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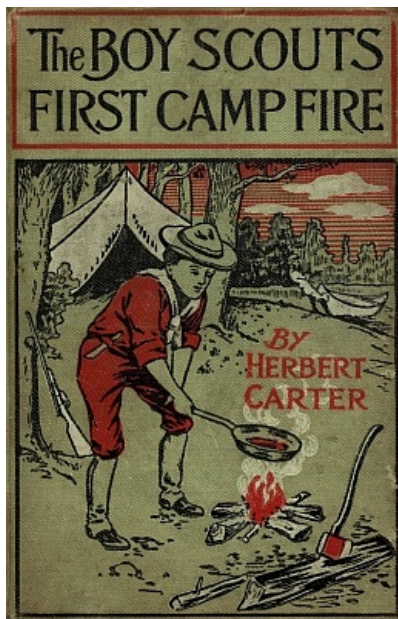
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS' FIRST CAMP FIRE; OR,
SCOUTING WITH THE SILVER FOX PATROL ***

[1]



The announcement of the bear by Davy Jones was succeeded by a mad scramble of every boy to reach a place of safety. [Page 48.](#)

The Boy Scouts' First Camp Fire.

The Boy Scouts' First Camp Fire

OR

Scouting with the Silver Fox Patrol.

By HERBERT CARTER

Author of "The Boy Scouts In the Blue Ridge," "The Boy Scouts On the Trail," "The Boy Scouts In the Maine Woods," "The Boy Scouts Through the Big Timber," "The Boy Scouts



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THE BOY SCOUTS' FIRST CAMP FIRE.

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THE BOY SCOUTS' FIRST CAMP-FIRE.

CHAPTER I.

A HALT BY THE ROADSIDE.

"Tara—tara!"

Loud and clear sounded the notes of a bugle, blown by a very stout lad, clad in a new suit of khaki; and who was one of a bunch of Boy Scouts tramping wearily along a dusty road.

"Good for you, Bumpus! Can't he just make that horn talk, though?" cried one.

"Sounds as sweet as the church bell at home, fellows!" declared a second.

"Say, Mr. Scout-Master, does that mean a halt for grub?" a third called out.

"Sure, Giraffe. Brace up old fellow. You'll have your jaws working right soon, now. And here's a dandy little spring, right among the trees! How shady and cool it looks, Thad."

"That's why we kept on for an hour after noon," remarked the boy called Thad, and who seemed to be a person of some authority; "when all you scouts wanted to stop and rest. You see Davy, Allan here, and myself made a note of that same spring the other day, when we came along on horseback, spying out the lay of the land." [4]

"Well, now," remarked the boy called Davy, as he threw himself down to stretch; "that's what our instruction book says,—a true scout always has his eyes and ears open to see and hear everything. The more things you can remember in a store window, after only a minute to look, the further up you are, see?"

The boy called Thad not only wore a rather seedy and faded scout khaki uniform; while those of all his comrades were almost brand new; but he had several merit badges fastened on the left side of his soft shirt.

These things would indicate that Thad Brewster must have been connected with some patrol, or troop of Boy Scouts, in the town where he formerly lived before his father, dying, left him in charge of the queer old bachelor uncle who was known far and wide among the boys of Scranton as plain "Daddy Brewster"—nobody ever understood why, save that he just loved all manner of young people.

In fact, it was a memory of the good times which he had enjoyed in the past that influenced Thad to start the ball rolling for a troop of scouts in Scranton. In this endeavor he had found energetic backing; and the Silver Fox Patrol of the troop was now starting out upon its first hike, to be gone several days. [5]

Several of the eight boys forming this patrol were lagging more or less along the dusty road; for the brisk walk on this summer day had tired them considerably.

At the cheery notes of the bugle, blown by "Bumpus" Hawtree, the stray ones in uniform quickened their pace, so as to close up. Of course the stout youth had another name, and a very good one too, having been christened Cornelius Jasper. But his chums had long ago almost forgotten it, and as Bumpus he was known far and wide.

He was a good-natured chap, clumsy in his way, but always willing to oblige, and exceedingly curious. Indeed, his mates in the patrol declared Bumpus ought to have been born a girl, as he always wanted to "poke his nose into anything queer that happened to attract his attention." And this failing, of course, was going to get Bumpus into a lot of trouble, sooner or later.

His one best quality was a genuine love for music. He could play any sort of instrument; and had besides a wonderfully sweet high soprano voice, which he was always ready to use for the pleasure of his friends. That promised many a happy night around the camp-fire, when once the Silver Fox Patrol had become fully established. [6]

And this love of music which the fat boy possessed had made the selection of a bugler for Cranford Troop the easiest thing possible. He actually had no competitor.

Presently the entire eight lads had thrown themselves down in such positions as seemed to appeal to them. Some lay flat on their stomachs, and drank from the overflow of the fine little spring; while others scooped up the water in the cup formed by the palms of their hands.

One rather tall boy, with flaxen hair, and light dreamy blue eyes, took out his handkerchief, carefully dusted the ground where he meant to sit, then having deposited himself in a satisfactory manner, he opened the haversack he had been carrying, taking out some of the contents very carefully.

"My! but they're packed smartly, all right, Smithy," remarked the fellow who had responded to

the name of Davy Jones; "you certainly take a heap of trouble to have things just so. My duds were just tossed in as they came. Threatened to jump on 'em so as to crowd the bunch in tighter. What are you looking for now?"

"Why, my drinking cup, to be sure," replied the other, lifting his eyebrows in surprise, as if he could not understand why any one would be so silly as to lie down and drink—just like an animal, when nice little aluminum collapsible cups could be procured so cheaply.

[7]

And having presently found what he wanted, he deliberately returned each article to its proper place in the carryall before he allowed himself the pleasure of a cooling drink. But at least he had one satisfaction; being the possessor of a cup allowed him the privilege of dipping directly into the fountain head, the limpid spring itself.

They called him just plain "Smithy," but of course such an elegant fellow had a handle to the latter part of his name. It was Edmund Maurice Travers Smith; but you could never expect a parcel of American boys to bother with such a tremendous tongue-twisting name as that. Hence the Smithy.

While the whole patrol, taking out the lunch that had been provided, and which one of them, evidently from the South from the soft tones of his voice, called a "snack," were eating we might as well be making the acquaintance of the rest.

The Southern lad was named Robert Quail White. A few of his chums addressed him as plain Bob; but the oddity of the combination appealed irresistibly to their sense of humor, and "Bob White" it became from that time on. Sometimes they called to him with the well-known whistle of a quail; and he always responded.

There was a very tall fellow, with a remarkably long neck. "Giraffe" he had become when years younger, and the name was likely to stick to him even after he got into college. When his attention was called to anything, Conrad Stedman usually stretched his neck in a way that gave him a great advantage over his fellows. He was sometimes a little touchy; but gave promise of proving himself a good scout, being willing to learn, faithful, and obliging.

[8]

Another of the patrol had a rather melancholy look. This was Stephen Bingham. He might have gone to the end of the chapter as plain Steve; but when a little fellow at school, upon being asked his name, he had pronounced it as if a compound word; and ever since he was known as Step-hen Bingham. Whenever he felt like sending his companions into fits of laughter Step-hen would show the whites of his eyes, and look frightened. He could never find his things, and was forever appealing to the others to know whether they had seen some article he had misplaced. Step-hen evidently had much to learn before he could qualify for the degree of a first-class scout.

The one who seemed to be second in Command of the little detachment was a quiet looking boy. Allan Hollister had been raised after a fashion that as he said "gave him the bumps of experience." Part of his life had been spent in the Adirondacks and in Maine; so that he really knew by actual participation in the work what the other lads were learning from the books they read.

He lived with his mother, said to be a widow. They seemed to have plenty of money; but Allan was often sighing, as though somehow his thoughts turned back to former scenes, and he longed to return to Maine again.

[9]

Here then was the complete roster of the Silver Fox Patrol of Cranford Troop, as called by the secretary, Bob White, at each and every meeting.

1. Thad Brewster, Patrol Leader, and Assistant Scout-Master.
2. Allan Hollister, upon whom the responsibility rested after Thad.
3. Cornelius Hawtree.
4. Robert Quail White.
5. Edmund Maurice Travers Smith.
6. Conrad Stedman.
7. Davy Jones.
8. Stephen Bingham.

Of course, as the rules of the organization provided, there was a genuine scout-master to accompany the boys when possible, and look after their moral welfare; as well as act as a brake upon the natural exuberance of their spirits. This was a young man who was studying medicine with Dr. Calkins in the town of Cranford. Frequently the clever young M.D. could not keep his appointments with his boys; at such times he had to delegate to Thad his duties. And to tell the truth when they learned that as the elder doctor was sick himself, their scout-master would be unable to accompany them on this, their first real hike and outing, none of the scouts felt very sorry.

[10]

"Pretty near time we started again for the lake, isn't it, Thad?" demanded Step-hen, something like an hour after they had stopped to break the march with a bite and a cool drink.

"Oh! please let me finish this little grub," called out Giraffe, who was tremendously fond of eating; "it's a shame to waste it. You stopped me from making a fire you know, Thad; and I fell behind the rest of you that way."

"I never saw such a fellow, always crazy to set fire to things," remarked Davy Jones. "He'll burn the whole world up some day."

"I expect to set the river on fire when I get in business," grinned Giraffe.

"Give the signal to fall in, Mr. Bugler—but I say, where *is* Bumpus anyway?" asked the acting scout-master, looking around.

"Oh! he went wandering away some time ago," remarked Davy. "But here's his horn; let's see if I can blow the old thing."

He put the shining instrument to his lips, puffed out his cheeks, and emitted a frightful groaning sound. The rest of the scouts had just started to laugh when there came a strange, rattling noise from the woods near by, as though a landslide might be in progress. And accompanying the racket they heard a feeble voice that must belong to Bumpus, though no one recognized it, calling out:

[11]

"Help! help! Oh, somebody come quick, and save me!"

With that call every member of the scout patrol leaped erect, staring at one another in dismay.

[12]

CHAPTER II.

THE PRISONER OF THE TREE STUMP.

"Oh! perhaps a wolf has got poor Bumpus!" exclaimed Smithy, who had never had any real experience in the woods, and was therefore a genuine "greenhorn" scout.

"Or a bear!" suggested Step-hen.

Thad was not the one to stand and speculate, when a comrade appeared to be in deep trouble, so he immediately cried out:

"Get your staves, and come along, everybody; no; you stay with our knapsacks, to guard them, Bob White. This may be some trick of Brose Griffin and his cronies to steal our stuff. This way, the rest of you, boys!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Step-hen, showing great animation; but cautiously falling in the rear of the procession that went rushing into the depths of the woods.

"Which way did it come from, Thad?" asked Smithy; who, despite his girl-like neatness of person and belongings, and dainty ways, was close to the leader, his face whiter than usual, but his eyes flashing with unaccustomed fire.

[13]

"I think over in this direction," said Davy Jones, before the leader could reply.

"Listen!" commanded Thad, as he held up his hand, bringing them all to a halt. Straining their ears, each scout tried to catch some sound that would give him the privilege of being the first to point to the spot where Bumpus was in sore need of assistance.

"I think I heard a groan!" remarked Step-hen, in an awe-struck voice, that trembled in spite of his effort to seem brave.

"So did I," declared Allan; "and it was over yonder to the left."

Accordingly the six boys went helter-skelter into the underbrush, making all the noise an elephant might in pushing through the woods. Perhaps it was only the result of their eagerness to reach the companion, who seemed to be in trouble; and then again, a racket like that might frighten away any wild beast that had attempted to carry their stout bugler away.

"Stop again, and listen," said Thad, half a minute later. "We must be near the place where that groan came from. Hear it again, anybody?"

"Help! oh, help! they're eating me alive!" came in a muffled voice from some unknown place near by.

Thrilled by the words, and half expecting to see some savage monster struggling with their fellow scout, the six boys stared about them in dismay. Not the first sign could they see of either Bumpus or the attacking beast.

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"Where under the sun can he be?" exclaimed Giraffe.

"Perhaps it was a big eagle, or a hawk; and it's carried him up into a tree!" suggested Step-hen; and strange to say, no one even laughed at the silly idea.

"Allan has guessed it!" cried Smithy, who had chanced to see a little smile chase across the

face of the boy from Maine.

"Where is he, then?" asked Thad, wheeling on his second in command.

"I think if you move over to that big old tree-trunk yonder, you'll find Bumpus, sir," replied Allan, making the scout salute; for he believed in carrying out the rules of the organization when on duty, as at present.

"But we can see the whole thing from top to bottom, and never a sign of Bumpus anywhere?" remarked Step-hen, doubtfully.

"And he ain't such a little chap that he could hide under the bark of a dead tree either," remarked Davy, scornfully.

Thad was already advancing upon the stump in question. Perhaps he had caught the hidden meaning to Allan's words; and could give a pretty good guess as to why the other smiled.

[15]

"Surround the stump, scouts!" he ordered; and the boys immediately started to obey, holding their stout staves in readiness to resist an attack, if so be some unseen wild beast made a sudden leap.

"Say, it's all a mistake; there ain't a blessed thing here!" grumbled Step-hen, when, after reaching a point on the other side of the immense stump, he could see the entire surface of its trunk, some three feet through, possibly more.

"Yes there is; and I want to get out the worst kind! Ouch! they're biting me like hot cakes! I'm getting poisoned, I know I am! Oh! dear!" came the muffled voice that they knew belonged to Bumpus.

"Whoop! he's *in* the old stump!" shouted Davy Jones, starting to grin broadly.

"That's right," replied the unseen Bumpus; "but please don't stand there, and guy a poor feller, boys. Do something for me before I'm a goner. Oh! how they are going for me though! I'm beginning to swell up like anything! Be quick, Thad, Allan, and the rest of you!"

"But what's biting him, do you think?" said Step-hen, looking serious again. "Can it be rattlesnakes, Thad, or bumble-bees?"

"Hardly," replied the other, readily; "I'd expect rather that it was ants. What do you say, Allan?"

"No doubt of it," came from the boy who had practical experience in the ways of the woods. "They like to make their nests in old dead trees. But ask Bumpus."

[16]

Evidently the boy who was imprisoned inside the stump of the forest monarch must have heard every word spoken by his mates, without, for he instantly called aloud:

"Yes, that's what it is, ants, and they are fierce, I tell you. I'm covered all over right now with lumps as big as hickory nuts. Be quick, boys, and get me out!"

"How under the sun d'ye think he ever got inside that stump; for the life of me I can't see any hole down here?" Davy asked, wonderingly.

"He must have fallen in through the top," replied Allan, casting a quick glance up toward the place in question. "The old thing's hollow, and it gave way under Bumpus."

"Sure, that's the way!" called out the unseen sufferer, eagerly. "Get a move on you, fellers. I want to breathe some fresh air, and take some stuff for all these poisonous bites."

"But what were you doing up that stump?" demanded Step-hen; while Thad and Allan were examining the remains of the once proud tree, as if to decide what ought to be done, in order to rescue the unlucky scout.

"I know what ails Bumpus," cried Davy; "his old curiosity bump was working overtime, and coaxed him to climb up there."

[17]

"Well, how'd I know the old thing'd give in with me like that?" protested the other, faintly. "I saw a bee going in a hole up there; and you know I'm just crazy to find a wild bees' nest in a hollow tree, because I dote on honey. But I was mistaken about that; it's ants biting me; because I caught one on my cheek after he'd taken a nibble. Oh! ain't they making me a sight, though? Where's Thad? I hope you don't just go on, and leave me here to die, boys. Please get busy!"

"Just hold up a little, Bumpus," called Thad, cheerily. "We haven't any rope to pull you up again; and besides, Allan says the top of the rotten stump would like as not give way, if anybody tried to stand on it. But I've sent Giraffe back to the spring after the ax we carried. We'll just have to cut a hole, and let you climb out that way."

"But be careful not to give me a jab, won't you, please, Thad?" asked the other, between his groans. "I'm bad enough off as it is, without losing a leg."

"Don't be afraid," replied the scout-master; "we're going to let Allan do the job, and few fellows know how to handle an ax as well as he does. And here's the tool right now; Giraffe made pretty quick time."

"But what do you want me to do?" asked the prisoner of the stump, piteously.

"Why, here's a hole already, big enough for me to stick my hand in; feel that, do you, Bumpus?" and Thad inserted his hand, to clutch the leg of the other. [18]

"Oh! how you scared me at first, Thad; I sure thought it was a wildcat, or something, that had grabbed me. I'm trembling all over, what with the bites, the tumble, and the excitement."

"Now keep as far back from this side as you can," continued the other. "Is the hollow big enough to allow that, Bumpus?"

"It surely is, Thad," replied the other, somewhat more cheerfully, as if the confident manner in which Thad went about his business reassured him. "Guess there must be nearly a foot of space between."

"That's fine," Thad went on to say; "now keep back, and leave it all to Allan. He's going to commence chopping."

Immediately there sounded the stroke of the descending ax.

"Huh! went all the way through, that time," said Step-hen, who was watching the operation closely; "reckon the old tree must be as rotten as punk."

"Make a dandy blaze, all right," ventured Giraffe, whose mind was bent on fires, so that he never lost a chance for making one; and who loved to sit and watch it burn, much as the old fire worshippers might have done in long-ago times.

"Take care, Allan," remarked Thad; "don't strike so hard next time. Why, you'll knock a hole in that stump in a jiffy. It's only a shell." [19]

"I could drop the whole thing in fifteen minutes, believe me," answered the boy who wielded the ax so cleverly, having learned the trick from the native woodsmen up in Maine, his native State.

Again the sharp-edged tool descended; and the hole grew considerably larger. The prisoner kept urging them to make more haste, and exclaim that he was swelling up so fast as a result of his bites, that he'd soon be unable to crawl out, even if half the tree trunk were chopped away.

But Allan was a methodical chap, and could not be urged into carelessness when making use of such a dangerous tool as a keen-edged ax. He chopped close to the imaginary line he had drawn; and as large chips fell in a shower the aperture increased in size until they could see the lower limbs of the prisoner.

"Can't you drop down on your hands and knees, Bumpus?" called Thad. "I should think the hole was big enough now to let you get out."

"Oh! I'll try," wailed the other; "I'm willing to do anything you say, Thad, if only you can patch me up, and keep me from bursting. There, I did manage to squeeze down on my knees; but I don't believe I can ever get through."

"We're willing to help you, old fellow," remarked Davy, as he seized hold of a hand; while Step-hen took the other; and between them they pulled, while Bumpus used his legs to kick backward; and finally he was dragged triumphantly out of his strange prison. [20]

But when the boys saw his swollen face they stopped their loud laughing; for although the fat boy tried to grin good-naturedly, he was such a sight that pity took the place of merriment in the hearts of his chums.

The vicious ants had really bitten his cheeks so that they were swollen up very much, and Bumpus looked like a boy with the mumps. [21]

CHAPTER III.

THE ACCUSATION MADE BY STEP-HEN.

"Am I going to swell up any more, Thad; and will you just have to put hoops on me to keep me from bursting?" asked Bumpus, earnestly.

The other fellows wanted to laugh, but to their credit be it said that they restrained this feeling. It would be heartless, with poor Bumpus looking so badly.

"Oh! don't get that notion into your head," said the young leader; for as assistant scout-master, in the absence of Dr. Philander, Thad was supposed to take charge of the troop, and assume all his duties; "here, fellows, bring him along back to the spring. I've got something in my haversack the doctor gave me, that ought to help Bumpus."

"Was it meant for ant bites, Thad, do you know?" asked the victim, as he allowed his comrades to urge him along slowly; while he rubbed, first one part of his person, and then another, as the various swellings stung in succession.

"Well, he really said it was to be used in case any of us got scratched by a wild animal, and there was danger of poisoning; but it strikes me it would be a good antiseptic, he called it, in this case."

[22]

Having reached the spot where Bob White still faithfully stood guard over their few belongings, Thad hurriedly threw open his bundle, and took out a little package carefully wrapped up. It contained rolls of soft white linen to be used for bandages in case of need; adhesive plaster, also in small rolls; and a few common remedies such as camphor, arnica, and the like, intended for ailments boys may invite when overeating, or partaking too freely of green apples.

"Here it is," he remarked, holding up a small bottle.

"How purple it looks," observed Davy Jones, curiously; "and what's this on the label, here. 'Permaganate of Potash, No. 6; to be painted on the scratch; and used several times if necessary.' That's Doc. Philander's writing, sure."

"It looks pretty tough," commented Giraffe.

"The remedy is sometimes worse than the disease, they say," remarked Smithy.

"You don't think it'll hurt much, do you, Thad?" asked the victim, trying to smile, but unable, on account of his swollen cheeks.

"Not a bit, I understand," came the reassuring reply. "Besides, I should think that you wouldn't hold back, even if it did, Bumpus. You're in a bad way, and I've just got to counteract that poison before your eyes close up."

[23]

"Go on, use the whole bottle if you want to," urged the alarmed boy.

"The only bad thing about it is that this stuff stains like fun, and you'll be apt to look like a wild Indian for a day or two," Thad observed, as he started to apply the potash with a small camel's hair brush brought for the purpose.

"Little I care about that, so long as it does the business," replied Bumpus; and so the amateur doctor continued to dab each bite with the lavender-colored fluid until the patient looked as though he might be some strange freak intended for a dime museum.

Of course that was too much for the other boys. They snickered behind their hands, and presently broke out into a yell that awoke the echoes. Bumpus only nodded his head at them, for he was a very good-natured fellow.

"Laugh away and welcome, boys," he remarked, grimly. "Feels better already, Thad, and if the stuff will only do the business I don't care what happens. Besides, the fellows must have their fun. But they wouldn't think it a joke if any of them had climbed up, looking for a honey pot, and dropped through the rotten stuff that covered the hole in the top of that stump."

"Well," said Step-hen, "if it had been our monkey, now. He'd have had a great time climbing out; but Davy could have done it; he's more at home in a tree than on the ground."

[24]

He said this because the Jones boy was as nimble as an ape when he found an opportunity to show off his gymnastics; he dearly loved to hang from a limb by his toes, and carry on like a circus athlete or trapeze performer.

"Do we make a start now?" asked Bob White; "exactly fifteen minutes spent, suh, in rescuing our comrade in distress."

"Are you able to walk with us, Bumpus?" asked Thad.

"Oh! I guess I can amble along somehow," responded the fat boy; "but please detail a couple of scouts to keep near me, in case I begin to swell again. I'm sorry we haven't got a rope along; because I'd feel safer if I had one wrapped around me right now."

"Where's my campaign hat?" burst out Step-hen just then; "anybody seen it layin' around loose? I declare to goodness it's queer how *my* things always seem to disappear. I often think there must be some magic about it."

"Huh! the only trouble is you never keep a blessed thing where it belongs," declared Davy, in scorn. "Now, there's Smithy, who goes to just the opposite extreme; he's too particular, and wastes time, which a true scout should never do. The rest of us try to be half-way decent; and you notice we seldom lose anything. There's your old hat right now, just where you flung it when we dropped down here."

[25]

"Oh! thank you, Davy; perhaps I am just a little careless, as you say; but all the same it's funny how *my* things always go. Hope, now, I don't lose that splendid little aluminum compass I bought the other day, thinking that it might save me from getting lost in the woods some time."

"Oh! come along, old slow-poke, we're going to start There's Bumpus trying to screw his lips into a pucker right now, so he can blow the bugle. Ain't he got the grit, though, to attend to his business with that swollen face?"

Presently, after the inspiring notes of the bugle had sounded, the patrol once more took up its line of march. Each scout had his staff in his hand, and carried a haversack on his back. Blankets

they had none, for all those necessary things had been entrusted to the care of a farmer, whose route home from early market took him near the intended camping place on Lake Omega; a beautiful, if wild looking sheet of water some miles in length, and situated about ten from Cranford town.

Allan and Thad headed the procession that soon straggled in couples along the side of the dusty road.

"What made you mention the name of Brose Griffin when you detailed Number Four to remain at the camp?" asked Allan, who had evidently been thinking about this same thing. [26]

"Well," replied the scout-master, "it flashed into my mind that these tough fellows might have dogged us up here, to play some of their tricks on us when in camp; and that holding Bumpus was meant to draw the rest off, so they could run away with our haversacks, which they knew must contain lots of things we couldn't well get on without in camp."

"Smithy couldn't if his hair brush and his little whisk broom were missing," declared Allan, with a chuckle. "Why, that boy seems to only live to fight against dirt. He's the most particular fellow I ever knew."

"Oh! wait and see how he gets over that before he's been a scout two months," said Thad, also laughing. "Nothing like the rough and ready life in camp and on the march to cure a boy of being over-clean. He'd never learn any different at home, you know, because his mother is the same way, and brought him up pretty much like a girl. But he's reached the point now where the true boy nature is beginning to get the better of that false pride."

"But seriously, Thad, do you believe we'll see anything of Brose Griffin and his two shadows, Bangs and Hop?"

"I certainly hope we won't," replied the other; "but you know what they are; and I've been told that they went around asking all sorts of questions about where we intended to make our first camp-fire. It wouldn't surprise me much if they did try to give us trouble." [27]

"What will we do if it happens that way?" asked Allan.

"Defend ourselves, to be sure," replied the scout-master, promptly, as he gave a weed a snap with his staff that cut its top off neatly.

"But scouts are not supposed to fight; that is one of the principles of the organization," Allan remarked.

"In a way you're right," replied the other, slowly; "that is, no true scout will ever seek a fight; but there may be times when he has to enter into one in order to defend himself, or save a comrade from being badly hurt. You know the twelve rules we all subscribed to when we joined the Silver Fox Patrol, Allan? Suppose you run them over right now?"

"Oh! that's easy," laughed the second in command. "A scout must be trustworthy, loyal, helpful to others, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient to his superiors, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent."

"Well, in order to be brave, and helpful to others, he may even have to fight; but he is expected only to resort to such extreme measures when every other means fail. And if those three roughs come playing their jokes around our camp we'll try and speak decently with them first. Then, if that doesn't work, they'd better look out." [28]

The way Thad snapped his teeth shut when saying those last few words told what he would be apt to do if forced into the last ditch by circumstances over which he had no control.

"I hope we can coax Giraffe to quit trying to make fires all the time," said Allan. "It's a dangerous thing to do in the woods. Why, up in Maine every hunter has to employ a licensed guide just to make sure he doesn't leave a camp-fire burning behind him when he breaks camp, which the rising wind would scatter into the brush, so that valuable timber would be burned, and heaps of damage done. I've stood my turn as a fire guard myself in the Fall, and was hired by the State too."

"Listen, would you?" said Thad, just then; "what do you suppose is the matter between Bumpus and Step-hen now? The chances are he's gone and lost something again and is accusing poor old Bumpus of taking it. Let's wait for them here, and settle the trouble."

The two in question brought up the van of the trailing patrol. As they came along Step-hen was venting his disgust as usual over the "mighty queer way" *his* things had of vanishing without anybody ever touching them. [29]

"What's gone now, Step-hen?" asked Thad, as they came up, still wrangling.

"Why, just to think," called out Bumpus, "he says I never gave him back that new compass of his, after he showed me how it worked, before we started on this hike; and I say I did. As if I'd want to take his silly compass, when I learned how to tell north from the mossy side of a tree, and the way the sun hangs out up there."

"Well, I just can't find it on me anywhere," complained Step-hen; "and as I remembered showing it to Bumpus, I thought he was setting up a game on me by hiding it somewhere about

him. He wouldn't let me look in his pack, either, you know."

"Course I wouldn't!" cried the fat boy, indignantly; "because that'd look like I half admitted the charge. Guess I know enough about law to understand that. Just you think real hard, Step-hen, and p'raps you'll remember where you put it; but don't throw it up at me, please."

The other grumbled something, but made no further charge. From the suspicious way in which he looked at Bumpus out of the corners of his eyes, it was plain that his mind was far from convinced, and that missing compass would be apt to make trouble during the whole trip.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THE FIRE WAS KINDLED.

"How are you feeling now, Bumpus?" asked Thad, some time later, as he once more stopped to allow all the stragglers pull up; for some of the boys were beginning to look rather fagged, though they tried to hide the telltale signs, being too proud to own up to any weakness that ill became a scout.

"Pretty ragged, to tell the truth," replied the fat boy, who was puffing as he came along. "It ain't the poison I've absorbed in my system, so much as a weakness that just makes me shiver all over. And Thad, I've walked this far before, and never felt like this, either."

"Oh! I expected that you'd have that sort of a spell," remarked the other. "You see, that tumble, and the shock of feeling something biting you, that was terrible because you were in the dark, must have given your nervous system a bad jolt. But keep up if you can, Bumpus. In a little while now we'll be near the lake, and our first camp."

"And just think of it, boys, what a roaring old fire we'll have to-night," spoke up Giraffe, craning his long neck to glance around the circle that had gathered about the leader.

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"You'll just leave all that to me, Giraffe," said the patrol leader, sternly. "Here we are about to get into our first camp, and begin to take up the duties all scouts ought to learn, so they can take care of themselves, and be of help to others in the woods. And let me tell you, the first camp-fire is too serious a thing for you to start it off-hand. So I positively forbid you to think of using a single match to-night without permission."

Giraffe shrank back, looking crushed. He had been building high hopes on having unlimited chances for carrying out his favorite diversion, once away from the restraints of civilization. But he must learn by degrees, possibly through sad experience, that a fire is just as terrible in the wilderness, once it gets beyond control, as in a settled community. It is a good servant, but a very bad master.

"How far is the lake from here, would you say, Thad?" asked Davy Jones.

"Not over two miles," was the reply. "You notice that the country is getting wilder the further we go. And around Lake Omega they say it beats everything, for you can't see a single house."

"How does it come that this lake, lying so close to Cranford, has never been visited by any of you fellows?" asked Bob White, who, being a comparative newcomer, like Allan and Thad, could not be supposed to know as much about things as the rest of the scouts, who had been born in Cranford, and brought up there.

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"Why, you see for a long time all this country up here was owned by a rich man, who meant to make a game preserve out of it. He even had a high wire fence built around part of the tract, including the lake, and kept game keepers here, so nobody could get in to steal a single fish. But he died before he ever had a chance to finish the job; and his widow sold the ground to a lumber concern, that never cared a thing for game. Chances are there'll be some high old hunting around up here this Fall; and I'm going to get in on it if I can."

It was Davy Jones who gave this information. He had a father who was said to be a very smart lawyer; and Davy bade fair to follow in his footsteps. At least, the boy was never asleep when anything was going on; and he could easily subscribe to that scout injunction which requires that a boy keep his eyes and ears open, in order to learn things the ordinary person would never see nor hear.

Once more they took up the march, Bumpus being a little refreshed from the halt. A couple of the other fellows kept near him from now on, and even linked arms with the fat boy, who was universally well liked on account of his disposition being sunny, no matter whether in fair weather or in storm.

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Along about four in the afternoon a shout arose.

"I see water ahead!" yelled Giraffe, who had managed to get in ahead of the others.

"Well, with that neck you ought to be able to see anything," called out Bumpus, from further back in the line.

"I guess I could see whether a bee went into a hole in a stump, or just swung past," retorted the other. "But there's your lake, fellows; and we're right close up on the same, now. Just look through that opening in the trees; see the sun shining on the little waves. Say, don't it look fine, though? Talking about fires—but that'll keep," as he saw the patrol leader turn his eyes quickly upon him.

Every one felt like quickening his pace, even the weary Bumpus. Step-hen seemed especially solicitous about the welfare of his stout comrade, for he kept hovering near him, offering to lend his arm, or do any other kindly act. Bumpus eyed him a little suspiciously, as though he had an idea the other might have some dark motive in being so extra kind.

"See here, Step-hen," he declared once, when the other slipped an arm through his and helped him on his way; "I reckon you're thinking that if you're good to me I'll own up to taking that beastly little compass of yours, eh? Well, just get that notion out of your head, won't you? Because I ain't goin' to confess to something I never did. And don't you say compass to me again, hear?"

