

FICTION

Edward Sylvester Ellis

The Boy Patrol Around the Council Fire

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FICTION



In It a Single Man Was Seated

THE BOYPATROL SERIES

The Boy Patrol Around the Council Fire

BY

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Launch Boys Series," "The Deer-foot
Series," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

EDWIN J. PRITTIE

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The Boy Patrol Around the Council Fire

CHAPTER I -- "He and I Must Never Meet"

You will recall that one day in a recent August, Jack Crandall, a member of the Stag Patrol of Boy Scouts, who with the Blazing Arrow and Eagle Patrols was spending the summer vacation on the shore of Gosling Lake, in Southern Maine, met with a serious accident. In climbing a tall pine to inspect a bird's nest, he fell to the ground and broke his leg. His companions, Gerald Hume and Arthur Mitchell, belonging to the same Patrol, made a litter upon which he was carried to the clubhouse. Dr. Spellman, staying with his wife and little daughter Ruth, christened "Sunbeam" by Mike Murphy, in answer to a signal, paddled across the lake in his canoe, set the fractured limb and did all that was necessary.

Jack was an athlete, in rugged health and with no bad habits. He, therefore, recovered rapidly. After spending a few days on his couch, he was carried to the front porch, where in the cool shade and reposing upon an invalid chair, especially fashioned for the occasion, he feasted his eyes upon the delightful scenery and enjoyed the pleasures of his friends although he could not take part. He insisted that they should pay no special attention to him, though there was not a boy who would not have gladly kept him company all the time. A reunion of the troop took place in the evening, when he was carried inside, listened to the reports and took part in the conversation which you may be sure was of a lively nature.

Thus the days passed until the arrival of the silver mounted maple wood crutches, a gift from the other Scouts, and Jack swung carefully out on the porch and walked the length of it several times before sinking down in the waiting chair. This, of course, did not take place until the month was well by and the time for going home near. I thought it best to close my previous story with this glimpse of things, but it now becomes my duty to turn back and relate some incidents that occurred during the first days of the patient's convalescence, since they have to do with what follows.

Dr. Spellman and his wife returned to the bungalow on the day succeeding Jack's mishap.

Scout Master Hall and several of the lads expressed their surprise that no call had been made by Uncle Elk, the Hermit of the Woods, who showed so much fondness for the Boy Scouts that they expected to see him every day, provided the weather was favorable.

"I am sure he would have been here last night or this morning, had he known of Jack's misfortune," said Mr. Hall.

"If ye have no objection I'll drop in on him and let him know," replied Mike Murphy, whose heart was as sympathetic as that of a young child.

"Please do so."

Mike glanced around for his chums, Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes, but they were not in sight. It did not matter and he decided to make the trip alone, using one of the canoes to take him to the end of the lake, where he would follow the path that led to the cabin through the woods.

"On me way back," remarked Mike to the Scout Master, who walked with him to the water's edge, "I'll drop in to lam how Sunbeam is getting on."

The Scout Master smiled.

"That will take you considerably out of your way."

"It's not worth the mintion, as Ball O'Flaherty said whin he fell off the church steeple and broke his neck. Then ye know it's a long time since I saw Sunbeam."

"Yes,--less than a day."

So the Irish youth seated himself in the stern of the graceful craft, and swung the paddle with creditable skill. No task could have been easier, and he grinned with satisfaction, as keeping close to shore, he watched the trees with their exuberant foliage glide silently backward.

"A canoe is a blissed boon to byes that can't walk; we might set Jack in one of 'em, and he could paddle wherever he wished. I'm going to suggist to me friends that whin they go back home, each of 'em has a canoe mounted on wheels, so he can roam round the country, the same as if he's skimming over the water as I'm doing this minute. I'd try it mesilf whin I get back, but dad would objct and there's so much water there I don't naad anything of the kind."

Far over to the left, he saw the other canoe handled by several of the Scouts, while somewhat nearer and a little way back from the water, a thin, feathery finger of smoke filtering through the tree tops showed where Dr. Spellman's house stood.

"Sunbeam has been gone so long that I'm worrit less something may have happened to her; I won't tarry at Uncle Elk's, but make haste to relave me mind as regards the Quaan."

Uncle Elk's canoe was drawn up the bank and turned over. Landing near it, Mike followed the winding path to the door from which the latch string hung, pulled it and stepped across the threshold.

"Good afternoon, Uncle Elk," was his greeting as he closed the door behind him.

The hermit was sitting in his rocking chair, reading "The Truth of Religion," by Rudolf Eucken, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Jena and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1908. The old man laid aside the heavy volume, still open, face downward.

"Michael, I'm glad to see you."

He leaned forward, shook hands and motioned the youth to the chair opposite. Mike obeyed with the remark:

"We have been expecting a call from ye, Uncle Elk."

"You don't wish me to bore you with too much of my presence," said the hermit, with a twinkle of his bright eyes.

"That's something that can't be done, if ye tried it till ye were an old man," replied Mike warmly. And then told of the mishap that had befallen Jack Crandall. Uncle Elk listened sympathetically.

"That's bad, but it might have been much worse."

"Which Jack himself has observed,--for instance, 'spose it had been *mesilf*."

"That surely would have been worse for *you*, but better for him. You say that Dr. Spellman set his injured leg?"

"That he did, and I couldn't have done it better *mesilf*. He called this morning and said the spalpeen was doing splendid."

"When will the doctor call again?"

"I'm not sartin,--but likely tomorrer."

"Forenoon or afternoon?"

"I couldn't say."

Uncle Elk withdrew his gaze from the face of the lad and looked into the fireplace, where only a few dying embers showed. He was silent for a few moments and then addressed his caller.

"Michael," he said in low tones, "I shall call upon Jack at the earliest opportunity, but my call must be timed so there will be no possibility of meeting Dr. Spellman."

Mike was amazed by the words and at a loss what to say. Therefore he said what after all was perhaps the best thing.

"I'll see that the doctor doesn't try any expirimints on ye."

The old man actually laughed, but only for an instant. With a shake of his head he said:

"It isn't that, Michael, but he and I must never meet."

The youth was astounded, but his sense of propriety forbade any questioning. If Uncle Elk did not choose to make known the cause of his strange enmity, Mike had no right to object.

A strained silence followed for a minute or two, when the hermit again looked meditatively into the smouldering embers.

"It can be easily arranged: let Dr. Spellman make his calls at such times as suit his convenience and I will adjust mine accordingly."

"That should be aisy. I hev it!"

"Let me hear your plan."

"'Spose the doctor makes it a rule to call ivery other day and ye can fit yer visits in betwaan, though we should like it to be oftener."

"That would hardly answer, for he might be needed every day. A better plan will be that he should never call at the bungalow during the evening. If he agrees to that, everything will be right."

"That'll doot! He wouldn't come anyway unless we signalled him, and if ye happen to be at the clubhouse, ye'll have plinty of time to run."

"How am I to know that he consents to it?"

"If he objects, I'll come back and tell ye; if he agras, I won't show up here agin till after ye have visited us."

"That settles the matter. I suppose, Michael, you are wondering why I make such a strange request?"

"I am, but I'm not asking any questions, as ye'll observe."

"Well, you will never learn from me."

Mike was slightly nettled.

"Why thin did ye think it worth while to raise me hopes, when I hadn't made any inquiries?"

"I beg your pardon, Michael; I shouldn't have done it. Let neither of us refer to it again."

"Do ye wish me to tell Docther Spellman what ye said?"

"I do."

"Then consider that I've told him."

"It would be hard for him to understand my request unless he knew my feelings. You may as well stay to supper and over night with me."

"I thank ye, Uncle Elk, but I much fear that if I don't return to the byes they'll think I've tumbled out of a tree the same as Jack, and have broke me neck. I'll bid ye good afternoon and make me way to Docther Spellman. Unless ye hear from me to the contrary, ye'll understand that he'll not visit the bungalow on any evening unless he is sent for, so the way will be open to yersilf."

The hermit rose from his chair and stood in the door as Mike walked down the path to the side of the lake. He looked round just before passing out of sight and waved his hand to the old man, who nodded.

"It's mighty qu'ar," mused the lad, as he shoved off in his canoe; "the docther has niver said a word as far as I've heard about any trouble between 'em, and I couldn't guess what it is to save me life."

The bright, sunshiny afternoon was well advanced when Mike paddled a little way from shore and turned in the direction of the thin wisp of smoke which revealed the location of the physician's summer home. Almost beyond sight could be made out the second canoe, which some of the Scouts had used in making an excursion over the sheet of water. The craft was close in shore and seemed to be motionless, as if the boys were fishing. The distance was too far for him to tell the number of occupants, but he judged they were three or four.

"And I believe Alvin and Chester are among 'em," he added, after a scrutiny of the boat; "I mind me now that they said something about going off to-day on a cruise. Hello!"

The exclamation was caused by an unexpected discovery. Between him and the home of the physician he saw a second spiral of vapor climbing up among the treetops. Like that of the former, it was so far back from the water that nothing could be seen of the party that had kindled it.

Mike held his paddle motionless while he looked and thought.

"They must be strangers to the rest of us. If this thing kaaps up, bime by we sha'n't have elbow room and will have to camp farther inland. I wonder now if they could be some other Boy Patrols that have strayed in here. They may have heard of us and desire to make me acquaintance, as do most people."

