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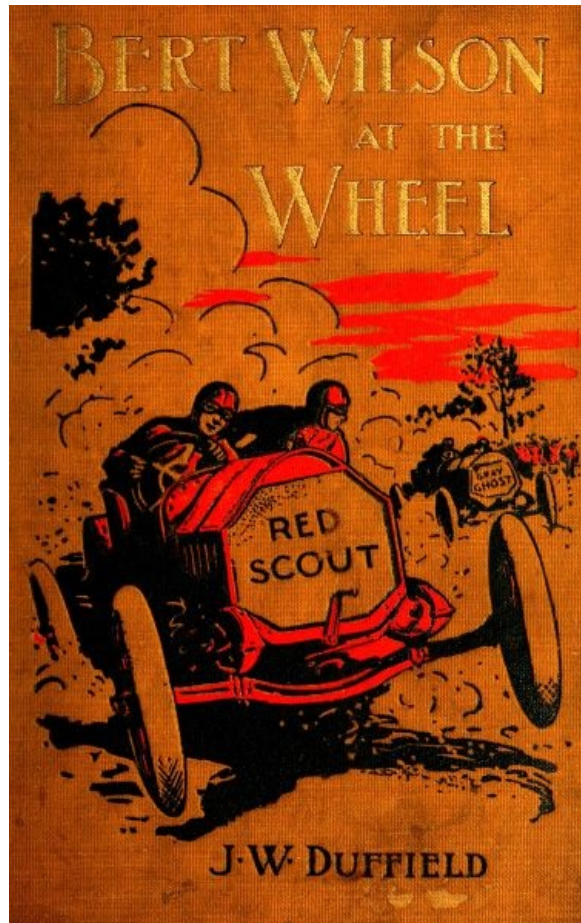
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## BERT WILSON AT THE WHEEL

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**He wrenched the steering wheel around, and headed it directly up the track.**—(See page 168)

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# BERT WILSON at the Wheel

BY

J. W. DUFFIELD

AUTHOR OF "BERT WILSON'S FADEAWAY BALL,"  
"BERT WILSON WIRELESS OPERATOR,"  
"BERT WILSON MARATHON WINNER."



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# Bert Wilson at the Wheel

[1]

## CHAPTER I

### THE "RED SCOUT"

"What dandy luck."

"It's too good to be true."

"Who'd ever thought we'd have the luck to get it?"

"It can't be true. I shan't believe it till it gets here."

"Anyway, it *is* true, and won't we have the niftiest time ever?"

"Well, you might as well sit down, Bob. Running around like a hen with her head cut off won't make it come any sooner."

"Aw, how's a fellow to sit still when a thing like that's on the way? I wonder how long we'll have to wait. What can be keeping him?"

A score of voices, talking singly, two together, all together, woke the woodland echoes, silent through the long winter and tardy spring, gone at last. Summer had come and with it the annual encampment of a score or more of manly, healthy youngsters, overflowing with animal spirits and vitality. For several years past, substantially the same group under the supervision of a Mr. Hollis, a gentleman of sterling character and considerable means, had gone into camp together for two or three weeks of the heated season. Brimming over with life, the boys always made the camp a lively place; but this summer a new and enveloping excitement seemed to have taken possession of everyone, and now all were plunged into a discussion of the cause of the hullabaloo, the voices rising higher and higher as each one sought to make himself heard above the rest. [2]

Turning a bend in the road that brought the camp into view, Mr. Hollis, as he witnessed the excited gestures of the boys, and heard the volume of sound caused by every enthusiast trying to talk at once, instinctively quickened his pace, for it almost seemed as though a serious altercation were in progress; but as he came near enough to distinguish words and heard—"Six cylinders," "Forty-eight horsepower," "Chrome nickel steel," "Wheel base one hundred and twelve inches," "Diamond tires," "Autometer," "Safety treads," "Grip treads"—he realized that nothing more serious was going on than a discussion of the relative merits of automobiles and their fittings. No wonder there was gesturing and loud talking. What boy would not rise to the topmost heights of enthusiasm at the thought of an automobile in which he was to have a personal interest? Such a delight had come to the camp, and since the announcement in the morning that on account of the long trips that the summer's plans would make necessary, the boys would be allowed an automobile for their own exclusive use, nothing else had been thought or talked about; and each eager boy was impatiently awaiting the return of Mr. Hollis to learn the make and all other details of that most wonderful car. [3]

Now, as he came into camp, the boys crowded around him and the wood rang with cheers as he told them that the car would arrive the following morning. A volley of questions overwhelmed him: "How large is it?" "What speed?" "What color is it?" "How many of us can ride in it at a time?" Question followed question in quick succession, until Mr. Hollis put his hands over his ears, and, refusing to answer any more, proposed dinner as a means of quelling the noise.

The boys could scarcely have told of what their dinner consisted that night, so great was their excitement. All were glad to turn in early as the surest way to bring the morning and the longed-for car. A full hour earlier than usual the lights were out and silence settled over the camp, broken only by nature's mysterious night sounds. A belated rabbit homeward bound, keeping ceaseless vigil with round bright eyes, encouraged by the unusual quiet, crept close to the door of the mess tent, and snatching a stray cracker from the grass, scurried joyfully away. At the distant menacing "Tu-whit, tu-whoo" of the night owl, the birds stirred uneasily and nestled closer under cover of the sheltering leaves. The quiet hours crept on till at last morning dawned and gave promise of a glorious day. [4]

Frank Edgewood was the first to open sleepy eyes, and seeing a few clouds not yet dissipated by the early sun, woke the camp with the dismal wail: "Fellows, it's going to rain."

"Put him out," "Smother him," "Duck him in the brook," came in a chorus; and Frank, taking to his heels, dropped the flap of his tent, with not a moment to spare.

"Run early and avoid the rush," sang out Tom Henderson.

"To pass he had such scanty room,  
The descending grazed his plume,"

chanted Dick Trent.

"Let's forgive and forget," said Ben Cooper.

"Be glad we let you live, Frank," Bob Ward chimed in; and so the culprit, reassured, ventured out to breakfast. [5]

Again the all-absorbing topic was renewed, two vital questions claiming them. What should they name their auto? Who would be able to run it? The first was easy enough, for almost from the first they had decided, the color permitting, to call it the "Red Scout." The second was not so easy, for Mr. Hollis must be assured, for the sake of the general safety, that the driver should be fully capable. If only Bert Wilson were there, the question would be answered, for capable Bert in New York had studied the mechanism of automobiles and grown very proficient in handling them; but they were not sure that he would be able to be in camp with them this year. Expressions of regret were heard on all sides, for Bert had a very warm place in their hearts. His splendid qualities had easily made him their natural leader and his absence was far more keenly felt than that of any other fellow in the camp would have been.

Still, Bert not being there, they must choose someone else, so Mr. Hollis called for volunteers. Several answered, but their qualifications were rather doubtful, until Bob Ward said that he had had a lot of experience in driving his uncle's machine, and felt very sure he could handle it. So it [6]

was decided that the next day Bob should take them on their first trip, which would be in search of a new camp site, the old one proving too small for this year's requirements.

While the question as to who should be chosen to drive the automobile was being decided, Sam Fielding and Philip Strong, two of the younger boys, had placed a long plank over a big rock which rested under the shade of a low-branched tree, and thus improvised a capital see-saw. When the question was settled, there was a general movement among the boys, and one of them, thoughtless of consequences, jumped upon Sam's end of the board. This added weight gave the other end a sudden jerk upward, and in a twinkling Philip was tossed into the boughs of the tree, where, his foot catching in a forked branch, he hung suspended, head downward, his jacket falling about and covering his head and face, while he yelled like a Comanche Indian.

In an instant the entire camp was aroused and Phil was quickly extricated from his uncomfortable position. At the sight of his astonished face, the whole camp went into paroxysms of mirth, while peal after peal of laughter made the woods echo again. Even Phil, now "right side up with care," could not resist the contagion and joined in the merriment.

It was many minutes before a normal condition of things was re-established, but at last the boys fell to discussing the proposed change of camp. [7]

"It's a shame that we have to change," said Charlie Adams; "I don't believe we'll have such bully times in the new camp as we have had here."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom cheerily; "we'll have the dandiest fun, hunting new caves and things."

"It will at least have the charm of novelty," joined in Dick Trent—Dick was eighteen and sometimes used words and phrases so ponderous as to give him added dignity in the eyes of the other fellows. "Things will be altogether different this summer," he went on; "having the auto will make a great change."

"Well, we're going to have a great time to-day, anyway," said Bob Ward; "Mr. Hollis says we are to make a flying trip in the new machine, and I will have a chance, while the man who brings it is here, to study handling the car."

As Bob finished speaking, a distant but distinct "honk-honk" sent each boy tearing down the road, where in due time a great, red, glistening car came up the turnpike like a gleaming streak of light, and, with a graceful curve to the side of the road, stopped. The car, *their* car, the "Red Scout" had come!

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## CHAPTER II

 [8]

### THE FLYING AUTO

A group of the campers stood regarding the big red touring car rather dubiously.

"The fact is," Bob Ward was saying, as he meditatively chewed a long piece of grass, "you never can tell when the fool thing is going to go back on you. I used to drive my uncle's car a good deal, but I never could go very far without some part of the machinery breaking down. Uncle Jack said I was a Jonah and I guess I was, because he could run the pesky thing all over the country if I wasn't with him, and it would go like a bird. One day I ran it into a fence and nearly got killed, so I took the hint and haven't fooled with one since."

"But we ought to make a try at locating a site for the new camp," Frank Edgewood objected. "We volunteered, and we'll be the laughing stock of the whole camp if we don't succeed, besides breaking our word to Mr. Hollis."

"Yes, I don't see why you said you could do it, if you are going to get cold feet at the last minute," said Jim.

"I haven't got cold feet," Bob defended hotly, then virtuously, "it isn't because of my own danger that I hesitate, but I don't like to drag you fellows into it with me." [9]

"If you don't mind breaking your own neck, you needn't worry about ours," said Dave Ferris; "we'll stay here while you take a little spin across country," grinning wickedly. "Of course, if you should find a good camp location in the meantime, you could claim all the glory"—this last condescendingly.

Before Bob had time to retort, a cry of "Bert, Bert Wilson!" caught the boys' attention, and they turned in time to see a young fellow take a flying leap over one of the fences and land in the midst of a group of excited, welcoming friends.

"Make believe we're not glad to see you, Bert. We thought you wouldn't be able to get off this year."

"Tom Henderson spread that report. Where is he?"

"Wait till I get at him."

"He ought to have a ducking," and other undeserved threats were hurled at poor Tom's innocent head.

"Hold on, fellows," said Bert, laughing; "Tom wasn't to blame. I didn't know myself that I could make the camp till yesterday."

At that moment the maligned Tom dashed up, nearly upsetting his friend in an ecstasy of delight. [10]

"You're a brick with a capital B and the best kind of a sight for sore eyes," gasped Tom, getting his breath back by degrees. "I never was so glad to see anyone in my life. And you came just in the nick of time, too, to help us out."

Then, dragging his friend away unceremoniously, Tom explained the situation in which he and the other volunteers found themselves.

"You will help us out, won't you, Bert?" he asked appealingly.

By this time the rest of the volunteers had come up and were eagerly awaiting the decision. When they heard Bert's hearty "Surest thing you know," they went wild, and after giving him "three cheers and a tiger," marched him off to the mess tent, there to partake of corn bread and maple syrup. This last had such a good effect on Bert as to lead him to say that the fellow who had never known the gastronomic delight of corn bread spread thick with maple syrup didn't know what it was to live.

The dramatic arrival of Bert at the camp just when they most felt the need of him had been almost as unexpected to him as to the other campers.

Through the recommendation of Mr. Hollis, he had secured a position with a large manufacturing business in New York. There from the very start he had made good and his industry and ability were soon noted by his employer. It was not long before his salary was increased and larger opportunities afforded him, and he soon found himself treading the path that was bound to lead to success. [11]

Of course, like every other healthy boy, he felt the need of friends and recreation. The first he found in Tom Henderson, with whom he struck up a great friendship. Another crony was Frank Edgewood, who worked on the same floor as himself. When the work of the day was done they were usually found together, either in each other's rooms or at some of the places of wholesome recreation of which the city offers so great a variety.

If Bert had one trait that stood out more prominently than any of the others it was his love for mechanics. Anything in the way of a clever mechanical toy, a puzzle, or a machine attracted him immensely. He wanted to "see the wheels go 'round." Especially was this true in the case of automobiles. The huge machine moving so swiftly, so noiselessly, with such a sense of freedom and the sensation of flying, drew him like a magnet. He scarcely dared to dream that one day he might be the actual owner of a motor car, but he did hope that some day or other his hand might be on the wheel, his foot upon the brake, while he steered the flying monster as it sped like a flash across the country. [12]

His dream seemed perceptibly nearer being realized when Tom introduced him to the owner of a garage in the vicinity of his home. There he speedily became familiar with every joint and crank and lever of the great machines. He saw them taken apart and put together, he saw them brought in battered, broken, almost wrecked, and made as good as new. From theory to practice was not far. Little by little he was permitted to help in the minor repairs. After a while he was entrusted with short trips, at first in the company of an experienced chauffeur and at last on his own responsibility. It was not long before he felt capable to handle, steer, drive, and repair, and, if he had cared to do so, he would have had no difficulty in passing an examination and securing a license to drive a car.

His idea of recreation ran in the same direction. Whenever there was a motor meet anywhere within reach, especially on Saturday afternoon, which was a half holiday at the factory, Bert could be found, accompanied by either Tom or Frank, or both, watching with intense delight the exciting incidents of the race. The crowd—the start—the great machines flying by like streaks of lightning—the roar of the partisans of each car as their favorite took the lead, and above all the frantic excitement and enthusiasm at the finish as the victor flew across the line—all these things stirred his blood with inexpressible delight. [13]

On another occasion he and his chums had visited the "Greatest Show on Earth." He had laughed at the clowns and had been thrilled by the acrobats. Every pore of his body had drunk in with delight the tremendous feats of skill and daring that appeal so strongly to a boy. But the one supreme thrill, the one he never forgot, the one that repeated itself over and over again in his dreams, was when the automobile with its daring operator starting from the very top of the immense building, amid the deathlike hush of the crowd, flew like a flash down the steep incline, sprang into space, turned a complete somersault, and, lighting on the further side of the gap, rushed across the arena. This was the climax of everything. Little else appealed to Bert; he talked of nothing else on the way home. There was no use talking, the "auto fever" was in his blood.

With this passionate delight in his favorite machine, Bert's feeling can be understood when he learned that the chief feature of the boys' encampment when the summer opened was to be an automobile "hike," the car itself having been kindly loaned by Mr. Hollis. At first, owing to [14]

conditions at the factory, he had feared that he would not be able to go at the time set for the encampment, and his disappointment was crushing. A quiet little talk of Mr. Hollis's with his employer, however, had adjusted things so that he learned at the last moment he would be able to go. We have already seen how uproariously he had been received by his old companions when he came so unexpectedly into the howling mob of enthusiasts at the summer camp.

In less time after his arrival than it takes to tell, Bert was clad in khaki and had obtained the ready permission of Mr. Hollis to take the boys on their desired expedition.

The fellows scrambled into their adored "Red Scout" with more haste than grace, while Bert was busy cranking it. Then with a cry of "All right back there?" and an answering shout of "You bet your life," the great car started smoothly up the ascent.

As it quickened its speed and disappeared around a bend of the road, more than one of the boys at the camp wished he had been quicker to offer his services.

"If I'd only known that Bert would be here I'd been one of the first to volunteer, but I must say I wasn't anxious to trust my neck to Bob's safe-keeping. He doesn't know any more about running an automobile than I do," and when Jim said that he was saying a great deal.

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Meanwhile the "Red Scout's" passengers were having the time of their lives.

"Gee, it's like flying," said Frank joyfully.

"It's a heap sight better," challenged Tom. "Can't you make it go faster?" he asked of Bert.

"I guess yes," Bert shouted, as he put on more speed.

The automobile darted forward like a live thing and the boys were enraptured by the rapidity of its motion. It almost seemed to them as though the "Red Scout" were standing still and all the scenery were flying past. Hardly did the farmhouses come in sight than they were passed and lost in the distance.

Scores of timid little woodland creatures scurried away to the shelter of holes and empty logs, surprised and alarmed at the streak of red lightning that flashed by. Mother birds hovered protectingly over their fledglings, ready to defend them against the whole world if necessary, while excited squirrels scolded noisily from the treetops long after they had any excuse for it.

On, on they rushed along roads over which giant trees met, past meadow lands where cattle grazed lazily, over bridges, past sparkling brooks that formed miniature waterfalls as they rushed over the stones—on, on!

[16]

As they slowed up to take a sharp bend in the road they came face to face with another automobile dashing along at a reckless speed.

Fortunately both Bert and the driver of the other machine kept their presence of mind. Before anyone had a chance to realize what was happening, Bert had swerved the Scout way over to the right side of the road. There happened to be a fairly deep depression on that side, so Bert had the choice of two evils. He had either to crash squarely into the other automobile or he had to run the risk of having his own machine turn turtle. He chose the lesser danger and ran into the ditch. However, it wasn't as bad as it easily might have been, for only the front and rear wheels of one side of the car were in the depression. Even at that they had come within a hair's-breadth of being upset.

As soon as the boys could pull themselves together, they tumbled out of the car. The occupants of the other car were four men, who sprang out at once to see if they could be of service in any way.

"I think we'd better improvise a lever," Bert suggested.

"That may look all right in print," grumbled Bob, "but how are you going to do it?"

"I know how we can work it all right," said one of the men. "See those big stones over there? Well, the first thing to do is to bring them over here."

[17]

"Oh, I see what you mean to do," Bert chimed in eagerly. "There are lots of big tree branches lying around. Looks as if they had been blown down in some storm. We can use them for levers."

"Guess you've got the right idea, son," said the man who had first spoken. "Now let's get down to business."

It was a work of time to place the stones in the right position and to pick out branches that would stand the strain. It proved a tremendous task to lift the heavy car. At times they almost despaired of moving it. However, it was that very desperation that gave them strength at last. Inch by inch, slowly, carefully, they finally forced the great car upward, until with a sigh of relief they realized that the task was finished.

The boys dropped to the ground, exhausted by the unusual exertion. It doesn't take very long, though, for strong, healthy boys to recover from any strain, however great; so in a few minutes they were again in the car and ready to start for camp. It was too late to go further, and after thanking the men for their help they started back—slowly this time.

It was after dark when they reached the camp, and Mr. Hollis, although confident of Bert's

[18]

resourcefulness, was beginning to be slightly worried when the wanderers appeared at last upon the scene.

In a very few moments the half-famished boys were seated at a most appetizing meal, to which they did full justice.

The rest of the fellows listened with the greatest interest, while Tom related the adventure. Bert and Mr. Hollis at a little distance discussed the events of the day and planned to renew the trip on the following morning.

It was only when everything was quiet in the camp and the boys were supposed to be asleep, that Tom, rising on his elbow, called out softly:

"Hello. Are you asleep over there?"

"Just turning the corner," came a sleepy voice.

"Well, stay on this side for a minute. I was just thinking that in that wild ride we never even looked for a place to pitch camp."

"Gee, that's so," came the voice, a little less sleepy this time. "Well, of all the boneheads we're the limit. I always thought my head was hard, but now I know it's solid. Oh, well," and again the voice grew sleepy, "we'll have plenty of time to-morrow to think of that. I'm too tired now. Good night. I've just got to—turn—the—corner."

Where Tom promptly joined him.

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## CHAPTER III

[19]

### THE COPPERHEAD

**B**right and early next morning Bert awoke to find the sunbeams playing all over his tent. He noticed lazily what funny spots they made on Tom's sleeping face. Then, with a start, he remembered that Tom had grumbled the night before because they would have to get up early to catch a mess of fish for breakfast.

Thinking that he would wait a little while till Tom woke up, he rolled off his cot on to the floor so that he could command a view of the brook through the open tent flap. He had just made himself comfortable when an irritable voice hailed him from the direction of Tom's cot:

"That you, Bert? What are you doing awake at this unearthly hour?"

"Same as yourself, I suppose," came the calm reply.

"Humph! Well, you're not going to rout me out at five o'clock in the morning."

"Don't be a bear, Tom. We've got to help the fellows catch that fish and you know it, so the sooner we start the better. A couple of the fellows are down there now."

"Oh, well, I suppose we've got to, then, worse luck. They probably will guy us unmercifully, too, about yesterday. It's a wonder they didn't, last night," which was all the credit the boys got for trying to save the feelings of the reckless volunteers.

[20]

As the two comrades ran swiftly down to the water's edge, they noticed that Shorty—Philip Strong had been nicknamed Shorty because of his very small figure—was tugging hard at his line.

"Got a bite, Shorty?" they shouted, when they came within hailing distance.

"Bet your life, and it's pulling like a good fellow, too."

"Better let me help; I'm stronger than you," offered Bob, who was sitting a little distance down the bank and whose luck hadn't been of the best up to that time.

Now, a very sore point with Shorty was his lack of strength, and whenever anybody referred to it, no matter with what good intentions, he always bristled up as if at a personal insult. This morning that very touchiness proved to be his undoing, for, as he got to his feet, intending to inform Bob that he could do very well without any of his help, the fish gave a sudden jerk to the line that made Shorty lose his balance and tumble head-first into the water.

The boys, convulsed with laughter, fished him up, dripping and sheepish. Without thanking the boys for their help, Shorty zig-zagged up to the tent, making, it must be confessed, a rather sorry figure. When they finally had managed to get the line up they found that the cause of Shorty's undoing had escaped.

[21]

"Poor little Shorty, he's always getting into trouble," one of the boys said when he had breath enough.

Then, as the time was getting short, they all settled down in good earnest to their task and,



before the camp was awake at half-past six, had caught a "corking mess," as they expressed it.

As each tent poured forth its several occupants, the fishermen took their mornings catch to the mess tent and went to report—some of them with sinking hearts, it is to be feared—to Mr. Hollis.

However, the leader was very lenient with the offenders, merely reprimanding their carelessness and cautioning them not again to forget that they had pledged their word of honor to render him the most absolute obedience in every particular.

Upon the boys eagerly promising that they wouldn't offend again and upon Bert's asking to be allowed to have another chance to find the camp site, permission was given and they sauntered away, filled with the happy anticipation of laurels still to be won.

Soon after breakfast the "Red Scout" was brought out and the original volunteers, their ranks swelled by three new recruits, Shorty among them, started off up the hill amid the cheers and good wishes of the fellows. [22]

For an hour they rode steadily up hill and down dale until they saw far off through the trees the faint gleam of water. Running the auto into the woods for a short distance, they all jumped out and started to investigate.

The boys thought they had never seen the woods when they were as beautiful as on that day. They had not gone very far before Bert, who was in the lead, called back, "Come here, fellows and see this grove of chestnut trees. Isn't it great?"

The boys all hurried forward and there, sure enough, was a regular colony of chestnut trees, their huge branches giving promise of abundant harvest, when the frost came.

"Say, fellows, its a shame not to be able to get any good out of these nuts that are sure to be so plentiful in the fall. Don't you suppose we might arrange to stay until the frost comes?" Shorty asked.

"I should think we ought to be able to fix it up," said Frank. "We can ask Mr. Hollis about it anyway."

Then they started again, on the lookout for other finds. All the way along they came across numbers of clear, cold springs and never failed to test each one. More than once they had to cross brooks on stones that were not over steady and, at one time, a very loose one nearly caused Shorty another ducking. [23]

At last they reached the border of the woods and looked out upon a sight that held them spellbound. There before them was a smooth, grassy stretch of ground, dotted here and there with beautiful, spreading oak trees. Sloping gently down, it stopped at the edge of a clear, transparent lake that reflected the radiant brightness of the sun. On the other side the ground was level for a short distance and then rose forming a small hill, richly carpeted with low shrubs and gorgeously colored wild flowers. Branches of trees drooped low over the lake, as if trying to catch their own reflections in its clear depths. Birds twittered and sang in the branches, joyously mingling their bubbling notes with the music of a rippling brook near by. It seemed as if the soft voice of Nature spoke to them in the murmuring of the trees, sang to them in the song of the birds, joyously called to them in the babble of the brook, smiled a welcome to them from the bright surface of the lake.

"Gee!" said Tom, drawing a long breath. "It sure is wonderful!"

"Wonderful!" Bert exclaimed. "It's by far the most beautiful place I've ever had the luck to locate! Come on, fellows, let's take a look around." [24]

So look around they did and found that every thing about this ideal spot was all they could possibly ask for—and more. After examining everything in sight they found that they were just about starved, so they sat down under one of the trees near the lake and spread out the contents of the lunch basket. After a feast of chicken, canned salmon, cornbread, maple syrup, and sweetened lemon juice, which, when mixed with cold spring water made a very tempting drink, they started off with the empty lunch basket, the latter being, as one of the boys remarked, "a heap sight lighter than it was when we started."

"That's all right," said Frank, "but I feel a heap sight heavier."

"You shouldn't have eaten so much," Shorty reproved him.

"If I'd eaten as much as you have, Philip Strong," Frank retorted, "I wouldn't be able to walk."

"Speaking of eating," said Shorty, sniffing the air inquiringly, "do any of you fellows smell cucumbers?"

"What's the matter, Shorty? Has the little ducking you indulged in this morning addled your brains? Whoever heard of cucumbers in the woods?" said Frank contemptuously. [25]

"I know it sounds foolish but it's the truth just the same," and Shorty stood his ground stoutly.

"Shorty's right, boys: I noticed the cucumber smell quite a while ago and it seems to grow stronger the farther we go," said Bert.

"By George, that's so! I smell it myself, now." "I do, too." "So do I." and various other

exclamations of the same sort showed that Shorty was right.

The boys scattered all over trying to locate the odor, which was very strong at this time. Tom was the first to discover the cause of it. At his low, imperative, "Come here quick, fellows, but don't make a noise," they all ran to see what was the matter.

Excitedly he pointed to a long, copper-colored snake, that seemed to be watching a bird's nest built low in one of the bushes. The mother bird was hovering distractedly over her nest, uttering shrill, excited cries that brought her mate to her side. Just then the snake coiled ready to strike and the boys looked around desperately for stones but Bert had gotten ahead of them. As soon as he had seen what was happening he had slipped noiselessly away to a brook they had just passed and, snatching up a heavy stone, had hurried back to the scene of the tragedy. So, as soon as the snake had its head in a position to strike he hurled the stone directly at it. Slowly and convulsively the snake untwined and finally lay still. [26]

"It's strange I didn't think of that cucumber smell being caused by a copperhead," said Bert; "I used to kill them every once in a while when I was at my uncle's farm."

