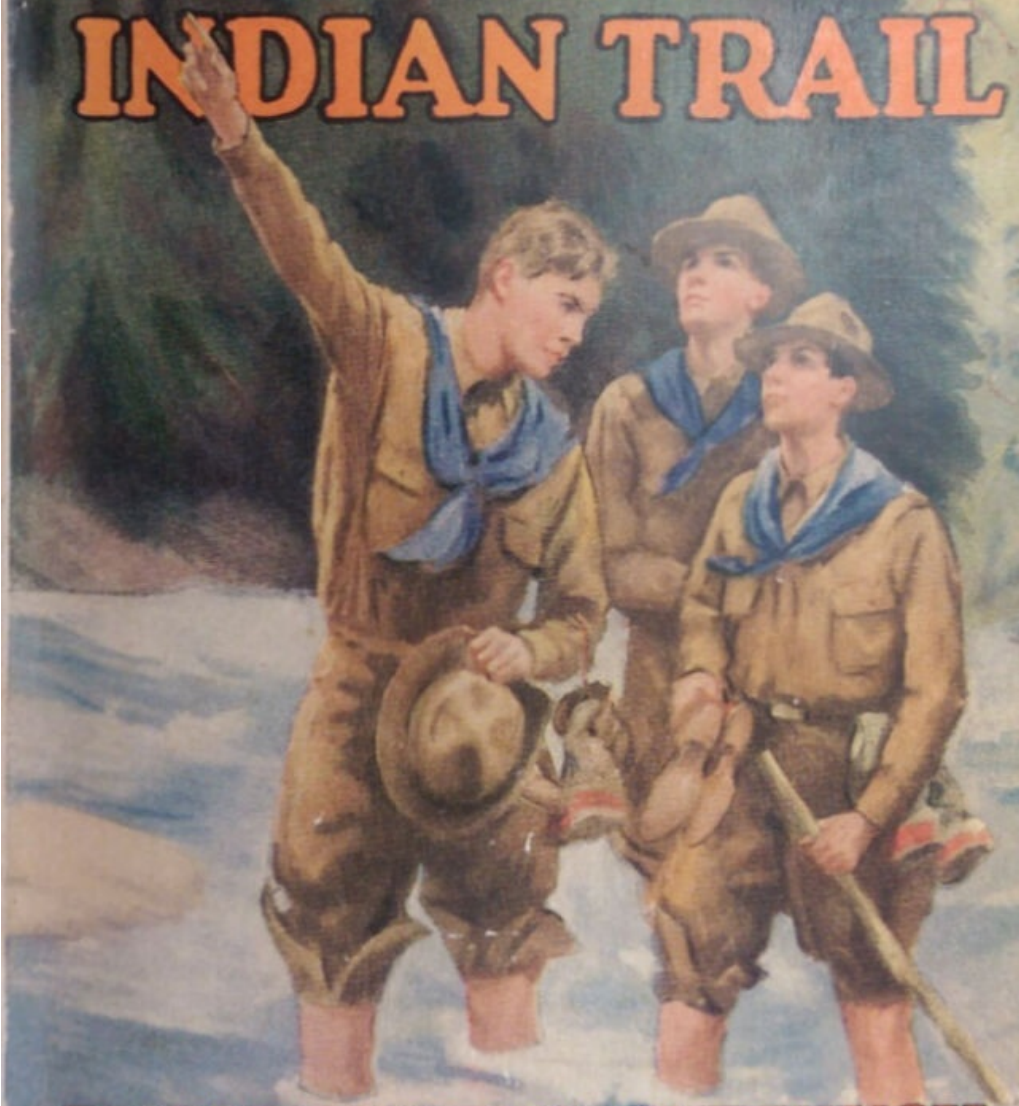


# WESTY MARTIN ON THE OLD INDIAN TRAIL



BY PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH  
APPROVED BY THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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*Title:* Westy Martin on the Old Indian Trail

*Date of first publication:* 1928

*Author:* Percy Keese Fitzhugh (1876-1950)

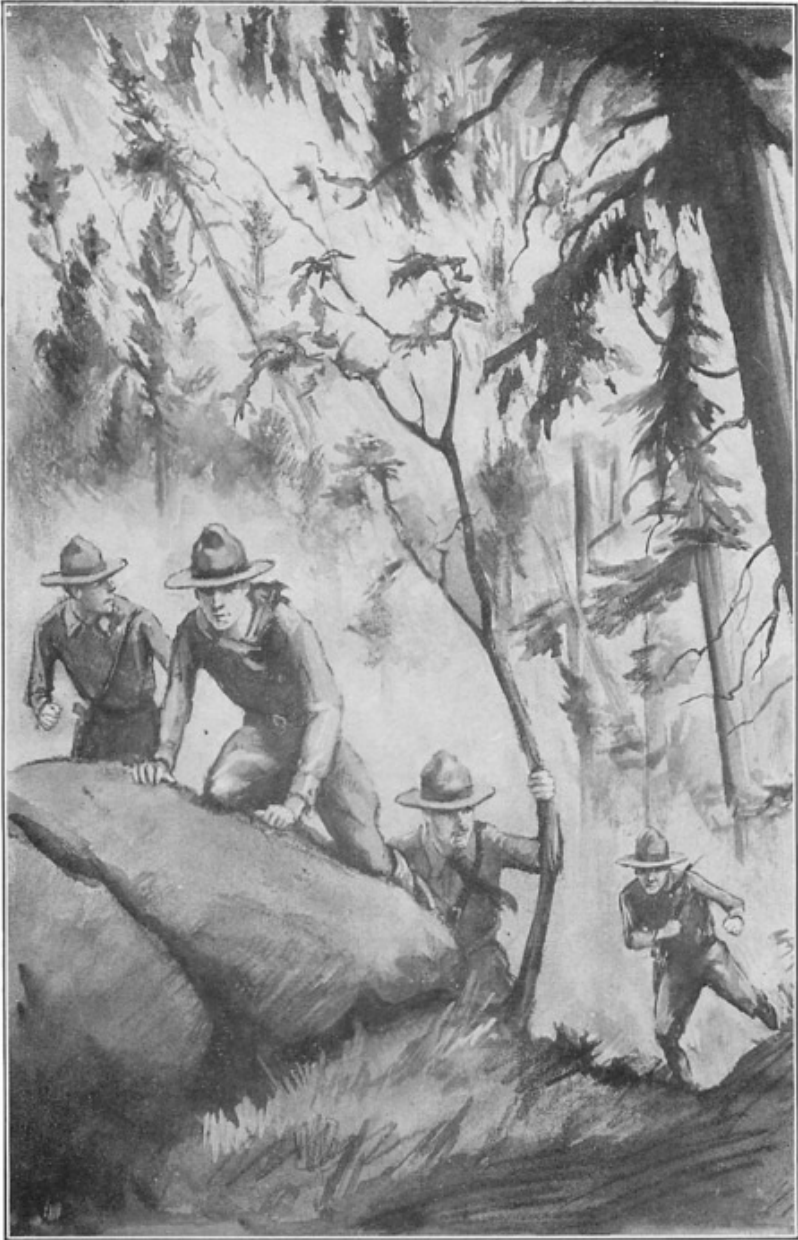
*Date first posted:* Sep. 1, 2019

*Date last updated:* Sep. 1, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190901

This eBook was produced by: Roger Frank and Sue Clark

WESTY MARTIN ON  
THE OLD INDIAN TRAIL



THEY CRAWLED UP THE HILL TO ESCAPE THE FIRE.

WESTY MARTIN  
ON THE OLD  
INDIAN TRAIL

BY

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

*Author of*

THE TOM SLADE BOOKS  
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS  
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS  
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

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Published with the approval of  
THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS      NEW YORK

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Made in the United States of America

## CONTENTS

- I. [TO BEGIN WITH](#)
- II. [A QUESTION OF FAITH](#)
- III. [THE EVIL EYE](#)
- IV. [SUSPENSE](#)
- V. [BENNY](#)
- VI. [PROMISE](#)
- VII. [A GHOSTLY VISIT](#)
- VIII. [A CLUE](#)
- IX. [A SORT OF TRAIL](#)
- X. [A MESSAGE](#)
- XI. [MR. CONDON TALKS](#)
- XII. [ABOUT THE CAVE](#)
- XIII. [IN THE TEMPEST](#)
- XIV. [GONE](#)
- XV. [ONE LESS](#)
- XVI. [RAIN](#)
- XVII. [HOPE](#)
- XVIII. [FOOTPRINTS](#)
- XIX. [AND THEN](#)
- XX. [TO THE RESCUE](#)
- XXI. [WHO?](#)
- XXII. [A HAUNTING FACE](#)
- XXIII. [ALONG THE HIGHWAY](#)
- XXIV. ["IN EVERY WAY"](#)
- XXV. [A STRANGE VISIT](#)
- XXVI. [MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY](#)
- XXVII. [JERRY CONDON](#)
- XXVIII. [WESTY GOES AFTER](#)
- XXIX. [RISK](#)
- XXX. [ENEMIES](#)
- XXXI. [THREE CHEERS](#)
- XXXII. [STRATEGY](#)

- XXXIII. [SOMETHING ACCOMPLISHED](#)
- XXXIV. [WESTY KEEPS A DATE](#)
- XXXV. [WHERE CREDIT IS DUE](#)
- XXXVI. [REVERIE](#)
- XXVII. [SOUVENIR](#)
- XXXVIII. [MAN OVERBOARD](#)



# WESTY MARTIN ON THE OLD INDIAN TRAIL

## CHAPTER I TO BEGIN WITH

Westy said it all came about by accident. Not the Trail, of course, but the occasion of his going there. He declared that Benny Stein started it by saving his life.

It happened in early February, at a pond up in North Bridgeboro where Westy was skating. Benny was looking on, interested and wishing he knew how to skate. There was some thin ice. The tall, slim scout of the famous Silver Fox Patrol fell in and the little Jewish boy pulled him out. From then on, they were fast friends.

In early June, Benny joined the scouts. He became a member of Westy's patrol under the leadership of Roy Blakeley. After that impressive ceremony was over, Benny, consciously a tenderfoot in his full scout regalia, walked down Main Street, linking arms with Westy.

The night was moonless, but full of the call of spring and ice cream, beckoning to the tenderfoot and first-class scout alike. Consequently, the destination of these two was a certain confectionery store called Bennett's, which offered, as one of many delicious concoctions, a very tasty chocolate parfait. They put more whipped cream on a parfait than any other place in Bridgeboro. Any scout could bear witness to that.

"You see, Ben," Westy said, during their walk down town, "it wasn't so bad after all. You got through great. Even Mr. Ellsworth said so. The only thing, you were a little nervous. That's all."

Benny sighed deeply. "Yes, that's all," he said. "Could it be worse, I ask you? I almost disgraced myself. The scout sign even—I put my hand upside down and the words got mixed up in my teeth yet. And shiver! On a warm night in spring like this, I was *shivering!*"

Westy laughed heartily. "There's no disgrace in being nervous and shivering, Ben. Besides, it's all over now and you're a full-fledged tenderfoot. By the time you're ready to be a second-class scout, you'll be all over your nervousness."

"Oi, I hope so," Benny said, rather dejectedly. "I'm a student, not an athlete, Westy, my friend," he added, almost tragically.

"Say," Westy said, cheerily, "you're aces high. All the fellows liked you—I could see that. What more do you want?"

"To be full of pep like that Blakeley," he answered, "and to talk fast about scouting like that so little Harris boy. I want to be a good scout. But a failure I

am, already. Sometimes I don't know that it's west when I'm looking at the sun even. A fine scout I am!"

"Take it easy," Westy said, consolingly. "You'll learn everything in time. At least you're a good student and that means a whole lot. Even if you've never known much about outdoor life, it doesn't say *you won't*. I'll teach you a lot before Temple Camp opens. You can swim. That's something!"

Benny laughed outright. "Westy, don't be foolish," he said. "*I swim!* Hah! I float when I swim—that's how good I am a swimmer!"

Westy peered into Benny's face. "Gee," he said, at length, "say...." He peered closer, as if he doubted that which his ears had just heard. "Ben, you're kidding me, aren't you?"

Benny's face was very grave. "I should kid my best friend, that I don't swim when I do?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "I'm a scout now—it means the truth I'm telling you. Without water wings, I don't float. I just sink right away—like lead to the bottom."

They had reached Bennett's. But Westy stood still and faced Benny. "Do you mean," he said, incredulously, "that you couldn't swim a stroke when you pulled me out of that hole? Out of that deep, icy water?"

Benny grinned and shook his head. "Positively, no!" he said. "Should it be such a surprise?"

Westy, speechless with admiration and surprise, slowly shook his head. In answer, he flung his arm about young Stein's shoulders and together they walked into Bennett's. People seeing them thus little guessed that it was more than an arm that linked them together.

The chocolate parfait loosened Westy's tongue. "Gee, Ben," he said, "I'll say this much for you, you know one of the most important scout laws there is to know. Saving my life when you wouldn't have been able to save your own—*gee whiz*, that's what I call doing something! And all this time I never knew but what you could swim."

"Aw, forget it," Benny said, kindly. He was trying hard not to swallow too much at one time. His embarrassment was obvious.

"Oh, I know," Westy said, "you don't want me to say anything about it and I won't. But just tell me why you did it. *Why?*"

"I should know why?" Benny said, trying to chew on an oversized walnut. "Ask me something easy!"

"Everybody has reasons for doing things," Westy said, insistently.

Benny smiled. "Maybe it was because I was wishing I could skate like you—I don't know. Anyhow it's made us good friends."

"And it's made you a scout," Westy added.

"It's nice to hear you say that, Westy," Benny said, with delight. "But because I'm a flivver of a scout I shouldn't say it out loud."

"Nope," Westy said, laying his spoon down. "Even if you were a punk scout—and you're not—you mustn't be afraid to say it aloud. Once a scout, always a scout—that's what it says in the handbook."

"It's settled," Benny said, emphatically. "Whatever you say."

As they stepped out from the store into the street, Westy heard his name called loudly. He looked up to see Warde Hollister beckoning to him from his father's car, parked across the street. They crossed over.

Mr. Hollister was sitting behind the steering wheel and Warde was in the seat beside him. "Hullo!" Westy said, in greeting. Benny grinned.

"Hello, boys," Mr. Hollister returned. "How about a lift home?"

"That wouldn't be so bad," Westy answered. "Benny lives on Fourth," he added as they climbed in back.

Mr. Hollister gave Benny a friendly nod and started the car. After they were out of the Main Street traffic, Warde turned to his father. "Benny's just joined us tonight," he said.

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Hollister said. "So you're a scout, eh, Benny?"

Benny looked almost frightened. "I'm...."

"Sure, he is," Westy interposed and nudging Benny with his elbow. "I'm going to teach him how to be a good one, too! Not that he isn't one already—he's just shy about admitting it."

"You'll get over that," Mr. Hollister said, kindly. "And with Westy looking out for you—you can't go wrong."

"Don't I know it!" Benny answered emphatically.

"Vacation starts in two weeks," Westy reminded them, "and I'll have plenty of time to teach Benny before Camp opens. I'll start him off with pathfinding."

"That reminds me," Warde said, "that father's going up over the Mohawk Trail in two weeks. I'm going with him. Isn't that all to the good, Westy?"

"Betcha life," Westy answered, feeling a trifle envious.

"One of my salesmen has been sick, Westy," Mr. Hollister explained, "so I have to take his place and get our summer souvenir orders. I have to stop first at North Adams and make other calls between there and a place called Greenfield. It'll take me about a week and I thought it would be nice for Warde to wait for me at North Adams and explore the trail to his heart's content."

"Gee, I'll have some time to kill, won't I?" Warde asked, proudly.

Mr. Hollister looked down at his son. "Perhaps you wouldn't have to kill time if you had another scout along. Say, for instance, Westy Martin."

Westy sort of choked. Then he summoned courage. "Would another scout be too many?" he asked, anxiously. "A scout like Benny?"

"Surest thing you know," Mr. Hollister answered, laughingly. "The more the merrier. You can camp on the trail—do whatever you like for a whole

week. I'll pick you up on the way back.”

There was silence on the back seat—a joyful silence. Benny was too overwhelmed for words. He coughed and, reaching his hand out in the darkness, found Westy's and clasped it. That was all.

## CHAPTER II

### A QUESTION OF FAITH

Benny's eyes were aglow when he burst into the living room of his home. His father and mother were sitting quietly there, listening to the radio.

He threw his scout hat upon the divan, his face radiating joy. Mr. Stein nodded and smiled. "You're glad to be a scout. Eh, Sonny?"

"Sure," Benny answered. "It's beautiful. Patriotic by your country and your mama and papa. Only me—I was nervous. But Westy says he'll show me that I shouldn't be like that."

"And they were all nice to my Sonny?" Mrs. Stein inquired, anxiously.

"Mama," Benny answered, happily, "any better they couldn't be to me. I thought I was a president how they all shook hands with me afterward. And just now coming home in Mr. Hollister's car, Westy got me an invitation to go on the Mohawk Trail before even Mr. Hollister knew he was going to ask me."

"Dat's nice, Benny," Mr. Stein said, pleased.

"You should help out with camping things, huh?"

"Sure," Benny answered. "It's no piker they'll say I am, anyhow." He turned and fixed his eyes upon his mother. "Everything's been so nice. Westy is my friend. On a big hike I've already got an invitation. It's only that I shouldn't turn out to be a dumb scout to change my good luck as yet."

"You won't be a dumb scout, Sonny," his mother assured him. "With that nice Westy boy taking care of you—it's sure you won't!"

At that very moment, Warde and Westy were discussing Benny. They were standing on the sidewalk in front of Warde's house where Mr. Hollister had left them. Warde had said something about taking a tenderfoot in wild, mountainous country.

"Are you hinting that I shouldn't have asked Benny along?" Westy asked, indignantly. "Do you mean you don't want him—that he's not good enough or something?"

"Gee whiz, Wes," Warde implored, "there's nothing to get fussed up about. I didn't say anything about not wanting Benny. And I wasn't hinting either."

"What did you mean, then?" Westy demanded to know.

"Oh, gosh," Warde answered with something like despair in his voice, "you're too touchy. You fly right off the handle before a fellow can explain. Benny's your friend, isn't he?"

Westy uttered a vehement, "Betcha!"

"Well," Warde went on, "and you're a friend of mine, too. Aren't you?"

“You know I am,” Westy grunted.

“If you had any sense then,” Warde continued, “you’d know that I like Benny on account of that. But no, right away you get up in the air because I said I wondered how he’d get along on the trail when he’s only a tenderfoot. He said himself he’s never been in real country like it must be up on the old trail.”

“Don’t worry,” Westy assured Warde, “Benny’ll get along all right, no matter how wild the country is. Even if he is a tenderfoot he has brains. Why, he’s ahead of any of us in school.”

“That’s it,” Warde said, “maybe he’s not sure of himself as a scout, because he likes to read and study best.”

“Well, anyhow,” Westy said, insistently, “he’ll learn scouting as well as he’s learned everything else. He’s not dumb as a scout at all. He thinks he is, but he’s proved already that he’s not.”

With that, Westy sprinted the length of two lawns and reached his own. Warde stood where he was for a few minutes. “Dumb?” he asked himself, at length. “Well, he seemed to get everything twisted tonight—saying the scout laws backward and all. Still, Westy may be right—you can’t always sometimes tell.”

Warde left it at that and went into the house.

## CHAPTER III THE EVIL EYE

They were on the ferry crossing from Newburgh. Mr. Hollister, relieved of driving for a few minutes, sat back to rest. "Do you know anything of the Mohawk Trail, Westy?" he asked.

"No," Westy replied. "Not very much, anyhow. My father said it's full of nice scenery and that the new paved highway from North Adams to Greenfield is about fifty miles long. He said that the Mohawk Indians used to come from New York State and go through Massachusetts to Connecticut. That's all I know."

"Few people know much about it," Mr. Hollister said. "Only the old settlers up there can give a complete history of it. The new Mohawk Trail—the highway, I mean—follows the original trail, and one can see, riding along, where the old beaten path of the Indians crosses and recrosses the new concrete road. I've heard say that parts of the old trail have become obliterated with time, especially where it led up and across the mountains and into secret recesses where the red men hid in times of danger."

"Gosh!" Westy exclaimed, turning to Warde. "Let's make that—let's hunt out the old trail and follow it wherever it goes!"

"That's a good idea," Mr. Hollister said. "The difficulty is, that something like a few hundred years of undergrowth will impede your progress."

They came out of the ferry house at Beacon and started along a fine, smooth road. "A scout knows how to overcome a whole lot, though," Warde said, taking up where his father left off. "As Pee-wee Harris says, 'we'll circumvent Nature.'"

Mr. Hollister laughed heartily. "Well," he said, "try it, anyway. I'll be interested to know how you've done it, when I see you again. Meanwhile, safety first. I'll appoint Westy your leader, what do you say?"

It was agreed, and Westy promised to keep that trust faithfully, although he secretly hoped that the promise would not prevent him from participating in any great adventure that Chance might offer. His mind was eager to know more of this romantic, historic old trail. "Gee whiz," he said, enthusiastically, "I bet if we only knew it, there's lots of stories about that trail that've never been written."

Benny, who had thus far sat in respectful silence, burst forth: "Maybe ghosts of Indians and skeletons, we'll step on, Westy, huh?" He asked the question timidly.



"Oh, boy!" Westy answered, "then that would be a regular hike. I like spooky, mysterious places—the spookier, the better."

"Say," Benny wailed, "for me—not! I like dead Indians to stay dead. They shouldn't speak no more after a hundred years."

"It's not only the Indians' ghosts, Benny," Mr. Hollister said, laughingly. "They say that many of the first Massachusetts settlers along there were secretly massacred and some held captives in the mountains. So their ghosts, too, supposedly are haunting the Berkshires."

"Ugh!" Benny said, with a hint of a groan, "to hear it, I shiver. But I'll show you I won't run if they speak to me!"

"That's the stuff," Westy said. "You talk like a scout."

It had been agreed upon at starting to eat along the way and leave their generous supply of camping things undisturbed until the Trail was reached. So they stopped at supper time in a little hamlet that boasted of one lunch wagon.

"Are you scouts willing to ride tonight until we strike North Adams?" Mr. Hollister asked, after supper was finished.

"Sure," Westy answered for himself and Benny.

"It's unanimous then," Mr. Hollister said. "The sooner we get to North Adams, the more time you will have. It might be daylight before we get there."

"We should worry about that," Westy said. "We didn't come up here to sleep much anyway."

"Say," Benny put in, "so full of excitement I am, my eyes wouldn't close. It's better I should ride and keep awake."

"Don't let anyone kid you about ghosts, Benny," Warde said. "There's no such thing."

Benny said nothing. He felt that to challenge a belief in ghosts was to challenge that which made Westy so likable. The adventurous, romantic spirit of Westy seemed fitted for ghosts and such things, and Benny wouldn't have had him changed for the world.

They sped along and after an hour or so encountered but little traffic. The towns were few and far between and on the far horizon, mountains raised their tree-covered crests into the deepening twilight.

Night came on apace. Mr. Hollister put on his lights and increased his speed, rushing into the black void, ever yawning before them. He was enjoying the friendly argument that his son and Westy were having on that spectral subject, ghosts.

Benny, on the other hand, was far from enjoying it. To put it mildly, he was uncomfortable. Finally, he could stand it no longer. "Westy," he said, with a calmness that belied his true feelings, "as a friend, I ask you—don't talk such things no more. In daylight, I can stand it, but when it's dark everywhere around—no!"

They all laughed heartily. Westy leaned over and gave him a fraternal crack on the knee. "All right, Ben," he said, "I'll save the ghosts for the Trail. There'll be so many up there that you'll soon get used to them."

Westy little realized that his statement, uttered in jesting tones, would perhaps be horribly real before another week had passed. Some portion of this truth was creeping into his thoughts, even as he spoke. He could not divine why suddenly a chill should steal upon him when he was so warm. Perhaps it was the weird effect of a little gleam of light appearing far down the dark road, seeming gradually to come nearer and nearer.

"Is that something coming to us or us coming to something?" Warde asked his father.

"I think it's us coming to something," Mr. Hollister answered. "From here, it looks like the tail light of a car."

