THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER

CLARENCE YOUNG

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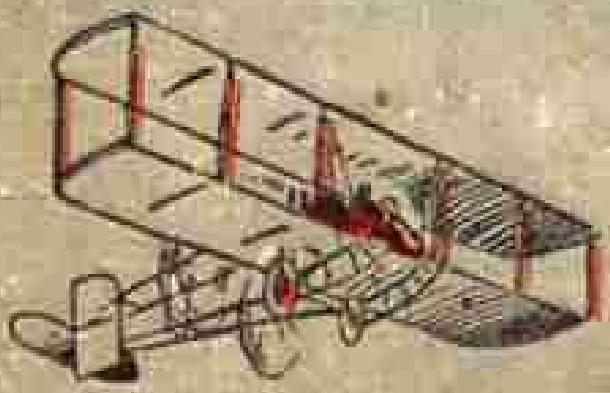
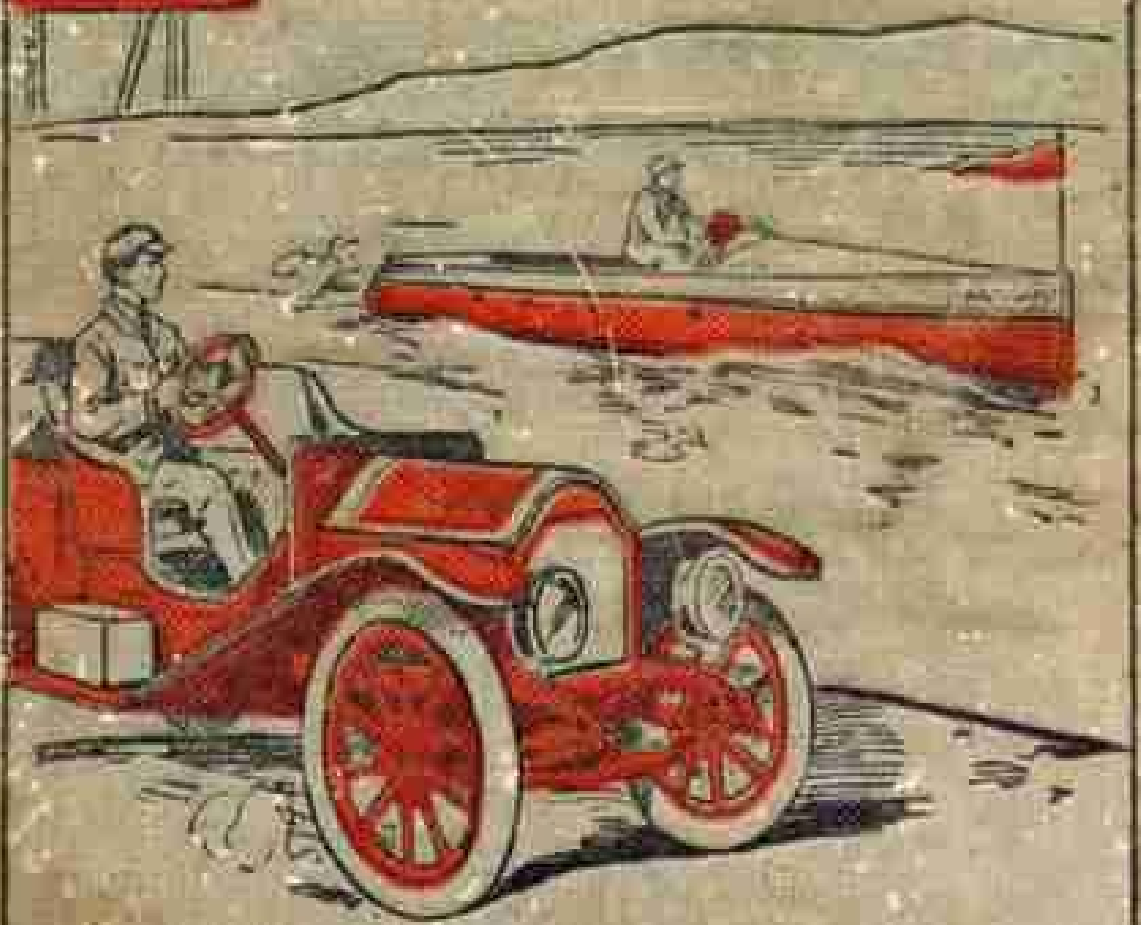
THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER





CLARENCE YOUNG

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       Or, Racing To Save a Life

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THE CAR POISED FOR AN INSTANT, THE FRONT WHEELS ON THE VERY BRINK.

THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER

Or

Racing To Save a Life

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF “THE MOTOR BOYS,” “THE MOTOR BOYS UNDER THE SEA,” “THE RACER BOYS SERIES,” “THE JACK RANGER SERIES,” ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

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THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER

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MY DEAR BOYS:

Sometimes, as you doubtless know, the simplest actions result in the most remarkable complications. When Jerry Hopkins picked up a lump of common-looking clay on some swamp land that his mother owned he had no idea what a strange series of events was to transpire from his simple act. Before he realized it he and his chums were involved in a strange secret, and they had set off on a trip that had, as its ultimate object, the saving of the life of Professor Snodgrass.

In this, the sixteenth volume of the "Motor Boys Series," I have set down what followed when Jerry learned the value of that lump of clay. How he and his chums started off after the professor, who had strangely disappeared; how they found him, almost lifeless; and how they raced to bring the celebrated doctor to him—all this you will find related in this book.

You have shown that you liked the other books I have written concerning the "Motor Boys," and I venture to hope that this one will appeal to you.

That there was really a two-tailed lizard was left for Bob to demonstrate in an unexpected manner. That is all I will say, now, regarding that strange creature. You may turn the following pages and learn the rest for yourselves.

Your sincere friend,

CLARENCE YOUNG.

THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER

CHAPTER I
JERRY IS ABSENT-MINDED

“Pretty good game; wasn’t it?”

“It sure was—a corker!”

“I thought our Cresville boys wouldn’t be able to pull up, after the Red Sox got that big lead on ’em, but they certainly played their heads off.”

“They sure did. The pitcher won the game for them with that last wallop of his!”

“That’s right,” remarked a stout lad, one of a group of three who were walking slowly across the green diamond at the conclusion of a ball match.

“The umpire made some pretty rank decisions,” added the boy who had made the first comment, glancing across in front of his companion, who, in the middle of the trio, separated the two speakers.

“You’re right,” commented the stout youth.

The two exchanged looks—queer glances, and, as if by mutual consent, gazed up at the face of their chum who walked between them. Then the stout lad winked.

“What’s the matter, Jerry?” he asked. “Didn’t you like the game?”

“Game? What game? Oh, yes—sure I liked it!” was the hurried response, as though the speaker’s thoughts had been far afield when the import of the question was grasped. “It was a good little game,” went on the lad in the centre of the trio. “Too bad our boys didn’t win, though!”

“Too bad!” echoed the stout lad. “Why, what——”

“Didn’t win!” interrupted the other. “Say, Jerry, what’s got into you? The Cresville team did win!”

“Oh, did they? That’s funny! I guess I didn’t pay much attention toward the last.”

“No, and not toward the beginning, either, I guess,” grumbled the stout lad. “I

wonder what's gotten into him," he thought.

"So they won; did they, Bob?" asked the lad addressed as Jerry. "Well, I'm glad of it."

"Of course they won, Jerry Hopkins," was the quick answer. "And this practically clinches the local championship for them, too. It was a corking good game; wasn't it, Ned?"

"Now you're talking! A good crowd, too," and Ned Slade looked at the throng pouring down from grandstand and bleachers.

"What shall we do?" asked Bob Baker, the stout lad before referred to. "I vote not to go home just yet. It's early. Let's take a little spin down the road."

"All right," agreed Ned. "Shall we, Jerry?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, I'm in for whatever you fellows say. It'll be nice on the river to-day."

"River! Who said anything about the river?" demanded Ned. "Do you think we came to this ball game in our motor boat, Jerry Hopkins? Say, what's the matter with you to-day, anyhow? We're talking about taking a spin in the auto. Will you come along?"

"Oh, sure I'll go. You know that!" exclaimed Jerry, and with an effort he seemed to recall his thoughts from whatever distant realms they roamed. "Sure we'll go for a spin. I guess I was thinking about the ball game."

Ned and Bob each gave their chum a queer look, but they said nothing. Only Ned thought to himself:

"Thinking about the ball game; eh? That won't go with me, when, a little while ago, he didn't even know which side had won. There's something wrong with Jerry. I wonder what it is?"

But, whatever it was, it did not seem to be anything very serious, for soon Jerry smiled at his chums, and clapping Bob on the shoulder with a force that made the stout youth grunt, exclaimed:

"Sure we'll go for a spin! It will give us an appetite for supper, and I seem to need one. I've been a little off my feed the last few days."

At this Bob looked worried. Eating was something in which he took a great deal of interest. Perhaps it was that which made him so stout, and had gained for him the nickname of "Chunky," which his chums occasionally called him.

The three boys—the “motor boys” they were locally called—because they so often rode about in motor vehicles—automobiles, motor boats, or motor-driven airships—had come to the ball game in their auto which stood parked, with a number of others, back of the grandstand. Thither they now made their way.

The air was filled with the noisy chug-chug of scores of machines as they backed, turned and darted ahead to get from the ball field to the road. In and out of the receding throng the autoists guided their cars. On all sides were talk and laughter—talk of the game just finished, congratulatory calls to the winners, and expressions of regret for the losers.

“Yes, it sure was some nifty little game,” remarked Bob, as the chums reached their machine. “Are you going to drive, Jerry?” he asked.

“I will if you want me to—sure.”

“I hope he pays more attention to the wheel than he did to the ball game,” remarked Ned, with a slow shake of his head. “If he doesn’t he’s likely to have us up a tree, or in the ditch.”

But he made no objection as Jerry took his place at the wheel, and slipped in the switch key of the electric starter. Ned and Bob got in the tonneau, and Jerry, looking back to see that both doors were closed, was about to start off when a voice behind the machine cried:

“Hold on! Wait a minute! I won’t be a second! Give me a lift; will you? I forgot all about it! Terrible important message! Dad’ll be wild if I don’t deliver it! Great game; wasn’t it? Our boys won fine! Here I am! Let her go! Never say die! Whizz her along, Jerry! I’m here! Let her out, do you hear? Move the boat!”

A small youth, very much excited as to manner and words sprang, leaped, scrambled, climbed, hopped, jumped, vaulted and fell into the vacant seat beside Jerry. He sat there, his breath coming in gasps, both from his run and from his outpouring of words.

Jerry, with a quizzical smile, looked down at him; Bob, with half-opened mouth, leaned forward to gaze; and Ned shook his head in a hopeless fashion, murmuring:

“Is it all over, Andy Rush?”

“Is—is what—all over?” demanded the small chap.

“Everything,” answered Ned, throwing his hands in the air. “Your talk—your—your—well, you know what I mean. Is it all over?”

“Of course it is,” was the quick answer. “You can go ahead now, Jerry,” he added, as though they had been waiting for him.

“Well, I like your nerve!” gasped Bob, who at length found his voice.

“That’s all right. I saw you had a vacant place!” exclaimed Andy, starting off in another “spasm.” Then he proceeded:

“I’ve got to get back to town in a hurry. Important message—dad told me not to forget, but I did—went to the ball game. Say, it was great; wasn’t it? That fly of Watson’s—up in the air—thought it would never come down—run around the bases—nobody out—whoop her up! Everybody run! Nobody out—all over!”

He had reared up in his seat to “explode” this, and now sank back again.

Jerry looked at the diminutive orator.

“Are you all through, Andy?” asked the tall lad, gently. “If you are, we’ll start, with your kind permission and attention. Only we’re not going back to town right away, so if you have an important message to deliver you’d better walk, or take a hop, skip and a jump into someone else’s car. We’re going to take a little ride, and we don’t know when we’ll get back.”

“Oh, well, I guess it isn’t so important after all,” spoke Andy, slowly. “I’ll go with you. I’ll leave the message when I come back. You are coming back; aren’t you?” he asked.

“No telling,” answered Ned, winking at Jerry. “We may take a notion to run over to San Francisco and spend the night.”

“Huh! I don’t care,” laughed Andy. “I’ll go along. I can telephone the message back, I guess. Let me go; will you?”

“Oh, well, there’s no getting ahead of you, Andy,” conceded Jerry. “Stay in, if you like. Only don’t blame us if your dad wants to know why his message wasn’t delivered.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Ned. “Let her go, Jerry. It’s hot sitting here in the sun.”

There was a whine and a whirr, as the electric starter spun the flywheel of the big automobile. Then came a snap, as the gears meshed, and as the clutch slipped into place the machine slowly backed to a clear place. Then, as Jerry threw in the first forward speed, it shot ahead, and, a little later was spinning down a pleasant, shaded country road.

“This is something like,” observed Bob, leaning back in comfort. “Want to go anywhere special, Jerry?”

“No, I’ll go anywhere you fellows say.”

“Let’s have a race!” burst out Andy Rush. “There goes a car! You can easy pass that, Jerry! Speed her up! Let’s race ’em! Look, they’re laughing at us! Go ahead! Whoop!”

The tall steersman made no effort to increase the speed of the car. Instead he smiled down at the excited lad beside him, and remarked:

“It’s too hot to do all that talking, Andy. Save it for the winter season when you’ll need it. We’ll have no race to-day.”

If the small chap was disappointed he did not show it. For something new claimed his attention. A big gray squirrel scurried across the street in front of the car.

“Look at that!” cried Andy. “Say, he can go some! If I only had a gun now! Squirrel pie for mine!”

“Squirrels are out of season now,” remarked Bob. “You’d be fined if you shot ’em.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Ned.

“Let’s go on to Blairtown, and have a bite to eat,” suggested Bob, after a pause. “There’s a good restaurant there.”

“Humph! Seeing that squirrel must have made you hungry,” commented Ned with a laugh. “But go ahead, if you like, Jerry. I don’t mind.”

Jerry, at the wheel, nodded, and for some time guided the car in silence. Now and then Andy made some excited remark at the sight of something along the highway. Bob and Andy exchanged occasional opinions.

“How’s she running, Jerry?” asked Bob, after a bit.

“Yes, our fellows did some good running,” was the unexpected answer.

“Oh, wake up!” cried Ned, with a laugh. “We weren’t talking about the ball game.”

“No?” queried Jerry. “I thought Bob said something about runs.”

“I was asking how the car ran,” put in the stout lad.

“Oh!” exclaimed Jerry, comprehendingly. “Why, she’s going like a sewing machine—just as easy. She sure is some car!”

“Yes, I’m glad we traded in our old one, and got this,” commented Ned. “That self-starter alone is worth the difference. No more breaking our backs cranking up.”

Jerry did not reply to this. After his remark to Bob he had relapsed into silence again—a silence to which Ned called his chum’s attention by a nudge.

“Something sure has gotten into Jerry,” whispered the stout youth.

“That’s right, Chunky,” agreed his companion.

They rode on for some distance farther, Jerry guiding the car skillfully enough, even though his mind did not seem to be on his task.

As he turned up a cross road, that would take them to Blairtown Ned, glancing up suddenly, cried out:

“Look out, Jerry! Where are you steering? You’re heading right for that other car!”

A big machine, coming from the opposite direction, and at high speed, was headed directly for the auto of the motor boys. But it was on the proper side of the highway, whereas Jerry was on the left.

“Look out!” Bob cried, springing to his feet. “We’re going to have a smash, sure!” He leaned forward to open the side door, as though he would leap out.

CHAPTER II
JERRY EXPLAINS

“Sit still!” yelled Ned, grasping his chum by the arm.

“But we’re going to smash, I tell you!”

Bob sank back in his seat with a thud, for Ned had forcibly pulled him by the coat.

“Look out!” yelled Andy, adding his alarm to the others.

“Eh? What is it? Oh, another car!” cried Jerry, and, for the first time, he seemed to be aware that there was danger from his thoughtlessness in taking the wrong side of the road.

The driver of the other car sent out a strident blast from his electric siren, and crowded his machine as far over to the other side as possible. But a high bank afforded very little leeway.

“Look out where you’re going!” the chauffeur yelled, his angry voice accentuating the warning of the horn.

Jerry Hopkins seemed to come to life in an instant. His absent-mindedness left him in a flash, and his strong hands turned the steering wheel rapidly.

So suddenly did he shift the direction of his car that it skidded, and, for an instant slid along on two tires. Then, with another quick shift of the wheel, the steersman brought it back on the proper course.

The two machines passed safely, but, so narrow was the space between them, the thickness of one’s hand would have sufficed to fill it.

Then, in a swirl of dust, the other machine passed on, the dirt-cloud serving to hide the indignant glances of the occupants. Jerry brought his car to a stop with a whine of the hastily-applied brakes.

“Say, I didn’t see that fellow coming,” declared Jerry, turning to speak to his chums in the tonneau.

“You didn’t see him!” cried Ned. “Why, he was right in front of you, and on

the proper side of the road, too. You were off. Say, what's the matter with you Jerry, anyhow?"

The tall lad did not answer for a moment. Instead, he slowly got down out of the car, and walked over to a spring that bubbled out of a rock at the side of the road.

"Wait until I get a drink," he said. "I'm dry."

Ned and Bob looked at one another.

"What do you make of it?" asked Ned, in a low voice, as Jerry leaned over to drink.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the answer of the stout lad. "He's been acting queer and absent-minded for the last few days. He seems to be worrying about something."

"I wonder what it can be?" ventured Ned.

"Let's ask him," suggested Bob. "Maybe we can help him."

They spoke in louder tones now, for Andy, who had been sitting beside Jerry, had also alighted to get a drink at the spring.

"Maybe he wouldn't want us 'butting-in,'" remarked Ned.

"Well, something's got to be done," declared Bob, with a sigh. "I'm not going to ride, and have him steer like that. He nearly ran over a dog a while back, and now he almost sends us into another car. Something sure is wrong. Jerry has something on his mind, and we ought to offer to help him."

"Well, maybe we ought," responded Ned, thoughtfully.

And while the two chums are thus debating as to whether or not they ought to interfere sufficiently in Jerry's affairs to offer to help him, I will take a few moments to tell my new readers something of the boys and of the previous books in this series in which my heroes have figured.

Bob Baker, son of Andrew Baker, a rich banker; Ned Slade, whose father, Aaron Slade, was the proprietor of a large department store; and Jerry Hopkins, the only son of a well-to-do widow, were the three "motor boys" with whom we are concerned. They lived in the town of Cresville, not far from Boston, and had been chums and companions ever since they were youngsters. They had been "lost" together, they had played ball on the vacant lots, they had gone swimming and fishing in one another's company, and, when they grew older, they went

bicycling together.

It was the bicycles that gained for them the name “motor boys,” for it was through the winning of a bicycle race that one of them gained a motorcycle as a prize, and in the first book of the series, entitled “The Motor Boys,” you may read of this thrilling contest.

But the motor boys were not content with one motorcycle, nor with winning one race. They obtained an automobile, and made a thrilling trip overland, afterward going to Mexico, where they located a buried city, coming home across the great plains.

Many and thrilling were the adventures our friends had on land, and not a few dangers encompassed them, some being due to the evil doings of Noddy Nixon and Bill Berry, two bad characters.

But action ashore was not sufficient for the motor boys. They were able to obtain a motor boat, and in the fifth volume of this series, entitled “The Motor Boys Afloat,” is related their adventures in that staunch craft. They had strenuous times on the Atlantic, in the strange waters of the Florida Everglades, and on the Pacific.

As might be expected, having, in a manner, conquered the problems of the land in their automobile, and of the water in their motor boat, the boys sighed, like Alexander, for new worlds. They found one in the air, and though they themselves were a little doubtful of their ability to navigate an aeroplane they did not hesitate to try.

In the ninth book, “The Motor Boys in the Clouds,” I had the pleasure of relating to you their adventures in their motorship. They flew over the Rockies, and over a part of the ocean, and again, taking wing, they went in search of a lost fortune.

Hovering over the border between the United States and Canada, the motor boys were able to help Uncle Sam capture some daring smugglers, and hardly had they finished that thrilling work than new activities presented themselves. The volume immediately preceding this one is entitled “The Motor Boys Under the Sea.”

While out in their motorship *Comet*, one day, the boys saw floating on the waters of Massachusetts Bay a strange object which at first they thought was a whale. It turned out to be a submarine, however, and when the boys encountered it, later, in a terrific storm, and were taken aboard the strange craft, being kept

virtually prisoners, they realized that they were about to pass through some strange scenes.

Whether they did or not I will leave to the decision of those of you who have read the book. Suffice it to say that, eventually, Dr. Klauss, the commander of the submarine, though endeavoring in his insane fury to make an end of them all, was overpowered, and our friends reached safety.

A winter of comparative inactivity followed the lively times in the submarine, and now spring had come once more. The motor boys had made no plans for their vacation, but they had talked, more or less indefinitely, of a long trip to be taken, partly by auto, and partly aboard their new motor boat. Nothing had been settled, however.

The three, having no other engagement this Saturday afternoon, had gone to the ball game, for Cresville boasted of a good semi-professional team, and it was on their way back from this contest that I have introduced my new readers to them.

“I’m going to make the break, and ask Jerry what ails him,” decided Ned, as he watched his tall chum straighten up after taking a long drink at the spring.

“Yes, maybe it will be best,” assented Bob. “He surely isn’t himself. He’s been acting queerly for nearly a week. He seems to be in a sort of dream.”

“That’s right,” agreed Ned. “Well, maybe he won’t like me ‘butting-in’ on him, but we’ve been chums too long to stand off, and not help him when he needs it.”

Andy Rush, who had begged a ride with the three friends, had just run down the road in pursuit of a rabbit, so he was not within sound of the voices of the three chums. Andy was an excitable chap, who never did any one thing very long at a time. He was rather a “fly-away,” but Ned, Bob and Jerry liked him for all that.

“Feel better?” asked Ned, as his tall chum approached.

“Yes, that was fine water. But there wasn’t anything the matter with me,” replied Jerry, quickly, as he sensed Ned’s words. “What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? Well, Jerry, old man,” spoke Ned, “it’s evident to both Bob and me that something is wrong with you. It isn’t like you to have such a near-collision as the one we just avoided, and also to nearly run over a dog, as you did a while back, isn’t a bit like you. Neither is it to see you so absent-minded.

“Now we don’t want to pry into your affairs, Jerry,” went on Ned, with a look at Bob, “but if we can help you—why, you know we’re only too willing. Is there anything we can do?”

“For we’re sure something’s wrong,” put in Bob. “Suppose we go to that restaurant in Blairtown and eat. I can always talk better when I eat,” added Bob, innocently enough.

“The same old Chunky,” murmured Jerry, with a smile. Then his manner grew more serious.

“Understand!” exclaimed Ned, quickly, as he noted the change in his chum’s face, “we don’t want to ‘butt-in,’ but we would like to help you. Are you in trouble, Jerry? Noddy Nixon isn’t bothering you again; is he? And Dr. Klauss hasn’t turned up again with his submarine; has he?”

“No! Oh, no! It isn’t anything as serious as that,” and Jerry smiled.

“Well?” spoke Ned, questioningly.

Jerry hesitated for a moment, and looked up and down the road, as though to make sure no one could hear what he was going to say.

“Fellows,” began the tall lad, “I sure do appreciate your interest in my affairs. And I don’t consider it ‘butting-in,’ either. I suppose I have been acting queerly, the last few days, but——”

“Queerly! I should say you had!” cried Ned. “It’s all right, old man,” he added, with a laugh, “no offense you know, but if you call it ‘queer’ to nearly smash us up a couple of times, I guess we’ll agree with you. Now then, out with it, and if we can help you, why, you know you don’t have to ask twice. Let her go, as Andy Rush would say,” and he glanced toward that distant youth.

“Well, I don’t know that it’s so very important, or serious,” resumed Jerry. “But, the truth of the matter is, I’ve been doing a lot of hard thinking of late, and I suppose it’s that which has made me seem absent-minded.”

“There wasn’t any ‘seeming’ about it,” put in Bob. “It was the real article.”

“Yes, I guess it was,” admitted Jerry. “I really couldn’t tell you, now, who won that ball game, and as for nearly running into that auto, I didn’t see it until the last second. I was thinking of something else.”

“Of what?” asked Ned.

“Well, business matters,” explained Jerry. “You know my mother owns

considerable property. Some of it is real estate, and more is in bonds and mortgages. Of late some of her investments have turned out poorly."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Ned. "She ought to see my father. He might help her."

"Oh, well, I don't think it is as serious as all that," said Jerry. "But she thinks she will have to sell some of her real estate, and there's where the tangle comes in."

"I don't see what sort of a tangle it can be," spoke Ned. "We all know her land is quite valuable."

"That's just it," exclaimed Jerry. "If she had received an offer for some of her town lots, or for some of her other real estate holdings that plainly show their worth, I wouldn't think so much of it. But it's about that old strip of swamp land she owns."

"What, down in Ryson's swamp?" asked Ned, in surprise.

"That's the place," answered Jerry. "She owns quite a strip there, and Noddy Nixon's father owns lands on one side, and someone else on the other. Mother's land is a sort of narrow tongue between two other parcels. She never thought it was worth anything, but the other day she received an offer for it, and at a price that made her open her eyes, though relatively it wasn't so much."

"Well, I don't see any bad luck in that," remarked Bob. "If she can get a good price for the land, why doesn't she take it?"

"That's just the point," resumed Jerry. "Why should such a comparatively high price be offered for such seemingly worthless land? It's that which has me guessing, fellows. I'm trying to find out what the underlying motive is, and that's what made me so absent-minded of late. Now, I've told you!"

CHAPTER III
THE CLAY-DIGGERS

There was silence among the three chums for several moments, and then Ned remarked:

“Well, you sure have been absent-minded, Jerry, though maybe it was justified. But it doesn’t seem to be so very serious—except, of course, we’re sorry your mother has lost any money.”

“That’s right,” agreed Bob. “And now, if that’s all that’s on your mind, Jerry, let’s go and——”

“Eat!” broke in Jerry, with a smile. “I can easily guess that was what you were going to say, Chunky.”

“Well, I was, but——”

“Oh, no offense,” put in Jerry, hastily. “I feel so much better, from having told you fellows, that I think I can eat a bit myself.”

“Who made the offer to your mother?” asked Ned. “That is, if it isn’t a secret,” he added, quickly.

“Oh, no,” answered Jerry. “The offer came from the Universal Plaster Company of New York.”

“Well, then, I don’t wonder she’s suspicious of anything that comes from New York!” broke in Bob. “There are more swindlers in that town than anywhere else in the world.”

“That’s because it’s such a big town,” observed Ned, deprecatingly.

“No, it isn’t either,” insisted the stout lad. “I got stung there once myself. I saw an advertisement of how to double your money, and, as I was short, I sent on the dollar bill they asked.”

“Did you learn how to double your money?” asked Ned, chuckling.

“Yes,” replied the fat youth, shortly. “They sent back word to fold it lengthways, and it would be doubled all right. Talk about a bunch of swindlers!

Tell your mother to be on her guard, Jerry."

"I will, Bob. And I'm looking out myself." Jerry was laughing now.

"The Universal Plaster Company," murmured Ned. "And so that concern wants to buy the swamp land of your mother's, Jerry?"

"Yes, Ned."

"What sort of a concern is it?"

"I don't know. Their letter head doesn't show. But it's the price they offered that made me suspicious. It's a lot more than the land is worth."

"And that makes you think——" began Ned.

"That there's something we don't know about," finished Jerry. "Either there is some valuable deposit on that land, or else the strip my mother owns is wanted for some development project. In either case the swamp piece may be worth a lot more than this Universal Plaster Company is offering, and, if it is, she ought to get the benefit of it."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "But you ought to be able to find out, Jerry."

"I ought to—yes. But so far I haven't been able to. I can't find out anything about this plaster company, except that it is a New York concern. I don't know whether they make plaster for houses, or porous plasters for sick people. It's a new concern, and they aren't giving away their secret. But they've made mother a good offer for the land, and she wants to take it."

"And you don't want her to?" suggested Ned, questioningly.

"That's just it," Jerry agreed. "I want to look into it more, and find out what's at the bottom of the offer. If the land is worth as much as they are willing to give, it may be worth more. But mother doesn't agree with me. She wants to sell right away, particularly as the letter said the offer would be withdrawn in a few days, if not accepted."

Jerry's chums were silent a moment, and then Ned spoke.

"Say, what's the matter with us fellows going over to Ryson's swamp, and taking a look at the land your mother owns, Jerry?" he asked. "There's been a lot of rain, lately, and we can almost get up to it in the motor boat, by going up Cabbage Creek. We can wear boots and wade when we can't go any farther in the boat. Maybe we can get a line of how things are going that way. If there's coal, or diamonds, on that land we might be able to see it."

Jerry laughed.

“I can’t believe there’s anything as valuable as that on the swamp piece,” he said. “But, all the same, I’m suspicious. It’s very good of you boys to take an interest in my affairs.”

“Huh! It’s nothing of the sort!” cried Bob. “You’d do the same for us. I’m in favor of Ned’s plan—to go take a look at the place.”

“All right, then we’ll go,” assented Jerry. “We’ll start the first thing Monday morning. The offer doesn’t expire until the end of next week, and by that time we may find out something. It would be a queer thing if that swamp tract should prove valuable.”

“Hush! Here comes Andy!” exclaimed Ned, as the small chap was seen returning from his unsuccessful chase after the rabbit. “If he once gets wind of anything like a secret it’ll be all over town in a day or so.”

“That’s right,” agreed Jerry. “We’d best keep still about it.”

“Say, I hope I didn’t keep you fellows waiting!” exclaimed Andy, running up. “Thought sure I’d get that rabbit—he couldn’t run very fast—I was right after him—hop, skip and jump—up hill and down—through the bushes—I almost had hold of his hind leg once—I fell down—in the mud,” he needlessly added, for it could be seen plainly on his clothes. “Up again—on again—rabbit went in a hollow log,” resumed Andy, in his most excited voice. “I tried to build a fire and smoke him out, but I couldn’t. We’d have had rabbit potpie if I’d got him.”

“Rabbit potpie nothing!” cried Bob. “Rabbits are out of season, too. Come on, hop in and we’ll go to that restaurant. I’m half starved.”

“Chunky’s usual state,” commented Ned, as he took his place beside his stout chum.

Jerry resumed his position at the wheel, with Andy on the seat beside him, and once more the auto started off. This time the tall lad paid more attention to the steering, and there were no near-accidents.

But, if Jerry was not as absent-minded as he had been, still his thoughts were busy over the offer for the swamp land. And he realized why his mother was so anxious to have the money that might be paid for it. Though Mrs. Hopkins was quite well off, she depended on the income from her investments, and if some of these failed, she would need to have a larger capital in order to get the same return from the interest.

“But I’m going to try to induce her not to sell that land until I find out why those fellows are so anxious to get it,” mused Jerry, as he drove on in the big touring car.

It was dusk when the motor boys and Andy Rush returned to Cresville, after having had supper at the restaurant. Bob’s appetite proved even better than he himself had suspected, and the other boys were not far behind him. Andy Rush, too, in spite of his inability to sit still very long at a time, ate his share.

