

The Boy Scouts in a Trapper's Camp



THORNTON W. BURGESS

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Thornton W. Burgess

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The Boy Scouts in a Trapper's Camp

By Thornton W. Burgess

Author of "The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp", "The Boy Scouts on Swift River", "The Boy Scouts on Lost Trail"

Illustrated by F. A. Anderson

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*To
W. H. T.,
A lover of the open, and his three boys,
this book is affectionately dedicated*

HE SAW SOMETHING MOVE

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HE SAW SOMETHING MOVE

HE JOTTED DOWN THE NUMBER

ONCE MORE THEY BUCKLED DOWN TO THE TASK

NOT TEN FEET AWAY WAS A BIG BUCK

FOR A FEW SECONDS HE STOOD MOTIONLESS



Introduction

To those who have read the preceding volumes in this series, "The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp," "The Boy Scouts on Swift River," and "The Boy Scouts on Lost Trail," some of the characters in the present volume will be familiar. To me they are old friends in whose struggles and adventures I have taken the keenest personal interest.

In this, the fourth and concluding volume, I have endeavored to portray in some small measure the life of the trapper who in solitude and loneliness pits his skill against the cunning of the fur-bearers, and his courage and fortitude against the forces of Nature in her harshest and most relentless mood; to bring to my young readers a sense of the mystery of the great life eternal that broods over the wilderness to an even greater degree when its waters are fettered in ice, and its waste places wrapped in snow than when it rejoices in its summer verdure; to show that the standards a man or a boy sets for himself are as binding upon him in remote places where none may see as in the midst of his fellow men; and lastly to demonstrate what a powerful factor in the development of character and true manhood are the oath and law of the Boy Scouts of America when subscribed to in sincerity and conscientiously observed.

Man or boy is never so true to himself as when in intimate contact with nature. Adventures such as herein described may not fall to your lot, oh, boy reader, but be assured that whenever you heed the call of the Red Gods and hit the long trail you will find adventure of a degree awaiting you, and you will return stronger physically and mentally for having come in closer contact with the elemental forces which we term nature.

THE AUTHOR.

The Boy Scouts in a Trapper's Camp



CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED DREAM

Walter Upton pushed aside books and papers, yawned, stretched, yawned again, then settled back in his chair comfortably, his hands clasped behind his head.

"I'm glad that vacation is only one week off," he murmured. "School is all right, and I know I'm going to be mighty sorry when school-days end for good. Just the same, this infernal grind to get a scholarship does get a fellow's goat sometimes. If I don't win it I don't see how I can go to college next year unless I can find some way to earn the money. Poor old Dad! That slump in stocks pretty nearly bowled him over. Lucky I thought of this scholarship when he tried to tell me that unless business picked up he couldn't send me to college next year. It sure did me good to see the shine in his eyes when I told him about this and that I was going to win it. He's a great old scout, and I'm going to get it now if for nothing more than to see that shine in his eyes again. My, but it's a tough old grind! Wonder how it would seem to go to a prep school like Hal Harrison and not have to think about money and where it is going to come from. I guess scholarships don't bother Hal any. Wonder if he is coming home for the Christmas winter vacation."

Idly Walter allowed his eyes to wander over the walls of his den. It was a snug little room, simply furnished with a spring cot, which was a bed by night and a couch by day, a desk, a deep-cushioned Morris chair, a revolving desk chair, a foot-rest and two well filled bookcases. The walls were covered with photographs. Nearly all of them were of outdoor scenes, most of them of his own taking, for he was an expert with the camera. A number were enlargements neatly framed. Among these was the famous flashlight made during his first summer at Woodcraft Camp which had furnished the evidence to put Red Pete, the outlaw and poacher, behind the bars. There, too, were the splendid portraits (they were nothing less) of the bull moose of Swift River, a lasting tribute to the nerve of Plympton, the tenderfoot comrade of that memorable cruise.

There were studies of deer and other wild animals, views of Woodcraft Camp, of scenes along Swift River, and of the various camps and points of interest on Lost Trail, the relocating of which by Walter and his four fellow Scouts of the Lone

Wolf Patrol had won for them the distinction of a special letter of commendation from national headquarters of the Boy Scouts of America.

Above the door hung a hard-used set of boxing gloves. Crossed above one window were a pair of snow-shoes, while above the other window were a pair of fencing foils. In one corner, each in its case, were two fishing-rods, a rifle and a tennis racquet. In the opposite corner leaned a Scout staff and a couple of canoe paddles. A great horned owl stared unblinkingly down from the top of one of the plain oak bookcases. On the wall just back and above it was fastened a small banner having the head of a wolf worked in black against a white background, and bearing the one word "Persistence." It was the Lone Wolf banner which had been carried on that never-to-be-forgotten search for Lost Trail. By unanimous vote of the patrol, it had been presented to Upton at the conclusion of the trip in recognition of successful leadership.

Several small silver cups on the bookcases and half a dozen medals pinned to a little square of black velvet on one wall attested to well-won victories in various lines of sport. The books on the shelves were what one might expect in such surroundings, well selected stories of adventure and exploration, treatises on hunting, fishing and outdoor sports, a very complete nature library, handbooks on woodcraft, camping, first aid, forestry and surveying, a well-thumbed Scout manual and other books which attested to the owner's love of the great outdoor world. But these were not all. A whole shelf was devoted to history, and another to selections from standard American and English authors, including several of our best loved poets.

Altogether, it was a room such as a keen, red-blooded, broad-minded boy might well delight in. Upton did delight in it. Everything in it held some special significance or sentiment for him, and now as his eyes idly roved from one object to another one memory after another was stirred within him. At last his eyes rested on the snow-shoes and remained there.

"Wonder if I'll get a chance to use those things this winter," he muttered. "Little old New York doesn't know much about that kind of foot-gear. I suppose Pat has worn out two or three pairs since he gave me those, and here I haven't had 'em on but once in three years, and then there was hardly snow enough for an excuse. I guess I'd be some tenderfoot all right, all right, on those things up in the woods. Good old Pat! Wonder what he's doing. It's a long time since I've heard from him. Well, I ought not to kick over a little extra grind! He's trying to get an education and support himself and help his folks at the same time. Wish he could

come down here for the vacation. What fun it would be to show him around and listen to his remarks on the big city. It would be almost as much fun as going into the big woods in the winter. Fact is, I envy him right now, and I'll bet he doesn't envy me a penny's worth."

Swiftly his thoughts reverted to his first meeting with Pat Malone, chore boy and bully of a sawmill village in the North Woods, and of the thrashing he had given the young woodsman in spite of the latter's advantage in weight and strength.

"It was all in the know how. Imagine me trying to do it now," he chuckled. "Why, Pat could take me across his knee just as he did the youngster who mistook him for a deer and put a bullet through his hat last fall. I've never seen anybody take to an idea as Pat did to scouting. He just soaked it up. It was the principle of the thing that got him right from the start, and not just the fun that goes with it. And just see what it's done for him! I don't know of any one it's done so much for, unless——"

Almost unconsciously Walter turned to stare through the gathering dusk at a photograph on the nearer of the two bookcases. A pair of frank eyes, kindly but keen, looked down at him from a face good to see, the face of a boy of about his own age. It was a handsome face and the beauty lay, not in regularity of features, but in the strength of character and purpose written in every line. It was the face of Hal Harrison, son of a multi-millionaire, and comrade and fellow Scout in the fun and adventures of the last three summers. It was the sudden remembrance of Hal that had caused the abrupt break in the trend of his thought. Not even for the poor, rough, tough young bully of the woods had scouting done more than it had for this other lad, brought up in the lap of luxury, his every whim gratified, toadied to, petted, spoiled. From opposite extremes of the social strata it had brought these two together on the common ground of true brotherhood—the brotherhood of democracy. It had discovered to the young savage, for Pat was little more than that, his own manhood. It had stripped from Hal, the cad, the veneer of false social rank based on wealth and found there also a man. And now these two—the one whom he had fought and the one whom he had despised—Upton regarded not only as comrades and brother Scouts, but almost as chums.

Some such thoughts as these were floating through his mind as he sat there in the soft dusk of winter twilight. It was just the hour for dreaming the dreams which every boy loves to dream, half thought, half idle fancy. He tried to picture what the future might hold for himself and for these two comrades. Hal would be a captain of industry. It could hardly be otherwise. He would inherit vast wealth.

He would in time take charge of the great enterprises which his father had built up. Would he apply to their management the principles of which as a Scout he was now so earnest a champion? Pat dared to dream of some day becoming a naturalist. Would he succeed? Remembering what Pat had been and what he now was Walter somehow felt that he would. As for himself he could not see his own career with a like clearness. He would like—

Ting-aling-ling! It was the telephone in the hall. With a start Walter came back to earth and the present. He went to answer the call. Picking up the receiver he called, "Hello." For a moment there was no response, but he caught a sound as of voices and something that sounded like a laugh. Then over the wire came a rich brogue that caused Walter to nearly drop the 'phone.

"Hello, Misther Leader. I have to reporrt the discovery av the city av Noo Yor-r-k and the losing av mesilf entoirely."

"Pat! You big red headed son of Erin! Are you really in New York? When did you get in? Where are you? Are you——"

"Aisy, aisy now. Have ye not learned thot ye can make but wan bull's-eye at a shot? Shure I be in Noo Yor-r-k, an' 'tis proud the city ought to be av the honor I be doin' ut."

"Quit your kidding, Pat, and tell me where you are and when you came and all about it," interrupted Walter.

"Shure, wasn't I afther telling ye thot I be in Noo Yor-r-k?" protested Pat in a grieved tone. "'Tis at the illigant home av an illigant gintleman thot I be, but begorra I forgot entoirely to blaze the trail and I don't know how I got here at all, at all."

There was a sound of a scuffle and a smothered laugh, then another voice broke in:

"Hello, old Scout!"

There was no mistaking that voice, and Upton grinned more broadly than before as he replied:

"Hello, Hal. It sure does me good to hear your voice. I might have known whose illigant home Pat is honoring. Where did you find him, and why didn't you tell me? Didn't expect you home until the end of next week. Funny thing, but I was

thinking of you two fellows when the 'phone rang. Same old Pat, isn't he? Gee, but it's good to hear the voices of you two fellows! Now when do I see you and where?"

"Right after dinner. We'll drive around and pick you up and then give Pat a glimpse of the Great White Way," replied Hal, answering the last questions first. "I've had this all planned for a month by way of a surprise. I have a week more vacation than you do, and I got in just in time to meet Pat's train. Had hard work to persuade him to come, but I got him at last. Say, got any plans made for your vacation?"

"Nary a plan. Been waiting to hear from you," replied Walter.

"Good! I've got the greatest little stunt you ever heard of to tell you about to-night. Pat suggested it, and I had to promise to try to put it through before he would agree to come down here. We've got to go clean up for dinner now, but we'll be around about eight o'clock. So long until then."

"So long," replied Walter, and hanging up the receiver he whooped joyously and proceeded to execute a war dance that ended with a crash as a rug slipped under his feet and he came down in a heap. It happened that at that very instant his father, just home from the office, opened the hall door briskly and a second later landed on Walter with a force that brought a grunt from each. He had tripped over one of the boy's sprawling legs. As quickly as he could disentangle himself Walter scrambled to his feet. Concern was written in every line of his face as he extended a helping hand to Mr. Upton.

"Oh, Dad, are you hurt?" he cried anxiously.

Mr. Upton's eyes twinkled good-humoredly as he replied: "Only in my dignity. But tell me, son, why all this hilarity that led to the utter downfall of the house of Upton? I heard you break loose, and was hurrying to share in it."

"It's a shame," declared Walter contritely as he brushed off his father's coat. "I ought to know better than to be acting like a wild Indian in the house. Fact is, I had just got some mighty good news over the 'phone. Guess what."

"Hal is coming home for the vacation," hazarded Mr. Upton promptly, for these two, father and son, were chums, and he knew just how eagerly Walter had hoped for Hal's homecoming.

"Right and wrong, both!" whooped Walter. "You're a good little guesser, Dad,

but you didn't guess enough this time. He's home already, and Pat's with him!"

"Pat! Pat who?" A puzzled frown wrinkled Mr. Upton's forehead.

"Pat Malone, of course! As if there was more than one Pat! They got in half an hour ago, and they're coming around here after dinner to get me."

Mr. Upton's face lighted with a smile of pleasure. "That's splendid," he declared. "It's news worth getting upset for. How ever did Hal lure that young giant out of his beloved woods?"

"I don't know," replied Walter. "All I know is that he is here, and the rest we'll find out when they get here. Hope he's going to stay through vacation. It'll be no end of fun showing Pat around. Wish you could be with us."

"I wish I could," replied Mr. Upton, smiling. "Suppose we eat dinner now so that you will be ready for them when they arrive."

Promptly at eight o'clock a big touring car drew up in front of the house, and Walter was down the steps before the two figures in the tonneau could disentangle themselves from the robes. Three voices mingled in a joyous shout, there was a swift clasping of hands in the Scout grip, and then the three boys started up the steps to the open door, where Mr. Upton stood waiting with outstretched hand.

"Welcome to our city, Pat!" he cried heartily.

"Thank you, sir. If everybody receives such a welcome as I have had it is no wonder that we cannot keep people in the woods."

Walter actually gaped open mouthed at Pat. There was not a trace of accent. Pat caught the look and his blue eyes twinkled. Suddenly he whirled and hit Upton a resounding whack between the shoulders with his open palm. "Did I not tell ye thot whin I got the leaves out av me hair and the Irish out av me shpach I would come? And here I be. Tell me now, do ye want to foight? 'Twas the reception I was afther giving ye whin ye first came to the woods, and 'tis no more than roight thot ye should trate me the same whin I land in Noo Yor-r-k."

Walter ran a calculating eye over the brawny young woodsman, six feet in his stockings and broad in proportion, and backed away. "I waive the privilege—out of politeness," said he with a low bow.

"'Tis loike Noo Yor-r-k to be gentle with the helpless. Shure 'tis a foine settlemint and foine people in ut," retorted Pat.

"I am interested to learn how Hal induced you to come here, Pat," said Mr. Upton as he ushered them into the library.

Hal chuckled. "I trapped him," said he. "I set a trap and baited it and he walked right into it. Don't you think I'm some little trapper?"

"You certainly are," declared Mr. Upton, while Pat grinned. "Let's hear all about it."

"Well, first I made sure that I could get passes from Dad. You know he controls the railroad to Upper Chain. Dad was tickled to death with the idea. Even offered to send up his private car. You know he's a great admirer of Pat. Then for a bait I arranged through a friend to get an introduction for Pat to some of the head people out at Bronx Park and at the American Museum of Natural History. I knew that he just couldn't pass that chance up, but to make sure I wrote to Doctor Merriam at Woodcraft Camp, and of course he joined the conspiracy right away. For a clincher I promised Pat that Walt and I would spend Walt's vacation with him up in the woods."

Walter came out of his chair with a bound. "What's that?" he cried. "Say it again!"

"I said that to get Pat down here I promised him that we—you and I—would spend a week in the woods with him this winter. Is that perfectly clear?" Hal spoke slowly and with emphasis.

"It sounds clear, but it isn't," replied Walter, glancing at his father with a rueful smile. He was thinking of the expense and that as things then were he could not afford the trip.

Hal intercepted the glance and understood. "Oh, yes, it is," said he. "It is perfectly clear. We leave here next week Friday night and you and Pat are my guests until we reach Upper Chain the next morning. Then the three of us become the guests of Doctor Merriam at Woodcraft Camp for a day or two, and after that you and I will be the guests of—guess who?"

Walter shook his head. He was a trifle dazed by the way in which Hal took everything for granted.

"Pat and his partner!" cried Hal, while Pat grinned broadly. "Pat's trapping this winter instead of lumbering, and we're going to spend a week in a real trapper's camp, and snow-shoe and have no end of fun. Won't it be great? Walt may go, mayn't he, Mr. Upton?"

Mr. Upton laughed aloud. "I wouldn't dare say no in the face of such completely organized plans," he confessed. "Of course he may go. It's a splendid idea, and I suspect that when he comes back for the next term of the school year he will be feeling so fine that nothing can stop him from winning that scholarship he has set his heart on, and has been working so hard for."

"Then it's all settled!" cried Hal. "Pat is going to stay and go back with us, and while he is here it is up to us to show him what New York is like. We'll begin by showing him the Great White Way to-night. Get your coat and hat, Walt. The car is waiting. Won't you go with us, Mr. Upton?"

"Not this time, thank you, Hal," replied Mr. Upton. "I have an engagement for this evening, though I would much rather join you youngsters than keep it. I feel that I am to lose something really worth while—a rare pleasure."

"And the loss is equally ours, sir," said Pat as they rose to don their coats.

Once more Walter eyed Pat quizzically. It was clear that the young Irishman had been pursuing his studies under Doctor Merriam to good advantage. Without the rich brogue it was a new and wholly different Pat. But he forbore to make any comment, and in a few minutes they were off to show Pat one of the most wonderful scenes in the world, New York's famous Broadway by night.



CHAPTER II

PAT SEES WHITE MAGIC

Mindful of the lasting effect of first impressions Hal had contrived to give Pat no opportunity to get more than a fleeting glimpse of crowded streets and glaring lights. He had met Pat at the train, which had not arrived until the early winter evening had set in, hurried him to a big touring car with curtains drawn and then whirled him away to the palatial Harrison home on Riverside Drive without giving him a chance to sense more than a glare of lights and that confusion of sounds which constitutes the voice of a great city. The same car had brought them to Walter's modest home. While they had been making their brief call there the chauffeur, under Hal's orders, had put back the top of the machine, so that as they descended the steps Pat did not recognize the car at all. In fact, until that day Pat had never so much as seen a motor car, a buck-board being the most stylish equipage of which Upper Chain could boast.

"Arrah, 'tis black magic!" exclaimed Pat as he settled himself comfortably between Hal and Walter in the tonneau, convinced at last that he was really in the same car which had brought him there.

"And we're going to show you some white magic," cried Hal, as he leaned forward to give orders to the chauffeur.

A quick run through side streets, comparatively deserted at this hour, brought them to Broadway at the junction with Sixth Avenue. Turning north the dazzling splendor of the "Great White Way" burst upon the startled eyes of the young woodsman. His companions heard him catch his breath with a little gasp. Then he closed his eyes for the space of a few seconds, opening them slowly as if he suspected them of playing him tricks. An instant later he seized a leg of each of his companions just above the knee with a grip that brought both half-way to their feet with a little yell of surprised protest.

"'Tis true, then, and no drame," said he as he settled back with a little sigh of relief. "Sure and had I pinched mesilf I would not have believed me own sinse av feeling. White magic, did yez call ut? Sure 'tis the city av enchantment."

It was a rare bit of thoughtfulness on Hal's part to give Pat such an introduction

to America's greatest city. Whatever the disillusionment in the garish light of day he would always think of New York as he saw it for the first time—a fairy city of twinkling lights, the street crowded with pleasure seekers, the great buildings towering into the sky with all harsh and rigid lines softened by the protecting shadows, and above all the moving pictures in many colored lights of the advertising signs. These were indeed a revelation to the young woodsman, and he was soon oblivious to all else. The usual ready tongue was silent. Only once did he speak after the first outbreak and this was when the car was stalled for a few minutes where he had a full view of the famous chariot race from Ben Hur. As he saw that wonderful picture leap out of the darkness between two flaming torches, the driver leaning from his chariot and shaking the lines above the four galloping horses, Pat leaned forward with tense, eager face. Then the picture disappeared and he dropped back with a little sigh.

"I knew ut was not true," he murmured half to himself, staring at the blank space between the lighted pillars. A second later the picture again flashed out of the darkness and the young Irishman relapsed into a silence that was not broken until, having gone up one side and down the other of the Great White Way, Hal proposed they spend the remainder of the evening at a theater. But this Pat vetoed and he did it so tactfully as to remove all possible sense of disappointment which Hal might have felt.

"Ye may fill a cup no more than full," said he, "and one drap more would be making the cup av me joy run over. 'Tis poor shcoutcraft to be wasteful even av pleasure, and by the same token the Scout thot tries to see everything at wance remimbers nothing. I have seen the white magic, and thot be enough for wan noight. 'Tis just the two faces av yez I would be seein' now, and hearing the voices av yez to remoind me thot I be still Pat Malone av the North Woods."

"We'll go back to my house and spend the rest of the time in my den with the pictures and other things to help make us think we are back in the woods," declared Walter. "I'm crazy to know about this scheme you fellows have cooked up for the vacation, and all the news from the woods. What do you say?"

"Suits me to a dot," replied Hal promptly. "I'd rather have a good old gabfest than see the best show in the city, and if Pat feels that way too it's all settled."

Fifteen minutes later the three boys were lounging comfortably in Upton's den and Pat was undergoing a regular bombardment of questions.

"How's Doctor Merriam?" demanded Walter.

"The Big Chief is just as fine and a little finer than ever," replied Pat, dropping his brogue. "He's one grand man. There's none grander blesses the earth with the touch of his feet. I've been living with him at Woodcraft ever since you fellows left, except for a week or two at a time on the trap line, and if ever I amount to anything it will be because of Doctor Merriam. 'Tis he that has taken the Irish from my tongue, though not from the heart of me. Shure I be as good an Irishman as iver, and the Saints defend me if I iver be anything else," he added, with a twinkle at this lapse into his mother tongue.

"You're a wonder, Pat!" broke in Walter. "I wouldn't have believed that even Doctor Merriam could have taken that burr off your tongue. What did he do it with—a file? Gives me a funny feeling, as if you were not you at all, every time I hear you speak without it. Feel sort of—well, you know—like an old friend had disappeared. And—and—I don't think I quite like it."

Pat's face suddenly sobered and rising to his feet he strode over to where Upton sat tilted back in his chair, his feet on the desk, and swung a big fist, hard as nails, perilously close to Upton's nose. "Take ut back, ye little spalpeen," he commanded. "Take ut back and tell me ye loike me betther for what I am than for what I was!"

Walter ducked in mock fear. The sudden move threw him off balance, and with a crash he and the chair went over backward. One of Pat's big hands clutched him by the collar and lifted him to his feet. An exaggerated sigh from the young giant followed. "I don't know but that ye be roight afther all," he said mournfully. "The first toime we met ye gave me the best thrashing av me loife and I loved ye for ut. Now I have but to shake me fist to put ye down for the count. Shure 'tis not I that was, and yet if I be not I that was, who be I that I be?" The humorous blue eyes grew tense and earnest. There was a new note in the deep vibrant voice as he continued.

"I am still Pat Malone, and proud of it. If I am not the old Pat I am proud of that too. And what I am to-day is due to Walt Upton, Doctor Merriam and the Boy Scouts of America. It was Walt who first blazed the trail for me. It is Doctor Merriam who is teaching me how to follow it, and it is the principles of the Boy Scouts which have brought out whatever of good there is in me. I tell you, fellows, if there is any one thing that I am proud of it is that I am a Scout."

"Same here," interrupted Hal. "Scouting hasn't done any more for you than it has for me."

"You fellows are surprised because I can speak the King's English without wholly murdering it, as I used to, and as I have a sneaking idea you liked to hear me," continued Pat. "Let me tell you it has cost me something. I've talked to the trees all day long when I've been alone on the trap line—just practicing, and even now it's easier to slip into the old way than to stick to the new. Don't for a minute think that I am ashamed of the old. I love it, and I always will. But I've begun to understand what education means, and this is the first step. It isn't easy. Don't think it. I have to keep guard on this slippery tongue every minute. I believe it's harder than it would be to learn a foreign language. It's up to you fellows to help me while I am here. I've used the old brogue to-night because I knew you liked to hear it, but I'm not going to any more unless it slips out when I am excited or my feelings get the best of me. Now this is enough about myself. What are the plans for the rest of my stay here?"

"Hold on," protested Upton. "You haven't told us a thing about the woods or what luck you've had trapping, or what has become of Alec Smith, or what we are going to do if we go up there, or who your partner is. Now fire away and we'll make plans afterward. What are the woods like now?"

"Two feet of snow and ten below zero when I left, and the beauty of them is not for the tongue to tell, but for eyes to see. It's even whiter magic than you have shown me this night, and I am not going to spoil it by trying to tell what it is like," replied Pat.

"And the trapping?"

"Fair to good."

"Who's your partner? You haven't said a word about him."

"An old woodsman and trapper I scraped acquaintance with. He's a little rough, but when you get to know him I think you'll like him." There was a twinkle in Pat's eyes which neither Hal nor Walter caught.

"Now tell us about Alec Smith, and we'll let you off. How is that broken leg, and what is he doing? Say, he must have felt good when Black Charley confessed to having knifed The Mick! Looked pretty bad for Alec for a while, didn't it? Is he living up to all those good resolutions he made?"

"You bet he is!" Pat answered the last question first. "After Big Jim and I got him out to Woodcraft Camp he stayed there doing odd jobs around the camp

until that leg was strong enough for him to go into a lumber camp as cook. He was there a month and then quit for the trap line. The last I heard of him he was somewhere up in the Smugglers' Hollow country, and I guess probably he's there yet. You remember he had some traps cached up there. Leg's as good as it ever was, and he swears, and believes it too, that Walt here is the greatest little doctor that ever came into the woods. He'll talk any one who will listen deaf, dumb and blind on the Boy Scouts, and I believe he'd cut his right hand off any time for Doctor Merriam. Alec's all right."

"And Big Jim! What's Jim doing and how is he?"

"He's the same old Jim. He's the boss of the Atwater lumber camp this winter, with two crews under him and out to make a record cut. If the weather holds good he'll come pretty near to doing it. Jim's the best logging boss, as well as the best guide, in the North Woods. Now what are you fellows going to do with me in Noo Yor-r-k?"

"That's mostly up to Hal, I'm afraid," replied Upton ruefully. "You see I have to go to school next week. To-morrow is Saturday, and a holiday of course, so I've got that free. No, I haven't either, come to think! I promised to take my patrol out for a hike to-morrow afternoon, and I don't quite see how I can avoid it now because there is no way of getting word to the fellows unless——" He paused and scowled thoughtfully. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "Scout McNulty has a 'phone in his house, and I'll send him around to notify the others to-morrow morning that the hike is off."

He jumped to his feet to go to the 'phone, but Pat stopped him. "What's the matter with us going on that hike?" he demanded.

Instantly Walter's face lighted with pleasure. "Will you? Are you sure you want to?" he cried. "The boys have heard so much about you that they will be tickled silly to have a real, live, sure enough guide from the woods with them. We were planning to go out to Bronx Park and try a little winter woodcraft and——"

"That settles it. If it's Bronx Park I'm right with you, my son, unless Hal has something else planned," interrupted Pat. "In that case, why, I be in the hands av me frind, of course."

"Suits me," declared Hal promptly. "We'll take Pat down-town in the morning and show him the sights and take him into Scout headquarters. Then we'll go out to the park and show him that your Blue Tortoises are not so slow as he may

think from the name. We'll frame up something else for the evening. That's a bully scheme. I'll bet that Pat will be jealous of that patrol of yours, Walt, before we get through. Just you put 'em on their mettle and give him something to tell that patrol of his at Upper Chain about. I suppose you're still leader of the Bull Moose, Pat?"

Pat shook his head. "Yes and no," said he. "You see I've been away so much that I had to resign. A patrol to be what it should be needs a leader on the job every minute, and so one of the boys at the sawmill is leader now, and he's a good one, too. He's a Scout of the first class and is working for merit badges now. He's got five already—personal health, physical development, taxidermy, signaling and stalking—and has won a medal for saving life. When I happen to be at home I just give them my valuable advice." Pat grinned.

"Oh, we've got some little patrol up there in the woods, and I'm just waiting to be shown what your city Scouts have got on us," he concluded.

"That takes care of to-morrow, then," said Hal. "We'll plan doings next week so that Walt can be with us out of school hours. Then Friday night we'll head for the good old woods. My, but that does sound good to me! Ten days up among the big trees, where there's snow enough to make a footprint without having to photograph it in order to prove it isn't a fake; where the foxes and the other critters with nice fur coats are sitting 'round waiting to put their little footsies in our traps; where

"The Red Gods dwell
Neath a mystic spell;
The red flame glows,
And the red blood flows,
And a man's a man
For a little span."

A sofa pillow full in the face cut short this poetic outbreak, followed by an inquiry from Pat as to Hal's experience on snow-shoes.

"Never had 'em on in my life, but I'm crazy to," replied that exuberant youth. "Bought a pair yesterday purpose for the trip. Don't look to me as if it can be much of a trick to walk on 'em."

"Did you buy any liniment to go with them?" asked Pat.

Hal looked puzzled. "Liniment? What for?" he demanded.

"Oh, just to be prepared. You know a good Scout always is prepared," replied Pat evasively, at the same time tipping Walter a wink.

"Meaning what?" persisted Hal.

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary, especially on snow-shoes," was Pat's enigmatic reply. "I'd lay in a good supply of that liniment if I were you."

Hal made a wry face at Pat. "Quit your kidding," said he. "We'll take a gallon of liniment if you say so. Now tell us what else we'll need. Do we take guns?"

Pat shook his head. Then seeing a look of disappointment in both faces he hastened to say that the closed season was now on for all game excepting rabbits and hares, and if they wanted to hunt these they might take their 22 caliber rifles. In fact he wasn't sure but this would be a good idea, as bunnies were plentiful and hunting them on snow-shoes might afford some excellent sport.

"What about fish? Will there be a chance to do some fishing through the ice?" asked Hal.

Pat smiled at Hal's eagerness. "There are just as big pickerel under the ice as ever swam," he averred, "and if you are willing to do some real work and chop out holes I think I can promise you some whales without the trouble of swimming for them."

There was a general laugh at this thrust at Hal, whose adventure with a big pickerel, during which he and Plympton had been capsized from a raft, was one of the never-to-be-forgotten incidents of the search for Lost Trail.

"But you haven't told us yet just where we are going, where your camp is, you know," Walter broke in.

Just then the honk, honk of an automobile sounded from the front of the house.

"There's the car!" cried Hal. "We'll have to be getting a move on, or Pat will lose his beauty sleep and be in no shape for to-morrow. We'll be round at 9:30 sharp in the morning, Walter. I don't want to get Pat up too early."

"Early!" Pat fairly snorted. "Arrah now! Do yez play all night and slape all day in Noo Yor-r-k?" he demanded.

CHAPTER III

THE BLUE TORTOISE PATROL

Sparrer, otherwise Edward Muldoon, smallest Scout in the Blue Tortoise Patrol, darted back from the corner to the group waiting about the up-town entrance to the subway.

"He's coming!" he shrilled. "An' two guys wid him, de one wid de dough an' de biggest rube yer ever put yer peepers on!"

The announcement was electrifying and there was an immediate rush to look down the street.

"It's Walt and Harrison all right, but who in the dickens is that with them, and where did they find him?" exclaimed Ned Patterson.

"Gee, look at the size of him! He's a rube, all right, by the looks of him, but I'd hate to tell him so," muttered Chick Parsons.

"Red headed and Irish at that! Say, fellers, we'll have some fun with him," chortled Jack Norwood.

"Quit your kidding and fall in for a salute!" snapped Assistant Leader McNulty.

Instantly the patrol lined up and as Walter approached, Hal on one side and Pat on the other, seven hands were raised as one in the Scout salute. It was returned by the three older lads.

"Somebody's wised him to de game, all right," whispered the irrepressible Sparrer to his neighbor as his sharp eyes took note of the fact that Pat had saluted quite as if accustomed to it. "Mebbe he belongs to some rube patrol."

There was a nudging of elbows and here and there a half smothered giggle as the youngsters sized Pat up and noticed the awkward fit and rough material of his "store suit," the celluloid collar and the flaming red four-in-hand clumsily tied. In the eyes of his young critics he was branded by these things quite as much as if he had worn a placard "Just from the Country."

"Green goods right from the farm," whispered Chick to Sparrer. "I dare you to ask him how the caows are."

Whether or not Sparrer would have taken the dare will never be known, for at that instant Upton introduced the big stranger, and the effect was magical to say the least. "I want you fellows to shake hands with some one you already know all about, Corporal Malone of the Lone Wolf Patrol, which had the honor of finding Lost Trail last fall, and one of the best guides in the North Woods," said he. "He and Harrison, whom you all know, are going with us on the hike this afternoon, and if you chaps feel as I do about it you know that we are the luckiest patrol in New York City. Pat, shake hands with Assistant Leader McNulty."

Then in turn the others were presented, ending with Sparrer. Pat's blue eyes twinkled as his big hand closed over the little one put out to him. "'Tis Irish ye be," said he, "and 'tis the same blood flows in me own veins. Pwhat iver would the wor-rld do widout the Irish? The Blue Tortoise Patrol should be proud thot it has a son av St. Patrick."

"It is," laughed Upton. "Now, fellows, the Blue Tortoise yell for the best Scout I know—Pat Malone!"

The yell was given with a will and caused many a head to turn in the hurrying throng, and many a smile, for the trim uniformed youngsters, faces alight with eagerness for their afternoon outing, were good to see. Laughing and joking the patrol squeezed into the crowded subway express and they were off for Bronx Park, the wonderful great playground where for a five cent fare one is lifted as by magic from the heart of the city to the heart of the country.

As the train roared through the great tunnel Pat scanned the individual members of the patrol with manifest approval. They were a clean-cut, sturdy looking lot of boys ranging in age from thirteen to sixteen, McNulty, the assistant leader, being the only one of that age. And they were a representative lot. Two were the sons of well-to-do merchants, one was the son of a broker, another was from the modest home of a patrolman on the police force, a fifth was the son of a subway guard, and the remaining two were Bernstein, whose features unmistakably stamped him as a Hebrew of the upper class, and Sparrer Muldoon, newsboy and street gamin.

Pat's interest promptly centered in the latter, and he took the first opportunity to ask about him and how he happened to be associated with others seemingly so

far above him in the social scale. Upton smiled.

"There isn't any social scale among Scouts, you know," said he.

Pat nodded. "I ought to know," he agreed. "If there were Pat Malone wouldn't be this very minute the guest of the son of a millionaire. But I wasn't one of a regular patrol of fellows better off. Tell me something about this imp you call Sparrer, and how you dared take him into this bunch. He seems to fit all right, so far as I can see."

"Sure he fits," replied Walter. "I put it up to the fellows themselves and they invited him to join. First time I ran into Sparrer made me think of the first time I met you. He had just trimmed the life out of a bully half a head taller than himself for stealing the papers of a little Jew."

Pat's eyes began to dance appreciatively. "Go on," he commanded.

"He had a black eye and a bloody nose and he was as dirty a little heathen as ever you laid eyes on. But he sure packed a healthy punch in each fist and knew where to put 'em, to judge by the looks of the bully, who was sneaking away with a whole crowd of newsies jeering at him. Sparrer didn't pay any attention to the rest of 'em, but went over to the little Jew and gave him half of his own stock of papers to make up for the ones the bully had taken, and which had been destroyed in the scrap. When the youngster tried to thank him Sparrer swore at him, and he could swear in those days, believe me! That was the Irish in him, trying to cover up a good deed."

"A bye afther me own heart," murmured Pat.

"The whole affair, or rather the motive underneath it, struck me as so Scout-like that I thought I'd try to get acquainted," continued Upton.

"'Good boy,' says I.

"'Wot's it to you?' says he. 'Oi'll smash yer the same way fer a nickel, yer big dude!' That tickled the bunch, and they began to egg him on and guy me until I saw that if I didn't want to be mixed up in a common street scrap I'd better retreat, which I did ingloriously. Later I managed to scrape acquaintance with him, and by making some inquiries I found out that his mother is a widow and he was helping support the family, that he had a reputation as a scrapper and that though he swore like a pirate, smoked and chewed tobacco, as most of these street gamins do, he was strictly honest and was a terror to the bullies of his

neighborhood. Also that he'd rather fight than eat. Just by chance I discovered that his ambition was to become a soldier, but he was worried for fear he never would be big enough. He's small for his age, stunted for lack of good food when he was a kid, I guess. Next to going into the army he wanted to be a prize-fighter. I talked scouting to him a little, but he didn't seem interested until one day I happened along in full uniform. That got him. I suppose it looked next best to being a soldier. Then I told him all about my patrol and what we were doing and what scouting stands for, and he gulped it all down like a hard run buck trying to drink a lake dry.

"Gee, Oi'd like dat, but it ain't for poor blokes the loikes of me,' said he. That gave me an idea. There was a vacancy in the patrol, and at the next meeting I put it right straight to the fellows. I told them all about Sparrer and got 'em interested, and then I just kind of hinted at the brotherhood and democracy idea of scouting and what a mighty good turn it would be if Sparrer could be given a chance to get into the game, and then dropped the subject. The hint worked all right. They're a pretty good bunch, these fellows. They talked it all over and then they came around and asked me if I supposed Sparrer would like to join the Blue Tortoise Patrol. I told them that I was sure he wouldn't if he suspected that the invitation was charity on their part. They chewed this over for a while and then came around and said that they really would like to take him in, and there wasn't any charity about it. I took the invitation to Sparrer and he went up in the air like a rocket, just as I knew he would.

