

Don Strong, Patrol Leader eBook

Don Strong, Patrol Leader

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Page 1

THE WOLF PATROL ELECTS

A baseball rose gracefully in the air, carried on a way, and dropped. Three scouts back from a hike halted under the maple tree that bordered the village field, and unslung their haversacks.

"Gee!" cried Fred Ritter. "Did you see Ted Carter make that catch?"

"And did you see Tim Lally get that one?" demanded Wally Woods.

Andy Ford grinned. "Ted's the boy to keep them working. Chester will have a real town team this year."

"You bet." Ritter unscrewed the top of his canteen. "Anyway, Ted and Tim are about the whole team."

"Hold on there," Andy protested. "Where do you leave Don Strong?"

"It's Tim's catching that makes him a pitcher," Ritter answered seriously.

"Who says so?"

"Why, Tim says so."

"O—h!" Andy began to laugh. "And you swallowed that?"

"Sure," said Ritter. "A catcher ought to know just how good a pitcher he is. Tim says—"

But what Tim said was not told just then. A small, wiry boy steered his bicycle up on the sidewalk and pedaled toward the tree.

"Hey, fellows!" he shouted. "Did you hear the latest? Mr. Wall is going to give a cup to the best patrol and Phil Morris is moving to Chicago."

The three scouts surrounded the bicycle.

"Who told you about the cup?" Andy Ford demanded.

"Mr. Wall told me," Bobbie Brown answered. "It's a contest, with points for everything—attendance at meeting, neatness, obeying orders, all that. There's going to be a contest every month, and at the end of three months a big scout game for points. Isn't that swell?"

Three heads nodded. Ritter plucked at Bobbie's sleeve.

"How do you know Phil Morris is moving?"

"Mr. Wall told me that, too."

"Then the Wolf patrol elects a new leader," said Ritter. He glanced out toward where Tim Lally was catching.

Andy's eyes puckered, and a swift change came over Bobbie Brown's face.

The practice ended. Tim came across the grass with a big mitt under his arm. Ritter and Wally went forward to meet him.

"Tim won't get my vote," said Bobbie. "The patrol leader ought to be a fellow who's up in things, like Don, or Alex Davidson, or you—"

"Don and Alex have it all over me," said Andy.

They watched the field. Tim was walking now with Ritter and Wally. Bobbie reached a foot for the nearest pedal.

"Guess I'll ride along," he said. As he turned the corner he glanced back across his shoulder. Tim and Ritter and Wally were talking to Andy.

Bobbie rode faster. Presently he came in sight of a house with a white-washed fence in front and a sign rising above the lawn grass:

*Robert strong & Son
carpenters and joiners
window screens and screen doors
bird-houses*

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A boy who whistled as he worked was tacking wire to a door frame.

Bobbie opened the gate and pushed through with his bicycle. The whistling boy glanced up.

"Hello, Bobbie."

"Hello, Don. Phil Morris is moving to Chicago."

"To Chi—" Don Strong paused with his tack hammer raised. "That means a new patrol leader, doesn't it?" The hammer fell and the work went on.

"Tim Lally wants it," said Bobbie.

A thoughtful expression came to Don's face. He went on tacking the wire until it was all tight and snug. Still thoughtful, he cut the molding and nailed it fast. From under one of the two wooden horses on which the door lay, he took a can of green paint.

"Tim wouldn't make a good patrol leader, would he, Don?"

"Easy, there," Don warned.

Bobbie flushed. "Well, he always wants to boss things and you know it."

Don said nothing.

"Doesn't he?" Bobbie insisted.

Don dodged the question and demanded that Bobbie show him how he was progressing with his semaphore. Bobbie retreated to the fence and sent the message that was given him.

"Was that right, Don?" he asked eagerly.

"Right," said Don. He was on the point of sending the boy off with another message when the gate clicked. Tim Lally advanced as though he had important business on his mind.

"Hello," said Tim, and rubbed his fingers across the door. "Gee! Why didn't you tell me the paint was wet? Give it a rub or two; that will fix it up again. Did you hear about Phil Morris?"

Don nodded.

"I guess I'll take a crack at being patrol leader," said Tim.

Bobbie looked up quickly. Don stood the door aside to dry, went down to his father's basement workshop and came up with another frame.

"I guess I'll take a crack at being patrol leader," Tim repeated. "I have two votes already, Ritter and Wally Woods. My own, of course, is three. All I need is another. Now, how about you fellows?"

"I'm going to vote for Alex Davidson," said Don.

Bobbie scarcely breathed. A spot of red flamed in each of Tim's cheeks.

"What's the matter with me?" he demanded. "Don't you think I'm good enough?" He swung around. "How about you, Bobbie?"

Bobbie swallowed hard. "Why, Tim, I—I—I—"

"Well, how about it?"

Bobbie looked appealingly at Don. Don laid down the tack hammer.

"Is that fair, Tim?" he asked quietly.

"Why isn't it?" Tim bristled.

And yet, after a moment, his eyes fell. He knew what Don meant. Bobbie was the "baby" of the troop, the smallest and the youngest scout. He walked out of the yard and slammed the gate defiantly.

"I'll get it without you," he called over the fence.

Don didn't do any more whistling that day. And after supper, as he heard the details of the contest for the Scoutmaster's Cup, the concerned look on his face deepened.

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The patrol leader, he thought, should be a fellow who was heart and soul in scouting—a fellow who could encourage, and urge, and lend a willing hand; not a fellow who wanted to drive and show authority. If Tim, with his temper and his eagerness to come to blows, should take command—Don shook his head. Why did Phil Morris have to move away?

All next morning he built bird-houses. He had developed quite a business with Audubon societies and it took a lot of work to keep up with his orders. After dinner he trudged off to the village field. Tim greeted him as though nothing had happened.

Don was delighted at this turn of affairs. When the work ended and he saw Tim following his steps he waited.

"You can vote for me now," Tim said confidently. "I saw Alex today. He won't have time to be patrol leader. He goes to work for the Union grocery store next Monday."

Don felt that everything had been turned upside down. So this was why the other boy had been so friendly! Of course, he could go home and let Tim think that the vote was his. But that would be cowardice. That would not be a scout's way of meeting the situation.

"I'm going to vote for somebody else," he said uneasily.

Tim's good humor vanished. "You are?"

Don nodded. "You're too hot-tempered," he said. "You always get things stewed up. You—"

"I don't see any wings on you or Alex," Tim cried wrathfully. "What kind of a game is this?"

Don said nothing. What was the use, he thought. He walked on; and after a moment Tim stood still and let him go his way.

Next morning a letter came from the Scout Scribe announcing the terms of the contest for the Scoutmaster's Cup. The competition would start at Friday night's meeting. For each scout present a patrol would be awarded a point, while for each scout absent it would lose a point. Another point would be lost for each scout who came to meeting with buttons off his uniform, or with scout pin missing, or with hair uncombed, or shoes muddy. Any patrol that did not live up to its orders from the Scoutmaster would be penalized from five to ten points. At the end of the first month there would be a contest in advanced first aid, and points would be awarded to the patrols that came in first and second.

Don read the letter twice and sat on one of the wooden horses and stared at the ground. His sister Barbara, anxious to show a berry cake, had to call to him three times before he heard her.

“What’s the matter, Don?” she asked.

“Tim Lally wants to be patrol leader,” he answered.

“Oh!” Barbara gave him a quick, understanding look.

Tim did not have a word to say to him that afternoon. Next day he worked steadily helping his father on a rush order and did not get to the field at all. When the work was done, he went upstairs and washed, dressed in his scout uniform and came down to the dining-room.

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Barbara came in from the kitchen to set the table. "Hungry?" she asked. Then, after a moment: "Isn't Tim your catcher on the town team?"

Don nodded.

Barbara put her head close to his. "Scouting isn't all fun, is it?"

"It wouldn't be worth shucks if it was," Don said stoutly. And yet, as he walked toward troop headquarters after supper, his steps were slow.

The command "Attention," came from Mr. Wall's lips as he entered the meeting place. He hurriedly joined his patrol. The color guard and the troop bugler stepped to the front, and the brassy notes of "To the Colors" rose and fell. Standing stiffly at salute, the troop pledged allegiance to the flag, and repeated the scout oath. The bugler stepped back to the ranks.

Slowly Mr. Wall made his tour of inspection. When it was finished, the scouts waited breathlessly. For the first time Don noticed a small blackboard nailed against the wall:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle
Fox
Wolf

"The Eagle patrol," Mr. Wall said, "has one scout absent and two scouts untidy—thirteen points."

The Scout Scribe wrote the points upon the board.

"The Fox patrol, all scouts present and two scouts-untidy—fourteen points. The Wolf patrol a perfect score—sixteen points."

Silence in the patrols.

"Break ranks," the Scoutmaster ordered.

Instantly there was a babel of excited talk. Scouts who had cost their patrols points through untidiness were upbraided by their comrades. Andy caught Don's arm.

"We're off in the lead," he chuckled.

"It's staying in the lead that counts," said Don.

The shrill of Mr. Wall's whistle brought the scouts to attention again.

"Tonight we take up the theory of building a bridge with staves and cords," the Scoutmaster said. "The Fox patrol was to have provided two logs."

The Fox patrol hustled outdoors and returned in a moment with their burden.

The scouts set to work to build a bridge from one log to the other. Mr. Wall walked about, watching but offering no advice. After an hour the bridge was completed.

"Scouts Lally and Davidson," said Mr. Wall, "see if it will hold you."

Tim and Alex stepped out on the structure. It held. A cheer started and died. For the bridge was sagging. Abruptly it gave.

"Ten minutes for examination to see where the fault lies." The Scoutmaster took out his watch. "Next meeting we'll try again."

Ten minutes later the lashings were untied, the staves were back in their wall racks, and the logs were outdoors. Each scout was sure he knew just what was wrong with that bridge and no two scouts agreed.

"Squat!" came the next order.

There was a rush for camp stools piled in a corner. Still grouped by patrols, the scouts faced Mr. Wall.

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"The Wolf patrol," he said, "is to select a new leader. So long as Patrol Leader Morris will not serve under his successor, the Council of Patrol Leaders feels that he should not vote in this election. The Scout Scribe will distribute pencils and paper. Each member of the Wolf patrol will write the name of his candidate. When I call his name, he will deposit his ballot, folded, in my hat. The patrol leaders will count the ballots."

Don's throat was dry. When he received his paper and pencil his hand shook. He wrote "Andy Ford" quickly, and folded the paper. He caught a glimpse of Tim sending sharp glances from face to face.

"Assistant Patrol Leader Ford," Mr. Wall called.

Andy went up and dropped his ballot.

"Scout Lally."

Tim voted, came back to his stool and sat biting his lips.

Finally all the votes were in. The patrol leaders carried the hat aside, counted the votes, and came back to Mr. Wall.

"The result is—" The Scoutmaster paused. "Scout Lally, three votes; Scout Strong, three votes; Assistant Patrol Leader Ford, one vote. As no candidate has received a majority, another ballot is necessary."

Don wondered if he had heard the Scoutmaster correctly. Three votes for him? He saw Tim eye him with dark suspicion. Andy's voice sounded in his ear:

"Did you vote for me?"

He nodded.

"Well, cut it out. Next time vote for yourself."

Don shook his head slowly. This thing of voting for himself did not appeal.

"If you vote for me," Andy said sharply, "this will be a tie until the cows come home. Don't be a chump. Tim is voting for himself."

Still Don was undecided. Besides, he could not get over the wonder of finding himself with three votes.

"How about a man who runs for president of the United States?" Andy insisted. "Do you think he votes for his opponent?"

"We are ready to ballot again," said Mr. Wall.

"Wake up," said Andy.

Don did not know what to do. There was no use in voting for Andy. Alex would not take the place and Bobbie Brown was altogether too young a scout. What should he do?

"Assistant Patrol Leader Ford," called the Scoutmaster.

Don, in desperation, wrote his own name.

This time, when the patrol leaders brought Mr. Wall the result, they put the hat out of the way, and the troop knew that it would not be needed again.

"Scout Lally," Mr. Wall read, "three votes; Scout Strong, four votes, Scout Strong is elected patrol leader of the Wolves."

Five minutes later the meeting was over. Don had been formally saluted by the Foxes and the Bears, and a patrol leader's stripes had been pinned, temporarily, to his sleeve. Flushed and excited, and still amazed at the turn fortune had taken, he faced about to where his own patrol was gathered. All at once the flush died out of his cheeks.

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"When I asked Bobbie for his vote," said Tim, "it wasn't fair. But you could ask the fellows, couldn't you?"

"I didn't ask anybody," said Don.

Tim laughed. "When do you think I was born—yesterday? How did you get the votes if you didn't ask for them? We'll see about this."

He walked out of headquarters. Ritter and Wally Woods whispered together, looked at Don, and seemed unable to make up their minds. Finally they edged their way toward the door.

There was work for Don to do—checking up what property the Wolf patrol owned and signing that he received it in good condition. But all joy was gone from the honor that had come to him. The Wolves were divided among themselves! What chance would they have for the Scoutmaster's Cup?

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST CLASH

Barbara and Mr. Strong were sitting on the porch when Don reached home. He reclined on the top step and fanned himself with his hat.

"Was Tim elected?" Barbara asked.

"No," said Don; "I was."

"Don!" The girl sprang to her feet. "Isn't that fine! We must celebrate with a piece of berry cake—"

But Don said gloomily that he did not feel like celebrating. He told about having won through the aid of his own ballot.

Barbara, concerned, looked at her father. "Was it wrong for Don to vote for himself?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Strong. "A candidate always votes for himself on a secret ballot."

Don felt a load leave his heart. He decided that perhaps he would like some berry cake. While he ate he told himself that there was no sense in worrying about Tim. Tim might get over his disappointment and not make a bit of trouble.

Next morning, while he built bird-houses, his mind was busy with eager plans for his patrol. The first-aid contest would really be a test of skill. With the exception of Bobbie

Brown and Wally Woods, every member of the Wolves was a first-class scout. They knew the theory of their first aid. The thing to do was to make them freshen up in the actual work of doing.

"We'll have to get on the job at once," Don told himself. "I'll call a patrol meeting for Monday night. If Bobbie comes around—"

Bobbie rode up to the gate. "Hello, Don."

"Hello, Bobbie. I was just hoping you'd show up. Take a scout message for me?"

"Sure!" The boy held on to the palings of the fence and did not dismount.

"Pass the word that there'll be a patrol meeting at my house Monday night."

Bobbie rode away as though the message had to be delivered within the next five minutes. Don smiled, and then grew thoughtful. Wouldn't it be fine if all scouts were as keen and as alert as that?

Tim did not come to the field that afternoon. On the way home Don met Mr. Wall.

"Well," the Scoutmaster smiled, "how's the new patrol leader?"

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"All right, sir."

"Think you're going to like it?"

"Yes, sir."

"It has its hard spots," Mr. Wall said seriously, "just like any other job. It isn't all milk and honey. There are lots of things you could do when you were a scout that you cannot do now. Not that they are exactly forbidden by the scout laws. They're forbidden by you, yourself. Do you understand?"

The boy nodded soberly. "I think so. You mean that when I was a plain scout I could skylark and cut up a bit, but that now I must be out in front setting the pace. I can't ask any of the fellows to be what I am not myself."

"Exactly. And there's another thing. Don't get discouraged when your plans go wrong. Get your grip and hold on. Scouts are only human. They're not angels."

Don smiled.

"I mean that. Scouting wasn't made for angels. It was made for everybody, fellows like you and me. And just because we're not angels, we sometimes kick things around and don't seem to play fair. When that happens—"

"Yes, sir?" said Don.

"That's the time we need scouting most," Mr. Wall said gravely.

It seemed to Don that the Scoutmaster was giving him a warning. But though he puzzled his head and wondered, he could not fathom what Mr. Wall might mean.

He told Barbara and his mother about Monday night's meeting and said that he would take the scouts up to his room out of the way. Barbara told him indignantly that he would do nothing of the kind. The scouts would meet, she announced, in the cool dining-room.

Monday, as soon as supper was over, she began to prepare for the coming of the patrol. Don wanted to help, but she routed him from the place. He went out to the porch and sat there in the gathering darkness. A vague sense of uneasiness stole over him.

Presently Bobbie Brown rode up and left his bicycle inside the gate. Soon he was followed by Alex Davidson and Andy Ford. Then came a long wait. At length two figures loomed in the dusk.

"Who's there?" Don called eagerly.

"Ritter and Woods," came the answer.

Don suddenly knew the cause of that vague uneasiness. The meeting had been called for eight o'clock, and it was now five minutes after, and there was no sign of Tim.

But none of the others seemed to think of the missing scout. Alex was bubbling over with the wonder of his first day in business. He told of how many orders he had delivered, and how much money he had collected, and how careful he had to be in making change. Don listened nervously. By and by he struck a match and glanced at his watch.

"Quarter past eight," he said.

"How about starting?" said Andy.

Don led the patrol indoors. The dining-room lamp shed a soft glow over the table. Chairs were drawn up, and at each place was a sharpened pencil and a few sheets of paper.

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"I'll bet Barbara thought of that," said Andy,

At any other time praise of Barbara would have brought a quick smile to Don's face. Now, however, he sat down soberly and gave the order to call the roll. Andy cleared his throat.

"Patrol Leader Strong."

"Here," said Don.

"Assistant Patrol Leader Ford. No doubt about me being here."

"Scout Davidson."

"Here," said Alex.

"Scout Ritter."

"Here."

"Scout Lally."

Silence.

All at once an uneasy feeling crept around the table. Alex forgot his business adventures of the day and glanced quickly from face to face.

"Tim may come later," he said.

Don looked at Bobbie. "Did you tell him?"

Bobbie nodded.

"What did he say?"

"N—nothing."

Every scout knew at once that Tim had said something. Don shut his lips tightly.

"I guess Tim forgot," Andy suggested.

Don grasped at this straw. Not that he believed it, for he didn't; but it gave him a chance to ease the tension. He forced a smile and said that Tim might come bolting in at the last minute. The moment the roll call was completed, he turned the talk to the Scoutmaster's Cup. He didn't want to give the scouts a chance to sit there and think.

"We're in the lead now," he said, "and it's up to us to stay there. It will be easy if every fellow will do his part. Attend every meeting and come ready for inspection. When Mr. Wall gives us a job to do as a patrol, let us dig in and do it right. And let us work hard so that we'll stand a good chance of winning the monthly contests."

"The first contest is easy," said Ritter. "We all know our first aid."

"We know it," said Don. "But can we do it? That's what counts."

"It's like riding a bicycle," Ritter argued. "You never forget."

Don had not expected anything like this. He didn't want the patrol to be cocksure—he wanted it to work. But there would be small chance of work if each scout was going to think that practice was unnecessary.

"Wait until I get some bandages," he said. He ran up to his room and came down with a little white roll. Ritter smiled confidently.

"Let's see you make a spiral reverse bandage," Don invited.

Ritter took the bandage and went to work on Alex's arm. Presently, after having gone half way to the elbow, he flushed and pulled the bandage off.

"It's sloppy," he said. "I see your point. I need practice."

"We all need practice," said Don. There were no further objections to hard work. The talk became eager as details were planned. The patrol would practice Wednesday afternoon at troop headquarters. Don would work with Ritter on splints, and Tim and Andy and Bobbie would form a team for artificial respiration, fireman's lift and stretcher work. Wally and Alex would practice straight bandaging at night after Alex had finished his labors at the Union grocery store.

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Bobbie accepted the arrangement in silence. As the meeting broke up and the scouts crowded into the hall, he pulled at Don's sleeve.

"Must I work with Tim?" he asked.

"Tim's strong and you're light," Don explained. "You can be handled easily on the fireman's lift and stretcher work."

Bobbie wet his lips and seemed to want to say something more. Abruptly, though, he turned away and followed the others out to the porch.

"How about Tim?" Ritter asked. "Shall I tell him about Wednesday?"

Conversation stopped. The feeling of tension came back.

"I'll see him at the field tomorrow," said Don. "I'll tell him myself."

Alex looked at him sharply, and the look said as plainly as words, "Going to make him toe the mark?"

Don lingered on the porch until the last footstep had died away in the distance. Then he went up to his room and stared out of the window. Thunder! Why couldn't Tim stick to his patrol and play fair, and not spoil all the fun?

He had an uneasy feeling about the morrow's interview. Once he had heard Mr. Wall say that there is something wrong when a patrol leader and his scouts live at loggerheads. He did not want to start wrong, he did not want to quarrel. But what could he do if a scout made up his mind to stay away from meetings and be nasty?

A dozen times he tried to picture what he would say to Tim and what Tim would say to him. At last, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, he began to undress for bed.

"Tim may be as nice as pie," he muttered. "He may not say a word."

Which was exactly what happened. Tim listened in silence to a report of what the patrol meeting had decided, nodded shortly when told of Wednesday's practice, and then moved off a few steps and called for the ball.

Don found himself, all at once, wishing that this refractory scout had spoken his mind. As things stood now he did not know what to expect. Tim might come to the practice, or he might stay away.

Twice, that afternoon, he walked toward the other boy, resolved to ask him point blank what he intended to do. Twice he paused and turned away. Perhaps it might be bad to let Tim see that he was worried.



Wednesday he was the first scout to reach troop headquarters. Inside, on the wall, was the slate:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 13

Fox 14

Wolf 16

Don stared at the sign a long time. What an honor it would be to win! Not the mere honor of getting a prize—he didn't mean that. But the honor of being the best scouts in the troop, the honor of achievement, the honor of something well done.

He heard a noise at the door. It was Andy Ford.

"Any trouble with Tim?" Andy asked at once.

Don shook his head.

"Did you tell him? What did he say?"

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"Nothing."

Andy puckered his eyes. "What's the matter with Tim, anyway? Is he going to grouch just because he wasn't elected patrol leader? He has the makings of a good scout."

There was the sound of a step outside.

"Sssh!" Don said softly.

Tim put his head in through the doorway. "Are we the only fellows here?" he demanded. "I want to get to the field and do some ball playing."

Don said that Ritter and Bobbie would be along any minute. Tim came in and sauntered around the room. He banged his mitt against the scout staves in the racks and seemed to find pleasure in the noise. Finally he brought up in front of the slate.

"Think we can stick in the lead?" Andy asked.

"Cinch!" said Tim. "What other patrol has anything on us?"

"It means work," said Don. "If we practice once or twice every week—"

"Once or twice?" Tim cried. "Gee! Have a heart. Isn't that rubbing it in?"

"We've got to be perfect," Andy said quickly, "and we're depending on you for the big stuff."

"What big stuff?" Tim asked.

"Stretcher work, fireman's lift, artificial respiration. The hard stuff, Tim."

"Oh well—" The praise seemed to have soothed Tim's feelings. "Maybe I could find time."

Andy winked. Don walked to the door. Was that the way to handle this hot-tempered scout—humor him a bit, praise him a little, give him the important assignments?

"Here come Bobbie and Ritter," said Andy.

The two scouts arrived, somewhat breathless from running, and the work started. Don took splints and bandages from the troop's medicine chest. Tim and Andy fashioned a stretcher from staves and coats.

"Try it again," said Tim. "Too slow."

"Let Bobbie button as soon as the first coat goes on," said Andy.

"Let Bobbie keep out of the way," said Tim.

Don looked up quickly. However, the work seemed to be going on satisfactorily. He brought his attention back to the splint he was adjusting.

After that, from time to time, he walked over to see how Tim and Andy and Bobbie were making out. Twice he thought that Andy frowned at him and gave a cautious movement with his head.

"Ouch!" Bobbie cried toward the finish. "You're hurting, Tim."

"You can't help hurting a fellow a little on artificial respiration," Tim answered gruffly.

Don frowned. Had Andy been signaling to him? Had something been going on over there?

When the work ended the staves and the splints and the bandages were put away. Tim mopped his face and breathed heavily. Bobbie Brown edged over toward the farthest window.

"How about another session Friday?" Don asked.

"Can't," said Tim. "Saturday we play our first game. Ted Carter wants everybody out for practice Friday afternoon. He told me to tell you."

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“Well—” For the moment Don wasn’t interested in baseball. “How about Monday?”

Monday, it appeared, would be all right. Tim put on his coat and walked toward the door.

“You’re forgetting your mitt,” Don called.

“I’m not going to the field,” said Tim.

