

Chapman Allen

Tom Fairfield in Camp: or, The Secret of the Old Mill



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	15
CHAPTER V	18
CHAPTER VI	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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CHAPTER I

TOM GETS A LETTER

“Say, Dick, just throw that forward switch in; will you?”

“Sure I will, Tom. Going any place in particular?”

“Oh, just for a run down the river, and on my way back I guess I’ll stop and get the mail.”

“Can I go along?”

“Certainly. Did you see anything of Will to-day?”

“No, he’s gone fishing, I guess,” and Dick Jones, one of the best chums of Tom Fairfield, threw in the connecting switch of the latter’s motorboat, and the craft was ready to run.

“Now I wonder if she’ll start easily, or if I’ve got to break my back cranking her?” murmured Tom.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dick. “Hasn’t she been behaving herself lately?”

“Oh, yes, but you never can tell. One day she’ll run like a sewing machine, and the next I can’t seem to get her started. She’s like all the other motorboats, good at times, and off her feed occasionally. That’s why I called her the *Tag*. I never know whether I’m ‘it’ or whether she is. However, here’s for a try.”

Tom revolved the fly wheel vigorously, but there was only a sort of sigh from the engine, as if it did not like to be disturbed from the rest it had been taking.

“One strike,” murmured Tom whimsically as he looked at the engine to see if all attachments were in their proper place. “Here goes for another spasm.”

Once more he whirled the heavy wheel around. But, save for a more pronounced sigh, and a sort of groan, there was no result.

“Let me try,” suggested Dick.

“I’m afraid to. This engine is like a balky horse at times, and if anyone but the regular trainer monkeys with her she just sulks all day. I’ll get her going yet.”

Again came an attempt to make the motor do its work, and again there came a sigh, accompanied by a cough.

“Three strikes, and I’m out!” exclaimed Tom, sinking back on the seat rather exhausted. “But she’s speaking better than at first. Didn’t you think you heard her sort of talking back at me, Dick?”

“Yes,” laughed his chum. “But say, are you sure you’ve got any gasolene?”

“I put in five gallons last night, and didn’t run two miles.”

“Are you sure it’s turned on?”

“Of course I am!”

“Have you adjusted the carburetor?”

“Foolish question number twenty-six!” exclaimed Tom. “Say, you’re as bad as a chap at Elmwood Hall – George Abbot. We call him ‘Why,’ because he’s always asking questions. Don’t you get in that habit, Dick.”

“I won’t, but I wanted to be sure you’d done everything you ought to to make the boat go.”

“Don’t worry. Nobody can do all he ought to do in running a motorboat. The best authority that ever was would get stuck once in a while, and then some greenhorn could come along, scatter

a little talcum powder on the cylinder head, and off she'd go. And the funny part of it is that no one would know why."

For a moment Tom sat looking at the refractory engine, as though trying to read its mind, and then, with a sigh himself, he once more cranked up. This time there was hardly a murmur from the engine.

"Hum! Gone to sleep again!" commented Tom. "I can't understand this."

Taking off his coat he made up his mind that he would go systematically over every part of the engine, from the batteries and magneto to the gasoline tank and vibrator coil. He started up in the bow, and, no sooner had he looked at the switch which Dick had adjusted, than he uttered an exclamation.

"There it is!" he cried.

"What?" asked his chum.

"The trouble. Look, that one wire is loose, and even though the switch was connected I didn't get any spark. It's a wonder you didn't see it when you turned it on."

"Say, I'm not a motorboat expert," declared Dick. "All I can do is to steer one."

"I guess that's right," agreed Tom with a laugh. "It's my fault for not looking there first. I must have jarred that wire loose when I came in last night. I hit the dock harder than I meant to. But I'll soon have it fixed."

With a screw driver he presently had the loose wire back in place on the switch connection. Then, with a single turn of the flywheel, the *Tag* was in operation, and Tom steered out into Pine river, on which was located the village of Briartown, where our hero lived.

"She's running fine now," commented Dick, who, at a nod from Tom, took the wheel.

"Yes, as slick as you'd want her. She's making good time, too," and Tom glanced over toward shore, watching the trees seemingly slip past.

"Hey, Tom, wait up, will you?" This came as a hail from the shore, and, following it, Tom and Dick saw a lad running along the river bank, waving his hand at them. "Wait!" he cried.

"It's Dent Wilcox," said Dick Jones.

"Yes, and he's running – that's the strange part of it," commented Tom. "I wonder how he ever got out of his lazy streak long enough to get up that much speed."

"It is a question," agreed Dick, for Dent Wilcox was known as the laziest lad in Briartown. "Probably he wants a ride badly enough to chase after you," added Tom's chum.

Once more came the hail:

"Hey, Tom, give me a ride; will you?"

"What for?" called back our hero.

"I've got to go down to Millford for a man. I've got a job," answered Dent.

"Then you'd better walk," answered Tom. "It's good exercise for you."

"Aw, say, stop and take me aboard," begged Dent.

"Not much!" shouted Tom. "I'm not going to take any chances on stopping this engine now, just when it's going good. You walk!" and as Dick steered the boat out from shore Tom opened wider his gasoline throttle to increase the speed of the boat, which he had checked when Dent hailed him.

"Aw, say, you're mean!" charged the lazy lad as the craft got farther and farther from shore. "You wait; I'll get square with you yet!"

"Think he will?" asked Dick, glancing anxiously at his chum.

"Of course not. In the first place he won't dare, and in the second he's not smart enough to think up something to do to me, and if he is, he's too lazy to carry it out after he's planned it. Dent can't worry me."

The two chums kept on down the river toward the main part of the town, for Tom's home was on the outskirts.

“I want to get a new set of batteries,” explained the owner of the *Tag*. “I always carry two sets so I can run on one even if some of them give out, and one set I’ve got now is running pretty low. This motor won’t start on the magneto, for some reason, so I have to start on the batteries and then switch over.”

They soon reached the town, and Tom tied his craft at a public dock. Having purchased the batteries, and some other things he needed, he went to the post office.

