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THE CALL OF THE BEAVER PATROL

OR

A Break in the Glacier

By

CAPT. V. T. SHERMAN

Author of

**THE WAR ZONE OF THE KAISER;
BOY SCOUTS WITH JOFFRE;
THE PERILS OF AN AIRSHIP;
THE BOY SCOUT SIGNAL,
Etc.**

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CHAPTER I

CAMPING IN THE BREAKER

"And so I says to myself, says I, give me a good husky band of Boy Scouts! They'll do the job if it can be done!"

Case Canfield, caretaker, sat back in a patched chair in the dusky, unoccupied office of the Labyrinth mine and addressed himself to four lads of seventeen who were clad in the khaki uniform of the Boy Scouts of America.

Those of our readers who have read the previous books of this series will have good cause to remember George Benton, Charley ("Sandy") Green, Tommy Gregory and Will Smith. The adventures of these lads among the Pictured Rocks of Old Superior, among the wreckers and reptiles of the Florida Everglades, in the caverns of the Great Continental Divide, and among the snows of the Hudson Bay wilderness have been recorded under appropriate titles in previous works.

The four boys were members of the Beaver Patrol, Chicago. Will Smith was Scoutmaster, while George Benton was Patrol Leader. They wore upon the sleeves of their coats medals showing that they had passed the examination as Ambulance Aids, Stalkers, Pioneers and Seamen.

Instructed by Mr. Horton, a well-known criminal lawyer of Chicago, the boys had reached the almost deserted mine at dusk of a November day. There they had found Canfield, the caretaker, waiting for them in a dimly-lighted office. The mine had not been operated for a number of months, not because the veins had given out, but because of some misunderstanding between the owners of mines in that section.

The large, bare room in which the caretaker and the Boy Scouts met was in the breaker. There was no fire in the great heater, and the tables and chairs were black with dust. A single electric light shone down from the ceiling, creating long, ghostlike shadows as it swayed about in a gentle wind blowing through a broken window.

"Well," Tommy Gregory said, as the caretaker paused, "you've got the Boy Scouts, and it remains for you to set us to work."

"And a sturdy looking lot, too!" grinned the caretaker.

"Oh, Mr. Horton wouldn't be apt to send a lot of cripples!" laughed Sandy Green. "He's next to his job, that man is!"

"I presume he told you all about the case?" suggested Canfield.

"Indeed he did not," replied Will Smith.

"Not a thing about it?" asked the caretaker.

"He only said that you would give us full instructions."

"That's strange!" Canfield observed thoughtfully.

"Perhaps he thought we wouldn't want to undertake the job if we knew exactly what it was!" suggested Sandy.

"It is a queer kind of a job," Canfield admitted, "but I don't think you boys would be apt to back out because of a little danger."

"I have wanted to back out several times," laughed Tommy, "but, somehow, these others boys wouldn't permit me to."

"Go on and tell us about it," urged Sandy. "Tell us just what you want us to do, and then we'll tell you whether we think we can do it or not."

"You've got to find two boys!" replied Canfield.

"Mother of Moses!" exclaimed Tommy. "I hope we haven't got to go and dig up blond-haired little Algernon, or discover pretty little Clarence, and turn a bunch of money over to him!"

"I think these two boys may have money coming to them," the caretaker replied. "There must be money back of it or the friends of the lads wouldn't be giving me cash to spend in their interest."

"Where are these boys?" asked Will.

"I've heard the opinion expressed that the boys are somewhere in the mine!" answered Canfield. "I can hardly believe that they are, but it has been suggested that we may as well begin the search under ground."

"Where do these boys belong?" asked George.

"Anywhere and everywhere," was the reply. "Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson came here as breaker boys six months ago. They were ragged and dirty, and appeared to be as tough as two young bears. They worked steadily until the day before the mine closed down and then they disappeared."

"That's easy!" declared Tommy. "They got tired of work!"

"That may be," answered the caretaker, "but they certainly didn't get tired of drawing their pay. They went away leaving about eight dollars, the two of them, in the care of the company."

"Then something must have happened to them!" Will suggested.

"Who's looking for these boys?" asked George.

"A New York lawyer," was the reply. "I know nothing whatever about the man. In fact, I don't know why he wants to find out where the boys are. He sends me money and tells me to continue my quest until the boys are found, and then to send them to New York."

"So you have entire charge of the search," said Sandy, tentatively.

"Yes," was the reply, "except for Joe Ventner. He's a detective sent on from New York by this Burlingame person, the lawyer to whom I referred a short time ago."

"What part of the world is he searching?" asked Will.

"He seems to think that the boys ran away because of some childish prank put on by them the night before. They broke some windows in a couple of shanties down by the tracks, or, at least, the other boys say they did, and Joe thinks they ran away because of that. He accounts in that

way for their not calling after their pay envelopes."

"So he thinks they've gone out of the country, does he."

"Yes," was the reply. "He comes back here every few days to ask if I have heard anything regarding the youngsters, and then goes away again. If you leave it to me, I don't think the fellow is working very hard in the case. There's a half a dozen saloons in a little dump of a place about ten miles away, and my idea is that he puts in a good deal of his time there."

"You don't seem to take to this detective?" asked George.

"Oh, I don't know as he's so much worse than the average private detective," replied the caretaker. "He's out for his day's wages, and the easier he can get them, the better it suits him."

"So you don't know who wants these boys, or what they're wanted for?" asked Will. "Lawyer Burlingame never took you into his confidence so far as to post you on the details of the case."

"He never did!" answered the caretaker.

"Is he liberal with his money?" asked George.

"He pays all the bills I send in," was the answer. "And seems to keep this bum detective pretty well supplied with ten-dollar bills".

"We may have to investigate this investigator!" laughed Sandy.

"Did Mr. Horton say anything to you about your lodgings while here?" asked the caretaker. "It's getting too cold here for me, and we may as well be shifting to warmer quarters."

"You said a short time ago," Will began, "that you rather thought we ought to begin this search in the mine itself."

"That's my idea!" answered the caretaker.

"Do you think the boys are hiding in the mine?"

"Well, there are some things connected with the case which point in that direction," replied Canfield. "For instance, there's a lot of queer things going on under ground".

"Ghosts?" demanded Tommy.

"You're not steering us up against a haunted mine, are you?" asked George with a wink at his chum. "That would be too good to be true!"

"I haven't said anything about ghosts or haunted mines," chuckled the caretaker. "I'm only saying that there are queer things taking place in the mine. Now there's Tunnel Six," he went on, "I have seen lights there with my own eyes, when I know there wasn't a person within two miles of the spot except myself. And I've heard noises, too! These unaccountable noises which make a man think of graveyards and ghosts."

"But why should two healthy, active boys want to seek such a hiding place?" asked Will. "It certainly can't be very pleasant in the dark and damp tunnels! Besides, where would they get their provisions?"

"I'm not arguing the case, lads," the caretaker replied, "I'm placing the case in your hands without instructions. I only suggest that you look in the mine first, but you don't have to do that unless you want to!"

"I don't see how we can find fault with that arrangement!" laughed Will. "And now," he went on, "let's arrange about our lodgings. In the first place, who knows that we are here on this job?"

"Not a soul, unless some one saw you coming into the breaker!"

"That's just as it should be," Will went on. "Now I propose that we camp out in the breaker. There must be a cosy corner somewhere, under the chutes, or in back of a staircase, or away up under the roof, where we can camp out while we are going through the mine."

"You won't find the old breaker a very comfortable place to live in," suggested Canfield.

"Oh, we can line the walls of some little cubby-hole with canvas if necessary, and you can string a wire in so as to give us electricity for heating and lighting, and we can live as comfortable as four bugs in a rug. If we keep out of sight during the day time, no one will ever suspect that we are here."

"Have it your own way!" replied Canfield. "I'll see that you get plenty to eat and plenty of bed clothing."

"That'll help some!" laughed Tommy. "During the night we can travel through the mine with our lights, and during the daytime we can crawl into our little beds and sleep our heads off!"

"When do you want your first load of provisions?" asked Canfield.

"Right now, tonight!" replied Sandy.

"Well, come along then," Canfield said, rising from his chair, "and I'll let you pick out a spot for

your camp, as you call it."

After quite an extended search through the breaker the boys selected a small room on the ground floor, from which one window looked out on the half-deserted yard where the weigh-house stood. The room was perhaps twenty feet in size each way, and the walls were of heavy planking. The whole apartment was sadly in need of a scrubbing, but the lads concluded to postpone that until some future date.

"I can bring in cot beds and bedding," the caretaker announced, "and string the electric wire for heating, lighting, and cooking before I go to bed. That will leave you all shipshape in the morning, and you can then begin your cleaning up as soon as you please."

The caretaker was as good as his word, and before ten o'clock the cots and bedding were in place, also an electric heater and an electric plate for cooking had been moved into the apartment.

Not considering it advisable to go out for supper, Canfield had also brought in provisions in the shape of bacon, potatoes, eggs, bread, butter, coffee, and various grades of canned goods, so the boys had made a hearty meal and had plenty left for breakfast. While cooking they had covered the one window with a heavy piece of canvas.

"Now you're all tight and snug for the night," the caretaker smiled, as he turned back from the door and glanced over the rather cozy-looking room. "If I'm about here during the night, I'll look in upon you again."

Canfield stepped out and closed the door behind him. Then he came back and looked in again with a half-smile on his face.

"Do you boys know anything about mines?" he asked.

"Not a thing!" replied Tommy.

"Then don't you go climbing down the ladders and wandering around in the gangways tonight!" the caretaker warned.

"Say, there's an idea!" Tommy said to Sandy, with a wink, as Canfield went out. "How do you think one of these mammoth coal mines looks, anyway?"

"Cut that out, boys!" exclaimed Will. "If I catch one of you attempting the ladders tonight, I'll tie you up!"

"Who said anything about going down the ladders tonight?" demanded Tommy.

CHAPTER II

THE CALL OF THE PACK

It was somewhere near midnight when the boys sought their beds. Will and George were soon asleep, but Tommy and Sandy had no notion of passing their first night in the mine in slumber. Ten minutes after the regular breathing of the two sleepers became audible, Tommy sat up in his bed and deftly threw a pillow so as to strike Sandy in the face.

"Cut it out!" whispered Sandy. "You don't have to do anything to wake me up! I've been wondering for a long time whether you hadn't gone to sleep! You looked sleepy when the light went out."

"Never was so wide awake in my life!" declared Tommy.

"Well, get up and dress," advised Sandy. "If we get into the mine tonight, we'll have to hurry!"

"Have you figured out how we're going to get into the mine?" asked Tommy. "It will be the ladders for us, I guess."

"Of course it'll be the ladders!" replied Sandy. "Do you suppose Canfield is coming here in the middle of the night to turn on the power?"

"I wonder how deep the shaft is?" asked Tommy.

"I guess this one must be about five hundred feet."

"Is that a guess, or a piece of positive information?"

"It's a guess," laughed Sandy, drawing on his shoes and walking softly across the bare floor in the direction of the shaft.

The boys passed out of the sleeping chamber into a passage which led directly to the shaft of the mine. This shaft was perhaps twenty feet in width. It included the air shaft, the division where the pumps were operated, and two divisions for the cages which lifted the coal from the bottom of the mine. The pumps were not working, of course, and no air was being forced down.

One of the cages lay at the top so the other must have been at the bottom of the shaft. As the boys looked down into the shaft, Tommy seized his chum by the arm and whispered:

"Did you see that light down there?"

"Light nothing!" declared Sandy.

"But I did see a light!" insisted the other.

"Perhaps you did," replied Sandy, "but if there's any light there it's merely a reflection from our electric lights. There may be a metallic surface down there which throws back the light rays."

"Have it your own way!" grunted Tommy. "You know yourself that the caretaker said there were lights in the mine which no one could account for, and he especially mentioned the light in Tunnel Six."

"All right!" Sandy grinned. "We'll sneak down so quietly that any person who happens to be at the bottom of the shaft with the light will never suspect that we are within a hundred miles of the place. We may be able to geeze the fellow that's making the ghost walk around here nights."

The boys took to the ladders and moved down as silently as possible. Now and then a rung creaked softly under their feet, but they got to the bottom without any special mishap.

Tommy drew a long breath when at last they landed at the bottom of the shaft. He threw his light upward, then, and declared that in his opinion they were at least ten thousand feet nearer the center of the earth than they were when they started down.

"I remember now," Sandy said with a grin, "that the Labyrinth mine is only about five hundred feet deep. If I remember correctly, there are three levels; one at three hundred feet; one at four, and one at five."

"And which level is this?" asked Tommy.

"Why, we're on the bottom, ain't we?"

"Of course," laughed Tommy. "I ought to have known that!"

"Well come along if you want to see the mine!" urged Sandy. "All we have to do is to push our searchlights ahead and walk down the gangway. We'll come to something worth seeing after a while."

As the boys advanced they found the gangway considerably cluttered with "gob," or refuse, and the air was none of the best.

"I wish we could set the air shaft working," suggested Sandy.

"Well, we can't!" Tommy answered with a scornful shrug of his shoulders. "We can't set the whole works going in order to give us a midnight view of the Labyrinth mine. What gets me is, how are we going to find our way back? There seem to be a good many passages here."

"I've got that fixed all right!" Sandy exclaimed.

As the lad spoke he took a ball of strong string from his pocket and tied one end to the cage which lay at the bottom of the shaft.

"Now we can go anywhere we please," he chuckled "and when we want to return, all we've got to do is to follow the string."

"Quite an idea!" laughed Tommy.

The boys proceeded along the gangway, walking between the rails of the tramway by means of which the coal was delivered at the bottom of the shaft. The experience was a novel one to them. The dark walls of the passage, the echoes which came from the counter gangways, the monotonous dripping of water as it seeped through seams and crevices in the rock, all gave a weird and uncanny expression to the place.

After walking for some distance the boys came to a level which showed several inches of water.

"We can't wade through that!" Tommy declared.

"Well," Sandy suggested, "if we go back a little ways, we can follow a cross heading and get into the mine by another way."

The boys followed this plan, and, after winding about several half-loaded cars which had been left on the tramway, found themselves in a large chamber from which numerous benches were cut.

"Where does all this gas come from?" asked Tommy stopping short and putting a hand to his nose.

"There must be a blower somewhere," Sandy explained.

"What's a blower?" demanded Tommy. "What does it look like, and does it always smell like this?"

"It doesn't look like anything!" replied Sandy. "It's composed of natural gas, and they call it a blower because it blows up out of crevices in the coal and in the rocks."

"If I should light a match, would it set it on fire?" asked Tommy.

"I wouldn't like to have you try it!"

The boys continued on their way for some moments, and then Tommy stopped and extinguished his light, whispering to Sandy to do the same.

"What's that for?" demanded the latter.

"Didn't you hear that noise behind the cribbing?" asked Tommy.

"Rats, probably!"

"Rats nothing!" replied Tommy. "Rats don't make sounds like people whispering, do they? Keep still a minute, and we'll find out what it is!"

"You'll be seeing a light next!" Sandy suggested.

"I see it now!" answered Tommy.

Sandy saw it, too, in a moment. It seemed at first to be floating in the air at the very top of the gangway. It moved from side to side, and finally dropped down nearer to the floor. There seemed to be no one near it or under it. Its small circle of illumination showed only the empty air.

"What do you make of it?" asked Tommy.

"Is this Tunnel Six?" asked his chum.

"I don't know! If it is, we've seen the light the caretaker referred to. We'll have a great story to tell in the morning!"

The boys stood in the darkness of the gangway watching the light for what seemed to them to be a long time. Now the light advanced toward them, now it receded. Now it lifted to the roof of the gangway, now it dropped almost to the floor.

At intervals, the noises behind the cribbing to which Tommy had referred were repeated, and the boys at last moved over so as to stand with their ears almost against the wooden walls.

"There is some one behind the cribbing, all right!" Tommy declared. "I hear some one breathing."

"Aw, keep still!" whispered Sandy. "If there is anyone there, you'll frighten them away! I thought I heard some one myself!"

"I'll tell you what I think," Tommy suggested in a moment, "and that is that either Will and George, or both of them, beat us to this gangway. They are hiding behind there on purpose to give us a scare."

"That's a dream!" replied Sandy. "We left them both asleep."

"Dream, is it?" repeated Tommy scornfully. "You just listen to the sound that comes from behind this cribbing, and tell me what you make of it!"

Both boys listened intently for a moment, and then Sandy switched on his light and moved swiftly along the cribbing as if in search of an opening. Tommy gazed at him in astonishment.

"You've gone and done it now!" he said.

"There's some one in here all right!" Sandy explained. "Did you hear the call of the pack a minute ago? There are Boy Scouts in there, and what we hear are the signals of the Wolf Patrol."

"That's right!" cried Tommy excitedly. "That's right!"

CHAPTER III

WHO CUT THE STRING

"Do you suppose he would understand the call of the Beaver Patrol?" asked Sandy. "I'm going to try him, anyway!"

The boy brought his hands together in imitation of the slap of a beaver's tail on the water, and listened for some reply.

"He'll understand that if he's up on Boy Scout literature," suggested Sandy. "He ought to be wise to the signs of the different patrols if he's a good Boy Scout."

There was a short silence, broken only by the constant drip of the water in an adjoining chamber, and then the call of the pack came again, clearly, sharply and apparently only a short distance away.

"What did Mr. Canfield call those two boys we are looking after?" asked Sandy, after waiting a short time for the repetition of the sound.

"Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson," replied Tommy.

Sandy threw out his chest and cried out at the top of his lungs:

"Hello, Jimmie! Hello, Dick!"

The lad's voice echoed dismally throughout the labyrinth of passages, but there was no other reply. Tommy and Sandy gave the call of the Beaver Patrol repeatedly, but the call of the Wolf pack was heard no more.

"I'll bet it's some trick!" exclaimed Sandy after waiting in the chamber for a long time in the hope of hearing another call from the boys who were hidden somewhere behind the cribbing.

"What do you mean by trick?" demanded Tommy.

"Why, I mean that some of the breaker boys, out of work because of the stoppage of operations, may have sneaked into the mine on purpose to produce the impression that there are ghosts here."

"But ghosts wouldn't be giving signals of the Wolf Pack, would they?" asked Tommy.

"Not unless they were Scouts," replied the other.

"Oh well, of course the kids would want to test us, wouldn't they, seeing that we were only boys?"

"Well, we've discovered one thing by coming down," said Tommy, "and that is that there really are people in the mine who have no business here."

"Then we may as well go back to bed," advised Sandy.

"Do you know how many corners we've turned since we came in here?" asked Tommy.

"About a thousand, I guess," replied Sandy.

"Yes, and we'd have a fine old time getting out if you hadn't brought that ball of twine!"

"Tell you what we'll do," Sandy said, as the boys turned their faces down the gangway, "we'll pass around the next shoulder of rock and then shut off our lights. Perhaps the kids who gave the cry of the pack in there will then show their light again."

"That's a good idea, too!"

The boys came at length to a brattice, which is a screen, of either wood or heavy cloth, set up in a passage to divert the current of air to a bench where workmen are engaged, and dodged down behind it, first shutting off their lights, of course.

"Now, come on with your old light," whispered Tommy.

As if in answer to the boy's challenge, the light showed again, apparently but a few yards away from their hiding place.

A moment later the call of the pack, sounding louder than before, rang through the passage. The boys sprang to their feet and switched on their lights.

"Why don't you come out and show yourselves?" shouted Tommy.

"I don't believe you're Scouts at all!" declared Sandy.

There was no answer. The boys could hear the drip of water and the purring of the current as it crept into a lower gangway, but that was all.

"That settles it for tonight!" exclaimed Tommy. "I'm not going to hang around here waiting for Boy Scouts who don't respond to signals!"

"That's me!" agreed Sandy. "We'll go to bed and think the matter over. There may be some way of trapping those fellows."

"Suppose it should be Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson?" asked Tommy.

"Then we'd have the case closed up in a jiffy!" was the reply.

Before leaving that particular chamber, Tommy selected a large round piece of "gob," placed it in the center of the open space, and laid another small piece of shale on top of it.

"What are you doing that for?" demanded Sandy.

"Don't you know your Indian signs?" demanded the boy. "That means 'This is the trail.' Now I'll put a stone to the right, and that will tell these imitation Boy Scouts to turn to the right if they want to get out."

"I guess they can get out if they want to," suggested Sandy.

Thirty or forty feet further on, where, following the string, the boys turned again, this time to the left, Tommy laid another signal which showed the direction to be taken.

"There," he said with a grin, "we've started them on the right path. If they don't want to follow it, that isn't our fault!"

"We must be getting pretty near the shaft," Sandy said, after the boys had walked for nearly half an hour on the backward track.

"Pull on your string," suggested Tommy, "and see if it stiffens up like only a short length of it remained out."

Sandy did as requested, and then dropped to the floor with his searchlight laid along the extension of the cord.

"The other end is loose!" he said in a tone of alarm.

"Loose?" echoed Tommy. "How did it ever get loose?"

Sandy sat down on the floor of the passage and began drawing the cord in, hand over hand.

"I'm going to see if it's been cut!" he said.

Tommy stepped on the swiftly moving cord and held it fast to the floor.

"You mustn't draw it in!" he exclaimed. "As long as it lies on the floor as we strung it out, we can follow it without taking any chances. If you pull it in, then it's all off."

"I understand!" Sandy agreed. "I didn't pull much of it in."

The boys started up the gangway, one of them keeping a searchlight on the white thread of cord.

They seemed to make a great many turns and once or twice Sandy declared that they were walking round and round in a circle.

"I don't believe the passages run so we could walk around in a circle!" argued Tommy. "That ain't the way they run passages in mines!"

"I don't care!" Sandy insisted. "We've been turning to the left about all the time, and if you leave it to me, we'll presently come out in the chamber where we heard the call of the pack!"

"That may be right," admitted Tommy. "It does seem as if we'd been turning to the left most of the time. Besides," he went on, "we've been walking long enough to have reached the shaft three or four times."

"And yet," argued Sandy, "we've been following the line of the cord every step. It lies right in the middle of the gangway here, and we're going the way it points all the time."

This bit of reasoning seemed to give the boys fresh courage, and they walked on, expecting every moment to come in sight of the frame work which surrounded the shaft. At length, after a long half hour, Tommy stumbled over an obstruction lying in a chamber which somehow seemed strangely familiar. He lifted his foot and gave the obstruction a hearty kick.

"That's my Indian sign of the trail!" grunted Sandy.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Tommy. "Have we been traveling all this time to come out in this same old hole at last?"

"That's what we have!" replied Sandy. "If we had paid no attention to the string whatever and followed the rails when we came to the main gang way, we would have been home and in bed by this time!"

"But we didn't," grinned Tommy. "We thought we had a cinch on getting out by way of this cord and so we followed that. I don't see, though," he continued, "how we came back to this same old chamber by following the cord. That looks queer to me!"

"I'll tell you how!" replied Sandy. "There's some gink been walking on ahead of us stringing the cord out for us to follow!"

Tommy sat down on the bottom of the chamber and wrinkled his freckled nose provokingly.

"We're a couple of easy marks!" he laughed.

"Easy marks is no name for it!"

"Well, what'll we do now to get out?" Tommy asked. "First thing we know, it'll be daylight, and then Will and George'll be calling out the police to find us. We ought to get home before they wake up."

"I'm willing!" declared Sandy. "I'd like to be in my little bed this minute! I've had about enough of this foul air!"

The boys passed along until they came to the second trail sign and then stopped. Tommy pointed down to it with a hand which was not quite steady and looked up into his chum's face with frightened eyes.

"That's been moved!" he said.

"How do you know it's been moved?"

"Because you had the side stone on the other edge."

"I don't think I did!" argued Sandy.

The boys puzzled over the situation for a few moments, and then proceeded down the chamber looking for the tramway rails.

They passed from chamber to chamber and finally came to a place where the slope was upward.

"I guess we've struck it at last!" Sandy exclaimed.

"But there are no rails here!" Tommy argued.

"Then we're on the wrong track again," admitted Sandy.

He bent down to the rock with his searchlight and pointed out evidences that the passage had once been laid with rails.

"When they strip a chamber or a counter gangway," he said, "they take away the rails. It seems that we are now in a part of the Labyrinth mine which has been worked out."

"I know what to do!" exclaimed Tommy. "I'll give the call of the Beaver Patrol and tell those ginks who have been giving the call of the pack that we're lost! That ought to bring them out of their holes."

The Beaver call was given time after time, but no reply came.

"Say," Tommy said after his patience had become exhausted, "I believe it's daylight. Look at your watch. I left mine in the bed!"

"I left mine in bed, too," answered Sandy. "I know it is day, because I'm hungry."

CHAPTER IV

A SENSATIONAL DISCOVERY

When Will awoke he began preparations for breakfast before paying any attention whatever to his chums, whom he believed to be sleeping quietly on their cots. It was November, and quite chilly in the apartment, so his next efforts were directed to coaxing the electric coils into a cheery glow.

Presently George came tumbling out in his pyjamas and sat down on a rickety chair to talk of the adventures in prospect.

"I wonder if the Labyrinth mine is so much of a labyrinth after all?" he asked. "It seems to me that we might find our way through it without danger of losing ourselves," he continued with a yawn.

"It's some labyrinth, I take it," Will replied.

"Well, we can make chalk marks on the walls as we move along," suggested George. "Besides," he added, "we can string an electric wire through the center gangway and turn on the lights."

"There are probably electric lights there now," answered Will.

"Then there's no danger of our becoming lost," George argued.

"I wish you'd go to the back of the room and tip over those two cots," grinned Will. "It's the hardest kind of work to get Tommy and Sandy to bed, but when you do get them in bed once, it's harder still to get them out of it. Just tip the cots over and roll 'em out on the floor."

George approached the two cots in a stealthy manner and made ready to give Tommy and Sandy the bump of their lives.

"Don't break their necks!" advised Will.

As soon as George reached Tommy's bunk he stretched forth a hand for the purpose of tangling the boy up in the bedclothing so that his fall to the hard floor might be in a measure broken.

As he swung his hand over the cot, however, his eyes widened and he called out to Will that the boys were not in their cots.

There was a look of alarm as well as of annoyance on each face as the lads thought over the situation.

"The little idiots!" exclaimed Will.

"That isn't strong enough!" George corrected.

"There's no knowing how long they've been gone," Will suggested. "The chances are that they went away as soon as we went to sleep."

"In that case, they're in trouble!" George declared.

"In what kind of trouble?"

"The good Lord only knows!" replied George. "Tommy and Sandy can get into more different kinds of trouble in less time than any other boys on the face of the earth. They're the original lookers for trouble!"

"Do you suppose they've got lost in the mine?" asked Will.

"It may be worse than that!" cried George. "They may have butted into some of the people the caretaker indirectly referred to last night."

"He did speak of strange noises and mysterious lights, didn't he?"

"He certainly did, and I've got a hunch that Sandy and Tommy have butted into some hostile interests.

"It does seem as if they would be back by this time unless they were in trouble!"

The boys prepared an elaborate breakfast in the hope that Tommy and Sandy, who would be sure to be hungry, would return in time to partake of it. A dozen times during the meal they walked back to the shaft opening and looked anxiously down into the dark bowels of the mine.

"Those fellows are always getting into trouble," Will said, rather crossly, as he stood looking down. "They have a way of running into most of their dangers at night, too. It was the same up on Lake Superior; the same in the snake-haunted Everglades of Florida; the same on the Rocky Mountains, and the same in the Hudson Bay country."

"They sure do keep things moving," grinned George.

"I think," Will suggested after a time, "that we'd better find Canfield and get his advice before we do anything in the way of setting up a search. I hate to admit that two members of our party got into a scrape on the same night we struck the mine, but I guess there's no way out of it."

While the boys talked together, the door opened softly and the caretaker entered, accompanied by a short, paunchy man with a very red face and eyes which were black, small and suspicious. He was a man well past middle age, but he seemed to be making a bluff at thirty-five. His hair, which had turned white at the temples, and his moustache were both dyed black.

Canfield introduced the new-comers as the detective, Joe Ventner, of New York, and the boys greeted him courteously.

He accepted their proffered hands with an air of condescension which was most exasperating. He puffed out his chest, and at once began talking of some of his alleged exploits in the secret service of the government.

"How did you pass the night, boys?" asked the caretaker.

"Slept like pigs!" replied Will with a laugh.

"Where are the others?" asked Canfield.

"They're out getting a breath of fresh air, I reckon," answered George.

The boys did not take to the detective at all. There was an air of insincerity about the man which at once put them on their guard.

Had Canfield visited them alone, they would have explained to him the exact situation. In the presence of this detective, however, they decided to do nothing of the kind.

"Now then," the detective said after a moment's silence, "if you boys will outline the course you intend to pursue in this matter, I think we can manage to work together without our plans clashing."

"We have talked the matter over during the night," Will replied, "and have decided to remain here only long enough to obtain some clue as to the direction taken by the boys in their departure."

"Then you think they are not here?" asked the detective.

"There is no reason why they should be here, is there?" asked Will.

"I don't know that there is," replied Ventner.

"Can you imagine any reason for their wanting to linger about the mine?" asked George.

"No," was the reply. "It has always been my opinion that the boys left the mine because they feared arrest for some boyish offense committed in some other part of the country, and that they are now far away from this place."

Both lads observed that the detective seemed particularly pleased with the statement that they proposed to abandon the search of the mine immediately. Somehow, they caught the impression that they would interfere with his plans if they remained.

"It might be well," Ventner said, directly, "to keep me posted as to any discoveries you may make. We must work together, you know."

"Certainly," replied Will, speaking with a mental reservation which did not include the giving up of any information worth while.

"Well, then, I'll be going," the detective said, strutting across the room, with his little round belly protruding like that of an insect. "You can always find me at the hotel down here, if I'm in this part of the country. Just ask for me and I'll show up."

Canfield was turning to depart with the detective when Will motioned to him to remain. The caretaker turned back with a surprised look.

Will waited until the door had closed on the detective before speaking. Even then, he went to the door and glanced down the passage.

"Something exciting?" smiled the caretaker, noting the boy's caution.

"Yes," Will answered, "there's something exciting. Tommy and Sandy disappeared during the night."

"Disappeared?" echoed the caretaker.

"Yes," George cut in, "there was some talk of their visiting the mine just before we went to bed, and we are of the opinion that they went down the shaft shortly after we fell asleep, and failed to find their way to the surface again. We are considerably alarmed."

"I should think you would be!" replied the caretaker. "In the first place, the Labyrinth mine bears the right name. There are old workings below which a stranger might follow for days without finding the way out."

"Then we'll have to organize a search for the boys," George suggested.

"Besides," continued Canfield, "there are things going on in the mine which no one understands. I have long believed that there are people living there who have no right to take up such a residence."

"I'm sorry you said anything to this detective about our being here," Will said, after this phase of the case had been discussed.

"As a matter of fact," the caretaker replied, "I didn't intend to say anything to Ventner about your being here, but in some way he received an intimation that you were about to take up the case and so pumped the whole story out of me."

"Perhaps he received his information from the New York attorney," suggested Will.

"I'm sure that he did not," answered the caretaker. "If the attorney had written to him in regard to the matter at all, he would have posted him so fully that when he cross-examined me such a proceeding would have been unnecessary."

"Has this man Ventner visited the mine often?" asked George.

"Yes, quite frequently."

"Does he always go alone?"

"Yes, he always goes alone," was the answer. "Once I accompanied him to the bottom of the shaft, but there he suggested that we go in different directions, and did not seem to want me anywhere near him."

"I don't like the looks of the fellow, and that's a fact!" exclaimed Will. "He doesn't look good to me."

After some discussion it was decided that the caretaker would accompany the two boys to the bottom of the shaft and direct them down gangways, which they could follow without fear of losing their way, and the illumination of which would be likely to be observed by anyone wandering about the blind chambers and passages of the mine.

When they reached the bottom of the shaft, climbing down the ladders, as Tommy and Sandy had done some hours before, they gathered in a little group at the bottom while the caretaker gave them a few general instructions regarding the general outlines of the Labyrinth of tunnels, chambers and cross passages which lay before them.

"Did any one come down after us?" asked Will directly.

"No one," was the reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," Will answered, "there's some one skulking off down that passage, and it looks to me like that bum detective!"

CHAPTER V

THE FLOODED MINE

"What makes you think it's Ventner?" asked the caretaker. "Did you see his face? I don't think he is here."

"I didn't see his face," answered Will, "but I saw the shape of his shoulders and the hang-dog look of him."

"You're prejudiced against Ventner," laughed Canfield.

"I admit it!" replied Will. "He looks to me like a snake in the grass. I don't think anything he could do would look good to me."

"Now," Canfield said, "perhaps we'd better be mapping out a plan of campaign. Here are three gangways leading in three different directions. We'll leave one of the lights burning at the shaft, then we'll each take a light and proceed into the interior, making as much noise as we conveniently can, and flashing the light into all the chambers and cross headings we come to."

"How long are these gangways?" asked Will.

"Somewhere near a half a mile straight ahead!" was the answer.

The caretaker went away swinging his electric searchlight, and Will and George pushed forward in their respective passages.

After proceeding a short distance, George heard Will calling to him.

"There's some one just ahead of me in the gang-way!" Will declared. "I think we ought to go together!"

"Do you think it's that bum detective?" asked George.

"I certainly do!"

"Well, we can go together if you like," George said. "We can't cover quite as much ground in that way, but I guess we can accomplish more in the long run!"

The boys had proceeded only a short distance when they heard Canfield calling to them. A moment later they heard the caretaker's steps ringing on the hard floor of the gangway down which they were advancing. He came up to them panting, in a moment.

"There's something mighty queer about this mine," the caretaker declared. "It was punk dry only two days ago, and now there are four or five feet of water where the gangway I started to follow dips down."

"And look there!" Will exclaimed holding his light aloft and pointing, "you can see plenty of water ahead! I guess all the gangways are taking a washing, and the water seems to be rising, too!"

"Is there any way by which the mine could be intentionally flooded?" asked George. "There may be some one planning trouble for the owners."

"There is only one way that I know of in which the mine could be flooded intentionally," replied the caretaker. "There is a large drain, of course, in what is known as the sump. Considerable water runs off in that way, and the rest of the drippings are taken out by the pumps. If this sump drainage should become clogged, the mine, of course, would become flooded though not to such an extent, unless the pumps were kept constantly at work."

"Then I guess you'd better set the pumps going," Will suggested. "We can't get into the mine in its present condition unless we swim."

"Haven't you got a boat?" asked George.

"Why, yes," replied the caretaker. "There's a couple of boats somewhere in the mine. The operators placed them here thinking they might come in handy at some future time, but I haven't any idea where they are now. Still, I think they're not far away."

"If you'll go and set the pumps in motion," Will advised, "George and I'll look around for the boats. We may need them before the pumps get under motion the way the water is pouring in now."

"I guess Tommy and Sandy don't come back because they're penned in by water," George suggested, as the boys began searching the vicinity of the shaft for the boats.

"If they're anywhere within hearing distance, they ought to answer us when we called out, hadn't they?" asked Will.

"We haven't tried that yet," George answered. "Suppose we let out a couple of yells!"

To think in this case was to act, and the boys did let out a couple of yells which brought the caretaker running back from the shaft.

The boys were listening for some answer to their shouts when he arrived, and so they paid little attention to his numerous questions.

"There is no time to lose," Canfield went on. "I'll go to the top at once and call an engineer and a couple of firemen. When you find the boat, take a trip down the main gangway here and stick your lights into all the cross-headings and chambers you see. But, above all," he continued, "don't

fail to leave a light here at a shaft, and be careful that you never pass out of sight of it."

Canfield hastened away, climbing the ladders two rungs at a time, and soon disappeared into the little dot of light at the top.

The two boys searched patiently for the boat for a long time, but did not succeed in discovering it. At last, Will suggested that it might be in the mule stable and thither they went.

The boat was there, in excellent condition, and the boys soon had it swinging to and fro on the surface of the water which now lay several feet deep in the main gangway.

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed George, taking the depth of the water with an oar, "if the water is four feet deep here, how deep must it be at the middle of the dip?"

"About forty rods, I should think!" exaggerated Will.

The boys left a large searchlight at the shaft, so situated that it looked straight down the passage they proposed following, and started away in the boat. The flashlights illuminated only a small portion of the underground place, but the boys could see some distance straight ahead.

Once they ceased rowing to listen, believing that they had heard calls from the darkness beyond. The sound was not repeated, and they were about to proceed when a sound which brought all their nervous energy into full swing reached their ears.

It was the bumping of an oar or paddle against the side of a boat. The blow echoed through the cavern as sharply as a pistol shot might have done. There could be no mistake in the cause.

"Now who's in that other boat?"

"Somehow," George grumbled in a whisper, "we always have propositions like that put up to us! There's always a mystery in every trip we take! We found one on Lake Superior, and one in the Florida Everglades, and one at the top of the Rocky mountains and one in the Hudson Bay wilderness."

"Yes, and we solved them, too!" grinned Will. "And we're going to solve this one! You remember about my seeing some one sneaking in here just ahead of us, don't you?"

"Yes," was the answer. "You thought it was that bum detective."

"I think so yet," replied Will.

"If it's the detective," asked George, "why didn't he give the alarm when he found that the mine was being flooded. He might at least have done that and saved the company a great deal of expense and trouble."

"Give it up," replied Will. "I might ask you," he went on, "why he was rowing away into a flooded mine which is supposed to be deserted."

"And I'd have to give you the answer you gave me," George declared.

The boys could now hear the strokes of the oarsman who was in the lead quite regularly and distinctly. Now and then he turned into crossheadings and chambers, as if to escape from their surveillance, but they kept steadily on after him, not taking into account the fact that they were leaving the light they had set at the shaft far out of view.

"Perhaps we ought to turn back now," George proposed, in a short time, seeing that they came no nearer to the boat in advance. "We left the main gangway some time ago, and we ought not to get too far away from it."

Will turned and looked back, facing only an inky blackness.

"We should have stuck to the main gangway," he said. "I don't even remember when we left it! Is it very far back?"

"Some distance," answered George. "You see we followed this other boat without thinking what we were doing."

"Perhaps, if we continue to follow the other boat, it will lead us somewhere. The fellow rowing must know something about the interior of the mine or he probably wouldn't be here!"

"I've been listening for a minute or more, trying to catch sound of the fellow's oars," George went on, "but there's nothing doing. I guess he's led us into a blind chamber and slipped away!"

"We don't seem to be lacking for excitement," Will suggested with a grin. "We've lost Tommy and Sandy, and the machinery of the mine has been interfered with, and the lower levels are filling with water! Any old time we start out to do things, there's a general mixup!"

"Aw, quit growling and listen a minute," suggested George.

The boys listened only for a moment when the sound George had heard was repeated. It was the call of the Wolf pack!

CHAPTER VI

THE BEAVER CALL

"That's Tommy!" exclaimed Will.

"I never knew that he belonged to the Wolf Patrol!" George observed.

"He might give the call without belonging to the Patrol!" urged Will.

The boys listened, but the sound was not repeated, although they called out the names of their chums and gave the Beaver call repeatedly.

"I guess it was a dream," George suggested.

"Then it was the most vivid dream I ever had!" Will declared.

They rowed about the chamber for some moments searching for the source of the call, but to no purpose.

"Let's go back to the shaft," urged George.

"I'm agreeable," answered Will. "The only question now is whether we can find the shaft. The water is so deep that all branches of the mine look alike to me!"

In passing out of the chamber into another passage the boys were obliged to stoop low in order to avoid what is called a dip.

After passing under the dip so close to the ceiling, so close that the boys were obliged to lie down in the boat in order to protect their heads, they came to a large chamber which seemed to be fairly dry save in the center, where there was a depression of considerable size.

"Nothing doing here!" Will exclaimed as he flashed his searchlight around the place. "This chamber looks as if there hadn't been an ounce of coal mined here for a hundred years."

"Then let's get out," George proposed, "and make our way back to the shaft if possible. If we can't, we'll make noise enough to attract Canfield's attention and let him come and lead us out."

"Here we go, then," cried Will, giving the boat a great push toward the dip. "We can't get out any too fast."

The boat came up against a solid projection of rock!

"I don't seem to see any way out!" George exclaimed.

"Well, it's there somewhere!" declared Will.

"I see it now!" cried George. "It's under water!"

"Under water?" repeated Will.

"Yes, under water!" answered George. "If we don't get out of this hole before the pumps get to working we'll have to swim!"

Will turned his searchlight on the dip and saw that it was now full clear to the down dropping roof.

"I guess we'll have to swim," he agreed.

"That black water doesn't look good to me," George exclaimed with a little shudder. "It seems to me that I can see snakes and alligators wiggling in it from here. Looks worse to me than the swamps of the Everglades! And there was a quart of snakes to every pint of water down there!"

"But we got to swim just the same!" urged Will. "In half an hour from now the air in this chamber will be unbreathable. There is no vent at all, now that the water fills the dip, and the coal gas is naturally seeping in all the time."

"That's all right, too!" admitted George. "But I'm not going to jump into that black water until I have to. If a rope or something should twine around my legs while I was in there, I'd drop dead with fright! Besides," he went on, "the chances are that Canfield will get the pumps going before long now."

The boys waited for a long half hour, during which time the water rose steadily. It seemed certain that the mine was about to be flooded throughout all the lower levels.

"Tommy and Sandy may have bumped into just such a situation as this," Will said, as he pushed the boat from side to side in the hope of coming upon some exit from the place.

"Serves 'em good and right!" exclaimed George.

Will chuckled to himself and held a wet hand high up toward the roof of the chamber or passage.

"There's a current of air here!" he said.

"Then we won't smother to death!" George grunted.

"And, look here," Will continued, as the boat bumped into a pyramid of shale which had been thrown up to within a few inches of the roof, "some one has been building this hill of refuse and using it for a refuge!"

"It does look that way," George agreed. "That shows that at some time the water must have ascended to the very top of the wall. We may have to climb up there ourselves in order to keep from getting our clothing soaked in that ink down there!"

The water rose higher and higher in the passage, and it seemed to the boys that by this time most of the lower gangways were entirely impassible.

"It doesn't seem to me that the water in this blooming old mine could rise any faster if the whole Mississippi river were turned into it!" cried George in a tone of disgust. "If Canfield doesn't get his pumps going before long, he'll have a job here that'll take him all winter!"

"I presume he's doing the best he can," Will argued. "For all we know, the boilers as well as the electric motors may have been tampered with. That would be just our luck!"

"I wonder what's become of that bum detective?" asked George after a short silence. "We heard him rowing along in front of us one minute, and the next minute there wasn't a single sound to indicate that there was another boat in the mine."

