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Mountain Camp, by John
Henry Goldfrap**

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Title: The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp

Author: John Henry Goldfrap
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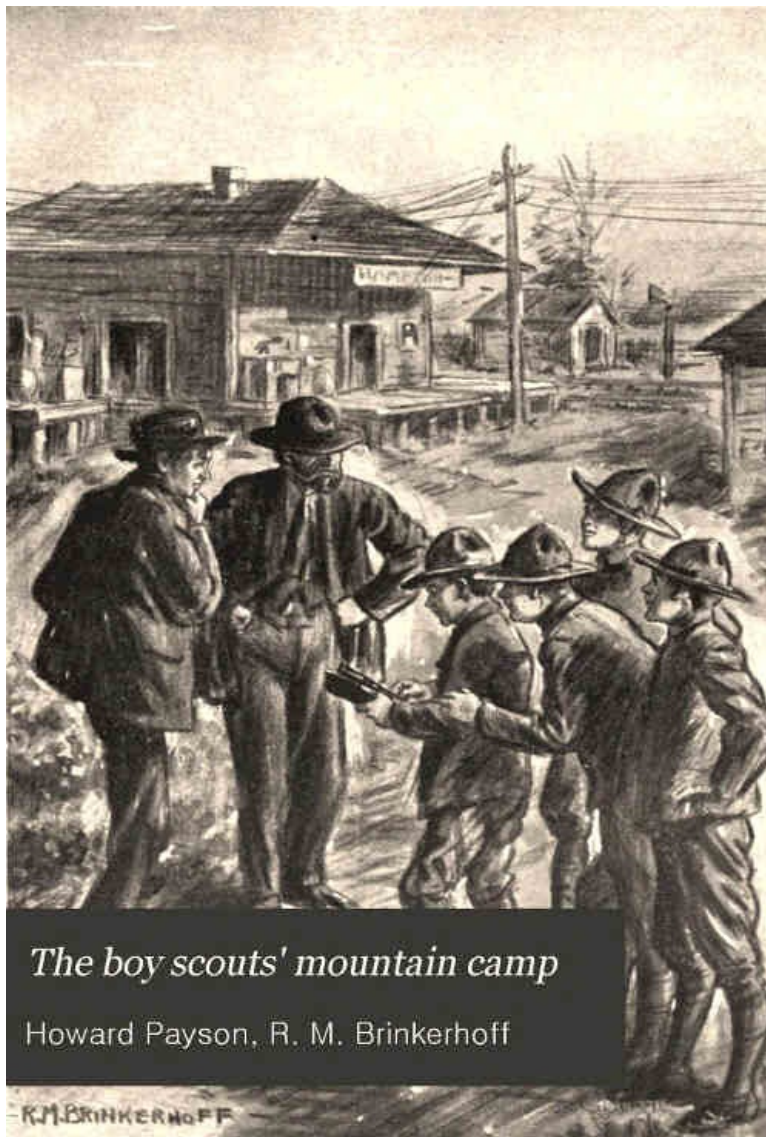
Release date: February 16, 2013 [EBook #42102]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS' MOUNTAIN CAMP ***

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The boy scouts' mountain camp

Howard Payson, R. M. Brinkerhoff

**THE BOY SCOUTS'
MOUNTAIN CAMP**

BY
LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

AUTHOR OF "THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE EAGLE PATROL,"
"THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE RANGE,"
"THE BOY SCOUTS AND THE ARMY AIRSHIP," ETC.

*WITH FOUR ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS
BY R. M. BRINKERHOFF*

NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp.

CHAPTER I. A TYPICAL BOY SCOUT.

"Hullo, Rob; what's up?"

Merritt Crawford stopped on his way past the Hampton post-office, and hailed Rob Blake, the leader of the Eagle Patrol, of which Merritt was corporal. Both lads wore the natty scout uniform.

"Not a thing is up or down, either," rejoined Rob, with a laugh; "it looks as if things had stopped happening in Hampton ever since that schooner was blown up."

"And Jack Curtiss's hopes of a fortune with it," added Merritt. "Well, I'm off home. Going that way?"

"Yes, I'll be with you in a— Hullo, what's happening?"

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From farther up the street, at one end of which lay the glistening sheet of water known as Hampton Inlet, there came excited shouts. Then, suddenly, into the field of vision there swept, with astonishing rapidity, a startling sight.

A large automobile was coming toward them at a rapid rate. On the driver's seat was a white-

faced young girl, a cloud of fair hair streaming out about her frightened countenance. She was gripping the steering wheel, and seemed to be striving desperately to check the onrush of the machine. But her efforts were vain. The auto, instead of decreasing its rate of progress, appeared every minute to be gaining in speed.

It bumped and swayed wildly. A cloud of yellow dust arose about it. Behind the runaway machine could be perceived a crowd of townsfolk shouting incoherently.

“Oh, stop it! I shall be killed! Stop it, please do!”

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The young girl was shrilly screaming in alarm, as the machine approached the two boys. So rapidly had events progressed since they first sighted it, that not a word had been exchanged between them. All at once, Merritt noticed that he was alone. Rob had darted to the roadway. As the auto dashed by, Merritt saw the young leader of the Hampton Boy Scouts give a sudden flying leap upon the running-board. He shot up from the road as if a steel spring had projected him.

For one instant he hung between life and death—or, at least, serious injury. The speed with which the auto was going caused the lad’s legs to fly out from it, as one of his hands caught the side door of the tonneau. But in a jiffy Rob’s athletic training triumphed. By a supreme effort he managed to steady himself and secure a grip with his other hand. Then he rapidly made his way forward along the running-board.

But this move proved almost disastrous. The already panic-stricken girl took her attention from the steering-wheel for an instant. In that molecule of time, the auto, like a perverse live thing, got beyond her control. It leaped wildly toward the sidewalk outside the Hampton candy store. A crowd of young folks—it was Saturday afternoon—had been indulging in ice cream and other dainties, when the shouts occasioned by the runaway machine had alarmed them.

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Instantly soda and candy counters were neglected, and a rush for the sidewalk ensued. But, as they poured out to see what was the matter, they were faced by deadly peril.

The auto, like a juggernaut, was careening straight at them. Its exhausts roared like the nostrils of an excited beast.

Young girls screamed, and boys tried to drag them out of harm’s way. But had it not been for the fact that at that instant Rob gained the wheel, there might have been some serious accidents.

The lad fairly wrenched it out of the hands of the girl driver, who was half fainting at the imminence of the peril. A quick, savage twist, and the car spun round and was on a straight course again. That danger, at least, was over. But another, and a deadlier, threatened.

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Right ahead lay the spot where the road terminated in a long wharf, at which occasional steamers landed. Every second brought them closer to it. If Rob could not stop the machine before it reached the end of the wharf, it was bound to plunge over and into the sea. All this

flashed through the boy's mind as he strove to find some means of stopping the car. But the auto was of a type unfamiliar to him. One experiment in checking its motion resulted instead in a still more furious burst of speed.

Like objects seen in a nightmare, the stores, the white faces of the alarmed townsfolk, and the other familiar objects of the village street, streaked by in a gray blur.

"I must stop it! I must!" breathed Rob.

But how? Where had the manufacturer of the car concealed his emergency brake? The lever controlling it seemed to be mysteriously out of sight. Suddenly the motion of the car changed. It no longer bumped. It ran terribly smoothly and swiftly.

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From the street it had passed out upon the even surface of the planked wharf. Only a few seconds now in which to gain control of it!

"The emergency brake!" shouted Rob aloud in his extremity.

"Your foot! It works with your foot, I think!"

The voice, faint as a whisper over a long-distance telephone, came to the ears of the striving boy. It belonged to the girl beside him. Glancing down, Rob now saw what he would have observed at first, if he had had time to look about him—a metal pedal projected through the floor of the car. With an inward prayer, he jammed his foot down upon it. Would it work?

The end of the pier was terribly close now. The water gleamed blue and intense. It seemed awaiting the fatal plunge overboard.

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But that plunge was not taken. There was a grinding sound, like a harsh purr, the speed of the car decreased, and, finally, it came to a stop—just in time.

From the landward end of the pier a crowd came running. In front were two or three khaki-uniformed members of the Eagle Patrol. Behind them several of the Hawks were mingled with the crowd.

Beyond all the confusion, Rob, as he turned his head, could see another automobile coming. It had two passengers in it. As the crowd surged about the boy and the girl, who had not yet alighted, and poured out questions in a rapid fusillade, the second car came "honking" up.

A murmur of "Mr. Blake" ran through the throng, as a tall, ruddy-faced man descended, followed by a military-looking gentleman, whose face was strongly agitated. Mr. Blake was Rob's father, and, as readers of other volumes of this series know, the banker and scout patron of the little community. It was his car in which he had just driven up with his companion.

The latter hesitated not a moment, but in a few long strides gained the side of the car which Rob's efforts had stopped just in time.

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"Bravely done, my lad; bravely done," he cried, and then, to the girl, "good heavens, Alice, what an experience! Child, you might have been killed if it had not been for this lad's pluck! Mr. Blake,"

as the banker came up, "I congratulate you on your son."

"And I," rejoined the banker gravely, "feel that I am not egotistical in accepting that congratulation. Rob, this is my friend, Major Roger Dangerfield, from up the State."

"And this," said the major, returning Rob's salutation and turning to the girl who was clinging to him, "is my daughter, Alice, whose first experience with the operation of an automobile nearly came to a disastrous ending."

Rob Blake, whose heroic action has just been described, was—as readers of The Boy Scout Series are aware—the leader of the Eagle Patrol, an organization of patriotic, clean-lived lads, attracted by the high ideals of the Boy Scout movement.

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The patrol, while of comparatively recent organization, had been through some stirring adventures. In *The Boy Scouts of The Eagle Patrol*, for instance, we read how Rob and his followers defeated the machinations of certain jealous and unworthy enemies. They repaid evil with good, as is the scout way, but several despicable tricks, and worse, were played on them. In this book was related how Joe Digby in the camp of the Eagles, was kidnaped and imprisoned on a barren island, and how smoke signaling and quick wit saved his life. The boys solved a mystery and had several exciting trials of skill, including an aeroplane contest, which was almost spoiled by the trickery of their enemy, Jack Curtiss.

In the second volume, *The Boy Scouts on the Range*, we followed our young friends to the Far West. Here they distinguished themselves, and formed a mounted patrol, known as *The Ranger Patrol*. The pony riders had some exciting incidents befall them. These included capture by hostile Indians and a queer adventure in the haunted caves, in which Tubby almost lost his life.

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In this volume, Jack Curtiss and his gang were again encountered, but although their trickery prevailed for a time, in the end they were routed. A noteworthy feature of this book was the story of the career and end of Silver Tip, a giant grizzly bear of sinister reputation in that part of the country.

The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship, brought the lads into a new and vital field of endeavor. They met an army officer, who was conducting secret tests of an aeroplane, and were enabled to aid him in many ways. In all the thrilling situations with which this book abounds, the boys are found always living up to the scout motto of "Be prepared."

How they checkmated the efforts of Stonington Hunt, an unscrupulous financier, to rob a poor boy of the fruits of his inventive genius—a work in which he was aided by his unworthy son, Freeman Hunt—must be read to be appreciated. In doing this work, however, they earned Hunt's undying hatred, and, although they thought they were through with him when he slunk disgraced out of Hampton, they had not seen the last of him.

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As the present story progresses, we shall learn how Stonington Hunt and his son tried to avenge themselves for their fancied wrongs at the hands of the Boy Scouts.

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CHAPTER II. TWO MYSTERIOUS MEN.

"Tell us all about it, Rob!"

The Eagles and the Hawks pressed close about Rob, as, after the two machines had driven off, the scouts stood surrounded by curious townsfolk on the wharf.

"Not much to tell," rejoined Rob, with a laugh. "Major Dangerfield is, it appears, an old friend of my father. He comes from Essex County, or rather, he has a summer place up there. On an automobile trip from Albany, to take his daughter to visit some friends down on Peconic Bay, he decided to stop over at Hampton and see the governor.

"He entered the bank to give dad a surprise, leaving his daughter outside for a few minutes, in the machine. She became interested in its mechanism and pulled a lever, and—the machine darted off. And—and that's all," he concluded modestly.

"Except that the leader of the Eagles covered himself with laurels," struck in Bob—or Tubby—Hopkins, another member of the Eagles.

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"Better than being covered with fat," parried Rob, who didn't relish this open praise.

"Three cheers for Rob Blake!" yelled Fylan Fobbs, a town character.

"Hip! hip! hooray!"

The cheers rang out with vim, the voices of the young scouts sounding shrill and clear among them, giving the patrol call:

"Kree-ee-ee-e!"

Rob, coloring and looking embarrassed, made his way off while the enthusiasm was at its height. With him went Merritt Crawford, Tubby Hopkins and tall, lanky Hiram Nelson, the New England lad, who had already gained quite a reputation as a wireless operator and mechanical genius of the all-round variety.

"Reckon that was a right smart piece of work," drawled Hiram in his nasal accents, as the four of them trudged along.

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"Al-ice, where art thou?" hummed Tubby teasingly, with a sharp glance at Rob. "Say, what a romance for the newspapers: Gallant Boy Scout rescues bee-yoot-i-ful girl at risk of his life, and——"

He got no further. The tormented Rob grabbed the rotund youth and twisted his arm till Tubby yelled for mercy. With a good-natured laugh, Rob released him.

“Bet-ter sue him for damages, if he’s broke your arm,” grinned the practical-minded Hiram, in consolatory tones.

“No, thanks; I’ve got damages enough, as the fellow said who’d been busted up in a railroad accident and was asked if he intended to sue,” laughingly rejoined Tubby; “but”—and he dodged to a safe distance—“that was a mighty pretty girl.”

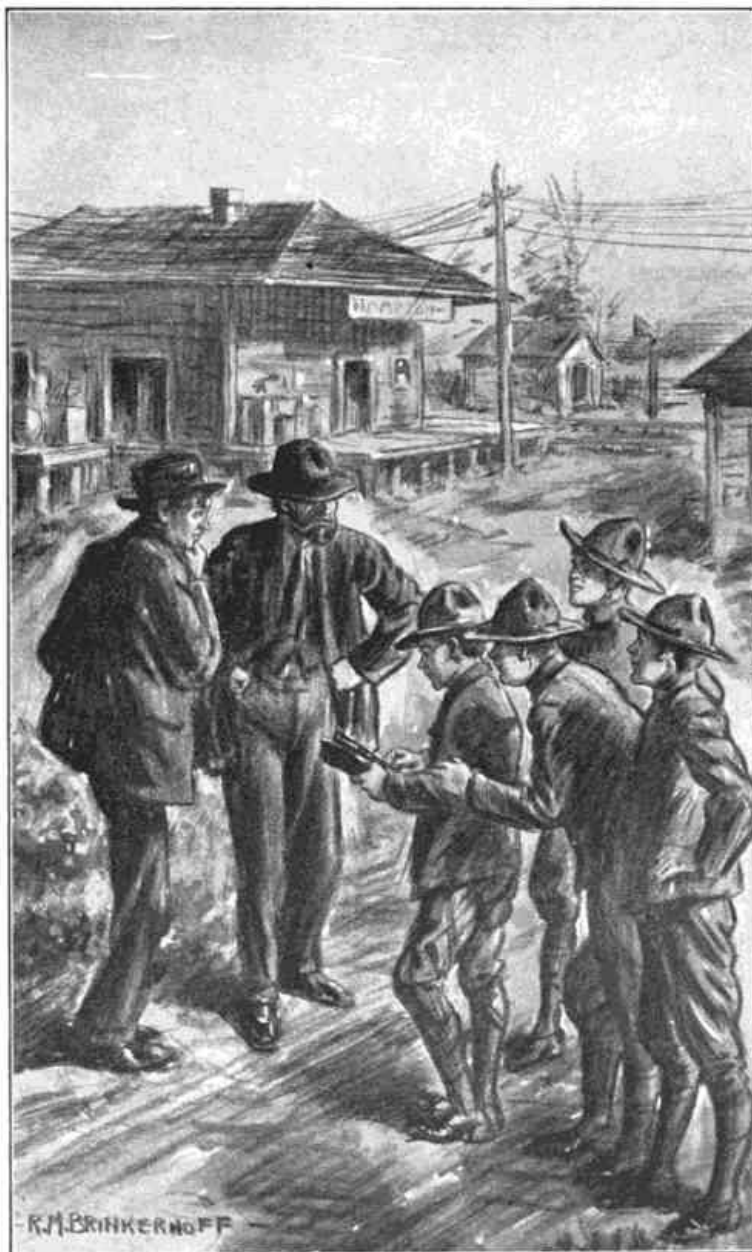
As he spoke, they were passing by the railroad station. A train had just pulled out of it, depositing two passengers on the platform. But none of the boys noticed them at the moment. Instead, their attention was attracted by the strange action of Merritt, who suddenly darted to the center of the roadway.

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The next instant his action was explained, as he bent and seized a big leather wallet that lay there. Or, rather, he was just about to seize it, when one of the two men who had alighted from the train also dashed from the small depot, in front of which they had been standing.

He was a broad-shouldered, rough-looking fellow, with a coarse beard and hulking shoulders. His clothes were rather poor.

“What you got there, boy?” he demanded, as the other Boy Scouts and his own companion came up.



“WHAT YOU GOT THERE, BOY?” HE
DEMANDED.

“A wallet,” said Merritt, examining his find; “it’s
marked ‘R. D.—U. S. A.’”

A strange light came into the rough-looking
man’s eyes. His comrade, too, appeared
agitated, and gripped the bearded fellow’s arm,
whispering something to him.

“Let’s have a look at that wallet, young chap,”
quoth the bigger of the two strangers, almost
simultaneously.

“I don’t know that I will,” rejoined Merritt; “it’s
lost property, and may contain valuables. I had
better turn it over to the proper authorities.”

But the rough stranger, without ceremony, made
a snatch for it. Merritt, however, was too quick
for him, and the fellow missed his grasp. He
growled something, and then, apparently
thinking the better of his ill-temper, said in a
comparatively mild voice:

“Guess that’s my wallet, boy. I must have
dropped it coming across the street. My name’s
Roger Dangerfield, Major Roger Dangerfield, of
the United States Army, retired.”

“Then there must be two of them,” exclaimed

Rob sharply.

“How’s that? What are you interfering for?” growled the rough-looking man, while his companion—a much younger individual than himself, though quite as ill-favored—edged menacingly up.

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“Because,” said Rob quietly, “I had the pleasure of talking to Major Dangerfield a few minutes ago. Moreover, there’s no doubt in my mind that the wallet is his. He probably dropped it on the way up the street.”

The bigger and elder of the two strangers looked nonplussed for an instant, but he speedily recovered himself. Making a snatch for the wallet, which Merritt for an instant had allowed to show from behind his back, he upset the lad by the sheer weight of his attack. Flat on his back fell Merritt, the bearded man toppling over on top of him.

But, as they fell, the Boy Scout’s assailant seized the wallet from him and tossed it hastily to his companion, as one might pass a football. This action was unnoticed by the Boy Scouts, and the younger man of the two strangers darted off instantly, with the pocketbook in his possession.

In the meantime, Merritt, by a wrestling trick, had glided from under the bearded fellow, and, despite his struggles, the man found himself held in the firm grip of four determined pairs of young arms. He was remarkably strong, however, and the situation speedily assumed the likeness of an uneven contest, when another detachment of the Eagles, headed by little Andy Bowles, the bugler of the Patrol, came up the street on their way from the exciting scene on the wharf.

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Aided by these reënforcements, the man was compelled, despite his strength, to give in. All about him surged his excited young captors. At this moment an individual came hurrying up. He wore a semi-official sort of dress, adorned with a tin badge as big and shiny as a new tin pie-plate. It was Si Ketchum, the village constable.

“Hoppin’ watermillions!” he gasped, “what’s all this here?”

It took only a few words to tell him. Si assumed his most terrific official look, which consisted of partially closing his little reddish eyes and screwing up his mouth till his gray goatee pointed outward horizontally.

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“Ef so be as you’ve got that thar contraption uv a wallet, in ther name uv ther law I commands yer to surrender said property,” he ordered ponderously.

The bearded man, still panting from his struggle, rejoined with a grin.

“Surely you’re not going to believe a pack of irresponsible boys, constable. I know nothing about the wallet, except that I saw that lad there pick it up.”

“Um—hah,” said Si, wagging his head sagely, “go on.”

“Naturally, I was anxious to see what it was. I demanded to have a look at it, thinking it might

be some of my property that I had dropped. What was my astonishment, when this young ruffian attacked me. In self-defense, I resisted, and then they all set on me."

"That story is a fabrication from start to finish," cried Merritt, while the others shouted their angry confirmation of his denial. "Let me——"

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For the second time he was about to relate the true circumstances. But Si interrupted him.

"Only one way ter settle this," he said.

"Any way you like, officer," said the bearded man suavely, "anything that you say, I'll agree to."

"Air yer willin' ter be searched?"

"Certainly. But not here in the public street."

"All right, then; at the calaboose, ef that'll suit yer better."

"It will. Let's proceed there," said the man, with a sidelong look at the boys, who began to wonder at his assurance.

Followed by a small crowd, Si and his prisoner led the way to the "calaboose," a small, red-brick structure on a side street not far from the station. The boys waited eagerly outside, while within the walls of Si's fortress the search went on. Before long, the constable emerged with an angry face, and very red. The stranger, cool and smiling, was beside him.

"What kind uv an April fool joke is this?" demanded Si loudly, while the boys, and the townspeople, who had been attracted by curiosity, looked at him in astonishment.

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"You boys ain't tole me the truth," he went on, waxing more furious.

"You—you haven't found the wallet?" demanded Merritt. "Why, I distinctly felt him snatch it from my hand."

"Wall, it ain't on him."

"The other man!" cried Rob, suddenly recalling the bearded man's companion, and perceiving, likewise, for the first time since Merritt's adventure, that the fellow had vanished.

"He's gone!" cried half a dozen voices.

In the same instant, they became aware that the bearded man had also vanished in the excitement. Almost simultaneously, Major Dangerfield put in an unexpected appearance. He was out of breath, as if from running.

"Is this the police station?" he demanded of Si, and, receiving a nod from that stupefied official, he hastened on:

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"I wish to report the loss of a pocketbook. I must have dropped it on Main Street. Has it been found?"

"It wuz found all right," grunted Si, "but—it's bin lost agin."

"Corporal Crawford here, found it, sir," struck in Rob, seeing the major's evident agitation at Si's

not over-lucid explanation, "but while he still had it in his hand, a man—a rough-looking customer—demanded to see it. As soon as Merritt told him of the initials on it, he——"

"Tried to seize it," exclaimed the major excitedly.

"Why, yes," rejoined Rob, wondering inwardly how the major guessed so accurately what had occurred, "there was a scuffle, and in it the man who had attacked Merritt must, in some way, have found a chance to pass the pocketbook to his companion."

"Was the man who first inquired about the book a big, bearded man, with sun-burned face and rather shabby clothes?" inquired the major.

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Rob's astonishment increased. Evidently this was no ordinary case of ruffianism. It would seem now that the men were known to the major, and had some strong object in taking the book.

The boy nodded in reply to the major's question.

"Do you mind stepping aside with me a few minutes, my lad? I'd like to ask you some questions," continued the retired officer.

He and Rob conversed privately for some moments. Then the major strode off, after authorizing Si to offer a reward of five hundred dollars for the return of the wallet.

"He asked me to thank all you fellows for the aid you gave in trying to hold the man," said Rob when he rejoined his comrades, "he added that it would not be forgotten."

Nor was it, for it may be said here, that a few days later a fine launch, named *Eagle*, was delivered at Hampton harbor with a card from the major, begging the Eagle Patrol to accept it as their official craft. But we are anticipating a little.

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As Rob walked away with Merritt, Tubby and Hiram, the lanky youth spoke up:

"It beats creation what there could have been in that wallet to upset him so," he commented; "he doesn't look like a man who's easily excited, either."

"Well, whatever it was," rejoined Rob, "we are likely to learn this evening. I rather think the major has some work on hand for us."

"Hooray! some action at last," cried Merritt enthusiastically.

"Haven't had enough to-day, eh?" inquired Tubby sarcastically. "I should think that seeing a runaway auto stopped, being knocked down and plunged into a mystery, would——"

"Never mind him, Merritt; the heat's sent the fat to his head," laughed Rob.

"I was going to say," he continued, "that Major Dangerfield has invited us to the house this evening to hear something interesting."

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"All four of us?"

"Yes. I rather think then we shall learn some more about that wallet."

Soon after, the boys, following some talk concerning patrol matters, separated. Each went to his home to await, with what patience he might, the coming of evening, when it appeared likely that some light would be shed on what, to them, seemed an interesting puzzle. Rob, on his return home, found that the major had motored on to his friend's with his daughter, but he had promised to return in time to keep his appointment.

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CHAPTER III. THE MAJOR EXPLAINS.

"Well," began the major, "I suppose you are all naturally curious concerning that wallet of mine."

The four lads nodded attentively.

"I must admit we are," volunteered Rob.

They were gathered in the library of Mr. Blake's home. The banker was seated in his own pet chair, while the major stood with his back to a bookcase, a group of eager-eyed Boy Scouts surrounding him.

"In the first place," continued the major, "I think you would better all sit down. The story is a somewhat lengthy one."

The boys obeyed, and the major began:

"I shall have to take you back more than a century," he said, "to the days when the first settlers located adjacent to the south banks of Lake Champlain. Among the colonists were my ancestors, Chisholm Dangerfield and his family. Chisholm Dangerfield was the eldest son of the Dangerfield family, of Chester, England. He had been left an ample fortune, but having squandered it, decided, like many others in a similar case, to emigrate to the new country.

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"On arrival here, he and his family went up the river to Albany, and there, hearing of new settlements along the lake, decided to take up land there. They went most of the way by water, being much harassed by Indians on the journey. But without any serious mishaps, they finally arrived at their destination, and, in course of time, established a flourishing farm. But Chisholm Dangerfield had a younger brother, a harum-scarum sort of youth, to whom, nevertheless, he was much attached. When quite young, this lad had run away to sea, and little had been heard of him since that time.

"But while his family had remained in ignorance of his whereabouts, he had joined a band of West Indian pirates, and in course of time amassed a considerable fortune. Then a desire to reform came over him, and he sought his English relatives. They would have nothing to do with him, despite his wealth, and in a fit of rage he left England to seek his brother—the only being who ever really cared for him. In due time

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he arrived at the farm with quite a retinue of friendly Indians and carriers.

"He was warmly welcomed. Possibly his money and wealth had something to do with it. I don't know anything about that, however. At any rate, for some years, he lived there, till one day he fell ill. His constitution was undermined by the reckless, wild life he had led, and he died not long after. He left all his gold and jewels to his brother.

"Indians were many and hostile in those days, so in order to be secure in case of an attack, the elder brother had no sooner buried his kin with due reverence, and received his legacy, than he decided to secrete the entire amount of the old pirate's treasure in a cave in a remote part of the Adirondacks."

