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the Trail; or, Scouting  
through the Big Game  
Country, by active 1909-1917  
Herbert Carter**

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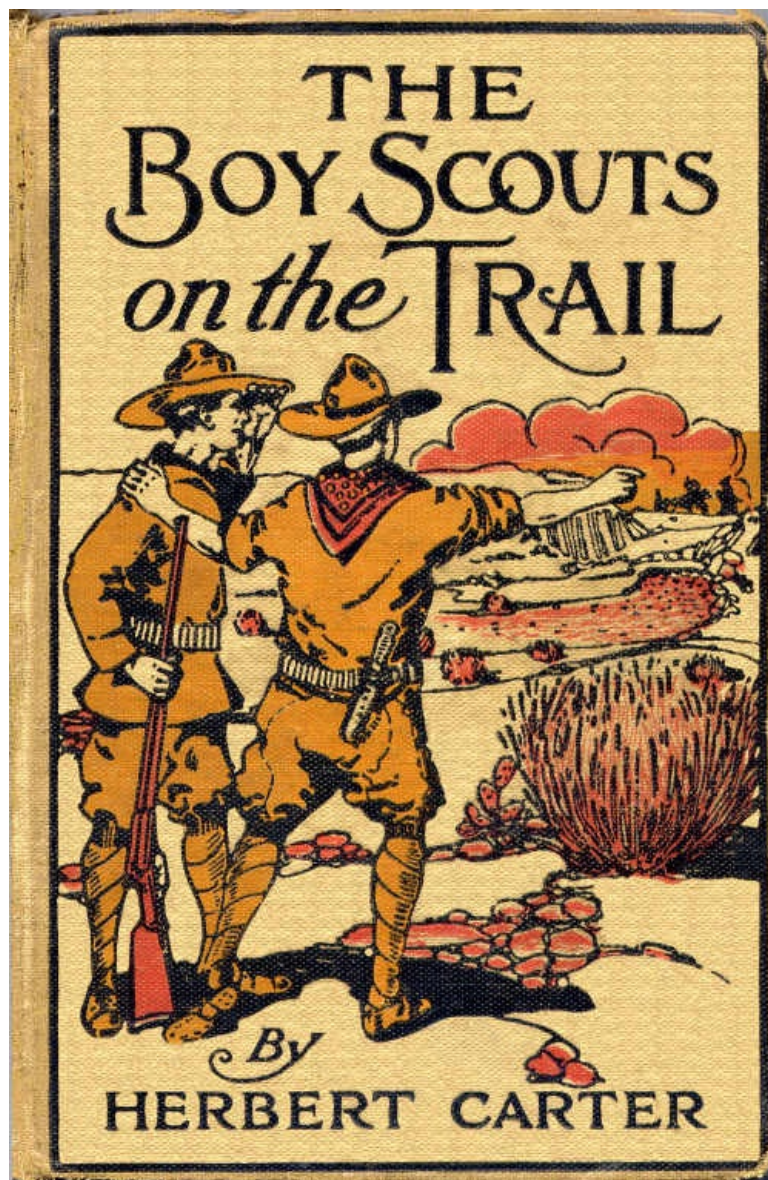
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THE BIG GAME COUNTRY \*\*\*



## **The Boy Scouts On the Trail**

OR

**Scouting through the Big Game Country**

BY HERBERT CARTER

Author of "The Boy Scouts' First Camp Fire," "The Boy  
Scouts

in the Blue Ridge," "The Boy Scouts on the Trail,"

"The Boy Scouts in the Maine Woods,"

"The Boy Scouts In the Rockies"



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"Did you get him, Thad?" shouted the boys. "Come over here, all of you!" said Thad. [Page 83](#)  
— *The Boy Scouts on the Trail.*

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## THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL

### CHAPTER I. WHAT TOOK THE SCOUTS UP INTO MAINE.

"There never was such great luck as this, fellows!"

"You're right there, Step Hen; and never will be again, that's sure!"

"Let's see; first, there was that silly old epidemic breaking out in our town, and forcing the directors to put up the bars in the school till after the Christmas holidays; that was a great and glorious snap for the Silver Fox Patrol of the Cranford Troop of Boy Scouts, wasn't it?"

"But that was only a beginning, Giraffe; there were better things still headed our way."

"Sure there were, Davy. As luck would have it, just at that same time Thad Brewster's guardian found that it was mighty necessary he get word to a gentleman by the name of James W. Carson. He wired up to Maine, you remember, only to learn that Mr. Carson, who was a great hunter, had started into the big game country after

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moose, with a couple of guides, and wouldn't be back until late in the winter."

"Everything just worked for us, seemed like," remarked the boy called Davy. "Thad suggested that he be sent up to follow this party, and deliver the message, and his guardian fell in with the idea right away, didn't he, Thad?"

"I think he was only too willing, boys; because he knew we wanted to get up in Maine the worst kind; ever since our comrade, Allan Hollister here, began to tell us such splendid stories of the fun to be had in the pine woods of his home state. But go on, Step Hen, finish the story while you're about it."

"Why, of course, when Thad, he found he could go, that gave him an idea; and sure enough, the whole of the patrol got the fever. Bob Quail had to give it up, because he had too much on hand to leave home just then; and Smithy had the hard luck to get a touch of the plague that had dropped in on Cranford for a visit; but didn't the rest of us hit it up, though?"

"I should say we did, as sure as my name's Davy Jones!"

"Well, the upshot of the whole matter was that one fine day six of us left Cranford, bound for Maine, with all our camp stuff along; and here we are at last, in the country of big game, canoes, guides, tents, and everything along we need for a month of good times, or more if we want it."

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"But don't forget, Step Hen, that the one main object of the trip is to find Mr. James W. Carson," interrupted the boy named Thad; who seemed to be looked up to as the leader of the scout patrol, which office he really filled.

"Sure," replied Step Hen, who was stretched out comfortably by a blazing fire. "But we've got heaps of time for hunting besides, and trying out a lot of things we've been learning as scouts. It was fine for our rich chum, Bob Quail, to insist on handing in a big lump of coin to add to the funds contributed by our folks. That put us on easy street; and now, here we are, as happy as clams at high tide, just finished our grub, and pitying the fellows left behind."

"Poor Smithy; poor Bob!" exclaimed the one who had called himself Davy Jones.

There were six of them in all, and it was easy to see from the various parts of the khaki uniforms that were in evidence, these lads belonged to a section of the Boy Scout organization.

Cranford had made a start in getting a troop together, and the first patrol of eight had been formed for some time. Another patrol was promised by Spring, to be followed by others as the boys became attacked by the disease, and a desire to learn the numerous splendid things that Boy Scouts find out.

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Besides the acting scoutmaster, Thad Brewster, and his assistant, Allan Hollister, there were Step Hen Bingham; Conrad Stedman, who on account of his long neck went by the characteristic name of "Giraffe" among his fellows; Davy Jones; and last but far from least a

short, puffy, rosy-faced boy who had once been christened Cornelius Jasper Hawtree; but few people ever knew it, because he was called Bumpus by young and old alike.

It was a little after the nooning hour. The boys had evidently been paddling part of the morning, for there were three long canoes close by, with as many men, doubtless guides, doing something to change the luggage, so that it would allow of a more even keel during the voyage up-stream.

These boys would have liked nothing better than to have come out here by themselves, relying upon their knowledge of woodcraft to carry them through; for several of their number were well versed in such things.

Their parents, however, would not hear of such a thing; and the expedition must have been wrecked on the rocks before it really started, only that the boys promised to take several guides along. And besides, Allan had informed them that by the new laws up in Maine, hunters were bound to employ regular licensed guides when going into the woods, to render the risk of fires less probable; since some city men are so careless about leaving a camp-fire burning when breaking up; and in consequence whole districts have been burned over by the rising wind scattering the brands among the leaves and pine needles.

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But those three Maine guides were promised the easiest time of their lives; since there were so many willing recruits to do the cooking; and lend a hand at the paddling.

One canoe carried, besides Thad and Step Hen, a dark-faced, quiet fellow, who was really a full blood Penobscot Indian, and of course named Sebattis, as nearly all of them seem to be.

The second was given over to Allan and Davy Jones, with a young guide named Jim Hasty; who, by the way was, about as slow and deliberate as any one could be.

And the third boat had for a crew a real Maine character, Eli Crookes, about as straight as a pine tree; Giraffe, and Bumpus.

Of course the tents and various stores were divided up so that each canoe carried its share. Even so they seemed overloaded at times; but then Bumpus was accustomed to declaring that the danger of their foundering grew less day by day, judging by the amount of eatables that disappeared after each meal.

The fall season had set in so far that it was getting pretty cold in the Northern Woods; and the boys had come prepared for such severe weather as might be expected. But they were a hearty lot, and capable of standing almost any amount of fatigue. Already had the outdoor life of scouts wrought a remarkable change in several who had been hitherto inclined to be either lazy, or indifferent to their muscular development.

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Bumpus Hawtree, fat little fellow that he was, could walk twice as far now as when he first joined the patrol; and besides, his general fund of knowledge had increased several hundred fold.

Step Hen, once the most careless and indifferent of boys, was nowadays noticing the wonderful things that can be seen all around in Nature's working; and thus he discovered that a fellow might have a fine time, even though left alone in the woods for a whole day!

Giraffe, too, had picked up amazingly; he never seemed to take on any more flesh; but his arms and limbs were getting like iron; and he too was beginning to take a decided interest in affairs relating to the trail, the camp, and life in the open generally.

Then as to Davy Jones, who had once been known as the "Monkey," because of his indulging in all manner of acrobatic stunts, hanging by his toes from a high limb of a tree; standing on his head; walking on his hands; and turning back somersaults without the slightest warning, just as though he belonged to a circus—even Davy was beginning to tone down somewhat, and his breaks were not quite so numerous.

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Of late however, strange to say, Bumpus had manifested an odd fascination for imitating some of the tricks to which the acrobatic Davy was addicted. He had begun to even fancy that he was actually becoming supple, and could copy Davy with ease.

When these rivalries did not seem to be along a dangerous line Thad wisely kept quiet, knowing that Bumpus would speedily realize his inability to compare with the active one; and besides they often afforded a deal of amusement for the balance of the patrol.

While the three guides were making sure that the last spark of their late camp-fire had been extinguished, by pouring water from the river upon the ashes, the boys were taking their places in the boats.

Davy was feeling particularly frisky; and resting his hands, one upon either gunwale of the canoe, close to the bow, where he had his position for the afternoon, he threw himself up, with his heels in the air, cracking these together sharply.

"How's that, fellows?" he demanded. "Don't you call that a pretty good poise? Why, I guess I could do it even if we were shooting the rapids. Hey, Bumpus, that's one on you, all right," and the heels cracked together suggestively.

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"Mebbe you think I ain't got the nerve to try that cute little dodge," remarked the fat boy, aggressively. "I've done a heap of things you thought I couldn't. Now, you just wait and see your Dutch uncle show you a stunt worth two of that."

"Careful, Bumpus, the water's deep right here!" called out Thad, whose back happened to be turned toward the other canoe just then, as he was changing some of the stuff, so as to give his legs more room when he took the paddle.

"And likewise cold!" added Giraffe, who was grinning with anticipation of the fun that was coming.

But Bumpus was in deadly earnest. He gripped the sides of his canoe, just as he had seen Davy

do; and then, giving a flirt into the air, started to extend his dumpy lower limbs upward.

But alas! Bumpus did not know how to stop going, once he got started. The consequence was, that instead of remaining at an exact perpendicular, his body kept on turning until he could no longer maintain his desperate grip on the narrow gunwales of the canvas canoe. And as a shout broke out from several of the scouts, poor Bumpus went over the bow into the water; where he made a splash that must have dreadfully alarmed every speckled trout that had not yet taken up its winter quarters.

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## CHAPTER II. THE TROUBLES OF BUMPUS.

With the splash the three guides looked up from their task at the fire, and then turned toward each other with grins. These boys were a lively lot, and kept things moving all the time; but already had the guides come to like them more than a little. But if one of the lads chose to go in swimming with his clothes on, of course it was none of their business. So they did not run to the rescue.

"Wow! gimme a hand, somebody!" spluttered poor Bumpus, as his head came up, and he sent out a little Niagara of water that he had started to swallow in his excitement.

Bumpus could swim, and there was not the least danger of his drowning; so none of the other boys manifested a frantic desire to help him. Indeed, Giraffe even showed himself heartless enough to give vent to a hearty laugh; while Davy Jones immediately called out:

"Bumpus, you never said a truer word in your whole life; that *was* a stunt worth two of mine. When it comes to doing *real* things, with the splash to 'em, I'm a back number compared with you. Oh! you Bumpus!"

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Seeing that no one was going to do more than extend a paddle toward him, the indignant fat boy started to paddle ashore; where he crawled out of the water, looking like a half drowned rat, as Step Hen took occasion to tell him.

But as the fire was out, and the air rather chilly, although in the middle of a glorious fall day, wise Thad knew that the boys stood a chance of getting cold unless he quickly changed his clothes.

"Here, Giraffe, overhaul his clothes bag, and get out his extra duds," the scoutmaster remarked, in a tone of authority, which the elongated boy understood permitted of no nonsense; so he condescended to act as valet for the unfortunate Bumpus, selecting the garments he was to wear, and offering some of his own in case the other did not have a complete assortment.

As Giraffe was as tall and skinny as Bumpus was fat and rotund, it would have been an utter impossibility for the latter to have worn anything



belonging to his fellow voyager, even had he needed assistance.

Fortunately he had plenty for a complete change, and a sweater which Thad insisted he should draw on over the shirt, gave promise of preventing any serious result from the ducking.

"Wasted just twenty minutes, all on account of Bumpus's vaulting ambition," remarked Step Hen, when they were finally ready to make a fresh start.

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"Vaulting ambition is good," observed Davy Jones, with a wink at Allan, who sat near him in the second canoe. "Now, d'ye know, I've tried that stunt many a time, but I never yet was able to get one-half the fun out of it that Bumpus did the first shot. No use talking, he can see me, and go one better. I'll have to take in my sign, and retire from business, boys."

"Anyway," grunted the object of all this side talk, and there was a twinkle in his eye as he looked at Davy; "I made the biggest splash you ever heard; all of you have just got to admit that."

"You certainly did, Bumpus," said Thad; "but I'd advise you to be a little more careful after this how you try to copy Davy Jones. To tell the honest truth, though I don't want to hurt your feelings, Bumpus, but, you see, you're hardly built for doing most of the things he shows off in. If it was Giraffe here, instead, he might have a look-in."

"But Giraffe, he's just a little too smart to get caught trying; he cut his eye teeth some time ago;" remarked that individual. "But I give you all warning that from now on I am going to try some of those different ways of making fires without using a single match. I've got a burning glass along; then there's my fine flint and steel, like our forefathers owned in the good old pioneer days; and last but not least, I'd just bent on using a bow and a stick in the manner they say the South Sea islanders do. You wait and see me show you something."

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Thad moved a little uneasily at hearing this. Truth to tell, he had had considerable trouble with the tall scout in times past, on account of this very failing, which was once more coming to the surface.

Giraffe seemed to be a regular fire worshipper. It was a subject that went away ahead of all others in his mind. Indeed, there were some of his mates who declared that the long-legged scout had really joined the patrol in order to find chances to indulge in his favorite pursuit, which was to see the flames creep upward, snapping and glowing. Giraffe, having started a blaze, would sit there and gaze into the heart of the fire, just as though he could discover the most wonderful things there.

As a rule, he occupied much of his spare time when in camp whittling; and if asked what he was doing, would reply that possibly they might want to start a fresh fire later on, and he was getting the tinder ready.

His folks had had more or less trouble with him at home on this same account; as on three separate occasions the fire department had been

called on a run to save the Stedham home, when the boy, in pursuing his investigations, had endangered it.

And now, it seemed that his latest fad was to try every kind of known method for bringing about a flame without the use of a match. No wonder Thad felt uneasy. He knew about the stringent laws of Maine with regard to setting the woods afire; and with such a reckless lad loose among the pines it would be necessary for some one to keep control over Giraffe pretty much all the time.

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The afternoon began to wane as they pushed on up the current of the river. The guides had informed the boys that there was still a short time when trout could be legally taken, as the fishing season overlapped the hunting term a week or two. And hence a couple of jointed rods had been brought along, with the idea of making use of them. A platter of deliciously browned trout was a dish that appealed to the appetites of these boys tremendously, and right now Thad was keeping Allan on the lookout for a tempting spot, where it seemed likely they might gather in a mess of the speckled beauties.

All at once Bumpus was seen to half rise from his seat in the bottom of the canoe in which he had a place. Thad noticed that the fat boy seemed strangely moved, as though distressed over something.

"What ails you, Bumpus?" he asked. "I hope you don't feel the effect of your bath. This sun has been fairly warm, and by now you ought to be feeling all right, especially after doing your share of paddling for an hour or so."

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"Tain't that," said Bumpus, weakly; "but I guess I ought to turn around, and go back, fellers."

"Sure," cried Step Hen, "go right over the end of the canoe; the walking on the water is fine, Bumpus."

But Thad saw that the other was really distressed about something that had suddenly come into his mind.

"Why should you go back, Bumpus, when you know well enough it's out of the question?" he demanded. "Have you forgotten something? Thought we left all that to Step Hen here, who's forever losing his possessions?"

"That's right, I did forget, Thad," replied the other, with a forlorn look on his face, that would have made the scoutmaster laugh, only that he realized Bumpus was suffering mentally.

"Forget what, Bumpus?" asked Giraffe.

"I'll tell you, fellers," continued the fat boy, with a sigh that seemed to come from the very depths of his heart. "Just before I started off on this glorious trip with you my father handed me a letter which he said he wanted me to take right away to Mr. Harriman, the cashier of the Cranford Bank, as it was *very* important that he should have it before noon that day. I was just trying to remember whether I did go there and give it to him or not; and d'ye know, for the life of me I just can't make sure of it."

"That's funny!" exclaimed Giraffe. "Ain't you able to recollect seeing the gentleman, or anything he said to you?"

The other shook his head sadly.

"That's the queer part of it," he declared. "Sometimes it comes to me that I must have done it, and I think I see it all plain before me. Then it gets mixed, and I'm not so sure. You see, here's what bothers me. That same morning I met a friend who was going about ten miles off in his dad's machine, and he asked me to have a spin with him. Just couldn't resist, boys, and we did go lickety-split. I'm telling you right now."

"I saw you go past our house, riding for fair," remarked Step Hen.

"Tell us the rest, Bumpus; what had that ride in a car to do with the important letter your father gave you to be delivered at the bank?" asked Davy Jones.

"A heap, I'm afraid," answered the other, making a wry face. "I can just remember that my coat managed to break loose, and was flapping in the wind before I was able to grab it shut, and button it again. And fellers, I had a glimpse of something white, like a letter, that had slipped out of my pocket, and was carried over the fence into Brainard's woods!"

"Wow! and again, wow!" exclaimed Giraffe, that being his favorite way of expressing surprise and interest in anything.

"I thought at the time that it must be only a scrap of waste paper I happened to be carrying in my pocket; but fellers, it just broke in on me a little while back that it *might* have been that very important letter I was to give to Mr. Harriman at the bank!"

"Oh! the chances are ten to one it wasn't, Bumpus," said Thad, who saw that the scout was really dreadfully worried, and in a fair way to have his whole vacation trip to the woods spoiled by over anxiety.

"Perhaps you're right, Thad, and it's kind of you to bolster up my hopes like you do; but then, there is one chance, you see, that I lost that document; and I'm wondering right now what it could be. Oh! what if it was so important that my folks would suffer because I lost it? Think how I'd feel if I came home after having the time of my life up here, and found all the household stuff out on the street, and the red flag of an auctioneer telling people that the Stedman place was for sale? Whew! it makes me feel chilly all over just to think of what I may have done. Then I just say to myself that of course you delivered that letter Bumpus Stedman; you couldn't be so wrapped up in getting ready for the start on this jaunt as to just forget all about it. And now, it's too late to go back, and I've just got to worry and worry until I lose pounds every day. And perhaps, when we go back, I'll be a living skeleton, like Giraffe here. Oh! that's the worst of it. Better learn to quit callin' me Bumpus, fellers, because right soon it won't fit at all."

"Cheer up!" said Thad, "and sooner or later you're sure to remember something that Mr. Harriman said or did, when you handed him the

letter;" but poor Bumpus only shook his head sadly, and sighed again.

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### CHAPTER III. A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

"How about this for a camp site, Thad?" asked Allan, half an hour later.

"Looks fishy around here, for a fact," remarked Step Hen, just as if he knew all about such things; when, truth to tell, he had a lot to learn before he could call himself much of a woodsman.

"Wonder if there's any chance of finding that bee tree you said you was goin' to show me some time, when we got up in Maine?" spoke up Bumpus; who had managed for the time being to put his troubles out of his mind; for Thad assured him that after sleeping over it, most likely he would remember some little incident connected with his entering the bank on that last morning in Cranford, and which would prove to his satisfaction that he *must* have delivered the letter there.

"Well," said Allan, the Maine boy, "it's pretty late in the season to talk about bee trees, for I doubt if we'll find any of the little buzzers flying; and it's really necessary to have that happen in order to locate the hive; but I'm going to keep my eye open all the time, Bumpus, and try and accommodate you."

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"But just think of gettin' whole heaps of rich ripe honey!" ejaculated Giraffe, who dearly loved eating; "say, wouldn't we have flapjacks every morning then, boys, with honey to smear over them an inch thick? Um! um! take me to that bee tree as soon as you locate it, Allan, and give me an axe. I promise to cut her down, remember that."

"And I hope to hold you to that promise, Giraffe," returned the assistant patrol leader. "But what d'ye say, Thad, shall we stop here?"

"What do the guides say; how about it, Sebattis, Eli, Jim; will we be apt to pick up a mess of trout here, do you think?" and Thad turned to the bronzed Maine men, who nodded their heads, and one after the other promised that if the boys knew how to handle their rods, there should be little difficulty in securing all they wanted, for a better pool could not be found along the river.

A little side stream came into the main river with a noisy rush, falling from a ledge; and under the cascade there was a very deep place, where the trout were likely to stay until the coming of thick ice caused them to bury themselves in the mud, after the fashion of most fish, until the ice went out in the spring.

Accordingly a landing was made, and soon all was bustle, the boys working with the three guides, as became true scouts, eager to learn all the little wrinkles of life in the open.

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The tents were soon erected. There were just

two of these; and as this was apt to make it rather crowded, the guides had offered to sleep outside except on any real stormy nights. They were hardened to the weather, and thought little of such a small matter.

Of course Giraffe looked after making the fireplace, for he would not hear of anybody else having anything to do with that part of the programme. And Thad generally let the tall scout have his own way about this one matter; he fancied that it might keep Giraffe out of mischief; as well as employ his time, and save the guides considerable work.

And Giraffe certainly did extract more pleasure in making a fine cooking fire than any one Thad had ever seen. After supper was done he usually insisted on having a rousing camp-fire, around which they could sit with hands clasped about their knees; or else lie in comfortable attitudes on their several blankets, while they coaxed the guides to tell them stories of the woods, and the big animals they had come in contact with during the years spent in serving hunting parties on the trail of deer and moose.

Jim and Eli did about all the talking, for it was difficult to get Sebattis to say anything about his experiences; though every one just knew the old Indian must be "as full of thrilling yarns as an egg is of meat," as Step Hen put it.

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Thad and Allan meanwhile had taken their rods, and set to work trying to coax the shy trout to bite the bait they offered them. Both boys were good fishermen, and had had considerable experience in the ways of the speckled beauties; so that in the end they succeeded in getting a pretty mess of the trout, enough to give them a fine feast that evening.

One of the guides was set to work cleaning the fish even before the boys stopped taking them in; and about the time the sun sank out of sight in the west, a most delicious odor began to arise, that Giraffe sniffed, with his eyes glistening; for this was the first mess of trout they had caught on this expedition.

Later on the whole of them sat around the fire, and enjoyed one of the most tasty dishes ever placed before a hungry boy—fresh brook trout, rolled in cracker crumbs, and done to a turn in hot grease extracted from several pieces of salt pork.

"Only hope we get a few more chances to feast on this thing before the season's up, or the cold drives the trout into winter quarters," remarked Giraffe, as he heaved a sigh of regret because the pan was now empty—for eight hungry people it was of course necessary to use both large skillets, and even then the supply never exceeded the demand.

"But why should we bother our heads about the season, when we're away up here, and with no one to know what we're doing?" demanded Step Hen.

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"That's just it, Step Hen," replied Thad, who seemed to think the question was intended for him; "we're Boy Scouts, and when we joined the organization every one of us subscribed to certain rules, twelve in number, you remember.

Could you repeat those twelve cardinal principles of the scouts for me right now, Step Hen?"

The boy addressed turned a little red in the face; while the two Maine guides listened intently, evidently very much interested. Sebattis did not seem to pay the least attention to what was going on; though that may just have been his way. These Indian guides have a habit of hearing, when nobody expects it.

"Oh! sure, I can," Step Hen made answer, cheerfully enough.

"Then please let us hear them," continued Thad.

"Well," the scout went on to say, as if he easily knew the list by heart; "he promises to the best of his ability to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful to others, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient to his superiors, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent."

"All right, Step Hen," the scoutmaster remarked, "the great State of Maine trusts us. We've taken out licenses to shoot, up here. We're entitled to a certain number of deer, and one moose apiece. And in accepting these favors we virtually agreed to refrain from breaking the laws. Can a scout be trustworthy who deliberately breaks a law, like the killing of game, or the taking of fish out of season, when there's no real excuse for it?"

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"Well, p'raps you're right, Thad," grumbled the other, rather loth to see the point; "but s'pose now, I was lost in these here big pine woods, and hungry near to starving. I knew the season for trout was up, but it was a case of 'root hog, or die,' with poor Step Hen. Would you blame me then, if I just dropped a line to Mr. Trout and invited him to waltz into my little frying-pan?"

Thad smiled.

"There may be cases where breaking the game law is justifiable," he remarked, "and I'm not saying otherwise. I think that would be one of them. A fellow shouldn't be compelled to starve, with game around him, because certain men have decided that as a rule the laws ought to be made just so and so. But Step Hen, if he were really just to his better self, I believe that scout would, when he had reached a point of safety, go to a game warden, state the case, and offer to pay the fine, if it had to be imposed. I rather guess the great state of Maine would do the generous thing, and remit such a fine."

"Well, that lets Giraffe out, I see," remarked the still unconvinced Step Hen. "Because he's always at the starving point."

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"All the same, boys, as true scouts, I hope none of you will bring discredit on the name of the Silver Fox Patrol by doing anything that is going to get us into trouble, in case we happen to meet a game warden. For one I'd like to look him in the eye, and feel my conscience clear," and after that Thad changed the subject, with the hope that the weak member might, when he had digested all that had been said, see the thing in its best light.

"There's one thing we don't want to forget,"

Thad remarked later on, as some of the boys began to manifest a desire for a little "rough house" time.

"What's that, Thad?" asked Allan, though doubtless he could already give a fair guess as to what the reply was going to be, since he had seen signs of a frown on the forehead of the scoutmaster when the noise broke out.

"We mustn't forget," said Thad, "that right now we're on the border of the big game country, and any time we're apt to run across signs of deer and moose. Now, when hunters who know their business go into the wilderness, they don't kick up a row, and make all sorts of a racket that would tell the timid woods' folks a delegation of town people had invaded their haunts. If they did, they'd not be apt to find Mr. Moose within twenty miles. How about that, Allan?"

"You're right, Thad," replied the Maine boy, smiling. "Most of the deer hunters are what we call still hunters. They look for their game, and creep up on it from the leeward side, with the wind coming from the deer. There is no dog chasing deer allowed in the state, or in New York, any longer; so the noise and excitement is all gone. And in a noisy camp you'll find mighty few deer taken. It's the quiet, earnest fellows who succeed in getting the game up here."

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"You hear that, scouts," said Thad, pleasantly. "We want game the worst kind, as well as to overtake that gentleman who is ahead of us, and whose trail we're now following. So if you please, we'll dispense with the usual bugle blasts, and the horse play, while in camp here. Let's have a jolly good time, which I believe is possible among boys, without wrestling, and singing, and rough play. Am I right, Step Hen, Giraffe, Davy, Bumpus?"

"You are, every time, Thad," said Bumpus, and the other three were quick to take their cue; so that from this hour it seemed likely that the scouts who were for the time being playing the part of big game hunters, meant to carry out the rôle to the letter.

Jim looked at Eli, nodded his head, and winked. It was as though one guide had said to the other that Thad Brewster knew his business, all right.

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About half an hour later Step Hen was seen to be moving about in the bushes near the edge of the camp, with his head bent low. Now, every one knew what such an attitude meant when it was Step Hen who assumed it. He had lost something, as usual.

"What's gone this time, Step Hen?" asked Thad.

"That little jinx been around again, hooking your things?" demanded Giraffe, who always made all manner of fun of the careless scout whenever he complained that he was unable to find a certain thing, which he felt just sure he had laid aside only a minute before.

As usual Step Hen was simply positive that he could not have himself mislaid his property. Proven guilty on numerous previous occasions did not seem to convince the boy that he could ever do such a silly thing again. This was always a case of where some mischievous chum had

been playing a trick on him.

"Why, it's that little bundle I fetched along, with a black piece of waterproof cloth around it, torn from an old rain coat," he explained, as he continued to poke among the bushes. "It's got some things in it that I thought I'd likely need up here, in case I happened to get lost; among others, a cute little compass, an extra box of parlor matches that you just can't blow out in any wind, and some other little wrinkles."

"Sounds all to the good, Step Hen," Thad went on to remark; "and I've no doubt that if you ever did have the misfortune to get lost, while up here in Maine, that same little packet would come in mighty handy, providing you chanced to have it with you at the time. If it was in camp, why, it couldn't do you any good. But what makes you think it's gone now?"

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"I had it in my hand not ten minutes ago, and laid it carefully aside," Step Hen went on, in a whining tone as though he felt hurt; but which was doubtless only assumed for the purpose of arousing sympathy; "oh! you can grin as much as you want, Giraffe and Davy, but it's so, *this time*. I was careful as could be. And now, she's gone. I just know one of you fellers scooped that packet, and hid the same in the bushes, just to give me a rough jolt. And that's why I'm hunting for it right now."

Thad was on his feet at the time; and with a smile at the old complaint, which he had heard Step Hen make, time without end, only to find himself compelled to "eat his words," as Giraffe put it, he sauntered away, meaning to take a little look around, before turning in.

Two minutes later Step Hen gave a little gurgling cry.

"Found it?" asked Giraffe, with an interested air.

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"Just like I said was the case," came from Step Hen, in the bushes close by. "The feller that took it just gave it a flirt, and over she came, right here. What! Well, I declare that's mighty funny now," and he pushed his way into view carrying some object in his hand, at which he was staring incredulously.

"Say, that ain't your package, is it, Step Hen?" demanded Giraffe.

"I should say it wasn't;" replied the other scout; "but tell me, fellers, how in the wide world now, d'ye suppose this came in them bushes?" and he held up what seemed to be a small hand-bag of black leather, apparently weighty, and very much used.

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## CHAPTER IV. THE IGNORANCE OF STEP HEN.

All of them, guides as well as scouts, stared at the strange object which Step Hen was holding up.

"Looks like a little hand-bag of leather; but it's



been used a heap, I reckon," suggested Davy Jones.

"Just what she is," replied Step Hen, as he lowered the article; and something in his manner of doing this impelled Giraffe to remark:

"Reckon she must be kinder heavy, Step Hen?"

"Heft it for yourself, and see," replied the other, as Giraffe came to his side.

"Whew! I should say, yes!" declared the tall member of the patrol, as he lifted the old black hand-bag, and held it out in a horizontal position for a few seconds. "All of five pounds there, if there's a single one. Now, what d'ye suppose is in that thing?"

"And how did it ever come in them bushes; that's what gets me?" queried Step Hen, staring at the bag, which he had taken again, as though half inclined to suspect that the mischievous little jinx, whom Giraffe always said played these mean tricks on him, might possess the power to change his black package into this weatherbeaten little bag.

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"Oh! it's old, you c'n see," remarked Giraffe, carelessly. "P'raps the hunter that carried it up here got sick of his bargain; and slipping a few rocks inside, to weigh it down, he just gave her a heave out of sight."

"Think so?" remarked Step Hen. "Well, anyhow, it don't look a bit like that lost package of mine, does it?"

"Suppose you open it up," suggested Allan; "it might be you'd find your missing things inside."

Doubtless he only said this in a spirit of fun, in order to hasten Step Hen; but the other took it seriously.

"Now, however in the wide world would my packet come in here, Allan?" he asked. "None of the boys ever set eyes on this bag before, have you, fellers?"

Giraffe, Davy, and Bumpus thereupon solemnly raised, each one his right hand, and declared that to the best of their knowledge and belief they had never glimpsed that same bag until their comrade carried it out of the bushes.

"Now, open her up, Step Hen, and let's see the kind of rocks it's got inside," Giraffe demanded.

Whereupon Step Hen proceeded to cautiously test the catch of the bag. Finding that it would give readily, he pressed it further, and then drew back the jaws of the leather receptacle.

