

Chapman Allen

Fred Fenton Marathon Runner: The Great Race at Riverport School



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CHAPTER I IN THE SNOW

"Now then, let's see who can put a shot through that round hole in the tree-trunk up there. Take a try, Sid."

"Must be twenty yards away from here, if a foot, eh, Bristles?"

"More like twenty-five to me, Colon; and looks farther than from first base to third, on the diamond."

"Line up, everybody, and we'll soon find out who takes the cake at making a center shot. But hadn't we better bar out Fred Fenton?"

"What for, Bristles?"

"Why, because he's the regular pitcher on the Riverside High School nine: he's used to putting 'em over the plate for a steady diet."

"That's a fact, and Fred, you'll have to consider yourself handicapped in this little contest of skill."

"Anyhow, wait till we've had our fling, Fred; and then if nobody seems to get a bull's-eye, you might show us how to do the job."

"All right, boys, that suits me. And while you bombard that poor old tree, I'll be amusing myself making one good firm snowball, against the time my turn comes."

"Go at it, fellows! There, did you see me smack one just a foot below the hole? Gee! that was a sure-enough dandy hit of yours, Bristles; closer by six inches than mine. Everybody put your best licks in!"

The hard balls flew thick and furiously, for it happened that the rather heavy fall of snow was just moist enough to be easily pressed into the finest of missiles for boyish use.

Many of these swiftly thrown balls missed the tree-trunk entirely. Others splattered here and there against the bark, leaving a tell-tale white mark. A few came dangerously near the yawning opening; but not a single one thus far had managed to disappear within the gap.

The boy who had been called Fred Fenton, having manipulated a single snowball in his hands, stood there watching the onslaught, and occasionally speaking words of encouragement to those who were taking part in the spirited contest.

"That was a corker, Sid Wells, and it would have done the business if you'd only put an ounce more of speed in your throw, so as to have raised it three inches. Good boy, Brad, you left a mark just alongside the hole, so some of it must have splattered in the hollow! Not quite so fierce, Bristles; that one would have landed, if you'd been a little less powerful in your throw!"

Presently some of the boys began to grow weary of the sport.

"What's the use of our trying to hit that mark so far away?" grumbled Bristles; which expression of defeat was something strange to hear from his lips, because the owner of the shock of heavy hair that stood upright, and had gained him such a peculiar nick-name, was as a rule very stubborn, and ready to stick to the very end.

"Let Fred show us how!" suggested Sid Wells, who was known as the particular chum of the pitcher, he being the son of a retired professor, now engaged in wonderful experiments which might some day astonish the world.

The rest of the boys seemed ready to join in the chorus, and make way for the ball flinger. They had watched this same Fred send his dazzling shots over the plate with such wonderful speed and accuracy that he held the strike-out record for the high school league.

"Remember I'm hardly in practice just now," Fred told them, laughingly; "though Sid and myself have been putting over a few, just to warm up these days when it feels as if Spring might be flirting with Winter. On that account I hope you won't expect too much from me; and give me three chances to make a bull's-eye."

"Sure we will, Fred!" exclaimed Bristles.

"Take six if you want to," added the generous Colon, who was a very long-legged fellow, a magnificent sprinter, with a peculiar habit of leaping as he ran, that often reminded people of the ungainly jumps of a kangaroo. But he nearly always "got there with the goods."

"No, three ought to be plenty!" declared Fred, as he prepared to send his first one in.

It struck just below the edge of the opening, being really a better shot than any of the scores that had marked the tree-trunk up to that time. The rest of the half dozen boys gave a shout.

"Clipped the edge of the plate that time, Fred!" cried Bristles, whose real name was Andy Carpenter.

"Two inches higher, and it would have gone straight in. Now you've found the rubber, strike him out, Fred. You can do it! I ought to know, because haven't I been your backstop many a time, and watched them spin straight across?" and Sid Wells handed his chum a ball he had squeezed into a shape that was as nearly round as anything could be, and also as hard as ice.

Bristles, too, presented his contribution, so that the candidate for honors stood there with a missile in each hand. He looked carefully at the trees as though measuring the distance and height with that practiced eye of his. Then they saw him draw back his arm after the same manner in which he delivered the ball during an exciting part of a hotly contested game of ball.

The shot went true to the mark, and as they saw it vanish in the cavity, a shout arose from the five boys. This burst out in redoubled violence when, as quick as a flash, Fred sent the second snowball exactly after the first, so that it too went straight into the dark hole.

While they continue to express their delight, by shouts, and slapping
Fred on the back, perhaps it might be well to say a few words concerning
Fred Fenton and his friends.

They were all Riverport boys, and attended the high school there. Fred and two of the others were taking a post graduate course, meaning to enter college during the following season.

In the pages of the first volume of this series, entitled "*Fred Fenton, the Pitcher*," we had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of most of the boys who were to play prominent parts in the events taking place along the banks of the Mohunk River, where two other towns, Mechanicsburg, three miles up, and Paulding, seven miles down the river, were rivals of Riverport.

Turning from baseball, as the Summer waned, the boys of Riverport naturally took to the gridiron, and their struggles for supremacy with rival teams are to be found in the second story, called: "*Fred Fenton in the Line*."

When Summer came again, other sports took the energetic lads of the river town by storm. With such splendid opportunities for boating, as were presented by the Mohunk River, of course they availed themselves of the chance to again enter into competition with those whose one ambition seemed to be to defeat Riverport. These lively encounters are set forth in the pages of the third volume, entitled "*Fred Fenton on the Crew*."

The next Winter the three towns became so filled with enthusiasm over the great advantages of athletic training, that fine gymnasiums were organized through public subscription. In time a meet had been organized, and there were some fierce struggles for supremacy between the rival towns. Just how the boys of Riverport carried themselves in these exciting happenings, and what

measure of success perched on their banner, you will find narrated in the pages of the fourth volume, just preceding this book, under the title of "*Fred Fenton on the Track*."

The Winter had now almost reached its conclusion, though some of the boys who claimed to be weather-wise declared that they would very likely have just one more cold snap before the final break-up.

They hoped it might be severe enough to give them a last chance to skate upon the Mohunk, and use their ice-boat again. The ice had become pretty "punky," as Bristles called it, with numerous airholes that threatened disaster in case one went too close, so that for several days Fred and his chums had avoided the river.

This trip up into the woods on Saturday afternoon had been taken just to enjoy the first real tramp of the season, and to get together to talk of plans for the coming Spring athletics. As boys can never resist the temptation to throw snowballs when the moist white covering seems just suited to such conditions, every little while one of them discovered some sort of target at which they could exercise their skill.