There were several letters in the Fairfield box, and as Tom looked them over he found one for himself.

“Hum, I ought to know that writing,” he murmured. “If that isn’t from Jack Fitch I’m a cowbird. I wonder what’s up? I thought he was in Europe, with his folks, this vacation.”

Tom quickly opened the missive. As he glanced through it he gave utterance to an exclamation of delight.

“What is it?” asked Dick, who stood near his chum.

“Why it’s great news,” explained Tom. “It seems that there was some slip-up in the plans of Jack’s folks, and he didn’t go to Europe after all. And now here it is, just at the beginning of the summer vacation, and he writes to know what my plans are. He says he’d like to go somewhere with me.”

“Why don’t you go traveling together?” asked Dick.

“We might, that’s a fact,” agreed Tom. “Hello, here’s another page to Jack’s letter. I didn’t see it at first. Well, what do you know about that?” he cried.

“More news?” asked Dick.

“I should say so! Bert Wilson – he was my other chum with Jack, you know, at Elmwood Hall – Bert will come with Jack and me if we go somewhere, so Jack says. By Jove! I have it!” cried Tom, with sparkling eyes.

“What’s the game?”

“We’ll go camping! We talked of it this spring, just after I got back from Australia, but we couldn’t seem to make our plans fit in. Now this will be just the cheese. Jack, Bert and I will go off camping together in the deepest woods we can find. It will be great sport.”

“It sure will,” said Dick enviously.

Something in the tone of his chum’s voice attracted Tom’s attention.

“Say, look here!” he exclaimed suddenly. “Wouldn’t you like to go camping with us, Dick?”

“Would I? Say, just give me the chance!”

“I will! Do you suppose your folks’ll let you?”

“I’m sure they would. When can we start?”

“Oh, soon I guess. I’m glad this letter came at the beginning of the summer, instead of at the end. I’m going home, tell dad and mother, and see what they say. Maybe dad can suggest a good place to go.”

Tom’s motorboat, though making good time on the home trip, did not go half fast enough to suit him, as he was anxious to get back and tell the news. But finally he did reach his house, and, while Dick hurried off to see what arrangements he could make with his family, Tom sought his parents.

“Go camping; eh?” mused Mr. Fairfield when Tom broached the subject to him. “Why of course. That will be a good way to spend the summer. Where will you go, the seashore or the mountains?”

“Mountains, of course!” exclaimed Tom. “It’s no fun camping at the seashore. Mountains and a lake for mine! I thought maybe you might know of some good place.”

“Well, I’ve done some camping in my time,” admitted Mr. Fairfield, “and come to think of it, I don’t know any better place than up in the northern part of New York state. It’s wild enough

there to suit anyone, and you can pick out one of several lakes. There's one spot, near a little village called Wilden, that would suit me."

"Then it will suit us," declared Tom. "Tell me all about it. Were you ever camping there?"

"No, but I used to live near there when I was a boy. So did your mother. It's a beautiful country, but wild."

"Then I'm for Wilden!" cried Tom. "I'll write to the fellows at once. I'm going to take Dick Jones along with us. Hurray for Wilden!"

Mrs. Fairfield came into the room at that minute, and at the sound of the name she started.

"Wilden!" she repeated. "What about Wilden, Tom?"

"Nothing, only I'm going camping there, mother."

"Camping at Wilden! Oh, Brokaw, do you think that's safe for Tom?" and the lady looked apprehensively at her husband.

"Safe? Why shouldn't it be safe?" asked Tom quickly.

"Well – Oh, I don't know but – Oh, well, I suppose it's silly of me," his mother went on, "but there's a sort of wild man – a half insane character – who roams through the woods up there, and you might meet him."

"How did you hear that?" asked Tom.

"I had a letter from a lady with whom I used to go to school in Wilden years ago," explained Mrs. Fairfield. "She wrote me the other day, and mentioned it. I told you at the time, Brokaw."

"Yes, I remember now. Old Jason Wallace. Let's see, didn't Mrs. Henderson say he stayed part of the time in the old mill?"

"Yes, he's trying to solve the secret of it, Mrs. Henderson said, and that's one reason why he acts so strange, as if he was crazy. Oh, Tom, I wish you'd go camping some other place!" finished his mother.

"What, mother! Pass up a place like that, with all those attractions – a wild man – a mysterious old mill? I guess not! What is the secret of the old mill, anyhow?"

"Ask your father," advised Tom's mother. "He knows the story better than I do."

"Let's have it, dad," begged our hero. "Say, this is great! A mystery and a wild man in camp! Maybe the boys won't like that! I must write and tell 'em to hurry up and come on. Oh, I can see some great times ahead of me this summer, all right!"

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF THE MILL

“Let me see if I can remember the story of the old mill,” mused Mr. Fairfield, as Tom stood expectantly waiting. “It’s quite some years since I heard it,” and he gazed reminiscently at the ceiling.

“This is better luck than I expected,” murmured Tom, and, while he is thus waiting to hear the story of the secret of the old mill, I will take the opportunity to tell you something more about him and his friends, and the two previous books in this series.

My first volume was entitled, “Tom Fairfield’s Schooldays,” and in that I related how our hero came to go to Elmwood Hall. It was because his parents had to go to Australia to claim some property left by a relative of Tom’s father.

As Tom could not go to the land of the kangaroo with his folks they decided to send him to a boarding school, called Elmwood Hall.

Tom at once entered into the activities of the school. He made a friend and an enemy the same day, the friend being Jack Fitch, with whom Tom roomed, and whom I have already mentioned, in this story. Of course Tom had other friends at the school, one being Bert Wilson.

Sam Heller, and his crony Nick Johnson, made it unpleasant for Tom, but our hero managed to hold up his end. It was harder work, however, in regard to Professor Skeel, who was a most unpleasant instructor. He was unfair to the boys, and Tom proposed a novel plan to get even.

He suggested that they all go on a “strike” against Mr. Skeel, refusing to recite to him unless he changed his manners. The unpopular professor did not change, and Tom headed the revolt against him. This took Doctor Pliny Meredith, the head master of the school, and all the faculty by surprise. They did not know what to do until Mr. Skeel proposed that the whole Freshman class, of which Tom was a member, be kept prisoners in their dormitory, and fed on bread and water until they capitulated.