"Somebody stalled, most likely," Westy said.

"I guess so," Mr. Hollister agreed.

"After talking of ghosts," Warde said, laughingly, "I'm so creepy feeling, it makes me think of the evil eye coming for us. It's so red and gleaming on this dark road that it's spooky-looking."

Poor Benny felt a slight chill, too. But he determined not to show any weakness again. He forced a loud, shrill, contemptuous laugh. "Hah!" he said. "So foolish you talk, Warde. It couldn't be no such thing. Evil eye! Hah!" Then he laughed again, quite naturally.

His mirth sounded gay and cheerful along the lonely road. It echoed even above the click-click of the big cord tires as they gripped the smooth pavement with each revolution.

Gradually the light became quite distinct and in the glare of Mr. Hollister's headlights they could see that it was indeed the tail light of a car. And along the road, walking and coming toward them, were two men, waving their arms quite frantically.

"I guess they need some help, all right," Mr. Hollister said, sympathetically. "I wouldn't want to be stuck along here."

He slowed down and came to a full stop just as the two men reached the car. Mr. Hollister leaned out. "What seems to be the trouble?" he asked, kindly.

The two men spoke as if with one voice. "*Up with 'em! All of you!*" they commanded.

The four occupants of the car, so full of mirth a few minutes before, now looked fearfully into the grim, death-dealing muzzles of two guns.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUSPENSE

There was silence—profound silence—for the open span of perhaps thirty seconds. For those inside the car, it was a silence fraught with terrible fear. But to those outside—what did it mean? They seemed to be intent—listening to a distant, almost meaningless sound coming from afar, and yet their eyes were fixed upon their intended victims.

Westy listened then, too. He thought he detected a quick flicker of anxiety upon those two faces. As the sound grew louder, he noticed that their features drew up taut. They feared something—had other concerns besides their immediate one, Westy was sure.

The sound of a starting motor broke the tense silence of that fear-ridden area. The gunmen started nervously, but did not let their guns stray one sixteenth of an inch from their captives. One of the men, shorter and more stockily built than his pal, emitted an oath, for in that second the “evil eye” had sped away into the darkness.

The sound from afar became very real—like a motorcycle—perhaps two, bearing down upon them from the east. The little group in the car took a bit of hope in hearing it. But the taller gunman shifted on his feet and pulled open the front door of the car.

“C’mon, Buddy,” he said to Mr. Hollister, “get out and make it snappy!”

The short man opened the back door and ordered the boys out, also. Benny was the last to get out but the first to find his voice. “Hah!” he shouted, with a falsetto laugh following. “We come up by the Indian Trail to find ghosts of dead Indians and what do we get yet? A couple of tough bandits from New York!”

“*Shut up, you!*” the short one growled, poking Benny in the ribs with his gun. “Stand out there with the rest of them!”

Benny, silenced into submission, took his stand in the road. The two gunmen then climbed into the car, the tall man sitting at the wheel. He bent forward and tried the starter, but no sound issued from the engine. He tried again, but without success and in desperation got out of the car, his companion following.

“Get out of the road and under cover!” the tall man ordered the captives. Then peering down into Mr. Hollister’s face, he said quietly: “Account of *you* feller, bein’ so smart and stallin’ that car on me, yer kin take yer medicine with me ’n me pal! Walk fast and find a hidin’ place where we kin use our guns

foist. Them's two coppers trailin' us, now. See!"

The boys glanced up the road. The gunmen's pursuers were indeed almost upon them. Near enough to spur the short man into action. He herded the captives together and walked back of them, Mr. Hollister leading the line, and the boys following.

They struck into the underbrush. Except for a few large trees, it was pretty open and, by the gunmen's flashlight, Mr. Hollister espied a huge rock, large enough and wide enough to screen them all. It afforded some protection for his young charges, he decided, in the event of gun play. So to this they made their way.

The motorcycles came thundering along, slowed down and stopped. Then ensued tense, groping moments in which they stood—the highwaymen flanked by Benny and Mr. Hollister on one side and Westy and Warde on the other. In this way, they protected themselves from attack from either side of the rock. They crouched close to the stone, their guns ready.

The darkness and silence became so intense as to be intolerable. A stifled "Oi!" came from Benny's direction, and Westy's taut nerves became more taut as he caught a quick, catlike movement on the part of the short gunman. He knew it meant that poor Benny had just received another rough prod in the ribs with a gun.

Two powerful flashlights gleamed on either side of the rock, spreading rapidly from long, thin shafts into broad areas of light. It was the officers, Westy knew. His heart began beating like a triphammer against his chest. How near to the rock were they, he wondered.

Was Warde's heart beating as fast as his own? And Benny—good, true, gentle Benny, how did he feel? Truly, he must be shivering now. Not in the presence of ghosts, but in the presence of real, starkly real, death. There was nothing make-believe about that, Westy knew. Tears welled up in his eyes at the remembrance of his little Jewish friend's wistful humor concerning Indian ghosts. He wished he could say just one word to Benny now. Something to give him courage.

The lights circled about, playing a sort of will-o'-the-wisp game upon the rock. Then they rose higher, lingering caressingly across the top of it. Poor Mr. Hollister, Westy thought, as he watched it—how frantic it must make him to think of himself and his son in such a plight—at the mercy of two bandits.

The light on Westy's side errantly strayed again, circling about the field. The other one, like some portentous signal from above, landed directly upon Benny's shining black hair. Benny heaved a choking sort of sigh. It was pitiful to hear.

Westy's feet became icy. His throat was dry and parched. Never in his life, within his memory, had he felt so utterly helpless—useless. A wild instinct

whispered somewhere in the depths of his mind for him to shout. To run. To make some desperate attempt to give the alarm to the searching officers.

But his saner instincts counteracted that first impulse. His unselfish nature triumphed over selfish self-preservation. He had not himself alone to think of—he had three other lives to take into consideration. Three other lives as worthy as his own.

The officers didn't know that four innocent people were being used to protect the lives of two desperate bandits. Perhaps they were murderers! Why, Westy reminded himself, men of that kind would stop at nothing! If he cried out they would shoot him, shoot Benny and Warde and Mr. Hollister, perhaps.

Ah, yes, he must be careful. A rash thought, a reckless attempt would mean....

## CHAPTER V

### BENNY

The gunman nearest Westy turned and faced the rock, centering his immediate attention upon the top. Evidently, he expected something from that quarter very soon, and nothing else than trouble, at that.

Were the officers just the other side of the rock? Why was everything so terribly quiet? Which way would the officers come upon them and who would be shot down first?

All these questions seared Westy's brain like darts of flame. But nothing answered except the chorus of some gaily chirping bullfrogs from a near-by pond. The seconds dragged wearily by in the darkness.

There was a sudden, peculiar sound. Something throaty, spasmodic. It came again. Peering over at the light-bathed Benny, Westy had a hunch it came from him.

What was it he did, Westy wondered. He looked more intently. Again it came, louder. Then he saw Benny's head bob violently as the sound spent itself.

Benny's captor moved a trifle into the light. Bending over the tenderfoot scout, he whispered something. The sound came again, even as the gunman whispered to him.

Benny looked back over his shoulder into the dark, appealingly. Westy sensed it was meant for him—that appeal. Even though Benny couldn't see him from where he was standing, he had flashed a silent message to his brother scout and friend.

Westy pondered the meaning of the appeal and message. As he tried to solve it, Warde touched his sleeve, ever so lightly. He too, then, had caught Benny's look.

The gunman was still standing over Benny. The stillness of the night air was broken suddenly by the thin, falsetto voice. "Can I help it that I hiccough? Ever since I'm a baby already I hiccough—should you tell me to stop when I can't?"

If Benny had been standing before a microphone, his voice couldn't have sounded any more distinct or startling. It simply rang out and up to the wide heavens in an echo.

Westy could see in that flashing second that the gunman was startled by Benny's unexpected outburst. He was completely off his guard for the moment. And Westy took advantage of that moment.

He did not stop to consider his motive. He just knew by blind instinct that the one chance had presented itself, and he took it.

Leaping with one bound, he kicked the gun out of the man's hand and it fell. There was a soft thud as it landed in the soft grass. A shot rang out, clear—deadly.

Westy flung himself prone upon the ground. Covering the revolver with his own slim body, he waited. The gunman lost no time. He was upon Westy, struggling to wrest his one means of protection from the wary scout.

Westy groaned audibly under the weight of the man. He felt crushed and his breath came only in short gasps. Hadn't the officers heard? He hoped, ah, he hoped....

"You're covered," a deep voice broke in upon the struggle. Its commanding, yet calm, accents came upon Westy's ears like a soothing breeze in the wake of a storm.

The gunman quickly removed his weight from the suffering scout. Westy scrambled to his feet, his two hands firmly grasping the gun. He didn't need it, he soon discovered. For the gunmen were very much covered and captured by the state police.

They stood at each side of the rock, their guns in position. Mr. Hollister and Warde and Benny had sidled up to the officers. The gunmen, already handcuffed, were being marched out to the road.

"That was quick work, young fellow," said one of the officers to Westy. He smiled pleasantly and turned to Mr. Hollister, who interposed with a question.

Westy would have liked to protest that compliment. He wanted to share it with Benny, who was standing mute and trying to gather together his distracted wits. Westy knew intuitively that Benny, in some ingenious way, had made it possible to disarm that gunman. The appeal—that silent message—had something to do with it.

At that juncture one of the officers spoke to Mr. Hollister. "Those two fellers," he was saying, "belong to Frankie Wolfe's gang. They did a big job at the City Bank in New York yesterday. Got twenty-five thousand in currency. Killed the messenger but they didn't have a chance to exchange the money. Cops were right on their trail and chased them through Jersey. They must have hid somewhere in New York State all last night. Probably right over the line, because we got the tip soon after dark that they were in the state and heading for Connecticut."

"Do you suppose their comrades meant to desert them?" Mr. Hollister asked.

"Sure," the officer replied. "Frankie's noted for that. He's thought up the scheme of holding up your car and putting the two green ones onto the job. It

was a good way of getting rid of them and having more dough for himself and his favorite pal. Frankie knows it's pretty hard to make a good getaway with any excess baggage on board and the coppers on their heels."

The searchlight was still shining from up on the rock. There Benny stood in its light, as if loath to leave the friendly rays gleaming upon him. He gazed up, an incredulous expression dominating his small features. "That searchlight, Westy," he said, "should nobody be holding it there yet?"

The officer talking to Mr. Hollister laughed and turned to Benny. "Nobody's holding it there, son," he said. "I climbed up and put it there myself just to fool your captors—make them think we were there. We had to have light, too, on our little act, and we needed the full use of our hands. You see, we didn't know how many we had to fight."

"Anyhow," Benny said, sympathetically, "for you I'm glad it's all over and for me, too, and Westy and everyone! I'll go by the rock up and get for you your light."

The officer made an attempt to protest this little service on Benny's part, but to no avail. The tenderfoot was already in possession of the flashlight and on his way down the rock. They watched him, admiringly.

"If I'm not mistaken, Westy," Mr. Hollister said, quietly, "I think you have a find in Benny Stein."

"I know it," Westy said, proudly. "He's the scariest and yet the nerviest, bravest kid I've ever known."

"I don't know but what they're the best kind to have around," the officer said. "Especially at a time like this. They think quickly and act."

Benny, unaware that he was the topic of conversation, handed the light to the officer. They walked back to the roadway, Mr. Hollister and the officer first and the scouts in the rear.

"Say, Ben," Westy said, before they reached the roadway, "how come you got rid of those hiccoughs so quick? I just happened to think of that, now. Gee whiz, they sure did come on all of a sudden, didn't they?"

Ben giggled. He stopped walking and looked at Westy. "Say," he said, "did they sound good? Like real ones?"

"What do you mean?" Westy asked, wonderingly. Warde, too, was puzzled.

Ben threw back his head and laughed. "Westy," he said, between hearty spasms, "oi, I laugh—you should believe it. And all the time I thought by myself I sounded so foolish doing it!"

"Foolish, doing *what*?" Westy wanted to know.

"In my whole life," Benny answered, more composed, "never did I have those hiccoughs once even. I just was what you call making a noise like it so the bandit should forget he had a gun, because he would get mad at me. That



look I gave you? It was telling you to jump on him when I should speak already. But anyhow why should I tell you this, you understood, so what's the use of talking now!"

There wasn't any use of talking. Westy knew there was nothing fitting enough to say to Benny. He wasn't on a par with praise of any kind—he was above that. He was aces high and higher, and Westy's heart was full of admiration for his friend.

But how can a scout tell that to another scout without feeling like a sap? That's the question Westy would have liked to have answered.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROMISE

The police requisitioned Mr. Hollister's car to take the captured men into the next town. They were to await extradition there, the officers told them. So the scouts waited patiently for Mr. Hollister's return.

They were glad to see him come back, so tired and exhausted were they. The nerve-racking ordeal had told upon them and they climbed into the car, thankful that the dark road would soon be but a memory.

Only Westy was interested and wakeful enough to hear the final details of the captured bandits' ride in Mr. Hollister's car. "Gee whiz," Westy said, "I bet they're good and sore at their pals deserting them like that. Huh?"

"Mad?" Mr. Hollister repeated. "Mad is a weak word to express their contempt for their former comrades. They were so mad about it, that they told everything they knew to the police. Right in my presence, too. They told who engineered the hold-up and who shot that poor, unfortunate messenger and all about it. Of course, I suppose a lot of what they said was untrue. Naturally they'll want to lay all the blame on those who've escaped. But the main thing is, they've given such a good description of the two pals who betrayed them that every town in Massachusetts, right now, would recognize them. They won't get out of the state in their own car. Not unless I'm mistaken."

"I hope they don't," Westy said.

Benny had nothing to say. He had long since lost track of all mortal care and concern, so peacefully was he slumbering. His resolve to stay awake all night was of no purpose now. Warde, too, maintained a silence that hinted of lethargy.

Every here and there they were intercepted by police. The car was closely scrutinized as well as its occupants and then passed on. Long after daylight, as they drove into North Adams, four more policemen stopped and searched the car.

"No sign of them, yet?" Mr. Hollister asked one of them.

The officer shook his head. "I guess they got past here before we had word," he said. "Don't worry, though, they'll have to go some to dodge us all. They can't spend a dollar of the money. The numbers are all known."

They rode on and through the main street of North Adams. As Mr. Hollister stopped the car, Westy had a thought. "I just happened to think," he said, "those bandits couldn't get this car started that time. Didn't the tall one say something about you stalling it?"

Mr. Hollister laughed. “Yes,” he said, “I was stalling for time—for the officers to come. But I didn’t stall the car—I locked it quickly when they ordered me out. Then I threw the key under the cushion on the front seat.”

Westy woke Benny and they all went into a near-by restaurant for some breakfast. “Who wants to sleep now?” Mr. Hollister asked.

“Not me,” Westy said. “I guess the other two will hold out after their nap.”

“What I want first,” Warde said, “is a nice spot to camp in.”

“All right,” Mr. Hollister agreed, “we’ll drive up the Trail directly after we eat.”

They agreed upon that. Even Benny.

“We’ll go on until someone says stop,” he continued. “The tourists don’t strike the highway until six or seven. I’ll see you settled and still have time to get back before business opens up here.”

The plan sounded good. But the pancakes and coffee and sliced bananas, with cream, momentarily put other thoughts out of Benny’s mind. “Now it’s like last night I was dreaming,” he ventured, his mouth full of banana. “No more will I get frightened with ghosts. We sleep in the mountains—maybe this afternoon even. I don’t care! Indians—oi—they’re dead! But bandits....” The memory of them was too fresh for Benny to give an impartial opinion on the subject.

“Gee,” Warde said, “I bet it’s quiet up there, though. Like a tomb. That’s the kind of a place to sleep in. No noise—nothing. We won’t see anyone, I bet, until my father comes for us. A week from today. All the excitement we’ll have is following up the old trail and chasing turtles.”

“To me,” Benny said, “it sounds so nice I can’t believe it should be such a place. I’ll sleep quiet for a week after so much excitement.”

“You will not,” Westy spoke up with mock severity, “you’ll be allowed to sleep eight hours each night and no more. The rest of the time you’ll be learning how to become a second-class scout.”

“Westy,” he pleaded, his smiling face belying his voice, “for two days let me rest once. Then after, whatever I should do for you—by me it’s all right.”

“You’re hopeless, Ben,” Westy said, shaking his head. “But I don’t intend giving in so easily.”

Mr. Hollister finished eating and strolled over to the door where the restaurant’s manager was standing. They talked for a few minutes and then Mr. Hollister called back to Westy. “Our old friend, the evil eye,” he said, “was abandoned up on the Trail, right out of here. Sometime before daylight. They had run out of gas.”

“Where do you think they’ve gone?” Westy said.

“Oh, they’re out of the state by now,” the manager interposed. “They’ve had a car waiting to meet them there and drained the gas tank just to fool the

police. You can bank on it. Those fellers do things pretty thoroughly. They're not taking chances."

"Well," Mr. Hollister said, "it's the end of them. As far as we're concerned, anyway."

Benny looked up, worried. "I hope so," he said, a bit dismally, "but it's always new worries yet, just when I think it's peaceful."

"Quit fuming, Ben," Westy said, trying hard to be severe. "They're a couple of hundred miles away by now. Your own common sense should tell you that. They're not going to hang around a state where everyone is looking for them. Try and forget it."

"By you, Westy," Ben said, "I'll do anything. But without handcuffs, I shouldn't trust no bandits a hundred miles away."

## CHAPTER VII

### A GHOSTLY VISIT

The site they picked for camp was about a half hour's walk off the main highway. A clearing, hidden by a grove of giant trees, it nestled comfortably in the frowning shadow of the mountain.

They came upon it by following the Old Trail. At the clearing it ended abruptly. Beyond, a mountain brook plashed on, seeming to delight in confusing Westy as to where the Trail took up again. There was no sign of its going up the mountain—none that he could see.

Warde and Benny were busy setting things to rights. Westy had been sent to the brook for some water. He watched it coming down the mountain and along back of the clearing. He followed it leisurely and wondered if its stony bed had once been part of the Trail.

The dashing little rivulet bubbled defiantly as he walked along. It was enjoying being an obstruction to this boy scout. In its hurried murmurings, Westy imagined it was whispering the secret of the lost trail. But strain his ears as he did, he could not divine one bit of the whispered secret.

At last he came to the jumping-off place of the stream. At least he called it so. It took a sharp turn and disappeared under two large boulders forming a small arch which the brook ran under. At the top, they were grown together and stood rather shakily on the edge of some overhanging rock. They looked not very sure of themselves, Westy thought. A part of the mountain, a part of each other, and yet severed beneath. Almost as if Fate meant them not to be one—ever!

Westy drew his water at that point. It was cooler, somehow, than up at the clearing. Benny, seeing him there, came on down.

"I've been trying to find the rest of that darn Trail," Westy explained. "I guess it got lost in the brook skeenteen hundred years ago. And now, this brook disappears from under my very eyes and under these queer-looking boulders, too. Where does it go? That's what I'd like to find out!"

"We should climb up those boulders and that mountain to find out?" Benny asked, anxiously. He was visualizing, with apprehension, the stupendous effort it would require of him.

Westy laughed. "I wish for your sake, Benny," he said, "that mountains and boulders like these were covered with velvet instead of moss. We'll have to take them as they are and climb them."

"My poor hands—my poor feet!" Benny exclaimed, with an attempt to

sound tragic. He couldn't manage it, however, and so he laughed. "You'll see how I do it, Westy, when even I hate the thoughts of it right now."

"You'll like it," Westy assured him, "once you get used to it. It's like everything else. But talking of this brook, I think there must be a gorge back there somewhere. This part of the mountain doesn't look so high to me. We'll try it in a day or so."

"Anyhow, it's not today we'll do it," Benny said, with great relief. "Already on the two feet I'm standing, I'm falling asleep."

The sun was a bit of ribboned scarlet, when their little camp was all in order. Supper over, they sat down, tired and weary, to watch the fire burn itself out. Benny looked longingly through the open tent flap at the two trim-looking cots all ready to receive their respective occupants.

He was to sleep with Westy. "That was to protect him from ghosts," Westy explained to Warde.

Before twilight had given way to night they were all sleeping soundly. Benny's fears were put to rout in the dreamless sleep of exhaustion. Westy was dreaming pleasantly—leaping with one superhuman bound up over the boulders and mountainside. Warde's dreams were filled with never ending searches for Westy—only to find him, at last, standing beside his bed.

Warde rubbed his eyes. He felt someone, something by him. He did not know whether he was still dreaming or not. It was an effort to wake himself. In the dark he couldn't see anything and he fumbled under his pillow for the searchlight.

"Are you awake, Warde?" he heard a voice whisper.

Warde sat up straight. "Who'sit?" he asked.

"Shush! 'S—me—Wes. I'm right by you. Don't talk loud! I don't want to wake Benny."

"What's the idea?" Warde asked, alarmed. "What's'matter?"

Westy sat carefully and quietly down on the edge of Warde's cot. "I don't know," he said, faintly. "I thought I heard a noise in here. Something woke me up, anyhow."

"Is that all?" Warde queried. "Gee, I thought it was something startling. You must have heard one of Pee-wee's chipmunks or a mountain goat. One or the other."

"I don't know. I just felt it, kind of," Westy explained, ignoring Warde's joking. "First I was dreaming and then all of a sudden I felt something. When I woke up, though, I couldn't hear a sound."

"Aw, you were dreaming," Warde assured him. "Did you look outside?"

"No, but I will," he answered, and looked out of the tent. Drawing his head in, he noticed their supply box cover off. It stood right at the foot of Warde's cot. "Things'll get all damp if that's left off," Westy mumbled to himself, as he

covered it.

He tiptoed back to Warde's cot. "There's nothing," he whispered. "Everything's quiet. Guess I was dreaming, all right."

"Sure, you were," Warde agreed, as he snuggled down into the warm covers. He heaved a sigh, thankful to return to his blissful slumbers.

Long after Westy had convinced himself that his fears were but dreams, he lay awake. He listened to Benny's deep, even breathing and then to the myriad night noises all about them. An owl hooted its eerie cry, near by. After that, Westy pushed himself farther down under the covers and buried his head. He stayed that way until he felt he would suffocate.

When he raised his head again, all was quiet. He listened until his ears heard no more, for he slowly fell asleep. He did not know how long he had been asleep—he only knew that he was slowly waking, as before. The realization came gradually. He opened his eyes and stared into the darkness.

As he stared he felt that it wasn't a dream that woke him again. He felt positive that within the tent was some presence other than Warde's, Benny's or his own. Not a sound was there to give him such knowledge. Not a sound, but the beating of his own heart. And the very darkness, somehow, was sound itself.

After a time his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. He looked toward the tent opening. Something moved there. He was sure of it! Something rose—a bulky form—stood in the opening and then merged itself with the darkness outside.

What was it? *A ghost?*

Westy felt beads of cold perspiration trickling down his forehead. He seemed not able to move his body upon the cot. A sort of paralysis had gripped his arms and legs. He strained his ears for the crackle of some bush or the breaking of a twig underfoot. He waited.

Nothing came to answer his waiting fears. Nothing but the night and the myriads of little mountain people toiling away, up in the hills and darkness.

Westy got up.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CLUE

A full moon was bravely struggling to take its rightful place in the firmament. As Westy stood there peering out of the tent, the clouds passed on leaving the moon in full possession of the heavens. Its yellow light flooded the mountains.

A tall hemlock tree waved its branches in rhythm with the soft breeze. Was that something moving to the east? Westy stepped out of the tent to see. He walked over the soft, cold ground, oblivious of his bare feet.

How plainly he could see the boulders! He stopped, listening intently. No, that was the brook. There wasn't a noise alien to the ones he had been hearing all night.

He laughed heartily and turned back. "Gee," he said, aloud. "Something's the matter with me tonight. I've been seeing things, I guess."

Just inside the tent, his foot kicked something. He stooped; felt around. His hand touched a cold object and he grasped it. And laughed. It was a package of bacon—just like one of the many packages they had brought along and had stored away in the supply box.

Warde must have dropped it there last night when he was getting supper. Funny, though, Westy thought, that one of them hadn't stepped on it going to bed. It wasn't so small that they couldn't have seen it.

"Say," Benny called loudly, "is that you, Westy?"