Once it had been a venturesome bluejay that had wintered near the Mohunk; but the wary bird was awing before the first snowball struck near its perch. Then a crow dared them, and fled amidst a shower of missiles and uproarious shouts, each fellow claiming that it must have been his shot that had struck the limb just where the cawing bird had been sitting.

They were possibly two miles from town, and in the midst of the Budge woods, a section that always had a certain charm for the boys of both Riverport and Mechanicsburg, as it lay half-way between the two towns, and not far from the river.

Which brief but necessary digression again brings us to the occasion when Fred's chums were applauding his double hit, after he had sent two successive snowballs so cleverly into the hole Bristles had selected as a mark.

"Same old accuracy," chanted Colon.

"I'm sorry for poor Paulding, and the other town above us, when Fred steps into the box again this year. He's got 'em as straight as a rifle ball. No trouble for him to put three over when he's in a hole."

Sid Wells had hardly said this when something came to pass that was entirely unexpected by the six Riverport boys. Through the air a cloud of solid icy balls came hurtling with what seemed like an angry hiss. Some struck around them, spattering against the tree-trunks with loud thuds; but several, being better aimed, came in contact with the persons of the astonished boys, producing more or less of a stinging sensation, as icy balls are apt to do.

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE BETWEEN OLD RIVALS

"Hey! What's all this mean?" shouted Bristles, as he dodged another shower of smartly-thrown missiles that came from a point close at hand.

There was hardly any use asking, because all of the lads had by then discovered the flitting forms of half a dozen boys about their own age, who must have piled up plenty of ammunition, to judge from the reckless way in which they were hurling snowballs in the direction of Fred and his chums.

"The Mechanicsburg crowd, that's who it is!" snapped Colon, who, being so much taller than the others, had a better chance to see over the tops of the bushes.

"They're in for a snowball fight, fellows!" exclaimed Brad Morton, who was the captain of the football team, as well as track manager in all athletic meets.

"Give 'em Hail Columbia, fellows! Riverport High to the fore! Now, altogether, and send 'em in as hot as you can make 'em!"

That was Dave Hanshaw whooping it up. Dave had always been known as the heavy batter when he was feeling right, and many a time had he knocked out a home run, to the wild delight of the Riverport rooters.

The scene immediately took on a lively air. Fred and his five chums were feeling in just the right trim for a warm scrimmage with their Mechanicsburg rivals, who had always managed to give them a hard task before confessing to defeat, and were said to be breathing all manner of threats with regard to evening up the score at the very next available opportunity.

It seemed as though there were about the same number of lads on the other side, and they had one advantage in the fact that, knowing of the presence of the Riverport fellows, they had secretly prepared an enormous number of fine round balls, so firmly pressed as to be almost as hard as stones.

Preparation is all very good, but there is something that, as a rule, proves even better. This is organization and leadership, backed up by pluck; and here the Riverside boys were in a class by themselves.

Somehow, when an emergency like this suddenly arose, they were accustomed to looking to Fred Fenton as leader. It may have been because Nature had fashioned him in such a way that others readily believed in his ability to win; past experiences had considerable to do with it, and they had known him to carry off the honors for the home school on many a hotly contested field.

For a short time the air was filled with flying snowballs, most of which were fruitlessly thrown, though the better marksmen managed to now and then get in a telling hit, that gave them more or less satisfaction.

Fred soon saw, however, that this sort of play would lead to nothing. One side or the other might become exhausted, and call a truce; but there would be little satisfaction in such a tame victory. What he wanted was an exhibition of strategy, by means of which the enemy would be fairly routed.

"Brad, take Colon and Dave, and work off to the right, while the rest of us turn their other flank!" he explained to the track captain, as they dodged a new flurry of deftly thrown missiles.

"That's the ticket, and we're on to the game, Fred!" came the immediate response, showing how ready the others were to follow up any scheme which Fred proposed.

"Lay in a stock of ammunition first of all," cautioned Fred; "and when I sing out, make your start. We'll round up that lively bunch in a hurry, mark me."

His confidence filled his mates with enthusiasm, as it always did. A belief in one's self goes a great way toward winning the battle, no matter how the odds may seem to stand against success.

There was a hasty making of half a dozen balls apiece, all they could conveniently carry, and when Fred had managed to supply himself with that many rounds, he gave Brad the order to advance.

With new shouts that were intended to strike alarm to the hearts of the Mechanicsburg boys, the two detachments now pushed along, making something of a swinging movement, with the idea of turning the flanks of the enemy.

Of course the other fellows understood just what was up, and could also divide their force, so as to meet the conditions; but when they found themselves between two fires, with hard snowballs striking them in the back, their valor began to give way to uneasiness, that was apt soon to merge into a regular panic.

That was what Fred called strategy. It was of a different kind from that of the great Napoleon, who used to plan to divide his enemy's army, and then strike quickly at first one-half, and then the other, before they could unite again.

In this case the main idea Fred had in mind was to be able to pour in showers of missiles from two opposite quarters. In this way, while his own men would be scattered, and could dodge any shot that seemed likely to cause trouble, the enemy remained bunched, and presented a splendid target.

The thing that was likely to tell most of all was the fact that even though a snowball happened to miss the boy at whom it had been aimed, there was always a good chance of its finding a mark in the back of another fellow, who, being struck so unexpectedly, must cringe, and feel like running away.

Loud rang out the cries of the rival fighters, and all the while the attacking force kept working closer and closer to the group of almost exhausted fellows from up-river way.

"Soak it to 'em!" pealed Bristles, who was surely in his element, as he dearly loved action of any sort; "three hits for every one we've taken, and then some. Put your muscle into every throw, fellows! Rap 'em hard. They started it, and we'll do the winding up, and make the peace terms. It's a surrender, or run away. Now, all together again!"

By this time the Mechanicsburg boys had had quite enough. Every one of them was nursing some wound. One had indeed even started off through the woods, holding a hand to his eye, as though he had failed to dodge a throw quickly enough; several others were hugging the tree-trunks closely, and showing that they had had about all the snowball fight they wanted.

There was one heavy-set but athletic looking chap who appeared to be the ringleader of the assailants. His name was Felix Wagner, and in times gone by he had given the Riverport boys many a hard tussle to subdue him; though he had a reputation for square dealing second to none.

