

**TOM SLADE  
AT BEAR MOUNTAIN**

**PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH**

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# TOM SLADE AT BEAR MOUNTAIN



THE LITTLE CAR DELIVERED A MASTERLY ASSAULT UPON AN OAK TREE.

TOM SLADE  
AT BEAR MOUNTAIN

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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# TOM SLADE AT BEAR MOUNTAIN

## CHAPTER I

### SPRINGTIME AND AUNT MARTHA

I have often reflected that if it had not been for my long promised visit to my aunt up in Kingston, New York, these very extraordinary events which I purpose to narrate would never have occurred. To be sure, the silent stranger, as we called him, would still have pursued his grim course in the tragic business. But I would have been none the wiser for that. And Tom Slade would not have had the thrilling experience (dear to his adventurous heart) of participating in it.

I have found some amusement in speculating on just what might have happened if I had not stumbled into the prelude of that black drama; or rather, I should say, plunged my young friend headlong into it. For to tell you the truth I was either sitting in my wicker chair on the porch or playing golf while the whole strange affair was unfolding.

More particularly have I derived amusement from thinking how my Aunt Martha was, as one might say, remotely involved in the story. Not that she ever defied an outlaw or dug for buried treasure, for she is one of the mildest and sweetest old ladies that ever lived. But if she had not insisted on my making good the old, neglected promise to visit her in her little cottage in that quaint old city up the Hudson, why there would have been nobody to confront Slick Somers and send him sprawling to the ground. I am fond of telling my Aunt Martha that she was really the one who did that. Then she always lays down her knitting and tries gently to show me how my reasoning is defective.

Well, in any case, I started to spend a quiet, restful week with her, and I landed plunk in the middle of the eighteenth century. For here you shall find outlaws quite as bold as Jesse James or Robin Hood, and treasure too, if those are the kind of things you care about. And it all began with my trip to see Aunt Martha up in Kingston.

So I shall begin the tale of these adventures with a certain fair morning in the springtime when I set forth from my home in New Jersey and drove up the state road past the picturesque old water wheel at Arcola, and so on through Allendale and Ramsey to Suffern, which is just across the New York state line. North of this point the Ramapo Hills close in about the road and soon the highway takes a winding course among rugged mountains. Now the road is shadowed by precipitous heights, now a fair expanse of rolling country unfolds before the eye.

I think it must be in the neighborhood of Sloatsburg that the country to the east thickens into a mountainous wilderness. Beyond that flows the lordly Hudson whose general course I was following. I suppose those intervening wooded heights are what they call the Hudson Highlands. I knew that zigzagging in and out among those dense hills, this way and that, was the freakish boundary line of the Interstate Park, which forever sets a resolute limit against the sneaking advance of civilization.

As I glanced over that way I said to myself, "Master Progress, with all your fine claptrap, you may not enter here."

For in those magnificent wilds a holy circle has been drawn where trees and trails and wild flowers and all the beautiful furniture of nature are eternally safe. "That is a fine thing in this twentieth century turmoil," I reflected.

The birds were making a great chorus in the trees as I drove along, and I noticed a hawk poised in air above the woods. I wondered whether he was in fact within the limits of the reservation.

Then, suddenly, the spirit of the spring and the outdoors caught me and I was glad I was off on my visit. I was glad, particularly, because I had decided to drive to my destination. For you know my Aunt Martha had never in her life been in an automobile and I was thinking what an adventure it would be for her to have a ride at thirty miles an hour or so in the fragrant, blooming country.

Little I thought how that trip would mean real adventures—adventures dark and perilous. Little did I dream of the secret which lay hidden among those neighboring hills. Little did I dream of the dark story which the region to which Bear Mountain has given its romantic name, had to tell.

## CHAPTER II

### PAST AND PRESENT

There seemed to be no roads crossing the highway I was journeying on which might lead into that mountainous reservation. I knew of the popular entrance to it on the shore of the Hudson. But I wondered whether it might not be entered at some inland point in this neighborhood. The reader who is familiar with this region will bear with me for the sake of those who live at a distance from it.

On making inquiries at Tuxedo I learned that I could enter the tract (I cannot bring myself to call it a park) by a bridge over the Ramapo River several miles north of the village. I was told that this was the only way of entering the reservation, which information I later found to be incorrect. I know now an obscure and unfrequented route into those hills which you shall hear about later.

Soon I was over the bridge, and passing a little log shelter where a couple of state troopers loitered, I knew I was within the precincts of the region dear to scouts. My intention now was to cross the reservation to the Hudson and continue my journey to Kingston along the shore road up the river.

I doubt if there is any drive hereabouts more interesting and picturesque than this Seven Lakes Drive, as they call it, which takes one in and out among those clustering heights and skirts the shores of tranquil waters. Half hidden in the surrounding woodland may be seen camping shacks and cabins whose rustic architecture consorts well with the wild surroundings.

There were men painting rowboats as I drove along, and others repairing picturesquely rough structures by the wayside. The camping season had not yet opened and there was an alluring air of preparation as I drove along.

At Kanawauke Lakes, about a third of the distance to the Hudson, is the Boy Scout Headquarters, from which point, I understand, the various camps are provisioned and supervised. A lonely boy scout in a reefer jacket was lolling here; I did not ask him his business thereabouts so early in the spring; he seemed like the first robin to reach the north.

As I drove along the winding way, up hills and down, I noticed primitive country roads here and there, and I wondered where they could lead to in that hilly wilderness. Clearly they were not incidental to the making of the Park; they had an old country look about them, and I wondered to what remote habitations they might lead.

Not so much as a hamlet is there along that scenic course, but now and again I could see embowered in the woods or standing upon distant hillsides quaint little old-fashioned houses, the humble abodes of old settlers, I supposed. There could never have been any community life in that region, for these primitive abodes were secluded and widely scattered among the mountains.

Who were the hardy folk who had reared their simple homes so near to Nature's heart—so far removed from civilization? The thought of them suggested pioneers of old. For no cabin of a restless Daniel Boone in the depths of the Kentucky wilderness would seem more remote than these same little ramshackle houses must have been less than a score of years ago, before the dedication of this region to the revival of woods-lore and pathfinding. I wondered whether these original inhabitants or their descendants had been ousted in the interests of the reservation. That would seem a pity, I told myself. They must have been a bold, adventurous race.

It was quite interesting, the contrast between these dwellings as I saw them hidden here and there in the distance, and the consciously primitive architecture of those modern camps. I could not help it, my fancy wandered to the old life of the district, and I conjured up visions of the hardy adventurers who must once have lived there. What did they do for a living? There was no village life. There was one of these houses, two hundred years old I should say, standing a little distance back from the road, and against its unpainted, weather-beaten side rested a motorcycle. I suppose perhaps one of those clanking, decorated paragons of romance, a state trooper, lived there.

Well, I mused, you cannot make modern camping and outdoor life and all that anything like the life of real scouts and pioneers; you can't do it. The motorcycle sneaks in when you are not looking, they have machinery for making logs correctly rough, and when they are pressed for time they put up cabins in the glare of an arc light. You cannot link up the past with the present. The one is the one thing and the other is quite another, and there you are. But they are both very interesting, and the aggressiveness of one and traces of the other one were to be seen in this wild territory extending in from the Hudson Highlands.

Then suddenly, just as this historic name of Hudson Highlands was in my thoughts, I went rolling down-hill and around sweeping turns till the majestic river opened in full view before me. And soon I was skirting an extensive lawn where games are played, I suppose, and was making a circuitous approach to the picturesque rubble-stone building which is known as the Bear Mountain Inn. This is the neighborhood of Bear Mountain, one of those frowning giants that guards the noble river in its course. In popular

usage its name has been used for the whole region through which I had passed.

If I had been truly of the spirit of those hardy folk to whom I was pleased to attach so much romance and tradition I suppose I should have climbed the mountain or done something of that sort. But instead I fell back into the modern way and parking my car in front of the attractive Inn I went inside for a hearty luncheon.

## CHAPTER III

### A STRANGER

There were some scout officials lunching at the Inn; I suppose they had come up from the city. They wore khaki and ate chicken salad and talked about some Council or other; that and a new store-house. Not many others were lunching; it was too early in the season.

On my way out I stopped and asked these gentlemen if they could tell me anything about the history of that region. They expressed regret that they could not, but were able to advise me about the road I should take in continuing my journey northward. I learned that I would pass through West Point and so on over the scenic Storm King Highway up through Cornwall and on to Newburgh.

I was just pondering on how long it would take me to reach Kingston by this unpremeditated route when I noticed standing near my car the strangest looking man I have ever seen in my whole life. He looked queer enough where he stood, amid rural surroundings; how he would have impressed one if met with in the city it was amusing to contemplate.

He was, I think, the tallest man I have ever seen; tall and spare and rawboned. Yet, somehow, *tall* was not the word for him. *Long* would be a better word. And I later learned that this word *long* was commonly prefixed to his already romantic title. Long Buck Sanderson was the name he went by. He was quite old; I would have said seventy years at the least. He wore a fur cap very much the worse for age, and his face was as brown and wrinkled and leathery as an old dried-up cocoanut. Probably his height (though, as I have said, it was an impression rather of length than of height) was not less than six feet seven inches, and even so some of his original stature was lost by age.

He wore a corduroy jacket which might have done duty in pre-revolutionary days. I suppose it was once yellow; it was a sort of drab when I first saw it. I do not know what his dirt-colored trousers were made of, but it was not khaki; he and all that pertained to him were of the pre-khaki era.

He had a pointed nose and even this was deeply wrinkled. Somehow it gave me the impression of a fox, though I do not mean that there was anything suggestive of slyness in his expression. His old eyes were gray and of a shrewdness which only the wilderness can breed. He wore hanging about his neck a discolored old cartridge shell of a considerable size; why I do not know. But I later learned that with the aid of this ancient trophy he

could reproduce the voices of birds and beasts at will and fool them with his mimicry.

I could not repress the temptation to inspect rather frankly so strange a figure, and he, on his part, watched me with a kind of easy observation as I felt one of the front tires of my car to make sure that it was hard.

“She’s a-leakin’,” he said.

“No, she isn’t,” I said, “but she needs a little air.”

“She’s a-leakin’,” he repeated, unperturbed by my superior knowledge.

“All right, feel of it,” I laughed. “Come around here and feel of it.”

“I ain’t got no call to feel it,” he drawled; “I can hear it.”

“Standing there?” I laughed. “You must have better ears than I have.”

I went and stood beside him, in front of the car, and heard nothing.

“Hear it?” he asked.

“I certainly don’t,” I told him.

“Them ears o’ yourn is stopped up like a ole ground-hog hole,” he said.

“Thank you,” I said, and by way of closing the matter finally I stooped and listened at the tire valve. As sure as life there was a faint hissing there, a slow leak. I dare say at the rate of leakage that was going on the tire might have stood up till I reached Kingston, though I changed it then and there to be on the safe side. What astounded me was that this stranger had heard at ten or twelve feet that all but inaudible hissing which bespoke the slow emission of air out of the tire. It was nothing less than miraculous.

The stranger smiled, which multiplied the wrinkles about his firm old mouth. “Them ears o’ yourn is ’baout’s clear as a ole filled up skunk hole,” he drawled.

“First it was a ground-hog, then it was a skunk,” I complained good-humoredly.

He disregarded me entirely and moved about the car squinting at it as if it did not belong to me at all. I felt quite an outsider, the comrade of skunks and ground-hogs. He seemed to think I would wait till he completed his leisurely inspection.

“If I’d a had all wuz belongin’ ter me,” he observed carelessly, “I might o’ had one o’ them pesky contraptions.”

I answered with that insincere phrase which motorists are so fond of using to the uninitiated. “You’re very lucky not to have one,” I said: “they’re a lot of trouble.” And I smiled inwardly at the thought of his driving one. “You going my way?” I added.

“Yer ain’t goin’ by south road, mebbe?” he asked.

“South road; where is that?” I said.

“Yer know Hawkeye Spoke them youngsters got?”

“I don’t,” I said, “but it’s a bully good name all right. Hawkeye. I’m going north up to Kingston.”

“They got one of them cylums there?” he said.

“Cylums?” I queried.

“Fer youngsters.”

“Oh, asylum,” I said. “Yes, I dare say they have; it’s quite a city.”

He moved out of the way so that I might start, and then I noticed that he limped.

“Is South Hawkeye, or whatever you call it, far?” I asked him.

“Whatcher call far, mebbe no,” he said, which was not altogether enlightening. “Like on ten mile,” he added after a pause.

“Well,” I said, “that’s nothing if we can get there by a road. I can have you there in half an hour. Climb in if you’re going home. Where is South Hawkeye anyway? I’ll shoot you there quicker than you could foot it.”

He climbed in and sat beside me without any polite hesitation or superfluous acknowledgments. He glanced at me with a fixed, shrewd, inquiring gaze. I had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not so astonished at the wonderful speed and convenience of a car as at my use of the word *shoot*. I think it amused him. He looked me all over and I fancied he was of the opinion that such a person as myself couldn’t possibly *shoot*. He was right at that, for I never shot anything in my life except a game of pool.

## CHAPTER IV THE OBSCURE TRAIL

I had seen something of Interstate Park and now I was to have a glimpse of the old life which had been there before the region was set aside; the life and times which had caught my imagination.

Long Buck Sanderson lived in the country south of the road which is the main artery through the reservation. By his advice I returned along this road until we came again to Kanawauke Lakes where the Scout Headquarters are located. Here he directed me into a country road which ran south and we followed this for two or three miles till we came to a sort of hamlet with a tiny primitive schoolhouse and a horrible gasoline station. Of all the atrocities committed by the automobile, the killing of children, the maiming of pedestrians, this was the worst. It would have been the quaintest little hamlet in the world, but for that ungodly gas station. Sandyfield is the name on the schoolhouse.

This place was Buck Sanderson's market town. He lived in a remote suburb, as one might say, and that was at a place another couple of miles south called Rattlesnake Gulch. To reach Rattlesnake Gulch you must leave your car to the tender mercies of Sandyfield, but you could almost carry Sandyfield away in a Ford. From this sequestered hamlet you have to hit the trail southwest for Rattlesnake Gulch. There is really no visible trail most of the way. And Rattlesnake Gulch has no other habitations except the primitive cabin of Buck Sanderson; or rather, I should say, *had* none, for even that homely abode is no more.

We had almost reached Sandyfield and I was preparing to part from my chance acquaintance when it jumped into my head to ask him what he had meant by saying that if he had what really belonged to him he might own one of them contraptions—meaning an automobile.

"I reckon three thousand would buy one," he said.

"It would certainly buy a better one than mine," I observed. "Did somebody cheat you out of three thousand dollars?" I asked. For I suspected that he might have had some differences with the government in the matter of taking over his property in the public interest, though to be sure his real estate holdings in Rattlesnake Gulch could not have been worth three hundred dollars, to say nothing of three thousand. I should say three dollars would have been a fair price.

“You come ’long daown ter my cabin, mister,” he said, “and I’ll tell yer, an’ show yer. Mebbe yer kin tell me along ’baout my little gal. Guess yer a lawyer, mebbe, huh?”

I told him no, I was an author, but that if he had anything interesting to show or tell me, I would be glad to follow him. He did not vouchsafe me any further information but started down into the woods, and after making sure that my car would be safe I followed him.

I have often wondered why I did this upon such slight provocation and with a destination elsewhere. I suppose there is a little of the spirit of adventure left in me. For one thing the old man captivated me. Perhaps also the name of Rattlesnake Gulch fascinated me. At all events, I was in for it before I knew it and the machinery of the weirdest chain of happenings I have ever heard of was set going.

Our way led down through a dense wood and up a rugged height and through a wild pass between hills. Beyond this he showed me where the White Bar Trail crossed our path, that trail of the Boy Scouts which inscribes an erratic oblong course about the region and is met at intervals by spoke trails, as they are called, which converge in a rambling way toward Scout Headquarters at the lakes. Old Buck did not take the Scouts very seriously.

All the way he was telling me a queer story. “Me’n Mink lived daown here till he got possessed,” the old man said. “Mink, me’n him was pardners.”

“You mean dispossessed—put out?” I suggested.

“They can’t put me outer here nor him neither if he was here,” he said. “I got title ter my place ’long as I live. When I go it re-verts.”

“You mean it’s taken over as part of the reservation?”

“My little gal goes ter the Home then.”

“That’s your——”

“She’s my granddaughter, she’s a orphan, she’s my son’s little gal.”

“Well,” I laughed, “I think you’ll live to be a hundred.”

He made no comment upon that, only trudged along ahead of me through the woods, following a sort of path of least resistance, verging here and there the easiest way; one could hardly call it a trail.

“So that’s the way they do with the old settlers, hey?” I said. “Let them stay in their old homes as long as they live——”

“We can’t rent or sell though,” he said.

“Well, I shouldn’t think you’d want to,” I observed. “It’s just the idea of home, of the old homes of your people, that the state is thinking about, I suppose. But wouldn’t your granddaughter have the place when—if she were old enough, I mean?”

“She ain’t like ter be old enough,” said he. “Fifteen, that’s all she is.”

“You’re mighty lucky to have her,” I observed. He stopped short, quite disregarding my last remark and appeared to be listening. “Yer hear footsteps?” he asked me.

“No,” I laughed; “you know what you said about my ears. Why, did you hear someone?”

It seemed to me that the silence of the woods was as that of a grave. An unseen bird flitted from one limb to another, causing a quick rustling of leaves as if it had been startled. I could hear a drowsy locust humming his monotonous little solo. He ceased just as I began listening, which is an uncanny way they have.

“I guess nobody but you ever comes through here,” I said.

“Mink, he’s like to come back,” he said as he moved on.

“And how long since Mink went away?”

“That’s long ago; he got *possessed*—him.”

“Yes, tell me about that.”

## CHAPTER V

### RATTLESNAKE GULCH

“Mink Havers, me’n him was pardners,” old Buck said.

I tried to walk alongside him the better to hear his narrative but the way through the tangled thicket was so narrow that I was forced to follow. Now and again he would hold the brush apart so that I might pass through. Occasionally we were able to proceed side by side. He told me that in the fall an old trail was visible here. In the spring and summer when the foliage was thick, he followed it by instinct. He did not go back and forth often enough to make a permanent opening through the brush.

“Yes,” I encouraged, “and he got possessed?”

“Crazy like,” he said.

“Oh, yes.” I caught his meaning then.

“We was trappers and hunters ’round here, me’n Mink was. We got bear and deer aplenty in them days. Me’n him, we didn’t think nothin’ o’ hoofin’ it ter Newburgh in them days. More often I’d hoof it ter Suffern ’n’ go daown ter Noo York on the cars. I ain’t seed a train close by fer twenty year. Ole Haley Corbett, he was engineer them days. Reckon you didn’t guess when yer looked me over I’d ben in Noo York, now, did yer? I seed ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ in Fourteenth Street. Them wasn’ real bloodhounds; reckon I know a bloodhound when I see one. Hed two on ’em here jes’ after the war.”

“The Civil War, you mean?”

“Me, I wuz usual the one ter go ter Noo York with furs.”

“And I dare say you had a pretty good time when you went there, eh?”

“Ever ter Barnum’s Museum?” he asked.

“That was before my time,” I said.

“Me’n old Haley we was there nigh on every time I went daown with furs. Ever hear o’ Union Square?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Ever hear o’ Joe Pollock?”

“No, I never did. I suppose probably he’s dead.”

“Him it was I’d fetch furs to. He wouldn’ say nuthin’, I wouldn’ say nuthin’.”

“Why, was there anything wrong in it?” I asked.

“Ony huntin’ outer season, mebbe a few days or so.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Ain’t nuthin’ so wrong in that, I reckon?”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” I laughed.

“Watch out fer that poison ivy,” he said, as he pulled a bush aside for me to pass through.

Here, I thought, was a rather attractive picture of old times, refreshing to think of in these days of speeding autos and rushing trains. I pictured this hunter emerging from his wild haunts with his stock of furs and walking to Suffern to get on a train for New York. “Good old Erie Railroad,” I said to myself, “and you have romance and tradition too.” It must have been fine to travel on one of those old-time trains (probably the only train to go in the day) and to hobnob with the engineer and go to Barnum’s Museum with him. I fancied Long Buck Sanderson as rather a gay visitor to the metropolis in those days. The business men of that time were not all too scrupulous either. For how about Joe Pollock, who received furs not always legally procured. Well, well.

I asked him how long ago it was that his partner, Mink Havers, had become possessed. The nearest he could come to it was that it was twenty or thirty years, or perhaps more. He seemed to remember events and places better than dates.

“Well, and what happened to Mink?” I asked him.

“It was a heap o’ years ago leastways,” he said. “I come back from Noo York with three thousand dollars. These scout boy youngsters thinks hunters ain’t never got nuthin’ but their guns. I come back with three thousand dollars—a bit more, even. I wuz always the one ter go ter Noo York ’count o’ bein’ more cityfied; good at the bargaining.”

I smiled inwardly at the thought of his being “cityfied.”

“Yes, and then?” I encouraged.

He continued, “Me’n Mink wuz livin’ in the cabin, same as you’ll see, ’n’ he wuz waitin’ fer me ter come back. Barney Wythe’s gang, they wuz there ter see him—low, sneaky varmints they wuz, every one on ’em. He was the wust. Yer know the likes o’ that tribe—game wardens——”

“Oh,” I said.

“They wuz tellin’ him we had a heap o’ prohibit furs. They says they wuz watchin’ on us.”

I was tactful enough to refrain from asking him if this were true.

“They wuz turnin’ the cabin outer winders huntin’ ’n’ pawin’ roun’, ’n’ all the while me comin’ back from Noo York with three thousand dollars. That wuz pay fer three stocks, that wuz; Pollock he weren’t so regular, but honest, I’ll say that. He went ter Europe owin’ us close on a thousand, he did.”

It occurred to me that the enterprising Pollock could ill have afforded to cheat these distant associates.

