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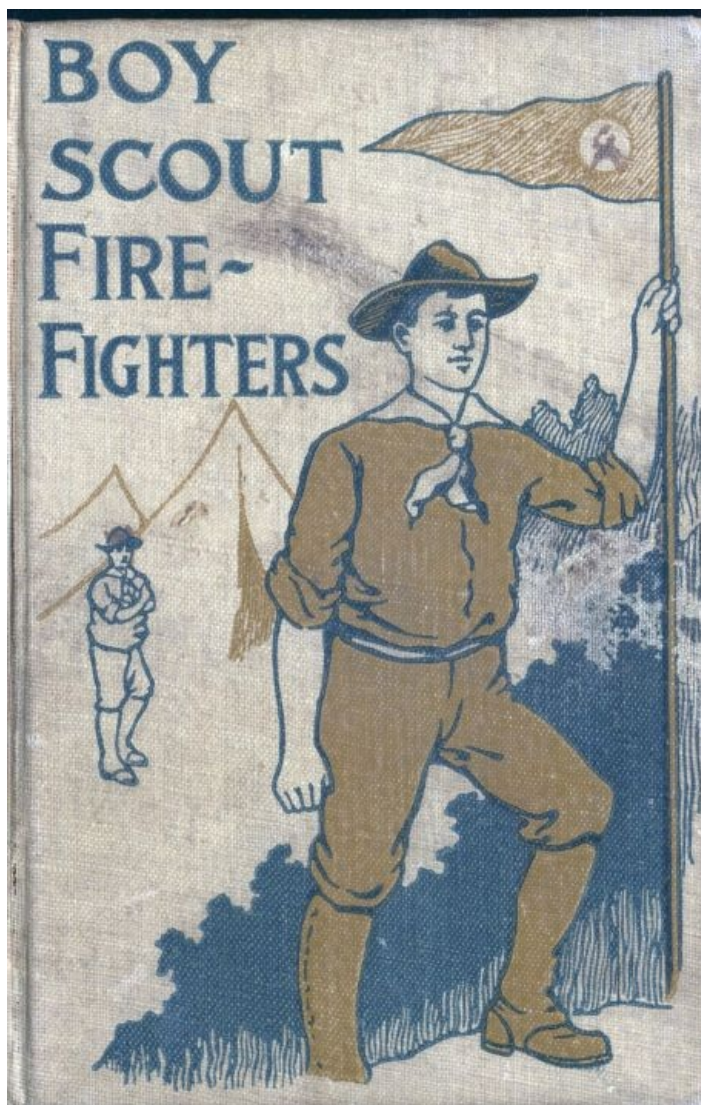
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**Cover art**

# The Boy Scout Fire Fighters

OR

## Jack Danby's Bravest Deed

BY

Major Robert Maitland

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[Transcriber's notes:

Two chapters in the source book were misnumbered. Chapters in this ebook have been

renumbered.

The last numbered page in the source book was page 168, but damage to the book indicates that a number of pages were missing after that point. Since the original book did not have a table of contents, it is unknown what may be missing.]

# The Boy Scout Fire Fighters

## CHAPTER I

### AT THE EDGE OF THE FIRE

A pall of smoke, dark, ugly, threatening, hung over a wood in which the Thirty-ninth Troop of the Boy Scouts had been spending a Saturday afternoon in camp. They had been hard at work at signal practice, semaphoring, and acquiring speed in Morse signaling with flags, which makes wireless unnecessary when there are enough signalers, covering enough ground.

The Scout camp was near the edge of the woods. Beyond its site stretched level fields, sloping gradually upward from them toward a wooded mountain. The smoke came from the mountain, and in the growing blackness over the mountain a circular ring proclaimed the spreading fire.

"Gee, that looks like some fire, Jack," said Pete Stubbs, a Tenderfoot Scout, to his chum, Jack Danby, head office-boy in the place where he and Pete both worked.

"I'm afraid it is," said Jack, looking anxiously toward it.

"I never saw one as big as that before," said Pete. "I've heard about them, but we never had one like that anywhere around here."

"We used to have pretty bad ones up at Woodleigh," returned Jack. "I don't like the looks of that fire a bit. It's burning slowly enough now, but if they don't look out, it'll get away from them and come sweeping down over the fields here."

"Say, Jack, that's right, too! I should think they'd want to be more careful there in the farmhouses. There's some of them pretty close to the edge of the woods over there."

Scout-Master Thomas Durland, who was in charge of the Troop, came up to them just then.

"Danby," he said, "take your signaling flags, and go over toward that fire. I want you to examine the situation and report if there seems to be any danger of the fire spreading to the lowlands and endangering anything there."

"Yes, sir," said Jack at once, raising his hand in the Scout salute and standing at attention as the Scout-Master, the highest officer of the Troop of Scouts, spoke to him. His hand was at his forehead, three middle fingers raised, and thumb bent over little finger.

"Take Scout Stubbs with you," said the Scout-Master. "You may need help in examining the country over there. I don't know much about it. What we want to find out is whether the ground is bare, and so likely to resist the fire, or if it is covered with stubble and short, dry growth that will burn quickly."

"Yes, sir!"

"Look out for water, too. There may be some brooks so small that we can't see them from here. But I'm afraid not. Every brook around here seems to be dried up. The drought has been so bad that there is almost no water left. A great many springs, even, that have never failed in the memory of the oldest inhabitants, have run dry in the last month or so. The wind is blowing this way, and the fire seems to be running over from the other side of Bald Mountain there. From the looks of the smoke, there must be a lot of fire on the other side."

No more orders were needed. The two Scouts, hurrying off, went across the clear space at the Scout pace, fifty steps running, then fifty steps walking. That is a better pace for fast travelling, except very short distances, than a steady run, for it can be kept up much longer without tiring, and Boy Scouts everywhere have learned to use it.

"Why do they call that Bald Mountain, I wonder?" said Pete, as they went along. "It isn't bald any more'n I am. There are trees all over the top."

"I don't know, Pete. Places get funny names, sometimes, just the same way that people do. It doesn't make much difference, though, in the case of a mountain."

"Nor people, either, Jack," said Pete Stubbs, stoutly. He had noticed a queer look on his chum's face, and he remembered something that he always had to be reminded of—the strange mystery of Jack's name.

He was called Jack Danby, but he himself, and a few of his best friends, knew, that he had no real right to that name. What his own real name was was something that was known to only one man, as far as his knowledge went, and that one a man who was his bitter enemy, and far more bent on harming him than doing him the favor of clearing up the mystery of his birth and his strange boyhood at Woodleigh. There Jack had lived in a cabin in the woods with a quaint old character called Dan. He had always been known as Jack, and people had spoken of him as Dan's boy. By an easy corruption that had been transformed into Danby, and the name had stuck.

He had come to the city through the very Troop of Boy Scouts to which he now belonged. They had been in camp near Woodleigh, and Jack had played various pranks on them before he had struck up a great friendship with one of them, little Tom Binns, and so had been allowed by Durland to join the Scouts. More than that, Durland had persuaded him to come to the city, and had found a job for him, in which Jack had covered himself with glory, and done credit both himself and Durland, who had recommended him.

"Gee, it's getting smoky," said Pete, as they reached the first gentle rise at the foot of the mountain, though it had seemed to rise abruptly when viewed from a distance.

"A woods fire always makes this sort of a thick, choking smoke. There's a lot of damp stuff that burns with the dry wood. Leaves that lie on the ground and rot make a good deal of the smoke, and then there's a lot of moisture in the trees even in the driest weather."

"Sure there is, Jack! They take all the water there is when the rain falls and keep it for the dry weather, don't they, like a camel?"

"That's a funny idea, Pete, comparing a tree to a camel, but I don't know that it's so bad, at that. It is rather on the same principle, when you come to think of it."

Men were working in the fields as they approached the fire. They seemed indifferent to the danger that Durland feared. One boy not much older than themselves stared at the carrot head of Pete Stubbs, and laughed aloud.

"Hey, Carrots," he cried, "ain't you afraid of settin' yourself on fire?"

"You ain't so good lookin' yourself!" Pete flamed back, but Jack put a hand on his arm.

"Easy there, Pete!" he said. "We're on Scout duty now. Don't mind him."

A little further on they met an older man, who seemed to be the farmer.

"Aren't you afraid the fire may spread this way?" asked Jack, stopping to speak to him.

"Naw! Ain't never come here yet. Reckon it won't now, neither."

"There always has to be a first time for everything, you know," said Jack, secretly annoyed at the stolid indifference of the farmer, who seemed interested in nothing but the tobacco he was chewing.

"Tain't no consarn of your'n, be it?" asked the farmer, looking at them as if he had small use for boys who were not working. He forgot that Pete and Jack, coming from the city, might work almost as hard there through the week as he did on his farm, without the healthful outdoor life to lessen the weariness.

"Sure it ain't!" said Pete, goaded into replying. "We thought maybe you'd like to know there was a good chance that your place might be burnt up. If you don't care, we don't. That's a lead pipe cinch!"

"Come on, Pete," said Jack. "They'll be looking for a signal pretty soon. If we don't hurry, it'll be too dark for them to see our flags when we really have something to report."

The fields nearest the mountain and the fire were full of stubble that would burn like tinder, as Jack knew. The corn had been cut, and the dry stalks, that would carry the flames and give them fresh fuel to feed on, remained. Not far beyond, too, were several great haystacks, and in other fields the hay had been cut and was piled ready for carrying into the barns the next day. If the fire, with a good start, ever did leap across the cleared space from the woods it would be hard, if not impossible, to prevent it from spreading thus right up to the outhouses, the barns, and the farmhouses themselves. Moreover, there was no water here. There were the courses of two little brooks that in rainy weather had watered the land, but now these were dried up, and there was no hope of succor from that side.

As they approached the woods, too, Jack looked gravely at what he saw. Timber had been cut

here the previous winter, and badly and wastefully cut, too, in a way that was now a serious menace. The stumps, high above ground, much higher than they should have been, offered fresh fuel for the fire, dead and dry as they were, and over the ground were scattered numerous rotting branches that should have been gathered up and carried in for firewood.

"Looks bad, doesn't it?" Jack said to Pete.

"It certainly does," rejoined his companion. "Now we've got to find a place where we can do the signaling."

"I see a place," said Jack, "and I think I can reach it pretty easily, too. See that rock up there, that sticks out from the side of the mountain? I bet you can see that a long way off. You go on up to where the fire's burning. Get as near as you can, and see how fast it's coming. Then work your way back to the rock and tell me what you've seen."

"Right, oh!" said Pete. "I'm off, Jack!"

Though the smoke was thick, now, and oppressive, so that he coughed a good deal, and his eyes ran and smarted from the acrid smell, Jack made his way steadfastly toward the rock, which he reached without great difficulty. He was perhaps a mile from the Scout camp, and there, he knew, they were looking anxiously for the first flashing of his red and white flags to announce that he was ready to report.

He stood out on the rock, and, after a minute of hard waving of his flags, he caught the answer. Thus communication was established, and he began to make his report. He had no fear of being misunderstood, for it was Dick Crawford, the Assistant Scout-Master and his good friend, who was holding the flags at the other end, and not some novice who was getting practice in signaling, one of the pieces of Scout lore in which Jack had speedily become an adept.

"Bad fire," he wig-wagged back. "Seems to be spreading fast. Ground very bad. Likely to spread, I think. Fields full of stubble. No water at all. Brooks and springs all dried up."

"Mr. Durland says have you warned men working in the fields?"

"Not yet," was the answer from Jack. "But they think it's all right, and seem to think we're playing a game."

Then Jack dropped his flags in token of his desire to stop for a minute, and turned to Pete Stubbs, who had come up.

"It's burning mighty fast," said Pete. "The woods are awfully dry up there. There's no green stuff at all to hold it in check. If those people on the farm down there don't look out, they'll be in a lot of trouble."

Jack sent that information, too, and then came orders from Dick Crawford.

"Return to camp," the Assistant Scout-Master flashed. "Warn farmer and men of danger. Suggest a back fire in their fields, to give clear space fire cannot jump. Then report, verbally, result of warning."

The warning was a waste of breath and effort.

"Think you can learn me my business?" asked the farmer, indignantly. "I don't need no Boy Scouts to tell me how to look after my property. Be off with you, now, and don't bother us! We're busy here, working for a living. Haven't got time to run around playing the way you do."

Jack felt that it was useless to argue. This farmer was one who believed that all boys were full of mischief. He didn't know anything about the Boy Scout movement and the new sort of boy that it has produced and is producing, in ever growing numbers. So Jack and Pete went on to camp, and there Jack made his report to Durland.

"It would serve him right to have his place burned," said Durland, "but we can't work on that theory. And there are others who would suffer, too, and that wouldn't be right. So we'll just go over there and stop that fire ourselves."

There was a chorus of cheers in reply to that. The idea of having a chance to fight a really big fire like this awoke all the enthusiasm of the Scouts of the three Patrols, the Whip-poor-wills, the Raccoons and the Crows, this last the one to which Jack and Pete belonged.

So off they went, with Durland in the lead.

## FIGHTING THE FIRE

The three Patrols of the Troop had been nearly at full strength when the hike to the camping ground began, and Durland had at his disposal, therefore, when he led them across the open fields toward the burning mountain, about twenty quick, disciplined and thoroughly enthusiastic Scouts, ready to do anything that was ordered, and to do it with a will.

"What's it like over there, Jack?" asked Tom Binns, who was Jack Danby's particular chum among the Scouts, and the one who had really induced him to join the Crows.

"It's going to be pretty hot work, Tom," said Jack. "There's no water at all, and the only chance to stop that fire is by back firing."

"That's pretty dangerous, isn't it?"

"Yes, unless the man who's doing it knows exactly what he wants to do and exactly how to do it. But I guess Mr. Durland and Dick Crawford won't make any mistakes."

"It's lucky for these farmers that Mr. Durland knows a fire when he sees it, isn't it, Jack? If they let that fire alone, Bob Hart said it would sweep over the whole place and burn up the farmhouses."

"Sure it would! The trouble is they never believe anything until they see it. They think that just because there never was a really bad fire here before, there never will be."

"There have been fires on Bald Mountain before, though, Jack. I've seen them myself."

"That's true enough—and that's just the trouble. This is the trouble. There's been scarcely any rain here for the last two months, and everything is fearfully dry. If the brooks were full the fire wouldn't be so likely to jump them. But, as it is, any old thing may happen. That's the danger—and they can't see it."

Each Scout was carrying his Scout axe and stick, a stout pole that was useful in a hundred different ways on every hike. The axes were out now, and the sharp knives that each Scout carried were also ready for instant use. Durland, at the head of the little column in which the Scouts had formed, was casting his keen eye over the whole landscape. Now he gave the order to halt.

The Scouts had reached the edge of the fertile land. The course of the little stream was directly before them, and on the other side was the land that had been partially cleared of timber the year before, filled with stumps and dry brush.

"Go over and borrow a few shovels from the farmhouse over there," directed Durland. "Crawford, take a couple of Scouts and get them. I want those shovels, whether they want to lend them to you or not. It's for their own sake—we can't stand on ceremony if they won't or can't understand the danger."

"Come on, Danby and Binns," said Dick Crawford, a happy smile on his lips, and the light of battle in his eyes. "We'll get those shovels if they're to be found there, believe me!"

The farmer and most of the men, of course, were in the fields, still at work. If they had seen the advance of the Scouts they had paid no attention whatever, and seemed to have no curiosity, even when three of the Scouts left the main body, and went over to the farmhouse. There Dick and the others found a woman, hatchet faced and determined, with a bulldog and a hulking, overgrown boy for company. She sat on the back porch, peeling potatoes, and there was no welcome in the look she gave them.

"Be off with you!" she shrilled at them. "You'll get no hand-outs here! You're worse'n tramps, you boys be, running over honest people's land, and stealing fruit. Be off now, or I'll set the dog onto ye!"

"We only want to borrow some shovels, ma'am," explained Dick Crawford, politely, trying to hide a smile at her vehement way of expressing herself.

"What next?" she cried. "Shovels, is it? And a fine chance we'd have of ever seeing them ag'in if we let you have them, wouldn't we? Here, Tige! Sic 'em, boy, sic 'em!"

The dog's hair rose on his back, and he growled menacingly as he advanced toward them. But there Jack Danby was in his own element. There had never been an animal yet, wild or tame, that he had ever seen, with which he could not make friends. He dropped to one knee now, while the others watched him, and spoke to the dog. In a moment the savagery went out of the bulldog, who, as it seemed, was really little more than a puppy, and he came playfully up to Jack, anxious to be friendly.

"The dog knows, you see," said Dick. "A dog will never make friends with anyone who is unworthy, ma'am. Don't you think you could follow his example, and trust us?"

"You'll get no shovels here," said the woman, with a surly look.

"Oh, I don't know!" said little Tom Binns, under his breath. His eyes had been busy, darting all around, and he had seen a number of shovels, scattered with other farm implements, under a pile of brushwood. He leaped over to this pile now, suddenly, before the loutish boy who was helping with the potatoes could make a move to stop him, and in a moment he was dancing off, his arms full of shovels. Dick Crawford saw what had happened, and could not help approving.

"Thank you," he said to the enraged woman, who rose and seemed about to take a hand herself, physically. "I'm sorry we had to help ourselves, but it's necessary to save your home, though your own men don't seem to think so."

They were off then, with the woman shouting after them, and trying to induce the dog, who stood wagging his tail, to give chase.

"I don't like to take things that way," said Dick, "but if ever the end justified the means, this was the time. We had to have those shovels, and it's just as I told her—it's for their sake that we took them, not for ours at all."

"What will we do with these shovels when we get them?" asked Tom Binns, who had distributed his load so that each of the others had some shovels to carry. They made a heavy load, even so, and Tom couldn't have carried them all for more than a few steps without dropping from their weight.

"I guess Mr. Durland intends to dig a trench, and then start a back fire," said Crawford. "You see, the wind is so strong that if we started a back fire without precaution like that it would be simply hastening destruction of the property we are trying to save, and it would be better not to interfere at all than to do that. With the trench, you see, the fire we start will be quickly stopped, and the other fire won't have anything to feed on when it once reaches the part that we've burned over."

Crawford had guessed aright the reason for getting the shovels, for Durland, as soon as the three Scouts reached the stream with their precious burden of shovels, picked out the strongest Scouts and set them to work digging the trench. He took a shovel himself, and set the best of examples by the way he made the dirt fly.

They were working on a sort of a ridge. On each side there was a natural barrier to the advance of the fire, fortunately, in the form of rock quarries, where there was absolutely nothing that the fire could feed on. Therefore, if it hadn't been checked, it would have swept over the place where they had dug their trench, as through the mouth of a funnel, and mushroomed out again beyond the quarries.

The trench was dug in an amazingly short time. It was rough work, but effective, the ditch, about two feet deep and seven or eight feet wide, extending for nearly two hundred feet. On the side of this furthest from the fire Durland now lined up the Scouts, each armed with a branch covered with leaves at one end.

"I'm going to start a back fire now," he said. "I don't think it will be big enough to leap the trench, but to make sure, you will all stay lined up on your side of the ditch, and beat out every spark that comes across and catches the dry grass on your side. Then we'll be absolutely safe."

He and Crawford, skilled in the ways of the woods, soon had the brush on the other side burning. The rate at which the little fire they set spread, showed beyond a doubt how quickly the great fire that was sweeping down the mountain would have crossed the supposed clearing.

"Gee, see how it licks around those stumps!" said Tom Binns. "It's just as if they'd started a fire in a furnace or a big open fireplace."

"That's the wind," said Jack. "It's blowing pretty hard. I think the danger will be pretty well over by tonight, for the time being, at least. Unless I'm very much mistaken, there's rain coming behind that wind."

"It's hard to tell," said Bob Hart, Patrol Leader of the Crows, waiting with his branch for the time to beat out sparks. "The smoke darkens the sky so that all weather signs fail. The sun glows red through it, and you can't really tell, here, whether there are any rain clouds or not. But it's a wet wind, certainly, and I guess you're right, Jack."

"I don't see how you can tell about the weather as well as you do, Jack," said Pete Stubbs. "You never seem to be wrong, and since I've known you, you've guessed better than the papers two or three times."

"I've lived in the woods nearly all my life, Pete. That's why I can sometimes tell. I'm not always right, by a good deal, but the sky and the trees and the birds are pretty good weather prophets as a rule. In the country you have to be able to tell about the weather."

"That's right," said Bob Hart. "I've known farmers, when there was a moon, to keep men working until after midnight to get the hay in, just because they were sure there'd be a storm the

next day. And they were right, too, though everyone else laughed at them."

"It means an awful lot to a farmer to get his hay in before the rain comes," said Jack. "It means the difference between a good year and a bad year, often. Many a farm has been lost just because a crop like that failed and the farmer couldn't pay a mortgage when he had expected to."