"As soon as I get out of this," Will stated, "I'm going to make it my business to find out whether that detective is regularly employed on this case. He looks to me like a crook!"

It was dreary waiting there in the sealed-up chamber, and the boys found themselves dropping into long intervals of silence while they listened for the gurgle of the water which would indicate that the great pumps had been set in motion.

During one of those intervals of silence, they heard sounds which brought them to their feet in great excitement. Almost unable to believe his ears, Will turned to George with a question on his lips:

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Of course I did!"

"I did, too, but I thought I must be dreaming."

"No dream about that!" replied George. "That's the call of the Beaver Patrol!"

"And that means that Tommy and Sandy are not far away!"

"We heard the call of the Wolf Patrol not long ago," suggested George. "I wonder if this blooming old mine is chock full of Boy Scouts of assorted sizes. There can't be too many here to please me!"

The boys returned the Beaver call but no answer came. At times they thought they heard whispers coming from the dark reaches of the cavern, but they were not quite certain.

"There may be real Beavers in here for all we know!" suggested Will.

"That's all you know about it!" chuckled George. "Beavers only operate in running water."

"Well, isn't that water out there running?" asked Will.

"No jokes now!" replied George. "I've got all I can endure now without standing for any of your alleged witticisms!"

While the boys sat in the boat, occasionally moving it from side to side, a shaft of light appeared directly above the point where the shale had been heaped up. It moved swiftly about for an instant and then dropped out of view. It was a moment before either boy spoke.

"That's some of Tommy's foolishness!" Will declared.

George repeated the Beaver call several times, but no answer came.

"That's a searchlight, anyway!" insisted Will. "And I don't believe these ginks in the mines have electric searchlights to lug around with them!"

Will unshipped an oar and struck the water with the flat of the blade several times, exerting his whole strength.

"Keep it up!" advised George. "That sounds exactly like a beaver's tail connecting with the surface of a stream!"

"Yes, keep it up!" cried a voice out of the darkness. "Keep it up, and perhaps some beaver'll come along and build a dam to get you out of that mess you're in! You're always getting into trouble, you two!"

"You've got your nerve with you!" exclaimed Will, half-angrily. "Here you go out in the night and get lost, and we come out after you, and the mine gets flooded, and we get tied up between the the solid wall and a bend in the passage, and then you blame us for getting into trouble!"

"Can you climb?" chuckled Tommy, throwing the rays of his searchlight on the boat. "If you can,

just mount up on that pile of shale and work your way through the opening between the two levels. This might have been used as a sort of an air hole a few hundred years ago," he went on, "but I'll bet that not one out of a hundred of the miners of today know that there is an opening here!"

Leaving the boat, the boys mounted the pile of shale and were soon making their way up the rugged face of the shaft in the direction of the level, which ran along above the one now being flooded.

"Can you find your way out of this dump, now?" asked Will as the boys stood with their chums at the end of a long passage.

CHAPTER VII

A TREACHEROUS FOE

"There seems to be fewer twists and turns in this level than on the one below it," Tommy explained, "and I guess we can find our way out readily enough. If we don't," he went on, "I shall be obliged to eat a ton or two of coal to keep from starving to death."

"Serves you right!" declared Will. "You had no business getting up in the middle of the night and wandering off into the mine!"

"What did you do?" demanded Tommy.

"We waited until morning, and then enlisted the services of the caretaker," replied Will. "So far as I can remember, this is about the nine hundredth relief expedition we've been out on in search of you boys!"

"Seems to me," Tommy chuckled, "that you're the lads that were in need of the relief expedition! We found you boxed up in a chamber in a boat."

"But we wouldn't have been in any such mess if we hadn't started out to look you up!" George declared.

"We should have been back before you got out of bed this morning, if some one hadn't cut our string," replied Sandy. "We had a cinch on getting out, but some geezer led us a fool chase by cutting our cord and steering us around in a circle."

"Did you see any one?" asked Will.

"Not a soul!" was the reply. "But there's some one in here, just the same. We heard the call of the Wolf Patrol a long time ago and we've heard it several times since."

"What do you mean by some one cutting your string?" asked George.

"Why," replied Sandy, "we tied the loose end of a ball of twine to one of the shaft timbers and unwound the ball as we moved along, expecting to follow it back when we wanted to get out."

"How do you know some one cut it?" asked Will.

"Perhaps you broke it," George suggested.

Sandy took a piece of the cord from his pocket and passed it over to George with a sly chuckle.

"See if you can break that!" he said.

George tried his best to break the string, but it remained firm under all his strength.

The boys now fell into a discussion of the ways and means of getting out of the mine.

"I believe," Sandy exclaimed, "that if we follow the current of air which the rising water is forcing out of this old shaft, we will come to the entrance. As you all know, a current of air takes the shortest way to any given point, and this one ought to blow straight toward the shaft."

"Great head, that, little boy!" laughed Tommy.

After proceeding some distance the steady thud, thud of the pumping machinery was heard, and the boys understood that the efforts of the caretaker were at last bringing results. The sounds also aided them in direction, and in a short time they stood at the shaft on the second level.

When they came out to the timber work, Will, who was in the lead, motioned to the others to remain in the background.

"What's doing now?" whispered Sandy.

"There's a man working on the ladders," explained Will in a low whisper. "I can't see him yet, but I can hear the sound of a saw."

"He may be cutting the rungs," suggested Tommy.

"That's the notion I had," replied Will. "Suppose we all get around behind the air shaft and wait until we can find out what he is up to. It may be that bum detective, for all we know."

"What would he be doing there?" questioned Sandy.

"Sawing the rungs!" whispered Will. "He wouldn't cut them down, of course, but he might saw them so that they would break under our weight and give us a drop of a couple of hundred feet."

"It doesn't seem as if any human being would do a thing like that!" cried George. "It would be a wicked thing to do!"

While the boys whispered together, the sound of sawing continued. The man engaged at the task was evidently unfamiliar with such work, for they heard him puffing and blowing as the saw cut through the wood.

"He's cutting the rungs, all right!" Will said in a moment. "And that cuts off our escape until the cables can be put in motion and the cages started. I wish I had him by the neck!"

"We'll get him by the neck, all right, before many days," Sandy cut in, "if we can only get a sight of him so as to be sure of his identity."

Presently the man ceased working, and they heard him ascending the ladders, step by step. In a moment the saw which he had been using dropped from his hands and clattered to the bottom of the shaft.

Then they heard him springing swiftly forward, and directly they knew that he had reached the top. The boys all looked disgusted.

"And we never caught sight of him!" exclaimed Tommy.

Will now walked around to the front of the shaft and looked down. The saw which had been used lay shining on the lower level.

"I'm going down after that!" he said in a moment.

"Yes, you are!" whispered Tommy.

"Got to have it!" insisted Will.

"Well, go on and get it, then," laughed Sandy. "You've got to show me!"

"I don't think he cut the rungs between this level and the next one," George interposed. "It may be safe to use the lower ladders."

"I can soon find out!" Will declared.

The cutting had been done between the second level and the top. The ladders below seemed perfectly safe. After testing them thoroughly, Will trusted himself on one of the rungs and let himself down slowly, bearing as much weight as was possible on the standards.

He was at the bottom in a moment, and in another moment stood by the side of his chums with the saw in his hand.

"I don't think that's so very much!" Tommy exclaimed.

"Right here, then," Will explained, "is where you get your little Sherlock Holmes lesson! This is a new saw, as you all see. It probably never was used before. Now the man who did the cutting bought this at some nearby store. Don't you see what it means?"

"That's a fact!" cried Tommy. "We can find out who bought the saw, and so discover the gink who tried to commit murder by sawing the ladders."

"And look here," Will went on, "do you see these threads hanging to the teeth of the saw? Do you see the color?"

"Blue!" replied the boys in a breath.

"That's right, blue. Now, what sort of a suit did the detective wear this morning? It was blue, wasn't it?"

"Sure it was!" replied George. "A blue serge! I noticed it particularly because it wasn't much of a fit."

"Well, these are blue serge threads!" commented Will.

"That's right, too," admitted Sandy.

While the boys still stood at the second level they heard some one moving down from the top. Will rushed around to the ladder and looked up.

He could not see the face of the man who was climbing down, but he could see that he did not wear a blue serge suit.

In a moment he called out to him, asking some trivial question regarding the action of the pumps. When the man looked down he saw that it was Canfield. The caretaker seemed surprised at finding the boys at the second level. He kept on descending.

"Wait!" Will called. "Stop where you are!"

"But I've got to find out what's the matter with the machinery at the bottom," the caretaker called out. "There's something wrong there!"

"Then you'd better take long steps," replied Will, "for if you put any weight on those rungs, you're likely to land at the bottom of the shaft. The rungs have been cut!"

"I can't believe that!" replied Canfield.

"Suppose you look and see!"

The caretaker advanced cautiously downward until he came to where a fine line of sawdust lay on one of the rungs.

"Do you know who did this?" he asked.

"We think we do," replied Will, "but this isn't any time for long stories. The first thing for us to do is to get back into the breaker and cook Tommy and Sandy three or four breakfasts apiece!"

"So you found them, did you?" asked Canfield.

"No; we found them," shouted Tommy.

"Well, how're you going to get out?" asked the caretaker.

"Get a rope," directed Will, "and throw it over the sound rung lowest down, and we'll climb up until we can trust our weight on the ladder."

This plan was followed, and in a short time the boys all stood, hungry and tired, in their room in the breaker. Tommy made an instantaneous dive for the provisions which had been brought in the night before.

"Nice old time we've had!" he exclaimed, with his mouth full of pork and beans. "I guess we're some Boy Scouts after all!"

"I'm going to tie you up tonight!" Will declared.

While the boys talked and ate the caretaker darted to the door leading to the passage which ended at the shaft.

He returned in a moment looking both angry and frightened.

"The pumps have stopped!" he said. "The mine will probably be flooded before tomorrow morning! The very devil seems to have taken full charge here today. I never saw anything like it!"

"There are boys in the mine who will be drowned!" exclaimed Tommy.

"I'm not so sure of that!" answered Canfield. "It was only a suggestion on my part that the boys we are in search of have taken refuge under ground. I think I must have been mistaken!"

"Do you know whether these breaker boys belonged to the Boy Scouts or not?" asked Will. "Did you ever see any medals or badges on their clothing which told of Boy Scout experiences?"

"Sure they belong to the Boy Scouts!" declared the caretaker, "and that is the very reason why I sent for Boy Scouts to help find them."

"What Patrol did they belong to?" asked Will.

"If you had heard them howling like wolves around the breaker night after night," was the reply, "you wouldn't ask what patrol they belonged to!"

"Then they are in the mine!" shouted Tommy. "We all heard the call of the pack, but the funny thing is that they wouldn't show themselves."

CHAPTER VIII

"THEY WENT UP IN THE AIR!"

"There's something funny-about those boys!" exclaimed Canfield. "They seemed to be merry-hearted fellows, just a little bit full of mischief, but for some reason they never mixed with the others much."

"Where did they come from when they came here?" asked Will.

"The information in the letters I received from the attorney in charge of the case is that they came here from New York, not directly but by some roundabout way."

"Did this attorney ever inform you why he wanted the boys found?" asked Tommy. "Are we all working in the dark?"

"He never told me why he wanted the boys found. For all I know, they may be wanted for some

crime, or they may be heirs to an immense property. My instructions are to find them. That's all!"

"Where did these boys lodge?" asked Will.

"They didn't have any regular room," was the reply. "They slept in the breaker whenever the watchman would permit them to do so, and when he wouldn't, they threw stones at him and slept in the railroad yard somewhere. But the strangest part of the whole business is the way they disappeared from sight."

"You didn't tell us about that!" exclaimed Sandy.

"I meant to," the caretaker answered. "The last seen of them here they were at work on the breaker. It was somewhere near the middle of the afternoon, and the cracker boss had been particularly ugly. The two boys were often caught whispering together, and more than once the cracker boss had launched such trifles as half pound blocks of shale at them. I happened to be on the outside just about that time."

"The boys didn't go up in the air, did they?" asked Sandy with a chuckle. "They haven't got wings, have they?"

"To all intents and purposes, they went up into the air!" answered the caretaker. "One moment they were on the breaker sorting slate and stuff of that kind out of the stream of coal which was pouring down upon them, and the next moment they were nowhere in sight!"

"Had any strangers been seen talking with them?"

"Now you come to a point that I should have mentioned before!" replied the caretaker. "Two days before they left a strange boy came to the mine and went to work on the breaker. He was an unusually well-mannered, well-dressed young fellow, and so the breaker boys called him a dude. He resented this, of course, and there was a fight at the first quitting time. These two boys, Jimmie and Dick, stood by the new lad, and gave three or four of the tough little chaps who work on the breaker a good beating up."

"Now we've got hold of something!" exclaimed Will. "Were these three boys together much after that?"

"No," was the reply. "The new boy thanked Jimmie and Dick for helping him through his scrape, and that was about all. They might have talked together for five minutes that night, but they were never seen, in each other's company again so far as I know."

"How long did this new boy stay here?" asked George.

"He quit the next day."

"He didn't go up in a pillar of fire, did he?" grinned Sandy.

"No, he walked up to the office and asked if he could get his pay for the time he had worked. The boss told him he'd have to wait until Saturday night, and he turned up his nose and walked out."

"And where did he go?" asked George.

"He said he was going down the river in a boat," answered the caretaker. "He bought an old boat, stocked it with quite a supply of provisions, and started on his way. The next day the boat was found bottom side up on a bar, and the lad's hat lay on the bank not far away".

"Do you think he was drowned?" asked Sandy.

"It would seem so."

"Drowned nothing!" exclaimed Tommy. "He sneaked those provisions into the mine under cover of the darkness, and the three little rascals are feeding on them yet. You can see the end of that without a telescope!"

"Now, smarty!" exclaimed George. "You've told us where the boys went, and where the provisions landed, and all that, now tell us why these kids hid themselves in the mine. And while you are about it, you may as well tell why they gave the Wolf call and refused to reply."

"This story," replied Tommy with a grin, "is not a novelette, complete in one number. It's a serial story, and will be continued in our next issue. What did you say about the pumps stopping, Mr. Canfield?"

"They've stopped, all right!" the caretaker replied.

"Are you going to let the ginks flood the mine?" asked Sandy.

"While I was out a few moments ago," Canfield explained, "I notified one of the clerks in the company's office to send up a gang of men to repair the machinery. They ought to be here by this time."

"How long will it take to repair the pump?" asked Tommy.

"It may take an hour and it may take twenty-four."

"In the meantime," Tommy continued, "do you think you could send one of the county officers out to round up this bum detective?"

"You mean that you want him watched?" asked Canfield.

"Sure!" answered Tommy. "He sawed the rungs in the shaft, didn't he? He could get ten years for that!"

"All right," replied Canfield. "I'll send word out and have him arrested if you are positive that he is the man that did the cutting."

"We are positive that he's the man," replied Will, "but it'll spoil everything if you have him arrested. We want to give him a free hand for a time, and see what he will do. He's a crook, and he's bound to show it! And another thing," the boy went on, "we don't want anyone to know that he is under suspicion. We just want him watched."

"You're handling the case," smiled Canfield, "and I'll take any steps you advise. I can't tell you how sorry I am that I brought the detective in here this morning!"

"Well," Will said, "we put up a bluff about getting out of town and perhaps we can make that stick. We can take a train out and come back in on a lonely freight, and get into the mine without his knowing anything about it. The mine is the best place to work from, anyway!"

"That's why I wanted to know how soon the mine could be pumped out!" stated Tommy. "I don't care about wading around in a mess of water that's blacker than a stack of black cats."

"I think I can have the mine fairly dry by the time you boys get out of town and back again!" laughed Canfield.

"Well," Tommy said, "then you'd better get a couple of dry-goods boxes and fill them full of good things to eat, and drop 'em down to the first level. Perhaps you know of a cosy little chamber there where we can set up housekeeping."

"I know just the place," said the caretaker. "To the left of the old tool house there's a room where odd articles of every description have been stored for any number of years. The blacksmith and the fire-boss used to go there to smoke and tell stores, if I remember right."

"Does anyone ever go there now?" asked Will.

"Not that I know of," was the reply.

"Then we'll drop down there some time towards morning," Will decided. "And in the meantime," he added, with a wink at his chums, "we'll be looking for a boy tramp out in the railroad yards."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the caretaker.

"Oh, I've just got an idea," replied Will, "that there's a kid hanging around this part of the country whom we ought to interview."

"But I don't understand."

"You wait until we get hold of him, and you'll understand all right!" laughed Will. "We just need that boy!"

"But how do you know there is such a boy?" urged the caretaker.

"He gets it out of a dream book!" Tommy chuckled.

"Do you mean to say that there is some go-between between the boys who may or may not be in the mine and some persons outside who are interested in them?" asked the caretaker.

"I didn't say anything of the kind!" replied Will.

"There are times," Tommy explained to Canfield, "when the gift of frank speech is taken away from Will, so you mustn't blame him for not answering. He'll tell you all about it when the time comes."

The caretaker went away with a puzzled look on his honest face.

CHAPTER IX

WHO DISCOVERED THE LEAK?

"You've got to explain to me," George laughed, as the caretaker left the room, and the boys began picking up their clothing, preparatory to the alleged journey. "I can't understand what you mean by saying that you'll watch out for a boy tramp in the railroad yards."

"It's a sure thing, isn't it?" Will asked, "that the boys we are in search of are in the mine? We don't know what they're in there for. They may be hiding there because of some fool notion they have in their heads, or they may have been sent here for some definite purpose."

"You bet they've been sent here for some definite purpose," George replied. "They never came here to work on the breaker without having some well-defined motive. Boys answering to their

description don't accept such jobs as they accepted here!"

"Well, the boys are in the mine," Will continued. "As stated, we don't know what they're there for, but we know they're there. Now, this third boy comes to the mine and works just long enough to get in touch with the other two. Then he disappears."

"Buys a lot of provisions and goes down the river to leave his hat on the bank!" laughed Tommy. "I guess that was a pretty poor imitation of a suicide or a drowning accident, either!"

"But this boy didn't get to be intimate with the two breaker boys," contended George. "He talked with them about two minutes after the fight, according to Canfield, but paid no further attention to them after that. If he had any secret understanding with them, he must have done a whole lot of talking in a mighty short space of time."

"The right kind of a boy can say a good deal in a minute and half!" laughed Tommy. "But suppose we let Will go on and explanation us about that boy tramp in the railroad yards. I think I know what he's getting at, but I'm not quite certain. Go on, Will, it's up to you."

"In order to make the connection," laughed Will. "I'll state for the third time that we know that the boys are in the mine. It may also be well to state, once more, that we are reasonably certain that this third boy came to the mine for the specific purpose of communicating with the other two. Now, this boy didn't drop into the river. He dropped the provisions he bought for the boat into the coal mine, and left them there for the consumption of the two boys inside. That's reasonable, isn't it?"

"Fine deduction, as Sherlock Holmes would say to Watson!" laughed George.

"But this third boy," Will went on, "doesn't go into the mine. He stays outside to serve as a means of communication between the boys who are hiding in the mine and some interested person or persons on the outside. That's perfectly clear, isn't it?"

"That'll do very well for a theory," replied George.

"I'll go you a plate of cookies," argued Sandy, "that Will is right, and that this third boy is hanging around taking messages from the two boys in the mine and also to the two boys in the mine."

"Didn't I say it was all right for a theory?" chuckled George.

"Now, the point is this," Will continued. "What are those boys in the mine for? What do they want there? Why didn't they answer our Boy Scout challenge when we replied to their call of the pack?"

"If you don't ask so many questions, you won't get so many negative answers," Sandy advised. "We're here to find the boys, and I don't see that it makes any difference to us what they're in there for."

"But we've found the boys now," contended Tommy. "We haven't got our hands on them yet, of course, but we know they're in there, and we know it's only a question of time when we get hold of them."

"Well," Will insisted, "I'm going to find a motive before I quit the case. I'm going to know who sent those boys here, and all about it, before I make any report to Mr. Horton."

"Go as far as you like," laughed Tommy. "My bump of curiosity is growing half an inch a day, and will continue to spread out until I find out exactly what those boys are doing burrowing in a deserted mine."

"Now, we'll get back to the point we started from," Will explained. "This boy who is undoubtedly doing duty outside the mine in the interests of the persons who sent the two boys in, furnishes the clue to the whole situation! When we find him, and find out what he's up to, and trace any communications he may make back to their original source, we'll have the whole case tied up tight!"

"That's right!" declared Tommy. "We'll have the case tied up tight if we succeed in getting hold of this third boy."

"Oh, go on!" laughed Sandy. "We'll be picking third boys and fourth boys and fifth boys out of the air, first thing you know. We never went away on a Boy Scout expedition yet that we didn't find all manner of kids hanging around on purpose to be discovered. We found them on Old Superior; and in the Everglades; and on the Great Continental Divide; and up in the Hudson Bay country, we began to think we had stumbled on the center of population so far as Boy Scouts were concerned!"

"There's just one thing that's likely to make us trouble," Will resumed. "And that is the fact that Canfield very foolishly sopped over to Ventner when explaining the purpose of our visit here. That bum detective knows now that we're here to search the mine. Of course he might have received, as Canfield says, the most of his information from outside sources, but the caretaker should have thrown him off the track instead of telling him exactly what our mission here was."

"But Ventner came here to search for the boys himself!" George broke in. "At least, he says that he did."

"There's a mystery about the whole matter," Sandy declared, "and I'd like to help clear it up from beginning to end!"

"We're likely to have a chance!" laughed Tommy.

"What are we going to do all the afternoon?" George asked.

"Wander around town," smiled Will, "and find out about the evening train, and ask fool questions about the pumps and the mine, and laugh at the idea of anybody living in there. That'll give Ventner the idea that we're going for good, I reckon. He's a pretty bum skate to pose as a detective!"

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do most of the afternoon!" Tommy declared. "I'm going to the hay! I never felt so bunged up for want of sleep in my innocent life."

"Haven't you forgotten something?" asked Sandy.

"Sure!" shouted Tommy. "I'm forgetting to eat!"

"And you're forgetting something else!" insisted Sandy.

"Nix on the forget!" declared Tommy. "When I forget my eatings and sleepings, the world will come to an end!"

"You forgot to read a chapter in your dream book!" said Sandy.

"Never you mind that dream book," Tommy replied. "Whenever you want to find the answer to any puzzle, you look in that dream book!"

After eating another hearty meal the boys, having already packed their wardrobes, locked the door of their room and addressed themselves to slumber.

They were awakened about five o'clock by a loud knocking on the door, and presently they heard the voice of Canfield calling to them.

"Wake up, boys!" he cried. "I have good news for you!"

"All right, let her go!" shouted Tommy.

"The pumps are working, and the water is lowering in the mine!"

"That's nice!" laughed Sandy.

"And we've found out what caused the sudden flooding," the caretaker went on. "It seems that a partition, or wall, between the Labyrinth and the Mixer mines unaccountably gave way. The Mixer mine has been flooded for a long time and, as it lies above the level of the Labyrinth, the water naturally flowed into our mine as soon as the wall was down."

"But what caused the partition to fall?" asked Will, opening the door for the admission of the caretaker.

"No one knows!" was the answer.

"If you look about a little," Tommy suggested, "I think you'll find traces of dynamite. Who discovered the break in the dividing wall?"

"A gang under the leadership of Ventner, the detective!" was the reply.

The caretaker was very much surprised and not a little annoyed at the effect his answer had upon the four boys.

"I don't see anything humorous about that!" he said as the lads threw themselves down on the bunks and roared with laughter.

"It looks funny to me!" Tommy replied. "If we had never showed up here, the mine wouldn't have been flooded. As soon as we start away or promise to leave the district, which amounts to the same thing, this cheap skate of a detective finds the break, and all is well again!"

"Why, you don't think that he had anything to do with the trouble at the mine, do you?" questioned the caretaker.

"Oh, of course not!" replied Sandy. "Ventner had nothing to do with cutting the ladder! That fellow will land in state's prison if he keeps on trying to murder boys by sawing ladder rungs!"

"I had forgotten that," said Canfield.

"Well, don't forget that this man Ventner is playing the chief villain's role in this drama!" Tommy advised. "And another thing you mustn't forget," the boy continued, "is that you're not to say a word to him that will inform him that he is suspected."

"I think I can remember that!" replied the caretaker.

The boys prepared a hasty supper and then, suit cases in hand, started for the little railway station. There they inquired about the arrival and departure of trains, bought tickets, and made themselves as conspicuous as possible about the depot.

"Keep your eye out for the third boy," George chuckled, as the lads walked up and down the platform.

"Don't get excited about the third boy," Will replied. "We'll find him when the right time comes!"

"There's Ventner!" exclaimed Tommy as the detective came rushing down the platform. "Of course the good, kind gentleman would want to bid us farewell!"

"I'd like to crack him over the coco!" exclaimed Sandy.

"I'll bet he's got some kind of a fake story to tell," suggested Will. "He looks like a man who had been working his imagination overtime!"

"News of the two boys!" shouted the detective as he came up smiling.

CHAPTER X

THE BOY IN THE "EMPTY"

"Didn't I tell you," whispered Will, "that he is there with a product of his imagination? If you leave it to him, the two boys we're in search of are somewhere on the Pacific slope!"

"He must think we're a lot of suckers to take in any story he'll tell!" whispered Tommy. "A person that couldn't get next to his game ought to be locked up in the foolish house!"

"I've just heard from a railway brakeman," Ventner said, rushing up to the boys with an air of importance, "that the two lads you are in search of were seen leaving a box car at a little station in Ohio. I don't just recall the name of the station now, but I can find it by looking on the map! It seems the lads left here on the night following their departure from the breaker, and stole their passage to this little town I'm telling you about."

"Good thing you came to the depot," declared Will. "We should have been out of town in ten minutes more!"

"Where is this town?" asked George, thinking it best to show great interest in the statement made by the detective.

"It's a little place on the Lake Erie & Western road!" was the answer.

The detective took a railroad folder from his pocket and consulted a map. It seemed to take him a long time to decide upon a place, but he finally spread the map out against the wall of the station and laid his finger on a point on the Lake Erie & Western railroad.

"Nankin is the name of the place. Strange I should have forgotten the name of the place. They were put out of the car at Nankin, and are believed to have started down the railroad right of way on foot."

"But you said they were seen leaving the car at Nankin!" Tommy cut in. "Now you say they were put out of the car!"

"Well, they were chased out of the car, and that covers both statements," replied the detective somewhat nervously.

"Thank you very much for the information!" Will exclaimed as the train the boys were to take came rolling into the station. "The pointer is undoubtedly a good one, and we'll take a look at the country about Nankin."

There was a crossing not more than six miles from the station where the boys had taken the train, and they were all ready to jump when the engineer slowed down and whistled his note of warning. It was quite dark, although stars were showing in a sky plentifully scattered over with clouds and, as the boys dropped down out of the illumination of the windows as soon as they struck the ground, they were not seen to leave the train by any of the passengers.

In a moment the train rushed on, leaving the four standing on the roadbed looking disconsolately in the direction of the town.

"Now for a good long hike!" exclaimed Tommy.

"It's for your own good!" laughed Sandy.

"I can always tell when anything's for my own good," Tommy contended.

"You don't look it!" chuckled Sandy.

"When anything's for my own good," the boy continued, "it's always disagreeable! It makes me think of a story I read once where the man complained that everything he ever wanted in this world was either expensive, indigestible or immoral."

"Well, get on the hike!" laughed George. "You can stand here and moralize till the cows come home, and it won't move you half an inch in the direction of the mine!"

"And look here," Will exclaimed as the boys started up the grade, "when we get within sight of the lights of the station, we must scatter and keep our traps closed! We can all make for the mine by different routes. Ventner thinks we are out of town now, and the chances are that he'll be plugging around trying to accomplish some purpose known only to himself. For my part I don't believe he is employed on the same case we are! He's working here for some outside parties!"

"That's the way it strikes me!" George agreed. "If the detective had been honestly trying to assist us, the mine wouldn't have been flooded, the pumps wouldn't have broken down, and the electric motors would have been found in excellent working order."

"Did you notice the suit he had on when he stood talking with us at the station?" asked Will. "That was a blue serge suit, wasn't it?"

"It surely was!" Tommy declared, quick to catch the point. "And there was a tear down the front of it which looked as if it had been made by the scraping of a saw! I guess if you'll match the shreds we found on the saw with the breaks in that coat front you'll find where the saw got in its work, all right!"

"And there was a cut on his hand, too!" Sandy observed. "Looked like he had bounced the saw off one of the rungs on top of a finger."

"Oh, he's a clever little boy all right!" Tommy cut in. "But he forgot to leave his brass band at home when he went out to cut into that ladder! If he does all his work the way he did that job, he'll be sitting in some nice, quiet state's prison before he's six months older."

When the boys came within a quarter of a mile of the station lights, they parted, Will and George turning off from the right of way and Sandy and Tommy keeping on for half a dozen rods. When the four boys were finally clear of the tracks they were walking perhaps twenty rods apart, and at right angles with the right of way.

"Now, as we approach the mine," Will cautioned his companion, "keep your eye out for Ventner and this third boy. They are both likely to be chasing around in the darkness."

The route to the mine taken by Tommy and his chum crossed a network of tracks, led up to the weigh-house and so on into the breaker. As they came to a line of empty cars standing on a spur they heard a movement in one of the empties and crouched down to listen.

"There's some one in there!" declared Tommy.

"Some old bum, probably!"

This from Sandy who had recently bumped his shins on a pile of ties and was not in a very pleasant humor.

"It may be the boy we're looking for!" urged Tommy.

Sandy sat down on the end of a tie and rubbed his bruised shin vigorously, muttering and protesting against railroad yards in general and this one in particular as he did so.

Tommy made his way under the empty and sat listening, his ear almost against the bottom of the car. Presently he heard a movement above and then it seemed to him that something of considerable weight was being dragged across the floor. This was followed in a moment by a slight groan, and then a shadowy figure leaped from the open side door and started away in the darkness.

Now Sandy had been warned to hang onto the third boy like grim death if he caught sight of him. He saw this figure bounce out of the car and start away. Therefore, he promptly reached out a foot and tripped the unknown to the ground.

He fell with a grunt of anger and pain and lay rolling on the cinders which lined the roadbed for a moment without speaking. In the meantime, Tommy had crawled out from under the car and stood ready to seize any second person who might make his appearance.

Almost immediately a second body came bouncing out of the empty.

Instead of starting away on a run, however, the second person stopped where Sandy stood beside the wiggling figure and looked down upon it.

"Hand him one!" he said in a boy's voice.

"Who is it?" asked Sandy.

"Don't know!" was the reply.

"What was he doing to you?"

"He was trying to rob me!"

"I don't think a man would get rich robbing people who ride in empties!" laughed Sandy. "I shouldn't think their bank rolls would make much of a hit with a bold, bad highwayman!"

"There's men riding the rods," was the reply, "who would kill a boy for a dime! If I wasn't opposed to cruelty to animals, I'd give this fellow a beating up right now. He tried to drag me from the car by the leg and nearly broke my ankle!"

"I heard him dragging you across the floor!" Tommy said, coming up to where the two boys stood. "Can you see who it is?" he added.

"He's just a tramp!" the other replied. "I saw him sneaking around the empties just before dark."

"Why were you sleeping in an empty?" asked Sandy.

"Because I like plenty of fresh air!" replied the boy with a chuckle.

While the boys talked the tramp arose and sneaked away, limping over the ties as if tickled to death to get out of the way of the three youngsters.

As he disappeared in the darkness Tommy turned to the boy who had dropped out of the car to ask him a question.

The boy was nowhere to be seen.

"Now we've gone and done it!" cried Sandy.

"I guess we have!" agreed Tommy. "We've let the third boy get away from us! And we couldn't have done a worse thing!" he went on, "because the boys in the mine will know that we are still in this vicinity!"

While the boys stood blaming themselves the sharp call of the Wolf pack came to them.

CHAPTER XI

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

When Will and George came to the back of the weigh-house they heard some one moving about at the front.

"That's probably the caretaker, taking his last look for the night," suggested Will. "He pokes around all the outbuildings every night before he goes to bed. At least, he is supposed to."

"But this fellow hasn't got any lantern," urged George.

"The plot deepens!" chuckled Will.

"Can you crawl around there and see who it is," asked George, "or shall I go? It may be a thief, or it may be Ventner, or it may be this boy we're looking for. Anyway, we want to know who it is!"

"I'll go!" Will suggested, "and don't you make any racket if you hear something doing there. The one thing to do at this time is to keep our presence here a profound secret."

Will moved cautiously around the angle of the weigh-house just in time to see a figure leaving the side of the building and moving toward the breaker. There was a little side door in the breaker not far from the weigh-house, and it was toward this that the prowler was making his way.

Half way to the little house the fellow stumbled over some obstruction in his path and fell sprawling to the ground. He arose with an impatient oath and moved on again, but not before the watcher had recognized both the figure and the voice. Will turned back to where George stood.

"That's Ventner," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure!"

There was a short silence.

"What can we do now?"

"I don't know of anything we can do, unless it is to watch the rascal and see where he goes," answered the other. "The chances are that he's trying to get into the mine!"

"That shows that the fellow's a crook," Will contended. "He has full permission to enter the mine at any time he sees fit."

"Of course, he's a crook!" agreed George. "What would he be sneaking around here in the night for, if he wasn't engaged in some underhand game? You just wait until we get into the mine," the boy continued, "and we'll give him a ghost scare that'll hold him for a while."

As Ventner approached the little side door leading into the breaker, a light flashed in the window of the room which the boys had occupied, and directly Canfield's voice was heard asking:

"Who's there?"

"Now if he's on the square, he'll answer!" whispered Will.

There was no reply whatever, and in a moment the caretaker called again, this time rather peremptorily:

"What are you prowling about the yard for?"

The detective dropped to his knees and began crawling away.

"If I see you around here again," the caretaker shouted in a braver tone now that the intruder was taking his departure, "I'll do some shooting!"

Evidently giving over the attempt to enter the mine at that time, the detective arose to his feet as soon as he gained the shelter of the weigh-house, and walked away, passing as he did so, within a few feet of where the boys were standing.

"That settles that bum detective, so far as we are concerned!" Will said to his chum, in a whisper. "We knew before that he was playing a rotten game on us, but we didn't know that his plans included such surreptitious visits to the mine."

After making sure that the detective was not within sight or sound, Will and George tapped softly at the little door and were admitted by the caretaker. Five minutes later they were joined by Tommy and Sandy.

"Were you boys out there a few moments ago?" asked Canfield.

"Nix!" replied George. "That was Venter. We saw him from the weigh-house. He was trying to sneak his way into the mine!"

"But he has full permission to enter at any time he sees fit!" urged the caretaker. "It doesn't seem as if he would attempt to steal his way in during the night. You must be mistaken!"

"Yes, and perhaps we were mistaken about the sawing of the ladder, too!" Tommy broke in.

"Yes, we may all be mistaken about that."

"Not so you could notice it!" declared Sandy. "If you look at the thief's coat, you'll see that he didn't do all the sawing on the rungs of the ladder. We've got him too dead to skin!"

Without any lights being shown on the surface, the boys were conducted down the ladder to the first level. There they found a room very cosily furnished, indeed. A lounge from the office, a couple of good sized cupboards, and a large table had been brought down, together with a serviceable rug and numerous chairs, and tho apartment presented an unexpectedly homelike appearance.

The current was on, and two electric lamps made the room as light as day. The cooking was to be done over electric coils so that the presence of the boys would not be disclosed by smoke. One of the ventilating pipes which supplied the offices in the vicinity of the shaft with fresh air passed through the room, so there was no lack of ozone.

"Have we got plenty of eatings?" asked Tommy.

"Plenty!" was the reply. "I have arranged for fresh meat, milk and vegetables to be brought in every evening."

"Talk about your bull-headed, obstinate men!" exclaimed Tommy, as the caretaker finally took his departure. "That fellow takes the cake! He knows very well that we caught Ventner in the act of sawing on the ladder, and he knows, too, that we heard Wolf calls while we were in the mine. Still, he shakes his head and says that he don't know about the boys being there, and don't know about that bum detective being crooked. If you could get a saw and operate on his head, you'd find it solid bone!"

"You'll feel better after you get supper!" Sandy declared.

"This isn't any grouch!" insisted Tommy. "This is the true story of that man's life! If I had a dollar for every time he doesn't know anything, I'd be the richest boy in the world!"

"Are you thinking of going down the mine tonight?" asked George, with a wink at Will. "We might try another midnight excursion."

"If you kids go into the mine tonight", declared Will, "I'll send you both back to Chicago on the first train!"

"Aw, how are you going to find these boys if you don't go into the mine?" demanded Tommy. "I suppose you'll want us to wait till daylight when the owners will be looking around to see if any damage was done by the inundation. The best time is at night!"

"Look here," Will argued, "we've got to do more than lay hands on the boys! We've got to find out why they are hiding in the mine."

"That's the correct word," agreed George. "Hiding is the word that expresses the situation exactly!"

"There is no doubt," Will continued, "that the boys were sent here by some one for some specific purpose. They are hiding in the mine with a well-defined motive. I have an idea that we might be able to find them in twenty-four hours, but what is more important, is to find out what they are up to."

"Well, in order to get the whole story, we'll have to pretend that we are looking for them and

can't find them!" George said.

"That's right!" laughed Tommy. "Give them plenty of rope and they'll hang themselves. We may as well have the whole story while we're at it."

Before preparing their beds for the night, the boys paid a visit to the shaft and made their way down to the rungs which had been cut. They found that they had been replaced by new ones.

There was still water in the lower levels of the mine, but it was slowly disappearing through the sump, and the indications were that it would be dry by morning. The boys listened intently for some evidence of occupancy as they moved up and down the shaft, but all was still.

"This would be a good place to tell a ghost story," Tommy chuckled as they moved back to their room on the first level.

"There's about a million stories now, entitled The Ghost of the Mine!" declared Sandy. "Perhaps however," he went on, "one more wouldn't hurt."

"If I see a ghost tonight," declared Tommy, "it'll be in my dreams!"

Sandy and Tommy were sound asleep on their cots as soon as supper was over, and Will and George were getting ready to retire when the soft patter of a light footstep sounded in the vicinity of the shaft.

"Rats must be thick in the mine!" suggested George.

"Rats nothing!" declared Will. "Those two youngsters are prowling about in order to see what we are up to!"

As he spoke the boy arose, turned off the electric light and stepped out into the passage.

CHAPTER XII

A MIDNIGHT ROBBER

There was a quick scamper of feet as Will stepped out, then silence!

"Where did he go?" asked George, joining his chum on the outside.

"Down the ladder!" replied Will.

"Why don't we go and see where he went?"

"That might be a good idea," Will replied. "Do you think it's safe for us to try to navigate that shaft in the dark?"

"We can stick to the ladders, can't we?" asked George.

"We ought to find out where the kids hang out," Will argued. "I'd like to get my hands on one of them!"

"I don't think we're likely to do that tonight," George answered. "It seems to me that about the only way we can catch those fellows is to set a bear trap. They seem to be rather slippery."

Will, clad only in pajamas and slippers, moved toward the shaft, and looked down. It was dark and still below, and he turned back with a little shudder. The situation was not at all to his liking.

"Well, are you going down?" asked George.

"Sure, I'm going down!" Will answered. "I'm only waiting to get up my nerve! It looks pretty dreary down there. If we could use a light I wouldn't mind, but it's pretty creepy going down that hole in the darkness."

"Then suppose we wait until morning," suggested George.

Will leaned against the shaft timbers and laughed.

"It'll be just as dark in here in the morning, as it is now!" he said. "I think we'd better go on down tonight and see if we can locate the fellows."

The two boys passed swiftly down the ladder, paused a moment at the second level, and then passed on to the third. The gangways leading out from the shaft were reasonably dry now. Lower down the dip they were still under a few inches of water.

"I don't see how we're going to discover anybody down in this blooming old well!" George grumbled. "There might be a regiment of state troops here and we wouldn't be able to see a single soldier!"

"We can't show a light, for all that!" declared Will. "We've just got to wait and see if *they* won't be kind enough to show a light."

"You guessed it," chuckled George, whispering softly in his chum's ear, "there's a glimmer of light, now!"

"I see it!" Will replied.

The boys left the ladder and moved out into the center gangway. They could see a light flickering some distance in advance, and had no difficulty in following it.

"That's an electric torch!" Will commented.

"Perhaps, if we follow along, we'll be able to track them to their nest," George suggested, "and, still, I don't care about getting very far away from the shaft. We might get lost in these crooked passages."

"Yes," replied Will. "Some one might head us off, too. I don't care about being held up here in pajamas."

The mine was damp and cold, and a wind was sweeping up the passage toward the shaft. The boys shivered as they walked, yet kept resolutely on until the light they were following left the main gangway and disappeared in a cross heading.

"That means 'Good-night' for me," whispered Will, "for I'm not going to get out beyond the reach of the rails. I guess well have to go back and invent some other means of trapping those foxy boys."

As Will spoke the light reappeared and moved on down the gangway again. Then, for the first time, the boys saw a figure outlined against the illumination. Will caught his chum by the arm excitedly.

"That isn't one of the boys at all!" he exclaimed.

"Well, how large a population do you think this mine has!" demanded George. "If it isn't one of the boys, who is it?"

"That bum detective!" answered Will.

"So he got in here at last, did he?" chuckled George. "Well, it's up to us to find out what he's doing in here!"

"Do you think that is the gink who was prowling around our room?" asked Will. "If he is, then our little trip in the country doesn't count for much!"

"The fellow who visited us," George argued, "was light and quick on his feet. This bum detective waddles along like an old cow."

"Then we've passed the boy who called to see us, and failed to leave a card," grinned Will. "We may meet him as we return!"

"Here's hoping we bump straight into him if we do meet him," George exclaimed. "I'm just aching to get my hands on that fellow!"

"I'm not particularly anxious to catch him just yet," Will suggested. "I want to find out what the kids are up to before we pounce down upon them."

While the boys stood in the passage, whispering together, the light moved on until it came to a chamber which seemed to be rather shallow, for the reflection of the searchlight was still in the gangway.

"Now we've got him!" exclaimed Will. "I think I remember that chamber, and, unless I'm very much mistaken, it opens only on this passage! While he's poking around in there, we'll sneak up and see what he's doing!"

Before the boys reached the entrance to the chamber they heard the sounds of a pick. When they came nearer and looked in they saw the detective poking away at a heap of "gob" which lay in one corner of the excavation. He worked industriously, and apparently without fear of discovery. Now and then he stooped down to peer into a crevice in the wall, but soon went on again.