"Say, yer can't put no stuff loike dat over on me,' said he. 'Wot do yer tink Oi am to fall fer a steer loike dat? Dat bunch of high-brows ain't wantin' me trainin' in dere camp. Youse has been on de level wid me, now hand it ter me straight—wot's de game?'

"I did my best to make him see that the invitation was sincere and explained all over again how there is no social distinction between Scouts, and how money and that sort of thing doesn't count, but I couldn't break through his pride. I'd about given up when I had a happy thought. 'Sparrer,' said I, 'I thought you were a dead game sport, but I guess you've got a streak of yellow in you after all. Some of these fellows are from fine homes and some are not, but they're white right through, and they've got more sand than you have. They dare to take you in on the same footing that they are on, and you haven't got the nerve to show 'em that you are just as good as they are.'

"That got him. The long and short of it was he agreed to come around to my

house the next night and meet the bunch, and he did. The fellows were good Scouts, all right, and treated him on the level just as if he were one of 'em. When he saw those photos of mine and the snow-shoes and paddles and the rest of the junk, and heard about the good times the bunch was having, he was eager to be a Scout, but he wouldn't say that he would join the patrol. It wasn't until about three weeks later when he came around in full uniform and said that he would like to be a Blue Tortoise that I tumbled to what the trouble had been. He wouldn't join until he could at least look as well as the rest, and he'd been working over time and saving every penny to get that uniform. I guess he was right, at that. The fellows wouldn't have cared, but he cared, and being dressed like the rest made him feel more as if he belonged with the crowd."

Again Pat nodded his full understanding of the youngster's feelings.

"Sparrer took to scouting like a duck to water," Upton continued. "He cut out tobacco and swearing, and being naturally quick from his life in the streets he learned quickly and passed the tenderfoot and second class tests quicker than anybody else in the patrol. He's a first class Scout now, and a mighty good one. He is so full of life and fun that it wasn't any time at all before he was one of the most popular fellows in the patrol, and when he's on hand he keeps things moving. The hardest thing he has to overcome is slang. You know he was brought up in the streets. It's his mother tongue. I'm afraid the boys don't help him much. They like to hear him. But he's doing his best, and now he's going to night school. Of course I've told him all about you and the fight you've made and I rather fancy he's made something of a model and hero of you."

"The saints forbid!" exclaimed Pat. Nevertheless he looked pleased.

"Bronx Park! All out!" sang out the guards.

Once out of the car the patrol fell into line and with Upton in the lead headed for the park. Once inside the turnstiles he called a conference, "You fellows know what we planned to do to-day," he began, "but that was before we knew that we were to have the honor of Corporal Malone as our guest. You know he is something of a naturalist, and there are a lot of animals and birds and snakes and things here that I expect he is anxious to see. I propose that we show him around instead of doing the field work we had planned."

"Mr. Leader!" Pat saluted as he spoke. "The beasties and the bur-rds will not know what they are missing if they have no chance to inspect green goods to-day."

Chick started violently, remembering his remark to Sparrer, and the latter maliciously punched him in the ribs and ducked to hide a grin. "But I know what I shall miss if you do not carry out your plans, and I have no mind to be handed that kind of a lemon. I have all next week to look at the beasties and only this afternoon to see how little a city patrol knows of scouting. Arrah now, 'tis mesilf belaves ye be afraid to be showing me how much bettther the Scouts av Upper Chain be than the Scouts av the great city av Noo Yor-r-k!"

"That settles it!" cried Upton when the general laugh had subsided. "We'll show him that the Blue Tortoise Patrol isn't afraid to take a dare from any one, and we'll show him a few stunts to make his Bull Moose up there in the woods turn green with envy. You're on your mettle now, fellows. We'll go over to the wildest and most lonesome part of the park and divide into two companies. Pat can take one and be the enemy which has made a successful raid and made its get-away. Hal can go with him because he knows the country as well as any of us. We'll give them ten minutes' start and then go in pursuit. There's enough snow in patches to make snowballs. Any one hit on the arms or legs is wounded. A hit on the throwing arm puts that man out of the fighting, but he is still at liberty. A hit on either leg puts a man out of action, but he may hide if he can within a radius of a hundred feet of the place where he was hit. A hit on the head or any part of the body puts a man wholly out of action and he becomes a first aid man to take care of the wounded. You fellows have played the game before, and I presume each of you has a Red Cross arm band to pin on when you are hit so that you will be recognized as a non-combatant."

There was a general assent and Upton continued: "Our camp will be at the point we start from. If the enemy can elude us and get back and capture the camp they win. If we run them down and defeat them or defeat them in a battle at the camp we win. Any man taken prisoner becomes a member of the other side. Scouts sent out by either side will make full reports not only of signs of the enemy but of the country and its conspicuous characteristics and animals and birds which are seen. Pat, you can pick your side. You get three besides Hal."

Pat's first choice was Sparrer, to the youngster's secret delight. He then chose McNulty and Bernstein, and the two companies, Pat at the head of one and Upton at the head of the other, started at the Scout pace for the scene of action. Arrived there a camp was marked off and Pat and his company at once started off to make the most of the ten minutes allotted them. Meanwhile Upton laid out his plan of campaign. The camp had been chosen with a view to defense. On two sides were dense thickets of bushes from which it would be practically

impossible to throw a snowball. Moreover, to reach these thickets it would be necessary for the enemy to cross a bare hilltop, which meant that surprise from that quarter was virtually out of the question. On the third side was an outcropping ledge of rock behind which the defenders could take shelter. The fourth side was open, but could not be approached without the enemy being in sight for some time. Moreover, in the flat open country beyond there was no snow, hence the enemy attacking from that direction would not be able to replenish their ammunition. Upton decided that two men were ample for defense, and at once set all hands to work making a supply of snowballs from the patches of snow still lingering in the thickets. Promptly at the end of ten minutes Chick Parsons was sent out as scout to try to pick up the enemy's trail at the point where they had disappeared from view with instructions to signal what he should discover. Norwood was sent in the opposite direction to look for signs on the chance that the enemy had circled as soon as they were out of sight. Patterson and Chambers were left to guard camp and Upton climbed to the top of the little hill which flanked the camp and from which point he could get signals from both Scouts. The game was on.

CHAPTER IV

"HELP!"

Every member of the Blue Tortoise Patrol was on edge, eager to show Pat that though they were city born and bred they still knew something of practical woodcraft and the art of tracking; also of the even more difficult art of covering up tracks. But it was ordained that things should be otherwise that day and that the big woodsman should witness a real and not an artificial test of Scout resources and pluck.

Chick, studying what struck him as a suspiciously broad trail leading west from the point where the enemy had last been seen, and suspecting a ruse, was startled by the faint sound of a whistle to the north. It was the patrol signal for help and was used only in case of an emergency or when, as in the present game, a Scout was in danger of capture by the opposite side and wanted to summon aid. His first thought was that one of his own side had run onto the enemy and was summoning help. Then he remembered that he was the only one who had gone out on that side of camp and so it was manifestly impossible that this could be.

"Wonder if that's a trick to lead us into an ambuscade," he muttered, listening with growing suspicion. Again he heard the signal, and there was something in the sound of it that banished all idea of trickery. "Something's happened to one of the fellows!" he exclaimed, and scrambled up a knoll to his left where he could get a fairly clear view. Far in the distance toward the outer boundary of the park he saw a figure which the instant he came in sight began to signal with a whistle in the Morse code.

"M-o-t-o-r s-m-a-s-h o-n r-o-a-d h-e-l-p c-o-p-s," he spelled out. Raising his own whistle he signaled O. K. and saw the distant figure turn and race away at top speed.

"Phew!" he gasped. "Must be bad if they need the cops. That must mean they need an ambulance." He whirled toward camp, and caught sight, of a figure on the hill just back of it. It was Upton watching for signals, and Chick knew that he must have heard him whistle the O. K. Once more raising the whistle he repeated the message, adding the location of the accident as nearly as he could judge. He

heard Upton whistle for Norwood and then saw him bound down into the hollow where the camp lay. A minute later Patterson, the best runner in the patrol, sprang into view headed for the park administration buildings at top speed. Satisfied that help would come in the shortest possible time Chick picked up his staff and started swiftly for the point where he had seen Sparrer disappear, for it was he who had first signaled.

Meanwhile Pat, Hal and the three members of the Blue Tortoise Patrol who had started out with them were working with might and main at the scene of the accident and in their hearts praying that help would reach them speedily. It was one of those disasters which in these days have become so common that often they receive no more than a paragraph or two in the daily papers. Two automobiles had come together on a turn in a road at this time of year little frequented, and the smaller of the two had turned turtle. The other, a powerful roadster, had escaped with but trifling damage and the driver of it had not even paused to ascertain the results of the collision, but had thrown on full power and left the scene at racing speed.

The accident had occurred at a point about one hundred yards from where Pat and Sparrer were about to emerge from a thicket of bushes lining the drive and at the sound of the crash they sprang out. An instant later a big roadster tore past and they caught a fleeting glimpse of a strained white face behind the big steering wheel and beyond, partly raised and half turned to look back, a fur-coated figure, evidently that of a young man. For just a second his face turned toward them, then hastily turned away. But that brief glimpse was enough to show them that it bore the stamp of guilty fear.

Pat confessed later that the whole thing was so sudden and so wholly foreign to anything within his experience that he was too confused to think or act quickly. Not so Sparrer. His life in the streets of New York had made him no stranger to accidents of a more or less tragic nature, and he had seen too many violators of the law seeking to escape the consequences of their own acts not to grasp the situation instantly.

"They are trying to make a get-away!" he snapped. "Get de number!"

This was Greek to Pat, whose acquaintance with automobiles was too recent for him to appreciate the importance of a license number at a time like this. But Sparrer had not practiced taking automobile numbers in the rush hours at Madison Square for nothing. It had been only fun there, by way of training his

eyes to quick and sure observation. Now as a result eye and brain worked in unison and almost automatically and despite the speed of the car he got the number as surely as if it had been at a standstill.



HE JOTTED DOWN THE NUMBER

"Jersey car! Dey'll beat it fer across de river," said he as he jotted down the number in his note-book. "Did yer pipe dere monikers? Oi'd know dem in a tousand! Now let's see wot happened to de others."

They started on a run for the overturned car and as they drew near the sound of moaning from the wreck gave wings to their feet. A small touring car was bottom up at the side of the road, a rear wheel off at one side. Half among the bushes and half in the road lay the body of a young woman, whether dead or simply unconscious they did not take time to find out. If dead there was nothing for them to do. If unconscious she could receive attention later. The moans from beneath the wrecked car told them that there was where aid was needed first.

The driver, a middle-aged man, was pinned under the steering post, which was bent and rested across his chest in such a way that while the full weight of the car did not fall on it, still it was crushing in the ribs on one side. One leg was doubled under him in a way that denoted a bad break. His face was badly cut by the glass of the wind-shield and what was worse, the crimson stream gushing in little spurts from a jagged gash on one arm, fortunately thrust beyond the edge of the car, proclaimed a severed artery.

That must be stopped immediately at all costs, before any attempt was made to get the man out, or he would bleed to death. Both boys saw this on the instant, and without a word Pat stooped and gripped the arm above the cut, bringing to bear all the strength of his powerful fingers. The effect was immediately apparent. The wound still bled, but no longer in those fateful jets. Sparrer meanwhile had snatched off his neckerchief and was preparing a tourniquet. From a shrub by the roadside he cut a stout stick a foot long, then hastily made search for a smooth pebble. Finding none he started to feel in his pockets for some small object that would serve his purpose when his alert glance fell on Pat's mackinaw. Whipping out his knife once more he cut one of the big smooth buttons from the mackinaw. Tying the handkerchief loosely around the injured arm just above where Pat was gripping it he slipped the button in so that it rested directly on the artery. Then putting the stick under the handkerchief on the outer side he rapidly twisted it until the pressure of the button on the artery was

sufficient to stop the flow of blood and Pat could release his grip. The stick was then tied so that it could not untwist, and they were ready for the next move.

By this time Harrison, McNulty and Bernstein had come up. They had not been so far away but that they had heard the crash. Then, too, Sparrer had whistled for help as soon as he had seen the extent of the disaster. The quick wits of the newsboy, trained to acute sharpness in the school of the streets, peculiarly fitted him to take command of the situation. Also familiarity with suffering and with scenes of violence made him less susceptible to the shock of the grim spectacle before them than was the case with his comrades, and he now assumed leadership by right of fitness. Indeed, he did it quite unconsciously and his comrades quite as unconsciously accepted the situation and turned to him for directions.

"We got to git de cops and an amb'lance. Youse guys git de man out from under de car and Oi'll chase fer de cops!" Without waiting another second he plunged through the bushes and started in the direction of the camp, which lay in almost a direct line with the park administration buildings, the nearest point at which he could be sure of getting help. He knew the lay of the land perfectly, and he reasoned that by this time one or more of the other party would be out on the trail and that if he could signal them and they in turn signal those behind valuable time would be saved. So on the first high ground he stopped to blow the help signal with the result already noted. To gain time he made his message as brief as possible. "Motor smash" told the nature of the accident. "Help—cops" told the urgency of the case and the need of police aid. He counted on Upton's knowledge of the way things are handled in a big city to make the message as clear as if he took precious time to spell out the full story, and when he heard Chick's O. K. he turned back confident that help would reach them in the shortest time possible.

Nor was his confidence misplaced. As soon as Upton got the message from Chick he understood the situation exactly. Getting down into the hollow where the camp was he issued orders. The others had heard Chick's message and knew where the accident had occurred. "Get over to the administration building as fast as you can run," he ordered Patterson. "Tell 'em to notify the police and put in an ambulance call. If you meet a mounted cop on the way tell him. It may be life or death, so run for a record."

Patterson was off before the last words were out of Upton's mouth. Upton, with the other two boys at his heels, at once started for the scene of the accident,

running at top speed. Half-way to his goal Patterson caught sight of a mounted policeman, hailed him with a shrill yell, and brought him at a gallop. Briefly he told his story, and the officer was away to put in a call for an ambulance and get help.

Meanwhile the boys at the wreck had been working with might and main. Pat's great strength had stood them in good stead, and they had managed to raise the car sufficiently to free the victim and draw him out. The cushions and robes were pulled out of the wreck and on these the still unconscious woman and the man were laid. By the time Upton and his comrades, panting for breath, reached the scene both victims had been made as comfortable as possible. The first aid kits had been opened and temporary bandages were being applied where most needed. In this work the newcomers at once took a hand.

Seeing that his assistance was not needed Sparrer had busied himself elsewhere. He went along the road for some little distance in each direction, studying the ground carefully. The top surface of the ground had softened a little in the sun and in places the wheel marks were visible. This was especially true of the wrecked car, as this had been fitted with chains. It was comparatively easy to trace the course of this car, and Sparrer was soon satisfied in regard to it. On the wheel marks of the other car he spent more time, and he had just completed his examination as two mounted police dashed up. Swinging down from their horses they made hasty examination of the victims.

"Good work, boys," said one of them. "You've done all that can be done, so far as I can see, until the ambulance gets here. Now then, which of you is the leader?"

Upton stepped forward. "Tell us what you know about the accident," commanded the officer.

"I know nothing about it," replied Upton curtly. "Everything was practically as you see it now when I reached here. Pat, did any of your party see the thing happen?"

Pat shook his head. "None of us saw it, but two of us were right handy when it happened, and were on the spot in less than two minutes," said he, addressing the policemen. "We heard the crash and saw a car which seemed to be trying to get away, and then we saw this car overturned. When we got here the young woman was lying by the side of the road half in the bushes, and out of her senses, just as she is now. The man was pinned under the car and bleeding like a buck that has

just felt the knife. We stopped that as soon as we could, and then got him out. Muldoon there can tell you more than I can, because he saw more than I did. He proved himself a better Scout."

Sparrer flushed with pleasure. Praise from this source meant more to him than it would have from any one else, and at a sign from one of the officers he stepped forward to tell what he knew.

"We was in de bushes," said he, "about a hundred yards up de road, when we heard de smash an' jumped out just in time to lamp a big gray roadster wid two guys in it making dere get-away, and dey was beatin' it fer fair."

"Don't suppose you thought to get the number," interrupted one of the officers.

Sparrer grinned as he fished out his note-book. "Sure Oi got it," said he. "Jersey car, and dey was beatin' it fer de ferry loike New York was bad fer de health. No cops around, same as usual." Sparrer winked at the other boys. "Prob'ly dey think dey made dere get-away and dey would have, if some real Scouts hadn't happened to be around."

One of the officers had reached for the note-book and hastily glanced at the number. "I'll 'phone this number in and see if we can't head off that car while you take care of things here," said he, as he vaulted into the saddle, and a second later was off at full gallop.

"Go on with your story," commanded the other.

"Dey ain't no more 'cept while de others was getting the man out from under de car Oi signaled to de fellows over across de park to get word to youse, and dey done it," replied Sparrer, quite as if his quick-witted handling of the matter was as commonplace as his grammar was bad.

"The man didn't come to, and make any statement?"

The boys shook their heads. "He's been just as you see him now," said Pat, with a pitying glance at the injured man.

The officer shook his head. "Too bad," said he, "that there wasn't a witness. If we nab those fellows they'll swear that it was this fellow's fault. Their running away will make it look bad for them, but they'll frame up some sort of cock and bull story about being so frightened that they didn't realize what they were doing and without evidence their word will be as good as the other man's. If the latter

doesn't recover sufficiently to make a statement, and the young lady doesn't either, the case will fall through. Was that car right where it is now when you first saw it?"

"Say," drawled Sparrer scornfully, "do 'youse tink we had nothing to do but to pick up a ton or two of scrap and lug it 'round?"

The policeman grinned. "You chaps seem to be equal to about anything," said he. "I didn't know but that you had moved the car in getting that fellow out. Unless he was knocked over here by the collision it appears that he was on the right side of the road."

"Sure thing," retorted Sparrer. "He was on de right side of de road and driving easy. De other blokes was burning up de road and tried to make de turn wide. Dey skidded and side-swiped de little car, and it turned turtle. Dat's all dey is to it."

He spoke with such an air of finality that the officer looked at him suspiciously. "I thought you said none of you saw this happen," said he.

"None of us did, but even a cop orter be able ter see what *has* happened," retorted Sparrer. He walked back up the road a short distance. "Here's de marks of de chains," he called, "an' dey's all on de right side of de road. Here's a place where de ground is pretty soft, but de tracks are clean-cut. If de car had been beatin' it de mud would have been trown more. Now lamp de tracks comin' de other way."

He led the way around the curve in the opposite direction, pointing out soft spots where the tracks of a heavy car without chains were clearly visible. Little globules of mud had been thrown some distance on both sides, conclusive evidence that the car was being driven at high speed. The curve was rather sharp, and the tracks showed that the car had started to take it wide, but at the scene of the accident had been pulled sharply to the right and had skidded, striking the smaller machine and causing it to turn turtle. For those with eyes to see the whole story was written out on the road surface, and yet the tracks were comparatively faint, because the surface had softened only where the sun had lain longest, and might easily have been overlooked by those not trained to close observation.

The officer looked at Sparrer curiously. "Hurry up and grow, sonny," said he; "we need you on the force."

Sparrer's retort was interrupted by the clang of a gong as an ambulance dashed up. The young surgeon made a hasty examination of the two victims and then as they were lifted into the ambulance he turned to the group of boys and spoke crisply.

"You fellows have done just the things to be done and all that could be done here. If this man lives he'll owe his life to you. If you hadn't known enough to get a tourniquet on that arm at once he would have bled to death by this time. Officer, I hope you will report the good work of these Scouts. If there was nothing more to scouting than the teaching of first aid to the injured it would be a great thing."

He swung up on the rear of the ambulance, and as it dashed away raised his hand in the Scout salute, which was promptly returned by the patrol. Meanwhile the officer was taking down the names and addresses of the boys, as they would in all probability be needed later as witnesses in court. When he had finished Upton ordered the patrol to fall in.

"I guess, fellows," said he, "that none of us feels much like continuing our game after what's happened. What do you say if we spend the rest of the afternoon showing Pat around the park? Those in favor say aye."

The vote was unanimous. As soon as it had been taken Pat stepped forward. "Mr. Leader," said he, "I want to say just a few words."

"Speech! Speech!" shouted half a dozen together.

Pat's face lighted with a grin, and his eyes began to dance. "Arrah now, yez be looking for a bear in the wrong tree," said he, "for there be no silver on me tongue and me thoughts be too bashful to be dressed in wor-rds. So 'tis no spache yez will be getting from me this day." Then abruptly he dropped the brogue. "Mr. Leader, you started out this day to show me what city Scouts can do, and you have shown me in a way that none of us dreamed of. I take off my hat to the Blue Tortoise Patrol. That was as good scouting as ever I have seen, and we've got some Scouts up where I come from. They can do stunts in the woods that probably would make you fellows green with envy if you could see them. If you were to come up there in the woods I expect that they would laugh at you behind your backs, just as you would laugh at them if they should come down here. As nearly as I can make out that seems to be the way with the world—to laugh at others who happen to be different in speech or ways or dress. You city boys call a country boy a rube and green just because his ways are different from your

ways and he isn't wise to the things that you are. He thinks just the same way of you when you visit him in the country. What I have seen to-day has taught me a lesson. Out in the woods I know just what to do, how to do it and when to do it, no matter what happens. When I started out with you to-day I smiled down inside at the idea of you being able to show me anything in the way of scouting. I wished I had the Bull Moose Patrol here to show you what real scouting is like.

"Then that accident happened, and found me as helpless as a new-born babe. But Sparrer here was right on the job from the jump. He had the number of that car before I had it through my head what had happened, and he knew just what to do next. I expect that it would have been the same with any of the rest of you in his place. Anyway, I've been shown the very finest kind of scoutcraft, and that little smile I started with has turned to pride. I'm proud to be out with the Blue Tortoise Patrol, as fine a bunch of real Scouts as I know of. And I am particularly proud of my friend Sparrer Muldoon. I might be able to give him some points on tracking a deer or a moose or even a man in the woods, but when it comes to tracking a crazy motorcar Sparrer has got my number. I would like to propose, Mr. Leader, three cheers for Scout Muldoon."

The cheers were given with a will and with a rousing tiger at the end, to the confusion of Sparrer. Then Upton called for the patrol yell for Pat Malone, and in that Sparrer found vent for his own feelings. These preliminaries out of the way the patrol fell in to escort Pat about the park and show him the hardier animals which winter out-of-doors. Nor was their courtesy without gain to themselves, for the young naturalist's comments as they visited one enclosure after another revealed an intimate knowledge of the characteristics and habits, not only of those species with which he was familiar in their native wilds, but of many which he was now seeing for the first time, which was a revelation to his young admirers. Chick wasn't far wrong when he whispered to Norwood:

"We ain't showing him anything; he's showing us."

It was an afternoon never to be forgotten by the Blue Tortoise Patrol, and it was an equally memorable one for Pat. And when they parted that night there was a mutual respect and liking which found expression in the hearty grip of Scout brotherhood.

CHAPTER V

OFF FOR WOODCRAFT

Edward Muldoon, otherwise Sparrer, surreptitiously pinched himself to make sure that he was not dreaming. He, newsboy from the lower East Side of New York, who had never been farther from it than Coney Island, riding in a brilliantly lighted Pullman coach on his way into the great woods of which he had dreamed so much since he became a Scout, and of which he had only the vaguest idea! It couldn't be.

And yet it was. The roar of the wheels told him that it was. The very feel of the luxurious seat in which he was sitting told him that it was. And to clinch the fact and at the same time make it harder to believe there were his three companions, Upton, his patrol leader, Harrison and Pat Malone, whom he had secretly made his hero. Yes, it was all true, and yet he couldn't get rid of the idea that sooner or later he would wake up and find it all a beautiful dream.

The fact is, this trip was in the nature of a Christmas present. From their first meeting Pat had taken a great fancy to the street gamin. He recognized a kindred spirit. Instinctively he realized that the difference between Sparrer and himself at the same age was mainly one of environment. The youngster's sturdy independence and self-reliance, his quick wit, even his impudence, struck responsive chords in the young woodsman. Sparrer was what he himself would have been had his nursery been a New York East Side tenement instead of the log cabin of a mill settlement in the lumber district of the North Woods.

The night after the motor accident the three older boys had been discussing Sparrer and his prompt resourcefulness. Pat dropped a remark that he wished with all his heart that he could have the youngster in the woods with him for a couple of weeks.

"Let's take him with us! It would be no end of fun," cried Hal on the spur of an inspiration.

Upton shook his head. "It would be bully if we could, but I'm afraid we can't," said he.

"Why not?" demanded Hal. "I can get a pass for him, and between us I guess we can take care of him. It won't cost him a cent."

"That's just it," declared Upton. "There is nothing on two legs in New York more independent than Eddie Muldoon. He'll scrap for his rights as long as he can swing a fist, but the minute you try to hand him anything for nothing he'll turn you down hard and cold. Sparrer pays his way, or he don't go, and wild horses couldn't drag him. He would stand for the pass, all right, because he would be on the same footing as the rest of us, but if we tried to give him anything in the way of an outfit, and it goes without saying that he hasn't anything suitable for the weather we are likely to have up there, he would kick like Barnum's trick mule. That's one thing I like about the little beggar. And when you come right down to it, independence is one of the fundamental principles of scouting."

Once more Hal was inspired. "I have it, fellows!" he cried. "We'll make him a Christmas present of the trip. He can't refuse a Christmas gift, if it is put to him right. I'll get the passes and chip in toward whatever he needs in the way of outfit. You two can make up the rest. He'll be Pat's guest when he gets there, the same as Walt and myself, so he can't kick on that. You're all my guests on the train anyway, so I don't see how Sparrer's independence is going to be hurt a little bit."

"That will be great, if we can put it across," declared Upton, "and I for my part would like nothing better than to have the youngster along. It would be the event of a lifetime for him."

So it was decided that Upton should use all his diplomatic powers to persuade Sparrer that he was needed for the largest success of the party. His success was the result of a great deal of argument, helped out by the boy's own longing to know what the woods life of which he so often dreamed really was like. So now here they were actually on their way, four as happy boys as ever set forth in quest of pleasure.

The week had been a busy one. Pat had spent a good part of it at Bronx Park and the American Museum of Natural History, where his letters of introduction and his own ready wit and evident thirst for knowledge had made him a welcome visitor. During the rest of the time there had been something doing every minute. Hal had seen to that. Upton had dug at his books as if that scholarship hung on that one week's work. As for Sparrer, he had worked early and late that he might leave a few extra coins to make Christmas for the brother and two sisters at

home.

"Did you telephone the hospital before we left?" asked Hal, turning to Upton as they waited for their berths to be made up.

Walter nodded. "Did it the last thing before I left the house," he replied. "The young lady is practically all right now, and has gone home. Her father is getting along nicely and it is only a matter of time when he will be right as ever. By the way, their story is exactly as Sparrer had it. Looks like a sure case against the owner of that other car. I understand that they are going to bring suit for damages. I suppose that means that we'll have to go on the witness stand when the thing comes off."

"Lucky they caught those fellows at the ferry."

"Do you suppose there's any truth in that claim by the owner of the car that it was a joy ride by unknown parties who had taken the car without his consent or knowledge?" Hal asked.

"Looks pretty fishy to me," replied Upton. "Still, he may get away with it. Understand that neither of the victims can identify the men in the other car. You remember that curve is pretty sharp, and they were hit almost before they saw the other car, let alone who was in it. Sparrer and Pat seem to be the only ones who even had a glimpse of the scoundrels, and that a mighty brief one. If there is any identifying done I guess it is up to you two fellows. Think you can do it?"

"Not I!" declared Pat with emphasis. "I could shwear to the number of points on a jumping buck in the brush, but nary a thing could I shwear to about that engine av destruction."

"How about you, Sparrer?" demanded Hal.

"If Oi was one of them artist guys Oi could draw you a picture of both of them. Let me put my peepers on them and Oi'll shwear to them in a tousand," replied the newsboy with such an air of finality that there was no doubt in the minds of his companions that he could do just what he said he could.

"Well, you're likely to have a chance if that case goes to court," Upton remarked. "For my part, I hope you can do it. I'd like to see those fellows get what's coming to 'em. I move we turn in now, for we've got to get up at an unearthly hour. It's bad enough to turn out before daylight in the summer, but it makes me shiver to think what it will be at this time of year. Br-r-r-r."

Pat laughed. "If you're going out on the trap line you may as well get broken in to early rising at once. We often have some miles behind us by the time the sun is up," said he. "However, I guess you're right about turning in. I'm ready, for one."

It seemed to Sparrer that he had hardly closed his eyes when some one shook him, and he tumbled out of his berth to find the others in the dressing room hurriedly getting into their clothes. They had no more than time to dress and gather up their baggage and various parcels before the train stopped. They had reached Upper Chain.

As they stepped down into the night, for day had not yet begun to break, Upton recalled his first arrival there, a rather lonely youngster, uncertain that this was the right place. It had been summer then, but everything had been shrouded in a heavy night mist and the chill of the high altitude had struck clear to the marrow in his bones. He had been a tenderfoot then, his only knowledge of woodcraft what little he had gleaned from books. He remembered how the mystery of the great woods had swept over him and engulfed him even as did the night mist, and how insignificant he had felt. Even now, after three years of experience in camp and on the trail he felt something of that same spirit of awe, and he knew that it would always be thus. It was the tribute exacted by nature from the true devotee entering her temples.

He glanced curiously at Sparrer, wondering what responsive chords might be struck in the soul of this waif of the great city, but it was too dark to see his features clearly, and he could only dimly surmise something of the younger lad's feeling from Sparrer's quick intake of breath as the dark, heavy coaches of the train rumbled off into the night, leaving them standing between two walls of white. Overhead a myriad of stars burned like jewels. Never had they seemed so near, so brilliant, so alive. The snow thrown high on either side of the tracks, for there was a siding at this point, was above their heads. The stillness was almost oppressive now that the train was beyond hearing.

Pat stretched his arms and drew a long breath of the cold, rarified air, then expelled it in an audible sigh of supreme content.

"Arrah now, 'tis me foist breath av real air in a week, and the two lungs av me aching for ut," said he. "Shure 'twill make the likes av ye grow to a man's size in a week, me bantam, and thot's more than Noo Yor-r-k will be doing for ye in a loifetoime," giving Sparrer a hearty slap on the back. "Hal, I thought those

passes read to Upper Chain, and here we be dropped in a snow-bank. I'll be after making complaint to the management for inconveniencing four gentlemen and reducing them to the ranks of common laborers."

The others laughed as they followed Pat's example and shouldered their duffle to tramp the hundred yards up to the station, for they had been in the rear car. In a few minutes they were in the bare little waiting room, in the middle of which a big stove was radiating welcome heat, and exchanging greetings with the night operator, who having wired the arrival and departure of the train was preparing to go home, for there would be no more traffic for many hours. He shook hands warmly with Walter and Hal, whom he recognized at once as Woodcraft Camp boys, was introduced to Sparrer, and jollied Pat on what he was pleased to term his "New York airs."

"I reckon your mother is waiting for you, Pat," said he. "I saw a light over at the house when I came along. You're welcome to stay here until daylight, but I expect she's looking for you over there."

"I wrote her we'd be there to breakfast, but not to get up any earlier on that account," replied Pat. His eyes danced. "Shure the ould lady thinks her son has been in the hands av the inimy and cannot rest aisy 'til she sees for herself that not a hair av his red head has been left in Noo'Yor-r-k. God bless her. We'll go over there and relieve her mind."

In speaking of his mother as the "ould lady" there was nothing disrespectful on the part of Pat. In reality it was a term of endearment. The stars were beginning to pale as the boys made their way in single file along a narrow path through the snow toward the yellow gleam of a light set in the window of one of the rough frame houses that made up the village. Pat led straight for this.

"Hello!" exclaimed Upton in surprise. "Have you deserted the old cabin?"

"Sure," replied Pat, and there was just a suggestion of pride in his voice. "The mother was a long time between log walls, but now, the saints be praised, she do be living in one of the illigant mansions of Upper Chain, and by that token is a member of the aristocracy. Moved in last fall."

By this time they had reached the house and at the sound of voices the door was thrown open and Mrs. Malone stood in the doorway looking out eagerly. It was a warm Irish greeting that the boys received and Hal, who never had met her before, understood where Pat got his humor and ready tongue. He at once

dropped into his old brogue entirely and while Mrs. Malone bustled about putting a hot breakfast on the table Pat told her of his adventures in the great city as only he could. From time to time she interrupted with comments so like Pat's own ready repartee that between the two the boys were kept in a gale of laughter.

"Eating breakfast by lamplight is a new experience to me," declared Hal as they sat down to bacon, corn bread just from the oven, flapjacks with thick maple syrup, and coffee.

"'Tis pwhat yez will be doing every day for the next week, and lucky if yez get the breakfast, as good a wan as this, anyway," declared Pat.

They had just finished the meal when Pat's younger brother and two little sisters shyly joined them. They were neatly dressed, and Walter was immensely tickled with Pat's manifest pride in them. It had been decided to spend the day there to prepare for the trip into the woods, and also to give Pat a day at home. They would take the train the next morning over to Lower Chain, a twenty minute run, and from there they would have to depend on their own good legs to take them the twelve miles on the lake to Woodcraft Camp. One of Pat's first inquiries had been as to whether there had been any snow during his absence, and great was his satisfaction to learn that there had not. He explained that that meant clear ice on the lake, for the heavy snows had come early this year, before the lake froze, and they would be able to make practically the whole distance on skates.

While Pat was attending to affairs at home the three visitors went out to do the village. The sun was well up and as they stepped out into the clear still air both Hal and Walter paused with a little gasp of surprise and pleasure. This was not the ugly sawmill village of their acquaintance. But for the tall stack of the mill and the whine and scream of the saws there was nothing familiar. It was as if a good fairy had touched the scene with a magic wand and all the sordid ugliness had been transformed to beauty. Over everything lay the white mantle of snow. It half buried the smaller cabins. It hid completely the stumps of the clearings. It had buried the litter of the mill yard. It glittered and sparkled in the rays of the sun. Beyond the clearing the evergreens rose in great pyramids of white. No, Upper Chain was no longer a blot on the landscape. It was beautiful.

As for Sparrer, he was dumb. While he could not appreciate the wonder of the transformation he could and did appreciate the wonder of the scene, and for the time being his tongue was tied. From the mill office they called up Woodcraft Camp to tell Doctor Merriam of their arrival and that they would be with him on

the following day.

"Gee, didn't it seem good to hear the Big Chief's voice again?" said Hal as they went out into the mill to show Sparrer how logs are transformed into boards, timbers and shingles. "Sparrer, to-morrow you are going to meet one of the finest men in the whole world, bar none. He's a great old Scout."

Mrs. Malone was naturally disappointed that Pat was not to be home for Christmas, but she said little and busied herself in helping the boys prepare for their holiday. Her motherly Irish soul warmed at once to Sparrer, and she fussed over his outfit and comfort in a way that was new to the youngster, for his own mother, working from daylight to dark and often late into the night, had had little time for mothering. The boys had brought some gifts for the children, and these their mother hid against the arrival of good St. Nick. A part of Sparrer's outfit as a Christmas gift from his comrades had been a warm mackinaw, and to this Mrs. Malone insisted on adding a pair of thick woolen stockings of her own knitting. Pat's contribution was a pair of snow-shoes, which he brought out at the last moment as they were starting for the train, and as he took them a lump rose in the younger lad's throat and cut off speech. But the shine in his eyes expressed more than his tongue could have. Such kindness was a new experience in his life, and he hardly knew how to meet it.

The short run by train to Lower Chain was quickly made, and the boys piled out, eager to be on their way. Pat had provided a stout toboggan which showed the effects of long use, and on this he deftly loaded their duffle and supplies, lashing them securely into place. Sparrer watched him with troubled face. Ever since the mention of skates the day before he had worried over that twelve mile trip down the lake. He knew that Upton and Harrison had brought skates, but he had none, and if he had had he couldn't have used them. He had never been on a pair in his life. Skating is not an accomplishment of the lower East Side of New York.

So Sparrer had worried. If it had been merely a matter of a twelve mile hike he would have been on edge to show the others that he could keep up, but he knew that with the others on skates for him to try to keep up was as absurd as for a truck to try to keep pace with a racing car, and it hurt his pride to feel that he would be a drag on the others. Hal and Walter already had their skates on and were cutting circles, figure eights and grape-vine twists on the smooth ice. With the fastening of the last lash Pat put on his own skates.

"Now, me bantam, get up on that load," he ordered.

Sparrer demurred, but the young giant picked him up bodily and plumped him down on a roll of blankets, wrapped him up in a blanket left out for the purpose, ordered him to sit still, with dire threats of what would happen to him if he did not, called to the others to get on to their jobs, and they were off, Hal and Walter with the rope of the toboggan between them pulling, and Pat pushing behind with his hands on Sparrer's shoulders.