"Well, if they're all as stupid as this fellow, they deserve to lose their farms," said Bob Hart.

"Here he comes now, and he looks mad enough to shoot us!"

It was true. The irate farmer was coming, pitchfork in hand, with his two sturdy sons and a couple of farm hands, who grinned as if they neither knew nor cared what would happen, but were glad of a chance for a little excitement.

"Who gave you leave to dig your ditch here?" he shouted. "This is my land, I reckon. Be off with you now! And look at the fire you started!"

Indignantly he made for Bob Hart with his pitchfork. He was worked up to a regular fury, and it might have fared ill with the Patrol Leader had it not been for Jack Danby's quick leap to the rescue.

"You don't want to use that pitchfork," shouted Jack, springing forward. And, before the astonished farmer realized what the Scout was up to, the pitchfork had been seized from his hand.

"What's the trouble here?" cried Durland, rushing up just then. "Shame on you, my man! Can't you see that we've saved your farm?"

He seized the farmer by the shoulders and spun him around to face the sea of fire that was billowing down the slopes from the blazing mountain, that was now a real torch. The fire had passed beyond the stage of the slow burning circle that is so characteristic of wood fires. It was rushing relentlessly forward, and even now it was at the edge of the clearing.

"There!" cried Durland. "You can see now how it would have eaten that cleared timber lot of yours. See?"

The back fire had been started half way in the timber lot. It had traveled fast, and before the onrushing big fire was a space a hundred yards wide of blackened ground, where the saving flames Durland had lighted had had their will. As far as that space came the big fire. Then, because there was nothing left to feed it and the gap was too wide for it to leap, it stopped, and there was an open space, already burnt over, where only sparks and glowing embers remained.

"Jumping wildcats!" exclaimed the farmer, in awe. "That was a purty sizable fire! I say, stranger, I guess I was a leetle mite hasty just now. You've saved us from a bad fire, all right, though I swum I don't see how you thought to do it."

"This is exceptional for this part of the country," said Durland, with a smile. "But I have lived in countries where whole towns have been swept away by a sudden shift of the wind just because the people thought they were safe, and I have learned that the only way to fight fire is with more fire. Also, that you never can tell what a big fire is going to do, and that the only way to be on the safe side is to figure that the fire is going after you just as if it was human. It wants to destroy you, as it seems, and it keeps on looking for the weak spot that you haven't guarded."

"You come right back to the house, all of you," said the farmer, "and the wife will give you a supper that you don't see the like of in town very often, I'll warrant ye!"

Durland was glad to accept the invitation for the whole Troop, for the Scouts had had no time to cook their own supper. He felt, too, that his Troop had won a sturdy friend, and that pleased him.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **WHAT THE SPY SAW**

The boys who had fought the fire and saved the farm were so tired the next day that most of them, including Jack Danby and Pete Stubbs, were glad to spend the whole day in rest. The work had been more exhausting than they had been able thoroughly to understand in the heat and rush of getting it done. The next day saw them with aching muscles, sore feet, and eyes that still smarted from the acrid wood smoke. It was Sunday, so, of course, there was no reason why they should not rest as much as they liked.



"We sure want to rest up today, Jack," said Pete Stubbs, in the afternoon, when they had gone to Grant park to lie on the grass and watch a game of baseball that was being played by two teams of young men who had no other day for games of any sort. "Tomorrow's field day, you know."

"I know it is, Pete. I've been practicing long enough to remember that!"

Monday of that week was a holiday in that State, and all the Scouts had the day to themselves. Durland, always trying to think of things to make life in his Troop interesting and happy, had devised the plan of a field day, in which there should be games of all sorts. There was to be a baseball tournament between the three Patrols for the championship of the Troop, and a set of athletic games, including running, jumping, and all sorts of sports. There were eight Scouts in each Patrol, and, to make up a full nine, each had been allowed to select one boy from its waiting list so that the roster might be complete.

Jack Danby was the hope of the Crow Patrol in these sports. He was a wonderfully fine athlete for a boy of his age, and was proficient in many games. There had been no other real candidate for the post of pitcher on the Crow baseball team, and he was expected to make a new record in strike-outs the next day.

"How's your arm, Jack?" asked Pete Stubbs, anxiously. "You didn't strain it yesterday, did you, digging that ditch?"

"Not a bit," said Jack, with a laugh. "It did it good, I think. I'm not much of a pitcher, but if we get licked tomorrow the work I did yesterday won't be any excuse. I'm as fit as any of the others, and I won't mind admitting that anyone who pitches better than I do tomorrow deserves to win."

"Gee, Jack, I hope I do some hitting! I'm crazy to make a home run!"

"Don't worry about it, Pete. That's the worst way you can do if you really want to bat well. And remember that while it's fine to knock out a home run and have everyone yelling and cheering you, the fellow that sacrifices is often the one that wins the game."

"It seems hard, though, Jack, just to bunt and know you're going to be thrown out when you really might be able to make a hit."

"It's the team that counts, though, Pete. Always remember that. And a Scout ought to be able to obey his captain's orders just as well in a baseball game as any other time. Just remember that there's a reason for everything, even if you can't always understand it yourself, and you won't mind making a sacrifice hit when what you want to do is to knock the cover off the ball."

"I'm going to play short stop tomorrow, Jack. Bob Hart brought me in from the outfield and put Jack Binns out there. He says Tom can play better with the sun in his eyes than anyone on the team. I missed a catch the last game we had because I couldn't see the ball."

"It's a mighty hard thing to do, to play the sun field well," said Jack. "I wonder how that new pitcher the Raccoons have will do?"

"He's their extra pitcher, and I guess he's a good one, Jack. He pitched for the Bliss School team last spring, and they say his pitching was what won the county championship for them."

"Don't you believe it, Pete! He had a good team behind him. That won the championship. No one man ever won a championship for a team, or ever will. He's a good pitcher, and he probably helped them a lot, but it's the team that does the work, every time."

"Well, I don't know, Jack. In their big game, with the High School, he struck out fourteen men and the other side didn't get a run. His team only made one run off the High School pitcher, so he had to do it pretty nearly by himself. I hope you beat him, anyhow. He's got an awful swelled head. They say the only reason he wants to join the Scouts is so that he can get a chance to show he's a better pitcher than you are. That's Homer Lawrence all over!"

"Oh, I guess he's all right. I think he's a pretty nice fellow. I was talking to him the other day."

"His father's one of the richest men in this town, Jack. He has all the money he wants, and he's been taking lessons in pitching from one of the State League players. That's why he's so good, I guess. The other fellows don't have a chance to learn things that way."

"It isn't always the fellows who had the most lessons who are the best players, Pete. Ty Cobb never had any lessons in baseball but he's a pretty good player. And there are lots of others."

"I don't think it's fair, anyhow, Jack. The Raccoons oughtn't to have picked him out. He's a long way off from the top of their list, and I don't believe he'll get in this year."

"That's the rule we made, Pete. Each Patrol needed an extra player, and they were allowed to pick anyone at all they liked from their waiting lists. So it's perfectly fair, and we haven't any kick coming."

Jack was willing to rest for quite a while after that, but presently he began to feel more

energetic.

"Come on, Pete," he said, "I'll pitch a few balls to you somewhere, if we can get a bat and a ball, and perhaps that'll help you in your batting tomorrow."

So they left the park, and went back toward their homes. At Jack's room they got a bat and ball, and then wondered where they should go for their practice.

"I know!" cried Pete. "Down by the river there. There's nothing doing there on Sundays—it's quiet as can be. And maybe we'll find some little kid around to chase balls for us."

"Any place you like, Pete; it's all the same to me. I'll be glad to limber my arm up a little, too. It feels a tiny bit stiff, and a good work-out will be fine for it."

Because it was Sunday they tried to keep their bat out of sight.

"I don't think it's wrong for us to practice this way," said Jack. "We have to work all week, and I think we need exercise. If we can't get it except on Sunday afternoons, it's all right to practice a little, though I wouldn't play in a regular game, because I do get a chance for playing on Saturdays now. They don't give you Saturday afternoon off in every office, though, I can tell you."

First of all Pete, highly elated at the chance to further his secret ambition of developing into a catcher, put on a big mitt and Jack pitched all sorts of curves to him. Then he took his bat and tried to straighten out the elusive, deceptive balls that Jack pitched.

"Gee, I can hardly see the ball, much less hit it!" exclaimed Pete, after whiffing ingloriously at the air two or three times and barely tapping the sphere on several other occasions.

"Keep on trying, Pete. Those aren't really hard to hit. The trouble is you don't watch the ball."

"It never goes where I think it will, Jack."

"That's the whole idea of pitching, Pete. Keep your eyes on the ball after I pitch it, not on me. Then you can see just what it does. Now you think I'm going to pitch one sort of a ball, and if I pitch anything else, you're up in the air right away."

At last, in huge disgust, Pete hurled his bat away from him, after making a mighty swing at a slow floater. He seemed to be furious.

"Easy there, Pete!" said Jack, amused at this display of temper, as he picked up the bat and advanced toward Pete to return it to him.

"I wasn't mad," said Pete, in a low whisper. "I just wanted to talk to you without anyone knowing that I wanted to. Say, Jack, there's someone watching us."

"Watching us, Pete? Why should anyone do that?"

"It's Lawrence,—that chap that's going to pitch for the Raccoons, Jack. I'm sure of it! He and Harry Norman are behind that fence over there—the sneaks!"

Jack dropped back to his position without saying anything more. He was careful for a minute or two not to look in the direction of the fence that Pete had referred to. But when he did look, his keen eyes were not long in finding out that Pete had been right. There were spies behind the fence, and they were studying every ball he pitched.

A few moments later he found, or made, another chance to speak to Pete.

"You were right, Pete," he said. "They are watching us from there."

"Let's chase them out of there, Jack!"

"Not a bit of it, Pete. I don't want them to know we've found out they're there—not now, at any rate. If they're mean enough to try to find something out by spying that way, I'll be mean enough to give them something to look at that won't do them much good!"

"Say, Jack, that's the stuff! That's better than giving them a licking, too. What'll you do?"

"Just wait and see! And hit these balls just as hard as you can."

The ball looked as big as a house now to Pete as it came sailing up to him. Mysteriously all the "stuff" that Jack had been "putting on" the ball was gone and done with. The balls Jack pitched now were either straight or broke so widely that almost anyone could have batted home runs galore off him. And Pete, who saw the point, swung wildly at every one of them, hitting them easily.

"That's a fine joke," said Pete. "They won't find out very much about what you can do as a pitcher from that—that's a sure thing! If Lawrence thinks that's the best thing you can do when you get in the box I'm afraid he'll get an awful jolt tomorrow."

"I hope so, Pete. The sneak—you were quite right. If he'd come right out to me and told me he wanted to watch me pitch, I wouldn't have minded. But that's a mean trick!"

"It won't do him much good, that's one good thing. Say, I don't believe he's as good himself as they make out, or he wouldn't have played such a trick. I bet he's got a big yellow streak in him."

"We'll find that out tomorrow, Pete. I hope not, because he certainly knows how to pitch. If he does a thing like that, though, he'd be apt to try to cheat in the game, or do something like that, I'm afraid. I don't care, though. If he wants to win in any such fashion as that, he's welcome to the victory. He must want to win worse than I do."

"I didn't think Harry Norman would play a dirty trick on you after the way you saved his life, Jack. I was surprised to see him there."

"He doesn't like me. I've always been willing to be friendly with him, even when I had to fight him up at Woodleigh. He forced me into that."

"He isn't a Scout, is he?"

"No, he doesn't like the Scouts. I guess he'll never join, either."

"He's no great loss, I guess. We can get along better without him than with him if he's going to do things like that. I bet Lawrence won't join either, when this game's over."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DOUBLE HEADER

Pete Stubbs had wanted to tell everyone of the trick that Lawrence had tried to play on Jack, and of Jack Danby's clever way of turning the tables on him, but Jack dissuaded him.

"That won't do any good," he said. "After all, he may not have meant to do anything wrong, and we'd better give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Aw, sure he meant to be mean, Jack! I ain't got no use for him. If we told the others he'd get a ragging he wouldn't forget in a hurry, I'll bet."

"I guess you can stand it if I can, Pete. Keep quiet about it, because I want you to."

"All right, Jack, if you want me to, I will. Say, there's one thing I hadn't thought of. If he takes all that trouble to find out how you pitch, he must be afraid of you!"

"I hope he is, Pete. That's half the battle, you know, making the other fellow think you're better than he is, whether you are or not—and thinking so yourself. Often it makes it come out right."

Full grown men would have been appalled by the program that had been mapped out for the Boy Scout Field Day.

Baseball filled the morning and early afternoon. There were to be three games in all. First the Crows were to play the Whip-poor-wills. Then the Whip-poor-wills were to play the Raccoons, and finally the Crows and Raccoons were to meet. There was to be an hour of rest for the baseball players between the games, and during that time there were to be running races and jumping contests, and also a race for small sailing boats on the lake, with crews from the three Patrols for three catboats. Durland owned one, Dick Crawford another, and the third, the one to be used by the Crows, was lent by Mr. Simms, the president of the company that employed Jack Danby and Pete Stubbs.

The first event of all on the program was the baseball game between Crows and Whip-poor-wills. The Whip-poor-wills, or the Willies, as they were called for short, by the rooters, were not as strong as the Crows and the Raccoons, and were expected to lose both their games, leaving the championship to be fought out between the Crows and the Raccoons in the afternoon.

Bob Hart, captain of the Crows, came up to Jack Danby in the early morning at the campfire.

"We'll let Tom Binns pitch the first game, Jack," he said, "and save you for the Raccoons. They're saving Lawrence, too, and he'll pitch against you. So you want to be fresh and ready for him. You play left field. That'll give you some exercise, and won't tire your arm out."

"I think I could pitch the two games, if you wanted me to," said Jack, "but I'll be glad to see Tom get a chance to pitch. He's a good pitcher, and he ought to beat them easily."

So the teams lined up with Jack in left field, and the game began.

"Gee," said Pete, in the fourth inning, as he and Jack waited their turn to bat, "we can't seem to hit their pitcher at all. Tom's pitching an elegant game, but I thought we'd have eight or nine runs by this time, and the score's really two to one in their favor."

"There's plenty of time to begin hitting later, Pete. No need to worry about that yet. There's nine innings in a ball game, and a run in the ninth counts for just as much as one we make now."

Pete Stubbs made a home run and tied the score in the sixth inning, and after that, until the ninth there was no more scoring.

The despised Willies were playing better than they knew how, as Pete Stubbs said, and the Raccoons, who stood around to watch the game, began to look anxious, for they had expected to see the Crows walk away with the game.

But in the ninth inning there was quite a break in the game. Bob Hart, who batted first, led off with a screaming two bagger, and went to third, when Tom Binns was thrown out. Pete Stubbs batted next, and was so anxious to make a hit that he popped up a little fly to the first baseman. But Jack Danby, with a rousing drive to center field, put his team ahead, for he ran so fast that he beat the throw to the plate, and made a home run, as Pete had done before him.

"That's great, Jack!" cried Tom Binns. "Gee, I thought we'd never get a lead on them! They can't hit much, but they've certainly got a good pitcher."

Jack trotted contentedly out to his position for the last half of the ninth inning. The Crows seemed certain to win now, because Tom Binns' pitching had been getting better every inning, and in the last two times they had been at bat the Whip-poor-wills hadn't been able to get a man to first base, much less get anywhere near making a run.

The first man up now made a little tap, and the ball rolled toward the third baseman, who muffed it. The next got a base on balls, and the third was hit. The whole game was changed in a second. Tom Binns seemed to be rattled. Try as he would, he couldn't get the ball over the plate, despite Bob Hart's efforts to steady him, and in a moment he passed the fourth batter, forcing in a run, and leaving the Whip-poor-wills only one run behind, with the bases full and none out.

Two or three of the Crow fielders looked anxiously at Jack, and Pete Stubbs called from his position at shortstop.

"I say, Bob," he cried, "better change pitchers. Tom's wild and can't see the plate."

Jack himself was more than anxious. He felt desperately sorry for poor little Tom Binns, who had been tremendously proud of being chosen to pitch for his team, and he was afraid, as were the others, that the sudden rally was more than Tom could check.

"He's going to leave him in," cried the center fielder to Jack as Hart shook his head at Pete's suggestion that he take Tom out of the box. And Tom began pitching again to the fifth Whip-poor-will who stood at the plate brandishing his bat.

Jack Danby knew a lot about baseball that was planted in him by sheer instinct. And now he did something that was against orders and entirely different from what any other amateur outfielder would have thought of doing. It smacked more of big league baseball, where thinking is quick. He crept in, inch by inch, almost, while Tom Binns pitched two balls and a strike, until he was not more than thirty feet behind the third baseman.

"If they hit a long fly one run will come in," he reasoned to himself. "A good single, even, will score two runs and win the game. The only chance is to make a double play. That's why the infielders are all drawn in close, so that they can throw to the plate. And that batter will try his hardest to push the ball over their heads."

"Crack!"

The sound of the bat meeting the ball fairly came to him, and in a moment he saw the sphere sailing for the outfield, and about to pass squarely over the place the shortstop had just left.

It looked like a sure hit, and the base runners started at once with the ball. The center fielder, running in desperately, was too far out to have a chance to catch the ball. But suddenly there was a shout. Jack Danby, who had crept far in without being noticed, sprinted over, and, by a wonderful jumping dive, caught the ball. Like a flash he threw it to third base, and the runner who had started thence for the plate was doubled easily. He had reached home, and there was no chance for him to turn back. The runner from second, too, had turned third base, and, as soon as the third baseman had stepped on his bag he turned and threw to second base, completing as pretty a triple play as was ever made, and winning the game for the Crows.

"That was a wonderful play, Jack!" said Scout-Master Durland, who served as umpire. "I never saw a better one, even in a big league game. You were out of position, but if you hadn't been, that ball would have fallen fair, and Tom Binns would have lost his game. Really, though,

you're the one that deserves the credit for winning it, for your batting put your team ahead, and your fielding kept the Whip-poor-wills from nosing you out in the finish."

The Whip-poor-wills, disappointed by losing when victory seemed to be within their grasp after such a gallant up-hill fight, seemed to have shot their bolt. Their pitcher had outdone himself against the hard hitters of the Crows, in holding them down so well, and when, after an hour's rest, they lined up against the Raccoons, it seemed that they were a different team. The Raccoons simply toyed with them. They piled up runs in almost every inning, and won with ridiculous ease, by a score of twenty to three.

Harry Norman, who had come out with his friend Lawrence to watch the sport, came up to Jack after the Raccoons had given this impressive exhibition of their strength.

"Gee," he said, "you might as well forfeit this game, Danby! You haven't got a chance against the Raccoons, especially when Homer Lawrence begins pitching for them. Look at the way they beat the Whip-poor-wills, and the trouble you had with them. You only beat them four to three, and you wouldn't have done that if you hadn't made that lucky catch in the ninth inning."

"That wasn't a lucky catch," protested Pete Stubbs. "Jack knew that the ball might be hit that way, and he took a chance, because if the ball had been hit to his regular position it would have meant a run anyhow. That isn't luck—that's baseball strategy!"

"There wasn't any luck about the twenty runs the Raccoons made anyhow," said Norman, with a sneer. "And I'll bet you five dollars they beat you. Money talks—there you are!"

"We can't afford to bet," said Jack, quietly, while Pete Stubbs looked angry enough to cry, almost. "We only get small salaries, Norman, and we have to use all the money we make to live on. We support ourselves, you know."

"Oh, I suppose that's right," said Norman, contemptuously. Like many other boys who are fortunate enough to have wealthy parents and to be relieved from the need of starting out when they are little more than children to earn their own way in the world, Norman had an idea that he was, for that reason, superior to boys like Jack and Pete, when, as a matter of fact, it is just the other way around.

"Scouts don't bet, anyway," said Dick Crawford, who had overheard the conversation, and showed, by his manner, that he had little use for Norman, of whom he had heard many things that were far from pleasant. "We don't want to win money from one another, and betting on friendly games leads to hard feelings and all sorts of trouble. It's a good thing to let alone. Come on to lunch, now, fellows. It's all ready."

The members of the Crow Patrol and two or three volunteers who were trying to prove that they were really qualified to be Scouts, though they had to wait for vacancies before they could join, had prepared lunch while the second baseball game was being played.

"Guess I won't eat much today," said Pete Stubbs, sorrowfully. "I like eating, but if I eat too much I'm never able to play a good game of ball afterward."

"Satisfy your hunger, Pete, and don't eat too much," advised Jack. "Then you'll be all right. The trouble with you is that when you get hold of something you like, you always feel that you have to eat all you can hold of it. Don't starve yourself now—just eat a good meal, and stop before you get so full that you feel as if you couldn't eat another mouthful."