There was something peculiar in the way he said it. Don looked inquiringly at Andy. The assistant patrol leader nodded toward the window.

“Anything wrong, Bobbie?” Don asked.

Bobbie gave a start, and smiled and shook his head. “Guess I’ll go along,” he said; but he made no move to leave the place.

Something was wrong. Andy sauntered down to the door, peered at the woodwork as though examining it, scratched with his finger-nail, and then began to tap with his knuckle.

Don wrinkled his forehead. Why did Andy tap like that—two taps, pause, another tap—over and over again? Suddenly he understood. Andy was sending him a message in Morse, and the first letter was C. He looked up, caught Andy’s eye, and nodded. The tapping went on.

“.”

“O,” whispered Don.

“- -”

“M.”

“.”

“E. Come.”

A pause, longer than the other. The tapping began again.

“.. ..—-.. .”

“Come outside,” Don muttered. He strolled toward the door.

The moment he passed out of troop headquarters, Andy caught his arm.



“Did you see Tim roughing Bobbie all afternoon?”

“Hurting him?” Don asked quickly.

“Not really hurting him, but pulling his hair, and twisting his ears, and things like that. Bobbie’s frightened. It’s going to spoil all our first aid.”

Don’s mouth twitched. He had congratulated himself that the work had gone so well. And all the while trouble had been lurking at his elbow. He walked back into troop headquarters with his head bent. If one scout was going to nag another there would be no harmony, no pulling together, no striving toward a common goal. It would be good-bye to the Wolf patrol so far as the Scoutmaster’s Cup was concerned.

He paused in front of the slate. What should he do? If he went to Tim and told him plump and plain to cut it out, there might be a ruction. If he allowed the nagging to go on, there would be tension and unrest within the patrol. No matter which way he turned, disorder and adversity loomed.

He walked to the window where Bobbie stood. Suddenly he stiffened.

“Isn’t that Tim down the road—that fellow leaning against the fence?”

Bobbie nodded nervously.

Don drew a deep breath. He knew what was happening. Tim was waiting to continue his plaguing.

“I—I guess I’ll go,” said Bobbie again.

“Wait,” said Don. “I’m going down that way.”

There was no help for it. He had no choice. He couldn’t let Bobbie go out and get his hair pulled and his ears twisted. He’d have to see him past the danger.

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There was vast relief on Bobbie's face as they came out of troop headquarters. But Don's face was grave.

It took but a minute to walk down the road to the fence. Bobbie's steps unconsciously became slower. He edged out toward the curb. Tim saw him and instantly became alert.

"Here, now," he called; "don't try to dodge past. Come over here and—"

"Hello, Tim," said Don.

Tim stopped short. His eyes darkened suspiciously, as though he suspected that Don was acting as guardian. For a moment he seemed to be debating what he should do; and while he paused, Bobbie edged past.

"Don't forget Monday," said Don. He wanted to shift the other boy's thoughts.

"I may be busy Monday," Tim answered scowlingly. He took a step after Bobbie, but found the patrol leader in his way and stopped short.

Don continued on down the road. He knew that Tim was aware why he had walked with Bobbie, and he knew that Tim resented it. After all, what had he gained? He couldn't be with Bobbie always. If Tim wanted to plague, he could catch the little scout alone almost any day.

Abruptly Don swung around and went back. Tim, seeing him coming, set his feet farther apart. It was a fighting pose. Don's heart fluttered.

"Look here, Tim," he said; "what's the use of stewing around this way? Why can't we all pull together?"

"Did I do anything to you?" Tim asked.

"No, but—What's the use of tormenting Bobbie?"

"Gee! Are you the keeper of the whole patrol?"

Don bit his lips. The talk wasn't going at all the way he wanted.

"We've got to work together," he said, "or we won't have a chance for the cup."

"Don't you worry about me," Tim said airily. "I'll do my share. Didn't I show up for practice today?"

"Yes."



"Well, what more do you want?"

Don hesitated. Tim began to grin. He walked back to the fence and leaned there carelessly.

"It—it's going to muss the practice if you tease Bobbie," Don said slowly. "He'll be edging away from you, not knowing what moment you'll twig him, and it will spoil the work. You can't give him a good fireman's lift if he's hanging back."

"What are you doing," Tim demanded, "asking me to let up on him or telling me?"

"I'm asking you," Don said slowly.

"Oh! Well, that's all right." Tim's grin grew broader. "I won't bother him."

All the way home Don was haunted by that grin. He knew what it meant. Tim thought he had started back to lay down the law and had wilted. Tim thought he was afraid.

Don swallowed a lump in his throat. There was no use in trying to disguise the truth. Deep in his heart he didn't know whether he was or not.

CHAPTER III

TIM STANDS BY

It was a very quiet Don who sat down to supper that night. He had the uncomfortable conviction that he had blundered. Having started to see Bobbie past trouble, he should have seen him past with quiet firmness. It had been a mistake to try to bargain.

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Regrets, though, would do him no good. What was past was past. It was the future that troubled him the most.

Tim, he was sure, would now carry a chip on his shoulder. And if he tried to make him keep step with the other scouts of the patrol, and if Tim did not want to keep step—

“You’re not eating, Don,” said Barbara.

He came to himself with a start, smiled sheepishly, and gave thought to his supper. But for the rest of the meal he could see Barbara watching him. There was also a concerned look in the eyes of his sister Beth.

Why had he gone back that time? And having gone back, why had he not told Tim, bluntly and plainly, that he would have to let Bobbie alone? Had there been a clash of wills, it would all be over with now. Instead, the time of decision had been put off. It might come any day. And because he had hesitated to meet it once, it would be all the harder to meet it in the future.

“I don’t think Don is hungry,” said Beth.

He came to himself with a start and found that he was again staring fixedly at his plate. He was glad when the meal came to an end.

He went up to his room. There were two letters he ought to write to Audubon societies that had ordered bird-houses. But, though he drew out paper and ink and envelopes, he could not concentrate his thoughts on what he had to say. At last he went downstairs and sat on the porch.

He was discouraged. Under Phil Morris, the Wolf patrol had been strong and vigorous. Phil had refused to stand for any nonsense.

“I guess—I guess I haven’t the spunk Phil had,” Don told himself.

In the kitchen the sounds of dish-washing ceased. Presently Barbara came out on the porch. The chair in which he sat was wide. She touched his arm.

“Push over, Don.”

He made room for her.

“Well,” she asked, “what’s the scout trouble now?”

He could always talk to Barbara as though she were an older brother. Now he told her about his meeting with Tim, and of the sorry way he had handled himself.

"And now," he ended, "Tim will think I'm scared of him and that he can do just as he pleases."

"Will he think that?" Barbara asked.

"Well, won't he?"

The girl did not answer. After a moment she asked:

"How about good turns, Don? Does Tim do any?"

"Of course he does. Isn't he a scout?"

"What kind of good turns?"

"Well—" Don thought. "Remember last winter when Mr. Blair was sick?"

"Yes."

"Tim looked after their furnace three times a day."

"Don," Barbara said, "don't you think he's all right at heart if he does acts like that?"

Don stared. This was putting things in a new light. Then he thought of Tim riding rough-shod, and tormenting Bobbie, and wanting his own way in everything.

"Maybe Tim's all right at heart," he said dubiously, "but he's always making trouble just the same. I'm not going to let him stew up my patrol. I'll go to Mr. Wall—"

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“Don!”

The sharp note of disappointment in Barbara’s voice sent the blood into his cheeks.

“Stand on your own feet,” she said. “What would Mr. Wall think of you? Did the old-time scouts like Daniel Boone go running for help every time they found themselves in trouble?”

The boy did not answer. There was a long silence. Barbara touched his arm.

“Angry, Don?”

“No. I—I guess I’ll fight my own way,” he said.

Somehow, that determination seemed to lighten his worries. He went upstairs and wrote his letters. Afterward he picked up his Handbook and idly turned the pages. Presently his eyes fell on the tenth law:

“He has the courage to face danger in spite of fear ... and defeat does not down him.” Next he read the fourth law, “He is a friend to all and a brother to every other scout.” And then he closed the book and for a long time stared straight ahead.

Friday brought a busy day—bird-houses all morning, baseball practice in the afternoon, and a troop meeting at night.

During the morning, as Don planed, and sawed, and hammered, he whistled a gay air. But after dinner, as the time for baseball practice approached, the whistle became subdued and at last stopped.

Up to now he had pitched against high-school boys, lads of his own age. Tomorrow, though, he was to face a town team with its older, more experienced players. He wondered if he would be able to make good. And he wondered, just a little, how he and Tim would work together.

He might have saved himself the worry of wondering about Tim, for that afternoon’s practice gave no time for anything save work. Ted Carter drove the players with a high-strung, nervous vim. He seemed to find time for everything—first a signal drill, then fielding, then sliding into bases.

Don was kept on the jump. As soon as his arm was warm and limber Ted hustled him to the mound, and for fifteen minutes he stood there and threw to bases as signals were flashed to him. Then Ted gave him ten minutes of fielding bunts. By that time the sweat was running down his face and his breath was coming hard.

“Get into a sweater,” Ted ordered. “I’ll want you back here in ten minutes. Now, Tim, I’m going to let some of the fellows steal bases. Let’s see you throw them out.”

Don was glad of the respite. He retired beyond the foul lines and watched. There was no doubt but that Tim knew his job. Short and stocky and agile, he seemed made in a catcher’s mold. He could reach second base with a forearm throw while squatting on his heels, and a snap of the wrist was enough to send the ball to first or to third.

“He’s got an awfully strong arm,” said Don to himself.

“All right, Don,” called Ted.

He shed his sweater and went back to the mound. One by one the batters were called in to hit against him. He watched for Tim’s signals, and tried to put the ball where Tim wanted it. The batters hit him freely.

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When the practice ended he was worried. If older players could hit him like that—

“Forget it,” said Ted. “Fielding bunts for ten minutes took a lot of your sap. You’ll go in fresh tomorrow. Isn’t that right, Tim?”

“Sure,” said the catcher.

“And another thing,” said the captain. “Toward the end there you were shaking your head to Tim’s signals and pitching what you wanted. None of that tomorrow. Let Tim judge the batters. This is his second year against town teams; he knows their game better than you.”

Tim swelled out his chest and swaggered.

“All right,” said Don. If Ted thought nothing of the way he had been batted, why, everything must be all right. He walked home gayly.

“Scout meeting tonight?” his father asked.

“Yes, sir,” said Don, and ran upstairs to dress. He wondered if the Wolf patrol would get another perfect score. He paused in the act of brushing his hair. A thought that he could not push aside popped into his brain. Would Tim come spick and span?

Tim, Andy, Alex and Ritter were at headquarters when he arrived, and Tim was as clean as any.

“We’ve been inspecting each other,” Andy laughed. “Look at those fellows over there.”

The Fox patrol had a box of blacking and a brush, and two scouts were polishing their shoes. The Eagles had a needle and thread, and one scout, under the watchful eye of his patrol leader, was sewing on a button.

“This is going to be a fight,” Andy went on. “Those scouts are in earnest.”

“That’s the way for a scout to be,” said Don. The prospect of a struggle sent a sparkle into his eyes. “We’ll have to do that.”

“Needles and thread and shoe-brushes?” Tim demanded.

Don nodded.

“Not for me,” said Tim. “I’m no kid. Nobody has to tell me to clean myself.”

Don said nothing. Why, he wondered, did Tim seem to take such a delight in going against everybody else? He was sure now that what Barbara said was right. Tim was sound at heart. Look how clean he came to tonight's meeting. And yet—

"Going to get needles and thread and things?" Andy whispered.

Don nodded. Oh, yes; he'd get them. What was the use of letting the other patrols prepare for the unexpected and doing nothing yourself?

The Scoutmaster's whistle called the patrols to attention. Don gave a quick glance as his patrol took its station. His heart sank. Bobbie Brown was not in place.

Mr. Wall walked down the line of scouts. He was halfway through inspection when Bobbie burst into the room. He checked himself when he saw what was going on, came to salute, and quietly tiptoed to his place. But his face was flushed from running, and his hair was awry.

Don hoped Bobbie might be able to make himself presentable before Mr. Wall got that far. Then common sense told him that that was impossible. The troop was at attention. Bobbie could not lift a hand even to touch his hair. He had to stand there stiffly as he was.

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The inspection came to an end, Mr. Wall faced the waiting lines. Don held his breath. *Would* the Wolf patrol—

“Fox patrol,” Mr. Wall announced, “a perfect score. Eagle patrol, all present, all clean, but one scout talking in ranks, one-half point off. Wolf patrol, one scout untidy, one scout late, one and one-half points off.”

A moment later the lines were broken. Tim turned to the unhappy Bobbie.

“See what a fine fix you got us in!” he demanded angrily.

“I couldn’t help it,” Bobbie explained. “My mother didn’t know she was out of sugar, and the man in the store had to open a new barrel, and he couldn’t find his hatchet, and I had to wait.”

“You should have gone for the sugar this afternoon,” Tim insisted. “The rest of us take the trouble to come here right and then you spoil things.”

“I couldn’t help it,” Bobbie said miserably. “I—”

“It’s all right, Bobbie,” said Don. “Don’t let it happen again.” He was disappointed, but what was the use of jumping on a scout who was trying to do right?

“What’s the use of me slicking up,” Tim scowled, “if other fellows are going to do as they please?”

The scout scribe walked toward the slate. Instantly Bobbie and his lapse were forgotten. Every eye in the room watched while the scribe rubbed out and wrote. Soon he stepped away from the slate. There was the new standing:

Patrol points

Eagle 28-1/2

Fox 30

Wolf 30-1/2

The Wolves were still in the lead, but Don did not feel the least like cheering. For the next hour, while the troop worked at signaling, and map-reading, and advanced knot-tying, he did his part and forgot to be despondent. He even brightened when the logs were brought in and the theory of bridge building was applied. But when the bridge was done—this time it held—he lost interest.

“The Wolf patrol—” he heard Mr. Wall say.

He roused himself and listened.

“The Wolf patrol has the assignment of having headquarters clean for the next meeting,” the Scoutmaster announced.

The session was over. Don told his patrol not to forget Monday’s practice and walked out alone. He had gone but a short distance when running footsteps sounded in his rear.

“Don!” It was Bobbie. “I’m sorry—”

The patrol leader forced a smile. “You only lost us a point and a half, Bobbie. Maybe you’ll get that back in the first aid contest.”

Bobbie’s mouth tightened. “It won’t be because I’m not trying,” he said; and Don went home telling himself that he knew one scout the Wolf patrol could count on through thick and thin.

Next morning he tried to build bird-houses, but for once he could find no pleasure in the work. His thoughts were turned on the afternoon. The Glenrock team had a reputation as hitters, and he wondered, in spite of what Ted had said, whether he would be able to hold his own.

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When Ted had asked him to pitch for the Chester town team, he had protested that he was only a high school player. Ted, however, had told him earnestly that many town team pitchers were no better. Besides, wouldn't it be fine experience to pitch against stronger batters? Weeks ago that argument had won, but now Don made a wry face.

"Fine lot of experience it will be if they knock me out of the box," he said.

The game had been well advertised. The Chester *Chronicle* had carried a story, and notices had been chalked on the bulletin board at the railroad station. Don was sure that there would be quite a crowd.

Nor was he mistaken. Early as it was when he came to the field, spectators were already gathering. Ted, a seasoned veteran, was calm and undisturbed, but there was a noticeable tension among most of the other players. Don sat on the rough bench and waited for the signal to warm up.

Presently the Glenrock players arrived. He looked at them closely and his nerves jumped. Gosh! didn't they look big! And what big black bats!

"All right, Don," said Ted. "Warm up. Take it easy. These fellows can strike out and pop up flies just as easily as anybody else."

Don tried to smile as he took his place. By this time a solid wall of spectators ran along the base-lines and down toward the foul flags. There was another gathering under the maple tree; and out in deep center a third group lounged on the grass and waited for the call of "Play ball!"

Don began to throw. His first few pitches went wide, and Tim glanced at him sharply. The catcher was almost as cool as Ted, and to show his calmness, he began to toss the ball into the air as he caught it and then catch it again in his bare hand as it came down.

As soon as his arm felt right, Don tried out his curves. His drop, his best ball, worked nicely, but his in-curve and his out-curve were only fair. He kept trying them, and became worried, and went back to his drop and found that he had lost his control of this curve, too. What was the matter? Was he getting stage fright?

"That's enough," called Ted.

He walked toward the bench. Tim hurried to his side.

"Scared?" the catcher asked.

Don nodded.

“Gee!” said Tim. “I thought you had more nerve than that. Just go out there and stick it over. You don’t see me getting rattled.”

“You don’t have to serve the ball,” said Don.

“No,” said Tim; “but I’m the fellow who has to decide what balls they get. I guess that’s some responsibility. You pitch the way I tell you to and we’ll be all right.”

Glenrock was still practicing in the field. Don sat on the bench and watched. They handled the ball well, but not any better than Chester. If their hitting had been overrated

“They’re through,” said Ted. “Come on, Don. Don’t get excited now. Watch Tim’s signals and give him what he signals for. We’re in back of you.”

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"That's what I've been telling him," said Tim.

A minute later Don faced the first batter. Tim squatted, rose up on his toes, stuck his mitt between his legs, laid a finger on the mitt, and then spread his hands wide.

"Come on, Don," he called. "Easy-picking here; easy picking. Put it right over."

Tim had signaled for the drop. Don swallowed a lump in his throat. Would the ball break true? Would this broad-shouldered young man who stood so confidently at the plate hammer it a mile?

"Come on, now," cried Tim.

Don pitched. The batter swung and missed.

"Easy picking," chanted Tim. "He couldn't hit it with a fence post. Come on, now."

The second signal was for an in. Don pitched. The batter tightened his muscles to swing, changed his mind, and allowed his arms to grow limp. And the ball that looked as though it would be outside the plate, suddenly broke inward and crossed the corner.

"Strike two!" ruled the umpire.

The batter looked annoyed. And as for Don, a wave of gladness ran through his veins. His curves were working, and this batter didn't seem to be any harder to pitch to than some high school players he had faced.

Tim called for pitch-outs on the next two, hoping that the batter would "bite." The Glenrock player, though, seemed to have become cautious. Then Don pitched a drop, and the batter hit a bit too high and sent a grounder toward third base, and was thrown out.

The next batter caught the first ball pitched and hammered it to center field for a base.

Don's lips twitched. He wondered if the runner would try to steal, and if he would be too green to hold him close to the bag. Ted motioned him to play the plate.

Tim signaled for a pitch-out, or waste ball. He pitched.

The catcher had shrewdly judged that Glenrock would try to steal the moment she got a runner on. He saw the runner break for second. He got the ball, drew back his arm, and shot the sphere down without rising from his squat.

It was a beautiful throw, and the runner was out by a yard.

“Try to get fresh with the kid pitcher, eh?” yelled Tim.

“That’s turning them back,” shouted Ted Carter. “Get this fellow, Don.”

Don “got” him on an in-curve that was hit for a puny infield pop.

Glenrock was out. She had had her first inning and had not scored. Ted came running in to the bench, calling instructions to Chester’s first hitter. Don drew on a sweater and sat down.

“Well,” said Ted, “they aren’t giant-killers, are they?”

“Tim saved me that time,” Don answered. His pulse was still throbbing.

“Sure I did,” said Tim. “That’s what I’m there for.”

Don tried to tell himself that it was only Tim’s way to be so cocksure and chesty; and yet, in a small corner of his brain, was the thought that it might have been just as well had the runner not been thrown out. In spite of himself, he was beginning to resent the catcher’s air of superiority.

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He admitted that he was lucky to have escaped during that first inning. But he was not so lucky in the innings that followed. Two runs were scored by Glenrock in the third, one in the fifth, two in the seventh, and one in the eighth. Five runs was all that Chester could gather. The end of the game found her one run behind.

Don was disheartened. He put on his sweater and started to leave the field. Ted called him, and he waited.

"Down in the mouth?" the captain asked. "Forget it. I knew you'd have trouble today. You were worried, weren't you?"

Don nodded.

"And yet they beat you only six to five. That's all right. Next time you won't be so nervous and you'll do better."

"Will I?" Don asked. "You're not fooling me, Ted?"

"Oh, Tim." Ted called to the catcher. "What did I tell you about this game?"

"That you'd be satisfied if Don held them to a respectable score," Tim answered. "You told me to hold him up and keep him going—"

"All right," Ted said quickly. He turned to Don. "Does that look as though I'm stringing you? Next week you pitch against Springfield—and next week you're going to win."

Don drew a deep breath. A big part of his courage had come back. Now, if Tim would only stop saying how important *he* was—

"I know those Springfield batters," said Tim. "I'll signal him what to throw."

Don turned away. Was Tim going to act like that all summer?

Monday the Wolf patrol had its second first-aid practice. This time there was no trouble. Tim appeared, and did his work, and then went shouting and hallooing down the street. Andy Ford laughed and shook his head.

"He's a wild Indian, Don. You can't do much with him."

"I—I can't do anything with him," said Don.

The days that followed were busy ones. There was a rush of orders for window screens, and he dropped his bird-houses and helped his father. Twice he went to the field. Once he met Tim there, and Tim caught his delivery and called instructions in a

breezy, high-handed way. Andy Ford was right, Don thought. A wild, untamed, careless, unthinking Indian!

Friday, in response to Don's orders, the patrol came to headquarters to clean up for that night's meeting. Tim brought with him an impish, reckless desire for fun. While the others tried to sweep, he lined up a string of camp stools and played leap-frog down the length of the meeting-place, and got in everybody's way.

"Come on, Tim," Don called. "Cut it out!"

"Cut what out?" Tim asked innocently.

"That jumping. You're scattering the dust. Put the stools away and get a broom."

Tim shook his head, and sat on the nearest stool, and looked as though he was going to dispute the order. Andy and Ritter nudged him and told him to be a good sport and help. He looked at them doubtfully, and then, apparently convinced, he piled the stools in a corner and got a broom.

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Only for a short time, though, did he apply himself to the work in hand. Soon a voice shouted, "Behold a knight of old!" and when the scouts looked around there was Tim with the broom as a sword and a galvanized water bucket over his head. Even Don laughed.

Next Tim sent the pail clattering across the floor, and Bobbie had to jump to avoid being hit in the shins. After that this troublesome scout insisted on fighting a broom duel with Wally Woods, and a collection of dirt that had been swept into a pile was scattered right and left.

"Tim!" cried Don.

Tim stopped. "What's the matter?"

"Look at that dirt. We'll never get cleaned up this way."

"Oh, forget it," said Tim. "Can't a fellow have a little fun? I'll sweep it up again," and he attacked the pile.

Ten minutes later he was chasing Ritter around the room for a piece of cake, and a pail of water that Andy had just brought in was upset over the floor.

"Yah!" shouted Tim. "Swim for your life." He swished his broom through the water and swished too hard, and the dirty water flew far and high and spattered the walls.

"Now look what we've got to clean," cried Andy.

"Gee!" said Tim. "I didn't know it was going to do that. What did you want to leave the pail there for?"

"What did you go cat-acting for?" Don demanded.

He was exasperated. He felt like telling Tim to go out and let them finish the job themselves. But—There was the rub. What would happen then? Suppose Tim got hot-headed and wouldn't go? Or suppose he went, glad to be relieved of his share of the job? Or suppose he walked out sullen and grumbling, and stayed away from the meeting or came late or came untidy—and the Wolves lost points?

Don was bewildered. He wanted to do what was best—for Tim, for himself, for the patrol—but what was best? Was it best to let Tim run on in the hope that he'd be shamed into a better spirit by the other scouts? Phil Morris would have said, very quietly, "Hey, there, Tim!" and that would have been the end of it.

Don sighed. "I wish I was as big as Phil," he muttered.

For a time it seemed as though Tim had been sobered by the accident to the water pail. He worked with Andy trying to clean the walls. It seemed, though, that there were a thousand spatters.

"Gee!" said Tim. "Mr. Wall surely likes to stick a fellow. This is no cinch."

"It's your own fault," Andy grunted, trying to reach a high spot.

"Aw! shut up," cried Tim; "you fellows are always preaching. You fellows never do anything. I'm tired and I'm going to rest."

He brought out a camp stool and sat down. Don bit his lips and went on working. The other scouts cast covert glances at the stool and its occupant.