"I wonder if he thinks he can find two boys in that heap of refuse?" laughed George. "I wonder why he don't use a microscope."

The detective busied himself at the heap of refuse for a considerable length of time, and then began a further investigation of little breaks in the wall. Using his pick to enlarge the openings he made a systematic search of one break after another.

"Looks like he might be hunting after some pirate treasure," George chuckled. "I never heard of Captain Kidd sailing over into the sloughs of Pennsylvania. Did you?"

"That tells the story!" Will whispered. "The fellow is here on some mission of his own. That story of his about being in quest of the boys is all a bluff! I reckon he had heard somewhere that two boys were missing and came here with the fairy tale!"

"Well, he's got a good, large mine to look in if he's in search of treasure," George suggested. "He can spend the rest of his days here, provided the operators don't get sore on him."

While the boys looked, Ventner turned toward the entrance to the chamber, and they scampered away. Turning back, they saw him pass out of the place where he had been working and into a similar excavation farther on. There he worked as industriously as before.

"You see how it is," Will suggested. "The fellow is hunting for something, and doesn't know where to look for it! So it's all right to let him go ahead with his quest for hidden wealth, or whatever it is he's after. When he finds it, we'll not be far away!"

"I like this walking about in my naked feet," George grunted in a moment. "I had my slippers on when I came down the ladder, but I either had to take them off and carry them in my hands or lose them in the mud."

"Same here!" Will said. "I'm going back to my little cot bed right now and go to sleep. I think we have the detective sized up and we can catch the kids some other night."

"Me for the hay, too," George exclaimed. "I don't think I was ever quite so sleepy in my life!"

"Now, on the way back," Will cautioned, "we ought to keep still and keep a sharp lookout for the person who was sneaking around our quarters."

"Whoever it was may be between us and the shaft," George suggested.

"If I thought so," Will argued, "I'd just stand around and wait until they pass us on the way in. I don't want to find those boys just now. There's a mystery connected with this mine which the caretaker knows nothing about, and which Mr. Horton never referred to when he sent us down here.

"We wouldn't be able to breathe if we didn't discover an air of mystery every fifteen minutes," George declared.

Half way back to the shaft, the boys, who were walking very softly in their stockinged feet, heard a rattle as of a moving stone or piece of coal in the passage, and at once drew up against the side wall.

While they stood there, scarcely daring to breathe, they sensed that some one was passing them in the darkness. The tread was light and brisk, and they thought they heard a soft chuckle as the unseen figure breezed by them.

"I'll bet the lad who was listening near our door never came down the shaft until after we did!" George whispered after the figure had passed by.

"That's very likely!" agreed Will.

"Then he may have been poking around our quarters while we have been gone."

"That's very likely, too."

Believing the way to be clear now, the boys hastened on toward the shaft. Just as they reached the foot of the ladder they heard a sound which sent the blood throbbing to their cheeks.

"He's making fun of us!" exclaimed George.

"It looks like it," admitted Will.

The sound they heard was the low, complaining snarl of the Wolf.

"The nerve of him!" exclaimed George.

"Perhaps he'll answer now!" Will suggested.

Then followed the "slap, slap, slap!" of the Beaver Patrol.

No answer came from the darkness beyond the shaft.

"He's got his nerve with him!" declared Will. "When I get hold of him, I'll teach him to answer Boy Scout challenges!"

When the boys got back to their quarters they found Tommy and Sandy sitting in the darkness with their automatics and their searchlights in their hands. One of them turned on a finger of light as the boys entered but immediately shut it off again.

"What's coming off here?" demanded Will.

"Do you know what those fellows did?" asked Tommy. "They came here while we were asleep and stole about half our provisions!"

CHAPTER XIII

ONE MORE HUNGRY BOY

"We may as well turn on the lights!" Will said. "If any one comes in here to steal Tommy's

necktie," he added with a wink at his chum, "we want to see what he looks like."

"Why didn't you stay here and watch, then?" demanded Tommy. "Why did you go off and leave the camp all alone? I heard people moving around, and I thought it was you."

Will and George sat down on the edge of their cots and laughed.

"Yes, you thought it was me!" Will said directly. "You never heard a thing! You'd better look and see if the midnight visitors didn't steal your pajamas. Or they might have taken your pillow."

Tommy threw a shoe at his tormentor and turned on the electric light.

"Now that I'm awake," he said with a sly grin, "I think that I'll get myself something to eat. Seems to me I'm always hungry."

While the boy rattled among canned goods and candled eggs to see if they were fit for a four-minute boil, Sandy turned to George.

"What did you find in the mine?" he asked.

"We found that bum detective nosing around. We've got his number now, all right," the boy went on, "and there's something in the mine that he wants to find and he doesn't know where to look for it. He isn't looking for Jimmie and Dick any more than we're looking for a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. I don't believe he was ever sent here to make a search for the missing boys!"

"What was he doing when you saw him?" asked Sandy.

"Poking around in worked-out chambers with a pick!"

"Did he see you?"

"You bet he didn't! Do you think we're going to walk six miles in from the country in order to dodge the detective, and then let him run across us in the mine?"

"Yes, but what's he looking for?" insisted Sandy.

"That, me son," George replied with a wink, "is locked in the bosom of the future! We may be able to find out what he's doing here when we find out who struck Billy Patterson."

"Don't get gay now!" grinned Sandy.

"Well, if you insist upon it," George continued with a smile, "Ventner was digging in refuse heaps for something which he didn't find!"

"Did you meet the boys who stole our provisions?" was the next question. "I wish you'd got hold of them!"

"We are certain that one of them passed us while we were returning," George answered.

"The nerve of him!" shouted Sandy.

"The idea of his coming here and swiping our provisions!" Tommy cut in. "If I ever get hold of that gink, I'll beat his head off!"

"You going back after that bum detective tonight?" asked George.

"Not me!" answered Sandy. "Me for ham and eggs!"

"What's the matter with passing the ham and eggs around?"

Every one of the four boys sprang forward as the words came from somewhere just outside the door.

"That's one of those thieving kids!" declared Tommy.

"You've had your share!" shouted Sandy.

"It has now been nine days since I've tasted food!" came the answer from the other side of the door, and the boys thought they caught a chuckle between the words.

"All right!" replied Tommy. "You go and sit in the deserted mine nine days more, and then we'll consider whether you have any right to be hungry. Go on away tonight, anyhow!"

"Not so you could notice it," came the insistent tones from beyond the door. "I'm going to stay right here until I get something to eat!"

"Eat the stuff you stole!" advised Sandy.

"You're in wrong!" came from the other side of the door. "I haven't had a thing to eat in forty or fifty days. Come on, now," he added, "be good fellows and open up. I'm so hungry I could eat a brass cylinder."

"Aw, let him in!" advised Tommy. "He'll stand there chinning all night if we don't! We've got enough to eat for the present anyway."

Will unfastened the door and a tall, slender young fellow of perhaps seventeen stepped inside the room and stood blinking a moment under the strong electric light. His face was streaked with

coal dust and his clothing was ragged and dirty. Still, the boy looked like anything but a tramp. Tommy eyed him suspiciously for a moment.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked.

"Off the rods!" was the reply.

"And I suppose," Sandy broke in, "that you were just taking a stroll by starlight and just happened to walk into this mine."

"Sure!" answered the other with a provoking grin.

"Well, if anybody should ask you," Tommy continued, "you're the boy that had a mixup with the tramp tonight, and ran away while we were trying to invite you to supper. What do you know about that?"

"Invite me to supper now and see if I'll run away!"

"If you boys will cut out this foolish conversation for a minute," Will suggested, "I'll try to find out what this boy wants. Do you mean to say," he added turning to Tommy, "that you bumped into this kid while returning to the mine from the tracks?"

"Didn't I tell you about that?" asked Tommy. "I thought I did. We found him in a mixup with a tramp, and that's all there is to it!"

"And I told you at the time," the stranger interrupted, "that the tramp tried to rob me! That was all right, too. He did try to rob me, but I didn't have a blessed cent in my possession, so he didn't get anything! The tramp who got a hold of me night before last stripped me clean! And that, you see, is why I haven't got any money to buy provisions with. And also that's the reason why I'm hungry."

The four boys gathered around the stranger and began a systematic course of questions which at first brought forth only unsatisfactory answers.

"And also," the boy went on, taking up the speech he had begun some minutes before, "that's why two other boys are hungry just about this time. I got rolled for my wad plenty."

"That's South Clark street!" laughed Tommy.

"That's Bowery!" corrected the other.

"What'd you say about other boys being hungry?" asked Sandy.

"I said that's why two other boys are hungry."

"They ain't hungry any more," Tommy declared with a wink.

"That listens good!" the stranger said.

"Because," continued Tommy, "they came in here about an hour ago and stole everything they could get their hands on."

"Brave boys!" laughed the other.

"You wasn't hiding behind the door when they gave out nerve, either!" declared Tommy. "Here these boys come here and steal our grub and you seem to think they did a noble thing! What's your name, anyhow?"

"Buck," was the reply. "Elmer Cyrus Buck, 409 Lexington Avenue, N. Y. C. Member of the Wolf Patrol, Boy Scouts of America, and just about ready to scrap for something to eat!"

"Why didn't you say so before?" Tommy exclaimed, setting a great slice of ham and several freshly boiled eggs, together with bread and butter and canned tomatoes, before the young man. "Why didn't you say something about being a Boy Scout before you tried to hold us up for a hand-out? You seem to go at everything wrong end first!"

"How long since you've seen Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson?" asked Will. "You must have failed to connect with them tonight!"

"How do you know that?"

"Because, if you had bumped into them, they would have fed you out of the provisions they stole from us!"

"I haven't been looking for them tonight!" Elmer replied. "I tried to follow you to the mine," he added turning to Tommy and Sandy, "when you left me at the car. But, somehow, I lost track of you in the darkness, and when you finally got into the mine, I had to wait for things to quiet down before I could force an entrance. I don't think I could have got in at all if some one hadn't been ahead of me with a jimmy, or an axe, or something of that kind."

"That must have been Ventner," suggested Will.

"Mother of Moses!" cried Elmer. "Has that fellow got into the mine again? Does he know you're here?"

"He knew that we were here," was the answer, "but he thinks we've gone away! He's down in the mine now, hunting for a pot of diamonds in the refuse cast aside by the miners."

"Well you got into the mine at last," Will suggested, "what is the next move you are thinking of making?"

"After I finish my modest supper," Elmer answered, with a nod at the great stack of food which Tommy had piled up on his plate, "I'm going to give you boys the surprise of your lives!"

"You've pretty near done that now!" laughed Will.

"And I'm going to begin," Elmer resumed, "by fishing two members of the Wolf Patrol out of the mine and bringing them up here to apologize for stealing your grub!"

"If you'll do that," replied Will, "we'll forgive you!"

CHAPTER XIV

MINE RATS READY FOR WAR

"Wait till I destroy this hen fruit," Elmer said, "and I'll go down and bring those two foolish youngsters up with me. It's time we had an understanding with you boys. You're here looking for something, and we're here looking for something. Perhaps we would meet with better success if we talked over our plans."

"What are you looking for?" demanded Tommy.

"Keep it dark," grinned Elmer. "I'm not going to tell you a thing until I bring Jimmie and Dick up here so they can get next to the whole story! I guess you boys can work together without scrapping, can't you?"

"When we find the boys," laughed Will, "our job will come to an end!"

"So that's what you came down here after, is it?"

"Yes, we came here to dig two boys out of a mine."

"I don't believe it!" replied Elmer.

"We came here from Chicago for that very purpose," went on Will.

"Who sent you here?" asked Elmer.

"Lawyer Horton."

"Then Lawyer Horton didn't tell you the whole story," laughed Elmer. "He held out on you boys, just to see if you wouldn't get the story at the mine. Of course he didn't know where we were at the time he sent you down here, but he never sent you for the express purpose of finding us!"

"Then why did he send us?" asked Tommy.

"You just wait till I go and bring up Jimmie and Dick, and I'll tell you all about it! I won't be gone more than a minute."

"But hold on!" cried Sandy. "You mustn't go chasing down into the mine now. That bum detective is there, and we don't want him to know that we're anywhere within a hundred miles of this place."

"He doesn't know that we're here, either," commented Elmer. "His notion is that he drove us all into the next state when he caused the mine to be flooded. He thinks he has the whole mine to himself now."

"So he caused the mine to be flooded, did he?"

"Sure he did," was the curt reply. "The boys saw him digging away at the wall which protects this dry mine from the wet one next door."

"So you saw him doing it, did you?"

"I didn't, because I haven't been in the mine before for any length of time, but Jimmie and Dick saw him."

"We've been told that he made the trouble," Will agreed, "but we weren't so very sure of it, after all. At least, we didn't have the proof. He ought to get twenty years for that!"

"Well, if you keep asking me questions all night," Elmer declared, "I'll never get the boys up here, and you'll never know why you were sent here! You can come along with me if you want to."

"But how about this detective?" insisted Sandy.

"We ought to be able to get the boys up here without letting him know that we are in the mine,"

answered Elmer. "We needn't travel with a fife and drum corps ahead of us, nor even carry any lights down with us. He's probably working in some inside chamber."

"All right," Will answered, "we've had our trip through the mine tonight, so we'll let Tommy and Sandy go with you. Are you sure the boys will come if you ask them to?"

"Sure they'll come!" was the reply.

The two boys drew on their rubber boots with which they had provided themselves before taking up their quarters in the mine, and which they had been too excited to use on a previous occasion, and Will loaned a pair to Elmer, then they started down the ladders.

"It would be something of a joke if we should butt into that detective now, wouldn't it?" Sandy laughed, as they passed down from the second level.

"I shouldn't consider it much of a joke," replied Tommy. "We took a lot of pains to make him think we'd gone out of town!"

As the boys walked softly down the center gangway they heard a fall of rock which seemed to come from the passage next north. This passageway was connected by the main one with a cross-heading situated perhaps three hundred feet from the shaft.

"I don't know much about mines," whispered Elmer as the boys stopped and listened to the clatter of the rocks as they settled down on the floor of the cavern, "but that sounds to me a whole lot like a fall from the roof. I hope the boys are not injured."

The boys walked faster until they came to the cross-passage and then turned to the right. Just as they left the main gangway, they heard the sound of running feet and directly the distant creaking of the ladder rungs.

"Some one's making a hot-foot for the surface!" exclaimed Tommy.

"That's Ventner!" declared Sandy.

"How do you know that?"

"Because he wears heavy boots. We have rubbers on, and Jimmie and Dick, who are down in the mine, are also wearing rubber boots!"

"The farther he gets away from the mine, the better it will suit me," Elmer broke in. "I wish he'd go away and stay for a hundred years!"

"The chances are that he dug away one of the pillars and caused that drop from the roof," suggested Sandy.

"I guess that's all right, too," Elmer argued. "If he's been digging around here the way the boys say he has, he's certainly taking chances on cutting down more than one column. He ought to be fired out of the mine!"

The boys now came to a chamber across the entrance to which a great mass of shale had been thrown when the fall from the roof took place.

At first they listened, fearful that they would hear the voices of the lads they were in search of beyond the wall, possibly crushed under the weight of the mass of stone. Then they passed along for a short distance and peered into the chamber over the heap of refuse.

What they saw brought excited exclamations to their lips.

Jimmie and Dick stood in the interior of the chamber, hedged in by fallen debris. They were swinging their searchlights frantically from side to side, and while the boys looked, they began, the utterance of such yells as had never before been heard in that gloomy place.

"What's the trouble?" asked Elmer, showing his light at the narrow opening between the roof of the chamber and the pile of refuse.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" asked one of the boys. "We thought perhaps you'd gone back to New York and left us to starve to death."

"Well, you didn't starve, did you?" asked Elmer.

"Wow, wow, wow!" yelled Jimmie.

"Now, what is it?" asked Elmer.

"Rats!" yelled the boy. "Millions of rats! They're creeping out by the regiment from behind the cribbing where we were hidden!"

"That idiot of a detective," the other boy went on, "undermined a pillar and let about half an acre of roof down into this chamber. When the roof fell, it broke the cribbing and the rats began pouring out."

"They won't hurt you!" declared Tommy. "Only you mustn't go to picking a quarrel with them. They're fighters when they get their tempers up. Just let them alone and they'll let you alone!"

"Who's that talking?" demanded Jimmie.

"That's the relief expedition!" laughed Elmer.

"You ought to be fired out of the Wolf Patrol for not answering Boy Scout signals!" Tommy broke in. "We called to you more than a dozen times, and you never answered once!"

"Well, we had to wait until Elmer reported what kind of fellows you were, didn't we?" asked Dick. "We couldn't go and make friends with you without knowing what you were here for, so we kept out of your way until Elmer could find a way to learn more about you."

"And instead of finding a way," Jimmie took up the argument, "he goes off and gets lost in a thicket about six feet square and never shows up with any grub for twenty-four hours! So we had to go and steal grub of the boys!"

"Yes, and we're going to have you pinched when you get out!" laughed Tommy. "You'll get ninety days for that."

"Where'd that bum detective go?" asked Jimmie. "When the roof fell, we heard him go clattering down the gangway running as though he had only about thirty seconds in which to get to New York."

"He's a long distance from the mine by this time," Elmer suggested.

"Well," Jimmie said, "I don't like the company of these rats, so if you'll kindly dig into the refuse on your side, we'll work from this side and we'll soon be out. These rats look hostile."

"You let 'em alone!" advised Tommy.

"Yes, I'll let 'em alone—not!" shouted Jimmie. "You wait until I get an armful of rocks and I'll beat some of their heads off!"

"For the love of Mike, don't do anything of the kind!" yelled Tommy. "They'll climb onto you nine feet thick if you injure one of them!"

But it was too late! Jimmie acquired an armful of large sized pieces of slate and began tossing them into the huddle of rats in the corner.

For an instant the rats squealed viciously as they were struck by the sharp edges of the slate, then they seemed to confer together for a moment or two, then they spread out like a fan and began moving toward the two boys.

"Now you've done it!" cried Tommy. "If you don't get out of there in about a second, the rats'll eat your legs off!"

Without waiting for the boys to assume the offensive, the rats began screaming and springing at their feet.

The three boys on the outside of the barrier, understanding the peril their friends were in, crawled up to the top of the wall of refuse which shut the boys into the chamber and turned their lights inside.

It seemed to them then that the rats were two or three deep on the floor. There appeared to be hundreds—thousands of them. They circled around the boys, becoming bolder every moment. They nipped at the rubber boots and left the marks of their teeth on the tough uppers.

"Now, boys," Tommy yelled, as they drew their automatics and leveled them over the wall, "shoot to kill! This is no Sunday School picnic! And while we're shooting, boys, you back up to this wall, and see if you can't work your way to the top. If you can get up here, we can manage to displace enough slate to let you through."

The boys fired volley after volley, but the rats came on viciously.

CHAPTER XV

A STICK OF DYNAMITE

By this time Jimmie and Dick had their automatics out and were firing into the horde of rats. They killed the rodents by the score, yet for every one slaughtered a dozen seemed to appear.

Presently the chamber became so full of powder smoke, the air so stifling, that the lads were obliged to cease firing.

"Work your way up this wall," Tommy cried out to the lads as he heard them panting below. "Work your way up so we can catch hold of you, and you'll soon be out of that mess!"

"There's a dozen rats hanging to my boots!" cried Dick.

"And mine, too!" declared Jimmie.

The three boys on the outside continued to hurl refuse from the top of the wall into the chamber. This in a measure kept the rats back, and before many minutes Jimmie and Dick were drawn to

the top of the barrier.

Their rubber boots were cut in scores of places by the sharp teeth of the rats, and even their clothing as high up as their shoulders showed ragged tears. A dozen or more rats hung to the boys' boots until the top was reached, then they dropped back screaming with baffled rage.

"Talk about your wild Indians!" exclaimed Tommy. "I never saw anything as vicious as that was! I told you boys not to open up an argument with those fellows! Mine rats are noted for their courage when attacked."

"How many bites did you get?" asked Elmer anxiously.

"I got half a dozen nips!" answered Jimmie.

"And so did I," Dick cut in.

"Well, you boys ought to get back to the room right away," Tommy suggested, "and have peroxide applied to the wounds. I've known of people dying of blood poison occasioned by rat bites."

"Have you got it in camp with you?" asked Elmer.

"We're the original field hospital!" laughed Tommy. "We never leave Chicago without taking with us everything needed in the first aid to the wounded line. We'd be nice Boy Scouts to go poking about the country with nothing with which to heal our wounds!"

"Boys," Elmer now said, with a mischievous grin on his face, "I want to introduce you to Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson. I've heard that your names are Sandy and Tommy, but that's all I know about it!"

"Green and Gregory!" laughed Tommy. "My name's Gregory. Sandy's name isn't Sandy at all, but Charley. We call him Sandy because he looks like he'd been rolled in sand."

"Well, we may as well be getting back to headquarters!" declared Sandy after these original introductions had been made. "But hold on," he continued turning back to Jimmie and Dick, with a look on his face intended to be severe, "aren't you going to bring our provisions back?"

"The provisions," laughed Jimmie, "were hidden in the chamber where the rats were, and you're welcome to all you can get your hands on now!"

"Oh, well," Sandy groaned, "I suppose we'll have to buy more."

"One difficulty about passing in and out of the mine so frequently," Tommy stated, "is that this man Ventner is likely to catch us at it. There's no knowing what he'll do next if he finds that we're searching the place. According to Elmer, you know," he continued, "we didn't finish our job when we landed on you boys. He says the real game is now about to begin".

"He's right there!" declared Jimmie.

"Strange thing Mr. Horton didn't tell us all about it!" complained Tommy. "Where was the use of his sending us down here and making monkeys of us? He ought to be ashamed of himself!"

"He wanted to see whether you could find out what you were here for!" laughed Elmer. "Perhaps he understood that after you caught us, we'd tell you all about it. He's a pretty foxy guy, that man Horton, from all I hear about him! I'm going to Chicago some day to meet him!"

"Well, what is it we've got to look for now?" demanded Sandy.

"You just wait till we get to headquarters!" replied Jimmie.

"We ought to do that just as quickly as possible," Tommy ventured, "because there's no knowing when that bum detective may return. I'd give a whole lot of money right now to know what he is looking for!"

The three strangers regarded each other laughingly, evidently well pleased at the puzzled look showing on the faces of their friends.

"Wait till we get to headquarters and get a square meal under our belts," Jimmie promised, "and we'll tell you what this bum detective is looking for. It won't take long to do it, either."

"You know, then, do you?" asked Tommy.

"Of course, we know!"

"Then why don't you tell?"

"Couldn't think of telling on an empty stomach!" laughed Jimmie provokingly.

As the boys walked along the passage, only a short distance from the old tool house, they heard a rattling and bumping on the shaft ladders and instantly extinguished their lights.

Presently they heard footsteps on the hard floor of the gangway, and then a light such as those being used by the boys flashed out.

"Now we're in for it!" exclaimed Tommy.

"For the love of Mike, don't let him see us!" whispered Jimmie.

"It'll spoil everything if he does," Dick submitted.

The boys crowded close against the wall of the gangway and waited impatiently for Ventner to pass along.

He was muttering to himself as he moved down the gangway, and his round, protruding belly and his little shapeless shoulders reminded the watching lads of the gnomes they had read about, living in underground cells and preying at night upon the fairies.

Only for a trifling accident the boys would certainly have been discovered. Just as the detective came to a position ten or fifteen feet from where they were standing, when he was in a position to see their faces by the rays cast on ahead by the flashlight, he partly turned his ankle in a stumble on the rails, and for a moment the rays of the light were directed downward. He hobbled along, raving and cursing, for a few steps and then walked briskly on again.

But the ever-watchful eye of the searchlight no longer struck upon the wall where the boys stood, and they realized that for the present they were safe from discovery. Ventner moved on down the gangway and soon disappeared in a cross cutting which ran to the right.

"That's lucky!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"Why didn't we geezle him?" demanded Tommy.

"Because we want his help!" replied Dick.

"His help?" laughed Sandy. "Yes, you'll get his help, all right! That fellow would get up in the middle of the night to do you a dirty trick, and don't you ever forget it!"

"That's the way he's going to help us!" laughed Elmer. "He'll get up in the middle of some dark night to do us a dirty trick, and before he knows what he's about, he'll be doing us a great kindness!"

"Suppose I slip back there and see what he's doing?" asked Tommy.

"Can you find your way back to headquarters alone?" asked Sandy.

"If I can't," asserted Tommy, "I won't be sending any wireless messages to you! If you think I'm likely to get lost, Dick can go back with me. He ought to know every corner in the old mine."

"Sure he does!" laughed Jimmie. "We've been travelling this mine for a good many nights now, and we know it like a book."

So Tommy and Dick started back down the passage, the intention being to hasten to the spot where Ventner had disappeared from the gangway, and then return to their companions immediately.

"We can't stay very long, you know," Tommy explained, "because you've got to have that peroxide dope put on your bites. It doesn't pay to fool with wounds of that description!"

"We'll be back to the old tool room as soon as they are!" answered Dick. "It will take only a minute to run down there and back!"

When the boys reached the cross-cutting into which Ventner had disappeared, they saw his light some distance away. It seemed to be in one of the chambers connected with the cross-cutting.

As they looked, the detective stepped forward into the circle of illumination and began working with a pick.

"Is he always doing that when you see him?" asked Tommy.

"You bet he is!" answered Dick.

"What's he doing it for?"

"You'll have to ask Elmer that."

"But you know, don't you?"

"Of course I know, but I'm not going to tell, because we all agreed that the story should never be told by any member of our party until Elmer got ready to tell it. So you see you've got to wait!"

"If I had my way about it," gritted Tommy, "I'd go back there and geezle that bum detective and wall him up in a chamber until he got hungry enough to tell the story himself. Then we wouldn't have to go sneaking around the mine in order to keep out of his way!"

"That would be a foolish move," insisted Dick, "because every stroke of the pick Ventner takes helps us along in the game we're playing."

"You're the original little mystery boy, ain't you?" said Tommy rather crossly. "All right, I'll get even."

The detective now moved farther along the cross-cutting and attacked a column of mingled rock and coal which helped to support the roof.

"The blithering idiot is going to try that trick again!" exclaimed Dick. "He'll have the whole mine

down on our heads if he doesn't stop that business. He's always cutting down pillars."

"Just say the word," declared Tommy, "and I'll go stop him!"

"Let him go his own gait," replied Dick. "We'll manage to keep out of the way of the falls, and he can run his own chances."

Presently they saw the detective take something which resembled a stick of dynamite from a pocket and begin the work of setting it into the pillar. The boys moved hastily back.

"Now what do you think of that for a fool?" exclaimed Dick. "He'll have the whole mine down on our heads some day, just as sure as he's a foot high! I hope he'll be broken in two when the fall comes."

The boys stood some distance away watching the detective as he awkwardly manipulated the stick of dynamite.

CHAPTER XVI

CAUSED BY A FALL

In the meantime Sandy, Elmer and Jimmie, reaching the old tool house, found Will and George very wide awake and doing the most extraordinary stunts of cooking.

"You said that your friends would be hungry," laughed Will, "and so we're preparing to feed them up fine. After that, you know, you've got to go on and tell us why we were sent down here without any real information as to the work we were to do."

"Where did you leave Tommy and Dick?" asked George.

"They went back to see what the detective was up to."

"So he's in the mine again, is he?"

"Yes," replied Sandy, "and if I had my way about it, he'd go out so quick that he'd think he'd struck a barrel of dynamite."

"If he keeps fooling with dynamite, he's likely to do that anyhow," Elmer cut in. "The boys say that he uses dynamite in the search of the mine he is making. He doesn't know how to use it, either!"

"Then he's got to be fired out of the mine!" declared Will. "We can't have him around here carrying dynamite in his clothes, and dropping it on the ground. You might as well give a baby a box of matches and a hammer to play with. Some day there'll be an explosion."

"Aw, leave him alone for a few days!" Jimmie advised. "He's doing us a lot of good just now, and we don't want to lose his help."

"His help?" repeated Will.

"He's bully help!" shouted George, with fine sarcasm.

"I guess I'll have to tell you about the mystery of the mine," Elmer laughed. "Tommy ought to be here to get the story with the rest, but you can tell him about it later on."

"He ought to be here any minute now," Jimmie asserted.

"Oh, he'll be here all right!" George argued. "Go on with the story. It's been hours since you came in here with the suggestion that there was a story, and you haven't told it yet!"

"Yes," Will interrupted, "get busy and tell us what Mr. Horton neglected to say when he sent us down here; and while you are about it," the boy went on, "you may as well tell us whether you really became lost in the mine, or whether you were sent here to do the very things you did do."

"Also," George broke in, "you may as well tell us what the detective is doing here, and how he is helping you in trying to blow up the mine."

"The boys were never lost in the mine a minute!" replied Elmer, with a grin, "and Mr. Horton knew it. Mr. Horton received his instructions from Attorney Burlingame of New York, and I am positive that Burlingame gave his brother lawyer the whole story."

"Foxy game, eh?" laughed Will.

"I guess they wanted you to find out if we boys were of any account, and whether we were playing fair!" laughed Jimmie.

"Well, anyway, they expected you to find us and learn the story I'm now going to tell," Elmer continued.

"Je—rusalem!" exclaimed Will. "Why don't you get at it. That story has been jumping from tongue to tongue clothed in mystery for hours and we haven't been favored with it yet!"

"The story opens," Elmer began, "on a cold and stormy night in October in the year 1913. As the wind blew great gusts of rain down upon such pedestrians as happened to be out of doors——"

"Aw, cut it out!" exclaimed Will. "Why don't you go on and tell the story? We don't want any more of that Henry James business! You know he always has a solitary horseman proceeding slowly on foot."

"Well, it was a dark night, and a stormy one!" declared Elmer. "If it had been clear and bright, Stephen Carson, the Wall street banker, wouldn't have received a dent in his cupola. In stepping down from his automobile his foot slipped on the wet pavement, and he fell, striking on the back of his head."

"What's that got to do with this mine mystery?" demanded George.

"It has a great deal to do with this mine mystery," Elmer answered. "Stephen Carson arose from the ground, rubbed the back of his head with his gloved hand, and continued on his way to a meeting of a board of directors. He appeared to be perfectly sane and responsible for his acts at the meeting of the board, and when he left in his machine there were no indications that he had suffered more than a slight bruise from his fall. He was not seen at home again for two weeks."

"Now you begin to get interesting!" declared Will.

"Where did he go?" asked Sandy.

"That is what his friends don't know," replied Elmer.

"But he must have been seen somewhere!" insisted Sandy.

"He was!" answered Elmer. "He was seen in the vicinity of this mine!"

"Wow, wow, wow!" exclaimed Sandy.

"What was he doing here?" asked Will.

"Wandering about the premises."

"Now I can tell you the rest," Will said with a chuckle.

"Go on, then," advised Elmer.

"From the meeting of the board of directors that night," Will went on, whimsically, "this man Stephen Carson went directly to a safety deposit vault where three or four hundred thousand dollars' in the way of cash and jewelry, were hidden. He took the whole bundle and disappeared. Is that anywhere near right, Elmer?"

"Go on!" Elmer replied.

"Then in two weeks time he comes back and says that he don't know where he put the jewelry, but that he thinks he hid it in this mine. And, as they can't find any place where he hocked the jewelry, or put it up to carry out some gigantic Wall street plan, they are forced to believe that he really did mislay the jewelry while temporarily out of his head. Is that anywhere near right?"

"If you'll amend your report so as to show that he went to the Night and Day bank and drew out something over two hundred thousand dollars which he had on deposit there, and disappeared with the entire sum, you'll come nearer to the truth."

Will gave a long whistle of amazement.

"Two hundred thousand dollars in real money!" exclaimed George.

"Yes, he took two hundred thousand dollars in real money away with him that night," Elmer went on, "and when he returned to his home again, he was penniless and in rags."

"Was he in his right mind?" asked Will.

"He seemed to be."

"Has he now recovered from the injury he received that night?"

"So the doctors say."

"Then why doesn't he tell what he did with the money?"

"That part of his life is blank. He was seen in the vicinity of this mine, yet denies it. He was seen loitering in the woods not far away, but insists that he never visited this mine except to attend meetings of the board of directors."

"Now I've got you!" laughed Will. "His friends think he hid the money in this mine and we've been sent here to find it!"

"That's the idea," agreed Elmer.

"And this bum detective is here for the same purpose!"

"Yes, though where he received his information is more than I know. Upon his return to his home, Mr. Carson immediately made good the two hundred thousand dollars taken from the Night and

Day bank and employed detectives to look up the missing coin.

"Is Ventner one of them?" asked Will.

"I don't think so," replied Elmer. "We were sent here to look through the mine, with the understanding that you were to come on from Chicago in a few days. Mr. Horton recommended you to Mr. Burlingame and so you were employed."

"Then this detective has no right here at all?"

"None whatever, so far as I can make out."

"Then why not fire him?"

"Because he may accidently run across the money some day."

"If he does, he'll get away with it!" declared George.

"No, he won't," answered Elmer, "He'll be watched every minute from now on. You may be sure of that!"

"But you didn't seem to know what he was doing tonight," laughed Will.

"But I knew enough to come to the right place for the information I desired," replied Elmer.

"Strange thing Tommy and Dick don't come!" Sandy exclaimed, stepping to the door of the old tool house and listening intently. "They should have been here a long time ago!"

"Perhaps they've butted into Ventner," suggested Jimmie.

"They wouldn't do that," Elmer replied. "Every blow he strikes with his pick saves us the trouble of making one."

"You don't think he had any directions from anyone, do you?" asked Will. "You don't, think he knows where to look for the money any more than you do?"

"No, I think he just heard of the loss of the money and came down here on his own account."

"Well, if he's using dynamite in the mine," Will continued, "he ought to be turned out of it. If Mr. Carson really hid two hundred thousand dollars in currency in here, it's in some little pocket easy to find if we get into the right chamber. The use of dynamite might bury it twenty feet deep under a load of shale that would never be removed!"

"That's a fact!" cried Elmer.

The boys now stepped to the door and listened again, attracted by the sound of running feet.

"There's something doing!" exclaimed Sandy. "When Tommy comes home on a run, there's always something going on."

Directly the boys came panting up, stopping in the doorway to look behind them. They were both well winded.

"That bum detective back there," Tommy exclaimed, as soon as he could catch his breath, "is putting in dynamite enough to blow up the whole mine. He's attaching a long fuse, so he can get out before the explosion comes. We cried to get down far enough to choke off the fuse, but couldn't do it. In just about another minute, you'll hear something like a Fourth of July celebration!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIGNS IN STONES

"We thought he'd send the shot off before we got up the ladders!" exclaimed Dick. "We're expecting to hear the roar of it every minute now!"

"Perhaps something went wrong," suggested Will.

"What part of the mine is he in?" asked Jimmie.

Tommy explained the location of the cross-cutting and Jimmie gave a whistle of dismay. In a moment he asked:

"Was he cutting into one of the pillars?"

"Yes," was the answer; "he was getting ready to blow it down with dynamite. It's a wonder we don't hear the explosion!"

"If the spot where he's working is the place I think it is," Jimmie continued, "the gink stands a pretty good chance of finding something. We've been searching in that chamber, and just before you boys showed up tonight we thought we were on the right track. Whether the money is there

or not, it is a sure thing that the walls of the chamber have been tampered with. We think, though, that the money is there!"

"Then we mustn't let Ventner get it!" exclaimed Will.

"It won't do him any good to get it after that stick of dynamite explodes!" exclaimed Tommy. "It'll blow him to Kingdom Come."

"Well, why don't we go down and see about it?" asked Will.

"Not for me!" exclaimed Tommy.

"He may blow his own head off if he wants to," Dick cut in, "but he can't blow off mine, not with my consent. I've got only one head!"

"I don't believe there's going to be any explosion at all!" exclaimed Elmer. "He wouldn't be apt to lay a fuse that would burn fifteen or twenty minutes, and you've certainly been that length of time coming up here, to say nothing of the time we've been talking!"

"All right!" Tommy exclaimed. "Perhaps he was loading up that pillar with dynamite just for the fun of it!"

"It would be a nice thing to have him blow that money out of the pillar and get away with it, wouldn't it?" scoffed Will.

"Come on, then," shouted Tommy, "I can take you to the firing line in about a minute. If you want to see an earthquake in a coal mine, just come along with me! You'll see it, all right!"

The boys left the old tool house without spending any more time in conversation, and hastened down the ladders to the lower level. On the way down the last gangway they heard some one moving about in the darkness, and then came a cry of warning.

"Stand clear! Stand clear!"

"That's Ventner's voice!" exclaimed Will.

"There's a blast going off in a minute!" the voice came again.

"Now we've gone and done it!" exclaimed Will. "After all the trouble we've taken to make that fellow think we've left the country, we've let him bump right into us. I wonder if he really has fired the fuse."

"Stand clear! Stand clear!" shouted the voice.

Almost before the words had died out, the explosion came, tearing more than one pillar out of position and dropping a great mass of slate down on the floor of the cross-cutting.

For a moment the gases which filled the chambers were overpowering. The only wonder was that they were not ignited. The electric lights carried by the boys shone dimly through the smoke of the confined place.

"There goes Ventner," whispered Will, pointing to a figure moving swiftly through the half-light of the place.

"He's going to see what the shot brought down!" suggested Tommy.

The boys rushed forward in a little group. When they gathered at the scene of the explosion, the detective was not there.

"If he got hold of the cash, he knew what to do with it all right!" exclaimed Tommy. "He got away with it before we got a chance to see what he had. Now we've got to catch him!"

"May as well look for a needle in a load of hay!" grumbled Sandy.

"Look here," Jimmie exclaimed. "There's a way to keep him shut up in the mine if we do the right thing. This cross-cutting runs out to a gangway on the north, and that, in turn, leads, of course, to the shaft. Now, one of you boys duck out to the shaft and see that he doesn't get up. You'll have to go some on the way there, because a man with two hundred thousand dollars in his pocket will put up some running match!"

"I'm off!" shouted Tommy. "I know I can get to the shaft before he can! He's too fat-bellied to run, anyway!"

Tommy started away at a swift pace, and the other boys closed in on the gangway, Will alone stopping at the scene of the explosion.

"This gangway," Dick explained, "runs back into the mine for some distance, but there are no cross passages. I guess the coal wasn't very good here. At least, they never spread out the drive."

"Then we've got him bottled up unless he got out of the shaft!" declared Sandy. "We'll soon know whether he got out or not!"

"I don't believe he would try to get out," suggested Elmer. "The chances are that he'd make for the back of the mine, thinking to hide away with the plunder, provided he had any plunder to hide away with."

"I'm afraid he found the hidden money," Will said, taking a scorched ten-dollar bill from a pocket. "I found this back there, where the pillar fell. I guess he found the cash all right!"

"And that's a nice thing, too!" exclaimed Sandy. "You boys kept saying that Ventner was helping you find the coin. You were right about that, for he did find the coin. And now the trick is to get it away from him!"

"I'd like to know whether Ventner got up the shaft or not," suggested George, "and I believe I'll take a run up there and see.

"That's a good idea!" advised Will. "If he didn't get up the shaft he's surely imprisoned in the gangway. He may be between this cross-cutting and the shaft, or he may have gone further in!"

"It'll take a long time to find out about that," suggested Jimmie.

Directly Tommy and George were heard returning from the shaft. They came through the gangway flashing their lights in every direction.

"He never went up the shaft!" Tommy exclaimed as they came near. "We've got him canned in the mine all right. If he's got the money, we'll take it away from him! He wouldn't know what to do with it, anyway!"

"First," suggested Will, "we'd better make sure that the fellow got the money. The bank note I found may have never been in the possession of Mr. Carson. And even if it was, it may be the only one to be blown out of its hiding place by the explosion. It strikes me that we'd better give the place a thorough search before we waste much time looking for Ventner. If, as Tommy says, he never left the mine by way of the shaft, we've got him blocked in, all right!"

The boys now began a careful examination of the cross-cutting where the explosion had taken place. As has been stated, more than one pillar had been blown out. There was a great heap of debris on the floor, and this the boys attacked with a vim.

Tommy and George were now standing guard at the mouth of the cross-cutting so that no one could pass down the gangway toward the shaft.

"Suppose that fellow did get the money?" asked Sandy, as the boys cleared away the heaps of slate, "what then?"

"Then we'll have to take it away from him!"

"We'll catch him first."

"We've got him blocked in, haven't we?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, we know that he can't get out," Dick cut in, "but we know, too, that there are a lot of shallow benches along that gangway. We can't walk in and pick him out in a minute. Besides," the boy continued, "when we find him, we may find his pockets empty."

"That's just what we will do!" Elmer agreed. "He'll hide the money in another place, and swear that he never found it!"

"I wish we'd kicked him out of the mine!" exclaimed Sandy.

The boys continued their search until daylight, and then, leaving Tommy and George still on guard, they went up to the old tool house for breakfast. The lads were by no means elated over what had taken place. They believed that Ventner had succeeded in finding the money, and were certain that, even if located in the mine, he would deny any knowledge of it.

"I guess we got you boys into a mess by insisting on having the detective roaming around," admitted Elmer, as the boys were eating a hastily prepared breakfast. "I guess we should have listened to you in regard to that. There is no knowing how much trouble we have made!"

"He may help us find the money after all!" laughed Will.

"Yes," cut in Sandy, "it may be easier to get it away from him than to find the place where it was hidden."

"Oh, yes, if we could lay our hands on him and order him to give up two hundred thousand dollars, and he would say: 'Yes, I've been waiting to find the owner,' that would be all right, too! But the thing isn't likely to turn out in that way! He'll hide the money, and swear he never found it! Then, when everything quiets down, he'll sneak back and get it!"

This from Jimmie, who seemed to take a rather gloomy view of the situation. The boys remained at the old tool house only a short time. Their minds were fixed so intently on the work in hand that they hardly knew whether they had had any breakfast at all.

As they passed down the ladders to the lower level, they heard something which resembled a pistol shot, and almost tumbled over each other getting down into the gangway. Will and Elmer were first to reach the cross-heading where the explosion of dynamite had taken place.

They called to Tommy and George, but received no answer. They walked for some distance down the gangway without hearing any sound indicating the presence of their companions, or of any one else.

"Now that's a funny thing!" exclaimed Will. "I don't see why those boys should go rambling about the mine at a time like this just for the fun of the thing!"

"They never did!" replied Elmer. "You remember the shot we heard!"

"It might not have been a shot!" suggested Will.

