

ALAN DOUGLAS

WOODCRAFT: OR, HOW
A PATROL LEADER MADE
GOOD

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Patrol Leader Made Good**

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Woodcraft; Or, How a Patrol Leader Made Good

CHAPTER I.

TWO SCOUTS IN A STORM

Crashes of thunder, sounding like the roll of heavy artillery in battle, echoed through the forest some miles above the town of Hickory Ridge on an August day.

Overhead, black, sullen clouds had covered the heavens, and at any moment now the ominous stillness of the woods might give way to the rushing sound of the wild wind, together with a downpour of rain.

Two half-grown lads, dressed in the usual khaki costume recognized as the official uniform of the Boy Scouts of America, were standing there in the midst of the heavy growth, casting uneasy looks around them.

It is one thing to watch the coming of a furious storm from the windows of one's home, and quite another to be caught napping, miles away from shelter. And the smaller of the comrades had a frightened look on his face.

"My goodness! hear that, will you, Larry?" exclaimed this rather timid fellow, as he instinctively caught hold of his more sturdy comrade's sleeve, when a particularly fierce flash of lightning was succeeded by a terrific crash. "Ain't you going to find a hollow tree somewhere, and climb in? Why, we'll get soaked to the skin if we don't look out, I tell you!"

"I reckon you're about right there, Jasper," replied the other, Larry Billings by name; and he made a wry face while speaking. "But then, you see, there are some things worse than getting wet, and being struck by lightning happens to be one of the same. Excuse me, if you please; I'll take my medicine the best I can, but you remember, Jasper, among a lot of other things we learned when we joined the scouts, we were warned never under any circumstances to get under a tree during a thunderstorm."

"But that meant out in the open, where there might be only one tree," remonstrated Jasper, whose last name happened to be Merriweather. "Here in the woods it's a heap different, I should think. Among so many big trees you don't think now for a minute that freak lightning's going to pick out the very one we're in, to knock it to flinders, do you, Larry?"

"I don't know, and what's more I ain't going to try to find out," went on the stockier built lad, with resolution in his manner. "You and me came away up here just to see how much we had learned about woodcraft, and it wouldn't look right if we shied at one of the rules the first chance. Besides," he went on, with a broad grin, for Larry was a good-natured fellow ordinarily, "if the experiment proved to be a dead failure, we wouldn't be given a chance to try it over again, you see. Lightning don't often knock at the same door twice."

"Ugh! you make me shiver, Larry!" exclaimed the smaller lad. "But what in the wide world can we just do to keep dry?"

"Oh! that's the least thing that bothers me," replied the other. "Being wet ain't anything much-a-much. I've tumbled in mill races, and been yanked out of ponds ever since I was knee high to a duck. But the worst is yet to come, Jasper."

"Now you're just trying to scare me, Larry, and you ought to be ashamed to do it. You know I used to be the most timid fellow ever, and that it was only after I joined the scouts, and went on that trip up the Sweetwater to Lake Solitude that I began to outgrow that failing. Now it's beginning to

get a grip on me again. But tell me, whatever do you mean by saying the worst is something more than getting our new uniforms soaked through?"

"Why, you see, Jasper, we're lost, that's what!" remarked Larry, although the fact did not seem to frighten him very much, for he was chuckling while speaking as though it looked like a big joke to him.

But with poor Jasper the case was entirely different.

"Well, that beats the Dutch!" he cried with genuine disgust. "The two of us felt so dead sure we knew it all, that nothing would do for us but to come away up here five miles or so from home, just to show everybody that we could take care of ourselves. And now you deliberately tell me we've gone and got lost, like the poor little babes in the woods, and with a terrible storm going to pounce down on us right away."

"Oh! brace up, Jasper!" exclaimed Larry, seeing the lower lip of his comrade quivering, and his face showing signs of becoming pallid. "This may be the making of us as scouts, you see. No fellow's worth beans until he's proved that he can take the rough jolts as well as the smooth things of life. Just put your teeth together, and say you're going to grin and bear it, no matter what comes."

"Ain't I trying to, Larry," pleaded the smaller chap, "but it seems like my teeth keep on rattling all the while. I'm shivering, and yet it can't be with the cold. I wish I had some of Elmer Chenoweth's nerve just now."

"Shucks! I reckon now that you can have your share of nerve, Jasper," declared Larry, impatiently, "if only you make up your mind to *take* it. Didn't Mr. Garrabrant, our fine scout-master, tell us only the other night that was so? Just shut your teeth hard, and say over and over again that you ain't goin' to let anything feaze you. You'll be surprised at the feeling it gives you."

"I wonder now, did Elmer really mean to keep tabs on what we were doing?" remarked Jasper, after another tremendous peal of thunder had seemed to almost split the heavens open. "You know, we thought he looked at us kind of funny when he asked us what we meant to do this morning, hiking out of Hickory Ridge, with our sticks in our hands and some grub in our haversacks."

"Oh! I don't think Elmer would bother following all this way," replied Larry, though at the same time he might have been seen to cast an anxious, eager glance around, as though indulging in a faint hope himself that something of the sort had happened.