Before them stretched the gray-white expanse of the lake, and on either side the glistening white shores, now receding as they passed a deep bay, again creeping out in a long point. There was no sound save the sharp ring of the skates and the soft grate of the smoothly slipping toboggan. Past two big summer hotels with blank staring windows, past shuttered and deserted summer camps they sped until all sign of man's handiwork disappeared. The keen air was like wine in their veins and it was hard to believe that the thermometer had registered eighteen below zero that morning, for the air was dry and did not penetrate as would the moisture laden air at home at a temperature many degrees above the zero mark.

"I just can't believe that thermometer was on its job," protested Hal, as they stopped for a breathing spell half-way down the lake. "Why, I'm so warm I wish I was rid of this mackinaw."

"Me too," added Walter.

Pat suddenly whirled Hal around and looked keenly at his left ear. The rim was a dead white. "If you can't believe the thermometer perhaps you can believe this," said he drily as he touched the ear. "What did I tell you about keeping your cap down over your ears? Shure, 'tis a tenderfoot and not a first class Scout at all, at all, that ye be."

"What do you mean?" demanded Hal as he slipped a glove off to feel of the ear. At the look of blank astonishment that swept across his face as he discovered that the edge of his ear was stiff and wholly without feeling the others roared with laughter.

"I mean that you're frost-bitten already," replied Pat, "and I hope that this will be a lesson to the whole bunch of you. You may not feel him, but old Jack Frost is right on the job just the same, and it don't do up here to needlessly expose yourself. It is because the air is so dry that you don't feel the frost, but you freeze just the same. We'll run over to that point and thaw you out, and then I guess you'll keep your cap down where it belongs."

At the point Pat rubbed the frosted ear vigorously with a handful of snow until the frost was out and for a few minutes Hal danced with the ache of it, while the others grinned. "That's one on me, all right, and you're welcome to laugh, but little Hal Harrison has learned his lesson. No more frost-bites for me, thank you," he growled. "I don't wish you fellows any hard luck, but I hope you'll get a taste of it yourselves just to know what it feels like."

Walter and Sparrer took warning from Hal's experience and saw to it that their ears were well covered before they started on. As they drew near the end of the lake Old Baldy and Mount Seward loomed up with a grandeur and forbidding austerity that was almost menacing, and which was yet grandly heroic. The long pier of Woodcraft Camp jutting out into the lake was now clearly visible and on the end of it were two figures waving greetings.

"It's the Big Chief and Mother Merriam! Let's give them the old yell!" cried Upton.

They stopped and with Upton to lead sent the old Woodcraft yell ringing down the lake—"Whoop-yi-yi-yi! Whoop-yi-yi-yi! Whoop-yi-yi-yi! Woodcraft!" And even as the echoes flung it back from Old Baldy it was returned to them in the mingled voices of a man and a woman. The doctor and Mrs. Merriam were sending them welcome.

A few minutes later they reached the pier and were exchanging warm greetings. Sparrer had felt a natural diffidence at the thought of meeting the man of whom he had heard so much, but it vanished in the first hand-clasp and by the time he had reached the snug cabin he felt as if he had always known this great-hearted, kindly man and the sweet-faced woman whom the others called "Mother." In a dim way he understood the loyalty and affection of his comrades for these two who were devoting their lives to the making of strong men from weak boys.

CHAPTER VI

SNOW-SHOES AND FISH

Around the great log fire that night Pat told Doctor Merriam about his trip and his impressions of city life, winding up with the emphatically expressed conviction that while it might be a good place to do business it was no place in which to live, and that he would rather have a cabin in the shadow of Old Baldy than a palace on Riverside Drive.

"So you don't envy Hal?" laughed the doctor.

"I do not!" roared Pat. "I wouldn't give the poorest muskrat pelt I ever took to change places with him."

"Oh, you young savage!" cried the doctor. "Still, I share in a measure your feeling. I have lived in many cities, but you see here I am buried in the woods, and some of my friends wonder why. I'll tell you. It is because here I can live simply, unaffectedly, true to myself and to God. Here," he swept a hand toward the book-lined walls, "are my friends ready to give me of inspiration, comfort, advice, knowledge, whatever I demand or may need. They are not dead things, these books. They are living personalities, which have enriched and are enriching the world. When you boys listen to me you are not listening just to an audible voice. You are listening to an expression of that invisible something that we call the spirit—the true personality. And so it is that the writer of a great or good book never dies. His spiritual expression is there on the printed page just as much as if he were giving expression to it in audible speech. So with all these great and wonderful men and women constantly about me how can I ever be lonely? And then when I step out-of-doors it is directly into the temple of God. His nearness and presence are manifest in every phase of nature. The trees are alive, some of them sleeping, but alive nevertheless, and others not even sleeping. Sometimes I wonder if the very rocks are not alive. The elements seemingly war with one another, but there is nothing mean or petty or base in the mighty struggle, as there invariably is in the conflict of human passions. The Indian sees the Great Spirit in the lightning, and hears him in the rushing wind and the thunder, and is not afraid, but bows in reverence. He has a sense of nearness to the creator and loses it when he is confined in the man-made world

of brick and stone and steel and is eager to get back. It is elemental in him. In nature he sees God made manifest. We call him a savage, but I sometimes wonder if he is not more nearly a true child of the Father of all than many so-called civilized men who win the plaudits of the world and seem to forget whence they came and whither they will go.

"But I didn't mean to preach a sermon, but just to give you an idea of why Pat and I prefer to be savages, if you please, and spend our lives with nature. Now, Pat, what are your plans? When do you start in for camp? Haven't heard a word since you left from"—he paused at a warning wink from Pat, and then finished—"your partner. Big Jim was down from the lumber camp this week and reported seeing a silver gray. If you could catch a couple of those fellows that problem of going away to school would pretty nearly settle itself."

"What's a silver gray?" asked Hal, whose knowledge of fur bearers was rather limited.

"A color phase of the common red fox," replied the doctor, "and if not worth its weight in gold it is worth so much that a single skin is often worth twice over the whole of a season's catch of other furs. Why it should be called silver I don't know, for the only silver about it is the tip of the tail. The color is black, and single skins have sold as high as \$2,500 and more and \$800 to \$1,500 is not at all unusual. So valuable are the skins that black fox farming has become an established industry and a pair of black foxes for breeding purposes are worth from \$1,000 up. So you see, Jim saw considerable money running loose when he saw that fox."

"Phew!" exclaimed Hal with a low whistle of astonishment. "I didn't suppose there was anything on four legs except blooded live stock worth so much money. Wouldn't it be great if Pat could catch three or four this winter!"

Pat threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Make it a dozen while you're about it, son," said he. "Don't be so modest. I've lived in these woods some years, but I never yet have seen a live black fox, and I've known of only two being caught. If Jim says he saw one he did. There's nothing the matter with Jim's eyesight. I guess I'll have to have a look around the neighborhood where he saw it. As for our plans, Doctor, we are going to spend to-morrow with you and give these tenderfeet a few lessons on snow-shoes. We'll hit the trail for camp bright and early the next morning."

The next day dawned clear and cold and after a hearty breakfast the snow-shoes

were brought forth. First Pat explained the tie in common use and showed just how to adjust the rawhide thongs to give free play to the ankles and yet prevent the toes from creeping forward to the crossbars. With the thongs properly adjusted the shoes could be easily kicked off or put on again without untying the knots.

"The chief thing to remember," said he, "is to take a long stride with the toes pointed straight ahead. If you take a short step you will be almost certain to step on the tail of one shoe with the toe of the other and over you go. Now I'll show you how, and you fellows can practice a while out here in front where the snow has been cleared away until you get the hang of the thing. Then we'll make a little trip out into the woods and visit some of the old places, so you can see how different they are from what they were last summer."

"I have a suggestion to make," said the doctor. "While Mother puts up a lunch, you get these youngsters so that they can keep right side up. Then we'll all take a short hike and show Muldoon how real woodmen can have a hot meal when there is three feet of snow in the woods."

"Hurrah!" shouted Hal. "That will be bully! Come on, Walt, and let's see your paces."

For the next fifteen minutes the three boys tramped back and forth in front of the cabin, the shoes clacking merrily amid a running fire of chaff and comment from Pat. Once Sparrer stepped on one of Upton's shoes and sent him headlong, to the huge delight of the others. Again Hal did just what Pat had warned them against, took a short step and tripped himself up. But at the end of a quarter of an hour they had pretty well "got the hang of the thing," as Pat expressed it, and were eager to try it on deep snow.

"There's nothing to it," declared Hal. "I thought there were something to learn, like skating, but this is a cinch. I could keep it up all day," and by way of emphasizing his remarks once more tripped himself up, and sat down abruptly.

"Sure, it's no trick at all," chaffed Walter. "When you can't keep up sit down, and when you're down stay down. There's nothing to it." For Hal, forgetting the width of his present underpinning, had no sooner scrambled to his feet than he had gone down again, because of the overlapping webs.

The doctor and Mrs. Merriam now joined them, for the latter was an expert on shoes and had no mind to miss the outing. Pat and the doctor swung to their

backs the packs wherein were the supplies and dishes, and they were off, the doctor in the lead, Mrs. Merriam next, then Sparrer, Hal, Upton and Pat in the rear to keep the tenderfeet from straggling and to pull them out of the snow, he explained.

For a short distance a broken trail was followed. Then the doctor abruptly swung off among the trees where the snow lay deep and unbroken. The three novices soon found that progress here was a very different matter from walking on the comparatively hard surface of the packed trail. The shoes sank in perhaps a couple of inches and it was necessary to lift the feet more, to step high, which put more of a strain on the muscles. Also there was a tendency to step higher than was at all in good form, and to shorten the stride by so doing, losing the smooth easy forward roll from the hips.

Still, all things considered, the three novices were doing themselves proud until in an unguarded moment Hal stepped on the stub of a broken branch of a fallen tree buried in the snow. It caught in the tail of the shoe just enough to break his stride. He took a short step to catch his balance, stumbled and took a beautiful header. At Pat's roar of laughter the others turned to see two big webs wildly waving above the snow and nothing more of the unfortunate Hal. Now being plunged head first into deep snow with a pair of snow-shoes on your feet is a good deal like being thrown into the water with a life preserver fast to your feet—you can't get them down. For a few moments the others howled with glee as they watched the frantically kicking legs and listened to the smothered appeals for help from the luckless victim. Then Pat reached out and loosened the shoes, gripped Hal by the ankles and drew him forth, red in the face from his exertions and spitting out snow. He looked so wholly bewildered and withal so chagrined and foolish that he was greeted with a fresh peal of laughter, to which he responded with a sheepish grin as he tried to get the snow out of his neck and from up his sleeves.

"There's nothing to it, nothing at all!" jeered Walter.

"I didn't know but you thought you heard that black fox down there and were trying to get him," said Pat.

At that instant Upton involuntarily stepped back, a thing for which snow-shoes were never designed, and a second later had measured his length in the snow. Falling at full length he did not disappear as Hal had done, but he was hardly less helpless. Every effort to help himself by putting his hands down was futile.

He simply buried his arms to the shoulders in the yielding snow without finding anything on which to get a purchase. Hal was jubilant.

"When you're down stay down!" he yelled. "Laugh at me, will you?"

Walter had by this time managed to kick his shoes off and once free of these was soon on his feet and was enjoying the joke as much as any one. Both he and Hal were up to their hips in the snow, for here among the evergreens it had not packed and flounder as they would they could not get out.

The doctor's eyes twinkled as he picked up Hal's shoes and handed them to him. "Well, boys," said he, "it's high time we were hitting the trail again. Suppose you put your shoes on, and we'll make up for lost time."

Hal took the shoes and then looked helplessly across at Walter, who had just secured his, and it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps the doctor's remark was not so guileless as it seemed.

"How in thunder are we going to?" he demanded, vainly trying to force a shoe down to meet an upraised foot half-way, in the doing of which he once more lost his balance.

"I thought I showed you fellows just how to put your shoes on this morning. A good Scout ought not to have to be shown twice how to do a simple thing like that," said Pat, without cracking a smile. "What kind of Scouts are you, anyway, crying for help the first time you tumble in a little bit of snow?"

"Who's crying for help?" demanded Upton, vainly striving to get a shoe down where he could get his foot into the fastening. "I wouldn't take any help now if I thought I'd got to stay here all day. Take that and that!"

He began to dig furiously with the shoe, throwing the snow with malice aforethought full in Pat's face. Hal instantly took the cue and there was a hasty retreat on the part of their tormentors, in the midst of which Sparrer came to grief and had his turn at the snow-shoer's baptism. In a few minutes Walter had dug away enough snow to get his shoes under him and walked forth in triumph, followed by Hal. Sparrer, anxious to prove himself a good sport, refused all aid. Being small and light he had not sunk in as the others had and managed to get one shoe under him. With this for a support he soon had the other fastened. It was the work of a moment to adjust the first one and he was ready to take his place in line.

There were no more mishaps and as they tramped on through the great still woodland the wonder and the beauty of it silenced them, for it seemed like a vast cathedral in which the human voice would be a profanation of the solemn hush. Upton knew every foot within a radius of two miles of Woodcraft Camp, and for five miles in the direction in which they were heading, and yet not even to Sparrer did the surroundings seem more strange, such is the alchemy of the snow king to make the familiar unfamiliar, the commonplace beautiful. So it was that when at the end of three miles they emerged on the shore of a frozen sheet of water Walter at first failed utterly to recognize it, and it was not until Pat made some reference to the huge pickerel Walter had caught during his first summer at Woodcraft that it dawned on him that this was the very setback where he had discovered Pat's secret fishing grounds and on the shore of which he had given Pat his first lesson in boxing and in the meaning of the word honor.

"I've come over here because Mother insists that a dinner in the woods is no more complete without a fish course than it would be in a New York hotel, and because to tell the truth I have a hankering for a taste of fresh fish myself. Pat, I hope that spring is still open where you put the minnows last fall. Suppose you take this net and pail and see what you can find." He opened a small folding net as he was speaking. "I take it for granted that you youngsters have your belt axes with you, as good Scouts in the woods should. One of you can run over to that alder thicket and cut a dozen straight sticks about three feet long and as thick as my forefinger. The other two can chop holes in the ice. They don't need to be very big, you know, not over a foot across. I suggest that you scatter them pretty well. It adds to the fun to have them some distance apart, and it multiplies the chances of a good catch. While you are doing that I will start a fire and get things started for lunch."

Sparrer, having no axe, but a stout Scout knife, volunteered to cut the alder saplings while Hal and Walter attended to the holes in the ice. Hal was radiant. This was one of the things he had counted on, and he had brought from New York a dozen type, as the modern tip-ups for fishing through the ice are called. But when they had started out that morning he had not dreamed that he would have a chance to use them on a snow-shoe trip, and so they were neatly rolled in his duffle bag at the camp.

"Wonder what kind of a rig the Big Chief has got, and how he's going to use those sticks," said he to Upton as he came up to where Walter was making the ice fly in glittering chips.

"Don't know, but whatever it is you can bet your last dollar it is all right," replied Walter. "How many holes have you cut?"

"Five; I'm going to chop one more over there toward the north shore. How many have you?" replied Hal.

"Six. That ought to be a good place over there, and that will make the dozen. Here come Sparrer and the Big Chief, and I guess we'll soon see what the idea is. Pat must have found the spring open, for Sparrer has the pail."

The guess was a good one, for when he peeped in the pail Walter found that it contained a couple of dozen minnows. Together the three walked over to where Hal was just finishing the last hole. The doctor took from under his arm a bundle of short pieces of lath, each about eighteen inches long, tapering toward one end, to which was fastened a bit of red flannel. Two inches from the other end was a hole big enough for one of the alder sticks to pass through freely. Fastened close to the end, and neatly wound around it, was a short length of stout line on the end of which was a hook with wire snell. Unwinding one of these lines the doctor passed one of the alder sticks through the hole in the lath, baited the hook with a lively minnow and dropped it through the hole in the ice. The alder stick was placed across this so that the lath came in the middle and lay on the ice at right angles. A pull on the line would drag the end of the lath down, making it stand upright with its little red signal on the end, and that was all there was to it.

It was simple in the extreme, but quite as effective as Hal's more elaborate type could have been, as was presently demonstrated. They were just preparing to set the last tip-up when Hal, glancing over to the first one set, saw the red signal and with a wild yell of "We've got one! We've got one!" started for it at top speed. The others paused to see what the result would be, and saw him yank out a flapping prize.

"It's a beaut!" he panted as he rejoined them, holding out a handsome pickerel. "Bet it weighs five pounds if it weighs an ounce. Say, this is great!"

The fish was already stiff, but much to their surprise the doctor told them it was not dead, frozen fish often retaining life for some time after being taken from the water. He now left the tip-ups to the care of the three boys, warning them to make frequent rounds of the holes to break the ice as it formed and keep the lines free. The fish he took with him to where Mother Merriam was busy beside the fire, for which Pat was chopping wood.

Pickereel were numerous and hungry, to judge by the way they bit. It was novel and exciting sport to the three city boys. There would be a yell of "There's one!" and then a wild race to see who could reach it first. At first they almost invariably forgot in their excitement to take along the bait pail, which meant a second trip for one of them to rebait the hook. Sometimes the signal would drop before they reached it and they knew that the fish was off. Several times there were two signals waving at once and one time there were five. By the time the doctor's welcome hail of "Din-ner!" came ringing across the ice the bait pail was empty and they had fourteen fish, none under three pounds, and from that up to six. With the first one caught they had a total of fifteen. The doctor smiled as he scanned the eager faces of the young fishermen and then looked at the long row of fish laid out on the snow.

"Enough is plenty," said he, "and I guess this will do for to-day. We want to leave some for the boys next summer. We'll take the lines up after dinner."

How good that dinner did smell to the hungry boys with appetites whetted by exercise in the keen air! The snow had been shoveled away nearly to the ground for the bed logs for the fire and ample space cleared in front and spread with balsam boughs on which to sit. There was a steaming kettle of pea soup and a pot of hot chocolate. The pickereel had been split and, broiled in halves pinned to pieces of hemlock bark, stood before the fire and basted with bacon drippings. There was a venison steak done to a turn, for the doctor had hung a deer in his ice house at the end of the open season. There were potatoes boiled in their jackets. There was a brown johnny-cake baked in a reflector oven, and to cap all a plate of the doughnuts for which Mother Merriam was famous.

"And you call this a lunch!" cried Walter when he had eaten until he had to let out his belt. "No wonder it required two packs to bring it here. Well, is there anything to beat this in New York?"

"Not in a thousand years. Oi'm going to run away and live here," declared Sparrer, and while the others laughed he stared with dreamy eyes into the leaping flames of the huge fire Pat had built, and who shall say but that in them he saw the symbols of new hopes and ambitions springing from the colorless, sordid drudgery which until this time had been his life.

After the meal was finished and the dishes washed there was an hour of story-telling by the doctor, ending with the singing of America under the towering snow-laden spruces and then the homeward trip. Thanks to their experiences on

the outward trip and the watchfulness resulting therefrom there were no further mishaps, and when they reached camp and kicked off the big webs once more the boys were ready to vote their first day in winter woods all that they had dreamed it would be and more. Also they were quite willing to second and carry by unanimous vote the motion that they seek their beds early in preparation for an early start the next day.



CHAPTER VII

ON THE TRAIL

Day was just breaking when the boys bade farewell to Doctor and Mother Merriam, and with a hot breakfast under their belts started for the trapping camp. As yet Pat had given no hint as to where it was located, and Walter and Hal, respecting his reticence, forbore to ask questions. Walter did venture to ask if they would reach there before dark.

"No," replied Pat. "We'll have to make a camp to-night," and advanced no further information.

All their duffle and the supplies which Pat was taking in were loaded on the toboggan, and to this Pat had rigged a sort of harness so that two walking single file could drag it. This relieved them of packs. Walter and Hal each carried his rifle on the chance of picking up a rabbit on the way. The snow-shoes were slung over their backs, Pat explaining that for a time they would follow a broken out lumber trail and it would be easier walking without the shoes than on them.

It was when they turned into this trail that the first suspicion of where they were bound for flashed through Upton's mind, but he held his peace and settled to the task of doing his share of the pulling. And this proved to be no easy matter. The trail was but roughly broken out by the passage of lumber sleds, and it soon became necessary for one to steady the load to keep it from capsizing. It was slow, toilsome work, and when at the end of ten miles Pat called a halt for a rest while he made four cups of hot pea soup by the simple process of melting snow and crumbling into it a roll of erbswurst the others were ready to declare that they had come twenty miles.

As he drank his soup and munched a cracker Walter scanned his surroundings closely. Presently he discovered what he sought, a partially obliterated blaze on a big tree just beyond and to the right of where they were squatting.

"I've got you now, old Mr. Foxy!" he cried. "This mysterious camp of yours is the cabin in Smugglers' Hollow, and we're going to camp to-night at Little Goose Pond. More than that, your partner is Alec Smith. Why didn't I guess it before? Own up now, old Crafty!"

Quite unabashed, Pat bestowed a grin on Upton. "Three bull's-eyes," he commented. "I've been wondering how long it would take you fellows to catch the scent. Began to think I'd have to rub your noses in it."

"Hurrah!" interrupted Hal, who had been an eager listener. "I never thought of the Hollow, and yet there is no place I should like to go to so much as that. Say, Walt, these heads of ours sure are thick. Don't you remember that Pat told us that first night in New York that Alec was trapping, and the last he heard of him he was over in the Hollow? Well, we'd make good detectives, we would. I've done a lot of wondering about Pat's partner and what sort of a fellow he would prove to be and whether or not we'd like him. And to think it's Alec! If you weren't such a young and tender innocent I'd throw you in the snow and give you a shampoo. What do you say, Walt, to doing it anyway?"

"Come on!" cried Pat, "the two of you, or all three!"

Upton shook his head mournfully. "I'd like to, but it wouldn't be right. He isn't as big as the two of us, and so it wouldn't do at all. It would be the same as a big fellow picking on a little one. You know I thrashed him once for doing that very thing, and now if we should turn around and do it I'm afraid the force of my beautiful example would be wholly destroyed. I tell you what, you do it alone, Hal."

"He's too small," declared Hal. "That's why I wanted you to help. Then my conscience would be only half guilty. I'm going to let him off this time with just a snowball."

Suiting his action to the word he landed a big soft snowball full on the side of Pat's head. Pat made a rush for him, but Walter thrust out a foot and sent him headlong into the snow, and before he could regain his feet Hal was on him endeavoring to wash his face with snow. In a second there was the liveliest kind of a snow fight, Upton and Sparrer yelling encouragement with absolute impartiality. It ended with Hal's smothered cry of "enough" and Pat's allowing him up just in time to see Walter and then Sparrer unceremoniously pitched into the snow, by way of showing that all Scouts are equal, Pat explained, as he rubbed their faces.

Panting and glowing from the frolic they put out the fire built to heat their soup and were ready to hit the trail again. From this point on the snow-shoes were an absolute necessity, for they left the lumber trail for another ten miles through the woods. This time they were not dependent on the blazed trees as they had been

when they went that way in the fall, for some one had been over the trail since the last snowfall, evidently coming out from Little Goose. Pat studied the tracks for a few minutes. Then his face cleared. "It was Big Jim," said he. "I wonder now if he took a look in the Hollow to see how Alec was getting on. He may have been over to the Gillicuddy camp, the trail from which comes in at the pond, you remember, but I have an idea he swung around to see Alec. I wonder now where he saw that fox. I just took it for granted that it was around where he is cutting and didn't ask any questions for fear of letting the coon out of the hole about where we were going. Then when I was alone with the doctor we both forgot all about Jim, there were so many other things to talk about. It may be that he saw that silver gray somewhere along this trail. We'll keep our eyes peeled for signs."

"How do you know that Big Jim made these tracks?" asked Walter, who had been studying them closely, hoping to find out for himself the clue which made Pat so sure of his man, but unable to see anything distinctive save that they were of odd shape, being nearly round.

"By a combination of two things—the shape of the tracks and the length of the stride," replied Pat. "Jim always uses bear's-paw shoes, and I don't believe there are more than half a dozen other pairs in this neck of woods. Then look at the length of the stride. It's a good three inches longer than mine, and there's nothing dainty about mine. There isn't a man in the woods who could take that stride and hold it but Jim Everly. So I'm as sure it was Big Jim as I am that if we don't get a hustle on we'll have to camp in the snow, and it'll be a lot more comfortable at the pond. We've got another long hike to-morrow, and we want to be in shape to do it."

For some miles the going was fairly level, and once they had got into the swing of the thing the boys found it comparatively easy. There were two or three mishaps, but these were counted part of the sport. About two miles from their destination they came to a spur of a mountain over which the trail led. In fact, it was the very spur on the other side of which Spud Ely had overrun the trail and got lost the fall previous. Pat called a halt.

"It's going to be no small job to get this load up there," said he. "We can go around the spur, but to do that will add a good three miles, and in the valley it will be dark before we can reach camp. What do you think? Are you game to try the hill?"

"The hill! The hill! Follow me, comrades, up yonder heights, and drive the enemy from their guns!" shouted Hal, striking a heroic attitude and pretending to flourish an imaginary sword.

"Where lives the Scout, by difficulties pressed,
Who will admit a chicken heart possessed?
Who will not rather bravely face the wust
And do and dare and conquer or go bust!"

"Bravo!" cried Walter.

"When dares our comrade coin and use a word like wust
We'll take his dare and see who'll scale yon hillside fust!"

Lead on, Mr. Malone. We'll make it or die in the attempt."

"All right, me brave Scouts," replied Pat. "Up we go! 'Tis a chance to see the kind of stuff that's in the likes of you, for 'twill be no child's play getting this load up there. And when we get up there where you see the bare rock watch your footing. That rock is slippery, and a fall there would be serious."

The next half hour was one of panting, sweating toil. In the first place, as soon as the grade began to rise sharply the boys found that the only way they could progress was by digging their toes into the snow through the toe holes in the shoes, which brought an added strain on the already weary muscles of the calves. It would have been bad enough in view of their inexperience if they had had nothing else to consider, but there was that heavy load, and it grew heavier every minute. As they got higher where the wind had had full sweep there was comparatively little snow, and in some places the bare rock was exposed. Here they found it easier going without the snow-shoes than with them.

Hauling and pushing they worked the toboggan up until at last the spur was crossed.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Hal. "I'm sweating like a butcher. That's what I call work."

"And we're doing it for fun," added Upton. "Funny what a difference the view-point makes. I suppose it's all in the way you look at it whether work is fun or fun is work. I can tell you one thing, and that is that I for one am mighty glad that there isn't another one of those things to cross to-day. I'm afraid I'd lie down and holler quits. What are you rubbing your legs for, Sparrer?"

"Just feeling of 'em to get wise if dey's all dere," replied Sparrer.

The remainder of the trail to Little Goose was comparatively easy and they reached the familiar lean-to just as dusk was settling down, and there was more than one sigh of thankfulness as the shoes were kicked off for the last time.

"I'm tired enough to drop right down and go to sleep in the snow, but my little tummy won't let me," confessed Hal. "Ring for the waiter, please, and have him bring me a planked steak with half a chicken on the side, grapefruit salad, and a pot of coffee with real cream. Wake me up when it comes."

"Nothing doing," declared Pat. "This isn't the Waldorf Astoria, but Hotel de Shivers; heat and food supplied only to those who pay in labor, all bills payable in advance."

"That's me!" Hal seated himself on the pile of stuff and gave vent to an exaggerated sigh of contentment. "Haven't I labored all day? Tell the bellhop to take my stuff to my room. I think I'll have my dinner served there."

He ended with a grunt, the result of a sharp poke in the pit of his stomach from an axe handle. "To turn on the heat with," explained Pat sweetly, thrusting the axe into Hal's hands, and pointing to a pile of birch logs.

Hal got to his feet with a groan and a grimace and followed Upton who, with another axe, had already started for the wood-pile. "You're a slave driver! That's what you are, a flint-hearted slave driver," he grumbled, albeit with a twinkle that belied his words.

"My tummy, oh, my tummy!
It gives me such a pain!
I wonder will it ever
Feel really full again!"

"That depends on how soon you get that wood split," grinned Pat. "If you don't get a move on it will be so dark you can't see what you are doing, and I give you fair warning—no wood, no dinner."

"Let it never be said I am ever a shirk
When a dinner depends on the way that I work,"

retorted Hal, and forthwith fell to his task with a vim that put Upton on his mettle to break even with him, for Hal was no mean axeman, as Pat well knew. The handling of an axe was one of the things which Hal had learned, and learned

well during his three summers in the woods. To the thorough woodsman an axe is a complete tool-chest. With it he can do almost anything that needs to be done from the cutting of fire-wood to the building of a log cabin.

Sparrer was put to work pulling down the hemlock boughs which had been piled in front of the lean-to to keep out the snow, while Pat unpacked things, started the fire and made preparations for the evening meal. This was Sparrer's first experience in a lean-to, and when the boughs were out of the way he examined it with interest. The back and two ends were of logs, the front being open its whole width. The roof was of big sheets of hemlock bark laid overlapping and with a sharp pitch to the back.

On the ground about seven feet from the rear wall two six-foot logs about eight inches through had been staked end to end so that they reached from one side wall to the other. Midway a similar log had been laid across to the rear wall, making two pens, as it were. These had been filled with small balsam boughs thrust at an angle, butts down, so that they "shingled," and packed closely. The result was two beds fifteen inches thick and so springy and comfortable that it made one sleepy just to look at them. It was perhaps three feet from the beds to the open front. In this space at one end was a table two feet square made by driving four stakes into the ground and nailing on a top made of a flattened sheet of cedar bark.

A little snow had sifted in through the protecting boughs and this Sparrer swept out with a fir bough for a broom. Pat, meanwhile, had a kettle of snow melting for water for soup and was mixing up a johnny-cake. The reflector oven was set before the fire to get heated and while Sparrer helped bring in the wood which the two choppers had split Pat sliced bacon and put it on to parboil in the frying-pan, having melted snow to make water enough to cover it.

"Wot youse doing that for?" asked Sparrer. "Oi thought youse always fried bacon."

"To get some of the salt out of it, son," replied Pat. "I'll fry it all right when the time comes. Just you lay out the plates and cups where they will keep warm."

Sparrer ranged the four agate-ware plates, which were really shallow pans so that soup could be served in them as well as dry food, against a stick where they would get warm but not too hot to handle. The erbswurst was crumbled into the now boiling water, a handful of julienne, or evaporated vegetables cut in thin strips, was added, the pan of johnny-cake was put in the oven and the four boys

gathered around to watch and wait with many a hungry sniff. The soup was soon ready, and Pat announced the first course. How good it did taste as they sat on their blanket rolls near enough to the fire to enjoy its warmth, each with a pan of the hot soup on his knees.

Before this was finished Pat poured off the water from the bacon and that was soon sizzling and throwing off that most delicious of all odors to a hungry woodsman.

"Course number two!" called Pat as he apportioned the brown slices among the four plates and then drew forth the johnny-cake, baked to a turn, a rich even brown all over with a heart of gold, the very sight of which brought forth gasps of delighted anticipation.

"What's course number three, Mr. Chef?" asked Walter as he prepared to sink his teeth into his quarter of the corn bread.

"Something worth saving your appetite for," replied Pat, re-greasing the pan and pouring in the remainder of his batter for another cake. He poured off all but a little of the bacon fat from the big frying-pan, and then dropped into it a slice of meat which he had kept hidden under a towel.

"Venison, by all that's great!" shouted Hal as the meat began to sizzle on the hot iron. "Why didn't you tell us you had venison, so that the thought of it would have helped us up that pesky hill?"

"Tis the docthor's contribution to the joy av living," responded Pat, deftly flipping the steak over to sear the other side. "But I mistrust yez have eaten so much already thot 'tis not the loikes av yez will be wanting more than maybe a wee bite. But never ye moind. 'Tis meself will do justice to the docthor and his gift."

"Don't you believe it!" roared the three in unison.

The steak and the second johnny-cake were done together and were finished together to the last scrap and crumb, and along with them went hot chocolate. There was a general loosening of belts, and then Hal broke the silence of contentment which had fallen on the little group.

"My tummy, oh, my tummy!
It has now another pain!
I wish that it were empty

That it might be filled again,"

said he, gazing mournfully into his empty plate.

"Them's my sentiments too," said Walter, when the laugh that followed had subsided. "But any fellow who springs a thing like that has to pay for it. I move that Hal wash the dishes. All in favor say aye."

Three ayes made the woods ring. "All opposed say no!"

Hal's "No!" was shouted at the top of his lungs.

"'Tis a vote," declared Walter. "Mr. Harrison will now attend to his duties and carry out the action of this assembly."

After the dishes were out of the way Pat built a huge fire with three great backlogs one above another and slanting back to keep them from rolling down. They were held in place by braces at the back. In front of these smaller logs were piled, the backlogs reflecting the heat forward into the lean-to. Then the blankets were spread on the rough beds, and with all their clothing on, including moccasins, four weary young woodsmen turned in for the night.

Pat was asleep almost as soon as he touched the bed, and Hal and Upton were not far behind him. But to Sparrer, tired as he was, the novelty of his surroundings was too great for immediate sleep, and for a long time he lay staring out at the flickering flames and above them at the brilliant stars, his active imagination keyed to a high pitch. It was like fairy-land to him. Nothing seemed real. He had read and heard of these things, but that he, Eddie Muldoon, could actually be experiencing them, sleeping in a real hunter's camp in the dead of winter, tramping on snow-shoes through great lonely forests, eating such meals as he had never known before in all his short life—meals cooked over open fires in the great wonderful out-of-doors, couldn't be. And yet here he was.

The fire died down until only a deep glow, a warm ruddy glow which grew less and less, lighted the rough interior, and before it had quite vanished Eddie had slipped from the real which seemed unreal to the unreal which so often seems real in the realm of dreams.

Three times during the night Pat crawled out of his blankets to put wood on the fire, but the other sleepers knew nothing of it. They slept the deep heavy sleep of healthy, tired boys and it mattered not to them that the temperature dropped until the very trees cracked and split with the cold. They were as warm and

comfortable as if in their own beds at home. Overhead the stars shone down on a great white world wherein the fire made but a flickering point of yellow light, and wherein was no sound save the heavy breathing of the sleepers, the sputter of hot coals snapping off into the snow, the occasional crack of a frost-riven tree, and the soft stamp of a snow-shoe rabbit gazing wonder-eyed at the dying embers.



CHAPTER VIII

ALEC HINTS AT DARK THINGS

Hal was willing to swear that he had not been asleep more than ten minutes when he was awakened by the beating of a pan with a stick and Pat's roar of "Breakfast! All hands out for breakfast!" He rolled over sleepily so as to look out. Pat was laughing at him. Beyond the firelight and from the tiny strip of sky above the dark tree tops he could see a few pale stars blinking at him weakly.

"Aw, Pat, that's no joke. You may think it's funny, but it isn't," he growled, and there was a note of real anger this time.

"What?" demanded Pat with a deep throaty chuckle.

"You know what—waking a feller up when he's just got to sleep and is dead tired and got a hard day coming!" flared Hal.

"Aisy, aisy, son! Do ye think I would be frying bacon in the middle of the night for a joke? 'Tis meself has been up this good hour and 'tis six o'clock this very minute. 'Twill be daylight by the toime we be ready to start," returned Pat good-humoredly.

Hal had it on the tip of his tongue to say that he didn't believe it, but by this time he was sufficiently awake to smell the bacon and hear it sizzle and sputter in the pan. Moreover, his companions were already kicking off their blankets, and he had the good sense to realize that Pat meant just what he said. Still, it was hard to believe, and it was not until he had reached for his watch that he was convinced that it really was time to prepare for another day's tramp. Then he hastily crawled from his blankets, his good humor fully restored, for Hal was a good sport, and there was nothing of the shirk about him.

"I beg pardon, Pat," said he, as he joined the two shivering figures crowding as close to the fire as they could comfortably get while they watched Pat stir up the pancake batter. "I honestly thought you were up to one of your old tricks and putting something across on us. Doesn't seem as if I'd more than closed my eyes. Phew! but it's cold!"

It was. It was the hour just before the break of day when, perhaps because the blood has not yet begun to circulate freely, the cold seems to have reached its maximum of strength. Beyond the narrow radius of the glow from the fire it seemed to fairly bite to the bone.

"Get busy with the axe and you'll forget it," advised Pat, adding, "It is the courtesy of the woods to leave a little wood ready for the next fellow who may hit camp late, as we did yesterday. You'll have just about time enough to get warmed up before these flapjacks are ready."

"Good idea!" cried Walter, seizing an axe. "Come on, you fellows! Sparrer can lug it in as we split it."

At the end of ten minutes Pat called them to eat, and by that time they had forgotten the cold, for they were in a warm glow from exercise.

"I'll bet it was cold in the night," said Upton as they sat down to bacon, flapjacks and hot chocolate.

"Right you are, my boy," replied Pat. "When I got up the second time it was cold enough to freeze the tail off a brass monkey."