Among the pupils at Elmwood Hall was Bruce Bennington, a Senior, and Tom was of great service to him in securing a forged note that Mr. Skeel held over the head of Bennington, threatening to expose the student and ruin his career. Tom put an end to the illegal acts of the professor, who unexpectedly withdrew from the school.

Tom and his mates, after that, greatly enjoyed their life at Elmwood Hall, and matters were more to their liking, but Tom was not at an end of having adventures.

As I have said, Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield had gone to Australia to look after some property. When Spring came they started for home, coming in a sailing vessel for the sake of the long sea voyage.

Unexpectedly, one night, one of Tom’s chums saw a note in a paper telling of a vessel picking up wreckage from the *Kangaroo*, the ship on which Tom’s parents had sailed. This at once plunged Tom into the depths of despair, but he did not give up hope. He at once decided to go to Australia himself, and if necessary charter a small steamer and cruise about in the location where the wreckage was picked up, hoping his parents might still be afloat on some sort of life raft, or in an open boat.

In the second volume of this series, entitled “Tom Fairfield at Sea,” I related the details of his most exciting trip. For Tom’s vessel, the *Silver Star*, on which he was proceeding to Sydney, was wrecked in a storm, and Tom was tossed overboard. He managed to grab a life belt, and floated until, in the early dawn, he saw two sailors from the ship clinging to a derelict which the *Silver Star* had hit, and which had wrecked her.

Tom got aboard, and a little later a partly smashed lifeboat was sighted. It was brought to the derelict by one of the sailors, and found to contain Professor Skeel, who, it seems, had, by accident,

taken passage for Honolulu on the same ship as that on which our hero started out. Naturally there was a mutual surprise.

Tom, the two sailors and Mr. Skeel were on the derelict for some time, and then having patched up the lifeboat they set out in that. But it was some time before they were picked up, and they had nearly starved. There was also a little boy saved from the wreck – Jackie Case – and Tom took charge of him.

Eventually Tom got to Australia, and then set out in a small steamer he hired to search for his parents. It was a long trip, but he heard that some survivors of a wreck were on an island in the Friendly group, though which island it was could not be learned. Tom searched on several and at last, and just in time, he discovered his father and mother, and some others who had gotten away in a small boat from the sinking *Kangaroo*.

That Tom was overjoyed need not be said, and he and his parents lost no time in starting back for their home in this country. All the details of the wreck, and how Tom brought his quest to a successful close, will be found in the second volume. I might add here that later nearly all those on board the *Silver Star* were saved, including the father of Jackie Case.

Tom went back to Elmwood Hall, and finished the spring term, graduating and becoming a Sophomore. He had come home, ready for the long summer vacation, when he received the letter from Jack Fitch, mentioned in the first chapter of this book.

I might state that Tom's father was quite well off, and that our hero had sufficient spending money for his needs. He had, as I have mentioned, a good motorboat.

"Well, dad," remarked Tom, when he thought his parent had sufficiently collected his thoughts. "Let's have the story of the secret of the old mill."

"As nearly as I can recollect it," began Mr. Fairfield, "this mill is located about eight miles from the town of Wilden, where, as I told you, I spent some years when a lad. No one seems to know when the mill was built, but it is quite old, and must have been put up by the early settlers. It is of stone, and used to grind grain by water power.

"The mill is on the bank of a small river that flows into Lake Woonset, and it was this lake I was thinking of when I suggested that you go camping near it. It's of good size, and there is fine fishing in it."

"But about the mill, dad. What's the secret of it, and what about the wild man?"

"I'm coming to that. As I said, the mill was probably built by the early settlers, and, ever since I can remember, there has been a rumor that there is treasure concealed in or about the old place."

"Treasure, dad? What kind?"

"Well, there were all sorts of rumors. Some said pirates had come that far inland, and had buried their ill-gotten gains there, and another story was that during the Indian wars the settlers, of the then small village of Wilden, fled one day, after warning had been given them of a raid by the redmen. Before fleeing, however, it was said that they had hidden all their money, gold and silver ornaments, and so on, in the old mill. I think that story is more likely to be true than the other. At any rate it is history that the Indians once descended on Wilden, and killed nearly all the inhabitants."

"Well, I'm glad there aren't any Indians up there now, if we're going camping," remarked Tom, "though one or two might be nice for variety. But go on dad."

"So it may be true that there is some treasure in or about the old mill," went on Mr. Fairfield. "I know we boys used to hunt for it, but I never found any, though one of my chums, Tommy Gardner, did find a dime once, and right away there was a wild story that he had come upon the buried treasure. But it happened that the dime was one of recent date, so that story soon fell through.

"Still, ever since I can recollect, there has been more or less of a search made from time to time for gold and silver in the mill. In fact while it was pretty much of a ruin as long as I can remember, it must be much worse now, as the treasure hunters literally pulled it apart."

"What about the wild man, dad?"

“Well, that has to do with the old mill also. This old Jason Wallace, of whom your mother spoke, is a descendant of some of the early settlers of Wilden. Naturally he heard the story of the treasure supposed to be in the mill, and he was one of the most persistent searchers after it. I never knew him very well, but it seems that constant searching, and never finding anything, has turned his mind.

“He is practically crazy now, and fairly lives in the old mill. He has fitted up some sort of a room there and goes about through the woods at times, looking in all sorts of places for the treasure, thinking I suppose that, after all, it may not be in the mill, but somewhere around it.”

“Is he a dangerous character, dad?”

“Well, I suppose he might be in a way, if you crossed him, or if he thought you were trying to do him out of the treasure.”

“Then we won’t cross him,” said Tom, with a laugh. “But all this sounds interesting, and I don’t believe we could camp in a better place.”

“You’ll be careful; won’t you, Tom?” asked his mother.

“Oh, sure,” he answered with a smile. “But after what I went through in the shipwreck I’m not afraid of a wild man. Why, I might even help him find the treasure.”

