here in hopes that you might solve a little bit of a mystery that's bothering Carl's mother, Dock," continued Tom.

It was pretty dark out there, as the night had settled down, and not much light escaped from the windows close by; still Tom thought he saw the other boy move uneasily when he said this.

"That's a funny thing for you to say, Tom Chesney," grumbled the other. "How'd I be able to help Mrs. Oskamp out, tell me? I ain't much of a hand to figger sums. That's why I hated school, and run away, so I had to go to work. Now what you drivin' at anyhow? Just tell me that."

"Day before yesterday you called at Mrs. Oskamp's house, Dock, as you do every morning, to take orders. You always make it about the same time, I understand, which is close to a quarter after nine."

"Oh! I'm the promptest grocery clerk you ever saw!" boasted Dock, perhaps to hide a little confusion, and bolster up his nerve.

"After you had gone, or to make it positive at just a quarter to ten Mrs. Oskamp, who had dressed to go out, missed something that was on the table of the sitting room where you came for orders, and which she says she knows was there when you first arrived!"

"What's this you're a-sayin', Tom Chesney? Want to make me out a thief, do

you? Better go slow about that sort of talk, I tell you!" blustered Dock, aggressively. "Did Mrs. Oskamp see me take anything?"

"Oh! no, certainly not," continued Tom; "but she had to go upstairs to get a bill she wanted you to take back to the store for correction, and left you alone in the room for a couple of minutes, that's all."

Tom was fishing for a "rise," as he would have put it himself, being something of an angler; and he got it too. All unsuspicious of the trap that had been spread for his unwary feet Dock gave a harsh laugh, and went on to say angrily:

"You have got the greatest nerve I ever heard about, Tom Chesney, a-comin' here right to my own home, and accusin' me of bein' a reg'lar thief. I wouldn't take a thing for the world. Besides, what'd I want with a silly old scrap of paper, tell me?"

"Oh!" said Tom, quietly, "but I never mentioned what it was that was taken. How do you happen to know then it was a paper, Dock?"

Carl gave a gasp of admiration for the clever work of his chum. As for Dock, he hardly knew what to say immediately, though after he caught his breath he managed to mutter:

"Why, there was some papers on the table, I remembered, and I just guessed you must be meanin' that. I tell you I ain't seen no paper, and you can't prove it on me either. I defy you to; so there! Now just tell me what you're goin' to do about it."

He squared off as though he had a dim idea the two boys might want to lay hands on him and try to drag him around to the police headquarters. Of course this was the very last thing Tom and Carl would think of attempting. Strategy alone could influence Dock to confess to the truth.

“Oh! we don’t mean to touch you, Dock,” said Tom, hastily. “All we wanted to do was to ask you if you had seen that paper? If you denied it we knew we would have to try and find it another way; because sooner or later the truth is bound to come out, you understand. We’d rather have you on our side than against us, Dock.”

“But what would a feller like me want with your old paper?” snarled the boy, who may not have wholly liked the firm way in which Tom said that in the end the real facts must be made known, just as if they meant to get some one accustomed to spying on people to watch him from that time on.

“Nothing so far as it concerned you,” replied Tom; “but it was of considerable value to another. Your employer, Mr. Culpepper, might be willing to pay a considerable sum to get possession of that same paper, because it bore his signature.”

Dock gave a disagreeable laugh.

“What, that old miser pay any real money out? Huh, you don’t know him. He squeezes every dollar till it squeals before he lets it go. He’d bargain for the difference of five cents. Nobody could do business with him on the square. But I tell you I ain’t seen no paper; and that’s all I’m a-goin’ to say ’bout it. I’m meanin’ to let my dogs out for a little air soon’s I go back in the house, an’ I hopes that you’ll close the gate after you when you skip!”

There was a veiled threat in his words, and as he proceeded to terminate the interview by passing inside Tom and Carl thought it good policy to make use of the said gate, for they did not like the manner in which the dogs growled and whined on the other side of the barrier.

“He’s a tough one, all right,” Carl was saying as they walked on together, and heard the three dogs barking in the Phillips’ yard.

“Yes,” admitted his chum, “Dock’s a hard customer, but not so very smart when you come right down to it. He fell headlong into my trap, which is a very old one with lawyers who wish to coax a man to betray his guilt.”

“You mean about saying it was a paper that had been lost?” said Carl. “Yes, you fairly staggered him when you asked him how he knew that.”

“There’s no question about Dock’s being the guilty one,” asserted Tom. “He gave himself away the worst kind then. The only thing we have to do is to try and get the truth from him. Sooner or later it’s got to be found out.”

“Yes,” continued Carl, dejectedly, “but if he’s handed that paper over to Mr. Culpepper in the meantime, even if we could prove that Dock took it what good will that do? Once that paper is torn up, we could recover nothing.”

“But I’m sure he hasn’t made his bargain with old Amasa yet,” Tom ventured.

“Why do you believe that?” asked the other, eagerly.

“You heard what he said about the meanness of his employer, didn’t you?” was what Tom replied. “Well, it proves that although Dock sounded Mr. Culpepper about being in a position to give him the paper they haven’t arrived at any satisfactory conclusion.”

“You mean Dock wants more than Amasa is willing to pay, is that it, Tom?”

“It looks that way to me,” the other boy assented; “and that sort of deadlock may keep on indefinitely. You see, Dock is half afraid to carry the deal through, and will keep holding off. Perhaps he may even have put so high a price on his find, that every once in a while they’ll lock horns and call it a draw.”

“I hope you’ve hit on the right solution,” sighed Carl; “if it didn’t do anything

else it would give us a chance to think up some other scheme for getting the truth out of Dock."

"Leave it to me, Carl; sooner or later we'll find a way to beat him at his own game. If he's got that paper hidden away somewhere we may discover his secret by following him. There are other ways too. It's going to come out all right in the end, you take my word for it!"

Contents

# CHAPTER V

## THE BLACK BEAR PATROL

It was a lively scene in the room under the church when the meeting was called to order by Mr. Witherspoon, the civil engineer and surveyor. A dozen boys were on hand, several having come from curiosity, and meaning to join the scouts later on if they saw reason to believe it would amount to anything.

Besides the boys there were present Judge Stone, his friend the hermit-naturalist, Larry Henderson, and two fathers, who had dropped around to learn whether this new-fangled movement for the rising generation meant that the boys were to be secretly trained for soldiers, as so many people believed.

Robert Witherspoon having once been a scout master knew how to manage a meeting of this sort. After he had called it to order he made a neat little speech, and explained what a wonderful influence for good the organization had been in every community where it had been tested.

He read various extracts from the scout manual to show the lofty aims of those who had originated this idea which was taking the world by storm.

“The boys have been neglected far too long,” he told them; “and it has been decided that if we want a better class of men in the world we must begin work with the boy. It is the province of this scout movement to make duty so pleasant for the average lad that he will be wild to undertake it.”

In his little talk to the boys Mr. Witherspoon mentioned the fact that one of the greatest charms of becoming scouts was that growing habit of observing all that

went on around them.

“When you’re in town this may not seem to be much of a thing after all,” he had gone on to say; “but in the woods you will find it an ever increasing fascination, as the wonders of nature continue to be unfolded before your eyes. We are fortunate to have with us to-night a gentleman who is known all over the country as a naturalist and lover of the great outdoors. I think it will be worth our while to listen while he tells us something of the charming things to be found in studying nature. Mr. Henderson I’m going to ask you to take up as much time as you see fit.”

When Tom and Carl and some of the other boys did that little favor for Mr. Larry Henderson they were inclined to fancy that he was rather rough in his manner.

He had not been talking five minutes however, before they realized that he was a born orator, and could hold an audience spell-bound by his eloquence. He thrilled those boys with the way in which he described the most trivial happening in the lonely wilds. They fairly hung upon his every sentence.

“When you first commence to spend some time in the woods, boys,” he told them, “it will seem very big and lonesome to you. Then as you come to make the acquaintance of Br’er ’Coon and Mr. Fox and the frisky chipmunk and all the rest of the denizens, things will take on a different color. In the end you will feel that they are all your very good friends, and nothing could tempt you to injure one of the happy family.

“Yes, it is true that occasionally I do trap an animal but only when I find it a discordant element in the group. Some of them prey upon others, and yet that is no excuse why man should step in and exterminate them all, as he often does just for the sake of a few dollars.”

This sort of talk roused the enthusiasm of the boys, and when after a while Mr.

Witherspoon put the question as to how many of them felt like immediately signing the roster roll so as to start the first patrol of the intended troop, there was a good deal of excitement shown.

First of all Tom Chesney signed, and immediately after him came Carl, Felix, Josh and George. By the time these five names had appeared Josh had slipped his arm through that of Walter Douglass and brought him up to the table to place his signature on the list.

“We need two more to make up the first patrol,” announced Mr. Witherspoon. “Unless eight are secured we cannot hope to get our charter from scout headquarters, because that is the minimum number of a troop. I sincerely hope we may be able to make so much progress to-night at this meeting that I can write to-morrow to obtain the necessary authority for acting as your scout master.”

At that another boy who had been anxiously conferring with his father walked forward.

“Good for you, Billy Button!” called out Josh. “That makes seven, and we only need one more name. Horace, are you going to see this grand scheme fall through for lack of just a single name? Your sig would look mighty good to the rest of us at the end of that list.” Then he ended with an air of assumed dignity, “Horace, your country calls you; will it call in vain?”

Horace Herkimer Crapsey was the boy who had been spoken of as a dainty dude, who hated to soil his white hands. Tom had expressed it as his opinion that if only Horace could be coaxed to join the troop it would prove to be the finest thing in the world for him. He had the making of a good scout only for those faults which other boys derided as silly and girlish. He was neat to a painful degree, and that is always looked on as a sort of crime by the average boy.

Horace evidently had been greatly taken by the combined talk of the scout master and the old hermit-naturalist. To the great delight of Josh, as well as most of the other boys, he now stepped forward and placed his name on the list.

“That makes eight, and enough for the first patrol,” announced Mr. Witherspoon, with a pleased look; “we can count on an organization now as a certainty. All of you will have to start in as tenderfeet, because so far you have had no experience as scouts; but unless I miss my guess it will be only a short time before a number of you will be applying for the badge of second-class scouts.”

“That’s just what we will, sir!” cried Josh, brimming over with enthusiasm.

“We cannot elect a patrol leader just now,” continued Mr. Witherspoon, “until there are some of you who are in the second class; but that will come about in good time. But it is of considerable importance what name you would like to give this first patrol of the new Lenox Troop of Boy Scouts.”

There was a conference among the boys, and all sorts of suggestions were evidently being put forward. Finally Tom Chesney seemed to have been delegated as usual to act as spokesman.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, rising from his seat, “my comrades of Lenox Troop have commissioned me to say they would like to ask Mr. Henderson to name the first patrol for them. They believe they will be perfectly satisfied with any name he may think best to give them.”

Judge Stone smiled, and nodded his head as though he considered this quite a neat little compliment for his good old friend. And the naturalist was also evidently pleased as he got upon his feet.

“After all, boys,” he told them, “it is a matter of very little consequence what you call this fine patrol. There are a dozen names that suggest themselves. Since

you have a Bear Mountain within half a dozen miles of your town suppose you call it the Black Bear Patrol."

There was a chorus of approving assents, and it looked as though not a single objection was to be offered.

"The black bear is an American institution, you might say," Mr. Henderson continued, when this point had been settled, "and next to the eagle is recognized as distinctive. From what I have heard said this evening it seems to me also that the Boy Scouts of America differ from any other branch of the movement in many ways."

"Above all things," exclaimed Mr. Witherspoon, "in that there is nothing military about the movement over here. In Europe scouts are in one sense soldiers in the making. They all expect to serve the colors some day later on. We do not hold this up before our boys; though never once doubting that in case a great necessity arose every full-fledged scout would stand up for his country's honor and safety."

"Every time!" exclaimed the impetuous Josh.

Long they lingered there, discussing many things connected with the securing of their uniforms, after the proper time had elapsed. Various schemes were suggested whereby each boy could earn enough money to pay for his outfit; because that was one of the important stipulations made in joining a troop, no candidate being allowed to accept help in securing his suit.

Before the meeting was adjourned it was settled that they were to come together every Friday night; and meanwhile each member of the Black Bear Patrol expected to qualify for the grade of second-class scout just as soon as his month of membership as arranged under the bylaws of the order had expired.

Contents

# CHAPTER VI

## SETTING THE TRAP

“Three weeks have gone by since we had that first meeting, Tom; just think of it.”

Carl was walking along the river road with his chum when he made this remark. They had seen the last of the snow vanish, and with the coming of milder days all the boys began to talk of going fishing before long.

Perhaps this saunter of the pair after school may have had something to do with the first contemplated outing of the season, and they wanted to see whether the fish had commenced to come from their winter quarters, though the law would not be off for trout yet awhile.

“That’s a fact, Carl,” replied the other boy; “and at our very next meeting most of the members of the patrol are going to get their badges as second-class scouts, because they’ve already qualified for it to the satisfaction of Mr. Witherspoon.”

“Honest to goodness I believe there’ll be only one tenderfoot left in the lot,” Carl continued; “and that of course is our dude, Horace. He managed to exert himself just enough to fulfill the requirements a tenderfoot has to possess, but there he sticks.”

“Wait a while longer,” Tom told him, “and one of these fine days you may see Horace wake up. I haven’t lost hopes of him by a long shot. At our next meeting, after we’ve passed up, the first thing we have to do is to elect a patrol leader.”

Carl laughed softly.

“Oh that’s all cut and dried, already,” he asserted.

“Well, if it is no one has said anything to me about it,” objected Tom, at which the other laughed again.

“Why should they bother when it was seven against one, Tom?” argued Carl. “Why, the boys wouldn’t dream of having any other leader than you!”

“But that doesn’t seem quite fair, it ought to be talked over openly. Why pick me out above every one else for that?”

“Because you’ve always been a leader among your schoolmates, Tom, that’s why!” he was quickly, told. “You’ve got it in you to take the lead in every kind of sport known to boys. Baseball, football, hockey, athletics—tell me a single thing where you’ve had to play second fiddle to any other fellow. And it isn’t because you want to push yourself either, but because you can go ahead.”

“Well,” said Tom, slowly and musingly, “it’s mighty nice to know that the other boys like you, and if the fellows are bound to make me take the office of patrol leader I suppose I’ll have to accept it.”

“No one so well able to do the work as you are, Tom. But this has been a terribly long three weeks to me, I tell you.”

“Now you’re thinking that we haven’t made a bit of progress about finding that stolen paper,” suggested Tom, looking a little crest-fallen. “Both of us have tried from time to time to watch Dock after nights, but somehow we haven’t had much success up to now.”

“No,” added Carl, with one of his heavy sighs, “if he has that paper hidden somewhere he’s smart enough to keep away from his cache, so far as we’ve been

able to find out."

"I don't believe he's come to any settlement with Amasa Culpepper as yet," Tom observed, with considerable positiveness.

"We think that, but we don't know for sure," ventured the less confident Carl. "If only I could glimpse the paper I'd have a big load lifted from my mind. And it cuts me to the quick to see poor mother trying to look cheerful when I come indoors, though I've noticed signs of tears on her cheeks several times."

"I've been thinking of some sort of scheme," began Tom, slowly.

"Good for you!" burst out Carl, delightedly. "Tell me what it is then; and can we start in to try it right away?"

"That depends on several conditions," explained the other. "First of all do you remember what that receipt made out by Mr. Culpepper looked like, Carl?"

"Do I? Why, it seems to me it must have been burned on my memory as though you'd take a red hot poker and make marks on the clean kitchen floor. When I shut my eyes nights and try to go to sleep it keeps dancing in front of me. Before I know what I'm doing I find myself grabbing out for it, and then I want to kick myself for being so foolish, when I know it's all just a silly bit of imagination."

"I'm glad you remember so well how it looked," remarked Tom, somewhat to the mystification of his companion.

"What has that got to do with your scheme?" he demanded, in perplexity.

"A whole lot," came the swift answer; "because I want you to get me up as close a copy of that receipt as you possibly can!"

"Whew! do you mean even to signing Mr. Culpepper's name at the end?" asked

Carl, whose breath had very nearly been taken away.

“Yes, even to that,” he was told; “in fact the paper wouldn’t be worth a pinch of salt in my little game if that signature were omitted. Do you think you could duplicate the receipt, Carl?”

“I am sure I could; but even now I’m groping in the dark, because for the life of me I can’t see what you expect to do with it, Tom.”

“Don’t forget to crease it, to make it look as though it had been folded and opened ever so many times; yes, and soil the outside a little too, as if it had been carried in a boy’s pocket along with a lot of other things like marbles or a top or something like that.”

“But please explain what all this means,” Carl pleaded.

“Listen!” replied the other, impressively, “and I’ll tell you what my game is. It may work, and it may fall flat; a whole lot depends on circumstances, but there’s no harm trying it out.”

“Of course not; go on and tell me.”

“In watching Dock when he didn’t know it, we’ve learned considerable about his habits,” continued Tom. “For one thing every single night he walks home along the river road here after delivering a package or two at certain houses. It seems to be a part of the programme. Well, some fine night we’ll lie in wait for him about this spot; and on the road will be that duplicate of the paper which we believe he stole.”

At that Carl became quite excited.

“Oh! now I see what your game it!” he cried; “and let me tell you I think it’s as clever a trick as could be thought of. He’ll pick up the paper, thinking it may be

something worth while; and when he sees that it is the very receipt he thinks he has got safely hidden away somewhere, Dock will be so rattled that the first thing he does will be to hurry to find out whether it's been taken or not."

"That's the idea, Carl; and of course we'll follow him, so as to jump in the very minute he gets out the real document to compare them."

"Fine! fine, Tom! You are certainly the crackerjack when it comes to laying a trap to trip a scamp up. Why, he'll fall into that pit head over heels; and I do hope we can snatch the paper away from him before he has a chance to tear it up."

"We'll look out for that all right, you can depend on it," came the reassuring remark from the other scout. "When will you get busy on that copy, Carl?"

"To-night, after the kids are in bed," Carl hastened to reply; "I wouldn't care to have them see what I was doing, though in this case I firmly believe it's all right."

"And if your mother wants to know, tell her," said Tom.

"I'd have to do that anyway," said Carl, without the least confusion or hesitation; "I always tell my mother everything that happens. She takes an interest in all my plans, and she's the dearest little mother a boy ever had. But she'll understand that it's only meant to be a trick to catch the thief."

"Then if you have it ready by to-morrow afternoon we might try how it works that same evening," Tom remarked.

"I wish the time was now, I'm getting so anxious to do something," sighed the second boy, as he again remembered how he had seen his mother force herself to appear cheerful when he came from school, though there were traces of tears on

her cheeks, and her eyes looked red.

Soon after that the chums separated, as the afternoon was drawing near a close.

“I wish you luck with your work to-night, Carl,” was what Tom called out in parting; “and if any one wants to know where we’ve been, be sure and tell them that so far as we’ve been able to find out the fishing promises to be mighty fine this spring, better than for years, if signs go for anything.”

On the following day at noon when they walked home for lunch Carl showed his chum the paper. It had been carefully done, and even bore the marks of service in the way of numerous creases, and some soiled spots in the bargain.

Tom was loud in his praise.

“It certainly looks as if it had been carried in a boy’s pocket for some time,” he declared; “and it’s up to you to say how close a copy the contents are to the original.”

“I’m sure Amasa Culpepper would say it was his own crabbed handwriting to a fraction,” Carl had no hesitation in asserting. “And so far as that goes Dock Phillips isn’t capable of discovering any slight difference. If he ever picks this up you mark my words, Tom, he’s going to get the biggest shock he’s felt in many a day.”

“And you can see how the very first thing he’d be apt to do would be to look around to see if anybody was spying on him, and then hurry away to find if his paper could have been taken from the place where he hid it.”

“Oh! I hope, Tom, he doesn’t just step over it, and never bother to pick it up.”

“We’ve got to take our chance of that happening,” he was told; “but we know how nearly every boy would act. Besides, scraps of paper have begun to seem

worth something in Dock’s eyes lately. The chances are three to one he’ll get it.”

“Well, I’ll meet you at just seven o’clock to-night at the old smithy, and we’ll lay the trap when we hear his whistle up the road. Dock always whistles when he’s out after dark. I think it must help him keep his courage up.”

The church bells had just started to ring seven when the two boys came close to the old blacksmith shop that had been deserted when Mr. Siebert moved to a better location.

They had chosen this spot because it was rather lonely, and there did not seem to be very much chance of their little game being interrupted by any other pedestrian coming along just at the critical time.

On one side of the road lay the bushes, in the midst of which the boys expected to hide; on the other could be seen the river.

All was quiet around them as the minutes passed away.

“There, that’s his whistle, Tom!” whispered Carl, suddenly.

Thereupon the other scout crept swiftly out upon the road, and placed the folded paper where it could hardly help being seen by any one with ordinary eyesight. He had just returned to the bushes when a figure came hurrying around the bend, whistling vigorously as some boys are in the habit of doing. Carl’s heart seemed almost to stop beating when he saw Dock suddenly halt and bend over.

Contents

# CHAPTER VII

## DOCK GOES FROM BAD TO WORSE

Just at that instant, as luck would have it, a vagrant gust of wind, perhaps an advance courier of the prospective storm, swooped down across the road. Before the boy who was stooping over could touch the paper that had attracted his attention it was whisked suddenly away.