“Well,” he continued, “they leaves the cabin mad ’n’ pricked up like a ole porkeypine. They says they’d ketch us yet ’n’ hev us behind bars. I comes up from Suffern ’n’ cuts through along Torne Brook, never knowin’! I heads it east up by Conklin Cabin ’n’ aroun’ Pine Meadow Mountain and ’long Woodtown Trail. There wuz Mink a-waitin’ fer me right where the trail goes by Green Swamp. He says, ‘Barney Wythe’s gang wuz ter the cabin ’n’ overhauled us complete; smoked out the place like we wuz woodchucks.’ I says, ‘Well, they didn’ get nuthin’.’ Mink says, ‘No, but they’re comin’ agin ’n’ we ain’t goin’ ter fetch that money ter the cabin, not yet, Buck,’ he says. ‘They’ll want the whole on it, they will, ter leave us free, they will.’

“Well, I told him he was right in that way of it and good he come out like he did ter meet me. ‘But,’ I says, ‘I ain’t goin’ ter leave it roun’ Green Swamp here, yer can lay ter that. We want it near where we can keep a bead on it,’ I says. Wasn’ I right?”

“I guess you were,” I said.

“Well,” he continued, “we talked ’baout different places and I says Conner’s well is the best place—near and safe and all growed over.”

Suddenly he grabbed me by the shoulder with his old, brown hand and for just a second I was a little fearful that he had lured me into a trap for some dark purpose. I suppose it was because the place was so remote and dense. But it was for only a second.

“Look over there,” he said; “there’s Conner’s well. Yer see that ole foundation? That’s Conner’s ole place, that is. That’s my cabin in there among the trees.”

We were emerging from an area of underbrush into the shelter of solemn woods. In my first glance I did not see all that he had pointed out, for my eyes caught sight of a young girl standing in the open door of a log cabin, watching us eagerly as we approached. It was like a shock, withdrawing my thoughts from those old scenes with hunters and game wardens and treasure brought from distant parts so long ago, and presenting in their stead this winsome little maid waiting for her old grandfather and guardian to come home.

## CHAPTER VI OUT OF THE PAST

Buck Sanderson did not interrupt his narrative to greet his young granddaughter. Before approaching the cabin he strolled into the woods and I followed him to the old foundation, which was, perhaps, a hundred yards or so from his abode.

A small house had evidently once stood there, though the fallen stonework bore no resemblance now to a foundation. Near-by was a clump of bush and as Buck pulled some of this aside I looked down into a dank, black hole. I can smell the damp earth of the place even now as I write. As I looked in I saw a long, thin, gray something on the masonry a yard or so below the surface. At first I thought it was a snake but it was only one of the myriad tentacles of root from a great elm which stood a few feet distant. I shuddered as I looked down into the darkness of that frightful place.

“So that’s where you hid it, eh?” I commented.

“That’s where Mink fetched it to,” the old man said. “He fetched it there whilst I goes on to our cabin. No sooner I lights a candle ’n’ gets off my city clothes than along comes Barney Wythe—that much of a narrow escape it wuz fur us—just like that. He says, ‘Yer back, Buck? I reckon yer made a passable good sell in Noo York.’ That much of a narrow squeak we had of it with them varmints! He says, ‘Yer got some money, huh?’

“Well, I tells him he can search the cabin; I tells him I wouldn’t talk with the likes o’ him. He asks where Mink is and I says he wuz about his business. Well, then, they must fuss aroun’, turnin’ things about agin. I lights my pipe ’n’ lets ’em search me. I says, ‘It’s a bad season fer game in my pockets, Barney; yer kin see fer yerself.’

“Well, they says they would wait fer Mink. So they waited suspicious like, ’n’ they waited ’n’ they waited ’n’ Mink never come. I knowed he wuz holdin’ off on account of ’em—he smelled ’em. I knowed our money wuz safe in that well. Pretty soon they puts their heads together whisperin’ ’n’ they goes away ’n’ says they’ll come again.”

Old Buck Sanderson looked straight at me with his shrewd old gray eyes and he said, “Pardner, I ain’t never seed them lyin’, thievin’, law hounds since. I ain’t never seed Mink since, leastways not so he could tell me nuthin’. I waited more’n two hours, then I goes out ter look fer Mink. There he wuz, lyin’ like dead, near that there ellum, with a big cut in his forehead. I carries him to our cabin ’n’ he comes to, ’n’ don’t remember nuthin’. After

that he was possessed. He was always huntin' fer the money. He don't know where he put it, that's what he says. He was plum, clean gone, crazy as a loon after that. 'Long 'baout a year after that, he wanders away 'n' I ain't seed or heerd nuthin' of him since."

He ceased and I glanced about the scene, unable for a moment or so to speak. "You searched in the well, of course?" I asked.

"Sure fer certain," says he. "But 'tweren't no need, fer them law hounds got it. They knocked Mink's senses out and got it. They got my pardner and they got our money. I jes' soon drop a game warden as a skunk. I calls 'em skunks but that ain't no way ter talk 'baout skunks—hey Junie? That ain't no way to talk 'baout them nice, little animals what I made yer a purty fur collar out of, now is it?"

The young girl had come running to him as we approached the cabin, and it was pretty to see how she clung to him as they walked.

"Junie ain't er goin' ter no Home along while ole Grandpa Buck is 'raoun', is she now? Junie, she knows more 'baout the woods 'n all them dum' fool scout boys put tergether. Ain't she a nice little girl—that's Junie."

It was a pretty picture; perhaps it was all the prettier because there was a shadow behind it. For old Buck Sanderson was not going to be in his old hunting ground much longer. He was going to another hunting ground—the Happy Hunting Ground, as the Indians called it. And what about little June Sanderson then?

## CHAPTER VII

### JUNE AND DECEMBER

It was now mid-afternoon and I could not linger at old Buck's cabin. But I sat upon the doorstep with him for a few minutes while he performed on that cartridge shell instrument of his. I actually saw him lure one of those noisy bluejays almost within reach of his arm, and I think he would have captured it if his granddaughter had not laughed aloud at my astonishment.

By using the shell in conjunction with a pebble he could reproduce the appalling sound of a rattlesnake. No rattlesnakes appeared, however. The girl assured me it was a "sure enough take off." I don't know; I have never heard a rattlesnake. I told her that if I ever heard that sound, even in church, I would run, which seemed greatly to amuse her. "Fraid cat!" she said, and added that there were "heaps and heaps and heaps" of rattlesnakes around there. I told her one small heap would be enough for me. Her innocent amusement at my tenderfoot quality was very pretty to see. And her buoyancy against the background of her old grandfather's lazy manner and drawling voice was very attractive.

I suspected she was right about the rattlesnakes. I have always associated rattlesnakes with hollows and gullies and impenetrable depths of thicket. Whenever you visit a neighborhood of weird and haunting wildness you will be told (by people who have not put it to the test) that there are rattlesnakes there. The rattlesnake seems to be a sort of symbol of the dark and forbidding spots in nature—gloomy fastnesses, dank caverns on mountainsides, and the like.

Be that as it might, this spot seemed to me the very ideal habitat of those dreadful reptiles. It derived its name not only from them, but from a small gulch which broke the woods and was all but hidden by a maze of interwoven brush which grew in the depth of that horrid place and luxuriantly overflowed its brink. You might step into this gaping trap of nature without knowing it.

Long Buck told me that once a brook had flowed through that overgrown hollow and that a time had been when he and his primitive neighbor Conner had got their water there. What a company they must have made in those old days—Buck and Mink Havers and Conner! What a life they must have led in that remote wilderness!

Buck's cabin was upon the brink of this gulch and by following its course (which as I said was now indicated by a ridge of overflowing brush)

you came to the area of scattered stone which had once been the foundation of Conner's cabin. Near to that, and somewhat included in the area of overgrowing thicket, was the black hole which had been Conner's well. It seemed unlikely that rattlesnakes would miss such a place. It was hard for me to believe that not so far distant the encircling White Bar Trail of the Boy Scouts crossed the invisible private trail of these lusty old settlers. Though to be sure the White Bar Trail is no boulevard.

Old Buck accompanied, or rather guided, me back to the hamlet, and June went along oblivious to crowding brush and prickly brambles. Once she really startled me by calling, "*Rattlesnakes!*" But she played the trick too much, as children will, and I became a model of courage, heedless of her warnings.

The last I saw of the two of them, they stood near my car where it was parked in a sort of alcove in the country road, and they made a very pretty picture—June and December. As I rode away I saw them return along the trail until their own familiar woodland again closed in about them. Then I was sorry I had not asked old Buck about the story of the girl's parents. I have never known where they lived nor how and when they died.

I had now, as they say, to go all around the mulberry bush again, or part way at least, and as I drove up what they call the Haverstraw road toward the headquarters lake (as I called it) the thought that was uppermost in my mind was that a lucky chance had put me in the way of meeting, and even visiting, one of the picturesque old settlers of that region.

As sure as I am sitting here writing, old Buck's rather dubious reminiscence of his former glory and his clashes with the authorities did not greatly interest me. Certainly I was not greatly prejudiced against him because he had circumvented one or another good regulation of the state, goodness knows how many years ago. I have yet to hear anybody denounce Robin Hood for his outlawry; I know that the modern world thinks only of his romance. A few bears or deer or wildcats more or less before I was born are not worrying me now.

But Long Buck Sanderson is one of my treasured memories. I confess that I could not help wondering whether this shrewd, hardy old woodsman had perhaps regarded the laws of civilization rather lightly; that would not necessarily conflict with a sturdy sense of private honor—the fine, crude honor of pioneers. As I drove along part of an old stanza came jumping into my head.

For why? Because the good old rule,  
Sufficeth them. The simple plan.  
That he shall take who has the power,  
And he shall keep who can.

And anyway, the most conspicuous thing about Long Buck Sanderson was his love for his little orphan granddaughter, and his concern for her when she should find herself alone in the world. So I think he could never have been very bad, any way you look at it....

## CHAPTER VIII

### TOM AND BRENT

I am now approaching the point of my withdrawal from this narrative to make way for the grand hero, Tom Slade. I think you know him. I take pleasure in setting down here that of all the crack-brained disciples of adventure he is positively the most hopeless. Brent Gaylong is not quite so bad, but bad enough.

I spent two very pleasant weeks with my Aunt Martha in Kingston and I took her driving here and there. I shall never forget the drive around the great Ashokan Reservoir nor the luncheon we had at the picturesque little Watson Hollow Inn. It was restful to be in company of a sweet old-fashioned lady like Aunt Martha. Why in goodness' name I had neglected her for so many years I can't imagine.

She told me that the old hunters who had lived back in the Catskills when she was a young girl in that same quaint little house, had been a rather questionable lot. It seemed that many of them carried on banditry as a sort of sideline. It was interesting to hear her talk of those old days and the wild surrounding country. I can't for the life of me guess why people always turn their thoughts to the Far West when they feel the need of trappers and bandits and such. In the Ramapo Hills south of Central Valley there lived not sixty years ago an outlaw band who robbed stage-coaches and buried their booty in the ground.

Well, the very first evening of my return to Bridgeboro up came Tom Slade and Brent Gaylong (whose folks have lately moved to town) and as we sat on the porch I told them in detail of my pleasant encounter with Long Buck Sanderson. They made a funny picture, those two, as they sat together in the swing seat, Tom in the khaki that he always wears in deference to his official connection with Temple Camp, and Brent, long and lanky, with his steel spectacles halfway down his nose. He placed them that way because I suppose it pleased him to have them thus absurdly adjusted while listening to a thrilling tale of adventure. He looked soberly receptive.

"Proceed with your narrative," he said.

So I proceeded with my narrative, and when I had finished Tom said, "That's all pretty good. But let me tell you one thing. I know more about these things than you do. I've met in with some shyster hunters in my camp work and I've met a lot of game wardens and rangers, too. You'll find game wardens a pretty decent set of men—straight and clean. If a man's going to

go in for graft he doesn't hit the woods—you can chalk that up on your score-board. They never took the old codger's money—no siree!"

"What do you know about game wardens in those old days?" I said. "You're only twenty-three years old. Those were rough, lawless times. These are the times of daily good turns."

"And three thousand dollars is a lot of money to come home with," said Tom.

"It's more than I ever came home with," said Brent.

"All right," said I, waxing interested in the point. "Let's say that Long Buck was wrong. Let's say that that gang——"

"They were no gang," Tom shot back at me; "they were there to protect the wild life—for you and for me!"

"For me too," said Brent.

"All right," I said, undaunted. "Let's say that Barney Wythe and his associates didn't knock Mink Havers on the head and get the money. *Where is the money, then?* It isn't there in the well. Where is it? What became of it?"

"Did you look under the Victrola when you were up there?" Brent asked soberly.

"How about Havers?" Tom suggested.

"You mean he put something over on his partner?" I shot back. "Let me tell you, if you can defend your game wardens, I can defend my woodsmen; they weren't that kind and you can chalk *that* up on your score-board."

"Maybe we don't know the whole story," Tom said. "Three thousand bucks was a lot——"

"Oh, it was payment for much stock and service, I suppose," I said. "I dare say those old hunters let their accounts run up. You don't think old Buck was a highwayman, do you? They had a lot of rugged honesty, that old race."

"Law one, a scout is trustworthy," said Brent.

"Then, now, and always," I added more seriously.

So then we all sat in silence, the two of them swinging in the seat.

"So there you are," I said. "I don't see that you've helped matters any, you've simply created a mystery."

"What could be nicer?" said Brent.

"If the officials didn't get their fists on the money, and if Mink Havers didn't get it (which of course he didn't), why, then, it's still up there somewhere."

"We'll go and get it," said Brent. "With my share I'm going to get a Ford sedan—don't try to talk me out of it, I always wanted a Ford sedan."

"Then, it's still up there," I said, with a complacent show of triumph.

No sooner were the words out of my mouth than I was sorry I had said them. For there sat Tom Slade staring at me as if seized by a sudden thought.

“Sure it’s up there,” he said. “But it won’t be, not when we get through.”

“*Good heavens*, you’re not going hunting for buried treasure?” I gasped. “I always knew you were a bug, but I never supposed you’d go in for the Captain Kidd stuff.”

“Have you got a couple of shovels you’re not using?” Brent asked.

“You’ll have to take off those spectacles first,” I said.

## CHAPTER IX

### END OF THE TRAIL

“Anyway, let’s go up and call on the old fellow,” said Tom. “I’d kinder like to see him. We can go in my flivver——”

“Speaking of rattles,” said Brent; “that is, rattlesnakes.”

“We don’t have to go way up to Tuxedo,” said Tom. “I’ve got a map of that region. We can shoot in at Sloatsburg. I bet that’ll let us right into the section you’re talking about. They’re building a dam in there; there’s going to be a new lake. I’ve been in that way a mile or so already, it’s a pretty punk road.”

“In that case we’ll go in your flivver,” I said. “That will have the advantage of making it unlikely that we’ll ever get there. I am not in favor of this trip. I’d like to show you my old settler but I don’t want to start anything.”

“Come ahead, we’ll bang up there,” said Tom.

I might have known it.

Now there *is* a way that you can get into the Interstate Park reservation by turning in at Sloatsburg. It was by some such route that Long Buck had entered that region on his memorable return from New York. But this route is so little known that even a state trooper in that very neighborhood told me he had never seen or heard of it.

That was the way we went in Tom’s flivver. We turned in at Sloatsburg and went in past what they call Burnt Sawmill Bridge. They are building a dam there now to flood the section west of Brundige Mountain, and by the time this chronicle is in your hands there will be a fine new lake there which I am afraid will swallow up the old cave below the mountain.

Pretty soon we hit into a road going southeast and went through about the most unfrequented country that ever a road traversed. Then we came to St Johns, which is a picturesque little church (I can’t imagine who attends it). The rest of the municipal furniture seems to consist of a girl, a house, a turtle, and four cows. Then we came to Sandyfield, approaching it from the west instead of from the north. This obscure route had taken us through about the loneliest section of country that I have ever known within a stone’s throw of civilization.

We parked the flivver exactly where I had parked my car, and I modestly resigned to Tom the task of piloting us through the woods. I was astonished at his skill in doing this. Like old Buck, he seemed to recognize a trail where

there was no trail, and at times he would be always looking to right and left trying to discover the path of least resistance. Now and then he asked me questions, and once or twice my memory came to his aid. It is wonderful what a scout and woodsman he is. As for Brent, he moved along soberly. I don't know whether his soberness is altogether a humorous pose; with his steel spectacles and his intentness on the pathfinding he seemed to me excruciatingly funny.

One familiar thing (trail signs, I think they call them) I did see, and I have thought of it often since. I plucked from a bush a little wisp of gingham that was fluttering like a tiny pennant in the breeze. No doubt it was torn from the simple dress of my little friend June Sanderson, perhaps upon that very trip when she and old Buck accompanied me back to Sandyfield. "We're on the right track," I said, waving it at Tom. But in a way we were not exactly upon the right track either.

"Look here, Tomasso," I said to Tom; "I don't want you to get into an argument with the old man. I don't want you to crack up game wardens. Above all, I don't want you to tell him that those fellows never got his money. He knows they did and that's enough."

"If it makes him happy to think they got his money, let him think so," said Brent. "He might be disappointed if he thought it was safe and secure now."

"Well, you mind what I say," I repeated to Tom. "You can never convince or change a person of his age; especially one of his type. We'll just make a little call. Barney Wythe got the money whether he got it or not and game wardens are varmints."

"Absolutely," said Brent.

But, indeed, there was no need to coach Tom in the matter of handling my old chance acquaintance. There was no need of my concern for the old man's feelings. I need not have troubled myself about respecting his sturdy prejudices. Indeed, there was no need of our following that obscure trail at all. For Long Buck Sanderson's cabin was closed up tight with a rough board nailed across the door. He had gone where there were no game wardens—or only good game wardens. And it mattered very little where his precious three thousand dollars were after all.

## CHAPTER X

### THE STORM BLOWS OVER

They told us at Sandyfield that old Buck had died of pneumonia and been buried somewhere near Mt. Ivy. As the old hunter had anticipated, and dreaded I think, June had been sent to an orphanage in the neighborhood of Haverstraw.

Sandyfield, it seemed, was independent of the reservation, notwithstanding that it was within its boundaries; it was part of the township of Haverstraw. I suppose that this fact operated in the choice of an asylum for the girl. I had an idea of hunting the place up and going to see her, but you know how it is—good intentions.

I was relieved to learn that old Buck had not been laid to rest in some potter's field but in a quiet little rural cemetery in the region which he knew so well. He was the last inhabitant of Rattlesnake Gulch.

"So that's that," I said, as we drove back down the state road. "I wish now that you could have seen him."

I don't suppose I would have gone to see him again myself, but now that I couldn't I felt that I would miss him.

"Well, there's one thing," Tom said. "I'm going up there to camp and hunt for that money."

"Treasure, you should call it," said Brent.

"Well, then, treasure," said Tom.

"And when it comes to using the right words," I said, "*nut* is the word to use for a treasure hunter. I've known you to do many reckless things, but until now I've never known you to make yourself ridiculous!"

He just drove along, lickety split, in his old Ford; I never was so shaken in my life.

"It's a stirring ride, isn't it?" said Brent, in his funny way. "Don't you feel all stirred up?"

"You're not in with me, then?" Tom asked.

"I? I should hope not! Do you think I want to get my picture into the Pathé News, digging treasure? Do you suppose I want all the boy scouts up that way laughing at me?"

"You coming?" he asked Brent.

"If I thought I'd get into the Pathé News I'd certainly go," Brent said. "I've seen so many airplanes and dirigibles in the Pathé News that it would

be a pleasure to dig into the solid earth. What they need in the Pathé News is more underground stuff. I rather think I'll go."

"Well," I said, "all I can say is that I'm sorry I ever told you anything about it—either one of you. Brent, I would say that *you* at least have too much sense of humor to go hunting for hidden treasure."

"That's just what you need, a sense of humor," said Brent.

"Well, I don't know but what you're right," I added half-disgustedly.

"We'll go up there," said Tom, intent upon his breakneck driving, "and we'll camp right in old Buck's cabin; I can get permission from the Interstate Park bunch, all right. We won't have to say what we're there for. We'll have the whole summer to hunt."

"How about Temple Camp?" I asked him.

"I can get leave all right," he shot at me.

"And what are you going to do with the—the *treasure*—when you get it, if I may ask?"

"We're going to turn it over to June Sanderson," said Tom.

"Then we're going to marry her and live happily forever after," said Brent. "With the money from the Pathé News I'm going to get my laundry."

I said, "Tom, if you ask for leave of absence from Temple Camp to spend the summer in such a fool enterprise you put yourself on a level with freaks and fanatics the country over. You'll have every boy scout up in that place laughing at you——"

"Let 'em laugh," said Tom decisively.

"Let me ask you," I continued, "did you ever know of any one finding hidden treasure? Did you ever know any one that knew any one that ever heard of any one who was personally acquainted with anybody that ever really found any hidden treasure—did you?"

Brent said, "That's rather a long question; let me think a minute."

"If you could just name me one person," I said. "Why, there was a young fellow, a millionaire's son, who fitted up a yacht and went down off the coast of South America fishing for a sunken Spanish galleon. He ended in an insane asylum. There was a man in Massachusetts who had some inside dope on where Captain Kidd bunked some bars of gold and stuff—Baxter, his name was. They wouldn't take him for service overseas because he was mentally deficient."

"Thanks muchly," said Tom. "You don't have to be connected with this."

"Heaven forbid," I said.

"If it's a question of reason and common sense——" he began.

"Will you *please* drive a little slower?" I begged.

"If it's a question of reason and common sense," he continued, "where is the money if it isn't somewhere up there? You think the game wardens

cracked Munk or Mink, or whatever his name was, on the head and got it somehow. I don't believe that; I say those men were on the level—I know the type. All right, then, *you* say Mink didn't pull a game on his partner—*you* know that type. Well, then, Mink left the money *somewhere*, didn't he? Do you see anything so ridiculous about that? Where is it?"

"I was wondering," Brent said; "of course, this is only a suggestion \_\_\_\_\_"

"That's what I want—suggestions," said Tom.

"I was wondering if the rattlesnakes could have eaten it. No?"

"Tom," I said, "I'm going to ask you seriously, now before we get to Bridgeboro, don't fly out of your senses and go hunting for treasure—that's old stuff. I wouldn't even put it in a story. The way to get money is to earn it \_\_\_\_\_"

"Now you're making a noise like a papa," he said.