"Sure, it's me," Westy answered. It was a relief to hear a voice besides his own, after the fright he had had. "Who did you think it was, Ben?"

"I should know!" he replied. "After I wake up all of a sudden and you shouldn't be here, it's no surprise what should happen."

At this, Warde stirred and sat up. "Are you still ghost hunting, Westy?" he asked, sleepily. "What are you going to do—wander around every night like this, listening for noises?"

Warde had spoken before Westy could stop him. But it was too late. Benny did not need to hear more. He was startled. "Westy," he shouted, "is it true there's been noises?"

"Sure," Westy said, forcing a gay laugh. "There's all kind of noises to pick from up here. There's owls and frogs and...."

"It was a ghost, maybe. Huh, Westy?" Benny asked.

"Naw," Westy answered, emphatically. "I guess I was just wakeful. Sometimes, being too tired does that. And not having any sleep the night



before. That must be the reason.”

Whether Benny believed him or not, he didn't say. He kept a discreet silence, but Westy sensed he hadn't fooled his friend one bit. At any rate, dawn found them sleeping soundly. The medley of the waking birds had no power to disturb them.

It was nine o'clock before they waked. They dressed hurriedly, so as to get breakfast over with. The day was perfect and Westy wanted to make the most of it.

Warde was first to be dressed. He hurried outside to get the fire going. Then he came in again and went to the supply box. Instead of getting what he wanted he just stood still, looking at it and staring. His eyes were fixed steadily upon it.

“What's the idea?” Westy asked, and watching him meanwhile.

“Say,” Warde exclaimed, indignantly. “Were you trying to get anything out of this box last night?”

“No,” Westy answered. “Why?”

“Were you, Benny?” Warde insisted, ignoring Westy's question.

“For why?” Benny returned. “So full I was already last night, should I want more yet? Don't be foolish!”

“What's wrong?” Westy insisted. He walked over to Warde. So, also, did Benny. The condition of the supply box answered the question.

Packages and cans were all tumbled about. Disorder held sway where order had been the night before. Warde was cook and quartermaster (he had commissioned himself, he said), and the supply box was a matter of pride to him.

He scratched his head in perplexity and gazed at his two companions. “Well, if neither of you did it, and I didn't do it—*who did?*”

A hazy sort of scene flashed through Westy's mind. Should he tell it? A conflicting thought warned him not to. After all he wasn't positive he had seen anything. It might have been part of a dream. If it was, he'd never hear the end of it.

“Well,” Benny commented, calmly, “it shouldn't be a ghost, anyway. They can't eat.”

That struck Warde as funny. He laughed aloud. “How do we know they can't?” he returned. “I never heard of ghosts eating before, but you can't tell. Maybe the ghosts on the Mohawk Trail are different. Who knows!”

“That's right,” Westy said, encouraging a humorous turn of the affair. “They probably didn't get much to eat while they were alive. They might even have starved to death. Now they want to make up for what they didn't get.”

Warde grinned. “I feel sorry for them if they're hungry. But I'll feel sorrier for ourselves if they pay us any more visits. We'll have the pleasure of hiking

to North Adams and buying some more eats.”

“How much is gone?” Westy asked.

“Enough to do us for three good meals,” Warde answered. He began putting the things in order again.

“Oi,” Benny wailed. “What did I tell you! In one day it’s everything excitement again!”

“Calm down, Ben,” Westy implored. “Seeing is believing.”

“Then should my eyes be closed if it comes tonight again,” he said. “Anyhow, I should worry. Let’s eat!”

Westy grinned. That was Benny all over. Getting all excited in a moment and raising the greatest fuss. Then just as suddenly accepting the situation with perfect equanimity. He was a puzzle.

Westy walked down to the brook for water. He liked his job. It gave him time to think and ponder over the mystery of the little stream. And that morning his thoughts were conflicting, owing to the strange night he had spent. The more he thought the more he was convinced that a real person had been in their tent. That which he had seen wasn’t a dream. Things had been stolen.

In his deep abstraction he reached the boulders. They looked more precarious than ever in the strong, revealing light of morning. A series of good-sized fissures gaped appealingly to the sunlit world.

“Gee whiz,” Westy murmured, “a good landslide would knock them higher than a kite.”

He stooped over and filled his bucket. Drawing up again, his eye was attracted to something lying on the farther bank of the stream. He put down the bucket and jumped over.

One of their missing packages lay serenely on the sloping bank. Westy looked up at the wall of rock and stared. There was no sign of anyone having climbed it. Not a bush or blade of grass was disturbed upon the bank. Whoever it was had probably climbed the boulders and retraced his steps again, had dropped the package in a hasty retreat from the tent. Where could one go up there?

It did not look at all risky. It wasn’t that. But the place looked so wild and forbidding, and unless it held some secret shelter, Westy could not imagine why anyone would want to go there. From where he stood, the growth looked undisturbed for centuries. He picked up the package, took up his bucket and started back.

He looked for footsteps all the way but found only his own. Here was mystery, indeed.

## CHAPTER IX

### A SORT OF TRAIL

He decided to try and forget about it. Let the thing reveal itself. But he hoped it wouldn't. Things like that—mysterious things—had an effect on everything. On themselves. Warde had been in a temper about the supply box being upset. And Benny—nervous—it didn't do him any good at all.

Westy determined that he would do his share in forgetting the whole thing. They would have a happy week of it. Pathfinding, stalking; there was plenty to do in scouting. No more of mystery, he resolved, as he put down the bucket outside the tent.

Warde was busy with the breakfast and Benny was making up the beds. He did it with all the precision of a housewife.

"That's the stuff, Ben," Westy said, in a complimentary manner. "You're learning fast. There's something else I'll show you after breakfast."

"Say," Benny protested, "it's enough I should take time in one day to make beds. To do things so close together yet, I can't!"

"Before we leave the Berkshires, Benny," Westy warned him solemnly, "you'll be a knockout. I'll teach you to do a dozen things at once."

Benny eyed him quizzically. "What do I do after breakfast?" he asked, with resignation.

"I'm going to start you in with pathfinding," he replied. "I might even give you a few pointers about direction, too. Teach you the compass."

"Hah!" Benny laughed. "It's O.K. by me I should start right now. It doesn't make any difference. This morning or tomorrow morning, I won't learn anyhow."

"Oh, you'll learn all right," Westy said, all optimism.

At breakfast, Westy outlined his plan to Warde. He was going to pick out a destination and hike Benny to it. "By the time I show him how to do that he'll be quite useful when we pick up the lost trail," he said.

"If that's what you're going to do today," Warde said, "I think I'll go out to the highway and see what I can see. Three is one too many, when one is a scholar and the other's a teacher. I won't fit in."

"Whatever you say," Westy returned, pleasantly. "It won't be much fun for you following us. It'll be all the nicer when Benny learns, won't it, now?"

"So, how do we go?" Benny inquired, listlessly. "We have to go somewhere, isn't it?"

"Sure it is," Westy laughed. "Don't worry, kid, we'll find something."

“What gets me,” Warde interposed, “is whether this trail has any continuation.”

“Why not?” Westy wanted to know. “The mountains go right on and up, don’t they? Well, so must this trail. Believe me, the Indians never did things by halves. Why should they go to the trouble of beating a path up to here and stop?”

“That’s what I’m asking you,” Warde returned. “We know it’s hidden. But where?”

“We’ll find out, all right,” Westy assured him. “Wait until Benny gets used to hiking.”

“So, how should you find it?” Benny asked, with interest.

“First off, I’m going to try Pee-wee Harris’ stunt. He says, by looking down from a tall tree you can pick out a hidden trail, no matter how many years it’s hidden. Tom Slade’s tried it too—I guess that’s where Pee-wee got the idea. While we’re talking about it I’ll look.”

He got up and studied the tall hemlock tree. It towered over all the rest in the grove. He climbed it. “There’s one peachy view from here,” he called from his lofty perch. He could see the shining white pavement of the new trail like a vast bolt of satin, unwinding itself beneath the sun.

It was the undiscovered, old trail in which he was interested; not the new and discovered things. So he fixed his attention upon the country lying about them and the mountains rising into the sky.

A cawing crow flew up from the trail and disappeared back of the mountain. All kinds of birds disported about on the slopes. Moss, bushes and rocks were in profusion. If the trail were there, the grim old mountain was keeping it a dark secret, Westy thought.

A tiny, dark wisp of something atop the mountain, attracted him. Eagerly he watched it—a tedious, creeping something. He tightened his hold upon the limb.

A billowy cloud effaced the sun for a second. After that it was distinct. He realized it was rising from somewhere, north. Back in the mountain. Then a shaft of feathery blue smoke trailed heavenward.

Westy thought of Benny. Here, at least, was a trail to follow. A fickle, flimsy one, perhaps. Leading one a will-o’-the-wisp chase. But nevertheless, a trail.

## CHAPTER X

### A MESSAGE

Two hours later, Westy and Benny were struggling up the mountain side on the trail of the smoke. They stopped to rest on a small, smooth rock. That is, Benny was resting after the arduous climb. Westy was interested in one thing—too interested to rest.

“It’s crazy we should climb a mountain after smoke,” Benny remarked. “It might be a forest fire and the wind should be blowing it like that, how do we know?”

“That’s what scouts are for,” Westy said. “We’re supposed to know. It isn’t a forest fire and there isn’t any wind today. It’s going up straight as a rocket.”

“I like best we should follow trails by the ground, Westy,” Benny said simply. “Up in the air it’s too much. I got a stiff neck already looking always where the smoke is blowing.”

Westy laughed. “One thing you’ll have to learn, Benny, if you want to be a good scout. Don’t start for home until you find what you went after.”

“So,” Benny commented. “It’s a good thing for me to remember. But what’ll we do about the smoke when we find it?”

“Whatever we find to do,” Westy answered, laughingly. “It’s pretty sure that where you see smoke, a trail is near. Not always, of course. Maybe we’ll have an easier trail going back.”

“I should keep my mouth shut to have sense,” Benny said, critically. “It’s a worse scout I am instead of better. I don’t learn at all. Instead I talk.”

“You’re doing fine,” Westy said. “You’ve only complained a half-dozen times. That’s all. Come on, kid!”

They came out upon a grassy, sun-covered slope. A large farmhouse with many barns, and a smaller cabin standing beside a little brook, snuggled placidly in the fertile-looking valley. Some cattle dotted the landscape and a flock of sheep grazed peacefully, just east upon the hillside. The smoke rose out of the woods about there.

The scouts stopped to admire the peaceful scene. “Who’d think of people living way back here!” Westy said, half aloud. “It must be a shepherd keeping that fire.”

“For why should he cook?” Benny asked. “He could take his lunch or go by his house to eat. It shouldn’t be long if he lives down there.”

“I’ll ask him why,” Westy laughed. “I’ll tell him it’s your suggestion.”

The mountain on that side sloped gradually to meet the plain. It almost

looked as if one could roll down it with ease. Westy would have liked to try it but he had another purpose. And they hiked right to it.

As they drew near, they could see a white-haired, white-bearded old man, quite energetically moving about. He was putting some fresh wood on a fire that was already brisk.

The smoke rose straight up with each kindling. The old man's eyes followed it intently, then glanced at his sheep and sat down. He seemed neither to hear nor see the scouts. His mind, his whole attention was centered upon the fire blazing before him. Neither boy moved, lest he should disturb the old man's reverent contemplation.

After a time he rose, attended the fire and hurried up the slope a little. He scanned the mountain side and the country to the east. Then again he watched the smoke rising—watched it until it became a very part of the billowy clouds. A sad, sweet smile crossed his face. He walked slowly back and resumed his vigil before the fire.

"I think he's a little deaf," Westy whispered into Benny's ear. "You'd think he'd have heard us coming."

"He shouldn't be interested in the way where we came from," Benny said, wisely. "He's looking for something where the sun isn't now."

They walked quietly, then, into the old man's presence. He raised his head and looked at them, quizzically. But he seemed not to be surprised at all, by them.

Westy doffed his scout hat and smiled. "I hope we didn't scare you," he said, pleasantly. "We're just two boy scouts. We saw your smoke and we thought we'd hike to it. See where we came out at. We're camping the other side of the mountain by the brook."

The old man's weather-wrinkled skin crinkled up until his blue eyes were hardly visible. He smiled. "So ye be boy scouts, eh!" he said. "I heerd o' ye many times. Which way did ye come from?"

Westy told him.

"North and then east, eh!" he repeated. "Too bad yer didn' know 'bout the trail. It's a long way over them hills."



THE OLD MAN PUT SOME FRESH WOOD ON THE FIRE.

“We didn’t know about any trail,” Westy said, all interest. He winked to Benny. “Can you tell us where it is?”

The old man nodded his head. He took a well-used corncob pipe out of his

pocket and proceeded to light it. A happy light filled his eyes and he turned to Westy. "First tell me about my smoke. You saw it, eh?"

"You bet we did," Westy answered. "That's quite a big fire for a warm day."

"Yes, yes. So 'tis," he agreed, a touch of pride in his tones. "Fer three years now I build one here, reg'lar. Summers and winters. On Tuesdays and Thursdays. Keep it goin' all day long, too. That's the day my son went away. *Fifteen year ago!*

"It's a signal ter tell him all's well and he's right welcome ter hum. He don't know it but we don't live in the big place no more. I owned everything 'round 'fore the boy went away. Then we lost it cuz I couldn' make it pay alone and gittin' old besides. The people what bought it, give me and my wife the little cabin by the brook. We git it rent free and I tend their sheep for our keep."

Westy felt a lump in his throat and Benny too remained unusually quiet. What despair and what hope the old man had breathed in those sentences.

Fifteen years ago! It was a long, long time for a son to be gone from his home. Evidently, the old people had never heard from him since. Perhaps he was dead.

"Sit down, boys," the old man said. He moved over to make room for them. A bed of dry leaves was spread beyond the range and heat of the camp fire; the fire whose smoke sent up a silent message into the clouds to a lost and wandering son.

Benny and Westy sat down.



## CHAPTER XI

### MR. CONDON TALKS

“You boys cum frum down Noo York way?” he asked at length.

Westy nodded. “Near there anyway,” he answered. “We live in Bridgeboro, New Jersey.”

He knocked out his pipe against a stone at his feet before he spoke again. “Maybe you’ve seed my son, eh?” he asked.

Benny coughed. Westy’s heart swelled with pity at the simple question. The anxiety in the old man’s voice rang in his ears long afterward.

“What is your son’s name, Mr...”

“Condon,” the old man said. “Jerry Condon—same’s mine. We look ’nuff like each other ter be brothers. ’Ceptin’ Jerry ain’t got a beard. No, sir! Nary a whisker has that boy. Never liked ’em, he said.”

Mr. Condon took up a long, crooked staff from the ground and poked the fire. “Jerry’s mother,” he continued, “thought this up about the fire. She’s right smart with ideas. She said as how Jerry went away east—he went to Noo York. When he cums back he’ll cum back same way more’n likely. That’s why I build it here.

“Ef he cums it’ll be through the hills. That’s what his mother reckoned. He wouldn’t take the wagon road, cuz it passes through Milltown. He don’t like Milltown folkses, Jerry don’t.”

“Does your son know about the fire?” Westy asked.

“I wrote ter him,” Mr. Condon said, by way of answer. “I told him ef he seed smoke comin’ from below Haunted Hill all day, he’d know it wuz our smoke. He’d know it wuz a’right ter cum hum.”

“Where did you write to him?” Westy asked.

“Noo York,” he replied. “He didn’ answer my letter, but I don’t think nothin’ o’ that. He wuzn’t much on the writin’ anyhow. He’ll cum soon now, I guess. He knows we’re a-waitin’ ter see him.”

Westy gulped. “Well, Mr. Condon,” he said, “if we ever see him, we’ll tell him. You can bet on that!”

“He’ll see the smoke ef he cums today or Thursday,” Mr. Condon said, with quiet conviction. “I allus believe he will.”

“Sure you do,” Westy said, emphatically. “And you will see him!”

“I’m glad ye think so too!” Mr. Condon said, happily. “I’ll tell his mother. Yer’ll keep yer eye out fer him, eh?”

“I’ll say we will!” Westy declared. “Could you tell us what trail he’d be

likely to take through the hills, as you call them?"

Mr. Condon rose and beckoned them to follow. He led the way up the slope where he had stood before the boys approached him. He pointed below to a little silvery line—the brook. It came rushing out of a gorge and through the hills and so on back of Mr. Condon's little cabin, out through the plain. Beside it ran the trail—a little narrow path, only wide enough to go single file.

"Be ye campin' at the clearin' by the brook?" Mr. Condon asked, again.

"Wa'al, that be the rest of the trail yer lookin' fer. Know where Twin Boulders be and the brook runs under? Wa'al," he said, without awaiting any reply, "yer climb up thar, mebbe fifty foot and yer strike a clump o' pines. Thar's the rest of the trail runnin' through and down till it gits ter the brook agin. It follers along back o' my place and aroun' till it gits ter the hills once more.

"Thar's a little trail what strikes off'n jest at the gorge. Thet's what goes up ter Haunted Hill. It's right steep and narrer. The summit hez a big cave thet the Injuns claimed wuz full ter the brim o' evil speerits. Us white folks allus said it wuz jest plain haunted."

Westy was aroused and Benny plainly excited. "How long a hike is it up there?" Westy asked, spiritedly.

Mr. Condon turned and looked westward to the sun. "Yer wouldn' git back ter yore camp fer supper," he answered. "'N I reckon like as not yer hungry now."

Westy laughed. Benny looked relieved. "What makes you think we wouldn't get to camp on time? Is it so far?"

"No," he admitted, "not so far fer young fellers like ye. But it's full o' brush by now. Yer couldn' git through without choppin' yer way along and thet takes time. Jerry used ter do it. He wuz the only shaver hereabouts who'd go up thar—they wuz all skeered o' it. And it's fifteen years since Jerry wuz thar. Yes, sir! It must be chuck full o' brush by now."

"Should we see the cave from down below?" Benny asked, anxiously.

Mr. Condon shook his venerable head. "It's hid away, son. Haunted Hill is right tucked out o' sight. Yer can't see it even from them smart new lookout towers on the trail."

"Some hiding place for evil spirits," Westy murmured to Benny. "No wonder some of our food disappeared last night."

## CHAPTER XII ABOUT THE CAVE

“Thar’s meny stories ’bout this pertikler part o’ the trail,” Mr. Condon said. “They all cum from the Injuns, too. They sed that the good speerits put up them boulders thar ter hide the rest o’ the trail from their enemies.

“Then one day, some evil white folks follered some good Injuns and found whar the trail went on. The settlers hed guns and the Injuns got skeered. So they run off’n the trail and up ter Haunted Hill and hid in thet cave.

“The bad white fellers found them and killed them. They stole furs what the Injuns were takin’ to trade ’cross the hills to Vermont. Ever since thet time thet cave’s full o’ the revengeful speerits o’ Injuns.”

“And shouldn’t your son Jerry be scared to go up by that terrible, haunted place?” Benny asked, incredulously.

“Jerry wa’nt skeered o’ nobuddy,” Mr. Condon answered, proudly. “Only o’ one thing—ter cum hum. But it’s a’right now, ef he’d only believe it and cum.”

Westy refrained from asking him why. He felt it was intruding in something personal. There was a ring in Mr. Condon’s voice when he spoke of Jerry, that held one back from inquiring further.

“While we’re here, Mr. Condon,” Westy said, “we’ll be glad to help any way we can. That’s why we’re scouts.”

Mr. Condon looked at Westy and smiled. “How long be ye stayin’ over thar?”

“Till next Monday,” Westy answered.

“Thet’s good,” Mr. Condon said. “Mebbe yer cud cum up agin tomorrer or next day and see Jerry’s mother. She’d git right cheerful agin talkin’ ter nice boys.”

“Betcha life we will,” Westy said, emphatically. “Now that we know the trail, it’ll be easy.”

“Part o’ the way it’s flooded and you’ll hev ter wade the brook,” he warned them. “It allus gits thet way this time o’ year when we hev heavy rains. I hain’t been thet way in years. Git rheumatiz at the sight o’ rain even. If I hev ter go ter North Adams, I take the buggy through Milltown. The trail cuts off ’bout five mile though.”

The scouts shook hands with him and started back for camp. Going down the slope, Westy called back to him that they would surely return in a day or so. That seemed to please the old man and he smiled.

They struck into the trail. Just before passing into the gorge, Westy paused and looked back, he waved a hearty farewell to Mr. Condon and went on. But the memory of that sweet, hopeful old face remained with him for a long time.

“Do you know, Benny,” he said, “I’d give anything to know where Jerry Condon is.”

“Oi, it’s too sad,” Benny agreed. “I would like to help such nice old people.”

“The worst of it is,” Westy went on, “this Jerry doesn’t know all these things have happened to his father and mother since he’s left home.”

“Why did they lose such a nice farm and home?” Benny questioned. “And that old man should have to mind sheep on what used to be his property—it’s terrible!”

“I guess he depended upon his son, and things just went from bad to worse. That’s all.”

“It’s enough,” Benny said, incensed. “On top of that yet, the people what were so stingy to take it from him should insult him with a sheep keeper’s job. Now he must live in a barn!”

They had to remove their shoes and stockings before long. The brook had overflowed the banks until the upgrade was reached. There they discovered the trail so dear to tradition—the trail to Haunted Hill.

They stood out in the center of the stream and gazed upward with a fearful fascination, staring at the narrow path which ran up out of the flooded trail, following with their eyes, its course zig-zagging over jagged, moss-covered rocks and gaunt cliffs, until it attained a dizzy height. Then it receded back into the bosom of the hills until the crest was reached.

Somewhere up there in the innermost recesses of forest and rock, was a cave. A haunted place where the sorrowing ghosts of murdered Indians were keeping vigil. Somewhere up there on a wind-blown slope, many years ago, some white men killed the red men. One had little trouble in visualizing Tragedy and Death, stalking that path and hill.

Westy shivered at his own thoughts. He was thankful to catch up to Benny who had gone on and was standing on dry land.

Benny looked at Westy’s thoughtful face. “What is it, Westy?” he asked. “Already you look like you saw a ghost with your face so solemn.”

“Aw, go on,” Westy answered, smiling. “I was just thinking about the story of that place, that’s all. I wouldn’t mind hearing more about those Indians. Even if they were savage, they were brave.”

“They’re better off dead, Westy,” Benny said. “At least we can walk through here in peace!”

They reached the clump of pine trees and could see their camp nestling in the grove. Warde was there and had a brisk fire going. That meant supper, so

they scrambled on down and over the boulders.

Benny ran on ahead, but Westy stayed back to look over the way they had just come. He had in mind a certain miscreant who had stolen their food the night before. Was it possible for him to have trod that same trail?

Of course it was, Westy thought. A light dawned through his perplexed mind. The cave—it held that secret, he felt sure. He would like to go up there himself. Benny was too nervous, entirely. Perhaps he could make it the next night—alone.

He shivered, delightfully, then went on to camp. The thought of Jerry saddened him, however. Had he hiked the trail for the last time, he wondered, fifteen years ago?

“I hope Mrs. Condon tells us more about Jerry,” he told Warde some time later. “I’d like to know why he went away and why they’re trying to give him the signal to come back. Anyway, Mr. Condon said it was all right for him to come back—so that settles it. It would be one big, good turn to find him, though, wouldn’t it?”

“You said it,” Warde agreed. “Jiminy, I’m interested.”

Benny was interested in eating at that time and said nothing. Westy sat back and fell into a reverie. He was too sleepy to think of much more that night.

He climbed the hemlock tree, however, before they went to bed. Yes, it was still going. There to the north in the cool of early evening—ever faithful to its purpose. A swaying shaft of blue, filmy smoke circling heavenward and merging with the gathering clouds of night.

Did Jerry see that, too?

## CHAPTER XIII IN THE TEMPEST

At midnight, the three scouts were awakened by the howling of the wind. Their tent, protected as it was in the grove, pulled restlessly at its fastenings. The two cots rocked back and forth like frail barques on an angry sea.

Westy got up first. The skies were threatening and dark. Trees and shrubbery swayed and groaned in the high wind, their uneven outlines revealed in occasional flashes of lightning.

"Pity the poor sailor on a night like this," Westy said. He closed the tent flap and got back into bed. "It's none too warm, believe me."