“And now, fellows, we’ll see if we can solve the mystery of the swamp land!” exclaimed Ned Slade on the Monday morning following, when, with Jerry and Bob, he had taken his place in the staunch motor boat.

“Well, we’ll make a try for it, anyhow,” agreed Jerry.

“Has your mother heard anything more from that plaster concern?” asked Bob.

“Yes, there was a letter from them this morning,” replied the tall lad, “reminding her that this week, Saturday, was the last day they would hold their offer open.”

“Did they say what they’d do if she didn’t accept it,” asked Ned.

“No, but they intimate that she would regret it,” answered Jerry. “So we’ve got a week before us, anyhow.”

The motor boat chugged off. Cabbage Creek, whither the boys were bound, was a sluggish stream, flowing from the swamp into a river which ran near Cresville.

The creek was navigable, part of the way up, for fairly large boats. Then the channel shallowed until only canoes could be used. But now a rainy spell had poured more water than usual into the creek, and the motor boat could be taken up it almost to the land owned by Mrs. Hopkins.

“And we can put on boots and walk when we can’t go any farther in the boat,” spoke Jerry, looking at three pairs of hip-boots in a seat locker.

Talking of various subjects, but, in the main, of the matter at present in hand, the boys sailed up Cabbage Creek. The sluggish stream was deeper than they had anticipated, and they did not have to stop, and tie the boat, until they were within a few hundred feet of Mrs. Hopkins’s land.

The swamp was surely a dismal place. Tall, gaunt trees, most of them dead,

reared their branchless trunks high above the black water. Rotted and decayed stumps, in all sorts of grotesque shapes, lay half submerged in muddy pools. Trailing vines were all about, and hummocks of wire grass, here and there, offered uncertain footing.

“The only thing valuable I see about this place,” remarked Ned, “would be a place to take moving pictures of something like ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ It looks enough like the Everglades to be part of Florida.”

“It sure does,” agreed Bob, as he threw a piece of canvas over the seat locker containing the lunch he had been thoughtful enough to bring along. “That’ll keep off the sun,” he said, in explanation to his chums, who looked questioningly at him.

“Yes, it sure is dismal,” agreed Ned.

“And that’s all the more reason why I think it’s strange they offered so much for the land,” observed Jerry.

“Is this your mother’s land here?” asked Bob, motioning toward a tract just beyond the boat.

“No, it’s farther in. If you fellows want to go to it, better put on the boots.”

“Of course we want to go,” assented Ned.

A little later they were stepping from one grass hummock to another, carefully making their way through the swamp.

“Mother’s land begins here,” said Jerry, indicating the remains of a wire fence, the posts of which had rotted away. “Now if any of you can tell me what’s valuable about this——”

“Hush!” exclaimed Ned, stopping his chum.

“What is it?” asked Jerry, in a whisper.

“There are some men over there—just beyond those trees and bushes,” went on Ned. “They seem to be digging.”

He pointed, and Jerry, following the line of Ned’s index finger, saw some men with long-handled spades, removing what seemed to be yellow clay from a tract of land just beyond the boundary of his mother’s land.

“They’re after clay!” exclaimed Ned.

“Looks like it,” admitted Jerry. “I always knew there was clay here, though.

There’s nothing new in that. But it’s no good. A man once tried to use it to make pottery, but it wasn’t the right kind. He said it wasn’t worth taking out. If that’s what those fellows are after they’re going to be disappointed.”

Jerry spoke louder than he intended, and his voice must have carried to the clay-diggers. One of them looked up, and, seeing the three boys cried out:

“Hey, you fellows! Clear out!”

CHAPTER IV
SUSPICIONS

Jerry Hopkins looked at the men sharply. With the exception of one, who seemed to be a sort of foreman, they were all laborers. Just who had spoken neither Jerry nor his chums could determine exactly, for there were five men looking at them, four resting on their long-handled spades.

“Huh! He’s got nerve, whoever he is,” remarked Jerry. “I think I see myself chasing off my mother’s land!”

“Are we on her property now?” asked Bob.

“Not exactly, but she has a right of way over this strip, leading in from the creek. We’ll be on her land as soon as we cross that low fence. Come on, fellows! We’ll see what this means!”

Jerry started forward, his chums following.

They tried to step from one grass hummock to another, but at times they would slip off, and into the mud and water. It was well they had thought to wear long rubber boots.

The three boys had not more than crossed the fence, to stand with uncertain footing on the land owned by Mrs. Hopkins, than the man who seemed to be the foreman hurried forward.

“What’s the matter with you fellows?” he demanded, angrily. “Can’t you understand plain United States?”

“Why, I guess so, when it’s properly and politely spoken,” drawled Jerry, with provoking calmness.

“Come, now! None of your impertinence!” blustered the man.

“And none of yours!” cried Jerry, sharply this time.

“You heard what I said!” snapped the man. “I told you to clear out! This is private property, and trespassers aren’t wanted. We’ll have signs up in a day or so, but, in the meanwhile, you’ll have to take my word for it. Get off this land!”

“I guess you’re laboring under a slight delusion,” went on Jerry, speaking evenly. “You may have some authority over that land on the other side of the fence, but, as it happens, my friends and I are on my mother’s property, and we don’t propose to vacate for you, trespass signs to the contrary.”

The man seemed to start. He gazed keenly at Jerry for a second, and then looked along the line of fence. In many places the boundary mark had fallen over, because the posts holding the wire had rotted away. In other sections there was no fence at all, but there were enough posts, and sufficient wire, to indicate where the fence had originally run.

“I don’t know you, young man,” said the foreman, speaking slowly, “but you speak as though you knew what you were talking about,” and his tone was more respectful than at first.

“I do know,” was Jerry’s brief answer.

“And you say you’re on your mother’s land there?”

“We are.”

“Then you must be——”

“Jerry Hopkins,” supplied the tall lad, with a twinkle in his brown eyes.

“Ah, yes. We did hear that Mrs. Hopkins owned a strip of land somewhere about here, but we didn’t know just where it was. And, as my company happens to have bought up most of this swamp, we didn’t care to have the public walking about it. It’s dangerous—for the public,” he added, with what he evidently meant for a frank smile. But, somehow, in spite of that smile, Jerry and the boys took an instinctive dislike to the man. He did not seem sincere.

“Yes, it is a bit dangerous in here,” agreed Jerry, looking across to where the men had been digging. Piled about them were heaps of the stiff, yellow clay, which underlay the top layer of slime and mud. “I don’t get here very often myself.”

“Well, since you are here, let me introduce myself,” went on the man. “I am Rickford Fussel. Sorry I can’t give you a card, but I don’t carry them when I’m out prospecting.”

At that word Bob gave Ned a nudge, and whispered:

“Did you hear that? Prospecting! He’s after gold, sure!”

“Dry up!” ordered Ned, in a like whisper. “You leave this to Jerry. Whoever

heard of gold in a swamp like this?”

“Then it’s diamonds!” hissed Bob.

Ned tried to wither his chum with a look, but Bob evidently had big ideas in his head. He looked triumphantly at his companion.

“I’m glad to know you,” said Jerry to the man. That was polite fiction on his part, but it is a common expression, so we will let it go at that. “I’m Jerry Hopkins, as I told you,” he went on, “and these are my friends, Bob Baker and Ned Slade.”

“Glad to know you all,” responded Mr. Fussel. “I’d shake hands only I’m pretty dirty,” he went on, showing his palms, covered with the yellow clay. “Sorry I tried to order you off your own land,” and he laughed, but it was rather forced. “Mistakes will happen,” he continued. “And so this is the Hopkins strip? I guess you know our company has tried to purchase it from your mother,” and he looked at Jerry.

“Yes. She said something about it,” Jerry replied.

“I haven’t anything to do with that part of it,” went on Mr. Fussel. “I’m only connected with the field forces—the prospecting line.”

“Then you’re from the Universal Plaster Company?” asked Jerry.

“Yes, that’s the concern.”

“And you say you are—prospecting,” resumed Jerry, hesitating over the word. “Is it for anything special? What line is your company in?”

“There you’ve got me,” admitted Mr. Fussel, with seeming frankness. “I’ve only been with them a short time, and, as far as this present job is concerned, I was only told to make some ditches to drain this land.”

“Oh, then you’re not getting out the clay?” asked Ned, taking a part in the talk.

Mr. Fussel glanced at Ned sharply.

“We’re taking out clay, certainly,” he said, and again he seemed to want to appear very frank and open. “But we have to do that to make the drainage ditches deep enough.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Jerry, and there was considerable meaning in his tones. “Some folks have tried to make use of the clay, but they haven’t succeeded,”

went on the tall lad.

“It doesn’t seem to amount to much, that’s a fact,” spoke Mr. Fussel, kicking a lump of the yellow stuff into a nearby puddle of water. “Well, I’m glad to have met you boys, and I want to tell you how sorry I am that I ordered you off.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” responded Jerry, quickly. “We just came out to have a look at the place. I sort of wondered what your company wanted my mother’s land for.”

“And I can’t tell you,” declared Mr. Fussel. “As I said, I have only been with the concern a short time. All I know about the Universal Plaster Company is that it is incorporated to do all sorts of business. It can buy and sell land, erect buildings, manufacture anything it sees fit to, that isn’t protected by patents, and, in short, deal in all sorts of things. It’s one of those corporations with a very liberal charter.

“Just at present it is engaged in developing this land. This swamp can easily be drained, and the land made much more valuable. But it will take considerable money to do it. That is why it has to be done on a large scale.”

“Yes, I suppose the swamp would be valuable if it could be made dry,” admitted Jerry.

“It certainly can!” declared Mr. Fussel, with conviction. “I’m an engineer by profession, and I am sure of that. But what the company will do with the land when it is drained is more than I can say.”

“Does the concern own much swamp?” asked Jerry.

“As far as you can see,” replied the engineer. “That is, all but your mother’s strip, and I understand negotiations are under way to obtain that.”

“Yes, they are,” admitted Jerry, for Mr. Fussel looked at him questioningly. “But I’m not so sure my mother will sell,” he went on.

“Well, of course you and she know your own business best,” remarked the engineer, “but if the land were mine, and I had a fair offer for it from a concern that owned on all sides, I should sell. Her land will be of no value after the property all about it is drained,” he resumed, “and if the water is allowed to remain on her land it will not only make it valueless, but will be a nuisance to the adjoining property.

“In fact,” and Mr. Fussel again smiled frankly, “I am not certain but what your mother could be compelled to drain her land to prevent the water from it from

running on our land, after we have made it dry," he said. "My company would probably go to law about it, and, while we do not desire litigation, we could not afford to have our land spoiled, after going to a big expense draining it, you see."

"That's right!" exclaimed impulsive Bob, hardly knowing what he was saying.

Ned gave his fat chum a dig in the ribs that made Bob grunt.

"Hey! What's the matter with you?" he asked of Ned, indignantly.

"Oh, nothing. I was killing a mosquito that was biting you," replied Ned, winking at Bob; whereat Chunky subsided.

"Well, my mother hasn't quite made up her mind," said Jerry, slowly, for the engineer seemed to expect him to say something. "I just thought I'd take a run out here. I wanted to see why the Universal Plaster Company wanted the land."

"And I tell you, plainly, I don't know," said Mr. Fussel. "It may want it for building purposes, or the erection of some sort of a plant, or it may be trying to demonstrate a new method of drainage. All I know is that I was told to drain this swamp, and I'm doing it. You'll see a big change here in a few weeks. You fellows can keep on working," he said, addressing the laborers. "We're only sinking experimental ditches now," he resumed, "to ascertain the direction of the flow of the surface water."

"There's a lot of that yellow clay," remarked Ned, half casually.

"Yes; isn't there?" exclaimed Mr. Fussel. "It's hard digging in it, too. Mr. Nixon was glad enough to part with his swamp land," he continued, "and so was Colonel Wright. Now, when we get your mother's strip, we'll have the whole tract," and he smiled at Jerry. He seemed to like to smile, perhaps to show his big white teeth.

"Well, perhaps she'll sell," spoke our tall hero. "I'll tell her what I've seen, anyhow."

Mr. Fussel went back to direct his men. Jerry and his chums walked about a little, but there was nothing more to see. It was gloomy and dismal in the swamp, and the mosquitoes were a pest. The boys' hands and faces were badly bitten.

"The next time I come here I'm going to bring along a bottle of citronella, and a bundle of Chinese punk sticks!" exclaimed Bob, slapping vigorously at his neck.

"That's right! They're fierce!" agreed Jerry. "Well, I guess we might as well

go back.”

He led the way to the motor boat, seemingly indifferent to the operations of the men in the swamp. But, when he was out of their sight, around a clump of trees, Jerry began digging with a sharp stick, turning up some of the yellow clay.

“What in the world are you doing?” asked Ned. “Going to plaster some of that on your mosquito bites? I’ve heard that mud was good for a bee sting, so it might be good for mosquito bites.”

“Nothing like that,” said Jerry. “I just want to get some samples of this clay, that’s all.”

“But I thought you said it was no good,” spoke Bob.

“I did say so,” admitted Jerry, “but I’m not so sure of that now. Ned, did you happen to notice that, though Fussel said they were only making drainage ditches, the men had all the yellow clay they took out piled in one place? Did you notice that?”

“I did, but what does that mean?”

“It means, in my opinion,” said Jerry, slowly, “that those fellows were up to some other game than merely draining this swamp.”

“You think——” began Ned, excitedly.

“I don’t know exactly what to think,” interrupted Jerry, “but I have my suspicions. I’m going to have this clay analyzed. It may be of some value after all, and mother’s land is full of it! In fact, there’s more on her strip than anywhere else in the swamp.”

CHAPTER V
PROFESSOR SNODGRASS

For a moment Jerry's chums looked at him curiously, and then Ned exclaimed:

"That's right! There may be something back of all this. Come on, Bob, help get some of this mud."

"Say, it's nasty and sticky," complained the stout youth, who was somewhat fastidious about his personal appearance.

"Oh, never mind!" laughed Jerry, who did not mind soiling his hands. "I only want a little for analysis. I've got enough," and he wrapped a chunk in some green leaves that he pulled from a wild grapevine.

"And you really think it might be of some value?" asked Ned, washing his hands in a pool of water, for he had dug up a small chunk of the yellow clay for Jerry.

"As I said, I'm not a bit sure—only suspicious," spoke the tall lad. "It's worth taking a chance on, that's all. And certainly, if what Fussel says is true, and he's draining the swamp, mother's land won't be of any use unless that's drained also. And, in case there's no value in this clay, she might as well get rid of her property to this concern, that has offered a good price—that is, if there's nothing back of it."

"Then if you can't find anything valuable in this clay you'll advise her to sell?" asked Ned.

"I think so. And from the fact that several persons have tried to find some use for this yellow mud, and have failed, I'm not very hopeful," went on Jerry. "But it would be a fine thing if mother could make some money out of this swamp land. For she has lost considerable of late."

"Has she?" asked Bob, sympathetically. "I thought you said a few days ago that it wasn't much."

"It's turned out worse since then," and Jerry's usually smiling face wore a worried look. "In fact, fellows, my mother may be very glad to sell this swamp land," he went on.

“No wonder he was absent-minded,” confided Bob to Ned in a whisper, as they got in the motor boat, while Jerry was busy loosing the bow line.

“Yes—I had no idea the trouble was so serious,” admitted Ned. “Well, we’ll help him if we can.”

“That’s what!” agreed the stout youth, heartily.

On the way down Cabbage Creek the boys talked of the clay-diggers, speculating as to what could be their object. But they could arrive at no definite conclusion.

“I wonder if you’re of any use after all?” exclaimed Jerry, kicking the lump of yellow clay at his feet.

“It might be good to caulk a boat,” suggested Ned, “and I see we’ve got a little leak here,” he added, as he pointed to some water in the pit below the flywheel of the motor.

“That comes in through the stuffing-box,” said Jerry. “It just needs a little tightening. We’ll haul her out to-morrow.”

“Yes, we ought to get her in good trim, and take a long trip,” suggested Bob. “We could pack up a lot of grub——”

“There he goes! Grab him before he makes it any worse!” laughed Ned, extending a hand to clap over Bob’s mouth. But the fat lad evaded his tormentor.

“That’s all right!” Bob protested. “We’ll want something to eat if we go on a cruise; won’t we?”

“Sure we will!” agreed Jerry. “Don’t let him worry you, Bob. He’s just as fond of eating as you are, Chunky, only he hides his bad habit. But, seriously, fellows, what are we going to do this vacation?”

“We ought to do something,” declared Ned. “Every summer we have gone somewhere, or done something. I wouldn’t mind finding another buried Mexican city.”

“Me either!” cried Bob. “Or locating the hermit of Lost Lake.”

“That wasn’t a bad stunt,” admitted Jerry. “I don’t know as I care for a trip like our last one, though, in a submarine. It’s a little too uncertain, especially when you’re cooped up under the sea with a madman.”

“You’ve said it!” cried Bob. “I think our airship stunts were about as good as

any. The time we went after that fortune we had lots of exciting times."

"And when we were over the ocean, looking for the lost dirigible—that kept us guessing," said Ned.

"Quit it, fellows," begged Jerry. "You're getting me all excited. I want to start off on a trip right now!"

"Why don't we?" asked Bob, quickly.

Jerry, for answer, kicked the lump of clay at his feet.

"I first want to get this business settled," said the tall lad. "After that I may go off somewhere."

"Don't forget us," urged Ned. "We want to be in it."

"Oh, we'll all go together," Jerry agreed. "It won't take long to settle the question about this clay, I think. And then we can go off on a trip. What'll we take—the airship, motor boat or automobile?"

"All three!" cried Bob.

"That's a little too much of a proposition," laughed Jerry. "We might cut out the airship, and take turns using the car and this boat. We could send the car on ahead, and after a long cruise pick up the auto at some place, journey as far as we liked in that, and come back to the boat."

"That sounds good!" cried Ned. "Let's do it!"

None of the chums realized under what strange circumstances they were soon to take a trip of that sort.

"Well, we'll think about it," agreed Jerry, as he guided the boat on her homeward course.

With this new thought to occupy their minds the boys found plenty to talk about, varying their remarks occasionally with references to the clay-diggers.

"Jerry," began Ned, diffidently, "if you're short of cash, you know—I mean if your mother's investments—oh, hang it! Say, if you want a loan, you know where to come for it!" he cried.

"Say, count me in on that!" added Bob, with energy.

"I've got my mining stock," went on Ned, "and you know if it hadn't been for you we wouldn't have that! So call on me for all you want, Jerry!"

“And me, too!” interjected Bob.

“That’s awfully good of you fellows,” spoke Jerry, his voice a bit husky. “But it isn’t as bad as that. I have my stock, too, when it comes to that. But I don’t imagine we’ll go to the poor house this year. I appreciate your offers just the same.”

The boys were in receipt of comfortable sums of money from a gold mine they had helped an old miner to recover, as told in a previous volume.

Winding in and out, along the devious channel of Cabbage Creek, the motor boat finally reached the broader river that led to the dock near Jerry’s house. As the craft approached the little pier the boys saw a small crowd assembled on it.

“Hello! Something’s up!” exclaimed Jerry, who was guiding the swift craft.

“Hope nobody has fallen overboard,” observed Ned, anxiously.

A moment later they heard a shrill voice crying:

“He’s got it! There it is! Hold his legs, somebody! Don’t let him fall in! Oh, he’s got it! A big one, too!”

“That’s Andy Rush!” cried Bob. “It sure is!”

“Yes, and somebody is evidently in the water,” chimed in Ned. “Hurry up!”

“No, he spoke of an ‘it,’” declared Jerry. “And there isn’t quite enough excitement to indicate a drowning.”

“Well, speed up and see what it is,” suggested Ned.

“Hurray! He’s got it!” cried Andy Rush, and the excitable chap could be seen dancing about the outer edge of the crowd on the dock.

Jerry guided the boat to the stringpiece. The crowd moved back, and parted. A small man, who had been stretched out full length, with his head and shoulders over the edge of the wharf, suddenly arose. He had a small net in his hands, and something in the meshes was wiggling.

“I have it!” cried the little man. His hat fell off, revealing a shiny bald head and a pair of spectacled eyes. “I have it!” he cried again. “The finest specimen of a calico bass I have ever seen! Now my collection is complete!”

He held the dripping net and the wiggling fish afloat, and then his eyes fell on the boys.

“Professor Snodgrass!” cried Bob.

Jerry said nothing. He shut off the motor, and, as he looked at the lump of yellow clay in the bottom of the boat, he thought:

“This is most opportune! I’ll get Professor Snodgrass to analyze this for me.”

CHAPTER VI
DISAPPOINTMENT

The boat was made fast and the boys climbed out on the dock, the throng of sight-seers making way for them. Professor Snodgrass, the well-known scientist, was holding aloft his net, containing the flopping fish.

Andy Rush, not satisfied with the view he had had of the professor's prize, crowded forward to get a closer look. And then something happened.

Whether Andy's head collided with the net, knocking it from the hand of the professor, or whether the latter had an insecure grip on the handle, or whether the fish itself caused the accident, probably will never be known. At any rate, the net slipped, turned over, and, a moment later the fish was flopping about on the dock, doing its best to get back into the water.

"There it goes!"

"Stop it!"

"Grab it, somebody!"

"Fall on it!"

"Get a hook and line!"

These were the cries from the crowd of men and boys on the dock. As for Andy, he stood rubbing his head where it had come in contact with the iron ring of the net. The professor at first looked dazed, then alarmed, and then anxious. He gazed at his empty net, and next at the flopping fish, which he had called a calico bass. It seemed to be something between a sunfish and a perch.

"Don't let that fish get away!" he cried, finding his voice at length. "It's worth a lot of money to me! Don't let it get away."

Some of the crowd were laughing, and others took the words of the little scientist earnestly. Among them were the three motor boys, who well knew the value their friend attached to his living specimens.

"I'll get it!" cried Jerry, toward whom the fish was flopping its way.

“No, I can nab it!” exclaimed Ned.

“Let me try for it!” suggested stout Bob.

It was like several out-field ball players each trying to catch a high fly.

Andy Rush, realizing that it was probably as much his fault as anyone’s that the fish had gotten out of the net, also made a dash forward.

“I’ll get it! I knocked it out! I’ll grab it! Put your foot on it! Rub your hands in sand and then it won’t slip out! Hit it with a club! Grab it! I’ll get it!” spluttered Andy.

“No! No! Don’t hurt it! Don’t hit it, or kill it! If you use violent measures the fish will be spoiled as a specimen!” cried Professor Snodgrass. “I had rather let it get in the water, and net it again, than to harm it.” He danced about excitedly.

But no one seemed to pay any attention to him. Nor did the little scientist notice our three friends. His attention was all on the escaping specimen.

“I have it!” cried Andy, suddenly throwing himself forward, full length on the dock. The fish was just ahead of him, and it seemed that the small chap must capture it.

But Andy had given himself too much impetus. He threw himself not only down on the dock, but over the edge of the stringpiece as well, and, an instant later, clothes and all, he disappeared beneath the surface of the river. The fish, too, had vanished.

Then, if possible, the excitement increased, only Andy was not present to add his shouts to the din. He was under water and could not yell.

“Man overboard!”

“Throw him a line!”

“Get your boat ready, fellows!”

Thus cried those in the crowd as they peered anxiously over the edge of the dock.

But there was really little danger. Andy was a good swimmer, the water near the dock, while rather deep, had no current, and the boy had on light summer clothes. In a moment he rose, gasping, to the surface.

“Let me take your net, Professor!” exclaimed Jerry to the little scientist.

It is doubtful if Professor Snodgrass really realized who Jerry was, well

enough as he knew the lad and his chums. But the scientist's mind was on the fish.

"There he is!" cried someone.

"Who, my specimen?" asked Mr. Snodgrass, eagerly.

"No, Andy Rush!" was the answer, and indeed it was the small chap who had bobbed into view.

"Here you go, Andy!" cried Jerry, extending the net handle. "Grab hold of this my boy!"

Andy, with a shake of his head, cleared his eyes of water, and reached out one hand for the pole.

"Use your other paw!" cried Jerry. "I'll haul you out then."

"Can't—can't use my—my other—hand!" panted Andy.

"What's the matter—is it hurt?" Jerry wanted to know.

"Hurt? No, but I've got the professor's fish in it!" was the answer.

"Ha! My fish! Good boy!" cried Professor Snodgrass. "Hold on to it, and you shall be rewarded."

"All—right!" gurgled Andy, for just then some water splashed in his mouth.

The swimming lad held up one hand, to show, tightly clasped in the fingers, the fish. Then, with the other hand, or "paw," as Jerry had called it, Andy grasped the pole of the net. He was pulled up far enough so that he could hand the fish to the scientist.

"That's the boy!" cried the professor, as he opened a box, into which Andy dropped the wiggling creature. Then the lid was slammed down.

"Now I have you, my little beauty!" the professor exclaimed, dancing about in boyish delight.

Andy, with both hands free, now secured a good grip on the pole, and Jerry soon hauled him, dripping wet, to the dock. The excitement calmed down, and, for the first time, Professor Snodgrass seemed to note the presence of our three friends.

A word at this moment about the professor. Readers of the previous books of this series know him well. Dr. Snodgrass was a learned scientist, belonging to several prominent societies. His chief business in life was the collecting of rare

specimens of animal life, from snakes to snails and from monkeys to lizards. He was connected with a large Boston museum, and his activities were directed to securing specimens for it. He traveled all over, going here, there, everywhere in search of queer specimens, of which he either heard, or which his studies convinced him lived in certain localities.

Professor Snodgrass had made the acquaintance of the boys some years before, and had gone with them on many of their expeditions, to collect rare bugs or animals. That was all he did. He took little or no interest in the object of the expedition, as far as the boys were concerned. All he cared about was his specimens. It might be a blue-nosed monkey, a triple-toed frog or some such queer thing that he sought, but, whatever it was, the professor usually got it, sometimes most unexpectedly.

“Well, is it all over?” asked Ned, as he watched Andy take off his coat, and wring some of the water out of it. “Have you got your specimen safe, Professor?”

“Yes, indeed, thanks to this brave young man. I must reward him, as I promised.”

“Oh, that’s all right!” exclaimed Andy. “It was my fault, I guess, that the fish got away. And I didn’t mind the bath. It’s a hot day.”

“Oh! Why, bless my soul! It’s Andy Rush!” cried Professor Snodgrass, seeming to recognize Andy for the first time. The little chap had often gone with the boys and the scientist on trips.

“Yes, I’m Andy,” admitted the owner of that name.

“And here’s Jerry, Ned and Bob,” proceeded the scientist. “Why, bless my soul! I quite forgot all about you. I was so interested in getting that fish. I must see if it is safe,” and he looked in a box he carried slung over his shoulder by a strap—a box half-filled with grass.

“Yes, he’s there all right,” the scientist announced with glee. “Now I must painlessly put it out of misery, and see to its preservation.”

“How did you get here, and where did you come from?” asked Jerry, as soon as most of the crowd dispersed, seeing no more chance for excitement.

“Why, I am on one of my usual collecting trips,” replied the professor. “So far I have not been successful, and, as I found myself in the vicinity of Cresville I thought I would stop off and see you.”

“Glad you did,” interjected Ned, for the scientist was always welcome.

“I stopped up at your house, Jerry, as is my custom,” the little bald-headed professor went on, “and your mother made me very welcome. She said you boys had gone off in your motor boat, but would soon be back—especially as it was near dinner time,” and the professor looked at Bob, but he did not smile.

“Um!” mumbled the stout lad.

“So, knowing you would land at this dock, I came down here,” went on Mr. Snodgrass. “While waiting, it occurred to me that I might profitably occupy my time by using a net, to see if I could get any rare fish specimens.

“I was fortunate enough to secure a beautiful calico bass,” the scientist went on. “That is a fish something like a perch, but partaking also of the nature of a sunfish. I got one in my net, in spite of the distractions of the crowd that gathered to watch me, and—well, I guess you know the rest,” he finished with a smile. “I thought surely my fine specimen was gone, but I have you safe, my beauty!” he exclaimed, again looking in the box.

“And,” resumed the professor, “now that everything is all right, I will go back to your house, Jerry, and make some notes concerning my latest success.”

“Was that what you started out after—a calico bass!” asked Ned.

“No, my dear boy, that is only a side issue, as you boys would say,” was the answer. “What I am really after is a two-tailed lizard. I am not certain that such a creature exists, but, from having examined many specimens of lizards, and finding some with rudimentary evidences of once having possessed two tails, I am convinced that such creatures once did exist.

“I made a statement to that effect before one of the learned societies to which I belong, but my statement was questioned by a rival, Professor Battin. He laughed at the idea of a two-tailed lizard. I said I would prove to him that such a creature existed, and I am going to do it!

“I at once set out from Boston, and, knowing that you boys always go off on summer trips, I came to you. May I accompany you on your travels this time? I am sure I shall find the two-tailed lizard somewhere, and I always have good luck when I go with you boys. May I accompany you on this occasion?”

“Of course, Professor,” said Jerry, heartily. “But we have made no plans as yet.”

“Is that so? You surprise me!” the professor exclaimed. “Usually, at this time,

you are ready to go away."

Jerry's two chums looked at him, as though he might explain.

"The truth of the matter is," began the tall lad, "there is a little trouble afoot. If we can settle that, one way or the other, we may go on a trip. And perhaps you can help us!" he exclaimed, as he went back to the boat, bringing up the lump of yellow clay. "I'd like to know, Professor Snodgrass," said Jerry, earnestly, "whether or not that clay is good for anything; and if so, for what?"

Professor Snodgrass looked at it, smelled of it, touched a bit to his tongue, and remarked:

"Well, Jerry, I shall have to analyze it to tell what it is good for; if anything."

"Oh, yes. I didn't expect an answer off-hand," said the tall youth. Then he asked Mr. Snodgrass about his activities since their last meeting, and, thus talking, the boys followed the little scientist to Jerry's home. Andy went on to his own house to don dry garments.

"A two-tailed lizard!" grunted Bob to Ned, as they walked in the rear. "That's about the craziest stunt yet!"

"Oh, well, you know what the professor is," said Ned, tolerantly.

For nearly a week, while he remained the guest of Mrs. Hopkins, Professor Snodgrass tested and analyzed the yellow clay. Then, one afternoon, coming out of the room he had fitted up as a laboratory, his hands and face covered with the yellow mud, Professor Snodgrass remarked:

"Well, Jerry, I've finished!"

"You mean you have analyzed the clay?" asked the youth, excitedly.

"Yes. I have given it the last test, as far as I am able."

"And what do you find?"

"Is it valuable?" demanded Ned, who, with Bob, was at his chum's home.

"Does it contain gold or diamonds?" Bob wanted to know, eagerly.

"Neither one," and the professor smiled.

"Perhaps it is the sort of clay that contains aluminum," suggested Jerry, a bit apprehensive at the look on the face of the professor.

"No, Jerry, nor aluminum either."

“Is it good for anything?” asked the tall lad, desperately.

“Well, Jerry, as nearly as I can tell, and I have subjected it to numberless tests, that yellow clay would make excellent material for filling in waste land, but that’s all,” was the disappointing answer of the scientist.

“Then it isn’t any good?” faltered Jerry.

“Not the least in the world, my dear boy,” was the final report. “I am sorry, but it seems to me to be absolutely valueless!”