He made an ineffectual effort to seize upon it in the air, but missed it and had to stand there, while the paper floated far out over the river, to fall finally on the moving current.

Carl quivered with another feeling besides anxiety and suspense; keen disappointment was wringing his heart cruelly. Just when their clever little plot seemed on the point of working, a freak of fate had dashed his hopes to the ground.

He had the greatest difficulty in suppressing the cry that tried to bubble from between his lips. Even Tom must have felt bitterly chagrinned when he saw the paper go swirling off, without having had a chance to test its ability to deceive Dock Phillips, and perhaps lead him into confessing his guilt.

The grocer’s boy was now walking on again. Of course he knew nothing about the character of the elusive paper, save that it had played him a little trick. They could hear him whistling again in his loud way as though he had already forgotten the circumstance.

“Hang the luck!” complained Carl, when he felt that it was safe to let a little of

the compressed steam escape through the safety valve of his voice.

“That was a rough deal, all right,” admitted Tom. “Who would have dreamed such a blast could sweep down and take that paper off? Too bad you had all your work for nothing, Carl.”

“Oh! the work didn’t amount to much,” said the other boy, despondently; “but after hoping for such great things through our plan it’s hard to feel that you’re up in the air as bad as ever.”

“We might try it all over again some time, after Dock’s kind of forgotten about this happening,” suggested Tom. “But if he kept on seeing loose papers every little while he might get suspicious about it. Perhaps we can think up another plan that will have the earmarks of success about it.”

“I never thought the river would play me such a trick,” said Carl, looking out on the moving water; “up to now I’ve had a sort of friendly feeling for the old stream, but after this I’ll be apt to look on it as an unprincipled foe.”

“Oh! I wouldn’t say that,” urged Tom, always practical; “the river wasn’t to blame at all. And that gust of wind would have come whether we thought to place our bait on the road or not. I’d call it a piece of hard luck, and let it go at that.”

“We couldn’t do anything, Tom, now our paper’s gone off on the current?”

“Oh well,” replied the other purposely allowing himself to grow humorous so as to cause Carl to forget the keen bitterness of his disappointment; “perhaps if we went fishing to-morrow below here we might take the trout that would have your paper tucked away in his little tummy.”

“That’s right, Tom,” the other added; “we’ve read some thrilling yarns about

jewels being recovered that way; and I remember that even a gold watch was said to have been found, still running inside a fish after many moons."

"Yes, they tried to explain that phenomenon in a lot of ways, but I guess it must have been meant for a joke, just as my idea was."

"It's all over for to-night then?"

"Yes, let's go home," replied Tom. "We have lots to talk over and do, too. Before long the exams will be coming on, and we want to pass with honors if we expect to enjoy our vacation this summer."

"And it's pretty nearly decided I hear, that the Black Bear Patrol takes a long hike the first thing after school closes," Carl was saying, as they started down the river road into Lenox.

"Ten days in camp or knocking about will do more to make us seasoned scouts than as many months at home," ventured Tom, knowingly.

"All the difference between theory and practice you mean," added Carl. "On my own part I don't care how soon we get started. I've a whole lot of things written down to be attended to, once we get away from civilization. That long list Mr. Witherspoon gave me I've made up a name for."

"What is it, then?" asked Tom.

"Things for a Tenderfoot Scout to Look for on His First Visit to the Storehouse of Nature. What do you think of the title, Tom?"

"A pretty long one, it strikes me," answered the other; "but it covers the ground. Every one of us must have a copy, and it'll be a lot of fun to find out who'll be the first to answer all those questions."

“One thing I hope will happen before we start out on that hike,” said Carl.

“Of course you’re referring to that paper again, and I don’t blame you a bit. We’ll do our level best to get hold of it before then,” and trying as well as he knew how to buoy up the drooping spirits of the disappointed chum Tom locked arms with him, and in this fashion they walked home.

The days again drifted along into weeks.

Scout matters were looking up decidedly in Lenox. There was even some talk of a second rival organization among another set of boys, though Mr. Witherspoon gave it as his opinion that nothing could ever be done with such a wild crowd.

“There isn’t a single one among them, from what I hear and know, who could comply with the requirements every scout is expected to have as an asset when he makes application,” was the way he put it. “Those boys couldn’t subscribe to any of the rules which govern scouts in their daily life. They’d have to turn over a new leaf for a fact before they could don the khaki.”

“And,” said Josh Kingsley, “when such tough fellows as Tony Pollock, Asa Green, Wedge McGuffey and Dock Phillips start to turning leaves you can begin to see angel wings sprouting back of their shoulder blades.”

There were already five boys who had given in their names to make up a second patrol. When it was filled they meant to join the troop, and qualify for a better standing than greenhorns or tenderfeet.

Larry Henderson had long since gone back to his wilderness home beyond Bear Mountain. Twice had Tom received a letter from the old naturalist, in which he asked a great many questions, all concerning the boys of Lenox, in whom he had not lost interest, and what progress the new troop was making.

He also expressed a hearty wish that should they ever take a trip through the section of country where he lived they would not neglect to look him up in his cabin.

One thing Tom and Carl had noticed of late, and this was that Dock Phillips had taken to going with that tough crowd again. For a while his work in the grocery store had tired him so much each day that when evening came he had been content to go to his home, eat his supper, and then crawl in between the sheets.

Once more Dock was to be seen hanging around the street corners late at night with that group of rowdies that gave the uniformed force so much trouble. Some of them only escaped arrest on numerous occasions because their fathers happened to be local politicians whom the police did not wish to offend.

Tom and Carl talked this fact over and arrived at a conclusion, which may, and again may not, have been the true explanation.

“Dock’s getting tired of holding down his job,” Tom had said, “He’s been out of school so long now that he can’t be sent back; and he doesn’t like hard work either. Since his father signed the pledge he’s been working steadily enough, and perhaps Dock gets into trouble at home because of his temper.”

“I happen to know he does for a fact,” assented Carl. “He’s been acting hateful, staying out up to midnight every night, and his father has threatened to pitch him out. I rather think he’s lazy, and wants to loaf.”

“Perhaps he thinks that he ought to be drawing a regular salary because of that paper he’s got hidden away, and which is worth so much to Amasa Culpepper, as well as to you. To keep him quiet it may be, the old man is paying him a few dollars every week on the sly, even though he refuses to come down with a big lump sum.”

“Tom, would it be right for me to have another talk with Dock, and make him an offer?” ventured Carl, hesitatingly.

“Do you mean try to find out what the sum is he asked Amasa to pay him?” questioned Tom; “and agree to hand it over to him just as soon as the stock of the oil well company can be sold, after your mother gets it again?”

“Yes, like that. Would it be wrong in me? anything like compounding a felony?” Carl continued.

“I don’t see how that could be wrong,” the other boy answered, after stopping to think it all over. “You have a right to offer a reward and no questions asked for the return of your own lost or stolen property.”

“Then I’d like to try it before we settle on leaving town, Tom.”

“It would do no harm, I should think,” his chum advised him. “The only danger I can see would be if Dock took the alarm and went to Mr. Culpepper, to tell him you were trying to outbid him for the possession of the paper.”

“That would be apt to make him come to time with a jump, wouldn’t it?” said Carl.

“Unless he got it into his head that Dock was only trying to frighten him into meeting the stiff price at which he held the paper,” said Tom. “He might make out that he didn’t care a pin, with the idea of forcing Dock to come down.”

“Yes, because he would believe Dock wouldn’t dare put his neck in the noose by confessing to us he had stolen the paper. Then would you advise me to try the plan I spoke of?”

“If you get a good chance I should say yes.”

That was on a Wednesday afternoon, and Carl went home, his head filled with a programme he had laid out that concerned the cornering of Dock Phillips.

On Thursday he learned, when home for lunch, that a new boy had come for orders from the grocery. Carl was immediately filled with alarm. In imagination he could see Dock and Mr. Culpepper coming to terms at last.

After school that afternoon he waited for Tom, to whom the startling news was disclosed. The stunning effect of it did not seem to affect Tom's quick acting mind.

"Let's find out just what's happened," he remarked. "Perhaps over at Joslyn's, next door to the Phillips's, we might pick up a clue."

"Yes, and I know Mrs. Joslyn right well in the bargain," said Carl, showing interest at once. "I'm sure that if I told her as a secret just why we wanted to know about Dock she'd tell me if anything had happened there lately."

To the Joslyn house the two boys went. Mrs. Joslyn was an energetic little woman, and said to be able to mind her own business.

She listened with growing eagerness to the story, and at its conclusion said:

"I'm sorry for your mother, Carl, and I don't know that I can help you any; but there was something strange that happened at the Phillips' house last night."

Contents

# CHAPTER VIII

## SIGNS OF TROUBLE AHEAD

“Was it about Dock?” asked Carl, eagerly, while Tom could see that the color had left his face all of a sudden.

“Yes,” continued Mrs. Joslyn, “Dock seems to have fallen into the habit of staying out until midnight, with some of those young fellows who loaf on the corners and get into every kind of mischief they can think up.”

“That’s what we’ve been told was going on, ma’am,” said Tom.

“I could hear his father scolding him furiously, while his mother was crying, and trying to make peace. Dock was ugly, too, and for a time I thought his father was going to throw him out of the house. But in the end it quieted down.”

“That’s a new streak in Dock’s father, I should say,” remarked Tom. “Time was when he used to come home himself at all hours of the night, and in a condition that must have made his wife’s heart sick.”

“Yes, but you know he’s turned over a new leaf, and acts as if he meant to stick to the water wagon,” Mrs. Joslyn explained. “Somehow it’s made him just the other way, very severe with Dock. I guess he’s afraid now the boy will copy his bad example, and that’s peeving Mr. Phillips.”

“But he let Dock stay in the house, you say?” Carl continued. “Then I wonder why he didn’t show up for orders this morning. The other boy told my mother Dock was sick and couldn’t come.”

Mrs. Joslyn smiled.

“Yes, he says that,” she observed. “I went over to take back a dish I had borrowed, and he was lying on the lounge, smoking a cigarette. He said he was real sick, but between you and me, Carl, I’m of the opinion he’s just tired of his job, and means to throw it up. He’d rather loaf than work any day.”

Carl breathed more freely. It was of course none of his business what Dock did with himself, though he might think the other was a mean shirk to hang around idle when his people needed every dollar they could scrape up.

“Thank you for telling me this, Mrs. Joslyn,” he said as with his chum he prepared to take his departure; “it relieves my mind in several ways. And please don’t whisper my secret to any one. I still hope to be able to get that paper from Dock sooner or later, if he doesn’t come to terms with Amasa Culpepper.”

“I promise you faithfully Carl,” the little woman told him. “I guess I’m able to hold my tongue, even if they do say my sex never can. And Carl, you must let me know if anything happens to alter conditions, because I’m dreadfully interested. This is the first time in all my life I’ve been connected with a secret.”

“I certainly will let you know, Mrs. Joslyn,” Carl promised.

“And furthermore,” she continued, “if I happen to see Dock doing anything that looks queer or suspicious I’ll get word to you. He might happen to have his hiding-place somewhere around the back yard or the hen house, you know. He may have buried the paper in the garden. I’ll keep an eye on the neighbors while he’s home.”

Tom was chuckling at a great rate as he and Carl went down the street.

“It looks as if you’ve got Mrs. Joslyn a whole lot interested, Carl,” he told the

other. “She’s just burning with curiosity to find out something. Every time Dock steps out to feed the chickens she’s going to drop whatever she may be doing, and focus her eyes on him, even if her pork chops burn to black leather.”

“I wonder what he’s meaning to do?” remarked Carl, in a speculative way.

“Oh! just as Mrs. Joslyn told us, Dock’s a lazy fellow,” Tom suggested; “and now that his father is working steadily he thinks it’s time for him to have a rest. Then we believe he’s expecting sooner or later to get a big lot of money from Mr. Culpepper, when they come to terms.”

“Yes,” added Carl. “And in the meantime perhaps he’s got Amasa to hand him over a few dollars a week, just to keep him quiet. That would supply his cigarettes, you know, and give him spending money.”

“Well, it’s a question how long his father will put up with it,” Tom mused. “One of these fine days we’ll likely hear that Dock has been kicked out, and taken to the road.”

“He’s going with that Tony Pollock crowd you know,” Carl hinted; “and some of them would put him up for a time. But I’m hoping we’ll find a chance to make him own up, and hand back the thing he stole. I’d like to see my mother look happy again.”

“Does Amasa still drop in to call now and then?” asked the other.

“Yes, but my mother insists that I sit up until he goes whenever he does. You’d have a fit laughing, Tom, to see the black looks he gives me. I pretend to be studying to beat the band, and in the end he has to take his hat and go. I’m allowed to sleep an hour later after those nights, you see, to make up. It’s getting to be a regular nuisance, and mother says she means to send him about his business; but somehow his hide is so thick he can’t take an ordinary hint. I think

his middle name should have been Rhinoceros instead of Reuben."

"What will she do when you're away with the rest of us on that ten day hike over Big Bear Mountain?" asked Tom.

"Oh! she says she'll have told Mr. Culpepper before then she doesn't want him to call again," explained Carl; "either that or else she'll have to keep all the rest of the children up, and get them to romping like wild Indians. You know Amasa is nervous, and can't stand noise."

Tom laughed at the picture thus drawn of three boisterous youngsters employed in causing an ardent wooer to take his departure.

"It's only a few days now before we can get started, you know, Carl. Nearly all the preparations have been made. Each scout will have his new uniform on, with a few extra clothes in his pack."

"We won't try to carry any tent, will we, Tom?"

"That's been settled," came the ready answer. "At the meeting when I was elected patrol leader we discussed this trip, and it took like wildfire. In the first place we haven't a tent worth carrying; and then again it would make too heavy a load. All of us have been studying up on how to make brush shelters when in the woods, and even if it rains I think we'll get on fairly well."

"Each scout has a rubber poncho, which can be made mighty useful in a pinch, I should think," said Carl. "Then besides our clothes and a blanket, we'll have to carry a cooking outfit, as light as it can be made, and what grub we expect to eat up."

"Oh! most of that we'll rustle for on the way," the patrol leader told him. "We'll find farms scattered along our route, and it'll be easy enough to buy eggs, milk,

perhaps a home-cured ham, some chickens, and other things like bread and butter."

"That's a great scheme, Tom, and it makes my mouth fairly water just to talk about it. Sounds like an army foraging, only instead of taking things we'll expect to pay cash for them. How many are going along on the hike?"

"I have yet to hear of any member of the Black Bear Patrol who dreams of backing out; and there are several others who've told me they hope to join us. The way it looks now only a bad case of sickness would be able to keep any scout from being in line on that wonderful morning when Lenox Troop marches out of town headed for Big Bear Mountain."

"One good thing, we don't have to pack any heavy guns along with us," declared Carl.

"No, that's absolutely forbidden," the patrol leader declared; "we can take a fishing rod if we feel like it, because there's a chance to pick up some trout or bass before we come back on the down-river boat ten days later."

"I like that idea of making the return trip by water," Carl continued. "It will be great after so much tramping and camping. Besides, some of the boys have never been fifteen miles up the river before, and so the trip is going to be a picnic for them."

"Come over to-night and do your cramming for the exam with me," suggested Tom.

"I'd like to the worst kind," the other boy said with a grimace; "but this is the night Mr. Culpepper generally pops in, and you see I'm on guard. But I'm hoping mother will give him his walking papers pretty soon now."

“You would have to put a bomb under his chair to convince Amasa that his space was more desired than his company,” laughed Tom, as he strode off toward his own comfortable home.

The days passed, and since school would be over for the year at the end of the week, in the bustle of examinations and all that they meant for each boy scout, the intended outing was over-shadowed for the time being.

When, however, several of the scouts got together of course the talk soon drifted toward the subject of the hike, and many were the wonderful projects advanced, each of which seemed to give promise of a glorious prospect ahead.

So Friday night finally came.

School had been dismissed with all the accustomed ceremonies that afternoon, and there were few of the boys who had not gone up to a higher grade, so that when the last meeting before their expected vacation trip was called to order by the president of the organization it was a care-free and happy assemblage that answered the roll-call.

Mr. Witherspoon, the scout master, was on hand, but he seldom interfered with the routine of the meeting. It was his opinion that boys got on much better if allowed to manage things as much as possible after their own ideas. If his advice was needed at any time he stood ready to give it; and meanwhile he meant to act more as a big brother to the troop than its leading officer.

Of course Mr. Witherspoon expected to start out on the hike with the boys. His only fear was that he might not be allowed to finish the outing in their company, since he was liable to be called away at any time on urgent business.

The usual routine of the meeting was gone through with, and then a general discussion took place in connection with the anticipated hike. They had laid out

the plan of campaign as well as they could, considering that none of the boys had actually been over the entire route before.

“That makes it all the more interesting,” Tom had told them; “because we’ll be apt to meet with a few surprises on the way. None of us would like to have anything all cut and dried ahead of time, I’m sure.”

“It’s generally the unexpected that gives the most pleasure,” declared Josh Kingsley, who was known to have leanings toward being a great inventor some fine day, and always hoped to make an important discovery while he experimented in his workshop in the old red barn back of his home.

“Well,” remarked George Cooper, getting slowly to his feet, “there may be some things that drop in on you unexpected like that don’t seem to give you a whit of pleasure, and I can name one right now.”

“Oh come, George, you old growler, you’re just trying to throw cold water on our big scheme,” complained Felix Robbins, trying to pull the other down.

“I’ve seen him shaking his head lots of times all evening,” asserted Billy Button, “ and I just guessed George was aching to make us feel bad. He’s never so happy as when he’s making other folks miserable.”

George refused to take his seat. He even shrugged his shoulders as though he thought his comrades were hardly treating him fairly.

“Listen, fellows,” he said, solemnly and ponderously; “I don’t like to be the bird of ill omen that carries the bad news; but honest to goodness I’m afraid there’s a heap of trouble looming up on the horizon for us unless we change our plans for a hike over Big Bear Mountain.”

“What sort of trouble do you mean, George?” asked the patrol leader.

“Only this, Mr. President,” said George, “on the way here I learned that Tony Pollock, Wedge McGuffey, Asa Green and Dock Phillips had started off this very afternoon, meaning to spend a week or more tramping over Big Bear Mountain; and I guess they’ve got it in for our crowd.”

Contents

# CHAPTER IX

## NO SURRENDER

“It looks like a set-up job to me!” declared Josh Kingsley, with a ring of honest indignation in his voice.

“They’ve been hearing so much talk about what a great time we meant to have, it’s just made them green with envy; that’s what I think,” ventured Horace Crapsey.

“Yes, but why pick out Big Bear Mountain,” Felix wanted to know; “unless they meant to spy on the scouts, and give us all the trouble they could?”

There were signs of anger visible on every side. Scouts may be taught that it is noble to forgive those who wrong them, but all the same they are human, and deep down in their boyish hearts is the resentment any one with spirit feels at being imposed upon.

“We haven’t lifted a finger to interfere with anything that crowd wanted to do,” said Walter Douglass, aggressively; “and they have no business to upset our plans.”

“Huh! just let them try it, that’s all!” grunted Josh, shaking his head.

“We had an experience something like this over in Winchester, where I belonged to the scouts before moving to Lenox,” remarked Rob Shaefer, one of the two new boys.

“Do you mean some rowdies tried to make trouble for you?” asked Carl.

“In every way they could,” the new boy replied. “We stood it as long as we could, and then acted.”

“What did you do to them?” asked Mr. Witherspoon, with an amused smile, for he liked to see these wide-awake lads figure out their own plans, and was greatly interested in listening to their discussions as they worked them out.

“When it became unbearable,” said Rob, gravely, though his eyes twinkled, “we ducked the whole five in a frog pond, and after that they let us alone.”

“Cooled ’em off, eh?” chuckled Josh, whom the account seemed to amuse very much. “Well, that isn’t a bad idea, fellows. Frog ponds have their uses besides supplying messes of delicious frog-legs for eating. Anybody know of a pond that’s got a nice green coating of scum on the top? That’s the kind I’d like to see Tony and his bunch scrambling around it.”

“Oh! the pond will crop up all right when the time comes,” asserted Felix Robbins, confidently; “they always do, you know.”

“But what are we going to do about this thing?” asked Tom, as the chairman of the meeting. “Motions are in order. Somebody make a suggestion, so we can get the sense of the troop.”

“One thing certain,” observed George, “we’ve got to give up the plan we’ve mapped out, and change our programme—or else count on running foul of Tony and his crowd. Which is it going to be?”

A chorus of indignant remonstrances immediately arose.

“Why should we take water when we laid our plans first?” one demanded.

“There are only four of them, all told, while we expect to number ten, perhaps a full dozen!” another scout announced.

“I don’t believe in knuckling down to any ugly lot of fellows that chooses to knock up against us,” and Josh must have expressed the feelings of most of those present when he said this, for there was a chorus of “my sentiments exactly,” as soon as he finished.

Then, somehow, all eyes began to turn toward the scout master. They had come to think a great deal of Mr. Witherspoon. He seemed to have a great love for boys implanted in his heart, and was thus an ideal scout master; for there was always an exchange of sympathy between him and his charges.

“You want to know what I think of it, boys?” he started to say.