By and by it began to grow dark. The floor had been swept and mopped, but the walls still had dirty sections and there were the two windows to do.

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"We're not going to get this clean in time," said Andy.

Tim stirred from the chair and came over and helped. The light failed rapidly. The lamps were in the troop "treasure chest," and Don though a patrol leader, had not yet received a key to the locker.

"No use wasting any more time here," he said at last. "Let's do the windows."

"Maybe we have the walls all clean," said Andy. Ritter struck a match. By the feeble flame they looked intently, but could not be sure.

They did the windows. Tim was silent and apparently not anxious to attract attention to himself. It was almost dark when the last window had been finished.

"Could we try the walls again?" Bobbie asked.

"Too late," Don answered. "They may be all right. We'll know tonight, anyway. Everybody on time tonight, and everybody clean."

He walked off with Andy. The assistant patrol leader said after a moment:

"I think Tim's sorry now."

"What good does it do to be sorry now?" Don asked bitterly.

As soon as his supper was over, he hurried back to headquarters. Nobody was there yet. Presently the patrol leader of the Foxes, a boy named Kearney, came along, whistling shrilly. He opened the treasure chest and brought out the lamps, cleaned the chimneys and lighted them.

"Hello!" he said. "Wasn't it the turn of your patrol to clean house?"

Don nodded miserably. One patch of wall, by a window, was a mess. The windows themselves, cleaned in semi-darkness, were streaked. And some of the floor, down by the door, had not been mopped at all.

Scouts began to arrive. Bobbie brought a shoe brush and a can of blacking, and Ritter brought a hair brush and a comb. Andy brought needles and khaki-colored thread. These things were laid quietly in the patrol's locker. Nobody said anything about the walls.

By and by Tim arrived. He looked around and his face became red. Don gave him a quick glance. He met it and his flush grew deeper, and all at once he seemed to force his shoulders back and his eyes became defiant.

“He’s stung, all right,” thought Don, “but he doesn’t want to show it.”

Mr. Wall called the patrol leaders forward to discuss the plans for a hike. Don scarcely heard the details. All he knew was that somebody said, “Wednesday, then,” and the Scoutmaster’s whistle shrilled, and the troop lined up by patrols.

Slowly the inspection was made—first the scouts, then the room. Don forced himself to keep his eyes level, but he felt like hanging his head.

“Every scout present,” Mr. Wall announced, “and every scout clean. Each patrol is awarded sixteen points.”

Fleeting smiles through the ranks of the Foxes and the Eagles. Sober faces among the Wolves.

“However,” the Scoutmaster went on, “the Wolf patrol had the detail of cleaning the meeting place. I am sorry to say that the patrol has been derelict. I am, therefore, compelled to fine the Wolf patrol five points.”

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Don's heart was like lead. He knew what the slate would show; and yet, when it was changed, he stared at it miserably:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 44-1/2

Fox 46

Wolf 41-1/2

The meeting was over at last. He ordered his patrol to wait. The other scouts, looking at the Wolves queerly, went out into the night and scattered. Mr. Wall passed out.

"Good night, scouts," he called.

"Good night," they answered, and looked at Don.

"We're going to clean this place," he said. "Get some water."

There was a rush for pails. Tim hesitated. He knew he was the cause of the disaster that had overtaken the patrol, but he had the mistaken idea that it would seem babyish and weak to jump in and show contrition. He had always been looked upon as a little "hard." This, he thought, was soft—and he didn't want anybody to regard him as a softy.

"Aw!" he said, "what's the use? We've lost the points, haven't we?"

"Is that your idea of being a scout?" Don asked.

Tim flushed again. For a few minutes he lounged around; then, looking ill at ease, he slouched out.

"I didn't think he'd do that," Andy said thoughtfully.

Don's lips had gone a little white. He turned toward the spattered wall and stopped all at once. For Tim was coming back through the doorway.

"I'm as good a scout as you," Tim said passionately. "If you say I'm not, I'll bang you in the eye."

Don said nothing. While Tim selected a pail and a floor cloth, Don rubbed away at the wall. Slowly a little smile spread across his face. He was quite content the way things had gone. What did five points amount to, if their loss would make Tim a better scout?



CHAPTER IV

DANGER MOUNTAIN

Next day Don pitched his second game for Chester. His pulse was steady, his control was good, and the Springfield batters seemed unable to do much with his drop. When the score-keeper marked the last play and closed his book, Chester had won 5 runs to 3.

"Didn't I tell you?" Ted Carter cried jubilantly. "Some pitching!"

"Sure," said Tim. "I doped out what the batters couldn't hit, and he threw me what I wanted."

"There's a lot of pitchers can't do that," the captain said lightly, and shot a quick look at the pitcher.

Don pretended that he had not heard; but he could not keep the color from rising in his cheeks. All during the game Tim had seemed to rasp him a bit—not enough to spoil his work, but enough to keep him on edge.

He had thought, after last night's meeting, that there would be a big change in Tim. Instead, it began to look as though Tim would continue to be the same wild, heedless, quarrelsome lad he had always been.

"Today's tussle will give you confidence," said Ted in his ear. "You'll be able to give them all a fight now."

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Don flashed a smile, and then the smile was gone. So was the thrill of his triumph. It was hard, this thinking you had weathered a storm and then finding that you hadn't.

At supper Barbara and his father asked him about the game. He told of his success, but with none of the flash and fire of a conqueror. Barbara caught his glance and smiled at him understandingly.

"More trouble with Tim?" she asked.

"N—no; not exactly trouble. You see—" And then he related what had happened last night, and the great hopes that had come, and how Tim had acted today.

"Don," said Mr. Strong, "do you remember when you learned to pitch an outcurve?"

"Yes, sir."

"You used to pitch to Alex Davidson out there in the yard. One day you came running into the shop and shouted that you had it, and I went out to watch, and you couldn't throw the curve again."

"But I got it again next day," Don said quickly.

"And now you can pitch it any time you want to," said his father.

Don frowned. This was too deep! He saw Barbara smiling and nodding as much as to say, "Think it out, Don." Suddenly he straightened.

"You mean that because Tim played fair that once—"

"Just the way you pitched your curve that once," said his father.

Don sighed. It was funny how his troubles dropped away when he brought them home.

Monday there was another patrol meeting. Tim attended, but an imp of perverseness seemed to rule him. It was the first time he had seen the patrol as a group since Friday night. At first he looked hot and uncomfortable. After a while he began to scrape his feet and drum on the table. He seemed anxious to have it understood that, regardless of what had happened, no one need think that he was going to be bossed.

"Oh, keep your feet still!" Alex Davidson said at last.

Tim rolled a page of his pad into a ball and shot it across the table. The missile struck Ritter on the nose. Tim giggled, and made another ball, and shot this one at Andy Ford.

"Cut it out!" Andy said good-naturedly. "You'll get papers all over the floor."

Tim grinned, and rolled another cartridge. Don caught his bold, sidelong glance—a glance that seemed to say, “Well, what are you going to do about it?”

Others around the table caught that look, too. Don’s face grew hot. In an effort to keep the scouts from paying attention to Tim, he talked rapidly about the first aid contest, now two weeks off. The Eagles and the Foxes, he said, were working hard, and the Wolves would have to give more time to practice.

“We’re behind,” Don finished, “and we must catch up.”

Somehow, what he said sounded strained, and forced, and lame. Every scout felt it—even Tim. Andy Ford’s eyes snapped. He didn’t look good-humored now.

“We’re not getting any better on our stretcher work,” he said bluntly. “We need practice there.”

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Tim stopped rolling his pad page. "That's a crack at me, isn't it?" he demanded.

"I'm in the stretcher work, too," said Andy.

"Aw, you're too clever," Tim flared. "I know what you mean." He shot the ball, and it whizzed past the assistant patrol leader's ear.

The meeting was spoiled. Tim glanced defiantly around the table. Alex Davidson tried to get the talk going again, but discussion seemed to lag. And then, just when Don, in his disgust, was ready to adjourn, the door opened and Barbara came into the room.

She had glasses and cake, and a pitcher of lemonade. Soon a filled glass was in front of each scout.

"How is that for a good turn?" she smiled. "Why so many sober faces? What's the matter with you, Tim?"

Tim flushed, and looked down at the floor.

"He won't tell me," Barbara cried gayly. "That's what I get for being a girl—can't learn any boy scout secrets. Have a piece of cake, Tim."

"Thank you," said Tim bashfully.

The plate was passed around the table. Tim's eyes were still downcast. At the door Barbara paused.

"Don't leave those papers on the floor, boys," she said. "Next time I come in I want to see you all smiling."

Tim ate his cake and drank his lemonade. The talk started again, a little brisker now, and a little more hopeful. Plans were made for two practice periods during the week.

"Will that be all right for you, Tim?" Don asked.

"Don't worry about me," the red-haired boy answered shortly. "I'll be there." He arose, went around to the other side of the table and stooped to pick a paper ball from the floor.

A soft smile touched Andy's mouth.

"Aw! what are you laughing at?" Tim cried.

"I'm not laughing, Tim," Andy protested. "Honest."

But, for all that, Tim was furious when he left the meeting. The others stood on the porch and chatted a moment; he strode out the gate and down the dark road.

“Gee!” he said in disgust. “They’ll think I’m a little Janie.”

Letting a girl make him do things! It stung his pride. Friday night he had said no, and had changed his mind and had scrubbed with the others. Tonight he had grinned when told about papers on the floor—and had ended by picking them up.

Everything had gone wrong, Tim told himself, since Don had become patrol leader. He began to blame Don for all his troubles. Don had upbraided him when the patrol had lost points. It was at Don’s house that Barbara had made him pick up papers. His cheeks burned.

“I’ll show them!” he vowed wrathfully. He would redeem himself in the only way he knew. He would “start something.”

He started it by picking at Don all during next day’s practice.

“What’s the matter with you?” Ted Carter demanded sharply. “Are you sick?”

“Don’s pitching like a freak,” Tim answered.

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"It's Saturday's pitching that counts," said Ted. "You fellows have had enough warm-up. Go out in the field, Don, and catch fungoes."

Don was glad to get away. When the work was over Ted ran to the outfield and took him by the arm and led him toward the road.

"Have you and Tim been scrapping?" the captain asked.

Don shook his head.

"You fellows are in the same scout troop. Do you pull?"

"N—no."

"What's the matter; did Tim want to be patrol leader?"

Don nodded.

Ted slapped his glove against his thigh and whistled thoughtfully. At the corner he paused. Don halted, too.

"Look here," Ted said suddenly. "You know that Tim is a harum-scarum, don't you?"

"Everybody knows that," said Don.

Ted broke into a relieved laugh. "Well, if you know it, what's the use of paying any attention to him? Just let him beef along until he gets tired. He can't hurt you."

Don tried to wrest some comfort from the captain's words—and failed. True, Tim couldn't hurt him, but he could make things mighty unpleasant, and that was almost as bad.

At home he found a post-card from Mr. Wall:

The troop will assemble tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. Light marching order.

Don forgot all about Tim. Light marching order meant that this would not be an overnight hike, and a blanket was unnecessary. Haversack, cooking kit and rations for one meal would constitute the load.

Ordinarily, hikes were arranged in advance and discussed at troop meetings. But sometimes Mr. Wall did the unexpected. He had said once that it added spice to scouting, and the scouts had agreed. It gave them practice, too, in assembling at a few hours' notice. But the scouts did not think of that.

Don hustled upstairs and overhauled his haversack. His eating things were in their places. Frying-pan and two sauce-pans intact, can-opener, matches, salt—

“Got to get some salt,” he said, and ran downstairs to the kitchen. Barbara called that supper was ready. He scooted upstairs, washed, and came down to the dining-room.

“Hiking tomorrow?” Mr. Strong asked.

“Don will be too excited to eat,” Barbara said with a laugh as Don nodded in reply to the question.

But she was mistaken. Don ate a supper of healthy size. Afterward he went out to the porch and squinted up at the sky. Stars dotted the black heavens like so many small windows. Now, if it didn’t rain—

It didn’t; not during the night, anyway. Don awoke with the morning sun in his face. In a moment he was out of bed and into the bathroom. Twenty minutes later he was downstairs.

His breakfast was merely a bite and a promise. There were too many things to do and too much to think about! What should he take along to cook at noon?

“There’s some lamb chops in the ice-box,” said Barbara.

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Two of the chops went into the haversack. Then potatoes, and six slices of bread, and some coffee wrapped in a paper, and a small can of evaporated milk. He strapped the haversack, and suddenly remembered that he had forgotten salt, after all, and unstrapped it again. Barbara stuck in two apples, and by the time the load was slung from his shoulder, whistles and calls sounded from the gate.

Andy Ford, Ritter and Bobbie Brown were waiting impatiently. Bobbie was sure that they would be late, and kept saying that everybody knew that Mr. Wall started promptly on the minute. Don winked at the others and led the way toward troop headquarters.

They were not late. Mr. Wall's watch, hanging from a screw hook in the door, told them that they still had ten minutes. Don opened the patrol locker.

"Who'll carry the ax?" he asked.

"I will," said a voice.

He turned. Tim Lally was waiting with outstretched hand.

"Oh!" said Don uncertainly. Tim took the tool and strapped its leather sheath to his belt. He seemed to have forgotten all about his grouch.

Everything was noise and bustle and confusion. The Eagles and the Foxes were grouped in front of their patrol lockers. There were cries of, "Hey, Jimmy! what did you bring to cook? What did you bring, Charlie?"

Suddenly the silver notes of a bugle arose above the clamor. Assembly! Lockers were banged shut. Scouts scurried outdoors and fell into their places.

"Column twos," came Mr. Wall's voice. "Forward! March!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp, sounded eager feet. Down to Main Street and then to the left. Alex Davidson waved to them from the door of the grocery store.

"I wish Alex were with us," Don said wistfully.

"I guess Alex wishes he was, too," Andy answered. "But nobody'll ever catch him wearing a long face just because he must work. He isn't that kind."

The troop approached the turnpike.

"Column left!" came the order.

They knew where they were going up—up toward Gipsy Grove. The place had gotten its name from the fact that whenever a gipsy tribe came to the neighborhood it pitched

its tents there. It was an ideal camping ground, with plenty of firewood, a clean, running stream, and just enough open timber to let the sunlight through.

Presently they were away from the village and out in open country. The discipline of the march was dropped. In a straggling, merry line they moved along.

Twice the Scoutmaster called rest halts, and each time there was a short talk on roadside flowers, and trees, and weeds. The morning wore away. By and by the sun was almost directly overhead, and Gipsy Grove was at last in sight.

There was a race to see which patrol could get all its fires going first. Each scout was to cook for himself.

"I'll chop," cried Tim. "Somebody get my fire going." His strong, muscular arms made short work of the dry dead wood that littered the ground under the trees.

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"We win," shouted the Foxes. But their last fire went out as it was lighted, and a flustered scout prepared to try again amid cries of, "Not more than two matches." This time his wood took the flame. But now the Eagles and the Wolves also had their fires going. Mr. Wall declared the race a triple tie.

Haversacks were unpacked. Frying-pans and pots were dragged forth. Potatoes were laid among hot coals.

Mr. Wall had chopped some wood and had his own fire going. Now he walked among the boys.

"You're getting your fire too big," he warned Bobbie. "You don't need much of a blaze to cook."

"How's mine?" said Tim.

"Fine!" said the Scoutmaster. "Keep it that way."

"Sure," said Tim. "I'll show some of these other fellows how to do theirs."

Andy Ford gave a low groan. "Good night; now we're in for it."

Tim wasted no time. He approached Ritter. That scout eyed him suspiciously.

"You let my fire alone," he warned.

"Go chase yourself. Mr. Wall told me to show you fellows—"

"Tim!" Don chided.

Tim flashed the patrol leader an angry glance. "I said I was going to show the fellows, didn't I? He didn't tell me not to. Anyway, Ritter's fire sprawls out too much. Wait until I get a stick. Now, all you have to do is to pull out these pieces, and—"

"You're raking out my potatoes," cried Ritter.

"It won't kill you to put them back," said Tim. He tossed the stick away and turned toward Bobbie.

"Your fire's all right now, Bobbie," Don said distinctly.

Tim turned up his nose and faced in Wally Woods's direction. But Wally's fire, small and compact, gave him no excuse to tinker. He advanced to where Andy Ford was preparing to fry his meat.

"Gee!" he said. "That sure is one sick-looking fire."

"Suits me," said Andy. He laid the meat in the pan.

Tim began to prod the fire with his foot. The flame, which had been low and even, began to flare and smoke. Andy dropped his frying-pan and sprang forward.

"Get away from there," he cried. His rush caught Tim and pushed him back. Then the red-haired boy braced, and there was a scuffle. Andy's fire was scattered.

"What's the meaning of this?" came Mr. Wall's voice.

Instantly the boys separated. Andy hung his head as though ashamed. Tim carried an injured air.

"Andy pitched into me," he complained.

"He was interfering with my fire," Andy answered.

"I wasn't. I was only showing him."

"Andy is a first-class scout," said Mr. Wall quietly. "If he doesn't know how to build a fire and cook a meal I have blundered as Scoutmaster in awarding him his first-class badge."

Tim looked away. This was putting the whole thing in a new light. He dug the toe of one shoe into the ground, and kept twisting and turning it nervously.

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Mr. Wall's voice softened. "You go off the handle too quickly, Tim. You've ruined Andy's fire. What do you think you should do—the square thing?"

"I'll finish my cooking over Don's fire," Andy said quickly.

Mr. Wall never made the mistake of continuing a lecture to the point where it lost its force. He knew when to stop. This flurry was over.

"All right, scouts," he said, and went back to his own cooking. Tim shuffled off and squatted down beside his own blaze.

Andy rounded up his potatoes. They were cold and discouraged looking.

"I've enough potatoes for us both," said Don. "What kind of meat have you?"

"Sausage."

"Gosh! That ought to be fine. Let's go whack—half my lamb chops for half your sausage."

Soon eager nostrils were sniffing the glorious odor of sizzling meat touched with the tang of wood smoke. Don and Andy finished their cooking in silence. They began to eat. All over the camp scouts drew together and pooled their rations. Tim Lally sat by his fire, alone.

"He's beginning to look good and sore," Andy said in a low voice.

Don glanced toward the red-haired scout. Tim caught his eye and made a derisive face, and then turned his back and began to whistle as though he was having a gloriously good time.

But Don was not fooled. Tim was lonesome. He felt that he was frozen out. But what could Tim expect if he was going to antagonize everybody?

By and by cooking utensils were cleaned and put away. The fires were smothered. Haversacks were slung across strong young shoulders. The troop marched away.

Up a winding road the scouts went, sometimes singing, sometimes shouting boisterously, sometimes silent. Suddenly they came out in a clearing.

To the right was Danger Mountain; to the left was Lonesome Woods.

The scouts spoke in subdued voices. Danger Mountain! They all knew how it had come by its name. A man had tried to climb one of its high, rocky walls and had fallen to his death.

And Lonesome Woods. There was another name to make scouts edge closer to one another. Three miles wide it was, and about seven miles long, and dark and dense with thick growth. The gipsy caravans kept away from it. Passing tramps gave it a wide berth. From time to time boys dipped into its edges, but soon came out. Lonesome Woods, indeed!

"We'll have to explore that some day," said Mr. Wall.

"The mountain?" Tim asked eagerly.

"The woods," the Scoutmaster answered.

A shout broke from the troop. With Mr. Wall along there would be nothing to fear. When would they go? Next week?

"We'll take it up at Friday night's meeting," the Scoutmaster promised.

"Why can't we do the mountain?" Tim demanded.

"Because Danger Mountain is a bad spot. Broken bones are a heavy price to pay for foolish daring."

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Tim stared off at the mountain. “It doesn’t seem so hard,” he said, and his eyes lighted with eagerness. Mr. Wall’s face became grave.

The hike home was all downhill. The scouts swung along gayly. The prospect of penetrating Lonesome Woods shortened the miles. What would they find? What strange adventures would befall them?

“Adventure? Piffle!” said Tim. “Give me Danger Mountain.”

“Sssh!” warned Ritter. “Mr. Wall will hear you.”

“Gee! Can’t I even say what I’d like?” Off in the distance a dog barked. Tim barked in reply. The dog answered. It became a duel of sound.

Tim was in his glory. Weird, nerve-racking screeches came from his throat. Presently the uproar became unbearable.

Mr. Wall’s whistle shrilled. The noise stopped.

“What’s the matter back there?” Mr. Wall demanded. “Can’t the patrol leader keep order?”

“Cut it out, Tim,” said Don.

“Go on!” Tim answered sullenly. “Say it louder so Mr. Wall will hear you.” He slouched through what was left of the hike and did not speak a word to anyone.

“He surely can make things pleasant,” said Andy. “Some day he’ll go too far and Mr. Wall will bundle him out of the troop, and it will be good riddance.”

Don said nothing. He wanted to be relieved of the burden of Tim’s trouble-making, but not by expulsion. That, he thought, was no way for a fellow to end as a scout. If Tim would only be a little bit more like the other fellows in the patrol!

But the chances of Tim doing that seemed remote. He had his good moments—times when it seemed that he had struck the right road and was on his way to better things. Always, though, something happened to turn him aside.

Next day there was baseball practice. Don came to the field eager for a warm-up. He nodded hopefully to Tim, and took his place, and noticed that Ted Carter was loitering near by.

“Come on,” cried Tim. “Let’s see if you can do a little better pitching today.”

Don bit his lips. Evidently, Tim was in one of his sour, irritating moods. He served the ball and resolved to pay no attention to the catcher. By and by he threw his first curve.

"They'd kill that," said Tim.

Don pitched again.

"Oh, come on! *Come on!*"

Ted Carter walked out between the boys, "That will be all from you, Tim. When you come out on this field, you come out to play ball. If you can't play ball, you quit."

Slowly Tim pulled off his mitt. He was the only regular catcher. Ted was trying to bluff him. And his temper was flaring because he had been rebuked in front of Don.

"Think you can get anybody to play any better for you than I play?" he asked flippantly.

"You bet I can," said Ted. "I can use a fellow who'll be in the game every minute."

"Get him," Tim said indifferently.

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"I will," said Ted. "You're through. Get off the field."

Tim was jarred. He hadn't expected anything like this. He looked at Ted. There could be no escaping what he saw—the captain meant it.

"Where—where are you going to get another catcher?" he asked weakly.

"Is it worrying you?" Ted asked. "I'll go behind the bat myself. I guess I can get somebody to play first base. Now get off the field; you're in the way."

Tim walked over to the maple tree and stood there in its shade. He was raging. Chased from the field! Routed out as though he didn't amount to a rap, and he the best catcher in the village!

"I'll play with some of the other teams," he vowed. "I'll offer to catch for them. I'll come here and make these fellows feel sick. I'll—"

But he knew that he'd do nothing of the sort. Breaking into teams out of your own town was almost impossible. He was out of it, on the shelf, discarded.

"I ought to go out there," he muttered fiercely, "and whack Don one in the eye." He saw the pitcher begin to throw to Ted. The sight was too much for him. He swung around and plunged down the road, the big mitt under his arm, and did not once look back.

Had he stayed, he would have seen that Ted Carter called the pitching to a halt in a very few minutes. The captain was no fool. The first six balls Don threw him proved to him that the pitcher was upset.

"Don't let this bother you," he said. "Tim had it coming to him. It wasn't your fault. Go home and forget it, and tomorrow you and I'll work out and get acquainted."

Don went home, but he did not forget. He was sure that this latest twist would only pile up trouble for him as patrol leader.

Next morning the news was all over the village. Don heard it when he went on an errand for his father. Afterward he worked on his bird-houses and tried to brush aside the worried thoughts that plagued him. Andy Ford came to the yard, and was followed by Bobbie Brown and Wally Woods. The three boys looked at Don, and looked at each other, and looked away.

"Was Tim chased?" Andy asked at last.

Don laid down his plane. "Fellows," he said seriously, "if you hear any talk about Tim just—just keep your mouths shut. Talk always makes things worse and—and we're after the Scoutmaster's Cup."

The three boys nodded that they understood. There wasn't much to say after that. One by one they went their way and left Don alone.

Late in the afternoon he went to the field. He did not see Tim, and at once a weight seemed taken from his heart. He pitched to Ted. His control was better now, and presently he found himself enjoying the work. His curves broke well, and Ted kept calling, "That' a boy, Don; that' a boy!" and he felt a thrilling desire to give Ted the best he had. Tim never made him feel like that.