[34]

"Oh! never mind," said Step-hen, very sweetly, for him, and with a curious smile that made the fat boy uneasy; "of course if you say you didn't keep it, there must be some mistake; only it seems mighty funny how *my* things are always disappearing, and the rest of you get off scot free. But don't bother about it, Bumpus; sure the thing is bound to turn up somewhere. Only I hope I find it before I go and get lost in the forest. I always was afraid of that, you know. I'll try and forget all about compasses. Here, lean on me a little harder if you want to. I ain't tired a whit, and can stand it."

But Bumpus was able to walk alone. Truth to tell he fancied Step-hen was trying to frisk him all over, as if endeavoring to locate the position of some object that might feel like the missing compass.

"There's the stuff the farmer brought, fellows!" said Thad, presently.

It had been dumped alongside the road at a certain place marked by the two who had come up here on a spying trip beforehand. Each boy took what he could carry, and in this way the entire equipment was carried down to a camp site on the shore of the splendid body of water known as Lake Omega.

"That word Omega means the end, don't it?" said Davy Jones, as they started to put up one of the two tents, and gather the provisions, blankets, cooking utensils and such things together.

"I hope it won't be the end of any of us," chuckled Giraffe, who had been casting furtive looks around, as if searching for an ideal spot on which he hoped the first camp-fire would be built.

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"Well, every fellow who doesn't know how to swim has got to get busy, and learn the first thing," said the patrol leader, looking toward Smithy meaningly.

"Oh! I want to know how, Thad, believe me," returned that worthy, earnestly. "My mother doesn't believe any fellow should go near the water until he knows how to swim; but how could he ever learn in that case, I'd like to know?"

"Fix himself up in a tree, and strike out!" suggested Davy, to whom a tree appealed very frequently as the first way out of any trouble.

"Now, you're away off there, suh," broke in Bob White, smiling; "he should immediately proceed to get in touch with one of those schools that teach everything through the mails; and take his dives off the dining-room table."

It was at least satisfying to see how, under the management of the two experienced leaders, Thad and Allan, the tents were soon raised. Then several of the boys were set to work digging around the upper half outside the canvas.

"What's all this for, Mr. Scout-Master?" asked Smithy, as he laid an old newspaper on the ground to kneel on, and began digging away with the hatchet; having actually drawn on a pair of new working gloves made of canvas, in order to keep his hands from getting soiled.

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"Why, in case of a sudden and heavy rain, we'd be in danger of having a flood rush through the tents if we didn't make this gutter or sluice to throw it off. Notice that it's on the upper side only. And while you're finishing here, boys, Allan and myself will make the stone fireplace where we expect to do pretty much all our cooking. The big camp-fire is another thing entirely, and we'll let you all have a hand in building that of logs and brush."

So they constructed a long fireplace of stones easily found along the shore of the lake; it looked a little like a letter V, in that one end was wider than the other. And across the smaller end a stone was placed as a support for the coffee-pot which would occupy a position in that quarter, the frying-pan needing considerably more room.

Taking pattern from this first fireplace some of the other scouts, ambitious to try their hand at making such a useful adjunct to camp life, fashioned a second one close by. For the patrol was to be divided into two sections, when the matter of cooking was concerned.

The sun was sinking low behind the hills when the matter of supper was agitated. Giraffe was calling for something to stay the terrible sense of hunger he declared was making him feel weak.

This thing of not being able to sneak into the home pantry between meals was already giving him trouble; and evidently Giraffe would have to lay in a greater stock when the regular chance arose, or else go hungry.

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Finally, however, those who did the cooking on this first night, Thad and Allan they chanced to be, announced that the meal was ready. So, to carry out the idea of being under rules and regulations, the bugler was told to sound the assembly call, though every member of the patrol hovered close by, ready to fall to with the eagerness of half famished wolves.

Then came the job of making ready for their first camp-fire. That was a matter of such tremendous importance in the eyes of all that every fellow had to share in bringing the fuel, and helping to stack it, according to the directions of Allan.

No one worked with greater eagerness than Giraffe. He was fairly wild to see the red flames dancing upward, and the sparks sailing off on the faint night air, as though they carried messages from the camp of the Boy Scouts to some distant port unseen from that lower world.

And when finally all was ready, the young scout-master after grouping his followers around the heap, solemnly took a brand from one of the cooking fires, and with a flourish applied it to the inflammable tinder. Immediately the crackling flames shot up through the stuff prepared, and in another minute there arose a brilliant pyramid of fire that caused the neighboring trees to stand out like red ghosts. And then arose a shout from eight lusty young throats, as the Silver Fox Patrol danced around the first camp-fire of their new organization.

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That was an event long to be remembered, and to be written down in the annals of the outing with becoming ceremony.

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CHAPTER V.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

What a truly glorious hour that was, as those eight lads sat around the splendid camp-fire, chatting, asking questions, and giving information, as it happened they were able.

Of course Thad and Allan were usually called upon to explain the thousand and one things connected with woods life, as yet sealed mysteries to those of the patrol who were experiencing their very first camping out.

Some of the other six had doubtless made fires in the woods after a fashion, and possibly tried to cook fish over the same, with poor success. Bob White admitted that he had often been in the mountains with some of the men who worked on his father's place, and had spent lots of nights afoot in the Blue Ridge; so that he could not really be called a "tenderfoot scout."

But Bumpus and Smithy were very green; Davy Jones knew but little more; and as for Step-hen and Giraffe, they would not commit themselves, watching every move the leaders made, as though hoping to pick up information in this way that could be used at another time, and which would stamp them as real woodsmen.

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To all appearances Bumpus had entirely forgotten all about his suspicions toward Step-hen. Malice he could not harbor any great length of time toward any one, his nature being too broad and forgiving.

But in the midst of an earnest discussion between several of the scouts on the subject of Indian picture writing, which it is recommended all scouts should learn as a very useful and interesting means for communicating with companions who may be late on the road, Bumpus gave out a roar.

"Hey! guess you think my eyes got closed up by that swelling, didn't you, Step-hen Bingham? Now, whatever are you sneaking my knapsack off like that, for? Want to search it, perhaps, to see if that old compass you left behind could a got in there? Well, you put it back right away; and keep your hands off my property, or I'll complain to the scout-master, see if I don't. What would I want your compass for, tell me that?"

"I thought you might have hid it just to tease me, Bumpus," grumbled the detected one, as he hastened to hang the bag back where he had found it.

"All right," returned Bumpus, falling back lazily, again; "you don't choose to accept my word for it when I say I ain't got it; and so you can take it out any old way you want. But don't you bother me again about that compass, hear?"

[41]

Some of the boys began in due time to yawn, at first slyly; and then as they saw others openly gaping, they forgot to hide it behind their hand.

"Pretty near time we thought of making up our beds, ain't it?" inquired Giraffe; who secretly wondered how he was ever going to tear himself away from sitting there, his hands clasped around his shins, and admiring that magnificent sight of the fire eating up the dry fuel that was fed to it in liberal doses.

"Yes, after I've gone the rounds, to see how well our stock of provisions has been protected," replied the scout-master, getting upon his feet.

"We've got it stowed pretty much in the two tents, suh," remarked Bob White, to whom this particular duty had been detailed.

"Think any wild animal might try and raid the camp, and get away with some of our grub?" asked Bumpus, a little uneasily.

"Oh! hardly that," laughed Thad; "but one of the duties of a scout is never to just take things for granted. He must be wise enough to make provision against any ordinary happening that might come about. In other words he insures his stock of provisions like a sensible merchant does his goods. He doesn't expect to have a fire, you know; but he wants to be sure he won't be ruined if one does come." [42]

"Huh! he'd have to pay a pretty big premium on insurance if it was known that Stephen Bingham was around, then," remarked Davy, meaningly.

"I'm going to tell you more about that picture writing another time, fellows," Allan remarked, as he proceeded to get his blanket out of the pile, and fold it double, just as he wanted it. "You'll say it's a fine thing too. Perhaps we can get a chance to try it out at the time we send a good swimmer over to the island in the lake, to signal with the flags and looking-glass."

The rest of the boys immediately busied themselves with their blankets too; for when in camp they are pretty much like a flock of sheep, and will follow their leader, or bell-wether, without questioning.

Presently a cry arose, and it came from Davy Jones.

"Say, look at that Smithy, would you; bless me if he ain't got some *white sheets*, and a regular nightgown. Now, what dye think of that, fellows? Are we going to allow such sissy goings-on in this, our first camp? He'd hoodoo the whole business, sure. No luck with such baby play. Use the sheets for towels when we go in swimming; I've got an extra pair of pajamas along, that I'll lend him, if he promises to be a true scout, ready to rough and ready it in camp. Next thing he'll be pulling out a nightcap to keep from getting cold!" [43]

All of them were laughing by now. As for Smithy, he looked as if he could not understand what all the fuss was about.

"Why, I always sleep this way at home," he stammered, as he glanced around at his hilarious comrades.

"Perhaps you do," jeered Davy Jones, who could take hard knocks without any whimper; "but mother's darling boy ain't home right now. A true scout must learn to sleep in his blanket alone. An old boot will do for a pillow; and he won't ever want to be rocked to sleep either. The breeze will be his lullaby, and the blue canopy of heaven his coverlet."

"Hurrah for you, Davy; that's as good a definition of what a Boy Scout should accustom himself to, as I ever heard. I didn't know you had it in you to talk like that," said Thad, warmly.

"Oh! I got that out of a book," declared Davy, frankly.

"And Thad, do I have to give up these nice clean sheets; and crawl in between the folds of a nasty, rough, tickly blanket?" asked Smithy, pleadingly.

"It will be just as well for you to begin right, Number Five," said the scout-master, pleasantly but firmly. "Sooner or later, if you stick by the Silver Fox Patrol, you've got to learn how to rough it. And if you think enough of your fellow scouts to make this sacrifice, all the better." [44]

Without a word then, Smithy tossed the offending sheets across to Thad; and followed with his usual night apparel.

"I'll take those pajamas, Davy; and thank you kindly for offering to loan them to me;" he said, bravely; but when the faded and somewhat torn night suit was immediately handed over to him, the particular boy was seen to shudder, as though they gave him a cold chill.

Still, he proved to be true grit, and was soon donning them, so as to keep up with the balance of the boys. Thad winked toward Allan, as much as to say that he felt very much encouraged at the progress being made in the education of Edmund Maurice Travers Smith, the spoiled darling of a weak mamma.

"Mark my word for it," he said in a low tone to his second in command; "with all his pink and white complexion, and girlish ways, there's the making of a good scout in Smithy. Given a little time for him to get over the cruel shock these rough ways bring to his orderly system, and you'll see a different sort of fellow spring up. The seed's there all right. And mamma's baby boy will turn into as sturdy and hardy a scout as there is in the troop."

Allan smiled, and nodded. Perhaps he did not have quite as much faith as the young scout-master, because he may not have been as good a reader of character; but he realized that what Smithy had just done was as valiant a thing for one of his nature as attacking a wildcat would be for another boy, built along different lines. For he was defying what had threatened to become a part of his own being, and with gritting teeth trying to show himself a real flesh and blood boy for [45]

once.

"When we're all ready, fellows," remarked Thad, presently; "the bugler will sound taps, and after that, see to it that all lights are out but the camp-fire. I've fixed that so it will burn several hours; and once or twice during the night Allan or myself will crawl out, to add some wood from the pile you heaped up here. Not that we need the heat, you understand; but there ought to be a lot of sentiment connected with a first camp-fire; and the Silver Fox Patrol must never forget this one. All ready now?"

"Hold on!" called some one from inside the near tent; "I can't find part of my pajamas; and it'd be too cool to sleep with only half on. Now ain't it funny why it's always *my* things that get taken? Just like I was going to be a target for all the fun that's going."

"Of course it's that poor old careless Step-hen again, always throwing his things around, and forgetting where he put 'em," said Davy, in a tone of disgust; then he took a peep inside, and burst out into a roar of laughter, adding: "Well, did I ever see such a crazy thing? Hi! fellows look here, and see him hunting around like fun for the lower half of his pajamas, when they are trailing behind him right now, fastened to the shirt part; and he never got on to it. It's right killing, I declare."

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"How could I see behind me?" grumbled Step-hen, as he hastened to get into the balance of his night outfit; "my eyes happen to be fixed in front; but some of you smart set may be able to see both ways. All ready, Mr. Scout-Master; let her go!"

The eight boys presented a comical appearance as they stood there, awaiting the sweet notes of the bugle sounding "taps;" for their pajamas were of all sorts of patterns, from gay stripes to deep solid blues and reds.

Thad gave one last look around, and picking up a lantern motioned to Allan to take charge of the other, so that at the last notes they could "douse the glim."

Then he turned toward the stout bugler, clad in the gayest suit of all, and looking like "a rolypoly pudding," as one of the other boys declared.

"Now!" called out the patrol leader, in a tone of authority.

So the official bugler raised the instrument to his swollen lips, game to do his duty; and started to put his whole soul into the thrilling score that, heard at a late hour of the night, always brings with it a feeling of intense admiration.

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He had just uttered the first few notes when they saw him suddenly whirl around in consternation, and at the same time point with the bugle, as he shrieked:

"Oh! look! look what's coming in on us, fellows!"

"It's a bear!" whooped Davy Jones, making a bee-line for the nearest tree, just as might have been expected of such a gymnast.

And Thad, with one look, realized that there was no laughing matter about it; because it was a sure-enough bear that walked into their camp on his hind feet!

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CHAPTER VI.

THE DANCING BEAR.

The excited announcement made by Davy Jones was instantly succeeded by such a mad scramble as those boys had certainly never witnessed before in all their lives. Indeed, none of them saw more than a very small proportion of the queer sights that took place, and for a very good reason; because every single fellow was more concerned about reaching a place of safety than anything else.

Davy gained his tree in about five mad leaps, and the way he mounted up among the convenient branches would have made a monkey turn green with envy. There was Giraffe also, who had very good luck in picking out a tree that offered easy stages for climbing, in that the branches began fairly close to the ground.

Thad and Allan just happened to choose the same resting-place, and met as they began to mount upward. Still, as they seemed to have forgotten an important engagement above, they did not stop to enter into any conversation just then. There was no telling which one of the crowd the invader might have selected for his victim, and each boy imagined that he could feel the hot breath of the bear right at his bare heels.

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Some were not so fortunate.

For example, poor Bumpus was having a perfectly dreadful time. He had had the advantage of sighting the bear first; but that did not go very far toward counteracting his unwieldy heft, and his clumsy way of always finding something to stumble over.

True to his habits, Bumpus tripped over one of the guy ropes holding a tent in taut shape. He rolled over with a howl of fright, fancying that now he was surely bound to become bear's meat; for you see poor Bumpus had considerable to learn about the woods animals, or he would have known that as a rule the American black bear lives on roots and nuts and berries, and bothers his head not at all about feasting on fat boys, such as a tiger might fancy.

Bumpus, however, did not mean to just lie there, and let himself be eaten, not if he could do anything whatever to prevent such a vacancy in the Hawtree family. As he struck the ground he began revolving rapidly. No doubt it was rather like a barrel rolling, for Bumpus was quite round.

This sort of thing quickly brought him up against the other tent. He had not meant to make for it, but as soon as his second or third revolution brought his clutching hands in contact with the canvas, Bumpus had a brilliant idea. It was not often that he could boast of such an inspiration; but then a fellow may even surprise himself when the necessity is great. [50]

If he could only tear away one or two of the loops that were fastened to ground stakes, what was to hinder him from pushing his way into the tent, and possibly hiding under some of the blankets?

Eagerly he jerked at the nearest one; and fortunately it seemed to be a trifle loose, for it came free in his hands. But try as he would he failed to budge the next stake, which had taken a firm hold.

In a panic, when he saw the walking bear still drawing nearer, poor Bumpus managed to push his legs under the lower rim of the tightly stretched canvas. Only the lower half of him could find admittance; the balance was of such larger girth that in spite of his frantic labor he could not push under the tent.

There he lay, one half of him safe, and the other exposed to all the peril. He dropped his face on the grass. Perhaps it was to shut out the terrible sight; or it may have been that Bumpus was like the foolish ostrich, which, upon being hotly chased, will thrust its head into a tuft of grass, and imagine itself hidden from the foe simply because it cannot see anything.

The others? Well, the boy from the Blue ridge proved himself no mean sprinter when a real live bear threatened to embrace him; for he had managed to clamber up a tree with more or less difficulty, and was even then astride a limb. [51]

There was Step-hen on the other side of the same friendly oak, breathing hard, and casting frequent looks aloft, as though considering whether it might not be a wise thing to mount upward, so as not to attract the attention of the bear towards himself.

Smithy was perhaps almost as badly frightened as Bumpus, only he did not meet with the series of mishaps that befell the fat boy.

Like the balance of the covey the "particular" boy made a bee-line for the tree that happened to catch his eye by the light of the camp-fire. Had any of his chums thought to observe the movements of Smithy they would have discovered that for once he did not even think of stopping to brush his hair, or pick his steps. Barefooted as he was, he dashed over the intervening ground, and hugged the trunk of his tree with a zeal that spoke well for his activity.

And now they were all securely seated in various attitudes, breathing hard, and gazing at the invader with various emotions. Some still had their hearts going after the fashion of trip-hammers; others were beginning to see the funny side of the affair, and chuckle a little, even though confessing that they too had been more or less alarmed at the unexpected call of Bruin. [52]

Of course Allan and Thad belonged to this latter class, partly because they were built a little differently from their comrades in the Silver Fox Patrol; and also on account of previous experiences along this line.

The Maine boy had come from a State where bears are plentiful; perhaps, now, it may not have been the first time in his life that Allan Hollister had found himself chased by one of the hairy tribe.

All this, which has taken so long to describe, really happened in a bare minute of time. When Thad reached a safe perch on a friendly limb, and looked around at the strange fruit those neighboring trees had suddenly taken to bearing, it was really little wonder that he felt like laughing. Some were clad in red, others blue; while a few had the gayest stripes running in circles or lengthwise throughout their pajamas.

What was this to a hungry bear? Absolutely nothing; and doubtless the invader of the first camp of the Boy Scouts saw little that appeared humorous in the situation. He had entered in a friendly way, expecting to be treated to a supper; and here his intended hosts had fled wildly, as though they feared lest he meant to make a meal of them.

Strange enough, no doubt Bruin thought, if he was capable of thinking at all. He still remained standing on his hind feet, and turning his head from one side to the other, thrusting out his nose in an odd way, as though he might be sniffing the air in order to locate the place where the food was kept. [53]

It began to strike Thad as really comical, now that his own little panic was in the past. He also noticed certain things that had not appealed to him before, no doubt chiefly because he was too

busy at the time to pay attention.

But fancy the horror of poor Bumpus when, raising his head presently, consumed by a horrible fascination he could not control, he actually saw the bear *looking straight at him!* That settled it, and he just knew that the savage beast had already picked him out as a tender morsel. Oh! why was he so unlucky as to be born to plumpness? If only he could be more like the skinny Giraffe, or Step-hen, perhaps this awful beast would have passed him by.

He let out a roar as he saw the bear start toward him another step, moving his forepaws as though growing anxious to embrace him.

"Keep away! Just you try to get one of them other fellows! They're the ones you want, not me, I tell you. Scat! Get out!"

But the bear only advanced still another half hesitating step, and Bumpus, unable to look longer, wriggled vainly in the endeavor to withdraw within the shelter of the tent, and then dropped his face to the earth again. [54]

He believed that his time had come, and he might as well be saying his prayers before he made a late supper for a wild bear.

About this time a glimmer of the truth began to work in upon Thad's brain. He realized in the first place that no ordinary bear of the wild woods would act in this remarkable fashion. No doubt, had it ventured into the camp at all, it would have come on all four legs, "woofing" its displeasure that human beings had disturbed the loneliness of its haunts.

And by the way, as a rule wild bears were not in the habit of going around dangling chains behind them, which was just what he discovered this animal did. He had heard the peculiar jangling sound as the beast first rushed the camp; but at the time was hardly stopping to investigate its cause.

And perhaps that was why Allan was laughing to himself, rather than because of the queer looks of the party perched in the surrounding trees. He had already guessed the truth.

But the situation afforded no comfort to those other boys who stared, and wondered what under the sun they could do if the creature selected their tree to climb. Most of them were trying to remember whether bears really did climb trees or not; and hoping that because this one seemed different from the common black American bear, he might not be able to do much in that line.

He still stood there, erect, sniffing to the right and to the left. Why, now that Thad had guessed the secret, he could see something almost pitiful in the begging attitude of the poor bear. No doubt the animal was very hungry, and did not know how to go about finding his own meals, he had been accustomed to having them brought to him in the shape of hunks of bread or such things, most of his life. [55]

Thad had a sudden brilliant idea. He saw a chance to have a little fun, and give his frightened companions an opportunity to further express their surprise.

When poor Bumpus tried to escape in such a clumsy fashion that he tripped over the stretched guy rope of a tent, he had let go his beloved bugle. What was music to a fellow when his existence hung in the balance. He could get another horn, but never another life.

Thad had by chance discovered the shining bugle even while on his way to the friendly tree, and had snatched it up; mechanically perhaps, for he could not have entertained any fear lest the bear would swallow such a thing.

At any rate he had it in his possession right then, and being able to play a little, he put it to his lips and trilled a few bars of a ditty that sounded like a queer sort of a waltz. And to the utter amazement of his companions the bear immediately started to tread a lively measure with his two hind feet, extending his shorter forepaws as though holding a pole. [56]

In future years no doubt the thought of that strange picture would never appeal to Thad Brewster without exciting his laughter; for it was certainly one of the most comical things that could be imagined. [57]

CHAPTER VII.

SMITHY DID IT.

"Oh! would you look at him waltzing!" cried Giraffe.

"He's turning around and around, like a real dancing bear!" echoed Step-hen; and then, still feeling a little malicious toward poor Bumpus, whom he really believed was hiding his precious compass, just to annoy him, he could not help adding: "he feels so good, because he sees his dinner all ready for him under the flap of that tent there."

That brought out another whoop from Bumpus, who felt impelled to raise his head once more,

even though it gave him renewed pain.

"Oh! now I know what it all means!"

It was Smithy who uttered this cry, and drew the attention of all his chums toward the tree where the boy in the borrowed pajamas sat astride a limb, just like all the rest, and which he had certainly never stopped to brush off with his handkerchief before occupying, either.

"Have you seen the beast before, Smithy?" asked the scout-master, ceasing his little racketty waltz; which caused the bear to once more stand at attention, waiting for the piece of bread that usually came after he had performed his little trick; and still sniffing hungrily around this way and that. [58]

"That's what I have, Thad," replied the other, eagerly. "Why he came past our house only a few days ago, and gave us quite a performance. I made friends with him too, and the man let me even give him some bread I brought out."

"Sure he did, and glad in the bargain to have some fellow help keep his show bear," Allan remarked, half laughing still.

"Hey, Smithy, suppose you climb down right now then, and renew your acquaintance with the ugly old pirate!" sang out Davy Jones.

"And there's half a loaf of that stale bread wrapped in a newspaper, left right where you c'n put your hand on it, inside the tent where Bumpus is kicking his last. You're welcome to feed it to the bear, Smithy."

It was Step-hen who made this magnificent announcement; how easy it was to think up things for some one else to do, while he clung to his safe anchorage up there among the branches of the beech tree.

"Only half a loaf, remember," put in the cautious and always hungry Giraffe; "we don't want to run short too early in the game; and there's a lot of meals to be looked after yet." [59]

"Somebody's got to do something, that's sure," remarked Bob White. "This night air is some cool to a fellow with my warm Southern blood; and I give you my word, suh, I'm beginning to shiver right now."

"And if we don't think up some way to coax the beast to get out," declared Step-hen, gravely; "why, just as like as not he'll eat up everything we've got, and then go to sleep in our blankets, with us hanging around here like a lot of ripe plums."

"Let Davy do it," remarked Thad; for that was an expression often used among the boys, Davy being such a spry chap, and usually so willing.

But he at once set up a determined protest.

"Now, I would, believe me, boys, if I only knew the gentleman, which I don't, never having been properly introduced. Must have been out of town when he gave his little show the other day. So I respectfully but firmly decline the honor you want to pay me. Now, it's sure up to Smithy to get busy, and make up with his old chum again. Here's his chance to win immortal glory, and the thanks of the whole Silver Fox Patrol as well. Smithy, it's your move."

The delicate boy was pale before, but he turned even whiter now, as he looked in the direction of Thad.

"Perhaps I *might* coax him to be good; and get a chance to whip the end of that long chain around a tree," he said, in a voice he tried in vain to keep from trembling. [60]

Thad hardly knew what to say. He understood that animals never forget an enemy, or one who has been good to them. An elephant in captivity has been known to bear a grudge for several years, until a good chance came to pay his debt.

Now Smithy said he had fed the traveling bear at the time it danced for his amusement. Doubtless, then, it might recollect him, and would be less inclined to show any vicious temper if he approached, than should a stranger try to take hold of the trailing chain.

"You said you had fed him, didn't you, Smithy?" he asked.

"Yes, with half a loaf of good bread; and I would have gone after more only just at that minute my mother happened to come to the window, and became so frightened at seeing me near the bear, she called to me to come in the house. But I shook hands with him before I went," the last proudly, as though he wanted the boys to know he was not the milksop they sometimes had imagined in the past.

"And do you think he would remember you?" continued Thad, only half convinced that he ought to let the other take the risk; though there really seemed no other way out of the difficulty that promised one-half as good chances. [61]

"Oh! I'm sure he would, he acted so very friendly. Please let me try it, Thad. I really want to; and see, I'm not afraid at all; only I do wish I had my shoes on, for the hard ground hurts my feet. I never went barefooted before in all my life."

"Oh! let him try the trick, Thad," called out Davy; "I'm getting cold, too. This here private box is full of draughts you see; and my attire is so very airy. Blankets are what I want most right now. Give Smithy a chance to show what he can do in the wild beast taming line."

"It'll sure be the making of him," echoed Step-hen cheerfully, from his perch.

"But perhaps a quarter of a loaf would do just as well; I'd try it on him if I was you, Smithy," suggested Giraffe; who groaned to think of all that good food being wasted on a miserable traveling show bear that had strayed into camp.

"All right, if you feel confident, Smithy;" said Thad; "but watch him close; and if he makes a move as if he wanted to grab you, shin out for the tree again. We'll all stand by, ready to give a yell, so as to scare him off."

Bumpus was staring at all this amazing procedure. Slowly the fact had begun to filter through the rather sluggish brain of the fat boy that after all fate had not decided to offer him as a tempting bait to whet the appetite of a bear. He even began to pluck up a little bit of hope that Smithy might succeed in chaining the ugly old terror to a tree, and thus saving his, Bumpus' life. [62]

When the delicate boy started to scramble down out of his leafy bower the others tried to encourage him in various ways.

"Good boy, Smithy!" cooed Step-hen.

"You've certainly got more grit than any fellow in the bunch; and I take off my hat to you, suh!" cried the Southern boy, making a movement with his hand as if in salute.

"Try the quarter loaf, Smithy; you'll find it just where Step-hen said, inside the tent where Bumpus is hanging out," Giraffe called.

"Only half-way out," corrected that party; and then ducked his head as he saw that his voice had attracted the attention of the bear.

So Smithy dropped to the ground. Thad saw that he was fearfully white about the face, and was half tempted to recall him; but had an idea Smithy would refuse to obey, now that he had resolved to prove his valor, which must have been more or less doubted in the past.

The tall, slim boy started walking toward the tent where Bumpus was confined, unable to go or come, so tightly had he become wedged under the canvas.

They saw the bear had become greatly interested. Watching the movements of the boy in the borrowed pajamas he made some sort of pitiful sound that was not unlike a groan. Evidently mealtimes had been a long ways apart lately for Bruin; but he seemed to understand that the boy had gone to secure him something. [63]

The short forelegs began to beat imaginary time, and the bear started to again tread that queer measure, turning slowly around and around as he continued to follow out the line of discipline to which he had been brought up.

He was really begging for something to stay the pangs of hunger.

Meanwhile Smithy, though doubtless shivering like a leaf, had reached the open flap of the tent. Passing inside his eyes quickly found the half loaf of bread wrapped in a newspaper. And seizing it he tore the cover away, after which he once more appeared in view.

As he now advanced, slowly yet eagerly, in the direction of the dancing bear, he held out the bait, and began to softly call, just as he had heard one of the two keepers of the bear do:

"Bumpus! Bumpus, good boy! here supper for Bumpus!"

"Hey, quit calling him by my name," said the fat boy, indignation even making him forget his recent fear.

But Smithy paid not the least attention to him. He was advancing, repeating the name over and over; and trying the best he knew how to speak in tones resembling the thick voice of the man who had held the chain at the time the animal danced for him. [64]

So he presently came close to the bear, which had now ceased dancing, and was thrusting out his nose toward the coveted bread, while making a queer noise. Not a fellow among the scouts moved so much as a little finger. Every eye was glued on the form of Smithy, and doubtless more than one of them really wondered while thus holding his breath in suspense, if the starving beast would actually seize upon the boy who came offering gifts.

"Oh! he took it!" gasped Step-hen.

"And it was the whole of that half loaf too," added Giraffe, with a sigh of regret.

"The chain, quick! Smithy; there's a small tree right by you that ought to hold him! That's the way! Hurrah for you, Smithy; he's done it, boys; and you can drop down now without being afraid," and Thad followed the words by allowing himself to leave the branches of his tree, landing softly on the ground.

Loud shouts attested to the delight of the other prisoners, when the delicate and pampered boy

snatched up the end of the long and strong chain, bringing it around the tree Thad mentioned, and apparently locking it securely. After which Smithy staggered away from the spot, and sank down upon the ground, trembling and weak from the great nervous strain under which he had been laboring.

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The shouts turned into cheers, and Smithy's name was given three and a tiger; so that the racket made even the hungry bear look wonderingly at the fantastic group that took hold of hands, and danced around the hero of the hour.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT TO BE REMEMBERED.

"Are you sure that chain will hold, Smithy?" asked the still nervous Step-hen, when some of the noise and enthusiasm had died away, so that the scouts could act like reasonable human beings again.

They had dodged into the tents, and appeared wrapped in their various blankets; so that as they walked to and fro they resembled so many solemn Indian braves.

"No question about it," returned the other, in whose cheeks a splash of color had come, while his eyes were sparkling with satisfaction over the receipt of honors such as any Boy Scout should be proud to deserve of his fellows.

"Hey! ain't you goin' to help me out of this?" called Bumpus just then.

"Well, would you ever, if he ain't sticking there under that tent, too lazy to help himself crawl out again," remarked Step-hen; possibly wondering whether this might not be a good opportunity for him to sneak off with that knapsack belonging to Bumpus, so that he could secure the compass he was positive the fat boy was hiding from him.

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"Yes, I *am* stuck here, and so tight I just can't hardly breathe," complained the prisoner. "Somebody go inside, and give me a shove. If that don't do the business, then another of these here pegs has got to be lifted, that's all."

Allan obliged the other with a helping hand, and Bumpus was soon able to don his blanket like the rest. Sleep had been banished for the time being, by this remarkable happening. The boys began to speculate as to what they should do with the bear, now that they had him tied up.

"It's sure a white elephant we've got on our hands," laughed Thad. "We don't dare let him loose; and if we keep him here long, he'll eat us out of house and home."

At that Giraffe groaned most dismally. If there was anything he hated to see it was good food being tossed to the beasts.

"Our first camp-fire brought us bad luck, fellows!" he complained.

"Oh! I don't know," remarked Thad. "It gave us a run for the money; and chances are, we'll never get over laughing at the funny things that happened. Then besides think what it did for Smithy! After what he did I guess there isn't a scout who will ever taunt him about being a coward."

"No, Smithy certainly made good this night; and I pass him up away ahead of me on the roll. He deserves a merit badge, suh, for his true grit," was what the generous Southern lad declared firmly.