“It would have a heap of influence on our actions, sir—even if we did hate to play second fiddle to that crowd,” admitted Felix.

“But I can see no reason why we should do that,” the scout master immediately told them, and at this the anxious look on many faces gave way to one of satisfaction.

“Then you don’t want us to give up the Big Bear Mountain hike, and make up another programme; is that it, Mr. Witherspoon?” asked Tom, who had not been quite so much concerned as some of the others, because he believed he knew the nature of their efficient scout master, and that he was not one of the “back-down” kind.

“Why should we do that?” replied the other, quietly. “We are not supposed to be aware of the fact that these four rowdies have gone off in that direction. Our plain duty is to follow out our original plans, go about our own business, interfering with no one, and at the same time standing up for our rights.”

At hearing this some of the boys turned and exchanged expressive grins; others

even shook hands with each other. Fair play was something they admired above all things; and this manly stand on the part of their scout master pleased them immensely.

“We’re all glad to hear you say that, Mr. Witherspoon,” the chairman of the meeting told him. “I’m sure I voice the sentiments of every scout present when I say that while we’ll try to avoid trouble up to a certain point, there’s going to be a limit to our forbearance.”

“And the frog-pond cure is always available as a last resort,” added the new boy from Winchester.

“Now let us try to forget all about this disagreeable topic, and go on with the discussion concerning the things we should take with us,” the scout master suggested. “Scouts should always be able to meet an emergency, no matter how suddenly it is forced on them. We’ll be prepared, but at the same time not borrow trouble.”

Accordingly all mention of Tony Pollock and his scapegrace cronies was avoided as they once more entered into a warm but perfectly friendly argument.

There was one among them, however, who seemed to still look troubled. This was no other than Carl Oskamp. Glancing toward his chum several times, Tom could see the lines on his forehead, and he was also able to give a pretty good guess why this should be so.

Of course, it was all on account of the fact that when George made his announcement concerning the movements of Tony Pollock he had stated that Dock Phillips was one of the group that had left town, bent on spending a week on Big Bear Mountain.

This meant that the new scheme which Carl had expected to “try out” on the

coming Saturday night could not be attempted, because the object of his attention would be far away.

Tom meant to comfort his chum after the meeting, when they were walking home together. He could see further than Carl, and would be able to find more or less encouragement in the way things were working.

Scout affairs were certainly picking up in Lenox of late. Perhaps the coming to town of Rob Shaefer and Stanley Ackerman, who had both belonged to troops in the past, may have had considerable to do with it.

At any rate the new Wolf Patrol numbered five, and other boys were showing a disposition to make application for membership. Rob Shaefer was booked for the patrol leader, because of his previous experience along those lines, as well as the fact that he was becoming well liked in Lenox boy circles.

The other new boy, while a pretty fair sort of fellow, did not have the same winning qualities that Rob did. Some of them even thought he felt envious because of Rob's popularity, though if this were true, he took the wrong means to supplant his rival in the affection of their new friends.

As this would be the last chance to talk things over, every little detail had to be settled before the meeting broke up. Each boy who expected to accompany the expedition starting out to explore Big Bear Mountain was directed what to carry with him.

"And remember," Mr. Witherspoon told them as a final caution, "we expect to do much tramping under a hot June sun, so that every ounce you have to carry along will tell on your condition. Limit your pack to the bare necessities as we've figured them out, and if necessary the strong will assist the weak. That's about all for to-night, boys. Seven sharp on Monday morning outside the church here, unless it's stormy. The church bell will ring at six if we are going."

The boys gave a cheer as the meeting broke up. And it was a merry-hearted lot of lads that started forth bound for various homes where there would be more or less of a bustle and excitement until the hour of departure arrived on Monday morning.

Tom and Carl walked home together.

“I could see what ailed you, Carl,” the patrol leader was saying as he locked arms with his chum; “you felt as though things were going against you when George announced that Dock had left town.”

“Because now I’ll not have a chance to try out that second plan we’d arranged for, and which I had great hopes might succeed,” complained Carl, gloomily.

“Cheer up,” urged the other, in his hearty fashion; “perhaps things are working your way after all. How do we know but that a glorious chance may come up and that you can win out yet? Dock has gone to Big Bear Mountain, where we expect to camp. In a whole week or more we’re apt to run across him maybe many times. And Carl, something seems to tell me your chance is going to come while we’re off on this hike. Dock hasn’t settled with Mr. Culpepper yet, that’s certain; and he’s got that paper hidden away still. Keep up your hopes, and it’s sure to come out all right yet. Besides, think what a grand time we’re going to have on our outing!”

Contents

# CHAPTER X

## READY FOR THE START

On the following day, which was Saturday, there was considerable visiting among the scouts who so proudly wore their new khaki suits. Conferences were of hourly occurrence, blankets brought out for inspection and comment, packs made up and taken to pieces again, and all manner of advice asked concerning the best way to carry the same.

Each boy had a written list of what he was expected to provide. This was a part of the wonderful system Tom Chesney had inaugurated. He had told them it was copied from the methods in vogue in the German army, so that in case of a hurried mobilization every man capable of bearing arms in the whole empire would know exactly what his particular duty was.

This scout was to carry a generous frying-pan, made of sheet-steel to reduce the weight; another had to look out for the coffee-pot, which was also to hold enough for at least six thirsty campers. So it went on through the whole list of necessities.

There were to be two messes of five or six each, and the second had a duplicate list of cooking utensils, as well as food to look after. Nothing had been omitted that Tom, assisted by several others who had had more or less camping experience, could think of.

It was about eleven this Saturday morning when Tom, doing a little work among his vegetables in the kitchen garden, heard his name called. Glancing up he discovered Carl standing there by the fence that separated the garden from the

highway.

Immediately Tom realized that something new must have happened to make his chum appear so downcast. His first fear was that Mr. Culpepper had been asked by Carl's mother for the securities, and had flatly denied ever having had them.

"Hello! what's gone wrong now, Carl?" he asked, as he hurried over to join the boy who was leaning both elbows on the picket fence, and holding his head in his hands.

"It seems as though everything is going wrong with us nowadays, Tom," sighed poor Carl.

"Anything more about that stolen paper?" asked Tom.

"No, it's something else this time," Carl replied. "Just as if we didn't have enough to worry about already."

"No one sick over at your house, is there?" demanded the other, anxiously.

"I'm glad to say that isn't the case," Carl told him. "Fact is, some bad news came in a letter mother had this morning from a lawyer in the city who manages her small affairs."

"Was it about that tenement house she owns, and the rents from which comes part of her income?" continued Tom, quick to make a guess, for he knew something about the affairs of Carl's folks.

The other nodded his head as he went on to explain:

"It burned down, and through some mistake of a clerk part of the insurance was allowed to lapse, so that we will not be able to collect on more than half. Isn't that hard luck though, Tom?"

“I should say it is,” declared the other, with a look of sympathy on his face. “But if it was the fault of the lawyer’s clerk why shouldn’t he be held responsible for the loss? I’d think that was only fair in the eye of the law.”

“Oh!” said Carl, quickly, “but my mother says he’s really a poor man, and hasn’t anything. Besides, he’s been conducting her little business since father died without charging a cent for his labor, so you see there’s no hope of our collecting more than half of the insurance.”

“Too bad, and I’m mighty sorry,” Tom told him.

“Coming on top of our losing that paper you can imagine how my mother feels,” continued the other; “though she tries to be cheerful, and keeps on telling me she knows everything is sure to come out right in the end. Still I can see that while she puts on a brave face it’s only to keep me from feeling so blue. When she’s all alone I’m sure she cries, for I can see her eyes are red when I happen to come in on her unexpectedly.”

“Nothing can be done, I suppose, Carl?”

“Not a thing,” the other boy replied. “That is what makes me furious. If you can only see what’s hitting you, and strike back, it does a whole lot of good. Unless something crops up to make things look brighter between now and fall there’s one thing certain.”

“What’s that?” asked Tom, though he believed he could give a pretty good guess, knowing the independent spirit of his chum so well.

“I shall have to quit school, and go to work at something or other. My mother will never be able to meet expenses, even in the quiet way we live, now that part of her little income is cut off. A few hundred dollars a year means a lot to us, you see.”

“Oh, I hope it won’t come to that,” said Tom. “A whole lot may happen between now and the beginning of the fall term. For all we know that missing paper may be recovered, which would put your folks on Easy street.”

“That’s about the last hope, then,” admitted Carl. “It’s all I’m counting on; and even then the chances seem to be against us.”

“But you won’t think of backing down about going on this grand hike over Big Bear Mountain, I hope?” remarked the patrol leader.

“I believe I’d lack the heart to do it, Tom, leaving mother feeling so bad; only for one thing.”

“Meaning the fact that Dock Phillips is somewhere up there on the mountain; that’s what you’ve got in your mind, isn’t it, Carl?”

“Yes, and what you said last night keeps haunting me all the time, Tom. What if I did run across the chance to make Dock own up, and got him to give me that precious paper? It would make everything look bright again—for with the boom on in the oil region that stock must be worth thousands of dollars to-day, if only we can get hold of the certificate again.”

“Well, you’re going to; things often work in a queer way, and that’s what is happening now. And I feel as sure as anything that Mr. Culpepper’s stinginess in holding out against Dock’s demands is going to be his undoing.”

Such confident talk as this could not help having its effect on Carl. He had in fact come over to Tom’s house knowing that he was sure to get comfort there.

“You make me feel better already, Tom,” he asserted, as he took the hand the other boy thrust over the top of the garden fence; “and I’m going to try and look at it as a true scout should, believing that the sun is still shining back of the

clouds."

"I'm about through with my work here in the garden," Tom told him, "so suppose you come around to the gate, or hop over the fence here. We'll go up to my room and take a look over the stuff that I expect to pack out of Lenox Monday A. M. I want to ask your opinion about several things, and was thinking of calling you up on the 'phone when I heard you speak just now."

Of course the main object Tom had in view was not so much getting Carl's opinion as to arouse his interest in the projected trip, so that for the time being he might forget his troubles.

The two boys spent an hour chatting, and consulting a map Tom produced that was supposed to cover most of the Big Bear Mountain territory. It had been made by an old surveyor some years back, simply to amuse himself, and while not quite up to date might be said to be fairly accurate.

Mr. Witherspoon had secured this chart and loaned it to Tom, for there was always a possibility of his receiving a sudden call on business that would take him away from town, when the duty of engineering the trip must fall to the leader of the Black Bear Patrol as the second in command.

That was going to be an unusually long and tedious Sunday for a good many boys in Lenox. Doubtless they would have their thoughts drawn from the sermon, as they sat with their folks in the family pews. And, too, looking out of the window at the waving trees they would probably picture themselves far away on the wooded slope of Big Bear Mountain, perhaps making their first camp, and starting the glorious fire around which, as the night drew on, they would gather to tell stories and sing school songs.

And it could be set down as certain that few of those who expected to join the adventurous spirits starting forth on the long mountain hike slept very soundly

on the last night.

When the hour agreed on, seven o’clock, came around, there was a scene of bustle under the tower of the church, where the scouts had gathered, together with many friends both young and old who meant to give them a noisy send-off on their hike over Big Bear Mountain.

Contents

# CHAPTER XI

## ON THE WAY

Amidst many hearty cheers and the clapping of hands the Boy Scouts started off. Felix Robbins had been elected bugler of the troop, and as there was no regular instrument for him, he had thought to fetch along the fish horn the boys used in playing fox and geese.

This he sounded with considerable vim as the khaki-clad lads marched away, with a flag at their head, the scout master keeping step alongside the column.

Some of the older people had come to see them off. Others hurried to the open doors and windows at the sound of the horn and the cheers, to wave their hands and give encouraging smiles.

It was a proud time for those boys. They stood up as straight as ramrods, and held their heads with the proud consciousness that for the time being they were the center of attraction.

There were ten in all starting forth. More might have gone, only that no scout not wearing the khaki could accompany the expedition; and besides the members of the Black Bear Patrol, Rob Shaefer and Stanley Ackerman were the only two who could boast of a uniform.

A number of boys accompanied them for a mile or so, to give them a good send-off; after which they either returned home or else went over the river fishing.

For the first two miles or so every one seemed to be standing the tramp well.

Then as it began to get warmer, and the pack, somehow, seemed to increase in weight, several scouts lagged a little.

Seeing this, and understanding that it is always an unwise thing to push a horse or a human being in the beginning of a long race, Mr. Witherspoon thought it best to slacken their pace.

They were in no particular hurry to get anywhere; and once heels began to get sore from the rubbing of their shoes, it would not be easy to cure them again. The wise scout master was a believer in the motto that “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.”

Ahead of them loomed the lofty elevation that possibly from its shape had long been known as Big Bear Mountain. The boys had tried to learn just how it came by that name—and naturally this subject interested them more than ever as they found themselves drawing steadily closer to its foot.

“It doesn’t look so *very* much like a bear to me,” George Kingsley remarked, as the discussion waxed warmer. Though for that matter George always did find some reason to object to almost everything.

“I was told by an old settler who ought to know,” ventured Tom, “that long ago numerous bears lived in the rocky dens of the mountain, and that’s how it came to be called as it is.”

“Must have been years and years ago then,” said Josh, “because I never remember hearing about a bear being seen hereabouts. I often used to look for bear tracks when I was out hunting, but of course I never found one.”

“Wouldn’t it be a great thing if we did happen on a real bear while we were out on this hike?” suggested Billy Button, who was rather given to stretches of imagination, and seeing things where they did not exist.

So they beguiled the time away as they tramped along. Gradually they approached the great gloomy looking mountain, and it was seen that by the time they stopped for their noon meal they would probably be at its foot.

Tom and Carl were walking together, for somehow the boys seemed to pair off as a general thing. Carl was looking brighter now, as though in the excitement of the start he might have temporarily forgotten his troubles.

“There don’t seem to be so many farms up this way as we thought,” Tom observed as they found themselves walking close beside a stretch of woodland, with a gully on the other side of the road.

“That may make it harder for us to get the supplies we’ll need, I should think,” suggested Carl, who knew the leaders of the expedition had counted on finding hospitable farmers from time to time, from whom they could purchase bread, butter, and perhaps smoked ham or bacon, very little of which had been carried with them—in fact no more than would be required for a few meals.

“Yes,” admitted Tom readily enough. “But then it will afford us a chance to show our ability as scouts—and if you look at it the right way that counts for a lot. When everything goes according to the schedule you’ve arranged there isn’t much credit in doing things; but when you’re up against it good and hard, and have to shut your teeth and fight, then when you accomplish things you’ve got a right to feel satisfied.”

Carl knew full well there was a hidden significance beneath these words of his chum’s—and that Tom was once more trying to buoy up his hopes.

Since they had struck a portion of country not so thickly populated, the observing scouts had commenced to notice numerous interesting sights that attracted their attention. Soon every boy was straining his eyesight in the hope of discovering new things among the trees, in the air overhead, or it might be

amidst the shadows of the woodland alongside the country road.

The scout master encouraged this habit of observation all he could. He knew that once it got a firm hold upon the average boy he could never again pass along a road or trail in the country without making numberless discoveries. What had once been a sealed book to his eyes would now become as an open page.

About this time there were heard inquiries as to when they expected to stop and have a bite of lunch. Tom and the scout master had already arranged this, and when the third scout was heard to say he felt as hungry as a wolf, Tom took it upon himself to explain.

“If you look ahead,” he remarked, so that all could hear, “you’ll notice where a hump of the mountain seems to hang over the road. That’s about where we expect to rest an hour or so.”

“Must be something unusual about this particular place, I should say, for you to settle on it ahead of time this way,” remarked wise Josh in his Yankee way.

“There is,” Tom informed him. “According to my map here, and what information I’ve been able to pick up, there’s a fine cold spring bubbles up alongside the road right there; and for one I’m feeling the need of a good drink the worst kind.”

After that it was noticed that even the laggards began to show unusual energy, as if the prospect of soon being able to throw themselves down and slake their thirst, as well as satisfy their hunger, appealed forcibly to them.

It was close on to noon when finally, with a shout, they hurried forward and dropped their packs close to where the ice-cold spring flowed.

“Queer how heavy those old packs do get the longer you carry them,” observed

George, as he waited for his turn to lie down and drink his fill of the spring water.

“You’re a suspicious sort of fellow, George,” declared Felix; “I’ve seen you turn around as quick as a flash, just as if you thought some other scout might be hanging his pack on to yours, so as to make you carry double.”

George turned redder than he had already become under the force of the sun; but he did not deny the accusation.

It was decided not to light a fire at noon. They could eat a cold lunch and wash it down with water.

“We’ll keep our fire for this evening,” said Mr. Witherspoon; “you know it is generally quite a ceremony—the starting of the first campfire when scouts go off on a long trip.”

Waiting until the sun had started well on his way down the heavens, and there had arisen a little breeze that made it more bearable, the scout master finally had Felix sound his fish horn for the signal to “fall in.”

Some of the boys did not show quite as much animation as on that other occasion. They were not accustomed to walking for hours, and would have to get used to it through experience.

An hour later they were straggling along, some of them on the other side of a wire fence that separated the road from the woods, as there seemed to be a chance of making interesting discoveries there.

“Look at that red squirrel hanging head down to the bark on the trunk of that tree!” exclaimed Billy Button; “I never noticed just how they did that stunt before.”

“Huh! lots of us are seeing things through a magnifying glass since we joined the scouts,” admitted Felix. “Seems as if the scales have been taken from my eyes, and I find a thousand things worth looking at all around me.”

“Well, here comes one right now, Felix; and he’s a bouncer at that!” cried the third of the group that had invaded the woods beyond the barbed-wire fence.

Even as he spoke there was a furious barking, and a savage-looking dog came tearing swiftly toward them, evidently bent on doing mischief.

Contents

# CHAPTER XII

## THE FIRST CAMP-FIRE

“Help, he’s going to eat us all up!” shouted Billy Button.

Felix and Rob Shaefer did not like the looks of the oncoming dog any more than did Billy. Being more pugnacious by nature, however, instead of making a frantic dash over the wire fence, and trying to crawl through between the strands at the risk of tearing their clothes, they hurried to snatch up some clubs which would serve them as a means of defence.

The dog acted as if he meant business. They were trespassing on his master’s territory, and as the guardian appointed to defend this ground he assailed the intruders without fear or favor.

They had quite a lively time of it, what with the shouting, the loud bursts of laughter from those scouts who were safe on the other side of the fence, and the agonized cries of Billy Button, caught fast in the grip of the barbed-wire, and expecting to be devoured.

Both Felix and Rob had luckily managed to secure fairly strong pieces of broken limbs from the trees. With these they boldly assaulted the dog, and kept him from jumping on the helpless comrade until some of the others came to Billy’s assistance, and by raising the wires allowed him to crawl through.

Tom and George hastened to join in the fray for it was evident that the savage dog would have to be beaten off before those who were in danger could find a chance to reach the road again.

With four enemies against him the dog concluded that he had done all that could be expected of him, and that it was now no dishonor to beat a masterly retreat; which he accordingly did.

The boys pretended to chase after him, with loud shouts; but seeing their opportunity to escape made haste to put the wire fence between themselves and the owner of those cruel white fangs. As long as he could follow them from his side of the barrier the dog continued to bark savagely; but did not offer to leave his own domain.

After all Billy Button was the only one to suffer, and he had a fine big three-cornered hole in his coat.

“Going into the real-estate business, are you, Billy?” asked Josh, who could always see a chance for a joke.

“Oh! am I?” retorted the other. “What makes you think that, Josh?”

“Because you’ve got a sign up ‘to rent,’” is what the other told him.

“Didn’t I see that dog take hold of you by the leg, Felix, at the time you struck him so hard on the head with your club?” Mr. Witherspoon asked.

“Yes, sir, but he only dented my leggings, you see,” the bugler replied, as he showed where the marks of the animal’s teeth could be plainly seen; “that’s the good of having extra-thick canvas leggings on; they save you from snake bites and all sorts of other things that you don’t want.”

“It was a pretty lively skirmish while it lasted, let me tell you,” admitted Rob Shaefer, who had seemed quite to enjoy the affair.

Another hour or more passed, with the column straggling along, and some of the boys showing positive signs of fatigue. Mr. Witherspoon had been consulting

with the leader of the Black Bear Patrol, and evidently they had reached a conclusion, for presently the welcome order was given to turn into the woods, as the day's hike was at an end.

Gladly did those tired lads obey the call. And one of the first things they discovered was that there was another cold spring nearby, the presence of which, of course, had been known to those who carried the chart of the region.

First of all they dropped down to rest themselves. Later on, when they were feeling more like doing things, they would start to put the camp in order, get the fires started, and perhaps erect some sort of rude shelter that to a certain degree would take the place of tents.

Finally some of the more enterprising began to stir around. Josh took it upon himself to provide a fireplace made out of stones which lay conveniently near. It was to be built according to the best formula he knew, something in the shape of a letter V, with the large end toward the wind; and across the top of the stones they would lay their iron rods, thus forming a gridiron on which would rest the frying-pan and the coffee-pot.

"I'll duplicate your cooking fire, Josh," said Rob Shaefer, who meant to show some of his new chums a few wrinkles he had learned when in camp on other occasions.

Half an hour before the sun went down both fires were crackling at a great rate; and when good beds of red embers should have formed operations looking to supper would be started by those in charge of the occasion.