CHAPTER VII
A QUEER CONFERENCE

That Jerry Hopkins, especially, and his two chums, relatively, were disappointed by the verdict of Professor Snodgrass may easily be imagined—and "disappointment" is putting it mildly. True, there had been no real grounds for thinking that the queer, yellow mud was of any value, and yet Jerry had chosen to assume as much. And his half-belief had affected his chums. Now to find out that it was worthless was something of a shock.

"No, I can't imagine any use for it," went on Dr. Snodgrass, as he fingered the sticky, yellow lump Jerry had handed to him. "I am familiar with most kinds of clay in this region, and this is not among the valuable sorts. What made you think it was, Jerry?"

"Well, the way those fellows seemed to be taking it out for one thing, and the eagerness with which they are trying to get mother's land for another."

"Are you sure they were taking out the clay itself?" asked the scientist.

"They said they were merely excavating ditches to drain the swamp," spoke Ned.

"Well, I think that is more likely to be right than that they are trying to utilize the clay itself," went on the professor. "I am sorry, boys, but—Oh, there's one of those queer green flies I've been trying so long to capture. One moment, Mrs. Hopkins. He is on your dress! Please don't move, and I'll have him!" and with that, dismissing from his mind, for the moment, all thoughts of the clay the professor "concentrated" on the fly in question.

He stole softly up to the side of Jerry's mother, and, with a little net, which was never absent from him, Mr. Snodgrass made a neat capture of the buzzing insect.

"Ah, there you are, my beauty!" he exclaimed, as he clapped the fly into a small wire box. It was anything but a beauty, being very large, with a green body, and unpleasantly mottled wings—a vicious-appearing fly. But to the professor it was beautiful from a scientific standpoint.

“A rare insect!” he murmured, holding the wire box up to the light to examine his catch more closely. “A rare find. This has been a lucky day for me.”

“And an unlucky one for us,” remarked Jerry, disconsolately, as he tossed the lump of clay out of the window.

“Maybe someone else could give you another opinion about it, Jerry,” suggested Bob, as the three chums went out. They knew it was of little use to question the professor further. He had given his ultimatum, and, besides, he would be so interested now in his new specimen—preserving it and making notes about it—that he would find time for nothing else.

“No, I’m not going to bother any more about it,” declared Jerry. “The professor evidently knows what he’s talking about. I guess I was on a wrong lead. Those fellows must have been telling the truth, though it didn’t seem so. I was foolish to dream that the clay could be valuable. I guess mother will have to sell the swamp land as a bog tract and nothing else. Come on, let’s go for a spin in the car.”

“Maybe it’ll do him good,” whispered Bob to Ned, while their tall chum was filling the gasoline tank from a supply in the garage. “He sure has got the blues.”

“That’s right,” agreed Ned. “We don’t often see Jerry that way, either. His mother must have lost considerable money, and he depended on the swamp land to make up the shortage. Well, it’s too bad!”

“That’s what it is!”

If Jerry had been absent-minded on the occasion of the ride following the ball game, he was much more so on this occasion. He was so careless in his steering that once he nearly ran into a tree, and another time he came so close to running down an elderly man that Bob and Ned, in the rear seat of the automobile, leaped up in alarm.

“What’s the matter, Jerry?” cried Ned, when the machine was slowed down.

“I don’t know,” confessed the tall lad. “I guess one of you fellows had better take my place. I get to thinking about that yellow clay, and I can’t put my mind on anything else. You’d better steer, Ned.”

“Well, perhaps I had, old man, if we count on getting home safely.”

“But say, you aren’t still thinking that clay is any good; are you?” asked Bob. “Not after what Professor Snodgrass told you?”

“I guess it’s foolish, but I am,” admitted Jerry, as the auto proceeded after the change of seats. “Somehow I can’t help thinking that there’s more in it than appears on the surface.”

“Oh, forget it!” advised Ned.

“Well, I’m going out there to have another look in a day or so,” decided Jerry. “Maybe those fellows will show a bit more of their hands, and I can get a line on what their game is. Yes, I’m going to have another look.”

“Will you have time before your mother makes up her mind to sell?” asked Bob.

“Oh, yes. There’s a new slant to the affair now. It seems those fellows have bought up all the swamp but the tract mother owns. And, if she doesn’t sell, they threaten to shut off her right of way—that is, even if she owns the land she won’t be able to get to it unless she goes up in our airship.”

“Can they do that?” asked Ned.

“It seems they can. No one ever thought much of that swamp land, and deeds and papers regarding it weren’t as carefully drawn as they would have been if the land had been on the main street. So if mother doesn’t sell, her land won’t be worth anything, anyhow.”

“That’s too bad!” sympathized Bob. “Still, it may be for the best after all.”

“I hope so,” murmured Jerry.

In the days that followed the professor’s characterization of the yellow mud as worthless, the boys saw little of him. He was off, presumably searching for the two-tailed lizard, a reptile in which our heroes, for the time being, took little interest.

“The professor sure has found some queer things in his day,” admitted Ned, “but this is the limit! I wonder if he really believes there is such a thing?”

“Well, of course such a thing is possible, as a freak,” spoke Jerry. “I saw a two-headed calf at a fair, once, so a two-tailed lizard wouldn’t be so much out of the way.”

The professor seemed willing to search indefinitely around Cresville for the lizard, or other specimens, though, once or twice, he did ask the boys when they expected to start off on a tour, for no summer went by without seeing them off after some sort of adventures.

“We’ll go next week,” decided Jerry. “By that time this land business will be settled, one way or the other, and I’ll feel easier in my mind. Now let’s go out there, and see what’s up.”

They went up Cabbage Creek to Ryson’s swamp in the motor boat, as on a former occasion, making their way to the land owned by Mrs. Hopkins, wading with their big rubber boots.

“Well, boys, here you are again!” called Fussel, with what he probably meant to be cordiality. “Better make the most of your trips here,” and he laughed.

“How’s that?” asked Jerry, though he guessed at the other’s meaning. Jerry looked around. Considerably more work had been done in excavating, and it did look as though only drainage was the object, for long ditches had been dug, the yellow clay being piled about promiscuously.

“Well, we’re going to close up that right of way, if we don’t get that tract there,” and Fussel motioned to Mrs. Hopkins’s land on which the boys were standing. “Have to use an airship on your next visit, I guess,” and he smiled, showing his big, white teeth.

“That’s what we thought,” spoke Jerry, with a laugh. He was not going to let the foreman gain an advantage on him by being good-natured. Jerry could play that game, too, if it meant anything.

The boys looked about them. There seemed to be more men digging in the swamp than on their former visit. The laborers were delving in the mud and water with their long-handled shovels, taking out the sticky mud and clay. The yellow stuff lay beneath a layer of black peat, and Jerry noticed that the peat was piled on one side of the ditches, while the yellow clay was stacked on the opposite bank.

They made their way to where the motor boat was moored, and, as they reached it, Jerry looked back for a moment in the direction where the men were digging in the swamp. As he did so he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“What’s up? Another bite?” asked Ned.

“No! But look!” whispered Jerry. “Isn’t that Professor Snodgrass?” and he pointed toward the place of the yellow mud.

“It sure is,” agreed Ned. “He must be looking around here for the two-tailed lizard.”

They saw the little scientist, with his green specimen box and his butterfly net,

talking to Fussel.

“Seems like they have met before,” observed Bob, and indeed the boys noted a cordial greeting between the professor and the foreman of the diggers.

“Oh, the professor would make friends with anybody who could tell him where to find a new kind of pink-nosed mosquito,” laughed Jerry. “Shall we wait for him?”

“Better not,” recommended Ned. “Dr. Snodgrass will want to stay here all day, gathering specimens, and if he has a liking for being eaten up by swamp mosquitoes, I haven’t. He wouldn’t want to come with us, anyhow, very likely. Let’s leave him to his own devices.”

“All right,” agreed Jerry, but, as the tall lad set the motor going he looked back at the place whence they had come. He was somewhat surprised to see Professor Snodgrass and Foreman Fussel in apparently earnest conversation. And the subject seemed to be the yellow clay, for the foreman was holding a lump of it out to the scientist.

CHAPTER VIII
SELLING THE LAND

Though Jerry thought it rather strange that the professor and the foreman should be in such close conference, and, though he wondered very much what it could be about, his cogitations did not “get anywhere.”

That is, he could formulate no theory that made matters plain to him. He had an idea, once or twice, of speaking of the matter to his chums, but he did not know exactly how to go about it.

Then, too, both Bob and Ned seemed so sure that the professor had come to the swamp, as he went to other queer places, merely to collect bugs, that it would be hard to make them believe otherwise. Not that Jerry himself was sure of anything else, but he was somewhat given to fancies, and he had some queer ideas in his head just then.

He said nothing, however, and the motor boat chugged her way out of the tortuous channel into the creek, thence to the river, and so to her dock.

“Well, I sure am glad to get out of that place,” observed Ned, looking at several large and rapidly-swelling mosquito bites on his hands. “If we’d stayed there much longer they’d have eaten us alive.”

“Speaking of eating——” began Bob, with a hopeful expression on his face.

“Let’s go and have some pie!” mocked Ned. “Go to it, old man! I’m with you. That swamp air seemed to give me an appetite.”

“All right,” agreed Jerry. “But if you fellows want to eat, why not go down the river a ways, and have some good grub at Fletcher’s?”

“Go ahead,” exclaimed Ned. “Then we won’t have to go home to dinner.”

“I’m with you!” cried Bob. He generally was when the “eats” were concerned.

The boat, which had approached the dock, was turned out into the river again by Jerry. Then over the water floated a plaintive voice, calling:

“I say, fellows! Hold on! Come back! It’s fearful hot! I want a ride—come and get me—I’ll stand treat—ice cream—lollypops—lemonade—come on back and

take me!”

“It’s Andy Rush!” observed Jerry, not looking around. He knew the voice well enough.

“Yes, and he’s hopping up and down on the dock,” said Bob.

“Let him hop,” went on Jerry. “He’ll give us all the fidgets on a hot day like this. Let him hop.”

And let him hop they did, much to the disgust of small Andy Rush, who ran back and forth, begging and pleading to be taken for a ride in the motor boat. But our friends had other plans.

They very much enjoyed their dinner at the river-house pavilion, but, through it all, Jerry could not forget the sight of the professor and the foreman talking about the clay.

“But I guess the plaster company—whatever sort of a concern it is—thinks it can make use of the mud as a sort of by-product,” mused Jerry. “Probably there’s so much of it they don’t want to cart it away unless they can find a use for it. Well, I wish, for mother’s sake, it had some value; but if it hasn’t—it hasn’t—that’s all.”

“Well, we’d better begin to think of where we’re going for our vacation,” remarked Ned, a little later, shoving back his chair, for the meal was finished.

“That’s right,” agreed Bob. “I hope if we go anywhere we have as——”

“Good grub as this—isn’t that what you were going to say, Chunky?” finished Jerry, with a laugh.

“Well, what if it is?” asked the stout lad. “I guess you fellows are as fond of eating as I am, when it comes to that.”

“Sure we are, Bob,” spoke Ned. “Now let’s talk of where we can go.”

“Maybe we’d better wait and see where the professor thinks is the most likely place to find the two-tailed lizard,” suggested Jerry. “It doesn’t make much difference to us where we go, and it does to him.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Ned. “We’ll have a talk with him.”

But it was some time before the boys had a chance to carry out their plans, and talk with the professor, for, from the moment they had seen him in consultation with the foreman in the swamp, there set in such a chain of old

happenings as the boys had never known. And these took the professor out of communication for a considerable period.

“I can’t see what keeps Dr. Snodgrass,” said Mrs. Hopkins to Jerry, some hours after her son, and the other boys, had returned from the river. “He never stayed out as late as this before.”

“Not unless he was after specimens that fly after dark,” agreed Jerry.

The scientist had not been home all that afternoon. Jerry told of having seen him in the swamp, though they did not stop to speak to him. Now it was after supper, and dark, and he had not returned to the Hopkins home, where he was a guest.

“I wonder if I’d better get the boys and go out after him?” mused Jerry. “That swamp is a bad place to be lost in.”

“Oh, I don’t like to think of you going out there at night, Jerry,” objected his mother. “Though of course, if anything were to happen to the professor, it would be——”

“Here he comes now!” interrupted Jerry, with a note of relief in his voice. Steps were heard on the front steps, but they did not prove to be those of the little scientist. Instead they were those of a messenger with a note.

“It’s from the professor!” exclaimed Mrs. Hopkins, as she read it.

“What does he say?” asked Jerry, quickly.

“Why, he isn’t coming home to-night,” answered the widow, some surprise manifest in her voice. “He is on the track of some insect—he gives the Latin name of it, but I can’t pronounce it. He’s too far away from Cresville to get back until late, and he doesn’t want to put us out. He will stay at a hotel all night, and come here to-morrow or next day.”

“Well, he’s considerate, at all events,” yawned Jerry. “Now that I don’t have to worry over him I think I’ll go to bed.”

It was not unusual for the scientist to remain away several nights when he was on the trail of some rare specimen, and Mrs. Hopkins and her son were not alarmed, now that they had received word from him.

“Where did he send that from?” asked Jerry, wondering how long the professor had remained in the swamp.

“It’s from the hotel at Bellport,” replied his mother. “He telegraphed here from

there.”

“He must have had a ride in someone’s auto then,” commented the tall lad, “for he never could have walked to Bellport from the swamp. That’s what happened—he got a ride on the road.”

“All his things are here,” said the widow.

“He’s got his net and a specimen box,” commented Jerry. “They’re all the baggage he needs.”

The professor did not come back the next day, or the next. Instead came another note saying he might remain away a week, for he had not yet obtained the specimen he was after.

There was nothing strange in this, for he had done the same thing before.

“But if he wants to go with us on a trip he’d better come back pretty soon,” said Bob, one day when he and Ned were calling on Jerry.

“Oh, he’ll be back soon now,” declared the tall lad.

Meanwhile the matter of Mrs. Hopkins’s land came to an issue. The Universal Plaster Company served formal notice on her that if she did not agree to their terms they would drop all negotiations, and her land would be of little value, since there would be no right of way to reach it. Then, too, their lawyer pointed out, Mrs. Hopkins did not have the best title in the world. It was threatened that her claim could not be substantiated in the highest court, and suit was threatened if she did not agree to sell without litigation.

“Why, they’re practically forcing you to sell that land, Mother!” cried Jerry.

“I know it, my boy,” answered the widow. “But what can I do? I really need the money from it, though it isn’t so much. I need it at this time especially, for some of my securities are so depreciated that it would be folly to sell them. Later on they may increase in value. Meanwhile the money from the land will tide us over.”

“But, Mother, I have some money from the mine.”

“No, no, Jerry!” she exclaimed, with a gentle smile. “I am not so poor as all that. You keep your little fortune. I dare say my affairs will come out all right after all. I shall sell the swamp land, even though the company is practically, as you say, forcing me to do by threats.”

“If only that yellow clay was of some value,” observed Jerry. “But the

professor said it was not.” So the swamp land was sold, and Professor Snodgrass did not appear.

CHAPTER IX
A HURRIED DEPARTURE

Three men were seated about a table in a small room. On the table were several instruments, a delicate scale, glass vessels and test tubes, a burning alcohol lamp that flickered under a pan, in which boiled, bubbled and steamed some odd-smelling mixture.

“Isn’t it almost done?” asked one of the men. “It seems to me, Professor Bailey, that it has cooked long enough.”

“What do you say, Professor Snodgrass?” was the reply of the one appealed to.

“Hum! Well, you might put a little more of the clay in, and add a bit more glycerine. I think that would make it about the right consistency,” and the little bald-headed man bent over the steaming pan.

“All right, here goes a little more of the clay,” and the third member of the trio, who in the dim light could be identified as Rickford Fussel, put in the pan some of the yellow mud that he and his men had dug from the swamp. “There’s plenty of it—that’s one consolation,” he laughed, “and if it proves to be what we want, why, there’s a fortune in it.”

“Several of them, I should say,” was the opinion of the man who had been called Professor Bailey. He looked at Professor Snodgrass for confirmation.

“Yes,” admitted the little scientist, nodding his head thoughtfully. “There is no reason why this mixture should not replace the old-fashioned poultice and mustard plaster. It seems to be highly efficacious. But I want to make that final test on a large swelling, as I told you, before I give my deciding opinion.”

“And you want to be sure the mixture is just right before you try it; is that it?” asked Fussel.

“That’s it,” said Professor Snodgrass. “You say you have the subject on whom it can be tried?”

“Yes, I’ve got the subject. He’s one of our workmen, and his knee is badly swelled from rheumatism. If this yellow clay, with the medicines we have put in

it, will cure that, it will do other things in the medical line that will make it worth all the money we paid for the land, and more too."

"I think so," responded Professor Snodgrass, gravely.

Again he bent over the pan that was simmering above the alcohol flame. He put in some more of the yellow clay, that was in a box on the table, and added some glycerine and other things, stirring the mixture slowly. A pleasant, aromatic odor filled the room.

"I think we might now call in the man on whom we are to try the experiment," said Dr. Snodgrass, after taking some of the mixture, and examining it.

Fussel went to the door and called:

"Here you are, Bill!"

A man limped and shuffled into the room.

"How's the pain?" asked Professor Bailey, a man with curiously shifting eyes. He never, except by chance, looked you squarely in the face.

"The pain is fierce!" exclaimed Bill.

"And the swelling?" asked Fussel.

"Worse! My knee is as big as your head!"

"That's good," and Fussel rubbed his hands.

"Good!" cried Bill, indignantly. "Huh!"

"Well, I mean it's good for our experiment, and it'll be good for you when the pain is gone and the swelling reduced. Now put out your leg and we'll clap the plaster on."

The man, whose trouser leg was slit to the knee, exhibited a red, inflamed and swollen leg. He could hardly move it.

"Now look here!" blustered Bill, "no monkey business, you know! I'm willing to stand for this experiment, 'cause you paid me, and 'cause none of the other doctors seem to do any good. But no hocus-pocus! No cutting, you know."

"No, nothing like that," agreed Fussel, smilingly.

"Perhaps I had better explain," Professor Snodgrass said.

"Perhaps," agreed Professor Bailey.

“My friends here,” began Dr. Snodgrass (and how Jerry would have stared had he heard the scientist address Fussel as a “friend”), “my friends,” Professor Snodgrass went on, “have accidentally discovered a valuable medicinal clay.”

“We discovered it,” broke in Fussel, “but it wasn’t until we appealed to you that you suggested a use for it.”

“Well, be that as it may,” went on the professor. “They have found a deposit of a curious clay that, when there is mixed with it certain kinds of medicine, acts as a most efficient poultice, or plaster.”

“Maybe you know what you’re talkin’ about, but I don’t,” grumbled Bill. “All I know is that my legs hurts.”

“Exactly,” said Professor Snodgrass. “Well, I will make it more simple. Did your wife ever put a mustard plaster on you for pain?”

“Indeed she has, and it burned like fire, too!”

“Ah, yes, I expect so. And did you ever have on a flaxseed poultice?” resumed Mr. Snodgrass.

“Once, when I had pneumonia.”

“Well, this new plaster, made of medicated clay, takes the place of a mustard plaster, or a poultice. It will draw out pain, soreness and swelling, as we have proved in several cases. We now wish to try it on a larger scale, and with a severe case. It will not hurt you, and it may benefit you greatly. Are you willing to risk it?”

“I’ll risk most anything to get rid of this pain!” cried Bill. “It’s fierce! Go ahead with your plaster.”

The mixture in the pan was stirred some more. Then a part of it was spread on a cloth, and, when it was cool enough, it was put on the inflamed knee.

“Ouch! It burns!” cried Bill, jumping up.

“It will soon cool,” said Professor Snodgrass. “Sit still!”

The knee was bound up, and Bill limped away.

“We’ll look at it in the morning,” said Fussel. “Then you’ll be much better.”

“If I’m any worse I’ll be dead,” grunted Bill.

“It is most fortunate that we met you, Professor Snodgrass,” spoke Professor Bailey, when the things had been cleared from the table. “We thought there was

some value in the clay of the swamp, but it needed your specific line of knowledge to bring it out. We are deeply indebted to you."

"Oh, not so much as you imagine," was the professor's answer. "My accidental visit to the swamp resulted in the finding of several valuable entomological specimens. And I have not yet despaired of finding the two-tailed lizard here. I must resume my search to-morrow."

The professor, who was stopping at the hotel in Bellport, sought his room, leaving the two men, in the house they had engaged not far from the hostelry, gazing thoughtfully at each other.

"He put us on the right track," said Fussel.

"He sure did," agreed his companion. "And as soon as we have the widow's land we won't need to keep under cover any longer. Once we have the deed we can announce our discovery, and I guess the stock of the Universal Plaster Company won't soar! Oh, no!"

"It will be a big thing," agreed the other. "Medicated clay—no more flaxseed poultices or mustard plasters. The new method will receive the indorsement of all physicians. There'll be a fortune in it for all of us."

"And the best of it is that no one around here suspects what we are up to," went on Fussel. "We've fooled 'em all!"

"And we mustn't let this Snodgrass give us away," cautioned Bailey. "We must get rid of him, now that he has shown us how to use the clay."

"That's right. I hope it works on Bill."

And it did. The new plaster mixture did all that was expected of it. The swelling was all gone from Bill's inflamed knee next morning, and the pain much less.

"I thought it would work!" cried Professor Snodgrass, as he came over from his hotel to look at the patient. He went into a long explanation of the process of the plaster—how it contracted the small capillaries, and brought the internal poisons to the surface, where the clay absorbed them.

"I don't care how it did it, as long as my swelling is gone down, and I can go to work!" cried Bill.

The new plaster was a success. They had proved it before on small cases, and now, on this severe one, their opinions had been confirmed.

“And there’s clay enough in that swamp to make us all rich!” cried Fussel to Professor Bailey, when they were alone.

“Yes, but we must get the Hopkins tract,” was the answer. “The best and the most of the clay is on that. We must have her land—by hook or crook.”

And so, while Professor Snodgrass was busy looking for the two-tailed lizard, and other rare specimens, and, incidentally, giving advice to his new “friends” about the yellow medical clay, negotiations for obtaining the land of Mrs. Hopkins were under way. They were nearly concluded, when, one night, Professor Snodgrass, who was calling on Professor Bailey and Fussel, remarked:

“Well, I don’t believe I am going to find that lizard here. I will leave the hotel and go back to my friend, Jerry Hopkins. He and his chums must be about ready to start on a trip. I am always lucky when I go with them. I shall surely find my two-tailed lizard!”

Fussel and Professor Bailey stared at each other. Then they looked at Professor Snodgrass. The same thought was in the minds of both.

“Are—are you a friend of Jerry Hopkins?” asked Fussel.

“Why, yes. I’ve known him for some years. He and his chums have often taken me with them on their trips. I’ve been with them ever since we discovered a buried city in Mexico. Oh, what rare specimens I got there! Those were happy days. But now I need that two-tailed lizard, and they may be going to the very place where I can find it.”

“And where is that?” asked Fussel, winking at his companion over the professor’s head.

“Oh, I can’t say, as to that. But no matter where the boys go I am sure to have some luck.”

“And you want a two-tailed lizard?” mused Fussel, thoughtfully.

“Indeed I do!”

There was a rapid interchange of looks between the two conspirators.

“Say!” suddenly exclaimed Fussel, “why didn’t I think of it before? You know that shack of mine—that hunting cabin up in the Maine mountains, Professor Bailey?”

“Of course I know it, Rick. What about it?”

“Why, don’t you remember those queer-looking, crawling things that used to bother us so. Weren’t they lizards?”

“Why, yes, now I come to think of it; they were!”

“And didn’t they have a sort of double tail; not two tails side by side, but one on top of the other—the short one on top; didn’t they?”

“By Jove! So they did!” cried Professor Bailey, clapping his hand on his leg as though the idea had just occurred to him.

“Maybe they’re just what the professor is looking for,” went on Fussel. “I didn’t dream of it before, but those were a sort of two-tailed lizard.”

Professor Snodgrass, with a hopeful look on his face, gazed from one to the other.

“Gentlemen, is this so?” he asked, eagerly.

“Well, of course I don’t know what sort of a two-tailed lizard you are after,” observed Fussel, slowly, “but the kind you want might be up around a place I have in the mountains. If you like, I’ll let you stay there and hunt for the things. Glad to do it, in fact.”

“I’ll go!” cried the professor, with enthusiasm. “Where is it? How do I get there? Tell me about it!”

They did, in a jumbled, confused way which showed how quickly they had made up the story between them. But the professor was not critical. All he thought of were the lizards.

“I’ll go!” he decided. “I’ll leave for Cresville at once, and get the things I left with Mrs. Hopkins. Then I go. The boys can join me later if they wish. I’ll go to Cresville at once!”

“No, you don’t need to do that!” exclaimed Fussel, again winking at the other professor. “You can get a train from here. In fact, one leaves this afternoon.”

“But I have many things, and some rare specimens, at the Hopkins house.”

“No matter. We’ll send there and get them for you, and forward them to you. Just write a note, or order, saying you want them. We’ll attend to the rest.”

“All right,” agreed Professor Snodgrass. He was in a sort of daze. All that stood out clearly in his mind was the chance of getting the two-tailed lizards.

While he was writing the note to Mrs. Hopkins, requesting her to deliver to

the bearer his possessions, Fussel and Bailey went out of the room.

“Whew!” exclaimed Bailey. “A close call, that!”

“I should say so! I never knew he was a friend of the Hopkins chap, or I’d never have asked him to make an examination of this clay.”

“Well, we’ve done it now. It’s too late to be sorry.”

“But no damage is done, if he doesn’t tell how valuable it is until we get possession of the land. After that we don’t care what happens.”

“No; but we must get him out of the way before he has a chance to talk. We’ve got to ship him right off. He mustn’t even see the Hopkins lad, or his chums.”

“You’re right; he mustn’t. We’ll have to keep him on the move. Fortunately he’s so wrapped up in this lizard business he won’t think of anything else. Now we’ll stick by him until the train leaves. Once he’s up in the mountains, hunting for lizards that don’t exist, we’ll be safe. We’ll have the land in our possession in a few days.”

The two conspirators took the note the professor had written. Then, never leaving him for an instant, they got him ready for his trip to the mountains, where Fussel really did own a hunting cabin. It was unoccupied, and was to be placed at the disposal of the professor.

“There you are now!” exclaimed Fussel, as he and Professor Bailey went to the station with Dr. Snodgrass. “Just in time for the train.”

“And you won’t forget to send for my things at Mrs. Hopkins’s house?” asked the professor.

“We’ll attend to that,” promised Bailey.

“And you’ll tell her and the boys, why I had to leave so hurriedly—in order that I might not miss a chance to get those lizards; will you?”

“Oh, yes, we’ll tell them,” glibly promised Fussel.

The train pulled in. The professor was hurried aboard with some articles of wearing apparel hastily provided for him.

“Sorry to have to hustle you off in this way,” said Fussel, as the train pulled out, “but you really had no time to go to Cresville, you see.”

“No, indeed,” added his fellow conspirator. “Those lizards are scary things.

They’re here to-day and gone to-morrow.”

“Don’t forget to send on my things!” cried the professor from the car window, “and don’t neglect to tell the boys to come and see me!”

CHAPTER X
THE PLASTER-MUD

“Where do you imagine he’s keeping himself?”

“Give it up!”

“Oh, he’s after bugs—you can make up your mind to that. Bugs or that two-tailed lizard.”

Thus Jerry asked a question, and Ned and Bob, in turn, answered it. The three motor boys were seated on the porch of Jerry’s house one warm summer day, about a week after Professor Snodgrass’s departure to Bellport. Since then they had seen nothing of him, and had only heard from him in that first brief note.

“Well, if he’s going with us he’d better get a move on,” observed Ned, idly whittling a stick. “We want to leave by the end of this week if we can.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Bob. “And I say, Jerry, I hope you have mapped out our route so it won’t be too far between eats.”

“Oh, I had you in mind all the while, Chunky,” laughed the tall lad. “There’s a restaurant, or corner grocery, about every five miles, and that ought to be close enough for you.”

“Huh! Don’t get fresh!” retorted Bob, who resented too pointed references to his eating propensity.

“No, but speaking seriously,” put in Ned, “the professor ought to be on hand if he is going with us. And I suppose he will want to go,” he added. “He hasn’t missed a trip since we went to Mexico. Say, there were some doings then!” he exclaimed with a sigh of regret.

“Oh, we may have just as much fun and excitement now,” commented Jerry. “We’ve got a long trip mapped out. And, if the professor doesn’t want to come with us, I suppose we’ll have to go without him. Though it’s more fun when he’s along.”

The boys had, as Jerry intimated, planned a trip for their summer vacation. It was to be made partly in their big auto, and partly by motor boat, and several

hundred miles would be covered. They intended to tour the upper part of New York State, and end with a long voyage on Lake Champlain, whither their motor boat would be sent. But the unexpected delay caused by Professor Snodgrass remaining at Bellport had rather hampered them.

“What’s the matter with taking a trip over there and seeing what’s keeping him?” suggested Ned, after a pause. “He’ll be glad to see us, and, if he hasn’t caught that two-tailed lizard yet, he may be glad to change his base of operations. Let’s take a run over in the car. It isn’t far.”

“Go ahead!” agreed Jerry. “I’m with you.”

“Same here,” half-grunted Bob, for he was chewing gum, probably as a substitute for eating.

“Well, as long as we’ve made up our minds to hunt up the professor,” said Jerry, “we might as well make a full day of it, and go out to the swamp. I want to look around there.”

“What’s the good?” asked Ned. “Your mother has sold the land; hasn’t she?”

“Yes, that’s gone, and I suppose I ought to be satisfied with the price she got,” spoke the tall lad. “But, somehow, I can’t get over the notion that there’s something back of it all. Those fellows weren’t square and above-board, I’m positive of that.”

“Do you mean they cheated you?” asked Bob.

“Well, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that,” replied Jerry, slowly. “They paid mother what they agreed to; but it was their veiled threats as to what they’d do if she didn’t sell that made me mad. They practically forced her to dispose of that land, though I’m not saying but what the condition of her money matters might not have made her sell it anyhow.”

“But I’ve a notion I’d like to see how things are going out there, and whether those fellows are really draining the place as they said they were. Come on. It won’t take long to go there in the boat, and then we’ll make the trip to Bellport in the auto.”

“I’m with you,” assented Ned. “Only you know your mother doesn’t own any land there now, and we may be ordered off as trespassers.”

“I’ll take that chance,” returned Jerry.

A little later, in the motor boat, they were winding their way up Cabbage

Creek.

“It hasn’t changed much,” observed Bob, as they came within sight of the swamp. “There’s as much muddy water as ever, in spite of their drainage ditches.”

“I’m not so sure they were drainage ditches,” observed Jerry, who was at the wheel.

The boat swung around a bend in the sluggish stream, and as it did so Ned uttered a cry.

“Look!” he shouted. “They’ll never let us land there!”

He pointed to a large sign, and, even from where they were, the boys could read that all trespassers were warned off under the “full penalty of the law.”

“Hum!” grumbled Jerry. “They didn’t lose any time. I wonder what’s up?”

“Let’s go as near as we can and see,” suggested Bob, and he steered the boat to the usual landing place. But that was as far as it could go. Barbed wire stretched across the right of way by which Mrs. Hopkins’s land had formerly been reached, and there was another sign which warned trespassers away.

