

Douglas Alan Captain

Boy Scouts: Tenderfoot Squad: or, Camping at Raccoon Lodge



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CHAPTER I

SURVEYOR RUFUS AND HIS FRIENDS

"All aboard for Raccoon Bluff. Those who can't get aboard take the rail route! Hi! Elmer, squeeze in!"

"On deck, Lil Artha; but do you expect me to climb on top of that mountain of camp duffle, and other luggage you've got piled up, so that your car looks like a tin peddler's outfit?"

"Oh! we've reserved just one crack for you, Elmer. That's right!" sang out the khaki-clad boy at the wheel, "work your way in alongside George Robbins, who's holding down the rear seat with Lil Artha. I've got Alec McGregor beside me here. And after all, worse luck, I had to leave some things behind that I wanted to take the worst kind."

"What's this sticking out – a gun? You ought to know that it's the off season for most kinds of game, Lil Artha," expostulated the latest passenger, as, following directions, he painfully forced his way into the heavily laden car.

"Yes, I know, and I don't intend to do any great stunts at hunting, Elmer. I only thought it might be good policy to fetch my little reliable Marlin along, because sometimes it's mighty pleasant to know you've got some means of defense handy in case of trouble."

"Hear! hear!" ejaculated the boy answering to the name of George Robbins, and who it may be said in passing – for the reader would soon find it out anyway – was a regular born "Doubting Thomas," who nearly always had to be shown, and seldom believed any statement unless it were backed up with abundant proof. "Sometimes there are other beasts abroad in the wild woods besides the common four-footed kind. I believe now we've all had our experiences with tramps and yeggmen of the Weary Willie species. For one, I'm glad you fetched your gun along, Lil Artha."

Meanwhile the driver had once more started the car, and they were moving along the streets of the home town. Several groups of boys, some of whom also wore the well-known khaki of the scouts, called out to them in greeting, and even waved their hats with a salute. Envious eyes followed the car as it sped along in a cloud of dust; for it was pretty generally known that the lucky five were starting off on a week's camping trip; and those fellows of the Hickory Ridge group of Boy Scouts could anticipate a glorious time ahead for the favored ones.

While the big old seven-passenger touring car, which the father of Rufus Snodgrass had loaned them for the occasion, is speeding along, doing very good time as long as the road is fair, a few words connected with these lively lads may not come in amiss.

Elmer Chenowith was the leader of the well-known Wolf Patrol, and those boys who have had the good luck to own some of the previous stories in this series do not need to be told that he was a capable and resourceful lad, who through his merits as a first-class scout had received from Headquarters the privilege of acting as assistant scout-master, a rôle only filled by the most efficient in a troop.

"Lil Artha" was really Arthur Stansbury. When he was very young he had been given this nickname, and even after he suddenly shot up like a mushroom, so that he now measured a full head taller than any of his mates, he could not shake off the ridiculous appellation. People always smiled when hearing it for the first time; but then Lil Artha treated the matter as a huge joke, and often joined in the laugh when the subject came up.

George Robbins was a pretty good sort of a chap, only he did worry his chums by his continual fault finding, and that everlasting desire to have everything proved before he could "swallow" it. At one time he had been inclined to be thin, and a rather poor hand at meal times; but of late his folks seldom had to ring the dinner bell twice for George; indeed, as a rule he was keeping an ear to the ground listening for the welcome sound.

The other two boys were new members of Hickory Ridge Troop, and had not as yet progressed beyond the greenhorn stage. Indeed, it was partly with the hope that various opportunities for teaching the "tenderfoot squad" – as Lil Artha persisted in calling the pair – all sorts of useful knowledge that scouts must sooner or later acquire, that had induced Elmer to give up another partly formed plan and consent to accompany the expedition into the woods.

Rufus Snodgrass was a rather peculiar boy, taken in all. Elmer believed he had never up to that time come in contact with just such an odd fellow. He had been somewhat spoiled by a doting mamma, though Elmer believed he possessed many good qualities about him, if only some revolution could only bring them forward.

In the first place Rufus lacked self-reliance to a remarkable extent. He could not seem to feel confidence in himself when some sudden or alarming emergency arose. On this account he turned out to be somewhat of a failure as a baseball player, for when he saw a high ball driven to his outfield his heart always sank "to his shoes," as he told himself he never could get that fly in the wide world; and lacking confidence he seldom did hang on to it.

Elmer had faith to believe he could cure Rufus of this grievous fault if only he associated with him in camp for a time. He would show him a score of things such as go to make good scouts, and teach him how to "hit the knot squarely in the centre," when chopping wood, to begin with.

Alec McGregor was a boy who had not been a great while in America. His folks, needless to say, hailed from Scotland, and freckle-faced and red-headed Alec had a delightful little "burr" to his tones when talking. Like so many of his kind he was inclined to be a bit pugnacious, and hot-tempered; still Elmer believed him to be both warm-hearted, and as true as steel. After he had been with the scouts a while, and picked up a few lessons in the broad principles of the craft, the patrol leader fancied that Alec would prove one of the smartest members of the troop.

He had a little sister named Jessie at home, a pretty rosy-cheeked Scotch lassie, who was the pride of his heart. The boy never tired of chanting her praises, and often sang ballads, in which "Sweet Jessie, the Flower of Dumblane," occupied the leading part. And Alec had a robust tenor voice in the bargain, which his mates always liked to hear when seated about the camp fire.

Now as to their reason for taking this thirty-mile trip, laden down with tent, camp duffle, edibles enough for a regiment, and all sorts of traps in the bargain, so that the car did resemble a moving van, just as Elmer had remarked when it stopped at his gate for him to work his way aboard.