Mike had his natural share of curiosity, and decided to learn who the strangers were. He had enough time at command to permit a diversion of this nature, and he headed his craft toward the bank at a point opposite the dim wavering column of vapor which showed that a fire kindled beneath was the cause.

CHAPTER II -- A Slight Miscalculation

The distance was so slight that a score of strokes drove the canoe to shore. Nothing in the nature of a path was to be seen, and there was so much undergrowth that when Mike glided under the vegetation, only the rear of the boat was visible to any one on the lake. He drew the craft up the bank far enough to prevent its floating away during his absence, and began picking his way through the bushes. A few rods and the wood grew more open, though not being much accustomed to that sort of traveling, he made considerable noise in his progress. He was thus engaged with his head bent and his arms thrust out in front feeling his way, when a low horizontal limb slid under his chin and as it almost lifted him off his feet brought him to a sudden stop.

"Worrah! I wonder if me hid is left on me shoulders!" he exclaimed, vigorously rubbing his neck; "yis,--the most of me is here, as Tarn Murry said whin he came down after being blowed up in a powder mill."

A few rods farther and he came upon a sight which caused him to halt as abruptly as before, with a strong inclination to turn about and go back to his canoe.

In a small open space a fire of pine cones, twigs and branches was burning beside the trunk of a fallen tree. Resting on the top of the blaze was a tomato can, filled with bubbling coffee, whose aroma reached the nostrils of Mike at the moment he caught sight of the fire. On the log sat a ragged, frowsy tramp, with a crooked stick in his hand tending the blaze, while on the ground half lying down and half sitting up, was a second vagrant sucking a comcob pipe.

You remember the two nuisances who called upon Dr. Spellman and because of their insolence were sharply rebuffed by him, though his wife, in the kindness of her heart, gave them food. These were the same hoboos, who it will be noted had not as yet wandered far from the physician's home. You remember, too, their characteristic names,--Buzby Biggs and Saxy Hutt. Lazy, shiftless, dirty, rugged of frame, thieves and unmitigated pests, they were straggling through this part of Maine, in mortal dread of two afflictions,--work and a bath. They were ready to suffer harsh treatment and privation rather than submit to either.

Mike's sensitiveness revolted at sight of them, but before he could turn away, both of the men, who must have heard his approach, raised their heads and looked toward him. Hutt, who was smoking the pipe, slowly rose to his feet, stretched his arms over his head, and beckoned with his grimy forefinger.

"Welcome, my lord!" he called in his husky voice; "wilt thou not come into our baronial castle and partake of a flagon of wine with us?"

The grotesqueness of the invitation appealed to Mike and he walked forward, recalling that he had not his buckthorn cane with him. Had he gone for a tramp through the woods he would have held it in his hand, but it was in his way when using the canoe. He never carried firearms, for to do so is to disobey one of the strictest rules of the Boy Scouts, besides which, as you know, an Irishman believes in the use only of nature's weapons, with the addition perhaps now and then of a stout shillaleh. Not that Mike Murphy expected any trouble with these men, but the thought which came to him was natural under the circumstances.

He approached in his confident fashion, with a grin on his face, halted a pace or two from the fire, and with the couple examining him, made the Boy Scout salute.

"'Tis so kind of ye that I will halt a brief while and enjy the hospitality of the Knights of the Ragged Shirt and Dirty Face."

This was a pretty crisp salutation, but it need not be said that Mike felt no more regard for the couple than do all respectable persons. He remained standing and did not go nearer.

"Aren't yer afraid of being arrested fur yer beauty, young man?" asked Biggs with a grimace.

"Not while yersilves are in the counthry."

"Who are you anyway?"

"Mike Murphy of Southport, State of Maine. I would exchange cards wid ye, but I'm afeard ye couldn't return the compliment."

"I left my pasteboards at home on the piany. We gather from your dress that you're one of them Boy Patrols."

"Ye're right, excipt jest now I'm on this side of the lake."

"Gee whizz! but you're keen. How long do you chaps intend to stay there?"

"Probably until we lave. We're not among the folks who hev to be kicked out by their betters."

"Meaning us?"

"As ye please; I want to be agreeable to ye."

Mike had not shown tact. He ought to have reflected that it was imprudent to rouse the resentment of two full grown men of so lawless a character as these tramps undoubtedly were. Combative as Mike was by nature, he would have hardly been the equal of one of them in a "shindy" which could be easily started and which it seemed he had set out to provoke.

"I observe," said Biggs, "that you have a brass chain dangling from yer coat pocket in front; does the same signify that there's a watch anchored at t'other end?"

Mike answered the question by flipping out his time piece and displaying it.

"The best Waterbury chronometer made,--price a dollar and a half."

"I should like to borrow the same for my pal and me."

"I'm thinking ye would like to borrow a good many things ye can't; I carry a little loose change in me pocket. Mebbe you'd like to borrow the same?"

"Ye guessed it the fust time; while yer turning over that turnip and chain yer may as well h'ist out the few pennies in yer garments."

The tramp took a step toward the lad, his companion grinningly watching proceedings.

The words and manner of Biggs left no doubt that he meant to rob Mike of his watch and money,--though neither was of much value. Was the Irish youth angry? I cannot do justice to his feelings, so let us try to imagine his state of mind.

Prudence demanded that he should try to conciliate the scamps, or, failing in that, to dash off at the top of his speed, but two reasons checked this course. You know he was not formed for running, and either one of the tramps could have overtaken him by half trying. The other reason was that Mike never ran from any foe. He would die fighting before showing the white feather. Convinced that nothing could avert a fierce struggle, he instantly prepared for it. He would have felt better had his shillaleh been in his grasp, but it has already been shown that his only weapons were those which nature had furnished and no youth of his years could have known better how to use them.

I should be distressed if I had to describe Mike's fight with two full grown men, for it was impossible that he should not get much the worst of it. While it may be a relief to picture one in his situation as baffling, if not defeating two burly despoilers, yet to do so would be contrary to truth.

The youth recoiled a single step, closed his fists and assumed an attitude of defense. Saxy Hutt, still stood grinningly listening and watching. As he viewed the situation it was preposterous to think his pal would need his help. None the less, he would be quick to give it should the call be made.

"Come on as soon as ye please, and I'd as lief take both as one; don't kaap me waiting."

"Hear him talk," said Biggs, still advancing, though more slowly than before; "he makes believe he ain't scared half to death."

"Ye'll be thankful in less nor a minute if ye're allowed to escape wid yer life."

This sounded like the wildest kind of boasting, but it was justified. Since Mike Murphy faced the two tramps, he saw what was behind them, which they did not. In a direct line with Biggs, slightly to the left of Saxy, and no more than a dozen paces to the rear, stood Dr. Spellman with leveled revolver and face red with anger.

"Move a little to one side, Mike, so I shall run no risk of hitting you," called the physician; "just now you're right in line with that ruffian."

Buzby Biggs leaped fully a foot in air, and with a gasp flashed his head about and stared at the point whence the dreadful voice had come. Then his spiky hair seemed to rise on end and lift his dilapidated hat to a height of several inches.

"Shall I wing him, Mike?" asked the doctor, with the weapon still at a level.

"Folly yer own plisure in that regard; I don't begrudge ye the enjoyment, as Mrs. O'Flaherty remarked whin she refoosed to fire at the bear that was chasing her husband."

At that instant, Biggs emitted a howl, and with what was left of his fragmentary hat fluttering to the ground, dashed in a headlong panic through the wood and undergrowth toward the lake.

The sharp crack of the Smith and Wesson rang out, and the fugitive made another bound in air, as if he felt the sting of the bullet, and dived out of sight.

"I missed him on purpose," remarked the doctor; "he isn't worth a cartridge, but I'm undecided about you."

As he spoke he shifted his aim to Saxy Hutt, who was a-tremble with fear.

"I--I--I've got an engagement," he stuttered, beginning to shamble in the direction taken by his companion; "I'll bid you good day."

"Hold on!" sharply commanded his master; "wait till I decide what's best to do with you."

"Why--why, boss, I haven't done anything."

And too weak to stand in his excessive terror, Saxy sagged back and sat down heavily on the log. Mike could not help pitying him.

"It was t'other spalpeen that meant to rob me, docther."

"One is as bad as the other; this one would have helped had it been necessary."

"Oh, doctor," protested the aggrieved Saxy, "how can yer think such a crool thing of a gentleman like me? I was just going to stop Buzby when yer spoke up."

The physician lowered his weapon with a laugh.

"Off with you! I hope never to see the face of yourself or Buzby again. You may drink your coffee if you wish before you leave."

But the tramp had lost his thirst as well as his appetite for the time. He came unsteadily to his feet, and began moving gingerly over the trail of his companion.

"I say, doctor," he said, pausing a few steps away, "if you feel like firing off that little thing in your hand, please p'int t'other way."

"I shall take your request into consideration, but don't advise you to bank on my granting it."

Saxy increased his pace until it equalled that of him who had gone before. Dr. Spellman extended his hand to Mike.

"I hope that is the last of them. I supposed they left the neighborhood, but they will do so now."

"Why do ye think that, docther?"

"Heretofore we had nothing positive to bring against them. Now I can bear witness that they tried to rob you. They know it and have no wish to go to jail while the weather is so pleasant outside. Let's sit down on this log for a wee bit, before going to my house. Tell me how you came to be in this place."

"I was on me way from Uncle Elk's cabin whin the smoke of this camp caused me to turn aside, wid the result that I'd been mixed up in the biggest shindy of me life if ye hadn't took it in yer head to spoil the picnic."