Everybody took a deep interest in what was now going on. All sorts of suggestions were called back and forth as the ham was sliced and the potatoes put in the pots for boiling; while further along the fires the two coffee-pots began to emit a most delightful and appetizing odor that made the hungry boys wild

with impatience.

The spot where they had determined to spend their first night out was in the midst of the woods. Around them the forest trees lay on every side, some being great oaks, others beeches, with drooping branches and smooth silvery bark—as well as other species, such as sycamore, ash and lindens.

Most of the scouts were bubbling over with enthusiasm concerning the outlook before them; but several of the less daring ones might be seen casting furtive glances about as though the prospect of passing the night amidst such lonely surroundings had already commenced to make them feel a little queer.

No doubt the pride of these fellows would carry them through the initial night; and after that by degrees they would become accustomed to their new experiences. Every soldier can look back to his first battle, remembering how he trembled in his shoes, and feeling that he would give all he possessed for the privilege of running away at top speed.

And when supper was ready, with the boys gathered around, each bent on doing the best he knew how to show his appreciation of the work of the cooks, it seemed to be the fitting climax to a most wonderful day. Would they ever forget that supper? Never had anything tasted so royally good at home.

“This is the life!” declared Josh Kingsley, buoyantly, as he passed his tin plate along for a second helping when he heard it mentioned that there was still a further supply not distributed.

“It certainly does taste pretty fine to me!” admitted Horace Crapsey, who had in times gone by been so finicky about his eating that his folks had begun to wonder what was going to become of him—yet who was now sitting there cross-legged like a Turk, wielding an ordinary knife and fork, and with his pannikin on his lap, actually doing without a napkin, and enjoying it in the bargain.

Mr. Witherspoon had the seat of honor, for the boys insisted that he should occupy the highest place on the log that had been rolled near the fires. He observed all that went on with satisfaction. Boys were close to his heart, and he never tired of his hobby of studying them. It was a constant source of delight to the scout master to listen to them chatter, and he noticed that a perceptible change was taking place in some of his charges since first joining the troop.

Finally when every youth admitted that he had had all he could eat, Mr. Witherspoon got up.

“Now it’s full time we started our *real* campfire,” he announced. “That was why I had you gather such a big heap of wood. Here’s the right place for the blaze, as we must be careful not to scorch any of the trees, the branches of which hang down over us, because this property belongs to some one, and we must respect his rights.”

He had no trouble about finding willing workers, because every one acted as if anxious to have a hand in the building of that first campfire, to be recorded in the annals of Lenox Troop as an event of unusual importance.

When finally the pyramid had been carefully built the scout master was asked to apply the match.

“Unfortunately I do not know the customary procedure on such momentous occasions,” he told the boys, as they formed a circle around the pile; “and all I can say is that with this match I am about to dedicate this fire to the useful purpose of bringing all our hearts in tune with our surroundings. For to-night then, we will try to believe ourselves real vagabonds, or children of the forest, sitting around the sanctuary at which every camper worships—the crackling fire!”

Then the blaze began to seize hold of the wood, and amidst the cheers of the enthusiastic scouts the fire got fully under way.

High leaped the red flames, so that presently there was a general backward movement, on account of the heat. Had it been November instead of June, they would doubtless have enjoyed the cheery warmth much more.

Each boy managed to pick out a comfortable place, and then the talk began to grow general. Plans for the morrow and the succeeding days were being discussed with much ardor.

It was while this was going on, and the scouts were all feeling most happy that with but scant warning a discomforting element was suddenly injected into Camp Content. Moving figures, harsh voices, together with the half strangled barks of dogs held in leash startled the seated campers. Two rough-looking men, evidently a farmer and his hired man, armed with guns, and holding a couple of dogs by ropes, came in sight close by.

Contents

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE LIFE THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAVED

“Hey! what d’ye mean by trespassin’ on my ground? I’ll have the law on ye for darin’ to build a big bonfire like that! No tramp convention c’n threaten to set fire to my woods, let me tell ye!”

The man in the lead was shouting this in an angry voice as he bustled forward, with his dog growling and straining to get free. Of course every one of the boys scrambled to his feet in a hurry. The sight of their khaki uniforms seemed to give the big farmer a decided shock, for they saw him come to a stop.

“What’s this here?” he exclaimed, as he stared at the dozen lads. “Tell me, am I seein’ things Bill Scruggs? Is it the State Militia dropped down on us? Is there a war on?”

Mr. Witherspoon, who was of course in uniform, stepped to the front and made the old fellow a military salute that must have gone far toward soothing his ruffled feelings.

“We’re sorry if we’ve intruded on your ground, sir,” he said in that convincing voice of his. “The fact is these are some of the Boy Scouts of Lenox, a troop that has lately been organized. I am Robert Witherspoon, the surveyor, and if I’m not mistaken I did some work for you a few months ago, Mr. Brush.”

“That’s a fact ye did, Mr. Witherspoon,” declared the farmer, with less venom in his tone. “Seems like I didn’t know ye with them togs on.”

“I’m acting as scout master to these lads just now,” continued the other, in his conciliatory way. “One of the rules of the organization is that each troop must have a grown person to serve with them, so that any undue boyish spirits may be kept within reasonable bounds.”

“So I read in the paper, Mr. Witherspoon,” continued the countryman.

“Won’t you tie up your dogs, Mr. Brush, and come and join us here before the fire?” asked the scout master, who doubtless had more or less faith in the ability of a cheery blaze to curb animosity.

They saw the farmer rub his chin with his hand. He seemed to be debating within himself as to whether or not it would be advisable to comply with such a friendly invitation.

“Well, p’raps I mightn’t git such a good chance to look scouts over again as this here one,” he presently said, half to himself. “I’ve been reading a hull lot lately ’bout the doin’s of the boys. Got three lads o’ my own yet,” and there he was seen to swallow something that seemed almost to choke him.

“Then for their sake you ought to be interested in this great movement, Mr. Brush,” said the scout master; “I remember a bright boy of yours who was very much interested in the little surveying work I did for you that day. He helped me some, and said he thought he’d like to be a civil engineer when he grew up. If he joined the scouts that desire might be encouraged, sir, I assure you.”

“Oh, they been pesterin’ the life outen me to let ’em jine, but I ain’t had no faith in the thing,” Mr. Brush went on to say, with a stubborn shake of the head.

He had by this time tied up his dog, and was accepting a seat on the log close to the obliging scout master. The boys were satisfied to let Mr. Witherspoon do the most of the talking. They could see that he meant to open the eyes of this

unbeliever, and show him a few things that he ought to know.

“Just why did you frown on the scout movement, may I ask, sir?” Mr. Witherspoon continued, quietly.

“Well, in the fust place I don’t calc’late that my boys be brought up to be food for gunpowder,” replied the farmer.

“Then like a good many people you think Boy Scouts in this country are intended to become a part of the military defences; is that it, Mr. Brush?”

“Do you mean to tell me it ain’t so, Mr. Witherspoon?” asked the farmer.

“Nothing is further from the truth than that, as I’ll prove to you in a dozen ways, if you care to listen,” the scout master told him.

“Fire away, then,” said the farmer. “I’m not hide-bound ye know, and allers open to conviction; so tell me why I orter let my three boys jine the scouts.”

Mr. Witherspoon started in and explained the fundamental principles upon which the new movement was organized. He soon convinced the farmer that there was not the slightest intention on the part of those having the matter in hand to incorporate the scouts into a National Defence Movement.

“Was that the only objection you had, Mr. Brush?” he asked when the farmer frankly admitted that he had been wrong in his opinion.

“I reckoned that these boys only got together and wore uniforms for a big lark,” was the reply to his question. “I ought to know what boys is like, havin’ had four of my own.”

“Then you have lost one, have you sir?” questioned the scout master, not from idle curiosity, either, Tom Chesney felt positive.

The old man heaved a great sigh.

“Yes, my youngest, and the darling o’ his maw’s heart, little Jim. Only last summer he was off swimmin’ with several o’ his chums, and got caught with a cramp. They got him out, brave enough, but—he never kim to agin.”

Mr. Witherspoon cast a quick and meaning glance around the circle of eager faces. Several of the scouts nodded in a significant fashion as though they guessed what was flashing through the mind of their leader.

“Mr. Brush,” said the scout master, gravely, “I’d like to tell you some things that to my own personal knowledge scouts have done; things that they never would have been capable of performing in the wide world had they remained outside of this organization that first of all teaches them to be manly, independent, helpful to others, and true to themselves. May I, sir?”

“Jest as ye please, Mr. Witherspoon,” came the low reply, for the farmer had evidently been partly overcome with the sad remembrance of the vacant chair, and the face he missed so much at his table.

The scout master went about it in a very able manner. Again he explained the numerous duties of a scout, and how he was taught to render first aid to the injured in case, for instance, his services should ever be needed when some comrade cut himself with an ax, and was in peril of bleeding to death.

“There are other ways,” Mr. Witherspoon continued, “in which the scout is instructed to be able to depend on himself should he be lost in the wilderness, caught in a tornado, tempted to take refuge in a barn, or under an exposed tree during a thunder storm.”

“All o’ that sounds mighty interestin’, I must say, sir!” commented the farmer, deeply interested.

“To my own personal knowledge, Mr. Brush,” finally said the other, “on three separate occasions I have known of cases where a boy in swimming was apparently dead when dragged from the water after having been under for several minutes; in every one of those instances his scout companions, working according to the rules that had become a part of their education, managed to revive the fluttering spark of life and save the lad!”

There was an intense silence as the last word was spoken. Every one of those boys realized how terribly the man was suffering, for they could see his face working. Presently he looked up, with a groan that welled from his very heart.

“Jest a year too late, sir!” he said, in an unsteady voice. “Oh, why didn’t ye come last June? My little Jim was alive then, and the apple of my eye. If he’d jined the scouts he might a be’n with us right now. A year too late—it’s hard, hard!”

“But you said you have three boys still, Mr. Brush?” said the scout master.

“So I have, and mighty dear they be to me too!” exclaimed the farmer, as he proceeded to bring down his ponderous fist on his knee, “and arter what you’ve told me this night, sir, they cain’t be scouts any too soon to please me. I’ve had my lesson, and it was a bitter one. I’m right glad ye kim along to-night, and camped in my big woods, where we seen the light o’ yer fire.”

“And we’re glad too, Mr. Brush,” said the scout master, while several of the boys were heard to cough as though taken with a sudden tickling in their throats.

Long they sat there talking. Mr. Brush became an ardent advocate of the scout movement, and even made an arrangement for his boys to join the new patrol being formed, though it would mean many a trip in and out of Lenox for him in his new cheap motor car, in order that they attend the weekly meetings.

After all that was an evening long to be remembered. Tom Chesney, who kept a

regular log of the outing, meaning to enter his account in a competition for a prize that had been offered by a metropolitan daily, found a fine chance to spread himself when jotting down the particulars.

The farmer could hardly tear himself away from the crackling fire. Three times he said he must be going, yet did not stir, which quite amused Josh Kingsley and Felix Robbins.

“Our scout master sure must have missed his calling when he set out to be a civil engineer and surveyor,” whispered the former in the ear of Felix.

“That’s so,” replied the other, “for while he may be a pretty good civil engineer, he’d made a crackerjack of a lawyer or a preacher. When he talks somehow you just hang on every word he says, and it convinces you deep down. That old farmer on a jury would do whatever Mr. Witherspoon wanted. But it’s been worth hearing; and I’m a heap glad to be a scout, after listening to what he’s been saying.”

Finally the owner of the woods shook hands all around with them, and accompanied by his hired man and the two dogs respectfully took his departure.

Contents

# CHAPTER XIV

## AT THE FOOT OF BIG BEAR MOUNTAIN

It took them a long time to get settled on that night. Some of the scouts were about to experience their first camp sleep. They had to be shown just how to arrange their blankets, and what to do about the customary pillow upon which they wished to rest their heads.

Tom, Josh and Rob Shaefer, having been through the mill before, explained these things. They even helped the tenderfeet fill with hemlock browse the little cotton bag, which had possibly once held flour, and which each scout had been advised to carry along in his pack.

“They’ll be worth their weight in gold many times on the trip,” said Tom, when even Mr. Witherspoon stood listening with interest, for he had not as yet learned everything, he was free to confess.

“But do we have to carry them along with us like that?” asked Horace as he held up the rather bulky object he had made of his cotton slip.

“Certainly not,” he was informed; “you empty it before breaking camp, and in the evening fill it again. Plenty of hemlock or spruce handy, whenever you choose to stretch out your hand and pluck it.”

“You must show me about all these things,” Billy Button remarked. “To tell the truth I don’t know the difference between balsam, fir, spruce, hemlock, larch and some other trees I’ve heard you talking about.”

“I’ll begin to-morrow, and you’ll find it simple enough,” Tom promised him.

After all the night really passed without any disturbance. Tom and Rob managed to wake up a number of times, and getting quietly out of their snug nests, they renewed the fire, thus keeping it going all through the night.

Had any one been watching closely they probably would have seen a head bob up occasionally, the owner take a cautious look around, and then drop back again as though convinced that all was well, with no danger of ferocious wild beasts raiding the camp.

These were the tenderfeet of the troop. They of course could not sleep save in snatches, and the strangeness of their surroundings caused them to feel more or less nervous. All they heard, however, was the barking of Farmer Brush’s watch dogs or some little woods animal complaining because these two-legged intruders had disturbed the peace of their homeland.

With the coming of dawn there was a stir in camp. Then one by one the scouts crawled out from their blankets, all but two greenhorns.

“Let them sleep a while longer,” said Mr. Witherspoon. “I fancy neither of them passed a very comfortable night.”

And at this the other boys moderated their voices as they proceeded to get an early breakfast ready, though in no hurry to leave that pleasant Camp Content.

Of course both the laggards were up and ready by the time the call to breakfast was heard in the land. It may be that the smell of the eggs and bacon frying and the aromatic coffee’s bubbling had much to do with arousing them.

While they were eating who should appear but the hired man of Farmer Brush. He had a big basket on his arm, also a note for the scout master.

> “I have to go to town early this morning or I’d fetch these few things myself,” the note ran; “I want you to accept them from me with my compliments, and my hearty thanks for your entertainment last night. I have hardly slept a wink thinking about what you told me; and next meeting me and my boys will be on hand.
>
> “Ezra Brush.
>
> “P.S. The chickens my wife sends you, and she says they are tender enough to fry.”

Besides the four chickens, all ready for cooking, there was a fine print of new butter, as well as a carton of several dozen eggs fresh from the coop.

“Three cheers for Mr. Brush, fellows!” cried Tom, after the scout master had read the note aloud; and they were given with a will, much to the entertainment of Bill, who stood there and grinned broadly.

It was about eight o’clock when the column started once more. They meant to leave the main road they had been following up to this time, for it did not run in the direction they wanted to go.

There was another smaller one which they expected to follow, for that day at least, and which skirted the base of the mountain, even ascending it in several places, as their map showed.

“It will be our last day on any sort of road, if we follow out the programme as arranged,” Tom Chesney explained, as they sat around at noon munching the “snack” each scout had been commissioned to prepare at breakfast time against his being hungry in the middle of the day, when they would not care to start a fire in order to do any cooking.

“You mean we expect to push right up the mountain and begin exploring the country, don’t you, Tom?” asked Josh between bites.

“Yes, and three of the fellows intend to make maps as we go, for practice,” the leader of the Black Bear Patrol explained.

“All I hope is,” commented Billy Button, anxiously, “that we don’t manage to get lost. I’ve got a very important engagement a week from Friday that I wouldn’t want to miss.”

“Huh, guess I’m in the same box,” chuckled Josh; “anyway I promised to be sitting in my usual chair with my feet under our dining table on that same day; and it’d grieve my heart if I missed connections.”

The middle of that June day proved to be very warm, and the boys decided to lie around for several hours. When the sun had got well started down the western sky perhaps there might be a little more life in the air. Besides, they were in no hurry; so what was the use of exerting themselves unduly?

“I hope it isn’t going to storm!” suggested Carl, as they sprawled under the shady tree where they had halted for the noon rest, each youth in as comfortable an attitude as he could assume.

“Oh, is there any chance of a terrible storm dropping down on us, do you think?” asked Horace Crapsey, looking troubled; for although none of the others knew it, the crash of the thunder and the play of lightning had struck terror to his soul ever since the time he had been knocked down, when a tree near his house was shattered by a bolt from the clouds.

“Not that you can see right now,” Josh informed him, a little contemptuously; with a strong boy’s feeling toward one who shows signs of being afraid; “but when it’s summer time and when, in the bargain, a day has been as hot as this one, you never can tell.”

“That’s so, Josh,” George Kingsley remarked, wagging his head as though for once he actually agreed with something that had been said; “a simmering day often coaxes a storm along. It may hit us toward night-time, or even come on any hour afterwards when we’re sleeping like babes in the woods.”

“But what can we do for shelter?” asked Billy Button; “we haven’t got even a rag for a tent; and once we get soaked it’ll be a hard job to dry our suits, you know.”

“Leave that to us, Billy,” Tom told him, confidently. “First of all every scout has a rubber poncho; two of these fastened together will make what they call a dog tent, under which a couple of fellows can tuck themselves, and keep the upper part of their bodies dry. Soldiers always use them.”

“Yes,” added Rob Shaefer; “and if it looks like rain to-night we’ll raise several brush shanties. By making use of the rubber blankets they can be kept as dry as a bone. Scouts must learn how to meet every possible condition that can rise up. That’s a big part of the fun, once you’ve begun to play the game.”

Billy seemed to be much impressed by this cheering intelligence; and even Horace smiled again, having recovered from his little panic.

It was almost three o’clock when the signal was given for a start. They took it slowly, and in the next two hours had probably covered little more than two miles. They were still loitering along the road that skirted the foot of the Big Bear Mountain.

“As we have some extra cooking to do to-night, boys,” the scout master told them, “we had better pull up here where we can get fine water. That’s one of the things you must always look for when camping, remember.”

Nothing pleased the scouts better than the prospect of stopping, and starting supper, for they were tired, and hungry in the bargain.

“If we didn’t want to eat these fowls right away,” Tom remarked, “I’d suggest that we bake them in a hot oven made in the ground. That’s the original cooker,

you know. But it takes a good many hours to do it."

"Another time, perhaps, when we're stopping several days in one camp we'll get some more chickens, Tom," said the scout master, "and have you show us just how it is done. I've heard of the old-time scheme, but never tasted anything cooked in a mud oven."

Everything looked calm and peaceful just then, but after all that was a deception and a snare. Even while the cooks were starting in to cut up the chickens so that the various parts might be placed in the two big frying-pans, after a certain amount of fat salt pork had been "tried out," and allowed to get fiercely hot, Josh, who happened to be seen coming from the spring with a coffee-pot of water called out:

"Well, here comes your storm cloud all right, Horace; only instead of a ducking we stand a chance of getting a licking from another enraged tiller of the soil!"

Contents

# CHAPTER XV

## NOT GUILTY

“Whew! but he looks even madder than Mr. Brush did!” exclaimed Billy Button, when he saw the advancing man snap his whip furiously, as though to warn them what to expect on his arrival.

Every scout was now on his feet and watching.

“There’s his wagon over on the road,” said Carl; “he must have been passing and have seen us here. I wonder if we’ve trespassed on *his* private property now. Mr. Witherspoon, you’d better get ready to hypnotize another mad farmer.”

“He’s got his eye on our chickens, let me tell you!” urged Josh, as he moved over a few paces, as though meaning to defend the anticipated treat desperately if need be.

The man was a big brawny fellow, and very angry at that. Mr. Witherspoon faced him without a sign of alarm, even smiling, because conscious of having given no reasonable cause for an assault.

“That cracking of his whip isn’t going to scare us a bit,” muttered the pugnacious Josh; “he’d better not lay it on me for one, or any of my chums, that’s what!”

The man could hardly speak at first, from the effect of his anger, together with his hasty rush from the road up to the camp. Then holding his threatening whip in one hand he pointed a quivering finger straight toward the fowls that they were expecting to have for their supper, and which could no longer be concealed

by Josh.

“So,” bellowed the man, “now I know where the chickens that were stolen from my coop last night went. Raidin’ the farms up this way, are you? I want to tell you it’s going to be a bad job for every one of ye. I’ll have the law on ye if I have to go to Lenox and look every boy in town over. And I’ll know ye all again, if its a month from now.”

He snapped the whip viciously as he stopped talking; but Mr. Witherspoon did not seem to shrink back an inch. Looking the excited farmer squarely in the eye the scout master started to speak.

“I judge from what you say, sir, that you have had the misfortune to lose some of your poultry lately? I’m sorry to hear of it, but when you come and accuse us of being the guilty parties you are making a serious mistake, sir.”

“Oh, am I?” demanded the other, still as furious as ever, though the boys noticed that he made no effort to use the dreadful whip he carried. “I lost some fowls, and you’re expecting to have some chickens for dinner. Anybody with hoss sense could put them facts together, couldn’t they? I ain’t to be blarnied so easy, let me tell you.”

“You seem to talk as though no one owned chickens up this Bear Mountain way but yourself, sir,” said Mr. Witherspoon, calmly. “These lads are Boy Scouts. They are a part of the Lenox Troop, and I can vouch for every one of them as being honest, and incapable of stealing any man’s fowls.”