"Well, he's the best fellow ever, you know, Larry," the smaller boy went on, "and he's sure taken a heap of interest in my trying to make a man of myself. He even took the trouble to come and see me twice, and go over a lot of things with me that he said a true scout ought to know."

"Sure Elmer is worth his weight in gold," Larry affirmed. "And now's the time to show him his faith in you wasn't wasted, Jasper. Buck up, and just make up your mind neither of us happens to be made of salt, so a little juice ain't going to hurt us. As for that lightning, well, perhaps we might find some hole to climb in, because it wouldn't hunt us out underground."

"Oh! if we only could!" gasped Jasper, as another flash came that fairly dazzled both boys; to be succeeded by a sudden report that sounded as though something had exploded near by.

"Listen! what's that?" demanded the smaller boy, again clutching his comrade by the sleeve.

"Reckon she's hiking along right fast now," answered Larry, grimly. "Come, let's walk over this way. Who knows but we might run on some sort of shelter. And when we're up against such a snag, I tell you flat that beggars ain't goin' to be choosers if the chance comes our way."

"That must be rain we hear away off there," suggested Jasper, shuddering.

"Rain and wind together; and sounds to me like it might turn out to be something of a howler. Hope the trees don't go dropping around us. We might have some trouble dodging 'em if they came too fast."

Jasper shot a quick look at his companion's face, as if to see whether Larry could mean what he said. Then he bit his lower lip until it actually bled. But for the time being not another expression of dismay did he utter. Fear of ridicule had conquered over the genuine article.

They hurried forward, both of them eagerly looking for some hollow log, or overturned tree, that might give some promise of shelter against the deluge that would soon be upon them.

"You keep tabs on the right, and I'll cover the left!" remarked Larry, but he had to raise his voice to almost a shout now, because of the increasing roaring sound that was sweeping down upon their rear.

"It's getting night in the woods!" cried Jasper, as the gloom increased.

"Rats!" scoffed his comrade, derisively. "You know it ain't more'n two o'clock. After it's all over the bully old sun will be shining again, all right."

"Oh! do you really think so, Larry?" asked the other, grasping at the slightest gleam of hope, just as a drowning person might at a floating straw.

"Well, it'll be shining, all right," asserted Larry, positively, "and I reckon we'll be on deck to see it, too. Hi! what's this here, Jasper?"

"Have you struck a place for us to crawl in, Larry? Oh! I hope so, I'm sure! Why, it's a hollow log, and with a hole plenty big enough to let a fellow creep inside!"

"That's right," called the other, cheerfully. "And now suppose you get down on your knees, and push in, feet first. Then if you should get stuck, you could crawl out again, see?"

"But looky here, Larry," cried Jasper suddenly and suspiciously. "It's such an awfully short log, I don't believe both of us can ever get in it."

"No more we can, Jasper, and all the more reason for you to crawl in right away now," and Larry began to urge his comrade to flatten himself out on the ground, with both feet in touch with the hollow log.

"But how about you, Larry?" expostulated Jasper.

"Shucks! didn't I tell you I wasn't made of sugar or salt? Rain won't ever hurt Larry Billings. Get a move on you now, and squeeze in. That wet old rain is mighty near here now. I thought I felt a drop right then. Crawl, you slow tortoise! Here, let me give you a shove along."

Jasper turned a white face upward.

"You ain't going to run away, and leave me here, are you, Larry?" he asked.

"What! me?" shouted the other, indignantly. "What d'ye take me for, Jasper? A true scout would never act that way to a chum. Not much. I'm just goin' to snuggle down alongside the log here, and wait till the storm blows itself out. Get a good grip on yourself now, and nothing ain't goin' to hurt you. Give you my word on it, Jasper," and he again started to energetically push the smaller lad into the gaping hole that had offered such an asylum in time of need.

"And the lightning won't strike this log, either, will it?" the boy who was accepting the wooden jacket asked.

"Never in the world. That's what Mr. Garrabrant told us – hunt out a hollow log if you can, but never a tree that's standing upright. Nor a barn either, for that matter. In you go, Jasper; why, man alive, you're going to be as snug as a bug in a rug, don't you know."

"But Larry, won't you please knock on the side every little while," asked the timid one, eagerly. "It'll be so comforting to me to just know you're still there, even if I can't see you."

"Course I will, and right hearty, too," jollied Larry, who realized now that the boy was pretty badly rattled by the terrific roar of the storm, as well as by the strange gloom that had fallen on the great woods, and in thus trying to comfort his weaker companion Larry quite forgot any natural fear he might have himself otherwise experienced.

"I guess I'm fixed all right now," came in half muffled tones from inside the log, and then suddenly Jasper gave a shrill cry. "Oh! there's something biting at my feet! Larry, pull me out, quick! There's a bear or a wildcat in here, and it'll chew my feet up! Hurry, hurry! get me out!"

So there seemed nothing for it but that Larry should catch hold, and help the panic-stricken one out of the hollow log again. When this had been done, they just stood there in the gathering gloom and looked at each other.