“I don’t really believe there is any,” said Mr. Fairfield. “I wouldn’t lose any sleep over it if I were you, Tom.”

“I won’t. We fellows will probably be so busy having a good time in camp that we won’t go near the old mill, except maybe to take some photos of it. Is that all there is to the story, dad?”

“That’s all I know,” replied Mr. Fairfield. “You might see your mother’s friend, Mrs. Henderson, when you get to Wilden, and she may be able to give you some additional particulars.”

“She wrote me,” said Mrs. Fairfield, “that the way old Jason Wallace takes on is terrible at times. He rushes around through the woods, yelling at the top of his voice, and whenever he meets people he imagines they are after the treasure in the mill. I do wish, Tom, that you weren’t going to such a place. Can’t you pick out just as good a spot somewhere else, to go camping?”

“Oh, no, momsey! This is great! I wouldn’t miss this for anything, and the fellows will think it’s the best ever, I know. I’m going to tell Dick Jones first, and then write to Jack and Bert.”

“Well, do be careful,” urged Mrs. Fairfield, who seemed filled with anxiety.

“Don’t worry,” advised her husband. “Tom can take care of himself I guess. Why, he even found us when we were shipwrecked, you know.”

“Yes, I know. But this is different, up there in the woods, with that crazy creature roaming about. And it’s so lonesome and so far from a town!”

“All the better,” laughed Tom. “It’s no fun camping next door to a village. We want to rough it. I’m going to find Dick.” And he hurried off to tell his village chum the good news.

CHAPTER III

TOM'S CHUMS ARRIVE

"Well, Tom, how about it?" greeted Dick, when our hero met him, soon after having heard the details about the old mill and the wild man from Mr. Fairfield. "Is it all right for camp?"

"I should say yes, and then some more! Say, Dick, it's going to be great! Think of it; a mystery to solve, and a wild hermit sort of a chap, roaming around through the woods, looking for your scalp."

"Where's that?"

"Where we're going camping – where else? Here's the yarn," and Tom told it as he had heard it. "How about that?" he asked when he had finished.

"Couldn't be better," declared Dick enthusiastically.

"Have you fixed things with your folks so you can go?" asked Tom.

"I sure have."

"Then come on down to the river and we'll take another spin in the *Tag*. I want to get out on the water, where it's nice and quiet, and talk about going camping."

"So do I," agreed Dick, and a little later the two chums were once more chugging away, and talking of everything, from the best way to kill a bear to what to do when the motorboat would not "mote," as Tom put it.

"And we may get some game up there," said Tom. "This Lake Woonset is away up in the northern part of New York state, and it's wild there. I'm going to take my gun along."

"So am I," declared Dick. "When are your other friends coming?"

"I'll get 'em here as soon as I can."

"Say, Tom, maybe they won't want me to come along."

"Don't you worry about that," declared our hero. "I'm in charge of this camping party, and I'll take whom I please. But they'll like you all right, Dick, and you'll like them. That's sure."

"When do you think you'll go camping?"

"Just as soon as we can. In about a week, I guess. I'll have to get a lot of things together. I've got a tent that will do, but we'll need another small one to cook in, and a connecting piece of canvas for an awning so we can go from the kitchen to the dining room when it rains, without getting wet. The only thing I'm sorry about is leaving the *Tag* behind."

"Why don't you take her along?"

"By Jove!" cried Tom. "I never thought of that. I believe I will. I wonder if I could ship her to Lake Woonset?"

"I don't see why not," declared Dick.

"I'll find out from dad," declared Tom.

"Then go right back and do it," suggested Dick. "We might as well get this thing settled."

Tom turned the boat back, and in a short time was getting information from his father about the shipping facilities to Lake Woonset.

"You can get the boat up there all right," declared Mr. Fairfield, "but you'll have to hire some sort of a truck to haul it to the lake, as it isn't near any railroad station."

"Oh, we'll manage it," declared Tom. "Now I'm going to mail the letters to Jack and Bert."

The missives were posted, and then Tom and Dick began to make out lists of what they needed, and to get their camping outfits together.

This took them several days, and in the meanwhile word came back from Tom's two school chums that they would come on at once. They were delighted with the prospect of going camping in such a location as Tom described, though he did not give them all the particulars by letter.

“If we’re going to take the motorboat,” said Dick, one afternoon, about a week later, “we had better make a sort of crate for it, hadn’t we.”

“Yes, and take off the rudder and propeller,” added Tom. “It’s going to be quite a job, but I guess we can manage it.”

They at once began this task, the tent and other camping supplies having been gotten in readiness to ship. At work on the crate for the boat the next afternoon, Tom was surprised to hear a shout behind him.

“Hi there, old man!” a voice called. “What in the world are you up to?”

Tom turned to behold his two school chums, Jack and Bert, coming toward him.

“Well for cats’ sake!” he cried, running forward. “I didn’t expect you until to-morrow? How’d you find me down here?” for Tom was at work in his boathouse.

“We managed to get off sooner than we expected,” said Jack, as he and Bert shook hands with Tom.

“And we hiked for your house as soon as we landed,” added Bert.

“Your folks said you were down here, and we managed to find the place without getting lost more than ten times,” broke in Jack with a laugh. “Now what’s going on? Tell us all about it.”

“I’m going to take the boat along,” explained Tom. “And say, talk about luck! We’re going to camp near a mysterious old mill, and there’s a wild man roaming through the woods up there, who may sneak in and scalp us any night.”

“Great!” cried Jack.

“All to the string beans!” exclaimed Bert. “How did you happen to stumble on such a combination as that?”

Tom told, and the two newcomers expressed their satisfaction in unmeasured terms.

“Let’s start right away!” exclaimed Jack.

“Oh, there’s lots to do yet,” spoke Tom. “If you fellows will get off your store-clothes, you can help crate this boat.”

“Sure we will!” came from Bert. “We left our grips at your house. We’ll go back and change into our old duds.”

“Good idea,” declared Tom. “Mother’s got your rooms all ready for you.”