"Pity the poor sailor," Benny repeated. "Hah! We should pity ourselves if the tent should blow away yet while we're sleeping!"

"Well, you wouldn't sleep long after, if it did," Warde assured him. "You'd be wide awake before we struck the highway."

"Should you mean this tent isn't fastened so good?" Benny asked, straightening up.

"Sure, it is," Westy replied. "But a tent isn't like a house, Ben. It's good night if the wind becomes strong enough to get under it."

"Oi, what next!" Benny shouted. "The second night we're here it's a cyclone and the first night ghosts. And Warde said it should be so peaceful and nice on the Indian Trail by the Berkshire Mountains. Hah! I've heard it more quiet by Fifth Avenue on a holiday."

Warde laughed. "Don't get nervous, Ben," he teased. "Maybe it's not a cyclone at all. Maybe it's the ghosts having a summer night party."

"You fool about it," Benny said. "By me it's nothing to laugh when it's thunder and lightning and all!"

"What shall we do?" Westy asked, laughing. "Get up and go home?"

A terrible peal of thunder crashed around them and the lightning made the tent as bright as day. Benny was standing full on his two feet, wide-eyed, as the echoes of the crash died away and darkness surrounded them once more.

"Where you going?" Warde asked. "Out to stop it, eh?"

"Westy," Benny appealed, "come! You should see the tent's fastened good in case it gets worse. I don't know how to fix it."

"All right, kid," Westy said, kindly. "Anything to see you calm down." He got up and put on his clothes.

"Say," Benny said, defending himself, "the weather gets excited with lightning and thunder and wind. Should it be strange I get excited too?"

“Atta boy,” Warde said. “Plenty of men and soldiers dislike thunder and lightning. You’re not the only one.”

It began to rain. In torrents. It lashed against the tent with fury, the wind hurtling it into a veritable deluge. Westy hurried outside. In a few moments he came back again. “It’s one awful storm,” he said. “The tent’s pretty strong but it wouldn’t stand a whole lot of wind. You ought to hear the brook—it sounds like a little Niagara Falls.”

“Guess Ben and I better get dressed too, huh?” Warde asked.

“You better,” Westy answered. “It might calm down, but we’ll have some safety first. We can pack our things and put on our storm clothes, boots and all. We’ll keep our things dry that way, because if this should keep up all night everything would be pretty damp.”

They folded up the cots and closed up their supplies. Then they sat down on their belongings and waited for a lull in the storm, or worse.

“Gosh,” Warde said, after a time, “you certainly are quiet, Ben.”

“It’s no use complaining,” Benny said, resignedly. “If I get wet so will Westy and you. I’ll be sorry for you besides myself. So what’s the use of complaining!”

“Now you said something,” Westy remarked. “We’re all in for it if anything comes.”

No lull came. It was worse if anything. Their voices sounded small and strange in the noise of the storm. Still, they sat, waiting for the tent to flop in upon them.

Some time passed. It was an effort to talk, so they sat in silence. It sounded as though a deluge were pouring down the mountain and into the little brook. Thunder pealed relentlessly and the lightning played almost steadily around them. Westy wondered what kept the tent up.

A tree somewhere groaned piteously, twisted and snapped with a terrific crash. “That must have been a big fellow,” Westy commented. “It made enough noise.”

“So glad I am, I’m not a tree,” Benny said, consoling himself.

A sound other than that of the warring elements made itself heard to the scouts. They listened intently. Each recognized it as a human sound. The quick patter of leather-shod feet running in desperate strides through the storm. Someone bent on shelter.

Benny was looking out before a word was spoken. “Say,” he shouted, “it’s the ghost from last night, maybe. Just now in the lightning I saw him running up by the boulders!”

Westy and Warde rushed to Benny’s side. But darkness obscured whatever vision Benny had seen.

“Are you sure?” Westy asked, doubtfully.

“Say,” he replied, almost indignantly. “I’m so sure it looked like a man as I’m sure it’s raining. That’s how sure I am, Westy!”

“I don’t know why a man would run right past us,” Warde said, “and in such a storm too. It wouldn’t be much shelter for him, but it would be better than running out there. The trees won’t protect him a night like this.”

“Maybe it’s the ghost that stole the things last night,” Benny ventured, “and he don’t want to come by us now!”

“Ghost, *bosh!*” Warde said, a trifle cynically. “That’s rot! If it’s a man, say so. Don’t call him a ghost!”

Poor Benny felt that both Warde and Westy doubted that he had seen anything at all. He wanted to prove to them that he wasn’t seeing things. “I’m so sure I saw him,” he said, breathlessly, “I should run and bring him back so you’ll believe me!”

With that he was gone. Into the storm. The darkness had swallowed up his slim, small figure before Westy could stop him. “That crazy kid,” Westy said. “I’d better go after him.”

“Aw, he’ll be back,” Warde assured him, “quicker’n you can say Jack Robinson. He’ll be scared to death when he finds himself alone out there. And if it were anyone, he’d run back here like sixty.”

“Believe me, Warde,” Westy returned stoutly, “you’ve got one big pile to learn about Benny Stein. I’d like to bet that deep down in his heart he’s never been afraid of anything in his life.”

“Maybe,” Warde said. He sensed Westy was hurt. “Anyway, I wasn’t saying anything against him when I said he’d be scared, was I? Lots of nice fellers are nervous like Benny. Just the same as I told him before.”

“Well,” Westy replied. “If Benny’s nervous, he can’t help it. That doesn’t say he’s not brave. He’s all wool and a yard wide. That’s what my mother says.”

A mighty, muffled roar cut short their conversation. In the wake of that, a piercing scream stifled for the moment the moaning of the tempest.



## CHAPTER XIV GONE....

“Benny!” Westy exclaimed, fearfully. “Was that him?” He stepped outside; ran. His heart was beating wildly and he shouted Benny’s name with each running step.

Warde followed him. Running and fearful, too, when no answer came to Westy’s frantic calls. “He couldn’t have gone far!” Warde shouted.

“Maybe far enough!” Westy answered. He played the searchlight before him as they went. Suddenly he grasped Warde’s arm. “*The boulders!* Look!” he cried, hoarsely.

The flashlight revealed a mass of broken rock, splintered trees, all kinds of shrubbery. Some of it lay heaped upon the ground, some of it choking the brook and strewn across the banks. The boulders in the wake of the landslide had tumbled pathetically into the brook, broken and forlorn looking.

Westy and Warde turned away from the wreckage, wondering where Benny was, and shouting. The brook was gurgling frantically, unable to get past this new obstruction in its path.

Westy searched around, up the slope and in the brook. He and Warde pushed aside as much of the débris as they could. But not a sign was there of Benny.

Again he called. He looked where the boulders were damming the rushing stream. A bit of white stuck out between the banks and the inert rock. He leaned over, touching it curiously.

He drew back, dizzy and faint, and cried, “Warde! *It’s Benny!*”

“What is it? How do you know?” Warde shouted.

“It’s a human finger!” he cried out, brokenly. “It’s Benny, pinned underneath there!”

“What’ll we do?” Warde gasped. “Do you think he’s....”

“What could save him?” Westy sobbed. He stepped over nearer with his light. The boulders and other débris completely filled that end of the brook. Whatever was caught beneath there....

Yet that primal law of all human life and thought spurred Westy into action. Perhaps there was hope—some little spark of life. He turned to Warde. “Quick! Get the spade. A channel may help—may release him!”

Warde was off and Westy tugged desperately at the soft, rain-soaked bank with his bare hands. He pulled clod after clod away and had made quite an indentation by the time Warde returned.

They took turns with the spade and their hands, working swiftly and silently. Warde piled up the earth to dam the brook still more. Their one aim was to keep the water out. In their terrible anxiety they did not think of the water that had been there and which the débris had already soaked up. It did not occur to them that the poor, unfortunate victim must certainly have drowned, instantly.

The thunder and lightning had ceased. The rain was still driving onward, lashed by the wind. That was another difficulty added to their futile-seeming task.

Warde pulled and tugged at heavy, broken limbs. Westy's hands seemed to put the breath of life into the spade. His strength was almost superhuman. Tirelessly, they both worked on.

The dark, gray gloom of a rainy dawn found them still laboring. As daylight slowly crept over the horizon, Westy saw with tired, moist eyes that stark reminder of a human life. He shuddered and recoiled from it. It was too horrible, too ghastly to think of!

Of course he was *dead*, Westy told himself. He must have been dead all along. He didn't want to think of it before. Couldn't think of it as being true. Benny wasn't there any more. It was just what used to be Benny.

Thoughts, dreadful and heart-sickening, raced through his mind. What would he say to Benny's mother and father? To Mr. Hollister? Hadn't he promised to look out for Benny? Why did he let him go out of the tent that time? Oh, if only Warde hadn't talked and kept him from going after his little tenderfoot friend!

Utter despair seized him. It was he, Westy Martin, who hadn't kept a trust. Benny had gone out into the storm because he thought they doubted him. He had *gone*—never to return. All the despair, all the self-condemnation in the world would never bring him back. The boy who had saved his life not a year ago. And in the crucial moment of Benny's life, Westy had not been there to lift a hand and help him.

He couldn't stand the torture that racked his conscience. Great tears welled up in his eyes. His heart was bursting with remorse. Flinging himself upon the wet ground, he buried his face in his hands.

"*I'm to blame*," he murmured, fighting down the sobs in his throat. "All on account of me."

Warde stopped, came over and sat beside him. "Don't, Westy," he pleaded, "you had nothing to do with it. It was me. I'm to blame! I held you back, talking about him getting scared and all. I'm to blame!" Warde's voice trailed off into a smothered sob. He felt himself unfit to be a boy scout any longer. *He* had been the cause of a comrade's death!

So it was with both of them. They felt guilty of every known human

omission. Never again could they look into the faces of those who had believed in them. Benny's death would ever be haunting them—a specter of their own negligence.

Daylight brought more rain, more gloom. The wind died down considerably. A few more shovelsful, and their task would be accomplished.

Westy leaned wearily upon the spade, surveying his work. Warde, too, looked on. He put a sympathetic arm on Westy's shoulder.

“Hello!” a familiar voice called to them from somewhere above.

Astonished, they looked—stared—at the bedraggled but happy, smiling figure in yellow slicker and water-dripping hat. Yes, he was actually smiling!



TIRELESSLY THEY BOTH WORKED ON.

“Oi, *am I tired!*” he proclaimed, and carefully proceeded to descend the scene of the recent landslide and tragedy.

Westy and Warde watched him as if he were a phantom stepping out of a

dream. Before he reached the spot where the boulders had fallen away, the mist of joy cleared from Westy's eyes and he cried, "*Benny!*"

## CHAPTER XV

### ONE LESS

“Say,” Benny shouted, as he viewed the débris, “what did you have here? An earthquake already?”

“Benny!” Westy exclaimed. “Where have you been?”

“To tell you,” he answered, “it should be a long story.” Westy held out his hand and helped Benny down. Then he pointed to the victim of the landslide.

Benny leaned over and stared. “Oi, it’s him,” he whispered excitedly. “He must have hid when I was up there. And all night till now I was looking for him that you should believe me yet. It’s too bad—it’s terrible!”

“Then you *did* see him again after you left the tent?” Warde asked.

“Sure,” Benny answered. “I touched him almost. I saw him go up by the boulders. So why shouldn’t I? Up there I went and didn’t see him. Then I remembered what Westy said—a good scout don’t go by his house till he gets what he went out for yet.

“I got a thought, maybe he should be hiding somewhere back in the gorge. Even I looked till it’s daylight that I should get what I went for. And all the time he’s dead and I shouldn’t know it.”

Westy gripped his shoulder. “We thought it was you all the time, Ben,” he said. “All night long we thought it was you. No matter who it is, though, it’s terrible. Gee, but I’m glad you’re here.”

“So am I,” Benny whispered. “My feet from walking yesterday already and again last night—so tired they are. And soaking wet I am. It’s a regular flood by the gorge.”

“Gee whiz,” Westy said. “I suppose we’ll have to hail someone on the highway to tell the troopers. We better not do anything more until they come.”

They hurried back to the tent, glad to leave their gruesome task behind. Benny put up the cots once again. Warde and Westy hiked wearily out to the highway to tell someone of their tragic find. When they returned Benny was peacefully sleeping.

They did not disturb him but sat silently waiting for the arrival of the troopers. Inside of the tent, it felt cold, damp and cheerless and the continued rain added to their discomfort.

They were hungry but could not make a fire. Scouts are supposed to triumph over every disadvantage, but how can a scout make a fire when there isn’t a dry piece of wood in the world? That’s what Westy wanted to know. In desperation, he got out a can of beans. They ate them without relish.

An hour passed. They heard the chug, chug of motorcycles, coming along the trail. Westy wondered what the Indians would have done upon hearing that, if they had been alive right then. What would they have said upon seeing this modern invention with its ear-splitting noises desecrating the peace and tranquillity of their rain-soaked trail! The trail named in their honor.

As the troopers came nearer the boys could hear their voices. Then they thundered around into the quiet little grove. There were four of them and they greeted the scouts with such a loud “Hello,” that Benny was rudely jarred out of his slumber.

Westy led the troopers up to the scene of the tragedy. The little brook was struggling angrily against Warde’s makeshift dam. It had overflowed its banks up above, so steadily was the water rising.

The troopers listened attentively while Westy related the story of their night’s adventures. Also he told of their food being stolen the night before.

Benny interposed and related, in his own piquant way, his experience of having seen the ghost in the lightning. When he described his diligent search all through the night, it encouraged some hearty laughter. Westy was pleased. He knew that Benny had struck the troopers just right.

A tall officer stepped forward and glanced quickly at the mute evidence revealed beneath the boulders. “I think it’s a hobo,” he remarked. “Most likely he had been running to get out of the storm.”

Westy thought otherwise but he didn’t say so. He would have liked to ask them why a hobo would run right past the shelter of their tent in such a storm. Westy had ideas of his own.

The officers were planning their next move and the boys helped them. They rolled some of the fallen young trees as near under the boulders as possible and cleared away most of the smaller rocks and shrubs.

“Did you identify the hobo?” Westy asked the tall trooper. They were getting ready to leave the grove.

“Hobo, nothing,” the trooper answered. “I missed my guess that time all right. That feller was Jake Martin—Frankie Wolfe’s pal. They’re the birds what did that big City Bank job.”

“I thought he escaped with Frankie Wolfe,” a short trooper said.

“Sure he did,” the tall one said. “But Frankie must have slipped him. He hasn’t a thin dime in his pockets.”

“Great stuff,” the short one commented. “Frankie’s the next one on the list then.”

Benny looked at Westy and Warde, shaking his head sagaciously. “What did I tell you about such bandits, huh? In the mountains even we’re not safe no more until that Frankie should have handcuffs on.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### RAIN

The rain continued throughout the afternoon, a steady downpour. At two o'clock they went to bed and slept. There was nothing else to do.

At six o'clock they munched a cold lunch in listless silence. The food tasted damp—everything was damp. "We might as well sit in the brook," Warde remarked, "until this rain stops. We'd feel just as comfortable."

"We wouldn't mind it so much," Westy said, "if we could eat something hot."

"If tomorrow it's no better," Benny proposed, "maybe we could take our cans and things up by that nice Mrs. Condon. She should let us heat it up by her stove."

"Sure," Warde said, "and get soaking wet in the gorge."

"What's the difference?" Westy asked. "You suggested sitting in the brook, didn't you? If we have to swim the gorge—I should worry. We'll get dried out when we get there. Anything's better than sitting around all day grouching in a damp tent."

"Sure," Benny agreed, "it's O.K. by me, too. I'll take my water wings along."

"Maybe it'll be clear tomorrow," Warde said, hopefully.

They were forced to work until dark. The brook steadily overflowing its banks had threatened their camp. "It's nice to have a vacation like this," Warde remarked at bedtime. "It's the only time we ever work real hard."

Morning came, cold and rainy. "If it doesn't rain any harder, it'll be a rainy day," Westy said, jumping into his damp clothes.

"If this keeps up," Warde threatened, "I'm going up and try the cave. Are you with me?"

"It sounds nice," Westy answered, "but who'd go for the water? That's some trip, boy, two and three times a day. I wouldn't want to try it when we can camp right alongside of the brook."

"Anyhow, it's hard luck," Benny said, trying to discourage the proposition. "Look what that Jake Martin or whoever he is—look what he got. Before he got there even he was killed. It should happen to us too maybe. Such places are not good luck."

Warde laughed. "Jiminy, Ben," he said, "you'd believe anything. I'd have to hear and see first before I'd believe it was haunted."

"Mr. Condon's lived there all his life," Westy spoke up. "He ought to



know if it's haunted or not. And he says *it is*."

"In other words, we won't make it a nice rainy day shelter," Warde laughed.

"Right the first time," Westy said. "A cave's damp any time of the year. What must it be this morning?"

"I thought you were so keen about going up there?" Warde insisted.

"I am," Westy returned, "but not to camp in. I'm all set to look around there on a nice, clear day. Give the ghosts a chance to dry out."

"That's settled," Warde said, pleased. "If it's clear this afternoon we'll go. How about it on our way back?"

Westy's hopes of going alone crashed to earth. He smiled. "Sure," he answered. "Suits me."

"Didn't I feel it would come!" Benny exclaimed. "It can't stay peaceful. You should be always looking for more trouble."

## CHAPTER XVII

### HOPE

They started early. Benny offered to carry the food. That left Westy and Warde free to go ahead. They needed freedom, for the trail that morning was beset with difficulties.

Warde's remark about swimming the gorge was almost realized. Water was everywhere. At one point beneath the cliff, it had risen considerably since the day before so that Warde and Westy had to remove their clothing, put it in Benny's keeping and carry him through on their shoulders.

Coming out of the gorge they could see the smoke of Mr. Condon's fire blowing crazily in the rain.

"If Jerry comes today," Westy said, "I'm afraid he won't see it. Before it has a chance to reach the tree tops the rain beats it down again."

Mrs. Condon welcomed them with all the warm hospitality of her kind. She was younger than her husband, but tired and aged looking. Her little cabin was spotlessly clean. It had that delicious, heavy smell of dried apples and carefully scrubbed floors.

Westy explained about the food Benny was carrying. Mrs. Condon wouldn't hear of it. "Do ye think I'd let ye cook yer own food when I've plenty in the house?"

"That wouldn't be fair," Westy said. "Boy scouts aren't supposed to do things like that. Just show Warde and Benny where your cooking things are and they'll show you what scouts can do. When we get through, your kitchen will look as clean as when we came."

"Sure," Warde agreed. "We're great at cleaning up, truly."

"You'll say by yourself that nobody's been here yet," Benny said, assuringly.

"Well I want ter know someone's been here!" she insisted, pleasantly. A smile lighted her face. "'Twa'nt no good yer comin' ef I don't see some mess aroun'. I like it right well ter clean up fer boys."

"Sit down this once, Mrs. Condon," Westy implored. "We came to cheer you up, not make you work. Warde and Benny can do it and I'll talk to you."

She smiled. "Ye be jest like Jerry," she said to Westy. "He wuz forever pesterin' me to set down. Allus afraid I wuz tired. He wuz a right thoughtful boy, Jerry wuz."

Westy sat down alongside of Mrs. Condon. They were at a window facing the large veranda of her former home. She looked over toward it rather

wistfully, the scout thought; as if that veranda brought back vivid, poignant memories of a happier bygone day.

Westy hated to ask, yet he wanted to help her. Wasn't that why he was a boy scout—to help old people in trouble? And to help, he must ask. At least she could do no more than keep silent if she preferred not to talk of Jerry.

He mustered up courage. "You know, Mrs. Condon," he began, "there's an awful lot that scouts can do for people who need help. A scout's honor is to be trusted. Anything you wouldn't like to tell others you could tell to us and know that it would never be repeated."

Mrs. Condon looked at him and nodded. "I've heard o' thet," she said, quietly. "You mean about Jerry. Did Mr. Condon tell you?"

"Only about his going away," Westy answered. "And about the fire being a signal to tell him to come back."

"He would o' told yer more," she said, "but it makes him so sad. We allus thought Jerry wuz the best boy ever. We do yet, 'ceptin' when Mrs. Clement throws up 'bout what Jerry stole. We don't believe *thet*—he wuz too good a boy."

"Who's Mrs. Clement?" Westy asked.

Mrs. Condon nodded her head in the direction of the veranda. "The folks we lost the property to," she answered. "Mr. Clement, he ain't mean. He took pity on us, I guess, knowin' how we got everything as good as paid fer and then had ter lose it. He give Mr. Condon that job o' lookin' after the sheep and this place, rent free."

Westy shoved his chair forward. "Mrs. Clement, she ain't kind. She jest loves ter tell me what she's doin' fer us. She never gits tired o' talkin' what a good-fer-nothin' son I had and how he almost killed her son Jake and wuz the reason fer him disappearin' too."

"How did that happen?" Westy queried.

"The Clements lived down Milltown then. They hed a feed store. Mr. Clement, he went out west. His health wuzn't so good.

"Jest after thet we bought this here farm from them. Their son Jake transacted all o' the business. Mr. Condon he ain't no business man. He sed he wouldn't take no deed fer the place till it wuz all paid fer. Thet took years, o' course.

"Mr. Clement wuz away 'bout five year. All thet time, Jake used ter take our payments from Jerry 'n they wuz all friendly 'n nice. Then we got the money ter pay up in full. It wuz four thousand. We had three good years—not much rain.

"Jerry hed been ter North Adams in the buggy and he stopped in Milltown ter tell Jake ter cum up, thet we hed the money and fer him ter bring the deed."

Mrs. Condon paused. Warde and Benny came in and sat down.

“Long ’bout nine o’clock,” Mrs. Condon continued, “Jake cum. I thought it wuz queer thet he should cum so late. He knew we went ter bed pretty early and as usual we wuz ter bed. So we give the money to Jerry ter take down ter him.

“After a spell I heard Jake go out to his buggy sort o’ runnin’ like. Jerry called to him from the house. Jake didn’t answer but started up his horse and I heard Jerry run out on the veranda and down the steps.

“O’ course we got up and went downstairs. Jerry didn’t cum back all night. He never cum back. Next mornin’ one o’ the farm hands found Jake lyin’ fer dead ’longside his buggy. The horse wuz tied ter the willow tree but no sign wuz there of Jerry.”

“I bet your son had good reason,” Westy said, emphatically. “I just bet he did.”

Mrs. Condon smiled sadly. “Anyhow, Jake laid in the hospital fer quite a spell. He hed a fractured skull. After he wuz able ter talk his mother hed him swear out a warrant fer Jerry fer attempted murder and robbery. He sez he forgot everything what happened thet night. Didn’t remember nothin’ at all.”

“Did you believe him?”

“No, I didn’t,” Mrs. Condon answered stoutly. “And I don’t believe it yet. He might hev wanted ter forget about it. Thet’s about the size o’ it.”

“What about the money and the deed?” Westy asked, interestedly.

“The farm hand what found him told me on the quiet thet Jake didn’t hev a cent o’ thet four thousand on his person. Neither wuz the deed. Nobody’s found it since.

“Jerry didn’t take thet money. I allus sed the reason he run away wuz becuz he thought he’d killed Jake—not becuz he stole the money. Jerry wuzn’t dishonest—never! He went away thinkin’ he’d disgrace us if he wuz arrested. Thet’s why!”

“I think so too!” Westy said, vehemently.

Her eyes lighted up. “Why, after Jake’s father come home,” she said, “he found there wuz a lot o’ money missin’ out o’ the business. Strange ter say, Jake couldn’ account fer it either.”

“Jiminy,” Warde put in, “that Jake sounds phoney to me.”

“From then on,” Mrs. Condon said, “Mrs. Clement, she blamed everything ter Jerry. Said he ruined Jake’s memory and his life. ’N then Jake disappeared.”

“Did they ever find him?” Westy asked her.

“Never. No more’n we did Jerry. Mr. Clement, he felt right bad about it all. He had ter give up his feed business so much money hed gone.

“Mr. Condon got a streak o’ hard luck too. We hed two straight seasons o’ rain and couldn’ keep up the place without Jerry, so Mrs. Clement nagged her

husband into takin' it away from us so they could live here themselves.”