“You don’t say, mister?” sneered the man; “but tell me, who’s a-goin’ to vouch for you, now?”

“My name is Robert Witherspoon,” replied the scout master, showing wonderful self-control the boys thought, considering the insulting manner of the angry

farmer. “I am a civil engineer and surveyor. I love boys every way I find them; and it is a pleasure to me to act as their scout master, accompanying them on their hikes when possible, and seeing that they behave themselves in every way. You can find out about my standing from Judge Jerome, Doctor Lawson or Pastor Hotchkiss in Lenox.”

The man still looked in Mr. Witherspoon’s calm eyes. What he saw there seemed to have an influence upon his aroused feelings, for while he still shook his head skeptically there was not so much of menace in his manner now.

“Boys will be boys, no matter whether they have scout uniforms on or overalls,” he said sullenly. “I’ve suffered mor’n once from raids on my orchards and chicken coops, and found it was some town boys, off on what they called a lark, that made other people suffer.”

“But I assure you there is not the slightest possibility of any boy here having taken your chickens, sir,” continued the scout master.

“We’ve been on the move all day long,” added Tom, “and only arrived here half an hour back. Last night we were several miles away in camp.”

“But—you got chickens, and I was robbed last night,” faltered the farmer, as though that fact impressed him as evidence that no argument could keep down.

“If we could prove to you,” continued Mr. Witherspoon, “that we came by these four fowls honestly, I hope you will be frank enough to apologize to my boys for unjustly suspecting them of being hen thieves?”

“Go on then and do it, mister; but I warn you I’m sot in my ways, and hard to convince. It’s got to be a mighty likely yarn that’ll fotch me over.”

“You’ve lived around here some time, I take it?” asked Mr. Witherspoon.

“Man and boy forty-seven years,” came the reply.

“Then you must know Ezra Brush, for he was born in the farm house he occupies to this day?” suggested the scout master.

“I know Ezra like a book. Him and me have always been good friends, except for that boundary dispute which took us to court; but I reckon Ezra don’t hold no grudge agin me ’cause I won out.

“We had Mr. Brush sitting beside our campfire for two hours last night, while I told him all about the things Boy Scouts are taught. He means to have his three boys join the troop at the next meeting; for he knows now that if his little Jim and some of his companions had been scouts, the boy’s life in all probability would have been saved last summer.”

“It might have been,” admitted the farmer, “if them other lads had knowed what to do, but before a man got there it was too late. And Ezra certainly sot some store by that bright-faced little Jim; everybody keered for him, he was so winnin’ in his ways.”

“Well,” continued Mr. Witherspoon with a smile, for he was certain of his ground by this time, and the whip hung listlessly alongside the farmer’s leg; “we made so good an impression on Mr. Brush that early this morning his man Bill came over with a basket, and also this note. Please read it, sir.”

He placed the paper in the other’s hand; and leaning down so that the waning light of the setting sun might fall on the writing the farmer seemed to take in the contents of the note.

When he looked up he no longer scowled, but let his eyes rove around at the faces of the scouts, all filled with eager anticipation.

“Well, I was wrong to say what I did, I owns up,” he commenced, making a wry face, as though it was rather an unusual thing for him to admit being anything but right; “and since I promised to apologize to ye, boys I’m ready to do it. Chickens all looks alike after they’ve been plucked and the heads cut off; but ’cordin’ to what that note reads these here are Brush fowls and not from the Perkins coop.”

Mr. Witherspoon nodded his head, and his eyes twinkled.

“Are you satisfied to accept Mr. Perkins’ apology, boys, in the same spirit in which it is given?” he asked, looking at his charges.

Of course there was an immediate response, and in the affirmative too. Boys are not apt to harbor any deep resentment, once the accusation is withdrawn.

“There, you see these boys are not the ones to hold it against you, Mr. Perkins,” the scout master continued.

“Did you see the thieves who were in your hen house last night, Mr. Perkins?” asked Tom, as though he had some object in making the inquiry.

“Wall, no, though I heard the racket when my chickens got to squawkin’, and run to the coop with a gun; but the pesky rascals had cleared out with half a dozen of my best young fowls. I reckoned to larn where they was, and I’m on my way to town right now with a load of stuff, meanin’ to make a few inquiries in the mornin’.”

He grinned as he fumbled at the pocket of his coat.

“What have you got there, Mr. Perkins?” asked Tom.

“It’s a boy’s cap as was left in my coop last night,” declared the farmer; “and a queer lookin’ one at that. Guess they might tell me who it fits in Lenox.”

Every eye was focused on the cap which he held up. It was indeed of an odd color, and very likely the only one of the kind in that section.

Josh Kingsley laughed out loud.

“Guess we ought to know that cap, fellows!” he exclaimed. “The last time I saw the same it was perked on the red head of Tony Pollock.”

Contents

# CHAPTER XVI

## WHAT TO DO IN A STORM

“Would you mind letting me see that cap for a minute, Mr. Perkins?” asked the leader of the Black Bear Patrol.

The farmer seemed to hesitate as though loth to let his only evidence go out of his hand; but after one good look at the smiling countenance of Tom Chesney apparently he felt ashamed of suspecting that so clean-looking a boy could mean to deceive him in any way. So he passed the head-gear over.

Knowing that Tom must have some object in making this request the other scouts pushed closer and watched eagerly. They saw him turn the cap partly inside out.

“I thought as much,” Tom remarked laughingly, at the same time carefully picking several tiny objects up, which he held before the eyes of the admiring farmer, who had doubtless never before heard of such a thing as “scoutcraft.”

“Look for yourself, Mr. Perkins,” Tom said exultantly; “you will have no difficulty in recognizing these as fiery red hairs. The boy mentioned by my chum here, has a brick-top like that. I should say the evidence is about as conclusive as anything could be.”

Mr. Perkins’ mouth had opened wide. He was apparently thunder-struck by the cleverness displayed by this stripling in clinching the guilt of the party who had stolen his spring chickens.

“Tell me his name again, Bub,” he said turning to Josh; “I calc’late makin’ it some warm for him unless I gets pretty good pay for them fowls.”

“His name is Tony Pollock,” he was told with a grin, for somehow Josh seemed to be tickled over the retribution that was likely to overtake the boy who had for so long a time acted as a bully in Lenox.

After some talk the farmer withdrew, taking with him his evidence in the shape of the queer checked cap, and also the best wishes of the assembled scouts, who gave him a cheer as he drove away.

He had even promised to drop around at a couple of their houses with messages hastily scribbled, to the effect that the boys were very well, and having the time of their lives.

Needless to say that those who sent these were the tender feet of the troop. Horace and Billy, who imagined that their respective mothers must be lying awake nights in mortal fear lest something dreadful had happened to the heretofore pampered darlings. Most of the other boys were accustomed to being away from home, and prided themselves on being able to show the spirit of veteran campers.

The fowls turned out to be the peer of any the boys had ever tasted. Indeed with the chicken cooked a delicate brown by those in charge, and seasoned with the keen appetites a day in the open air is apt to give a boy, that supper must always linger in their memories as a bright spot never to be excelled.

By now the greenhorns would be getting more accustomed to seeing the woods all around them, and probably sleep better than they did before. The second night in camp always does find everybody feeling more at ease, and settling down for a good rest.

They had no reason to find fault with anything that happened to them after the departure of Mr. Perkins. The stars came out in the heavens and there was apparently no sign of rain.

To satisfy the more timid boys, Tom and Rob Shaefer had started on a brush shanty, which they so far completed that it could be changed into a fair shelter by making use of their rubber ponchos. It was not really needed, though several of the boys chose to make up their beds under its arched roof, mentioning that they might feel the dew if it happened to prove heavy.

Again they prepared breakfast, and then started off with a day's tramp ahead of them that would differ in many respects from anything as yet encountered. This was because they expected to strike boldly up the side of the massive mountain that reared its head far above them, its slopes covered for the most part with a heavy growth of timber. This, however, thinned out the nearer one came to the summit, which in turn was composed of bald rocks, grim and silent, save when some eagle gave its shrill scream from a projecting crag.

They took their last look at the little road, and then Tom led the way into the heart of the wild growth. Just as they had anticipated it was a great deal more difficult going now, for there was no trail save an occasional cowpath which might lead down to the creek, or anywhere else; and to which, for this reason, they could not pay any attention.

When noon came there was a loud call for a halt. While every boy was too proud to confess that his muscles were beginning to feel sore from the continual strain, he tried pretty hard to find some plausible excuse for wanting to make a good long halt.

While they were eating and fanning themselves, for it was very warm, Walter Douglass noticed Tom glancing off toward the southwest. Upon looking in that

direction himself he burst out with an exclamation:

“It’s going to strike us this time, boys, as sure as anything!”

“What another irate farmer?” cried Josh, laughingly. “Whatever have the scouts been doing this time to raise trouble? We’ve been accused of trespassing, and stealing chickens; p’raps they’ll try to make out we have evil designs on some country bank.”

“It looks like a storm,” admitted Tom; upon which Billy Button began to stare at the clouds in plain sight, and Horace seemed to be listening anxiously to catch the first distant mutter of thunder in the air.

“If you are all through eating,” said Mr. Witherspoon, “perhaps we had better move out of this. I’m not the best judge of such things, but I think we could find a better spot than this to stay during the storm.”

“There! listen to that, will you?” exclaimed George as they heard a heavy boom that seemed to throb on the heavily charged air like the roar of a monster siege gun.

Horace was looking a little pale, though he set his teeth hard together, and apparently had made up his mind to at least refrain from showing the white feather, no matter how frightened he felt.

They did up their packs, keeping the rubber ponchos out, according to the advice of the patrol leader.

“At the worst we can put our heads through the slit in the center,” he explained to them; “and then it serves as a waterproof to keep the upper part of you dry. But perhaps we can find an overhanging shelf of rock under which all of us can crawl.”

“But how about that fine big tree yonder, couldn’t we take shelter under that?” asked Horace, pointing to a massive oak with wide-spreading branches that made a canopy through which even a downpour of rain could hardly penetrate.

“Never!” Tom told him hastily. “A tree standing apart like that is always one of the most dangerous places you can select when seeking shelter from an electrical storm. Far better stay out and take your little soaking than to take chances in a barn, or under an isolated tree. In the forest it is not so bad, where there are hundreds of trees; but then you ought to be careful which one you select. Lightning loves a shining mark, you know.”

“But that big tree has stood for one or two hundred years and never been hit by lightning,” objected Horace, who could not understand exactly.

“So have others that I’ve seen shattered to fragments,” Mr. Witherspoon told him, “but their time came at last, and without warning. We can’t afford to accept the risk. There is only one safe way, and that is to avoid dangerous places.”

The thunder grew louder with every peal. There were vivid flashes of lightning, too, each of which caused Horace to start and close his eyes, though he bravely suppressed the groan that seemed ready to burst from his lips.

Tom, as well as Mr. Witherspoon, Josh and Rob Shaefer, was constantly on the lookout for some sign of shelter. The ground seemed to favor the possibility of finding something in the line of overlapping lines of rock, which, forming a mushroom ledge, would screen them from the violence of the expected downpour.

After all, the honor of making the discovery went to Carl.

“Look over yonder between those bushes, sir; doesn’t that seem to be about the kind of place you’re after?” he called out, clutching the scout master by the arm.

So impressed was Mr. Witherspoon by what he saw that he immediately directed all of his charges to make for the spot pell-mell. The first big drops were coming down as they arrived, to find that, sure enough, the ledges of stone cropped out as much as six or seven feet.

“Crawl under wherever you can find a good place, and lie quiet!” ordered the scout master; and in several detachments they proceeded to get out of the rain, now commencing to fall heavily.

The wind rushed through the branches with a furious shriek; the thunder crashed; they heard several trees fall under the strain; and then without warning came a blinding flash, with a terrific ear-splitting roar of thunder accompanying it.

Horace, who with a number of others was in the cavity Tom had chosen, shrank close to the leader of the Black Bear Patrol.

“Oh, Tom!” he cried, when his voice could be heard, “didn’t that sound right from where that magnificent big oak tree stood that I wanted to get under?”

“Just what it did!” Josh Kingsley told him, vehemently, while Tom said:

“We’ll investigate after the storm is over, Horace; but right now I’m of the opinion your fine oak is lying shattered into fragments by the bolt that fell!”

Contents

# CHAPTER XVII

## THE LANDSLIDE

“Whether that’s so or not,” said the trembling Horace, “I feel that I’ve learned a lesson. I own up that I’m terribly afraid of lightning; but after this I’m going to face it, even if I have to lie out in the storm, rather than take chances.”

It became difficult to carry on any sort of conversation, what with all the racket around them. The wind blew, the rain fell in sheets, and the thunder boomed so continuously that one deep-toned roll hardly died away before there would come another crash that made everybody start.

Still they were a thankful lot of boys as they lay under the ledges and counted the minutes creep past.

“We’ve managed to keep our jackets tolerably dry after all,” announced Josh, at a time when there happened to be a little slackening of the gale; “and that’s what everybody couldn’t have done under the same conditions.”

“Well, I should say not,” another scout declared; “I know lots of fellows who think themselves extra smart around town, and yet put them up here and they’d either have been knocked out hiding under a tree that was struck, or else soaked through to the skin.”

“It takes scouts to figure things out when the supreme test comes,” said Josh.

“Yes, *some* scouts,” added Felix, drily; as much as to tell Josh not to plume himself too highly, because this was not his bright thought.

A more terrific peal of thunder than any they had yet heard except that one outburst, stopped their talking for a brief time.

“I really believe the old storm is coming back to try it all over again!” cried Billy Button, in dismay.

“They often seem to do that,” remarked another boy. “That has puzzled me more’n I can tell. What’s the explanation, Mr. Witherspoon?”

“Well, as near as I can say,” replied the scout master, “it’s something like this. Most storms have a regular rotary movement as well as their forward drift. On that account a hurricane at sea has a core or center, where there is almost a dead clam.”

“Yes, I’ve read about that,” interrupted Josh. “Sea captains always mention it when they’ve found themselves in the worst of a big blow. It slackens up, and then comes on again worse than ever.”

“But always from exactly the opposite quarter,” the scout master continued.

“You can see how this is, for the wind coming from the east up to the time the core of the gale strikes them, is from the west after the center has passed by. We may be about to get the other side of this little storm now.”

“Listen to it roaring, up on the mountain?” cried Horace.

“I wonder what those other fellows are doing about now?” Josh was heard to say, in a speculative way.

“Of course you mean Tony Pollock and his crowd,” observed Tom. “Unless they’ve been as lucky as we were they’re feeling pretty damp ground this time. Still Tony is a shrewd fellow, and may have discovered some sort of shelter before the downpour came.”

“I hope so,” Horace went on to say, for he was not at all cruel by disposition; “because I wouldn’t want a dog to be out in this blow, much less boys I’ve known all my life, even if they have been an ugly lot.”

There was a short interval of violent downpour. Then all at once the storm again slackened, and soon the rain ceased.

Horace had been whispering to Tom, and the pair of them now started to crawl out from under the shelter.

“Where are you going, Tom?” asked Josh, wondering what the strange move meant.

“Just mean to take a little walk over here,” was the reply; “we’ll be back in a few minutes. Horace is curious to see if it was the big oak that was struck.”

“I’ll go along, if you don’t object,” said the always ready Josh.

“Me too,” called out a second scout.

Accordingly several of them followed Tom and Horace out from under the ledges. There were at least six in the group that hurried along toward the spot where the splendid oak had been noticed an hour before.

They were compelled to pick their way along, for little streams of water flowed in almost every direction; besides, the trees were shedding miniature Niagaras that would be very unpleasant if received in the back of the neck by any one passing underneath.

In this fashion they neared the place. Every boy was keenly on the lookout.

“Why, I don’t see anything at all of the tree, and yet it certainly stood high above

those smaller ones over there!” exclaimed Horace, presently, with a curious little quiver of awe in his voice.

Ten seconds later they had advanced far enough to pass the barrier formed by those lesser forest trees. Then the entire group of scouts came to a sudden stop and simply stared. Horace even rubbed his eyes as if he half believed he might be dreaming.

The big oak was gone!

Where it had stood they saw a shattered trunk not more than twenty feet high. Upon the ground in every direction lay torn and twisted limbs and smaller branches, just as they had been violently hurled when that terrible electric bolt struck with such amazing force.

“Whew!” gasped Josh, “there’s an object lesson for you, Horace!”

“It’s the same for each one of us,” added Tom, gravely; “and for every scout who ever hears of it.”

“Supposing we had taken refuge under that fine old oak,” suggested Felix, with a shrug of his shoulders; “not one of us would have ever known what hit him.”

“I’ve seen all I want to, Tom; let us go back,” said Horace, who looked rather white by now. “Besides, I think it’s going to pour down again shortly.”

“That’s right,” added another scout; “you can hear it coming over there. Everybody scoot for the home base.”

They lost no time in retracing their steps, and just managed to reach the friendly shelter of the ledges when the rain did come down, if anything harder than ever.

“There’ll be a big boom in the river after this!” remarked Felix, when the rain

had been falling in a deluge for ten minutes.

“I think it must be next door to what they call a cloud burst; wouldn’t you say so, Mr. Witherspoon?” asked another boy.

“It seems like it,” he was told by the scout master. “Meantime we ought to be very thankful we’re so well provided for. No danger of being floated away this far up on the mountain. But the rain is going to stop presently.”

“Getting softer already!” announced the watchful Josh.

“I didn’t have any chance to ask you about the big oak?” Mr. Witherspoon continued.

“There isn’t any,” remarked Felix; “only a wreck that would make you hold your breath and rub your eyes.”

“Then it was struck by that terrible bolt, was it?” asked the scout master.

“Smashed, into flinders,” replied Josh. “You never in all your life saw such a wreck, sir.”

“We’ll all take a glance at it before we leave this place,” the leader of the hiking troop told them. “But from the way things look there’s a good chance we may think it best to put in the night right here, where we can be sure of a dry place for sleeping.”

“That strikes me as a good idea, sir,” said Tom, promptly, for he had been considering proposing that very plan himself, though of course he did not see fit to say so now.

“All I hope is that the river doesn’t sweep away a part of Lenox,” one of the boys was heard to say. “You remember that years ago, before any of us can

remember, they had a bad flood, and some lives were lost."

"Oh yes, but that was in the spring," explained Josh, "when the heavy snows melted, and what with ten days of rain the ground couldn't take up any more water. It's a whole lot different in June. Besides, we've been having it pretty hot and dry lately, remember, and the earth can drink up a lot of water."

“Still, you never can tell what a flood will do,” George was heard to say; but as they all understood his way of looking at the worst side of things none of the other boys took much stock in his gloomy predictions.

“We must hustle to find some dry wood, so as to cook our supper, and keep warm afterwards,” Felix told them.

“Leave us alone to do that,” Josh announced. “No matter how hard it has been raining you can always get plenty of dry stuff out of the heart of a stump or a log. And thank goodness we brought an ax along with us.”

“Say, did you feel anything then?” called out one of the other boys. “Seemed to me the rocks might be trembling as they did when it thundered extra loud. There it goes again! Get that, fellows?”

They certainly did, and a thrill of wonder and sudden anxiety passed over them when the trembling sensation became even more pronounced. Then they realized that a strange rumbling sound had arisen. It came from further up the mountain, and yet drew rapidly closer, increasing in intensity, until it began to assume the proportions of a terrible roaring, while the rocks vibrated in a sickening way.

“Oh! it must be an earthquake!” shrilled one scout, in alarm.

“Lie still, everybody!” shouted Mr. Witherspoon; “don’t think of crawling out. It’s a landslide coming down the side of the mountain!”

Contents

# CHAPTER XVIII

## CAMPING ON THE LAKE SHORE

For several minutes the scouts lay there and fairly held their breath in the grip of that sudden fear that had come upon them. As the rumbling noise and the sickening sensation of the rock trembling under them passed away they regained in some degree their former confidence.

“The worst is over, I think,” said Mr. Witherspoon; “but we’ll stay where we are a while longer.”

Content to abide by his judgment, and glad that they had escaped being caught in that avalanche of earth and rocks, the boys kept quiet until finally, as there was no repetition of the landslide, they were allowed to issue forth.

Investigation showed them where the slip had occurred. Some fault in the formation of the mountain side had allowed it to happen, the conditions being just right.

Later on the rest of the scouts went over to view the wrecked oak, bringing back some of the splinters of wood to use in making the fire they expected to have going presently.

Considering the two narrow escapes they had passed through recently, one from lightning and the other from the avalanche, the boys all felt that they had reason to be thankful.

“You’ll have some remarkable things to set down in that log book of yours for

this particular day, Tom," said the scout master; "and I think you can do the subject justice. I hope to read an account of this trip in print one of these days."

"Oh! there's a small chance of my account taking the first prize, I'm afraid Mr. Witherspoon," laughed the leader of the Black Bear Patrol; "I imagine there'll be scores of competitors in the race, and plenty of them can write things just as well as I can, perhaps even better."

"Yes," remarked Josh, "but don't forget that every account of an outing trip has to be absolutely true. No wonderful imaginary stories will be allowed in the competition, the rules said."

"Yes, that's just what they did state," added Felix; "you've got to have things authenticated—wasn't that the word the paper used?"