Seeing that his side had given up the fight, since he was the only one still hurling missiles, at the advancing enemy, Felix knew it was folly to try to keep it up any longer.

"Hi! hold your horses, you Riverside tigers!" he called, laughingly, as well as his almost exhausted condition allowed; "guess we've had about all we want of this sort of thing for once. My cheek stings like fun, and I think I'll have something of a black eye to-morrow. I only hope I gave as good as I took, that's all."

"Do you own up beaten, then, Wagner?" demanded the pugnacious Bristles, "because we're still as fresh as daisies, and bound to put it over on you, now that you've started the fight?"

"Oh sure! With such a crippled army, what else can a fellow do?" replied the leader of the other crowd. "We throw up the sponge, and wave the white rag. You're too much for us, that's what. I reckoned it'd be that way when I saw Fred Fenton was along. He put you up to that game of dividing your forces, and getting us under a cross-fire, I'll be bound. And that rattled us more'n anything else you did; for when you get a crack on the back of the head, it sort of knocks your calculations silly, and you can't pay attention to what you're doing. We surrender, all right."

Besides Wagner there were some of the other baseball stars in the defeated set – Dolan, who guarded the middle garden, Sherley whose domain was away off in right, Boggs, the energetic shortstop, Hennessy the catcher, who had taunted Fred and his chums so persistently whenever they came to bat, in hopes of making them nervous, and Gould the agile second baseman.

A number were rubbing their heads, or their faces, where red marks told of a "strike," and while one here and there grumbled, wanting to know if the Riverport boys put stones in their snowballs, the majority took their punishment in good part.

"It was a lively scrimmage while it lasted, let me tell you," Fred remarked, as he rubbed his icy hands together in order to induce circulation.

"As fierce as any I've been in this year," admitted the big Hennessy, whose favorite feat of throwing out runners at second had gained him a great name, and who must have been responsible for a number of hits which the Riverport boys had suffered during the "late unpleasantness."

"Getting to be an old story to have you Riverport fellows crow over us," grumbled Boggs, who had been the one to walk away while the battle was still on; he had his handkerchief crushed in his hand, having wet it with melted snow, and in this fashion was trying to relieve the smarting, as well as prevent his eye from becoming discolored – something the average boy dislikes more than almost any other punishment that can be imagined.

"Is there anything that we can beat you in?" demanded Sherley, frowning; "because I'd give something to know it. We've tried our level best, and for two years now only picked up a few crumbs of comfort, while the feast's been spread for Riverport. And yet Mechanicsburg has just as good athletes as you can boast. We manage to win now and then, sometimes by sheer hard work, and again by a fluke. But they seem to be only the minor events; all the big plums go to your crowd."

"That's Fred's diplomacy, Sherley, don't you understand?" said Bristles, with one of his wide grins. "He looks out for it that we get our best licks in the things that count. We've got a billiard and pool table at our house, and when we play pool don't we go after all the big balls first? what's the use knocking the One in a pocket, except it's your only shot, and gives you a chance to get at larger game?"

Felix Wagner looked at the speaker, and gave a low whistle.

"Shucks! I believe that's what's been the trouble all along," he went on to say, presently, as though he had been awakened from a sound sleep; "and to think none of us got on to that racket before. Sure, we've been chasing after the Number One ball just as hard as we have after the Fifteen. All looked alike to us. Much obliged for giving me the tip, Bristles; we'll see if we can't do better next time. And if all the talk about having a regular Marathon race this Spring turns out right, that's where Riverport is going to run up against her Waterloo!"

"Glad to hear you talk so smartly, Wagner," said Fred, cheerfully, for such methods never had the slightest weight with him, or affected his own confidence. "If you go at things that way, there's a chance we'll have a glorious run, in case that Marathon race does come off. All of us are pulling the hardest we know how to get it fixed up; and we hope you fellows and Paulding will put in your oars. It will be a great event, if we can spring it this season."

"Chances look pretty bright up our way," said Wagner, as he and his friends prepared to start toward their home town; "and after the tip Bristles was so good as to hand us, I wouldn't be surprised if Mechanicsburg managed to show you down-river fellows her dust, this time for keeps. So-long, everybody!"

"Good talk, Wagner; may the best man win, we all say!" called out generous Bristles.

CHAPTER III

UP THE MOHUNK ON AN ICE-BOAT

As Fred and Bristles, as well as Sid Wells, were all taking a post graduate course, they got out much earlier than any of the other scholars. This was how on Monday afternoon Bristles turned up at the Fenton home close to the river, he having arranged with Fred to have a last spin on the ice-boat which the Carpenter boy had made himself, and used with more or less success during the past Winter.

The weather had indeed hardened over Sunday, so that the slush was turned into ice again. The surface of the river was not as smooth as they could have wished, but then since it promised to be their very last chance to make use of the *Meteor* that year, the boys could not complain, or let the opportunity pass by.

"We'll have to be careful about some of the blowholes in the ice," Bristles was saying, as they headed for the bank where he kept his craft in a shed he had built for the purpose, and which was close to Fred's home. "Everybody says the ice seems to be thin around where the water bubbles up. I'd hate to drop in and have to go home wringing wet, to scare ma half out of her wits."

"Oh! no need of doing that, even if we should have the hard luck to get wet," Fred told him. "I always carry a waterproof matchsafe, so we could go in the woods somewhere, start up a bully hot fire, and dry off. All the same, here's hoping we don't have to try that stunt out. It sounds well enough, but in this cold air a fellow'd shiver so he'd think his teeth were dropping out. We'll keep a bright watch for those same blow-holes, believe me, Bristles."

Fred was a careful hand at everything he undertook, from driving a horse or a car, to manipulating an ice-boat. So Bristles, who had the utmost confidence in his superior merits, did not feel the slightest uneasiness as he led the way down the bank to the shed that sheltered his home-made but very satisfactory ice craft.

Of course he had a padlock on the door. This was not because the sprawling craft was so very valuable; but Bristles had expended considerable time and money in fashioning the flier; and he did not mean to put it in the power of any malicious boy to injure or steal, if a mere padlock could prevent such a catastrophe.

There were some pretty mean boys in Riverport, as indeed you can always find in any town. The leading spirit among this class of young rascals was Buck Lemington, who had once been the bully of Riverport, until Fred, coming to town, succeeded in breaking up the combination that had so long held sway.

Ever since that time the Lemington boy had lost no opportunity to try to get back at Fred Fenton. He had played several tricks on the other, and his chosen friends, who also came under the condemnation of Buck; but as a rule the vicious leader of the bad set had had these things recoil on his own head.