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"Hear! hear! we'll put in an application to Headquarters for a badge to be given to our comrade Smithy for saving our bacon!" cried Davy Jones.

"Well," declared Giraffe, "it might have been our bacon, in fact; because I saw him sniffing in the direction of the tent where it happens to be lying. A fine lot of scouts we'd be, camped away up here, far from our base of supplies, and to run out of bacon the first thing. What's a breakfast without coffee and bacon; tell me that?"

But apparently none of the others were so much given to thinking about the delights of eating as Giraffe, for nobody answered his question.

Thad had pulled Allan aside.

"What did I tell you about that boy?" he whispered, as he watched the emotions that flitted across the now flushed face of the proud Smithy, receiving the homage of his fellow scouts.

"Well, you were right, that's all; he did have the pluck as you said, and he showed it too. I never saw a better piece of grit, never," was the reply the Maine boy gave to the question.

"His mother and aunts may have done their level best to make a sissy out of him; and we always believed they had come mighty near doing it too; but I tell you, Allan, I just feel sure that his father or grandfather must have been a brave soldier in their day. There's warrior blood in

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Smithy's veins, in spite of his pale face, and his girlish ways."

"Oh! it won't take long for him to get rid of all those things," said the other, confidently. "Already we've seen him accept that tattered old pair of pajamas from Davy Jones; either of us might have hesitated to put 'em on, because of the laugh they'd raise. I think Davy only fetched them along to get a rise from the boys. Smithy is all right, Thad. Given a few months with us, and his mother won't know her darling angelic little boy."

"Say, Thad," sang out Step-hen just then; "what d'ye reckon could have happened to the fellers that own the bear? We've been talking it over, and no two think alike. Some say they got tired feeding the beast, and turned him loose on the community, to browse off poor scouts, camping out for the first time. Then others got the notion that p'raps some hobos might have stopped the show foreigners, and took their money, letting the bear shuffle off by himself."

"We'll just have to take it out in guessing, and let it go at that," was the reply Thad made. "You see, we haven't anything to go by. The bear wasn't carrying any message fastened to his collar, or anything of the sort that I could see."

"Now you're joking, Thad; the only message he had about him was a hungry one, and it showed on his face and in the way he begged," Bob White remarked.

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"But, oh! dear me, don't I hope then that the two foreign chaps are hot on the trail of their lost performing pet; and will show up here bright and early to-morrow morning; for just think what an immense stack of precious grub that bear can put away inside of forty-eight hours."

Nobody but Giraffe could have had a thought along these lines.

"Well, he's tired as all get-out now, it seems," said Step-hen; "for there he's lying down like he meant to go to sleep in the shadow of that tree. Makes himself right at home, I must say. I reckon he likes us, fellows."

"Please don't say that, Step-hen; it makes me nervous," remarked Bumpus, wrapping his blanket around him after the way an ancient Roman might his toga, as if, in spite of its warmth, he had started shivering again, as the significant words of Step-hen awakened unpleasant thoughts in his now active mind.

"But how about appointing a sentry to stay on guard during the night?" suggested Giraffe, turning to the scout-master.

"What for?" asked Thad, winking at Allan.

"To watch that he don't get loose, and spread himself at our expense," the other explained. "Why, if that bear overfed, and killed himself, those foreign men'd be just awful mad, fellows. I wouldn't be surprised now, if they tried to make us pay a big sum for letting the old sinner feed on our rich truck. Sometimes these educated animals are worth a heap."

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"Oh! you c'n watch all you're a mind to, Giraffe," jeered Step-hen; "the rest of us want some sleep. Be sure and shoo him away if he does break loose, and try to wreck our cooking department. I'm going to hunt for a soft spot right now inside this tent. Don't anybody dare to wake me up before the sun shows again."

With that he started to crawl under the flap of the tent. His action was the signal for a general disappearance, as the boys remembered again, now that the excitement was a thing of the past, that they were both tired and sleepy.

Thad was the last in sight. He wanted to stroll over in the direction of the uninvited guest; and if the bear remained quiet, he meant to examine for himself just how securely Smithy had made the chain.

No one could question his intentions; but then at the time Smithy was worked up to a degree that might excuse some bungling.

The bear was lying down. He raised his head and made that queer sniffing sound when Thad approached, as though possibly anticipating another feed. Thad spoke to the beast in a low, soothing tone, as he used his fingers to ascertain just how the end of the chain was fastened.

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Smithy had done his work in a business-like way, in spite of trembling hands. There was a little metal bar which was intended to slip through an extra strong ring, that in turn was connected with one of the links. This being done the bear would be held securely, unless through some accident the ring and bar parted company, which might not happen once in a year's time.

So Thad, quite satisfied, left the shady tree under which the prisoner had stretched his hairy form, and returned to the vicinity of the fire. Here he busied himself for a little while, fixing things so that there would be no necessity for any one attending the camp-fire during several hours at least; indeed, the big back log would doubtless last until morning, smouldering hour after hour.

Giving one last look around, and quite satisfied with the arrangement of this, the first camp of the newly organized Silver Fox Patrol of Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts, Thad finally followed the example of his chums, crawling under the flap of the tent, which he left up for ventilation.

He found three fellows apparently already far gone in sleep, if he could judge from their steady

and heavy breathing.

So Thad, chuckling to himself as some humorous thought flitted through his mind, settled down to join them in dreamland. He knew no reason why he should deny himself the rest he sorely needed. There was no danger hovering over the camp that he was aware of; the bear was securely fastened, and apparently content to take up regular lodgings again with human companions; and the fire could not communicate to any dry brush or grass, so as to cause an alarm.

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And on this account Thad gave himself up to the pleasure of securing his full measure of sleep, intending to awaken inside of, say three hours, when he could creep softly out, to throw a fresh log on the camp-fire, without disturbing any one.

The last sounds he remembered hearing consisted of a crackling of the flames as they seized upon a particularly fine piece of fuel; and the croaking of some bullfrogs along the shore of the lake. Thad lazily made up his mind to try and secure the hind legs of a few of these big green "mossbacks," as he called them; for he knew from experience what a dainty meal they would make, fried with some salt pork, being equal to any tender spring chicken he knew of.

Then he slept, perhaps for some hours, Thad could not tell; when he was aroused by the greatest kind of shouting from somewhere near by. He sat up instantly, his senses on the alert, listening to locate the disturbance, and get some sort of line on its nature.

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CHAPTER IX.

LUCKY BRUIN.

"Oh! murder! he's broke loose, and remembers about me!" Bumpus was shouting close to the ear of Thad; and there was a great scurrying in that quarter, as if the fat boy might be trying to hide himself under the blankets.

Thad hurried outside as fast as he could; and in this he was closely imitated by Bob White and Giraffe, who happened to be his other tent mates.

Already Thad had made a most important as well as surprising discovery. Those yells did not appear to be given by Allan, Step-hen, Davy Jones or Smithy. They were fashioned on another key from the well-known voices of these fellow scouts.

Of course, the first and most natural idea that flashed into Thad's mind lay in the direction of the two foreigners, whom Smithy seemed to believe must be Bohemians. Could they have followed the trail of the escaped bear, and entering the camp of the scouts by stealth, were now engaged in administering the beating to the poor animal, as they thought he deserved for leaving them in the lurch?

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In one way it sounded like that might be the case, for amidst all the clamor of shouts Thad could detect something like roars or grunts from the bear.

But no sooner was he outside the tent than he realized that this could not be the case at all. The voices were certainly not those of men, but rather sounded like cries falling from boys' tongues. And instead of being raised in anger, they were frantic with *fright!*

An old moon had risen while the campers slept, so that it was no longer dark out on the lake near by.

The first thing Thad did was to look toward the tree where the bear had been chained at the time Smithy took care of him so neatly. He was standing on his hind legs, and giving tongue to his feelings in deep rumbling roars that seemed to almost make the very air tremble.

"Just listen to 'em go, would you?" ejaculated a voice close to Thad's shoulder, and he turned to find Allan there; while his three tent mates were close behind, all worked up again over this new and exciting mystery of the first night in camp.

"Who in the wide world can it be?" asked Bob White.

"Don't know; but I'm sorry for one of them," remarked Thad; "because he smashed into the trunk of that tree just then; and I rather guess he'll have the marks to show for it a long while."

"And listen to that splash, boys!" exclaimed Step-hen.

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"Just as like as not another of the lot slipped and fell into the lake;" spoke up Giraffe, "there he goes splashing like fun, and how he does holler in the bargain!"

"Hark! what is he shouting?" asked Allan.

"Why, he's calling for help, because he thinks the old bear will get him now, sure. I c'n see him near the shore there, kicking up the water like an old stern-wheel steamboat. Say, ain't he the worst scared fellow you ever saw?"

"Don't forget there were a bunch about as bad off as that, a while back," declared Thad; "but he seems to be calling for some one to come back and help him."

"I got it then, and it was Brose!" exclaimed Bob White, who had very acute hearing.

"That explains it all," declared Thad. "Now we know who we have to thank for making all this racket. Brose Griffin and his two shadows, Hop, and Eli Bangs were going to pay us a nice little surprise party visit. Perhaps when we woke up in the morning we'd have found all sorts of things gone, and have to hike back to town to-morrow. But they didn't know we had a bear in camp, did they, fellows?"

"Oh! my, and if they didn't stumble right on the beast!" exclaimed Bumpus, who, not wanting to be left by himself in the tent, had crawled out, after taking a cautious look first. "What a rich joke on Brose and his crowd. I can just see 'em scooting for home for all they're worth. Never catch any of that bunch around our camp again on this trip, that's sure, boys." [77]

"I hope," Thad went on to say as he stood listening; "the fellow in the lake don't go under; it must be Hop; because you know he does limp some, from that broken leg he got last winter."

"Oh! he got out all right," observed Allan.

"Sure thing," added Giraffe; "because I saw him climb up the bank; and there, if you listen, you can hear the silly right now, going whimpering along. Say, what a time we are having, eh, fellows?"

"Who'd ever think so much could be crowded inside a few hours?" declared Smithy; who felt that he would have good reason to look back on this remarkable experience as the crowning feature of his whole life, because he had certainly lived more in the last four hours than all the balance of his years thrown together.

"And boys, don't forget we owe a lot to our guest—what was that you called him, Smithy—Bumpus?" Thad continued.

"Oh! let's change it to just plain Smith," suggested Bumpus.

"But we do owe the old fellow a whole lot of thanks," remarked Bob White. "And in the morning, suh, I intend to see to it that he gets a good filling breakfast, even if I have to cut down my own allowance." [78]

At that Giraffe groaned dismally.

"Oh! say, you don't think of going that far, I hope; and for only a dancing bear; we ought to be able to feed him on the leavings, don't you think?" he asked.

"He'd soon kick the bucket, then, Giraffe, if he waited for any leavings from your platter," observed Davy Jones; "because I notice that you lick it clean every time."

"Listen, do you hear any more shouting?" asked Thad.

Though they strained their ears no one could catch a single sound.

"Guess they've got beyond earshot," remarked Step-hen.

"But you take it straight from me, suh, they're running yet; and I wouldn't be afraid to say that they'll keep it up until they fairly drop," Bob White gave as his opinion; and indeed, all of them agreed with him there.

Then the funny side of the thing seemed to strike them. First one commenced to laugh, and then, as the others looked at him they too started, until the merriment grew, and some of the scouts were holding each other up in their weakness. Bumpus even solemnly declared the bear joined in the general hilarity; he did act a bit queerly, and made a series of sounds that might be construed into bear laughter.

Smithy remarked that the old fellow deserved another feed after such splendid service in guarding the camp. [79]

"There's that heavy cake Step-hen fetched along; might try him on that; and if he likes it, we'll be saved more'n one stomach ache," Davy proposed.

"Why, I didn't think it was so *very* bad," spoke up Giraffe; and then, seeing the others frowning at him, he hastened to add; "but if you think he ought to be fed again, to keep him quiet, why break off a piece, Smithy."

"A piece!" cried Step-hen, "he gets the whole cake, understand. Talk about base ingratitude, some persons can never feel anything but the empty state of their stomach. Why, that bear saved us the whole of our grub, mebbe, by giving the alarm; and Besides, he scared that bunch so bad they'll let us alone after this. The bear takes the cake, don't he, Thad?"

"He certainly does," replied the scout-master, laughing again.

Smithy found that the chained visitor was perfectly agreeable, for the way he took that heavy cake and devoured, it was a caution.

"Watch him eat, Giraffe," suggested Davy Jones; "he can give you some valuable pointers on

how to stow the grub away. You see, his neck ain't like yours, and it takes less time to navigate the channel."

"Huh! I only hope it gives him a cramp, and doubles him up," grunted the other, in more or less disgust.

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"Now you're getting one off on me, you think," remarked Davy; for he had been subject to cramps a long time, and never knew when one would attack him, making him perfectly helpless for the time being; and the boys were beginning to notice how accommodating the said "cramps" seemed to be, visiting Davy just when some hard work loomed up in which the victim was supposed to have a part.

"And now what?" demanded Step-hen, yawning, and stretching his long figure.

"Do we go back to our downy couch again, fellows; or is it so near morning that we'd better stay awake?" asked Davy Jones.

"Do you know what time it is?" asked Thad, who had been inside to consult the little nickel watch he carried: "just ten minutes after two!"

"Wow! me to get seven more winks!" exclaimed Giraffe; "and please don't wake me so suddenly again, boys. My eyelids popped open with a bang. If they hadn't been fastened on as tight as they were, I'd have lost one, sure."

"That's the way you wake up, eh?" remarked Step-hen. "Remember the Irishman who heard the cannon fired when the flag went down, and asked what it was. When they told him it meant sunset he said——"

"Sure, the sun niver goes down in ould Ireland wid a bang loike thot!" called out Giraffe from the interior of the tent, spoiling the telling of Step-hen's little story, which no doubt every one of the boys knew.

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Soon the camp was wrapped in silence again, even the contented bear lying down, better satisfied than ever with his new friends. And that wish of Giraffe's could not have borne fruit, for there was nothing heard to indicate that the bear suffered the least bit of indigestion from devouring the whole heavy cake that would have lain like lead in even a boy's strong stomach.

The rising moon sailed higher in the heavens, and looked down upon the peaceful camp of the Silver Fox Patrol. The little wavelets washed up on the shore with a sweet musical tinkle that must have been like a lullaby to the boys, seeing that even Thad failed to awaken again, while night lasted; and the smouldering camp-fire had to take care of itself from the time of that second alarm.

Some of them would very likely have imitated their habits when at home, and tried to sleep until long after sunrise; only that they were under military rules while in camp.

And so it was the clear notes of the bugle, blown by the now recovered Bumpus, as he alone could blow it, that rang out over the water, telling the sleepers that they must make their appearance for the early morning dip in the clear lake, after which the various duties of the day could be taken up, beginning with the first camp breakfast.

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CHAPTER X.

LOOKING TO BIG THINGS AHEAD.

"Ain't this fine and dandy, though?" remarked Bumpus, as he stood on the shore, after a short session in the water, and rubbed his plump form with part of the fine sheet Smithy had fetched along, foolishly thinking he would need it for sleeping.

They had splashed, and swam about to their hearts' content, until Thad timing the bathing period, ordered the last scout from the water.

There was an absence of the frolicsome spirit so often seen among boys when in swimming. Discipline would not allow Step-hen, for instance, slapping a lump of mud upon Bumpus just after he had succeeded in drying himself; though possibly he might have enjoyed doing it first-rate; since he still felt that the fat boy was playing a joke on him by concealing his precious compass upon which he depended to show him the right road, should he ever get astray in the woods.

Breakfast was an easy meal to get. They just had to boil the coffee, and fry several rashers of bacon for each mess; after which the appointed cooks, tried their hands at making flapjacks; which, be it mentioned here, are about the same as the common pancake at home, though never called by that ordinary name in camp.

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These were fairly good, though a bit heavy, not quite enough "rising" having been put in the flour. The next time, Thad said, they would carry the self-raising kind of flour along, when they would be sure of having light bread.

"If there are any left, boys," remarked Thad, "don't forget that we are honored by the presence

of a guest in our camp. He came without invitation, and is kept here perhaps against his will; but all the same we owe him a heavy debt of gratitude."

"Yes," spoke up Bumpus, who had not cared very much for the latter end of his breakfast, as he was a light eater, and rather particular, "fussy" Step-hen called it, "which we will proceed to cancel by a heavy dose of dough. Give him my share, boys, and welcome. I've got too much respect for my poor stomach to cram such prog down into it."

"Hold on," remarked Giraffe, looking up, hungrily; "perhaps everybody ain't through yet; and Bob, I think those flapjacks you made are simply delicious."

"Thanks, suh!" returned the cook of his mess, with a pretended bow; "but I beg to diffah with you; and by the orders of the scout-master I am handing the balance over to Smithy, from the other mess, who will proceed to feed it to the prisoner. Our scout-master is afraid that if you did get sick so early in the outing, he might have to exhaust the medicine chest befo' your appetite returned."

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"Oh! all right, Bob, just as you say; and perhaps I have devoured as many as I had ought to; but they *were* good, I don't care what you say. Come again, Bob."

"Hey! anybody seen my head—" began Step-hen; when Davy interrupted him to bawl:

"Anybody seen Step's head; he's done gone and lost that, now. Always said he would have done it long ago, only Nature had it fastened on tight. But the catastrophe has arrived at last. Step's lost his head, fellows; not that it matters much. A liberal reward is hereby offered to the finder. Apply to Step-hen Bingham."

"Think you're smart, don't you?" jeered the lean one, as he kept on overturning all manner of things. "I was only going to ask if any one had taken my head gear, otherwise known as my campaign hat? Of course I know what the answer'll be—nobody's seen a thing of it. It does beat the Dutch how *my* things are always going, the funniest way ever. Now I could declare I hung that hat up on the broken branch of this tree."

"Well, you've been sitting on it all the time you were eating breakfast; and there it lies, as flat as any pancake that was ever cooked. Now perhaps you'll learn sometimes just to put things where you c'n find 'em," said Bumpus.

Step-hen turned to shoot an accusing stare at the speaker that made the fat boy writhe, for he knew what was passing in the mind of the other.

"Didn't, so there!" he snapped, as he turned away; and Step-hen, looking after him, wagged his head as he muttered:

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"Honest Injun now, I really believe he *did* take it, and the joke's gone so far he just hates to own up. Oh! all right, Bumpus, I'll get on to your game sooner or later; and then the laugh will be with you, just wait and see."

It was the purpose of Thad, in the absence of Dr. Philander Hobbs, the real scout-master of Cranford Troop, to daily put the scouts through various interesting exercises connected with the education of a Boy Scout.

For instance there was the following of a trail in the woods, observing every little item of interest connected with it, until the properly educated scout would be able to actually describe the man who had made the tracks without ever having seen him, telling his height, whether thin or stout, even the color of his hair, what sort of shoes he wore, whether new or old, and that he walked with a limp, carried a cane, and many other interesting facts in connection with the unknown.

Then there was photography in which two of the Silver Fox Patrol were deeply interested, so that they kept continually in a fever of expectancy regarding the prospects for pictures that would be out of the common.

One of the scouts even went so far as to propose that the boys don their fancy pajamas in the broad daylight, and hunt up the friendly trees, in whose branches they had sought refuge when the bear first invaded the camp; so that a snapshot could be taken that would preserve the event for all time.

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Bumpus, however, put his foot down flatly against having anything to do with such an "idiotic proceeding," as he chose to term it.

"Huh!" he remarked, disdainfully; "all very fine for you fellows, looking so grand up in your leafy bowers, like a flock of queer parrots; but what about poor me, pinned there on the ground by that pesky old tent, that wouldn't let me back in? Think I want to be the butt of the joke? Count me out. I refuse to join in any such silly game."

Besides there were classes in tying difficult knots, which every scout in good standing is supposed to know how to do neatly. Then came lessons in erecting and taking down the tents, so that every fellow might know just how to go about making camp, and breaking the same.

In the water they played the game of landing the big fish, one of the boys allowing a stout line to be fastened to him; and then by swimming and struggling making it as difficult as possible for the angler to reel him in.

Thad knew considerable about first "aid to the injured", because, as has been stated, he had belonged to a patrol before he came to Cranford. So he was able to show the others many things about stopping the flow of blood in case any one happened to be cut with a knife, or an ax, and bandaging the wound afterwards.

But the drowning person being brought back to life when it seemed next to hopeless was what interested Allan most of all. He had seen more than a few accidents while up in the woods of Maine, and knew of the very rough means adopted by the native guides looking to resuscitating a person who has been in the water until life seems extinct. [87]

So he eagerly watched the way Thad placed the supposed patient on his chest, and kneeling over him, started pressing down on his back while others worked his arms with a regular motion; the whole endeavor being to imitate breathing, and in this artificial way induce the muscles to take on genuine respiration.

"That takes with me, I tell you," said Allan, eagerly. "I saw a man drowned once, and I believe right now his life could have been saved if only the guide had known the right way to go about it. I'll never forget that lesson, Mr. Scout-Master, never."

"It's a splendid thing for any boy to know," said Thad, "and might save a chum's life at any time. Because, boys are always falling into the water, in summer while swimming, and in winter skating. I intend to practice that every day we're here. It's one of those things you may never want; but in case you do, you want it in a hurry."

"How about the fire building tests?" demanded Giraffe, eagerly.

"Yes, that's where Giraffe feels at home. Give him a chance to start a blaze, and you'll make him happy," laughed Step-hen. [88]

"You know you're as good as licked, before we begin," replied the other, derisively.

"I'm going to start on that fun right away," returned Thad. "Some of you may be thinking that we're spending entirely too much time with these things; but all the same they go right along with all that a Boy Scout has got to know. Pretty soon Cranford Troop will be getting its charter from the organization headquarters, and I'd like to have a few merit badges come along with it. That isn't all, either."

"I reckon I can give a pretty good guess what you mean by shaking your wise old head that way, Thad, and looking sorter mysterious-like," declared Davy Jones; who seldom showed the proper amount of respect to the acting scout-master, that by rights he should.

"Then tell us all about it, Davy; because we want to know," demanded Step-hen.

"That's right, and we *must* know; so start up the music, Davy," said Giraffe.

"Why, there's been a whole lot of talk between Thad and Allan here about the new Silver Fox Patrol taking a trip away from home. It's only a question of getting the money, and the consent of our parents and guardians. I guess the money part could be taken care of, all right; but when it comes to getting permission to really leave Cranford, and go down to the Blue Ridge mountains, that's another thing. It might be done; but my father is a lawyer, and hard to convince."

"You're wrong there, Davy," said Thad, with a laugh; "he was the easiest proposition of the whole lot to fix. There'll be no trouble in that quarter. What we can do about Smithy's mother is another thing." [89]

"But why the Blue Ridge mountains; whatever put that notion in your head, Thad?" demanded Giraffe, deeply puzzled.

"I did, suh," announced Bob White, drawing himself up; "you see, I came from that section, and I've been telling my chums so much about it that they've become wild to make it a visit. And I invited them to drop in on my old home there, you understand. It would be very nice for me to have you all there as my guests; and to tell you the truth, my mother has been telling me that I ought to go down there right soon now on particular business. If you all could be with me, I should be mighty glad of it. And it might be a splendid thing foh me, I confess."

"The Blue Ridge!" repeated Bumpus, as if to see just how it sounded. "Say, I've read a lot about the Alleghanies, the Big Smokies, and the Blue Ridge mountains down there in North Carolina, where Bob White came from; but honest now, I never expected to find myself there, at least not till I grew up. The Blue Ridge! Well, if so be you can win my folks over to letting me go along, say, won't I wake up the echoes in them old mountains with the merry notes of my bugle? But there goes the scout-master to start the fire building, and water boiling test. Come along boys and see who can beat Giraffe at his pet game!" [90]

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT WHO USED HIS EYES.

"Hold on," called out Step-hen, "let's start even all around. Has anybody seen my tin cup? Funny how *my* things are always the ones to take to hiding. Now I give you my word, fellows, I laid that cup in a safe place after we washed up the breakfast dishes this morning. And I just can't run across it anywhere. If we're all going to take part in that water-boiling, fire-making test I can't enter unless I have my cup, can I? So if anybody's trying to play a joke at my expense, call it off, won't you, please?"

"You put it in a safe place, did you, and then forgot where that place was?" laughed Thad, who knew the weakness of Step-hen very well by this time. "Now, what's that hanging from that little broken twig up there?"

"Well, I declare, I do remember putting it there!" cried the other, with a wide grin, as he unhooked the handle of the tin cup, and took it proudly down. "And after this, you fellows had better go easy with me. I'm learning to keep my things where they won't get lost, understand that?"

"Yes, but write it down each time, Step-hen," laughed Smithy.

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Step-hen turned upon this new tormentor.

"Oh! Smithy," he remarked, pleasantly, "you're sure going to get another new suit of clothes, because there's a measuring worm right now, crawling up your back, with his tape line working over time."

Smithy writhed, and looked piteously at his nearest neighbor.

"Oh! please knock him off, Bumpus; and do be careful not to mash him, because you know, it would make a nasty spot. Ugh! I detest worms, and snakes, and all the things that crawl. Thank you, Bumpus; I'll do the same for you some day."

Smithy was getting on very well, Thad thought, considering how much he had to "unlearn" in order to make a good scout. That morning, after the dip in the lake, the boys had had considerable fun with the tidy one. They had watched him dress in his fastidious way, and before long several of them were mocking him. He brushed his clothes with a lovely brush he had brought along, and which was better fitted for a lady's dressing table than a boys' camp. Then he adjusted his tie before a little mirror he produced, spent a long time fixing his flaxen locks to suit him, with another silver mounted brush; and finally dented in his campaign hat with the greatest precision.

Then the boys burst out into a roar, and Smithy became aware that he had been an object of great interest to his campmates for ten minutes. He turned fiery red, looked confused for a brief time; and finally snatching off his hat, gave it several careless blows, after which he thrust it on his head in any old way.

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At that a cheer had arisen from the other scouts. They seemed to understand that in a short time Smithy would have learned his lesson. The work which had taken his doting mother and maiden aunts years to accomplish, would be thrown overboard in a week, and a new Smithy arise.

Each fellow having taken his tin cup, they sought an open spot where the water boiling test could be carried out without one scout interfering with the work of the others.

Then the acting scout-master mentioned the rules governing the sport.

"I'm going to give each scout just three matches," he remarked, "and he is put on his honor not to have another one about him. Then you will line up here, after you have each selected a spot inside the boundaries where you mean to conduct your experiment in quick-fire making. For five minutes you can look around, so as to get your mind fixed on just where you will get your kindling, and water. Then at the word you start. Now, line up here, and get your supply of fire sticks."

After the time limit had expired the word was given. All of the patrol save the scout-master started to get busy; and it was a comical sight to see some of them running around in a haphazard way, having lost their bearings in the sudden excitement.

Bumpus was early out of the game. He did succeed in getting his cup filled with water at the lake some little distance away, but of course in his clumsy fashion he had to stumble, and spill most of it on the way to his chosen station. And as one of the rules insisted that each cup should be at least three-quarters full of water, Bumpus gave up the game in abject despair, contenting himself with watching his more agile companions, and cheering them on.

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Smithy also had his troubles. He took so long to get his cup filled, actually washing it out because he discovered a few coffee grounds in the bottom, that the others were building their fires before he awoke to the fact that again had his love for neatness lost him all chance of making a favorable showing. So he too threw up the job as hopeless; but from his determined looks Thad knew Smithy would do better the next time.

This left but five competitors at work. Step-hen was doing very well, and Allan knew just how to get tinder with which to start a quick fire; but even these two could not be said to be in the same class with Giraffe.

Fires had ever been his hobby, and what he did not know about starting a blaze could be put in a very small compass. More than that, Thad noticed that Giraffe certainly had good powers of observation. During that period of five minutes when those who had entered the contest were given an opportunity to look around, Giraffe had certainly used his eyes to advantage.

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While the others had hastened to the border of the lake to fill their cups with water, the shrewd Giraffe had simply stepped over to a tiny little spring which he had noticed not ten feet away, and there managed to get all he needed.

And the way he shaved that fine kindling was a caution. Giraffe was a born Yankee in that he always carried a keen-edged jack-knife, and could be seen cutting every enticing piece of soft pine he came across. Why, he had applied his match to the tinder before the others returned from the lake; and the smoke of his fire blew in their faces most enticingly.

Then he added just the right sort of bits of wood, not too much at a time, until he had coaxed his fire into doing the very best it knew how.

His four rivals were bending every energy to heat up the water in their cups, testing it now and then with disappointed grunts, as it failed to scald their fingers, when a shout from Giraffe announced that he needed the attention of the judge, as his cup of water had commenced to bubble.

"Giraffe has won, hands down," Thad said, "but the rest of you go right on, and see how long it takes each one. Then another time you will learn to use the faculties that every fellow has just as well as Giraffe."

When the last one had finally succeeded in coaxing his fire to get up sufficient heat to cause the water in the cup to bubble, the competition was declared closed, with Giraffe an easy winner, and Allan a fair second.

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"Huh!" said Step-hen, "he got the bulge on us right in the beginning by filling his old cup, at that little spring right here, instead of running to the lake like all the rest of us did. Don't seem fair to me, Mr. Scout-Master."

"Why not?" demanded Thad, while the victor smiled serenely, knowing what was coming. "You all had the same chance to look around that Giraffe was given. If he was smart enough to notice that he could save time by filling his cup at the spring rather than run away over to the lake, so much the more to his credit. A first-class scout will always discover means for saving time. He will keep his eyes and wits about him to see and hear things that an ordinary person might pass right by. That's one of the first things he's got to learn. 'Be prepared' is the slogan of the Boy Scouts; but in order to get the best out of anything, a fellow has to keep awake all the time."

"I guess that's so," admitted Step-hen, rather sheepishly. "Giraffe is smart, and if anybody thinks to get ahead of him he must wake up early in the morning. Just wait till we try this game a second time, and see."

Thad was more than satisfied. He believed the lesson would not be wasted on the ambitious scouts. Even Bumpus would use more care in making haste, and look for treacherous roots that always lay in wait for his clumsy feet. While Smithy, it might be understood, would either have his cup thoroughly clean to start with, or let a few innocent grains of coffee go unnoticed.

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"I don't know why," remarked Allan, as they were cooking a little lunch that noon; "but somehow that island over there looks mighty inviting to me."

"Do you know," Thad remarked, "I've thought the same myself, and some of the other fellows have their minds set on it. If we only had some way of getting over, I might think of changing our camp, and going across. Of course I could swim over and see what the island is like, but that wouldn't do us any good without a boat."

"A boat up here is something nobody ever saw, I reckon, suh," said Bob White.

"It certainly does look cool and fine across the water there; and I suppose the bear could swim it if we chose to go; unless we made up our minds to turn the old rascal loose," Step-hen put in.

"Say, I think myself he'd follow us, we've fed him so well since he came in on us," Giraffe grumbled; for it certainly did provoke him to see a shaggy beast devouring good food that human beings could make use of. "Why, I had to get up from breakfast hungry because of him. The island for mine, if it's going to help us get rid of our star boarder any quicker."

"Star boarder!" mimicked Step-hen; "well, that's a joke I take it; because all of us have got our minds made up who fills that bill, all right."

But Giraffe pretended not to notice what was said. He did not like to have his comrades pay too much attention to his little weakness in the food line.

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"How about my being rewarded for coming in first in the water boiling test, Mr. Scout-Master?" he called out. "Wasn't there something held out as an inducement, a sort of prize, so to speak? Seems to me you said the feller that won might have the privilege of making the big camp-fire this evening; and that would be reward enough for me, I tell you."

"That was the offer, Giraffe," replied Thad; "and I'm going to give you that chance, on one condition only. It is that you promise not to carry a single match around with you this blessed

day."

Giraffe knew only too well what that meant, for he understood how Thad worried over his propensity for starting fires at any time the notion came upon him. He gave a big sigh, shook his head, and then handed over his matchesafe, remarking:

"Well, I reckon I'll just have to comply with the rules; but it's pretty hard on a feller, not to have just *one* match along, in case he needs it right bad. But anyhow, it's me to build that big blaze to-night, remember, boys, and I'm going to make your eyes shine, the way I do it, too."