"I guess he never gets enough to eat except when he's out this way," said Harry Norman, beneath his breath.

Jack Danby heard him and was furious, but he restrained himself, although an attack on his friend angered him more than a similar remark aimed at himself would have done.

"I don't want any more trouble with you, Norman," he said very quietly, taking the rich boy aside. "But don't say that sort of thing around here. Remember that you're a guest, and that Pete is one of your hosts and helped to pay for the spread that you're going to enjoy."

"Mind your own business!" said Norman, rudely. "I didn't say anything about you. I will if you don't look out—I'll tell them you haven't got any right to your name, and that you don't know who your father and mother were!"

Jack bit his lips and clenched his fists for a moment, but he controlled himself, and managed to let the insult pass by without giving Norman the thrashing he deserved.

After lunch, when the mess had been cleared away, the dishes had been washed and everything had been made neat and orderly, the championship game between the Raccoons and the Crows was called.

There was quite a crowd out to see this game. Boys from the neighborhood, attracted by the prowess of the rival pitchers, turned out in good numbers. Many of Lawrence's school friends were also on hand, and practically every boy employed in the office with Pete and Jack was on

hand, ready to yell his head off for the success of the Crows. The defeated Whip-poor-wills were anxious for the Crows to win, for the Raccoons had taunted them unmercifully on the poor showing they had made in their second game, and they wanted to see the team that had beaten them so badly humiliated in its turn. So the crowd of Crow rooters was a little the larger, and if Jack Danby could win this game, his victory was certain to be a popular one, at least. But few thought that he would have a chance against the clever and experienced Lawrence.

"I've got an idea that the best way to beat Lawrence is to let him beat himself," said Jack Danby to Bob Hart before the game. "He knows how to pitch two good curves, and he's been striking out ten and twelve fellows in every game he played just because they've swiped at those curve balls."

"That's just what I'm afraid our fellows will do," said Bob. "That's what's been worrying me."

"Well," said Jack, "about every one of those curves breaks outside the plate. That is, if the batter didn't swing at them, the umpire would have to call them balls. Just watch him in practice and you'll see what I mean. Why not wait him out and make him pitch over the plate?"

"Say, that's a good idea, Jack! I'll call the fellows together, and we'll see how that works. I think that's a good way to save the game—hanged if I don't!"

And Bob Hart gave his orders accordingly. But it was harder to get the Crows to do it than to tell them. Time after time they struck at tempting balls, that looked as if they were going to split the plate, only to have them break away out of reach of the swinging bats. So, in the early stages of the game, Lawrence looked just as formidable as he had in the school games in which his reputation had been made. Bob Hart himself, and Jack, and Pete Stubbs, who could and would always obey orders, made him pitch to them, and, because they waited and refused to bite at his tempting curves, they put the star pitcher in the hole each time.

He was a good pitcher as far as he went, but his equipment was not as large as it should have been. He knew how to pitch a few balls very well, but if they failed him, he was in trouble. He had nothing but his wide curves—no straight, fast ball with a jump, no drop, no change of pace. The first time Jack Danby came up, in the second inning, he let the first three balls that Lawrence pitched go by, and Durland called every one a ball. Then, when Lawrence had to put his ball straight over or give him a pass, Jack smashed it to right for two bases. But he was left on second, for the two who followed him were over anxious, and were victims on strikes.

But Jack himself was pitching high class ball. He didn't try to strike out every man who faced him, but made it next to impossible for the Raccoons to make long hits off him, and he did have some fun with Lawrence, striking him out three times in the first six innings.

In the seventh inning Bob Hart waited and got a base on balls. By that time the Crows had begun to understand, and they waited now while Lawrence's best curves went to waste, never offering to hit at any ball that didn't come straight for the plate. Three passes in quick succession filled the bases, and then Jack Danby was up again.

Lawrence was no poor player. He had a head as well as a good pitching arm, and he set a trap for Jack. His first three balls were curves—and called balls. Jack waited. Twice before, in the same situation, Lawrence had had to pitch him a ball he could hit and he had swung at it. And now Lawrence expected him to do the same thing, and sent up a floater that looked good for a home run. But Jack only smiled, and the ball broke away from the plate.

It was the fourth ball, and it forced in the first run of the game. Moreover, Lawrence, fooled and outguessed, went up in the air, and the Crows made six runs in that one inning, and five more for good measure in the eighth, while Jack shut out the Raccoons.

The Crows, thanks to Jack, also won in the races and jumping contests, so it was a great day for them.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **TOM BINNS' BAD LUCK**

Jack Danby and Tom Binns, Second Class Scouts, were ready now to become First Class Scouts, and so to earn the right to wear the full Scout badge, and compete for all the medals and special badges of merit for which Scouts are eligible. They had passed all the tests save one. They had proved their efficiency in signaling, in scout and camp craft, in the tying of knots, had given evidence of their ability to save those who were drowning and give first aid to the injured, and they had only to make a hike of seven miles, alone or together, to receive the coveted promotion.

They determined, with Scout-Master Durland's permission, to make this hike together the Saturday afternoon following the Field Day that had brought so much glory to Jack Danby and his Patrol, the Crows. Although Tom Binns had been a Scout longer than Jack, Jack had been a Tenderfoot Scout for only thirty days, the shortest time in which a Scout can pass out of the Tenderfoot class, and he was fully as good a Scout now as many of the older ones who had had the right to wear the First Class Scout's badge for a long time.

"Gee, Jack, I wonder if we'll ever get to be Patrol Leaders and Scout-Masters?" asked Tom Binns, as they met after work that Saturday, and prepared to start on their hike.

"Why not, Tom? Everyone has to make a start. And Mr. Durland wasn't a Scout when he was our age, because there weren't any Boy Scouts then."

"I suppose it's a lot of responsibility, but then that's a good thing, too."

"You bet it is! That's one of the things I like best about being a Scout. It teaches you to be responsible, and to understand that you've got to do things just because you are responsible for seeing that they're done, and not just because someone keeps standing over you and telling you what to do."

"Where shall we go, Jack?"

"The camp for the Troop hike today is out at Beaver Dam. I thought we might start from the other side of the lake there, go to Haskell Crossing, and get back to camp in time for supper. Then we could get our badges from Mr. Durland, I guess."

"That's a fine idea, Jack. I don't know that country very well, though. Do you?"

"No. That's one reason for going that way. We know that we'll find a place where we can make a fire and cook our supper, though. We don't need to eat it unless we're particularly hungry, but we've got to cook it."

"Say, Jack, if fellows make that hike alone, who's going to tell whether they really did it or not? If a fellow wasn't straight, he could go off somewhere; and then report that he'd hiked the fourteen miles, and there wouldn't be anyone to prove that he hadn't."

"I know, but we're all on our honor, Pete, and a chap who had got to be a Second Glass Scout wouldn't ever play a trick like that. It wouldn't pay."

"I guess that's true, too, Jack. That's another fine thing about being a Scout. When you see a fellow give you the Scout sign in a strange place, you know he's all right, just because he is a Scout, even if you never saw him before."

"Yes. That's why we've all got to be so careful to keep up the honor of the Scouts, and not do anything ourselves, nor let any other Scout do anything that would give outsiders a chance to say that we preached one thing and did another."

They took the trolley to their starting point, on the side of Lake Whitney away from Beaver Dam, where their fellow Scouts were to gather later in the afternoon for a practice camp, such as Durland and Crawford arranged for nearly every half holiday.

"How will we know when we've gone seven miles?" asked Tom.

"It's just about seven miles—perhaps a little more—to Haskell Crossing, so we can tell without any trouble. That's one reason I picked out the place. The trail through these woods is pretty rough, but we can follow it all right."

"Whose land is this, Jack?"

"No one knows, exactly. It's a sort of a no man's land. Or, at least, two sets of heirs to an old estate are fighting about it in the courts. They've been trying for years to get it settled between them, but the courts haven't decided yet, and they may not for a long time."

"And meantime no one can use it?"

"That's it. It seems silly, doesn't it? If the courts take so long to decide it must mean, I should think, that both sides were partly right, and I should think they'd want to settle it between themselves, and so each get some use out of the land. There's an old house, more than a hundred and fifty years old, in the woods, too."

"Doesn't anyone live in it?"

"No one now. Tramps go there sometimes, I've heard, because it is so lonely. Some people say it's haunted, but I guess the tramps played ghost, just so that people would stay away and let them alone."

"Gee, if there's a ghost around, I hope he stays in when we're passing. I'm afraid of them!"

"Why, how could a ghost hurt you, Tom? Anyhow, you don't need to worry about ghosts in the daytime. They only come out at night."

"It's pretty dark in here, Jack. The woods are mighty thick."

"I believe you *are* scared, Tom," said Jack, laughing. "Well, don't you worry! I'm pretty sure that if anyone ever did see a real thing here that he thought was a ghost it was a tramp in disguise. And I don't believe you're afraid of a tramp—though I'd rather meet a ghost, myself, than a vicious tramp."

"Gee, that railroad train's whistle sounds good," said Tom, a few minutes later. "That must be at the crossing."

"Yes. It isn't much further now. And the house is near the crossing, too. I believe the people who lived in it made a great fuss when the railroad went through, and that was about the time when the quarrel started. They said it would spoil their property to have the station so near them—instead of which, if they could only see it, it's made it a whole lot more valuable."

Suddenly Tom, who was walking as fast as he could and was ahead of Jack, stumbled and fell against a root. When Jack got beside him he was white with pain.

"I guess I must have twisted my foot pretty badly," he said. "I don't believe I can stand on it for a while."

He put a hand on Jack's shoulder and tried to walk, but found the pain too great.

"Here, let me see it," cried Jack. "I may be able to do something to make it better."

Tenderly he removed Tom's shoe, and turning the stocking back from the injured ankle, rubbed and examined it thoroughly.

"I may hurt you when I rub it around, Tom," he said, "but it won't hurt your ankle for more than a minute."

For two or three minutes, while Tom, with set teeth, endured the pain without even a whimper, Jack rubbed and massaged the ankle, already slightly swollen.

"It's just a strain, I think, Tom," he said. "I'll find a spring or a brook, if they're not all dried up around here, and make a cold compress for it. Next to blazing hot water, that's the best thing to do for it, and I think you'll be able to get to Haskell Crossing pretty soon, with a little help from me. Then we can get a train or a trolley back."

"Gee, I never thought, Jack! You can't do that! If you go back with me, you won't be able to get your First Class Scout badge."

"What of it, Tom? I guess I can wait a week or two for that without suffering very much. And you didn't think I'd leave you alone here, or to go home alone, did you? You can't walk back on that foot—that's one sure thing."

Tom protested that all Jack should do was to get him to the station, whence he said he could manage to get home all right, but Jack wouldn't hear of such an idea, and, after he had put the cold water bandage on Tom's ankle, he helped his comrade the short distance that remained to the track, and the little flag station at Haskell Crossing.

The sun was low on the horizon when they got there. In the little shanty that served as a station, loafing and wishing for something to do, was a red-headed, gawky youth whose business it was to set signals and listen at a telegraph key for the orders that went flashing up and down the line.

"There's no train back to town for four hours," he told them, when they asked how soon they could get a train. "One went a few minutes ago—you must have heard it whistle. Hurt, there, sonny?"

"Twisted my ankle a bit," said Tom Binns, with a plucky smile.

"Sho, that's too bad," said the red-headed one. "Here, come into the station and set down! There's a place in the freight daypo where you can be more comfortable like."

The shanty was divided into two parts. One was for the sale of tickets, though Jack guessed that there were few purchasers, the other held a few empty milk cans, which showed pretty well what made up the bulk of the freight handled there. But there was a pile of sacks in one corner, also, and on those, arranged and spread out like a bed, Tom was made fairly comfortable. Rest was what his ankle needed, and he could rest there as well as anywhere else.

"I ain't got but a little lunch here," said the red-headed telegrapher, station agent and baggage man rolled into one, regretfully. "But you're welcome to share it with me."

"No need of that, thanks," said Jack, heartily. "We were going to cook our supper in the



woods, and if you'll show me a place where I can build a fire, I'll cook it now. We've got plenty for you, too, and I'll give you some bacon and eggs and coffee if you like them."

"Say, you're all right! My name's Hank Hudson, and if there's anything I sure do hanker after, it's bacon and eggs. I can't get a hot supper on this job—I have to tote everything along with me from home, and it's all cold victuals I get."

"Well, we'll have a treat for you tonight, then, and I'm glad we will. It's mighty nice of you to let Tom Binns lie in the depot."

Jack was as good as his word. Hudson showed him a place where a natural fireplace, as it seemed, was all ready and waiting for the fire to be made, and Jack, in a comparatively short time, sent up a fragrant odor of frying bacon and eggs, and of rich, steaming coffee that would have given a wooden Indian an appetite. He carried the meal to the station, too, and the three of them ate it together, while Hudson's cold lunch, despised now, and not to be compared with the fine fare Jack provided, was cast aside in a corner of the station.

"Do many trains pass here that don't stop?" asked Tom.

"Sure they do!" said Hudson. "This last hour is about the quietest one of the whole day. I have to watch them all, too, and report when they pass here, so that the despatchers can keep track of them."

"What would happen if you didn't?"

"Can't tell! But there might easily be a bad wreck. If the despatcher thought he would get a flash from here as soon as the Thunderbolt passed, for instance, and I was asleep when she went by, he might let something into the track ahead of her, and then there'd be a fine lot of trouble. You can see that!"

"I should say so! You've a pretty responsible place here, I should think. Do you like it?"

"Sure! I think the work's great! I'd rather work on a railroad than anything I can think of. But it gets awful lonely here sometimes. That's the worst part of it. The work's easy enough, but it's not having anyone to talk to, except the fellows and the girls on the wire, that makes it a hard job."

"You talk to all of them, I guess, don't you?"

"Sure." Hudson walked over to the telegraph instrument by the window and threw his switch. "There's a girl at Beaver Dam calls me about this time every evening. Things are slack, you know. They send her in a hot supper from the restaurant there, and she calls every evening and tells me what she had and how good it was, so that I'll be jealous. I'll have something to surprise her with tonight though—Hullo! There she is now!"

Both boys knew the Morse code, from their signal work with the Boy Scouts, and Jack, indeed, had experimented a little with wireless, so that he could read the code of dots and dashes, if it was not sent too fast.

"H-K—H-K—H-K—" he heard now, and, in a minute more, he was trying to interpret the swift interchange of chaffing messages between the two operators.

"That's the only break in the loneliness," said Hudson, "unless someone comes in for a visit the way you have. I wish there were more of them—except for those tramps back there in the woods. They hang around a lot, and they get my goat!"

"In the big house in the woods there, you mean?" asked Jack. "The one they say is haunted?"

Hudson laughed.

"That's the one. They say it's haunted, but it's Willies and Tired Toms that haunt it, believe me! They come over here and look up the place, and they'd have stolen everything in it long ago if there'd been anything to steal. They let me alone because they're pretty sure I haven't got any money, and they know I've got a gun, too."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ATTACK ON THE STATION

"What time does the Thunderbolt go through?" asked Jack.

"Eight thirty-four she's due, but she's sometimes a few minutes late. Then, at eight forty-two there's the second section of the Thunderbolt, when there's one running—and there is to-night, and your train for town gets in here at eight fifty-seven."

"What's the next station below this?"

"Conway. That's about eleven miles down the line, and away from the city. 'Tisn't much more of a station than this. Just an operator who doubles up on all the other jobs same way I do."

"I've got to go wash dishes and make up our packs," said Jack. "It's eight o'clock now, and that doesn't leave so very much more time than we need. I've got to put out the fire, too."

He went off with the dishes on which they had eaten their simple but delicious supper, and left Hank Hudson to talk to Tom Binns and watch his key, which might at any moment click out some important order that would make the difference between safety and disaster for a train laden with passengers.

The fire on which he had cooked their supper was still glowing in the woods about a hundred yards from the railway tracks, and he hurried toward it to extinguish it, in accordance with the strictest of all Scout rules for camping. Fires left carelessly burning after a picnic have caused many a terrible and disastrous forest fire, and it is the duty of every Scout to make sure that he gives no chance for such a result to follow any encampment in which he has had a part.

As he made his way toward the fire he thought once or twice that he heard the sounds of a man or an animal moving through the woods, and once, too, he thought he heard a hoarse and raucous laugh. But he decided, after stopping to listen once or twice, that he had been mistaken, and he laughed at himself when he was startled as he got near the dancing shadows east by the dying fire, by what looked like the shadows of three men.

There was no danger in the fire he had built as long as the wind held steady, and he might have left it to burn itself out with little fear of any adverse happening as a result. But that was not thorough, nor was it the way of a Scout. A wind may shift at any moment, and a fire that is perfectly safe with a northwest wind may be the means of starting a conflagration no one can hope to check if the wind shifts even a point or two.

So Jack put his fire out thoroughly, and made certain that no live embers remained to start it up anew. Then he washed his dishes, and made his way back toward Hank Hudson's cabin.

Inside the cabin, as he approached, he could hear slight sounds, and then, insistent, compelling, the clatter of the telegraph key.

He stopped to listen a moment to its clicking, and then found, to his surprise, that it was "H-K," the call for Haskell Crossing, that was sounding.

"Why doesn't Hudson answer?" he asked himself.

Still the call sounded. There was a continued noise within the station—someone was there, and it must, surely, be Hudson. He could not fail to hear the chatter of his sounder, and yet he was ignoring the steady call from his instrument—a call more than likely to be of the last importance.

Jack, sure now that something must be wrong, did not rush hastily and impulsively for the door of the cabin. Instead, he crept up quietly toward the side, where there was a window, that would give him a chance to look in without being seen himself.

And, when he got there, he saw what was wrong. Hudson, his face livid, a red handkerchief stuffed into his mouth, was tied in a chair, his arms, legs and body being securely tied up, so that there was no chance for him to work himself free. He could hear what went on, but he could do nothing, and there was no chance for him to reach that key and answer the insistent urging of the wire, though Jack could see, from the look in his eyes, that he knew an attempt was being made to raise his office.

"They'll think he's deserted his key," said Jack to himself. "That's what's worrying him."

Apparently Hudson was alone in the station, and Jack was just on the point of rushing in to free the operator when the door into the freight station opened, and three burly men, dressed like tramps, appeared, dragging poor little Tom Binns with them, despite his twisted ankle.

Tom was trying to cry out and give the alarm, as Jack could see, but in vain, for one of the ruffians had his hand over his mouth, and there was no chance for Tom's cries to be heard.

Jack, horror struck, but, knowing that aid was far away, watched the scene that followed with distended eyes. He was powerless against three such men as the tramps that had attacked Hudson and Tom Binns, and the nearest station, as he knew, was eleven miles distant. But he felt that he must try to find out, at least, what the attack meant. Hudson, as the assailants must know, had no money to make such an attack worth while, and, even if they could blow or otherwise open the little safe it was unlikely that more than a few dollars would be there—a poor

reward for such a desperate business.

Suddenly, however, a thought came to him that terrified him a thousand times more than what he had already seen.

"The key!" he thought, almost shouting the words aloud and betraying himself in his excitement. That was it! These men were train robbers—or, worse, possibly, train wreckers. They would endanger every life on the onrushing Thunderbolt to gain their ends. That was why they had put Hank Hudson out of business, why they were guarding Tom Binns with such care, crippled as he seemed to be. Men in their desperate business could take no chances. It was all or nothing for them—success, and the chance to rifle the registered mail and the valuable express pouches, or failure and death on the gallows or a life in prison.

For a moment Jack had the impulse to seek safety in flight. If they caught him spying on them they were likely to have little mercy for him, and well he knew it. But the impulse lasted scarcely a second.

"I guess if I'm ever to make good as a Scout, this is one of my chances," he said to himself, grimly. "I'm going to stay right by this window and try to hear what they say to one another. They may give away their plans and give me some sort of a chance to foil them."

Jack was frightened, and he was brave enough to admit that to himself. Even the river pirates that he and Pete Stubbs had helped to thwart when they tried to steal the fittings from Mr. Simms' yacht were mild mannered criminals compared to these. Each of them wore a black mask that hid his eyes and the upper part of his face, but Jack, trying desperately to discover something that would enable him to identify them should he ever have the chance, picked out lines about the lower parts of their faces that would, he thought, make it impossible for him to mistake them should he ever have the chance to see them again. One had a prominent, undershot jaw. Another bore a furrow across his chin, the mark of a bullet, as Jack guessed, that was white against the stubble of his beard. And another had lost part of his right ear, which was not hidden by his mask.

"I'm really more certain of knowing them again now than if they hadn't worn those masks," said Jack, to himself. "The masks made me look more attentively at the part of each one's face that I could see."