Next night came the troop meeting. He wondered if Tim would carry his bad temper so far as to come carelessly dressed. Evidently others shared his anxiety, for as soon as he reached headquarters Andy asked him anxiously if Tim would be "all right."

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Tim came to the meeting as clean as any scout in the troop. The patrol leader of the Foxes had left the key of his locker at home, and Fox patrol scouts who had expected to brush their shoes before the meeting was called found themselves face to face with a difficulty.

The “fall in” signal came all too soon for the flustered Foxes. Quietly Mr. Wall walked down the line of stiff-backed, silent boys.

“A perfect score for the Wolves,” he said. “Four points off the Foxes for untidiness. Two points from the Eagles for a scout absent.”

Up went the new standing:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 58-1/2

Fox 58

Wolf 57-1/2

“Gosh!” breathed Andy. “We’re close now, aren’t we?”

“It’s all in sticking together,” said Don. In spite of himself his voice trembled. He looked at Tim. The trouble-making scout was staring at the board with puckered eyes. Don would have given much to know of what he was thinking.

There was a lot of work that night—knot-tying, drowning grips and how to break them, identifying leaves from trees and bushes, and map reading. Finally that part of the meeting was over. A voice cried, “How about Lonesome Woods?” There were cheers and shouts.

There wasn’t much debate about the trip. There was, however, a hot wrangle about the day. Finally it went to a vote, and Thursday was selected.

“Gee!” said Tim. “I bet that will be a great hike.”

The meeting adjourned. A scout of the Eagle patrol caught Don’s arm.

“What team do you pitch against tomorrow?” he asked.

“Little Falls,” said Don.

Tim’s face lost its animation and grew dark. He walked toward the door. And Don, watching him, wondered why it was that fellows were always asked questions at the wrong time.

By this time Don knew that Tim, whenever anything peeved him, could be counted on to display a reckless streak. For a moment this worried him; then he brushed the thought aside. He was always fretting about Tim, and nothing serious was ever happening.

He had planned to mow the lawn and spade the flower beds next morning. It was well that he went early to his task, for at ten o'clock Ted Carter came for him.

"You had better come to the field," the captain said. "No pitching—just a little throwing to bases. I've dug up a fellow named Marty Smith to cover first. I want you to get used to each other."

Don evened off the flower beds, carried the raked-up grass around to the chickens, and put the gardening tools away.

"Dinner at twelve sharp," Barbara called after him.

At first he felt odd, throwing to the bag and not finding Ted there. He made some crazy tosses. But Marty's long reach always saved him, and Marty's cheery voice kept calling, "That's the stuff; that's what will get them."

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Another first-baseman, Don thought, would be scolding about the throws. His heart warmed to the newcomer. He began to feel at home. His throws steadied and became sure.

"That's enough," Ted called. "Nobody'll get much of a lead on you fellows. Now for some fielding."

Don walked over to the shade of the maple tree. Intent on watching the field, he did not notice the small figure that took a place at his side.

"Hello, Don," said a voice.

"Oh! Hello, Bobbie! What's the matter, you look worried?"

"I'm all right," Bobbie said hastily.

Don turned his eyes to the field. Even though his interest was completely absorbed, he thought, subconsciously, that the boy at his elbow was very restless.

By and by the dwindling tree shadows warned him that it was time he started for home. He walked out to the road. Bobbie walked with him.

"Going my way?" he asked.

"Y-yes," said Bobbie. They passed one corner, then another.

"I—I want to ask you something," Bobbie said haltingly. "If a scout knows that some other scout is going to do something—something dangerous, maybe—is it blabbing if he tells?"

Don stopped short. "Who's doing something dangerous?"

"Is it carrying tales?" Bobbie insisted.

Don thought a moment. "I don't think so, Bobbie."

"But when a fellow tells about other things—"

"Could you stop this scout from doing something dangerous if you told?" Don asked.

"I—I think so."

"Does he know it's dangerous?"

Bobbie nodded slowly.



"Then you ought to tell," said Don.

Bobbie looked at the ground. "Tim Lally is getting up a party to go to Danger Mountain today," he said.

A shiver ran through Don's nerves. "Where's Tim now?" he asked.

"Home, getting ready."

Don turned back toward the ball field. Past the maple tree he strode. A factory whistle sounded the noon hour. He broke into a run.

Two blocks farther on he stopped short. Tim was coming toward him carrying an oil can.

"Are you going to Danger Mountain?" Don demanded.

Tim put down the can and cocked his cap over one eye. "Sure. Why?"

"You can't. Mr. Wall said it's a bad spot."

"He didn't say we couldn't go."

"That's what he meant."

"How do you know?"

"Everybody knows. That's why he won't take us there. He said you could get broken bones."

"I'm not afraid." Tim picked up the can and swung it carelessly. "I guess Mr. Wall was trying to scare little fellows like Bobbie. He didn't mean a big fellow like me."

Don knew that arguing with Tim would be useless. And yet, as the trouble-maker stepped around him, he made a last plea.

"You'll get the patrol in trouble, Tim, and we're only one point behind the Eagles."

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"I knew you weren't worrying about *me*," said Tim.

Don followed slowly. He had pleaded for the troop thinking that that might win where all else had failed. And, as usual, Tim had misunderstood.

At the corner he paused. New thoughts were crowding through his brain. Tim's recklessness was jeopardizing not only himself—it was threatening the entire troop.

Suppose he fell and broke an arm, or a leg, or—or worse. People would say, "There; that's what comes from letting boys become scouts and go hiking." Boys would be taken from the troop. The troop might even break up. All Mr. Wall's plans for the future would be ruined.

"It isn't fair," Don told himself bitterly. "If there was somebody who could make him stay home—"

His eyes puckered and his mouth grew tight. He had told Bobbie that this wasn't carrying tales. It wasn't. Suddenly he turned to his left and went up a side street.

A few minute's later he rang the doorbell of a plain, pleasant-looking house. The screen door opened.

"Good afternoon, Donald," said a woman's voice. "Are you looking for Mr. Wall?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wall." Don's cap was in his hand. "Is he home? Could I see him right away?"

Mrs. Wall shook her head. "He went to the city this morning. I do not expect him until evening. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"N-no," said Don. He went down the stoop, stumbling on the last step, and walked slowly toward home.

CHAPTER V

A PLEA ON THE ROAD

Dinner was almost over when Don reached home. Barbara brought his food from the kitchen where she had kept it warm.

"Didn't you hear me say twelve sharp?" she scolded.

Don told of Bobbie's message, of his interview with Tim, and of his fruitless trip to Mr. Wall's house. Barbara, engrossed in the tale, dropped into her own seat and listened intently. Mr. Strong shook his head soberly.

"Going to Danger Mountain will be a foolhardy trick," he said.

"I wish Mr. Wall were home," said Don. He had lost appetite for his dinner and pushed his plate away. "I did right to go to him, didn't I, dad?"

"You'd have been foolish not to go," said his father.

Don stared hard at the tablecloth. He had entered joyously on his duties as patrol leader, but one disagreement after another with Tim had roughened his road. And now—now that he seemed powerless to stay this latest folly—he suddenly felt very, very tired.

"Why will Tim be so headstrong?" cried Barbara.

"It's a way some boys have," Mr. Strong explained. "Tell them not to do a thing, and immediately that is the one thing they want to do. As for Tim—Well, I fancy he's disgruntled because Ted Carter dropped him. He doesn't want to sit around and watch baseball today. He probably figured that the best way was to go off and pretend he didn't care. If he could add spice to the going off, it would make it seem all the more as though he was really having a good time."

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"And won't he have a good time?" Barbara asked.

"No boy really enjoys himself, when he knows he's doing wrong," Mr. Strong answered.

Don roused himself from his dull, discouraged mood. "Is there anything I could try, dad, to stop him? Just one more trial?"

"You might take him by the back of the neck and tell him you're boss."

"I would," Don said slowly, "if I were able."

He went upstairs and got into uniform—all except his spiked shoes. He would put those on on the porch where there was no carpet to rip and tear. He went over to the window and looked down at the yard. Nothing was there but grass, and hedge, and a small bed of flowers. And yet he saw a steep side of Danger Mountain, and khaki-clad boys climbing that steep side and missing their steps.

"Twenty minutes of two, Don," Barbara called.

He carried the spiked shoes down to the porch. He was angry now. Why should he worry when he had done the best he could? He *wouldn't* worry. He'd pitch his game and have a good time. If Tim wanted to get hurt, that was his funeral.

In this mood he walked to the field. The practice had already started. He gave the Little Falls players a casual glance. Visiting teams no longer worried him—not before the umpire's cry of "Play ball!" anyway. He had had his baptism of fire. He was a veteran.

"I was just going to send somebody to look you up," said Ted. "Everything all right? Good! Shoot away."

Thoughts of Tim came, but Don thrust them aside and shook his head stubbornly. What had happened was no fault of his. He had done his best. Now he was going to enjoy himself.

"Great stuff," said Ted when the warm-up was over. "Sting them in like that during the game and there'll be nothing to it."

Don laughed and walked toward the bench. His eyes scanned the spectators. It was just possible that Tim had changed his mind—

"I don't care whether he did or not," the pitcher muttered hotly. He drew on a sweater and took a seat on the bench, and stared out toward center field.

By and by it was time to start the game. Ted cried, "Come on, now; everybody get into this." Don dropped his sweater on the bench and walked out toward the mound.

The Little Falls coaches began a sharp rattle of talk. Don glared at them coldly. Up went his arm—and down.

“Strike one!”

Don pitched again. The batter hit a twisting, difficult fly, but Marty Smith ran back and caught it deftly.

“Yah!” cried Ted. “That’s getting them.”

It was clever fielding. Don seemed to catch the contagion of its worth. Why, with support like that a pitcher ought to do wonders. He pitched again.

“Strike!” ruled the umpire.

“Wow!” Ted said softly. “He surely has stuff on the ball today.”

Two more pitches, and the batter was out on strikes. The next player fouled to Ted. Little Falls’ first turn at bat had been a sorry failure.

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Cheers came from the spectators as Don walked to the bench. Somebody yelled, "Take off your hat, kid." He flushed, and doffed his cap, and sat down with crimson face.

"Come on," cried Ted. "Give Don a run and this game will be sewed up."

But it wasn't until the third inning that Chester tallied. Then she scored three runs in a rush. Ted led off with a three-bagger. After that came a single, an out, a base on balls, another out, and a long two-bagger. Marty Smith, with the crowd imploring him to keep up the good work, struck out on three pitched balls, and not one of them was worth offering at.

"Too bad," said Ted. "If that fellow could only hit he'd be a star."

Meanwhile, Little Falls had not yet scored. Nor did she tally in the fourth. Don, today, was master of the situation.

He came to the bench. Up to this point, the touch and go of battle had held him at a tension. Now, with the game comparatively safe, he relaxed. He paid attention to things he had been too busy to notice before—the afternoon shadows, for instance.

The shadows told his practiced scout eyes that it was about four o'clock. Unconsciously he began to figure. If Tim had started at one o'clock, he should have reached Danger Mountain an hour ago—

"Here!" Don told himself abruptly. "I must stop thinking of this."

Chester scored two more runs. He went out, jauntily, to pitch the fifth inning. Before he had hurled three balls he knew that something was wrong. He had lost the razor edge of pitching perfection.

He staggered through the fifth inning without being scored on, but it was ticklish work. Little Falls hit him hard. With the bases full and two out, Marty Smith sprang sideways, made a blind stab, scooped the ball and touched the bag for the third out.

Cries of chagrin came from the Little Falls bench. "Oh, you lucky dubs," called one of the coaches. "That was horseshoes."

Don smiled mechanically. It was his turn to go to bat; and after he was thrown out he came to the bench and fought stubbornly to keep his thoughts on the game and away from Tim.

Grimly he stuck to his task. When it came time to start the seventh inning, he was almost master of himself. He found his drop ball working again.

"Yah!" cried Ted. "Here's where we get in the game again."



Little Falls, following that turbulent sixth inning, expected to go right on with her hitting. Instead, her batters found themselves once more helpless. Three players stepped to the plate and were thrown out in order.

Don's spirits had risen. He walked toward the bench with a springy stride. The spectators in back of third base began to cheer. He glanced at them with a smile—and then his face sobered.

Bobbie Brown was pushing his bicycle hurriedly along in the rear of the watchers. His attitude said plainly that he had come with a message.

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Don walked past the bench and waited. Bobbie came directly to him.

"Tim just started," he said. "He had to do chores for his mother and couldn't get away earlier."

"It will be almost dark when he gets there," Don cried.

"Tim went just the same," Bobbie answered. "He told the fellows they could hurry and get there before sunset, and then start back after taking a little look around."

Don could understand harum-scarum Tim refusing to give up a plan. But as for his companions—

"What fellows are with him?" he asked. "Not scouts?"

Bobbie nodded,

"Any from our patrol?"

"Ritter."

Don caught his breath.

"There's a scout from the Foxes and one from the Eagles, too," said Bobbie.

But Don could find no consolation in the fact that other than Wolf patrol scouts were derelict.

"I think they wanted to quit," Bobbie went on, "but Tim jawed them—you know—and they went along."

Don could find no comfort in that, either. The inning was over. It was Little Falls' turn to go to bat. He took a few steps toward the diamond, and paused.

"Come on, Don," called Ted.

He turned back. "Wait here with your bike," he said quickly. "Have you a wrench? Raise the seat."

There was no use pretending that he did not care. And his duty, he thought, was clear. He could ride after Tim and overtake him before he had gone very far. What sort of patrol leader would he be to let two of his scouts break faith with the Scoutmaster and not fight to the very last to bring them back? For it was breaking faith. Mr. Wall had not dreamed that they would do anything like this.

He was on fire now for the game to end. In his eagerness he began to pitch wildly. The first batter got a base on balls.

Ted walked down to him. "Steady, there; you're pitching too fast."

Don saw that if he gave bases on balls he would prolong the struggle. Though it was torture for him to go slow, he fought his desire to hurry. But it was impossible to lose himself in the game. The edges of his skill were blunted. Little Falls began to hit freely again.

Two runs came over the plate before the third player was out. The score was now 5 to 2.

"Arm tired?" asked Ted.

Don shook his head. Why wouldn't the batters hurry? When the third Chester boy was thrown out he sprang to his feet and strode to the mound.

Desperately he worked, trying to retire Little Falls' batters in order. But Little Falls, in that last inning, had tasted blood. Now she would not be denied. Three runs were scored. The game was a tie.

Ted came to the bench with puckered eyes. Here was something he couldn't understand. It was a common thing to see pitchers gradually weaken, but Don had lost his effectiveness all in a moment. He dropped down on the bench and motioned for Don to sit beside him.

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"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said Don. What was the use of worrying Ted, he thought.

He had not deceived the captain in the least. Ted leaned back and sighed. He knew that here was a ball game that was lost.

The ninth inning was a slaughter. Little Falls scored four times. Each hit, each run, made the game last that much longer. Don labored grimly to reach the end.

Ted asked him no questions when he came in from the mound. In fact, the captain only half-heartedly urged his players to make a rally. The leaderless, dispirited team fell easy victims to the rival pitcher's curves.

The moment the last player was out, Don hurried to where Bobbie waited with the wheel. He threw one leg over the frame. His foot found the toe-clip.

"Got your scout whistle?" he asked.

Bobbie handed it over. Don thrust it in his pocket and was off.

Shading his eyes, Bobbie watched wheel and rider fly down the road. A hand touched his shoulder.

"What's Don rushing off for?" Ted asked.

Bobbie told about Tim's journey to Danger Mountain. Ted's eyes snapped.

"Think Don'll catch him?" he asked.

"Sure he will."

"I hope," said the captain, "I hope he gives him a beating to remember."

But Don, as he pedaled down the road, was not thinking of fight. Into the Turnpike he raced at an angle of forty-five degrees. The dry dust sifted up from under the spinning tires. It powdered his legs, and burned his eyes, and parched his throat.

Half an hour later he came to where Christie's Brook crossed the Pike. It was clean water, and safe. He threw himself on his stomach and reached down with his lips. His whole body cried out to him to drink, drink, drink. But he was too wise a scout not to know the dangers of such a course. He rinsed his mouth and throat, and swallowed a few drops, mounted again and rode off.

Another twenty minutes, and he came slowly to the top of a ridge. Down below dark forms moved along the road. He gripped the handle-bars hard and coasted.

A few minutes later he had almost reached them. They heard the whir of his chain and looked back. Then they stopped.

"It's only Don," Tim said carelessly.

Ritter shrank back as though he wanted to hide.

Up to this point Don had thought only of overtaking the hikers. Now he was face to face with the problem of what he should say to them. He laid his bicycle at the side of the road and advanced with fast-beating heart.

"How many of you scouts told Mr. Wall you were going on this trip?" he demanded.

"Wasn't necessary," Tim answered promptly. "Mr. Wall didn't say we couldn't go."

"Mr. Wall didn't expect that any scout would go."

"How do you know what Mr. Wall expected? Did he tell you?"

It was a losing argument. Don could see the other scouts looking at Tim and nodding their heads as though agreeing with his logic—all except Ritter, who was looking at the ground.

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Don's mind worked feverishly. They were scouts. They were breaking the scout law that said that a scout was trustworthy. He tried to grasp words that would make them feel what he felt, but the words would not come.

"We can't stay here all day," Tim hinted.

The sound of a locomotive came faintly. Perhaps it was the train bringing Mr. Wall back from the city. All at once Don's mind, groping, searching, caught the first vague outline of an idea.

"Wait a minute, fellows." His eyes were on fire. "If you thought Mr. Wall would have no objection to a Danger Mountain hike, why did you wait until you got him out of the village?"

"What do you mean by that?" Tim asked suspiciously.

"Why did you wait until he went away for the day and then sneak off on this hike?"

Indignant cries broke from Tim and from the scouts. They had not known that Mr. Wall had gone to the city. Ritter caught Don's arm.

"Is Mr. Wall away today, Don? Honest?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?" Tim asked.

"I went to his house at noon to tell him about this hike."

Silence fell over the group. The scout from the Eagle patrol took off his hat and fanned his face.

"Mr. Wall won't think we sneaked off just because he was away," he said uneasily.

"Why shouldn't he think it?" cried Don. One of the party was weakening, anyway. He pressed his advantage. "You fellows know what he said on the last hike—that Danger Mountain was a bad place. And the moment he leaves town, a bunch of scouts start for the mountain. How does that look?"

It looked distinctly bad. Tim's carelessness vanished.

"Well," he demanded of Ritter angrily, "what are you looking at me for? I didn't know he had gone to the city."

The hikers were demoralized and leaderless. The right word now—

"Fellows," said Don, "let us show Mr. Wall that he can leave the village as often as he pleases and not have to worry about a single scout of Chester troop."

Ritter took a step toward him. But the others were still just a bit uncertain.

Don almost held his breath. There was nothing more for him to say. He ran a nervous hand into the pocket of his sweater. His fingers closed on some cord, and something round and hard. Bobbie's whistle!

He put it to his lips and blew a long, shrill blast.

It was the voice of authority—the scout signal for attention. Instinctively the boys straightened and looked alive.

"We're going home," said Don. "We're going to show that a scout is trustworthy. Forward!"

An air of suspense seemed to come down over them there in the road. Don's pulse throbbed. Would they obey?

"March!" he ordered. The die was cast.

Three of the boys swung forward. Tim stood with his feet spread apart, frowning and glum. Presently, when the others had gone several hundred yards, he hunched his shoulders sheepishly and slowly followed after.



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CHAPTER VI

SPROUTING SEEDS

Don had pitched a full game that day. He was tired. Yet, as he slowly rode the bicycle, he scarcely felt the weary complaint of his muscles.

A great peace lay over the road. The air was soft with summer's glory. Faces that had been turned toward Danger Mountain were now turned toward Chester, and that made all the difference in the world.

At first the journey back was something like a funeral. Tim shuffled along in the rear. Ritter and the two other scouts had nothing to say. Then by degrees the tension wore off. Tim still clung to the rear, but the others began to laugh and to talk.

Half way back to town they saw a man in the distance riding toward them.

"Isn't that Mr. Wall?" Ritter asked anxiously.

It was Mr. Wall. Tim hurried up from the rear. He wanted to be where he could hear what was said when scouts and Scoutmaster met.

Mr. Wall seemed to be riding hard. Suddenly, as he saw them, his pace slackened.

"He's going to dismount," said Ritter.

"He's waiting for us," said the Eagle patrol scout.

Their steps unconsciously became slower, Don jumped from the bicycle and walked with them. He studied Mr. Wall's face. Did Mr. Wall know?

He had gone to the Scoutmaster's house that morning ready to tell. Now, though, he thought he faced a different situation. He was sure that the Danger Mountain hike had been blocked—not for today alone, but for all the days of the future. To bring it up again would be like trying to re-heat a stale pie.

He had faced the situation alone. By luck—he called the use he had made of Mr. Wall's absence a lucky stroke—he had conquered. What had happened had been among scouts. They had settled it among themselves. He felt, dimly, that a great lesson had been learned. Maybe it would be better to leave things as they were.

The Scoutmaster's greeting was cheery. "Hello there, hikers! How did you find the going?"

Ritter and the others glanced at one another sideways.

“Pretty dusty,” Don said promptly.

“That’s how I found it. How far did you go?”

“About a mile past Christie’s Brook.”

“Who was the star cook?”

“We didn’t cook anything today.”

“Cooking ought to be a part of every hike,” the Scoutmaster said pleasantly. He felt his tires. “I guess I’ve worked up an appetite for supper. I’m going back. Want to ride in with me, Don?”

The patrol leader of the Wolves hesitated. Did Mr. Wall suspect something and intend to question him?

“I—I guess I’ll stick with the fellows,” he said.

Mr. Wall called a good-by and rode off. A few minutes later his retreating figure was outlined against a patch of bronze evening sky.

Ritter drew a deep breath. He hadn’t exactly expected Don to tell, and yet—

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"Phew!" said the Eagle patrol scout, "That was a close shave."

"Close shave nothing," cried Tim, "He's wise. Four scouts in uniform, and a patrol leader in baseball clothes and spiked shoes, and riding a bicycle. What does that look like?"

"Well, what does it look like?" Ritter demanded.

"It looks as though somebody jumped on a bicycle and rode after us, you gilly."

"Gee!" said the scout from the Eagles. "Mr. Wall will want to know—"

"Mr. Wall doesn't go snooping around," cried the scout from the Foxes.

"And Don could have told him right here, had he wanted to," said Ritter.

Tim said nothing. The march home started again. Don, embarrassed, rode far in the van. Twice, looking back over his shoulder, he saw Tim trudging with the others, but with his hands in his pockets and his head bent thoughtfully.

For the second time that day Don was late for a meal. His father, his mother and his sister Beth had gone off to a church social. Barbara gave him his supper; and while he ate, he told her how the scouts had turned back when they learned that Mr. Wall was away.

"They must be all right at heart, Don," said Barbara.

"Of course they're all right," said Don.

Barbara went out to the kitchen for a piece of cake. He sighed, and relaxed in his chair, and waited. It seemed that she was gone a long time. Suddenly he gave a start, and jerked open his eyes, and looked up to find her shaking his shoulder.

"Better eat your cake tomorrow, Don. You're falling asleep."

He stumbled upstairs and went to bed. As he lay there, on the borderland of sleep, his thoughts drifted back to Tim walking with the others with his hands in his pockets—the way no scout who was alert and alive should walk.

"Wonder what Tim was thinking about," he muttered sleepily.

Tim had been thinking about a boy who could have made it hot for him—and who hadn't. He had expected Don to tell. He had hurried forward ready to argue heatedly in his own defense. And instead, Don had plainly tried to shield him.

He slouched his shoulders with an air of hard toughness, but deep inside he felt small and cheap. He was used to wrangling and boisterous striving for what he wanted. Yet, for all of his roughness, a finer streak of his nature could, on occasion, respond to fair dealing. Squareness—being white—was something he could understand. Don had been white.

He found himself wishing, as he walked along, that he had never started the hike. He had seen Mr. Wall's eyes travel in his direction as though picking him out as the ringleader in whatever mischief had been afoot. He wondered what the Scoutmaster thought of him.

"Aw!" he told himself uncomfortably, "I'm a mutt."