Across the swamp a number of men, with big rubber boots, and long-handled shovels, could be seen working. And it needed no very intent observer to see that they were taking out quantities of the yellow clay. It was not excavating work at all; it was more like mining—mining for mud.

“I thought so!” remarked Jerry. “But what’s it good for? That’s what gets me. What in the world are they doing with it?”

“I guess that’s for us to find out,” spoke Ned. “We can’t go any closer, that’s evident.”

“No,” agreed Jerry, in a low voice.

As he spoke there was a movement among the diggers, and a figure detached itself from among them and came forward.

“For the love of stamps!” cried Bob. “Look who’s here—Noddy Nixon!”

It was indeed the old enemy of the motor boys who was advancing toward them. They had not seen him in some months—not since the last time he had made trouble for them.

“Hey! You fellows want to clear out of here!” said Noddy, with his

supercilious air. “Vamoose, or you’ll be arrested!”

“Oh, is that so? Who says so?” returned Bob.

“I say so!” and Noddy bristled up like an angry rooster. “This is private land, and I order you away.”

“Who are you?” asked Ned, with a laugh. “Seems to me we’ve seen you before.”

“Don’t get fresh!” advised Noddy. “I’m in charge here, and I order you away. This land belongs to the Universal Plaster Company, and I’m assistant foreman. They made me that when they bought my father’s swamp land. Now you get away!”

“What’s the row, Noddy?” asked a voice, and the boys saw Fussel coming toward their enemy.

“These fellows won’t get away!” blustered Noddy.

“I should say we wouldn’t!” snapped Jerry. “This creek is public property, and we have a right to be here.”

“Well, don’t you come on this land!”

“Wait until we do, before you order us off,” suggested Ned.

“They aren’t on our property, Noddy,” observed Fussel, quietly. “You boys can read, I suppose?” he asked, and his voice was a bit sharp.

“Oh, we’ve been to school,” replied Ned, easily.

“Well, just observe what the sign says—that’s all,” the foreman went on. “You haven’t any rights here now, you know,” he said, addressing Jerry.

“And we don’t intend to claim any,” was Jerry’s answer. “At least not now.” There was a significance in his tone that made Fussel look at him in a peculiar manner.

“I guess you don’t need to stand guard, Noddy,” went on the foreman, “and I need you over at the work. Come on.”

“You needn’t worry. We won’t take any of your yellow clay,” called out Jerry.

“You’d better not!” blustered Noddy. “That clay is——”

“That’ll do!” interrupted Fussel, sharply. “Go back where you belong,” and Noddy, rather taken down by this rebuke, slunk off.

Fussel, as though he knew the signs would not be disregarded, had turned away, and Jerry, after standing up in the boat, so as to get a good view of the men digging in the yellow mud, threw in the clutch and started the craft on her return trip.

“What in the world do you imagine that yellow clay is good for, Jerry?” Ned remarked.

“I haven’t the least idea in the world, but I’m going to find out. Professor Snodgrass said it was valueless, but he may have been mistaken. I’m going to find out what it is good for.”

CHAPTER XI
“WE’VE BEEN TRICKED!”

Sending the motor boat along slowly, for they were in no especial hurry, the boys discussed the experience through which they had just passed.

“Imagine finding Noddy Nixon there!” exclaimed Bob. “Next thing we know Bill Berry will be showing up.”

“I didn’t see him there,” observed Ned. “He’d probably be among the laborers, if he were there at all. But you wouldn’t catch Noddy soiling his hands in the clay. The job of assistant foreman is about his limit.”

“I’m not so much surprised at seeing him, for the company bought part of his father’s land,” spoke Jerry. “But what gets me is that clay! It’s queer they should find a use for it.”

“Are you sure they have?” asked Ned.

“Well, they’re taking it out carefully enough,” responded the tall lad, “and they wouldn’t do that if it didn’t have some value. We’ve got to get busy on this. But don’t say anything to my mother, or she might feel as though she had done wrong in selling the land.”

“Is there any chance of her getting it back, in case it develops that there is a valuable deposit of mineral, or something else on it?” Bob wanted to know.

“I’m afraid not,” Jerry answered. “But I’m going to have Professor Snodgrass make another examination of the yellow clay.”

“How you going to get any of it?” asked Ned.

“Oh, I’ve got some of the first lump left yet. I’ll have him experiment on that. He didn’t make a very exhaustive test before. I’ll take some to Bellport when we go over this afternoon.”

But the boys were disappointed in their search for Professor Snodgrass at Bellport. As we know, he had already left the hotel there, being hastened on his way by the conspirators, for reasons of their own.

“No, the professor ain’t here, boys,” drawled Ike Rossiter, proprietor of the

Mansion House, where the scientist had written that he was making his headquarters.

“Where did he go?” asked Jerry, eagerly.

“I don’t know,” replied Mr. Rossiter. “But I wish I did.”

“Why—does he owe you money?” Ned wanted to know, for the professor was sometimes in the habit of absent-mindedly going off without paying his bills, and the boys, several times, had made up the deficiency, for which he reimbursed them later.

“No, he don’t owe me a cent,” said Mr. Rossiter. “Oh, he’s honest enough, as far as that’s concerned.”

“Then why do you want him?” Bob asked.

“’Cause he left behind a box of funny bugs,” answered the hotel proprietor, “and every woman servant in the place is so nervous, for fear they’ll get loose and bite ’em, that they can’t do their work half properly. Great big black bugs they are, in a wire box. The professor left ’em behind in his room, and I had ’em brought down to the office. I don’t want to turn ’em loose, for fear he might want ’em and bring suit against me for losin’ ’em. I don’t know what to do.”

“We’ll take charge of them for you,” volunteered Jerry. “We expect to see the professor soon. But can’t you give us any idea of where he has gone?”

“Not in the least, boys. He left here suddenly, with a couple of men, and all I heard ’em talkin’ about was a two-headed lizard, as if there was any such critter.”

“Wasn’t it a two-tailed lizard?” asked Ned.

“Well, maybe it was,” admitted the hotel man. “I didn’t pay no attention. But if you’ll take them bugs away I’ll be much obliged. They’re big, fuzzy things, and they look dangerous.”

The boys readily assumed charge of the specimens the professor had forgotten in his haste, but further questioning failed to bring out any information as to his whereabouts.

“He must have gotten some clue, or what he thought was a clue, to the location of the lizards,” observed Jerry, “and he started after them in his usual hurry. He’ll be back again soon. But I don’t like the idea of waiting for him. It will upset all our vacation plans.”

“Then why wait for him?” asked Bob.

“Oh, we don’t want to leave without him, after we half promised to take him with us.”

“No, I don’t mean that,” went on Ned. “But let’s trail him.”

“Trail him? How can we?” asked Ned. “We haven’t the least idea where he went.”

“No, but we might find out,” resumed the stout youth. “He would probably leave word at his home, near Boston, where he could be reached. He’d want his mail forwarded, too. You can be pretty sure that his housekeeper knows his address.

“Now what’s the matter with us starting our trip, and calling at his residence? We’re almost sure to get some information about him there. And you can bring along that specimen of yellow clay, Jerry.”

“Good idea, Bob! We’ll do it!” cried the tall lad.

Further questioning of the hotel man brought out little that was of value. Professor Snodgrass had been seen with two strangers in Bellport, but only a meager description of them could be obtained. No one had paid much attention to them. And beyond the fact that the professor had been seen taking a northern-bound train, nothing further was known of his destination. The ticket agent could not remember to what destination the scientist had purchased a ticket.

“Well, we’ll go to his home, and start the search there,” decided Jerry, as he put in the auto the lump of yellow clay, and the box of bugs.

Preparations for the boys’ trip were quickly made, and a few days later they were ready to start. And then came a disclosure that had a startling effect.

Bob and Ned were at Jerry’s house, the evening before the start. They were going over the final details, to see that they had omitted nothing, when Ned, who was looking over a New York paper, uttered a sudden exclamation.

“What’s up?” demanded Jerry.

“Lots!” cried Ned. “If this isn’t your yellow clay stuff, Jerry, I’m mistaken!”

He pointed to a large advertisement of the Universal Plaster Company, in which was announced the discovery of a new medicinal agent. It was a plaster, or poultice, which it was claimed would work wonders with sores, swellings, aches, pains and other maladies. And, amid a mass of other information, were set

down the facts that the preparation was harmless, being composed of medicated clay from “the vicinity of Cresville, Mass., where are located the largest and only beds of this valuable earth in the world.”

The advertisement went on to tell how the clay had accidentally been discovered, and how, after many experiments, it was found that it could be mixed with medicinal agents that rendered it very valuable. The successful efforts of the company to get control of the whole available supply were noted, and there were appended to the advertisement testimonials from many well-known physicians.

“And look there!” cried Ned, pointing to the extract from a scientist’s letter. “Professor Snodgrass says he has analyzed the clay, and found it exceedingly valuable for the purpose intended. See, there’s a fac-simile of his signature boys!”

“That’s so,” spoke Bob, slowly.

Jerry looked at the professor’s printed letter. Then, as he took in the import of the advertisement, and realized how his mother had sold the valuable clay land for a tenth of its present value, the tall lad exclaimed:

“Boys, we’ve been tricked! Professor Snodgrass has double-crossed us!” And he banged the table with his fist.

CHAPTER XII
ON THE BRINK

It is a hard matter to know, or even fear, that a faithful friend has been unfaithful, particularly so when one is young and rather unsophisticated. It is no small matter then to have one's ideals shattered.

And it was thus with Jerry and his chums when they read the advertisement of the Universal Plaster Company, and saw the indorsement of Professor Snodgrass, concerning the value of the yellow clay, which was given a high-sounding medical name, based on the Latin term.

"Professor Snodgrass has betrayed us!" went on Jerry, still in a heat of passion. "He knew all the while that the yellow clay was valuable, and yet, when I asked him to analyze it, he said it was worthless. And he knew there was a deposit of it on mother's land."

"Are you sure about that?" asked Ned slowly.

"Sure? Of course I am! Didn't I tell him so when I showed him the clay? I told him where it came from, and he said all the good he could see in it was for filling. Now he goes and helps these fellows made a medicine of it. He's double-crossed us, I tell you!"

"It does look so," admitted Bob, who was rather more likely than Ned to agree with the more positive speaker—in this case Jerry Hopkins.

"My, what's all the excitement about?" asked Mrs. Hopkins, coming into the room at this juncture. "Has something gone wrong with your plans?"

For a moment no one spoke, and then Jerry said:

"Something has gone wrong, Mother, but not exactly with our plans. Look here," and he showed her the advertisement. She read it through without remark. Over her shoulder Jerry saw some statements that had escaped him at first.

These were to the effect that several cures of stubborn ailments had been effected by the yellow clay, and the medicines with which it was impregnated. The clay was of medicinal value in itself, it was claimed, but it was rendered more efficacious by the introduction of other chemicals.

Rheumatism, swellings, pains, aches and ailments of various sorts yielded to its application, and the names of well-known medical men bore out the claims of the Universal Plaster Company.

“And to think that the most of that clay was on your land, Mother, and you have sold it!” cried Jerry, when she looked up from the paper.

“Well, it can’t be helped now, Jerry,” she answered, quietly. “What’s done is done.”

“I’m not so sure about that!” cried Jerry, pacing up and down the room. “I think Professor Snodgrass cheated us in not telling me the clay was valuable.”

“Maybe he did not know it,” suggested Mrs. Hopkins. “I am sure the professor would never do anything dishonorable.”

“Look at that!” demanded Jerry, pointing to the letter of the scientist—a letter appearing over his own signature—in which the claims for the clay were substantiated.

Mrs. Hopkins could not answer. Certainly it looked as though the scientific friend of the boys had acted against their interests—or, at least, against the interests of the Hopkins family.

“And just think, Mother!” cried Jerry, “if we owned that land now we could sell the clay ourselves, and get back some of the fortune you have lost.”

“It sure is tough luck,” remarked Ned.

“And that’s where the professor has been all this while—working in with those fellows,” declared Bob. “He’s been helping them get this clay ready for the market, and we thought he was after the two-tailed lizards all the while. I wouldn’t have believed it of him!”

“Why do so?” asked Mrs. Hopkins gently. “Everyone is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. Why not give the professor a ‘show for his white alley,’ as I often hear you boys say? Why condemn him unheard? That isn’t fair!”

Jerry blushed.

“Well, maybe it isn’t, Mother,” he admitted, “but the facts are all against him. Didn’t I give him a chance to tell us the clay was valuable before we sold the land?”

“I know, but there may have been some mistake. Science is not always

accurate.”

“That’s so,” admitted Ned. “Lots of times the professor has been mistaken when he tried to find a certain kind of bug where all the books said it was sure to be. Why not give him another chance, Jerry? Maybe this is all a fake,” and he pointed to the advertisement.

“It doesn’t look so,” returned the tall lad. “Still, it isn’t any fun for me to believe the professor helped to swindle us. I’d a heap sight rather find out it was all a mistake. And, as you say, I’m willing to give him another chance. But how can we do it?”

“Follow up our original plan,” suggested Bob. “Go to his home and see him. If he isn’t there, they may know where he is, and we can follow him. That’s what I’m in favor of.”

“So am I!” cried Ned.

“That settles it!” exclaimed Jerry. “The majority rules. We’ll go find the professor. But it’s a hard thing to believe him against us—a hard thing.”

“Don’t believe it, dear,” suggested Mrs. Hopkins in her gentle voice. “Just suspend judgment. I am sure it will all come out right.”

Jerry shook his head doubtfully.

“And, if it doesn’t,” went on his mother, “money isn’t everything in this world. We shall live, even without the money we might have had from the sale of this yellow clay, Jerry.”

“Oh, but I do hate to be cheated and fooled!” he answered. “Noddy Nixon is laughing at us now, I believe.”

“Let him!” advised Ned. “He laughs best who has the last inning, you know.”

“Well, maybe—yes. Anyhow, we’ve got our work cut out for us for some time ahead.”

Jerry sat down to read the advertisement over again. There was little to be extracted from it save to confirm the first impression. There was told how the clay was accidentally discovered, and how, after much experimenting, a medicinal use was found for it. Then the efforts of the company to get control of all the available supply were detailed; but nothing was said of the forceful efforts made to induce Mrs. Hopkins to sign away her rights, of which she was in ignorance at the time of making the deed.

“I suppose, legally, they are within their rights,” remarked Jerry, “but, morally, they are not. But I’ll wait and see what the professor says. It looks bad for him; but maybe, after all, he is innocent. He’s a regular kid when it comes to some things, and those fellows may have ‘put one over on him’ without his knowing anything about it.”

“That’s the way to talk!” cried Ned. “I can’t believe the dear old professor would go back on us.”

As their preparations were nearly completed, nothing more was done that night. Jerry’s two chums would meet at his house the next morning, and in the auto would make the journey to the home of the professor, in the vicinity of Boston.

“When will you be back?” asked Mrs. Hopkins, as the motor boys started away in their powerful machine.

“No telling, Mother,” answered Jerry, blowing her a kiss. Then he slipped in the gear lever, let the clutch engage, and they were off.

The weather was fine, the roads good and the boys had nothing at present before them but the trip to the professor’s house. They expected to reach it early that afternoon.

But they counted without accidents. It seemed that Fate had it “in for them.”

Engine trouble developed before they had gone thirty miles, and as they were near no garage they attempted to locate the difficulty themselves, as they had often done. The mischief seemed to be in the carbureter, and it took an hour to remedy it.

“Whew! Some work!” cried Bob, for they had to labor over the engine in a hot sun. “Let’s pull up in the shade and eat!” suggested the stout lad, for they had brought along a liberal luncheon.

“A little of that ice-cold lemonade from the vacuum bottle!” sighed Ned. “It is some warm!”

Jerry smiled indulgently, and, a little later the boys were seated in the auto, beneath the shade of a big maple, enjoying a well-earned rest.

But this was not the end of their troubles, for first one tire, and then another, blew out, necessitating the use of two spare shoes they carried, so that when they had finally passed through Boston, and were on the road to the town where the professor lived, it was getting dusk.

“We’ll have to stay all night,” commented Jerry, as he switched on the electric lights, and peered at the road ahead. It was not the best highway they had encountered, either, being uphill, and in poor condition.

“Looks like a shower,” commented Bob.

It grew rapidly darker, due to the fast-gathering clouds, and a few drops of rain fell.

“We’re in for it,” cried Ned. “Better get the top up, Jerry, old man.”

“All right. Just as soon as we get around the turn in the road.”

The lights of the car showed a bend just ahead of them. It was a road the boys had never traveled before and Jerry was taking no chances.

Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a sharp clap of thunder, startled the boys. At the same moment every electric light in the car went out.

Whether the sudden darkness, following the vivid flash, confused Jerry, or whether, involuntarily, he twisted the steering wheel, was not made certain. But, an instant later the big car gave a lurch, and in the light of the next flash the boys saw, with horror, that they were headed for the edge of the road, where a frail wooden rail alone separated the highway from a sheer descent. The car poised for an instant, the front wheels on the very brink, while, all about the thunder crashed, the lightning blinded them, and the rain came down in torrents.

CHAPTER XIII
ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT

Jerry had instinctively jammed on both the foot and the hand emergency brake as he felt the big car slipping. It came as natural to do this as it does to one to put out his hands when he is falling. Jerry had been in too many tight places not to know what to do when confronted with sudden danger.

And the brake bands had not ceased their shrill squeaking, which could be heard above the roar of the storm, before Ned and Bob yelled in chorus:

“Hold her, Jerry!”

“I am holding her,” was the grim response. “And don’t you fellows move too suddenly, or we’ll go over. Get out as easily as you can while the getting’s good!”

“What—what happened?” panted Bob, between thunder claps, as he peered ahead to see by the intermittent lightning what their position was.

“She’s almost over the brink—that’s what happened,” answered Jerry. “I don’t know whether she’s going to stay here or not. Get out, while you can, and we’ll decide what to do.”

“We’ve got a rope and a pulley,” volunteered Ned. “We may be able to haul her back on the road.”

“The first thing is to get out and save ourselves,” were Jerry’s next words. “Then we can talk about what to do. Open the side doors carefully, fellows, and step out as lightly as you can. The least jar may send her over.”

It was a perilous position, but the boys kept their heads. Jerry remained at the wheel, his hands gripping the wooden rim as though his very grasp could hold the ponderous car from slipping into the chasm revealed by the lightning flashes.

Then Ned on his side, and Bob on his, cautiously opened the doors of the tonneau, and stepped down. As soon as they were out from under the shelter of the canopy they were drenched by the pelting rain that stung their faces.

“All right?” asked Jerry, from his seat.

“All right,” replied Ned.

“Get some stones, then, to block the rear wheels,” directed the tall lad.

“Aren’t you going to get out?” asked Bob.

“That’s what I am,” was the reply. “I wanted to wait until you fellows were out, though. Too much motion at once might start her over the edge.”

And, not until then did it occur to Bob and Ned what an act of heroism Jerry had performed in staying in his place until they were safe.

He might have leaped at the first intimation of danger, for he was in a position to do this more easily than either of his chums. But he had stuck to his post, doing what he could to hold the car in place, until the others were out of danger.

Bob and Ned said nothing at the time. But later they gave Jerry to understand that they appreciated his pluck and self-sacrifice, though the latter was not fully consummated. But it was characteristic of Jerry Hopkins.

“Whew! How it rains!” exclaimed Bob.

“Don’t talk—get some stones and block the wheels, Chunky!” directed Ned.

By this time Jerry, yanking back the emergency brake lever to the last possible notch, in order to keep the car from slipping, cautiously made his way to the side of his chums. Bob and Ned had managed to find, by the lightning flashes, two large rocks, which were wedged in front of each of the rear wheels.

“I guess that’ll hold her,” remarked Jerry, with a sigh of relief.

“How did it happen?” asked Bob.

“Why, I didn’t know about that sharp turn,” replied Jerry, “and I didn’t swing her around soon enough. She went right through that guard rail—it doesn’t amount to a toothpick, anyhow—and I got the brakes on her just in time. The lightning showed me where I was going. Otherwise we’d be down there at the bottom of the gulch, and——”

“Don’t talk about it!” begged Ned, with an involuntary shudder. “It’s too horrible!”

For a moment the three motor boys stood in the storm, their faces, each time it lightened, showing the fear they felt at their narrow escape.

Then Bob spoke.

“What are we going to do?” he asked. “We can’t stay here all night in this

rain.”

“I don’t see what else we’re going to do,” Jerry answered. “We don’t want to desert the car, and we don’t want to go to sleep in her. She might come loose any moment. Guess we’ll have to camp out here, and make the best of it. ’Twon’t be the first time we’ve roughed it.”

“No, but I don’t see any necessity for it,” spoke Ned. “We have a strong rope in the tool box—a wire cable—and we can take a turn about the rear axle with that, and fasten it to a tree. Then the car can’t slide over, especially if we put plenty of blocking stones in front of the wheels. In fact we could brace the car up enough so that it would be safe to stay in her.”

“Hardly that,” said Jerry. “We’d have a nightmare, give a jump and start her going, I’m thinking. But maybe we can fasten it with the wire rope so that she will be safe until morning. Let’s try, anyhow. Then we can take the robes, and our raincoats, and make a sort of shelter in the woods. If we only had something to eat it wouldn’t be so bad. I wonder if we could find a place where we could get a bite?”

“I—I’ve got some lunch stowed away,” said Bob, half apologetically, as though he feared being censured. “I thought maybe we’d get hungry before supper, so I brought along some grub, and there’s a vacuum bottle of coffee with it. That ought to be hot.”

“Chunky, you’re a bird!” cried Ned. “Never again will I rig you about the eats. Lead me to ’em!”

“Fix the car first!” ordered Jerry. “We can’t take any chances with that.”

Working cautiously, so as not to jar the automobile, and start it over the brink, the boys, disregarding the drenching rain, got out the thin wire rope, which they carried in case they might need a tow, and fastened it to the rear axle and then to a big tree, pulling the cable taut.

“That ought to hold her,” said Jerry. “But we’ll pile some more stones in front of the wheels.”

Not until this was done, and the car made as secure as possible, did the boys get their raincoats and blankets from the space under the seats. By this time they were pretty well drenched. But the night was a warm one, and their condition was not as unpleasant as it might otherwise have been.

“Now for the eats!” cried Ned. “Pile ’em out, Bob.”

With some of the auto robes they made a rude sort of shelter among the trees, and one of the oil lamps, carried on the car for emergency, made the place a little light. The red tail lamp of the auto was sufficient to warn other travelers that the road was partly blocked.

“Though I don’t believe anyone will come up here in this storm,” remarked Jerry.

The hot coffee from the vacuum bottle, and the sandwiches which Bob had provided, made them all feel better.

“Though it’s no fun to stand all this drenching,” said Ned. “Now that the car is safe I vote we go up or down the road and see if we can’t find a hotel or some place to stay the rest of the night.”

“No,” said Jerry, “we’d better stay here, near the car. No telling what might happen.”

“Then what’s the matter with getting in the car?” asked Bob. “The canopy will shelter us.”

“No,” again said the tall lad, “it’s too risky. The chances are that the car won’t go over, but I’m not going to take the one chance that might be against us. It won’t be long until morning, and then we can see what needs to be done.”

But the wet night was miserable enough for all of them. Their shelter gave little protection against the downpour which kept up until nearly morning, and they were tired and cramped from the positions they had to occupy. But no one found much fault, though all were glad when a faint light in the east told of the coming of the dawn.

As soon as it was light enough to see, they inspected the position of the car. It was perilous enough, and the rising sun showed how near they had come to going over the brink.

“Can we pull her back?” asked Ned.

But they could not move the machine, which had settled in the mud.

“It’ll take a team of horses,” decided Jerry. “Now that we can see the car isn’t in any danger of going over, we can go for help.”

“One of us had better stay,” suggested Ned.

Making sure that the car would not slip, Bob and Jerry started down the road, intending to hire a team from the nearest farmer. Ned was left on guard.

The appearance of Bob and Jerry, from having camped out in the rain all night, was not very prepossessing, and the farmer's wife, to whom they applied for horses, looked at them askance. But the sight of some bills in Jerry's hand changed her rather glum face to a smiling one, and the farmer, returning from his early milking, readily agreed to take his team and haul the auto back to the road.

"And while we're here, hadn't we better eat?" suggested Bob, in a whisper to Jerry. "We can take Ned back some grub, too."

Fortified by a substantial meal, the boys could look on their adventure with better spirits now. Ned was grateful for his portion, and with the help of the farmer and his horses the car was soon back on the highway. No damage had been done to it, and, after paying the man for his services, the boys were soon under way again.

A little later they entered the driveway of the home of Professor Snodgrass, having stopped at a hotel on the way for a wash and change of clothes, which garments they carried with them.

"The professor? No, he isn't here," replied the housekeeper, after she had greeted the boys, whom she knew well. "He hasn't been here since he went to Cresville."

"But where is he?" asked Jerry, quickly.

"He's somewhere in the Maine mountains," was the answer. "He's after a two-tailed lizard, and he doesn't know when he'll be back."

CHAPTER XIV
ON THE TRAIL

Disappointment showed plainly on the faces of the three motor boys. They looked at one another, and then at Mrs. Johnson, the housekeeper. She could not mistake their feeling.

“I’m sorry,” Mrs. Johnson remarked. “If he had known you were coming to see him, I’m sure he would have waited for you. But I understood him to say, when he left here, that he was going to call on you boys, and get you to go with him.”

“He did call on me,” explained Jerry, “but he left suddenly to make a search for some specimens, and did not return. We supposed he came back here.”

“No, he didn’t,” the housekeeper answered, “though he sent me a letter in which he said he was going to the mountains, and for me not to worry about him.

“But I always do that, when he’s off on one of his queer trips,” went on Mrs. Johnson, with a sigh. “I never know what danger he may get into. I don’t fuss so much when I know he is with you boys, for I know you’ll sort of look after him. But when he’s by himself he’d just as soon get wet through and never change his things from one day to another. He is so thoughtless!

“And now it is such a queer search he is on. A two-tailed lizard! As if there could be any such thing as that. Oh dear! I don’t know what to do!”

“Well, the professor has found queerer things than two-tailed lizards,” remarked Jerry, “so that part is all right. But I can’t understand about his going away without saying a word to us. That’s what makes it seem queer.”

“It sure does,” agreed Ned.

“Didn’t he want you to go with him?” Mrs. Johnson wanted to know.

“He didn’t give us a chance to say,” was Bob’s answer. “He just—disappeared.”

“Have you his address?” asked Jerry of the housekeeper.

“Yes, it’s Hurdtown, but you’ll wait a good while before you can get an

answer from there.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s miles away from a railroad, and in a lonely part of the mountains. I have written once to the professor since he sent me word where he was going, but I haven’t heard from him.”

“Hurdtown,” observed Jerry. “I wonder how we could get there?”

“Are you going after him?” the housekeeper wanted to know.

“I think so—yes,” replied Jerry. “I want to see him on important business.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” Mrs. Johnson cried. “He just needs you boys, I know he does! I can’t understand his going away without you. Please find him, and here—take these dry socks to him. I know he’ll go about with wet feet.”

Jerry smiled as he took the socks, and then his face grew grave. He was thinking of the yellow mud of the swamp, and wondering what Professor Snodgrass would say when asked why he had told Jerry it was worthless, and why, later, he had indorsed it as of great value.

Mrs. Johnson brought out the professor’s letter. It was short, as his epistles always were, and merely stated that he had gotten on the track of a two-tailed lizard. He gave his address simply as Hurdtown, Maine.

“Well, we’ll have to go after him!” decided Ned, “and the sooner we start the better. I wonder where this place is, anyhow?”

“I looked it up on the map,” said the housekeeper eagerly. “I can show it to you.”

Hurdtown appeared to be in the northern part of New England, several hundred miles from Boston, and in a lonely section, poorly supplied with railroad facilities.

“Yes, we could get there,” decided Jerry, looking at the map. “We could best make it by road and river, as well as by some lake travel. See,” he went on, tracing out a route with a pencil. “We could go up that far in the auto, leave the car there, and make the rest of the trip in the motor boat. That river would take us nearly to Hurdtown, and we could finish up with a lake trip.”

“Shall we do it?” asked Bob.

“I’m willing, if you are,” assented Jerry. “I sure do want to have a talk with

the professor."

"Well, it will be an all-right jaunt; merely as a trip," said Ned slowly, "and of course we'll stand by you, Jerry. But I don't see how we're going to do any water traveling—not with our motor boat, anyhow. We can't haul it along behind the auto very well."

"No, but we could ship it on in advance, and have it waiting for us at the head of Silver River. Then we can go down that to Lake Mogan and so on to Hurdtown. It will be quite a trip, but maybe we'll enjoy it."

"Enjoy it! I should say we would!" cried Bob. "We can take along a lot of things to eat, and——"

He stopped as he saw his chums smiling at him. A flicker of amusement also came into the face of Mrs. Johnson.

"Well, I certainly will be glad if you boys can locate the professor," she said. "Tell him I was quite worried about him. But then I don't s'pose that will do any good—he'll do just the same thing next time—or worse. But you can send me word how he is when you find him, and that's more than he'd do. When he writes all he thinks about is his bugs, and he'll write and tell me how many of such-and-such an insect he has. He gives them their Latin names, and he might just as well talk Italian to me. But you boys will look after him; won't you?"

"We sure will!" exclaimed Jerry. In spite of the feeling he had that Dr. Snodgrass had not played fair with him, the tall lad could not forget the affection he had for the absent-minded scientist.

"Well, if we're going to make that long trip we'd better set about it," spoke Ned. "We'll have to go home and make preparations, I suppose."

"Oh, sure!" broke in Bob. "It'll take a lot of grub——"

"Can't you think of anything else, Chunky?" asked Jerry, with a smile. "Of course we'll have to make some plans," he went on, "and arrange to ship the motor boat. We'd better get busy, I guess."

They said good-bye to Mrs. Johnson, and, a little later, were on their way back home in the auto. The visit to the professor's house had detained them somewhat, as Mrs. Johnson insisted that they stay to dinner.

"We can't make Cresville by night," observed Ned, looking at his watch, when they were on the road. Ned was at the wheel.

“No, we’ll stay at a hotel until morning, after we cover as much ground as we care to,” decided Jerry. “No use taking any chances with night travel.”

They had said nothing to Mrs. Johnson about their reasons for wanting to see the professor, and to his original one, of merely desiring an explanation about the yellow clay, Jerry had added another.

“Fellows,” he said, “I’m not so sure but what mother could claim that she was fraudulently induced to sell that land. It wasn’t a square deal, anyhow, and maybe the professor, unless he’s too friendly with that Universal Plaster Company, could give evidence in our favor.”

“What good would it do?” asked Bob.

“Why, if we could prove that the sale of the land was brought about by fraud, the transfer would be set aside,” Jerry said. “Mother could have her property again, and get a profit from the medicated mud. I only hope it will turn out that way.”

“And you think the professor can help you?” asked Ned.

“He may be able to. I can’t believe that he’s gone back on me altogether, though it does look so.”

Discussing this subject made the time pass quickly for the boys, and soon they had arrived at a hotel where, once before, they had put up over night.