"Gee!" exclaimed Tubby, who was hugging his knees, while his eyes showed round as saucers in his fat cheeks.

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"Did the Indians get it?" asked Hiram.

"Wait a minute, and you shall hear," continued the major. "Well, as I said, the treasure was buried in a cave so securely hidden that nobody would be able to find it again, except by a miracle, or by aid of the chart of the spot, which Chisholm Dangerfield carefully made. A few nights after that, a tribe went on the warpath, landed in canoes near to the Dangerfield farm, and massacred every soul on the place but one—a young boy named Roger Dangerfield, who escaped.

"This Roger Dangerfield was my great-great-grandfather. With him, when he fled from the burning ruins, he took a paper his father had thrust into his hands just before the Indian attack came. All this he wrote in his diary, which did not come into my hands till recently. Well, Roger Dangerfield, left to his own resources, proved so able a youth that he was, before very long, a prosperous merchant in Albany. But in the meantime he made several expeditions to the mountains to try to find the hidden wealth.

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"I should have told you that the paper was in cipher, and a very elaborate one, so that it had never been completely worked out. This, no doubt, accounts for Roger Dangerfield's failure.

"Well, in course of time, the cipher became a family relic along with Roger Dangerfield's diary. His descendants moved to Virginia, where I was born. I recollect, as a youngster, being enthralled by the story of the old piratical Dangerfield's hidden gold, and resolving that when I grew up I would find it. We had, in our employ at that time, a butler named Jarley. I was an only child, and he was my confidant. I naturally told him about the cipher and what its unraveling would mean.

"This happened when I was about eighteen and home on a vacation. Jarley seemed much interested, but after both he and I had puzzled in vain over the cipher, we gave it up. When I came home on my next vacation, I learned that Jarley had left. His mother and father had died, he declared, and he was required at his home in Maine. Well, I thought no more of the matter, and forming new acquaintances in our

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neighborhood, which was rapidly settling, I soon forgot Jarley. But one day a notion seized me to look at the cipher and the diary again.

“But when I came to look for them, they had gone. Nor did any search result in my finding them. It at once flashed across my mind that Jarley might have taken them. So fixed an idea did this become, that I visited the place in Maine to which he said he had gone, only to find that he had removed soon after his return from Virginia. However, pursuing the trail, I found that he—or a man resembling him—had visited the spot on the lake where the old-time house had stood, and had made a mysterious expedition into the mountains. The spot was at that time known as Dangerfield, and was quite a flourishing little town, with a pulp mill and a few other local industries. In that quiet community they recollected the mysterious visitor well.

“However, as I learned, Jarley had left the town without paying his guides or the man from whom he had hired the horses, I concluded that the expedition had not been successful. Then I advertised for the man, but without success. Then I was appointed to West Point, and for a long time I thought no more of the matter. In fact, for years it lay dormant in my mind, with occasional flashes of memory; then I would advertise for Jarley or his heirs, but without success.

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“The last time I advertised was about a year ago. After six months’ silence I received a letter, asking me to call at an address near the Erie Basin in Brooklyn, if I was interested in the long-lost Jarley. All my enthusiasm once more at fever heat, I set out for the place. The address at which I was to call I found to be a squalid sailors’ boarding-house. On inquiring there for James Jarley, the name signed to the letter, I was conducted into a dirty room, where lay a rough-looking sailor, evidently just recovering from the effects of a debauch.

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“So dulled was his mind, that it was some time before I could explain my errand, but finally he understood. He frankly told me he was out for money, and wanted to know how much I would give him for some papers he had which his father—our old butler, it transpired—had left him. His father, he said, had told him that if ever he wanted to make money with them he was to seek out a Major Dangerfield, who would be likely to pay him well for them.

“But it appeared that his father had also told him that he stood a chance of arrest if he did so, and that it might be a dangerous step. However, he told me that he had at length decided to take that chance, and on a return from a long voyage, during which he had encountered my advertisement in an old newspaper in a foreign port, he had made up his mind to find me on his return.

“His father, it appeared, had always kept track of me, but fear and shame had kept him from trying to arrange a meeting. The son, I gathered, both from his conversation and the situation in which I found him, had always been a ne’er-do-well. Well, the matter ended with my paying him a sum of money for the papers, which as I suspected, proved to be the yellow-paged old diary and the well-thumbed, tattered cipher.

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Then I had him removed to a hospital, where a few days later he died in an attack of delirium.”

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CHAPTER IV. THE NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

“But it appeared that even while on his deathbed the man had been playing a dishonest game. Before he had made his bargain with me, he had revealed the secret and tried to sell it to a certain money-lender at a seaport in Maine. This man had refused to have anything to do with what he thought was a chimerical scheme, but later confided the whole thing to a friend of his by name Stonington Hunt—a former Wall Street man, who had been compelled to quit in disgrace the scene of his financial operations.”

“Stonington Hunt!” gasped Rob, leaning forward in his chair, while the others looked equally amazed.

“Yes, that was the name. Why, do you know him?”

“Know him, Major!” echoed Mr. Blake. “He was concerned in some rascally operations in this village not so long ago. That he left here under a cloud, was mainly due to activities of the Boy Scouts, whose enemy he was. We heard he had gone to Maine. Is he engaged in new rascality?”

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“You shall hear,” pursued the major. “Well, as I said, this seaport money-lender told Stonington Hunt of the chart and cipher and the old diary recording the burial of the treasure. Hunt, it would seem, placed more importance on the information than had the money-lender, for he agreed, provided the latter would help to finance an expedition, to try to solve the cipher, or else have some expert translate it. He set out at once for Brooklyn, arriving there, as I subsequently learned, just after I had departed with the diary and the papers which young Jarley had carried in his sea-chest for some years.

“He lost no time in tracing me, and offered me a large sum for the papers. But my interest had been aroused. For the sake of the adventure of the thing, and also to clear up the mystery, I had resolved to go treasure hunting myself. With this object in view, I rented a bungalow on a lake not far from the range in which I suspected the treasure cave lay, and devoted days and nights trying to solve the cipher. At this time a college professor, an old chum of mine, wrote me that his health was broken down, and that he needed a rest. I invited him to come and visit me in Essex County, at the same time suggesting that I had a hard nut for him to crack. Professor Jeremiah Jorum arrived soon after, and his health picked up amazingly in the mountain air. One day he asked about ‘the hard nut.’ I produced the cipher, and told him something of its history. Perhaps I should have told you that Professor Jorum has devoted a good deal of his life to what is known as cryptology—or the solving of seemingly unsolvable puzzles. He had translated Egyptian cryptograms and inscriptions left by vanished tribes on ruins in

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“He worked for several days on the cipher, and one day came to me with a radiant face. He told me he had solved it. No wonder I had failed. It was a simple enough cipher—one of the least complex, in fact—but the language used had been Latin, in which my ancestor, as a well-bred Englishman of that day, was proficient. As he was telling me this, I noticed a man I had hired some days before, hanging about the open windows. I ordered him away, and he went at once. But I had grave suspicions that he had overheard a good deal more than I should have wished him to. However, there was no help for it. I dismissed the matter from my mind, and we—the professor and I—spent the rest of the day discussing the cipher and the best means for recovering the treasure. We agreed it would be dangerous to take men we could not absolutely trust, and yet, we should require several people to organize a proper expedition.

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“But, as it so happened, all our plans had to be changed that night. I was awakened soon after midnight by a noise in my room. In the dim light I saw a figure that I recognized as our gardener, moving about. The lamp beside my bed had, for some reason, not gone out when I turned it down on retiring, and I soon had the room in a blaze of light. The intruder sprang toward me, a big club in his hand. I dodged the blow and grappled with him. In the struggle his beard fell off, and I recognized, to my amazement, that our ‘gardener’ was Stonington Hunt himself.

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“The shock of this surprise had hardly been borne in upon me when the fellow, who possessed considerable strength, forced me back against the table. In the scuffle the lamp was upset. In a flash the place was in a blaze. Hunt was out of the room in two bounds. He seized the key, as he went, and locked the door on the outside, thus leaving me to burn to death, or chance injury by a leap from the window, which overhung a cliff above the lake. I had just time to throw on a few clothes and grab the papers, which I had luckily placed under my pillow, before the flames drove me out. The wood of the door was flimsy, and without bothering to try to force the lock, I smashed out a panel. Crawling through, I aroused my friend Jorum and my old negro servant, Jumbo.

“We saved nothing but the precious papers, but as the bungalow was roughly furnished, I did not much care. We made our way to a distant house and stayed there the night. The next day we took a wagon to the shore of the lake and went by boat to Whitehall. There we embarked on a train for Albany, where my daughter was at the home of friends. I, too, have a residence there, but, having received an invitation from friends to visit them on Long Island, I decided to give my little girl a motor trip.

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“But while in Albany I perceived I was being followed, and by the two men whom you have described to me as taking part in the filching of the wallet. I thought I had thrown them off, however, but your adventure to-day proves that I have not been as successful as I hoped. The most unfortunate part of it is that the cipher was in that wallet.”

“And it’s gone,” groaned Tubby dolorously.

"I'm not so sure of that. I am hopeful that we may recover it," said the retired officer. "I have wired my friend Jorum, who, with Jumbo, is now in New York, and I am in hopes that he can recollect something of his translation of the cipher. If not—well, there's no use crossing bridges till we come to them."

"If you do recover it?" asked Rob.

"If I do, I am going to ask your parents to let me borrow a patrol of Boy Scouts to aid in the treasure hunt," smiled the major.

"My dear Major," cried Mr. Blake, holding up his hands, "Mrs. Blake would never consent to——"

"But there would be such a lot of fun, dad," urged Rob. "Think of a camp in the mountains. We'd have to camp, wouldn't we, Major?"

"Certainly. It would be a fine opportunity for you to perfect yourselves in——"

"Woodcraft," said Tubby.

"Signaling," put in Merritt.

"I've got a field wireless apparatus I'd like to try out," put in Hiram, his voice a-quiver with eagerness.

"Well, the first thing to be done is to recover that cipher," said the major; "at present all we know of it is that it is in the hands of two rascals."

"In the employ of another rascal, Stonington Hunt," put in Rob.

"Well, we can do nothing more to-night," said the major.

"No. We were so interested in your story that I think none of us noticed how the time flew by," said Mr. Blake, and Mrs. Blake, entering just then, announced that there was supper ready for the party in the dining-room. Tubby's eyes glittered at this news.

Soon after the sandwiches, cakes and lemonade had been disposed of, the Boy Scouts set out for home, agreeing to meet the major next morning after breakfast.

They had not gone many steps from the house when Tubby stopped as suddenly as if he had been shot.

"Gingersnaps!" he exclaimed. "I've just thought of something."

"Goodness! Must hurt," jeered Merritt un sympathetically.

"No—that is, yes—no, I mean," sputtered the fat boy. "Say, fellows, I heard this afternoon that Sam Phelps from Aquebogue told a fellow in the village that he had seen Freeman Hunt over there this morning."

"You double-dyed chump," exclaimed Rob, who was walking a way with them, "and you never said anything about it. If Freeman was there, I'll bet his father was, too, and that's where those two men have gone."

"Gee whiz, if they have they must be there yet, then!" exclaimed Merritt, excitedly, "unless they left by automobile."

"How's that?" demanded Rob.

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"It's this way. There was no train after those chaps took the wallet, till almost eight o'clock. They must have hidden in the woods and caught it some place below, unless Si arrested them."

"He'd have been at the house to get the reward if he had," rejoined Rob.

"Very well, then. He didn't catch them, and if the Hunts are at Aquebogue, that's where they've gone."

"Yes, but what's to prevent them leaving there?"

"No train after nine-thirty till to-morrow morning, and the eight o'clock from here doesn't get to Aquebogue till after that time; so they must be stranded there, unless they have a car."

"Cookies and cream cakes! That's right!" cried Tubby, "let's phone the police at Aquebogue to look out for them."

But the lads found that the wire between Hampton and Aquebogue wasn't working. The telegraph office was closed. They exchanged blank glances.

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"What are we going to do?" demanded Tubby.

"What all good scouts ought to do—the best we can,"—rejoined Rob.

"And that is, under the present circumstances?" questioned Merritt.

"To go to our garage—Blenkinsop's—on Main Street, and get out the car."

"It'll be closed," rejoined Tubby.

"I've got a key," replied Rob; "I'll 'phone the house that I'm going for a night spin. We can get there, notify the police, and be back in two hours."

"Forward, scouts!" ordered Merritt, in sharp, "parade-ground" tones, "and 'Be Prepared' for whatever comes along."

Rob found that the telephone to his home was also out of order, owing to repairs which were being rushed through by night. So ten minutes later, when the car glided out of the garage on Main Street and slipped silently through the sleeping town, there was nobody in Hampton who knew the Boy Scouts' night mission.

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CHAPTER V. A MIDNIGHT AUTO DASH.

The auto, a fast and heavy machine, plunged along through the night at a great rate. Its bright searchlight cast a brilliant circle of radiance far ahead into the darkness. Occasionally frightened birds could be seen

flying out of the inky hedges, falling bewildered in the path of the white glare.

It was exhilarating, blood-stirring work, all the more keenly delightful from the sense of adventure with which it was spiced.

Rob was at the wheel, steering straight and steady. He knew the road well. Part of it had been the scene of that thrilling night ride described in *The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship*, when the boys had overtaken the two thieves who had stolen the aeroplane documents. On that occasion, it will be recalled, an accident had been narrowly averted by a soul-stirring hair's breadth, as a train dashed across the tracks.

Rob's three companions sat back in the tonneau and conversed in low tones. Only the irrepressible Tubby was not duly impressed with the momentousness of the occasion. From time to time a snicker of laughter showed that he was cracking jokes in the same old way.

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"Say," he remarked, as they bumped across the railroad tracks, "even if we do find out where these fellows are, I don't know just what we're going to do with them at this time of night. Reminds me——"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Tubby," groaned Merritt.

"Let him go ahead," struck in Hiram, "the sooner he blows off all his steam the sooner he'll shut up for good."

"Reminds me," went on the unruffled Tubby, "of what a little girl said to her mother when the kid asked her what sardines were. The mother explained that they were small fish that big ones ate. Then the little girl wanted to know how the big fish got them out of the tins."

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There was a deathly silence, broken only by a low groan from Merritt.

"Call that a joke?" he moaned.

"Don't spring any more. My life ain't insured, by heck," put in Yankee Hiram.

"Well, that got a laugh in the minstrel show where I heard it," responded the aggrieved joke-smith.

Before long, lights flashed ahead of them, and, descending a steepish hill, they chugged into the town of Aquebogue. It was a fairly large town, and here and there lighted windows showed that some of the low resorts were still open for business. Far down the street shone two green lights, which marked the police station. The auto glided up to this, and Rob jumped out, accompanied by Merritt, leaving Tubby and Hiram in the car.

"Let's get out and stretch our legs a bit," said Tubby presently. It was taking some time for Rob to explain his errand to a sleepy police official.

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"All right, my boy," drawled Hiram. "I'm not averse to a bit of leg-stretching."

The two lads got out and strolled as far as the

street corner.

"H's'h!" exclaimed Tubby suddenly, as they reached it. He seized Hiram's arm with every appearance of excitement.

"Wa-al, what is it now?" asked the down-east boy; "more jokes and didoes?"

"No. See that chap just sneaking down the street from the opposite corner?"

"Yes; what of it? Are you seeing things?"

"No. But it's Freeman Hunt—I'm sure of it."

"By ginger, I believe you are right! It does look like him, for a fact. But what can he be doing here?"

"I've no more idea than you. But he must be up to some mischief."

"Reckon that's right."

"I tell you that where Freeman Hunt is, his father is not far off, and the rest of the gang must be about here, too. I guess it was a good thing we came out here."

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"Well, what shall we do? Go back and tell the police?"

"No. While we were gone he'd sneak away, and we might miss him altogether. I've got a better plan."

"Do tell!"

"We'll follow him at a distance and see where he goes. Then we can come back and report."

"Sa-ay, that's a good idea. Come on."

Freeman Hunt was almost out of sight now. But as the two scouts took up the trail, they saw him pause where a flood of light streamed from the window of a drinking-place. He paused here for an instant and gave a low whistle; presently the boys' hearts gave a bound. From the doors of the resort issued three figures, one of which they recognized, even at that distance, as Stonington Hunt. With him were the two men who had played such a prominent part in the filching of the wallet belonging to Major Dangerfield.

"Keep in the shadow," whispered Tubby, crouching in a convenient doorway; "they haven't seen us. Hullo, there they go. Keep a good distance behind—as far back as we can, without losing them."

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The men the scouts were trailing struck into a lively pace. They seemed to be conversing earnestly. Through the shadows the two boys crept along behind them. Presently they were traversing a residence street, edged with elms and lawns and white picket fences. It was deserted and silent. The occupants of the houses were wrapped in sleep.

"Maybe they're going to turn into one of these houses," whispered Hiram.

But the men didn't. Instead, they kept right on, and before long the last electric light had been passed and they were in the open country.

"Hadn't we better turn back?" murmured Hiram.
"It looks as if we were going too far for safety."

"Let's keep on," urged Tubby. "There's no danger. If we gave up the chase now we'd have had all our work for nothing."

Hiram made no reply, and the two boys, taking advantage of every bit of cover—as the game of "Hare and Hounds" had taught them—kept right on dogging the footsteps of their quarry. All at once Tubby began sniffing the air.

"We're getting near the sea," he proclaimed. "I can smell the salt meadows."

Aquebogue lay some distance back from the open waters of the ocean. It was situated, like Hampton itself, on an inlet. In the dim light of the stars, the two boys presently perceived that they were traversing a sort of dyke or raised road leading across the marshes.

"Where can they be going?" wondered Hiram.

"Don't know. But there are lots of fishermen's huts and shacks dotted about in the marshes. Maybe they are making for one of them."

"Maybe," opined Hiram, "but if you weren't so all-sot on following them, I'd be in a good mind to turn back."

"Not yet," persisted Tubby, and the chase continued.

But it was soon to end. All at once the faint glimmer of a watercourse, or inlet from the sea, shone dimly in front of them. Upreared, too, against the star-spangled sky, they could see the inky outlines of a structure of some kind.

"Crouch down here," said Tubby suddenly, as the men ahead of them came to a halt.

A bunch of marsh grass offered a convenient hiding place, and behind it the two boys lay flat. Pretty soon they heard the scratch of a match, and then the grating of a lock, as the door of the dark building they had remarked was opened. The men entered the place and slammed the door to. A few instants later, from the solitary window of the shack, a light shone out. The window was toward the creek, and the glare from it showed the two watching boys the mast and rigging of a large sloop. At least, from her spars, they judged her to be of considerable size.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Tubby, "we've found the place, all right. They must have come in that sloop. Maybe that's the way the two men who took the wallet got out of Hampton unobserved."

"But the wind's against the sloop, and she couldn't have beaten her way down here in that time," objected Hiram.

"She might have an engine, mightn't she?" whispered Tubby in scornful tones.

"That's so. Lots of boats do have gasoline motors. I guess you're right, Tubby. What are you going to do now? Go back?"

"Not much," rejoined the fat boy. "We'll just have a look into that hut and see what's going on. We might even get a chance to get that

wallet back.”

“Say, you’re not going to take such a chance! If you looked through that window——”

“Did I say I was going to look through the window, stupid? Don’t you see that chimney on the roof? Now, the roof comes down low, almost to the ground. I’m going to climb up on it, and, by leaning over the chimney, I can hear what is said.”

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“But they’ll hear your feet on the roof,” objected the practical Hiram.

“I’m going to take my shoes off.”

“It’s awfully risky, Tubby.”

“Say, look here, Hiram,” sputtered the fat boy, “if this country was to go to war, you’d want to go to the front and fight for Old Glory as a Boy Scout, wouldn’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Well, then, don’t you suppose that if you were scouting after an enemy you’d have to take bigger chances than this?”

Hiram said no more. Kicking their shoes off, and leaving them by the grass hummock, the two boys crept forward as silently as two cats. In the yielding sand their feet made no noise.

As Tubby had surmised, at the rear of the house the roof came almost to the ground, for the sand was heaped up against that particular wall, being driven in big dunes by the winds off the ocean.

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“Up with you,” whispered Tubby, giving Hiram a “boost.” The Yankee boy’s long legs carried him onto the roof in a jiffy. Then came Tubby. Already the two boys could hear below them the low hum of voices, Freeman Hunt’s sharp, boyish tones mingling with the bass drone of the elder men’s conversation.

The roof was formed of driftwood and old timbers, and was as easy to climb as a staircase. Before many seconds, the boys were at the chimney. With beating pulses and a heart that throbbed faster than was altogether comfortable, in spite of his easy-going disposition, Tubby raised himself and peered down the flue. It was of brick. But to his astonishment, as he peered over the edge, he found he had a clear view of the room below.

The chimney, as is often the case in rough dwellings, did not go all the way down to the floor. Instead, it was supported on two beams, so that, peering down it, the boy could command a view of the room below, just as if he had been looking down a telescope.

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Round a table were seated Stonington Hunt, the two rough-looking men who had stolen the wallet, and Freeman Hunt. A smoky glass lamp stood on the rough box which served for a table. Spread out on the table, too, was something that almost made Tubby let go his hold of the chimney and go sliding down the roof. It was the wallet, and beside it lay the paper covered with figures and markings, which, the boy had no doubt, was the precious document of the major.

"We'll have to get out of here early in the morning," Stonington Hunt was saying. "I don't fancy having the police on my heels."

"No. And Jim here says that those pesky Boy Scouts are mixed up in the search for the wallet," struck in Freeman Hunt.

"Well, this is the time we give those brats the slip," growled his father. "Come on, let's turn in. We'll get the motor going and drop down the creek before daylight."

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"Better leave the light burning then," said one of the men who had been in Hampton that afternoon.

This was done, and presently snores and heavy breathing showed the men were asleep. Tubby could not see what resting places they had found, but assumed that there must be bunks around the edge of the hut, as is usual in such fishermen's shelters.

Before retiring, the men had shoved the paper into the wallet, but for some reason, probably they didn't think of it during their preparations for sleep, the wallet had been left on the table. It was almost directly below the chimney. As Tubby looked at it, he had a sudden idea.

"Got a bit of wire, Hiram?" he asked, knowing that the mechanical genius of the Eagle Patrol usually carried such odds and ends with him.

"Guess I've got a bit of brass wire right here," rejoined Hiram, "but it isn't very long."

"Long enough," commented Tubby, scrutinizing the bit handed to him, "now, if you had some string——"

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"Got a bit of fish line."

"Couldn't be better. Give it to me."

Much mystified, Hiram watched the fat boy bend the bit of wire and tie it to the string.

"Going fishing?" he asked in a sarcastic tone.

"Yes," replied Tubby quite seriously.

His quick eye had noted that the straps that closed the wallet had not been placed round it but lay in a loose loop on the table. If only he could entangle his improvised line in the loop, it would be an easy matter to fish up the wallet. If only he could do it!

Very cautiously, for he knew the risk he was running, Tubby lowered his line. Then he waited. But the breathing below continued steady and stentorian. Swinging his hook, which was quite heavy, the stout boy grappled cautiously for the wallet. It was tantalizing and delicate work. But after taking an infinity of pains, he finally succeeded in getting it fast.

Tubby at this moment had difficulty in suppressing a shout of "hooray!" But he mastered his emotions, and slowly and delicately began to haul in his "catch." Hiram, fascinated, crept close to his side. Perhaps it was this fact that was responsible for the disaster that occurred the next instant.

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Without the slightest warning, save a sharp, cracking sound, the roof caved in under their feet. In a flash, both boys were projected in a heap into the room below. As they hurtled through the rotten covering of the hut, shouts and cries resounded from the aroused occupants.

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CHAPTER VI. IN DIREST PERIL.

The wildest confusion ensued. Fortunately, the drop was a short one, and beyond a few scratches and bruises, neither boy was hurt. The lamp, by some strange fatality, was not put out, but rolled off the table. As Stonington Hunt sprang at him, Tubby seized it. He brandished it threateningly.

"The Boy Scouts!" shouted Stonington Hunt, the first to recover from his stupefaction at the sudden interruption to their slumbers.

He dashed at Tubby, who swung the lamp for an instant—it was his only weapon—and then dashed it, like a smoky meteor, full at the advancing man's head.

It missed him by the fraction of an inch, or he would have been turned into a living torch.

Crash!

The lamp struck the opposite wall, and was shattered into a thousand fragments. Instantly the place was plunged in darkness, total and absolute. At the same instant a sharp report sounded. It seemed doubly loud in the tiny place. The fumes of the powder filled it reekingly.

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"Don't shoot!" roared Stonington Hunt. "Guard the door and window. Don't let them get away."

"All right, dad," the boys heard Freeman Hunt cry loudly, as he scuffled across the room.

"Keep the doorway and the window," shouted Stonington Hunt. "I'll have a light in a jiffy. We've got them like two rats in a cage."

As he struck a match and lit a boat lantern that stood on a shelf, a low groan came from one corner of the room. Hiram was horrified to perceive that it was Tubby who uttered it. The shot must have wounded him, fired at haphazard, as it had been. The man who had aimed it, the bearded member of the gang, stood grimly by the doorway.

Almost beside himself at the hopelessness of their situation, Hiram gazed about him. All at once he noticed that on Tubby's chest a crimson stain was slowly spreading. The stout boy lay quite still except for an occasional quiver and groan. Without a thought as to his danger, Hiram disregarded Stonington Hunt's next injunction: "Don't move a step."

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Swiftly he crossed to his wounded comrade. He sank on his knees beside him.

"T-T-T-Tubby," he exclaimed, "are you badly hurt, old man?"

To his amazement, the recumbent Tubby gave him a swift but knowing wink, and then, rolling over on his side again, resumed his groaning once more. Mystified, but comforted, Hiram was rising, when a rough hand seized him and sent him spinning to an opposite corner. It was the burly form of the bearded man that had propelled him.

"Not so rough, Jim Dale," warned Stonington Hunt. "We've got them where they can't escape. Lots of time to get what we want out of them."

"The pesky young spies," snorted Jim Dale, "I wonder how much they overheard of what we said."

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"It don't matter, anyhow," put in his beardless companion of the afternoon. "They won't have no chance to tell it."

"Guess that's right, Pete Bumpus," struck in the bearded man. Suddenly Hiram felt a stinging slap across the face. He turned and faced young Freeman Hunt.

"How do you like that, eh?" snarled the youth viciously. "Here is where I pay you out for what you Scout kids did to me when we lived in Hampton."

He was stepping forward to deliver another blow, when Hiram ducked swiftly, and put into execution a maneuver Rob had shown him. As Freeman, a bigger and heavier lad, rushed forward, Hiram's long leg and his long left arm shot out simultaneously. The leg engaged Freeman's ankle, and the Yankee lad's fist encountered the other's chin with a sharp crack. Freeman Hunt fell in a heap on the floor. Hiram braced himself for an attack by the whole four. But it didn't come. Instead, they seemed to think it a good joke.