"Reckon you'll just have to take your ducking the same as me, then," grumbled Larry, with the resigned air of a martyr who had done his best for a friend, and could not be blamed for whatever happened.

"Then I will, Larry," said Jasper, trying to be brave, though still shuddering. "Let's both run over there, and see if we can find shelter behind the roots of that fallen tree! Oh! wait, wait, I surely saw something moving there! Yes, look Larry, there it is again! Why, it's a man – no, a boy! that's what it is!"

"Sure it is," laughed Larry, with the greatest relief possible in his voice; "and no other than Elmer Chenowith, our scout leader. He *did* follow us all the way up here, and it's a mighty good thing for us that happened. It's all right now, Jasper. He'll know what to do!"

CHAPTER II. A LESSON IN WOODCRAFT

"Hello! hello! come this way, quick, both of you!" shouted the sturdy-looking young fellow who had appeared so opportunely on the scene, and whose coming seemed to inspire both Larry and Jasper with renewed confidence.

He beckoned as he gave utterance to these words, and catching hold of his companion's arm Larry hastened to obey.

There was indeed need of hurrying. Already the drops had begun to come pattering down, like shot rattling through the thick leaves overhead. And that furious combination of howling wind and descending rain was almost upon them.

Stumbling along, the two boys reached the spot where stood Elmer Chenowith, who was the assistant scout-master to the Hickory Ridge Boy Scout troop.

"Here, get back of this upturned mass of roots!" cried the other, as he pushed both the scouts ahead of him.

The tree in falling, years back, had lifted a great mass of earth with its roots. This formed a bulwark at least seven feet in height. And as luck would have it, the hole in the ground was just on the other side from the direction where that wind howled now. This proved that the previous storm, by which the king of the forest had been bowled over, must have come from exactly opposite that quarter from whence the present gale was springing.

Neither Larry nor Jasper thought anything about such a thing just then, their one anxiety being to gain such shelter as the barricade promised to afford. But Elmer was always on the watch for curious facts in connection with the woodcraft he studied at every opportunity, and this matter was of considerable importance in his eyes.

So the three lads cowered there, trying to make themselves as small as possible.

"We're bound to get soaked, all right," called Elmer, as the rain commenced to come down heavier and heavier; "but then, that doesn't cut any figure in the case. So long as we keep from being carried away by the hurricane wind, or have a tree squash down on top of us, we hadn't ought to complain."

"That's what," answered Larry; "and I tell you we're both as glad as can be to run across you up here, Elmer. This storm came on us just when we had to admit we'd lost our grip of all the boasted woodcraft we knew, and were at sea."

"Don't try to talk any more just now, fellows!" called Elmer. "The old storm's making too much racket. Wait till the worst goes by."

Jasper was still shaking some. True, this shelter promised to be comforting, but he found reason to fear, from words Elmer had let fall, that the worst was yet to come, and that the storm would increase. Otherwise, why should the scout leader, who was so well versed in everything pertaining to outdoors, speak of it as a hurricane wind?

So poor Jasper held on to some projection of the fallen tree, and drew his breath in little gasps. The uplifted mass of roots protected them in some measure from the rain, and altogether from the driving wind, but by degrees little rivers of water commenced to descend from the trees overhead, and these soon completed the job of soaking the trio of scouts.

The minutes passed, and nothing very serious happened. True, once or twice Jasper believed he heard a crash as some weak tree yielded to the strain, and went over. But this did not come to pass very near them, so they did not incur any particular danger.

"Seems to be letting up a bit!" finally remarked Larry, raising his voice in order to be heard, for the racket was still tremendous.

"Oh! do you really think so?" cried Jasper, excitedly.

"There's no doubt of it," declared Elmer, with a reassuring nod, for he understood the nervous nature of the smaller boy, and in times past had made it his particular business to build up Jasper's courage and determination, always wabbly.

The crashes of thunder as a rule sounded further away, though now and then one would break that seemed to outdo all the rest, as though the storm might be trying to linger in the vicinity of the upturned tree.

Then the rain slackened.

"Not that it matters much," said Elmer, laughing; "because we're all like drowned rats right now. But wait till it stops; then we'll build a jolly big fire, and dry off."

"But how about matches – Larry forgot to bring any, and I lost mine?" sighed Jasper, dolefully.

"Oh! that's all right," the scout leader went on. "I've got some safe and sound in my pocket right now."

"But if you're soaked through to the skin, won't the matches be done for?" asked the smaller lad, who was beginning to feel better already, now that the storm had broken, and a rift appeared in the dark clouds overhead.

"I could stay in the water ten minutes, and still have matches to burn," laughed Elmer, "because, you see, I make it a point to carry them in a water-proof safe that has been tested, and found all right. Besides, I know how to make a fire without a solitary match, and have done it again and again."

"Oh! yes, to be sure, I saw you do it once!" cried Larry.

"You mean by use of a little bow, and a stick that turns around in a notch of some wood, don't you, Elmer?" asked Jasper, interested.

"Just that," replied the scout leader. "I might try it now, to show you fellows how it's done; only it generally takes a lot of time, you know; and the sooner we have a warm blaze after this rain stops, the better. So we'll stick to the matches this round."