"You go up to Temple Camp and work on your job and earn your salary," I told him; "don't be a quitter. At least don't be a quitter to go chasing a rainbow. Everybody respects you in town; don't make a fool of yourself. I'm sorry I told you. If you get a leave of absence from Temple Camp to go treasure hunting, why, Temple Camp is paying for the treasure hunt. If that tastes good in your mouth, all right."

That got him. I honestly believe that it was the only thing I said that had any weight with him. In any case, weeks went by and I never heard any more about treasure hunting in Rattlesnake Gulch. I saw Tom about town and once he told me that he had been up to Temple Camp and was back in Bridgeboro to see Mr. Temple about something or other. He seemed to be in a hurry, as he usually is, and I assumed that he had come safely through the treasure-hunting peril. Anyway, he did not speak of it.

As for Brent, I don't think he was disappointed at all. I don't think it makes much difference to him what he does; he seems always to be whimsically ready for anything. That's the funny thing about him.

## CHAPTER XI

### NEWS FROM ANOTHER QUARTER

So there you are. I was out of it and I was glad to think that Tom and Brent were out of it. I felt almost as if I had incited a couple of boys to go hunting Indians. Though, to be sure, Tom and Brent are “grown-up fellows,” as boys say. I went in for golf at the North Bridgeboro Country Club and a couple of times I went fishing up the river. And in my work and summer diversions I forgot all about Long Buck Sanderson and his deserted, sequestered home. After all, the episode had loomed large only while it lasted.

Then, all of a sudden, Tom Slade had a fatal relapse. Up he came to my house one evening waving a newspaper in my face. I should tell you that Temple Camp (the big Scout community up in the Catskills) is advertised in newspapers all over the land. Tom attends to these matters along with six million other duties, and I never in my life knew any one so thoroughly well posted on Scout activities the country over as he. He is all the time foraging in western dailies, and this paper with which he now confronted, or rather menaced, me was the *St. Louis Star*.

“Here’s something to open your eyes,” he said, all excitement. “Now who’s a freak and a bug? Read that!”

The news item which confronted me was headed, SKULL CURE SUBJECT DISAPPEARS, and was as follows. I copy it word for word from the old yellowed clipping with the red stain on it which Tom has carried in his wallet these many months.

The Missouri Institution of Physicians and Surgeons is greatly interested in the case of an inmate of the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane who escaped yesterday. The man was known as John Mink and he had been in the institution for the last fourteen years where he was taken following the failure of a St. Louis jury to convict him of theft upon the ground of insanity. He was pronounced a typical case of aphasia, or amnesia, which is that phase of the former disorder characterized by loss or morbid impairment of the memory.

The man’s history and antecedents were not known to the authorities, and he came to be known as Treasure Jack because he was forever making vague references to a bait-box full of money

which he had once put in the ground. He was harmless and amiable and able to work with his hands at making baskets in the institution.

Recently the man was the subject of an experimental operation by Doctors Calloway and Waring which resulted in certain encouraging signs pointing to complete success. A piece of bone which was pressing against the brain was removed. Shortly afterward the old inmate made one or two rational and very interesting references to his boyhood but seemed unable to recall any significant details which might have enlightened his keepers as to his history prior to the time of his arrest.

Following his operation, John Mink was placed in the observation department of the institution where he showed an encouraging inclination to read, something which he had never done before. His case attracted a good deal of attention. He was lately given a copy of Stevenson's *Treasure Island* to read in the hope that the title and subject matter dealing with hidden treasure might recall certain episodes in his own life. He did not react to this except to remember that he had been to sea, and he has the tattooed design of an anchor on his arm which he had never before been able to explain.

The apparent convalescence of this interesting subject was interrupted on Monday last by the departure for Europe of the young physician who has been personally caring for him and watching his case. He suffered a nervous setback on the following day, and that evening, evidently under the spell of a delusion that he was pursuing someone, jumped from a second-story window of the institution and has not been seen or heard of since.

His disappearance has been broadcasted by western radio stations and it is hoped that some trace of him may be secured in that way.

"Well," said Tom, "what do you think of that? Is that Mink Havers or not?"

"Why, it may be," I answered. "Mink is an unusual name, but this man was known as John Mink."

"Treasure Jack," urged Tom. "And let me tell you something," he added, waxing very excited. "Mink was probably the only name he remembered. When a person who runs foul of the law doesn't know his name or refuses to give it or gives a name that they know isn't right, they put him down in the records as John. Public insane asylums are full of Johns. It's sort of—a name

they use like John Doe. Why, anybody with any sense at all would know this was Mink Havers!”

“Well,” I laughed, “I suppose I haven’t any sense, then. I *don’t know* that this is your unknown friend of long ago, Mink Havers—I tell you frankly. But it may be, for all I know.”

“He talked of treasure and they called him Treasure Jack,” said Tom, conclusively.

“All right, Tomasso,” I laughed, “if we’re going to match facts, the man seems likely to have been a sailor; he had an anchor tattooed on his arm.”

“He might have been a sailor once upon a time,” Tom shot at me.

“Do sailors become hunters?” I ventured.

“Why not?”

“All right, then,” I said, “here’s another. He spoke of money he hid away as being in a bait-box. Bait-boxes, all that I’ve ever seen, are quite large and made of metal. Did old Buck carry his precious money from New York in a metal bait-box and hand that over to his partner? Is that the way you carry your money? You can put three thousand dollars in a wallet.”

“Maybe they had only coin in those days.”

“And maybe they hadn’t,” I laughed. “Look here, Tomasso,” I added, folding the newspaper up and rapping him on the head with it. “If you want to go treasure hunting, go ahead and do it. So far as I can see, the matter stands about as it did a month ago.”

“Then you don’t think that that man out west there may have had an inspiration about his treasure—that he may remember where he put it? You don’t?”

I shook my head skeptically, sorry at the same time that I had not the assurance and enthusiasm of youth.

“And that he may be on his way east—to Rattlesnake Gulch?”

“Clearly he is not capable of enterprise yet,” I said; “even assuming him to be Havers, which is possible, of course. I doubt if he would get so far—without money.”

“Half of it belongs to the child, doesn’t it?” he shot at me.

“Yes, I suppose so,” I conceded.

“Of course, you don’t think it’s there,” he said. “You think old Sanderson was right about what became of it.”

“Yes, I’m afraid I do,” I laughed.

“All right,” said he. “Here’s one for you, and I didn’t read it in a newspaper. I did some investigating while you’ve been playing golf.”

I smiled, “Yes?”

“Barney Wythe, game warden in that section, lived in old Tappan and died there in 1916. I wrote to the Fish and Game Commission and learned

that much. He had been head game warden for thirty-nine years—he was a character. He was a respected citizen, a church member, and as square and honest and clean an old codger as ever lived; one of those blunt, old-fashioned, honest, adventurous countrymen that it’s refreshing to hear about. Old Squire Wythe—that’s what they called him—wasn’t any grafter like you think. I talked to his grandson. Old Buck was wrong there, you can bet on that!”

I confess this somewhat took the wind out of my sail. “Well,” I said, “I’m glad to hear that; poor old Buck did him an injustice. And I’m sorry that I dishonored his memory. You’re quite a Sherlock Holmes, Tom.”

“That isn’t the point,” said Tom vehemently. “The point is that if the law’s men didn’t get the money, *it’s up there yet.*”

“So you said a month ago.”

“And Brent and I are going to find it.”

“Well, I can’t stop you,” I laughed. “What does Brent think?”

“Oh, he says he rather likes the idea, he likes the western element in it,” Tom said. “He says that with the anchor tattooed on his arm, Mink may turn out to be a nephew of Captain Kidd himself—you know how he talks.”

“Well, it would be fun with him along,” I confessed.

“And you won’t go?”

“To live in Rattlesnake Gulch? Not so you’d notice it,” I said.

## CHAPTER XII ON THE SCENE

The whole thing seemed so preposterous—so *story like*, in this prosaic age. As I see the whole thing now I realize that the trouble was with me and not with Tom. Anyway, what actually did happen in that wild, remote spot up in the Bear Mountain Reservation was a great deal more thrilling and astonishing than what Tom believed might happen. He who laughs last, laughs best; though to be sure it was no matter for laughter.

A few days after I saw the newspaper article, Tom and Brent went up to camp in Rattlesnake Gulch. I believe they obtained permission from the authorities up there to use poor old Buck Sanderson's deserted cabin. Perhaps Tom's position at Temple Camp made this easy to secure. There could not have been much objection, I think, for of all the remote and forlorn places that ever were, Rattlesnake Gulch was certainly the most uninviting. It certainly had real wildness, primitive wildness indeed, and held out, I suppose, that attraction to the camper. No one was likely to molest the sojourner there.

I believe that the first honors are due to Tom's dilapidated Ford, which the two adventurers succeeded in driving to within a mile of their destination. To me this has always seemed one of the triumphs of the whole business. They had at first thought of hiking to the lonely scene of their enterprise but decided that they had too much luggage for that. It was necessary to take provisions for a lengthy sojourn.

On the other hand, they preferred not to leave their car at Sandyfield where it might be a continual reminder to the few inhabitants of their presence in the neighborhood. They wished not to be disturbed. For the same reason, I understood, they did not leave it at the Scout Headquarters up at the lakes, where it might advertise their presence to curious and enterprising Boy Scouts. For the camping season was then in full swing.

What they did was to drive in from Sloatsburg, and at a point short of Lily Pond (which is west of the hamlet) they succeeded in finding an old, overgrown wagon trail which wound through the woods and was sometimes completely obscured by brush. I suppose it might once have been used for ox teams. It petered out completely in the hills north of Breakneck Pond. Here Nature set her wild face to the lusty little Ford and said, "You shall not pass."

So they left the Ford there, sheltered by an old canvas tent thrown over it, and I will here record that when the big adventure was over, the shabby and redoubtable little car started off as if nothing had happened, backed around into a swamp, delivered a masterly assault upon an oak tree, broke her bumper and one fender and one light, then proceeded triumphantly back along a trail which I was never able to see with my eyes. Two cylinders were missing—probably stolen, as Brent remarked.

From this strategic base of supplies Tom and Brent, with all the provisions they could carry, made their way south to the Gulch.

I did not see my young friends again until fall, when the whole affair was over. Several post cards reached me, mailed I suppose at Scout Headquarters, and one letter from Brent which I here copy:

*Dear Friend:*

We are located very comfortably in Rattlesnake Gulch and as yet nothing has happened except I lost my spectacle case down the well. We expect to investigate the well to-morrow and then I hope to recover it. We are boarding with a very respectable family of rattlesnakes, mother and father and two sons, and I like them because they let us alone. Last night we heard a noise after turning in; it sounded like someone approaching stealthily. But on sneaking out of the cabin I found it was only an empty shredded wheat box which I had carelessly left about after supper; it was blowing hither and yon in the breeze and disturbing some dried leaves. I pursued and captured it.

This cabin is a very primitive little bunk; there are two rooms but no improvements except an old cook stove, which I suppose you saw. We remind ourselves of Daniel Boone and William S. Hart. The place is very wild, much more thickly grown than when you were here. Tom will not have a light burning at night, for he wishes to take our friend from the West unawares; I don't know why. So I cannot work on my cross-word puzzles after sundown.

Mr. Mink has not showed up yet, though he has had a couple of weeks since his escape to get here; I suppose he is coming by the Erie.

Tom sends regards and says he will write. How is the golf coming on? Sometimes I am sorry I ran away from home—vain regrets. I have decided to subscribe to the *Literary Digest* with my share of the treasure.

Best wishes,

Brent.

The balance of this story, as I shall tell it to you, was gleaned from the detailed accounts given me by Tom after his return to Bridgeboro. Brent's story would have been interesting, but, alas, no sprightly characteristic narrative was to come from him. Somewhat I have fallen back on the newspapers, but only when their rather highly colored accounts were confirmed by bare facts coming from other sources.

Knowing Tom Slade as I do, I am able to record not only his adventures but his reaction to the extraordinary things which happened. I know how he felt and thought and acted and so I can give you, I think, a well-rounded yarn which, albeit true, shall have a little of the pleasing color of romance. For I know Tom Slade as I know a book. And what is more, he knows that I know him....

## CHAPTER XIII

### DOWN—DOWN——

You will remember the story that Long Buck Sanderson told me: how he was returning from New York with a sum of money. His partner, Mink Havers, was waiting for him near a swamp some distance from their cabin to advise him of the visit of Barney Wythe and others. Mink wished to hide the money and they agreed upon Conner's well as a safe place. Nothing could be more certain than that Mink started off to hide the money there.

Now, when I read that newspaper article which Tom brought me, I noted that this mysterious John Mink out in a western asylum had spoken of some treasure or other in a bait-box. I thought it altogether unlikely that Long Buck would carry his money from New York in any such container. But on thinking it over afterward, I saw that here one thing hitched up plausibly with another. Perhaps Mink had taken such a box to the meeting place when he went to wait for his partner. They had intended to secrete their money for only a few days at most. Yet clearly a wallet would not be a suitable thing to leave in a swamp or in the bottom of an old well. So, after all, the metal box was not a false note in the story.

As soon as Tom had gone away I began to have a little respect for his enthusiastic reasoning. He had certainly scored a triumph over me in his investigation of that old game warden of bygone times. In face of this it seemed a rational supposition, at least, that the money was still secreted in that forsaken fastness. I had to admit as much.

Therefore, it seemed to me altogether sensible for my adventurers to begin by an exhaustive exploration of the old well. "Tom has some sense, at that," I said to myself on reading Brent's letter. To be sure, old Buck must have explored that black hole more than once; I could picture him visiting it again and again in those weary last years of his. Still, mud and débris accumulate in such a place, and it was barely possible that even within a day or two of the secreting of a box there, it might have been swallowed up in the oozy bottom of the dank hole.

It was Brent who volunteered to descend into that forbidding place, and he insisted on having his way. They first took the precaution of getting some wood on fire and throwing it in so that they might see the bottom. They found the place to be very deep and the bottom covered with stones and rotten wood. Together they tumbled a heavy rock in to ascertain if the bottom was solid. Of course, the material below yielded under the weight of

the rock, but Tom and Brent decided that there was no treacherous quicksand or even a perilous accumulation of mud below.

Brent then let himself down, sliding over the edge and clinging to the branches of root which projected into the well through crevices in the rough masonry. Those damp, earthy tentacles were not pleasant to the touch. Here and there he could find a foothold on some slight projection of rock. But, after descending a few feet, he found himself with no dependable foothold below him and he was still a considerable distance from the bottom.

“Don’t see how I’m going to make it,” he called.

“Don’t drop,” Tom warned; “it’s too far.”

“There’s a rock sticking out if I can only reach it with my foot,” Brent called. “I wish I was a few inches taller.”

“Come back and I’ll try it,” Tom said.

“I can’t get back, either,” answered Brent; “that piece of root I had hold of broke off. They don’t put the material into roots that they used to—quantity production, I suppose. I’m stranded—also sanded; my eyes are full of earth and woods and mountains and things. I bet that rock landed right on my eyeglass case.”

“Watch your step,” Tom called down.

“I haven’t got any step,” Brent answered. “Is this a time for joking?”

At last, by a series of perilous acrobatics, he reached the bottom. “Here I am on terra cotta, or firma, or whatever they call it,” he shouted. “If we don’t find the money I’m going to climb buildings—Harold Lloyd. I’d climb the Woolworth Building for five and ten cents. Well, here I am; I wonder what property’s worth down here?”

“Is it solid?” Tom called down.

“It’s nice and springy,” said Brent. “I think I can be very happy down here; I suppose I’ll have to be, for I don’t know how I’m going to get up again. The root of the trouble, or I should say the trouble with the root——”

“Oh, that’s easy,” Tom called. “I’ll get a rope.”

“I’ll be the old oaken bucket,” called Brent,

“The Bridgeboro woodsman,  
The boy scout explorer,  
The lonely young camper  
That hung in the well.

I’m glad I brought the clotheslines from our yard; they’ll have to send the stuff to the laundry, but they’ll have their son back.”

“Don’t worry,” Tom called; “dig around and see what you can find.”

“Here’s my eyeglass case,” Brent announced. “Do you want me to dig in the mud?”

“Sure, see what’s what.”

“Well,” Brent called, “there’s an old, rotten vine and some stones—and, oh, here’s a tin wagon, a kid’s tin wagon. Or maybe it’s a Ford—no, it’s a toy wagon, all rusty.”

I have often thought of that tin wagon eaten and brittle with rust in the bottom of Conner’s well in Rattlesnake Gulch. Did the unknown Conner “fetch” it from “Noo York” to some little Conner, perhaps? At Christmas time? Christmas time in Rattlesnake Gulch!

“Strike a light,” Tom called down. “Have you got plenty of matches? Is there anything else down there?”

“I think there’s malaria down here,” Brent called. “You go ahead and get the rope and I’ll reconnoiter. I’ve got my flashlight. Don’t worry about me: I may be down but I’ll never get out. Go and get the rope while I’m hunting.”

“I’m afraid it’s in the car,” Tom called down.

“All right, go and get it—no hurry. I’m going to systematize my search. If you think of a word meaning treasure and ending with qzx jot it down in my cross-word puzzle book. Try the car and see if you can get it started just for fun—it may start, at that.”

“I may be an hour,” Tom called.

## CHAPTER XIV IN THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT

Tom looked in the cabin but, as he had suspected, the coil of rope had not been brought from the car. So he set forth through the woods to their obscure parking place.

Meanwhile, Brent proceeded with a systematic exploration of the old well. Directing his flashlight at the crevices in the masonry of the shaft, he scrutinized and removed every removable scrap of stone which might have concealed something. This inspection he carried as high as his arms could reach. He searched, not only for a metal box, but also for any remnants of a smaller and perishable container. Here and there where a stone in the wall looked as if it might easily be dislodged, he worked it out and scrutinized the hollow place it left. He proceeded upon the supposition that, if the money were there at all, it would be secreted in the wall somewhere. It was there, of course, that in all likelihood no absolutely complete search had ever been made.

And here was a point which his humorous but keen mind took cognizance of. I thought it was rather skilful reasoning. It occurred to him that to search the wall was better than to direct his attention to the mud and débris below him, because the section of wall he was searching *had probably never been examined before*. If old Buck had examined the walls he had done so standing on the bottom. But now the bottom was elevated by many years' accumulation of nature's rubbish. Perhaps it was elevated six or eight feet. So Brent carried on his inspection in a previously uninspected area of masonry.

It was possible that Mink Havers had reached down from the surface and slipped his treasure in somewhere. And it was more than probable that his partner had searched that area, as also the area near the bottom. But was it not possible that Havers had descended part way, secreted his treasure behind some loose stone, and then climbed out? If he had, it seemed likely that there was still an uninspected belt in that crude masonry. Brent believed (so he said) that the accumulation of débris in the bottom raised the floor of the well to a point enabling him to explore this area. It was good reasoning and showed his real intelligence.

He had not scrutinized the wall for long, nor removed many suspicious stones, before he noticed something which gave him a thrill. This was a stone with a rough cross cut upon it. And you will understand that this was

at a point in the well which must have been several feet above the head even of Long Buck as he stood on the bottom many years before. You will remember, too, that the old hunter had no glaring flashlight to aid him in his search.

With these thoughts in his mind it was with a thrill that Brent's eye fell upon this rough cross cut in a stone of the masonry. With his jackknife he began digging at the plaster around it and his hope ran high as he found that it crumbled readily. He thought that clay might hastily have been introduced there in place of the dislodged plaster.

At last with trembling hands he got a hold upon the stone and worked it out. I can well imagine his excitement (young philosopher though he is) as he removed this stone with its telltale mark. He had to reach somewhat above him to do this and had slipped his flashlight under his armpit to use both hands, when suddenly the flashlight slipped from its place and fell upon the enmeshed and rotted accumulation on which he had been keeping a precarious foothold. Instantly there was an appalling rattling sound (emphasized, I suppose, by that dark echoing shaft) and Brent's blood ran cold as he beheld almost at his very feet a coiled snake hissing with darting tongue at the area of brightness shed by the flashlight.

Brent still held the stone in air and his thoughts of hidden treasure vanished at the horrible spectacle below him. Should he drop the stone upon the enraged reptile? Suppose it should not fall right? And how long would this frightful thing, hated by man and bird and beast—how long would it wait?

It was angry at the flashlight, not at Brent. But if Brent moved, stirred . . . And, meanwhile, the seconds passed. A crumbling bit of plaster fell. The hissing continued. The little ball of light burned brightly and cast a luminous circle on the dank, oppressive débris. Six, seven, eight seconds. And Brent Gaylong did not stir—not a hair. He stood like a statue. But his blood was cold. Nine, ten, eleven seconds.

We are all subject to insane impulses. Who has not felt the impulse to jump off a roof? For a moment Brent was in the spell of a strange impulse to stoop leisurely, lay down the stone and pick up his flashlight. But he did not do that. He did not budge. He still held the stone above his head, like a piece of Roman statuary. The reptile did not budge either, but he rattled and hissed, and his tongue darted like lightning. And meanwhile the seconds passed—twelve, thirteen, fourteen....

## CHAPTER XV

### THE TRAP

Now something happened, trivial and barely perceptible, but it relieved the frightful situation of the moment. The flashlight flickered; it was less than a flicker; a scarcely visible flutter of the light for the fraction of a second. But the alert reptile projected its head like lightning. Its appalling rattle sounded in the hollow shaft; it hissed and its tongue darted.

Brent Gaylong knew what that suggestion of a flicker meant; he had tinkered often enough with the defective connection in that troublesome flashlight. Should he cast the stone down on the horrible thing's head? Suppose he should miss? Again the light flickered. Fortunately, that hideous, flat head was in the circle of brightness cast by the flashlight. It was poised menacingly a few inches above a flat bit of rock.

Like lightning, Brent raised his right foot and planted it on the reptile's neck. He had intended to crush the head but missed it, and there was the dreadful writhing thing pinned down but not killed. Though Brent's foot had missed its mark and left him in a terrible predicament, still, the move had been well considered. Considering all the chances, it was better than casting down the rock.