“We know. She took us up to ’em first shot,” said Jack. “Great little mother you’ve got, boy!”

“Glad you like her,” laughed Tom.

A little later the three chums were back at the boathouse making the crate. There was hammering, pounding, splitting and sawing – that is, when there was a cessation in the talk, which was not very often, as the lads had much to say to each other.

Then, too, each one had a different idea of how the work ought to be done, and they argued freely, though good-naturedly.

“Say, we’ll never get anything done if we keep this up,” said Tom after a while.

“That’s right. Talk less and work more,” advised Bert.

“Here comes Dick Jones. He’ll help,” said Tom, and he explained that his village chum was going to camp with them. Dick was introduced to the two Elmwood Hall boys, and they liked him at once, as he did them.

After that the work went on better, for it was no small task to crate the motorboat and an additional pair of hands were much needed.

“And what did you say the name of the lake is, where we’re going camping?” asked Jack, during a pause in the hammering and sawing.

“Lake Woonset,” explained Tom. “It’s an Indian name. Didn’t I mention it before?”

“You did, but I guess I forgot it. Lake Woonset, near Wilden, in New York state. Say, Bert – !”

“By Jove, that’s so. It just occurred to me too,” interrupted Bert.

“What did?” asked Tom. “What’s up? What’s the matter with Lake Woonset?”

“Nothing, but isn’t it near Crystal Lake?” asked Jack, a curious look on his face.

“Yes,” answered Tom. “But Crystal Lake is a small one. Why, what has that to do with our going camping?”

“Nothing much, only we’ve got some curious news for you. Who do you think is going to camp at Crystal Lake?”

“I can’t imagine, unless it’s Sam Heller and that sneaking crony of his, Nick Johnson.”

“Worse than that,” declared Bert. “It’s our old enemy, Professor Skeel!”

CHAPTER IV OFF TO CAMP

“What’s that?” cried Tom. “Are you joking? Professor Skeel going to camp near us?”

“I’m not joking a bit,” declared Bert. “You can ask Jack.”

“It’s true enough,” put in Tom’s roommate at college. “We heard it the other day – just before we came on here – from your old friend, Bruce Bennington. I don’t know why we didn’t think to tell you before, except that I didn’t recall that Crystal Lake, and the one where we’re going camping, were so near together.”

“They’re about five miles apart,” said Tom. “But how is it that Mr. Skeel is going up there? The last I saw of him was when the ship picked us up from the derelict, the time we were wrecked, and he went on to Honolulu. What brought him back from there?”

“It seems the place didn’t agree with him,” explained Jack. “He tried to get into some business there but he failed. I guess he didn’t play fair. Anyhow his health failed, and the doctor said he had to get back to the United States. So he came.”

“Then he heard of a relative of his who was going up to camp in the New York woods, and he decided to go along. In some way Bruce Bennington got word of it. You know Mr. Skeel tried to play a mean trick on Bruce once.”

“Sure he knows it,” put in Bert. “Didn’t Tom show up old Skeel?”

“Oh, yes, I forgot about that,” admitted Jack. “Well, anyhow, our old enemy Skeel is going to camp near us, it seems.”

“It won’t bother me,” spoke Tom. “I don’t believe he’ll come near our place, and, if he does, we’ll just politely ask him to move on.”

“Sure,” said Jack. “But it’s rather odd that he should be so near us.”

“It is,” agreed Tom. They discussed, for some time, the possibility of meeting the former Latin teacher, who had been so unpleasant to them, and then they resumed work on making the cradle, or crate, for the motorboat.

There were busy times ahead of the boys. Their camp equipment had to be gotten together, packed for shipment, and then came the details of arranging for a food supply, though not much of this could be done until they reached Wilden.

“And maybe we’ll come across the fortune that’s hidden in the old mill,” suggested Jack, laughing.

“Or we may make friends with the wild man.”

“Don’t build too much on that,” advised Tom.

“Anyhow, we won’t want to be puttering around the old mill much,” said Dick. “We’ll be out in the boat, or fishing, or going in swimming, or something like that most of the time.”

“Or else hunting,” suggested Tom. “I hope you fellows brought guns.”

“We sure did,” spoke Jack.

The boys packed their kits of clothing, taking only as much as was absolutely necessary, for they were going to rough it. A small quantity of the most needful medicines were put up, and some other supplies were included.

Their grips and guns they would carry with them, but the tent, a portable cooking stove, and a case of canned provisions, as well as some in pasteboard packages, were to be shipped by express. The motorboat, which had been well crated up, was to go by freight.

By letter Tom had arranged for a supply of gasoline which was to be left at a small settlement at one end of the lake. They could also get additional provisions there and some supplies, and they hoped to get fish enough to help out on the meals.

Finally everything had been packed up. The motorboat had been shipped, with the other things, and the boys were to leave the next morning. They would have to travel all day, reaching the town of Wilden at night. They would sleep there, and go on to camp the next day.

The evening mail came in, and there was a letter for Mrs. Fairfield. It was from her former school chum, Mrs. Henderson, and as soon as Tom's mother read it she exclaimed:

"Oh Tom! That old Jason Wallace is worse than ever."

"How so?" asked Tom.

"It seems the other day that some campers who were staying near the old mill went in the ruins and began digging about. He saw them and had a quarrel with them. Now he's got an old army musket and he keeps going about the place like a sentinel, Mrs. Henderson says. He threatens to shoot anyone who comes near. Oh, I don't want you to go there!" and Mrs. Fairfield was seriously alarmed.

"Don't worry, mother," spoke Tom. "I won't take any chances. I guess us fellows can make friends with old Wallace, and we'll have him so tame that he'll eat out of our hands, and show us all the interesting places in the woods and about the old mill."

"Oh, Tom, you will be careful; won't you?" asked his mother.

"Sure I will," he promised, and she had to be content with that.

Later, when Tom told Jack and Bert about the news from the place where they were going camping, Jack said:

"I wonder if it could have been Mr. Skeel who bothered the old man?"

"It can't be," declared Bert. "Why he's hardly up there yet."