“She should never have luck, that Mrs. Clement!” Benny put in angrily.

Mrs. Condon looked at him and smiled. “Some folks are like thet,” she said. “Mr. Clement, he’s allus nice. He made her let us stay here. He even made her withdraw the charge agin Jerry.

“Thet wuz four winters ago when I wuz so sick. Mr. Clement thought if the charge wuz withdrawn Jerry would hear about it and come home.”

“That’s when Mr. Condon wrote the letter to New York to Jerry, wasn’t it?” Warde asked.

“Yes. He wanted him ter know cuz I wuz sick. He thought I’d git better right away soon’s I saw Jerry agin.”

“Was that when you thought up the fire signal stunt?” Westy queried.

“Yes,” she answered wistfully. “We’ve kept it a-goin’ ever since. Fer three years now. He ain’t come yet.”

“You must believe *he will!*” Westy exclaimed, optimistically.

“*I must believe he will!*” she echoed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FOOTPRINTS

Mr. Condon came in before they left and Westy told him of the landslide and of their fearful night. The old people were keenly interested. News like that did not often sift into their isolated home.

“We’ve been trying to clear up some of the mess there,” Westy told him. “We had to, or we would have been flooded ourselves.”

“There’s still a lot we could take out,” Warde reminded him.

“I know it,” Westy said, “but it’s going to be some job to pull the heavy limbs out. They’re water-soaked and slippery to handle.”

Mr. Condon went out of the house. When he came in he had a large coil of rope in his weather-browned hands which he handed to Westy. “Here ye be, youngster,” he said, kindly. “This’ll help ye. It’d be a right nice job for ye to clear that brook. We’d be gittin little by little o’ it down here sooner or later, ’n I’d hev ter filter every bit I drew out.”

Westy felt glad that he’d be doing something to lighten at least one burden in Mr. Condon’s life. There was something about them—well, he just wanted to help them, no matter what it was. They accepted their misfortunes so gamely and kept hope ever alive.

The scouts promised to come back again on Saturday, and left the old people a great deal happier than before.

“I’ve heard it said that if it’s good for you to have a thing you’ll have it. That’s if you wish long enough,” Westy said.

“Well, they ought to find their son, then,” Warde said.

“You said it,” Westy agreed. “I’d like to be the one to tell him how they’re looking for him every day.”

The rain had stopped and the sunset colored the drifting clouds a vivid pink. The grass and trees were heavy with water. “C’mon,” Warde urged Westy, “let’s take a peek at Haunted Hill. It won’t rain any more tonight.”

Westy glanced at the sky. He looked for all the world like some old salt in his oilskin slicker and hat and hip boots. To complete the picture he carried the coil of rope upon his left shoulder. “I don’t care,” he said. “Only you’ll have to keep an eye out for Benny going up. See that he doesn’t slip. The rocks shine like mirrors they’re so wet and slippery. I’d better lead the way.”

Benny followed Westy into the gorge, silently acquiescent. Warde followed happily. At last he was to see the famous Haunted Hill.

“You should sleep tonight good,” Benny commented, as they struck into

the upward path. “It’s no peace yet for me till you see this spooky hill. I feel in my bones I shouldn’t laugh, but I have to. It’s so funny I should go up by here to a place I hate without complaining.”

“It’s because you’re a good sport and don’t know it,” Westy told him.

On they went. Up and up. Almost devoid of grass, long stretches of moss and solid rock. “It’s getting steeper,” Westy called. “If the brush is as bad as Mr. Condon thinks it is, we’ll have to turn back. We haven’t an axe with us.”

“Aw, we’ll make it,” Warde said, hopefully.

The path narrowed as they went. They reached the slope. It was terribly wild and forbidding looking. Beyond, stunted growths emerged from between the rocks. In the distance, a stubby pine forest crept onward and up to the crest.

Westy looked back over the way they had just come. On either side of the path the jagged rocks seemed to say “Beware!” “Don’t worry,” Westy murmured to himself, “I wouldn’t try it.”

To the north, a lone but sturdy pine stood sentrylike upon a sharp, jutting cliff and leaned out over the gorge. They peered over. Down below, the brook seemed to fill the whole of the gully.

“Come on,” Westy said, “let’s find that cave if we can. It’ll be dark before we know it.”

A little later, they reached the edge of the pine forest. The growth was luxuriant there. Still the path stretched on before them. Here and there, Westy saw signs that interested him and noticed that the brush had been cut down recently.

He told this to Warde. “Maybe it was our late friend, Jake Martin,” Warde suggested.

“Maybe,” Westy said, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

Warde’s shoe lace came undone and he stooped to fix it, bending low to the ground. “Whew!” he suddenly exclaimed. “Look what we have here!” Startled, Westy and Benny stopped and stared at the spot that so held Warde’s interest. A large footprint lay revealed in the soft earth where the rock had broken away.

“Do you think that’s Jake’s?” Warde asked.

Westy examined it closely. “Nah,” he answered. “Looks too fresh to me.”

He walked a few feet farther, studying the ground. About twenty-five feet distant, he came across another break in the rocky substance. Where the earth had sifted through was another footprint.

Westy scratched his head. “If you ask me,” he called to Warde, “it looks as though someone’s been through here during the last few hours!”

“Hmph,” Warde said. “That’s funny. Jake’s been dead—how long....”

“Long enough to know he can’t make footprints no more!” Benny finished, emphatically.

## CHAPTER XIX AND THEN

“That’s that!” Westy said.

“The plot thickens,” Warde said.

“You should now see who’s been walking by here, I suppose,” Benny brought forth, in measured tones.

“Oh, absolutely,” Westy laughed.

Their progress became easier. More and more of the brush had been hurriedly slashed down. “Now the plot’s getting thinner,” Westy remarked. “It’s like walking along Broadway.”

“Only different,” Warde said.

“It’s darn funny,” Westy said. “I can’t understand it.”

“Soon you won’t be puzzled,” Benny said, consolingly. “Up here I wouldn’t be surprised at anything no more. In that cave, if a bear lived by a hermit, I’d just say, ‘hah—is this a relation, Mr. Hermit?’”

“In other words you’re getting hardened, huh?” Westy asked, laughingly. “Nothing can scare you now. Is that it?”

“Should I know!” he answered. “It’s how much *nothing* is!”

The path turned sharply again and up. Off to the right, they caught a glimpse of overhanging rock just visible between the thick growth of pines. The scouts halted there.

“I wonder if that’s *it*?” Westy mused.

“To find out we shouldn’t stop,” Benny advised.

“How do we know who’s in there?” Warde asked.

“A surprise we should make it and walk in by them,” Benny suggested.

“Now who has the cold feet!” Westy said to Warde. “You’re wondering who’s in there, but Benny isn’t worrying. He’s all set for a surprise party.”

“How do you get that way!” Warde retorted, indignantly. “It’s all right to be brave and another thing to be reckless. I only meant we ought to take it easy. We don’t know. We had one experience this week, didn’t we?”

“Sure,” Westy answered. “Thanks to Benny’s imitation hiccoughs we’re alive, too!”

They paused. The brush beyond rustled strangely somewhere in among the pines. Startled, they listened. Again that rustle. Then came a groan—loud and weird. It echoed long, through the still air.

They exchanged significant glances. The groan came again, louder than before. A sound followed it, like feet scuffling along the ground. The boys



couldn't see anything, but a shot rang out which seemed to pierce the very air.

Something whizzed past Westy's face. A bullet. It struck and lodged in the tree he was facing. Another shot! Warde started to run. Benny grabbed Westy's arm and pulled him behind the tree.

A third shot! Westy whispered, "*Let's go!*"

They never stopped to look behind. Westy heard the patter of running feet. Someone was chasing them. "Run for your life, Benny!" Westy commanded. "I'm right behind you. It's each scout for himself. Be careful on the down grade. It's getting darker!" All this breathlessly.

Benny turned to implore—to assure himself of his friend's safety. Westy pushed him ahead. "The quicker you go—the better for me, kid!" he shouted.

Benny ran on then. Twilight deepened—darkened. Westy paused a second to listen. Were the feet still pattering? Or was it the beating of his heart? He shifted the rope over to his right shoulder. He wished he had left it below. It was a nuisance. Hard to run with it weighting him down.

Shadows loomed ahead. Shadows in back of him. Was that a shadow moving back there? Yes. He could see something move. An arm upraised—that was it. Then another shot!

Westy flung himself down, dragging the rope with him. Benny was out of sight. On the down grade now. Thank goodness for that, he breathed prayerfully.

He crept forward, then over into the higher grass. It covered him sufficiently. He'd wait. Hide there. Make his pursuer think he was on the down grade too. He crawled on, fearful to lift his head and look.

Time did drag on. Had *he* gone? He knew he had crawled considerably off the path. But where? The brush was so high, so thick, he could hardly see. His hands and face felt scratched.

Gee, it would be dark in a little while, he thought nervously. He felt like a worm lying there on the ground. He raised himself up finally and looked. No one was about. That was good. He felt stiff and crampy from his unnatural position. Whew, what a narrow escape! What had they done that anyone should want to shoot at them?

He stood on his feet and stretched. The pines were now enveloped in the deepening twilight. All was still as a tomb. He breathed freely—joyously. Now to get back to the path.

He turned to get his bearings. A shudder ran down his spine. Near to death had he been in fleeing from the bullets. But nearer to death had he been in his hiding place—almost on the edge of the cliff.

Unknowingly, he had crawled there in his fright, through the dim, high brush. He was almost on top of the lone pine. Two feet more and then the gorge.

He started back to the path, cautiously. Was that a cry he heard? He stopped again. Listened. What next? A cry. A feeble, muffled sort of cry. From where?

He strained to hear. Walked back toward the edge of the cliff. It grew louder with each step. Seemed to come up from the gorge. Out of the gully.

He leaned over. He couldn't see anything. Everything was dark down there. The silver line of the brook was a running black void now. Nothing was discernible.

That cry, "*Help!*"

Again Westy leaned over. Was that something light moving along on the running black void of the brook?

"*Oi! Help!*"

*Benny!* It was Benny. Where was Warde?

Westy drew up in a flash. Thought. Hadn't the water been up to their chests that morning? It had rained all day, hadn't it?

The water had risen, most likely. Was over Benny's head. He was shorter, by far, than Westy. How he had come to get in there—well!

He flung the rope off his shoulder.

## CHAPTER XX TO THE RESCUE

Westy tied the rope around the tree. Uncoiled it—his fingers working like lightning. How far would it go? He didn't know, didn't care. As long as it would cut off some of the distance down. He could make the rest easy. There wasn't a minute to be lost.

He let himself down. His fingers slid over the rough hemp, painfully. He wished he knew where the end of it was. He'd have to reach it cautiously. It wasn't a time to take foolhardy chances. Benny was in danger. Needed help. He wasn't calling. Had he drowned?

Ah, there was the end of it. Space yawned beneath him, perilously. Space and darkness. Should he jump or dive? It was a chance in any case. The brook or the rocks? He called out to Benny that he was coming. But no word in answer did he hear.

He paused a flashing second in mid-air. His lips moved in prayer. Then he let go, swinging himself a little backwards.

He cut the water and came up easily. "Benny!" he cried, his eyes blinded with the spray his body had caused. "Where are you?"

"Oi, Westy!" Benny answered, in a shout. "Quick! Come here!"

Westy looked. Yes, there he was. The light form bobbing in the darkness. The water was high. He couldn't touch bottom at all.

Westy swam over and touched the form. Grasped Benny. "Gee, kid," he said, and towed him upstream. "How did you manage to keep yourself up?" he shouted, breathlessly.

"I should know!" Benny answered, trying to do his utmost toward lightening Westy's burden. "I'll always be surprised by myself how I kept up. I knew you'd come!"

"Betcha," Westy said, with a little catch in his voice. He had never been so thankful for anything in his life. He had been able to save Benny!

At length they felt the ground beneath them. Together they groped their way through mud and stone and water. At last they felt the solid ground of the trail under their feet.

"How did you ever get in there?" Westy asked, then.

"Say," Benny explained, "I couldn't see the feet I was running on even. Down that path I stumbled, thinking by myself that you were right back of me. All of a sudden, so excited I was I got in the brook before I knew I wasn't on the trail no more."

Westy had to stop and laugh. “You gave me a terrible scare, Ben,” he said. “I thought you were drowning. When I heard you call—gee, I forgot everything. I even forgot that the danger wasn’t so awful. That it was only a flooded brook you were in.”

“So,” Benny said. “It might have been the Atlantic Ocean the way it kept me from getting back to the bank. Always it pushed me back and knocked me off my feet. I thought it shouldn’t be dry land there no more since all the rain came. I couldn’t find anything but water.”

“It’s pretty swift, I know that,” Westy said.

“I yelled first that Warde should help me,” Benny continued. “So scared I was right away. But Warde didn’t answer. So quick by myself I thought I’m a tenderfoot scout, I shouldn’t act like a girl so I tried to keep on floating and I did.

“Swim, I couldn’t. My arms got tired holding them like I was dead. So I called for you. Then I heard you call to me and I was happy. I was floating like a regular fellow then so I didn’t call again to make you nervous. Anyhow I was afraid I should change my luck if I opened my mouth again. I was afraid to sink from excitement.”

“You did fine, Ben!” Westy said, joyously. “I get prouder of you all the time. You’ll show ’em all something yet. See if you don’t!”

“I make a noise like I’m patting myself on the back, Westy,” Ben returned, “but by me it’s a record. In a Coney Island pool I stayed up for two minutes with water wings. Just now it seemed like an hour I stayed up by myself only. *It’s a record!*”

“I’ll say it is,” Westy agreed.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WHO?

As they neared the camp, Warde came out of the darkness. "Hullo," he said, his voice strangely quiet. "Gee, I thought you'd never come."

"We wouldn't have," Westy said, "if we'd depended on you."

"Whatcha mean?" Warde flared.

"I mean," Westy answered calmly, "that you could have waited when you got to the trail. You could at least have waited to see if Benny was in back of you. For all you cared we might have been as dead as doornails from those bullets. That's how much you cared."

"Didn't I hear you shout to Benny?" Warde asked, contritely. "Didn't I hear you yell it was a case of every scout for himself?"

"Sure I did," Westy admitted. "I meant it, too. You and I are scouts long enough to know where we're going in the dark. But Benny hasn't been. He's a tenderfoot. Don't forget that! It was up to you to see he got on that trail all right. Instead he almost drowned, walking right into the brook. You can't touch bottom for that whole stretch under the cliff."

"I thought you were right in back of him," Warde said, apologetically. "Gee, I'm sorry."

"By me it's all right, Warde," Benny said, pleasantly. "It's a baby I am that I shouldn't know where I'm walking in the dark. After this I'll kick out first and feel. But so excited I was I didn't think then. All I could think of was bullets shooting into trees and over Westy's head."

"Anyhow, it was swell like a Tom Hick's out west movie how Westy came down the rope and dived into the brook by me. Like ice I was all over and my mouth wouldn't speak when I saw him. My eyes got closed so nervous I was that he should hit his head on the rocks or never come up again by the water. Oi yoi, was I nervous!"

"Jiminy!" Warde exclaimed admiringly. "You took some chance, Wes."

"I had to," Westy said. "He could have drowned by the time I ran down to the trail. Now I'll have to go back up there in the morning for that rope. It doesn't belong to us, you know. I'll get it if our gun-toting friend doesn't take it. I'll go early, before he's up."

"Maybe he roams all night and sleeps in the day," Warde said. "You'd better be careful, Wes, anyhow, you know."

"Don't worry," Westy said. "I'll be pretty cautious. I'll go alone. There's no safety in numbers on Haunted Hill."

“Say,” Benny asked, anxiously, “you shouldn’t be going up near that cave again, are you?”

“I’ll say not,” Westy promised. “That cave can stay just where it is. I won’t go out of my way trying to find it again. I want to live as well as you. And I wouldn’t give a hang about that rope if I hadn’t borrowed it from Mr. Condon. They can’t afford to lose a nail the way they’re situated.”

“So,” Benny remarked. “Anyhow, it’s over. You found all the trouble what you looked for in that spooky place. It was terrible! The groans. The shooting. I’ve never had dreams as bad as that even.”

“Gosh!” Westy said. “It was weird. As I said before, I can’t understand it. I couldn’t see the man’s face or anything. Just heard the groans like and afterward the moving form that I saw in the dimness with the arm upraised. Boy, what an experience!”

“It’s somebody who doesn’t want us to see them,” Warde said. “That’s what I think. Why should he shoot at us? He could have called and chased us away just as well. Besides, when you think of it, Haunted Hill isn’t the property of anyone, I guess. We had the right to it as well as he did.”

“Hermits are queer, sometimes,” Westy said. “You can’t tell what they’re likely to do. I suppose he thought if he scared us good and hard with those bullets that we’d never come near there again. When people get queer like that they never want to see other people. I guess that’s the way with him. Still, I wouldn’t mind seeing what he looks like.”

“The pleasure’s yours,” Warde said. “I’m cured.”

“Anyhow, it’s no ghost,” Benny said, with a sigh of relief.

“It’s far worse than if it were a ghost,” Westy laughed. “A ghost wouldn’t shoot bullets into trees and into the air.”

“What about those groans?” Warde asked. “What did he do that for?”

“Maybe he coughs like that,” Benny suggested. “Maybe he’s up by the mountains for his health.”

Westy laughed. “I don’t know,” he said. “We’ll have to tell Mr. Condon about it. I bet he’ll be surprised.”

“Come, Westy,” Benny said. “We’re soaking wet already from the brook. My teeth sound like hailstones in my mouth so much I’m shivering.”

As they opened up the tent a rush of damp air greeted them. “Let’s hope the sun comes out good and strong tomorrow,” Westy said. “Everything needs to be dried out, including myself.”

The stars were coyly blinking and the moon came out, round and clear. A warm west wind blew sweetly in their faces. The brook, too, sounded calm again and trilled along tranquilly.

They pinned their wet clothes up against the tent to dry. Westy dropped his safety pin and scooted after it. He crawled along until he captured it at the foot

of Warde's cot.

There he flopped down, plainly startled. A strange sight confronted him. He gasped; threw himself back in sheer amazement.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "We have another surprise on the Berkshire program."

"What's that?" Warde asked indifferently. He was at a very tedious task then, untying his shoestring.

"We don't eat tomorrow!" Westy answered, dramatically.

"Don't eat?" Warde repeated, aroused. "How come, Wes?"

"Our eats have all been stolen."

## CHAPTER XXII

### A HAUNTING FACE

"It's some honest country up here," Benny said, from under the covers. "We're lucky the beds should still be here. And the tent."

Warde and Westy ruefully contemplated the empty supply box. "At least they could have left us one cake of soap," Warde said.

"And one can of beans to start the day with," Westy added, wearily. "Gee whiz, they've cleaned us out. That's what I call a mean trick."

"It's good we had our money in our pockets," Warde said. "We wouldn't have had anything left. This means we'll have to go hiking for eats tomorrow."

"We'll go in the morning," Westy said. "After I get back with the rope. We'll eat some killies for breakfast."

"How do we know maybe the killies should be stolen out of the brook, too," Benny said.

"I never thought of that," Westy said, laughingly. "Still a fellow has to have patience to get killies sometimes and I don't think our thief has patience. He wasn't even patient enough to wipe the mud off his feet when he came in to steal our eats."

Westy flashed the light where the intruder had been standing. Large, muddy footprints had been made all over the place as though the man had snooped into everything.

"It's a wonder he didn't take box and all and even our clothes," Warde said.

"I suppose he thought the box would be too heavy," said Westy. "A person has all he can do to take himself up that narrow path, let alone carrying our big box. I suppose he took half of them one time and came back for the rest later. We've been gone all day, you know."

"Jiminy," Warde said, "you think he's your hermit friend then, don't you?"

"Sure I do," Westy answered. "I don't know of anyone else around here now."

Warde shook his head. "So far," he said, almost sadly, "we've had one mysterious time."

"Say," Benny called out, "how should we know he won't come in the night yet and take our money?"

Westy went out and looked around all sides of the tent. When he came in he was smiling. "No one's around, Ben," he said. "If you'll feel safer I'll bury all our money under the hemlock tree for the night. We can dig it up in the



morning.”

“It’s safer on Eleventh Avenue,” Benny commented. “Plenty people leave money by their clothes around there and wake up in the morning with it still in the same place. But here—no!”

If their mysterious visitor came again that night they were not aware of it. Their sleep was sound and undisturbed. It was six o’clock when Westy awakened.

He dressed quietly so as not to disturb his sleeping companions. In five minutes he was out of the tent and on his way. The sun, warm and friendly looking, greeted him out of the east. The air was cool and fragrant. Myriads of birds chirped their morning roundelays throughout the hills. Westy felt their presence comforting, and their singing cheered him.

He hurried along the trail and into the dim, damp gorge. The water had gone down quite a little, but not enough for him to chance it fully clothed. He wondered how the hermit had managed with his arms full of their stolen eats.

Then he came to the path. Quickly but cautiously he ascended, glad to get up into the sunlight again. It was hard to realize it was morning down there in the gorge. Up on the slope—oh, how different, he thought. Haunted or not, the sun embraced it warmly.

He scanned the distant pine forest and the rising slope beyond. No human figure moved about. He was taking no chances, however, but crawled over to the cliff through the high brush on his hands and knees. The hermit would not see him first this time.

As he neared the cliff he could see that the rope was still untouched. That was something to be thankful for. He stood up and looked again. No one was coming; no one in sight.

He untied the rope. In five minutes he had it coiled again and was ready to go back. He was standing in the shelter of the lone pine, pondering whether it would be necessary for him to crawl or walk back to the path. Everything was still. Not even a bird broke the solemn quiet of Haunted Hill.

He peered around the pine. No one in sight. Yet, he sensed a sound. He waited. The sound became distinct. He flung himself down again and crawled nearer to the cliff’s edge, into the higher grass. There he lay inert—waiting.

No one had seen him. He was sure of that. The sound came nearer. He dared not look, yet he felt he must. Was the grass covering him sufficiently? He struggled to flatten his body still more over the dew-covered ground.

Still the sound came. Footsteps beating steadily along the rocky path. Westy had to look. He was rewarded with a glimpse of the maker of the sounds; a dark man of medium height, hatless, coatless and unshaved.

Westy’s heart raced furiously. The man had been looking straight ahead. Not to the cliff! Perhaps he hadn’t been seen after all. Or was it just a ruse on

the man's part to be walking along indifferently as though he were not aware of the boy's presence on the cliff?

Maybe he was planning to turn off the path and rush in upon him suddenly. Kill him without a word. He wouldn't have a chance to save himself. It would be his own fault. He should have let the darn rope go. It was just as Benny had told him—he "should always be looking for more trouble yet." Well, it was coming to him.

On came the man. How near was he? Westy thought he could tell by the sound. Then the footsteps ceased altogether. What was wrong? Was he going to come over toward the cliff now?

Nothing happened. Nothing moved. Seconds dragged by. Westy felt like shouting. Still no sound. Perhaps the man had gone down the path without making a noise.

He felt he could not guess about it any more. He must look. He moved some brush just a trifle and peered through, then grew bolder and looked still more. The sight that met his gaze astonished him greatly.

The man was standing in the path. Westy could see his every feature. The unshaved face, and sort of twinkly blue eyes—eyes that were filled with tears and gazing north.

Westy could hardly believe what he saw. Yet it was true. The thief, the man that would have killed three boy scouts only the night before, was crying. Actually crying!

He knew the man was too preoccupied to be concerned about another's presence. His whole mind was centered over the hills and away to the north. His tear-streaked face was haggard looking.

After a few minutes he turned and walked slowly back the way he came. Westy watched him intently until the pine forest hid him from view. Then he crawled back to the path and took the down grade on nimble feet.

All the way back the man's face haunted him. The eyes—especially the eyes! There was something familiar in the wistful expression as he looked to the north. And the forehead and chin, disguised though they were by the straggling growth of beard, reminded him of someone.

Who was it?

## CHAPTER XXIII

### ALONG THE HIGHWAY

As they hiked out to the highway that morning their talk was chiefly of the crying thief. "Maybe we ought to notify the police," Warde suggested.

"Maybe we shouldn't," Westy said. "Something tells me not to. Not just yet, anyhow. Things work out funny sometimes. The police might spoil it all. Anyway he might not be the one that shot at us. There might be two hermits. Who knows!"