Still, knowing how gladly Clem Shooks, Oscar Jones, Conrad Jimmerson and Ben Cushing, the cronies of Buck, would seize upon a chance to destroy his pet ice-boat, Bristles had always kept it under lock and key when not in use.

"Everything seems to be lovely," said Bristles, opening the door of the shed. "Somehow I never count on finding my things as I left 'em, because often I've seen one of that bunch hanging around the river here, as if he were only waiting for half a chance to get even with me. Why, each time the fire bells have rung at night time this Winter, I've climbed into my duds with the feeling that it was good-bye to my bully old *Meteor*."

"Oh! I hardly think they'd dare do anything as bad as that, after the lesson they had before," Fred went on to say, as he bent over to help the owner drag the rather clumsy craft out toward the nearby shore.

"Well, when you're dealing with such a tough gang as that," explained Bristles, "there's only one thing to do, and that's believe 'em equal to anything. I warrant you now that many a time it's only been the fear they have for our hustling little fire eater of a police officer, Chief Sutton, that's kept Buck and his crowd from trying a heap more stunts than they did. Remember when they cut the wires, and left that big meeting in pitch darkness? Yes, and that other time they turned loose a dozen mice at the bazaar, and set the ladies to shrieking and fainting? But thank goodness I've got through the Winter without losing my boat, and I'm calling myself Lucky Jim."

They soon had the queer craft ready for service, with its mast rigged, and the few ropes in place. Bristles secured a couple of old comfortables to serve them in place of cushions, which more elaborate ice-boats carried. These were tied on the boards in a way to suit the needs of those who would soon be sprawled out under the swinging boom.

"If the ice were only a whole lot smoother, I'd call this a jolly day for a spin," the skipper of the craft went on to say, while continuing his preparations.

"Yes," added Fred, standing there, and having completed his arrangements to his complete satisfaction, "the sun shines with just a taste of Springtime about it; and the breeze is neither too hard nor too squally. It comes from the best quarter we could wish for, across from the west, so we'll be able to run up or down the river without trying to tack, and that's always a hard job on a narrow stream, when you're booming along so fast."

"Well, everything's ready, Fred, so hop aboard."

"Is it up or down this time?" demanded the other.

"Whichever you say, it doesn't matter a pin to me either way," Bristles continued.

"On the whole, I rather think we'd better head up-river this time," said Fred. "We went down the last trip we made, yes, and the one before that too, because of a poor wind, and the river being wider below, so we could tack better. I'd like to go past Mechanicsburg and as far up as we can, for the last time this year."

"Call it settled then, Fred. Let's point her nose that way and get a move on us in a jiffy."

Some small boys were skating near the shore, and had come around to watch the starting of the iceboat, which was a familiar sight with them, though they never seemed to grow weary of watching it go forth on its swift cruise. Bristles had waited only long enough to make use of the padlock again, so that no one might meddle with such things as he kept in the shed. Then he was ready to raise the sail, and spin up the river like the wind.

Just as Fred had said, they were apt to have an unusually hazardous trip on this particular afternoon, partly on account of the rough ice opening up chances for an upset, and then again because of the presence of so many weak places, where the recent thaw had started blow-holes.

Of course the very swiftness of their passage would be one means of safety; for the ice-boat could skim across a small stretch where a skater would most surely break in. But Fred did not mean to take any more chances than necessity demanded; and Bristles, though commonly known as a reckless fellow, had promised to steer clear of any spot which his companion told him was unsafe.

Both of the boys were very fond of this sort of sport. It was a delight to them to feel themselves being carried along over the ice at a merry clip, with the steel runners singing a sweet tune, and the wind humming through the dangling ropes.

The shore fairly flew past them, once the iceboat got fairly started; and it seemed almost no time before they glimpsed the smoke from the factories of Mechanicsburg, which was just three miles above their home town, and on the same bank of the frozen Modunk.

"Keep a bright outlook while we're passing!" called out Fred; "they may have been cutting ice up here, as they were early in the Winter, though the openings froze over again."

"Looks a bit suspicious over to the right, and I'll hug this shore. Give me a call if you see any hole ahead, so I can sheer off, Fred."

"That's what I will, Bristles, you can depend on it!"

Already they had come abreast the lower houses. The breeze had even freshened a little, or else the bank was somewhat lower, so they caught its full force. At any rate, they fairly rushed past the busy manufacturing town, where there were a number of big mills and factories, giving employment to hundreds of hands.

"Somebody's waving his hat to us on the bank up there, and shouting in the bargain," called Bristles, who was too busily engaged in looking straight ahead to turn his eyes aslant.

"Yes, and I think it's Felix Wagner," admitted Fred. "Looked like his figure, but I can't squirm around so as to see again. Doesn't matter much anyway. Hi! there, turn out a little more, Bristles; you're heading for a hole! Not too far, because there's another just as bad stretching out from the other side. Careful now, boy; a little too much either way, and we're in for a ducking!"

"Just room enough to get through, I reckon, Fred. Whee! that's going to be a tight hole for us. I hope we can make the riddle, all right!"

"Steady, a little bit more to the left; now a quick swing the other way, and we're over safely enough. Say, that was as pretty handling of an ice-boat as I ever saw done. You deserve a heap of credit for that job, Bristles, and that's straight!"

"Thanks, awfully, Fred," said the other, in rather an unsteady voice; "but all the same, I'm glad we're well across the narrow pass. My heart seemed to climb right up into my throat. I tell you I never would have made it only for you tipping me off the way you did."

"Yes you would, Bristles, even if you'd been alone, because you must have seen how the lay of the ice ran for yourself. But I hope we don't strike another place like that above. I don't think we shall, though they cut ice and let it float down till it gets opposite the town; but that's done only on one side, as a rule."

They had quickly left the smoky town far behind them, and on both sides of the river could now be seen snow-covered farms, patches of woods, sloping hillsides, and now and then little hamlets. Once they passed what seemed to be a lumber camp, at which some sturdy men were at work, getting logs ready to float down the river with the usual Spring freshet.

Occasionally it was not so easy to make progress. This was when the crooked river took a sudden turn, and they had the breeze from a different quarter. But since Bristles knew how to manage his strange craft very well, they overcame all such difficulties, and continued to make rapid headway for some little time.

"The holes seem to be getting worse up around here," remarked Bristles, after he had had to execute several speedy movements in order to avoid running into dangerous spots.