Mr. Snodgrass was a rich man who had latterly taken up his residence in the town. He had come into possession of a large tract of land, partly heavily wooded, and lying up along Raccoon Bluff, a place the boys had often heard of, but none of them ever visited.

Now, it seemed that Rufus had just one great ambition, which was to become a civil engineer when he grew up. His mother had supplied him with all the necessary instruments for the calling of a surveyor, and for several years now Rufus had associated himself at odd times with some people engaged in the business, doing very hard work for a boy of his customary easy habits, simply because his heart was enlisted in the game.

He now believed that he could carry out the lines about a tract of ground as well as the next one; and upon hearing his father say that he distrusted the accuracy of a recent survey that had been given him of the new territory purchased, Rufus became possessed of an idea which he was now engaged in carrying out.

His folks had readily given their consent that he should get several of his scout chums to accompany him up to Raccoon Ridge, and assist him to re-survey the ground. Indeed, Mr.

Snodgrass, who was not blind to the failings of his only son and heir, insisted that he coax Elmer Chenowith to go along, as a necessary preliminary to his loaning the big car and also paying all the expense in the way of provisions.

The real-estate man was a good reader of human nature, and after hearing all the fine things that were being said about the Chenowith boy he took occasion to have a heart-to-heart talk with Elmer, in which he told the patrol leader how much he hoped association with a fellow like him would be worth to Rufus, and actually begged him to consent to be a member of the little company.

So that was the way things stood. Rufus, of course, did not know about this secret understanding between his father and Elmer; had he done so he might have rebelled, for he was exceedingly high-spirited. As it was he felt that all these good fellows were only keeping him company because of their love for outdoor life.

It was that sly rascal, George, who had managed to get possession of the ear of Rufus, and gain his consent to make out the list of edibles they would likely want while away. Which fact accounted for the "young grocery store," as Lil Artha termed it, that was taken along. But then, no healthy boy has ever been known to be dismayed at a superabundance of good things to eat; and as Rufus's father did not object to the size of the bill, none of them felt he really ought to say a single word.

They made no attempt to speed, for what did thirty-odd miles amount to when in a car, with an abundance of gasolene to take one through? An hour saw them well on their way. Farmhouses were now becoming "as scarce as hens' teeth," to quote Lil Artha. As they had not started until nearly ten in the morning, owing to various causes, it was now getting well on toward noon.

"What say we pull up at the next farm-house we strike, and get dinner, if the good woman of the place will agree?" asked the driver of the expedition, who had in the beginning laid down the law that no one was going to spend one cent except himself, for his father had insisted on this.

"Suits me, all right," said George, with alacrity. "You see, I had breakfast pretty early this morning, and right now I'm feeling about as empty as Si Hunker's hen-coop was that morning after the gypsies camped near his place."

Some ten minutes afterwards they found a wayside farm-house, and the woman, for a consideration, agreed to cook dinner for the crowd. Elmer on his part took occasion to pick up considerable useful information concerning the region which generally went under the name of Raccoon Bluff, possibly because there chanced to be an unusually large number of those "ring-tailed varmints" so destructive to corn fields, and poultry flocks, making their dens in hollow trees around that vicinity.

Among other things the farmer warned Elmer to keep an eye out for Jem Shock. The oddity of the name impressed the boy, and he asked what there might be about the said Jem to give them any cause for uneasiness.

"Well, Jem has been a thorn in the flesh of folks up in this neck of the woods for nigh ten years now, I guess," was what the tiller of the soil told him. "He c'n work when he wants to, but he'd a heap rather loaf, with a gun over his shoulder. He fishes and hunts out of season. I've seen him spearing trout, and more'n once heard how he was known to be taking meat home in the close season, that couldn't have been sheep or veal. Besides that, he's a quarrelsome man, and a desperate character. I wouldn't trust him out of my sight, for I believe he'd steal from a camp as quick as anything. But I hope you don't have any trouble with Jem."

Elmer hoped so, too. At the same time he found himself wondering whether, after all, some of those country people might not be judging the man harshly. Perhaps Jem Shock might not be such a bad character, on better acquaintance. And Elmer decided that if the opportunity should come to him he would take occasion to know the old poacher at close range, so as to study him well.

Once more they were on the move, and as this farm-house would be the last they expected to run across, all of them were keenly on the lookout for signs of the ridge which would mark their arrival at Raccoon Bluff.

They had possibly gone six or seven miles since eating that glorious farm dinner, when suddenly as they were passing slowly through a piece of woodland where the road was a bit soft and wet, there rang out the nearby report of a rifle, startling them all, and causing George Robbins to involuntarily duck his head, as though his first suspicion was that some one had fired at them.

Then came a crashing in the bushes, and across the road sprang a buck, whose antlers were just reaching their full growth after the late rutting season.

Never had the boys seen a prettier picture than when that buck bounded lightly across the road. Lil Artha mechanically reached out a hand toward his gun, though, of course, he never would have thought of using the same while the law protected the game. Then the frightened animal plunged into the thick copse on the opposite side of the woodland road, and could be heard bounding swiftly away.

CHAPTER II

THE GAME POACHER, JEM SHOCK

Rufus had involuntarily halted the car at the very instant the shot was heard, so that the boys were stationary at the time the deer leaped past them.

"Oh! what a beaut!" exclaimed George Robbins.

"The equal of any Scotch stag I ever saw in the preserves!" echoed Alec, who had stared with eyes that were round with wonder.