Just then, Tom called their attention to the mother bird. "Doesn't it almost seem as if she were thanking us?" And it really did seem so. The little bird had settled back on her nest with her black eyes fixed gratefully on her rescuers and making little, low, gurgling noises way down in her throat. Nearby on a low branch the father bird was swaying back and forth, pouring out his musical notes straight from a little heart bursting with gratitude and joy.

Leaving the happy family to its own devices, the boys took up the trail again. In high spirits, they chased each other over fallen logs and through the dense foliage, peered into squirrels' holes and rabbits' burrows, commented upon the appearance and habits of the sly little chipmunk and other interesting, woodland creatures.

Before they realized it they had come upon the "Red Scout" standing just as they had left it in its leafy garage. [27]

While they were on the way home they examined the snake skin. It was a beauty of its kind. It was about a yard long and the sixteen copper-red, moccasin-shaped stripes were very clearly defined.

As soon as they reached camp they gave in their report to Mr. Hollis. The boys all crowded around, eager to hear about the snake and camp site. The heroes of the day were deluged with questions. "How did you get it?" "Have you found a good place for camp?" "Where is it?" "What does it look like?" "Tell us all about it."

Finally, Mr. Hollis, seeing how tired and hungry they were, came to their rescue, proposing that they eat their supper first and save the tale of adventure until the camp council. At first they agreed rather hesitatingly but, as an appetizing smell issued forth from the mess tent, they found that they couldn't get there fast enough.

After supper the boys made a roaring fire and squatted around it, waiting for the roll-call. Then Mr. Hollis called the roll, beginning with Adams and ending with Taylor. As everybody was there, the reports were called for. Every boy reported his adventures and experiences during the day; all of which would have been intensely interesting to the boys as a rule, but they were so anxious to hear Bert's report that they passed over the others rapidly. [28]

When at last Bert's turn came, they all crowded forward with eager interest, and they were not disappointed. Bert told his story simply and well, and was not once interrupted.

When the tale was finished the boys fairly exploded. Cries of "Isn't it great?" "Everything is sure going our way this year," mingled with "How did you manage to get the stone without the snake hearing you?" "What are you going to do with the skin now that you've got it?" And to all Bert gave a satisfactory answer.

It was a long time before the boys could quiet down and even then they felt like hearing something exciting.

"Who can tell a good ghost story?" Bob asked.

"Dave's the boy. Come on, Dave, put on your thinking cap."

Dave Ferris had been elected official story teller at the beginning, because he always had a stock on hand, and they were generally thrilling tales of adventure or weird ghost stories, the kind that boys always revel in.

Dave was silent, thinking for a little while. Then he said, "All right boys, here goes. Are you ready?" [29]

To a chorus of "Sure thing, fire away, and break the speed limit," they all gathered closer together around the fire and Dave began his story.

Dave certainly could not complain of a bored or indifferent audience. Even Mr. Hollis was absorbed and listened with a smile on his kindly face. He was always intensely interested in anything the boys said or did, and was never happier than when he saw that they were especially enjoying themselves.

Dave had just reached the most thrilling part of his story, and in their imaginations the boys could hear the wailings of the ghost and the clanking of his chains. He was describing the awful appearance of its sunken fiery eyes, when Shorty happened to glance apprehensively around and immediately emitted a blood-curdling yell.

"The ghost! The ghost!" he stammered, pointing in the direction of the road. All leaped to their feet and followed the direction of Shorty's trembling finger, and for a moment even Bert Wilson felt a queer little tightening sensation about the heart, for there, apparently coming directly toward them, were the fiery eyes that Dave had just described with such gusto.

"Why, you simps," laughed Bert, "that's no ghost, or if it is, it is the most solid spook I ever heard of. Those are the acetylene lamps of another auto," and as he spoke he exchanged significant glances with Mr. Hollis. [31]

Somewhat ashamed of having been so startled, the boys now fell to guessing at the mission of the strange car. They had not long to wait. In a few minutes they could hear the purring of its exhaust, and soon a great gray automobile dashed into camp and drew up in front of the fire.

From it descended a genial looking man, apparently of about the same age as Mr. Hollis, followed by five clean cut young fellows.

Mr. Hollis and Mr. Thompson, as the new comer's name proved to be, evidently knew each other and shook hands heartily. Meanwhile the camp boys mingled with their unexpected guests and with the freemasonry of youth soon became chummy.

The only fault perhaps that could be found with the new arrivals was that they seemed to be a trifle overbearing, and evidently thought that their car, which they called the "Gray Ghost," could beat any other automobile ever made.

It is needless to state that Bert's crowd felt the same way regarding the "Red Scout," so that the boys were soon engaged in a heated argument concerning the respective merits of their cars. [32]

"Why," maintained Tom, hotly, "you fellows have no idea what our 'Red Scout' can do in the way of speed and hill climbing. Just to-day we were out on a run and, though I didn't actually time it, I am dead sure there were stretches where we did as well as a mile a minute. What do you think of that?" he asked triumphantly.

Indeed, this seemed to cool the visitors down somewhat and they exchanged surprised glances. But they soon recovered their confidence and went on to describe the speed qualities of their car with ever-increasing enthusiasm.

"It was just a short time ago," said one whose name turned out to be Ralph Quinby, "that we took the 'Gray Ghost' around the old race track just outside the town, and we averaged over fifty miles an hour. We could have gone much faster too, only Mr. Thompson would not let us. I'll just bet your auto couldn't go as fast as that."

It was now the turn of their hosts to look doubtful. They were sure, however, that the "Red Scout" could hold its own with any other car, and as they thought of their idolized driver, Bert Wilson, their confidence came back with a rush.

"Well," replied Tom, drawing a long breath, "you fellows evidently think you could win in a race and we just *know* that we could, so I guess the only way to settle the dispute is to run off a race somewhere and prove which is the better machine. I know we'd be willing if you would, wouldn't we, boys?" [33]

There was a chorus of approving shouts from his companions, but the visitors only smiled in a superior fashion, and evidently thought there could be but one conclusion to any race in which their car was entered.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hollis and Mr. Thompson were holding an earnest conversation in which the latter seemed to be urging some point about which Mr. Hollis apparently hesitated. In fact, Mr. Thompson was trying to get Mr. Hollis to give his consent to a race between the cars owned by the two camps. But the latter thought that it would involve too much risk for the boys who drove the machines.

"You see, it's this way," he was saying, "you and I, Thompson, are responsible for the safety of these boys. We both feel toward them as though they belonged to us and if anything happened to them we would never forgive ourselves. It seems to me too big a risk to take merely for the sake of seeing who owns the faster car."

"Yes, you're dead right there, of course," returned Mr. Thompson, "but then I don't think the risk is so great as you imagine. I have seen the track they would use, provided the race was run, and I think there would be little, if any, danger. The track has not been used for several years and most of the fence is missing, so that if they ran off the course itself, it would only be a matter of [34]

running over the grass until they stopped. You know me well enough to realize that I would not sanction anything that contained too large an element of peril. As for the slight risk that undoubtedly exists, it seems to me that it would not hurt the boys to take it, and it would teach them self-reliance and confidence."

"As far as that goes," said Mr. Hollis, smiling reluctantly, "my boys have too much confidence in themselves and I have to be constantly curbing their tendencies toward taking chances. However, I have every confidence in your judgment, so I suppose I might as well consent this once. I wish to have it understood, however, that this is the last as well as the first race they ever run, win or lose."

"That suits me all right, so I guess we can consider it settled," answered Mr. Thompson, "what do you say to going over and having a look at the machines? You haven't seen our car yet, have you?"

"No, that's a pleasure still in store for me," replied Mr. Hollis; and the two men rose and strolled over to where the cars stood, their brass work glittering in the light of the dancing campfire. [35]

By this time most of the boys had gathered around the cars, but they saluted and made way respectfully for their leaders as they came up. They both smiled when they saw Bert and Ralph Quinby, for they were so engrossed in the discussion of the respective merits and appliances of their cars that they did not even notice the coming of their leaders.

Such terms as "gear ratios," "revolutions per minute" and "three point suspension" filled the air, and Mr. Hollis whispered to Mr. Thompson: "I'll wager that those boys saturate their handkerchiefs with gasoline, so that whenever they get a block away from a machine they can smell gasoline and feel at home again."

"Wouldn't be surprised if they did," laughed Mr. Thompson.

"Here, you fellows come out of your trance," called Dick, and Bert and Ralph turned quickly around and saluted.

Their leaders returned the salute, and Mr. Thompson said: "Well, I suppose both you boys think you have a pretty fast machine there. How would you like to have a test of speed?"

There was a chorus of excited cries and exclamations from the boys, and their leaders smiled indulgently. [36]

Bert stepped forward and said: "I think, sir, that I speak for Mr. Quinby as well as myself when I say that nothing would suit us better." Ralph gave a nod of assent and Bert went on: "We will both promise to be cautious, and I think if we take proper precautions we will be able to run off a good race without an accident. How long do you think the race ought to be?"

"How long is the track that you propose using?" inquired Mr. Hollis.

"Why, it's just one mile, isn't it Ralph?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"Yes, sir," replied Ralph.

"Well, it seems to me," said Mr. Thompson, "that ten miles, that is ten full laps around the track, ought to be about right. Will that be satisfactory to you, Mr. Hollis?"

"Yes, I can see no objection to that," replied the latter, "what day shall we have the race?"

"How would a week from today suit you?"

"Let me see, that will be Tuesday, won't it? I guess that will be satisfactory to all concerned. How do you boys feel about it?"

They voiced a unanimous assent to these arrangements, and both sides started discussing the various chances and possibilities of the contest, but with perfect good humor and friendly feeling. [37]

It was now getting late, however, and the discipline of the camps could not be too much relaxed, even in the face of such an important event as this. Accordingly, hearty farewells were exchanged, and the visitors climbed into their big gray car.

All the boys gathered around expectantly to note the behavior of the car when it started, and it must be admitted that even Bert Wilson's expert eye could find no defect in the handling or running of the rival machine. Ralph started it smoothly and without a jerk, and soon all they could see of it was the angry gleam of its red tail-light.

As they turned away to prepare for sleep, Jim remarked: "Aw, I bet we'll have a walkover in that race."

Bert knew better, however, and was convinced that he would have to use every ounce of power that the "Red Scout" possessed to beat the "Gray Ghost." But one thing he was sure of, and that was that whoever won it was going to be a mighty close race. He did not make the mistake of underrating his rival, as so many boys in his position would have done, but made up his mind to do the very best he could, right from the start.

For a long time he stood staring at the "Red Scout," and then raised its shining hood and [38]

patted the spotless cylinders.

"I guess we can do it, old boy, but you will have to stand by me and work as you have never worked before," he said, and gently lowered the hood and walked off toward his tent.

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## CHAPTER V

[39]

### THE HOBOES AND THE BEES

Early in the morning the boys began to break camp and start for the new location. Groups of three or four were detailed by Mr. Hollis to accomplish certain tasks and they started to carry out his directions right merrily. Some were sent to store the provisions and cooking utensils; others to take down the tents and gather together their blankets and other bedding; still others got together the fishing tackle and all was done to the accompaniment of songs and jests and laughter, so that before they knew it everything was ready to dump into the old farm wagons they had hired for the purpose. When everything was packed in the wagon that would possibly go in, Mr. Hollis selected Tom to ride beside the driver and show him where to go.

After the wagon had started off, some of the boys' own personal belongings that were left over were put in the "Red Scout" and seven of the fellows scrambled in somehow—trust boys to find room if there is any to be found—and started away after the wagon. They soon passed it and went on until they came to the turn in the road where the lake could be dimly seen through the trees. There Bert stopped and the boys got out, taking the packages with them. Shorty had been detailed to lead them to the lake and then to come back and wait for the farm wagon.

[40]

Then Bert went back to pick up Mr. Hollis and Dick Trent who had stayed behind to see that nothing had been forgotten.

On the way back he passed the wagon and hailed Tom with a "How are you getting along, old man?"

"Pretty badly, I thank you. I wish Mr. Hollis had picked out somebody else for this job—someone who didn't care if he spent hours getting nowhere," Tom replied sourly.

"Cheer up, the worst is yet to come," laughed Bert. "Never mind, even the worst trials have to end some time," he added consolingly and started off again while Tom looked enviously after the red car, now fast disappearing in the distance.

When Bert reached the old camp site, now looking very bare and forlorn, he found Mr. Hollis and the boys waiting impatiently for him. Mr. Hollis and Dick got in, followed by six of the boys. Bert promised to come back for the rest right away and the "Red Scout" started off with its second load. In a little while, for Bert had found a second and much shorter road to the lake, they came once more to "Campers' Crossing" as the boys had named it. There they found that the wagon had just arrived with its load, but the boys had delayed unloading it until Mr. Hollis should reach the scene of action. In a minute the Camp Master had taken charge and the boys were busy unloading and carrying everything to the camp.

[41]

Once more Bert started back with the reliable "Red Scout" for his last load. When he got to the old camp the boys greeted him with the news that Jim Dawson had disappeared and couldn't be found anywhere.

"He was here just a few minutes ago," said Steve Thomas. "But when I went to ask him a question just now he was gone. We have hunted high and low but we can't find a trace of him."

Bert was troubled at first, but suddenly a thought struck him and his face lighted up as he exclaimed: "I think I can explain the mystery. Follow me, fellows."

He led them through a dense thicket to the side of a hill, covered with underbrush. Pulling a bush aside, he disclosed to the boys' astonished gaze, a great, black hole which was evidently the mouth of a cave.

"Come on out, Jim," Bert called. "We don't want to keep Mr. Hollis waiting *too* long, you know."

[42]

Jim Dawson was one of those hungry boys who never can get enough to eat, so, having discovered the cave one day, while chasing a butterfly, he had secretly brought food there in a tin box, so that if he chanced to get hungry, he always had something to eat at hand.

Bert had discovered the cave and its secret long ago but he was not given to tale-bearing and so had kept his own counsel.

As Bert spoke, a sound was heard inside the cave, and, in a minute, out came the culprit with an accusing piece of cornbread in his hand, blinking like an owl brought suddenly into the glare of the sun.

At the look of complete surprise and dismay on his face the boys burst into a shout of laughter.

"Oh, you lemon," gasped Steve. "You full-sized lemon! How did you ever manage to get away with it?"

"No wonder we have been short of grub, lately," Dave said, holding his sides as if he were afraid he would burst.

"Aw, I don't see why you can't leave a fellow alone," said Jim, sulkily. "I only brought grub here that belonged to me."

"Don't be sore, Jim," Bert said, good-naturedly. "I wouldn't have disturbed you if we hadn't been in a hurry. That reminds me that we've wasted a good deal of valuable time, already. I guess we had better be getting along."

[43]

At that they all started back on the run and soon had Jim in such a good humor that he even told them how he had escaped being found out by a narrow margin many a time, and that nobody but Bert had even suspected the cave's existence.

They all piled into the "Red Scout" in a hurry because they feared that Mr. Hollis would worry on account of their prolonged absence.

They arrived at "Campers' Crossing" just in time to carry the last barrel of provisions. When they reached the new camp the boys were surprised to see how much had been done in their absence. The tents had been set up and from the mess tent came the clattering of utensils and the savory odor of creamed salmon on toast.

Soon, the call to dinner was heard, and the boys all gathered around the table, chattering like magpies.

"It seems as if we'd always camped here," said Shorty. "There's something about the place that makes you feel at home right away."

"It's the classiest place I've ever been in," Dave Ferris declared, enthusiastically. "It makes you imagine that Nature might have had a little time on her hands and devoted it to making this one spot a little paradise."

[44]

"Hear! Hear!" Tom cried, clapping his hands in mock praise. "Dave will be a poet if he doesn't look out. Give us some more, old man, the sample's good."

"You'd better be careful how you

"Beard the lion in his den  
The Ferris in his hall,"

said Dick Trent, warningly. "He won't favor us with any more stories if you are not careful how you offend him."

"I'd just as soon he'd spout all the poetry he wants to if it relieves him any, as long as he doesn't forget how to tell stories," Shorty remarked as he contentedly munched a piece of toast.

"How very kind of you," said Dave, sarcastically. "I thank you with all my heart for your liberality."

"My which? Say, Dave, if that ever belonged to me, I call you all to witness that I disown it from this time on. It's no friend of mine from this time on."

"You'd better hang on to it, Shorty. It's the best kind of thing to have around at times," said Mr. Hollis, as he rose to leave the table.

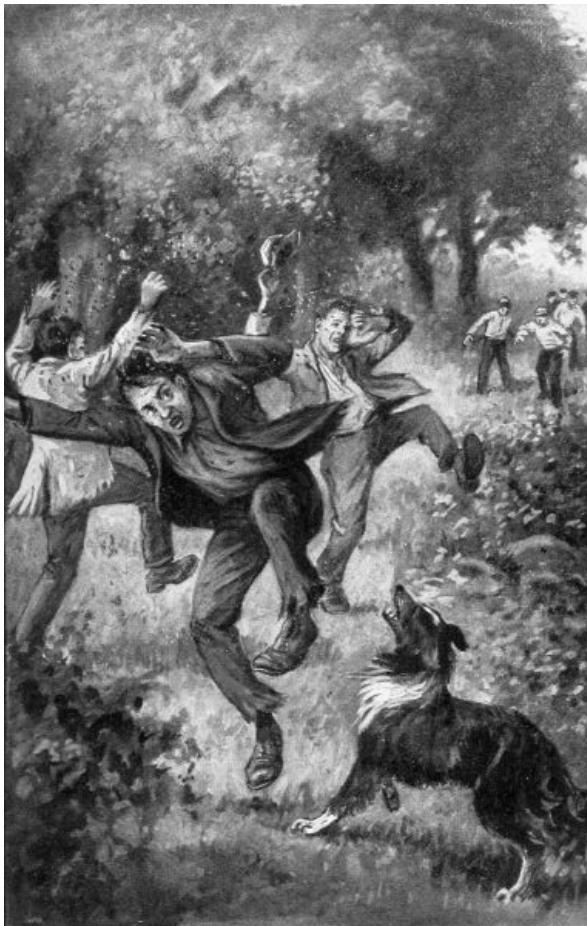
[45]

In the afternoon scouting parties were sent out in all directions to find out the nature of the surrounding country. Steve Thomas, Bert, Tom, Bob, Shorty, and Jim Dawson were sent off to scour the woods in an easterly direction from the lake.

For a considerable distance they tramped along, talking of the different plants and shrubs they came across and naming the birds they saw in the trees. They threw peanuts to the squirrels that peeped inquiringly at them from branches over their heads or ventured shyly from the shelter of their holes. They imitated the clear notes of the birds until the little songsters paused to look wonderingly at these strange creatures that could not fly and yet sang like themselves. Timid little rabbits watched the boys with soft, brown eyes, not knowing whether or not to sally forth from their security even for the tempting carrot that Bert held out so coaxingly. When he threw it at a distance, however, one little fellow, braver than the others, his appetite overcoming his fears, ran forth quickly, snatched the carrot and scurried back in a panic to his burrow, where, with his bright eyes fixed on these humans who had been so kind to him, he ate contentedly.

Suddenly the quiet woods rang with shouts and cries, the barking of a dog and the noise of people running to and fro furiously. Alarmed, the boys started on a run for the place from which the cries seemed to come. They fairly gasped when they came upon the cause of all the commotion. [Three men, of the roughest order, were dancing distractedly around](#), trying to beat off a swarm of bees that surrounded them, and yelling like mad, while a big collie dog, wild with excitement, barked with all his might.

[46]



**Three men of the roughest order were dancing distractedly around.**

“Say, this is better than a circus,” Shorty shouted, “only I’m glad that those hoboies and not I are the whole show now.”

“Shut up, Shorty. The question now, is, what we can do to help the poor fellows out,” said Tom; then, turning to the tramps, he yelled, “You’d better make a dive for the brook and get under water. It’s right through the trees to your left,” he added, as the men, now nearly crazy with pain, started to follow his advice.

Rushing frantically to the brook, they plunged in head first, while the bees, deprived of their prey, flew off angrily into the woods to search for new victims upon whom they might vent their spite. When the tramps came up, dripping from the water, they were a sight to behold. Their faces were swollen so that their eyes seemed to be mere slits and their ears appeared to be twice their natural size.

[47]

The boys at once ran to get mud to put on the red, angry wounds. The tramps submitted with indifferent grace to the treatment, grumbling that they “didn’t see what good being all smeared up with mud was going to do.”

As soon as the boys had done what they could to ease the pain, the tramps declared that they would have to be moving on “because them pesky critters might come back to finish up their business.”

So the boys watched the strange company of sullen, muttering men disappear through the trees. As they were lost to view, the comical side of the adventure struck Shorty and he began to laugh and the longer he laughed, the harder he laughed. The others caught the infection and in a second the woods were ringing with the unrestrained roars of the boys. They laughed until they could laugh no more and then lay on the grass, gasping for breath.

“Oh, they did look *so* funny!” said Shorty between gasps. “I never shall forget that sight until my dying day.”

At that minute Bert sat up suddenly, exclaiming, “Fellows, look who’s here!”

With one accord they turned and saw the collie which they had entirely forgotten, sitting near and regarding them with inquiring, wistful eyes.

[48]

“Come here, Beauty,” Bert called, and the dog came unhesitatingly and stuck his cold, black muzzle in Bert’s hand.

“Did they desert you, old fellow?” Bert asked, putting his arm around the dog’s neck.

The collie waved his beautiful brush and, lifting his soft eyes to Bert’s face saw something there that made him his slave forevermore. For the collie, with true dog instinct, had recognized that in Bert he had a friend.

"I wonder where those tramps got him." "Probably swiped him." "Doesn't look as if he'd had very good treatment." "He doesn't and it's a shame, too. Isn't he a beauty?" were some of the comments of the boys as they gathered around the dog, patting his head gently. The collie waved his tail and in his eyes was a great longing for sympathy and love. And you may be sure the boys gave him what he asked for.

Tired out, the boys finally went back to camp, followed by their new friend who soon became a favorite with everyone. That night Don, as they called the dog, sat with the rest around the camp fire and answered whenever they spoke to him with a wave of his silver brush. Bert made him a bed on the floor of his tent and Don gladly took possession of it. Just before he got into bed Bert put his hand on the dog's head, saying, "I guess we're going to be good friends aren't we, old fellow?"

And Don, looking up in his master's face, with eyes that held a world of gratitude and love, answered to Bert's entire satisfaction.

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## CHAPTER VI

### SHORTY GOES TO THE ANT

The next morning, when the boys drew aside the flaps of their tents, the sky was dark and lowering. A good many anxious glances were thrown at the clouds and open disapproval of the outlook was not slow in breaking out.

"Gee, what a fearful day," said Jim.

"You bet it is," chimed in Shorty.

"That's our luck," wailed Dave, "just when I wanted to go to town to get a new blade for the jack-knife I broke yesterday."

"Oh, come off, you pessimists," sang out Bert, who had just plunged his head in a bucket of cold water and now was rubbing his face until it shone, "somewhere the sun is shining."

"Heap of good that does us," grumbled Shorty, "but say," as he turned to Bert suspiciously, "what sort of thing was that you called us?"

"I said you were pessimists."

"Well, what does that jawbreaker mean?"

"Why," said Bert, who could not resist his propensity to tease, "that means that you are not optimists."

"Worse and worse and more of it," complained Shorty.

"That's just as clear as mud," echoed Jim.

"Well," said Bert, tantalizingly, "listen my children——"

"Listen, my children and you shall hear  
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,"

chanted Frank, who had recited that identical poem in his elocution class at the last term of school.

A well-aimed pillow made him duck, and Bert resumed:

"You see, Shorty, it's just like this: The optimist is the fellow that sees the doughnut. The pessimist sees only the hole in the doughnut. Now, for my part, there is no nourishment in the hole, but there's lots of it in the doughnut."

"Aw say, don't make a fellow's mouth water," said Shorty, before whose practical vision rose up his mother's kitchen, fragrant with the smell of the crisp, brown, sizzling beauties, as they were lifted from the pan, "and me so far from home."

If there were no doughnuts at the breakfast to which all hands came running, their place was more than taken by the golden corn bread and the savory bacon that formed the meal to which they sat down with all the enthusiasm of hungry boys. The food disappeared as if by magic and the table had been replenished more than once before the boys cried enough. Many a sated millionaire would have willingly exchanged a substantial part of his hoarded wealth for one of those unjaded appetites. But in pure, undiluted satisfaction, the boys would have been the losers by the exchange.

That very thought struck Mr. Hollis as he watched the havoc made at table by these valiant young trenchermen, and, turning to Dick, who sat at his right, he spoke of the starving King Midas. Jim, who overheard the name, which, as he said "was a new one on him," wanted to know who Midas was, and how, if he were a king, he couldn't get grub enough to keep him from



starving. The boys, who had by this time taken the first keen edge off their appetite, were equally eager to hear the story, and Mr. Hollis went on to tell about the avaricious king of the olden time who could never get enough, but was always asking the gods for more. After a while they became wearied and disgusted and granted his request that everything he touched should turn to gold. The king was delighted at this beyond all measure. Now, at last, he was to have his heart's desire. He put the gift to the test at once. He touched his sword and it changed to gold. That was fine. He stroked his beard and every hair became a glistening yellow spike. That wasn't so fine. He began to get a little worried. Wasn't this too much of a good thing? Well, anyway there was no use in fretting. He would go to dinner and get his mind off. But when he touched the food, it too became gold. He lifted a goblet of wine, only to find that it held molten metal. In the midst of plenty, he was starving. Upon his knees, he begged the gods to take back their fatal gift, and, thinking he had learned his lesson well, they did so. His gold vanished, but, oh, how delicious was the first taste of food. "And to-day," concluded Mr. Hollis, "there is many a millionaire whose gold doesn't give him the pleasure that a square meal gives the ravenous appetite of a healthy boy."

[53]

"Well," said Tom, expressing the general sentiment, "I'd sure like the money, but, oh, you corn bread."

After breakfast, the boys broke up into separate groups. One went off under the guidance of Mr. Hollis to gather some fossils that were to be found in great abundance in the limestone that jutted out from a quarry at a little distance from the camp. Another group of the fellows with Dick in charge, who were especially interested in bird and insect life—the "bug squad" as they were commonly and irreverently referred to in camp—went to a little clearing about half a mile away that was especially rich in specimens. The day before, Tom had secured an uncommonly beautiful species of butterfly that topped anything in his experience so far, and the other boys wanted to add one to their rapidly growing collection. Whether the lowering day had anything to do or not with the absence of these fluttering beauties who love the sunshine, their search was without result, and after two hours spent in this way they threw aside their butterfly nets and sat down in the shade of a spreading beech to rest and as Shorty called it "to have a gabfest."