“We’ll stay here,” decided Jerry, “and go on in the morning.”

At supper that evening Bob called Jerry’s attention to an advertisement in the paper, extolling the virtues of the yellow clay for rheumatism and other ills.

“Don’t take my appetite away, Chunky!” begged Jerry. “I don’t want to think about it until I have to. And yet, with it all, I can’t believe the professor has betrayed us.”

“Me either,” chimed in Ned.

Mrs. Hopkins, after some thought, consented to the plans of her son and his chums.

“I know you will be careful,” she said, “though I have not much hope that you will accomplish anything. I haven’t the least idea that Professor Snodgrass is at fault. He is not that sort of a character. There has been some mistake, I am sure. But the trip may do you good, even if you don’t get my land back, Jerry,” and she smiled at her impulsive son.

“Well, I’ll give the professor a chance to explain, anyhow,” the tall lad remarked. “One funny thing about it is that he hasn’t sent for the things he left here. I should think he’d want them. There are some specimens, and his clothes. I wonder——”

Jerry was interrupted by a ring at the door. A servant came back with a note.

“Great Scott!” cried Jerry, as he noted the writing on the envelope, “it’s from Professor Snodgrass himself!”

“Maybe he’s coming back!” added Ned.

“Or maybe it’s an explanation,” said Bob.

But it was neither, as Jerry discovered when he opened it. It was merely a request that the professor’s possessions at the Hopkins house be sent to an address he gave.

“I am off after a two-tailed lizard,” the scientist wrote. “I’ll see you boys later. No time to come and say good-bye.”

“Humph! He was in something of a hurry,” observed Jerry.

The note thus delivered was the one Professor Snodgrass had written at the instigation of Fussel and his fellow conspirator, who had used the scientist for their own ends. They had held back his communication until it pleased them to have it delivered. They now thought they had matters in their own hands. Of course Jerry and his chums had no means of knowing this.

“Well, we’ll send his things, of course,” Jerry decided. “Or, rather, we’ll take them to him ourselves. We can do it as quickly as they would go to him by express. Come on, boys, let’s hustle and get on the trail.”

The motor boat was sent by freight to the headwaters of Silver River, and then the boys spent a few days getting their own outfit ready to take with them in their auto.

“Say, I wish you’d take me!” cried Andy Rush, when he heard something of the prospective trip. “I’d help—do the cooking—bring the water—rustle the wood—stand guard—Noddy Nixon might try some of his funny tricks—I’d stand him off—take me along—I need a vacation—I’ll pump up the tires—whoop!”

“You’ve got enough hot air—that’s sure—to pump up a dozen tires, Andy,” said Jerry. “But it can’t be done!”

CHAPTER XV
A STOWAWAY

“Well, are we all here?”

“Looks so—what there is of us.”

“And have we got everything?”

“Couldn’t take much more.”

It was Jerry who asked the questions, and Ned and Bob, in turn, who answered them. The big automobile stood in the yard at the side of the Hopkins homestead, stocked with the various things the boys thought they would need on their tour to the mountains to find Professor Snodgrass. In addition to their own outfit, they had with them some of the things the scientist had left behind, when he so unexpectedly departed.

Fortunately for the boys, the auto was an extra large one, capable of carrying eight passengers, and as there were but three of them they used the extra space to pack away their belongings.

In addition to extra clothing, and some provisions (you can easily imagine who oversaw to the packing of them), the boys took a small but complete camping outfit. There was a sleeping tent, a portable stove and other things, for they had decided to take their meals in the open when it was not convenient to go to a hotel over night.

It was possible, also, to sleep in the auto, in case too severe a storm made the tent undesirable. The heavy canopy of the big car would prove most effectual against rain.

The motor boys planned to make part of the trip in the auto, and part in the boat. The latter, they hoped, would be waiting for them on Silver River when they arrived.

“And we’ll have more fun aboard her than in the auto,” said Ned. “There’s more room to spread yourself, and the traveling is easier.”

“We can sleep aboard very comfortably,” added Jerry.

“And it’s a good deal easier to cook,” remarked Bob, innocently enough, whereat his chums burst into laughter.

“Oh, well, you don’t need to eat if you don’t want to, Ned!” spluttered the stout lad, for his tormentor was poking him in the ribs, under pretense of seeing how much fatter he had grown.

“Don’t let him worry you, Chunky,” consoled Jerry. “He’ll be glad enough to sit up at the table when the gong rings. Now then, help me get this trunk up on the rear,” for a trunk, containing some of the things they would not need for a time, was to be put on the luggage carrier of the auto.

“Well, boys, take care of yourselves,” cautioned Mrs. Hopkins, as Jerry took his place at the wheel. The tall lad generally did the steering for his chums.

“We’ll try to,” answered Ned.

“And, Jerry,” his mother went on, coming down the path to kiss him good-bye, “don’t be too harsh with the professor, even if you find he is against you.”

“All right, Momsey, I’ll try,” was his answer, after a moment of thought.

“And it may be all a mistake,” she added. “I’m sure I hope it will prove to be so.”

“I do, too,” added the tall lad. “All ready, fellows?”

“All right,” answered Ned, stowing away the last of his belongings.

“Let her go!” called Bob.

“We’ll go past you fellows’ houses so you can say good-bye,” Jerry announced, as he turned the lever of the self-starter and the big car moved slowly forward.

In turn, as they glided past their homes, Ned and Bob waved farewells to their folks, and then, reaching the broad highway that extended over the first part of their tour, Jerry opened the gasoline throttle a bit wider. With a hum and a roar, the powerful engine took up the burden, bearing the boys toward the mountains.

There had been busy times since they had come back from their fruitless trip to see Professor Snodgrass. The preparations for the trip occupied some time, and one day was spent in going to the swamp where the taking out of the yellow clay was in progress.

Jerry did not wish to get into a conflict—verbal or otherwise—with Fussel and

his workmen, nor with Noddy Nixon, who, it appeared, was still acting as assistant foreman. So the motor boys did not approach very closely the scene of operations.

They could see, however, that a larger force of men was employed, and that considerable of the yellow clay was being taken out. It was being piled on narrow, flat-bottomed boats, that had been made purposely to float along the little canals created when the clay was cut out.

“They’re working on a big scale,” remarked Ned, as he stood beside Jerry in the motor boat, watching the operations.

“Yes, and most of their work is being done on the land my mother used to own,” replied the tall lad. “Well, maybe we’ll be able to get our rights; but it looks doubtful.”

Noddy Nixon had strolled down to the fence that marked the limits of the ownership of the Universal Plaster Company. But he had no excuse for ordering away our friends, for which he was doubtless sorry. Jerry, however, took care not to give him any chance to be insulting, if nothing worse.

Then had come the packing up and the start.

On and on sped the auto, the boys talking of many matters, and speculating as to what Professor Snodgrass would say when he saw them.

“Here, you take the wheel a while, Ned, I’m tired,” requested Jerry, after about an hour in the front seat. The car was stopped while the transfer was being made, and when they were about ready to proceed again Bob called:

“Hey! Wait a minute. I see some apples over in that field. Wait ’till I get some.”

“Eating again!” cried Jerry, with a gesture of mock despair, for Bob had been nibbling at something ever since they started.

Without waiting for assent the stout lad slipped over the fence and he had his hands and pockets full of the apples before his chums had ceased laughing long enough to object.

“They look dandy!” exulted Bob, as he climbed back over the rails. “Have some, fellows; I guess I’m some little Willie when it comes to gathering apples; eh?”

“I guess you are, son, but it’ll cost ye suthin’!” and to Bob’s astonishment a

tall, lanky farmer arose from where he had been concealed in the tall grass near the fence, and laid a detaining hand on the stout lad's shoulder.

"Hey? What's the matter? Let me go!" spluttered Bob, so surprised that he dropped part of the fruit. Jerry and Ned, in the car, were laughing at his plight.

"Oh, I'll let ye go all right," said the farmer, with a grin, "but you've got to settle fust! I find this is the best way to collect," he went on. "Wait until they have the goods and then nab 'em. There ain't no way gittin' away from that there!"

Truly it seemed so.

"How—how much do you want?" faltered Bob. He was caught red-handed. He could not deny it. And the apple tree had seemed so isolated—so far from any house.

"Wa'al, son, them apples'll cost ye about a dollar," said the farmer grimly. "Them's my best Gravensteins, and right choice they be. Yep, I guess about a dollar'll square matters."

"A dollar!" cried Bob. "Why, I haven't got more'n a quart of your old apples. A dollar a quart! Why, that's thirty-two dollars a bushel!"

"Yep. Apples is kinder high this year," went on the man, and, whether it was intentional or not, he reached down and brought into view an old shotgun.

"This is robbery!" protested Bob.

"Are you speakin' of what you did?" inquired the farmer, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "If ye are I agree with ye!"

"A dollar!" spluttered Bob. "I'll never pay it."

"Wa'al, mebby ye'd ruther come along up to Squire Teeter's, an' have him value them apples," said the farmer coolly.

"Oh, here's your dollar!" cried Bob, handing over a crumpled bill. "But it's robbery."

"Yep," admitted the farmer coolly, as he pocketed the money. "That's what the folks around here calls takin' other people's things—robbery."

He sank down in the grass again, probably to wait for his next victim, while Bob, under the laughing eyes of Jerry and Ned, made his way to the auto. They started off, and Bob's good nature came back as he viewed the apples.

“Well, they look fine, anyhow,” he said.

He set his teeth into one—after an effort—and then he let out a yell.

“Whew! Ouch! Good night!” he cried.

“What’s the matter?” asked Jerry.

“They’re as hard as rocks, and as sour as lemons!” cried Bob. “I’m stung, all right! Those apples won’t be ripe until next winter. The old skinflint! A dollar a quart! Whew!” and Bob threw the apples into the road.

They stopped for lunch beneath a big shady maple tree, near a cool spring bubbling out of a roadside hill.

“Bring that box under the back seat when you come,” called Ned to Bob, who was handing out the eatables.

“What box?” demanded the stout youth.

“The one marked ‘cakes.’ I put in a tin of fancy ones.”

“Good,” cried Bob, who had a sweet tooth.

He reached under the seat, where Ned had told him, but a look of surprise spread over Bob’s face, as he brought out an empty tin.

“They’re gone!” he cried.

“What’s gone?” asked Ned.

“The cakes!”

“They are? Then somebody’s eaten ’em! I’ll have a look!”

Ned ran toward the car, but, before he reached it, there was a movement under the seat. The leather flap was lifted up and a voice said, mildly enough:

“I ate the cake, fellows. I was hungry.”

“Andy Rush!” cried Jerry, as he saw the disheveled figure of the small chap. “How in the world did you get there?”

“Oh, I stowed away,” replied Andy, as he crawled out. “Can’t I come along, fellows? I’ll be good, and I’m awful hungry.”

CHAPTER XVI
A HARD FALL

Jerry Hopkins hardly knew whether or not to be angry at the small lad who had the assurance to stow himself away in the auto. Bob looked at his tall chum as if to shape his own conduct by Jerry's. Ned was frankly angry.

"Well, you have got nerve, Andy Rush!" exclaimed Ned. "What do you mean by slipping in on us this way; eh? What do you mean?"

"I—er—I, well, I just couldn't help it," burst out Andy, who seemed to be in some difficulty as to what to say. "I wanted to come awfully bad, and I was afraid you fellows wouldn't let me if I asked you."

"That's the time you spoke the truth!" muttered Ned. "You sure are right—we wouldn't have let you."

"And I thought maybe, if I came along anyhow, and you didn't find me until you had a good start, you'd let me stay rather than take me home," finished Andy.

"Take you home!" cried Ned. "Well, you sure have got nerve! Take you home? Well, you'll go home the best way you can. We're not going to turn around and take you back to your mother; you can make up your mind to that!"

"You—you won't leave me here; will you?" faltered Andy, looking around apprehensively, for they were in a rather lonely neighborhood.

"It's as good a place as any," grumbled Ned. "Stowaways can't be choosers."

Andy looked more frightened than ever. He was only a small chap, and not very robust. His usual vivacious manner, and his rapid style of talking seemed to have deserted him.

"Go on home!" exclaimed Ned. "We don't want you!"

"Oh, don't be mean," urged Bob in a low tone to his chum.

"No, we can't desert him this way, even if he did sneak in on us," added Jerry.

Andy took heart from this.

“I—I didn’t mean to do wrong,” he said eagerly. “I’m willing to pay my way. I’ve got ’most five dollars saved up. You can have that!” and he pulled some change from his pocket. “Don’t send me back!” he pleaded. “Let me come along.”

A flicker of a smile lighted Ned’s face. I fancy those of you who know the merchant’s son realize that this harsh attitude was only assumed for the time being. Really Ned was very gentle, and he only spoke that way on the impulse of the moment, and to make Andy feel a proper sorrow for his escapade.

“You will let me stay; won’t you?” the small boy pleaded. “I—I’ll do anything you say. I’ll help a lot—run all your errands for you—I’ll get water for the auto—I’ll pump up the tires—I—I’ll put up the tent, chop wood—whoop! I’ll do *everything*!” And Andy fairly yelled—a return of his usual spirits.

“All right, if you want to work your passage,” agreed Ned, as though a problem were solved. “I’ve no objections, if you’re willing to help out,” and he winked at his chums. “But it won’t be easy,” he warned Andy.

“Oh, I’m not looking for anything easy,” replied Andy quickly. “I’ll do anything you tell me to.”

“All right, then get some wood and make a fire,” ordered Ned. “We want to boil some coffee. Then hand me another of the boxes of the cakes I put away. If it hadn’t been for them we wouldn’t have known where you were. After that you can hunt up a spring and get a pail of water. I guess the auto radiator needs filling; doesn’t it, Jerry?”

“Oh, be a bit easy with him,” pleaded fat Bob, who knew what it was to keep pace with Ned’s demands.

“Keep still! It’ll do him good to hustle,” warned Ned to Chunky, as Andy set off on his first errand, that of getting wood.

“But we don’t need a fire,” objected Jerry. “The coffee is hot in the vacuum bottle.”

“I know it,” laughed Ned, “but Andy ought to do something to work his passage, and that’s the only thing I can think of now. Let him make a fire. And we really ought to put some water in the radiator. Let him go.”

“All right,” agreed the tall lad. “Of course Andy had no right to stow himself away, and he ought to have it rubbed in on him a little. But don’t be too rough with him, Ned.”

“I won’t,” was the promise, but Ned winked at Bob.

If Andy thought he was to have a sinecure on his stolen jaunt with the boys he was sadly mistaken. Ned particularly seemed to “have it in for him” and invented new tasks constantly.

Some of them were errands that really needed to be done, and, to the credit of Andy be it said, he did not once grumble. He might have suspected he was being “worked,” when he was made to wash the few dishes from lunch through two waters, a hasty rinse being all that the boys usually indulged in. But Andy was “game” and the dishes fairly shone when he restored them to the hamper.

But when, as they were traveling slowly along, looking for a good place to camp for the night, Ned looked over, saw one of the tires flat, and ordered Andy to get ready to pump it up, Jerry objected.

“You know he can’t pump it up—he isn’t strong enough,” the tall lad said. “Besides, we have an air pump on the motor.”

“I know, but I just want to see what Andy will say.”

Again the small lad was “game.”

“Where’s the pump?” he asked cheerfully, as the auto stopped. “I’ll have it full of air in a jiffy,” and he seemed ready for the back-breaking work.

“You’re all right!” declared Jerry, with a laugh. “I guess you can belong, Andy. Never mind the hand pump. I’ll soon have the tire fixed. We’ll have to put in a new inner tube, anyhow.”

And, while this was being done Andy explained how, after hearing of the boys’ contemplated trip, he had made up his mind to go with them. He knew his request would, most likely, be refused, so, watching his chance, and being small, he managed to slip under the seat, back of a pile of luggage.

“And I wouldn’t have come out when I did, only I was hungry,” he finished. “I took the cakes because I couldn’t find anything else.”

“Well, since you’re here you might as well stay,” spoke Jerry. “We’ll have to send some word to your folks, though.”

“You needn’t bother,” said Andy coolly. “I told ’em I was coming with you, and they said it would be all right.”

“Well, you have your nerve with you, if nothing else!” exclaimed Ned.

“Yes, and I’ve got my baggage, too!” cried the small lad, as he reached into the cavity where he had made a place for himself and pulled out a small bundle. “I brought some clothes along,” he said.

This took place shortly after Andy’s discovery. Then he had been fed, the trip was resumed, and the puncture discovered. The repaired tire was soon pumped up from the motor, and, after going on a short distance farther a good camping site, near a spring of clear, cold water, was reached.

“We’ll put up the sleeping tent, and use that,” decided Jerry as, with Andy along, there would scarcely have been room in the car.

“And we’ll have a camp fire,” suggested Bob.

“Andy will get the wood,” broke in Ned, with a wink at his chums.

“Sure!” assented the small lad, and, a little later they were eating bacon and eggs, with fragrant coffee, around a merry blaze.

There was no need for haste on the trip, and the boys did not speed their auto. They felt that Professor Snodgrass, even if he were successful in finding the two-tailed lizard, would not return to his home at once. He would, most likely, remain in the mountains in search of other specimens. So the boys took their time. They planned to be two days on the road in the auto, and about as much longer in the boat, though this time could be cut down considerably if there were need for it.

They camped, on the evening of their third day’s auto trip, at the foot of a steep hill, the road having been cut through it, and high banks rising on either side. So far, aside from tire troubles, and once getting stuck in a bog, when they tried a short cut, the journey had not been eventful.

Supper was gotten at a road-side blaze, and the boys were stretched out in lazy comfort on the grass when Bob, who usually showed little desire for unnecessary exercise, scrambled to his feet.

“What’s up?” asked Jerry, looking at his fat chum.

“I thought I saw some sort of a lizard in a hole up on the face of that hill,” responded Bob. “Maybe it’s the two-tailed one the professor wants. If it isn’t it may be some kind of a rare specimen. I’ll see if I can get it for him,” and with that Bob started up the incline.

“Come back—you’ll fall,” cried Ned, for the climb was not an easy one.

“Oh, I can make it,” was the answer. “It’s some sort of a lizard sure enough, but not a two-tailed one,” and Bob pointed to where a wriggling object could be seen. His chums sat up watching him, but they were not prepared for what followed.

Bob reached for a shrub, growing on the side of the hill, intending to pull himself up by it. But, as he grasped it, the shrub pulled loose, and, an instant afterward, the stout lad toppled backward, turning completely over, and rolled to the bottom of the hill. The others could hear his head come in contact with a stone, and then poor Bob rolled into a crumpled heap, and lay motionless.

CHAPTER XVII
THE CELEBRATED DOCTOR

Jerry, Ned and Andy were on their feet together and in an instant. Together, also, they started for the place where poor Bob lay.

“That was a nasty fall,” declared Ned as he raced onward.

“A hard one,” agreed Jerry.

“Is he dead, do you think?” Andy asked. “Maybe his neck is broken—what’ll we do? Have to get a doctor—I’ll go—in the auto—poor Bob! I wonder if he got the lizard?”

“Dry—up!” ordered Ned, pausing between the two words, and the volatile Andy subsided.

Ned and Jerry leaned over their friend. He was unconscious, and, as Jerry lifted him, a trickle of blood ran from the back of his head.

“Oh, his skull is fractured!” cried Andy, who shuddered at the sight of the bright, crimson stream that spread over Jerry’s hand.

“Andy, if you don’t cut out that kind of talk I’ll boot you one!” cried Ned, in exasperation. “Now you go get some water and something for a bandage. Take one of my shirts if you can’t find anything else. Hustle now!”

That was the best advice to give Andy. He needed something to do to take his mind off the accident.

“Is he hurt badly, do you think?” asked Ned, as he helped Jerry carry Bob to a grassy place.

“It’s hard to tell. I’ll have a look when I wash off his head. There’s a bad cut, that’s evident.”

They laid the stout lad, now sadly limp and white, on a soft place in the grass. By this time Andy had come up with the water, and some pieces of cloth, obtained by hastily tearing up the only extra shirt he had brought along for himself.

Jerry soaked a rag in water, and carefully sponged away the blood; but, as he did so, more spurted out from a long gash on the scalp.

“I guess I’d better let it alone until it coagulates, or at least until a doctor can look at it,” he said. “It will need sewing up, if I’m any judge, and we’ll have to get help for that.”

Jerry and his chums knew something of rough and ready first aid to the injured, but this was beyond their skill.

“What’ll we do?” asked Ned, rather helplessly.

“We’ll have to get a doctor,” said Jerry. “Let’s see, the last town we passed through was Lynnhaven. It didn’t look as though it would support a physician of any account, and the nearest doctor must live a good ways out.”

“There’s quite a town just ahead of us,” suggested Ned. “I noticed the last signboard we passed said it was eleven miles to it. There ought to be a doctor there, and we could bring him to Bob in the auto.”

“That’s what I’ll do!” cried Jerry. “You and Andy will have to stay with Bob, Ned, while I go for help. You can put up the tent, and get him under that, while I’m gone.”

“Shall we give him any medicine?” asked Ned, for they had brought a few simple things with them, as they always did.

“No, I wouldn’t give him anything but water,” replied the tall lad. “He’ll probably develop a fever, and the simpler the things he has, the better for him, until the doctor sees him.

“Come on, Andy!” called Jerry to the small lad. “You’ve carried water enough. Now you help Ned put up the tent, and make Bob as comfortable as you can. I’m off.”

Jerry lost no time. Taking out of the auto the tent, and other things he thought would be needed, he took his place at the wheel, shoved over the lever of the self-starter, and was off in a cloud of dust. For Jerry had determined not to observe any speed laws, save as they concerned his own safety. He realized that his errand would be excuse enough if he were stopped, and he did not think he would be, as it was getting dusk.

“I ought to do the eleven miles in short order,” reflected Jerry, as the car swung around a turn, almost skidding. “The only trouble will be to find a doctor at home.”

But it was not to be all smooth sailing for Jerry. He had not covered more than five of the eleven miles when the sky became overcast, and a little later he was in the midst of a thunderstorm.

He did not mind this, however, as the canopy was up, and the rain-shield protected him. Jerry switched on the electric lights, and kept on, though he reduced his speed somewhat. He had to stop once to get out at a cross-road and read the signs, and then, as luck would have it, he took the wrong turn. It was not his fault, as the old sign post leaned so that it was difficult for a stranger to determine in which direction the hand pointed.

“Am I on the road to Brookville?” Jerry yelled at a passing farmer, who sat huddled up in a horse blanket on the seat of his rickety wagon.

“Whoa! Hey?” asked the man, one remark being addressed to his horse, and the question to Jerry.

“I say, am I on the road to Brookville?”

“No, you’re headed for Deanhurst. You ought to have took the left hand road a piece back to get to Brookville. Can’t you read the signs?”

“I can, yes—when they’re right,” snapped Jerry, who was not in the best of humor. “Thanks!” he called, as he waited for the other to pass on, so that he might turn the car. It was no easy matter to get the big machine headed the other way in the narrow road, but Jerry finally managed it and then he sent the auto on at a fast clip, passing the man who had given him the needed direction.

Jerry reached the decrepit sign post again, and this time made the right turn. It grew darker and darker as he advanced, but the lights on the car were powerful. The thunder and lightning had ceased, but it still rained hard, and the roads were fast becoming puddles of mud and water.

“I’m glad I have the car,” reflected Jerry. “A doctor won’t have the excuse that he doesn’t want to take his horse out in the storm.”

It was fully night when Jerry reached Brookville, though had it not been for the storm there would have been the glow of sunset to dispel the gloom. The tall lad stopped at the first house he came to, in order to inquire about a doctor, and was delighted to learn that a physician lived about a mile down the road.

But his delight was turned to disappointment when he reached the office, and learned that the medical man had been called out into the country, on a case that would probably keep him all night.

“But he’s needed for an accident!” cried Jerry. “Is there any other physician in town?”

“Yes,” he was informed. “Dr. Madison lives about two miles out, on the State road.”

But Dr. Madison was not at home either, and his wife could not say when he would return.

“Sometimes he is out until long after midnight,” she said. “His patients are widely scattered.”

“What shall I do?” muttered Jerry, speaking more to himself than to the doctor’s wife. He thought of poor Bob in the little tent, with Andy and Ned keeping lonely vigil beside him.

“I’m very sorry,” said the lady, when Jerry had told of the circumstances, and the need of haste. “I heard there is a New York doctor stopping at the hotel in the village. He came up here for a rest, but perhaps he might go see your friend. I don’t know who the doctor is, but I have heard my husband speak highly of him. He is some sort of a specialist, so I understand.”

“I’ll try him!” decided Jerry desperately. “He can’t refuse to help us out in this emergency.”

A little later his mud-spattered car drew up at the only hotel in the village.

“Is there a physician stopping here?” asked Jerry of the hotel clerk. The lad’s appearance indicated the need of haste, and alarm and anxiety showed on his face.

“Yes, Dr. Wright is stopping here,” replied the man behind the desk, “but I don’t know that he would like——”

“May I see him?” interrupted Jerry. “It’s a case of accident, and he’s just got to come. Both the other doctors are out of town.”

As he spoke a tall, slim gentleman, in a well-fitting, dark suit came from the dining-room to the hotel corridor. Beside him walked a handsome young woman. The man showed interest in Jerry’s rather loud remarks, and at the word “doctor” said:

“Is someone hurt?”

“Yes—my chum,” replied Jerry quickly. “He had a bad fall and his skull may be fractured.”

“That is Dr. Wright,” the clerk informed Jerry, but the lad had already guessed as much.

“Oh, can you come?” appealed Bob’s chum. “We’re afraid he’s badly hurt. It was a fall!”

“Where is he?” asked Dr. Wright.

“About eleven miles from here.”

The doctor involuntarily looked out at the raging storm.

“I have a car!” cried Jerry eagerly. “You won’t get a bit wet. I can have you there in half an hour, and bring you back.”

The doctor smiled grimly at the lady beside him.

“I can’t seem to escape from it,” he remarked.

“No,” she answered with a gentle smile. “But perhaps you had better go, even if you are on your vacation.”

“Oh, yes,” he assented, somewhat wearily. “I must go, of course, as long as there is no one else. I’ll be with you directly, young man,” he said to Jerry. “Just as soon as I can get on a coat, and pack my bag.”

“I came out here to get rid of work,” he went on, “but I seem to have it thrust upon me. But never mind.”

Jerry fidgetted about impatiently until the physician, wearing a heavy raincoat, and carrying a black bag, descended from his room. Then, eager to be in motion, Jerry led the way to the waiting car.

“That’s a fine auto you have,” observed Dr. Wright.

“Yes, it goes, too,” added Jerry. “I’ll soon have you there.”

Neither Jerry nor the physician spoke much on the trip. Each was too busy with his own thoughts. Jerry sent the car ahead at even greater speed than he had used coming out, for he knew the road now. Soon, splashing through mud and water, now sliding on some inclined highway, and again puffing up a hill, they came in sight of a lighted tent beside the road.

“Oh, you are camping here!” exclaimed the doctor.

“Not exactly,” Jerry explained. “We are making a trip, and we have a sleeping tent. My chum is in there with a friend.”

“Well, we’ll have a look at him.”

It was raining hard when the doctor and Jerry alighted, and the small tent was not the best place in the world wherein to make an examination. Andy had worked well, however, and had made Bob as comfortable as possible. The latter was on an improvised bed, with rubber blankets under him, and well covered. Fortunately the tent was waterproof.

The doctor bent over Bob.

“Has he showed any signs of consciousness since he received the hurt?” he asked.

“He moaned once or twice—that’s all,” answered Andy.

“Hum!” remarked the physician non-committally. “I’m afraid I can’t do anything for him here. He ought to be at the hotel. Do you think you can take him there in the auto?”

“We’ll have to,” said Jerry simply.

They made an improvised stretcher, and carried Bob through the rain to the car. He was propped up in the tonneau, and then, the tent being struck, Jerry, Andy and Ned, with the physician, took their places in the car.

Jerry drove more slowly on the return trip, but it was made in good time, and without accident. Bob was still unconscious when carried into the hotel, and taken to a room that was hastily prepared for him. The doctor took charge of matters now, and, somewhat to Jerry’s surprise, the lady he had seen with the doctor appeared in the garb of a trained nurse.

“You fellows are in luck,” remarked the hotel clerk, while Ned, Andy and Jerry were waiting in the corridor for the result of the doctor’s examination.

“I should say so!” agreed Jerry. “A doctor and a trained nurse located at the same time. Is she the doctor’s nurse?”

“Yes, his head one, I believe. You know who Dr. Wright is; don’t you?”

“Can’t say I do,” replied Jerry.

“Why, he’s the greatest surgeon on brain diseases and head injuries in the country!” exclaimed the admiring clerk. “He’s an authority, and so much in demand that he can charge anything he pleases. He gets anywhere from one to ten thousand dollars for an operation.”

CHAPTER XVIII
A CRY OF FIRE

Jerry looked sharply at Ned. The same thought was in the minds of both—would they have money enough to pay the doctor, in case it should be found that Bob was badly hurt, and needed a complicated operation?

Then Jerry smiled. Of course, even though the skill of the celebrated surgeon was required, he would not have to be paid at once. And Bob's father was wealthy. After all, there was no need for worry, save as to Bob himself.

And this was soon dispelled, for Miss Payson, which, the clerk said, was the name of the doctor's head nurse, soon came down to relieve the anxiety of the boys.

"How's Bob?" Jerry asked her impulsively.

"All right," she answered with a smile. "He has only a scalp wound."

"Then his skull isn't fractured?" asked Andy, excitedly.

"Bless your heart, no! The doctor will soon have him very comfortable, and then I'll stay with him to-night."

"Oh, but we can't think of letting you do that!" cried Ned.

"Indeed!" and Miss Payson elevated her eyebrows, and smiled at the eager lad. "I fancy you'll have to," she said. "Dr. Wright isn't in the habit of having his orders disobeyed, and he has told me to look after the patient to-night."

"Oh, but that's too bad!" burst out Jerry. "Just when you are on your vacation, too."

"Oh, well, it doesn't so much matter," said the nurse, genially. "As long as we have taken the case we will see it through. That's Dr. Wright's way."

"Is it—is it serious?" asked Andy.

"Oh, not at all. You boys can stand harder bumps on the head than you imagine. If concussion doesn't develop your friend will be up and about in a few days."

“That’s good,” returned Jerry, for though there was no special need for haste, still he wanted to get in touch with Professor Snodgrass as soon as possible.

“Now I must go back,” said the nurse. “I just came down to relieve your anxiety.”

“Thank you,” rejoined Jerry.

“Say, you fellows are in luck,” the clerk informed them when Miss Payson was gone. “You’ve got a combination, in that nurse and doctor, that many a millionaire would be glad to have.”

“Yes?” questioned Ned.

“Surest thing you know,” went on the hotel man. “Dr. Wright is a specialist whom even European physicians are glad to consult.”

“Well, as long as we had to have someone, it might as well be the best,” said Jerry. “Bob’s father can afford it, at any rate.”

“Maybe he won’t charge you so much, seeing he is on his vacation,” suggested Andy.

“He’ll probably charge more,” declared the clerk. “Say, he earns more by one operation than I do in a year.”

“But look how long it took him to study and qualify for the work he does,” suggested Ned. “Is he only a specialist on injuries to the head?”