For the time being, at least, his hot blood was chastened. He had gone off that afternoon and had left several chores undone. When he reached home his mother scolded and his father threatened. It was no new experience. Nevertheless, he finished the neglected work in silence, and in silence he ate his supper.

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It had begun to dawn on him that he was spoiling things for himself. He wasn't getting any fun out of scouting. He had been banished from baseball. If Ted Carter stayed behind the bat, and if he didn't get another chance to play—

"It's coming to me," he said, and his eyes blinked.

The time he had ruined Andy's fire Mr. Wall had said, "What do you think a scout should do—the square thing?" He was confronted with the same question now. What should he do—the square thing?

All of Sunday he wrestled with the problem. Monday afternoon he went to the field early. He was the first boy there. He sat under the tree; and when he saw Ted coming, he stood up slowly and went forward to meet the captain.

"Say, Ted, any chance for me to get back?"

Ted glanced at him sharply. "Get back for what?"

"To play ball."

The captain tossed him the mitt. "Sure. Here comes Don. Catch him. No curves—he worked nine innings Saturday. Just a little warm-up."

It was an awkward moment for Tim. He was not used to knuckling under. He swallowed a lump in his throat; but Don acted as though there had never been a change in the team. Slowly his restraint wore away. The other players took him back without question; nobody mentioned Saturday's disastrous game.

Tim went home from the practice whistling shrilly. There was a patrol meeting at Don's house that night. He arrived on time. The others talked eagerly of the first aid contest that was scheduled for Friday night. For once he listened without trying to break into the conversation and monopolize it, and gradually a little frown of worry wrinkled his forehead.

The dining-room table was pushed up against the wall.

"No fooling tonight, fellows," said Don. "Let's see how much work we can do."

Tim worked as faithfully as any of the others. In a corner Don and Ritter practiced with splints, and over by the bay window Wally and Alex did their bandaging. He and Andy and Bobbie had the center of the floor for artificial respiration, stretcher work, and fireman's lift.

He worked feverishly. Something whispered to him, "Why didn't you work hard before? You're too late now." Presently it was nine o'clock and the work was over.



“How does it look?” Don asked eagerly.

“All right here,” said Wally.

Tim and Andy were silent. Don’s eyes clouded.

The meeting broke up. The boys passed out through the hall calling back good night. Andy stayed behind.

“Tim’s going to fall down,” he said bluntly, “and fall down hard.”

Don slowly returned the bandages to the first aid kit. “He was trying tonight.”

“Sure he was—tonight. Why didn’t he try at the other meetings and cut out his fooling?”

Don closed the kit and pushed it aside. “If he practiced a couple of times this week—”

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"How are you going to get him to practice?" Andy demanded.

"Ask him."

"Mackerel! Ask *him* to do extra work? Can't you imagine what he'll tell you?"

Don could imagine it without much trouble. But he remembered how his last appeal, when everything seemed lost, had stopped the Danger Mountain hike. It cost nothing to try. He had no love for the job of intimating to Tim that his work was not satisfactory. And yet was it fair for him to keep silent? Was it fair to those scouts who had labored with a will?

He went out to the porch and lifted his voice. "Tim! O Tim!"

An answering cry came faintly.

"Now for the fireworks," said Andy.

Tim came through the gate and advanced as far as the porch steps.

"How about you and Andy and Bobbie practicing a couple of times before Friday?" Don asked.

There was a long interval of silence.

"All right," said Tim at last. He swung around and walked out the gate.

"Mackerel!" said Andy. "I thought he'd go up in the air."

Wednesday morning Tim practiced at troop headquarters. Thursday afternoon, as soon as the baseball drill was over, he practiced again. Friday morning he was even ready for more; but that morning Bobbie had to weed the vegetable garden in back of his house and could not come around. Tim went home vaguely disappointed.

That afternoon, at the baseball field, he played a butter-fingered game. He could not hold the ball, and his throws to bases were atrocious.

"Hi, there!" called Ted. "Go take a walk around the block."

Tim was frightened. "Don't you want me to play tomorrow?"

"Sure I do. Tomorrow you'll be all right. This is your bad day. Go off by yourself and get the air."

Tim went off to the maple tree and sat down. And by and by he found himself wondering, not what kind of baseball he would play on the morrow, but whether he would be good or bad in first aid that night.

He came to troop headquarters after supper with a queer, nervous feeling in the pit of his stomach. Outside, the Eagles were making one last hurried practice of the business of making a coat stretcher. Tim wished he could do a little practicing, too; but when he went inside and joined his patrol, he shrank from asking Andy and Bobbie to work with him.

The hands of the clock crept around to the hour of eight. The Eagles came inside. Mr. Wall called the patrol leaders.

"We don't want any lagging or fooling," he announced. "Have your scouts move lively."

"Yes, sir." The leaders went back to their patrols and repeated what the Scoutmaster had said.

Mr. Wall's whistle shrilled. The bugle sounded "To the Colors." Fifteen minutes later the inspection was over. Each patrol had a perfect score. The result was marked on the board:

PATROL POINTS

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Eagle 74-1/2

Fox 74

Wolf 73-1/2

It was now time for the contest. An air of tension ran through the troop. Each patrol kept to itself. There was a deal of husky excited whispering. Of all the Wolf patrol, Tim alone was silent. The muscles of his mouth twitched. How he wished he could have back those afternoons he had wasted!

"Scouts!" called Mr. Wall.

The room became silent.

"First in each division of work," he said, "will count five points, second three points, and third one point. The patrol having the greatest number of points at the finish will have five credits to its blackboard score; the second patrol, three points; the third patrol nothing. Two things will count, speed and neatness—and, oh yes, care. I say speed, but I also warn you to use your heads."

Use their heads? What did that mean? But before the scouts had much time to think about it, the first event was called.

This was bandaging. Two scouts from each patrol stepped forward, ready. Wally and Alex represented the Wolves.

"Arm sling," called Mr. Wall.

Quickly, deftly, the slings were made. There was little to choose, it seemed to the watching scouts.

"Head bandage," called the Scoutmaster.

Again there was quick work. But this time the Fox boys slipped a moment. Warning calls came from their patrol. Bobbie yelled a "Go it, Wally." The Fox scouts finished only a second behind the others.

"Broken collar bone," was the next command.

This time one of the Eagles dropped a bandage. There was a shout from the scouts. The shouting increased as the Fox bandager fumbled the binding knots. Wally worked coolly and rapidly. He was the first to finish in this particular test.

"We're going to get bandaging points sure," cried Andy. "Bully work, Wally; bully work."

"Foot bandage," said Mr. Wall.

The three teams finished only seconds apart.

The triangular bandage was now discarded.

“Spiral bandage,” ordered Mr. Wall.

Here, for the first time, Wally ran into trouble. The bandage became flabby. Quickly he pulled it apart and began again. The Fox and Eagle patrols jumped to their feet and pleaded for their respective teams to hurry. Wally calmly ran the bandage up the calf of Alex’s leg.

“Finished,” cried the Foxes and the Eagles.

“Finished,” cried Wally.

“Gosh!” whispered Bobby. “His bandage looks neater than theirs.”

Then came a spiral reverse, and after that a complete spiral for all the fingers. When this last job was finished, Mr. Wall smiled, as though well pleased.

“Pretty work,” he said. “That will be all.” The contestants walked back to their troops, and he figured on a pad.

“Wonder if he’ll tell us now,” whispered Bobbie.

“Of course he will,” Andy answered. “That’s what makes things exciting, knowing that you are behind or ahead—”

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“Sssh!” Don cautioned.

“I’ll award the points now,” said Mr. Wall. “Later you can look over my scoring pad and see how I scored each individual test. Wolf patrol five points—”

“Wow!” yelled Bobbie.

Andy dug him in the ribs. “Shut up, you shrimp. Want Mr. Wall to put us out?”

But Mr. Wall only smiled at the excited scout. “—Eagles,” he went on, “three points, and Foxes, one point.”

The Foxes seemed glum. The Eagles clamored about their patrol leader. Don felt like dancing.

“Fine start,” he said to Tim; and Tim nodded and swallowed a lump in his throat.

He was used to having his pulse throb during the heat of a baseball game. He was used to the wild urge to win that stirred him on the diamond. But the breathless anxiety that ran through him now was something new. He ached to get in and do something for his patrol.

Splints came next. This time Don and Ritter represented the Wolves. Mr. Wall’s first order was for a broken thigh.

The watching scouts were silent. All three teams worked rapidly. There was a hush as the Scoutmaster examined the patients.

“Too tight,” he said when he examined Ritter’s thigh.

Tim squirmed in his seat. Don took off the splints and looked down at the floor.

Broken leg splints came next, then broken arm splints, and then applying a tourniquet. On this the Eagle scouts failed dismally. Don and Ritter came back to the patrol.

“How does it look?” Andy demanded.

Don shook his head. He was afraid of that first tight splint. It was no surprise to him when Mr. Wall gave first place to the Foxes. But his heart leaped as he heard the Wolves rated second.

“We’re ahead,” Alex cried jubilantly. He pushed a paper in front of Don’s eyes.

Wolf 8
Fox 6
Eagle 4

Tim wet his lips. His turn was next—his, and Bobbie's, and Andy's.

"Artificial respiration," called Mr. Wall.

Bobbie lay on the floor, face down, and stretched his arms above his head. Andy held his wrists lightly. Tim knelt astride the prone figure and placed trembling hands between the short ribs.

Mr. Wall, holding a watch, walked back and forth. Tim's heart thumped. Would he go too fast or too slow? He wondered how the other patrols were making out, but he dared not look. Presently the Scoutmaster called, "That's enough," and he scrambled to his feet.

"Gosh!" Bobbie said ruefully. "You surely put some pressure on."

"Wonder how we made out," said Andy.

Tim wondered, too. When the call came for a demonstration of fireman's lift, he shut his teeth hard. He wouldn't fall down on this!

Two minutes later the lift was over.

"You were quicker than any of them," cried Andy in his ear.

"Stretchers," called Mr. Wall. "Lift the patient in and stand at attention. Patients must not help themselves. Got your staves? Ready? Go!"

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A yell burst from the watchers.

“Go on, you Eagles!”

“Chew them up, Foxes; chew them!”

“Faster, Tim; faster!”

Tim’s coat was off and on the staves. His fingers fumbled with the buttons.

“I’m ready,” came Andy’s voice. “Ready, Tim.”

His fingers hesitated. Were the buttons all right? He saw the Eagle stretcher-makers begin to straighten up. He swung around to Bobbie.

“All right, Andy, lift him. Up! Now down on the stretcher. Quick! There go the Eagles. Lift it. *Lift it!*”

They lifted their burden. Mr. Wall came down to inspect.

“Buttons out,” cried a voice from the watchers. “Buttons out on the Wolf stretcher.”

It was true. Tim’s coat, under Bobbie’s weight, had popped open. Tim’s face turned fiery red. Was he always going to be the fellow who made his patrol lose? Why hadn’t he made sure of those buttons instead of taking a chance?

“Maybe some of the others have coats open,” Bobbie whispered.

But none of the other coats were open.

Somebody cried that the contest was over. The scouts formed a pushing, excited ring around Mr. Wall and the stretchers. The Scoutmaster shook his head gravely.

“I’m afraid I cannot make a decision yet. Each patrol has excelled in some one thing and has done poorly in some other.”

The pushing and the clamor ceased.

“One more test,” Mr. Wall added.

The scouts fell back. The big moment of the night had come. This next event would probably seal the doom of some one patrol.

“Each team,” said Mr. Wall, “will go to the rear of the room down near the door. At the word it will make its stretcher, lift in the patient, and bring him to me as though I were the doctor. Understand?”

"Yes, sir."

"Clear the room."

The watchers pushed back along the side wall in a straggling line. There was no such thing now as each scout keeping with his own patrol. Eagles, Wolves and Foxes found themselves hopelessly mixed. Don squeezed in next to Alex Davidson.

"Look at Tim," said Alex.

Tim's lips were stern. Here was *the* chance. The palms of his hands began to sweat. If they could win this—

"Watch your buttons," whispered Andy.

"Go!" came the word of command.

This time Tim took no chances. His fingers were cold, and every nerve cried to him to go faster, faster, faster, but he forced himself to make sure that every button was snug. Then he hitched forward on his knees and helped Andy.

"All right," Andy cried excitedly. "Get him by the shoulders, Tim."

It took them but a moment to lay Bobbie in the stretcher. Tim sprang to the front of the staves, Andy to the rear. They swung the stretcher from the ground.

"Ray for the Wolves!" cried Wally's voice.

All Tim thought about was getting to Mr. Wall with his burden. He broke into a walk that was almost a run.

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“Look at the Wolves!” The cry could be heard above the noise. “That’s no way to carry an injured person.”

Tim looked around, startled. What was wrong? He saw the Eagles and the Foxes carrying their loads slowly, with precious care. All at once he understood. Oh, what a blunder he had made!

He slowed up abruptly. He could hear tense voices shouting that the Wolves were out of it. He came to a stop in front of Mr. Wall.

The scouts rushed forward from the wall. Somebody’s hot breath was on his neck and a squirming elbow was poked in his side. He did not look around. Mr. Wall’s whistle shrilled, and the gathering became quiet.

“I am glad this happened,” the Scoutmaster said. “I do not mean I am glad because a patrol has failed, but glad because now the lesson will be driven home. An injured person must always be carried carefully. That’s what I had in mind when I said speed would count, but that I wanted you to think.”

Tim’s cheeks burned. There was more to what Mr. Wall said, but he scarcely heard. The points were awarded—Fox patrol, first; Eagles, second; Wolves, last. Bobbie slipped out of the stretcher and Tim turned away forlornly.

Don gripped his arm. “That gives us second place, anyway, Tim. The Foxes have 11 points, and we have 9, and the Eagles have 7.”

But Tim could take no comfort. He had fallen down again. Bonehead! That’s what he was—a bonehead!

The blackboard was changed:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 74-1/2

Fox 79

Wolf 76-1/2

“Gosh!” cried Bobbie. “Before inspection we were third, and only one point behind first place. Now we’re second and two and a half points behind. Funny, isn’t it?”

Tim didn’t think it was funny at all. His scout honor, not yet fully awake, throbbed with a sense of guilt. Every other fellow in the troop had worked hard. Even Alex, after finishing in the grocery store, had worked at night. And yet in spite of how hard they

had tried, his lapse had blackened every one of them, just as though they had been skulkers and shirkers.

Just staying around where the others were made him hot and uncomfortable. While the room rang with cheers for the victorious Foxes he slipped out of the door and melted away in the darkness.

Suddenly the fact that he was sneaking away struck him like a blow. Sneaking away! He stopped. With a careless, cocky swagger he had always, before this, stood up to his troubles.

"I'll go back," he said defiantly. "I'm not afraid."

He wasn't afraid. That was true. If any fellow there had threatened to punch his head he would have peeled off his coat in an instant. He was not scared of physical force; but he was afraid of what every scout in the room might be thinking—that Tim Lally had spoiled things again.

He leaned against a tree, pulled a tender twig, and chewed it thoughtfully. He could see the glowing windows of troop headquarters, and a bright light streamed out through the open door. Shouts, and cheers, and laughter, came faintly to his ears. The whole troop seemed to be having a good time congratulating the victor without envy. He was the only boy who had slipped away.

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All at once, as he watched, a great longing arose in his heart to be like other scouts. He was tired of being picked on, and blamed for everything, and spoken of with a doubtful shake of the head. Once he had not minded these things. Now he hungered wistfully for his share of what scouting had to offer: fun, and whole-hearted work, and—and respect.

The noise became subdued. The scouts began to leave. One group, talking excitedly, passed him and he drew back behind the tree.

Then a man stepped out through the doorway and came his way. Tim drew a quick breath and walked out into the roadway.

“Hello, Mr. Wall.”

“Hello, Tim. Coming my way?”

“Yes, sir.”

They fell into step.

“It was my fault the Wolves lost tonight,” the boy said huskily.

“Anybody can make that mistake—once,” Mr. Wall told him.

“It was my fault,” Tim said stubbornly. What he wanted to say next didn’t come so easily. “How—” He hesitated. “How does a fellow get to be a better scout?”

Mr. Wall’s hand fell on his shoulder. “Tim, it’s all in the way a fellow handles the laws and the oath. If he lives up to them, he’s all right. He’s a real scout.”

“But if I had somebody to go to when I got stuck—”

“Go to your patrol leader, Tim. He’s the one to help you.”

That night, long after going to bed, Tim lay awake. Well, if speaking to Don was the right way, he’d do it.

But it wasn’t easy. When he reached Don’s yard next morning, he sat on the grass and tried to scare up courage to say what was in his mind.

“Signaling contest next month,” Don told him, “Were you there when Mr. Wall made the announcement?”

Tim shook his head.



"Three kinds," Don explained; "telegraph, semaphore, and Morse. Which can you do best, Tim?"

"I don't know."

"Andy and Wally are down for telegraphy. How about you and Alex Davidson taking Morse?"

Morse was harder than semaphore. Tim didn't want to fail again. Neither did he want to dodge something just because it was hard.

"Alex works," he said hesitatingly. "If I had somebody to practice with in the daytime—"

Don's heart leaped. Could this be rough-and-tumble Tim?

"I'll practice with you now," he cried. "Wait until I get flags."

A minute later he was out of the house. Tim went down near the gate. They began to wig-wag.

At first the work was rusty. By degrees, though, as they corrected each other's mistakes, smoothness came and a measure of speed.

Tim's eyes danced. Gee! but wasn't this fun? He wig-wagged, "Don't give up the ship," and was delighted when he found that his sending had been so sure that Don had caught every letter.

By and by Bobbie appeared and leaned over the gate.

"Hello, Tim," he called.

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Tim nodded shortly. He was too much engrossed in what he was doing to have thought for anything else. Don sent him, "Give me liberty or give me death." He stumbled and slipped through the words, threw his cap on the grass and yelled to Don to send it again.

Factory whistles sounded, and Barbara called that dinner was ready. Tim put down the flag regretfully and mopped the sweat from his face. It was Saturday, and this afternoon the nine had a game. But as he turned toward the gate, baseball was very, very far from his thoughts.

Bobbie joined him on the sidewalk. Tim strode off briskly, and Bobbie, shorter of leg, almost had to run.

"Getting ready for the signal contest, Tim?"

Tim nodded.

"I bet you won't make any mistakes next time."

Poor Bobbie meant no harm, but it was about the worst thing he could have said. From Andy, or Alex, or any of the bigger scouts, Tim would not have minded so much. But to have little Bobbie hold up his shortcomings was like drawing a match across sandpaper.

"Gee!" Bobbie rattled on; "aren't you glad Don is going to show you how to do things?"

"Say," Tim said ominously, "you shut up and run along or I'll twist your ears around your head. Go on, now." He gave the astonished boy a push. Then, scowling blackly, he passed him and went down the street with steps that had lost their lightness and their spring.

CHAPTER VII

CROSS CURRENTS

In the days that followed, Tim became as restless as a caged animal. He had had a taste of the fun of being a real scout. He knew the dissatisfied emptiness of not pulling with his patrol. He wanted to play fair, but his high-strung nature could not shake off the dread of having anybody think that Tim Lally could be led around by the nose.

That morning's signal drill with Don had opened the door to a strange, delightful country. He tried to find the same zest when they practiced again. It was gone. Suspicious thoughts sneaked through his brain, whispering, "Maybe Don likes this because it gives him a chance to be a big fellow."

He had spells of moody silence during which he was dissatisfied with himself and his whole small world in general. The news of what he was doing had spread through the patrol. The third time he worked with Don, Andy, Ritter and Bobbie all watched from the fence.

After he was gone there was a hubbub of excited talk. Gee! Tim was getting to be a peachy scout, wasn't he! Don took the signal flags and walked thoughtfully toward the cellar. He had begun to notice a change.

Two days later Tim came back by appointment. His work was listless and dead. The next time he did not come at all. That evening Don met him on Main Street.

"I guess I can do all right now working nights with Alex," Tim said uneasily.

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"All right," Don agreed. "Any time you want to come around, though—" He waited, but Tim said nothing.

Don went home feeling rather blue. "I suppose he'll start scrapping with everybody all over again," he muttered.

But he was wrong. Tim went his way moody and silent, but with no chip on his shoulder. He came to the next troop meeting clean and tidy, and on time. Each patrol won a perfect score. The blackboard read:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 90-1/2

Fox 95

Wolf 92-1/2

"Still two and one-half points behind," Don sighed. Wasn't it hard to catch up? If the Wolves could win the next contest on signaling—But he wasn't going to think of that, now that Tim had become balky.

The other scouts spoke of it, though. Alex said earnestly that Tim was really practicing this time. Andy grinned and said that the Eagles and the Foxes had better watch out because they were heading straight for trouble. Don walked with them and said not a word.

Five days later the patrol awoke to the fact that Tim no longer practiced in Don's yard. Andy and Bobbie came around and sat on the front stoop with the patrol leader.

"Mackerel!" said Andy, "but he's a queer fish. Was there any scrap?"

Don shook his head.

"Didn't he say anything?"

Another shake.

"Just quit, eh?"

Don nodded.

Andy whistled softly, took a scout whistle from his pocket and examined it. "How is that going to hit our signaling chances?" he asked.

"Alex says Tim works all right with him," Don answered.

"That's all right, but—" Even Bobbie knew what he meant, that the right kind of stick-together was better than all kinds of practice. "Something must have bit him," Andy went on. "If he liked practicing here at first—He did like it, didn't he?"

"You bet," said Bobbie. "Even if he did push me and tell me to run along."

Andy sat up straight. "When was that?"

"The first day he practiced here. I asked him wasn't it fine to have Don showing him—"

"Oh!" Andy said softly.

"He liked it all right," said Bobbie.

Neither of the other boys made any comment. By and by Bobbie went off. Don looked at his assistant patrol leader.

"Think that could be it?" he asked.

"Maybe." Andy puckered his eyes. "How is he on the ball field; all right?"

"Fine. His hitting won last Saturday's game."

"Maybe it isn't that," Andy said doubtfully. He was so used to Tim being grouchy when anything displeased him that he could not grasp the thought that perhaps there had been some little change.

By this time the troop contest had every scout on his toes. Friday night's meeting saw each patrol win another perfect score. Don decided gloomily that there wasn't much chance to get ahead by being clean and on time for roll call—every scout in the troop was clean and on time. It was the monthly contests that would decide the winner of the Scoutmaster's Cup.

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Before going home he studied the changed figures on the blackboard:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 106-1/2

Fox 111

Wolf 108-1/2

"Tim's doing fine on signaling," said Alex in his ear.

Don drew a deep breath. Well, maybe everything would be all right, after all.

Next day the Chester nine played St. Lawrence. It was touch and go from the start. Now Chester led; now the visitors led. The eighth inning found Chester in front by a 6 to 5 score.

All during the game Don had felt the strength of Tim's support. Not once had the catcher's playing faltered. Don, waiting on the bench, allowed his thoughts to wander. If Tim would plunge into scouting like that—

"Come on, Don," called Ted Carter. "Ninth inning."

The first Chester batter doubled. Instantly all stray thoughts were swept from Don's mind. The next player fouled out. Then came a long fly to the right-fielder and the runner ran to third after the catch. Any kind of a dinky hit would score the tying run.

Don pitched to the batter. Without shifting his position, Tim snapped the ball to third base. The runner, caught asleep, scrambled frantically for the bag.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

The game was over. Don ran to the bench.

"Pretty work, Tim," he cried.

"I guess I don't need anybody to show me how to play baseball," said Tim.

Don paused in the act of reaching for his sweater. Tim's eyes met his, a bit uncertain, a bit defiant. Ted Carter, laughing and happy, romped in between them.

"You fellows are one sweet battery," he cried joyously. Other members of the team crowded around the bench. Tim, with his mitt under his arm, walked away.

Slowly Don buttoned his sweater. Tim's change of heart was a mystery no longer.



At the edge of the field he found Andy Ford waiting.

“Mackerel!” cried the assistant patrol leader; “wasn’t that a corking game? When Tim made that throw—Hello! What’s the matter?”

“Tim’s sore because of what Bobbie said.”

“How do you know?”

Don related what had happened at the bench.

“Well, the big boob!” Andy gave a snort of anger. “Doesn’t he know any better than to pay attention to a kid like Bobbie?”