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Almost directly beneath the eastern branches was a large mound nearly three feet above the surrounding level and perhaps twenty feet in circumference. As Shorty flung himself down on the centre of the mound, a curious expression came into the eyes of Dick. He glanced quickly at Frank, who returned his look and added a wink that might have aroused suspicion in Shorty's mind, had not that guileless youth been lying stretched out at full length with his hat over his eyes. The warmth and general mugginess of the air saturated almost to the raining point, together with the constant activity of the last two hours, had tired him out, and after a little badinage growing less and less spirited, he began to doze. The other boys who had been given the tip by Frank and Dick, let the conversation drag on purpose, and with a wicked glint of mischief in their eyes watched the unsuspecting Shorty slip away into the land of sleep. Soon his arms relaxed, his chest rose and fell with his regular breathing and horrors! an undeniable snore told that Shorty was not "faking," but was off for good.

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From being a spot of perfect peace and quiet, the mound suddenly burst into life. From numberless gates a swarm of ants issued forth and rushed about here and there to find out the cause of this invasion. The weight of Shorty's body and his movements as he composed himself for sleep had aroused them to a sense of danger and they poured out in thousands. Soon the ground was covered with little patches of black and red ants, and as though by common consent they began to surround the unconscious Shorty. Some crept up his legs, others his arms, while others climbed over his collar and slipped inside.

First, an arm twitched violently. Then a sleepy hand stole down and scratched his leg. The boys were bursting with laughter, and Tim grew black in the face as he crowded his handkerchief into his mouth. Shorty shook his head as a horse does when a fly lights on it. Again he twitched and this time seemed to realize that there was something wrong. Still half asleep, he snapped:

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"Aw, why don't you fellows quit your kidding? Stop tickling me with that——"

A yell ended the sentence as a nip more vicious than usual brought Shorty to his feet, this time wide awake beyond all question. He cast one glance at the boys, who now made no pretence of restraint but roared with laughter. Then he saw the swarm of ants surrounding him and took in the situation. He tore his hat from his head, his coat from his shoulders, shook off his tormentors and spinning around like a dancing dervish, dashed off toward the brook. A moment later there was a splash and they heard Shorty blowing, spluttering, diving, rubbing, until finally he had rid himself of the swarms that clung closer to him than a brother.

At last he succeeded and came up the bank. Before resuming his clothes, he had to take each garment separately and search every seam and crease to make sure that not a single ant remained. Then he came back into the group like a raging lion. His temper never was any of the best, and the sudden awakening from sleep, the stings and ticklings of the invaders, and perhaps most of all, the unrestrained laughter of the boys had filled his cup to the brim. He "saw red," as the saying is, and regardless of age and size was rushing toward the rest with doubled up fists and rage in his heart, when Dick caught him by the wrists and held him in his strong grasp until his fury had spent itself somewhat and he began to get control of himself.

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"Phil," said Dick—he never called him Shorty, and at this moment that recollection helped to sober the struggling boy—"remember that the first duty of boy or man is to control his temper. The boys didn't mean any harm. It looked to them like a splendid joke, and perhaps we let it go a

little too far. I am really to blame more than any one else because I am older and in charge of the squad. I'm awfully sorry, Phil, and I beg your pardon."

The kindly tone and sincere apology were not lost on Phil, who was not without a sense of humor, which through all his anger began to struggle to the surface. The other boys, too, thoughtless and impulsive though they might be, were sound and kind at heart, and following Dick's example crowded about Phil and joined in the apology. The most flaming anger must melt before such expressions of regard and goodwill and Phil was at last compelled to smile sheepishly and say that it was all right.

"You're a sport, Phil, all right," called out Frank, and at this highest of commendations from a boy's point of view, the last vestige of Phil's resentment faded away. [58]

"Well, anyway, fellows," he said, "I don't bear any grudge against you, but I am sure going to get even with those pesky ants. I never did care much for ants anyway. I've been told so often to 'go to the ant, thou sluggard,' that now I'm going to them for fair, and what I do to them will be a plenty."

As he said this, he turned toward the ant hill as though to demolish it, but Dick put up a friendly hand:

"No, Phil," said he, "you wouldn't destroy a wonderful and beautiful palace, would you?"

"Palace," said Phil in amazement, thinking for a moment that Dick was "stringing" him. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say," returned Dick; "a wonderful and beautiful palace. There is a queen there and she walks about every day in state, surrounded by a throng of courtiers. There are princesses there that are taken out daily to get the air, accompanied by a governess, exactly as you have seen a group of boarding-school girls walking out with their teachers. Surrounding the palace is a city where there are hundreds of carpenters and farmers and sentinels and soldiers. If you waited round a while, you would see the farmers going out to milk their cows——" [59]

At that point, Dick was interrupted by a roar of laughter that burst from every boy at once. They had listened in growing amazement that had rapidly become stupefaction, but this was really too much. What was the matter with Dick? Was it a joke, a parable, a fairy story? They might be kids all right, but there was a limit to everything, and when Dick talked of ants going out to milk the cows—well! It was up to him to explain himself or prove his statement, and that they felt sure he could never do.

Dick waited good-naturedly while they pelted him with objections and plied him with questions. Then he took from his kit a strong magnifying glass and told them that he was going to prove to them all what he had said.

"He laughs best who laughs last," he said, "and I am going to show you that all I said is true. That is," he modified, "I cannot *prove* everything just now, as I would have to destroy this wonderful palace if I were to try to show you how marvelous it is and how perfect in all its appointments. But what we don't see ourselves has been seen time and time again by hundreds of wise and truthful men, and their testimony is as strong as though it were given under oath in a court of law."

"Well," said Frank, "I'm willing to take everything else on faith, but I'm afraid I'd have to see the milking done myself in order to believe it." [60]

"All right," said Dick, "as it happens that is just the thing I can show you more easily than anything else."

The boys crowded eagerly around him.

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## CHAPTER VII

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### THE ANTS GO MILKING

"**Y**ou know," said Dick, as the boys threw themselves down at the side of the mound and looked at it with an entirely new interest, "if these were African ants, you wouldn't be taking any such liberties with them. Instead of hanging around this mound you would be running away like all possessed. And if you didn't make tracks in a hurry the only thing left here would be your skeleton picked as clean as the one you saw the other day in old Dr. Sanford's office."

"What?" cried Jim, "do you mean to say that I would run away from a little thing like an ant. Not on your life, I wouldn't."

"Let's see," said Dick, "you'd run away from a boa-constrictor, wouldn't you?"

"Who wouldn't," retorted Jim.

"Well, if you'd run away from the boa-constrictor, and he'd run away from the ants, where do *you* get any license to face the ants."

"Do you mean to say that those monster snakes are afraid of such tiny things?"

"I should say they were," replied Dick, "the ants go from place to place through the great African forest in countless numbers, millions at a time, a regular army of them. Nothing can stand before them. They strip every shrub, eat every blade of grass. They swarm over every living thing they find in their way. Sometimes they come across a snake unawares, and climb all over him. He squirms and twists and rushes away, trying to brush them off, against the bushes. At last he turns and bites frantically, but they never let up. They actually eat him alive, and in less than ten minutes they pass on leaving his bones picked clean as a whistle. The natives take their wives and children and flee for their lives whenever they see an army of ants approaching."

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"But that, of course, has nothing to do with these little American neighbors of ours. They are perfectly harmless and though they are fierce scrappers among themselves, inflict no injury on any one else. And there is nothing in the whole animal or insect world, except perhaps the bees, that have a society and government so much like that of men."

"In one respect they are like their African brothers and that is in their fondness for travel. Every once in a while they make up their minds to emigrate and then they fly in swarms of millions——"

"What?" interrupted Frank, "do you mean to say they fly? I never knew that an ant had wings."

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"Of course they have," said Dick, "they often have to cross rivers to get to their new home. How could they do that without wings?"

"Oh, I don't know," hummed Shorty:

"The bed bug has no wings at all  
But he gets there just the same."

A rather severe glance from Dick quenched Phil's exuberant spirits which had all come back to him since his ducking.

"Now," continued Dick, "these swarms are sometimes so vast that they darken the sun in certain localities. Men working on high buildings have been surrounded and almost blinded by them. While these emigrations last they are a bother, if not a peril, and the only ones that are really happy are the fish in the brooks and rivers over which they pass. Sometimes the surface is fairly black with them and the trout and little troutlings have the time of their lives. Once the flight is ended, however, and the new locality chosen, the wings disappear. Nature has no use for needless things and from that time on the air knows them no more. The carpenter ants get busy right away. The place is marked off as accurately as a surveyor marks out a plot in the suburbs of a city. The queen ant is given a royal room apart from all the others. She is a good mother and takes the best of care of her little ones. As they grow older, they in turn help the queen to care for their little brothers and sisters. They are excessively neat and clean in their personal habits. They spend hours preening and combing and cleaning until they are immaculate——"

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"Regular dudes," muttered Jim.

"Well," said Tom, "that's something that will never be laid up against you, Jim."

Jim, who indeed had a hard time keeping up to a high ideal of cleanliness, and whose hair was usually tumbled while his nails too often were draped in mourning, looked a little confused, and while he was thinking up something to hurl back at Tom, Dick went on.

"There is one thing, however, about the ants that I don't admire. They like to get somebody else to do their work. A certain number of their own colony are 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' for the rest. Indeed, the aristocrats among them get so lazy after a while that they will not even feed themselves. The workers not only have to hustle for the grub, but actually have to feed it to the lords and dukes. And talking of hustling for grub, just look here."

The boys followed the direction of Dick's finger, and there coming up a little beaten path they saw a procession of ants dragging along a big fat caterpillar. It had evidently put up a good fight, judging from the numbers that had been necessary to capture it, but they had proved too strong. A little convulsive movement showed that it was not yet quite dead, but it no longer made any resistance. The formic acid that the ants secrete had partly paralyzed it and made defence impossible. There was an almost comical disproportion between its large helpless bulk and the tiny size of its conquerors, but this was a case where numbers counted. The victors all pulled like good fellows and passing through one of the entrances of the mound finally dragged their booty into the inner cave.

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"Another thing," said Dick, when the keenly interested boys had again gathered about him, "the red ants are slaveholders. When their working force has been weakened or diminished, they get a big army together and raid some colony of black ants a few hundred feet or yards distant in order to carry them away as slaves. There is nothing haphazard or slouchy about the way they go about it. Everything is arranged as carefully and precisely as in the case of an American or European power getting ready to go to war. At a given signal the troops come out and get in order of battle. There is perfect order and system everywhere. When there is a very large army, a sort of hum or buzz arises from it almost as though they were beating drums to inspire the soldiers for battle. They march forward in perfect time and dash upon the enemy with irresistible fury. The black ants through their scouts have been told of the enemy's approach and have made

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all the preparation they can to beat them off. The infant ants, together with their household goods, have been tucked away in upper galleries where they can see the fight but not be in it."

"Reserved seats as it were," murmured Frank.

"The ants have two weapons. One is the nipper, that can cut off their enemy's head as neatly as a pair of shears. Then they have the formic acid that, used against ants or other insects, has a poisonous quality. With both of these weapons they fight with the greatest desperation until victory declares for one side or the other. The red ants are usually victorious, as they are larger and stronger and more aggressive. In case they win, they carry away all the little ones of their black opponents and bring them up as slaves. They are treated kindly, and after a while seem to grow content and take their place as the humbler members of the community. After the battle is over the wounded ants are carried home by their companions and the dead are buried in a regular ants' cemetery."

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The boys had listened with a fascinated interest to these marvelous stories of life going on all around them and to which they had never given more than a passing thought.

"Well," said Jim, "it sure is the queerest thing I ever heard about. If anyone else but Dick had told me this I wouldn't have believed it."

"Yes," said Tom, "it certainly sounds like a fairy story."

"What gets me," said Shorty, "is that the queen seems to be the most important of the whole bunch. What about the king? It must be a regular suffragette colony."

"Yes," replied Dick, "in a certain sense it is. The males of the community don't amount to much. One by one their privileges are taken away from them. They even lose their wings before the females do. After they have taken their flight and safely escorted the queen to her future home they drop out of sight. Their wings fall off and in some cases are pulled off by the more ill-tempered females of the family. They hang around a little while and then drop out of sight altogether. Nobody seems to care what becomes of them. They can't even get back to the place from which they started. Their wings are gone and they can't walk. They remind me of the cat—they are so different—the cat came back—the male ants can't."

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"Gee," said Jim, "how do the rest get on without them?"

"Oh," replied Dick, "they don't seem to mind the males at all. It takes away some of the conceit of the male sex when they see how easily one can get along without them."

"Well," said Shorty, who was never partial to work, "they at least get rid of a lot of trouble. How about the carpenter ants, the soldier ants, the foraging ants? Are they all females?"

"Every one of them," said Dick. "It is a regular colony of Amazons."

"It seems to me," said Shorty, "that in all the bunch the queen is the only one who has a snap."

"Don't you believe it," returned Dick, "as a matter of fact, she is the hardest worker of all, that is, at the start. She is the busiest kind of a mother, brings up all the little ants, washing their faces, combing their hair—"

"Oh, say," interrupted Shorty, "aren't you putting it a little bit too strong, Dick?"

"Not at all," said Dick; "here, take up this ant and look at it through the magnifying glass."

Under the lens the boys, crowding around, saw that there, sure enough, was a fine silky down resembling very much the hair upon the human head.

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"Of course," said Dick, "as in every other part of the animal or insect world, this only lasts for a little while. Men and women are the only creatures in the whole universe that stick by their children through thick and thin. There is no better mother than a cat, for instance, while the kittens are small and they need her help, but just as soon as they are able to shift for themselves, nothing more doing for Mrs. Cat. Out they go to hustle for their own living, and if some of the slower and lazier ones still hang around, the mother's claws soon give them a sharp reminder that it is time to be up and doing. The same is true of the birds. See how the mother bird sits brooding over her eggs. With what tender care she watches them while they are still unable to feed themselves. How the father bird scratches from morning to night to find worms to put down those scrawny little beaks. But after a while they, too, go to the edge of the nest, and with many a timid flutter stretch their wings and drop off the edge. And with the laggards, the parental beak is ready to push them off into the new world where they hustle for themselves. It is only a fellow's father and mother that stand by him to the end. No matter how bad he is, how often he wrenches their hearts, how many times he has sinned and been forgiven and sinned again, the mother heart clings to him to the end. I tell you what, boys, you can't make too much of that father and mother of yours."

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"You bet," came in a responsive murmur from the boys.

"Now, going back to the queen," said Dick, "it sure does seem that after the kids have grown up she'd have a dandy time. She is by far the biggest figure in the colony. The worker ants can't do too much for her. She has the finest room and the choicest food, and yet, after all, I suppose this becomes tiresome. It is just as it is with human queens. So many things are done for them, so much pomp and ceremony surrounds them, that no doubt they often sigh for freedom and would

exchange their places with almost any of their subjects. They are something like a little girl that was a rich man's daughter. Her milk was pasteurized, the water she drank was sterilized, so that after a while her only thought was to grow big enough to do as she chose and the very first thing she was going to do was to eat a germ."

The boys laughed and Dick resumed.

"It is almost pathetic to see the poor old queen going out for a walk. She moves in a perfect circle of courtiers. As long as she keeps in the middle she is all right, but the minute she strays to one side or attempts to go further, this surrounding group push her back. Sometimes they thrust their shoulders against her and at other times simply mass themselves in front of her, and even, at times, are undignified enough, if these hints are not sufficient, to take her by one of her antennae and lead her back into the center of the circle, for all the world like a mother taking home a naughty child by the ear. No, you can bet it is not all 'peaches and cream' where the queen is concerned."

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"Well," said Shorty, only partly convinced, "even if the queen has troubles of her own, it must be nice to be the aristocrat. Think of having nothing to do but just hang around and let the carpenter ants build your house and the farmer ants store up the grain and the foraging ants bring in the caterpillars and the soldier ants do the fighting."

"No," said Dick, "you are wrong again, Shorty. They do so little and become so dependent upon the work of others that after a while they seem to lose their faculties. They wander around in a crazy and feeble way, trying to kill time, I suppose, and after a while become so lazy and helpless that they can't even eat without help."

"Can't eat!" said Jim, whose appetite was a standing joke in camp; "then no lords and dukes for me."

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"I really think," resumed Dick, "that just as it is in human life, the workers are the lucky ones after all. There is something doing every minute. Their lives are full of interest. They are too busy to be unhappy. Don't make any mistake, fellows, work is the salvation of the world. The happiest are the busiest; the drones and sluggards are almost, without exception, the most miserable creatures on the face of the earth. If I were—"

But just at this moment a curious thing happened. The afternoon had worn on while the boys were talking, and so keen was their interest in the wonders that were being brought before their eyes that they had failed to realize how late it was. The ants had been wandering around in an aimless way—that is, it seemed aimless to the boys, but doubtless they knew what they were about and had a definite object, even though the boys couldn't understand it. But now a sudden stir and bustle seemed to arouse the colony. From numerous gates the throng came forth with almost military order and precision.

"Ah," said Dick, "here's just the thing you want to see, boys. It is milking time and the ants are going to herd their cows. Now we will follow one of these lines and see just how they do it."

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At a few feet distant from the mound there was a little shrub about three feet high, covered with foliage and with widely extended branches. The column of ants reached the foot of this, climbed it, and scattered among the branches.

The boys at a signal from Dick followed him softly, so that the ants might not be disturbed.

"See," said Dick, gently taking hold of a branch that projected beyond the others, "look through this magnifying glass."

One by one the boys stole up, each eager for a sight that they had never before seen or dreamed of. On the upper side of the branch which Dick held between his thumb and finger were little groups of parasites, almost too small to be seen by the naked eye. All day long they had been feeding upon the sap that came from a branch until their bodies were swollen with a transparent honey dew. An ant approached one of them, placed its antennae over the throat and extracted a tiny drop of the colorless liquid. Again and again this was repeated. It seemed like rank robbery, but there was no resistance on the part of the herd. They seemed just as glad that milking time had come as do the cows that stand lowing at the bars of the fence and calling for the farmer. Drop after drop of the honey dew was extracted, until finally the aphid, as the little creature is called, grew lank and thin, while the ant became correspondingly large. From time to time the antennae of the ant stroked the tiny hair on the back, just as a farmer would stroke the cow in order to soothe it and keep it perfectly still.

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Finally the milking was completed and the farmer ants retraced their way along the branch and down the stem and, falling into line with their comrades similarly laden, resumed their march to the colony. The boys had watched with bated breath and almost awe-struck interest.

"Well," said Jim, at last breaking the silence, "those ants are surely not going hungry to bed."

"Gee," said Shorty, "I bet they will suffer from indigestion."

"Not a bit of it," said Dick. "You don't suppose they keep this all to themselves, do you? Just look here."

He lifted a stone about eighteen inches from the foot of the mound. Under the magnifying glass they could see a number of tiny apertures that evidently led in the direction of the colony, and on

one side an ant waiting for the return of the milking party. As Dick selected one and placed his magnifying glass directly upon the opening, the boys could see one of the ants laden with the honey dew stop and, placing its mouth close to that of the waiting ant, exude a tiny drop of its burden. Moving the glass around quickly in the arc of a circle, they saw this process repeated until finally the round was finished and the farmer ants, more lightly laden than before, went on toward the main entrance of the colony.

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"Those," said Dick, "are the lords and dukes getting their supper."

"Well," said Tom, "after this I am ready to believe anything. I tell you what, Dick, I never learned so much in my life as I have to-day."

"Yes," said Shorty, as the boys picked up their kits and prepared to return to camp, "I am glad enough now that I didn't smash that ant nest when I tried to. After all, they are good sports and I would hate to spoil their fun."

"Yes," replied Dick, "you know that one of the most important principles in life is kindness to anything that breathes. Of course there are certain pests that are harmful to human life and we are compelled to kill in self-defense, but for anything that is harmless the one great principle that should govern us always is found in those two lines that Mr. Hollis repeated the other day:

"Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow to the meanest thing that feels."

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## CHAPTER VIII

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### THE GIPSY CARAVAN

"Hello, fellows. Look at this. Well, of all the——"

The boys looked up at Bob's startled exclamation, and for a moment everything else was forgotten, while they stared with wide-open eyes at the grotesque procession that came into view.

Down the road crawled a little caravan of ten or a dozen ramshackle wagons, drawn by tired-looking horses. At their heads or alongside walked a number of men of various ages, dressed in all sorts of nondescript costumes. Their swarthy faces and dark eyes, together with the large earrings that they wore, gave them a distinctly piratical appearance, and to the boys they looked as though they might have been taken bodily from one of the old romances of the Spanish Main. They might easily have been the blood brothers of the rascals who sang in thundering chorus:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,  
Sing heigho, and a bottle of rum."

But, alas! there were no murderous pistols thrust in their belts or cutlasses held between their teeth to complete the illusion, and the picturesque crowd resolved itself into a troop of gipsies going into camp.

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The place they had pitched upon for their temporary stay was about three miles distant from the boys' camp and had been chosen with a keen eye to its advantages. Either through a scout sent ahead or simply by that marvelous sixth sense so highly developed in wandering peoples, they had elected to stop at a little ravine through which ran a brook of sparkling water and surrounded by a wood that furnished ample supplies for their campfires. It was fascinating to see the dexterity, born of long experience, with which the camp was pitched. The horses were unhitched in a twinkling and turned out to graze, while the wagons were ranged in a single circle around the camp. Some brown, dirty canvas and a few branches of trees were quickly transformed into tents. Wood was cut, a rough fireplace built, a huge kettle suspended over the flames that crackled merrily beneath, and the women and girls who had descended from the wagons busied themselves in bringing water from the brook and preparing supper for the tired and hungry crew. The men, after the rougher work was done, sprawled around upon the grass, talking in a language unintelligible to the boys, and occasionally casting an indifferent look at the group in the automobile, who had watched the scene with breathless interest.

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"Well," said Bert at last, as he roused himself with an effort, "they haven't asked us to stay to supper, and I suppose it isn't good manners to hang around while they are eating, even if this is a public place. So here goes," and throwing in the clutch he started the "Red Scout" off toward camp.

The liveliest interest, not unmixed with envy, was shown by the other boys at the recital by the auto squad of the afternoon's adventure.

"Gee," said Jim Dawson, "you fellows certainly do have all the luck. If I'd been with you there'd have been nothing more exciting than a rabbit scurrying across the road. To-day I stayed behind and here you fellows have watched the pitching of a gipsy camp."

"Never mind, Jim," said Tom, "we'll all go over soon and take it in. I suppose they'll be there for

some time."

"There's no telling," remarked Dick. "Sometimes they stay in one place for two or three weeks, until the call of the road becomes so strong that they can't resist it. Then again, after a day or two, they

"Fold their tents like the Arabs  
And silently steal away."

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"'Steal' is a very good word to use in that connection, Dick," said Mr. Hollis, as he joined the group, when after an abundant supper they sat around the campfire; "for if what we hear of gipsies in general is true, they spend most of their time in stealing."

"Perhaps, though," he went on, "that is putting it a little too harshly. There is a strong prejudice against them because of their vagrant mode of life, and there is no doubt that the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine' is very vague in their minds. Hen-roosts are apt to be mysteriously thinned out when they are in the neighborhood, and many a porker has uttered his last squeal when gripped by a gipsy hand. Horses, too, occasionally vanish in a way that would mean a short shrift and a rope in the Western country, if the thief were caught. But, on the other hand, they seldom commit deeds of violence. You never hear of their blowing open a safe, and, though they are passionate and hot tempered, they are not often charged with murder. The Bowery thug and yeggman are much more dangerous enemies to society than the average gipsy. Perhaps the worst indictment to be brought against them is that in years past they were frequently guilty of kidnapping. But that was in the earlier days, when the country was sparsely settled and communication was difficult. Then, if they got a good start, it was often impossible to overtake them. But to-day, with the country thickly populated and the telegraph and telephone everywhere, they would most certainly be caught. No doubt the elders of the tribe shake their heads sadly as they reflect that the kidnapping industry is no longer what it has been."

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"How do they make a living, anyway?" interjected Dave. "What they steal isn't enough to keep them alive."

"Well," returned Mr. Hollis, "the men are very keen traders in horses. They know a horse from mane to hoof. They can take a poor old wreck of a cart horse and doctor him up until he looks and acts like a thoroughbred. Very few men can get ahead of them in a trade, as many a farmer has found to his cost. The women are often very expert in embroidery and find a ready sale for their really beautiful work. Then, too, as fortune tellers they are proverbial the world over. Cross a gipsy's palm with gold or silver and she'll predict for you a future that kings and queens might envy. It is safe to say that during their stay here they will reap quite a harvest—enough at least to suffice for the simple needs of to-day. As for to-morrow, they don't care. That can take care of itself. They are as irresponsible as crickets or butterflies. They 'never trouble trouble till trouble troubles them.'"

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"Well," said Dave, "they get rid of a whole lot of needless worry, anyway. They don't suffer as much as the old lady did who said that she had had an awful lot of trouble in her life and most of it had never happened."

The boys laughed, and Tom asked:

"Where do they get their name from? Why do they call them gipsies?"

"Because," answered Mr. Hollis, "they were supposed to be descended from the old Egyptians. They resemble them in features, and many words in their language are derived from Egypt. Many scholars think, however, that their original home was India. Europe has been familiar with them for the last four hundred years. They have always been Ishmaelites—their hand against every man and every man's hand against them—and by some they have been believed to be the actual descendants of Ishmael, the outcast son of Abraham. Everywhere they have been despised and persecuted. In the old days they were accused of being sorcerers and witches. They have been banished, burned at the stake, broken on the wheel, hung, drawn and quartered. It is one of the miracles of history that they have not been wiped out altogether. But they have always clung closely together and persisted in their strange, wandering way of life. They have a language of their own and certain rude laws that all the tribes acknowledge. The restless instinct is in their blood and probably will be there forever. They are a living protest against civilization as we understand it. Occasionally, one of them will join the ranks of ordinary men, but, far more frequently, they gain recruits from those who want to throw off the shackles and conventions of the settled life. More than one man and woman have listened to the 'call of the wild' and followed the gipsies, as the children in the fable followed the Pied Piper of Hamelin. But now, boys," he said, rising, "it's time for 'taps.' To-morrow evening we'll all go over and take a closer look at these gipsies of yours."

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All through the following day the boys, though attentive to what they were doing, were keenly alive to the promised treat that night. There was an early supper, to which, despite the undercurrent of excitement, they did full justice, and then in the gathering dusk the boys set out for the grove. Since not all could go in the automobile, it was decided that all should go on foot, and with jest and laughter they covered the three miles almost before they knew it.

Quite different from that of the day before was the sight that burst upon them as they rounded a curve in the road and came upon the picturesque vagrants. Here and there were torches of pitch pine that threw a smoky splendor over the scene and hid all the squalor and sordid poverty

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that had been so evident in the broad light of day. By this time it was fully dark, but a full moon cast its beauty over the trees and flecked the ground with bright patches that added to the torches made the whole grove like a fairyland. The news of the gipsies' coming had reached the surrounding towns, and there was quite a gathering of pretty girls and country swains, whose buggies stood under the trees at the roadside, while youths and maidens wandered among the wagons of the caravan. At the open door of one of the vans a young gipsy drew from a violin the weird, heart-tugging strains that have made their music famous throughout the world. Others sat around their fire and talked together in a low tone, casting furtive glances at the visitors, whose coming they seemed neither to welcome nor resent. With their instinctive appreciation of the fine points in any animal, the eyes of some of them brightened as Don threaded his way through the different groups, but, apart from that, they gave no sign that they were conscious of the newcomers.