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CHAPTER XII.

BUMPUS MAKES A FIND.

"I say, Thad, come over here with me; I've got something to show you," remarked Allan, about half an hour after they had finished lunch, and while most of the boys were lying around, taking it easy.

The young acting scout-master quickly followed his chum, who led the way back of the tents and into the timber. Here they discovered Giraffe, bending down, and so industriously engaged with some object he had in hand that he seemed to pay no attention to anything else.

At first Thad thought the boy was sawing something, for there was a continuous movement to his right arm, and a sort of low, buzzing sound; but then he knew they had not brought a saw of any kind along with them, an ax and a hatchet being the only tools considered necessary in camp.

Presently Giraffe halted, to draw out a red bandana handkerchief with which to wipe his dripping forehead, while he stared hard at the object he had before him, and looked dubious enough.

Thad saw now what it was, and he could hardly keep from laughing as the determined boy once more started sawing away as though his very life depended on his accomplishing the end he had in view.

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The object he had in his right hand was a queer sort of a little bow, made by fastening a stout cord to a piece of bent hickory. This cord was doubled around a stick that stood upright, its pointed lower end placed in a sort of hollow wooden dish where a socket had been scooped out. The upper was also kept from burning the hand of the aspiring scout by another bit of wood.

Of course Thad knew what Giraffe was trying to do. Deprived of matches for the balance of the day, and feeling a gnawing desire to see a fire sparkling, the scout had started in to try and make a blaze after the old-fashioned method used by some South Sea islanders. But evidently the boy did not twirl the stick fast enough to produce sufficient heat to make the fine tinder smoke, and then take fire. Giraffe's ambition was commendable, however, and so Thad said nothing; only crept away again, after touching Allan on the arm, and beckoning.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the latter, when they had reached a safe position, where their voices might not be heard by the object of their attention.

"Why, nothing, I suppose," replied Thad, smiling. "Did you ever see such a fellow in all your life? He's a regular fire worshipper. I think he must have come down from the old Aztecs in Mexico. He's never happy without his little blaze."

"But he might get fire after all?" protested Allan.

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"Between you and me, my boy, I don't think he will this time. Evidently he's never tried that game before; and no fellow ever succeeds at it the first time. It's harder than it seems. Let Giraffe work away; he'll have his fingers sore with the business before he gives up."

"But what do you think makes him experiment that way right now, when he knows you're trying to put a curb on his weakness for building fires?" the other demanded.

"Well, in the first place, I suppose he feels like starting *something*; and then again, Allan, it's a part of a boy's nature, you know, to always want to do that very thing he's been told he musn't do. Now, Giraffe wants to show me that even keeping matches away from him won't prevent a really smart scout from making a fire, in case he feels like it. My praise of this morning must have spurred him on to let us see just what he can do."

"But if the bow and spindle way turns out bad, there's an easier chance for him, if he only thinks of it," said the Maine boy.

"What's that?" asked Thad, smiling calmly.

"Why, all he's got to do is to take one of the lens out of the field glasses we have along with us; and as the sun is hot enough, he could set fire to some tinder in three shakes of a lamb's tail. Why, I've started fires that way dozens of times myself, when matches were scarce with us in the pine woods."

Thereupon Thad quietly drew something, from each pocket in his khaki trousers.

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"Well, I declare, you thought of that same thing, didn't you?" exclaimed the astonished Allan; "and took the trouble to remove both lens, so as to upset his calculations if he started to try the dodge. Giraffe has to be pretty cunning to get ahead of you, all right, Thad."

"But I never imagined he'd be trying that saw method," admitted the scout-master. "There, he's given it up and thrown his bow away. Next time he'll like as not make some improvement on that outfit. It must have been faulty, so he just couldn't get enough speed out of it. For the thing can be done; and I've seen it more than once, though I never could make fire that way myself."

"Giraffe has one good quality," admitted Allan, "and that's persistence. Once he makes up his mind to do a thing and he hates the worst kind to quit."

"Especially around grub time," chuckled the other.

"Oh! that's a little weakness of his. Step-hen says he must have hollow legs, or how else could he stow away all he does, and never show it. But just look how the sun shines on the trees over across the water, where that pretty little island lies in the middle of the lake. I never saw a nicer camping place, Thad."

"And the same here," admitted the scout-master. "I've about made up my mind I'd like to investigate that island, even if we can't hope to get the whole outfit over. You're a good swimmer, Allan, what do you say to going across?"

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"Alone, or with you?" asked the other, quickly.

"Oh! I wouldn't think of sending any one alone," remarked the scout-master. "You know, some of the boys have already said the island had a terrible mysterious look, as though it might be concealing some wonderful secret. The more they talk about it, and speculate that way, the stronger grows my desire to explore it."

"Then let's call it a go. Think we can leave the rest of the patrol alone for an hour or two this afternoon?" asked Allan, eagerly, as he too cast wistful looks across the shimmering water toward the strange little island that lay nestling there so modestly.

"If they're put on their honor to behave, they'll be all right," replied Thad. "A scout must never dream of breaking his word, once given. That is a part of his creed, you know, Allan; and even Bumpus understands that."

"By the way, where is Bumpus; I haven't noticed him around in camp for ten minutes or more?" remarked the second in command.

"I suppose he's wandering around somewhere close by," replied Thad. "Bumpus certainly has got a big bump of curiosity, and is always poking into everything he can think of. I heard him asking you this very morning when you would find a bee-tree for him, the way you used to do up in Maine. He's just bound to get honey, if there's any to be found around this region."

"Yes, and I said I would try it out while we were up here, if the chance came. You see, perhaps there mightn't happen to be any wild bees around, for I haven't noticed 'em working."

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"Oh! make up your mind to that," declared Thad. "I've heard several farmers tell how they lost a fine swarm, no matter how much racket they kicked up with dishpans and all sorts of tin buckets. There are lots of bee trees in this region I'd be willing to wager now. And if we could find one, it would be great. I like honey about as well as the next fellow, don't you forget it, Allan."

"There goes Giraffe into the tent; and from the sly way he looked around, I've got an idea he's suddenly remembered the lens in that field glass, and means to try one of them with the rays of the sun, to make a little fire."

"Yes, Allan, I saw him; and just as you say, if his manner counts for anything, that's just what Giraffe has in hand. But won't he be the most surprised boy in seven counties when he finds that the lens have been taken from the glass?"

"There he comes out now, and say, don't he look sheepish, though?" Allan went on to remark. "I can see him peeping out of the corner of his eye at you; and just make up your mind Giraffe is saying to himself that it's a mean game to cheat a poor fellow out of a little expected pleasure that way."

"On the other hand," remarked the scout-master, "I reckon he feels cheap to know that I'm on to his game, and have made ready to upset his calculations. But next time I'll put him on his honor not to try and make a fire in any way, shape or style. Now, I don't fancy going away with Bumpus absent. He might get into trouble while we were off. Perhaps I'd better take his bugle, and give a few notes to let him know he's wanted."

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"A fine idea, Thad," observed Allan; "I'll go and get it for you, as I happen to know just where Bumpus keeps it inside the tent here. He's just the opposite of Step-hen, and never leaves his things scattered around."

He had even climbed to his feet, for they were sitting at the time, when there broke out a sudden clamor that caused Allan to turn quickly, and give his superior officer a meaning look.

For the voice that made all that racket was only too well known to both boys; in that it belonged to the very scout about whom they had been talking.

Bumpus must be in some trouble again, if they could judge from the noise he was making. Immediately visions of rattlesnakes, and all manner of dangers connected with the forest trails, flashed into the mind of Thad. What could the luckless fat boy have stumbled into now? That bump of curiosity which he was pleased to term his "investigating spirit," must have led him into some fresh difficulty.

The boys were all on their feet by this time, and several had even snatched up the stout staves which had proven so useful during their arduous tramp from home to this far-off region of Lake Omega.

"He's coming this way!" called out Step-hen, excitedly.

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"Yes, suh, and on the full gallop, too, believe me!" added Bob White, actually taking a step forward, as if ready to meet the danger half way, should there any peril develop.

Thad did not give the order to advance because he had 'ere now discovered that there was no evidence of fright in the shouts of Bumpus. Rather could he detect a note triumph, as though the fat boy believed he had accomplished something worth while, and was deserving of congratulation.

And now all of them could make out what he was calling as he came stumbling along.

"Hey! fellers, what d'ye think, I've found—oh! that old vine nearly cut my neck in two, plague take it—a boat! Yes, a regular boat, hid away in the brush where I was looking for rabbits' tracks; meanin' to learn how to follow the same. And better still, it's got a paddle in it, too. Now we c'n go fishing, and have a bully old time exploring that island out yonder. Don't you think I ought to get a merit badge, Thad, for being so smart, hey?"

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

Sure enough, when the others followed the proud Bumpus through the woods for a little distance, and then down close to the edge of the water, they found that he had really come upon a boat in a dense thicket, where it had evidently been hidden.

"Must a belonged to some of them game keepers that rich man hired to watch his property up here," declared Step-hen, as he examined the craft, while they all crowded around.

"Looky here, got a bully old paddle under the seats too!" called out Giraffe, holding up the article in question, admiringly, after they had turned the canoe over.

"Ain't this a great find, though?" declared Bob White, who was particularly fond of the water, and boats of all kinds.

Bumpus smote himself on the chest, and puffed out his fat cheeks, as he looked around at his comrades.

"Make fun of that wonderful investigating instinct of mine, will you, boys?" he remarked; "well, see what a feller gets for being persevering, and wanting to learn all the while. Now, if I'd been like, say Step-hen here, and content to lay around after eating, where'd we be about the boat question? But I wanted to find out why a rabbit makes two marks with its front paws and only one with the hind legs; and so I looked around to see if there wasn't a track where we saw that bunny scoot away yesterday when we got here. I didn't find the tracks, but I did run across a boat!"

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"It was all right, Bumpus," said Thad; "and I'm going to congratulate you on it. A scout can be a bit curious, and keep on the right side, too. But Allan, there's no need of our taking that long swim, now."

"And no need of both of us being away at the same time," remarked the other, who did not feel easy about leaving such careless fellows as Bumpus and Giraffe behind, since there could be no telling what trouble might not follow. "Suppose you draft Bob White to do the paddling, Thad; he just dotes on that sort of thing, you know."

The eyes of the Southern boy gleamed with delight.

"I surely do the same, suh; and if so be you think to take me along on the exploring expedition I'll be proud to accompany you. Depend on me to do the work, and glad of the chance. I just love to be in a boat, any kind of boat from a dugout to a cedar canoe. And this paddle isn't so bad, even if home-made."

Thad bent down to examine closer. Then he turned to give Allan a little nod that brought the other quickly to his side. The two leaned over where they could exchange a few words without the others hearing what was said.

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"Did you notice that the boat was turned upside-down when found?" asked Thad, first of all.

"Yes, that was done to keep the rain from filling it, I reckoned," replied the Maine boy. "They do that up my way too; because you see, if water stays very long in a boat it rots it. No matter what it's built of, canvas, cedar, or birch bark, water in a boat is a bad thing."

"Some of the boys think this boat has been lying here since the game keepers left this part of the country; which, as I understand it, must have been quite a few months ago?" Thad went on to say.

"Yes, that's what I heard them saying," returned the other.

"And what do you think?" asked the scout-master.

Allan knew that he was on trial. He also understood that there must be something suspicious about the boat to make Thad speak in this way. So he instantly scanned it, foot by foot, from one end to the other; after which his eyes sought the paddle which Giraffe was still handling.

Then he smiled.

"I'm on to what you mean, Thad," he observed. "That paddle has been in the water not a great many hours ago, for it's still wet. Yes, and inside the boat I can see signs that point to the same thing." [109]

"Last night, perhaps, while we were sleeping here, this boat was being used on the lake by some person or persons," Thad continued, earnestly; while the balance of the scouts disputed among themselves as to who should be given the privilege of accompanying Bob White and Thad on the trip to the island.

Thad looked a little serious.

"Kind of queer, any way you take it," he remarked. "Our camp-fire could have been seen easy enough by any fellow who was landing here, and hiding his boat. Then tell me why he didn't come into camp, and see who we were? Seems to me any honest man would have been glad to do that same thing."

"Say, perhaps he doesn't happen to be honest, Thad?" suggested Allan, in rather a hushed voice; for there was something a little mysterious about the finding of this boat that excited his curiosity more or less, and caused strange ideas to form in his boyish mind.

"Oh! I hardly think it could be as bad as that," Thad hastened to remark. "Just because he avoided our camp doesn't mean that he's a thief, or a rascal, I take it. Perhaps he saw we were Boy Scouts; and most men wouldn't want to bother knowing a parcel of boys in their first camp."

"But what could he be doing, away up here in this lonely place?" asked the other.

"Well, of course I don't pretend to know," replied the scout-master; "but then I might give a guess. Suppose one of the men who used to be hired to guard these preserves of that rich gentleman who meant to make a game park here, after the idea was given up, took a notion to come back up here for some reason. He might be getting ready to trap animals in the fall; or shoot deer out of season. Then again, perhaps this same lake was stocked with game fish some years ago, and a couple of smart fishermen might take out a heap of bass that would net them a lot of money in the market. Sometimes they use nets too, Allan, when the game wardens are far away." [110]

"I know," replied the other. "It's just the same up in my country, I'm sorry to say. But are you going over to take a look at that island just the same, Thad?"

"Sure thing; and as the boat is large enough, to hold three or four without crowding, perhaps I'd better pick another to go along. Step-hen, how would you like to help Bob White, Bumpus and myself look that island over?"

Step-hen was about to give an affirmative answer, when he just happened to remember something.

"Guess I'll have to decline the chance this time, Thad," he remarked, making a wry face. "Thought I felt the signs of one of my fits comin' on, a while back. I'd sure hate to have anything like that happen in such a cranky little boat; 'cause it might upset, you know."

"Oh! all right, then just the three of us will go," returned Thad, carelessly. [111]

But there was one who had heard what Step-hen said, with suspicion in his heart. Of course this was Bumpus. He looked at the other, and catching a sly glance cast in his direction, immediately sized up the situation. So marching directly into the camp, Bumpus plunged into the tent to which he was assigned, appearing with his haversack in his hands. And this he deliberately hung on a nail that had been driven into a tree, in plain sight of all who might happen to be in camp.

Everybody saw the act, and could guess what the motive was that actuated Bumpus to do this queer thing. Step-hen turned somewhat red in the face, as he felt the eyes of his comrades turned toward him.

"Huh!" he exclaimed, "think you're funny, don't you, Bumpus? Seems to me you're mighty

careful of that old bag of yours. If you had a lump of gold in it you couldn't handle it nicer. And sometimes haversacks do hold all sorts of queer things. I've known lost knives, and medals, yes, and even *compasses* to get in 'em. Hung it out to air, did you? Mighty afraid somebody might *happen* to peek in it by accident when you was gone, ain't you?"

But Bumpus never made any reply, only grinned, and looked wise, as though he felt satisfied at having outgeneraled the cunning Step-hen, and spiked his guns.

The boat upon being launched was found to be water tight. This fact went far toward convincing Thad that his suspicions regarding its having been recently used were based on a good foundation. Had it been lying there ashore for weeks, and possibly months, it would have been leaky; and required many hours' soaking before the wood swelled enough to stop this fault. [112]

Thad took up his position in the bow, while the heavy weight of the expedition, Bumpus, who had been invited to go because of his discovery of the boat, occupied the middle. Bob White, paddle in hand, shoved off; and then squatted in the stern to propel the craft.

They soon saw that he was indeed an adept with the paddle. Even the Maine boy, standing there on the shore, called out words of commendation when he saw how cleverly Bob White feathered his paddle, and seemed able to do almost anything he wished without removing its blade from the water.

Often when a hunter is creeping up on a feeding deer in the water, this proves to be a valuable quality, in allowing him to get closer than would be possible did the water drip from the blade of the paddle every time it was raised above the surface.

And so they headed straight for the mysterious island. Thad was turned half-way around in his seat, so that he could observe the shore they were rapidly approaching. And Bumpus, squatted there amidships like a big frog, kept his eyes fastened on the same place, with a growing feeling of uneasiness.

He even wished now that he had not been so greedy to take part in this exploring expedition. After all, it was much more comfortable ashore, than in a cranky boat that wobbled every time he chanced to move his weight from one side to the other. And then again, there was something rather queer about that same island; the trees and bushes grew so very dense all over it, and Bumpus wondered if it might not be the home of wildcats, or even something worse. [113]

One or twice he imagined he could see staring eyes among the bushes, but was ashamed to mention the fact to his chums.

The boat had arrived at a point within about eighty feet of the shore when there came to the ears of the three boys a sudden gurgling sound that sent the blood leaping through their veins much faster than ordinarily might be the case. Thad turned his head to see what Bumpus and Bob White might appear to think of that thrilling sound; for it was not repeated; and although plainly heard, Thad could not at the time make up his mind whether it was a husky voice calling aloud for help, or some bird uttering its discordant scream. [114]

CHAPTER XIV.

MAROONED.

"W-w-what d'ye think it was, Thad?" asked Bumpus, presently; and the fact was very evident that his teeth were rattling at a lively rate, warm though the afternoon sun was at the time.

Bob White said nothing, only he tried to read the face of their leader. Bob gave promise of making the finest kind of a Boy Scout. He was next door to fearless; or at any rate would scorn to allow his natural feelings to sway him when he believed a sense of duty required his doing something.

"Well, at first *I* thought it might be somebody calling for help," replied Thad, slowly; "but you notice that it wasn't repeated. And that makes me think now it must have been some fishhawk screaming. I've known them to make a queer sort of a sound."

"Just what it must have been," remarked Bob, nodding his head in approval.

Bumpus, however, did not seem to be wholly satisfied.

"Say, it went right through me," he observed. "I just seemed to have a cold feeling run up and down my spine, like you'd emptied a cup of ice-water down my neck. Think we've seen enough of the old island by now, Thad? Hadn't we better be turning around, and heading back for camp?" [115]

"Well, I should say not, Bumpus, bless your timid soul," replied Thad, laughingly. "Why, that only makes Bob here and myself the more anxious to land, and look the island over. If there's anything queer around, we ought to find out all about it. Am I right, Bob?"

The answer the Southern lad made was very suggestive. He simply dipped his paddle into the water again, and with several sturdy movements of his arms sent the boat forward once more,

headed directly for the shore of the island. Bumpus drew up his plump shoulders, but he made no protest. It would not have done him much good if he did try to say anything. No doubt they would have told him that the walking back to camp was good, and no dust blowing, if he wanted to return.

He simply gripped both sides of the boat, and held on, while keeping his eyes fastened on the shore they were now fast approaching.

No further sounds were heard, save the water lapping among the rocks, and giving out a musical gurgling in the rising wind.

"There's a good landing where that little sandy beach runs along," Thad remarked, as they drew in closer.

"So it is, suh," replied the paddler. "I was just making up my mind to head foh it when you spoke. Here she goes, now."

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Thad was half standing, and as the prow of the boat grated on the sand he made a flying leap for the shore. Bumpus looked as though he half expected to see some terrible monster dart out of the brushwood, and seize upon the scout-master. He heaved a sigh of relief when nothing of the sort came about; and even condescended to waddle ashore himself—that is the only word capable of doing justice to the clumsy actions of Bumpus when in a narrow boat like a canoe.

So the three scouts now stood on the sandy beach. Bumpus scanned the bushes, but Thad was observing certain marks on the little sandy beach that told him others had drawn a boat up in that same place before now. In fact, to judge from the freshness of the signs, it had not been very long ago since men or boys were here.

Now, there is something in the makeup of certain lads calculated to draw them on, when there is an element of uncertainty in the air. Thad had been curious to explore this island before; and now that he had seen signs of others having landed, he began to feel doubly anxious. Perhaps it was the "call of the wild" in his composition; or possibly he had inherited some trait bordering on a love of adventure, handed down from some remote ancestor who may have roamed the world seeking excitement.

"Are you really going in there, Thad?" asked Bumpus, his face showing signs of uneasiness as he surveyed the fringe of bushes under the dense trees that overhung them.

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"That's just what we expect to do, Bumpus," replied the scout-master, firmly. "You may pull the boat up further, and follow after us; or if you prefer staying by the boat, you can do that, just as you please. Ready, Bob?"

"Yes, suh, and more than anxious to be on the move," answered the Southern boy.

They turned their backs on poor Bumpus, who found himself in a quandary, hardly knowing which course would be the worse for him to pursue, tag at the heels of these two adventurous comrades, and meet with what danger they might unearth; or stay there alone with the boat.

He quickly decided that it would be far more risky to separate from his comrades. If the island *did* contain savage beasts, which Bumpus really believed to be the case, they would be sure to select such a nice juicy morsel as he promised to afford, in preference to one of the other fellows. And it horrified him to think of being pounced on while all by himself.

"Hold on, Thad, I'm coming along!" he called out, hurrying as best he could so as to overtake the other scouts, who were already plunging boldly into the heavy growth.

Being eager to keep in close touch with the others, Bumpus quickly overtook them, and panting with the effort, jogged along as close as he could get. At any rate, if trouble should spring out upon them, there was always a satisfaction in having loyal comrades along. And Bumpus noted with considerable satisfaction that both of the others had armed themselves with stout cudgels, fully three feet in length, with which they would be able to give a good account of themselves if the occasion arose when defense would be necessary.

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"Oh!" exclaimed the fat boy, when with a sudden whirr a partridge arose close beside them, and flew away with a rapid motion.

He saw the Southern boy throw his stick to his shoulder, as though taking aim.

"Oh! what a dandy shot that would have been, Thad, if I had had a gun!" Bob exclaimed, eagerly. "I could have dropped that beauty like a stone."

"Well," replied the other, "since it's the close season on partridges perhaps it's just as well you didn't have a gun. But I wouldn't be surprised if we got up more'n a few of those fellows here. The island would be a great place for their nests."

"Then I wish they'd let a poor feller know when they meant to scoot off," remarked Bumpus, wiping his face with his handkerchief; "because that one nigh scared me to death, he went buzzing off so sudden-like."

"You'll never make a hunter, whatever else you turn out to be, Bumpus," Thad remarked, smiling, as he turned to look at the red face of the perspiring fat boy.

"I don't know," the other said, with a vein of regret in his voice; "I always wanted to roam the woods, and do all that sort of thing; but then you see Nature, she wasn't kind to me. I don't seem to be made just right for tramping. And I must say some things do make my heart jump like fun. Oh! well, there are other things a scout c'n do, perhaps,—findin' boats, and lookin' for bee trees mebbe."

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"Lots of things, Bumpus," replied Thad. "You can't change your make-up; and so you'll have to do what suits you best. Shall we head to the left here, Bob; or take to the right?"

Secretly Thad was keeping his eyes on the ground part of the time as he pushed on. He had an idea they might find footprints that would lead the way to some old cabin or hangout, where perhaps the game-keepers used to live when they were employed to patrol the district, so that no one hunted or fished against the orders of the rich man who owned the country around.

"Well," replied the other, after taking a glance about him, "I don't suppose it matters much which way we turn, since we propose to look over the entire island one way or another, suh. Say we turn off here to the left, and circle around. Or if you would rather have it, we might separate and spread out like a fan."

Bumpus drew in his breath with a half gasp. It looked so very gloomy around the spot which they had reached that not for worlds would he drift away from his association with one or the other of his companions. Besides, they might need him in some way or other; because there were *some* things he could do, if he wasn't cut out for an agile fellow because of his heft.

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"No, we'd better all keep together, I think?" Thad answered, much to his relief. "You see, we're in a strange situation, and even if we put in half an hour looking this place over, what does it matter? Time isn't so valuable as all that. The others will wait for us, and take things easy. Allan has promised to show them some Indian picture writing this afternoon, and I know he'll amuse the bunch so they won't miss us."

"Now, I'd be sorry to miss that same myself," remarked Bob; "because he's got me worked up to top notch fever about it, and I wanted to try and read the sign he left behind him. I've sure heard a heap about that picture writing, and what fun scouts have trying to make out what it all means. But there don't seem to be anything out of the way on this same island, suh. A sure enough pretty place, and would make the finest camp-site you ever saw."

"Perhaps we may move over here to-morrow," said Thad. "I've several reasons for thinking that way."

"One of which is that you'd like to get rid of that bear," chuckled Bob.

"Don't be too sure of that," answered the other; "we might want to fetch him over here with us. He did us one good turn when he frightened that Brose Griffin crowd away, and who knows but what he might repeat?"

They came out on the other side of the island, and had seen no sign of any sort of human habitation. On the way back again to the other shore Thad took a different route, so that he believed they would thus cover the better part of the territory that went to make up the lake island.

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"Sure we're heading right, Thad?" asked Bob, presently.

"Oh! my goodness I hope we don't get lost!" exclaimed Bumpus, in alarm.

"It's all right," replied Thad, with not a trace of uneasiness in his voice; "we are pretty nearly across now; and unless I've made a bungle of it, we ought to come out right on that same little sandy stretch where we landed."

"I can hear the waves beating against the rocks, and they sound right loud now," remarked Bumpus.

"That must be because the wind has been getting stronger all the time we've been gone; and even now you notice the trees begin to thin out. Tell me, isn't that our sandy stretch right ahead there, and am I a good woodsman or not?"

"You brought us through as straight as a die," said Bob, admiringly; "and just as you say, Thad, that's the same spot we landed on."

"But tell me," broke in Bumpus, "if that's so, where's our boat, fellows?"

The others stared, and well they might, for although they easily recognized the pretty little beach, it was now entirely destitute of any sign of a boat!

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CHAPTER XV.

THE BOY FROM THE BLUE RIDGE.

"I expected this, but not so soon!" quavered Bumpus, dropping in a heap on the ground, and

continuing to mop his heated face with that enormous bandana.

The other two walked forward.

"We must make sure that this is the same place," remarked Thad. "Because, you see, there might happen to be two little sandy beaches very much alike."

"No danger of that, suh!" declared Bob, with conviction in his manner. "I took right good notice of a heap of things, and they all seem to tally. This is the same place, I give you my word on that."

"Well, here's all the proof we want," said the scout-master, pointing down at his feet, as they stood close to where the little waves were running over most of the sandy stretch. "The water has washed out some of our footprints; but you can still see where Bumpus tripped at the edge of the rise here, where that root sticks up a little. Remember that, don't you Bumpus?"

"That, you're IT," replied the fat boy, getting up to come forward, and stare at the marks he had made, as though they confirmed his worst fears. "And now fellers, you see the blessed old island *has* got people hidin' on it! They came back here and hooked our boat while we were poking along through the scrub like a bunch of geese. Now, how are we going to get back home? We'll just starve to death out here. And Step-hen he c'n turn my bag inside-out while I'm gone, too!"

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That last seemed to worry him more than anything else, Thad noticed, with a little surprise; because he did not believe for a minute that Bumpus knew anything about the compass which Step-hen accused him of hiding.

They looked across the wide stretch of water. The waves were indeed dancing at quite a lively rate now, showing that a fresh breeze had started up since they started on their little exploring trip.

Thad suddenly conceived an idea. Perhaps it was the wash of the waves against the bank that gave it to him.

He turned on Bumpus.

"See here, how far up did you pull that boat?" he asked, suddenly.

The fat boy stared, and scratched his head.

"Do you mean when we first landed; or afterwards when you told me to come along or stay here, just whichever I liked?" he asked; but it was only to gain a little time that he said this, because he already knew what the answer would be.

"When Bob and myself were going into the brush I told you to pull the boat up, and either stay here, or follow. Did you do it, Bumpus?" Thad went on.

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"Oh! I heard you say it, all right," admitted the fat boy, frankly; "but when I looked back, it seemed to me that the old boat was far enough up on the sand; and then you fellers were making off so fast I just thought you'd leave me alone if I didn't hurry. So I just put after you, pellmell."

"Well, that's what's the matter," said Thad, with a look of disgust. "Next time see to it that you obey orders, no matter what you happen to think."

"Then the boat's drifted away, suh, you think?" Bob remarked, eagerly.

"That's what I imagine," replied Thad. "Notice which way the wind is coming, and you can see that it throws the water up on this beach, which is wasn't doing when we left here. Once she was loose and the same breeze would make her move along past that little wooded point yonder. I reckon that if we climb out there, we'll see the boat adrift."

"But why haven't some of the boys ashore noticed it, and let out a whoop to draw our attention?" asked the boy from the Blue Ridge.

"They may have been too busy to look this way," answered Thad; "and then, besides, the boat would be carried behind the island so they couldn't see it. Come on, and we'll soon find out."

"But if we don't find it however am I going to get on the main land again?" complained Bumpus.

"Well, it would serve you right if you did have to stay here alone awhile," Thad told him, with a sternness in his face which the merry twinkle in his eyes belied. "After being so shiftless as to let such an accident happen, you surely deserve to suffer. Isn't that right, Bumpus; own up now?"

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"Oh! I suppose it might be," the fat boy admitted; "but I hope you won't think of leaving me out here all alone. I might get a scare, and be tempted to jump in; and you know what a poor swimmer I am, Thad. Oh! bully, bully, there she is, Thad, and floating along just as sassy as anything!"

The boat was not more than a hundred and fifty feet away, though by degrees moving further off all the while, as the wind and the waves influenced her movements.

"Now somebody will have to strip and go after her," said Thad. "And if you were a better swimmer, I'd say it ought to be you, Bumpus."

"You'll have to excuse me this time, Thad," declared the other, earnestly. "But are you sure it was only the wind that carried her off?"

"You can see for yourself that there's no one in the boat, using the paddle," the scout-master replied.

"That's so, Thad, but seems as if I c'd see somethin' in the water under her bow; and it looks like two hands holding on to the gunnel above, just as if somebody might be swimmin' along and dragging the boat after him."

Both the others broke out into a laugh at that.

"I see that imagination of yours is working overtime, Bumpus," remarked Thad; and then turning to the Southern boy he went on: "Shall it be you or I, Bob?"

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"I hope you'll let me go after her, suh," said the other, quickly, beginning to throw off some of his clothes, as if anticipating a favorable decision on the part of his superior officer in the Silver Fox Patrol.

"Go then, if you want to, Bob," suggested Thad, smiling; for he was being drawn closer to this gallant son of the Sunny South every day; and constantly found new causes for admiring the other's self sacrificing disposition.

Inside of three minutes Bob White went in from the headland with a splash, and swam toward the floating boat like a water spaniel. Reaching the runaway he was seen to clamber aboard, after which he picked up the paddle, and started to urge the boat toward the shore again.

Not until then did Bumpus seem to heave a sigh of relief. Evidently the poor fellow had really expected to see some dreadful enemy clasp Bob around the neck as he started to slip over the side of the boat.

After Bob had resumed his clothes, they entered the boat, and left the vicinity of the island. Thad kept looking it over as they gradually moved further away, as if not satisfied, by any means, with what little he had seen of the place.

"Yes," he remarked, "I'm pretty much of a mind to put it to the fellows; and if the majority favors, we'll change our camp to-morrow, for a try on the island. There's *something* about that place that seems to draw me."

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"Well, I'm sorry to hear that," declared Bumpus, dolefully; "because I just know they'll want to ferry over—Allan because he's ready to do anything you say; Step-hen, for he wants to meet up with all sorts of adventures, and says he means to get away out in the Rockies some of these days; Smithy because he's afraid you'll all think him weak and girlish if he draws back; and Giraffe too when he gets the idea that mebbe we'll be leaving the bear behind; because it'll mean just so much more left for him to eat. Huh! if I'm the minority, might as well make it unanimous, and be done with it. Can't die but once, anyhow, so what does it matter?"

Of course neither of the others paid much attention to what Bumpus said. He always liked to hear himself talk; and as his comrades said, his "bark was worse than his bite." Bumpus often said he wouldn't, and changed his mind immediately.