He was thinking of Jasper, who had never been very stout or strong, and whom he could feel trembling whenever he chanced to touch the boy. Excitement, and the wetting, might cause trouble, unless he found means for warming the boy up ere long.

By degrees the wind died away completely, while the rain hardly amounted to much – in fact, what water fell was now the drippings from the trees overhead.

"Come, let's get a move on us," said Elmer, as he started to climb out of the depression behind the upturned roots of the fallen oak.

"Wow! I'm standing in water half way to my knees!" laughed Larry, to whom the affair was something like a picnic – now that they had run across one who knew how to find a way out of the labyrinth, dry their clothes, and generally create an atmosphere of cheer.

"Wait till I take a look in at this tree," observed Elmer, hurrying around to where the broken pieces of the trunk lay.

"Whatever is he doing now?" asked Jasper, as he saw the scout leader clawing at the heart of the fallen forest monarch.

"Well, I rather think he's getting some dry wood out of that log," replied the other. "I've seen him make a fire in a rain before, and that was the way he got hold of some tinder for a start. Yes, there he picks up a lot, and is coming this way with it. We'll soon have a bully blaze started, and once she gets going why there's oceans of wood lying around loose here that will burn."

"Yes, I guess there are oceans of it; anyhow there's been enough water turned loose on it to swamp things. Elmer, is there anything we can do to help?" asked Jasper, eagerly.

"Sure there is, both of you," replied the other, readily. "Get busy breaking up some of those dead limbs there. We'll need a lot soon, and besides, it's going to help warm you up. Jump around, and slap your arms across your chest, Jasper, just like you would do on a winter's day, if cold. Here

goes for a start," and as he spoke Elmer applied a match to the little pile of loose dry tinder he had heaped up.

A flash, and up sprang the flame, for the boy had made his preparations carefully so as not to waste a single match. One of the first tests a tenderfoot scout is put to, is to make a fire in the woods without paper, and possessing only three matches. The careless new beginner learns how to husband his resources, after he has been shown how priceless even so common a thing as a match may become, under certain conditions.

When the fire had taken a good hold, other fuel was added, dry so long as it could be obtained, and then some of the wet stuff, which readily dried off and burned fiercely.

"If I had only had a camp hatchet along," said Elmer, as he made Jasper disrobe, so as to get his clothes hanging near the blaze, "I could have done this affair up in better style; but I reckon none of us have any reason to growl at the way things are going, eh, fellows?"

"Well, I should say not," laughed Larry, who had followed the example of the others, and was hanging his garments on convenient roots of the fallen tree, where the heat would reach them by degrees. "We're lucky all the way through, and that's a fact. It was mighty good of you to track us away up here, Elmer. Whatever made you do it?"

"Oh! I happened to have nothing to do, and while neither of you had the politeness to ask me to go along, why, I thought I'd like to know just how you made out. So I kept out of sight, and yet near enough to hear what you said lots of times. And on the whole you did pretty well, fellows. You can't expect to learn everything about woodcraft at once, you know; and the time I was up in the Canada bush gave me a long start over the rest of the bunch."

He did not want to confess that he had been a little worried lest the two ambitious scouts get lost in those great woods lying northwest of Hickory Ridge; but such was really the case. And as subsequent events proved, his fears had after all not been groundless.

While their clothes were steaming and drying the boys jumped around, and managed between thus exercising themselves, and keeping fairly near the blaze, to ward off any chilliness; for after the storm the air had become remarkably cool.

"There's the blooming old sun peeking out!" declared Larry, presently.

"For goodness' sake don't scare it off," said Jasper, who was now busily engaged getting inside his clothes. "Oh! say, look here, somebody's changed with me."

"What's the matter?" asked Elmer; although he gave Larry a wink as he spoke, as if he knew very well what ailed the other.

"Why, I've got the wrong trousers, that's what! They look like they'd been made for my younger brother," complained Jasper; then seeing Larry smiling he continued: "Now, what are you grinning at, Larry? Trying to play a joke on me, are you?"

"Well, since both of us are a heap bigger than you, whose clothes d'ye think you've got hold of anyway, eh?" demanded Larry. "Fact is, they've shrunk, that's all. Had 'em too near the fire, after being wet. They'll stretch again in time, Jasper. Mine are in the same fix, you see."

Amid considerable merriment then, the three scouts finished dressing.

"I'll never forget this, never," declared Jasper, after he had completed this operation in the best way possible.

"And just think what a fix we'd still be in if Elmer here hadn't taken a notion to look us up!" observed Larry. "It's a fine thing to have a scout leader, who feels a personal interest in his men. Because, honest Injun, I don't yet know in just which way home lies. That's about west over there, because the sun is heading yonder; but where's Hickory Ridge?"

"Give it up," said Jasper, shaking his head as though the problem were too much for him. "I'm like you, Larry; I know the cardinal points of the compass only because the sun happens to be shining now. When it was dark I couldn't have told north from south."