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"Rocks?" he ejaculated, scornfully, just as if he had never taken the least stock in that far-fetched theory himself; "what d'ye call that, fellers?"

He had thrust in a hand, and was now holding something aloft. The dancing light from the campfire shone upon the object, which seemed to glisten like polished steel.

Immediately Giraffe set up a laugh.

"Well, I declare, fellers," he remarked, "some

poor old carpenter's gone and lost his kit of tools. Shows that Step Hen ain't the only loony wanderin' about in these here pine woods, droppin' his things around loose, and then forgettin' where he put 'em. And to think it should be the same sort of one that found these tools. Ain't that a queer case, though?"

"Carpenter's tools," Step Hen went on, indignantly, as he held up a second, and then other articles, which he took from the bag; "did you ever watch a carpenter at work, Giraffe; and did you ever see him use tools like them? If you did, then believe me, that feller ought to a been in the lock-up, that's what."

"Lock-up!" repeated Giraffe after him, and he stared at Step Hen as though he believed the other might be trying to play some sort of a joke.

"That's right, in the lock-up," the other scout went on, firmly. "When I was down to New York with my dad last year, he had to see the Police Commissioner about a little business; and they were old friends too. I went along, and sat there in one of the offices nigh an hour. To amuse myself, I examined the heaps of queer things they had there, which I reckoned had been taken from all sorts of crooks that'd been arrested for years. And in the lot I saw some tools mighty like these, boys!"

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"Wow, and again I say, wow!" murmured Giraffe.

"Thieves' tools, hey?" grunted Bumpus, pushing forward to handle some of the shiny articles himself. "P'raps now, one of these here might be what they call a jimmy, and another a centerbit. I always used to read about such things in every story in the papers of a burglary down in the city."

Davy also wanted to examine the things at close range, and so they were passed around. Even the two guides seemed to take a deep interest in the contents of the little old black bag; and for several minutes a buzz followed, as each voiced his opinion concerning the merits of the tools to accomplish such a job as breaking into a strong box of a bank.

"But just stop and think," remarked Step Hen, presently, "how far this is from any town where these fellers could use their tools. No wonder they hid 'em in the bushes right here. The only thing they could expect to break into up here would be the game laws."

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"Or the river," suggested Giraffe, with a sly glance toward Bumpus, who flashed him back a scornful look.

"My opinion is, fellows," observed Allan, who thus far had not taken any part in the earnest discussion, "that these things might never have been lost at all."

"Oh! then you think they hid 'em here?" asked Step Hen.

"Either that, or else just tossed them away, to get rid of carrying such a heavy package any longer," the Maine boy went on. "Such men would never come up here to camp out, or to hunt. Only one thing would be apt to tempt them

to dive into the woods like this; they expected to be hunted, and are on the way to the Canada border as fast as they can pack."

Somehow, the idea seemed to please the rest of the scouts; and even Jim and Eli nodded their heads, as though they quite agreed with Allan, after he had evolved the suggestion, which likely enough would have never occurred to them.

"Say, d'ye suppose, now," Giraffe asked, "that these jail birds could have cracked a crib before they took to the woods?"

"Well, just as like as not," answered Allan; "though we can't tell that so easy. They must have tried to get away with some loot, though, and found the officers hot after them. So, to escape being caught they've taken to the woods."

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"But that might be jumpin' from the frying-pan into the fire," Davy declared. "If they happened to be greenhorns, now, it'd be apt to go hard with 'em up here, with the winter comin' on, p'raps no blankets along, and only a little grub. Huh! they might even wish they'd let the officers ketch 'em. Three meals, such as they are in jail, are better than nothin' to eat in the wilderness."

"Oh!" Allan went on to say, "the chances are, they had a fellow along who knew more or less about what to do in the woods, and what not to do; because you see, they seemed to get up this far all right."

"What if there was a big reward out for their capture, and we managed to crowd the bunch to the wall?" suggested Bumpus, enviously. "Say, we'd be fixed then for a lot more of outings, wouldn't we, fellers?"

Allan laughed. It was so strange to hear Bumpus, usually the most peaceable of the entire patrol, speak in so fierce a tone.

"You don't stop to mention what these desperate chaps would be doing all that time, Bumpus," he remarked, drily. "There must be two of them, perhaps more; and it stands to reason that they're hard cases, ready to fight at the drop of the hat. I guess we'll have to just attend to our own affairs, and let the sheriff look after these jail birds."

[37]

"But if we happened to run foul of them, wouldn't we be doin' the right thing to try and grab the lot?" demanded Bumpus, loth to admit defeat when he had been conjuring up a bright idea.

"Certainly, if it could be done without too much risk," replied the assistant scoutmaster, readily enough. "Such men are outlaws to society, and it's the duty and privilege, I've heard my father say, of all honest persons to capture them, in case the chance comes along."

"We've got a rifle or a shotgun apiece; and each of the guides is provided with his gun too, so we ought to turn the trick easy enough," Bumpus continued. "Eight determined men against two, or p'raps three, you see. They may be tough characters, when they're in cities, but I just bet you now their old knees knock together if they saw a row of eight firearms all aimin' at their

heads. That's talkin' some."

"I should say it was, from you, Bumpus," remarked Allan; "but don't get too anxious to come to close quarters with these men. I can give a guess what they're like. I've seen what they call yeggs before now, roving burglars who play the part of tramps, so as to get a chance to look country banks over, and break in some dark night, when the town people are sound asleep. And I want to tell you, boys, I don't like the breed. If I have my choice I'm going to mind my own business, and let the law officers attend to theirs."

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"And," broke in Davy Jones, "up here our business is first of all following the trail of Mr. Carson and his two guides; and after that, to get just as much hunting of the big game as we can."

"What you going to do with all these clever little tools, Step Hen?" asked Giraffe. "I hope now, you don't expect to tote 'em along with you? If they turned out too heavy for the fleeing yeggmen to keep, think of how you'll suffer. Better give 'em a heave into the bushes again, and say good-bye. They might get you into a peck of trouble, boy."

"Oh! I don't know," remarked Step Hen, "I'll keep the bag till mornin' anyhow, an' then let Thad say whether we want to pick out a few of these things, just to remember the affair by."

He laid the numerous tools in a heap beside him, and then turned the old hand-bag over, as though meaning to clean it out before replacing the contents.

"Hello! what's this?" he exclaimed; "Oh! I thought at first it was another tool; but seems like it's only an old stick of dirty gray mud. Queer how that could a got in this bag, ain't it? Whatever did them yeggmen want carryin' hard mud around with 'em, I wonder?"

He drew his hand back, evidently with the intention of throwing the article into the blaze, when a hand clutched his wrist, and the voice of Thad, a bit husky, sounded close to his ear:

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"Hold on! don't you think of tossing that into the fire, Step Hen! Why, are you crazy? Didn't you ever see such a thing before in your life. No wonder Allan, there, was nearly scared to death when he saw what you meant to do; because Step Hen, this stick of innocent mud, as you called it, is really dynamite!"

Step Hen weakly allowed his hand to open, and the scoutmaster possessed himself of the deadly four-inch stick of explosive.

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## CHAPTER V. THE TELL-TALE TRACKS.

"Dynamite!" echoed Giraffe as his face blanched. "And the silly was just goin' to give it a heave into the fire. Great governor! what would have happened to the Silver Fox Patrol if he had?"

"Please don't mention it, Giraffe," said poor Step Hen, weakly, "However was I to know what it was, when I hadn't ever seen such a thing before in all my life?"

"Well," remarked Thad, grimly, "that's the time you should have remembered that a scout must always be prepared to think for himself, and observe too. I heard something of what was said as I stood here, watching. You had guessed easily enough that these were the tools with which bank burglars break into safes. And since you read the papers, Step Hen, you must surely know that they often use dynamite to burst open the lock of a safe. You never stopped to think, that's the trouble. All you had to do would be to say to yourself, 'now, what would thieves be likely to have this for, because it must enter into their business?' and the chances were ten to one you'd have guessed it, right away. Think twice after this, Step Hen, before you do a rash thing like that."

The scoutmaster spoke more sternly than was his wont when dealing with those who were under his charge; because he had been horrified and thrilled when he realized the terrible danger that hovered over them all, should Step Hen manage to give the innocent looking stick a toss into the fire, before he could leap alongside, and stay his arm.

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Perhaps the dynamite might not have exploded before he could with a frantic effort dislodge it from the burning brands; but the chances of its going off were legion, and he could never afterwards think of the incident without a shudder.

"I'll try and remember, Thad," said Step Hen, meekly, for he was shivering now, because of the narrow escape he and his chums had had.

Thad, on his part, carefully placed the dangerous explosive in the crotch of a tree near by, where it could do no harm.

"We'd better bury it in the morning, to get rid of it," he observed, as he sat down to examine the odd looking assortment of little tools, for himself.

The others gathered around, curious to hear what Thad's opinion might be; for they were used to setting considerable store by his decisions on any subject.

"How d'ye s'pose now, Thad," remarked Giraffe, to draw the other out, "these fellers just came to stop over here, in the identical place we chose for a camp? That what's getting me."

[42]

"Oh that's easy," replied the other, with a little laugh. "We seemed to strike this place by accident; but I reckon that if you asked Eli or Jim here about it, they'd be apt to tell you it's an old camping spot. How about it, men?"

"Be'n here often with parties," replied the older guide, promptly. "Seen hundreds o' fine trout jerked outen thet pool over there."

"Me tew," declared Jim, grinning broadly at finding how smart this boy seemed to be.

"There you are, Giraffe," Thad went on to say,

turning once more to the scout. "Perhaps, as somebody said only a little while back, this leader of the sprinting yeggmen has himself been camping here one or more times in the past, and he knows the trails of the woods around here. Why, there's a pretty good chance that Mr. Carson himself stopped here over night, something like a week or less ago."

"But he didn't find that bag, nor his guides either," remarked Step Hen, with a little show of pride; as though he believed he ought to at least have a small amount of credit for bringing the thing to light.

"For a good reason," Thad went on; "because it wasn't in the bushes when Mr. Carson came along this way."

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"You think, then, that the fellers who owned these things must have been here after Mr. Carson was, do you, Thad?" Davy Jones asked.

"I've a good notion that way," the scoutmaster replied; "and we're going to prove it, presently. There are lots of ways to do that, you'll find; and if Allan and I happen to fall down, why, we'll call on Sebattis here to show us. Allan tells me that an Indian can read signs just like you would print, Davy."

"Like to see him try it, then," muttered the scout, casting a side glance toward the silent Penobscot brave, who was sitting there watching them, and never so much as opening his mouth, or betraying any particular interest, though he must have heard every word that had been spoken thus far.

"After we've had a hack at it, we may," Thad admitted. "You know Allan is up to some of these things, and we ought to give him a show before calling in outside talent; isn't that so, boys?"

"Sure it is," cried Bumpus; "and it's my private opinion, publicly expressed, that our comrade can deliver the goods too. Give Allan a square deal. Let him 'mosey' around, and say what he thinks. Then we'll ask the guides to prove it. That's the ticket, fellers. An' he can't begin any too soon to satisfy my bump of curiosity. They do say at my house I'm a reg'lar old woman for wantin' to know; and I must acknowledge the corn all right. Won't you get busy, Allan, and relieve a sufferin' public?"

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Thus appealed to, the Maine boy could not resist. "Of course I'm not saying I can tell you all that either of these guides might—not to mention Sebattis here," he remarked, "but I'll do the best I can."

"Reckon that's about nigh all anybody can do," observed Giraffe, also getting to his feet; for he was more or less interested in any demonstration of woodcraft that applied to Boy Scout knowledge.

"Of course I know what the footprint of every one of us looks like, even to our guides," began Allan; "because I've made it my business to keep my eyes around. And the first thing I'm going to do is to find out if there is any track here different from ours. If I find that, I'll be pretty sure it was made by others who camped here within the last night or two."

"But why do you say that?" demanded Bumpus, eagerly. "What if Mr. Carson did stop here five, six or even seven nights ago; you might run on his track, you know."

"If I did, I'd know it," replied Allan; "not that I've even set eyes on the print of his hunting shoe or boot, if he wears such, instead of moccasins; but stop and remember, Bumpus we had a heavy rain day before yesterday that must have passed over this section as well as where we struck it. After that it turned cold."

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"Oh! I forgot all about that," admitted the other scout, looking foolish. "Why, of course, that same rain would have washed out the footprints of anybody who had camped here as long ago as four or five nights. That's right Allan."

"If it didn't exactly wash the footprints out, it would make them look faint; and a trailer would soon know they were old. Now let me take a turn around, and do the rest of you sit quiet here, till I call out that I've found something."

He took a blazing brand from the fire, and began to move around the outskirts of the camp, beyond the tents and the glow of the fire.

"Why does he go so far away?" asked Bumpus.

"Because we've been walking around here so much that all chance of making any discovery would be lost," replied Thad; "and out there he may stand a show. There, I can see him stoop down lower, and I wouldn't be surprised if he'd hit a footprint right away."

The others all craned their necks in order to see what Allan was doing; and of course Giraffe had them left far in the lurch when it came to this, on account of his being gifted by a bountiful Nature with such an exceedingly long ostrich like appendage below his head.

"Yes, he's sure struck something," Giraffe declared, as though anxious to show what an advantage it was sometimes to be the possessor of a neck that was longer than any of the others.

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"There, he's beckoning to us to come on over, fellers!" exclaimed Bumpus, as he tried to leap to his feet; but, owing to his weight, this was never an easy thing for him, and he did not refuse the helping hand Thad stretched out.

So they joined Allan, as he stood there, holding his torch near the ground.

"What you found?" asked Giraffe, as they came up.

"Here's a print, all right, that seems altogether different from any of ours. I can show you that the shoe has been patched across the toe, and none of ours has such a mark. It's a fresh print too, and that means the man who made it must have been here since that rain storm. Is that clear enough for you, boys?"

"It's a cinch, that's what, Allan. Why, I'm only a tenderfoot scout, but I can understand that much. And I'm real glad to know it, too. We want to take a good look at that shoe print, fellers; p'raps we might want to know it again sometime."

Step Hen as he said this threw himself down on the ground, and seemed to be making a mental photograph of the impression.

"How d'ye reckon they got here, Allan; by boat, or through the woods direct?" asked Thad, as though he had himself been pondering over that question, without being able to connect, as yet.

[47]

"Let's take a look along the edge of the river," remarked the Maine boy. "If so be they had a canoe, we ought to be able to see where it was pulled up on the little beach down here. Such a mark would stay a long time unless the water rose, and I don't think that happened here, not over half a foot, anyhow."

So once more they walked after Allan, who was soon examining the shore close to the edge of the water.

"There's a mark you can all see, that looks as if a boat had been pulled up, but it's old and faint. The rain has nearly washed it out. Do any of you glimpse signs of another scratch that's fresher?"

Allan's purpose, of course, was to make his chums think they were having a hand in the search. Then, when telling the story afterwards, they could say "when *we* had hunted all along the shore, and didn't find any fresh sign, we knew that the yeggs must sure have walked all the way through the woods."

There was a little hustle as Giraffe, Davy, Step Hen and Bumpus all endeavored to earn the right to include themselves in the affair; after which they united in declaring that no further signs lay along the little beach.

"Well, we've settled that part of it pretty cleverly, I guess," Thad declared, as he smiled at Allan.

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"It was one of the easiest jobs I ever tackled," declared the other.

"Wonder which way they went when they left here?" Bumpus remarked.

"Now, just don't bother your head about that, Bumpus," said Step Hen. "You're letting your envious mind think of that fat reward again; but you'd better forget it, Thad says."

"Oh! if they were making toward the Canada border," observed Allan, "why, of course they headed north after leaving here."

"And so are we," was all Bumpus allowed himself to say in reply; but the look he gave Step Hen was sufficient to announce that he did not mean to wholly relinquish all idea that somehow, some time, they might yet run across the fugitives, and be able to capture them handsomely.

The boys started back to the fire. Some of them were even settled down close to the cheerful blaze, warming themselves, and ready to talk some more about the strange thing that had happened. Bumpus was kicking his toe into the earth, as if some object had attracted his attention. All at once he swooped down, and then gave utterance to an excited ejaculation.

"Looky at what I got, fellers!" he exclaimed



hurrying up to the fire.

"Money, real hard money!" cried Step Hen, enviously. "Where'd you dig that up, Bumpus? Say, p'raps there's more like it buried there. Mebbe we'll strike a gold mine, and go home millionaires, every one."

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For Bumpus was holding a bright new five dollar gold piece in his hand, at which they all stared with more or less delight.

"I saw it shinin' and gave a little kick at the place, thinkin' it might be a piece of glass, or some old tin cut off a can. Then it broke loose from the frozen dirt, and I saw this little beauty," Bumpus was saying, in rapture.

"Easy money!" grunted Giraffe, enviously; while Step Hen darted over to see if he might not be as lucky, though only to meet with bitter disappointment.

"That seems to settle one thing, boys," remarked Thad. "Those rascals did rob a bank before they took to the woods. And the stuff they got was so heavy to carry, they just had to throw away their tools here. That looks plain enough, don't it?"

All of them agreed that it did sound very much that way. Indeed, Davy Jones remarked that he considered them very sensible men, because he himself would only too gladly get rid of some old steel tools, if he had a chance to carry a bag of gold coins along.

Ten minutes later, as they were talking and laughing there, never thinking how late the hour was getting, and that they ought to be seeking their blankets under the shelter of the two tents, Sebattis was seen to quietly reach out his hand, and pick up his gun, after which he slipped away.

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The boys exchanged glances, but made no remark. Another ten minutes passed by, when there came a startling interruption to the peaceful quiet of the camp. From some point near by a harsh voice suddenly sounded, thrilling the scouts as they could seldom remember being shaken:

"Throw up your hands, there, every one of you, and see that you keep 'em raised, if you know what's good for you!"

And at the same moment three men issued from the recesses of the woods, and advanced toward them, all of whom held leveled guns in their hands.

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## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **A SHERIFF'S POSSE.**

Of course everybody did as they were told; and when they afterwards exchanged opinions regarding the ridiculous character of the picture they must have made, with six boys and two men trying to see who could elevate his hands the highest, they must always laugh until the tears rolled down their cheeks.

Somehow all of the scouts just took it for granted that these three advancing parties must surely be the men of whom they had been talking, the fleeing desperate rascals who had lately robbed a bank, and were trying to make the border so that they might cross over into Canada, from which territory they would be able to make faces at any pursuers.

But Thad, as he began to see the newcomers better, when they drew nearer the fire, felt relieved. An idea started to flit through his active brain, to the effect that after all they might not be the thieves, come back for some purpose, perhaps to recover possession of the little, old, black tool-bag.

"Now," called out the tall man who was in the lead, and who seemed to be in authority, "we know you're tough cases, and we don't mean to give any one of you a chance to play a game on us; so my men will keep you all covered, while I go the rounds, and put the irons on."

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"Wow!" exclaimed Giraffe, his eyes looking as round as saucers, when he heard this remark on the part of the supposed terrible yeggman.

"Please go a little slow about that, Mr. Sheriff!" called out Thad. "If you look again, I'm sure you'll discover that six of us are only boys, and that we belong to a troop of scouts. We're up here on the track of a Mr. James W. Carson, who is in the woods, with two guides. It is of great importance that I find him, as I am bearing a communication that means a heap to both Mr. Carson and my guardian. As for these two men here, they are our guides, Jim Hasty and Eli Crookes. I guess you ought to know them both, sir. And there's another, Sebattis, who is right behind you, gun in hand, ready to hold you up if you try to do us any harm."

The tall man whom Thad had rightly guessed to be the sheriff in chase after the burglars who were fleeing toward the border, gave another look, and then burst into a loud shout.

"That's one on us, all right, young fellow," he remarked. "We wondered why under the sun our birds had started to hobnob with a crowd of Boy Scouts; but you never can tell what's what, when you're dealing with such sharp customers, and we didn't mean to take any chances. It's all right, men, you needn't handle those guns as if you meant to shoot, any longer. These parties are all right. But what I do want to know is, how came you by that?"

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He pointed as he spoke at the old tool-bag that was lying beside Step Hen; and evidently he must have recognized it, or else suspected what it contained.

"That's mine—er, I mean to say I found the same in the bushes here, when I was huntin' something I lost," and Step Hen held up a little packet secured in waterproof cloth, which he had evidently since discovered, just where he formerly laid it down.

"We opened the bag, and guessed that the tools must have been thrown away by some yeggmen who were making a bolt across country for the Canada border," remarked Thad, as the three officers sat down close to the fire to warm their

hands.

"And that's just what's what," responded the sheriff, nodding as he examined the contents of the bag. "We hope to get 'em in time, because it means a cool thousand to us, perhaps more, because the reward may have been doubled after we hit the woods. Sometimes we've been hot on the track, and then again they'd give us the slip, and we'd lose ground. I've often wished we had dogs along; but they're hard to find; and people, somehow, don't like to see dogs up here, since the law put a ban on deer hounding."

"I'd like to keep just one of them tools, to remember my find by, if you didn't have any objection," suggested Step Hen anxiously.

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"You can keep the whole bunch if you like, son," answered the sheriff; "we don't need any such evidence against these birds, if only we can ketch 'em. They're carrying all the evidence we want, in the shape of the entire capital of the bank they looted so slick."

"I suppose they broke open the safe in the usual way, with dynamite?" Thad remarked, quietly.

"Just what they did, though how you guessed it I don't see," the sheriff replied.

"We found something in the bag that told us that," and Thad, as he spoke, stepped over to the tree, in the crotch of which he had placed the stick of dynamite.

Step Hen turned red in the face as he heard the story told of how he had just been about to throw the unknown substance into the fire when prevented. The lengthy sheriff looked reproachfully toward him, and remarked, mildly:

"You want to go slow, my boy, about handling things that you never saw before. I wouldn't like to say what would have happened to the lot of you, once this dropped into that red-hot fire. Many a fool miner has been blown to atoms because he tried to dry damp dynamite out in an oven, and let it get too hot. Better ask yourself a few questions before you go to trying tricks with strange things."

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"Will you spend the night with us, Mr. Sheriff?" asked Thad, thinking that they ought to appear hospitable, as every one who goes into the great timber should be.

Besides, he rather fancied this Maine sheriff, and believed that a session in his company alongside the blazing camp-fire, would be both pleasant and profitable, as doubtless the officer could relate many things of interest to the scouts.

But the other shook his head.

"Sorry, but when we're as close to the heels of our game as this, we must keep on the move. It requires considerable hustling to run down such a lively set as those three yeggs. And Charley Barnes, he know his business up here in the wood, all right. They've led us a lively chase up to now; but the longer we're held off, the more determined we become to follow them, night and day, till we bring the lot to bay. They've got mighty little grub along, and we don't want to let

'em have any time to hunt. Then perhaps hunger will help us out."

"But if you're going on right away," said Allan, "perhaps you'd let us make you some hot coffee, Mr. Green?"

The sheriff looked keenly at him, and then held out a hand.

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"Seemed like thar was somethin' kinder familiar about your make-up," he said; "now I know you, Allan Hollister. How's the dad, and the little lady you call mother? I remember her well; and you too, as a boy who loved to hunt and fish as well as any lad in all Penobscot county."

"My father is dead, Mr. Green; but mother is fairly well," replied the boy, with a sad tone to his voice. "We are not living in Maine any longer, but down in New York state, where all these other scouts belong. But will you drink that coffee, if we make a pot for you?"

The sheriff saw that Allan did not seem inclined to say anything more about his own family; and so he allowed the subject to drop. But he did look inquiringly at his two husky deputies, who gave him affirmative as well as eager nods.

"Just please yourselves, young fellows," he remarked. "My men look a bit peaked, because we've been hitting it up at quite a warm pace; and I guess now, they'd enjoy a hot cup right smart. I confess I wouldn't object myself, seeing that you're so pressing."

The coffee pot was quickly clapped on the red coals, and would soon be sending out a fragrant odor. Thad meanwhile stated to converse with the officer, and by asking a few questions learned something concerning the robbery, of which the three fleeing tramp burglars had been guilty.

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According to the sheriff, they were all hard characters, and had served time in various jails, for other crimes.

"If by chance you did run across the lot," he observed; "you'd better look sharp, for they wouldn't hesitate at anything, if they thought there was any fear of being held up. Remember that, boys, and govern yourselves accordingly."

"Which I take it," observed the listening Bumpus, "to mean, that we had ought to get them covered first, if we run up against the crowd."

"Just what it does, and look out for tricks. That Charley, he's as full of sly games as an egg is of meat. H'm! that does smell prime, son. What, condensed milk along with you, too, and sugar. I must say we struck a snap when we saw your fire here, after heading for this old campground. That tastes like nectar, let me tell you: and warms a fellow up inside better than any strong drink could ever do."

"Glad you like it," said Thad; "and we all of us hope you come up with those three tramp burglars, and gather them in."

After drinking several cups of the coffee apiece, the sheriff and his posse of two deputies declared that they ought to be going.

"We've got a pretty good hunch as to where they struck for after leaving here," remarked the officer, as he shook hands all around, not forgetting the silent Indian guide; "and if they only stop over a day, so's to get some game, why, we expect to surprise them right smart. Good-bye, boys and good luck. If so be we run across Mr. Carson, whom I happen to know, why, we'll tell him you're on his trail."

Waving his hand to them, the sheriff walked quickly away, followed by his two men. And they were heading due north the last the scouts saw of them.

"Wonder if they'll overtake that active bunch; or will the yeggs get across the line as they're planning to do?" Giraffe ventured, as they sat there, talking over this latest development in the affair, though one or two of the scouts began to yawn every minute or so, and rub their eyes, as though growing sleepy.

"Nobody can tell," Thad remarked; "but that Sheriff Green bears all the earmarks of an officer who generally get what he goes after."

"That's what they say about him," Allan put in; for he had not been talking with the rest; something which the sheriff had said, possibly when asking after his father, had caused the boy to think of things that had happened in the past, which apparently could not be apt to give him joy.

By degrees the scouts sought their blankets under the canvas. Thad and Allan were the last to crawl in. The guides had made themselves comfortable near the fire, having blankets with them; and the boys noticed how they all made sure to keep their feet toward the blaze when selecting places for the night. It was the woodsman's way, because the feet are the first part of the body to feel cold, when, during sleep, the blood fails to circulate as thoroughly as when one is awake, since the heart slackens its functions, in order to get rested for the next day's labor.

Finally all was quiet. The night wind crooned among the trees; an owl hooted to its mate; but the scouts all slept calmly, with not a fear of danger.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **THE BIRCH BARK CHALLENGE.**

"Eli says we're now in the big game country, fellows!"

Giraffe was rubbing at his gun when he made this remark. They sat about a fire among the pines that bordered the river; and another day had elapsed since we last saw them in camp, at the time of the visit made by the Maine sheriff, and his posse.

"That sounds good to me," Step Hen observed. "Now, as for myself, I never claimed to be great shakes at doing any hunting; but all the same, I

feel a longing to see a great moose standing up before me while I proceed to bore him through and through with my trusty rifle.”

Giraffe laughed scornfully as he continued to rub away with a rag he had greased with vaseline.

“You just take it from me, son, though I’m not a great woodsman myself, that if you ever do shoot that popgun of yours at a full grown moose, the quicker you shin up a good tree, the better. For if you delay, he’s going to help you with his horns.”

“Popgun, nothing,” remonstrated Step Hen; “now, I’d just like to know what you mean by that? I took advice before I had my dad buy me that gun. It was Allan here who told me the good points about it. Just because you carry one of those old-fashioned, big-bore rifles, that carry half a pound of lead, more or less, you think a light thirty-thirty gun is a plaything. But, my friend, investigate, and you’ll discover that it all lies in the ammunition you use, not the bore of the gun. Ain’t that a fact, Thad?”

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“It certainly is,” replied the other; “and I’ll prove it when I borrow that new repeating rifle of yours, Step Hen, to try and bring down my moose—when I get a chance to strike one.”

“Huh! don’t see how you make that out,” grumbled Giraffe. “This here gun is one of the hardest hitters ever made. It is some hefty, I admit; and in a long jaunt you’d come off much better than me, Step Hen. But what harm could your little pea-shooter do against a big black bear, or a savage moose, not to speak of a panther, or a wolf?”

“Looky here, and I’ll show you, old scoffer,” replied Step Hen. “Just take note of the cartridge that goes in the magazine of my rifle. Do you see how extra long it is, and how the powder chamber swells much larger than the end that holds the bullet? Well, the power is all there. But that ain’t all, not by a long sight.”

“Go on!” said Giraffe, fretfully, as the other paused, dramatically.

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“Well, this is what they call a soft-nosed bullet. They’ve tried to prevent the use of them in war, because they are so terrible in their results. When it strikes even the flesh of a deer, it mushrooms out till it makes a larger hole even than your big bore. Yes, and if you asked Eli there, he’d be likely to tell you that if he *had* to choose between the two, he’d much prefer being hit by a bullet from your old elephant gun, to one from my pea-shooter, as you call it. That’s all.”

Giraffe listened, and frowned. He may have tried to look as though he did not believe half he heard; but apparently he had lost considerable interest in his own heavy artillery, for he was seen to quietly lay it down immediately afterwards.

“And Sebattis has promised to show me how he makes what he calls a ‘moose-call,’” remarked Bumpus, proudly; “being a strip of birch bark, curled up in a peculiar way like a long cornucopia; and through this the hunter can coax an old bull to come near enough to give

him a shot. P'raps now, he'll even let us hear what it sounds like."

"Bully!" exclaimed Davy Jones; "I've always wanted to know what that could be like, when I've read about men calling the moose. Does he come to have a fight, Eli?"

"I guess that's jest what he does," replied the older guide, who was smoking his pipe contentedly by the fire, all duties for the day having been closed up.

"Then that must have been why Sebattis stripped that bark from the birch tree after we landed this afternoon," remarked Step Hen. "I wondered whether he meant to write on it, the way you told us the Indians did, Allan; making pictures where white men would have letters, and drawing the story out. There he goes now, starting to make the horn, I guess."

"This is mighty pleasant up here, fellows," said Thad, as he glanced around; "all of you look perfectly happy, as though not a single care rested on your minds."

Bumpus immediately shivered, as though that reminded him he ought to be ashamed of himself to be enjoying such things, with heartless disregard concerning the dreadful happenings that, for aught he knew, were taking place at his home.

"Ah!" he remarked, with a big sigh; "I wonder where they all are to-night. And I certainly hope from the bottom of my heart, my poor father and mother, and all my brothers and sisters ain't a-sittin' on the curb, without a place to sleep in. What if that foolish forgetfulness was the cause of it all? I'll never be happy again, boys, never once!"

"Oh! there he goes again on that same old racket!" exclaimed Giraffe; who did not appear to feel the slightest sympathy for his afflicted comrade, simply, because he would not believe there could be any reason for the dire forebodings of Bumpus. "Now, if we only had a wireless outfit along, and Bumpus, here, could get in direct touch with his folks, I reckon they'd give him the merry laugh because he's been so silly about that old letter. Why, chances are, it wasn't anything much, after all. Perhaps your dad wanted to ask his friend the cashier of the bank to drop around that evening, and have a game of billiards at your house. Do please forget it; or anyway bury your troubles deep down in your own bosom, Bumpus; because, if you keep on frettin' and moanin' like you've been doing, the chances are you'll spoil this outing for the rest of us."

"Well," remarked Bumpus, indignantly; "guess if you happened to be in the same fix that bothers me, you'd moan and groan too."

"Oh! I've got troubles of my own, let me tell you," continued Giraffe; "all of us have. There's Step Hen, he's wondering what we're going to have to eat if we clean out all we fetched along, and the game keeps some shy; Davy's been uneasy this long time, ever since, in fact, he fell into the camp-fire from the limb of a tree, where he was hangin' by his toes when the rotten thing broke under him; Bumpus, you yourself are over

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your head in a sea of troubles; or you were a short time back, when you took that header over the end of the canoe, into the river. We all have 'em, old fellow; but we don't go around whinin', and tellin' every one. Do close up. There, looks like Sebattis is satisfied with the shape of the horn he's made. Let's take a squint at it, please."

The birch bark trumpet was passed around for examination. No one knew better how to manufacture the simple but effective moose call than the Penobscot. Even such an old and experienced guide as the Maine woodsman, Eli Crookes, was ready to admit that Sebattis stood in a class all by himself, when it came to enticing the wary but belligerent moose to approach, by means of insidious calls upon the crude horn, that breathed defiance one minute, and enticing sounds the next.

"See if you can make it go," suggested Step Hen.

Accordingly Thad, who had it in his hands at the time, placed it to his mouth. He puffed his cheeks out, and Bumpus hastened to clap both hands over his ears, as though he expected to hear a strident blast, such as the old-time Highland chiefs were accustomed to making when they wanted their clans to appear, and attack the hated English from south of the border.

But it was wonderful what a miserably soft noise followed all these efforts on the part of Thad. He had never touched a moose call before, and did not have the knack of extracting anything like a bellow from the innocent-looking device.