When they landed the others were just about starting out to have Allan show how the long talked-of Indian picture writing was done. They asked questions, of course but neither Thad nor Bob would gratify their curiosity.

"We're going to keep all that for around the camp-fire to-night boys," declared the scout-master, firmly. "Wouldn't interrupt this arrangement for anything. And to tell the truth we didn't find anything so serious as to warrant a recall. So go right along with the game, Allan, and let the rest of us in on it; because Bob here is as eager to learn as any of the boys."

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Bumpus, however, declared he was that tired he preferred staying in the camp, to keep the bear company.

"He might get loose and try to clean us out of all our grub," he suggested, with a broad smile.

"Sure," replied Step-hen, sneeringly; "and I just warrant you've already got your tree all picked out beforehand, if he does. Much good you'd be trying to defend our provisions. Now, if it was *me*, I'd fight to the last gasp before I'd let him make way with a single piece of cheese, or even a cracker."

"I believe you would, Step-hen," replied Bumpus, calmly; "and by the way, perhaps my knapsack has aired enough by now, so I'll put it in the tent again."

Step-hen made a face at him, and hurried away after the rest; but from the manner in which he looked back a number of times, and continued to shake his head as he talked to himself, it was plain to be seen that he still believed the fat boy was hiding something in that same haversack, which he did not wish any one, particularly a fellow named Step-hen Bingham, to set eyes on. And what else could that be but the missing compass, which Bumpus had once so indignantly denied having seen, after he handed it back to its owner?

Allan did not intend going far, since there was no need of it. He could illustrate all he wished to in the way of the famous Indian picture writing, which Boy Scouts in other troops had found so

interesting a study in connection with woodcraft. Even Thad, who had dabbled in it to some extent in the past, was deeply concerned; because he knew that the more these boys became interested in observing things that were happening all around them, the sooner they would climb up the ladder leading to merit badges, and a right to the name of a first class scout.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE PICTURES THAT TALKED.

"What's that Allan's got in his hand?" asked Davy Jones, as the little party reached an open spot, and the Maine boy came to a halt.

"Looks like a strip of fresh birch bark," remarked Giraffe.

"Just what it is," Allan spoke up, "and if you watch me, you'll see how the poor Indian, not carrying a hammer and nails along, finds a way to leave his message so that it attracts the attention he wants, just as well as if he nailed it against the trunk of a tree."

He bent down, broke off a long wand from a bush, and seemed to partly split one end of this. Into the crotch he inserted the birch bark. The other end he pushed into the ground.

"There you are, fellows," Allan went on. "When you reach this point along the trail of your friend, you find that he has left this message for you. Being an Indian, or a border man used to the ways of the Indians, you take the strip of bark in your hands, and examine it. To the eye of the experienced one it is as plain as so many words would be to all of us. Here, look at what I've written, boys."

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"Say, it's a cute little boy's idea of a procession," remarked Step-hen; "for I take it that all these figures must be meant for men."

"And I can see a fire burning, right here," declared Giraffe, eagerly.

"What's this four-legged critter, a wolf or a dog?" asked Step-hen, pointing to the object he had in mind.

"What would you say, Thad?" asked Allan, smiling.

"Well, it strikes me that it must be a dog, because you've made it have a curly tail; and no wolf was ever known to possess such a thing. Besides, it always appears close to the heels of one of the men, and the same one too; so I should say it belongs to that fellow."

"Just exactly what I wanted to convey," Allan went on, nodding his head in approval. "Now, if you'll pay close attention, fellows, I'll show you how easy it is to write messages this way. Just as Step-hen said, it's like a boy trying to show his first skill in drawing; but in this case every little mark has its meaning."

"It's interesting, all right, Allan," observed Davy Jones.

"That's right, it is," echoed Smithy, who had apparently never before realized what a delightful thing it was to get out in the woods with a parcel of chums, and discover what strange things can be found there.

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"Now, here is what the man in advance is telling the one who comes after," continued the boy who knew. "He is himself following on the track of a party of enemies, and has discovered certain facts connected with their movements, which he wishes to communicate to his comrade coming after, so as to gave him the trouble of wasting time in investigating for himself. And here's the way he does it."

He held the birch bark up so all could see. Six pair of eager eyes were immediately glued upon the marks which he had made on the smooth brown inside bark, with possibly the point of his knife, just as the real Indian might.

"First, you see, here are five figures represented," Allan began.

"That means the total number of the enemy, don't it?" asked Davy, quickly.

"Just what it does, and I'm glad to see how you catch on," continued Allan. "Now, after telling how many foes they have ahead, the scout tries to mark each one in some way so they can be distinguished all through the letter. Here's a fellow who seems to be one-armed, for he always appears that way. A second is very tall, you notice, while a third is a dwarf, and a fourth limps a little, for his leg is bent some in every picture. The fifth wears a hat; and as for the sixth, he must be feeling the effects of looking into a bottle too many times; because he wobbles some as he pursues his way. Got all that, fellows?"

"Sure, and it's some interesting, Allan," declared Step-hen.

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"Well, they've been in camp here, for you can see the remains of a fire, but with very little smoke ascending, showing that it is nearly dead. They have gone due northeast after breaking

camp. Here are five marks like the pickets on a fence, just alongside this cross. Now, what would you think those meant?"

"Looks to me as if the men had gone five miles up to that cross," Thad remarked.

"Just what I was going to say," said Davy, disappointed to come in second.

"Both of you have hit the nail on the head," laughed Allan; "for that is what the Indian wants to say. And here at the five mile station the party of hostiles appear to have separated, the tall man and the one who is groggy, together with the dog, going off toward the east; while the others keep on straight. And you can see that our friend chooses to follow the three, for some reason of his own."

"Here's another picket fence," remarked Davy; "this time only four miles."

"Then what?" asked Allan.

"There's a crooked line running across. Can't be a snake they've struck, because it's too big for that," mused Davy.

"I know," remarked Smithy. "That must be a river, because here's a boat; anyhow, it looks like one to me."

"Why, of course," broke in Bob White; "and I must have been blind not to have glimpsed that before. They've got to a river, and found a boat there. But what do all these funny marks on the river stand for? Looks like the three chaps might be in swimming. Is that what it means, Allan?"

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"In one way, yes," replied the other, laughing again, for he found it great fun to have his comrades guessing at the explanation of his crude chart. "Here you see them standing up in the boat, and all of them are holding their hands over their heads. That is the Indian's idea of showing fright."

"And just beyond, the boat seems to have broken in two; that shows something happened, I reckon," Davy hastened to remark.

"Well, here the three of them are swimming like ducks, and the boat doesn't appear again, so something *did* happen. Go on Allan, this is just as fine as any illustrated rebus I ever struck," Thad said, himself deeply interested.

"Perhaps the one who writes this birch bark message was himself responsible for the sinking of the boat. You failed to notice that just before the accident happened there was a *dot* on the water close to the boat. That may have been his head, and he managed to cut a hole in the birch bark canoe."

"But see here, a little further on you forgot to mark the whole three again; I can only see two, all told," Davy declared.

"Well, evidently then the scout wants to convey the impression that there were only two of the enemy at that time," Allan went on. "He must have found some means of disposing of one, either in the water, or from the shore with his gun while they were floundering there."

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"I guess the two chaps crawled out here on the bank," said Step-hen, pointing.

"And plunged into the woods too, for here are trees again, and what looks like a trail, leading toward the west, which is marked by a setting sun. An Indian always designates a *setting* sun by the spurs that stand up like spokes; while the sun rising is simply a half circle on the horizon."

"Well," remarked Davy, his eyes round with eagerness; "I declare, this is mighty interesting; and I must get the hang of this Indian picture writing as quick as I can. You'll see what stunts I'll do after a little while. I'll sure have the rest of you guessing at the puzzles I get up."

"You're near the end of the picture, Allan," remarked Thad; "and as I can see only one figure ahead now, I think something must have happened to our friend Limpy, because he doesn't appear again."

"I suppose that the scout who follows must have found a chance to cut down the number of the enemy in advance to one," remarked Allan; "and he wants to let his friend know he is still on the trail of that fellow. Here the pursued one must have spent the night, for you can see another dead fire. Away off here it looks like a village, for there are lodges and dogs and squaws. He marks that as ten miles off, and evidently expects to overtake the lone warrior before he reaches the shelter of the tepees. And so you see he has managed to tell the story of his adventure, crudely of course, yet just as well as any one of us might write it out. And once you've got the knack of reading this sort of talk, you can manage it just as fast as you would hand-writing. That's all I'm going to tell you about it to-day; but if you feel that way another time, I'll show you a lot more that is interesting."

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Davy Jones declared that he would keep the Maine boy to his promise. This queer way of communicating a whole story without writing a single letter seemed to appeal to him especially. And all that evening he was scribbling away upon a pad of paper he had brought along, drawing all manner of remarkable figures, which he jumbled up in such a way that he actually forgot the key to the combinations; and had to get Allan's help in solving some of them, which the others considered a rich joke.

During the balance of the afternoon the boys amused themselves in various ways. Several tried the fishing, with the result that there was a good mess of gamey bass caught for supper.

Thad, Allan and Bob White lay in the shade for a long time, talking. The Southern boy was eagerly telling his chums various things in connection with his old home away off in the distant Blue Ridge; and from the way the others asked questions it was evident that the proposition to have the Silver Fox Patrol visit the mountain region where Bob had once lived must have sunk deeply into their minds. [137]

"I know one thing sure," remarked Thad; "if we're lucky enough to go there, I'm going to carry my shotgun along. A Boy Scout as a rule is seldom seen bearing arms; but there's nothing in the rules of the organization that I can find to prevent a member from enjoying a hunt when he has the chance. Besides, if we camp out, as we expect to, we must depend on getting game for part of our supplies."

"And as for the money part," remarked Bob, "while a scout is required to earn the money for his suit and outfit, there's nothing to prevent him from accepting a railroad ticket from his folks, or any other cash to provide him with a summer's outing. So far as I can see it, suh, the whole intention of the organization is to make its members manly, independent, helpful to others, and thrifty. I hope, suh, all of us are trying to carry out those rules. And it would please me more than I can tell you, if you decided to accompany me to that mountain country where they grow men; because I am compelled to go there for my mother, and would be the happiest fellow alive if my seven chums went along to keep me company."

"Don't tell it around, Bob," said Thad, quietly, "but really it's as good as settled that if we get back from this first little camping trip in good shape, we're going to get the chance to make a bigger tour," and then the three exultant scouts shook hands, as they saw a glorious future prospect opening before them. [138]

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAKER OF FIRES.

Giraffe spent fully half an hour, if not longer, that afternoon, making ample preparations for his anticipated building of the camp-fire that night, after supper had been disposed of.

He had his busy jack-knife at work laying in a store of shavings that would flare up in a jiffy, and set the next-sized kindling to going; when by degrees the larger logs would take fire under the fierce heat. Thad kept an eye on him, and others were a bit worried lest the boy who just doted on building fires overdo the matter, and set the forest ablaze.

"Why, you've already got twice too much tinder, Giraffe," remonstrated Davy Jones, as he saw the boy with the knife start in again to cut more.

"Do for starting the fire in the morning then," replied Giraffe. "Must be doing something all the time, you know; and I don't enjoy anything half so much as making whittlings for a blaze. You go along with your silly pictures, Davy, and let me alone. Thad's keeping an eye on me, all right. And I haven't got a single match about me, you know."

Supper was finally in preparation. The bass had been neatly cleaned by those who had caught them, Step-hen and Smithy; and for the first time in his life no doubt, the pampered son of the rich widow found himself doing the work of a cook's helper. Whether he fancied it or not, Step-hen declared that he did his work neatly, and fairly fast; which compliment made Smithy's light blue eyes shine with real pleasure. He had entered into a new life, and was evidently resolved to pursue it further, taking the bitter with the sweet. [139]

But of course the fish did not constitute the only food they had. Healthy appetites like those possessed by the eight scouts could not fare on fish alone. Thad, for instance, cared very little for fresh water bass, though fond of catching them. And he saw to it that a large can of corned beef was opened, together with one containing succotash, out of which he constructed a savory dish which he called the canoeists' stew.

Then besides they had stewed prunes, together with a kettle of boiled rice, over which those who preferred it could sprinkle sugar, and wet down with the evaporated cream which was carried in sealed tins.

Given the voracious appetites which healthy boys usually carry along with them into camp, and it was amazing how this mess vanished. And Giraffe, as he scraped the kettle that had contained the stew, remarked that the only mistake made on the trip had been in providing too small cooking utensils. [140]

"Make your mind easy, Giraffe," said Davy; "next time we'll fetch along all our mothers' preserving kettles. Fact is, there must be times when even a wash boiler looks about the regulation size, to you!"

"That's mean of you, Davy," remarked Giraffe, when he could make himself heard above the

roars of laughter. "Just because I happen to have a better appetite than the rest of you, is no reason you should keep on joking a feller about it. You eat twice as much as Smithy here, and yet you think that's nothing. Well, I happen to be able to go a little further than *you*, that's all. Nothing to be ashamed of, is it, Thad?"

"Oh! the boys must have their fun, Giraffe; and if you're wise you'll laugh with them," Thad remarked. "When they find it doesn't bother you, the chances are they'll quit quizzing you on your eating ability. Doctor Philander said that the only danger lay in your putting to great a strain on your digestive powers."

"Well, Doctor Philander ain't here, and we seem to be getting along O. K. without a regular scout-master, too," remarked Davy Jones. "I wouldn't care if business kept on chaining him to town whenever the Silver Fox Patrol has a chance to camp out. Thad, here, keeps us subdued just about right."

The bear had not been forgotten at meal times. Thad saw to it that there was enough food given to the animal to satisfy its hunger; though Giraffe always complained that it was just ruinous the way that animal did eat into their supplies.

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"Lucky you laid in an extra amount, Thad," he remarked that same evening, as he saw the captive make way with all that was placed before him. "Guess you must have had an idea we'd have company up here."

"Why, no, the boys warned me that the fresh air might sharpen up some of our appetites," replied Thad; "and I guess it has."

"That's just it," said Giraffe, quickly; "and I can't be held responsible for what this ozone does, can I, Thad? Why, ever since we started, I've just got an empty feeling down there, like the bottom had dropped out. Half an hour after I fill up, I'm hungry again. It's an awful feeling, let me tell you."

"I was just wondering," said Thad, "if those two foreigners who own this beast will ever show up to reclaim him."

"My stars! I hope so," remarked the other, looking horrified at the very thought of keeping Bruin much longer. "But what can we do to let 'em know we've got their old hairy exhibit eating us out of house and home?"

"Nothing that I know of," laughed Thad, "No use advertising, because papers don't circulate through the wilderness; and those ignorant foreigners couldn't read the notice if we put one in. And we can't find where to stick the message even if we printed one in picture writing, as Allan had shown us the Indians do. Guess after all we'll just have to take pot luck, Giraffe."

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"That means, I reckon, that we'll just have to keep on stuffing our good grub down the throat of this silly old bear, until his owners happen along. Tough luck, Thad! Why, oh! why did the beast ever smell us out in the beginning?"

"Oh! the odor of our supper cooking must have done that," Thad went on to say. "If you were almost starved, and got on the track of onions frying, wouldn't you make a bee-line for that camp-fire, and beg to share the meal? That's what he did, came walking in, and in his clumsy way tried to dance himself into our good graces. But the hour was late, and we all made a break for the branches of the trees. I'll never remember that without laughing. It was sure the funniest sight ever."

"There's Step-hen," Giraffe had gone on to remark, "always talking about that uncle of his who lives out somewhere in the wild and woolly west; he says he expects to pay him a visit some day, and brags about how he'll have a chance to bag his grizzly bear then; but excuse me, if a grizzly can eat any more than this tame one; I wouldn't bag him for a gift."

"Oh! you mistake his meaning," chuckled Thad, "When he speaks of bagging a bear he means shooting him and bringing him to bag, not capturing one. The man doesn't live who would try to capture such a monster, single-handed."

"Have you ever shot one, Thad?"

"Well, hardly, seeing that I've never lived where they grew grizzlies; but the time might come when I would have the chance. I'd like to be able to say I had brought such a fierce beast down. But I want to get back, and keep an eye on that fire you've built. It's sure a wonder, only I wouldn't throw any more wood on it for a long time. Those flames shoot up pretty high, right now."

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"Oh! it's just glorious!" declared the young fire worshipper; "and I don't see how I'm ever going to get to sleep to-night for tinkering with it. When I can attend a fire I seem to thrill all over. Funny, ain't it, Thad, how it affects me? My folks say they'll have to send me to the city, and make a fireman out of me."

"Well, if they asked my advice," remarked the other, "I'd say you ought to be put on a railroad engine to stoke. Inside of a month you'd be so sick of making fires you'd never want to try it again as long as you lived."

"Hey! don't you go to putting them up to that dodge, then," remarked Giraffe, in sudden alarm,

"because I don't want to get an overdose of making fires. Just now it's a passion with me. I love to sit, and stare into the blaze, because I can see all sorts of things there. Why, Thad, honest now, they talk to me just like that silly old Injun picture writin' does to Allan. I read stories in the fires I make."

"Well," remarked Thad, drily; "we'll make sure then, that this camp-fire dies out before we go to our blankets; because I'm bound to know just where you are, Giraffe. And now that the bear has finished his supper, and is begging for more, let's go over to the rest of the boys again."

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"Yes, for goodness sake let's get away from here," the other scout said. "Somehow or other I just know that beast feels a grudge against me. There's Bumpus, as choice a morsel as you'd like to see; yet it's always me the bear is watching. I sometimes believe that if he did get loose, he'd be mean enough to try and make a meal off me."

"Well, if he can understand English, or even the actions of human beings, you'd admit he's had good cause for disliking you," chuckled Thad; "because all along you've put up quite a good-sized objection against our wasting any more food on him. And animals can tell who their friends are, you understand."

"Is that really so?" Giraffe remarked, uneasily; "then me for a tree if ever he does break that chain. And I'm going to keep a way open under the edge of the tent, so I can slide out while he's searching among the lot for me. If I had a gun along. Thad, we might enjoy bear steak on this trip yet."

"Pretty tough eating, believe me; and I'm just as well pleased that you have no rifle," with which Thad threw himself down by the roaring fire, the heat of which felt good, since with the coming of night the air had become quite chilly.

Giraffe soon fell back on his shaving occupation again. Allan was telling stories about the Maine woods, and enthusing his hearers, so that even Smithy was heard to declare that he hoped they would some day have a chance to visit that country, to see for themselves if it was as fine as Allan pictured.

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"I hope it will be in the early fall, then," remarked Allan; "because then you would be in time for the late fishing, and the opening of the deer season. That's the best time for going up into the Maine woods."

Davy Jones, who had gone down to the edge of the lake to listen to the bass jumping as they fed upon some smaller species of fish, as frequently happens at night time, came hurrying back to the fire just then, his face filled with excitement. Thad saw at once that something must have occurred to give the scout a shock; and he wondered whether it could have anything to do with the mystery of the boat, and those footprints over on the island.

"The ghost walked, fellers!" exclaimed Davy, as he caught his breath again.

"What's all that silly talk mean, Davy?" demanded the scout-master.

"Well, he's been prowling around with a lantern, all right, lookin' for something; I give you my word I saw it, Thad," Davy declared, crossing his heart, boy fashion.

"Where was all this happening?" pursued Thad.

"Why, over there on the island!" answered Davy, positively.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ALARM.

Davy's words created no end of excitement in the camp of the Boy Scouts. Every fellow jumped to his feet, and several immediately stepped out so that they could get a better view of the dark lake. The stars shone brightly, and gleamed on the tiny wavelets that purred along toward the beach close by.

Knowing just where the distant island lay, they could manage to locate it by the inky blur that seemed to settle upon the water at this one particular spot. But if any one expected to see lanterns moving to and fro like animated fireflies, they made a sad mistake. It remained as dark as the inside of a pocket over there.

"Oh! come, what sort of talk were you giving us, Davy?" remarked Step-hen, in disgust. "I was mighty comfortable lying on my blanket, and you just thought you'd see how you could stir us up with some fake news."

"I tell you I *did* see it!" affirmed Davy, stoutly.

"Say, I know what he glimpsed," remarked Bumpus.

"What was it, then?" asked Step-hen.

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"That star hanging low over yonder," the fat boy went on, eagerly; "if a feller saw it all of a sudden, he might think it moved. And it does look like a lantern, now, it sure does."

"Think everybody is a booby like,—well, some people, do you, Bumpus?" demanded Davy, indignantly. "What I saw waved back and forward, just like I might do, if I wanted to make a signal to somebody over here on the mainland. Thad, you believe me, don't you?"

Before the scout leader could answer, another took up the argument.

"Boys," said Smithy, "what Davy Jones says is perfectly correct, because I myself saw some sort of moving light. I just happened to turn my head, for perhaps Davy said something right then, and it was out there over the dark water."

"There, what d'ye think of that, Smarty?" demanded Davy, turning on Step-hen and Bumpus, who were on the same side for once, and about the only time the others could remember:

"It goes," said Thad, positively. "What Davy told us has now been proven by a second reliable witness. Then there must have been some sort of light moving over there on the island. If a light, then a human being, either boy or man. And that makes me all the more anxious to look that same island over again. I didn't get to cover all the ground when we were there last."

"But there wasn't any cabin or hut there?" Bob White declared.

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"I don't believe there could be one, and none of us sight it. Still, it's a rocky island, you remember, and there might be some sort of cave on it, good enough to be used to keep a man from the rain, or housing goods, if need be."

"Whew! listen to Thad, would you?" said Step-hen, drawing a big breath, which betrayed his state of mind, and the excitement that was beginning to make his pulses thrill. "Whatever do you suppose these unknown men can be doing around here?"

"You remember what I said before about this country having been stocked with game, and this lake with thousands of young bass years back?" Thad continued. "It is possible that some of the late gamekeepers have a neat little plan to make a pile of money out of their knowledge. And as the law would punish them if they were caught, perhaps they're hiding while we're in camp so close by."

"That sounds good enough for me," remarked Giraffe, taking advantage of Thad's attention being diverted to softly toss another pine knot upon the fire.

"Perhaps it's worse than that," Step-hen remarked, in a half-awed voice. "I've been reading a lot lately about some convicts that broke out of a penitentiary up in the next county. Mebbe now some of 'em have located here, and are living off the game they snare in the woods, or the fish they hook."

"That might be, of course, though I doubt it," Thad went on to remark. "In the first place, if they were convicts they would be wearing heavy brogans, such as are always used in prisons. One of these men had on a neat pair of pointed shoes, for I saw the marks clearly. The other's shoes were pieced. I pointed that out to Bob White, didn't I, Bob?"

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"It is just like you say, suh," replied the other, readily; "and you showed me how I could tell that shoe again any time, and under any conditions; foh it had a home-made patch on the sole, running crisscross from side to side," and he made the figure with his finger in the earth beside him.

Davy Jones had left the fire again, to go back to the lake shore, and so did not happen to hear this explanation. He seemed to be hoping another glimpse of the moving lantern would be granted to him. There was something so weird and fascinating about the mystery that Davy wished it to keep up.

"How about our moving the camp over on the island to-morrow; have you changed your mind about that, Mr. Scout-Master?" asked Allan.

"Yes, I was just hanging in the balance, when this new thing happened, and settled it for me," replied Thad.

"Then we don't go?" asked Step-hen, guessing the way things were moving from the expression he saw on the other's face.

"It would hardly pay us," answered Thad. "In the first place we're nicely fixed where we are. Then again, if that island should be a harboring place for hoboos or some other rough men, we'd soon get into trouble with them. I don't think many of us would enjoy sound sleep if we camped over there. It would mean sentry duty every night, just like we were soldiers."

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The boys had voted in one way to go over, and no one would have liked to show the white feather. But this decision on the part of their scout-master let them "down easy," as Step-hen afterwards confessed. And they all seemed to look pleased over the decision, even Davy, who came in just in time to hear the last words Thad spoke, having seen no further sign of a lantern.

But perhaps there was one who remained silent, and looked glum when it was thus decided to remain in the old camp. Giraffe dropped his head, so that his comrades might not see how disappointed he felt over the change of plans. For he had hoped that the bear would be set at

liberty when the last scout took passage for the new island camp; and that the beast would start off hunting food in the woods after the fashion of bears in general.

Now they faced a panic in the food department, Giraffe feared; for he seemed to be certain that some night that beast would break loose from his chain, and devour everything they had in the line of provisions.

"Who goes over with you to-morrow, Thad?" asked Davy, hoping that he might be the favored one; for Davy loved adventure, and could never get too much of the same, he believed. [151]

"Well, I hope he don't choose you, for one, Davy," said Step-hen, jealously.

"Why not?" demanded Davy, showing resentment at once.

"Because you might have one of your fits in the boat, and upset the whole outfit," Step-hen went on, with a grin; "you know, when we wanted you to help clean up around the camp yesterday, you said you were afraid of exerting yourself too much, because you felt the signs that always came along before you got one of them terrible cramps."

Davy looked a little confused. Deep down in his own heart he knew that he had been playing a little game of "shirk" about that time, and taking what was a mean advantage of the good nature of his fellow scouts. And now it was coming back to make him pay the penalty. So he said not another word.

"I haven't decided yet who I want to take," remarked Thad, looking around at the circle of eager faces upon which the light of the glowing camp-fire shone; "and perhaps the fairest way will be to draw lots, then the lucky one will not be of my picking; and there can be no bad feeling."

Bumpus had been sitting there for some time now, taking things easy. He certainly enjoyed remaining quiet as well as any one in the patrol, which, considering his weight, was not to be wondered at.

Some thought must have struck him just about that time, for he was observed to struggle to his knees with many a grunt, and then gaining his feet vanish within the nearest tent. [152]

Nobody was paying any particular attention to the fat youth, however, unless it might have been Step-hen, who turned his head to see what was going on; and even he joined in the laugh when Davy Jones performed one of his comical antics, jumping up, and hanging from the lower limb of a tree by his toes, so that he swung to and fro like a big pendulum.

"Better be careful, suh, how you play that trick, if ever you go down with me into the Blue Ridge country," laughed Bob White.

"Why, would they arrest me for cruelty to animals?" demanded Davy, as he made a flying leap, turned completely over in the air, and landed ever so lightly on his feet, as neatly as a circus gymnast might have done.

"No, but if some of the darkies were passing through the woods, suh, and saw you hanging like that, they'd positively think it was the biggest 'possum that ever was grown in North Car'lina. And you'd hear an ax at the butt of that tree in a jiffy, believe me."

Just then Bumpus came staggering out of the tent, having tripped as usual on a guy rope in his hurry. He scrambled to his feet, and although nearly out of breath, managed to grasp:

"Well, there's thieves broke loose in this same camp, fellows, or else the place is just bewitched, that's what!"

"You'll have to explain what you mean, Bumpus?" declared Thad; while Step-hen half started from his seat on a blanket, his face becoming scarlet as if he expected that every eye would immediately be turned in his direction. [153]

"I tell you I hung it right on the pole in the middle of the tent, and now it's clean gone. Yes, I even hunted around on the ground, and everywhere, but nary a sign did I see. Things have come to a pretty pass, I think, when a fellow just ain't allowed to leave his haversack around without somebody running off with the same. Like to know what the rules'd say to that sort of thing. Thad, is this going to keep up right along? It's downright robbery, that's my opinion; and I don't care who knows it. Oh! my goodness gracious! there they come now, walkin' right in on us!"

From the way Bumpus spoke, one would think he meant the thieves were descending on the camp to complete its looting; and as the boys scrambled to their feet, no wonder they were thrilled to see two shadowy figures of men advancing from the direction of the dense forest! [154]

CHAPTER XIX.

A GOOD RIDDANCE.

Bumpus somehow seemed to keep his senses about him. Frightened as he was, he never forgot

that, as the chosen bugler of Cranford Troop, he had certain duties devolving upon him which should not be neglected.

So he made a frantic dive for his precious bugle, hanging close by. Seizing the instrument, he clapped it to his lips, and blew a clarion call. It was the rallying signal of the scouts, and which they knew full well.

The bear immediately set up a whimpering, and then merged this into a roar that echoed from the side of the hill far away. Thad wondered whether this action on his part was intended to be disgust with the music produced by the silver-voiced troop bugle; or if the coming of the two men had anything to do with it.

Immediately he saw that the latter was the case, for one of the men left the side of his companion, and striding swiftly toward the dancing bear, began to fondle the beast, while speaking words in some outlandish tongue.

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That told the story. The newcomers then, were the two men whom Smithy had seen exhibiting the trained bear near his house, and one of whom he had declared asked him ever so many questions in good English about the country above, and the people living on the farms there.

But the scouts had had their little scare all right. Under the belief that the camp was in danger of being raided by a couple of thieving tramps, who had already picked out the bag of Bumpus as the choicest prize of the lot, Davy and some of his mates had gained their feet only to jump for the spot where their stout staves happened to be resting against various trees.

They really presented quite a warlike front as they began to wave these sticks in a menacing manner, and ranged on either side of their scout-master.

"Hold on, boys, there's no need of making such a show as that," Thad remarked, secretly pleased, however, to see how bold a band he had under him; "these men are the ones who own the bear; and I rather think they've come for him at last."

"Hurrah!" shouted Giraffe, ready to dance with happiness over the sudden prospect of being rid of their "star boarder," while the stock of food still remained fairly bountiful.

Thad was observing the man who kept on toward them. He was coarsely dressed, and to all appearances as much of a foreigner as the one who was caressing the whining dancing bear, and speaking such strange words to him. At the same time Thad, who was quite an observer, felt that there was a vast difference between the two men.

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This one had clear features, sunburned and begrimed it is true, but with intelligence in his manner; while his gray eyes were keen and penetrating.

Just now, as he surveyed the hostile attitude of some of the scouts, Thad could detect a grim smile passing over the face of the other. He nodded his head to the boy whom he guessed must be the leader of the campers.

"We lost the bear by accident, and my companion has been mourning ever since. You see he brought the beast over the ocean, and cares a heap for him," he said, as he pointed to where the bear and keeper were actually hugging each other, so it seemed.

"He walked in on us the other night, just when we were ready to go to our blankets," Thad went on to explain, "and nearly scared some of the boys out of their wits. But we happened to have a scout who had fed your bear, and talked to him. He was brave enough to get down from his tree, and offer the animal part of a loaf of bread."

"Half a loaf it was too, mister!" broke in Giraffe, determined that the other should not be left in any doubt as to the immense hole the beast had made in their provision chest.

"And while the bear was eating, Smithy managed to get the chain fast around that tree," Thad continued. "We hoped you'd come for him, sooner or later, because we hadn't laid in stores for a bear when we started out on this hike. And Giraffe here is anxious to see the last of him, because he's afraid his rations will have to be cut pretty soon if it keeps on much longer."

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"Thank you, boys, for keeping the bear," the man remarked, in excellent English, as he smiled, and bowed around the half circle. "If you say so, we will gladly settle his board bill right now, as we have to be off, too much time having been lost in this hunt. But he refused to do anything without his bear, and I had to give in."

"That's kind of you; but I guess we don't want to ask any pay for the little he ate of our food," Thad hastened to say.

"Little, oh, my!" Giraffe burst out with; and then subsided at a frown from the scout-master.

"And besides," went on Thad, "he happened to do us a service by frightening away a lot of boys from town who meant to play some trick on us, perhaps stealing all our eatables; so you see we feel square. But perhaps you'd like to have a cup of coffee while you're here? We have plenty, and can fix you up in short order."

Giraffe could only groan. To his mind it seemed that they must be keeping open house for all the roving creatures at large in that section of the country. And besides, who could say what manner of men these two with the trained bear might turn out to be? For his part, the one who

talked so well, looked very suspicious, to say the least; and why should an educated man be tramping all over the country in company with an ignorant foreigner and his dancing bear, if he did not have some sly game back of it?