"When you got up the second time! What in the dickens were you up for?" exclaimed Hal.

"To kape yez from freezing to death," grinned Pat. "Did yez think the fire would feed itself?"

"I didn't think anything about it," confessed Hal. "Gee, it must have been cold when you crawled out to start things this morning! Makes me shiver to think of it. I guess the rest of us are the lucky little boys to have everything started for us and a ripping good fire going before we turned out. Do you always get up before daylight in the woods, Pat?"

"Sure," replied Pat. "It's nothing when you're used to it. Most trappers are on the trail by break of day. The days are all too short in winter, anyway, especially when you've got a long trap line to work over. I expect Alec is on the line now. He'll be trying to get through early to-day so as to have things ready for us when we reach the cabin. It's going to be a stiff pull to-day for you fellows, and the sooner we get started the better."

As soon as breakfast was finished the toboggan was packed, the brush piled once

more in front of the lean-to and the fire put out by the simple process of throwing snow on it. The cold light of the stars had given way to the colder gray of the dawn as they once more slipped on the shoes and hit the trail around Little Goose Pond. It was then that the three novices realized that they were indeed tenderfeet. They had not gone half a mile before it seemed as if every muscle from their thighs down was making individual and vigorous protest. But they were game, and if Pat guessed their feelings it was not from any word which they let drop.

Gradually the stiffness wore off, and at the end of a couple of hours they were traveling with some degree of comfort. Pat purposely set an easy pace for the first few miles and he kept a watchful eye on Sparrer, for whom he felt personally responsible. As a matter of fact the youngster was standing it even better than the other two. For one thing, he was considerably lighter, and his shoes bore him up better than was the case with his companions. In places where the snow was packed he did not sink in at all, whereas the others broke through slightly, and on soft snow he did not begin to sink as far as they did. Of course this meant far less strain on his muscles, and greater ease in walking.

As they rounded the end of the pond Pat pointed out the place where he had been mistaken for a deer by two city boys and got a bullet through his hat. A little beyond this point they saw the first sign of life since they had entered the woods, the tracks of a hare or snow-shoe rabbit, and with them other tracks which at first glance all but Pat mistook for those of another rabbit.

"You fellows wait here a minute," said he and followed the trail into a thicket of young hemlocks. A few minutes later he called to them to join him. They found him at the farther side of the thicket. At his feet the snow had been considerably disturbed, and there were some blood-stains and torn scraps of white fur. Beyond a single trail led to the foot of a tree and there ended.

"Marten," explained Pat briefly in response to the looks of inquiry. "He ran Mr. Longlegs down here, ate his dinner and took to the trees. I've had a hunch that there were marten in this neck of woods, but haven't had a chance to trap them yet."

Later they put up a flock of spruce grouse, but it was out of season and the boys had too much respect for the spirit as well as the letter of the law to be even tempted to shoot. After the noon lunch Pat quickened the pace somewhat. The temperature had moderated rapidly and the sky was overcast. "It's a weather

breeder, and we're in for more snow," said Pat as he scanned the sky with some appearance of anxiety. "I don't like the looks of it. We want to reach the cabin before the storm breaks, and we've got to hit it up faster in order to do it. How are your legs?"

"Still doing business," replied Hal. "The stiffness is out, but I guess I won't object to reaching that little old cabin. How about you, Walt?"

"Same here," replied Upton. "I'm game for the rest of the distance, but the cabin will look good to me, all right, all right. Hope Alec will have dinner ready. I've no sooner eaten than I'm hungry again."

"My tummy, oh, my tummy!"

began Hal, but Pat cut him short with the order to fall in, and started off at a pace which left Hal no breath to waste on doggerel. They now buckled down to the trail in earnest. Pat's fears proved well grounded, for they were still some three miles from the cabin when the first needle-like particles began to hiss through trees and sting their faces. By the time they entered the pass to Smugglers' Hollow the tracks of Big Jim had been entirely obliterated and Pat was holding the trail by the blazed trees, a feat by no means easy because of the difficulty of looking ahead in the face of the storm.

In the narrow pass they stopped for a few minutes for a breathing spell. There the force of the storm was broken, but when they emerged into the Hollow they found that they must force their way into the very teeth of it. The wind had risen, and it drove the fine icy particles with a force that almost cut the exposed skin. The blinding cloud swirled about them and completely hid their surroundings. Pat, in the lead, partly broke the force of the storm for those behind. It seemed to them as if he must be going by blind instinct, but if he was he had a dogged confidence that was at least reassuring. At last when it seemed to the three city lads that they simply could not push on another foot Pat stopped and raised a warning hand. "Listen!" said he.

With straining ears they listened, but for a couple of minutes heard nothing. Then seemingly out of the heart of the storm there came a faint "Hello-o!"

"Alec," said Pat briefly. "He's getting worried."

Together they gave an answering shout, but the wind seemed to snatch the sound from their lips and whirl it behind them. "No use," said Pat. "Wind's the wrong

way, and we better save our breath. We'll need it. It isn't far now, and he'll keep yelling to guide us."

Once more they buckled down to the task in hand. The few minutes' respite had eased the weary muscles, and the sound of Alec's voice was wonderfully stimulating. Fifteen minutes later, panting and gasping, powdered with snow from head to feet, they stumbled up to the cabin just as Alec Smith threw open the door to renew his signals. For a second he stared, then a look of intense relief swept across his rugged features.

ONCE MORE THEY BUCKLED DOWN TO THE TASK

"Glory be!" he cried, springing forward and unceremoniously shoving the exhausted boys into the cabin. "I was feared that ye would be having to spend the night in a snowdrift. Did ye no hear me shouting?"

Pat nodded as he sank on to a stool, panting for breath. "We heard you all right, Alec, but we couldn't make you hear us because the wind was the wrong way. Besides, we didn't have any breath to spare."

But Alec wasn't listening. He was delightedly shaking hands with Walter and Hal and helping them to strip off their mackinaws, not forgetting Sparrer, whose presence was a surprise, Pat having sent no warning of this addition to the party.

"My, but ye be a sight for sore eyes!" he declared as he bustled about preparing hot chocolate and in other ways striving to make his guests comfortable. "Saving Big Jim, who spent one night here, I haven't laid eyes on a living soul since Pat left, and that was three weeks gone, though I mistrust that there be others no so very far away."

Pat looked up quickly. "What's that?" he demanded sharply.

Alec's face clouded. "I've seen signs which I dinna like. I'll be telling ye more aboot it after dinner," said he briefly.

"And the catch since I've been away?" asked Pat.

"Is no what it should be. There's na doot about that; it's no what it should be." The face of the young Scotchman darkened still more. Pat flashed him a look of understanding. "We'll talk that over by and by," said he. "Just now we're half famished. My, but that stew smells good. I'll unpack while you are getting the stuff ready. With that toboggan in here there isn't room to turn around."

The toboggan had been dragged in when they first arrived and it occupied most of the available room. Walter helped him unload, piling the stuff on one of the bunks for the time being. Presently Alec called for their eating outfit, confessing that his establishment didn't possess dishes enough for so many. At length he announced dinner ready and bade the four draw up to the little rough deal table spread with a piece of white oilcloth. For seats there were two five-foot benches made by splitting a log, smoothing the flat sides and inserting four stout birch legs in the convex side of each. These were drawn up on either side of the table, and at one end Alec drew up an empty box for his seat.

Alec had, as Walter expressed it, laid himself out on that dinner. There was venison stew with dumplings, and a rich thick gravy. There were baking-powder biscuits as light as feathers. There were baked potatoes and canned string beans. And last but not least there was a great brown loaf of hot gingerbread.

"How's your tummy now?" asked Walter as Hal at last was forced to refuse a third helping of stew.

"It's too small," Hal complained. "I want more. I want a lot more, and I can't eat another mouthful."

Pat insisted on helping Alec do up the dishes and flatly refused to allow any one else take a hand, so the others spent the time in stowing away their duffle and inspecting the interior of the cabin. To Sparrer it was, of course, all new and strange. As for that, it was hardly less so to Harrison and Upton. When they had last seen it it had been windowless, doorless and the roof at the rear had been but temporarily patched. Now there was a stout door. Four small windows had been fitted into the openings left for this purpose. The temporary repairs which Pat had made on the roof at the rear end had been replaced with a permanent roof. In fact, the whole roof had been put in first class shape. The side walls had been repacked with moss between the logs, the four side bunks repaired and a new one built at the back, and all filled with freshly cut balsam. The floor had been repaired. So also had the fireplace and chimney. A small cupboard and shelves had been added. On the floor were two big deerskins.

But the thing which caught and held the attention of the boys most was a big bearskin which had been thrown on one of the upper bunks.

"When and where did you get him?" asked Upton eagerly.

"Shot him within less than half a mile of the cabin just before real cold weather set in," replied Alec. "He was just gettin' ready to den up for the winter. I misdoot he was the same one that give that young feller you called Sister the scare the day he was alone here last fall. Tracked him in a light snow and was lucky enough to see him first. Regular old he feller, and he sure took some killing. First shot got him right back of the shoulder and made him squall a plenty, but it didna stop him. Knew by that that I had hit him and hit him hard, but the way he beat it you never'd have guessed he was hurt at all. When I see the blood on the trail I kenned he was hard hit and would no travel far if left alone, so I sat down and smoked a pipe. Then I took up the trail and sure enough he had laid down behind a windfall about a quarter of a mile from where I first see him. The old fox heard me coming and sneaked away again, but he was getting weak and didna go far before he laid down again. This time I got another shot and broke his backbone, but at that it took two more shots to finish him. You ain't never killed a bar till he's dead. What do you think that feller Ely will say when he gits that skin?"

"Spud? Is that for Spud? Do you mean to say that you are going to send that skin to Spud Ely?" cried Walter.

Alec nodded. "I promised him a barskin when he left, and I reckon that that's hisn. Hope he'll like it."

"Like it! Alec, he'll be tickled silly. He wrote me that you had promised him one," cried Walter. "It's perfectly bully! Good old Spud! I wish he could be here with us now to make a little sunshine. Not that we need it," he hastened to add, "but he sure would enjoy this. I bet he's green with envy if he knows that we fellows are up here now."

"He knows, all right," Hal broke in. "Wrote him when I first thought of this trip, but he couldn't get away."

"I wanted to get that skin to him for Christmas, but didn't have a chance to pack it out," explained Alec. "Guess I'll send it out when you fellers go. A little old barskin don't begin to pay what I owe that boy. If it hadn't been for him I'd probably died up there in that hide-out where he found me. And if it hadn't been

for the little doctor here I'd likely have died anyway. Anyhow I'd have lost my leg. There's a barskin coming to you too, some day."

Walter flushed. It made him uncomfortable to be called the little doctor, as Alec persisted in calling him, yet at the same time he was conscious of a warm glow of pride which he tried hard to stifle. "Pooh, Alec, that was no more than any of the other fellows would have done if I hadn't been here. You know all Scouts know what to do for first aid to the injured," said he.

"Just the same I don't believe there was one of us would have had the nerve to tackle that broken leg of Alec's. I wouldn't for one," declared Hal.

To relieve Walter's embarrassment Pat abruptly changed the subject. "What was that you hinted at when we first got here about signs of some one else in these diggings?" he asked, turning to Alec.

The Scotchman's face darkened. He threw a couple of big logs on the fire and then as the others made themselves comfortable he told his story briefly. For the last two weeks there had been little fur in the traps, especially on the forty mile line to the north. He had made the round of this line twice in this time with only one marten, a fox and a few rats to show for it, but he had found signs which led him to believe that some of the traps had been robbed. He was morally certain that some one had been systematically making the rounds of the traps, timing the visits so that there would be no danger of running into him and so cunningly following his trail that it was only by the closest study of the tracks that he had made sure that a stranger had been on the line. At one unsprung marten trap he had found a couple of drops of blood which indicated that there had been something in the trap. At another there had been the faint imprint of the body of an animal laid in the snow off at one side. In one trap he had found the foot of a muskrat, nothing unusual in itself, but it had been cut off with a knife and not twisted or gnawed off.

These things he had discovered on his trip two weeks ago, and on his return trip he had thrust tiny twigs into the snow of the trail in such a way that they would not be noticed. On his second round from which he had returned only the day before, he had found some of these crushed into the snow, sure evidence that they had been stepped on. He had kept a sharp watch for a strange trail joining his own, but had discovered none, doubtless due to the fact that the thief or thieves had come across the bare ice of one of the lakes near the farther end of the line and then it had been an easy matter to step into his trail where it skirted

the edge of the lake. On this last trip he had found an empty rifle shell which apparently had been dropped unnoticed.

Pat's face had hardened as he listened to the recital. "Any signs of the bloody minded thaves in the Holler or on the short lines?" he asked.

Alec shook his head. "They've kept away from here. The catch on the short lines has been fair, and on the long line it ought to have been better."

Pat stood up and shook himself. "Arrah now, 'tis time I was back on me job," he growled. "Wance I lay the two hands av me on the thafe 'tis the last time he will be wantin' to look wid the eyes av envy on fur thot don't belong to him. A thafe who would shtale another man's fur would rob his own grandmother. This storm will cover up all tracks, but 'tis like there will be a chance for some real scouting after it is over. 'Tis thaves we'll be trappin' and not fur for a while. Did Big Jim say anything about a silver fox when he was here?"

"No," replied Alec, his face lighting. "Why?"

"He told Doctor Merriam that he saw one on his way out, and we've been wondering if it was over this way," Hal broke in eagerly.

"Likely he saw it on his way out of the Hollow," replied Alec. "There's one here. I've seen him twice, but didn't get a shot. I've got traps set for him, but he's been too smart for me so far. He's a big feller, and his skin will grade No. 1 prime. If we can get him the thieves are welcome to all the rest of our furs."

"No, they're not!" retorted Pat. "They're going to fork over every pelt they've taken, to the smallest rat, or Pat Malone will know the reason why." He shook a big fist by way of emphasis. "Now, let's turn in and forget our troubles," he ended with a mildness that brought a general laugh.



CHAPTER IX

SNOWBOUND

All that night the storm raged and in the morning the snow was still falling. Pat and Alec from force of habit were up early, but seeing that there would be nothing doing outside they forbore to waken the three visitors and were not averse to returning to their blankets for a couple of hours of extra sleep. How long the three boys would have slept is a question had not Alec dropped a pan which clattered noisily. Upton poked a sleepy face out from his bunk.

"What you fellers doing?" he demanded.

Pat grinned. "Getting dinner. Will you have some or will you wait for supper?"

Walter felt for his watch and looked at it. Then he tumbled out in a hurry. "Hey, you fellows!" he yelled. "Are you going to sleep all day? It's eleven o'clock and Alec is cooking dinner. We've missed breakfast and——"

"My tummy, oh, my tummy!"

murmured a sleepy voice from the opposite bunk. "What you giving us? It isn't morning yet." Hal thrust out a tousled head and blinked stupidly.

"It isn't to-morrow morning, but it will be this afternoon in about an hour," laughed Pat. "'Tis the way they do in Noo Yor-r-k, turn day into night," he explained to Alec.

"No such thing!" protested Hal indignantly. "It isn't more'n daylight now."

There was some foundation in fact for Hal's statement, for the little cabin, but dimly lighted at best, was even at this late hour in a semi twilight, due to the snow that partly covered the windows; the effect was very much that of daybreak. The odor of frying bacon, however, was a potent inducement to get up, and by the time dinner was ready the boys were ready for it. There was considerable good-natured joshing over their ability to sleep and Pat warned them that if they repeated the performance they would be taken out and dropped in a snow-bank. It had been a good thing for them, however, just what they

needed after their strenuous experience of the previous day, and beyond some stiffness they confessed that they never had felt better in their lives.

"What are we going to do this afternoon—start scouting for those thieves?" Hal asked as he wiped the dishes.

Pat laughed. "Not so that you'd notice it, me bye. We're going to stay right here. The storm's not over yet, and if it keeps on I'm thinking we'll be buried completely. However, it looks to me as if it will break away shortly, and then you'll have a chance to show what good little diggers they raise in Noo Yor-r-k."

"And in the meantime?"

"We'll enjoy all the comforts av home." Pat yawned and stretched.

"Which means, I suppose, that we'll sit around and play Simon says thumbs up, or something like that, all the afternoon," laughed Hal.

"Perhaps ye'd like to sleep some more," suggested Alec slyly.

"And perhaps you've got another guess coming," retorted Hal. "What's that thing you're whittling on?"

"A stretching board for marten," replied Alec.

"What's a stretching board, and how do you use it?" Hal was all interest.

"To stretch skins on. Dinna ye know that all skins have to be stretched?" Alec tossed the board one side and reached for another.

"Don't know a thing about trapping or furs except that Dad has promised me a new fur coat when I get back," retorted Hal. "I'm painfully and sublimely ignorant, but willing to learn, and I have a hunch that there are others. Suppose you elucidate the facts by way of killing time."

"Here, here! That will do for you, Hal!" cried Upton. "Your alleged poetry is bad enough without springing anything like that. What have you been doing at that prep school—confabulating with the profs or flirting with the dictionary? Elucidate! I move, fellows, that if he springs anything more like that we throw him in the snow. I would suggest doing it anyway if his idea wasn't so good. Go to it, Alec, and tell us about fur."

"I dinna ken where to begin," protested Alec as he carefully rounded the smaller

of his board to a point so that it looked much like one of the shingle boats every boy knows.

"Begin with that thing you're making—stretching board, I believe you called it," said Hal.

"That would be holding the gun by the wrong end," protested Pat. "The story all happens before one of these things is needed." Pat was himself at work on a stretching board.

"Begin with the kinds of fur, and the ways in which it is trapped, and the life of a trapper and all that sort of stuff," suggested Upton.

"Just tell us what youse do every day and how youse live all alone and de scraps youse gets inter wid de bears 'n' things, and how youse has t' foight for life, an' pass it out hot—right off de fire."

"That's the stuff, Sparrer! That's what we want," cried Hal, as everybody laughed. "Give us the story of trapping right off the griddle."

"Ye dinna find anything very hot about a trapper's life." Alec paused in his work to gaze reflectively into the fire. "It's mostly cold and lonesomeness and hard work. There's no fighting with the beasties worth mentioning; it's mostly fighting with storms and sometimes hunger, and a struggle with nature. I've sometimes wondered if some of the grand ladies and men, too, would be so proud and take so much pleasure in their fine furs if they knew what it has cost in suffering to man and beastie to get them. And yet I am no complaining, laddies. Ye ken that. It's a hard life, and yet there is something about it that gets down into a man and calls him, and he has to hit the trails and is no happy until he does.

"The fur that we get in this country is muskrat, mink, otter, marten, fox, lynx and once in a while fisher. Sometimes we get a few skunks, but not many so far in as this. We used to get beaver, but it is against the law to take the beasties at any time now."

"Which is the most valuable?" Hal interrupted.

"Black or silver fox. They're worth so much they don't count. I've trapped ever since I was knee high to a speckled fawn and haven't taken one yet. I dinna ken what they're worth, but I've heard that more'n \$2,500 has been paid for an extra prime skin."

"What makes 'em worth so much? Is it because the fur is so extra fine?" asked Upton.

"Fine nothing!" Pat broke in. "If there is any poorer wearing fur than fox I wish you'd show me. A large prime red fox will bring only four dollars to perhaps six or seven in a year when fur is scarce and high, and the fur of a black fox isn't any different or better. All that difference in price is because once in a blue moon Nature gets tired of red and tries black for a change, and people with more money than brains pay the price because it is rare and they can wear something that mighty few others can have. It's fox, just the same, and it will wear out just as quickly as if it were common every-day red. It's a fad. But the saints defend us from any more brains till afther we have the hide av the black gintleman thot Jim and Alec have seen here in the Hollow!"

"Money does talk, doesn't it, Pat?" chuckled Hal. "Here's hoping you get both the fox and the long price. By the way, what's a cross fox?"

"The prettiest baste in the woods," returned Pat promptly. "He has black legs and underparts, black tail with white tip, and gray head and body with a dark cross on the shoulders. But he's just a sport of the red fox, a variation in between the red and black. A perfect specimen is worth a lot of money, but nowhere near what a black will bring. Between the red and all black there are a lot of variations of the cross, and the price varies accordingly. But let's get back to regular fur instead of freaks. Have you looked over that price list I brought in, Alec?"

Alec nodded. "I see otter and fisher are quoted just the same, \$15 for No. 1 prime. I think the two otter and the fisher we've got will grade that all right. Up here," he continued, turning to the boys, "marten pay us best because they bring us from \$6 for No. 2 to \$12 for large No. 1 prime and some years more than that. Lynx pay pretty nearly as well, when we can get 'em. The trouble is we don't get enough of 'em. We get some foxes and some mink. The latter are rather down now, but some years they are high and pay right well. Last and least, but like the pennies that make the dollars, are the muskrats. They're bringing only thirty cents now, but I have seen 'em as high as a dollar.

"In other parts of the country are other furs. Coon disna get up as far as this, and Arctic and blue fox dinna get as far south. We get some weasel which when pure white is quite worth the trouble of skinning, little as the critters are. Ye ken it is the ermine of royalty."

"How about bearskins? I suppose they are worth considerable," said Walter, glancing over at Spud's prize.

"Less than ye will be thinking," replied Alec. "Yon skin is prime—and will grade as large. What now would ye be thinking it would be bringing me from a fur buyer this minute?"

"Fifty dollars," ventured Hal.

Alec and Pat smiled. "What do you say, little doctor?" Alec turned to Upton.

Walter did some quick thinking. He had set in his own mind the same figure Hal had given, but he had caught that smile of the two trappers and he suspected that Hal was rather wide of the mark. It didn't seem possible to him that such a beautiful great skin could be worth less, but at a venture he cut it in halves. "Twenty-five," said he.

"Knock ten off of that, and ye will be aboot right," said Alec.

"What? Only fifteen dollars for that big skin?" Hal fairly shouted.

Pat laughed outright. "That's all this year. And they never are worth a great deal. You see, for his size even a rat is worth considerable more, and is therefore not to be despised. And when you consider the labor of skinning a big brute like that and then packing out his hide the rats are more to my liking if there be enough of them."

"Don't you trap for bears at all?" asked Hal. "I had figured on seeing a bear trap and perhaps finding old bruin in one."

Pat smiled as he noted the look of disappointment on Hal's face. "We don't trap them this time of year, son, because there are none to trap; they're denned up for the winter," he explained. "But you shall have a chance to see a deadfall before you go back. Alec built a couple, but it was rather too late in the season. They'll be ready for early spring when bears begin to move again. Then I suspect Alec will build one or two more, eh, Alec?"

"A couple, I guess. I've marked some likely places," was the reply.

"What about steel traps?" asked Upton. "I had an idea that most trappers used those almost altogether these days."

By way of reply Alec dragged out from under one of the bunks a clanging mass

of steel. "Heft it," said he briefly, passing it to Walter.

"My, but that's heavy!" he exclaimed. "What does it weigh?"

"Nineteen pounds," replied Alec. "Tell me, how would ye like to pack three or four of those in addition to a lot of smaller traps for ten or fifteen miles?"

"Not for me!" declared Upton. "I begin to see the why of the deadfalls. It's easier to build a few of those than to lug these heavy things around. I didn't suppose they were as heavy as this. Are all of 'em like this?"

"No, there are some that weigh only a little over eleven pounds, but those are for small bars. I don't no ways favor 'em myself because, ye ken, I never yet have found a way of being certain what size bar would be stepping in one, leastways not until he was caught. A big feller will sometimes get out of the smaller trap, but a little feller never gets out of the big trap. So I sets only the big ones. This is a No. 5, and big enough for any bars around these parts. There's a bigger one made for grizzly bar and lions and tigers and such like critters, but that weighs forty-two pounds. We've got two of these No. 5's to set in the spring. If I was in good bar country, where the critters are plenty, I'd use more of these, but as long as they ain't plenty and I'm after other fur I'd rather use the deadfall. In the first place it kills the critter, and if he's caught you know right where to find him. He's right there. But if he gets caught in one of these things he may be a couple of hundred yards away and he may be in the next county, which is mighty inconvenient, 'specially if ye've got a lot of traps to tend to."

"How's that? I thought you fastened the traps." Hal was plainly puzzled.

"Sure we fasten 'em," returned Alec, "but do ye no see that if it was to anything solid like a tree the critter would be breaking the trap or the chain, maybe, or tearing himsel' loose? So we cut a log small enough at one end for the ring on the end of the chain to just barely slip over it and down to the middle where it is fastened with a spike. The clog is six or seven feet long and of hard wood. Then when Mr. Bar gets caught he has nothing solid to pull against to tear himself free. He marches off with nineteen pounds of trap and the clog dragging from his foot. The clog catches in the brush and between trees and usually he disna get very far, because the heavy drag tires him. Besides that, every time he's pulled up short it must hurt like the mischief and take the heart out of him. Sometimes we find where he has stopped to fight the clog. Once in a while a swivel breaks or something else gives way and he gets rid of the clog, but still has the trap fast to his foot. Then he's likely to dig out for parts unknown. I've known a trapper to

camp two or three nights on the trail of a bar that had gone off with a trap before he could catch up with the critter. Mostly they will go a ways and then make a bed, lie down a while, get uneasy and move on to do the same thing all over again. Sometimes they won't lie in the bed after they've made it, but move on and try again."

Sparrer's eyes were bulging. "Do youse mean dey really make a bed same as us?" he asked.

"Surest thing you know," replied Pat. "When a bear dens up for the winter he makes himself comfortable. Does it when he's traveling, too. Don't know how he got wise to the danger of rheumatiz from sleeping on the bare ground, but he seems to be on all right. Breaks a lot of brush and makes a regular bough bed. Sometimes he uses rotted wood when it is handy and brush isn't. Oh, he's a wise proposition, is Mr. Bear. If he once gets nipped in a trap and gets away it is a smart trapper who can get him in another."

Meanwhile Hal had been examining the trap and trying to force down the springs. "I'm blessed if I see how you set one of the things," said he at last.

"I'll show ye, only when it's set ye want to keep away from it. It's more dangerous than a bar himsel'."

He brought forth two screw clamps and adjusted them to the double springs of the traps. By turning thumb-screws the springs were compressed and held so that the jaws of the trap could be opened and the pan set to hold them. The boys noticed that in doing this he worked from underneath, sure sign of the careful and experienced trapper. In the event of the clamps slipping there would be no chance of his hand or arm being caught in the jaws.

"How does the bear get caught?" asked Sparrer, to whom traps were an unknown quantity.

"By stepping on that pan," explained Pat. "I'll show you."

He removed the clamps and then with a long stick touched the pan. Instantly the jaws flew up and closed with a vicious snap, biting into the soft wood so that pull as they would the boys were unable to get the stick out.

"Huh!" exclaimed Hal, "I'd hate to have that thing get me by the leg! I should think it would break the bone."

"It very likely would unless your leg was pretty well protected. A bear's bones are not so brittle and do not break easily, but once that thing has got a grip it's there to stay," said Pat.

"I suppose you cover the trap up so that the bear won't see it," ventured Upton.

"Right, son. That is just what we do," replied Pat. "We cover it with leaves or moss, according to where the set is made."

"Where does the bait go?" inquired Hal. "Do you put it right on the trap or hang it over it?"

"Neither," laughed Pat. "We build a bait pen of brush or old logs, roofing it over, and set the trap just at the entrance in such a way that Mr. Bear must step in it in order to get into the pen or cubby where the bait is staked at the rear. Sometimes we lay a stick across the entrance close to the trap and six or eight inches from the ground so that the bear will try to step over it and in doing so he will be sure to put one foot in the trap. An old bear who has lost a toe or two in a trap and so has learned his lesson will sometimes tear the bait pen down from the rear and so get the bait. A deadfall is about the only way of catching one of that kind."

"I should think other animals would spring the trap," ventured Hal.

"They do sometimes, especially your friend Prickly Porky the porcupine," replied Pat. "But when we are after bear we try to set the trap so that nothing less than a bear will spring it. Show 'em the trick, Alec."

Good-naturedly Alec once more set the trap. Then he took a small springy stick and fastened it upright in a crack in the floor. Then he bent it over until the other end was hooked under the pan of the trap. The spring of it held the pan in place even when considerable weight was placed directly on the pan. "That would allow small animals to pass over it freely, ye see," he explained, "but the weight of a bar would spring it. We do the same thing with other traps, using smaller sticks according to what we are after."

At this point Pat went to investigate conditions outside. "Hi, you fellows!" he called. "Storm's over, and it's time to get busy and dig out. It's been raining, but it's clearing off cold, and by morning there'll be a crust that'll hold a horse. Walt, you and Hal know where the spring is, so you fellows make a path down to it. The rest of us will shovel out the wood-pile and the storehouse."

"What's the storehouse? There wasn't anything of that kind last fall." Hal was all

eagerness.

"Just a bit of a log shack we put up to keep the meat and supplies in. You'll see it when you get outside. Now, everybody to wor-r-rk!" Pat flung the door open. A wall of snow faced them.

Alec produced a home-made wooden shovel and an old iron one. With these he and Pat soon cleared a space in front of the cabin. Then the others, armed with snow-shoes and an old slab, went to work with a will and soon Smugglers' Hollow rang with the laughter and shouts of the merry crew. It was not far to the spring, and the task of digging out and trampling down a path was not difficult. When they finished Walter and Hal turned for their first good look at the surroundings. It was a wilderness of white broken only by the thin column of smoke from the cabin chimney, and the figures of their comrades busy at the wood-pile and storehouse. The cabin itself was nearly buried in snow, which was more than half-way to the low eaves. It had drifted quite over the little shack where Pat and Alec were at work. All tracks had been obliterated and for a few minutes it was difficult for them to get their bearings, so changed was the landscape. Then one by one they picked out the landmarks they had learned to know so well in the fall, but which now were so changed as to be hardly recognized.

They stood in silence, something very like awe stealing over them as the grim beauty, combined with pitiless strength, of the majestic scene impressed itself upon them.

"Just think of a man living here all alone for weeks at a time. That's what I call nerve. I believe I'd go dippy in a week," murmured Hal hardly above a whisper as if he were afraid to trust his voice in the great solitude.

"And yet there is something fascinating about it. I can feel the call of it myself," replied Upton. "I suppose when one gets used to it it isn't so bad. It's—it's—well, I suppose it's what you would call elemental, and there is something heroic about this battling with the very hills and elements to wrest a living from them. Hello! Pat's calling us."

They hurried back to the cabin, where Pat promptly shoved a pail into the hands of each and ordered them back to the spring for water. When they returned Alec had begun preparations for supper.

"This evening," announced Pat, "Alec will finish his yarn about trapping and

then we'll plan for to-morrow. Will you fellows have baking-powder biscuit or corn bread for supper?"

"Corn bread!" was the unanimous shout.

"Corn bread it is then," declared Pat. "And how will yez have the murphies?"

"French fried!" cried Hal.

"Yez be hearing the orders av the gintle-min—corn bread and French fried praties, Misther Cook," said Pat, turning to Alec. "I'll be mixing the corn bread whoile ye cut the spuds. The rest av yez can bring in wood and set the table, an' the wan who loafes most gets the least to eat."

At once there was a grand scramble to see who could do the most, in view of such a dire threat.



CHAPTER X

LIFE ON THE FUR TRAILS

Supper out of the way the boys made themselves comfortable and gave Alec the word to take up his yarn.

"To begin with," said Alec, throwing a log on the fire, "when a trapper is thinking of going into new country he generally prospects it first, same as a prospector for gold, only he looks it over for signs of fur instead of for minerals. Sometimes he does this in summer or early fall, and sometimes he does it in winter, planning for the next winter. Friend o' mine went up into Brunswick last winter, and looked over some country which never has been trapped to amount to anything and this year he's up there with a line over one hundred miles long."

"Jerusalem! where did he stay nights when he was looking it over?" asked Hal.

"Wherever he happened to be," replied Alec.

"Didn't he have no tent nor nothin'?" Sparrer was round eyed with wonder.

Alec shook his head. "Nothin' but a week's supply of grub, his axe, rifle and blanket. That's all any good woodsman needs."

"But was it as cold as it is now?" asked Hal.

"Colder, because that part of Brunswick is consid'able farther north. When night came he would just dig away the snow, build a fire and when the ground was het up move his fire back, lay some boughs down where the fire had been, make a little bough shelter over it, build a good big fire to reflect the heat, and turn in. Sometimes when there's a big rock handy or an upturned tree we warm up a place a little way in front of that and then move the fire over against it and turn in without any shelter at all. More'n once I've slept in just a hole in the snow. Tisn't so bad when you're used to it. Have to get up a few times in the night to put wood on the fire, but that ain't nothin', is it, Pat?"

"Tis no more than a reminder av how good it is to shlape," returned Pat.

"When a man's prospectin' for fur he not only looks for signs of the beasties but

he looks the lay of the land over and gets the landmarks fixed in his mind," continued Alec. "He picks out a place for his main camp, locating it where he can get his supplies and stuff in and his furs out at the end o' the season without too much difficulty. If it is in lumbered country he picks out a place that can be reached by some old trail with a little clearing out so that a team can get in. More often, though, he locates on a river where he can get his stuff in by canoe, and can get out again the same way in the spring.

"At the same time he tries to choose a location that will be to his best advantage in working his trap lines. If he's got a long line laid out he also picks out likely places for temporary camps, places handy to springs and fire-wood. Early in the fall he gets his stuff together and goes in to build his camps. Trappers mostly work in pairs, but sometimes one goes it alone like my friend up in Brunswick. He took his traps an' stuff in in September, so's to get his camps built and be ready for bus'ness as soon as fur got prime."

"Can one man build a log cabin without any help?" asked Walter.

"Sure," replied Pat, "if he's reasonably husky, and most woodsmen are. A smart axeman can roll one up in four days, but of course it's easier and quicker if there are two."

"The main camp is made stout and comfortable as possible, same as 'tis here, only usually 'tis no so big." Alec resumed the thread of his story. "The other camps are just big enough for a bunk an' to cache some supplies, and are one to two days' journey apart, accordin' to the country. In good weather a feller disna mind sleeping oot one night between camps if he must, though he disna aim to if he can help it. A few supplies are left in each camp, and fire-wood cut and left handy. When this work is done it's usually 'bout time to be gettin' after the critters.

"A long line is usually planned on a sort of loop when the country will permit, so that the trapper may go out one way and return another. When two are trapping together, pardners like Pat and me, one works the line one way and one the other. Of course two can work a longer line than one can, and cover it the way it ought to be covered. I've put in more'n one winter alone, but ye ken it's mighty satisfying to hae speech wi' some one once in a while. When I'm alone it gets so that I talk to the varmints just to hear a human voice, even though it be my own."

"I shouldn't think it would be safe for a man to be all alone for so long," Upton interrupted.

"Tisn't altogether safe," replied Alec. "There was old Bill Bently. Never was a better woodsman than old Bill. He used to trap way up north of here. Used to go it alone mostly, but one winter he took a pardner. Lucky thing for Bill he did. They had a long line that year and Bill covered it one way and his pardner, Big Frank, covered it the other. They would meet at the upper end and then again at the main camp. Well, one time Big Frank was a day late getting to the upper camp. A big bar had busted a swivel on a trap and gone off with the trap. Took Frank a whole day to catch up with him. When he got to the camp he expected to find Bill waiting for him, but nary a sign of Bill could he find.

"This wasn't su'prisin' considerin' his own luck, but somehow it made Big Frank uneasy. He hit the trail 'fore daylight the next morning and didna stop to look at traps, but just made tracks watching out for some sign of Bill. Long about noon he found him by a deadfall alongside of a bar. Of course the critter was dead, and Bill would have been if he had to lay there much longer. Seems in resetting the deadfall the lever with which he was raising the 'fall' log broke, and somehow Bill got one leg under it and there he was caught in his own trap and with a broken leg to boot. Lucky for Bill it was early in the season, or he would have frozen to death long 'fore Frank got there. As it was he was in pretty bad shape. If he'd been trapping alone it would have been the end of him.

"But I'm getting off my story of how we catch fur. Of course we have to have a number of sizes of traps. For muskrats we use No. 1; for mink No. 1 or No. 1-1/2. This is also big enough to hold fox, coon and fisher, but No. 2 is better. For marten we use mostly No. 1, but if there are signs of fisher or lynx we use No. 1-1/2 so if one happens to get into a trap it will hold him. These critters are so strong that they would pull out of the smaller trap."

"It's marten that you are after mostly, isn't it? I understood you to say that," Upton interposed.

"We're after anything we can get, but most of our sets are for marten," returned Alec. "In the fall we took a good many rats and will again in the spring, but at this time o' the year when everything is frozen 'tis only around spring holes that we can get a rat now and then since the law will no let us trap them at their houses. I dinna ken what these lawmakers want to meddle with a poor man's business for. So long as the rat is killed I dinna see what difference it makes where he's killed or how. We used to get good fur when it was no against the law to trap at the houses."