"He might be," spoke Jack. "If he is, and he hears anything about treasure, I'll wager that he gets after it. And he'll make trouble wherever he goes – he's that way."

"He sure is," agreed Tom, thinking of how the former professor had hidden away a secret supply of food and drink when the others were trying to save themselves from starvation in the lifeboat.

"Well, anyhow, we don't need to worry," said Dick, who had come over to Tom's house to have a last talk before the start in the morning.

"That's right," agreed Tom. "Now let's go over everything, and see what we've forgotten."

This took them the best part of the evening, and having found that they had omitted a few things, they packed them into their grips and went to bed, Dick promising to come over early in the morning to go with the three chums to the train which they were all to take to reach Wilden.

Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield went to the station with the boys. The baggage was checked, and Tom had to spend some time saying good-bye to a number of his town chums.

"Hey, wish you'd take me along," said Dent Wilcox, as he shuffled along the depot platform. He seemed to have forgotten his little feeling against Tom for not taking him in the motorboat, the day our hero got the letter from his chum. "Can't you take me, Tom?"

"I might if you'd promise to chop all the wood, go for all the water, do the cooking, wash the dishes, make the beds, sweep up, and run for gasolene."

"Huh!" exclaimed Dent, looking for a place to sit down. "I guess I don't want to go."

"And we don't want you," spoke Tom in a low voice.

There was a toot of the whistle, a puffing of smoke, and the train that was to take our lads to camp, pulled in. The last good-byes were said, Mrs. Fairfield made Tom promise about a dozen things that he would be careful about, and gave him so many injunctions that he forgot half of them. Mr. Fairfield shook his son's hand, and those of his chums, and there was a trace of moisture in the eyes of father and son as they said farewell.

"Be careful, Tom," said his father. "Don't be tempted too much by the fortune in the old mill."

"I won't dad, but – er – that is, I think I'll have a try for it – wild man or not."

"Well, I supposed you would, after you heard the story. But don't worry your mother."

“I won’t. Good-bye!”

“All aboard!” called the conductor, and the boys hurried into the car. They waved their hands out of the windows and, a moment later, the train pulled out. Tom had a last glimpse of his mother with her handkerchief to her eyes, and he felt a lump coming into his throat.

“Oh, here, this won’t do!” he exclaimed half aloud. “I must send her a postal from the first post office, to cheer her up,” and he carried out that intention.

As the cars clicked along the rails, Jack, who had been looking into the coach just ahead of the one in which he and his chums were riding, uttered an exclamation.

“What’s the matter – forget something?” asked Tom.

“No, but I just saw someone I know.”

“Oh, if that’s the case, go ahead up and talk to her,” laughed Bert. “He’s the greatest chap for girls I ever saw,” he confided to Tom. “He’ll spot a pretty girl anywhere. And he knows so many of ’em.”

“This isn’t a girl,” said Jack in a low voice.

“No? Who is it then?” asked Tom, curiously.

“It’s our old enemy, Sam Heller; and Nick Johnson is with him!”

CHAPTER V

LAUNCHING THE BOAT

For a moment Tom did not answer, but stared at Jack as if he could not believe what his chum said. Then our hero asked:

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I am. Take a look for yourself,” and Jack moved over so that Tom could have a glimpse into the other car.

“It’s those chaps, sure enough,” spoke Tom. “This is a great go! Sam Heller and that nuisance Nick Johnson on the same train with us, and the prospect of meeting Professor Skeel when we get to camp. I don’t like this!”

“Neither do I,” agreed Bert. “But we can’t help it.”

“Do you think those two fellows are going to meet that mean professor you spoke of?” asked Dick.

“I hardly imagine so,” answered Jack. “Mr. Skeel wasn’t any too friendly with even Sam Heller, though Sam was more in his class than the rest of us. No, I guess it’s just a coincidence, that Sam and his crony are on this train. But I’d like to know where they got on, and where they’re going.”

“They must have boarded the train before we did,” explained Bert, “for I’ve been looking out of the window at every station we came to since Briartown, and I didn’t see them hop on.”

“That’s right,” agreed Jack. “Come to think of it now, Sam lives in Newtonville, and that’s not far below your town, Tom. Nick was probably visiting Sam, and the two are off on a trip together.”

“Yes, but where are they going?” persisted Tom. “I hope, if they’re going camping, that they don’t pick out any spot near us. There’ll be sure to be trouble if they do. I won’t stand for any more nonsense from either Sam or Nick.”

“And I don’t blame you,” declared Bert.

“There’s one way to find out where they’re going,” suggested Dick Jones.

“How?” asked Tom.

“Ask ’em.”

“That’s right!” laughed Tom. “Only I don’t like to do it. There’d be sure to be a quarrel if I did, for Sam and I never got along well together.”

“I’ll ask ’em,” offered Jack. “While I’m not any too friendly with them I think I can get into a conversation with ’em, and learn what’s up. Shall I?”

“Go ahead,” spoke Tom; and Jack sauntered into the next coach. Sam and Nick were surprised to see him, of course, and they probably suspected that Tom was somewhere about, but they did not admit it, or show much curiosity regarding Jack’s presence, so unexpectedly manifested.

“Going far?” asked Jack.

“Oh, not so very,” replied Sam, coolly. “And yet we may make quite a trip of it before we finish; eh, Nick?”

“Sure. Where are you bound for, Jack?”

“Oh, we’re just going camping – Tom Fairfield, Bert Wilson and a friend of Tom’s.”

“No camp life for ours!” exclaimed Sam. “It’s too much work. We stop at hotels.”

“Yes, and you miss half the fun,” rejoined Jack.

There was some more conversation, and then Jack went back to join his chums.

“Did you learn anything?” asked Tom.

“Not much. They were as close-mouthed as clams. I did my best to pump them without showing too much curiosity as to where they were going, but there was ‘nothing doing,’ as our

friend Shakespeare might say. I guess they thought I wanted to know, and so they took special pains to keep mum. But we won't let it make any difference to us."

"That's right," agreed Tom. "Maybe there won't be any trouble after all."