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"That is very kind of you, boy," remarked the man, with a smile that made Thad forget his soiled face and rather ragged clothes; "and as the night is cool, and we've still got a long tramp before us if we expect to make half the distance to Faversham before morning, I'm going to take you at your word. But I wish you'd let me pay you something for all this trouble."

Thad of course shook his head, and gave orders for coffee to be put in the pot, which might be set close enough to the hot camp-fire to soon start boiling.

The man sat down and began to talk to Davy Jones, who happened to be next him. He seemed to be asking a few questions, possibly concerning the road to the town toward which they were bound, and which was really a good many miles away.

Thad walked over to where the other was still chattering to his recovered pet. He found, however, that the man could not speak enough English to answer any question. If the other man was able to communicate with this fellow at all then he must be educated enough to speak Russian; for that was what the foreigner's native country seemed to be, as far as Thad could make out.

When the coffee was ready, the man by the fire accepted of a cup, and thanked Step-hen warmly. Davy carried another cup to the bear keeper, who took it with some strange words, which the boy supposed were meant to express his gratitude.

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And after that, to the immense delight of Giraffe, they prepared to depart. The bear was made to shake hands with each scout, and in his odd fashion express his thanks for the attention that had been given him. But Giraffe declined the honor.

"It's all right for you fellows," he grumbled, when they joked him on his timidity; "he likes you, and wouldn't do anything to hurt you; but it's different with me, you see. The old rascal's taken a dislike to me, and I'd be afraid he'd give me a sneaky bite, or claw me. Just say good-bye for me, and a good riddance."

Thad was afraid the man who could talk such good English might show some signs of being offended by these frank expressions of Giraffe's views; but instead he laughed quite heartily, as though rather tickled.

"A bear can eat a big amount of stuff in a day," he remarked, "and I don't blame your friend for being afraid he'd clean you out, if he stayed longer. Good-bye, boys. Hope you enjoy your outing to the limit; and that the time may come when I can return that favor of a bully cup of coffee."

With that they were off, the bear growling one minute, as it struggled with its chain, and looked back; and then whimpering in its joy at seeing a familiar face again.

"See, he knows he'll miss the good feeds he's had since he dropped in on us," remarked Davy.

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"You're away off there, Davy," declared Giraffe, drawing a big sigh; "he's ugly just because he can't get a bite at me. He's been waiting all the time to do that, and he shows how mad he is to be taken away without a chance. Perhaps I'll sleep easier to-night, boys. It's an awful thing to lie awake there in a tent, and know a revengeful bear is trying to break his chain only twenty feet away, meaning to take a nip at you."

But the others only laughed at Giraffe, as the shadowy figures of men and bear were swallowed up in the dense darkness of the forest.

Still, every one was glad the bear had gone. They might have laughed at some of his antics; but his little eyes looked treacherous; and Thad had given orders that nobody should be too familiar with the beast while he honored them with his company.

"That one man was sure a foreign chap," remarked Allan; "but the other talked as good English as any of us, perhaps better than some. I saw him speaking with you, Davy; did he tell you who he was, and all about his roving life?"

"Well, I guess not," replied the other, "to tell the truth, he was asking questions about getting to Faversham, and finding a couple of parties he seems to want to come up with mighty bad. But I couldn't give him much help, because you see, I've never been as far as that town; and I sure never met up with the men he described. But I promised him I'd keep my eyes open, and if so be I ran across 'em, I'd send him word, in care of a man up in Faversham named Malcolm Hotchkiss."

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"Well," broke in Bumpus just then, after his usual impetuous style, "for my part, I'm believin' that they're the very two rascals Thad spoke about, hanging out in this region, and taking game out of season. And perhaps now, one of 'em even sneaked in camp when nobody was around, and got away with my bag."

He said this in a sneering way, and kept his eye fixed reproachfully on Step-hen while speaking. The other frowned, and shook his head, in a combative way.

"Of course you mean it's me that touched your old bag, Bumpus," he remarked; "but you've got another guess coming. I watched you hunting in the tent like you'd lost your head. Reckon you have, all right, because *you took the wrong tent!* Just step in the other one for a change, and my

word for it you'll find your blessed old haversack just where you hung it!"

And Bumpus, looking rather shame-faced, did go into the second tent; to appear a moment later carrying the disputed bag in his hand, and with a rosy blush mantling his fat face.

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CHAPTER XX.

DRAWING STRAWS FOR A CHANCE.

At any rate Bumpus was manly enough to do the right thing. He walked straight up to Stephen, and held out his hand.

"I was a fool, and that's all there is about it, Step-hen," he said, frankly. "Will you shake hands with me, and excuse the blunder I made when I felt sure you had hooked the old bag, just to bother me?"

"Sure I will, Bumpus," said the other, gripping the fat hand extended so confidently toward him, and giving it a squeeze that brought tears to the eyes of poor Bumpus. "And after all, I don't hardly blame you for thinking I had a hand in gettin' away with the bag; because, you know, I've wanted to look through it this long time. Don't you think you might let me have it now, Bumpus?"

"But I tell you I haven't got anything that belongs to you, Step-hen, and you ought to believe me," protested the fat boy, firmly.

Step-hen looked at him queerly, as though he might be still a little undecided. Then with a sigh he turned away; and Bumpus knew that he had not been convinced.

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"Here, you c'n tumble out everything I've got in the haversack, if you want to, Step-hen," added the other, giving in finally.

"Never mind, I take your word it ain't there," said the other, over his shoulder; but somehow Bumpus knew that the feeling of suspicion was only "scotched," not killed; and that Step-hen fancied that he, Bumpus, had only changed the hiding-place of the lost compass.

Thad had considerable to think about as he sat there, looking into the fire, and listening to the talk that was going the rounds. His mind was fixed upon the mystery that seemed to be hovering over the island; and in various ways he found himself trying to connect the coming of the two men and the bear, with the presence of those tracks across on the wooded territory beyond the water.

He even got up, and went across to the other side of the fire, to stoop down and examine the plain footprints left by their late guest. Then he shook his head as though the result failed to tell him what he sought.

To make absolutely sure, he took a pine knot that had been thrust into the fire; and using this as a torch, made his way to the tree where the bear had been chained ever since coming among them.

It was no great task to discover the imprint made by the heavy shoes worn by the Russian. They were marked all around by hobnails such as are used by the lower classes across the water, in order to save the leather soles, for leather costs more money than a few nails.

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Apparently Thad found little satisfaction in his labors, for he was frowning when he returned to the circle.

"Not the same parties, eh, Thad?" asked Davy, who had kept a wondering eye on the movements of the young scout-master, and could give a shrewd guess as to the reason for his action, as well as the disappointing result.

"I'm dead sure of that," replied Thad.

"Different shoes make different trails, eh?" went on Davy.

"Oh!" Thad replied quietly, but conclusively; "that spluttering foreigner has hobnails in his soles; and I saw none like that over on the island. And this other man wears a shoe with a square toe; but pretty good material in it. There was no print like that either."

"Well, then, that proves them innocent, don't it?" asked Smithy. "For my part now, fellows, I rather took to that man who sat here, and drank his coffee. He's no hobo, I give you my word. His hands may look soiled, but under it all they're decent enough to belong to a gentleman."

"Hey! listen to Smithy, would you?" exclaimed Step-hen, as if surprised. "Now, I never knew he had such a way of figgering out things. If he keeps on like that, he'll leave us all in the lurch, fellers."

"To tell the truth," admitted the other, smilingly; "time was when I wouldn't have thought of noticing a single thing about such a man; but you see, I've been studying up the rules and suggestions our scout-master loaned me, and it keeps on telling greenhorns and tenderfeet to

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always be on the lookout, so as to remember what they see. And when he sat there, I just thought it would be a fine chance to make a mental note of anything queer about him I could detect."

"Good for you, Number Five," said Thad, warmly. "I said you were going to make your mark yet, once you got into the fever of things; and already you're proving a credit to the Silver Fox Patrol."

"Then you saw the same things, did you, Thad?" asked Smithy, eagerly, and with a really happy look on his delicate face; because this practice of "doing things" was a new experience for him, and success made him feel proud indeed.

"Partly so; though you went me one better when you made out that his hands were white under the grime," answered the scout-master.

"That sounds like you think he took on all that dirt on purpose?" remarked Bumpus.

"Perhaps he did," replied Thad; "perhaps the man is playing some sort of part, for a reason of his own."

"Bunking with an ignorant foreigner just to get a chance to sneak into camps, and run off with the haversacks that have been carelessly left lying around loose?" suggested Step-hen, still harping on his wrongs.

"Well, I don't agree with you there, Step-hen," remarked Allan. "Like Smithy here, I found something about that man that interested me. If asked me point-blank now, possibly I couldn't tell you what it was that attracted me—his eyes, his smile, or his whole manner. But I'd be badly mistaken if he would turn out to be a rascal."

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"And I say the same," observed Thad, vigorously.

"Oh! well, you fellows may be right," remarked Giraffe; "but to my mind there's something mighty suspicious about the way they came snooping around here. Reckon that party might know more about how certain kinds of wild game find their way to the New York hotels in the close season, than he'd like to own up to. And I tell you right now what I mean to do."

"Go on, we all want to know," urged Thad.

"While I'm up here," Giraffe continued, loftily, "I expect to keep my eyes open to find evidences of traps and snares set in the woods to catch partridges, rabbits and the like. And some time, if anybody wants to paddle for me, I'm agoin' to go all the way around this here lake, lookin' for nets, set to haul in the game bass."

"You ought to be wearing the badge of a game warden, Giraffe," declared Davy, with a mock bow in the direction of the speaker; "but they'd have to watch you right smart now, because some of that game would go to keep you from starving."

They continued to talk until a late hour, and every boy was given a chance to air his opinion. Still, no wonderfully new ideas seemed to be in evidence; and when the patrol sought the blankets, leaving the camp-fire dying down, they were about evenly divided on the question as to whether the educated tramp keeping company with the foreign owner of the bear was a smart man, or just a scamp.

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But a night of peace followed all these thrills. The skies above showed no sign of storm; and from the neighboring forest there issued no more bears, or any other savage beast, to raid the camp, and produce another mad scamper of the scouts to places of refuge among the branches of the friendly trees.

Once or twice Allan came out to take a look around. It seems to be the habit of all old campers to do this, whenever they happen to awaken; not that he suspected that there would be any peril hovering around; but then possibly the fire might have worked its way through a line of dead grass, and threaten to extend; or it perhaps needed another small log to keep the blaze going, and ward off the chill of night.

Over the water came a weird cry at the time Allan last performed this vigil; and the Maine boy smiled as he listened for a repetition; because it was a familiar sound in his ears, and reminded him of his former home further north.

"Was that a loon, Allan," asked a quiet voice near him; and turning, the Maine boy saw the acting scout-master poking his head out from under the canvas of the second tent.

"Just what it was, Thad," replied the other, when the last speaker crawled out to join him; "I think he must have just dropped down here, for I heard a splash before he gave tongue; and we know there wasn't any such bird around up to sunset. If any of the others wake up and hear that cry, they'll think it's the ghost of the island, sure."

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As it was too cool to sit around with such a scanty amount of clothes on, both scouts soon vanished again. The fish were jumping as on the previous night; and in the eastern sky the battered old moon had thrust her remnant of a circle above the horizon for a little peep at the world below.

Morning came along in due time, and of course the usual swim was first in order. Giraffe was apparently in high spirits. The others saw him taking stock of what stores they had left, and

evidently the big eater found that there would be an abundance to see them through. That sort of thing always pleased Giraffe. He was gloomy only when he feared for the worst; and in his mind that consisted of short rations.

After breakfast the question came up as to which one of the other scouts Thad was to take with him. As he had stated he would do, in order to be quite fair, and keep the others from feeling that any favoritism had been shown, Thad took a number of short blades of grass, each of a different length. These he mixed up in his hand, so that no one could know which was the long, and which the short ones. Then he invited the boys with the exception of the second in command, Allan, to draw as they pleased, the shortest straw to win out.

Of course there was more or less joking as the operation was carried out; for boys can hardly do so simple a thing as draw lots without a certain amount of fun being injected into the game. [169]

"Now, the last belongs to Smithy, because he didn't draw," said Thad. "Hold up the one you got, Bumpus, and see if you go along with me."

Bumpus actually shook a little when he compared his "straw" and finding that it was longer than the other, he laughed with glee. That island did not have much drawing power for Bumpus; in fact, he hoped never to set foot on it again.

Each one tried to show that he had a shorter straw than the one that fell to Smithy, but without success.

"It's Smithy who goes," observed Thad; and possibly he looked pleased; for he was beginning to take a great interest in the boy who had been wrongly raised by his mother and maiden aunts, to be what is known as a "sissy;" and hoped to see him turn out to be a manly, self-reliant and brave scout. [170]

CHAPTER XXI.

STEP-HEN'S STRATEGY FAILS.

"Don't throw your straws away yet, fellows;" remarked Allan, after the drawing had come to a conclusion; "Thad has something more to say."

"Yes," remarked the patrol leader, smiling; "after talking it over with Allan, who will be left in charge here during our absence, I've concluded to take a second scout along. Three will be better than two, in case of any trouble."

"Trouble! Oh! my stars!"

It was Bumpus who said this; and he actually turned pale as he glanced down at the short stick he held in his hand. What if after all he should turn out to be the ill-fated one chosen to cross again to the island? He thought it would be just his luck.

"Now, it's only right that the one who has the next shortest stick should be the second fellow in the boat with me," Thad went on; "so let's compare lengths again, boys."

Some came up anxiously, actually hoping they might be the lucky one; while others were indifferent; because there had been an interesting programme laid out for that morning's work, and they should hate to miss the "wigwagging" with signal flags; as well as more of Allan's trail talks, which were so great. [171]

"Davy Jones, you go!" remarked Thad, after the various "straws" had been compared, and his was found to be the shortest.

Davy gave a pleased grunt and his face glowed with delight. If there was one fellow in the patrol whose soul seemed to crave excitement, and the element of danger, it was the Jones' boy. When everything else failed he was in the habit of climbing a tree, and ascending to a dizzy height, perform some of his astonishing gymnastics there. No wonder they called him "Monkey" at times.

"Me for another chance to hook a three pound bass, if I can get a few minnows with that little seine made of mosquito net," announced Giraffe, after they had cleaned up the breakfast dishes, and the camp looked spic and span as a camp always should look when boys are being taught how to live in the woods.

"Of course you are; though we've got plenty to eat besides fish," remarked Step-hen; "but they sure did taste mighty fine, Giraffe; and I'll take a turn with you along the shore. We can get on without the boat, I reckon."

"Count me in that job, if Allan will let me go along," Bumpus declared, showing considerable interest.

"If you do come, the chances are three to one you'll trip on some vine, or stone, and take a header into the lake," remarked Giraffe. [172]

"Well, what if I did, I know how to swim, don't I?" burst out Bumpus, who seemed to be carrying "a chip on his shoulder," these days, as some of the boys declared.

"Course you do, Bumpus," said Step-hen, coming to the defense of the fat boy in rather a strange manner, Bumpus thought; "I wouldn't be surprised if you could give Giraffe a race, and beat him out. He never will be a first-class scout when it comes to the water tricks; though if you hung up a whole ham as a price it might make him stir himself some."

Of course Giraffe was indignant.

"Why, I could beat Bumpus with one hand tied behind me!" he declared.

"Oh! you don't say so?" mocked Step-hen, who for some reason seemed desirous of arousing the feeling of rivalry between these two scouts, and egged them on as a boy who loved to see dogs fight, would sick one on the other. "Mebbe, you'd be willing to back up that assertion right now, and prove your boast?"

"I'm willing, if he says he wants to try it out!" snapped the aroused Giraffe, who at any rate was not lacking in spunk.

Bumpus, too, seemed to be fully aroused. The other boys crowded around, with wide grins, because they fancied it would be rather a comical sight to see a race between the fat boy, who had only recently learned to swim, and made a tremendous splashing in the water; and Giraffe, who was a clumsy water dog at best, with one arm tied down to his side. [173]

Just then Bumpus happened to look at Step-hen. He could not help noticing how unduly the other seemed tickled at the prospect. And then and there a sudden terrible suspicion gripped hold of Bumpus.

Now, there could be no particular reason why Step-hen should want to see him enter for this queer water race, unless he had some deep motive behind it. What could that motive be? Did the artful scout expect to find a chance for searching his, Bumpus' clothes, while he was in the lake, engaged in an exciting competition with Giraffe; and all the other fellows having their attention centered on the race?

"Oh! he believes he can find out something that way; and he's just pushing me in over my head so I'll leave my clothes on the bank, and he c'n search 'em!" was what Bumpus was now saying to himself.

Indignation filled his honest soul. Thank goodness he was too smart to fall into such a silly little trap. Step-hen would have had all his trouble for his pains.

So Bumpus, looking the other straight in the eyes, went on to say:

"Come to think of it, we'll have to call the race off for to-day. I promised my folks that I wouldn't go in swimming more'n once each day. To-morrow morning then, Giraffe, I'll promise to go you just as we said, you to have one arm working. And I warn you right now you'll have to do your best, unless you want to be left in the lurch, because I'm learning fast." [174]

Step-hen certainly looked very much disappointed. There was a sneer, as well as a shadow on his face, as he remarked scornfully:

"Huh! you take water, eh, Bumpus?"

"Only once a day," replied the fat boy, calmly; and yet the look he gave Step-hen told the other that his clever scheme had been understood.

Of course the action of Bumpus in calling the race off convinced Step-hen more than ever that the fat boy did have his precious compass. If it was not in that old haversack then, he had, as Step-hen suspected, transferred the same to one of his pockets; and was even then carrying it around, in defiance of the owner.

Now Step-hen could have ended all this disturbance by appealing straight to the scout-master, who would have asked Bumpus to tell on his honor if he had what did not belong to him. But it did not suit the boy to do this. He was naturally rather obstinate, and had a bulldog nature.

"I started out to recapture that compass on my own account, and I ain't going to play the baby act now, and ask Thad to get it for me, no siree. Just you wait, Bumpus Hawtree, and see if I don't find some way to fool you. It's in one of those pockets of yours that stick out so; and sooner or later I'll prove it before the rest of the troop."

Step-hen was saying this to himself as he watched the three, who were to go to the mysterious island, finishing their preparations for the journey across the lake. But apparently the fat boy had already forgotten all about the trouble. He had a disposition that could not harbor resentment any great length of time. Like a little summer storm it quickly blew over; and Bumpus was then the same smiling, genial comrade, ready to do anything to oblige his late antagonist. [175]

Thad did not have many preparations to make, however. Most of his time was spent in talking with Allan, and arranging for the work that was to be done that morning, in showing the balance of the patrol numerous interesting things connected with scout life.

"I reckon we'll be back in time for lunch," he remarked, when Davy called out to say the boat

was ready; "but to make sure we won't go hungry each of us is carrying what Bob calls a 'snack,' along with us—some ham between crackers."

"Well," said Allan, who secretly wished he might be going along too; "here's hoping you learn something about the queer men who have been using that island for some purpose or other."

"I hope so, too," replied Thad; "because, somehow, they've aroused a sort of curiosity in me. They seem to hide from us, as if they didn't want anybody to see what kind of fellows they were. Why, all the time we've been here they must have known about us, and could even see our flag flying from the pole in front of the tents; yet they've never as much as said 'good morning' to us." [176]

"Never a peep," Allan went on to say. "And that makes me think there's sure something crooked about 'em. I wish——"

"Now I know what you're going to say," broke in Thad, with a smile; "you feel bad because I didn't fetch my double-barrel gun along on this trip. Well, between you and me, I do, myself. It would have been a whole lot of comfort right now. But you know, Boy Scouts don't want to look too much like soldiers. Some of the town people talked a heap about not wanting their sons to join a military company; and we had trouble convincing them that the scouts didn't have a thing to do with army life. That's why we've only been able to organize one patrol up to now. But the feel of that little twelve bore would be good this morning, even if game laws stood between me and getting a few partridges."

"Please hurry up your stumps, Thad!" called Davy, who was wild with eagerness to get moving; for he had envied those who were allowed to go to the island on the preceding day, and felt anxious to set foot on the enchanted ground, where mysterious strangers seemed to have their abode, yet could not be found.

"That's all I wanted to say, Allan," the scout-master concluded; "and as Davy will have one of his fits soon, if I don't get off, I reckon I'll start. If we fail to show up at noon, why, don't worry. Nothing is going to hurt any of us, that I can see."

The rest of the scouts gathered at the water's edge to see them embark on the exploring expedition; and all sorts of chaffing was indulged in between Davy and some of his camp mates. Bumpus in particular was so pleased over not having been drafted to go in the cranky canoe that he seemed to be just bubbling over with exuberant spirits. [177]

When the boat had gone some fifty yards from the shore he drew out his bugle, kept hidden up to then, and sent the most mournful notes across the water after the departing voyagers. It was so like a funeral dirge that Davy Jones thrust his fingers in his ears; and then shook a fist at the stout bugler; who however kept on with his sad refrain until Allan put a stop to it.

And so the scout-master backed, by his two valiant assistants, set out to learn what the secret of the mysterious island might be; nor did any of the trio suspect right then in the beginning of the voyage what strange results would follow this invasion of the haunt of the unknown prowlers. [178]

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PATCHED SHOE AGAIN.

Those on the shore, after the bugle's sad refrain had been silenced, gave the departing adventurers a last cheer, and a wave of their campaign hats. Over the water sounds carry unusually clear; and Thad and his mates smiled when they distinctly heard Step-hen bawling from the interior of the tent where he had his sleeping quarters:

"Hey, you fellers, which one of you hid my coat? None of your tricks now; don't I know that I hung it up all right last night, when I came to bed; and blessed if I can find it now? Funny how it's always *my* things that go wandering around loose. Own up now; and whoever hid it just come right in here, and show me where it is!"

"The same careless Step-hen," remarked Thad; "always leaving his things around loose, and then ready to accuse some one else of hiding them. To hear him talk you'd believe in the bad fairies, and that they just took their spite out mixing his clothes and things up, while he slept. I wonder if he can ever be cured of that trick. He'll never pass for a merit badge till he does, that's sure. Neatness in a scout is one of the first things to be won." [179]

Davy was handling the paddle. While he did not show the proficiency that the Maine boy, Allan Hollister, could boast, or Bob White, who loved everything pertaining to the water, still Davy did manage to keep the prow of the canoe in a fairly straight line for the island, as he dipped first on one side and then on the other.

Thinking the chance to show Davy a few points in the art of paddling ought not be lost, the scout master took the spruce blade, which was a home-made one, from his hands. By turning the canoe around, and using the stern as the bow, he was able to illustrate his meaning easily enough.

"Now, it is not necessary to change from one side to the other as often as you do, Davy, when you have a breeze blowing like it is now, and you're heading across it. By holding the blade in the water this way after a stroke, it serves in place of a rudder and checks the turning of the canoe under the influence of the push. And another thing, you reach too far out. That helps to whirl the boat around in a part circle. Dip deeply, but as close to the side of the canoe as you can."

Davy was a ready observer, and not above picking up points from one who knew more than he did.

And presently, profiting from these plain hints, he was able to make easier progress.

"Why," continued Thad, "Allan tells me that among the expert canoemen up in his State of Maine lots of them wouldn't be guilty of lifting the paddle out of the water at all, and make swift work of it too. You see, in creeping up on a deer that is feeding on the lily pads in the shallow water near the shore, just around a point perhaps, the water dripping from the paddle when it was raised; or even the gurgle as it came out, would give warning of danger; and about the only thing they'd know about that deer would be its whistle as it leaped into the brush. So they always practice silence in paddling, till it gets to be second nature, Allan tells me."

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"Say, I certainly do hope we get a chance to see that same thing for ourselves," remarked Davy; "I've heard and read a heap about Maine, and always wanted to get there. Since Allan's been talking about his life in the pine woods that feeling's just grown till I dream of it nights, and imagine myself up there."

"And I'd like to go along too, if my mother could be persuaded to let me," was what Smithy said, a little doubtfully; for he had been so long "tied to his mother's apron-strings," as the other boys called it, that he could not believe she might overcome her fears for his safety enough to let him go far away.

Nevertheless, Smithy had now had one full breath of what it meant to be a boy with red blood in his veins; and he was inwardly determined that never again could he be kept in bonds, while the smiling open air beckoned, and these splendid chums wanted his company.

All this while good progress had been made, and they were now drawing close in to the island. It lay there, looking calm and peaceful in the morning sunlight. A few birds flew up from along the shore, some of them "teeter" snipe that had been feeding. Davy even pointed with his paddle to a big gray squirrel that ran along a log in plain view, and sat up on his haunches as if to curiously observe these approaching human beings who intended to invade his haunts.

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"What's that bird out yonder on the water?" asked Smithy, just then pointing beyond a spur of the island.

"That's a loon," remarked Thad. "Allan heard him drop in here last night; and both of us happened to be awake when he gave one of his cries. You'll be apt to hear him some time or other; and if you think it's a crazy man laughing, why just remember they named that bird rightly when they called him a loon."

"I don't see anything moving on shore; anyhow there's no man in sight," Davy remarked a minute later, as they drew in still closer.

"Oh! I didn't expect to see a crowd waiting to receive us," laughed Thad. "We may have all our trouble for our pains; but I just couldn't rest till I got one more squint at that imprint of a shoe on the island."

"Oh! yes, I remember that Bob White was telling me about you being taken up with that track," Davy went on; "but he didn't say just why. Perhaps you'll show me, now that I'm along on the trip?"

"Sure I will; and tell you a few things I got from him," the scout-master went on to say, as they pushed in toward the little beach where the landing had been made on the first occasion of their visiting the lake island.

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"Bob must have been through some stuff in his old home," remarked Davy, enviously; "from the few little things he's said. Things *happen* there in the Blue Ridge mountains, down in the Old Tar Heel state. Up here it's as dead as a door nail; nothin' goin' on at all to make a feller keep awake. Don't I just hope you get that deal through, Thad, and take the whole patrol along, to pay a visit to Bob's home country. I just know we'd have a scrumptuous time of it. Imagine me up in the real mountains, when I've never even seen a hill bigger than Scrub-oak mountain, which I could nearly throw a stone over!"

Then the prow of the canoe ran aground in a few inches of water. Thad sprang ashore, and holding the painter, drew the boat in closer. Relieved of his weight in the bow its keel grated on the dry sand, and the other two were able to step out easily enough.

They drew the boat up good and far on the beach.

"The wind's liable to get even stronger than it is," remarked Thad, "and we don't want a second experience of having the canoe blown out on the lake."

"I should say not," observed Smithy, uneasily; for he had only recently learned how to swim, and the shore seemed a tremendous distance away, with the flag of the camp floating in the

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morning breeze, and the tents showing plainly against the green background.

"Now, this time I'm going to comb the whole island over, and see what's here," announced Thad, resolutely. "You see, we can make a start, and keep close to this shore until we strike the other end. Then changing our base, we'll come back this way, keeping just so far away from our first trail. After that, it's back again; and in that way we ought to see all there is."

"Going to be pretty tough climbing, I reckon?" remarked Davy, surveying the piled-up rocks, of which the island seemed to consist mainly, with the trees growing from crevices, and in every odd place, so that they formed a dense canopy indeed.

"That'll make it more interesting, perhaps," said Smithy; and Thad nodded his head encouragingly; for he liked to see evidences in the spoiled boy tending to show what his real nature must be, back of the polish his fond mother and maiden aunts had succeeded in putting upon his actions in the past.

They reached the other end of the island and began to make the return trip. As Davy Jones had said, it was strenuous work at times, since the rocks were piled up in a way to suggest that some convulsion of nature had heaved this island up from the bottom of the lake.

"Just see the black holes, would you?" Davy declared, again and again. "Why, lots of 'em'd make the finest kind of fox dens; and I reckon a wolf wouldn't want a better hiding-place than that big one over there. Say, Thad, I c'd crawl in easy, myself, and I'd like to do it for a cooky now, if you said the word." [184]

"Not just yet, Davy," remarked the scout leader; who began to wonder himself if the men of the island might not be hiding right then in one of the cavities Davy pointed out. "We want to see what the place is like, you know. Come along, and in a jiffy we'll be at the end where our boat lies."

"But what are you keeping on looking so close at the ground, whenever we strike any soil at all, Thad?" the Jones boy continued. "S'pose now, you think you might run on that footprint Bob was speakin' about, say?"

"Just what was in my mind, Davy," replied the other, always willing to give information to those with him. "I wanted you to see what it looked like, so you and Smithy here could be keeping on the watch. If we found that it made a regular trail, and led to one of these same black holes, we'd know more than we do right now. There, I saw a track, but it wasn't a clear one. Hold on, and let's see what this patch of open ground will show up."

"This just suits me to a dot," remarked Davy. "Feels quivery-like, you know, just like something queer was agoin' to happen right soon. Wonder if there's any wildcats loose over here. I'd like to get a whack at one with this club; wouldn't I belt him a good crack between the eyes. Hello! found what you wanted, Thad?" [185]

The scout-master had come to a sudden stop, and was down on his knees, examining something on the ground. He beckoned the others to drop beside him, and both boys did so eagerly.

As Davy Jones saw the imprint of the shoe that had a patch on it, he gave a low exclamation, and his eyes sought those of Thad.

"Well, what d'ye think of that, now, Thad?" he muttered; "the same patched shoe that feller with the bear man was tellin' me about. Say, listen, he said that he was lookin' for a man with a shoe just like that! Yes, siree, he described it to a hair, and asked me if ever I saw a footprint like that to send word to Malcolm Hotchkiss up at Faversham!"

Thad felt a thrill at these words, for he realized that they meant there must be some connection between the supposed hobo who accompanied the owner of the dancing bear, and the two men who were hiding on the island! [186]

CHAPTER XXIII.

FIGURING IT OUT.

"That's what he said to you, did he, Davy?" asked the scout-master; and perhaps unconsciously his voice was lowered a little when he spoke, as though he felt that peril lurked close by.

"Yes, when we were sitting close together by the fire, and he was drinkin' his cup of coffee," the other replied, also in hushed tones; while Smithy hovered as near as he could get to them, his face filled with apprehension.

"And he told you he wanted to meet up with the man who had a patch on the sole of his shoe, did he?" Thad continued, thoughtfully.

"Just what he did," Davy answered, cheerfully. "I remember thinkin' that it was a mighty funny way to describe a feller, by telling how one of his shoes had been mended in that way. But, Thad,

you know Bob didn't finish tellin' me about this track over here on the old island. If he had, I'd sure remembered; and then I c'd have spoken about it to you."

"I'm sorry now it didn't happen that way," remarked the scout-master, "it might have made some difference in my plans, you see, boys."

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"You mean you wouldn't a come here, is that it?" demanded Davy; "then I'm glad you didn't know about it; because this just suits me. Whew! don't it make a feller have just the nicest cold creepy feelin' run up and down his back, though? I wouldn't have lost the chance for anything."

Thad was compelled to smile at the odd way the other had of expressing his pleasure in the thrill that passed over him, as he contemplated the possibility of meeting with new adventures.

"Oh! no, I didn't mean that," he replied; "but I'd have asked you a lot of questions before coming, and perhaps we'd have been better posted. Then again, I might have brought a couple more scouts along, so we could feel stronger, in case—" and he suddenly paused, with his head cocked on one side as though listening.

"In case, what?" pursued Davy, who wanted to know everything.

"I thought I heard a voice somewhere, but it might have been a bird in the bushes," Thad continued, in a relieved tone. "Why, I was only going to say in case we had any trouble with these men. But they may not be here at all now. I've got an idea they own another boat, in which they could have slipped away last night while it was so dark."

"Then what's the use of our hunting all over the place as we're doing?" asked Davy, fanning himself with his hat; for the day was turning out warm, and it began to seem like tiresome work, and all for nothing, too.

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"In the first place," went on Thad, with that steady glow in his gray eyes that bespoke determination; "I want to see if there really is a hidden shack or a cave here, where they could be hiding out. Then I'd like to learn if they're poachers, snaring the wild game, or the bass up here, and getting it to market on the sly; or some tramps who have been breaking into a store or a bank and are hiding from the constables."