"Walt, here's a subject for a little missionary work. Alec is still an uncivilized savage in some things, especially when what he calls his rights to hunt and trap are concerned," Pat broke in.

Upton looked a bit puzzled. "I don't quite get the point about the house trapping," said he.

"You've seen muskrat houses a-plenty, haven't you?" asked Pat.

Walter nodded. "Well," continued Pat, "before this law was made trappers used to chop a hole in the side of a house and set a trap on the bed inside. Of course this drove the rats out, but they would soon be back, because there was nowhere else to go. By visiting the traps night and morning it was no trick at all to get all the rats. Now the law forbids this kind of trapping. Alec here doesn't approve of the law. He thinks that there are rats enough and to spare and he can't see that that kind of work is cutting his own nose off and killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Says you can clean all the rats out of a place and in time more will come to take their places, and I can't make him see it any different."

"How about beaver?" asked Walter, turning to the Scotchman. "Nowhere near as plentiful as they used to be, are they?"

The trapper shook his head. "Been trapped pretty near out of this country. I'm for protecting the beaver, all right, but rats is different. Ye couldn't trap out all the rats in a million years. There's rats enough and there always will be."

"Ever hear of the passenger pigeon?" asked Upton.

Alec signified that he never had. "Guess they dinna live in this country," he added.

"I guess they don't," replied Upton drily. "Fact is they don't live in any country any more. What is supposed to be the very last specimen died in captivity in Cincinnati last year. A reward of several thousand dollars for proof of a single pair nesting anywhere in America has stood for several years. But the bird is believed to be absolutely extinct. And yet seventy-five years ago they were numbered by millions and extended over America from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains. Probably billions would be nearer the truth. The ornithologist Wilson once watched a flock which he estimated to be a mile wide, moving at the rate of a mile a minute, and it took four hours to pass. Allowing three birds to each square yard there must have been more than two billion birds in that one

flock. In 1869 one town in Michigan shipped to market in forty days almost twelve million birds. They were so plentiful that they sold as low as twelve cents a dozen and netters made money at that. When the first efforts to protect them were made they were fruitless because people said that the numbers were so great that it would be impossible ever to reduce them to a serious extent. And to-day there is not one living. It doesn't seem possible, but it is a cold, hard fact. And man alone is to blame.

"The same thing is happening right now with a lot of animals and birds. Just as sure as that fire is burning fifty years will see a lot off them extinct unless they are better protected. The hunters of the pigeon didn't believe it any more than you believe it about the rats. On the level, Alec, do you think it a square deal to take a rat in the only place he's got to stay in the winter?"

"Oh, I'm not taking them that way," Alec protested with some haste. "I believe in respecting the law, even if it is a fool law."

"But is it a fool law? I don't think so," said Walter quietly. "In a boxing match it is a foul to hit a man when he's down."

"'Tisn't in a lumberman's fight," Alec broke in. "If a man's down so much the better. Then you've got him. That's the thing to do—get him down and then do him good."

"Aw say, youse don't mean that!" Sparrer's eyes were round with indignation, for even a street gamin has better ethics than this.

"It's the way they fight up here, Sparrer, I'm sorry to say," said Pat. "In a rough and tumble fight here they kick, bite and gouge, and you may well pity the under man. But they're learning better."

"Would you hit a man who was bound and helpless?" asked Walter quickly.

"Certainly not!" cried Alec indignantly. "That's different."

"Not so very different from your rats in their houses," protested Upton. "They come pretty near to being helpless. Besides, they have no reason to suspect harm there, and they don't. Put it up to any Scout and he'd say right off the reel that it is unfair, and that is something that no Scout will stand for. But this is nothing to do with marten. You were saying, Alec, that you trap for marten, mostly."

"Aye," replied Alec, rather glad to have the subject changed, if the truth were

known. "And it's the prettiest and most comfortable kind of trapping in the winter. Ye see the beasties are found in heavy timber and broken country, and that gives the trapper more protection from cold and storms. Then the beasties are no so hard to trap as some others. When ye find marten sign ye may be pretty sure that the critter will be along there again. They live on mice, rabbits, birds and squirrels. Fish makes good bait. When the snows are not too heavy I build a little cubby, a pen, ye ken, of sticks, at the foot of a big tree, the tree forming the back, and roof it over with evergreen branches to keep out the snow. On a little bed of boughs I set the trap just inside the opening of the cubby and cover it lightly with tips of evergreen. The bait is placed on a stick at the back of the cubby. I hang a couple of boughs partly over the opening so that if Whiskey Jack happens along he won't see the bait and steal it."

Here Pat interrupted to explain for Sparrer's benefit that a Whiskey Jack is the common name in the north for the Canada Jay.

"I shouldn't think the marten could get his peepers on the bait, then," said Sparrer.

"He disna need to, laddie," replied Alec. "His nose finds it for him. Another set which I like and use a good deal is this. I cut a small spruce of about four inches through so as to leave a stump about two feet above the snow. In the top of this I cut a V or crotch, and after trimming off the lower limbs of the tree I rest it in this crotch so that the butt end projects some distance and is three or four feet above the snow. About a foot from the butt end I flatten off a place for the trap and tie it in place with a bit of string and loop the chain around the trunk of the tree. Then I make a split in the end of the butt and in this fasten the bait. Mr. Marten runs up the tree to get the bait, steps in the trap and falls off and hangs there. He can't twist a foot off or pull free in any way. Once he steps in the trap he's a goner.

"Deadfalls work pretty well with marten. Ye'll have a chance to see some, as I've got some right handy here, in some draws off the Hollow. Ye'll understand them better by seeing than by me trying to tell you about them."

"How about otter?" asked Hal.

"Steel traps for them, and we have to be some pertic'lar how we set 'em. There's nary a critter that I know of more suspicious of man," replied Alec. "In the fall and spring we get 'em with water sets. I got one this fall up at one of the beaver dams. I cut a hole in the middle of the dam so that the run-off from the pond was

all through this but not enough to lower the pond and bring the beavers to stop up the hole. I made the passage only eight or nine inches wide and set the trap in the water at the upper end. The first otter to come along tried to go through that opening and I had him. Sometimes when we find a point of land running out into a lake or big stream we'll find an otter trail across it where the critter has taken a short cut. Then we set a trap in the water at one end. Water sets are best, because there is no human scent. In the winter we set under the ice, and I'll show you a couple of sets of that kind before you go back."

"And foxes?" prompted Upton.

Alec grinned. "They're worse than otter," he confessed. "Ye think ye ken all about the critters, and then ye meet up with one that just gives ye the laugh, like the silver that's hanging around here. I've tried every set I know of for that feller, but he's still grinning at me. And this crust ain't going to help matters any. It's bad enough in dry snow, but with a crust there won't be anything doing. In the fall I use water sets where I can. One of the best is at a shallow spring, four or five feet across. About a foot and a half from the shore put a moss-covered stone, or a sod, so that it will come just above the level of the water. Half-way between this and the shore set the trap, covering the jaws, springs and chain with mud or wet leaves from the bottom. The pan should be just under water and on this place a little piece of moss or sod so that it will come an inch above the water. On the outer stone or sod put a small piece of bait and a little scent. Mr. Fox comes along, smells the bait and promptly investigates. He disna like to wet his feet, and the bit of covering on the pan of the trap looks like a good stepping-place. Then you have him.

"Ye must take care to leave everything in a perfectly natural state. I wade up the outlet and take care not to touch the banks. Some trappers boil the traps in hemlock boughs to kill the scent. Others just leave them over night in running water. I wear clean gloves to handle the traps. There are a lot of dry sets, some with bait and some without, the latter being used in frequented runways. A very good set is to find an old moss-covered log or stump and set the trap on the highest point, covering it so that the whole thing looks just as it did before. Then toss a big bait like a muskrat or rabbit eight or ten feet from it. Mr. Fox is always suspicious, and before he goes too near anything like that he will go to the highest point to look the ground over. That's when ye get him. Of course, there mustn't be any other high point for him to get on."

"You spoke of scents, Alec. I've read about them. What are they, anyhow?" asked Upton.

For answer, Alec got up and went to a corner of the cabin and brought forth an old fruit jar. Pat grinned. "Here's some," said Alec simply as he unscrewed the cover while the boys crowded around. They took one whiff and then fairly tumbled over each other to get away.

"Cover it up! Take it away!" howled Hal, holding his nose. "I won't be able to eat a square meal for a week."

"Me too!" yelled Sparrer. "Dey has some awful smells in New York, but dis is de limit."

"Jumping crickets! I should think that stuff would drive things away and not attract 'em!" exclaimed Upton. "What is it, anyhow?"

"Skunk fat and mice cut up and put in the jar and hung in the sun until thoroughly rotted, and then some skunk and muskrat scent added. Sorry you don't like it," replied Pat. "A drop or two judiciously used seems to be a great attraction for foxes and some other critters. Alec has got another brand if you would like to sample it—fish oil made by cutting up fish and letting them rot in the same way. It's a mighty good scent."

"No, thanks!" cried Hal hastily. "We'll take your word for it. What about those stretching boards?"

"I'm coming to that," replied Alec. "Raw furs are handled in two ways, 'cased' and 'open.' Mink, marten, fox, fisher, weasel, muskrat, skunk and bob cat are 'cased.' That is what these boards are for. We skin 'em by cutting loose around the feet and then cutting down the back of the hindlegs to and around the vent and then skin the hindlegs carefully, and also the tail. Then the skin is turned back and stripped off the body wrong side out to the ears, taking as little fat as possible. The ears are cut off close to the head, and the skin is cut loose around the eyes and nose. The easiest way is to hang the critter up by the hindlegs after skinning out these and the tail.

"These small boards Pat and I are making are for muskrats in the spring. For marten, mink, otter, fisher and such like we use longer, narrower boards; that is, they are narrower in proportion to their length. I'll show you some presently. The best boards are those with a narrow strip ripped out of the middle for the whole

length. This makes a wedge or tongue. Of course it should be tapered. This makes it possible to use the board for various size animals and to stretch the skin to its fullest extent. It also makes it easy to remove a skin from the board, as taking out the wedge at once loosens the whole board.

"The skins are put on the stretchers fur side in. Then with a blunt knife they are fleshed. That is, they are scraped clean of every particle of fat and flesh. Then they are stretched to their fullest extent and put to dry or cure in a cool, airy place. As soon as dry enough to prevent shrinking or wrinkling they are taken from the boards. Lynx and fox are then turned fur side out, but the others are left as they are.

"Beaver, coon, bear, wolf and badger are skinned 'open.' That means that a cut is made from the point of the jaw straight down the belly to the vent. A cut is made down the inside of the forelegs across the breast to the point of the brisket and another down the back of the hindlegs. Big animals like bears, wolves and wolverines should be skinned out to the ends of their toes and have the feet left on. These skins are stretched flat, a coon nearly square, a beaver round, and others to their natural shape. The best way is by lacing them with twine in a frame. Many trappers lose money by careless handling of the furs. All dirt, blood and lumps should be carefully removed. Lots of skins, prime when caught, grade way down because of careless handling. Now I guess you chaps have got your fill of furs. What about to-morrow? It's Christmas, ye ken."

"That's so, and it will be the queerest Christmas I ever have spent," said Hal thoughtfully. "We ought to celebrate, somehow. What's the program, Pat?"

"How about a rabbit hunt in the morning, a big dinner and a shooting-match in the afternoon?" replied Pat.

"Bully!" cried all three together.

"What's the matter with a Christmas tree in the evening?" added Upton. "We ought to do something Christmasy."

"I was going to suggest that very thing," retorted Hal. "We'll make it the greatest Christmas this old Hollow ever saw. Now, let's turn in. I want to be out for those rabbits right early. By the way, Alec, I hope there's some of that venison left for the big feast."

"Dinna ye worry, laddie. I hae saved a roast special," replied Alec as he prepared

things for the night.



CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS IN SMUGGLERS' HOLLOW

"Merry Christmas!"

At the sound of Pat's roar the three guests hastily tumbled out of their bunks with answering greetings. A cheerful fire blazed up the chimney and added its flickering light to that of a couple of candles, for the sun was not yet up. Alec was cutting bacon and Pat was mixing flapjack batter.

"Breakfast will be ready in fifteen minutes, and the one who isn't ready goes hungry," he announced.

"It won't be yours truly," declared Hal, reaching for his clothes.

"My tummy, oh, my tummy!
It gives me such a pain!
I wonder will it ever——"

"Say, who swiped one of my socks? I can't find but one, and I left 'em together." He began to toss things left and right in search of the missing article.

Meanwhile Upton was down on his knees fumbling under his bunk. At Hal's complaint he looked up suspiciously. "I can't find one of mine," he sputtered. "Somebody's been putting up a job on us. Hi! What the——" He finished by pointing toward the fireplace.

Hal looked. There hung his missing sock. Also one of Upton's and one of Sparrer's, all three misshapen and bulging.

"Ut would not be Christmas an' we did not hang the childer's stockings," announced Pat gravely.

With a whoop the three boys fell on the stockings. Entering into the spirit of the occasion they seated themselves on the floor in front of the fire and pulled out the contents as gleefully as ever they had emptied Christmas stockings at home in their younger days. The gifts were trifling in themselves, but the better for that

very fact. There were little packages of spruce-gum, a carved paper-knife, a tiny birch-bark canoe, whistles made from buck's horn, a rabbit's foot charm, and other knickknacks of the woods. Pat's voice broke into the midst of the babel produced by the discovery of the socks and their contents. "Five minutes for those who want breakfast," he announced.

Instantly there was a mad scramble to finish dressing and when time was up it was evident that no one proposed to go hungry that Christmas morning. During the meal it was decided that Alec should remain at camp to prepare for the grand feast while the others went in search of rabbits. Walter and Hal, knowing the surrounding country, were to go each on his own hook while Pat would take Sparrer with him. Just before starting the two former held a whispered conference. They had brought in with them a few gifts for Pat and his partner and also some small packages which the home folks had pledged them not to open until Christmas day. At Hal's suggestion it was decided to say nothing about these until night and spring them as a surprise at the Christmas tree on which Hal had set his heart.

As Pat had foreseen, there was a crust on which the shoes made no impression. Hal elected to go down the north side of the brook while Upton took the opposite side. Pat and Sparrer were to visit a certain swamp not far distant. All were to be back at the cabin by eleven o'clock.

To Upton the tramp in that wonderful wilderness of glistening white meant far more than the hunt. As a matter of fact the very thought of killing anything amid such pure surroundings was repugnant to him. To this feeling a big white hare which foolishly sat up to stare at him within fifteen minutes after he had left the cabin undoubtedly owed its life. Slowly the rifle had been raised until the sights rested squarely between the two innocent staring eyes. Then it had been as slowly lowered. "I can't do it, puss. The others will get all we need to eat, I guess, so suppose you remove your pretty self from the range of temptation," said he, taking a sudden forward step. Thereupon puss promptly acted upon his advice, and so precipitately that Upton laughed aloud. "Merry Christmas!" he shouted as the bounding white form disappeared.

That decided him. His heart was not in hunting that morning. What he did want to do was just to tramp and drink in the beauty of the wonderful scene. His rifle was a nuisance. He wished that he had not brought it at all. Why not cache it and pick it up on his way back? A hasty survey of his surroundings discovered a fire blackened hollow stub split its full length on one side. It was the very thing he

was looking for. It was a landmark he could not very well miss on his return. He put his rifle in it, tightened his belt, and then deliberately turned his back on the valley and headed for the top of the ridge. He was in quest of views, and not of game.

Climbing a ridge on a snow crust is no child's play, as Walter soon found out. It sometimes seemed as if he slipped back two feet for every one he gained. He tried taking off the shoes, only to find that in sheltered places he broke through and was worse off than on the slipping shoes. But he was grimly resolved that he would get to the top of the ridge, cost him what it might. It was characteristic of the boy that what he set out to do he did. So he ground his teeth and kept at it, slipping, scrambling, pulling himself up by brush and trees. After a little he discovered that by zigzagging back and forth along the face of the slope and taking advantage of every little inequality he could make fairly good progress.

Still it took an hour and a half of strenuous work to gain the coveted top of the ridge, and he was thoroughly winded and weary, to say nothing of sundry bruises and scratches from frequent falls. Panting and perspiring he turned to look back. Below him lay Smugglers' Hollow, but how different from the Hollow into which he had gazed for the first time in September! It was not less lonely or less wild. In fact if anything these features were accentuated. The mountains which seemed to enclose it on all sides were no less heroically grand and rugged, but they had been robbed in a measure of their forbidding, somber gloom by the transforming mantle of snow. The heavy stand of spruce on the opposite mountain no longer cloaked it with the shadows of night like a perpetual threat of evil. Each tree was a pyramid of myriad gems flashing in the sun.

He could trace the course of the frozen brook through the heart of the Hollow, a ribbon of white, smooth and unbroken, between the fringe of alders on either side. He could see the cabin, or rather the roof and eaves, for the cabin itself was nearly buried in a drift. From the chimney a thin pencil of blue smoke rose straight up in the still air. It was the one thing needed. It in no way marred the grandeur of the scene, but it saved it from utter desolation. Something of this sort flitted vaguely through Upton's mind. Then he heard the faint crack of a rifle on the opposite side of the Hollow, followed by two more cracks. The smoke and the sound of the rifle removed the last vestige of temporary depression which the grandeur of the scene and the utter silence of the vast solitude had tended to produce.

"Hal's got into a bunch of 'em or else his shooting eye is off," he chuckled and

turned to scan the ridge he was on to the west. It presented a broken line of low peaks. One slightly higher than the rest marked the place where the pass to the Hollow entered. It was the hill from which the Lost Trail party had first looked into Smugglers' Hollow, and the view from the summit was more complete than from the point Walter now occupied.

"I'd like to get up there," he thought, "but it's a little too much of an undertaking on this crust. Besides, it would make me late for dinner. Hello! Wonder what that is."

He had caught a sudden flash on the highest point of the peak. As he watched he saw it again. His first thought had been that it was the sun reflected from a bit of ice, but an instant's thought convinced him that this couldn't be. It would of necessity be fixed and steady. The flashes he had seen were made by something moving. With this knowledge came the sudden conviction that the flashes were caused by the sun striking on polished metal. Hastily feeling in his rucksack he drew out a pair of opera-glasses which he always carried with him for use in studying birds and animals. They were not very strong, but sufficiently so to bring the peak perceptibly nearer. At first he could make out nothing unusual. Then through the glasses he caught that flash again and focussed them as nearly as possible on the spot from which it had come. For some minutes he saw nothing suspicious. He was almost ready to give up and conclude that it was in his imagination when he was positive that he saw something move back of a stunted little spruce growing from a cleft in the rocks at the point where he had located the flashes.

Instantly every instinct of the true scout was aroused. There was something alive back of that little spruce. It might be an animal and then again it might be a man. At once there flashed into his mind Alec's account of the robbed traps. Could it be that one of the thieves was reconnoitering the Hollow? His heart gave a queer jump at the thought. Anyway it was clearly up to him to find out what he could.

Rapidly he reviewed the situation. It was clear that from his present location he would gain no further information if his suspicions were true. If an enemy was watching from behind that spruce he was undoubtedly aware of Walter's presence, for he was standing in the open. Beyond question he had been watched from the time he left the cabin. To make a false move now would be to give warning. He regretted that he had gazed so long at the suspected point. That in itself would be sufficient to arouse suspicion in the mind of any one hiding there. The first thing then was to allay any such suspicion.

Deliberately he turned his glasses across the Hollow and studied the opposite mountain for a greater length of time than he had watched the point where he had seen the flash. Then he squatted down and leisurely turned his glasses from point to point in the Hollow in the manner of one having no interest in anything but the view. Not once did he glance back along the ridge, although he was burning with curiosity and desire to do so. He ignored it as if it held no further interest for him whatever. For perhaps ten minutes he continued to act the part of a mere sightseer. Then putting his glasses back in his rucksack he stretched lazily and in a leisurely manner began to pick his way down into a little draw which cut back into the ridge in the opposite direction from the pass. Once down in this he would be out of sight of a possible watcher at the spruce lookout.

As soon as he was sure that he was beyond observation Upton hurried. The draw led back into a thick stand of young growth, and he hoped by working up through this to be able to cross the ridge unobserved and work back to a point which he had carefully noted and from which, owing to the change of angle, he felt sure he would be able to see back of the little spruce tree which had previously cut off his view. Getting up to the top of the ridge was stiff work for an inexperienced snow-shoer in a hurry and was productive of many tumbles, but it was accomplished at last. After this it was comparatively easy to work along just below the top on the back side to the point he had selected.

There he cautiously crept into a thicket of young spruce and, his heart beating like a trip-hammer with excitement, carefully parted the branches until he could get a clear view. His hands trembled as he drew out the glasses. Would he discover anything, or had he been wrought up to such a pitch over nothing? The little spruce leaped out clear and distinct as he got the focus. "Ha!" The exclamation was wholly involuntary and he experienced an absurd impulse to look around to make sure that he had not been overheard, although he knew that he was absolutely alone.

The cause was the figure of a man squatting behind the spruce and peering intently into the valley. He wore a fur cap pulled low to shade his eyes, and this, together with the distance, made it impossible for Upton to see his features clearly, but somehow he received an unshakable conviction that it was an Indian or a half-breed. A rifle leaned against the tree and doubtless it was the glint of the sun on its polished surface that had produced the mysterious flashes that had first caught his attention.

"He's watching to see if I go back to the cabin," thought Walter. "If he doesn't see

me by the time the others return he'll smell a rat. There's nothing more to be gained by staying here. I've proved that we are being watched, and that's all I can do. It's up to me to get back and tell the others."

Cautiously the boy retreated through the thicket until he was below the cap of the ridge. Then he hurried, running when he could and finding it less difficult than he had imagined. He crossed above the head of the draw and went on until he had reached a point which he judged must be about opposite to where he had left his rifle in the hollow tree. His first impulse had been to keep on until he could come out directly in the rear of the cabin, but on second thought he had decided that it would be wiser to return by the same way that he had left and get his rifle. If he had been seen leaving the cabin with his rifle it would look odd, to say the least, if he should be seen returning without it.

In climbing the ridge he had zigzagged back and forth, picking the easiest grade, but now he was too impatient for so slow a method of descent and plunged straight down, slipping, sliding, checking himself by catching at trees and brush, getting a fall now and then as the web of his shoes caught in a stick, but on the whole doing very well. One thing he had not considered as he should have—the possibility of slipping over an unseen ledge. It was brought home to him when he brought a rather long slide to an abrupt end by catching a tree on the very edge of a sheer drop of perhaps eight feet.

"Phew!" he gasped. "A little more and I'd have gone over that and had a nasty tumble. Been the same way if it had been a fifty foot ledge. I see where little Walter will be turning up missing one of these days if he doesn't look out. It's a poor scout who takes needless chances in territory he isn't familiar with. I'll be more careful hereafter."

He peered over the edge of the ledge. Below the snow had drifted deep and it was clear. The ledge ran east and west for some distance, and to make a detour would take time. His first thought was to kick off his shoes, toss them down and then jump. But if he did this he would be sure to break through the crust and he had no means of knowing the depth of that drift or what might be underneath it. He had no desire to find out. He must either jump on his shoes or go around, and the temptation was to jump.

"May as well learn to jump now as another time," he muttered, for the time being forgetting that in the event of a mishap, such as a twisted ankle, he would be helpless in a temperature far below zero.

He walked back a bit, took three or four long quick strides and leaped. As he left the edge of the little bluff he felt the tails of his shoes drop until the big webs hung from his feet at an angle but slightly off the perpendicular. A momentary doubt of a successful landing flashed through his mind. He had a vision of an ignominious plunge through the crust and perhaps broken shoes. Then automatically he set himself for the landing, arms spread, body thrust forward and knees bent. It seemed as if those hanging shoes certainly must trip him. A second later he struck the crust in a half crouch. The crust cracked and gave a little, just enough to prevent the shoes from sliding. With a quick step he regained his balance and with a sense of exhilaration realized that he had made successfully his first jump on snow-shoes.

From this point he had little difficulty in reaching the hollow stub, where he secured his rifle and then turned toward the cabin. Hal was just coming in. From one hand dangled a snow-shoe rabbit.

"Is that all you've got for all that shooting I've heard?" chaffed Walter.

Hal grinned. "Couldn't hit a balloon if it was big as a mountain and tied down in front of me," he confessed. "Don't know what the trouble was, but I just couldn't shoot. Wouldn't have got this fellow if he hadn't sat up and begged to be shot. Missed him a mile the first time at ten yards. Bullet didn't go near enough to scare him. Second shot was no better. Got him on the third shot, but I believe at that he jumped in front of the bullet. You don't seem to have had even that much luck. What was the trouble? Haven't heard your rifle this morning."

"Didn't feel like hunting. Went up on the ridge to get the view instead," returned Walter carelessly. "Wonder how Sparrer made out."

They entered the cabin to find Pat and Sparrer already there, the latter so excited that he gave vent to a joyful whoop when he caught sight of them and rushed precipitately to the back of the room to drag forth two pairs of rabbits.

"Plugged 'em all meself!" he declared proudly.

The rabbits were duly examined and Sparrer was praised for his marksmanship until his cheeks burned, Pat leading in piling it on thick. Two of the rabbits had been neatly drilled through the heads, a third had "got it in the neck," as Pat put it, and the fourth had been shot through the body. Pat forestalled any criticism by explaining that this was the first rabbit they had found and he had told Sparrer to "shoot at thot little lump av snow just by way av gettin' yer hand in." Quite

innocently Sparrer had done so, and had nearly dropped the rifle in surprise when the lump of snow had resolved itself into a rabbit which gave a few spasmodic kicks and then lay still.

Of course Hal was chaffed unmercifully over his one lone contribution to the larder, especially when he admitted that he had shot at no less than five. But he took it good-naturedly, confessing that he was utterly at loss to account for his bad form.

Meanwhile Upton had said nothing about his discovery on the ridge. His first impulse had been to blurt out the news, but on second thought he had decided not to. At the first opportunity he drew Pat aside and told him. The big fellow's face darkened. "Say nothing about it," he counseled. "There's no use in spoiling a merry day, and the knowledge that we are being watched will do them no good. There's nothing we can do about it to-day. 'Tis not likely they mean us any harm. It's the fur they are after, and they've just taken advantage of the crust which leaves no trail to look us over and find out how many are in our party."

So Walter held his peace, and threw himself into the preparations for dinner as if he had nothing of more importance on his mind. That Christmas feast will never be forgotten by the three city lads. There was the promised roast of venison, a rabbit stew, potatoes baked in the ashes, canned peas, biscuit, a jar of jam, and, to top off with, a hot apple pie made from evaporated apples. But the real surprise was a steak done to a turn over the hot coals.

"Bear!" shouted Hal as he set his teeth in the first mouthful.

Alec smiled. "I see ye have tasted it before," said he.

"Once," replied Hal. "Louis Woodhull got one on that Swift River trip a year ago last fall. But when did you get this fellow, and why have you kept so mum about it?"

Alec nodded toward the skin which was to be Spud Ely's. "It's the same one," said he. "I've kept part of him ripening out in the storehouse against this day," he explained.

When they could eat no more there was a general loosening of belts and sighs of complete satisfaction into which Pat rudely broke with a demand for dishwashers and wipers.

"Oh, can it!" grunted Hal. "When a fellow's in the seventh heaven what do you

try to bring him down to earth again for?"

But Pat was obdurate, and with many an exaggerated grunt and groan the remains of the feast were cleared away, the dishes washed and the cabin set to rights. Then followed a lazy hour before the rifle match. It was agreed that Pat and Alec, both of whom were expert shots, should count as a clean miss any shot not striking in the black, while the others should be credited with whatever their actual scores were. Each was to be allowed ten shots. The bull's-eye counted ten, the first ring outside counted nine, the next ring eight, and so on. Each was allowed three trial shots to get the range.

Hal was the first to take his trial shots. At the crack of the rifle Upton ran forward to examine the target. "Never touched it! Didn't even hit the board! Some shooter you are, Hal!" he yelled.

Hal flushed, but said nothing. For his second shot he took plenty of time and was as careful as he knew how to be. The result was the same. For his third shot he used a rest, which was contrary to the rules, but was allowed, as this was only a trial shot. This time he nicked a splinter from one edge of the board on which the target was fastened.

"Here, let me see that rifle," cried Pat, striding forward and snatching the gun out of Hal's hands. He sighted it, then handed it back with a grin. "Will ye tell me how iver ye got that wan rabbit wid a gun the loikes av thot?" he demanded.

"Why, what's the matter with the gun?" demanded Hal, reaching for it, a puzzled scowl furrowing his brows.

Alec forestalled him and took the rifle from Pat's hands. He in turn sighted along the barrel. "Laddie," said he, the soberness of his face belied by the twinkle in his eyes, "do ye no ken that a gun is like a fine lady? It must be treated wi' respect."

Hal took the gun with a puzzled look. "I don't quite get you fellows yet," said he.

Pat laughed outright. "Look at your forward sight, man. You've hit the end of your barrel against something and knocked that sight a wee bit out of alignment. It must have been pure luck that you got that rabbit this morning."

"Use my rifle," interrupted Walter.

"Thanks," replied Hal. "I believe I will. Even if I got the sights adjusted on my

gun I shouldn't be able to shoot. Every time I made a poor shot I'd have the feeling that it was the gun's fault. My, but it is a relief to know that I haven't gone back in my shooting quite so badly as all that."

All having made their trial shots the match was on. Walter shot first, getting five tens, four nines and an eight, a total of ninety-four. Alec was next, and his first shot was a nine, followed by nine bull's-eyes, a total of ninety under his handicap. Hal started off with a seven, went into the black six times in succession, then got two eights and wound up with a nine, total ninety-two. Sparrer gave them a surprise with eighty-seven and Pat slapped him on the back. The coaching he had received that morning during the rabbit hunt had not been in vain. Pat was the last man up, and shot rapidly and with seeming carelessness, but the succession of bull's-eyes was proof that this was more apparent than real. His last shot, however, barely touched the edge of the black, and he insisted that it be counted a miss, tying him with Alec and giving Walter the match.

After this Pat and Alec shot a friendly match. While this was going on Hal slipped back to the cabin. He had marked a small spruce of perfect shape not far from the rear of the cabin, and this he now cut and dragged in. By the time the shooting was over he had it set up at the rear of the room and had stretched a blanket across so as to screen it. When his comrades came trooping in they were warned not to peep behind it under threat of dire penalties. He made one exception. He needed Upton's help and also the gifts that Walter had brought from home.

By the time they had finished it was quite dark in the cabin. They piled logs on the fire and when the blaze was leaping merrily up the chimney and casting a warm ruddy light over the room Hal suggested that they draw up to the fire for a Christmas story. He chose the German legend of the origin of the Christmas tree. He possessed no mean skill as a story-teller and he threw himself into the telling of this so that his listeners sat in rapt attention.

Just before the conclusion he gave Walter a signal and the latter arose and slipped back of the blanket. As the story ended the blanket was pulled down and there was the little tree glittering with lights and tinsel and hung with the gifts which the boys had brought. There was a delighted gasp from Pat, Alec and Sparrer and then a silence that was a tribute in itself as they watched the colored candles gradually shorten. The truth is it was the first Christmas tree within the experience of any one of the three, and they were as delighted as any children could have been.

When the candles had burned down to the danger point Hal blew them out and then distributed the gifts, which were opened amid much hilarity and fun making.

"This makes up for the stockings this morning," he laughed as the others showered him with fulsome praise.

"It more than makes up," declared Pat. "'Tis a Christmas I'll never forget." Then as he lovingly fingered a long desired book sent in by Doctor Merriam he added: "But when did you think of the tree idea? Was it in New York?"

Hal nodded. "The idea came to me the very day we left. Saw a window full of tree fixings and on the impulse ran in and got the candles and tinsel. Glad you like it."

An hour of story-telling followed ere they turned in and silence like a Christmas benediction settled over the cabin.



CHAPTER XII

A DEER YARD

"Would you fellows like to visit a deer yard?" Pat asked at breakfast the next morning when the subject of the day's program had been brought up.

"Would we!" Upton fairly shouted it. "Say, Pat, do you mean that there is a really, truly sure enough deer yard anywhere near here? I've read about 'em, and I'd give all my old shoes to see one."

"Right O, my fine bucko! You shall see one, and it won't cost you so much as a shoestring," replied Pat. "It's not over a mile from camp, and on the ridge just above it is one of those deadfalls for bear that Alec built last fall. We'll take that in and kill two birds with one stone if you say so. There are some marten traps on that same ridge that I want to have a look at. What do you say, Alec?"

"Verra good," replied Alec. "You show the laddies the yard and look over that line, and I'll take the short line east. We'll get back here by noon and this afternoon we can show them some other sets."

To this plan the others agreed with enthusiasm and preparations for an immediate start were begun. "Shall we take rifles?" asked Hal eagerly.

"For what?" demanded Pat. "We be going to visit a deer yard, and 'twould be tempting fate and flying in the face of Providence to let such a bloodthirsty young gintleman in among the poor cratures with a gun in his hands."

Hal joined in the laugh at his expense and then added rather lamely:

"We might run across that silver fox."

"And we might jump over the moon. The one is as likely as the other," retorted Pat.

So the guns were left at the cabin. Pat led the way straight to the ridge on which Spud Ely had missed his first chance to get a buck in the fall, but instead of climbing the ridge worked along the foot of it, skirting a swamp. They followed the edge of this for some distance and then abruptly turned into it. The growth

was dense in places, with thickets of young hemlocks which afforded both warmth and shelter in severe weather. Almost at once they came to a deeply trodden path which led them presently to a maze of paths running in all directions.

"Here we are," said Pat.

Sparrer's face was a study. "Where's de yard?" he asked.

"All around here," replied Pat with a comprehensive sweep of his arm, "wherever you see these paths." Then, a sudden light breaking over him, he added, "Did you expect to find a fence around it, son?"

Sparrer grinned, not at all embarrassed by the general laugh and perfectly willing to confess his ignorance. "All de yards ever Oi seen had fences round 'em. Oi thought a fence was what made a yard," he confessed.

"Not a deer yard," replied Pat. "A deer yard is a place where the deer tramp out paths in the snow and spend the winter. It is made where they get both shelter and food. When the first deep snow comes they collect in such a place and start the paths while browsing for food. Then as the snow gets deeper they follow the same paths because it is easier going, and make new paths only when they have to to reach new food supplies. By continually using these paths they keep them open and manage to pick up a living browsing on twigs and pawing down to the ground moss. By the time the heaviest snows come they can't very well get out if they want to, especially when there is a crust like this. You see some of those paths are two to three feet deep. The more plentiful the feed and the smaller the herd the smaller the yard. Before there were any laws to protect deer and moose they used to be slaughtered in the yards by trappers and lumber jacks because it is no trick at all for a man on snow-shoes to run them down. Once get them frightened so that they break out of the yard and they can be run down in no time. There's a deal of poaching goes on now when a yard is discovered near a lumber camp. It's just plain murder and nothing less. I've known a whole family of moose, bull, cow, yearling and calf, to be wiped out in one day by a bloody-minded game-hog. Didn't even waste a shot on the calf, but ran it down and cut its throat. Red Pete, the brute Walt helped to put in the pen the first year he came up here, used to make a business of locating deer yards and keeping lumber camps supplied with fresh meat all winter. The poor critters haven't even a running chance for their lives."

"Oi hope we'll be able to lamp some. Oi wud loike to put me peepers on a real

live wild deer before we go home," said Sparrer, his eyes shining with suppressed excitement.

"I guess I can promise you that, my son," replied Pat. "We'll separate here. Sparrer and I will work off to leeward, Hal will keep straight ahead and Walt will swing to windward. If you two start any they will work over to us and give Sparrer a chance to see em. Yell if you start any. I reckon you'll find 'em pretty tame. They haven't been bothered here and they know as well as we do that the law protects 'em now. Watch for fresh sign and follow it up."

They separated as suggested, Hal and Walter moving slowly so as to give Pat and Sparrer time to gain a good position. Walter swung well to the windward side. Of course this meant that his chances of getting a close view of any deer which might be on his side of the yard were comparatively slim. They would wind him and at once move on. He was in effect a driver for the others. But he didn't mind this. Wild deer were no new sight to him, and he was only too anxious to give Sparrer the pleasure which he knew a glimpse of Peaked-toes in the freedom of his native woods would be.

He chose what appeared to be one of the most used paths and followed this as quietly as he could. He soon found that still hunting on snow-shoes and with moccasined feet on bare ground were two very different matters. He was not yet sufficiently adept on the big webs to keep them from clacking as the rim of one shoe passed over the rim of the other. The harder he tried not to the more noise he made, it seemed. Clack, clack, clack. It was most annoying. He stopped to consider. Then on the impulse of a sudden idea he slipped his shoes off and dropped down into the path he had been following. Here he could walk without noise. The droppings of the deer, known as "sign" by all hunters, were numerous, and the brush within reach from the path showed indications of having been browsed on recently, and he found several places where sharp hoofs had pawed away the snow since the last storm.