With the gipsy women, however, it was different. This was their hour and they improved it to the utmost. Withered crones and handsome girls with curious turbans wound about their heads went from group to group, offering to tell their fortunes, provided their palms were crossed. There was no difficulty about this, as most of the girls had come there with that one desire and the gallant youths who escorted them urged them to gratify it regardless of expense. If the recording angel put down that night all the lies that were told, all the promises of wealth and title and position that sent many a giddy head awl to its pillow, he was kept exceedingly busy. Just for a lark, the boys themselves were willing patrons of these priestesses of the future; but little of what was promised them remained in their memory, except that Tom was to meet a "dark lady" who was to have a great and happy influence upon his life. The boys chaffed him a good deal about this mystical brunette, but he maintained with mock gravity that "one never knows" and that perhaps the swarthy soothsayer "knew what she was talking about after all."

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In view of the unusual circumstances, Mr. Hollis had not insisted upon the ordinary rules, and it was nearly midnight when the boys, having trudged back to camp, prepared to retire.

"What time is it, anyway, Dick?" yawned Bert, as they started to undress.

"I'll see," said Dick, as he reached for his watch; "it's just——"

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He stopped aghast as the chain came out of his pocket with a jerk. His watch was gone.

At this instant a shout came from Bob Ward's tent: "Say, fellows, have any of you seen my scarfpin? I can't find it anywhere. I'm sure I had it on when I started."

Bert looked at Dick and Dick stared back at Bert. The same thought came into their minds at once.

"Stung," groaned Dick, as he sank down heavily on his bed.

At once the camp was in commotion. Everyone made a hasty inventory of his belongings and the relief was general when it was found that nothing else was missing. Their hearts were hot with indignation, however, at the loss of their comrades. Dick's gold watch had been a graduation present and Bob's scarfpin had held a handsome stone, so that the money loss was considerable. But deeper yet was the sense of chagrin voiced by Jim Dawson:

"Well," said he, disgustedly, "if this isn't the limit. Here we are, city fellows who think we are up to snuff. We are surrounded by pickpockets every day and nothing happens. Then we come out in the country and are roasted brown by a band of wandering gipsies."

By this time Mr. Hollis, aroused by the unusual stir, had hastily dressed and joined the excited group. The facts were quickly detailed to him, and, as he listened, his face set in hard lines that boded ill for the thieves. He first directed that a thorough search be made in order to be perfectly sure that the missing articles were not somewhere about the camp. When careful examination failed to reveal them, doubt became certainty. If only one thing had been lost it might have been set down to carelessness or accident, but that two should disappear at the same time pointed to but one explanation—theft. And it was a foregone conclusion that the thieves were to be found in the gipsy camp.

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The more hot-headed were for starting out at once to regain the watch and pin at any cost. But this was vetoed by Mr. Hollis, who recognized the futility of attempting anything at so late an hour. He promised that early in the morning they should all go together, and with that promise they were forced to be content.

There was very little sleep for the boys that night, and at the first streak of dawn the whole camp was astir. Breakfast was swallowed hastily, and Bert whistled for Don as the boys made ready to start.

"Here, Don, old fellow, good dog," he called when the whistle failed to bring him; but no Don appeared. Then a thought suddenly struck Bert. When had he last seen the collie? In the excitement last night he and the other boys had given no thought to the dog. He recalled with a sudden sick feeling that he had last seen him in the light of the gipsy torches. His heart smote him for his forgetfulness. Was it possible that the gipsies had stolen Don also? Why not? He never would have stayed away of his own accord. The collie was a splendid animal of the purest breed and would easily bring a large price if offered for sale anywhere. A fierce rage flamed in Bert—a rage shared by all the others when he hastily told them of the suspicion that every moment was becoming a conviction—and it was lucky for the abductor of Don that he did not at that moment

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meet Bert Wilson face to face.

With Dick, Tom and Bob, he leaped into the "Red Scout," and taking up Mr. Hollis as they came to the door of his tent, they swung into the broad high road, leaving the others to follow as fast as they could.

"Now, purr, old Scout," said Bert as he threw in the clutch; and the "Red Scout" purred. It leaped forward like a living thing, as though it pulsed with the indignation and determination of its riders. They fairly ate up the three miles in as many minutes, turned the curve of the road just this side of the gipsy camp and—

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The camp was gone!

Gone as though it had dropped into the earth. Gone as though it had melted into the air. Utterly and completely gone. The ashes of last night's fires, some litter scattered here and there, alone remained to mark the spot that a few hours before had been so full of life and animation.

They leaped from the car and scattered everywhere looking for signs to indicate the direction the caravan had taken. They had certainly not come south by the boys' camp. It was equally certain that they had not gone directly north, as this led straight to a large town that they would instinctively avoid. This narrowed the search to east and west roads, from which, however, many byroads diverged, so that it left them utterly at sea.

"The telephone," cried Bert; "let's try that first."

They bundled into the car and a few minutes brought them to the nearest town. Picking out half a dozen addresses along different roads, they called them up. Had they seen a band of gipsies going by? The answer "No" came with exasperating monotony, until suddenly Bert leaped to his feet.

"Here we are, boys," he cried. "Bartlett on the Ashby road, eight miles from here, saw them go by two hours ago. Now let's get busy."

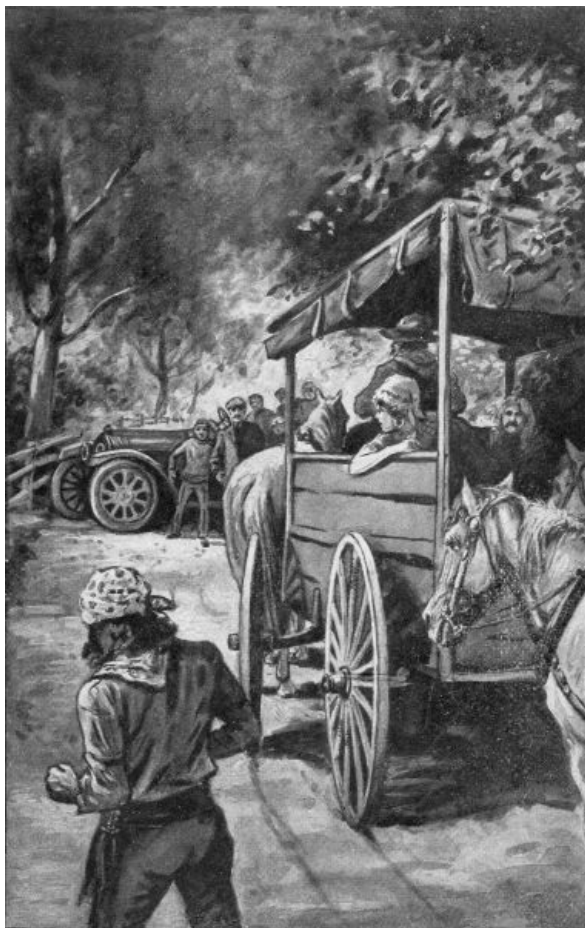
They flew down the Ashby road and in a few minutes came to the Bartlett farm. Yes, they had passed there and they certainly were traveling some. A couple of miles further on the road forked. There was a negro cabin at that place and they might get some information there. He hoped so, anyway. Good luck, and with a word of thanks, the boys rushed on.

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A stout negress washing clothes under the tree at the fork of the road wiped the suds from her hands with her apron as she came forward.

"Dey sholy did go pass hyar, gemmun, and dey wuz drivin' as do de ole Nick was affer dem. Dat's a pow'ful po' road up dataway and der hosses wuz plum tired. Dey kain't be ve'y far ahaid, I specs."

Exultingly Bert threw in the high speed. Their quarry had been run down at last. The motor fairly sang as they plunged up the road. Turning a curve to the right they came upon the procession of carts, now toiling along painfully. Bert never hesitated a second, but rushed past the line of wagons until he had reached the head of the caravan. [Then he swung the "Red Scout" squarely across the road](#) and with Mr. Hollis, Dick, Tom and Bob, sprang to the ground.



**Then he swung the "Red Scout" squarely across the road.—(See page 89)**

Consternation plainly reigned in the halted carts. The men crowded forward and hastily consulted. A moment later an old man, evidently the chief, came forward. He was prepared to try diplomacy first, and with an ingratiating smile held out his hand to Mr. Hollis. The latter, ignoring the extended hand, came straight to the point. [90]

"I want three things," he said, "and unless you are looking for trouble, you'll hand them over at once. I want the pin and watch and dog your people stole from us last night."

The leader's smile faded, to be replaced by an ominous scowl.

"It's a lie," he said sullenly, "my people stole nothing. Get out of our road," he snarled viciously, while his followers gathered threateningly around him.

The air was surcharged with danger and a fight seemed imminent, when suddenly a familiar bark came from one of the vans. Bert dashed forward, thrusting aside a young gipsy who sprang to intercept him. He threw open the van door, and out rushed Don, mad with delight. He had chewed in half the rope that held him and the frayed remnant hung about his neck as he leaped on Bert and capered frantically about him.

The game was up! Fear and chagrin were painted on the gipsies' faces. They might have bluffed through as regards the stolen articles and it would have been almost impossible to prove their guilt. But here was the living proof of theft—proof strong enough to land their party behind the bars. Moreover, the great dog was no mean addition to the little force that faced them so undauntedly. It was plainly up to them to temporize. As Bob with regrettable slanginess, but crisp brevity, summed up the case: "They had thought to make a quick touch and getaway, but fell down doing it." [91]

The chief held up his hand. "Wait," he said, "while I talk to my people. Perhaps they have found something. I will see."

A whispered conversation followed and then he came forward sheepishly, holding out the watch and pin. "They found them on the grounds. I did not know," he mumbled.

Mr. Hollis took them without a word and motioned Bert to get the auto ready. He had gained his point and did not care to press his advantage further. After all, they were almost like irresponsible children, and, despite his resentment, he felt a deep pity for these half-wild sons of poverty and misfortune. Their code was not his code, nor their laws his laws. They were the "under dogs" in the fight of life. Let them go.

The motor began to hum. The party piled in, with Don between them, barking joyfully, and they swept down the shabby line of carts with not a glance behind them. They waved gaily to the old black mammy, who beamed upon them as they went by. A thought struck Bert, and turning to Tom, he shouted: [92]

"The dark lady, Tom. The dark lady that the gipsy prophesied would bring you luck."

"Sure thing," grinned Tom. "It certainly is luck enough to get old Don back, to say nothing of the watch and pin. Isn't it, old fellow?" and he patted the dog's head lovingly.

So thought the rest of the boys, also, when the "Red Scout" reached camp. Don was overwhelmed with caresses and strutted about as though he had done it all. As Jim put it: "Napoleon on his return from Elba had nothing on Don." It was late when the excitement subsided and the campers went weary but happy to bed.

Mr. Hollis, Bert and Dick lingered about the fire. Only these older ones had realized how ticklish a situation they had faced that day. They didn't like to think what might have happened if it had come to an open fight.

"The way you faced that crowd was the pluckiest thing I ever saw, Mr. Hollis," said Bert; "but suppose it had come to a showdown?"

"Well," laughed Mr. Hollis, "it was a case of touch and go for a minute. But I counted on the fact that we were right and they were wrong. 'Conscience makes cowards of us all.' Behind us were law and order and civilization. Behind them crowded nameless shapes of fear and dread that robbed their arms of strength and turned their hearts to water. It was simply a confirmation," he concluded, as he rose to say good night, "of the eternal truth:

"Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."

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## CHAPTER IX

### HOW THE "RED SCOUT" CLIMBED DOBB'S HILL

The morning of the long anticipated day in the "Red Scout" dawned bright and clear, and the campers who were to go were astir soon after dawn. Most of them would willingly have dispensed with breakfast, but Mr. Hollis insisted that they take their time and eat a hearty meal. However, everything comes to him who waits, and at last they were ready to start. It had been arranged that on their trip they were to stop in town, and get supplies and some camp appliances that Mr. Hollis required. Otherwise they were to do as they pleased, subject only to Bert's authority.

The car was ready to start, and Bert had received Mr. Hollis' last instructions.

"Well, fellows," said Bert, "pile in, and we'll start for town right away. It rather looks now as though we might have a little rain before the day is over. I don't like the looks of the sky over there any too much, but we've got to have grub anyway, even if we have to go after it in boats."

"Yes, or we might swim, I suppose," suggested Shorty, sarcastically.

"In that case, we'd let you try it, as its only a matter of twenty miles or so each way, and see if you are as strong as your name," retorted Bert, and Shorty subsided.

Meanwhile the others had taken their appointed places in the auto, and, after adjusting spark and throttle levers, Bert walked to the front of the machine and cranked the motor.

On the first turn, such was the beautiful condition in which he kept the car, the engine started with a roar, and he quickly climbed into the driver's seat and threw in the clutch. Without a tremor the big car glided away as if moving on air, which indeed it was, in a way, if the air in the tires could be counted.

With the ease of a driver who thoroughly understands his car, Bert steered the machine around and between the bumps in the road, and even one who had never ridden in an automobile before would have appreciated his masterly handling of this machine.

Suddenly Tom, who, as usual, was riding in the seat beside Bert, leaned over and said, "Say, Bert, do you suppose she would take Dobb's hill?"

Now, the hill to which Tom referred was one notorious in the neighborhood. More than one gray-haired farmer had shaken his head dubiously while inspecting the "Red Scout," and said, "Yes, that there contraption may be all right on the level, and there's no getting over the fact that it can run circles around a streak of greased lightning, but I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that it could never get up Dobb's hill."

So Bert thought a moment before answering Tom's question, and then said, "Well, that's an awfully steep hill, but the old 'Scout' has never balked at anything yet, and I have a sneaking feeling that it wouldn't even stop at Dobb's hill. However, there is only one way of finding out about it, and that is to try it. What do you say, fellows, shall we try it and show these people around here just what our machine can do?"

There was a unanimous chorus of assent from the other occupants of the car, so at the next crossing Bert turned off the main road in the direction of the famous Dobb's hill. Soon the hill

itself loomed up in front of them, and Bert opened the throttle a trifle. The machine immediately picked up speed, but to the occupants of the machine it seemed almost impossible that anything but an elevator could get up that hill. It looked to them almost like a high wall. Bert, however, was thinking more of the machine than of the hill. He had been gradually giving the engine more gas, and now, when they were almost at the foot of the hill, he realized that the moment had come to call forth the supreme effort of the motor. He opened the muffler so as to get rid of all back pressure, and opened the throttle to its widest extent. With a bound and a roar the powerful machine took the hill, and to the boys in the car it seemed as though they had some powerful, willing animal working for them. Up the great machine climbed, with scarcely diminished speed, the engine emitting unbroken and exhilarating music, or at least that is what it sounded like to the tense boys in the auto. At last with a final roar of the motor, and rumble of the straining gears, the machine topped the hill and started on its long downward coast. Bert threw out the clutch, and giving the engine a well-earned rest after its strenuous work, allowed the "Red Scout" to glide rapidly and smoothly down the hill.

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Every boy in the car seemed half-crazy with delight over the performance of their mechanical pet. Some even went so far as to pat the sides of the car, and Bob expressed the general feeling when he said, "Well, I'd rather be a camper and be able to say I held part ownership in a car like this, than to be King of England."

The boys also realized that a lot of credit was due Bert for the success of their climb, as even such a car as the "Red Scout" could never have gotten up that hill without expert handling.

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Down the long hill glided the "Red Scout" with constantly increasing momentum, and long before they reached the bottom Bert had to apply the powerful brakes with which the machine was equipped, and check its speed.

Gradually he slowed it down to a safer, but less exciting speed, and at the bottom eased in the clutch and the willing motor took up the load.

In the meantime the sky had taken on a more threatening appearance, and while the happy-go-lucky boys in the tonneau gave it little thought, Bert, to whom the care of the car and its occupants were intrusted, cast more than one dubious and anxious glance in the direction in which the storm might be expected to break. He hoped that they might at least make the necessary trip to town and back before the rain could catch them, however, and so held a steady pace, and they were soon rolling down the main street.

Bert got out his list of the things they would need, and detailed the boys to different stores so that they could get started again as soon as possible.

Bert's last remark to them was, "Now, fellows, step just as lively as you know how, and whatever else you do, don't come back drunk." This raised a general laugh, as, it is needless to say, the boys had had no such intentions.

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Bert and Tom remained with the car, and while Bert said less than the other boys about his love for the machine, it was easy to see that he had a real affection for it, and took pleasure in cleaning and adjusting it.

"Say, Tom," he called after a few minutes, "bring me grandfather, will you?" Now, "grandfather" was not what that word usually means, but an immense monkey-wrench, with jaws on it like a vise. It was called grandfather for no particular reason that anybody knew of, but someone had called it that once, and the name had stuck. The boys sometimes used it to exercise and perform feats of strength with, so heavy was it. So now, when Tom got it out of the tool box on the running board and handled it with loving care, Bert took it from him, and for several minutes was busy adjusting and tightening bolts and nuts around the motor and transmission case. Finally he handed the wrench back to Tom with a sigh of relief.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "There's a good job well done. I'll bet we could take that hill now even a little better than we did, if that's possible."

"I don't know about that," replied Tom, "this old Scout went up that hill better than I thought it could, and I guess you ought to have as much credit as the machine. After this I will back you and the 'Red Scout' against all comers."

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From this it may be seen that there was more than a little hero worship mingled with Tom's love for Bert, and no wonder. Bert was the sort of fellow that everyone had to admire and like.

By this time the boys had begun to return with their bundles and boxes, and soon everything was safely stored in the tonneau, and the boys had time to wonder how they were going to get themselves in too, as the supplies seemed to take up about all the room.

Finally it was arranged that Jim and Dave should stay in the tonneau to see that nothing was shaken overboard, while Bob and Frank ranged themselves on the running board.

In this fashion they started, but it soon became evident to everybody that they would never be able to get back to camp before the storm broke, even with the help of the "Red Scout."

Thunder could be heard coming nearer and nearer, and soon they felt the first warm drops of rain. Bert wished then that they had a top to their car, but unfortunately the leather covering ordered by Mr. Hollis had not yet arrived at the camp.

"What do you think we'd better do, Bert; make a run for camp or hunt shelter around here?" asked Tom.

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"Why, this road is pretty rough, and we can't make much speed," replied Bert. "I guess we'd better hunt cover right away," as a vivid streak of lightning split the sky, followed by a crash of thunder.

"We noticed an old barn over toward the right when we were on a botany expedition the other day," said Frank, "and I think that if you swing into that dirt road we're coming to, it will lead us right to it."

"Well, here goes," said Bert, and swung the "Red Scout" into the old road. Sure enough, before they had gone a quarter of a mile they sighted the old barn, and were soon snugly established in it. To be sure, the roof leaked in places, but it was fairly tight, and what did a bunch of hardy campers, in the pink of condition, care for a few drops of rain?

There was some hay left in the barn, and they lounged comfortably around on this, talking and listening to the rain, which by this time had increased to a downpour, and beat fiercely on the roof and sides of the old barn.

The boys started a discussion about the hill-climbing feat of the "Red Scout," and while all agreed that it had been a splendid performance, Bob seemed to be inclined to sneer at Bert's handling of the car. He firmly believed that he knew more about automobiles than Bert, and was sometimes a little jealous of the praise given him by the other boys.

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"Oh, I don't know," he finally remarked, when Tom remarked that some people seemed able to coax more out of a car than others, "I don't see that that makes much difference. I'll bet that if I had been running the 'Red Scout' this morning it would have gone up that hill just the same. Why, when I used to run my uncle's car——" but here he was interrupted by cries of derision, and Tom remarked:

"I suppose that if Bob had been running the 'Red Scout' he would have run it up the hill backwards so that it would think it was going downhill, and so got to the top without any trouble."

This sally caused a general laugh at Bob's expense and he subsided, but was heard to mutter about "getting the right mixture," and "easing her down to second speed," which nobody but Bert understood, but which seemed to make him feel much better.

In justice to Bob, it must be said, however, that he did know quite a little about automobiles, but usually lacked nerve when it came to putting his knowledge into practice.

By this time the boys were all hungry, and as there seemed to be a small chance of the rain letting up for a while, Bert proposed that they have lunch. There was plenty of food in the automobile, and Bert started the boys to fishing out crackers and jam.

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Suddenly a thought struck him. "Say, fellows," he called, "how about making some cornbread and having a real bang-up meal? We've got bacon and all the fixings here, and we all know how to cook, thanks to our experience as campers. I'll make the corn bread, and Tom here will fry the bacon."

There was such a joyous and noisy consent to this plan that Bert could not help laughing. "All right," he cried, "some of you fellows dive into the car and bring out the new frying pan and the Dutch oven we bought to-day. We'll build a fire on that slab of stone over there, and have something to eat in next to no time."

This was no sooner said than done, and as the odor of frying bacon and hot "corn pone" filled the old barn, the boys thanked their lucky stars for the thousandth time that they had come on this camping trip.

In a short time everything was ready, and they seated themselves near the fire. Tom dished out the sizzling bacon and steaming "corn pone."

Under the cheering influence of this feast even Bob Ward forgot his grudge of the morning, and when he shouted, "What's the matter with Wilson?" the resulting "He's all right!" almost lifted the roof off the old barn.

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Soon they had finished and cleared away the meal, and when they opened the barn door were surprised and delighted to find that the sun had struggled through the clouds and was now shining brightly. Quickly they packed the tonneau, and were soon ready to start.

"All right, fellows, get to your places," sang out Bert, and soon they were chugging out of the old barn that had offered them such timely shelter.

Once outside and fairly on the disused road, however, it soon became apparent that only with great difficulty could they make any progress at all. The rain had converted the road into a quagmire, and although Bert brought the "Red Scout" from third speed to second, and finally to first, he saw that they must soon stop altogether, and indeed this soon proved to be the case.

The faithful motor apparently had plenty of power, but the car sank into the mud up to its axles, and the rear wheels simply turned around without propelling it. Bert finally threw out the clutch and the "Red Scout" stopped as though he had applied the brakes, so great was the opposition

formed by the mud.

"Well, this is a pretty fix, to be sure," exclaimed Bert. "We're going to have the time of our lives getting this machine out. What you need for this road is not so much an automobile as a boat. However, it wouldn't speak well for us if we couldn't get our car out of this scrape after all it has done for us, so let's get busy."

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"That's all very well," said Jim, "but the question is, how are you going to do it? This isn't exactly a flying machine, although it can go pretty fast, and it seems to me that we will need something like that to get us out of here."

"Say, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jim Dawson," exclaimed Tom, indignantly, "here you call yourself one of the crowd, and yet you are willing to give up before you have fairly begun to try. That isn't the right spirit."

"Oh, it's easy enough to talk," answered Jim, sulkily, "but I'd just like to know how you are going to do it, that's all."

"Well, I can't say I have a plan right now, but I'm sure that our old 'Red Scout' isn't going to leave us in the lurch now after all it has done so far," and here he patted the vibrating car lovingly.

Meanwhile Bert had been thinking deeply, and had finally hit on a plan. "Here, some of you fellows, run back and bring me all the hay you can carry from that barn, will you? We want to get out of here as soon as we can, because Mr. Hollis will be anxious about us. Lively's the word."

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Tom, Bob, and Frank ran back to the barn and soon reappeared, carrying armfuls of hay. When they reached the car Bert took charge of it, and placed it carefully under the rear wheels, and made a path in front of each wheel for about six feet.

"If we can only get over to the side of the road and up on that grass there," he explained, "we will be on firmer ground and can get better traction. I only wish we had tire chains."

"What are tire chains, Bert, and what are they for?" inquired Frank.

"Why, you see how it is," replied Bert, "we have plenty of power, but the wheels can't get a grip on the ground, and just skid around. If we had a network of chains over the tires they would bite through the mud to solid ground and get the grip we need. Understand?"

"Sure thing, and much obliged for the explanation," said Frank, heartily.

By this time Bert had arranged things to his satisfaction, and now climbed into the driver's seat, while the boys looked on expectantly.

Bert threw out the clutch, advanced the spark slightly, and opened the throttle a few notches. Immediately the motor increased its revolutions, and when it had reached a good speed Bert gently eased in the clutch. There was a grinding sound of clutch and gears as the power was transmitted to the rear wheels, and the "Red Scout" lunged forward.

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The front wheels were so firmly embedded by this time, however, that even the "Red Scout" was helpless. Again and again Bert raced his engine and let in the clutch, and each time the machine made a gallant attempt to free itself, but could never quite make it. Finally he reversed, but with no better result. At last he gave up the attempt, and leaving the motor turning over slowly, descended to hold a consultation with the other boys.

"Have you any suggestions to make, fellows?" he asked, "I confess I'm up a tree just at present. What do you say, Bob? Can you think of anything?"

"Why, I was thinking," answered Bob, flattered by this direct appeal to his vaunted experience, "that if we could dig out a path in front of the machine up onto the grass we might get it out that way."

"Say! you've hit the nail on the head this time!" exclaimed Bert, enthusiastically. "That's just what we'll do. Get that spade out of the tonneau, will you Frank, and we'll get to work."

Frank immediately complied, and in an incredibly short space of time the boys had a path dug in front of the auto down to hard gravel, and were ready for another attempt to extricate their beloved car.

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Bert climbed into his seat with a do-or-die expression on his handsome young face, and repeated his former tactics, but this time with greater success. The "Red Scout" surged forward with a roar, like some imprisoned wild creature suddenly given its liberty. Bert took no chances this time, but plugged steadily onward until he reached high, firm ground. Here he stopped the panting machine, and waited for the cheering boys to catch up.

They soon reached the faithful car, and quickly jumped into their places. Before starting again Bert turned around and said, "Fellows, I think we owe Bob a vote of thanks. All who agree please say 'Aye'."

There was a hearty chorus of "Ayes," and Bob flushed with pleasure at this tribute from his comrades. He thought, and with reason, that he had demonstrated his knowledge of automobiles to good advantage, as well as his ability to meet emergencies.

By this time it was getting near dusk, and Bert knew that Mr. Hollis would be worried over their continued absence. Accordingly, when he got on to the main road, he threw the gears into high speed, and soon they were bowling along at a rapid, but safe, pace toward their camp.

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It would be hard to imagine a happier set of boys in the world than those who sat in the big red automobile in the silence of good fellowship and listened to the contented purring of the "Red Scout's" powerful motor.