"A bully good place to hide, all right," remarked Davy, as he glanced around at the wild character of their surroundings, and heaved another sigh in contemplation of further scrambling over those sharp-pointed rocks.

"But Thad," put in Smithy, who had been listening all this time without saying a single word, "have you changed your mind about what these strange men may be, since you heard what Davy said about that man at our camp-fire?"

"Well, yes, I am beginning to, right fast," answered the other, frankly.

"You don't think he was as bad as they are, and meant to join them, do you?" continued Smithy, taking an unexpected interest in the matter; for he had observed the party in question closely, as Thad knew, and formed rather a good opinion of him, somehow.

"No, I don't," replied the scout-master, decisively. "If you asked me point-blank what my opinion was, I'd say that he might be a game warden playing a part, or else an officer of the law, looking for yeggmen who have done something that they knew would send them to prison if caught!"

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"Whew! just keep right along talking that way, Thad," muttered Davy. "It sure does give me the nicest feeling ever to hear you. Yeggmen now is it, and not just poor game poachers? That's going some, I take it. Say, perhaps they've been and broke into a rich man's place over in Faversham. I happen to know that quite a few city people own cottages there for summer use."

"Have you ever been in Faversham, Davy?" asked Thad, suddenly.

"Well, no, I must say I haven't; but I've heard some about it from a boy who visited Sim Eckles, and who used to live there. It's a big place, Thad."

"Oh! size has nothing to do with this matter," remarked the other. "I was just wondering whether you might not have heard that name before."

"You mean Malcolm Hotchkiss, don't you?" asked the other, eagerly.

"Yes, the name he mentioned to you, when he spoke about the marked shoe?" the patrol leader went on to say.

"Hold on!" Davy exclaimed, hoarsely; "now, that's queer; I never once bothered my head to think about it till you asked. Sure I've heard the name before. The boy over at Sim Eckles' mentioned it more'n once."

"Who is he, then, Davy?"

"Why, Malcolm Hotchkiss, he's just the Chief of Police over at Faversham, that's what, Thad," replied the other scout, almost breathless in his renewed excitement.

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"Oh; is that so?" remarked Thad. "Well, how does it strike you now, Davy?"

"Looks bad for these here men, that's what," came the reply.

"You mean they must be worse than game poachers; is that it?" continued Thad.

"I just reckon they are, Thad. Game wardens are hired by the State; and seems to me it don't interest the common police if a man chooses to take a few deer out of season, or net black bass against the law."

"Sounds like good logic, Davy," Thad continued; "and anybody could see that you're all fixed to follow in the footsteps of your father, when you get through law school. That settles it, in my mind. After this I don't expect to run across any nets in the lake, or snares for partridges in the woods around here."

"You mean there might be something stronger than that to be found, if only we could run up against the place they use for a hideout; is that it, Thad?"

"I certainly do; but I wish you could tell me one thing," the other remarked.

"Try me and see," grinned Davy. "I'm loaded with information, like a gun is, to the muzzle; and all you have to do is to pull the trigger."

"Try and remember if that boy said anything about this Malcolm Hotchkiss that would describe him—was he tall or short; did he wear a beard or had he a smooth face; were his eyes blue or black?"

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Davy screwed up his eyebrows as though he might be cudgeling his brain to remember. Then he grinned again, showing that the result had at least been satisfactory from his point of view.

"I caught on to it, Thad," he declared with the air of a victor.

"Well, what do you think about it now, Davy?"

"Not the same man. You remember our visitor was a tall feller, don't you? Well, I heard that boy say how they played a trick on Malcolm, and they was only able to do it because he happened to be a small man, with white hands, and looked kinder like a woman dressed up in police uniform. But then he's smart as chain lightnin', he said at the same time."

"Well, that proves one thing. Our visitor couldn't have been the Faversham Head of Police. Perhaps they're in the game together, and he wanted you to send word that way, knowing that Hotchkiss would be able to reach him," Thad concluded.

"Looks like you'd got it all figgered out right, Thad," admitted Davy, in open admiration for the genius of his chum. "And if that's the truth, I reckon it must be a pretty big game that has made this here feller take all the trouble to hire that bear man to go 'round the country with him, just so he could ask questions, and nobody think he was anything but a common tramp."

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"I don't just understand what sort of officer would be doing that," Thad candidly admitted. "Now, if these men were what Bob White tells us they have down in his country, moonshiners, I could understand it. But we've rested enough now; let's go on to the boat. Perhaps after all, we might decide to leave the island to look after itself from now on."

"I'd sure be sorry to hear you say that, Thad," remarked Davy, his face showing keen disappointment.

"After all, it's really none of our business," continued Thad; "and now that you know the man he is looking for everywhere is somewhere around here, perhaps it'd be best for you to start over to some place where they have a telephone, and call up Mr. Malcolm Hotchkiss at Faversham."

"Huh! reckon I c'd surprise him a little now," chuckled Davy, falling in behind the leader, as they continued on down toward the spot where the boat had been left some time before.

"We've done all that could be expected of a patrol of Boy Scouts, under the circumstances," said Thad firmly; "and the rest had better be left to men who are used to such things. Listen to that wind blow, boys? I hope a storm doesn't come up before we get back to camp again. Careful, Davy, don't be in such a hurry; we're nearly at the beach, and our boat."

"That's just it," remarked the Jones boy; "I had a look in at that same beach under the branches of the trees, Thad; and believe me, I didn't see a sign of any boat!"

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"What's that?" demanded the scout-master, quickly, a sense of gathering clouds beginning to oppress him; for it would indeed be a serious matter if they were actually taken prisoners by these unknown parties of the island, whom they now believed to be worse even than game poachers.

"Look for yourself, Thad; for here you can see the beach end to end," Davy went on; and the others stared as though hardly able to believe their eyes; for it was just as Davy said; there was the little sandy stretch, without a doubt, where they had left their canoe; but from end to end it was vacant!

Again had the boat vanished while they were away; and this time it was utterly impossible that it could have gone without the agency of human hands, for they had pulled it high up out of the water!

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CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT SMITHY FOUND.

"Here's tough luck, and more of it!" remarked Davy Jones; but while Smithy was looking excited, and rather white, the Jones boy was grinning, just as if the new condition of affairs, thrilling in the extreme, pleased him intensely.

Thad hastened to examine the ground, as a true scout always thinks of doing when he seeks information concerning the movements of others; for neither men nor boys can well move around without leaving some traces of their late presence; and when one knows how to use his eyes to advantage, it is possible to learn many valuable things after this fashion.

"Did they take it, Thad?" continued Davy, as the scout leader arose from his knees again, his face filled with all sorts of wild conjectures as to the meaning of this new mystery.

"They must have," replied Thad; "because they've been around since we were. Fact is, as you can see for yourselves, boys; here's where the imprint of that marked shoe has half covered Smithy's track. And of course that could mean only one thing."

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"You're right, it could," admitted Davy, easily convinced.

Smithy looked around at the undergrowth, out of which they had just pushed. No doubt his imagination was working at full speed, and he could see a face leering out from behind every scrub bush. Smithy was at least a great reader, even if he had until lately never been allowed to associate with other boys; and likely enough he had spent many hours over Stevenson's "Treasure Island" and kindred stories of adventure. And being of a nervous temperament, the consciousness of hovering peril acted on him to a much greater extent than it did in the cases of his fellow scouts.

"But where do you think they could have taken the boat, Thad?" Smithy now asked, as he stared out on the waves that were sweeping past so merrily, and could see no sign of any craft.

"Perhaps gone around the island, hiding it in some place they know about; or it might be they've just sunk the canoe out in deep water there," replied Thad.

"Sunk their own boat!" remarked Smithy, in bewilderment; "now, please explain to me just why they would want to do so remarkable a thing as that, Thad?"

"So that we couldn't have the use of it to get back ashore again; and our comrades over there mightn't be able to come over," was the reply of the young scout-master.

"Do you mean they've made up their minds to try and keep us prisoners on this terrible island?" asked the other.

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"It looks a little that way to me right now, Smithy; fact is they've got me guessing good and hard what they do mean by that sort of thing. Perhaps they want a certain amount of time to make their escape, and expect to get it by keeping us cooped up here. The question now is, shall we let them carry that scheme out?"

"Not if we know it, we won't," Davy spoke up, and declared in his positive way. "Why, I think I could manage to get over to the mainland somehow, with that log there to help me. The wind and waves would carry me along, you see, Thad; and I could do my clothes up in a bundle and keep 'em dry. Seems to me that's the kind of work for a scout to try, ain't it?"

"A pretty good idea, Davy," admitted the scout-master, readily enough; "there's only one drawback to it, that I can see."

"And what might that be?" asked the one who had conceived the brilliant thought, and who seemed to be disappointed because his chief had not immediately declared it to be a marvel of ingenuity.

"Well, you're not much of a swimmer, and couldn't make any headway against the wind and the waves. Consequently you'd just have to let them carry you along with them. That would take a lot of time; and even if you did get ashore safely it'd be at the far end of the lake. You know the country is pretty rough between there and the camp. By sticking to the beach, where there is any, you might make it in a couple of hours; but altogether it'd be well into afternoon before you got in touch with Allan and the rest."

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"All right, I'm willing to make the try, if only you give the word, Thad," the Jones boy went on, with a vein of urgency in his voice. "Just the idea seems to tickle me more'n I c'n tell you. And if I kept on the other side of the log, why you see, these fellers wouldn't know a thing about it. They'd think it was just an old log that had drifted around, and was going wherever the wind wanted."

"Well, such talk would convince anybody, I guess," laughed Thad.

"Then you're goin' to let me try it, I hope?" ventured Davy, joyfully.

"Perhaps I may a little later," the other admitted. "After we've talked it over some more. And first of all, I think Smithy and myself had better arm ourselves in the same way you have, with a good stout club. If the worst comes, it's a jolly good thing to have in your hand."

"Well, I should say, yes," Davy went on; "more'n once I've stood off a savage dog with a stick like this, and dared him to tackle me. But here, if I'm going to take that little swim with the log, I won't need my club. S'pose I hand it over to Smithy?"

There was a method in his madness; and Thad, who could read between the lines, understood it easily enough. If allowed to give Smithy his weapon of offense and defense, such permission would really be setting the seal of approval on his proposition to swim ashore. And Davy was shrewd enough to figure on that. [198]

"All right, give it to Smithy," said Thad; making up his mind that since one of them ought to make the effort to get in touch with the balance of the patrol, it were better to allow Davy to go than that he leave the two boys on the island; for that might look strange in a leader.

And so the delighted Davy hastened to comply; indeed the manner in which he thrust the stick into the willing hands of the other seemed to indicate a fear on his part lest the scout-master alter his mind. And once the club had changed hands he appeared to believe the thing was settled beyond recall.

"Do you think they might attack us, Thad?" asked Smithy, who was somewhat pale, but showing a resolute front in this crisis.

"I don't know any more than you do, Smithy," replied the other; "they had some scheme in view when they scooped the boat, and hid it from us. As I said before, I can't make up my mind whether they only want to make time by cutting off all chances of pursuit; or else mean to come down on us."

"What do you suppose they'd be apt to do to us for giving them so much trouble, and taking their boat?" continued Smithy.

"What Paddy gave the drum, perhaps," remarked Davy; "a beating. But if you two fellers can only manage to keep out of their hands a little while, I ain't afraid about my being able to reach shore, and the camp. Then what, Thad?" [199]

"Just what I said—have one of the boys, Giraffe perhaps, because he's a good runner, start over to Rockford. I think from the rough map a charcoal burner made of this section of country for me, that town can be only about seven miles or so across country, though the going might be pretty rough. Here, take my little compass, in case he is afraid he may get lost in the woods," and Thad detached the article in question from his silver watch chain.

"I'm glad you said Giraffe," remarked Davy; "because if it had been Step-hen, who is also a clever long-distance runner, he'd have been sure to lose himself, because he says he's going to take the first chance, just because somebody took his old compass. Then, when he gets to Rockford you want Giraffe to get Faversham the 'phone; is that it, Thad?"

"Yes, and tell his story to the Chief—all about the queer things that have happened to us up here since we made camp,—the coming of the bear; then our finding the boat; the tracks on the island; how we had a visit from the bear man, and what his companion told you to do in case you ever saw the imprint of a shoe that had a crooked patch across the sole. I reckon Mr. Malcolm Hotchkiss'll know what to do when he gets all these facts in his head. And then Giraffe can rest up before he tries to come back to-morrow."

"I got it all just as you stated it, Thad," declared Davy, beginning to unfasten his shoes, as if anxious to be busy; "now, if you fellers would just roll that same log into the water while I'm doing up my duds in a little package that I c'n tie on top, so as to keep 'em dry, I'll be ready in short order. Then you watch me paddle my own canoe for the shore. It'll be just more fun than a circus for David, believe me." [200]

So Thad and Smithy took hold, and with the aid of the sticks in their hands it was found that the log could be readily turned over. Each time this was done it drew closer to the water's edge, and presently splashed into the lake.

"See her float just like a duck, will you?" remarked the delighted Davy, who was by this time making a bundle of his shoes, hat and clothes, which he expected to secure somehow to the log, or thrust into a crevice, where the package might not be seen by watchful eyes ashore.

"Well, anyhow, if that boat did have to be captured by the enemy," remarked Smithy, just then, as if remembering something; "I'm glad I found that stuff before it went, that's a fact, boys."

Thad turned on him in some surprise.

"Now you've got us both wondering what you mean, Smithy," he remarked; "suppose you explain before Davy leaves us."

"Oh! I forgot to say anything about it," declared the other, in more or less confusion; "the fact of the matter is, Thad, when I found I was going to be your canoemate on this little adventure, I went down at once and turned the boat over to see that it was perfectly clean. You know it's a hobby of mine to want everything just so; and I noticed that a little washing would improve the [201]

looks of our boat. So I took out the false bottom that keeps heavy shoes from cutting into the thin planking; and what do you suppose I found in the cracks below?"

He had thrust his fingers into one of his pockets, and now held up something at which both the others stared in surprise, that gradually deepened into dismay, on the part of Thad at least.

"Let me look at them, please, Smithy," said the scout-master, quietly; and in response to his request the other placed in his outstretched hand two bright new silver half dollars!

A rather queer find, to say the least, to run across under the false bottom in a little canoe that had been secreted among the bushes bordering this lonely sheet of water known as Lake Omega!

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE SCOUT-MASTER'S SCHEME.

Smithy and the Jones boy watched their patrol leader with something more than ordinary curiosity, as Thad examined the two shining coins. And when the other even tried his teeth on each half dollar in turn, Davy gave an exclamation of delight; while the other scout was in a measure filled with sudden consternation.

For both of them could understand what this meant, and that Thad felt more or less suspicious regarding the genuineness of the two coins.

"He thinks they might be counterfeits, Smithy," said Davy, in low but thrilling tones. "Now wouldn't that be a great joke if we found ourselves bunking on this old island along with a lot of desperate bogus money-makers! Oh! say, things are just turning out tremendous, and that's a fact. But I don't exactly know, whether there'd be more fun staying here, or taking that little voyage with the log."

"That part of it has already been settled," remarked Thad, with a vein of authority in his voice; for he wanted Davy to understand that as a true scout, he must always pay respect to the orders of his superior, and never try to evade a duty that had been imposed upon him.

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"Oh! all right, Thad;" Davy replied; "I'm willin' enough to try the swim; but say, what if they jump on you fellers while I'm away?"

You would have thought from the patronizing manner of the Jones boy that upon his presence alone depended the safety of the group of scouts. Thad, however, knew Davy pretty well by this time, and did not take all he said seriously.

"We'll have to manage to get on, somehow," he said; "and perhaps, after all, the danger may not be so very great. If there are places for these two men to hide, why, seems to me we ought to be able to keep out of their sight some way or another."

Smithy was not saying much, but it might be understood that he was doing a whole lot of thinking. This was certainly a novel experience for him. A short time before, and he had not really known what it was to associate with any boys save a delicate little cousin away off in a city, and who was very girlish in all his ways. And here he was now, not only in the company of seven healthy fellows, fond of fun, and all outdoor sports; but a genuine scout in the Silver Fox Patrol, and facing danger with a bravery no one had ever dreamed he could display.

That was why Smithy felt pleased, even while he at the same time experienced a touch of uneasiness because of the new developments that were constantly making their situation look more desperate.

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As Thad had discovered, under all that gentle exterior there beat a heart within Smithy that yearned to have its fair share of excitement. Reading Robinson Crusoe and Treasure Island might be all very well; but acting a part in a little bit of daring seemed much better.

Thad bent down to assist Davy secure his clothes to the log. The Jones boy had waded in, and upon examining one side of the old tree trunk as it floated buoyantly on the water, he found that there was just the nicest hiding-place one could wish for in the shape of a cavity well above the reach of the water.

"You see, Thad," he explained, "it ain't goin' to be on the side that the waves beat against, and so my duds won't be apt to get *very* wet. The cutest pocket you ever saw; and looks like it might just have been made specially for a feller that wanted to take a tour of the lake with his private yacht Now, do I go, Thad? I'm ready, and only waitin' for orders."

"Then you might as well start, Davy; and if I was you I'd keep out of sight all I could. If they happened to spy you, and believed you were going for help, so that they might be captured before night came, it would go hard with you perhaps."

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"I got your meaning, Thad," Davy replied, without showing the least concern, for he was a fearless chap; "which is, that they've got the boat, and could chase after me if they thought I was going to get 'em in a peck of trouble by flitting. Never you fear, I'll keep low down, and out of

sight."

He thereupon proved how easy it would be to lie in a position where he could guide the floating log, and yet be out of sight from the side that was toward the island.

"Oh! this is the greatest thing that's come my way for a long time," he said, as he walked further away from the shore, the water getting deeper all the time until his body was very nearly all submerged; "and I'm ever so much obliged to you for giving me the chance, Thad. Don't bother a thing about me. If some big mud-turtle don't grab me by the toe, and pull me down, I'll come out swimmingly, see?"

Thad knew that he could depend on the Jones boy. When a fellow can even think to joke like that when facing danger of any sort, he certainly could not be feeling in a state of panic.

"Now the breeze strikes me, fellows, and I'm off. I'd like to give a whoop, I feel so great; but something tells me that would be wrong. So just consider that's what I'm doing inside, anyhow. Good-bye, boys, and I hope you pull through O. K."

Thad did not answer, for the simple reason that the log with its boyish freight was already so far away that he would have to raise his voice to make Davy hear; and such a thing would be foolish, when they wanted to keep as quiet as possible, so as not to attract attention. [206]

Standing there, they watched the strange argosy floating away on the dancing waves. Davy was urging it from the shore of the island as well as he could by swimming, and without showing any part of his person.

"He's going to make that point, all right," said Thad, knowing that the Jones boy's one fear had been lest he ground on the bar that put out there, and be compelled to show himself in order to push off again.

"But you said it would be hours before he could even get to camp, didn't you, Thad?" asked Smithy.

"The way he's drifting now, he'll surely be at the end of the lake in half an hour; and given four times as much to make his way round all the coves, would bring him to camp about noon, I reckon. Then, if Giraffe starts out at once, and has fair luck traveling he ought to get to Rockford in two hours, running part of the way, once he strikes the road."

"That would mean two in the afternoon, then, Thad?"

"About that, if all goes well," the other continued, as though mapping out the programme, step by step. "Then give him a quarter of an hour to tell Mr. Hotchkiss the story over the wire; and after that the Faversham officers would have to come on here. But perhaps they might get a car to bring them along the road. It's not a first class auto road, but could be navigated I guess. Say by four o'clock they could be at our camp, Smithy." [207]

The other sighed.

"That means something more than six hours for us to play hide and seek here on the island, doesn't it?" he remarked; but Thad saw with relief that Smithy was certainly showing less signs of alarm than he had expected, under the best conditions.

"Well, if you were only as good a swimmer as you hope to be one of these days, Smithy," he remarked, pleasantly, "we might try for the shore. But as it is, we've got to make the best of a bad bargain, and wait. You've got good sight, so suppose we try and see if we can tell what the boys are doing in camp. Two pair of eyes ought to be better than one any day."

"But honest now, I don't seem to see a blessed fellow there," declared Smithy, which was just what Thad had himself found out. "I can see the fire burning lazily, and the flag whipping in that splendid breeze; but as far as I can make out the whole pack have deserted, and gone somewhere. Perhaps they're fishing."

"You could see them on the bank, if that were so, Smithy," remarked Thad. "Try again with another guess; and this time think well before you answer." [208]

"Well," remarked the new tenderfoot scout presently, after he had stood there, conjuring up his thoughts; "I remember that you told them something before we set sail on our trip."

"Just what I did, and tell me if you can remember the nature of the task they were to handle during our absence?" the scout-master continued.

"Allan was going to show them some more interesting things about following a trail," Smithy immediately replied; "how to tell what sort of little animal like a fox, a woodchuck, a mink, a muskrat or an otter had made the marks; what it was trying to do; and how it was captured by the men who make a business of collecting skins, or as they call them, pelts."

"Just so," Thad observed, "only it was to be this afternoon Allan meant to show them all that. If you think again, now, Smithy, I'm sure you'll recollect there was another piece of scout business, and a very important one too, that they were to practice this morning."

"Yes, I remember it all now—wigwagging it was," the tenderfoot went on to say with eagerness, and not a little satisfaction, because he had recalled everything that Thad wanted him

to. "Allan was to go up to the top of that little bare hill back of the camp, and two of the other fellows were to hike over to another about a mile or so away. Then they would exchange sentences by means of the signal flag, waved up and down and every which way, according to the alphabet used in the U. S. Signal Corps. And to-night the result was to be given to you to correct."

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"I see your memory is in good working order, Smithy, for that is exactly what sort of a task I set the boys we left behind. And now, I've just thought up a dandy scheme that if it can only be carried out, may gain us just about two hours over Davy's best time, in letting our chums know what a hole we're in."

Smithy looked interested. Indeed, whatever Thad did always excited his enthusiasm; for he believed the young scout-master to be the smartest boy he had ever heard of in all his life.

"It's something to do with this same wigwagging, Thad, I'm sure of that?" he remarked, drawing a big breath in his new excitement.

"Well, there's no use wasting any more time in beating around the bush, so I'll tell you right now what the idea is," Thad continued, smiling at the eagerness of his comrade. "Suppose I could climb to the top of some tree, and attract the attention of Allan, as he stood on that bald hill, which is in plain sight from here; don't you understand that by making use of my handkerchief, and the code, I might be able to tell him what's happened, and get him to send Giraffe to Rockford so as to call the Faversham Chief over the 'phone?"

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Smith's face was wreathed in a smile of mingled admiration and delight as he caught the full meaning of the bright thought that had come to the mind of his companion, the scout-master.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

A SIGNAL STATION IN A TREE-TOP.

"Oh! that's the finest thing that ever could happen, Thad;" was the way the delighted Smithy put his feelings into words. "And just to think that right here you can make use of scout knowledge to tell Allan what's happened. Why, without the wigwag telegraph we'd never be able to let him know one single thing."

"Just what I was thinking myself, Smithy," returned the scout-master. "And as you get deeper into the splendid things a Boy Scout is supposed to learn, while he climbs the ladder, you'll find that never a day passes but what he can help himself, or some other fellow, by what he knows."

"I'm quite certain about that, Thad," Smithy went on, brimming over with satisfaction, and wonder at the cleverness of his chum. "Why, I was just thinking it all over this morning, and what great chances a scout has to do things that an ordinary boy would never be able to even try, because he had not learned. Right now I'm positive I know how to best stop a runaway horse without endangering my life more than is absolutely necessary."

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"That's the kind of talk I like to hear, Smithy; it shows that you understand what the scout movement stands for; and mean to make the most of the opportunities."

"Then suppose a chum of mine got in the water, and was taken with a cramp," Smithy went on hurriedly, his blue eyes sparking with delight; "why, after what you showed me this morning, I believe that as soon as I know a little more about swimming, I could get him ashore."

"And when you had done that?" questioned Thad, who was meanwhile keeping his eyes around him for the purpose of discovering the best tree which he could use as a signal tower, in the carrying out of his bold plan for communicating with the balance of the Silver Fox Patrol.

"Why, I wrote down every little thing you did when showing us how to revive a partly drowned person; and Thad, I practiced on a dummy when nobody was around to laugh. I'm positive I have it down pat, and could do the business."

"Laugh!" repeated the pleased scout-master; "I'd just like to see any scout under my control make fun of a fellow who was so much in earnest that he devoted some of his spare minutes to practicing the art of saving a human life. I hope you may never have to put that knowledge to practical use, Smithy; but if the occasion ever does come along, I firmly believe you'll be equal to it. I'm more than pleased at the earnest way you've taken hold of these things."

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"Thank you, Thad," replied Smithy, actually with tears in his eyes; "but if I have, you can lay it partly to the fact that up to now I've been half starved in respect to all the things that most boys know and do, and just wild to learn; and also that I've had the finest chum that ever drew breath to coach me. Oh! yes, there are dozens of other things I've learned that are bound to widen the horizon of any boy. It was a fortunate day for *me* when you coaxed my mother to let me join the Boy Scouts. Nobody else could have done it but you, Thad."

Smithy was growing more and more excited; and Thad thought best to end that sort of talk. Besides, the time and place were hardly suited for an exchange of opinions with respect to the

advantages of the scout movement.

"We'll talk it over another time, Smithy," he said, kindly. "Just now we ought to bend our minds wholly on finding the right sort of tree for my wigwag station. Come along, and let's take a look at that tree just up the bank yonder. Seems to me it ought to answer my purpose."

So he led the way to the tree in question, which happened to be close by. It was little effort for Thad to climb up into the branches, leaving Smithy below; with directions to return to the beach when he heard a whistle from his chief; it being Thad's idea that the presence of some one below might draw attention to his flag work above, and interrupt the message. [214]

The higher he climbed the better he was satisfied; for he found that the tree was dead from a point half-way up, and consequently there was a stronger chance that he could manage to attract the attention of Allan, on the hill a mile and a half away.

Finding the perch that seemed to answer his purpose best, Thad broke off a few small dead branches that threatened to interfere with the free use of his arm. After that he gave the whistle to let Smithy know the signalman was fixed, and that he had better go back to the beach to wait.

As yet he had seen nothing of Allan. The bald top of the hill was in plain sight from where the scout-master sat, perched aloft, but he scanned it in vain. Thad would not allow himself to doubt that presently the second in command of the patrol would show up there. He knew Allan was a stickler for obeying orders to the very letter, and if his superior had said that he should reach the crown of that hill at exactly seven minutes after ten, the chances were fifty to one Allan would make his appearance on the second; or there would be trouble in the camp.

So, to amuse himself while waiting Thad turned partly around, and looked after Davy. At first he was astonished not to see the floating log on the troubled surface of the lake to leeward, where it had been moving at a pretty fast clip when the scout-messenger left the island. [215]

He experienced a sudden sensation of alarm, but immediately took a fresh grip on himself. Surely the waves were not so very boisterous now, for the wind seemed to be diminishing, if anything. And Davy was a pretty fair swimmer, all things considered.

Thad presently gave expression to a little sigh of relief; for far away, just under the fringe of trees bordering the extreme end of Lake Omega, he had discovered a moving object. It was the flash of a breaking wave over the same that had attracted his attention first; and he now made out the floating log.

Then Davy must have made much better time than he, Thad, had expected would be the case. No doubt he had assisted the progress of his novel craft by swimming, being desirous of reaching land as soon as possible.

So Thad divided his time between the bald top of the signal station hill, and the log that as he knew concealed the swimming scout.

"There he goes, creeping through the shallow water and heading for the bank," he presently muttered to himself in a pleased way. "And I can give a pretty good guess that right now Davy is the happiest fellow in the county; because he just loves adventure of any kind, and he's sure getting his fill. There, he pulls himself up on the shore, and ducks behind that bunch of brush! Good boy, Davy; that ought to count for a merit mark, all right. Nobody could have done it better, and few as well." [216]

After that Davy vanished from his sight. He knew that the other was making for camp at his best speed; but as he had a difficult task, with the way so rough, it must be a couple of hours at least before he could expect to bring up at the tents, where the flag floated gaily from the mast.

Turning wholly, so as to devote his full attention to the signal station hill, Thad counted the minutes that seemed to drag so heavily.

Once or twice he thought he heard some sort of rustling sound down on the island somewhere. He hoped that nothing was happening to Smithy; but of course it was utterly out of the question for him to call aloud, to inquire whether the tenderfoot scout was safe.

"He ought to be showing up soon now," Thad was muttering as he kept watch of the smooth hilltop; "Every minute lost counts now. I hope nothing has happened in camp to disarrange the programme I laid out."

He had hardly spoken when he started, and a pleased look came over his anxious face; for at last there was a movement on the bald top of the elevation, as if something might be doing. [217]

Yes, a human figure was climbing steadily upward, now and then stopping to make some sort of gesture to an unseen comrade at the base of the hill, either with his arm, or one of the signal flags he carried.

Eagerly Thad watched the ascent of his chum. He knew that Allan was carrying the precious field glasses, for he saw the sun glint from their lens when the other stopped to take a survey.

Oh! if he would only look toward the island now; for Thad was already waving his handkerchief up and down, and ready to make a certain signal which had often been used as a sign of importance between himself and this chum from Maine. Once Allan detected it, he would know instantly that the person waving was the scout-master, and that he had news of great importance

to communicate.

But it seemed as if Allan were devoting all his attention to the other quarter, where he doubtless anticipated seeing the second signalman begin to tell him that the station was ready to receive messages.

Still, knowing that three of the patrol had gone that very morning to the mysterious island, to investigate further into the strange things it seemed to hide, it would seem that presently Allan *must* turn his head, and sweep the shore of the same with his glasses.

Ordinary curiosity should cause him to do that; Thad thought as he waited; waving his handkerchief and fixing his eyes on the far-away figure of the khaki-clad scout with the flags. [218]

He even found himself hoping that the one sent to a more distant station might meet with some unexpected delay on the way; so that, becoming weary of looking for a sign, Allan would presently amuse himself by taking a view of other quarters.

Five minutes later, and Thad's heart gave a throb. He could see that his wish was coming true, for the sun flashed more brightly than ever as it glanced from the moving lens of the field glass. Allan was now surveying the landscape around him, and gradually his attention must be drawing nearer the island.

So Thad began to make the circular movement, followed by a downward plunge of his handkerchief, that would surprise Allan when he noticed it, for he was bound to understand what it signified.

A few seconds of suspense, and then Thad breathed with relief.

He had seen the other focus his glasses straight toward the tree, in the dead upper branches of which, he, Thad, was clinging, and wildly waving his improvised signal flag.

"He sees me! Good for that!" Thad said to himself; while his heart was pounding wildly within its prison, because of the excitement that had seized him in its grip. [219]

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WIGWAG TELEGRAPH.

Thad now devoted himself to the task of communicating all he had to say to his second in command, and as briefly as possible. Time was a factor in the affair; and it would not pay to waste more minutes than were absolutely necessary. The full particulars must be kept, to thrill the patrol as they sat around the next blazing camp-fire, each one telling his individual part of the story.

Fortunately Thad and Allan had long been practicing this exchange of flag signals together; and in this way had become fairly expert in the use of the little telegraphic code that takes the place of the dot-and-dash of the wire process. With but his handkerchief to use in place of the flag, Thad knew he would be hampered more or less; but he had faith in the ability of his chum to grasp the truth, once he caught an inkling of the peril that threatened.

And now Allan was signaling that he understood the chief wished to send an important message, which he was ready to receive. [220]

So Thad commenced by asking:

"Who have you close by to send with a message to Rockford?"

Allan asked him to repeat; and no wonder, for he could not exactly grasp such an astonishing query; but on its being waved again he replied promptly:

"Giraffe, Bumpus; other two gone signal station beyond."