"Hey, Tom," said one of the men, gruffly, looking at his watch, "got them tied? I thought there was another one of the young rips."

"If there was, he ain't a comin' back here, or he'd have been here long ago," said Tom, scowling fiercely at his two captives. "What's the time, Bo?"

"Time enough. She ain't due for ten or twelve minutes yet, even if she's on time. Wish't I could tell what that key was saying."

"Don't make no difference. It'll be saying a lot more when we get through tonight," said the other.

All the time the monotonous calling of the key had kept up—"H-K—H-K." Now suddenly there was a change. "B-D—B-D—" clicked the instrument, and Jack knew that the sender had given up Haskell Crossing and was trying now to raise Beaver Dam, the next station up toward the city.

Beaver Dam answered at once, and Jack listened intently to the wire conversation that followed and was sounded by Hudson's open key.

"Hello, B-D," it called. "What's the matter with Hudson? I've been trying to raise him for half an hour."

"I heard you. He must be asleep or sick—sick most likely."

"That's what I thought. There's a hand car with another operator ordered down. But it'll have to run behind the Thunderbolt. She's an hour late and trying to make up time."

"That's bad! It'll tie up the whole line."

"So long!"

"So long! I'll pass on word."

Jack's heart leaped within him. The train the robbers were waiting for was an hour late. All sorts of things might happen in an hour. He could only wait. But there was more chance now, at least.

The robbers waited patiently until the limited was twenty minutes overdue. Then they began to get nervous.

"Sure the tie will throw her off the rails?" asked one.

"Go out and see for yourself if you're nervous."

And the first speaker followed the suggestion. The others fidgeted about for a few minutes.

"Let's get out, then," said one of those who remained. "Those kids are tied up safe enough. No need to stay here. Let's get some fresh air and look to see if she's coming."

And in a moment the station was empty, save for the two prisoners.

Jack acted on the instant. In a second he was at the key, pounding away, and calling B-D, B-D, in frantic efforts to get an answer and have the limited stopped and help rushed.

"O-K—" came the answer at last, and in a frenzied rush, but with the hand of an inexperienced operator, Jack sent the story over the wire. He had won!

He was in time, he was sure. The train had not yet passed the last telegraph station before Haskell Crossing, and it would be stopped before it could rush on to destruction. Then, swiftly, he rushed over to the chair in which Hudson was strapped, and quickly cut the ropes that held the operator. As quickly he snatched the gag from his mouth.

"Gee, that was great!" cried Hudson. "I didn't know you knew how to handle a key. You did fine!"

"I guess they got the message in time to stop the train. Don't you think so?"

"Listen to it now."

The key was clicking away furiously. The sounds were so fast that Jack, who was only an amateur and a beginner as a telegrapher, after all, could not understand.

"Beaver Dam's sending the word along the line," said Hudson. "The warning's been acknowledged and the train will be held up. They're going to send help, too. I hope those fellows don't come back here too soon. If they'll hold off a few minutes we'll be all right, thanks to you."

"Haven't you got a gun, Hank?" asked Jack.

"Gee, what a fool I am! Of course I have! A peach, too. They gave us new automatic revolvers—only they don't revolve—a few weeks ago. I'll get it."

He was not a moment too soon. The steps of the train wreckers, as they returned, were heard outside, and in a moment Jack disappeared again.

"I'll be outside," he called to Hudson, from the window.

"Pretend to be tied up still, and get them covered. Then try to hold them in there with your pistol. Don't shoot unless you have to, but remember that they're bad men, and don't hesitate to shoot if that's the only thing you can do."

In another minute the three tramps were inside the little station again. Hudson had thrown the ropes about his body again, and had stuffed the handkerchief in his mouth. They gave him a hasty glance.

"There's something wrong, Tom," said one of them, anxiously. "That train ought to have been here a good hour ago. Wonder if that clicking key means that there's anything loose that we ought to know about. We ought to have had someone along that knows how to read that thing."

"Throw up your hands!"

Jack exulted as he heard Hudson, in a firm, ringing voice, give the order. The operator had nerve—they would catch the robbers in the neatest sort of a trap.

He slipped around to the door.

There was a snarl of rage from one of the men, while the others stood in helpless surprise. The one who had cried out rushed at Hudson, and a bullet whizzed by his ear.

"Stop!" cried Hudson, savagely. "I'll shoot to hit you next time."

"He's got us—better keep quiet," exclaimed another of the men, with a savage curse. "That's what we got for leaving them alone here."

Jack stepped into the station.

"Keep them covered, Hank," he said. "You forgot me, too, you see," he said to the men. "Now, keep your hands up and you won't get hurt. You won't need your pistols where you're going, so I'll just take them away from you now."

He was as good as his word, searching them for their concealed weapons, and putting all three of the pistols that he found in a heap beside Hudson. Then he released Tom Binns, and in

the same moment there was the sound of a distant whistle. A few minutes later an engineer drew up outside, drawing a single car, and from it a dozen armed men streamed into the station, sent post haste from Beaver Dam.

"Good work, indeed!" said one man, who was the chief of the railroad detective bureau, Captain Haskins, famed in a dozen states. "This is a fine haul. Omaha Pete, Tom Galway, and 'Frisco Sammy. Glad to see you, boys! There are rewards of about eleven thousand dollars for the three of you. You'll be as welcome as the flowers that bloom in the spring when the police get hold of you."

He was curious to know how the three boys, for Hank Hudson himself was little more than a boy, had effected such a capture, and he was unstinting in his praise when he heard the story. Hudson insisted on giving Jack Danby most of the credit, but Jack wouldn't have it that way.

"You did the trick with your gun," he said. "I may have given you the chance and helped to save the train, but you were the one that caught them."

"There's credit enough for both of you," said Haskins, kindly. "And I'm here to see that you get what's coming to you, too, rewards and all. The road can afford to be grateful to a boy who saved the Thunderbolt from being wrecked."

## CHAPTER VII

### JACK DANBY'S PERIL

Tom Binns was in no condition to go to the Scout camp opposite Beaver Dam, and he was taken back to the city by one of the railway detectives. Jack Danby was going home with him, but Tom wouldn't hear of it.

"They'll be wondering why we didn't turn up after our hike, and maybe they'll think there's something wrong with us," he said. "You go on to the camp, Jack, and explain. I'll be all right, sure, tomorrow."

So Jack, reluctantly enough, for he felt, in a way, that he was deserting his plucky little comrade, got off the train at Beaver Dam, and rowed across the lake to the twinkling fire that showed where the rest of the Scouts were gathered.

He was welcomed with a shout.

"But where's Tom Binns?" cried Pete Stubbs finally, when they realized, suddenly, that the little fellow wasn't with them.

Then Jack explained. He told of the accident that had turned out, in the end, to be so fortunate a happening, since, had it not been for Tom's twisted ankle, they would never have reached the station, and the train might have been wrecked, with a terrible loss of life.

"So we couldn't finish our hike tonight, of course," said Jack. "We'll do it the next time, though. And a week or so doesn't make much difference."

A tall, bearded man, with a slouch hat, was sitting with Scout-Master Durland at the fire, and at Jack's last words he turned to the Scout-Master with a smile.

"I think you can afford to waive the strict letter of the rule this time, Durland," he said. "These boys of yours have certainly proved their right to be regarded as First Class Scouts. I don't know that there's any special badge of merit or honor, except the one for lifesaving, that they are entitled to, but I shall make it my business to see that the Scout council takes some action on the heroism of Scout Danby."

Then Jack learned that the stranger was a member of the National Scout Council, one of the highest officers of the organization, and a man famous all over the world as a pioneer and a worker for the things that the Boy Scouts stand for.

"You think that Scout Danby is entitled to his badge, then?" said Durland, unsmiling, and, at the other's quick nod, he called Jack up to the center of the group around the fire, and pinned the full Scout badge, of which Jack had thus far been wearing only the bar, to his breast.

"You have earned this badge by close attention to duty, and by being always prepared," said the Scout-Master, while the Scouts of the three Patrols cheered the reward. "We are all proud of you, Danby, and we know that you will never do anything to bring discredit upon your badge, nor do anything that is not strictly in accordance with the Scout oath that you took when you were first enrolled as a Tenderfoot Scout."

There was another burst of cheering at that, and all of the Scouts who were present crowded up to shake hands with Jack and congratulate him. Dick Crawford was one of the first, and gripped Jack's hand heartily.

"I guess you'll get a big reward out of the railroad," he said. "That's a splendid thing for you, Jack. You can use it to go to college, if you want to. They ought to be generous."

"The detective did say something about a reward, Dick, but I'd forgotten all about it for the moment. It will be divided up among Tom Binns, Hudson and myself, of course, if there is one. But I wasn't thinking about that."

"I know you weren't, Jack, but that's no reason why you shouldn't have it. It wouldn't be right to do a fine thing just because there was a reward, but that's no reason why you shouldn't take it. You helped to capture those fellows, and the chances are that they are well-known thieves, who are wanted for more than one crime."

"The detective recognized them, I think, Dick. He called them by name, and seemed to know all about them. I suppose men who would dare to try to do a thing like that must be old stagers. No man who was committing his first crime would try anything so fiendish as wrecking a train and taking the chance of killing a lot of innocent people, do you think?"

"I should say not! And there wasn't any chance about it, either. If the train had been wrecked, going at sixty miles an hour or so, as it would have been, if it was late, and trying to make up lost time, there couldn't have been any result but a terrible wreck."

"I wonder if there were only three of them?" said Jack, thoughtfully. "I've been thinking since that there may have been others in the gang that weren't caught. There must have been someone to set the blockade for the train, and I don't believe those fellows we caught had time to do everything. They had to put Hudson out of the way, you see, and keep him from using the telegraph to give warning. I've got an idea there was at least one other man in it, and maybe more than that, who didn't show up in the station at all."

"Well, if that's so, you'd better look out for yourself, Jack, in case they try to get even with you for spoiling their little game. They'd be apt to try to take that out of you."

"Perhaps they won't know I had anything to do with it. And, anyhow, I'm not sure there was anyone else mixed up in it. That's only a guess anyhow."

"I'd be careful, just the same. Don't go around alone at night—though you'll be safe enough in the city, I guess, unless some of those people that were mixed up in that kidnapping case get after you."

"They haven't anything more against me, or any more reason to be sore at me, than at anyone else that was concerned in the whole job, anyhow. But I'll keep my eyes open. I'll be glad to turn in pretty soon. I'm pretty tired."

"I should think you would be. I am myself, and I haven't done as much as you."

Soon after that sentries were posted, and the Scouts, wrapped in their blankets, were all asleep in their lean-tos. Jack's sleeping partner, Tom Binns, was not there, so he slept alone, on the edge of the camp, and some distance from the campfire.

Tired as he was, he did not get to sleep at once. Out on the lake puffing motor boats, running back and forth from the big summer hotel at the head of the lake to the cottages that were clustered near the dam, made the night noisy. Those people were late risers and they went to bed late as well. There was a dance at the hotel, and it was well attended. So the sharp beat of the engines of the little boats disturbed those who were trying to sleep. Jack was so tired, too, that it was hard for him to get to sleep.

He kept thinking of everything that had happened at Haskell Crossing, and of the desperate minutes in which, while he knew the fate that was in store for the onrushing train, he had been powerless to prevent the catastrophe that threatened. And then suddenly, while he was half asleep and half awake, he remembered something that had escaped him before, something he had seen and that had been recorded in his brain, although it was only now that the picture stood out vividly and with meaning.

There had been three men in the room with Hank Hudson and Tom Binns while he had waited at the window and spied upon them. And three men had returned, after he had seized the chance to give the warning that had saved the train. But they were not the same three. He remembered now, with a sudden flash of clear understanding that one of the three had been a stranger—that of the three who were caught, one was a man he had not seen before.

He started up in his blanket.

"Then there *were* four of them!" he cried, half aloud. "And one of them is free, and able to plan new deviltries. I wish they'd caught them all!"

But even that thought, disturbing as it was, did not keep him awake much longer. As he lay there, his tired body resting with the very act of lying down, he grew gradually more drowsy, and he drifted off asleep at last with the humming of a power boat on the lake beating against his ears.

He slept a long time. The camp was quiet. In the distance an owl hooted now and then, and until long after midnight the sounds of activity persisted on the lake. The moon had risen early, and was setting soon after midnight, so that it was very dark under the trees, though out on the lake, once the shadow of the trees around the shore was passed, the stars gave abundant light. And, because he was so tired, and trusted so entirely to the sentries, Jack had no thought of watchfulness when he fell asleep, and slept more heavily than was usual with him when he was in camp with the Scouts.

The sentries were posted on all sides of the camp, as a rule, but no one had foreseen the need of any watch on the side of the camp nearest the lake. Yet it was from that spot that danger came, in the end.

It was two o'clock when a launch, with silenced engine, glided up to the beach near the camp, as silently as a rowboat might have done, and grated softly on the shelving beach. One man, slight and delicate in appearance, was at her wheel, and from the bow, as she touched bottom, another stepped out into the water and made his way cautiously, and in roundabout fashion, toward the sleepers. He was big, strong, and massive. His face was concealed, or nearly concealed, by a black mask that hid his eyes and his nose and he walked with the stealthy footsteps of one long used to avoiding detection as he moved about his business. He seemed to know what he was doing, and where to go, and one might have guessed that he had been spying on the camp, to learn the way in which the sleepers were disposed. He avoided the lean-tos near the fire, and, sneaking back and around through the woods, he approached Jack Danby's lean-to from behind.

For a moment, silent and ominous in the darkness, he stood there, studying the situation, as it seemed, and making up his mind just how to accomplish his purpose. Then, drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, he took the cork from a small bottle and poured its contents on the handkerchief. At once a strong, sickly, sweetish smell arose, unhealthy, and unpleasant, in contrast to the strong, fresh smells of the sleeping woods. Holding this handkerchief in his hand, the newcomer, a savage grin of ugly satisfaction on his lips, approached Jack Danby, and, with a motion so swift as to be hardly visible, flung his hand, with the handkerchief flat on his palm, over Jack Danby's face.

Jack awoke at once and struggled for a second. But he could not cry out, and in a moment the handkerchief, soaked with chloroform, had done its work, and he lay unconscious.

Jack was entirely helpless, drugged as he was, and, with a triumphant leer, the man who had drugged him picked him up, and, moving as cautiously as ever, carried him to the motor boat. But he had underestimated the watchfulness of the Scout sentries. At the sudden, sharp explosions of the engine as it was started, and the launch backed off the beach, there was a sudden cry from one of the watchers, and in a moment his shrill whistle aroused the camp, so that a dozen Scouts, turning out hastily, saw the motor boat back out and turn, as if to race for the outlet at the foot of the lake, nearly ten miles away.

For a moment all was confusion in the camp. Awakened suddenly from a sound sleep, the Scouts could not at first tell what had happened.

The sentry who gave the alarm had seen only the one thing—the motor boat backing out from the beach.

"It's nothing," said Bob Hart, sleepily. "Someone mistook this for their own landing, and, when they found out their mistake, backed out and went for their own cottage."

But Dick Crawford thought suddenly of Jack Danby.

"Jack!" he shouted. "Jack Danby!"

There was no answer, and a swift rush to his lean-to proved that it was empty. Durland and Dick Crawford ran there together, and Durland recognized the smell of the chloroform at once.

"There's been foul play here!" he cried, furiously. "Someone has drugged Jack and carried him away."

He called for Crawford then, but the Assistant Scout-Master was already gone to the rescue.

"Get to the outlet as soon as you can!" he shouted, and they heard him breaking through the woods to the road that was near by. "I'm going there on my wheel!"

Dick had ridden to the camp on his motorcycle, and now they heard the sharp clatter of its engine as he started it.

"If they're making for the outlet, he'll head them off," said Durland. "Hart, take your Patrol

and go up to the dam there, in case they went that way. The rest of you follow me. We'll take Crawford's route, and see if we can't get there in time to help him. I'm afraid Danby is in the gravest sort of danger."

They followed him with a shout, half dressed as most of them were. Jack Danby didn't lack friends, at least, even if he did have powerful and determined enemies.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE RESCUE

Needless to say, it was some time after he was roughly thrown into the bottom of the motor boat before Jack came to his senses. The chloroform had taken effect quickly, and the soaked handkerchief had not remained very long over his mouth and nostrils, or Jack might have ended his career then and there. As it was, however, the rush of the cool night air as the swift motor boat sped along the quiet waters of the lake did a good deal to revive him, and it was, comparatively speaking, only a short time before he realized where he was—or, rather, realized that he had been snatched from his blanket, and was being carried off somewhere, probably by those who had anything but good-will toward him.

His first impulse was to cry out, but he checked himself, for he realized that his best chance just then was to feign an ignorance of his surroundings that would throw his abductors off their guard. If he made them think that he was still senseless, he might find some way of escape opening before him, and he might, too, overhear something that he could turn to his own advantage.

It was pitch dark in the bottom of the boat, and his eyes, moreover, were aching. His whole head throbbed as he came out of the effects of the deadly drug that had been used to make him helpless, and he decided that the first thing he should do was to give nature and the healing air a chance to restore him to his senses and some semblance of a better physical condition. He was in no state now to do anything to help himself, and he had no idea of whether or not any of his comrades had taken the alarm when he was carried off. He was senseless when the men who had caught him were making their escape, and he had no way of telling what had happened.

He guessed, even before he saw the evil face of the man who sat up in the bow, stripped now of his black mask, and gloating over his success, that it was one of the trapped and disappointed train wreckers who now had him in his power, and he shivered a little at the thought of what his fate might be. A man who had planned such a fiendish crime was not likely to be anything but brutal in his treatment of one of those who had helped to foil him, and Jack understood that perfectly well. If he had needed anything more to make him realize his position it was supplied in a moment.

"I wonder if that young whelp's shammin', or if we really knocked him out with the dope?" asked the man who had worn the mask.

And, by way of finding out, he lurched back, and kicked Jack brutally in the ribs. Jack expected the blow, and managed to relax so that no bones were broken by the kick, though he was sore for hours. Moreover he fortified himself so that, although the pain of the kick was far from trifling, he did not cry out.

Satisfied, the man made his way to the bow.

"Dead to the world!" he said. "That's all right! We'll get him through the lock. That's better. I don't want to knock him on the head and throw him overboard here—his body would turn up too soon. Once we're through the lock we can get down the river all right, and they'll never know what happened to him. I hope Dick don't make any mistake about meeting us with the big boat. This is a tidy little craft, but she's not meant for deep water sailing."

"How about the others?" asked the man at the wheel, in a nervous, timid tone that made Jack grin. Only one of his captors was formidable, anyhow, and that was something to be thankful for.

"I don't care about the others," replied the other, with a vile oath. "They'll have to save themselves. And they'll be in jail for the next ten years, sure. More fools they for gettin' caught! An' it was only kids as did them up. If they'd taken my advice, it wouldn't never have happened."

"You oughtn't to have stopped for this kid. It was too risky."

"Risk? My eye! Ain't everythin' we do risky? An' it's the only chance the others have got, anyhow. He's the biggest witness against them. He saw their mugs—no one else did. They'll have trouble getting off, anyhow, even if he ain't there. But he'd finish them, sure. An' he cost me twenty thousand dollars with his infernal buttin' in, too. I ain't overlookin' a chance to get hunk



with him, the little rip!"

He was almost shouting in his rage.

"Easy there!" said the timid one, in a low tone. "We're getting near the lock. Look out, or you'll have everyone on to us."

"Right, oh! I'll shut up. Time enough to attend to him later, anyhow."

The boat slowed down, now, and Jack guessed that they were near the lock that formed the outlet of the lake into the river that ran through the city, the same river on which he had his exciting experience with the river pirates. Late as it was, the lock was quickly opened at the insistent, shrill call of the power boat's whistle, and in a moment it was in the narrow channel that led from river to lake.

It was Jack's chance. Here, where the banks were close on either side, if he could slip overboard, there was a chance to swim to the safety of the shore. He was still weak and dizzy from the effects of the drug, but he had an idea that if he could get into the water it would complete the work of reviving him, and he determined to make the effort. Both of the men who made up the crew of the little craft were busy as they passed through the lock, and, thinking him unconscious, they paid no attention to him.

Silently he slipped to the side. And, a second later, he dropped overboard. Silent as he was, he made a splash as he struck the water, and, at the sudden curse from the robber in front, and his quick leap around, Jack determined on the boldest and the riskiest move he could have made. But it was also the safest. Instead of striking out at once for the shore, he slipped around behind the motor boat, and clung to the stern as it swept along, clear of the propeller, but hidden by the shadow from the overhanging stern.

At the same moment there was a sudden outburst of shouts from the shore, and where all had been silence and darkness lights sprang out and the forms of excited, running men and boys appeared.