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There was a general laugh at his inability to make use of the call; even the two Maine guides joining in, though the result was nothing more nor less than had been expected on their part. It requires long practice to know just how to pucker up the lips, and send the wind whistling through the bark tube that becomes larger at the further end, until it resembles a megaphone.

So Thad turned it over to Step Hen. That worthy did his level best, and was only able to extract a miserable squeak that made Bumpus chuckle.

"Just try it yourself, and see," said Step Hen, thrusting the call into the chubby hands of the stout scout.

And so Bumpus, feeling confident that he could at least excel the last attempt, since he was the bugler of the troop, and could play on any sort of instrument, took the call. He grew so red in the face with trying to send forth a clarion note, that some of the boys feared he would break a blood vessel. But not even a grunt followed. The horn refused to show any of its good qualities, even when a master hand at the bugle took hold.

Then Giraffe was induced to try, and with no better success than had attended Step Hen's attempt.

"I don't believe the old thing can make a noise at all!" declared Bumpus, aggressively.

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"Suppose you ask Sebattis to show you," suggested Allan; who might have done it himself fairly well, but did not wish to spoil the work of the Indian.



Accordingly, the dark-faced guide, without showing the slightest interest in the matter, took the roll of birch bark, and placed it carelessly to his lips. What the boys listened to then, was a revelation to them. At first, the sound seemed like several troubled grunts, and Bumpus was grinning with the expectation that it was going to prove to be a rank failure, when the call grew louder and more insistent, until it seemed to roll up against the mountain far away on the other side of the river like a burst of thunder; or in great waves of sound. Then it grew softer again, and finally wound up with another tremendous volume that seemed to make the very air vibrate.

After Sebattis took the call down from his lips the echoes swung back and forth from one side of the river to the other, gradually dying away in the far distance.

"My! but that was simply great!" ejaculated the entranced Step Hen.

"Never heard anything to equal it in all my life; and such a queer whoop too!" declared Giraffe.

"Look at Sebattis; what's he sitting up that way for?" cried Davy Jones.

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"Seems to be listening, fellers! Oh! I wonder what he's heard? Is that an echo that comes stealing back from up-river way?" and Bumpus half started to clamber to his feet.

Then the six scouts remained motionless, as, with their ears on the alert for the faintest sounds, they heard an increasing answering call come stealing through the night air.

Thad reached out his hand toward where Step Hen had rested his new magazine rifle against a neighboring tree. He guessed instantly what it meant. There was no echo about that thrilling sound! Sebattis had sent out a challenge, and it must have reached the ears of a real bull moose that chanced to be within hearing; and this swelling roar that they were listening to now was his sturdy response.

Yes, it was surely a genuine moose that had answered the call; and no doubt he was even at that very minute lumbering along over the pine-covered slope, eager to accept the challenge that breathed in that strange medley of sounds!

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## **CHAPTER VIII. OUT FOR BIG GAME.**

"Whew! so that's a moose, is it?" gasped Giraffe, being the first to break the tense silence that had fallen upon the campers.

"What a queer old sound," almost whispered Bumpus. "My stars! but I guess he's most as big as our old red barn at home. Is he heading this way, Sebattis, Eli, Jim?"

Bumpus cast a despairing look around him while saying this. Thad had an idea he must be trying to pick out a desirable tree which he could

"shinny up" in case the moose raided the camp; for owing to his build Bumpus was not so good at climbing as some others, Giraffe or Davy Jones for instance.

"Just now that's what the ole duffer, he's a-doin'," replied Eli; while the Indian guide only nodded his head, being a man of few words usually.

"Who's goin' to tackle him?" demanded Step Hen. "Now, don't you fellers all look at *me*, just because I said that little rifle of mine was good for any animal that walked these here Maine woods. I gave up first chance to Thad long ago, didn't I, Thad? You see, a feller that hasn't had great experience at such things don't want to rush in too fast. I promised my maw to be careful, and I mean to. As for me, you see, I said that Thad had to try out my new gun. The man in the store told me not to think of standing up before any big game till I'd practiced how to use the pump part. You see, if a feller got rattled, and needed to send in a second shot, he might try to work the thing wrong, get it stuck, and then have a fine old time. So Thad for mine."

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"So say we all of us," remarked Giraffe. "We'd like to see what Thad could do. He hasn't never had a chance at a moose. You go with Sebattis, Thad. The rest of us'll sit by the fire here, and wait for things to happen."

"No fire," remarked Sebattis. "Eli put um out. You come 'long with me, Tad!"

Somehow the Indian could never get the hang of Thad's name, and called him Tad; but it was rather a curiosity to hear him talk at all, so nobody ever objected, least of all the patrol leader.

"This is mighty fine of you boys," whispered Thad, as he watched Eli and Jim proceeding to scatter the fire, and trample on the embers; in which task the other members of the party only too willingly assisted.

In a minute, almost, they were in darkness under the pines. Meanwhile Sebattis had baited the moose with another of his wonderful calls, thrilling the lads just as much as on the first occasion.

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"Ugh! make me shiver," muttered Bumpus. "Seems like there just must be a great big critter, with horns ten feet high, ready to rush the camp. Hey! don't get away from me, Jim; I want to squat alongside in the dark. After all that light it seems rough to be left in the gloom."

"Mustn't talk no more, or sneeze, or cough! Skeer moose right bad," whispered the younger guide, as he threw an arm across the fat shoulders of Bumpus, for whom he seemed to have taken an especial fancy.

And so the balance of the campers crouched there, with every nerve on edge, listening eagerly for the slightest sound, which of course was magnified a dozen fold, owing to the tension under which they were laboring.

Meanwhile Thad had followed after the Indian guide.

His very first act, before the light of the fire was extinguished, had been to hastily examine the small-bore repeating rifle which belonged to Step Hen, and which the owner was so anxious to have Thad christen with the first shot, at game worth while.

It seemed to be in splendid working order, and Thad believed he could depend on it to do the work, providing he aimed straight. There is a vast amount of result depending on the man behind the gun, whether in war, or in hunting.

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At first it seemed pitch dark to the boy, as he kept close at the heels of the Penobscot Indian. That was partly because his eyes had been blinded from sitting there, looking into the heart of the blazing camp-fire so long. Now that this did not happen to be the case any longer, he found that he could gradually see better; until presently the dim form of Sebattis began to make itself noticeable just in front.

How silently the Indian moved along. Thad wondered whether this came from the fact of his wearing elkskin moccasins, or because he had been raised never to make a noise when passing through the woods; perhaps it was both; but Thad wished he could only emulate his example; and then and there he determined to possess himself of the soft-soled hunting boots of the same type as those of Sebattis, at the first opportunity.

He knew from the confidence with which the guide was advancing through the darkness that he must have immediately settled in his mind just where they should lie in wait for the bull moose.

And it struck Thad right then and there that the dark-faced guide was about as good a pattern for a Boy Scout to follow, as any one whom he could imagine. Surely Sebattis kept his eyes constantly on the alert; and never could be caught napping.

For instance, look at the way he lifted his head to listen some ten minutes before the sheriff arrived upon the scene, and gave the boys that rude jolt when he called out to them to surrender. Sebattis must have heard some slight sound that warned him of the stealthy approach of either human beings or game, and he had crept out of camp so as to be in a position to hold the upper hand, in case of any necessity.

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Perhaps it was a little strange how all these thoughts crowded through the mind of Thad, as he was following silently as possible at the very heels of the guide.

Other things trooped through that active brain of his, too; for Thad had schooled himself to see and notice everything he could. For instance, he became aware of the fact that they were heading almost directly up into the wind. That in itself was nothing surprising, for a true still hunter always looks to have the air blowing from the game toward himself, as in that way he prevents the keen-scented animal from getting notice of his approach, and fleeing before he can find a chance to send in a shot.

Yes, the night breeze was coming out of the north, and the moose was approaching from the

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same quarter. The last time they heard his echoing challenge it seemed much closer than ever, showing that the bull was advancing with little rushes. He would push on for a couple of minutes, and then halt to send out a call, and listen. Then Sebattis would proceed to lure him on with the most seductive calls he could extract from his wonderful birch bark horn.

So it went on, the two parties approaching one another at a speed which promised a meeting very shortly.

Thad felt his heart beating almost twice as fast as ordinarily. He did not like this, and sternly resolved to control his nerves. The party who expects to shoot big game must be able to aim straight, and keep his wits about him, so as to send in a second and a third shot, should they be needed; else he may find that the boot is on the other foot, and that it is he himself who is being hunted.

Fighting down this nervousness as best he could, the boy set his teeth firmly together, and was resolved to do all in his power to justify the confidence his comrades seemed to have in his ability to "do the troop proud," as Giraffe would have said.

Another thing he noticed by this time. They did not seem to be trying to get to higher ground at all, as he had expected would be the case. On the contrary, Sebattis was following the upward trend of the river. Perhaps he only wanted to move as far away from the camp as possible, so that the suspicious animal might not get a whiff of air that, to him, might bear some sign of the extinguished fire; or detect uneasy movements among the scouts left behind, and who could not keep just as still as they should.

But somehow Thad had an idea there might be yet another reason for their keeping on in this direction, as if meaning to intercept the coming bull moose; and presently he found it out for a fact.

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Once, twice, three times had the guide stopped to send out that strange sound that went reverberating down the river, until it died away in mournful cadence in the distance.

Then he came to a sudden stop.

"Here do, Tad; you drop down this way. Keep eye on top ridge up there. See um moose stand out 'gainst sky. Try hit back shoulder. No get, p'haps me shoot too. How that suit?"

That was more than Thad had ever heard Sebattis say in one breath since meeting the Old-town guide. But he instantly saw what the other meant, for Thad had the instincts of a born hunter in him.

From the spot where they knelt, by looking up just a little, they could see the bald top of a low-lying ridge close at hand, where it was outlined sharply against the star jeweled sky. Any bulky object as big as a cow, or even a wolf, would, if standing there on the ridge, be plainly shown against the heavens.

"I understand, Sebattis," the boy whispered back; "and I'll try to do you credit. Tell me when

to shoot, that's all."

Then the two relapsed into silence. The last defiant call of the coming moose was just dying out. It had been fearfully close, and Thad knew that the animal must be less than a quarter of a mile away from them at the time he stood still to give that call.

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Sebattis answered it, and Thad began to notice that he no longer sent out that vociferous challenge as before. He believed that the guide must now be imitating the voice of the moose cow, to tempt the other bull on so as to fight for the possession of a mate, which he doubtless lacked.

A few more minutes passed away. Thad imagined he could actually hear his heart pounding away within its prison, so loudly did it throb. He began to fear that after that last challenge the bull had become suspicious, and declined to advance any closer. But apparently the guide did not share in his apprehensions; for he continued to make those lower sounds, as though wheedling the other into coming on, and entering the lists with the bull who already had a mate.

Still there was no answering blast. What could it mean?

Thad was beginning to have a feeling of bitter disappointment and chagrin, when all at once he heard something that gave him an electric shock.

It was like the crackling of branches, or the breaking of dead bushes under the impact of a ponderous body. Thad knew now that the guide had not been mistaken with regard to his ability to coax the suspicious old bull to close quarters; for the moose was even then climbing the other side of the low ridge, and must appear in sight on the summit at any moment!

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## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **"GOOD SHOT! GREAT LITTLE GUN!"**

Strangely enough, Thad discovered at the same time that his nerves had suddenly become as rigid as though he were simply about to fire at a mark, to try the new rifle belonging to Step Hen.

This is one of the tests of a born hunter. He may feel nervous up to the critical moment, when he stiffens, and seems to be made of steel.

Thad believed that he was in condition to do himself justice when the proper time came to shoot. The distance was short, and although he would have preferred having a different kind of light than merely seeing a black object lined up against the sky, still he was familiar with guns, and could, if necessary, aim merely through instinct.

The floundering grew in volume. Evidently the bull was having some difficulty in pushing upward through the bushes that covered the other side of the little ridge, the existence of

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which Sebattis must have known before, or he would never have headed this way so confidently.

But the animal was certainly coming on, for the sounds grew louder all the while. And whenever he seemed to stop, from any cause, there was always that same tempting, wheedling sound to draw him on again.

It was a minute that the scout would never forget, since this was really his first attempt to bring down game of any great size.

Again there came a silence. Was the bull hesitating again? Somehow Sebattis had toned down his notes to a low murmur; but it was intended to be very enticing to the stranger.

And all at once Thad felt the hand of the guide touch his arm. He guessed that this must be meant as a signal to draw his attention to the fact that there was at last something doing above; and at the same instant the boy detected a moving object come into view over the top of the bald ridge.

Higher it rose until he no longer had any doubt that he was looking at the towering horns of a giant moose bull.

And in another moment the whole bulk of the beast was outlined against the starry heavens.

The critical time was at hand.

Sebattis no longer played upon his birch bark horn. He had dropped it to the ground, and doubtless gripped his old rifle so as to be ready to pour in a second shot, should his boy-companion fail to send his lead where it would strike a death blow. For Sebattis remembered that after all Thad was a lad who had never before looked upon one of these greatest of all American game animals on his native heath and that perhaps the sight might rattle him.

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“Shoot!”

It was only the faintest of whispers, but Thad caught it, for the mouth of the Indian guide was just a short distance away from his ear.

He had already lowered his cheek to the stock of the little rifle, and his finger was touching the trigger. Almost through instinct, such as comes to one who has the blood of a hunter flowing through his veins, the boy judged where he must aim, for such a thing as actually seeing the shoulder of the gloomy figure was just then impossible.

The sight of that grand animal standing there with upraised head, listening eagerly for the faintest indication of the presence of those whose calls had tempted him to make this pilgrimage, was one Thad would never be able to wholly get out of his mind.

Then he pressed the trigger of his rifle, and its quick response to the invitation came as a pleasure to his ears. Hardly had he fired than Thad was working the mechanism that was intended to throw out the empty shell, and send another fresh cartridge into the firing chamber; and it spoke well for his ability to do the right thing when he accomplished all this without the

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slightest hitch; so that in two seconds he was ready to send in a second shot if needed.

Sebattis had not fired.

This was really the first thing that flashed into Thad's mind, and gave him sudden hope. The second was that even though he himself had wanted to shoot again, there was no chance, for the moose had disappeared.

He expected to hear that crashing of the bushes again, telling how the wounded animal, for he knew he must have hit the moose, was rushing away as fast as he had come. But he failed to catch it.

On the contrary, different sounds came to his ear, which he could not understand for the moment. It even seemed to him that the brave moose might have really met with an enemy, and was fighting gallantly against heavy odds.

Well, that was just what must be happening; and the foe was one that every moose must sooner or later find himself grappling with; for it was the grim reaper, death.

Sebattis, with that wonderful instinct of his, had known instantly from certain actions of the moose upon being struck, that the animal had received his death wound. He understood that there was really no need of his sending in a second shot; and besides, he preferred that the young Nimrod should have the full credit of slaying the big bull.

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Sebattis, for all he was an Indian, had all the generosity that marks the true sportsman; and later on, in thinking it over, Thad realized how much he was indebted to the guide for refraining from firing after he had done so.

"You get um, Tad!" exclaimed the Indian, with a touch of pride in his tone.

"Oh! do you really think I did, Sebattis?" cried the delighted young hunter, now trembling like an aspen leaf, for the crisis was all past.

"Come with me; see!" was the reply.

Eagerly did Thad climb that little slope. It was now all as silent as death up yonder. He hoped after all, Sebattis might not be mistaken, and that the wily old moose, although severely hurt, had managed to slip away. They would surely never be able to track him by the drops of blood he shed.

But now they were on top of the rise. Thad had brought along with him the little electric torch which he had purchased before starting on this trip to Maine. All he had to do was to grip it in his left hand, press a button, and instantly a brilliant ray of light shot out of the end. With this he could see objects as much as sixty or eighty feet away, and plainly at half that distance.

So now he flashed this light ahead. At first he failed to discover anything on the ground, and his heart seemed to rise in his throat with cruel disappointment at the thought that after all he had missed.

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"Tad, see!"

It was the Indian who was plucking at his sleeve, and directing his attention over to the left. And as the boy quickly turned the light in that direction he was thrilled to discover the moose lying there on his side, and not moving in the slightest degree.

“Oh! I did get him, didn’t I, Sebattis?” he cried, delighted beyond measure at his good fortune; for it is not every hunter who can say he brought down the first big game at which he has fired.

The guide was bending over the fallen monarch of the Maine woods. His first inclination was to see where the fatal bullet had struck.

“Mighty good shot. Great little gun.”

He looked at Step Hen’s up-to-date thirty-thirty calibre rifle as though after this he must be a fool to go packing his own heavy tool through woods, and over carries, when one-half the weight would do better work.

And he even thrust his finger into the ragged hole just back of the fore leg of the dead animal, as though wondering how so small a bullet could ever make such a big opening. Sebattis had something to learn concerning the results springing from the use of a soft-nosed bullet, that flattens out when striking any object, even the side of an animal.

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“We ought to let the boys know right away,” said Thad, thinking of how his chums must be almost consumed with anxiety to be told the result of that lone shot; which Step Hen must guess came from his new rifle, and not the larger one carried by the Indian guide.

“Tad call um here. Me make little fire, so see how climb hill,” said Sebattis.

Only too gladly did Thad send out a whoop that easily reached the listening ears of those comrades in camp. An answering hail came back.

[“Did you get him, Thad?”](#)

“Come on over here, all of you,” was all Thad would say in return.

Immediately they heard a great threshing, as the entire crowd started on a run in the direction of the call. Doubtless poor Bumpus would have fared badly, and been left far in the lurch, only for the kindness of Jim, who gave him a helping hand over all obstacles.

Meanwhile the Indian had hastened to scrape together a few handfuls of dead stuff, which he seemed to know just where to look for; to this he applied a match and as it sprang into a tiny flame, he proceeded to add such fuel as he could most readily pick up.

In less than a minute he had a real fire going, that began to dispel the shadows of night around the vicinity of the spot where the giant moose lay. As it burned on the top of the bald ridge, the fire would serve as a beacon to show the others just how to reach the place.

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Now they were climbing the low elevation. Thad could hear some of them puffing at a great rate. Of course Giraffe was the first to arrive, with Eli



close on his heels; then Allan, and the others trailing after in any old style.

Each one of them pushed immediately to where the prize lay; and loud were the exclamations of astonishment when they realized just what a monster it was that Thad had brought down with that one fortunate shot.

Step Hen in particular was almost crazy with joy.

"Now make fun of my pea-shooter, will you, Giraffe?" he cried, dancing around, and hugging his fine little rifle with all the delight a boy might show in the possession of his first long trousers. "Just look at what it did, would you? Why, anybody's just silly to lug an old heavy blunderbuss like yours around, when he c'n own such a bully little thing at this. Oh! didn't she just do everything to that old bull, though? If he'd known about my gun he'd have lit out in the other direction, lickety-split. After this, why should I be afraid to stand up in front of any sort of big game that walks on four feet or hoofs? You hear me, Giraffe?"

Thad did not disturb the wild dream of the tenderfoot chum; though he wondered whether Step Hen could have hit Bumpus' old red barn, if, lying there in wait, he had suddenly seen the monster rise into view above the crown of the low ridge, and felt Sebattis nudge him in the ribs, as a warning that the time had come to shoot.

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But it was a great moment for all the scouts, as they stood over the prize that had fallen to the gun of their patrol leader, Thad Brewster.

## **CHAPTER X.**

### **THE OLD TRAPPER'S CABIN.**

"How're we goin' to get this game all the way to camp?" demanded Giraffe.

"Camp?" echoed Davy Jones, beginning to look alarmed, as he contemplated the enormous bulk of the bull moose, and then imagined the lot of them tugging and straining every nerve to drag it over the intervening ground.

"Now, just you hold on, there, Davy; don't begin to feel one of them cramp fits of your comin' on, just because we have to work like pack horses," Step Hen remarked.

"Ain't never thinking of such a thing," said Davy, stiffening up again. "You just think it's funny, but if ever you got doubled up once, you'd feel for me."

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In times past the Jones boy had been subject to queer fits that took him all of a sudden, and doubled him up with a severe cramp. When he had one of these, he was utterly helpless. They had saved Davy more than a few whippings, in school and at home: and in this respect proved very accommodating cramps. But latterly the boys suspected Davy had really outgrown them; and that he was only threatened with a return of

the disease whenever there seemed to be some hard work to be done. Possibly his active outdoor life, and that gymnastic desire on his part to do all manner of athletic stunts had helped get rid of the trouble.

"But after all," declared Thad, "I don't think anybody is dreaming of trying to carry, or drag the moose all the way to our camp. How about that, Eli?"

The older guide, upon being appealed to in this fashion, remarked that they would be foolish to think of such a thing.

"We kin cut it up right here in the mornin'," he observed. "I guess yu boys'd like to try a steak from the ole bull; an' we'll tote sum o' the meat along. An' as fur the horns, I kin fix them all right. We'll kerry 'em in one of the canoes, so's ye kin show yer friends the kind o' game we has up here in Maine."

That suited Thad just right. He wanted those towering horns very much, and was only afraid there might be some objection to taking them along, for they must weigh quite heavily.

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So after a while the whole party started back to the camp, where a fire was once more kindled, the night being cool, the guides felt the need of warmth, since they would have no cover over them as they slept.

It was some time before the scouts could think of settling down. The glorious success that had attended this first try at game worth while, seemed to inspire the entire lot with an eager desire to emulate Thad's example. Why, even Bumpus seemed to partake of the fever to some extent, though he had brought no gun along, and did not claim to be any sort of sportsman.

When morning came at last the oldest guide went over, and started operations on the dead moose. He took off the skin, and secured the horns for the successful hunter, to be preserved as a trophy of the event.

Besides this, Eli brought back quite a lot of the best meat. The boys were wild to see what moose steak tasted like; but although it aroused their hunger while it was in process of cooking, still the best any of them could do was to gnaw at their portion, for it was as tough as anything they had ever struck.

"That's where we missed it," grumbled Giraffe, after giving up in disgust all efforts to masticate some of his portion.

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"In what way do you mean?" asked Thad, expecting the other would say he ought to have selected a younger and more tender animal, when supplying food for the camp.

"Why," the tall scout continued, with a broad grin; "d'ye know, I said we had ought to fetch that little meat chopper our folks at home use; and the rest of you laughed at the idea. Just think, if we had it now, what a fine hash we'd be enjoyin' every day. That's the only thing I know of that could grind up this tough meat."

It was rather later than usual that morning before they got started in the canoes; there

seemed so much to do. But in good time these various duties were fulfilled. The guides did not appear at all anxious. They seemed to feel satisfied that before a great while had passed, they would get in touch with the party they were following; and meant that the boys in their charge should enjoy some of the Maine hunting on the way.

Eli declared that he knew of another fine camping spot ahead, which they would doubtless reach about dark. This was really an old and long deserted cabin, once occupied by a trapper, who had taken his toll of furs in the neighboring streams where once upon a time all manner of valuable animals were plentiful, from mink, otter, marten, and even beaver; while around the vicinity foxes used to be thick, not to mention wildcats, an occasional panther, and even wolves; though these latter can seldom be found within the limits of Maine at the present day.

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The boys had had more or less experience in using log cabins for nights lodgings; and they amused themselves as they pushed on, with reminiscences of events that would always be interesting to them.

Of course there were times when the three canoes were some little distance apart, but again they would come close enough together for the inmates to have shaken hands, had the inclination to do so arisen.

At noon they stopped to eat lunch, and give the guides a chance to rest, for the work of pushing up against that current was no child's play. Although the boys were ready to lend a helping hand, and "spell" the guides from time to time, naturally the brunt of the work fell on Eli, Jim and Sebattis.

"Did any of you hear a gunshot a little while ago?" asked Giraffe, when the boats came together about the middle of the afternoon.

"He keeps on sayin' he's sure he did," broke in Bumpus, who was in the canoe with the tall boy, making "the long and short of it, or both extremes meet," as Bumpus himself often humorously remarked; "but neither Eli nor I caught it. How about the rest of you?"

"Nothing doing here," said Step Hen; and all the rest, even the stolid Sebattis, denied having heard anything that sounded like the report of a firearm.

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"Which way did it seem to come from, Giraffe?" asked Thad, wondering if after all the other could have caught a faint sound that escaped the vigilance of the three guides; and thinking of Mr. Carson, of course, who was ahead somewhere.

"Oh! about the way we're goin' I reckon," replied Giraffe. "Just seemed to ketch the faintest little boom; but Eli said as how he hadn't heard nothin'. The wind had died out at the time, but the air was still from the north. I'm right sure it was a gun, even if Bumpus here does say I had an idea, and it was such a new thing it hit me with a bump."

The afternoon wore away, and the sun set without their having reached their destination.

"Where's your old and comfy cabin?" demanded Bumpus. "I'm tired of sittin' here so long, and I guess I'll never be able to get straightened out again."

"Huh!" grunted Giraffe, "think of me, will you? Ain't I near twice as long? Ain't I twisted up in a knot every which way? My legs took to bendin' so they'll knock my knees together; or else look like hoops. How much you got to complain about, you little dumplin', Bumpus."

"But Eli says we're going on, and that we'll make it not a great while after dark sets in," Bumpus remarked, scorning to enter into an argument with the other on the subject of whether it paid to be long drawn out, or else shut up in a small compass.

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"Good for Eli, then; we can't get there any too soon to suit me," declared Davy Jones, who was working a paddle in conjunction with Jim; Allan having done more than his share of the work during various periods in the afternoon just passed.

"Give us half a hour more, and we'll sure git thar," said Eli, later on, when the shadows of coming night began to cover the river; and had already swooped down in full force upon the adjacent woods.

They paddled along in silence, except when one of the boys managed to splash in dipping or removing his paddle blade. Those who were new to the work found that they had considerable to learn before they could expect to work as silently as Sebattis, for example. The way the Indian would sent the canoe forward with vigorous thrusts, and yet never removing his paddle from the water, and making no sound whatever, was a never ending source of delight to both Thad and Step Hen. And the latter tried valiantly to imitate his example whenever he took the extra spruce blade in hand.

Finally, when the half hour had about arrived at its conclusion, Eli gave the tired voyagers a pleasant shock by suddenly calling out:

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"Land here!"

The three canoes were enabled to find good places to run ashore, by means of Thad's precious little electric torch, which came in handy in scores of different ways during the Maine expedition, and paid for itself time and again.

Then, first of all, they found where the cabin lay. Eli seemed to know all about it, and claimed to have spent many a night under the shelter of its still fairly well preserved roof; though it had been two years now since last he was here; for on the previous season he took a party along another trail.

Giraffe insisted on starting a little blaze outside. He was always thinking of some excuse for making fires; and in this instance nobody quarreled with him, for they really needed some light in order to unload the canoes, and carry the stuff up to the old cabin.

The door would not go more than half-way shut, but outside of this defect, which was not so very

serious, since the wintry blasts had not yet set in, the log cabin seemed to offer a cozy shelter for the night.

Once they got inside, and Giraffe was set to work again, building another fire, this time in the big fireplace, above which yawned the wide-throated chimney.

The cabin had once been quite a pretentious place, in those old days when the builder, perhaps with a trapper pard, spent his time here gathering a heavy tribute of rich pelts from the native furry inhabitants of swamp and river and forest.

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Its roof was quite high, and the reason for this became manifest as soon as any one entered; for it was found that there was a loft extending halfway across, and which could be reached by a rude but still sturdy ladder.

"Now, what in the dickens do you think he ever built that up there for?" Step Hen said, as he started to ascend the ladder; and then, thinking better of it, gave up the idea.

"A place to store his bales of dried furs, so Eli says," replied Allan. "You see, being up here for six months, constantly gathering in new pelts every day, they increased rapidly, and took considerable space; so, having plenty of room, he just ran that platform half-way across, and six feet and a half from the floor down here."

"Great stunt," remarked Step Hen, but he made no further attempt to ascend to the platform, his curiosity being satisfied.

And later on, Step Hen shook hands with himself because of that second thought, considering himself a lucky boy, which indeed proved to be the case.

There was more or less talking and laughing as they started preparations for supper. The chimney seemed to draw poorly at first, possibly on account of not having been used for so long. When it got warmed up, perhaps it would "behave", Eli remarked. Meanwhile there was considerable smoke in the cabin, and more or less sneezing, as well as rubbing of smarting eyes.

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"Say, what d'ye mean, trying to choke us all, Giraffe?" demanded Bumpus, who looked as though in great distress, as the tears were rolling down his fat cheeks like "little Niagaras", Step Hen declared.

"And I reckon, now, you just picked out the greenest wood ever, so's to give us a good dose of this?" suggested Davy Jones, also rubbing his eyes.

Altogether the boys were making so much noise themselves that no one could expect to hear anything else. That was the only reason Thad could give, later on, why the keen ears of Eli or Sebattis had not detected certain things that must have come to their knowledge had it not been for this clamor, and rattle of merry tongues.

"Anybody think of having some more of that india-rubber steak for supper?" sang out Giraffe,

still working with the fire, which seemed to be behaving a little better already, and gave promise of being all right presently.

"Say, don't everybody shout out at once. Put me down for baked beans first, last and all the time," declared Bumpus, seeking the vicinity of the door in order to cool his heated eyes, smarting from the pungent smoke.

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"Hello! who's rocking the old cabin like that? Let up, can't you before it goes over?" shouted Step Hen, standing in the doorway for air.

Possibly he may have thought it did go over, for just then some great hairy object came tumbling down from the loft, making some use of the ladder, but at the same time landing with a crash on the floor. Then, before any one could so much as make the first move toward one of the guns, standing in a corner of the cabin, this lumbering object hustled over to the half-open door, and bowled through, upsetting both Step Hen and Bumpus in its passage.

For a second or two silence followed, and then a tremendous shout broke out:

"Great smoke! did you see it?" whooped Giraffe, jumping to his feet.

"Who hit me?" gurgled Bumpus, who had crashed into the wall of the cabin, and was sitting there on the floor, looking dazed.

A head was thrust in through the half-open door, and Step Hen shouted:

"It was a great big black bear, and he just went and kicked me out of the place, fellers!"

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## **CHAPTER XI. ON THE WINGS OF THE NIGHT WIND.**

"A bear!" shrieked Bumpus, struggling to his knees; "and he shoved me around like I was a bundle of hay! Did you ever hear of such nerve?"

"Think what he did to me?" cried Step Hen entering through the partly open door; "I was just pokin' my nose out, to get a whiff of fresh air, for I couldn't hardly breathe in here; when he sent me a flyin', just like you'd kick for goal on the gridiron. Guess I covered all of ten feet, and landed in them bushes out there. Look here! See what I got off'n the old beast."

He opened his clenched hand, and exhibited a bunch of long black hairs. Undoubtedly Step Hen must have involuntarily clutched at the bear as they came in contact, and had managed to hold on to these tokens of the collision.

Thad was laughing and shaking all over, so were Eli and Jim; and Allan joined in. Presently the whole of them began to see the ludicrous side of the adventure, and even Sebattis was noticed to be grinning. Nobody had ever known him to emit a genuine laugh.

"And just to think how near we came to having bear steak for breakfast, instead of that old tough moose meat," remarked Giraffe.

"Well, that's all right," Step Hen took occasion to say; "but if a feller c'n judge from the way he kicked *me*, that bear was some tough too. My! I'd sure hate to put on the gloves with him in a bout. I just had time to turn and look around, when I heard that big bump; then he jumped me, and out we both went. Mebbe I ain't glad now I didn't keep right on going up that ladder when I started. Just think what a time I'd had up there with him!"

"Wow, and again I say, wow!" snapped Giraffe. "Things seem to be happening right thick and fast now, fellers. This sure is the big game country, all right, and to the good."

They were all of one opinion with respect to that. To get one night a lordly moose bull, and by the romantic way of calling, too; and then the very next to run across a big burly bear, was as fine a piece of good luck as any of them could wish for.

"Wonder what's coming along next in line?" remarked Bumpus, nervously, as he made sure to get close to the fire, and away from the open door.

"Say, you don't think that old bear'd have the nerve to come back here on second thoughts, and try to clean out the whole bunch?" Step Hen queried; "because I've seen all I want of him. They say three times and out; but I reckon it was only once with me; and I went, too."

"No, I wasn't thinking of him," Bumpus declared; "but then there might be a few elephants or rhinoceroses, or camels, or something else hanging around these diggings, waiting to get acquainted. I don't like meetin' up with 'em so sudden like. Whiff! bang! and then good-bye! Why, it ain't decent to treat a feller that way without bein' introduced first."

"And to think that the sly old critter was up there all the time we kept talkin' and carryin' on down here?" said Davy Jones, who had come out of the affair with only a skinned knee, owing to striking up against some wood on the floor, when he threw himself wildly to one side at sight of the descending bear.

"What d'ye think ever started him movin'?" asked Bumpus.

"Smoke do it," replied Eli. "The ole bear, he lies quiet, not knowin' what to make o' us comin' in here, whar he's expectin' to take up his winter quarters. But purty soon thet smoke it begins to smart his eyes. Bears don't like smoke, any more'n any animile does. So gettin' frightened arter a while, he starts down the ladder, misses his grip, an' lands in a heap on the floor. If I'd be'n able tuh git hold o' a gun I'd a guv him his pill; but I guess it'd be'n dangerous work shootin' in here, with so many 'raound."