"But somebody shot at him, all the same, don't you know, and the close season on in the bargain," Lil Artha hastened to say, indignantly.

"Hush! here he comes!" observed Elmer.

They all heard a hasty trampling sound, as though someone might be hurrying through the bushes close by. It came from exactly the same quarter from which the alarmed buck had appeared.

Then a moving figure caught the gaze of the five scouts. A burly man, roughly dressed, strode into view. He stared at the car and its occupants, as though he considered the boys to be mostly responsible for his recent ill-luck.

"Howdye, mister," sang out Lil Artha, not to be cowed by angry looks; "are we on the right road for Raccoon Bluff, would you mind telling us?"

Suspicion lay in the look which the man was now bending on them. He acted as if he imagined they might be more than they seemed; for a guilty conscience can discover a game warden in every inoffensive traveler, especially when the culprit is suddenly caught in the very act of trying to kill a deer out of season.

"Raccoon Bluff ain't far ahead o' ye, if that's whar ye happen tuh be headin' fur," he told them grumblingly; "but might I arsk what yuh a-doin' away up here in this forsaken kentry?"

"Oh!" Lil Artha told him blithely, "we're off on a little trip, and mean to spend a week or so under canvas around this section. You see, the father of the young fellow at the wheel here, Rufus Snodgrass, of Hickory Ridge, has lately come into possession of some property up this way, and we're going to find out if it's been surveyed right and proper. If you see our smoke some time or other, drop in and have a little chin with us, stranger. We nearly always have the coffeepot on the fire, and the latch-string is out."

Perhaps the man may have understood this sort of a genial invitation, but all the same he gave no indication of being pleased because of it. The look of suspicion could still be noticed about his dark face, and he twisted his rifle about in his hands kind of nervously, as though he wished he could keep it from being seen.

"I reckon I ain't a-goin' tuh bother ye much, strangers," he mumbled. "I got my own business tuh look arter. Yuh see, I'm the assistant game warden o' this region, an' it takes a heap o' trampin' tuh kiver my territory."

With an odd sort of chuckle and grin he nodded his head toward them, and then whirling on his heel vanished amidst the scrub. They soon lost track of his retreating footsteps.

Lil Artha laughed in his peculiar way.

"Huh! smoked the coon out, didn't I? Game warden, did he call himself? Whoo! to think of his colossal nerve! I bet you any warden in the State would give a month's salary to have been here, and caught him in the act of shooting at a deer when the law is on."

"Then he was a braw poacher, was he?" burst from Alec. "Aweel, I can feel for him in a way, because, to tell you the truth, lads, I've snared my hare more than a few times across the big water. But then it's different there, because all the game country is owned by rich dukes and lords, and

the poor man hasn't any show; while over here all he has to do is to tramp off into the wild woods for a couple of days, and take his chances.

"Elmer, do you think that could have been Jem Shock?" asked Rufus just then.

The patrol leader showed his surprise, for up to then he did not know that Rufus had ever heard that name; at least, the other had kept his knowledge to himself, for some reason or other.

"I'm pretty sure that's who he is," he told the boy at the wheel; "but how did you know about him and his ways; when the farmer only told Lil Artha and myself?"

Rufus chuckled, and looked wise.

"Oh! I plead guilty," he acknowledged. "I heard stories about Jem Shock before I left home, but I wasn't silly enough to pass them along to the rest of the party, because some of you might have changed your minds, and found an excuse for not coming on the trip."

Lil Artha snorted indignantly.

"Now, don't get mad, Lil Artha," said Rufus, promptly.

"Oh! I'm not riled so much because you kept your knowledge to yourself, Rufus," the tall scout told him; "but on account of you thinking Elmer, George and myself could be shooed off by such a little thing as that. If you looked back at the history of the Wolf Patrol you'd find that the boys belonging to it have all been through a heap of excitement. We've exposed so-called ghosts, had adventures with ugly hobo bands, been in forest fires, fought floods and – well, time wouldn't allow me to enumerate one-half of the things that have befallen us."

"That's enough, Lil Artha," said Elmer, seeking to soothe the long-legged scout, and pour oil on the troubled waters. "Rufus will come to know us better after he's graduated from the tenderfoot class. But suppose we start on again. That incident is closed. We may and we may not see more of Jem Shock. For myself, I'm half hoping I do, because he's something of a character, and opens up a new type for a fellow to study."

"So far as I'm concerned," observed Rufus, scornfully, "I hope we never run across him again. He looked like a bad egg to me, and his eyes had a wicked stare in them, that I didn't like."

"Oh! that can be easily accounted for," said Elmer, as the car once more commenced to glide along the rough woods-road. "You see, in the first place he had that feeling of guilt that makes a rascal look at all the rest of the world as his enemies. Then again I half imagine Jem thinks the game wardens are back of our coming up to this neck of the woods."

"Game wardens, Elmer!" exclaimed Alec; "how could that be, and what would scouts have to do with the officers of the State?"

"Well, scouts seem to have a hand in a good many things that are connected with keeping the laws, and making communities live on a higher standard," the patrol leader explained. "I could tell you of dozens of things our troop has been connected with along those lines. And why shouldn't they enter into an arrangement with the head warden to get evidence against some of these guides who kill deer out of season, and hotel proprietors who offer it to their guests as 'mountain sheep'?"

Alec apparently was a bit puzzled to understand all this, and so Lil Artha, leaning forward, took occasion to explain it more fully as they continued on.

They were passing into an even wilder section of country than any thus far encountered. Not a sign of the white man's presence could they see except in some sections where the original timber had been cut away years back, and a second growth now covered the land; with here and there an old forest monarch left to overtop its neighbors like a giant looking down on a pigmy host.