“Tim’s always been that way,” said Don. “He’s sensitive.”

“Sure; but he isn’t sensitive about his patrol, is he?”

Don sighed. No; Tim wasn’t very sensitive about that.

After supper he came out of the house and walked down to the fence. He had an idea that Andy would be around; and when presently the assistant patrol leader came down the dark street, he held open the gate. They sat on the grass and talked in low tones.

“I’ve doped it out,” said Andy. “Why don’t you shift—you and Tim do the Morse instead of Tim and Alex?”

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Don shook his head—slowly.

“Why not?” Andy demanded. “If you worked with him and let him do things his own way wouldn’t he get over his grouch?”

“I don’t know. Would he?”

“Sure he would. Suppose some day when we were all hanging around you asked him to show you how to do something.”

“Gee!” cried Don. “That would get him, wouldn’t it?”

Andy grinned. “I guess we’ll tame that roughneck, what?”

Don always rested his arm after a game. He had not planned to go to the baseball field until Tuesday. But his business with Tim was too important to wait. Monday afternoon he put away his tools and his bird-houses, and went off to the village green.

“Hello!” called Ted Carter. “What are you doing around here on a Monday?”

“I want to see Tim,” Don answered. He took the catcher off to one side. “We’re making some changes,” he said. “Alex will work with Ritter on semaphore signaling.”

Tim’s eyes grew suspicious. “Who’ll work with me on Morse?”

“I will,” said Don.

Tim’s eyes snapped. “So that’s the game, is it?” he asked darkly. “What’s the first order I get; practice tomorrow?”

“That’s up to you,” said Don. “When do you want to practice?”

Tim was taken aback. He had expected to be told, not asked; ordered, not consulted. He mumbled that tomorrow would do, and went back to practice. He could not get his thoughts back on the work. Once, when the ball was traveling around the bases, his attention wandered, and when somebody threw the sphere home, it almost struck him in the head.

“Let’s call it a day,” cried Ted Carter, “before Tim gets killed.”

Tim smiled absently. He looked around for Don. The patrol leader was gone. He walked away slowly, turning one question over and over in his puzzled mind. What new trick was this, anyway?

Next morning he went around to Don's house. He was still sure that something had been hidden, and that at the proper moment the surprise would be sprung. He was watchful and cautious.

The practice ran its course serenely. Barbara came out, and after watching awhile, wrote a four-word message and asked Tim to send it. Don received it without a mistake.

"Isn't that splendid?" she cried. "The Wolf patrol will surely win points in the signaling, won't it?"

"We'll give them a fight," said Don.

Tim said nothing. But the fire to be something more than the Wolf patrol failure began to burn again. When the last message had flashed back and forth, he handed Don his flag.

"We'll get down to real work after this," said the patrol leader.

Ah! So here was the trick. Tim waited.

"Sending messages back and forth," Don went on, "is all right while we're brushing up the code. We know the code now. It's time to begin to specialize for the contest. One of us will have to do nothing but send, and the other nothing but receive."

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Still Tim waited.

“Which do you want to do, send or receive?”

“I—I’ll send,” said Tim. He felt like a boy who had squeezed his fingers in his ears and had waited for a gun to go off, and had then found that the gun was not loaded. He was bewildered, lost, confused.

Wednesday he came again. And still there was no bossing, no giving orders, no high hand of authority. Perhaps there was no trick.

“Ah!” Tim told himself, “there must be. Why did he shift me here? Why didn’t he let me stay with Alex? There’s a reason, all right.”

And so, whenever he and Don were together, on the baseball field or in Don’s yard, he found himself weighing every word and act.

Friday night’s meeting brought no change in the score. Each troop, eager and keen, reported faultlessly. The blackboard read:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 122-1/2

Fox 127

Wolf 124-1/2

Tonight there was silence when the scores were posted. The contest had grown too tight for mere noise and bluster. A false step now by any patrol might drop it hopelessly to the rear. When Mr. Wall’s commands still held the scouts in ranks, the faces they turned to him were boyishly sober.

“I am going to keep a promise,” the Scoutmaster said, “that I made some time ago. Next week’s meeting will be held in Lonesome Woods.”

The sober faces were suddenly aglow.

“Attention!” came the low voices of the patrol leaders. The ranks stood firm.

“It will be part of an overnight hike. We will leave here Thursday afternoon at one o’clock.”

A quick murmur—then silence.

“The signaling contests will be held in the woods. Break ranks.”

The pent-up enthusiasm swelled up in a wild cheer. The Scoutmaster found himself pushed and jostled. A dozen boys tried to shout questions at once. He laughed and covered his ears with his hands. When he brought them away Don spoke quickly:

“How about telegraphy, sir?”

“Each patrol will bring its own wire and rig its own instruments,” was the answer.

Why, this was just like war—signaling from hidden places, and running telegraph wires over tree limbs and across the ground.

Tim’s adventurous blood quickened. The troop meeting seemed tame and prosaic. He went through his setting-up exercises mechanically. He could almost smell the tang of a wood fire burning.

There was work tonight in identifying leaves and barks of trees, and stems of plants. Tim twisted restlessly. The moment the meeting was over he followed Don down the room.

“How far apart will they put us in the woods?” he demanded.

Don didn’t know.

“We’d better get out among some trees and practice,” Tim said.

The suggestion was good. Don said so. Tim’s face flushed.

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Patrols were clamoring around their patrol leaders. How much wire would be needed? Tim went back to where he had left his hat. And there, on his way out, Mr. Wall paused a moment.

"How's everything, Tim?"

"All right, sir."

"Good!" The Scoutmaster's hand ran gently over his head. Their eyes met. There were no questions of, "Did you go to your patrol leader, Tim?" Mr. Wall seemed to be the kind who understood without asking questions.

"Tim," he said, "I think we're going to be proud of you some day."

"I hope so," Tim said huskily. His heart beat faster as he turned back to his patrol. And then he heard Ritter's voice.

"Say, how is Tim going? Has Don got him working?"

"Stop that, Ritter," Don cried angrily. Gosh! couldn't some fellows ever learn to hold their tongues? His eyes sought Tim; one look told him enough. Tim had heard.

Here was another mess, and right on the eve of the big overnight hike. Don made up his mind that he'd square things with Tim tomorrow when they reported at the field for the regular Saturday game. A mix-up like this couldn't be neglected.

But there was a heavy fall of rain that night, and more rain the next morning. By noon the village field was flooded. Ted Carter sent word that the game had been called off.

At two o'clock the sun broke through the clouds. From the porch Don had watched the weather restlessly. The moment the sun appeared he hurried off toward the field. There was just a possibility that Tim might come around. He had to speak to him.

Tim came at last, but without his catcher's mitt. He stood around with his hands in his pockets and had very little to say. His mouth was a trifle tight, and his eyes rather hard.

"When shall we go into the woods for that signaling?" Don asked.

Tim shrugged his shoulders.

"Monday or Tuesday?"

But Tim was still indifferent. Don came nearer.

"If you're sore about what Ritter said—"

“Me sore? Why should I get sore? I’m used to it.”

“Now, Tim—”

Tim walked away. He told himself that he was through. Not through with the scouts, but through with going down to Don’s yard as though he were a poodle dog being taught new tricks.

He would not stop practicing. Nobody was going to get a chance to say that *he* was to blame if anything happened this time. All next morning he wig-wagged in his yard. After dinner he went at it again. The work was cruelly monotonous.

“There,” he said grimly, when at last he quit; “I bet Don didn’t practice that much today.”

All at once a voice whispered to him, “How could Don practice? He receives. He must have somebody to send to him.”

“Aw!” Tim growled, “let him go get somebody to send to him.”

Somehow, that didn’t seem to answer. Next afternoon, when he began his self-imposed task of signaling, the flag seemed like lead in his hands. He sat on the chopping block outside the kitchen door and stared ahead. A long time later he sighed and walked around to the front gate.

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"I'm a boob for doing it," he said, and stopped short. In a minute he went on again, slowly, doubtfully—but on.

All the way to Don's house the old questions pricked him sharply. Why *had* he been shifted? Just to be watched? What would Don say to him now?

Don, working on the lawn, said: "Hello, Tim. Wait until I tack on this screening, will you?"

But the patrol leader's heart was beating fast. If Tim was ready to smile and dig in, the Wolves' chances were improved 50 per cent.

But though Tim was ready to work, he was far from being in a friendly state of mind. His flag wig-wagged short three-and four-word messages that Don could carry in his head without resorting to pad and pencil. At four o'clock the work was over.

"Want to go to the woods tomorrow?" Tim asked gruffly.

Don nodded eagerly.

"All right; I'll be around at one o'clock." He turned on his heel and was gone.

Don went indoors dejectedly. Barbara was mixing biscuit batter in the kitchen. He stood in the doorway and blurted out the doings of the past few days.

"Nothing there to worry about," Barbara said brightly. "Be honest, now. How did Tim act a couple of months ago whenever anything displeased him?"

"He kicked things around."

"And now he comes here and works."

"Gosh!" said Don in a relieved voice, "that's so. I didn't think of it like that." He went back to his screens for another hour of work before supper, and as he measured and cut molding, his whistle was cheery and good to hear.

Even Tim's crabbiness on the next day's trip did not dampen his spirits. There was a thicket a mile from town. They selected this spot for their work.

The light was different from the open. Somehow everything seemed changed. Messages were harder to read. It was fine practice.

"I'm glad you thought of that," Don said on the way home.

Tim's stiffness melted a little. It was hard to be stand-offish with a boy who kept praising your judgment.

As though by instinct, that night saw a gathering of the patrols at troop head-quarters. Telegraph instruments, and dry batteries, and coils of wire, were laid together for the morrow's hike. The trek wagon was hauled from the old barn in back of Mr. Wall's house. The tents were carried from the same place and laid in the wagon. The lanterns, swinging underneath, were cleaned and filled and put back on their hooks.

At first Tim had hung on the outskirts of the crowd. But it was impossible to resist for long the glamour of these preparations. The trek wagon, the tents, the night lanterns, all helped to stir his quick blood. They whispered of evening, and night fires springing to light, and white tent walls showing ghostly through the dusk.

"Say!" called a voice, "how are you Wolves going to manage about Alex Davidson? He works in the store. Is he going on the hike?"

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"No," said Don.

"Well, how about the signaling?"

"He has half a day off Friday. He'll come out Friday afternoon."

The nine o'clock fire bell sent the scouts scurrying for home. The trek wagon was left against the wall of troop headquarters.

Next morning the patrols assembled early. Mr. Wall dispatched a scout to the baker's for two dozen loaves of bread. Another boy hurried off to the grocer's shop for molasses, cocoa, and evaporated milk. When these had been put safely in place, the last strap was adjusted. The trek wagon was ready for the journey.

"You fellows get home," Mr. Wall ordered, "and get back here on time. Remember, the same rule as always—individual cooking. Two or three scouts or a whole patrol can team up, but each scout must bring enough food to feed himself for three meals—supper tonight, and breakfast and dinner tomorrow. The troop treasury furnishes the bread, molasses and cocoa. Everybody understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. We leave here at one o'clock sharp."

The Scoutmaster could have saved himself the warning. At 12:30 o'clock the last scout was there, haversack and blanket on his back, ax and canteen on his hip.

At 12:55 the bugle blew. The scouts fell into line.

"Each patrol," said Mr. Wall, "will take its turn hauling the trek wagon. The Wolves first."

Don's patrol dropped back.

At one o'clock the bugle sounded again.

"Forward!" cried Mr. Wall. "March!"

"Forward!" echoed the patrol leaders. "March!"

Chester troop was off. Small boys followed along the sidewalk and on past the village limits. After that, one by one, they dropped back, and at last the troop swung on through the early afternoon alone.

Tim threw himself joyously into the work of hauling the wagon. When Mr. Wall ordered route step, and the discipline of the hike gave way to laughter and song, Tim's voice rose above all the rest.

He felt like dancing in the road. The first hill found him impatient to run the wagon to the top. His zeal caused a quickened pace. Oh! there was no loafing or shirking today.

At the end of a half-mile the Foxes took the load. Tim strode on with a swinging step. His doubts were vanishing. Not once had Don tried to force him to do what he did not want to do. If there was some hidden reason for switching him from Alex, it should show itself now, shouldn't it? Maybe he had been wrong all along.

Don fell into step with him. "How about some practice in the woods this afternoon, Tim?"

"Sure." Tim's eyes danced. "We'll be first if we win this time."

Now it was Don who felt like dancing in the road. Tim, for some reason, had had another change of heart, and was once more eager.

Soon the whole patrol was walking with Don and Tim. And Tim, light-hearted, irrepressible, kept the talk flying merrily. When the call came for the Wolves to take the wagon again, he was the first to reach the shafts.

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"Come on, slaves," he called.

Andy winked at Don. Don clutched the assistant patrol leader's arm and squeezed hard.

Tim made lively work of the next half-mile. The relief found Bobbie Brown gasping and wilted.

"Gee!" said Tim; "you're packing too heavy a load for a runt. Here, I'll take your blanket."

Bobbie straightened his shoulders. "I'm all right. I—"

"Aw! forget it." Tim turned him around, unstrapped the blanket, and stuck it under his arm. "Feels better, doesn't it?"

"Y-yes," said Bobbie.

Mr. Wall, coming down the line to watch for stragglers, saw what happened, smiled quietly, and went back to the head of the column.

After a time the jokes and the laughter stopped. They were approaching Lonesome Woods. Of course, this was going to be all kinds of fun, but—but—Well, Lonesome Woods was Lonesome Woods, wasn't it? A mile from camp Mr. Wall halted the column.

"Volunteers to go forward and cut firewood," he called.

But though the scouts might draw together a bit, here was too good an adventure to be missed. There was a rush for the Scoutmaster. Tim got there first.

"The Wolves have it," Mr. Wall decided.

"Little more load for the Eagles and the Foxes," sang Tim, and pitched his blanket and haversack into the trek wagon. Don and the others unslung theirs. Two minutes later the Wolf patrol was running in advance of the column with only their axes and canteens.

They plunged into the woods with a whoop. Presently they all drew together and listened. The place was still—ghostly still. The air was cooler, and heavier, and—and different.

"Gee!" said Bobbie. "It *is* lonesome in here, isn't it?"

Tim shrugged his shoulders. "Come on. Let's get firewood."

The sound of the axes chased away the quiet. The firewood became a small pile, a great pile, and then a fat, clumsy pyramid.

"Hello there, Wolves," came a faint hail.

The troop had arrived. Soon the woods rang with high-pitched shouts and cries.

The problem now was to find a camp site. Scouts swung out in all directions. One group tried to advance the wagon. Now the wheels would get tangled in clumps of underbrush, and now there would be seemingly no way to squeeze through the trees. At last it could be advanced no further.

The Foxes had found a clearing on sloping ground. A brook ran at one end. The ground slope insured good drainage in case of rain.

The Wolves went back to bring in their firewood, and the Eagles and the Foxes carted tents and equipment from the trek wagon.

Tim's blood ran riot in his veins. As he carried in the last of the kindling, the second tent arose against the background of trees.

"Say," he called eagerly, "let's help there."

The tent squad made a place for him.

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He seemed tireless. By and by, with the last tent up and the last rope guyed, he wiped the sweat from his face and grinned.

"Doesn't look like Lonesome Woods now, does it?"

Mr. Wall's watch showed four o'clock. Supper cooking would start at five. There was an hour in which to string telegraph wires.

"The messages," Mr. Wall said, "will be received here. Do not get too close to each other with your instruments."

Scouts hustled out to the trek wagon for batteries, wire and instruments. Tim staked a claim for the Wolves' receiving station.

"How much wire must each patrol have out?" Andy Ford asked.

"Two hundred feet," was the answer.

Eagles and Foxes gathered and broke into clamorous discussion. How should the wire be measured? Don gathered his patrol and took it to one side.

"Andy has a fifty-foot tape. We'll measure as we unwind. Bobbie, you stay here and hold this end. Come on, fellows."

Into the dense growth of trees they wormed their way. It was slow work passing the wire through the branches of trees. Tim climbed and shinned his way from limb to limb like a monkey. Wherever the wire was laid, it was fastened in place with rubber tape.

About one hundred and twenty-five feet were out when the Scoutmaster's whistle sounded the recall. The scouts came back to camp. There was a comparison of results. The Eagles had strung about seventy feet of wire, and the Foxes less than sixty.

"We'll have ours finished before the others know what's happening," chuckled Andy. "And then we'll get in some practice."

"Tim and I are going to get some practice after supper," said Don.

"Sure thing," said Tim.

Fires were lighted and pots and pans appeared. Somebody yelled that cocoa was ready. The Foxes dished it out, and Mr. Wall distributed bread thickly covered with molasses.

“Some feast,” said Tim. He took his place in the circle of Wolves. He was one of them—at home.

There was still some daylight left after dishes had been washed and put away, and the supper refuse burned. Tim and Don walked off a way with their flags. Teams from the other patrols scrambled for their flags, too, and practiced until the last light began to go.

The night-fire grew brighter in the darkness. A hush fell over the camp. The boys formed a circle about the blaze. Where they sat there was light and warmth, but ten feet back were the trees, and darkness, and the melancholy whispering of the breeze through stirring branches.

There was sober discussion of the morrow’s contest. No voice lifted itself loudly. Mr. Wall told an Indian story. The scouts drew closer to the fire, and Bobbie glanced back over his shoulder. After a time heads began to nod.

“Time to turn in,” said the Scoutmaster. “Better fill your canteens. You may want a drink during the night.”

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The brook was a hundred yards away, out in the darkness—and this was Lonesome Woods. Bobbie said he never took a drink during the night.

“Aw!” cried Tim. “Let’s go down there and fill them up.”

He led the way. Bobbie decided that he might need a drink after all.

Twenty minutes later they were all in the tents. Out at the dying camp-fire the bugler sounded “taps.” As the mournful notes echoed, more than one scout, under his blanket, felt goose-flesh.

Ordinarily, in camp, the first night is one of restlessness. But Chester troop was tired. For a while voices sounded faintly. They grew fitful and yawny. Finally they ceased. The camp was asleep under the stars.

And then the bugle blew again. Reveille! The scouts tumbled out to a new world. The darkness was gone. Lonesome Woods was no longer spooky. The whole world smelled clean, and green, and damp, and sweet.

Breakfast was rushed. The Foxes were the first to get away from camp. The Wolves were next. They finished stringing their wire, adjusted a sender, and came back to install the receiver. As soon as everything was ready, Wally went off to the end of the line to send to Andy Ford.

The Foxes were the next to get rigged. The Eagles rushed in almost on their heels. Morse and semaphore teams practiced frantically. Over everything lay a fever of preparation.

At ten o’clock Mr. Wall sent a squad to take down the tents and pack them away in the trek wagon. Another squad brought wood and water. The camp prepared for dinner.

It was a happy, noisy, high-strung meal.

“Clean camp for the contests,” Mr. Wall ordered next.

Empty cans and refuse went flying into the fire, to be raked out later and buried. Presently the last sign of litter was gone. The scouts waited expectantly.

“Telegraphy first,” said the Scoutmaster. He handed a sealed envelope to each sender. “There’s your message. Read it when you get to your instrument. Off you go. A bugle blast will be the signal to start. Speed and accuracy will count.”

Wally Woods ran off with Andy yelling after him to take his time and not get rattled. Then came a wait. Mr. Wall nodded to the bugler. The woods echoed to a sharp blast.

Almost at once telegraph instruments began to click. Andy, with puckered eyes, bent down and wrote slowly. The scout at the Fox receiver was supremely confident, but the Eagle scout seemed worried and harassed.

To the watching boys it was impossible to tell who was ahead. The minutes passed, the excitement grew. All at once the Fox scout sprang to his feet and came running to Mr. Wall with his paper.

“Shucks!” said Tim. “He may have it all mixed up. Look at Andy.”

The assistant patrol leader of the Wolves was now running toward the Scoutmaster. Two minutes later the Eagle scout came forward reluctantly.

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"It's fierce," he said in disgust. "It doesn't make sense nohow."

The message had been, "A hundred men searched the hills for the Indian." The Fox scout had made but one error. Andy had made four, and the Eagle scout had twisted the message into a knot.

"Well," said Tim, "that gives us three points for second place. Now, if Alex gets here—"

The calling cry of the Wolves sounded faintly.

"That's him," said Tim, and shrieked an answer. Andy and Bobbie went out to meet the newcomer and show him the way. Presently they led him into camp. He had ridden to Lonesome Woods on his bicycle, and had ridden hard. He was hot, dusty and thirsty.

After half an hour's rest on the grass he was ready. The semaphore signaling started.

All three patrols scored perfect messages, but the Foxes finished first, the Wolves second, and the distracted Eagles last.

"That gives the Foxes 10 points and us 6," said Bobbie. "The Eagles have 2."

Don shook his head uneasily. The Foxes had been in the lead ever since the last contest. If they won again, they would be out so far in front that it would be almost impossible to catch them.

It was time for the Morse. Tim put his flag under his arm and went out to his station. Ritter went along to read the message to him, word for word, so that there would be no loss of time. Bobbie, at the receiving end, was to write the message as Don called him the letters.

Ritter tore open the envelope and took out the paper.

"How long?" Tim demanded.

"Eleven words." Tim reached out his hand and Ritter drew back. "Never mind reading it. Just send what I give you. You won't get twisted thinking about the next word, because you won't know what it is."

Tim did not argue. He could see Bobbie lying on the ground with pad and pencil, and Don crouched on one knee above him. Gee! when would the bugle blow?

"Don't go too fast," Ritter said huskily.

Tim scarcely heard. He and Don had made no mistakes the last time they practiced. How would it be now on the day of the real thing?

“T-a-a-a-a, ta, ta,” sounded the bugle.

“Every—” cried Ritter.

Tim sent the word. His hands gripped the flag staff with a nervous, straining strength.

“—patriot—”

This word followed the first.

“—places—his—all—”

Tim was breathing hard.

“—at—the—service—”

His throat was dry.

“—of—his—”

Tim’s arms trembled. Was there much more?

“—country,” said Ritter, as though he couldn’t get the word out fast enough. “End of message.”

Tim fronted his flag three times. He saw Bobbie hand the message to Don, and Don race over to Mr. Wall.

“We’re first in,” cried Ritter. “Come on, Tim.”

But Tim was suddenly afraid. He dropped the flag and pretended that his shoe-laces were loose. Ritter ran ahead. Tim fussed with the laces a long time—was still fussing, in fact, when cries of “O you Foxes! What’s the matter with the Foxes?” brought him to his feet.

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This time he walked in hurriedly. Ritter met him.

“You had three mistakes, Tim,” he said sadly.

“/ had three mistakes?” Tim cried angrily.

“Well, we had three mistakes. The Foxes were perfect again. They’re sharks on signaling. The Eagles were last.”

Tim went over to Don. “Let’s see that message.” He read it under his breath. “Every patriot places his all at the service of his country.”

The Foxes were still skylarking when he handed back what Bobbie had written. He looked around at the members of his own patrol. Bobbie shifted his eyes. Wally tried to smile that it wasn’t a bad showing at all. Tim turned away slowly, went over to his equipment, and began to roll his blanket for the homeward march. All the sunshine, and the frolic, and the outdoor freshness was gone from the day.

He was sure that he had sent the message right. He couldn’t send an e for a v, because e was the simplest letter in the Morse alphabet—just a single dot. And as for sending two b’s where he should have sent two p’s—

“I didn’t,” he muttered wrathfully. “They think I did because—”

His face clouded with swift suspicion, and the blanket dropped from his hands. He had been telling himself for two days that there had been no hidden reason for Don taking him as a partner, but now that was all swept aside. Don had wanted him as the goat. If any mistakes were made he would be the one to be blamed—just as he was being blamed. Wasn’t he Tim Lally, the fellow who always spoiled things? Oh, what a woodenhead he had been not to see it all before!

CHAPTER VIII

DON’S CHOICE

The jubilant Foxes found enough flour to make a paste, and enough paper to stick on a blanket and make a sign. The sign read:

Eagles 122-1/2

Foxes 132

Wolves 127-1/2

They carried it, spread out like a banner, all the way home.

The hike back to Chester was a bit one-sided. The Foxes enjoyed themselves hugely, but every other scout was sober with his own thoughts. The Eagles were convinced that they were out of the race. Don and Andy Ford were trying to take some comfort from the fact that they had four weeks yet in which to overtake the Foxes. Nobody noticed that Tim, a bubbling source of energy yesterday, was now sour and glum.