As the boy spoke he bent over and pointed to three stones lying on the floor of the gangway.

"There!" he said. "The boys have left a record. They not only point out the trail, but warn, us that there is danger in following it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO HOLD-UP MEN

"That's Boy Scout talk all right!" exclaimed Elmer.

"Yes, the three stones, piled one on top of the other, mean that there is danger in following the trail. I don't understand exactly what kind of danger can be threatening us, and so the only thing we can do is to go on and find out," Will said with a glance backward.

The other boys now came up and a short consultation was held. It was decided to leave Sandy and Dick at the point where the explosion had taken place, while Will, Elmer and Jimmie followed on down the gangway.

"Now whatever you do," warned Will as the two boys were left behind, "don't leave this gangway for a minute. If Ventner isn't out of the mine now, we don't want him to get out. He may have the money or he may not. That is one of the things no fellow can find out at this time, but whether he has or not, we want him to give an account of himself before he leaves the Labyrinth. He's got several important questions to answer."

The boys promised to watch the passage faithfully, and the others passed on down the gangway, flashing their lights in every direction and making no pretense of moving quietly.

"Look here," Jimmie said after they had proceeded some distance into the mine and discovered nothing of importance, "I have in my possession a great idea! Want to hear about it?"

"Sure!" laughed Will.

"We're making too much noise."

"Making too much noise in order to attract the attention of a couple of lost youngsters?" asked Elmer.

"They're not lost!" insisted Jimmie. "They've been lured away or dragged away! We don't know how many men were in the mine with Ventner!"

"Well, produce your idea!" Elmer exclaimed.

"Well, my notion is that I ought to go on ahead of you boys, walking as quietly as possible and without a light. If there are people waiting to snare us, they'll naturally think we've bunched our forces and are all coming along together. Then, you see", he continued, "I'll be right in among them before they suspect that we have a skirmish line out."

"That's an all right notion, kid!" answered Will.

"Then I'll be on my way," Jimmie replied. "And if I need help at any time, I'll give the call of the pack!"

"But you mustn't do that unless you have to," Will cautioned, "because, the minute the cry is heard, everybody within eighty rods would know what's going on. Have you matches with you?"

The boy felt in the pockets of his coat and nodded.

"Well, then," he said, "if you want to signal, wet your hands and rub the phosphorus off the matches. Turn your hands, palms in our direction, so no one can see from the other side and wig-wag."

"That will be fine!" exclaimed Jimmie. "I've got this wig-wag system down pat. I guess this Boy Scout training is pretty poor, ain't it, eh? The darker it is, the better we can talk!"

Jimmie darted away, while Will and Elmer remained stationary for a short time in order to give him an opportunity to get out of the range of their lights. Directly they heard him whispering back and listened.

"There's another stone cairn here!" he said. "I guess I knocked it over, for I can't tell exactly what it is. You can learn that when you come up with your searchlights! I think there are three stones."

"All right!" Will whispered back.

When the boys came to the spot from which the voice had been heard they found three stones lying side by side on the floor of the gangway. It was plain that they had been placed one on top of the other, and so they accepted them as another warning of danger.

"I wish we had some intimation of the kind of trouble we are likely to get into," Elmer suggested, as they passed along. "I don't like this idea of boring a hole in the darkness with a little bit of a light and anticipating an attack at any minute."

"I don't like it a little bit myself," replied Will.

"A person so inclined might shoot us down without ever showing himself," declared Elmer. "In fact, the only protection we have lies in the fact that Jimmie is on ahead, and would not be likely to pass any one lying in wait for us. Bright little boy, that!"

"There he is now!" exclaimed Will. "He's using the phosphorus, all right, and I can begin to understand what he's trying to say? There's a 'W', and an 'A', and an 'I', and a 'T'. That means that he wants us to stay where we are. The system works fine, doesn't it?"

The question now was as to whether the lads should extinguish their lights. That, of itself, they understood would be suspicious in case they should be in sight of their enemies. It would simply proclaim their knowledge of the danger they were in, whatever it was.

"I think we'd better keep the lights going until we hear something more," Elmer said. "Jimmie will talk again in a minute."

The boys waited patiently for some moments, and then the wig-wag figures came again. Will read slowly:

"There's a 'V', and an 'E', and an 'N', and a 'T', and an 'N', and an 'E', and an 'R'," he said. "Now the boy's starting it again. He says, 'Ventner is here.' Now wait a minute, there's more coming!"

"The next words are: 'With two others'."

"It's only a question of time when that detective will get next to the wig-wag game," Elmer declared. "This gangway smells like a match factory already. I wonder how far Jimmie is away from them."

Directly Jimmie began talking the wig-wag tongue again. This time he said that Tommy and George were not in sight, and had evidently been surprised and taken prisoners. He advised Will and Elmer to come on softly with their lights out.

The boys did as requested, but they had advanced only a few paces in the darkness when Canfield, accompanied by Sandy and Dick came running up, showing both lack of breath and profound excitement.

"Boys," Canfield called. "Boys!"

"Will!" yelled Sandy.

"I guess they're going to bust up the whole combination!" declared Will rather sourly. "I wish I had them by the neck!"

"They may have important news," suggested Elmer. "Anyway, we'll have to turn on our lights and meet them. If we don't, they'll keep on yelling all down the gangway!"

Canfield and the two boys came up as soon as Elmer showed a light, and stood for a moment looking cautiously about.

"I don't think you boys ought to go any further into the mine!" Canfield exclaimed, breathing heavily from the long chase down the passage. "I have just received word that two of the most desperate hold-up men in the country have taken refuge here. There's no knowing how they got over to the mine, but it is a sure thing that they did get here, for a couple of breaker boys saw them climbing into the breaker."

"What time was this?" asked Will.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Canfield. "The matter was reported to me early this morning. I couldn't find you before, or you should have had the news sooner. It isn't safe for you to go into the mine!"

"Your information," grinned Will, "comes a little bit late, but it's all right, just the same! Ventner is in there, and there are two men with him. It's a mystery how they made their way in without being discovered, but it seems that they did so."

"What are you going to do?" asked Canfield.

"We're going on into the mine."

"In the face of my warning?"

"It's just this way," answered Will. "We left two of the boys on guard in this passage, not so very long ago, and they have disappeared. We suspect that Ventner and the two men to whom you refer have good reason to know something of their whereabouts."

"They won't injure the boys!" pleaded Canfield.

"We don't mean to give them a chance!" insisted Elmer. "We're going to jerk those boys out so quick it'll make their heads swim!"

"But it's positively dangerous!" urged the caretaker.

"If there wasn't an element of danger in the situation, we wouldn't be here!" replied Will. "I don't see as we need to run away from two hold-up men, anyway," the boy went on. "Here are five boys and one full grown man in the gangway. We ought to give a pretty good account of ourselves, in case some one starts anything!"

"Where's the fifth boy?" asked Canfield. "It seems to me that you're getting quite an accumulation of boys in here!"

"Two of the boys are Jimmie Maynard and Dick Thompson!" answered Will. "You know you informed me quite positively not long ago that the two lads were hundreds of miles from this place by this time."

"You might barricade the hold-up men and starve them out," suggested Canfield, "that is, if you're sure they're in there!"

"We have just had a wireless from the interior," Elmer answered. "There are three men in there, all right!"

"Well, it won't take any longer to starve three out than it would one!" declared Canfield.

"Yes," Elmer cut in, "and about the first time the hold-up men got good and hungry, they'd be sending out Tommy's ears or one of George's fingers just as a warning to us not to meddle with their appetites."

Before long Jimmie began wig-wagging again, but before any words could be formed the waiting boys heard a distant scuffle, a short, quick cry of alarm, and then the phosphorus-covered palms disappeared from sight.

"They've got Jimmie!" Elmer said in a tone of dismay.

"Well, what are we going to do?" demanded Sandy. "We've got to do something right away, and that's no story out of the dream book!"

"I don't suppose it would be of any use to rush them," suggested Elmer.

"They'd mow us down like rats!" declared Dick.

"It strikes me," Sandy said, "that we'd ought to get back further and keep out of sight until we can decide upon some definite plan of action."

"I've got an idea wandering around in the back of my brain," Will said. "If the situation is exactly as I think it is, we may be able to get the best of those hold-up men after all."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MONEY IN SIGHT

"Not while they have possession of the boys," Canfield declared, dolefully. "They'll murder those boys if we shut off their supplies!"

"Oh, I don't know about that!" suggested Dick. "We've been mixed up in a great many awkward situations, but we've always managed to save our necks. We'll get the boys out in some way!"

"Look here, Mr. Canfield," Will said, "how well do you know this mine?"

"Every inch of it!" was the reply.

"Every inch of every level?" asked Will.

"Yes, sir!" replied the caretaker, rather proudly. "I can go into any part of it without a light!"

"Then look here, Dick," Will directed. "You chase back to the old tool house and bring back a long rope. And when you return, stop at the second level. Some of us will meet you there."

"I hope you don't expect to pull these boys up through fifty or a hundred feet of shale?" asked the caretaker.

"I don't know whether my scheme will work or not," Will answered, "but it's worth trying! We shall have to leave at least two here, well armed, and take the others with us. You'll have to act as guide, Mr. Canfield, and we'll meet Dick when he comes down to the second level with the rope. As soon as we get the boys out of their trouble, we can leave the three outlaws in full possession of the mine. If we watch the shaft at the old tool house, they can never get out without our knowing it!"

"I don't understand what you have in mind," faltered Canfield.

Leaving Sandy and Elmer in the gangway from which the wig-wag signals had been shown, the others hastened up the ladder to the second level. Then Dick ran away to bring the rope, while Will questioned the caretaker regarding the fall between the two levels.

"You remember the old shaft, cut through years ago, and doubtless deserted when the vein ran out, which at one time connected the two levels, don't you?" asked the boy of the caretaker.

"There is such a place," replied the caretaker.

"Can you find it?"

"Of course I can."

"Does the fall open into the system of chambers in the center or to the north? You understand what I mean! Is it possible to enter any of the benches or chambers connecting with the north gangway on the lower level by means of this deserted shaft?"

"I am not quite certain about that," replied Canfield, "but my idea is that the north benches and chambers can be reached by means of that opening. I am glad you thought of that," he went on.

Dick now returned with the rope, and the three proceeded down the second level until they came to a confusion of passages and benches which would certainly have bewildered any one not familiar with the mine.

"Unless I am very much mistaken," Canfield went on, "this passage, the one straight ahead, runs almost directly over Tunnel Six. If I am right in this, the deserted shaft is here."

"And Tunnel Six is the haunted corridor, isn't it?" asked Dick.

"That's where the lights have been seen!" replied the caretaker.

"You never believed in the ghost stories told about Tunnel Six?" asked Will. "I should think you'd begin to see now that the alleged ghosts were pretty material things."

"Well, I don't know about the ghosts," replied the caretaker, "but I really was getting a little bit nervous when you boys arrived. You know," he continued, "that we all feel a little shivery when we butt into anything which we can't understand."

"Well, suppose you follow this passage to the end and see if you discover anything like the deserted shaft," suggested Dick.

"You're not going to venture into the lower level again, are you?" asked Canfield. "I don't blame you boys for wanting to rescue your companions, but, at the same time, I don't want to see you throw your lives away. Those are desperate men in Tunnel Six!"

"If my idea is worth anything at all," replied Will, "we'll get the boys out without ever letting the hold-up men know that we are within a mile of them. You know we had very little difficulty in getting out of the chamber where we left the boat."

"Trust you boys for inventing ways of doing things!" exclaimed Canfield.

"Of course," Will said hesitatingly after a time, "it may be that this deserted shaft doesn't connect with Tunnel Six, but even if it doesn't, we'll find some way of getting to our friends from the new position. We can only try, anyway!"

"I'm pretty certain that it connects with Tunnel Six," replied the caretaker. "But you mustn't show your light when you approach the old shaft," he went on, "because if it does connect with the chamber we seek, and the chamber in turn connects with the north passage, the robbers will see what we're doing."

"That's a valuable suggestion!" replied Will.

"I'll go on ahead," Canfield continued, "and find the old shaft. Then you can follow on with the rope, and one of you boys can drop down and see what can be discovered."

"It's dollars to apples," chuckled Dick, as the boys trailed along after the caretaker, "that we find the three kids trussed up like a lot of hens ready for the market in the chamber where you came so near getting wet. I hope we do, at any rate!"

"There's one thing we overlooked," Will said as Canfield whispered to them that he had found the deserted shaft, "and that is this: We should have directed the boys in the gangway to have attracted the attention of the outlaws by a little pistol practice while we are communicating with our friends. They may be all packed away in the chamber together."

"Yes, we should have attended to that," replied Dick. "Perhaps I'd better go back now and tell them to get busy with their automatics."

"We may as well investigate the situation here first," the other answered.

The boys heard the caretaker creeping about in the darkness, and presently a piece of shale or coal was heard rattling down the old shaft.

"We'll have to get that blundering caretaker away from there," whispered Will. "If we don't, he'll

notify the hold-up men that we're getting ready to do something! I've heard that about three-fourths of the people in the world object to doing anything unless they can take a brass band along, and I guess it's true."

"Say," Canfield whispered, calling back to the lads, "when that stone dropped down, I heard something that sounded like a paddle slapping down on the water. That room can't be wet yet, can it?"

"The Beaver call!" whispered Will.

"Right you are!" replied Dick. "The boys are there, all right!"

"Now the next thing to do is to find out if those highwaymen are watching them," declared Will.

"I'll tell you that in a minute," Dick whispered.

As the boy spoke, he passed one end of the rope to Canfield.

"Hang on to it, whatever takes place!" he whispered, "and I'll drop down and see what's going on."

"You must be very careful," warned Canfield.

"That's all right," answered Dick, "but we can't stand here all day figuring out precautions. We've got to know right off whether there's anyone in that chamber watching the boys!"

"What a joke it would be to put on a ghost in Tunnel Six!" laughed Will, in a decidedly cheerful frame of mind, now that rescue seemed so near.

"Don't try any foolishness!" advised Canfield. "Let's rescue the boys if possible and make our way out of this horrible place."

Will crawled to the edge of the shaft with Dick and whispered as he lowered him into the dark opening below:

"Remember," he said, "that Ventner may have discovered the money. If so, we must secure it before we leave the place! It will be just like him to stow the bank notes away in some chamber like the one you are about to enter. When you strike bottom, if there is no one in sight except the boys, turn on your searchlight and take a good look over the interior of the chamber.

"We were in there not so very long ago, but at that time we weren't thinking of making a search there for hidden money. You'll have to use your own judgment about turning on the light, of course. The outlaws may be out in the gangway, some distance from the entrance to the chamber, or they may be within six feet of where the boys are held as prisoners."

"Tommy ought to be able to tell me the minute I strike the heap of shale whether the outlaws are close by or not!" Dick suggested.

"Of course!" answered Will, "if he knows. If the men are not in sight, and he doesn't know where they are, you'll simply have to take chances. If you get caught in there, you'll have to shoot, and shoot quick!"

Dick, dropped down into the old shaft and directly the anxious watchers above heard the rattle of shale as it dropped from the pyramid under the opening. Will, still clinging to the rope, lay on his stomach and peered downward, watching with all anxiety for some show of light, or some sound which might indicate the situation below.

Directly Will felt a soft, steady pull at the rope, and knew that one of the boys was ready to be assisted to the top.

Dick came up first, chuckling as he landed on the edge of the break in the rock, and was immediately followed by Jimmie.

"Where's Tommy and George?" asked Will in a whisper.

"They're down there looking for the money!"

"Looking for the money in the darkness?"

"Sure!" was the reply. "You see," he went on, "those ginks tied us up good and tight, and then threw the money around promiscuous like!"

"So the money is there?" asked Will.

The news seemed too good to be true!

"It was there when we were first thrown into the chamber," replied Jimmie, "but I have an idea that Ventner sneaked in and removed it so as to prevent his mates getting any share."

A light flashed out from below, followed immediately by a pistol shot!

SANDY IS DISCHARGED

Elmer and Sandy, guarding the gangway variously called the North section and Tunnel Six, presently heard voices coming from the direction of the shaft, and the latter moved back a few paces in order to inspect the new-comers. In a moment he saw three rather pompous looking men approaching him, their footsteps being directed by a man clothed as a miner.

"Here, boy!" shouted one of the pompous men. "Can you tell me where Canfield, the caretaker of this mine, may be found?"

"He's up on the next level," replied Sandy.

"I was told he was down here," growled the speaker, who was very short and fat, and very much out of breath.

"He was here a little while ago," answered Sandy.

"What's the meaning of this show of firearms?" demanded the fat man, after glancing disdainfully at the automatic in the boy's hand.

"We've got three robbers cooped up in the mine," replied Sandy.

"That's the old, old story!" exclaimed the fat man. "I don't know that I ever knew of a mine that wasn't haunted, either by ghosts or robbers! Mysteries seem to breed in coal mines!"

Sandy walked back to the place where he had left Elmer, and the three men and their guide followed him. When Elmer caught a view of the fat man's face and figure, he gave a sharp pull at Sandy's sleeve.

"That's Stephen Carson!" he said. "I guess I'd better keep out of sight, because I don't care about getting into an argument with him. He's the most contrary person I ever saw in my life, and never fails to get up an argument about something or other with yours truly."

"You seem to know him pretty well," whispered Sandy.

"I ought to," returned Elmer, "he's my Uncle! The two tall men in the party are my father and the cashier of the Night and Day bank. I'll take a sneak, and that will shorten the session."

Accordingly, Elmer strolled along the gangway and came to a halt some distance from where the three men had drawn up.

"My boy," Carson went on, looking condescendingly at the youth, "will you kindly run up to the second level and tell Mr. Canfield that his presence is required by the president of the mining company?"

"I'm not allowed to leave this place, sir," replied Sandy, taking offense at the man's air of proprietorship.

"All persons in and about this mine," Carson almost shouted, "are subject to my orders. Run along now, you foolish boy, find don't make any further trouble for yourself!"

The man's manner was so unnecessarily dictatorial and offensive that Sandy found it impossible to retain his temper. He was not naturally a "fresh" youngster, but now he had passed the limit of endurance.

"Aw, go chase yourself!" he said.

"You're discharged!" shouted Carson.

"You didn't hire me!" retorted Sandy. "You haven't got any right to discharge me! I'm going to stay here until I get ready to leave!"

"If you don't get out of the mine immediately, I'll have you thrown out!" shouted Carson. "I never saw such impudence!"

"If I do get out," replied Sandy with a grin, "you'll wish I hadn't!"

Carson turned to Elmer's father and the bank cashier, and the three consulted together for a short time. Then Elmer's father came closer to where Sandy was standing.

"Why do you say that?" he asked. "Why do you think we will wish you had remained in case you are sent out of the mine?"

"Because I was left here to prevent robbers getting out of the gangway. They're further in, and have captured three of my chums."

"All nonsense!" shouted Mr. Carson breaking into the conversation impatiently. "These breaker boys never tell the truth!"

"Are you Mr. Buck?" asked Sandy, speaking in an undertone to Elmer's father. "Because if you are, you'll find Elmer just a short distance ahead. He's on guard, too. He didn't want his uncle to recognize him, because he says he's always getting up an argument with him."

"I'm glad to know that Elmer is attending to his duty," Mr. Buck answered. "Somehow," he continued with a smile, "Stephen Carson always rubs Elmer the wrong way of the grain."

"What's he butting in here for?" asked Sandy, while the cashier of the Night and Day bank and the miner stood by waiting for the peace negotiations to conclude.

"Why, he came in to get his two hundred thousand dollars!" replied Mr. Buck. "He thinks he knows how right where he left it."

"Does he often get foolish in the head like that?" asked Sandy with a grin. "If he does, he ought to hire a couple of detectives to keep track of him when he goes wandering out in the night!"

"Oh, Stephen is usually a pretty level-headed sort of a fellow!" replied Mr. Buck. "He is out of humor just now because he has always denied that he visited the mine during his two weeks of absence. He is one of the men who dislike very much to be caught in an error of any kind."

"So he knows where the money is?" asked Sandy.

"He says he can find it if he can secure the services of Canfield, the caretaker. He remembers now of getting in the mine, and of hearing footsteps in the darkness. His impression at that time was that robbers had followed him in, so he unloaded the banknotes in a small chamber which he is now able to describe accurately but which he cannot, of course, find."

"Was the money hidden on this level?" asked Sandy.

"Yes, on this level."

"In this gangway?"

"He thinks it was hidden here."

"Right about here, or further on?"

"Why," was the answer, "he seems to remember something about Tunnel Six. He thinks he hid the money there! As soon as he finds Canfield, the caretaker will probably be able to tell him exactly how Tunnel Six looks."

"It looks all in a mess right now! I can tell you that," grinned Sandy.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that there's been doings here!" replied Sandy.

"Are there really robbers in there?"

"Sure, there are robbers in there!"

"Then perhaps we'd better bring in a squad of deputies."

"If you'll just let us boys alone," Sandy said, "we'll bring the money out if it's anywhere in the mine, but if this man Carson goes to butting in at this time, he'll have to dig out his own money. He won't believe there's any robbers in there, and he wants to fire me out of the mine, so I guess we'd better let him go his own gait a little while."

"He'll do that anyhow no matter what you say!" replied Mr. Buck.

"Look here!" shouted Carson, starting forward, with his stomach out and his fat shoulders thrown back, "what's all this conversation about? Why don't some one go up and get Canfield, and why isn't that young rowdy thrown out of the mine? I won't have him in here!"

"Say," Sandy broke in, "Mr. Buck says that you're looking for Tunnel Six. If you are, I can show you right where it is!"

"Do so, then!" shouted Carson.

"Go straight ahead," Sandy directed, "and when the robbers begin to shoot, you command them to throw down their weapons in the name of the law. They'll probably do it, all right, if you tell them to, but you'll be lucky if they don't throw them down your throat!"

"Do you mean to tell me," screamed Carson, "that there are actually robbers here, and that they have taken possession of Tunnel Six?"

"That's the idea," replied Sandy.

"Why, that's where I put my——"

"That's where you put your money, is it?" Sandy went on.

"I never saw such impudence!" reared Carson.

"Well, go on and get your money!" advised Sandy. "Just go straight down the gangway until you come to a face of rock and then switch off to the left, and you'll find yourself in a chamber used at present by robbers and hold-up men as a winter resort."

"Oh you can't frighten me!" declared Carson. "I believe that you're here in quest of the money yourself!"

"That's right!" admitted Sandy. "Go on in, now, and tell the robbers to give up your hoarded gold! Just butt in, and tell 'em what you want them to do! They'll probably do just as you tell them to!"

"I never saw such impudence in my life!" roared Carson, wiping his perspiring forehead with a large red silk handkerchief.

"I don't see where the impudence comes in!" replied Sandy. "You said you wanted to find Tunnel Six in order that you might locate your money. I'm telling you where it is, and what to do to get it!"

"Old Stephen never took a bluff in his life!" chuckled Mr. Buck, "Now see if he doesn't go stalking down that passage and declaring himself in the name of the law!"

The banker did exactly what Mr. Buck had predicted. He went storming down the passage, giving notice to all intruders to walk out of his mine in a peaceable manner. Mr. Buck followed along until he came to where Elmer was standing with his back against the wall, and then the two paused and entered into conversation. The cashier of the Night and Day bank and the miner started back toward the shaft.

"What's the matter?" shouted Sandy. "Why don't you stay and see the fun? There'll be shooting here directly!"

The miner and the cashier now took to their heels and were soon out of sight. Every moment the boy expected to see a flash of fire in the gangway. Carson was now very near to Tunnel Six, and it seemed certain that the outlaws must soon open fire on him.

"Come back, Stephen!" shouted Mr. Buck. "Don't make a fool of yourself!"

"This is all pure bluff!" shouted Carson. "There are no robbers here at all. This is a scheme to keep me out of Tunnel Six, where I believe my money to be hidden!"

They saw Carson halt in his rather clumsy passage down the gangway, and draw an automatic revolver from his pocket.

There was a quick shot and the banker rushed ahead!

CHAPTER XXI

"I TOLD YOU SO!"

Directly Elmer, Sandy and Mr. Buck heard the banker shouting at the top of his lungs and dashed on toward the mysterious tunnel.

"He'll get his head shot off in there!" exclaimed Sandy.

"I don't care if he does!" declared Elmer.

"Your uncle isn't such a bad old fellow, after all," Mr. Buck exclaimed. "He has plenty of courage, at any rate!"

"But I don't understand why they don't open fire on him!" exclaimed Sandy. "The robbers certainly were in there not very long ago. We heard the scuffle when they geezled Jimmie."

"Who fired that shot?" asked Mr. Buck.

"Uncle Stephen did," replied Elmer. "I saw the flash spring out from the spot where he stood!"

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed Sandy. "The old chap is actually making his bluff good! He's getting into Tunnel Six single handed and alone! I guess we'll have to advertise for those three outlaws if we find 'em in here! He's a nervy old fellow, isn't he?"

The three now followed fast on the heels of the banker, and soon came to where he stood swinging his searchlight at the end of a short drift which ended, after sliding under a dip, in a chamber which at first glance seemed to be piled high with a mass of shale.

While the three looked on, Carson dropped on his knees beside a crevice in the wall and began an eager exploration of the opening.

Directly he sprang to his feet with rage and disappointment showing on every feature of his face. He raved about the cluttered chamber for a moment, almost dancing up and down in his anger and chagrin, and then sat limply down on the pile of shale.

"It's gone!" he said. "The money's gone!"

"So it wasn't hidden back there in that cross-cutting at all?" asked Sandy. "We thought sure we had a cinch on the coin several hours ago!"

"It was hidden here in this chamber!" declared Carson wearily. "The minute I entered the place I remembered where I had hidden it. And now it's gone! I've had all my trouble for nothing."

As he ceased speaking, he glanced suspiciously at Sandy. And Sandy, in turn, made a most provoking face.

"I believe you know something about my money!" Carson said.

"Sure I do!" replied Sandy.

"Then where is it?"

"The robbers got it!"

"That's a nice story to tell," howled Carson. "If you think I'm going to be defrauded out of my money in this way, you're very much mistaken!"

Without paying any further attention to the threats of the banker, Sandy stepped over to Elmer's side and pointed up the deserted shaft.

"There's where the robbers went," he said, "and they doubtless took Carson's money with them. I don't understand why Will didn't stop them."

"Will and George probably released their friends and went away," complained Elmer. "I don't think they showed very good judgment in doing that, either. The result is that the money has now disappeared entirely. A short time ago, Uncle might have reclaimed it."

"We don't know whether the money has gone beyond recall or not," replied Sandy. "I don't believe Will and George ever left the old shaft unguarded. They are still somewhere in this vicinity!"

Carson now blustered up to Sandy and pointed an accusing finger into the lad's face. Sandy regarded him with indifference.

"Now that your story of the robbers has been disproved," Carson shouted, "you may as well tell me who took my money. If I had not the courage to make this investigation in person, that cheap story of the robbers would have held good for all time!"

"That's a horse on me, all right!" admitted Sandy. "I don't know where the robbers are, unless they went up through that old shaft, and it doesn't seem as if the boys would permit that!"

"Too thin! Entirely too thin!" declared Carson. "A moment ago you tried to tell me that the money wasn't hidden near Tunnel Six at all, but was hidden back there near the cross-cutting."

"We had good reason to believe it was hidden there!" replied Sandy. "We found a burned ten-dollar banknote there just after a dynamite explosion had taken place."

"That would naturally lead to the supposition that the money had been hidden there!" Mr. Buck exclaimed.

"Come to think of it," Sandy went on, "I believe that was one of Ventner's tricks. I believe he blew down those pillars and burned the banknote for the express purpose of making us search two or three weeks in the wrong place. I guess we have under-estimated that fellow's ability. He's a keener man than I supposed!"

"I don't quite see the point to that," Elmer suggested. "When you say that Ventner probably caused you to dig in the wrong place, you admit that he must have known something about the right place. Now, how could he have known anything about where to look for that money?"

"I don't know," replied Sandy. "But when you say that he might have known exactly where to look, you set him down as a fool, because he has been searching a long time and never came upon it until today."

"I think I can understand that," Mr. Buck said. "This man you speak of probably knew where to find the money provided he could discover the right drift, bench, chamber or tunnel. Like Mr. Carson, here, he could doubtless go straight to the cache if directed into the right apartment."

While the four stood together at the bottom of the chamber, their searchlights making the place as light as day, an exclamation came from the shaft above, followed by two pistol shots.

Carson dropped to his knees and began twisting at his automatic, which had in some way become entangled in the lining of his pocket.

"There are your robbers!" he shouted. "Put out your lights!"

"Don't you do anything of the kind!" argued Sandy. "Get out of range of the old shaft and keep your lights burning so you can shoot any one who drops down! I guess we have them hemmed in!"

"It's a scheme to get away with my money!" shouted Carson.

"I wish you had your old money chucked down your throat!" exclaimed Sandy. "I'm getting sick of the sound of the word!"

All members of the party now drew back toward the dip, where they were entirely concealed from any one in the old shaft.

Directly there was a rattling of shale and slate, and then the lights showed the figure of Tommy

sitting astride the peak of the pyramid.

"What you fellows trying to do down there?" he asked.

"We're looking for Carson's money?" replied Sandy.

"Did you get it?" the boy demanded.

"Not yet!"

"That's the boy that's got my money!" shouted the banker.

"Money's a good thing to have!" grinned Tommy.

"What have you done with the highwaymen?" asked Sandy.

"Why continue this senseless talk about highwaymen?" demanded Carson, "when you know just as well as I do that there are no robbers here other than yourselves! Mr. Buck," he added, turning to Elmer's father, "I call upon you to assist me in restraining these robbers until the proper officers can be summoned."

"Where did that fat man come from?" asked Tommy.

"You impertinent rascal!" shouted Carson.

"Sure!" answered Tommy. "But where did you say you came from?"

"I'm president of this mining company!" screamed Carson, "and I'll have you all in jail if you don't produce my money!"

"Is this the gentleman who went batty and lost two hundred thousand dollars?" asked Tommy, sliding down from the slate pyramid and standing beside Sandy.

"That is believed to be the man!" laughed Sandy.

"Believed to be!" roared Carson.

"Does he know where he left the money?" asked Tommy.

"Sure I know where I left my money, you young jackanapes!" declared Carson. "I pointed out the exact hiding place only a few moments ago!"

"You found it empty?"

"Yes, I found it empty," roared Carson.

"Then," Tommy suggested, "we've all got to get busy."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Carson.

Before Tommy could reply, Will came sliding down the rope and landed within a few feet of where the little group stood.

"Look here, Will," Tommy said, "are you sure we made a good search of those three ginks? They've got the money all right!"

"How do you know they did?" demanded Will.

"That fat man over there who looks as if he was about to bust," Tommy grinned, "is Mr. Carson, the man who hid the money and couldn't find it again. He's just been looking in the place where he concealed it, and it isn't there! We've got to get busy!"

"I don't understand this at all," Mr. Buck interrupted.

"It's just this way," Will said, facing the speaker "we caught the three men who were wandering about in the mine. We rescued our chums first, and then when the outlaws heard your party advancing they scrambled up the old shaft, and took to their heels supposing, of course, that we had lost no time in getting out of the mine."

"And you geezled them all?" asked Sandy.

"The whole three!" replied Will. "All we had to do was to stretch a rope across a passage, trip them up, and do a little winding around their geezled forms before they could get their breath. They're all tied up good and tight now."

"And you searched them for the money and didn't find it?" shouted Carson.

"And we searched them for the money and didn't find it!" repeated Will.

"I don't believe it!" shouted Carson. "You'll be telling me in a moment, when I ask you to produce your robbers, that they have broken their bonds and escaped!"

At that moment, George's voice was heard calling down the shaft:

"Break for the main shaft!" they heard him saying. "Head those fellows off! They cut their ropes and got away!"

"I told you so!" thundered Carson.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCLUSION

"Bright boys up there!" exclaimed Will, as the unwelcome news of the escape of the robbers came down the old shaft.

"Me for the elevator!" shouted Tommy.

All four boys, Will, Elmer, Tommy and Sandy, started in a mad race down the gangway. As they carried their searchlights with them, and as Mr. Carson and Mr. Buck moved at a slower pace, the latter gentlemen were soon feeling their way through a dark tunnel.

"We've just got to head 'em off!" grunted Tommy, as the boys passed along at a pace calculated to break the long distance running records.

"I don't believe they'll make for the main shaft anyway," Sandy panted.

"I don't believe they will, either," Will declared, "but if we get to the lift first, we'll be dead sure they don't get out!"

Will was in advance as they swung into the lighted space about the shaft. The first thing he observed was that one of the cages was just starting upward. He sprang to the push button and almost instantly the cage dropped back to the third level again. The power was on in honor of the visit of the president of the company.

"Pile in, boys!" he shouted. "We'll stop at the second level!"

The man at the top responded nobly to the quick signals given to start and stop, and in a very short space of time the elevator stood at the second level. The bar was down, but Will threw it aside and stepped out into the passage. There he saw the bank cashier and the miner standing cowering against the wall only a few feet from the shaft.

"What are you doing here?" asked Will.

"We started to the top," the miner replied, "but stopped here because we thought there might be need of our assistance on this level."

"Why on this level?" asked Will, observing that the miner was pretty thoroughly frightened. "I haven't heard of any disturbance here!"

"But there has been a disturbance here!" insisted the cashier. "We heard scuffling out there in the darkness, but as we had no lights, we could not investigate. My friend, the miner, had a light on the lower level, but he lost it as we made our way out to the shaft."

"Has any one passed up the shaft?" asked Will.

The miner shook his head.

"Then we're in time all right!" cried Will exultantly. "We have the outlaws headed off!"

The heavy voices of the two men who had been left on the lower level now came rumbling up the shaft.

"What do you mean by leaving us in this plight?" demanded Carson. "Lower the cage instantly, and take us to the top!"

"Stay down there and look after your money!" cried Sandy, mockingly.

"I think I know where my money is!" shouted Carson.

"I wish I knew!" returned Sandy.

In the moment of silence which followed the boys heard the call of the Beaver Patrol ringing down the second level.

"George seems to be alive anyway!" laughed Tommy.

A moment later a snarling sound which seemed to emanate from a whole pack of Wolves reached the ears of the boys.

"Why didn't you tell me there were wild animals in the mine?" shouted the cashier. "Let me into that cage immediately!"

"Don't be in a hurry," advised Tommy. "All the Wolves and Beavers you'll find in here won't do you any harm!"

While Carson and Elmer's father continued to call from below, and while the Boy Scout challenges rang in the second level, two pistol shots were heard not far away from the shaft.

The cashier and the miner both broke for the cage, but were turned back at the point of Sandy's automatic revolver.

"You stopped here because you thought you might be of some assistance, you know," the boy said. "Now you just remain here long enough to help out."

"But there are people being murdered in there!" cried the cashier.

Two more shots came from the gangway and then the stout figure of the detective came staggering into the circle of light around the shaft. He had evidently been wounded seriously, for he fell as he drew near to where the boys were standing and raised his eyes in a piteous appeal for help. Will stooped over and felt his pulse.

"You're about done for!" the boy said in a husky tone. "Who did it?"

"Those two hold-up men," was the faint reply.

"Where are they now?" asked Will.

"I fired back," replied the detective with a grim smile, "and I guess they're lying on the floor of the passage!"

Will bent closer over the wounded detective while Tommy and Sandy started down the gangway on a run, closely followed by Elmer.

"Why did they shoot you?" asked Will.

"I found the money," Ventner replied, "and hid it in a crevice in the wall, and they found it. When we managed to escape by cutting the ropes I saw them take the money and disappear in the darkness. I followed on and accused them of the act and they shot me! Then I shot back, and I guess it's a pretty bad mess, when you take it altogether!"

"Where is the money?" asked Will.

"They have it in their possession," was the reply, "if they haven't hidden it again."

Before the wounded detective could continue, George, Jimmie, Dick, Canfield, Sandy and Tommy came running out of the gangway.

"Where's Elmer?" asked Will.

"We left him back there talking with one of the hold-up men," replied George. "They're both badly hurt, and won't last long!"

"I'm not sorry!" moaned Ventner.

A moment later, Elmer came out of the passage with a bill-book of good size in his hand. He lifted the book gaily as he entered the illumination.

"I'll bet he's got the money!" exclaimed Tommy.

"Sure he has!" replied Will, and Elmer nodded.

The voices of Carson and Buck again came roaring up from below.

"Why don't you lower the cage?" Carson shouted. "I'm going to have every one of you arrested as soon as I can find an officer! You can't work any of your gold brick schemes on me!"

"We may as well drop down and take them aboard," Will laughed.

Carson was swelling with rage when he stepped onto the platform of the lift. He shook his fist fiercely under Will's nose, and announced that he would have him wearing handcuffs before night.

"How much reward was offered for the return of that two hundred thousand dollars?" asked the boy, without paying any attention to the angry demonstrations of the banker.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" replied Carson. "But you'll never get a cent of it. I hired a party of Boy Scouts to come here from Chicago and look into the case, but they never came near me."

"When you write to Chicago again," Will replied, with a smile as the elevator stopped at the second level, "just tell Mr. Horton that the Beaver's didn't succeed in getting the money, but that the Wolves did. Elmer has the money in his possession right this minute!"

"Impossible!" shouted Carson.

"Hand him the money, Elmer," requested Will.

Carson snatched the bill book as it was held out to him and began looking through the ten-thousand-dollar banknotes which it contained.

"The next time you get drunk and fall out of your machine, don't accuse every one you meet of robbing you!" Sandy cut in.

"Are you the boys who came on from Chicago?" demanded Carson.

"Sure!" replied Will.

"I guess I'm an old fool!" admitted Carson. "Here I've been roaming around about half a day accusing you boys of stealing my money, when all the time you were planning on returning it to me!"

"Do we get the reward now?" asked Will.

"Twenty thousand and expenses!" replied Carson. "I'll settle with Elmer and his chums later on!"

"It's a shame to take the money!" declared Sandy, but Will gave him a sharp punch in the back and he cut off any further remarks which he might have had in his mind.

The story ends here because the adventure ended with the finding of the money. The old tool house was deserted that night. The two hold-up men and the detective recovered after a long illness in a Pittsburgh hospital. The detective was permitted to go his way after promising to keep out of crooked detective deals in the future. He never told how or where he received his information about the lost money. The hold-up men were given long sentences in prison.

A few weeks later, when the mining company resumed operations at the Labyrinth, Tunnel Six was walled up. Mr. Carson, the president, declared that it made what few hairs he had left stand on end to think of the experiences he had endured there!

However, there are still stories about the breaker, that on dark nights, when the wind blows, and the rain falls in great sheets, there are mysterious lights floating about Tunnel Six.

Jimmie and Dick often tell exactly how these lights were made, and how they enjoyed themselves living down in the bowels of the earth, but the superstitious miners still claim that the boys were not responsible for all the lights which burned there!

Dick and Jimmie also have their joke with the Beaver Patrol boys whenever they meet, declaring that if they had not finally relented and dropped the string the boys had carried into the mine for their own protection, they would still be wandering around in the Labyrinth Mine.

"And now," Will said as they settled down in their old room on Washington boulevard, "we're going to be good boys from this time on and remain in Chicago and stay at home nights!"

However, in three days, the boys were preparing for another bit of adventure, the details of which will be found in the next volume of this series entitled:

"Boy Scouts in Alaska; or, The Camp on the Glacier."

THE END.



Boy Scouts in Alaska

Or, The Camp on the Glacier

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CHAPTER I

UNDER SEALED ORDERS

An August night in Alaska.

To the North, the tangle of the Chugach Mountains; to the East, Bering Glacier; to the South, the purple waters of the Gulf of Alaska; to the West, Prince William Sound. All around, the grandeur of a world in the making—high mountains, rugged summits, deep cut valleys, creeping glaciers.

In a log cabin standing in the center of a small forested moraine four boys of about seventeen were grouped together. The one door and the two windows of the structure were covered with mosquito wire. The hum of insect life came into the room with the monotony of the murmur of the sea. Although it was after ten o'clock in the evening, the sun still rode high above the horizon.

A few hundred feet from the outer edge of the ice-cliff, the forested moraine became a "dead" glacier. When a glacier advances no longer, but draws back year by year, it is said to be "dead." The live glacier is simply a river of ice pouring down precipices and into gorges and fiords.

As a matter of fact, the log cabin was built upon a glacier, for under the luxuriant summer undergrowth, under the flowers, and under the bright green of the hemlocks, lay a great bed of ice which, however, was slowly receding. In times gone by the current of ice had flowed into the Gulf of Alaska, but now, because of drainage in another direction, the glacial ice swept off to the west, in the direction of Copper river.

The four boys in the cabin had just finished supper, the cooking having been done over a gasoline "plate," and they were now discussing the advisability of spending the remaining hour of daylight in the investigation of the strange, wild land in which they now found themselves.

Two days before they had landed at Katalla, and had spent the intervening time in transferring their supplies to the log house on the glacier. They had traveled northward by the inland route, and landed in the vicinity of Controller bay, bringing with them provisions sufficient for a long stay in the wonderful North.

Those who have read the previous volumes of this series will well remember the adventures of Will Smith, Charley (Sandy) Green, George Benton and Tommy Gregory. After startling experiences among the Pictured Rocks of Old Superior, in the mysterious swamps of the Everglades, in the rocky caverns of the Continental Divide, amidst the snows of the Hudson Bay wilderness, and in the coal caverns of the Pennsylvania anthracite region, they had decided to spend a portion of the summer in Alaska. They had reached Controller bay without serious accident, and now found themselves in one of the most picturesque sections of the great territory, with plenty of provisions and ammunition.

The lads were all dressed in the khaki uniform of the Boy Scouts of America, the badges showing membership in the Beaver Patrol of Chicago. Their coat sleeves showed medals proclaiming the fact that they had passed examinations and were well qualified to serve as Stalkers, Seamen, Pioneers, or in the Ambulance squad. The pennant of the Beaver Patrol flew above the door of the cabin.

Tommy Gregory separated himself from the group about the supper table and walked to the heavily-screened doorway. His face was covered by an Alaska head-net, and he wore a pair of strong leather gloves.

"Why didn't some of you boys tell me that the mosquitos here are as large as robins?" he asked.

"Because they are only half as large," replied Sandy Green with a grin.

"If some one will hand me my gun off the table," Tommy went on, with a wrinkling of his freckled nose, "I'll shoot one, and we can have him for supper! One of the outlaws ought to make a good meal for us four!"

"Better do the killing with a handspike," advised Sandy, "for we haven't any ammunition to throw away. Besides," the boy went on, "I don't believe a thirty-eight would kill one of these wild animals, anyway!"