"Yes, and as it's getting rougher in the bargain, as well as narrow between the banks, perhaps we'd better call a halt, and start back," suggested Fred.

"Let's make that turn up yonder," urged the skipper. "I remember there's something of a wider span there, and I'd like to try swinging around without stopping, if I can. Last time I made a stab at doing the same, I piled up ashore in a wreck; but the wind's in my favor to-day. You can't down a Carpenter, that's all there is to it."

"Just as you say, Bristles; I'm game to stick it out with you. Swing over a little farther, so as to get all the space you can for turning. Listen, wasn't that somebody screaming; or could it have been a locomotive whistling for a crossroad?"

"I heard it too, Fred," said Bristles, hastily, "and give you my word for it I think it came from around the bend there. We'll turn in before you can count twenty. There it is again, Fred, and worse than before. Somebody's in, the chances are, and I only hope we get on hand in time to be of help."

As the flying ice-boat turned the bend and they could begin to see the wider stretch of the Mohunk, both boys eagerly waited to discover what the cause of all that screaming could be.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESCUE, AND A MYSTERY

"Look there, Fred!" cried Bristles, "over nearer the shore, to the left!"

"I see them!" replied the other, almost instantly.

"It's a girl, and she acts as if she might be trying to get at somebody in the water," the skipper of the ice-boat shouted, as he headed the flying craft straight toward the spot.

"Be ready to bring up in the wind, so we can tumble off, Bristles!" advised Fred, taking in the whole situation at a glance, in his comprehensive way.

Bristles was already so excited that he came near upsetting the ice-boat by being too speedy about making the turn. Both boys scrambled to their feet as soon as they possibly could, and hurried toward the place where a girl of about ten years of age was wringing her poor little hands, and trying to reach a boy who was clinging to the crumbling edge of the ice. He was up to his neck in the cold water of the river.

"Hold fast, and we'll get you out of that!" cried Fred, as they drew near. His quick eye had already taken note of the fact that a rail fence came down close to the water's edge just beyond, and it was straight toward this that he was now hurrying. Bristles knew what he was going for, and he kept near the heels of his chum.

The frightened girl thought they were deserting her, and redoubled her cries.

"Help! Oh! help us! Please don't go away! My poor brother will be drowned! He can't hold on much longer! Oh! come back and help get him out!"

By that time Fred had reached the end of the fence, which ran into the water so as to keep the cows from straying out of their pasture. He struggled with one of the rails, and managed to break it loose.

"Get another, and chase after me, Bristles!" he shouted, as he once more turned and hastened toward the hole in the rotten ice, where the boy, who could not be more than twelve years of age, was trying as best he could to keep from being drawn under by the sucking force of the strong current.

Once close up, Fred dropped on his knees, shoving the rail ahead of him. In this fashion he was able to push it directly to the imperiled boy. Bristles had been so rapid in his actions that he was hardly ten seconds behind the leader. He immediately copied Fred's example, so that there were now two rails reaching out in the direction of the hole, their further ends actually overtopping the gap in the ice.

"Stay here, Bristles, and do whatever I tell you!" Fred told his chum, when, having arranged the rails as he wished, he started out along them.

His weight being now distributed over a wide surface there was no danger of the rotten ice giving way under him. That is the essential point about nearly all rescues on the ice, and what every boy should bear in mind the moment his services are needed in order to save an imperiled companion.

Fred was now enabled to approach the very edge of the hole, so that he could hold out his hand to the boy in the water, who had been constantly telling the girl to keep back lest she too fall in. Between them it was possible to accomplish the rescue, for while Fred pulled, the boy also exerted himself to the utmost, and presently crawled over the edge.

"Keep your weight as much as you can on the rails, because with your clothes soaked, you weigh twice as much as I do," Fred kept telling him; and yard by yard he drew the other along until finally they could get to their feet, and make for the shore.

The girl was crying hysterically now, although she had shown considerable bravery before.

"Oh! Brother Sammy, what if you had let go, and the current had drawn you under the ice! I think I'd have wanted to jump in, too, because I'd have nothing left to live for then!" she kept repeating, as she patted his cold hand tenderly, and tried to warm it.

Fred knew that unless something was done immediately, the boy would be very apt to be taken down sick, after all that nervous exhaustion, and the cold bath he had suffered. The air was chilly, and must strike him keenly.

"Here, you can't go home in that way, no matter how near by you live," he went on to say, in his cheery way.

"Home!" repeated the girl, and her eyes exchanged a strange look with her brother. "But what can we do, for there isn't any farmhouse around here? We were coming across the river, and Sammy went too near a hole. Then the ice broke, and all I could do was to scream. He wouldn't let me come near him, but kept trying to climb out himself. Every time he got up on the ice it broke again, and he went in. Oh! it was just terrible, terrible! But he'll freeze now, mister, if we don't find a house soon."

"No he won't, not if we know it," said Fred. "Here, slap your arms about you this way as hard as you can, and jump up and down as if you were crazy. Never mind how it looks, if only you get the blood to circulating good. Bristles, it's up to you and me to start a fire booming in a hurry."

"Here's as good a place as any, Fred, for there's plenty of loose wood around."

Fred was already busily engaged in hunting all manner of small bits of dry fuel under the sheltered sides of the logs, and in hollow stumps. As soon as he had gathered a few handfuls of this tinder, he drew out a match, and started it burning.

Fred was a clever hand at making a fire, and this one did not fail him. Bristles had in the meantime brought an armful of wood, and, selecting the smaller pieces, the two soon had a fine, large blaze going, that began to send out a considerable amount of welcome heat.

"Back up here, and see how this feels, Sammy," Fred told the shivering lad. When the other had done so, he added, "Now, just as soon as you feel warm on one side, change to the other. You know what they say, 'one good turn deserves another,' and here's where it applies. Keep up your exercising, because all that is going to help prevent you from taking cold. If I only had some hot tea or coffee, I'd give you some, but we'll have to do without it, I'm afraid."

He kept talking to the boy and girl as he worked at the fire, and Bristles continued to carry fresh supplies of wood, laboring like a good fellow. In this way Fred managed to learn that the name of the boy they had rescued was Sam Ludson and that he lived with Corny Ludson; though when he asked how far away it was they lived the answer was an evasive one.

"A good distance away," was about all the boy would say, and Fred could not help noticing that he again exchanged uneasy looks with his sister.

There was certainly something very queer about these two, though Fred could not understand why they should feel backward about telling where they lived, and especially to a couple of boys who had just done them a great favor.