Brent's shoes were equipped each with a triangular metal plate upon the sole, with corners bent up so as to form three spikes. They were running shoes and Brent had worn them thinking that they might serve him best in descending into the well. Though he had not stamped out the serpent's life, still he might have done worse than he did, for one of the metal plates with its bent corners pinned the snake more effectually than a shiny piece of sole leather could have done. Brent believed that this plate, though its turned corners had not stabbed the snake, held the squirming reptile firmly within it. He did not relax the pressure and the snake seemed unable to do more than writhe and squirm with horrible contortions.

Soon, in the course of its frantic maneuvers, the snake coiled itself around Brent's right leg and he felt the embracing pressure of the loathsome, winding, tightening body. He pressed harder with his foot and this pressure seemed to communicate itself to the snake, for it coiled tighter around its captor's leg and its menacing rattle sounded hollow in the dank well.

It was like a tug of war, the snake braced, by its coiled position, around its captor's leg and pulling desperately to free its neck from the trap which held it fast. And as Brent tightened the pressure, so the snake drew harder,

and as it drew harder, Brent could feel its pressure on his leg. The situation was appalling.

One advantage the loathsome, coiling thing had in this fearful encounter; it had no nerves to give way under the harrowing strain. Its effort seemed easier, less frantic, less fatiguing than Brent's. Such a situation could not last. Brent thought the reptile was not suffering, that the plate on his sole held it only but did not squeeze it much; certainly did not crush it.

The flat, mottled head with its lightning tongue rested on the rock, and the beady little eyes looked at the ball of light. The snake's head and Brent's foot lay in the circle of brightness. Comparative darkness withheld from view the body coiled around Brent's leg.

Once he felt of the reptile; it seemed smooth and damp. He took his hand away shuddering and pressed tighter with his foot. As he did so the snake hissed. Then Brent heard the awful rattle near his knee. Should he touch the tail? It was harmless but he could not touch it. He just pressed tighter with his foot and set his leg like a brace. And the snake adjusted its winding body to this straightening and increased pressure, this tautness of the leg. And the tongue darted incessantly.

Then the flashlight went out.

## CHAPTER XVI IN THE DARKNESS

The circle of brightness had disappeared. Brent's foot and the rock and the snake's head were blotted out. He could see nothing now, only feel the coiled reptile around his leg. Instinctively, he pressed more firmly. The snake relaxed a trifle, being probably less agitated in the darkness.

Even in his frightful predicament, Brent noted with interest how every instinctive impulse of the snake was evidenced in the pressure and relaxation of its coiling body. But he was all but panic-stricken now in the enshrouding darkness; he could only feel and hear his would-be assailant. The sudden failure of that little flashlight was like the sun going out of his life.

The rank growth on the surface above overflowed into the deep hole and had taken root here and there in crevices of the loose or fallen masonry. Looking up Brent had not even an unbroken view of the little area of sky above the shaft. He could only see little glints of light through the brush. This unwholesome growth, starved of open sunlight, was damp and emitted a pungent, sickening odor. He wondered whether this horrible deadlock would end in his falling in a faint from the unwholesome air, and being attacked during unconsciousness. Well, in that case, he reflected, he would never know the feeling of the serpent's fangs.

There was no light below now, and only checkered glints of light above. He wondered what time it was and why Tom did not come. Tom, all-round scout that he was, could have told him that one loses all sense of time in a predicament occurring in darkness. He could have told him (as he later told me) of the hunter who was imprisoned by a rock falling against the mouth of a cave in the Rockies and was rescued after three hours' waiting. He thought he had been in the cave two days.

But, in any case, it was getting dark above: Brent could see that. The failure of the flashlight had confounded several moves he had been considering. They had not been pleasant moves to think of, but they had been less unpleasant to think of than death. He had thought of trying to reach his knife, which had dropped in among the dank growth in the well, and stab the snake with it. He had feared that if he stooped and dealt with the head his action might result in a certain relaxation of his foot's pressure with instant fatal results. So nicely did he calculate in the dreadful position he was in. He had hesitated to jeopardize his safety by any kind of action.

So, also, stooping and groping in that enveloping mesh for his knife might cause the imprisoning foot to stir—relax. So he had done nothing. And now, in darkness, he did not dare to try anything. He could only hold on.

And he feared he was not doing even that. In the uncertainty of the darkness he thought that the wriggling neck was making some headway. Suppose that smooth, incessantly wriggling and struggling snake should succeed in working enough of its neck through the trap which held it, to enable the creature to turn its head and dart its fangs into the shoe. Could it do that? Could it possibly contrive by its constant wriggling to reach the unprotected ankle? Brent was glad that his were high shoes. But his fears were now manifold.

The darkness and the inaction and the waiting and the sickening odor were sapping his morale. His imagination was turning against him and playing him false. He could not, as before, check up the situation with his eyes. He felt that the snake was wriggling little by little through the vise which held it. In that awful darkness he had a feeling that any second he might feel the sting of deadly fangs in his foot or ankle. He was panic-stricken—plunged in ghastly apprehension and horror.

In his growing terror he could not bear the feel of those moving coils upon his leg; he would have given anything to be able to free himself of that living, spiral mass. Yet here his impulse eclipsed his good sense. If the snake had known enough to free its body it might indeed have had a chance to free itself, or at least move a few inches in the vise which held it. By following its blind instinct to coil, it had placed itself in a position where it could not contribute the full measure of its strength to pulling and wriggling. It exerted a *dead* pull but not an *agitated and spasmodic* pull.

If that horrible rattlesnake had possessed the intelligence of a fox it would have got its poisonous fangs into Brent in short order. But it coiled in blind instinct, as they always do, and made the conflict a mere tug of war instead of a wrestling match, as one might say. It could have lashed Brent and squirmed frantically until it got free. For the pressure of his foot was not invincible. But a snake has no brains, and there you are.

Yet this constant pulling, pulling, pulling under his foot was bad enough. It was appalling in the darkness. Again and again he looked above and listened. Would Tom never come? Each time he looked the light through the overflowing brush seemed fainter. Then there seemed no light at all. And again the sun seemed to go out of his life. Light, blessed, cheering, companionable light, had been snatched from beneath him, then from above him. And Brent Gaylong was alone in the world, in a deep, dank hole crowded with unsavory débris, vines and smelling moss and loathsome fungus and deformed toadstools. Nature's outcasts. And mud and rock.

The gathering night above him had no cheering voice; not even a cricket or a locust could he hear; they did not patronize such places. Only darkness. He pressed harder with his foot; his whole leg was aching. Could the fatal poison be in his veins? How? Absurd.... It was just the pressure that made his leg ache. And must this pressure go on all night? Until he dropped?

Just then the rock which was the little theatre of his terrible deadlock, the rock on which his weary feet pressed, sank a little in the oozy bottom of the dark well....

## CHAPTER XVII

### SEEN IN THE TWILIGHT

When Tom Slade started to go to the Ford for the rope he tried to cut off a little of the distance by taking a new route through the hills. That is Tom all over; always exploring, always experimenting. He got into a fine mess doing this. Soon he found himself in a dense thicket and had to retrace his steps and hunt for the more familiar way. He thinks he lost "maybe half an hour or so" in this way. I dare say it was nearer to an hour. I thought it was a poor time to be seeking new routes with his companion in the bottom of an old well, and I told him so. "Brent had plenty to do," he said. He was certainly right about that!

The car, as you will remember, had been left some distance from the Gulch in the country north of Breakneck Pond. Its parking spot marked, I dare say, the farthest point in roadless, undeveloped country ever penetrated by the gallant and redoubtable Ford car. I say this advisedly, knowing Tom and his driving, and something of his bizarre advances through swamp and wilderness. I am quite ready to believe that his lusty little flivver could not have been urged one inch nearer to the camp. It must have looked lonesome enough as he approached it where it stood wrapped in the old, rotten canvas which gave it somewhat the appearance of a deformed tent.

Now, as Tom approached it through the woods, he saw the hanging canvas gather somewhat, so that the effect was the same as when one grasps a portière on the side away from the beholder. Something (and that a hand, it seemed) was holding it closed or was about to part it, making an opening. The appearance, or rather the concealed presence, of a hand thus disguised is unmistakable. The hand was holding the canvas, perhaps only to keep it from blowing.

Suddenly, as Tom approached, the covering undulated as if something within were moving where there was little room to move. Something was, indeed, moving and seeking a point of exit where escape and flight might not be seen.

Tom paused behind a tree. Then for a few seconds there was neither sound nor stir. Suddenly, beyond the car—that is, beyond the end of it which was farthest from Tom—he saw the shadow of something moving. It was shadow time in the woods, early twilight; the witching hour when Nature masquerades in a score of ghostly forms, and trees conceal lurking specters.

Through the soft-toned quiet woods stole a figure, running silently. It was a figure clad in khaki and was hatless, exposing a wealth of thick, gray, curly hair. The playing light fell upon this and brightened it to a lustrous iron gray. Yet the figure sped with great agility, with the buoyancy of youth.

Tom paused in astonishment. His first impulse was to pursue. But instead he walked up to the car, lifted the old canvas, and climbed into the Ford. On the floor in back some canned goods and other things were lying loose; he thought nothing had been taken. The rope was there. The camera (carelessly left) was still there. It was an expensive little collapsible camera and worth stealing. If anything had been taken it must have been some small container of food. He could not check up on these things because he did not know exactly what they had brought or how much of it had been taken to the cabin. But, anyway, the leaving of the camera indicated that the fugitive was not a wanton thief.

He now saw that the stranger had slept under the car. A couple of old cushions and a blanket which he and Brent had not yet taken to the cabin were lying there. In picking these up, he saw a khaki hat lying just inside the canvas. It had evidently been left by the fugitive, perhaps knocked off as he crawled out under the lifted canvas. It was after the fashion of a scout hat and on the inside of the crown was stamped

GORDON PENLEY  
MEN'S OUTFITTER  
BUFFALO  
N. Y.

“So he came from Buffalo,” said Tom. “That’s a blamed funny thing, that is!”

He sat on the rear seat of the Ford, resting and enjoying for a few moments the dim cosiness of the little ramshackle enclosure. It wasn’t half bad in there—a pretty nifty little bunk, he thought. He contemplated the hat where it lay on his knee. “A blamed funny thing.”

He did not mean that there was anything funny about the owner of the hat coming from Buffalo. What astonished him was that this young man, evidently a camper and one of the great scout fraternity, should flee from the auto upon the approach of someone. This fellow was too old to be a scout. A boy (Scout though he be) might prowl and investigate where he has no business to, and run if discovered. Boys do those things. But a scout official? A camp manager? Or a scoutmaster? Hardly.

This fellow was evidently of the scoutmaster age; that is, he was a young man. He would know the scout laws (Tom knew them) and the scout

standard of honor. Yet he had escaped and fled when discovered. Why? He did not seem to have done anything wrong. Tom had (and I shall be glad if he reads this) an easygoing though fine sense as to the point of honor. He certainly would not have thought it wrong for a stranger to take shelter under the protecting drapery of his old Ford. He's a pretty good sort of sport, Tom is.

So that is why he gazed at the hat and mused. "That's a mighty funny thing when you come to think of it."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SHINING EYES

And here you have Tom Slade all over. He was not in the least bit angry. But he was curious. Instead of hurrying straight back to the Gulch, he hit into the Hawkeye Spoke trail of the scouts. Just north of him it met the encircling or White Bar Trail. Already he knew this interesting trail system like a book. There is something uncanny about the way Tom gets the lay of strange country.

Well, he slipped the coil of rope over his head, laid one side of it on his shoulder and started up along the Hawkeye Spoke to Kanawauke Lakes. He said he met two Boy Scouts on this spoke trail who, seeing that he was not in khaki regalia, asked him playfully if he didn't think he'd get lost. I have always been amused at this, and if those youngsters chance upon this narrative they will be interested to learn that the young fellow whom they so blithely "kidded" was Tom Slade of Temple Camp, who came out of Barrel Alley in my own home town and is the hero and idol of every scout in the big camping community in the Catskills. *Tom Slade lost!* It is to laugh.

At Scout Headquarters, which was seething with business now, this scout of another region inquired for a Scout or Scout official who might possibly have lost his hat. No one knew of such a one. Then he asked if there was record of any such official or scout who lived in Buffalo. No such entry could be found.

"Well," said Tom, "I'm camping over in the wilds and I found this hat. If anybody claims it, give it to him and tell him he's welcome in my flivver any time and no questions asked. So long."

He did not tell who he was, and I think no one up there knew anything about him or Brent until the climax came. They are so busy with their own affairs up there. And Tom is so modest and unassuming.

First and last, Tom probably lost an hour by his attempt at trail-making and by his visit to Scout Headquarters. He told me that he had wanted to see the place in full swing and that the scout hat gave him the incentive to go. He greatly enjoyed the woodland exhibit there, so he told me. I wish they could have known who he was. He has every award for heroism known to scouting, and a pile of badges and things as well. When he was a Scout it was an act of his which prompted Mr. John Temple to found Temple Camp of which Tom is now assistant manager. I dare say they would have given him a rousing welcome at Bear Mountain Scout Headquarters if they had

known. But that is Tom all over; he blew in and he blew out and no one was the wiser.

To be sure, he knew that Brent intended to make a pretty thorough search of Conner's well. And he knew that hurrying was not one of Brent's weaknesses; he was always leisurely. Still, he had intended to return before dark, and he might still have done so if a most unfortunate setback had not intervened.

His journey back took him south along the Hawkeye Spoke and then (for variety's sake, I suppose, or perhaps in the hope of shortening the journey an inch or two) he followed the White Bar Trail (rim trail) south till he hit into old Buck's trail from Sandyfield. He had not been on this trail since the time he was there with me, which was early spring, and now he found it very much overgrown; or, to be exact, he did not find it at all.

Still, Tom does not need a trail; how he finds his way in strange woods at night is beyond my comprehension. He said he could hike through the woods from the country club above Bridgeboro and get home quicker than I could drive home by the road. And he did it. But of course, I do not drive as he does.

Well, he left the White Bar Trail about where he thought old Buck had been accustomed to crossing it, and plunged into the thicket. By now it was dark, but he said he had the stars to guide him. Still, I think he could not have been too sure of his way, for he went to the trouble of climbing a tree to see if he could catch a glimpse of a light in the Gulch. If Brent had grown tired of waiting and managed to get out of that earthy dungeon, the light would prove as much.

Anyway, Tom climbed a tree and was not able to distinguish the faintest spark anywhere. He moved out on a limb so that his view might not be embarrassed by the heavy foliage, but not a glimmer could he see in all that wild, desolate country. Then, suddenly, he heard a menacing sound beyond him on the limb and was aware of two savage eyes fixed upon him, alert to his every move. Advancing farther out on the limb was out of the question. Even retreating to the trunk seemed likely to give action to the wrath which was blazing in those two shining eyes. A move in either direction seemed fraught with peril.

## CHAPTER XIX OBLIVION

Brent Gaylong could see nothing, but he felt the flat rock on which his foot had pinioned the snake sinking beneath the pressure. As it yielded and settled in the oozy bottom it was necessary for him to press still harder with his foot, or at least to maintain the pressure. There was a tendency to relax this pressure somewhat as the rock sank, for Brent knew not how far it might go down in that unseen muck. Obviously, he could not hold the snake imprisoned except upon a firm foundation. Obviously, also, the harder he pressed the more the rock would go down.

This new and ominous turn of affairs below him was somehow communicated to the winding, clinging, undulating mass that held his leg like a spiral cable. There were pressure and relaxation of pressure in that sinuous body, as if the reptile were preparing for a new stage in the deadly tussle.

Then Brent heard a sound above him. I can well imagine his joy and his relief. It was a sound as of parting brush—Tom had returned! At this thought he took heart and his sense of relief expressed itself in renewed and vigorous pressure on the rock. It sank, sank, sank....

There he was, in utter darkness, with not even a glint of light from the world above, where human beings lived. Not the faintest glimmer insinuating itself through the rank overgrowth that crowded the mouth of the well. His foot held the neck of a deadly reptile which was coiled about his leg, while the tiny stage of this terrible encounter was sinking below him....

But there was the sound of parting brush above, and it was like music in Brent's ears. In a kind of nervous relief he rubbed his dripping forehead with his left hand and encountered one of those loathsome little creeping slugs that love the damp and darkness. He knew by the feeling of it and brushed it away with a shudder.

In all the time he had been there he had not spoken aloud; he had an odd feeling that his voice might in some way enrage his horrible captive and give it fresh strength. But now he called, "Is that you, Tom?"

There was no answer, only another sound as of parting brush. With a shudder it occurred to him that perhaps the sound was caused by the freshening night breeze.

"Tom! That you?" he called. "Hurry up!"

There was no response. Far, far away, up in the world, he heard an owl. Its call did not seem ghostly; it seemed even cheerful, coming from the solemn woods. There was no other sound; only a bubbling, oozy sound below him as the stone settled in the oozy mud and network of rotten roots and twigs.

*“Tom!”* he shouted.

There was no answer. The human body and the human spirit can bear only so much. When despair is added to fatigue and alarm, then hope dies and one accepts the verdict of fate. Death is welcome; anything is welcome.

In a blind impulse of despair, Brent straightened his embarrassed leg, felt the coils tighten with the movement, and pushed with all his might and main. The rock moved, he lost his balance and went sprawling down into the foul débris. He felt his senses slipping from him. But in his ebbing consciousness he knew that the reptile was now free and that presently its deadly fangs would be buried in his flesh. Even as his senses left him he could feel that sinuous body relax and unwind around his leg. Well, whatever happened, he would not know it...

## CHAPTER XX

### END OF THE STRUGGLE

Tom knew that he was facing a wildcat. He knew that he was not in danger so long as the animal was not at bay. It is no longer the fashion for wildcats to chase young heroes as they used to do in the *Dan Dreadnaught* and *Slickshot Sam* Series. But, just the same, an encounter with a wildcat at bay is no pink tea. Personally, I prefer golf. If that wildcat had been able to listen to reason all might have been well, but he seemed to have an hallucination that Tom was advancing against him. And there was not much room behind the beast for a masterly retreat.

So he drew back, mouth open, eyes blazing, and cruel paw uplifted. His demeanor was exactly like that of a cat, lifted out of the domestic sphere and made magnificent. Tom had no intention of advancing, though he thought it quite likely that, if crowded, the creature would spring to the ground or to another branch. However, he took no chances. Discretion is the better part of valor, and he was in a hurry. He backed away along the limb and, as he did so, the creature, encouraged, advanced a trifle with menacing paw. He might spring, thought Tom.

In the circumstances a precipitous exit from the scene seemed wisest and he decided to give unmistakable appearance of withdrawal by a dexterous move to the limb below him. Getting a foothold on this, he caught hold of a small branch which broke, and he went tumbling to the ground.

He fell upon some thick brush and for a few moments saw all the stars known to astronomy. Then he picked himself up, staggered out of the natural cushion which had saved his precious young life, and found that he could hardly walk.

“No harm done,” was the laconic way in which he described the incident to me. But for all that he had to limp to the Gulch, occasionally pausing on a rock or fallen tree to ease the pain of walking.



HE BACKED AWAY AS THE CREATURE ADVANCED.

It was, of course, long after dark when he reached the Gulch. Going straight to the cabin, he found it dark and empty. Then he went to Conner's well and called down. I should have thought that his very proximity to that black hole in the darkness would have made him cautious and fearful. But

he approached to the very edge, pulled aside some of the obstructing growth and called down.

There was no answer. He called again, and receiving no response began investigating the spot, trying to determine if Brent had succeeded in getting out. He might have gone somewhere for a little while. He examined the brush as well as he could in the dark. It was broken and lately disordered, he could see; but that he thought had been caused by himself and by Brent in descending.

Now he began to be puzzled, and his puzzlement grew to alarm. There was nothing to do but descend himself, and it would be useless, or at least unwise, to do that without a light. He had no flashlight, so he did the thing which he could do quickest. I dare say it was a good idea. In the cabin was an old cage trap, relic of Buck Sanderson's hunting days. This Tom filled with straw out of the old mattress that was in the cabin. Some dry twigs also, and a couple of chunks of solid wood he took with him. All this he tied to an end of the rope which he had brought and lowered into the well, having first securely fastened the other end of rope to the big elm which, you will remember, grew not far from the well; the elm whose wandering roots penetrated the hole and hung loose within it.

Then, by a dexterous trick of throwing the rope into a loop with his foot and thus getting a foothold from point to point as he went down, he lowered himself hand over hand down the black shaft. Tentacles of root brushed in his face as he did so. Here and there he got a foothold in the rough masonry and so, by hook or crook, reached the bottom. It must have been difficult and painful, for his ankle was very sore.

He alighted on something soft—an inert form. Lighting a match, and from this a rolled strip of paper, he beheld a dreadful sight. There lay his comrade, Brent Gaylong, his face white and mud bespattered. Around his right leg lay loosely the deadly snake, its sinuous body relaxed. Near to Brent's right foot the mottled head dangled loosely above a tiny, muddy hollow. The creature was quite dead. Tom examined its chafed and torn neck but saw that this injury would not account for its death.

When Brent Gaylong, in a last physical expression of his despair, had impetuously pushed his foot down upon the sinking rock with all the strength of desperation, he had pushed the deadly head of the pinioned reptile under the oozy water and, all unknowing, held it there between rock and iron sole plate until it had drowned.

There was not a scar on the victor in this terrible encounter. And he lay there prone in the muddy water which had proved his salvation, never knowing what he had done.

## CHAPTER XXI

### GOING UP

He opened his eyes slowly and saw Tom kneeling over him. On a rock stood the cage of straw burning cheerily. On the cage lay the twigs and on these, two solid bits of hard wood, not yet ignited. The place looked horrible in the light, a light which it had never known before.

“You’re all right, old man,” Tom said feelingly; “I ought to have got here sooner, but you’re all right. What happened?”

Brent stared about him blankly. “My leg—I——”

“I know, I’ll get you free of him, he’s dead, don’t worry.”

“The—a—snake——”

“Yep, it’s one, but he’s dead. What happened?”

“It’s light,” said Brent, blinking his eyes and moving his head right and left.

“Yep, that’s all right. Can you sit up? Fine! What killed him, do you know?”