"This just suits me to a fraction," Lil Artha was saying, as they began to ascend what seemed to be another rise of land. "Why, it's as free from the restraints of civilization as that Adirondack region where we went with Toby Jones last winter, to visit his hermit uncle, Caleb, who was living all by himself in the heart of the wilderness. My lands! if only I thought we'd have half as much fun on this trip as we ran across then, I'd be happy as a clam at high tide."

"Perhaps we will," Elmer told him. "You never can tell what's ahead of you when starting out on one of these trips."

He was thinking at the time of Jem Shock, and wondering whether the poacher might not take it into his head to make things interesting for them during their stay along Raccoon Ridge. Secretly Elmer was almost hoping he *would* see something more of the strange man. He wondered how Jem lived; what his ambition, providing he had any, might be; whether he cared for a single human creature besides himself in all the wide world – these and many more thoughts were gripping Elmer's mind, and he could not shake them off.

Although, of course, he did not know it at the time, still it was fated that the golden opportunity he so eagerly sought was destined to come his way under conditions of a peculiar nature. But of that more anon, since it would be hardly fair to lift the curtain now, and disclose the presence of coming events long before they were due to arrive.

"Don't you think this must be the place they call Raccoon Bluff, Elmer?" asked George just then, as they continued to climb the rise by means of the winding road, so seldom used that Rufus had the greatest difficulty in forcing the car over exposed roots and outcropping rocks.

"I've been looking around," explained the scout leader, "and according to what that farmer told me, I'm sure this is our destination. We can keep our eyes on the lookout for a suitable camp site right along now. There'll be plenty of time for us to get our tent fixed, and a lot of other things done, before sunset comes."

"Well, we seem to have mounted to the crest of the bluff, if that's what this rough piece of ground turns out to be," said Rufus, with a sigh of relief, for at times he had found it hard work navigating the rough road, and occasionally he almost feared they would have to get out and walk the balance of the way.

A couple of minutes later and Elmer called out to him to stop the car.

"I think I glimpse a dandy place for a camp over yonder!" was what the patrol leader remarked to the others, pointing as he spoke. "And see what a glorious view we'll have all the time we're here."

They faced the west, where the sun was heading toward the horizon, though a good two hours must elapse before he sank from view. Through openings in the dense forest they could obtain fine glimpses of distant parts. It was really as delightful an outlook as any of the scouts had ever gazed upon. Alec McGregor, accustomed to those Scotch mountain views, was loud in his admiration.

So Rufus brought the car as near the camp site as was possible, and then all of them leaped out. Filled with a burning desire to get things started they proceeded to carry the cargo of the big touring car across the intervening ground.

Lil Artha, George and the leader held a brief discussion as to the exact spot that was most suitable for erecting their waterproof tent, rendered so through a process of tanning that changed its color to correspond with their own khaki-hued garments.

This important detail being finally settled they began work. Alec and Rufus, being tenderfeet, of course had to be told about everything they attempted; but as the spirit of willingness was strong upon them in the beginning, they carried out orders cheerfully enough.

Elmer was looking for that inherent weakness on the part of Rufus to crop out, and sure enough it came to the surface before they had been a full hour on the ground. The tent having been properly set, and a fireplace built after the most approved scout fashion by Lil Artha, with the two new fellows taking accurate notes so they could in turn carry out a similar task, Rufus was set to work chopping firewood, while Alec had been given another job connected with making a drain on the upper side of the tent.

"That is so the water will run aside, and not flood us out," explained George, who was directing operations in this quarter. "You see, we may have a whopping big storm while we're up here, and again not a drop of rain may fall; but all the same a true scout gets things ready to meet an emergency. That's what our motto 'Be Prepared' stands for. It's a sort of insurance against possible

loss by fire. Your house may never burn down; in fact, you don't expect it ever will, but you take out a fire policy all the same, if you're a wise dicky."

"I get what you are telling me, George," admitted the shrewd Scotch lad, "and all the while I'm understanding this scout business better. There's a muckle mair in it that I used to ken, but I like the way it turns out; and I'm o'er glad now I joined the ranks o' the scouts."

Meanwhile Rufus was having his troubles a-plenty. Evidently he was not very well posted as to the best way of handling an ax, though he swung the tool with quite a lusty stroke, Elmer noticed. For some little time he managed to smash a certain amount of wood, but finally he seemed to have run across a section of hard oak that was giving him a lot of trouble.

He stopped several times to wipe his reeking forehead with his big red bandanna. Elmer could see him shake his head as though he felt that he was up against a hard proposition. For some time the scout leader did not interfere. When, however, he saw Rufus throw the ax down petulantly, as though determined to give the job up as a bad bargain, Elmer concluded the moment had come for him to take a hand in the game and pilot the tenderfoot through his initial troubles.

As a greenhorn in camp, Rufus must be expected to do considerable of the fuel getting; and in order to meet his duties with the least possible friction and trouble, the sooner he learned how to handle an ax properly, the better for his peace of mind. Besides, Elmer did not like to see that "white flag" business. He disliked a quitter above all things; and was grimly determined that before that camp broke up the said Rufus would have learned a lesson or two that would be profitable to him.

CHAPTER III

"HIT THE KNOT AND HIT IT HARD!"

"How are you coming on, Rufus?" asked Elmer, pleasantly, as he dropped down on the log alongside the perspiring chopper.

Rufus laughed, a little unpleasantly, Elmer thought.