"It was mighty lucky for you that I did so, Mike. Did Uncle Elk send any message to me?"

"He did that," gravely replied Mike, who thereupon told his friend of the assertion of the hermit that he and the physician must not meet.

"I had begun to suspect some such feeling on his part, though not to the degree he shows. I have called there twice, the last time with my wife, who insists that the old man was in his cabin at the time and purposely kept out of our sight. He can depend upon it that I shall not put myself in his way, though I am wholly at a loss to understand his enmity. But we may as well go to the house, Mike."

As he spoke, the doctor rose to his feet, and the two began threading their way through the wood to the point where Mike had left his canoe.

CHAPTER III -- A Strange Occurrence

It was not far to the edge of the lake, and, as you will remember, there was abundant undergrowth, but the fleeing tramps had left a trail of broken and twisted branches which it would have been easy to follow, even with greater distance and more uncertainty of direction. Mike kept a few paces in the lead, and soon caught the shimmer of water, but when he glanced around saw nothing of his craft. He stood perplexed when Dr. Spellman stepped beside him.

"Where's the canoe?" asked the man.

"That's what meself would like to know."

"Is this the spot where you stepped ashore?"

Mike moved farther until his shoes touched the water. He recognized the projecting limb of a beech which had attracted his notice when he came ashore.

"There's no mistake about the same. Now, dochter, that boat can't hev a habit of sneakin' off whin ye're not watching-- what's the matter?"

His companion touched his arm and pointed over the water.

"There's the answer to your question."

"It beats me, as the drum said to the drum stick."

Some two hundred yards out on Gosling Lake was the canoe heading toward the western end of the sheet of water. In it were seated Biggs and Hutt, the two rascally tramps, their appearance suggesting that they were owners of the graceful craft in which they were making a pleasure excursion. Their backs were toward the two on shore, but Hutt who sat near the stern turned his head. Observing the indignant couple, he waved his hand in salutation and grinned so broadly that the gleam of his yellow teeth showed.

Neither Mike nor the doctor spoke for a moment or two. Then the youth solemnly extended his hand.

"Dochter, would ye mind shaking?"

"Certainly not, but what is the idea, Mike?"

"Cause I can't think of anything ilse to do, as the p'liceman said whin he prosaaded to break his club over the head of ivery one in sight."

"Were there ever two such pests? The next time I get a chance I won't kill them, but I'll give each something he'll remember."

"Where's your boat?"

"At the foot of the path leading to the house; the distance is so short that I did not use it, but strolled to this point."

"Let's jump into the same and make fur these spalpeens."

The physician was so angry that he did not hesitate. They hurried through the wood to the spot where the other craft lay as it had been left by its owner. It has been shown that from this spot the house was not visible and therefore the wife and daughter knew nothing of what was afoot, which perhaps was best. The doctor, being the most skilful with the paddle, took up the implement, and headed after the other craft, which was making good progress toward the farther end of the lake.

Each of our friends had asked himself the question as to what Biggs and Hutt meant by their act and what they were likely to do. It could not be seen that the vagrants had anything to gain, for they must soon abandon the canoe and continue their flight on foot. They knew the medical man carried a deadly weapon, and did not seem backward in using it, because of which they certainly could not desire another meeting with him.

Moreover, a third canoe was involved. It seemed to have disappeared for the time, but must be somewhere near the western end of the lake, which being the case, the tramps were likely to find themselves between two fires, though it was not to be supposed that they had any cause to fear the unarmed Boy Scouts in the invisible boat.

The flight and pursuit had lasted only a few minutes when an unpleasant truth impressed itself upon Mike and the doctor:--Buzby Biggs, who swung the other paddle, did it so deftly that his boat steadily drew away from the pursuer despite the utmost efforts of Dr. Spellman. In a straightaway race the tramps were sure to win, but the course had bounds, and in the end they must be pocketed, a fact so apparent that they themselves saw it from the first. They had the choice of keeping directly on until they reached the western margin so far in advance of their pursuers that they

need give them no thought, or they could take the shorter course to the northern shore, opposite the bungalow. It looked as if they had decided upon the former plan, which would indicate that they knew or suspected nothing of the third canoe, nestling somewhere under the overhanging limbs along shore.

Such undoubtedly would have been the action of the tramps, had not it changed so abruptly and inexplicably that the astounded doctor ceased paddling and stared without speaking a word.

Since our friends sat with their faces toward the backs of Biggs and Hutt, they saw their every movement no matter how slight. Hutt was idle, with a grimy hand resting on either gunwale of the canoe. Now and then he glanced back and when he saw the pursuers steadily falling behind, had the impudence to reach out one hand and beckon them to move faster. The other, knowing he could not be overtaken, showed little interest in those who were striving to come up with him. Something far in advance seemed to hold his attention.

Such was the situation, and the forward boat was within a furlong of the western shore when Biggs suddenly held his paddle suspended as if he had caught sight of some object that startled him. The next moment he flung aside the implement, uttered a cry of terror and dived overboard. Hutt was not five seconds behind him. Both stayed so long under water that our friends suspected they were drowned, but the frowsy heads, one without a hat, bobbed up at some distance from the boat, and they were seen swimming furiously toward the northern bank, which was not far off.

They had not taken a dozen strokes when they dived again and went as far under the surface as before. Thus diving, swimming and working desperately, they quickly reached land, scrambled out, plunged in among the trees and vanished as if Death himself were nipping at their heels. Never was greater panic shown.

Doctor Spellman sat mute and motionless until the tramps had disappeared. Then he turned his head:

"What do you make of that, Mike?"

The occasion was one of the rare ones when the Irish youth had nothing to say. He sighed and shook his head; he couldn't do justice to the theme.

"Something scared both of them out of their wits. It couldn't have been on the shore ahead, for that's too far off, nor on their right, for they tried with might and main to reach land there."

"Could it have been at the rear?" ventured Mike.

"That is toward us. *We* couldn't have caused them such alarm."

"Mr. Hutt may have looked around and caught the frown on me brow; I'm towld I have a tumble expression when I'm mad."

"It must be true to cause them thus to leap into clear spring water, knowing it meant the coldest kind of a bath. No, Mike," added the doctor gravely, "they saw something *in the water* that threw them into fits. What could it be?"

This was the only theory possible and yet it simply deepened the mystery. What could there be in the clear cool waters of Gosling Lake, besides the different species of ordinary fishes that are taken with hook and line? To Mike and the doctor the puzzle was more inexplicable than before.

One conclusion, however, was warranted by what had occurred: if the tramps had seen something which terrified them beyond imagination, what was to prevent the man and youth from gaining a sight of the same frightful object whatever it might be?

Now, while it cannot be denied that Dr. Spellman and Mike Murphy were more than ordinarily brave, yet they felt a shrinking in stealing up to the spot where the tramps had dived from the other canoe. It was their ignorance of the character of the peril which affected them more than any tangible danger could have done.

The doctor dipped his paddle in the water and gently swayed it. The boat moved slowly toward the other canoe, drifting like an eggshell over the placid surface. In leaping overboard, Buzby Biggs had flung the paddle from him and it was seen floating a couple of rods distant from the boat. Very slowly the doctor advanced until Mike leaned over and lifted the implement into their craft. Then the man sheered his boat beside the other and Mike, tossing the paddle into it, held it steady, and sat down.

"Now, dochter, we can manage it, I'm thinking," remarked the youth, looking up into the face that it seemed to him had gone a little pale.

"Can you find anything to explain the fright of the tramps, Mike?"

Both peered into the clear water, whose depth was too great for them to see the bottom, but nothing rewarded their piercing scrutiny. And right here a fact must be admitted which was not discreditable to either of them. The breath of air that sighed over the lake had swept the empty canoe fully a hundred feet from whence it was at the moment Buzby Biggs dived overboard. It followed, therefore, that when Mike and the doctor peered into the pellucid depths, it was

not at the spot where the tramps had descried something which unnerved them. Moreover, each of the pursuers knew such was the case, but did not try to correct it nor did either drop a hint of his knowledge until some time afterward.

It may be added that had the doctor and his young friend paddled a little farther in the proper direction they would have solved the mystery and been overcome probably by the same panic that had driven the tramps overboard.

"Well," said the physician, "there is nothing to be gained by staying here. Let's go to my home, have supper and spend the evening. I know my wife will be glad to have you, and I suspect that Stubby feels a little that way herself."

"I hope so," replied Mike feelingly; "I may as well confess that my main purpose in going thither is to meet Sunbeam, as the callers used to say regarding mesilf whin they purtended they wanted to see dad and mither."

Paddling at a leisurely rate, they soon drew the two canoes up the bank and stepped out. Mike paused and looked back.

"Can there be any fear of thim spalpeens poking round here while we're not in sight?"

"It seems unlikely; since they tried that sort of thing they have been scared so fearfully that I think they will avoid us."

"Docther, what could it have been that made them jump out of their boat and swim and dive like two crazy persons?"

"I should give a good deal to be able to answer that question, but I have no more idea than you. Let us try to content ourselves with the belief that like the cause of Uncle Elk's resentment toward me, it will be made clear sooner or later."

Before leaving the landing, as it may be called, they scanned the surface of the lake. The doctor generally carried his binoculars and he traced the margin clear around from their right back again to their left. There stood the bungalow with the flag idly drooping from the staff and several of the Scouts were seen lounging at the front. In no other direction was a sign of life discerned.