"Attested to in due form by the scout master who accompanied the troop," Mr. Witherspoon explained, smiling; "and in this case I can do that with an easy conscience."

"And if things keep going as they have been lately," declared another boy, "there never was and never can be a trip so crowded with interesting happenings as this same hike of Lenox Troop over Big Bear Mountain."

The fire was made without any particular trouble, just as Josh and some of the others had predicted. The boys knew how to get dry fuel out of the heart of a stump, and once the fire was roaring it hardly mattered what kind of wood was used, since the heat quickly dried it out.

Then supper was cooked as usual, only on this occasion they dispensed with some of the conditions that were not absolutely necessary, such as having two separate fires.

On the whole they managed to get on, and every one admitted he could dispose of no more when finally the meal was concluded.

Later on the boys sat around, and while most of them compared notes regarding their experiences during the exciting day just closed, others proceeded to attend to certain duties they did not wish to postpone any longer.

As for Tom Chesney, it was an aim with him to write out his account of daily events while they were still fresh in his mind. He was afraid many of the little details might be forgotten if he delayed; and in the end those were what would give most of the charm to the narrative of the scout doings.

The storm had passed on, and above them they saw the stars peeping out once more. Long into the night the steady drip of water could be heard, telling of numerous little rivulets that still ran down the side of Big Bear Mountain, though by morning most of these would have dried up.

They slept under the friendly ledges. It was, after all was said, a pretty “rocky” bed, as Josh termed it; but since the ground outside was so well soaked, and there was always more or less peril in the shape of another landslide, none of the boys complained, or expressed his feelings in more than sundry grunts.

With the coming of morning the strange camp was astir, and one by one the boys painfully crawled out, to try to get some of the stiffness from their limbs by jumping around and “skylarking.”

About nine o’clock the hike was resumed Mr. Witherspoon did not think it advisable to go on up the mountain any further after that avalanche; he believed they would have just as good a time passing around the base, and in the end making a complete circuit of the high elevation.

The day turned out to be a delightful one after the storm. It seemed as though the

air had been purified, and even in the middle of the day it was not unpleasantly warm.

“We ought to make that little lake by the afternoon, oughtn’t we, Tom?” the scout master asked, as he plodded along at the side of the patrol leader.

Another consultation of the map Tom carried followed, and it was decided that they must be within a half a mile of the water. Ten minutes later Josh declared he had caught a glimpse of the sun shining on dancing wavelets; and shortly afterwards a sudden turn brought them in full view of the pond.

It was hardly more than that, covering perhaps ten acres; but the boys declared they had never set eyes on a prettier sight as they arrived on the near shore, and proceeded to make a camp there.

“If we only had a canoe up here what a great time we’d have fishing,” said Josh, who was particularly fond of casting a fly for a trout or bass, and scorned to use the humble angleworm, as ordinary fishermen do.

“What’s the matter with taking a log and straddling the same?” asked Tom. “Three of us could manage it, one to troll with a spoon, another to cast near the shore and the third to paddle the log.”

“Let’s try that in the morning,” suggested Josh, eagerly; “it’s too late in the day to have any great luck now. But I like the looks of that pond—and I think we might get a good string of fish from it, if the wind’s right.”

That night their fire glowed upon the border of the water. It was a new experience, and the boys, seeing Tom busily engaged in writing, told him to do full justice to the theme, for it deserved to be recorded exactly in the way they saw it.

It was a comfortable night they spent by the pond, in sharp contrast to the preceding one when flattened out under the rocky ledges. Every one got a good sound night's sleep, so that when morning came they were in prime condition for the work of the day.

"We'll stay here to-day and not go on for another twenty-four hours," decided the scout master, as they sat around eating breakfast.

"For one I'm glad to hear that," said Felix; "I can hike as well as the next fellow; but just the same when I'm off for pleasure I don't like to keep moving all the time. This suits me first-rate. Then I expect to do some paddling when we find the right sort of a log, with Josh at the bow casting his flies, and Tom at the stern trolling his phantom minnow along."

The log needed was easily found, and was rolled down, to be launched in the pond. A rude paddle was also cut, with the aid of the ax and a sharp knife. Felix declared he could make it answer the purpose; so presently the enterprising scouts composing the fishing party went forth, followed by the best wishes of their mates.

"Fix it so we have a fish dinner to-night, fellows!" Billy Button called out.

"If you're wise you'll not make up your mouth that way; then there's no danger of being disappointed," said George. "I never expect anything, and so I meet with pleasant surprises once in a while."

Perhaps since the days of old Robinson Crusoe a more remarkable fishing party never started out than that one. The three boys had taken off shoes and socks, and rolled up their trousers above their knees. Straddling the log, Felix used his paddle, and, sure enough, the clumsy craft moved along fast enough to answer their desires.

Tom let out his line and trolled, while Josh began to cast with great animation, sending his trailing flies close to the shore, and drawing them toward him in fine style.

Presently he struck and managed to land a fair-sized bass. Then Tom caught a larger one on his imitation minnow. The fun began to wax furious, so that once both the anglers chanced to be busily engaged with fish they had hooked at the same time.

It was while this was going on, and their string had already reached respectable proportions, that the boys on the log heard a sound far away, up on the side of the mountain, which caused Josh to exclaim:

“That’s a pack of dogs yapping, and they’re hot on the track of some sort of game, too! It may be only a poor little cottontail, but we’ll soon know, for they’re heading straight in our direction. Whew! listen to the yelps they give!”

“There’s something in the lake over yonder, and coming this way, too!” exclaimed Felix “Can it be a muskrat, Tom, do you think, swimming on top of the water?”

“Not much it isn’t!” cried Josh from the bow of the novel craft; “it’s a deer I tell you, a stag with half-grown antlers, taking to the water to escape from the hounds.”

Contents

# CHAPTER XIX

## FRIENDS OF THE DEER

“Yes, its a buck,” announced Tom, as a shout from the camp told that one of the other scouts had also discovered the swimming animal.

“Whew! there come the dogs along the shore!” cried Felix, pointing as he spoke to where a number of swiftly-moving objects could be seen.

“They’ve taken to the water after the deer!” exclaimed Josh.

“It’ll be a shame if they manage to catch up with the poor thing in the pond!” Felix declared; “we ought to break that game up somehow. Isn’t there a way?”

“If we had a canoe instead of a log we might get between, and keep the dogs back,” he was told by the patrol leader; “but I’m afraid we’ll never be able to make it at this rate.”

Felix had started paddling furiously even while the other was speaking. The novel craft began to move through the water much faster than at any previous time. It was really surprising how much speed it could show, when driven by that stout, if homely, paddle, held in the hands of a muscular and excited scout.

Tom gave directions as though he were the pilot, and while the swimming buck certainly saw them approaching he must have considered that these human enemies were not to be feared one-half as much as those merciless hounds following after him, for he swerved very little.

“We’re going to cut in between the deer and the dogs after all, boys!” cried the

delighted Josh, who was bending his body with every movement of the paddler, as though he hoped to be able in that fashion to assist the drive.

“It’s a pity we didn’t think to bring another paddle along!” was Tom’s comment, “for that would have added considerably to our progress.”

As it was, however, they managed to intervene between the hounds and the frightened buck. Josh waved both arms, and shouted threateningly at the eager dogs. They possibly did not know what to make of it, for as a rule their masters probably tempted them to chase a deer even with the law against hounding in force.

“Keep back there, you greedy curs!” yelled Josh; and as Tom and Felix joined in the shouting, the last mentioned also waving his flashing paddle, the swimming dogs came to a pause.

Whenever they made a start as though intending to sweep past the log on which the three scouts were perched, Felix, waiting for some such move, paddled vigorously to head them off. This series of obstructive tactics, coupled with the demonstration made by the other boys, served to keep the hounds in check for a certain length of time.

“There, he’s made the shore across on the other side of the pond!” announced Tom.

Looking that way the boys saw the harried buck hasten out of the shallow water. He turned once on the very edge to give a single glance back toward the baffled dogs, still swimming aimlessly about, and yapping in defeat, then leaped lightly into the undergrowth and vanished from sight.

“Good-bye!” shouted Josh, waving his hand after the rescued deer, “and good luck!”

The dogs by this time had managed to flank the obstruction.

“No use chasing after them any more, Felix,” said Tom; “I think the deer has a good lead on them now, and will easily make his escape.”

They watched the pack swim to the shore, and noted that they came out at some little distance from the spot where the buck had left the water.

“That’s going to delay them still more,” announced Tom; “they’ve lost the scent, and will have to chase up and down hunting for it.”

Sure enough the hounds ran first one way with their noses to the ground, then doubled back. It was several minutes before a triumphant yelp announced that they had finally struck the lost trail.

“There they go with a rush!” said Josh, as the pack was seen to start off, following the course taken by the deer.

Their eager yelps became less distinct as they skirted around the foot of Big Bear Mountain.

“Well, that was a queer happening, wasn’t it?” said Tom, as they prepared to resume their fishing, which had been so singularly interrupted.

“It’ll make an interesting event for your note book, Tom,” declared Felix.

“A deer is seldom seen around this region,” Josh ventured to say; “which makes our luck all the more remarkable. I wouldn’t have missed that sight for a good deal!”

“I saw Stanley Ackerman using his camera, so let’s hope he got a bunch of snapshots that’ll show the whole circus,” Felix announced.

“How about allowing dogs to roam the woods up here, Tom; isn’t it against the law in this State nowadays?” Josh asked.

“It certainly is,” he was informed. “For a good many years chasing deer with hounds, and using a jack-light at nights to get them, has been strictly forbidden. Time was when packs of hounds used to be met with in plenty. Men would start out and hunt deer that way. Then the papers took it up, and showed the cruelty of the so-called sport, and it was abolished.”

“According to the law anybody is allowed to shoot dogs caught in the act of running deer, especially in the summer time; isn’t that right, Tom?”

“Yes, that’s what we would have had a perfect right to do if we’d had a gun along. But I don’t believe that pack belonged to any one man. They are dogs that have gone wild, and having gathered together in the woods, live by hunting.”

“I’ve heard that dogs do go back to the old wolf strain sometimes,” Josh admitted; “and now that you mention it, Tom, there was a wild look about every one of the beasts. I even thought they had half a notion to attack us at one time; but the way Felix kept that paddle flashing through the air cowed them, I guess.”

The fishing was resumed, though all this racket seemed to have caused the bass to cease taking hold for some time. By skirting the more distant shores, close to where the water grass and reeds grew, they finally struck a good ground, and were amply rewarded for the efforts put forth.

“I think the bass must have their beds on this shoal here,” said Tom, when they paddled back over the place at which success had come to them. “It’s early in the season as yet, and a lot of them are still around here. They haven’t gone out into deep water with their newly-hatched young ones.”

“Is that what they do?” asked Felix, who was not as much of a fisherman as

either of his chums.

“Well, not immediately after the eggs hatch,” Tom told him. “The mother bass is going to keep her swarm of little ones in shallow water, and guard them until they get to a certain size. Then she darts in among them, scatters the whole lot, after which she is done with them. They have reached an age when they must take their chances.”

When finally about noon the three came ashore, rather stiff from having straddled that log for such a length of time, they had a pretty fine string of fish, two of them in fact.

The talk as they ate their mid-day meal was along the subject of deer hunting, and Tom as well as Josh had to tell all about it, as far as they knew.

Stanley declared he had made good use of his camera, and hoped the results would come up to expectations. All of them united in saying that it had been an adventure worth while; and apparently their sympathies were wholly with the gallant buck, for they expressed a fervent hope that he would succeed in outrunning his canine enemies.

Somehow in the course of the conversation mention was made of Tony Pollock and his crowd.

“I heard Tony tell a story of having seen a deer pulled down somewhere in the forest last fall by a pack of ugly dogs,” related George Cooper. “At the time I believed he was only yarning, though he vowed black and blue it was so. He said the dogs looked and acted so ugly that he thought it best to clear out before they turned on him.”

“Like as not this same pack,” remarked Tom. “They say that once a dog has taken to that savage sort of life nothing can ever coax him to go back to living

with mankind again. It's in the blood, that call of the wild."

"Well," chuckled Josh, "we know of another kind of call of the wild that's going to be heard in the land pretty soon, when Farmer Sile Perkins faces Tony. He will demand double pay for the chickens Tony and his crowd stole, on penalty of his being arrested if he doesn't whack up. Oh I can just see Tony begin to crawl then; and I wonder how he'll get the money."

Carl was saying little or nothing, and Tom knew why. Here they had been on the hike several days, and as yet there had arisen not a single chance for him to get in touch with Dock Phillips.

Tom understood that another spell of dark foreboding was beginning to enfold his chum. At the first opportunity he could find, Tom joined Carl. The latter had thrown himself down on the bank some distance away from the camp, where he could be in the shade, and yet look out on the sunlit water, which just then had a most attractive aspect.

"You're worrying again because nothing has happened as we hoped would be the case, eh, Carl?" was what the patrol leader said as he dropped down close to the moody scout.

Carl sighed heavily.

"Perhaps it's foolish of me, Tom," he said, with a curious little break in his voice, which he tried hard to master; "but once in so often it seems as if something gripped me, and made me shiver. It's when I get to thinking what little real progress I am making that this chilly spell comes along."

"Yes, I can understand that," the other told him. "I did hope we might run on Dock while we were up here, and either force or coax him to tell what he did with the stolen paper. He's away from the influence of Mr. Culpepper, you know,

and if we had to come down to offering him a price to get the paper he might accept."

"Oh! much as I hate to have to compromise such a thing," said Carl, desperately; "I believe I'd do it. Anything to get that paper, for the more I think of it the stronger I believe it means everything to my mother."

"Well, we haven't quite got to the end of our tether yet," the patrol leader assured him. "I can't explain it, but somehow there's a feeling inside of me that tells me to keep on hoping. In some sort of fashion luck is going to turn your way. Just keep up your grit, and hang on. Take a lesson from the persistence of those dogs in following the deer."

"Yes, I suppose I ought to. I've read how wolves will keep chasing after a deer day and night, steady as dock-work, until in the end they tire it out and get their dinner."

Just then they heard a shout, or what was closer to a shriek. It came from beyond the camp, and was immediately followed by cries of alarm from the other scouts.

"What's happened?" asked Tom, as with Carl he hurried to the spot to see a group approaching bearing some burden in their midst.

"Walt Douglass fell out of a tree," replied Billy Button, looking very pale; "and Mr. Witherspoon says he's afraid it means a fractured leg, if nothing worse!"

Contents

# CHAPTER XX

## FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

Dismay seized upon most of the scouts upon realizing what a disaster had fallen upon them. Tom however was not the one to forget that he had made a special study of “first aid to the injured,” as had also Rob Shaefer.

“Carry him over here, where we’ll make a soft bed of the blankets, and then we’ve got to see how badly he’s hurt!” was what Tom called out, hurrying on ahead to arrange things.

His example seemed contagious. Boys are apt to follow a leader very much as sheep will a bell-wether. Everybody wanted to assist; and the feeling of panic gave way to one of confidence. Scouts should be equal to any sudden emergency; and in that way prove the value of their education along the lines of usefulness.

Walter was groaning dismally, although trying his best to bear the pain. He looked as white as a sheet in the face. Tom’s first act was to force himself to appear cheerful; he knew that if all of them stared and shuddered it would have a bad effect on the injured lad.

When they had made an examination Tom and Rob agreed that one of the bones only had been broken.

“It’s a painful thing, but not nearly so bad as a compound fracture would be,” Tom announced. “I think we can set it all right, temporarily, and then bind the leg up. In the meantime, Mr. Witherspoon, please make up your mind what we’d

better do about getting Walter home in a hurry, where the doctor can take charge of him."

"I hope you won't think of giving up your hike just on account of me, fellows," said the poor Walter, weakly, showing a magnanimous spirit in adversity that made his chums feel all the more admiration for him.

"Leave that to me," Mr. Witherspoon announced; "I remember seeing an old car in the yard of that house we passed some three miles back. If you boys can make some sort of stretcher for carrying Walter I'll see that he gets home to-day, if I have to accompany him, and then come back again to you."

This cheered the stricken lad as nothing else could have done. Home just then had a most alluring look to Walter. The woods may seem all very delightful when a boy is perfectly well, but let sickness or an accident put him on his back, and there is nothing like one's own home.

After making some preparations, Tom and Rob announced that they were ready.

"It's going to hurt you some, Walter," said the patrol leader, regretfully; "but it's got to be done, you know. Those two ends of the bone must be brought together, and after that we intend to bandage your leg the very best we know how."

Walter shut his teeth hard together, and seemed to prepare for the worst.

"Go ahead, boys," he said, grimly; "I'll have to grin and bear it, I guess. And I deserve all I'm getting for being so silly as to slip when I was climbing that tree to see what was in the hole in the trunk."

He managed to stand it very bravely indeed, though the agony must have been intense. The other scouts heaved a sigh when they saw the amateur surgeons start to binding up the injured limb.

“That’s all through with, Walter,” said Tom, cheerily, “and you stood it like a soldier, we’ll all declare. Just as soon as that litter is done you’re going to be carried back to that house, if it takes every one of us to do the job.”

Josh and some of the others had been busily engaged trying to construct a suitable litter. Fortunately they had learned how this should be done, for it is one of the duties of every Boy Scout to know this.

With the ax they cut a couple of stout poles about eight feet in length. These were to constitute the sides, and would form the handles, each one to be in charge of a scout.

A blanket was arranged across these in such a manner that there would not be the slightest danger of its slipping, after the two poles had been held a certain distance apart with a couple of cross-pieces.

When finally the litter was completed it was pronounced first-class by every one.

“I’m proud of the way you boys grapple with an emergency,” said Mr. Witherspoon, enthusiastically. “You’re all a credit to the organization to which you belong. I mean that your light shall not be kept under a bushel, for this is an example worthy of being spread abroad, and copied by other scouts.”

The next thing was to lift Walter to the litter, which was done without giving the poor fellow much pain. He seemed so grateful for every little thing they did for him, and looked so pitiful lying there that tender-hearted Billy Button was observed to hurriedly rush away, pretending that he wanted to wash his hands down at the water, when they all knew the tears had been welling up in his eyes.

“It’s going to be no easy task getting him all the way back to that house,” said Mr. Witherspoon, “especially over such rough ground as we’ve struck. Four will be needed to work at a time, and they’ll have to be relieved often, so perhaps we

had better all go along save one scout, who can stay to look after the camp."

"Let Billy stay," said Josh; "he was complaining of a stone bruise on his heel, and would be better off here than taking that six mile tramp."

So it was decided that Billy Button should remain in the camp. He did not look as if he enjoyed the prospect very much.

"No wild animals around here to bother you, Billy," Josh assured him, when they were prepared to make the start.

"You forget those dogs, I guess," Billy told him; "they must be pretty mad at us for holding them up. What must I do if they take a notion to come back and threaten to eat me up?"

"Oh! the easiest thing for you to try," Josh told him, "would be to shin up this tree here, and wait for us to rescue you. We've hung our grub up so nothing can get hold of it. But don't worry, Billy; there isn't one chance in ten that the dogs'll come back this way."

It was a strange procession that left the camp. Stanley took a picture of the litter bearers so they would have something to remember the occurrence by; and Walter had so far recovered from the shock and the acute pain as to be able to raise his head, so that he might appear in the scene as the object of all this excitement.

Billy saw them depart, and then turned his attention to other things. Being left in full charge of the camp he had a sense of responsibility resting upon him, such as he had never experienced before.

It would take them perhaps two full hours going that distance with the injured boy, because great care would be required in picking the easiest way. Of course

the return journey would be made in half that time.

Altogether three hours might elapse, even with the best of luck, before the main body of scouts could be expected back; and Billy had been told that they would depend on him to get supper started.

It was fine to see how very careful the litter bearers were as they pushed along the back trail. One would go ahead to lead the way, and so avoid any unusually rough places as much as possible. Every boy looked well to his footing, since any sort of jolt, such as would accompany a stumble, was apt to cause Walter unnecessary pain.

Their progress was necessarily somewhat slow. Tom said that was one of the times when it paid to be sure rather than to try to make speed. And from the fact that not once did they cause poor Walter to give a groan it could be seen that these careful litter-bearers fulfilled their duty fully as well as Red Cross or hospital attendants could have done.

The two hours and more had passed before they came to the house at which Mr. Witherspoon had remembered seeing a car. It turned out that the man who lived there was doing so for his health. He wanted to be in a quiet place on account of shattered nerves.

When he learned what had happened he told them he would gladly take the injured scout to his home, and that there was room also for Mr. Witherspoon, whom he would bring back with him again.

The splendid manner in which the scouts had managed, both with regard to doing up the fractured limb, and in making that litter, excited the man’s admiration; and he felt that he could not do too much for those self-reliant lads.

“Such work should be encouraged by every right-thinking man or woman,” he

told them; “and after you’ve all had a cup of hot coffee, which my wife is getting ready right now, we’ll be off.”

Of course all of them were feeling much more cheerful, now that they knew the hike would not have to be abandoned on account of this accident. Some of the boys had begun to fear this would be the result.

“When I get back here from town,” Mr. Witherspoon told them, “it is apt to be late, and I’ll be too tired to try that three miles over rough ground. So I’ve made arrangements to stay here over-night with our good friends. In the morning after breakfast I’ll start off along the trail for the camp. Of course it would be nice if several of you met me half way there.”