It was not until next day that Don noticed any change. In the regular weekly game on the village field Tim backed him up faultlessly; but on the bench the catcher edged away and sat at the end with the score-keeper.

“Good night!” Don murmured. “What is it this time?” He was becoming used to Tim’s blowing hot one minute and cold the next. He didn’t worry so much over Tim’s moods. By tomorrow, he reflected, this rather uncertain scout would probably be running around again like a loose cyclone.

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Besides, Don had something to worry about just then, something so acute that it could not be shared with another worry. His pitching was undergoing violent assault. He was sure he had plenty of stuff on the ball. Nevertheless, the rival team was lacing his best efforts to all parts of the field.

The end of the game returned him a loser.

"Can't win them all," Ted Carter said philosophically. "They seemed to hit everything today, Tim, didn't they?"

"Everything," said Tim. He took his sweater from the bench and started for home.

Don had a notion to follow. Instead, after a moment, he walked off with several of the players. So long as Tim was losing his scrappiness, what was the use of fussing over him? Probably by tomorrow, or Monday, whatever was biting him would have stopped, and he would come around to discuss the ifs of the contest, and the what-might-have-happened. It occurred to Don, vaguely, that he had not yet heard Tim say a word about what had happened at Lonesome Woods.

Tim did not come around—neither on Monday nor Tuesday. Wednesday Don met him at the field for the regular mid-week practice.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, Tim?"

"No place."

"You haven't been around since—"

"No," Tim broke in bitterly, "and I'm not coming around. Nobody can make a boob out of me twice."

Don's face sobered. This wasn't the Tim of passing moods. This was more like the blustering Tim who had once overawed the Wolf patrol.

"Who made a boob of you?"

"You did. Oh, don't look so innocent; you can't work it the second time. Take me for a partner. Then, if anything went wrong in the contest, everybody would say that Don Strong couldn't have made a mistake—oh, no. It must have been Tim Lally because he's always queering things. And they did say it!"

"Who did?"

"Ritter. 'Too bad you made those mistakes, Tim.' I ought to have whanged him one in the eye. How did he know whether I made any mistakes?"

Gone was Don's thought that Tim would be all right in a day or so. If this firebrand scout convinced himself that he had been tricked, and if he kept thinking so—

"You've got this wrong," Don cried. "I—"

"Sure I've got it wrong," Tim mocked. His voice changed wrathfully. "But I didn't have the message wrong, and don't you forget it. I know my code. I sent the message right. Do you think I'd send an e for a v?"

"Do you think I wouldn't know an e?" Don asked.

Tim was staggered. He hadn't thought of that—that an e would be as simple to Don, receiving, as it would be to him, sending.

"Aw!" he said recklessly, "it's a trick. You can't fool me again. If you're going to pitch, get busy, else I'll go home."

Don pitched. He decided that there was no use in arguing with Tim now. Besides, he wanted time to think.

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He had saved the message that Bobbie had written. That night he took it from his bureau drawer.

"Every batriot," he read aloud, "blaces his all at the sereice of his country." Funny there should be two b's instead of two p's. He repeated the letters slowly, thoughtfully.

"B, p; b, p—Gosh! I'll bet I know what happened."

He jumped up and paced the room excitedly. It was clear now. Tim had sent p, and he had called p, but p and b sound almost the same and Bobbie, tense and excited, had caught the wrong sound.

"E and v are almost the same, too," Don cried. "I'll tell Tim tomorrow."

Next day he sought Tim eagerly. Tim gave him a sarcastic sidelong glance.

"B and p do sound alike," Don said sharply.

"I'm going to ask Mr. Wall to take me out of the Wolf patrol," was Tim's response.

He meant it. He thought Don's explanation sounded fishy. Why should it take six days to discover that b and p sounded almost the same? He quite forgot that he had not thought of b and p sounding the same at all.

Don did not bother him again. Friday night he came to the troop meeting. His resolution to ask for a transfer from the Wolves had weakened. In the past he had never paid much attention to Mr. Wall, accepting him as a matter of course—every troop had to have a Scoutmaster. Now, somehow, the thought of Mr. Wall strangled his desire to complain.

The Scoutmaster had said only two weeks before, "I think we're going to be proud of you some day." A queer little lump came up into Tim's throat and made him swallow hard. He did not think Mr. Wall would like it if he asked to be changed, and—and he wouldn't ask.

The entire patrol saw that he avoided Don, for he made no effort to hide his feelings. He left the meeting as soon as it was over. Andy Ford and Alex Davidson glanced questioningly at the patrol leader.

"He thinks I took him as a partner so that he'd be blamed if the Morse signaling went wrong," Don explained.

"Oh, the mule!" Andy cried. "Why doesn't he wait until somebody blames him?"

"He says Ritter blamed him for the three mistakes."



“Good night!” Andy breathed.

Alex walked over and stared at the score-board. The Foxes had a scout absent and had been penalized two points. As a result, the Wolves had recovered the ground they had lost at Lonesome Woods. The new score read:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 138-1/2

Fox 146

Wolf 143-1/2

“Tim gets some crazy hunches,” Alex said, after a time, “but I don’t think he’ll lose any points for us—not any more.”

“Let him go fish then,” Andy cried. “We should worry. How about it, Don?”

Don shook his head slowly. “I’m patrol leader of the Wolves.”

“And he’s a Wolf scout,” Andy nodded thoughtfully. “I see what you mean. I guess you’re right. What are you going to do?”

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"Nothing. Maybe by next Friday he'll be over it."

But next Friday found Tim unchanged. He mingled with the other scouts, but from his patrol leader he held aloof.

A Fox scout reported late, and the Foxes lost a half-point. The score read:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 154-1/2

Fox 161-1/2

Wolf 159-1/2

"Wow!" cried Bobbie. "Only two points behind now."

A gain by the Wolves meant little to Don just now. A belief was slowly growing in his mind that Tim had the makings of one of the best scouts in the troop. The right kind of patrol leader, he thought, would have had Tim where he belonged before this. He felt that he had been a failure.

He longed for advice and the wisdom of an older head. Barbara or his father would not do tonight; he wanted somebody who knew scouting. When the meeting was over he went slowly to Mr. Wall with his troubles.

"The little blue bugs surely have you tonight," the Scoutmaster said cheerily. "Let's reason this out. A month or so ago a frightened scout told me that some of my boys were off for Danger Mountain. Remember?"

Oh, yes, Don remembered.

"Tim led that expedition. Do you think he'd do a stunt like that now?"

"No, sir."

"Nor I," the Scoutmaster said gravely. "He's swinging around, probably because he's tied up with fellows who want to be real scouts. Would you call that failure?"

The boy was silent several minutes. "No, sir," he said at last.

Mr. Wall clapped his shoulder. "Then there's nothing left to worry about, is there?"

Don was somewhat surprised to find that there was not. The cloud had vanished. He went home with his mind at peace. He had given Tim his own head of late, and even

Mr. Wall said that Tim was coming around. He'd give him his head again, and wait for the sulks to wear off.

But it was hard to work with Tim all next day against the Ironside nine, and to find him, even in the heat of the struggle, stiff and unbending. And it was harder still to see the days of the next week pass and bring no change. For a rumor had gone through the troop that the reason Mr. Wall had announced no contest for this month was because he was going to uncover a surprise. Don could not help feeling that the Wolves would stand very little chance. Tim, at odds with his patrol leader, would surely lack the zest and the spirit necessary to cope with unexpected orders.

Over Friday night's meeting hung the promise of something to happen. Roll-call and inspection brought to light no derelicts. The score board read:

PATROL POINTS

Eagle 170 1/2

Fox 177 1/2

Wolf 175 1/2

The ranks broke. Usually there was play for a few minutes. Mr. Wall rapped for order at once.

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"Next week," he said, "the contest for the Scoutmaster's Cup comes to an end. The final ordeal will start Friday. It will be a two-day test of your mettle. It will take place at Lonesome Woods. A treasure has been hidden there, and blazed trails will lead to the hiding place."

The room was still—startlingly still.

"This time," Mr. Wall went on, "we will have a real test of scouting. For that reason, I have decided to award ten points to the winning patrol. There will be no second or third points."

The troop stirred. Ten points! That gave every patrol a chance. Even the Eagles, if they won, would be tied with the Foxes for winning honors.

"Each patrol leader will select a scout to accompany him into the woods. They will enter Friday afternoon at 3:30 o'clock. Each patrol will start from a different part of the woods. They will find trees blazed with whitewash. They will follow this blaze. When night comes they will camp."

"Each two scouts by themselves?" asked a voice breathlessly.

"By themselves," the Scoutmaster answered, "unless they desire to risk capture."

The patrols murmured softly. Gosh! This was a real stunt.

"Each of the three trails leads toward the treasure; it has been hidden. When a patrol comes to a blaze mark that has a circle around it, they will know that that is the last blaze, and that the treasure is near. Two things they must then do—search for the treasure, and avoid capture by another patrol. Any patrol surprised by another patrol will be considered captured and out of the contest."

"But suppose a patrol finds the treasure, what then?" called another voice.

"Then that patrol must make its way safely from the woods and avoid capture. If it is captured, it surrenders the treasure to the captors."

"Why," cried Don, "that's just like old-fashioned Indian warfare."

Mr. Wall smiled. "I think you'll like it. There will be another meeting Wednesday night. I want every scout to notify his patrol leader in writing whether he will be allowed to make the trip if he is chosen. Wednesday night each patrol leader will announce the name of the scout who will accompany him into the woods. I think you're too excited to do scout work tonight. Would you prefer to talk this over?"

"Yes, sir," came a roar.

Mr. Wall laughed and waved his hands.

Instantly the room broke into riot. A night camp at Lonesome Woods, a blazed trail, a buried treasure and a threat of sudden capture! This was great!

“Will trails cross?” cried the leader of the Foxes. “Must we watch out for Eagles and Wolves even before we get to the treasure?”

“Perhaps,” the Scoutmaster answered.

Here was uncertainty—and uncertainty made the game all the more fascinating.

Tim’s breath came fast. If he could get into a thing like that—

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"Aw!" he told himself hopelessly, "Don would never take me." He stood around listening to every word, but saying little. His heart ached with an empty longing. Once he caught Don's eye, and flushed and turned away his head quickly. And Don, who had been as high-strung as any of the others, suddenly became sober and grave.

Next day, between innings, he sat on the bench and studied his catcher. If they should go into the woods together—He sighed, and shook his head, and thought of Andy Ford. Andy would pull with him. Perhaps Andy would expect the place.

Over Sunday Wally and Ritter brought around written consents, and Bobbie announced gloomily that his father would not let him go. Monday morning Andy brought his paper.

"Seen Tim yet?" he asked. "No?" He fell to whistling softly.

Late that afternoon Tim appeared. "There's mine," he said defiantly. There was an awkward silence. Presently Tim walked out through the gate and was gone.

Don sat beside his work and pondered. As a patrol leader, what should he do? What was expected of a patrol leader—that he strive heart and soul to bring victory to his patrol, or that he stake everything on making one boy the kind of scout he ought to be? Victory for the Wolves, he suspected, would soon be forgotten. That was how it was with baseball victories.

Suppose he took Tim into the woods and nothing came of it. But suppose something did come of it—something big.

"I wonder," Don mused, "I wonder what Andy thinks."

Tuesday passed. Wednesday came drearily with rain and chill.

That night Don purposely delayed his arrival at the troop meeting. He did not want scouts looking at him and almost asking for the chance. Mr. Wall was calling the gathering to order as he entered. He slid into a seat and stole a look around. Andy was calmly making notes in a diary. Tim was plainly trying hard to keep his shoulders back and to appear unconcerned.

"I call on the Eagles," said Mr. Wall, "to announce their team."

The Eagle patrol leader chose his assistant.

"Foxes."

The leader of the Foxes picked the oldest boy in his patrol.

"Wolves."

Don stood up. He saw Tim bite his lips and stare at the ceiling. Perhaps he was making a mistake, but it seemed to him that one true scout was worth all the prize cups in the world.

"I pick Tim Lally," he said clearly.

And then a wonderful thing happened. Andy Ford threw down the diary and gave him a wide, approving, understanding grin.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT IN THE WOODS

Slowly Tim's eyes came away from the ceiling. His heart stood still. Was this a joke? Eager hands fell on him from the rear—Wally's, Ritter's, Alex Davidson's. There could be no doubt after that.

His heart began to thump. Chairs were pushed back, and patrols clamored around their teams. He found himself next to Don with one of Andy's arms around his shoulders.

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"You fellows bring that treasure out," Andy threatened, "or you'll wish you had stayed there. Hear me?"

Tim's eyes were unusually bright, but his heart had begun to drop to normal. A sudden decision had come not to let this prospect run away with him. He knew the bitter taste of disappointment and he wanted no more of it. He had started for Lonesome Woods in high spirits the last time, and had come home in the dumps. There'd be an understanding before this start. There'd be an understanding tonight.

He stuck close to Don, waiting for the moment when they could be alone. It came.

"Look here," he said sharply; "why did you pick me?"

Don was startled. "Why—why—" How could he tell the real reason without setting a new spark to the gunpowder in Tim's nature. "I thought you were the fellow to go," he ended.

It sounded lame even to Don. It sounded like an evasion to Tim. Why couldn't he be told the truth? What was there that had to be hidden?

He went back to the patrol. The thrill had begun to weaken. He tried desperately to call it back. He wasn't going to be cheated out of a good time. By and by, through dint of striving, he roused a new spirit of anticipation.

Don walked with him as the scouts crowded toward the door. "Better come around tomorrow, Tim, and talk over what we'll take," he said, and wondered if Tim would offer any objection.

"Right-o!" said Tim almost cheerily. Outside Don mopped his face. When he expected Tim to be all right, Tim was nasty; when he expected him to be surly, he was all right.

"Well," he said in relief, "it didn't last long that time, anyway."

But Tim wasn't over it. A new thought had caused him to change tactics. What was the use of his spoiling his own fun? He'd get his good time regardless of what Don had up his sleeve. He'd throw himself into this treasure hunt heart and soul. He'd work as hard as any scout could work. But once they were in Lonesome Woods he'd do what he thought was best. If Don tried to interfere with him there'd be trouble.

Next day he found the whole patrol, with the exception of Alex, at Don's yard. Ritter called him a lucky stiff, and Wally looked at him with envy. They made him feel, for the first time, that he was one of the "big" scouts.

There wasn't going to be much cooking stuff taken along. A little coffee and a little bacon—nothing else. Perhaps they would not have time to cook even that much. If

they reached the treasure place and found the treasure gone, they would have to try to overtake the finders before they got out. That would mean hustle.

They decided on pilot biscuit and the always dependable beans. A blanket each and a poncho, a watch and a compass. Tim was for leaving the poncho out and taking a chance on rain, but Don said no.

“Ax,” said Tim. “We’ll need that, anyway. I’ll go home and put an edge on mine.”

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He ground it until it was almost razor sharp. That night he dreamed that he was a scout of the old days and that Indians in their war-paint were stalking him through the forest.

Next morning he prepared his haversack, and rolled his blanket and strapped it. Several times he cocked his eyes at the sky. Finally he did the unheard-of thing of going down to the station and spending three cents for a city paper. On the first page was news that was worth many times three cents. It read: "Weather: Fair today and tomorrow; southwesterly winds."

There was nothing to do now but wait for dinner. Twenty minutes past noon he had his arms through the straps of the haversack and was on his way to headquarters.

The troop had already assembled. The scouts were feverish. It still lacked fifteen minutes of one o'clock when Mr. Wall appeared.

"All here?" the Scoutmaster asked. "Care to start now?"

The patrol leaders jumped to line up their patrols.

The treasure-hunting teams were treated as something precious on the way out. Scouts took turns carrying their packs so as to have them fresh when they entered the woods. Just as on their first trip, Tim wanted to leap and run. But he knew that would be folly. Besides, Mr. Wall held them down to a steady, even pace that ate up distance but did not tire.

In the general excitement the miles slipped away unnoticed. All at once the woods were ahead. Mr. Wall halted the column and called the teams.

"I want you to compare your watches with mine." The Scoutmaster's timepiece said ten minutes of three. Don and the others set their watches.

"At 3:30," Mr. Wall continued, "each team will enter the woods. Some place near where it enters it will find the first blaze. At 3:30. Is that clear?"

They said it was. He led them to a point a quarter of a mile on.

"Here's where the Wolves go in. Foxes and Eagles, follow me."

The other patrols went on, nervous, high-strung. The Wolves were left alone.

Tim tried to stretch off on the ground and lie there quietly. With his head pillowed on his arm he could see the group that followed Mr. Wall. On they went, on, on—and then a turn hid them. Everything from now on would be mysterious, unknown.



Lying there quietly became impossible. He jumped to his feet and walked up and down. Every few minutes he looked at his watch. Ten after, fifteen, twenty.

"Better get on our haversacks," said Don.

They waited. Twenty-five after. Tim felt the throb of his pulse.

"Another minute," said Ritter.

Don stood with his watch in his hand. All at once he put it away.

"Three-thirty, Tim." They walked toward the woods.

The patrol followed them to the edge and stopped. There were cries of good luck. They waved their hands and stepped among the trees. Twice they looked back; the first time the scouts were visible, the second time they were gone. The cries of good luck grew fainter and ceased. They were alone.

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"There's one of two things to do," said Don, in a voice that trembled with excitement. "We do not know whether our trail crosses the others. We must either go cautiously, or go fast in the hope that they don't cross. If we go fast we may get to the treasure first."

"All right," said Tim; "fast. Let's find that blaze. If you get it, give a low whistle."

They separated and worked among the trees. A long time later, it seemed, Tim found the blaze. It pointed north. He whistled softly, cautiously. A whistle answered him. Don's footsteps sounded frightfully loud in the stillness.

They started north as fast as they could go. Three hundred feet on they found the second blaze. They lost the third and had to retrace their steps before finding it. The fourth was easy, but on the way after that they encountered a patch of dense undergrowth and a section of fallen trees. Here they had to separate and search once more. This time it was Don who found the mark. Their watches said ten minutes of five.

"Let's go on until almost dark," Tim whispered. There was a sound off on their right. He clutched Don's arm, and they stood like statues and listened, scarcely daring to breathe. By and by they relaxed.

"Must have been a squirrel or something," said Tim. They advanced cautiously.

The fright had thrown them out of their reckoning. They did not remember in which specific direction they had been heading. After a while they had the uncomfortable feeling that they had gone on farther than the ordinary distance between blazes.

"Have to search," said Don.

So they began again. They worked at a tension, running when they could. It did not take long to get out of sight of each other.

This time it was Tim who finally found the blaze. He whistled—no answer. He whistled again—still no answer. He'd have to make a louder sound. It was growing dusky, and he did not want to become separated from Don for the night. He put his fingers between his lips.

He did not mean to whistle loudly but, in the quiet woods, his summons echoed shrilly. His heart gave a frightened leap. Gee! Suppose anybody was near?

Don came crashing through the woods. "For the love of Mike, Tim, why did you do that?" he asked sharply.

Tim bristled. It was one thing for him to blame himself; it was another for Don to find fault. "I wanted you to hear me," he answered shortly.

"I did hear you!"

"Well, why didn't you answer?"

"I thought I heard something else. You'll have every Eagle and Fox around us."

"I'll have every Eagle and Fox around us," Tim thought. "See! *I'm* the one who's spoiling things."

They started again. Don was sorry he had spoken so hastily. So far Tim had been a real partner. He made up his mind that he'd think twice before he spoke sharply again. You had to handle a fellow like Tim with gloves.

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As for Tim, the hot, angry blood was still in his cheeks. What did Don mean by jumping on him? He wouldn't stand for it. He was to blame! How about Don being to blame for not answering the signal?

"Tim!" Don called from the rear. "How about making camp? It's getting late."

"Nothing doing," said Tim. "We're between blazes. In the morning we wouldn't know which way to start."

"We have compasses," said Don.

Tim was just stubborn enough to refuse to listen to reason. Besides, he felt that his judgment was questioned.

"We'll camp at the next blaze," he said. "Then we'll know where we are."

After a moment of hesitation Don followed. The easiest way was best.

They soon reached the blaze. Tim began to gather leaves and young twigs for his bed. Before long he knew that he had blundered again. It took time to make a camp bed properly, and the failing light would not give him the time. He had made camp too late.

The knowledge of his second mistake increased his ill humor. He spread his poncho and sat on the bed. Don still gathered leaves.

"Trying to rub it in," Tim reflected. "Just like telling me, 'See, why didn't you camp when I said so?'"

Don turned from his bed, dived into his pack and brought out a can.

"How about eats, Tim?"

Tim was disgusted with the whole adventure. In this black mood he did not relish the thought of cold food in the dark. He wanted light, and a hot drink—something to chase away the gloom.

He kicked together some wood. He found small twigs, broke them and made a pile. Then he drew out matches.

Don was opening a can. "What's wrong, Tim?"

"I'm going to have a fire."

"Fire?" Don dropped the can. "Good night! do you want the Eagles and Foxes coming down and gobbling us?"

“Piffle!” said Tim. “Do you think *they’ll* sit around in the dark? Anyway, I want a cup of coffee.”

Don drew a deep breath. Why hadn’t he brought Andy Ford! However, it was too late for regrets. Once Mr. Wall had said that sometimes a fellow had to brace his legs and stand firm. One of those times had come.

“There’ll be no fire,” he said in a voice he did not recognize as his own.

“There will be a fire,” Tim retorted. “I worked as hard as you today. You can’t say I didn’t. But I’m not going to put up with crazy notions. Who ever heard of a night camp and no fire?”

Don’s fingers twitched. He was the leader here and he had said no fire. The scout law read obedience. And yet, if Tim insisted, what was he to do? Oh, it wasn’t fair for a fellow to get bull-headed and smash the rules.

Tim scraped the match. It burst into a tiny flame.

Don took a step forward. “Tim—”

“Oh, forget it,” said Tim. He was going to light that fire, even if he put it out a moment afterward. He shielded the match with his hands and bent over the wood.

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There was no other way—not if Tim was twice as big. Don's heart was in his throat. He was afraid. Nevertheless, without hesitation, he knocked Tim's hands apart and the match went out.

"You will, will you?" cried Tim. He scrambled to his feet and rushed.

There was not much light. What there was aided Don, for Tim could not make full use of his superior weight and strength. One rush followed another. Don kept striking out and stepping aside. Sometimes a fist came through his guard and stung him and made him wince. Always, ever since becoming patrol leader, he had feared that he and Tim would some day clash. Now the fight was on.

Slowly, as blows stung him, his blood quickened. The boy in front of him had spoiled so much scouting. If he could only give him the thrashing he deserved! If he only could! He set his teeth. He would thrash him. He swung, and felt a sharp pain in his knuckles.

"I'll get you for that," roared Tim.

Don, aroused now, scarcely felt the blows. A hard knock caught him off his balance and sent him sprawling.

"Got enough?" Tim demanded, breathing heavily.

Don, battle mad, sprang to his feet and rushed.

That rush was a mistake. Tim's fist caught him as he came in and staggered him. Another blow shook him up. And then a third blow sent him to the ground again. He was beaten, winded, and all but sobbing.

"I guess you've got enough now," said Tim. There was no answer. He turned away and found his matches.

The sound of the match box being opened brought Don to his knees. Tim, muttering, scraped the tip.

Don struggled to his feet. The tiny flame seemed to fill him with a new strength. If necessary he would fight again, and again, and again. An iron doggedness was in his blood—the same doggedness that nerves men to sacrifice everything for principle. The lot had fallen to him to face Tim on a matter of scout discipline. Tim might thrash him again—but *he could not light that fire!*

"Drop it!" he cried.

Tim guarded the match. "Want more?" he demanded.

“Drop it, or I’ll fight you again.”

“And I’ll lick you again,” said Tim. He touched the flame to the dry leaves.

Don sprang forward and scattered the fire with a kick. Tim leaped to his feet. He was furious. This time he’d see that he wasn’t bothered again.

The scattered fire was burning fitfully in two or three clumps. There was just light enough to see things hazily. Tim, his fist drawn back, caught a glimpse of Don’s white face. He stared, relaxed, and continued to stare, and his hands fell to his sides.