"I cannot discover the other canoe," remarked Dr. Spellman, passing the glass to Mike at his side. "If the boys had returned, the boat would be in sight by the bungalow; whoever used it, they are still absent."

"They have landed and gone into the woods to look after birds or to trace out other kinds of trees. They will be back before the set of sun."

"No doubt, unless," added the doctor half in earnest, "they should receive the same shock that struck Biggs and Hutt."

"In that evint, they will be home still earlier."

"Come on; I'm beginning to feel hungry."

"And I'm wid ye there."

CHAPTER IV -- Curious Sights And Doings

One of the incidents which made that night memorable in the life of Mike Murphy was that it brought him a compliment, the equal of which he had never received before, nor in the years to come can any similar words so touch his heart.

Ruth Spellman, or "Sunbeam" as she was coming to be called, was so interested in his fairy stories that when the time arrived for her to go to bed she was restless and the mother feared it was something in the nature of a fever that disturbed her. The father, however, assured his wife that it was due to mental excitement and would soon pass away. When Ruth had said her prayers, kissed each good night and lain down on her cot, with the thin blanket spread over her, she still fidgeted. From the next room the three heard her tossing as children will do when sleep fails to soothe them.

Suddenly they heard her pleading voice:

"Cousin Mike, won't you please sing to me?"

"I'll do my best," he replied with a laugh, as he walked back and sat on a camp stool beside her couch, where only a small portion of the light from the front apartment reached them. He began the baby song with which his mother had often lulled him to slumber in infancy. Its exquisite sweetness was beyond description, the parents sat motionless and listening as much enthralled as the little one for whose benefit it was sung. They were almost holding their breath when Sunbeam murmured during one of the slight pauses:

"I think one of the angels you told me about, mamma, is singing."

"I don't wonder," whispered the father; "I never heard anything like it."

Five minutes later the child had drifted away into dreamland and Mike came forward and joined the two on the outside. They sat silent for a few minutes. Neither referred to the wonderful treat they had enjoyed, for it would have grated when compared with the simple words of Sunbeam. Nor did Mike speak of it, but, as has been said, his heart had been touched as never before.

It was comparatively early in the evening when he bade his friends good-by, having declined their invitation to stay over night, and walked down to the water, accompanied by the doctor.

"When you next see Uncle Elk, assure him that his wishes shall be respected by me; I shall not call at the bungalow in the evening unless you signal for me, nor do I intend to go near his home."

Mike promised to carry out the doctor's wishes and turned the prow of the boat south, which was the most direct course home. He glanced back, and observing that his friend had gone up the path, made a change of direction, his action showing that he did not wish the doctor to notice it.

The truth was that Mike was obsessed with what he had witnessed that afternoon. There must be an explanation of the fright of the two tramps, but he could not frame any theory that would stand for a moment.

"And I'll never be able to do it," he muttered, "till I learn a good deal more than I know now, which isn't anything at all, as Ted Ryan replied when his teacher asked him what he knew about his lesson."

Now, as that which terrified Biggs and Hutt seemed to have appeared in the lake near them, it would seem that there was the spot to look for the solution of the mystery, and yet it was impossible to hit upon the precise place. He and the doctor had come pretty near it some hours before, without any result.

"We agreed that what the spalpeens saw was *in the water*, but that couldn't be. It must have been on the land and that's where I'll hunt for the same."

There were just as strong objections to this supposition, the chief of which was that the vagrants when they went overboard swam with frantic energy toward the shore; in other words, they made for the point where the terror was awaiting them. Moreover, their actions in diving repeatedly and glancing back proved that what they dreaded was behind them.

It was useless to theorize, for the more Mike tried it, the more puzzled he became. He decided to paddle slowly and silently to the point where the tramps had landed and make his investigations there. Using his eyes and ears to the utmost, he ought to learn something, provided always there was something to learn. He certainly displayed "nerve," but no more than he had done on other occasions.

It has been shown that the youth was only an amateur in handling a canoe, but by slowly and carefully moving the paddle, he caused scarcely a ripple and was sure no one could detect him through the sense of hearing. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and studded with stars whose brilliancy enabled him dimly to see objects at a distance of a

hundred yards or so. From the first, he kept so close inshore that the undergrowth and wood were in sight and served him as a guide. Even an expert in the circumstances would not have been able to decide precisely where Biggs and Hutt left the water, but Mike was sure he was not far from the spot when he ceased plying his paddle.

He decided not to land, at least not for the present, but to halt where the bow of the canoe rested directly under the dipping branches. Thus, should it become necessary, he could slip out of sight under the leafy screen, or could retreat if it should prove advisable to do so.

An overhanging bough rested on the prow of the craft and held it motionless, a very slight force serving as an anchor in the case of so delicately poised a craft. First, with his heart beating a little faster than usual, he peered round in the gloom that shut him in on every hand. To the southward he saw the lights of the bungalow twinkling like stars, one of the windows throwing the rays well out on the lake, but in no other direction could be noted a sign of life.

"Every one of the byes, not forgetting Scout Master Hall, are there, for the ones that wint out in t'other canoe must have gone back while I was at the docther's. They know where I wint so they won't be worrying about me, which they wouldn't be likely to do anyhow," he added with a touch of his natural whimsicality, "if they didn't know anything about me at all, at all."

No sound reached the intently listening ears, except that deep almost inaudible murmur which is never absent in a stretch of forest or near the ocean.

"I'll try it awhile, but if Mike Murphy knows his own heart, which he thinks he do, he isn't going to sit in this steamboat many more--whisht!"

From a point not fifty feet distant shot out a canoe, like an arrow driven from a bow. In it a single man was seated and vigorously swinging the paddle. He had emerged from under the overhanging limbs and sped southward, absolutely without any noise at all. Mike was so startled by the apparition that he stared breathless for a minute, nor did his wits fully come back until the craft and its occupant were swallowed up in the gloom.

Not only was the unexpected appearance of the canoe startling, but the recognition of the Master of Woodcraft who drove the boat forward like a skimming swallow, added to the amazement of Mike. Beyond a doubt he was Uncle Elk. He was so near when he first darted in view that there was no possibility of mistake.

"I wonder ef I'm Mike Murphy or a big fool or jest both," muttered the youth, when able to pull himself together. "I lift Uncle Elk in his cabin studying his primer or spelling book, and now he is in *this* part of the world."

After a moment's reflection the youth added:

"Which the same may be said of mesilf, so that don't count. It looked to me as if he was heading for the bungalow and an interisting question comes before me: being that I obsarved him, did he return the compliment and obsarve *me*?"

After turning the question over in his mind, Mike said to himself:

"If I kaap at this much longer I'll go clean daft, as Jimmy Hagan did whin he tried to whirl his two hands in opposite directions at the same time. Can it be I'm mistook?"

He sniffed the air several times and was convinced that he caught the odor of a burning cigar which could not be far off, else the nose would not have detected it when no wind was blowing.

"Uncle Elk doesn't smoke, leaseways I niver obsarved him doing the same, and if he did he ain't here, so the perfume can't be projuiced by him."

He now ventured to draw his canoe nearer shore, by gently pulling the overhanging bough. It was blankly dark all around him, the foliage shutting out the star gleam, so that he had literally to feel his way. Suddenly there was a slight jar, proving that the bow had touched shore. He paused to consider whether anything was likely to be gained by leaving the craft. While it seemed almost certain that Uncle Elk had come to this lonely spot to meet some one, there was no obvious way by which Mike could assure himself on the point.

He still noted the aroma of the cigar, which he judged to be a pretty fair specimen of the weed, though he was so accustomed to the pipe of his father that he was a poor judge.

"The spalpeen can't be fur off," concluded Mike still gently sniffing, "and begorra! he isn't!"

The exclamation was caused by the sound of a voice, not in speaking, but in chortling, as if pleased over something. The sound was so near that had there been the least illumination Mike must have seen the one from whom it came. Then a second person--as the peculiar sound proved--joined in the ebullition, the two so near together that otherwise the listener would have thought the laugh came from one.

"It's them tramps!" was the thought of the startled Mike; "though one of 'em wouldn't be smoking a cigar unless he stole it or Uncle Elk had give the same to him."

It was unpleasant thus to associate the hermit with the pestiferous vagrants with whom the youth had had much trouble already. He waited for the strangers to speak, but they did not seem to care to do so. Once he thought he saw the glowing end of the cigar, but was probably mistaken, for a second look failed to reveal it, nor did either of the men laugh again.

With a feeling akin to disgust, Mike stealthily worked his canoe from under the overhanging boughs and set out on his return to the clubhouse.

CHAPTER V -- Concerning Certain American Trees

As Mike Murphy approached the landing he saw the second canoe drawn up the beach, which was proof that his friends had returned from their excursion to the western end of the lake. The bright light from the main room of the clubhouse showed that the Boy Scouts were gathered there and he decided to go in.

The night was so mild that no fire burned on the broad hearth, but the suspended lamp filled the apartment with a soft illumination which served almost as well as midday. Jack Crandall, the hero of the broken leg, sat in his invalid chair in front of the fireplace and at his side was Uncle Elk. Jack had been listening to the reports of his young friends who had been investigating trees, but were mostly interested in bird lore. The comments which Jack made on the written notes as read to him showed that he was the best informed of any of the Scouts concerning birds. He cleared up many doubts and answered questions so intelligently that the venerable Instructor in Woodcraft complimented him.