"Up on the Yukon," George Benton interrupted, "when they sentence a man to death, they don't hang him. They send him down the river in an open canoe, and give the mosquitos a crack at him!"

"You stated that in the way of an exaggeration," Will Smith suggested, "but it is the absolute truth, for all that! Men lost among the nigger-heads have been found later on with their bones picked dry."

"What's a nigger-head?" asked Tommy.

"A nigger-head is a bog," was the reply. "When I say a bog, I don't mean a swampy hole, either. I mean a grassy knoll sticking up out of a swamp full of mud. If you keep on the bogs, or nigger-heads, you are reasonably safe, but if you drop down into the mud, you are likely to go in over your head."

"How far down does this mud go?" demanded Sandy.

"Down to the ice," replied Will. "This entire country," he went on, "is lined with ice! Ten or twelve feet below the foundation of this cabin, the ice is almost as hard as steel. Sometimes the earth-crust over the ice is a foot thick, and sometimes it is ten feet."

"Are those brilliant flowers growing over a glacier?" asked Tommy, pointing to a group of violets growing not far away.

"Sure!" replied Will. "If it wasn't for the ice, there wouldn't be any violets here. The glacier supplies water as well as soil."

"What'd you say about going up to the end of the moraine?" asked Sandy, joining Tommy at the screened door of the cabin.

"Isn't it quite a climb?" asked Will.

"It isn't so very steep," replied Tommy, "but the way seems to be rather rocky. I'd like to know where all these round stones come from!"

"They are brought down by the glacier ice and rounded into shape by the same force which discharges the ice stream into the gulf. There is always a line of moraine at each side of a glacier, and usually several ridges in the middle of it. Those at the edge are called lateral moraines, those in the middle, medial moraines, and those at the end, terminal moraines. And that's about all I know of Alaska," Will added, with a smile.

The lads passed up the moraine for some distance, until, in fact, they came to a point where vegetation became thinner, and hemlocks of smaller growth. Then they turned toward the west and stood for a long time watching the yellow glory of the sunset.

But the heat of day passes swiftly in Alaska when the direct rays of the sun fail, and so the boys were soon glad to return to their cabin, which they had found standing unoccupied.

"I'd like to know the history of this old shack," Sandy said, as they paused in the gathering darkness at the doorway.

"There's no knowing how long it has stood here, waiting for us to come and gladden its dirty old walls with our presence and our scrubbing brushes!" laughed Tommy. "I've seen a good many cleaner cabins in my life!"

"And there is no knowing how many tragedies have been enacted here, either!" exclaimed George. "It must have witnessed many a queer sight!"

"It must have been built within a year or two," Will observed, "for the logs do not yet show decay."

"What I can't get through my noodle," George said, with a puzzled look, "is why any one should construct such a habitable little cabin in this out of the way spot, and then go away and leave it. We must be at least twelve or fifteen miles from the nearest neighbor."

"We're farther than that," observed Sandy, "judging from the time it took us to row our supplies over from the floating dock where we landed. I hope we'll be ready to go out by the time our provisions run short."

"Look here, Will," Tommy questioned, "did Mr. Horton direct you to this exact spot, or did he only tell you to locate somewhere in this vicinity? You never told us what he said."

"He told me," was the guarded reply, "that I might be able to find a deserted cabin on this moraine."

"And he told you right where to find the moraine?" asked Sandy.

"Of course he did!"

"And you said nothing to us about that, either," complained Tommy. "You're always holding something back from us!"

"Well, now that we're here," George suggested, "perhaps Will can be coaxed into telling us exactly what we're here for."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Tommy. "We don't, know at the present moment whether we're here to trap brown bears, or to box and ship Northern Lights to the eastern markets."

"Don't get sarcastic, boys!" replied Will. "I was instructed by Mr. Horton to communicate to you all the information in my possession on our first night in camp, and I'm ready right now to obey orders. Shall we go inside? The bugs are pretty thick out here!"

"I should say so!" shouted Tommy. "I'm pretty well hedged in from the blooming insects," he went on, "but it makes me nervous to hear them blowing their dinner horns every minute."

"Gee!" exclaimed Sandy. "Whenever I get into this anti-mosquito rig, I feel like an armored train!"

Twilight lay heavy over the landscape now, and so the boys were confronted by a dark interior as they stepped into the cabin.

"Who's got a searchlight handy?" asked Will.

Tommy replied that he would have a light on in a second, but before the finger of light from the electric shot into the room, Will half fell over a yielding figure which lay on the floor not far away from the table.

Then the circle of light, thrown hastily down, rested upon the white, drawn face of a boy not far from sixteen years of age. There was a little showing of blood on the floor, and his eyes were tightly closed, indicating that he had been rendered unconscious by a wound.

The lad was dressed in the khaki uniform of the Boy Scouts of America, and the badge on his hat showed that he was Leader of the Fox Patrol.

A long envelope torn open at one end and bearing the name of Will Smith, lay empty by the lad's side.

"Where did he come from?" cried Tommy, "and who is he?"

"Must have dropped out of the sky!" declared Sandy.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINT OF A THUMB

"The Fox Patrol!" exclaimed George. "I wonder if that means the Fox Patrol of Chicago? It doesn't seem to me that this kid could have followed on our heels across the continent!"

Will lifted the torn envelope from the floor and examined it critically.

"That's your name isn't it?" asked Sandy looking over his shoulder.

"It certainly is!" replied Will.

"Well, you've got the address left, anyhow!" said George.

"Say," Tommy suggested, opening his eyes very wide, "some gink followed the boy here, bumped him on the coco, and stole the communication! I reckon we're getting into the center of population again. Here we are, several hundred miles from nowhere, and we've unearthed an innocent messenger and a bold highwayman already!"

"Have you any idea what the stolen paper contained?" asked George.

"Not the slightest!" replied Will.

"Wasn't it arranged that Mr. Horton should communicate with you after we reached this point?" asked Sandy.

"Certainly not!" was the reply. "He gave me full instructions before we left Chicago. If I found a deserted cabin at this point, I was to make camp here. If I did not, I was to keep along the coast toward Bering Glacier until I discovered one answering this description."

"But where did this kid come from?" insisted Tommy. "How did he ever get here all by his lonely? We had two guides to help us in, and it seems that he came alone, that is, as far as we can see."

"I don't think he came alone!" replied Sandy pointing to the wound on the boy's head. "He never got a bump like that in a fall!"

"Oh, we'll have to wait until the kid wakes up!" Tommy cut in. "We'd better be doing something to help him out of his trance, instead of standing here guessing. He may be badly hurt!"

The limp figure was lifted from the floor and placed on one of the bunks fastened to the wall of the cabin. The lad groaned slightly as the change was made, but did not open his eyes.

"I guess he got a bad bump," Will suggested. "And I'm sorry to say that his wound requires a piece of surgery far beyond my ability to perform. I'm afraid we'll have to send out for a doctor!"

The boys used every means within their knowledge to bring the lad back to consciousness, but all their efforts proved unavailing. The lad lay in a comatose condition long after all their resources had failed.

So busily engaged were the boys in their efforts at resuscitation that they did not for a moment remember that they, themselves, might be in danger from the same hand which had struck down the boy.

As they worked over the lad, bathing the wound with hot water and endeavoring to force stimulating drinks between the set teeth, they did not observe a bearded face was pressed for a moment against a window pane. It was an evil face, and was gone on the instant.

After three hours of steady exertion, the boys relaxed their efforts and sat down to consider the situation. They had searched the boy's clothing, but had found nothing giving a clue to his name or residence.

"Right out of the air!" exclaimed Sandy. "If we should blunder into a camp devoid of a mystery, we'd have to move out or die of suffocation!"

"I'd like to know who the boy is, and where he came from," Will said, after a short pause, "but the principal question now is this: What was in the paper that was stolen from the envelope?"

"Probably some information directed to you," suggested Tommy.

"Undoubtedly," Will answered.

"And now, instead of coming into your hands," George remarked, "the warning, or the command, or whatever you may call it, passes over to the man who attempted murder in order to secure it!"

"That's just the size of it!" Tommy agreed.

"It strikes me," George suggested, "that we'd better set a guard through the rest of the night. The fellow who struck this blow may be waiting to strike another!"

"How long were we gone from the cabin?" asked Will.

"Less than an hour," replied Sandy.

"Then, if we had at once set up a search for the assassin," Will went on, "we might have discovered him."

"Not in a thousand years, in this wild country!" exclaimed Tommy.

Will went to the door and looked out toward the east.

"It will be daylight directly," he said, "and then we will see what can be accomplished in the way of finding clues."

"Nix on the clue!" argued Tommy. "The gink who bumped our friend on the cupola came after the paper. He got the paper and ducked, and that's all there is to it! If there were any secret communications concerning our mission in the paper, the robber got them!"

"And where does that leave us?" asked Sandy.

"Up in the air!" grumbled Tommy.

"So far as I can see," Will stated, "you boys have the situation sized up correctly! The boy was sent here to convey certain information to me. He made his way to the cabin before being attacked. Then he was struck down and the important paper abstracted from the envelope."

"I've got an idea!" cried Tommy springing to his feet and walking up and down the cabin floor. "I've got a bully idea!"

"Pass it around," advised Sandy.

"This lad wasn't followed in at all!" Tommy went on. "The man who attacked him and stole the paper was waiting for him at this cabin! The lad was mistaken for the boy whose name appears on the envelope, and so he got what was meant for some one else!"

"But look here," George argued, "if the assassin was waiting here for the boy to come, why didn't he jump us as soon as we made our appearance?"

"That's another question I can't answer," Tommy admitted. "I might say that the man reached the cabin and found this boy sitting here alone, but that would be only guess work."

Will arose and walked over to the bunk where the wounded boy lay.

"Half a dozen words from his lips would settle the whole question," he said, "but it appears to me that it will be a long time before he will be able to speak a word. All our Boy Scout learning in the matter of wounds is ineffective here!"

"There's one thing clear to me," George argued, "and that is that some one in this wild region now knows more about our mission here than we do ourselves. Of course, Will may know quite a lot regarding it," he added, with a wink, "but, if he does, he hasn't yet confided the story to us."

"That's a hint that you get busy and tell us what we're here for," suggested Tommy with another wink.

"I'll tell you what I know about the matter," Will answered, "but in the face of the fact that a more recent reading of the case is known to exist, the chances are that any explanations I may make may prove to be worthless."

"Can you answer a straight question?" asked Tommy.

"I think so," answered Will.

"Will you answer a straight question?" persisted the boy.

"Certainly!"

"Then answer it. What are we here for?"

"We are here," replied Will, "to secure the print of a thumb!"

"Has the shock of this incident turned your head?" asked Tommy.

"I answered the question correctly!" replied Will. "We came all the way from Chicago to find the print of a man's right thumb!"

"Where do you expect to find it?" demanded Sandy.

"Somewhere among the mountains and glaciers," smiled Will.

"I can get all the thumb prints I want on South Clark street!" declared Tommy. "Of course, it's fun to come out here, under any pretext whatever, but I think Mr. Horton might have given us a more sensible errand than that. This is worse than the trip to the coal mine!"

"Now tell us the excuse Mr. Horton gave for wanting this print of a man's right thumb," smiled Sandy.

Will arose and went to the door. The sun was lifting through a narrow pass in the mountains, and the creatures of the thickets and the air were astir. A flock of water fowl was winging swiftly to the north, and what seemed to be the keen eyes of a wolf looked out from the shelter of the undergrowth. The air was clear and invigorating.

"Why don't you answer my question?" asked Sandy.

"Did you hear footsteps outside?" asked Will.

Sandy shook his head, but the two boys, after drawing on their head-nets, stepped out into the glorious morning.

"There is no reason," Will decided, "why the person who attacked the boy and stole the paper should find it necessary to leave this section without trying to find out something more. I have an idea that whoever injured the lad is still in this vicinity—that he will remain in this vicinity as long as there is a prospect of his securing additional information."

"The mosquitos will eat him up if he remains around here without proper shelter!" Sandy suggested.

"That is one way of fighting off mosquitos," Will said, catching the boy by the arm and pointing off to the east, where a faint line of smoke was making its way through the still air.

"There's some kind of a camp there, all right!" exclaimed Sandy.

Tommy and George now came out of the cabin and the four boys stood for some moments watching the column of smoke which seemed to grow more dense every moment. While they looked, a second column appeared beside the first.

"If we were in a Boy Scout country," Tommy exclaimed, "I should say that was an Indian signal for help."

"In a Boy Scout country!" repeated Sandy. "If this isn't a Boy Scout country, what is it? Every inhabitant, so far as we know, belongs to the order!"

"Well, there's a Boy Scout call for assistance," urged Tommy, excitedly, "and I think we'd better get a move on and see what it means!"

CHAPTER III

A MESSAGE IN CODE

"We mustn't all go," Will said, as his companions started on a run in the direction of the smoke signals.

"I should say not!" exclaimed Sandy. "If we should all go away at one time we might find another

wounded boy in the cabin on our return!"

"Suppose you keep watch, then," Tommy suggested.

"All right," Sandy agreed. "I'll stay if you'll stay with me."

Tommy grumbled a little at the idea of missing a little possible excitement, but the two lads entered the cabin and closed the door while Will and George started away toward the signals.

The moraine over which they passed was something like a floor of loose rocks of different sizes, with mats of mosses, lichens, sedges, and dwarf shrubs scattered here and there, so the traveling was by no means easy. Now and then the boys came to a place where the rocks were entirely bare, and here their progress was more rapid.

The columns of smoke grew more distinct as they advanced, and, after traveling a mile or more, they came to a position from which a figure could be seen moving back and forth between the two fires.

"That's a kid all right!" Will decided, watching the figure closely through a field glass. "And he's wearing a Boy Scout uniform, too!"

"I have an idea," George declared, with a sly wink at his chum, "that if we should ascend to the Mountains of the Moon and drop into a gorge a thousand feet deep, we'd find a Boy Scout in a khaki uniform at the bottom."

"I'm not kicking at the discovery of a Boy Scout," laughed Will. "The more Boy Scouts we come across in this desolate land the happier we shall be."

"I'm not kicking, either," replied George. "I was only commenting on the queer fact that we find Boy Scouts in every region we chance to visit."

"You'll find the little fellows scattered all over the world!" declared Will. "And they're always doing something wherever they are."

Will now handed the field glass to George and he, in turn, made a short study of the figure passing back and forth between the two fires, piling wood now on one and now on another.

"It's dollars to doughnuts," Will observed, "that the boy by the fires came in with the one who lies in the cabin with a busted head."

"I've been considering that proposition," George said.

"Then, perhaps, we may be able to solve a portion of the mystery as soon as we get into conversation with the lad," Will continued.

"I wonder why he didn't come to the cabin during the night?" asked George. "He surely must have seen the lights shining from the windows."

Will turned and looked back over the route they had followed.

"We can't see the cabin from here," he said.

"That's a fact," George agreed, "and if the smoke hadn't been going up good and plenty we would never have seen that!"

The next moment the lad at the fires saw Will and George approaching and ran forward to meet them, uttering as he ran the sharp, quick bark of the fox. The boys responded with the challenge of the Beaver Patrol.

The lad met the two with anything but a serious or anxious expression on his face. He grasped them heartily by the hand and pointed toward the columns of smoke, still rising into the sky.

"No matter where you start a signal fire," he said with a smile, "you're sure to find some Boy Scout who will understand and answer."

"Even in Alaska!" George grinned. "A thousand miles from nowhere you can dig up a nest of Boy Scouts by sending up an Indian sign for help."

"Are you Will Smith?" the boy asked after a few more words of greeting had been exchanged. "If you are, I've come along way to find you!"

"Yes, I am Will Smith," the boy answered.

"How'd you guess it?" asked George. "Why didn't you ask me if I was the boss of the bunch? Don't I look dignified enough?"

"I have a description of Will Smith lying nicely tucked in at the back of my brain!" replied the boy. "Mr. Horton told me where I'd be apt to find him. It seems that I've found him all right, but in doing so, I've lost my chum! Haven't seen anything of a stray Boy Scout, have you?"

Will did not reply to the question immediately, yet he did not care to convey to the boy the news of what had occurred until after a clear understanding of the situation had been reached.

"What's your name?" asked George.

"Frank Disbrow, Fox Patrol, Chicago," was the reply.

"And your chum?" asked Will.

"Bert Calkins, Fox Patrol, Chicago."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have followed us boys from Chicago?" asked George. "You've had a long chase if you have done so!"

"No," answered Frank, "we were very much surprised, one day, to receive a wireless telegram from my father, who is connected in various business operations with Lawyer Horton. The wireless stated that father had work for us to do in Alaska, and the result of it all was that we received a long message in code from Mr. Horton."

"In code?" asked Will, excitedly.

"Exactly! In code."

"In whose code?" asked Will.

"Father's," was the reply.

"I see," said Will. "And you, of course, understand your father's code?"

"Certainly!" was the answer.

"What did the message in code say?" asked George.

"It was addressed to Will Smith," was the answer, "and I, following instructions, did not translate it."

"The message to you simply requested the delivery of the code message?" asked Will.

"Yes, that's all it told us to do."

"Do you know what the code message contained?" asked Will.

"I do not!" was the reply. "You see," the boy went on, "Bert Calkins and I were at Cordova on a vacation. If the wireless message had been two hours later it would have found us on the way to Cook Inlet."

"Just traveling about for the fun of the thing, eh?" asked George.

"That's the idea," replied Frank.

"Perhaps we'd better return to the cabin before we get the history of this boy's life," suggested George, with a grin. "I don't like the way these mosquitos howl about my ears. I'm afraid they'll devour the net and begin on me."

"The cabin?" repeated Frank. "Did you find the cabin?"

"Sure we did," answered George. "And we left the cabin for an hour or so last night, and when we came back we found a member of the Fox Patrol asleep on the floor."

"So that's where Bert went, is it?" asked Frank. "You see," the boy went on, "I got separated from Bert just this side of Katalla. He loitered behind to view the scenery, or something of that sort, and I came on ahead."

"And he never caught up with you?" asked George.

"He never did," was the reply, "although I saw him at different times during yesterday. I thought he headed off in this direction, and so came here. I've had rather a bad night looking for him."

"He had the code message addressed to Will?" asked George.

"Yes," was the reply.

"The untranslated code message?" Will asked.

"Yes, the untranslated code message."

"Glory be!" shouted George.

Frank looked at the boy in wonder for a moment, and then turned to Will with a question in his eyes.

"It's a long story," Will said in answer to the look, "and we'd better wait until we get to the cabin before entering upon it."

"Is Bert all right?" asked Frank.

"He got a little bump on the head somewhere," answered George, "but he'll come out of that all right, in time. I wasn't rejoicing because your chum got a poke on the belfry," George went on, whimsically, "I was shouting because the man who stole the code message didn't accomplish anything."

Frank, who was now standing by the fire collecting such bits of wardrobe as had been removed

from his handbag, and also collecting the remains of the solitary lunch of which he had partaken that morning, again turned to Will with an interrogation point in each eye.

"Was the code message stolen?" he asked.

"It certainly was!" Will answered. "At least a large envelope with my name written across the front was found, with the end torn open, by your friend's side as he lay on the floor."

"That's the work of the man who followed us in!" declared Frank.

"We'll get this story all out of you pretty soon," laughed George.

"Suppose we go to the cabin before we uncork the entire yarn," suggested Frank. "To tell you the truth, boys, I didn't have half enough breakfast, and I'm about starved to death!"

"All right," Will replied. "There's nothing to keep us here that I know of. Did you see any one around your camp in the night?" he continued. "What kind of a night did you pass?"

"A rotten, bad night!" was the answer. "I traveled a long way before I came to any wood suitable for building a campfire, and after I got one built it seemed to send out a bugle call to every wild animal within forty miles of the place. I guess I heard bears, and wolves, and wild dogs, and bull moose, and every other form, of wild life known to Alaska, at some time during the night!"

"And all the time," grinned George, "you were not more than a mile or so from our cabin. It's a wonder you didn't see our light."

"Well, I didn't," Frank replied. "But that's past and gone," he went on, in a moment, "and what I'm thinking about at the present time is this: Did the man who stole the code message from Bert force the boy to translate it for him? Tell me something more about the attack on the boy."

"We don't know anything about the attack," replied Will. "We found him lying on the floor of the cabin unconscious, and he has been unconscious ever since."

"Well," Frank went on, "Bert understands the code, for I taught it to him while we were translating the telegrams which came to me. Now, if this outlaw took the code before he struck the blow, the chances are that he ordered Bert to translate it for him. In that case, something which those opposed to you ought not to know is in the hands of your foes."

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST PLANS

"Well, there's a chance that the boy didn't translate the code message," George argued. "Anyway, we ought not to worry about that part of the case. Time enough to fret when real trouble comes."

By this time the boys had reached the cabin, after an exhausting journey over the moraine. They found Tommy and Sandy standing just inside the screened doorway, waiting impatiently for their arrival.

"Where did you find this one?" asked Tommy with a grin.

"Did he drop down out of the sky?" Sandy questioned.

Frank stood back for a moment, eyeing the two critically.

"I know you two kids," he said. "You're Tommy and Sandy. I've read about you in the Chicago newspapers, but I never expected to meet you out in Alaska. You seem to be getting plenty to eat, judging from your condition. And that brings back to my mind the condition of my own stomach."

"Boys," Will exclaimed, "this is Frank Disbrow. He started for our cabin in company with Bert Calking, the boy we found on the floor last night. The two were bringing a code despatch to me, and they became separated early yesterday morning."

"A code message, was it?" Tommy asked.

"Yes, a code message," Will answered, "but the bearer of the despatch may, for all we know, have been forced to translate the message for the benefit of the man who robbed him of it."

In a moment Frank was by the side of his chum, gazing down into a white and haggard face. He turned away in a moment with a little shiver of anxiety. His face, too, was pale.

"I'm afraid that's a serious wound!" he said.

"If we only had a surgeon," Sandy suggested.

"I'll go get one," offered Tommy. "I can cut across to Katalla in no time and bring back the best doctor there is in the country."

"I'll go with you," offered Sandy.

"Now, wait a minute, boys!" Will said in a moment. "Let's think this matter over. If you go to

Cordova instead of Katalla, you can communicate with Frank's father at Chicago, and so get in touch with Mr. Horton. In this way, we can learn the contents of the code despatch. There surely was some strong reason for sending it, and it seems as if we ought to know its contents."

"That's a good idea, too," exclaimed Tommy. "We'll go to Katalla, and perhaps we can find a boat about ready to sail for Cordova. In that case we ought to get up to the wireless station and back in a couple of days. The distance isn't great, but it's rough traveling."

"I wish we could take Bert with us," suggested Frank.

"Are you thinking of going?" asked Will.

"Yes," was the reply, "if I could take Bert out."

"Bert is in no condition to be taken, out," Will answered, "and even if he were it would take so long to make the journey that we could get a surgeon out here before we could land him in a hospital."

"I think," Frank said, "that I ought to go with the boy who is sent out after a surgeon. It is not certain that father will communicate by wireless save to his son. Anyway, I can find out a great deal more by talking with him than could any one else."

"I guess that's right!" Will replied.

"Then I'll go with him!" Tommy shouted. "I want to see what's going on in the world of fashion, anyway!"

"All right," Will said. "Pack up your provisions and get ready to move. Of course you'll need provisions."

"I usually do!" grinned Tommy.

The lads packed up the good supply of sandwiches and started off towards Katalla. It was somewhere near noon when they left the cabin, and they expected to reach the town on the coast before twilight fell, the distance being not more than fourteen miles.

"If you don't get to town when night falls," Will warned, "don't try to camp out in the open, but keep going until you find some human habitation. You remember what happened to Bert!"

"Any one who comes within a half a mile of me in a lonely place," Tommy put in, "will scrape the acquaintance of a bullet."

"And here's another thing," Will advised, "don't travel without a wet cloth or a bunch of green leaves inside your hat. It'll be ninety in the shade before the afternoon is over!"

"Yes, and a hundred in the sun!" declared Sandy.

"That's a nice weather for the Arctic regions, isn't it?" asked Frank.

"We have to take it just as we find it!" replied Will.

The boys started away on a brisk walk, and were accompanied by their chums some distance down the faint trail which led to the coast. At one time in the history of the country one large glacier had completely covered that section. But now, thousands of subordinate canyons and hollows on the mountains were filled with independent masses of ice.

All that section of Alaska, from smoking Wrangell to the Pacific coast, shows volcanic peaks. There are many dead craters, and some which are not so dead! There are still peaks of fire as well as rivers of ice.

After the departure of the two boys, Will and the others devoted considerable attention to the wounded lad. They did their best with the simple means at hand, but never, for an instant, did the boy regain consciousness.

"I don't think we can do anything for him until the surgeon comes," Will said as he threw himself disconsolately into a chair.

"If we only knew whether he was forced to translate the code message for the benefit of the man who robbed him," Sandy suggested, "there wouldn't be so much doubt as to what course we ought to take."

"The code message," Will argued, "may change the whole scheme."

"Yes," Sandy complained, "and we won't know what to do until Frank comes back with the duplicate."

"We won't know what to do then unless Will loosens up!" laughed George.

"Referring, of course," Sandy laughed, "to the prospective story of the mark of the human thumb. Will was about to tell us all about it when we saw the signals sent up by Frank."

"That's a fact," Will replied. "I didn't get any further than the mention of the human thumb, did I?"

"We're waiting to hear the rest of it now!" declared Sandy.

"Well," Will began, "there was a safe robbed in Chicago one night, and two men were accused of the crime. The accused men were in the employ of the manufacturing concern whose safe was entered. They admit that they were in the private office of the firm during the night, but they deny that they opened the safe."

"Of course!" laughed George.

"Now don't form any hasty conclusions," Will went on. "There was a third person in the office that night, according to the stories told by the two men who are accused, but this third person says he wasn't there!"

"Then this third person may be the one who opened the safe."

"That is the theory of the defense," Will explained.

"But what's all this got to do with the mark of a man's right thumb?" asked George.

"I'm coming to that," Will went on. "The three men who were in the office that night—we are supposing for the sake of the argument that there were three men there, and that the man who says he wasn't there is lying about it—were looking over a set of plans for a new machine which the company was arranging to manufacture."

"I've got you now!" laughed Sandy. "The thumb print of the third man was left on the drawings!"

"That's the idea," admitted Will. "The two men say that they were not a little annoyed during the course of the evening because this man, Babcock, persisted in pawing over the plans with dirty hands. They declare that the marks of both thumbs are to be seen on drawings, not in plain dust and grime, but in ink."

"He must have spilled the ink," suggested George.

"That's what they say," Will replied.

"Well, go on!" urged George.

"The statement is made by the two accused men that they worked over the plans until after midnight, and that they left this man Babcock at the office when they went to their homes. Babcock denied that he was in the office at all that night."

"Where are the plans?" asked George.

"In Alaska," answered Will.

"But whereabouts in Alaska?"

Will looked at the boy quizzically for a moment before he answered.

"That's just what we're here to find out!" he finally said.

"But why, when, where, how?" began the boy.

"One at a time!" laughed Will. "On the morning following the robbery, the plans having been rejected by the two men who were accused of robbing the safe, were sent to a mining company having an office at Cordova. So far as the defense is concerned, they have never been seen since that time."

"Were they actually sent?" demanded George.

"Yes, they were sent. The manager of the mining company admits having received them. He says they were turned over to a clerk for examination. From the time they passed into the hands of this clerk, no one had seen them. The clerk says he never had them."

"Do the manager and the clerk know what the defense in the robbery case expects to prove by the papers if they can be secured?" asked George.

"They are not supposed to know," Will answered.

"But you think that they may know, for all that?"

"At the time of leaving Chicago, I had no idea that there would be any trouble at all in securing the plans. In fact, until Bert was found lying on our floor last night, I believed that we should discover the papers as soon as we came upon one Len Garman, a miner who has, against the advice of his friends, been prospecting in this district, and who is known to have at one time occupied this cabin."

CHAPTER V

FISHING IN ALASKA

"Are you sure this is the same cabin?" asked George.

"Yes, I am sure this is the same cabin. At any rate, the description is perfect, both as regards the structure and the surroundings."

"I may be somewhat dense," George went on, "but I can't understand why a miner who is fool enough to prospect for gold on a dead glacier should take pains to conceal plans concerning the manufacture of a machine. What did he want of the plans?"

"I didn't say that he was concealing the plans," laughed Will.

"Well, you inferred as much!"

"As a matter of fact, I think he is hiding the plans."

"Does he expect to go into the manufacturing business?" grinned Sandy.

"I don't know about that," Will replied, "but there is talk that the clerk and the miner conspired to lose the plans."

"Because of the thumb prints?" asked Sandy.

"No; because the machine outlined in the plans is a mining machine, and because this clerk, Vin Chase, his name is, and this miner, Garman, have a notion in their head that they can steal the idea and bring forth a machine of their own. At least that is the supposition in Chicago."

"The plot deepens!" laughed George, "We'll be doing business with the Patent Office the first thing we know!"

"Are the plans which are claimed to hold the thumb prints of any value?" asked Sandy. "What I mean is, is the alleged invention of any account? You know there are plenty of inventions which are not worth the paper they are drawn on."

"Spaulding and Hurley, the two men accused of stealing the money," Will answered, "declare that the plans are absolutely without value."

"Why didn't you tell us all this before we left Chicago?" asked George. "I don't see any necessity for your keeping the story of the plans such a profound secret!"

"Well," answered Will, "the principal reason why I didn't tell you the whole story in Chicago is that I didn't care to clutter your minds up with a puzzling proposition which might be solved in a moment at the end of the journey. I expected to find Garman and the plans in this cottage. In that case, I should have shipped the plans back to Chicago and we should have gone with our playful little vacation under the North Star."

"Then you wouldn't have told us anything about the plans or the robbers?" questioned Sandy.

"Certainly not," was the reply. "You see, boys," Will went on, observing the injured look on the faces of his chums, "we've always been mixed up in some mystery, ever since the day we started out to visit the Pictured Rocks of Old Superior. So I thought you might like one trip free of puzzles and excitements."

"Don't you never permit us to lose sight of a mystery!" exclaimed George. "I eat mysteries three times a day, and then dream of mysteries at night! And Sandy," he went on, "just gets fat on mysteries!"

"All right," Will agreed. "If you want to tie your intellect all up into knots studying out such Sherlock Holmes puzzles as come to me, I have no objections."

"Well, we've found the cottage," George observed presently, "but we haven't found the man."

"Perhaps Bert Calkins found him," contended Will.

"Do you really think the miner is still hanging around this cabin?" asked Sandy. "Do you think he is the man who gave Bert the clout on the head? If you do think so, we'd better keep a sharp lookout."

"Garman wouldn't know anything about our coming here after the plans!" suggested George.

"Any man who steals another man's invention, or tries to steal it, will go to almost any length to protect the thing he has stolen. Even if Garman had no previous knowledge of our visit to this place our arrival here would at once excite his suspicions."

"I see that now," agreed George, "and the first thing the fellow would do would be to try to discover what we were doing here."

"Yes," continued Will, "and that would be sufficient motive for him to attack the bearer of the code despatch."

"I guess we've got it all doped out now," laughed George. "All we've got to do is to find this man Garman, take the original plans away from him, mail them back to Chicago, and go on about our business."

"And the lawyers in Chicago will do the rest!" grinned Sandy.

"It looks easy, doesn't it?" suggested Will.

"Why, if this miner doesn't know anything about what we're here for, we can tell him any story we're a mind to. We can tell him we're here on a vacation and have money to invest in a mine, if he can find the right kind of a mine for us," laughed George. "In twenty-four hours after we get hold of him, we can have him eating corn out of our hands, like a billy goat."

"You say it well!" laughed Sandy.

"That's all very well," Will agreed, "provided Garman isn't the man who took the code despatch from Bert Calkins."

"And provided, too," George declared, "that Garman didn't force the boy to translate the despatch for his benefit."

"And provided, also," Sandy cut in, "that the code despatch doesn't give away the whole snap to the miner. If he sees the machine plans referred to in any way, he'll think we want to get them away from him, because they are the stolen plans, and then it will be all off for us!"

"And so, when you come to round up on the proposition," Will argued, "we are not much further along than we were when we left Chicago, except that we have found the cabin."

"Who said anything about getting dinner?" asked Sandy, after a short pause. "I remember having a little snack about twelve o'clock, but that wasn't to be considered as a full meal, I hope."

"What have we got to eat?" asked Will.

"Nothing but a lot of canned stuff!" declared Sandy.

"Well, then, go out and get a deer, or half a dozen rabbits, or go back here to the little creek that runs into Copper river and see if you can get a mess of fish. There ought to be plenty of fish in Alaska!"

"What kind of fish can you get?" asked Sandy.

"Salmon!" answered Will.

"How far is it to the creek?" was the next question.

"Something over a mile, I should say," replied Will.

"It can't be any further than that," George cut in. "The glacier this cabin is built on supplies most of the water for it."

"All right, then," Sandy replied. "I'll get myself up a little lunch consisting of a couple of slices of bacon and three or four eggs, and go out and catch a ten-pound salmon for dinner. Want to go with me, George?" he added. "No need of all three staying here."

"Let Will go," replied George. "I'm tired, and there's a particularly interesting book I'd like to finish this afternoon."

Will went pawing among the fishing tackle, and finally called out to George who was just crawling into a bunk with his book:

"What do they catch fish with in Alaska?"

"Hooks!" replied George.

"Hooks and eyes?" asked Will, with a chuckle.

"Sure! Hooks and eyes! You see 'em with the eyes, and grab 'em with the hooks!"

"Aw, never mind that gink!" laughed Sandy. "He doesn't know any more about fishing in Alaska than a hog knows about Sunday! Bring along all the flies we've got and some red flannel, and some pieces of dirty bacon, and we'll manage to get fish. If one bait won't answer, another will."

"Do we have to cut a hole through the ice?" asked Will.

"Cut a hole through the ice!" repeated George. "Eighty or ninety in the shade! If you don't get this boy out of here, Sandy," George added, "I'll give him a poke in the eye!"

After selecting such flies, hooks, and lines as they thought might prove alluring to the fish, Will and Sandy started away in the direction of the little stream which ran out of the glacier a mile or so to the north and took a general direction toward Copper river.

After walking half a mile or more, they came to a line of rocks which seemed to extend from the open ice of the glacier to the coast, a distance of perhaps five or six miles. West of this line of moraine rocks the land sloped gradually to the northwest and here the headwaters of the little creek they sought were found.

Straight away to the north, west of the glacier, rose a range of wooded hills just now bright with blossoms and swarming with insect life. The little creek crept along to the south of this range, and, further down, separated the ground to the south from the hills.

Sandy leaped across the little rivulet as it came bubbling out of the ice hidden under the moraine and started down the bank next to the line of hills. Will kept to the other side.

"Why don't you come across?" shouted Sandy.

"What's the good of crossing over at all?" Will asked. "Before long the stream will be so wide that you can't cross back, and then you'll have to retrace your steps clear to the headwaters!"

"I can swim, can't I?" laughed Sandy.

"Not in that cold water!" replied Will.

Sandy only laughed in reply to the warning, and the two boys proceeded downstream, one on each side of the rivulet.

Within half an hour they caught half a dozen salmon of fair size, weighing from four to six pounds, using only red flannel for bait.

"What do you think of a fish in his right mind that'll try to eat red flannel?" asked Sandy, speaking from the opposite side of the creek.

"Boys do more foolish things than that!" answered Will.

"Explanation!" grinned Sandy.

"They smoke cigarettes, for one thing!" replied Will. "Even a fish that tries to make a meal off red flannel won't smoke a cigarette."

"We don't seem to get anything very big!" shouted Sandy.

"Well," Will answered back with a faint smile, "take a look up the hillside and see if that bear coming is large enough for you!"

CHAPTER VI

A MISSING BOY

"Bear nothing!" laughed Sandy. "There isn't a bear within a hundred miles of us! You can't fool your Uncle Isaac!"

"Look back and see!" advised Will.

Sandy paid no attention to the remark, but kept on fishing, following on down stream until he was some yards in advance of his chum.

So interested was he in the sport in which he was engaged that he thought no more of what had been said to him regarding the bear until a pistol shot reached his ears.

Then he glanced quickly in the rear, taking in the whole line of the hillside at one glance.

Just at that moment the whole landscape seemed to consist principally of bear! Will had wounded a great brown bear, and he was charging down toward the place where Sandy stood. The boy drew his automatic and faced about, hardly knowing what else to do, as the creek was too wide to leap across. The bear came on with a rush.

"Run!" shouted Will.

"I guess you'll have to show me a place to run to!" Sandy shouted back. "This bear seems to have taken possession of about all the territory there is on this side of the creek."

"Shoot, you dunce, shoot before he gets up to you!" shouted Will. "If he gets one swipe at you with that paw, you'll land out in the Gulf of Alaska! Fill him full of lead!"

Sandy began firing, but the bear came steadily on.

"You'll have to swim for it!" shouted Will in a moment. "You mustn't let that big brute get near enough to hand you one with that educated left of his. Jump in and swim and I'll help pull you out!"

Sandy looked at the creek and shivered. The water looked blue, as if shivering from the cold. He faced about and decided to take a few more shots at the bear before risking his life in the cold water.

"You'll have to jump!" Will shouted from the other side.

"I wouldn't have to jump," Sandy cried back, "If you'd do more shooting and less talking! Go on and use up your lead!"

In the excitement of the time, Will had, indeed, forgotten to keep his automatic busy. He now began shooting as fast as the weapon would carry the lead away, and bruin seemed to take offense at the activity with which the bullets flew about him. He was bleeding in several places, and was in a perfect frenzy of rage.

"I guess that's an armored bear!" Will shouted across the creek. "I don't believe our bullets have

any effect on him!"

By this time the bear was within a few paces of Sandy. The boy's automatic was empty now, yet he obstinately refused to spring into the water. Bruin reached out one paw and Sandy ducked, coming up behind the clumsy animal and landed a blow with the butt of the automatic on his head.

The next few moments were something of a blank in the mind of the boy. He heard Will calling to him, he knew that he had been struck by the bear, knew that his chum's bullets were still flying across the river, and knew that things were turning black around him.

Then he felt a dash of cold water in his face, and looked up to see Will standing over him, pouring water out of his hat.

"What did I do to the bear?" he asked faintly.

"Wait till you get to a mirror and see what the bear did to you!" replied Will. "What you got was a plenty!"

"Why didn't I jump in and swim across?" asked Sandy feebly.

"Because you're the most obstinate little customer that ever drew the breath of life," answered Will. "You took a chance on being eaten alive by a bear rather than get your feet wet!"

"Did I get my feet wet?" asked Sandy.

"No, but I did!" answered Will. "I had to swim across. The bear handed you one between the eyes and then dropped dead. I was afraid you'd lie here all night if I didn't do something, so I swam over."

"So you're the one that got wet?" grinned Sandy.

"Yes, I'm the one that got wet, but you're the one that got beat up!" replied Will. "Do you think you can walk home now?"

"Sandy straightened out one arm at a time, then one leg at a time, then arose to a sitting position.

"I don't know why not!" he replied.

"Get up and see if you can walk!" advised Will.

"Course I can walk!" replied Sandy. "I just went down for the count!"

He scrambled slowly to his feet and turned about to gaze at his late antagonist. The bear was lying stone dead close to the stream.

"He's a big one, isn't he?" he asked.

"He certainly is," was the reply. "If he'd got a good swipe at you before he became weak from loss of blood, you'd be in the 'Good-night' land all right now!" the boy added, with a grin.

"Well, I'm glad he didn't, then!" answered Sandy.

"Do you think we can carry the rug home?" asked Will.

"Perhaps you can," replied Sandy. "I don't feel as if I could carry an extra ounce. I guess Bruin did pass me a stiff jolt!"

"You bet he did!" replied Will. "Anyway," he added, "we'll have to leave the rug until some other time, because we've got quite a lot of fish to carry. If any one steals the hide, we'll have to stand it."

"We might skin the bear and put the hide up in a tree," suggested Sandy. "We'll have to tan the pelt in the sunshine, anyway!"

"That's a good idea, too!" exclaimed Will, getting busy at once with his knife. "And that reminds me that we can have bear steak for supper if we want it. We all like bear steak, you know!"

"I should say so!" replied Sandy.

It took the boys only a short time to remove the pelt from the bear and provide themselves with a few pounds of steak. Then leaving part of their fish, they started away up the creek toward the cabin.

Now and then Will stopped in the hurried walk to look toward Sandy and grin in the most provoking manner.

"If you see anything about me you don't like," Sandy said, half-angrily, on the third or fourth inspection, "you can just step over here and knock it out of me! What are you making fun of me for?"

"You look like you'd been through a battle with a cage of monkeys," replied Will. "You've got a swipe on the side of the face, and your cheek is scratched and bloody, and you got a swipe on your shoulder, and there's a tear on your shoulder, in the flesh as well as in your coat, and one eye will be black as soon as the blood settles under the contusion. Take it up one side and down

the other, you're a pretty disreputable looking object!"

"You wait until you get into a fight with a bear, and see how you come out! I'll bet you won't look as if you'd just dropped in from a pink tea! You'll look about like thirty cents!"

"When I see a bear coming," replied Will, "I hope I'll have the sense to run! I won't stay and get into a knock-down argument with him!"

It was nearly sundown when the boys came in sight of the cabin. They looked eagerly through the twilight for a light, expecting that George would have the great acetylene lamp in working order.

But no light showed from the cabin, and all was still as they approached the door. When Will looked in he saw the interior was in confusion.

"I should think George might straighten things out a little bit," he grumbled. "I'll bet he's been asleep all the afternoon!"

"I presume he has," agreed Sandy.

Will reached to the top of a shelf for an electric flashlight and swung the circle of flame about the room.

"Why, look here!" he said excitedly, "what do you know about that?"

"About what?" demanded Sandy, who was looking the other way.

"About Bert's bed being empty!"

"That's another joke!"

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Will.

Sandy turned around, gave one glance at the vacant bunk, and dropped weakly back into a chair.

"Do you think he got up and walked away?" he asked.

"No," replied Will, "I don't!"

"Then, who carried him away?" demanded Sandy.

Will turned the rays of the searchlight on the bunk where he had seen George cuddle down and then walked over toward it.

"George didn't!" he answered, "because George is here sound asleep!"

"Sound asleep?" repeated Sandy. "Do you suppose he'd lie here and sleep and let some one come and carry away Bert?"

Will took hold of the boy's leg and half drew him out of the bunk.

"Wake up, here!" he shouted.