The headlight of an automobile was suddenly thrown on the scene, and Jack, guessing who was there, called out that he was safe and in the water.

"Swim ashore, Jack," shouted Dick Crawford's welcome voice, and a moment later, all fear of his captors gone now, Jack was helped up the steep bank.

"We got them in a trap," cried Dick Crawford. "I figured they'd have to come this way. They can't turn around, and the gate of the lock is closed against them at the river end. They're bottled in here, and they can't escape, no matter which way they turn."

In the power boat the big man who had carried Jack off was standing up now, cursing volubly, and trying to see what lay ahead of him. But it did not take him long to see and realize that all hope of escape in that direction was cut off. The boat had come to a full stop, and he looked about him in desperation, his mask on his face again. He held a revolver in his hand, but, for some reason, he did not fire.

"Careful, fellows!" cried Dick Crawford. "He's got a gun there, and you can't tell how soon he'll begin shooting."

"Not very soon, Dick," said Jack Danby, with a laugh. "He left his gun within reach of me, thinking I was still senseless, and I took all the cartridges out. There was a box half full of cartridges and I dropped that overboard, too, so I guess his teeth are drawn unless one of them has another gun."

"Good work, Jack! He'd find it hard to hit any of us, but it's good to think he can't even try, anyhow. You surely had your nerve with you to think of that."

"I had to, Dick. I was going to make a break for it here in the lock, anyhow, and I didn't want him to be able to take a shot at me from behind while I was trying to climb up to the shore. It would have been too easy for him to hit me, and from the way he talked there's nothing he'd like better than to use me as a target."

Suddenly the roar of the boat's engine broke put again.

"What's he trying to do now?" shouted Dick, racing for the opening of the lock.

The gate that barred the boat was in place. But suddenly Dick understood. The desperado in the launch intended to be true to his nature. He saw just one chance of escape in a thousand, and he meant to take it, perilous as it was.

Straight for the gate he drove the boat. The man at the wheel was crying out in piteous fear and the burly ruffian stepped back from the bow, crushed his friend to the deck of the boat with a brutal blow, and took the wheel himself.

"They'll both be killed," cried Dick. "He can't mean to drive against the gate."

But that was just what was in the desperate robber's mind. He saw and weighed the chances that were against him, but he was ready to risk life itself for liberty, and, in that desperate moment even Dick and Jack, debased as they knew the man to be, could not but admire his daredevil courage.

At top speed the launch crushed into the barrier. There was a terrific crash, and those, including Durland, who stood on the gate, leaped back precipitately.

For an instant the timbers shivered. Then, with a crash, they gave way, and the launch hurled through and dropped to the surface of the river. There, for a moment, it spun around. But the boat was well built. It stood the shock, and the next second, swaying from side to side, it was dashing away, past the possibility of pursuit. Jack was saved, but the villain had escaped—for the time at least.

## CHAPTER IX

### A SWIMMING PARTY

Though Jack Danby, partly through his own courage and determination, and partly by reason of Dick Crawford's quick thinking, had escaped from the hands of the desperado who had so evidently determined to murder him, Scout-Master Durland was anything but easy in his mind regarding his friend, as he was proud to call the young Scout who had done so well whenever he had been put to the test.

He did not want to alarm Jack himself without cause, but to Dick Crawford he spoke without hesitation.

"I'm worried about Jack, Dick," he said. "These villains are quite capable of making another attack on him, and that would never do."

"I should say not, sir! He might not get off so lightly another time."

"That's just what I'm afraid of. If they strike against him once more they are more than likely to realize that to have a chance against him, they must strike quickly. If that scoundrel had had the slightest idea that the alarm had been given, or that poor Jack was conscious, I am afraid Danby would have had very little chance of his life."

"It makes me sick to think of what they might have done. That was what I was thinking of all along as I rode for the lock."

"You made good time getting there, Dick."

"I felt as if I had to! I was helpless as long as they were out on the lake, where it was broad. Even a boat would have been useless. If they had seen a boat making for them, they would have known at once that they were in danger, and would have either gotten rid of Jack or made a desperate stand, with a good chance of beating off any attack. The lock was the only place to reach them—and that meant fast moving, or I would have been too late."

"Well, what I meant to say was that we ought, if it is at all possible, to take steps to see that Jack does not again expose himself to any such risk. He is too valuable a Scout to have him take chances that are not necessary."

"Especially since he doesn't seem to know what fear is. He never stops to think of the effect of anything he does upon himself. He goes ahead and trusts to luck, if he thinks that it is his duty to do anything, if there seems to be danger. So, when there is no need of his being in peril, it is only right to do all we can to guard him."

"Tom Binns and Pete Stubbs are devoted to him, aren't they, Dick?"

"I think either one of them would go through fire or water for him if there was need."

"Well, then, suppose you get hold of them quietly, without letting Jack learn anything about what you are planning, and have them keep a close watch on his movements. They can do it without arousing his suspicion, and, if he seems likely to do anything that would give these fellows a chance to get at him, we will interfere, if possible, and spoil their little plan."

"That's the idea, sir! Those two boys will be trustworthy, and they've got a lot of good horse sense, too."

"This may prove a very important commission for the two of them, though I hope, of course, that we are afraid of a shadow, and that Jack has nothing more to fear from these men."

Tom Binns and Pete Stubbs were delighted when Dick Crawford told them what he wanted them to do.

"Gee, Dick," said Pete, "that makes us like a couple of sure enough detectives, don't it?"

"Yes—except that you're supposed to prevent anything crooked from being done, and not simply to find out how it was done afterward, and who did it. We don't want any work for detectives that Jack Danby is the centre of."

"I understand," said Tom Binns. "Pete and I are just to keep our eyes open, and if we think Jack is running into any danger, we're to let you know, so that you can help to keep him out of it."

"I think there's more than one person would like to see Jack out of the way," said Pete Stubbs, thoughtfully. "You know, he's told me something lately about this queer business of his name. It looks mighty funny to me. There are people, he says, who know who his father and mother were, and who are mighty angry and sorry that he's left Woodleigh and dropped out of their sight."

"Is that so, Pete?" asked Dick, surprised, since he had heard nothing of all this.

"Yes, indeed! There was a man who has been up at Woodleigh, trying to find out exactly where Jack had gone, and what he was doing. Jack seemed to think that this man was satisfied to have him up at Woodleigh, where people wouldn't see much of him and weren't likely to be curious about who he was."

"And where anyone who wanted to could keep tabs on him pretty well, eh? That's easier to do in a little country place like that, where everyone knows the business of everyone else, than it would be in a big city like this, isn't it?"

Dick was very thoughtful.

"I've heard funny stories about Jack Danby and his name," he went on. "In fact, Jack's told me himself that Danby really isn't his name at all, and that he has no idea of what his real name is. As he gets older, naturally, it means a great deal to him that he isn't like all the rest of us, and doesn't know all about himself. It doesn't make any difference to his real friends, but it bothers him, naturally. I think we'll have to see if we can't help him solve that mystery, don't you?"

"I'd give anything if I could make Jack happy by telling him all about himself!" cried little Tom Binns, full of love and loyalty for the friend who had always done so much for him.

"Well, we'll see," said Dick. "Meantime, if Jack has the best name in the world, it wouldn't do him much good if it had to be carved on a tombstone before he's had a chance to use it at all, and if that fellow that carried him off from our camp ever gets another chance at him, that's what he'll be needing."

It wasn't like Dick Crawford to be alarmed by anything as a rule, and the two Scouts were mightily impressed by his solemn tone and the warning he gave, as he meant them to be. He didn't want them to go into the work of guarding Jack as if he were simply a figure in a new and fascinating game. He wanted them to take the task very seriously, and give their best efforts to it. And, after such a speech, he had no doubt that they would carry out his intentions, and that if there were any way of making Jack safe from future attacks they would find it.

Jack himself suffered no ill effects worth mentioning from his rough experience, unpleasant as it had been.

"Gee, Jack," said Pete Stubbs, when he saw his chum the morning after his rescue, "one would think, just to look at you, that you liked having a chap chloroform you and kick you around a little bit of a boat. You look great!"

"I had a good night's sleep, Pete. That's why. Look at the time—it's the middle of the afternoon, isn't it? I felt a lot more tired the day after that baseball double header than I do right now. They didn't really hurt me, you see. And that swim in the cold water was just what I needed to make me feel fine after it, too. That chased the headache the drug gave me, and set me up in fine shape."

"I tell you why, Jack. It's because you always take a lot of exercise and look after yourself all the time, that things like that don't upset you."

"Say, Pete, Tom Binns is coming around here again, later. I feel so good that I think I'd like to go and do something this afternoon. What do you say? I think it would be fine to go down to the lake and have a great old swim. Summer don't last so long that I want to miss any of the swimming while it's as good as it is now."

"I'll go you!" said Pete, never thinking that it might be just such expeditions that Dick Crawford was afraid of. "Say, wouldn't it be fine to live in a place where you can go swimming all the year round, like Florida, or California, or some place like that?"

"I don't know that it would, Pete. I think all the seasons are good, in their own time. You wouldn't like never to see the snow, or to be in a place where it never froze and made ice for

skating, would you?"

"Say, Jack, I never thought of that! That's a funny thing about you. You never go off the way the rest of us do, without thinking about things. You think of all sides of anything. I wish I was like that. I wouldn't make so many fool breaks!"

"Old Dan used to catch me up every time I said anything in a hurry," explained Jack, with a smile. "I guess that's the reason I'm that way, if I really am, Pete. It isn't that I'm any more likely to think of things than you, but that I've been trained that way. Whenever I said anything reckless, or quick, Old Dan used to ask me why I said it, and make me try to prove it. So I got to thinking about everything I said before I let myself say it, and I've sort of kept up the habit."

"I'm going to try to be like that, too, Jack. I think it's a good way to be."

"Well, here's Tom Binns! Want to go swimming with us, Tom?"

"You bet I do, Jack! Sure you feel well enough, though? You don't want to take any chances on being sick after what you were up against last night, you know."

"No. I'll be all right. Come on."

So they went off. The day was warm, but overcast, and there was a threat of a thunderstorm in the sultriness of it. But they cared little for that.

"If we're going to get wet," said Pete, "we might as well do it comfortably. We won't be any wetter for a thunderstorm than if the sun were shining if we're in swimming."

They changed their clothes in a little hut at the camping place, and went in from the little sandy beach there, the presence of which was one of the reasons the Scouts had favored it for a camping ground.

They had not been in the water very long before great drops of water, began to fall, and then, with a howling of wind, the threatened storm came down. They laughed and enjoyed the novelty of being in the water in such weather, since they were in a sheltered cove. Presently the wind died down and furious thunder and lightning came to take its place, but that didn't bother them, either. It was not until, after a vivid flash and an immediate roar of thunder, cries of distress came from the lake, that they were aroused. They looked out, and saw a burning launch.

"Gee," cried Pete Stubbs, his face white, "the lightning must have fired their gasoline tank! Let's get out there and see if we can't help."

At once they swam to the rescue.

## CHAPTER X

### THE BURNING LAUNCH

The launch fortunately was not very far out. Had it been more than a hundred feet or so from shore no one could have done much for the unfortunate party on board, since beyond the shelter of the cove the lake was like a stormy sea, with white-capped waves defying swimmers, and giving even the stoutest of the craft that had been caught in the squall all they could do to make headway against the wind.

The three Scouts, swimming strong and fast, saw as soon as they were within plain sight of the launch that she was doomed. The fire had spread with a rapidity that would have been astonishing had it been anything but gasoline that supplied fuel for the flames over the after portion of the boat, where the tank had been. Up in the bow, huddled together, and shrieking for help, were two men and two women. They seemed to be terrified, and none of them had thought to seek safety by dropping overboard. They seemed, indeed, to prefer to stay and wait for the fire to reach them, which it threatened to do at any moment.

It was no time to waste breath on words, but Jack, who had taken command of the situation, as he always seemed to do, held his head well out of the water to see what lay in front of them and then turned to his companions.

"They can't swim," he said. "We'll have to make them jump overboard, though, and take a chance in the water. Then, if they don't get troublesome, we'll probably be able to keep them up until help comes. You know how to choke them if they try to drag you down. And don't hesitate, even if it's a woman. It's better to be rough with them than to let them drown."

Even in the water the heat from the blazing launch was terrific as the three Scouts

approached the burning boat. For those on board it was even worse. The flames were almost touching them as Jack and the others got within a boat length of the burning boat, and Jack cupped his hands and shouted through them, so that those on board could hear him above the roar of the flames and their own cries of terror and distress.

"Jump into the water!" he cried. "Don't struggle, and we'll be able to hold you up all right. But jump quick—it's your only chance!"

One of the women—she was a girl, not more than twenty, Jack thought—jumped at once. Sparks had set her hair on fire, but the water put that out as soon as she was in it, and Pete Stubbs, who was nearest to her, swam to her at once, and supported her in the water. She was plucky, and made no attempt to interfere with him. He told her to put her hand on his shoulder and keep perfectly still, and she obeyed without question.

"Good work!" cried Jack. "Swim ashore with her, Pete, and then come back here. We need all the help we can get if these others are scared to jump."

But whether they were scared or not, the fire left them no choice after a moment more. One after another the three of them jumped.

The two men, who were both fairly young, seemed to be plucky enough. They waited quietly enough for Tom Binns to swim to them, and, by treading water, he was able to let each one of them put a hand on his shoulder, so that they could keep their own heads out of water. He couldn't swim with them, but he could, at least, keep them from sinking until help came. That could not be very long, since the blazing launch was a signal of danger and the need of help for everyone who could see it.

But Jack's task was more difficult and dangerous by far, both for himself and for the woman he was trying to save. She had been mad with terror when she jumped, and, as soon as she felt Jack's arm about her, after she had struck the water, she fastened both her arms about him convulsively, and began dragging him down with her. Her strength was greater than Jack's, since she was a big, powerful woman, and Jack had no chance to break her hold on him by ordinary methods.

"Let go!" he cried. "I'll save you if you'll leave me alone and just put your hand on my shoulder. You'll drag us both down if you keep this up!"

But she only shrieked the louder, when her lungs were not so full of water as to silence her, and Jack felt his strength going, and knew, that in order to save either of them, he must be brutal. So, without a moment's hesitation he seized her hair, which had come down about her shoulders, and pulled until he wondered why it did not come out by the roots.

She continued to shriek, but it was with pain now instead of fright, and in a moment her arms relaxed their desperate grip about Jack's arms and shoulders, so that he was free. She continued to struggle like a madwoman, however, and, since there was nothing else to do, Jack hit her again and again, until she was afraid of him, and ready to do what he told her.

It had taken him some time, and as he turned with the woman he had saved, limp and helpless now, to swim for the shore, Pete Stubbs passed him.

"Want any help, Jack?" cried Pete.

"No, thanks! We're all right now. Go on out and help Tom and the two he's got, Pete. You two can get them ashore all right, I guess."

Only the woman that Jack had saved was in need of attention when they were all finally ashore. She was half drowned, thanks to the struggle she had put up after she had jumped into the water, but it was not much of a task to revive her, and when she had regained her senses she, like the others, was grateful. Jack himself was tired and pretty well exhausted by his exertions, but he cared little for that, since he had been successful. A few minutes' rest, and he was all right.

"Our launch—it's burned up, I guess!" cried the girl who had been so sensible and plucky, the one who had let Pete Stubbs tow her ashore without making a single movement to hamper him in any way. "Look, the fire seems to be out, but I don't believe there's much left of the poor little boat."

The driving rain and the lake water had, indeed, put the fire out, and the blackened hull of the launch, which had drifted slightly toward the shore, was floating quietly now.

"I'll swim out and see what sort of shape she's in," said Jack. "Perhaps she's worth saving yet. The engine may be all right, with a little repair work, and I think I can tow her in without much trouble. She's drifted pretty close in already."

He plunged in at once, without heeding the protests from the rescued ones, who said he had already done more than enough for them. A minute of fast swimming took him out to the launch, and he climbed aboard, cautiously, to see what damage had been done. The boat smelled most

unpleasantly of the fire, and he found that the engine would need a good deal of attention before it would be of service again. But the forward part of the boat had suffered comparatively slight damage, as Jack saw with pleasure. Then, suddenly, as he looked around him, he saw something that made him jump.

"It can't be!" he exclaimed to himself.

But a few moments of examination convinced him that he had made no mistake. He searched the boat then from stem to stern, and, when he had satisfied himself, he dropped overboard again, after making a rope he had carried with him from the shore fast to the launch, and towed her leisurely in, until her keel grated on the beach, and the men who had been on board pulled her up beyond high water mark.

As soon as he could then Jack drew Pete Stubbs aside.

"Say, Pete," he said, in a low tone, and tremendously excited, "here's a queer business! That launch is the one that was used to carry me off last night. I'm absolutely certain! I stayed on board long enough to make sure. Do you suppose these people can be mixed up with that scoundrel? It's the same boat—and if you'll notice, when you get a chance, she's been patched up in front, right where she must have been smashed up in going through that lock. What do you make of that?"

Pete looked frightened as he realized what it might mean.

"I know one thing we ought to do," he said. "That is let Tom Binns get hold of Dick Crawford right away and tell him about this. There's something mighty funny doing, and I don't think we can get at the bottom of it by ourselves."

"That's a good idea, Pete! Tom's the fastest runner. You get him off by himself and tell him to get Dick Crawford. They'll have to stay around here until their clothes dry off, anyhow, so I guess we can manage to hold them here until he comes back."

Tom had already put on his clothes, and he was able to slip off quietly, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the shivering castaways, who, muffled in blankets that were kept by the Boy Scouts in the hut near the beach, were waiting while their clothes dried out.

When he had gone off Jack and Pete busied themselves with making a fire. It was still raining, but not very hard, but if the clothes of those from the burned boat were to be dried that night a fire was necessary. And, as they worked, Jack got a chance to examine the party more closely.

The men didn't please him very much as he looked them over. They looked like cheap, flashy fellows, who might be fond of drinking and smoking because they thought it made them look like men. Indeed, one of them, as soon as the fire was made, and he had seated himself as close to it as possible, asked Jack if he had a cigarette or the makings of one, and seemed scornful when Jack told him that he never smoked.

The woman who had given Jack so much trouble, too, was hard of face and unpleasant in her speech. She scowled at Jack as if she resented the rough way he had handled her, and seemed entirely forgetful now of the fact that he had had to treat her in just that way to save his life—to say nothing of her own. But the younger girl, whose hair had been on fire when she jumped, was sweet of face, and had been trying to show how grateful she was ever since she had been brought ashore. She looked sadly out of place when compared to her companions, and Jack wondered mightily how she came to be with them. He couldn't say anything about it, however, and he and Pete busied themselves with trying to make those they had rescued comfortable. After all, Jack thought, these people had been in the gravest sort of peril, and it made no difference whether they were pleasant or not. To go to the rescue had been no more than their duty as Scouts, and no Scout is ever supposed to stop and think about personal likes or dislikes when he has a chance to be of service to anyone in trouble or danger and needs help a Scout can give.

Jack, looking around for Pete Stubbs after he had been off to bring up a fresh supply of dry firewood, since the wood all about the fire itself was damp and too wet to burn with the bright heat that was needed to dry the clothes of the victims of the fire, found that his red-headed chum was missing. The two women, in fact, were the only ones about. He looked in surprise for the men of the party, and then spoke.

"Your friends haven't gone off without their clothes?" he said.

"No," replied the older woman. "They've just gone off to have a look at the launch, and they look like red Indians. I'm sure our clothes are taking long enough to dry—and when we get them, I suppose we'll have to walk miles and miles to get anywhere!"

"We're lucky to be able to walk at all," said the girl, interrupting, then. "I think we ought to be very grateful, Mrs. Broom, instead of complaining so much about what's a very little discomfort, anyhow."

Jack liked her for that speech, as he had already liked her for the pluck she had shown. But before he could answer her, he was seized suddenly from behind, and a cloth was thrown over his

head, so that he could not cry out. He heard the girl scream, and one of the men shout roughly to her to keep out and not interfere. Then he was carried away swiftly.

But his captivity did not last very long. Before he had been carried more than a hundred paces the man who was carrying his head stumbled suddenly, and, cursing, went down in a heap. The one behind, who had Jack's feet, fell over him, and Jack, active as a cat, worked himself free in a second, and twisted the bag from his head.

"Soak 'em, Jack!" cried a cheery voice, and he realized that Pete Stubbs, alarmed in some way, had been ready to rescue him, and had seized the exact moment to do it. Now Pete, with a cry of exultation, snatched the blankets from the two men, who were struggling with one another on the ground, and ran off with them.

"Get their clothes, Jack!" he shouted. "They were carrying them in a bundle. They can't go very far that way."