As they revolved in their minds the exciting occurrences of the day, and thought of other equally happy days yet to come, it seemed to them that there was indeed nothing more desirable in life than to be campers with such leaders as Mr. Hollis, Bert Wilson, and Dick Trent. It is safe to say that they would not have changed places with any other set of boys on earth.

"Say, Bert," said Jim Dawson, breaking the long silence, "that race is as good as won already. I'm sure that with this machine and you driving it, we couldn't lose if we tried. What do you think?"

Bert did not answer for a moment, and when he did his eyes twinkled merrily. "Well, Jim," he said, "I don't know whether we'll win or not and that 'Gray Ghost' is certainly some racer. From what I have seen of our old 'Red Scout' to-day, however,—but there, I'm not going to say any more just now. There is no use raising your hopes, and then perhaps have nothing come of that in the end." And with that they were forced to be content.

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By this time they had almost reached the camp, and could see the smoke of the fire. Soon they rolled smoothly into camp, and Mr. Hollis came to meet them with a relieved look on his face. At first he seemed inclined to blame them, but Bert soon explained matters to his entire satisfaction.

The boys mingled with their comrades, and many were the exclamations of wonder over their day's experiences. After a short rest, supper was prepared, and while they all voted it delicious, still they claimed that nothing had ever tasted quite as good as their lunch in the old barn.

As Tom and Bert were dropping off to sleep that night, Tom murmured drowsily, "Say, Bert, did we or didn't we have a bully time to-day, eh?"

"Just bet your hat we did."

"Well, say, isn't the old 'Red Scout' about the greatest automobile that ever turned a wheel?"

"That's whatever it is," concurred Bert, and dropped off to sleep with a smile on his face, and the image of a big red automobile enthroned in his heart.

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## CHAPTER X

[111]

### QUICK WORK

"**Y**ou fellows get it all," complained Steve Thomas, with as ugly a look as such a round good-natured face as his could wear.

"You sure do seem to move in a charmed circle," chimed in another grumbler.

"Don't they?" echoed a third. "They ought to be called the lucky three. This is the fourth time in less than two weeks that they've had the auto."

The "lucky three," to whom these remarks were addressed, stood grinning happily at the disgusted faces of the other fellows in camp.

The question to be settled was as to what ones should take the auto into town for some supplies that were unexpectedly but urgently needed. There had been quite a lively dispute, waxing louder and louder until it threatened to end in a genuine quarrel.

Mr. Hollis, busily finishing some letters that he wanted to send into town by the boys, was at first too absorbed in his writing to notice the unusual disturbance, but as the recriminations grew hotter he saw that immediate action was necessary.

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Rising hastily and taking in his hand a sheet of paper on which he had been writing, he stepped from his tent into the group of heated boys.

The clamor ceased at once and when he learned the cause of the discussion, Mr. Hollis proposed to draw lots. The fellows who should draw the numbers one, two and three were to be the autoists for the trip.

This seemed fair to all, and cutting the paper into equal strips Mr. Hollis wrote a number on each and, shaking them well in a hat passed them around. When they had all been drawn, each one turned over his slip and looked eagerly for the sign that fate had been good to him.

The lot had fallen to Bert, Tom, and Ben. There was no appeal and the rest of the camp had to submit, some, however, with so poor a grace that Mr. Hollis, smilingly genially remarked:

"Come, boys, be sports. Any fellow can growl but it takes an all-around manly one to bear

defeat smilingly. There's always the chance of better luck next time."

His words and manner speedily dissipated what shreds of ill-temper remained, so that the boys gave a rousing cheer for a send-off as the car, gleaming like red gold in the brilliant morning sunshine, shot off up the road and disappeared from their longing eyes. [113]

As for the fortunate three in the car, everything unpleasant was forgotten in the twinkling of an eye. A great splendid flying auto is no place for disagreeable memories, and the woods rang with song and jokes and laughter as the car flew on.

Out of the woods at last they swept into a wide well-kept turnpike, where they could safely ride at greater speed.

Bert opened up the throttle and the "Red Scout" fairly "burned up the ground." They passed a number of lumbering ox carts and farm wagons drawn by sedate old horses, whom nothing could dismay. Now just in front of them they saw a runabout, drawn by two spirited bay horses evidently of the thoroughbred type.

As they came up behind the carriage, Tom noticed that one of the horses began to prance and that the lady who held the reins glanced behind nervously.

"Wouldn't you better go rather slow," he cautioned Bert; "one of those horses doesn't seem to have any love for automobiles."

Accordingly, Bert was very careful as he attempted to pass the runabout; but at the first glimpse of the car the prancing horse reared up on his hind legs and lurched heavily against his mate. Startled, the other horse plunged forward, jerking the reins from the driver's hands. The feel of the loose reins on their backs completed their panic, and before anyone realized what was happening, the horses had taken the bit between their teeth and were dashing down the road, utterly beyond control. The carriage swayed frightfully from side to side, and the two ladies, their faces blanched with fear, clung desperately to the seats. [114]

The "lucky three," feeling not a bit lucky at that moment, were filled with dismay.

"I suppose that's our fault," groaned Tom, "although I don't for the life of me see how we could have helped it."

"That's not the question," said Bert, anxiously, "the only thing now is how to help them."

"It seems to me," said Tom, "that the thing to do is to overtake them, range up alongside and then one of us jump into the carriage and get hold of the reins."

This seemed the only feasible thing and the speeding auto soon came within a few feet of the runaways. Bert waited till the road widened and then shot the auto over the intervening space and drew alongside. Tom grasped the wheel and Bert, watching his chance, sprang into the carriage. The double motion hurled him backward and almost out on the road, but with a desperate effort, he succeeded in grasping the back of the seat and held on. Then climbing over, he made his perilous way out upon the shaft between the flying horses and snatched the reins. Upon these he pulled and sawed with all his strength until he at last brought the frightened beasts under control. [115]

Tom and Ben, seeing their opportunity, stopped the machine, and, running to the horses' heads, brought them to a standstill. They helped the trembling women to alight and with cushions and robes hastily brought from the auto made them a comfortable seat at the foot of a tree by the roadside. Ben, bethinking himself of the drinking cup that was part of the auto's equipment, filled it with water from a nearby spring, and under these attentions the ladies somewhat recovered from their terrifying experience. The elder of the two turned to the boys and tried to express her heartfelt gratitude, while, if the younger was to be believed, they had proved themselves veritable heroes. This they modestly disclaimed and declared they were only too delighted to have been able to stop the team before any serious harm had been done.

Meanwhile the horses stood panting and trembling at the side of the road. Evidently it would not be safe to attempt to drive them again at present, and they were greatly relieved when a young farmer, who had seen the runaway, came up and offered to keep them overnight in his barn. [116]

The horses thus disposed of, the "lucky three" offered gallantly to drive the ladies home in their car. So, fastening the runabout to the rear of the auto and seating their guests comfortably in the tonneau, the boys crowded into the driver's seat and were soon gliding up a broad avenue of elms that ended at the spacious and elegant home to which they had been directed. Declining a pressing invitation to enter, the boys, followed by their repeated thanks, started off with redoubled speed on their original errand.

Without further adventure they secured their supplies and turned toward home. What was their surprise as they neared the camp to see a procession of the fellows coming down the road, some beating on imaginary drums, others blowing on horns, still others with harmonicas and jewsharps, but managing in some unaccountable way to evolve the well-known air of

"Hark! The Conquering Hero Comes!"

It was evident that the news of their adventure had preceded them.



The "Gray Ghost," coming over to the camp to discuss some detail of the forthcoming race, had overtaken the farmer leading the runaway horses and had learned the particulars. Hence the impromptu band and the nerve-racking rendition of the triumphal welcome. It was comical but cordial, and the boys would not have been human had they failed to appreciate it. And later on their hearts thrilled with still greater pleasure at Mr. Hollis' earnest words of commendation.

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They were soon seated at the table with their guests from the rival camp, and in the discussion of the anticipated race all else was forgotten. They had not finished before a strange automobile rolled up and the colored chauffeur lifting a large basket from the car and bowing low, announced that it was for Mr. Bert Wilson and his friends from the ladies whom they had rescued that day from deadly peril.

Many and loud were the exclamations of delight when the basket was found to be filled with the mostly costly and delicious fruit. Before the onslaught of the crowd it vanished like magic and Jim urged the boys to stop a team of runaways every day that summer.

The fruit seemed to the boys the last souvenir of that memorable day, so crowded with incident and accident. But it was not. The "lucky three" were to be reminded of this day's adventure in a most unexpected manner before the season ended.

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## CHAPTER XI

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### THE FOUR-LEGGED RECRUIT

"Don, boy, look here," cried Bert, coming out of the mess tent after dinner with a plate of scraps. "Now how are you going to thank me for it?" he asked as Don pranced up, barking and wig-wagging with his tail.

Don's answer was to stick his cold muzzle into Bert's hand and to wig-wag a little harder.

"Now, old fellow," said Bert when Don had cleared the plate, "some of the boys are hunting butterflies over there and I want you to get this note to them right away. Do you understand, Beauty?"

The dog looked up with full understanding in the eyes that said so much and barked joyfully as Bert tied the note to his collar. He started off in the direction pointed out to him perfectly happy in the thought that he was serving his master.

Bert looked fondly after the proudly lifted head and waving silver brush of his favorite. The dog had been a mystery to the whole camp. He seemed to know what was said to him and scarcely ever failed to carry out any directions given him. He had learned a great many tricks in the few days he had been in camp besides displaying some he had mastered previously. With one accord they decided that he must have been stolen by the tramps, who, in the discomfort and excitement of the other day, had forgotten all about him.

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A squad of the boys had that morning been sent over to the hills on an all-day hike to hunt for butterflies and to study ants—the last had become a favorite amusement among them since Dick's talk of a few days before. Bert had expected to go with them, but, as more supplies were needed from the village, he had volunteered to go over for them in the "Red Scout," although he would much rather have gone with the "bug squad." The note that he had entrusted to Don contained a warning to the boys to come home by the main road and not attempt to come over the hills as they contained many dangerous holes and pitfalls. He was sure that Don could find the boys because he had gone with them more than once on their hikes among the hills.

Meanwhile, up in the hills, one of the boys, Arthur Gray by name, had wandered way off from his fellows before he realized it. A strikingly beautiful butterfly had led him on and on, now lingering on one flower, now on another, always flitting away at the very instant when Arthur felt sure of success. Finally, with a lazily graceful motion of its delicately marked wings, it flew away and was lost to sight, leaving Arthur to "mop his fevered brow," as Dick would have said.

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Looking around him he discovered that the boys were nowhere to be found. He reached for his pocket compass and found, to his great surprise and dismay, that it wasn't there.

By this time, really worried, he tried to remember where he was and which way he had come, but all with no result. The butterfly had led him there by such a roundabout path that he could not, for the life of him, point out the direction from which he had come. What should he do? In a moment he thought that he had brought his watch with him—more by luck than anything else, for he often left it at the camp—and he remembered that he could find in what direction the South lay by means of it.

By that time it was exactly four o'clock, and, pointing the hour hand toward the sun, he found that the number 2 on his watch-face pointed to the South: that is, half the distance between four o'clock and twelve when the other hand is pointed toward the sun, marks the southerly direction. Of course, when he had one point of the compass it was very simple for him to find the others—that being a necessary part of summer camp training. Arthur knew that the camp lay somewhere to the East so he started to get there as fast as his legs would carry him.

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But, alas. The time when we think fate has been most kind to us often turns out to be the time when it is hardest. So it was in Arthur's case. As he hurried along, congratulating himself on having thought of so easy and quick a way to get out of his difficulty, he forgot that the passes over the hills had been reported dangerous.

Going happily along he had no warning of what was in store for him until, with a groan, he sank to the ground and began to rub his ankle. He had stepped into one of those treacherous holes that covered the whole countryside and had sprained his ankle very badly.

Painfully, he tried to get up, but when he attempted to bear his weight on the injured ankle, it pained so cruelly that he winced.

"Oh, I can't, I can't," he moaned aloud in his misery. "What shall I do, what shall I do?" and, sinking to the ground, he covered his face with his hands.

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Meanwhile, the boys had missed him and had begun to search all over for him. Not finding him, they became anxious and looked desperately for him in every place they could think of.

"I wonder if he could be hiding in a cave the way Jim was doing the other day," Shorty suggested. [122]

"Don't be a fool, Shorty," said Tom, rather sharply. "Arthur isn't that kind. Probably he's chased some butterfly way off somewhere and can't find his way back."

"He ought to be able to find his way easily enough with his pocket compass. The thing I'm afraid of is that he may have met with some accident," said Frank.

Just then Don came trotting up to Tom, calling attention to the note tied to his collar by a series of short, imperative barks. Tom patted his head lovingly and called him a "good fellow" at which Don wig-wagged vigorously. The boys all crowded around, eager to see what was in the note.

"It's from Bert," Tom announced, "and he says that Mr. Hollis wants us to come home by the main road because of the dangerous holes and pitfalls. Say, fellows," as the truth dawned upon him, "do you think that Arthur can be hurt so that he can't get to us?"

"Nobody knows. But I know one thing," said Shorty stoutly, "and that is, that I won't leave these hills to-night until we have found him."

"Good for you, Shorty," said Frank. "I know we all feel the same way so we had better get down to business in a hurry." [123]

All the time the boys had been speaking Don had stood with his head cocked knowingly on one side, watching their every action. When they started to go he looked up into Tom's face, mutely asking to be allowed to go too. And Tom answered heartily, "You just bet you can come along, Don. We couldn't do without you."

Then the boys began to scour the woods in good earnest. For half an hour they worked hard with a dull, aching sensation at their hearts. They looked behind rocks, pulled aside dense underbrush, gazed down deep ravines with the awful fear that they might see their comrade lying at the bottom. They were coming now into the most dangerous part of the country and they were forced to work slowly and with the utmost care.

When they paused, weary and discouraged, to consult on what course was best to follow, Don's short bark reached their ears and in a minute the dog himself rushed up to them. Then, running back and forth between them and the direction from which he had come, he plainly showed them that he wished them to follow him.

"We'd better go," Tom said. "He may have found him, or at least some trace of him."

So, with Don in the lead the boys started once more. As they went they called Arthur's name, but at first nothing but the echoes answered them. They were so torn by thorns and briars and so wearied by the long search, that nothing but the thought that their poor comrade was in a much worse plight than they, could have kept them to their task. Finally, when they were beginning to think that Don was leading them on a wrong scent, they heard a faint cry. Joyfully, they called out again and again and each time the answer came nearer. When they came upon the runaway at last they were so happy that they didn't notice his condition at once. When they did realize how badly he was hurt, they forgot how tired they were and set about at once to relieve him. [124]

The poor boy had tried to drag himself along on his hands but had not been able to get very far. The boys bandaged the ankle and then began making a litter. It wasn't very long before they had Arthur fairly comfortable on the improvised bed. With light hearts the procession started for camp, Don proudly taking the lead. The boys thought it was best not to question Arthur until he had had time to recover from the shock.

It was nearly dark, when, tired and hungry, the "bug squad" reached camp. It is a well known fact that boys are not worth much when they are hungry. Mr. Hollis, who was a good judge of human nature, hurried the troop into supper, declaring that curiosity could be much better satisfied on a full stomach than an empty one. [125]

After supper the boys made the usual campfire and made the wounded hero of the day comfortable before it. When the preliminaries were over the boys called for the story of the "bug squad's" adventures.

Tom told as much of the story as he knew and then, turning to Arthur, asked, "Did Don really find you there? We weren't sure but that he might just have struck the trail."

"He did both," Arthur replied. "He struck my trail and followed it until he found me. I don't think I was ever so glad in my life as I was to see our Don come trotting up ready for some petting. He saw that I was hurt, though, and started away like a streak of lightning to bring you to my help. At first I thought that he was deserting me, but even as the thought came to me I knew it was unjust. Think of our gallant Don deserting anyone in distress. Then in a few minutes I heard you hail and answered as well as I could. I will always carry a picture of you fellows as you came into sight, with Don in the lead. Believe me, it was the finest I ever saw or expect to see. And now, fellows, I want you to give three cheers for the hero of the day and the finest dog that ever lived. Come on, now——

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"HOORAY-HOORAY-HOORAY—Now let 'er out fellows—HOORAY," and in spite of his sprained ankle, Arthur led the cheers that echoed and re-echoed through the trees for rods around.

All the time the cause of all the enthusiasm was lying with his head on Bert's knee, watching the boys contentedly. When they all crowded around, he took the praises they showered on him as a true gentleman should—with courtesy and dignity, only those speaking eyes of his telling of the love in his heart for the boys that would have made him die for any one of them.

If ever a dog was glad and happy, his name was Don that night. Although he didn't understand what it was all about, he knew that he was being honored and showed that he appreciated it.

The happiest moment in the whole day for Don came when Bert put both arms lovingly around his neck and whispered, "You're a trump, old man."

And so the four-legged recruit went happily to sleep to dream that he was rescuing all the boys in camp.

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## CHAPTER XII

[127]

### THE YOUNGSTERS' GREAT DAY

"Say, fellows," said Bert, as he lay stretched out lazily beneath the limbs of a spreading beech, "isn't this the finest day ever?"

"You bet it is," said Tom, "the mould was broken when this day was made."

It was, indeed, one of the perfect days that come sometimes to break the heat of sweltering midsummer. A brisk wind stirred the branches through which the sunlight, flecking lazily the ground beneath, played over the group of boys, who lay in all sorts of abandoned attitudes on a bit of rising ground a little removed from the camp. They had had a splendid morning's sport. The coolness of the day and the fine condition of the roads and meadows had suggested to them the game of Hare and Hounds. Up hill and down dale they had raced with occasional intervals of rest. When the hares had successfully shaken off their pursuers, still the bewildered hounds had nosed about, so to speak, seeking to pick up the lost trail. Bert and Tom had been the hares and their escape from capture had added to the delight occasioned by the day and the game itself. It was only after the rice that they had carried in their pouches to make a trail had been almost exhausted, that they thought of doubling on their tracks and making for camp.

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The hounds had trailed in a little later on, looking a bit discomfited but not disheartened. As Pete Hart, one of the hounds, said "though slightly disfigured they were still in the ring." And, oh, how that dinner tasted and how impossible it was almost for the famished boys to wait while the fish snatched from the brook that morning were frizzling in the pan and came in tantalizing whiffs to the nostrils of the boys. Something more substantial than whiffs, however, did quickly follow, and now like gorged anacondas full to the brim, they lay stretched out upon the grass and talked over the events of the morning.

"I tell you what, boys," said Frank, "it sure was the luckiest day in my life when I struck this camp."

"Well," said Tom, "I reckon we all say amen to that. Think of being out in these woods on such a day as this with a lot of jolly good fellows and not a thing to do but be happy. When I think of the people in town roasting under the summer heat while we are out here under the trees, you bet I feel sorry for them."

"Yes," said Jim, who, as usual, had eaten more even than the others and hadn't before had energy enough to speak, "the town is all right in the fall and spring, but when the summer comes, me for the long hike and the camp in the woods."

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"It sure does us a lot of good," said Bert. "I know that when I go back to the city after a

summer like this I feel so strong that I could lift a ton."

"God made the country but man made the town," chimed in Dick who was great on quotations. "I think it does everybody good to get away somewhere where they can come in contact with the woods and the brooks and the squirrels and the birds. Who was it we used to read about—that fellow in the old Grecian stories—I think his name was Antaeus, who got into a fight with one of the old heroes and every time he was knocked down, refreshed by contact with mother earth, got up ten times stronger than before. I guess that is the way we feel after a summer spent in the woods."

While they were speaking, Mr. Hollis had joined the group. The boys quickly moved aside to make room for him. Although he was so much older than they, his genial spirit and unflinching friendliness kept him in touch with every one of the boys. At heart he was still a boy and always would be one. He was a stickler for discipline, but not in the slightest degree a martinet. With him it was always the "iron hand in the velvet glove," and he was so just, so considerate, he understood boy nature so thoroughly and in the case of each was able so accurately to put himself in his place, that the boys regarded him as a father or rather an older brother, instead of a commander. [130]

"I heard what you said, Tom," he said, smiling, "about not having a thing to do but be happy. Are you quite sure you have nothing to do but that?"

Tom stared a moment, "why yes," he said slowly, "to make somebody else happy."

"That's the thing," said Mr. Hollis. "You hit the nail right on the head that time, Tom. There is no higher aim in life than to make some one else happy."

A murmur of assent arose from the boys.

"Now," said Mr. Hollis, "we ought to do some one a good turn every day. It doesn't matter especially what that good turn is. It may be a thing so slight as almost to escape notice. It is just in some way or other to add to the sweetness of human life. It may be to give somebody a lift in the automobile—it may be a word of appreciation to kindle a smile on some tired face; it may be guiding a blind man across the street, or giving your seat to a woman in the street car, or even so slight a thing as to kick a banana peel off the sidewalk. The essence of the whole thing is self-forgetfulness. To lend a hand, to give a lift, to make life brighter and easier for someone even in the smallest degree. [131]

"But what I have in mind just now is a sort of wholesale lift. When I was in town the other day I passed the orphan asylum. You know the one I mean. That building just off the Court House Square with a stone wall around it and a pretty lawn in front."

The boys remembered perfectly. Every one of them at some time or other had passed the place and seen the childish faces at the windows.

"Now," said Mr. Hollis, "my idea is this. There are from forty to fifty children in that building. It serves as the asylum for all the towns in the county. I happen to know it is carried on in a splendid way. The officials at the head are kind and humane and the matrons in charge take the best possible care of the little ones, but after all they need variety. They want individual attention. In a home of that kind even with the best intentions there has to be a certain monotony and uniformity. They have to rise at a certain hour, sit down at the table at the same moment, go to the school room at a given time, and even play under the direction of somebody else. Now, what a glorious thing it would be if for one day those children could come out into the woods and roll in the grass and chase the squirrels and kick up their heels like young colts let loose in the pasture. What do you say boys, to giving up one whole day of this vacation and make those little ones think they have had a glimpse of heaven?" [132]

What they said was plenty. As Shorty said, "it hit them where they lived."

There was a chorus of excited exclamations, "Will we?" "You bet!" "Just try us and see." "When's it going to be?" "Why can't we have it to-morrow?" "How many kids are there in the asylum?" "What's the best way to get them here?" At last Mr. Hollis, smiling, had to raise his hand, in order to be heard.

"Well," said he, "I haven't fixed upon the date. As a matter of fact, I haven't spoken to the officers of the institution at all and am not absolutely sure that they will see their way clear to make the arrangement. Of course, they have a great responsibility upon them in caring for so many little ones and they would have to look at the question from every side. Still I don't think there will be much trouble in arranging it. They are just as eager to see the children have a good time as we are, and I think the idea will strike them as a capital one. One or two of the people in charge will, of course, have to come with them. Ordinarily they might feel a little timid about letting the children spend a whole day in the woods in company with a lot of high-spirited boys who might be reckless, and, even with the best intentions, lead them into danger. Still, you boys have established such a good reputation in this neighborhood," and here Mr. Hollis looked about on the eager faces with an expression of pride, "that I don't think there will be any real trouble in arranging the affair." [133]

"It is a capital idea," said Dick, warmly. "How did you come to think about it?"

"Well," said Mr. Hollis, "it wasn't original with me. It's a custom in the city to set aside a day

each year as 'Orphans' Day.' There are thousands of well-to-do people, owners of automobiles, who have the tenderest sympathy with these little ones deprived, by nature, of their natural guardians, and on that one day of the year they give up all thought of selfish enjoyment and try to give the children the time of their lives. It's a splendid sight and warms the heart to see the long line of automobiles coming down the avenues decked with flags and overflowing with the little tots. Off they go to the beach where all sorts of amusements have been prepared for them. They dig in the sand. They paddle about with bare feet at the edge of the breakers. They take in every innocent amusement from one end of the island to another. They haven't any money to spend, but they couldn't spend it if they had. Everything is free. The spirit of kindness and good feeling is shared by all the owners of the different resorts, and the doors are flung wide open the minute the children come in sight. They see the moving pictures. They ride in the merry-go-round. They hold their breath as they speed up and down the scenic railways. They watch, with awed admiration, the wandering artist who moulds tigers and lions in the sand. The life guards take them in their boats and row around the different piers. They go to the great animal shows and see the big brutes put through their wonderful tricks. They sit in the weighing machines. They throw base-balls at the clay figures and the larger boys are even permitted—supreme pleasure for a boy—to fire at the target in the shooting galleries. They watch the great ocean steamers as they go past at a distance, and the smaller vessels, like white-winged birds, that hug the shore. And eat! How they do eat! They are like a flock of ravenous locusts and the food disappears as if by magic. It's a day of days for the poor little youngsters, to be talked over and dreamed over for months to come, and when at the end of the day they pile into the autos, tired, full, happy as larks, for the swift return journey to the only place they know as home, it is a question who are the happier, the little ones to whom this means so much or the owners of the machines who, for that one day at least have spent themselves gladly for the happiness of others."

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The boys listened with rapt attention, and when Mr. Hollis had finished they were chock full of enthusiasm.

"Well," said Tom, "we haven't any beach here, but I am willing to bet that by the time we get through with those kids they will have had just as good a time as any youngster in the big city ever had."

The boys all chimed assent to this, and Shorty, who was always impulsive and never could bear to wait for anything that he greatly desired, suggested, "Why not fix it up right away?"

"Well," said Mr. Hollis, "I don't see any objection to that. If Bert has the automobile in shape we will go over at once."

So many of the boys wanted to go with him that, to avoid any selection, Mr. Hollis suggested that they draw lots. Of course it went without saying that Bert would go to drive the machine, but in addition fate decreed that Tom, Frank, Jim, and Shorty should pile in with them. Off they went along the smooth country roads, their hearts leaping not only with the delight of the glorious day and the thrilling swiftness with which the great machine sped over the turnpike, but also from the feeling that they were going to carry gladness and sunshine into a lot of wistful little hearts to whom father and mother were only names.

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In what seemed only a few minutes from the time they left the camp, they reached the asylum. Bert went in with Mr. Hollis while the rest of the boys stayed outside in the machine of which they never tired, and where they much preferred to stay rather than wander about the streets of the town. The interview with the officers of the asylum was most cordial. They knew Mr. Hollis as a courteous gentleman and a capable and careful ruler of his little kingdom. The matron in charge was called in at the conference and she also assented heartily and thankfully.

It was arranged that on the second day thereafter, provided, of course, the weather was suitable, the outing should take place. Then arose the question of transportation. How were they to get there? The automobile would only carry a few of the little ones even though they were packed in like sardines. The superintendent suggested that no doubt they would be able to find plenty of the townspeople who would be glad to furnish teams to carry the rest.