"So," Benny said, "if everything comes at once and you shouldn't have cops by you, don't say you wish you had done like Warde said. It's crazy you shouldn't tell the cops all our eats get stolen!"

"That part is all right," Westy said. "But if we reported that down at North Adams it would be all around before night and we'd have our camp full of snoopy tourists. We don't want our weekend spoiled, do we? Gee whiz, we've had enough noise with ghosts."

"Hah!" Benny laughed. "Tourists snooping by our camp would be peaceful yet after what excitement we've had."

They were lucky enough to have a lift all the way in to North Adams. Warde shopped around for eats enough to do them until Monday while Westy went across the street and bought a paper.

"Did you want to read that we're going to have more rain tomorrow?" Warde asked, as Westy joined them.

"No," Westy answered. "I just wanted to see if there's anything exciting happening down in Bridgeboro." He winked slyly at Warde.

"Say," Benny said, "it's enough we have trouble here. You should be a bear for punishment, Westy. Honestly, Bridgeboro's so nice and calm—I wouldn't believe how nice till we came here."

They had hiked as far as the first turn of the trail out of North Adams when a big truck came along. The driver, friendly and smiling in answer to Westy's silent appeal for a lift, nodded, slowed down and took them on.

Warde and Benny sat in the back and Westy climbed up on the front seat. "Are you boy scouts camping on the trail now?" the driver asked, genially.

Westy laughed. "There's three boy scouts camping on the trail now," he corrected. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yeh," the driver answered, grinning. "What do you do to call it a day?"

"Since we've been here," Westy answered, "we've waited for the rain to stop and when it did stop we've had to clear up the rain."

“You tell ’em,” the man said. “We sure had a lot of it this week. Where ’bouts yuh campin’?”

Westy told him.

The driver raised his eyebrows. “Say, ain’t that around where the troopers found Jake Martin this week?”

Westy said it was. He told of their fear that night of the landslide and the subsequent discovery of Martin.

“Holy Cat!” the driver exclaimed. “Some excitement, I bet. Huh?”

“We were pretty frightened,” Westy admitted.

“He was a bad egg, Jake Martin was,” the driver said. “It’s too bad, too. They say he came from a nice family somewhere in Massachusetts. The cops are trying to find out who his folks are so’s he kin have a decent funeral.”

“Is that so!” Westy exclaimed.

“Yeh. The cops found a note inside o’ his shirt. It was half finished. But oh, boy, what there was of it certainly razzed Frankie Wolfe to a finish! It seems that bozo slipped away on Jake Martin with all the dough. Believe me, Jake must have been one sore guy.”

“Well, Martin had a terrible ending,” Westy said.

“Yeh. But he had it comin’ to him, I guess. They all have, them guys. They’d as lief shoot a buddy down as a stranger. They ain’t got no hearts. That’s what I say.”

“I guess they haven’t,” Westy agreed.

“Anyways,” the driver continued, “they’re scouring the world for Frankie Wolfe, you can bet. The bank’s got a big reward out if the money’s returned along with Frankie, dead or alive. It’s *only* five thousand smackers. Just a mere bag o’ tricks, huh, lad?”

“I’ll say,” Westy said, enthusiastically. “Gee, I’d like to be the one to return that money.”

“Not to get a bullet for it, though. It’d be K.O. if Frankie didn’t see you first. They say that big boy’s a bear at the trigger.”

Westy was thoughtful for a while. “I suppose if the police captured him, they’d get the reward, wouldn’t they?”

“Yeh. The reward and some bullets,” the driver answered. “That guy won’t give up without a struggle. You can take that from me, kid!”

“What else did Jake Martin say in his note?” Westy asked, anxiously.

“Say,” the driver confided, “I got this straight from a trooper friend of mine I met down in Williamstown. He says it wasn’t even published in the papers. The cops are pretty keen about the whole thing. They’re figgerin’ on gettin’ him from a clue in Jake’s note.”

“Gosh!” Westy blurted out.

“Yeh, sure,” the man went on. “It’s not much of a clue, if you ask me. But

they're workin' on it just the same."

"What was it?" Westy asked.

"Martin scrawled on that paper how he had been brought up nice in Massachusetts. He said he got into bad company when he was a boy and stole from his father. Then he got an injury to his head and said things were worse after that. He couldn't remember much of his past life except that he knew he had stolen a lot of money out of his father's business.

"Anyways, he wrote how he run away to New York then and got in with Frankie Wolfe. They got to be regular pals and Jake confided everything he could remember to Wolfe.

"After the City Bank job, they escaped up here somewheres. He says their car ran out of gas and they had to leave it. They hid then in some woods and he fell asleep, he says. When he woke up, Wolfe had slipped with the money.

"Jake says it was broad daylight then and he didn't dare go out on the highway. He knew the troopers would get him. And that night he felt too sick to go. He was scared, too, so he waited all through the next day. The next night such a terrible storm came up he took a chance and beat it from where he was hiding.

"He said he kind of remembered that he once told Wolfe of a hiding place he knew of when he was a kid. It was some place back in the hills. So he started out thinking maybe he'd find Wolfe there. Anyways that's all he said in the note. He didn't say where the place was. Only that he had told Wolfe about it and would look for him there.

"He must o' had a hunch he was goin' to kick off. Anyway he knew it'd come sooner or later. That's why he wrote the note, I guess. Too bad he couldn't have finished it, though. He must have run out o' lead."

Westy laughed. "Did your trooper friend say where they were looking for Wolfe?" he asked.

"They're doing a thorough job in this hunt, believe me," the driver answered. "They're searching the hills above first and then they'll work down. If they don't find him before, they ought to get to your place around Monday."

"Our place?" Westy asked, laughingly. "What would Frankie Wolfe be doing around our place?"

"Say, you got me, kid," the man answered. "You can never tell about guys like Wolfe. He might have picked himself out a hiding place near you kids just to throw the troopers off the scent."

"Well, I hope not," Westy said. And he truly meant it.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### “IN EVERY WAY”

“Well,” Westy announced after they were back in camp, “I think I know where Frankie Wolfe is hiding and I’m pretty sure who the late Jake Martin was, too.”

“I heard you talking to the driver,” Warde said. “I couldn’t hear all of it. What did he say?”

“First of all,” Westy answered, “he said that Jake Martin wrote a note and said he came from a nice family in Massachusetts. All he said makes me think it’s Jake Clement. He was on his way to find Wolfe when the landslide killed him.”

“Well, what was he doing here?” Warde asked.

“He had told Wolfe of a hiding place in the hills,” Westy answered. “That’s what he wrote in the note. And he was found dead right here. Benny saw him going up over the boulders that night, didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Figure it out yourself. Who else but a native of this place or someone who had been told by a native—who would think of going up over those boulders to find the rest of the trail?”

“Gee, you’re right, Wes,” Warde said. “We didn’t know it until Mr. Condon told you.”

“Sure,” Westy said. “I didn’t say a word about the excitement we had. I just let that man tell me all about it. I wanted to hear every word.”

“And all the time you should keep still?” Benny asked, incredulously.

“Sure I did. I just looked wise. There’s only five thousand dollars reward for the return of that money. Also Frankie Wolfe dead or alive.”

“Oh, boy!” Warde exclaimed. “That’s real money. Think what we could do with five thousand dollars!”

“There’s only one catch in it,” Westy said. “We know from experience that our friend upon Haunted Hill is handy with a gun.”

“Sure, but...” Ward began.

“But, nothing,” Westy interrupted. “The driver told me that Wolfe won’t give up without a struggle. After what we saw of him, I wouldn’t care to see him struggle.”

“At last it’s some sense you’re talking,” Benny said, happily. “You shouldn’t be foolish for five thousand bucks even!”

“Gee, that’s a nice lot of money though,” Warde said, wistfully.

“Your life should be nicer,” Benny told him. “We should tell the police now before we’re murdered in our sleep already.”

“Take it easy, Ben,” Westy said. “I want to think it over tonight. There must be some way of us getting that reward. Gee, we couldn’t be any closer to it if we tried. Wolfe is the one risk.”

“One risk!” Benny repeated with amazement. “You talk crazy, Westy. Wolfe is a thousand risks. And while you say take it easy I bet trouble comes.”

“Why should we let the troopers earn that five thousand when we can get it ourselves? Another thing, I’ve as good as discovered Frankie Wolfe myself. Didn’t I see him up on the path this morning with my own eyes?”

“It’s good they shouldn’t be mine,” Benny remarked. “I would die before I looked again.”

“You leave it to me, kid,” Westy told him. “Everything’s going to come out great. I’ll fix it somehow.”

Benny grinned. “It’s O.K. by me, Westy,” he said. “We started with trouble; it shouldn’t end in trouble.”

They sat around after supper, talking. The sun went down, sweeping the western sky a brilliant scarlet. Gradually twilight deepened around them.

“Did you read how Bridgeboro’s getting along without us?” Warde asked.

“Gee whiz, no,” Westy answered. “I forgot all about the paper, talking to that driver. It’s right in the pocket of my coat. I hung it up alongside of the flap when we came home. Do you want to read it?”

“In the dark?” Warde asked. “Anyway I’m too sleepy. But I was wondering what was new in Bridgeboro. It seems as though we’ve been gone from there skeenteen years.”

“You said it,” Westy agreed. “We’ll take a look at it tomorrow before we got to Condons’.”

“If we have another peaceful night tonight,” Warde said, as they turned in, “that’ll make two nights altogether.”

“Say, it’ll be something yet to brag about,” Benny agreed. “Even this morning I couldn’t believe myself when I woke up and I had no excitement to worry about.”

“Just as I told you,” Westy said, “every day in every way it gets better.”

“And worse,” Warde interrupted. “I hear someone coming!”

They listened. Someone was walking up from the brook. Coming toward them. “Oi, yoi!” Benny exclaimed in a stage whisper, “we bragged too quick, already!”

“Maybe it’s some tourists,” Westy said.

“From the brook?” Warde questioned.

“We’ll act like we’re sleeping,” Benny said.

“Don’t be silly,” Westy said. “Whoever it is, they could hear you say that

down at the brook.”

“Then we should look ready for a fight,” Benny said, not to be discouraged.

The footsteps came closer. Closer to the tent. Then right at the tent. “Can I come in?” a man’s voice asked, gently.

Westy went to the flap. His fingers fumbled nervously in trying to open it. His coat fell to the ground and the paper fell out on to the ground as he opened it. But he was too amazed to pick it up. He stared in sheer terror of the man outside!

It was the man from the Hill—Frankie Wolfe.



## CHAPTER XXV

### A STRANGE VISIT

Westy couldn't speak. No one spoke. All they did was stare stupidly.

Wolfe's face was drawn and sad looking. He stood there, waiting to be spoken to. "I guess it's a shock," he said, falteringly, "to see anyone around here this time of the night." His voice was quiet and he smiled a little as he spoke.

"Y-y-yes," Westy stammered. "Of course."

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," he said, apologetically.

"Oh, no," Westy said, and warming up to the gentle voice. "We were just talking."

"I see," he said. He looked back over his shoulder, out into the darkness. "I'm camping too, quite a distance from here. I saw your smoke this evening."

Westy nodded. He could not think of anything to say.

"I'm feeling sick," he went on. "I'm not used to outdoor life, I guess."

Something in his tones touched Westy. Was this the murderer speaking? Was this the gunman who had robbed and routed them with bullets? It was hard to believe. The man's voice was singularly gentle.

"I'm sorry," Westy said, at length. "I'm sorry you're sick." He felt he shouldn't be sorry for this man, yet somehow he was.

"Thank you," he said, simply. "I think it's just a cold, though—just a cold. That's why I came—to ask you a favor."

"Why—a—certainly," Westy managed to say. "Maybe you'd like to come in?" He wondered if Warde and Benny were thinking that he had lost his mind to ask such a man inside their tent.

Wolfe's face lighted up. "Thank you," he answered. "I would." He stepped inside the tent.

Westy asked him to sit down on the cot. Warde stirred then. "Do you want something for your cold?" he asked. It was Westy's turn to wonder about Warde.

The man nodded. "If you have it," he answered. "Campers generally have first-aid kits. That's what I said to myself when I saw your smoke tonight."

"We're boy scouts," Westy said. "We're always glad to help people when they're sick. Even—oh, everybody."

"I'm glad to hear you're boy scouts," Wolfe said. "They do a powerful lot of good, don't they?"

Was the man crazy? Did bandits talk that way? Westy and Warde and

Benny sat there staring at him. Benny found his voice first. "Say," he said, quite boldly, "you don't know the half of it. I surprise myself what I should do since I'm a boy scout already."

The man laughed heartily. "That's saying something," he said, applauding Benny.

"What could we give you?" Westy asked, spurred on by Benny's friendliness.

"If you've got aspirin or something," he answered. "Anything will do as long as it relieves pain and I can sleep."

"Maybe you should take some quinine too?" Benny proposed. "It goes nice by aspirin with a cold. I've tried it."

"Sure," Warde laughed. "Nice as a banana split."

Wolfe laughed outright. His blue eyes twinkled merrily. In that second he seemed to lose the wistful expression that Westy had first seen on the cliff. The chin, so firm and honest looking—could it belie the man's real character as much as that?

He warmed right up to the scouts. One could not believe the things said of him, Westy thought. Yet, what was he doing up there on the hill? And in such a neglected looking state?

His clothing was torn considerably. His straggling beard—his unnatural pallor—oh, it must be the man! The man whom all the country was hunting. A despicable bandit and murderer.

Westy couldn't help chuckling at a stray thought that flashed in his musings. What would his father say if he could see his own son actually entertaining this man, Frankie Wolfe!

He knew they would have to do something. Notify the police. But when? The man evidently had not thought of escaping that night or the next. He wouldn't act so calm if he did. Still, Westy thought, recalling what the driver had told him, you could never tell about that kind. They did queer things.

A warmth stole over him when he thought of the reward. It was as good as theirs now that they had discovered Wolfe. The driver was all wrong, Westy told himself, when he said that Wolfe was a tough customer. Why, he was as gentle as a lamb.

But how would he act if the boys went up to the cave and tried to get the money?

That would be another story, Westy breathed. And Frankie Wolfe dead or alive wasn't interesting him without the money.

"We had some rain," Wolfe broke in upon Westy's thoughts.

"Yes, we did," Westy agreed, foolishly.

"I've seen rains up here before," he went on. "But never rains like this week. The trail never got as flooded as that. The brook too—I had ter swim it."

“Have you been here long?” Westy ventured.

Wolfe colored up. All three noticed it. “No,” he answered at length, “I haven’t. Not long.”

Warde spoke to relieve the confusion. “Would you like to take that stuff now?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” Wolfe answered. “If it’s not too much trouble.”

Westy secured the medicine, dipped the glass in the water bucket and handed it to Wolfe. After it was gone, he looked at the scouts gratefully. “You’re kind,” he said, simply. “I won’t forget it.” He rose and walked outside of the tent.

Out there he paused, stooped and picked something up and put it in his pocket. Westy wondered what it was, but hated to ask. Then Wolfe walked away.

“If you get worse, Mister,” Westy called, “let us know.”

Westy heard a faint answer but he could not distinguish the words. Silence enveloped them again. “Gee,” he said, flopping on top of the covers, “it’s a great world! What is a feller supposed to think of such a man?”

“It’s a mystery,” Warde answered. “That’s what it is. If you ask me, I think he’s cuckoo!”

“Do you?” Westy asked.

“Sure. Nobody’s sane that’ll try to kill you one night and comes begging for aspirin the next. Gee, wasn’t he nice and pleasant, though?”

“Say,” Benny said, “maybe he should be a regular Dr. Jekyll last night. And tonight he was Mr. Hyde. I liked him when he laughed.”

“So did I,” Warde agreed. “Anybody would.”

“I can’t get his face out of my mind,” Westy said. “Especially the eyes. I’ve either seen him before or someone just like him.”

“That reminds me,” Warde said, “wasn’t he fussed up after he said that about having seen rains before up here and about the brook! I wonder why it was?”

“Say!” Westy exclaimed. “Just a minute! Let me think—about the brook—he said he had *ter* swim it. No *to* swim it, mind you, but *ter*. Did you hear that?”

“Sure, I noticed it,” Warde answered indifferently. “What about it?”

“Who do we know uses the word *ter*?” Westy asked.

“Mr. Condon,” Benny spoke up.

“Right,” Westy said, like a teacher. “Remember how Mr. Condon said his son looked enough like him to be his brother? Except for the beard?”

Benny nodded his head, wide-eyed and wondering. “Honest, Westy,” he said, “you don’t mean....”

“Sure I do. I’m positive that Frankie Wolfe is Jerry Condon!”

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY

“Jiminy!” Warde exclaimed. “Are you sure?”

“Sure,” Westy answered. “I thought of it all of a sudden. Twinkly eyes, just like Mr. Condon’s. And how he twirled his *r*’s when he was excited. When he’s shaved he probably wouldn’t look so much like Mr. Condon. That is, not enough to give him away like when he’s not shaved.”

“No wonder he knew enough to go up to the cave. Jake Martin wouldn’t need to have told him,” Warde remarked.

“There’s the one thing that puzzles me,” Westy said. “Jake Martin was Jake Clement, I’m pretty sure of that. If Frankie Wolfe was Jerry Condon you’d think Jake would have said something about it in his note. It couldn’t be possible that they were partners and didn’t recognize each other!”

“It’s too much before going to bed,” Benny said. “It’s bad for sleep, such mysteries.”

“Maybe they did know each other,” Warde said. “Maybe they worked the whole thing on purpose.”

“In that case,” Westy said, “Frankie Wolfe or Jerry Condon could have come home. It was because he thought he killed Clement that he ran away.”

“How do we know what he thought?” Warde asked. “After all we don’t know Clement’s story or Jerry’s story. It’s all guess work. The whole thing is queer.”

“Anyway,” Westy said, sleepily, “we were as kind to him tonight as anybody’d be under the circumstances. Gee, though, just think of poor Mr. Condon with his fire burning to welcome Jerry home! And Mrs. Condon, too. I hope they never find out what kind of a man their son really is.”

“That’s the worst part of it,” Warde said. “For the first time in fifteen years Jerry is almost on top of his home. And he can’t tell them he’s there—that he’s a murderer!”

“I guess that’s why he was crying,” Westy said, as he jumped into bed. “At least he has some conscience. All we can do is try and cheer the old people as much as possible. It’s too bad we aren’t staying here all summer. They’d forget their troubles if they could talk to us every day for a while.”

“Do you really think he was sick?” Warde asked.

“My gosh,” Westy answered, “he certainly looked it. He looked hungry, too.”

“Hungry!” Benny repeated. “We should be hungry if we didn’t have

money for more eats today. He shouldn't be hungry after what he took by us yesterday."

"Gosh," Westy admitted, "that's right. I never thought of that."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### JERRY CONDON

“Say,” Westy said, next morning, “I think we ought to start out right after breakfast.”

“Why so early?” Warde asked.

“We ought to take a look up at Wolfe or Jerry. He might have pneumonia for all we know. We might even see where he has the money hidden.”

“And take the chance of more bullets!” Warde exclaimed.

“Aw,” Westy assured him, “he wouldn’t do that again. He knows who we are now and he doesn’t know that we know who he is. There’s the difference.”

“It was mighty funny,” Warde persisted, “that he never mentioned about seeing us up there the other night.”

“I bet he was ashamed of it,” Westy said. “Now that we’ve been kind to him he’ll act differently. Especially when he’s sick. We have to get that money and it’s the only excuse I know of.”

“If he’s sick, all right,” Warde said. “But if he’s well—Well!”

“Aw, don’t worry till it’s time,” Westy said.

“I know,” Warde said. “But honestly, Wes, we ought to put the police onto this. We should have told them last night.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” Westy said, impatiently. “Gee, I can’t believe it of him. It’s like everything was a dream. He has such a nice, gentle voice, and a smile that makes you think he wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“You’re a sentimental cuss,” Warde said. “I hate to give him away, but it’s not right to let a man like that be free. It’s not being a scout, either!”

“All right,” Westy said quietly. “We’ll tell them soon’s we get back!”

Once more they took the old trail. It was a glorious morning and even in the dim gorge little flecks of sunlight danced joyously. The water had receded to such a degree that they had only a short distance to wade.

When they reached the slope things were as still as on the morning before. No songs of birds, nothing to relieve the stillness of the place. The stubby growths and high brush made a queer crackling sound in the light breeze.

“We should bring our tent up here,” Benny suggested. “Such a nice breeze it is up high.”

“Not for me,” Warde said. “There’s something about it up here—I don’t know. It gives me a chill, sort of. Even in the daytime.”

“Now who’s talking ghosts!” Westy teased.

“I didn’t say anything about ghosts,” Warde said. “But I do think places

have a sad feeling. The air is heavy, somehow.”

“That’s the spirits,” Westy reminded him. “The spirits of revengeful Indians. Gr-r-r!”

“Quit your kidding,” Warde said. “I bet you feel it yourself. I think people sort of leave their sorrows behind them. I really do.”

“What do you call that but believing in ghosts?” Westy challenged him.

“When people say ghosts,” Warde argued, “they mean spooky-looking things in white. I don’t believe anyone ever really saw a thing like that. I just think they sort of feel them and they imagine they see them.”

“I couldn’t tell you,” Westy laughed. “You’ll have to ask someone in the business. They’ll give you the dope.”

“Shall we attack *en masse*?” Westy asked, looking toward the forest.

“Sure,” Warde answered, “whatever that is.”

“That means all together,” Westy said. “How about it?”

“We should call first, maybe,” Benny suggested. “Tell him we’re coming by him for a sick visit.”

“That’s an idea,” Westy said. “It’ll give him time to put the cave in order.”

Westy walked on and into the forest. He had no fear but that Wolfe would welcome him. After he had gone forward a few feet he paused and called. A few pine needles fell noiselessly at his feet.

He looked around. Then he walked on a little farther and paused. There was someone coming—he was sure of it! He wondered if he should run. But no, there was nothing to run away from this time. Wolfe knew him now.

A figure emerged from between the trees. It was Wolfe. He was running and waving to Westy. As he came nearer, the scout could see that the man’s face was ghastly looking. He seemed to be stumbling along as if he were weak and faint.

Westy forgot everything; he forgot that it was Wolfe, the murderer. He only knew that a human being was stumbling and weak and beckoning for his help.

Westy ran to him. “What’s the matter?” he asked. “You look...”

Wolfe put his fingers to his lips for silence. “Sh-sh,” he whispered. “Just help me down to the trail. *Quick!*” He grasped the scout’s arm heavily.

Westy put his arm about him, sensing that he was weak. Wolfe said nothing, accepting the support of the scout silently. Westy could feel his body quivering.

Seeing Benny and Warde beyond, he smiled. “I’m glad your pals are here,” he said weakly. “They can help you. I feel I’m going to keel over.”

Westy beckoned the boys and they came running. “C’mon, Warde,” he said, “you and I will have to carry Wolfe down to the trail. He’s sick!”

Wolfe looked up at the mention of his name. Westy thought he grew whiter

and his eyes looked at the scout in amazement. "I'm not Wolfe," he said. "Not *that*, thank heaven! Just get me down and I'll tell you."

Westy and Warde carried him chair fashion. He was a heavy burden to carry down that precipitous path. At last they reached the trail. "Walk up a little," he told them. "Toward the plain. I'll tell you when to stop."

Just before the trail left the gorge he stopped them. The path to Haunted Hill could not be seen from there. Was that why?

As they put him down, Westy noticed a large red spot on his shirt front. It made him gasp. "Are you hurt?" he asked.

The man smiled. "A little, not much," he said. "I'll just rest a little and tell you. There's not much time to lose."

"But what is *that*?" Westy asked, fearfully.

"Nothing but a flesh wound," he answered. "Don't worry. I picked the bullet out myself. I've lost a little blood and the lack of food, too, that's what makes me weak."

"Aren't you too weak to talk?" Westy persisted.

"It's important I tell you," he answered. "Please listen! It won't take long."

Westy nodded sympathetically.

"I'm Jerry Condon," he said simply. "And I left my home a long time ago because I thought I killed a man. He stole four thousand dollars right out of my hand that I was to give him as the final payment on my father's house. He refused to give me a receipt and said that he forgot to bring the deed which he had promised. I had always been suspicious of him and when he ran out of the house I went after him.