"Well, you must get over that failing," declared Elmer, positively. "Now, just take a good look at all these forest trees; you notice that nearly every one has a certain amount of green moss, as we call it, on one side, and also that it decorates the same side of every tree!"

"Sure enough it is, Elmer; and if a fellow only knew *which* side, he could always find out how he stood," cried Jasper.

"In nine cases out of ten that moss is on the north side of the tree. If it varies at all, it will be found on the northwest bark. Remember that, fellows, and you need never want for a compass when in the woods," suggested Elmer.

"Well, now," remarked Larry, chuckling, "what a couple of silly geese we were after all, Jasper, to think of coming away up here in the woods, and never carry even a compass."

"That's a fact," replied the one addressed, with a sickly grin; "but the trouble with us, Larry, was our being so dead sure we knew all about it. After this I'm going to buy a neat little trick of a compass, and carry it along with me. Honest, now, I never knew it was so easy to get twisted around. Some day I'll turn up missing on my way to school."

"Here's a compass, all right; I seldom go without one," remarked Elmer; "though it's mighty seldom a fellow, who is wide awake, would ever need such a thing where the trees grow. Now, out on those tremendous prairies where hundreds of miles of open country surround you on every side, and one section looks exactly like another, it's a different question."

"I've heard it said that a fellow can use his watch, if he's got one, for a compass; how about that, Elmer?" asked Larry.

"It's a fact," replied the scout leader, "though I don't ever remember of being put to that test. Still, I can explain just how it's done, though we haven't time right now to take the matter up. I reckon we'd better be heading toward home."

"That suits me to a dot," declared Jasper, cheerfully.

He was feeling quite chipper after the recent terrifying experience. In a great measure it had done the boy good. His confidence had been strengthened, and in many ways Jasper saw how necessary it was in times of emergency to retain both determination and assurance.

They were soon walking briskly through the woods, with Elmer promising that in a short time he would surely take his comrades to the road over which they could make their way to Hickory Ridge.

"I've got a little news for both of you," said the scout leader of the Wolf Patrol, as they journeyed on, chattering like so many jackdaws.

"I hope it ain't bad news then?" remarked Jasper.

"That remains to be proven," Elmer continued, gravely. "It may turn out good or bad, as happens to enter the active mind of one Matt Tubbs."

"Oh! the bully of Fairfield – the fellow who did more to break up the baseball games with our rival town than all other causes bunched together. Now, what under the sun has Fighting Matt gone and done, Elmer?" demanded Larry, eagerly.

"Well," replied the scout leader, calmly, "what do you expect, but get in line, and organize a new and rival troop of Boy Scouts!"

CHAPTER III. MORE RUMBLINGS OF COMING TROUBLE

"Whew! you don't say!" exclaimed Larry, frowning.

"Takes my breath away, that's what!" gasped Jasper.

"Seems to me that both of you look on the event in the light of what my chum, Mark Cummings, would term a *catastrophe*!" chuckled Elmer.

"Well, I know that Matt pretty well," grumbled Larry. "To tell the truth, him and me have had more'n a few battles inside the last five years. And I owe more'n one black eye to his way of carrying his fists. If Matt Tubbs has gone and organized a gang of scouts it spells trouble with a big, big T for our fellows. Huh!"

"See here, why do you call the new troop a 'gang'? Is that respectful, and the way to treat fellow scouts?" laughed Elmer.

"You know just as well as I do, Elmer," went on the indignant Larry, "that with such a bully as Matt Tubbs at the head of it, no collection of scouts could ever get a charter from Headquarters. Why, the tough crowd he trains with couldn't begin to subscribe to the twelve cardinal laws of the organization."

"Well, it makes me smile," said Jasper, though in reality he looked disgusted. "Think of Matt Tubbs, the bully who uses more hard words than any fellow I ever ran across, promising these things: To be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient to authority, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and last of all but hardest for Matt, reverent! Oh! my, the world will come to an end before Tough Matt can hold up his hand in a scout salute, and solemnly say that he believes in that list."

"It does seem next to impossible," remarked Elmer; "and yet sometimes miracles happen even in these days, fellows. Who knows but what we Hickory Ridge scouts may be given the chance, and the privilege as well, to open the eyes of Matt Tubbs?"

"That would sure be a miracle!" scoffed Larry, who believed that he ought to know the subject of their talk better than Elmer, since the latter had not been living in the neighborhood more than a year or so, having come with his father from Canada, where Mr. Chenowith had had charge of a great ranch and farm.

"All right, we'll wait and see," Elmer went on, evenly. "Anyhow, I've had the news straight that they have two patrols enlisted, of eight fellows each. That is doing better than the Hickory Ridge scouts; because up to now our patrols are not completed, there being but six in each."

"Say, that's always been a puzzle to me, why Jack Armitage and Nat Scott were left out to start a new patrol to be called the Eagle," remarked Jasper.

"I thought you knew about it," replied Elmer. "But you must have been absent at the time it was talked over. You see, it's hardest to find fellows qualified to be scout leaders, and assistant leaders. Plenty of raw recruits can be enlisted on the other hand. Myself and Mark happened to be selected for the first patrol, and Matty Eggleston, with Red Huggins, came along and qualified for the second. That gave us just six members for each patrol, you see."