Jack laughed as he saw the dark bundle of clothes and picked it up. Then he ran swiftly after Pete, chuckling at the savage threats and exclamations from the two men, who, without a stitch of clothing, would certainly not dare to pursue them very far, for fear of being seen in that state of nature, as well as for the brambles and thorns that would scratch them if they attempted to make their way through the woods without the protection of clothes and, more especially, shoes.

At the camp they found Dick Crawford, who had returned with Tom Binns. The two women, their clothes dry by this time, had taken possession of the hut to make themselves presentable, and Dick in silent astonishment heard Jack's story.

"There's something queer behind all this," said he. "The attack those fellows made on Jack shows that they are pretty hard characters. Why, he'd just saved their lives for them!"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

They stood together for a moment, puzzled and silent, trying to figure out what it could mean. The two women were quiet. So far they had had nothing to do with the attack on Jack. In the distance, perhaps a hundred feet or so away, they could hear the men, whose clothes Jack and Pete had taken, cursing and demanding that their property be returned.

"Keep quiet, you!" Dick Crawford called to them. "You'll get your things when you've given some account of yourselves and we're ready to give them to you. If you make any more disturbance around here, you won't get them at all. Remember that!"

A deep silence followed, and Pete laughed.

"Guess that scared them some, Dick," he said. "I don't think they'd fancy the idea of going back to the city that way. In funny papers, if a man loses his clothes, he always fetches up with a barrel. But I always did wonder where he found the barrel!"

Dick looked doubtfully at the little heap of clothing.

"I don't suppose we ought to leave them out there without any clothes at all," said he. "But I do think, after the way they've acted, that we've got a right to look and see if there are any weapons. They would be useless, in any case, after the wetting they've had, but—"

He picked up the coats of the two men and shook out the pockets. Sure enough, a pistol fell from each, and from one there also dropped a black mask.

"That doesn't look very well for them," he said. "I think, Tom, you'd better go to a telephone and see if you can get Captain Haskin to meet us here. He or some of his railroad detectives may know something about these people."

Tom hurried off at once to obey the order, for such it was, though Dick, as he almost always did, had put the order in the form of a simple request. Then Dick looked more carefully at the things that had fallen from the pockets.

"Hello!" he cried, suddenly. "Say, Jack, look here! Here's a letter postmarked from Woodleigh. That's where you came from, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is!" cried Jack, on the alert, as always, at a sign of any sort from the town where he had spent his boyhood.

"I think we've got a right to open this," said Dick, "though looking at letters that aren't addressed to one is pretty small business, as a rule. However, when people do the sort of thing that these fellows so nearly got away with tonight they don't have a right to expect decent treatment from others."

He looked grave when he had finished reading.

"This letter seems to concern you, Jack," he said. "It's from a lawyer up there, and it's addressed to a man called Silas Broom, at the General Delivery window of the post office in the city here. It says that the boy Jack Danby, about whom Mr. Broom was making inquiries, left Woodleigh some months ago, and has since, it is supposed, been working near here. Now why does anyone want to know about you? And why does this fellow Broom, if that is really his name, have to hear this? He is a great scoundrel, whatever his name is."

"You quit callin' my husband names. Who are you, I'd like to know?"

The older woman emerged suddenly from the hut, in time to hear Dick's last words, and she faced him now like a fury, her arms akimbo, and her eyes snapping. She looked around suspiciously, too.

"Where's Silas?" she asked, angrily. "What have you done with him? Ain't those his clothes there?"

She snatched the clothes up in an instant. Before Dick, who was astonished by her appearance, could check her she had torn the coat from his hands.

"Silas!" she yelled. "Where are you, honey?"

"Here I am—out in the woods," cried her husband, frantically. "They've stolen my clothes, Carrie. Get 'em, and bring 'em here, will you?"

"Comin'!" she called, and darted off with surprising speed, considering her weight and the terrible exhaustion that had seemed to afflict her when she was being brought ashore from the launch.

Dick and the two Scouts were laughing, although a bit ruefully, as she vanished.

"I can't touch a woman," said Dick, sadly. "I'm afraid I'll have to admit that I'd like to—but I guess she could lick me at that, if she was put to it. Is that the one you dragged ashore, Jack?"

"That's the one!" said Jack. "It's a wonder she didn't drown the two of us. But she certainly seems to have recovered pretty completely."

"It's bad business," said Dick, frowning. "Those fellows will get away now. The only hold we had on them was that they didn't have any clothes. Now they'll make tracks, and all ye can do is to tell Captain Haskin what they looked like and what they did. I think we look pretty foolish, myself."

Just then the girl, who had won Jack's admiration by her courage when she was in real danger and by her reproof of the others when they had shown their ingratitude, stepped into the firelight, fully dressed. She did not look at all as if she belonged with the others. She was more refined, gentler, and sweeter in every way. Dick Crawford stared at her in astonishment. Jack had told him about her, but, since seeing the others, he had thought that Jack had made a mistake in praising her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, speaking to her as she stopped and looked about her, evidently puzzled by the absence of her companions. "But I'm afraid we'll have to ask you to tell us what you can of the people you were with. You are not related to them, are you?"

"No," she said. "No, indeed! I came with them because they promised to show me how to reach a certain person for whom my father has been searching for a long time. Then, of course, there was the fire on the launch. But even before that they had kept putting me off, and I didn't like the way they were acting at all. Where are they now?"

"I wish I knew!" said Dick. "However, we can talk more about them later. I think that now the best thing we can do is to get you back to the city. Your father will meet you there, I suppose, won't he?"

"Yes," she said. "My father is not at all well, and he is quite an old man. We are staying at the Hotel Lincoln. I came with them alone, though father didn't want me to, because they were so very positive that our chase was nearly over."

"I think it's my duty to tell you," said Dick, "that these people who were with you seem to be a very bad lot. They made an attempt to kidnap this boy, who helped to save the lives of your whole party, and we have every reason to suppose that they are associated with a gang of thieves who have a grudge against him. I think you had better let us take you back to your father. And if you will follow my advice, you will have nothing more to do with any of them. They will only lead you into danger and trouble."



Dick was anxious to question the girl further, but she was much shaken, and in no condition to tell him anything more. So they all went back to town together, and Dick himself acted as Miss Burton's escort to her hotel.

"I will follow your advice," she promised him. "If any of those people try to see me again, I will refuse to have anything to do with them. But won't you come to see us, and perhaps you will be able to help us in our search?"

"I'll be glad to do that," said Dick. "But if those people approach you again, it might be better to pretend that you still trust them. Don't put yourself in their hands in any way, but try to get them to talk to you. In that way you may be able to get valuable information that would otherwise not be available at all."

Captain Haskin, the head of the detective service of the railroad on which Jack Danby's bravery had averted a terrible wreck, was much concerned when he heard the story of the rescue and the ungrateful conduct of those whose lives had been saved.

"We've got to look after Danby," he said. "He's an important witness for us, and if he turns up missing, it's going to be more difficult to get a conviction, though perhaps not impossible. But I think there's more than that in their attempt to get rid of him."

"What do you mean, Captain?" asked Dick Crawford.

"Why, I don't know, my boy. But these people are not loyal enough to one another as a rule to lead them to run such risks as these villains have encountered just to get rid of a witness who may be damaging to some of them who have been captured. When one or two of them are caught, those who escape are usually so glad to get off free themselves that they disappear and make no effort to help those who were not so fortunate. The fact that they have kept after Danby this way is very suspicious."

"Well, I happen to know," said Dick, "that there are people who seem to have a grudge against Jack, or at least who have an interest in maintaining a mystery that exists as to his birth. I don't like to talk about that as a rule, because it's his own-business, but I'd better tell you. He does not know his real name, or who his parents were, and it is the ambition of his life to discover them. Since he came away from Woodleigh, attempts have been made to find out what has become of him, and a man who was concerned in an attempt to rob me of a considerable sum of money that I was carrying for my employer is one of those who seems most anxious to find out all about Jack. He knows the secret of his birth."

"That would explain," said the detective, "the whole business at once. Now, you see, you've given me something to work on. The railroad can't feel at ease until all the men concerned in that plot that so nearly wrecked the Limited the other night are safely in jail. It isn't that we're vindictive, but when men are ready to imperil the lives of the passengers on the trains we run, it isn't safe for us to let them be at large. They may make another attempt, and there is no way of being sure that the next time we shall be able to stop them. It was all a matter of luck that blocked their plan before—and we can't trust to luck in such matters. It might cost a hundred lives to do so."

"Well, if we can help you in any way, you can depend on us to do anything in our power, Captain. I think any of our boys in the Scouts would do anything for Jack Danby, and, of course, we want to do anything we can to help the railroad safeguard its trains, for the sake of all the people who have to ride on them."

"The most important thing right now is to see that nothing happens to Danby. They have been so bold and so determined in their efforts to put him out of the way already that I am afraid they are not likely to stop at the two attempts. One thing seems very curious to me. The man who carried him off from the camp was entirely willing to kill him—planned to do so, didn't he?"

"So Jack says. And he is not the sort to be scared by idle threats."

"Just so! But now here is a queer thing. These people that tried to carry him off to-day used the same boat as the man who took him from the camp. Presumably they would have served him the same way as the other scoundrel would have done. And yet they seem also to want to get in touch with Jack himself—and not for the purpose of killing him.. It looks as if they were working at cross purposes—as if they did not know that the boy who foiled the train-wrecking plot and the one they have lost are one and the same. Don't you see?"

"I certainly do! Say, this is a confused affair, isn't it?"

"It's like a Chinese puzzle. But we'll work it out somehow."

## CHAPTER XII

### AN UNGRATEFUL PARENT

When his work was done the next day, Jack Danby found Dick Crawford waiting for him.

"Jack," said the Assistant Scout-Master, "I don't want to raise any false hopes in you, but I think we're on the verge of finding out something about you—about who you really are, and all that."

"How, Dick? I'd give anything if that were true!"

"We were awfully stupid not to think of it last night, Jack. You know that pretty girl, that Miss Burton, who was on the burning launch? She wasn't like the others—we all saw that. She wasn't their sort at all! Well, she said she was with them because she believed that they were going to be able to lead her to someone that her father had been searching for."

"You mean I might be the one they were looking for, Dick?"

"I don't know, Jack, but it looks possible. Not that she might not be looking for someone else. But she was with these people, and one of those men had a letter about you from the lawyer up at Woodleigh. I don't believe they really meant to lead her to you at all. I think that there are people who are spending their time in making it impossible for those who are really interested in you to get any trace of you."

"Then why should they have told her they could find me, if it really is I she's looking for?"

"They might think it better to fool her, Jack, than to let her deal with people who would treat her honestly. If she thought they were helping her, and trying to earn a reward, if there is one, she and her father would be unlikely to go to anyone else. And as long as they could convince her that they were doing their best they would be in complete control of the situation, you see."

"That certainly sounds as if it might be right, Dick. What do you think we'd better do?"

"Go and see Mr. Burton and his daughter right away. I'm certain of one thing: that girl is all right. She's true and honest, no matter what sort of people may have deceived her and have induced her to fall into their plans and ways. She thinks she's doing the right thing. Depend on that!"

"I think you're right about her, Dick. I thought she was different from the others at once. She was so plucky and so cool, and she helped Pete all she could when he swam ashore with her, instead of getting frightened and making it harder, as the old woman did. She was all right."

"Well, we'll go there right away. They're at the Hotel Lincoln. That's the best hotel in town, you know, so I guess they're people who are pretty well to do."

They had not long to wait at the hotel before they were asked to go up to the suite of rooms occupied by Mr. Burton and his daughter.

The girl, who looked much better, naturally, since she had had a good rest, and a change of clothing, greeted them with a good deal of friendly interest, but her father, who walked with a stick, seemed to be querulous and inclined to distrust them.

"A fine lot of people we've run into since we've come here!" he said. "Molly, who are these people?"

"Mr. Crawford warned me against Broom and his wife, father," she said. "I told you of that. And this is Jack Danby, who helped to save us all from the launch."

"Well, what do you want? What do you want?" asked Mr. Burton, peevishly. "Money? I'll give you some—but don't come bothering me!"

"I don't want any of your money, sir, and neither does Danby," said Dick, indignant and surprised by this reception. He looked at the girl. She seemed to be as angry as he was himself, and had flushed until her face was a bright pink. He thought she looked even prettier than before, but she also looked frightened, as if, while angry, she dared not provoke her father further by seeming to resent what he said.

"We came here," said Dick, facing the old man, "because we have an idea that we can help you in your search. You are looking for a boy, are you not?"

"Yes, yes!" said the old man. "It's a wild goose chase—we'll never find him! It's a cousin of Molly's—my daughter—and my nephew. A worthless young scamp, probably, even if he's alive. No use looking for him—let him stay lost, I say! He's less trouble that way."

"The reason I say that I think we may be able to help you, sir, is that we think the gang that had your daughter with them yesterday are on the trail of the boy you are looking for. Can you

not tell us what you know of his movements?"

"I don't see why I should! You're probably just another of the blackmailing crowd that's been after my money since I was fool enough to allow myself to be persuaded to look for the boy. He was stolen from my brother's house when he was a very small boy. We had reason to suspect a man who had a grudge against my brother. That's the only clue we have."

"That's not worth very much by itself, sir. But it happens that I know of a boy who was mysteriously brought up by an old man. He knows nothing of his parentage. But he does know, and his friends know, also, that there are people who know all about him, and that these people are very anxious to keep him from learning the truth about himself. And these people who have been trying to locate this boy lately are connected with the ones who were with your daughter last night—people with whom no young woman ought ever to be trusted by her father!"

Dick was furious by this time at the way in which Mr. Burton treated him, and he forgot, for the moment, the respect due to age and infirmity. He regarded Burton as a careless father, who should be made to understand that he had been criminally careless in allowing so beautiful a girl to be left in the power of wretches like those who had been on the boat when it took fire, and he had no mind to be polite and diplomatic.

"Get out of my room, you impudent young rascal!" shouted Mr. Burton when he realized what Dick was saying. "Don't you think I can see through your game, eh?"

He shook his stick threateningly at Dick.

"I'm not afraid of you, sir," said Dick. "I told the truth, and I think you know it. We're not going to stay here—but I warn you that you may be sorry before this business is cleared up. You'll trust a scoundrel like Broom, and yet, when we come to you with an offer to help you in your search, you insult us!"

Molly Burton, frightened and distressed by the turn matters had taken, tried to make peace, but her efforts were of no avail. Her father ordered the two of them out of his rooms, and they could do nothing but go.

"Well, we didn't gain much by going there," said Dick. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Jack, but it would have been pretty hard not to, when he was talking and acting that way."

"I wonder if he can really be my uncle, though, Dick. I don't know that I'd be so crazy to have him for a relative, but I would like to think that pretty girl was my cousin!"

"She's all right, isn't she, Jack? But we have gained something, at any rate. We've got some sort of a starting point. Now, if we can get Captain Haskin to help us, we may be able to start with the time when you turned up at Woodleigh, and trace some of Old Dan's movements. In that way, you see, it may be possible to get at the truth. It's a little more than we knew before we went to see them, at any rate."

"I think if we could see Miss Burton alone, Dick, she would treat us better, and tell us anything she knew."

"I'm sure of that, Jack. I'll try to see her, too. It seems wrong to try to do anything of that sort without letting her father know, but we haven't any choice. He certainly wouldn't allow her to see me if he knew that she was planning anything of that sort. I'll try that in the morning."

But in the morning when Dick went to the hotel, he was told that Mr. Burton and his daughter were gone, and that they had left no address. No one at the hotel could give him any idea of where they might be found, and they had left no orders, it was said, about the forwarding of any letters that might come for them. Dick, resourceful as he was, felt that he was facing a blind wall. There was nothing more for him to do. He could only wait, and trust that chance, or the detective abilities of Captain Haskin, would enable him to pick up the trail again.

Jack Danby, needless to say, was bitterly disappointed when he heard what Dick had to tell him the next evening, after his fruitless effort to see the Burtons again. Jack had never wavered in his belief that some time he would settle the mystery of his birth, that had worried him ever since he had been able to understand that he was set apart from others. To see a chance now and then just as he felt that he was about to read the secret have that chance vanish, was doubly hard. It was worse than if he had never had the hope of success.

But he tried hard not to let Dick Crawford see how badly the incident made him feel. Dick had done what he had for the best, and he had honestly thought that there was a chance for Jack's great ambition to be realized. He felt as disappointed as did Jack himself.

"Gee, Jack," he said, "who'd ever guess that a sweet girl like that would have such an old curmudgeon of a father? He's the limit! But there's nothing we can do right away. I think Captain Haskin will be able to find out where they came from, and where they've gone to without any trouble—that's the sort of thing detectives are supposed to be able to do."

"But if the old gentleman won't help us at all it's going to be pretty hard to get anything done."

I've seen crusty old fellows like that before. When they've been deceived in a person it takes a long time before they're willing to trust anyone else—and, of course, you can't blame them so very much, at that.

"I'm not going to give up, Dick, anyhow. I'm surer than ever now that the secret of who I am is worth a lot of trouble, and I'll find out what it is if I never do anything else!"

"At that rate you're bound to win, Jack. Keep on trying."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MOVING PICTURES

Captain Haskin, though he took no one into his confidence as to just what he was doing, impressed Dick and Jack alike as a man who, once started, would never drop any undertaking until he was successful. He might not always succeed, but failure in his case would never be due to lack of effort. So they were not surprised when he came to them a day or two after the Burtons had left town and told them that he had what might be a valuable clue.

"I want you to come to the theatre with me," he said. He smiled as he said it. "That may seem like a frivolous thing to do when we are at work on a mystery of this sort, but you'll see what I mean when we get there."

Dick and Jack, who liked the railroad detective and trusted him implicitly, were certainly surprised, but they made no bones about accompanying him. He had called for them at Dick's house, where Jack was spending the evening, and he said he wanted Tom Binns and Pete Stubbs to be along, too. So they rode with him in the automobile which he was using, and picked up the other Scouts.

"I don't believe you ever saw the particular theatre I'm going to take you to," he said, when he had all four of them in the car. "It isn't much of a theatre, even for a moving picture place. It's a little place over near the river, and the films are cheap and not very good. But you'll see why I picked it out later."

It was a long ride, after they had picked up Tom Binns, even in the detective's big car. As they rode, Haskin kept looking around behind him.

"I've had a queer feeling two or three times to-day," he said, "that I was being followed. I've shadowed so many people in my time that I'm pretty well acquainted with the ways of doing it, and I must say I don't like the look of things. Those fellows are desperate enough to do anything at all, but if they're actually shadowing the detective who's in charge of the efforts to run them down and catch them they've got even more nerve than I thought was possible."

Two or three times, now, as they made their way along, at a slow pace by Haskin's direction, those in the car got a glimpse of a smaller automobile that seemed to hang pretty persistently on their track. They were evidently never out of sight of the occupants of the other car for very long.

"I suppose they know what they're doing," said Haskin, finally, "but what their game is, is beyond me. I'm not trying to hide from them or anyone else. I don't see why they should want to track me down this way. Go ahead, full speed, now! We'll give them a chase for it, if they're looking for that."

It was not long before the car pulled up in a dirty, tumbledown street near the water front, before a shop that had been turned into a moving picture theatre. Haskin paid their way in, and they found themselves in a darkened hall and the pictures were being thrown on to the screen as they entered.

"One of the things these people do to attract people to their theatre," explained Haskin, as they took their seats, "is to have a film made every week right here in the district where it is to be shown. For instance, this week they are showing a picture that was made on the river front a few days ago. People come and think that perhaps they'll see themselves or their friends in the 'movies.' It's lots of fun for them, you see, and it's a good idea for the company that invented it."

Jack and Dick suddenly began to understand.

"Is there anyone we know in the pictures, Captain?" asked Jack.

"That's what I hope, Jack. What I do know is that there is a section of the film that shows three of the men who tried to wreck the train the other night. They are talking with some other men, and it is because I think that one of these others may be this man Broom that I want you to see it and identify him, if you can. Then, you see, we can send out his picture and have a much

better chance of catching him."

Haskin had looked around carefully before he spoke. He had no idea that there would be anyone around who would be able to make head or tail out of what he was saying, but he was trained to take chances only when he had to. But there seemed to be no one near except a sleepy, slouchy sailor in a seat immediately behind him. The man had been drinking, and his heavy breathing convinced Haskin that he was harmlessly asleep.

But the next time he looked around the sailor was gone. He must have moved very quietly to escape the notice of Haskin, and he was just passing out through the door when the detective saw him.

"That's bad business!" he said to himself. "It was mighty careless of me. I ought to have known better, certainly, than to talk that way, even if there didn't seem to be anyone around to hear me. I only hope he didn't understand, or that he really is what he seems to be—just a sailor on a spree."