"Oh! I guess I was never cut out for a hewer of firewood, Elmer," he remarked indifferently. "Some fellows may take to that sort of thing, but I incline in the direction of less strenuous employment. I can fiddle with a surveyor's outfit all day long, tramp through the woods and the brush, cut a path, and enjoy it all; but swinging an ax doesn't seem to be my forte."

"Then if I were you, Rufus," the other told him, quietly, "I'd shut my teeth together and make it my forte. I never would let a little thing like that get the better of me. Why, I couldn't sleep easy at night if I did."

Rufus moved a little uneasily at that. He undoubtedly must have guessed that the scout-master meant to reprove him for giving up so soon. Then he shook his head and frowned.

"Oh! there'll be heaps of other things I *can* tackle around the camp, besides playing wood-chopper, Elmer, that's sure. I've given it a fair trial, and don't seem to get the hang of the old thing. Why, it's lucky, I reckon, I didn't smash my foot. My hands don't seem to tackle the ax properly. Alec may be better suited to it."

"It isn't hard, once you learn," said Elmer.

"Well, I've given it a try, and I'm ready to call it off, though I know you don't like to hear that kind of talk," grumbled Rufus, actually turning redder than ever with confusion as he felt the eyes of the other fastened upon his face.

"That's not the spirit in which a scout who has any respect for himself should act," Elmer told him, slowly and with a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Deep down in your heart, Rufus, you just know that you *can* master such a little job as learning how to handle an ax, if only you keep persistently at it, and never give up. A scout on being baffled once or twice just sets his teeth together, takes a fresh grip on himself, and says he's going to do that thing, no matter if it means trying sixty-seven times. It's the old maxim of 'Pike's Peak, or Bust,' which the emigrants across the great plains years ago used to paint on their wagon-tops. And generally they got there, too, remember, Rufus."

Then Elmer got up and took hold of the offending ax.

"Now, if you watch me you'll see just how I swing it, and bring it down in the exact spot I want to strike," he went on to say, after which he made several strokes and the stubborn piece of oak that had resisted all the efforts of Rufus to split it fell into two slabs.

"Well, that was certainly fine," admitted the boy, wonderingly; "but you're an old hand at it, Elmer. I'd never be able to do that sort of work."

"Get that notion out of your head in the beginning, Rufus," he was told, sharply. "There's no reason in the wide world why you shouldn't make a good axman, perhaps even better than any of us. You're strongly built, and can put a heap of muscle in the work. At first you'll strike poorly, until you grow accustomed to landing on a given spot. Practice makes perfect in that particular. And now, there's one great lesson for you in chopping wood, just as there is for every beginner. Take a look at the stick, see which way it will split easiest; and then if there's a nasty knot in it, as there was in the one you tackled, strike the blade of your ax straight into the centre of that knot *again and again*, until you succeed in making it give up the ghost. Hit the knot, Rufus, and hit hard! That ought to be a maxim you'd find ringing in your ears every time you feel tempted to be a quitter!"

That last word stung, just as Elmer meant it should. Rufus flushed, and jumped to his feet almost half angrily.

"Here, give me that ax again, Elmer," he said between his set teeth; "and pick out for me the toughest old chunk of oak you can find. We'll see if I'm a *quitter*. I'll hit the knot, and hit her hard, to boot; you watch me!"

Elmer hastened to accommodate him. He was secretly congratulating himself on his success so early in the game. It chanced that a second fragment of oak lay near by, and offered a fairly good test, as it, too, had a difficult knot in its heart. He showed Rufus just how to take the right sort of grip on the ax, and several times corrected him when he struck violently. Of course the blows lacked much of the accuracy that long practice gives, and thus considerable energy was wasted; but after he had been working away for five minutes, a lucky stroke caused the thick bit of oak to fall apart. It had been done by keeping up a constant pounding at the centre of resistance, which in this case was that tough knot.

Rufus was perspiring, and short of breath after his exertion, but there was a look of extreme pride on his flushed face, and his eyes kindled also. Indeed, there was good reason for his self-congratulation; he had proven to himself that "where there is a will there is a way"; and possibly for the first time in his life Rufus realized the power that one may command when determined not to give in.

"Well, I did do it, didn't I, Elmer?" he chuckled, visibly pleased. "And next time I won't be so ready to throw up the sponge. I was a little bit huffed because you spoke the way you did, Elmer, but now I thank you. I wouldn't be surprised but that I'd have caught that big fly last summer instead of muffing it, and losing the game for our side, if only I'd made up my mind I *could* hold it, and must."

"That's the ticket, Rufus," the other told him. "Confidence is half the battle, and the rest is in doing it. But you've chopped enough for a while; better change work and give some other set of muscles a chance to get busy."

"Now, that isn't a bad idea, either, Elmer," Rufus went on to say. "I'd like to take a little turn out of camp before evening comes on, because somehow I seem to have a sneaking notion we'll run across one of the survey lines close by here. You see, they run down from the bluff across that wide stretch of country toward the setting sun; and by pushing along the ridge we ought to find a slashing."

"Well, if you can coax George, here, to go with you, Rufus," the patrol leader remarked, "I've no objections. I can understand how eager you must be to get your location fixed in the start; and I expect you'll sleep easier tonight if you learn that our camp happens to be near one of the survey lines."

George upon being appealed to readily agreed to go with the greenhorn. He knew why Elmer had made this arrangement; for as Rufus was quite a novice in most things pertaining to woodcraft, the chances were he would get lost the first thing. If given an opportunity, George, as a first-class scout, could begin the education of the tenderfoot thus placed in his charge; and the first lesson would be upon various methods of learning how to make his way through the densest forest when caught without a compass, and unable even to see the sun so as to know east from the west, the north from the south.