Still, Fred was not unduly curious about it. If the brother and sister did not want to take him into their confidence, he was not the one to persist. So far as he could remember, Ludson was a name he had never heard before, so it did not seem as though they could ever have lived around Riverport. Bristles later on also declared that it was strange to him, and he had been born there, while Fred was comparatively a newcomer, having arrived only a couple of years previous to this time.

His particular business, as Fred saw it, was not to poke into other people's private affairs, but to get the clothes of Sam dry as soon as possible. Then he would feel that he and Bristles had finished their duty.

So he continued to keep the fire burning, and have Sam turned around every little while. At first the child steamed at a tremendous rate, but as by degrees the moisture was absorbed by the heat, he began to feel much more comfortable.

"I guess I'll go now, mister," Sammy remarked, finally, as though anxious to get away from these kind friends before they took to asking him any awkward questions.

"Just hold up a little while longer, and then you'll be all right, Sam," he was told by Fred, and like a great many other fellows, the boy fell into a habit of observing the wishes of this leader among the scholars at Riverport High.

"Whatever you say, mister, goes," he observed, with humility. "You've sure done me a great service, and I ain't going to forget it, either. I don't reckon it'll happen that I c'n pay you back, but if the chance ever does hit me, I'm agoin' to do it, sure thing."

"Are you feeling as good as ever again, Sammy?" asked his sister, who was rather a pretty girl, Bristles thought, as he looked her over, from the wretched little hat she wore on her bonny brown hair, the odd cheap pin at her throat, the faded dress, to the coarse shoes that gaped badly at the toes.

"I certainly am," he responded, caressing the hand she had laid on the sleeve of his ragged jacket. Somehow it struck Fred right then and there that mutual suffering must have drawn these two frail looking beings closer together than the average brother and sister.

"Well, then you can make off home if you feel fit," Fred told them, "and let me tell you my friend here and myself both feel mighty glad we happened to be as close by as we were. It taught you a lesson, I expect, Sam, and you'll fight shy of blow-holes in the rotten ice after this, won't you?"

"You bet I will, mister; and say, I guess I'm gladder'n you c'n be about that same thing; because the river is awful swift around here, and I kept getting colder and weaker all the while. Couldn't have held out much longer. I want to thank both of you for what you did. I ain't goin' to ever forget it either, see if I do, though, shucks! I don't 'spect I'll ever have a chance to pay you back."

He shook hands with both Fred and Bristles, as did also the little girl, now looking both grave and pleased. Then they walked away, making for the nearby road that led from Mechanicsburg to some other town many miles away, and leaving the vicinity of the Mohunk.

Fred and Bristles prepared to seek once more the ice-boat, and resume their interrupted cruise, this time heading for home. Both of them were thrilled with a deep satisfaction on account of having been given such a splendid chance to effect a rescue, for nothing pleases the average boy more than to realize that he has been enabled to play the part of a hero.

They were not the ones to boast of such a thing as that. Indeed, neither of them considered that they had been in the slightest danger at any time. Had one of them found it necessary to jump into the cold waters of the Mohunk in order to save the drowning boy, that might have been a different matter.

"This fire does feel pretty fine," Bristles remarked, as they got ready to depart, "and I kind of hate to leave it, because, as you know, Fred, I always worship a camp fire. No need to put this one out, is there? because it couldn't set these woods afire if it tried its best, while everything's covered with snow.

"Ready to make the start? What'd you think of Sam and his sister, Sadie Ludson, eh? Mysterious sort of pair, weren't they? Didn't want to tell us anything about themselves, at all. I'm trying to knock my head and say where I've heard that name before, but so far it gets me. Well, we never may see them again, so what's it matter? I'm glad, though, you pulled Sam out of the river. He owes his life to you, Fred."

"To us, you mean, Bristles, for you had just as much to do with it as any one," insisted Fred; and afterwards, whenever he told the story, he always maintained that Bristles had stood by him, and done his share of the rescue work.

They managed to make the return trip safely, and Bristles took it upon himself later on to try to find out if anybody knew the Ludsons, but he met with little success, and with Fred was compelled to put the thing down as a mystery that could not be solved.

CHAPTER V

LOOKING OVER THE COURSE

"One thing sure, Fred, we couldn't have a better day for taking a spin over the ground, and finding out what we'll be up against on the great day."

"Yes, we're in luck that far, Bristles. The only thing I'm sorry about is that Sid couldn't come along. What was it he told you, when you ran across him early this Saturday morning in Bramley's sporting goods store?"

"Why, you see," continued Bristles, as he trotted easily alongside his friend, for they were in their running togs, and out upon the country road at the time, "when I went to look over my outfit, I found my shoes were partly worn, and that I needed a new pair. I'd been looking at some cross-country running shoes Bramley got in last week, and liked their style. They have a low broad heel, and spikes only in the sole. Feel as easy as anything I've ever worn, and don't seem to rub my heels like the old ones always did."

"You're getting there, Bristles; keep going right along," laughed Fred, because the other had a reputation for being what boys call "long winded." It sometimes took him double the time to tell a story that any other fellow would have consumed.

"Oh! I was only going to say Sid was in there doing something, and he asked me to tell you to excuse him on our trial spin to-day, as his father had laid out a little trip for him. Sid looked mighty disappointed, I could see. He'd like to be along, for even if this run of ours is only to spy out the land, it may count big."

"Well, we may have another chance to go over the route, after we know just what the committee has mapped out," said Fred.

"This is only guess work on our part, of course," continued the other, "but then everybody seems to think that it's bound to be the course chosen in the end."

"Yes," Fred added, reflectively, "because it offers a great variety of country – level roads, then trails through the woods, crossing creeks, and after that a stretch over country roads made up of soft dirt."

"Of course they'll have stations all along the route, as usual?" ventured Bristles.

"No question about it," Fred told him. "That's done so every runner may register in his own handwriting, and mark down the time he stopped at each station. In such a way the committee will have a complete record of what every contestant did, and there can be no suspicion of cheating."

"Whew! you don't think any fellow would be so small and mean as to try a thing like that, do you, Fred?"

"I'd hate to think so," returned the other, "but this is done in order that no one may even be suspected by outsiders. It's what you might call an insurance against any rank work."

"How could a runner cheat, tell me?" asked Bristles.

"Well," replied Fred, "there's likely to be one or more places where he could cut across lots and never show up at some advanced station at all. In that way he'd be saved a mile or two of the gruelling run, and that might be enough to give him a big lead on the home stretch."