"Yes, I'm following you, Elmer; please go on," said Jasper, eagerly.

"It just happened that the next two boys to enlist were Jack and Nat, both of whom knew considerable about woodcraft, and were ambitious to learn more. When Mr. Garrabrant and myself talked it over – for I was a duly appointed assistant scout-master by that time, you know – we concluded that it would be wise to start a third patrol, with those two fellows at the head, and after that fill up our three patrols to the limit of eight each."

"Thank you, Elmer; I get on to it now," Jasper remarked.

"And I understand that several good fellows have applied for membership in our troop?" observed Larry.

"Yes, their names will be proposed at the next meeting, which by the way comes this very night. Hope neither of you will be so leg tired that you stay away. Before Fall comes around the church improvements will be finished, and then we'll have a meeting room worth while. Just now that old wheelwright's shop at the crossroads must serve our purpose."

"Oh! there, that's too bad!" suddenly ejaculated Jasper, coming to a halt.

"What ails him now?" Larry remarked, surveying his companion queerly.

"I went and forgot something; how silly of me," Jasper went on.

"Oh! we'll agree with you, all right," grinned Larry; "but suppose you tell us what it was? If you left anything back there where we hung our clothes on a hickory limb, until it looked like a regular Irish washday, why, the chances are you're out that much, because I for one decline to cover all that ground again."

"And I wanted to know so much!" grumbled Jasper, as he raised one of his feet and rubbed his shoe regretfully.

Elmer watched his actions and smiled. Evidently he had guessed what was on the other's mind.

"Perhaps I might tell you what it was, Jasper," he said, quietly.

"I wish you would, Elmer," cried the other. "Did you peek in, and see him? And was it a great big black bear, or a savage bobcat?"

"Neither, I think," came the answer. "You would be pretty safe to call it a 'coon, and let it go at that."

"What, only a pesky little raccoon, and to pitch in for me like that?" cried the other. "Why, I thought he was going to chew me all to pieces, and I was sure it must be a wildcat at least."

"That may have been because you were excited," the scout leader pursued; "and I've no doubt but what the rascal clawed at you, and used his sharp teeth pretty freely, because he was badly frightened and concerned. Even a rat will fight when at bay. And he thought you were coming in to get him."

"But how do you know it was a raccoon?" demanded Jasper.

"I saw his tracks near the log, in a spot where the rain hadn't washed them out," Elmer went on.

"Oh!" Jasper laughed, "I forgot that you showed us how different the tracks of wildcats, raccoons, mink, possums, and muskrats were. I saw it at the time, but just now they're all alike 'coons to me. But Elmer, I'm going to study up on that subject. It seems to grip me more'n anything else about the scout business, except p'raps that Injun picture writing. I liked that; and me to be an artist. I can draw, if I can't excel in other things."

"But when you get to drawing remember that every picture has got to tell a story, so plain and simple that a child can read it. That's the beauty of Indian picture writing. But look, fellows, what's ahead!"

Elmer pointed as he spoke, and the other scouts gave a hearty cheer.

"The road!" cried Larry.

"Now things look promising," Jasper observed; "and the walking will be easier. But speaking of shoes, I suppose those scratches on mine will prove my little yarn about the hollow log, when I tell it to the bunch. If they try to make out I'm stretching things, you fellows have just got to back me up."

"So long as you stick to facts we will," remarked Larry; "but take care you don't go to calling it a bobcat, or a tiger. I'll throw up my hands at that."

"A scout is truthful, even if it doesn't say anything about that in the twelve articles we subscribe to," remarked Jasper, solemnly.

"Yes," Elmer broke in, "and now that Jasper knows it was only a 'coon that had its den in that hollow log, he will never try to say it was a wildcat; though if he wants he can declare he *thought* at the time he was being attacked by a panther."

"I somehow can't help thinking of that Matt Tubbs," Larry observed, after they had been tramping along the road for half an hour or more, and had covered nearly two miles of the five separating them from Hickory Ridge.

"Yes," Elmer admitted, "I suppose there'll be more or less talk about him to-night at the meeting. Now, if his crowd only went into this thing the right way, what great times we could have competing with the Fairfield troop! But as it is, as they find themselves debarred from becoming affiliated with the regular Boy Scout organization, I'm afraid Matt and his cronies will try to take it out on us, by giving us all the trouble they can."

"Why, I wouldn't put anything past that mean chap," declared Jasper.

"It does seem as though Matt didn't have any redeeming qualities about him," remarked Elmer, thoughtfully; "and yet, fellows, do you remember that just one year ago when a house burned over at Fairfield, who was it dashed recklessly into the building, when even the regular fire laddies held back, and pulled an old woman out alive? Seems to me that was Matt Tubbs, queer though it sounds."

"Right you are, Elmer," admitted Larry. "We all wondered about it at the time, and were beginning to think Matt might be turning over a new leaf, but the next time we met him he was just the same nasty scrapper as ever."

"And you know," went on Jasper, "it turned out that the old woman was his grandmother, and not a stranger."