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"That will teach you to keep your temper," laughed the boy's father roughly; "plenty of time to punch him and pummel him when we have them tied up."

"Maybe I won't do it, too," promised Freeman, gathering himself up, with a crestfallen look.

Stonington Hunt stepped up to Hiram.

"Tell me the truth, you young brat," he snarled; "are the police after us?"

Hiram pondered an instant before answering. Then he decided on a course of action. Possibly it was a bad one, judging by the immediate results.

"Yes, they are," he said boldly, "and if you don't let us loose, you'll get in trouble."

Stonington Hunt paused irresolutely. Then he said:

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"Get the sloop ready, boys. We'll get out of here on the jump."

A few moments later Hiram's hands were bound and he was led on board the craft the boys had noticed lying in the creek. A plank connected it

with the shore. Tubby, still groaning, was carried on board and thrown down in the bow beside Hiram.

"We'll attend to him after a while," said Hunt brutally; "if he's badly wounded it's his own fault, for meddling in other folks' affairs."

One of the men went below. Presently there came a sharp chug-chug, and the anchor being taken in, the sloop began to move off down the creek. As Tubby Hopkins had surmised, she had an engine. Hunt, Jim Dale and Peter Bumpus stood in the bow. Hiram leaned disconsolately against a stay, and Tubby lay at his feet on a coil of rope.

The shores slipped rapidly by, and pretty soon the creek began to widen.

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Freeman Hunt was at the wheel, and from time to time Jim Dale shouted directions back at him.

"Port—port! Hard over!" or again, "Hard over! Starboard! There's a shoal right ahead!"

A moon had risen now, and in the silvery light the darker water of the shoals, of which the creek seemed full, showed plainly.

"This crik's as full of sand-bars as a hound dorg is uv fleas," grunted Jim Dale. "It won't be full tide for two hours or more, either. If——"

There came a sudden, grinding jar.

"Hard over! Hard over!" bellowed Jim Dale.

Freeman Hunt spun the wheel like a squirrel in its cage. But it was too late. The sloop had grounded hard and fast. Leaving Peter Bumpus to guard the boys, Jim Dale and the elder Hunt leaped swiftly aft. They backed the motor, but it was no use. The sloop was too hard aground to be gotten off till the water rose.

"Two hours to wait till the tide rises," grumbled Jim Dale; "just like the luck."

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Slowly the time passed. But never for an instant was the watch over the boys relaxed. Tubby lay still, and Hiram, almost carried out of himself by the rapid rush of recent events, leaned miserably against the stay.

At last, just as a faint, gray light began to show in the east, they could feel the sloop moving under their feet. With reversed motor, she was backed off the sand-bar, or mud-shoal, and the journey resumed. As the light grew stronger, Hiram saw that they were dropping rapidly down toward the sea. Right ahead of them could now be seen the white foam and spray, where the breakers of the open sea were shattering themselves on the bar at the mouth of the creek.

The channel was narrow and intricate, but Jim Dale, who seemed to be a good pilot, and who had assumed the wheel, brought the sloop through it in safety. Before long, under her keel could be felt the long lift and drive of the open Atlantic.

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By gazing at the sun, Hiram saw that the sloop's head was pointed west. By this he judged that her navigators meant to head down the Long Island shore toward New York.

The sunrise was red and angry. Hiram, with his knowledge of scout-lore, knew that this presaged bad weather. But the crew of the sloop did not seem to notice it. After a while they began to make preparations to hoist sail, as the breeze was freshening.

"Take those kids below," ordered Stonington Hunt suddenly. Under the escort of Jim Dale, who had relinquished the wheel to Freeman Hunt and Pete Bumpus, the lads—Tubby being carried—were presently installed in a small, dark cabin in the stern of the sloop. This done, the companionway door was closed, and they heard a key grate in a lock. They were prisoners, then, at sea, on this mysterious sloop?

"What next?" groaned Hiram to himself, sinking down on a locker.

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"Why, I guess the next thing to do is for me to come to life, my valiant downeaster," cried Tubby, springing erect from the corner into which he had been thrown. The apparently badly wounded lad seemed as active and chipper as ever.

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CHAPTER VII.

ADrift IN THE STORM.

At the same instant the sloop staggered and heeled over, sending Hiram half across the dingy cabin. He caught at a stanchion and saved himself. Then he turned his amazed gaze afresh on Tubby. The stout youth stood by the companion stairs, regarding him with a grin. Presently he actually began to hum:

"A life on the ocean wave!
A home on the rolling deep!"

"Yo ho, my hearties," he added, with a nautical twitch at his breeches, "we're going to have a rough day of it."

As if in answer, the sloop heeled over to another puff. A tin dish, dislodged from the rusty stove, went clattering across the inclined cabin floor. But still Hiram stood gaping vacantly at Tubby.

"Well, what's the matter?" inquired that individual cheerfully, "have you lost that voice of yours?"

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"No, b-b-b-but I thought you were badly wounded!" Hiram managed to sputter.



"No, b-b-b-but I thought you were badly wounded!" Hiram managed to sputter.

"So I was, but in reverse English only," said Tubby cheerfully; "the bullet just nicked me and knocked the breath out of me for a minute. When I came to, I saw that the best thing I could do was to act like Br'er Rabbit and lay low."

Hiram looked his admiration.

"Wa-al," he drawled, dropping, as he seldom did even in emotional moments, into his New England dialect, "ef you ain't ther beatingist!

"But, say," he added quickly, "what about that red stain on your shirt? Look, it's all over the front of your uniform."

"Jiggeree, so it is. I guess that fountain pen of mine must have been busted cold by that bullet. I had it filled with red ink, because I'd been helping Rob fill out some reports to mail to Scout headquarters. Ho! ho!" the fat boy broke into open mirth, "it certainly does look as if some one had tapped my claret. Yo-ho! that was a corker!"

The sloop lurched and dipped deeper than ever. They could see the green water obscure the port hole for an instant.

"That sea's getting up right along," said Tubby

presently, as he unbound Hiram's hands. "Say, Hiram," he added anxiously, "you don't get seasick easily, do you?"

"N-n-n-no, that is, I don't think so," sputtered Hiram rather dubiously.

"Well, don't, I beg from my heart! Don't get seasick till we get on land again."

"I'll try not to," said the downeast boy seriously, ignoring the fine "bull" which Tubby's remark contained.

"Reminds me," said Tubby presently, "of what the sea captain said to the nervous lady. She went up to him and told him that her husband was scared of getting seasick. 'My husband's dreadfully liable to seasickness, captain,' she said. 'What must I tell him to do if he feels it coming on?' 'You needn't tell him anything, ma'am,' said the captain; 'no need to tell him what to do—he'll do it.'"

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But somehow this bit of humor did not bring even a wan smile to Hiram, willing as he usually was to laugh at Tubby's whimsical jokes. Instead, he turned a pale face on his companion.

"I—I—do feel pretty bad, for a fact!" he moaned.

"Oh, Jiminy Crickets!" wailed Tubby, "he's going to be seasick!"

Hiram, with a ghastly face of a greenish-yellow hue, sank down on one of the lockers, resigning himself to his fate. The sloop began to plunge and tumble along in a more lively fashion than ever. Overhead Tubby could hear the trample of feet, as her crew ran about trying to weather the blow.

Suddenly, above the howling of the wind, Tubby heard a sharp click at the companionway door. The next instant the companionway slide was shoved back and a gust of fresh, salt-laden air blew into the close cabin. Stonington Hunt's form was on the stairway the next moment, and Tubby, with a quick dive, threw himself on the floor in a corner, carrying out once more his rôle of the badly wounded scout.

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Lying there, and breathing in a quick, distressed way, Tubby, out of the corner of his eye, watched the man as he moved about. Hunt's first idea was evidently to rouse Hiram. Perhaps he needed him to help in navigating the storm-buffed craft. But he soon gave up the task of instilling the seasick lad with ambition or life. Then came Tubby's turn, but after bending over the fat boy for an instant, Hunt muttered:

"He's no good," and without offering to aid the supposedly injured boy, moved away. He ascended the steps and presently the companion slide banged to, and the padlock clicked once more.

Tubby arose, as soon as he was convinced the coast was clear, and, despairing of arousing Hiram, sat on a locker and began to think hard. Rather bitterly he went over in his mind the circumstances leading to their present predicament. In the first place, he could not but own he had had no business to embark on such an enterprise at all without a bigger force. In the

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second place, if he had lived up to the Scouts' motto of "Be Prepared," there was a strong possibility that they would not have been so disastrously precipitated through the roof of the lonely hut. However, before long, Tubby's naturally buoyant temperament asserted itself. As became a boy who had won a first-class scoutship, he did not waste any further time on vain regrets. Instead of crying over spilled milk, he began to figure on finding a way out of their predicament.

Casting his eyes about the cabin, he suddenly became aware of a small door in the bulkhead at the forward end of it. Curious by nature, Tubby opened it, and peered into a dark, cavernous space. A strong odor of gasoline saluted his nostrils, and presently—his eyes becoming used to the light—he could make out the occasional glint of metal. In a flash he realized that this was the engine-room of the sloop, and housed her auxiliary motor.

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A button-switch being made out by the boy at this moment, he turned it. Instantly two incandescent lights shone out, illuminating the place. By their light Tubby made out another door beyond the motor. Determined to investigate the sloop thoroughly—come what might—he thrust it open, and found himself in what seemed to be the hold. But it was too dark to perceive much. Besides, the sloop was pitching and rolling so terribly that the lad had all he could do to hold on.

Returning to the engine-room, he almost stumbled across an electric torch secured to a bracket on the bulkhead. It was evidently used for examining the motor without exposing an open light to the fumes of the gasoline. Armed with this, Tubby once more investigated the hold. It was a capacious place. Stanchions, like a forest of bare trees, supported the deck above. So far as the boy could make out, the place was empty. Far forward was a ladder leading up to a hatchway. Tubby, following out his naturally inquiring bent of mind, was about to examine this, when his heart gave a great bound and then stood still.

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He had not thought to cast a glance behind him in his eagerness to examine the hold.

This had proved to be a fatal bit of oversight on his part, for Stonington Hunt and his son, descending to the cabin for some purpose, had observed his absence. A brief investigation showed them the open door into the engine-room and thence they had glimpsed the flash of Tubby's torch.

The boy turned, warned by some instinct, just as they tiptoed up behind him. Freeman Hunt, with a grin on his face, rushed straight at the Boy Scout. But Tubby was prepared this time, at any rate. He dashed the torch, end down, on the floor of the hold, extinguishing it instantly. At almost the same instant, he rushed straight at the place where he had last seen Freeman Hunt.

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To his huge satisfaction, he felt the other go down in a sprawling heap under his onrush. As he fell, Freeman gave a shout of:

"He ain't wounded at all, dad! He was fooling us!"

"Yes, the brat! He was!" shouted Stonington Hunt, blundering about in the black hold and striving to keep his footing on the pitching, heaving floor.

Tubby, guided by instinct, dashed forward toward the spot, as nearly as he could judge its location, where he had noticed the ladder. He found it, and had placed his foot on the bottom rung, when there was a sudden shock.

The motion of the sloop seemed to cease, as if by magic. Tubby felt himself hurled forward into darkness by the shock. His head crashed against something, and a world of brilliant constellations swam in a glittering array before his eyes. Then something in his head seemed to give way with a snap, and young Hopkins knew no more.

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CHAPTER VIII.

EAGLES ON THE TRAIL.

"Hullo! Wonder what's become of those two fellows?"

Merritt voiced the inquiry, as he and Rob emerged from the police station. The sergeant in charge had promised to do all he could to apprehend the stealers of the pocketbook if they were anywhere within striking distance of Aquebogue.

Rob looked about him. There stood the automobile. But of the two lads they had left to guard it there was no sign. After waiting a reasonable time, the two Boy Scout leaders began to feel real alarm.

"Somehow I feel as if Hunt and his gang have got something to do with this," murmured Rob uneasily.

"It does seem queer," admitted Merritt. "Let's look around a bit more, and then, if we find no trace of them, we'll go back to the police station and look for aid."

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"All right; I guess that's the best thing to do."

But, as we know, it was impossible that their search could terminate in anything but failure. Not a little worried, Rob informed their friend, the sergeant, of what had occurred. That official at once galvanized into action. Before this, he had not seemed to take much interest in their affairs. But now he really moved quickly. By telephone he summoned two detectives, and the lads soon put them in possession of the facts in the case.

"Pretty slim grounds to work on," remarked one of them with a shrug.

Rob could not but feel that this was true. After their consultation with the detectives, who at once set out to scour the place for some trace of Hunt and his crew, the two lads, much dispirited, and with heavy hearts, set out for home. They arrived there in the early morning, and turned in for a brief sleep. As Rob had expected, his father was not at all pleased when

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he learned of the nocturnal use made of his car, and of the serious consequences which had ensued. But Major Dangerfield, who had listened to the lad's story with interest—it was related at the breakfast table—was inclined to take a less serious view of the matter.

"After all, Mr. Blake," he said, "the boys behaved like true Boy Scouts. It was their duty to try to aid in the matter of the pocketbook, and they did their best. I think that it was cleverly done, too."

"But young Hopkins and Hiram are missing," protested Mrs. Blake. "What will their parents say?"

"I don't think, from my observation of Master Hopkins, that he is the kind of lad to get into serious difficulties," said the major. "In fact, I am convinced that he has stumbled across some clew and is following it up."

"I hope it may be so, and that both of them are safe," said Mrs. Blake fervently.

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The first duty, after the morning meal, was to call on Mrs. Hopkins, who was a widow, and also on Hiram's parents, and explain the case. It was not a pleasant task, but Rob saw it through with Spartan courage. He succeeded in quelling the first vivid alarm of the lads' parents, however, and promised to return with news of them before the day was over. This done, Major Dangerfield, Merritt and Rob set out in the Blake car for Aquebogue.

"It is your duty as Boy Scouts to find your missing comrades," said Mr. Blake, as the car started off.

"We'll do it, if it's possible——" began Merritt dolefully.

"We'll do it, anyway," said Rob stoutly.

"That's the right Scout way to talk," said the major commendingly, "that is the spirit that will win."

No news greeted them on their arrival in Aquebogue. The two detectives were still out on the case, and the officials in charge had nothing to report. This was discouraging, but before long one of the detectives arrived with an important clew. He carried in his hand a paper package. On being opened, it proved to contain two pairs of shoes, of Boy Scout pattern. Rob and Merritt immediately identified them as belonging to Hiram and young Hopkins. The major seemed much impressed by the value of this bit of evidence, and before many minutes had passed they were all in the auto and spinning toward the spot where the articles of apparel had been discovered.

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The detectives, it transpired, had not yet explored the hut, and Rob's keen eyes were the first to spy the jagged hole in its roof. He at once set his scout training to work. The first thing he observed was that the hole had been freshly torn. An investigation of the inside of the hut showed the traces of the fight between Hiram and young Hunt.

All at once Rob gave a sharp exclamation, and

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pounced on some object in a corner of the place. Its bright glitter, as the light fell on it through the hole in the roof, had attracted him at first. True Scout as he was, Rob did not allow even the minutest object to escape his scrutiny. In this case, he was richly rewarded, for what he had seen turned out to be a Scout button. It was one that had been torn from Hiram's coat in the struggle.

"This is conclusive evidence that the two lads were here," decided the major. "What else can you deduce from what you have seen, Rob?"

The leader of the Eagle Patrol pondered a moment. Then he spoke.

"In the first place," he said decidedly, "it is evident that Tubby and Hiram in some way got on the track of our enemies in the town. They followed them here. That is proved by the finding of their shoes on that dune near the hut. They took their shoes off for some object, of course. Evidently it must have been to silently observe the men who occupied this shanty. By looking at the footmarks in the sand outside, I traced them to the wall of the place. The steps did not turn in at the door, therefore, obviously, they must have climbed on the roof, for the steps ended at the low-hanging eaves, and they do not go back.

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"An examination of the roof shows that it must have given way under their combined weight. See, that beam is as brittle as match-wood, from dry rot. They could not have been hurt—at least, I don't think so—or this button, which must have been torn off in a struggle, for they are tightly sewn on, would not have been found."

"Very good," approved the major. "I have seen Indian scouts on the border who could not have done much better. But what is the next step?"

"To find out what has become of them, of course," put in Merritt.

"Well, let's see how close we can come to deciding that," said the major, with a side glance at the detectives, who seemed puzzled and bewildered at the swift deductive work of the young Scout.

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Merritt left the hut and made a hasty examination of the numerous tracks without. He then scrutinized the muddy banks of the inlet closely. The tide was not yet full, and the marks of the sloop's keel still showed. Also sand had been tracked on to the little wharf. It was evident that a vessel of some sort had lain there between tides. Equally plain did it appear, that the two missing lads had been carried on board her. Merritt lost no time in communicating his discoveries to his companions.

"You have done well," commended the former army officer, "I am convinced that your deductions are, in the main, correct. But now the thing is to get some craft to go in pursuit of these fellows."

"Ike Menjes, up the creek a little way, has a big gasoline launch he lets out," volunteered one of the detectives.

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"We'll get it if possible," said the major instantly.

"Is she a fast boat?"

"None quicker hereabouts," said the other arm of the law.

Ten minutes later a bargain had been struck, and with Ike Menjes at the engine, and Rob at the wheel, the swift launch *Algonquin* was dashing off down the winding creek headed for the open sea. As she tumbled and rolled through the rough waters of the bar at the creek's mouth, Rob's eye swept the sky.

"Bad weather coming," he remarked.

"No need to worry in this craft," declared Ike; "she's weathered the worst we ever get off here."

"I expect so," agreed the major, with an approving glance at the craft's broad lines and generous beam.

Before many moments had passed, Rob's prediction came true. The *Algonquin*, without any diminution of speed, was being pushed along through a rapidly rising sea, while the wind howled about her, growing stronger every moment. Rob caught himself wondering what sort of a craft the kidnappers of the boys possessed. He hoped it was staunch, for in his judgment the blow was going to be a bad one.

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"It'll get worser before it gets betterer," opined Ike Menjes, coming forward from his engines and peering ahead at the tumbling masses of green water. The rising wind caught their tops and feathered them off in masses of snowy spume. Overhead, dark, ragged clouds raced along. So low did they hang that they seemed almost to touch the crests of the angry waves.

Each time the *Algonquin* topped a roller and then staggered down into a deep trough, Rob scanned the surrounding sea eagerly. But no sign, had, so far, appeared, of any craft resembling the one which they knew must have left the creek. Seaward some sails showed, but they were all those of large coasting schooners.

The craft they were in search of was, no doubt, a smallish vessel, otherwise she could not have negotiated the narrow, winding creek, with its innumerable bends and shallow places.

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"Keep more in shore," advised Ike. "They may have hugged the land to get the benefit of the weather shore."

Rob headed closer in toward the low-lying coast. He could see the waves breaking angrily in white masses on the sandy beach. All at once, above a distant point of land, he sighted the gray shoulder of a sail. The next instant it had vanished.

Had it found an opening through which to slip into an inlet in the bleak coast, or had it foundered in the wild breakers?

The question agitated Rob hugely. Some intuition told him that the craft he had glimpsed had been the one they were in search of, but of its fate they could have no immediate knowledge.

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CHAPTER IX. WHAT SCOUT HOPKINS DID.

When young Hopkins came to himself, he was dimly conscious that the driving motion of the sloop had ceased. Instead, lying there in the pitchy darkness of the hold, he could feel the vessel being struck with what appeared to be mighty blows from a Titanic hammer. Tubby guessed instantly, from the sensations, that they were aground, and that what he felt was the terrific bombardment of enormous breakers.

A swift "overhauling" of himself soon showed the lad that he was not hurt, although the blow on his head, when he had been hurled from the ladder, had stunned him. Of how long he had been unconscious, he had, of course, no knowledge. Worse still, he could not form any idea of how to get out of his dark prison, and he realized that he had no time to lose if he wanted to save Hiram and himself.

Risking the chance that their enemies were prowling about, waiting for the lad to declare himself, Tubby set up a shout.

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"Hiram! Oh, Hiram!"

In the intervals of the crashing blows that shook the frail sloop from stem to stern, Tubby listened intently. But for some time no answering cry came to greet him. Then all at once he thought he caught a feeble shout. He responded, and the cry came more distinctly. Guided by it, he made his way aft with considerable difficulty. Presently a dim, gray light, filtering through the blackness, apprised him that he was nearing the door in the bulkhead through which he had blundered into the hold. A moment more and he had passed through the engine-room and was in the cabin. Hiram, looking pale and wild, was clinging to a stanchion. Water had come into the cabin through a broken port, and was washing about the floor.

"Oh, Tubby, I'm so glad you've come. Where have you been?" breathed the unfortunate Hiram, weak and shaky from his bout with seasickness. "What is happening?"

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"I guess we're aground somewhere," rejoined Tubby. "I'm going to see."

He made for the companionway and rattled the door at the top. As he had dreaded, it was locked. They were prisoners on board a doomed vessel. For an instant even young Hopkins' resourcefulness came to a standstill. His heart seemed to stop beating. His head swam madly. Was this to be the end of them, to be drowned miserably, like two captive rats?

But the next instant the thought of their plight acted as a stimulus. "A true Scout should never say die," thought the boy, and then, retracing his steps, he joined Hiram.

"What's become of Hunt and his outfit?" he asked.

"Why, Stonington Hunt and Freeman passed through the cabin a few minutes ago," replied

Hiram, "right after that terrible bump—"

"When the sloop struck," thought Tubby. Aloud he said:

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"Well?"

"I heard them say that you were done for, and that I could be left to drown."

"Yes, yes, Hiram; but did they say anything about escaping themselves?"

"Yes. I heard them shouting on deck to cut loose the boat. Then I heard a lot of noise. I guess they launched her. That's all, till I heard you shouting back in there."

"Humph!" ejaculated Tubby; "so they left us to perish on this old sloop, eh? Well, Hiram, we'll fool 'em. We'll get away yet in spite of them." In talking thus, young Hopkins assumed a confidence he was far from feeling, but he deemed it best to stimulate Hiram with hope.

"Got any matches?" was his next question.

Hiram nodded, and presently handed out a box.

"Good. Now follow me. By the way, how's the seasickness?"

"Oh, better, but I feel shaky yet. I can manage, though."

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"That's the stuff—wough!"

A heavier blow than usual had been dealt the sloop. The two lads could feel her quiver and quake under the concussion like a live thing.

"Come on, we've got to move quick," said Tubby. Striking a match, he set off into the hold. Hiram followed. Before long they stood at the foot of the ladder from which Tubby had been so violently flung a short time before.

The stout youth darted up it with an agility one would not have expected in a boy of his girth. With the strongest shove of which he was capable, he pushed up the scuttle above.

To his great joy, it gave, swinging back on hinges. But, as he opened it fully, Tubby came nearly being hurled from the ladder for the second time. A great mass of green water swept across the deck at that instant, and the full force of the torrent descended into the hole through the open hatch. Luckily, Tubby had seen it coming in time to warn Hiram, and the downeast lad clung on tightly enough to avoid being carried from his foothold.

In a jiffy young Hopkins clambered through, shouting to Hiram to follow him. It was a wild scene that met both boys' eyes when they emerged on the deck of the stranded sloop. She lay in a small inlet which, though partially sheltered, in hard storms was swept by the seas from outside. The sloop was heeled over to one side at so steep an angle that standing on her wet decks was impossible without clinging to something.

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About three hundred yards away lay the shore, a wild, uninhabited expanse of wind-swept sand dunes, overgrown with dull, green and prickly

beach-grass. No sign of a human habitation could be discerned. Outside on the beach the big seas thundered, flinging masses of white foam skyward. It seemed almost impossible that she could have been navigated through the narrow inlet leading into the small bay where she had stranded. As a matter of fact, it had been more by luck than by design that she had accomplished the passage.

All at once, as the two castaways stood looking about them, a figure bobbed up from behind one of the sand hills. It was instantly recognized by Tubby as Stonington Hunt. The lad now saw that a boat lay on the beach; evidently then, that was how they had reached the shore, as Hiram had surmised. Hunt had apparently been seeking shelter from the storm behind the dune, with the rest of his band. As his eyes fell on the figures of the two Boy Scouts standing on the deck of the stranded sloop, he beckoned toward the dune. Instantly there appeared the rest of the lads' enemies.

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They stood staring for a few minutes, as if amazed to see the Boy Scouts. But before they had time to take any action, an astonishing thing happened.

The sloop began to move.

The incoming tide, which had been steadily rising, had floated her, and she gradually reeled off the sand bank, on which she had struck, into open water. As she did so, Tubby suddenly ducked low, and something whistled by his head. Above the wind came the crack of a firearm's report. Gazing toward Stonington Hunt, Tubby saw that the man held a revolver in his hand. It was from this weapon, evidently, that the projectile had been discharged.

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"Get out of the way, Hiram, quick!" exclaimed the stout lad, for he now saw that the others were preparing to discharge pistols at them. It was apparent that they did not mean the boys to escape if they could avoid it.

But Tubby had suddenly thought of a plan. It had been born in his mind when the sloop rolled off the shoal into deep water. He knew something of gasoline engines from his experiences on board the *Flying Fish*. Why would it not be possible to get out of the little and dangerous bay under motor power? The shots hastened his decision. Clearly if they remained where they were, destruction swift and certain threatened. Stonington Hunt did not mean to let them land, so much was only too apparent.

Before the men left the sloop they had hauled down the canvas, probably in an effort to keep her from grounding. It was the work of an instant for Tubby to dash below and give a turn to the rear starting device on the engine. It worked perfectly. Then he turned on the gasoline, easily finding the connection, and threw on the switch. A blue spark showed that the current was on. Then, with a beating heart he turned the starting device once more.

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Bang!

The engine moved. To the lad's delight it worked steadily. This done, he darted back on deck and took the wheel. He was not a moment too soon,

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for, with no one at the helm, the craft was heading once more for the sand bank. Crouching beneath the stern bulwarks, and ordering Hiram to do the same, young Hopkins navigated the sloop skilfully ahead, steering straight for the open sea. Tempestuous as it was, the sloop seemed still staunch, and he felt they were safer there than in such close proximity to Hunt. Especially since they were followed by an unceasing fire from the pistols of the gang. But although some of the shots splintered the bulwarks, sending showers of slivers about the two crouching lads, neither were hit.

At last, after a dozen hair-raising escapes on the choppy bar, the sloop gained the outside, and throwing showers of spray high over her bluff bows, began to breast the sweep of the seas.

"Go below and take a look at the glass oil cups," ordered Tubby as soon as they were safe from the firing, "if any of them are empty fill them. There is an oil can on a shelf beside the motor."

Glad to do anything to help out, Hiram hastened on this errand. He was below about ten minutes. When he returned on deck his face was white, and he was breathing quickly. Tubby's quick eye noted, too, that the lad was wet to the waist.

"What's up below?" he demanded.

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"The cabin's half full of water, and it seems to be rising every minute;" was the disquieting reply.