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But just before this arrangement was concluded a thought occurred to Bert. He knew how much the auto appealed to a youngster. They were used to seeing horses and wagons and at times would be taken for a ride in them, but automobiles were scarce in that locality and seemed almost like a fairy vehicle to the little ones, as with faces pressed against the panes they would see an occasional touring car glide swiftly along the road in front. "Where were the horses?" "What made them go?" "Why do they go so fast?" It seemed to Bert that half the delight of the little ones would be in the automobile ride and as he pictured the little wave of envy and discontent that would inevitably come over the youngsters who were forced to take the more prosaic and common place wagons, he said:

"What's the matter with taking them all over in the machine? Of course we would have to make a good many trips, but what of that? It only takes a few minutes to get from here to the camp and turn our load loose in the woods and then come back for another. The whole thing could be managed in a couple of hours. Bob and I could take turns in driving the machine. I am sure Bob would be glad to, and I know I would, and as for the kids, there is no question of the way they would feel about it."

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"All right," said Mr. Hollis, while the superintendent and matron greeted gratefully this further example of Bert's thoughtfulness and kindness of heart.

When the machine returned to camp and the boys who had been left behind learned of the arrangement, everything was bustle and stir at once. Although the camp was always kept in first-class order, this being one of their cardinal principles, yet there were a good many little things that needed doing in order that the youngsters should have the glorious time that the boys had mapped out for them. Some of them took a long rope and fixed up a great swing between two oaks at a little distance from the camp. Others arranged an archery butt and prepared bows and arrows for the larger boys to use. A number of fishing lines with sinkers and hooks were prepared so that the children might have the rare delight of trying to catch their own dinner. Then, too, it was necessary to go to town on several different occasions to secure supplies. Their own store had to be replenished, and besides, they wanted to get a lot of extra dainties that would appeal especially to the appetites of their little guests.

There had been a heavy rain a day or two before and the prospects were that nothing in the way of bad weather would mar the outing. This had been a question of a little anxiety because their stay in camp was rapidly nearing a close. Many of the boys had only a limited time to stay and had to return to their employment in the city. And even those who could extend the period had no desire to do so after their fellows had gone. [139]

In all this rush of preparation the automobile race was not neglected. Every boy in the camp felt as though his own personal reputation was involved in winning. Rumors had filtered in from different quarters that Ralph Quinby, the driver of the "Gray Ghost," was simply burning up the roads in exercise. It was even said that for a short distance he had attained the speed of a mile a minute.

While there was no bitterness in the rivalry between the two camps, yet their desire to win was extremely keen.

"You have simply got to get there, old fellow," said Dick as he and Bert were tinkering at the machine on the morning before that set for the outing. "It would never do to have those fellows say that the 'Red Scout' had to take the dust of the 'Gray Ghost.'"

"Well," said Bert, who, as the driver of the car, naturally felt a greater weight of responsibility than anybody else, "there are just three things we need in order to come in first. Above everything else, we've got to have the car in splendid condition. It must be stripped of every single thing that might furnish wind resistance and make its work that much harder. Every bolt and nut must be examined and tightened. The lever, the clutch, the gear, has to be thoroughly examined. Many a race is won in advance in this way, even before the machine leaves the post. In the next place, we've got to have good judgment. By this I mean judgment of pace. It isn't only what the speedometer says, but there is a little something that tells the man who has his hand on the wheel just when and just how hard he should hit it up. Sometimes it is wise to trail the other fellow. At other times it may be well to set the pace, but the ability to do either one or the other is the thing that, other things being equal, is bound to tell in the long run. Then, greatest of all, perhaps, is nerve. I don't know whether you have ever ridden, Dick, in a machine that goes a mile a minute, but if you have, especially on a circular track, you'll know something of what I mean. A fellow's nerves must be like iron. The least hesitation, the least doubt, the least shakiness even for the merest fraction of a second, may be fatal. This is true even if one were riding without anything especially at stake, but when we know that all the fellows will be yelling like Indians, begging us to win, and know the bitter disappointment that will come to them if the other fellow shows us the way over the line, I tell you it is a sure enough test of a fellow's nerve." [140]

"Well," said Dick, "as to that last point I haven't any doubt about you having plenty of nerve, Bert. If that were the only thing in question I would call the race won just now, but how about the machines themselves? Don't they enter into the calculation?" [141]

"Of course," said Bert, "that counts for an awful lot. You can't make a cart horse beat a thoroughbred, no matter how well he is ridden. There's got to be the speed there or everything else counts for nothing. But take two machines of about equal power, and from all I hear the 'Red Scout' hasn't much, if anything, on the 'Gray Ghost' in this particular, it puts the matter right up to the drivers of the cars. Under those conditions, nine times out of ten, it's the best man and not the best machine that wins."

While Tom and Bert discussed the thing in this way soberly, the rest of the troop hadn't a doubt in the world that their hero would win. They idolized Bert. They had seen him under a variety of circumstances and never once had he shown the white feather. Never once had he failed to measure up to an emergency. Never once had he failed to use every ounce of energy and power that he possessed. If he *should lose*—and this thought was instantly dismissed as traitorous—they knew that, although beaten, he would not be disgraced, and so, with a vast amount of excitement but with scarcely the slightest feeling of trepidation, they awaited the momentous day when the "Gray Ghost" and the "Red Scout" should battle for supremacy. [142]

"Orphans' Day" dawned clear and beautiful. There was just enough breeze to temper the heat of the sun. The skies were cloudless. Many a tousled little head up at the asylum had tossed restlessly on its pillow through that night and almost all of the expectant youngsters needed no rising bell to call them from their dreams. Even breakfast was dispatched more quickly than usual, and the feverish impatience of the little tots made it almost impossible to wait for the coming of that glorious automobile.

As it was necessary to save all possible space in the auto for the children themselves, Bert

drove the car over alone. When he came in sight he was hailed with a yell of delight by a little group of seven or eight gathered on the lawn, who had been told off, to the envy of their less fortunate companions, for the first ride. The matron in charge made a pretense of keeping order, but she had been a child herself and the attempt was only half-hearted. In they piled, one after the other, tumbling over the sides, or tossed in by the strong arms of Bert, and untangled themselves somehow, some on the seats, some on the bottom of the car between the last and the driver's seat. Brown heads, black heads, blond heads, yes, even one little red head—that of Teddy Mulligan—made what Shorty said when he saw it was “a sure enough color scheme.”

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As soon as they were safely ensconced, Bert blew his horn, swung the car around, and then made off for the camp. Oh, the delight of that swift trip on that glorious morning. Oh, the chatter that rose from those eager lips. Oh, the joy that bubbled in those little, motherless hearts. It wasn't earth—it was heaven. On sped the machine, noiselessly, softly, swiftly as a bird. If it had not been for the other groups who were eagerly waiting their turn Bert would surely have turned off into a side road and given the kids a good many extra miles; but the others had to be considered, too, and time was passing, so into the camp they glided, all alive with eagerness, delight and anticipation. The ready hands of the other boys lifted the little ones from the machine, which instantly turned about for its second trip. Again and again this was repeated, until the last little group on the lawn of the asylum had melted away, and the woods resounded with their childish prattle.

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The boys had surely spread themselves to give “the kids” a day that they'd never forget. Frank took some of the larger boys to the little glade where the archery practice was on, put the bows and arrows into their hands that had been prepared and showed them how to shoot. The girls were taken to a swing that the boys had rigged up and swung to and fro to their hearts' content. Tom showed them how to make jack-o'-lanterns and told them about the time when Bert had put one up in a great cave and frightened him so badly when he caught a first glimpse of it. A little group under the guidance of Dick went down to the brook and watched the sunfish dart to and fro under the gleaming surface and the great perch and catfish lying lazily under the reeds that fringed the bank. Shorty, who was an expert fisherman, threw his line while the boys looked on with bated breath, and in a few minutes pulled up a plump catfish.

“Why do they call them that?” said little Tony Darimo.

“Well,” said Shorty, “maybe it's because of the whiskers they have; perhaps because the face looks something like a cat, or else because of the noise they make when you take them off the hook.”

Little Billy Jackson seemed unconvinced.

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“It doesn't seem to me like a cat,” he said.

Just then Shorty, who had turned his head to put the fish in the basket, uttered a loud “meow.” Billy jumped.

“I guess you are right after all,” he said. “It surely does sound like a pussy cat.”

In the shallow part of the brook some of the little ones under the guidance of the matron were permitted to take off their shoes and stockings and paddle about. The water was less than a foot deep. One of the children slipped and fell. In a moment Don, who had been racing along the bank, jumped in and grabbed him by the collar of his blouse. The child was on his feet in a minute and had never been in the slightest danger at all, but Don felt just as proud of his exploit as though he had saved him from a raging torrent. The boys laughed and called him a “fake hero,” and yet every one of them knew in his heart that, however great might have been the danger, Don would have jumped just the same. Don outdid himself that day. He made the children scream with delight. Under the guidance of Bert he played soldier, shouldered the stick and marched, rolled over and played dead, and did it all with such a keen sense of enjoyment in his tricks that the children stood about and watched him, with endless wonder and delight.

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But the one whom the children remembered above all the others was Bert. He was everywhere. He told them stories. He carried them on his shoulders. He imitated the calls of the different birds. He summoned the squirrels and the timid little creatures, who long since had lost all fear of him, came readily forward, ate out of his hand and perched upon his finger tips. The children looked on with wide-eyed amazement, delight and admiration.

Then came dinner, and such a dinner! The kids had never seen anything like it before. Fish caught fresh from the brook, the golden corn bread made by the boys themselves, the maple syrup, the cakes, the pies, the countless goodies that melted away before those famished youngsters would have filled a dyspeptic's heart with envy.

But all things come to an end, and in the late afternoon, amid the shouted good-byes and waving of hands from all the boys in the camp, the “Red Scout” took up its burden—and it had never borne a happier one—and carried the kids away, their little hearts full of unspeakable content, at the end of the best day's outing they had ever known.

The boys were tired that night. Even Tom, who prided himself on never owning up to weariness, admitted fairly and squarely that he was “clean tuckered out.” But it was a delightful weariness. They had forgotten themselves. They had worked and planned for others. They had not looked for their own happiness, and just because they had not, they found it. They had

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learned the one supreme lesson of life, "that to give is better than to receive," "that he who seeks pleasure as an end in itself never finds it," and that he who bestows happiness upon another has his own heart flooded with peace.

## CHAPTER XIII

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### DAVE'S TIGER STORY

The next night, while Dave, who had promised to tell them a tiger yarn, was pulling his "thinking cap" on tight, and trying to select his most fetching story, the boys gathered closer about him, and with hearts beating a little faster at the very mention of the word "tiger," prepared to listen.

At last Dave looked up, and in order to make his story a trifle more thrilling, gave a little talk on the bloodthirstiness of his majesty, the tiger. When he concluded by the tense look on his hearers' faces that the right moment had arrived, he plunged into

#### THE STORY OF THE TIGER

"One calm evening in the summertime, somewhat later than usual, a gentleman stepped from the train at a railroad station in a suburban town and walked up the street toward his home. Deep in thoughts of business, he did not notice at first that a most unusual silence pervaded the town. In a short time the deadly stillness roused him, and he noticed, wonderingly, that he was the only person to be seen on the streets. Not a man, woman, or child could he see, a most unusual thing, as at that time, in the early evening, the town was always a very lively place indeed. He noticed, too, with amazement, that the doors and windows of the houses were all closed. Not a face appeared at any of them. All the windows that had blinds or shutters attached had them drawn tightly, and fastened securely. Not a sign of life anywhere. What had happened? Had everybody gone crazy?"

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"Amazed and frightened, he hurried on, up one street and down another, until his own house came into view. That, too, was closed and shuttered. The welcoming face that had never failed to greet him was not at door or window. Now, thoroughly alarmed, he ran up the steps of the porch and wildly rang the bell. The door was opened cautiously, just a little crack, and to his great relief the face of his wife appeared at the tiny opening.

"At the sight of him the door opened wider. He was clutched by the sleeve and hurried into the house with scant ceremony. Before he could get his breath after this amazing treatment the door was closed and locked and double-locked on the instant, and the white face of his wife confronted the dazed man.

"His dinner was ready, but without waiting for him to be seated at the table his wife commenced to tell him the cause of the unusual state of affairs. 'Did he remember that the wild animal show was to have arrived in the town that day?' 'No,' he had not remembered, 'but go on.'

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"Well, it did come, and while the show was in progress one of the animals, a tiger, had escaped from the tent and raced up Main Street, while everyone on the street hurried to the nearest refuge. At the end of Main Street he dashed into the woods, and though the crowd of pursuing men and boys did their best to recapture him, he was still at large. The manager of the show told the people, while they ran madly in pursuit, that the tiger was a new one, scarcely at all trained, and by far the fiercest and most savage of all the animals in the show. He warned everyone to stay closely within doors that night, and assured them that as soon as daylight appeared every possible effort would be made to capture and cage him. That is why everybody is barricaded within doors.

"Of course, being a man, he laughed at his wife's fears, said there was no danger, and that it was extremely foolish for everyone to be so scared, and that, as for him, he would not lose a wink of sleep worrying about it. His wife noticed, however, that although he talked so bravely, he kept closely within doors all the evening, and that when they were ready to go upstairs for the night he looked with unusual care at the fastenings of all the doors and windows, both upstairs and down. Once, as he fastened the bolt of a window, he had stopped and grown a little white at a slight scratching noise just outside the window."

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Here a decided shiver ran around the camp, furtive looks were cast over hiked shoulders, and Sam, who for some minutes had been watching a moving shadow just outside the line of camp firelight, decided that the shadow was decidedly tigerlike, and wanted to know if they did not think the fire needed some more logs. "All right, old man," said Bob, and the logs went on. They blazed up brightly, and gave every man Jack, even the bravest of them, a more comfortable feeling of security, and Dave went on with the story:

"In the middle of that night the man found himself suddenly awake, with an intense feeling that someone or something was in the room. Raising himself upon one elbow, he gazed searchingly about the dim room, and was just about to give himself a lecture for imagining things, when, in the farthest and darkest corner, he saw what appeared to be two great balls of green fire glaring straight at him. At once the thought of the escaped tiger leaped into his mind, and he knew that

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the fierce and savage beast was within his room. For a moment his heart fairly stopped beating, but, gaining control of himself with an effort, he tried to think what he should do. He reached over and laid his hand softly over his wife's lips and whispered in her ear. Then together they watched the two glowing points of fire, wondering with sick hearts how soon the tiger would be upon them.

"They had not long to wait, for now the tiger began crawling toward them, inch by inch, inch by inch——"

At this point in the story the boys, utterly forgetful of the world and everything in it, had crowded close about the story teller, and with flesh creeping and hair rising on their heads were listening, open-mouthed, to the story. Dave had paused to take breath, when every heart stood still as a fierce scratching on the bark of a nearby tree and a deep, savage growling were heard.

All sprang to their feet. Dick Trent was the only one who remained cool. Having seen Bert Wilson (who never lost an opportunity for a little fun and mischief) steal quietly away under cover of the darkness, he more than suspected that something was going to happen, and so was prepared.

Suddenly a burst of ringing laughter made itself heard, and there on the grass lay Bert, rolling over and over, holding his sides and saying between gasps, "Oh, my! Oh, my! you did look so funny! Hold me, somebody, or I *will* go to pieces. Oh, my! Oh, my!"

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At first the boys were inclined to be angry, but they were good fellows and always ready to laugh at a joke, even when it was on themselves, and so with many a laughing threat to "get even with Bert, and that mighty soon," they came, a little sheepishly, back to the fire and with one accord begged Dave to go on with the story.

"Well," resumed Dave, "we left the tiger creeping inch by inch, inch by inch, toward his two victims, and feeling very sure of his capture; but the man was not the one to give up his life or that of his wife without a brave effort to save them. He whispered hastily to his wife, 'Be prepared'"—here a voice interrupted to exclaim, "They ought to have been campers"—"to jump out and roll way back under the bed the instant I say Now!"

"By this time the tiger had come to within a few feet of them, and they could see him in the dim light, every muscle quivering, crouched for a spring. The man had slipped his feet over the side of the bed to the floor, and his hands clutched the bedclothes from underneath.

"As the beast sprang the man shouted, 'Now!' and at the same time flung the bedclothes over the head and body of the tiger. The two terrified people used the few minutes the angry, snarling beast took to get out from the tangle of bedclothes to roll as far under the bed as they could. The bed was a very low one, and the man knew that the tiger, who was very large, could not creep under without raising the bed with his shoulders. So the two resolved that when he tried to get under, as they knew he would, they would grip the steel springs above them and hold on like grim death, and try to hold the bed down.

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"All too soon they found themselves holding on to those springs with all the combined strength of their muscles. The tiger tried again and again to lift the bed, but could not get enough of his shoulders under to get a purchase, and finding himself baffled, crept away to his far corner to consider what to do.

"The man knew that they could not keep the tiger at bay in this way very long, for their strength was nearly gone. Groping about desperately, his hand touched his son's tool box, pushed carelessly under the bed. How thankful he was that their boy was visiting relatives at a distance. He, at least, was safe. He grasped the box as a drowning man grasps a straw, and lifting a lid searched for and found a screw driver, and, oh, joy! a few large screws.

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"Working desperately, and more rapidly than ever in his life before, he drove a couple of the screws through the two top legs of the bed, securing them to the floor. Another two minutes and he had one of the bottom legs in the same condition. Before he could touch the fourth leg the tiger, angered by the noise of the screw driving, bounded forward and again tried to lift the bed. Finding he could not get at them, the tiger suddenly sprang upon the bed and began tearing at the mattress. Very soon there was nothing between him and the now almost despairing couple but the woven wire springs. These springs were of extra strong, fine quality, but even these could not hold out long against the onslaught of those terrible, powerful claws.

"Almost mechanically the man again thrust his hand into the box, and drew out a small saw. The idea came to him to cut a hole through the floor into the ceiling of the room below, slip through, and rush for help. He spoke to his wife, and found she had fainted. He worked desperately, faster and faster, while all the time the tiger tore more and more fiercely at the tough springs. His hot, terrible breath swept across their faces, so close to that snarling one above them, while the saliva dropped from his savage jaws.

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"Almost fainting with disgust and terror, the man worked on still more desperately, for dear life now. At last one side was finished, then another, now the third, and a little hope came back to the man's heart. If he could only finish that other side he would have at least a slight chance of escape. But now the tough woven wire links began to give way under the tearing of the tiger's savage claws. In one place a small hole is broken in the wire. In mad haste the man tears the saw through the wood. It seems as if it would never give way. Once the saw slips and bends. What if it

should break! One more desperate, despairing effort. Only two more inches now, only one, only a half inch. At last it is over, and the saw drops from his nerveless hand. He makes a last effort to arouse his wife, but without avail. He cannot bear to leave her, for he fears that before he can get help and return the tiger will be upon her. What can he do? It is his only chance to save her. He *must* take it.

"The tiger, as if he knew a crisis had come, ceased his tearing and lay above them, watching with angry fire flashing from his eyes, and keeping up a low, savage snarling.

"With a muttered prayer for protection for his poor wife and help for himself, the man lowered himself through the opening until he found himself suspended from the ceiling of the lower room. In desperate haste to go for help, he is about to drop to the floor, but pauses to hear if there is any sound or movement in the room above. Not a sound. There is comfort in that, for his poor wife must be safe as yet, but what is the tiger doing? Why is everything so deadly quiet? Incensed at the escape of one of his victims, one would suppose him to be all the more eager to secure the other; but there is no sound. What can he be doing? [157]

"At this moment an awful thought comes to him. What if the cunning tiger had crept silently down the stairs into the room below? He remembers that the door into that room was open when they passed it on their way upstairs. How safe they had felt then! How little had they dreamed that this awful thing would come upon them! Could it be only a few hours since they had gone upstairs, chatting cheerfully together? It seemed days and days ago. Perhaps the tiger was at that moment crouched below him there in the darkness, ready to spring upon him the moment, yes, even before, his feet touched the ground.

"The awful thought made him pause, and he hung there with fiercely throbbing heart, undecided what to do. If he could hear one sound of the tiger moving in the room above him he could drop, quickly close the door, and rush away for help. Still no sound from his wife's room. What should he do? Perhaps it would be better to try to hold on until morning, when he could at least have the blessed light to aid him. It could not be long now before daybreak. Surely out of doors there must be daylight now. Soon it would come into the room and enable him to look about him. Yes, that would be the best and only thing to do. [158]

"But no; he cannot! His strength is failing. Already his numbed fingers are slipping—slipping—another moment and the tiger will be upon him and all will be over. He can hold on no longer. He is falling—falling—

"'John! Oh, John!' comes a cheerful voice from below. 'Aren't you coming down? It is almost train time, and breakfast is ready.'

"John sits up in bed, looking with dazed eyes all around the bright room, flooded with morning sunshine, and it is minutes before he realizes that it is *all a dream!*"

If anyone could have taken a photograph of the boys' faces just before the conclusion of the story and another just after it, the two pictures would have been a comic study; but they could not have given the transition from faces filled with rapt, motionless, breathless interest to the astonished, somewhat disgusted look as the totally unexpected ending of the story filtered in upon them. [159]

Mr. Hollis, who had listened to the last part of the story with as much interest as the boys, thanked Dave for the pleasure he had given them, but could not keep back a smile as Shorty voiced the general sentiment, "You ought to be ashamed, Dave Ferris, for handing us such a lemon."

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## CHAPTER XIV

### WITH DEATH BEHIND

Pop! Pop! Bang! The "Red Scout's" motor gave a few preliminary explosions, and then started off with a sound like a whole battery of field guns going off at once. A cloud of black smoke issued from the exhaust, and in a few seconds had enveloped the car so that it could hardly be seen. Some of the boys came running up with consternation written in their faces, evidently thinking that the automobile was about to explode, or run away, or do some equally disastrous thing. They were reassured by Bert's broad grin, however, and Bob Ward gave a relieved laugh.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, "what's the matter with the old machine, anyway, Bert? You had us scared stiff there for a few minutes. I thought that after this when we wanted to get anywhere we'd have to walk, sure. It looked as though the old 'Scout' were on fire."

"It sure did," confirmed Frank. "What *was* the matter, Bert?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of," replied Bert airily. "I had just washed the engine out with a little kerosene oil, and, when I started it, why, of course that burned, and gave out the smoke you saw. I don't wonder that you thought something was up, though," he continued, laughing. "It certainly did look like the 'last days of Pompeii' for a few seconds, didn't it?" [161]

"That's what it did," broke in Shorty, "and seeing all that smoke reminded me of a riddle I heard a little while ago."

"Go on, Shorty, tell us the riddle and get it out of your system," laughed Bert. "If you don't it might grow inward and kill you. Some brands of humor are apt to work that way, you know."

"Well, the riddle is this," said Shorty. "Why is it that an automobile smokes?"

Many were the answers to this, but at each one Shorty shook his head. Finally he said, "Well, do you give it up?"

"I guess we'll have to, fellows," grinned Bert. "Go on and tell us, Shorty; why *is* it that an automobile smokes?"

"Because it can't chew," crowed Shorty triumphantly, and dodged just in time to avoid a piece of greasy waste that Bert threw with unerring aim at his head. Amid cries of "Lynch him!" and "This way out!" and "Don't let him escape alive, fellows," Shorty took nimbly to his heels and skipped behind a tree. After the excitement had subsided Bert returned to his grooming of the "Red Scout," and soon had matters fixed to his entire satisfaction. [162]

It was a hot, sticky afternoon, and the boys had nothing particular to do outside of the routine duties of the camp. They had been lying around on the grass, lazily talking and listening to the drowsy hum of an occasional locust, when one had said:

"Gee, I wish to goodness there was a little wind stirring. I feel as though in about five minutes I would become a mere grease spot on the landscape."

"Well," Bert had replied, "if you feel that way about it, why not manufacture a little wind of our own?"

"Manufacture it," had come a chorus of surprised protest, "how in time can you manufacture wind?"

"Oh, it's very simple when you know how," Bert replied, in an offhand manner. "What's to prevent us from piling into the auto and taking a spin? When we get out on the road I think I can promise you all the breeze you want. What do you say, fellows? Want to try it?"

The answer was an uproarious shout of approval, and accordingly Bert had been getting the machine in shape.

In a short time they were ready to start, and as they were getting in they discerned Shorty's stocky form emerging from the trees. He signaled frantically for them to wait, and soon came up panting. [163]

"Say, you weren't going without me, were you?" he asked reproachfully.

"Well," laughed Bert, "you deserve almost anything after springing a thing like that on us, but I guess we can forgive you, if we try real hard. Shall we take him along, fellows?"

"I don't see what Shorty needs to come for, anyway," said Ben, slyly. "It seems to me that a fellow that can run as fast as Shorty did a little while ago can make all the wind he needs himself. He doesn't have to get in an automobile to get swift motion."

"That's so," agreed Bert, with a serious face, "still, probably Philip has other views, and so we might as well give him the benefit of the doubt. Jump in, old scout."

This was easier said than done, however, as the big red auto was already literally overflowing with perspiring boys, but they managed to squeeze in, and started off, singing three or four different songs all at the same time, and each one in a different key.

Nobody seemed to be bothered much by this, however, and they soon reached the hard, level, macadam high road. Bert "opened her up" a few notches, as he expressed it, and they were soon bowling along at an exhilarating pace. The breeze that Bert had promised them soon made itself felt, and you may be sure it felt very grateful to the overheated boys. [164]

"This beats lying around on the grass and whistling for a wind, doesn't it?" asked Frank, and, needless to say, all the rest of the boys were emphatically of his opinion.

They had been going along at a brisk pace for several miles when they heard the purr of another motor car in back of them, and glancing back saw a handsome-looking blue auto creeping up to them. A flashily dressed young man, smoking a cigarette, was driving it, and three girls were sitting in the tonneau. The blue machine overtook them steadily, and soon was abreast of them.

"Gee, Bert," exclaimed Frank, excitedly, but in a low voice, "you're not going to let them pass us, are you?"

"Oh, let them, if they want to," replied Bert; "we didn't come out for a race, and I feel just like loafing along and taking things easy. What's the use of getting excited about things on a hot day like this? Besides, I don't think those people are looking for trouble, anyway."

At this point the blue car passed them, however, and as it did so one of the girls in the tonneau looked back and called, "How does the dust taste, boys? Like it?" The fellow driving it laughed at [165]

this sally, and shouted, "Hey, youse, why don't you get a horse?"