“That’s what he takes up most,” the clerk informed the boys, “though of course he must know about all kinds of doctoring.”

Jerry and his chums decided to put up at the hotel for the night, since it could not be told how long they would have to remain.

When they had been assigned to their rooms, and had seen to the putting away of the auto in a garage connected with the hotel, they sat in the lobby, waiting for Miss Payson to tell them how Bob was progressing.

They soon received good news. The nurse approached them with a smiling face, and said:

“He’s conscious now.”

“May we see him?” asked impulsive Andy.

“Oh, no, indeed! Not until morning,” was her quick answer. “He needs rest and quiet. He had a bad fall, but not a serious one. He will be lame and sore for a

day or two. I'll look after him."

"Tell him we're here, so he won't worry," suggested Jerry, and the nurse promised.

"Well, boys, it isn't as bad as I thought it would be," said Dr. Wright a little later, when he had laid aside his sick-room habiliments, and joined them in the lobby. "It's only a big cut. Let me see, I don't believe you told me who he is."

"His name is Bob Baker," said Jerry, "and if you will send your bill to his father I know——"

"Tut! Tut!" interrupted the physician with a laugh. "This is no time to talk about bills. I am only too glad that I was able to serve you in the emergency. Any doctor would be. I was getting a bit out of practice, anyhow. I haven't had a patient in nearly a week," and he laughed genially.

Miss Payson remained with Bob all night, though he needed little attention, for he slept heavily. In the morning he was much improved; but Dr. Wright said he must not be moved for at least two days, or until all danger of brain concussion was passed.

"Did I get that lizard?" asked the stout lad when, in due time, he was allowed to sit up in bed and receive his chums.

"We didn't stop to look," replied Jerry, with a laugh.

"Too bad," said Bob slowly. "It might have been just what Professor Snodgrass was looking for. I say, how long before we're going on with the trip?"

"Oh, you'll soon be able to travel," said Miss Payson with a smile. "You boys are the most wonderful creatures in the world. You get knocks that would almost kill a grown person, and you come up smiling every time. I wish I were a boy."

"I wish so, too!" exclaimed Bob with enthusiasm, for he and his chums had taken a great liking to the young and pretty nurse. She told them she had been with Dr. Wright for some time, and, when he found he needed a vacation he insisted on taking her with him, in addition to his sister and a man servant.

"I guess he must be pretty rich," said Bob, when he was alone with his chums. "Dad will have a steep bill on my account."

"Don't worry," advised Ned.

"I'm not," laughed the stout lad. "Dad is able to meet it, and I guess he thinks I'm worth it—at least I hope so."

Jerry was glad *his* mother did not have a heavy doctor's bill to meet, for, in the present state of Mrs. Hopkins's finances, it would have embarrassed her very much.

"But if I can only get back that clay land we'll be all right," said Jerry.

He had spoken casually of the new medicated clay put out by the Universal Plaster Company, and Dr. Wright had heard him.

"That certainly is wonderful stuff!" said the celebrated physician. "I have tried it on some of my cases. It is a wonder no one ever thought before of using it. It works like magic. There is a fortune in it for the promoters."

Jerry did not tell the doctor that the clay came from land which had once been owned by Mrs. Hopkins.

Bob was well enough, on the third day, to be up, and two days later permission was given to him to travel, if too great a speed was not maintained.

"You must go a bit slow with him at first," Dr. Wright informed the boys. "He is out of all danger, however, and I wish you good luck on the rest of your trip. I have heard of Professor Snodgrass. He is a wonderful scientist in his line."

"Are you going to remain here long?" asked Jerry.

"Yes, I shall stay until I get thoroughly rested. It is a quiet place, just what I need, and I don't imagine I shall have any more emergency calls," and the great doctor smiled.

He little realized, nor did the boys, how soon they would have need of his services again.

Bearing in mind the injunction of the physician as to speed, Jerry did not try to make fast time in the auto, once they were under way again. They had said good-bye to Dr. Wright and his friends at the hotel, and again were headed toward the mountains. Two days more of leisurely travel would bring them to Silver River, where they expected to take to the motor boat and in it sail up Lake Mogan to where Professor Snodgrass was camping, and looking for the two-tailed lizard.

Without further incident, or accident, they came, one evening, to the town of Waydell, at the head of the river. It was to this place they had shipped the boat, and they had received, en route, a postal from the man they had engaged to put it in the water for them, the postal stating that the craft had arrived safely, and would be waiting for them.

“Let’s go down and have a look at her,” suggested Jerry, after their supper at the hotel, where they arranged to leave their auto until they came cruising back.

The *Scud* was in the boathouse, taking up considerable of the available space, for the boys’ new craft was a large one.

“Does she run all right?” asked Ned.

“Fine!” said the man in charge of the boathouse. “We had her out for a spin, and she passed everything on the river.”

The boys, who had adjoining rooms in the hotel, were awakened in the middle of the night by a commotion in the street.

“What is it?” asked Ned, for Bob got up to look from the window.

“Sounds like a cry of fire,” was the answer. “It is!” exclaimed Bob, a moment later.

“Is it the hotel?” demanded Ned, leaping out of bed to join his chum Jerry.

“Doesn’t seem so. They’re all running toward the river.”

A moment later they heard someone in the street ask:

“Where’s the blaze?”

“Down at Kroll’s boathouse,” was the reply. “The whole place is going!”

“Kroll’s boathouse!” cried Ned. “Come on, fellows! That’s where the *Scud* is tied up!”

CHAPTER XIX
ON THE WAY

How the motor boys got into their clothes they hardly knew at the time, and afterward there was so much to talk about that they did not go into those details.

Jerry echoed Ned's cry with:

"Lively, fellows! We've got to get down there in jig style, and put her out in the river!"

"We're with you!" exclaimed Bob, whose recent injury was now only in evidence in a small bandage around his head.

"And be careful of yourself!" cautioned Ned.

Out of their rooms, the doors of which opened one into the other, the boys rushed, half dressed. It was no time for ceremony, and the fact that the fire was so near the hotel had aroused most of the guests.

Many of them were running about as though the place itself were on fire, but sufficient notice had been given to quell any possible panic. Those going out did so for the reason that they wanted to view the fire.

That the blaze was a large one was evidenced as soon as the boys reached the street, for they could see the reflection in the sky of the ruddy, leaping flames.

"Some fire!" gasped Ned.

"That's what!" responded Jerry. "Come on!"

Some of the fire apparatus of Waydell was already at the scene, and other engines were on the way. The place boasted of three, and it was soon seen that all would be needed.

"And more, too!" panted a half-dressed man who rushed along with the boys. "I reckon they'd better telephone over to Lafayette, and get what apparatus they can. It's going to be a hummer, all right!"

And, as Jerry, Ned and Bob turned a corner, and sped down a street that led to Silver River they saw that the blaze was in a large lumber yard, adjoining the

house where their boat was stored. The piles of dry boards were rapidly being licked up by the advancing flames. While the boathouse had not yet caught it was evident that it soon would go, for the wind was driving the tongues of fire in its direction.

“It hasn’t caught yet,” panted Bob, as he raced on beside Jerry. “False alarm for us!”

“Not much!” snapped the tall lad. “We’ve got to get busy. It’ll go up in short order.”

“That’s what!” agreed Ned.

So hot was the blaze, and so fiercely was it eating up the lumber that the firemen made no attempt to save the board-piles that had already caught. They were devoting their energies to saving the surrounding property.

There was a big crowd already on hand, and it was growing larger every minute. The boys managed to push their way through, after some hard work, gaining a place where they could see the fire more plainly. And as they gained a vantage point they saw that which made them cry out in alarm.

For the side of the boathouse, nearest the lumber yard, which side had been smoking from the heat, now burst into flame.

“Look!” cried Ned.

“There she goes!” supplemented Bob.

“Come on, fellows! That’s our cue!” yelled Jerry. “We’ve got to get our boat out!”

The crowd, surprised by the sudden turn of the fire, gave way for a moment, and this presented to the boys just the advantage they wanted. There was an opening through which they slipped, running on toward the blazing boat house.

“Hey! Come back here!” called one of the firemen, for fire lines had been stretched.

“Don’t mind him!” advised Jerry. “We know what we’re about!”

And he and his chums ran on, unheeding.

As they reached the doors on the shore side of the structure another fireman, hurrying up with an axe called to them:

“What are you doing here? Get back! You’re not allowed here!”

“We’re going to get out our boat,” said Jerry sharply. “It won’t take a minute to run it out of the boathouse now, and we don’t want to stand by and see it burn.”

“That’s right,” the fireman agreed. “I’ll help you. No use standing on ceremony.”

He gave a glance at the doors. They were locked and there was no time to look for the key.

“Stand aside!” the fighter of the flames called. The boys drew back, and, with a few blows of his axe, the man shattered the fastening of the door.

“There you go!” he cried, as Jerry, Ned and Bob rushed into the structure. The flames without, shining in through the shattered door, made it light enough to see. Their boat, as yet, was unharmed, but already the flames were eating through the thin side of the boathouse which had first caught.

“Lively, boys!” yelled Jerry. “You and Bob cast off the mooring ropes, Ned, and I’ll start the motor. Lucky she’s in shape to run.”

“We’ve got to open those other doors, Jerry!” Ned cried, pointing to those which were on the river side. They were big, double ones, swinging on hinges instead of raising up like a window sash.

“We’ll ram ’em!” Jerry shouted. “We haven’t time to try the axe on ’em!”

In fact, there was no axe to use, for the fireman, as soon as he had smashed open the shore doors for the boys, had set off to join his comrades.

The *Scud* lay in the basin of the boathouse with her bow pointed outward, for she had been backed in after her final trial the evening before. And the basin was sufficiently long to enable her to get headway enough to gain considerable power.

“All ready?” cried Jerry to his chums, as he bent over the motor.

“All ready,” answered Ned. “Let her go.”

Jerry thrust over the switch of the self-starter. There was a whine of the generator, and then came the hum and throb as the motor itself started.

“Here we go, boys! Be ready to duck!” Jerry yelled, as he pulled on the gear handle, and the motor meshed in the cogs of the propeller shaft. There was a boiling and bubbling under the stern, and the powerful craft surged forward.

“Down in front!” Jerry cried, for Ned and Bob were standing in the bow as unconcernedly as though they were on a pleasure jaunt, whereas, in another moment, the boat would ram the locked doors.

The fire had now eaten a large hole in the side of the boathouse, so that the interior was well lighted. The boys could hear the crackle of flames, and the shouts of men mingled with the puffing of the steamers. The whistle of boats approaching to do battle with the flames from the river front, was also heard.

“Low bridge!” cried Jerry, as the bow of the *Scud* rammed the double doors. There was a crash, and a splintering of wood, but the portals held, and did not swing open. The shock sent the boat back in the water, and the boys were almost thrown off their feet.

“Got to try again!” Jerry cried. He had put the propeller out of gear as soon as the boat hit, and now he reversed the screw. The *Scud* drew back to the limit of the water in the boathouse.

Once more she came rushing at the double doors. It must be now or never, for by this time the interior of the structure was beginning to blaze.

“Crash!” went the bow, aimed full at the dividing line between the doors. And this time, weakened as they were by the previous assault, they gave way. The *Scud* shot out into the stream.

THE SCUD SHOT OUT INTO THE STREAM.

“Hurray!” cried Bob. “We’ve saved her!”

“But it was a close call,” observed Jerry.

“And those other boats in there are goners,” remarked Ned. “Too bad!”

“Maybe we can save one or two,” suggested Jerry, for there were a number of fine motor craft in the place.

It was rather dangerous turning back, for the house was now half enveloped in flames. But the *Scud* was under control, and the boys well knew how to handle her. Accordingly her bow was pushed back into the boathouse long enough for the boys to cast off the mooring lines of two other boats, which they shoved out into the river.

“Better pull out! It’s getting too hot here,” panted Ned.

“Guess you’re right,” agreed Jerry. He sent their boat out into the middle of

the stream, and the cool night air was grateful to the boys.

From this vantage point they watched the progress of the flames. The fire would have to be left to burn itself out, for, after the lumber yard and the boathouse were consumed, there was no other material near for the flames to feed on. The firemen could do but little, as the conflagration was beyond control when discovered.

Some time after midnight the fire had nearly burned itself out, and the boys, finding another boathouse, where they could leave their craft, went back to the hotel. They found Andy Rush there waiting for them.

“Where have you fellows been? I was looking all over for you! Big fire!” panted Andy.

“We’ve been saving the boat,” said Jerry coolly. “What happened to you?”

And then it developed that they had forgotten all about Andy in the excitement. His room was farther down the corridor, and they had not remembered to call him.

“Huh!” exclaimed Andy, when explanations were made. “You might have called me!”

“There was excitement enough without you,” spoke Ned drily.

There was little more sleep for our friends that night, though they dozed fitfully. A careful examination in the morning showed no damage to the *Scud*, beyond a little paint scratched from her bow.

“That won’t delay us,” decided Jerry. Their baggage and stores were put aboard, a goodly supply of provisions was laid in, and, steaming up past the burned lumber yard, our friends were soon on their way by boat to locate Professor Snodgrass.

CHAPTER XX
STUCK

“Well, this is something like living!”

“It sure is! The weather man is good to us!”

“This beats the auto!”

Jerry, Ned, Bob and Andy were taking their ease in the *Scud*, which was making her way down Silver River toward Lake Mogan, which lay fifty miles to the south. I say taking their ease, for they were not trying to make speed, but going along at a comfortable rate. They planned to spend two days on the river, and about three days more on the lake, though by urging their motor to higher power they could very much shorten this time. But, even though Jerry was anxious to have a consultation with Professor Snodgrass, he did not feel the need of great haste.

“Well, the auto’s all right when you want it,” commented Jerry, in answer to Bob’s last remark. “It came in very handy the night you were hurt.”

“That’s right,” agreed Bob, touching the place on his head where Dr. Wright had taken the stitches.

“I like an auto!” exclaimed Andy. “It goes so much faster—zip! Away you go! Up hill and down! Never stop! Faster and faster! Get a puncture! Fix her up! Away you go!”

“Yes, and away you’ll go, if you’re not careful!” cried Ned, for the small chap, in his excitement, nearly slipped overboard. He occupied a rather perilous position on the bow, and Ned pulled him into the enclosed cabin.

“Andy likes an auto because it’s easier to hide in,” remarked Bob, with a smile at the stowaway. “And, by the way, Andy, you promised to work your passage, you know. You might holystone the deck for practice.”

“Shall I?” asked Andy of Jerry. The boy was really in earnest in his desire to do whatever tasks were required of him, and he had been a jolly companion since he had been allowed to make the journey.

“No, I guess not this morning,” was Jerry’s answer. “The decks will do very well.”

“Then you can help me get dinner,” suggested Bob.

“Dinner!” cried Ned. “Why, we just had breakfast!”

“Huh! That was an hour ago!” declared Bob. “You’ve got to plan dinner ahead, I guess. If I’m going to be cook I want to know what I’ve got to get ready.”

“Go ahead and be cook,” granted Ned. “Nobody wants your job, Chunky.”

“I’ll help,” volunteered Andy, and the two were soon busy calculating what sort of a meal to serve. It would be the first one aboard the boat that trip.

Their craft had been stored, for the remainder of the night following the fire, at a house farther up the river than the destroyed lumber yard. And now, as they steamed past it, they saw men at work, trying to see if anything had been saved from the flames. Some of the piles were still smouldering, and on these the firemen were playing streams of water.

“That was a lucky escape for us,” Jerry reminded his chums.

“It sure was,” they agreed.

The weather was fine, their boat was running to perfection, there was plenty to eat aboard, and the boys could enjoy their vacation to the full. The only matter that worried Jerry was the financial status of his mother. And that could not be helped—at least just at present.

“But if we can get back that swamp land, and work the yellow clay deposits ourselves,” mused the tall lad, “it will make a big difference. I can’t understand Professor Snodgrass. It doesn’t seem possible that he would go back on us that way, and yet he did. But, as mother says, I’ll give him a ‘show for his white alley.’”

They had decided to do no night traveling, as they were on uncertain waters, and there was no special need for haste. So, as the afternoon waned they began looking for a good river town where they could tie up for the night. They passed through one called Birchville about five o’clock, and learning there was a good restaurant not far from the river they decided to get supper there, rather than cook aboard the *Scud* again. They would, however, sleep in the cabin bunks, as there were a number of comfortable beds arranged.

“And I think I’ll just stop at the post-office and send mother back a card,” Jerry decided. “We’ll probably get some mail from home, at Mason Junction, which we’ll reach in the morning.”

The boys had asked their folks to write to them at this place, and there was a letter for each one of them except Andy when they arrived about ten o’clock the next morning. Andy, coming away in such a hurry, and in such a surreptitious manner, had not been able to give any mail directions.

“But your folks are all right,” said Bob, reading his own letter. “My mother says your mother called on her the other day, Andy, and they spoke of you.”

“That’s good,” said the small chap. “As long as they’re all right I won’t worry.”

“I never knew him to worry anyhow,” observed Jerry, who was deep in his own correspondence. There was not much news from Cresville. Mrs. Hopkins wrote that the men were still taking out large quantities of clay from the swamp.

“But, whatever you do, Jerry,” she penned, “don’t run into trouble on account of the swamp land. It isn’t worth it.”

“Well, I’m not going to give it up without a struggle,” Jerry declared. “If the professor comes over to our side after all we may be able to beat those fellows yet.”

“Well, we’ll be on Lake Mogan to-morrow morning,” announced the tall lad as they tied up, the second night on the river. “We’re at Ralston now, and an hour’s travel after breakfast will bring us to the lake.”

“Is it much of a lake?” Bob wanted to know.

“Pretty fair size. We won’t see much of it this trip, if we head for the professor’s camp.”

“Oh, well, we’ve seen plenty of lakes,” remarked Ned. “We had quite a time on Lost Lake, you remember.”

“We sure did—with that old hermit,” assented Jerry.

The second night aboard the boat passed off quietly enough, though about midnight Andy roused and excitedly whispered:

“Hey, fellows!”

“Huh! What’s matter?” sleepily asked Bob.

“I—I hear something,” murmured Andy.

“Ned snoring, I guess,” answered Bob, turning over to resume his nap.

“No, it’s somebody trying to get aboard the boat!” insisted Andy.

“What’s that?” cried Jerry, suddenly sitting up in his bunk.

“Andy had the nightmare and thought a horse was coming aboard, I guess,” chuckled Bob.

“I did not!” indignantly denied Andy. “But I heard something, all right.”

And, unmistakably there did come, just then, a bumping sound at one side of the craft.

“Keep still,” advised Jerry in a whisper, as he cautiously slipped from his bunk. He went outside, and, a moment later there was a blinding flash, as Jerry switched on the searchlight. Then the tall lad laughed.

“What is it?” asked Bob.

“Nothing but a big muskrat. He was swimming alongside. I guess we must have tied up in front of his nest. Well, we won’t bother you, old fellow,” and Jerry came back to bed.

After breakfast they went on again, and, in about an hour’s time they saw, shining before them, at the mouth of the river, the sparkling waters of Lake Mogan.

“There she is!” cried Bob.

“The last half of our trip!” added Ned.

“And Professor Snodgrass is at the end of this lake—or, at least I hope he is,” said Jerry, looking ahead as he stood at the wheel.

“Speed her up!” cried Andy, who liked swift motion.

“All right,” assented Jerry, as he opened wider the gasoline throttle. The *Scud* shot ahead for a few feet and then the boys were almost thrown from their feet as the craft struck some obstruction under water.

“What’s that?” cried Ned, as Jerry quickly shut off the power.

“Back water!” called Bob.

Jerry had thrown in the reverse gear, but it was too late. The *Scud* was as if anchored at the junction of lake and river. The obstruction which she had struck

held her fast.

CHAPTER XXI
THE DESERTED CAMP

“Guess we ought to have had a chart of this lake,” observed Jerry grimly, as he looked over the side of the boat.

“That’s right,” came from Ned. “What is it, anyhow?”

“Hard to say,” replied Jerry. “We either struck a log, a rock or a sand bank. Guess we’ll have to take a look to tell what it is. We’re fast, at any rate.”

There was no doubt of that. The *Scud* lay motionless on the water, tilted slightly. On either rail stretched a wide expanse of low, marshy ground, in which cat-tails and rushes seemed to thrive. There was no town or settlement near, and only a few scattered boat houses, about which there seemed to be no life. It was a rather lonely neighborhood.

“Are we taking in any water?” asked Ned, looking at the bottom of the cabin floor.

“Not enough to show yet, anyhow,” replied Jerry, for the floor of the cabin was raised some distance above the bottom of the boat, and was carpeted. “We can soon tell, though. Sound the pump, Bob.”

There was a hand pump that went down into the bilge of the boat, and, by means of this, water could be pumped out when the motor was not running. In case of a bad leak, by the turning of a valve the motor itself would force out any water that came in.

“She seems to have more in than usual,” announced Bob, as he managed to get a fairly good stream from the hand pump nozzle.

“Seams opened a bit, I guess,” was Jerry’s opinion. “We didn’t appear to strike hard enough to put a hole in her. Well, let’s see what’s to be done. In the first place, let’s find out how bad a leak it is.”

The boards of the cabin floor could be taken up, and when this was done, not without some labor, no hole could be seen. But the water was undoubtedly coming in faster than it did ordinarily when it seeped in through the stuffing box, or through opened cracks.

“Not so much but what we can keep it down by the motor pump,” remarked Jerry. “Now let’s see if we can pull her off by her own power.”

He started the motor, and with the screw reversed put on full speed. But, though the water foamed and bubbled at the stern, the boat remained immovable.

“No go,” declared Jerry. He tried again and again, but without result.

“Somebody’s got to go overboard,” he announced.

“You mean to lighten ship?” asked Andy, and he seemed a bit apprehensive.

“Not yet,” answered the tall lad, with a smile. “I mean someone will have to dive over and see what sort of a thing we’re stuck on. Then we can tell what to do.”

“I’ll go,” volunteered Ned, who was perhaps the best swimmer of the boys. “I wonder if it’s cold?” and he thrust his hand over the gunwale of the boat into the water.

“Is it?” asked Bob.

“Not very. Well, might as well plunge in at once and have it over with.” Ned donned his bathing suit in the cabin, and, a little later, plunged over the side. He dived deeply, and swam under the *Scud*. Up he came panting for breath, for he was below the surface for some time.

“Well?” asked Jerry, as his chum clung to the rail.

“It’s a tree—a big tree,” Ned reported. “We slid right up on the inclined trunk. I don’t believe we can get off until we all get out of the boat.”

“But how are we going to do that?” asked Andy, for no rowboat was towed behind the *Scud*.

“Oh, we’ll manage somehow,” Jerry replied. “But first we’ll try shifting the weight, and see what that does. How does she lie, Ned?”

“I’ll take another look, and tell you.”

The boy dived again, and, when he came up, he said:

“If you all go in the stern, and on the port side, I think that will raise the bow enough so she’ll slip off. Try it.”

They did, but it was no use. The *Scud* was still held fast.

“We’ll have to get out,” said Jerry.

“Then I’ll swim over to one of those boat houses, and see if I can find a rowboat,” went on Ned. “No use in everybody getting wet.”

Ned was lucky enough not only to find an available boat, but to locate a man who offered to help get the *Scud* off the submerged log. When Bob, Jerry and Andy had been transferred to the dock of the boathouse a plan of procedure was worked out. A rope was attached to the stern of the *Scud* and, the other end being carried to shore, they all pulled on it.

The motor boat, being lightened of her load, rode higher in the water, and when sufficient force had been applied to the rope, she slid off the log into deep water.

“Hurray!” cried Andy. “That’s the stuff! Now we’re all right. Away again!”

“Not quite yet,” warned Jerry. “Those leaks will have to be attended to. Is there a drydock around here?” he asked the man who had helped them.

“About three miles down the lake—yes. Think you can make it?”

“Oh, I guess so, if we don’t have any more hard luck.”

“It’s too bad you ran on that tree,” the man went on. “It must have drifted there lately. I’ll mark it, and then get it out of the channel. Well, good luck to you.”

The boys embarked once more, and started for the boat yard. The water came in rapidly, but by means of the hand and motor pumps it was kept below the level of the cabin floor, and out of the engine compartment. Then, on reaching the place whither the man had directed them, the *Scud* was put on the car of the marine railway, and hauled out to have her seams caulked.

This would take two days, and she would need a coat of paint below the water line, so the boys found themselves with unexpected time on their hands.

They made it pass as best they could, in the small town where they had been forced to lie over. Fortunately the place was a sort of summer resort, and as the season was at its height the boys did not lack for such amusements as moving picture shows and other like attractions. But they were glad when they could resume their trip down the lake.

As Jerry had said, it was a large body of water, and around its shores were many resorts where cottagers and hotel guests spent the summer months. The lake, too, was dotted with pleasure craft of many sort, but the boys did not stop to enjoy themselves as they might have done.

“We can do that on the trip back, if we want to,” said Jerry, little realizing how soon they would come back that way again, and on what an errand.

On they sped, now and then blowing their whistle three times, in response to the salute of some lake craft, the skipper of which recognized a strange boat.

“That looks like a good place to eat,” observed Bob, as they passed a large hotel, set in the midst of beautiful gardens, that came down to the water’s edge. “A fine place, all right!”

“I guess the *Scud’s* galley will do for the present,” rejoined Jerry. “I want to see Professor Snodgrass as soon as I can, and we’ve been longer on this trip than I calculated.”

“Speed her up!” advised Ned.

“That’s what I’m doing,” was the reply.

Hurdtown, where the professor had said he would stay, was a small settlement, about a mile from the northerly end of Lake Mogan. It was in a lonely neighborhood, and it could be reached only by boat.

There were no railroads near it, and no towns of any size. It was a hunting district, but one not very well known and, in consequence, not thickly settled.

Inquiries made by the boys before reaching the place where they expected to locate Professor Snodgrass brought forth little or no information concerning him. Their first queries resulted in nothing. No one seemed to know anything about a little bald-headed man, with a passion for bugs. But, as they sent their boat into the swampy end of the lake they saw, on the shore, a single cabin, that looked as if it might be the home of a hermit.

An old man came to the door of the shack and, in answer to their hail, gave them their first reliable information.

“Yep, there’s a crazy feller up there in the mountains,” the hermit said, nodding in the direction the boys were taking.

“A crazy man?” repeated Jerry.

“Well, suthin’s the matter of him. He picks up bugs and puts ’em in a box. He says they’re valuable. If that ain’t crazy I’d like to know what is?” he asked, as if there were no disputing his question.

Further talk with the man disclosed that he had taken Professor Snodgrass and his belongings up to a sort of hunting cabin, which the little scientist was to

make his headquarters.

“That’s the place for us, then,” announced Jerry.

“Be you friends of his?” the hermit wanted to know.

“Yes,” answered Jerry.

“Humph! Queer he didn’t tell me he had company comin’,” said the man, as if he had been intentionally slighted.

“Well, he doesn’t expect us,” said Jerry.

“Oh, that’s all right then,” and the hermit seemed relieved.

“Yep,” he went on, “folks most generally has me take ’em up into the mountains when they come here. I’m th’ only guide around here. Think you fellers can find your way?”

“Oh, I guess so, thank you,” replied Jerry. “You say the trail is a straight one?”

“Fairly so, fairly. Keep on straight and you’ll come to th’ cabin. There’s only one. You can’t mistake it.”

The boys departed, thanking their informant. They sent the boat to the extreme end of the lake, mooring it in a little bay where it would be safe. Then, having reached the water end of their journey, they set off into the woods for the last stage.

It was not easy traveling, for the trail was uphill and rough, but they kept on, and finally emerged into a little clearing which held a substantially built log cabin.

“Here’s the place!” cried Ned.

“Yes, and there are some of the professor’s nets!” exclaimed Bob, pointing to some with long handles leaning against the side of the log house.

“Hello, Professor Snodgrass!” shouted Jerry. The echoes alone answered him. The boys, with a vague feeling of alarm, pressed forward. There was no sign of their friend and as they looked into the cabin they did not see him.

On a table were the remains of a meal, as though it had been hastily abandoned, and the condition of the food indicated that it had been there several hours, if not days. The bread was hard and dry, and many flies swarmed over the food.

“Looks as though he’d gone,” said Bob, in a low voice.

“It does look like a deserted camp,” agreed Jerry. “And yet, there are his nets.”

CHAPTER XXII
SEARCHING

Silently the boys stood in the deserted cabin. For a moment it seemed as though they had come to the end of the trail—that they were up against a stone wall, and could go no farther. They had counted so much on meeting their old friend that not to find him was something of a shock. Jerry was, perhaps, the most disappointed of all.

True, he harbored a slight feeling of resentment against the scientist for the manner in which he had acted in regard to the yellow clay—or, rather, the manner in which Jerry feared his friend might have acted.

But, the more Jerry thought it over, the more convinced he was that his mother was right, and that the professor had not been, and never could be, guilty of any mean or underhand act.

So, in a measure, Jerry was prepared to forgive Dr. Snodgrass, though, as a matter of fact, there could be no forgiveness when there had been no wrong done, and no accusation made.

“Well, he isn’t around, that’s sure,” remarked Bob, as he went outside, in the vain hope that he might see the professor coming along the trail. But there was only the whispering of the wind in the trees, and the tinkle of some distant waterfall.

“He’s probably off after some bugs,” observed Ned. “Of course we couldn’t expect to find him here. I’ll wager he’s only in long enough to get a meal, and then he hikes off again after that two-tailed lizard, a pink frog, or something equally absurd. He’s probably deep in the wilderness somewhere.”

“Then I guess the only thing for us to do is to wait here until he comes back,” suggested Jerry. “There looks to be room enough for all of us here, and we brought plenty of grub along.”

“We sure did!” chuckled Bob. He had seen to that.

“Maybe the professor’s hurt,” ventured Andy.

“What makes you say that?” asked Ned, quickly.

“Oh, I don’t know. You see, it’s so easy to get hurt, or lost in the woods—a bear might attack him, he might be bitten by a snake, his gun might go off accidentally——”

Andy was working himself up to quite a pitch of excitement.

“Here! You stow that kind of talk!” interrupted Jerry. “The professor never carries a gun—he’s as harmless a hunter as a fellow with a camera. Besides, there aren’t any bears in these woods now.”

“Well, something must have happened,” insisted Andy.

“Oh, get out, you old calamity howler!” laughed Ned. “Now, fellows, we’re here, what’s to be done?”

They looked about them, “sizing up the situation.” They were in the midst of a clearing, with big trees surrounding it. The “log hut” was of very solid construction—a veritable hunting lodge in the wilderness. There were several rooms in it, a well-equipped kitchen, a living room and bedrooms. Of course there were no electric lights nor gas, for the place was far from a settlement, but there were many comforts and conveniences.

In fact, it was such a place as a hunting party, or even a gathering of men and women, could live in and enjoy for a considerable time.

“I wonder how the professor stumbled on this shack?” observed Bob, when they had looked about, and taken drinks from a nearby spring, which bubbled over with cold, clear, sparkling water.

“Oh, he probably heard someone say there was a two-tailed lizard spending his vacation up here, and he put off for it hot-foot,” ventured Jerry, little knowing how near he had guessed the truth.