At the same instant the sloop's motion stopped and she began rolling in a sickening fashion in the troughs of the mighty seas.

"Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Scout Hopkins, "we're in for it now. The water's reached the engine and it's stopped!"

As he spoke a gigantic mountain of green water suddenly towered right above the helpless sloop. Its crest seemed to overtop the mast tip. Automatically Tubby crouched low and reached out a hand for Hiram.

The next instant the wave swept down on them enveloping the lads in a turmoil of salt water. The two boys were swept away in the liquid avalanche like feathers before a gale.

When the wave had passed, the wreck of the sloop could be seen staggering and wallowing like a stricken thing. But of her two recent occupants there was no trace upon the wilderness of heaving waters.

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CHAPTER X.

A RESCUE AND A BIVOUAC.

From the bow of the *Algonquin* Rob kept his eyes riveted on the spot at which he had seen the sloop vanish. But for some time he could see nothing but the billowing crests of the waves. Suddenly, to his astonishment, from the midst of the combing summits, there was revealed the swaying mast of the sloop, cutting great arcs dizzily across the lowering sky.

As the *Algonquin* climbed to a wave top the entire length of the sloop was disclosed to the lad's gaze. On her deck he could now plainly see two figures.

"Got a glass?" he inquired of Ike.

"Sure," responded that individual, floundering forward with a pair of binoculars.

Rob clapped them to his eyes. The figures of Hiram and Tubby Hopkins swam into the field of vision. At the same instant, or so it seemed, Rob made out the wall of green water rushing downward upon the sloop.

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While a cry of alarm still quivered upon his lips, the sloop rallied an instant, and then—was wiped out!

The others had pressed forward too, and the *Algonquin* had, by that time, gotten close enough for them all to witness the marine tragedy.

"Steady, Rob," exclaimed the major, his hand on Rob's shoulder, "they may be all right yet."

Rob's face was white and set, but he nodded bravely. It seemed impossible that anything living could have escaped from the overwhelming avalanche of water.

Merritt seized the glasses as Rob set them down to take the wheel again. He peered through them with straining eyes.

"Hullo, what's that off in the water there?" he shouted suddenly, pointing.

The next instant the object he had descried had vanished in the trough of a sea.

"Could you make out anybody?" asked the major anxiously.

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"It looked like a spar with—Yes, there are two figures clinging to it."

"Here, let me look!" Rob snatched the glasses out of his comrade's hand.

"Hooray!" he cried the next instant, "it's Tubby and Hiram!"

"Are you sure?" asked the major, "perhaps it's some members of Hunt's crew."

"No, it's Tubby and Hiram. I can make out their uniforms," cried Rob. As he spoke he swung the wheel over, and the *Algonquin's* head was turned in the direction of the spot where a spar with two objects clinging to it had last been seen.

"Wonder what can have become of Hunt and his crowd?" said Merritt presently.

"Maybe they've met with a watery grave," conjectured one of the detectives, "and from what you've told me it would be a good end for them."

"If they hain't taken that pocket-book with them," put in his companion, "the kidnapping of those boys was as desperate a bit of work as I've ever heard tell of."

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In a brief time the two lads, none the worse apparently for their immersion, had been hauled on board the *Algonquin*, and were being plied with eager questions.

"I guess I caught on to that boom more by instinct than anything else," explained Tubby, "when I got the water out of my lungs I looked about me and saw that Hiram had grabbed it too."

"That's what I call luck," said one of the detectives in a wondering tone.

"It surely was," agreed Hiram, "but I guess there's a bigger bit coming."

"What do you mean?" asked the major, struck by something odd in the lad's tone.

For answer Tubby thrust a hand into an inside pocket of his coat and drew forth something that, dripping with water as it was, could be easily recognized as—the missing pocket-book!

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Tubby drew forth the missing pocket-book.

"I guess they forgot to search me for it in the excitement following the collapse of the roof. I'm sorry it got wet, major," he added.

But the major and the others could only regard

the fat boy with wondering eyes. Suddenly the major, the first to recover his senses, spoke:

"I don't know how I'm ever to thank you for this, Hopkins——," he began.

"Tell you how you can," spoke the irrepressible Tubby swiftly.

"How, my boy?"

"By taking us some place where we can get something to eat," quoth Tubby, "I'm so hungry I could demolish the left hind leg of a brass monkey without winking."

* * * * *

From the tumbling waves of an angry sea to the cool shadows of a magnificent forest of chestnut and oak may be a long distance to travel, but such is the jump over time and space that we must make if we wish to accompany our Boy Scouts to their Mountain Camp. The evening sun, already almost touching the peaks of the nearest range, was striking level shafts of light through the forest as our party came to a halt, and Major Dangerfield ordered the canoes, by which they had traversed the smooth stretches of Echo Lake, hauled ashore.

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It was more than three days since the party had left the shores of Lake Champlain. The passage of the lake from its lower end had been made by canoes. The same craft they were now using had transported them. There were three of the frail, delicate little vessels. One was blue, another a rich Indian red, and the third a dark green.

The canoes had been purchased by Major Dangerfield at Lakehead, a small town at which they left the railroad. They had been stocked with provisions and equipment for their long dash into the solitudes of the Adirondacks. Reaching Dangerfield, the canoes had been transported overland till the first of a chain of lakes, leading into the interior, had been reached. Here, to the boys' huge delight, they once more took to the water.

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In the party were Rob, Merritt, young Hopkins, Hiram and little Andy Bowles, the bugler of the Eagles. Andy had been brought along because, as Rob had said, he was so little he would tuck in anywhere. Of course there had been keen regret on the part of the lads who were, of necessity, left behind. But they had borne it with true scout spirit and wished their lucky comrades all the good fortune in the world, when they embarked from Hampton.

Travel had bronzed the lads and stained and crumpled their smart uniforms. But they looked very fit and scout-like as they hustled about, making the various preparations for the evening's camp. Two members of the party have not yet been mentioned. One of these was a tall, lanky man with a pair of big horn-rimmed spectacles set athwart his nose, and arrayed in a queer combination of woodsman's clothes and pedant's immaculate dress. He had retained a white lawn tie and long black coat, but his nether limbs were encased in corduroys and gaiters, with a pair of big, square-toed shoes protruding beneath. On his head was an odd-looking round, black hat, which was always

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getting knocked into the water or caught on branches and swept off. This queer figure was Professor Jeremiah Jorum.

The second addition to the party was the major's factotum, Christopher Columbus Julius Pompey Snaggs. But for purposes of identification he answered to the name of Jumbo. Jumbo was a big-framed negro, intensely black and with a sunny, child-like disposition. He had a propensity for coining words to suit his convenience, deeming the King's English insufficient in scope to express his emotions.

Standing on the sandy strip of beach as he emerged from the red canoe, with a load of "duffle," Jumbo gazed about him in an interested way.

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"Dis sutt'in'ly am a glumpferiferous spot to locate a camp," he remarked, letting his big eyes roll from the tranquil expanse of lake, fringed with feathery balsams and firs, to the slope above him clothed in its growth of fine timber, some of it hundreds of years old.

"Here you, Jumbo, hurry up with that bedding and then clean those fish!"

The voice was the major's. It hailed from a level spot a short distance above the sandy beach. On this small plateau, the canvas "tepees" the Boy Scouts carried were already erected, and a good fire was burning between two green logs.

"Yas, sah, yas, sah! I'se a comin'," hailed the negro, lumbering up among the loose rock, and almost spilling his load in his haste, "I'se a coming so quintopulous dat you all kain't see muh fer de dus' I'se raisin'."

Before long the fish, caught by trolling as they came along, were frizzling in the pan, and spreading an appetizing odor abroad. The aroma of coffee and camp biscuit mingled with the other appetizing smells.

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"Race anybody down to the lake for a wash!" shouted Rob suddenly.

In a flash he was off, followed by Merritt, Hiram and Tubby. Little Andy Bowles, with his bugle suspended from his shoulders by a cord of the Eagle colors, hurried along behind on his stumpy little legs.

"I win!" shouted Rob as he, with difficulty, paused on the brink of the lake. But hardly were the words out of his mouth before Merritt flashed up beside him.

"Almost a dead heat," laughed Rob, "I—But hullo, what's all this?"

Above them came a roar of sliding gravel and stones that sounded like an avalanche. In the midst of it was Tubby, his rotund form dashing forward at a great rate. His legs were flashing like the pistons of a racing locomotive as he plunged down the hillside.

"Here, stop! stop!" shouted Rob, "you'll be in the lake in a minute!"

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But the warning came too late. Tubby's heavy weight could not be checked so easily. Faster he went, and faster, striving in vain to stop himself.

"He's gone!" yelled Merritt the next instant, as a splash announced that Tubby had plunged into the lake water.

In a flash the fat boy was on the surface. But he was "dead game," and while his comrades shouted with laughter he swam about, puffing like a big porpoise.

"Come on in, the water's fine," he exclaimed.

"Even with your uniform on?" jeered Hiram.

"Sure! Oh-ouch! what's that?"

The fat boy had perceived a queer-looking head suddenly obtrude from the water close to him. It was evident that he was not the only one to enjoy an evening swim that day. A big water snake was sharing his involuntary bath with him.

Tubby struck out with might and main for shore, and presently reached it, dripping profusely. The major, when he heard of the occurrence, ordered a change of clothes. When this had been made, Andy's bugle sounded the quick lively notes of the mess call, and the Boy Scouts and their elders gathered round the table which the boys' deft hands had composed of flat slabs of birch bark supported on trestles of green wood. They sat on camp stools which they carried with them. How heartily they ate! They had the appetites that are born of woods and open places.

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"Mah goodness, dose boys mus' have stumicks lak der olyphogenius mammaothstikuscudsses!" exclaimed Jumbo as he hurried to and from his cooking fire in response to constant demands for "more."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE MOUNTAIN CAMP.

Supper concluded, the talk naturally fell to the object of their expedition. The chart or map of the treasure-trove's location was brought out and pored over in the firelight, for the nights were quite sharp, and a big fire had been lighted.

"How soon do you think we will be within striking distance of the place?" inquired Rob.

"Within two or three days, I should estimate," replied the former officer, "but of course we may be delayed. For instance, we have a portage ahead of us."

"A-a—how much?" asked Tubby.

"A portage. That means a point of land round which it would not be practicable to canoe. At such a place we shall have to take the canoes out of the water and carry them over the projection of land to the next lake."

"Anybody who wants it can have my share of that job," said Tubby, "I guess I'll delegate Andy Bowles to carry out my part."

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There was a general laugh at the idea of what a comical sight the diminutive bugler would present staggering along under the weight of a canoe.

"Andy would look like a little-neck clam under its shell," chuckled Merritt.

"Well, you can't always gauge the quality of the goods by the size of the package they come in," chortled Andy, "look at Tubby, for instance. He —"

But the fat boy suddenly projected himself on the little bugler. But Andy, though small, was tough as a roll of barbed wire. He resisted the fat lad's attack successfully and the two struggled all over the level place on which the camp had been pitched.

Finally, however, they approached so near to the edge that Rob interfered.

"You'll roll down the slope into the lake in another minute," he said. "Two baths a day would be too much for Tubby. Besides, he'd raise the water and swamp the canoes."

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The fat youth, with a pretence of outraged dignity, sought his tepee and engaged himself in cleaning his twenty-two rifle. After a while, though, he emerged from his temporary obscurity, and joined the group about the fire, who were happily discussing plans.

"One good thing is that we have plenty of arms," volunteered Hiram, "in case Hunt and his gang attack us we can easily keep them off."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the professor, "surely you don't contemplate any such unlawful acts, major?"

"As shooting at folks you mean," laughed the major. "No indeed, my dear professor. But if those rascals attack us I hope we shall be able to tackle them without any other weapons than those nature has given us."

"I owe Freeman Hunt a good punch," muttered Tubby. "I'd like to make the dust fly around his heels with this rifle."

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"Goodness, you talk like a regular 'Alkali Ike'," grinned Hiram.

"Bet you I could hit an apple at two hundred yards with this rifle, anyway," asserted the stout youth.

"Bet my hunting knife you can't."

"All right, we'll try to-morrow. This rifle is a dandy, I tell you."

"Pooh! It won't carry a hundred yards."

"It won't, eh? It'll carry half a mile, the man who sold it to me said so."

"Minds me uv er gun my uncle had daown in Virginny," put in Jumbo who had been an interested listener, "that thar gun was ther mos' umbliquitos gun I ever hearn' tell uv."

"It was a long distance shooter, eh?" laughed the major, scenting some fun.

"Long distance, sah! Why, majah, sah, dat gun hadn't no ekil fo' long distancenessness. Dat gun 'ud shoot—it 'ud shoot de eye out uv er lilly fly des as fur as you could see."

"It would, really, Jumbo?" inquired Andy Bowles, deeply interested.

"It sho' would fer sartain shuh, Massa Bowles."

"Pshaw, that's nothing," scoffed Tubby, with a wink at the others. The fun-loving youth scented a joke. "My uncle had a gun that once killed a deer at three miles."

"At free miles, Massa Hopkins?"

"Yes. It sounds incredible I know, but they had the state surveyor measure off the ground and sure enough it was three miles."

"Um-ho!" exclaimed Jumbo, blinking at the fire, "dat's a wun'ful gun shoh 'nuff. But mah uncle's gun hed it beat."

"Impossible, Jumbo!" exclaimed the major.

"Yas, sah, it deed. Mah uncle's gun done cahhey so fah dat mah uncle he done hed ter put salt on his bullets befo' he fahed dem."

"Put salt on his bullets before he fired them, Jumbo! What on earth for?" demanded Rob while the others bent forward interestedly.

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"Jes' becos of de distance at which dat rifle killed," explained Jumbo. "Yo' see, and especially in warm weather, dat salt was needed, 'cos it took mah uncle such a time te git to it after he done kill it dat if those bullets weren't salted the game would hev spoiled. Yes, sah, da's a fac', majah."

A dead silence fell over the camp at the conclusion of this interesting narrative. You could have heard a pin drop. At last the major said, in a solemn voice:

"Jumbo, I fear you are an exaggerator."

"Ah specs' ah is, majah. I specs' ah is, but you know dat zaggers is bo'n and not made, lak potes."

Then the laughter broke loose. The hillside echoed with it, and Jumbo, who deemed that he had been called a most complimentary term by the major, gazed from one to the other in a highly puzzled way.

"Reminds me of old Uncle Hank who keeps a grocery store near my uncle's farm up in Vermont," put in Hiram. "One night in the store they were talking about potato bugs. One old fellow said he had seen twenty potato bugs on one stalk."

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"'Pshaw!' said an old man named Abner Deene, 'that's nothing. Why, up in my potato patch they've eaten everything up and now when I go outdoors I kin see 'em sitting around the lot, on trees and fences, waitin' fer me ter plant over ag'in.'

"Then it came the turn of an old fellow named Cyrus Harper. Cyrus laughed at Abner.

“Sittin’ roun’ on fences,’ he sniffed, ‘that’s nuffin’. Nuffin’ at all. Why whar I come from the potato bugs come right into the kitchen, open the oven doors and yank the red hot baking potatoes out of the stove.’

“My uncle hadn’t said a thing all this time, but now he struck in.

“Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘all these potato-bug stories don’t begin to compare with the breed they had down near Brattleboro, where I come from. Down there I used to clerk in Si Toner’s grocery and general store. Well, the potato bugs used to come into the store in the spring and look over Si’s books to see who’d been buying potato seed.’”

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“Funny thing your uncle never met the wonderful rifle shot, Philander Potts,” said the professor musingly, after the laughter over Hiram’s yarn had subsided.

“Philander Potts,” exclaimed the boys, “never heard of him.”

“Too bad,” said the professor musingly, “he was the best shot in the world, too, I guess. Why, once he undertook to fire at a rubber target 2,000 times in two minutes. The way he did it was this. He had a repeating rifle and kept firing as fast as he could at the india-rubber target. The bullets would bounce off and he caught them in the muzzle of his rifle as they flew back and fired them over again.”

“But what about the bullets that were coming out? Didn’t they collide with the ones coming back?” asked Andy Bowles in all seriousness.

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“No,” said the professor gravely, “you see, Philander was so swift in his movements that he was able to fire and catch alternately.”

“I’ll have to practice that,” laughed Tubby.

Soon after the narration of this surprising anecdote, the major looked at his watch.

“Bless my soul!” he exclaimed, “nine o’clock. Time for lights out. Andy, sound ‘Taps’ and we’ll post the sentries for the night.”

Tubby and Hiram were selected for the first watch. The major and young Andy were to stand the second vigil while the third period of sentry duty fell to Merritt and Rob. It seemed to the latter that they had not been asleep half an hour when the major entered their tepee and aroused them for their tour of duty. He reported all quiet, and a clear moonlight night.

Hastily throwing on their uniforms the Boy Scouts turned out. For some time they paced their posts steadfastly without anything occurring to mar the stillness of the night. The moon shone down brightly, silvering the surface of the lake which could be glimpsed through the dark trees.

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Suddenly Rob, who had reached the limit of his post, which was not far from where the canoes had been hauled up, was startled by a slight sound. It ceased almost instantly, but presently it occurred again.

Cautiously the boy crept through the forest

toward the water's edge. He took every advantage of his scout training and carefully avoided treading on twigs or anything that might cause a sound of his approach to be made manifest.

Gliding from tree trunk to tree trunk he soon arrived at the spot in which the canoes had been dragged ashore. At the same instant he became aware of several dark figures moving about among them. Suddenly, right behind him, a twig snapped. In the stillness it sounded as loud as the report of a pistol. Rob wheeled round swiftly, but not before a figure leaped toward him from behind a tree trunk. Before Rob could raise a hand in self-defense another form sprang at him.

The lad tried to cry out and discharge his rifle, but before he could accomplish either act he was felled by some heavy instrument, and a gag thrust into his mouth. The next instant, bound and incapable of uttering a sound, he was borne swiftly toward the canoes.

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CHAPTER XII. CAPTURED.

But silently as the attack upon Rob had been made, it had not taken place without causing some disturbance. Moreover, the sharp crack of the snapping twig which had attracted Rob's attention to his trailers, had also reached Merritt's sharp ears. In the silence of the night-enwrapped forest sounds carry far.

Merritt was all attention in a flash. The snap of the twig might have been caused by some prying animal or——

"Gee whiz! That's the scuffling of feet!" exclaimed the young sentry the next moment as the sounds of the tussle came to him.

His first act was to fire a shot. It should have been aimed in the air, but in his excitement Merritt fired low. The bullet whizzed in the direction of the camp, struck a tin kettle which was piled up with a number of other tin utensils, and brought the whole pile down with a crash. Now Jumbo's chosen sleeping place was right behind this barricade of tin hardware. When it fell it came crashing about the colored man in an ear-splitting avalanche. Jumbo leaped to his feet with a howl. He was attired in his shirt, trousers and shoes, not having bothered to remove these when he retired.

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"Fo' de lan's sake what dat gum gophulous racket?" he yelled. In a flash his long legs began to move.

"Ah'll bet a pint uv peanuts dat's Injuns!" he shouted as he sped along, "mah goodness, ah wish ah had mah uncle's gun. But as ah ain't ah's jes' a gwine te trus' ter mah laigs."

Jumbo, in great leaps and strides, arrived at the lake-side in a few instants. In the meantime, the camp behind him was in an uproar of excitement over the midnight alarm.

The negro had already reached the waterside before he felt himself knocked flat by a heavy blow on the head. Now Jumbo's head, like all negroes', was about as hard as a bit of adamant. But the cowardly fellow deemed it better to lie perfectly still when he was knocked flat. Presently he felt himself being picked up and thrown into something that the next instant began to move off. He realized in a flash that he was lying in the bottom of one of the canoes.

"Hailp! Hailp!" he began to yell, but was silent instantly as a harsh voice breathed in his ear:

"You shut up if you don't want a bullet in your black head."

Jumbo lay silent after that. But his thoughts were busy.

"Bullet in mah haid, eh?" he mused, "mah goodness, ah don't want nuffin' lak dat. Mah cocoanut feels now laik ah'd done tried ter butt a locusmocus off'n de track. Wondah what deportentiousness uv all dis unusualauness done mean?"

His meditations were interrupted by a shout from the shore.

"Bring back those canoes at once!"

"Mah goodness, dat am de majah," exclaimed Jumbo, but to himself. "He shuh am po'ful mad. Wondah if dem boys is playin' pranks. If dey is dey'll be sorry fer it."

The black ventured to raise his head a little and peep up to see who was in the canoe with him. In doing so his eyes fell on another figure lying beside him. In the moonlight he could see the cords that bound it. The radiance of the moon also revealed the Boy Scout uniform.

"Gabriel's Ho'hn! Dat's one of dem Boy Scrouts!" he exclaimed, "an' mah gracious, ah wondah who dat fierce lookin' man am whose paddlin' dis yar boat. Reckon ah'd better lay quiet. He looks pretty frambunctious."

In the meantime, the aroused inmates of the camp had rushed to the shore. They reached it just in time to see their entire flotilla of canoes being paddled swiftly off across the smooth, moonlit waters. Tubby and Hiram raised their rifles when a hoarse laugh of defiance greeted the major's command to the marauders to halt. But in a flash the officer saw what they were about to do.

"None of that, boys," he ordered sharply, "put down those rifles."

"No use for them now," grumbled Tubby, "see, they've disappeared round that point."

"Let's get after them," suggested Hiram.

The major shook his head.

"Over this rough ground they could easily outdistance us," he said, "is anyone missing?"

It took but a few minutes to ascertain that both Rob and Jumbo were not among them.

"This is even more serious than the theft of the

canoes," exclaimed the professor, "do you suppose that it was Hunt's gang that took them?"

"I don't doubt it," said the major, "who else would be interested in annoying us? But let's hear Merritt's story. What did you hear, my boy?"

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Merritt soon told his narrative of the crackling twig and the struggle. A visit to the beach showed that there had, indeed, been a struggle before Rob had been landed in the canoe. A disconsolate silence fell on the little party.

"What are we to do now?" wondered Hiram.

"Get in pursuit of them as quick as possible, I should think," opined Tubby.

The major shook his head.

"Not much use in that," he decided, "we would not be likely to find them. No, the best plan is to wait right here. If Rob escapes he will be able to find his way back again."

"Do you think they mean him harm?" inquired little Andy Bowles tremulously.

"I hardly think so," responded the major, "they wouldn't dare to do much more than keep him prisoner. But even that's bad enough."

"But what object can they have in all this except to annoy us?" asked the professor.

"Simple enough," said the major, rather bitterly, "I guess they are going to hold Rob as a hostage."

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"What do you mean?"

"That if they manage to keep him prisoner we shan't see him again till I have given them the plans to the location of the Dangerfield treasure cave."

"They wouldn't dare——" began the professor. But the major interrupted him.

"We have already had a proof of what they will dare," he said, "they are as desperate a band of ruffians as I have ever heard of."

"I guess that's right," agreed Tubby, "but I'll bet," he added stoutly, "that Rob will find a way out of it yet."

In the meantime the canoes sped on through the night. Rob mentally tried to keep some track of the distance traversed, but he was totally unable to do so. He judged, however, when the paddles finally ceased their splashing, that they must have come some distance, for it was day-break when the canoes came to a halt.

Rob was roughly jerked to his feet and then, for the first time, became aware of Jumbo. For his back had been toward the negro in the canoe.

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"Mah goodness, Marse Blake," exclaimed the black, "ain' dis de mostes' parallelxillus sintuation dat you ever seen. Ah declar'——"

But further remarks on Jumbo's part were roughly checked by the man who had paddled the two prisoners to their present situation. He

was none other than the big-limbed rascal, Jim Dale, who had played such a prominent part in the theft of the pocket-book.

"Shut your black head, nigger," he ordered gruffly.

"Ah ain't no niggah. Ah's a 'spectabilious colored gent"; protested Jumbo, "and I kain't shut mah haid nohow 'cos it keeps openin' an' shuttin' of its own accord whar you busted me on it."

But a fierce look from the man made even the garrulous negro subside. As for Rob, he disdained to talk to the fellow, or bandy words with him. Instead, he gazed around while the other canoes, filched from the Boy Scout camp, were coming up. He noted that one was paddled by Peter Bumpus, while the third one contained Stonington Hunt and his son Freeman, the lad who had already given the Boy Scouts so much trouble.

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It was a curious place in which the boy found himself. But Rob, with his scout instinct, could not but admire the skill with which it had been chosen as a retreat.

The spot was like a large basin with steep rock walls on all sides but one. On the open side a narrow neck of the lake led into this natural fortress. Great trees and luxurious water growth masked the entrance and anybody, not knowing of it, might have passed by it on the lake side a hundred times without noting its presence. The canoes had been paddled through this natural screen of water maples and rank growth of all kinds, which had closed like a curtain behind them.

A beach, narrow except at the far end of the cove, ran round the water's edge at the foot of the rocky walls. A small tent was pitched there, and a fire was smoldering. Evidently the place had been occupied for some little time as a camp. Rob found himself wondering how the men, in whose power he now was, had ever found the place. He did not know then that Jim Dale and Pete Bumpus had once been associated with a gang of moonshiners, whose retreat this had been before the officers of the revenue service broke the gang up and scattered them far and wide.

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Hunt had gleaned enough knowledge from the plan, during his brief possession of it, to divine which route the party would take to the hidden treasure trove. He had, therefore, sought out this place when Dale and Bumpus told him of it. The boys' enemies had made straight for it, and had been encamped there some days awaiting the arrival of the party. The notes of Andy Bowles' bugle floating out across the lake the night before had apprised them of the arrival of the party, and plans had immediately been made for a hasty descent on the Boy Scouts' mountain camp. How successful it had proved we already know. But of course, to Rob, all this was a mystery.

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The canoes were grounded at the end of the cove on the broad strip of beach. Rob and Jumbo were at once ordered to get out, and Rob's leg-bonds being loosened and gag removed, he followed Jumbo on to the white sand. Hardly had their feet touched it before Stonington Hunt and

his rascally young son, the latter with a sneer on his face, also landed.

"Fell neatly into our little trap, didn't you?" jeered Stonington Hunt, staring straight at Rob with an insolent look.

"Yo' alls kin hev yo' trap fo' all I wants uv it"; snorted Jumbo indignantly, as Rob disdained to answer.

"Be quiet, you black idiot!" snapped Hunt, "we didn't want you, anyhow. I've a good mind," he went on with a brutal sort of humor, "to have you thrown into the lake."

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"By golly yo' jes bring on de man to do it," exclaimed the negro with great bravado, "ah reckon ah kin tackle him. Ah'm frum Vahgeenyah, ah is, an——"

But Hunt impatiently checked him. He turned to Peter Bumpus. "Cook us up a meal," he ordered.

"For them, too?" asked Bumpus, jerking his thumb backward at Rob and Jumbo.

"Of course. You may as well get used to it. I expect they'll make quite a long stay with us."