So George took great pride in explaining how the moss on the trees would serve as an almost infallible guide, all else failing.

"You see, in this section of country nearly all the big storms come from the southwest," he told Rufus as they walked on. "The moss is almost always on the north side of the trees, veering just a little toward northeast. Notice that fact well, Rufus, and never forget it. Some time it may save you heaps of trouble; I know it has me, and lots of other scouts in the bargain."

Finding that the tenderfoot seemed to show considerable interest, George went on to tell of other facts connected with the important subject.

"Now," he observed, soberly, "you may think I'm going to a lot of trouble telling you all this, Rufus; but if ever you do get lost in the woods, and keep wandering around for hours, and then have to make a lonely camp, and sit up most of the night listening to the owls and foxes and such things, why, you'll understand why it's so important a thing in the education of a scout."

Meanwhile Lil Artha and Alec were trying their hands at the woodpile; for as the elongated scout explained to the Scotch lad, they would have need of considerable fuel during the long evening, as they sat by their fire and talked.

Alec proved to have enough stamina, at least; there was a stubborn streak in his Scotch blood that would never allow him to give up easily. Nevertheless, Lil Artha knew Alec had faults that must be corrected before he could reach that condition of excellence that all true scouts aspire to attain.

He had a hasty temper, like most red-haired, impulsive boys, and was, moreover, a little inclined to be cruel, especially toward dumb animals. Lil Artha, himself, had once been the same sort of a chap, and could readily sympathize with Alec; but at that he meant the other should see the error of his ways, and reform. So the tall member of the Wolf Patrol took it upon himself to be a mentor; and who so well fitted for the task as a boy who had had personal experience? No one can preach temperance so splendidly as the man who, himself, has passed through the fire of unbridled passions, and learned the folly of giving way to them.

Alec was particularly interested in the subject of the reversal of his badge. He had, of course, followed the customary habit of all scouts by fastening this to his coat in the morning in an upside-down position, until he found some opportunity for doing a good deed toward some one, which act allowed him to change its position.

"That was easy enough at home, d'ye mind, Lil Artha," he was saying, as he rested upon his ax, and recovered his breath, "because a fellow would be a gillie if he couldnae find mony a chance to do something for sae sweet a bairn as our little Jessie. But it's going to be a harder task away up here in the wilderness, I trow."

"Oh! I don't know about that, Alec," the other told him, encouragingly. "All you have to do is to keep your eyes about you. There are four chums around, and if at any time, for instance, you took a notion to do my stint of wood-chopping, that ought to entitle you to turn your badge over, because it would be a good deed, you see."

Alec looked queerly at him, and then laughed.

"But it would be depriving you of your necessary exercise, Lil Artha," he hastened to say, "and that I'd hate to do."

"Well, seriously speaking then, Alec, there are endless ways of doing good. You needn't be confined to lending a helping hand to human beings; a boy who takes a stone out of the shoe of a limping mule is just as much a benefactor as the one who helps a poor old woman across a crowded street, or carries her heavy basket part of the way home from market. I've bound up the broken wing of a crow; yes, and I knew a scout who even helped one of those queer little tumble-bugs get his ball up a little rise, after he'd watched him fall back a dozen times, and then claim the right to alter his badge. The rest of the troop laughed at him, but the scout-master hushed them up, and said the boy was right; and that not only had he done a good deed toward one of the humblest of created things, but he had learned a practical lesson in pertinacity and never-give-upitiveness that would be of great value to him all the rest of his life."

"Nae doot, nae doot," muttered the Scotch lad, reflectively, as though Lil Artha's interesting words had found a firm lodgment in his heart. "I can see where it is a verra interesting subject, this scoutcraft, Lil Artha. And ye ken I'm mair than glad now I took up with it."

"And as you get to be more intimate with the little animals of the woods," continued the experienced scout, "you come to like them as brothers. We usually have a pet squirrel ducking about the camp, picking up the crumbs; and birds will come, too, if you're kind to them. All those little things help to make an outing more enjoyable, you'll find, Alec, the deeper you dip into them."

Alec scratched his head as though he found it just a little difficult to understand; he had been raised under such vastly different conditions that it would take some time to change his habits, Lil Artha realized. Still, he liked the tenderfoot very much, and meant to do all he could to make him see things through another pair of spectacles than those he had used in the past.

Already his lessons in handling the ax had borne fruit, and Alec gave promise of soon becoming an expert at the job. His success also gave the greenhorn a new-born ambition to excel in other branches of scout education. Lil Artha did not believe he would have much trouble in posting Alec; getting him to govern his temper, and be kind to everything that had life, would be another proposition; but constant association with such a fellow as Elmer Chenoweth was bound to work a change little short of miraculous, Lil Artha had faith to believe; for he knew personally what the patrol leader was able to accomplish in his quiet, persistent way.

"After you've finished with that log, Alec," he told the other, "we'll start our fire. I want to show you just how to go about that task, because there are a hundred things connected with making a fire that you'll find mighty interesting."

"Ye don't say, Lil Artha? I didna ken that there was more than one way to start a blaze, which was to stick a match to the paper, and let it go at that."

The tall scout laughed delightedly. Really, he would find great pleasure in showing this greenhorn how many curious ways there were of starting a fire. Lil Artha had made this a sort of fad for some time past; and while several tricks were still beyond his comprehension, he had mastered a number of others; so that he could start into the woods minus a single match, or even a burning sun glass, and make a fire in any one of five different ways.