"I found him down the road by the willow tree waiting for me. I demanded the money or a receipt. He said he had neither and asked me to search him. I did and couldn't find it.

"I knew he had played some kind of a trick on me—that the money was hidden around somewhere. But I couldn't find it. All the while he stood there grinning as if to say 'keep on looking!'

"In my anger, I knocked him down. When he didn't get up I was frightened. I listened to his heart. He wasn't breathing that I could hear. So I ran away. I didn't want my mother to see me again. I knew that even though the man deserved it, I couldn't admit to my mother and father that I was a murderer.

"I went away. Never mind where. It's too long a story. When this summer time came I couldn't stand being away from my folks any longer. I wanted to just get a glimpse of them before I wandered on again and before they died. They're getting old.

"I came up here to the haunted cave because I didn't think anyone else knew about it. But I was wrong. Someone did know and came the first night I



was here. He arrived with a little black satchel that he proceeded to hide. I've never found it and I've done some looking.

"He had a gun also and threatened me if I left the hill that it would be my end. He said he had to be careful, that the police were hunting him, and he would stay there until things quieted down.

"I told him then I too was under a cloud and that I couldn't give him up without giving myself up. He seemed satisfied but still wouldn't let me go off the hill. Kept after me day and night.

"We didn't have any food, of course. One night he said he was going out and get some. He wasn't gone long before I saw him coming through the pines with something in his arms. He didn't say where he'd got it or anything.

"By Thursday we had eaten it all. So he went out again and came back with still more. He laughed about it that time. Said he had stolen it from a tent where some kids were camping. I wouldn't touch it. *Stolen food!* Hungry as I was, I wouldn't touch it."

He paused a little then, resting his head back upon Westy's arm. Warde, too, gave him his support. Then he went on.

"You boys came then," he said, weakly. "He sighted you from the cave and reached for his gun. I pleaded with him not to use it. I struggled with him to get it away. Then he hit me on the head with the butt and I must have dropped.

"When I came to, he acted as if nothing had happened. Said he scared the bunch of you away with four bullets. I was so fearful that one of you had been shot! Then yesterday, late, I glimpsed your smoke.

"He fell asleep and I sneaked out. I was feeling so sick. Then when I left your tent I saw the paper lying on the ground where it fell when you opened the tent to let me in. I was hungry for news so I took it.

"Early this morning I read it. On the front page was a picture of *him*, Frankie Wolfe. I was reading about the terrible murder he committed when he came out and looked over my shoulder at the paper.

"He laughed. I was horrified. I told him so and went inside to get my coat and hat. He came in and shot me."

The boys gasped.

"Wait," he pleaded. "Don't be frightened. I knew it was only a flesh wound the minute the bullet pierced my skin. But I fell down—feigned death.

"I could feel him watching me a second. Then he spoke aloud. He said, 'I better go up the line and get something to barricade me in—now that Jake's snatched.'

"He went out and I knew he was going up the hill farther to get some dead brush. I waited till he was gone about five minutes and then I probed for the bullet. When I got it out I heard you call, so I rushed to meet you before he came back.

“So you see,” he ended, in a faint whisper, “it’s just as I said. He intends to give the police a fight—escape if he can. There’s not a minute to be lost if the money is to be recovered and also him.”

His head dropped heavily on Westy’s arm. He was unconscious.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### WESTY GOES AFTER

“Come on,” Westy said, “we’ll take him home, quick!”

“Do you think it’s serious?” Warde asked, as they started off.

“I hope not,” Westy answered. “Mrs. Condon will know what to do for him before the doctor comes. You run over to the Clement place as soon as we get him home.”

“It’s like a movie,” Benny said, in a hushed voice. “We should be taking him home and he’s innocent and everything.”

They waved to Mr. Condon up on the hill and beckoned for him to come quickly. He stared, then came hurrying down.

Jerry’s unconscious condition only intensified the pathos of that meeting between son and parents. They seemed not to believe that these scouts had brought their beloved son home to them.

Mrs. Condon’s fingers trembled in their ministrations, but her heart beat with joy. A light, beautiful to see, had transformed that tired, aged looking face into a mirror of happiness. And she looked to the scouts as if they, too, must reflect that happiness, having contributed to it in bringing Jerry home again.

Westy waited until Jerry was conscious and sent Warde scurrying back to the Clements’ to phone the troopers. Then he took Mr. Condon aside. “Can I get up that hill without going around the trail way?” he asked. “I want to go some way where I won’t be so easily seen.”

Mr. Condon seemed suddenly come to life. He took Westy by the arm and led him outside. “Yer know the little rise,” he said, “above whar yer seed me hev the fire?”

Westy nodded.

“Go straight up thar. Foller that course till yer see the pines agin. Walk right inter them. It’s the back entrance ter the cave. A big yaller-covered rock hides it. Yer crawl aroun’ thet. Be careful, though, youngster,” he warned, “thar’s a pit near the passageway inside thet Jerry sez is mighty deep. He wuz never down it cuz no one ever went up thar with him to help pull him out. It’s been thar since the Injuns’ time.”

“All right,” Westy said, calmly. “I’ll be careful. But I can’t wait until the police come or the money’ll be gone. I’ve just got to get it!”

“Oi, Westy!” Benny implored. “I’m all nervous you should take such a chance. It’s terrible! I should go with you!”

“No,” Westy answered, emphatically. “One is safer, Ben. I’ll be all right.

Warde must go and wait for the police. You wait on the trail for them, too. I'll wait my chance. I won't take any risks!"

Westy was off for the hill. Warde and Benny ran down the trail, and Mr. Condon stood watching them, a mist of happiness in his eyes. He smiled when Westy waved back to him. "They *did* bring my boy hum ter me," he whispered. "Thet's what they did!"

Up the hill Westy climbed. He felt strangely calm. He needed to, he told himself. To lose his head now would be disastrous. Over and over he repeated Mr. Condon's directions. The pines and the rock. The warning about the old pit of the Indians. All those things were stamped indelibly upon his mind.

He bent forward, his body on a level with the brush. In through the pines he stalked from tree to tree. No living thing moved—only the birds trilled little snatches of song from some tree down nearer the plain.

Then he sighted the rock standing sentinel-like against the rising hill. Behind it was the cave! Westy hugged close to the tree, peering out at intervals. How was he to know when to make the final move? When to enter the cave?

It would have to be chance, in any case, he told himself. A sort of seventh sense would have to guide him. A squirrel darted past him. The brush crackled audibly in its wake. Westy hugged closer to the tree again. All was still.

A few seconds passed. He darted out from his hiding place and over to the rock. Behind it, he crouched. He was not excited—just tense. Then he listened.

The deathly calm of noonday held the hill in its grip. The sun, high in the heavens, shone straight down upon Westy's brown hair. A playful breeze puffed out his scout blouse at the back like some inflated balloon.

Something told him to go. To move and take the chance. He crawled swiftly along the ground and around the rock. There was the entrance. He stopped again and listened.

It was narrow, long and dark. He peered through. He could not see a thing. One thing made his heart beat faster—leap for joy. He didn't hear a sound from within. Perhaps Wolfe was still gathering brush or hunting now for Jerry.

He crept cautiously in. His eyes blinked blindly in the dim, foul-smelling place. But he went on. Moss, sticky and damp, brushed against the palms of his hands.

At that end, one could not stand upright. A sort of natural, narrow hall led into the front part. It was there that Westy hesitated. Suppose Wolfe should be waiting for him to come through the hall?

He wished heartily that he had asked Jerry all about the interior of the cave. He was fearful that Wolfe would be hiding in one of its many recesses. It was all a chance, he thought, as he rounded the turn that would bring him to the front.

Would he see Wolfe first or would Wolfe see him?

## CHAPTER XXIX

### RISK

Westy held on to a piece of jutting rock. It came out just at the point where the hall turned into the front. Here, he stood on his tiptoes and peeked. The opening of the cave he could see plainly with the daylight streaming through.

Not a sound was there. Westy grew bolder. He stepped forward. No one was there. A sigh of relief escaped his compressed lips. Quickly he went to the opening and looked out.

No sign of Wolfe could he see from there. To watch the path one would have to crawl out farther. There was not time for that, he felt. It was enough that all was quiet.

He glanced around hurriedly. Bits of food strewn here and there met his gaze. In one corner was all that remained of what Wolfe had stolen from them.

Two coats and two hats had been flung in a corner. He hurried over and picked them up separately. As he lifted one coat, a flashlight fell out of the pocket. That was all the little heap disclosed.

He kicked at the earth around and searched in corners. Then he hastily glanced out, but the continued silence was reassuring.

He went to the back part and searched there, using the flashlight. It was discouraging. Every crevice in the place he had explored. He felt every inch of the cold, damp earth. His hands touched something. The earth loosened under his fingers and he scooped it up. Underneath, he discovered a few rotten boards.

Removing them quickly he put his hand down into space. It touched nothing. He reached over the full length of his arm. All was emptiness.

He flashed the searchlight upon it and remembered. It was the pit! The old Indian pit, yawning there below him. How deep it was he couldn't tell. He only knew it appeared to be much wider at the bottom than at the top.

One thing was certain. Wolfe did not know of the pit. The dirt and old boards had not been removed in years. Westy was convinced the satchel was not there. Where else could it be? Where had he hidden it?

Had Wolfe gone for good? Escaped? Westy wondered if his search was destined to prove futile.

He jumped up and sneaked back to the front. Carefully, he went over all that he had searched before.

Always his eyes and ears were strained for sounds of Wolfe. He began to feel the thing hopeless. Only the hat and coat of the bandit spurred him on

afresh. He felt sure the man wouldn't try to escape without them.

He hurried to the back again to get the flashlight. Some dark corner still might yield the treasure. Many times he circled the darkened area with this hope in mind. Then he glanced out in front, disappointment darkening his features.

A step sounded. He crawled farther out to look. Who? He could just get a glimpse of something light between the trees. Then a bare head came into view.

He knew instinctively it was Wolfe!

For the first time in his life, Westy felt panic-stricken. He knew not what to do. Where to hide? He asked himself frantically.

He scurried back. Of course he could escape. He had time. But without the money? No, he told himself. He wouldn't go without the money.

It came to him in that perilous, flashing second what he had preached to Benny. A scout never starts for home until he gets what he goes after! Was he going to fall down on just that?

He could not face Benny if he returned without it. The little tenderfoot's faith in his friend would forever be destroyed. He must find it! But how?

He grasped the jutting rock in his anxiety. There wasn't time to look now. Wolfe was getting nearer. Was almost there. His foot slipped on some damp moss. His arm instinctively slid over the rock and grasped it to keep from falling.

He felt a sort of smooth shelf, receding. Then his hand touched something. A solid object. He grasped it tightly in his hands and drew it out.

It was the satchel!

Joy seized him. His eyes flashed with triumph, then darkened with fear. Wolfe's footsteps were just outside the cave.

Westy ran frantically through the hall to the back. Blind terror dominated him. Wolfe was entering the cave. He knew he couldn't crawl out that narrow passageway quickly enough to escape the bandit. He'd be shot down like a dog before he was halfway through.

Lightning-like a thought flashed through his mind. Wolfe was walking around the front of the cave. There was only one thing for Westy to do. The pit.

He pushed the dirt around the edges. Then he kicked the boards down. Holding the satchel between his teeth he climbed over, his hands grasping the slippery sides. He let himself go!

Feet first he landed, but flopped from the impact. The satchel, the money, all were safe. The flashlight, too, was in his hip pocket. He dared not use it. Not yet.

He crouched breathless and fearful. The stifling darkness of the place held

him in its grip.



## CHAPTER XXX

### ENEMIES

The air was terrible. A sort of vapory substance seemed to ooze out of the earth and envelop him. It blurred his eyes and choked him. His feet slipped in the slimy earth beneath.

There was nothing to do but wait, and he did that, breathlessly. Had Wolfe discovered that his money was gone?

Westy could not hear him. He seemed to be in another world—so strange was the pit. He wondered how he was ever going to get out. Who was there to know of his plight and help him out?

Time seemed interminable before he heard the sound of someone talking. He listened and realized it was Wolfe. He was talking loudly to himself, and pacing around the back of the cave.

Westy was thankful that it was dark up there and that he had deprived Wolfe of the light. The pacing continued. Sometimes near, sometimes away from the pit's edge. Westy feared the next move.

Would he come too near and fall in on top of him? Cold drops of perspiration came out upon his forehead and trickled down his temples. He began to shiver.

Then he heard Wolfe laugh. A loud malevolent laugh. "You'll fight fire before you fight me!" he shouted. His voice trailed off with his footsteps.

What did the man mean? Fight fire! Westy would have given much to know what was going on. It was terrible. He could only stand helplessly and wait.

Suppose Wolfe should set fire to the cave. It was too damp to blaze much. Nothing really to take fire. But he might set fire to some brush and create a lot of smoke which would find its way down to the pit and suffocate him—choke him to death.

That thought spurred him into action. He was too full of life to contemplate death. If it challenged him he would fight it. He determined fully to struggle with whatever came.

He removed the light from his hip pocket. The absence of sound from above made him bold but he covered the end with his hand before he pressed his finger down on the switch.

He released it ever so carefully. The light gleamed through his fingers and cast a weird, orange glow around the bottom of the pit. Little, slimy creatures scurried about at his feet, and tried to dodge the light. They seemed not to like

this bright intrusion into their darkened home.

Around the sides Westy flashed it and listened. The same oozy substance coated the pit everywhere. Here and there bits of rocks protruded. They would be something to hold on to. He wondered if it were safe to try.

He put the light back in his pocket and gripped the satchel in his teeth. Then he reached up and felt for the jutting rock. Finding it, he clutched it desperately and lifted himself; hung on with one hand and felt for the next rock.

Twice he did this successfully. The third time, he pulled with all his might. The rock he was grasping seemed to wobble under his hold. It loosened, shoved and finally slipped out of its place, throwing Westy down again into the oozy bottom.

Something struck his head, then fell away from him. It made a soft sort of thud as it landed. Westy quickly got to his feet, shuddering at his contact with the horrible place.

He felt contaminated and purposely refrained from brushing his clothes. He could not bear to touch himself, but he felt the moisture of the damp mud penetrating to his skin.

He waited a few seconds to make sure that Wolfe's footsteps did not sound in the back of the cave. He took out the light and flashed it to see what had struck him.

Horror gripped him at the sight confronting him. He moved away from it, standing taut with his back against the slippery side of the pit. Farther he could not go. He was trapped.

A rattlesnake lay almost at his feet, curled and hissing venomously. Would it spring? He grabbed the satchel again, put the light back in his pocket and reached for the nearest rock. But it was no use, he realized. His feet would still dangle within reach of the viper.

His fear of Wolfe could not exceed his fear of this hissing, slimy thing. Its tiny, blazing eyes seemed to bore into the very flesh of the defenseless scout. He wished he could shout. But his tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth.

He looked despairingly up into the darkness. Two enemies to reckon with now, he thought. Wolfe was up there waiting to shoot him and the snake....

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THREE CHEERS

Benny was waiting on the trail. He had been waiting hours, it seemed to him, for Warde to come back with the troopers.

His fingers twitched spasmodically. He ran up a little way to see if they were coming. He couldn't stand the suspense. His mind was clamoring for news of Westy.

Westy had gone up there alone. To Haunted Hill. Had Wolfe caught him, shot him down? "Oi, it's terrible they don't come!" Benny wailed aloud. He ran back until he came to the path once more.

"Warde should show them up there," he said, in an indignant voice. "He's got police, but Westy's got nobody."

He stopped and thought a moment. A solution to his problem was filtering like crystal-clear water through his active mind. He searched his pockets for a scrap of paper and a stubby pencil and scribbled a brief note to Warde:

WARDE:

To Westy I should go—he's in danger—maybe, so long it is since he don't come back. If you don't see Westy and I in a little while you should right away take the cops by the back entrance of that hoodooed place.

Anyway, if it's everything silence when you come by there I'll say good-by now—Remember me to everybody—tell my Mama and Papa Westy saved me by the flood in the brook.

You, too, Warde—I liked you——

Your friend,  
BENNY STEIN.

This he laid upon the ground pegging it down at the corners with four small sticks. Then he hurriedly gathered together a number of small rocks and laid them about along the four sides of the paper. Warde could not help seeing it, he told himself.

He raced out of the gorge and up the hill until he came to the little rise of ground and joyously picked out Westy's footsteps. How clear they were to follow!

When the brush became too high and thick for him to see them, he recalled another of Westy's teachings and sought to live up to it.

His bright eyes eagerly picked out the broken twigs and limp bushes.

Westy had gone there, he knew. And the damp side of pebbles kicked up in haste, what delight he took in recognizing them!

On he went, keeping in mind the yellow rock. He became breathless from running. Westy's cue about scout pace cropped up in his memory and he tried it. The result was excellent.

He reached the pines in no time. An acrid smell filled his nostrils. The farther he went the worse it was. Then he felt heat—a stifling, choking heat.

In the next second he heard a crackling, sizzling sound. Two trees just ahead burst into flame. He leaped past them as they broke into a giant shaft of flame, kindling the brush beneath.

Benny's whole mind was dominated by the thought of Westy. In his desire to protect the friend who had rescued him, he became utterly reckless of his own safety.

No thought did he have that Wolfe might be watching him. He simply didn't care. He ran through the smoking forest heedlessly. No effort did he make to conceal himself from the bandit. Westy must be saved!

He sighted the rock and ran blindly to it; crawled around it and in through the narrow passageway unhesitatingly, leaving the flaming forest behind.

He stood up and listened. Where was Westy?

The question cried for an answer in Benny's mind. His heart was beating furiously and he thought sadly of his tenderfoot status. Yet, somehow, in the wake of that, courage came to his rescue. Suddenly he felt like a giant.

"Helloi!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Is anybody home, yet?" Every tone was clear and calm.

He waited.

Footsteps came, softly shuffling. Wolfe came around through the narrow hall and faced him, gun in hand. Calm though he tried to look, amazement filled his hard-looking eyes.

Benny pretended not to see the gun. He looked up at Wolfe's face, barely visible in the dim place. "Hello, Mister!" he said, cheerfully. "Maybe you don't know it's a forest fire out by the woods, huh?"

Wolfe stood speechless.

"Say," Benny went on, "you must excuse me. It's one dumb feller I am. I don't introduce myself until I speak for five minutes."

Not a word from Wolfe.

"Maybe you shouldn't know it, I'm Benny Stein," the little tenderfoot said, bravely. "My Papa's Max Stein and he has a nice, big textile business by Main Street, Bridgeboro. It's two weeks already I've been a tenderfoot by the Boy Scouts of America and am I dumb! Oi!"

Wolfe grunted faintly.

"So," Benny commented. "Maybe you're a hermit or something? Anyway

I was out now and I saw by the hill a fire. By the scouts I learned I should help in trouble all kinds of people and forest fires. So all the way I ran to see if anyone should be caught in the fire, yet.”

Wolfe’s gun pointed to the floor. His hand held it rather limply. “Yuh let yuhself in fur some trouble, kid,” he growled. “Yuh shoulda kep’ on yer own block.”

He turned and walked to the front of the cave. Benny sighed with relief. But where was Westy? Westy!

Just then he heard a faint scraping noise. He stiffened. A voice came from somewhere, faintly. Benny peered frantically around—ran; reached the edge of the pit as it came again.

“Benny!” Westy’s voice called in a muffled whisper. “I’m in here—in the pit! There’s a snake— I’ve held it off—tried to bury it...”

Wolfe was coming back again.

Benny did a sort of hop, skip and jump to cover up the confusion. “Say,” he said, brightly, “it’s kind of dark here, Mister. Maybe you should let me visit your parlor.”

Wolfe walked to the front again and Benny followed with beating heart. Westy needed help. How was he, Benny Stein, to give it to him? He must think of some way. He *would* think of some way, surely.

Wolfe stood near the opening. Benny could smell smoke there, too. “It shouldn’t be another forest fire here?” he asked the bandit.

“I did it,” Wolfe answered calmly. “I did it to keep the bulls from getting here.”

Benny drew up. Sort of inside himself. Westy, then, had jumped down there to hide from the man. Something had to be done. He had a thought and laughed, his thin, falsetto laugh. “Say, Mister,” he said, “I should laugh when I think. You thought I was a bear or something, huh? Your gun it was point—it would shoot.”

“It would,” Wolfe said grimly.

“So,” Benny commented. “It’s a great thing by the ammunition business, my Papa says. I have never had a gun in my hands in my life and it’s fourteen years old I am!”

Westy! What danger was he in? That question pounded in his brain while he bravely awaited Wolfe’s reaction to his chatter.



BEFORE WOLFE WAS AWARE OF IT, BENNY HAD DEFTLY REMOVED  
THE GUN.

“Is it dangerous yet, Mister, to hold a gun?”

“Hey,” Wolfe growled, “I wish yuh’d kep’ out o’ here. What’ll I do if we

have any fireworks?”

“Once I should like to see a real gun in my hand,” Benny went on, ignoring Wolfe’s evident annoyance. “To the scouts by my patrol I could laugh ha-ha that it’s a real gun I had and not a popgun.”

Wolfe stood there stubbornly. Benny felt a bit panicky. What was he to do? Westy was waiting. All that time, Westy was waiting.

He kept up his cheerful chatter, hardly realizing what he was saying. Wolfe’s gun was in his right pocket, the butt of it sticking up. Benny’s moment had come.

He laughed again shrilly. Before Wolfe was aware of it, Benny had deftly removed the gun from his pocket. On two agile feet the tenderfoot scout had backed away from the bandit and pointed the gun at him—laughing.

“Say,” Benny shouted, “it’s like a bandit I hold you up, huh? Before even you know it I have your gun. Now I’m making a big noise like it’s hands up!”

## CHAPTER XXXII

### STRATEGY

Wolfe smiled faintly. Benny held the gun with a firm, steady grip, but his fingers were like ice. He went back step by step toward the hall of the cave.

Little voices were whispering inside his head. They were telling him not to look frightened, not to let Wolfe think he was in earnest. He must laugh, make believe—anything except allow the man one suspicion that the whole thing was deadly real.

“Yuh better lay that down,” Wolfe said at length.

“Hah,” Benny said. “It’s braver I get every minute I hold it.”

He was standing in the hall, his eyes blazing with determination. The burning trees outside were roaring and falling to the ground. What should he do? Wait for Warde and the troopers? It might be too late. Westy was in danger.

“Say, Mister,” Benny said, desperately. “Will you let me see how I can hit something. Just once. I’ll go by the back way and come right back!” Poor Benny wondered if his argument sounded weak and flat. He wondered if Wolfe was aware of the trick he was trying to play. Benny forced a smile to his lips. “Just once!” he shrieked to Wolfe.

He turned on his heel and ran through the narrow hall. Into the back he went, stumbling along in the darkness. Was Wolfe coming? The blood was beating too rapidly in his ears for him to hear.

No sound was coming from the pit. Where was it? He could hardly see. Was he too late? He tripped and almost fell headlong into the opening. Quickly he caught hold of the soggy earth with his free hand.

“Westy!” he called fearfully, yet softly.

“Oh, Benny!” Westy breathed. “He’s wriggling through. If I could kill him. If I had...”

“Here, Westy, quick!” Benny answered. “It’s *his* gun I’m throwing you. Catch it!” He let it drop out of his hand.

Benny sat still. Wolfe came through the hall. He stood there silently. “What’s the matter?” he asked. “Did I hear yuh callin’ me?”

“Oi!” Benny wailed in his most tragic voice, “it’s mad at me you’ll be, Mister. In such a darkness I could hardly see and I tripped. The gun it fell out of my hand and dropped into a big hole by here. Almost I fell in it myself.”

Wolfe muttered angrily and walked over to Benny. “I told yuh not to bother me,” he said. “I shoul da grabbed it on yuh, only I thought yuh had rats



in yuh garret!”

A shot sounded in the pit. Wolfe started—drew back. Benny stood up. “Say!” he exclaimed innocently. “It’s maybe somebody down there.”

“Up with ’em, Wolfe!” Westy’s voice commanded. His tones were so deep that Benny hardly recognized them.