They had a long and tedious wait for the time to come when the all-important film should be begun. What was reeled off first had little interest for any of them. The three Scouts all liked the moving picture shows well enough, but they preferred the other kind, the sort shown in the better houses uptown, and they could not get up much interest in the pictures that seemed to delight those who were seated all about them.

The place grew constantly more and more crowded. It was evidently a popular diversion near the river, and the attraction of the local scenes film, with the chance that any spectator might suddenly find himself a part of the performance, was what pleased them the most and attracted the greatest attention.

At last it was time for that particular film to be begun. It was quite a long one, as it turned out, and it was not until a number of pictures had been shown that Haskin suddenly leaned forward and pointed to a little pier, beside which a motor boat was bobbing up and down.

Jack, with a gasp, and a queer little thrill running up and down his back, recognized three men who stood by the boat. They were quarreling about something, and were by no means still, but there was no mistaking them. They were three of the men that he had seen in the little station on the night that the attempt to wreck the Limited had failed. And, from the edge of the screen, another man was walking toward them.

"There," said Haskin, "that's the fellow I want you to watch. Is that Broom? If it is—"

He couldn't finish. There was a sudden sputtering by the film. The lights went out—only to give place to a dark, red glare near the film. And, at the same moment, there was a wild shriek from the back of the hall—"Fire!"

The lights winked on again in a moment, and then went out and on again, alternating for two or three minutes, so that at one moment the little, crowded theatre was black as ink and the next as light as day. Most of those in the audience were women and children, and they were in a panic in a moment.

"Come on, Scouts!" roared Dick Crawford. "If they don't stop crowding and pushing, not one of these people will get out of this place alive."

The three Scouts knew what to do and how to do it. They were prepared for this as well as for any other emergency. They were, perhaps, the only cool-headed ones in the place. Adding their voices to Dick's, and with Haskin to help them, they managed somehow to restore some sort of order. They fought their way through the packed aisles, and, though the fire was gaining, back by the film, they made the people pass out in good order. Great as was the peril, not one of them flinched.

Jack Danby, in the center aisle, had to bear the brunt of the wild rush for the door, but he managed to keep the people from piling up against the door, and so making a human dam that would have kept everyone from safety. One or two men, and the braver of the women, inspired by the actions of the Scouts, pulled themselves together, and helped them, and before the flames had made much headway, everyone, it seemed, was out. But Jack Danby remembered seeing a child fall just before the last group had gone through the door. He did not see it outside, and, despite protests from all who saw him, he made his way back.

The lights had gone out for good now, but there was plenty of chance to see even in that grimy, smoke-filled place, by the fitful glare of the flames that were reaching out and licking up the seats and the tawdry decorations now. And he had not very far to go before he found what he was looking for—the body of a little girl who had fallen and been overcome by the smoke. He picked her up and with little difficulty carried her out to the street, where a fireman took her from him.

The firemen made short work of the blaze, and Haskin, with the four Scouts, walked away and reached the automobile, which had been forced to move several blocks on account of the fire.

"That fire wasn't any accident," said Haskin, gravely. "Now I know why those fellows were following me. They were afraid of something of this sort. My heavens, what cold-blooded scoundrels they are! They were willing to wreck that train—now they took the chance of killing everyone in that little theatre to keep me from seeing that film—and, I suppose, with the idea that they could get rid of me and the most dangerous witness against them at the same time, and by a single blow."

"Do you really think they did that?" cried Dick, shocked by the idea.

"I think so, yes. But it's one thing to think so, and to say that I think so, and it's quite another to prove it. That's the trouble! But I'm going to try pretty hard, and I'll fix the blame on them and see that they go to jail for it if there's any human way of doing it. It's a pity they succeeded as well as they did. They've destroyed that film, and it would have been mighty useful as evidence against them, let me tell you!"

"Is there no duplicate?"

"I'm afraid not. But we'll try, anyway. There's no harm in that."

## CHAPTER XIV

### A FOOLISH STRIKE

The next morning Jack Danby, arriving at the factory, found Pete Stubbs already there, for it was his duty that week to arrive a little in advance of the rest of the boys, and open up. He was wearing a glum face.

"Gee, Jack, here's a peck of trouble," he said. "I got down here and found that Mr. Simms, the big boss, and Mr. Carew, the manager, had been here since five o'clock."

"What's wrong, Pete?"

"I dunno, for sure, Jack, but I heard somethin' bein' said about a strike. And there ain't a man here yet!"

"Well, we're not on strike, Pete. I guess we'd better get busy and do our work just as if there wasn't anything wrong. Then *we'll* be all right, anyhow."

They were busy for a few minutes, as the other office boys and the clerks began to appear.

"Keep quiet about anything you know or suspect, Pete," said Jack, warningly, as the rooms began to fill up. "It's all right to tell me, but you'd better let the others hear anything there is to be known from Mr. Carew. He'll tell us all, probably, when he gets ready."

But the morning was well advanced before the conference in Mr. Carew's room was over. There was an unusual silence about the big factory. None of the machinery was running, which was sufficiently out of the ordinary to excite a lot of talk and gossip, although Pete gave out none of the information with which he was almost bursting. Finally, however, Mr. Carew came out.

"This company," he said, when everyone had turned in silence to face him, "has done business for a good many years and has never had any sort of trouble, until now, with any of the people who have worked for it. Now, unfortunately, some malcontents among the hands here have spread their ideas, and a strike has been called. We have tried to reason with the men, but they have quit work, and this factory will be closed for at least a week, beginning to-day."

"Gee, Jack, that's just what I was afraid of," said Pete, his face falling. "That means a week's wages gone!"

Murmurs arose from all over the room. But Carew, a smile on his face, held up his hand for silence, and went on.

"The company has no intention of making you suffer," he said. "Your wages will go on just the same, and we will simply consider this week's lay-off as a sort of a vacation. That will be all for now. You will get notice when it is time for you to return to work."

There was a wild cheer then. A week's wages meant a great deal to most of the boys and clerks employed in and about the factory, and the revulsion of feeling when they learned that they were not to lose their pay was enough to justify even a louder cheer than they gave.

"Danby and Stubbs," said Mr. Carew next, "I wish you'd wait when the others go, and come into my office. I want to talk to you."

They waited accordingly, and when they went into Mr. Carew's room they found Mr. Simms, the president of the company, waiting there with the manager.

"This is very serious business, boys," said Mr. Simms, gravely. "A strike is one thing, and if the men stopped at a strike they would be entirely within their rights. Unfortunately, some of them, bad workers, who had been threatened with dismissal, and others who were discontented, for one reason or another, have succeeded in stirring up a lot of hard feeling. And there is no telling what may happen."

"Do you think they'll try to put the place on the bum, sir?" cried Pete, the irrepressible, his eyes flashing.

Both the men laughed, though their faces showed that they were too worried to do much laughing.

"I certainly hope they won't attempt anything of the sort, for their sake, as well as ours, Pete," said Mr. Simms. "If they were let alone, our old men, even if they were to go on strike, wouldn't make a move against the company's property. But these rascals who are leading them want to make it impossible for them to back down and come back to work. And I am afraid that there are no lengths at which they would stop in the effort to injure us."

"Here is the point, boys," said Mr. Carew. "We know, from past experience with you, that you are trustworthy, and loyal to us. Now, what we want to do is to get through this strike with as little trouble as possible. We don't want any shooting, as there might be if we brought in armed men to guard the property. What we want is to prevent any attempt to destroy the place by getting ample warning of anything that is tried."

"And you're going to let us look out for them?" cried Pete. "Gee, that's great, Jack! We can do it, too, can't we?"

"The idea we had," said Carew, "was that you boys, and perhaps some of your companions in the Boy Scouts, being used to tracking and trailing in the woods, could keep a better watch than our regular watchmen. They are faithful enough, and would mean well, but what we are afraid of is that a lot of clever scoundrels could get inside and set the place on fire before they knew it. They wouldn't expect boys to be on the lookout, and we can arrange to have the place protected amply if we can have a few minutes warning. In that way the plans of the violent ones among the men would be blocked, and at the same time there would be no danger of bloodshed, or of anyone being hurt. I would rather lose a year's pay than have a man of them all injured."

"And I a year's profits, or a good deal more," said Mr. Simms. "Understand me, boys, we want you to do this in a way that will not get you yourselves into any danger. Simply stay here tonight, after, the place is closed up. Mr. Carew and I and a few other men will be inside, but we don't want to show ourselves. I am having telephones put in all over the factory, with instruments out in the courtyards, so that you can get word to us without delay if you see anything suspicious. Now suppose you run home and get your Scout uniforms. We will have plenty to eat here, and we will have cots rigged up for you, too, so that you can sleep in the day time."

"This is almost as good as being in the militia, isn't it, Jack?" said Pete, as they hurried out.

"I think it's a lot better, Pete. In the militia, if there's a strike, the men sometimes have to fire into a crowd, and a lot of foolish people who don't mean any harm may get hurt or killed. I'd hate to have to do anything like that. I suppose it's necessary, but I'd feel like a murderer if I'd ever fired into a crowd that way, I know."

"Well, this is going to be a great lark, anyhow, Jack. I'd rather do this than work, any day!"

"It may be pretty hard work before we're through, Pete. Look over there!"

They were leaving the factory then, and across the street was a crowd of men, in their working clothes, sullen and unhappy in appearance. Two or three men, dressed more like brokers than workmen, were passing to and fro among them, and leaving a wake of scowls and curses wherever they passed.

"Strikers!" said Pete. "Gosh, but they don't look like the crowd that we see coming to work every morning, do they, Jack? They look different—like wild men, almost."

"It's too bad," said Jack. "I'm mighty sorry to see them go out, because I know that they're treated as well here as they would be anywhere in the state, and a lot better than at most places. It's men like Big Ed Willis, who never wants to work at all, who make the trouble."

"Just listen here, young feller," said a big man, who appeared suddenly from behind them, "keep a quiet tongue in yer head about me. I'm Big Ed, I am, and I'll smash your ugly face in for ye, if ye don't look out! There's a strike on for higher wages and shorter hours here, see, and we don't want no scabs, man or boy, goin' into that factory."

"We're not in the union, Ed Willis," said Jack, unafraid. "We make our own rules about working or not working, and don't you forget it! You can beat me up easily enough, if you want

to, but you won't be much of a man if you try it."

"For two cents I'd smash you in the jaw, so I would!" said Willis, blustering, like the true bully he was.

"Let the kid alone, Ed," cried another man, coming across the street. "He ain't in the union. I think we're fools to strike ourselves. Don't go to making no more trouble without you need to."

"I'll let you off this time," said Big Ed, a little abashed. "But see to it that you keep away from the factory over there."

"You mind your business and we'll mind ours!" said Jack. "That'll keep you plenty busy enough, Ed Willis!"

"Gee, I thought he was going to hit you that time, Jack," said Pete Stubbs. "I'm pretty small, and if I hit him he'd never know it unless someone told him, but I was going to smash him behind the ear with a stone if he tried that."

"He's all bluff and talk," said Jack, disgustedly. "If he does any fighting, it'll be by letting someone else strike the blows while he looks on from a place where he knows he won't be hit. There's lots of fighters like that."

They hurried on home then, and changed from the clothes they wore every day to work in to their Boy Scout uniforms. Each of them took, too, his axe and Scout knife, in case of emergencies, though it was hard to imagine any use they were likely to have for them.

"Look here, Pete," said Jack, when they had changed their clothes and were ready to start back to the factory, "if we go in the way we came out they'll see us, and they're likely to watch for us to come out again. That wouldn't be much use, so I think we'd better try to get back without being seen."

"How can we do that, Jack?"

"I know a good way. We'll go down to the freight yard and find a car that is going to be shunted onto the private track. There's a car-load of wagon wheels due to-day, I know, and the chances are that we can find that and hide in it. The men at the freight yard would never know, and when we got inside we could get out and the strikers wouldn't know we were inside at all."

"That's a fine idea, Jack. We'll do that. Say, that'll be a great joke on Ed Willis and those other toughs he's got on his side, won't it?"

"I'll bet they'll never guess we're inside at all, Pete!"

Both boys knew their way around the freight yards very well indeed. Both had been sent there a good many times by Mr. Carew to look up delayed shipments, that were needed in the factory, and, as a consequence, the men at work in the yards, knowing that they worked in the factory, were not suspicious when Jack began asking about the wagon wheels. They found the car with little difficulty, and, once they had discovered that it was to be shunted into the private spur of track leading into the factory within an hour or two, they did not hesitate to get inside and hide themselves in one dark corner of the car.

There was plenty of room for them, and they crouched behind a case of wheels, and told one another stories. It was good fun, they thought, and they only wished that it was time for their ride to begin.

"Listen!" whispered Pete, suddenly. "That sounds like someone fumbling for the catch of the car door, Jack."

It was dark in the car, and suddenly, there was a stream of light as the door was pushed cautiously open.

"Right, oh, Ed," said a hoarse voice, trying to be quiet. "We can shove the stuff right in here. Then, about midnight, we can get in and let it off. They'll never open this car up tonight, and they won't know the stuff's in here."

"Not unless it goes off as she bumps over the frogs going into the spur," said Big Ed Willis, chuckling. "But if she lets go then there'll be a pretty big explosion, just the same. May leave a bit of the factory standing, but it'll take them a long time to make repairs. It would blow Number Four shop and this car to smithereens, anyhow."

Horrified, but unable to make a move, the two Scouts saw three heavy boxes being loaded gingerly onto the car and hidden under some sacking.

"There!" said Big Ed. "That's a good job, well done! And it looks mighty neat. No one'd ever guess, just to look at that sacking, that there was enough dynamite underneath it to blow half the town up if it was set properly."

Scarcely had the two men closed the door when the Scouts made a simultaneous leap for it.



But, as they moved, they felt the bump of the freight engine against the car and a moment later it began to move. It was too late for them to get off, and they could only sit and watch that pile of sacking, with its deadly secret beneath it, wondering if every moment was not to be their last. Every time the car jolted over a frog in the rail they jumped, wondering why the deadly stuff did not explode, and Jack was not ashamed to admit afterward that he was sick with fear during the whole terrible ride. But it ended at last, with the dynamite still safe and undisturbed, and they breathed great sighs of relief as they realized that the first and probably the worst of their perils was really over.

Mr. Simms was incredulous when they reached him and told him of what they had discovered, but the dynamite was a witness not to be discredited, and he had to believe when he saw that. With the utmost care it was removed and placed in water, and then they began to make fresh plans.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DYNAMITERS

"Well," said Mr. Simms, "that is a providential discovery, certainly! If they had been allowed to reach that car of dynamite and set off all that stuff there would have been precious little left of us or the factories tomorrow morning. Now the question is what to do to prevent them from doing anything else?"

"I think we'd better leave the car just as it is, and even fix something under that sacking to look like the dynamite," said Jack. "If they get to it at all they will be in a terrible hurry, certainly, and they won't stop to look to see if it's the right stuff. Then, if we are watching them we can catch them red-handed, and it will be just the ones that are making all the trouble that will be caught. Big Ed Willis and his gang are perfectly willing to sneak up in the night and set some dynamite to blow up innocent people, but they'll leave others to bear the brunt of their crimes, every time."

"That's a good idea," said Carew. "I think we'd better fix that up right away, Mr. Simms. Now, how about you, boys? Do you think you can keep a sharp enough lookout to be able to spot those fellows when they come in?"

"Yes, sir, I do! They'll be careful to dodge the places that would ordinarily be watched. I think they'll try to come in by the fence near the railroad spur. They'll know that the main gates would be closely guarded, and the spur itself. But the fence near the spur is easy to climb, and I think that's where they'll try to get in."

"And I'll tell you how to catch, them, too, Mr. Carew," said Pete Stubbs. "They'll have to get inside the car to fix that dynamite, you know, and get it ready to set off, and if Jack and I are right behind them, I don't see why we can't lock them inside the car. Then, if the gate is open, we can start the car rolling down the grade, and it will run right outside of the yard and down toward the freight yard. If we really catch them we'll have plenty of time to give the alarm, and they can be taken right out of the car. If they made a racket here they might make trouble."

"That's so," said Jack. "I think Pete's got the right idea, Mr. Carew. You see, those strikers, if they have an inkling of what's going to happen, are likely to be pretty close by, watching for the chance to rush in after the explosion, if I know anything about the way Big Ed manages things."

"You mean they might make an attempt at a rescue?"

"That's just the danger I should guess, sir. Big Ed and his precious friends probably plan to set a time fuse, and then disappear, and get as far as possible away before the explosion, so that they can have witnesses to prove that they were a long way off when the explosion took place."

They spent the afternoon not in sleep, as Jack and Pete had planned to do, but in going all over the ground outside the shops of the big factory, trying to determine the places most likely to be selected by Willis and his gang in their effort to reach the dynamite. Then, when they were satisfied that they had inspected the whole place, and that they could find their way even if they were blindfolded, Jack and Pete rested.

After supper Mr. Simms insisted that they should have some sleep. He told them they would have a hard night's work ahead of them, and that, as there was no telling at what time the attempt to reach the dynamite would be made, they must guard against the danger of getting sleepy.

"We're still depending a good deal on you two," he said, "although you have, of course, already made the complete success of this plot impossible. But if they got to that car without

being seen, and discovered that their dynamite had been taken away, they might still make an effort to set the whole place on fire, and, if they succeeded in that, and had a mob outside to hamper the firemen, there might be terrible damage, that would cripple the company for a long time."

It was about ten o'clock when Pete and Jack, in their Scout uniforms, hard to detect at any distance, even in broad daylight, and making them almost invisible at night, took up their vigil. The place seemed to be as silent and deserted as a tomb. Lights were few and far between, but each of them carried an electric torch supplied by Mr. Carew. These they did not intend to use except in an emergency, since to use them would mean betraying their position to the enemy, and it was their chief opportunity to succeed that they were not known to Willis and the others to be in the place at all. The strikers would be on the lookout for regular watchmen, not for keen-eyed boys.

There was a high wall around the greater portion of the grounds, topped with broken glass, so that the place was really well fortified against the attack of a mob. But the danger tonight was even greater than it would have been from a mob, more insidious, and harder to guard against.

The two Scouts, to make sure, if that were possible, that there should be no surprise, agreed to patrol the whole wall, and thus have the best possible chance of seeing anyone who tried to climb over. They could do this, meeting in the center of the trip, and leaving no spot unwatched for more than two or three minutes.

"If I hear anyone, Pete, or see anything wrong," said Jack, "I'll give the Patrol call—the cry of a crow."

"Sure! I'll understand, if I hear it, and I'll give the same call if I'm the one that sees something."

"Right! If we hear that call the one who hears it will stop patrolling at once and go for the sound."

"They can't see us if we keep in the shadow, can they, Jack?"

"I don't believe so, Pete. It is a pretty heavy shadow, and anyone coming over the wall is likely to have his eyes more or less dazzled by the arc lights on the other side."

"Don't call unless you have to, Pete. Remember that they're not fools, these fellows, and they're apt to know that such a call means danger, even if they don't know who's here. We don't want just to scare them off—they might come back if we did that. We want to catch the ring-leaders."

They started from the railroad spur, so they would meet there each time as they completed a round of the walls, since that was where they felt the enemy was most likely to appear.

"Sleepy, Pete?" asked Jack, when they had been at it nearly an hour.

"I would be, I think, if I wasn't walking around, Jack. That's fine, though. It helps to keep me awake."

"Same here! I've heard of being so tired that you can go to sleep standing up, or even when you're walking about, but it doesn't seem possible to me."

For a long time they kept up the patrol. All sorts of strange noises startled them, but, with their training as Boy Scouts, which had accustomed them to the night noises of the woods, and to keeping their heads, they did not give the alarm. At last, however, after Jack had met Pete and passed on, he heard the sound of a crow's call.

Gently and silently he slipped back. As he came near the spur he saw two dark figures climbing over the wall. And a moment later Pete, moving with the stealth of an Indian, touched his hand.

"I guess they're here, Jack," he whispered, tense with excitement and delighted that the long vigil was over at last.

Big Ed Willis was easy to recognize. The other man was a stranger to them, and, since both wore handkerchiefs over the upper part of their faces, it was impossible to tell what he looked like.

The strikers, full of their murderous intention, moved quietly and cautiously along toward the car, which stood by itself. It was on a sharp grade, but a billet of wood held it in place. The two Scouts, hardly daring to breathe, lest they be heard, followed the men not more than twenty paces behind them. They wore moccasins instead of their stout Scout shoes, so that their movements were without noise, and they could see and hear everything the two men did.

"We'll both have to get in the car," they heard Big Ed whisper. "The stuff's heavy, and we want to fix the fuses in there, so that we'll have less time to spend out in the open, where someone might see us."

"Right!" said the other man. "Come on, then!"