He was not afraid—and yet the fire went out of his blood. He felt suddenly uncomfortable, and small, and beaten. The fitful blazes dwindled and went out. The woods were in darkness.

After a time Tim turned away. He dropped down on his poncho and sat with his face in his hands. Gee! What wouldn’t he give to have the last hour back again.

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CHAPTER X

GOOD LUCK AND BAD

There was not much sleep that night. The beds were too uncomfortable. Tim, lying awake, had lots of time to think, and as he tossed in the darkness, the voice of his conscience reproached him sternly. He wondered what would happen in the morning. So great was his concern that he forgot that this was a forest bed and that all around him were strange noises of the night.

At the first gray light he was out of bed. Last evening the trail had crossed running water. He went back, filled his canteen and washed. The water was like ice. The early morning air had a biting edge. Shivering, he rolled down his sleeves, buttoned his collar snug and wished that the sun was up.

Don was about when he got back to camp. One of the patrol leader's lips was puffed. Tim looked away quickly. A cup of hot coffee would have put the early morning chill to route, but not for anything would he have suggested a fire. He pretended to poke through his things, trying to kill time, trying not to look at his companion, trying to figure out how they were going to get through breakfast. That Don was sore on him for keeps he did not doubt.

Don pulled a towel from his haversack. "How's the water?" he asked. His voice was forced, as though he had strained himself to speak.

Tim's mouth dropped. Gee! was this—was this real? He caught Don's eyes.

"Cold," he gulped.

"Look for dry pine. Pine doesn't make much smoke."

Tim gathered wood, and his face burned. He saw what the patrol leader meant—a fire stood a good chance of passing unnoticed now. Flame would not reflect and smoke would mingle with the rising mist. Last night a fire would have been madness. He could see it all now and he could see, too, the sorry part he had played.

"I always was a bonehead," he told himself bitterly. The feeling that he had been brought into the woods for some selfish purpose dwindled and died. Perhaps what had happened in the signaling test had been an honest mistake, just as Don said. He began to sense dimly that in all the troubled weeks of the contest the patrol leader had been working for something big, something clean.

He had everything ready for the match long before Don came back from the brook. They made a small, cautious fire. The water came to a boil. They hastened to fry

bacon before the fire died out. There was still some heat when the bacon was done and they dumped their beans into the hot pan.

Then, quickly, they killed the fire with dirt and water, and the discovery from that source was over. The hot coffee routed the morning chill. Not once were last night's happenings mentioned. Tim breathed with relief as the minutes passed. They took the trail. Before they had gone far the sun broke over the horizon and faintly touched the tops of the trees.

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There was still some restraint between them. The scars of last night's fight could not heal in a moment. But as they hurried among the trees, Don gave thanks that he had forced himself to speak and had broken the ice. For Tim was almost pathetically eager to show good will—picking the hardest tasks and the roughest paths, and squirming unbidden into doubtful corners to sound them out.

Every step now increased their chances of encountering the other patrols. They passed the fourth blaze since leaving camp, and then the fifth. The trees became thicker, the foliage denser. The sun was almost shut out. Even the sounds of the birds were hushed.

Don halted. "We must be getting near the end of the trail. We've come about a mile."

Tim's voice trembled. "Let's make a rush for it."

Don shook his head. "Too dangerous. We'll go ahead, stop and listen, and go ahead again."

"Gee!" said Tim. "Like stalking an Indian in Colonial days."

Now listening breathlessly, now darting forward, now creeping, they slowly forged ahead. Two more blazes were passed. They found the next. It was marked:

-O-

"The end of the trail," said Don in a whisper.

"Maybe we're here first," said Tim.

But they dared not take the chance of haste. Rival scouts might be waiting, hidden, to pounce on them. They listened, while their hearts beat heavily.

"I'm going forward," said Tim at last, and edged out. Soon they knew that neither the Eagles nor the Foxes had yet reached the goal.

Then began a frantic search. They wanted to find the treasure and away. Not a sound broke the stillness but bird calls and their own footsteps. Yet they knew that, from some place among the trees, scouts were stealing toward them. They went out in a wide circle, worked in, and found nothing.

"Mr. Wall wouldn't make this too hard," said Tim. "He's left some sign. How could he hide it?"

"Among tree branches," said Don, "or in a tree hollow, or in the ground—"

"That's it," cried Tim. "Burying would leave a sign—freshly turned earth. Come on."

They searched again in nervous hurry, and kept looking over their shoulders as though trying to peer through the veil of trees. Don saw no earth that looked fresh, but he did see a suspicious mound near a tree. He put his feet on the spot. His heel sank softly.

"Tim!" he called.

Tim came running. "That's it. Why didn't we bring a trowel?" He dug at the earth with his ax. Don unslung his haversack, pulled out the frying-pan, and scooped with the pan handle.

The sweat rolled into their eyes. They worked feverishly. All at once Tim's ax hit something softer and more yielding than the earth.

"She's here, Don! Gee! she's here!" He dropped the axe and worked with his hands; by degrees the top of a pasteboard box appeared. They loosened the earth around the sides, found grips for their fingers, and pulled. The box came out. It was tied with string and could have been in the ground only a few days.

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The prize was theirs. In their excitement they hugged each other joyously.

"You did it, Tim!" cried Don. "You get the credit."

"You found it," Tim said huskily. "You'd have found it without me. You—" Something he had kept bottled all morning, something he had never expected to say, tumbled from his lips. "You should have knocked my block off last night."

"Forget it," Don muttered lamely, but his eyes flamed with a new light. He knew now that he had made no mistake in bringing Tim into the woods.

They stood with that queer awkwardness that moves boys when they bare their hearts. Tim fingered the string around the box.

"Say, if we could open this—"

The spell was broken. They cut the string and lifted the cover. Inside, packed in a soft bed of cotton, was a prize that shone out at them with a soft splendor—the Scoutmaster's Cup!

"One little beauty," breathed Tim. "Who ever thought Mr. Wall would hide it like that. If we lost it!"

"Let's get out of here," Don cried in fright. He ran for his haversack. They took the back trail.

"We had better go easy," Tim said in a low voice, "until we're sure there's no chance of meeting the Eagles or the Foxes—"

"Sssh!" Don caught his arm.

Was that a noise? After a time it came again—the dry swish of dead leaves and the sharp crackle of dead wood under a weight.

Tim put his lips to Don's ears. "Over there—to the right."

Another silence. Then the noise again, farther off.

"They're at the last blaze," Tim whispered. "This is too close for comfort."

They made off with stealthy caution. Whenever they found clear ground they hurried, but for the most part it was slow work. All at once came a faint cry.

"They've found the empty hole," cried Tim. "Now they'll be after us."

"How will they know which way we went?" Don asked. Nevertheless, he hurried.

Ten minutes later they paused to listen. Far back of them they heard something which made them look at each other anxiously.

"Can't waste time here," said Tim.

At first, when they paused again, there was silence. Then came that which told them of pursuit. Don's pulse quickened.

"They've got our trail, Tim."

"They're following our blazes," said Tim. "We'll fool them. Let's strike off here to the east."

They swung off at a right angle. The blazed trail they knew, but necessity counseled that they face the unknown. Tim pulled out his compass.

When next they listened the sounds of pursuit were gone.

"We've shaken them," said Don, and drew a long breath of relief.

An hour later they came to a slight ravine with a brook flowing along the bottom. They squatted on the bank and opened their beans, but beans and pilot biscuit made dry eating, and soon the canteens were empty.

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"I'll fill them," said Don, and scrambled down the bank. A stone slipped under his foot; he fell, cried out sharply, and rolled to the bottom.

When Tim reached him he was sitting up and unlacing one shoe. It did not take them long to know the truth. The ankle was sprained.

Tim dipped his scarf in the water and wrapped it around the hurt. Of course, it might be a slight sprain, or it might be severe. Don kept staring at the foot and frowning. Tim, whistling softly under his breath, changed the compress twice.

"It hasn't swollen much," said Don. "Maybe I could walk on it."

"Here," said Tim; "lean on my arm."

Don hobbled. The pain was slight. He could walk on the foot if he favored it carefully, but speed was out of the question. He let go of the supporting arm and sank to the ground.

He was a hindrance—just so much dead weight. Sooner or later the pursuing scouts would find that they were on a false scent, and would begin to scour the woods. Mr. Wall had said that the treasure had to be brought out safely, but he did not say that two scouts had to bring it out.

Don bent over the ankle. "You'd better make a run for it, Tim."

"What's that?" Tim's eyes opened wide. "How about you?"

"Bring the fellows back for me after you get out. Hurry."

But instead of hurrying, Tim stood still. "Nothing doing," he said. "You'd stick to me if I were in a fix. I'd be a fine scout to run away, wouldn't I?"

Don bent lower over the ankle. Once Tim would have gone off promptly and have taken glory out of individual achievement. Now he stuck. Oh, but scouting was a great game when fellows played it right!

CHAPTER XI

CLOSE QUARTERS

After a while they bandaged the ankle tightly with wet cloths. Don put on his shoe but did not lace it. He tried to climb the ravine bank, but that was a bit too rough. Tim picked him up with a fireman's lift and surged with him to the top.

That experience set Tim to shaking his head. He could carry the patrol leader easily enough on the level, but climbing was a vastly harder job.

“Wait here,” he said. “I’ll see how the ground looks ahead.” In ten minutes he was back. “Two or three ravines. You couldn’t make them on that foot. We’ll strike north and follow the brook.”

Don puckered his eyes. “If the Eagles and Foxes get scouting around that will throw us right into them.”

“All right,” said Tim. “Maybe we’ll capture some Eagles and Foxes along with the cup.” He wasn’t going to get scared until there was something to be scared of.

At first Don limped along with one hand on Tim’s shoulder. By and by he found a tree limb that would answer as a cane, and let go the shoulder.

“You scout ahead,” he told Tim. “You’ve got to be the eyes of this party. We can guard against surprise better if we separate. Wait for me every little while. Whistle twice if anything goes wrong.”

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"How about one whistle if everything's all right?" Tim asked. "Then you'll know where I am if I change direction."

"All right," Don agreed, and Tim slipped away among the trees.

After that Don followed the sound of soft, guarded whistles. The combination of a cane and a bad foot made it slow work. Once he tried to hurry, and the ankle stabbed him cruelly. He was all right so long as he used the foot carefully, and he sighed and resigned himself to a snail's pace. Every now and then he would come upon Tim, standing like a statue—waiting and listening. Once Tim took off the bandages, wet them, and put them back.

When the job was finished, Tim gave him a hand and helped him up. They stood looking at each other. Each boy read something in the other boy's eye. An embarrassed grin twisted Tim's mouth.

"You're all right," Don said suddenly.

"Well—" Tim looked away. "I'm going to be."

The flight with the treasure was resumed. Tim disappeared ahead. Almost immediately he was back.

"We've got to swing out," he said. "There's a lot of tangled underbrush near the brook. We'll go more to the west."

"That will carry us over toward our old trail," said Don.

Tim nodded. They both knew what that meant. Either Eagles or Foxes had been following the blaze. The dangers of a meeting were increased.

They had completely lost track of distance. They did not know how far they were from the edge of Lonesome Woods. They did not even know where they were.

The flight slowed down to a cautious advance. So slow did they go that Don's tender foot scarcely impeded them. Tim would go out in front and come back, and then go off to the sides. He ranged about tirelessly. And always his whistle, low, soft, kept guiding.

There came a time when for a quarter of an hour the whistle did not sound. Don became alarmed. Which way to continue he did not know. In doubt he stopped. He heard a stirring off to his right, and quickly faced that way. Tim stole toward him.

"I think I heard something," he whispered.

They listened, but heard only forest noises.

“Careful,” warned Tim, and slipped away once more.

Don watched him until he disappeared. Following, he made sure not to stray from the direction Tim had taken. He limped around trees, and tried to avoid places where there were deep leaves and dead branches, because leaves and branches made noise.

Suddenly a sound halted him abruptly—two low, short whistles—the signal of danger.

Tim came back with concern on his face. “They’re over there, Don. Quick! this way.”

They changed their course to the east again. After a while they halted. For a moment they heard nothing. Then, to the left, came unmistakably the faint sound of voice.

Again they changed their course. Each step now was made with caution. By and by, when they thought they were safe, they stood still and strained their ears.

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This time the sound was even nearer.

"We can't go back deeper into the woods," Tim argued breathlessly. "Your ankle won't stand it. We've got to get out. We can't go to our right—there's the ravine and the underbrush. If we keep going ahead they'll overtake us. If we try to get off to the left, we're sure to cross them on an angle."

"Never mind me," Don urged. "Make a dash for it."

Tim shook his head stubbornly. "Wouldn't it be fine for a scout to leave his patrol leader in the lurch? Maybe we'll think of something. Come on; no use of standing here."

They wormed their way forward. They began to meet patches of thick brush. All at once Tim gave a suppressed cry.

"Look at that brush, Don. If we can get them off on a false scent—Where are they?"

The sound was still off to the left.

"Give me your haversack." Tim shed his own. "Now your canteen. Now over there. Lie behind that brush. Quick."

Don hobbled over to the dense growth. Watching, he saw Tim go off a short distance and drop a haversack; going on, he dropped a canteen and disappeared.

Don expected him to come back the way he had gone. Instead, Tim made a wide swing and approached the brush from the rear. He stretched off on his stomach alongside the patrol leader.

"I laid the canteens and the haversacks in a row," he whispered, "about a hundred feet apart toward the ravine. They'll think we went that way in a hurry and dropped our things so as to travel light. It will take them time to search that underbrush. As soon as they pass we'll go off to the left. Every minute we'll be getting farther away from them."

"Why won't they think we dropped the haversacks while heading the other way?" Don asked.

"What, toward them?" Tim grinned. "That would have walked us right into their arms."

Don thought it out. Through a peephole in the brush he could see the first haversack on the ground.

"Suppose they find it out there, Tim, and don't see the canteen?"

"Well, what of it?"

“Suppose they start to search right around here?”

“Gee!” Tim gave a low whistle. “I hadn’t thought of that. How’s this: if we see them coming, jump up and surprise them and yell ‘Capture!’”

“Suppose they yell, too?” Don asked. “Mr. Wall may say that two sound scouts would have a better chance to capture than a team with one limping scout.”

That was reasonable. The situation became tense. If the searchers took the false trail and went on, all right. If they started to search—good night!

They lay behind the brush and waited. It seemed, after a while, that they had been there an hour. Don had just begun to believe that the pursuit had gone off in a new direction, when Tim’s hand grasped his shoulder with a convulsive pressure.

There had been a faint sound of cracking wood.

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Nearer it came, almost directly in front of them. Then another sound echoed off to one side. All at once a khaki-clad figure slipped between two trees.

Tim's hand grew rigid. Don tried to flatten himself into the earth.

They knew the boy—Larkins, patrol leader of the Foxes. On he came. Suddenly he saw the haversack. He halted and jumped sideways behind a tree.

Don and Tim knew what that meant. Larkins thought it might be a trap. It was not going to be easy to fool him.

Would he never come out from behind the tree? They had heard, after he disappeared, a queer woody sound that somehow did not seem out of place. Now they heard it again and recognized its source. Larkins was hitting a stick of light wood against other wood.

At the first signal, the echoing sounds they had heard off to the side had ceased. At this new signal it began again. Larkins walked out and picked up the haversack. A moment later another khaki figure came into view. It was Rood, another Fox scout.

"It's Don's," Larkins said in excitement; "here's his name."

"Maybe they're hiding around here," said Rood.

Don's heart almost stood still.

"Maybe." Larkins stood up and walked slowly toward the brush.

Don felt Tim gather his muscles. He knew what that meant. If discovery was certain, Tim was prepared to spring out and cry "Capture!" and let Mr. Wall decide.

"Say," Rood called, "what's that?"

Larkins paused suspiciously. "What's what?"

"Down there. Looks like a canteen."

"Get it." Larkins turned quickly from the brush. Don buried his face in his arm so that the searcher would not hear his sigh of relief.

Rood brought back the canteen. "I could see another haversack, too. I bet they heard us and are making a run for it after dropping everything." His voice shook with excitement.



"We've got to get on then," cried Larkins. "Where's the other haversack? Which way? Never mind bothering with it. Spread out. No use being cautious—not until we think we're getting close."

He ran straight on. Rood sprinted off at an angle.

Behind the brush Don and Tim waited. The sounds of feet crashing through the forest grew fainter and at last ceased.

Tim jumped to his feet. "That settles the Foxes," he cried. "Now if we can duck the Eagles we're all right."

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF THE WOODS

Joyously Don broke from cover. The Eagles might threaten later, but just now the field was clear. He took great breaths of the fresh air. It was good to breathe deeply after having been almost afraid to breathe at all.

Tim brought back the haversacks and canteens and pushed them out of sight behind the wall of brush. After a moment's thought he changed his mind and pulled out one of the canteens.

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"That ankle may need another wetting," he said. "For the rest of the way we'll travel light. We should have dropped that load long ago."

"How will we find it again?" Don asked. "There's lots of brush."

Tim took out a handkerchief and tied it where it could be plainly seen.

"Believe me," he said, "we're some team. What one forgets the other thinks about."

Some team! Don smiled. He had never thought to hear Tim say a thing like that. All at once the troubles that Tim had given him in the past seemed as nothing. That was what a patrol leader was for—to stand up under thoughtless knocks from wayward scouts and to bring them back.

They struck off north. Tim had decided that the Eagles could not be in this neck of the woods, else they would have run into the Foxes and somebody would have been captured. He led the way more boldly, with a swing to his shoulders. Don, watching him, smiled again, this time wistfully. What a dandy patrol leader Tim would make—now.

At the first rest, while the red-haired boy poured water over the ankle bandages, Don said:

"You've heard about the new patrol, haven't you?"

Tim shook his head.

"It came up in the last patrol leader's meeting. We've had six fellows on the waiting list for a long time. Mr. Wall's going to organize a fourth patrol and take them in. There's a big chance for you."

Tim looked up quickly. "For patrol leader?"

"Yes."

Tim knelt motionless. After a while he slung the canteen on his back and slowly shook his head. "Nothing doing. What a fine mess I'd have made if I had become patrol leader of the Wolves! I can see it now."

"Just the same," said Don, "I'm going to recommend you."

Tim stared away through the trees. Patrol leader! He had always wanted that. As for Don recommending him—Gee! wasn't that a hot one?

"If I get it," he said in a low voice, "will you stand by me if I get stuck? I'm an awful bonehead sometimes."

"Every patrol leader in the troop will be glad to help," said Don.

"I know." Tim nodded. "But I'd sooner go to you."

Their course still carried them north. By degrees, as they advanced, Tim's boldness became tinged with caution. They had gone quite some distance from their hiding place; there might be Eagles around.

The old whistling signals were resumed. Tim would slip off through the trees and whistle after a while, and Don would go forward and join him. There seemed to be no end to the trees. Were they never going to get out?

The third time Don went forward, Tim was frowning and biting his lips.

"I thought I heard something again," he said nervously. "It can't be that the Foxes swung down and around and headed us off. Wait here; I'll sneak closer."

When the whistle sounded, several minutes later, Don limped forward eagerly.

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"I knew I heard something," Tim warned. "Listen, now."

They held their breaths. Voices! No doubt of it. And then, faintly from a distance, a call of:

"Bobbie! O Bobbie! Bob—bie!"

Don forgot that he was a woods fugitive. "That's Andy's voice," he shouted. "We're almost out. Come on, Tim. Rush for it."

They gave no care now to what noise they made. Don felt Tim take his arm to help him. He hobbled and hopped and squirmed, and only paused when the tender ankle brought him up wincing and shivering.

"Easy," said Tim. "No hurry. See that opening? We're almost out. Easy now."

But Don found it agony to go slow. Suppose they were gobbled here within sight of victory! He took another chance on a hobbling run. Around a clump of trees, straight ahead, another turn—and there was the wide, free outside in front of them.

"Safe!" gasped Don. No need to hurry now. He sank to the ground and rested his injured ankle. The Scoutmaster's Cup was theirs!

Three scouts, walking together, were disappearing over a knoll of ground in the distance.

"Andy!" Tim bellowed. "Andy Ford!"

One of the scouts looked around and pointed. He shouted to someone in the distance. Then he and his companions came forward on a wild run.

Tim pulled the cup from the box and held it up for them to see. At that the wild run became a desperate sprint.

"Ours, ours, ours!" cried Andy. The other scouts, Ritter and Wally Woods, caught Tim's arms and poured out a stream of questions. What had become of the haversacks and blankets? Had they been afraid in the woods? Had they seen the Foxes? Where had they found the cup?

Another scout came over the knoll—Bobbie Brown. After that came a rush of Fox scouts and Eagle scouts, and finally Mr. Wall. Scout whistles began to blow a salute and a welcome. Cheers came in ringing waves. Tim, his eyes bright with excitement, stood close to Don. Oh, but this was great!



Mr. Wall shook hands. His grip was hard and strong and gloriously friendly, and his smile made their blood run warmly. He stepped back and looked at them, and his gaze seemed to rest on Don's puffed lip. Tim caught his breath.

"How do you like it?" the Scoutmaster asked.

"Great!" said Don. "Wasn't it, Tim?"

Tim nodded.

"Who found the cup?"

"Tim did."

"I didn't," cried Tim. "You found the place."

"But you said it had probably been buried and to look for freshly turned dirt. And if you hadn't stuck to me when I hurt my ankle we'd been captured sure. And when the Eagles were trailing us you threw them off the scent—"

"Aw!" said Tim, "you deserve all the credit for limping along on that bum foot."

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A light of satisfaction leaped into Mr. Wall's eyes. There was little that went on in Chester troop of which he was in ignorance. He had known what that trip into the woods meant, and he had wondered many times that morning what would come of it. From the look of Don's lip and from a lumpy look above one of Tim's eyes, he would say there had been a fight. He proposed, though, to ask no questions. Whatever had happened, the atmosphere was clear. The Tim who had come out was a vastly different boy from the Tim who had gone in, and that was all that mattered.

He slipped off Don's shoe and examined the foot. "Nothing much," he said. "A couple of days' rest and you'll be as good as new." As he stood up his hand rested in the old familiar way on Tim's shoulder.

"I told you it would happen some day, Tim."

Tim looked up timidly. "What, sir?"

"That we'd be proud of you."

Tim's eyes dropped. A thrill ran through his veins. Not because he had been praised—paugh! that didn't mean so much—but because Mr. Wall seemed to speak to him as man scout to boy scout. He was accepted without question as worthy. He could see it in the eyes of Andy Ford and of every scout there. Gee! what a difference it made.

The scouts had been shrilling a succession of short, sharp blasts, the rallying signal. Now Larkins and Rood burst out of the woods. When they saw Don and Tim their faces lengthened, but they came forward and offered their congratulations.

The whole story had to be told. Don related how they had followed the trail, he told of finding the treasure, of getting away and learning of pursuit, of cutting away from their trail, and of his tumble at the ravine, and of how Tim had refused to leave him.

"Good boy," cried Andy.

Next Don described their journey with Tim ranging around as scout. When he told of laying out the haversacks Larkins' face went red.

"Were you fellows hiding behind that brush?" he demanded.

"You bet," said Don. "We hid the haversacks there after you went on. You'll find Tim's handkerchief tied there now."

A grudging look of admiration came into the Fox leader's eyes. "It was some plan," he admitted, "and it surely fooled us. That's one we owe you, Tim."

Tim laughed.

The story was over at last, and the position of the sun warned the troop that it was time to start for home. At Mr. Wall's orders a coat stretcher was made and Don was lifted in. Just before the start he thought of something.

"What became of the Eagles?" he demanded.

"Shucks!" said Larkins. "They built a fire the first night, and we sneaked up and bagged them."

Tim looked at Don miserably, and Don flashed a glance that told him to forget it. It was their secret. Nobody would ever know.

Tim walked a step behind the stretcher, with his head bent thoughtfully. What a good scout Don was—fair, and square, and willing to be white where another fellow would hold a grudge! Tim sighed. He wasn't built like that. He scrapped and got himself in Dutch, and let himself think things that he shouldn't think.

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Well, he was going to stop that. He had thought of the laws and the oath back there in the woods and they had begun to mean something serious. Fellows like Andy, and Alex Davidson, and Don showed what the laws and the oath were. Some day—The muscles in Tim's jaw hardened. Some day he would be that kind of scout, too.