The boys traveled all that day, the journey being a pleasant one for the four chums, who had much to talk about. They took an observation now and then of the forward car, and saw that Sam and his crony were still aboard.

"Well, we'll soon be at Wilden," remarked Tom, as the day was drawing to a close.

"Where are we going to stop?" asked Jack.

"At a hotel, of course," put in Bert.

"Hotel nothing!" exclaimed Tom. "In the first place there isn't any, and in the second place mother's friend, Mrs. Henderson, would feel hurt if we didn't put up at her house. She wrote specially to invite us when she heard we were going camping near Lake Woonset. So we'll go there, and proceed to make ourselves at home."

The train pulled into a station a few miles below Wilden, and to the surprise of Tom and his chums, Sam Heller and his crony got off. Our friends watched them.

"What do you know about that!" exclaimed Jack, as he leaned out of a window to look. "The expressman is pulling off some tents and other camping stuff, and Sam is telling him where to place it. Say, those fellows are going camping after all their high-flown talk about a hotel, and I'll wager we run across them again before the summer's over!"

"I shouldn't wonder," spoke Tom. "No matter, we'll have a good time anyhow. We'd better be getting ready to leave on our own hook."

As the train pulled out again our friends saw Sam and Nick arranging their tent and baggage, but the two did not look up at their former schoolmates.

Wilden was soon reached, and as Tom was making inquiries of the freight agent as to whether or not his boat had arrived a man stepped up and greeted our hero.

"Isn't this Tom Fairfield, and his camping chums?" he asked pleasantly.

"It is, and you –"

"I'm Mr. Amos Henderson. My wife used to go to school with your mother, and when Sallie – that's my wife – heard you were coming up here she got all ready for you. She sent me down to the station to bring you up to the house. I said I didn't think I'd know you, but land shucks! Sallie said that didn't matter. She told me to pick out four boys, and they'd be sure to be the right ones.

"And I did, by gum! Though it wasn't a hard matter, seeing as how you're the only ones who got off the train. But come on now, supper's waiting, and Sallie won't like it to get cold."

Tom and his chums, pleased with their warm reception, followed Mr. Henderson, and were soon sitting down to a substantial meal, enlivened by much talk.

"Tell us all you can about the old mill, and that crazy man, please," asked Tom, during a lull in the conversation.

"Oh, I do hope you don't run across him!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson. "He's really dangerous," and she proceeded to give a few more details of the story of the secret of the mill, already substantially known to my readers.

Tom and his chums asked innumerable questions, as to how to reach the mill, and where the best spot to camp would be.

"I can see what those boys are pointing for," said Mr. Henderson when the four had gone to bed.

"What?" asked his wife.

"The old mill. You couldn't keep 'em away with ropes. They'll go poking about it, looking for that treasure, which I don't believe exists, and they'll have a row with old Wallace as sure as chickens."

"Oh, Amos! What had we better do?"

“Can’t do anything, as I can see. Those boys will do as they please, anyhow. But I guess they can look out for themselves.”

Early the next morning Tom went to see about getting the boat and other stuff carted to the camp in the woods. On the advice of Mr. Henderson they had picked out the east shore of the lake, that being the nearest to Wilden.

“And that side is the most direct road to the old mill, by way of the river,” said Mr. Henderson, “but,” he added, with a twinkle in his eyes, “I don’t ’spose you boys will go there.”

“Oh, won’t we though!” exclaimed Tom, laughing.

Provisions were bought, the camping stuff, together with the boat, was loaded upon a heavy wagon, and with good-byes to the Hendersons, the boys started for the depths of the woods. The boat had been hard to get on the wagon, and they knew they would have difficult work launching it, but the wagon-driver and his helper promised to assist.

During the drive through the woods Tom and the others kept a lookout on every side for a possible glimpse of the old man who had searched so long for the mill-treasure, but they did not see him. The scenery became more and more wild, and the road was almost impassable in places.

“Say, this looks like the jumping-off place,” remarked Dick, as they passed through a particularly lonely spot.

“It’s just what we want,” declared Tom. “We’ll do some real camping out here.”

“Yes, I guess no one will bother you,” said the driver. “No one hardly ever goes to Lake Woonset, except maybe a fellow who wants some good fishing now and then. I like it myself, but I haven’t been but twice in the last three years. It sure is lonesome.”

“How much farther to the lake?” asked Dick, after a pause.

“About a mile. You can see it when we get to the top of the next hill, but the road winds around.”

A little later they had a glimpse of a beautiful sheet of water, set in the midst of wooded hills.

“That’s great!” cried Tom, and the others agreed with him.

They drove along the edge of the lake until they came to a place where a spring bubbled out, and Tom exclaimed:

“Here’s where we’ll camp! Let’s unload and get the boat into the water. I want to see if she’ll run.”

“Got gasoline?” asked Jack.

“Yes, there’s plenty on the wagon, and I’ve arranged for a supply to be brought up to the lower end of the lake, and left there. A couple of barrels ought to last us all summer.”

It was hard work to unload the boat, and harder still to launch it, but it was finally accomplished, and when the tents and camping paraphernalia had been stacked up, the driver and his helper turned back toward civilization.

“Say, it sure is lonesome!” exclaimed Dick, when the rattle of the wagon had died away.

“It won’t be in a minute,” said Tom. “We’ve got lots to do to get our camp in shape. Come on, now, everybody get busy, and we’ll try out the boat.”

There was some little work to be done to it, and then, having filled the gasoline tank, and improvised a dock out of some dead tree trunks, the boys were ready for a spin.

“Now to see if she’ll run,” remarked Tom, as he prepared to turn over the flywheel.

There was a wheeze, a cough, a sigh and a groan, and the *Tag* started off as if she had never an idea of balking.

“Hurray!” cried Tom. “This is great!”

As they skimmed over the smooth lake, the beauty of it impressed them more and more, and they were delighted with their camping place. Tom steered the boat into a little cove, and as he neared the shore something moved in the bushes.

“Look!” whispered Jack. “It’s a deer, maybe.”