George yawned and rubbed his eyes.

"First good sleep I've had in a week!" he said.

"Did you sleep all the afternoon?" asked Will.

"I guess I did!"

"Hear any one around the cabin?"

"How could I, when I was sound asleep?"

"Well," Will went on, "while you were having that fine sleep, some one came to the cabin and carried off Bert Calkins!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded George.

"Look in his bunk and see!" advised Sandy.

"How was it ever done?" demanded George.

"I'm not asking how it was done," Will returned. "What I want to know is: Why was it done? What object could any one have in carrying away that kid? I wouldn't believe he was gone if I didn't see the empty bunk."

"It's something connected with that code message!" Sandy suggested.

"I've got it!" replied Will. "The man took the message away before he knew whether he could read it or not. When he found he couldn't read it, he came back to get Bert to read it for him."

"But Bert is in no condition to be kept prisoner," George insisted. "He won't give the information the man seeks, and the man will probably mistreat him because he can't! What we've got to do is to get a move on and find the boy before he is starved or beaten to death."

"That's just what we've got to do!" agreed Will. "We've got to drop everything until we find that boy!"

CHAPTER VII

A LOST "BULLDOG"

"How much do you know about this case?" asked Tommy of Frank, as the two stumbled over the uneven moraine.

"How much do I know about what?" asked Frank.

"Why, this case that your father talked with you about when he used the wireless; the case referred to in the code message."

"Why, I know that you boys are out here in search of the print of a man's right thumb!" laughed Frank.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, I know a little more than that. I know that two men are soon to be tried for burglary, and that the discovery of the thumb marks is quite essential to a successful defense."

"Did your father tell you all that?"

"Oh, we talked quite a lot by wireless."

Tommy considered the situation for a moment and then said:

"I wish you'd tell me all you know about it."

In as few words as possible, Frank related the story practically as told to George and Sandy by Will.

"Does Bert know all about this?" asked Tommy when the recital was finished. "Did you talk the matter over with him?"

"I certainly did."

"I hope," Tommy mused, "that he wasn't forced to tell anything about the thumb marks when the man robbed him."

"I don't think he would do that," suggested Frank. "He would be apt to plead ignorance."

The boys came, about nine in the evening, to the little station of Katalla, which is just a mite of a town sitting perched high above the Gulf of Alaska. The first thing they did was to make inquiries at the water front regarding transportation to Cordova.

As they passed swiftly from point to point, consulting a half-breed here, an Esquimaux there, and an American trader at another point, they noticed that they were being followed. Finally Tommy drew back and waited until the man who seemed to be pursuing them came up.

"Are you looking for me?" he asked.

"I would like to speak with you," was the reply.

"Well, then, why didn't you come up like a man and say so?" demanded Tommy. "You needn't have skulked along in the dark!"

"Fact is," the man answered, "that I heard you making inquiries regarding the possibility of getting to Cordova tonight."

"Yes, that's where we want to go."

"Have you secured transportation yet?"

"We have not!" Tommy answered.

"Well, I was going to let you inquire at one more place," said the other, "and then tender you the use of my boat."

"Why were you going to wait?"

"Because I wanted you to exhaust your last chance so that I could get my own price for the service."

"You must be a Yankee!" laughed Tommy.

"Right!" was the reply. "I'm a Yankee direct from Boston. I don't have many opportunities of acquiring wealth out here, and I smelt real money as soon as I saw you boys come to town a couple of days ago."

"What kind of a boat have you?" asked Tommy.

"A swift little motor boat."

"Can you get us to Cordova and back by seven or eight in the morning?"

"I don't think I can do the job as soon as that, but I'll do the best I can! Why are you in such a hurry?"

"There's a boy sick at the camp!" was the short reply.

"How much are you going to charge for the use of your boat?" asked Frank. "We're willing to pay for fast service."

"I think a couple of hundred dollars will be about right," was the reply. "It's a little bit risky going out in the night."

Tommy was about to protest against the exorbitant charge, but Frank motioned him to remain silent.

"The price is satisfactory," he said. "When can you start?"

"In an hour," was the answer.

After promising to meet the boys at the floating dock in an hour's time, the owner of the motor boat took his departure, and the two lads dropped into a smoky and smelly restaurant for supper.

The place was foul with evil language as well as evil smells, and the boys did not remain long. Instead of sitting down at the table and ordering their meal, they bought such provisions as they could get and took their way to the water front. When they sat down to eat their rather unpalatable repast, they saw that a boy of about their own size and age was loitering not far away.

"I'll gamble you a five cent piece," Tommy whispered to Frank, "that that is a Boy Scout! What do you say?"

"You're on!" exclaimed Frank.

Tommy struck three times on the planking of the dock with his open hand. Instantly there came back to his ears the low snarling voice of a bulldog. Then footsteps advanced down the dock, and the boy soon stood close to the others.

"You're a Beaver?" he asked.

"And you're a Bulldog!" said Tommy.

The boys presented their hands, palm out, in the full salute of the Boy Scouts and then stood examining each other's faces.

"Where's the Bulldog Patrol located?" asked Tommy.

"Portland, Oregon," was the reply.

"Do you live here now?" asked Frank, who had already been introduced as a member of the Fox Patrol.

"I'm obliged to live here," was the answer, "because I can't get out of town. I wish I could get away!"

"You may go with us," offered Tommy.

"Where?" was the question.

"To Cordova tonight, and to a camp out on a glacier tomorrow."

"Tickled to death!" exclaimed the boy.

"You're welcome!" declared Tommy;

"Who're you going with?" was the next question.

"He didn't give us his name, but he said he owned a fast motor boat, and he said he'd get us there and back before noon tomorrow!"

"Jamison is the only man here who has a motor boat, but you want to look out for him. He's as crooked as a corkscrew!"

"That's the impression I received when he fixed his price."

"Well," the stranger said in a moment, "I've got a little baggage up the street and I'll go and get it."

He was gone perhaps half an hour, and when he returned the boys saw an anxious expression on his face.

"Are you sure that man Jamison is going out with you tonight?" he asked.

"He said he would," was the reply.

"He's up there loading in whiskey," the boy, who had given his name as Samuel White, continued, "and has surrounded himself with about as tough a bunch of crooks as there is in all Alaska."

"Perhaps he wants them to help run the boat," suggested Tommy.

"No, there's something crooked on foot!" declared Sam. "The fellows are whispering together in a bar-room up the street, and pounding the tables, and letting cut great shouts of laughter as if they had a good joke on some one."

"Do you know any of the men with Jamison?" asked Frank.

"One of them," the boy replied, "is a crooked mine agent, and one is a fellow who hangs around town without revealing any business whatever, but seems to have plenty of money."

While the boys talked, Jamison, accompanied by two men who seemed to be somewhat under the influence of liquor, came down to the dock.

After nodding familiarly to the lads, he gave a signal with a lantern which he carried in his hand, and in a short time a very capable looking motor boat came puffing out of the darkness.

"There you are, boys!" he said. "Jump in, and I'll have you up to Cordova in no time. I've got a good crew on board, and I may be able to get you back long before noon."

The boys did not exactly like the looks of the "good" crew, but they said nothing as they took their seats in the little trunk cabin and waited for the boat to get under motion.

When at last the motors began whirling and the rocking motion told the lads that they were out among the high waves, Jamison came in and seated himself by Tommy's side.

"Little bit bumpy tonight," he said, "but you'll soon get used to that. If you have the money ready, I'll collect fares now."

Frank took two hundred dollars in bank notes from a pocket and passed it over to the owner of the boat.

"A hundred apiece," Jamison said. "I was to have a hundred for each passenger. You owe me a hundred more."

"Don't pay any hundred for me," Sam White exclaimed, springing to his feet. "I'll jump over-board and swim back."

Frank laid a hand on the boy's arm and pushed him back into a seat.

"It's all right," he said. "I did agree to pay a hundred dollars a passenger. You're quite welcome to the ride at my expense."

As Frank spoke he took a roll of bank notes from another pocket and stripped off one of the denomination of one hundred dollars.

Jamison saw large denominations, some as high as five hundred dollars, in the roll, and his evil eyes glittered greedily.

When Frank put up the roll, the fellow's eyes followed it until it passed out of sight in the pocket. Other members of the crew had seen the money also, and Tommy was decidedly uncomfortable as he thought of the situation they were in.

Having received his pay, Jamison grew very friendly and confidential, and began pointing out the show places along the dim coast.

Presently Sam whispered cautiously in Tommy's ear:

"He is headed for the Barren islands, and not Cordova," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE GULF OF ALASKA

"Where are the Barren islands, and why should he want to take us there?" asked Tommy, apprehensively.

"The Barren islands," replied Sam, "lie in the Gulf of Alaska, just south of the mouth of Copper river, west of Controller bay. They extend along the coast, only a short distance out, for twenty miles or more, and are just what the local name signifies, Barren islands."

"But why should he want to take us there?" insisted Tommy, slipping a hand toward his hip pocket to make sure that his automatic was ready for any emergency.

Sam did not answer the question, for Tommy's quick start of surprise, his low exclamation of dismay, checked the words which were on his lips. Instead, he pushed closer to the lad and asked:

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"My revolver has been taken!" replied Tommy.

Frank, sitting close to his chum on the other side, now pushed his hand into his hip pocket and brought it forth empty.

"So is mine!" he said.

The boys looked at each other for a moment in the gathering darkness without speaking. The situation was a serious one.

"Who did it?" asked Tommy presently.

"No one has been near me except that man Jamison," replied Frank.

"He's the only one who's been within reaching distance of me," Tommy observed. "He must be a clever pickpocket!"

"I saw him eyeing that roll of money rather greedily," Sam cut in, speaking in a very low tone, for Jamison had now turned back from the prow and was looking in their direction.

"I noticed that, too," Frank answered. "I'm afraid we're going to get into trouble with that gink. Anyway," he continued, "he's started in right. He did well to get our guns before he started anything!"

"He didn't get my revolver," Sam said with a low chuckle. "It's a little bit of a baby thing, but it's a great deal better than none!"

"It will shoot, won't it?" asked Tommy.

"It will shoot, all right, but it's only a twenty-two," replied the boy. "I've been trying for the last two days to get a square meal on it, but couldn't get even a ham sandwich. They don't look with favor on baby guns up in Alaska. They want the real thing!"

"Well, keep your gun where you can reach it at any moment!" advised Frank. "Even a twenty-two caliber may prove effective at short range."

"I presume," Sam went on, "that my coming on board in shabby clothes, and as an object of charity, convinced Jamison that I wasn't worth searching. I saw him looking me over, though!"

"Object of charity—not!" returned Frank. "We're mighty glad you're with us right now! You say he's taking us to the Barren islands. Well, we wouldn't know the Barren islands from any other place without you. You've put us on our guard, at least, and that's worth more than the price of the ticket! We're glad of your company, too!"

"Now, see here, boys," Tommy whispered, "we mustn't let this man Jamison know that we have discovered that we have been robbed. The minute he knows that we are suspicious of him, the matter will come to a focus immediately. We've got to have time to think this matter over before anything is done."

This plan of action was agreed to, and the boys sat for some minutes in silence. After a time Jamison came to where they were seated, just at the doorway of the trunk cabin, and began asking questions about the need for a doctor. Tommy explained that a member of their party had been injured by a fall, and that they were going to Cordova in quest of a surgeon. He again asked Jamison to put on full speed.

"There's a man over here on the coast, this side of Katalla, who is said to be a fine surgeon," Jamison explained, after Tommy had finished his statement. "He's a sort of a recluse, people say, and lives alone in a shabby hut, high up above the tide. You might stop and consult him. That would be better, it seems to me, than going away up to Cordova. Still," he went on with a grim smile, "I've been paid to take you to Cordova and back, and, if you insist, I mean to live up to my bargain!"

Sam gave Frank a quick poke in the ribs and whispered in his ear:

"Yes, he does!"

"Let him play out his string," whispered Frank in return.

"This surgeon," Jamison went on, "is a queer old fellow. Sometimes he'll take a case, and sometimes he won't. If he feels in an ugly mood, he's likely to kick us out of his cabin."

Tommy listened with apparent interest to what the treacherous Jamison was saying, but it is needless to remark that he did not accept it as truth. It was his belief that the fellow was manufacturing a pretext for getting himself and his friends quietly on shore as soon as one of the Barren islands was reached.

There were three men on board the motor boat besides Jamison. They were evil-looking fellows, and spent most of their time on the forward deck, where the steering wheel and the motors were located.

The men frequently drank out of a black bottle, and were fast becoming intoxicated. Instead of attempting to restrain the fellows, Jamison seemed to encourage them in their debauch.

"He's getting them in trim to start something," Sam whispered, as the three men broke into a rough drinking song.

"Yes," agreed Tommy, "I imagine that he wants whatever takes place on board the boat tonight to be regarded as the acts of men made irresponsible by whisky. You'd better keep your gun handy, Sam!"

"I've got my hand on it every minute!" replied the boy. "And if anything is started here, Jamison will be the first one to know that I've got it! He's the man that needs the lesson!"

It was very dark now, and the sea was rough. The motor boat plunged about like a leaf, tossing from wave to wave, and dropping into one trough after another. It was plain that the members of the crew were becoming too drunk to handle the boat.

Jamison finally approached the cabin doorway and sat down on one of the stationary seats. Notwithstanding the fact that the boat was taking water at almost every jump, the fellow's face bore a satisfied look.

"What are those fellows trying to do with the boat?" asked Tommy.

"Oh, they're all right!" answered Jamison.

"Looks to me like they were trying to drop us to the bottom," Frank said. "There won't be any boat left directly!"

"I guess they have got a little too much John Barleycorn on board!" laughed Jamison, as the boat gave a lurch which sent him head foremost from his seat. "I'd go and take the wheel myself, only I don't know much about running a motor boat under present conditions."

Frank gave Tommy a quick nudge in the side.

"I can run the boat," he whispered, "shall I?"

"If he'd let you, yes!" replied Tommy.

"Where shall I take her?"

"To Cordova, of course, but perhaps you'd better wait until the men get a little bit drunker. Jamison will become frightened for the safety of his boat before long, and then he won't object to your taking charge of her. He's beginning to look sick already."

"If I ever get hold of that wheel," Frank whispered to Tommy, "I'll send her flying toward Cordova! I hope the members of the crew will be too drunk to know which way I'm taking them."

Directly the boat gave another tremendous lurch, soaking the boys with cold salt water. Jamison rose to his feet with an oath and, steadying himself by clinging to the top of the cabin, shook a fist angrily at the man at the wheel. The man frowned back.

"What are you doing, you drunken hobo?" shouted Jamison.

The man grinned foolishly but said not a word.

"I wish I knew how to operate a motor boat as well as he does when he's sober," gritted Jamison.

"The owner of a boat ought to know how to run her!" suggested Frank.

"I bought the boat only a few days ago," replied Jamison.

"Look here," Frank said, as the boat gave another sickening whirl, "I can run a boat all right. Shall I take hold?"

"No," replied Jamison sourly, "we've got to land!"

"But there is no place to land," urged Sam.

"There is a place on the point where the doctor lives," answered Jamison, "where we can land in a rowboat. I'm glad now that I brought the dinghy along with us. We can anchor the motor boat under the point and take refuge in the doctor's cabin until this storm blows over."

The boys were greatly disappointed at this decision on the part of Jamison, but they dare not argue the point with him for fear that he would suspect that they were watching his every movement.

In a few moments a dark bulk showed directly in front of the racing motor boat, and only the quick action of the man at the wheel prevented a collision with a bold headland which showed dimly under the light of the few stars which looked down from the cloudy sky.

In a moment the boys saw a light, and then Sam whispered to Frank:

"That's not a coast point," he said. "It's one of the Barren islands. I don't believe there's any doctor there, as he said! What shall we do if he asks us to go ashore?"

"We'll have to go, I suppose," returned Tommy, "but, all the same," he went on, "if we get a chance to get possession of the boat, we'll let these outlaws take a swim to the shore!"

Presently the boat came under the shelter of the headland, and then a member of the crew, in obedience to whispered orders from Jamison, dropped into the dinghy which had been trailing behind, and shouted to his mate to follow. Then Jamison himself stepped into the dinghy, which

was swinging about wildly in the surf.

"Now boys," he said, "if you'll get aboard, we'll take you ashore for an interview with the doctor. He'll demand big pay, but he's skillful and you ought to secure his services if you can."

"Only one man on board now," cried Tommy, "Now's our chance!"

CHAPTER IX

THE CLUES WILL FOUND

"I wish one of you boys would give me a good swift kick," George exclaimed as the three lads stood in the cabin discussing the strange disappearance of Bert Calkins.

"I'd do that all right if it would accomplish anything!" laughed Will.

"I'll do it anyhow, if you insist upon it!" grinned Sandy.

"It was a rotten thing for me to do!" exclaimed George. "I never expected to go to sleep when I lay down in my bunk, but I did go to sleep, and some one walked into the cabin and carried Bert away! I'll never get over it if anything serious happens to him!"

"Aw, cut it out!" exclaimed Sandy. "We'll find him all right. The question before the house right now is whether we're going to get supper before we start out on a hunt for the kid."

"We may as well get supper," Will advised. "There's no use whatever of our running around in circles in the dark. We've got to sit down here and reason it out. Before we do anything at all, we ought to reach some conclusion as to why the poor kid was taken away."

"Why, I thought that was all understood," Sandy interrupted. "I thought we decided not long ago that the man who stole the code wireless came back to get Bert to translate it for him."

"There was some talk of that kind," Will agreed, "and I guess it's as near to the truth as we can get with our present knowledge of the incident. Anyway, I can conceive of no other reason for the abduction."

"Then we may as well get supper while we're studying out the proposition," George said, "and, by way of penance, I'll do the cooking!"

The lad turned to Sandy to ask a question regarding the sudden appearance of the bear steak, and then for the first time noted his dilapidated and generally disreputable condition.

"Where did you get it?" he asked, pointing to the bruised face and torn garments. "You've gone and spoiled a perfectly good Boy Scout suit."

"And the bear we're going to have for supper," Will chuckled, "came very near spoiling a perfectly good Boy Scout."

"Did the bear hand him that?" asked George.

"He certainly did!" replied Sandy. "And he put me out for the count, too!"

"Then I'll take great joy in eating him!" declared George.

While George fried the bear steak over the gasoline "plate," Sandy told the story of the fishing trip, while Will listened with a grin on his face, now and then interrupting with what Sandy declared to be an entirely irrelevant remark.

The big acetylene lamp which, had come in with the boys' baggage had not been set up, so the cabin was now lighted only by flashlights. This made cooking difficult, and George protested against it, so Will went to work setting up the tank and getting the big lamp into use.

"That's better!" exclaimed George, as the great light flashed out. "Now, while I'm cooking the supper, you might look about and see what you can discover in the way of clues. There is an old theory, you know, that no person can enter a room and leave it without their leaving behind some trace of having been there!"

"That's a part of the Sherlock Holmes business that I entirely overlooked!" laughed Will. "Come to think of it, the fellow must have left some clue here. We'll see if we can find it!"

While Sandy and George worked industriously over the gasoline "plate," frying bear meat and fish, and making toast and coffee, Will began a thorough search of the cabin floor. He moved about for some moments on his hands and knees, studying the rough boards through a microscope.

When he came to the bunk he examined that in the same careful and painstaking way. Sandy and George pretended to be very much amused at his alleged posing as an investigator, but the boy paid no attention to their smiles and sarcastic remarks.

All through the meal Will kept his own counsel as to what he had discovered, if anything. His

chums quizzed him unmercifully, but he gave out no information regarding discoveries until after the meal was completed and they sat, wrapped in their heavy coats, before the stripped table, now bearing only empty dishes.

"Now tell us about it!" demanded Sandy. "How tall was this man who carried Bert, away?"

"Five feet six," replied Will.

"Black or white?"

"Black hair and eyes and whiskers."

"Fat or lean?"

"Neither, just heavily built."

"Come, Smarty," Sandy laughed, "perhaps you'll be kind enough to go on now and tell us the color of his necktie."

"He didn't wear any necktie!" answered Will. "He wore a leather hunting shirt and leather leggins. His hands were protected from the mosquitos by leather gloves. He wore moccasins."

"Will you be kind enough to tell us what he had for supper last night?" asked Sandy. "Also, can you tell us which side he sleeps on nights?"

"This is no joke!" Will answered. "I really think I have a good description of the man who abducted Bert. And I think, too, that the description will serve to locate him."

"That's all right!" laughed George, "when Tommy comes back, we'll have him get out his dream book and read you to sleep!"

"Yes," Will said gravely, "when Tommy comes back with the surgeon."

"It would be a rotten proposition, wouldn't it, if Tommy should get back with the surgeon before we found Bert?"

"It certainly would," answered Will.

"Tommy can't possibly get back before some time tomorrow night," Sandy argued, "and we ought to be able to find the boy before that time!"

"Especially as Will has a perfect description of the outlaw," said George with a wink at Sandy.

Then the boy added with a laugh:

"Go on, Will, and tell us how you know the man's size and weight."

"Yes," Sandy broke in. "Tell us how you know he's exactly five feet six. You weren't here to measure him!"

"The wall measured him!" replied Will.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sandy with a grin.

"Back there by the door," Will went on, "the man leaned against the wall for some purpose. Of course, I don't know why, but I suspect that he leaned there for a moment to get the boy well balanced in his arms before stepping outside. At any rate, he stood there for an instant with a broad back braced against the dusty logs. You can see where the top of his head came, without getting up."

"That's reasonable!" replied Sandy. "Now tell us how you know he has black hair and eyes."

"He left half a dozen hairs on the pillow at Bert's bunk," replied Will. "Also he left coarser black hairs which evidently came from his face. They lie there on the table."

The boys examined the hairs curiously, and then Will asked:

"What do you think of it?"

"I think," replied Sandy, "that Bert regained consciousness while he was being lifted from the bunk and got in a couple of digs at the fellow's hair and whiskers."

"The motion which removed the hair and whiskers," suggested George, "might have been entirely involuntary."

"That's very true!" answered Will. "It doesn't seem to me that the boy regained consciousness. If he had, he would have made such objections to being taken away that George would have been awakened. At any rate the hairs are here, and that is sufficient!"

"Now tell us how you know about the bulk of the fellow."

"The marks on the wall show that," replied Will.

"What do you know about his leather leggins, hunting shirt and gloves?" asked Sandy. "I know about the moccasins, because I saw the tracks on the floor myself. He must be an Indian if he wore moccasins."

"I never saw an Indian with long whiskers!" replied Will.

"Well, go on and tell us about the leather he wore," urged George.

"The hunting shirt," Will replied with a smile, as he pointed to a small piece of leather lying on the table, "was patched and in the struggle at the bunk the patch was torn away. A cloth garment, you know," he continued, "wouldn't be apt to be patched with leather."

The boys looked at the leather patch, not much larger than a silver dollar, and nodded their heads.

"The marks on the wall where the outlaw seems to have balanced his burden, show that he wore leather gloves," Will continued. "You can see the blunt mark where he threw up a hand to steady himself. The fingers of a cloth glove would have shown narrower."

"I guess you've got the Sherlock Holmes part of it all right!" said George, "so all we've got to do now is to find the boy!"

"But this will help!" Sandy argued. "At least we know what kind of a man to look for. By the way, how did you know that he wore leather leggings?"

"He lost a buckle!" replied Will. "I found it on the floor under Bert's bunk. And so, you see," the boy went on, "when we find a man wearing leather leggings from which a buckle has been lost, we'll be perfectly justified in keeping close watch of him."

"It seems as if there must have been a struggle here!" George argued in a moment. "The man lost hair, whiskers, a buckle, and a patch off his hunting shirt! I don't see how I could have slept through it all!"

"Well, you did!" returned Sandy, "and that's all there is to it!"

"Are we going out tonight?" asked George.

"Of course, we are!" answered Sandy. "We're not going to crawl into bed in comfort and leave Bert in the hands of some brigand!"

Will held up his hand for silence, and the boys sat looking at each other with questioning eyes as a soft knock came on one of the windows.

In an instant their eyes were turned in the direction of the sound, and what they saw caused them to spring excitedly to their feet.

During the silence which followed, the sound of a heavy footstep was heard at the door of the cabin. When they looked again nothing was to be seen at the window.

CHAPTER X

IN LUCK AT LAST

Instead of moving toward the dinghy, the boys sprang to the top of the trunk cabin and dashed forward toward the wheel.

With an oath Jamison tried to clamber back to the deck of the motor boat, but the dinghy was just then performing a bit of nautical gymnastics at the bottom of a trough and he did not succeed in reaching the desired footing. He fell back into the bottom of the boat, cursing the two rowers because they had not assisted him.

As Frank and Tommy sprang forward over the cabin the man at the wheel released his hold and reached for a pistol. The boat swung around and would have been capsized only that Frank seized the wheel and brought her head to the waves again.

The wheelsman struck a savage blow at the boy as he threw the wheel around, and was in turn the object of attack from Tommy. The two went to the deck together and came near being thrown into the sea.

When the short battle ended the wheelsman lay on the deck unconscious, his head rolling from side to side as the boat tossed about on the waves. In the fall his head had struck the rail.

Seeing that Jamison and the rowers were still trying to board the motor boat, Sam rushed to the after deck and threatened them with his revolver. In a moment Jamison presented a thirty-eight at the boy's head.

"This is piracy!" he shouted. "Surrender, or I'll blow your head off! This is piracy, I tell you!"

The only reply to the man's threat was the increased clatter of the motors. Tommy had turned on full power, and Frank was heading the craft for the mouth of Copper river. As she drew away from the dinghy, several harmless shots were fired.

"That was a close shave!" Tommy declared as the three boys gathered on the forward deck. "If

Jamison hadn't been a fool, we couldn't have done it! Can you find your way to Cordova, Frank?" he added.

"Sure I can!" was the reply, "but I take it that we don't want to go there just now."

"And why not?" asked Tommy in surprise.

"Because this is piracy, all right!" exclaimed the boy. "Old Jamison was right, and he'll have all the officers along the coast after us as soon as he gets to land. We're in bad with the cops now."

"But Jamison won't be able to get to land tonight!" suggested Sam.

"Indeed he won't!" agreed Frank. "He'll have to pull in toward the island and lie there on his oars until daylight."

"Can't he land?" asked Tommy.

"I don't think he can land in the dark!" was the reply.

"Why can't we get to Cordova and get back here with the surgeon before he can communicate with the officers?" asked Tommy. "We can't afford to go into hiding just now. We've got to get the doctor up to the cabin, and we've got to find out what that code message contained."

"How far is it from here to Cordova?" asked Frank.

"It must be about thirty-five or forty miles," replied Sam. "If the waves wouldn't keep us traveling up and down all the time, we ought to make it in about three hours."

"Jamison was trying to make us believe he was doing a fine thing if he took us to Cordova and back in ten or twelve hours!" said Tommy.

"I don't think he intended to take us to Cordova at all!" insisted Sam.

"Well," Tommy argued, "there's no way he can stop us until we get to Cordova, and he can't stop us then unless he reaches the coast or gains the wireless station before we leave the town. Once out on the gulf again, with the surgeon on board, we'll reach Katalla in spite of Jamison, and start the doctor toward the cabin."

"Then here goes for the town!" cried Frank, turning on an extra bit of power and sending the boat through the waves like a meteor.

It was rough riding, but the boys were fairly good seamen and stood the shaking up well.

About midnight the wheelsman began showing signs of consciousness. He sat up on the swaying deck and motioned for water.

"Tip him overboard!" advised Sam.

"Aw, give him a drink," argued Tommy. "If you'd had had as much red liquor during the last few hours as he's had, you'd want to connect with the water cooler, I guess! Give the man a show!"

"Where are you taking the motor boat?" asked the wheelsman.

"Cordova."

"Is that right about your wanting a surgeon?"

"That is right!" replied Tommy.

"Where is he wanted?" asked the wheelsman, who had given the name of Boswell. "Why didn't you bring the sick boy out with you?"

"Because we thought it better to take the surgeon to him!" replied Tommy. "The boy really wasn't able to be moved!"

"Fever?" asked Boswell.

Tommy hesitated a moment before replying. He was in doubt as to just how much he ought to tell Boswell. The fellow seemed to be friendly enough, and might be useful in case the lads were arrested for piracy, as, if he saw fit, he could testify that Jamison was not carrying out his agreement with them, but, instead, was planning to maroon them on a barren island in the gulf. Owing to these considerations it seemed best to keep on good terms with the fellow, and yet Tommy did not care to describe in full what had taken place at the cabin.

"No, the boy isn't sick of fever," Tommy finally answered. "He received a wound on the head and lies unconscious."

Both boys thought they saw Boswell give a quick start, but in a moment his face was as impassive as ever.

"Do you know what Jamison was up to?" asked Sam after a short pause.

Boswell looked keenly at the boy before answering.

"I only know what he told me!" he replied.

"What did he tell you?"

"He said he had a joke on you boys; that he was charging you three hundred dollars for a trip to Cordova, and that he meant to leave you on the first little island in the gulf that he came to."

"Did he tell you why he was going to do that?" asked Tommy.

Again Boswell looked keenly at his questioner.

"I guess I'd better not answer that question," he said finally.

"I wish you would answer it," Tommy urged. "I ought to know just what motive the fellow has for throwing obstacles in my way."

"He thinks it's funny!" answered Boswell.

"That isn't the correct answer," Tommy insisted. "He has some motive for what he is trying to do. I'd like to know what that motive is."

"You can't find out from me!" declared Boswell.

"You must be a chum of his!" sneered Sam.

"I hate the ground he walks on!" replied Boswell. "I wouldn't have hired out to him at all if I hadn't been drunk. But I'm not going to repeat to any one what he told me in confidence!"

"We shall have to put you off some distance this side of Cordova," Tommy suggested, "because if we don't you're likely to make us trouble by reporting the case of alleged piracy as soon as we land."

"You needn't trouble yourself about my reporting anything," Boswell answered. "I'm not mixing with Jamison's affairs! If you boys are arrested for piracy, I'll tell all I know about it, and that won't do you any harm."

Dawn came slowly that morning, for heavy clouds were gathering in the sky. The short Arctic night came to an end at last, however, and in the murky distance the boys saw the long coast line. Shortly after three o'clock they passed the wireless station and landed, not without some difficulty at Cordova.

They found the town asleep, of course, but after a time an early riser directed them to the residence of a surgeon. They arranged with him to meet them later in the day and at once set out for the wireless station. It was two hours before they saw the operator coming to his post of duty.

He remembered Frank, and willingly promised to at once open communication with Seattle and take up the work of securing a duplicate of the code message. He explained that a copy had been kept, but that it had been destroyed by a careless janitor, who had said that he could make nothing at all of the jumble of words and letters!

As soon as Seattle answered the Cordova call, a duplicate of the code telegram was asked for, and Seattle undertook to place the request on the wire and cause it to be rushed through to Chicago.

"We ought to receive the answer some time this afternoon," the operator said as the boys started away.

CHAPTER XI

MAKING NEW PLANS

When the boys returned to the floating dock at which the motor boat had been tied during their absence at the station they found Boswell sitting in the cabin in a crouching attitude.

"Did you get what you wanted?" he asked.

Tommy shook his head.

"Then," continued the sailor, "you'd better give over trying to get it for the present and duck away from here! You'll have trouble if you don't!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Frank.

"Do you see the tug coming up the bay?" asked Boswell.

"Certainly!" was the reply.

"Well, she's been signalling to have this boat held until she arrives! And the chances are that she picked up Jamison and his pirates somewhere near the island where you left them."

"Then, of course, Jamison will want us arrested for piracy?" asked Tommy tentatively. "I presume that's what it means."

"Well", Boswell replied, "when you take another man's boat and leave him afloat in a dinghy, you must expect something to come of it besides kisses. Of course you'll be arrested!"

Frank gave a long, low whistle of dismay.

"Then," he said, "we'll have to go and notify the surgeon of what's coming off and get him to go on to the cabin alone."

"Yes" Tommy added, "and we can tell him to inform the boys what's going on here. We may have to remain here for several days if we are actually arrested."

"But how about the code duplicate?" asked Sam.

"I presume that will have to remain with us unless it comes before the doctor leaves for the cabin," Tommy answered.

"Look here," Sam said, "you two boys are the fellows Jamison wants. He won't put up much of a search for me. You go back to the wireless station and tell the operator to deliver the code duplicate to me and I'll see that it gets to the cabin."

"It's all right of you to make the offer," Tommy replied, "but there's no one at the camp that can read it."

"Then why can't Frank slip away and get the message to camp?" inquired Sam.

"Will certainly ought to have it," suggested Tommy.

"I'll tell you what we'd better do," Frank advised. "We'd better make a rush for the Cordova dock before that tug gets in. Then we can arrange with the doctor to go on to the cabin by any conveyance he can secure while we take a sneak into the wilderness and get back when we can and as we can. That's better than being arrested."

"I'm for it!" declared Sam. "But how will you obtain possession of the wireless when it comes if you duck away in advance of the arrival of the tug? The message won't be here as soon as the tug is."

The boys pondered over this proposition for a moment, and then Frank came to the front with another suggestion.

"I'll go back to the wireless station," he said, "and arrange for the operator to leave the message in some secret hiding place where we can get it after nightfall."

"I don't like this fugitive-from-justice business!" exclaimed Tommy.

"I don't either," replied Frank, "but it's a long ways better than lying in some dirty old jail. We can arrange here with father's agent to find out what sort of a case they've got against us, and pick out a good lawyer to represent us, so we'll be all ready to defend ourselves when the arrest is finally made."

"Your father has an agent here?" asked Tommy, regarding Frank suspiciously. "What business is he in?"

"Oh, quit it!" replied Frank. "We haven't any time to talk about private affairs. What we've got to do right now is to find out how we're going to escape arrest at this time. I'll go and make the arrangement with the operator, and we'll all make the arrangements with the doctor, and then we three boys will start across country to the little old log cabin in the lane!"

"There ain't no lane there!" grinned Tommy.

"There may be some time, when that part of the country becomes a suburb of Cordova!" laughed Frank. "But I reckon I'd better be getting back to the wireless office. That tug's coming in hand over hand!"

The boy was back from the office inside of ten minutes, but by that time the tug was so near that the motor boat was obliged to shoot ahead at full speed in order to keep clear of her. The boys saw Jamison standing by the captain urging him to greater efforts in the speed direction, and saw him shake a huge, ham-like fist in their direction as the motor boat left the tug behind.

"I'll tell you why I want to leave the case in the hands of a lawyer here," Frank said, as the boat shot toward the Cordova dock, "Jamison doesn't want to prosecute us boys for piracy. He's interested in some way in this case you are here to handle, and he wants to keep us under lock and key until something he wants done can be accomplished."

"I'm sure that's right!" Tommy answered.

"I don't know much about this thumb-print case," Frank went on, "but I believe that this man Jamison is trying to make sure that you boys don't get hold of the drawings you are looking for. Of course I have no proof, but I'm sure that, in the long run, you'll find that I'm right?"

The motor boat made such good time in the run for the Cordova dock that the tug was nearly out of sight when the boys climbed into the main street of the town.

"Now," Tommy said, as they all stood together at the principal business place of the town, "Frank can go and make sure that the doctor will start for the cabin immediately, and Sam and I will go

and buy provisions for the cross country trip. We may be two or three days in making it, and we'll surely want to eat on the way."

"But we can't get the wireless until night!" urged Frank. "He's going to bring it to Cordova tonight and leave it in the old blacksmith shop just back of the line of store buildings."

"Well, we can get all ready to go," Tommy urged. "We don't want to take any chances on being pinched just as we get ready to leave!"

"We'll meet at the old shop in half an hour," Frank suggested, "and then we can make all the plans necessary."

Tommy noticed that afternoon that a strange fatality seemed to accompany all of Jamison's efforts to cause the arrest of the boys. First, there was no Federal officer in the town. Next, there was no judicial or ministerial officer before whom a complaint of piracy could be made. Next, the motor boat owner and his two outlaws accosted Boswell on the street and made to him insulting remarks concerning his championship of the boys.

Following this there was a general mixup, in which Boswell was not permitted to fight alone, and the result was that Jamison and his two sailors were badly beaten up. However, while the lads knew exactly what was taking place, and understood the hostility of the town toward Jamison, they understood, too, that it would be the duty of almost any officer to arrest them if they should make their appearance on the public street.

Tommy wondered vaguely at the hostility displayed toward Jamison, but Frank explained it all by saying that the fellow was a common loafer and hadn't a friend in town.

The boys might have been arrested a dozen times that day had the hostility to Jamison and his men not taken such positive form. But while Jamison, half-intoxicated, roared about the street, the boys kept as quiet as possible and so escaped general notice.

About two in the afternoon the boys were very much surprised to see a gentleman who had been pointed out to them as the surgeon walk into the old blacksmith shop where they sat. He beckoned Frank to one side and the two engaged in a short but apparently satisfactory conversation, at the conclusion of which the doctor shook the boy's hand heartily.

"All right," he said on taking his departure, "I'll attend to the matter at once! I know the operator and it'll be all right there."

"Now, what's up?" demanded Tommy suspiciously.

"I've got a new scheme!" replied the boy.

"Pass it around!" urged Tommy.

"Now, you just wait until I see whether the doctor gets the message or not!" replied Frank. "If he does, it's us for a ride home!"

"I'd like to steal that old drunkard's motor boat!" Tommy said.

Frank broke into a hearty laugh.

"You just wait and see!" he said. "We've got to be mighty careful to keep away from the Federal officers, for a deputy marshal has been sent for. Can you get up a good hot run if you have to?"

"You bet I can!" answered Tommy.

"Well, we may get a signal to make a hot foot to the dock directly," the boy went on, "and if we do, there mustn't be any mistake about the pace you set."

"Are you really going to steal the motor boat?" asked Sam.

"I don't know!" replied Frank. "We've been waiting around here all day for something to take place, and I guess it's about time there was something doing."

"I thought you were going to wait until night before sneaking out with the despatch," suggested Tommy, eyeing his friend suspiciously.

"When we made those plans," replied Frank with a grin, "I didn't know how many friends I had in town."

"Is the doctor going with us?" asked Tommy.

"No," was the reply, "we are going with him!"

"Aw, have it your own way," Tommy exclaimed. "I never could get any satisfaction talking with you!"

The doctor returned to the old blacksmith shop in an hour and called Frank outside. The two talked together for a moment, and then the boy called out the wonderful news that they wouldn't even have to run to the dock; that a carriage was waiting for them!

"Something mighty funny about this!" mused Tommy. "I'd like to know who that boy is that has such luck in Alaska! Anyone would think he owns the town, the way things are shaping themselves here!"

A moment later a wagon drawn by a pair of sturdy horses made its appearance in front of the old blacksmith shop, and the boys took their seats. As they did so the sound of a pistol shot came from around the corner and Jamison dashed into view, hatless, coatless, very red in the face and very excited as to manner.

By his side appeared a man whom the doctor at once recognized as a Federal officer. He came to a halt when he saw the boys in the wagon.

"Wait!" he commanded, "I have warrants for your arrest!"

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER LOST "BULLDOG"

The step outside the cabin door halted, and the boys stood silent for a moment, hardly knowing whether to dispute the stranger's entrance or to admit him with a show of courtesy.

While they waited, Will glanced at the window and saw the flutter of a white hand on the pane.

"That's the Boy Scout salute!" he said.

"Another Boy Scout?" whispered Sandy. "I wonder if it rains Boy Scouts up here in Alaska!"

"I wish there were a thousand here!" George declared.

"I don't care how many Boy Scouts show up just now," Will argued, "but I would like to know where they all come from!"

There now came a knock on the door and a gruff voice demanded admittance.

"Shall I open the door?" whispered Will.

"May as well," answered George.

When the door swung open, a stout man of middle age presented himself in the opening. After casting a keen glance about the interior he stepped inside and closed the door.

"You boys seem to have taken possession of my home!" he said.

"We found the cabin unoccupied, and took the liberty of using it," Will answered in a conciliatory tone.

"Oh, it's all right!" returned the other. "That's the way I took possession of the place! I found the cabin deserted and just moved in."

"We can vacate if necessary," Will suggested.

"Oh, there's room enough for all of us, I take it!" answered the stranger. "My name is Cameron, and I spend only a day or two here occasionally. I was hoping when I saw your light that you were having a midnight supper. How about something to eat?"

"There's plenty in the cabin!" George replied. "We can give you either fish or bear steak for supper."

"Then I'm glad to find you here!" laughed the other, "for I've been traveling all day and I'm as hungry as a wolf!"

The visitor threw himself into a chair and began a careful survey of the interior, far more searching than the one made from the doorway.

"My name is Cameron, as I said before," he said, "and I'm prospecting for gold."

"Prospecting for gold on a glacier?" asked Will.

"Young man," Cameron replied, "there is plenty of gold in this vicinity. The ice brought it here. I'm being laughed at by my friends," he continued, "because I'm searching for the mother lode. But, all the same, I've every prospect of discovering it!"

"The mother lode in a glacier?" asked Sandy.

"It is my theory," Cameron went on, "that the range of mountains to the north holds gold in large quantities. It is a part of my theory, too, that the drifting ice brought tons of it down to the moraine. If I find any gold here at all, I'll find it in quantities sufficient to clog the money markets of the world!"

Cameron looked from face to face as he spoke, apparently anticipating a burst of enthusiasm from his listeners.

"Up on the Yukon," he went on, "the gold was found under the ice, where it had been deposited by glaciers which are now dead. The same conditions exist here. For all we know, there may be

tons of the precious metal at the bottom of the first layer of ice."

"That's very true!" replied Will. "And if you don't mind, we'll stick around a short time and see what you discover."

"Remember," Cameron said then, "that this is my claim!"

"Of course," Will answered, "we wouldn't attempt to rob you of any legitimate discovery."

In the meantime George and Sandy were preparing a supper for the visitor. With their heads bent low over the gasoline "plate," they discussed the personality of the man and his theory in low conversation.

"How tall should you say that fellow was?" asked Sandy.

"About five foot six!" was the reply.

"And he's stout!"

"Decidedly so."

"And he wears a leather hunting shirt, and leather leggins, and he took off a pair of serviceable leather gloves when he entered?"

"I see what you're getting at," George replied, "Can you see whether there's a buckle missing from his leggins?"

"There is!" answered Sandy.

"And a patch missing from his hunting shirt?"

"Just as sure as you're a foot high!"

"Did you ever see such nerve?" whispered George. "He comes here and steals a sick boy, and then has the nerve to return and claim the cabin!"

"Well, I'm glad he came," Sandy whispered back. "All we've got to do now is to play the sleuth when he leaves the cabin."