"Will we ever run across him again?" remarked Step Hen, as he felt all over his body, to ascertain how many scratches or bruises had resulted from the rather hurried way in which he took his recent departure. "I don't mind being

fired from a cannon," he continued, as several twinges of pain told him he had not come through the ordeal entirely unscathed; "but I draw the line at being made a football by a scared bear. Wonder he didn't break every rib I have. As 'tis, I wouldn't be much s'prised if a dozen or so were fractured."

"Well, we'll make you a strait jacket to-morrow, and keep you in a plaster cast the rest of the trip," declared Giraffe; chuckling in rare good humor, because, for once at least, he had not been caught up in the little whirl.

"Like fun you will," grumbled Step Hen, getting Bumpus to rub his back for him, on promise of returning the favor in kind.

"But I think somebody ought to go up and look that loft over," suggested Davy Jones. "How do we know but what it's just full of bears right now. 'Tain't the nicest thing to think such a load's goin' to drop down on your head any old time. He might upset my coffee when I get to drinkin', too."

So, to quiet the boys, Jim climbed up, taking the little electric torch along with him. Upon his reporting that all was clear some of the others also ascended, to see where the bear had been sleeping at the time of their arrival.

"Now, if there was only a couple of nice jolly little cubs around, we'd have heaps of fun playing with 'em," Bumpus suggested, as he too examined the loft, and saw where the bear had been making a soft sleeping place out of dead leaves that must have drifted in through a hole at the end of the roof, but much too small to let the big beast go out that way.

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"Cubs! listen to him, would you?" cried Step Hen. "Why, it ain't the time of year for cubs; and if it was, I'd like to see *you* playin' with any, while the old missus was alive, and hangin' around. She'd cub you with a club, worse'n she did me; and don't you forget it, Bumpus. Cubs! Well, what queer things you do see when you haven't a gun," and the way he looked at the fat boy when saying this made Bumpus bristle up immediately.

"Don't you call me a *thing*, Step Hen!" he admonished, severely; at which there was a shout from the other.

"He admits it all, fellers;" Davy Jones exclaimed; "he puts on the shoe first thing. But then, Bumpus, we know you ain't up on natural history. It's a wonder you didn't say that was a hippopotamus, or a crocodile, instead of a bear. You're bound to know more about these things before you get back to Cranford again. We'll let it go at that. How's that supper gettin' on, Giraffe? Anything more I c'n do to help?"

"Anything more?" echoed the cook, disdainfully; "I'd like to know the first thing you've done to help get it. Didn't he say he felt one of them fits acomin' on when we landed here, fellers; and then on top of that, you got so scared by that old bear dropping down on us, you couldn't hardly move. I just see you helpin', when you c'n crawl out of it. The only help you'll give will be when supper's ready for servin', and then it'll be to make way with the stuff good and hearty. I

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notice you never get one of them cramps right then, Davy; oh, no! They're right handy things to have in the house, ain't they. I'm goin' to borrow a few sometime, see if I don't now."

In good time the supper was pronounced ready, Eli having assisted in its preparation; for, with nine hungry voyagers to feed, the amount that had to be prepared made the task no light one.

As usual, they made merry while disposing of the food that had been gotten ready. Some of the moose was cut up as small as possible, and made into a palatable stew. Then they had Boston baked beans; and some pretty fair biscuits, which Eli baked in the little portable oven that was carried in one of the boats. Of course coffee made a part of the supper. At home possibly few of these lads ever drank coffee more than once a day, and at breakfast at that; but here in the woods the meal would seem rather tame without the warm cup that every one looked for.

"What do you say to stopping here a day or so, boys?" asked Thad. "I've been talking it over with Eli, and he says we couldn't find a better place for game. Perhaps, now, one of the rest of you may run across a moose bigger even than mine; or Bumpus here stands a chance of meeting up with his friend, the bear, who gave him that handshake in passing."

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"Excuse me," Bumpus hastened to say; "that doesn't mean I object to hanging out at the Hotel Log Cabin as long as the rest of you see fit; but I don't hanker after meetin' up with that rude black pirate again. He may be a pretty fine kind of a bear, as bears go; but I object to the breed."

"Count us all as saying we'll be glad of a break in the journey, Thad," Allan remarked, just then. "Besides, we must be somewhere near where that Mr. Carson is hunting, right now; and at any time we might run up against him."

Step Hen, Giraffe and Davy nodded their heads, as though to intimate that Allan voiced the sentiments of all when he said that.

"There's one thing I've got in my mind, and it's this," Bumpus went on to remark. "Now's goin' to be the time for Allan here to keep his promise to show me a bee tree. He told me that summer was the time to do it, when the bees were on the wing, and he could work his little game; but that he'd try his best to 'commo-date me any time, once we got up here in Maine."

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"And so I will," replied the other, smiling at the earnestness with which Bumpus kept talking on that one subject. "Perhaps Jim, or Eli here, will help me find a tree. If the bees are hived up for winter, then the only way we can do it is to listen when the noonday sun is shining. Sometimes, before the weather gets too cold, the young bees come out of their hole, and buzz around, trying their wings. I've found a hive in the dead top of a tree that way."

"And got a lovely stock of juicy honeycomb too, I guess?" said Giraffe, making a face to indicate that the subject certainly appealed to him from the standpoint of a sweet luxury, if from nothing else.

"Sure we did; and a lovely lot of stings thrown in," chuckled Allan.

"Well, they say bee stings are good for rheumatism, and I've sometimes thought I was getting a touch of that in my legs," Davy Jones observed, thoughtfully.

"There wasn't much rheumatism about you when that bear dropped down on us," said Giraffe, scornfully. "The way you scooted out of the way would have made the best short distance sprinter turn green with envy. Rheumatism! Wow! that goes in line with cramps, I guess, now."

"What'll we put all the honey in?" asked Bumpus, just as though he counted the finding of the bee tree an accomplished thing, because Allan had agreed to do what he could to find one.

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"I'll hold all I can," retorted Giraffe, complacently; "but then you mustn't expect me to keep on loading up, till I bust. I c'n stretch sometimes; but even that's no sign I'm made of injy rubber, is it?"

"Well, we won't cook our rabbit till we've got him," said Allan. "Sometimes most of the honey in a bee tree is old, and candied. The new stuff is what counts. The other is dark colored and sickening sweet. But wait and see, if so be we're lucky enough to strike one."

After supper was over they enjoyed sitting there before the fire, and listening to Eli tell stories about the old cabin; which, according to his accounts, must have seen many queer happenings at least equal to the one surprise to which they had been treated, on their first acquaintance with it on this night.

Thad, being given a fair amount of imagination, found it easy to shut his eyes, and believe he could see the old trapper who once lived here, as Eli described him. Years upon years he had come and gone, as the winters passed, always taking toll of the woods' folks; yet never trying to make such a deep inroad on their numbers but that there were plenty left for breeding purposes. The wise old trapper looked forward to another year. Finally he had lost his life among the wild loggers of a Maine river; being unfortunate enough to get caught in a jam that he was trying to break.

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When some of the boys, tired from the work of the day, and lack of rest on the preceding night, stretched out their blankets, and disputed about where each should settle down later on. Thad and Eli stepped out to see what the night promised for the coming day. If it looked like snow they would find good tracking weather; though for one Thad hoped this would still keep off some little while, and allow them to do some hunting before winter closed on them.

The stars were shining brightly in the dark heavens. The young moon had sunk to rest; but every night now they might expect it to grow in size, until in a week considerable light would come from this source. And there is nothing more enjoyable when in the depths of the wilderness, than a round, clear moon.

As the two stood there, speaking of these things, there came stealing on the night air a strange sound that, although rising from a considerable distance away from the cabin, still struck Thad as very weird, and also blood-curdling. He had heard watch dogs bay to the moon; but this was something far more thrilling.

"That's no wildcat; and I don't think it can be a panther, a bear or any animal I've ever struck in the woods. What do you make out of it, Eli?" he asked, turning to the old guide, whom he had heard emit a whistle, as of astonishment, at the time that queer howl was heard.

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"It's be'n many a year now, Thad, since ever I heerd the like o' thet howl," the Maine guide observed. "Time was when they uster be here in plenty; but the bounty paid by the state, it just 'bout cleaned the hull lot out; er else they thort as how 'twar safer up yonder, acrost the line in Canada."

"What's that?" exclaimed Thad; "do you mean to tell me that was a wolf?"

"A real wolf, an' nothin' else," answered Eli; "an' let me tell ye, it do bring back the old days, fur me to listen to thet howl. This is like livin' again."

## CHAPTER XII. A FACE IN THE WINDOW.

"Ugh! that right, Eli; wolf only cry like that!" said a voice close beside the two who stood there; and turning, they could make out a figure which they knew must be that of Sebattis; but so softly had the Indian slipped out, after hearing that well-known though faint howl, that even Eli, sharp ears though he possessed, had not detected his coming until he spoke.

"Where thar's one wolf thar's agoin' ter be more," remarked the old Maine guide, with the air of one who knew what he was talking about.

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"Huh! wolf he always hunt in pack, never by self," observed Sebattis, drily.

"That adds a little spicy flavor to our being up here, then," Thad went on to say, being not displeased; for if only he could have that magical little rifle of Step Hen's in his hands, he cared not how many of the fierce brutes he might run across; for with its quick-shooting qualities, and the deadly nature of the bullets it used, he believed he could take care of all comers. Besides, if hard-pressed, it was always possible to take to a tree, where one would be safe from the cruel fangs of the animals.

When they went inside, and told what they had heard, the boys received the news with various shades of enthusiasm. Giraffe was really pleased, for he meant to do something bold on this trip that would forever establish his reputation as a mighty Nimrod; Step Hen fondled his rifle, and then stood it in the corner close to the spot where he had spread his

blanket, as though he had a faint idea he might find need for it in the night; Davy Jones shrugged his shoulders, and hoped he would not happen to run across the pack when alone; and as for Bumpus, he deliberately changed his blanket, placing it on the further side of several others, away from that open door.

But Eli had been examining that same door, and was of the opinion that, with a little effort, it might be coaxed to shut. This he proceeded to accomplish, and with a success that won him a cheer from the timid Bumpus.

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"Never did like to sleep in a draught," muttered the fat scout; "and I'm glad the glass stayed in that window all these years."

"That is queer, for a fact," observed Thad. "But I reckon now it would never have held out if some of the fellows we have in Cranford had come along."

"You hit it right about that, Thad," agreed Step Hen. "Take that Ambrose Griffin and his cronies, Eli Bangs and Walt Hopkins, and they never could pass an empty house without shyin' stones at the windows. I've heard a smash many a time, and seen one of them scootin' away like hot cakes. Guess they like to hear the jingle of the broken glass; it must sound like music to some fellers."

"What's thet ye say 'bout Eli?" asked the old guide, pricking up his ears.

"Oh! we weren't talking about you that time," laughed Thad. "It happens that you've got a namesake down in the town where we live, who's up to every trick there is, that he thinks will afford him some fun;" and as the guide expressed an interest in the matter, Thad detailed a few of the practical jokes which were believed to lie at the doors of the three bad boys of Cranford.

When he heard about the lights going out at the church, just when a convert was about to be immersed, and the cries of the alarmed audience, together with shrieks from the frightened woman, who really thought she had been transplanted from this world into another, since everything became suddenly black around her, the guide grinned. He had never heard of such carrying on, and thought it was comical. But Thad knew that more than one person had need of a doctor after that episode; and that if actual proof could be procured concerning the culprits who cut the electric wires, they would have been severely punished by the town fathers.

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Somehow none of the boys seemed in such a hurry to lie down now. Thad's stories of events which they knew from first hands started them talking again; and by degrees some of the rest related other doings that were commonly laid at the door of the three Cranford scapegraces.

Bumpus changed his blanket three separate times in the course of half an hour. There was no draught now to complain of, since Eli had managed to get the door closed; but Thad noticed the fat and timid scout eying that wide throat of the chimney; and really believed Bumpus had come to suspect that it was large

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enough to admit of the passage of one of those hungry wolves, should they find all other avenues of ingress closed to them. And he did not fancy being directly in the road of the first one that came in.

Bumpus knew that he must prove a juicy morsel for any half-starved beast of prey; and that, given the chance, they were just sure to pick him out. Giraffe was playing safe under any considerations, for the animal that would prefer that bag of bones must be out of its mind.

And Thad also made up his mind that after Bumpus got fairly to sleep he would manage to get possession of the gun he had hitched closer to him, and which was the double-barreled weapon carried into the woods by Davy, who had made no protest when the stout boy coolly appropriated the same.

There could be no telling but that Bumpus, with his mind worked up over that bear, and the wolf that had howled away off up the river, might dream he was being hotly attacked. And a gun in the possession of a greenhorn can be even more dangerous under such conditions than if an adept handled it.

"I've just thought of a good thing," suddenly exclaimed Bumpus.

"Then get it out of your system in a hurry, or it'll hurt you," said Giraffe.

"No danger of anything good ever hurting *you*, Giraffe," declared the other, with a fine show of sarcasm that caused the tall scout to grin; for somehow, when he and Bumpus got to exchanging compliments, Giraffe always seemed rather tickled if the other managed to give him a sly dig.

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"Well, let's hear what struck you, all of a sudden," he remarked.

"It's about our honey," began Bumpus, seriously.

"What honey?" demanded Giraffe, pretending to look all around. "I haven't seen any, that I know of."

"Oh! you know what I mean;" Bumpus went on; "the honey we expect to get, when Allan finds the bee tree. I'm just as dead sure he's goin' to do it, as I am of having my breakfast to-morrow morning."

"Well, I reckon Allan only wishes he was as sure as you are," Giraffe remarked.

"Let him tell what's on his mind, can't you, Giraffe?" broke in Davy Jones. "I think it's a shame how you badger that poor fellow. Don't you know there's a law against cruelty to animals?"

"Monkeys are included under that law, please remember," retorted the fat boy, as he turned on his new tormentor. "But I suppose you fellows are just dying to know the brilliant thought that just flashed into my mind a little while ago?"

"Go on, and get it out," begged Step Hen.

"Yes, we want to know, if we're not from Missouri," added Allan.

"Well, there isn't any reason why we should waste a whole lot of it after all, if we only know enough to use our brains, and take advantage of our opportunities," Bumpus went on, with exasperating slowness, as though this might be his method of getting even for the attack upon him.

"What sort of opportunities?" demanded Davy.

"Storage capacity," answered the other, simply.

"Now, its all very well to want to save the honey," observed Giraffe, eyeing the other suspiciously; "but if you expect us to fill up our kettles, and every dish we've got along with us, you're off your base, Bumpus. We have to eat three times a day; and just fancy having even the coffee pot jammed full of sticky sweetness."

"Guess again," remarked Bumpus, composedly. "Well, I suppose that I'll just *have* to tell you, because you'd never get on to such a brilliant idea in a thousand years. First thing, you didn't know I brought it along, perhaps. Don't hardly understand myself just why I borrowed it from Smithy; but I must have thought it'd come in handy, sometime or other. And it's going to, fellows; it's going to."

"What is?" shouted Giraffe, now at the end of his patience.

"Why, that cute little collapsible rubber foot bath belonging to our comrade, Smithy. You know he was such a clean feller, that he just couldn't think of going anywhere at first, without carrying that tub along. It holds quite a lot; and if we filled it with nice sweet honey——"

But poor Bumpus did not get any further in his explanation. Roars of laughter broke in upon his story; for the idea of filling a rubber foot bath with the sticky product of a bee tree was too much for the rest of the boys. And Bumpus, after staring around in a hurt way, shrugged his fat shoulders, and relapsed into silence, simply remarking.

"Oh! all right; that's all a feller gets for crackin' his brain trying to think up things for the benefit of the whole bunch. I just guess that old bear'll get the main part of our honey, after all."

"What's that? Do bears like honey, Allan?" demanded Giraffe.

"I should say they did," replied the Maine lad, readily enough. "They're just wild over it. A bear will overturn a hive, if ever he gets in a garden, and devour comb and all, like a regular pig."

"But the bees," continued the tall scout; "don't they sting him at all? Think of the thousands of little critters, each with his poison lance, stinging that poor bear."

"It doesn't seem to bother the bear one bit," Allan added. "I've known them to just clean out a hive; and when we shot the varmint just afterward, he didn't seem to have a swollen head from any stings. But if we should be lucky enough to find a bee tree, perhaps we'll coax our friend, the bear that was in this cabin, to come around; and then some of you can get a crack at him. His hide would make a rug to be proud of,

especially if you had killed the beast yourself."

"Count me in on that game," said Giraffe, earnestly. "I boasted to the boys at home that I was goin' to bag a big bear; and if I don't make good they'll give me the laugh, you see. And then we'll find out whether this heavy old rifle that belonged to my uncle, ain't equal to a new-fangled little popgun that shoots spreader bullets."

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The boys had begun to show new signs of quieting down. Some were yawning again, and the chances were the signal to crawl under the blankets would presently have been given by Thad.

It was Bumpus who suddenly aroused the whole party. He sat upright on the floor, and pointed directly at the window that was opposite to where he had last thrown his blanket down. Thad saw that the face of the fat boy really expressed surprise, not to mention consternation, as he cried out:

"Oh! I wonder who that was I saw peek in at the window just then, and draw back when he caught me lookin' at him. A white man, too, fellers, it was, believe me; I ain't foolin'!"

Everybody jumped up, the three guides as well as the boys, when Bumpus made this astonishing declaration. But although their eyes instantly sought the window indicated, the cob-webbed glass betrayed no sign of the presence of any one.

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### **CHAPTER XIII.**

#### **THE MARKED SHOE AGAIN.**

"He's got 'em again, boys!" exclaimed Giraffe, in utter disgust. "You know, time was when our friend Bumpus was always seein' things? He used to get us up in the middle of the night huntin' around for all sorts of crazy wild beasts; and then, after we'd been nearly frozen, he'd yawn, say he guessed he must a been dreamin' again, and turn over to go to sleep. Now he's beginnin' to see things with his eyes open."

Everybody looked severely at Bumpus. Thad knew the ways of the fat boy as well as any one could. And he understood that the other could not keep a straight face when attempting anything like a practical joke. A whimsical little grin would always betray Bumpus to shrewd and searching eyes.

But just then he had a solemn look. Bumpus even seemed to be aggrieved that his word should be so lightly taken.

"But I ain't foolin', I tell you," he persisted. "I really and truly did see somethin' that *looked* like a man's face, peek in at that window!"

"Oh! hear him beginning to hedge, would you?" cried Davy, fiercely. "First it was a man, and a white man too. Now he says it just looked like a man. Pretty soon he'll up and admit that he *thought* he saw something moving out there; and

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when we rush out to hunt around, I guess we'll find only the limb of a tree that waves in the night wind. Oh! you Bumpus, we know you, all right!"

"Oh! very well, if you don't believe me when I say so, and hold up my hand this way, why, I haven't got another thing to say," grumbled the fat boy. "But if I didn't see a face there, why, I'll, yes, I'll eat my hat."

"After all," remarked Thad, whom the guides had been watching, to take their cue from his actions, "it ought to be easy to prove Bumpus' statement one way or the other."

"How's that, Thad?" asked Step Hen.

"Why, all we have to do is to ask Sebattis here, or Eli, or Jim, to step outside and look for tracks!" remarked the patrol leader.

"Well what do you think of that for a bright lot of scouts?" laughed Giraffe. "That's what we ought to have thought of the first thing. And the sooner they get busy, the quicker we'll know whether Bumpus saw anything, or just thought he did."

Thad turned on the guides, and smiling, nodded his head. With that signal, which they easily understood, both Eli and the Indian darted over to the fire; while the boys watched them curiously.

"Oh! it's torches they're after!" exclaimed Bumpus, seeing the guides picking out blazing brands that, to their practiced eyes, offered all the advantages which a lantern might supply.

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Doubtless one of the three men would have hastened to the door and pushed out to investigate, as soon as Bumpus raised his racket; only, hearing Giraffe making fun of the fat boy, they suspected it was only a prank he might be playing; and none of them wished to be caught as the victim of a practical joke.

The door was somewhat difficult to open, but stout Jim threw his weight upon it, and had a passage for his fellow guides when they were ready to step out.

Of course every one of the scouts hustled after, even Bumpus, which fact seemed to speak well for his sincerity. Thad himself secretly believed that there might be something in what Bumpus had said; and he prepared himself to hear such an announcement from one of the two who were intending to look for signs.

The very first thing both Sebattis and Eli did, after emerging from the hut, was to swing their torches violently around their heads. These made a hissing sound and the strange action quite aroused the curiosity of some of the scouts.

"Whatever are they doing that for?" asked Step Hen.

"Looks like they might be signallin' to somebody, and sayin' 'it's all off,'" Davy remarked.

But somehow Giraffe, knowing all about fires, and what uses they could be put to, laughed at their dense ignorance.

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"Why, don't you see," he declared with an air of superior wisdom, "when they whirl 'em around swiftly that way, it starts the flame to burning more fiercely, and so they get better light. See, what did I tell you? Ain't they burnin' to beat the band now? Talk about your electric torch, bah! it ain't in the same class with a good live firebrand."

Both the Penobscot Indian and the old Maine guide had pushed close up under the window by this time. It was seen that they carefully watched where they were stepping, as though not wanting to interfere with any tracks that might happen to lie there.

Bumpus in particular watched their every move as though fascinated. His veracity had been attacked by his fellow scouts, and he was waiting to see them "eat humble pie" pretty soon; for a face could not appear at the little dusty window without having connection with a human body; and that in turn could not get there save through the aid of a pair of legs; which would be connected with feet that must leave some sort of trail.

No doubt that was the way Bumpus was figuring it out, as he stood back with the others, and watched.

Eli evidently realized that though he might be an experienced hand at all such things as finding tracks and following them, under difficulties that might daunt many men, he could hardly expect to place himself in the same class with a genuine son of the forest.

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Therefore, Thad noticed that the old Maine guide seemed to purposely allow Sebattis to have the leading chance. He might know more than the Indian on many subjects, but was ready to "play second fiddle" as Giraffe expressed it, when there was a trail to discover, or read.

Hardly had the red guide reached the side of the cabin near the window, than he made a slight motion with his hand. Eli had evidently been waiting for some such signal as this. He quickly moved over to where the other bent down; and the two of them seemed to be looking closely at something.

A minute later they moved forward, a step at a time, and evidently following some tracks that were plainly marked upon the ground.

"Huh!" chuckled Bumpus; only that and nothing more; but the one word contained a world of meaning, and must have given him great satisfaction.

Perhaps, had he happened to be next to Giraffe, instead of Thad, he might have given the long-legged scout a sly dig in the ribs, and in this way let him understand that he believed his vindication in a fair way of being made complete.

"They've got something, that's sure," declared Davy Jones.

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"And now they're right under the window, too." added Step Hen. "Guess Bumpus wasn't dreamin' after all. He saw a face, all right. Look at 'em movin' off now. Say, Thad, you don't think

they're goin' to try and follow the owner of that face up till they get him, do you?"

"Well, hardly," returned the patrol leader. "I suppose they just want to make sure he did skip out, after he saw Bumpus had discovered him. And that looks like the fellow hardly cared to join our family circle."

"But who under the sun could he be, Thad?" asked Step Hen. "If there's more or less game around these diggings p'raps some trapper's made up his mind to stay up here all winter, and take pelts. When he saw our crowd, he was that disgusted he just pulled up stakes, and lit out for all he was worth."

"I think you're away off there, Step Hen," declared Giraffe. "Now, if I was asked my opinion, which nobody seems to care shucks for, I'd say that feller might be one of the two guides Mr. James W. Carson took into the woods with him. You see, I reckon there's a heap of jealousy between all these same guides; and it galled him to know that after they'd gone and fetched the gentleman away up here, promisin' that he'd have all the big game huntin' he wanted, without being bothered by any other party, they had to run smack up against a pack of Boy Scouts, out on a trip. That's why he scooted the way he did, I say."

Giraffe looked toward Thad, as though wishing he would speak up, and either substantiate his opinion, or else advance a new one. But the patrol leader was closely watching the guides, and made no remark.

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Sebattis and Eli had not gone far away. They seemed to be satisfied with following the trail just a little distance; and then turning, came back. Arriving under the window again they beckoned the others to approach.

"Don't walk over this patch right hyar, boys," warned the old guide, pointing down close to his feet; and from this they understood that the marks lay there.

"It's thar, all right, Thad," remarked Eli, with a grin. "Seems like the boy, he was right arter all, an' sum critter was a peekin' in at us."

Both Thad and Allan of course looked down at the ground. The guides held their blazing pine-knots closer, so that they could see better.

The impression of human foot could not be easily mistaken for the track of any sort of wild beast. Even the most ignorant tenderfoot scout that ever joined a troop must have known that fact at a glance.

But the patrol leader and the Maine boy seemed to discover something about the imprint of a shoe that caused them to stare. The balance of the scouts realized that something was about to happen beyond the ordinary: for they pushed in closer, and waited for either of the two experts to advance an opinion.

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Allan looked at Thad, and the other returned his glance with a nod.

"Seen that track before, eh, Allan?" Thad remarked.

"I sure have, for a fact," replied the Maine lad, positively.

"Remember how you found a footprint at that other camp of ours, before the sheriff came along; it had a patch across the sole, and so has this one. So it stands to reason that the same fellow made both prints. And didn't Sheriff Green tell us the leader of those hobo burglars wore a shoe that had just this same criss-cross patch on the sole? That looks like we might be somewhere close to that bunch of rascals right now; and that the sheriff must have gone off on the wrong scent."

The other scouts listened to all this with wide-open eyes, and expressions of both amazement and eagerness; but it was Giraffe who voiced their feelings when he exclaimed, drawing in a long breath:

"Wow! and again I say, wow!"

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## CHAPTER XIV. FIGURING IT OUT.

"Told you so!" Bumpus could not refrain from saying, in triumph.

Thad turned on him.

"Suppose you let us know what the fellow looked like, Bumpus?" he remarked. "If we happen on him in any of our wanderings, it might be just as well that we knew the kind of customer we have to deal with. Can you describe him?"

"I'm afraid not, Thad," replied the fat boy, a little dejectedly. "You see, just as quick as he caught sight of me turning my eyes up there, he ducked. And all I saw was that he had a face, and a kinder hairy one at that."

"Oh! you mean he wore a beard?" asked the other.

"Sure he did," was the reply. "That's what made me wonder whether it might have been a monkey of some sort, even if I didn't say as much to Giraffe when he was kidding me. But I happened to remember that *ordinary* monkeys don't grow up here in Maine," and the suggestive look he shot in the direction of Davy made that comrade sneer; as though he had grown hardened to being classed with the tree-climbing tribe, just because he could hang by his toes from a limb, or go up to the tiptop of any tree that he had ever seen.

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"Well, he came, and he saw; but he didn't conquer, not by a long sight," observed Step Hen. "He didn't like our looks one little bit, fellows, and made tracks out of here. What d'ye s'pose brought him around, in the first place?"

"Mout a be'n jest passin', an' seein' our light in hyar, thort he'd cum ter look us up. If he's thet kind o' a varmint, he mebbe thort as how thar was good pickin's ter be bed. But he knows better now."

It was Eli who advanced this opinion. Thad had another one that was based on certain facts obtained from the Maine sheriff who had dropped in on their camp so unexpectedly.

"If that was the man called Charley Barnes," he said, "you must remember that we heard he used to be a guide up in this country long ago, before he took to his present calling. And in that case, why, perhaps he may have known of this old cabin here, and was coming to see if it would make a half-way decent place to stay for a while. Perhaps one of his friends is sick; or it might be they feel that they just have to hold over somewhere, so as to lay in a stock of food. That's an idea the sheriff had, I recollect; and he wanted to keep so hot on their track that they'd find no time for hunting, and must get hungry."

"Well, it *was* a man, anyway, wasn't it?" asked Bumpus, demurely; for he felt that Giraffe owed him an apology of some sort.

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"Yes, it was a man," admitted that worthy, frankly; "and for once you've got a bulge on me, Bumpus. Rub it in all you want to; my hide's about as thick as the skin of a rhinoceros, and I c'n stand it easy."

"Oh! that's all right, Giraffe," replied the other, ready to forgive, now that things were coming his way; "I was only thinkin' how queer it seems to have them hobo burglars huntin' us up. Remember what I said about that fat reward we'd get, if we happened to pull 'em in? A big thousand dollars, Mr. Green said it was; and p'raps double that by now. Well, funnier things have happened, understand, than a pack of Brave Scouts, tried and true, rounding up a bunch of cowardly hoboes. We can do it, fellers, and not half try, if we get the chance."

Again Thad thought it one of the queerest things he had ever seen, to watch how the fire of enthusiasm seemed to burn within the breast of the usually rather timid and backward Bumpus Hawtree. Evidently he had his mind set on that reward; and could see how splendidly it would come in for the patrol, in paying the expenses of another long vacation trip they had in mind.

"Wonder if he'll come back any more?" remarked Step Hen, as they began to move into the cabin again, there being no further reason for remaining out in the cold.

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"I reckon now, he saw all he wanted, and didn't care about waiting to be introduced to such a gang," Giraffe chuckled.

"Speak for yourself, Giraffe," remarked Davy, disdainfully.

"I just can't get over Bumpus, here, showing such a strong desire to grab these burglar fellers," Giraffe went on. "What's comin' over him, do you think? We never used to think him daring or bold. He always said his heft kept him from joining in with the rest of the boys, when they skated over a 'ticklish bender' in the ice; and that it'd sure break with him. Same way about doin' a lot of stunts. Now here he is, tryin' to copy after Davy Jones in some of his monkey-shines; and makin' the rest of us look like thirty cents when it comes to wantin' to surround these here ferocious hoboes, and take 'em

prisoners.”

Bumpus shrugged his fat shoulders, and tried to look indifferent.

“Huh! that’s because you never really knew what I had in me,” he said, calmly, though Thad could see the merry twinkle in his eyes; “It ain’t always the savage lookin’ feller that turns out a *real* hero, when the time comes around. Often the quiet, modest, retirin’ sort of chap jumps in, and saves the drownin’ child.”

“Oh; and that’s you, is it?” demanded Giraffe, as he settled himself down in his blanket, ready to try for a little sleep.

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“Everything seems to be comin’ my way,” replied Bumpus, proudly. “All you have to do is to wait for the turn of the tide. I’m feelin’ just joyful. let me tell you;—all but one thing;” he added, hastily. “If I only knew about that letter business. Did I deliver it at the bank; or was I silly enough to forget, and lose it? Sometimes I c’n just see myself walkin’ in through the door of that bank, and deliverin’ the old thing; then it all gets mixed up, and for the life of me I just can’t say one way or t’other. If one of you only remembered seeing me go in, or come out; or if I said anything about handin’ it over, it’d ease my mind a heap, now, I tell you.”

Every time Bumpus got to thinking about that one trouble he lapsed into silence, because he did not seem to get any sympathy from most of his chums; Giraffe and Davy in particular being very apt to taunt him on his poor memory. Step Hen was not inclined to say very much, lest he draw the vials of the fat boy’s wrath down on his own head; for as we know, Step Hen had a failing himself in the line of forgetting what he had done with things he owned.

Once more the boys crawled under their blankets. Each of them had managed to manufacture some sort of a pillow. One had taken his clothes bag, and this example several of the rest copied, as suiting their wants exactly. Bumpus, lacking enough material, had gone out to the canoe and brought in his old haversack, from which he extracted the very rubber foot bath which he had mentioned to his chums as belonging to Smithy. This he crammed half full of other things, and declared it made as soft a pillow as anybody wanted.

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“Better cover that rubber with a towel, or something like it,” remarked Thad.

“But this feels so nice and cool,” complained Bumpus.

“It may now, all right, but after a while, when you sleep, it’ll begin to draw like everything; and the chances are, you’ll look like a boiled lobster on one side of your face by morning. I’ve been there myself, and know how it smarts and burns.”

“Thank you, Thad, for the advice, and I’ll take advantage of it right away,” declared the stout scout, sweetly. “Ain’t it the best thing ever to have a chum or two along, like Thad and Allan, who know so many things? Why, if it wasn’t for them, the rest of us would look like the babes in the woods.”

"Let up on that chatter, please, Bumpus," grumbled Step Hen. "It's gettin' awful late, and we ought to been asleep long ago."

"Yes, button up, Bumpus, I'd rather hear you snore than talk just now," came from under the blanket that Giraffe had wrapped himself in, much after the style of a mummy.

"All right. I'll just lie on my back, then, and try to accommodate you," the other shot back.

"I've got one of my shoes handy, remember, and if you so much as give one little snort I mean to shy it over in that corner," Giraffe threatened.

The guides had been talking quietly among themselves, and when Thad saw Sebattis open the door and slip out, he could give a pretty good guess what the Indian meant to do. Perhaps he suspected that the hoboies, lacking a boat with which to make their flight easier as long as the river continued navigable, might return in numbers later in the night, in order to help themselves from the stock of Oldtown canvas canoes owned by the scouts' party.

Yes, the shrewd Penobscot Indian did not mean that such a disaster should come to pass; and doubtless he and his fellow-guides had arranged for sentry duty by turns during the entire night.