When he recovered from his astonishment he saw Wolfe hastily beating a retreat through the passageway, out the back entrance. Benny felt like shouting for joy. Wolfe had thought Westy a trooper.

“Is the snake dead already, Westy?” Benny called out anxiously.

“Yes, thank goodness,” Westy answered. “Has *he* gone?”

“It’s O.K. by me,” Benny returned, “if he doesn’t come back. It’s a big forest fire in the woods. He might run back.”

“Nah,” Westy said. “There’s not much of a chance.” He flashed the light in Benny’s face.

“Say,” Benny said, “it’s far enough down you are yet.”

“If you could throw me something to hold on to,” Westy said. “Pull me up that way. I’ve got this satchel, too, you know.”

“Oi,” Benny said, happily. “So glad I am now Jerry gets his reward!” He considered Westy’s plight a moment. “I’ll make a rope by my clothes, Westy,” he said, cheerfully. “My trousers and my blouse, they’re strong, like iron.” He was busily twisting his clothes into a makeshift rope.

“Some scout you are, Ben!” Westy called. “You had to come up here anyhow, didn’t you? You little rascal!”

“Sh!” Benny silenced him. “It’s enough. Wait till you get up by me.” He threw his makeshift rope over to Westy and dug his heels into the soft, damp ground and pulled.

Westy’s head bobbed up above the pit. Then his arms and shoulders. Benny grabbed him, helped put him on his feet. For a second they stood together, overjoyed.

Voices were outside. Many voices. Then someone came calling through the passageway, “Westy! Benny!”

It was Warde!

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### SOMETHING ACCOMPLISHED

As they leaped out to greet him and flashed the light in his face, Warde looked at the two boys, bewildered for the moment.

“So surprised you are, we’re not dead, huh?” Benny asked.

“Jiminy!” Warde breathed. “I thought something had happened. I didn’t hear a sound.”

“Where’s Wolfe?” Westy asked.

“A tree fell on him right below,” Warde answered. “We saw him as we came down.”

“Came down!” Westy repeated.

“Yes,” Warde said. “Everything’s burning. We had to crawl all the way up the hill and then down again to escape it. We wouldn’t have been here yet if he had set fire to that side, too.”

“It’s terrible such nice trees he should burn,” Benny said. “Never did I talk to a man so quiet as Wolfe.”

“How did you do it, Ben?” Westy asked, breathlessly.

“Say,” Benny explained modestly, “so nervous I was I laughed hysterical to keep from crying yet. And so punk an imitation I was that Wolfe told me to my face I was crazy. That’s the reason he should have let me take the gun from him.”

“Some nerve!” Ben said, admiringly.

The troopers came in and Westy handed over the money to them. He gave them Jerry’s name and told them that he was the one to get the reward.

They waited until the fire died down. No breeze was blowing and as the afternoon waned peace settled over the smoking, smouldering hill. Through the charred ruins, the scouts made their way, tired but happy.

The Condons were joyful—Jerry was coming around nicely. “He ain’t never a-goin’ ter leave us no more,” Mr. Condon said, happily. “He sez he’s goin’ ter git out and work ter git a farm tergether fer us so’s we kin git out o’ here.”

Mrs. Condon smiled her approval. “Mrs. Clement is feeling right badly,” she said. “She just got word that Jake Martin, that bad bandit, was her own son. I feel purty sorry fer her now, even though she wuz mean sometimes. She will hev it though that Jerry took the money and started Jake off wrong with the injury.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that any more,” Westy said. “I always say things

have a way of working out.”

Mrs. Condon smiled. “I think so, too,” she said. “Jerry, he sez when he gits well he’ll chop the willer tree down so’s Mrs. Clement’ll forgit about her grievances.”

“Where is that willow tree?” Westy asked, with interest.

“On the right hand side of the road,” Mrs. Condon answered. “Yer can’t miss it. It’s a right purty tree.”

The boys had to promise to come back for dinner the next day. “It’ll be a reg’lar home-comin’ affair,” Mr. Condon explained. “In honor o’ Jerry and in honor o’ the best boy scouts in the country. Yer brought him hum, ’n I’ll never forgit.”

Again on the trail. They were happy—happy that they had accomplished something for someone. Happy that they were alive after such experiences. Westy drew a deep breath and exhaled luxuriously. “Gee whiz,” he sighed with another intake, “how I wanted to breathe up there!”

“So,” Benny commented. “How should you keep alive?”

“It was terrible,” Westy said. “I don’t want to think of it any more. I never waited so long in my life.”

Benny walked on ahead.

“I know,” Warde said, sympathetically. “But, jiminy, I have to laugh when I think of Benny. To think everyone was scared to death of Wolfe—even the troopers. And Benny went up there and put it all over him.”

Westy smiled proudly. “I guess you’ll believe me now,” he said. “I think that classes in scouting are states of mind, sort of. A tenderfoot may think faster than a first-class scout. And I know plenty of first-class scouts who ought to be tenderfeet.”

“Yes,” Warde laughed. “Is that meant for me?”

“No,” Westy answered. “Not you particularly. Myself included. Gee, lots of scouts could learn a lesson from that one stunt of Ben’s!”

Hearing their voices in discussion, Benny walked back. “It’s not arguing already, is it?” he asked. “Everything should be so happy. Tomorrow it’s a nice dinner we’ll eat at the Condons’. And Jerry....”

“That makes me think, Wes,” Warde interrupted. “Why did you ask Mrs. Condon about that willow?”

“Now you’ve asked me something,” Westy answered, enigmatically.

## CHAPTER XXXIV WESTY KEEPS A DATE

Westy routed the two boys out of bed next morning. "We're starting early," he announced.

"What, again?" Warde complained.

"Sure," Westy said. "I've got a date three hours before we go to Condons'."

"What's that got to do with Benny and me," Warde asked, curling up on the foot of his cot.

"I want you all to be in on it," he answered. "It may be a surprise and maybe it won't."

"Say," Benny said, sleepily. "Tomorrow we go home. It's not one morning yet we're here I don't get up like the chickens."

"You can sleep all the way home in the car," Westy teased. "That'll be a nice, long sleep."

"After dark caves—not," Benny said. "I should look at the sun now and the daylight."

"That's why I got you up," Westy laughed. "To look at the sunlight."

"Temple Camp was never like this," Warde said, hopelessly.

Shortly after eight o'clock, Westy, spade in hand, was on his way. Benny and Warde followed like lambs in sleepy silence.

"Where is this date?" Warde asked curiously. They were well along the trail.

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," Westy answered.

"It's maybe a gold mine he wants to dig," Benny said. "By Westy nothing should surprise me."

"Nothing, is right," Warde agreed. "Only that we have to get out of bed for the surprise."

Westy laughed. "Talking of gold mines and surprises, won't Jerry be happy to get that reward from the bank!"

"Oh, boy," Warde said. "It'll knock him off his feet. I know it would knock me if I was getting it."

"Well," Westy said, "Jerry'll be able to do a whole lot with that money. They need it. They're deserving of it too. Gee, I think he's one fine fellow. I'm glad I felt that way about him from the start. I knew he was all right."

"He sure is," Warde agreed. "He's a fellow you feel like helping somehow. He's so nice and gentle. Jiminy, I sure like him!"

“So do I,” Westy said. “That’s why I’ve got this date. I’d like to see Jerry squared with the whole world,” he added as they walked out of the gorge.

Instead of crossing the fields to the cabin, Westy turned the other way, toward Milltown. Then they came to the road and walked on. All the while Westy kept watching the trees, majestically arching the narrow road.

Finally he stopped. Benny and Warde stopped too. “This is it,” he announced. “The willow tree!”

“Well,” Warde said. “What are you going to do? Cut it down for Mrs. Clement?”

“Watch me,” Westy answered. “You two sit down.” He flung his hat away, off on the grass. Then he walked leisurely around the tree, examining it closely, feeling of the bark and sounding it.

Benny and Warde watched him amusedly. They sat on the grass, legs doubled and knees drawn chinward. “This isn’t so bad,” Warde remarked. “I don’t mind as long as I don’t have to work. I love to look on.”

“You and Ben were born tired,” Westy flung at them over his shoulder, as he attacked the ground under the tree with his spade.

“So this is the date, huh?” Warde asked.

“Yep,” Westy answered. “It’s an uncertain one, but there’s no harm trying.” He went on digging, circling the trunk. Then he sat down and scooped out the dirt with his hands. “It couldn’t have sunk farther than that in fifty years’ time,” Westy said, more to himself than to his watchers. “I’m sure of it.”

“So am I,” Warde said. “You sound like a regular Sherlock.”

“I wish I were,” Westy returned. “I wouldn’t go chasing all around like this if I had a Sherlock’s brain.”

“Maybe Benny and I could supply an idea,” Warde said. “Tell us the secret.”

“I will if it doesn’t show up soon,” Westy answered. He took up his spade again and dug out toward the road. Little by little a miniature embankment piled up. Still no success. Westy looked around and up the tree.

“We shouldn’t be late for dinner,” Benny said. “I forget already that besides beans there’s other food yet.”

Westy said nothing, but looked up the tree. Warde laughed. “You’ll know every leaf on that tree, Wes,” he said.

Westy looked at him and smiled. “You gave me an idea, Warde,” he said, “just saying that.”

“I’m good for something,” Warde said. “Will you tell us your idea?”

Westy climbed the tree. “Sure,” he answered, as he reached the level of the first limb, “I’m looking for the same thing up here that I looked for down below.”

“The same to you,” Benny laughed.

It was good to hear them laugh after the days of rain, the nights of mystery. No wonder they felt joyful. The sun shone down, bright and clear, and the crickets serenaded a lovely summer morning.

“It shouldn’t be such a bad place,” Benny said. “Just because we’re going to leave I like it. Only the cave I don’t want to see again. The rest of the trail I like.”

“So do I,” Warde agreed. “The brook and through the gorge—it must have been swell when the Indians came here. Now we know it’s true about the cave. Mr. Condon knows something when he says it’s haunted. It seems everyone that goes there has hard luck.”

“Even snakes,” Benny added. “Hard luck they should have.”

Westy laughed from up in the tree. “If at first....

“Did you find your idea?” Warde asked, jumping to his feet. Benny did likewise.

“Yep,” Westy answered. “It was nicely hidden in a crotch under this limb.”

“Do we hear about it now?” Warde persisted.

“When we get to Condons’,” Westy answered.

He clambered down, stuffing something into the front of his blouse.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Just before they reached the cabin, Westy paused. "You go over to Mrs. Clement's, Warde," he said. "Tell her to come right over. If Mr. Clement is there, tell him to come too."

Jerry called to Benny and Westy from the bedroom. He was feeling well enough to sit up and smiled a welcome as the scouts entered the room. "Say," he said, "I had a telegram from the City Bank this morning. A reward of five thousand for the money and the apprehension of Wolfe, they mentioned. The check is on the way!"

Westy pretended to look surprised. "Gee whiz," he said. "That's fine!"

Mrs. Condon came in and smiled her appreciation. "I can't say anything, boys," she said with a catch in her voice; "I'll jest hev ter let Jerry do my talkin'."

"You betcha I'll talk," Jerry said, smiling. "This here Westy boy tries ter look like he don't know the sun's shinin'. Jest the same he's earned half o' that reward."

"No such thing," Westy said, coloring. "You get all the credit for that, Jerry. You're deserving of it."

"Who found that money up there and hid in the pit ter keep from losin' it?" Jerry asked.

"Well," Westy answered. "If you hadn't told me of Wolfe, I wouldn't have known it. So you can't get out of it. Benny, too, he deserves some credit."

"Betcha," Jerry agreed. "You're both entitled to a share."

Westy shook his head. "It wouldn't be fair," he said. "In the first place I thought you were Wolfe, and in the second place we're boy scouts and aren't supposed to be always looking for rewards and things."

Mr. Condon came in at this juncture. "Seems the only way we kin make these youngsters share in the reward is ter feed 'em up good fer dinner."

"That's talking, Mr. Condon," Westy said. He looked at Benny, then over to Jerry. "You know what," he said. "I don't care a gosh hang about the reward. And I'm glad everything happened the way it did. Not only for you and your father and mother, but for me."

"Everyone thought I couldn't make a scout out of Benny—I know they thought it. Even Warde. Well, I didn't make a scout of him. I wouldn't give myself the credit. But you did, Jerry, indirectly sort of; you made a scout of Benny. You and your mother and father."

“Gee whiz, I suppose I sound like a movie hero or something, but honestly you did something for Benny that all the rewards in the world couldn’t do. And at the same time you did it for me because I believed he’d be aces high and no one else thought so. So that’s my reward. Benny’ll get his up at Temple Camp. Before Thanksgiving comes he’ll be a first-class scout.”

“Sure, he will,” Jerry said. “If yer want me to, I’ll write to yer scoutmaster. I’ll tell him the whole story and recommend Benny as high as our Hills.”

“Will you!” Westy exclaimed, delightedly. “Gee whiz, that’ll be great.”

“Say,” Benny said, “under my hair I’m red with blushing. Did you hear that noise, Westy?”

“No,” Westy answered, turning to him. “What was it?”

“By my blouse,” Benny answered, smiling. “Two buttons came off, so chesty I’m getting.”

In the midst of their laughter, Warde came in. Mr. and Mrs. Clement followed. “Here they are, Wes,” Warde said. “Now what’s the big surprise you’re offering? You’d think it was Christmas.”

Westy smiled and nodded. “It’s better than Christmas,” he said. “I bet you’ll all say so.” He made Mrs. Condon sit down. “Hold your apron,” he said to her. “I’ll put something in it.”

Mrs. Condon did as she was told. Westy unfastened his blouse—held it open. A little pile of crumpled bills dropped into the apron. Then Westy delved farther into his blouse and brought forth a little ball of white paper, also crumpled.

He smoothed it out and went over to Mr. and Mrs. Clement, holding it before them. Mrs. Clement gasped audibly. “The deed!” she exclaimed. “W-w-where did you find it—the money, too?”

“The willow tree,” Westy answered. “Near the top, under a limb and in a crotch.”



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### REVERIE

“Jiminy,” Warde said, that night. “This is what I call the perfect end of an imperfect week.”

“I shouldn’t believe it only I saw it with my own eyes,” Benny said. “It’s better than movies with Westy.”

“What have I got to do with it?” Westy asked.

“You ask me!” Benny returned. “I should know why such things happen by you! Ghost and rattlesnakes—wherever they are you find them.”

“The only thing to spoil our last night is rain,” Warde said.

“Don’t think of it,” Westy said. “It’s a little misty but I don’t think it’ll amount to anything. Anyhow, we should worry. Tomorrow night you’ll be home in your own bed, Benny will be in his and I’ll be in mine.” His voice trailed off in the darkness.

They huddled around the camp fire—their last night in the Berkshire Hills. An owl hooted its eerie cry somewhere off in the distance. The muffled hum of night creatures floated hazily about them. And the brook babbled happily on its way.

No longer did it hide the secret of the trail. No longer did it gurgle its mysteries to the whispering winds. The boulders had fallen. Fate had torn the cloak from the Hills. The Trail was bared to mankind.

They sat silently, feeling the spell of it all. Had the Indians felt that same spell? Westy wondered. Perhaps, long centuries ago, they too kept vigil at their camp fire.

Westy wished he could know if that same owl hooted in the distance then? Every tree bending its boughs in the gentle breeze, beckoned to his imagination. They seemed to be the departed Indians come back to look upon their old trail once more. He felt that the new highway out there, the new trail, could hold no charms for the once savage red men.

The streams and the mountain forests, the grass-grown trail—all these things they loved. And they had come back on phantom feet to tread the trail once more.

On a moonless night and under the starlit skies they could wander about unseen. And those who had been so cruelly slain on Haunted Hill, perhaps some bright night they would leave the accursed cave and return to the Land of Good Spirits.

Westy’s mind rambled on. The trees seemed cloaked in ghastly white

robes, as he looked. Benny shifted to keep from falling asleep. Warde yawned audibly.

Westy started out of his nocturnal reveries. He heard no sound but he felt the presence of something—someone. Somehow, he did not want to turn around for fear he'd see it.

He tried to beckon Warde and Benny but they paid no attention to him. They just sat stupidly, gazing into the fire.

He coughed. No look from either of them. He made a smacking noise with his mouth. Benny's eyes were half closed. Westy shifted his feet about noisily. Warde yawned again.

Then Warde started; held his mouth halfway open and stared. He must have pinched Benny for that near-sleeping scout sat up instantly, staring too. Westy turned around quickly.

A sort of misty shadow moved in between the trees, at the entrance to the grove. Even as the boys stared, it moved again. Came nearer to them. Nearer.

Three hearts missed a beat as it stepped out of the darkness and into the radius of the firelight. They looked up simultaneously.

Mr. Hollister!

He stood there smiling. Then he laughed at their obvious fright. "It's I, all right," he said, reassuringly. "I wonder if you could accommodate one more camper tonight? I could sleep on a picket fence."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### SOUVENIR

They were homeward bound before seven o'clock the next morning. Westy was entertaining Mr. Hollister with a detailed account of the week's events.

"Well, Benny," Mr. Hollister said, "I hear good reports of you. After such a strenuous week it's a wonder you haven't a broken leg or something worse. You're lucky not to be carrying home any souvenirs of that kind."

"Say," Benny said, "I'm good and healthy with all the excitement what we had. But souvenirs—hah! Do you think I should come home without one souvenir? After such a fright like I had?"

"Do you mean you have a souvenir, Ben?" Westy asked.

"Hah! Why not?" Benny answered. "Until I die I shouldn't lose it. It's more than a souvenir. It's a remembrance how I wasn't a dumb scout no more. I made it a present to myself."

"That sounds interesting," Mr. Hollister said.

"What is this wonderful souvenir or remembrance as you call it?"

Benny leaned over and opened his bag. He fumbled about for a few minutes, then drew forth a revolver and handed it over to Mr. Hollister. "The bullets I emptied out by the brook," he said.

"It belonged to Wolfe," Westy told Mr. Hollister. "Benny threw it to me and I shot the snake with it."

"You see!" Benny exclaimed proudly. "That's why I keep it. It tells a story."

"That's quite a souvenir," Mr. Hollister said. "Perhaps, though, its earlier history would not have been in such good interests as it served later for you and Westy."

"It had a good ending," Benny said, "so what's the difference!"

"There's a whole lot in that," Westy agreed.

"It sort of redeemed itself. Is that it?" Mr. Hollister asked.

"Yes, sort of," Westy answered. "It put Benny on his feet like. Made him brave. Not that he wasn't brave before. It just made him braver to know that he was big enough to defend himself and me, too!"

"I guess that was it," Mr. Hollister said, handing it back to Benny.

They drove on to the ferry. A hot-dog and ice-cream boy came around calling out his goods in a raucous voice. "C'mon," Warde said. "Me for a hot dog and an eskimo pie. What do you say?" He stepped out of the car.

"I'm right with you," Westy said, emphatically. "C'mon, Ben!"

Benny slipped his precious souvenir in his right coat pocket and dashed out after Westy. They cornered the hot-dog boy and came away with their hands full.

They strolled around the deck, munching the savory things. The right deck forward was devoid of passengers and Warde made a leap toward it, perching himself upon the rail. Westy and Benny did likewise.

The river was calm, a gentle swell lapping the side of the boat. The sun glistened down, flecking the surface a golden green. A motor boat came racing up and passed them. A rowboat with a lone fisherman sitting in it rocked upon the water.

The tide was running out. The ferryboat drifted with it for a little way before heading her course toward the opposite shore. Roll in hand, with the hot dog peeping through, Benny watched the water.

“When I look by that water, Westy,” he remarked, “I say to myself that never can I swim. So deep it seems and heavy I get frightened already. Always it makes me think I can’t be a good scout yet, till water don’t frighten me.”

“Take it easy, kid,” Westy said, between bites. “It’s the thoughts of it. That’s all. Once you get in the water and your legs get going, the rest is easy.”

“How easy to say, Westy!” Benny said. “To you, a good swimmer, it’s nothing. But to me—hah! I should learn first to float in heavy water.”

Benny moved his right hand in a sweeping gesture. It was to express utter contempt for himself and his inability to swim.

Bringing his arm back to its natural position, it brushed by his pocket and tipped it. The gun, his precious souvenir, slipped out.

It cut through the water and sank out of sight. Benny stared. Then he pushed himself around on the rail, facing the water.

Without a cry he jumped in.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII MAN OVERBOARD

At that moment the ferryboat turned against the tide, heading her course for the opposite shore. It all happened so quickly that neither Westy or Warde cried out. Then the boat swerved.

Westy ran to the stern, crying, "*Man overboard!*" Warde ran to his father. Passengers were screaming and running hither and thither. Westy poised on the stern rail and leaped into the water.

The boat had not yet stopped. Benny was nowhere to be seen. Had the paddle wheel caught him? Westy swam about furiously, straining his eyes above the spray to catch a glimpse of a black head.

The boat was still turning. Why didn't it stop? Didn't they know Benny was drowning—might be caught beneath the ponderous thing?

In desperation, Westy called. Then he realized that he could not be heard above the drumming noise of the wheel. Passengers were hanging over the rails, watching anxiously. They were calling something to him. He could not hear.

Did they see Benny? Westy lifted his head up and looked. No sign of him. Surely, if he had drowned he would have come up, once at least. He would have called.

Then Westy remembered Benny's words of only a minute ago. How frightened he was at the sight of deep, green water! Why, he must have fainted—opened his mouth when he struck the water!

Benny faint? Westy would not believe it. He was sure of Benny and knew that he wouldn't lose his head like that. He swam up alongside the prow. The boat had stopped. Someone threw a life preserver overboard. Then another one hit the water.

They floated along like two dead things. What good were they now? He couldn't find Benny. He shuddered at the thought, and he swam around to the left side, missing not one wave.

Frantically, he neared the left stern rail. About fifty feet from the boat he saw something buoyantly skimming the waves. What was it? His heart pounded the question.

He dove into the next swell and came up, using an overhand stroke. He could make it faster. He dove into another swell and found Benny resting leisurely upon it when he came up.

"Well, I'll be...." Westy began.

“Say, Westy!” Benny cried delightedly, “can I float in heavy water! *Look, Westy!* A surprise! Can I swim—hah! Look!”

Westy looked on, mute with astonishment. Benny turned over on his stomach and struck out. He went a few strokes, turned on his back again and laughed.

“You should say hurrah!” he shouted. “You should laugh that I swim and float so quick in heavy water. Instead you look dumb!”

“I....” Westy tried to say.

“It’s a surprise by me, even,” he explained. “I get crazy when I see my souvenir drop overboard. Without brains I just drop in after it to get it. What happens? I don’t find it. I come up already, I’m so scared. I remember what you said about legs, and I kicked. Hah! Right away I swim!”

Westy grabbed hold of him and towed him back. “Didn’t you know I’d be scared?” Westy asked. “Why didn’t you call?”

“I was so surprised I couldn’t speak, Westy,” he answered, contritely. “Anyhow I knew you’d come.”

“You’re a corker, Ben,” Westy said. “A plain, every-day corker.”

The passengers helped them up on deck, hailing them like heroes. The boat started again. Dripping, they walked to Mr. Hollister’s car.

“Can you beat him?” Westy asked Mr. Hollister.

“I don’t think so,” Mr. Hollister said. “It did give me a scare.”

“Can you imagine me, then!” Westy exclaimed. “I thought surely he had gone. After the night in the brook and the day on the hill, I thought he’d had all the excitement he could stand.” He stood outside the car shaking his head. The water ran off his clothes and body, forming a little pool about his feet.

Benny was inside the car, curtains drawn, getting into dry clothes. “It’s no use,” he called out, “every excitement what happened to me this week was good luck. I learn pathfinding in the dark, chasing a ghost. I floated without water wings in the brook. And by the Haunted Hill I learned to track and save Westy. Now in two minutes I swim already.”

“You’re an A-1 scout, Ben,” Warde shouted in.

“Hah!” Benny laughed. “By me it’s a record, Warde,” he answered. “In deep water....”

“Say,” Westy called, “come out here, you pest! I want to get in there and dress. I’m shivering!”

Benny’s answer could not be heard above the noise. The ferryboat was making fast to her moorings.

THE END

[The end of *Westy Martin on the Old Indian Trail* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]