All the boys looked at Bert to see how he would take this. He said never a word, but his grip tightened on the steering wheel, and the "Red Scout" gave a lunge forward that almost jerked some of the boys out of their seats. Faster and faster the powerful car flew, and it was evident that they would soon overtake the blue car. The latter was also a first rate machine, however, and the boys could see one of the girls in the tonneau lean over and speak to the driver. The blue car started to draw slowly away, and Bert opened the throttle a few more notches. The motor took on a deep, vibrating note, and the hum of the gears rose to a higher pitch. Soon they began to overtake the car in front, and now it became evident that the latter was doing its best. The "Red Scout" fairly "ate up" the intervening space, and in a few moments had come up to within a few yards of the laboring blue car. The driver looked back, and seeing that the big red car in back of him would surely pass him in another few seconds, swerved his own car over so that it was squarely in the middle of the narrow country road. There was a shallow ditch on each side of the road, and the only way Bert could pass him was to take a chance of overturning and run two wheels in this ditch. Usually he would not have thought of exposing the boys to such a risk, but now he threw caution to the winds. Amid hoarse and excited cries from the boys he "gave her the limit," to use his own expression, and the "Red Scout" seemed fairly to leap ahead. [166]

He swerved the big machine into the ditch, and the wheels bumped and pounded over the uneven surface. The big car fairly shot by the blue machine, however, and amid a triumphant shout from the frenzied boys regained the smooth road and hid the defeated challenger in a cloud of dust.

Then Bert slowed it down a little, but kept well in the lead. The blue machine had evidently given up in despair, however, and gradually dropped back until a turn in the road hid it from their view. The boys broke into an excited discussion of the recent "brush," and all were enthusiastic in their praise of the staunch old "Red Scout." They also had many flattering things to say in regard to Bert's driving, until he was forced to protest that he would have to buy a hat about five sizes larger, as he could fairly feel his head swelling.

Finally the excitement subsided somewhat, and the boys had time to look around them and get their bearings. It did not take them long to find that they were in unfamiliar surroundings. They had gone at such a fast pace that they had covered more ground than they would have believed possible. Bert consulted the odometer, or distance recording instrument, and announced that they had covered almost thirty-five miles! [167]

"Say!" he exclaimed, "we'll have to do some tall hustling to get back to the camp in time for lunch. We'll keep on a little way, until we get to a place where the road is wide enough to turn around in, and then we'll beat it back as fast as possible."

As he finished speaking, they rounded a sudden turn in the road and a gasp arose from every boy in the car. Not fifteen feet ahead of them was a railroad crossing, and giving a lightning-like glance up and down the track Bert saw that there was a train approaching from both directions. It was obvious that the automobile would not be able to get across in time, and at the brisk rate at which they were traveling, it was equally impossible to stop the machine. It seemed inevitable that the auto would be struck by one or both of the ponderous locomotives, and it and its occupants be crushed to atoms.

The boys turned sick with horror, and gripped the sides of the automobile without being able to say a word. Their eyes gazed without winking at the two rushing locomotives, and they were unable to move. [168]

But Bert saw that they had one, and only one, bare chance of life. He did not try to apply the brakes, which would have been useless and fatal, but as the big auto reached the railroad tracks [he wrenched the steering wheel around and headed it directly up the track](#) in front of the northbound train. As he did this he opened the throttle, and bent over the wheel in a desperate and almost hopeless attempt to beat the flying locomotive until the engineer, who of course was using every means in his power to stop his train, could check its momentum and give them a chance to escape.

The "Red Scout" bumped and swayed wildly over the uneven ballasting and ties, and the boys breathed heartfelt prayers that nothing on the staunch car would break. In spite of all Bert could do, the fast express train gained on them, although sparks were streaming from the wheels where the brakes were clamped against them. The engineer had reversed the locomotive, and the great driving wheels were revolving backward.

The momentum of a fast and heavy express train is not a thing to be checked in a moment, however, and the boys in the rear of the automobile could feel the heat from the locomotive boiler. [169]

But the powerful automobile had gotten "into its stride" by this time, and was fairly flying over the uneven roadbed, and to the boys it felt as though it were only hitting the high places, as Frank afterward expressed it. For a hundred or two hundred feet the train failed to gain an inch, and then the brakes began to tell and it gradually fell to the rear.

Shorty leaned over and thumped Bert on the back and yelled: "Slow up, Bert, slow up! We're out of danger now, I guess."

Bert glanced back, and saw that Shorty was right. They were drawing rapidly away from the locomotive, so he reduced speed, and the automobile gradually attained a safer pace, and at the first opportunity Bert swung it up off the tracks and onto a country road. This done, he stopped the machine, and leaning on the steering wheel, buried his face in his hands. He said not a word, and the boys could see that he was trembling like a leaf. In a few moments he recovered himself, however, and the boys began to overwhelm him with questions:

"How did you ever think of going up the track instead of trying to get across, Bert?" inquired Frank. "If you had tried to cross that would have been the last of us, because we could never have made it."

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"I did it because it was the only thing to be done, I guess," replied Bert, in a shaky voice. "I'm no end of a fool to go at that speed on a road that I don't know, anyway. I don't know what I could have been thinking of to take such chances. Mr. Hollis will never have any confidence in me again, I guess."

"Nonsense!" retorted Bob, indignantly. "Why, if Mr. Hollis could have seen the presence of mind you showed, I think he would trust you all the more, if that is possible. Not one person in a hundred would have thought of doing what you did."

"Yes, but that's not all of it, by any means," said Bert, in a mournful voice. "I'll bet that we've broken something on the old car, as well as almost getting ourselves converted into sausage meat. Here goes to look things over, anyway."

A thorough inspection failed to reveal any break in the mechanism or frame, however, and even the tires were intact. Finally Bert straightened up with a relieved expression on his face, and said: "Well, I can't seem to find anything at present, that's one comfort. However, I wouldn't have believed that any car could stand such punishment and hold together. We won't kick against fate, though, for not smashing our car for us, will we?"

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"I guess not," agreed Shorty, heartily, "I think we ought to thank our lucky stars that any of us are left to talk about it, even. It's more than we had a right to expect fifteen minutes ago."

"I guess you're right, Shorty, at that," agreed Bert, "but now, we'd better make a quick sneak back to camp. Mr. Hollis will have given us up for lost."

Accordingly the boys all climbed into the car, and they were soon humming along on their homeward journey. You may be sure that Bert slowed down almost to a walking pace at every turn they came to, however, and once, just for fun, he said, "Say, Shorty, I don't like the looks of that curve ahead of us. Perhaps you had better get out and go on ahead to make sure that the coast is clear. I intend to be on the safe side this time."

Shorty immediately entered into the spirit of the joke, and vaulted out over the side of the tonneau while the auto was yet in motion, and disappeared around the curve. As the auto crept around the bend its occupants could see Shorty waving his handkerchief and signaling for them to come on. Bert laughingly complied, and, as they passed Shorty, stopped a moment to give him a chance to climb aboard. Shorty was soon in his place, and Frank laughed.

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"Gee, Bert, that's being careful for fair. If Mr. Hollis could have seen that I think it would have made up for our going too fast and almost getting smashed up. What do *you* say, fellows?"

There was a unanimous chorus of assent to this proposition, but Bert did not join in the laughter. He felt in his heart that he had been careless, and he knew that even his subsequent presence of mind in getting them out of a tight scrape did not wholly atone. His mind was filled with these thoughts, when Bob said, "Say, fellows, I don't see why we have to say anything to Mr. Hollis about our near accident, at all. It will just make him angry at us, and maybe he will not want to let us use the car again. Besides, now that it's all over, it won't do him any good to know what a narrow escape we've had."

"No, no, Bob, that would never do in the wide world," replied Bert, quickly, and in a reproving voice. "The last thing we ought to think of is to deceive Mr. Hollis, and you know it. I'm surprised that you should even have mentioned such a thing."

"Well, there's no harm done, is there?" replied Bob, but in a rather shame-faced manner. "We won't do it if you don't think we ought to, so there's no use getting mad about it. I just offered that as a suggestion, that's all."

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"Well," replied Bert, "the chief blame for this thing lies on me, anyway, and as soon as we get back to camp I intend to make a clean breast of the whole matter to Mr. Hollis, and he can do as he thinks best."

"Oh, all right, have it your own way," growled Bob, sullenly, and they relapsed into silence. By this time it was almost dark, and Bert was forced to drive very slowly, as he had never been over that particular road before. He had a well-developed sense of location, however, and was pretty sure that he was going in the right direction.

As it proved he was not deceived in this, and they shortly struck a road with which they were all familiar. Bert ventured to accelerate their pace somewhat, and it was not long before they came in sight of the cheery camp fire, around which Mr. Hollis and the boys who had not gone on the automobile trip were seated. As they heard the sound of the machine the group around the

fire leaped to their feet, and Mr. Hollis walked slowly toward them. When the auto swung into the circle of fire light and came to an abrupt halt, he said:

"What has been detaining you, boys? It seems to me that you are not treating me quite right by going off in this manner and returning at such an hour as this. Why, you should have been back two hours ago."

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A chorus of excited exclamations rose from the boys, but Mr. Hollis raised his hand for silence. When this had been restored, he said, "One at a time, boys, one at a time. Here, Bert, let's hear your explanation."

This Bert proceeded to give in a very straightforward manner, and did not attempt to gloss over any of the details of his recklessness, as he was pleased to call it.

Mr. Hollis listened with a serious face, and when Bert had finished, said, "Well, Bert, you were certainly to blame for taking chances in the manner that you did, but, on the other hand, you deserve credit for the presence of mind and courage you showed in extricating your companions and yourself from what might very easily have been a fatal accident. Still, you were right to tell me all about it, and I think that to-day's experiences may have the effect of making you more careful in the future."

"You may be sure, sir, that I will never be so careless again," promised Bert, and by the tone of his voice, Mr. Hollis knew that he meant it.

It was a hungry lot that sat down to supper that evening, and little was spoken of except their thrilling experiences of the day. After supper, however, they began to feel the effects of the exciting day, and all expressed themselves "tuckered out." As Frank said, "He felt too tired to take the trouble of going to sleep."

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They all managed to overcome this very important objection, however, and soon there was no sound to be heard in the camp except the rustling of the embers in the camp fire as they slowly burnt themselves out and settled into ashes.

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## CHAPTER XV

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### MOUNTAIN SCOUTING

**S**unshine! glorious, golden sunshine! Was ever sunshine more bright? Was ever sky more blue? Was ever day more beautiful? So questioned our campers as, fresh and glowing from a cold plunge in the lake, a hearty breakfast despatched, bedding aired and cots freshly made up, camp cleared up and morning duties all attended to in tip-top fashion, they mustered about Mr. Hollis to receive the day's commissions.

It mattered little what might be the commission allotted to each squad. Anything, everything that might come to them in the way of camp duty, could not but be a pleasure on such a glorious day as this. With young bodies aglow with health, young minds, awake and alert for all new impressions, young hearts filled with desire to live right, to do right, to be kind and helpful to all with whom they came in contact, how could they help being happy?

The camp was full of merriment, but perhaps the happiest squad of all was the auto squad. In fact this was always the case, but today the autoists had a special expedition. They were to play the mountain scouting game, and as the nearest mountains were at a distance from camp the squad had been detailed for the automobile.

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Gaily the fellows piled in and away they flew. As the roads which they must travel today were rough, their progress was much less rapid than usual; but, despite this they reached their destination in about half an hour.

"Hurrah for the 'Red Scout,'" cried Bob, as they tumbled out of the car. "If she can travel like that over these roads, what'll she do on the race track? Oh, say, fellows, the 'Gray Ghost' won't be in it. She'll fade away like a real ghost."

"Don't I wish the day of the race was here," said Tom. "Seems as if it would never come, doesn't it, fellows?" and "It sure does," they all chorused.

The "mountains" were really very high, rocky hills, but, as they were known to embrace many very steep and dangerous ravines, some of them nearly as perilous as mountain precipices, many and earnest had been the warnings given by Mr. Hollis as the boys had started on their expedition, and each boy carried in the pockets of his jacket some part of the equipment for first aid to the injured that was a part of the camp outfit. Thus safe-guarded, they felt no fear.

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As soon as they had arrived the three "hares," who had been coached in the game, went to hide themselves in the mountain, and, after sufficient time had been given them for this purpose, the "hounds" followed them; while Bert and Dave Ferris remained in the auto to watch for any signal that might be given them from the mountain.

The game of mountain-scouting consists in the "hounds," who must stay within certain limits of

ground, finding or "spotting" the "hares" within a given time. If they find or spot them even with field glasses, it counts, provided that the finder can tell who it is he has spotted. The hounds write down the names of any of the hares that they may see. If at the end of the allotted time no hare has been spotted, the hares win.

To-day two hours had been the given time and the boys in the mountains were to signal to Bert the news as each hare was found.

Time was nearly up. Three hares had been found. The chase had been a merry one and now hares and hounds together, no longer pursuers and pursued, but just happy-hearted campers were hiking down to the two in the automobile.

The return signal had been given, and Bert and Dave, relieved of the slight anxiety they had felt while the game was going on, expected each moment to see the boys come into view. [179]

Suddenly Dave sprang to his feet. "Look, Bert," said he, "another signal."

Breathlessly the boys read the signal wig-wagged to them from a point high up on the side of the hill. "Come quick! Fred hurt. Bring splints and kit and ropes."

It took only a very short time for the boys to reach the scene of the accident, and one glance took in the situation. Turning a corner the boys had come, all unknowing, upon a spot where the rocks shelved suddenly down into a deep ravine. The edge of the descent was hidden by a fringe of breast-high bushes, and Fred Morse, all unconscious of his danger, had stepped upon a piece of rock which gave under his foot, and, before the boys could even put out a hand to save him, had slipped through the bushes, and the horrified boys had heard their comrade go crashing through the bushes on the side of the ravine. His frightened cry, "Help, fellows, I'm falling!" still echoed in their ears. While two of the boys were signalling, the others had called to Fred but no reply had come back to them. When Bert reached them, Bob was running along the edge of the cliff, in great danger of going over himself, in a vain effort to find a place to climb down. [180]

Now, not waiting for the call for volunteers, he ran to Bert and begging him to hurry and help him, began fastening the ropes about himself. In a twinkling, the rope was adjusted, the knots securely tied, and the rope firmly held by four boys, Bob was lowered slowly and carefully over the side of the cliff.

Down, down he went till, just as the boys began to fear that the rope would not be long enough, it lay slack in their hands, and they knew that Fred was found. Presently came the signal, three distinct pulls on the rope, and soon poor Fred was lifted tenderly over the edge and laid gently down. A few minutes more and good old Bob was back with them.

Now, all attention was turned to Fred. After a careful examination from head to toe, Bert relieved the anxious fears of his comrades by the announcement that he was sure that Fred's life was not in danger. A faint cheer went up, which faded when Bert said Fred's leg was broken.

Consternation filled their hearts, for the nearest doctor was miles away, and though Bert felt sure there was no more serious injury than the broken limb, it was hard to tell what internal injury might have been sustained, and a long ride in the motor with the leg in the present condition might prove a serious matter. There was no doubt about it, the leg must be set at once. [181]

Not one of the boys had anything but the simplest knowledge of first-aid-to-the-injured, but, though at first hearts feared and hands trembled, they conquered fear and each boy went steadily to work to do his part. Whether it was to hand the cotton batting or to pull with full strength upon the poor broken limb, or hold the splints while Bert wound yards of bandage around them, not a boy flinched, and at last the work was done, and well done.

Then with faces scarcely less white than Fred's own, they turned to the task of making a litter on which to carry him down to the motor.

After a long search, for the hill was almost barren of trees, being covered mostly with scrubby bushes, two short and two long saplings were found and, laying two of the boys' jackets on the ground and running each of the long poles through the sleeves of a jacket, the two jackets were buttoned together with buttons down. Then the short poles were lashed on and a comfortable stretcher was ready to their hand.

In the auto on smooth roads, carried tenderly by his fellows over the rougher places, they at last reached the office of the crusty old village doctor and laid Fred on the couch for the doctor's examination. But though the doctor was crabbed, he was skilful, and in a very short time the temporary splints were replaced by permanent ones and the party turned toward camp. [182]

Homeward-bound in the auto at last, the boys drew a great sigh of relief and weariness. What an eventful day it had been! Begun so brightly, it had nearly ended in a tragedy, and at the thought their hearts swelled with gratitude that they were taking dear old Fred home with them alive, and, if not well, at least only the worse for a broken leg and some severe bruises. They could not be thankful enough.

"Who's that going along the road ahead?" asked one of the boys, and all saw, walking in the middle of the road and directly in the path of the motor, a little bent old woman's figure, the most conspicuous article of whose dress was a bright red, very draggled looking feather which drooped from the brim of a very ancient hat.

Very tired and pathetic, the old figure looked to the boys as they brought the machine to a stop beside her, and the old wrinkled face, wet with tears that was turned to them when they spoke to her, made every warm boy's heart ache with pity.

"Why it's Kitty Harrigan's old mother, who has just come over from Ireland," said Dick, in a low voice. "Don't you remember, fellows, how we laughed when Mr. Hollis told us about her the other night? He said, you know, that the poor old lady had been quite a village belle in her young days, and now, in her age, she imagines herself back in her girlhood. Look at her now."

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Indeed, the old lady was a study, for no sooner did her old eyes fall on Bert's handsome face as he spoke to her, than tears were brushed hastily aside, and with a coquettish glance from her brown eyes that, despite the years, were still bright, she made him so deep a curtsy that her long black coat swept the ground.

She had eluded all watchful eyes, and slipped off by herself for a walk, and when she wished to return, had taken the wrong direction, and was walking away from home instead of toward it. She had enjoyed herself immensely at first, making the most of her seldom-obtained freedom, but now her old feet were very tired and the old limbs that had carried her sturdily for nearly ninety years were growing weak at last, and, after such unusual exertion, were trembling beneath her.

At the boys' proposal to take her into the car and give her an automobile ride, the tired old face broke into a smile, and, as the boys settled her in the most comfortable seat in the tonneau, she leaned back luxuriously, and, clasping her old hands, said in ecstasy, "Did annybody iver see the loike of Biddy Harrigan ridin' in an artymobile, no less." She beamed upon the boys, she patted the hands and shoulders of all of them within her reach, and in her rich Irish brogue showered compliments upon them; for a very demonstrative creature was old Biddy Harrigan. She did not notice that mischievous Bert, whom she had called a "rale foine gintleman," took advantage of her flow of talk to sing in a very low tone, "'H-a-double r-i-g-a-n spells Harrigan'," but the boys found it very hard to keep their faces straight.

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On Fred's account, poor Fred, who had, perhaps, shown more courage than anyone else in that day's ordeal, for not one word of complaint had he uttered through all his pain, the boys felt that they must go on to the camp where he could get the rest and attention he so sadly needed. They did not know that what was causing him keener anguish than the physical pain was the fear that he would be unable to be on hand on that day of days which he, like every other fellow in camp, had thought of every waking moment, dreamed of every night and looked forward to with daily-increasing impatience—the day of the race between their adored "Red Scout" and the challenged "Gray Ghost." To miss seeing the "Red Scout" come in gloriously victorious (not a single doubt of her victory entered any boy's mind), what was the pain of a broken leg to the misery of that possibility! But they did know that he needed care, so they carried Biddy Harrigan with them. As supper was ready when they reached camp, they placed Biddy in the seat of honor and regaled her with the best of the camp fare.

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Never had an old women enjoyed herself so much. She could not get over the fact that the delicious supper had been cooked by boys. "If Oi hadnt of seen it and tashted it, Oi niver, niver would have belaved," she said over and over again.

After supper they hurried the old woman, gesturing and exclaiming at the delight of another "artymobile" ride, into the auto and soon had her home.

Irish Kitty, who washed for the camp, was overjoyed at her old mother's safe return and overwhelmed them with gratitude.

The boys last view of Biddy was a grateful, curtseying, waving, delighted old woman who repeated over and over again, "O'll not forgit yez, B'ys, O'll not forgit yez. Yez'll hear from old Biddy agin," and they did.

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## CHAPTER XVI

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### BY A HAIR'S-BREADTH

Tap, tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap, tap, tap—sounded in Ben's ears before he was fully awake and conscious. He sat up in bed and listened, and asked himself what that sound was. Was it rain? At the thought his heart grew heavy with apprehension. Rain on *this* day, when he and Bert and Tom were going to auto ten miles over to the Red River for a day of trout fishing. The other fellows, who did not care so much for fishing, were going on a tramp with Mr. Hollis, and he and his chums were to have the auto all to themselves the whole day.

Slipping noiselessly from his cot, he lifted the tent flap and stepped outside. The first rays of morning sunshine beamed full in his face, and the insistent noise that had aroused him proved to be the tap-tapping of an energetic woodpecker out for the proverbial "early worm."

Delighted at the prospect of such a glorious day, he rushed back into the tent with a hop, skip and a jump, at sight of which Don, always ready for a frolic, began frisking about and barking joyfully.



Of course, there was no sleep after that for the other fellows, and, bath and dressing and breakfast dispatched as soon as possible, the three boys, seated in their beloved auto, and bidding a noisy good by to the rest of the camp, sped away on their quest for trout enough for a rousing fish dinner that evening.

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You would have had to go a long way to find a merrier or more care-free set of boys than our three adventurers. Used as they were, by this time, to the automobile, it never became an old story to them, and now, as the swift motion of the car sent the cool air rushing against their young faces, with the sunshine turning everything to gold, and with the prospect of a day of rare sport before them, they gave full vent to their overflowing spirits. They shouted and laughed, and chaffed each other until many a staid farmer or farm hand, starting early work in the fields, or doing chores about the barns, found themselves smiling in sympathy. They recalled the time when they were boys, and the whole world just a place to be happy and jolly in.

The boys had enjoyed the ride so much, that all three were almost sorry when Tom pointed out the gleam of water through the trees, and they knew that Red River was at hand; but in a moment nothing was thought of but the fun of getting ready for their day's sport.

Tumbling out of the "Red Scout," laden with fishing baskets and tackle and rods, they raced down to the river bank, selected each a shady, grassy, comfortable spot, and, line and reel and hook adjusted, were obliged at last to curb their wild spirits, still their noisy chatter, and settle down to fisherman's quiet, although irrepressible Tom, unable to subside at once, sang softly:

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"Hush, hush, not a breath, not a breath,  
I've a nibble, still as death, still as death."

The others could not resist joining in the chorus of the old song, and regardless of consequences sang lustily:

"Oh, the joys of angling!  
Oh, the joys of angling!  
Oh, the joys, oh, the joys,  
The joys, the joys of angling."

Then a Sabbath stillness descended on the party, until Ben shouted, "first bite," and giving his line a sudden jerk and swing, landed a beautiful speckled trout upon the grass a few feet away.

For a few moments excitement reigned, and cries of "Hurrah for Ben," "good for us," "isn't he a beauty?" "let's keep it up," were heard, until Bert's "We certainly won't keep it up unless we keep quiet," sent them back to their places and again quiet reigned.

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Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes went by, and there were no more nibbles. The boys were beginning to get restless, when Bert landed the second fish, and, a couple of minutes after re-baiting his hook, added a third beauty to their collection.

Tom, seeing the success of his comrades, began to feel as though he were being left on the outside of things, but Bert encouraged him by reminding him, "First the worst, second the same, last the best of all the game," and sure enough, after nearly half an hour of most trying waiting, he suddenly felt his line twitch, and had the joy of landing the largest and finest fish yet caught.

When the excitement had a little subsided, Ben said, "I think we ought to celebrate that dandy catch, and the very finest way would be to have a feast."

As, what with the stirring ride and the excitement of the sport, each fellow felt, with Bert, that he was hungry enough to "eat nails," the hamper was brought from the "Red Scout" and unpacked with scant ceremony.

Every boy who has spent a day in the open will know exactly how *good* those cold chicken and ham sandwiches tasted; and the way the doughnuts vanished was something to see. Washed down with a drink of cool water from a nearby spring, it was a luncheon to be remembered.

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Again settling themselves in their chosen places, they continued to try "the heedless finny tribe to catch"; for four trout, even though they were fine, large ones, would, Tom said, regardless of the aptness of his simile, be no more than "a drop in the bucket for all those hungry fellows"; but their luck seemed to have changed.

For more than two hours not a nibble disturbed the quiet of those exasperating lines, and, as the ground, although covered with springy grass, is not the softest seat in the world, the boys' patience was tested to the utmost. They lay outstretched, resting on both elbows, and Tom, tempted by the heat and the absolute quiet, was just falling into a doze, when he was aroused to immediate action by the violent twitching of his line. A moment more, and another speckled victim was added to their store.

For the next hour and a half the fish bit almost as fast as they could bait their hooks, and they were kept busy hauling in one after another, until, in the joy and excitement of the sport, they lost all count of time. Fortunately for the camp, Bert suddenly made the double discovery that they had more than enough fish, and that if there was to be a fish dinner at camp that night, they would have to stop at once.

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"We'll have to make a quick sneak," said Ben, who, in moments of excitement, sometimes

forgot his most polished English.

Hastily packing their catch in the fishing baskets they had brought, they tossed them and the tackle into the auto, scrambled in themselves, and were off and away.

"The 'Red Scout' goes fine," said Tom, as the great car gathered headway. From the beginning, the auto race, which even the wonderful day's sport could not completely banish from their minds, had been the almost exclusive topic of conversation among the campers, and now that the day was rapidly drawing near, they could think of little else. "Is she in first-class condition, Bert?" asked Ben.

"Yes," Bert replied, "except that I noticed on the way out this morning that the brake did not work as well as usual. As soon as we reach home I will find and remedy the trouble, whatever it is. If worst comes to worst I can send to the factory for a new part, which would reach us inside of twenty-four hours."

By this time about half the ten mile stretch had been covered, and now they had begun to descend a very steep hill. Suddenly Bert's face went white. Tom, chancing to look at him, exclaimed, "What's the matter, Bert?" and Bert replied, "The brake won't work, fellows. Something's stuck. I can't control the car."

Then for a moment all yielded to a panic of fear. "Oh, Bert," said Ben, "you *must* stop her." "There must be *something* you can do," begged Tom.

Looking into the frightened faces of his two companions, Bert recovered his self-control, and resolved to do his best to avert an accident. "Don't be frightened, fellows," he said. "The steering gear is all right. Just sit tight and keep a stiff upper lip, and we'll come through."

"But, Bert, the bridge!" gasped Tom, and at the same moment a vision of the narrow bridge, scarcely wide enough for two autos to pass, which crossed the river at the foot of the steep hill, and just where the stream was deepest, flashed before their eyes. All realized that should the automobile fail to pass over the center of the bridge, and should strike the frail railing on either side—Well, they didn't dare to think of that.

Calling up all their courage, the brave boys resolved to face, without flinching, whatever awaited them. Once past the bridge and onto the broad roadway beyond, they knew that they would be safe. On level ground, with the power shut off, they would come to a standstill.

But "would they ever reach that level roadway?" each boy asked himself, with sinking heart.

Bert renewed his efforts to use the worthless brake, but without avail. Down, down, they flew, gaining speed with every passing moment, and now the bridge was in sight. Another moment, and they would be upon it.

"Courage, fellows," said Bert, in low, tense tones, and bracing himself, he concentrated all his mind and energy in guiding the car to the center of the bridge.

When a few hundred feet away the forward wheel struck a large stone, and the machine, which had been headed directly for the bridge, swerved to one side, and now sped onward toward the river.