"O. K. Send Giraffe at once. Tell him to make it as fast as he can. At Rockford get Chief Police at Faversham on 'phone; name Malcolm Hotchkiss. Tell him all that happened to us, about bear men, and that one of them asked Davy to let chief know if he saw footprint of marked shoe around. Believe that man on island, and that he is thief wanted by authorities. How?"

This last was the query they understood between them. It meant that the sender wished to know if the burden of his message was being fully sensed by the one at the receiving end.

"O. K. Tremendous! Go on!" came the immediate reply.

Such long messages took more or less time, and would have been impossible only that in their enthusiasm the two scouts had abbreviated the code, so that they were able to really exchange sentences in a short-hand way.

Thad went on to give the other more knowledge, believing that Giraffe ought to be posted up to a certain point, so that he could urge the Chief of the Faversham police to hasten his movements; for if night fell, without the hidden men being captured, they could get away under [221]

cover of darkness.

"Davy gone ashore behind floating log. Just landed at end of lake. Thought of this scheme after he left. Man with owner of bear we believe to be officer of law, looking for these rascals. Let Giraffe have your compass. Give him map I left in tent. Our boat taken, and we can't get ashore, for Smithy not able to swim. Let all practice for day drop, and keep in camp, ready to take another message."

Then Thad made the winding-up movement that told Allan he did not wish to consume more time by further talk. Enough had been sent in this tedious way to let the other know the main facts of the matter; and they were surely startling enough in themselves, without the particulars that would follow later on, when peace had settled over the camp.

He saw that Allan understood the need of haste; for as soon as he had made that peremptory signal, the second in command commenced going down the slope of the hill with the bald top, taking great leaps as he went.

Eagerly did Thad watch his progress. Once, in his haste, Allan tripped and fell headlong; and Thad's heart seemed to be in his mouth with the suspense; but immediately the other scrambled to his feet again. His first thought must have been of the chum whose eyes he knew were glued upon him; for he made a reassuring wave of his arm, and resumed his downward progress, a trifle more carefully now. [222]

Presently he vanished among the trees that grew about two-thirds of the way up, and Thad saw only occasional glimpses of him from that moment onward; as the flying figure flashed across some little gap in the verdure-clad hillside; never failing to wave his arms reassuringly to the watcher.

"He must be nearly down at the base now," Thad said to himself, after some time had elapsed since he saw any sign of the hurrying scout.

Knowing what was apt to follow, he kept his ears on the alert for welcome sounds which would tell that Allan had given the recall to the two scouts sent to the distant station, with their relay of flags, in order to receive and send messages.

A minute, two, three of them glided away. Thad was beginning to feel a trifle uneasy, not knowing but that some further accident might have happened to Allan, in his eagerness to reach the foot of the hill.

But his fears proved groundless. Presently there floated distinctly to his ears, for water carries sounds wonderfully well, the sweet notes of the bugle which Bumpus Hawtree knew so well how to manipulate. It was the "assembly" that was sounded, and those distant scouts, upon hearing the well-known signal, would surely understand its tenor; and that for some reason the plans of the day had undergone a decided change, so that they were to return forthwith to the camp. [223]

Sweeter sounds Thad believed he had never heard than those that came stealing over the troubled surface of Lake Omega that morning, when affairs were beginning to have such a serious look for the Silver Fox Patrol.

He gave a sigh of relief. Some of the strain seemed to have departed, now that his signaling task had apparently been successfully carried out.

"In a short time, Giraffe will be starting across for the road leading to Rockford," Thad was saying to himself, as he sat there in his lofty eyrie, and surveying the whole island that lay bathed in the sunlight beneath him. "With a fair amount of good luck he ought to get there by half-past one, perhaps much earlier; for Giraffe is a fast runner, and has staying powers."

The prospect was of a character to give Thad infinite pleasure. And somehow he seemed also greatly delighted because he had been able to hurry matters along in a wonderful manner, thanks to the knowledge he and Allan possessed of this Signal Corps work.

"Why, it's already paid us ten times over for all the trouble we took to learn the code," he was saying to himself, between chuckles. "And besides, it was only fun, learning. Smithy was right when he said this Boy Scout business was the best thing ever started in this or any other country to benefit fellows. And I'm glad I had that idea of starting a troop in sleepy old Cranford, so far behind the times." [224]

Just then he happened to remember that he was not alone on the island. Smithy would be getting quite anxious about him by now; and Thad concluded that he ought to hunt the other scout up, so as to relieve his mind.

He had read enough of the character of the new tenderfoot scout to feel certain that Smithy would obey orders to the letter. Told to wait on the little pebbly beach until his superior officer joined him, he would stay there indefinitely; just as another lad, known to history and fame, Casibianca, "stood on the burning deck, whence all but him had fled," simply because his father had told him to remain there.

So Thad commenced to descend from his lofty perch, meaning to hunt Smithy up, and not only relieve his natural suspense, but reward him for his long vigil by relating the result of the exchange of signals.

That the new recruit would be deeply interested, he felt sure; for everything connected with the scouting business had a fascination for Smithy; now living an existence he may have dreamed about in former days, but really never hoped to personally experience.

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Just then the loon, floating and diving out on the bosom of the water somewhere, had to give vent to his idiotic laugh. Possibly he had been observing the watcher in the dead tree-top, and was announcing his opinion of such silly antics when he noticed Thad begin to descend.

The sound struck a cold chill to the heart of the boy, though he laughed at himself immediately afterward for allowing such a feeling to come over him.

"It's only the loon," he said, as he again slipped from limb to limb, constantly nearing the base of the tree. "I suppose the thing's been watching me all the time, and wondering what under the sun a fellow could be doing, waving his old handkerchief around as though he were daffy. He looks on me as a lunatic, and I know him to be a loon."

Chuckling at his little joke, Thad presently reached a point where he could hang from the lower limb by his hands, and then drop lightly to the ground.

He waited only a minute to recover his breath, for after all the coming down had been more of a task than the mounting upward. Then he started for the shore of the lake, and the little beach that had witnessed both landings of the invading parties of scouts.

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Twice now had that same beach afforded a surprise as unwelcome as it was unexpected, when the boat had vanished so strangely. Thad hoped history would not feel bound to repeat itself. True, they no longer had a boat to lose, since it had already disappeared; but then, there was Smithy!

As he drew near the beach, he tried to discover the form of his comrade somewhere in the open, but without success. Still, Thad knew that the tenderfoot would doubtless consider it the part of wisdom to hide, while waiting for his comrade to finish his work aloft, and join him.

Thinking thus, and yet with an uneasiness that he could hardly understand, Thad kept on, until presently he had broken through the last line of bushes, and stepped out on the little sandy stretch of beach.

Certainly Smithy was not in sight. He turned in both directions, and swept the half circle of brush with an anxious gaze.

Then he called in a low tone, but which might easily have been heard by any one chancing to be hiding behind that fringe of bushes:

"Smithy, hello!"

There was no answer to his summons. The loon laughed again out on the lake, as though mocking his anxiety; a squirrel ran down a tree, and frisked about its base; but the tenderfoot scout seemed to have vanished as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TRAIL AMONG THE ROCKS.

Of course the scout-master was given a shock when he realized that Smithy could not be where he had told him to wait until relieved. All sorts of dire things commenced to flash through his head.

"Here, this won't do at all," he presently muttered, starting to get a firm grip on himself; "I've myself alone to depend on, to find out the truth about Smithy, and to do that I must keep my head level. Now, I wonder have I made a mistake about the calibre of Smithy, and could he have wandered off in a careless way?"

Somehow he did not find himself taking any great amount of stock in this theory. Why, had it been easy-going Bumpus now, or even rather careless Step-hen, Thad fancied that there might have been more or less truth back of the suspicion; but unless his study of the tenderfoot had been wrong, Smithy would not be guilty of disobedience.

"Well, what am I thinking about?" was the way Thad took himself to task presently; "trying to find the answer to a riddle by bothering my brains, when it ought to be written here on the sand as plain as print."

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Immediately he commenced to move about, looking for signs. Of course there must be all manner of footprints there, some recent, and others made on the occasion of the preceding visit of the scouts. But Thad had studied trail finding more or less under the watchful eye of the Maine boy, who knew considerable about it; and hence he was able to decide what were new, and what old footprints.

And he had not been at this task more than half a minute when he received considerable of a shock.

"Why, here's that footprint with the marked sole!" he whispered, a new thrill in the region of his heart.

He could guess what that meant, for it was very fresh and new. The man whom he now believed to be some sort of criminal, had been right there on the beach since he, Thad, had quitted the spot to climb the tree selected for his signaling operations!

And since Smithy was supposed to be waiting there, only one inference could be drawn—the tenderfoot scout had fallen into the enemy's hands!

Evidently matters were approaching a crisis now. The two men who hid on this island as though they feared their fellows to see them, were beginning to grow bolder. At first they had only felt annoyed by the coming of the scouts, and the making of the camp opposite their secret retreat. Then, by degrees, as the boys began to infringe on their territory, they had commenced to strike back; first by causing the boat to disappear; and now by capturing poor Smithy, who must be nearly dead with fright because of his peril.

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Thad suspected the men may have begun to fear that their hiding-place was known, and that the boys would be trying to either effect their capture, or communicate their discovery to the authorities in some neighboring town.

Perhaps they hoped to keep matters boiling at fever heat until night fell, when they could make use of the recovered boat to slip away; or else swim from the island retreat.

He looked further, and soon found marks that plainly told the story of a struggle. It had been brief, however, for evidently Smithy was evidently taken by surprise, and with his breath immediately cut off by a cruel grip, must have soon yielded.

Thad looked around him. Would the two desperate characters be coming back to find the other scout? Did they know that Davy had gone with that log? Perhaps even at that minute hostile eyes might be upon him!

The very thought caused Thad to take a firmer grip on the stout cudgel he carried, and resolve that should he be attacked, these rascals would not have the easy victory they had found with his comrade, Smithy.

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But all was quiet and peaceful around him; and by degrees his excited nerves quieted down. What should he do, now that he knew the worst? Of course, being such a good swimmer, Thad might easily have stripped, and made his way over to the mainland, providing the men did not take a notion to chase after him in the boat. He put the thought aside with impatience. That would be deserting Smithy, who looked up to him as a faithful friend and ally; and this Thad would never be guilty of doing.

Should he simply conceal himself somewhere on the island, and wait for the coming of afternoon, and the expected officers? Suppose, for instance, Giraffe lost his way while trying to make Rockford, what then would become of Smithy?

Thad felt that he could never look a scout in the face again if he were guilty of such small business.

"I'm going to do my best to find Smithy, no matter what happens," he said to himself, as he shut his teeth hard together, and took a fresh grip on that comforting cudgel he carried again. "Perhaps they may stick close to their hiding-place, wherever that is, thinking they've scared the rest of us nearly to death; and that we'll swim ashore. Here goes, then, to follow the trail."

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He had already discovered where the party had left the sandy stretch, plunging into the shrubbery, at a point beyond that where he and Smithy had made use of.

The island, as has been stated before, was so very rocky that Thad, not being an expert at following a trail under such difficulties, might have had a hard time of it in places, but for unexpected, but none the less welcome, assistance.

Here and there, when he came to a small patch of earth, he was surprised to find plain marks of feet, and several deep furrows, as though some one had sagged in his walk, and was being half dragged along by those who had hold of either arm.

This must have been Smithy; and at first Thad was dreadfully worried, under the belief that his comrade might have been struck on the head, and injured. But when the same thing kept on repeating itself, and invariably when there was earth to show the marks, he suddenly grasped the splendid truth.

"Oh! isn't that boy a dandy, though?" he whispered to himself, in delight; "as sure as anything now, he's just doing that on purpose, meaning to leave as broad a trail as he can, so I could follow. Didn't I say Smithy had it in him to make one of the best scouts in the whole troop; and don't this prove it? Good for Smithy; he's all right!"

It made Thad feel quite pleased to know that the tenderfoot could be so smart, with such little training. He continued to follow the tracks with new ambition. So energetic a chum deserved to be looked after; and Thad was better satisfied than ever because he had resolved to hunt for Smithy, rather than lie around, trying to hide from the enemy in case they were out looking for him.

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By degrees he found that he was getting into a section of the island which did not seem familiar to him in the least. Evidently, then, in their various trips over the place, the boys had unconsciously avoided this part; possibly because of its very roughness, and the difficulty of pushing through the dense vegetation, and over the piled-up rocks.

"No wonder they chose this place to hide," thought Thad, as he climbed across a barrier that taxed his powers; and wondered at the same time however poor Smithy was ever able to make it, tied as he must be, or gripped in the hands of his two captors.

He realized that he must now be getting nearer the den where the two unknown men used as a hideout. The very solitude of the place affected him. It was as if a heavy weight had been laid on his back, that threatened to crush him.

Still, Thad was a very determined lad. Having made up his mind to accomplish the rescue of his comrade, if it were at all possible, he would not allow himself to be daunted by trifles such as these. Only shutting his teeth more firmly together, he kept pushing resolutely on, eyes and ears constantly on the alert. [234]

Perhaps Giraffe was having just such a difficult job in making his way across the country between the lake and Rockford; and if so, Thad hoped he too was pushing resolutely forward, undismayed by no obstacles that loomed up ahead.

Now and then Thad was at a loss which way to turn, for the rocks left little or no trace for him to follow. At such times he had to exercise his knowledge of slight clues to the utmost. Then besides, he could look around him and judge pretty well how those he was following, foot by foot, must have gone.

And finally Thad saw something just beyond that told him he had reached the end of the faint trail. It was a gloomy looking hole among the rocks that stared him in the face, with the trail leading straight toward it.

If ever there was a bear that had its den on that island, surely this must have been the spot; for it far excelled anything else that the scout had seen since he had started to prowl around.

As he crept closer he was astonished to see what a peculiar condition existed with regard to that open mouth of the bear den. Just above hung an immense stone that ordinarily several men could never have turned over, or even moved; yet by some convulsion of nature far back, this rock had been so delicately poised above the mouth of the cave that Thad believed even a boy could send it crashing down, if he but hurled his strength against it. [235]

"And if it *did* fall," he said to himself, with a sudden shiver of delight, "I honestly believe it would fill in that hole, so that not even a rattlesnake could crawl out. Oh! if those men are in there, as I hope, and I could start that cap-stone rolling, wouldn't they be shut up as snug as if they were in a bottle, with the cork shoved in?"

But fascinating as that possibility appeared to Thad, he must remember that the men had Smithy with them as a hostage. They could dictate terms of surrender so long as they held the tenderfoot scout a prisoner. And unless he could manage in some clever way to effect the release of Smithy, he had better go slow about trying to bottle them up in that bear's den.

He crept still closer, and lying there on his breast, listened anxiously, his ear close to the black opening. A regular sound came stealing out that, for a short time, puzzled him; and then Thad decided that it must be the snoring of a man who was asleep, and lying on his back.

Dare he try and crawl into the cave, to ascertain how the land lay? Thad was anything but a coward; but he could be excused for hesitating, and taking stock of the chances before deciding this important matter. But after a little he must have made up his mind; for he crept past the guardian rocks, and slipped into the entrance of the bear's den! [236] [237]

CHAPTER XXIX.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

When Thad Brewster was thus making his way into the hole in the rocks, perhaps he may have remembered reading what old Israel Putnam, the Revolutionary hero, did when a mere stripling, entering the den of a savage wolf, and dragging the beast out after him.

Well, in a way Thad was doing just as brave an act. True, those whom he had reason to fear, were human beings like himself; but they must be cruel men, since he knew them to be desperate characters; and if they discovered him invading their retreat, no doubt they would attack him with the ferocity of wolves.

He found himself in a passage-way among the rocks. It had evidently been well traveled by the feet or knees of the men who may have long concealed themselves in the snug retreat; while officers were searching the surrounding country in a vain quest for clues to their hiding-place.

Thad started when he suddenly heard a gruff voice; it sounded so very close by, that his first [238]

thought was he had been discovered. But as he caught the words that were spoken he realized his mistake.

"Mebbe ye'll be sorry now, ye bothered a couple of poor fellers atryin' hard to make a few honest dollars a takin' game out of season, an' sellin' the same to the rich folks what jest has to have it any ole time. Jest sit up, an' tell me what yer friends are thinkin' of doin' 'bout it."

Then Thad was thrilled to hear the voice of his chum respond. Evidently, if the men had kept some sort of muffler over Smithy's mouth during the time they were bringing him to their underground retreat, it had now been removed, as if they no longer feared that he would bring the others down upon them.

"Why, you see, we just wanted to explore this queer island, and that's all there is to it. Yes, we did rather guess that somebody must have been taking fish or game when the law was shut down on it; but then, you see, that was none of our business. We're just Boy Scouts off on a camping trip; and nobody's employed us to bother with game poachers, or send word to the wardens."

"Game wardens, hey? Ye seem to let that slip off yer tongue, younker, like ye might be used to sayin' the same. What we want to know is, why are ye so pesky anxious like to look this here island over? Lost anything here?"

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"Well, a boat we had seems to have disappeared in a funny way," Smithy said; and Thad could not notice anything like a tremble in the tenderfoot's voice, which fact pleased him greatly.

"Huh! thet boat belonged to us in the fust place, younker, an' ye hooked it from us. Spect ye thought boats jest growed in the bushes like wild plums, when ye run acrost that un. Wall, they don't, an' ye had no bizness to take it. An' what's more, me and my pal think ye mean to let the wardens know 'bout what we've been adoin' up this ways."

Smithy made no reply, and Thad knew why. The tenderfoot was well aware of what his chum had been doing while wigwagging Allan. He also knew that in all probability Giraffe must even then be on his way over to Rockford, to get the Faversham Chief on the 'phone, and give him a message that would bring the whole police force hustling over to Omega Lake, bent on making a big haul.

"Don't try to deny it, do ye, younker?" the man continued to growl; and from the fitful light that rose and fell Thad found reason to believe that there must be some sort of fire around the bend in the passage. "Well, let me tell ye what we mean to do about it. We'll jest keep ye fast here till night sets in, while yer friends hunt around, and git more an' more skeered, believin' ye must a fell inter the lake. Then we'll cut stick out of this place, and leave ye behind. P'raps so ye cud yell loud enough to draw 'em in here. Better be asavin' of yer breath, boy; 'cause ye'll have to do some tall shoutin' if ye wants to get out alive, arter Bill'n me vacate. Now roll over, and go to sleep. I'm hungry, and mean to cook a bite or two."

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After waiting for a few minutes, and hearing nothing more, Thad ventured to peep around the rocky bend. He saw that he had sized up the situation perfectly. One man bent over a small fire, and seemed to be busily engaged in cooking himself some food, which already began to scent the cave. From the quarter where the rumbling sounds came, the boy could see an indistinct form huddled on a blanket.

The man at the fire seemed to have a bandage around his left leg, and hobbled as he walked; from which Thad supposed he must have met with an accident of some kind. This might in a measure account for their having taken refuge on the island, rather than make their safety sure by flight.

He looked further, and was soon able to make out another figure lying on the rocky floor of the place. This he had no doubt must be his chum, Smithy. Yes, once, as the limping man threw a handful of fresh fuel on the fire, causing the flames to leap up, and for the moment illuminate the place, Thad's eager eyes discovered the well-known khaki color of the Boy Scout uniform worn so jauntily by the particular new recruit.

Oh! if only he could creep across the space that lay between, and set the bound boy free, how gladly would he attempt it. And the more he contemplated the thing, the better satisfied did Thad become that he could accomplish it.

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Why, there did not seem to be any great obstacle to prevent him. Surely the man who snored so deeply would not be able to interfere; and the second fellow at the fire was so deeply concerned with getting himself some lunch that apparently he had thought for nothing else.

So Thad decided to make the attempt. Even if it turned out to be a failure he believed he could elude any pursuer in the gloom of the cave entrance, and manage to reach the open in safety.

And the possible result was so pleasant to contemplate that he just could not resist trying for it.

Accordingly, Thad started to creep around the bend. He kept as flat on his stomach as possible, and always made it a point to watch the man at the fire. If the hungry one seemed to be looking that way, Thad flattened himself out as near like a pancake as he could, and did not so much as move a finger until such time as he felt convinced that the enemy had his full attention again taken up with his work.

In this cautious way, then, did the scout draw closer and closer to the figure of the captive. He hoped Smithy would be sensible, and not betray him by an incautious exclamation, when he learned of his presence.

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Now he was within a foot of the other, and could hear him breathing softly as he lay there. Thad had figured it out that if he kept quiet, and merely tried to feel for the other's bound hands, Smithy might let out a whoop as he felt something touch his wrists, under the belief that it might be a crawling snake. So, to avoid this chance of betrayal, Thad had determined to get his lips as close to the ear of the prisoner as he could, and then gently whisper his name.

Watching for his chance, Thad found it when the man at the fire was humming a snatch of a song to himself, as though care set lightly on his shoulders.

"Smithy—'sh!"

Thad saw a movement of the bound form. Smithy even lifted his head, and turned his eyes toward the spot from whence that thrilling, if soft, whisper had come. But fortunately he did not attempt to make the least sign, or try to whisper back.

Now that his chum had been warned of his presence Thad believed he could proceed to the next step in his carefully-arranged programme. This was to reach over, find just how Smithy was tied, and with the use of his pocket-knife, which he held open in his hand, effect his release.

The most risky part of the entire affair must lie in their retreat. Here Smithy, being a veritable greenhorn, was very apt to make some blunder that would draw the attention of the hungry man, and result in discovery.

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But there was no need of wasting time when the choice lay only in one selection.

Thad fumbled around until he could locate the bonds that had been tied around the wrists of Smithy. These he quickly severed, at the same time trusting to luck that he did not cut the boy with the sharp blade of his knife.

Next in order he crawled a little further, and managed to saw apart another piece of old rope that had been wound around the ankles of Smithy.

The latter knew what was expected of him. Perhaps it was mere instinct that told the tenderfoot, since he had never gone through any such experience as this before. But at any rate, no matter what influenced him, Smithy had already commenced to move backward. Thad was greatly "tickled" as he himself expressed it later, when he saw how Smithy maneuvered, keeping his head toward the enemy while moving off, as if he just knew he ought to watch the man, and lie low in case he looked.

Thad had waited only long enough to fix the blanket upon which Smithy had been lying, so that it would look like a human form reclining there. This he did by causing the middle to remain poked up a foot or so in the air, by deftly crunching the folds in his hand.

At a casual glance in that uncertain light, any one over there, with his eyes dazzled by looking into the flickering firelight, might be deceived into believing that the prisoner still lay where he had been left.

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Foot by foot the two scouts backed away. Why, Smithy was doing as well as any experienced fellow could have shown himself capable of performing. Smithy had certainly all the qualities in him to make a first-class scout; and Thad meant to encourage the ambition of the other to the utmost, given the opportunity.

Now they were turning the bend, and everything seemed to still be going smoothly. It began to look as though Thad had accomplished a task that at one time he feared would be beyond his capacity; and that freedom lay ahead for the late prisoner of the old bear's den.

Just as they reached the outlet there sounded a loud shout coming from the interior. It could have but one meaning, and this, discovery. The hungry man had possibly walked over to say something else to Smithy, and found that the prisoner had taken "French leave."

"This way, and give me a hand, quick!" exclaimed Thad, as he leaped out of the mouth of the den, and toward the pivotal rock that hung so temptingly above.

Smithy seemed to have noticed the same stone, for he threw himself against it at the very instant Thad did. Their combined weight, added to the force with which they struck the trembling rock, proved to be sufficient to start it moving. It appeared to hesitate just a second, and then went crashing over, making the very ground tremble with the tremendous shock.

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And so the mouth of the old bear's den was sealed, imprisoning within, the two fugitives from the law.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED—CONCLUSION.

"There!" exclaimed Thad, as he panted for breath after his supreme effort which resulted in the toppling of the boulder over the mouth of the rocky retreat of the two desperate characters; "if only there is no other way out, I reckon we've got those birds safely caged till the officers come."

"Well," remarked Smithy, who actually had some color in his usually pale cheeks, and whose blue eyes were sparkling with excitement; "from certain things they let fall when they were conversing, Thad, I am of the opinion that this is the only exit, as well as entrance to the place."

Smithy had been fed on big words, and very exact language so long, that as yet his association with other boys less particular had failed to rub away any of the veneer. In time, no doubt, he would fall into the customary method among boys of cutting their words short, and saving breath in so doing.

"Yes," remarked Thad, smiling broadly, "and from the way you can hear those two fellows on the other side of the stone carrying on, I guess you must be right; for they seem to be some angry I take it."

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"You don't think they could upset this rock, do you?" asked Smithy, a little anxiously.

"Not in a thousand years, without crowbars to help them. There they stay till we get ready to invite 'em out. When the officers come, they'll find a way to do the trick, never fear, Smithy. But how do you feel about taking a trip across to the camp right now?"

Smithy started, and turned an anxious face out to the water, where the waves were still running fairly high, though the wind had died down.

"I'm willing to do anything you say, Thad," he replied, with a sigh.

"Even if you never swam fifty feet in your whole life," remarked the scout-master, admiringly, for the pluck of the tenderfoot appealed to him strongly; "but make your mind easy, Smithy, for I don't want you to swim, this time."

"But Thad, how else can I go?" pursued the other. "We have no boat; I never did learn to walk on the water, you see; and so far, my wings haven't sprouted worth mentioning; so how can I get over to our camp?"

"Why, I didn't think to mention it to you, and I really haven't had the chance, to tell the truth; but I happened to discover where those men hid *our* boat in the bushes as I came along on the trail you left. And Smithy, while I think of it I just want to say that was a clever dodge of yours, making all the mess you could with your shoe every time you came to a patch of dirt. It helped me a heap, and saved me a lot of time."

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Smithy fairly glowed with pride. A compliment from the scout-master was worth more to this boy than anything he could imagine.

"I don't know what made me think of that, Thad; it just seemed to pop into my mind, you see. And I'm delighted to hear you say it helped some. As to my going over to the camp in the boat, I'm ready, as soon as we can launch the canoe. While I have had only a little experience in a boat, I've managed to pick up a few wrinkles, and ought to be able to get ashore safely. What do you want me to do, Thad?"

"Explain the situation to the others, and then have Allan and Bob White paddle over; yes, Stephen might as well come with them to take back the boat again, for the officers will need it when they arrive."

The canoe was easily carried down to the water and then Smithy with a few directions from his chief, started across. He managed very well, though once Thad had a little scare, thinking there was going to be an upset.

In due time Smithy was seen to land, with the other boys crowding around, doubtless plying him with eager questions. Shortly after the boat started off again, this time holding Allan, who plied the paddle with wonderful skill, Bob White, who might have done just as well if given the chance, and Step-hen.

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When they reached shore Thad breathed easier. If the two men should break out now there would be four stout fellows to oppose them; but all the same no one was anxious to have such a thing happen.

The boys had brought something to eat along, and they all sat down to have a bite. Everything was quiet inside the old bear's den. Bob White said he hoped the rascals had not been smothered; and Thad declared they could get plenty of air through the crevices between the rocks. On his part he was secretly hoping that the fellows might not be able to cut their way out before help came.

The time dragged slowly. Again and again did some impatient fellow ask Thad to look at his watch, and tell him how much longer they must wait before the officers might be expected.

As the westering sun sank lower and lower, Thad himself began to grow anxious; and could be noticed listening intently every time the faint breeze picked up; for it was now coming exactly from the quarter whence the assistance they expected would come.

"There, that was sure an auto horn, tooting!" he exclaimed about half-past four in the afternoon.

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Every one of them listened, and presently sure enough they agreed that it could be nothing else, though the loon out on the lake started his weird cry about that time, as though he considered it a challenge from some rival bird.

"Get aboard, and pull for the shore, Step-hen," ordered the scout-master; and as he had been expecting this, the long-legged scout pushed off.

They watched him paddling, and when he had almost reached the spot where Smithy and Bumpus, together with Davy Jones stood, a car came in sight, loaded with some four or five men in blue uniforms; Giraffe, and another, wearing ordinary clothes.

Step-hen brought two of the officers, and the extra man over, and then went back for another pair, while Thad talked with the Chief of the Faversham police, and the man whom he recognized as the guest they had given a cup of coffee to at the time the owner of the bear claimed his property.

The story was soon told, and it thrilled the scouts as they had seldom been stirred before. It seemed that the two men were notorious counterfeiters, known to the authorities as Bill Dalgren and Seth Evans. They had been surrounded by officers a month before, at a place where they were engaged in the manufacture of bogus half dollars; but had cleverly managed to escape with some of their dies and other material. One of them had been injured in the fracas accompanying this failure to catch them at work.

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Since then their whereabouts had become a matter of considerable moment to the authorities at Washington, and one of the cleverest revenue officers was put on the case. He had disguised himself, and hiring the owner of the dancing bear, had gone around the country trying to get trace of the men, one of whom he knew wore a shoe with an oddly patched sole.

This gentleman, Mr. Alfred Shuster, assured the scouts that they were entitled to the heavy reward offered by the Government to any one giving information leading to the capture of the two bold rascals; and he declared that he would see to it that this amount was paid into the treasury of the Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts, as they had certainly earned it.

When the big rock was finally rolled away, with the aid of heavy wooden bars, the trapped men came meekly forth when ordered. All the fight seemed to have been taken out of them. Indeed, the one with the lame leg declared he was glad that he might now have the assistance of a doctor, for he had of late begun to fear that blood poisoning was setting in. In the place plenty of evidence to convict the two men was found.

So by degrees everybody was ferried over to the camp, Bob White taking turns with Allan in wielding the paddle. Afterward the big auto whirled away, taking the wretched prisoners, as well as their exultant captors along. Then the camp of the Silver Fox Patrol settled down once more to its usual peace.

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Until late that night, however, the boys, unable to sleep after all this excitement, sat around the blazing camp-fire, talking. From every angle the story was told until each fellow knew it by heart. And all united in praising Smithy for the part he had had taken in the capture of the men for whom the officers of the law were searching.

For two more days the scouts remained in camp, and during that time many were the things Allan and Thad showed them. No one ever missed the real scout-master for a single minute. And when the hour arrived for the tents to come down, since a wagon had arrived to bear them back home, the eight members of the patrol united in declaring that they had had the time of their lives; and did not care how soon the experience might be repeated.

On the way back Thad ordered a halt at the identical spot where that little spring bubbled up, and ran away with such a cheery sound. While the fellows were drinking and sitting around, Thad called the attention of them all to some peculiar sort of fruit the small tree close by seemed to be bearing, in one of the lower crotches, where three limbs started out, forming a sort of cup.

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"Why, I declare, if it isn't my compass!" cried Step-hen, turning very red in the face, as he eagerly reached up, and secured the little aluminum article.

"Yes," said Thad, severely, "I saw you put it there, carelessly, when we were all here, and said nothing at the time; for I wanted to teach you a lesson. And now, all the time we were in camp, you've been accusing Bumpus here of losing, or hiding your compass. I think you owe him something, if you're a true scout, Step-hen."

"You're right I do," said the other, jumping up, and hurrying over to where the fat boy sat, his eyes dancing with delight over being cleared so handsomely; "and right here I want to say that I humbly apologize to Bumpus, who is the best fellow in the whole lot. I hope he'll forgive me, because I really thought he was playing a joke on me. You will, won't you, Bumpus? I was just a silly fool, that's what."

"Mebbe you were, Step-hen," said Bumpus, calmly, as he gingerly accepted the other's hand; "and I hope that this will be a lesson to you, as our patrol leader says. When a scout gives his word, he expects it to be believed, Step-hen. But it's all right; and I hope you find right good use

for that fine little compass when we get off on that trip into the Blue Ridge mountains."

And at that every scout snatching off his campaign hat, gave three cheers, as though right then, with the coals of their first camp-fire hardly cold, they were looking forward with eagerness to another outing that would bring new adventures in its train.

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THE END.

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Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

One instance of both game-keepers and gamekeepers was retained, as was makeup/make-up. The title and copyright pages both use Camp Fire, while the remainder of the book uses camp-fire. This was retained.

The original text for this book did not have a table of contents. One was created for this html version for the convenience of linking to the chapters.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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