Thad felt perfectly secure with such wide-awake videttes to look out for the approach of the enemy. He would have gladly taken his turn on post if asked; but it seemed as though the three guides considered that a part of their duty. They had an easy enough task as it was, with these boys so willing to paddle in turn, make fires, help cook the meals, and do all sorts of things that generally the guide has fall on his shoulders alone.

Presently silence fell upon the cabin. The fire smouldered on the great hearth, and occasionally flamed up, only to die down again. If it got very low, some one who happened to be awake at the time, was supposed to quietly get up, and put more fuel on; this had been anticipated, and there was plenty under the shelter of the cabin roof.

Perhaps Bumpus believed that Giraffe really meant that dire threat he made in connection with his heavy shoe; at any rate he did not venture to lie on his back at all, and therefore failed to emit anything that could be called a snore.

Hours crept on, and the night wore away. Some of the scouts never woke up once from the time they dropped off to sleep until the delightful odor of boiling coffee gave them to understand that dawn was at hand, and Jim getting breakfast ready for the whole outfit.

That caused the last of them to climb out, and there was more or less chattering as they went outside to try and find water that was not icy cold, in order to wash their faces, and chase the last remnants of sleep from their eyes.

"I wonder," said Bumpus, looking up at the brightening sky, and trying to keep from shivering as he dashed water over his rosy face; "if this is goin' to be a good day for bee tree

huntin'; because I'll never be happy till I've seen what a real honey hole looks like."

"But remember," warned Giraffe, solemnly, "we ain't fillin' our kettles an' bath tubs with the honey. I know where a heap of it c'n be stowed away right now; and that's all I'm thinkin' about. Hey! there's Jim rattling the frying-pan with that big spoon. I reckon breakfast's ready, before we are. Get a move on, Bumpus!"

## **CHAPTER XV. THE LUCK THAT CAME TO BUMPUS.**

"Where's Sebattis?" asked Step Hen, as they sat down to breakfast, there being a rude table in the cabin, around which the boys could gather; though the guides had to hold off, and either wait, or else munch their food elsewhere.

"That's a fact; I thought there was somebody missing!" exclaimed Bumpus.

Somehow or other they all looked toward Thad, as though he might be able to give an explanation. And sure enough, he did.

"Why, he beckoned to me about the time I came out," the scoutmaster remarked, "and told me he was going to take a little turn along the trail of that man. He hasn't come back yet; so I guess he's been able to follow it some distance."

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"That sounds real woodsy now," declared Giraffe. "Following the trail for me. I'm struck on everything that seems like Cooper's *Leatherstocking*. Wonder whether he c'n keep it right up till he drops in on the crowd? P'raps they ain't so very far away from here, after all."

"But I just saw Sebattis pass the window; there he is comin' in right now," observed Step Hen.

The dusky-skinned guide was indeed entering the door. And no one could tell by looking at his inscrutable face whether Sebattis had met with success or disappointment in his recent labors.

From the fact of his coming back so soon Thad rather imagined that the latter must be the case. He knew the Indian would volunteer no explanation unless asked questions; and so Thad managed to corner him while he was fixing his elkskin moccasins over by the fire. When presently the patrol leader came back to the rest of the scouts, he was greeted by numerous demands that he communicate what he had learned.

"Sebattis followed the tracks for some distance," Thad went on to say, as he poured himself another cup of coffee; "but after the fellow got a certain distance from the cabin, he began to be more cautious. It was just as if he thought some one might want to follow him, and he did not mean they should succeed. At any rate, he covered his tracks so that even Sebattis was unable to find the trail again."

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"Then it's sure a fact that the hobo must be some woodsman himself," Giraffe declared. "I

thought an Indian could follow the trail of a fox, if he wanted."

"Well, Sebattis said he was willing to go back again, and try further, and that he believed he *could* find the trail again; but he wanted to make sure first that we cared enough about it. From certain remarks he had heard some of us make, he thought we didn't care to make the acquaintance of the rascals. We even said, you may remember, fellows, that we hadn't lost any hoboos that we knew of, and didn't mean to go out of our way to find any. And so Sebattis came back to report."

"What did you tell him, Thad?" asked Step Hen.

"Why," replied the other, "that so long as they didn't interfere with us, we had no reason to bother our heads about these men. We had plenty of things on hand, as it was, without trying burglar catching. If they only let us alone, and didn't run across our path, we'd forget there were any such chaps in the Maine woods."

"Just think of the lost chance to lay in a big wad of the long green, enough to carry us all the way across the continent, and see something of the Far West, like we've often talked about," whined Bumpus.

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Thad was indeed surprised to hear the fat boy talk like this, for Bumpus was, as a rule, a very peaceful boy, never willingly seeking trouble. Really, this anxiety in connection with that valuable letter, which he could not place, try as he would, seemed to have upset him entirely, so that he was no longer the same jolly Bumpus of old.

"Which would you rather do to-day, Bumpus," the scoutmaster asked; "try and find these desperate men, and like as not get the whole of us into trouble; or hunt for a bee tree with Allan; while Davy and myself go with Eli for a hunt?"

There was no hesitation now, for with a wide grin Bumpus shouted:

"Bee tree, first, last and all time for mine!"

"Ditto here!" Giraffe followed by saying, as he laid a hand on the pit of his stomach, and bowed.

"Can you make the try, Allan?" queried the stout scout, turning appealingly in the direction of the second in command of the patrol.

"Do for goodness' sake oblige the little fellow," urged Giraffe. "Because we'll sure hear of nothing else every hour of the day. When that feller gets a thing on his mind he makes me think of the woman in the sleeping car, who kept saying out loud in the night, again and again; 'Oh! I am *so* thirsty; I am *so* thirsty!' till a traveler, who couldn't sleep, got up, and went and gave her a cup of water. He was just tryin' to drop off again when she started in, and this time she kept sayin', 'Oh! I *was* so thirsty! I *was* so thirsty!' Then he gave up tryin' to get a snooze till she tired out. And that's the way with Bumpus, boys."

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"But can we make the try this morning, Allan?" persisted the stout boy, when the laugh at his expense had died away.



"Better say yes, and save yourself a heap of trouble," suggested Step Hen, who was himself a little anxious to see how the search might be conducted.

"Well," remarked Allan, "nothing can be done until about noon. If the sun seems fairly warm then, we might have a chance to see bees flying, or catch the drone of the swarm of young ones trying their wings just outside the opening of the tree hive. I'll set you all to work watching and listening; and we'll see who the lucky one will be."

"Seems to me a lot of fellows make a living, picking up things in these Maine woods, from honey and bees wax, to lumbermen and pulp stuff choppers?" Thad remarked, with an inquiring glance toward Allan.

"They do," replied the other, promptly. "I could tell you a heap about these people, some of whom I've even met in my trips around."

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"Then go on and tell us," urged Davy.

"Yes, we always like to know what's doing," added Giraffe, as he helped himself to another flapjack, which Jim, the younger guide, seemed to know how to make in a way calculated to appeal to a hungry camper's appetite.

"Well, first of all there's the spruce gum hunter," Allan started to say. "You can follow the snowshoe trail of these busy chaps through pathless stretches, and find their camp-fires glowing in many a lonely glen. They get about between a dollar and a dollar and a half a pound, for the stuff, and it's worth all of that. They usually travel in pairs, and collect many pounds in a season."

"But how do they manage to climb some of these tall spruce trees we've seen on our trip?" asked Thad.

"Oh! that's easy enough," laughed the other. "Every spruce gum hunter has a pair of climbers with him. You've seen the telephone and telegraph wire men use these, fastened to their legs with straps. He has to have warm clothing; a curved chisel, in the handle of which a pole is set; a fine jack knife; and a gun. In the night he sits by the fire, smoking, while he cleans his day's pick."

"But he has to eat; tell us then how he totes his grub along; and where does he put up at in the woods? We haven't run across any hotels up here, it strikes me?" asked Giraffe.

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"As for his food," Allan continued, "he drags on a moose sled, and it's either a deserted camp, or the lee side of a tree every night, as he happens to find things. And he is satisfied with mighty little in the way of food, trusting to his gun to eke things out. With plenty of work, a few bushels of beans, some flour and molasses, and perhaps some coffee, a gum picker thinks himself well off for a winter's campaign."

"He must have a good eye for gum trees?" suggested Thad.

"Just what he has," replied the accommodating Allan. "A near-sighted gum hunter, or even a

careless one, would miss many a chance to fill up his pack. The keen picker runs his eye along every trunk. Here and there he sees a tall spruce marked by a seam, through which the sap has oozed, perhaps for years. The bubbles have crept out, and been clarified day by day by contact with sun and rain. There they are, nuggets of amber and garnet, ready for the picker's chisel. Sometimes he climbs up, and taps away like a giant woodpecker. Then again, when it pays to do it, the tree is felled; for of course he has his axe along; no man would ever go into the Maine woods without that, you know."

"If I was in that business," spoke up Bumpus, "tell you what I'd do."

"Go on, then," said Giraffe, taking advantage of the fat boy's abstraction to pick the pancake off his plate, there being no more in the main dish.

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"Why, I'd just have a few acres of extra fine trees, and I'd scar 'em good and hard, so they'd bleed. Then, in a year or two, I'd just gather the gum, like they do in the turpentine regions down South."

"Good idea, Bumpus," declared Allan. "But another great man has thought of that same idea, which isn't copyrighted either. Every year this man, who is called the spruce gum king, takes a certain circuit, and wounds the trees. Then, a couple of years afterwards he wanders that way, and reaps his harvest. There's another industry that gives employment to lots of men up here. That's gathering hoop poles."

"Oh! tell us something about that," demanded Step Hen.

"Well," Allan went on, "he follows in the wake of the logger, you might say, for he just wants the second growth that springs up around the stumps left after the tree is cut down. He takes what no one else seems to want, the young birch and ash sprouts that are too plentiful anyway.

"He takes a horse with him on his tours, for he has lots to tote. He hauls his day's cutting to camp, and spends the evening fixing the poles. It's pretty hard work, I'm told, all around; but then the evenings are pleasant, what with the crackle of the fire; the swish of the shaves at work taking the bark off the poles; the pipe-smoking; and the story-telling."

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"What do they get for the poles after they've been skinned?" asked Step Hen.

"About two or three cents apiece, but that pays well for their work, and they bring in a heap of stuff through a winter. Of course, you know that these poles are split later, and used for barrels, the smaller ones for nail kegs, and to put around boxes. Down South all the orange boxes have such bindings."

"Is that all the ways of earning a living up here in this wonderful country?" Thad asked, deeply interested.

"I should say decidedly not," replied the other. "Why, I couldn't begin to tell you the different things men do up here, besides acting as guides; fire wardens, to protect the woods; and logging.

There's the professional honey hunter who spends most of his time summers in locating bee trees. Then there's the axe-handle man. He needs ash of a larger growth than the hoop-pole fellow. The trees are chopped in the fall, and then by means of a 'fro' and an axe, each handle is shaped out in a rough state. Then they are buried, that they may season without cracking."

"How funny that is," said Bumpus, who was listening to all this with eager ears.

"For fear that the wood may split," continued Allan, "each end is daubed with a paint which is part grease; because ash goes to pieces mighty easy, if the sun gets at it. The rough handles are sent away to a factory to be nicely finished. Then there's the fellow who hunts for ship knees; and I tell you he has no picnic. I tried it once, and I give you my word I don't want to go out again."

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"Ship knees!" echoed Giraffe.

"Yes, and there are heaps of these picked up, but only after tough work. The prospector goes out with his axe, hunting for hack or back juniper, or tamarack. He must examine every one he finds to make sure it has just the right kind of a bend or crook; and then comes the job of digging it out, which is a muscle racking business, believe me."

"Any more?" demanded Bumpus, when Allen paused to finish his coffee.

"Oh! yes, lots. I remember the fellow who goes after hemlock bark for the tanneries. Then there are the Indians who make baskets; or who prefer to have the old style birch bark canoe, to one of these elegant up-to-date canvas ones, that are built on exactly the same model as those used hundreds of years ago. Big birches are few and far between up in Maine now, and sometimes, as Sebattis here has told me, one of the Penobscots will travel nearly fifty miles before he can strike a tree large enough to make a canoe, yielding a piece of bark without a crack, or a knot-hole, where a branch has been lopped off."

"That winds up the list, then, does it?" asked Step Hen, getting up.

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"Far from it," laughed Allen. "I could sit here for half an hour more, and tell you about other queer occupations that these wonderful Maine woods open up to the men who have a leaning that way. Why, I understand that some smart fellows have even been dredging some of the streams after the mussels or fresh water clams; and not only selling the shells to the factories where pearl buttons are manufactured, but finding pearls every little while."

"Pearls, and up here of all places!" exclaimed Bumpus, as though amazed.

"Certainly," replied Allen. "They've been taking a great many out in the streams of Indiana, Missouri and other states in the middle West these years back, and one man in the Moosehead region in Maine found a pearl not long ago that brought two hundred dollars, and was worth many times that when polished, I guess. And then, last but not least, are the trappers who are scattered all over the state."

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Each winter they take a tremendous amount of valuable fur; and as Maine is so far north, the pelts being several times as much as those in warmer countries. A muskrat hide from a swamp up here, is worth three times as much as one taken in Florida or Louisiana. But some other time I may tell you more about the resources of these great woods. It's time we got busy doing things; and here are Thad and Davy just waiting to be moving on their little hunt."

"Well, I declare," remarked Bumpus, "I never had any idea the woods up here had such a lot of living in 'em for an army of men," and he looked around at the encircling trees with renewed respect.

The little hunting party was soon ready to launch forth.

"Be back before night, I suppose?" bawled out Giraffe after them.

"We expect to," replied Thad; "but if we hold off, make your minds up we're all right, and don't let Bumpus worry."

"Huh! just as if Bumpus didn't have enough to worry about as it is," grumbled the fat boy. "I dreamed last night that when I got back to Cranford I found all my folks lined up at the station, and every blessed one apointin' an accusin' finger right at me, an' lookin' real sad. Say, I woke up all of a tremble, and was mighty glad to find that it was only a silly dream. Course I must a delivered that note to the bank; chances they're ten to one I did; *but I wish I knew; I just wish I could be dead sure!*"

He was a bit gloomy all through the morning, and sat there staring into the red heart of the fire until Giraffe demanded to know whether he was sick; and if he meant to go out with them after lunch to hunt for that bee tree, or keep camp.

That seemed to excite Bumpus, and he again forgot all his troubles. But evidently his pondering had not brought any happy result; and he was just as far as ever from knowing whether he had carried out his father's instructions with regard to that precious letter, or not.

The sun had indeed warmed things up toward noon. It often does during the fall season in Maine, and before the first heavy snow, making ideal weather; the early morning being crisp and delightful, with the middle of the day quite warm.

Allan had admitted that if ever they had a chance to find a bee tree that day ought to tell the tale. He believed that the young bees would surely be tempted to take some exercise before they were hived up for the long winter. And when there is a swarm buzzing around busily in a clump, they make quite some noise, that a keen ear can easily detect, if on guard.

So, after they had partaken of a light lunch, they started out, leaving Sebattis to look after the camp while they were gone.

Besides an axe, the boys carried a few things in which a supply of honey could be brought back,

in case success followed their efforts, and a genuine bee tree was located.

Allan told them the comforting truth, that since this region had apparently not been hunted over for some years, there ought to be a very good chance of running across a hive. Of course they carried their guns, because no one could tell when these useful articles would be needed. And as Jim said, "when a man wants his gun, he gen'rally needs it in a big hurry."

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As they went along Allan took occasion to point out numerous things that bore some relation to the facts which he had so recently been telling them.

"That's a birch almost big enough to make a canoe," he remarked, pointing to a splendid specimen of the shapely tree that stood close by. "And over yonder is a tamarack on the border of that swale. You generally find them in swampy sections. And around this tree blown down by a storm, you can see growing a lot of young shoots, which, as like as not, the hoop pole man would cut for his use."

Presently, however, he began to explain how they must stretch out, forming a line through the woods, and covering the ground. At one end Allen himself took up his station, with Jim the guide forming the other guard. This was a precaution, lest one of the others showed an inclination to stray. They were to keep in touch with one another by occasional shouts, which were to serve as signals. Each one had his particular and distinguishing call, and when Allen shouted, first Bumpus, next in line, then Step Hen, and after him Giraffe and Jim were to answer in order; that the one in charge could be sure that they were keeping in something of a straight line.

And in case a hum was heard that sounded like a hive, a certain cry, twice repeated, was to summon all the others to the spot.

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The boys tramped for half an hour, with eyes and ears on the alert. Many times no doubt they imagined they caught the welcome buzzing sound, but upon coming to a halt in order to listen and make certain, before bringing their companions hurrying to the spot, it always devolved into something else, much to the chagrin and disappointment of the hunter.

Bumpus was fully awake to the great possibilities of the occasion. Somehow this honey hunting had become a sort of mania with him. It was not that he loved the sweet nectar of the hive any better than Giraffe for instance; but his nature was such that he liked to find things that were lost. And somehow the idea of locating a genuine bee tree appealed immensely to the fat boy.

So he tramped sturdily along, looking upward with a great effort, on account of his stout build, and frequently wishing Nature had endowed him with that "rubber neck" which Giraffe boasted, and which must be an ideal one for a wild honey hunter, Bumpus imagined. It was perhaps the first and only time he had ever envied his comrade in the possession of such a long neck.

But Bumpus really believed that fortune was

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going to be extra kind to him. He kept telling himself that if any one discovered the wonderful bee tree, it must be himself, because he had dreamed of it so very often.

Now and then he answered the calls which Allen sent out. He did this because he had a horror of getting lost. These woods seemed everlastingly big to him; and he could just imagine the terrible condition that must face any tenderfoot scout who managed to stray away from contact with his camp mates.

About three quarters of an hour had gone now, and as yet no cry announcing the successful find had come pealing along the line. Bumpus was beginning to feel tired, without any question. He admitted it to himself, but grudgingly, for he did not want to halt the proceedings, now that they were actually engaged in the bee hunt.

He refreshed himself at every water hole he came to, whether it were a running brook, or just a tiny pond with a thin skim of ice along the shore.

They were passing through a rather thick patch of woods when Bumpus felt another thrill. He felt certain that he had caught something that sounded like the buzzing of a swarm of insects; and as he had more than once meddled with the hive his people had at home, Bumpus was well qualified to know what the droning might be like.

Eagerly did he look upward, all around him. Then he began to locate the quarter from which it seemed to come, and in so doing brought to bear what little woods' lore he had managed to pick up; for he actually noted the direction of the slight breeze, and how the noise came to him more clearly as he moved to a certain point.

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Finally he believed it must come from one tree in particular. He made several tests, and each time his conviction grew more and more positive. And still the droning kept up. But the tree was a very tall one, and Bumpus had never trained his eyes to detecting small objects at a distance. In fact, some of his friends had even declared that he must be near-sighted, though he stoutly denied this.

Then suddenly, he saw a confused blur between himself and the blue sky above the tops of the trees. It actually moved back and forth in a singular swaying way.

Bumpus thrilled now with new pride. He fully believed that in this tall tree of the Maine woods he had actually located a bee hive that would assure them all the clarified sweetness they could carry away.

And when he had made as sure of this as he could, Bumpus put his trembling hands to his mouth, and sent out in his loudest tones the call agreed upon to tell the others that he, Bumpus, had after all been the one to succeed.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE, WELL

## EARNED.

"A false alarm, boys!" sang out the envious Giraffe, as they all came hurrying up to the spot where Bumpus was dancing about excitedly, with a wide grin on his rosy fat face.

"It is, hey?" declared the discoverer, indignantly; "well, you just wait and see what Allan here says. There's the tree it's in; and if you put on your specs, Giraffe, p'raps even you c'n see the swarm buzzin' around up yonder."

"He's right, boys," declared Allan, quickly; "even before I look I can hear the noise that tells the truth. We've found our bee tree; and the honor goes after all to our chum, Bumpus."

"Hurrah for Bumpus!" exclaimed Step Hen, pounding the fat scout on the back, after the custom of boys in general.

They were all soon able to locate the buzzing sound, and gaped up with growing eagerness at the place where the swarm was in motion.

"Looks like a big hive, too," ventured Giraffe.

"You never can tell," Allan declared; "but from the signs I wouldn't be surprised if it was an old one, and just stocked to the doors with honey."

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"Wow! that suits me," Giraffe went on; "I can stand it every meal, right along. Never yet did get enough of the stuff."

"But it's awful high up," ventured Step Hen. "How under the sun will we ever climb up there, and dig it out?"

"Don't have to," remarked Bumpus, placidly; "that tree's just got to be chopped down, so's to let us scoop up all the stuff we can carry back home."

"But it's a whopper of a tree," Step Hen went on; "and who's goin' to chop it down, I'd like to know?"

"Oh!" remarked Bumpus, pleasantly, "that was all fixed long ago. You may remember that once Giraffe here promised to chop down the tree, if ever I located a hive. Well, there's the tree; so get busy, Giraffe. It's a pretty hefty axe, too, I should think; but you know how to swing one. I'll sit down on this log, and see how you get on; because I've done my part."

Giraffe started to answer back; then thought better of it; and seizing hold of the axe that Jim the guide carried, he started to hack the tree.

But Giraffe was no woodsman, and made such a sorry mess of it that Jim finally took pity on him. He knew the scout would never get that tree down in a day, judging from the clumsy way he started in. Besides, there would be danger of the amateur chopper bringing it down on himself. It takes an experienced woodsman to judge how a tree is inclined to fall. One of these fellows can drop a tree almost in any exact place he wants, unless the slant of the trunk is entirely too great to be overcome by judicious work with the axe.

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From time to time Allan "spelled" the guide, for

he knew how to handle an axe to some advantage. And the others stood around, watching with interest the clever way in which the sharp axe cut into the wood, exactly on a line with preceding strokes.

"I could never learn to do that in a coon's age," admitted Bumpus.

"But I mean to, and before I quit these here Maine woods," declared Giraffe. "A feller that's as fond of fires as me, ought to know how to chop down a tree, so's to always have plenty of wood for burnin'."

"And I can see the finish of these grand woods, after *you* do learn how," remarked Step Hen, a little sarcastically. "You'll never rest as long as there's one tree left to burn."

"Hey, she's shivering, now; better look out, fellers, because that tree's goin' to come down right soon!" called out Bumpus, edging away.

After a little more work Jim made the rest all get back beyond the danger line, in case the tree did chance to swing around; which he knew would not be the case; because Jim had once been a logger, and doubtless felled hundreds of larger trees than this one.

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With a crash it came plunging down, just where the man with the axe had said he meant to drop it.

"Whoop! Hurrah!" shrilled the excited Bumpus, who held a kettle in his hands; and carried away by the thrill of the moment, he forgot all the warning he had received from Allan, plunging straight toward the upper part of the tree.

"Split wide open, fellers, and oh! my, just look at the honey spilled all over the ground! What a wicked waste. Oh! Oh!"

"Come back from there!" shouted Jim.

It was too late. Bumpus was in the midst of the excited swarm of bees that had started to whirl around, dazed at first by the sudden catastrophe that had overtaken their house, but rapidly becoming furiously angry.

"Look at the silly, would you?" cried Step Hen, staring aghast at Bumpus, who had already started to fill his receptacle with the honey comb that lay around, partly broken by the fall of the tree.

"They're after him!" shrieked Giraffe, who thought it a comical sight to see the fat boy trying to gather up the sweet stuff with one hand, while the other was busily engaged slapping at the insects that began to get their work in on various parts of his anatomy.

Finally even the fortitude of Bumpus gave way before the onslaught of that army of angry bees, each member of which was armed with a sting that could make things exceedingly interesting for the intruder.

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So Bumpus began a masterly retreat. At first he clung to his spoils; and then, finding that he needed a dozen arms to ward off the savage little insects he dropped his plunder, and set out on a wild run, kicking and slapping at a



tremendous rate.

Giraffe laughed heartily at the sight. He had advanced much further than the others, before realizing that the example of Bumpus was reckless, and Step Hen's calling warned him to pull up.

In the midst of his merriment Giraffe was seen to give a vicious lunge at the side of his head; this was followed by another, and another, as more bees found him out; until with a yell he too had to seek safety in flight, his long arms waving every which way, like flails on a barn floor; or the wings of a Dutch windmill in action.

It was a pair of very contrite boys that presently asked Allan's advice as to what was best for bee stings. Step Hen himself could not keep from grinning at the enlarged appearance of their heads, and even gave them some fatherly advice about the folly of being so conceited, and having such swelled heads over a little thing like that.

But Allan found some mud on the border of a nearby pond, with which he plastered their hurts in the good old-fashioned way known to the early pioneers. After which there were two of the most comical looking fellows ever seen wearing the uniform of Boy Scouts. All the same, the cool mud did seem to ease the terrible burning caused by the stings, and Allan said it would in a measure take out the poison.

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"No more rheumatism cures for me, I tell you," remarked Giraffe. "Whew! I guess the remedy is some worse than the disease. And can't those little beggars just poke it into you, though? Every time one stung me, I felt like he was pushing a six-inch knife into me, and heated red hot at that. Honey, oh! yes, I like you; but I'd rather buy it in the market after this."

"But don't think of giving up so soon," remarked Step Hen. "I'm dead sure Allan here knows of a way to get all the honey we want, and never be stung once, don't you, Allan?"

"I'll show you how it's done," replied the other, "though in the summer time the bee hunters often carry a piece of mosquito netting along, which they fasten over their hats, so the insects can't get at them. But there's another way. Bees are in deadly fear of smoke. All bee men give them a few puffs of smoke before they open the hive."

"What does that do, stupefy the poor little critters?" asked Step Hen, who did not know as much about bees as even Bumpus.

"Why, you see," volunteered the latter, wishing to air his knowledge, "bees, as soon as they scent smoke, believe their hive is on fire. Every feller gets busy right away, loading up with honey. And when they're doing that, they won't take any notice of other things, so they c'n be handled easy enough. I know somethin' 'bout bees, because we got a new fangled hive at home."

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"Huh! I just guess you know more about 'em right now than ever you did before, Bumpus," chuckled Step Hen, who had not been stung once; "and it's been impressed on you pretty strong, too, so's to keep you from forgettin' the

same. After this you ain't agoin' to romp into a hive of bees that's been upset, not in a hurry."

"Allan, s'pose you get busy with that smoke," remarked Bumpus, disdaining to appear to notice this slur on his capacity for bee lore.

"We'd better wait a little longer," the other advised; "so we can get closer. They'll quiet down in a little while, and then we can make the fire on the windward side, so that the smoke must drift right across the hive."

Presently he set them to work collecting just the kind of fuel he wanted, and which was calculated to make a dense smoke. When this smudge was started going it seemed to set the bees working with feverish eagerness to load themselves down with honey. No one ever has learned just why they do this, unless it is the desire to save enough food for self support; because they never attempt to rescue any of the young brood in the cells.

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"Ain't it near time now?" asked the impatient Bumpus, whom even the swollen condition of his neck and cheeks did not seem to entirely cure of that eager desire to snatch the fruits of his victory from the savage little army of protectors.

"A little longer, and then we can set to work. Better let Jim and me do the main part of it, boys. You might be too excited; and it's always that kind of a fellow the bees tackle. I've known bee keepers who handle their hives day in and day out all season, and seldom get a sting. They're cool, and never make a false move, such as knocking the box, or coughing, or any sort of sound that will anger the insects."

He went on to tell them some interesting facts connected with the finding of bee trees, which he had either heard from the lips of others, or witnessed himself.

Ten minutes passed, and Bumpus was growing impatient again, when Allan remarked:

"Now, the time is up, I guess; and if you keep back of us, and hand us the buckets, Jim and myself can begin to get some of that clear stuff, which looks like this season's make. It won't take only a little time till we fill everything we brought, and there must be a ton of the stuff, all told, in this big old hive."

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Even Giraffe forgot his late unpleasantness as he again advanced nearer the spot where the stores of scattered sweetness lay.

## **CHAPTER XVII.**

### **THE COMING OF THE HAIRY HONEY THIEF.**

It did not take long for the honey gatherers to fill every receptacle they had brought along with them. Bumpus was once more feeling a little like himself, though Step Hen did take occasion to warn him against showing his pride over being the one to find the bee tree.

"Honors are about even, I guess, Bumpus," he would remark, with stinging emphasis; "you found the bees, and they found you, all right, looks like. And you're swelled up enough now without letting yourself puff out any more. We all admit that you're a wonder, and that you've sure got an eye for bee trees; just as Giraffe here is crazy about the stuff. Look at him now, would you, munching at that comb just like it was a slice of bread and jam."

"Yum! yum!" remarked the person in question, whose face was smeared almost up to his ears with the sticky stuff; "ain't had such a delicious feed since I sneaked into the preserve closet at home when a kid, and the spring lock caught. I knew I'd be in for a tannin' and was bound to get the worth of it first, so I just ate and ate, tryin' to sample every kind there was. It made me sick though, which was worse than the strappin' my dad gave me. But this is the finest ever, barring none. Yum! yum! and more to follow, too."

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"Well, if I was like that, I'd just camp out alongside this old nest, till I'd scraped it clean, if it took all winter," declared Step Hen; who did not happen to care particularly for sweet things, and therefore felt no sympathy for the other pair of scouts.

Bumpus had also tasted his find, and pronounced it prime. They could hardly coax Giraffe away from the fallen bee tree; and in securing a last comb of the lovely clear honey, he managed to get a few more stings that rather added to his ridiculous appearance. Step Hen nearly took a fit every time he looked at that pair, nor could Allan blame him; for they certainly were a sight calculated to make any one forget all his own troubles.

The afternoon wore away, and those who remained in camp talked over the next thing which was on the programme. This was nothing more nor less than making an effort to bag a bear; and of course Giraffe was particularly interested, because of the boast he had made in Cranford that he did not mean to return home until he had, alone and unaided, shot a black bear.

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"There was sure enough smell of honey in the air around that old bee tree to set a bear crazy for a taste, if he ever got wind of the treat," declared Allan, when Giraffe asked him for the fifth time about the chances they had of meeting with Bruin.

"Mebbe he's over there now, fillin' up?" suggested Bumpus, who was not very much interested, because he could not be coaxed to go all the way back to where they had secured their store of sweets, even though sure of seeing a bear diving into the honey tree, and stowing away great quantities of the sticky stuff.

"No, it isn't likely he's abroad in the daytime," Allan replied. "He got something of a scare when we chased him out of here, and I guess he's lying snug in some old hollow, where he can take up his quarters for the winter. But when night comes, I think he'll venture out; and once he does, he'll sniff that scent a mile away; for a bear, like all wild animals, has a great nose for odors."

"Then we don't need to go out till after supper?" suggested Giraffe. "Glad about that, too, because I'm some tired."

"I should think you would be," Step Hen put in, maliciously; "after that great sprint you did when the little busy bees tried to hand you their cards. If you could only make that fast time in a schoolboy race, you'd be a wonder, Giraffe."

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"Huh! glad you think so, Step Hen," grunted the other.

Time passed on. The afternoon waned, and supper was cooking; but as yet the absent scouts, with old Eli along, had not returned.

"No use waiting for 'em any longer, fellers," remarked Giraffe, who, as the shadows gathered, was anxious to be off, for fear lest the bear get to the honey tree, and secure a full supply before they arrived.

"Anyhow, we need not be bothered about Thad who knows how to get around, even if he has to stay out all night," declared Step Hen.

"Besides, they've got old Eli along; and what he don't know about the Maine woods you could put in a thimble," remarked Bumpus, not at all averse to attacking the supper Jim had cooked, and which seemed to have a splendid odor.

Accordingly, they sat down, and hurried through the meal. Giraffe kept urging Allan and Jim to hurry up, and in consequence they were all done before it was actually dark.

Giraffe took special pains to look his big rifle over before starting, for he wanted to be able to depend on it when the time came for business. Doubtless the boy could not quite forget the slurs that had been cast on his father's weapon, when the new up-to-date repeater, with its mushroom bullets, had given such a good account of itself, at the time of the killing of the moose; and he was fully determined that he would equal the score Thad had set, if given a chance.

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Jim declared he could lead them straight to the fallen bee tree, and Allan seemed to put full confidence in the guide. So they set forth.

Sebattis, Step Hen and Bumpus was left behind, to guard the camp and the canoes.

Perhaps it would seem a long way to Giraffe, for he had gone through considerable since daybreak. And those bee stings must have robbed him of more or less energy. But the prospect of big game buoyed up his spirits, and he trudged along with the other two, changing his heavy gun occasionally from one shoulder to the other, in order to rest himself.

"Smells pretty strong of honey, I must say," he muttered, after they had been moving quite some time.

This was doubtless intended to be put out as a "feeler;" and it worked well too, for Allan immediately remarked:

"Nearly there, Giraffe; a few minutes more, and you'll see the tree we cut down."

"D'ye think he c'n be there?" whispered the long scout, nervously fingering the lock of his rifle, as he peered ahead into the gloom of the night, possibly seeing a bear rearing up on his hind legs, every time he caught sight of a dim tree before him.