"All the better," said Elmer, stoutly. "It proves that Matt must have had some human feeling in that tough heart of his, to risk his life for an old and infirm woman. But listen, fellows, I thought I heard somebody shouting!"

The three scouts stood still, and strained their ears.

"Oh! help! help! won't somebody come to help us?" came a wailing cry, in what seemed to be a woman's voice.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Jasper, "somebody's in a peck of trouble right around that bend in the road there!"

"Yes, and I remember there was a house along here somewhere," Larry cried, as the three of them started on a sprint along the road.

When presently they turned the bend they came upon a scene that gave them a severe shock. And even Jasper forgot all his recent thrilling experiences in the warm impulse of his boyish heart to prove of some assistance to those who seemed in such dire need of aid.

CHAPTER IV. FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

Apparently the storm that had so lately passed over this section had played particular havoc with the farm buildings. Perhaps, with the queer, jumping movements known to cyclones, it had dipped down in this one quarter much more severely than anywhere else near by.

At any rate, it had succeeded in partly demolishing a barn, scattered several tons of fine hay – that year's crop – and upset things generally.

The first thing the scouts noticed after that one glance around at the damage done by the gale, was that a little group of persons seemed to be hovering over a certain spot.

"Somebody hurt by the storm!" Elmer called over his shoulder, for, being a good runner, he had easily taken the lead – Jasper was not so very strong, while Larry happened to be built much too stockily for a sprinter.

Then the boys received another shock. One of those bending over had straightened up, and proved to be a stout-looking boy, with a bold, resolute face.

Perhaps Jasper may have been reminded of the old saying he had heard quoted in his home many times: "Speak of an angel, and you'll feel his wings;" only no one who knew Matt Tubbs would ever dream of comparing that quarrelsome youth with a celestial visitor; in fact, their thoughts would be more apt to go out in the other direction.

Two women were wringing their hands, and crying. A man lay upon the ground, and his groans told that he was suffering considerable bodily pain.

"Don't I wish Ted Burgoyne was along!" exclaimed Elmer involuntarily, as he hurried toward the group.

The boy mentioned belonged to the Wolf Patrol. He seemed to possess a natural fancy for surgery, and had long ago been dubbed Dr. Ted by his mates. And in numerous instances had he proved that their confidence in him was not misplaced.

That was why Elmer now felt keen regret because of a lost opportunity for the young Boy Scout medicine man to show his skill at setting broken bones, or binding up other injuries almost as well as any experienced physician could have done.

Elmer himself had made it a point to know something about such things. He had in the past lived a wild life out in the great Canada wilderness, where men, and boys, too, find it necessary to depend upon themselves in great emergencies.

Although he feared he might be somewhat clumsy, and certainly lacked the natural talent Ted Burgoyne had always shown, the scout leader was only too willing to do whatever lay in his power to alleviate suffering.

In another moment he was leaning over the stricken man, whom he now recognized as a middle-aged farmer, Simon Kent by name. The women, wife and daughter of the farmer, had looked up eagerly as Matt seemed to speak of the coming of others on the scene. Then their faces grew blank again with despair. For what could a trio of mere boys do, when a doctor was needed so badly?

"Oh! Matt, find the horse if you can, and hurry to town for Dr. Cooper! He couldn't have run very far away!" the older woman was saying, doubtless referring to the horse, and not the well-known Hickory Ridge physician.

"Please wait just a minute or so, and let me take a look at Mr. Kent," said Elmer, modestly. "I happen to know a little about these things, you see, ma'am; and I've set more than one broken limb."

The women stopped wailing for a time, and watched the confident boy as he carefully examined the groaning farmer.

"How did it happen?" asked Larry of Matt Tubbs, who apparently must be some relative of the Kents, as the woman seemed to know him very well.

"Storm blew the roof off'n the barn, and he got caught. Any feller with peepers in his head ought tuh see that," replied young Tubbs, between whom and Larry there had always been bad blood.

Elmer looked up and smiled in the faces of the two frightened women. He knew they needed encouragement, and that he could not do them a greater benefit than to allay their fears.

"He has a broken arm," he said, reassuringly, "and I think a couple of his ribs are fractured, Mrs. Kent; but besides that there are only a few bruises, and they do not amount to much. Nothing very serious, understand. Mr. Kent isn't going to die. But I guess he'd better have the doctor here as soon as Matt can ride to town. I'll do what I can in the meantime, ma'am."

Matt Tubbs had been watching what he did with apparently the greatest curiosity. He was utterly ignorant himself about everything that pertained to first aid to the injured, and perhaps never before had felt so utterly insignificant as when he saw Elmer Chenoweth go about the duties of a doctor with such calm assurance.

Jasper had run off in obedience to a request from the scout leader, and now returned with some cold water. When Elmer had dashed a little of this in the face of the farmer, the injured man came to his senses. His groans ceased, though they could see from the expression on his rugged face that he was suffering severely.