Mike came through the open door so silently that none of the boys noticed him. No chair being available, he sat down on the floor, as the majority had already done. He was near the entrance and aimed to avoid observation, but as Uncle Elk from his position faced him it was probable he noticed the lad, as did Jack Crandall, who also fronted that direction.

The reports and the comments thereon having been finished, the old man was speaking:

"To make satisfactory progress in acquiring knowledge," said he in his low, musical voice to which all listened with alert interest, "you must do so systematically. In our tramp through the woods the other day we picked up a good deal of information, but it was haphazard. We talked of trees as we came across them, but it was fragmentary and ten times as much was left unlearned as was learned. I am glad to know that your Scout Master has followed the right course in directing your study of our native trees, not alone in Maine but as far north as Canada, westward to the Rockies and down to the northern boundaries of the Southern States. The subject is too vast for us to cover in one evening or in a dozen evenings. Let us rather summarize. We shall put our wits together and see how many families we can name, without giving the different species under each. The first is the magnolia family, of which there are four varieties, while under the custard apple there is but one, the papaw. Now let me hear from you."

Nearly an hour was spent during which scarcely a boy in the room kept silent. The pleased old man nodded his head and finally raised his hand for quiet.

"I believe you have mentioned about all. Now, while Isaac jots down the names at the table, let's try to evolve something like order therefrom. Are you ready?"

Isaac Rothstein nodded and held his lead pencil over the paper. Here is the list upon which all finally agreed:

Magnolia, custard-apple, linden, rue, ailantus, holly, staff-tree, buckthorn, rose, pea, sumach, maple, horse chestnut, heath, honeysuckle, dogwood, ginseng, witch hazel, ebony, olive, begonia, laurel, mulberry, elm, plane-tree, walnut, birch, beech, willow, pine, yew and oak.

"None of you has seen all of these," continued the old man, "but I hope you will have the opportunity of studying their peculiarities sometime. To illustrate what a rich treat is before you, we shall give a few minutes' attention to the oak family, concerning which you may think I had considerable to say the other day. Let me show you how much was left unsaid.

"Most persons think of the oak as a slow grower. This is true of two or three species but not of the family. The majority need a hundred years to attain perfection and they rarely bear acorns until twenty years old. The acorn requires no protection in order to mature, and those that are not eaten by wild animals or trodden under foot do their work well. The *quercus* is one of the longest-lived trees."

"What is the greatest age that they attain, Uncle Elk?" asked Scout Master Hall, one of the most interested in the audience.

"It is impossible to say, but there is little doubt that many of them flourish for a thousand years. There are vigorous oaks to-day in England that were old in the time of William the Conqueror. The famous White Oak of Hartford, in which Captain Wadsworth hid the charter two hundred and twenty-five years ago, was several centuries old at the time, and it was not until the summer of 1856 that a windstorm brought it to the ground. While it is one of the most valuable of the family, the white oak is in danger of extinction, because of its value as timber and on account of the sweetness of its nuts, which makes it a favorite with wild creatures that will not eat the bitter acorns of other oaks. You know the white oak is so called because of the color of its bark, which however is generally an ashen gray. Can any of you tell me the name of the oak that is fifty feet or slightly more in height, grows in Texas, has a fine-checked bark nearly the color of the white oak, with an awkward form and has shoots along the whole length of its branches, with the leaves coarse and rough on both sides? I shall not wait for you to guess the name, which is the post oak.

"The bur oak grows to a height of a hundred and fifty feet and ranges south to Texas and from the foothills of the Rockies to the Atlantic coast, being most abundant in Kansas and Nebraska. One of J. Fenimore Cooper's most pleasing tales is 'The Oak Openings,' a name applied to the scattered forests of Minnesota. Now, you may know that the cork of commerce is the outer bark of an oak growing in southern Europe. The bur oak seems to be striving to produce the same thing and probably will succeed after awhile.

"The chestnut oak sometimes reaches a height of a hundred feet, but the trunk divides into large limbs a few feet above the ground. It is found in this State, westward through Ohio and as far south as Kentucky. It has many features in common with the yellow oak, whose range is somewhat different.

"The dwarf chinkapin, or scrub chestnut oak, is a shrub rarely more than a dozen feet high and grows on sandy or rocky soil. We do not meet with it north of Massachusetts. In Missouri and Kansas, it acquires dimensions more like a tree.

"The swamp white oak grows to a height of more than a hundred feet, and is fond of the borders of swamps. The top is narrow and round and the branches pendulous. You know about the red oak, which is a rapid grower and ranges from this State to Georgia and westward to Kansas, but attains its finest development north of the Ohio.

"To continue, I should add the names of the scarlet oak, the black and the yellow oak, the pin oak, the swamp Spanish, the bear, the scrub, the black jack, the barren, the shingle, the laurel, and the willow.

"You have noticed that I have done little more than mention the names of the different species. You have learned very little, for it is necessary that you should know the range of each, the height to which it grows, the characteristics of the bark, the wood, the leaves, the flowers and acorns. In conclusion, I shall say that the willow oak is one of the most interesting of trees. Its leaves resemble those of the willow, as do the straight slender shoots. It grows on the wet borders of swamps, but keeps away from the sea coast. Its acorns are very small, with a kernel so bitter that you would never bite into it a second time.

"My object this evening," said Uncle Elk, "has been rather to awaken a desire on your part to study systematically our common American trees than to give you actual information. Let us dismiss the subject, for in dropping a matter of that kind we should follow the rule in eating, which is to stop before the appetite is cloyed. Suppose to-morrow night we have a little talk about American birds."

There was general nodding of heads and the old man rose to his feet. He was so pleased with his listeners that he said:

"If we get through that subject in time, I'll promise to tell you a story, provided you would like to hear one from me."

He could be seen smiling behind his abundant gray beard.

"Boys will be boys always. Nothing suits them better than a story. So I shall bid you good night for the present, hoping nothing will interfere with our meeting again to-morrow evening."

"The better plan," suggested Scout Master Hall, "is for you to take supper with us, for I foresee that there will be much for you to tell us. We don't want to miss the talk about birds, and I am as eager as the boys to hear your story, which I know will be a good one."

All crowded around the Instructor in Woodcraft, shaking hands, thanking him and urging him so warmly to accept the invitation that he could not refuse. The last one with whom he clasped hands was Jack Crandall, who straightened up in his easy chair and declared he was receiving more benefit than a dozen doctors could impart.

Mike Murphy had risen to his feet at the close of the old man's talk, but kept his place by the door until Uncle Elk came opposite. A nod of the hermit's head told Mike that he wished to speak with him alone. The signal was observed by several who stayed behind as the two passed out and down the porch to the beach. Uncle Elk did not speak until they were beyond the hearing of the others. Then he halted and looked into the face of the youth.

"Well, Michael, what word do you bring me?"

"I told the docther what ye said and he is agreeable. He will not come to the bungalow in the evening unless we signal for him, which the same doesn't seem to be likely."

"That is what I wanted to know, and I thank you for your service. Well, my son, did you learn anything to-night?"

The youth was not sure of the scope of the question.

"If ye ask whither I larned anything from your words to the byes, I may say I picked up a good deal more than I iver knowed, which wasn't much."

"I refer to what you did after leaving the home of Dr. Spellman and paddling to the upper side of the lake."

"Did ye obsarve me?" asked the astonished Mike.

"How could I help it, when I passed within a few feet of you in my own boat?"

"I didn't notice it when I came ashore."

"I landed a little way up the beach, where my boat now awaits me. You haven't told me whether you learned anything through your scouting."

"I saan no one but yersilf, but I heerd them two tramps laughing over something and I smelled the cigar that one of them was smoking."

"No, you didn't."

"I don't catch yer maaning, Uncle Elk," said the mystified Mike; "I sartinly sniffed a cigar and heerd two men chuckling to thimsilves."

"I haven't denied that, but they were not the tramps you have in mind."

"How can ye know the same for sartin?"

"I went to that spot on the shore to meet those men; they are old acquaintances and the name of neither is Biggs nor Hutt."

"Who are they?"

"It would be useless to name them, since they are strangers to you."

"Why didn't ye stay and inthrodooce me?"

"I may do so one of these days, but I gave you a chance to find out things for yourself."

"And mighty little I larned," remarked Mike disgustedly; "if ye don't mind, would ye tell me what the mischief scared thim two tramps to the extint that they jumped out of the canoe they had stole and took a bath in Gosling Lake?"

Uncle Elk was distinctly heard to chuckle.

"I had a talk with my two friends regarding the incident and I don't wonder that they laughed even after I had left them."

"I faal like laughing mesilf, Uncle Elk, and if ye'll give me the same cause I'll laugh so hard that it will wake the doother's daughter on t'other side of the lake."

"Have patience, Michael, and don't think I am trifling with you, but I am under a promise not to reveal this little secret until I have permission. Good night."

Mike stood gazing after the old man until he passed from sight in the obscurity and he heard him launching his canoe. Then the youth strolled thoughtfully back.

"I'm getting mixed," he muttered with a sigh, "as Jerry Lanagan said when they run him through a thrashing machine."

CHAPTER VI -- A Patriot Martyr

The next day brought a marked coolness in the temperature. In preparation for the evening's instructive entertainment, nearly all the boys spent the time in roaming through the woods, taking notes and brushing up their knowledge of birds, which were met with only in moderate numbers.

Mike Murphy told Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes of his singular experience the night before, and asked their help in solving the puzzle.