Rob's heart sank. He was a lad who always schooled himself to look on the brightest side of things. But no gleam of hope lightened the gloom of their present situation. Things could not have been much worse, he felt.

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CHAPTER XIII.

ROB FINDS A RAY OF HOPE.

The meal, a sort of stew composed apparently of rabbits, partridges and other small game, was despatched and then Rob, who had been released from his bonds while he ate, was tied up once more.

"These fellows don't think much of breaking the game laws," he thought as he ruminated on the contents of the big iron pot from which their noon-day meal had been served. Then came another thought. If they so openly violated the laws, the country was surely a lonely one, and seldom, or never, visited. Indeed, the thick forest of hemlock and other coniferous trees that fringed the cliff summits, would seem to indicate that the spot was well chosen.

Jumbo was not confined. The gang seemed to esteem him as more or less harmless for, although a sharp watch was kept on him, he was not fettered. Once or twice he caught Rob's eye with a knowing look. But he said nothing. One or another of the men kept too close and constant a watch for that. And so the hours wore on. Tied as Rob was, the small black flies and other winged mountain pests made life almost intolerable. With infinite pains the lad dragged himself to a spot of shade under a stunted alder bush. He lay here with something very like despair clutching coldly at his heart. The canoes had been anchored, with big stones attached to ropes, at some distance out in the little bay. Only

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one remained on shore, and by that Jim Dale kept an unrelaxing vigil.

Jim and Peter were talking in low voices. Rob overheard enough to know that their talk was of the old lawless days when the moonshine gang made the hidden cove their rendezvous.

"Those were the days," Dale said with a regretful sigh, "money was plenty then. By the way, Pete, did you ever hear what became of Black Bart and the others after the revenues broke us up?"

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"No, I never wanted to take a chance of inquiring," rejoined Peter, puffing at a dirty corn cob. "I did hear, though, that they had resumed operations some place around here."

"They did, eh? I suppose they figured that lightning don't never strike twice in the same place."

"Just the same, they are taking a long chance. With revenues against you it's all one sided—like the handle of a jug."

"That's so. But there's good money in it, and Black Bart would risk a lot for that."

The conversation was carried on in low tones. Rob, intent though he was, could not catch any more of it. But he pondered over what he had heard. If what Jim Dale and Peter had said was correct, a gang of moonshiners still made the mountains thereabouts their habitat.

"It's a strange situation we've stumbled into," thought the boy.

Then he fell to observing Stonington Hunt and his son, Freeman. The man and the boy were talking earnestly at some distance from Peter and Jim Dale. From their gestures and expressions Rob made out that the conversation was an important one. From the frequent glances which they cast in his direction he also divined that he himself, was, in all probability, the subject of it.

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All at once Stonington Hunt arose and came toward him. Freeman followed him. They came straight up to Rob and stood over him.

"Well, Rob Blake," sneered young Hunt, "I guess things are different to what they were the time you drove me out of Hampton and forced my father to profess all sorts of reformation."

"I don't know," rejoined Rob coolly and contemptuously, "you seem to me to be very much the same sort of a chap you were then."

The inference, and Rob's unshaken manner, appeared to infuriate the youth.

"We've got you where we want you now," he snarled, "it would serve you right if I took all the trouble you've caused us out upon your hide. You and that patrol of yours cost us our social position, then that Hopkins kid lost our sloop for us—"

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"The sloop in which you meant to decamp with the major's papers," put in Rob in the same calm tones, "don't try to assume any better position than that of a common thief, Freeman."

With a quick snarl of rage the boy jumped on the helpless and bound boy. He brought his fist down on Rob's face with all his force. Then he fastened his hands in Rob's hair and tugged with all his might. But suddenly something happened. Something that startled young Hunt considerably.

Rob gave a quick twist and despite his bonds managed to half raise himself. In this position he gave the other lad such a terrific "butt" that Freeman was sent staggering backward, with a white face. Unable to regain his balance he presently fell flat on the sand. He scrambled to his feet and seized a big bit of timber, the limb of a hemlock that lay close at hand. He was advancing, brandishing this with the intention of annihilating Rob when Stonington Hunt, who had hitherto been an impassive observer, stepped between them.

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"Here, here, what's all this?" he snapped angrily. "This isn't a fighting ring. Put down that stick, Freeman, and you, young Blake, listen to me."

"I'm listening," said Rob, in the same cold, impassive way that had so irritated Freeman.

"You want to regain your freedom and rejoin your friends, don't you?" was the next question.

"If it can be done by honorable means—yes. But I doubt if you can employ such, after what I've seen of you."

"Hard words won't mend matters," rejoined Hunt with a frown, "after all, I've as much right to this hidden treasure as anyone else—if I can get it."

"Yes, if you can get it," replied Rob with meaning emphasis, wondering much what could be coming next.

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"Your liberty depends on my getting it," resumed Hunt.

"My liberty?" echoed the boy, "how is that?"

"I want you to write a note to Major Dangerfield. He thinks a good deal of you, doesn't he?"

"I hope so," responded Rob, mightily curious to know what Hunt was driving at.

"He's responsible, too, in a way, for your safety, isn't he? I mean your parents rely on him to bring you back safe and sound?"

"I suppose so. But why don't you come to the point. Tell me what it is you want."

"Just this: You write to the major. I'll see that the note is delivered. You must tell him to give my messenger the plan and map of the treasure's hiding place. If he does so you will be returned safe and sound. So will the nigger and the canoes. We didn't want that nigger anyhow. In the darkness we mistook him for the major."

Rob could hardly repress a smile at the idea of the dignified major being confused with the ubiquitous Jumbo.

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"Are you willing to write such a letter?"

"You mean am I willing to stake my safety against the major's hopes of recovering his relative's hidden fortune?"

"That's about it—yes."

Rob's mind worked quickly. It might be dangerous to give a direct negative and yet he certainly would have refused to do as the rascal opposite to him suggested.

"I—I—Can you give me time to think it over?" he hesitated, assuming uncertainty in decision.

"Yes, I'll give you a reasonable period. But mind, no shilly-shallying. Don't entertain any idea of escape. You'll be guarded as closely here as if you were in a stone-walled prison."

"I know that," said Rob, feeling an inward conviction that Hunt's words were literally true. The cliff-enclosed cove was indeed a prison. Hunt turned away, followed by his son. The latter cast a malevolent look back at Rob as he went.

"My! His father must be proud of that lad," thought Rob.

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Hunt and his followers fell to playing cards. Rob was left to his reflections. Jumbo sat gloomily apart and yet in full view of the card players. After a while Rob's thoughts reverted to the conversation he had overheard between Dale and Peter Bumpus. In this connection he suddenly bethought himself of something. Jim Dale had spoken of the revenue officers raiding the moonshiners' plant. If that was the case, and the miscreants had all escaped, how did they go?

The revenue officers probably attacked the place from the lake side of the cove. This would have effectually shut off all hope of escape in that direction. The only conclusion left, to account for the freedom of the gang was a startling one.

The cove must have some secret entrance or exit. If such were the case it could only be by a passage or by steps cut in the seemingly solid rock. Rob's heart began to beat a bit faster. There might be a chance of escape after all, if only he could discover the means of exit he was now certain must exist somewhere in the cove.

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But a careful scrutiny failed to show any indications of such a device as he was looking for. The walls were bare and clean as cliffs of marble. Not more than two or three stunted conifers grew out of an occasional crevice. The enclosing walls would not have afforded footing to a fly.

"Guess I was wrong," thought Rob to himself and lying back on the sand he closed his eyes the better to concentrate his thoughts. But what with the strain of the early hours and the warm, sultry atmosphere, the lad found his ideas wandering. Presently, without knowing it, he had dropped off into a sound slumber.

When he awoke it was with a start. The long shadows showed him that the day was far spent. All at once voices near at hand struck in upon his half awakened senses.

Rob heard a few words and then, with wildly beating pulses, he fell to simulating sleep with

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all his might. From what he had heard of the conversation he believed that a hope of escape lay in the words of the talkers.

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CHAPTER XIV. A THRILLING ESCAPE.

It was Peter Bumpus and Jim Dale who were talking. From their first words Rob gathered that Stonington Hunt and his son had gone fishing, and that Jumbo, like himself, was asleep.

"You're sure that kid is off good and sound, too?" asked Dale.

"Soon find out," rejoined Bumpus.

Rob felt the man bend over him, his hot breath fanning his ear. It was a hard job not to open his eyes, but Rob came through with flying colors.

"He's sound as a top," decided Pete, "and old Hunt and the kid won't be back for half an hour anyway. Now's our time to see if the old rope ladder is still there."

"It sure did us a good turn the night the revenues came," said Jim Dale.

"Let's see, it was over this way, wasn't it? Right under that big hemlock on the top of the cliff?"

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"That's right."

Rob heard them cross the sandy strip of beach. Luckily, he was lying with his face toward that side, and by half-opening his eyes could observe their movements without danger of being discovered.

They approached a clump of bushes and fumbled about in it for a brief time. Peter did most of the searching, for that was what it seemed to be, while Dale stood over him.

"Well?" demanded Dale at length, "is it there?"

"Is what there?" wondered Rob.

"It's here, all right," responded Peter Bumpus and in triumph he held up something which only by great straining of his eyes Rob was able to recognize as a strand of wire. It was so slender that if his attention had not been drawn to it he would never have seen it.

"I'd like to give it a yank and bring the rope ladder down," said Dale.

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"I wouldn't mind a run in the old woods myself," said Peter. He seemed half inclined to pull the wire, which Rob judged, though he could not distinguish it against the dull background of rock, must lead to the cliff summit. On that cliff summit the boy also assumed, from what he had heard, there must lie a rope ladder. The mystery of the escape of the rascals from the revenue officers was solved. They had mounted by the rope ladder on the first alarm and pulled it up after them. Rob could hardly help admiring the strategy that had conceived such a scheme.

Suddenly, while Peter Bumpus still hesitated, there came the sharp "splash" of a paddle.

"Here comes the boss," warned Dale.

Instantly the two men strolled aimlessly across the beach, as if their minds were vacant and idle. Evidently then, Hunt was not aware of the existence of the rope ladder, and the two men had some strong object in wishing to hide it from him.

The two Hunts brought back several fish, perch and pickerel, which were cooked for supper. After that meal the men sat about and talked a while, and then preparations were made for bed. Jumbo was tied hand and foot, much as Rob was. But not content with these precautions, Dale was stationed to watch the captives. From what Rob could hear he was to be relieved by Bumpus at midnight.

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That Dale took his duty seriously was evident by the fact that, beside him, as he crouched by the fire, he laid out a ready cocked rifle, and kept one eye always upon the two prisoners. To amuse himself during his vigil he drew out a big case knife and began whittling a bit of driftwood into the likeness of a ship—a reminder of his old seafaring days. Rob, watching the ruffian at this innocent employment while the firelight played on his rough features, caught himself wondering what sort of childhood such a man could have had, and how he came to drift into his evil courses.

"I'll bet that the Boy Scout movement in big cities is keeping hundreds of lads out of mischief," he thought, "and helping to make good men out of them. After all, or so dad says, most bad boys are only bad because they have no outlet but mischief for their high spirits."

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After a while, Dale finished his carving. Then he darted a cautious look about him.

"Wonder if any of that old moonshine is still in the hiding place?" he muttered.

For a while he remained still. Then he once more cast a scrutinizing look around him. Rob interpreted this as a meaning that Dale was anxious to see if everything was quiet. The boy lay still and silent and Dale evidently assumed he was asleep. After a careful inspection of the spot where the others slumbered, the fellow cautiously made for the base of the cliff near the clump of bushes where he and Bumpus had investigated the wire that afternoon. Reaching toward a stone he pulled it aside, and thrust his arm into a recess which was suddenly revealed. When he drew his hand out it clasped a demijohn. The recess was the hiding place formerly used by the moonshiners to conceal their product.

With a swift glance about, to make sure he was not observed, Dale raised the demijohn to his lips. It stayed there a long time. He set it down and looked about him furtively once more. Then he raised the jug again and took another long swig of the poisonous stuff. Rob, through lowered lids, watched him with a shudder of disgust.

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When Dale finally thrust back the jug into its

hiding place and returned to the firelight, his step was unsteady and his eyes had a strange, glassy light in them. He sank down on the log which served him as a seat, and once more drew out his knife. His intention, apparently, was to resume his whittling. But after a few unsteady strokes at the bit of wood he had selected, he gave over the attempt.

His head lolled limply forward and the corners of his mouth drooped. One by one his fingers relaxed their grip on the knife, and, resting his head on his hands, he allowed himself to sink into oblivion.

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Instantly the Boy Scout's faculties were alert and at work. The firelight played temptingly on the knife the liquor-stupefied man had dropped. Very cautiously the fettered Rob rolled over upon his stomach and, slowly as a creeping snail, began a tedious progress toward the weapon. How he blessed the days he had spent practicing such stealthy means of advance. It was the old scouting crawl of the Indians he used. A means of approach as silent as that of a marauding weasel.

It was ticklish, scalp-tightening work, though. But Rob did not dare to hurry it. The rattle of a misplaced stone, the snap of a twig, might spoil all. To add to the peril at any moment, either the drowsy man by the fire, or one of the sleeping men beyond, might awaken.

But at last, without a single accident, Rob reached the proximity of the precious knife. It was a heavy weapon and lay on the rock-strewn ground with its blade upward. The boy noted this with a quick gulp of thankfulness. For, fettered as he was, he could not have manipulated it till he got his hands free.

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With infinite caution he rolled his body so that his wrists were close to the keen blade. Then he began sawing at the ropes, rubbing them back and forth against the blade. At length one of the strands parted. Then another was severed, and, with a strong jerk, Rob tore loose the rest. Then, cautiously picking up the knife in his freed hand, he slashed his leg-bonds. In less time than it takes to tell it he was free.

His next task was to liberate Jumbo. And then

Rob had allowed his thoughts to dwell on the daring possibility of recovering the canoes and paddling away with them. But on second thoughts he deemed this too risky. Instead he determined to trust to the rope ladder. It had flashed across his mind in this connection, that the strands of the ladder might be too weak to support his weight, or the much greater avoirdupois of Jumbo. But the lad felt that they must risk it.

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Jumbo very nearly ruined everything. For, as Rob bent over him, he awakened with a start.

"Oh, fo' de lan's sake, massa, don' you go to confustigate dis yar---

But in a flash Rob had clapped his hand over the garrulous black's capacious mouth. Jumbo's first fear that his last hour had come was speedily relieved as he saw who it was.

Rob, after a quick look about, assured himself that Jumbo's words had not aroused any of the sleepers. Then, taking his hand from the negro's lips, he quickly slashed his bonds. In another instant Jumbo, too, was at liberty.

"Wha' you go fo' ter do now, Marse Blake?" he whispered.

"Hush! Not a word. Follow me," breathed the boy.

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"Dis suttingly am a pawtuckitus state of affairs," muttered the black, "don' see no mo' how we can git out uv this lilly place dan er fly kin git out of a mo'lasses bar'l."

However, he followed Rob, who, on tip-toe, approached the clump of bushes where he knew the wire he had observed that afternoon lay hidden. With beating pulses he poked about in the scrub-growth till, suddenly, his fingers encountered the filament of metal. The most dangerous step of their enterprise still lay before him. What would happen when he pulled it? Would the ladder come down with a crash that would awaken their foes, or—

Rob lost no time in further indulging his nervous thoughts, however. He gave the wire a good hard tug. Simultaneously, from out of the blackness above them, something came snaking down. Rob dodged to avoid it.

He could have cried aloud with joy as, in the faint glow cast by the fire, he saw that, right in front of him were the lower rungs of a rope ladder. It was padded at the bottom so that its descent, abrupt as it had been, was almost noiseless. Rob noted, too, with inward satisfaction, that the ropes seemed strong and in good condition.

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"Up with you, Jumbo," he ordered in a tense, low whisper.

The black turned almost gray with apprehension.

"Ah got ter clim' dat lilly ladder lak Massa Jacob in de Bibul?" he whimpered.

"You certainly have, or—"

Rob made an eloquent gesture toward the camp of Hunt and his gang. The hint conveyed proved effectual.

"Mah goodness, dis am suffin' dis coon nebber thought he hab to do," muttered Jumbo, "but all things comes to him who waits—so heah goes!"

He set his foot on the ladder and, rapidly ascending it, soon disappeared in the darkness above. As soon as the slackness of the appliance showed Rob that the negro was at the cliff summit, the boy prepared to follow him.

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But as he set his foot on the lower rung the man by the fire awakened with a start. Before Rob, climbing like a squirrel, could mount three more steps he became aware that his prisoners were missing.

Snatching up his rifle he ran straight toward the rope ladder. The next instant Rob, with a hasty glance backward, saw that the weapon was

aimed straight at him. His blood chilled as he recollected having heard Dale that afternoon boasting of his ability as "a dead shot."

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CHAPTER XV. OUT OF THE FRYING PAN.

For only an instant did Rob remain motionless. Then, as if by instinct, he suddenly crouched. It was well he did so. A bullet sang above his head as he clung, swinging on his frail support, and flattened itself with an angry "ping!" against the rock wall above him.

The report brought the rest of the sleeping camp to its feet. In an instant voices rang out and hastily lighted lanterns flashed. Rob, taking advantage of even such a brief diversion, sprang upward. But with a roar of fury, Dale sprang to the foot of the ladder. Desperation gave Rob nimble feet. He literally leaped upward.

In his mind there was a dreadful fear. The ladder was hardly strong enough to bear two. By placing his weight on the lower part of it, it was Dale's intention to bring him down to the ground. That in such an event he could escape with his life, seemed highly improbable.

But fast as he went, he felt the ladder quiver as Dale's hold was laid upon it from below. At this critical instant a sudden diversion occurred. From right above Rob's head, or so it seemed, a voice roared out through the night.

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"Tak' yo' dirty paws off'n dat ladder, white man, or, by de powers, it's de las' time you use 'em!"

It was Jumbo's voice. But Dale answered with a roar of defiance. He shook the ladder violently. Rob felt himself dashed with sickening force against the cliff-face. But all at once there was a warning shout. Something roared past his ears, just missing him.

"Hoids below!" sung out Jumbo as he watched the huge rock he had dislodged go crashing downward.

It missed Dale by the fraction of an inch. But his narrow escape unnerved the fellow for an instant. In that molecule of time Rob gained the summit of the ladder, and Jumbo's strong arms drew him up to safety beside him.

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"Well done, Jumbo," he exclaimed.

"Oh, dat wasn' nuffin'," modestly declared Jumbo, "if dat no-account trash hadn't uv leggo I'd have flattened him out flatter'n dan a hoe cake. Yas, sah."

"I guess you would, Jumbo. But there's no time to lose. Come, we must be getting on."

"One ting we do firs' off wid alacrimoniousness, Marse Blake," said Jumbo.

"What's that?"

"Jes' len' me dat lilly knife you take frum dat

pestiferous pussonage below an' I shows yoh right quick."

Rob had thrust the knife into his scout belt. He now withdrew it and handed it to the negro. With two swift slashes, Jumbo severed the top strands of the ladder. A crash and outcry from below followed. Rob, peeping over, saw that Dale, who had just begun to mount after them, was the victim. He was rolling over and over, entangled in the strands of the ladder, while Stonington Hunt stood over him in a perfect frenzy of rage.

"Now den, Marse Blake, ah reckon we done cook de goose of dem criminoligious folks," snorted Jumbo as he gazed. "He! he! he! dey is sure having a mos' fustilaginal time down dere."

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"I guess they'll have plenty to think over for a time," said Rob, rather grimly; "come, let's set out. Have you any idea in which direction the camp lies?"

"No, sah. But I raickon if we des foiler de lake we kain't go fur wrong."

"We must go toward the south, then. See, there's the Scout's star, the north one. The outer stars in the bucket of the dipper point to it."

"Wish ah had a dippah full ob watah. I'm po'ful thirsty," grunted Jumbo.

"We'll run across a stream before very long, no doubt," said Rob.

With these words the lad struck off through the forest of juniper and hemlocks. The moon had not yet risen, and it was dark and mysterious under the heavy boughs. Jumbo held back a minute.

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"Come on. What's the matter, Jumbo?" exclaimed Rob.

"It look powerful spooky in dar, Marse Blake."

"Well, I guess the spooks, if there are any, will do us less harm than that gang behind us," commented Rob.

Jumbo, without more words, followed him. But he rolled his eyes from side to side in evident alarm at every step. On and on they plunged, making their way swiftly enough over the forest floor. From time to time they stopped to listen. But there was no sound of pursuit. In fact, Rob did not expect any. With the ladder destroyed, there was not much chance of the Hunt crowd clambering over the cliff tops.

At such moments as they paused, Rob felt, to the full, the deep impressiveness of the forest at night. Above them the sombre spires of the hemlocks showed steeple-like against the dark sky. The night wind sent deep pulsations through them, like the rumbling of the lower notes of a church organ. All about lay the deeper shadows of the recesses of the woods. They were shrouded in a rampart of impenetrable darkness.

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"I hope we're keeping on the right track," thought Rob, as it grew increasingly difficult, and finally impossible, to see the north star through the thick mass of foliage above them.

The boy knew the danger of wandering in circles in the untracked waste of forest unless they kept constantly in one direction. Without the stars to guide him, it grew increasingly difficult to be sure they were doing this.

"Golly! Ah suttinly hopes we gits out of dis foliageous place befo' long," breathed Jumbo stentorously, stumbling along behind Rob over the rough and stony ground that composed the floor of the Adirondack forest.

All at once, as Rob strode along, he stopped short. Some peculiar instinct had caused him to halt. Just why he knew not. But he was brought up dead in his tracks.

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"Wha's de mattah, Marse Blake?" quavered Jumbo, "yo' all hain't seein' any hants or conjo's, be yoh?"

Rob replied with another question.

"Got a match, Jumbo?" he asked.

"Yas sah, Marse Blake, I done got plenty ob dem lilly lucifers."

He dived in his pocket and produced a handful of matches, which he handed to Rob. The boy struck one, and, as the yellow flame glared up, he uttered a little cry and stepped back with a perceptible shrinking movement.

No wonder he did so. At the young Scout's feet the flare of the match had revealed a yawning abyss. One more step and he would have been over it. Gazing into the ravine he could hear the subdued roar of a stream somewhere far, far below. A cold blast seemed to strike upward against his face.

"Gracious, what a narrow escape!" he exclaimed. Then, stirring a small stone with his foot he dislodged it and sent it bounding over the edge. Bump! bump! tinkle! tinkle! plop! plop!—and then—silence.

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"Golly, goodness, dat hole mus' be as deep as de bad place itself!" exclaimed Jumbo, shrinking back in affright, "dat hole mus' go clean frough de middle of de world an' come out de odder side in China."

"It certainly does seem as if it might," agreed Rob; "at any rate, if we'd gone over it we'd have had no time to investigate—ugh!"

Rob gave a shudder he could not subdue as he thought of their narrow escape.

The only thing to be done under the circumstances, was to turn aside and keep on slowly, awaiting the daylight to see where they were, and the nature of their surroundings. They had progressed in this fashion perhaps half a mile or so, when Jumbo gave a sudden cry:

"Look, Marse Blake! Wha' dat froo de trees dere? Look uncommon lak a light."

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"It is a light. Although I don't know what any habitation can be doing in this part of the world," answered Rob.

"Maybe even ef it's only er camp we kin git suffin' ter eat dar," suggested Jumbo hopefully,

“ah’m jes’ nacherally full ob nuttin’ but emptiness.”

“You’d never make a Scout, Jumbo.”

“Don’ belibe I wants ter be no Skrout nohow,” retorted Jumbo, “dar’s too much peregrinaciusness about it ter suit me.”

Rob did not reply. But a moment later he cautioned Jumbo to progress as cautiously as possible. The boy could see now that the light proceeded from the open doorway of a hut. Within the rude structure he could make out a masculine figure in rough hunting garb bending over a stove at one end of the primitive place.

All of a sudden Rob’s foot encountered something. He tripped and fell, sprawling on his face. At the same instant the sharp report of a gun rang out close at hand.

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The wire over which the boy had tripped, and which was stretched across the pathway, had discharged the alarm signal. As the echoes went roaring and flapping through the forest, the man who had been bending over the stove, straightened as if a steel spring had suddenly sprung erect.

He was a small, dwarfish-looking fellow, with a clay-colored skin, beady, black eyes, shifty as a wild beast’s. The animal-like impression of his face was heightened by a shaggy beard of black that fell in unkempt fashion almost to his waist. He wore blue jean trousers, moccasins and a thick blue flannel shirt.

With a swift, panther-like movement, he snatched up a rifle that stood in one corner of the hut. His next move was to extinguish the light with a sharp puff. Then, with every sense wire-strung, he stood listening.

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CHAPTER XVI. INTO THE FIRE!

The moon had just risen. Her light silvered the dark hemlock tops, and, by bad luck, fell in a flood full upon Rob and Jumbo. The man who had sprung into such sudden activity was, on the contrary, completely shrouded in the black shadow of the hut.

Even had they had weapons they would, situated as they were, have been completely in his power. To use a slang term, but one full of expressiveness, he had “the drop” on them.

“Who are you?” rasped out the inmate of the hut in a harsh, startled voice. “Speak quick, for I’m right smart on the trigger.”

“We are two wanderers who have lost our way,” rejoined Rob, “we have no weapons and have no wish to harm you.”

“Come forward a bit while I look you over,” said the man, his suspicion mollified a bit by the boyish tone. But the next instant, as his eyes fell on Rob’s uniform, he seemed to bristle with

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suspicion again.

"What's that uniform?" he demanded; "be you some new-fangled revenue?"

"I'm a Boy Scout," rejoined Rob, and then, thinking it best not to relate his whole story at once, he added, "I got lost on a scouting expedition. Our camp is not far from here on the other side of the lake. All we want is some food, drink and shelter."

"Boy Scout, eh?" said the man, eyeing him curiously, "um, ay, I've read of 'em. To my mind you'd be best at home instead of gallivanting around the country and getting lost. But who's that black fellow?"

"Ah'se a 'spectable colored gen'ulman, suh," began Jumbo indignantly in his usual formula. But the black-bearded man checked him with a gesture.

"You're just a nigger, nigger, don't forget that. I come from south of the Mason and Dixon line."

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"Yas, sah, yas, sah," grinned Jumbo. The big black shivered and showed all the gleaming white of his teeth and eyes in his alarm at the bearded little man's fierce looks and gestures.

"S'pose I feed yer," was the bearded one's next question, "kin you pay? I'm a poor woodsman and—"

"Oh, we can pay," Rob assured him. Foolishly he drew out a rather well-filled purse. The next moment he wished he hadn't. For a brief instant the hut-dweller's keen, serpent-like black eyes had kindled with an avaricious flame.

But he cleverly masked whatever emotion it was that had swept over him at sight of the money receptacle.

"Guess that'll be all right," he said, "come on in."