"Jim says no, he hasn't come yet," replied Allan, also allowing his voice to sink; for although they were coming up to windward of the bee tree, it was better to be doubly cautious.

Presently they arrived on the spot, and found all quiet. Bruin had evidently not reached the scene, though both Jim and Allan were just as positive as ever that the old fellow would be along before a great while.

So Jim selected the place where they would lie in wait. It was close enough to the broken bee hive to afford Giraffe a splendid chance for a shot. Allan had made sure to fetch along the little electric hand torch belonging to Thad. This he meant to manipulate himself, and believed it would be all that was necessary to catch the attention of the honey-eating bear, and hold him in surprise until Giraffe could take aim, and pull trigger.

After that they had to remain very quiet indeed, lest some incautious movement warn the bear of their presence. Jim had seen to it that both the boys had dressed warmly, even donning sweaters for the occasion; since it is a shivery job to sit for one or more hours of a cold night, hardly daring to move. The blood seems to become congealed in the veins with the inaction; and once a shiver passes over the frame, the teeth start to chattering even against all will power.

When an hour had gone, Giraffe began to grow tired. He was more or less apt to show impatience, at any rate, and had not learned the lesson of controlling his boyish desire to have things happen quickly.

Allan was just on his left, holding the torch ready for action; and by leaning that way Giraffe could speak in the lowest of whispers.

"This is gettin' tough," he admitted.

"Keep standing it a while longer," came in reply.

"But do you really think he'll come along yet?" asked Giraffe, disconsolately, as he pictured Bumpus and Step Hen sitting so snugly beside the glowing fire he loved so much.

"Both Jim and I think the chances are the old fellow's on the way right now," answered the comforter.

"All right, then, I'll just try to stand it a while longer; but I hope my hands don't tremble this way when I come to shoot," Giraffe went on to say.

"Keep your gun resting on the log, just like I showed you," said Allan. "That way it won't much matter if you are shivering. And be sure and shoot just as soon as you're certain you've got his shoulder covered. I won't butt in unless I think he's going to get away. Now, close up again, Giraffe."

Silence once more rested on the scene. More minutes passed by—five, ten, fifteen dragging along.

Giraffe was just about to touch Allan on the arm again, and tell him he really could not stand it, he was so cold, when he heard a strange little sound that made him forget all about it. In a second, it seemed, his heart got to pounding away at such a lively rate that he actually felt hot all over.

Was that a real “sniff, sniff” that came to his ears? He strained his hearing, and caught it more plainly now; and besides, he could detect a shuffling sound, such as would indicate the presence of a large body moving along.

It approached the scene of the wrecked tree hive; and a minute later, while Giraffe almost held his breath with anxiety, he caught other sounds that told him the hairy honey thief had set to work gulping down the scattered combs so full of sweetness, with a greed that even excelled his own love for the product of the hive.

Apparently it was about time something were doing, unless they meant to allow the bear to fill himself with the honey, in the hope that while in this condition he might fall an easier prey.

Then came a nudge in the side from Allan. Giraffe knew what this meant. He had been warned that when the time for action had arrived Allan would give him such a dig; and that he was to prepare to take aim and fire, for the little electric torch would flash immediately afterward.

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All of a sudden the bear gave a snort. The intense darkness had been dispelled by a brilliant ray of light. Well had Allan judged the location of the honey thief, for Giraffe could instantly see the bear standing there, with upraised head, staring straight toward the point from whence that mysterious light sprang.

His side was fortunately toward them. Giraffe thought it looked almost as big as the famous red barn; and as he glanced along the extended barrel of his father’s rifle he tried to control his nerves.

“Shoot!” came in a shrill whisper from Allan, who feared lest the other might be so panic stricken that he could not pull trigger.

And obeying the injunction, Giraffe did shoot, the crash of the rifle being almost immediately drowned in a terrible roar that burst forth.

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **A MIGHTY NIMROD.**

“Again! give him another shot!”

Giraffe heard this shouted close to his ear, and mechanically working the pump action of the heavy repeating rifle which his father had carried for quite some years on his hunting trips up in the Adirondacks, he again fired.

"Once more, quick! you've got him going; but he's getting up again!" cried Allan, and so Giraffe did as he was told.

Then he did not see the black hairy mass move any more, though he could hardly believe that he had done what he had expressed such a great ambition to accomplish—shoot a real black bear in his native wilds.

"Good! you've finished him, Giraffe!" exclaimed Allan, reaching for the quivering hand of his chum, which he squeezed most heartily. "I'm ever so glad I didn't have to butt in, and spoil it all. That's your game for keeps, Giraffe. You've got to cut a notch in the stock of your gun after this, because you're no longer a greenhorn. Come along, and let's see what he looks like."

The bear was undoubtedly dead. That last bullet had evidently finished him, although very likely he would never have left that spot after receiving the first and second shots.

"Whew! but ain't he a buster, though?" ejaculated the delighted hunter, as he cautiously felt of one of the forepaws of the animal.

"We ought to get him out of this before morning," said Allan; "because the bees will be apt to make it good and warm for us, if we poke in here by daylight. Let's all get hold, and see if we can't budge the old critter."

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They found it all they were able to do, to move the bear a few inches at a time; but once clear of the branches of the trees, the task proved easier. By throwing all their weight into each pull, as Jim sang out: "yo heave-o!" they finally managed to get the prize where they wanted him.

"How about leaving him here through the night, Jim?" asked Allan.

"I'd say as how it war safe, if it hadn't be'n fur thet howl we heard last night," replied the guide. "If so be wolves is aroun', they'd clean up this carcass right smart between now an' daylight."

"Oh! but I want that hide the worst kind," declared Giraffe. "Why, whoever'd believe me, if I couldn't show the skin of the bear I shot?"

Jim took out his knife, and felt the edge.

"Somebody make a fire, so I kin see, and we'll fix things afore a hour goes past," he said, simply.

"Let me do it, Allan; you know nobody knows how to build fires as well as I do!" Giraffe exclaimed, laying his gun aside.

He was as good as his word, and had a splendid fire working inside of a very few minutes. The Maine guide was already busily engaged, and Giraffe watched him taking the bear's hide off with more than common interest; for was it not *his* bear, and did he not have the right to feel proud? Why, if he had shot poorly, the big beast, rendered savage through pain, might have charged the party; and then there would have been plenty of excitement. Even Allan might have missed, since he could hardly manage to see while trying to hold the torch, and his rifle at the same time; and there would be no telling

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what must have happened.

After Jim had very deftly taken the hide off, he started in to carve up some of the carcass, taking the choicest portions; for they could only carry a certain amount with them, and the wolves or foxes were quite welcome to the balance.

Indeed, from the grin on Jim's face, as he used his knife, Allan fancied that the bear was bound to prove about as tough as the moose. But then, hungry boys can masticate what would prove a difficult task to one whose teeth were less sharp; and besides, as that was Giraffe's bear; of course it would taste especially fine to him.

"Where'd I hit him, Jim?" Giraffe asked, after a time.

"One shot took him on the shoulder," said Allan, before the guide could reply. "I think that must have been your first. It kind of knocked him over. Then, as he was getting up again, you gave him a second clean through the heart. He kicked after that, but could never have done you any hurt. That was a dandy shot, fired at the time he was moving, too. The last one came in his side, and didn't amount to so much. But taken in all, you did finely, Giraffe. It speaks well for your nerve."

"Huh!" grunted the other, who was plainly pleased by Allan's words nevertheless; "they always did own I had plenty of nerve, you know. Eli Bangs said I had, when I stepped up and took his best girl away from him at that school dance we held out in Epply's big barn last winter."

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"Got enough, Jim?" asked Allan, as the guide wiped his knife, and put it back in the leather sheath at his belt.

"All we kin kerry," replied the other, "an' p'raps twice as much as we'll eat, I reckons. If so be them wolves is still around, let 'em come ter the feast. I'd like ter git a crack at one of the critters, myself. A wolf I never yet shot, 'cause you see, they be'n so skeerce ever sence I got to totin' a gun."

"Well, we might as well head back to the cabin," Allan remarked. "I see you've made that up in two packs, Jim—the hide in one, and the meat in the other?"

"Yep, I thort as how *he'd* like to kerry the skin, 'cause it's his'n; I'll tackle the bundle o' bear meat," and the guide slung the heavy load up across his back with the air of one accustomed to making trips across many a *carry*, toting boats, duffle and bedding, as well as tents.

"All right, that leaves the three guns to me; and if either of you get tired, why, just call on me to take a turn. You'll find me willing," said Allan.

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But that did not happen. Jim was tough, and accustomed to doing all sorts of burden bearing in his work as a guide, summer and winter, year in and year out. And as for Giraffe, catch him asking anybody else to lug *his* bearskin along, so long as he was able to put one foot before the other.

He may have grunted from time to time; but



when Allan asked if he wanted any assistance Giraffe indignantly denied being weary. And so he carried that heavy green hide all the way to camp.

When they arrived at the cabin they could see by the light through the window that those within still kept the fire going, evidently anticipating the arrival of the bear hunting expedition. They jumped up as the three new arrivals entered, and seeing their packs, with the long black hair of the pelt showing plainly, Step Hen and Bumpus were especially vociferous in their congratulations.

Allan noticed one thing as soon as he had taken his first peep into the cabin. This was that Thad, Davy and Eli had not come back as yet. But he saw no reason to be worried. Thad had taken the pains to notify them that possibly he and his companions might be away longer than a single day; and if they failed to show up after night set in, perhaps they would stay out a second day.

"That settles one thing, anyway," remarked Bumpus. "We ain't going to starve, as long as we have such mighty hunters as Thad and Giraffe along with us; even if the meat is tough."

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"It settles a number of things," remarked Giraffe, fastening his "eagle eye," as Bumpus liked to term those orbs of the tall scout, severely on Step Hen.

"Oh! I know what you're talkin' of now," declared the other, quickly. "It's all about that rifle of your dad's, an' how it c'n shoot. Now, I never said that it couldn't do the trick, all right. Goodness knows it's heavy enough for anything. It was you always pokin' fun at my little thirty-thirty, and callin' it a popgun, a squirtgun, and all such things. But I take notice, with all that's said, it took just three bullets for you to kill that poor bear, that was nearly ready to turn up his toes, an' die from old age; when Thad, he just fired once, and gave a bull moose in a fighting frame, his walking papers. And think how much easier to tote a light gun like mine twenty miles a day. Ask Jim here, and he'll tell you he means to get one like mine the next time he finds thirty dollars in the road."

"I suppose that bear is tough, but don't you say a thing about him being so old he would have soon kicked the bucket You know better than that, Step Hen. Don't all of us believe that this is the same bear we chased out'n the cabin here, only last night; and say, what did he do to you and Bumpus? Seems to me you wanted us all to know that you'd been thrown ten or twenty feet outside the door, when that poor weakly old sinner as you call him, just breezed past you. Now, that will be quite enough from you, Step Hen. The tougher he was, the more glory for the feller that shot him."

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After this broadside from Giraffe the other scout relapsed into silence; indeed, he could find nothing to say.

"It's gettin' pretty late, seems to me," Bumpus remarked, with a yawn.

"Yes, it is, for kids," added Giraffe, a little contemptuously; for somehow Step Hen had aroused his fighting blood and he seemed to

have a chip on his shoulder, daring any one to knock it off.

"But what's the use waitin' up to see if Thad gets back?" argued the short scout.

"There's no use at all," remarked Allan, just then; "because I think I hear them coming along right now. How about it, Sebattis?"

"Three come, Thad, Davy, Eli," replied the Indian, gravely; for Allan had first had his attention called to the slight sounds without by noticing that Sebattis was sitting with his head cocked in a listening attitude.

"I'd like to understand how he knows that," muttered Giraffe, who had edged over toward the corner where his gun stood, as though a little suspicious of the identity of those who were even now at the door; for he remembered that there were exactly three of those lawless hoboos loose in the woods, and not far away.

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But immediately the door opened, to admit Thad; and after him came Davy; while the weather-beaten face of the old Maine guide, Eli Crooks, showed up in the rear.

Each of the three hunters carried some sort of burden, though not of any great size, Allan noticed. These they tossed down in a corner, with the air of being more or less tired from a long tramp.

And Allan, accustomed to reading faces more than might the average boy, believed that he saw something like a frown upon all three countenances, that certainly must have been caused by something besides fatigue.

"Venison?" questioned Giraffe, just itching to have the newcomers ask what luck had fallen to the share of the bee hunters, when he could hold up that prized bearskin, and tell how he alone had shot the monster Bruin.

"Yes, what little of it was left to us," replied Davy, crossly.

"Why, whatever happened?" demanded Bumpus. "I wonder now, did you run across any of those savage wolves we heard howling last night?"

"Oh! not much," replied Thad, smiling; "that would have been a picnic—for us. But we had an experience that beat that all hollow. Fact is, we were fired at by some of those hoboos who are up here in the woods for their health, and safety!"

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## **CHAPTER XIX.**

### **THE "WHINE" OF A BULLET.**

"Wow! and again I say, wow!" broke out Giraffe, although rather feebly; for the astounding admission made by Thad seemed to have almost taken his breath away.

"Fired—on—by—the—hobo burglars?" gasped Bumpus.

"Sounds kind of interestin', Thad; s'pose you tell us more about it?" suggested Step Hen; who, strange to say, appeared to treat the matter in a less serious vein than any of his companions.

Sebattis had raised his head at hearing what the newcomer said, and was evidently taking note; Jim shut his teeth hard together, and assumed what he no doubtless believed to be his "fighting face"; and he certainly looked fierce enough, Bumpus thought, happening to glance that way.

"Well, let's have a bite to eat, first, and after that's done with, I'll tell you all there is to the story," declared Thad, who was evidently "some tired," as Giraffe liked to put it.

Then there *was* a hustle, as every one tried to do something about the fire, so as to hurry things along; for it became evident that Thad was in no humor to talk until he had refreshed the inner man.

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"Some of you fellers go back and sit down; there's quite too many cooks around here, and it hinders things more than it helps. Jim and me c'n get along faster if left alone," and with these words Giraffe "shooed" Step Hen and Davy into the background.

Presently the coffee was boiling, and there was a scent of cooking food in the air. While the three returned hunters were munching their supper the others hovered around. Seconds seemed like minutes to them; while the latter took on the shape of long hours, so impatient were the boys to hear what had happened.

But after a time Thad announced that he was satisfied; and assuming a comfortable attitude, he started in to talk, the others hanging on his every word, and frequently interrupting to ask questions, when a certain point was not wholly understood.

"We tramped all morning, and never started any game worth bagging," he began. "Of course, there were partridges, and if we hadn't been out after deer we might have brought in a good-sized bag of the birds. But you know how it is—when you've got your mind made up to have venison, these other things only annoy you."

"All the same," remarked Giraffe, "partridges are mighty fine eating; and I'm going to bring in a bunch some of these fine days, if Davy'll loan me his gun."

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As yet nothing had been said about the bee tree, or the black thief Giraffe had bagged; and the boy was holding the news back, in order to spring it on the deer hunters, in order to show them that they were not the only ones who had met with an adventure since sun-up that morning.

"At nooning," Thad went on to say, paying no attention to the interruption, for he knew the failings of Giraffe only too well; "we stopped to eat our snack, and figure out which way we wanted to tramp between then and night. Eli had his mind set on getting a deer, and all of us were willing to stay out till we had dropped one, even if it took all of to-morrow.

"Then once more we made a start, changing our

course, and intending to cover a larger territory, by making a big sweep. And about three in the afternoon we managed to start up a nice fat young buck, which fell to our rifles."

Davy was seen making motions with his hands just at this juncture, and the others had little difficulty in reading the signs to mean that in reality the said fat young buck had fallen to the rifle of the speaker, Thad, himself; and if the others could claim any share in the glory, it was small indeed.

"We hung the prize up," Thad went on, "intending to come back for him a couple of hours later; since Eli had an idea we might scare up another deer in the country just beyond; and Davy was wild for a chance to try his buckshot cartridges on one."

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"But it wasn't any use," broke in Davy just then. "We just tramped and tramped till even Eli said there didn't seem to be any more deer moving just then. Besides, I complained of sore feet; and I guess that was one reason why the others determined to turn back, pick up our young buck, and strike for home."

"The place where we had left the deer was about seven miles from here, down the wind," Thad continued; "and we just knew that with that tramp ahead, carrying what we wanted of the deer, it would take us a good time to get here. But no matter, we headed straight for the spot which Eli had marked down in his mind as being the big tree, to a limb of which we had hoisted our game.

"On the way, Davy, who had changed his shells, knocked over a couple of partridges very neatly. They are in one of those bundles there. I only mention this fact because Eli believes that the discharge of the double-barrel gun had something to do with what followed.

"Pretty soon we came in sight of the big tree; at least it looked mighty like the one we meant to find; but we had to rub our eyes, and look again; for do you know, there wasn't any deer at all hanging there? Eli said he had made no mistake, and Davy was as sure as I was that it must be our tree all right.

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"Just then one of us discovered that there was something lying at the foot of the tree, that had the look of a deer, and we hurried forward. Davy hadn't forgotten about the wolves we heard howling, and was saying that they must have dragged the buck down in some way. But Eli knew better, and that it could not be the work of any wolf that ever trotted on four legs.

"Then we came closer, and saw a sight that made us furious," Thad went on, a frown on his usually placid brow. "There was our lovely little buck, all carved up as fine as you please, and by one who knew just how to do the business, too. The best pieces had been carried away, and we were left only what might have done for the foxes or wolves!"

"Whew!" burst out the impulsive Giraffe, "say, that was enough to make anybody as mad as hops. I can just see Davy here jumping around like fun. Of course you looked for a trail, didn't you, Thad?"

"That was the very first thing we did," resumed the other; "and there wasn't any trouble about finding one either; for Eli said they had jumped off in such a big hurry he just knew they must have heard Davy's shots, and expected that we were coming back for our game. Well, there wasn't any use crying over spilt milk, boys. But we were so much upset by our misfortune, and so mad at those fellows, that we just started off on their trail."

"Meaning to hold them up, if only you overtook the bunch?" suggested Bumpus, who was listening with all eagerness, his eyes round with interest.

"Oh! well, none of us hardly knew what we meant to do," Thad answered; "I rather guess our only thought just then was to try and recover the fine venison those two rascals had robbed us of."

"Then there wasn't three of them again?" asked Giraffe, quickly; and Thad smiled as he turned toward the tall scout, saying:

"I was just wondering whether any of you would notice that, when I said it; but the fact is, there were only a pair of 'em; and Eli's about come to the conclusion the third man must be sick, or badly wounded. Well, we did start off at a hot pace, Eli of course doing most of the trailing."

"But just hold on there, Thad," interrupted Davy Jones; "you know well enough that three separate times you found the tracks when Eli had lost the trail; and didn't he say prompt enough that, for a boy, you certainly did show a heap of smartness?"

"I think we must have followed that trail about a mile;" Thad went on, giving Davy a smile for his compliment; "and it was beginning to get dusk a little, when all of a sudden a gun banged away, somewhere ahead, and we heard the whine of a bullet passing over close above our heads."

"Say," and again Davy broke in to express his own individual feelings in the matter, "none of you fellers ever was shot at, and I just guess now you can't understand the queer feeling it gives you. I felt like the pit of my stomach had kind of caved in, and there was a gnawing just like you have when you're *awful* hungry. And when Thad says that there bullet 'whined' over our heads, he hits the mark all right, for that's what it sounded like. I dropped flat on my face in the scrub, and lay as still as a 'possum playing dead."

"We all dodged some, I imagine," remarked Thad, with a smile at Davy's words. "I know I found myself behind a tree in pretty short order. Eli began to creep up, and it seemed rather exciting about that time. Even Davy and myself started to advance. And pretty soon there was Eli, calling to us to come on, because there was no longer any danger, for the birds had flown."

"Skipped out, just like that," and Davy, snapped his fingers contemptuously; "all the while we kept laying low, and trying to see if we could glimpse anything to bang away at. It was bad luck."

"Well," Thad resumed his story by saying, "with

the night at hand, and the two venison thieves a good half mile away by that time, even Eli saw that it was useless trying to overhaul 'em. So we concluded to make our way back to where our buck had lain, take what we could get of the remains, and then start by slow stages for the cabin here. But we had little to say on the way, for it seemed more like a funeral procession than the return of a victorious hunting party."

"And I'll own up I was pretty nigh tuckered out," admitted Davy. "That's one reason why Eli and Thad decided to come along home. Been limpin' the better part of the way, and I guess I've got a stone bruise on my heel that don't feel any too fine. But I'll be all right to-morrow, fellers; and then just see what we do to them that would take the bread away from your mouth, if they had the chance."

The others looked to Thad, as though what Davy had just said gave them a cue.

"Is that the game, to go back there in the mornin', an' take up the trail?" asked Giraffe, excitedly.

"This here seems to be the real thing, all wool, and a yard wide," muttered Bumpus; and then brightening up, he continued, with increasing earnestness: "and then, if we should find a chance to capture those slippery rascals, just think what we could do with all the nice money that's offered for their apprehension? Didn't our friend the sheriff say it was a whole thousand, and might be twice that by now? Count me in, Thad, I want you to know, if we're going to round up these bank burglars. You may wonder why I'm so fierce about it; but you forget that my dad is the president of our bank at Cranford; and who knows but what it might a been that institution these hoboies looted. I've got a personal interest in this matter, and I ain't going to be left out of any deal either, just remember that!"

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## CHAPTER XX. A WONDERFUL FIND.

"Do you really think they meant to shoot you, Thad?" asked Step Hen, after the fat boy had quieted down somewhat.

"We've been talking that over," the patrol leader replied; "and come to the conclusion that the shot was only meant as a warning for us to draw up, and haul off; to tell us that they were desperate men, and would not stand for any nonsense from a hunting party."

"But that bullet *did* whine, I tell you, fellers;" declared Davy, emphatically; "no other word would explain just how it sounded, when she went zipping past, so close to our heads that we all ducked without thinkin'."

"And like as not," remarked Allan, who thus far had taken no part in the discussion, "if we start taking up their trail in the morning, and come anywhere close to our birds, we'll be apt to more

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than hear the whine of a bullet. They're bad men, Sheriff Green told us, and if put in a hole, with a chance of spending some years in prison, wouldn't mind wounding a few of us—perhaps worse than that, even."

Thad looked serious.

"I've been considering that matter," he announced, "and trying to make up my mind just what a party of Boy Scouts, caught in such a puzzle, ought to do. If our real scoutmaster, Dr. Philander Hobbs, was only here, that would be a question for him to decide. I wish we had him along with us right now."

"And the rest of us are mighty glad business kept him tied down at home, just at the time we had this great chance to come up into the Maine woods," chuckled Step Hen.

"You're as able to settle anything as well as Dr. Philander," declared Allan. "And so, please let us know what came of your thinking this subject over; because we all know you too well, Thad, to believe you'd ever drop it without hatching out some sort of a scheme."

"That's the ticket; we all want to know," echoed Bumpus.

Of course this sort of talk must have been exceedingly pleasant to the young patrol leader. He would not have been a boy had he not been thrilled by this showing of confidence which his chums placed in his ability as a manager and scoutmaster; and so he hastened to oblige the eager demands of the others.

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"While we were tramping along homeward," Thad continued, "I got to figuring how best we ought to act. You see, somehow that thing of chasing after those toughs didn't appeal to me very much, after hearing how a lump of lead can sound when it's passing by so close to your head. And in the end I had an idea. If you think it's worth anything, why, we might try the same out."

"Sure we will!" declared Giraffe.

"And we know it's the right stuff, even before you start in to explain," Step Hen volunteered.

"Don't be too sure of that," laughed Thad; "but here's the scheme, boys, and let's hear what you think of it. Now, in the morning, sometime, we'll just pack up, and start along with our paddles, as if we meant to keep it going through the whole blessed day. But that'll only be a big bluff, you understand; because, when we've got about a mile or so above here, and the coast seems clear, why, we can land, hide our stuff, perhaps leaving one to guard the same, perhaps, and the rest put back to the cabin here."

"Wow! that's the thing!" exclaimed Giraffe. "I get the idea, Thad. You expect we'll hide in here, and gobble the gentlemen up as soon as they come along; ain't that what you mean, now?"

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"Not quite," said Thad. "It might answer just as well, in case when we got back here we could be sure they hadn't arrived before us, and were already quartered in the cabin. But if that proved to be the case, why, we'd set to work and

try to surprise Charlie Barnes and his pals. You see, whatever we do, we want to keep in the background till we're just ready to spring our trap; and in that way prevent them from doing us any bodily harm. I'm in charge of the patrol, and I'd feel pretty bad, now, if on going home I had to show up with a bunch of cripples on my hands. That's what keeps me guessing, and trying to accomplish things without taking too much risk."

"It's a good scheme, all right!" commented Step Hen.

"That's what I say, too," added Bumpus.

Davy, Allan and Giraffe also declared that they liked the plan immensely; and even Eli Crookes grinned, Jim nodded his head in appreciation; while Sebattis smoked on, and watched Thad admiringly out of the corner of his black eye, as if he had never before run across such a smart lad, and wondered what it meant.

"But of course," Thad went on to say, "the success of such a plan depends altogether on one thing to begin with."

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"You mean whether they're bound to come to the cabin here?" asked Allan.

"That's it," the scout leader went on, calmly. "I thought that all over carefully, and decided that, judging from the actions of that man in looking in here, as well as their hanging around the vicinity when they had ought to be well on the way to the Canadian border, that there must be some sort of unusual attraction about this same old cabin for those rascals!"

"Go on, Thad; we're catching on to what you've got in mind," hinted Allan.

"We happen to know," said Thad; "that this chief hobo, who calls himself Charlie Barnes now, though he may have gone by another name years back, must have been a Maine guide once on a time. If so, he is well acquainted up in this region, and must know all about this abandoned cabin. Now, if so be the third chap is sick, or badly hurt, as we've guessed, why, where could they find a better place to stay for a while than right here?"

"Seems like it," admitted Giraffe; "and say, p'raps that's just why they cribbed your venison like they did. If they expect to hole up here for some weeks, lyin' low while the sheriff and his posse go chasin' all over the country lookin' for the runaways, why, they'd need a heap of grub; and so they just couldn't resist the temptation to grab your little buck. It'd supply their wants for a long time, if they only jerked the meat the way the Indians do, and made it into pemmican."

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"Glad to see you take that view of the matter. Giraffe," Thad continued, for it was always an object with him, as the leader of the patrol, to tempt his scouts to think for themselves, and not depend wholly on others to plan things.

"But Thad," remarked Allan, about that time,— he had been watching the face of the other for signs that would tell him what Thad had on his mind; "was this the *only* thing you stirred up, that would be apt to keep these fellows wanting



to get in this cabin so badly?"

"Well, honest now, Allan," replied the other, smilingly, "it wasn't. I figured along another line too. I said to myself, that supposing now, a year or so ago this same hard case of a Charlie Barnes had made another haul, and escaped to the woods with his plunder, where would he be apt to hide that same until the time when he could add to the pile, and then skip across the border? And boys, I thought that this deserted old cabin would offer him about as snug a hiding-place for his loot as any place I knew!"

"Oh! Thad, do you really think that?" exclaimed Bumpus, a smile appearing on his plump face; "just imagine us diggin' up treasure, fellers, would you; gold, and jewels, and all sorts of precious things that these desperate yeggs have hooked in their bold operations? And when we restored the same to the original owners, how they'd pour the fat rewards into our pockets. Why, we'd just as like as not have our names in all the papers down in New York, and be famous."

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"Hold on," said Thad, "you make me think of the girl who was tripping to market with a basket of eggs, and saying to herself, that after she'd sold those she'd buy a pig; and when it grew up, she'd take that money and buy a calf; and then, after that grew up to be a cow, with the money she'd get from selling all the milk she could lay a nice sum by, so that when the right young man came along she'd have enough to get her outfit with, and——"

"Then she tripped once too often, fell over, and every egg was broken," broke in Bumpus, with a shout. "Sure, I've heard my mother tell that story. It means we hadn't ought to figure too far ahead. But Thad. I want to say, I like your scheme; and in the mornin' we ought to turn this here old place upside-down, huntin' in every nook and cranny for the hobo's plunder."

"Not forgetting that loft up yonder, where our friend, the bear—" began Giraffe, and suddenly broke off with a laugh, as he remembered that in the other excitement he had forgotten all about his private surprise.

He immediately went and picked up the bearskin, and held it up before the admiring eyes of Thad and Davy, who immediately started to ask innumerable questions.

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The story was by degrees told, and the late comers allowed to taste the beautiful honey. Thad declared he had noticed that Bumpus and Giraffe looked a little swollen about the head, but other things had kept him from asking the reason, up to now.

The hour was growing pretty late, but strange to say none of the scouts seemed to feel sleepy but Bumpus, who nodded occasionally as he sat there, trying to listen to the conversation that passed among his mates.

Thad had meanwhile been using his eyes to some advantage. He noticed that the stones about the hearth were rather large, and to his mind one of them had the appearance of having been recently disturbed. Suddenly getting up, as the fire burned low, and afforded him an

opportunity to come near without being scorched, Thad worked away for a minute or so, trying to insert his fingers under this certain hearth stone.

"Here, try this for a lever, Thad," remarked Allan, handing him a thick, short stick; for somehow he had quickly guessed what the other had in his mind, and was naturally intensely interested in the result.

So Thad, by inserting this under the stone, was enabled to raise it up. Breathlessly the others leaned forward to watch the result; for by now of course even the aroused Bumpus had guessed what Thad was doing.

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The patrol leader seemed to be fumbling around in some sort of little cavity he had found under the hearth stone. Then, with an exclamation, he drew some object into view, and laid it on the floor. It seemed to be a bundle of old clothes; but when Thad, with eager hands, had unrolled these, the scouts held their very breath at the sight that met their astonished eyes.

Thad had figured it all out, and now they understood just why that leader of the yeggmen was so determined to get into the old abandoned cabin in the woods; he had hidden the proceeds of other robberies there, and wished to take it all along with him when he crossed over into a safe asylum in Canada.

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## CHAPTER XXI. THE DUMMY PACKET.

Bumpus dug his knuckles into his eyes, and then stared again at the pile of plunder which had evidently been taken from some bank; for besides the little rolls that seemed to contain gold eagles, and half eagles, and fives, there were a number of packages of bank bills, and a lot of bonds—at least that was what the boys guessed they must be.

"Somebody *please* give me a pinch," said Bumpus. "I sure must be dreaming one of my old dreams about findin' buried treasure. Hey! not so hard, Step Hen; I'm awake now all right, because that hurt like the dickens. But just look at what Thad's unearthed, would you? Whew! I don't blame that feller for hangin' around here. I'd refuse to be chased away too, if I had all that stuff lyin' under a stone in an old cabin."

For some little time the boys continued to talk. Allan had wisely in the beginning stepped over and hung something over the one little window of the cabin. He seemed to understand that, with the finding of this stolen plunder belonging to a bank that had been looted at some previous day, they had taken up issues with these desperate men; and whether they wanted to or not, from this time forward it must be a question as to whether the hobo thieves recovered their prize; or were in turn taken prisoner by the scouts, and the guides with them.

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By unearthing this rich haul Thad had settled

the question. They could no longer hold aloof, and sit on the fence; but must enter into the game with the yeggmen.

And so the plan suggested, which looked to the ultimate capture of the rascals, appealed to the boys more than ever. If circumstances over which they seemed to really have little control, forced them to take a hand in the matter, it was the part of wisdom that they get in the first blow; and not wait for the desperate fugitives of the Maine woods to attack them, in order to try and force them to hand over this rich find.

"How'd it do to make up a dummy bundle, with these same old clothes," remarked Giraffe. "We could fasten it with the string, same as they had it; and in case the fellers didn't take the trouble to open the same, why, we'd be that much ahead, you see."

"That's a good idea, and can do no harm to try," remarked the patrol leader, who was only too pleased to receive suggestions from the scouts, even though at times they thought of plans that were wildly impracticable; for it showed their minds were working; and anything was better than that they fall into the state of letting some one else do their thinking for them.

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So Giraffe was set to work constructing the imitation bundle. Of course it did not contain one blessed thing worth mentioning. Bumpus wrote the single suggestive word "fooled" on a piece of paper, and wanted them to insert that; but Thad remarked that it would be better not to further arouse the anger of such lawless men. This was no child's play in which they were now engaged, but the most serious adventure of all they had ever run across; and must be treated with the sober consideration grown-up men would be apt to give to such a matter.

But even this rebuff could not quench the newly-aroused spirit in the stout boy, Bumpus, who saw his dreams coming true. He could imagine the wonderful results when they delivered these valuable bonds over to the bank that had been looted. Surely there must have been a generous reward offered for their return; which, with that they were certain to receive for capturing the hobo thieves, would cram the treasury of the Boy Scout troop, and open up many delightful chances for other vacation trips to far-away places.

"But what will we do with all this glorious stuff?" he asked, as they sat, and looked, and talked, while the night wore on.

"I'm going to make it up into a packet, somehow," remarked Thad. "Then, when I've got it in as small a compass as possible, I'll wind a cord around it every which way, and use a little piece of red sealing wax I remember seeing in my haversack, to seal it up with. Then nobody can break it open without our knowing it."