“Well, it’s a good place,” declared Bob. “We can bring up our things from the boat and be as ‘snug as a bug in a rug.’ We don’t want to take the professor’s grub.”

“There’s plenty of stuff, though,” said Ned, who had been to the kitchen pantry. And it did seem as though the lodge was kept stocked in preparation for visitors at any time.

“The professor never brought all this,” remarked Bob.

“No, it must have been here when he came,” agreed Jerry.

“He’d start off with a tooth brush and a collar button, after he made sure he

had his nets and specimen boxes," added Bob. "Well, come on, let's get busy and ____"

"Eat!" interrupted Jerry, laughing.

"Score one," went on Bob. "But I'm going to watch you fellows stow away the grub. Come on, Andy, we'll rustle it up from the boat."

They found, on inspection, that there were enough blankets on the bunks so that they did not have to carry any of their own up from the boat. In the matter of food, too, they decided to leave part of their stock aboard the *Scud*, and use part of what was at the cabin.

"We can pay whoever it belongs to, or make some dicker with Professor Snodgrass," said Jerry.

A little later they were sitting down to a comfortable meal in the kitchen of the cabin. They had cleared away the remains of food left by the professor when he started out in a hurry on one of his bug-hunting expeditions. The place was made tidy, for that habit was now second nature with the boys, and after the meal they sat about to further discuss the situation.

"Well, we're here, at all events," remarked Jerry, looking at his chums. "And now what shall we do?"

"Have to wait for the professor; that's all I can see to do," answered Ned. "We can't learn anything, or do anything, until we see him."

"And that won't be until night," observed Bob. "Might as well make ourselves comfortable until then. I'm going to try to catch some fish for supper."

"I'll go with you," volunteered Andy, and the two set off for the head of the lake, where they had left the motor boat.

Ned and Jerry, with no particular object in view, wandered about the camp. It was true nothing could be done or learned until Dr. Snodgrass returned, and the boys, knowing his eagerness when he was searching for specimens, realized he would not come back until called by darkness. Even the pangs of hunger were often ignored by the little scientist.

"There's no use trying to follow the trail, I suppose," observed Ned, after a time, which they had occupied by looking about. They saw where the professor had left his spare nets, and where he had carefully put away his filled specimen boxes. "That is," went on Jerry's chum, "until there is some object in going after him."

“What do you mean?” asked Jerry, impressed by some note in Ned’s voice. “Are you thinking of that stuff Andy talked?”

“Oh, well, you know accidents will happen,” replied Ned, a bit uneasily. He tried to laugh, but it was not much of a success.

“Huh! You’ve got ’em too!” said Jerry. “This solitary place must be getting on your nerves.”

“It is lonesome enough for that,” admitted Ned, involuntarily looking behind him, into the deep and silent woods.

Certainly the camp was not lively, but the boys were used to lonesome places.

“Here come the boys,” remarked Jerry a little later, as a crashing was heard in the underbrush along the trail.

“Maybe it’s the professor,” suggested Ned, hopefully.

“He wouldn’t make as much racket as that,” objected Jerry. “He’d be too afraid of scaring off the two-tailed lizard.”

And Jerry’s prediction was right—it was Bob and Andy returning with a good catch of fish—perch and sunnies.

“Did you see anything of the professor?” asked Ned.

“No. Did you expect us to?” returned Bob, in some surprise.

“Oh, no. I only thought you might,” was the evasive reply.

They sat about after supper, listening to the chirp of the crickets, and a few early katydids. The darkness was slowly falling and the woods were becoming more gloomy and dismal. Now and then, off in the forest, there was a crashing sound, as some dead limb of a tree fell, or a decayed monarch of the forest crashed to the ground, unable longer to repel the inroads of time.

“Guess I’ll light up,” spoke Jerry, when they could no longer see each other’s faces as they sat on a bench in front of the cabin.

“Yes, the professor will be able to see where his camp is,” said Ned. “Won’t he be surprised when he finds us here, though?”

“Rather!” agreed Bob.

They waited, more and more impatiently as the hours passed. They went inside, for the mosquitoes and gnats made life miserable outside, especially after the lanterns were aglow.

Nine o’clock came, and it seemed like midnight.

“He won’t come now,” observed Bob, yawning sleepily. “He may stay out all night.”

“That’s right, he may,” agreed Jerry. “It wouldn’t be the first time. That two-tailed lizard may only come out after dark, and the professor may have a portable camping outfit with him. He knows how to take care of himself, at any rate.”

“Then let’s turn in,” suggested Ned. “We can leave a light burning, and we’ll hear him when he comes in.”

They were all tired and sleepy, and they realized that no good could come of remaining up. So they turned in, to sleep fitfully at first, and then with the heaviness and abandon of healthy boyhood.

“Did he come?” was Bob’s first question on awakening in the morning. Jerry was up, making coffee.

“No,” was the quiet answer.

“Then we’d better hit the trail after him,” suggested Ned, as he, too, roused.

“I think so myself,” replied Jerry. “We’ll try to find him.”

And, after breakfast, they took up the search for the missing professor.

CHAPTER XXIII
IN THE GULCH

“Now, boys,” began Jerry Hopkins, who seemed to take the leadership in this crisis, “we’ve got to map out a plan of work for ourselves. It won’t do to go at this thing haphazard, or hit and miss. We’ve got to have a system.”

“That’s right, old man!” exclaimed Ned. “Go on, map it out, and we’ll be with you.”

“Why don’t we yell—fire guns—build a signal fire—climb a tall tree—find the professor that way!” cried Andy Rush, with his usual impetuosity.

“That’s just what we don’t want to do,” replied Jerry, calmly, for Andy was hurrying about in a manner that befitted his name, darting here and there toward several paths that led into the woods.

“Don’t we want to find him?” asked the small chap, wonderingly.

“Of course, but that’s not the way to go about it,” advised Jerry. “We’ve got to find the right trail, and that isn’t going to be so easy when there are several he might have taken.”

“Let’s follow the one that shows the freshest footprints, then,” suggested Bob.

“That isn’t easy to determine, either,” Jerry said. “We’ve tramped about here so much that we’ve covered up any marks that might have helped us.”

“Then what can we do?” Ned wanted to know.

“Well,” began Jerry slowly, “we’ll have to make a start on each of these trails, of course. Then when we find one doesn’t pan out we’ll try another.

“My notion,” he went on, “is that the professor used each and every one of these woodland paths. But he only used one the last time, and on that there will be no return marks. Now the thing for us to do is to find that last trail, and the only way we can do that is to pick out the one with the freshest marks—that is, the one that shows the freshest marks after we have gone beyond the point where we, ourselves, tramped.”

“That’s the idea!” cried Ned. “Come on!”

Jerry’s plan was the only feasible one. They must explore each woodland trail until they came on the one which showed it had last been used by the professor. Then they could follow it until they either found him, or found where the trail ended.

Fortunately the boys were experienced woodsmen. They were not expert guides, but they knew enough to follow a trail, and also to blaze one for themselves. They had had experience in this.

“Now,” resumed Jerry, after they had settled this point, “we must pack along some grub, for it won’t do to have to come back to the cabin at noon for something to eat. That would waste too much time.”

“I’ll look after the grub,” offered Bob.

“I thought you would, Chunky,” said Jerry, with a laugh. “And the rest of us will take what things we need.”

“Shall we stay out all night?” asked Andy, a bit apprehensively. He was not used, as were the others, to roughing it.

“No, I don’t think that would be wise,” replied Jerry. “We will divide up the time so that we can use half of the daylight hours in going in a direction away from the cabin, and the other half in returning. We’ll take a compass, so as not to get lost, and we’ll come back by a different route than the one we use going out. That will cover two trails, or paths, every day, and——”

“How many days do you think we’re going to spend on this search?” asked Ned, with an anxious look at Jerry.

“There’s no telling,” and Jerry’s voice took on a solemn tone that made his chums look at him in wonder.

“Maybe the professor will come back while we’re out looking for him,” suggested Bob, who was busy putting up the lunch.

“That’s right—he may,” agreed Jerry, “and to let him know that we are here, and will be back, we’ll leave a note for him that will explain matters.”

“He’ll wonder why we came up here after him,” remarked Ned.

“Well, we won’t explain that—in the note,” returned Jerry. “There will be time enough when we see him.”

They were soon ready to start. The cabin had not been locked when they reached it, and they did not now fasten the door. The note was left in plain sight

on the dining table.

They began at the trail farthest to the left of the cabin, intending to work to the right. There were several of these narrow paths leading into the woods, all of them in front of the cabin, except one, and that was at the back, going off into the woods beyond the spring. They decided to leave that until the last.

“Forward, march!” cried Jerry, as they set off. He took careful note of their direction by the compass and was sure they could find the cabin again.

I shall not weary you with an account of their exploration of all those trails. Suffice it to say that they soon exhausted the possibilities of the first three. Before noon they had demonstrated that the professor could have used none of them, save for a short distance, unless he possessed an airship, which they hardly believed possible, though more than once he had gone in theirs after bugs and other specimens.

But the first three trails, after straggling into the wilderness for a mile or so, became so overgrown with forest growth that it was evident they had not been used in a year or more. There was no use going along them.

The fourth was more promising, and showed plainly that the professor, or some one, had passed along it recently. The boys were quite sure it was Dr. Snodgrass, for the footprints showed the nail pattern of the shoes worn by the scientist. He was very particular about his tramping shoes, and always had them made to order.

“Though of course someone else might have his shoes made at the same place, and, naturally, the shoemaker would use the hob-nails in the same way,” observed Ned. “But I believe this was where the professor walked.”

The others were sure also, but the certainty did them little good, for they found where the person, whoever he was, had doubled back on his own trail.

“We’ll have to give this up,” said Jerry, “but it is getting more hopeful. Try the next one.”

This resulted in nothing. The trail was a blind one. But the one after that, which they started out on shortly after eating their lunch, at once raised new hope in their hearts. There were unmistakable signs that it had been traveled recently, and the peculiar marks of the hob-nailed shoes were very plain.

“We’ll find him!” cried Bob, enthusiastically.

But they were not destined to have matters so easy as they ventured to hope.

The signs became more and more pronounced as they advanced, and there was no back-track.

“He surely must have gotten on the trail of the two-tailed lizard this time,” exulted Ned. “Now we’ll find him, and we’ll probably see him camping out under a hut of boughs, studying the habits of the lizard, so he can write a book about it.”

“Maybe,” agreed Jerry.

They tramped on, and so eager and enthusiastic did they become that they failed to note the passage of time. It grew dark almost before they realized it, and Jerry, coming to a halt in a dense glade, where the shadows were long and gloomy, said:

“Hold on, fellows, we can’t keep this up.”

“Why not?” asked Andy.

“Because we’ll have to spend the night in the woods if we do. We can’t get back before nightfall, as it is, and this trail goes on, as you can see.”

Indeed the marks of the hob-nailed shoes were still plainly to be seen in the soft ground.

“Just a little farther,” pleaded Bob, and Jerry gave in, against his better judgment.

But finally the tall leader called a halt.

“Fellows, we really must go back,” he said. “We can take up this trail the first thing in the morning, and then we can come prepared for a night in the woods, if need be. But we must go back now.”

“But what about the professor?” asked Ned.

“I’m afraid we can do nothing for him. He may be all right, and he may not. He may be in need of help, but we can help him best by going back now, and starting out again. It will soon be so dark that we can’t see the trail, anyhow.”

Reluctantly they turned back. Jerry had spoken truly. They could not see the trail, and, in spite of blaze marks, and the compass, they were soon uncertain of their locality. They tried to go by the stars, and to follow the path by the light of an electric flashlight they carried, but several times they got off the trail. Finally Jerry said:

“Fellows, we’re only getting worse instead of better. We’ve got to stay here all night.”

“All night—without a tent!” faltered Andy.

“Why, that’s nothing,” laughed Jerry. “It’s warm, and we’ve often done it; haven’t we, fellows?”

“Sure,” echoed Ned and Bob, and the latter added:

“I wish we’d saved more grub.”

“Oh, well, it won’t be the first time we’ve gone hungry,” consoled Jerry, though his own stomach felt gnawing pangs.

They made the best of an unpleasant situation. Some evergreen boughs were cut, and a rude sort of shelter made. Under this they crawled, to pass the long hours of darkness. It was no fun waiting thus for morning to come, but the boys did not always look for fun.

They were astir with the first streak of dawn, and then they saw how needless had been their suffering.

For they had spent the night in the open, not half a mile from the comfortable cabin. Only they were not familiar enough with the woods to recognize how near “home” they were.

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!” exclaimed Ned, when this fact was borne in to them.

“No use crying over spilled milk,” consoled Jerry. “Let’s have breakfast and then we’ll start out again.”

And never had a breakfast tasted so delicious.

They made fast time back along the trail again, carrying with them enough food to last for some time, though they expected to be back in the cabin by night. They soon reached and passed the point where they had turned back before, and hurried on, alert for what they might find.

Suddenly Jerry, who was in the lead, uttered a cry.

“Have you found him?” called Ned, pressing forward.

“No, but look here!”

They all hastened to where Jerry stood on the brink of what they saw was a deep gulch. There, on the edge, were the unmistakable signs of someone having slipped over. The earth and grass was torn, as though the person had vainly tried

to prevent a fall.

“Is it—is he——” faltered Andy.

“Look,” answered Jerry. And, as they gazed over the brink, they saw, lying in a huddled heap at the bottom of the gulch, the figure of a man.

CHAPTER XXIV
DISCLOSURES

“Is it—is it the professor?” gasped Andy, in a low voice.

“I’m almost sure it is,” replied Jerry, “though of course I may be mistaken. But we must find out at once. And, whoever it is will be in need of help. Someone must go down there.”

“I’ll go!” offered Ned. He was lighter than Jerry, and more lively on his feet than Bob. In fact, Bob’s accident had made him a bit timid. Andy could hardly be trusted to go down into the deep gully, so Ned was really the only available person.

“I’ll go,” he said again. “What’ll I do, Jerry?”

“Find out who it is—and if—if he is living,” replied the tall lad slowly. “Then we’ll have to plan some way of getting him up here.”

Ned laid aside the pack he had been carrying, and took off his coat. He wanted to be unhampered.

At the point where the trail ended, the gully’s sides were steep. As a matter of fact, as the boys learned later, the correct trail really swung aside from the gully, at that point, and went down into it at a place farther distant. But whoever had fallen over the precipice had evidently followed a false trail, and so, unexpectedly, had toppled over, perhaps in the darkness.

“Can you get down, Ned?” asked Jerry.

“Oh, I fancy I can manage it,” was the answer.

Ned had quickly located a place where the descent was easier than where the unfortunate man had fallen, and, a little later, the lad was scrambling down the slope toward the bottom.

Now and then, on the way down, he paused to pick out a less dangerous path, and then he kept on. Dirt and stones, dislodged by his progress, rattled toward the bottom. But that silent, huddled-up figure never moved, nor showed signs of life. The boys on the brink felt an ominous chill at their hearts.

Ned reached the bottom of the gully. Pausing only an instant to get his breath, he hurried toward the prostrate figure of the man, for he had come down some distance beyond him.

“Is it the professor?” Jerry hailed his chum from the height.

“Yes,” floated up the answer, faintly.

It needed but a glance to determine the identity.

“Is he—alive?” was the next question.

To Ned it did not seem so, for the figure was very still. Overcoming a natural hesitancy, Ned placed his hand over the professor’s heart. He detected a slight beat, so faint as to be almost imperceptible.

“Yes—he’s alive—just about,” Ned called up, after a moment.

“YES—HE’S ALIVE—JUST ABOUT,” NED CALLED UP.

“Badly hurt?” asked Jerry, next.

“Hard to say,” was Ned’s reply. “We’ve got to get him up, anyhow.”

“Of course,” Jerry shouted back. And then, with him, the problem became one of deciding how best to aid the luckless professor.

“I’m coming down, Ned,” Jerry called, a little later. Clearly it was a problem for more than one head to solve.

“You fellows go back to the cabin, and get some ropes and one of the cot beds,” Jerry directed Bob and Andy. “You’ll find the rope in the corner of the living room. Bring all there is. We’ll have to haul him up. We can’t carry him up this slope.”

Jerry had already sketched out, in his mind, a plan of rescue.

“Lively now!” he called to Bob and Andy, as they set off along the back trail.

Then Jerry joined Ned at the bottom of the gulch. It was no easy task, and once Jerry slipped and almost plunged down the steep slope, but saved himself by clutching at some bushes.

Together, as gently as they could, Ned and Jerry straightened out the form of the professor. He had fallen in a heap, but no limbs appeared to be broken. There was a cut on his head, and this had bled considerably, but the blood had coagulated. That seemed to be the most serious injury, and the one that had made

the scientist unconscious.

It appeared that he had not been rendered senseless at once, for it was evident that he had both eaten and drunk after falling down, since his water flask lay empty beside him, and there was an empty basket of food, with crumbs scattered about, showing that he had been able to help himself after receiving his hurts.

“How we going to get him up?” asked Ned.

“Put him on a cot, tie ropes to each end, and hoist him up—that’s the only way I see,” announced Jerry.

“I guess you’re right. He must have had a bad fall.”

“Yes,” agreed the tall lad. “He was probably chasing after some bug, or butterfly, and came to the edge of the cliff before he realized it. I wonder what his chances are?”

It seemed many hours to Ned and Jerry, down there with the unconscious form of the professor, waiting for the return of Bob and Andy. Yet it really was not long, for the two boys made fast time. Meanwhile the professor had been made as comfortable as possible. His specimen boxes were beside him.

“There they are!” cried Ned, looking up to the top of the cliff. Bob and Andy were there.

“Lower the cot,” Jerry directed them, and when it came on the end of a long rope, the legs were left folded under it, and the professor was placed on it, as on a stretcher, being covered with blankets the boys had brought from the cabin.

“Now to see if we can haul him up,” suggested Jerry, as he attached short ropes, for slings, at either end of the improvised stretcher.

“They can’t do it alone,” said Ned, motioning to Bob and Andy.

“No, we’ll have to go up and help them pull,” agreed Jerry. It was hard work—harder than the boys had ever before attempted—or so they thought, at least.

It was finally done, however, and there he lay, stretched out on the cot.

“And now for camp!” cried Jerry. “Carry him as gently as possible.”

It was no easy matter to force their way along the trail, carrying the form of the scientist, but the boys managed it. It seemed as though their arms would be pulled out before they got to the cabin, but they did not give up, and finally they reached the lonely camp.

“We must get him into a bunk,” Jerry decided.

They did so, removing most of his clothes. Then Jerry bathed the wound on the head. As the blood was washed away the lad saw that it was no ordinary cut.

“I’m afraid his skull is fractured,” said Jerry. “We’ll need the best doctor we can get.”

“Then we’d better take the boat, and ask that old hermit where one can be found,” suggested Ned. “Andy and I will go.”

“I guess that will be a good idea,” rejoined Jerry.

While the two were getting ready to set off, Jerry and Bob managed to get a little cold water between the professor’s lips. This appeared to have its effect, for the eyelids were lifted from the glassy orbs. And then a hoarse voice muttered:

“The papers—letters—a mistake—I have them. The yellow clay—I didn’t know—so valuable—sorry—Jerry—your mother—the papers—I can prove—they shouldn’t have the land—a fraud—I can give evidence—soon as—two-tailed lizard—I must have it—boys must think me—Oh—Oh!” and his voice ended in a shriek.

Jerry and his chums looked with startled eyes at one another. What did this disclosure mean?

CHAPTER XXV
OFF FOR HELP

Professor Snodgrass lay quiet after his outburst. He fell back on the cot, from which he had raised himself, and his relaxed features took on a paler hue.

“Some more of that ammonia!” cried Jerry, for they had been trying to rouse the scientist by doses of that valuable stimulant. A little was forced between his lips, but it availed only for a moment, and then he sank back into a coma.

“Something must be done!” declared Bob.

“Yes, and pretty soon, too,” added Ned. He looked at Jerry for a solution of the problem.

“We’ll have to go for help,” responded the tall lad. “We can’t possibly treat him ourselves. There must be a doctor somewhere around.”

“If we only had Dr. Wright!” sighed Bob.

“Well, we haven’t got him, and can’t get him,” observed Jerry. “We’ll have to do the best we can. Now, then, let’s consider what it is.”

“I wonder what he meant by all that talk?” ventured Andy. “It sure did sound mighty queer.”

“We won’t consider that now,” spoke Jerry. “I have an idea it had something to do with those men who are digging the yellow clay, but I can’t be sure. Our first care must be to get the professor attended to, and we can ask him questions later—if he gets better,” Jerry added, dubiously.

There had come into his mind not one thought that the little scientist might have been disloyal to him and his mother. Jerry was big hearted, and big minded, enough not to consider that for a moment.

True, Dr. Snodgrass might have played into the hands of the enemy, knowingly or unknowingly; but, for all that, he was now in danger, and Jerry was not the lad to hold back.

“He spoke of letters—papers,” said Ned, vaguely.

“Yes. Maybe they’re in there,” returned Jerry, nodding toward the specimen boxes and leather cases, which had been near the professor when they picked him up after his fall over the cliff. “We won’t disturb them, though, until we find out how this is going to end,” and he looked at the unconscious form.

“Well, let’s do something,” suggested Ned.

“Sure,” assented Bob. “But what?”

“The doctor—first of all,” exclaimed Jerry. “Ned, do you think you and Andy could make the trip in the boat down to where that old hermit lived? He may know where we can find a local physician.”

“Of course we can go!” cried Ned.

“Then you’d better start. I don’t know just what sort of treatment may be needed, but it seems as though it will mean an operation. And the sooner it’s done, the better chance Professor Snodgrass will have.”

“We’re off!” cried Ned. “Come on, Andy.”

Be it said to the credit of the small chap that he kept his head admirably in this emergency. He was neither excited, nor did he make his chums nervous by his rapid-fire talk, as he sometimes did.

While Ned and Andy were on their way to the moored motor boat to get help, Jerry and Bob made Professor Snodgrass as comfortable as possible. There was little they could do, however, that they had not already done. Or, rather, they were afraid of moving or disturbing him too much, for fear of making his injuries worse.

The afflicted man moaned once or twice, and moved uneasily on the cot bed. Now and then he mumbled something; but what it was neither Jerry nor Bob could distinguish. Once, however, Jerry heard the professor say:

“I can prove it! I’ll not let them keep the land! It was a fraud on me and on them!”

“What does he mean?” asked Bob, wonderingly.

“Hush!” cautioned Jerry. “He may hear you. I fancy he is talking about that clay deposit in our swamp.”

“And maybe he knows something that will let your mother get the land back,” suggested the stout lad.

“Maybe,” assented Jerry. But he had little hope.

Meanwhile Ned and Andy were on their way. There were still several hours of daylight left, and they must make the most of them. The need of a doctor was imperative.

The boat was soon chugging its way down the lake to where the old hermit, who once before had directed the boys, lived in his lonely cabin. He was fishing from a leaky old boat, not far from shore, when the boys puffed up in their craft.

“Easy! Easy!” called the old man, in fretful tones. “You’ll scare all the fish, boys.”

“Can’t help it! We’re sorry!” exclaimed Ned. “But a friend of ours is hurt. Is there any doctor around here?”

“Ha! Someone hurt? That’s too bad! And you need a doctor?” asked the old man, winding in his line.

“Do you know of anyone?” demanded Ned, a bit impatiently.

“Why, yes—that is, Dr. Brown has an office in Tuckerton. He’s a young chap, but pretty good, they say.”

“And where is Tuckerton?” asked Ned.

“About ten miles down the lake.”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Andy. “That’s a good way to go for a doctor.”

“Huh! Folks up here don’t mind going twice that far,” retorted the hermit. “But hold on! Maybe you can do better than that. Dr. Brown has a patient up here—Old Betsy Blain—about a mile back in the woods,” and he indicated a point back of his log cabin. “The doctor comes to see her twice a week,” the man went on, “and to-day is one of the times. If you hustle over there you may catch him.”

“It’s worth trying, anyhow!” exclaimed Ned. “How can we find the place?”

“There’s a plain trail, back of my shack,” the hermit went on. “You can’t miss it. Betsy’s cabin is the first one you come to. They can tell you there whether the doctor has called to-day or not. If he has, and is gone, you’ll have to go on to his office, I expect.”

“Come on, Andy!” called Ned. “It’s worth a try.”

They tied the motor boat at the small dock near the hermit’s shack, and set off

at a fast pace through the woods. As the old man, who said his name was Peter Wantage, had indicated, the trail was a very plain one, and Ned and Andy soon arrived at the cabin in question. In front they saw a horse and carriage tied, and Ned exclaimed:

“The doctor, I’ll wager! We’re in luck.”

“Looks so,” agreed Andy.

And so it proved. An old woman, sitting in front of the cabin, nodded at the boys as they walked up the dirt path. A yellow dog came out, barking at them, but subsided, and wagged his tail in friendly fashion, at a rebuke from the old woman.

“Is the doctor here?” asked Ned.

“Jest goin’,” was the answer, and a little later a tall, slim gentleman, with a professional air about him, came out. He seemed a bit surprised at seeing the boys, for, clearly, they were not of the class of dwellers in that vicinity.

“Are you looking for me?” asked Dr. Brown, for it was he.

“Yes!” exclaimed Ned eagerly, and in a few words he explained what had happened.

“I’ll go with you at once, of course,” said the doctor, gravely. He turned to his horse.

“We can take you there much quicker in the motor boat,” declared Ned. “You can leave your horse here, or at Mr. Wantage’s place, and we’ll bring you back there.”

“Very good,” assented Dr. Brown. “But I fancy I had better leave Prince here. It isn’t a very good road in to Wantage’s place. I’ll leave him here.”

Nodding good-bye to the old woman the doctor set off after Ned and Andy. The walk back to where they had left the motor boat did not take long, and it seemed very short, for the physician, who carried his black bag, asked all sort of questions concerning the accident to Professor Snodgrass. Of course Ned and Andy could tell him little as to the nature of the injury.

To Jerry and Bob, waiting in the lonely cabin, beside the injured man, the absence of Ned and Andy seemed a long one. But really they made very good time, and bringing the doctor back with them was a distinct advantage.

Dr. Brown walked in and stood over the slowly-breathing professor. He

looked at him critically, lifted up the lids of the closed eyes, and then examined the hurt on the head. Then he straightened up with a long breath.

“Well?” asked Jerry anxiously.

“An operation is needed,” said Dr. Brown slowly. “And of such a delicate nature that I dare not perform it. I have not had experience enough. It needs a skilled hand to do what is needed to save his life. I dare not attempt it!”

CHAPTER XXVI
A RACE FOR A LIFE

Jerry and his chums looked blankly at one another. They had had very little experience in illness and accidents, though, often enough, they had been in tight places, and had been hurt. But they were unacquainted with the necessity for delicate surgical operations, and ignorant of their requirements. In a general way they thought that a doctor was all that was needed, and that one doctor was about as good as, or equal to, another. Now they could scarcely understand why Dr. Brown himself could not do what was necessary.

“You say he needs an operation?” questioned Jerry.

“Yes, a delicate one, if his life is to be saved, and it must be performed quickly.”

“Then why can’t you do it?” asked impulsive Bob.

“Because I have not the necessary skill. I can perform some operations, it is true, and I have done so. In fact, if we were outside of the pale of civilization, I would attempt this one. But when other and more experienced surgeons can be obtained, I would be guilty of unprofessional conduct did I not advise you to seek some other practitioner. I will do what I can, of course, until he comes, but the operating surgeon must be someone else.” The doctor spoke decidedly. Clearly he was carefully considering the matter.

“What sort of an operation is it?” asked Jerry.

“It is on the head—there is some sort of a fracture—a bone is pressing on the brain,” was the answer. “Delicate instruments which I have not, and a skillful assistant and nurse, are needed to perform the operation; especially up here in the wilderness where there are none of the conveniences of a hospital.”

“Then we’ll have to go for another doctor,” spoke Ned.

“In my opinion, yes. And only one surgeon in this country is capable of successfully performing that operation.”

“Who is he?” asked Ned, as the country physician paused.

“He is Dr. Wallace Wright of New York, and it is doubtful if he could be induced to come away up here, even if he could be brought here in time. He is a celebrated surgeon—a high-priced one—and in great demand. I doubt if you could get him.”

At the mention of Dr. Wright’s name the boys looked at one another. Unconsciously Bob put his hand to his head, which the great surgeon had sewed up. Something in the faces of the boys made Dr. Brown ask:

“Have you heard of Dr. Wright?”

“He recently treated me,” added Bob.

“Indeed. Then you must have made a remarkable recovery,” Dr. Brown said. “For Dr. Wright seldom operates unless the case is a serious one, and you do not look as though you had recently been under his hands.”

“It was only a small scalp wound,” Bob explained.

“We couldn’t get any other doctor,” added Ned.

“What! Couldn’t get any other doctor in New York?” cried the country practitioner. “You surprise me!”

“Oh, but it wasn’t in New York. It was not far from here, at a place called Brookville,” went on Jerry. “Dr. Wright, if he is the same one you mean, is stopping there on his vacation.”

“You can’t be mistaken in the man,” said Dr. Brown, and he quickly described him, for he had heard him lecture in college several times.

“That is he!” exclaimed Jerry. “He isn’t so far away as you thought, Dr. Brown.”

“No, but there is still the almost impossible task of getting him to come up here; to this lonely place, to perform an operation.”

“I think I can get him to come,” said Jerry, slowly. “I will explain matters to him, and tell him how necessary it is that the professor be saved—not only for the aid he may give my mother in her affairs, but for the sake of the world of science.”

“It is barely possible that the appeal to science may move him,” conceded Dr. Brown. “How are you going to get to Brookville? That is some distance away.”

“We can go part way in the motor boat, and the rest of the way in our auto,”

Ned explained. “We left our car at Waydell. We can pick it up there.”

“That’s good!” exclaimed the physician. “Now, then, you had better make your preparations at once. It will take you nearly three days to go down there, get Dr. Wright and get back here. If we were near a railroad it would be easier; but we are not. There is every need for haste! I’ll write that note at once.”

“And we’ll get ready to go,” said Jerry. “Bob, you and I will make the trip by auto and boat. Ned and Andy will stay here with the professor.”

“And I’ll stay, too!” exclaimed Dr. Brown. “He should not be left without medical attendance. You may tell Dr. Wright that I am with the patient.”

Ned and Andy looked relieved at hearing this.

Little beyond some food, and some extra clothing, was taken by Jerry and Bob. The motor boat was well stocked, and there was plenty of oil and gasoline for the trip to Waydell. Another supply could be put aboard there while the remainder of the trip was being made in the auto.

“You can stop at the hermit’s, and send word to have my horse taken to my home,” said Dr. Brown, as he handed Jerry the note for Dr. Wright. “I will stay here until you return. Now go, and good luck go with you.”

It was nearly five o’clock in the afternoon when Jerry and Bob started off in the boat. They had taken a last look at Professor Snodgrass. The scientist had roused a little, and had seemed to recognize Jerry, for he had murmured, looking full at the tall lad:

“Don’t mind—it’s all right—I have the papers—the yellow mud—I’ll explain—the scoundrels—the two-tailed——” and then he lapsed into unconsciousness again.

“Come on, Bob!” exclaimed Jerry, grimly. “This is a race to save a life!”