The path twisted and turned and doubled on itself, showing that it had been made originally by aimless wandering in quest of food. Other paths crossed it, but Walter avoided these, judging that the one he was on was as likely as another to lead him to the quarry. At length after an abrupt turn it led straight into a thicket of hemlocks, young growth. As he approached this there was a sharp sound like the sudden release of compressed air, repeated a second later from a point a trifle to the right. It was the alarm warning of deer. Above the snow just to the right of and beyond the thicket he caught a glimpse of the heads and necks

of two does moving rapidly. The effect was most peculiar. It was as if they possessed no bodies until one of them made a high jump for just an instant, bringing the back and rump, with its snowy white flag stiffly erect, into view.

"From the way they go I should think it was the hunting season. I had an idea that they wouldn't be particularly timid, but those two lit out in a regular panic. Act like they'd been hunted until their nerves were all on edge," thought the boy as he hurriedly forced his way through the thicket.

He had no expectation of finding more there, but was eager to see where the two had been lying and then to follow them up as rapidly as possible. So he burst through the screen of hemlocks in rather precipitate fashion, an unusual proceeding for Upton, whose natural caution had been supplemented by a very thorough training in woodcraft during the three summers he had spent at Woodcraft Camp. The instant he was through the barrier he realized the folly of his action. Facing him, not ten feet away, was a big buck with a splendid pair of antlers.

NOT TEN FEET AWAY WAS A BIG BUCK

If the does were panic stricken their lord was not. On the contrary he was the embodiment of vicious anger. The hair on his neck was raised, his eyes blazed with rage; and he was pawing the snow with impatience. These details were registered on Walter's mind to be recalled later, but at the time he was conscious of but one thing—that he had stumbled into a predicament which might easily cost him his life. No sooner was he clearly in view than the buck charged. Telling of it at the cabin that night Upton declared that in that fleeting instant it seemed to him that he was staring at a whole forest of horns pointed straight for him.

Intuition is subconscious direction without the aid of conscious thought and is usually the result of wisely directed thinking in the past. As a Scout Upton had tried to train himself to meet emergencies, to be prepared, and it was the result of this training that governed him now. Dropping his snow-shoes he leaped aside.

Fortunately the snow had been trampled down for a sufficient space at this point to allow of this. As it was the buck swept past so close as to almost graze his clothing.

Indeed so narrow had been the margin that the shoes, released as he jumped, fell directly in front of the infuriated animal and the brow antlers pierced the meshes of one of them. It was this lucky circumstance which was Upton's salvation. For a few minutes the buck's attention was wholly engaged with this new adversary which banged against his nose, obscured his vision and clung to him in such inexplicable fashion. He tried to back away from it, but in vain. Then he plunged forward and sought to grind it into the snow, with the result that he only fixed it more firmly on his antlers. In vain he struck at it with his feet. The dangling tail offered nothing on which to get a purchase. Fear now began to replace rage. Here was an enemy that would neither fight nor run away. Nor could he in turn run away from it.

Meanwhile Walter had made the most of his opportunity. But a few feet distant was a young hemlock tree. Floundering through the snow he reached this and scrambled up. It was a small tree, and his perch was none too secure, and anything but comfortable for an extended stay. But it meant safety for the time being, and just then this was everything. With a sigh of thankfulness he turned his attention to the scene below, and his sense of humor for the moment overcame everything else. The buck was plainly being worsted in his battle with the snow-shoe, and was working himself into a panic. His great eyes were wide with fright as he backed and plunged and vainly reared in an effort to strike with his forefeet. With every toss of his head the tail of the shoe rapped him sharply across his nose, adding injury to insult. It was so funny that Walter fairly shouted with laughter, and the sound of his voice added to the terror of the frantic animal.

With a desperate leap sidewise in an effort to get clear of his tormentor he landed in the deep snow, his sharp hoofs cutting through the crust. Then followed a succession of floundering plunges which took him still further into trouble until at last, panting from fright and the result of his efforts, he was forced to cease his struggles from sheer weariness.

It was then that Upton thought seriously of his own plight. The buck was not much more helpless than he himself without his shoes. One lay below him in the snow, somewhat the worse for the trampling of the buck during his wild plunging. This he could retrieve without trouble or danger. But the other was still fast on those uncomfortably sharp horns, and he was of no mind to make a closer

acquaintance with them unaided. It was then that he remembered that in the subsequent excitement he had failed to give the view hallo when he had started the does and thus warn the others that game was afoot. A yell now would mean to the others merely that they were to be on the watch for deer headed their way unless they were near enough to distinguish words, which he much doubted.

Then he remembered the whistle which he always carried and the emergency call for help of the Blue Tortoise Patrol. Both Hal and Sparrer would recognize and understand that. Somehow it seemed less a compromise of dignity than yelling for help. He raised the whistle to his lips and blew the signal, waited five seconds and blew again. A minute later he heard a reply from a lesser distance than he had expected, followed almost at once by another which was rendered fainter by distance.

"Reached both of 'em," he muttered complacently. "Hal isn't so far away as I was afraid he might be. Guess I better tell them what the trouble is."

With the whistle he spelled out in the Morse code "T-r-e-e-d b-y a b-u-c-k w-a-t-c-h o-u-t."

Back came the double reply "O. K.," followed by Hal's voice in a long drawn "Hello-o-o." Shouting occasionally to give the others the direction Upton climbed down from his perch, recovered the one shoe and then waited with such patience as he could. Hal was soon within easy shouting distance and the anxiety in his voice as he inquired if Upton was all right was very evident. Set at rest on this point he whooped joyously and Upton grinned ruefully.

"This will be nuts for Hal. He'll never let me hear the end of it. I'm glad he didn't see me up the tree," he thought. Aloud he warned Hal not to come too near, but to wait until the others came up. While he felt that the buck was so bedded in the snow as to be practically harmless he wanted no chances taken.

A few minutes later Pat and Sparrer came up, panting with the exertion of their long run, and the circumstances were briefly explained. Pat took in the situation at a glance and his eyes danced with enjoyment, and all three began to chaff Walter unmercifully. But there was little time for this just then. The coming up of the others had further alarmed the buck, who had recovered wind and strength to some degree, and was now renewing his efforts to escape.

Pat ordered Hal to circle around and head off the animal, while he himself came up from behind and endeavored to free the shoe. Sparrer was to stand by in case

of need and render any assistance he could. Upton was to stay where he was. Indeed there was nothing else for him to do, as once in the deep snow he would be more helpless than the deer. The latter was still floundering forward and there were stains of red on the crust where it had cut the slender legs.

As Hal appeared in front of him, whooping excitedly, the buck ceased his struggling and stood shoulder deep in the snow, his sides heaving and his steaming nostrils quivering as he labored for breath.

"Poor thing! He hasn't got another kick in him," Hal exclaimed, drawing so near that he could reach out and touch the slender muzzle.

"Don't be too sure of that, me bye. Better shtand back a bit," warned Pat coming up from the animal's rear and leaning forward to get hold of the shoe.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the buck flung his head up and back. The tail of the shoe flew up, striking Hal a sharp blow on the side of his head. Instinctively he jumped back, forgetting that he was on snow-shoes. The result was immediate and decisive. With a wild yell he pitched backward and disappeared in the snow. At the same instant Pat grabbed the buck's horns, one with each hand, and straddling his back called for Sparrer to free the shoe. This Sparrer succeeded in doing after a few minutes' struggle and then turned his attention to Hal, whose muffled cries of "Help! Take him away!" bore evidence to the fact that he was under the impression that the buck had knocked him down and was trying to trample him. In fact it was hard work to convince him that this was not the case until with Sparrer's help he regained his feet and got the snow out of his eyes sufficiently to see Pat struggling with the deer.

As soon as Hal and Sparrer were at a safe distance Pat let go and joined the others, breathing heavily from his exertions. The deer, freed of the hateful thing which had clung to his head and been the cause of all his troubles, turned and with awkward jumps plunged back through the way he had broken in leaving the yard. Pat warned Walter to keep out of sight so as not to turn the animal into new difficulties, and presently they saw him reach the trodden paths of the yard and with a shake of his beautifully crowned head bound lightly away.

Then while they took stock of damages Upton told his story. "An innocent babe in the woods," murmured Pat when Walter told how he had removed his shoes and taken to the deer paths. "If that had been a bull moose now instead of a buck 'tis loike yer frinds wud be weeping instead av laughing at ye this very minut."

"That's true, Pat," replied Walter promptly. "It was a foolish thing to do, and I know it now. As it is you've got the laugh on me—and Hal," he added slyly. "How about it, Hal?"

"Oh, it's on me too, all right," returned that young gentleman, rubbing the lump on his head. "I sure thought that brute was right on top of me."

Pat meanwhile had brought out some stout twine and was making temporary repairs on the damaged shoes. Beyond some damage to the webbing where the horns had pierced it the one which had been the cause of the buck's discomfiture was as good as ever, but the frame of the other had been badly split by the sharp hoofs of the plunging animal. Bringing the broken parts together Pat wound them with the twine, and when he had finished pronounced the shoe fit for the trip back to the cabin, where he would undertake a more permanent job.

"We won't visit those traps now," said he in spite of Walter's protest that he could go back while the others went on, and led the way homeward.



CHAPTER XIII

POACHERS

The behavior of the deer in the yard had puzzled Upton not a little. He could evolve no theory to account for it. Why at this season of the year should those two does have appeared so terror stricken at his approach, and why should the buck have been in such an ugly mood? From all accounts he had read, and from what Pat had said, he had had good grounds for expecting the animals to be fairly tame. He put the matter up to Pat as they tramped homeward, but his reply was evasive and unsatisfactory. In fact, the big fellow was not inclined to talk. He appeared to have something on his mind, and strode along with a black scowl darkening his usually good-humored face. Once Walter thought he detected a slight shake of his head at Sparrer as the latter started to say something. He was sure of it when the latter abruptly changed the subject.

Pat set a stiff pace. He seemed in a hurry to get back to the cabin. As he opened the cabin door and looked in a flash of what looked to Upton very much like relief crossed his face as he saw that it was empty, it being too early for Alec to have returned. This puzzled Walter more than ever, but he held his tongue and forbore to ask questions. He felt sure that in his own good time Pat would unburden himself. The latter at once went to work on the broken shoe, replacing the twine with a rawhide thong made pliable by soaking in water. This would contract in drying and the broken frame would be stronger than ever.

He had just finished the job when Alec came in with two marten. "Any signs of our friends, the enemy?" asked Pat whimsically.

Alec shook his head. "No one has been near the traps," he replied. "I dinna think they will dare come so near the cabin."

"You've got another guess coming, Alec," retorted Pat. "The murdering thaves killed two deer within a mile of here yesterday."

"What!" exclaimed Walter and Hal in unison, while Alec suspended his skinning knife in mid air and shot a keen glance at Pat.

"It's a fact," Pat went on. "Sparrer will tell you so."

Sparrer nodded in confirmation of Pat's surprising statement.

"But we didn't hear any guns," protested Hal.

"No," replied Pat, "for the very good reason that no guns were fired. They were not hunting; they were butchering." Then he graphically described for Alec's benefit Upton's experience with the buck that morning, and the story lost nothing in the telling. "Walt," he continued, "knows enough about deer to realize that the deer he saw did not behave as he expected they would, and he's been puzzling over it ever since. I'll tell you the reason. They've been hunted and harried in that yard till their nerves are on the jump so that they will run from their own shadows, all but the buck, and I guess now after his scrap with the snow-shoe he will be as bad as the does. As it was he was simply fighting mad, knowing their helplessness outside the yard. Ordinarily he would have simply trotted off quietly with the does. But they were hunted yesterday to a point where the old fellow was desperate, and the proof of it is what Sparrer and I found."

"What was it?" demanded Walter eagerly.

"We found where a fawn and a doe had been driven into the deep snow and butchered with a knife," replied Pat. "The story was plain enough for any one who can read signs. It was no trick at all for those bloody poachers on snow-shoes to run them down and drive them into the snow. After that no gun was needed. Besides, a gun is too noisy for thieves and lawbreakers. Walt didn't tell you what he saw yesterday. Fire away, Walt, and tell 'em."

Upton told briefly what he had seen on the peak by the pass and his reasons for telling only Pat. Alec's face hardened as he listened and a steely glint crept into his eyes. When Walter had finished Pat continued.

"You fellows wondered why I was so keen on getting back to the cabin. It was because I don't believe it is safe to leave it unguarded. As long as the snow was soft those thieves kept away from the Hollow, but with this crust to leave no tracks they've come down here, and they've been watching us. They know how many of us are here and are watching our movements. They'd raid the cabin in a minute if they saw the chance. But as long as anybody is here they'll keep out of sight. Hereafter we'll leave a guard when we go out. To-morrow Alec and I will start before daybreak to look for those fellows and leave you youngsters to amuse yourselves. I have an idea that their camp isn't so far away as Alec thought it was. Now we'll have dinner, and this afternoon Alec and I will look over a couple of the short lines, one of you can keep guard here and the other

two can go with us or do anything else you please."

Upton insisted that he should keep guard, Hal decided to go with Alec, and Sparrer with a little hesitancy confessed that he would like to hunt rabbits. The experience of Christmas morning had whetted his taste for hunting and following a trap line seemed tame sport in comparison. He was eager to try his luck alone, and when Walter offered the loan of his rifle his happiness was complete. When the others had departed he shouldered the rifle and at Upton's suggestion started to follow the course of the brook up to the beaver ponds so as to see the houses and dams and then go on to the swamp at the head of the ponds where Spud Ely had found the rabbit tracks which had ultimately led to his finding of Alec Smith the fall before.

It did not take him long to reach the first or big dam. It was difficult for this boy of the city to believe that this could be the work of animals and not men, and had he not seen some of the beaver cuttings in the Bronx Park at home he would have been inclined to think that Upton had been stuffing him when he told him about the dam. There was little opportunity to examine the construction, because it was covered with snow and was in effect a long solid wall of glistening white. Beyond stretched the smooth even surface of the big pond, with nothing to break the dead level of it but three white mounds over toward the north shore. These he knew must be the houses of which Upton had told him, and he at once decided to go over and investigate them.

As he approached them he discovered several small mounds around two of the houses, but thought nothing of this until he noticed that the snow around them had been recently disturbed, and that the mounds themselves were not crusted. Instantly every sense which his Scout training had developed was aroused. Here was something peculiar, and to be investigated. Could this be the work of the beavers? He would find out. Rapidly he dug into one of the mounds and presently disclosed evergreen boughs over which the snow had been heaped. Could this be some work of the strange little animals of which he had never heard? He lifted one of the boughs and looked at the butt. It had been *broken* off and not cut by teeth. Moreover, it was freshly broken. He examined another with the same result. Underneath was a larger one, and this had been cut with an axe.

Sparrer straightened and looked keenly in all directions. A sudden suspicion was rapidly crystallizing into conviction in his mind. This was the work of man. What did it mean? So far as he could see there was not another living thing in all that great white waste. The vast silence was oppressive. Involuntarily he

shivered. For the first time the loneliness of complete solitude gripped him, the more so that hitherto in all his life he had never known what it was to be absolutely alone. From babyhood he had been surrounded night and day by human beings, many of them evil, but human nevertheless. Even since he had entered the woods he had not been out of speaking distance of one or more of his companions until now. An overwhelming sense of littleness and insignificance swept over him. There was something sinister and threatening in the towering hills. He had the feeling that unseen eyes were watching him and it made his flesh creep. He knew it was, must be, only a feeling, yet he could not rid himself of it. It is a feeling which every one who is alone for the first time in the wilderness experiences.

Then he shook himself. "Youse is sure losing yer goat, Sparrer," he muttered. "Buck up!"

With this he resumed his investigations. When the last of the boughs had been removed he found a hole in the ice about a foot and a half wide and a trifle longer. Along one end and both sides small dead sticks had been driven into the mud and close to the edges of the hole. These were about four inches apart and formed a little pen with one end open. Close to one side and projecting beyond the pen through the open end was a long freshly cut green poplar stick fastened about two inches above the bottom. The water was shallow and presently he made out a steel trap dimly outlined well inside the pen quite close to the poplar stick, the chain fastened to one of the pen stakes.

It was all perfectly clear now to even such a novice as Sparrer. It was a set for beaver. He knew enough about the animals to know that their favorite food is poplar bark. The green poplar stick was bait. It seemed queer to think of a stick of wood as bait, but this is what it was, and nothing else. He saw that it was securely fastened at the butt end in a corner of the pen and was staked down near the opening so that there could be no cross movement. It could not be pulled out. The only way for a hungry beaver to get it would be to enter the pen and cut it off and in doing this he could hardly fail of stepping in the trap. Then he would drown miserably under the ice. The part left sticking out beyond the pen was by way of a teaser. It would be the first part touched by the animal and would undoubtedly be cut off close to the pen. Having had a taste of the fresh green bark and no harm having come from it the animal would unsuspectingly enter the pen to secure the remainder, whereas with the bait wholly within the pen in the first place the animal would be suspicious and wary of entering. It was all very simple, clever and diabolical.

Sparrer's first impulse was to spring the trap, but on second thought he decided to leave it alone. It might well be that his discovery were better unknown. His life in New York streets had taught him that it is possible to know too much; that some things are better forgotten as soon as learned. He recalled what had been said about the illegality of trapping beaver. If Pat and Alec were doing a little quiet poaching it was none of his business. They would not thank him for interfering. Of course the trap must be theirs. There was no one else trapping in the Hollow. The poachers there had been so much talk about were working miles beyond the Hollow, on the long line. He remembered now that neither Pat nor Alec had once suggested a trip up this way. Good reason. They wanted to avoid any embarrassing questions about those queer little mounds, for he knew now that each one covered a trap-pan. The boughs and the snow were to keep the holes from freezing over. He counted the mounds. There were three at one house and four at the other.

"Youse better cover this up and make yer get-away while the going's good," he muttered as he replaced the boughs and packed the snow over them until the mound was as nearly as he had found it as it was possible to make it. Then he made a hasty examination of the houses. The snow was melted on the tops of the two around which the traps were set, sure sign that they were inhabited. This was caused by the warm air from the interior escaping through the air holes which are always left in the top of a beaver house. The third was solidly crusted over, a reasonably sure indication that it was abandoned.

Having satisfied his curiosity Sparrer started back to the dam and followed it to the woods on the farther shore. He had intended to go straight across the pond to the second dam, but his discovery of the traps had aroused his sense of caution and he decided that it would be better to keep to the woods. On the broad white expanse of the pond he would be altogether too conspicuous should it happen that curious eyes were watching. As he skirted the shore of the pond through the brush his thoughts were so busy with his discovery that for the time being he quite forgot to keep an eye out for rabbit signs. The illegality of this attempt to catch beaver in a closed season did not impress him at first. He had had nothing to do with game and game laws. They were entirely outside his range of experience. In fact, he failed utterly to grasp the purpose back of the laws and like a great many others he regarded them as a restriction of individual liberty, and a violation as of no very great moment. They were to him very much as the "keep off the grass" signs in the city park.

So it was no shock to the boy to think that his new idol, Pat, should be breaking

a law for which he could see no reason. But what did give him a shock was the method employed. This outraged his strong sense of fair play. "It's hitting 'em below de belt. Dey ain't got a chance in de world," he kept saying over and over to himself. "Dey finds de food right by dere houses under de ice where dey ain't looking for no foul blow, and dey helps demselves and gits a knockout widout a show." He could overlook the breaking of the law because it held no meaning for him, but it was hard to reconcile this flagrant outrage on fairness with what he knew of Pat.

"Maybe Alec's doing it on de side and Pat don't know nothin' about it," he thought, and with this comforting reflection he felt better. As he tramped on his thoughts grew clearer. He recalled Alec's strong assertion that he was for protecting beaver. If Alec had been sincere this eliminated him, and Pat had not been away from the cabin unattended since they arrived. Moreover the traps had been set since the last snow, and that fact effectually disposed of both Pat and Alec. As he realized this Sparrer gave vent to a low whistle. "It's some other mugs, as sure as shootin'!" he exclaimed. "Bet it's de same guys dat killed de deer, and Pat an' Alec don't know nothin' about it." He paused, undecided whether to go back or keep on, but a moment's reflection decided him. Pat and Alec were out on the trap lines, and would not be back until dark. He would keep on and have his hunt. The news would keep until he got back.

But this new-born certainty that there were others in the Hollow gave him an uncomfortable feeling and he decided that he would keep as much away from the open as possible. For this reason as he approached the second dam he was content to look at it from the screen of brush. It was similar to the first, but smaller, and there were no houses in the pond above. The third dam was but a short distance above and this was the smallest of the three. Beyond this lay the swamp where he hoped to find the rabbits. That his nerves were jumpy he realized by the way he started at every unexpected sound. The grinding of one tree against another, even an unusually loud clack of his own snow-shoes, made his heart jump. Once he could have sworn that he heard a stick snap behind him, and for a full two minutes he stood listening. But he heard nothing further and nothing moved within his range of vision. Charging it up to an overwrought imagination and chiding himself for a silly chump he moved on.

Presently he discovered fresh rabbit sign, and this drove everything else out of his head. Slowly he moved forward, his rifle cocked and ready. Profiting by his experience with Pat the day before he scanned every little irregularity in the surface of the snow with suspicious eyes. Presently he discovered a little mound

ahead of him and a bit to one side of the path he was following. It seemed to Sparrer that it was if anything a trifle whiter than the surrounding snow. Study it as he would, to his untrained eyes it bore no resemblance to an animal. But presently he noticed two dark spots, and it flashed over him that they were eyes, intently watching him. Slowly he started to raise his rifle, but at the first movement the white mound dissolved into a long legged animal which bounded behind a stump and was gone before he could get his gun to his shoulder.

Disappointed, but resolved that the next one should not get the jump on him Sparrer kept on. Sign was plentiful everywhere, and his hopes ran high. So fearful was he of another rabbit's repeating the surprise of the first one that as he stole forward he kept his gun at his shoulder, until at last he was forced to lower it from sheer weariness. But in spite of his care and watchfulness he saw no more game and at last sat down on an old log to rest. He was tired and if the truth be known somewhat discouraged. He was too new at the hunting game to realize that his was no more than the usual experience of the hunter and that his chances of success, if no better, were no worse than in the beginning.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SILVER FOX

The log on which Sparrer was seated was near the edge of the swamp and commanded a view of the small upper pond, while he himself was more or less screened from observation from that direction by a fringe of young birch and alders. He had sat there perhaps ten minutes, and was just beginning to realize that he would have to move on in order to keep warm when his eyes, idly scanning the farther shore, detected something moving among the trees beyond the farther end of the little dam.

Instantly he was all attention, his eyes glued to the spot. He forgot that he was beginning to feel chilled. A warm glow of excitement rushed over him. There was an animal of some kind over there, but what he could not tell at that distance. But one thing was certain, it was no rabbit, for it was dark in color, and it was too big. He could catch but tantalizing glimpses of it in the young growth along the edge of the pond, and presently it disappeared altogether behind a tangle of fallen brush. Unconsciously he held his breath as he waited for it to reappear. Slowly the minutes slipped away. He began to think that his eyes must have been playing him tricks. He was once more becoming conscious of the cold and had almost decided to cross over and investigate the brush pile into which he thought the animal had vanished when a black form leaped lightly out on the farther end of the dam and paused with one fore foot uplifted and head thrown up to test the wind.

Sparrer needed but one look at the great plume of a tail to know that it was a fox, but such a fox as he had never dreamed existed. It was bigger than any fox he had ever seen, the great size being apparent even at that distance. And instead of the red coat of the foxes with which the boy was familiar at the Bronx Zoo this fellow was robed in the blackness of night, and this was intensified by contrast with the pure white of his surroundings.

"It's him, de silver fox!" gasped Sparrer under his breath, and with the realization that here before his very eyes was the king of the North American fur bearers, whose skin was worth a fabulous sum, according to what he had heard, he began to shake as with the ague. What if he could get him? A cold sweat broke out at

the mere thought. There on the dam was what to him was nothing less than a fortune, and here was he shaking like an aspen leaf in the wind. The distance was too great for a shot at present, but perhaps the fox would come nearer, and then a true eye and steady nerves for just a matter of a few seconds and the prize might be his.

With a quick intake of breath he tried to get a grip on himself. He thought of the battles he had fought with bullies older and bigger than himself, and had won because he had kept his head in the heat of contest and had coolly taken advantage of every opening. But that was different. Then he was in action and it was easier to keep cool. Then, too, if he missed one blow there was a chance for another. It was this sitting still with the knowledge that there would be but one chance, and that this must be taken at just the right moment or be lost forever that upset him so. Then curiously enough the motto of the Boy Scouts flashed into his head—"Be prepared." It was like a tonic to his shaking nerves. Was not a Scout supposed to be prepared for all emergencies, and what was this but a form of emergency?

He stopped shaking. He lifted his rifle ever so little and found that it remained steady and motionless in his hands. "It ain't no fox. It's just a rabbit and youse can't miss it," he whispered over and over to himself, and experienced an odd sense of confidence. He was himself once more, the Sparrer of the streets, able to take care of himself and keep his head in any emergency; the Sparrer of the Blue Tortoise Patrol, noting the number of the fleeing machine at the time of the accident.

Meanwhile the fox was leisurely crossing the dam, stopping now and then to sniff at the snow or to test the wind. Fortunately what little there was of the latter was blowing toward the hidden watcher, a fact which Sparrer did not appreciate at the time. Had the wind been the other way the fox would have caught the hated man smell and vanished like a shadow. As it was his every move denoted complete lack of suspicion so far as a fox ever does lack this characteristic trait.

Sparrer was at complete loss as to what he should do. The temptation to crawl forward so as to get within easy range of the end of the dam was almost irresistible, but he realized that the first move on his part would be likely to attract the keen eyes of his quarry, and arouse his suspicions. Had the fringe of brush through which he was watching been leaved out it might have been possible to successfully make this move, but as it was his dark body against the white background could hardly fail of detection despite the screen of brush. He

knew enough of animals to know that so long as he was motionless he would appear to be no more than a part of the log on which he sat, and wisely concluded to sit tight and await developments.

If the fox continued clear across the dam there was one point at which he would afford a clear shot through a little opening in the brush. It would be at long range, but the 22 was high powered, and if he could judge the distance aright and hold true there was a chance that he might kill. So far as he could see this appeared to be his only chance, and he prepared to take advantage of it. Inch by inch he wormed himself around on the log so as to face this opening. Then estimating the distance as best he could, a difficult matter across the snow, he set his sights accordingly, cocked the rifle and held it in readiness. All the time he kept whispering to himself, "Nothin' but a rabbit. Nothin' to git excited about. Youse has got a dead cinch. Youse can't miss." Somehow this trying to think of the fox as a rabbit helped wonderfully. Anybody could hit a rabbit.

The fox was trotting now with his nose to the snow. Sparrer was conscious of a hope so great that it was almost a prayer that the animal would stop when he reached the critical spot. It would be a hard enough shot at a motionless mark, but to hit a mark moving as swiftly as the fox was now going was more than he dared even dream of doing. The trot broke into a lope. Sparrer raised the rifle and sighted through the opening. It seemed to him that that swiftly moving form crossed the opening in one leap, a blur of black across his sights. Slowly he lowered his rifle. His chance was gone.

In the reaction that followed he realized how high his hopes had been. It seemed as if Fortune had but played with him, had put the prize almost within his grasp and then as he reached for it had snatched it away to tease and mock him. He could have cried with vexation and disappointment had he been of the weeping kind. As it was he swallowed a lump in his throat and leaned forward to peer through the brush for one last glimpse of the royal animal.

At the end of the dam the fox stopped. Sparrer could just make him out through the tangled screen of brush. For a moment he stood motionless. It seemed to the boy like adding insult to injury. Then with a long graceful leap he landed on the snow of the swamp. A sudden hope caused Sparrer to instinctively tighten his grip on the rifle and catch his breath. Perhaps the fox would come his way! If he should, well, he would at least find a true Scout—he would be prepared.

But the fox did not turn in his direction. Instead he kept straight on into the

swamp as if he intended to cross it to the high land which made up to the hills beyond. Sparrer caught occasional glimpses of him through the trees. He crossed the trail by which Sparrer had come in, sniffed at it, looked up in Sparrer's direction suspiciously, it seemed to him, sniffed again and then trotted on as if the matter were of no present interest. The dry snow had not held the scent sufficiently to cause alarm.

Instead of continuing in a direct course for the hills the fox now began to quarter the ground very much as a bird dog does in quest of quail. In short runs from side to side he advanced deeper into the swamp, investigating every bush and clump of trees in his course, pausing now and then with head raised and ears cocked forward to listen, then running on again. Gradually it dawned on Sparrer that Reynard had crossed the dam with a definite purpose. He had come over to the swamp with the same object in view that had brought Sparrer there—to hunt rabbits.

The sharp contrast between the snow and the black coat of the fox made it possible for Sparrer to follow the animal's movements at a distance which under ordinary conditions would have been impossible. He had turned and was working up wind, continually stopping to carefully test the light air in the hope of scenting a hare. His course was now directly away from Sparrer toward the lower end of the swamp. The boy could get only an occasional glimpse of him and presently lost him altogether. Once more bitter disappointment rankled in his heart. What should he do now? Should he remain where he was, or should he move on? How he wished that he knew more about hunting and the ways of animals, black foxes in particular. What would Pat do were he in his place? Would he give up? Somehow he couldn't picture Pat as giving up without further effort to capture so great a prize.

"He'd do somethin', but what?" Sparrer scowled in labored thought. The fox was somewhere between him and the cabin. Should he turn back on the chance that he would jump the animal somewhere on the way and get a running shot? "No chance," he decided, remembering the clack of his shoes in walking. "He'd hear me a mile." He slipped his shoes off and rose to his feet. The crust bore him, for he was a light weight. Then he took a comprehensive survey of his surroundings. There was one other chance. The fox might return. He would soon reach the lower edge of the swamp and failing to make a kill might decide to try his luck down wind in the main body of the swamp.

The more Sparrer thought of this the more likely it seemed. Perhaps

unconsciously he was allowing hope to father the idea. Anyway it raised his spirits wonderfully. In such an event he must be ready. Once more he looked the ground over carefully. His present position was on the outer edge of the swamp. He quickly appreciated that if he were farther in his chances would be doubled in case the fox returned. If he remained where he was the fox might pass so far toward the other side that he would not even see him, to say nothing of getting a shot, whereas if he could find a place farther in which would command a fairly open view in all directions the chances of the animal passing unseen would be greatly reduced. Slightly back of his present position and a good rifle shot in to the swamp he noted a small mound crowned by a clump of young birches. He decided to take his stand there and await developments. Silently but vigorously he swung his arms to restore circulation, then picking up his rifle and shoes he made his way quickly toward the new stand, taking the utmost care not to snap a twig or make the least noise.

As he entered the clump of birches a white form leaped out from the lower side, ran ten or twelve yards and sat up, looking back with eyes in which fear and curiosity were strangely blended. It was a hare, or so-called snow-shoe rabbit, and a big one. Slowly and carefully Sparrer put down his shoes and then straightened up and raised his rifle. Silently he brought the sights to bear on the motionless white form. His finger was already on the trigger when he remembered the fox. A shot now would effectually put an end to any possibility of getting the prince of fur bearers that day, and what was a rabbit compared with the latter?

Oddly enough the old adage "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" popped into his head, but this time the one in the bush was of so much greater value that he promptly decided to let the one in hand go. At that distance he couldn't miss, for he had readjusted the sights and he had but to press the trigger to put an end to bunny. A little sigh escaped him as he lowered the rifle. The lowering of that rifle was the hardest thing he had done for a long time. It required considerable power of self-restraint. The fox might not come back, and if he did might not offer a shot, or he might miss him. Then the chances were that he would have to return to the cabin empty handed.

With the lowering of the rifle the rabbit dropped to a crouch, thumped the snow smartly, and then slowly hopped away to a point twenty yards distant in the direction in which the fox had gone, and there crouched under a bush, an inconspicuous lump of white. Sparrer noted with satisfaction that she was still within good range, and made up his mind that if there were no signs of the fox

within fifteen or twenty minutes and the rabbit still remained where she was he would shoot.

Now be it known that the thump of a rabbit can be heard a long distance. It was so unexpected and so loud that it fairly startled Sparrer, who was wholly unfamiliar with this method of rabbit signaling. The ground is an excellent transmitter of sound and the heavy snow crust was hardly less effective. Other ears than Sparrer's heard, and for them that signal was pregnant with meaning and possibilities. Not two minutes later Sparrer caught sight of a black spot moving swiftly in his direction. It was the fox.

As he drew nearer he moved more slowly and with characteristic cunning and caution. Every few steps he paused to listen and to look sharply under every tree and bush. He no longer tested the air as when Sparrer had last seen him, for now he was working down wind and must trust to eyes and ears rather than to his nose. But he was no less thorough in the way in which he covered the ground. Back and forth across Sparrer's field of vision he wove, investigating every likely hiding-place, approaching each with infinite care, tense, alert, the picture of eagerness, prepared to spring at the first move of his quarry.

As he approached Sparrer could read in every move and attitude of the black hunter expectancy and confidence. That he knew to a reasonable certainty the approximate location from which that signal thump had sounded was clearly evident. That he also knew that the rabbit might have, and very likely had, moved since thumping was also clear and he was taking no chance of over-running his game. If he kept on as he was coming he would be within shooting distance within a few minutes. Inch by inch Sparrer raised the rifle and then, hardly daring to breathe, tense, as motionless as the trees among which he stood, he waited.

The fox was now within thirty yards, and still coming. It was plain that he was unsuspecting of danger and intent wholly on the hunt. At this point he turned obliquely to the left to investigate an old log. Sparrer was tempted to shoot, but a clump of alders was in the way and he well knew that even a small twig would be almost sure to deflect the bullet. He would wait. Finding nothing at the log the fox turned and quartered to the right, which brought him into the open between the rabbit and the hunter and but a few yards from the former. The angle at which he was approaching was such as to offer the smallest mark possible and make the shot uncertain for such a novice as Sparrer. By a great effort the latter overcame the almost overwhelming temptation to shoot and waited, hoping that

the animal would turn broadside.

Suddenly he whirled like a flash. The boy's first thought was that he had been discovered, but the next move of the fox explained his action. Crouching so that he appeared to move on his belly he began to creep toward the rabbit, which still sat motionless. The fox had caught the scent of the latter at the instant he turned and he had but to follow his nose straight to his victim. Meanwhile he presented no better mark than before, as he was now moving straight away, and Sparrer held his fire. By this time he was so interested in the tragedy that was being enacted before him that he almost forgot his own immediate purpose.

Inch by inch the black hunter crept forward, hugging the snow. Then Sparrer saw him gather his muscular hindlegs under him. There was a swift leap and at the same instant the rabbit left her form in a long jump. Before she could make another the fox was upon her. There was a shrill scream, a crunching of teeth and it was over. For an instant the fox stood with one foot on the still white form, a black statue of triumph. Then he picked the rabbit up by the middle and the limp form hung transversely in his jaws, the long legs hanging on one side and the drooping head with ridiculously long ears on the other. It was clear that Reynard did not intend to enjoy his feast on the spot.

In executing this last move he had turned broadside. It was now or never for Sparrer. With infinite care he lined his sights just back of the shoulder and pulled the trigger. Simultaneously with the sharp crack of the rifle the fox made a convulsive spring and then crumpled in a black heap on the snow. Shaking so that he could hardly manipulate the lever Sparrer ejected the empty shell and threw another cartridge into place. Then with the rifle at his shoulder, covering the pathetic black heap as best he could, he slowly advanced. Somewhere he had read or heard that it was an old fox trick to simulate death, and he was taking no chances.

But his precautions were needless. The bullet had severed the spinal column. The silver fox of Smugglers' Hollow had stalked his last rabbit and made his last kill. In the revulsion of feeling from the reaction following the long nervous strain Sparrer hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. As he stretched the black form out on the snow and ran his hands through the wonderful soft black fur and admired the great tail with its tip of snowy white he had for the moment almost a feeling of regret that he had been the means of destroying so beautiful a creature. Then the true significance of his achievement, luck he called it, swept over him and his eyes shone as he pictured his reception at the cabin.

In the midst of his triumphant thoughts a guttural voice broke in: "White boy heap good shot."

Sparrer whirled to find himself staring into a dark coppery countenance with beady eyes, low brow and high cheek bones. It was an Indian.



CHAPTER XV

SPARRER'S TEMPTATION

"White boy heap good shot," repeated the Indian with what was intended to be a friendly grin.

He was standing some twenty paces away, and where he had come from Sparrer hadn't the least idea. If he had sprung out of the snow at his feet the boy would have been no more startled and surprised. He was short, thick-set, and was dressed in a nondescript pair of trousers much the worse for wear, a faded mackinaw spotted with grease and dirt and was, of course, on snow-shoes. The swarthy evil face was crowned with a cap of unplucked muskrat fur. Save for a light axe carried in one hand and a knife in his belt he apparently was unarmed, a fact which Sparrer noted at once with a feeling of relief.