“I don’t know—unless it was worry,” said Brent.

“You’re all right,” Tom laughed, relieved. “You’re the same old Brent.”

“He wanted his own way and I had to put my foot down firmly,” Brent said coming to himself. “His death must have been quite unexpected. He was on the job the last time I saw him. Maybe he had a stroke.”

“Doesn’t make any difference—long as you’re all right,” Tom said, with a ring of real feeling in his voice.

“Oh, I’m all right; asleep at the switch, that’s all,” said Brent rather weakly. “Gee williger, he’s a long guy, isn’t he? Do you know there was something crooked about that snake? He’s a rattler, isn’t he?”

“He was,” said Tom, dangling the frightful thing, “but he ain’t.”

And do you know, it was I and no other, who suggested the solution of the snake’s death. And that was a month afterwards. It did not occur to Brent what he had done. As for Tom, scout, woodsman, detective, general wisacre, and what not, he did not deduce the fact; perhaps because the stone was not visible. Anyway, the little scene of the encounter was changed by his own descent and by Brent’s sprawling fall.

But unquestionably in those last moments of that ghastly deadlock the creature’s head was held under water long enough to kill it. What other explanation is there? If you can think of any you are welcome to it. At least

Tom is satisfied that I am right (for once in my life), and as for Brent the only alternative he has to offer is that the snake had acute indigestion.

“Any news of the sock?” Tom asked.

“Look in that hollow place where I lifted a stone out.”

“Nothing there,” said Tom.

“Foiled again,” said Brent. “There was a stone in there that had a cross on it.”

“Yes?”

“Anyway, let’s get out of here,” said Brent. “I feel the need of a change; you get tired of one place. We can talk it over in the cabin. As I see it now that cabin is my idea of heaven. And this—how are we going to—— By the way, were you walking around up there?”

“Not till I got here,” laughed Tom.

“Before I did my fainting stuff I heard some one up there and called, but no one answered. I guess it must have been a telephone girl.”

“What?” Tom asked, all interest.

“Let’s see if we can’t get up in the world,” said Brent. “I feel as if I’d like to be a rising young adventurer. Did you get my other shoes out of the car?”

“Wait till you hear about the car.”

“It didn’t start, did it? I’ve had surprises enough for to-day.”

“I had a run-in with a bobcat.”

“Tut, tut, you’re not in my class,” said Brent.

“All right, then,” said Tom, busy with the rope, “all I want you to do is sit in this loop and don’t do anything till you reach the top—leave it to me.”

“Going up,” said Brent; “third floor, ladies’ millinery, groceries, books, and sporting goods——”

“Shut up and get your long legs through that loop,” said Tom.

“Suppose it goes around my neck,” said Brent. “All the glory of my adventure with the snake will be as naught. Everything will hang on your word—and I’ll hang on the rope. What do you think I am? A baby, or a murderer or something? I’m willing to hang around here, but I’m not willing to hang *in* here. I’m going to climb up in a gentlemanly, dignified manner, as I came in. Is that rope fastened good and tight up there?”

“All right,” said Tom indulgently and with deep feeling still in his voice, “only you go first. And if you don’t make it, I’ll be here to tell you what to do next.”

“Somehow I hate to leave the place now,” said Brent. “I have too much sentiment, that’s the trouble with me.”

With which poetic reflection, he grabbed hold of the dangling rope, braced one of his legs against the masonry, and clambering, with the support

of the rope and both his lanky legs, contrived by a series of unlovely maneuvers to reach the top, where he scrambled out over the bushes.

“Top floor, stationery, men’s apparel, and leather goods,” he called down. “See if you can do it as gracefully as that. And don’t forget my flashlight.”

## CHAPTER XXII

### AT HOME

Tom and Brent had a late supper in the cabin that night. After the adventures of the day the little primitive abode, nestling in the surrounding wildness, seemed like heaven indeed. The supper, consisting of baked beans and bacon and fried potatoes and crumbling but flavory rusks, was prepared by Tom's own skilful hand.

Brent peeled the potatoes for frying, and he looked funny enough sitting facing the little stove with his long legs held up by another old rickety chair, his feet so close to the increasing blaze that one might have supposed they were going to have fried leather for supper. "I like the odor of burning shoes," he said; "it's the very sole of camping."

"Peel them closer," said Tom; "you're throwing away half the potato with the peel. And cut out the eyes, too; like this. Here, I'll show you."

A rusty old pan was on Brent's lap, and as he worked on soberly, his spectacles halfway down his nose, he gave the impression that peeling potatoes was a very sober and intellectual task.

"You'd better get water," said Brent, "I'll be ready to dump these in in about a couple of minutes."

Tom brought water from the neighboring spring and put it on the little round stove to boil, pausing to warm his hands over the red-hot lid. "Do you know it's blowing up mighty chilly outside for this time of year?" he said.

"A very funny thing has occurred," said Brent pausing soberly.

"Did you hear a sound too? Sounded to me like someone running; I was over by the spring."

"Probably the man coming to read the gas meter," said Brent; "or else the wind. You hear all kinds of things up here."

"You sure do," said Tom.

"But what I was going to say," said Brent, "is that I think this flourishing metropolis is haunted or bewitched or something. I just cut the peel off a potato only to find that there was no potato inside it. That's a very funny thing when you come to think of it. Where's the potato? It was inside when I started to——"

"You peeled it all away," said Tom disgustedly.

"Do you believe I could have done that?"

"That's what I was telling you," said Tom, "about peeling close. *You* don't *peel*, you *slice*."

“Them’s harsh words, Tom.”

“Well,” Tom laughed.

“You can’t imagine my *amazement*,” said Brent, “when I looked in my hands and found there was *no potato there*. Do you know, Tommy, I’m beginning to think I never really saw any rattlesnake at all, that it was just \_\_\_\_\_”

“Shh, listen!” said Tom.

“Tis nothing but the wind,” said Brent; “the i is pronounced as in high. Do you want me to slice some bacon now? I learned how to do that over the radio; also how to make salads. Station E-A-T-S.”

It was cosy eating supper in the cabin. Tried and true camper though he was, Tom had never been in such a place before. The little abode seemed to harmonize with that wild, remote gulch and to have become an inseparable part of it. There were two bunks in the drawing room (as Brent called it) one above the other, like berths on a ship. They were not furniture but a part of the place. In the little enclosed shed, which was the only other room, was an old-fashioned bed, of faded yellow wood with flowers painted on it.

All the coverings had been taken from the cabin (our adventurers had their own), but on this old single bed in the lean-to was a bearskin robe, memento of the old hunting days. It carried Tom’s thoughts back through the years (how many?) to the time when Mink and Buck trod those silent depths, and when the roar of beasts was borne upon just such winds as that which was now springing up.

Odds and ends of paraphernalia in this primitive lean-to, pathetic little trinkets, showed it to have been the room which little June Sanderson had occupied. Tom wondered where this child of the forest was now, and if she was happy in the big, glaring, noisy world. And if she ever wished for her warm bearskin comforter.

In the larger apartment (though it was small enough) were rusty old traps hanging against the logs, a couple of vicious-looking knives stuck in a crevice (Tom thought these had been used for skinning animals), and several dilapidated pairs of snowshoes.

One thing affected Tom strangely: this was a bleached skull of some small animal, on which stood, in its own grease, a half-burned candle. The other half of that candle had lighted the last minutes, perhaps, that old Buck Sanderson had spent in his lonely cabin. And the skull. How old was it? And when did the shot ring out in those solemn depths of wilderness which had laid that creature low? For how many years had it been a candlestick?

He pictured a candle burning there upon that ghastly little pedestal while Mink and Buck skinned a bear, or perhaps divided their gains acquired from Pollock, the questionable Pollock, who took care of furs so long ago. There

were rows of chalk marks on a log, too; the primitive bookkeeping of old days.

“Come on, let’s eat,” said Tom.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### FOOTSTEPS

“Here’s some salt, if you want any,” said Brent.

“We have plenty,” Tom answered. “Where did you get that, anyway?”

“It was under that old chest.”

“Let’s see it.”

There was no table to dine at, and they ate sitting in two old chairs close to the stove, so that they might refill their tin dishes without getting up. The warmth of the fire was grateful too, for the wind was blowing up outside and the one little window rattled and admitted volleys of air from time to time as the fitful gusts assailed that side of the cabin. They kept enough fire now to diffuse a comforting warmth and to keep the supper hot.

“Do you know,” said Tom, examining the box of salt, “that’s a bait-box. I bet that’s just the kind of a box John Mink used to hide away the money. See, there’s a place for fish-hooks.”

“I hope we didn’t eat any by mistake,” said Brent; “I never cared for those.”

“It helps to prove a connection,” said Tom. “I mean, that old fellow out there spoke of a bait-box and now we find a bait-box here.”

“Did he speak of a bait-box?” Brent asked.

“You know blamed well he did. Listen,” said Tom, resorting to his wallet.

“You’re not going to read the whole thing?”

“No, but listen to this:

“The man’s history and antecedents were not known to the authorities and he came to be known as Treasure Jack because he was forever making vague references to a bait-box full of money which he had once put in the ground. He was harmless and amiable and able to work with his hands at making baskets in the institution.”

“Well, it proves one thing, anyway,” said Brent, glancing at the metal box sideways over his spectacles and not troubling himself to take it from Tom. “I don’t believe a box of that size could be hidden behind the masonry in that well—their’s my sentiments. If old Mink put it there he must have been in a hurry——”

“Maybe not.”

“Well, anyway, you’d have to take out a couple of stones to fit a box of that size in, and then you couldn’t get the stones back. I’m so innocent I

didn't know how big a bait-box was. I thought maybe you wear them around your neck like a locket."

"Yes, you didn't!"

"Well," said Brent, "at least one thing is proved. The box is not in that well. If that's a bait-box, and if other bait-boxes are like it, why, then, the money is not in that well. I think I can say I know that well as well as anybody; I lived in it several centuries."

"Well, if that's the case," said Tom, somewhat impressed, "then, where is it?"

"Are you asking me?"

"There's nothing for us to do," said Tom, "but wait around and see if that John Mink doesn't come back here."

"I'm enjoying my vacation," said Brent.

Tom seemed nettled. "Yes, but it must be *somewhere*," he said. "I'm going to clear out the gully all the way to Conner's and search it thoroughly."

"Look out for snakes; remember they have the right of way. Have another sliver of bacon?"

"The trouble with you," said Tom, "is you're a Philistine."

"No, I'm not a Philippine," said Brent. "If you want to know honestly what I think, I don't think we stand much chance of finding that money—hold on now, I'm not a Philippine——"

"Philistine, I said," Tom shot at him.

"I believe the money is somewhere around here."

"Thanks," said Tom.

"Not at all," said Brent. "And I think it's likely that old geezer out west is the one who left it here."

"Now you're talking."

"And you're listening—that's fine," said Brent. "Have another sliver of bacon—no?"

"Go on," said Tom.

"All right, my father was a doctor and I've heard him say that people who go daffy from a fall and get magnesia——"

"Amnesia," Tom shouted.

"Pardon me, my error. I've heard him say that such people are sometimes cured by an operation after years. All right, then, I don't see any reason why he shouldn't come back here and get his money, if he remembers now where he put it. If he comes it will be mighty interesting to see him and help him. If he doesn't come, we're having a mighty good vacation, anyway. I'm here as a scientific observer. I don't care anything about hunting for treasure; I had my little fling to-day and I'm *through*. If

Captain Kidd's ghost came and told me where his pirate gold was, I'd say, 'Nothing doing, go dig in the sand yourself.'

"But I'd just kind of like to see if that old codger does come back here, like an old dog that can't forget a place. If that old fellow *is* Mink Havers, I'd like to see him and give him a hand—and, as you say, see that the kid gets her share. But if it's just a case of digging, I'd rather take my little pail and shovel and go down to Coney Island. So much for that. If you want to vacuum clean the Gulch go ahead and do it.

"What's interesting me just at present are two things to wit, wiz. I'd like to know who was wandering around up at the top of the well to-night, before you came. And I'd like to know—Potato? No?—I'd like to know who it was that ran away from the Ford. If he really intended to steal your Ford, that would prove conclusively that he was John Mink, alias Treasure Jack. Because anybody who would want to steal your Ford must be plumb crazy; I don't know if you'd call it magnesia or amnesia or what."

"It was a young man," said Tom; "he ran like an athlete."

"He had gray hair?"

"Yes, but lots of young men have that; fellows that think a lot——"

"I think a great deal," said Brent. "I'm always buried in thought when I'm not buried in a well. And my hair is wavy brown."

"That fellow wasn't Mink," laughed Tom.

"And the other—the sound up above the well?"

"I think you imagined that," said Tom; "the wind was blowing the bushes, though maybe at that—— *Listen!*"

They both paused, speechless. There was the sound of footsteps approaching the door.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ALIAS SPIFF

Tom and Brent stared at each other. The footfalls approached nearer and nearer, sounding clear upon the brittle underbrush which obscured the beaten track to the door; clear as footsteps on a pavement, as the driving wind which rattled the door and window, bore the sound to the cabin.

Just as the sound ceased, Brent drawled in his usual half-interested manner, "Come in, the place is yours."

Tom, however, jumped to his feet, fully prepared, watching the door keenly, intently. His attitude said that he was ready and not to be taken unawares.

The door opened and a small boy in a heavy collared gray sweater entered. He was a redheaded boy with the usual accompaniment of freckles and he had a black smear at one end of his mouth. He might have been fourteen, certainly not older than that. He wore khaki trousers and indeed the whole part of him that projected below the all-embracing sweater showed him to be a Scout of the Scouts. He had, what seems often to be found in company with red hair and freckles, a little round nose which somehow bespoke an impudent self-possession.

"*Well—I'll—be—hanged!*" Tom exploded.

"How do you do, sweater?" said Brent, eyeing him whimsically.

"I got lost," said the boy.

"Been roasting potatoes?" Tom asked, sniffing.

"Yop. I got a smutch?" said the boy, rubbing his mouth with his sleeve.

"The smutch is now on your sweater," Brent said. "If you'll take the sweater off, we'll be able to see who we're talking to."

"How'd you know I was roasting potatoes?" the boy demanded.

"I tell by the smutch and by the smell," said Tom, helping him off with the sweater. "That's right, it's warm in here."

"I ain't scared of cold," said the boy.

"You smell like a bonfire," said Tom. "Have you been roasting potatoes around here anywhere?"

"Back there in the woods—I seen a light here."

"And did you stamp the fire out?"

"I jumped all over it."

"Good, let's see your feet—your shoes. That's fine. You sure you stamped it all out? Regular—like a Scout."

"I got no use for those guys," said the boy aggressively.

"So? But you're sure you put the fire out? You're for the woods even if you're not for the scouts, hey?" Tom said pleasantly.

"Give him something to eat," said Brent. "The potatoes all fell off the stick, didn't they?"

"I only had two."

"And about all you got was a smutch," said Tom. "A kid, a bonfire, a stick, and a potato—and no nourishment, hey? They go good in stories though, don't they?"

"I got no use for stories," said the boy unabashed. "They ain't true. I got no use for Scouts either."

"Sit down and eat some beans and some bacon and explain all that," said Tom.

"First tell me, in goodness' name, where did you get that scarf-pin?" Brent asked.

His interested scrutiny of the boy had paused at a conspicuous ornament upon the necktie which the youngster wore. He had on an ordinary boy's jacket with white collar, and a tie which showed a heroic but ghastly effort to achieve the glory of a four-in-hand. Into this tie was inserted a scarf-pin presenting four magnificent glass gems set in a diagonal row.

"That's very nifty," said Brent. "It takes me back to the days when I lived in the civilized world. You got it——"

"I got it in a package of lemon-drops," said the boy, with aggressive frankness.

"Which you bought on a train?"

"In a show," said the boy, "between the acts."

"Exactly," said Brent, winking at Tom. "Now sit down and—— You like bacon?"

"Sure, I like anything," said the boy, eating.

"Except Scouts," said Tom.

"You don't like 'em, do you?" said the boy, out of a full and busy mouth.

Tom eyed him amusedly. His look seemed to say that he knew the type.

"Was you ever one?" the boy asked.

"I used to think I was," Tom said.

"It's good you got out of 'em."

"What's your name?"

"Arnold Henshaw, but you can call me Spiff, if you want to—it don't worry me."

"That's short for spiffy?" said Brent.

"Yop—it don't bother me, it don't. They're a fresh bunch up there, I'll tell the world."

“You camping up there, Spiff?” Tom asked.

“I was, but I’m through—never again—I’ll say.”

“Had a falling out with them?”

“Nix, they had a falling out with me.”

Tom winked at Brent. “You like chocolate?” Brent asked.

“Sure, I can eat anything.”

“It’s great for making smutches,” said Brent. “Now, tell us all about your life and death and Christian sufferings.”

“Gee, I didn’t die yet; not so you’d notice it.”

“So they’re a fresh bunch up there at the lakes?” Tom encouraged.

“Sure,” said Arnold Henshaw, alias Spiff.

“They says I got to take lessons from those guys. To get merit badges I don’t have to take lessons. Anyway, they get merit badges and they can’t do as many things as I can. I swam across the lake one night and they wouldn’t give me a merit badge. They can chuck it in the lake for all I care.”

“So?” Tom was sitting with hands clasped around his upraised knee, listening intently. He seemed inwardly amused.

“They got the knife in me, that crowd,” said Spiff.

“You’re not understood,” Brent commented in an undertone.

“May be true at that,” said Tom. “You see, I suppose it’s against the rule to swim at night. Of course, you can’t get merit badges breaking rules.”

“They got me washing dishes for discipline,” said the boy. “Would you do that?”

“Oh, I’ve washed lots of dishes,” said Tom.

“Well, they ain’t going to put *me* doing that. That’s why I sneaked away this afternoon.”

“Oh, I see,” said Tom.

“I’m going to go home, I am. I’m going to find my way out of here; you can go to Sloatsburg this way, can’t you?”

“I believe so. Where do you live?”

“And why?” said Brent.

“Jersey City,” said the boy.

“Why should anybody want to go there?” said Brent.

“The Erie Railroad goes there,” said Spiff.

“Well, you don’t want to be like the Erie Railroad, do you?” said Brent. “Do they have many like you in Jersey City?”

“Sure, I licked two of ’em,” said Spiff.

“Well, now,” said Tom, “let’s forget Jersey City and talk of something pleasant. You’re on the outs with the Scouts up yonder, hey? So you’re running away. They put you to washing dishes and you quit. Then you want me to believe that you licked two fellows in Jersey City. Why, you couldn’t

even lick a fellow in Hoboken, you couldn't. You're a quitter.—Here, have some more beans.”

“Who you calling a quitter?”

“You. You've got a grouch about the——”

“Oh su-u-u-re,” the boy sneered. “You're like the scoutmaster, you are.”

“Those are harsh words,” said Brent.

“You got to be a teacher's pet up there,” said Spiff.

“Did they ever call you fresh?” Tom queried sociably.

“Sure, all of them, lots of times. They wouldn't let me get into the second class and they wouldn't give me the astronomy badge, even if I can follow the stars——”

“You can do that?”

“You tell 'em I can.”

“We'll show 'em, that's better,” said Tom.

“*I'm through!* Didn't I hike out to White Bar not following the trail? *I made a trail of my own, I did!*”

“Now you're shouting,” said Brent.

Tom sat there studying the boy curiously.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LITTLE RASCAL

Yes, that was it, the little rascal would have to make his own trails; Tom saw that. And he had evidently made some pretty poor ones. He was one of those boys from whose point of view the world seems to be against him.

“They pretty sore at you?” Tom asked.

“Sure—that bunch! I think up things and then they say they’re no good. I shot a woodchuck with a bow and arrow and still they wouldn’t give me the archery badge. Can you beat that? Ain’t that archery? I’ll leave it to this other fellow.”

“That’s archery,” said Brent.

“But there’s a regular way to win the archery badge,” said Tom. “Do you know the history of archery?”

“Naah, what good is history?”

“Yes, but you’re supposed to know something about it to get the badge,” said Tom.

“Didn’t I shoot the woodchuck; ain’t that enough? Actions count, don’t they?”

“Yes, but maybe you’re not supposed to shoot woodchucks; see?”

“Are you hunters?”

“Well, in a way we are,” Tom laughed.

“Didn’t I make a semaphore signal across the lake? Didn’t I make bugle calls—signals?”

“Did you?”

“*Suuure* I did. And they gave a signal badge to a feller from Brooklyn but not to me.”

“Well, you see, there must have been something; you didn’t fulfill all the requirements of the test—maybe.”

“I didn’t do a thing but tumble that feller off the springboard. That’s why I got discipline wished on me—dish washing. *Not me!*”

“So you’re quitting?”

“What’s the use staying as long as I’m in dutch?”

There followed a pause during which this redoubtable youngster ate with a vigor surpassing all his other achievements.

“They got no use for me and I got no use for them,” he said. “Now they won’t even show me, they won’t. They won’t even tell me the trail signs. *Geeeeee*, they needn’t worry, I’ll get along all right.”

“Help yourself to bacon,” said Brent.

“They don’t need to tell me where the launch is sunk—not that bunch. I’m out on the lake every night hunting myself.”

“Against the rules?” Tom queried.

“I don’t need them,” was the rather vague reply.

“All right,” said Tom; “now have you finished eating? Had enough? All right, now listen. I don’t know anything about your complete life and adventures in camp, but it seems you’ve got around on the wrong side of the bunch.”

“Don’t you worry,” said Spiff.

“Oh, I’m not worrying,” Tom said. “I’d put my last dollar on you. I think you’re all right. How ’bout it, Brent?”

“I’ll put thirty-two cents on him, that’s all I’ve got. The rest went out of my pocket when I was upside down.”

“You see,” said Tom in a very fraternal way, “you don’t fit. They can’t make a thing to fit everybody. Now scouting is a great big thing and it’s not going to change. You’re one fresh little gizinko and you’ve *got* to change. You’ve either got to fit into it, or quit—just a minute!