Rather troubled in his mind, but deciding that it was best to accept the situation as it unfolded, Rob followed his conductor into the hut. Jumbo ambled along behind, his black face expanded in a grin of wonderment. The hut, within, proved to be a roughly constructed affair of raw logs. The chinks were plastered with clay, mixed with grass to give it consistency. A few skins hung on the walls and some rough, home-made furniture stood about.

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At one end of the place was a huge, open fireplace, with a big hearthstone. It was not used, however, the cookery being done upon the stove, which also provided the heat.

At the end of the hut opposite to the chimney a rough flight of steps led to an attic. After the two half-famished wanderers had concluded a hearty meal, washed down by strong, hot, black coffee, their host motioned to the steps.

"Ef you want a shake-down you'll find straw up thar," he said.

Rob thanked him civilly and he and Jumbo climbed the stairway and found themselves in a low-ceiled loft. The floor was of unnailed boards. Through the chinks between them the ruddy

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lamplight below could be seen.

"Dere's wusser beds in dis wale ob tears dan nice clean straw," observed Jumbo philosophically as he threw himself on his heap. Rob agreed with him. The straw did, indeed, seem soft and grateful after their recent hard knocks and experiences. Following Jumbo's example, the lad made for himself a kind of nest. Curling up in it he was soon off in the deep, dreamless slumber of healthy boyhood.

Voices awakened Rob. He sat up sharply. They were coming from below. The sounds of the conversation floated up through the wide chinks in the rough floor.

Rob rolled on his side and peered through the most convenient crack. Three men were now in the room below him. As he gazed he was amazed to see the hearthstone swing bodily backward, on some concealed hinges, and a fourth man emerge from some secret passage.

"Wall," said the newcomer, a huge figure of a man with a big, blond viking-like beard, "the last keg is headed and fixed up. We've finished our work. To-morrow——"

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But the black-bearded man checked him with a sharp gesture.

"Shut up, Sims," he warned, "not so loud. Go ahead, Watkins," he went on, turning to one of the men with whom he had been talking.

"What I ses is," resumed this fellow, a squatty-built, loosely-hung little fellow, with close-cropped sandy hair, and a bristly growth on his chin, like the stubble on an old tooth brush, "what I ses is, don't take no risks."

He paused impressively and then added in a lowered voice, but one that reached Rob, nevertheless, with thrilling clearness:

"Fix 'em."

"Great Abraham Lincoln!" gasped the boy, "this is a nice nest of hornets we've stumbled into. 'Fix 'em,' that must mean us."

But the talk went on, and Rob strained his ears for the continuation.

"But if they was guvn'ment men they wouldn't hev walked in like they done, I reckon," put in another man, a pallid, sickly-looking chap, with pink-rimmed eyes and a ferrety, furtive manner.

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"Best be on the safe side," counselled the black-bearded man, who had introduced the travelers to the hut, "they've got money, too."

"Money?" questioned the blonde-bearded man.

"Yes. The boy has. And they haven't got any weapons. I guess we'll have an easy time of it with them."

"That nigger looks pretty hefty, and the kid's no weakling."

It was the pink-eyed man who spoke. Rob felt a shiver run through him. So they had been observed while they were asleep and never knew it!

"Oh, I'm a fine Scout!" thought the lad bitterly.

"Seems kind of tough on the kid," said the blonde-bearded man, "but you never did have no sense of pity, Black Bart."

Black Bart! Rob's heart stood still and then beat furiously. These men then, were the moonshiners of whom Dale had spoken that afternoon. It seemed, too, from their talk, that they suspected him and Jumbo of being government spies. In that case they would stop at nothing. And they were four to one. The Boy Scout felt for the knife he had filched from Dale, but in their passage through the woods it must have been lost, for he could not find it on him.

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"Kid or no kid," retorted Black Bart, viciously, "he can tell the revenues a story jes' as well as anybody else, can't he?"

"That's so," agreed the red-headed man, "and if they get us this time they'll make it hot for us."

This argument seemed to extinguish all regrets in the blond-bearded man's mind.

"When air you goin' ter do it?" he asked. His voice was perfectly matter-of-fact and cold-blooded.

"No time like the present. But it's best to get 'em asleep. We don't want no noise," said Black Bart, with deliberation. "Pinky," to the pink-eyed man, "jes' take a look upstairs and see if they are asleep."

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Rob laid down and crouched still as a mouse while he heard Pinky ascend the creaking stairs, satisfy himself that the intended victims were asleep, and retreat again.

Then the boy awakened Jumbo. In a few words he apprised him of the situation. To Rob's great relief, the negro, in this dire emergency, seemed to be as self-possessed as he was cowardly in minor matters. Many natures are so constituted.

"What we gwine ter do, Marse Rob?" he breathed, crawling noiselessly about on his straw.

"There's a window over there," whispered Rob; "we'll have to drop through it and chance coming out safely."

"Lawsy sakes! S'posin' it looks out on one ob dem bottomless pitses lak yo' all near fell inter-ter-night?"

"Can't be helped, it's the only way we can escape. Hark! They're coming now. Get over to the window with as little noise as you can."

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"How 'bout you alls?"

"I'll follow. You get it open first."

Without another word the negro noiselessly wriggled across the floor to the window—a mere opening in the wall—that Rob had observed. At the same instant there came the "creak! creak!" of the staircase as one of the men below began to ascend the stairway.

There was a big bit of loose timber lying near Rob's straw. With a sudden flash of anger at the

thought of the men's treachery, the lad snatched it up.

"They shan't get off scot free, anyhow," he decided within himself.

With the bulk of timber clutched in both his hands, ready poised for a blow, Rob waited by the opening at the head of the rickety stairway as the midnight assailant ascended.

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CHAPTER XVII.

"WE WANT YOU."

A stubby red-head protruded itself through the opening. The crucial moment had come.

"Take that!" cried Rob bringing down the bulk of timber with a resounding crack on the fellow's pate. He grunted, clutched at the sill of the opening for an instant, and then went toppling down the stairway in a heap.

A roar of fury and a rush of feet from below followed. But Rob did not wait for the sequel.

"Hope I haven't seriously injured the chap," he thought, as he sprinted for the window, "I hit a bit harder than I meant to."

But the next instant, when red-head's voice was added to the uproar below, Rob knew that he had, at least, not impaired the miscreant's talent for profanity.

All need of concealment was gone now. Rob's heart leaped to the adventure. Jumbo was half way through the window as the lad reached it. Rob hastened him with a shove and a quick word. The black held for an instant, clutching the sill, and then he dropped. The next moment Rob had followed him. He fell in a sprawling heap on top of the black. Both were up in a jiffy.

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"Which way?" gasped out Jumbo.

"Any way—this!" cried Rob, dashing across a moonlit strip toward a dark belt of woods.

A fusillade of shots rang out behind them. Rob heard the bullets screech as they spun by.

"Law'sy, Marse Rob, dem bullets talk ter me mighty plain," gasped Jumbo as they gained the comparative security of the dark hemlocks.

"What did they say?" asked Rob, breathlessly.

"Dey say Jum-bo, we'se ah lookin' fo' you, chile!"

Whatever Rob's reply might have been it was forestalled the next instant by an entirely unsuspected and startling happening. From the woods *ahead* of them, came a sudden trampling of feet.

"Quick, Jumbo. Down in here!" exclaimed the Boy Scout, dragging the quaking negro down into a clump of bushes. They were just in time. The next moment half-a-dozen dark figures rushed by them through the woods, going in the direction of the hut they had just vacated so

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summarily.

"What on earth does this mean?" gasped Rob, half aloud in his utter astonishment. Parting the bushes a bit, he could perceive the dark outlines of the hut and the newcomers deploying across the moonlit strip in front of it.

A loud crash echoed through the sleeping woods as the door of the hut was suddenly slammed shut.

Almost simultaneously, the walls of the hut and the space in front of it seemed to spit vicious flashes of fire.

"Gee whiz!" cried Rob, excitedly, "they're attacking the hut, Jumbo! What under the sun does this mean?"

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"Dunno," said the negro, "but mah hopes is dat dey jes' nachully exterminaccouminicate each other like dem Killarney cats."

"Kilkenny cats, you mean, don't you?"

"It's all de same," retorted Jumbo, "but say, Marse Rob, we'd bettah be clearing out ob here."

"No, let's stay awhile. We're in no danger here. In fact I've an idea that this may all turn out to be a good thing for us."

The attacking party now dropped back a bit.

"They're well armed and desperate," Rob heard one of them say, "better breathe a bit, boys, and then we'll go for 'em again."

"Let's get a log and smash the door down," said a voice.

"Good idea, O'Malley," was the response, "here's an old hemlock trunk. It's just the thing. Lay hold, boys, and we'll smoke out that nest of rats in a jiffy."

Willing hands laid hold of the big stick of timber, and the next instant they were staggering with it toward the hut. There was a low word of command and a sudden dash. The log was poised for an instant and then:

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Smash! crash!

The massive door stood for a moment and then toppled inward, falling with a splintering crash. But a dead silence followed the fall of the door. No more pretence of defense was made by the inmates of the hut. Could they be going to give up so tamely?

Then a sudden voice floated through the night. The voice of one of the attacking party.

"Say! There's nobody here, boys!"

"Confound them! Have they escaped us again?" came another voice.

"Look's like it. Scatter and find them—back for your lives, all of you!"

The warning cry was followed almost instantly by a deafening explosion. A vivid flash of blue flame occurred simultaneously.

"Gollyation!" gasped Jumbo, "de end ob de worl' am comin'."

The whole hut seemed to burst into flame at once. Lurid, vivid fire seemed to gush from every window and opening in the place. In color it was an intense blue.

"Shades ob Massa George Wash basin!" yelled Jumbo, "all de debils in dat pit we see back dar is on de job! Come on, Marse Rob. Let's git out ob here in double quick jig time."

"Nonsense," said Rob sharply, "I see it all, now, Jumbo. That place was a moonshine joint—an illegal distillery. Those men who just attacked it are revenue officers. The explosion was caused by hundreds of gallons of spirits. I guess the moonshiners set it on fire to destroy the evidence."

Each instant the blaze rose higher. The hut, within its four walls, was a mass of flames. It glowed like a red hot furnace. Rob watched it with fascinated eyes. The whole clearing was bright as day. The dark woods beyond were bathed in a blood-red glare from the flames.

The intense heat fairly blistered the trunks of the nearest hemlocks. Resin ran from them freely.

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"Let's get further back, Jumbo, it's too hot here," said Rob presently.

"Golly goodness! It am dat," declared Jumbo in awed tones, "dat fire dere puts me in mo' fear ob dat bottomless pit dan all de preachifying I ever listened to."

But their retreat into the woods was checked in a strange manner. Rob, who was in advance, recoiled suddenly. A whole section of the woodland floor seemed to uprear itself before his eyes, and a wild figure, with a tangled black beard and shifty, wicked eyes, emerged. Rob realized in a flash that it was a trapdoor cleverly concealed by brush and earth that had just opened. Simultaneously he recognized the figure that was crawling from it as that of Black Bart himself.

The man was too much perturbed to notice their nearness to him. But suddenly his eyes fell on them. With a furious oath he dashed at Rob.

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"You young fiend! You're responsible for this!" he yelled in a frenzy.

A knife glittered in his hand, but before he could use it Jumbo's black fist collided with his jaw. Black Bart fell sprawling back upon the trap door which he had just opened.

"Reckon Jack Johnson himself couldn't hev done no bettah!" grinned the negro.

"Oh, no you don't, sah!" he exclaimed the next instant as Black Bart struggled to rise; "ah reckon you can repose yo'self right dar fo' a peahriod ob time."

So saying he pinioned the ruffian's arms to his sides and held him thus.

As he did so, violent knockings began to resound from under the trap-door. Evidently somebody

was imprisoned there.

"Hey! Let us out! Let us out!" came sharp cries from below, albeit they were considerably muffled by the trap-door.

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"Yo' all come an' sit on hyah too, Marse Rob," urged Jumbo. "Ah reckon den dey kain't git dat door open till we am willing dat dey should conmerge inter terrier firmer."

Rob guessed at once what had happened. The moonshiners, following the attack of the revenue officers, had realized that continued resistance would be useless. They had, therefore, made their escape by the secret passage, led into by the swinging hearthstone. Its outlet evidently being by the trap door on which they were then stationed. But first, with wicked craft, they had ignited their whole stock of spirituous liquors, hoping in the consequent explosion, that the revenue men would perish. This much seemed clear. Indeed, it was confirmed afterward, and—but we are anticipating.

The Boy Scout had just reached these conclusions when a sudden stir in the brush behind him made him look up. Two men stood there, the light of the conflagration showing every detail of their figures and countenances plainly. They were regarding the group on the top of the trap-door with peculiar interest.

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Rob started up toward them but was abruptly checked as two rifles were jerked to two shoulders, and aimed straight at him.

"Don't move a step!" warned one of the men, "I guess we want you."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

JUMBO EARNS \$500.00—AND LOSES IT.

"Guess you do want us, but not exactly in the same sense as you mean," retorted Rob with a chuckle.

"What do you mean, boy?" asked one of the men sharply, as several others of the revenue officers—as Rob had guessed them to be—came up.

"I mean that we've got the whole gang you were after bottled up in a tunnel under this trap door," rejoined Rob breezily.

"Yas sah, Misto Arm-ob-de-Law," grinned Jumbo, "ah reckon no coon up a tree was eber moh completely obfusticated dan dose same chill'uns."

"What does all this mean?" asked another of the group, a gray-moustached man of stern appearance, "this boy is either one of the gang or he has been reading dime novels."

"Nebber read a bit ob dat classification ob literachoor in mah life," snorted Jumbo indignantly, "ef yo' alls don' want dese men we got obfusticated under hay'ah, why we jes' gits

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off dis yar trap door an' lits dem skeedaddle."

"Who's that you're sitting on, nigger?" demanded the gray moustached man, who seemed to be in authority.

"Why, dis am a genelman what answers to de ufoinious name ob Black Bart," grinned Jumbo amiably, "an' ah's not a nigger, ah's a 'spectable —"

"Do be quiet, Jumbo," exclaimed Rob, as the inevitable protest came into evidence. "The case is just this, gentlemen," he continued. "I am a Boy Scout. This man is attached to our camp. We wandered away and got lost."

Rob did not tell all that happened, for he foresaw that such a procedure might lead to questions which would bring out the fact of their treasure hunt.

"I see that you wear a Scout uniform now," said the gray-moustached man.

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"Yes, and Boy Scouts don't lie," put in another man, "my sons are both in the organization."

"What troop?" asked Rob.

"The Curlews of Patchogue."

"Why, we've met them in water games at Patchogue," exclaimed Rob, "my name is Rob Blake."

"And mine's Sam Taylor," said the man, advancing, "glad to meet you, Rob Blake, I've heard of you. This lad is all right," he said, turning to the leader. "I'll vouch for him."

"All right," rejoined the gray-moustached revenue officer, "but we can't be too careful. Well, Rob Blake, what's your story? Go ahead."

"As I said, we lost our way," went on Rob. "We stumbled on that hut. We were tired and faint, and for pay this man, on whom Jumbo is sitting, took us in. I awoke in time to overhear a plot to rob us. We escaped and while hiding in the brush—not just knowing who you were, friend or foe, we saw that trap-door open and nailed that man—Black Bart. At least Jumbo did."

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"Then it looks as if Jumbo gets five hundred dollars reward for the capture of Black Bart, and more may be in store. You say that the rest are in that passage?"

"Yes."

"Some of you fellows tie Black Bart," ordered the leader.

When this was done, the sullen prisoner not uttering a word, the order to open the trap-door was issued.

"No monkey tricks, you fellows," warned the revenue officer, as it swung back, "we'll take stern measures with you."

One by one the occupants of the hut crawled out and were promptly made prisoners. They were almost exhausted, and could not have put up a fight had they been so inclined.

"Glad to get out," said the blonde-bearded man

as he submitted to being handcuffed, "it was hot enough in thar to roast potatoes."

"So you got scorched by the same fire you intended should destroy us," said the chief revenue officer dryly.

"Young man," he went on, turning to Rob, "I shall bring this bit of work to the attention of the government. In the meantime, I may tell you, that besides the five hundred dollars offered for Black Bart's capture, there was a reward of two thousand dollars for the apprehension of the gang as a whole. I shall see that you and your companion get it."

"But—but——" stammered Rob, "you had all the trouble and risk——"

"Hush, Marse Rob! don' be talkin' dat way. Dey may take dat reward away ag'in," whispered Jumbo, whose eyes had been rolling gleefully. He could hardly credit his good fortune.

"We're paid for our work," said the revenue man briefly, "I'm not saying that we always get much credit for the risks we take. Half the time they don't even mention our raids in the papers. But we do our duty to Uncle Sam and that's enough."

Soon after, a search having been made of the ruins of the hut, the revenue men set out with their prisoners for the lake, where they had a boat and two small bateaus. Rob and Jumbo accompanied them. Jumbo walked like one in a trance. He saw money fairly hanging to the trees.

"What will you do with all that money, Jumbo?" asked Rob amusedly as they strode along. Under the skilled leadership of the revenue men the path to the lake was a simple matter to find.

"Ah reckon's ah'll buy a 'mobile, Marse Rob, an' a pair ob patent lebber shoes—dem shiny kind, an' some yaller globes (gloves) an'—an' what's lef' ober ah'll jes' spend foolishly."

"If I were you I'd put some of it in a savings bank," advised Rob, smiling at the black's enumeration of his wants. "You get interest there, too, you know."

"Wha' good dem safety banks, Marse Rob? Dey calls dem safety but dey's plum dangerous. Fus' ting yo' know dey bus' up. Ah had a cousin down south. Some colored men dey start a bank down dere. Mah cousin he puts in five dollars reposit. 'Bout a munf afterward he done go to draw it out and what you think dat no-good black-trash what run de bank tole him?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Jumbo," answered Rob.

"Why, dey said de interest jes' nacherally done eat dat fibe dollars up!"

As Rob was still laughing over Jumbo's tragic tale there came a sudden shout from ahead.

Then a pistol shot split the darkness. It was followed by another and another. They proceeded from the knot of revenue men who, with their prisoners, were a short distance in advance.

"Gollyumptions! Wha's de mattah now?" exclaimed Jumbo, sprinting forward.

A dark form flashed by him and vanished, knocking Jumbo flat. Behind the fleeing form came running the revenue men.

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"It's Black Bart! He's escaped!" cried one.

Rob joined the chase. But although they could hear crashing of branches ahead, the pursuit had to be given over after a while. In the woods he knew so well the revenues were no match for the wily Black Bart. With downcast faces they returned to where the other prisoners, guarded by two of the officers, had been left.

"I'd rather have lost the whole boiling than let Black Bart slip through my fingers," bemoaned the leader, "wonder how he did it?"

"Here's how," struck in one of the officers, holding up a strand of rope, "he slipped through the knots."

"Serves me right for taking chances with such an old fox," muttered the leader, self-reproachfully.

"Anyhow we got the rest of them," said the man who had recognized Rob, "better luck next time."

"Dere ain't agoin' ter be no next time," muttered Jumbo disconsolately, "dat five hundred dollars and dat gas wagon I was a-gwine ter buy hab taken de wings ob de mawning!"

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The lake was reached shortly before dawn. True to their promise, the revenue men put Rob and Jumbo ashore at the Boy Scouts' camp. The amazement and delight their arrival caused can be better imagined than set down here. Anyhow, for a long time nothing but confused fusillades of questions and scattered answers could be heard. Much hand-shaking, back-slapping and shouting also ensued. It was a joyous reunion. Only one thing marred it. The canoes were still missing, and without them they could not proceed.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOREST MONARCH.

"Say, what's that up yonder—there, away toward the head of the lake?"

Tubby, standing on a rock by the rim of the lake where he had just been performing his morning's ablutions, pointed excitedly.

"I can't see a thing but the wraiths of mist," rejoined Merritt, who was beside him. The lads were stripped to the waist. Their skin looked pink and healthy in the early morning light.

"Well, you ought to consult an oculist," scornfully rejoined Tubby, "you've got fine eyes for a Boy Scout—not."

"Do you mean to tell me you saw something, actually?"

"Of course. You ought to know me better than to think I was fooling."

"What were they then—mud hens?"

"Say, you're a mud rooster. No, what I saw looked to me uncommonly like our missing canoes."

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"You don't say so," half mockingly.

"But I do say so,—and most emphatically, too, as Professor Jorum says," rejoined the stout youth, "there they've gone now. That morning mist's swallowed 'em up just like I mean to swallow breakfast directly."

"But what would the canoes be doing drifting about?" objected Merritt. "From Rob's story yesterday, Hunt and his gang had them in that cove. Do you suppose they'd have let them get away?"

"Maybe not, willingly," rejoined Tubby sagely, who, as our readers may have observed, was a shrewd thinker, "but it blew pretty hard last night. The canoes may have broken loose from their moorings."

"Jimminy! That's so," exclaimed Merritt, "I'll go and tell——"

"No, you won't do anything of the kind," said Tubby, half in and half out of his Boy Scout shirt.

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"Why not?"

"Because if they did turn out to be mud hens we'd never hear the last of it."

"H'um that's so. What do you advise, then?"

"We'll wait till after breakfast. Then we'll say we're going to take a tramp and sneak off toward the head of the lake. If they are the canoes they'll still be there."

"And if not——"

"We'll have had a tramp."

"Say," exclaimed Merritt as a sudden idea struck him, "how do you propose to get them, even if they do turn out to be the canoes. Stand on the bank and call 'come, ducky! ducky!'"

Tubby looked at his corporal with unmixed scorn.

"We can swim, can't we?"

"I see you have every objection covered, like a good Scout, Tubby. Well, we'll try after breakfast. If they're not the canoes there's no harm done, anyhow."

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"Except to our shoe leather," responded Tubby finishing dressing.

The morning meal over, and Jumbo washing the tin plates in silence—he was still regretting that five hundred dollars—the two lads, in accordance with their plan, got ready for their tramp.

They buckled on their belts, saw that their shoelaces were stout and well laced, and equipped themselves with two scout staves. It was against

the rules to carry firearms unless the major or one of the leaders was along. No objection was interposed to their going. In fact, the major, worried as he was over the vanished canoes, was rather glad to have an opportunity for a quiet talk with the professor. Rob was still rather fagged by his experiences of the preceding night and day, and Hiram and Andy Bowles had decided to indulge in signal practice.

"Well, good-bye," called the major as the young Scouts strode off.

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"Bring back the canoes with you," mockingly hailed Rob.

"Sure. We'll look in all the tree tops. I'm told they roost there with the gondolas," cried the irrepressible Tubby, with a wave of his hand.

The next instant the two adventurers had vanished over the ridge.

"Say, what a laugh we'll have on them if we really do bring the canoes back," chuckled Tubby merrily, as they plodded along.

Distances in the mountains are deceptive. From the camp it had not looked so very far to the head of the lake. But the two lads found that, what with the innumerable ridges they had to cross, and the rough nature of the ground before them, it was considerably more of a tramp than they had bargained for.

Of the canoes too, there was no sign. The mists had now vanished and the sun beat down on the smooth surface of the lake as if it had been a polished mirror.

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"Maybe they've drifted ashore," said Tubby, hopefully.

"If they have I'll bet they chose the other one," said Merritt, "it's what they used to call at school 'the perversity of inanimate things.'"

"Phew!" exclaimed Tubby, "don't spring any more like that. I didn't bring a dictionary."

It was about noon when they came to a halt in a ravine near the lake shore and sat down on a log to rest.

"Gee, I wish we had something to eat," groaned Merritt.

"Ever hear of a fairy godmother?" inquired Tubby, gazing abstractedly up through the tree tops.

"Well, if you aren't the limit, Tubby. What on earth have fairy godmothers to do—"

"They were always on the job with what was most wanted, I believe," pursued Tubby.

"Oh, don't talk rot. Let's— Gee whiz! I'll take it all back, Tubby. You are a real, genuine, blown-in-the-glass fairy godmother."

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Merritt's exclamation was called forth by the fact that Tubby had produced, with the air of a necromancer, two packets of sandwiches and ditto of cake.

"There's water in that spring, I guess," he said

laconically ignoring Merritt's open compliments.

The two lads munched away contentedly. They were seated at the head of the little ravine which ran back from the shore of the lake. Above them towered a rocky cliff from which flowed the spring. Ferns of a brilliant green and almost tropical luxuriance festooned its edges. The water made a musical tinkling sound. It was a pleasant spot, and both boys enjoyed it to the full. They would have appreciated it more though, if they could have stumbled across the canoes which Tubby was beginning to believe were a figment of his imagination.

"Wonder if there were ever Indians through here?" said Merritt, after a period of thought.

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"Guess so. They used to navigate most of these lakes," said Tubby, stuffing some remaining crumbs of cake into his mouth.

"Why?" he added, staring at Merritt, with puffed out cheeks.

"I was just thinking that if we were early settlers and an Indian suddenly appeared in the opening of this canyon or ravine or whatever you like to call it, that we'd be in a bad way."

"Yes, we couldn't get out. That's certain," said Tubby, looking around, "I guess the red men would bury the hatchet—in our heads."

"I'm glad those days are gone," said Merritt, "I should think that the early settlers must have—Hark! What's that?"

A sudden crunching sound, as if someone was leisurely approaching had struck on his ear.

"Sounds like somebody coming," rejoined Tubby.

His heart began to beat a little faster than was comfortable. What if some of the Hunt gang were prowling about.

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"What do you think it is?" he asked, the next moment, in rather a quavering tone.

"Jiggered if I know," said Merritt; "let's go toward the beach and investigate."

"Better do that than stay here," agreed Tubby.

Picking up their scout staves both boys cautiously tip-toed toward the mouth of the ravine. But before they could reach it a sudden shadow fell across the white strip of sand at the outlet.

The next moment a huge body came into view. Its great bulk loomed up enormously to the eyes of the excited boys.

"It's a big deer!" exclaimed Tubby; "what a beauty! Look at those horns!"

The deer, a fine antlered beast that was moving leisurely along the beach, looked up at the same instant. It gazed straight at the boys for a moment. Then it began pawing the ground angrily, and tossing its head.

"What can be the matter with it?" said Merritt in a whisper.

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"Bothered if I know," rejoined Tubby, "it looks

kind of mad, doesn't it? Maybe we'd better try to climb up that cliff."

"I think so, too," said Merritt, as the stag buck lowered its head and its big eyes became filled with an angry fire.

"Quick, Tubby!" he cried the next instant, "it's going to charge!"

Hardly had he voiced the warning before, with a furious half-bellow, half-snort, the buck rushed at them at top speed, its antlers lowered menacingly.

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CHAPTER XX. THE CANOES FOUND.

Merritt made a spring up the side of the steep-walled little ravine. He succeeded in grabbing an outgrowing bush and drawing himself up to a ledge about ten feet above the ground. Tubby followed him. But the fat boy's weight proved too much for the slender roots of the plant. It ripped out of the cleft in which it grew, and Tubby, with a frightened cry, went rolling over and over down the steep acclivity. He fell right in the path of the advancing stag. The creature saw him and prepared to gore him with its horns. But just as Tubby was giving himself up for lost, an inspiration seized Merritt.