"I wish we could aid you," replied Alvin, "but it is as much a mystery to us as it is to you. Gordon Calhoun went with us in the other canoe to the western end of the lake, where we found so romantic a spot that we ate our lunch there and did not return until after dark."

"And ye didn't observe anything of thim tramps and their dive overboard?"

"We must have been deep in the woods when that took place and, of course, we noticed nothing strange when we paddled back."

"I've tried to pump Uncle Elk, but the valves won't work. I'm going to kaap at it till I larn the truth or break a trace."

"Count us in to give all the help we can," Alvin assured him.

That evening when the Boy Scouts gathered in the large room of the bungalow and disposed themselves in their free and easy fashion, a moderate fire was burning on the hearth and all were on the tiptoe of expectancy.

"My friends," said Uncle Elk, "I am going to ask your permission to reverse the order which I laid out last night. Most of us old persons are apt to forget that the knowledge which interests us may not be equally interesting to everyone else. Although I cut short my talk about American trees, it was still dry in some respects. Now if I should start in concerning birds you would by and by become weary. Oh, you needn't shake your heads. I don't forget when I was a boy myself. So I have decided to say nothing about our little brothers of the air until to-morrow night, when we shall consider nothing else. The time now at my disposal is to be given to the story I have in mind. If any one has an objection to make let him do so now or forever after hold his peace."

He looked around in the bright faces as if he really expected a protest instead of a general series of smiles. Then with the prefatory remark that the narrative which he was about to give was true in every respect, he spoke as follows:

"The cause of American independence never looked more gloomy than in the summer and autumn of 1776. Washington with his famishing army was in the city of New York, preparing for the attack that he knew would soon be made by the British fleet and land forces. The American fortifications extended from the ferry station of Brooklyn and Gowanus Bay to Wallabout Bay (now Brooklyn Navy Yard), less than a mile and a half in length. Generals Sullivan and Stirling were in command, with five thousand miserably equipped troops. Unfortunately that fine officer General Greene was ill with a violent fever, and the boastful Sullivan assumed charge, but Washington soon replaced him with General Putnam. By a fatal oversight, one of the three roads over any of which the enemy could advance if it was unguarded, was left invitingly open. Through this the British soldiers rushed and drove the Americans pell-mell out of their intrenchments.

"Had Howe flung off his natural indolence, he would have captured the whole patriot army, including Washington and his officers, but certain of soon doing so, he wished to save the lives of his men. The Americans had several hundred killed and lost a thousand prisoners, among the latter being Generals Sullivan and Stirling. The leading officers were soon exchanged, but the privates suffered horribly in the hideous Sugar House and rotten hulks at Wallabout.

"A strange providence saved the Continental army. The fleet was checked by adverse winds, and a dense fog settled over Brooklyn, but did not touch the other shore. Thus hidden from sight, the Americans stole back to New York, unseen by the enemy.

"But, as I said, the outlook could not have been more gloomy. The situation was critical to the last degree. The army was so demoralized that little discipline remained; whole companies deserted; the few recruits who came into camp met double their number going out; those who stayed clamored for their pay, and the money chest was as empty as an egg shell. Winter was coming on, and more than once it looked as if the army would dwindle to nothing. The fourteen thousand troops declared fit for duty were strung the whole length of Manhattan Island.

"The crisis was imminent and Washington called a council of war September 7th, to decide whether New York should be abandoned or defended. The commander, seeing the dread necessity coming, had asked Congress if he should not burn the city rather than allow it to serve as the winter quarters of the invaders. He was ordered to use special care to prevent any damage being done, because that body was sure the place would soon be recovered. The first council of war decided to stay and defend New York.

"A few days later, however, another council agreed that the only course possible was to leave the city and take position on Harlem Heights. The public stores were to be sent to Dobbs Ferry and the sick carried across to New Jersey. The main army would march northward and General Putnam would stay in New York with four thousand troops. If he found his position untenable, he was to follow Washington.

"At this council the commander-in-chief said:

"I know absolutely nothing of the intentions of the enemy. Two ships-of-war have gone up the East River and others will follow. Their troops are active everywhere, but I cannot even guess what they mean to do. Until I have knowledge on that point, I am helpless."

"In his distressful dilemma, Washington wrote to General Heath at Kingsbridge, entreating him and General Clinton to aid in securing the indispensable information. He told them to spare no expense or pains, adding that not since the beginning of the war had he been so uneasy.

"Shortly after, Washington called his officers together again. He told them he was still without the least knowledge of the plans of the enemy. Only one recourse remained to him:--that was to send a spy into the British lines in quest of the information. Such a man must be clear-headed, cool, tactful, a good draughtsman and of undaunted courage. He appealed to Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton (soon to die the death of a patriot) to find him the person. Knowlton laid the request before a conference of his officers, and asked whether any one was willing to volunteer.

"A spy is very different from a scout and in the eyes of most people is the most contemptible of creatures, for the essence of his duty is treachery. To succeed he must play the hypocrite and betray confidence at every turn. In such scorn is a spy held by civilized nations that he is not permitted to die the death of a soldier, but is hanged like the worst of felons.

"The request of Knowlton was succeeded by an indignant hush. The bronzed faces flushed as if under the sting of an insult, and the officers dared not trust themselves to reply. In the midst of the strained silence, a clear voice spoke:

"I will go!"

"Every eye was turned in astonishment on the speaker. He was a young man of athletic figure and handsome face, whose paleness was due to a severe illness from which he was hardly yet recovered. He wore the uniform of a captain, and in the whole army there was not a braver or more beloved officer than he. His words caused a painful shock to his comrades, who, believing a disgraceful death was certain to follow his mad attempt, closed around him and protested in the most forceful language at their command. To all their appeals he smiled and shook his head.

"Gentlemen, it is useless. I am touched by your friendship, but all the arguments you bring forward have already been considered by me. A spy is looked upon with loathing, but the necessity of one's country makes every kind of service honorable. I am not seeking promotion or pecuniary reward. I go to serve our cause, for which I am ready at any time to give my life."

"It was not the words alone, but their emphasis which silenced his comrades. They saw it was useless to appeal to one whose patriotism throbbed and burned through his entire being, and inspired every thought, word and deed.

"And who was the young officer who thus took his life in his hands that he might serve the cause of liberty?"

"He was Captain Nathan Hale, born in Connecticut, in 1755, the sixth child among twelve, of the strictest Puritan parents. His mental and athletic gifts were wonderful. None of his playmates could approach him in running, leaping, swimming, throwing, wrestling and the feats of strength and agility so much admired by all rugged American youths. Many a time he would place a row of empty barrels beside one another and with little effort spring out of one into the other until he had completed the series. Standing beside a fence whose top rail touched his chin, he would rest one hand lightly on it and vault over as easily as a deer. One day, while a student at Yale, in a contest with his friends, he made so prodigious a leap that the bounds were carefully marked and preserved for years, the admiration and despair of all subsequent students.

"But, extraordinary as was Nathan Hale's athletic skill, his mental powers were more brilliant, while his social qualities made him a favorite with all. His simplicity, unflinching good nature and readiness to help others, no matter whom, justified the remark: 'Every man, woman and child who knew him were his friends and among them not one was ever an enemy.'

"He entered Yale College when fifteen years old and was graduated in due course with the highest honors. This fact attests his scholarship and ability. He was easily the most popular student, not only with his classmates, but with the tutors and the faculty of the college and the best families in New Haven.

"Hale left college in 1773 and engaged in teaching. In 1774, he was made preceptor in the Union Grammar School at New London. The building is carefully preserved and is well worth a visit. The institution was of a high order, and its students were not only grounded thoroughly in an English education, but were prepared for college. Hale was its first

preceptor, and his success was pronounced from the beginning. Boys like you have admired and always will admire physical prowess, and there was never one among them all who could approach their instructor in that respect. What a star football player he would have made in these later days! Added to this ability, his mental and social gifts and his profound religious nature explain his marked success among the youth of New London.

"On the 21st of April, 1775, a rider dashed into the little town upon his foaming horse and shouted the news of Lexington and Concord. Pausing only long enough to rest his panting steed and to snatch a bit of food, he thundered away for New York with his momentous tidings.

"Instantly New London flamed with excitement. The bells were rung and a 'town meeting,' the inalienable recourse of all New Englanders, was called at the court house for early candle light. Seemingly the whole town crowded thither. There were burning speeches and Hale's was the most impassioned of all.

"The talking being over, he wrote down his name as a volunteer. Others caught the contagion and elbowed one another in their eagerness to be among the first to enlist. The next morning, when the boys came together at the call of the school bell, their teacher offered up an earnest prayer for the success of the great struggle that had opened, commended his pupils to the care of their Heavenly Father, shook the hands of each lad in turn, uttered a few words of advice, and set out for Cambridge. Some time later, he came back to New London and resumed his duties in the school.

"The young patriot, however, could not remain idle so long as his beloved country needed her sons. He enlisted as a lieutenant in Colonel Charles Webb's regiment, which had been raised by order of the General Assembly of Connecticut for home defense and, if needed, for national protection. In September, the regiment marched to Cambridge and took part in the siege of Boston. Upon the departure of the British for Halifax, the American army went to New York. Some months later, when the term of his company's enlistment expired, Hale offered to give the men his month's pay if they would stay a little while longer.