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"My goodness! I hope now, Thad, you don't think any scout would be so pokey as to want to meddle with it, after you've taken it in charge?" remarked Step Hen.

"Certainly I don't," replied the patrol leader, quickly; "I know you all too well for that; but I believe there's a certain amount of red tape to

be carried out in a case like this; and I'm going to fasten it in the presence of every one of you, so that you can hold up your right hands and vow, if ever you are asked, that everything we found is sealed in this package. And here goes for a tough job."

Considering that he had little material to work with, it was a hard task; but then, Thad possessed considerable ingenuity; and could adapt himself to circumstances wonderfully well. And the result was all that could be asked, since the package he produced was not very large, but quite compact, and after being liberally daubed with the red sealing wax, so that none of the cords could be undone, really looked very important indeed.

"There, how will that do, boys?" asked Thad, when he had finished.

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"Simply great!" declared Giraffe; "and it's a wonder how you manage to get such big results from small things. I never saw the like."

"I was thinking," mused Allan, "that since Charlie Barnes came here only last night, what is to hinder him from paying us a visit again?"

"That's so!" ejaculated Giraffe. "Say, mebbe that's why Sebattis went out a long time back. He's the sly one, now, let me tell you. Chances are he expects that we may have uninvited company some time around now; and if the Wandering Willy tries to peep in at our window like he did last time, why, he's goin' to run up against Sebattis, good and hard."

"I knew that was why he went out," Thad observed, "and it gave me a comforting feeling; because I'm as sure as anything can be, that nobody could steal up here on us with the Indian on guard."

"Not much," added Step Hen. "He's got the ears of a fox, and can hear the least sound."

"Of a weasel, you mean," Bumpus declared. "I never turn over in my sleep but what, if I raise my head, there's them black eyes of Sebattis awatchin' me, just as if he expected I was goin' to have a fit, like Davy here used to take."

"Forget that, won't you, Bumpus," said the other hastily. "I reckon I'm cured of that caper by now; but sometimes," he added, as he saw Giraffe looking at him, and grinning, "I do feel signs like one was acomin' on again, though it never really and truly does, you see."

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"Now, where will you put that, Thad?" asked Step Hen, pointing to the sealed package that had been so officiously done up.

"Oh! keep it out of sight under my blanket till morning," answered the other. "Then we can hide it in one of the canoes, under the duffle, where it'll be safe."

"We want you to take it in your boat, remember that," observed Giraffe. "You was the one to find the prize, and the only claim any of the rest have to the reward will be that we stood ready to defend it."

Thad looked squarely at him as Giraffe said this.

"That'll do for you, Giraffe," he remarked sternly. "I don't want to hear any more like that. There are six of us here, and two more at home. Every scout will have an equal share in any reward that may happen to come to us; yes, and more than that, the other five who are on this expedition with me are going to be credited with their portion of the honor of recovering this lost bank capital. We're in the same boat, sink or swim, survive or perish. Understand that, fellows; and now after this, I'll take it hard of you if any member of the Silver Fox Patrol tries to shove more than a sixth of the glory on my shoulders."

They saw he meant it, and their boyish hearts warmed within them at the knowledge that they had such a splendid chum at the head of the patrol. Where could another like Thad Brewster be found, they would like to know?

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The dummy package was placed carefully under the hearthstone, and Thad tried the best he knew how to arrange it just about as he had found the treasure trove. And as one of them had said, if the hoboes in their hurry failed to open it up, they might remain in ignorance concerning their great loss, for some length of time.

"Now, I think that it must be nearly midnight," announced Thad, "and a lot of us are dead tired; so I put it up to you, fellows, if we hadn't ought to try and get some rest? We want to be in trim for other work to-morrow."

Giraffe held up his hand.

"Count me in," he remarked, wearily.

"Ditto here," said Allan, also making the high sign.

"Can't crawl under my blanket any too soon to please me," Davy added.

"Well, if the rest of you want to turn in, I'm there," Step Hen declared, yawning.

All eyes were fastened on Bumpus, waiting to hear his decision, so that it might be made unanimous.

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"Great Scott! he's dead asleep, and sittin' up at that!" exclaimed Giraffe.

Which was a fact; for the fat boy had been so completely tired out with his labor of the morning, when securing the store of honey; as well as from the excitement and nervous shock brought on by the bee stings, that he could not keep his eyes open any longer; and sitting there like a heathen god, as Giraffe called it, he had gone fast asleep.

Of course they had to wake poor Bumpus up, so that he could take his shoes off, and get ready to crawl under his blanket; but he started to perform these little tasks grumblingly, because he had been disturbed.

"Might let a feller snooze where he was," he muttered, working away, with his eyes still closed. "I was just goin' to sit down to the dinner table at home, an' it was Thanksgiving day too. Um! how that big turkey did make me crazy to get at it. And then comes a budge in the ribs,

and Giraffe here sayin' as how I'm takin' all the room, an' must roll over. A feller never can be let alone when he wants to, in this——"

Bumpus did not finish what he was saying. Nor was he longer sitting there with his eyes closed, groping at the fastening of his leggings in the endeavor to get the shin protectors off. On the contrary he started half-way to his feet, once more wide-awake.

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For without the slightest warning there came to the ears of the scouts the loud report of a rifle from some point just outside the cabin walls. And they suddenly remembered what had been said only a short time before, about the dangerous yeggmen coming back again on this night.

And also that Sebattis was on guard.

## **CHAPTER XXII.**

### **THE NIGHT ALARM.**

"What did I do with my gun?" cried Giraffe, darting around this way and that, as he tried to remember in which corner he had stacked his rifle, after coming in earlier in the night, from the bear hunt.

Already had Thad, Allan and Davy snatched up their weapons, and made a bolt for the door, following the lead of Jim and Eli, and wildly excited by the possibilities of finding that something of a tragic nature had been occurring without.

Poor Bumpus, having no gun of his own, looked around in despair. He certainly did not want to be left behind when all this turmoil was going on; nor was he desirous of rushing out without some sort of means of defending himself, in case he was set upon by enemies.

So he hastened to snatch up the same stout stick which had enabled Thad to pry loose the heavy hearthstone. And swinging this vigorously, Bumpus trotted after the other scouts, dragging his half-unfastened leggings along with him as he went.

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It was dark outside, for the young moon had gone to rest long before. But then Thad, with his customary wisdom, had remembered this, and as he went out he snatched up the only lantern they had brought along.

Bumpus could hear them all making for one point, and he followed suit. Eli and Jim had been able to locate the quarter from whence that single shot had come, and were now heading for it.

At any rate, there had been no succeeding shots, no bombardment of the cabin. And Thad, thinking it wise to have some light on the subject, stopped for a few seconds to scratch a match, and apply the flame to the wick of the lantern, after which he again hastened on.

By that time the others had gone ahead, but his

short delay served one good turn, since it enabled poor puffing Bumpus to reach the side of the patrol leader, which fact, no doubt, gave the fat boy considerable gratification.

"What is it, Thad?" Bumpus managed to gasp, as they hurried along.

"I don't know myself," came the reply; "but we'll soon find out now, because I hear them talking just ahead."

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"And that's Sebattis, too," declared Bumpus, in a relieved tone; just as though he may have been worrying over the possibility of the Indian having been injured when that gun was discharged.

"Of course it is," Thad said. "And I never thought it was any one else but him who fired that shot. He must have believed he saw a suspicious figure making up through the brush, or trying to damage our boats; though why these men should want to do that, when they're hoping for us to clear out, surprises me."

They were now close on the rest of the party; indeed, by the light which the lantern gave, they could make the group out, all of the others being clustered around the Indian guide, who was talking in his usual short-sentence way.

"Hear sound, see something move, shoot!"

That comprised the whole business with Sebattis. Where a white man would have described how he was thrilled to locate the suspicious noise; and tell what his feelings were as he drew up his gun and blazed away; the Penobscot Indian simply gave the bare facts—he came, he heard, he fired.

"You don't think, now, it could have been one of those wolves we heard yelping last night, do you, Sebattis?" Giraffe ventured to ask, more to draw the other out than because he himself believed any such thing.

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"Huh! when wolf speak does he swear hard?" asked Sebattis, quaintly.

"Oh! then he *must* have been a man, because so far animals haven't learned how to use hard language," admitted Giraffe, doubtless chuckling at the success that had followed his little plan.

"He must have been pretty mad because you blocked his plans, to use hard words like that," ventured Davy.

"Hurt!" declared the guide.

"He means that he thinks he wounded the fellow," explained Thad.

"Well, what else could he expect, to come nosing around our camp like that, and even taking a sly shot at our hunters, after stealing their nice buck?" demanded Bumpus, who could not be accused of acting as though he were sleepy now.

"Where were they when you heard them first, Sebattis?" asked Thad, wishing to get all the information possible.

"Round here, mebbe. Hear talk in whisper like, and know two men come. Then fire just one shot.

That all. They make off in hurry, quick!"

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"Let's see if we can find their tracks," suggested Step Hen; but before he spoke Thad was already circling around, holding the lantern close to the ground, and carefully looking to see if there could be found any signs telling that the Indian had not made a mistake.

"I hope they won't think to take a pot shot at the lot of us while we stand around here," said Giraffe, uneasily.

"You needn't worry," spoke up Bumpus: "a sharpshooter couldn't hit you, because you ain't wide enough to make a shadow. Think of me, and what dreadful chances I'm taking all the time. They could get me by shootin' with their eyes shut. But all the same, you don't hear me whine. I'm ready to take my medicine without showing the white feather."

"What's that over there; looks like a man kneeling down, and aimin' a gun!" called out Step Hen just then; and forgetting the boast that was still on his lips, Bumpus threw himself on the ground, and started to crawl behind a clump of thick bushes.

"It's only a stump, after all," announced Thad, throwing the light of his lantern in the direction of the suspicious object.

"Get up, Bumpus, the coast is clear," said Giraffe, sneeringly.

"These old leggings keep gettin' under my feet the worst kind," remarked Bumpus, complacently, as though a poor excuse might be better than none. "But see there, the Indian's found something or other. Just as like as not it's them tracks we're all lookin' for."

"Just what it is," added Davy Jones, eagerly.

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As scouts who yearned to learn the many interesting things connected with woodcraft, it can be set down as certain that Step Hen and his comrades gathered about Sebattis and Thad, then and there, convinced that something was coming worth while.

"Just as Sebattis told us, there were two of them," Thad was saying, while he bent down to see the imprint of footgear at closer range.

"Seems to be something familiar about one of them tracks, Thad," remarked Giraffe.

"Yes, our old friend, the patched shoe, has turned up again," chuckled the patrol leader, pointing to the plain, unmistakable sign across the toe of the impression of the shoe.

"Which of course means that Charlie is doing it again," Step Hen remarked. "He wants to be in every mix-up, seems like. But if here are two, where is the other feller?"

"You know we decided that he must be sick or something like that," Allan pursued.

"They were coming straight at the cabin when our guard turned them around, and sent 'em flyin'," Giraffe put in. "That looks like they wanted to see if we'd disturbed that stuff any. I guess they're gettin' rather nervous about our



hangin' out here so long. It sorter interferes with their plans, p'raps."

"Well," Allan observed, drily, "they'll see us getting out of here to-morrow, if they keep their eyes open, which we hope will be the case. And then perhaps this Charlie Barnes and his two cronies will think they're safe in entering the old cabin."

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"And putting up at the woods' tavern for a time, feedin' off our nice venison, to beat the band," grumbled Giraffe, who never could forgive the hobo outfit for depriving the scouts of that young buck.

"I wonder, now," piped up Bumpus, "if the chief means to start in tracking these two men tonight? He's thrown a good scare into 'em, seems; and they're running yet, I just reckon; but he gave 'em back the shot they fired at Thad and Eli and Davy here. That's the way we pay back our debts. All good scouts are supposed to settle when they owe anything, ain't they? What's Thad doing now, I wonder?"

"What do you take us for, Bumpus?" demanded Giraffe. "Don't you understand that Thad said he wanted us to do things with as little risk as we could? And then, to think we'd try to foller up these hard cases, holdin' a lantern, just to ask 'em to bang away at us as much as they pleased. We ain't that green. The other plan promises to work best, and you see if Thad don't stick by it."

"Well," said the fat boy plaintively, "How was I to know what they'd expect to be doin'? And when you're puzzled what to think, ain't it policy to just hold off, and fight for wind? That's what I was adoin' when I said that. But Thad is lookin' for something again, because he's movin' off with the lantern."

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Not wishing to be left in the dark, all the others followed Thad and Sebattis, both of whom seemed to be searching industriously along the ground, as if they had lost something which was worth looking for.

"P'raps they got a notion one of them fellers might a dropped somethin'," suggested Step Hen, himself unable to grasp the true meaning of the strange actions of the two ahead.

"You're closer to it than you think," was the puzzling remark of Allan; while old Eli and young Jim seemed too amused by the remark.

And while they all watched, and speculated, each according to his light, they saw Sebattis come to a pause. He called to Thad, whose back happened to be turned at the moment; and the patrol leader hastened to join him.

Sebattis was pointing down at his feet. The boys noticed that there was something rather dramatic about his attitude while doing this; and Giraffe voiced the feelings of his mates when he said:

"He found what he was looking for, believe me; and what d'ye suppose it c'n be?"

The scouts pushed forward. Just as Thad was doing, so Allan, Step Hen, Davy, Giraffe, yes, and even Bumpus, as curious as the rest, craned

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their necks forward, and stared at the object in plain view beyond the tip of the dark finger which Sebattis had extended.

There was a plain imprint of a shoe there, though not the one that bore the mark across the sole. And there was something more than this; for when Thad touched what seemed to be a little dark pebble, with the point of a stick he had picked up, they realized what it was.

A drop of blood, showing that Sebattis had made no mistake when he declared his random shot had at least slightly wounded one of the prowling hoboes!

## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

### **A FLANK MOVEMENT.**

"I should say Sebattis *did* hit something!" declared Giraffe, staring hard at the tell-tale spot in the footprint.

"But it wasn't Charlie that got hurt," remarked Davy, evidently alive to the fact that the track which showed the trace of blood did not have any cross line, showing where the sole had been patched.

"No, it was the other fellow," observed Thad. "Where was he hit, Sebattis?"

"Left leg, not much, but bleed heap," and the Indian pointed to several other significant spots as he moved along the trail.

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"Now how under the sun could he tell it was the left leg?" asked Step Hen, evidently deeply puzzled to account for the positive manner in which the guide made this assertion.

"Oh! that would be easy enough," remarked the patrol leader. "Just stop, and you'll remember that each foot makes a different track. This one is the left foot. And now you'll be quick to think, even if you don't say it, that perhaps that drop could have fallen from the right foot as it was raised, into the track of the left foot. Sebattis has other ways to prove what he says. Show them, chief, won't you; because they want to learn all they can."

"Huh! look this way, see how," replied the dark-faced guide, leading the several eager scouts to where he knew an extra-plain print of the foot in question might be found.

Then he pointed out the difference between the mark of the right from the left foot, and showed them that there was a heavier trail where that same right shoe happened to be planted.

"You understand?" remarked Thad, who was following all this with considerable interest himself, for he, too, had more or less to learn.

"Seems to me he means that if a feller happened to get hurt, sudden like, in his left leg, he'd begin to limp," Giraffe spoke up, eagerly.

"And when he limped," Step Hen went on to add,

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"it stands to reason the print of the foot on the leg he wanted to favor wouldn't be near so plain as the other. Why ain't that the easiest thing you ever heard tell of?"

"Sure it is," Davy Jones insinuated; "and after Columbus showed those Spanish grandees how to stand an egg up on end by punching the top down on the table, why, didn't they think that was the silliest thing ever? Oh! it's just as simple as turnin' over your hand—after another feller has been and told you how."

"All the same, it is easy," Thad went on to say, "and next time, perhaps some of you will be able to figure things out yourselves. That's what scouts ought to do every time. That's the best part of the Boy Scout movement, General Baden-Powell says; it makes boys stop depending on other people, when they can just as well look out for themselves."

"Will these hoboos haul off now, do you expect, Thad, and give the cabin a wide berth?" asked Bumpus.

"Well, it begins to look as though they ought to steer clear of it, as long as we're in possession," the patrol leader replied. "Still, you can never tell. By now they must be feeling pretty ugly toward us; and when such men have a grudge pushing them on, it's hard to say what they wouldn't do."

"Ketch me agoin' to sleep then," remarked Bumpus; but even while he was making this brave remark, with one of his hands he was trying to suppress a great yawn.

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"Oh! I don't suppose there will be as much danger as that," Thad continued, not wishing to alarm his chums unnecessarily. "The guides will divide up the balance of the night into three watches; and if we like, one of us can keep company; in fact," he went on in haste, fearing that Bumpus might, in the goodness of his heart, volunteer his services, which it would be hard to decline, "I'll appoint Allan here as one of the assistants, to help out Jim; while Giraffe can stay up with Eli; and I'll share the watch of Sebattis, because I want to have a little whispered talk with him as we sit alone."

So it was arranged. Bumpus made out to feel a little hurt that he had been overlooked in the distribution; but Davy showed him that both he and Step Hen were in the same boat.

"Besides," he added as a clincher, "you know you haven't got any gun, Bumpus; and don't know much about firearms anyway."

"Don't you forget it," remarked the stout scout earnestly; "I'm just determined to know more about 'em right along, after this. The Boy Scouts may stand for peace, all right; but I c'n see right now that the feller that's able to look out for himself is just the one that never gets trampled on. Be prepared to defend yourself, and chances are you'll never be called on to do a blessed thing. Oh! I'm on to a few dodges. I ain't so much asleep as some of you think. Wait till we go off on our trip across the Continent, with the money we're going to rake in for recovering this stuff, an' capturin' the thieves; mebbe I'll show you a thing or two then."

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"He's got a programme all laid out, I do believe," ventured Step Hen, afterward to Giraffe; "and expects to take lessons in shooting, and all sorts of stunts, once we get back to Cranford. But it'll be the making of Bumpus if he does wake up and do all kinds of things. He'll quit bein' so fat then, and make muscle instead. And for one, I hope he carries it out."

The entire party went back to the cabin. Here arrangements for the balance of the night were concluded, and the first pair sent out to take their places as sentries.

Bumpus had declared that he would not sleep a wink; but once he lay down, he really knew nothing more until he felt some one tugging at his sleeve.

"Is it my turn to be on guard? All right, I'll be up right away!" he exclaimed, and then began to sniff the air. "Say, what's all this mean; are you goin' to eat breakfast in the middle of the night?"

"Go over to the door, and look out," laughed Thad. "You'll think it still funnier to see the silly old sun poking his face up at such a time; but he's gone and done it, all the same."

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"Blessed if I ain't slept the whole night," muttered Bumpus, not knowing whether to be pleased because he had obtained such a refreshing sleep, or miffed on account of having been neglected when there was "a call for all brave men and true." Finally he concluded that what was done could not be undone; and besides, that venison did smell mighty appetizing. So he folded up his blanket, and went outdoors to chase the last remnant of drowsiness from his eyes by a dash of icy water.

There was no haste, for they did not mean to leave their present comfortable quarters until about the middle of the morning. This had been decided on as the best policy to be pursued; since they hoped that their actions would be observed by those in whom they were so deeply interested.

By degrees they started to pack their belongings, and stow them away in their regular places; for each canoe had its own complement, the object being to divide the many things besides tents which they carried, so that the boats might be about equally loaded.

It is no easy task to paddle a heavily charged canoe up against a strong current, hour after hour. Muscles hardened by constant use are needed to accomplish such a feat successfully without great fatigue. The scouts knew this now, if they had not been so wise before; for at sundry times each of them had been given opportunities to wield the spruce paddle, and battle with the swift current.

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It was in the neighborhood of ten o'clock that the last thing was stowed; and after looking all around to make sure that nothing had been forgotten, the patrol leader gave the signal to depart.

Bumpus did not have his bugle along on this expedition. He had wanted to carry it, being a clever musician, and quite fond of practicing the

many fine calls whereby scouts may regulate their going to bed, rising in the morning, assembling for meals, and other things. But Thad and Allan had shown him the folly of sounding a bugle in the Maine woods, where, as hunters, they were expected to keep as still as possible, so that the big game they hoped to secure might not take the alarm, and flee wildly from the vicinity of such weird sounds.

But Bumpus, not to be entirely undone, placed his hand to his mouth, and managed to give a pretty good imitation of the bugle call; though he subsided suddenly when he saw the patrol leader frowning at him.

So they left the spot where so many interesting, as well as exciting, events had come to visit them. And they carried away quite a few things besides the memories that would always haunt them. There was the honey, for instance, fastened up in every possible receptacle that could hold it securely; then they had some bear meat that would do to chop up into hash; the fine skin that Giraffe meant to have made into a rug for the floor of his den at home; and last but far from least, that precious packet so carefully tied up and sealed, containing the plunder which some bank must have lost a year or more back.

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This, of course, had been carefully hidden, so that even though the hoboes were secretly watching their departure, they could hardly guess that the scouts were carrying off their ill-gotten loot.

Gaily they paddled against the current. Although they were warned not to seem to stare around in too curious a fashion, most of the boys were really watching the shore as they bucked up against the stream. And a short time after they had quite lost sight of the cabin and landing, Giraffe quietly informed Thad, who was close by, that he was pretty positive he had seen a man peering out at them from a clump of bushes along the river bank. He had not mentioned the fact at the time, because he said he was afraid one of the "tenderfeet," meaning possibly Bumpus and Step Hen, might betray themselves by appearing too curious, and thus bring a shot from the shore.

On they pushed until fully a mile had been covered. Thad allowed the boys to emit an occasional shout, meaning that it should be carried back to the ears of the man on the shore, and by gradually growing fainter and fainter, convince him that the party had really gone for good.

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"There's the very place where we want to land," said Thad, after a little more time had elapsed. "Plenty of rushes growing along the bank, where we can hide the canoes, and leave two to guard them, which will be Jim, and Bumpus here. The rest of us ought to be enough to do the business, if we manage to surprise the hobo crowd."

Hearing what his fate was to be Bumpus groaned; but remembering what a scout must promise to do when given an order by one in authority, he shut his teeth hard, and doubtless determined that the next time he would have a gun, and then they must consider that he had rights, as well as the remainder of the party.

Once in the rushes the landing was made. It proved to be a splendid place for slipping away without showing themselves, for the woods grew unusually thick just alongside, and the sun happened to be hidden by clouds at the time, which was near noon.

And this was the way Thad led his company back toward the lone cabin, with himself and Sebattis in the lead, then Davy and Giraffe; and old Eli, in conjunction with Step Hen and Allan, bringing up the rear,—seven in all.

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## CHAPTER XXIV. WHAT WOODCRAFT DOES.

After leaving the spot where they had drawn the three canoes into the rushes, the little party started through the woods. Bumpus was very much grieved to see the balance of the scouts go off without him. He did not say anything; but his rosy fat face was eloquent enough, as he nodded in turn to each one of his chums.

“Poor old Bumpus,” said Giraffe, to Davy, in a whisper, “he feels badly cut up at not gettin’ a chance to earn that reward he’s had on his mind so long. And you mark me, the first opening Bumpus gets, he’ll be buying a gun, all right. He doesn’t like to be left out of the fun.”

As a rule they were supposed to keep absolute silence, and Giraffe knew this, as did Davy. Hence the other only nodded in reply, and taking his cue from this, the long-legged scout relapsed into quiet again.

But Giraffe was wide-awake. He meant to observe every little thing that took place around him. With two such veteran guides as old Eli, and the Indian, doubtless there would be more or less woodcraft displayed that must be well worth treasuring up; because a Boy Scout cannot learn too much along these lines.

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And the first thing Giraffe noticed was the confident way in which the leader started out. Why, he never seemed to bother his head in the least as to what direction the cabin lay in. Giraffe marveled at this very much. He realized that if the task had been left to him, he would have had to cudgel his poor brains to remember all he had been told by Allan, as to the various methods whereby woodsmen know what is north, when in the dense forest, with the sun hidden from sight, and no compass along.

So Giraffe amused himself while he strode along as carefully as he knew how. He attempted to picture himself in the rôle of guide to just such an expedition, starting out to get to the cabin as quickly as possible, by taking a short cut through the woods, rather than by following the windings of the river.

What would he do first? Oh! yes, there was the bark of the tree to be observed, and the fine green moss that grew only on one side, never all the way around. He remembered that this moss was said to be almost universally upon the north

side of the tree, and that if it varied at all, it leaned toward the northwest; because it was from that quarter most of the severe wintry gales came.

But trees differ; and to his surprise Giraffe failed to find this moss in the quantities he had expected. Evidently then pine trees are in a class by themselves, he concluded.

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But there were other ways of finding this out. How about the general slant of the trees? Didn't his instructor assure him that it only needed one glance around, for an old traveler through the forests to tell where north was? He would notice the slant of the trees, and if there were any lying on the ground, observe the way they had fallen, when overturned by the fierce wind. Why, that ought to be the easiest thing in the world; and Giraffe was beginning to feel quite proud of the knowledge he possessed when suddenly a very disquieting thought flashed through his head.

He knew which was north, east, west and south all right; but how was that to tell him where the old cabin lay? He might guess that in all probability it was somewhere off to the southeast; but that was a pretty big region, and the chances of his finding it might be set down as ten against one.

Evidently, then, something else was needed besides the ability to tell where the north lay. In fact, Giraffe was beginning to realize that a good scout must keep a mental map of the country in his head. He may not need a compass one-half so much as he has a use for constant wakefulness, and the power of observation.

He should be able under such conditions as these to put a finger on a certain point of the rude chart he draws, and say: "here's where I am right now, and there lies the cabin, exactly sou-south east of me; and I can tell where that quarter is as easy as falling off a log."

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The more Giraffe got to thinking about this subject the more he felt enthusiastic over it. Why, he had really never understood how intensely interesting it was. And then and there the boy determined that he would find out all about it. Allan knew, and Allan was only too willing to instruct his fellow scouts in the arts pertaining to woodcraft.

Practical demonstration is worth many times over what a fellow might learn from books. Take that Indian picture writing, for instance; a boy might read about it, and think it rather interesting; but when taking part in the game himself, puzzling his head over the meaning of the plain pictures of men, animals, camp-fire smoke, canoes, tracks in the dirt, and all such things, he would discover that it was intensely exciting, and liable to beat any game of fox and geese he had ever indulged in.

All this while they were making fair progress on their way.

Sebattis never seemed to swerve once, except to avoid some obstacle. Why, he was evidently as positive about his course as Giraffe might be when walking along a street in Cranford. And doubtless, the trails of the great pine woods were just as familiar to this dusky son of the

wilderness as those streets could be to one who had been born and brought up among them.

Giraffe figured that they must be about half-way to the cabin by now, though of course it had to be mere guess work on his part, since he had no means of knowing the facts.

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He did notice that Sebattis was growing a little more cautious. And also that Thad, looking around just then as if to see how the others were coming along, and catching the eye of Step Hen, put his finger on his lips, as if in that way he would warn the greenhorn scouts to exercise additional care.

It was certainly getting mighty exciting. Giraffe felt hot and cold by turns; but he would not allow himself for one moment to believe that this sensation had anything to do with the quality called fear.

He gritted his teeth, and put on a severe look. He would show them, if the case came to a point where there must ensue a rough and tumble fight, that because he had subscribed to the peace-loving rules of the scouts, he could at the same time rise to a special occasion, when valor was needed.

Why, this feeling was something the same as that which had attacked him when about to fire his first shot at the big black bear. Allan had described it to him once, when telling him how he must overcome the "buck ague" upon getting his first chance to shoot a deer. And Giraffe was determined to conquer himself now, so that he might not later on feel a tinge of shame when speaking of the way they returned to the cabin, bent on capturing the lawless hoboes.

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Why, there was Sebattis bending low now, and advancing with redoubled caution. They must surely be close upon the cabin; perhaps it was even in sight, if one cared to raise his head above the tops of the bushes that together with brushwood and dead treetops lay in the way.

No one could equal Giraffe in such a maneuver as this. Nature had given him the advantage over his fellows when endowing him with that extra long neck. And doubtless the shorter Davy, with his thick neck, envied Giraffe, when he saw how easily the other surmounted difficulties in the way of taking an observation, which were bound to prove a barrier to him.

Sure enough. Giraffe caught a fugitive glimpse of something that looked like the back wall of the old cabin, for he saw neither door nor window. How wonderful that the sagacious Penobscot brave could have taken them directly there; and so far as he, Giraffe, had noticed, without once feeling of the bark of the trees, or even sweeping one glance toward the heavens.

Now that the Indian and Thad had dropped on their knees. Of course the others were expected to do the same, and quickly did they follow suit. It must be a part of the game; indeed, [221] Giraffe would have been sorely disappointed had they failed to go through this same experience. In all the books he had read of forest trailing, and advancing upon an enemy's camp, it was absolutely necessary to go the last part of the journey on hands and knees. And



besides, it added vastly to the interest of the thing, Giraffe thought.

So they crept along, getting gradually nearer and nearer to the cabin. So far as could be seen, all was quiet around that place, just as they had left it, in fact. If the hoboos had already arrived they certainly gave no sign of their presence.

Perhaps Sebattis, with his wonderfully trained ear, was able to catch slight sounds that would not reach some of the rest of them, bunglers at best in the science of woodcraft. He seemed to be advancing with perfect confidence; and yet at the same time Giraffe could not but notice that the dusky-skinned Maine guide always kept his gun in a position for instant use.

It made Giraffe remember what he had once read about the early Virginia and New England settlers, pious men, all of them, to be sure; but realizing that each was expected to do his part in taking care of home and family. Giraffe had often repeated the words of their motto to himself, and figured out just what it meant to say "trust in the Lord; but keep your powder dry." Sebattis felt perfect confidence in his ability to reach the wall of the cabin unobserved; but at the same time he was always ready for *accidents*.

But they were now about the end of the little creeping journey, for the grim back wall of the trapper's old weather-beaten cabin was at hand. One by one the crawlers arrived, and ranged themselves as close as they could, following the example of the two who had reached the goal first.

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Giraffe was immediately conscious of some sort of movement within. It was as if a party might be laboring at something that rather tried his muscle; for besides the heavy breathing, there came a rustling noise, and then mutterings.

"Gimme that piece of wood over there, Kimball," a voice suddenly growled. "This stone sure beats my time, the way she sticks. I never thort she was half as heavy. Throw it acrost to me, if you don't want to git up. Thet's the ticket. Now, will you be good, consarn you?"

It gave Giraffe a thrill. He seemed to guess that the speaker must be working at the hearthstone, under which the scouts had found all that wonderful plunder. What would happen when he discovered how the package left there was only a false "dummy," and that the bank loot had been carried off? Before Giraffe could settle this at all in his mind, he heard the man inside give a little shout.

"It's all right, Kimball, I tell you! The stuff is here, under the stone, and jest like we left it a year ago. They never once suspected, the innocents, jest how near they was to a fortune. Things is atakin' another turn, and I reckon our hard luck's skipped out. This knocks a big load off my shoulders, believe me, Kimball!"

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## CHAPTER XXV. SURPRISING CHARLIE.

Sebattis was quietly creeping, foot by foot, along the wall of the cabin. Giraffe realized that it was the intention of the guide to make his way along the side, so as to command the front, where the only exit could be found. This they must cover, if they expected to hold the situation.

Old Eli had pushed up alongside the Indian. He seemed to feel that if it came to a case of holding the hoboos up, the desperate rascals would be more apt to surrender if they saw two determined men in the front rank of those who covered them with their guns, than if they believed the whole posse to be made up of inexperienced half-grown Boy Scouts.

Of course this started the others moving also, since no one felt like being left behind. Being close to the wall, it was possible for them to hear what was being said within; for the two men did not speak in anything bordering on whispers. They did not dream of the danger that was hovering over their heads; and the finding of the bundle, apparently undisturbed, seemed to make them both happier than they could have been for some time.

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When they reached the corner of the cabin the creepers turned it. Now they had to remember that the little window was here, and that if one of the new inmates of the hut chanced to thrust his face close up to the wonderful sash that had survived all these years of cold and heat, there was danger that they would be discovered, should one of them stray from the wall.

Giraffe was listening to what the men were saying. Somehow there seemed to be a sort of strange fascination about playing the part of eavesdropper in a case like this. But he did not allow himself to get so deeply interested as to forget all idea of caution.

The man with the great, heavy voice he guessed must be the leader, who went by the name of Charlie Barnes. He it had been, Thad and Allan had declared, who led the flight of the hoboos through the great Maine woods. And it had been this fact that seemed to convince the scoutmaster Charlie must at one time have been playing the rôle of guide in these same woods.

Apparently he had not bothered undoing the bundle then, for there was no trace of anger or bitter disappointment in his tones, such as must have been the case had he learned of the cheat.

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"How's the leg, Kimball?" he was asking.

"Hurts pretty bad, let me tell you," came the reply; "and the worst of it is, I can't get the bleed to stop. If this keeps on, I'll keel over soon; I'm feeling that weak, Charlie."

The man with the bass voice said something that sounded like strong language. At first Giraffe feared he had taken a notion to open up the package, and learned of the cheat; but when he spoke, this proved not to be the case.