"It's all right, Mr. Kent," Elmer hastened to say in that convincing way of his, as the farmer looked at him inquiringly. "You've got a broken arm, and perhaps a couple of your ribs are out of the running for a while, but you'll pull through all to the good. I'm going to do what I can while Matt rides off for Dr. Cooper."

"Oh! it's you, Elmer, is it?" said the man, faintly. "But how d'ye know I ain't got my death in that wreck of my barn? I feel like I'd been through a threshing machine; on'y my left arm is numb."

"I've had some experience with these things, Mr. Kent, up in Canada. Besides, sir, we belong to the Boy Scouts movement, and one of the things taught there is what we call 'first aid to the injured.' I could set your arm all right, but since the doctor can get here soon, I'd better leave it for him. He mightn't like my meddling too much with his practice. Will you ask Matt to please find the horse, and start for town?"

"Oh! I'm agoin', all right," said that worthy, arousing himself; for he had been staring at Elmer all this while, and listening to what he said about the obligations of the scouts in time of need, as though he might be hearing something that astonished him.

He glanced back several times as he walked away to look for the horse, that was doubtless in some corner of the lot beyond the demolished barns.

"Got something to think over, I reckon," grunted Larry, who had closed up like a clam when Matt answered his civil question so roughly.

Shortly afterward they heard a shout. Then Matt dashed past, riding bareback on the horse, and using the halter to guide him along the road. He went flying toward town, and they knew he would send the doctor before a great while.

"Here, fellows, Mr. Kent ought to be carried into the house," said Elmer, turning to his chums. "We've got to make a litter to lay him on. Come over here with me, and we'll knock one together in a jiffy."

"Sure we will!" declared Larry, who had a warm heart, even though a bit inclined to quarrel at times, being quick-tempered.

There was plenty of material lying around; the storm had seen to that when it tore things loose on the Kent farm. And presently the scouts came back with some boards forming a very fair litter. Elmer had covered it with several horse blankets he discovered in the partly demolished barn.

But the farmer was getting back his strength again. He shook his head at sight of the litter, and a slight smile appeared on his face, much to the joy of his sadly frightened wife and daughter.

"I reckon I ain't so bad off as to need that, Elmer," he remarked. "Now, if so be ye boys draw around, and take care not to handle that left arm too rough, p'raps I could manage to get up. Arter that, with some help, I'll hobble to the house. Don't ye look so peaked, wife; I'm better'n ten dead men yet."

They helped him to rise, and then, leaning on Elmer, with the others following close behind, eager to assist, they made their way slowly to the farm building.

"Oh! what would we have done only for the coming of you boys?" exclaimed Mrs. Kent, after they had managed to get the wounded farmer seated fairly comfortably in a big sleepy hollow chair.

Elmer was making a sling in which the broken arm could be held, to ease the pain and the strain until Dr. Cooper's arrival.

"Does this scouting teach you boys how to do that sort of thing?" asked the grown daughter, who had been watching these actions of the boys curiously.

"It is one of the things we have to learn before we can hope to become first-class scouts," the boy replied. "You see, no one can ever tell when a scout may be called on to help bring back a person to life who has been nearly drowned, or to keep another from bleeding to death after being cut with an ax in camp; then besides, sometimes boys have to be rescued when they get a cramp while in swimming. And when a fellow knows how to go about these things, he may be able to help save a human life. We think it worth while."

"I should say it was!" exclaimed Miss Kent, enthusiastically. "After this I'm going to take more interest in boys than I have. I always thought they were as much alike as peas in a pod; and perhaps I oughtn't to say it, because he's in our family, but you see, I somehow judged all boys by my Cousin Matt."

Elmer smiled.

"Well," he said, nodding, "I hope that when you come to look into this a little closer, Miss Julia, you'll understand that it stands for big things. My father says it's the greatest movement for the uplifting of American boys that ever happened, barring none. And I'm going to send you some printed matter that will tell you just what the Boy Scouts aim to do. When you know that, I just guess you'll find reason to change your opinion of boys."

Even the injured farmer had listened to what was said with a show of interest.

"Sho! Elmer," he remarked, "I've heard a heap of this thing, and didn't take much stock in it. Thought it meant the boys was goin' to be made into soldiers, and as I'm a man of peace I couldn't stand for that. On'y yesterday the dominie was tellin' me it ain't got a blessed thing to do with military tactics. And arter the able way you handled yourself to-day, blessed if I ain't agoin' to read the stuff you send Julie. If I had a boy I'd like him to jine the scouts. And that's as far as I've got. But if it makes the lads clean, manly, and ekal to emergencies, like you seem to be, it's a boss thing."

And Elmer felt his heart glow with satisfaction, for his whole interest was by now bound up in the success of the Hickory Ridge troop of scouts; and anything that went to make them new friends appealed to him strongly.

When half an hour had gone the sound of an automobile horn was heard out on the road.

"There comes Dr. Cooper!" called Jasper, who had been on the lookout.

When the physician came bustling in he looked questioningly at the three boys. Possibly Matt may have told him the scouts were meddling with things, and his professional instincts were shocked. But when he saw what Elmer had done, and made an examination himself, he declared that the extent of Mr. Kent's injuries were just as the boy had stated.

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