"Oh! I can see where you've got a whole lot to learn, Alec," he told the other. "I'll promise to show you some interesting things while we're up here in the Raccoon Bluff camp. For instance, I'll make a blaze by rubbing flint and steel together, like the old Indians used to do centuries back on this continent. Then I've a little trick with a couple of sticks and some dry tinder to catch the spark."

"Ye maun show me that, for a certainty!" cried the other, "because I've read of it in Robinson Crusoe, or some ither book of travel and adventure amang the islands of the sea."

"Oh! there are lots of other ways for doing it in the bargain," pursued Lil Artha, now upon his most favored subject. "You'll think it a most fascinating thing, Alec, I promise you. And once you wake up to the fact that a scout can learn a thousand facts, if only he uses his eyes and his head, you'll be more than glad you joined the troop. Why, we live in a world of our own, and the poor ninnies outside don't have one-tenth of the fun that falls to us."

"There come Rufus and George," remarked Alec. "They look unco' pleased, as if they had discovered the slashing they went to look for. I'm a little interested in survey work mysel'. Rufus is clean crazy over it, too, and sometimes his fash is all about theodolites and chains and compasses and the like. They told me he was lazy, but if ye seed him workin' at the business he loved, ye'd know they leed, they leed."

Alec turned back to his work of splitting the log he had attacked. Already he had a wedge well driven into its heart. A few more lusty blows of the ax and he had opened another cleft further along, into which he was able, with Lil Artha's directions, to place a second wedge. After that it was easy to continue lengthening the split until with a doleful crack the log fell apart, having been cleft in twain.

"That will do for now, Alec," said Lil Artha. "You have done splendidly for your first real lesson in wood-chopping, and I can see with half an eye that you bid fair to beat us all at the game, given a little time, and more experience. You've got a great swing, and seem able to hit a space the size of a dime, every time you let fall. That's half of the battle in chopping, to be able to drive true to the mark; because there's energy wasted in false blows."

Alec looked pleased. A little praise judiciously bestowed is always a great accelerator in coaxing reluctant boys to take up their tasks cheerfully; and wise Lil Artha knew it.

Just then Alec happened to catch a glimpse of something moving amidst the branches of the tree over his head. Lil Artha had turned aside, and did not chance to notice what the other was doing, as the Scotch lad, stooping down, snatched up a stout cudgel, and hastily threw it aloft.

His aim must have been excellent, judging from the immediate results. Lil Artha heard him give a satisfied cry, which, however, almost immediately changed to a howl of alarm. Whirling around, the tall scout saw something that might have amused him at another time, for it possessed the elements of comedy rather than tragedy.

Alec in hurling that stick aloft must have succeeded in dislodging some animal from its hold on the limb. The beast in falling had alighted fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the astonished Scotch boy, and given him a severe case of fright. Lil Artha saw that it possessed a long ringed tail, and hence he knew instantly that it was only a harmless raccoon, and not a fierce wildcat, as he had at first feared.

CHAPTER IV

SHOWING THE GREENHORNS

"Whoo! tak' him off, Lil Artha! It's a mad cat, it is, I'm thinkin'!"

The 'coon being presently dislodged, after having only given Alec a few trifling scratches, proceeded to retreat in hot haste. The angry Scotch lad, snatching up another billet of wood, was about to rush after the frightened animal as though to vent his fury upon it, when Lil Artha barred the way.

"Don't do it, Alec!" he called out, holding up a restraining hand; "let the poor thing trot along. He's more scared than you were, take it from me."

"But he *bit* me, ye ken; and I don't let any fearsome wild beastie do that with impunity, I tell ye!" snapped Alec.

"Well, who's really to blame, Alec?" said Lil Artha, promptly. "That's only a harmless raccoon. He must have his nest in a hollow limb of this tree we're under. Hearing all the talk going on below here, can you blame him for peeking, and trying to pick up a few points about eating, and the like? He was within his rights, and you had no business to knock him down with that chunk of wood. He happened to fall on your shoulders, and commenced scratching and clawing when you jabbed at him so with your hands. He only scratched you a little, and drew the blood. Elmer has the stuff to put on that, and prevent any chance of blood poisoning setting in. But surely you wouldn't kill that inoffensive little runt because he allowed you to knock him out of the tree."

Alec hung his head.

"Aweel, it may be you're right, Lil Artha," he muttered, being conquered by the arguments advanced by the other. "Anyway, it's too late now to chase after him, for the beastie is lang out of sight. Perhaps I was o'er hasty to throw. Next time I'll try to hold my hand."

"It pays not to be too fast while in the woods," he was assured. "If now that had happened to be a bobcat, you'd have been in a nice pickle, let me tell you; and he might have scratched out both your eyes before the rest of us could lift a hand to save you. Better go slow but sure, Alec. And try to look at things once in a while from the standpoint of the woods animal. You'll find it mighty interesting to put yourself in their place, and figure just what you would do."

Again Alec scratched that tousled red head of his. Plainly he was puzzled to exactly grasp what Lil Artha meant; but then, as time passed and he became more accustomed to this strange camp life, now so new to him, the boy would doubtless understand many things that in the beginning looked very mysterious.

When, a short time later, Lil Artha began to initiate him into the mysteries of fire-making, Alec displayed more or less fresh interest. He knew he was going to like that sort of thing first-rate, he told the other; which acknowledgment caused the tall scout to grin with pleasure, since it repaid him tenfold for all the trouble he had taken thus far.