With lightning-like rapidity Bert wrenched the steering wheel around, and once more, with only a few feet of space to spare, the "Red Scout"—good old "Red Scout," was headed *almost* for the middle of the bridge—not quite—the space had been too small. To the boys, looking ahead with straining, despairing eyes, it seemed that they *must* crash into the railing, and that nothing could save them.

Instinctively they closed their eyes, as the car dashed upon the bridge, expecting each minute to hear the crash of breaking timbers, and to feel themselves falling into the engulfing waters of the rushing river.

But the expected did not happen. Like a bird the "Red Scout" skimmed over the bridge, missing the railing by a hair's breadth, and was out upon the broad roadway. Almost before the boys could realize their escape from the awful danger that had threatened them, it was over, and the "Red Scout" gradually losing its speed, at last stood still.

Breathless, speechless, dazed, almost overcome, the boys sat looking at each other for a few moments, until, the full realization of their wonderful escape coming upon them, they grasped each other's hands convulsively. Each knew that in the other's heart, none the less earnest for being unexpressed, was a fervent prayer of thankfulness for their deliverance; but as speech returned to them, the first words uttered by Tom, were, "What do you think of that for classy driving, fellows?" at which they all laughed nervously.

Their laugh did not last long, however, for in the midst of it, out from among the trees and shrubbery that skirted the roadway emerged two rural constables. As if one overwhelming experience were not enough, the constables informed them that they were arrested for exceeding the speed limit.

Bert was the first to recover from the shock, and giving his companions a comical, but reassuring look, he stepped forward and said, "We have been speeding some, officers, but we simply couldn't help it," and he proceeded to explain. But the boys' faces expressed their

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consternation when they found that their explanation was not credited.

"We only have your word for that," said one of the men, "and you will have to convince the judge that you are telling the truth."

"Why, you certainly won't arrest us for an accident to our brake, for which we are not at all to blame!" cried Tom, indignantly.

"Well," said one constable, giving his fellow a knowing wink, "perhaps if you have a 'tenner' that you have no use for, we might forget all about it."

Bert, flushed and indignant, refused, and without further protest, the three boys, followed by the two constables, took their places in the car. As they were only a short distance from town, they soon arrived at the court house, and were left in an ante room to await their turn for a hearing.

Once alone, the three comrades stood for the second time within an hour, looking into each other's faces. As Tom afterwards said, "too full for utterance."

Suddenly Ben began strutting around the room in a most pompous manner, remarking, "I guess you don't know who we are. You know," said he, "that one is not a howling swell until he has been pinched for speeding, so behold us three aristocrats!" with another strut across the room. [196]

The boys could not help laughing, but Bert said, "Well, if this is being an aristocrat, I'd rather be excused. It won't be quite such a laughing matter if we find ourselves fined fifty or a hundred dollars."

"But," began Tom, and said no more, for at that moment they were called before the judge.

They were obliged to stand by and hear the constable's charge against them, given in detail. Then the judge turned to them—

"What are your names?" was the first question.

Bert replied for the three. Upon hearing the names the magistrate started, and looked keenly at them, but said nothing further than to ask what they had to say to the charge brought against them. Bert gave a clear and connected account of the accident to the auto brake, and its consequences, and ended by saying, that if any proof were needed, an examination of the brake would show the truth of their account.

The judge accepted the boy's statement, dismissed the charge against them, and turned to them a face from which all sternness had vanished, and been replaced by such a genial, friendly smile, that the three comrades were filled with wonderment. This was not lessened when the magistrate asked them if they were the three brave fellows who had stopped the two runaways a few days before, and saved the lives of the ladies who were driving. [197]

With amazement that the judge should know of the runaway, plainly written on their faces, the boys acknowledged that they had stopped the horses, but added that it was their auto that had frightened the animals, and so it had plainly been up to them to help.

The magistrate smiled more broadly at this, but repeated that they were brave boys, and that he was glad to meet them.

Looking quizzically at them, he said: "I have a special interest in those two ladies. One of them is my wife, and the other my daughter, and I can never repay you for what you have done for me. You have made me your debtor for life. If I can ever do anything for you, be sure and let me know."

Another handshake all around, and the boys found themselves free once more. Were they happy?—well, you should have seen them as they climbed into the car and headed toward camp. [198]

Events had so crowded upon each other that for the first mile or so the three speeders sat silently reviewing the occurrences of this most amazing day. And Tom, recalling their court room experience, broke out with:

"Gee whiz, I'm glad I'm free  
No prison cell for me."

This provoked a laugh and broke the tension, and a moment afterward a scouting party from the camp hailed them boisterously: "Where are those fish?" "How long do you think we can live without eating?" "Stand and deliver or take the consequences"—and as the auto came to a standstill, the basket was snatched and hurried off to the mess tent. Soon a delicious odor made every hungry boy's mouth water, and when at last they gathered around the table it was with wolfish appetites that they paid their respects to that belated fish dinner.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### BIDDY HARRIGAN REMEMBERS

“Cast thy bread—cast thy bread upon the waters,

“And it shall return—it shall return unto thee after many days,” chanted a clear, high voice, truly a wonderful voice, which Bert claimed as his own discovery.

It was almost bed-time in the camp. The day had been a most fatiguing one, and all had returned so weary that no one cared for the usual lively evening entertainment. Even Mr. Hollis had said that he was “dog-tired,” and he felt with the boys that the very finest thing in the world was just stretching out on the grass, resting weary feet, and saying to one’s self: “Nothing to do till tomorrow.”

It was a perfect evening, cool and quiet. There was no moon, but the stars twinkled brightly, and the boys had been looking up at them and trying to make out some of the six constellations that everyone should be familiar with. But even that, in their present state of laziness, was too much like work, and now they lay doing and almost thinking nothing.

Even Don, the big collie, that the tramps had deserted, was not inclined to romp with the boys as usual, but lay quietly with his great head resting upon his paws. He had become the pet and plaything of the whole camp and treated them all impartially except Bert whom he had chosen as his one particular master. He wanted no other heaven than this—to lie, as now, close to Bert, whose hand caressed his head while he said now and again: “Good dog”; “Good old fellow!” Don, like the boys, was at peace with all the world. [200]

Suddenly, someone started a popular air in which all joined. This put them in a musical humor, and song followed song, changing after a while from popular music and rollicking college songs to those of a more sentimental nature. Most of the boys had good voices. With the soprano of some, the tenors of the older fellows and Mr. Hollis’ fine bass, the camp singing would have delighted any lover of music.

Whenever the boys had sung together, they had noticed that Phil’s voice had never joined in with the others. They had guyed him about it but as he would never answer them, they had come to the conclusion that he could not sing and was sensitive about it, so they had stopped teasing him.

To-night, as the notes of “The Soldier’s Farewell” floated over the camp, Bert noticed that Shorty was singing for the first time, and though his voice was low as though he were purposely holding it back, for fear the attention of the boys might be drawn to it, the notes were remarkably clear and pure. [201]

When the song ended, Bert turned to Phil and asked him if he liked music. Phil answered that he loved it and added more as if he were thinking aloud than talking, that it was “the finest thing on earth.”

The boys sat up and stared. There was a moment of surprised silence and then a chorus of voices:

“Then you can sing?”

“We never dreamed you could.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Why wouldn’t you sing for us?”

“Because,” said Phil, who had decided to tell them the real reason at last, “because all you big fellows thought that just because I was small, I couldn’t do anything worth while, and I was sore.”

The fellows expressed their regret and then in responses to a few kindly questions put by Mr. Hollis, they learned that Shorty’s ambition was to obtain a thorough musical education. They learned too that for two years past he had been the soloist in the boy choir of one of the prominent churches in New York. He had joined the boy choir because there he could gain, without cost, a knowledge of sight reading and voice control. [202]

Bert’s “Won’t you sing something for us, Phil?” was not to be resisted and after a moment’s thought his clear notes rose in a burst of melody:

“Cast thy bread upon the waters”—

The boys fairly held their breath as the flutelike notes of one of the finest voices they had ever heard, floated off into the woodland spaces.

When he had finished, every one sat spellbound, paying the highest tribute of a moment of perfect silence. Even when the silence was broken by hearty hand clapping, the spell of the music still brooded over them. It had been too fine for noisy applause.

The boys’ appreciation of his singing was very grateful to Phil, and not the least tribute was Tom’s: “Gee, Phil, I hope the birds didn’t wake up to hear that. They would have been green with envy.”

The tension was broken by Sam’s asking: “What does that mean, ‘Cast thy bread upon the waters’—and how can it return?” Mr. Hollis was glad to explain that no kind deed or word is ever [203]

wasted, but is sure to return blessings on the one who gave it, if only in the glow that a kind action always brings.

But, uplifted as the boys had been, it is not in boy nature to stay long upon the heights and they soon came down to earth again.

Jim showed how fully he had come back to earth by remarking as he suddenly remembered that owing to a miscalculation as to the elastic nature of a boy's capacity, both flour and corn meal had given out, and that in consequence, nothing in the shape of bread had come their way that night: "I wish some real bread were coming tomorrow. I am not particular about its coming by water. It can get here any old way, as long as it comes."

The sound of someone approaching the camp aroused them. Irish Kitty appeared, with a big basket on one arm and a great bunch of red roses in her apron.

As soon as the boys saw the flowers, a shout went up: "Roses! roses! What beauties!" and on Kitty saying that she had counted them and there was one for each, they were seized upon and distributed in a twinkling.

Now, Kitty stated that she had a "prisint for the young gintlemin" from her mother, Mrs. Harrigan, "to thank thim for the foine illigant ride in the artymobile."

The big basket was uncovered and there lay revealed to the eyes of the delighted boys a number of large loaves of delicious homemade bread. One did not need to taste that bread to know its value. The firm white loaves spoke for themselves. Corn bread they had in plenty every day, but white wheat flour bread was not included in their regular camp rations, so that this was indeed a treat. They were all devouring it already in imagination, and each wished it were morning so that they might begin in reality.

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Kitty departed amid "Good nights" and hearty thanks to her mother, and, camp bed time having arrived, all drifted toward their tents, Tom gaily singing:

"'Tis a name  
That no shame  
Has iver been connected with  
Harrigan! That's me."

All at once some one shouted: "Look at Ben Cooper." They turned to see Ben standing like a statue, eyes fixed on nothing, staring straight ahead of him.

"Say, fellows," said he, "that bread that we cast on the waters on our way home from the doctor's the other day sure did come back, didn't it?"

"It certainly did and it didn't take 'many days' either to get here," said Tom.

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"And," chimed in Shorty, "a big bunch of red roses thrown in, too."

"Yes, Caruso," added Bert, throwing his arm affectionately over Phil's shoulder, "you must be a prophet as well as a singer."

Very soon the tired boys were off to dreamland, where visions of loaves of fluffy white bread, each loaf with a red rose growing out of it, floated about, and imaginative Dave dreamed that old Biddy made a "prisint" of a loaf to each one, singing in a high cracked voice as she handed them around: "Harrigan! That's me!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII

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### THE RACE

"Well," exclaimed Bert, drawing a long breath as he rose from his cramped position beside the "Red Scout," "this machine is in as good condition as I know how to put it, and if nothing happens I guess we can show you fellows some speed this afternoon."

It was the morning of the long wished-for race and Bert was addressing an excited group of boys, who were holding wrenches, oil cans, and such other appliances as he might need in putting the finishing touches on the pampered machine. The whole camp was in a ferment of excitement and expectancy, and many were the heartfelt wishes for Bert's success.

To these boys it seemed the most important thing on earth that their machine should win, and it is safe to say that if Bert had wanted to remove a piece of black grease from the car and had not a cloth handy, any one of them would have sacrificed his best handkerchief without a moment's hesitation, and been glad to do it.

Fortunately, such a contingency did not arise, however, and finally the last nut had been tightened and the last fine adjustment made, and everything was ready for the start.

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The race was scheduled to start at two o'clock, but as the boys had to walk to the track, and this necessitated a long detour around the lake, they started almost immediately after breakfast,

so as to get there in plenty of time.

The boys in the two rival camps were not the only persons interested in the race by any means. News of it had leaked out over the surrounding countryside during the week between the completion of arrangements and the actual race, and now there promised to be a goodly attendance of farmers and their families.

Considerable interest was taken in the camp by the kindly country folk, and now the boys were surprised at the number of carriages and farm wagons, full of jolly youngsters, that they met on their march.

Every one they met shouted cheery greetings to them, which they returned with interest. It made them very happy to see the interest taken in them by the farmers, and the very evident good will expressed by them. They didn't take the trouble to figure out the reason for this, but it was not very hard to find. The fact is, the boys were so manly and well-behaved that they won their way into all hearts.

Many a time they had seen the boys stop their machine rather than frighten a skittish horse, and more than one weary farmer had been given a lift on his way home from some distant field. [208]

So, as has been said, the boys were greeted with expressions of good will on every side as they marched along, and it made them realize, perhaps more than anything else could, that it paid to live a manly, upright life.

Meanwhile, back in camp Mr. Hollis, Bert, and Dick, were having a final discussion before leaving for the rival camp in the "Red Scout." It had been decided that Dick was to ride with Bert in the race, and give him any help that he might need.

The other boys had been bitterly disappointed, especially Tom, who had counted right along on going.

"It only seems fair that I should go," he had contended. "Bert and I have always been special pals, and I wanted to share any risk he is going to take."

But Mr. Hollis was firm as a rock, as he well knew how to be when he thought circumstances required it of him.

"I'm a little bit uneasy about the race, anyway," he explained, "and as long as somebody has to take chances I want it to be some boy who is old enough to be responsible for his own actions. I know nobody could fill the place better than you, my boy, but I am sure that when you think over what I have said you will agree with me in my decision," and Tom had to admit to himself that, as usual, Mr. Hollis was right. [209]

But now the time had come to leave for the rival camp, and Mr. Hollis and Tom climbed into the tonneau, while Bert and Dick occupied the two front seats.

Soon they had started, and as they went along Bert gave Dick his last instruction. "Remember," said he, "that when we take the turns you must lean as far toward the inside of the track as you can. This may not seem to help much in keeping those inside wheels on the ground, but every little thing like that does help, and I think that we will have to do everything we know how to beat that 'Gray Ghost' of theirs. That car is no slouch, as the saying goes, and Ralph Quinby knows his business."

"All right, Bert," replied Dick, "I'll try to remember all the things you have told me. I really believe," he continued, laughing, "that I have forgotten more about automobiles in the last week than I ever knew before. I never had any idea that there was so much to know about a car, and you certainly have got it down to perfection."

Bert was pleased at this evidently sincere tribute from Dick, and could not prevent a slight flush of pleasure from mounting to his face. [210]

"Well, Dick," he remarked after a moment, "all I've got to say is that if such a trio as you and I and the old 'Red Scout' can't win that race, there must be something the matter with the universe, that's all."

The rival camp all felt as confident as did Mr. Hollis' troop, however, and to the impartial observer it would certainly have seemed as though there was little to choose between the autos and their crews.

By this time they had come in sight of the old race track, and were astonished, and, it must be confessed, somewhat confused at the sight that met their eyes. There was an old rickety grand stand along one side of the course, and this was literally packed with a bright-colored mass of humanity. Even scattered around the infield there were quite a few farm wagons, with their complement of folks out for a holiday.

"Say," said Dick to Bert in a low tone, "I didn't count on having an audience like this. They'll guy the life out of us if we lose."

"Well," said Bert, who by this time had recovered from his first astonishment, "that's all the more reason why we should win. We simply can't let ourselves be beaten now, that's all there is about it."

But there was no time for further speculation, as Mr. Hollis was seen approaching them, and it was evident the race must soon begin. [211]

Bert ran the "Red Scout" around to a small shed in back of the grandstand, and he and Dick made their final preparations. These consisted in taking off the hood, or bonnet, altogether, and removing the exhaust pipes from the motor. As Bert had already explained to Dick, this was done to eliminate any back pressure from the exhaust gases. Under ordinary conditions, this makes such a small difference in the power of a car that it can hardly be said to count, but in a race every ounce of power is required. This is done on every racing car, and that is why the explosions make such loud, sharp reports when the car is in action.

It need hardly be said that every boy in Mr. Hollis's troop, except poor Fred, was present, and many were the anxious looks cast at Bert and Dick to see, if possible, how they felt about the outcome of the race. Both had been trained to have control of their feelings, however, and so outwardly they appeared to be very calm.

This was far from being the real state of their feelings, and both felt as though their hearts had suddenly become too large and were trying to get out between their ribs. They realized that it was not only their own reputation that would suffer if they were defeated, but the whole camp was involved. What would Mr. Hollis think of them if the other boys were victorious? What would the boys who had such blind confidence in them and the "Red Scout" do or say if the "Gray Ghost" won? [212]

Such thoughts were demoralizing, however, and neither Bert nor Dick entertained them any longer than they could help. Into both their faces came that stern, resolved look that all the boys had seen at times and come to love, and in the minds of Tom and the others all doubts as to the final result vanished.

Meanwhile, Mr. Thompson's troop had been giving the "Gray Ghost" its final touches, and now, at the sound of a mellow whistle, both Bert and Ralph cranked their motors.

None of the boys had ever heard the unmuffled exhaust of a racing car before, and at the savage roar that now issued from both cars all the boys fell back several steps with scared faces. As soon as they realized that the gasoline tank had not exploded, nor any other equally awful thing occurred, they came forward and tried to ask questions, but in the confined shed they could hardly hear the sound of their own voices.

Slowly the fire-spitting monsters were backed out of the shed, and their respective drivers swung them around and on to the track. They were greeted by a wave of cheering both from the boys and from the assembled farmers, and more than one burly countryman who had come to the "kids' racket" under protest was seen to sit up straight and open his eyes wide. [213]

No doubt many of them had expected to see a rather tame affair, and in fact few of them had ever seen an automobile race, or knew the tremendous speed of which a good car was capable, or realized the cool head and steady nerves required to control the condensed power of forty horses traveling at a speed of close to a mile a minute.

However, they were soon to experience a few of the thrills attendant on such an occasion. The two leaders had been holding a consultation, and now they approached the vibrating, eager cars.

Mr. Hollis was forced to shout to make himself heard above the din of the exhausts. "It is understood," he said, "that this race is to be run from a standing start, and is to be for a distance of ten miles, or ten laps around the track. The cars must line up on the tape that we have stretched in front of the grandstand, and at the report of my pistol they are to start, each driver getting away as best he can. We have drawn lots for the choice of position, and the 'Gray Ghost' won, and is to have the inside position. Mr. Thompson and I will act as judges. Is that perfectly clear?" to Bert and Ralph. [214]

"Yes, sir," they both responded, and proceeded to manœuvre their cars into the appointed positions.

Mr. Hollis and Mr. Thompson took their places in the grandstand, part of which the boys had been directed to reserve for them.

By this time the cars were in position, each one with its front wheels resting on the strip of white tape. The "Gray Ghost" had a decided advantage to start with, as it is evident that in any race the car that has the inside position, that is, the part of the track nearest to the center of the field, has a slightly lesser distance to travel than the car on the outside, and in a close race every few feet count.

But now there was a breathless hush over the grandstand, and all eyes were on Mr. Hollis's hand, holding the pistol aloft. Bert and Ralph were bent over their levers, every muscle tense, and nerves stretched to the breaking point.

Crack! went the pistol. With a mighty roar, and the blue flames spitting from the exhaust ports, the two great machines bounded forward, and almost with one movement Bert changed the gears from first to second, from second to high. At every change the willing car leaped ahead with ever-increasing momentum, and Bert felt a wild thrill run through his body as he realized the vast force beneath him, subject only to his control. [215]

The "Gray Ghost" had made almost as good a start, however, and now, although the "Red Scout" had a slight lead, the inside position began to tell, and the "Gray Ghost" gained a trifle.

Dick, who had been looking back over his shoulder, now turned to Bert and yelled excitedly in his ear, "Sock it to her, Bert! Give her the gas! They're gaining on us!"

They had now covered the first lap, and the speedometer hand on the "Red Scout's" dashboard registered a speed of fifty miles an hour. Bert knew he could do better than that, but remembered Mr. Hollis's instructions not to take any unnecessary chances. The machine was working beautifully, and a wave of pride surged over him as he thought that this was largely due to the care and work he had bestowed upon it.

But now the "Gray Ghost" was ranging alongside—ahead—

"Give her a pump full of oil, Dick," yelled Bert to his friend, and opened the throttle a trifle wider.

The machine answered like a thing of life. The wind whistled in their ears, the track seemed a mere gray blur racing away behind them, and the mighty speed song of the ravening motor was like music in their ears. [216]

Faster and faster they flew, the two cars keeping pace side by side, and the speedometer hand creeping up—up.

Fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-six! it registered, and the flying cars seemed barely to touch the ground. On the straight stretch in front of the grandstand they gathered such speed that at the turns the rear wheels skidded, throwing up showers of dirt, and the drivers were forced to slow down a little or the machines would surely have collided.

Up to that time neither car had a decided advantage, but now they had covered the eighth lap, and both crews realized that the time had arrived to call on the racing engines for their final and greatest effort.

The crowds in the stands were yelling like maniacs, as each car in turn pushed its nose ahead of the other. But Bert and Dick heard nothing but the terrific roar of the racing cars. Their pulses beat like trip-hammers; their eyes were starting from their heads. They felt rather than saw that the "Gray Ghost" was gaining—gaining only a little, inch by inch, but gaining. Now it had come abreast; now it was slowly but surely forging ahead. It looked as though the "Red Scout" had "shot its bolt," and its partisans in the grandstand groaned in an agony of apprehension that was fast becoming despair, while their rivals danced up and down and shrieked encouragement to their gray champion. [217]

Now they were on the last lap, and suddenly Bert leaned forward and advanced his spark to the limit. It was do or die. His heart exulted as he felt the splendid car leap forward. He took a firmer grip on the wheel and threw the throttle wide open. His mysterious "sixth sense" had told him that he had something in reserve, and now the "Red Scout" justified his judgment. It leaped, it flew. It collared the "Ghost" just as they turned into the stretch, and tore down the course, the explosions of its motor blending together in one deafening volley of defiance as it drew away from its rival. [Across the line it flew like a rocket](#), the pistol cracked, and—*the race was won!*





**Across the line it flew like a rocket.—(See page 217)**

Both cars made another circuit of the track before they were able to stop, and then drew up in front of the grandstand.

Immediately the crowd surged down, and in a moment the two contestants were surrounded by a frenzied mob of shouting and hat-throwing boys, and almost equally excited, if less demonstrative, country people.

Mr. Hollis pressed forward and grasped the hands of Bert and Dick, one in each of his. "You did nobly, boys," he exclaimed, but there was a catch in his voice, and his face looked gray and drawn, "you did great work, but I would not consent to your racing again for all the money in the world. It is altogether too dangerous."

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But by this time the defeated boys belonging to Mr. Thompson's troop had recovered a little from their chagrin, and now elbowed their way through the crowd, headed by their leader and Ralph Quinby.

Like the clean-cut and manly fellow that he was, Ralph walked up and shook hands with Bert and Dick in turn.

"Well," he said, "you fellows certainly put up a great race, and we have nothing more to say. It was simply a case of the best car winning, that's all."

Bert appreciated his manly spirit, and replied, "It was simply a matter of the 'Red Scout' having a little more speed. If we exchanged cars, you would win and we would lose. You gave us a hard tussle up to the last second."

All the other boys showed the same feeling as had Ralph, and both parties separated with mutual expressions of esteem and good will.

All the members of Mr. Hollis's troop that could do so crowded into the "Red Scout," and various good-natured farmers volunteered to make room in their capacious wagons and take the rest home. Room was even found for Don, who had been an excited spectator of the race and was now regarded by the jubilant boys as their mascot.

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"It's little enough to do at that," remarked one husky agriculturist. "I'd be willing to cart the whole outfit over and back a dozen times for the sake of seeing another race like that. I wish old Dobbin could hike along like them things."

And in this he expressed the general sentiment of the crowd.

As they traveled campward through the cool twilight the boys shouted and sang, and in a thousand other noisy but harmless ways found a vent for their overflowing enthusiasm.

Bert and Dick were the heroes of the day, as they well deserved to be. The race was run again

at least a hundred times, and by the time they struck camp they had quieted down to some extent. Their beloved car had, of course, reached camp ahead of them, and now, as they alighted and caught sight of Bert and Dick, their enthusiasm flamed up again, and cheer after cheer resounded through the silent woods.

At last they cooled down sufficiently to go to bed, but it was a long time before they finally got to sleep. Bert and Dick shook hands before parting to go to their different tents. For a few seconds they looked into each other's eyes, and the grip of their hands tightened before they finally separated and said good night. For when two good comrades meet danger face to face and win out, a new and never-to-be-forgotten bond is riveted between them that lasts through life.

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It was a wildly hilarious group of campers who sat down to a piping hot breakfast the next morning. Some, indeed, had hardly slept at all, so great was their rejoicing at the "Red Scout's" glorious victory. They had won and the much-vaunted "Gray Ghost" had had to "take their dust." What if it were their last day in camp? As Jim, who was famous for mixing his figures of speech, said, "The camp, anyway, was breaking up in a blaze of glory." Every exciting detail of the great struggle was rehearsed and enlarged upon, times without number. They crowded round the splendid car and praised it and patted it as though it were alive and could understand how proud they were of its victory.

And Bert! If he had been anything but the fine, manly fellow he was, he would have been utterly spoiled by the plaudits heaped upon him. He had been their hero before; now he was their idol. His skill, his judgment, his nerve, were dwelt upon to the exclusion of everything else; but he modestly disclaimed any credit and put it all up to the car. "This is the fellow that did it all," he said, patting the great machine affectionately.

[221]

"Yes," quoted Dick,

"This is the steed that saved the day,  
By carrying Sheridan into the fight  
From Winchester, twenty miles away,'

but all the same," he went on, "the steed saved the day because Sheridan was on his back, and the 'Red Scout' saved the day because Bert Wilson was at the wheel." And to this the whole camp gave a thundering chorus of assent.

And Bert was at the wheel that afternoon, when, after "three times three" given for the "Red Scout" and its driver, the noble car stood panting, crowded to the guards with as many as could tumble in, ready to lead the way to the station where they were to take the train to the city.

"I tell you, Tom," he said, as he grasped the wheel and the great car sprang forward, "I never expect to have so much pleasure and excitement in my life as I have had this summer."

But Bert was mistaken. A broader field and greater triumphs lay before him—exploits that would tax every ounce of brain and muscle; victory snatched from defeat amid the applause of excited thousands. How he met the test and won his fight will be told in the next volume, "Bert Wilson's Fadeaway Ball."

[222]

THE END

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Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected, except as noted below.

Colon (:) punctuation has been retained as in original.

Normalized variations of Red Scout and Gray Ghost to 'Red Scout' and 'Gray Ghost' within quoted speech and "Red Scout" and "Gray Ghost" in all other cases.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

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