A big stone lay close at hand. He grabbed it up and hurled it with all his might at the buck. The lad's experience on the baseball diamond stood him in good stead at this trying moment.

The rock, with all the power of Merritt's healthy young muscles behind it, struck the buck between the eyes. The animal staggered and snorted. For one critical instant it hesitated, its sharp forefeet almost on the recumbent fat boy. Then, with a shrill sort of whinny of terror, it swung, as swiftly and gracefully as a cat, and clattered off, running at top speed.

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Merritt lost no time in clambering down to Tubby, who was sitting up and looking about him in a comical dazed way.

"H-h-h-has it gog-g-g-gone?" he stammered.

"I should say so," laughed Merritt, "it stood not on the order of its going, but—got! as they say in the classics."

"I'm glad of that," remarked Tubby, getting up slowly, "I could almost feel those antlers investigating my anatomy. Let's see how far he's run."

The two boys made for the entrance of the ravine. Gaining it they had a good view up and down the beach in either direction. On a distant projection of rock stood the buck. He was looking back. As he saw the boys he wheeled abruptly and dashed into the forest.

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"Too bad," said Tubby shaking his head with a serious air.

"What's too bad?" asked Merritt, struck by the other's pensive air.

"Why, if he'd stood still a little longer and we'd had a gun we might have shot him," rejoined Tubby with a perfectly serious face.

They turned, and as they did so a shout burst from the lips of both.

Bobbing about serenely on the placid water, not half a mile in the other direction, was the red canoe.

"I'll bet the others are ashore right there, too," cried Tubby.

As he spoke the stout boy dashed off at surprising speed for one of his build. It was all Merritt could do to keep up with him.

It was as Tubby had suspected. The blue and the green canoes lay on the beach, their bows just resting on the sand. The paddles were in them and it was an easy task to embark and capture the red craft. This was made fast to the one Tubby paddled and the boys, congratulating each other warmly, set out for the camp. As they glided along Tubby uplifted his voice.

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"R-o-o-w, brothers, row!
The stream runs fast!
The rap—ids are ne-ar
And the day—light's past."

"Ro-o-w——"

"But it isn't rowing, it's paddling," objected Merritt.

"Whoever heard of a rhyme to paddling?" demanded Tubby, "you might as well expect one to motor boating," and he resumed his song.

As they drew near to the spot where the camp had been pitched they saw the black figure of Jumbo on the beach. Tubby hailed him in a loud voice. Instantly the negro looked up, and as his eyes fell on the canoes he tossed the frying pan he was scouring high into the air. It descended on his head again with a resounding whack.

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But that African head seemed hardly to feel it. Bounding and snapping his fingers in joy, Jumbo raced up to the camp, electrifying everybody with the glad news that the canoes had been found.

"How on earth did you discover them, boys?" demanded the major, as the prows grated on the beach and a glad rush of excited feet followed.

"Simple," said Tubby, with a grand air and a sweep of his hands, "simple. They were up in a tree, just as I suspected."

Before long Merritt had to tell the real story. But when they looked about for Tubby to congratulate him that modest youth had slipped away. He was found later, devouring a raisin pie of Jumbo's baking.

"You deserve pie and anything else you fancy," said the major warmly.

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"There's only one thing I'd fancy right now," rejoined Tubby.

"What is that?"

"I'd like to have hold of Freeman Hunt for about ten minutes."

An examination of the canoes showed that, as Tubby had guessed, their mooring ropes had chafed through during the wind storm of the night before. This set them wondering how Hunt and his companions could have escaped from the cove. The next day on resuming their journey they examined the place—the entrance to which was not found without difficulty—but of Hunt and his gang no trace was found but the embers of the camp fire. Rob and Jumbo viewed with interest the rope ladder which lay in a heap at the foot of the cliff, just as it had fallen on the night that they made their escape. Further investigation showed that, by walking along the lake shore, the rascals who had harried the Boy Scouts must have managed to find a place to climb up to the forests above.

"I'm sorry they got away," said Merritt.

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"So are we all, I expect," said the professor. "I don't suppose we shall ever see them again now."

"I hardly think so," agreed the major.

"Dere's only one man ah'd lak ter see ag'in," put in Jumbo.

"Who is that?" inquired Rob.

"Dat five hundred dollah baby wid de black whiskers," was the prompt rejoinder; "de nex time ah gits mah han's on him ah'm gwine ter fin' de bigges' chain ah can, den ah'm gwine ter fasten dat to de bigges' rock ah kin fin' an' den ah's gwine ter k'lect!"

"I hope for your sake and for that of law and order that you succeed," said the major, "liquor is vile stuff, anyhow. It's bad enough that it is made legally in this country. It is ten thousand times worse when laws are broken to distil it. I'm afraid, however, that all the rascals have slipped through our fingers. We shall hardly set eyes on them again."

How wrong the major was in this supposition we shall see before long. Such men as Stonington Hunt and his chosen companions are not so easily thrown off the trail for a rich prize. The thought of the treasure was in Hunt's avaricious mind day and night, and already he was plotting fresh means of wresting the secret from its rightful possessors.

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Possibly, if the major had seen an encounter which took place in the woods not so many hours before our party landed in the hidden cove, he might have felt less easy in his mind. Black Bart, in his flight, had encountered Hunt's party. Creeping through the woods he had seen the light of their camp fire. He had approached it cautiously. But as he neared it, keeping in careful concealment, he recognized his erstwhile comrades, Dale and Pete Bumpus. Hesitating no longer to declare himself in his half-famished condition, he had come forward and been greeted warmly. What he had to tell of his meeting with Rob and Jumbo, held, as may be imagined, the deepest interest for Hunt and the

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others. The consultation and plan of campaign that resulted therefrom, were fraught with important results for our party.

What these were we must save for the telling in future chapters. But stirring events were about to overtake the Boy Scouts and their friends.

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CHAPTER XXI. "THE RUBY GLOW."

Camp, that night, was made at the portage of which the major had spoken. Although strict watch was kept all night nothing unusual occurred. Bright and early the work of the portage was commenced. The Major, Jumbo and Professor Jorum, each burdened themselves with a canoe, which they carried across their shoulders, turned bottom up and resting on a wooden "yoke."

The lads carried the "duffle" and provisions. The portage, connecting the lake they had traversed with the one beyond, was over rough ground. In fact, at one place, they had to clamber up quite a ridge. It was rocky and grown with coarse undergrowth interspersed with scanty trees. Further on the trail ran beside quite a deep ravine.

Tubby, with his load of duffle, was slightly in advance of the other lads, and humming a song as he trudged along. With the curiosity natural to the stout youth, he could not refrain from wandering from the path to peer over into the depths of the gulch.

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"My goodness!" he exclaimed to himself, as he gazed interestedly, "it would be no joke to fall in there."

As he spoke he drew closer to the edge of the rift and craned his short neck to obtain a still better view of the abyss below him. At this juncture the others, laboring along the trail, caught up with him, and Rob gave the stout Scout a hail.

"Better come away from there, Tubby," he warned, "you know what happened out west, when you went rubbering about the haunted caves."

"It's all right," retorted the fat boy, "it looks nice and cool down in there. I'd like to——"

The rest of his speech was lost in an alarmed exclamation from the onlookers.

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As Tubby uttered his confident remark he seemed to vanish suddenly, like an actor in a stage spectacle who has dived through a trap door. Only a cloud of dust and a roar of stones sliding into the ravine told of what had happened to the over-confident youth. Standing too close to the edge he had stepped on an overhanging bit of ground and had been precipitated downward.

"Good gracious!" cried Rob, in real alarm, "he's gone over!"

With a swift fear that Tubby's accident might have resulted fatally, Rob was at the edge of the ravine in two jumps. The rest were not far behind him.

Rob experienced a feeling of intense relief, however, as he gazed into the depths. Some time before, a tree had become dislodged and slid into the rift. It lay upon the bottom of the place. Tubby, luckily for himself, had fallen into its branches and was, except for a few scratches, apparently unhurt.

"Are you injured?" demanded Rob, anxiously, nevertheless. He wanted to hear from Tubby's own lips that he was all right.

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"Nothing hurt but my feelings," the stout youth assured him. "Say, it *is* cool down here."

"Well, if nothing's hurt but your feelings you're all right," cried Merritt; "you couldn't hurt those with an axe."

"Just you wait till I get out of here," yelled Tubby from his leafy seat.

"Well, how are we going to get you up?" demanded Merritt. "Guess you'll have to stay there till we get a ladder."

"Tell you what we'll do," said Rob, "we'll take the ropes off the packs and join them together. Then we can knot one end to one of the staves and haul Tubby up."

"That's a good idea," called the stout youth, who had overheard, "and hurry up, too."

"Gracious, it needs an elephant to haul your fat carcass out of there," scoffed Merritt. "I guess we'll take our time over it."

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"Take as long as you like, so long as you get me out," parried Tubby, "you always were slow, anyhow, as the fellow said when he threw his dollar watch into the creek."

It did not take long to rig up an extemporized life-line with the pack ropes. This done, one end was made fast to the staves, and the other lowered to Tubby. At Rob's orders the rope was passed round a tree trunk, and when Tubby had adjusted the rope under his arm pits the young Scouts began to haul. As Merritt had said, Tubby was no lightweight. Once they had to stop, and the rope ran back quite a way. A yell from Tubby ensued.

"Hey! Keep on hauling there!" he roared, "what do you think I am, a sack of potatoes?"

"You feel like a sack of sash weights!" shouted Rob, "keep still now, and we'll have you out in a jiffy."

A few minutes later Tubby's fat face, very red, appeared above the edge of the rift over which he had taken his abrupt plunge. Rob seized him by the shoulders and dragged him into safety.

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"There now, for goodness sake don't fall in again," he said.

"As if you aren't always telling me to fall in," scoffed Tubby.

"When, pray?"

"Every time we drill," said the stout youth solemnly, flicking some dust off his uniform with elaborate care.

Owing to the length of time occupied by extricating Tubby from his difficulties, the canoe bearers had become apprehensive of harm to the following body and had halted. Of course questions ensued when the rear guard came up.

"What happened?" demanded the major, noting the suppressed amusement on the lads' faces.

"Oh, Tubby fell in again," answered Merritt.

"Fell in?" asked the professor in an astonished tone.

"I went hunting for botanical specimens at the bottom of a ravine, professor," said Tubby gravely.

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"For botanical specimens? Most interesting. Pray did you find any?"

"Nothing but a Bumpibus Immenseibus," replied Tubby with perfect gravity. The other boys had to turn aside and stuff their fists in their mouths to keep from laughing outright.

Even the major's lip quivered. But the professor displayed immense interest. As for Jumbo, he was lost in admiration.

"Dat suttinly am de mos' persuasive word I've done hearn in a long time," he exclaimed. "Blumpibusibus Commenceibus. What am dat, fish, flesh or des corned beef?"

"It's a pain," rejoined Tubby, "and usually follows a fall. But not a fall in temperature, or —"

"Ah, Hopkins, I fear you are making merry at my expense," exclaimed the professor, good-naturedly.

"Well, I took a tumble, anyhow," said Tubby.

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"About time you did," came in Merritt's voice.

In the chase that ensued a wave of merriment burst loose. But time pressed, and the march was speedily resumed, with but a short interruption for lunch.

Late that afternoon they emerged on the shores of the other lake. It was a beautiful sheet of water, narrow and hemmed in by high hills which shot up abruptly on every side. At the far end could be seen a series of three peaks, jagged and sharp against the sky. The major turned to the professor, and both consulted the map and the translation of the cipher.

"When the ruby mound masks the Three Brothers take a course by the great dead pine. Four hundred to the west, three hundred to the north, and below the man of stone."

Such were the words which the major read aloud from the professor's translation.

"How do you interpret that, professor?" he asked.

"Why, plainly enough: the three brothers referred to are those three similar peaks," said the professor; "the map indicates them. The ruby mound is not quite so clear. But I don't doubt that we shall stumble across its meaning, and also that of 'the man of stone,' which, I confess, I cannot make out."

"May be it's some mass of rock that looks like a man," volunteered Rob, who, like the others, had listened with eager attention while the major read.

"An excellent idea, my boy. That is possibly the correct meaning, although the old buccaneer may have spoken in riddles. Such men frequently did. However, we are at the gateway of our venture. To-morrow we shall know if it meets with success or failure."

"To-morrow!" echoed the Boy Scouts.

"Ef ah could cotch dat five-hundred-dollah-pusson to-morrow dat would be all de treasure ah'd want," mumbled Jumbo as he set down his canoe. He had kept it on his back up to now, like a shell on a black turtle.

"Ah don' lak dis business ob interfussin' wid a dead man's belongin's. No good ain't gwine ter come uv it."

"What are you mumbling about, Jumbo?" asked the major, overhearing some of this last.

"Why, majah, I was jes' a communicatin' to myself mah pussonal convictions on de subjec' ob dead men's gold."

"Why, Jumbo, are you superstitious?" inquired the professor.

"No, sah. Ah's bin vaccinated an' am glad to say it *took*. We ain't neber had no supposishishness in our fam'bly. But dis yar meddlin' an monkeyin' wid what belongs to dem as is daid and buried is bad bis'nis, sah—bad bis'nis."

"I thought that you had more courage than that," said the professor seriously.

"Ah got lots ob dat commodity, too, sah. Ah dassay dat ah is de bravest man in de—Oh! fo' de law's sake, wha' dat? Oh, golly umptions! Majah! You Boy Scrouts, help!"

Jumbo suddenly cast himself down on the ground and began rolling over and over, trying to seize the major's feet in his paroxysm of real alarm.

"Get up!" ordered the major curtly, "get up at once, you cowardly creature. What's the matter?"

"Oh, mah goodness, majah, you didn't see it. You had yo' back to der bushes. So did de odders. But ah seed it."

"Saw what, sir?"

"Oh, golly gumptions! De ugliest lilly face wid black whiskers an' eyes dat I ebber seed. It was lookin' frough de bushes an' listening to you alls."

"Where? Show me the place at once."

The major's tone was curt and fraught with a deeper meaning.

"Right hyah, sah, majah. Right hyah, dis am whar I seen dat homely lilly face. Yas sah."

But although they made a thorough search of the vicinity no trace of a concealed listener could be found.

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"I'd be half-inclined to put it down to Jumbo's foolishness if it wasn't that we know we have enemies in the mountains," said the major, after supper that night.

"But as it is, sir?" asked Rob.

"As it is," replied the major, "I think we had better keep a sharp look out and 'Be Prepared.' Jumbo's description of that face seems to tally pretty closely with the countenance of Black Bart."

"Just what I think," rejoined Rob; "if he hadn't got so frightened Jumbo might have secured that five hundred dollars after all."

"Marse Rob," said Jumbo, who had been listening intently, "you ebber hyah dat lilly story 'bout de man wot caught de wild cat?"

"No; heave ahead with the yarn, Jumbo," said the major.

"Well, sah, onct upon a time two men was campin'. One went to der spring ter git watah. Pretty soon de one lef' behin' hearn de awfulest racket and caterwaulin' by dat spring you ever hearn tell ob.

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"'What de mattah?' he call.

"'I got a wild cat!' holler de man by de spring.

"'Kain't you hole him?' hollers his fren'.

"'I kin hole him all right,' hollered de udder feller, 'but I don't know how ter let him go ag'in'."

After the laughter excited by this narration had subsided, Jumbo rolled his eyes solemnly and cleared his throat. Then he spoke:

"An' dat lilly nanny-goat (anecdote) applies sah, dat applies ter me and dis yar Black Bart or whateber his name am."

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE BUCCANEER'S CAVE.

"The three peaks are in line, but no trace of the 'ruby glow' the cipher speaks of."

The speaker was Rob Blake. He and Merritt, in the red canoe, were in advance of the other craft. The first level rays of the early sun were slanting down over the precipitous hills surrounding the lake and gilding the placid sheet of water with a glittering effulgence. The canoes seemed to hang on the clear water as if suspended.

Right ahead of the adventurers, the three jagged peaks seen the previous evening had gradually swung into line, until the first and nearest one veiled the other two.

"Let's run the canoe ashore. May be we shall come across something to make the meaning of the cipher plainer," suggested Merritt.

Presently the bow of the canoe grazed the beach, and the two active young uniformed figures sprang out. For an instant they looked about them. Then suddenly Merritt gripped Rob's arm with such a tight pressure that it actually pained.

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"Look!" he cried, "look!"

Rob followed the direction of Merritt's gaze and was tempted to echo his cry. Through the trees a rectangular mound of rock, with a dome-like summit, had just caught the rays of the sun.

In the early morning light it glittered as redly as if bathed in blood.

"The ruby glow!" breathed Rob poetically, gazing at the wonderful sight.

"Must be some sort of mica or crystal in the rock that catches the sunlight," said the practical Merritt; "good thing we didn't come here on a dull, cloudy day."

"I guess so," rejoined Rob; "we might easily have missed it."

"Let's get the others!" exclaimed Merritt. "See, the ruby glow is masking the Three Brothers."

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"That's so," agreed Rob, "this is the place, beyond a doubt."

By this time the other canoes had been beached and their occupants were presently gazing in wrapt wonder at the spectacle. As the sun rose higher they could see the glow diminishing.

"Your ancestor chose his hiding place well," said the professor to Major Dangerfield, "only at sunrise and at sunset can the glow be visible. At any other hour of the day there would be nothing unusual about that rock but its shape."

Suddenly Tubby broke into song. He caught at the others' hands. In a jiffy the Boy Scouts were dancing round in a joyous circle, singing at the top of their lungs:

"Ruby glow! ruby glow!
We have sought you long, you know!
Now you're found we won't let go
Till we get the treasure—ruby glow!"

"Rather anticipating, aren't you, boys?" asked the major, "there is still quite a lot to be done before we discover the cavern where the treasure is supposed to be buried."

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But despite his calm words they could see that the major was quite as much excited as themselves at the idea of being on the threshold of great discoveries.

"Suppose we press forward," suggested the professor presently; "I think that the base of the ruby mound is the place to start from."

The canoes were hauled up on the beach and concealed in a high growth of tangled water plants. They did not wish to risk having them stolen for a second time. Then they struck forward into the gloom of the woods lying between the ruby mound and the lake. As they went the Boy Scouts hummed Tubby's little song. Even Jumbo seemed to have cast off his gloom. His great eyes rolled with anticipation as they pressed on, ambition to find the treasure cavern lending wings to their feet.

Before long they were at the base of the ruby mound. It was quite bare, and rose up almost as if it had been artificially formed. The professor declared it to have been of glacial origin. Certain markings on it he interpreted as being Indian in design.

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"They seem to indicate that at one time the Indians, who formerly roamed these mountains, used this mound as a watch tower," he said. "It must have made a good one, too."

"Too high colored for me," said Tubby in an undertone.

But by this time the glow had fled from the conical-shaped top of the mound. It was a dull gray color now, and, except for its shape and barrenness, looked just like any other rock pile.

"There's the dead pine!" cried Hiram suddenly.

"So it is!" exclaimed the major, as his gaze fell on an immense blasted trunk soaring above the rest of the trees, "boys, we are hot on the trail."

"Looks so," agreed Rob.

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"Now, then," exclaimed the professor, as they stood at the base of the pine, which appeared to have been blasted by lightning at some remote period, "now then, one of you boys pace off four hundred feet to the west."

Rob drew out his pocket compass and speedily paced off the distance. This brought them into a sort of clearing. It was small, and circular in shape, and dense growth hedged it in on all sides. By this time the boys were fairly quivering with excitement, and their elders were not much behind them in eager anticipation.

"Now, three hundred to the north," ordered the major.

"We'll have to plunge right into the brush," said Rob.

"All right. Go ahead. In a few minutes now we shall know if we're on a fool's errand or not."

The former army officer's voice was vibrant with emotion.

Followed by the others, Rob pushed into the brush, pacing off the required three hundred feet as accurately as he could. All at once he came to a halt.

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"Three hundred," he announced.

As they looked about them a feeling of keen disappointment set in. Tall brush was hemming them in on all sides. No trace of a stone man, or anything else but the close-growing vegetation,

could be seen.

"Fooled again!" was the exclamation that was forcing itself to Tubby's irrepressible lips when he stopped short, struck by the look of keen disappointment on the major's face.

"It looks as if we had had all our trouble for nothing, boys," he began, when Rob interrupted.

"What's that off there, major, through the bushes yonder. You can see it best from here."

The major hastened to the young leader's side.

"It's a sort of cliff or precipice," he cried.

"Maybe the man of stone is located there," suggested Rob; "it's worth trying, don't you think so, sir?"

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"By all means. This growth may have sprung up since the treasure was hidden away, and so have concealed the place."

Once more the party moved on. A few paces through the undergrowth brought them to the foot of a steepish cliff of rough, gray stone. It appeared to be about thirty feet or more in height. Above it towered the rugged peak of the first of the Three Brothers.

"Now, where's the man of stone?" asked the professor in a puzzled tone, gazing about him.

"There's certainly no indication of a man of that material or any other," opined the major, likewise peering in every direction.

"What's that mass of rock on the cliff top?" asked Merritt suddenly; "it looks something like a human figure."

They all gazed up. A big mass of rock was poised at the summit of the cliff. There was a large rock with a smaller one perched on the top of it. To a vivid imagination it might have suggested a body and a head.

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"It's worth investigating, anyway," decided the major; "we'll look at the face of the cliff directly beneath it. Maybe there is an opening there."

But this decision was more easily arrived at than carried out. Thorny brush and thick, tall weeds shrouded the base of the cliff for a height of eight or ten feet. But the Boy Scouts had their field axes with them, and before long the blows of the steel were resounding. In a few minutes they had cleared away a lot of the brush directly beneath the two poised stones.

The major and the professor, with Jumbo looking rather awe-stricken at the major's side, stood watching.

"These balanced stones prove my theory that all this is of glacial origin," the professor was saying. "Some antediluvian water course must have left them there. Why, it wouldn't take much of a push to shove them over."

"That is true," agreed the major; "in that case, supposing that an entrance does exist at this spot, they would block it effectually."

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"Very much so," agreed the professor dryly; "in

fact—”

“Hoo-r-a-y!”

The shout rang gladly through the silent woods. The boys had thrown down their axes and stood with flushed, triumphant faces turned toward the elder members of the party. The major was quick to guess the cause of their excitement.

“They’ve found it!” he cried, springing forward.

The professor and Jumbo followed. As they came up Rob was pointing to an opening at the base of the cliff which the cleared brush had revealed.

“The entrance to the cavern of Ruby Glow!” he exclaimed dramatically, while the rest of the Boy Scouts swung off into Tubby’s extemporized song of triumph.



“The entrance to the Cavern of Ruby Glow!”

CHAPTER XXIII. TRAPPED IN A LIVING TOMB.

After the first excitement and confusion had quieted down a bit, the major and the professor began discussing ways and means for exploring the cavern.

"When shall we start?" asked Merritt.

"At once, I think," said the major.

"I agree with you," said the professor; "no time like the present."

"That being the case," declared the major with a smile, "Jumbo had better set out for the canoes at once, and bring some provisions and the lanterns."

The lanterns referred to were of the variety used by miners, which had been brought along for the special purpose in which they were now to be employed.

But Jumbo was not allowed to set off alone on his expedition. The eager Boy Scouts raced off with him. They soon returned with a supply of canned goods, plenty of matches and some firearms and the lanterns. The latter were quickly lighted and, each member of the party shouldering a burden, the dash into the cave was begun.

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It was a creepy, mysterious sensation. The light seemed to go out with a sudden snap as they passed the portals of the cave entrance. Only the yellow light of the lanterns, pale after the bright sunshine, illumined the damp walls. A queer, dead, musty smell was in the air.

"Better proceed carefully," said the professor; "we may encounter a pocket of poisonous air before long."

"I thought we were looking for a pocket full of money," whispered Tubby to Merritt, behind whom he was pacing.

The party had to advance in single file, for beyond the entrance of the cave was a narrow passage.

"I wonder how your ancestor ever located this place?" said Rob, wonderingly, as they proceeded cautiously.

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"The family legend has it that he came in here in pursuit of a wounded wild animal he had shot, and which sought refuge here," said the major.

It was a strange, rather uncanny feeling to be treading the long unused path leading into the bowels of the cliff. They talked in whispers and low tones. A loud voice would go rumbling off in a weird way, not altogether comfortable to listen to.

"Gee! I wouldn't much care to be trapped in here," said Tubby, as they pressed on.

All at once the path they had been following took a sudden dip. Right under their feet was a narrow chasm. If they had not had lights they might have been precipitated into it, but luckily their lanterns showed them the peril just in time.

For a short time it looked as if the treasure hunt would have to end right there. There seemed to be no means of crossing the chasm, and they

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had brought none with them.

"So near and yet so far," breathed Merritt.

But presently the major discovered a stout plank resting against the wall of the passage. It was worm-eaten and old, but a test showed it would support them. It had evidently been left there by the old buccaneer. It caused an odd thrill to shoot through Rob, as he stepped upon it, to reflect that the last foot to press it had been in the tomb for many scores of years.

On the other side of the chasm the cave widened out. In fact, it developed into quite a spacious chamber. The rock walls, imbedded with mica, glistened brightly in the yellow glow of the lanterns.

"We look like a convention of lightning bugs," commented Tubby, gazing about him at the unusual scene. The professor drew out a paper. He and the major bent over it, while the others listened breathlessly to ascertain the outcome of this inspection of the plan of the long lost treasure trove.

"According to the plan the treasure is located in this chamber," said the major at length.

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"At any rate," added the professor, "the plan does not give any further details of the cave."

"Do you think it extends further?" inquired Merritt.

"Impossible to say. Some of these caves and their ramifications extend for many miles. When the major has concluded his quest, I think it would be of scientific interest to explore the subterranean thoroughfares at length."

All agreed with this view. But the present business speedily banished all other thoughts from their minds. Like so many hounds on the scent, the boys ran about the place, seeking for clues to the hiding place. But to their bitter disappointment all their efforts resulted in nothing. No trace of any hoarded stock of precious articles could be found.

"We had better have something to eat and then we can determine on our further course," said the major, looking at his watch; "I am convinced that the treasure is here, however, and equally positive we shall find it."

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When they sat down to their meal it was discovered that, in their haste, they had forgotten to bring any water. Tubby, Hiram and Jumbo at once volunteered to fetch some in the canteens which had been left in the canoes.

"Ah'm jes' pinin' ter see dat ole Massa Sol once mo';" confessed the negro.

"All right," said the major, "you can be one of the party, Jumbo. But hurry back, Hopkins, for I am anxious to waste no more time than necessary."

"We'll hurry," Tubby assured him.

The trio, the two boys and the black, hastened off, retracing their steps through the dark passage of the cavern. It was a distinct relief to regain the sunlight and open air. So much so

that perhaps they lingered by the concealed canoes rather longer than they should have done.

"Come on. We've wasted enough time," said Tubby at length; "let's hurry back."