"You mean that if we follow him in his journeys over the country we'll be apt to find Bert?" asked George.

"That's just the idea!" replied Sandy. "I wonder if his mug is sore where Bert extracted the whiskers?"

"I wonder if he expects to get a good night's sleep, with Bert lying in some uncomfortable hiding place?" George asked. "I'd like to poke him in the mug, just for luck!"

"That wouldn't help us find Bert," Sandy cautioned. "We've just got to be good to him and follow him wherever he goes."

"Watch me put him off his guard," George suggested.

"How long have you been in this neighborhood?" he asked, turning to Cameron. "I ask," the boy continued, "because one of our chums wandered away from the cabin while we were out fishing and hasn't returned."

Cameron's eyes sought the floor for a moment.

"I have just returned from the coast," he said, "so, unless your friend strayed off in that direction, I wouldn't have caught sight of him. Do you mean that he strayed away in the darkness?" he asked.

"No," replied George, "he strayed away this afternoon while temporarily out of his mind. My friends were out fishing, and I was asleep at the time. He received a slight wound on the head, from a fall, not long ago, and that is probably the cause of his aberration of mind."

The boys thought they saw a sudden expression of satisfaction creep over Cameron's face as George finished his explanation.

"If you'll serve Mr. Cameron's supper," Sandy said, giving George a sly wink, "I'll go with Will, and we'll take different directions so as to cover more ground. We are getting anxious about Bert."

Of course the object of the boys in leaving the cabin was to meet the Boy Scout who had signalled to them from the window. When they turned the corner of the cabin, they found a thin, pale lad in a torn and faded khaki uniform leaning against the outer wall.

"Why don't you come in?" asked Will.

"Is the miner in there yet?" asked the boy.

"Yes, he says the cabin belongs to him, and he's going to remain all night! What do you know of him?"

"Nothing at all!" replied the boy, "except that I've been following him for half a dozen miles in the

hopes that he would lead me to some place where I could eat and sleep."

"Did you call out to him?" asked Will.

"No," was the answer. "I was afraid he would send me back if I did. Miners in this section are not fond of leading strangers to their claims."

"Where do you belong?" asked Sandy pointing to the Bulldog badge displayed on the boy's ragged coat.

"Bulldog Patrol, Portland," was the reply.

"How'd you get out into this country in such a plight?" asked Will.

"My chum and I," was the reply, "started out to seek our fortunes. We got to Katalla and couldn't get a thing to do. Sam—his name is Sam White—insisted on remaining in town, but I made a break for the country."

"How long since you've had anything to eat?" asked Sandy.

"About twenty-four hours," was the reply.

"Well, come on in, then, and we'll feed you up."

"Of course I'll go, now that I know that you are running the camp," replied the boy. "I suppose I should have gone in anyway, directly, for just as I came up I heard the man knocking at the door. I was still afraid I'd get kicked out if I put in an appearance at any miner's cabin and asked for food, but I should have risked it."

"I didn't know that miners did such things," Sandy observed.

"Some of them do, and some of them don't," replied the boy.

"You haven't given us your name yet," suggested Will.

"Ed Hannon," was the reply.

"Well come on in the cabin, Ed Hannon," laughed Sandy, "and we'll fill you up, but you mustn't say a word about having seen that miner, and if he talks to you about the route by which you approached the cabin lie like a thief! Which way did he come from, anyway?"

"He came from the west," was the reply. "I plumped into him not far from one of the little rivulets which joins Copper river not very far away."

"There!" said Sandy. "Now I guess we've got something tangible".

Chapter XIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL

When Will and Sandy entered the cabin with Ed Hannon, Cameron sprang up to meet them. There was a show of excitement in his manner as he exclaimed:

"So you found the lost boy, did you?"

"No," Will replied, "this is not the lost boy, but it is a lost boy!"

"Where did you come from?" asked Cameron hastily, regarding Ed with a pair of bold, black eyes. "How long have you been in this district?"

"I came from Katalla today," answered the boy.

"Tonight, you mean," corrected Cameron.

"I started early this morning," replied Ed, "but I guess I've been wandering around the country a good deal. It seems that I came up to the cottage from the north."

Cameron sank back into his chair with a look of satisfaction on his face. The boys now busied themselves getting a substantial meal for Ed, and the boy was soon attacking a generous slice of bear steak.

If Cameron had the plans bearing the thumb marks, he was certainly the man to keep them concealed if he believed them to be of any value whatever to any one. If he did not have charge of the plans, then the chances were that Vin. Chase, the crooked clerk, had them and that any reference to them in the presence of Cameron would be communicated as soon as possible to the actual holder.

Will was certain that Cameron was the man who had given the name of Len Garman by Mr. Horton in the interview in which he had received his instructions. At that time he did not believe that Cameron, or Garman, whichever his name was, knew anything whatever of the thumb prints on the plans.

He did believe, however, that the fellow would fight to the death for the drawings, not because he believed them to be of value as evidence, but because he believed them to be of great value to one in quest of mining machinery suitable for that section of the country.

Directly Cameron began pacing to and fro in the cabin and occasionally glancing out of the window. There were only a few stars in sight and no moon, but for all that the fellow appeared greatly interested in the landscape outside.

"Are you expecting some one?" Will finally asked.

"Certainly not," was the reply. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because you seem anxious about something."

"I am anxious about something," replied Cameron seating himself by Will once more. "I don't like the idea of this boy coming in here with his story of being lost on the moraine."

"You think he came here for a purpose?"

"I must say that I do!"

Will saw that Cameron was fearful that Ed had brought in a message of some kind, and so talked to the point for some moments in the hope of drawing the miner out. But the miner only stared at Ed with his evil eyes and said nothing of importance.

"I know what's eating you, old fellow," Will thought to himself. "You think that there's a gang of Boy Scouts scattered over the moraine looking for Bert, and you're afraid they'll find him!"

Sure enough this prognostication seemed to be the true one, for directly Cameron drew on his head net and leather gloves and walked to the door. He paused there a moment and turned back to say to Will:

"It will soon be morning, and I desire to get to the point of my investigation before daylight. I have been very courteously entertained and shall return to your cabin at night, with your permission."

"I guess it's your cabin rather than mine!" replied Will with a smile. "I think you are acting very decently about our taking possession of it. Of course you'll always find food here as long as we remain."

With a wave of the hand at the group of boys gathered about the table, Cameron went out and closed the door. They heard him moving heavily along toward the east and then came silence.

"He's stopping to see if he's watched," suggested Sandy.

"He'll be watched all right!" George declared.

"But how?" asked Sandy.

"I'm the original sleuth!" George replied with a grin. "I can follow the fellow by the sound of his footsteps, even if he is wearing moccasins!"

"Does any one doubt that Cameron is the man formerly known as Len Garman?" asked Will.

The boys all shook their heads, but Ed turned an inquiring face toward the speaker.

"He gave the name of Cameron here, did he?" he asked.

Will nodded.

"Well, that isn't the name I heard him called by at Katalla," Ed declared.

"So you saw him at Katalla, did you?" asked Sandy.

"Yes, I saw him at Katalla two days ago. He seemed to have a lot of business with a young fellow who appeared to be a stranger in the town."

"What name did he give there?"

"Brooks!" replied Ed.

"Well, we mustn't stand here chinning while the fellow is getting out of sight," suggested George. "I'm going to take after him right now!"

"Wait," Sandy suggested, "and I'll go with you."

"Do you think he will go straight to Bert?" asked Will.

"I have no doubt of it!" was the reply.

"It's just this way," George went on, "Cameron is suspicious that a great effort is being made to discover the whereabouts of the kidnapped boy, and he can't rest easy until he knows that he is safe. Besides, the fellow would like to know whether Bert had regained consciousness."

"Yes, I presume he is anxious to learn what the code despatch he stole contains," Will answered.

"There was some talk," Sandy said, directly, "about Bert regaining consciousness before he left

the cabin. Do you think that possible?"

"No, I don't!" replied George. "I should have heard a struggle had anything of the kind taken place. The fact of the matter is," the boy went on, "that Cameron thinks some one is after the drawings he values so greatly. He found Bert here with the code message and naturally concluded that the cipher referred in some way to his plans."

"Well, come on, then," Sandy urged. "We'll have to be moving if we follow Cameron. I think we've talked too long already."

"Don't you worry about that," Will declared. "Cameron will hang around the cabin for half an hour or more in order to see if any one leaves. Before any one goes out, we'll turn off the light and make a noise like going to sleep. Then, when all is good and dark, you two can slip out and locate the miner if you can."

"Locate him?" repeated Sandy. "We've got to locate him. He'll go straight to Bert and that's exactly where we want to go."

The boys made a great commotion in the cabin as if preparing for bed, and finally the lamp was extinguished, leaving the room in complete darkness.

"Now, be careful when you open the door," whispered Will.

For a wonder the door opened noiselessly on its hinges, and was closed without the slightest jar. Directly Will heard a soft tap at the window and pressed his face against the pane.

"Cameron is still in sight," Sandy's voice said, "and not very far away. He seems to be satisfied that we've all gone to bed, and is heading for the west. Looks like he was following the trail we followed when we went out after fish."

"Go to it, then," Will said. "Don't expose yourselves by being too rash, and don't come back in the morning without bringing Bert with you."

"You watch me!" Sandy replied, and then he was gone.

Chapter XIV

THE LAD WITH THE "DRAG"

When the federal officer appeared in front of the spirited team, announcing that he had a warrant for the arrest of the boys, Tommy and Sam both whispered to the driver to cut loose with the whip.

"Run him down!" Tommy insisted.

"Jump the rig over him!" Sam advised.

The doctor, however, stretched forth a detaining hand and the driver held in the horses.

"That's right!" Frank exclaimed.

"You mustn't get into any quarrel with the officers," Dr. Pelton suggested. "We can soon settle this matter."

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Tommy. "Here we've been hanging around an old blacksmith shop all day, and skulking through the streets, and not getting half enough to eat, only to get pinched at the last minute! If I had my way, I'd bump that officer on the coco and make for the landing. We can't stay in this blooming little burg all the rest of our natural lives. Will will be anxious."

"Now don't get excited!" laughed Frank. "We'll get out in, a few minutes, all right."

"If it was so easy to get out in a few minutes," argued Tommy, "why didn't you get out hours ago?"

Frank only laughed as the impatient question and sprang out of the carriage. The doctor alighted, too, and they both stood for a moment in close consultation with the officer.

Jamison, who was now very drunk, stood weaving about in the street, demanding that all the boys, and the doctor, and the driver of the carriage, be thrown into jail on a charge of piracy.

"Don't you think," Frank suggested to the officer, "that this man is too drunk to be out on the street?"

"Why, of course he is," replied the officer beckoning to an associate who stood watching the group from the next corner.

When the associate came up, Jamison was ordered under arrest, and was taken away with many threats and exclamations of rage.

"I don't like this man Jamison any better than you do," the officer said, speaking to Frank and Dr.

Pelton, "but the case did look rather bad for the boys, and I had to do something."

"He collected three hundred dollars of me, for a trip to and from Cordova," Frank explained, "and then tried to maroon us on one of the Barren islands. There's a member of his crew back here in the blacksmith shop who will tell you the same story."

"So you paid him three hundred dollars, did you?" asked the officer.

"Yes, sir," answered the boy.

"And you have proof that he tried to maroon you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And you took the boat only to enforce the contract you had made?"

"That's the idea!" replied Frank.

"Then I'm not going to bother with the case at all!" replied the officer. "If you had come to me with this story the minute Jamison began to rave about arrest, you wouldn't have been put to all this inconvenience."

"I think," grinned Frank, "that Jamison ought to pay us back the three hundred dollars, because he never brought us to Cordova at all, and even if he had, he wouldn't have earned the money until he returned us to Katalla. He ought not to keep the money."

"That's a fact!" exclaimed the officer with a smile at the boy. "I'll go down to the jail and make him give it back."

The officer started away, and Tommy and Sam sat in the carriage regarding Frank with wide open eyes.

"Say, who is that kid?" Tommy asked.

"I don't know," replied Sam.

"Did you notice that any time he said anything to the officer that the officer just fell right in with his ideas?"

"Sure I did," was the reply.

"And did you notice how the doctor paid special attention to every remark he made?"

"I couldn't help but notice it," was the reply.

"Well, that kid's got these fellows up here buffaloed all right," Tommy declared. "And that being the case, I wonder why he didn't use some of his influence hours ago and get us started on the road to Katalla."

"I give it up!" Sam replied.

Frank and the doctor stood talking together for a few moments, and then the federal officer returned and handed two hundred dollars in bank notes over to Frank.

"Jamison thinks he ought to have a hundred dollars because he paid the tug for bringing him and his crew in," the officer said, "and because he's going to let you run his motor boat up to Katalla."

"What do you know about that?" whispered Sam.

"I'll bet that boy's father is president of the United States," replied Tommy. "Or he may be king of England."

"Whoever he is, he's got a pull," replied Sam.

"Drag!" exclaimed Tommy. "Whenever a man's got a dead sure cinch like that, it's a drag and not a pull!"

"Well," the doctor said, "we're losing time! We may as well go to the wireless office and get our code message. I presume it's ready for delivery by this time."

"It's about time we were thinking about that boy with his head in a sling, too!" Tommy suggested.

"It won't take us long to get there now," Doctor Pelton remarked.

The Gulf of Alaska was remarkably smooth, when the vicious habits of that body of water are taken into consideration, and the boys made the run to Katalla without accident in little less than three hours, arriving at the floating dock with the sun still more than three hours in the sky.

"Now for the rotten part of the journey," Tommy suggested. "If we hadn't had to wait for the wireless after we landed at the dock we should have arrived here in time to reach the cabin before dark."

"Who's got the wireless?" asked Sam.

"Frank's got it tucked away under his uniform!" laughed Doctor Pelton. "He wouldn't even let me take a look at the envelope!"

"Do you know what's in it, Frank?" asked Tommy.

"Sure I do," was the reply.

"Then, what's all this mystery about? Why don't you pass the information around?" demanded Tommy impatiently.

"All in good time!" laughed the boy.

"I don't see any use of all this mystery!" Tommy grumbled, turning to Sam, "I get shut out of the inside features of every game I'm in!"

"Now, how do we get to the cabin?" asked the doctor.

"Walk, I suppose," grumbled Tommy. "It's only about fourteen or fifteen miles, and the country between the two points is mostly on end. We ought to get there by an hour or two after midnight, if we don't stop to play marbles on the way."

"If you will all wait here a few moments," Frank said, "I'll go and see what I can do in the shape of a rig."

"A rig!" repeated Tommy. "Fat lot of fun you'd have driving a rig over that moraine!"

"Of course we can't drive clear to the cabin," Frank replied, "but we can get quite along way from the coast if we have a strong team and a good wagon!"

"Yes, I remember smooth country somewhere on the route," replied Tommy.

"But even at best," Frank explained, "we shall have to walk five or six miles, so we may as well be getting busy."

In a very few minutes Frank returned with a pair of strong horses and wagon more desirable for its strength than its comfort.

"Where'd you find it?" asked Tommy.

"Sent a wireless ahead asking for it!" replied Frank.

"I wish you'd send a wireless over to the cabin," Tommy grinned, "and ask the boys to have supper all ready when we get there, and you might suggest that Sandy and George meet us a half a mile this side with a pie under each arm."

"I believe if that kid should ask to have some one dip him a blue blazer out of an ice cold spring it would be done," Sam whispered to Tommy, as the party clambered into the wagon.

"He's certainly got a drag somewhere!" replied Tommy.

"Things are running pretty smoothly boys," suggested Doctor Pelton as the straggling buildings of the coast town disappeared from view.

"They're running too smoothly!" exclaimed Tommy. "First thing we know, there'll be a cylinder head blowing out, or a volcanic eruption, or something of that kind. We've been having things altogether too easy ever since we landed at Cordova."

"Just listen a moment," Frank said, "I guess there's something going to happen, right now!"

There came a long, low rumbling sound, apparently moving from east to west, followed by a tipping of the moraine which almost brought the horses to their knees.

"It would never answer," Tommy grumbled, "for us to make a trip to Alaska without bunting into a glacier ready to smash up things!"

"That's not a glacial slide!" Frank said. "It's an earthquake!"

Chapter XV

A BREAK IN THE GLACIER

"An earthquake?" repeated Tommy. "I thought they never had earthquakes in Alaska any more!"

"There are few weeks when there are no earthquakes!" was the reply.

"Well, when's it going to stop quaking?" asked Sam, springing out of the wagon. "It seems to me that we're getting a sleigh ride!"

The others followed his example, and stood in a moment within fifty feet of a slowly widening chasm which seemed to run from east to west across the entire moraine. They had just reached the timber line when the disturbance began, and now they saw trees a hundred feet in height and from six to eight inches in diameter dropping like matches into the great opening in the earth.

"Gee!" exclaimed Tommy. "The breath of the earthquake is enough to freeze one! I wish I had a

couple of fur coats!"

The boy expressed the situation very accurately, for the opening of the moraine revealed the mighty mass of ice which lay under it. The glacier which had lain dead under the mat of vegetation for how many hundred years no one would ever know, showed far down in the great cavern, and a gust of wind sighing through the ragged jaws laid a chill over the little party.

Slowly the chasm widened. The ground under the boys' feet seemed to be unsteady. With a swaying motion it dropped off toward the coast, except at the very edge of the cavern, which seemed to be doubling down like a lip folded inside the mouth.

"It strikes me," Frank said, "that we would better be getting the team out of the track of that chasm! If we don't, the horses and wagon will take a drop."

Tommy and Sam both sprang forward, but it was too late! The southern line of the chasm seemed, to drop away for fifty feet or more, and trees and rocks crashed into the opening. The horses and the wagon went down with the rest. The screams of the frightened horses cut the air for an instant, and then all was silent.

"Rotten!" cried Tommy.

"Fierce!" shouted Sam.

"Awful!" declared Doctor Pelton.

Frank stood looking at the ever-widening chasm for a moment and then faced toward the coast.

"We'll have to walk around it now, I'm thinking," Tommy said, in a moment. "And a nice job we've got!"

As far as the eye could see the chasm extended, now growing in size, now contracting. A pale blue mist rose out of the opening, and the air was that of an August day no longer.

The sliding motion continued, and the chasm increased its width.

"Will it never stop?" asked Sam, almost thrown to the ground by a quick convulsion of the surface.

"Not just yet!" replied the Doctor gravely. "I can tell you in a moment just what has taken place. The weight of soil and timber on top of the dead glacier is shifting. The volcanic action tipped the moraine to the south and it broke, opening the way to the ice below. There is no knowing how serious the break may be. For all we know, the upheaval may send this whole moraine into the Gulf of Alaska."

"That's a cheerful proposition, too!" Tommy exclaimed.

"I wish I could get close enough to the chasm to look down," Sam observed. "I'll bet it's a thousand feet!"

"You'd better not try that!" advised Frank.

"The question before the house at the present moment," the doctor said, "is how I am going to get to my patient."

"Can't we get across this little crack in the earth?" asked Sam.

"That depends on the length of it!" answered Frank. "If the Doctor's theory is correct, this whole point has cracked away from the glacier above. In that case, we may be obliged to in some way work ourselves to the bottom of the chasm and up on the other side."

"We never can do that!" Sam insisted.

"Alaska is full of just such gorges as this one," Frank explained. "The whole country is resting on an icy foundation, and earthquakes find congenial conditions when it comes to cracking the crust. We don't know how long this chasm is, but the chances are that it isn't as long now as it will be!"

"Yes," agreed the doctor. "The chances are that the chasm started here today will continue to grow in length until it cuts across the point of land between Controller bay and the Bering glacier. I have known chasms of this character to travel fifty miles in a night, and I have known them to walk with such dignity that it took them ten years to go ten miles."

"But there must be some way of getting across it!" exclaimed Tommy. "Everything has been going all right up to now, and we're not going to be kept away from the cabin by any such playful little earthquake as this!"

"We'll do the best we can," Frank said gravely.

The boys turned to the east and west and traversed the line of the chasm for long distances. In places the width was not more than thirty feet. In others it was at least a hundred. Occasionally the walls of soil and ice sloped down at an angle of forty degrees, in other places the wall was vertical.

Within an hour the sound of running water was plainly heard, and the boys understood that the convulsion of nature had opened a reservoir somewhere in the glacier, and that the long chasm

would soon become a rushing torrent. The prospect was discouraging.

"I wish we had an airship!" suggested Tommy, as they came back to the starting place, a few minutes before the night closed down upon the moraine. "It's provoking to think that we can't get across a little chasm not any wider than a street in old Chicago!"

"I think I could get along very well with a derrick!" said Sam.

After a long conference, it was decided to keep to the west and endeavor to pass around the chasm in that direction.

"We certainly can't remain here inactive," the doctor argued. "We've got to go one way or the other, and I think the chances are better toward the west!"

"It will soon be good and dark," cried Tommy, "and then we'll have to make some kind of a camp for the night."

"I've got a searchlight with me," suggested Frank.

"So've I," answered Tommy.

"I'll tell you one thing we forgot," Sam cut in. "You didn't make Jamison give up your automatics!"

"Don't you ever think we didn't," Tommy answered. "That is," he continued, "the officer made him give them up. At least he brought them back when he came from the jail!"

"Seems to me," Tommy added, looking at Frank critically, "that you've got some kind of a drag with the people at Cordova."

"Never mind that now," Frank replied. "What we need now is some kind of a drag to get us across this chasm."

The electrics illuminated only a narrow path, but the boys and the doctor made fairly good time as they advanced toward the west.

After walking at least a mile and finding no narrowing in the surface opening, the boys stopped once more for consultation.

While they stood on the edge of the chasm considering the situation, a bright blaze leaped up some distance to the north.

"Some one's burning green boughs!" exclaimed Tommy.

"How do you know that?" asked Sam.

"Look at the white smoke!" answered Tommy. "I guess if you had made and answered as many Boy Scout smoke signals as I have, you'd know how to make a smudge."

"It's so bloomin' dark I couldn't tell whether the smoke is white or black!" declared Sam. "I can see only the bulk of it."

"If it was good and black," Tommy answered, "we couldn't see it so plainly. And, come to think about it," he added, laying a hand excitedly on Frank's shoulder, "there are two columns of smoke."

"I see the two now," Frank answered. "One column has just begun to show. You know what that means, of course!"

"It means a Boy Scout signal for assistance," replied Tommy.

Doctor Pelton turned to the boys with an anxious face.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked.

"Sure we do!" replied Tommy. "Two columns of smoke ask for help."

"Then there must be Boy Scouts in trouble on the other side of the chasm!" the doctor concluded.

"That's about the size of it!" Frank exclaimed.

"Look here," Tommy declared, "we've just got to get across that crack! I wonder if it would be possible to find walls so slanting that we could pass down this side and up the other."

"Well, even if we did," Sam argued, "there's a rush of water at the bottom. I don't see how we could get across that."

"I know how we can get across it if we find the walls accommodating," Tommy exclaimed. "You saw how the trees tumbled into the chasm, didn't you? Well, if we can find a place where the moraine was heavily wooded, we'll find a bridge of tree trunks across any water there may be at the bottom! And the bridge may not be very far down, either!"

"Great head, little man!" laughed Frank.

"You ought to consider the matter very seriously before entering the chasm at all," suggested the doctor. "Remember that it is uncertain as to size and that the walls are liable to crumble."

"But see here," exclaimed Tommy, "there's a Boy Scout signal for help on the other side, and we've just got to get across! For all we know, the cabin may have been wrecked by the earthquake, and the boys may have been injured in some way!"

"I'm game to go!" shouted Sam.

"Of course I'll go with you," the doctor went on. "In fact, I am satisfied that you are doing the right thing in making the attempt to cross. I only uttered a warning which we must all heed whenever we come to a place where a crossing seems possible."

The boys soon discovered a place where the walls did not appear to be very steep and where the mass of trees which had fallen completely covered the bottom. Then, cautiously feeling their way, they crept down.

Chapter XVI

GEORGE AND SANDY CAUGHT

When George and Sandy left the cabin they saw the figure of the miner very dimly outlined away to the west.

"We ought to get closer," Sandy whispered. "First thing we know, he'll duck down into some hollow, and that'll be the last of him for the night. I guess we can creep up without his catching us at it."

"Of course we can!" replied George. "He's making so much noise himself that he can't hear us! He wouldn't make much of a Boy Scout when it came to stalking, would he?"

The boys succeeded in getting pretty close to the miner; so close in fact, that occasionally they heard him muttering to himself as he stumbled over rocks and occasionally became entangled in such underbrush as grew along the top of the moraine.

"We can't be very far away from the place where the bear tried to beat me up," Sandy whispered, as they drew up for a moment. "I wouldn't mind having a bite out of that same bear just about now!"

After a time they came to the head waters of the creek in which Will and Sandy had fished, and saw Cameron standing on the other side.

"He's going into the mountains!" whispered Sandy.

"That's exactly where he's keeping Bert," George agreed.

In a short time Cameron paused in his walk and uttered a low whistle.

"What do you think of that?" asked Sandy. "He's going to meet some one here. And that means," the boy went on, "that he's had a pal watching Bert while he's been away."

"And it also means," George added, "that we can't be very far from the spot where Bert is concealed. I hope so, anyway, for I'm about tired enough to crawl into my little nest in the cabin."

"I should think you'd talk about sleep!" scoffed Sandy. "You slept all the afternoon!"

"If you mention that long sleep of mine again," George said half-angrily, "I'll tip you over into the creek. I'm sore over that myself!"

While the boys stood waiting and listening an answering whistle came from the side of a mountain not far from the rivulet.

"There's his chum!" whispered Sandy. "If we get up nearer, we may be able to hear what they say."

The boys crept along under the dim light of the infrequent stars, and finally crouched down behind an angle of rock which was not more than twenty feet removed from where Cameron stood.

They had hardly taken their position when a second figure made its appearance. The two stood talking together in whispers for a short time and then started to walk away.

"There's something doing, all right!" exclaimed Sandy.

"Yes, indeed, there is!" agreed George. "They wouldn't come out into such a hole as this after midnight to tell each other what good fellows they are, or anything like that."

"I'm getting suspicious!" Sandy chuckled.

"Why suspicious?"

"Because those fellows whispered!"

"I see the point," replied George. "From our standpoint those fellows were all alone here in one of

the wild places of Alaska, yet they drew close together and whispered when they communicated with each other!"

"They wouldn't do that," urged Tommy, "unless they were afraid of being overheard. It shows that they believe some one to be watching them."

The two men were now moving quite swiftly up the slope of the mountain. At times they were entirely hidden by the luxuriant growths, and at times they came out on little bald spots where rock outcropped to the exclusion of vegetation. The boys followed on into the thickets, pausing now and then to listen for the sounds of the advance of the others.

Presently they came to a shelf of rock which overlooked the valley of the rivulet. They paused for a moment to listen for the sounds of those in advance when a strong electric searchlight was thrown on their faces and they saw the grim, round barrel of an automatic pointing at their breasts.

"You may as well hand over your automatics, boys!" Cameron said.

"And be quick about it, too."

This last sentence came from a thin, cadaverous looking fellow whose face was only half revealed through the meshes of the head net.

There was nothing for the boys to do but to pass over their revolvers. Their searchlights were also taken from them, and then their hands were tied tightly behind their backs.

"Did you have a pleasant tramp through the woods?" asked Cameron.

"Say," growled Sandy, "if you'll just turn my hands loose, I'll give you a poke in the jaw!"

"That wouldn't be polite!" sneered Cameron.

"Don't take any lip from the young imps," snarled the other. "They've given us enough trouble already!"

"You're a foxy old gink!" exclaimed Sandy. "I wish I had you on South Clark street, Chicago, for a few minutes!"

"So that's why you came to the cabin is it?" asked George.

"Certainly," replied Cameron. "I had an idea that you'd follow me away! You see I figured it out exactly right!"

"Why did you want to make trouble for us?" asked Sandy.

"Because you're too smart!" answered Cameron.

"What do you mean by that?"

"When you sat sizing me up in the cabin while I was eating supper," Cameron went on, "you informed me as plainly as words could have done that you knew me to be the man who had abducted your friend."

"You didn't show that you knew," George suggested.

"I tried not to show that I knew," answered the other.

"What'd you steal Bert for?" asked Sandy.

"I needed him in my business," answered Cameron.

"Come, don't stand here all night talking with the little guttersnipes!" exclaimed Cameron's companion. "We've got work to do!"

"March along, then, boys!" Cameron ordered.

The lads were now pushed forward into a cavern which opened on the shelf of rock where they had been taken prisoners. The opening in the mountain side seemed to be of considerable size, for the boys passed from an outer chamber of fair dimensions to two smaller ones further in.

In the last of these chambers, on a huddle of blankets, lay the boy for whom they had been searching.

"Is he dead?" asked Sandy.

"No such luck," snarled Cameron.

"If you'll untie my hands, I'll look after him," George said.

The bonds were cut and George bent over the still figure.

"Has he regained consciousness at all?" he asked.

Cameron turned to his companion.

"Tell them, Fenton," he said, "whether the lad woke up during my absence. You were here all the time?" he added.

"Yes, I was here all the time!" answered Fenton. "And the lad never opened his eyes once. That was a deuce of a blow you gave him, Cameron!"

"And what did you gain by it?" demanded Sandy.

"We'll show you directly what we gained by it!" Cameron answered.

Seeing a bucket of water at one side of the cavern, George carried it over to the heap of blankets where the boy lay and began bathing his forehead and wrists. The boy groaned feebly but did not speak.

"What did you hit him with?" asked George angrily.

"The handle of my gun!" was the sullen reply.

"Why?" asked Sandy.

"Because I wanted to get a paper he had."

"Well, you got it, didn't you?" asked the boy.

"Yes, I got it!"

"And much good it did you, too!" said George angrily.

"Look here!" Cameron almost shouted, "can either one of you boys read that code despatch?"

George shook his head.

"Is there any one at the cabin who can read it?"

"I have never known of any member of the party reading the cipher," replied George. "I never have seen a code despatch before."

"You are lying to me!" shouted Cameron. "The boy to whom the despatch was addressed can certainly read it! Which one of you bears the name of Will Smith? Don't lie to me now!"

"Will Smith is at the cabin!" replied Sandy.

"Just my luck!" shouted Cameron.

"What do you want to know about the code despatch?" asked Sandy.

"I want to know what it contains. And what is more, I'm going to know, too! I want one of you boys to write a note to this Will Smith and get him to come here to this cave."

"Not for mine!" exclaimed Sandy.

George made no verbal reply, but the expression of his face showed that he had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"It will be the worse for you if you don't!" shouted Cameron.

"Oh, you've got the top hand for a few minutes now," Sandy said, tauntingly, "but you'll soon find out that you're not the only man in the world that's got a gun!"

This last as Cameron flourished an automatic in his hand.

"You'll write the note, or you'll starve to death!" replied Fenton.

"Then we'll starve!" answered George.

"No, we won't starve!" declared Sandy. "We'll get the best of you outlaws in some shape, and give you a beating up that will put you in the hospital for six months!"

Fenton raised his fist as if to strike the speaker. but Cameron caught his arm.

"Not now," he said. "Wait until all other plans have been tried."

"We have other work to do at this time, anyway," Fenton said, with a scowl, "so we'll just lock the door on these young gutter-snipes and leave them to think the matter over!"

The men passed out of the small cavern, but before they left the outer one, they rolled a great stone into the opening they had just passed through and blocked it firmly on the outer side.

Chapter XVII

THE MORSE CODE

"And this," said Sandy, as the great stone began to render the atmosphere of the place close and unpleasant, "is what I call a fine little Boy Scout excursion! Did they leave one of the searchlights?"

"Not intentionally," replied George, "but I swiped one!"

"Well, we mustn't show a light until they get some distance away!" advised Sandy. "We don't want them to know that we have it."

"And we'll need it badly," George suggested, "if we're to give Bert any attention! I wonder if the poor boy has had any care since he's been here! It doesn't seem to me that they would be heartless enough to leave him here in an unconscious condition very long!"

"You can never tell what such fellows'll do," Sandy observed.

The boys remained silent for a long time, each one busy with his own thoughts. After what seemed an aeon, they saw that it was daylight outside. Then they turned on their electric and made an examination of their wounded chum.

They found that the bandage on his head had been changed, and that his pulse was not so high as when he had been discovered in an unconscious condition at the cabin.

"I guess they've done the best they could," Sandy observed, "and I'm much obliged to them for that! Have you got anything to eat?"

"Now, look here, Sandy," George replied whimsically, "have you any idea that I'd ever go away with you without taking something to eat? You got up from the table one minute and demand something to masticate the next! You're about the most regular boy at your meals I ever knew. What'll you have now, pie or cake?"

"Pie!" laughed Sandy.

"Well, you get a bear sandwich!" replied George. "I've got four great big thick ones wrapped up in paper and stowed away in my pockets. If those ginks had suspected anything of the kind, they would have taken them away from me. They're a bum lot, those men!"

"Produce one of the sandwiches!" demanded Sandy. "They named me Sandy at first because I'm such a hand for sandwiches!"

George brought forth two great slices of bread and about a pound of fried bear meat. Sandy's eyes sparkled at the sight.

"We'll have one apiece now," George suggested, "and one apiece tonight. But every time they come near the cave, we'll tell them how hungry we are. That will make them think we're suffering."

"You don't think we're going to stay here till night, do you?" demanded Sandy munching away at his meat.

"I hope not," answered George.

"I wonder if Bert's had anything to eat since he got the wallop on the coco?" asked Sandy. "Suppose we mince some of this meat up very fine and feed it to him. He may not know when he swallows it, but it will give him strength just the same."

The suggested plan was followed, and Bert was given quite a quantity of the tender meat. At first it was necessary to pass it down his throat with draughts of water, but later, much to the surprise and joy of the boys, he began, to swallow naturally.

"He's coming back to life!" shouted Sandy. "A boy's all right as soon as he begins to eat! Sprinkle some water in his face and we'll see what effect that has."

The boys were so pleased that they almost cheered with delight when at length Bert opened his eyes and looked about.

"Time to get up?" he asked.

"Naw," replied Sandy. "Go to sleep again!"

"That you, Sandy?" asked Bert.

"That's Sandy all right!" replied the boy.

"Why don't you open a door or window and let in some air?" asked Bert.

"Aw, go to sleep!" advised Sandy.

"Nice old dive you've got here!" Bert went on. "Here I've walked about nineteen thousand miles to find a boy named Sandy and a boy named Will, and a boy named Tommy, and a boy named George, and when I find them they shut me up in a rotten old morgue."

"How'd you come to ask for Sandy?" demanded the boy.

"The name struck me as being funny!" was the reply. "Where are the others? Are you here alone?"

"George is over there on the floor," replied Sandy. "Ring off, now, and go to sleep! You're in no shape to talk."

"I remember something about getting a dip on the head," Bert said in a moment, evidently after long cogitation. "What was there about it?"

"You got it!" replied Sandy. "Go to sleep!"

"If you'll give me some more of that meat, I'll go to sleep!"

George pushed forward about half of one of the sandwiches and the boy began eating it greedily. In a moment, however, his arm dropped to his side and he appeared to be unconscious again.

"He's too weak to go at the grub like that," George advised, turning on the light. "We'll have to be careful!"

But Bert was not unconscious again. He was only sleeping.

"I'd like to know what brought him out of that trance," remarked George as the boys sat regarding the youngster with inquiring eyes.

"I don't know any more about it than you do," answered Sandy, "but, if you'll leave it to me, setting the stomach to work put the blood in circulation, and that swept the cobwebs out of his brain."

"Sounds all right, but I don't believe it!" replied George.

The day passed slowly. Bert slept continuously until George's watch told him that it was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon. Then he opened his eyes for a few moments, finished the rest of the sandwich and went to sleep again.

"Weak as a cat!" exclaimed Sandy.

The boy had scarcely closed his eyes when Cameron's voice was heard at the entrance.

"Are you boys ready to write that note?" he asked.

"Come in here a minute," requested Sandy. "I want to get a good poke at that ugly mug of yours!"

"You won't feel quite so lively after going hungry for a day or two," sneered Cameron. "You needn't mind about the letter, anyway," he added. "I have information that there's a boy coming in from Cordova who can read the code despatch and we're laying for him now."

"I don't want to seem to be irreligious," Sandy replied, "but I beg leave to state that if I owed the devil a debt of a thousand of the greatest liars on earth and he wouldn't take you and call the debt square, I'd cheat him out of it! Your fabrications are too cheap!"

"Don't get fresh now," advised Cameron. "If you do, I'll come in there and take it out of your hide!"

"Come on in!" urged Sandy. "I'd just like to get a good crack at your crust! I think I could fix you up in about five minutes so you'd want to lie in bed for about five months!"

"Aw, what's the good of stirring him up!" whispered George.

"I want to get him so mad that he'll say something that he wouldn't say if he wasn't angry!" replied Sandy. "What's your idea about this boy coming in, anyway? Do you believe it?"

"No!" was the reply. "There isn't any one to come in. And even if there was, there is no way in which he could be notified that he was coming! So you see, he's just lying for the fun of it!"

"Well, I'm sorry, boys," Cameron observed, "that you won't take advantage of the offer I'm making you. I brought a basket of provisions with me, and you might be having a square meal in five minutes if you'd only do what I ask you to do."

"I thought you didn't want the letter now!" scoffed Sandy.

"Oh, I'll get it all right whether you write it or not!" answered Cameron. "But if you have anything to say to me, you'd better say it now, because you won't see me again until tomorrow morning. I've just come from the cabin, and the boys there are about wild over your disappearance. I explained that I found your hats not far from a piece of torn and bloody turf, and that seemed to make them feel worse than ever."

"Oh, they're on to you all right!" replied Sandy. "You can't make anything stick with them. They know that you're the outlaw who stole Bert, and they know that you haven't any more right to the cabin than they have. You'll go sticking your nose around that domicile some time and get it knocked off! It's a two to one bet right now that they know that you've caught George and I in some kind of a trap."

"Let him alone," advised George. "What's the use of starting anything? He can make us trouble if he wants to!"

"Run along now," continued Sandy. "We were having a quiet little snooze when you butted in. It's all right this time, but don't you ever do it again. Here's hoping you remain away until morning!"

Cameron was heard to pass through the outer caverns and all was still, about the place. Notwithstanding the assumed lightheartedness of the boys, they realized that they were in a serious situation.

"I'm going to dig this stone out!" declared Sandy shortly after the departure of the miner. "I believe we can move this beautiful door if we go at it right. Come on and help me push."

The boys pushed with all their might, but the stone was firmly blocked on the outside, and could not be moved.

"It's after five o'clock," George said looking at his watch, "and if we do anything tonight, we'll have to do it right away. What time did Tommy say he would be back with the doctor?"

"There was some talk about his being back early in the evening," replied Sandy. "And that gives me an idea!" the boy continued.

"Pass it out!" said George.

"First," Sandy said, hesitatingly, "let me ask a question. Do you know how the boys are going to get in from the coast? What I mean is, have you any idea which way they will take on leaving Katalla?"

"That's all a guess," replied George.

"They may come this way, though," suggested Sandy.

"Yes, if they keep straight to the north until they strike the valley of this little creek and then turn east to the cabin, they'll be apt to pass this way."

"Here's hoping they do," Sandy said fervently.

"I don't see how that will help," George complained. "We're shut up in a hole, and might yell for a thousand years without being heard."

"Just you wait a minute," Sandy advised. "Let me see that searchlight of yours. Have you the red and blue caps with you?"

"They're right at the end," replied George. "Just unscrew that cover and take them out. I thought you knew where to find everything connected with an electric searchlight!"

Sandy unscrewed the false cover at the end of the battery case and brought forth two celluloid caps; one blue, and one red.

"It's been so long since we've used these Boy Scout signals," he add, "that I've almost forgotten which color we use for the dash and which for the dot when we signal in the Morse code."

"The red is the dash," explained. George. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to hoist a signal of distress," laughed Sandy.

"Expect it to show through the rocks?"

"I guess it'll show out of any opening we can look out of!" exclaimed Sandy. "I'm going to put on the red cap and set the light where it'll shine through the two outer caverns. If any of the boys come within sight of it, they'll understand the scrape we're in."

"Great head!" exclaimed George. "The boys will be coming back from Katalla before long, and Will and Ed will naturally be searching for us, so we're pretty sure to have the signal seen and answered before morning!"

"That's our only hope!" replied Sandy. "Unless our Boy Scout signal brings one party or the other, we're likely to starve to death in this rotten old cavern. Let's see how it works," the boy went on, screwing the red celluloid cap firmly over the eye of the electric.

After seeing that everything was in order, he switched to the blue cap. In both cases the light worked perfectly.

"There you are!" he said with a chuckle. "If one of the boys sees the red light, he'll read it for a Morse dash and if he sees the blue light, he'll read it for a Morse dot!"

Chapter XVIII

THE ROCKS TUMBLE DOWN

After the departure of George and Sandy from the cabin, Will and Ed decided that the best thing they could do would be to go to bed. They had been without sleep for many hours, and were thoroughly exhausted.

"I am anxious to know what success George and Sandy have in chasing Cameron," Will said, as he disrobed in the dark and tumbled into his bunk, "but I don't see how we can help matters any by sitting up."

No answer came from the bunk occupied by Ed save a prolonged snore, and Will knew that his companion was already in the land of dreams.

When Will awoke it was broad daylight and the sun was high in the heavens. Looking at his watch, he was surprised to see that it was after twelve o'clock. In a moment, he heard Ed stirring in his bunk, and then the boy sat up, rubbing a pair of sleepy eyes.

"That was a corker!" Will exclaimed.

"Have any of the boys returned?" asked Ed.

"Oh, they're back before this, of course," Will answered. "They've probably gone outside in order to give us a chance to sleep!"

"I don't see any indications of their presence," Ed said. "Everything looks exactly as it did when we went to bed last night."

Will, after arranging his head net, and drawing on a pair of gloves, opened the door and cast an anxious glance over the landscape.

"They haven't been out here!" he said. "What do you think it means?"

"It means that they're giving that fat miner along chase!" answered Ed.

"I'm afraid they're in some trouble," replied Will apprehensively.

"Suppose I look for them while you get breakfast," suggested Ed.

"Good idea," replied Will "I'll get pancakes and coffee and eggs for breakfast and then, after we eat, we'll both go out and look for the boys. I'm afraid they've been led into a trap!"

"How about leaving the cabin alone?" asked Ed.

"The cabin can go hang!" answered Will.

Ed returned in half an hour and reported that no trace of the lost lads had been discovered. The boys then ate breakfast and started away.