“Now, about quitting. I think it’s all right for a kid not to join the Scouts. But I don’t like a fellow that quits; see? Kids that don’t go in—well, I have nothing to say. But kids that get out—give up, surrender, climb out through the ropes and run——”

*“You say that’s me?”*

“Sure it is. You’re on your way to Sloatsburg. So far you managed to stumble in the right direction; you’re not a half bad Scout. I’m not handing you any bouquets for licking a fellow, but that’s better than being licked by one.”

“You said it,” vociferated Spiff. “I’d like to stay here with you, that’s what I’d like to do.”

“We’re not taking any boarders this season,” said Brent, then added in an undertone to Tom, “It wouldn’t be half bad having him around at that.”

Tom arose, stepping over to the boy, and in a humorous, friendly way lifted the four-jewelled pin out of the youngster’s scarf. “Here, Kid,” said he; “you put this in your pocket, you don’t need to wear it. One, two, three, four—four stones——”

“They’re glass,” said Spiff.

“Yep, and do you know what they stand for? Four means help; see? Four blasts of a whistle, four blasts of a horn, four flashes of light, four signs of any kind, says HELP. Four letters, H-E-L-P. That’s a rule we have up where I camp sometimes. Guess you never heard of it here? Now, I don’t think,” Tom added good-humoredly, “that you need to bat around with a call for

help stuck up in front of you, do you? You put that lemon-drop pin in your pocket and get your sweater on and come along with me; I'm going to set you on the trail."

The boy gazed at Tom, bewildered, fascinated. "To Sloatsburg?" he asked.

"No, back to camp. You're going to go back and beat that game just as you licked the two fellows in Jersey City. You're going to read your little book and find out just what you have to do to win badges. Then you're going to *do those things*. And you're going to have that whole crowd eating out of your hand, you fresh little rascal! Here, wear the pin if you want to; I was only kidding you."

But Spiff Henshaw held the gorgeous ornament tight in his hand and would not replace it in his scarf. "I wouldn't let anybody say I wear a call for help—geeeee, you don't know me!"

"Here, slip your sweater on," said Tom, "You're going to bang around into the enemy's country, and after you've read your little book—handbook, they call it?—why, you'll have them on their knees begging for an armistice."

"Shall I chuck the pin?" Spiff asked, with an air of manly independence.

"Well, it's a call for help," laughed Tom.

With a fine air of disgust the boy cast his magnificent ornament upon the floor, drew his sweater over his head and strode out into the night with Tom.

Brent, left alone, leaned over without disturbing his restful posture, picked up the pin, and gazed at it amusedly.

"Leave it to Tom," he said to himself.

## CHAPTER XXVI WATCHFUL WAITING

Tom was weary enough after his strenuous day, but he never did things by halves; he escorted his young acquaintance up to the Hawkeye Spoke Trail and set him upon his journey back into the land of the enemy.

“You going to read your little Scout book now?” he asked before taking leave of him.

“Suuuuure, if I say I do a thing, I do it.”

“Bully.”

“Don’t ever be a quitter or a walking call for help.”

“You leave it to me.”

“And you’ll go right straight back and report to your scoutmaster or camp manager or whatever he is? To the right one?”

“Suuuuure.”

“All right, so long. And you’re dead sure you stamped the fire out? Fires are bad things, you know. Some day I’ll show you how to roast potatoes on a stick—you need a wire.”

“I bet you’re a trapper, I bet.”

“So long, you little rascal. You don’t need any H-E-L-P.”

Tom watched him as he trudged along the dark trail, then retraced his steps to the cabin, staggering in with a theatrical show of weariness. “Guess we’ll call it a day, huh?” he said. “I’m about all in.”

“Did you look in the Ford while you were up that way?”

“I did not.”

“Some kid, huh?”

“All he needs is to get on the track,” said Tom. “He can do anything, only he never does it according to rules. Shoots a woodchuck with a bow and arrow and wants the archery badge! Can you beat that? He’ll land on his feet yet. Just at present the cruel world is against him.”

“The sign of the four got him,” said Brent.

Tom laughed. “It’s the only way to get a kid like that.”

“Some jewelry, ney?” said Brent, holding the gorgeous pin at length and contemplating it critically. “Well, this is our first treasure—gold and diamonds. We’ve done pretty well so far, for beginners. We’re pretty good bandits anyway. When they see us they throw down their jewels. Do you hear a sound, or is it the wind?”

Sounds to me like—— *What the dickens!* Listen—shh!”

"I guess it's nothing," Tom said wearily.

"Do you suppose we'd be able to get a little real rest if we moved to the Bronx?" Brent asked. "There's too much doing up here. My idea of—— *Listen!* No, honest, *listen.*"

As he spoke there was a sound of rustling leaves or bushes disturbed. Tom quickly opened the door and immediately there was the sound of running.

"You don't suppose that kid is back?" Brent said.

"I'll take him home by the collar if he is," said Tom.

They went out and walked around, examining the neighboring brush. The night was too dark for them to see anything. Besides, as the wind blew in gusts, they thought it likely that these impetuous assaults against the dense growth were the only sounds they had heard. They were too dog-tired to extend their investigation, so they turned in for the night.

This was the beginning of their period of watchful waiting. If it had not been for the pleasure of camping in that romantic fastness, they might have abandoned their enterprise. But the camping life, the atmosphere of the primitive little cabin, and the charm of the wild surroundings carried them along.

In the days immediately following, Tom rummaged in the overgrown hollow from which the place derived its name, pulling aside great masses of brush and searching the open ground underneath. I suppose there wasn't one chance in a hundred of his finding anything there. He finally acknowledged that the treasure-seeking phase of their enterprise was a failure. But there did seem at least a fair chance that the old fellow out west would turn out to be Mink Havers and would seek his old familiar home. There was adventure in the mere expectancy of this, for every rustle of a tree at night aroused the keenest apprehensions.

It was during this period that Brent (who declined resolutely to prosecute an aggressive search) hiked about the neighborhood and one day ambled into Scout Headquarters up at Kanawauke Lakes. Here he hunted up Spiffy and returned him his scarf-pin. I want you to read the letter he sent me, not only because it is so characteristic, but because it throws a light on certain interesting events which were shortly to occur. My facts I received from Tom, my local color from Brent.

DEAR FRIEND:

We have not found the money yet but we are very comfortable here. Tom pulls brush in the daytime and turns over suspicious rocks, and at night we amuse ourselves hearing noises. We hear as many noises as you hear on a Ford. Every now and then we start up and listen and then decide that it was only the zephyrs soughing in the trees. There is an

owl around here who works nights. When there is nothing else to do we tell bedtime stories.

I don't believe the campers up around the lakes know anything about us; anyway, they haven't bothered us any. Those kids travel on regular trails; very wild but you can't get lost. One kid jumped the track and dropped in on us late one night. It seemed that the world was against him and he was retreating to Jersey City. Tom made him go back. I inquired about him when I hiked up that way. A chap said there wasn't much hope for him—that his starting off like that had only made matters worse. His parents are away in the country somewhere, and as soon as the managers can get in touch with them, the kid goes back. It must be dreadful to spend a summer in Jersey City. If there is one type of kid I like, it's the kind that has all the world against him.

Oh, I forgot—there's a piece of news. A man in Sandyfield told me that some one had told him that Sarah Ann Berry had mentioned to Seth Plummer that a person from Eddyville told her that June Sanderson was in the Highland Orphanage at Kingston. So there's your little friend discovered for you. Tom said he told you about the fellow who ran away from his Ford, so I guess that's about all now.

Yours,  
Brent.

I answered this letter as follows, sending it to Scout Headquarters as per instructions:

Dear Brent:

Thanks for your letter. If you could capture some of those breezes and send them down here, that would be better than treasure. And thanks for telling me about the little girl; I'll send her a box of candy at Christmas. I wonder if she'd remember me?

Anyway, I can pay you back for your kindness by telling you that last night on the radio, Pittsburgh said that a man corresponding to John Mink in appearance had been seen on a freight train east of that town. Eastern cities are asked to be on the watch for him. He may be heading for Highlands at that. I was reading an article about amnesia; it seems they do wonders with people whose memories are broken down.

Let me hear from you again and good luck to both of you.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A VISITOR

“Well,” said Brent, “I suppose we’d better kill the fatted calf and dust the cabin and tidy up a bit. Keep the home fires burning. He might drop off the freight at Tuxedo. Do you think I ought to put on a white collar?”

They were lingering in the cabin as they usually did after lunch. “And the dishes not washed, either,” Brent added.

This kind of talk always nettled yet amused Tom.

“It may be days and days, if he comes at all,” he said. “Well, we’re having a good time of it, aren’t we?”

“Watchful waiting,” mused Brent. “What do you say we go fishing this afternoon, Tommy? I’m getting tired of bacon.”

“Suits me,” said Tom.

“Here comes the kid again,” said Brent.

Someone was approaching the cabin with quick steps. Presently there was a brisk knock on the door.

“Come in, Spiffy,” said Brent.

The door opened and a stranger entered. He was evidently the person whose back Tom had seen on a previous occasion. He showed neither hesitancy nor embarrassment; indeed, his entrance and briskly cordial bearing bespoke one who had nothing to explain or conceal.

He was a young man of athletic build, certainly not more than thirty years of age. He had replaced his lost hat with another one, and under the edge of this the campers could see a profusion of bushy gray hair. Clearly he was gray long before his time. He wore a lumberjack sweater of bizarre design, khaki trousers, and gaiters laced up to his knees. His general appearance of an out-of-doors man was somewhat modified by the rimless nose glasses which he wore. Since Tom knew that he was not a Scout official, he was led (not a little by the glasses perhaps) to suspect that he might be a young army officer. Though, to be sure, there was no better reason for hitting upon this supposition than that combination of a rather studious and intellectual appearance and semi-military costume with his self-possessed outdoor manner. He had not exactly an air of authority. Yet he did have a certain breezy assurance about him which somehow (to Tom at least) suggested the officer class of the army. At all events, for the first moment or two our campers seemed at a disadvantage.

“Excuse me,” said the stranger briskly; “you camping here?”

“Looks that way,” said Brent.

“You haven’t seen anybody around in here examining trees?”

Tom shook his head. “I think I saw you before, didn’t I?” he added.

“Yes?” the stranger asked curiously.

“Down in—near our car?”

“Oh, did you? Yes, I looked in there one day; in fact, I bunked there overnight. All right, I suppose?”

“Sure enough,” said Tom, somewhat relieved by this frank declaration; “I thought you saw me that day.”

“No. I’m in the conservation service; checking up on trees around here; I sleep anywhere I happen to be,” the visitor said briskly. “I was on the watch for a telephone gang; you’ve got to get them red-handed, you know; they work at night. They need an extra pole or so, and findings is keepings. You’ve got some pretty rotten looking trees around here.”

“They don’t belong to us,” said Brent.

“You expecting them to chop some trees around here?” Tom asked, with increasing interest.

“Well, I did; but I guess they know I’m around.”

“Sit down and make yourself at home,” said Tom. “You for the state or federal government?”

“Oh, state,” the visitor answered, so briskly that Tom felt chided for his ignorance. “You know they’re building a dam over here by Brundige Mountain——”

“Oh, yes, I know,” said Tom.

“They’ve got the old road turned into a quagmire,” said the government man, contemplating his boots ruefully through his rimless glasses. “We’re going to bring some of the cement in through here and fill some of the trees; cut down the waste.”

“You mean the trees?” Brent asked.

“Oh, no,” the visitor laughed. “Just put cement in where the trees are starting to decay; *filling* we call it; tree dentistry.”

“It’s a mighty good thing, too,” said Tom; “a stitch in time. They’re doing a lot of that work up in the Catskills.”

“Well, they’re not going far into the woods—they can’t,” the visitor said, in his brisk, sociable way. “You fellows smoke?”

“I’ll take a cigarette,” said Brent.

“You see it’s only when a dam or something like that is built away back that we can ring in a little of this work. We graft on the engineering enterprise and get some cement. Wherever you find construction work going on in the woods or mountains, you’ll find some tree doctoring going on; sort of by-product.”

“It gives you a good chance,” said Tom. “I suppose you go ahead of the men and mark the trees?”

“Yes, and half the time they don’t get around to the trees I mark.”

“You come from Buffalo?” Brent asked.

“Buffalo and all over. I chalked, I guess, five hundred trees up in that region. Ever been in the Great Lakes section?”

“No,” said Tom. “I saw a Buffalo imprint in your hat that you left——”

“Yes, I don’t wear one half the time; just let my hair grow long. A hat’s a blame nuisance climbing trees. I was wondering if you fellows could put me up here for a few days?”

“We sure could,” said Tom. “The place don’t belong to us; we’re just camping here.”

“Gulch, they call it—or Gully or something or other?”

“Rattlesnake Gulch,” said Tom. “Some name, huh?”

“Don’t look much like Broadway,” laughed the visitor.

“There aren’t many dances,” said Brent.

The visitor laughed heartily—a friendly, appreciative laugh. “Well, I’m not likely to bother you much,” he said. “I’m going to chalk up some trees around Brundige Mountain, then maybe I’ll drop in here to-morrow, and, if you don’t mind, I’ll make a headquarters here for a few days—just bunk in a corner.”

“You can have the bridal suite in the lean-to,” said Brent. “Nothing is too good for Uncle Sam.”

“Father Knickerbocker you mean,” said Tom.

“Guess that old guy means New York City, doesn’t he?” the conservation man asked, rising, “or maybe he stands for the state at that,” he added, giving his khaki trousers a perfunctory brushing.

“Well, the state conservation bunch can bunk in here any time,” Tom said heartily.

“Do you do cross-word puzzles?” Brent asked.

“Fraid not,” the visitor laughed. “Well, I’ll see you later.”

“How’s the work going on over there?” Tom asked.

“The dam? Oh, there’s going to be quite a lake over there. Only there’s a lot of trees down on the lower reaches of the mountain that have got to be filled.” He lingered in the doorway as if quite willing to explain. “You see, if they rot, why then there’s nothing left to hold the earth together on those slopes. What’s the result? It slides down into the lake and fills it up with mud. In the end they have to dredge it. That’s what they call erosion—earth falling away from where it belongs because there are no roots to hold it together. You see trees are important.”

“Well, I guess,” said Tom.

“The federal government is doing a lot of that out west,” said the visitor. He seemed quite willing to explain this interesting work, pausing still in the doorway, and smiling as if to encourage further questions.

“Well, I’m mighty glad you dropped in on us,” said Tom. “My name is Slade and my chum’s name is Gaylong.”

“Glad to know both of you,” said the visitor, with a little nod of acknowledgment. “My name’s Lawton.”

“Don’t you go to camping anywhere else now,” Tom said.

“Thanks,” said Lawton briskly; “you’ll see me.” And he hurried away.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THREE'S A COMPANY

"Well, there's my mysterious fugitive smashed in the head," laughed Tom.

"Also my mysterious sounds at the top of the well," said Brent.

"And that's that," Tom added. "Mighty nice chap, huh? Boy, that must be interesting work!"

"I'm disappointed," said Brent; "these prosaic calls are getting monotonous. We heard footsteps in the night and they turned out to be a Boy Scout——"

"Oh, there's nothing prosy about Spiff," laughed Tom.

"And now comes this tree dentist or whatever you call him, with his cement and his explosions——"

"Erosion," said Tom. "It's mighty interesting work. There's a lot of that kind of work going on that we don't know anything about."

"Not a single escaped convict so far!" said Brent. "The only bait-box I've seen is full of salt. Conservation experts aren't getting us anywhere. Escaping Scouts are not snappy enough. I was led to expect an old tottering hunter of the *Covered Wagon* type, and all I get is a dentist. I suppose the next person to come stealing in on us will be a life insurance agent. How about going fishing this afternoon?"

"Let me tell you one thing," said Tom; "these fellows are a mighty interesting lot, these government fellows; surveyors and rangers, irrigation fellows and all that—and——"

"Dentists," said Brent.

"Well, I hope you'll give him the glad hand," said Tom.

"He can fill all the cavities and do all the crown and bridge work and painless extractions he wants around here," said Brent, "as long as he doesn't bother me."

"He doesn't do it himself," said Tom.

"Well, he can blaze all the trails he wants," said Brent. "I should think his glasses would fall off climbing trees. He makes a noise like a professor, doesn't he? What is it—*corrosion*?"

"Erosion," Tom exploded.

"My error," said Brent.

"Why, take that old elm near Conner's well," Tom said.

"All right, take it, I don't care," said Brent.

“That needs some filling,” said Tom.

“I think it needs a whole new set of teeth,” Brent observed.

“And you can see for yourself how important it is,” said Tom; “you were in the well.”

“I seem to remember,” said Brent.

“Where do you suppose that well would be if it wasn’t for the roots of that old tree? Why, it would have all caved in, wouldn’t it?”

“Absolutely. And I wouldn’t have spent an evening in it. Don’t talk to me about erosion, I’m in favor of it.”

“Well, you’re interested in government work, aren’t you?”

“Oh, yes, I love, I love, I love my country best.”

“Well, then,” said Tom, “we’ve got to look at it just as if that fellow was billeted with us and treat him right.”

“Have you ever known me to be impolite?”

“No, but you’re funny; everybody doesn’t understand you.”

“I’m like Spiff, I am not understood. So far as I’m concerned, Tommy, our forest home is open to the stranger and the cause he represents. Are we going fishing?”

They went fishing in the brook that afternoon and so much enjoyed their catch of trout that they went again the next day. They found the fish a grateful variation to their rather restricted diet. On returning with their luscious string of trout on that second afternoon they were hailed by Lawton, who was invisible among the branches of a tree.

“The cat came back,” he called cheerily.

“On the job?” Tom shouted. “Come down and have some supper with us; we’ve got eleven trout.”

“Be right with you,” the cheery voice called down. “What’s it going to do, rain?”

“We need rain bad enough,” Tom answered.

“Do you know,” he confessed to Brent as they went on to the cabin, “I’ve about forgotten all about John Mink; off with the old love, on with the new, I suppose you’ll say. It’s a lot of fun just camping here and catching trout and sitting around the fire. I hope Lawton stays all night; we’ll have a three-handed game of pinochle. Boy, that’s some string of fish, hey!”

Lawton did stay all night and made himself mightily at home, to their great enjoyment. He ate trout and talked about fishing in the Great Lakes and played pinochle and told about forestry work generally. He had been in service in France, and he and Tom talked about that. Brent had missed out on that adventure, being then under the age limit. But he enjoyed the talk.

Lawton was no bore, even the Philistine Brent had to admit that. He seemed always ready to answer questions, to explain. He laughed at the

interest they showed and, thus encouraged, gave engaging morsels of adventure and talked somewhat of the difficulties the “forest bunch” have with the political powers that be. He was informative but not boastful. There was a contagious sprightliness about his eager manner of narration. He seemed amused at Brent, never taking offense at that sprawling young philosopher’s whimsical comments.

“Can’t you spare an afternoon and go fishing with us?” Tom asked.

“Don’t know about that! I’d like to right well, though. I’ve got to putter around over at the mountain in the morning; they’re going to revet some of the land where the shore line will run. I’ve got a couple of men coming down from up Lake Champlain to fill a lot of trees, if they ever get here. I was expecting them yesterday. They’ve got cement enough over there to close up the Grand Canyon. You may see me with my trained dentists in the afternoon. Be around?”

“We were thinking of following the White Bar Trail east to-morrow,” said Tom; “maybe up as far as Prairie Spoke. Do you know anything about Bockey Swamp?”

“Scout trails, eh? N-no. That’ll be an all day hike, I dare say?”

“We’ve got one coming to us,” Brent said.

“Yes, you get in the habit of lying around in a place like this,” Lawton said. “Well, so long, I may see you later.”

“Hang around for supper if you’re here,” Tom said. “Make yourself at home till we get here and we’ll have another crack at pinochle.”

“You might put some potatoes cooking at about five or so if you’re here,” said Brent; “put a little salt in the water.”

Lawton laughed good-humoredly as he went away.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE OLD ELM

The next morning something happened, trivial in itself, but destined to have a bearing on the course of this chronicle. The campers used up the last of their coffee for breakfast. After the usual playful expedient of trying to squeeze more out of the tin can, they found that even their supply for that particular breakfast was insufficient. A camp without coffee (whatever you may hear to the contrary notwithstanding) is as sad a thing as a camp without a camp fire.

“I don’t see but what we’ll have to bust into civilization,” said Brent. “I wonder if we look like a couple of Rip Van Winkles. Where do you suppose is the nearest grocery store?”

“Sandyfield? Scout Headquarters?”

“Let’s hike to Sloatsburg,” said Brent, “and that will give me a chance to buy a sweater. I’d like to explore the country southwest of here anyway. Let’s see if we can find a way out to the south and come back along the Sloatsburg road.”

“Suits me,” said Tom, always ready for anything in the way of exploratory hiking.

They struck into the trailless section south of Breakneck Mountain and pushed along in a westerly direction till they bumped into a trail running north and south. This brought them into the Tuxedo-Mt. Ivy Trail which they followed to the easterly end of Half Way Mountain. A leisurely exploration of this long mountain brought them out at Pine Meadow Brook. And so they passed out of the reservation to Sloatsburg by an unfrequented route.

They had an odd feeling, so Tom told me, that their sojourn in the dense forest would in some way advertise itself to the denizens of the outer world. And I think that he was a little disappointed that their backwoods career in the remote home of Long Buck Sanderson did not in some way give them a certain celebrity and prestige in the village. But the village did not know them for romantic treasure hunters. It sold them coffee and a sweater and a few post cards (one of which I received) and did not treat them as interesting pioneers and adventurers.

They returned along the Sloatsburg road and so came to Burnt Sawmill Bridge where the work on the new dam was going forward. The new lake would shortly spread over the country between this and the western reaches

of Brundige Mountain with two long, watery arms embracing the mountain to the north and south.

The vicinity of the new dam was a perfect riot of mud and cement and rocks and disordered road. A dubious *détour* had been provided, which went down into a very wallow of muck where great trucks were emptying their loads of crushed stone and blocking even this temporary way.

“Worse than when we drove in, hey?” said Tom.

“Guess we won’t try to drive out this way,” Brent commented; “unless we get an airplane. They stamp out lakes these days like cookies, don’t they? You can’t depend on geography any more at all—build a dam and start a lake. They’ll be selling mountains and valleys in the five and ten next. Nature’s getting to be a regular quantity production proposition, like Fords.”