"Black fox no good. Kill rabbits and birds. Good to kill fox. What white boy do with him?" continued his unwelcome visitor.

"Take his skin," replied Sparrer for want of anything better to say.

"Skin no good. Red fox skin good. Black fox no good—bad fur. No can sell. White boy take rabbit and give Indian fox." This astounding proposal was accompanied with what was intended for an ingratiating smile, but which served only to make the face still more ugly.

"He's wised me fer a tenderfoot, an' thinks Oi'm easy," thought Sparrer. Aloud he said, "What do youse want of it, if it's no good and youse can't sell it?"

Once more the dark face broke into a grin. "No sell. Make cap to wear." He touched his head to make clearer his meaning. "Indian like black cap," he added guilelessly.

Sparrer laughed aloud at the childish simplicity of the idea. Then he shook his head. "Nothin' doing," he replied. "Oi want the fox meself."

A look of cunning swept across the dark visage. "Indian buy fox. Give two dollar," was the next bland proposal.

Again Sparrer grinned and shook his head. He was beginning to enjoy the situation. This was a method of barter he was accustomed to, the method of the lower East Side. He began to feel at home.

"Five dollar!" The Indian pulled off a mitten and held up the hand with the fingers spread.

Once more Sparrer shook his head. "Youse can't buy it," said he decidedly as if to end the parley. "An' youse can't put nothin' across on me," he added. "It's worth a lot of dough an' Oi'm wise to it. Youse better run along." He shifted his rifle to a handier position by way of a hint.

The Indian, who had gradually advanced, stopped. His face changed completely. There was no longer any attempt to hide the greed in the beady eyes. He was no fool, and he saw the uselessness of trying to dissemble further. He meant to have that skin by fair means or foul, by fair means if possible, for he was keen enough to realize that thus he would avoid possible unpleasant consequences in the future. This youngster knew more than he had supposed he did, but he might not be proof against the temptation of ready money. Pulling off his other mitten he held up both hands, closed his fingers, opened them again, closed them and then opened those of one hand.

"Twenty-five dollar!" he exclaimed.

That was a larger sum than Sparrer had ever possessed at one time in all his life and to have that in hand at once was a temptation. There was no denying the fact. The skin might be worth all that he had heard and then again it might not. He was too wise in the ways of the world to be ignorant of the fact that fabulous tales are built around comparatively modest facts. Undoubtedly the skin was valuable. The fact that the Indian was so eager to get it was proof of this. But as for its being worth any such sum as two thousand, or even one thousand, that seemed absurd. He glanced down at the black form at his feet and his imagination couldn't conceive of any one paying even a hundred dollars for such a little bit of fur. Why, even when stretched it would be but a fraction of the size of the great bearskin back at the cabin and that was worth only fifteen dollars, and for his part he would much rather have the latter. He looked up to find the black beady eyes of the Indian fixed upon him as if they read his very thoughts. The man had been quick to perceive his hesitation and now began to speak again.

"White boy staying at trappers' camp. Fox no belong to white boy. Him belong

to trappers. Trappers sell and get money. White boy get nothing. White boy sell to Indian. No tell trappers. Indian go away and no tell. White boy have all the money—twenty-five dollar." Once more he held up his hands to indicate the amount.

Sparrer gulped. The plan was simplicity itself. Twenty-five dollars meant a great deal to him, and no one would ever know. A vision of the toil-worn face of his mother when he should place twenty-five dollars in her hands flashed before him. And wasn't the fox his? Hadn't it been free and wild, belonging to nobody, and hadn't he waited and watched and with steady hands and a true eye made a clean kill? He knew nothing of the ethics of a trapper's camp. What the Indian had said might be true, and he would get no share in the prize he had won. It wasn't fair. It was an aspect of the matter of which he had not thought. Indeed, in the excitement of the hunt he had had no opportunity to think of anything but getting the shot. What he should do with the fox if he got it had not entered his head. And after the kill the appearance of the Indian had put everything else out of his head.

In swift review there passed through his mind all that he had heard about the silver fox of Smugglers' Hollow. He thought of the traps which Alec had set especially for the wily king and how he and Pat had openly planned for his capture. This was their trapping territory by right of preëmption. He, Sparrer, was their guest, and but for Pat he would never have had this wonderful outing. It was even a borrowed rifle with which he had made the fatal shot. It was luck, mere luck, the luck of a novice, that had given him the opportunity. But was that any reason why he should not profit by it? If he had not killed it the animal would still be running at large and Pat and Alec might never have gotten it. It was his, his, *his* and no one else had any claim on it. Why should he not do as he pleased with it?

Meanwhile the Indian had been watching with an intense fixed stare that noted every change of expression in the boy's face. A less close observer than he would have realized that the boy was tempted. He was cunning enough to know that now was the time to play his trump card and catch the lad before he had fully regained possession of himself and spurned the temptation. With a single swift step forward he exclaimed, "Fifty dollar!"

There was a note of finality in his voice which Sparrer recognized. It was his last bid. He would go no higher. There would be no more bartering. If twenty-five dollars had seemed big the doubling of the amount meant little less than a

fortune in the boy's eyes.

"Youse hasn't got fifty dollars," he said weakly. "Youse is bluffin'."

In truth he had every reason for thinking so from the Indian's appearance. One does not expect to find so large a sum on a man presenting so rough an appearance as this fellow, particularly in the woods. Imagine Sparrer's surprise therefore when the Indian felt inside his shirt and brought out a worn buckskin bag which apparently had been suspended by a thong around his neck and from it drew forth a wad of greasy bills. Squatting on his heels he unfolded these and began to count them out before him on the snow. They were in small denominations and as he slowly spread them out, counting aloud as he did so, the effect was most impressive. He meant that it should be. He counted on the influence that the sight of so much currency would have.

It was a cunning move. Had he shown the money in a pile, or had the bills been in large denominations the effect would not have been nearly so impressive. As it was the snow around him was literally carpeted with bills. In spite of himself Sparrer gave vent to a little gasp. The Indian heard. Stuffing the two bills which remained after he had counted out fifty back in the little bag he rose to his feet and with a dramatic sweep of one hand above the green carpet exclaimed:

"All white boy's for fox! White boy count—fifty dollar! White boy buy much things. Have good time." He smiled meaningly. "Indian take fox and leave much money. White boy hide um—so." He thrust a hand into his shirt. "Nobody know. Indian go way—far." He swept a hand toward the mountains. Then he pointed at the bills at his feet. "Much money. Very much money. White boy count."

Sparrer looked down in a fascinated stare and unconsciously he did count. He had but to say the word and all those bills would be his, his to hide away in his bosom and gloat over in secret until he should reach home. And then? A vision of the things they would buy passed before him—things his boyish heart had coveted; things which his mother and brothers and sisters needed; things which would for a time make life brighter and better. And it would not be stealing. The fox was his. He had shot it and he had a right to do what he pleased with it "It would not be stealing," he repeated to himself almost fiercely.

But would it be honorable? Could he go back to his companions and tell them freely and openly what he had done? No. He must keep his deed a secret, locked in his heart, to be boasted of only among his companions of the street gang. Once he would have had no qualms whatever. His conscience would not have

been troubled in the least. But that was when he was Sparrer Muldoon, street gamin and champion scrapper of the gang; with no higher ethics than the right of might. Now he was Edward Muldoon Boy Scout, sworn "to keep physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight;" to obey the Scout law of which the first commandment is to be trustworthy and the second to be loyal.

Would he be either mentally awake or morally strong if he yielded to this temptation? Could he regard himself in the future as trustworthy or as loyal to his friends? Two selves were battling in one boy.

"It ain't nothin' wrong," insisted Sparrer Muldoon.

"A Scout's honor is to be trusted," whispered Edward Muldoon.

"You bet it is!" Unconsciously the boy spoke aloud. The battle was won. His face cleared. In that moment he understood many things. He knew now exactly what he would do. He would take the fox to the cabin and turn it over to Pat and Alec. He knew that that was what he had intended to do all along before the Indian had appeared. He knew, too, who this low-browed, ugly-faced redskin was. He was one of the thieves who had been stealing fur and who had butchered the deer the day before. It came over him all in a flash that it was he who had set those traps at the beaver houses, that he himself had been seen there and followed. Doubtless the Indian had been in hiding close by all the time and the killing of the fox had brought him forth because he could not let so rich a prize slip through his fingers. Yes, everything was clear to Sparrer now. In his first surprise, his own problem following hard on the heels of it, he had no chance to think or even to wonder how the man had happened to appear there at that moment. Now he understood and his face flushed with anger.

The money was no longer a temptation. He scowled down at it and he wondered if it had been come by honestly. He could not know that the man was an outlaw and had been forced to leave a lumber camp between suns with no chance to spend his accumulated wages. So he regarded the money with growing suspicion and his anger grew at the thought of how near he had come to selling his honor, perhaps for tainted money at that.

"Here, youse, take yer money an' git!" he growled. He motioned with the barrel of his rifle by way of emphasis. "An' youse better take up dem traps," he added significantly.

The Indian's expression changed as he squatted once more and picked up the

bills. He was too shrewd a sign reader not to know when it was useless to follow a trail further. The fox couldn't be bought, therefore it must be obtained in some other way, by craft or violence. If he could get near enough to the boy to disarm him the rest would be easy. If not—well, there was another way. He would avoid it if possible, for the boy's friends were too near. They would be on his trail inside of twenty-four hours. It would mean a long, hurried flight across the border with two of the best woodsmen in the whole section behind him, and every warden and lumber camp on both sides of the line watching for him. It would mean a battle if ever they came up with him, a battle to the death. But a thousand, perhaps two thousand dollars! One would dare much for such a sum. He had friends across the border. Through them the skin could be disposed of while he remained in hiding. Once across the line with the booty he had no fear, that is if he could obtain it without committing the blood crime. He would strike north and then market the pelt in the spring. It would be difficult to prove that it was not of his own killing. There were no witnesses. It would be only the word of this boy against him even should he be traced. Given a reasonable start he had little fear of this.

He looked over at the black fox and the lust of greed glittered in his eyes. The animal was of unusual size, and the fur was extra prime. Assuredly it would bring a great sum. After all, it was but a boy with whom he had to deal and by the looks of him a novice in the woods. He stuffed the money bag back in his shirt and rose, his axe in hand. Then without warning he leaped forward, axe upraised, his face contorted with rage like that of a demon.

"Stop!"

There was something menacing and sinister in the sound of the word, but more menacing and sinister was the muzzle of the little rifle into which he was staring. It brought him up short in the middle of a stride. He had seen the boy shoot and now the rifle was held as steadily as when it had been pointed at the fox. There was something in the sound of the boy's voice that warned him that he would not hesitate to shoot again, and at that distance he could not miss. The Indian froze into a statue.

"Turn around and git!" commanded Sparrer. He was not afraid. He knew that the rifle gave him the whip hand. A boy of his age from higher walks in life might have been intimidated. Not so Sparrer. Young in years, he was old in experience. He had seen too many drunken brawls, too many "bad men" in his street life, and knew too much of human nature to feel fear with that gun at his shoulder. Instead

a white hot consuming rage welled up within him as when he had rushed to the defense of some weakling against the attack of a cowardly bully. He saw red.

"Youse git!" he repeated and there was a threat in the very way in which he said it.

For a brief second the Indian hesitated. Then with an ugly snarl like that of a trapped beast he slowly turned. Baffled rage distorted his face until it was more like that of some savage animal than of a human being. It was humiliating to be balked by a slip of a boy. It was worse to have a fortune almost within his reach and be forced to leave it. There was murder, black murder, in his heart as he slowly shuffled forward a few steps.

Suddenly he turned like a flash and with a peculiar swing threw the axe. Sparrer knew nothing of the art of axe throwing at which many woodsmen are expert and are deadly in their quickness and precision. He was wholly unprepared for the move and it caught him off guard. He caught a glimpse of glinting steel and instinctively ducked as he had learned to do in fighting. At the same time he threw up his rifle. The axe struck the barrel of the latter just enough to be slightly deflected from its course and the end of the handle instead of the keen blade struck the boy a crashing blow on the side of the head. Without a sound he dropped in his tracks.

A slow grin overspread the face of his assailant as he strode over and looked down at the white still face of his victim. After all it was better so. He had not killed him and there was less to fear from the long arm of the law. Contemptuously he touched the still form with the toe of a shoe. Then gloatingly he picked up the fox, hesitated and picked up the rabbit. Without another glance at the huddled form on the snow he turned and vanished among the trees.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONFERENCE

Sparrer's eyelids fluttered, then slowly lifted. Dully and uncomprehendingly he stared up at a fretwork of bare brown branches against a background of blue. Where was he? What had happened? Then a throb of pain in his head cleared his senses and memory returned all too vividly. His brows contracted in a black scowl, and slowly and painfully he rolled over and got to his feet, staring about for his assailant. But of the outlaw there was no sign save the broken crust where the axe had plunged through. Nor was there any trace of the black fox save a little spot of crimson and two or three black hairs where the animal had lain.

How long he had been unconscious he had no means of knowing, but it could not have been long, or he would have been frost-bitten. As it was he was merely chilled and numb from the cold. His head ached badly, and passing a mittened hand over it he found a big lump where the axe had hit him. Moreover, he felt sick to his stomach, dizzy and weak. But for his physical ailments he had no thought. Wrath, black, boiling rage, surged over him. He had been robbed! He had been treacherously outwitted! For the moment it was the latter fact rather than the former that was the cause of his hot resentment. He, Sparrer Muldoon, who had lived by his wits ever since he could remember, had been caught napping!

"An' me wid de drop on him!" he exclaimed bitterly. "He put me down fer de count, but it was a foul, an' Oi wasn't lookin' fer no foul. Serves me right." He smiled bitterly. "Oi ought t'known better than t' give him an openin'. Serves me right fer listenin' t' his spiel. If ever Oi get de drop on him again he'll wish he'd never set eyes on Sparrer Muldoon."

This was idle boasting, and Sparrer knew it. The chances that he would ever again set eyes on the wily redskin were exceedingly slim. Still, it was possible that Pat and Alec might be able to pick up his trail, and the sooner they were put wise to the affair the better. He would get back to camp as soon as possible. He picked up his rifle, and even as he did so a new thought flashed across his mind. Why tell of his experience at all? Why mention the black fox? He could explain the bump on his head by saying that he had slipped and fallen, striking his head

against a log. Pat and Alec need never know that he had lost the rare pelt for them for all time, nor that he had been such a tenderfoot as to be outwitted by an Indian on whom he already had the drop. Why say a word about it? To tell would be likely to win for himself nothing but contempt—contempt for his weakness in parleying with the outlaw, and for his stupidity in being outwitted.

But there was a hope, a faint one, to be sure, but still a hope, that by some special favor of Providence Pat and Alec might be able to trace his assailant and recover the skin. Not to tell would be to surrender without a fight, and this was directly contrary to the boy's nature. A double motive urged him to leave no stone unturned that might lead to the capture of the Indian—the desire to recover the rich prize and the spirit of revenge. He could tell of the robbery without in any way committing himself in the matter of the temptation which had led to the parley with the outlaw. This is what he would do. He didn't want his companions to think worse of him than was absolutely necessary.

So with his mind made up to this course he headed for camp. "Click-clack, coward! Click-clack, coward!" His very shoes mocked him. He tried to shut out the sound, but he could not. Had Edward Muldoon, Boy Scout, won over Sparrer Muldoon, street gamin, only to lose in the end? Where the trail led close to the end of the big beaver dam he stopped abruptly and a last brief battle was fought between Scout and gamin. When it was over he pushed on with an eagerness he had not felt before, for the Scout had triumphed, and this time he knew that the victory was final. He would tell the *whole* story from beginning to end and spare himself nothing. "Youse ain't no quitter!" he muttered to himself fiercely. "Youse is goin' ter tell de truth, de whole truth and nothing but de truth."

His progress was slow and his snow-shoes seemed strangely heavy. The fierce conflict within, not less than the effects of the blow he had suffered, had left him physically weak. He felt light-headed. His nervous system had received a shock from which he was now feeling the effects. He was possessed of a desire to sit down and rest every few minutes. But he set his jaws grimly and plodded on. Upton was outside the cabin splitting wood as he approached. He looked up as the click-clack of snow-shoes caught his attention and seeing that it was Sparrer called cheerily, "What luck?"

A shadow of his old-time impudent grin flashed across Sparrer's face as he replied, "What luck wud ye be expecting with a tenderfoot loike me?"

"The greatest luck in the world. It's always that way in stories," retorted Upton.

Then he noticed the pale face of the younger lad, and dropping his axe he sprang forward, "Say, boy, what's happened?" he demanded anxiously. "You're white as a sheet. Are you hurt or have you had a fright? Spit it out!"

"A little of both, Oi guess," confessed Sparrer, sitting down wearily on a handy log. "Are de others back yet?"

"Not yet, but they're coming now," replied Upton as a faint yell reached them. "That's Hal, and by the sound of his voice they've had luck of some kind. But what happened to you?"

"It's a long story, and Oi'll tell it when de others get here," replied Sparrer. "Oi think Oi'll go in and get a d-d-rink of somethin' h-hot." His teeth chattered. It was the result of nervous reaction quite as much as cold. Upton, with real concern in his face, sprang forward and put an arm around the shaking youngster and led him into the cabin, then hastened to make him a cup of hot soup. With this in his stomach Sparrer rapidly recovered and by the time Pat, Alec and Hal arrived, the latter whooping joyously, he was quite himself. They brought with them three marten and a fisher.

When these had been duly admired Upton demanded that Sparrer tell his story, and this he did, sparing himself nothing. At the first mention of the black fox there was an eager leaning forward on the part of all his listeners, and when he told of the successful shot Hal whooped with joy.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"Oi don't know," replied Sparrer, and could not restrain a rather pathetic grin at the blank look of astonishment that swept over the four eager faces. Then he hurried on, blurting out a full confession of his temptation and winding up with the incident of the axe throwing and his final recovery of consciousness.

"De skunk didn't even leave me de rabbit," he concluded.

The faces of Pat and Alec had changed rapidly from interest and astonishment to seriousness, anger and determination. Both knew that murder and nothing less had been back of the throwing of that axe, and that it was merely the accident of good fortune that Sparrer was with them now instead of lying a corpse out there in the beaver swamp. Pat reached forward and pulled Sparrer's cap from his head, disclosing an ugly lump where the blow had fallen. Till that moment no one had noticed that the boy had kept his cap on.

"You may thank the good God that it was the handle and not the blade that struck you, son. 'Twas He alone that saved you this time," exclaimed the big fellow, a note of reverence in his voice. "'Tis an ugly bump," he added, passing his fingers lightly over the swelling. "'Tis a wonder it didn't break your skull, as it was. The cap saved you, I guess. Why didn't you tell us you had that nasty lump, you young spalpeen? It ought to have been treated long ago."

"It ain't nothing," replied Sparrer sheepishly, for he hated to have a fuss made over him.

Upton was already heating water and preparing a bandage. As soon as the water was hot he added a little tincture of arnica, and despite Sparrer's protests a hot bandage was soon applied, and he was forced to admit that it brought almost immediate relief. This attention having been given the victim Pat called a conference.

"It's plain enough," said he, "that this is the work of one of the black-hearted crooks who have been stealing our furs, for 'tis my belief that there is probably more than one and likely not over two." Alec nodded concurrence with this belief. "That they'll stop at nothing Sparrer's experience proves. I've known murder to be committed for less than the price of a prime black fox pelt. Now that they've got it 'tis like that they will pull camp at once rather than take the chance of being discovered. On the other hand they may think that their camp is so well hidden that they can just lie low. If, as I suspect, they have been run out of one of the Canadian lumber camps, this may be what they will do. They know that Sparrer here is a tenderfoot and that there is only his word against theirs. Besides, they can hide the pelt and deny all knowledge of it. Sparrer hasn't a shred of proof but the lump on his head, and it would take more than that to convince a court of law in these parts that he had killed a genuine black fox.

"It's my opinion that their camp is a whole lot nearer than Alec has supposed. There are plenty of draws back in these hills where a camp could be hidden and discovered only by chance, unless some one was making special search for it. The fact that that bloody-minded Injun was hanging around the beaver pond so late in the day is evidence enough for me that his camp isn't many miles away. I'll bet it's within five miles of us this blessed minute. They probably located our trap lines, then built their camp in a place we were not likely to visit and then by working back up through the hills kept their trail hidden, and crossed on the ice to work our long lines, as Alec suspects. They left our short lines alone, partly because they could not get at them without leaving a trail in the soft snow and

partly so as not to arouse suspicion.

"With the crust they could go where they pleased, and the Injun took the chance to do a little poaching on the beaver pond, knowing that we would leave it alone. He probably saw Sparrer when he uncovered that trap and followed him through the woods either with the idea of finding out if the youngster suspected anything and then frightening him into holding his tongue or else just to keep track of his movements. He saw the killing of the fox and decided that the fortune in that pelt was worth any risk.

"What he told Sparrer about the skin belonging to Alec and me isn't true. This is a free country, and the free creatures belong to whoever can get them. If the critter had been in one of our traps it would have been a different matter. Then it would have been our property. But the critter belonged to nobody until it was killed, and when Sparrer knocked it over every hair on that black hide belonged to him and to no one else. The cunning redskin made up that yarn to tempt Sparrer, and there wasn't a particle of truth in it. Now the question is, what are we going to do to get back Sparrer's property? If it was just an ordinary red fox or even a marten the case would be different, though even then I'd be for getting it back, and running those thieving poachers out of the country. As it is, we owe it to Sparrer to try to get that skin. What's your idea, Alec?"

Alec leaned forward and poked the fire. "Ye ken that the moon's full the night," said he slowly. "I am thinking that you and me might take a bit of a look around. If we could find the camp it would be time enough to decide what to do next. I dinna think that with that prize they will be staying in these pairts long, and what is done has got to be done quickly. I have no suspicioned that the camp was handy till now. I am no saying that I think so now," he hastened to add with characteristic Scotch caution, "but I will admit that it is possible. Ye ken there is no nook or hollow of these hills that I dinna ken every foot of. I hid out here once myself. We can leave the laddies to get a wee bit of sleep while we have a look in the most likely places."

"No, you don't!" protested Hal. "If there's any game like that afoot you can count us in, can't they, fellows?"

Upton and Sparrer voiced eager assent, but Pat shook his head. "Nothing doing," he declared. "Alec and I are responsible for the safety of you fellows and you'll stay right here and keep this little old cabin from running away. Besides," he added, noting the disappointment in the three faces, "this is no play-scouting; it

is men's work and only for those who know the country. Two are all that are needed and more would double the chances of giving alarm. If Alec and I can locate the camp we may need your help to-morrow in rounding up the thieves. So you will be good little boys and stay right here until you're needed. I was thinking of the moon before Alec spoke. When it is up 'twill be almost as light as day. 'Twill do no harm for us to have a look around. Alec says true that he knows every foot of these hills and hollows. I know them pretty well myself, and if those birds of ill omen, bad cess to the likes of them, do not fly too soon we'll come pretty close to locating 'em inside the next twenty-four hours. There's no use in starting before the moon is well up. Meanwhile we'll have supper. I have no mind to travel on an empty stomach, and I've the appetite of a lumber-horse this very minute. Any of that bear-steak left, Alec?"

Alec promptly produced the desired meat and it was soon sizzling over the fire. While they ate they discussed what should be done in case the camp of the outlaws was discovered.

"Do you suppose they will fight?" asked Hal eagerly.

"Look at Sparrer there and ask sensible questions," returned Pat sarcastically. "Is a man who would attempt cold-blooded murder likely to come at a whistle like a good doggie? We've got to take them by surprise, or somebody is likely to get hurt. That is why I want you boys to keep out of it. This isn't your business; it's Alec's and mine."

"How about me? Youse said a while ago that that skin is mine," piped up Sparrer.

"So it is, me bantam, but your own skin is worth more to you than all the silver foxes that ever lived, and if you cannot keep it whole yourself it's up to us to keep it whole for you," retorted Pat. "It isn't just the matter of that fox skin," he continued. "I'm guessing that Alec and I have a good sized stake in the skins cached in that camp right now. We had a little unpleasantness with those sneaking robbers of honest men to settle as soon as you left and this has simply forced it a little sooner. It's our job, and you fellows are to stay out. That's final."

They knew by the tone of his voice that no amount of begging or argument would avail them in the least. They knew, too, that Pat was right in his stand. They were his guests and as such entailed upon him a certain responsibility for their safety and welfare.

"But, Pat, can't we be in at the finish?" pleaded Hal. "Gee! Think of a real scrap going on under our very noses and we not seeing it!"

"Depends on what the finish is," replied Pat. "I'll promise you this much, that if there is anything to see, or if you can help without the risk of stopping a bullet or a knife, you shall have a chance. At present it looks like a dangerous game, but we'll know more when we've found that camp. The greatest help you can give us now is to stay right here. We'll be back before daylight and by that time we will know enough, I hope, to plan some action. Alec, it'll be a couple of hours yet before we can start. Suppose we turn in for a bit of rest. It's little enough we're likely to get for the next twenty-four hours. We'll leave the lads to put the camp in order."

This the boys were only too glad to do while the two trappers stretched out in their bunks and rested. Two hours later Pat arose and peeped out. The moon flooded the hollow with light and he grunted his satisfaction. A few minutes later he and Alec slipped out, and almost at once were lost in the heavy shadows of the evergreens. Each carried his rifle, and the two faces were set and grim. There was something sinister in this silent departure, and as they vanished into the vast brooding wilderness the three boys instinctively drew nearer together. Hal shrugged his shoulders and laughed, but somehow his laugh sounded oddly forced.

"Somebody kick me and tell me if I'm awake," said he, throwing another log on the fire. "You read about such things and think it's a bully story, but somehow the story seems more real than the reality. Of course nothing's going to happen to Pat and Alec, yet just the same they are out with rifles hunting sure enough bad men, and if there's any shooting somebody's likely to be hurt. If it wasn't for Sparrer's bandaged head there I'd think I was dreaming. How's the old nut feel anyway, Sparrer?"

"Better, but sore enough t' let me know dis ain't no dream," returned the younger lad. "Say!" he exploded abruptly. "What will de fellers say when we get back an' tell 'em we been fightin' outlaws an' that Oi gets a knockout from a sure-enough Injun? Bet dey'll wish dey was in my shoes."

Upton laughed. He was still boy enough to appreciate Sparrer's feelings. "As long as you had to get it I'm glad it was a real redskin who put it across," said he. "As for fighting, it doesn't look to me as if we were going to see any of it. Pat isn't going to take any chances on one of us getting hurt. It makes me sick every

time I think of the close call Sparrer had. If Pat and Alec find the camp of those brutes they won't do anything rash. They'll try to trap 'em some way. They're right about us, but just the same I wish we could be in it somehow. I'd like to see the finish."

"Perhaps we shall yet," Hal spoke hopefully. "Shall we turn in?"

"What's the use?" returned Upton. "I couldn't sleep a wink until Pat and Alec get back. We ought to keep the fire going and have something hot ready for them when they get in."

"Suits me," declared Hal. "I couldn't sleep either."

Sparrer was of the same opinion, so they sat before the fire and speculated on what was happening out there in the forest. Sparrer was plied with questions about his adventure and told the story over so graphically that the thrill of it sent little shivers down the backs of his listeners. At times they sat in silence wondering if they might hear distant rifle shots. And so the night wore on, the most exciting night in their experience, and yet a night in which so far as they were concerned nothing happened.



CHAPTER XVII

THE CAMP OF THE POACHERS

Upton had just glanced at his watch and noted that the hour was 3 A. M. Hal and Sparrer were both asleep, the long vigil having proved too much for them despite their assertions early in the evening that they couldn't sleep a wink. A slight sound outside the door caught Walter's attention. A second later the door swung open and Pat and Alec entered. It was clear that they had expected to find all the boys asleep, and were endeavoring to make as little noise as possible.

Walter flashed a keen look at the two faces and read there the success of the trip. "Hey, you sleepy-heads, they've found the camp!" he shouted, thumping Hal on the back.

"Wha-wha-what?" stammered Hal, rubbing his eyes and staring about him wildly, while Sparrer blinked stupidly. Then fully recovering his senses Hal sprang to his feet. "Did you really find the camp?" he asked eagerly.

Pat nodded. "Hurrah!" cried the impetuous boy. "Say, who hit me? I was right in the middle of a dream. I had three outlaws lined up against a cabin wall and covered with a rifle when I felt that thump, and for a minute I thought it was another one of 'em who had stolen up behind me and got me foul, I'm certainly glad it was only a dream."

Everybody laughed. Upton meanwhile had hung a kettle of soup over the fire and was setting a couple of places at the table for the two trappers, knowing that they must be hungry after their long tramp. "Now tell us about it," he commanded when they had had a chance to dispose of the soup and a big slab of corn bread.

"There isn't much to tell," began Pat. "We found their camp and watched it for a while and then came back."

"So simple," murmured Hal. "'We found their camp.' I suppose you shut your eyes and let a good fairy take you by the hands and lead you straight to it! It's a wonder you haven't been over to make a friendly call before, seeing it is so handy and easily found."

There was no mistaking the sarcasm in Hal's voice, and Pat laughed aloud. "'Twas no fairy led us to ut, me bye, but just common woods sense and me partner's knowledge av the counthry." Then dropping his brogue he continued: "You know enough about camping to know that one of the first and most important things to look out for in locating a camp is a good water supply. Alec knows every good spring for twenty miles around. Having made up our minds that the camp was within five miles Alec just ran over in his mind the likely springs within that distance and the lay of the land. The fact that those bloody-minded thieves have been working our long trap lines was a pretty good indication that their camp lay somewhere handy to these. That narrowed it down to two springs, the first of which is at the head of a little draw which makes in to the north about four miles west of here just before our line swings north. The second is in a draw which makes in to the south of a pond about a mile farther on and somewhat off our trap line. We made straight for the first one and found nothing there. Then we cut across to the second and as soon as we were in the draw we knew that we were on the right track."

"How?" interrupted Hal eagerly.

"The smell of wood-smoke," replied Pat. "We worked around to the spring, mighty careful to keep under cover and make no noise, expecting to find the camp right there, but there wasn't a thing to be seen. Then we followed our noses up wind over a little rise and there in the middle of a clump of spruce was the cabin, pretty near buried in snow. We watched it for a while and then as there was nothing doing we came back, and that's the whole of the story."

"What's the next move?" Upton asked the question with an eagerness he could not conceal.

"A little daylight surprise party," replied Pat with a grin.

"Are we in on it?" demanded the three boys in chorus.

"That depends," replied Pat. "Alec and I have been talking it over, and if you'll agree to obey orders and keep under cover maybe we'll take you along. Witnesses may come in handy. But you've got to agree to do just as you're told."

"We will!" chorused the three joyously.

"Our plan is to surround the cabin before daylight. The fact that those fellows haven't pulled out already indicates that they are planning to lie low. But they'll

be up and out early to spy on us. We've got to be in hiding before they are up, and that means that we must start in half an hour. You fellows are to remain in hiding and leave Alec and me to handle those chaps, and you're not to show yourselves unless we signal you to."

"How many of them are there?" asked Upton.

"Two, we think," replied Pat. "The cabin isn't big enough for more. Now get busy and stow away a good meal, because there is no knowing when you'll get another."

A hasty meal of bacon and cold corn bread, with hot chocolate, was speedily disposed of, and they were ready to start. At Pat's suggestion the boys had put on extra clothing to protect them should they be compelled to remain inactive for some time. With the exception of Sparrer each carried a rifle. In single file, Alec in the lead and Pat in the rear, they threaded their way through the forest. Never will the three city boys forget the uncanny strangeness of that tramp through the moonlit wilderness. The silence of the great frozen waste, oppressive even in the light of day, was doubly so now. Their errand and the thought of what might happen at the end of their journey combined to stimulate already overexcited imaginations to a point where nothing seemed real. They felt as if moving in a dream. It was as if by enchantment they had been translated from their commonplace selves into the heroes of one of their favorite books of adventure. They had the feeling that at any moment they might return to normal conditions and find it all a figment of the imagination.

Down the Hollow past the trail by which they had entered it Alec led the way, and out at the western end. Then for a couple of miles he bore slightly north along the old trapper's trail that Upton remembered the sheriff had taken in his search for Alec the previous fall. From this point they bore south, and presently came to the edge of a small pond glistening white and spotless in the moonlight. At that hour it was seemingly safe to cross, but Alec was taking no chances and kept to the cover around the edge.

At the entrance to the draw of which Pat had told them they paused for a whispered conference. The boys were cautioned to watch every step and to guard against the slightest sound. Pat was to place them in hiding to the rear of the camp where they would be out of all possible danger should there be any shooting and he once more impressed upon them the fact that they were Scouts under orders and under no circumstances were they to move unless signaled.

Alec would hide near the spring, while Pat would secrete himself where he could cover the cabin-door.

Making a detour Pat led the boys to a point slightly up the hill and back of the clump of hemlocks in which he said the cabin was hidden. Upton and Sparrer he placed together in a thicket directly to the rear of the camp, and Hal he stationed a hundred yards to the right. Then once more charging them to make no sound he left them and vanished as completely as if the ground had opened and swallowed him.

The moon still rode high, but already the gray of approaching dawn appeared in the east and dulled its silver radiance. They had arrived none too soon. Upton strained his eyes to make out the cabin, but in the uncertain shadows it was impossible. He found himself actually wondering if Pat and Alec were not mistaken. He found it hard to believe that there could be any other human beings within miles of them. It was bitter cold, and despite the extra clothing the boys felt the chill of it. It seemed to creep into the very marrow of their bones and the excitement which had exhilarated them at the start subsided in direct ratio to their increasing discomfort.

The gray in the east crept higher and the moon waxed pale. The shadows grew less dense and objects more distinct. Little by little something took shape down there among the firs. At first it was little more than a mound of white, but presently Upton made out that what he had at first taken to be a little blacker shadow than the rest was nothing less than the smoke-blackened top of a short chimney into which he could look from his position on the hill above. This gave him a clue to the cabin's situation. Evidently it backed up against the hill and at the rear was almost drifted over with snow. In fact the snow was banked to the eaves on both sides, the front only having been cleared. This was screened from view by a thicket of young firs in such a way that one might pass in front within thirty yards and not see the cabin unless looking especially for it. It reminded Walter of nothing so much as the cunningly hidden home of a fox.

The gray in the east had given way to a touch of rose color when Sparrer sniffed softly and silently pointed to the chimney. A thin column of smoke was beginning to rise. It was evident that the inmates were astir. The situation was rapidly approaching a climax. Muffled sounds from within the cabin reached the boys. With hearts thumping painfully the watchers waited. Presently there was the creak of a door. From their position Upton and Sparrer could not see what Hal from his location farther to the right had a clear view of, a dark, roughly clad

man who stooped to pass out of the low doorway. But a moment later they saw him as he entered the thicket, a pail in one hand. He was going to the spring for water.

He passed from sight over the little rise that separated the slight hollow where the cabin was located from the deeper hollow where the spring was. As he reached the bottom he came into view again. They saw him stop abruptly in his tracks as if frozen, then drop his pail and half turn as if to run, only to stop again and throw his arms above his head. Then Alec appeared, his rifle covering the man before him. There was evidently a parley of some kind, but the distance was too great for the sound of their voices to carry. Undoubtedly Alec had warned the other not to raise his voice. With bated breath the boys watched the strange pantomime below. It was plain that Alec was giving orders to which the other objected, for he violently shook his head. The former, who had partly lowered his rifle, raised it again menacingly, whereat his captive appeared to capitulate. Lowering one arm he fumbled at his belt and presently drew forth a wicked looking knife which with evident reluctance he tossed at Alec's feet. The latter then permitted his victim to lower the other arm and evidently issued an order, for the man turned and with Alec behind him disappeared in the woods.

"He's taking him around to where Pat is," whispered Upton. "That wasn't the fellow that got you, was it?"

Sparrer shook his head. His eyes were blazing with excitement. "Dat wasn't no Injun," he whispered. "Dat feller was easy. Wonder if de other gink will be as easy."

Once more they settled down to patient waiting. The smell of frying bacon mingled with that of wood-smoke and tantalized their nostrils. It seemed an age before the door creaked again. Hal only of the three boys could see the dark face that peered out in the direction of the spring. It was the darker for an ugly scowl which contracted the low brows. For a long minute the man stared in the direction of the spring and Hal could see his lips moving as if he muttered to himself. Then he vanished inside and the door closed. It was not long, however, before it opened again and once more the scowling face appeared, staring toward the spring. It was clear that his companion's continued absence was beginning to puzzle him. Taking a step forward he imitated to perfection the hoarse croak of a raven. So true to life was it that Hal instinctively looked up expecting to see the black bird of ill omen. Then it flashed over him that this was a signal call to the man who had gone for the water.