"That's hard luck, ain't it, Kimball?" he went on. "The only feller in our bunch that knows a blamed thing about the doctor game, he's gone an' took sick hisself, an' is alyin' thar under thet ledge, whar we've hed to camp out ever since larnin' thet them hunters was occupyin' this

here cabin. But after I'm rested a bit, tell you what I'll do—you lay around and take it easy, while I hike back and bring my brother-in-law here. He's on'y a light weight, an' I guess as how I kin kerry him on my back. Won't be the fust heavy pack I've toted over the Maine carries, believe me."

"All right, Charlie," said the other, who possessed a high voice, exactly the opposite of that belonging to the big leader. "And p'raps, now, Dick might be in one of his lucid turns, so he could tell me what to do to stop this pesky bleed. I never knowed what a crazy job it was till now, not to understand the first thing 'bout stoppin' blood from flowin' from a wound."

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"Sho! thet's nawthin'. I've seen a logger bleed right to death 'cause nobody had any ijee how to do that same. You'd think loggers, of all men'd larn sech tricks. Likewise, you'd expect sailors would every one of 'em know how to swim; but they don't, in half the cases."

"Say, Charlie, what we goin' to do?" asked the wounded man, fretfully.

"What d'ye mean by askin' thet, Kimball?" demanded the other.

"Supposin' I get in trim to move in a day or two, how long must we hang out in these here diggings, to take care of Dick?" Kimball asked.

"Wall, I want to do the right thing by the pore critter," replied Charlie, reflectively. "You remembers that he's my wife's brother. But in course thar's got to be a limit. We're in danger every minit we stays here this side the border. An' with thet thar sheriff pokin' 'raound every which way, tryin' to locate us, it'd be crazy fur us to hang out here long."

"Put a limit on the time, Charlie. He ain't any relation of mine, you see, and I just don't feel like taking chances on twenty years to oblige your wife's brother. P'raps I couldn't make it just as well without you, but I know which is north, an' that safety lies that way; so I'd just keep on travelin' till I learned I was over the line in Canada."

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"I tell you what, Kimball," said the other, after a pause, "we'll give the poor feller till to-morry night. If he ain't better then, we jest got to leave hyar by the next mornin' sure. The best we kin do is to fix him comfortable like, with a plenty o' water and grub handy, and let him take chances. Now, as I hev got my hands on this hyar bundle o' stuff again, I jest don't feel like bein' caged."

"That's all right, Charlie," replied the other. "I don't like to desert a man any more than you do; but what's a fellow goin' to do? We'd all get caught if we hung out here too long. As it is, we can send the sheriff word when we're safe over the line, and he'll find Dick. They ain't got much on the boy, you know; and if he's sent up at all, it'd only be for a few years."

By this time Giraffe himself was crawling past under the little window. He knew that he must be making more or less of a rustling sound while moving along; to his ears all trifling things were magnified immensely; why, he could even hear the pounding of his rapidly beating heart, and

wondered if it was calculated to catch the attention of those within the cabin.

However, he realized that several things were acting in his favor. In the first place the wind made more or less of a constant rustle through the tops of the tall pines, and this in itself would have deadened other sounds. Then again, the fact of the two hobo yeggs talking together acted as a buffer, since they were not so likely to keep their ears on the alert for suspicious noises from without.

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There were Sebattis and Eli turning the last angle now. That must bring them to the front of the cabin, where they could crouch down behind some of the shrubbery that Giraffe remembered grew on that side. Doubtless the keen-witted Indian had this very fact in mind when he chose to pass along to this side of the door, rather than take the other route; as Giraffe realized he must have done, simply because in that case he would not have to pass under a window at all.

Did they mean to suddenly spring into the cabin, and cover the men before they could snatch up their guns? Giraffe hoped not, for in that case the rest of them might not have any share at all in the winding up of the affair; and all the glory would pass to Sebattis, Eli, and perhaps Thad and Allan.

But then, the fact that the leaders were now crouching there would seem to indicate that just then at least there was no intention of going further.

So Giraffe, also pulling his long figure forward, found a place where he too could stretch out, and with his gun in his trembling hands, wait for the next move in the game.

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Now he remembered what the man with the heavy voice had just said about meaning to start out after the sick member of the trio, after he had recovered his wind. That looked as if Sebattis might be laying for him there. And when he stepped into the open, doubtless the two guides expected to suddenly spring to their feet, at the same time cowering him by leveling their weapons.

Giraffe realized that perhaps this was rather queer business for a Boy Scout to be in, rounding up desperate law breakers; but if Thad thought it all right, why, there could be no objection.

Some one pushed up against him, and twisting that wonderful neck of his, Giraffe was able to see that it was Step Hen, who in turn had arrived, and taken his position in the line.

Davy was last of all to reach the shelter of the clump of brushwood, but he came working his way along on his stomach, and pushing his shotgun ahead of him as best he knew how; though the chances were he filled the muzzle with dirt in so doing, and took chances of having a barrel burst, should he try and discharge the weapon before cleaning this out.

Well, they were all there now, and only waiting for Charlie to be accommodating enough to put in an appearance. It could not be for long; though with his nerves all keyed up to concert

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pitch, Giraffe thought the seconds were weighted down with lead, they passed so slowly.

There, was that a movement at last within the cabin? Some one was certainly crossing the pine-covered floor with heavy steps. Still, it may have been the wounded man, limping to new quarters.

Again Giraffe allowed himself to draw in some of the cool air; for in that second of strain he had actually stopped breathing.

The crisis was only delayed a little, and was sure to come along before a great while. He realized that those after whom he patterned were taking it calmly; and if they could wait, surely he had no right to show impatience. Many a plan doubtless owed its success to this quality of being able to restrain hasty action; why, Giraffe remembered a saying to the effect that "everything comes to him who waits."

Well, there it was again, and this time surely it must be Charlie starting up. The heavy boom of his voice could be heard, showing that he was even then advancing toward the open door.

"I guess I ought to be back again inside an hour, Kimball; an' if so be you kin wait thet long, p'raps Dick, he mout be in trim to tell you what to do 'bout thet leg o' yourn. Take it as easy as you kin while I'm gone, and make up yer mind as things is bound to move along arter this as slick as grease, believe me."

A bulky figure stepped out of the door. Sebattis waited until he had taken as many as five steps away, his object being to prevent the man from bolting back into the cabin, where he could defend himself with some chance of success.

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Then, as though by some preconcerted signal, the two guides, together with Thad and Allan, suddenly arose, and swung their guns to their shoulders. Thinking that this was an invitation for them to get busy, the other three scouts also scrambled to their feet, and followed the example of their leaders.

And that was the astonishing sight the hobo yeggman saw, as he turned his head upon hearing the noise made by the boys in gaining their feet.

## **CHAPTER XXVI.**

### **THE SHERIFF GETS HIS SHOCK, TOO.**

"Throw up yer hands thar, Charlie Bunch!" Eli had said in a stern voice; and from the fact of his mentioning another name besides that of Barnes, Giraffe realized the old Maine guide must have recognized the yegg bank burglar as one he had known in long days gone by.

The big fellow looked ugly for a few seconds, and Giraffe felt a shiver run up and down his spine, as he wondered whether he were about to witness a real desperate battle. But then

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Charlie, for all his fierce looks, had a grain of common sense besides. Doubtless he also knew what kind of man he had to deal with in old Eli Crookes. And then, it must have been somewhat discouraging for even the most daring and reckless of souls to see that grim array of seven guns, all covering his person, even if five of the lot were held by boys.

So Charlie gave a sort of make-believe careless laugh, and obeyed the order of the guide. He even thrust his hands up higher than there was any real necessity for doing, as though he believed in going to the limit.

"Caught at last, and with the goods on, too!" he remarked, in his booming bass voice. "How are you, Eli? So, arter all I'm goin' to owe my bein' passed over to a feller I used to chum with. But we never did git on together, did we, Eli? Say, Kimball, show yourself here. Come out an' jine in the dance. Thet's the way it allers goes; when you think things are breaking your way, kerflop she goes into the soup. Tie me up, Eli, so I can't do any damage when my mad comes on, like it will when I gets to thinkin' o' how near I was to bein' fixed for life."

A face was seen in the doorway just then, a frightened face too. Thad swung his gun around, and covered Kimball, who immediately showed new signs of alarm.

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"Don't fire, there!" he called out; "I'm all shot up as 'tis, an' losin' pints of blood at a two-forty rate. I surrender, all right! If Charlie, he gives in, there ain't no show for a wounded man like me holding out."

"Keep him covered, all the same, Thad, until we get this other one tied up," advised Allan, who possibly knew more about the type of rascal they were dealing with than any other among the scouts.

Eli did the job himself. And that he knew how to go about it in the right way Charlie himself testified in no uncertain tones.

"Reckon thet settles my hash, all right," he declared, as he surveyed the manner in which the stout cord was passed around his arms, so as to hold them behind his back when the guide wanted to complete the tying. "You'd do fur a sheriff, Eli Crookes. I s'pose this is jest what I ought to expect, after playin' the kind o' game I hev all these years; but I don't give up the ship while there's life. Mebbe so I kin git away yet."

That was possibly the only thing that had kept Charlie from putting up a desperate resistance when he found himself cornered. So long as there was life there was hope; whereas, if he tried to fight, and was shot to death, that ended it.

Then Thad had a chance to pay attention to Kimball. He saw that there was not the slightest chance for the wounded man to try and escape. He was really too weak to go far; and besides, that open cut did seem to be bleeding seriously.

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"Here, you just sit down and let me look at that leg," Thad ordered, after he had searched the man, and taken from him an ugly looking bulldog revolver that was an exact contrast with

the up-to-date automatic weapon they had found in Charlie's pocket, but which he had not dared attempt to reach when faced by the seven foes.

"Are you a surgeon, boy?" demanded Kimball, a note of eagerness in his voice. "I hope you are, because I'm feeling in a desperate way. Unless something's done to stop that flow of blood, why, I'll be a goner before to-morrow morning."

"Oh! I'll fix that, all right," said Thad, reassuringly. "No, I'm not a surgeon, or only a bungling one at that; but I do know how to stop a wound from bleeding. That's one of the things a Boy Scout learns when he makes up his mind he wants to get a medal, and reach out for the first class rank. You watch me, and see."

There was quite an interested audience, for Giraffe, Davy, Step Hen, Allan, and even the two guides hovered around, keeping tabs on all that the patrol leader did.

Thad first closely examined the mark where the bullet of Sebattis had cut across Kimball's lower limb. Then he took a big red bandanna handkerchief and tied it tightly around the leg, just below the knee, making sure that the large knot came exactly on the artery which ran back of the joint.

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After that Thad took a stick he had provided, and inserting this in the handkerchief, he began to calmly twist it around several times. Of course this immediately tightened the binding, and the knot being pressed in against the artery, prevented the blood from coming to any extent at all.

The man had shut his teeth hard together, but he groaned once or twice under the operation; though Thad believed this must be on account of the strain he was laboring under, rather than because of any particular bodily agony.

"Now, this is only temporary," the scout advised, after he had washed the wound with some tepid water, for, acting under his directions, Giraffe had hastily placed an old pan with some water in it, on the fire, which evidently Charlie had revived after finding his bundle intact under the stone.

"We're going to make a litter, and carry you up to the place we expect to camp to-night," he remarked a little later, when he had bound the man's leg up nicely. "And to-night I'll see if I can do something about that partly severed artery. It's hardly a job for a boy, and I wouldn't try it only the case is desperate. And it happens that I used to go around with an uncle of mine who was an old doctor, and he let me help him lots of times."

With that Kimball had to rest content. But the boy had done so splendidly as far as he went, that the wounded hobo began to hope he might even go further, and fix the artery, so that the numbing bandage could be eased up.

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At one time Thad thought of sending one of the guides up and having the canoes brought back to the cabin; but for some reason this plan was abandoned.

Giraffe and Davy manufactured the rude litter,

acting under the orders of Allan, who had seen one used in the past. It would easily hold Kimball, who was not a heavy weight.

Believing that they might as well make use of the strapping big hobo, Charlie, as a burden bearer, Eli unfastened his hands, and made him take the front end of the litter, while he himself would look after the rear, with some of the scouts to keep guard over the prisoner.

Of course in searching the two yeggmen there had been found the proceeds of their recent robbery, in the shape of packages of bills, and some gold. But when the little procession was ready to leave the cabin, and Thad took up the bundle of old clothes, which he tossed into the fire, Charlie let out a yell.

"Hey! that's a crazy thing to do, bub; don't you know what's wrapped up inside them same ole clothes?" he called, evidently greatly excited at the idea of a fortune burning up.

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"I ought to know, because I put it in there myself," replied Thad, smiling at the big man's excitement. "You see, Charlie, we began to figure on why you wanted to get into this same old cabin so much, and guessed that you had something hid away here. So we looked around a bit, found the hole under the stone, took out the boodle you had put away, fixed up a dummy to fool you; and there you are. So, let the old stuff go up in smoke. It's just as well to get rid of the duds that nobody wants."

"Well, I swan!" muttered Charlie, staring hard at Thad, as though he had begun to suspect that after all these Boy Scouts were worth considering, if many of them could do the things this leader seemed to be capable of, from managing a surprise party on a poor hobo innocent, to fixing up a wounded leg that threatened to do for Kimball.

So they went off, taking the back trail; and Giraffe, who was observing all these things now, noticed that they passed over exactly the same route as when heading for the cabin. And he gave Sebattis credit for a wonderful amount of ingenuity, which he feared must ever be beyond the capacity of a tenderfoot scout.

Of course it was the intention of Thad to take the litter later on, and acting on the directions which Charlie promised to give, seek the gully where, under a shelf of rock, they would find the sick hobo, Dick, who could also be brought to the camp.

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"I rather guess we'll have to break up our trip for a while," Thad remarked to Allan, as they walked along in company.

"Yes, I can see that plain enough," replied the other; "because we've had these sick and wounded hoboesh shoved on us, whether we would or not, and we just can't do anything else. But some of our crowd can go down the river in a big hurry, and after handing them over to the authorities in the first town, come back to you and Sebattis here."

"I'd want you to stay with me up here, too, Allan," remarked Thad, warmly.



In due time they reached the place where the boats lay, and hearing them approaching, Bumpus and Jim came ashore. A camp was next in order, for the boys really wanted to find themselves under canvas once more. Giraffe exerted himself to get a fire going, while the tents were being erected, and Thad with Allan had gone off to bring in the sick man.

This they had little trouble in doing. Dick was in a bad way, being feverish; and while Thad gave him some medicine, he declared that they had better get the man to a doctor as soon as possible.

So it was determined to make an early start. They would be up long before sunrise, the tents stowed, and the boats packed. One more in each would crowd a whole lot, but the guides thought it could be done by careful management.

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Supper was cooked, and the prisoners given their share. The wounded man declared he was feeling considerably better; and Dick too showed signs of having his high fever broken.

The scouts were lying around in any way they considered comfortable, while Charlie and Kimball, with their hands tied behind their backs, and a rope holding them to a tree, sat there, listening to the conversation, though not in any too happy a mood themselves, when there was heard the crash of approaching footsteps.

Then several figures loomed up, entering the camp. Sebattis had merely glanced up, but made no move to reach for his gun; so Giraffe felt that the danger could not be acute.

Well, of course it was no other than Sheriff Green, with his posse; and as they advanced they were holding their guns in such fashion that they had Charlie and Kimball covered; for evidently they had not discovered that the pair were tied up.

"Run you down at last, have we, Charlie Barnes?" the sheriff was saying, as he strode forward, and there was a vein of curiosity as well as triumph in his voice. "Don't bother getting up; we can put the irons on just as well where you sit. But hello! if here ain't our young friends the scouts! What does this mean, I wonder?"

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## **CHAPTER XXVII.**

### **DOWN THE RIVER—CONCLUSION.**

At that there was a roar from the scouts that must have shown the officer how badly he had deceived himself; but then discovering the two desperate rascals of whom he was in search, apparently sitting there, and taking things easy, how was he to know they were prisoners. Besides, he had eyes only for them, as he came advancing into camp.

"A little too late, Mr. Sheriff," remarked Thad, advancing to meet the other, "we found that in self-defense we just *had* to take these gentlemen

in out of the cold ourselves. Besides, one of them was wounded by Sebattis the other night, and a second is a pretty sick man, so we're going to send them down the river in the morning with part of our force."

Of course the sheriff was greatly disappointed. To have his work cut out for him by a parcel of lads wearing the khaki uniforms of the Boy Scouts was hard on the officer. And Thad felt that Sheriff Green must begrudge them the reward that had been offered for the apprehension of the yeggmen, and the recovery of the plunder taken from the last bank they had broken into.

"Tell you what we'll do, Mr. Green," he remarked, as they all sat around the fire, with the three last arrivals enjoying a late supper; "suppose we split that reward for the taking of the hoboes into three parts. One will go to you, as you gave us valuable information; another we scouts believe we deserve; while the third I want our guides to share among themselves."

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"That's a generous offer, my boy," declared the sheriff. "Most people would think they had a right to it all, as you really do. I accept for myself and posse. And if you can take the wounded and the sick man along in your boats, we'll see that Charlie gets down there all right. Is it a bargain?"

Thad glanced around at his chums, and each gave him a nod in the affirmative. That settled the matter, for the silent vote had been unanimous.

"It's a go, sir, and we take you up on that," declared the leader of the scout patrol.

Accordingly they talked over the arrangements, and how they might meet again in the town where the prisoners could be placed in charge of the authorities, until the proper officers came to take them to Augusta.

Giraffe managed to get Thad alone later on in the evening. The sheriff was feeling pretty good after his feed, and sat there by the fire swapping stories with old Eli, while the rest of the scouts lay around, listening and laughing.

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"I noticed that you didn't say anything about that other pile of stuff we landed under the stone in the old cabin?" remarked Giraffe.

"That's right, I didn't," answered Thad, readily; "and I kept mum on purpose. In the first place, it was none of their business, because they knew nothing about that plunder. And if they knew that we had it, perhaps it might have made bad feelings. Just remember, and don't mention it. Of course, if Charlie happens to give the secret away later on, when he's with them, that can't be helped. I wouldn't think of denying it, if they mentioned the matter right now; but I don't believe it's any of their business. Understand, Giraffe?"

"Sure I do, and let me say I'm of the same mind too," replied the other. "I'll just try and let Bumpus and Step Hen know, because, you see, they're kind of easy marks, and apt to talk too much. If that sharp sheriff ever gets a hint of what we dug up, he'll want to hear the whole

story.”

Of course, with an experienced officer to look after Charlie, none of the scouts saw any reason for anxiety, or losing sleep in fear of the desperate hobo breaking loose. Thad confined his labors to the sick and wounded. He had managed to accomplish that delicate little surgical job with a fair amount of success, considering his lack of experience. Kimball was loud in his praise of the boy’s nimble fingers and ready brain.

“You’ll sure be a great surgeon some day, younker!” he declared. “That was as nice a job as many a doctor could have done. And I reckon I’m agoin’ to get well now, and stand for that twenty year sentence the judge’ll hand out to me. I wish there had been such a thing as Boy Scouts when I was young; p’raps, then, there’d been a different story to tell about me.”

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Thad was sitting there, listening to the talk, when some one plucked him by the sleeve, and looking up, he saw Sebattis. There was a glitter in the black eyes of the dusky guide that surprised the patrol leader.

“Get gun—come ’long—think hear moose call ’gain,” whispered the Indian.

Thad was of course thrilled by this intelligence; but at the same time he remembered that he had promised Allan the next chance, in case they had reason to believe a moose were in the vicinity.

Accordingly, he spoke to the Maine boy, and then asked the others to kindly moderate their noise; though Sebattis had already told him that they would go fully a mile from the camp before answering the far-away call.

Again did Sebattis seem to know where he wanted to wait to see if the moose was to be drawn near the waiting rifles. He settled down at a certain place, and sent out the strange call that, heard in the dead silence of the Maine night, always makes the blood of the hunter leap wildly through his veins.

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There was an immediate answering call, and after waiting a little time, they once more sent a challenge forth.

This was kept up for half an hour, but so far as Thad could see, no advantage had been gained. Sebattis was grunting now, every time he called. Perhaps he began to believe this must be a mighty queer moose, to send back that rolling defiance, and yet not advance to any appreciable extent.

“No good, bull!” he finally declared, as they heard the answer come from some distance, and in exactly the same quarter as before.

“But if the mountain won’t come to Mohammed; why, he might go to the mountain,” Thad suggested; “in other words, chief, what’s to hinder us from heading that way, with you giving him a call every little while? He’ll either have to run away, or face the music then, I guess.”

“Huh! just like Thad say; Sebattis ready; heap queer; never know bull like that. Soon see!”

As they moved along, following the guide, who occasionally sent out a call, Allan took occasion to say to his chum in a whisper:

"He's some worked up about that answer, Thad, and I saw him shake his head. Come to think of it, I really don't believe it's a moose at all."

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"What's that?" exclaimed the patrol leader, quickly; "are you trying to tell me Sebattis thinks some other guide is making all that row, and trying to call a moose bull to the gun of his employer?"

"Just what I think; and Sebattis does too," replied Allan, positively. "You keep watching him, and see how he acts."

This was a staggering idea to Thad.

"What if it should be the very man I'm wanting to see, to hand him my adopted father's important message, Mr. James W. Carson?" he exclaimed.

"Well, the chances are, that's just who it'll turn out to be," replied Allan.

As they advanced, the calls became louder. Evidently they were approaching the place where that mysterious bull moose had taken up his stand, and dared the other on, to lock horns with him in battle.

Presently Sebattis slung his moose call over his shoulder, and called out aloud:

"How there, Louie! You do um purty well; fool me some time, hey?"

Voices were heard, followed by a loud laugh; and then two men appeared, Thad having thrown on the light of his little electric torch.

"Is that Mr. Carson?" he called out, as the other approached.

"Just who it is; and who may this be?" asked the hunter, who had another Indian guide with him, evidently from the same village as Sebattis, for they immediately got together, and began talking in their own language.

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"My name's Thad Brewster, and I've been sent up here by my guardian, Mr. Caleb Cushman, with an important communication for you. He tried to get in touch with you at your home, but learned that you had started for your annual winter trip into the woods of the big game country, and might not come out again until Spring. Please take this packet, then, Mr. Carson; and if there is any answer I'll carry it back to my guardian."

Mr. Carson sat down, and after looking over the important communication that had followed him so strangely into the woods, wrote out an answer, which he entrusted to the keeping of the patrol leader.

Then he asked many questions, and was deeply interested in all that he heard concerning the Silver Fox Patrol of Cranford Troop.

"I'd like to go back to your camp, and make the acquaintance of the rest of the boys," he remarked, as he shook hands with each of the

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scouts in parting; "but all my plans are laid to leave this section at daybreak. My guides are going to take me to where they promise I shall surely get my moose. You were lucky in having a chance at one. We came out here to make a last try, and were hoping our luck had changed when finally an answer came. But both Louie and myself agreed that the bull was the most cautious old animal we had ever met up with. And then, when Sebattis, with whom I have often hunted, called out, it gave us a shock, I tell you."

So the boys and Sebattis went back to camp, and the others were astonished as well as pleased to know Thad had been able to carry out the wish of his generous guardian; and that they need no longer think of dividing their forces in the morning, leaving Thad, Allan and Sebattis to continue the search, while the others took the two cripples to the nearest river town below.

The night passed without any more exciting incidents, for which the tired boys thought they had reason to be grateful; for of late their sleep had not been as sound as they might have wished, and every one of them had much to make up. And besides, now that Thad had delivered his message to Mr. Carson, his mind was free from worry.

With the coming of early dawn they were astir. Every scout had his particular duty to perform. Two of them stowed the tents away in the smallest compass possible; another couple began to pack the canoes; while Thad and Bumpus assisted in getting breakfast; or rather the latter did, for the patrol leader had his hands full in attending to his patients, Dick and Kimball.

The sun had hardly appeared above the horizon when they were once more afloat. Again did the merry paddles send the sparkling foam toward the stern of each slender canoe, as they headed downstream.

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Sheriff Green had declared that he would take Charlie about six or seven miles down to a place where he knew he could get the use of a large boat, capable of carrying four men; and in this he expected to arrive at civilization not a great many hours after the others did.

By changing the cargoes it was found possible to carry the two extra passengers, especially since neither of them happened to be a large man.

The boys were as happy as larks as they swept down the river. They laughed, joked and sang by the hour, because now there was no longer any reason for keeping silent, since they were passing out of the big game country.

"But not near half of our time is up," Giraffe would remark frequently; "and after we get these two cripples safely landed, why, we mean to make a fresh start. Allan says he'll show us another trail, where we c'n meet up with a new lot of adventures, have some fine hunting, and see more of these great Maine woods. For one I'm just hopin' we'll run up against a pack of them fierce old wolves like we heard howlin' near our cabin that night. A bear is all well enough, but I've always wanted to bag a wolf, the worst kind."

"Don't you think you're goin' to run the whole shootin' match," remarked Bumpus significantly. "There are others, Giraffe."

"Hello! sounds like Bumpus has changed his mind, and feels like he had ought to own a gun of some kind too!" declared Step Hen.

"That's right, he does," Bumpus hastened to declare, boldly. "If other Boy Scouts c'n carry weapons in the woods, I don't see why I hadn't ought to have the same privilege. My folks don't like the ijee very much; but then a feller's just got to keep up with the procession. And it'll be the makin' of me, I guess, if somethin' coaxes me to get out in the woods, and walk miles every chance that comes along. Let's look at that fine little gun of yours again, Step Hen. If I only can get one, that's my idea of a clever shooter. And it don't wear a feller's shoulder out, either, carryin' the same."

"Glad to hear it, Bumpus; and I reckon you'll be able to afford a gun, with all your share of the fat rewards ahead. If you say so, I'll go to the gun store with you, and help pick out a good one. You really ought to have an experienced hand along at such a time."

Thad and Allan exchanged glances at this remark on the part of Step Hen; for they knew full well that his rifle had been purchased entirely through the advice of the patrol leader.

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"Thank you, Step Hen," Bumpus was heard to say sweetly in reply; "I'll be only too glad to have you along. But I've got one important piece of business to look after the minute I get ashore, and within reach of a telegraph office. If it busts my pocketbook I'm sure goin' to send a wire to our bank cashier, and ask him if I did deliver that letter my dad told me was so important."

"Why, I should think you'd rather send the message to your own house?" Giraffe suggested, with a wink toward Thad, for the canoes were all close together at the time.

"Me?" exclaimed the stout scout, drawing in a long breath. "Well, now, I'd just be afraid to hear the news from headquarters, you know. What if they had lost their lovely home and all because of my stupid forgetfulness, d'ye think I could stand it to stay up here weeks longer, havin' fun? No, I've got it all mapped out, and know just what I want to say to the cashier. And believe me, I'm hopin' for the best, fellers. Have a little pity on me, won't you?"

"We do feel for you, old fellow," said Step Hen, who was drawn toward Bumpus more than ever, on account of this unconscious flattery regarding his new gun; and besides, boy though he was, he could see that the other was really laboring under a heavy strain, and actually suffering from the pangs of remorse.

What the number of miles might be they covered that day, no one dared even guess; but although they fairly flew at times, owing to the combined work of current and paddles, another night had to be spent on the way. But about noon of the second day they realized that they were getting on the borders of civilization again. A dog barking was the first sign, and then came the clarion crow of a barnyard rooster.

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Afterwards a house appeared, then several more; and far beyond the spire of a church reared itself against the clear heavens.

Bumpus looked frightfully pale—for him. He knew that the time had come when he might learn the facts as connected with that letter, the disposal of which he had never been able to solve; since the more he tried the greater became his confusion of ideas.

And about the hour of noon the canoes were turned in toward the shore, for they saw the town of Grindstone before them, with the railroad leading southwest in the direction of the homes that were so far away.

Hardly waiting for the landing to be made, Bumpus got ashore, and was seen hurrying off into the town. They knew that he had in mind the station, where he could send off a hurry message; and Step Hen, receiving a word from Thad, hastened after the fat boy, so as to make sure he did not get into any trouble.

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Once at the station Bumpus, who had made a rough draft of what he wanted to wire the cashier, gave it over to the keeping of the agent, and asked that it be sent at once. He would sit down and wait for the answer.

The clicking of the nimble telegraph key was about the only sound that disturbed the silence in that station, for trains were evidently few and far between on the Aroostook railroad.

It may have been an hour that dragged past, and it may have been much more, Bumpus declared he had aged terribly since coming there; and Step Hen tried all he knew how, to keep the other's spirits up.

"There, he's taking a message right now, and it may be for you, Bumpus!" he said.

A minute later, the operator came toward them, holding out a yellow paper.

"Here's the answer from Cranford," the telegraph man remarked, with a smile; and Bumpus could hardly take the sheet, his hands trembled so terribly.

Less than ten minutes later, a very stout youth, clad partly in the uniform of the Boy Scout organization, might have been seen running wildly down toward the river, followed closely by another, evidently belonging to the same patrol. And as Bumpus ran, he was waving above his head a yellow sheet of paper, while he let out frequent roars, that seemed to be fashioned on one key, and that of joy.

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"She's come, fellers!" was the burden of his whoops; "and I did my duty all right, just like I always said I must a done. He says I delivered the letter that mornin', when I met him on the street. That makes me happy, and I'm ready to buy the best gun I c'n get in this town, and stay up in the Maine woods a whole month, if the rest of you want me to."

They did stay some weeks longer, and met with a series of strange adventures, that some of the boys believed really excelled those that had befallen them in the Penobscot region. What

these happenings were, and just how Thad and his five chums acted their parts most manfully in the face of many difficulties will be found recorded in the pages of the next volume of this series, now published under the title of "The Boy Scouts in the Maine Woods," or "A New Test for the Silver Fox Patrol."

"By the way, Bumpus," remarked Thad, later, as they sat around, taking their ease, "did the cashier tell you what the nature of that communication was; and did it turn out to be so dreadfully important?"

Bumpus grew red in the face and grinned.

"Oh! shucks! I s'pose you all have just *got* to know," he remarked. "It was on'y a line from my dad, tellin' the cashier he'd lunch with him that same day, and take him out in his new Alco car. You know my dad's the president of the bank, but he's been sick at home for a long time, and had to get a car to take him out in the air. But who cares for expenses; gimme two cents' worth of gingersnaps? I'm feelin' fine right now', and c'n afford to laugh at all my silly worryin'. Might a known a scout wouldn't do such a silly thing as to forget an important message. Shucks! Step Hen, let's go around and see if we can find that gun anywhere. I've got the money to buy it all right."

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Of course the boys understood that the pretended anxiety of Bumpus in connection with trouble coming to his family through carelessness on his part had all been put on; but what he had feared was the reproaches of his father, who had long been trying to cure him of this same fault.

The two injured men had been handed over to the proper authorities, and a doctor was even then examining what Thad had done for Kimball.

"You owe this lad a lot of thanks, my friend," the doctor said; "he certainly has done a very neat job in uniting the lips of that artery. I'm afraid you'd have passed in your checks for a certainty, only for the prompt first aid to the injured which you received;" and Thad felt amply repaid when he thus learned that after all, his crude work had not been so clumsy as he had feared at the time.

To dispose of the three hobo yeggmen, it might be stated that they were eventually sentenced to various terms in the penitentiary. The reward, which had been increased to two thousand dollars, was paid over to the boys, and by them divided, just as Thad had proposed. And everybody seemed more than satisfied.

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But of course that was only a small part of what was coming the way of the six scouts. Thad soon learned that the bank recently robbed had also offered a reward for the recovery of the bonds that had been taken; and this eventually fell into the treasury of the Silver Fox Patrol.

Then there was that other plunder, which had been found under the stone in the old cabin of the trapper, away up the river in the big game country. Doubtless the plundered bank would be delighted to pay a big sum for the return of those valuable documents, not to mention the cash that had also been recovered.



Thad did not have the time just then to open up communications, for he wanted to be off with his chums on another trip in a different direction; and one that Allan had wished they could take at the time they were compelled to follow on the trail of Mr. James W. Carson. So Thad placed the sealed packet in the safe of a gentleman whom Allan chanced to know right well, and who promised to open negotiations with the robbed bank, while the scouts were up in the woods.

"I'm pretty sure," the gentleman remarked, "that there is a very nice sum offered in this case; and if so, you lads are to be congratulated indeed."

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"It means a trip out West next summer for our whole patrol; and a hunt in the wild Rock Mountains;" declared Bumpus, who was now wearing a perpetual smile, because of the good news he had received from Cranford.

And it turned out that they did receive a splendid purse from the bank people, who were overjoyed to get back papers that were of tremendous value to them, even if of little account to others. What this amount was there is really no necessity of telling; but it was enough, added to all the rest they received, to make the six boys the happiest fellows in all the great state of Maine. And doubtless, even before they knew to a certainty just what they were going to receive, it can be set down for a fact that they would start out on the second half of their vacation in the Maine woods with lighter hearts than they had known for many a day.

THE END.

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- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Added a Table of Contents.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL; OR, SCOUTING THROUGH THE BIG GAME COUNTRY \*\*\*

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