There were men wallowing knee-deep in mud, drilling rocks for blasting, sifting stone, and so forth. There were a couple of tents in the chaotic neighborhood and an old hut seemed to have been converted into a camp. There was something attractive about the whole confused scene as there always is about any kind of camp life. Several of the men, a fine, intelligent type, Tom thought, were guiding an apprehensive and fearful motorist through the worst part of the *détour* and explaining to him how he could accomplish the impossible and pass around a mammoth truck whose swinging body hung on end. They nodded in a friendly way at the returning campers, who paused to watch them.

“Lawton around?” Tom asked.

“Lawton?” one of the workers queried, and shook his head.

“The forest fellow,” said Tom. “He’s around here a good deal, isn’t he?”

“Never heard of him,” said the young man; then raising his voice he called to another worker, “Know any one named Lawton?”

The man consulted shook his head.

“Who’s boss around here, anyway?” Tom called.

“I am,” the man answered. “Why, was he supposed to be working here?”

“Well, I should hope,” said Tom. Then he glanced curiously at Brent.

“You can search me,” Brent said.

“That’s funny,” Tom commented. “Well, come ahead.”

Their hike back took them along the road by which they had originally entered the reservation and down through the woods which the gallant Ford had penetrated. The aggressive little car looked lonely and neglected under its tattered and soiled old covering. It seemed to be more buried than ever in foliage.

“See if there’s a can of soup left in the car,” said Tom. “I feel just like having a dish of soup to-night. Wonder if Lawton likes soup? Guess those government workers eat about anything, hey?”

Under the canvas was that odor which always emanates from an automobile in an enclosure, an odor as sure and invariable as the odor of beasts in captivity; a combination of oil, gas, metal, damp upholstery.

“Smells familiar, hey?” Tom said, poking his head in. “Here’s tomato and split pea. Which do you suppose he’d prefer?”

“Bring them both,” said Brent.

It was nearing twilight and they plodded on wearily through the solemn woods, Tom leading the way.

“We look like a nice domestic couple coming home on a Saturday night,” said Brent. “Why didn’t you remind me to buy an egg-beater? If this sweater doesn’t match my good socks I’m going to exchange it. There goes our friend the night worker”—as he called the owl. “Do you know I’m tired?”

“Same here,” said Tom. “We’ll feel like a little three-handed pinochle game after we have a good feed. I’d miss Lawty if he didn’t show up. I suppose they’re likely to shoot him off to the Great Lakes or somewhere soon. Look out you don’t throw that butt on the ground. Boy, but we need rain.”

“The leaves underfoot make as much noise as static, don’t they?” Brent said.

They approached the Gulch at the lower end where Conner’s ruin was. The place looked desolate enough in the waning light, the dead trees, of which there were a number, standing like outcast things amid the living foliage, their soulless look emphasized by the deepening shadows. Their bare, crooked branches, black and brittle, seemed the very symbol of death. Tom wondered if little June Sanderson had been timid in the haunted twilights of this uncanny place. What a scene for a little girl to witness in the bedtime hour!

“I wonder who Conner was and what he looked like,” Tom mused as they approached the Gulch.

Scarcely had he said the words when there was a sound in the distance and they paused amid the thick brush through which they were plowing. Conner’s was possibly two hundred feet distant, and looking in that direction they saw a figure descending the trunk of the old elm which shaded the well.

“There he is, busy as usual,” Tom said, with pleasure in his voice.

He was about to call when Brent, sensing his intention, grasped his arm and said, “Shh—keep still—*look*. What’s that he has under his arm?”

A last freakish ray of sunlight had caught the moving figure; he passed through it as he descended. But in those few seconds he was in a kind of spotlight. It seemed as if the good sun, already withdrawn from the desolate

scene, were pointing a long finger at the distant form, to direct the gaze of the campers upon it. Just a kind of friendly act of the great orb toward the sojourners in that lonely Gulch whom it had seen there every day.

“Don’t call,” said Brent.

## CHAPTER XXX

### A LOSS AND A GAIN

“Shh, don’t call,” Brent repeated; “wait a second.”

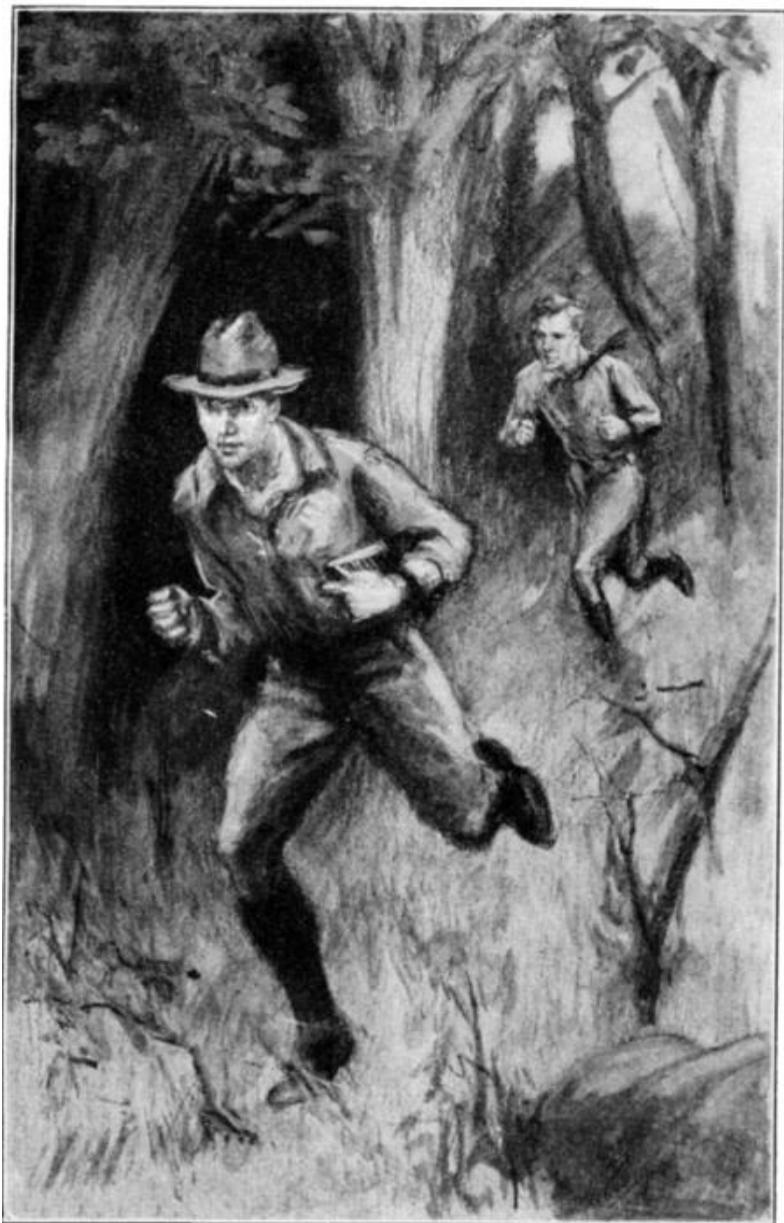
They paused in the brush waiting. The figure descended to within a few feet of the ground, then dropped. He seemed to fall over when he hit the ground. Then he picked himself up, looked quickly about, and sped into the woods.

Tom did not know what he thought; there was no time to think. He was greatly astonished. All in a second there came rushing into his mind the young workman at the dam saying, “Never heard of him,” and of the foreman shaking his head negatively at the unfamiliar name. He had studiously avoided thinking of this, or of speaking of it to Brent on their journey home. Brent had said nothing and Tom had wondered what he thought.

Now there was no time to call. The woods were not like a street; Tom knew not which way the fleeing figure might run.

“Go ahead,” said Brent, “I just wanted to see what he’d do.”

Tom was out of the bushes in a jiffy and running into the woods. Coming in sight of the fleeing form he called, “Hey, Lawton, wait a second; what’s the idea?” But Lawton neither paused nor turned.



“HEY, LAWTON, WHAT’S THE IDEA?”

Now he knew that something was wrong; Lawton heard him but would not wait. Tom had been running to catch up, as one might say; now he started in pursuit. He knew how to run in the woods and sped like a deer. Soon Lawton, fearful, glanced about, and seeing the distance between them

closing up, increased his effort. Probably he had at first thought that he was unseen. But having continued running after Tom had called, flight was now his only course.

But it was no use: Tom caught up, passed him, and, turning about, stood in his path.

“What’s the idea, Lawton?” he panted.

“What’s *your* idea?” Lawton countered, clearly embarrassed.

“Well, I was expecting to cook supper for you and beat you at pinochle,” Tom said, unpleasantly. “I didn’t think I’d have to beat you running. Did you think you could get away from me?”

“You didn’t have to run after me, Slade,” said Lawton looking in a way of reprimand through his rimless eyeglasses. They gave him a certain student look which put Tom at the slightest disadvantage. “Did I say positively that I’d stay for supper?”

“No, but what are you hurrying away for? What’s that you’ve got under your arm?”

“Why, it’s something that belongs to me,” said Lawton crisply.

“It looks like the salt-box from our cabin,” Tom said. He was trembling with expectation, yet he hardly knew what more he could do or say.

“I can’t help that,” said Lawton. “You don’t think I stole your salt-box, do you? You haven’t as much sense of humor as your friend, Slade. What’s the idea now? I was running because I’m late and in a hurry to get to the dam; I’ve got to pay off a couple of tree men. Let’s make it to-morrow.”

For a few seconds Tom looked straight at him. “You’re not running toward the dam,” he said, “and besides, they never heard of you there, Lawton.”

Lawton winced at this but regained his composure. “You were talking with Edwards?” he asked, with an air of perfect sincerity.

“Oh, cut it out,” said Tom disgustedly. “I don’t believe there’s any one there by that name and I think you’re the biggest liar that ever made fools out of two poor simps, that’s what I think.”

“I suppose you want me to lay this box down and hit you and then you’ll pick up the box,” said Lawton. “Does the box belong to you? Tell me that, *does the box belong to you?* Am I stealing anything of yours? There’s the whole matter at a point. Is it yours?”

“Well—n-no, it isn’t,” Tom acknowledged weakly.

“Well, then, how long do we have to stand talking here?”

“Why, just a few minutes longer,” said a familiar voice.

They both stared at Brent, who had approached through the woods unperceived. It was characteristic of him that he had not hurried (at least he had not run), and he carried his customary whimsical and lazy air of self-

possession. He had a paper in his hand, and what with this and his spectacles and altogether non-combatant manner, he looked as if he might be a lawyer bent on settling the dispute out of court. In his other hand he held his flashlight of adventurous memory.

“By the way, Doctor Somers,” said he, “I’m curious to know if you ever really were in the forestry service; you seem to know so much about it; you had me puzzled. I kind of suspected you weren’t a tree dentist, but I never knew you were a doctor. That’s a good front name you’ve got—Slicksby. Mother’s maiden name? I’ll always think of you as *Slick*—Slick Somers. Here you go, Tommy, glance at this, that I picked up under Conner’s elm.”

In the funniest way he handed the paper and flashlight to Tom (for it was now dusk) as if they were two parts of something to be used. And all the while he kept his eye on the discomfited Somers.

“Just a minute, alias Lawton,” said Brent. “This is turning out to be a real adventure after all. You found the money for us. Shall I take it? I can tell you all about it; that box has three thousand dollars in it belonging to your old friend out there in Missouri and we knew about it before you did, only we didn’t know where it was.”

Meantime, Tom was reading the paper. I have that paper now; it is my souvenir of the big adventure. It consists of about half a sheet of business letter paper, the lower half, so it contains no printed heading. I think, however, that it may be the letter paper of some lawyer. It contains the last part of a typewritten letter and a signature which I have never taken the trouble to investigate, and which I shall omit here. This was the letter, or as much of it as the sheet contained:

not to mention the note on which you forged the signature of endorser. The other matter about the automobile would certainly be considered as obtaining money under false pretenses. I set these two instances before you not as a threat but simply that you may know that the proceedings, if the matter is carried to the point of litigation, would inevitably take the form of a criminal action.

I am as anxious to avoid this as I am sure you must be, and it was for that reason that I suggested the possibility of your getting some accommodation in the matter of your salary at the sanitarium, so as to avert such a sequel.

I assume that this has not been possible. I doubt very much whether under the circumstances the professional money-lender would do business with you, as you have intimated. I have been able, as I say, to secure the promise which holds the matter in suspense until September 1st, and I very sincerely hope that you will be able to hit on some plan of securing the two thousand dollars by that date.

Yours very truly,  
(Signature of sender)

TO DOCTOR SLICKSBY SOMERS,

On the back of this letter are roughly scrawled in lead pencil certain brief memorandums. These do not appear in sequence, but are written every which way on the sheet, and their general appearance suggests, I think, that they were jotted down as they were secured, perhaps with difficulty, from the person who gave them. Perhaps each memorandum was the result of patient and discouraging catechizing. Who shall say? I copy them here in order:

Rattlesnake Gulch near Sandyfield township, Haverstraw, N. Y. East of Sloatsburg, N. Y. Big pond near—maybe half mile. Sloatsburg—maybe a little north. Swamp two miles west of place—about. Cabin—old ruin near well. Well—lots of brush. Either tree near cabin or near well—over well—elm. Hole in crotch—second branch. Try trees near cabin first. Must reach down. Conner's Hollow other name—could ask. Seth Borden—or Borsen—if alive could direct to Gulch—Ramapo. In tin box.

Tom glanced hurriedly over the letter and the not too intelligible notes on the back of it.

“So you're the doctor—his doctor—that's supposed to be in Europe, huh?” he sneered. “Oh, yes, we know old Mink—and now we know you. Give me that box, Somers; come, hand it over before I knock you flat, you low-down sneak!”

Somers had at least the courage to put up a momentary objection to handing over the box. It may have saved him a little measure of temporary self-respect. But it did not save him the box. Like lightning Tom wrenched it from him and sent him sprawling upon the ground.

“All right, Somers,” he said grimly. “Now, if you want to beat it you can do it. We came here to try and find that box and give it to the poor old fellow it belongs to——”

“That's just what I wanted it for,” said Somers.

“Yes, well what have you been lying for, then? What did you start to run away for? What did you sneak out of my Ford and run away for? What did you walk away from that well for when there was somebody calling for help in it? Oh, I was some dub! Somers, you're the biggest liar and the dirtiest low-down sneak I ever met in my life! Why, here in black and white is the proof that you forged somebody's name. And the other matter about the automobile—goodness knows what you did there!”

“We appreciate it that you didn't take our Ford,” said Brent.

“Honest to goodness, Somers,” said Tom earnestly, “when I think of that poor old codger out there, just getting hold of himself after his life being a blank all those years, and us waiting around here trying to find his money

for him so we could give it to him and tell him about his old partner and his kid that's in an orphan asylum; when I think of him wandering back here to his old home—why, Somers, I could almost shake hands with you for finding the box. You turned out to be the missing link in all this business—honest, I think some good fairy sent you here, with your lies about forestry and conservation! You're all right, Somers, only you don't get out of any of your scrapes with old Mink's money—not unless you can take this box away from me. So you're the young doctor that the poor old codger missed so much—oh, yes, you see we know all about it, we read the western papers.

“Now, Doctor Slick Somers, this old patient of yours is going to show up. If he doesn't show up here, he's going to show up somewhere; he'll turn up and the authorities will find him. And we're going to see to it that he gets his money.”

“We're out for adventure,” said Brent.

“Now,” said Tom, “maybe you don't trust us, and we certainly don't trust you. This money don't belong to any of us. If you want to hang around and make sure the old man gets it, why, you can sleep in the woodshed if you want to. But maybe your name will get into the papers, and then the automobile people may get after you and the guy whose name you forged and—— Now, wouldn't you say it was better just to beat it and let us take care of things? Just get into the Tuxedo road and——”

“Would you let me have money enough to get home?” Somers asked.

“Not one blooming cent,” said Tom.

“Millions for defense but not one cent for travelling expenses,” said Brent. “Why, a slick article like you ought to be able to jip a ride on some freight.”

“All right,” said Tom disgustedly, “there's no use standing here talking; come ahead, Brent. So long, Somers; you're the meanest proposition I ever met in my life.”

They went off leaving Somers standing stock-still where they had talked. He did not move till they were too far and too much engrossed with talk to notice him. Probably he had that odd feeling that the least move would make him the more shameful by making him the more conspicuous.

So he did not emphasize his presence by departing until there was no one to see him go. Where he went they never knew, but he was never heard of in his native home again. He certainly was a discredit to a very noble profession. Whatever his difficulties were, they must have been grave and pressing to prompt him to use the information given him by an unwary patient as a desperate means of saving himself from jail. I have often wondered, as Brent did, whether he really ever was in the conservation service.

“He would have made a good real estate salesman,” Brent said. And unquestionably he had one quality useful in that calling.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### JUST THE TWO OF THEM

So there at last was the precious three thousand dollars of Long Buck Sanderson and his partner Mink Havers safe in the hands of our adventurers. Even on their way to the cabin after the scene just described, Tom must pause long enough to climb the old elm and examine the hollow in which the box had been for, who shall say how many years. There were many nutshells in the hollow, which was evidently a favorite nest of squirrels. The thought occurred to Tom how he had probably many times seen the little creatures who lived so near that precious box.

From the branch where the hollow was, he could look straight down into the fearful depth of the well. Mink Havers must have changed his mind about the hiding place in a last moment of hurried consideration. It seemed likely that he had fallen from the tree and that this had been the cause of his cut head and unconscious state when found.

“You don’t suppose there’s the slightest possibility, do you,” said Brent, as they went on to the cabin, “that Mink told Somers to get the treasure? sure? That would put us in wrong.”

“Don’t make me laugh,” said Tom. “Why, didn’t the article in the newspaper say the young doctor went to Europe? What was the use of that lie? He didn’t go, he came here.”

“And like the light that lies in woman’s eyes, he lied and lied and lied,” said Brent.

“My theory,” said Tom, “is that old Mink Havers was able to remember something about where his money was; he knew it was in a tree, *but what tree?* Somers was in trouble; that’s clear enough, isn’t it? And he jumped at this means to get the money that he needed. Things certainly broke right for him—till the last scene. He nearly got away with it. The forestry and tree dentistry gag gave him the chance to explore all the trees around here without starting suspicions. He was slick all right—and some line of talk!”

“I think you were a little leary about him,” Tom said.

“I was, but I don’t know just why,” said Brent; “woman’s intuition, I suppose.”

“Well, it’s all over but the shouting,” said Tom. “Just the same, we’ll camp here till Labor Day, hey? I have a feeling things are going to move along O. K.; old Havers will be heard from. Wonder what the Philistine<sup>[1]</sup> will say.”

They found the bait-box to be locked, but they did not quite feel that they could suffer the least uncertainty as to its contents, so they ripped it open with a screw-driver and a can-opener. Inside it was a shabby old leather wallet, bulging with the little fortune that it contained. There was also an old bit of paper with some figures on it, a sample probably, of Long Buck's crude account-keeping in the matter of his relations with Pollock. There was also something else which (when I saw it later) interested me not a little. This was an old program of the Gayety Museum which held forth on the Bowery in the bygone days. I suppose old Buck had visited it.

The campers ate heartily and were gay at their meal that night. The treasure (for they could never call it anything else) lay upon the barrel which was their dining table and they glanced at it continually; it had a sort of fascination for them. It carried their thoughts back to a time when there were no camps and no Scouts in that wild region; when this overgrown fastness in which they were camping was the home of hardy hunters and trappers.

I had seen the last of the sturdy race who dwelt in that wilderness, but Tom and Brent had seen not so much as a living remnant of the old adventure and romance which had once been there. Only the little primitive cabin was left, nestling amid the brush and trees, and Conner's well, and the old overgrown foundation of the forest home in which Conner (whoever he was) had once dwelt. And the treasure, eloquent memorial of those old hunting days....

And as they looked into that old bait-box where the musty wallet lay open for repeated inspections, a thought was more or less clearly formulated in the minds of both the adventurers. It was Tom who voiced that thought.

"Do you know," said he, "now that it's all over, I don't want that money at all; I mean I wouldn't care so much about it even if it didn't belong to anybody. It was the fun of wanting to find it, and of getting it. Adventure is better than money, when it comes to a showdown. Because it's a blamed sight more scarce, I suppose."

"Money does not always bring happiness, Tom," said Brent, with a whimsical look on his funny face.

"There you go, joking again," said Tom.

"What are we going to do with the box when we go fishing?" Brent said. "It would be a shame to take the money out of the box, it wouldn't look like treasure any more, it would just look like plain, common, everyday money."

"Plain, common, everyday money is right," said Tom. "What do you say we have a game of checkers? Somehow, I've turned against pinochle since to-night."

"I always said there was no romance to pinochle, Tommy," said Brent. "Checkers is full of medieval tradition. I think the pirates used to play

checkers—or was it Mah-Jong? Anyway, it wasn't pinochle. All right, I'll beat you a game before we turn in. There goes the night worker."

"I kind of like to hear that owl screeching," said Tom.

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[1] By "the Philistine" he meant my humble self.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### A NEW FOE

I have told you of the geography of Rattlesnake Gulch; I must now tell you something of its immediate neighborhood. I never knew and I do not know now, whether the name Rattlesnake Gulch pertains to the little wild hollow where the cabin stood or to the larger gap of land in which it lay. It was, as one might say, a gulch within a gulch. Only the larger gulch is not so easy to present to the mind's eye. I find myself writing of these places in the past tense, for they seem to me now all as part of a tale that is told. You must, somehow, be made to see this wild section clearly, if you are to understand what happened there.

If some wide railroad cut were overgrown and cluttered with rock and crazy trees and tangled brush for a couple of hundred feet or so, that would be something like the immediate neighborhood of old Buck's cabin. Through this miniature jungle a stream had once flowed, and the old stream bed was a very chaos of rock and tangled undergrowth; a chaotic gully. On its damp bottom, underneath the rank growth, no ray of sunlight ever penetrated. A strange kind of life thrived here, slugs and little red lizards which hid under stones and scooted when such a refuge was removed by some alien hand or foot from the world above. So much you already know.