Twice it was repeated. The third call was answered from beyond the thicket in front of the cabin. Hal guessed rightly that it was Pat endeavoring to entice the Indian, for the man at the cabin was Sparrer's assailant, to come out. He hoped that by replying he would lead the Indian to think that the answer was from the latter's partner and that the redman would assume that something important had been discovered to keep his partner so long and would seek to join him to find out what it was. If once the Indian could be led away from the cabin his capture would be easy.

But Pat's hopes in this respect were doomed to be dashed. The instant the Indian heard the answering croak from in front of the cabin instead of from the direction of the spring suspicion flashed into his face. For a few seconds he stood motionless, his beady eyes boring into the thicket before him. But Pat was well hidden and Alec and his prisoner were out of the line of vision. Pat essayed another croak, but it served only to still further arouse the Indian's suspicions that all was not right.

FOR A FEW SECONDS HE STOOD MOTIONLESS

Taking a step forward he darted his keen gaze in all directions, at the same time listening intently. Then abruptly he turned to reënter the cabin.

"Stop! Hands up, or I'll shoot!" Pat was taking the one chance open to him. If he allowed the man to get back inside the cabin there was no telling when he would show himself again. It was clear that he suspected something. It was better to take the chance that he would obey orders, knowing that some one had the drop on him, rather than be obliged to lay siege to the cabin.

The Indian froze in his tracks, both hands up. "Now walk straight back five steps and stop," commanded Pat.

The Indian took one step back. Then in a flash he dove head first through the partly open door, throwing himself flat. The wily fellow counted on the suddenness of the move and the abrupt change of angle of fire to escape. Pat's rifle cracked, followed instantly by the bang of the door. He had missed his man. He afterward confessed that he had made no real effort to score a hit. The idea of taking a fellow being's life was repugnant to him even though the fellow was a would-be murderer. He had shot because the situation had required it. It was necessary that the fellow should know that he had to deal with those who could shoot and were not afraid to.

Half the battle was won. One man was captured and the other driven to cover. Knowing that the latter would make no attempt to get away for the present and that in any event Hal was posted where he could give the alarm should an attempt be made Pat and Alec turned their attention to their captive. His hands were securely bound behind him with a piece of rope which Pat had had the foresight to bring, and he was then subjected to a grueling examination, but sullenly refused to commit himself on any point. He was a French Canadian of the lower type and Alec recognized him as Big Pierre, a notorious character in the lumber camps of the region.

There was an ugly glint in his black eyes that boded ill for his captors should he once gain the upper hand of them. He refused to admit that he had been robbing the trap lines or that he had even been watching the camp in Smugglers' Hollow.

Only once, and that when Alex charged him with having a hand in the theft of the black fox, did his face betray anything but sullen rage. For just a fleeting instant a mingled look of surprise, interest, cupidity and anger swept across his face. Pat caught it and signed for Alec to cease his questioning. Then he drew Alec to one side out of ear-shot of their captive.

"As sure as you're standing here he doesn't know a thing about that fox," he whispered. "He's been double-crossed by the Injun. Perhaps we can use him to get the redskin out of his hole. It's worth trying, anyway."



CHAPTER XVIII

SMOKING OUT THE INDIAN

Pat and Alec returned to their captive. Alec acted as spokesman, speaking the patois of the Canuck or French Canadian fluently, while the Frenchman spoke English but little, and that very brokenly. Alec repeated his previously made charges of theft from the traps, and also of illegal poaching in the deer yard, to all of which Pierre shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Then speaking slowly, that every word might sink in, Alec charged him with being an accomplice to attempted murder and the theft of the black fox.

This roused the Frenchman to vehement denial. He swore by the name of his patron saint that he knew nothing of the black fox and had had no part in the theft. He declared that he didn't even know that a black fox had been seen in the Hollow, and as for the assault on Sparrer, he was as innocent as a new-born babe. Then Alec told him the story of the killing of the fox and the murderous attack by the Indian, concluding by stating his belief that the latter had hidden the skin and intended to desert his companion at the first opportunity and thus avoid having to share his ill-gotten gains.

Pierre's face grew black with ill suppressed rage, not, as his captors well knew, at the dastardly crime, but at the evident intention of his partner to "double-cross" him. Alec artfully pointed out the serious situation in which he, Pierre, was; if turned over to the officers of the law he would undoubtedly have to face the charge of being accessory to the Indian's crime. He wound up with the suggestion that if Pierre would endeavor to help them recover the skin they would in return be content to allow him to get out of the country. If he refused they would hold him and turn him over to the authorities.

It did not take Pierre long to make up his mind. He saw clearly that he had nothing to gain by refusing, and everything to lose. Moreover the spirit of revenge was strong within him. After a few minutes of hesitation he sullenly agreed to do whatever was required of him.

"Tell him," said Pat, "that he is to go out there and demand of that skulking redskin that he come out and surrender. Tell him to make it clear that the camp is

surrounded and the jig is up; that we're going to get him anyway, dead or alive, and we don't much care which. Tell him that he is not to go nearer than ten yards to the cabin, that we've got him covered, and if he makes any break it will be his last one."

Alec translated this and Pierre nodded. Then he walked forward through the thicket into the open, at Alec's command coming to a halt some thirty feet from the cabin door, where he hailed the Indian in the latter's own tongue. There was a muffled reply and after some delay the cabin door was opened a crack and a rifle barrel thrust through. Then followed a heated parley in the Indian tongue, of which Alec understood enough to gather the substance.

"He's laying it on thick," he chuckled. "Says that the sheriff and deputies are here and have got the camp surrounded, and that unless he comes out they'll shoot him on sight. The Injun has passed him the lie. He's mockin' Pierre for being caught by a couple of make-believe trappers—ye ken that's you and me, Pat—and a lot of infants. He says he hasn't got the black fox and disna know anything about it. Pierre is giving him a beautiful tongue-lashing and calling him everything bad this side of purgatory. 'Tis a shame ye dinna understand a little of the lingo, Pat. Ha! The red says he'll shoot on sight and is warning Pierre to get back before he takes a pot shot at him, and by the saints I believe he means it!"

As a matter of fact at this point they saw the rifle barrel raised. Pierre abruptly turned and without once looking back rejoined the two men in the thicket. He was in a towering rage and spat out French invectives at a rate to defy description. He reported the result of his mission, stating his opinion that the Indian could hold out indefinitely, as there was a plentiful supply of grub in the cabin and enough fire-wood to keep him from freezing for longer than his besiegers would care to stay.

"Will he shoot, do you think, if we rush the cabin?" asked Pat meditatively.

As if in reply the rifle at the cabin door spat fire and a bullet whistled through the thicket so close to Pat that instinctively he ducked. He had carelessly exposed himself to the view of the outlaw. Almost instantly Alec's rifle replied and a splinter flew from the door-frame.

"That will teach him that 'tis no make-believe shooter out here!" he growled.

The door still remained open a crack, evidently to allow the inmate to observe what was going on in front, the only vulnerable point of attack, there being no

windows in the cabin. Pat worked around to a point where he could put a bullet through this crack by way of warning and his shot was followed by the closing of the door.

"Ut remoids me," said he with a comical grimace as he slipped into the brogue, "av the first skunk I iver caught. 'Twas in a box trap, and having got the little baste in the trap I didn't know how in the mischief to get him out."

Meanwhile the three boys had obediently remained at their posts. They had witnessed the parley and the shooting, but just what it all meant and what the results were they could only guess. They were a-shake with excitement, and fairly ached with curiosity. Shortly after the last shot Pat joined them and briefly explained what had happened, and the present situation.

"There's only one thing we can do now," said he, "and that is to smoke the old fox out. This is where you fellows, or one of you, anyway, will have a chance to take a hand. The snow is banked clear to the roof here at the back and it will be no trick at all for one of you to steal down there to the chimney. He's got a fire there now, but the minute he suspects what is up he'll put that out. We've got to give him something he can't put out. I've got on an old sweater that's about worn out. A couple of you can slip around down where we passed those cedars and strip off enough bark and that hanging moss to stuff it out so that you can make a ball of it, and stuff it down the chimney with a pole so that it will stick half-way. On top of that you can drop some rolls of lighted birch bark and have ready the thickest fir boughs you can find to clap on top of the chimney. Walt, you better tend to putting the stuff down the chimney, and mind you work fast. And don't lean over it. When he finds what is up he's likely to try a pot shot up the chimney in the hope of blowing the stuff out. If you have good heavy boughs on top he can't do it. Alec and I will watch the front to get him when he comes out. Have plenty of bark and get it going well before you toss the rolls in. As long as you don't get over the chimney and keep off the roof there will be no danger. The roof is of bark, and he may take a chance shot up through it, so work from the drift on this end."

Hal and Sparrer went after the moss, while Upton made a trip over to a clump of birches and stripped off the bark. Then with his belt axe he cut a number of fir boughs. By the time the others returned he had the bark and boughs ready and had prepared a stick with which to push down the moss-filled sweater. If he should push this too far it would drop down into the fireplace. On the other hand he wanted to get it far enough down so that the flames from the bark would not

immediately fire the fir boughs on top. Breaking through the snow-crust he mixed snow with the moss and also rolled the sweater in snow. The boys had brought more moss than was needed for stuffing the sweater and this Upton also mixed with snow and placed in a loose mass at the foot of the chimney.

When all was ready he had Hal and Sparrer each light a couple of the birch rolls ready to hand to him. As soon as these were going he stuffed the sweater down the chimney, pushing it down with the stick as far as he dared. Then seizing the burning bark rolls he tossed them down on top, crammed the loose moss in, and clapped the fir boughs over all. On top of the latter he tossed some snow. Meanwhile Pat had created a diversion in front of the cabin by shouting threats of what they would do to the redskin if he didn't come out and surrender.

Upton had worked quickly and was through before the outlaw fully sensed what was up. At first he evidently thought that they had merely covered the top of the chimney to smoke him out with his own fire, and a hissing sound which came up to them through the chimney proclaimed the quenching of this with water. Then discovering that the smoke was increasing instead of decreasing he did exactly what Pat had foreseen—attempted to blow the chimney clear by firing his rifle up it. However he only succeeded in setting fire to the sweater from underneath and this, because of its nature, merely smouldered. It was now merely a question of whether the sweater and moss would burn and drop before the smoke in the cabin became too dense for a human being to live in it.

Birch bark, as every Boy Scout knows, is one of the most inflammable of materials. It burns like fat, and also like fat it throws off a thick smoke. This was working up now in little puffs through the fir boughs, but the great bulk of it must be pouring into the cabin, for Upton had taken care in stuffing the sweater down not to wholly block the passage. Now and then a little tongue of flame licked up through the fir boughs and was promptly extinguished with a handful of snow. The snow-damp moss shoved down on top of the bark was adding to the smoke, and from the sounds in the cabin it was clear that the occupant was in difficulties.

Presently Sparrer called attention to smoke pouring up at the front end of the cabin. The door had been set ajar to let out the smoke. Almost immediately there was a shot from the thicket where Pat was hiding, followed by a second shot, and then the bang of the door as it was once more shut. But it did not remain closed long. No human being could long survive in such an atmosphere as now prevailed in the little cabin. This time the door was flung wide open and in the

midst of the cloud of smoke that poured out the Indian staggered forth, gasping and choking.

Pat at once stepped from hiding, covering the outlaw with his rifle. But for this there was no real need. Until he should get some pure air into his lungs he was quite helpless. He threw himself down in the snow and gasped weakly. A sorrier looking spectacle could hardly be imagined. His eyes were inflamed, blood-red. His face and clothing were smeared with soot and ashes. One cheek was bleeding from a wound, made, as it afterward appeared, by a splinter torn off from the door-frame by one of Pat's bullets. Alec wasted no time in securing the prisoner's hands behind him and then deftly searched him for hidden weapons, finding nothing but a knife. That reminded him of the knife Pierre had tossed at his feet when he was captured at the spring, and he sent Sparrer to get it.

As soon as the capture was made the three boys had rushed forward, forgetting that they were under orders to remain at their posts until signaled. Somewhat sternly but with a twinkle in his eyes that belied the severity of his voice Pat now reminded them of this and ordered Upton back to clear the boughs from the top of the chimney. By this time the sweater had burned through and the whole mass had dropped into the fireplace, where it continued to burn, the smoke rolling out of the open door in a dense cloud. With the removal of the boughs from the top of the chimney a draft was reestablished and the smoke sought its natural outlet. It was some time, however, before the interior of the cabin could be examined with any comfort, and Pat took advantage of this to quiz the Indian.

So far as results were obtained he might as well have talked to a wooden post. The redskin stolidly refused to answer questions. When confronted with Sparrer he denied ever having seen him before, much to that young man's disgust. He steadfastly denied all knowledge of the black fox and refused to admit that he ever had been in Smugglers' Hollow.

At last Pat gave up in disgust. The cabin had sufficiently cleared of smoke by this time to permit of a search being made. Leaving Alec to stand guard over the prisoners Pat and the three boys entered and began their investigations. Two rifles stood inside the door, and these Pat emptied of cartridges and stood them outside against the end of the cabin. Then without ceremony he pulled the bedding from the two low bunks and tossed it out on the snow. This was followed by everything else the cabin contained until it was stripped bare. Under the two bunks they found part of the object of their search, many cased furs. There were marten, mink, fisher, a couple of otter, three red fox, two lynx and a

number of muskrat, a pile that altogether represented a tidy sum from a trapper's point of view. But the black fox was not among them.

Pat glowered at the prisoners savagely as he noted that some of the skins had been carelessly handled and therefore would not bring what they would had they been properly treated. Then he resumed his search of the cabin. The only thing further in the way of skins were two tightly rolled deer-hides freshly taken from the animals, one being that of a fawn.

"Do you mind what I told you had happened at the deer yard?" growled Pat as he tossed the skins out of the door.

Convinced at last that the skin of the black fox was not in the camp they regretfully gave up the search there and emerged from the cabin. Alec read the disappointment and chagrin in their faces. So, too, did Big Pierre, who had been awaiting the result of their search with ill-concealed impatience. He had scarcely looked at his partner since the latter had been captured. Now he turned and spoke rapidly in French to Alec.

"He says," explained the latter, "that if the Injun really has got the skin he has hidden it outside somewhere, and that if we'll agree to let him go he'll help us hunt for it. He says that it is probably in a hollow tree somewhere near, but swears that he doesn't know where. He thinks that the Injun meant to wait until he, Pierre, was away from camp and then get it and light out."

"I shouldn't wonder if he's right, at that," exclaimed Hal. "What do you think of the proposition, Pat?"

"He may be right enough about the Injun, but I wouldn't trust him the length of my nose," Pat growled. "Let me talk a bit more to the Injun."

He strode up in front of the captive and shook a brawny fist beneath his nose. "We've got you, and we're going to turn you over to the sheriff unless you come across mighty quick with that skin," he thundered. Then dropping into simple speech that the Indian could not misunderstand he continued, "You kill deer out of season; skins prove it." He pointed to the bundle of fresh hides. "You steal much fur; Big Pierre say so if we let him go." Alec translated and Pierre nodded. The Indian glanced at his late partner and saw the nod. A vindictive look swept across his face and left it as expressionless as before.

"You try to kill white boy. He go to court and swear. Injun go to prison for long

time, years and years. Black fox only thing can save Injun."

The Indian appeared to consider the triple indictment, but no hint of what was passing in his mind appeared in his face. It was as stolid and expressionless as ever. At length he spoke.

"You give Injun gun and all his things and let go if he tell something?" he inquired.

"We'll see about it," Pat growled.

"No promise, Injun no tell," was the prompt response.

It was Pat's turn to consider. Finally he made up his mind. "Listen, Alec," said he. "You tell Pierre that we'll give them their guns, but no cartridges; that we'll let them take their personal belongings and as much grub as they can carry and let them go on condition that they will admit having stolen those skins from our traps, that they will agree to get out of these parts and never come back, and that the Indian shows us where the fox is. Otherwise we'll take them to camp and hold them prisoners while one of us goes out for the sheriff. Tell him to tell the Injun."

Alec turned to Pierre and spoke rapidly. The latter interjected a question now and then and when Alec had finished made a brief reply. "He says," Alec explained, "that he agrees, though he thinks we ought to let them have some cartridges. He admits the stealing of the furs, but still protests that he wasn't in on the fox affair and wants to know if we'll let him go in case the Injun refuses to come across."

"Tell him yes," replied Pat.

This Alec did, and Pierre at once turned to the Indian and addressed him in his own tongue. Alec picked up enough to know that Pierre was putting the case in its strongest light and dwelling on the length of time in prison likely to follow conviction. When he finished the Indian turned to Pat.

"You come," he said simply, and turned toward the woods.



CHAPTER XIX

SPARRER SAVES THE SKIN

Without hesitancy Pat followed the Indian. It was a queer sight, the Indian leading with his hands bound behind him, and Pat with his rifle across the hollow of one arm stalking grimly behind him. They were soon lost to view and the others settled down to wait and speculate. It was almost three-quarters of an hour later that they reappeared, and it was seen at once that Pat carried a black object swinging from one hand. As by one impulse the three boys rushed forward to meet them. In their haste they quite forgot that they were on snowshoes, with the result that Sparrer took an inglorious header, in the course of which he upset Walter and the latter, landing on the tail of one of Hal's shoes, sent him sprawling. Alec roared and even Big Pierre permitted himself to grin.

By the time all three had regained their feet Pat and the Indian had come up.

"Here you are, son! See if you can take better care of him this time," said Pat as he flung the fox at Sparrer's feet.

With a cry of joy Sparrer seized the fox and held him up for the admiring gaze of his comrades. The animal had not been skinned, for which Pat and Alec were sincerely thankful. This important matter and the stretching of the skin they preferred to attend to themselves, especially after seeing the careless way in which some of the furs found in the cabin had been handled.

"Where did you find him?" asked Hal as he ran his fingers through the luxuriant fur.

"In a hollow tree, just as Pierre guessed," replied Pat. "The Injun wouldn't answer any questions, but it is clear enough that he didn't have time to skin the beast last night, and hid it there on his way to camp, intending to get it the first chance he had when Pierre wasn't around. He took good care of it, and it is in perfect condition. That was some shot of yours, son."

Sparrer flushed with pleasure. "'Twa'n't nothin'," he mumbled. "Anybody could have done it."

By this time they had rejoined Alec and Pierre. The latter's eyes glittered as he ran them appraisingly over the beautiful black form of the fox, then darted a malevolent glance in the direction of his partner.

"What will that skin bring, Alec?" asked Pat.

The trapper was studying the fox with the critical stare of the expert. "I dinna ken, Pat," he replied slowly. "'Tis a big beastie, and by all odds the finest fur I ever put my eyes on. It will bring \$1,500 anyway, and maybe \$2,000. I never thought to lay my hands on the likes of it." He turned and looked at Sparrer with an expression almost of awe. "Tell me, laddie, what is the charm ye carry?" said he.

Sparrer laughed. "Oi didn't even have a rabbit's foot," he confessed. "Sure, an' it was just the luck av the Oirish."

"Right, me son! Hurray for the Irish!" cried Pat. Then with an abrupt change he once more became the leader. "Alec, go through the clothes of our misguided friends and see that they have no cartridges in their pockets." This Alec did, despite the protests of Big Pierre. When he was sure that he had secured all of these, thus rendering the guns useless, he set both prisoners free, at Pat's order, and they were commanded to pack up their stuff and get ready to hit the trail. This they did sullenly enough, for they felt that they were under guard, as indeed they were. Their packs were soon ready, for besides their blankets, a few cooking utensils and grub, they had little enough. The latter included part of the ill-gotten deer meat.

When they were about ready to start Big Pierre made one last plea for cartridges, at least for himself. But Pat was obdurate and told them that they were lucky to be allowed to take their guns. When all was ready for the trail their knives were returned to them, and the Frenchman's axe was given him. The Indian's axe Pat retained.

"Ye may loike ut as a bit av a souvenir av the lump on yer head," he murmured in an aside to Sparrer, though his real reason was that he feared what might happen should the two outlaws be equally armed when it came to the quarrel which he felt sure was brewing between them.

They were given a final warning to get wholly out of the country and never show their faces there again on pain of having the charges of poaching and theft brought against them. The big Frenchman was manifestly glad enough to get off

so lightly, but there was an ugly gleam in the black eyes of his companion. Sparrer had laid the fox on the snow and drawn a few steps away from it the better to watch proceedings. As the outlaws started to hit the trail to the north, the redskin in the lead, the latter suddenly sprang toward the fox, at the same instant snatching his knife from his belt.

Sudden as was his move Sparrer was too quick for him. He thrust forward a foot that tripped the Indian and sent him sprawling, Sparrer also being upset. Before the Indian could regain his feet Big Pierre was on him, sending his big fist crashing full into the swarthy face. Then wrenching the knife from his grasp Pierre flung it far into the brush and once more raised his fist. By this time Pat and Alec had joined the mêlée and were dragging the infuriated Frenchman from his victim. All the time Pierre poured out a stream of invective which only the Indian and Alec could understand. The latter explained later that he was charging his companion with trying to put them both in prison after they had been fortunate enough to win their freedom, believing, and rightly, that if the Indian had succeeded in slashing the skin as he had intended they would have been held and turned over to the proper authorities.

"Dat puts me even wid him!" shrilled Sparrer triumphantly as he mounted guard over the fox, and the Indian with a bruised and battered face regained his feet and once more hit the trail, Big Pierre at his heels heaping abuse upon him. As they disappeared in the brush Pat dropped the butt of his rifle to the snow.

"That's the end of that precious pair, so far as we are concerned," said he with a sigh of relief. "Pierre is wise enough to know that this isn't a healthy country for them, and they won't bother us any more. He's got the Indian where the hair is short now, for the latter hasn't even a knife, and I guess it's just as well. Now we'll finish our job here and get back to camp. You fellows rustle up some birch bark and dry wood and heap it up inside the cabin."

"What for?" demanded Hal, looking blank.

"To fumigate after the prisence av a skunk," retorted Pat whimsically.

By means of the belt axes of the boys, supplemented by the Indian's axe in the hands of Alec, a pile of inflammable stuff was soon collected and heaped up inside the cabin. Then Pat touched a match to the pile and soon the whole interior was a roaring furnace. The bark roof quickly burned through and fell with a great hissing of the snow which it carried down with it, sending the sparks and embers skyward in a golden cloud. Satisfied that the destruction of the camp

would be sufficient to render it uninhabitable Pat ordered all hands to make ready for the return to their own camp and they were soon on the trail. The fire was left to burn itself out, as no harm could come from it, owing to the snow-covered surroundings.

Hal still puzzled over the burning of the cabin. "I should think you would have wanted to keep it, Pat," he ventured at length. "It might have come in handy some time."

"'Twas too handy altogether, as it was," retorted Pat. "When you've dug a fox out fill up his den." And with this cryptic reply Hal was forced to be content.

Sparrer, having no rifle, insisted on carrying the fox, an honor granted him with one accord. Very different was their entrance into Smugglers' Hollow from their departure in the small hours of that same day, and there was much jesting and hilarity, for their buoyant spirits had rebounded wonderfully now that the load of anxiety and dread had been lifted. Pat and Alec each carried a bundle of furs sufficient in themselves to raise their spirits to a high plane, for these, added to those they already had, assured the financial success of their partnership.

As they came in sight of their cabin Upton called attention to a thin vapor of smoke rising from the chimney.

"Somebody there, as sure as I'm alive and kicking," exclaimed Pat. "Now I wonder who is paying us a visit this time."

As if in answer the door opened and a big burly form stepped forth.

"Jim! Oh, you Jim!" yelled Upton delightedly.

The big guide and lumber boss, for it was he, turned in their direction, his weather-tanned face lighting with real pleasure. Then as they drew nearer a comical look of wonder and perplexity crossed it. He stepped back to the door and apparently spoke to some one inside, for a second later another strapping big man stepped out.

"Hello!" exclaimed Pat. "That's Bill Marshman, the game warden and deputy sheriff, who was looking for Alec last fall, and scared away the bear the day we left Plympton to take care of camp. It's lucky for those two chaps back there," nodding in the direction from which they had come, "that Bill didn't get here a day sooner. They wouldn't have got off so easy."

By this time the party had approached within easy talking distance of the men at the cabin, who were staring at them in dumb amazement. Pat chuckled.

"Hello, Jim! Hello, Bill!" he called. "Mighty glad to see you. Sorry you didn't get here sooner so as to join our little expedition."

"Say," drawled the warden, "is this a war party returning from a raid?"

"You've guessed it," declared Pat, dropping his load and shaking hands warmly with the two men. "In the absence av the constitooted authority" (he poked his fist into the ribs of the warden by way of emphasizing the point) "we have been upholding the majesty av the law and the rights av free-born American citizens, and yez have just missed putting the bracelets on as ugly a pair av villains as iver stole the furs av honest men."

A light broke over the sheriffs face. "Big Pierre and his Injun partner!" he exclaimed. "I was tipped off that they were somewhere about here, and that's what brought me in. Where are they now?"

"Hitting the trail for parts unknown," replied Pat. "We'll tell you about it later. Meanwhile here are some friends of mine you ought to know and keep an eye on, Bill. They'll bear watching."

He then introduced the three boys. Sparrer still clung to his prize, and as he came forward to shake hands Jim and the warden sensed for the first time what it was he was carrying.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jim. "I believe that's the very fellow I was telling you about, Bill. Saw him the last time I was over here. Did you trap him, Pat, or is he part of the spoils of war?"

"Wrong both ways, Jim," replied Pat. "He was the cause of this little expedition. Come on in and while we are rustling up some grub we'll tell you the yarn."

Jim and the warden listened with growing interest and appreciation while Pat unfolded the story. When it ended the warden gravely arose and walked over to Sparrer. "Shake hands over again, son," said he, to the boy's great confusion. "If I had had to sit still and watch a fortune trot around the way you did I sure would have been so plumb shaky that I'd have missed the shot when the time came. What are you going to do with him now that you've got him?"

Thus did the warden bring to a head a question that had been troubling the boy

ever since the fox was recovered. "He ain't mine," he gulped. "Oi lost him, and wouldn't never seen him again if it hadn't been fer dem." He nodded in the direction of Pat and Alec. "He's theirs, an' dey ain't no use talkin' about it." Sparrer set his lips firmly.

In an instant Pat and Alec were on their feet, protesting that such talk was foolishness, and that the prize belonged to Sparrer and no one else. But the boy shook his head stubbornly.

"Seems to me," drawled the warden when he could make himself heard, "that this here is a case for a disinterested party to decide. Now if you was to ask me I should say that an even split, fifty-fifty, is the fair thing. This here young tenderfoot comes up here with horseshoes or rabbit's-feet or some other luck charms hung all over him and without no help from any one bags a fortune which he finds running around loose. Right up to that point it's hisn and nobody else ain't got no claim on it. Then he loses it and ain't got no more chance of gettin' it back himself than a bull moose has of growing a long tail. Up steps Pat and Alec and friendly like does for him what he can't do for himself, an' gets the prize back. Now it seems to me that half ought to go to this here young feller fer gettin' it in the first place, and half to the other two fer gettin' it back after it was lost. What do you say, Jim?"

"The only fair thing," declared Jim judicially. "There's enough in it to give 'em all a comf'table bit."

A warm discussion followed in which Hal and Upton sided with the warden and Jim and it ended only when Sparrer at last agreed to a three-way split. From this stand no amount of argument could move him. He would take a third share if Pat and Alec would each take a third. Otherwise he wouldn't take any. And so it was finally agreed.

The skinning and stretching of the hide was left to Alec, who was a past master in the art. While he was thus engaged the warden mysteriously beckoned Pat to one side.

"Pat, whose are these?" he asked gravely, drawing a bunch of traps from under a bunk.

Pat reached for them and examined them curiously. "Mine. That is, mine and Alec's; those are our marks," he replied, pointing to certain file marks on them. "Where did you get them?" he added wonderingly.

"Where I got this fellow," replied the warden, reaching under the bunk and drawing out the body of a beaver. "I know you better than to think you had a hand in this, Pat," he continued, "but"—he hesitated and then continued hurriedly, "I thought perhaps your partner has been doin' a little poachin' unbeknown to you. You know he didn't have the best name ever was when he first came into these parts."

A great light broke over Pat's face. "Alec don't know anything more about this than I do," he declared. "There isn't a straighter man in the woods than Alec is now, and you just want to make up your mind to that right now, Bill. That's the work of that thievin' Injun. You mind what I told you about Sparrer's findin' those traps at the beaver-pond? Well, it's as plain as the nose on your face. That Injun lifted some of our traps and set them there. He knew that if you came snoopin' round and found 'em the marks on 'em would point to us. Those skunks didn't have any traps, anyway. Thinkin' about that fox I'd clean forgotten about the beaver. Poor little chap." Pat stroked the body of the beaver.

Alec was now called in, and his look of blank astonishment when he saw the traps and the dead animal was all that was needed to convince the warden that Pat was right in his surmise.

That evening Jim explained his visit by stating that he had all along planned to get over to the Hollow before the boys left. When the warden dropped into his camp early that morning and stated his intention of going on to the Hollow Jim decided that he would accompany him.

"How are you boys going back?" he asked.

"The same way we came in, I suppose," replied Upton.

"What's the matter with putting in a day with me and seeing how a logging camp is run? Then I'll send you out to the railroad on a lumber wagon," suggested the big lumber boss.

The idea appealed to the boys, and it was finally agreed that they would accompany him to his camp the next day. It would give them a new experience for which they were eager, and at the same time eliminate the long hike back to Lower Chain. So, not without sincere regret, it must be admitted, they got their duffle together preparatory to an early start the next morning for the fifteen mile hike to Jim's headquarters. They turned in early, for now that the excitement was over they felt the reaction from the long strain they had been under, and the loss

of sleep the night before. Jim and the warden bunked on the floor and the cabin in Smugglers' Hollow was soon wrapped in silence save for the gentle breathing of the sleepers. So ended a red letter day for at least three of the occupants.



CHAPTER XX

THE BLACK FOX IS SOLD

The day in the lumber camp was all too short for all of the boys, but especially for Sparrer, to whom the cutting of the great trees and the hauling of the logs and piling of them on the rollways on the banks of the river ready for breaking out on the high water of the spring was of absorbing interest. Hal and Upton were familiar with logging operations, having visited logging camps many times during their summers in the woods. The only novelty to them lay in the changed setting of the scenes produced by the snow.

Sparrer was of just the type to win immediate favor with the rough, big-hearted lumber-jacks, and they made him feel at home at once. They vied with one another in showing him things of interest, and his comments, colored with the slang of the city streets, afforded them no end of amusement. So it was with regret on all sides that at break of the following day the boys put their duffle on the big sled used for hauling in supplies and followed it themselves. Pat went with them to see them off at the train.

With the last glimpse of the lumber camp as the sled entered the forest a silence broken only by the tinkle of the bell on one of the horses, the muffled sound of their feet and the slithering slide of the broad runners over the snow, fell on the little group. None felt in the mood for talking save the driver, and he soon subsided, failing to elicit more than monosyllabic responses. Pat was busy with thoughts of what his share from the sale of the black fox skin would mean to him in the furtherance of his ambitions for an education. But on his three guests the unfathomable mystery of the wilderness had once more fallen and wrapped them in its spell. It was the deeper for the knowledge that they were so soon to break it with no certainty of when they might again surrender their spirits to it. They were going back to another world.

Oddly enough it was Sparrer who finally voiced the feeling of which both Upton and Hal were conscious, yet found no words to express.

"It makes a feller feel little," said he, "like he ain't nothin' at all, and yet dat inside av him is somethin' bigger'n this." He swung one hand around in an all

inclusive sweep. "An' it makes him feel clean inside, just like it is outside, an' like he'd got to do big things an' little mean things hadn't got no place. An'—an'"—Sparrer was groping for words to make his meaning clear—"it gives a feller a funny feelin' dat he ain't much and yet dat some way he's bigger'n de mount'ns, an' if dey is a million years old like people say, he's goin' ter last a lot longer. Bein' out here makes me feel just like Oi do when Oi go into de church an' de sun comes trew dem colored winders and de organ plays an' lifts a feller right up 'til he feels like he had wings an' could fly if he only knew how ter use 'em."

Sparrer stopped abruptly and gazed with unseeing eyes off through the forest aisles. Pat looked over at the youngster with the light of understanding in his eyes.

"Right, son," said he. "I know the feeling. This is the great cathedral that God has built for Himself and the littleness we feel is because of His own presence, and the sense of being greater than all this, the mountains, the lakes and the rivers, is, I reckon, because He makes us feel that if He made all these things to last through millions of years He isn't going to let His greatest work, man, perish in the little bit of time that makes a man's lifetime."

The bell on the horse tinkled, the runners slithered over the snow and no further word was spoken until the driver cried, "Yonder's the clearin'. I reckon you fellers hev got just about time enough to look the town over before the train comes."

An hour later farewells were said, and the three boys stood on the rear platform of the Pullman waving to Pat as the train pulled out. For some time after the straight form of the brawny young trapper and the dingy depot of the little village had faded from view the boys stood watching the panorama of frozen wilderness. Then, reluctantly it must be confessed, they turned to the warmth and luxury of the car.

"Say, hasn't it been great?" exclaimed Hal as he dropped into his seat.

"Great doesn't express it at all," declared Upton. "It beats even the hunt for Lost Trail."

As for Sparrer, he said nothing at all, but glued his face to the window that he might drink in as long as he could the beauty of this land of enchantment, where the test of a man was his ability to contend successfully with the forces of nature

and to live within the law when beyond the watchful eyes of the law; this land where a man was gauged by his moral strength no less than by his physical strength. These two weeks in the heart of the wilderness had wrought a change in the lad's whole attitude toward life. His inherent love of battle for battle's sake had been given a new turn. His old ambitions to be a soldier or a prize-fighter were forgotten in a new ambition—to be a woodsman; to pit his strength and courage and skill against the elemental forces of Nature instead of against his fellows. In short, Sparrer had resolved that some day he would shake the dust of the city from his feet forever. He would become a guide and lumber boss like Big Jim. And so he watched the flying landscape and dreamed dreams, and they were wholesome.

It had been agreed that Pat and Alec should attend to the marketing of the fox skin, Sparrer's share to be forwarded to him when the sale was made. The day after they reached New York the operator at Upper Chain received a message over which he puzzled long. It was addressed to Pat Malone, and was as follows:

"Wire best price you can get for skin, but do not sell until you hear from me. Hal."

It was two weeks before Pat's reply was received. Hal was back at school, but Mr. Harrison opened the message and smiled as he read it. It was brief and to the point:

"Two thousand dollars. What's up? Pat."

Mr. Harrison rang for his private secretary. "Take this message and get it off at once," he said crisply. "Pat Malone, Upper Chain: Will give twenty-four hundred dollars for skin. Ship at once by express. My check by next mail."

Then he dictated a letter to Hal telling him of the success of their conspiracy, for the two had hatched the plan together. Hal's description of the events in Smugglers' Hollow had so delighted Mr. Harrison that he had at once exclaimed: "We've got to have that skin, my boy. As a piece of fur it is worth as much to me as it is to any one else. For sentimental reasons it is worth more to me than it is to any one else. I don't believe in mixing sentiment with business, my boy, but there are exceptions to all rules. This is one. Besides, I owe that young Irishman up there in the woods more than money can repay for what he has done in helping to make you what you are to-day. You have him wire the best price he can get, and I'll go it one better. And by the way, you might suggest to that youngster who shot the beast that when he gets his share of the money I'll be

glad to invest it for him where it will earn more than it will in a bank."

And this is how it happened that Pat, Alec and Sparrer with eight hundred dollars apiece experienced for the first time that sense of independence, and power which comes with the possession of wealth, for not even Mr. Harrison with his millions felt richer than they. To Alec it meant the realization of a cherished dream which included the ownership of a certain tiny farm. To Pat it meant the education he had set his heart upon. While to Sparrer it meant a better home, a lifting of some of the load from his mother's shoulders, and a further stimulating of an already awakened ambition to gain for himself a share in the higher and better things of life.

Of course when the story was told to the Blue Tortoise Patrol Sparrer was more popular than ever. He was little short of a hero in the eyes of his companions, the more so because Upton was at pains to point out that the boy's good fortune was really due to his adherence to the Scout principles which he had embraced, and to the moral victory which he had gained through loyalty to the Scout oath in the face of the hardest kind of temptation—the temptation when there is none to see either victory or defeat.

A few weeks later the damage suit growing out of the automobile accident in Bronx Park was tried and the Blue Tortoises were called as witnesses. Once more Sparrer distinguished himself, unhesitatingly picking out from a group of men the one whose face he had seen for just a fleeting moment in the big car racing away from the scene of the accident. So positive was his identification that the defense, which was based on the claim that the car had been taken without the owner's knowledge, crumbled then and there, for the man who Sparrer identified was none other than the owner himself.

As for Upton, he returned to his studies with renewed vim and determination which in due time brought its reward—the scholarship on which he had set his heart.

"On my honor I will do my best—
To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout
law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally
straight."

Well might the men of to-day as well as the men of to-morrow subscribe to this
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