“We’ll be only too glad to do that, sir,” Josh told him; for Mr. Witherspoon had by this time firmly entrenched himself in the affections of his boys, who believed him to be the best scout master any troop had ever boasted, barring none.

After seeing the car start, and giving Walter a rousing send-off that must have done his heart good, the rest of the boys concluded to turn their faces toward the camp.

“Three hours will seem an age to Billy Button,” said Horace, who was feeling quite proud of the fact that he had been chosen as one of the litter-bearers.

“Oh! he’ll have plenty to do cleaning all those fish we caught this morning, and some other odd jobs I gave him,” remarked Josh, carelessly.

“Billy is inclined to be timid,” Felix observed, loftily; “and it’s a good thing, for him to be left alone once in a while. Nothing like making a scout feel he’s just got to depend on himself for things.”

The three miles was soon covered by the returning eight scouts.

“I can see smoke ahead!” announced Josh presently.

“Yes, and there’s the pond shining in the light of the sun,” added Felix.

“Isn’t that our chum, Billy, waving his hands to us?” asked George. “Looks as if he wanted us to hurry up some. I wonder what’s happened now?”

“Oh! he’s only anxious for us to join him,” said Carl; “perhaps he made a mistake in the time we were to be back, and he’s gone and cooked all the fish.”

It was soon seen, however, that the guardian of the camp had a good reason for his excitement. His face bore a troubled expression, it struck Tom, when he drew near the camp.

“Anything gone wrong here Billy?” he asked.

“I should say there had, Tom!” he burst out with. “Why, would you believe it, some miserable tramps raided the camp, and got away with most of our stuff!”

Contents

# CHAPTER XXI

## SCOUT GRIT

“Tell us how it happened, Billy!” said the patrol leader, when the clamor of excited voices partly died away, giving him a chance to make himself heard.

“Yes, what did they do to you, Billy?” demanded Josh, noticing that the other did not seem to be limping, or showing any other signs of having met with rough treatment at the hands of the camp raiders.

“Why, it was this way,” Billy hastened to explain. “You see I was down by the water cleaning all those fish at the time. Guess I must have been pretty much a whole hour at the job. And I’d just about finished when I thought I heard somebody give a sneeze, which made me get up off my knees and look around.”

“And did you see the tramps in camp cleaning things out then?” asked Felix.

“Well, no, not exactly,” replied Billy; “the most I thought I saw was something moving in the bushes on the other side of the camp; and yes, it was just like a laugh too that I caught.”

“What did you do?” asked Josh.

“I wondered if those wild dogs had come back,” said the guardian of the camp, “and the first thing I thought to do was to put the pan of fish I’d cleaned up in the crotch of a tree. Then I went to the camp, and oh! my stars I but it was in an *awful* mess, with things flung around, and most of our eatables taken, as well as the frying-pan and coffee-pot!”

“Oh! that’s sure the limit!” groaned Josh. “We’ll never be able to keep on our hike with nothing to eat or drink, and not a pan to cook stuff in, even if we bought it from the farmers. It spells the end, fellows!”

“Yes,” echoed George, always seeing the worst side of things, “we’ll have to go back to town like dogs with their tails between their legs, and have all the other fellows make fun of us.”

“Hold on there, fellows, don’t show the white feather so easily,” said Tom, who was looking very determined.

“Do you mean there’s any chance for us to keep going, after our things have been taken in this way?” demanded George.

“Well, we can talk that over to-night, and then see what Mr. Witherspoon has to say about it when he joins us in the morning,” Tom told him. “As for me, I’d be willing to go on half rations rather than own up beat. How do we know but that this raid on our stuff was made just to force us to give up our hike?”

“Why, how could that be?” asked Billy Button, wonderingly.

“And why would hoboes want that to happen?” added George.

“When Billy says they were tramps he’s only jumping to conclusions,” Tom explained, “he doesn’t know a thing about it, because he owns up he failed to get even a single look at the thieves. I’ve got my own opinion about this thing.”

“Meaning you believe you know who the fellows were?” questioned Carl.

“Stop and think—who would like nothing better than to put us in a hole? Don’t we happen to know that Tony Pollock and his crowd are around here on Big Bear Mountain somewhere? Didn’t they rob that hen roost of Mr. Perkins?”

“Tom, I really believe you’re right!” exclaimed Josh, beginning to look at the matter from the standpoint taken by the patrol leader.

“We can soon settle that part of it!” declared Rob Shaeffer.

“By hunting for their tracks, and finding out how many thieves there were,” Tom went on to say. “Come on Billy, and show me just where you saw the bushes moving when that laugh struck you.”

He called upon the others to keep back so that they might not spoil any tracks to be found at that particular spot. A very little search showed the boys what they so eagerly sought.

“Here are tracks enough, and all heading away from the camp,” said the patrol leader presently, “let’s see how we can classify them, for every footprint will be different from the others.”

“Here’s one that is square across the toe,” announced Josh, instantly. “And say, seems to me I remember Asa Green always wears shoes like that. Now Wedge McGuffey has got broad shoulders and spindle legs, and he wears a pointed shoe like the one that made these tracks.”

“Here’s another that’s got a patch across the toe,” said Felix. “Couldn’t mistake that shoe, no matter where you saw it. A fellow could be hung on such circumstantial evidence as that.”

“And here’s a fourth that’s different from any of the rest,” continued Tom, as he pointed downward, “so it looks as if there were just four in the bunch, which you may remember corresponds with the number in Tony Pollock’s crowd, now that Dock Phillips has thrown his lot in with them.”

Some of the scouts expressed their indignation loudly as they investigated the

results of the daring raid. It would not have been pleasant for Tony and his cronies had they been brought face to face with the angry scouts about that time.

Tom Chesney soon had reason to admit that he had met with a personal loss that bothered him exceedingly.

“They’ve even taken my little diary in which I’ve been keeping an accurate account of our entire trip,” he announced; “though what good that could do them I’m at a loss to understand.”

“Oh! they just believed it would make you feel bad,” explained Carl; “and that would tickle Tony, he’s such a mean sort of fellow. Perhaps he expects to read it out to the others while they sit by their fire, and then throw it away. I hope you can write it all over again, Tom.”

“Too bad!” declared Josh, “when you went to such trouble to jot everything down just as it happened, thinking you might take that prize offered for the best true account of a hike by scouts.”

“I’ll make sure to write this latest adventure out while it’s fresh in my mind,” remarked Tom, bent on making the best of a bad bargain.

“Well,” observed Felix, “all I hope is that we decide not to give up the ship for such a little thing as being without provisions. It’ll make us hustle some to lay in a supply; but, after all, the experience is going to be a great thing for us.”

“And if it comes to a vote,” added Horace, showing unexpected stamina in this emergency; “count on my voice being raised against giving up. Why, I’m just getting interested in this game, and I find it pretty exciting.”

“Just what I say!” echoed Josh.

“And I!” came from every one of the others, without even the exception of poor

Billy, who seemed to feel that he might be mostly to blame because the raid on the camp had been conducted while he was in charge.

Tom smiled on hearing so unanimous an expression of opinion. He knew that even such an apparent catastrophe as had befallen them was not going to cause these gallant fellows to “take water.”

“How long ago was it that the raid took place, Billy?” asked Josh, as though a sudden idea had struck him.

“Oh! I should say about an hour or more,” replied the other, after thinking it over. “I suppose they watched the camp for a while to make sure I was the only one around. Then when they saw me so busy down there by the pond they just started to root. They may have been poking around half an hour, for all I know; I was keeping my eyes on my work and thinking of poor Walter.”

“Tom, would it pay us to follow them right now?” demanded Josh, while his eyes sparkled with the spirit of retaliation, as though he could picture them pouncing on the spoilers of the camp, and making them pay dearly for their frolic.

The patrol leader, however, shook his head in the negative, much to the disappointment of the impetuous Josh.

“In the first place they were apt to hurry off,” said Tom. “Then they might even try to blind their trail, though I don’t believe any of them know much of the Indian way of doing that. But the sun will soon set, and it grows dark early along the northeast side of Big Bear Mountain you know.”

“Yes,” added George, always ready with an objection, “and some of us feel a little tired after all we’ve gone through with to-day.”

“We’d better leave that until Mr. Witherspoon joins us in the morning,” concluded Tom. “Of course that wouldn’t prevent a couple of scouts following the trail a bit while breakfast was cooking, and saving us that much trouble later on.”

“The next thing for us to see about is how under the sun will we cook all these delicious bass Billy’s got ready?” remarked Felix.

“Oh! I forgot to tell you they missed one frying-pan,” remarked Billy, exultantly; “it chanced to be hanging from a nail I drove in a tree, and they couldn’t have seen it. By making relays we can do our cooking in that.”

“Besides, we’re two shy of our original number,” added Horace.

“What would we have done without any skillet at all, Tom?” asked Billy.

“Oh! there are ways of doing it by heating a flat stone, and cooking the fish on that,” replied Tom. “Then some old hunters who won’t bother to carry a frying-pan into the woods with them manage by toasting the meat or fish at the end of a long sliver of wood. Given the fish and a hot fire, the fellow who couldn’t invent some way of cooking would deserve to go hungry.”

“That’s right,” agreed Josh. “And everybody notice that it’s going to take more than a little thing like this to stall the scouts who are up to their business.”

Indeed, there did seem to be an unusual spirit of animation among the boys that evening. Every fellow was anxious to assist in getting supper ready, so that after all it began to look at one time like a case of “too many cooks spoiling the broth.”

When the first batch of fish had been browned they were kept hot on a clean stone close to the fire while the other lot was cooked. As their supply of coffee

had gone together with numerous other things, the boys had to drink cold water for supper. Loud were the lamentations over this.

“The smell of coffee, bacon, or fried onions is what always makes it seem like camping out,” declared Josh, sadly; “and now we haven’t got a single one of those lovely things left. Our breakfast is going to be a pretty limited one; and as for other meals to-morrow, where they are going to come from is a question I’d like somebody to settle.”

“Listen,” said Tom. “I’m going to get you up at daylight, Josh.”

“Me? What for? Do we have to start in fishing that early, or else go hungry?”

“I want you to go along with me, that’s all, Josh.”

“Along—where to, may I ask?” continued the other scout, wonderingly.

“Back to where we took Walter,” replied Tom; “I think when that gentleman hears what’s happened to us, after we tell Mr. Witherspoon, he might be willing to sell us some supplies, such as coffee and bacon, and even loan us an extra frying-pan, as well as some sort of tin to boil coffee in.”

So, after all, the boys who gathered around the camp fire that evening, after such an eventful day, did not seem to be cast down one-half as much as undoubtedly the four young rascals who had played this mean trick upon them expected would be the case.

Contents

# CHAPTER XXII

## THE CABIN IN THE WOODS

It was just about an hour after dawn, and the sun had hardly got started on his journey toward the zenith, when two boys in the khaki garb of scouts arrived at the house to which Walter Douglass had been carried on a litter.

Mr. Witherspoon on coming out to get a breath of air before breakfast was announced was surprised and pleased to see Tom and Josh.

“Why, this is splendid of you, boys!” he remarked, as they came toward him. “Of course you were anxious to know about your comrade. We got him safely home, and called the doctor, who said he would not have to set the limb again, since you scouts had done the job in first-class style. It’s a feather in your cap, for he is sure to tell it everywhere. Now, what makes you look so glum, Josh?”

That gave them a chance to explain. When the scout master heard of the latest outrage of which the Tony Pollock crowd had been guilty, he was much annoyed.

“We thought,” Tom went on to say, “that perhaps by coming over here before you got started we might influence the gentleman to spare us a small amount of coffee, a strip of bacon, and some sort of tin to make the coffee in.”

“No harm trying,” Mr. Witherspoon immediately remarked; “and it does you credit to have thought up such a scheme. I’ve found him an accommodating gentleman. If he has anything he can spare I’m sure we’ll be welcome to it.”

When the matter was mentioned to Mr. Clark, he immediately offered to help them out as far as he could do so.

“I can give you plenty of eggs,” he said, “and enough coffee for several meals. It happens that I’m shy on bacon just now, and intended to run in to town to stock up either to-day or to-morrow, when I have my eggs to dispose of. What I can spare, you’re entirely welcome to.”

Nor would he allow them to pay a cent for what he handed over to them.

“What I’ve heard about you boys from Mr. Witherspoon here has aroused my interest greatly,” he told Tom and Josh as they were about to depart; “and I’d be glad to know more about such a splendid movement as this promises to be. You must keep me informed of your progress. I would appreciate an occasional letter. Then, if it happens that your account of the outing is ever put in print, Tom, remember me with a copy.”

“I certainly will, sir,” the patrol leader promised, for he realized that the gentleman and his wife led a lonely life of it, removed from association as they were, with most of their fellows.

They reached the camp in three-quarters of an hour after leaving the house, and received a noisy welcome from the rest of the boys, who gave their leaders the regular scout salute as they came into camp.

Then once again the affair was discussed, this time with Mr. Witherspoon to listen and give occasional comments. It ended in their original plan’s being sustained. They would not give up, and would try to carry out the plan as arranged before the hike was started.

Tom had an idea that they must be near the cabin of Larry Henderson, the naturalist whom he had met in Lenox, at the time of the snowball battle with the

Pollock crowd.

“He gave me directions how to find his cabin,” Tom explained to his companions when they were discussing this matter, “and I believe we must be somewhere near there right now. I asked Mr. Clark, and what he could tell me only confirmed my idea.”

“But Tom, do you think we could get some supplies from him?” asked Josh.

“There’s a reasonable chance of that,” he was told. “I understood him to say he always kept a supply of all sorts of food on hand. It was to lay in a lot that took him down to Lenox that time, you know.”

“Then goodness knows I hope we can run on his shack to-day,” said Felix fervently. “We want most of all coffee, potatoes, onions, bacon, ham, and, well anything that can stop the gap when ten campers are half starved.”

“Shall we get started right away, Tom?” asked George, who looked distressed, as though he had not been wholly satisfied with the amount of his breakfast.

“There’s nothing to delay us, since we have no tents to come down,” Tom told him. “Every fellow fold up a blanket, and make his pack ready.”

“It’s going to be marching in light order with us nowadays,” sighed Felix, “with all our good stuff stolen. That’s the only compensation I can see about it.”

“Tom, you’ve studied your chart good and hard, let’s hope,” commented Josh; “so we won’t run any chance of going past the place without knowing it?”

“He gave me certain land marks that I couldn’t very well miss seeing,” explained the patrol leader.

“According to my way of thinking,” Felix was saying, “we must be half around

the foot of Big Bear Mountain by this time."

"You've got the right idea of it," admitted the one who carried the chart; "and Mr. Henderson's cabin isn't far away from here. That crag up on the side of the mountain was one of the things he told me about. When we can get it in a direct line with that peak up there we will be within shouting distance of his place."

Tom continued to keep on his guard as they pressed onward. Every one was alive to the necessity of finding the cabin of the old naturalist as soon as possible. Farms were so rare up here that they found they could not count on getting their supplies from such places; and the possibility of going hungry was not a pleasant prospect.

After all it was an hour after noon when Tom announced the fact that the several land marks which had been given to him were in conjunction.

"The cabin must be around here somewheres," he said, positively.

Hardly had he spoken when Josh was noticed to be sniffing the air in a suspicious fashion.

"What is it, Josh?" asked the scout master.

"I smell smoke, that's all," was the answer.

Others could do the same, now that their attention was called to the fact.

"With the breeze coming from over that way, it ought to be plain enough we must look for the cabin there," remarked Tom.

The further they advanced the plainer became the evidence that there was a fire of some sort ahead of them. Presently they got a whiff of cooking, at which some of the hungry scouts began to sniff the air like war horses when the odor of burnt

powder comes down the breeze from the battlefield.

“There it is!” exclaimed one of the watchful boys, suddenly.

Yes, there stood a commodious cabin right in the midst of the thick woods. It was a charming site for the home of one who loved nature as much as the old naturalist did.

When a vociferous shout rang forth a form was seen to come quickly to the open doorway. It was the same genial Larry Henderson whom some of the scouts had once rescued from the unkind assault of the bully of Lenox and his crowd, as they pelted the lame man with hard ice balls.

He welcomed them to his little home with a heartiness that could not be doubted, and soon a royal dinner was being prepared for the whole party. While this was being dispatched later on, the owner of the woods cabin listened to the story of the great hike over Big Bear Mountain, as told by the boys.

Everything seemed to interest him very much indeed, and when last of all they told him how some unscrupulous boys had stolen most of their supplies, meaning to break up the hike, Mr. Henderson looked pleased.

“Don’t let a little thing like that deter you, boys, from carrying out your original proposition,” he remarked. “I can spare you all you want in the way of supplies. Yes and even to a coffee-pot and an extra frying-pan. An enterprise as splendidly started as this has been must not be allowed to languish, or be utterly wrecked through the mean tricks of such scamps as those boys.”

He was pleased when they gave him a round of hearty cheers, such as could only spring from a group of lively, wide-awake American boys.

Afterwards he showed Tom and some of the others many things that interested

them more than words could tell. Indeed, so fascinating were the various things he took the trouble to explain to them, that the scouts only wished they could stay at the cabin in the woods for a number of days, enjoying his society.

It was decided that they must remain there at least until another morning, which would give them a night with the naturalist and hunter, a prospect that afforded satisfaction all around.

Tom soon saw that Mr. Henderson had something on his mind which he wished to confide to him; consequently he was not much surprised when he saw him beckon to the leader of the Black Bear Patrol to join him.

“Tell Mr. Witherspoon to come, too, and also that bright chap you call Rob,” remarked the recluse. “It is a little matter that may interest you and I think it best to lay the story before you, and then let you decide for yourselves what you want to do. Still, from what I’ve seen up to this time of your character, I can give a pretty shrewd guess what your answer will be.”

Of course this sort of talk aroused a good deal of curiosity in both Tom Chesner and Rob Shaefer, and they impatiently awaited the coming of the scout master.

“And now I’ll explain,” Mr. Henderson told them, when he found three eager pairs of eyes fastened on him. “I chanced to be about half a mile away from home an hour before noon to-day when I heard angry voices, and discovered that several persons were about to pass by, following a trail that leads straight into the worst bog around the foot of Big Bear Mountain.”

“I warrant you that it must have been the four young rascals who robbed our camp, that you saw,” ventured Mr. Witherspoon.

“I know now that it was as you say,” continued the other. “At the time I might have called out and warned them of the peril that lay in wait for them if they

should continue along that misleading trail, but when I looked at their faces, and heard a little of the vile language they used, I determined that it would be a very unwise thing for me to let them know I lived so near."

"And you allowed them to go on past, you mean, sir?" questioned Mr. Witherspoon.

"Yes, I regret to confess it now," came the reply, "but at the time it seemed to be simply ordinary caution on my part. Besides, how was I to know they would pay the slightest heed to anything I might say? I did not like their looks. But since then I've had grave doubts about the wisdom of my course, and was more than half inclined to start out, lame though I am, to see whether they did get off the only safe trail, and lose themselves in the bog."

"Is it then so dangerous?" asked Mr. Witherspoon; while Tom was saying to himself that perhaps the chance so ardently desired by poor Carl might be coming at last.

"There are places where it might be death itself to any one who got off the trail, and became bewildered. The mud is deceptive, and once one gets fast in it an hour or two is apt to see him swallowed up; nor will his fate ever be known, for the bottomless mire of the bog never discloses its secrets."

Tom drew a long breath.

"If you will show us the way there, sir," he told the naturalist, "we will certainly accompany you."

Contents

# CHAPTER XXIII

## INTO THE BIG BOG

“Is it worth our while to bother with that crowd, Tom?” asked Josh, with a look approaching disgust on his face.

One lad waited to hear what reply the patrol leader would make with more or less eagerness, as his face indicated. Needless to say this was Carl Oskamp, who had so much at stake in the matter.

“There’s just this about it, Josh,” said Tom, gravely, “suppose after we arrived safely home from this splendid hike, the first thing we heard was that one or two of that crowd had been lost in the Great Bog up here, and it was feared they must have found a grave in the mud flats. How would we feel about it, knowing that we had had the chance given to us to stretch out a helping hand them, and had failed?”

Josh turned red in the face. Then he made a sudden gesture which meant he was ready to throw up his hands.

“Huh! guess you know best,” he replied, in a husky voice; “I didn’t think of it that way. I’d sure hate to have such a thing on my mind nights. Let’s start right away then.”

That was the way with Josh; when he had anything unpleasant to do he was always eager to get it accomplished. For that matter, however, there were others among the scouts who wished to be astir, for the words of the patrol leader had thrilled them.

“What if they have gotten lost in that awful mud bog, and right now are stuck fast there, whooping for help?” suggested Felix.

Billy Button and Horace looked white with the very thought. As usual George pretended to make light of the whole matter, though some of them fancied much of his disbelief was assumed, for George had a reputation to maintain.

“Oh! no danger of those Smart Alecks being caught so easy,” he told them; “they could slip through any sort of bog without getting stuck. Like as not we’ll only have our trouble for our pains.”

“You can stay here at the cabin if you like, George,” Tom told him.

That, however, was far from George’s mind; if the others meant “to make fools of themselves he guessed he could stand it too”; and when they started forth George had his place in the very van. Josh often said George’s “bark was worse than his bite.”