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They set out at a good pace. But as they pushed through the brush separating them from the cliff; in the face of which was situated the cave entrance, a sudden sound brought them to an abrupt standstill. Tubby, who was in the lead, raised his hand for silence.

In the hush that followed they could distinctly catch the sound of voices ahead of them. At first Tubby thought that they were those of some of the party in the cave who had come out to see what had become of them. But he was speedily undeceived.

One of the voices struck suddenly on his ear with an unpleasant shock. It was a harsh, grating voice, and Tubby, to his dismay, recognized it in a flash as being that of Stonington Hunt. He had heard it too often to be mistaken.

"Are you all ready?" Hunt was saying.

A sort of growl of assent followed these words.

"What can they be up to?" asked Hiram, who was also aware now of the identity of the voices in front of them.

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"I don't know," rejoined Tubby in the same low tones; "as well as I can see, they are all on that cliff top alongside those balanced stones."

"Wonder what they are doing up there?" mused Hiram; "I suppose that—"

His voice was drowned in a loud crash as the larger of two stones was pushed over the edge of the cliff. In a flash Tubby perceived the fiendish object of Stonington Hunt and his followers.

The great rock fell directly in front of the opening of the cave. The way in or out of the underground chamber was effectually blocked, unless the obstruction was blasted with dynamite.

Cold chills ran up and down Tubby's spine. Hiram shuddered and turned white, and Jumbo groaned.

"Oh lawsy! lawsy! I knowed no good 'ud come uv meddling wif dat ole dead teef's money."

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"Be quiet," ordered Tubby, sternly. With every nerve on the alert he watched Hunt peer over the cliff-face. The next moment their enemy retreated with a chuckle of laughter.

"They're all sealed up good and tight," he said. "We'll let them stay in there a day or two and then we'll blast the rock away."

"Gee, that fat kid will be thinner when he gets out," Tubby heard Freeman Hunt say as his father rejoined the group.

"Ho! ho!" thought the lad, "'that fat kid' as you call him is on the outside, Master Hunt. And it's a good thing he is, for the outside is where help

will have to come from.”

The watchers concealed in the brush below saw a new figure join the group on the cliff summit, a man with a great, bushy, black beard and shifty black eyes.

“Mah goodness!” exclaimed Jumbo; “dat am de pussonage who peeked frough dem bushes las’ night. I thought I knowed him. Dat’s Black Bart, the sun-shiner.”

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The party at the cliff summit turned and vanished. Apparently they had a camp up there from which they had observed every movement of the Boy Scout party. It was plain enough now, since Jumbo’s recognition, how they came to be there. Black Bart must have overheard the major discussing the plan the night before. By making a forced march by night the rascals had arrived ahead of the rightful searchers for the old buccaneer’s hoard.

“We’d better get back toward the boats before they take a notion to investigate,” said Tubby. “I don’t fancy sticking around here much longer.”

“Nor I,” said Hiram; “come on.”

“Golly knows ah’m willin’,” breathed Jumbo.

Snugly hidden in the thick growth into which the canoes had been dragged, the two Scouts and the negro discussed the situation. It was a desperate one. For the present, at least, Hunt and his party dominated it. One unpleasant thought, too, kept obtruding itself. The party in the cave had no water.

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“And Hunt says he won’t blast it open for two days, anyhow,” put in Hiram; “I suppose he figures that the major would be too weak to oppose him then.”

“Guess that’s it. What a rascal that Hunt is! But what are we going to do to help them? We can’t move that rock, and we’ve got nothing to blast it away with.”

Tubby’s face showed the dismay, the almost despair, that he felt.

“Tell you what, Hiram,” he said at length, “you’ll have to take one of the canoes and get off down the lake. When you reach the foot of it make a dash to the westward, where there is a village. I’ll wait here with Jumbo till you return.”

“But it will take two days, at least, maybe a week,” objected Hiram.

“Can’t be helped. We’ve got to do something. You are lighter and can travel quicker than I. Take food and a rifle and get through as quick as you can.”

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Ten minutes later the red canoe, well stocked with food, and paddled by the young Scout, shot out from the shore. By hugging the rim of the lake the boys had figured that he would be able to undertake the first stage of his journey without running much risk of being seen by their enemies. Besides, it was unlikely that Hunt or his cronies would be keeping a very keen lookout as they evidently believed that all the party was imprisoned in the cave.

Tubby and Jumbo watched the canoe while it remained in sight, and then returned to their hiding place. Toward the middle of the afternoon they saw smoke on the cliff top and well back from the edge.

"At any rate," thought Tubby, "they are camped at a good distance back from us. I reckon there's no danger of their seeing us moving about."

With great caution the lad wormed his way through the brush, leaving Jumbo to guard the canoes. He had formed a daring determination to examine the rock and see if it was not possible in some miraculous way to move it. But an examination confirmed his worst fears.

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The great stone was as immovable as if it had formed a part of the living rock. Tubby actually gave a groan of despair.

"There's not a thing we can do," he moaned disconsolately. A sudden footfall above him made him dive into the brush. He flattened out, immovable, in a flash. The next instant Hunt strode into the glade, followed by his son. They also examined the stone.

"If they won't come to our terms," said Hunt, as they turned away again, "we can immure them in a living tomb."

Tubby Hopkins, lying as quiet as a rabbit in his place of concealment, could not but feel the bitter truth the words held.

* * * * *

"Those fellows are a long time getting that water, and I'm as dry as a jar of salt," said Merritt, as they munched on their provisions.

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"I guess we're all pretty thirsty," said the major. "Perhaps you'd better go and hurry them up, my boy."

Merritt sprinted off on this errand. He had almost reached the ravine and was about to step on the narrow bridge across it when there was a sudden crashing jar that shook the earth.

Though, of course, he did not know it, the noise was occasioned by the falling rock dislodged by Hunt and his followers.

"Wonder what that was?" thought the boy, little guessing the real cause.

"If we were in the west I should think it was an earthquake. But I never heard of any in the Adirondacks."

Before long he gained a point in the passage where he knew he should have seen a disc of daylight ahead of him. Puzzled by its absence, the boy pushed on. Every minute he expected to see the light, but the darkness continued to prevail. Sorely perplexed, he took a few steps more, when he was abruptly confronted by a mass of solid rock. The passage appeared to have terminated.

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It was several moments before the meaning of this conveyed itself to the boy's mind. When he mastered the situation it was with a sense of shock that for an instant almost deprived him of his senses.

Recovering his wits he lost no time in communicating his alarming intelligence. Incidentally, the cause of the noise he had heard was abundantly explained.

It required but a brief examination by the major, to make known the full extent of their calamity.

"We are walled in," he said hoarsely.

"Is there no hope of escape?" gasped the professor. The boys were too much overcome to speak.

The major shook his head. Unconsciously he repeated Tubby's words.

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"Help, if it is to come, must come from the outside," he said.

His words rang hollowly in the musty, subterranean passage.

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CHAPTER XXIV. TWO COLUMNS OF SMOKE.

Through the deep woods a boyish figure was creeping. It was Hiram, footsore, sick and despondent. It was the second day since he had left the scene of the Boy Scouts' misfortune. Behind him lay the lake. And that was about all he knew definitely of his situation.

For the last hour of his slow progress over the cruelly rough ground, the lad's heart had almost failed him. But he had kept pluckily on. At last, though, he was compelled, from sheer exhaustion, to sink down under a big hickory tree. He was lost, hopelessly lost in the midst of the Adirondack wilds.

Few men or boys who have ever been in a similar fix will not realize the extreme danger of Hiram's position. There are still vast tracks in these mountains untrodden, except, perchance, at long intervals, by the foot of man. The predicament of one who misses his way in their lonely stretches is serious indeed. Hiram was a nervous, sensitive boy, moreover, and, as the dark shadows of late afternoon began to steal through the woods, he felt a sense of keen fear, and alarm. He even thought he could make out the forms of savage beasts prowling about him.

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At last the boy determined, by a brave effort, to make the best of it. He ate a meal of bread and salt meat from his haversack and washed it down with water from his canteen. Then he set himself to thinking about a way out of his position.

But as is often the case with those hopelessly lost in the wilderness, his brain refused to work coherently. A sort of panic had clutched him. To his excited, overwrought imagination it appeared that it was his fate, his destiny to die alone in these great, silent woods, stretching, for all he knew, to infinity on every side of him.

"I must brace up and do something," thought Hiram desperately; "maybe I haven't wandered

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as far as I think. Perhaps a signal fire might be seen by somebody. I'll try it, anyhow."

The thought of doing something cheered him mightily. The task of gathering wood and bark to make his fire also helped to keep his mind off his predicament.

The young Scout built his fire on the summit of the highest bit of ground he could find. It was a bare hillock, rocky and bleak, rising amid the trees.

The fire Hiram constructed was, properly speaking, composed of two piles of sticks and dry leaves and bark. Close at hand he piled a big armful of extra fuel to keep it going. For he had determined to watch by the fires all night, if necessary. It was, he felt, his last hope.

The fires arranged to his satisfaction, the boy set a match to each pile in turn. From the midst of the forest two columns of smoke ascended. The afternoon was still. Not a breath of wind ruffled a leaf. In the calm air the columns of smoke shot up straight. Hiram piled green leaves on his blazing heaps and the smoke grew thicker.

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The message the two smoke columns spelled out, in Scout talk, was this:

"I am lost, help!"

Hiram knew if there were any Scouts within seeing distance of the two smoke columns, that he would be saved. If not—but he did not dare to dwell on that thought.

The late afternoon deepened into twilight, and still Hiram sat on, feeding his fires, although the flames of hope in his heart had died out into gray ashes of despair. As the darkness thickened and a gloom spread through the woods, his fears and nervousness increased. It is one thing to have a companion in the woods and the surety of a camp fire and comfort at night, and quite another pair of shoes to be lost in the impenetrable forest. Anybody who has experienced the dilemma can appreciate something of poor Hiram's state of mind.

It grew almost dark. The two fires glowed in the twilight like two red eyes.

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All at once Hiram almost uttered a shout of alarm. Then he grew still, his heart beating till it shook his frame. Somewhere, close to him, a twig had cracked. He was certain, too, that he had seen a dark form dodge behind a tree.

"Who's there," he cried shrilly.

As if in reply, from behind the surrounding trees, a dozen dark forms suddenly emerged and started toward him. Half beside himself with alarm, Hiram, his mind full of visions of moonshiners, Indians and desperadoes, leaped to his feet and started to run for his life.

But he had not gone a dozen steps before he stumbled and fell. As he did so his head struck a rock and the blow stunned him.

The men who had emerged with such suddenness from behind the trees hastened up.

"We needn't have feared a trap," said one; "it

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was a genuine Scout signal. I'm glad my boys taught them to me or we might have been too late to save this boy."

The speaker was the same man who had recognized Rob Blake, and whose two sons were members of the Curlew Patrol. He picked Hiram up.

"Lost and half scared to death," he said tenderly; "and just to think that we crept up on him like a bunch of prowling Indians."

"Well, we've got to look out for traps, you know," put in the leader, the gray-moustached man; "those two smoke columns that you knew the meaning of might have been a trick to decoy us. I'm glad we approached stealthily, but I'm sorry we scared this poor kid so badly."

"Oh, he'll be all right directly," was the easy reply. "Sam, you and Jim get a kettle boiling and make coffee. We'll camp here to-night," said Rob's friend.

He set Hiram down at the root of a big tree just as the lad opened his eyes and gazed with astonishment on the group of stalwart, kind-eyed men gathered in wonderment about him.

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* * * * *

It was moonlight, and almost midnight, before Tubby deemed it safe to reconnoitre the vicinity of the cave mouth. Followed by Jumbo, who was quaking with fear, but accompanied the stout youth in preference to being left alone, Tubby cautiously made his way through the undergrowth. A spot of bright light above showed him the location of the camp fire of Hunt's gang. It was hardly likely that they would be patrolling the entrance to the cave, effectually blocked as it was. But Tubby took no chances. With the skill and silence of an Indian he wormed his way along.

He had almost reached the open space where they had chopped down the brush when, without an instant's warning, the figure of Stonington Hunt strode into view.

At the same unlucky instant Jumbo, lumbering along quite silently, stubbed his toe against an out-cropping rock. He fell headlong with a crash.

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"Gollygumptions! I'm killed dead!" he yelled at the top of his lungs, utterly regardless of consequences.

Tubby turned and was about to dodge back into the shelter of the dense growth when Hunt espied him. With an angry oath he sprang at him, pointing a pistol. But Tubby, in a flash, changed his tactics surprisingly. Converting himself into a human battering ram, he lowered his head and rushed full tilt at Hunt.

Completely taken by surprise by Tubby's onslaught, Hunt stopped and hesitated. The fat boy, at the same instant, rushed between the man's legs, seizing them in a firm grip as he did so. The unexpected assault resulted in hurling Hunt violently forward. He fell sprawling in a heap. At the same instant his pistol was discharged in the air.

As the report rang out from close at hand half a

dozen figures sprang into being. They were those of his followers who had been behind him at some distance on this nocturnal visit of inspection.

Dale and Bumpus instantly recognized Tubby.

"That's the fat kid who wrecked our sloop!" cried Dale.

"A hundred dollars to the one that gets him!" shouted Hunt from the ground where he still lay.

"How under the sun did he escape?" shouted Freeman Hunt, taking up the chorus of cries and exclamations.

But before Dale, agile as he was, could reach him, Tubby had darted nimbly off. He was heading for the bushes. In another instant he would have reached them but a second figure suddenly dodged into the moonlight and blocked his way. It was Black Bart. He outspread his long arms to catch the hunted youth.

The next instant he had shared Hunt's fate. Tubby, for the second time that night, executed his skillful tackle. Black Bart, with a string of bad words accompanying his fall, was upset without ceremony. But Dale was close on Tubby's nimble heels. As the lad dodged from his fallen foe Dale reached out, and his big hand grabbed the fleeing lad's collar. Tubby gave a dive and a twist but he could not get away.

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"Good boy, Dale. Hold him!" came Freeman Hunt's voice.

Suddenly another figure appeared. The newcomer sprang out of the shadows behind them. With one blow this personage knocked Dale sprawling beside Black Bart, and the next instant, as Pete Bumpus essayed to take part in the fray, he was sent to join the other two.

Tubby felt himself snatched up and carried swiftly off into the darkness of the friendly brush.

"Gollygumptions!" chuckled Jumbo, for it was he, as he ran, "but it shuah did feel good to swat dem no-good trash."

"Hullo, Jumbo, is that you?" asked Tubby as he heard; "I'll forgive you for almost getting us captured."

"Tank you, Marse Hopkins," rejoined Jumbo gravely; "but we bes' keep our words till we get furder away. Hark!"

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Behind them they could hear angry voices, and shouts and trampling in the brush.

The strong-muscled black, bent almost double, ran swiftly with his burden for some distance further. Then he set Tubby down and rested, breathing heavily. The sounds of the chase came from afar to them, much fainter now.

"Ha! ha!" chortled Jumbo; "dey look an' look, but dey no find us."

"That's all right, too, Jumbo," said Tubby, sitting down on a decayed log; "but it doesn't help to get the major and the rest out of that hole in the ground."

"Maybe Marse Hiram got frough," suggested Jumbo hopefully.

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Tubby with a mournful intonation; "it looks now as if that was our only chance of saving them.

"Where are we?" added Tubby, suddenly gazing about him. There was something familiar about the scenery. Especially about a tall, cone-shaped rock that loomed up close at hand.

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"That's Ruby Glow!" he exclaimed the next instant.

"And gollygumptions, ef dere ain't a spook or suthin' on top of it," cried Jumbo.

He pointed to a dark figure standing upright in the white moonlight that flooded the isolated mass of rock.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY— CONCLUSION.

We left the major and his party marooned in the cave, and overcome by the suddenness of the disaster that had overtaken them like a bolt from a clear sky. We must now return to them.

After the first shock of the discovery the major suggested that they retreat to the chamber and talk things over as calmly as possible. Each one of the party, with a strong effort to master his feelings, followed the advice. A long consultation followed, the result of which was that they determined that the first thing to be done was to institute a search for water.

The far end of the cavern had not yet been explored and it was decided to begin with that. Headed by the major, they started for what seemed a blank wall at the end of the chamber. But on nearing it, it proved that its appearance of blankness was chiefly caused by a sort of screen of rock that masked an opening as effectually as if it had been placed there by someone anxious to conceal it.

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"We'll penetrate beyond this," announced the major, and holding his lantern high, was stepping forward when he stopped. One word came to his lips:

"Water!"

From a tiny rift in the rock, sure enough, a small but blessed stream of clear water was flowing. The delight with which the imprisoned party hailed the discovery may be imagined. For a short time, while they assuaged their pangs of thirst, already painful, they almost forgot the seriousness of their situation.

While the others drank, Andy Bowles, who had been one of the first to taste the cool water, strayed further into the passage. Presently his voice was borne back to the others.

"Say!" he cried; "there's a funny sort of box in

here."

"What kind of a box?" hailed the major, alert in an instant.

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"Why, it's awful old by the looks of it. It's all bound with iron, and nails are stuck all over it. And—say! There are two more back beyond it."

"The treasure trove!" gasped the professor.

"Beyond a doubt," said the major. Then he added gloomily, "but what good is it to us now? If we cannot escape from here before long we shall perish miserably, and nothing but dynamite can release us."

"At any rate we must not give up hope," counselled the professor; "suppose we investigate these boxes. At any rate it will give us something to do. It is better than doing nothing."

"That is right," declared the major; "it may keep us from dwelling on the situation."

Merritt's axe was called into requisition, and, as the others stood round with upraised lanterns, the boy swung the weapon down on the iron lock of the first of the old chests. It was old and rotten, and, after a few blows, it gave way.

With trembling, nervous hands the lid of the box was pushed back. But a surprise greeted the fortune hunters. Instead of a mass of gold objects or coins meeting their eyes only a faded piece of red velvet, covering the contents of the box, met their gaze.

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"Pull it off!" ordered the major.

Merritt and the professor raised the bit of fabric and then started back with startled faces. Under the velvet was a picture. A grim portrait of a tall man in black garments holding a skull in his hands, while he knelt beside an open grave. Under it was painted in old fashioned letters:

"The End Of The Quest for Riches."

"Good heavens," exclaimed the major, who had paled a little under his tan, "that seems almost like a warning."

Mastering a feeling of dread, Merritt helped the professor to raise the picture. Under it was an old sea cloak, a brass spy glass of antique make, and an old-fashioned compass and—that was all.

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"It begins to look as if my ancestor had played a grim joke on posterity," said the major; "however, let us see what is in the other two boxes."

Crash!

Down came Merritt's axe on the first of the remaining two chests. The lid flew open with such suddenness that it startled them. It was operated by concealed springs.

As the light of the lanterns fell on the contents of this box, however, all doubt as to the success of the quest was removed. It was filled to the brim with golden candlesticks, vases, plates and cups of priceless value. Some of them flashed with gems. The hoarded treasure of the wicked old

pirate of the Spanish seas lay before them.

"Now the other," said the professor in a faint voice, "I can hardly believe my eyes."

"It does seem incredible," commented the major.

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The contents of the other chest, which was speedily opened, proved to be of the same nature as that of the second one rifled. On the interior of the lid, however, there had been a secret chamber. The spring of this, rotten with age, gave way as the cover was lifted. A niagara of coins of all nations, Spanish doubloons, French crowns, English Rose nobles and florins, and queerly-marked Oriental wealth, flowed out.

"What should you think was the value of all this, professor?" asked the major when he recovered his voice.

"At least two million dollars," was the rejoinder in tones the man of science tried in vain to render steady.

"I'd give half of it now if we could get out of here," said the major.

"Perhaps there is a way."

It was Merritt who spoke.

"What makes you think so, my boy?"

"Why, while we've been standing here I've noticed a draught. Look at the lantern flames flicker in it. It comes from further down the passage. We might explore it, anyway."

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"I think so, too," said the major, and followed by the others, still dazed by the sight of the hoarded fortune, he struck out into the darkness. For some distance the passage into which he had plunged was level. Then his feet encountered rough steps. Calling to the others to follow him the major mounted them.

Up and up they climbed, the wind blowing more freshly in their faces every instant. All at once, without any warning, the major emerged into the open air. He looked about him amazed. The others, as they joined him, heard his astonishment. They seemed to be on the summit of a small island in the midst of a sea of woods.

Gazing over the edge, they soon ascertained that they were at the summit of a high cone-shaped mass of rocks. The sides were steep as church walls, and offered no foothold.

All at once the explanation burst upon the major. "We are at the summit of Ruby Glow!" he cried.

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Astonishing as it appeared, this was the truth. The professor regarded it as a proof of his theory that the place had been used as an Indian watch tower.

"I know now what puzzled me before," he said, "and that was the manner in which they gained the summit of the cone."

"But that doesn't help us to get down," said Merritt, "it looks as if we are as badly off as before."

"I'm afraid you're right," said the major; "no

living being could scale those walls.”

“And no living being could move that rock from the entrance to the cave,” echoed Rob miserably.

They retraced their steps. The hours passed slowly in the cavern. But in order to employ them somehow they made an inventory of the contents of the treasure boxes.

Supper was eaten from their fast diminishing store of eatables. Nobody talked much. They did not feel inclined for conversation. At length nature asserted itself. Rob actually began to feel sleepy. Andy and the professor had already flung themselves down and were fast asleep.

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“Guess I’ll take one more look out from Ruby Glow before I turn in,” thought Rob to himself.

With this intention in mind he left the cave. He did not take long to reach the top of the cone. Moonlight flooded it, and the surrounding forest. Rob looked about him. It was a lovely scene, but somehow its beauty didn’t impress him much just then. All at once he became aware of two figures below the cone gazing curiously up at it. One was oddly familiar to him. In fact they both were.

“Who is it?” he asked, feeling that there was no danger in speaking clearly.

“Hush!” came up the answer in Tubby’s voice, in a low, but penetrating whisper, “it’s me, Tubby. Jumbo’s with me. How under the canopy did you get up there?”

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“It’s a long story,” responded Rob, in the same cautious tones; “the question is how are we going to get down again?”

“Gee whiz! that’s so. There’s no way of clambering down the sides. If only we had a rope.”

“We’ve got one. The canoe ropes joined together would be long and strong enough,” said Rob, “but how could you get them up to us? No trees grow close enough. I don’t see how——”

He stopped short. Tubby had suddenly begun to execute a grotesque sort of war-dance. His figure capered oddly about in the moonlight.

“Wait there till I come back!” he exclaimed, and suddenly darted off, followed by Jumbo.

“Well, if that isn’t just like Tubby,” said Rob; “what in the world is he up to now?”

But Rob knew Tubby well enough to divine that the lad would not have told him to wait if there had not been some good reason for it. So he sat down with what patience he could. It was some time before Tubby reappeared. When he did, he had something in his hands.

“Watch out!” he cried to Rob.

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The leader of the Eagle Patrol watched his Scout carefully. Suddenly he realized what Tubby was doing. He had made a bow and arrow out of springy wood. Then he had attached one end of a light string to the arrow. To the other extremity of the string, which was long enough

to reach the summit of the cone, was attached the knotted lengths of canoe and pack rope. Rob had hardly time to take in the details of this clever trick before the arrow came whizzing by his ear. He grabbed the string as it followed and began hauling in.

Before long he had reached its end, and started pulling on the rope. He made one end fast about a projecting pinnacle of rock, and then called down his congratulations to Tubby in a low but hearty voice.

"I always told you I could do something else than fall in," was the message Tubby sent back as he strutted about below.

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Rob's next act was to arouse the sleepers and Major Dangerfield. They were all naturally warm in praise of Tubby's clever device. It was tested by Rob who slid down it in perfect safety, but landed with barked shins and scraped hands. That was a cheap price to pay for deliverance, though, and the others, when they followed him, felt the same way about it.

"Now what are we going to do?" said the major as they all stood in a group on the ground.

"I think——" began the professor.

But the words were taken out of his mouth. Rob made a hasty sign to the others to conceal themselves. A sudden heavy rumbling sound had echoed through the air. It was followed by a red flash from the direction of the mouth of the cave.

"They've blown the rock up!" cried the major.

"That's why they were all prowling around there to-night, I suppose," exclaimed Tubby.

"Let's get to the canoes and arm ourselves," said the major; "we can catch them all red-handed."

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First the rope by which they had escaped was cut as high as possible from the ground, and then the major's suggestion was carried out. They reached the entrance of the cave just in time to hear footsteps approaching down the passage.

They crouched quietly till Dale emerged from the cavern entrance, stumbling over the shattered fragments of the big rock that had blocked it. His arms were full of plunder from the chests, and he was able to offer little resistance. He was seized and bound and gagged without his having any opportunity to make an outcry. One after another, as they came out, the rest of Hunt's gang were served the same way. Hunt and his son, however, in some manner became alarmed as they neared the entry. They dashed back, outfooting the lads who pursued them. Down the passage they fled and stumbled blindly, in their fear, along the further passage and up the steps to the top of the Ruby Glow peak.

Arriving here they spied the rope. In a flash they were over the edge and down it. Although they had had tumbles when they reached the part where it had been cut off, they managed to make good their escape. It would have been folly to pursue them in the woods at night.

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Black Bart's capture deserves some mention. It

was effected by Jumbo, who literally threw himself on the black-bearded man as he emerged. It was probably the noise of this scuffle that alarmed Hunt and his son.

"You looks like five hundred dollahs to muh," grinned Jumbo, as Black Bart, sullen and defiant as a wild cat, was manacled.

The remainder of that night was spent in the cave, the prisoners being closely guarded. The next day Dale was induced to tell how they had stolen the explosive from the hut of an eccentric old character who did some experimental mining not far away.

"We figgered we'd find some use for it," he said cheerfully.

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That day was occupied in packing the precious articles, in bags brought for the purpose. By evening all was complete. If they had known how Hiram was faring they would have felt perfectly content. It was decided, if he did not reappear, to leave some of the party in camp to await his return, while the others pushed on to give the prisoners up to the proper authorities.

But at midnight that night they had a great surprise. Rob, who was on watch, heard a sudden hail out of the darkness:

"K-r-r-r-e-e-e-e!"

It was the cry of the Eagle Patrol.

"Who can be giving it, I wonder," he exclaimed.

The next minute he knew. Hiram and the revenue officers, who had made a night march of it, burst in upon the camp. Hiram had, in his wanderings, retraced much of his way back toward the camp so that they had not had so very far to tramp. The officials were delighted to learn of the clever manner in which the moonshiners had been apprehended. They had been searching for Black Bart, when they sighted Hiram's signal fires.

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Jumbo was assured that his five hundred dollars would be awarded to him at the earliest opportunity.

Had we space, or opportunity, we would like to tell of the journey back to civilization, of the share that each Boy Scout, much against his inclination, was forced to accept of the treasure, and of Alice Dangerfield's thanks to the Boy Scouts for the brave way in which they stood by her father in time of peril. They really valued this—like true Scouts—more than the monetary reward.

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THE BOY SCOUTS FOR UNCLE SAM.

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