"Which way did they go?" asked Ed,

"Sandy said they were headed to the west."

"Then to the west we go," Ed exclaimed, darting forward in advance.

The boys searched patiently until five o'clock without discovering any trace of the missing lads. Then, they returned to the cabin and prepared supper. As they came within sight of the cabin they saw a stout figure dodging away into the grove of trees to the east.

"That's that sneak of a Cameron," Will said. "If he keeps shoving his ugly nose into our business, I'll ornament it with lead!"

After supper the boys loaded their pockets with sandwiches and a bottle of cold coffee and set forth again.

"I don't think we went far enough to the west," Will said, as they made their way over the moraine. "You remember the line of hills across the little creek? Well, I have an idea that if the boys have been captured they have been taken there."

"And if Bert has been hidden away anywhere in this vicinity," Ed answered, "he is there, too! In fact," the boy added, "it is my belief that if the miner is responsible for the disappearance of George and Sandy the three boys will be found together somewhere!"

"You are probably right!" Will agreed. "The miner and his gang wouldn't care about watching two separate points."

"I don't think they'd be apt to murder the boys, do you?" asked Ed.

"No, I don't think they would," Will replied. "Outlaws of the Cameron stamp resort to all sorts of tricks and crimes, but they usually fight shy of murder. I'm afraid, however, that the boys will be starved or beaten up."

It was seven o'clock when the boys finally came to the south bank of the rivulet, in the vicinity of the place where Sandy had encountered the bear. The sun was now well in the west and the south side of the line of cliffs lay in heavy shadows.

"If there's any deviltry going on," Will said, pointing to the summits above, "it's right over there under those peaks!"

"I guess there's plenty of room under the peaks for mischief to be plotted," Ed suggested, "I can see pigeon holes all along the cliff."

"Caves, do you mean?" asked Will.

"Sure," was the reply. "Those cliffs are of volcanic formation, and some of the strata are softer than others, and the water has cut into the heart of the range in many places."

"One would naturally suppose that such openings would be filled with ice in Alaska," Will suggested.

"They may be filled with ice in the winter," answered Ed, "but in the summer time they are hiding places for bears and crooked miners."

The boys advanced to the edge of the stream and Will swept his field glass along the distant slope.

Presently he handed the glass to Ed.

"Tell me what you see," he said.

"I see something that looks like the eye of a wild animal looking out over the valley!" answered the boy. "What can it be?"

"My first idea was that some one had built a fire in a cave," Will answered, "but the more I look at it, the more I suspect that the light comes from an electric."

"Then that must be the boys!" exclaimed Ed excitedly.

"But why don't they come on out?" asked Will, anxiously.

"Perhaps they have found Bert and don't want to leave him!" suggested Ed.

While the boys watched the red light, which seemed to glimmer from the very extremity of the cavern, it turned to blue!

"Now I've got it," cried Will almost dancing up and down in his excitement, "you know what that means, don't you?"

"I can't say that I do!" replied Ed.

"It seems to me that the Portland Boy Scouts are not very well posted," laughed Will. "One of the boys—which one, I don't know, of course—is talking to us in the Morse code!"

"Still I don't understand," said Ed.

"The red light means a dash," Will explained, "and the blue light means the dot. Now we'll see if we can catch what the boy is saying."

"But where does he get the red and blue lights?" asked Ed.

"From red and blue caps screwed over the electric searchlight," was the reply. "All of our electrics are provided with these signal caps."

"There, the light is red again!" cried Ed.

"I'll show how it works," Will said, bringing out his own flashlight and unscrewing the false cover from the loading end.

Directly he had the blue and red caps out, and then the red one was fastened over the eye of the searchlight.

"There, you see!" Will exclaimed turning on the light. "We've got a beautiful red light and that means a Morse dash."

"I see," answered Ed. "And when you turn on the blue, that means a dot. I learned the Morse code, of course, when I was admitted to the Boy Scouts, but I never knew that it was used in that way."

"I wonder if he sees this?" asked Will as he swung the red light back and forth in the growing twilight.

"We'll have to wait and see," replied Ed. "Of course, he'll answer if he knows we're here!"

Swiftly the light changed from red to blue and from blue back to red again. This took place several times and then Will said:

"Now, count!"

"Red," said Ed. "Red again. Red again."

"That's 'O'," exclaimed Will. "I guess we've got him at last!"

"Now there's another red," Ed went on. "Now there's a blue. Then one more red. Ob, this seems to be easy!"

"That's 'K'!" cried Will. "O.K., don't you see? O. K. That means that he knows we're here!"

"Glory be!" shouted Ed. "The boys are all right or they wouldn't be signalling. I hope they've found Bert!"

Will signalled back "O.K.," and then the lads turned back up the rivulet, the idea being to cross over to the north side.

"I want to find out why the boys don't show themselves instead of signalling," Will explained. "There must be some good reason."

After a walk of half a mile upstream the boys found it possible to cross without wading, and then

they turned down toward the mouth of the cavern where the lights had been seen.

As they did so, two figures detached themselves from a group of trees which stood not far to the east and followed stealthily along behind them.

If the lads could have heard the conversation carried on at that time between Cameron and Fenton, they would have proceeded on their way with less confidence.

"Just what we've been looking for!" chuckled Cameron.

"We surely have them trapped now!" replied Fenton.

"They'll naturally step into the outer cavern to see why their chums don't walk out, and when they do so, we'll hold them up with our guns until we can build up a barrier which will keep them in."

"One of the boys certainly must understand the code we are so anxious about," Fenton observed. "That's the kid we want. We've certainly got to find out what that message contains! If the people in the east are trying to steal our plans, we certainly ought to know it!"

The boys, however, heard nothing of this talk and passed on down the north side of the creek. As soon as they came opposite the cavern, in sight of the light once more, they stopped and began signalling.

As they did so, Cameron and Fenton came nearer and waited anxiously for the lads to enter the cavern.

"I'd like to know what all that signalling means!" said Cameron.

"Boy Scout signals," replied Fenton.

"You can't read them, can you?" asked the miner.

"Of course not," replied Fenton, "I'm no Boy Scout!"

The boys continued to signal back and forth until the situation was fairly well understood. Will and Ed knew that Bert had been found and that all three were barricaded in the cave.

They were disposed to make their way to the rescue of the boys without further delay, but George advised them to wait until it became darker, as Cameron might return at almost any moment. The news that Bert had regained consciousness was very welcome and, confident of their ability to thwart the plans of the miner, the boys looked forward to quiet hours in the cabin.

Of course the boys had no suspicion that their enemies were close at hand watching every movement. Cameron and Fenton became impatient, after a time, and began advancing slowly toward the boys, who were now not very far from the mouth of the outer cavern.

Something better than an hour passed, and then George signalled from the interior of the cavern that it might be well for the boys to come up and begin the work of removing the rocks which barred their egress.

"Sneak In," George signalled. "Don't show yourself more than you have to. Cameron may be about! It may be that he has seen our signals already!"

Sandy replied that he had not discovered any indications of the presence of the miner, and the two boys advanced to the shelf of rock which faced the opening. It was nine o'clock then.

"What's that strange noise?" asked Will as they moved along the shelf.

"You've got me!" replied Ed, "The ground's tipping!"

There came a deafening crash and the whole face of the cliff fell away! When Will and Ed regained their feet and looked through the dust which was rising over the scene, they saw that there was no longer any cavern in view. The rock on which they stood was sliding down the slope.

"Buried alive!" cried Will with a sob, "Buried alive!"

Chapter XIX

VICTIMS OF THE QUAKE

The broad rock upon which the boys stood slid down the declivity for some distance and brought up against a thicket of trees which stood not far from the bank of the creek. The boys were fairly thrown from their feet as the rock struck, but fortunately they were not injured in the least. It was quite dark now, and the dust rising from the disturbed earth made the scene still more dim.

The first thing the boys heard when they scrambled to their feet was a faint moan and then a call for help.

"Sandy! George!" called Will.

There was no answer from above, but a faltering voice was heard just at the edge of the thicket, where the rock had crushed into a hemlock of unusual size.

"Help," the voice said. "Help!"

Will threw his searchlight in the direction of the sound and soon saw a writhing figure in the underbrush which had been crushed down by the fall of the rock.

"Who are you?" asked Will.

"Fenton," was the answer.

"Where'd you come from?" asked the boy in amazement.

"For God's sake," exclaimed the writhing man, "don't stop to ask questions now. My leg is smashed under the rock upon which you are standing! It is enough to say that I came here with Cameron!"

"Where is Cameron?" asked Will.

Fenton pointed further down the slope.

"He fell over in that direction when a rock struck him," he said.

Will and George made a thorough examination of the slope where the cavern had been before wasting any time on their injured enemies.

They called loudly to George and Sandy but received no answer.

"I'm afraid," Ed said, "that the boys were crushed under the falling rocks! If they were, we ought to leave the men responsible for their death where they are! They are not deserving of human help!"

"And yet," Will replied, "I can't find it in my heart to leave them in such a plight. We ought at least to see if we can get them out of their present cramped quarters."

After much exertion the boys managed to manufacture something like a handspike from one of the broken saplings, and with this they began prying at the heavy rock. It gave, but slowly.

While they worked away, hoping every instant to be able to draw Fenton from under the stone and so lessen his sufferings, they saw the hand of the man they were so unselfishly assisting stealing toward his hip pocket.

"Watch him!" whispered Will. "He means to shoot us as soon as he is released! That shows what kind of a dirty dog he is!"

As the rock was lifted by slow degrees and propped so that its weight was not so heavy upon the unfortunate man the boys saw that his hand was creeping closer to his hip pocket.

When at last the weight was removed, Fenton's first act was to attempt to draw his weapon. Ed kicked it from his hand and then proceeded to tie the fellow's wrists together behind his back.

"You're a dirty sneak," the boy exclaimed, "or you wouldn't try to kill the people who have saved your life! From this time on, you get no assistance from us!"

"I didn't mean anything!" whined Fenton.

"Don't lie about it!" frittled Will. "Where's Cameron?"

"You'll find him lower down!" was the reply.

"I hope he's broken his neck!" Ed cut in.

But Cameron had not broken his neck. Instead, he had broken an arm, and one foot had been badly bruised by a falling stone. He was unconscious when the boys lifted him and laid him in an easier position.

The two men were at once searched for weapons and left for the time being to take care of themselves. There was no fear of their escaping, for one of Fenton's legs had sustained a compound fracture and Cameron's foot was badly injured.

"What next?" asked Will as the two boys stood facing the spot where they believed George, Sandy and Bert to be buried under many tons of rock. "It seems as if we ought to do something for the boys!"

"I'm afraid it's too late!" replied Ed, dejectedly.

"We never can dig under those rocks without help," commented Will, "therefore, I think we'd better be on the watch for Tommy and Frank and the surgeon. They surely ought to be somewhere near the cottage by this time, if not already in it."

"If they've had such blooming bad luck as we have," Ed observed, "they're probably in jail somewhere! I don't think I ever saw anything in a worse mess! The very Old Nick seems to be after us!"

"This," Will observed with a grave smile, "is what we call a quiet little Boy Scout excursion! We

have visited the Pictured Socks, the Everglades, the Great Continental Divide, the Hudson Bay country and got trapped in an anthracite mine in Pennsylvania since we started out on our quests for adventure."

"You seem to have found adventure all right!" smiled Ed.

"You bet we have!" replied Will.

The boys made still another inspection of the spot where the cliff had fallen, and thought that they heard a faint call from the inside.

"They are there!" cried Will. "I'm sure they're there, and alive!"

"But they can't live there very long!" suggested Ed. "So we'd better be doing something to get them, out!"

"The first thing to do," Will stated, "is to signal to the other fellows. I'm sure Tommy and Frank must be in with the surgeon before this!"

"There'll be plenty of work for the surgeon, I imagine," Ed added.

"I'm afraid so," Will admitted.

"But how are you going to signal to the cabin?" asked Ed.

"Indian smoke signals!" was the reply.

Almost before the words were out of Will's mouth, Ed was gathering both dry and green branches from the thicket.

"If the boys are at the cabin, or even on their way there," Will continued, "they'll be sure to see the signal, for the night is not so very dark now, and the land where we are is considerably higher than the moraine upon which the cabin is built. We'll have to get a blazing fire of dry wood and then pile on green branches."

"That ought to make a smudge visible ten miles off!" said Ed.

"Not quite so far as that!" smiled Will, "but it's a sure thing the signals ought to be seen as far as the cabin."

"Perhaps this earthquake shook the cabin down," suggested Ed. "I heard a racket over to the south which seemed to indicate that the moraine was being crumpled up like a piece of leather in a blaze."

"It seems to me," Will agreed, "that the earthquake did change the map of Alaska in some particulars. Now, if you've got enough dry wood, we'll start the fire and in five minutes we'll be ready for the green boughs!"

Two roaring fires were soon going on the mountainside, and then both Cameron and Fenton pleaded to be assisted nearer to the circle of warmth. They were both shivering with the cold.

"We ought to give you a swift toss into the blaze!" exclaimed Will. "And we may do it, too," he went on, "if we find that our chums have been brought to their death by your abducting them!"

"We had nothing to do with their being in the cave!" lied Cameron.

"What were you doing in the edge of the thicket?" asked Ed.

"We were watching you and your friends," was the reply. "We thought that you were in quest of our mine!"

"Did you see those red and blue lights?" asked Will.

"Certainly we did," replied Cameron.

"Well, they told the story of what has taken place since the boys left the cabin to follow your footsteps last night, so you may as well save your breath. Lies won't help you any!"

However, the lads managed to bring the two men closer to the fire and then set about piling on more green boughs.

"Now," Will said, as he stood regarding the two columns of smoke with no little satisfaction, "if our friends are within five miles of us, they ought to understand that we are in need of a little friendly assistance."

Time and again the two boys went back to the place where the cavern had been and listened patiently for some further indication that their friends were still alive. Several times they heard the rumbling of a voice but they could not distinguish the words of it.

Finally Will went back to where Cameron lay on the ground by the fire and asked abruptly:

"Is your name Garman, Cameron or Brooks?"

The fellow gave a quick start of surprise but made no answer.

"Is this man Fenton the clerk who stole the machine drawings?" was the next question. "Where

are the plans now?"

"I don't know anything about any plans!" declared Cameron.

"What do you fellows expect to do with the plans?" asked Will.

"We haven't got them!" was the surly reply.

"Don't lie about it!" Will advised. "We know that the plans were sent to Fenton's employer and that Fenton stole them."

"How do the plans concern you?" demanded Cameron.

"We don't want the plans because they are alleged to represent a valuable invention," Will replied. "We want them because they are needed in the criminal court of Chicago."

"I suppose you boys planned this costly and dangerous expedition for the purpose of seeing how the plans look!" sneered Fenton.

"That's about the size of it!" replied Will.

"Well, we don't know anything about the plans!" declared Cameron, "and we wouldn't give you any information on the subject if we did!"

"All right," Will replied. "We can tie you up out here and the mosquitos will do the rest!"

Before Will could ask the question which was on his lips, three quick pistol shots came from the south.

"There!" the boy said excitedly, "the signals have brought a response!"

"Friend or foe?" asked Ed.

"That's more than I know!" Will replied.

Chapter XX

DOWN IN THE CHASM

When Tommy, Frank, Sam and the doctor started toward the bottom of the chasm in order that they might reach the spot from which the smoke signal was ascending on the other side, they anticipated rough going, but the actuality was much worse than anything which had been expected.

The soil extended only six or eight feet. Passing this they came to a point where the solid glacier had been opened by the earthquake.

The break was uneven, there being little shelves and ledges upon which the feet might rest, but the going was uncertain for all that.

The roaring of the fast-lifting torrent prevented conversation, and the darkness made signalling impossible except when the searchlights were held in position.

It was very cold at the bottom of the break, too, and the boys felt their hands growing numb.

However, they proceeded with good speed until they came to a point where the current had swept the tree trunks far apart and parallel with each other. Here it became necessary for them to take the chance of a long jump. When it came Sam's turn to make the leap, the log upon which he struck rolled under his weight and he went down under the wreckage and rush of water.

Frank and Tommy sprang to his assistance at once, reaching down in the hope of getting hold of his hand, but the swift current carried the boy along until he was beyond their reach.

They saw his head come to the surface and saw him strike out for the floating logs on the north side of the chasm.

Then the bushy top of a tree drifted down upon him and he went under.

The boys stood for a moment as if paralyzed at what had taken place, and then Tommy sprang into the mass of floating boughs and, clinging to one which sustained his weight, called out to Frank to turn his searchlight on the place where he stood.

Frank did as requested, but it showed only a half-frozen and dripping boy clinging to the boughs of a tree which was already beginning to drop down beneath his weight.

The lads had about abandoned all hope of rescue when Sam's head once more appeared above the surface. He was within a short distance of Tommy and the boy, dropping his searchlight, sprang toward him.

He succeeded in getting hold of the boy's arm.

Then Frank, appreciating the situation, dropped in and, while retaining hold of a reasonably firm log on the west side of the chasm, caught the rescuer by the hand. Doctor Pelton, who had been creeping nearer to the point of danger, now seized Frank by the arm and slowly and with great effort the human chain drew the half-drowned boy to the little platform of logs and brush upon which the doctor stood.

Sam lay there for a moment panting and shivering, and then sprang to his feet. The north wall was still to climb.

The slope here was more gradual and all four soon found themselves at the top of the chasm, wet and cold, but on the side where the Boy Scout signal had shown.

"We ought to tell the boys we are coming, hadn't we?" asked Tommy.

He drew his automatic from his pocket as he spoke and pressed the trigger, but there was no explosion.

"Try mine!" advised Doctor Pelton. "I guess I'm the only person who didn't get wet."

As he spoke the doctor fired three quick shots.

"I wonder if they'll answer?" asked Tommy.

"They will if they can," replied Sam. "I don't know your chums, of course, but when a Boy Scout sends up a signal for help and shots are fired, it is only good manners to acknowledge the courtesy."

No answering shots came for a moment, however, for Will and Ed were at that moment some distance away from the place where their automatics had been thrown after having been taken from Cameron and Fenton.

The shots came before long, however, and the party of wet and shivering boys pressed on.

"I'd like to know what the boys are doing so far away from the cabin," Tommy grumbled. "They ought to have sense enough to stay put!"

The party was met just beyond the illumination of the fire by Will and Ed, who greeted their chums with such cordiality that a rather perilous situation was at once suspected.

"What are you boys doing out here in the scenery, anyhow?" demanded Tommy. "You ought to be at home in the cabin with a hot supper ready for us! You always go wrong when I go away!" he added with a grin.

"There's no time to tell long stories now," Will hastened to say. "The thing we've got to do is to pry open that mountain and dig George, Sandy and Bert out."

"Are they dead?" asked Tommy, turning very white.

"There's some one alive in there," replied Will. "We hear something which sounds like the human voice but we can't distinguish any words."

"Earthquake?" asked Tommy,

"Earthquake!" replied Will.

"But how——"

Will cut Frank off with a gesture and pointed to the cliff.

"We've got to get to work!" he said.

Just then a low groan reached the ears of the members of the group and Doctor Pelton sprang toward the place where Cameron and Fenton lay.

Tommy dashed after him and looked down on the two men.

"Where did you get 'em?" he asked.

"We didn't get 'em," was the reply. "The earthquake got 'em."

"Then I'll bet they were trying to do something to Bert!" Tommy declared.

"Right, little man!" replied Will. "But we haven't got time to talk about it now. This, I suppose," he added, turning to the surgeon, "is the doctor you brought from Cordova?"

"That's Doctor Pelton," Tommy answered, "and this," he continued, pointing to Sam, "is Sam White, Bulldog Patrol, Portland, Oregon. He isn't as hungry as he looks to be, for we fed him up good and proper on the way out!"

During this brief introduction, Sam and Ed had been eyeing each other with half-concealed grins.

"You boys seem to know each other," Tommy said.

"That's my chum," Sam replied, pointing to Ed. "I saw fit to seek my fortunes in town while he made a break for the mines."

The boys greeted each other warmly and then all turned their attention to that portion of the cliff where the caverns had once stood.

"They're still alive," Frank exclaimed as he reached a little fissure in the rock and bent downward. "I can hear some one talking!"

"Did you say that George and Sandy and Bert were all in there?" asked Tommy, turning to Will. "How did they get in there?"

"They were all in there just before the earthquake," replied Will. "I can't stop now to tell you how it all happened. They were signalling to us when the shock came."

"Signalling, how?" asked Tommy.

"Morse code, red and blue lights!" replied Will. "It's all the work of the miner and his bum friend," Will continued. "The boys were barricaded in the cave when the earthquake stirred things up, and the same convulsion which wrecked the cave injured the two men who were responsible for the condition the boys were in. Now you know all about it that I'm going to tell you until we get the lads out and get back to the cabin!"

"They're not dead, anyway," Frank exclaimed "I can hear Sandy's voice!"

Chapter XXI

EXPLAINING CORDOVA INCIDENTS

"I've found the door to the hole in the ground!" shouted Tommy, a few moments later, as he sent a great rock rolling down the slope.

The boys rushed to the opening so made and were overjoyed at seeing a light in the cavity thus exposed.

"Your door isn't big enough!" laughed Frank. "A good-sized cat couldn't get through there!"

"What are you boys talking about?" came a voice from the inside.

"Another one of those foolish questions!" laughed Tommy. "We're not talking at all, little man!" he continued. "We're getting our shoes shined! What are you doing in there?"

"We're not in here at all!" replied Sandy. "We're up on the Masonic Temple, watching a Columbia Yacht Club regatta!"

"Aw, cut it out!" advised Will. "Are you boys all safe?"

"Sure we're all safe!" answered Sandy, "George has a grouch because he hasn't anything to eat here, but the rest of us are all right!"

"Where's Bert?" asked Frank.

"In here!" was the answer.

"We brought a surgeon for him," Frank went on.

"He doesn't need a surgeon now!" replied George. "What he needs more than anything else is a cook!"

"We'll give him two cooks!" shouted Tommy.

"Why don't you hurry up and get us out?" demanded Bert, in a weak voice.

"If you remain in there a few weeks," Tommy laughed, "perhaps you'll get so thin you can crawl out of this crack!"

"Well, get to digging!" replied George.

"And for the love of Mike," exclaimed Sandy, "when you get to digging, don't drop any rocks on top of us! We have a little hole here now about four feet square!"

After making a study of the situation and advising with Doctor Pelton as to the proper course to pursue, the boys began prying at a large rock which lay almost on top of the shelf upon which the boys had ridden to the thicket. The rock moved, but grudgingly.

"If you can move that rock," the doctor said, "I think the one just above it will slide down and leave an opening large enough for the boys to pass out of. It ought not to be much trouble to move it!"

Notwithstanding the doctor's predictions, the boys worked at the rock with their home-made handspikes for an hour before it broke loose and rattled down upon the shelf just above the fire.

"Come out of that now," cried Tommy stooping down and looking into the cavern. "Come on out, now!"

Sandy was not long in obeying instructions. George came next and then the two lads turned about and lifted Bert out of his cramped position.

"That pigeon hole we've been occupying is about four inches square!" Sandy declared. "And I'm just about dead for a good long breath of fresh air! I never knew before how good air tasted."

Bert glanced around the circle of faces and smiled amusedly as he saw that his chum was there with the rest.

"Where'd you go, Frank?" he asked.

Frank hastened to the lad's side and bent over him.

"I headed for the cabin," he answered, "and missed it. The Indian smoke signal brought the boys out and they fed me up."

Will now approached the spot where the two boys were talking and pointed to Cameron and Fenton now sitting with their faces illuminated by the blaze. They both scowled at the inspection.

"Which one of those men gave you the clout on the head?" Will asked.

"That fellow with the alfalfas," replied Bert.

"And he stole the code message you were carrying?"

"I don't know!" replied Bert. "I had it when he came into the cabin and began talking with me and I haven't thought of it since. Was it stolen?"

"You bet it was!" replied Frank. "But we've been to Cordova and got a duplicate of it!"

Cameron and Fenton scowled fiercely as they listened to the conversation.

"Have you got the code message with you now?" asked Will.

"Sure I have!" answered Frank.

"Suppose you read it, then."

Frank took an envelope from his pocket, tore off one end, and brought out an ordinary sheet of letter paper bearing the heading of the wireless company. The boys gathered about him eagerly.

"It isn't very much!" Frank said with a laugh. "Say, you two fellows," he added, waving the paper in the direction of Cameron and Fenton, "would, you like to hear this code despatch read?"

"You bet they would," cut in Sandy. "That's all they've been thinking about for the last two days!"

"Well, it's short and sweet and very satisfying!" Frank laughed.

"Aw, read it!" demanded Tommy. "What's the use of making a monkey of yourself? Let's see what it has to say for itself."

Frank bent a searchlight on the paper and read:

"Will Smith, in camp near Katalla, Alaska: The machine plans have been traced to the cabin to which you were directed. Make close examination there before looking elsewhere. Horton."

"What do you know about that, Cameron?" asked Will with a smile. "Are the plans really hidden in our cabin?"

"Your cabin!" sneered Cameron.

"I guess the cabin belongs to us as much as it does to you!" Tommy cut in. "Are the machine plans hidden there?"

"What do you want of the machine plans?" demanded Cameron.

"They don't belong to you!" roared Fenton.

"We have no claim upon them," replied Will. "In fact, we have no use for them at all, except that we want to identify the mark of a human thumb which soiled one of the papers."

"All lies!" shouted Cameron.

"I'm telling you the truth," declared Will.

"Then why didn't you come right to me and say so?" demanded Cameron.

"You didn't give us a chance!" replied Will.

"Are the plans hidden in the cabin?" asked Sandy.

"This is all a faked-up story you are telling me!" Fenton shouted. "Whoever wired you that the plans were in the cabin didn't know what he was talking about! We don't know anything about the plans."

"That doesn't agree with what Cameron just said," Frank laughed.

"Cameron doesn't know anything about the plans, either," raged Fenton.

"Are you the clerk who stole the plans from your employer?" asked Will.

"I tell you that I don't know anything about any plans!" stormed Fenton. "Cameron and I are prospecting this moraine for gold, and we have no interest in any plans whatever!"

"And yet Cameron gave Bert a crack on the coco and stole the code message!" suggested Will.

"He probably thought the message referred to our mining properties!" declared Fenton. "We had a right to suppose it had."

"Then you won't tell us where the plans are?" demanded Will.

"I tell you that I don't know anything about the plans," screamed Fenton. "I never saw the plans."

"All right," Will replied. "We'll leave you fellows out here to think the matter over. By morning you will probably know where the plans are hidden. The mosquitos may be able to convince you."

"A little meditation may refresh his memory," Frank said.

"What have you got to do about it, anyhow?" demanded Cameron. "I don't think you've got any right to butt in here!"

"Who is that freshie?" asked Fenton.

"Frank Disbrow," replied the doctor with a smile. "He's the son of the military officer in charge of the military stations in Alaska."

The boys all turned and regarded Frank curiously.

"So that's why the walls all fell down when you knocked!" exclaimed Tommy. "That's why the federal officer refused to make any arrests. That's why Jamison returned the money and gave us the use of his motor boat. I begin to understand some of the things that took place at Cordova now. Why didn't you tell us something about it before we had all that trouble?"

"Oh, I didn't want to mix father up in the combination," Frank replied with a smile. "Besides," he added, "it did look something like piracy."

"It certainly did," observed Doctor Pelton. "If Frank hadn't been a member of the pirate crew, I rather imagine that you boys would be cooling your heels in some Alaska prison about now. Of course, you would have been released in time, but the affair would have made you considerable trouble."

"Who's Bert, then?" demanded Tommy.

"Bert is the son of a prominent federal official at Chicago," replied Frank. "But we've had enough of this," the boy declared modestly. "I didn't do any more than any other boy would have done."

"You undertook that long trip out to the cabin when you didn't have to!" exclaimed Will. "That was good of you!"

Chapter XXII

THE PLANS AT LAST

With a parting glance at Cameron and Fenton, the boys, accompanied by the doctor, turned away in the direction of the cabin.

"Wait!" shouted Fenton. "Don't go off and leave us in this plight! We'll starve to death if you do!"

"What about those plans?" demanded Will.

"I'll help you find the plans!" screamed Cameron. "I'll see that you get the plans; if you get us out of this scrape!"

"Keep still!" commanded Fenton.

"I refuse to keep still!" declared Cameron. "I'm not going to be left here to be devoured by insects. Tell me the truth about the plans," he went on, "what do you want of them?"

"We want to introduce the plans in evidence in the criminal court at Chicago," replied Will.

"And that will betray our secret," commented Fenton fiercely. "Those plans are worth millions of dollars to us! They represent the only perfect mining machine ever invented."

"We don't care anything about your mining machine," Will answered.

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about the plans?" Frank asked.

"Nothing except that they are dirty!" was the reply.

"Marked up with thumb prints, for instance?"

"Yes, there are thumb prints," replied Cameron.

"Well, we want the thumb prints," Frank laughed.

"You're a fool if you listen to any such arguments!" screamed Fenton. "Why should these gutter snipes want the papers for the thumb prints?"

"That's what we want them for!" insisted Frank. "Are you going to tell us where the plans are?"

"I'll tell you!" replied Cameron.

Fenton turned his back on his friend and refused to discuss the question further. When the lads started away carrying Cameron on a rude litter, they left his fellow conspirator lying by the fire.

"Please bring him along," pleaded Cameron. "He'll die if you leave him there! I can tell you where the plans are, and I'll do so, whether he likes it or not. This has been a misunderstanding all around. We were only trying to protect our interest in the mines which we believed to exist in this neighborhood, and in the plans, which we believed to be very valuable!"

Thus urged, the boys turned back and constructed a second stretcher for Fenton. The journey to the cabin was a long one, but the shelter was reached about daylight. Then Tommy at once began the preparation of breakfast.

"We'll have to get out pretty soon," Will laughed, "because the population of this county seems to be increasing with amazing rapidity. At the present time we have four Beavers, two Foxes, and two Bulldogs besides a very eminent surgeon. In other words," the boy went on, "we have this collection of wild animals in addition to a very eminent surgeon and two men with busted legs. If some one doesn't bring in provisions pretty soon, we'll have to exist on mosquito soup!"

"The mosquitos have been living off us long enough!" Tommy answered. "They ought not to find fault if we begin living off them!"

"I heard you boys talking about thumb prints on a set of plans," Doctor Pelton said, addressing Will. "I'd like to know what it all means."

"The story is soon told," Will answered. "On a night in Chicago not long ago, three men, Spaulding, Hurley and Babcock, worked until nearly daylight on the plans which we came to Alaska to find. They are experts in their line and were examining the plans of an invention which the inventor claimed would revolutionize mining.

"The three men rejected the plans as impractical, and Spaulding and Hurley left for home, leaving Babcock at the office. After the departure of the two men, the company's safe was broken open and robbed of a large sum of money. Naturally the men who had worked in the office during the night were questioned concerning the disappearance of the cash. Spaulding and Hurley replied, truthfully, that they had left Babcock in the office and that the safe was intact at the time of their departure.

"Babcock's reply to this statement was that he had not been at the office that night at all, and that he could furnish a perfect alibi which he proceeded to do. Spaulding and Hurley were arrested and thrown into prison, while Babcock, secure in his fraudulent alibi, was not even suspected until Mr. Horton, a noted criminal lawyer, was retained by the two respondents.

"In discussing the case, Spaulding and Hurley explained how Babcock had participated in the discussion of the plans, and added that if the plans could be found, his thumb marks would be noted on the paper. They said he handled the attached sheets carelessly, and that the marks of both thumbs showed very plainly."

"That will be a perfect defense!" said the doctor.

Cameron and Fenton who had been listening intently to the recital, now both spoke at once:

"Were the plans really rejected by the experts?" they asked.

"They certainly were!" replied Will.

"Then we've been through all this trouble for nothing!" exclaimed Fenton.

"If you two fellows hadn't been engaged in this dirty game," Will said severely, "you would have been mixed up in some other dirty deal, so you're probably no worse off than you would have been in any event."

"If you'll go to the peg driven into the wall near the north window," Cameron remarked, "pull out the peg and run your finger into the augur hole, you'll find the plans rolled into a very small package."

Will rushed to the peg indicated, and the plans were soon in his hands.

"This settles it!" exclaimed Will. "The case is finished!"

"Are the thumb marks there?" asked Frank.

"Plain as the nose on your face!" replied the boy.

"And to think that they have been right under our nose all the time!" exclaimed Tommy. "I shall

certainly have to partake of a large meal before I can recover my reason!"

"And to think that, after we came all the way to Alaska, we received the correct tip regarding the hiding place from Chicago by wireless!"

"I know how the people at Chicago came to discover the whereabouts of the plans," shouted Fenton. "There's a sneak of a clerk in the office where I was employed who gave me away. He saw me looking over the plans and betrayed me."

"Perhaps he didn't want to see you make a fool of yourself!" Will suggested. "He probably knew the plans had been rejected."

"I'll settle with him!" declared Fenton.

"If you do," Will replied, "you'll serve a term in an Alaska prison for abduction!"

"Yes," Fenton went on, "he probably wired the truth to Chicago after the search for the plans began in the office! When he saw me looking over the plans, I was obliged to tell him what they represented. I also told him where we were going to hide the plans, and of course, he had to wire that, too!"

"That clerk must be rewarded!" smiled Tommy.

Such a supper as the boys ate that night!

Notwithstanding the dreary predictions of Tommy, there was plenty of provisions in the cabin, and the party feasted on the game which was brought in as an addition to the supply until they returned to civilization.

They were obliged to bridge the chasm in order to reach Katalla, where they found the Jamison motor boat waiting for them.

They also found the wheelsman, Boswell, waiting for them there, he having made the trip from Cordova in a tug. At the request of Jamison, who had been released after the departure of the boys, he had made the journey in order to take possession of the motor boat.

When, after many delightful trips about the Gulf of Alaska, the Boy Scouts all turned their faces homeward, the wheelsman was left in charge of the boat. They afterwards learned that Jamison never claimed the craft, and that Boswell retained undisputed possession of it.

Doctor Pelton saw that Cameron and Fenton were well cared for on their arrival at Katalla, and a handsome present was sent to the federal officer by Frank Disbrow.

Frank and Bert accompanied the Boy Scouts to Chicago and later on became very warm friends. The two members of the Fox patrol, Sam White and Ed Hannon, traveled with the boys as far as Portland.

When the boys reached Chicago, Babcock was arrested and the unmistakable thumb prints secured the immediate release of Hurley and Spaulding.

"There's one thing we've forgotten," Tommy said as the boys landed in Chicago, one autumn morning.

"What's that?" asked Will.

"We neglected to bring back that bear hide!"

"I should think you'd want that bear hide!" laughed Frank.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to look the bear in the face!" declared Sandy.

The boys received the promised reward for the discovery of the plans and once more settled down in Chicago to take up their studies.

THE END.

BLACK ART IN CINCINNATI

Mr. Quinsey of Cincinnati was not an Apollo; neither had he ever assumed a name other than his own. He had never conducted a scheme to defraud by use of the mails; nor had he ever robbed a post-office or shot any body; yet his character is so interesting that I cannot, in justice to myself, omit a passing notice.

Quinsey was known as a mesmerist, a ventriloquist, an illusionist, a prestidigitator and a master of the Black Art, and occasionally in "pleasing sorcery that charms the sense" he would entertain audiences at church fairs, picnics and the like for simple fees, while he found much pleasure

amusing friends gratuitously at their homes, at his home and sometimes at his place of business.

One evening, at a little entertainment given by himself in neighboring Glendale, after he had knocked the spots off of several decks of cards; after he had taken half a dozen watches that belonged to people in the audience from the janitor's pocket; after he had received communications from departed spirits; after he had removed the head from a beautiful woman and had made the removed head talk; after he had paralyzed four men and a woman on the stage and had allowed the committee to stick pins in them, and after the curtain had dropped, one of the awestricken auditors, who had been instrumental in introducing Mr. Quinsey in Glendale, asked the wonderful magician why he did not follow this business in preference to any other?

The professor smiled blandly and appeared silent, but a voice that seemed to come from the bakery underneath the hall, was heard to remark in a deep melodious tone: "He has something better."

Quinsey was superintendent of what was known as the night set in the registry division of the Cincinnati post-office, and his hours of labor were from 10:30 P. M. to 7 A. M. In this set were employed six or seven clerks who worked under the superintendant's direction, and who performed practically the same kind of work that he did. It was their duty to properly record all registered matter that arrived in Cincinnati between 4 P. M. and midnight from the various railroad lines centering there, rebill it and pouch it in the through registry pouches to be dispatched in the morning.

There were something like thirty bills to make out, and the same number of pouches to properly close and send out. When the mails were running heavy the clerks never had a minute to spare, but when they were light, as they frequently were one or two nights each week, there was some opportunity for sociability and innocent amusement.

On these occasions Quinsey would sometimes tell the boys how easy it was for people to be mistaken; how much quicker was the hand than the eye; how it was that frequently things were not what they appeared; how easy it was to deceive the keenest intellect by doing something different than your actions would indicate, and how figures and objects are materialized and made to do their master's bidding.

Sometimes he would illuminate his ideas by a few practical illustrations, and after the young men had seen him shake any number of big silver dollars, a wheelbarrow full of handkerchiefs, and a lot of lanterns from a common gesture, and, in transfixed amazement, had beheld ordinary registered letters vanish before their eyes, without being able to tell where they went, they longed for the nights to come when the work was light. Quinsey was immense!

About this time, while in Chicago, Kidder came to me for conference with an armful of documentary evidence of skillful depredations. Here were the envelopes in which registered letters had from time to time been mailed at offices in Southern Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia, addressed to offices in all portions of the great Northwest, and which had been rifled of large portions of their contents. Everyone of the letters had passed through the Chicago post-office, where they had been handled during the night time. At first glance one would say it surely indicated trouble in Chicago.

But why, if the thief was in Chicago, did he confine himself to operations on the letters from this particular section, when he could probably have access to those from any other as well. A few minutes later when we discovered that everyone of the letters referred to had also passed through the Cincinnati office, and in every instance had been dispatched from that office in the morning in through pouches to Chicago, Kidder adjusted his eye-glasses, and offered as a reward, for the capture of the villain, a claim near that beautiful miniature salt-water sea, known as Devil's Lake in Dakota.

On the following morning when I tapped Herrick on the shoulder in Cincinnati, and asked who wrote the Chicago registry bills at night that were dispatched in the morning, he answered, "Quinsey," and seemed so amused at my question that he asked why I wanted to know.

"For the reason that I think whoever is doing it is too inquisitive."

"Well, if its Quinsey, I am afraid we'll have our hands full to catch him, for he's just a little bit the slickest man in America. He does all the seemingly impossible things ever heard of, and he does them right before your eyes, too. Quinsey is absolutely marvelous. Why, one night I was in the registry room looking around when, suddenly, I discovered my watch was gone. I had looked to see what time it was when I entered. Well, a little later somebody found it in the Boston pouch, with a tag on it marked: 'Covington.'"

"Yes," said Salmon, who was listening, "and I understand he charms birds, too; while somebody told me a few days ago that at cards he was so expert that nobody would sit in with him; that when it came his deal he could hold anything he wanted; that the high cards, figuratively speaking, would come to him in carriages; and remain till after the show-down."

The next day I went to Lexington, Ky., and while there I wrote a letter to Mr. Abram Hayden, of Aberdeen, Dakota, on one of the letter-head sheets of Mills, Jackson & Johnson, which read as follows:

"Dear friend Abe:

Jim Turner was in from East Hickman half an hour ago and left the enclosed \$200 for me to send to you, and he said you would know how to use it. He has just sold a car-load of mules to Springer, of Cincinnati, but he said he believed there was more profit in loaning money at 20 per cent. in Dakota, than there was in raising mules in Kentucky at present prices.

Say, Abe, when are you coming back after Mary? I heard Min. Stevens and some of the girls in her set say it was considered a sure thing. Hope it is; for of all the real fine blue-grass girls around these parts I think Mary is the—well never mind, old boy, if I wasn't married I'd try and prevent her going to Dakota. You better hurry up.

Jim just stuck his head in the door and told me to tell you if you couldn't get a gilt edge loan at 20, not to let it go less than 18. Jim is a cuss.

I suppose your brother wrote you what happened up at Gil. Harper's recently.

If the cyclones haven't got you by the time this reaches Aberdeen, write.

Very truly, your friend,
FRANK N. MILLS."

This letter I registered at Lexington and at night, about 11 o'clock, when I had followed it into the Cincinnati post-office, Herrick and Salmon were in the money-order division on a step-ladder, peering through a glass transom into the registry division. As soon as possible I joined them, and patiently we waited for Quinsey to turn a trick.

It was exactly two A. M. when he commenced on the Chicago bill. He reached the letter from Lexington at precisely 2:45. It was fat and tempting. Herrick was on the top of the ladder at that instant, and he sent a peculiar thrill of surprise through me when he turned and whispered:

"Hush, hush, he has picked it up.

"Now he's feeling of it.

"He's looking at the back of the of the R. P. E. (the outside envelope) to see how well it's sealed.

"He's laid it down and placed a book over it; somebody is moving around.

"It's quiet now and he's looking at the back again.

"Hush, don't move, he's carefully feeling again.

"It's under the blotter now; somebody at the other table got up to get a drink. There's no one at his table but himself.

"Hush now, he's making a close examination to see how well its sealed.

"Hush now, for God's sake don't move; he's trying to open it with his knife.

"Hush, hush, hush, he'll have it opened in an instant.

"Its open now, and he's looking at the letter envelope very closely.

"There, d—n it, some fellow has moved again and he's shoved it under the blotter.

"Hush, hush, don't stir; he's feeling of the letter again.

"Hush, don't breathe, he's trying to raise the flap of the envelope; it comes up hard; don't move."

"There, there, there, he's got it up.

"Hush, he's got the money out and is reading the letter."

"He's smiling as he reads.

"We must open the door and rush, in now."

"Come, be quick and be quiet; you know he's chain lightning."

"The door's unlocked; now, all together, go!"

An instant later there was a flutter, and all was over. The great conjurer had at last performed an illusion that was not optical—an act not mentioned on the bill.

Applause. Curtain. Prison.

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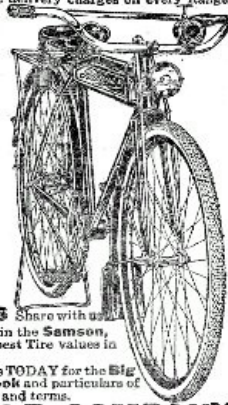
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