CHAPTER XXVII
THE BROKEN SPRING

Away from the small dock shot the motor boat. Jerry and Bob had called on the hermit, at the request of Dr. Brown, to leave word about the physician's horse. Dr. Brown had also written a note to a fellow practitioner, asking him to take charge of the patients, who, otherwise, would be left without medical attention.

"And now for a fast run!" exclaimed Jerry, as he stood at the wheel. "Is everything ready for to-night, Bob?"

"Yes, I've got the grub all laid out, and I'll make a pot of coffee and put it in the vacuum bottle to keep hot. I'll have some sandwiches, and——"

"Say, do you think I mean nothing but grub?" cried Jerry, but he could not help smiling at his chum.

"Well, we've got to eat; haven't we?"

"Sure! But what I meant was to have some extra oil in readiness, a spare spark plug or two, and things like that. We're going to run all night, you know, and it won't be so easy to pick things up in the dark, even if we are pretty well lighted up aboard here."

"Oh, all right," assented Bob. "I'll look after things. But the grub's ready, too."

"Trust you not to forget that," laughed Jerry. "Well, we'll need that, too."

They kept on down the lake. As Jerry had said, their trip on it, and their progress on Silver River had made them fairly familiar with the peculiarities of the waterway. Aside from having run on the submerged log, they had had no accidents, if we except the fire, which did them no damage. And, as there would be a moon, and they could keep in the center of the lake, there was really little danger to be apprehended from the night trip.

Still Jerry and Bob were not a little nervous as darkness settled down. They had gone through much in the last few hours, and to their natural anxiety regarding Professor Snodgrass there was added, in Jerry's case, the feeling that if

the scientist died without revealing what he knew about Mrs. Hopkins's land, it might mean financial ruin for her.

"I must get help back to him in time!" thought Jerry, desperately. "Dr. Wright simply must come and perform that operation. But it won't be an easy thing to do—up there in the wilderness."

Fortunately for Bob he was of a less nervous temperament than was Jerry. He was not so anxious, and, to be sure, he did not have so much at stake.

So Bob kept himself busy arranging matters for the night, seeing that the electric bulbs were working, and that the emergency oil lamps were in readiness.

"Grub's ready, Jerry," finally announced the stout lad, emerging from the galley, where he had been busy over the gasoline stove. "Come on down and eat, Jerry. I'll steer while you stow away some grub."

"Much obliged, Chunky," was the answer. "But I'm in no hurry. I'm not a bit hungry. You eat first, and then you can relieve me."

"Really?" asked Bob.

"Sure. I don't want to eat now."

Jerry fancied he heard a sigh of relief from the stout lad, and he smiled as he shifted the helm. Truly Bob did like to eat!

"All right now; I've had enough. I'm through, but there's plenty left," Bob announced a little later. "Come on, Jerry."

"All right. You can take the wheel."

"How are you heading her?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no special course. The lake's deep enough, except close to shore, to go almost anywhere. Just keep her as near the center as you can. We ought to fetch the river at this rate, about morning."

"It's going to be quite a trip," observed Bob, with a sigh.

"Yes, and the hardest part will be bringing back the doctor," remarked Jerry. "That will be the last lap."

He relinquished the wheel to Bob, and went into the cabin. Jerry's chum had spread out a substantial repast. It was simple enough, for not a great variety could be carried on the *Scud*. But Jerry was not very hungry. His anxiety had taken away his appetite in a great measure. Still, he managed to make a fairly

good meal.

Jerry arranged to take the first watch that night, and, after Bob had sat up with his chum for some time, while the boat glided past the distant villages on the shores of the lake, the stout youth began to yawn.

“Better turn in,” suggested Jerry. “I can manage until one o’clock, and then I’ll call you.”

“Will you—sure?” asked Bob.

“Sure. Go to bed.”

And Bob was glad enough to crowd into his bunk.

It was nearer two o’clock than one, as Bob learned by looking at his watch under his pillow, when he roused. Jerry had not called him; Bob had awakened by himself, and, to his surprise, the boat was not moving. Or, rather, she was not moving under the power of her engine. She was merely drifting.

Bob sat up, and peered into the motor compartment. He saw Jerry bending over the machinery.

“What’s up?” cried the stout lad, sliding out of his berth.

“Oh, you’re awake; are you?” asked the tall lad. “A little accident, that’s all.”

“Accident! Why didn’t you call me?” demanded Bob.

“Oh, I thought I’d let you sleep. I didn’t feel a bit like turning in, and I didn’t need you.”

“Yes, but the accident. What is it?”

“A valve spring has broken. We can’t very well go on without one, and I can’t seem to find an extra part. I thought we had some, but I haven’t come across them.” He was rummaging in a tool box. Meanwhile the *Scud* was drifting under the influence of a little wind and a slight current in the lake.

“What are we going to do?” asked Bob, helplessly.

“I’m trying to fix it,” said Jerry, “but I haven’t had much success. I can’t make this makeshift spring stay in place. It needs someone to hold it.”

“Would the motor work if that spring was held tight—I mean that one you’ve put in?” asked Bob.

“Yes. She’d go all right then. I’ve tried to rig up some way to tie the spring

with a cord, and fasten it to some part of the engine, but that makes it too stiff. It needs a hand to hold it—someone who could ease down just at the right time."

"I'll do it," said Bob quickly, as he saw where Jerry had used part of a spring from another spare part of the motor, and a cord to give the necessary tension. But, as the tall lad had said, it needed a human hand to hold it, to make just the right pull, to provide for the automatic opening and closing of the valve.

"You can't hold it," objected Jerry. "It will mean hours of remaining in one position, and your hand'll ache like the mischief."

"I'll do it," responded Bob quietly. "We've got to make this trip as fast as we can, and we haven't any time to lay up for repairs. I'll hold the broken spring."

"Good!" cried Jerry. "Then we'll take turns at it. It'll be hard work, and no fun having to stay so close to the hot motor. But if we can do it——"

"We'll do it!" interrupted Bob grimly. "You take the wheel!"

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE LAST LAP

The night would never pass, it seemed, yet slowly the hours of darkness crept onward. To Jerry and Bob, first one and then the other, crouched in the cramped motor compartment, holding the string of the tension spring, which alone kept the machinery in motion, the sixty minutes in each hour seemed like sixty thousand.

They had passed from the lake into the river, and but a comparatively few miles now separated them from the place where the auto had been left. The land part of their journey would take them until nearly night, they calculated.

It was now fully light, and still they sped on. Neither of them could desert his post. Jerry managed, by lashing the steering wheel, to snatch a few moments during which he rushed into the galley, and set the coffee to boiling. Then he was back at the helm again, for the boat was driving herself on shore.

The two chums ate a hasty meal at their posts, Bob in the motor room, Jerry at the wheel.

It was shortly before noon when they guided the *Scud* up to Kroll's boat dock, and as they made their craft fast, and scrambled out, taking only a few belongings with them, one of the workmen cried:

"What's your hurry? What's the matter?"

"Can't stop to tell now," Jerry shouted back over his shoulder. "Fix the boat up—mend that valve spring and have her ready for a dash some time late to-night or early to-morrow morning!"

There was no delay at the place where the auto had been left. Fortunately the gasoline and oil tanks were filled, and explaining to the garage keeper their need of haste the two chums were off again.

On and on they rushed. The first part of the auto trip was over good roads, and for this the boys were thankful. It was about a hundred miles to Brookville, where they hoped to find Dr. Wright. They had about five hours of daylight in which to make it and it would need an average speed of twenty miles an hour to

cover this.

“If we can reach Brookville by supper time, and persuade Dr. Wright to come back with us, we ought to get back to the boat some time in the early morning,” Jerry calculated. “That will give us a long day to make the trip back to camp.”

“Yes, if nothing happens,” Bob assented.

“Nothing must happen!” cried Jerry fiercely.

And, for a time, all went well. Then, when they had covered a bad bit of road, and reached a smooth stretch, and when Jerry had put on full speed, there came a sharp explosion.

“Back fire?” questioned Bob.

“Blow-out!” said Jerry, with a grim tightening of his lips, as he felt the car skidding under the stress of the collapsed tire.

Jerry brought the machine up with a jerk, and was out on the ground almost before it had stopped.

“Come on!” he cried grimly to his chum. “Got to put on a new shoe.”

It was not easy work, and it seemed as though it took them longer than usual, as it always does when one is in a hurry. But, doubtless, they worked with their usual speed.

Once more they were off again, and kept on speeding. They halted at a country store to get some crackers and a box of herring, also some bottled soda water to relieve their thirst. They ate on the run, glad enough to get their meal that way.

Then a puncture delayed them, but working with feverish haste, they managed to get in a new tube. Then, tired, with aching muscles, and covered with the oil from the motor boat, as well as the dust of the road, they swung into Brookville, and sent the car around a turn on two wheels, into the hotel driveway.

Once more Jerry was out almost before the vehicle had ceased rolling. Bob followed him more slowly into the corridor of the hotel.

“Dr. Wright—is he here—yet?” panted Jerry to the clerk.

That functionary looked up in surprise, and not a little suspicion at the grimy and disheveled figure before him.

“Yes, Dr. Wright is here,” was the slow answer, “but I don’t know that he will

see you. He is——”

“Oh, yes, he’ll see us,” said Jerry confidently. “Don’t you remember us? We were here before. This is Bob Baker, whom Dr. Wright treated, and——”

“Oh, yes. Of course! Now I know you. I didn’t at first because you——”

“No apologies necessary,” interrupted Jerry.

Dr. Wright had evidently not forgotten the motor boys, for he came down at once on receipt of the message.

“Why, Jerry!” he exclaimed, and then he drew back in surprise at the sight of his visitor.

Jerry plunged into the story of the professor’s accident. He made it as clear as he could, but it was rather an incoherent story, for all that. Bob put in a word now and then.

“But do I understand you want me to travel with you away up into the wilderness of the mountains—to a lonely hut, and there perform a delicate operation on Professor Snodgrass?” asked Dr. Wright, slowly.

“That’s it,” said Jerry.

“Go with you in your automobile and motor boat?”

“There’s no other way,” responded Jerry, quietly. “No railroad will take us there any quicker. And we must start at once. Here is the note Dr. Brown told me to give you.”

The great surgeon stretched out his hand for the paper. As he read it a different look came over his face. It was as though he were a general receiving news that he was about to take part in some important engagement.

“Ah,” he murmured, “the DeVerne operation,” for it was so named after its discoverer, and Dr. Wright was a pupil of that famous French surgeon. “Yes, that is the only hope in a case like that. Dr. Brown was fortunate in so quickly recognizing the necessity for it. Ah, yes, indeed,” and Dr. Wright seemed lost in a pleasant professional revery.

“Then you’ll come?” asked Jerry. “We want to save his life, doctor—save the life of Professor Snodgrass.”

“Yes, I’ll come!” exclaimed the great surgeon. “I have heard of your Professor Snodgrass. I honor him as a true disciple of science. I would do anything in my

power to aid him, but," and his voice grew more solemn, "I do not promise to save his life."

He shrugged his shoulders to express his doubt. And then the spirit of the soldier—of the fighter—came back to him. Indeed it had not deserted him. He merely did not wish to raise false hopes.

"Come!" he cried. "We will go. I will get ready at once. I will need—let me see——" and he began to go over in his mind the things he would need, as a general might before undertaking a decisive engagement.

Unseen by the boys, Miss Payson, the nurse, came down. She saw the doctor, and she must have known what his attitude, and his words, meant.

"Doctor! You're not going out to-night—on a case!" she exclaimed. "You forget you came here for rest. You——"

"I forget nothing, my dear Miss Payson," he interrupted, with a smile. "I only know that I am a doctor, and that a friend—a patient—needs me. You will please get my case ready, and prepare yourself. We are about to perform the DeVerne operation."

"The DeVerne operation!" she gasped. "Here—now?"

"Not here and now. In a lonely cabin, away up in the mountains. We shall have to travel all night, by auto and part of to-morrow by boat. But it can be done—it shall be done! These young men have come to call me to save the life of Professor Snodgrass. So we will go.

"You will please see that everything is ready. Remember we shall need many things, so do not omit any. Tell my sister. She will go with us. You will need relief if you are to nurse this case. Ah, the DeVerne operation!" and the doctor rubbed his hands as though he welcomed the surgical knot he must soon loosen.

"Very well, doctor," answered Miss Payson. Evidently she knew when she had sufficiently objected.

"I will be with you inside of an hour," Dr. Wright told Jerry. "Certain preparations must be made. Meanwhile you had better rest and refresh yourselves. Have you room to carry three of us? My sister will go along as assistant nurse to Miss Payson."

"We have plenty of room," replied Jerry, quietly. "We will be ready for you in an hour."

The preparations of the two youths were simple. They washed in the hotel lavatory, and ate—Bob especially doing the latter. Then, as they had a night auto trip before them, they carefully examined every part of the machine. The tires were blown up afresh, a thorough oiling was given to every part, and, in addition to the main gasoline tank being filled, an extra five-gallon can was taken along.

Punctual to the minute was Dr. Wright. He had with him a bag of instruments, and other things needful for the operation. Miss Payson and Miss Wright were carrying valises containing their personal belongings.

“We are ready, boys,” said the great surgeon, calmly. “From now, until we reach the cabin, we are in your hands.”

“And we’ll get you there,” promised Jerry.

None of those who participated in that night ride ever forgot it. Shortly after starting from the hotel in Brookville it began to rain, and the storm increased in violence until at midnight it was blowing a gale, and the rain was coming down in torrents.

“Can we go on?” asked Dr. Wright, calmly, from within the well-enclosed tonneau.

“The machine can,” said Jerry, wondering what the doctor meant.

“And if the machine can, we can,” was the reassuring reply.

The powerful lights marked out the muddy and sloppy road that lay ahead of them. Fortunately Jerry had been over it twice and he was pretty familiar with it now. He drove on cautiously enough, but at a pace that brought from Miss Payson and Miss Wright exclamations of alarm now and then. As for Dr. Wright, he betrayed no fear whatever. He sat silent in one corner of the big car.

“Will we be in time? Will we be in time?” was the question that ran through Jerry’s mind continually.

That every moment counted he well knew from the look on the face of Dr. Wright as he read the note Dr. Brown had written. Professor Snodgrass was in imminent danger. That much was certain. Could he be operated on in time? Could he be given back the life that was so fast slipping away, long enough to make the disclosure he had hinted at in his delirium—a disclosure that would prove the fraud of those who had taken the land from Mrs. Hopkins? Jerry asked himself those questions.

On and on they lurched in the auto. Now they glided down some slippery hill,

now they climbed the opposite slope, with all power on.

It was raining hard when a faint streak of light in the east showed that the dawn was trying to break. It was still raining when they headed for the shipyard.

“We had better stop and have some breakfast,” suggested Dr. Wright, and when Jerry looked a little dubious at the delay the surgeon said: “We shall all be better for it, and able to make better time. We must be in good shape for what lies before us. We must neglect nothing.”

They ate at a little restaurant near the dock. Probably never before had the great Dr. Wright—the New York specialist on whose nod millionaires waited—dined in such a humble place. But he made no comment, nor did his sister or the nurse. It was a case of emergency, and they all recognized it.

“Is she all right?” asked Jerry of the man at the dock, as they went down, through the drizzling rain, to where the *Scud* lay moored.

“Right as a trivet, sir!” was the answer.

“All aboard!” called Jerry. “We’re on the last lap, now!”

“And none too soon,” murmured Dr. Wright, as he again read the note from Dr. Brown, giving the nature of the injury and the symptoms of Professor Snodgrass. “None too soon. Speed her all you can, Jerry!”

“I will; yes, sir,” was the low answer.

The motor hummed and throbbed as the *Scud* swung away from the pier and out into Silver River.

Would they be in time?

Over and over again the chugging motor seemed to say to Jerry:

“Will we be in time? Will we be in time? In time—in time?”

CHAPTER XXIX
THE OPERATION

Part of the strain that had held all of them under its spell seemed to be wearing off. They were breathing more easily now.

True, the most critical part of what had been undertaken was still before them—the operation. Performed, as it must be, under the most unfavorable circumstances, from a surgical standpoint, there was every chance against Professor Snodgrass, and very few in his favor.

“But we’re this far on the return trip,” said Bob, with a sigh of relief, as they chugged forward in the motor boat. “And that’s a whole lot.”

“Indeed it is,” agreed Miss Payson with a smile. And Bob’s remark seemed to sum up the whole situation. They were well on the way of the return trip.

That, in itself, was a satisfaction, for there was so much that might have happened—in fact, so much that still might happen. But, on the whole, travel by the river seemed more certain than by road. Though the breaking down of the motor on the initial trip did not seem to argue much in that line.

But the night was over. They had the whole day before them, and, with good luck, they would reach the camp in the woods at night.

“Will you operate as soon as you arrive?” asked Miss Payson of Dr. Wright.

“It all depends—on the patient. I fear I shall have to. It has gone rather too long already, since the accident. There is only a slight chance—but, such as it is, we must take it.”

He had spoken in a low tone, though not so low but that Jerry heard him. And the tall lad felt a sense of foreboding; but not so much on his own account. It was solely because he loved the professor, and wanted to see him spared for many years to come. For now Jerry was thoroughly convinced that there had been some trickery, and that the little scientist had not played them false.

The motor was running true and “like a sewing machine,” as Bob expressed it. He and Jerry took turns at the wheel, in looking after the machinery, and filling the oil cups. Dr. Wright sat in the cabin, with his sister and Miss Payson, talking

in low tones about the coming operation, and making what plans they could in advance.

On and on they raced—a race against the clock, to save a life. Would they be in time?

There was nothing they could do—that Bob or Jerry could do—to increase the speed.

It was not like being in the auto. No advantage could be taken of the better parts of the road to make haste. All that could be done was to keep the machinery going, see that it was oiled, and steer a straight course. The extra five gallons of gasoline which they had not needed for the auto, were put aboard the *Scud*.

They had their dinner on the boat, and Bob was in his element as cook. The ladies praised his culinary skill, and that was enough to make Bob happy.

They passed from the river to the lake, and speeded on. Keen-eyed Jerry, at the wheel, noted point after point, land-mark after land-mark, as they passed them.

Bob and Jerry were standing on the raised after-deck, near the wheel, talking, when Miss Payson, who, with the doctor and his sister, was in the cabin, came to the door, and asked:

“Is there anything wrong, boys? There is some water on the floor in here. Perhaps something has spilled.”

“Water?” cried Bob.

Jerry handed his chum the wheel, and went into the cabin. He saw a little pool of water oozing up from the cracks in the cabin floor.

“That’s what’s been holding us back!” he exclaimed. “I wondered what made her so heavy.”

“What is it?” asked the doctor.

“A small leak,” Jerry replied. “Probably the same seams that opened before are widening now. We’ve been running pretty fast, and the vibration of the motor has probably shaken out some of the caulking.”

“Is there—is there any danger?” asked Miss Wright.

“Not at all,” Jerry assured her, though he was not quite as sure as his voice

indicated. “I’ll start the pump.”

This soon brought the water down to a level below the boards of the cabin floor, and for some time no more came in. But the leak must have grown, for, in spite of what the pump took out, the floor was soon covered.

“We’ll have to bail,” said Jerry, grimly. “But it won’t be more than three hours before we’re at the end of the lake.”

They had indeed made good time, better even than on the down trip, with the broken spring. The motor had worked to perfection—too well, in fact, for its vibrations had opened the seams.

“Bail!” cried Miss Payson.

“Yes, we’ll have to dip out the water as fast as it comes in,” said Jerry. “The pump hasn’t capacity enough.”

The progress of the boat was slower now, and it was not until complete darkness had fallen that they reached the improvised dock, whence the trail led up to the cabin where the wounded professor lay.

And the last mile was hardest of all, for the boat was so water-logged that even the powerful motor sent her along only at the pace of a scow.

“Well, she can’t sink, at any rate!” exclaimed Jerry, as he fairly grounded her in shallow water at the dock.

They made their way up the trail, carrying with them all that was necessary for the operation. But were they in time to perform it?

“Who’s there?” called the voice of Ned from the cabin.

“We’re back, old man,” answered Jerry.

“Oh!” and there was unmistakable relief in Ned’s voice.

“How’s the professor?” asked Jerry.

“Just about the same.”

“Then there’s a chance,” murmured Dr. Wright. “Now to get busy!”

Ned and Andy were quickly told of the race to save a life—the race the final spurt of which was now to be made. The boys who had been at the cabin reported that nothing of moment had transpired since Bob and Jerry departed.

Preparations for the operation were on apace. I will not weary you with them,

for such matters are never very pleasant. Instruments were boiled, to kill all germs. Bandages were laid in readiness. The nurses donned their uniforms, and the cabin was put in the best condition possible.

“You may come in and see him,” said Dr. Wright to Jerry and his chums, about nine o’clock that night. “We are about to start. He is conscious, and wants to see you.”

“Will it be all right?” asked Jerry.

“Oh, yes. He is more nearly rational than at any time since you brought him here.”

So they went in. The hapless professor was swathed in a sheet on the table. He looked very pale and thin in the light of candles and lamps, but his eyes now had the look of consciousness.

“Jerry—Jerry,” he whispered in a faint voice. “I—I can’t say much—I don’t know all that happened—those scoundrels sent me up here to get me out of the way—I know now. But I have evidence against them. When I recover—tell it all. That land is yours. I will give evidence——”

“That will do now,” said Dr. Wright gently, and he motioned for the boys to go.

The sickly smell of ether filled the night air about the cabin. The door was closed, as the boys went down the trail. They did not want to stay too near, and there was nothing they could do. The operation had begun.

CHAPTER XXX
THE TWO-TAILED LIZARD

Seconds seemed stretched into minutes, and minutes into hours, as the boys waited. They spoke little, not even when they went down to look at the *Scud*. She was in shallow water, and could easily be pulled up on shore, and the leaky seams made tight.

“She lasted as long as we needed her,” remarked Jerry, simply.

It must have been two hours later, perhaps more, when Dr. Brown came out of the cabin. His clothes smelled of ether and iodoform as he greeted the boys, saying:

“It’s all over.”

“Is he—will he——?” faltered Jerry.

“He will recover, unless some complication sets in,” was the answer. “The operation was a complete success. Oh, it was worth watching, to witness the masterly manner in which Dr. Wright worked! I am under obligations to you boys for giving me the opportunity.”

“It is we who are in your debt,” responded Jerry. “Can we see him?”

“Oh, indeed no. He has not come out of the ether yet. I doubt if you can see him before to-morrow noon. You had best go to bed. The doctor and the nurses will look after him.”

And, worn out with their nights’ vigils—Jerry and Bob from their long trips, and Ned and Andy from watching—they all felt the need of rest and sleep. But sleep came only fitfully at first, until, toward morning, when they all fell into heavy slumber.

They were awakened by Dr. Brown at their tent.

They found the professor paler and thinner than before, but looking better in spite of that, for he was out of pain. The relief of the operation, given under merciful insensibility of ether, had delivered him from the grip of pain.

“I—I want to talk to you, Jerry,” he said, faintly.

“Not too much,” cautioned Miss Payson.

“It—it will relieve my mind,” was the low reply of the sick man. “I have something to tell Jerry.”

They would not let him tell it all then, but he said enough to let Jerry know that fraud had been practiced by the Universal Plaster Company, and that fraud, Jerry was sure, was sufficient to set aside the sale, on the part of his mother, of the valuable lands in the swamp.

In a few days Professor Snodgrass was able to tell the whole story.

“I had no idea of the medical value of that yellow clay until, on one of my trips after insects, I met Fussel and Professor Bailey,” he said. “I know now that they are scoundrels, but I had no idea of it then. They asked me to test the yellow clay for certain ingredients, and I did so. I found them there, and they told me their plan—to impregnate the clay with certain medicines. I then saw how valuable a use of it could be made, and I gave them a testimonial of its worth. They paid me well. But if I had thought it was injuring my friends I never would have aided those scoundrels.

“I had no idea then, Jerry, that this was the same clay you had showed me. For when I examined your specimen I had no thought that it might be a vehicle for the administration of medicine in the shape of plasters and poultices.

“But from the moment I had given advice to Fussel and his gang, I had no chance to communicate with you. In fact, I did not know there was a large deposit of this clay on your mother’s land. They said it came from Mr. Nixon’s land, and from another part of the swamp. So I was not concerned about you, Jerry.

“Then they hurried me away, on the false assertion that I could find a two-tailed lizard up here. I had no time even to come and see you. In fact, I guess I did not think of it, I was so excited.”

“We thought that strange,” commented Jerry, “your not coming back.”

Jerry explained how he and his chums had set off in search of the scientist, to get his explanation of the matter, and Jerry told of their adventures on the way.

“I intended to have another analysis made of the clay, to see if it was of any value,” the tall lad said, “but I did not get a chance. However, it wasn’t necessary, Professor. But we sure did think it queer that you didn’t come back to us.”

“It was odd,” the professor admitted. “But I was so anxious to get the lizard that I thought of nothing else. I came up here and made the great discovery.”

“Did you find the lizard?” asked Ned.

“No. But one day, when I was out after specimens, I opened one of the box-cages I had brought with me from the hotel in Bellport, where I was stopping when Fussel and his gang sought my advice. In that box I found a certain paper which showed me how I had been tricked. It was one of the plaster company’s documents, and must have fallen into my box by mistake. But it gave away the whole plan, and showed how they had played a trick to get your mother’s land, Jerry.”

“A trick?” questioned the tall lad.

“Yes. They tried to make her believe she would have no right of way to get to her strip, and so, as I understand it, she sold.”

“That was one of the reasons that induced her to part with it,” said Jerry. “That, and the fact that we could not prove the yellow clay to be of any value.”

“And that representation that she had no right of way was a fraud,” the professor declared, “for she had. And it is well established in law that where the conveyance of land is obtained by fraud that it will be given back to the original owners.”

“Then mother will get her land back!” cried Jerry, joyfully.

“Yes, and the valuable clay with it,” declared Professor Snodgrass. “I will testify in her favor, and I have the documents to prove it.”

“When did you discover them?” asked Ned, eagerly.

“One day, as I say, when I was out hunting specimens. I had just caught a rare bug, and was putting it in the box, when the paper attracted my attention. Then, as I took it out and put the paper in my pocket, I saw a rare butterfly. I made a reach for it with the net, and fell over the ledge.

“I remembered nothing more for some time. When I recovered consciousness I found myself, badly injured, at the foot of the cliff. My water bottle and lunch box had fallen near me, and I managed to eat and drink. But I could not move. I called for help, but none came. Then I lost consciousness again, and I remembered nothing more until—until just before the operation.

“I understand you boys found me. You saved my life!”

“And you have saved my mother’s property!” voiced Jerry.

“You will find the papers to prove the fraud in my coat,” the professor said, and there they were. Jerry took charge of them.

“Then you haven’t found the two-tailed lizard?” asked Bob.

“No, and I am afraid I never shall,” was the discouraged answer. “I don’t believe there are any up here.”

Everyone in the camp was in a happy mood. As the days passed the professor grew stronger. There was no question now about his recovery. Jerry had sent the good news to his mother, and had communicated with the family lawyer, who promised to see that action was taken against the swindlers.

And I may state here that eventually Mrs. Hopkins received back her land, and the sale of the yellow clay recouped her fortune. In fact, on the adjoining property there was only a small amount of the clay, and Mrs. Hopkins had a monopoly. So she did not have to worry about money matters. Fraud was clearly proved on the part of Fussel and his crowd, and though they fought the case in the courts they were defeated. The paper accidentally found in the professor’s box won the case for Jerry and his mother.

Dr. Wright, with his sister and the nurse, remained at the camp until it was certain the professor was out of danger. Then Dr. Brown was placed in charge.

Jerry was a little apprehensive about Dr. Wright’s bill, but that matter was easily settled. When Jerry spoke of it the great surgeon laughed and said:

“Do you think I would present Professor Snodgrass with a bill for my services? We scientists are brothers, you know. It was a pleasure to preserve him for the great work he is doing.”

And so Dr. Wright, with the two ladies, went back to civilization. The *Scud* had been hauled out by the boys, the seams caulked, and she was as fit as ever. In her the doctor was taken back to his hotel.

The boys would remain in the woodland camp about a week longer, and then, by easy stages, would go back home, taking the scientist with them as far as Boston.

One night Bob awoke with a yell, sitting suddenly up in his bunk.

“What’s the matter—got the nightmare?” asked Jerry.

“No, but there’s something in my bed. A snake, I guess,” Bob cried.

Ned came with a light, and Bob, hopping out of his bed, turned back the sheet, for only that light covering was needed on account of the warm weather. As he did so something wriggled farther under the covers.

“There it is!” cried Bob. “Look!”

“It’s something, anyhow,” Jerry agreed.

The coverings were thrown off and Bob cried:

“There it is! The two-tailed lizard!”

It was a large lizard, surely enough, and Jerry, who had little fear of crawling creatures, easily captured the specimen.

“I believe it *is* a two-tailed one,” he said. “At least it might pass for one. Let’s show the professor.”

Dr. Snodgrass slowly examined the specimen in the light of a lantern. He turned it carefully from side to side.

“Well, I suppose you could call that a two-tailed lizard,” he finally announced. “But it is not what I expected. See, there is the rudiment of the second tail,” and he pointed to a short horny knob growing out above the main, or long tail, of the wriggling creature.

“Nature evidently intended to give this species of lizard two tails,” went on the professor, “but something interfered with her plans. Perhaps she, herself, changed her mind. But it is a sure-enough two-tailed lizard, and will be a valuable addition to our museum. And I can prove that my friend Professor Battin is mistaken when he says there is no such creature. Who found it?”

“It crawled in my bed,” spoke Bob, looking around as though he might see more of the uncanny creatures.

The professor was eagerly examining the specimen. Undoubtedly it was the two-tailed lizard, but it was not such an odd freak as might have been expected. However, the scientist was apparently satisfied. The lizard was put in a box, and the next day the professor, who was rapidly convalescing, made copious notes concerning it.

The motor boys spent another week in camp, fishing and tramping about. The professor was able to walk now. None of the plotters came to drive our friends away from the hunting lodge.

And then, one day, camp was broken, and they started down the lake, to finish

the trip by auto, Professor Snodgrass going with them.

“Well, we sure did have an exciting summer of it,” commented Jerry, as he steered the boat over the course on which he had guided her in the race to save the life of the scientist.

“That’s right,” agreed Ned. “And I wonder if we’ll have as lively a time next season?”

Whether our young friends did or did not may be learned by reading our next volume, entitled: “Ned, Bob and Jerry at Boxwood Hall; Or, The Motor Boys as Freshmen.” This will be the first volume of a second series devoted to the activities of our heroes.

In due time the boys, with Professor Snodgrass, reached Cresville. On the way the scientist caught several more specimens, but none, in his opinion, was as valuable as the two-tailed lizard, which had made a bed-fellow of Bob.

“Where you going, Jerry?” asked Ned, one afternoon, as he saw his chum starting out in the motor boat.

“Oh, just over to the swamp to see how the work is coming on. I heard they struck an even richer bed of yellow clay on mother’s land than that which those fellows developed at first.”

“I’ll come along,” went on Ned, and Bob came up soon after, joining the little party.

And while they are on their way to watch the men at work on the land so strangely restored to Mrs. Hopkins, we will take leave of the motor boys.

THE END

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