"Then I only hope they have every kind of safeguard against cheating, that can be used," declared Bristles, indignantly, "because for one I'd die before I'd try to win a thing by trickery."

"I reckon everyone knows that, Bristles," Fred told him, "because there never was a boy with a straighter record than you. You've got faults, as who hasn't, but being sly and tricky, like Buck Lemington, isn't one of them."

"I hear the scheme has created no end of excitement over at Mechanicsburg," Bristles hastened to say, turning a little red though with pleasure, at those words of confidence which Fred gave him.

"And at Paulding I'm told the whole town is on edge, with boys in running togs spinning along every country lane, in pairs or singly," Fred observed.

"Well," the boy with the mop of bristly hair went on to say, "once again will good old Riverport have to hustle for all that's going, to hold her own at the head of the procession."

"We mustn't expect too much," said Fred, modestly. "Up to now we've been pretty lucky to pull down the plums, but there may come a change any day, and we've got to show that we can stand defeat just as well as victory."

"They've got some good long distance runners over there in the mill town," Bristles remarked, seriously.

"Equal to anything we can show, I should say, and it's going to take a head, as well as flying feet, to beat them at the game, Bristles."

"Of course," added Fred's companion, "none of us have ever gone as much as twenty-five miles in a single run, so we don't know what we can do, but, for that matter, I don't believe a Mechanicsburg or Paulding fellow has, either."

"But we mean to cover the course in a trial run before the great day comes, you know," Fred told him. "I'm laying great store on one fellow we've got."

"Of course you mean long-legged Colon, Fred?"

"Yes," replied Fred, "our fastest sprinter, a fellow who can hump himself like a grayhound or a kangaroo in action, and cover more ground at the finish than anybody I ever saw."

"But the most Colon's ever gone is ten miles," remarked Bristles, "and we don't know what his staying qualities are. He may give out before fifteen miles have been covered. If anybody asked me, I'd say we had more chance with a husky fellow like you, for instance, who never has been known to get tired, and can use his head as well as his heels."

"Then there's Sid and Brad," remarked Fred, hastily, "who have made up their minds to be in the line when the signal is given; both of them are known to be stayers. Of course I'll do my level best, but I hope none of you pin your faith to a single runner. A little team work, or strategy, sometimes helps out in cases of this kind."

"How can that be, when everyone has to run for himself, until hopelessly distanced, if I read the rules straight?" asked Bristles.

"Only in this way," replied Fred. "If there are three entered from a school, one of them might take the lead, and set the pace for a while. When he had covered, say a third of the distance, he would fall back, and a second forge to the front, leaving the last fellow to cover the home stretch. It's been done in other races, though I believe some people frown on it. Still, there's no ban on the practice."

"Why, no, this is a race between rival schools," said Bristles, "and every fellow is supposed to be willing to sacrifice individual chances for the good of the lot, just as team-work pays in baseball or anything else."

"Well, let's cut out the talk for a while, and put on more steam," advised Fred. "Here's a good chance for a spurt, down the grade, and then along two miles of level road."

"Go you, Fred!"

The two runners went flying along like the wind until they had reached the foot of a steep hill, which it would be folly to attempt to climb at more than a walk. Once beyond this, a fine stretch of country opened before them, with farms and woodland on every side.

Fred had a pretty fair map of the region, which he had made from picking up information on every side. One of his motives in making this tour on Saturday morning, was to verify its truth. Once the route of the Marathon race had been issued, all those who expected to compete would

have the privilege of going over the ground as often as they pleased. If any fellow were smart enough to discover how he could cut off a hundred yards or two, and yet report at every station, he was at liberty to do so.

A knowledge of the course often counts heavily in a Marathon race, as it does in many other things. That is why most baseball clubs play better on their home grounds, where they know the lay of the land, the presence of treacherous little hillocks, the usual slant of the wind, the value of sending their balls toward a certain fence where home-runs count heavily, and all that sort of thing.

Five miles farther on, and the boys had come to a place where Fred, on consulting his map, observed:

"The road runs away around, and by cutting across the woods here as much as two miles can be saved. I understand that the contestants will have that privilege offered to them if they choose to take it.

"Why, of course everybody will grab the chance," remarked Bristles.

"I'm not so sure about that," he was told by his companion, "and for this reason: while the shortcut saves considerable distance, it's bound to be harder going, and some runners might even get lost in the undergrowth, so they'd be cut out of the race."

"Gee! I never thought of that, Fred; but you're right."

"Then if they have a hard time breaking through," continued Fred, "and finding the other road above the registering station, they may be winded, so that the other fellow who's gone all the way around would be in much better shape for a gruelling finish."

"It all depends, then, on knowing your ground?" pursued Bristles.

"And that's what we want to make sure of as we go through the woods here right now," continued Fred. "Both of us must take our bearings from certain trees as we push along. If we strike a trail that leads to the right quarter, we'll manage to blaze it in some fashion that other fellows would never notice, though we can put our own crowd wise to the signs.

"Here's where the head work comes in, eh, Fred?"

"Only a small sample of it," laughed the other, "and there'll be plenty more to follow before we win this Marathon. If any of the opposition crosses the tape ahead of Riverport, it'll be because they're better runners and managers than we are, that's all there is to it. But come on, let's break away from the road."

Upon that the two boys entered the woods, carefully marking the spot in their memories by noticing a certain bunch of white-barked birches that drooped over in a peculiar way, different from anything they had thus far seen.

Fred had his little compass with him. He had laid out his course exactly, so as to strike the other road at a certain spot, which it was believed would be just above the toll-gate, where he knew one of the registering stations was bound to be placed.

Of course they could not expect to go in a straight line, or as the crows fly. All sorts of obstacles interfered with such a scheme. Now it was a deep gully that barred their progress; a little further on they came to a stretch of swampy ground, where a runner would find himself bogged and placed in a desperate condition, if he attempted to push through. But wise Fred had early discovered what seemed to be a fairly well worn trail that seemed to lead in the direction they were intending to go. At times it was exceedingly difficult to see the track, but both these boys had keen eyes, and used good judgment, so they managed to come upon it frequently.

All the time they continued to make note of certain landmarks that would aid them later on, when again passing through this strip of woodland and jungle. Possibly there would be a mile of it, against three by the road. Plainly then, if a runner could get through in fairly decent shape he would have saved more or less time in so doing.

The two Riverport lads had perhaps gone half way, and were feeling well satisfied with the progress made, when Fred stopped and held up his hand.

"Listen, Bristles!" he exclaimed, "what's all that racket do you think?"