But this whole thicket where Conner's ruin and the cabin lay was in a close valley flanked by ranges of hills running east and west. These ranges of hills were about a quarter of a mile apart, running more or less parallel. The land between them was what I have called the valley; it was long and deep, the flanking heights being in places almost precipitous. For all I know, this whole wild vale was Rattlesnake Gulch. No old inhabitant of the region ever visited our campers to tell them otherwise. I learned the appalling name from old Buck and passed it on to my young friends. It makes very little difference how much of that forbidding section the name was supposed to include. I suppose the whole region, as far as the flanking hills to either side, might properly have been called a gulch.

In hot weather the heat in this whole section was terrific, as it usually is in valleys. But it was more so, I think, than in a spacious, open valley, because, when the sun was overhead, it poured its torrid rays down into a sort of natural receptacle where the heat was confined and retained. That, I suppose, is the reason why so much of the vegetation there was dry; much of it dead or dying. One made as much noise walking over dried twigs and

leaves there (even in the height of summer) as is usually made in walking on a pavement.

The whole place must have been frightful in times of storm. Dead and broken trees, sticking their crazy, dislocated branches this way and that, testified to the fury of the wind as it swept through the narrow valley. Even in calm weather, such as our campers had enjoyed, the door and little window of the cabin were always rattling at night because of the draught through the long, deep, narrow valley. I often think of the winters spent by old Buck and little June in that freezing channel between the hills: winters of lashing wind and blinding snow—they must have been terrible!

Well, a few days after recovering the treasure, Tom and Brent went fishing again. It was laughable, but they took the money with them (Tom carrying the wallet in his pocket) for fear of anything happening to it in their absence. They had done this before and faithfully replaced it in its romantic old container on returning, like a jewel replaced in its casket.

They had fished as long as daylight and hunger would permit, and were returning through the Gulch with a tempting string of trout. These they would cook and then settle down to an evening at chess, at which game Brent was something of an expert. They would lay the board on the dining table (that is, an old barrel) sitting on either side of it on a couple of old boxes. Four candles, one at each corner of the board, gave an ecclesiastical look to their silent encounters.

As they passed through the Gulch Tom observed (so he told me later) that if they hurried they could cook their fish by daylight, conserving their candles for the evening's pastime. He pointed to an area of brightness to the west, that is, beyond the end of the valley, or where it widened out into open country. "We'll have light for an hour yet," he said.

A little later, as Brent emerged from the cabin to get some water, he noticed that the area of brightness, instead of being less, was of a flaming red and that there was smoke above it.

"Come and look at this," he called.

The immediate neighborhood of the cabin was now in shadow, the hard outlines of trees and brush were dissolving in the softening light, but the light in the distance gleamed red. And now this red was rendered the more vivid in the pervading dusk. They saw now that it was not the changing red of sunset, but something alien to the twilight scene, and striking terror.

"It's fire!" said Tom excitedly.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### DAVID AND GOLIATH

“It’s blowing into the valley,” Tom said concernedly; “this is going to be bad.”

Scarcely had he said the words when the cabin door blew shut and the loose window rattled alarmingly.

“Maybe the swamp will stop it,”<sup>[2]</sup> said Brent.

“It’s this side of the swamp,” Tom answered, gazing intently; “why, it’s right in the valley. *Boy*, that’s bad! It’s going to sweep right through here.” He paused for just three or four seconds, thinking.

“Do you suppose we could head it off?” Brent asked.

“Either that or it’ll clean out the place,” Tom said. “I doubt if that’s seen anywhere else than here. The gang over at the dam might see it, at that.”

“They’ve stopped work by now,” said Brent.

“Yep, that’s the trouble. Looks to me as if it might just be starting. Here, I tell you what you do,” he added, in a kind of hurried uncertainty; “no, just let me think a second—here—give us that pail. The best thing for you to do, old man, is to beat it down through the valley and pull up all the brush you can—David and Goliath.”

“David got the decision, you know,” said Brent.

“Yere, well it’s all you can do. Hustle down that way and yank up all the brush you can—yank it up in a kind of channel right across the path of the fire—see? Here, take a knife—and take this other pail. Thank goodness, the brook runs through down here. After you get a channel cleared, souse it with water all the way across—you won’t get far, I’m afraid. Half an hour ago we could have stopped it—blame it all. Here—here’s your spectacles—hurry up—and go like a fireman, not like a philosopher!”

“It shall not pass,” said Brent.

“I wish I could believe it,” Tom said. “Anyway, hurry up, for the love of goodness! I’m going to send a signal from the hill. So long, I’ve got the money all right.”

Brent hurried along through the dry brush of the valley while Tom with frantic haste crowded some dried brush down into the pail and hurriedly grabbed old Buck’s threadbare corduroy jacket which still hung on a peg in the cabin. This he soaked in water at the spring and wrung it out. Then he started pell-mell for the nearest flanking hill.

It was a terrible climb, especially with one arm embarrassed by the pail; in places he had to lift himself from one rock or projecting tree to another, like a monkey. He might have made an easier ascent to a lower eminence, but every inch of altitude he could gain was needed now. From the hilltop he saw, to his comparative relief, that the flames had not spread over a very large area. It might be that the country beyond the narrow valley was not in great danger. The fire, so it seemed to Tom, had its beginning in the widening mouth of the big gulch and was being carried in by the rising wind.

Looking north from where he stood, he could see a few scattered specks of light. He believed that these were at the camps about Kanawauke Lakes. He knew he could not see the lights (if any there were) at Scout Headquarters because of the intervening eminence known as Pine Hill. But he could see the western end of the larger lake; that is, he could see little flickers of light which he thought were on or about the lake. It was now quite dark.

He set the pail upon a high rock and set fire to the contents. As soon as it was blazing prosperously, he poked it so as to get the whole mass of fuel to burning. Then he squeezed the old corduroy jacket into it as one wrings out a washed garment, and quickly spread the damp jacket over the pail. It is pretty skilful work getting just the right amount of water into a confined fire. You may make a smudge too voluminous to handle, or on the other hand, you may put the fire out. Tom knew the proportions for his signal fuel. When he pulled the jacket suddenly from over the pail a straight column of black mounted into the air. If a solid shaft had been raised it could hardly have been more readily discernible at a distance.

He watched the column piercing the sky, then looked into the pail as a chemist might do, pleased with an experiment. He let the column rise for perhaps a quarter of a minute, then spread the jacket over the pail. Just then the moon edged out from behind a wind cloud and lit up the hilltop. For perhaps a quarter of a minute Tom waited, long enough for the column to dissolve completely, then shot another dense pillar of blackness into the moonlit sky. Again, and still again he pierced the starry depths of heaven with this ghostly arm, rising out of a tin pail of smothered fire. So it was that water, the enemy of fire, was allied with the monster here to print a single word upon the open pages of the sky—H-E-L-P.

“That’s the worst of this signal business,” Tom said aloud, as he prepared to spell the word again. “One camp has one sign, another camp has something else, and you never know what reading they’ll get.”

He rolled up his sleeves, looked over to the north, then scrawled his urgent summons once again upon the firmament. “If it was at Temple Camp

they'd know, all right," he muttered.

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[2] Meaning Green Swamp.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

Spiffy Henshaw was breaking the rules that night. He did not care, since he was going to be sent home anyway. He was paddling about on the lake alone in his glory.

Spiffy had not fared well at camp. He had set himself up to be independent and do things in his own way. Then, when he had found that this way did not bring the world at his feet and win him merit badges, he had sought the coöperation and help which Scouts have in these enterprises. But by that time Spiffy was too deeply involved in difficulties with his superiors to make a new and proper start. He had denounced the ways of the Scout and had come to find that he could not count on the help of those that he had ridiculed and belittled.

This was the state of things when Spiffy had made his memorable call at the cabin. He had returned to camp after that call, resolved that he would win merit badges according to program and without help. But he had not made out. You cannot annihilate the past with a knock-out blow—unless it is a tremendous knock-out blow. Spiffy had scorned to wear his sumptuous four-jewelled pin, his cry for help, as Tom had called it, and had tried to win out alone. But he could not swim against the tide. And back he was going to Jersey City.

Suddenly, his gaze was attracted to something in the sky to the south. He saw a long, black, upright column hovering there. His ever scornful eye lingered upon it till it disappeared. Then it came again, high, commanding, alien in the clear, moonlit night. Then went, then came. And still Spiffy Henshaw watched it curiously, idly. Again it rose up like a climbing rocket, a great black, beckoning finger in the sky. And again it dissolved. Only the moon and the wind clouds were not to be seen in that direction.

Then it was that Spiffy Henshaw might have won a merit badge with his rowing—if frantic effort counts for anything. He did not row well; he did not do well anything which has to be learned. But if there had been any merit badge given for a mighty spirit, that badge would have been Spiffy's. Though ornaments were dear to his heart, he did not possess a single such badge. The only ornament of vainglory which he owned was in his pocket (where the misjudging world could not see it) with its sharp end stuck into a cork—the four-jewelled pin, his disgraceful call for help, which since his meeting with Tom he had disdained to wear. Yet who shall say that this

gorgeous trinket from a package of lemon-drops did not play its part in the life of Spiffy Henshaw?

It was just like him not to bother about chaining the boat. “*Hurry up!*” he shouted. “*Hurry up, come ahead, there’s a call for help!*”

He did not pause to see if any followed. Like a madman he ran headlong up the road to his own camp where he lived discredited. They were getting ready for camp fire (a pleasure he eschewed) and he alighted among them like a meteor out of the sky.

“*Come ahead, everybody!*” he fairly screamed. “There were four—black—smokes like—in—over there in the sky. It means help!”

“I guess not,” said the camp manager.

“Four—col—columns,” Spiffy panted; “it means help.”

Spiffy’s prestige in camp was not strong enough to win him much attention.

“It would be a lot of little puffs then,” said the young camp manager.

“Or four dots, and one dot, and a dot and a dash and two dots, and a dot and two dashes and one dot,” said a scout, who certainly knew the Morse code off-hand. “That’s what means help around here, if you know how to spell.”

Spiffy glared at him in mounting rage. And he said something which I think is worth recording. “What difference does it make what it means here?” he fairly roared. “It’s what it means over there that counts. I’m not asking *you* or anybody else what it means *because I know!* I’m asking you if you’re going to answer a call for help. Come ahead, those that are coming. You can come, too, if you want to,” he added, addressing the camp manager.



TOM SHOT ANOTHER DENSE PILLAR OF BLACKNESS INTO THE  
MOONLIT SKY.

A few straggled after him, smiling, doubting. And others followed after those few. These last would not have admitted that they were following Spiffy. They did not rally about him as he sped into the night; they straggled

along, laughing among themselves. One said that Spiffy had been seeing things, and this created a chorus of laughter.

I can't tell you how glad I am that the young camp manager went. He hurried along with the others, the big boy who knew the Morse code so well running at his side. In the intervals of his panting he said, "When's he going home, anyway?"

"To-morrow, I guess—poor kid," the young manager panted.

Yes, I am glad that those two went along; I wouldn't have had them miss it for anything....

## CHAPTER XXXV THE KNOCK-OUT

Into the Hawkeye Spoke Trail he sped, hatless, abandoned. And they followed, not because they trusted him, but because he seemed possessed. At least they would see the fun of an anti-climax. Over the edge of Pine Hill he sped and across the Sloatsburg road and past Breakneck Pond and into the valley. He had picked his way at night before, the unruly little rascal, and he knew his ground now. No one asked him where he was going, but the moon beyond the signal hill smiled upon him and guided him.

On he sped, stumbling, pausing in doubt, then plunging forward again with maniacal desperation. He had been denied the pathfinder's badge, this boy. It was quite all right and according to the handbook. Only they took credit afterward for his fine spirit. But it was not the Bear Mountain camps that stirred the soul within him as he ran headlong through the night. What bore him on in this perfect frenzy was a spirit from another camp, the personality of Tom Slade of Temple Camp which had knocked him flat and set him on his feet again. He knew what he knew. And he sped on....

And so it happened that a couple of score of Scouts swarmed into the wild, narrow valley and felt the heat which filled the place and saw the fast-approaching flames. They faced the infantry of the blaze and the rushing cavalry of the wind. And then indeed was fulfilled Brent Gaylong's rueful prediction, *They shall not pass*.

And they did not pass.

The Scouts found Brent in the upper end of the valley pulling up brush and throwing water across the path of the advancing flames. But the fire would have given its horrible, soulless, crackling laugh at his poor efforts. It was like a sharpshooter attacking an army.

"The—the brook is—over there," Brent panted.

"Use your hats, Scouts," their camp manager said. "Some of you pull up brush."

Hatful after hatful of water was thrown upon the ground across the narrow, precipitous way. Working was hard, for the heat was terrific. Stones were rolled into the path of the flames. Brush was pulled up with a rapidity that set Brent's poor striving at naught. And the land for a width of ten feet or more was soaked.

"Keep busy, we'll make it," the camp manager panted.

From the cabin a couple of Scouts came running with the barrel which was Tom's and Brent's dining table. As they approached the scene of action they were as clear as figures seen by day. The cabin stood in an area of red light, and the old elm near Conner's well stood out with strange clearness in the surrounding brightness. That end of the valley where the little gulch was seemed like an inferno, bathed, as it was, in vivid red.

But between that spot and the consuming flames the Scouts had drawn their dead-line. Here the careering flames hissed and paused. Here they tried to get across and failed. And they sent volleys of sparks across the dead-line, and these were stamped out by ready feet, and the little patches of fire which they started here and there were drowned out with water from the barrel. And so the fight in the big gulch was fought and won, and the flames diminished and died, hissing as they abandoned their triumphal march.

Against the half-filled barrel leaned Spiffy Henshaw, panting and resting. And as sure as you live he had a big black smear upon his freckled countenance. They were still too busy to bother with him, and it was Tom Slade who first approached him.

"You're all right, Spiff," he said sociably. "You got my message?"

"I wouldn't have got it if I hadn't been breaking a crazy rule," Spiffy announced, with a look of challenge at his camp manager.

Seeing Tom there the camp manager approached, and presently Spiffy was the center of a throng. He lifted himself and sat upon a bit of wood that lay across the barrel.

"Defiance on a monument," said Brent. "Do you know," he said, "I think somehow a barrel is the ideal pedestal for him. When they make a statue of Spiffy some day I hope they'll have him on a barrel. So you read the sky even if you don't read your book, hey, Spiff, old boy?"

"This is Spiff," said Tom, his arm about his protégé.

"Oh, yes, we know him," said the camp manager. "His acts are better than his reasoning."

"Actions speak louder than reasoning," said Brent.

"He certainly did a stunt to-night," said the tall boy who knew the Morse code so well.

But Tom did not condescend to discuss the triumph of his little hero. Instead, he took out his handkerchief and wiped the smear off Spiffy's cheek. "The honorable wounds of service," he said. Then he patted him on the shoulder and let his hand rest there.

"Spiff," said he, "you're the best little Scout that ever got himself in dutch. And you're wrong as usual. You say if you hadn't broken a rule you wouldn't have seen the message. If you hadn't gone back to camp as I told

you to do, you wouldn't have all these Scouts standing around and staring at you now—as if they really thought you were a hero.”

“Can I stay with you?” Spiff asked.

“No, you *cannot*. You've got them started now. Haven't they just given you help without you asking for it? And now they'll fall all over themselves to help you. There's no chance for advancement, kid, at our cabin. A kid like you wants a wider field, big opportunities. We're just a couple of campers here. This gulch is no place for a *hero*. What you want is a *world* to conquer—not a cabin. How about that—am I right?” Tom laughed at the camp manager.

And the camp manager winked at Tom. I don't know what he meant by it. But I do know that Spiffy Henshaw didn't go home till school opened, and when he did he took the stalking badge and the pathfinder's badge with him. I only hope his teachers in school understood him as well as Tom Slade did. But perhaps that would be too much to expect....

## CHAPTER XXXVI CHRISTMAS AND AUNT MARTHA

It was several weeks after the fire when a half dozen or more Scouts from up around the lakes appeared at the cabin escorting a tottering old white-haired man, clustering about him and rather frightening him with vociferous and conflicting information. Boys are usually ready with information whether they have it or not, and they told this poor old native that Buck had died, that he hadn't died, that he had gone away to New York, that he had a job as gate-tender somewhere on a railroad. Probably all these and other morsels of advice had a certain vague foundation in rumor. I doubt if any of the boys had ever really known old Buck. But they brought this returning Rip Van Winkle to his forest home, and so he fell into the hands of Tom and Brent.

No one at the lakes knew at what point old Mink Havers had entered the reservation. He must have been astonished at seeing the seething Scout life, for scouting was a thing undreamed of when he had wandered away. He said he had left the road at Ben Harlowe's place and struck into the hills. But as no one of that name is known for miles around it may be inferred that Ben Harlowe, and perhaps his place, are things of the remote past.

The old man, his memory restored (or at least in process of restoration) had escaped from kindly confinement in Missouri and in the course of time made his way to within three miles of his old cabin in Rattlesnake Gulch. Here, at the lakes, the new life had startled and confused him. It seems odd that after his long and devious journey the old hunter had been forced to submit to the guidance of Boy Scouts. Thus the old pathfinder of that region was taken to his primitive cabin by the young pathfinders of this present time.

I think old Mink's imperfectly restored memory was a blessing; a complete restoration of it would have wrung his old heart. As it was he took everything for granted (the discovered treasure included), and he did not seem to grieve over the death of his old partner. "Bucky, he went with the lung ail, huh?" was all he said. By which I suppose he meant pneumonia.

Actions speak louder than words, indeed, with an old man who has achieved a pilgrimage more by instinct than intelligence. So it was not necessary, nay, it was not even possible, to give him an account of the happenings which I have tried faithfully to record in these pages. He hesitated a little when Tom explained to him about June Sanderson's just

claim to half the money and declined to give up so much of the precious horde. "There weren't no sech gal," he said. "'Tain't no claim o' her'n 'cause they wern't no sech gal," he said.

The difficulty of explaining to him the rule about those who die intestate and the claims of unknown heirs was too much for poor Tom and even for Brent, so they sent for me (whom they had ridiculed because of my prosaic habits) to help them out of this rather puzzling sequel to their adventure. I drove up because I apprehended certain other difficulties as well. Here was an old, homeless man escaped from an institution and living, unknown to the authorities, with two young treasure-seekers at Rattlesnake Gulch. Clearly a mature intelligence was needed there, and I think I have that, even if I am not a seeker of wild adventure.

I left my car in Sandyfield, parked where I had parked it on that fateful first visit to the Gulch, and Tom met me and piloted me to the cabin. That part of the neighborhood which had not been burned was so thickly grown with brush that I hardly knew it for the same place I had visited in the spring. I think I never saw a spot so wild, so forbidding, so apparently remote; it was terrible. Old Mink seemed to fit well in those surroundings, but, of course, it was out of the question to leave him there.

We did, however, leave him in his beloved old cabin in the care of several Boy Scouts, while we pushed our way back through wood and jungle to Sandyfield and drove to Kingston. Heaven help the poor old man, he had questions enough to answer that day.

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Well, there is little more to tell you. I wired out west that we had old Mink and was able, I am glad to say, to inaugurate certain arrangements which resulted in his being placed in the Pinewoods Home for old people, of which my good friend Mr. John Temple was the founder. There he is living in patriarchal glory and his fifteen hundred dollars has gone to the institution. Whenever I drive past the beautiful place, almost hidden in the fragrant pines, I stop and see him, and sometimes I think his memory grows more clear. But he remembers things only in mass (if I may use such an expression) which is all that is to be hoped for, I suppose, considering his ninety-two years. I always take him tobacco for the pipe which I think is the only thing of my acquaintance older than he.

We found little June Sanderson to be another one of those unfortunates (of which Spiffy is the shining type) that the world does not understand. At least, the orphan asylum in Kingston did not understand her. I think that she never ceased to think of her forest home—and her beloved rattlesnakes, as Brent says. Even the knowledge that she was an heiress to the amount of fifteen hundred dollars did not seem to comfort her. She cried when she saw

me, and cried more when I reminded her how she had “scared me about snakes,” and clung to me and did not want me to go.

So then we went to Aunt Martha’s. She was sitting on her little porch and seemed quite overwhelmed as we stopped before the house.

“Aunt Martha,” said I, “I blame you for some perplexities I have. I always knew that no good could ever come of the visit I made you, and now I am dickering with the authorities out west and visiting orphan asylums and dividing a fortune, and here are my two friends, Tom Slade and Brent Gaylong, and one of them knocked down a thief in the woods. The other nearly got killed by a rattlesnake and all *I* have as my personal swag in these adventures is a program of the Gayety Museum of the Bowery. I blame you for all this. You invited me up here. You stood in back of that rattlesnake. It was you, strictly speaking, it was *you*, who pushed my friend Brent Gaylong into a well! *You* are the accessory before the fact in a chain of harrowing and very dark adventures. I am not denouncing you for your part. Perhaps you didn’t realize what you were doing. But tell me this, so I can close up a very dark chapter in my career. Could you use (I spoke deliberately) a thoroughly first class little girl, as good as new, fully guaranteed? Just answer yes or no.”

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Oh, well, to put an end to the nonsense, my Aunt Martha not only fell, but actually demanded, her share of the booty—“swag,” we told her she ought to call it. So I suppose I must consider her one of the gang of treasure-seekers, and like the pirate chief, she got the best part of the treasure. She is visiting me now, as I finish the record of these happenings, and chiding me for writing on this Christmas Eve, when I should be decorating the tree for her “swag,” which is just pretty little June Sanderson.

But I cannot stop till I have finished, for Tom and Brent are coming around to hear these last chapters and say whether I have told the plain truth. I have certainly tried to. And since they have been so much concerned with trees, I will let them try their hands at decorating while they “jolly” my poor old Aunt Martha as they always do, telling her that she was the cause of Brent’s mishap and Lawton’s thievery and the forest fire and all that. Well, it all sounds good in the home of a lonely bachelor. And my Aunt Martha will lay down her knitting, as she always does, and tell them that they should not make such charges against her in front of June, and try in her gentle way to show them how their reasoning and conclusions are defective....

THE END

[The end of *Tom Slade at Bear Mountain* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]