A moment later a man, with a long white beard, and clad in ragged garments, fairly leaped into view. For a moment he stood staring at the slowly moving motorboat, as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes. Then with a howl of rage he leaped into the water, and began swimming toward the craft.

CHAPTER VI

A BIG FISH

“Look at him!” yelled Tom. “What in the world is he doing?”

“Who is he?” inquired Jack.

“Put around!” excitedly yelled Bert. “He’s coming after us!”

The man was swimming directly toward the boat as if he contemplated an attack, and for a moment, though they knew he could not seriously harm them, the boys were actually afraid. For the swimmer had a really ferocious look as he came on through the water. He got to a shallow place, and stood up, running toward the boys.

“What do you make of this, Tom?” asked Jack.

“I don’t know what to make,” answered Tom, as he turned the boat away from the man. “But I think I can guess who he is.”

“Who?” cried his three chums.

“That’s the hermit – the wild man – old Wallace – who has been hunting for the fortune in the mill so long that his mind is affected.”

“By Jove! I believe you’re right,” said Jack.

“But what’s he coming after us for?” asked Dick, for the aged man was swimming again now, and could not hear the talk in the boat.

“I don’t – ” began Tom when the old man interrupted with another of his wild cries, following it with:

“Get out of this lake! What are you doing here? This is my lake! All this country around here is mine! Leave at once! Get out of my lake!” and again he yelled like a madman.

“This is fierce,” said Dick.

“It gets on my nerves,” admitted Tom. “Let’s hurry away. He may swim out after us so far that he can’t get back again, and I don’t want to be even indirectly responsible for any harm coming to him.”

“Speed up then,” advised Jack, “and we’ll get so far away that he’ll see it will be hopeless to keep after us.”

“That’s what I will,” agreed Tom, and, speeding up the motor, the *Tag* was soon well out in the water.

“Go away! Get out of my lake!” yelled the old man, as he again stood up in a shallow part, and shook his fist at the boys. “Never come here again!”

Then he turned and went back toward shore.

“Thank goodness for that,” spoke Tom. “He’s got some sense left, anyhow.”

“Whew! That was an experience,” remarked Jack, as the boat turned a point of land, and the hermit was out of sight. “I hope he doesn’t find our camp.”

“I don’t believe he will,” said Tom. “I guess he was just walking around, and when he saw the motorboat it sort of frightened him. I don’t suppose there’s ever been a craft like this on the lake before, and the old man may have imagined it was some sort of infernal machine. He came at us if he was going to throw us all overboard.”

“He’s a fierce character,” declared Bert. “The less we see of him the better.”

“And you don’t catch me monkeying around any mysterious old mill, if a fellow like that lives in it,” added Dick.

“You said he had a gun, too, didn’t you, Tom?” asked Jack.

“That’s what I heard, but maybe it’s a mistake. He didn’t have one this time, anyhow.”

The boys discussed their odd experience as they motored along, and soon they were back where they had left their camp stuff. It had not been disturbed, and there was no sign that the hermit had taken a short cut through the woods to get to their location, as Tom had half feared he might do.

“Now to get busy!” exclaimed our hero as they landed at the improvised dock. “There’s lots to do. In the first place we’ll have an election.”

“What for?” asked Jack.

“To choose a cook. We’ve got to eat, and some one has to cook. We’ll take turns at it.”

They selected a cook by the simple process of drawing lots, and the choice fell upon Dick, who made a wry face about it.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tom, with a laugh.

“I can’t cook a little bit,” was the answer.

“Oh, sure you can,” declared Jack. “Anyhow we’ve only got canned stuff so far, and you can read the directions and go by them. Start in now and get us up a meal. I’m hungry.”

“So am I!” came in a chorus from the other two.

“Well, if I’ve got to cook, you fellows have to get wood and water,” declared Dick. “That’s one of the rules of this camp.”

“All right,” agreed Jack, “only we won’t need wood with our oil stove. I’ll get you water though,” and he started toward the spring with a pail.

While Dick was getting out the food, and lighting the stove, Tom and Bert opened the tents and got ready to set them up. They also laid out their stores, and planned how they would arrange the camp. When Jack came back with the water he helped at this work and soon one tent was set up.

“Dinner!” called Dick, after fussing about the stove for some time.

“What are you going to give us?” asked Tom.

“And what are we going to eat from?” asked Jack. “Where’s your table cloth? Set out the knives and forks.”

“Table! Table cloth!” exclaimed Dick with a grunt. “Say, if you think this is a summer hotel you’ve got another guess coming. I’ve broken out the dishes, and knives, forks and spoons. You can use your lap or a log for a table, though we charge ten cents extra for logs. The money goes to found a home for aged cooks.”

“Never mind about that!” exclaimed Tom. “Just give us some grub and we’ll do the rest.”

“Where’s the bill of fare?” asked Jack. “I’m particular about what I eat.”

“Soup, corned roast beef, potato chips, bread, butter, jam, condensed milk and coffee,” rattled off Dick.

“I’ll take it all!” came from Bert.

“Same here!” chorused the other two, and soon the lads were passing around the food.

“Say, this is all right,” declared Tom, as he tasted the mock-turtle soup. They had brought along several cases of canned goods, soup among them.

“It’s easy to make,” explained Dick. “All you do is to open the can, chuck in some hot water, heat the mixture for a few minutes, and your soup is made.”

“How about the roast beef?” asked Bert.

“I – er – I boiled that,” explained Dick calmly.

“Boiled it!” cried Tom. “Boiled roast beef! Oh wow!”

“What difference does it make, as long as it’s hot?” demanded the young cook. “Here, you taste it, and see if it isn’t good. I put some ketchup on it, and a lot of spices, and it tastes – ”

“It must taste like a mixture of Hungarian goulash and Chinese chop-suey!” laughed Tom. “Boiled roast beef! Oh my stars!”

“Well, you don’t have to eat it,” fired back Dick, as he dished out a curious mixture. The boys tasted it, and to their surprise it was very good, or perhaps their appetites made it seem so. Then with bread, jam and coffee the meal progressed, and they all declared it a good one.

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