The fire was soon burning cheerily. Somehow it seemed a great source of joy to everyone, especially Elmer, Lil Artha and George. As veteran scouts the crackle of a blaze instantly called up fond memories of numerous former occasions when in the woods, and camping amidst the solitudes they had met with all sorts of interesting and even thrilling adventures, never to be utterly forgotten, even when they had grown to manhood, and gone forth into the world upon their appointed life missions.

Next in order came the preparations for cooking the camp supper. Here Lil Artha had fresh and glorious opportunities to show the tenderfoot squad all sorts of things that it was of prime importance they should early manage to acquire, if they expected to make good scouts.

And when the ham had been nicely browned in the skillet; the potatoes and onions thoroughly cooked; the coffee allowed to settle, after being brought to a boil; and the rudely-built table set with all sorts of good things besides, from cookies, jam, home-made pies, pickles, and such articles as the crafty George had prevailed upon his dupe, Rufus, to include in the bulky stores, it seemed as though there was hardly room to allow their plates a chance to find crevices for lodgment.

By this time the sun had set in a blaze of glory that called forth loud words of sincere admiration from the entire party. Twilight was upon the land as they sat down to enjoy that glorious spread; and both Rufus and Alec vowed they had never in all their lives felt one-half so hungry as right then and there.

That supper would never be forgotten by those tenderfoot scouts. Every fellow once new to the woods can look back to the first meal under such conditions, and remember how wonderfully good everything did taste. The food at home never had such tempting qualities, and his one great fear was that the supply would not be equal to the *enormous* demand.

After supper came the dish washing. That was not quite so fine, especially since Rufus and Alec had fairly gorged themselves. But Elmer knew that it was good to start out right.

"Oh! what's the use bothering with the old dishes tonight?" complained Rufus, spoiled at home by a doting mother; "I'm feeling too fine to be disturbed. Please don't spoil it all by doing anything disagreeable, Elmer."

His wheedling tone had no effect. The scout-master was determined that these two new recruits must learn that duty always precedes pleasure with a scout. After all work has been finished is the proper time to "loaf," and take things easy.

"We have a rule in camp that is as unbending as that of the Medes and the Persians, Rufus," Elmer went on to say, positively. "That is, the dishes must be cleaned up immediately after supper, by those who are delegated with the task. I'll be only too glad to show you and Alec how to go about it, in case you haven't had any experience; but the pot of hot water is waiting, and none of us can settle down to an evening's enjoyment until things are cleared away. All of us mean to take our turns at the job, remember, but we thought the new beginners ought to be the ones to start first."

Rufus looked as though inclined to rebel. Just then Alec jumped up, being more ready to give in than the boy who had always had his own way.

"Coom alang, Rufus, and we'll wrestle with the pots and pans!" he called out. "Between the baith of us we should be able to manage, I ken. And then for a lang evenin' listenin' to the stories Lil Artha, here, has promised to spin, that will, nae doot, mak' Robert Louie Stevenson's wildest tales tak' a back seat."

Well, after that Rufus could not hold out. He even grinned sheepishly a bit as he got up from his comfortable position, and followed the Scotch lad and Elmer over to where the dishpan was hung on a convenient nail, together with a supply of towels, and several dish cloths, all seen to by Lil Artha, who knew by long experience how necessary such things are in a well conducted camp.

So by slow degrees Elmer and his mates might make progress in educating the tenderfoot squad along the lines that every well drilled scout has to follow. Of course they would meet with many discouragements, and sometimes feel that the task was beyond their strength, especially in connection with Rufus, who had allowed such a multitude of tares to grow amidst the good seed that would have to be rooted out; but it is astonishing how much persistence and patience will accomplish, and in the end surprising results might reward the laborers in the vineyard.

They sat up late that night and the fire continued to crackle merrily as fresh fuel was applied from time to time. How wonderful it all seemed to Rufus and Alec, experiencing their very first night in camp. The moon had already set, being young, and darkness hung over the scene. Strange sounds, too, welled up out of that gloom to thrill the greenhorns as they listened. Again and again did one of them interrupt the conversation or the story-telling to demand that some fellow tell what manner of queer creature could be making such and such a noise.

Now it was some night bird giving a hoarse cry; again a distant loon, doubtless out upon some lake, the presence of which they had not even suspected, sent forth a fiendish sound like the laugh of an evil sprite and which chilled the blood in the veins of the tenderfoot scouts; later on they heard tree frogs commence their weird chorus, and were relieved to learn the nature of the noisy sounds, for they half suspected a circle of ravenous wolves might be closing in around the camp.

And so it went on, one thing after another. Perhaps the most singular effect of all was produced by the hooting of a big owl, doubtless squatted in some dead treetop within a few hundred yards of the fire. The two greenhorns really believed some man was calling out and making fun of them. Rufus, on his part, jumped to the conclusion that the poacher, possibly under the influence of liquor, was daring them to come out and have a fight with him, for that tantalizing "whoo! whoo!" seemed to breathe defiance and scorn. Alec, too, showed symptoms of "firing up," much to the secret amusement of Lil Artha and George.

They both quieted down after being told what sort of a big-eyed bird was responsible for the weird noise; though from time to time as the hoots continued to be wafted to them on the night air, the tenderfoot scouts would move uneasily, and exhibit fresh traces of interest bordering on rank incredulity, since it was difficult for them to really believe any feathered creature could indulge in such a mocking monologue.

And later still, after they had crept into their warm blankets, and sought to go to sleep, while the three veterans after a while managed to find forgetfulness in honest slumber, the other pair tossed back and forth, changed their hemlock-filled pillows into new positions, sighed dismally, and put in one of the most trying nights they had ever known.

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