"As soon as they get inside, Pete," whispered Jack, now, with a little thrill of exultation at the way the strikers were walking into the trap set for them, "kick that bit of wood that holds the car out of the way. I don't believe it will start moving right away. Then rush around and help me with the door, if I need you."

"All right, Jack! Be ready to slam it shut as soon as you hear me coming, will you?"

In a moment, as Jack crouched outside the door, with the heavy hasp in his hand, he heard the slight jar that showed that Pete had done his part. At once he slid the door close, and pushed the hasp in. With Pete to help him, they had it securely locked in a moment, so that no one inside could hope to get out. Then, while a yell of rage and surprise, mingled with terror, came from inside the car, the two boys leaned all their weight against it. So slight was the resistance it could offer, owing to the grade, that it started to roll at once.

"Come on, Pete," cried Jack. "Get aboard the car—swing up the way the brakemen do."

Yelling in triumph, to let Carew and the others know that they had succeeded, the two Scouts leaped to the top of the car. A man had been stationed in a nearby building, and, as he saw the car begin to move, he leaped to the gates and opened them. Then he swung aboard and joined the two boys on the top of the car.

Carew had telephoned to the freight yard as soon as he knew the men were locked in the car, and by the time it rolled into the freight yard and came to a stop on the level section of track there a score of men stood ready to capture the strikers as they emerged. The regular police were not on hand, but Captain Haskin, and some of his railroad detectives, well armed, were ready and waiting, and they were so strong that there was no chance for Ed Willis and his chum to make a successful rush.

"Surrender, you two!" cried Haskin, as the door was opened. "Don't attempt to escape or make any trouble, or you'll be riddled with bullets. We've got you covered!"

"Don't shoot, boss! We'll come down!"

Big Ed Willis, all the bluff stripped from him, so that his real cowardice was exposed, was the speaker. His tone trembled and terror filled him. He crawled out abjectly, and held up his hands for the handcuffs which Haskin at once fitted on.

"You're a fine sort of a low hound!" exclaimed the other. "I thought you were a man, Willis, when you proposed this game. I'd never have gone in with you if I'd thought you were going to quit cold this way."

But he saw that he could do nothing, single-handed, against such a show of force as Haskin and his men made, and he, too, came out of the car and surrendered. Haskin whipped the handkerchief from his face, and Jack, with a cry of surprise, saw that he knew him. It was Silas Broom—the man of the burning launch.

"That's Broom, Captain Haskin—the man that escaped!"

"I thought so," said Haskin, grimly. "He has some other names, but that will do for the present. You see it didn't do you any good to have that film destroyed, Broom!"

"I didn't do that," cried Broom. "So help me, I didn't!"

"I never said you did, did I?" asked Haskin, with a smile that wasn't pleasant to see. "Better wait until you're accused of a crime next time before you're so ready to deny it. The cap seemed to fit you when I threw it."

Broom, snarling, turned on Jack then.

"It's you, is it, you young whelp?" he gritted. "I might have guessed it. It's a pity I didn't smash your brains out the other day when I had you in my power. You're the one that's been in the way every time we've turned a trick for the last two weeks. But we'll get you yet—be sure of that!"

"Never mind him, Jack," said Pete. "He talks mighty big, but he can't do anything to you. Every time they've tried it, they've got into pretty serious trouble. I guess they'll learn to let you alone before long. If they don't, they'll all be in jail anyhow, won't they, Captain Haskin?"

"It looks that way, my boy," said the detective. "Take these fellows off, men. Turn them over to the police at headquarters. Tell them that Mr. Simms and the railroad will both make a complaint. The federal marshal will be after them, too, for trying to transport dynamite on a railroad car. That's a very serious offense nowadays, under the Interstate Commerce Law."

## CHAPTER XVI

### OFF ON A LONG HIKE

Jack and Pete, with a week's vacation on their hands, were puzzled as to what they should do. But Dick Crawford, anxious to get Jack away from the city for a time, until things should blow over, suggested a plan.

"I heard from Jim Burroughs the other day," he said. "You remember Jim, the fellow that is engaged to Miss Benton, up at Eagle Lake?"

"Sure—she's Chris Benton's sister," said Pete Stubbs.

Dick smiled.

"You'll get over thinking about girls as some fellows' sisters when you get a little older, Pete," he said. "Then you'll remember that the fellows you know are girls' brothers. Anyhow, Jim says they're all up in camp there again, and they were asking me if some of the Scouts couldn't go up there to see them. Why don't you make a long hike and go up there? You could tramp it in two days, easily enough, and the weather's just right for a hike like that."

"Say, I think that would be fine!" cried Pete. "Let's do it, Jack, shall we?"

"I'd like to, if I thought we wouldn't be in the way," said Jack, his eyes lighting.

"You won't be in the way," said Dick. "I know they'd be glad to see you. Come on over to Scout headquarters and we'll see what we've got in the way of equipment for your hike."

At headquarters they found everything they needed. They made up a couple of packs for each them to carry, with a frying-pan, a coffee pot, and the other cooking utensils necessary for their two days in the open, since they would cook their own meals and travel exactly as if they were in a hostile country, where they could expect no aid from those whose houses they passed.

"Let's take sleeping bags instead of a tent," said Jack. "I think it's much better fun to sleep that way. The weather seems likely to be good, and, anyhow, if it gets very bad, we can find some sort of shelter. They're a lot easier to carry, too."

Scout-Master Durland, when he heard of the plan, approved it heartily.

They planned to ride for the first twenty miles of their journey by trolley, since that would take them out into the real country and beyond the suburbs, where there were many paved streets, which were anything but ideal for tramping.

"Now we're really off, Jack," cried Pete, as they stepped off the car the next morning. They had taken the car on its first trip, and it was but little after seven o'clock when they finally reached the open road and started off at a good round pace.

"It's fine to travel on a regular schedule," said Pete. "Now we don't have to hurry. We know just when we ought to reach every place we're coming to, and how long we can stay. That's much better than just going off for a long walk."

"Sure it is! It's systematic, and it pays just as well to be systematic when you're starting out to have a good time as it does when you're at work. I've found that out."

"I never used to think so. When I first went to work I hated having to do everything according to rules. But now I know that it's the only way to get things done on time. The work's been much easier at the office since we began doing everything that way."

"Look at our Scout camps, Pete. If we didn't do things according to a system we'd never get through with the work. As it is, we all know just what to do, and just how to do it. So it takes only about half as long to cook meals and clean up after them, and we have lots more time for games and trailing and swimming and things like that. It surely does pay."

"Gee, I hope it doesn't rain, Jack. It would be too bad if we had to run into a storm after having good weather all this time when we were at work."

"I don't believe it's going to rain. But it ought to, really, and it seems selfish to wish for dry weather when the country needs rain so badly."

"It's been a mighty dry summer, hasn't it, Jack?"

"Yes. These fires in the forests around here show that. They started much earlier than they usually do. As a rule October is the time for the worst fires."

"They seem to be pretty well out around here, though."

"That's because there are so many people to keep them under. But up in the big woods, where we're going, they're likely to have bad ones, when they start. You see a fire can get going pretty well up there before anyone discovers it, and then it's the hardest sort of work to stop it before it's done an awful lot of damage."

"How do those fires in the woods start, Jack?"

"That's pretty hard to say, Pete. Careless campers start a whole lot of them. They build fires, and just leave them going when they get through. Then the sparks begin to fly, and the fire spreads."

"They ought to be arrested!"

"They are, if anyone can prove that they really did start the fire. But that's pretty hard to do."

"Don't the fires start other ways, too?"

"You bet they do! Sometimes the sparks from an engine will set the dry leaves on the ground on fire, and, if there happens to be a wind, that will start the biggest sort of a fire."

"Isn't there any way to prevent that?"

"Yes—but it's expensive and difficult. But gradually they're giving up the coal engines in the woods, and use oil burners instead. There are no sparks and hot cinders to drop from an oil burning engine, you see, and it makes it much safer and cleaner, as well."

"How about when a fire just starts? That happens sometimes, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and that's the hardest sort of a fire of all to control or to find. Sometimes, when the leaves and branches get all wet, they will get terribly hot when the sun blazes down on them. Then, because they're wet, some sort of a gas develops, and the fire starts with what they call spontaneous combustion."

"They have a fire patrol in some places, don't they?"

"Yes, and they ought to have one wherever there are woods. Out west the government forest service keeps men who do nothing all day long but keep on the lookout for fires. Up on the high peaks they have signal stations, with semaphores and telephone wires, and men with telescopes who look out all day long for the first sign of smoke."

"I think that must be a great life. They call them forest rangers, don't they?"

"Yes. And it is a great job. Those fellows have to know all the different trees by sight. They have to be able to plant new trees, and cut down others when the trees need to be thinned out. Forestry is a science now, and they're teaching it in the colleges. An awful lot of our forests have been wasted altogether."

"They'll grow again, won't they, Jack?"

"Y-e-s. They will if the work is done properly. But you see those great big mills, that use up thousands of feet of timber every season—even millions—don't stop to cut with an idea of reforestation. They just chop and chop and chop, and when they've cut all the timber they can, they move on to another section, where they start in and do it all over again. I'm working to get a Conservation badge, you know. That's how I've happened to read about all these things."

"I'm going to try to get a Conservation badge, too, Jack. I can start working for it as soon as I'm a First-Class Scout, can't I?"

"Yes. And this hike will be one of your tests for your First-Class badge, too. You're only supposed to have to go seven miles, and we'll make a whole lot more than that. How about your other qualifications? Coming along all right with them?"

"Yes, indeed. I think I can qualify in a couple of weeks."

"That's fine, Pete! You know I enlisted you, and a Scout is judged partly by the sort of recruits he brings into the Troop. They'll never have a chance to blame me for enlisting you if you keep on the way you've begun."

They were going along at a good pace all this time, not too fast, but swinging steadily along. The road did not seem long, because their hard, young bodies were used to exercise, and they took the walking as a matter of course.

"They'll be expecting us up at the Bentons, won't they, Jack?"

"Dick Crawford said he would write and let Jim Burroughs know we were coming, Pete. So I guess they'll be on the lookout all right."

"Do you remember the night we got to the lake, and Jim Burroughs and Miss Benton were

lost in the woods?"

"I certainly do! They would have had a bad night of it if we hadn't found them, I'm afraid. But all's well that ends well. It didn't hurt them at all, as it turned out, and I guess it taught them both to be more careful about going out in woods when they weren't sure of the trail."

"Gee, Jack, I could have got lost myself then. I didn't know how to travel by the stars, and I wasn't any too sure how to use a compass."

They had traveled more than half the distance when they picked out a sleeping place that night. They went to a farmer's house, and when he found that all they wanted was permission to camp in his wood lot, and to make a fire there, he told them they could do as they liked. He invited them to spend the night in the house, too, but they told him they preferred to sleep out-of-doors, and, laughing at them, he consented.

They were off at five in the morning, and at noon, when they built a fire and cooked their dinner, they could see the wooded crests of the hills that were their destination rising before them.

"Look at that haze, Jack," said Pete. "That isn't a storm, is it, coming along?"

"I don't think so, Pete. I don't like the looks of it. It looks to me more like smoke, from a woods fire. I've been thinking I smelled smoke for some time, too."

"Could you smell it as far as this?"

"Smoke from a big forest fire sometimes travels for two or three hundred miles, if the wind's right, Pete. In the city, even, in the fall, there will be smoky days, though there isn't a forest fire of any sort for a good many miles."

"I suppose that's because the wood smoke is so thick."

The further they traveled, the thicker grew the smoke. There could no longer be any mistake about it. The woods in front of them were well alight.

"I only hope the fire doesn't reach Eagle Lake," said Jack.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A TIMELY WARNING

It was nearly dark when they finally arrived at the lake. Chris Benton and Jim Burroughs were waiting for them at the landing with a couple of canoes, and they were soon skimming over the placid waters of the lake to the Benton camp.

"This smoke's pretty thick here," said Jack.

"The woods are on fire all around us," said Chris.

"That's the trouble," said Jim Burroughs. "The summer's been mighty dry. See how low the lake is. A lot of the streams around here have dried up. This lake is partly spring fed, and it doesn't depend altogether on the little brooks that flow into it. Otherwise I'm afraid this wouldn't be much of a place just now."

"Is there any danger of the fire coming this way, Jim?" asked Jack.

"Not a bit, Jack. The wind's the other way, and if it shifts it's certain to bring rain with it and put the fire out, anyhow. It would take a good, strong, east wind to blow the fire over this way, and that would mean a regular rain storm, sure. So we're safe enough here. Fires never have reached Eagle Lake."

"I'm glad of that. It would be a shame to have any fire here. It might burn up the camps, you know, and that would be a pity."

"It sure would! But I guess we're safe enough here. The guides all say so, and they ought to know, certainly. They've lived in the woods most of their lives, from what they say, and they don't seem to think that there's any danger at all."

"They certainly ought to know," agreed Jack. "They know more than we do, anyhow. That's a sure thing."

The two Scouts were pretty well tired out from their long hike, and they enjoyed their

comfortable beds that night. It was warm, and even though the air was full of smoke, it was strong and bracing. So they awoke in the morning refreshed and full of life, and, when Chris hailed them, they joined him with a will in a plunge into the chilly water of the lake.

"How far away is the fire, Jim?" Jack asked, after breakfast.

"Two or three miles to the west, I guess," said Jim, carelessly. "It won't come any nearer, either, Jack."

"I think I'll go take a look at it," said Jack. "Coming, Pete and Chris?"

"Sure we are!" they cried.

Their eyes smarted, and their throats were parched as they made their way toward the burning timber, but they didn't mind such small discomforts, and soon Jack had a chance to see a real woods fire burning at its height.

"This is the real thing, Pete," he said, when they got a good look at the fire from the ridge where they had found Bess Benton on the first night they had been at Eagle Lake, some weeks earlier.

"Gee," said Pete, "I thought that fire we helped to stop near the city was big enough, but this beats it all hollow, doesn't it, Jack?"

"Come on!" said Jack, with sudden determination. "This isn't safe, no matter what the guides say. If the wind changes this fire would sweep right down to the edge of the lake. A little rain wouldn't make any impression on it at all."

Jack, once his mind was made up, wasn't afraid of ridicule or anything else. He went back to camp, and sought out Mr. Benton.

"I think that fire's mighty dangerous, Mr. Benton," he said. "I know the guides say you're perfectly safe here, but I've lived in a place where they had big woods fires nearly every year, and this is the biggest fire I ever saw. It would take a week's soaking rain to stop it, and if the wind turns to the east, even if it does bring some rain, it will turn that fire straight for the lake here, and burn up everything it meets on the way."

"What would you advise, Jack?" asked Mr. Benton. There was a twinkle in his eye, for he thought the guides knew more than Jack, but he wanted to humor the Scout, who stood very high in his estimation.

"I'd dig a deep, broad ditch, and fill it with water. I'd make it at least five feet deep, and ten or twelve feet broad, Mr. Benton. That would give us a chance to keep the fire from reaching the buildings here. There's still some water in that brook that runs down from the ridge, though there won't be very long, and you could divert that into the ditch, and then dam the ditch at the lake, so that you'd have quite a little pond behind the houses on the side nearest the fire. If you could get half a dozen men they could dig a ditch like that, roughly, in a day. And I'd certainly do it, sir!"

Mr. Benton was impressed, despite himself, by Jack's earnestness. His camp had cost him nearly ten thousand dollars, and practically nothing would survive the fire if it should sweep over it. So, after a little thought, and not heeding the laughter of Jim Burroughs and the guides, he decided to take Jack's advice.

The guides, pressed into service for the digging of the ditch, thought that the task was foolish. They grumbled at having to do it, but they had no choice but to obey, once Mr. Benton had given the order. And before they were half done, the wind, which had died away completely, began to come again in short puffs from the east.

"That means rain," said Jim. "Jack, you young rascal, I believe you started this scare just to see us all work!"

"I've known the wind to blow from the northeast for a whole day before the rain came," said Jack, "especially at this time of the year."

The fire was a mile nearer the camp when the ditch was finished. It wasn't much of a ditch, and it wouldn't last very long, but looking it over, Jack decided that it was much better than nothing. And it held the water, at least, which was the most important thing.

As the wind continued to come from the east, without a sign of the hoped for rain, Mr. Benton looked very grave.

"I think you've saved us from a real disaster by your insistence, Jack," he said. "I'm certainly glad that we took your advice."

The roaring of the fire could be plainly heard now. The smoke was so thick that all of them went around with wet cloths tied over their mouths, and smoked glasses to protect their eyes. Even the guides looked serious, and seemed to have a new and greater respect for Jack Danby

and the precaution he had forced them to take.

"Never saw nothin' like this," said one of them. "Never in all the years I've been in the woods. The youngster sure do know a fire when he sees it."

"I'm sorry I laughed at you, Jack, old man," said Jim Burroughs, choking as he spoke. "You certainly had the right dope on this fire. Gosh, listen to it roaring back there!"

The ditch was in the form of a rough half circle, and went completely around the Benton clearing. It was dug so that the brook from the ridge ran into it and filled it, and a space of a foot or so was left untouched at each end of it where it reached the lake. This made a natural dam, and held the water in, so that, as the brook continued to flow in, a small pond was formed behind the clearing, just as Dick had suggested. That made a wide space for the fire to leap, and Jack felt that, even if the fire swept completely around his ditch, the men in the clearing, by constant vigilance, would be able to beat out any sparks and flying embers that might otherwise have set fire to the buildings. But, as a further precaution, the boats of the camp, with water and provisions, were kept ready, so that the family might take to the lake if the need arose.

"Gee," said Pete, suddenly after nightfall, "we forgot the stuff at Camp Simms, Jack!"

"So we did!" cried Jack. "Well, there's time enough yet. The fire will burn right over the camp site there, but it's better cleared than this, and there won't be much damage if we take the stuff from the shack and bring it all over here. We can't save the shack, but that can be built up again in a hurry after the fire's all over. Come on!"

They told the others what they planned to do, and Jim Burroughs volunteered to go with them and help them. In an hour they had brought everything portable from Camp Simms to the Benton camp, which was not very far away, and then they felt that they had taken every possible precaution. There was nothing more to do after that but wait on the fire. It could not be hurried, and, so great had it become, it could not be delayed or checked by any human agency.

There was no question in the mind of any of them now of the wisdom of Jack's fears. Had it not been for the ditch, they admitted, they could not have done anything to save the camp.

"There'll be no sleep for any of us to-night," said Mr. Benton. "We'll have to be ready when it gets near enough to keep it from jumping the ditch and the pond. There's nothing else to stop it, certainly."

The guides were on watch, beyond the water, like pickets, and before long they were driven in by the advancing fire. The heat was terrific, and, under Mr. Benton's direction, lines of hose were laid to the lake, and with the windmill that pumped fresh water to give pressure, the hose was played constantly on the roofs and walls of the buildings of the camp, to make it harder for flying sparks to set them afire.

There was plenty of hose, and as the fire advanced Jack was thankful for that. Water was better than branches and sticks for beating out any fire that leaped the water wall, and the hose was easier to handle, too.

Soon after eleven great drops of water began to fall, and then there was a steady downpour of rain.

"There's your rain, at last, Jim," said Jack. "You can see how much effect it has. It's like pouring water from a flower pot down a volcano and hoping to put it out. The fire doesn't even know it's raining!"

"I guess you're right, Jack," said Jim. "Don't rub it in, though. I'll admit that you saved the situation by making us do what you wanted."

Now began the real fight with the fire. Roaring, bellowing, furious in its onslaught, it swept all about the ditch that held it from its prey. It seemed maddened with rage at the obstacle that man had opposed to its conquering rush, and, raging, it flung sparks and flaming embers at the defenders of the camp.

For two hours they worked, looking, through the light of the lurid flames, like fiends. Their faces were blackened by the smoke, but they never ceased their efforts. Buckets of water were placed all about the clearing, and into these they plunged the cloths that they kept over their faces. Other buckets of barley water, with dippers, were also there, and when there was a chance for a moment's pause, they drank deep draughts of the most cooling and refreshing drink that man has yet devised. Barley water with a little lemon juice did more to moisten parched throats and mouths than the most elaborate drink could have done. It was food and drink alike.

The rain came down to help them all this time, pouring a great volume of water on the fire. And, after about two hours of fighting, the fire was beaten. It had burned over the whole section near the camp. The lake stopped it, and the fire, growling and angry, died away because there was nothing else for it to burn. But the vigil lasted all night.

Morning saw Camp Benton standing like an oasis in a desert of blackened trees and stumps.



The whole side of the lake was a wilderness. But the camp, thanks to the Boy Scout fire fighters, was saved.

"You're certainly welcome guests!" said Mr. Benton. "Thanks to you, we still have the camp. The trees will grow again. And now I think we can all go to sleep for about twenty-four hours."

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