"The Continentals had been in New York but a short time when Hale became the hero of a daring exploit. A British supply vessel lay in the East River under the protection of a frigate of sixty-four guns. He obtained permission to attempt the capture of the sloop. Selecting a few men as brave as himself, they stepped into a whale boat, rowed silently out late at night and drew up beside the vessel undetected by the watch. Like so many phantoms, the boarders climbed over the side, seized the sentinel, fastened the crew below the hatches, lifted anchor and took the prize into Coenties Slip, without raising the slightest alarm. Day was breaking when Hale, holding the helm, was recognized by his friends, who received him with hurrahs. For once at least his comrades enjoyed a 'square meal.'

"In May, 1776, he became captain of a company of Continental Rangers attached to Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton's regiment, called 'Congress' Own.' The young officer's company was the best drilled and disciplined of all. Little is known of his actions during those eventful days, but it cannot be doubted that he did his duty well. Illness kept him in New York at the time the British invaded Long Island, and still weak and pale, he joined the troops who retreated toward Harlem Heights early in September.

"This brings me back to the day when Lieutenant-Colonel Knowlton walked into the quarters of General Washington and introduced Captain Hale as the officer who had volunteered to serve him as a spy. The commander looked admiringly into the blue eyes of the handsome young athlete and took his hand. The great man was moved and feelingly thanked him for the inestimable service he hoped he would render his country. He saw without questioning that Hale was the ideal actor for so perilous a role. He gave him minute instructions, with a written order to the owners of all American vessels in Long Island Sound to take him to any point on Long Island where he might wish to go.

"Captain Hale left camp the same evening. He took with him Sergeant Stephen Hempstead, a member of his company, who was devoted to the officer, and a servant, Ansel Wright. They had to walk fifty miles to Norwalk before they found a safe place to cross the Sound, because of the British cruisers that were ever moving to and fro. At this place, Hale took off his regimentals and donned a brown cloth suit and a broad-brimmed hat. He assumed the character of a Quaker school teacher, who had wearied of the society of the rebels in New York and had started out to find a situation among more congenial folk.

"The captain instructed his companions to wait at Norwalk until the 20th, upon which day he expected to come back. They were to send a boat for him on that morning. He left with them his uniform, his commission and all other papers that might betray his identity. He crossed the Sound in a sloop and went ashore on the point of Great Neck in Huntingdon Bay, being rowed thither in a yawl. He landed near a place called 'The Cedars,' not far from a tavern kept by a widow named Chichester. She was a spiteful Tory and the inn was a lounging place for those of her neighbors who were of the same mind. In the gray light of early morning Hale walked past without being noticed. A mile beyond, he stopped at the farm house of William Johnson, and obtained breakfast and a bed for several hours' rest. Thence he went directly into the nearest British lines, where he was received without suspicion. He was gone for about two weeks, but what he did, where he went, what adventures befell him and the various means he used to escape detection can never be known. It is certain that he visited all the enemy's encampments near Brooklyn and twice passed their

lines. He made drawings and notes of what he saw and learned; he went from Brooklyn, then only a ferry station, to New York City, which the British captured after his departure, and was equally thorough in every place. The drawings and memoranda, the latter written in Latin, were hidden under the loose inner soles of his shoes.

"Having finished his work in New York, Hale recrossed to Brooklyn and threaded his way through the lines to Huntingdon. By this time he felt so secure in his disguise that he entered without hesitation the tavern of Widow Chichester and sat down among a group of loungers, with whom he talked in his character of a Quaker school teacher. He was happy over the thought that his dangerous work was over and the important knowledge he had gained would soon be in the hands of General Washington.

"Among the strangers in the place was one whose face seemed familiar to Hale, but he could not recall where he had ever met the man. He decided that the resemblance was one of those accidental ones that are occasionally seen, and he gave the matter no further thought. By and by the fellow, who silently studied the beaming young Quaker, slipped out of doors and did not return.

"Ah, why did Hale fail to see the sinister meaning of all this? After escaping so many perils, why did he not continue alert and suspicious until safe within his own lines? Sad to say, not a single misgiving entered his thoughts, and after awhile he bade the company good night and went to his room.

"The next morning at dawn he walked to the bay to meet the boat that was to come for him. With a thrill of delighted expectancy, he saw a craft containing several men approaching. He sprang lightly down the bank and then suddenly stopped in consternation. The boat was filled with British marines under command of an officer!

"He whirled about to flee. Had he discovered his peril sooner and gained a few minutes' start, no pursuer could have overtaken him. But six muskets were leveled, and he was ordered to surrender under threat of instant death. He paused, came down the bank again and stepped into the boat, which was rowed out to the British ship *Halifax*. There he was searched and the fatal papers were found on him.

"The tradition is that the man in the tavern who betrayed Hale was a distant Tory relative who recognized him as soon as he entered the place. Upon leaving the inn, he went to a British naval officer in Huntingdon Bay with the news.

"Captain Hale was taken to New York on the 21st and brought before Lord Howe, who read the documents that had been captured with the prisoner. It was useless to try to conceal the truth and Hale denied nothing. He said he wished no court-martial and was ready to meet his fate.

"Howe was naturally a kind-hearted man, but just then he was greatly irritated over a fire which had destroyed several hundred houses in New York, and which he believed had been started by the Americans to prevent his use of them. He condemned Hale to be hanged at daylight the next morning and placed him in the custody of William Cunningham, Provost Marshal and one of the most brutal wretches that ever lived. It is some consolation to know that this miscreant was hanged himself some years later for scores of confessed murders to which he had been accessory. He thrust Hale into a prison cell, and would not have unpinioned him except for the intercession of a British officer. When the prisoner asked for the presence of a chaplain, it was refused with curses, as was his request for a Bible. The same friendly officer obtained permission for Hale to write letters to his mother, sisters and the girl to whom he was betrothed. The missives were handed to Cunningham to be forwarded. With a leer he read each and then tore them up and flung the fragments on the floor. Hale looked scornfully at him but did not speak.

"The next morning he was led to the gallows, which was the limb of an apple tree, exactly where is not known. In accordance with the military custom of those days, a ladder was placed under the branch. The prisoner climbed two or three rounds, when at a signal the support was turned and he was left dangling in the air. A moment before, he had looked down in the faces of the hushed spectators and uttered his last noble words:

"I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country!"

"No one knows where the martyr was buried. On November 25, 1893, a statue to his memory was unveiled in City Hall Park, in the presence of a vast assemblage and amid impressive ceremonies."

CHAPTER VII -- Concerning Certain New England Birds

"One reason why I deferred our talk about birds," said Uncle Elk, addressing the troop of Boy Scouts who had gathered in the large room of the bungalow the next evening, "is that you might have more opportunity to brighten up your knowledge on the subject. Scout Master Hall tells me that when you learned you were to spend your vacation in southern Maine, you started in to inform yourselves about the birds which are to be found in New England. It is impossible under the circumstances that you should see them all, for the season is not the most favorable and not even a majority are to be found in this section. Instead of dealing out a lot of facts, I am going to ask you do it for me. Secretary Rothstein has given me a list of all the Boy Scouts who are present. There are too many of you for me to identify separately, so I shall call upon you at random. I think," he added with a sly glance at the invalid on his right, "that I shall except Jack, since he seems to know all about our feathered inhabitants and would be simply taking my place.

"Starting with Mr. Hall's Patrol I call upon his leader, Charles A. Chase, to name the first order as it is generally accepted."

The alert young man promptly arose and said:

"It is the raptors, which means robbers."

"What does it include?"

"The falcons proper, hawks, buzzard-hawks, eagles, horned owls, gray owls and day owls."

"Very good. Corporal George Robe will name the second order."

The plump little fellow blushed but did not hesitate.

"Scansores or climbers, which takes in cuckoos and woodpeckers."

"The third order is so numerous that I can hardly expect any one to remember the complete list. Will Kenneth Henke name the third order?"

"Insesores or perchers."

"I will ask Kenneth Mitchell, Robert Snow and Ernest Oberlander to help you in making out a complete catalogue."

While these boys did well, they would not have succeeded but for the aid of Colgate Craig and Robert Rice. Even then Uncle Elk had to supply several names, for the long list included humming birds, goatsuckers, screamers, kingfishers, flycatchers, singers, thrushes, mocking birds, wrens, warblers, tanagers, swallows, shrikes, skylarks, sparrows, orioles, blackbirds, crows, jays and some others less known.

Alvin Landon had an easy task with the rasores or scratchers, which embrace the doves, game birds such as the Canada grouse, spruce partridge, pinnated grouse, ruffed grouse improperly called the partridge, Virginia partridge, quail and Bob White.

Chester Haynes gave the fifth order as grallatores or waders, which with its herons, shore birds, plovers, snipes, sandpipers and others are known to every one.

The sixth and last order as named by Hubert Wood was the natores or swimmers, with the principal of which every American boy is familiar. Hubert, with the assistance of Harold Hopkins, named swans, geese, several kinds of ducks, gulls, terns, divers, loons and grebes.

"That is a pretty full list," commented Uncle Elk, "but it may be that Michael has some other waders in mind."

"That I hev," responded the Irish youth springing to his feet; "the first time Alvin and Chester tried to paddle a canoe it tipped over wid 'em--they lacking the sense I showed--and the water not being deep the same was waders for the time."

Mike did not smile as he resumed his seat on the floor, though every one else did.

"Let me remind you," added Uncle Elk, "that we have simply named the six orders, without any attempt to particularize. To illustrate will you name a bird?"

Some one called:

"Let's talk about the thrush."