"Sounds like dogs barking and snarling, to me, Fred."

"But away out here in the woods you wouldn't expect to hear a pack of dogs, unless they were running wild," urged Fred, still listening.

"Whew! that reminds me of what I heard an old farmer tell in the market one day last week," exclaimed Bristles. "He said he had lost three sheep this Spring from dogs, and that a pack of sheep killers was loose up around his section!"

CHAPTER VI

THE WILD DOG PACK

"How's that, Bristles, a pack of wild dogs running around, and killing sheep?" Fred demanded, appearing to take uncommon interest in what his companion had just said.

"Yes, and Fred, I honestly believe that farmer lives somewhere up in this region, because I heard him tell about having a runaway near the Belleville tollgate, and you know that's where we expect to fetch out on the road ahead."

"Then that settle it, Bristles. And there's no doubt we're hearing the yelping of that same pack right now. I reckon they're on some track or other."

"Whew! I hope it isn't *our* track then!" exclaimed the other lad, as he began hurriedly to look about him for a stout club, and eye the neighboring trees, as if an unpleasant alternative had forced itself upon his notice.

"The sounds seem to come from back yonder, where we passed along," remarked Fred; and as though in his mind an ounce of prevention might be better than a pound of cure, he too hastened to pick tip a heavy billet of wood, that was as large as an ordinary baseball club.

"But what makes dogs act that way, and go wild?" asked Bristles. "I never knew of any doing such a queer stunt."

"It's this way," explained the other, quickly, as though he had recently been reading the matter up, and was full of information. "Dogs are kin to wolves and foxes, you know. Fact is, many a wolf I've seen looked just like a dog."

"Yes, that's a fact, Fred!" admitted Bristles, nodding his head, and still noting the fact that the chorus of barks, yelps and snarls seemed to be gradually approaching all the time.

"Well, every once in a while some dog seems to hear the call of the wild. He takes a dislike to confinement, hates human beings, and the first chance he gets puts out for the woods, where he lives just as a wolf would do, by the chase. Sometimes farmers' watchdogs that are thought to be honest get this sheep-killing habit, and play tricks, covering their tracks so they go a long time without being found out, and then only by accident."

"Yes, I've heard all about that, too, Fred, but because one dog goes wild, why should a whole lot of others follow after him, I want to know?"

"Well," continued the other, "as far as I understand it, here's the reason. Every dog has that same nature about him. I've seen it proven many times. We had an old dog named Mose, who was never known to chase anybody. He used to lie there asleep on our front porch by the hour. Then next door there was a little cur that somehow took to chasing after wheels and wagons. You've heard how dogs yap-yap whenever they do that, haven't you, Bristles?"

"Lots of times," assented the other, nodding, and still earnestly listening.

"It's about like some of that racket we hear now," Fred went on to explain. "They say it excites a dog like everything. When that little cur next door would start down the street with a yap-yap-yap, I've seen our poor old Mose jump up, as if he'd had a signal no living dog could resist, and go rushing out of the yard, to join in with the cur and some others that gathered like a flash. That's what it means."

"And these other dogs have got the fever in their veins by this time too, eh, Fred?"

"Yes, and they are satisfied to chase around after the leader, perhaps taking an humble part in his kills. But Bristles, I'm afraid we're going to see for ourselves what the pack looks like."

"You mean they're coming this way fast now?" observed Bristles, tightening his grip on the club he had selected from many that lay under a tree shattered by a bolt of lightning the previous Summer.

"There's no doubt about it!" declared Fred, steadily.

"Course we could shin up a tree if we wanted to, Fred, but that'd go against my grain. I feel like standing my ground, and trying to get a whack at that sheep-killing leader of the pack. Gee! wouldn't the farmers give us a vote of thanks if we did manage to put him out of the running?"

"We may have the chance sooner than we expected," Fred went on to say, grimly, for the tempest of sounds seemed to be very close now, and they could actually hear the rush of the advancing pack.

"How many are there, do you think?" asked Bristles, and if his voice trembled a little, Fred believed it was from excitement rather than fear, because he had seen this local comrade tested many times, and knew that he never flinched.

"At least four," Fred replied, "because I can make out that many different yelpings, and there may be six, with some small runts coming along in the rear."

"I only wish I had more duds on, and a pair of leather leggings in the bargain," muttered Bristles, glancing rather ruefully down at his bare shins, which of course were wholly unprotected.

"Here they come!" announced Fred, suddenly.

There was a rush of pattering feet, together with a fierce series of yelps, and then through the thicket came pouring a string of hustling animals, heading directly toward the two boys.

"Whew! he *is* a dandy, sure enough!" exclaimed Bristles, referring of course to the large animal in the lead.

This was a dun-colored beast about the size of a wolf and not unlike one in many of his attributes. He presented a really terrifying front now, with his open jaws that disclosed shining fangs and a red tongue, and his blazing eyes, together with the bristles that stood up on his neck very much like those of a wild hog.

"Give 'em a shout!" exclaimed Fred, who remembered at that moment that most dogs have learned to respect the sound of a human voice, and this might serve to bring about a halt in the onrush of the savage pack.

Accordingly both of the young men started swinging their clubs wildly about their heads and yelling at the top of their voices. This threatening demonstration did have some effect on the milder elements of the pack, those dogs that had been lured into wrong-doing, and were not viciously inclined. Three immediately fell back, and one of these even turned tail and started to run away at breakneck speed as though the sight of those cudgels inspired him with respect, on account of a recollection of some previous beating.

There were three, however, that still kept on, the leader of the pack, and a couple of others. If ever Fred Fenton in all his life wished heartily for a gun of some kind it must have been just then, when, with only a single companion to stand alongside, he found himself about to be attacked by a trio of furious dogs gone wild, and running through the woods.

It would not have been so bad had there been only two, for then each of them could manage an adversary; but that odd beast bothered him.

"Tackle the leader, and leave the others to me; I'll help you as soon as I send them flying!" was what Fred exclaimed, as the three dogs bore down upon them.

"All right; I'm on, Fred!"

There was no time for another word, because the animals were upon them. They came with a rush, as though furious at seeing the bare-legged boys in their hunting preserves. That leader must have taken a decided hatred of all human kind, and when backed by his followers, seemed ready for any deed of daring.

Fred and Bristles had their hands full from the very start. It was their object to do all the damage they could without allowing any of the dogs a chance to sink their teeth into their legs, or leap upon their backs, as they appeared desirous of doing.

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