“Fortunately,” said the old naturalist, “the Great Bog isn’t more than a mile away from here, and as I’ve spent many a happy hour there observing the home life of the little creatures that live in its depths the ground is familiar to me.”

“But you still limp, I notice, sir,” remarked Tom; “are you sure you can make it to-day? Hadn’t we better try it alone?”

“I wouldn’t think of letting you,” replied the other, hastily. “I shall get along fairly well, never fear. This limp has become more a habit with me than anything else, I must admit. But if you are ready let us start off.”

Accordingly the entire party began to head in the direction taken by those four boys from Lenox. Rob and Josh were keeping a close watch, and from time to time announced that those they were following had actually come along that

same trail, for they could see their footprints.

“You know we took note of the different prints made by their shoes,” Rob told some of the other boys when they expressed surprise that this should be possible, “and it’s easy enough to tell them every once in a while.”

“They are really following my usual trail, which I always take when going to or returning from a trip,” explained the hermit-naturalist, looking pleased at this manifestation of scout sagacity on the part of the trackers.

Tom was keeping alongside his chum Carl, instead of being with those who led the procession. He had a reason for this, too; since he had seen that the other was again showing signs of nervousness.

“Tom,” said Carl in a low voice as they walked steadily onward, “do you think I may have a chance to see Dock face to face, so I can ask him again to tell me what he ever did with that paper he took?”

“While of course I can’t say positively,” was Tom’s steady answer, “I seem to feel that something’s going to happen that will make you happier than you’ve been this many a long day, Carl.”

“Oh! I hope you’re on the right track!” exclaimed Carl, drawing a long breath, as he clutched the arm of his faithful chum. “It would mean everything to me if only I could go home knowing I was to get that paper. Just think what a fine present it would be to my mother, worried half to death as she is right now over the future.”

“Well, keep hoping for the best, and it’s all going to come out well. But what’s that the boys are saying?”

“I think they must have sighted the beginning of the Great Bog,” replied Carl.

“Do you suppose Mr. Henderson has brought that stout rope along with the idea that it may be needed to pull any one out of the mud?”

“Nothing else,” said Tom. “He knows all about this place, and from what he’s already told us I reckon it must be a terrible hole.”

“Especially in that one spot where he says the path is hidden under the ooze, and that if once you lose it you’re apt to get in deeper and deeper, until there’s danger of being sucked down over your head.”

“It’s a terrible thing to think of,” declared Tom; “worse even than being caught in a quicksand in a creek, as I once found myself.”

“How did you get out?” asked Carl. “I never heard you say anything about it before, Tom?”

“Oh! in my case it didn’t amount to much,” was the answer, “because I realized my danger by the time the sand was half way to my knees. I suppose if I’d tried to draw one foot out the other would have only gone down deeper, for that’s the way they keep sinking, you know.”

“But tell me how you escaped?” insisted Carl.

“I happened to know something about quicksands,” responded the other, modestly, “and as soon as I saw what a fix I was in I threw myself flat, so as to present as wide a surface as I could, and crawled and rolled until I got ashore. Of course I was soaked, but that meant very little compared with the prospect of being smothered there in that shallow creek.”

“But the chances are Tony and those other fellows know nothing at all about the best ways to escape from a sucking bog,” ventured Carl.

“Yes, and I can see that Mr. Henderson is really worried about it. He is straining

his ears all the while, and I think he must be listening in hope of hearing calls for help."

"But none of us have heard anything like that!" said the other.

"No, not a shout that I could mention," Tom admitted. "There are those noisy crows keeping up a chatter in the tree-tops where they are holding a caucus, and some scolding bluejays over here, but nothing that sounds like a human cry."

"It looks bad, and makes me feel shivery," continued Carl.

"Oh! we mustn't let ourselves think that all of them could have been caught," the patrol leader hastened to say, meaning to cheer his chum up. "They may have been smarter than Mr. Henderson thinks, and managed to get through the bog without getting stuck."

Perhaps Carl was comforted by these words on the part of his chum; but nevertheless the anxious look did not leave his face.

They had by this time fully entered the bog. It was of a peculiar formation, and not at all of a nature to cause alarm in the beginning. Indeed it seemed as though any person with common sense could go through on those crooked trails that ran this way and that.

The old naturalist had taken the lead at this point, and they could see that he kept watching the trail in front of him. From time to time he would speak, and the one who came just behind passed the word along, so in turn every scout knew that positive marks betrayed the fact of Tony's crowd having really come that way.

By slow degrees the nature of the bog changed. One might not notice that his surroundings had become less promising, and that the surface of the ooze, green though it was, would prove a delusion and a snare if stepped on, allowing the

foot to sink many inches in the sticky mass.

In numerous places they could see where the boys ahead of them had missed the trail, though always managing to regain the more solid ground.

“It’s getting a whole lot spooky in here, let me tell you!” admitted Felix, after they had been progressing for some time.

“But it’s entirely different from a real swamp, you see,” remarked Josh; “I’ve been in a big one and I know.”

“How about that, Josh; wouldn’t you call a bog a swamp, too?” asked George.

“Not much I wouldn’t,” was the reply. “A swamp is always where there are dense trees, hanging vines and water. It’s a terribly gloomy place even in the middle of the day, and you’re apt to run across snakes, and all sorts of things like that.”

“Well, we haven’t seen a single snake so far,” admitted Horace. “I’m glad, too, because I never did like the things. This isn’t so very gloomy, when you come to look around you, but I’d call it just desolate, and let it go at that.”

“Black mud everywhere, though it’s nearly always covered with a deceptive green scum,” remarked Josh, “with here and there puddles of water where the frogs live and squawk the live-long day.”

“I wonder how deep that mud is anyhow?” speculated George.

“Suppose you get a pole and try while we’re resting here,” suggested Josh, with a wink at the scout next to him.

George thereupon looked around, and seeing a pole which Mr. Henderson may have placed there at some previous time he started to push it into the bog.

“What d’ye think of that, fellows?” he exclaimed, in dismay when he had rammed the seven foot pole down until three fourths of its length had vanished in the unfathomable depths of soft muck.

“Why, seems as if there wasn’t any bottom at all to the thing,” said Felix.

“Of course there is a bottom,” remarked the naturalist, who had been watching the boys curiously; “but in some places I’ve been unable to reach it with the longest pole I could manage.”

“Have we passed that dangerous place you were telling us about, sir?” asked Mr. Witherspoon.

“No, it is still some little distance ahead,” came the reply.

“If it’s much worse than right here I wouldn’t give five cents for their chances,” declared George.

“Hark!” exclaimed Tom just then.

“What did you hear?” cried Carl.

“It sounded like voices to me, though some distance off, and coming from further along the trail,” the patrol leader asserted.

“They may be stuck in the mire and trying every way they can to get out,” observed the naturalist. “Let us give them a shout, boys. Now, all together!”

As they all joined in, the volume of sound must have been heard a mile away. Hardly had the echoes died out than from beyond came loud calls, and plainly they heard the words “Help, help! Oh! come quick, somebody! Help!”

Contents

# CHAPTER XXIV

## RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL

When that wailing cry reached their ears it thrilled the scouts through and through, for now they knew that the worst must have happened to the wretched Tony Pollock and his three cronies, adrift in the treacherous muck bog.

“Forward, but be very careful to keep in my tracks all the time!” called out the naturalist as he started off.

They wound around this way and that. There were times when Rob, who came directly on the heels of the pilot, could not see the slightest trace of a trail; but he realized that from long association and investigation Mr. Henderson knew exactly where to set his feet, and thus avoid unpleasant consequences.

They now and then sent out reassuring calls, for those unseen parties ahead continued to make fervent appeals, as though a terrible fear assailed them that the rescuers might go astray and miss them.

By degrees the shouts sounded closer, though becoming exceedingly hoarse. Presently Felix called out that he believed he had glimpsed the unfortunate boys.

“Oh! they’re all in the mud, and up to their waists at that!” he cried.

“No, you’re wrong there, Felix,” said Josh. “Three of them seem to be stuck fast, but there’s one up in that tree nearly over them. He must have managed to pull himself up there, somehow or other.”

“He’s got a branch, and is trying to help one of his mates,” asserted Rob. “But he

doesn’t seem to be making much headway.”

“They’re in a peck of trouble, believe me!” admitted George, for once neglecting to sneer at the prospect of a fatality.

Carl was trying to make out who the three in the bog were.

“Can you see if *he’s* in there, Tom?” he asked, eagerly.

“Yes, it’s Wedge McGuffey up in the tree, and the others must be Tony, Asa and Dock,” the patrol leader assured him; nor did he blame poor Carl for sighing as though in relief, for he could easily guess what it meant to him, this golden opportunity to be of help to the stubborn boy who could lift the load from his heart, if only he chose.

When they came closer to the struggling captives in the lake of mud they heard them actually sobbing for joy. Hope must have been almost gone when first they heard that chorus of cheering shouts. And when the scouts saw what a desperate condition the three prisoners were in they could not blame them for showing such emotion in the excess of their joy.

Soon the newcomers were as close as they could come to the three who were stuck there in the mire. Never would they forget their deplorable appearance. They had evidently floundered about until they were fairly plastered over with the mud, and looked like imps.

“Can’t you get us out of here, fellers?” called Tony Pollock, in a voice that seemed almost cracked, such was his excitement, and his fears that these scouts, whom he had done his best to injure, might think to pay him back in his own coin and abandon him to his fate.

“Yes, we’ll manage it some way or other,” said the hermit-naturalist. “Keep as

still as you can, because every movement only sends you down deeper."

Then he turned to Tom, for he knew the patrol leader was the one to take charge of the rescue party.

"Here's the rope, Tom," he told him. "Pick out several of the stoutest of your comrades, and make use of the tree as a lever. It's all very simple, you can see, thought it may hurt them more or less when you pull."

Tom understood what was expected of him.

"Come along with me, Carl, Rob and Josh," he said. "The rest of you stand by and be ready to pull if we need any more help. We'll pass the end of the rope back to you."

"But how are we going to climb up in the tree?" asked Rob; "without getting stuck in the mud ourselves?"

"There's only one way," replied Tom, as he seized hold of a branch that happened to be within reach, and commenced to climb it as though he were a sailor swarming up a rope.

When he had effected a lodgment above they threw the rope to him, and after Tom had made one end fast to the thick limb the other three had little difficulty in following him.

Then they clambered out to where Wedge McGuffey was perched. His condition betrayed the fact that he too had been caught in the muck; but being closer to a friendly branch he must have made a tremendous effort and climbed into the tree.

First of all Tom made a running noose in the end of the rope. Then he lowered this to Tony who was almost below the limb of which they were astride.

“Listen, Tony,” said Tom, clearly, “put the loop under your arms, with the knot at your chest. Then grin and bear it, because we’ve got to drag hard to get you free from all that stuff you’re in.”

“Oh! never mind about me, Tom; I’d stand anything if only I could get out of this terrible place. Pull me in half if you have to; I’m game!” said the boy below.

They found that it was really a little harder than they had bargained for, because of their insecure footing. Accordingly, after several attempts that did not meet with much success, Tom had the other end of the rope carried to the scouts who were on the ground.

After that Tony just had to come. He evidently suffered pain, but, as he had said, he was game, and in the end they hoisted him to the limb, where he clung watching the next rescue.

It happened that Asa was the second to be pulled out. Meanwhile Dock was in great distress of mind. All his nerve seemed to have gone, for he kept pleading with Carl not to think of having revenge because of the way he had harmed him.

“Only get me out of this, Carl,” he kept saying, “and I’ve got something right here in my pocket I’m meaning to give back to you. I was getting shaky about it anyhow; but if you help me now you’re a-goin’ to have it, sure you are, Carl!”

It can easily be imagined that Carl worked feverishly when it came time to get Dock Phillips out. He was deeper than either of the others had been, and it required some very rough usage before finally they loosened him from his miry bed.

Dock groaned terribly while the work was being carried on, but they did not stop for that, knowing it had to be. In the end he, too, was drawn up to the limb, a

most sorry looking spectacle indeed, but his groans had now changed into exclamations of gratitude.

It required much labor to get the four mud-daubed figures down to where the others were awaiting them. Even Tom and his helpers were pretty well plastered by that time, and their new uniforms looked anything but fine. Josh grumbled a little, but as for Tom and Carl they felt that it was worth all it cost and a great deal more.

Carl would not wait any longer than he could help. Perhaps he believed in "striking while the iron was hot." Tom too was egging him on, for he felt that the sooner that precious paper was in the possession of his chum the better.

"Dock, I hope you mean to keep your word to me," Carl said, as they took up the line of march over the ground that had been so lately covered.

Dock was seen to be fumbling as though reaching into an inner pocket; and while the suspense lasted of course Carl held his very breath. Then a hand reached back, and something in it was eagerly seized by the widow's son. One look told him that it was the paper his mother needed so much in order to balk the greedy designs of Amasa Culpepper.

"How is everything now, Carl?" asked a voice in his ear, and turning he found Tom's smiling face close to his own.

"Oh! that terrible load seems to have fallen from my shoulders just as water does from the back of a duck!" Carl exclaimed, joyously, and the patrol leader saw that he was very happy.

"I'm so glad!" was all Tom said, but the way he grasped his chum's hand counted for much more than mere words.

When they finally reached the end of the treacherous Great Bog there was a halt called by the naturalist.

“We must stop here and try to clean these boys off as best we can,” he announced.

This was no easy task, but by making use of slivers of wood from a fallen tree they finally managed to relieve Tony and his crowd of most of the black mud, although they would be apt to carry patches of it on their garments for some time after it dried.

“Now,” said the kindly old hermit-naturalist, “I’m going to invite all of you up to my cabin, and we’ll have a feast to-night in celebration of this rescue from the Great Bog. You four lads have had a narrow escape, and I only hope you’ll never forget what the scouts have done for you.”

Even Tony seemed affected, and certainly no one had ever before known him to show the first sign of contrition. He went straight up to Tom and looked him in the eye.

“We played your crowd a mighty low trick I want to say, Tom Chesney; and while we’ve et up most of the grub we took, here’s something you might be glad to get back again,” and with that he thrust into the hand of the patrol leader the little note-book which Tom had mourned as lost to him forever.

“I’m glad to have that again, Tony,” the other said, offering his hand to the contrite one; “because I mean to use my account of this hike later on in trying for a prize. It’s lucky you didn’t throw it away as you did the frying-pan and coffee-pot, which I see you failed to carry along with you.”

“We know where they’re hid in the brush,” Tony hastened to declare; “and I c’n get ’em again inside of an hour. I’m a-goin’ to do it too, ’cause I feel mean about

that thing. I’m done with callin’ the scouts names. Fellers that’d reach out a helpin’ hand to them that didn’t deserve it must be the right sort. And laugh if you want to, Tom Chesney, but when we get back home I want ye to lend me a book that tells all a feller has to do when he thinks of gettin’ up a scout troop!”

Tony was as good as his word. When he said a thing he stuck to it, which was his best quality. He tramped a long way back along the trail, and reappeared after sunset bearing the missing cooking utensils.

“We’re going to pay for the eatables we took later on, I promise ye, Tom,” he declared.

They spent a great night and those four boys who had hated the scouts so long learned many wonderful things connected with the great movement as they sat by the fire, and listened to all that was said.

In the morning they went their way, and appeared to be different youths from what they had been in the past.

Mr. Witherspoon and the scouts spent another day and night with the hermit-naturalist. Then on the next morning they started forth to complete their hike over Big Bear Mountain.

It chanced that no further adventures came their way, and one afternoon weary but well satisfied with the success of their trip, the troop re-entered Lenox, with Felix sounding his fish horn just as valiantly as though it were the most beautiful silver-plated bugle that money could buy.

Contents

# CHAPTER XXV

## WHEN CARL CAME HOME—CONCLUSION

Amasa Culpepper had taken advantage of the absence of Carl to drop around that afternoon to see the widow. He fully believed that by this time Dock Phillips had either destroyed or lost the paper he claimed to have found; or else Amasa felt that he could secure possession of it at any time by paying the sum the boy demanded.

When Carl drew near his home he saw the well-known rig of the old lawyer and grocer at the gate. Somehow, the sight gave Carl an unpleasant feeling. Then, as his hand unconsciously went up to the pocket where he had that precious paper, he felt a sensation of savage joy.

They would get rid of this nuisance at last. Mr. Culpepper would have to produce the certificate for the oil shares that had become so valuable, now that the receipt he had given for it could be produced, and after that an era of prosperity would come to the Oskamp's, with grim poverty banished forever.

Carl entered by the gate, and passed around the side of the house instead of using the front door as usual.

The boy knew that the windows of the little sitting room must be open, and of course the afternoon caller would be in there. Carl was anxious to hear what had caused the rich old man to don his best clothes and drop in to see his mother of an afternoon, though he strongly suspected the reason back of it.

It did not strike the boy that he was playing the part of an eavesdropper, for in

his mind just then the end justified the means. And he knew that Amasa Culpepper had to be fought with his own weapons.

Evidently he must have again asked Mrs. Oskamp to marry him, and as before met with a laughing refusal, for Carl could hear him walking nervously up and down in the little sitting room.

Having exhausted his stock of arguments as to why she should think seriously of his proposal, Mr. Culpepper seemed to be getting angry. He had been courting the widow for a long time without making any impression on her heart. It was time to change his tactics. Perhaps since entreaties had failed something in the way of half-veiled threats would become more successful.

“You tell me that with the burning of the tenement building more than half of your little property has been lost,” Carl heard him saying as he crouched there under the open window.

“Yes, that is the sad truth, Mr. Culpepper,” the widow admitted.

“But with a family of children to bring up how are you going to live from now on, when before this happened you had barely enough? If you would seriously consider the proposition I make you, and become Mrs. Culpepper, your children would have a good home.”

“That is very generous of you, Mr. Culpepper,” Carl heard his mother say, while he fairly held his breath in suspense for fear she might agree to what the other asked; “but I cannot change my mind. I never expect to marry again.”

“But how can you get along, I want to know?” he demanded, angrily. “It takes money to live, and you will see the children you love suffer.”

“There is one resource still left,” she told him, as though urged to put him to the

test. “It lies in those shares of oil stock which you are holding for me. They have become very valuable, and when I dispose of them I hope to have enough and to spare for all future needs.”

There was a brief and awkward silence.

“But what evidence is there,” he finally asked icily, “that you ever placed any shares of stock in my hand, or even so, that they were not delivered to you again? Of course you can show my name at the bottom of a receipt if that is the fact?”

“Is that absolutely necessary, Mr. Culpepper?” she asked, helplessly.

“It is strictly business, madam,” the visitor went on, in his cold, cutting tones that were like the rasping of a file. “I could not think of handing over anything of value that was in my possession without receiving in return a receipt.”

“But you would not be so cruel as to deprive my children of their bread simply because of a little technicality, sir? I will do anything the law demands to insure that you are not held liable whether the lost receipt is ever found again or not.”

“There is only one thing you can do,” continued Mr. Culpepper, eagerly, “that will cause me to waive my rights, and you know what that is. Those are my only terms of surrender.”

“That’s just where you’re a whole lot mistaken Mr. Culpepper!” cried Carl, unable to hold in any longer, and thrusting his head and shoulders through the open window as he spoke.

The widow gave a slight shriek, while Mr. Culpepper said something half under his breath that no doubt expressed his feelings.

“What do you mean by saying that?” he asked, in a voice that was unsteady.

“You made a statement that you’ll have to take water on,” Carl told him with a broad smile on his face. “Listen! My mother will be down at your office to-morrow morning with Judge Beatty and myself, and she’ll demand that you deliver the paper that this receipt calls for!”

With that he held up the precious little paper so that those in the sitting room could see it. Mrs. Oskamp gave a bubbling cry of joy, while Amasa Culpepper, seizing his hat and stick, hurried out of the door, entered his buggy and whipped his horse savagely, as though glad to vent his ill humor on some animate object.

Carl was not another moment in climbing through the open window and gathering his mother in his strong arms. The whole story was told that evening with the younger children gathered around. Mrs. Oskamp sat there and felt her mother heart glow with pride as she heard how Carl had played his part in the exciting drama connected with the hike of the Boy Scouts.

“It seems as though some power over which you had no control must have led you on to the glorious success that came in the end,” she told the happy Carl, after everything had been narrated. “With that paper in our hands we can have no further trouble in securing our property. But I shall feel that we owe something to Dock Phillips, and that it can only be repaid through kindness to his mother.”

On the following day they took Judge Beatty, who was an old friend of Carl’s father, into their confidence, and the certificate of stock was promptly though grudgingly delivered to them on demand.

Amasa Culpepper knew that he had been fairly beaten in the game, and he annoyed Mrs. Oskamp no longer.

The oil shares turned out to be worth a large sum of money, and it placed the Oskamps beyond the reach of want.

Tom Chesney wrote his account of their great trip over big Bear Mountain, and, sure enough it did take the prize when submitted in competition with numerous others to the magazine that had made the offer. Tom remembered his promise and sent copies of the story to Mr. Clark, as well as to Mr. Henderson.

The last heard from Lenox the Boy Scouts were thriving famously. They expected to enjoy many an outing under the charge of the good-hearted scout master, Mr. Witherspoon, but some of the boys were of the opinion that there never could be just such a wonderful series of exciting adventures befall them as had accompanied the hike over Big Bear Mountain.

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