"Very well; its head is a clear cinnamon brown, the under parts white, sometimes tinged with buff on the breast and thickly marked beneath except on the chin and throat. The sides of the head are a dark brown, streaked with white, with maxillary streaks on each side of the throat. It is a trifle over eight inches long, the wings being a little more than half of

that, and the eggs are usually four in number, of a uniform light-blue color, without spots and showing a slight tint of green.

"The song thrush is common in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, but is not often seen in the other New England States. I have had persons say they saw and heard them in this section, when it was either the hermit or olive-backed thrush. You may look for their return from the South about the tenth of May, the two sexes coming at the same time.

"The great charm of the thrush is its wonderful voice. Hardly has it arrived when you hear the sweet notes of the male at early dawn or when twilight is coming on. Very rarely is it heard in the middle of the day, unless the sky is overcast. The best description of that which cannot be described is by Nuttall, which so impressed me when I first read it that I have never forgotten the words. He says:

"The prelude to this song resembles almost the double-tonguing of the flute, blended with a tinkling, shrill, and solemn warble, which re-echoes from his solitary retreat like the dirge of some recluse, who shuns the busy haunts of life. The whole air consists usually of four parts, or bars, which succeed in deliberate tune, finally blending together in impressive and soothing harmony, becoming more mellow and sweet at every repetition. Rival performers seem to challenge each other from various parts of the wood, vying for the favor of their mates with sympathetic responses and softer tones. And some, waging a jealous strife, terminate the warm dispute by an appeal to combat and violence. Like the robin and the thrasher, in dark and gloomy weather when other birds are sheltered and silent, the clear notes of the wood thrush are heard through the dripping woods from dawn to dusk; so that the sweeter and more constant is his song. His clear and interrupted whistle is likewise often nearly the only voice of melody heard by the traveler to midday, in the heat of summer, as he traverses the silent, dark and wooded wilderness, remote from the haunts of men."

"You have all been charmed by the music of this bird and will agree that this description, while it falls short of the reality, cannot be excelled. Now, in your rambles you have seen birds with gorgeous plumage; which one do you consider the most beautiful of all?"

After some discussion, the majority pronounced in favor of the scarlet tanager.

"Most persons will agree with you, but my preference is for what is popularly known as the wood duck, which builds its nests in trees and in size and habits resembles the common duck. The colors shown in the feathers of this bird to my mind are simply bewildering in their beauty.

"But to return to the tanager. He is found in all parts of New England but more frequently in the southern portions. A noticeable fact about this tanager is that it seems to be extending its range. I hear that it has been seen for the first time in sections where those familiar with its habits never expected to find it. Will Arthur Mitchell tell me when it arrives from the South and about its nesting?"

The lad appealed to rose and replied:

"It comes north about the middle of May, looks around for two weeks or so and then begins building its nest. It prefers oak groves situated near swamps. The nest is placed on the horizontal limb of a tree not more than twenty feet above ground."

"What of the eggs?"

"They vary from three to five in number, and are of a light greenish blue with spatters of purplish brown. It belongs to the order of perchers."

"Is the tanager a useful bird?"

"It is; the males destroy thousands of insects and though the song isn't noteworthy, it is pleasant to hear."

"Will Gordon Calhoun give a general description of this bird?"

"The wings and tail of the male are like black silk velvet, but the main color is a brilliant blood red. The female wears a more sober dress."

When the rambling talk had continued for some time longer, Scout Master Hall asked Uncle Elk to tell them something about bird migration.

"That is an interesting subject over which I with thousands have speculated and theorized without learning much. It is easy to understand why the geese from the extreme north hike south with the approach of the arctic winter, and why many others in more temperate latitudes do the same, coming north with the return of spring, but some of the migrations are beyond explanation. I should like to ask what birds make the longest flights?"

Scout Master Hall and Jack Crandall expressed their views, but the old man shook his head.

"Since all of you did no more than guess, it was a waste of time. Now follow me closely. We have no large maps here to

place on the wall for you to study, but you have a fair knowledge of geography and can draw a mental map that will serve. Picture a map of the western hemisphere. Have you done so?"

A general nodding of heads.

"You didn't nod, Mr. Hall."

"I have the map before my mind's eye," replied the Scout Master; "I am following you."

"Since the discovery of the North Pole, you have all become familiar with the contour of the polar regions. Locate the Arctic Islands in, say seventy-five degrees north latitude; then draw an imaginary line from those islands down along the coast of Labrador, across to Newfoundland, and down to Nova Scotia, then over the Atlantic to the Lesser Antilles in the West Indies, from there to Brazil and across Argentina and end your line in Patagonia at the extremity of South America.

"You have mentally swept over a tremendous stretch of country and water, but are not yet through. Push on westward to the Pacific, northward up the coast, then across Central America and up the Mississippi Valley, through central Canada and back to the Arctic Islands from which you started. Truly a long journey and yet it is the yearly itinerary of the American golden plover, which, measured in miles, is three-fifths of the distance round the world."

"You have mentioned one of the most remarkable facts in natural history," commented Mr. Hall, who, like every listener, was deeply impressed.

"Quite true," replied Uncle Elk, "though there are many equally inexplicable. I have sometimes fancied that birds resemble men in their longing for travel. With means of locomotion at their command still far beyond the skill of our best aviators, what wonder that our little brothers of the air are impelled to gather the best that can be secured?"

"This, however, is a fanciful theory which the naturalists will not accept. It must be remembered that the majority of golden plovers who start on this long journey never complete it, for almost every mile is attended with danger. They are dazzled by the vivid electric lights of the cities, and confused by the tall buildings, telephone and telegraph wires, especially on dark nights when the birds fly low. Thousands are thus killed, besides which adverse gales blow many out to sea, and blizzards and snowstorms destroy myriads.

"Perhaps we have talked enough about birds," said Uncle Elk, "but I shall be glad to answer any questions that may occur to you."

After a moment's silence, Mike Murphy rose to his feet. His face, as usual, was serious even when about to indulge in some of his waggeries, but this time he was in earnest.

"Maybe it's meself that knows mighty little about birds except them as is met with in Ireland, which isn't many. There is one that I once heerd of that belongs to anither country."

"Describe it, Michael," remarked the old man indulgently.

"It has the bill of a duck, webbed feet, lays eggs, has a furry body and I belave is what is called a mammal. It's a mighty qu'ar bird that I'd like to know the name of."

In answer to the general smiles Uncle Elk asked:

"Have you ever seen one of the creatures, Michael?"

"Not that I know of, though I have often made search for 'em."

"Michael has described no fancy creation. Such a thing exists. Can any one tell me its name?"

Isaac Rothstein replied:

"It is the ornithorhynchus or water mole of Australia, but it is not classed as a bird."

"No, although there seems to be some reason why it should be. You see what a limitless field opens before you when you leave the American continent to make investigations elsewhere. For a long time to come we shall find our hands full in our own country."

"What about the birds that are called *Indians*?" gravely asked Mike.

"There are some facts regarding Maine Indians which are worth remembering. In 1612, they numbered 38,000. At the close of the French and Indian War this number had been reduced to a thousand, which is the aboriginal population to-day. The decrease was due to the fierce wars which the tribes waged among themselves. The Indians in Maine were four times as numerous as those in Massachusetts. The Pine Tree State was the 'dark and bloody ground' of colonial days.

"In a general way the tribes bore the same names as rivers. Those west of the Penobscot were of the Abnaki group,

and those to the east into New Brunswick called themselves Etechemins. All belonged to the Algonquin nation. When King Philip's War broke out in 1675, the Maine Indians numbered about 12,000. This was twice the white population and sufficient to wipe out the settlements nearly to the New Hampshire border. Finally, in 1759, the Indians in Maine did not number more than a thousand. They were mainly Penobscots and Passamaquoddies. They remained faithful to the Americans throughout the Revolution. It is a curious fact that while the Passamaquoddies have decreased in number during the last ninety years, the Penobscots have increased to the extent of seven, the former being slightly more numerous. Both keep up their tribal conditions, and the Penobscots live in the same village site that their forefathers occupied before the white men set foot on the continent."

CHAPTER VIII -- A Council of War

That night, after Uncle Elk had left the bungalow, Alvin Landon, Chester Haynes and Mike Murphy held what Alvin called a council of war.

Sauntering a little way from the building, they sat down in the silent depths of the woods where no one could overhear what was said by them. Not that a Boy Scout would be guilty of eavesdropping, but it was best that no inkling of what was in the air should become accidentally known to others.

Without quoting all the conversation, let me make clear its substance. The three were so mystified by the incidents already told that they determined not to cease their efforts until the puzzle was solved. They were the only Boy Scouts who knew the particulars, and it was natural that their friends should give their chief interest to fishing, rambling in the forest, studying trees, picking up what they could of natural history, and laying in unnecessary stores of health and strength.

One thing was certain: Uncle Elk knew the secret and he wouldn't tell. More than that, Chester Haynes startled his chums by the declaration:

"So does Mr. Hall,--at least I am pretty sure he does."

"What reason have you for thinking that?" asked the astonished Alvin.

"I have seen them more than once whispering in a way that showed they were keenly interested."

"Did you hear anything that either said?"

"Not a word."

"How do you know then to what they were referring?"

"I don't; I'm only guessing."

"I believe ye're right," added Mike; "I observed the same thing and had the same 'spicion, and would have spoke of it if Chest hadn't got ahead of me. But I'm thinking that if Mr. Hall knows it all, why the mischief doesn't he tell us afore we bust?"

"For the simple reason that Uncle Elk has bound him to secrecy. No; what we find out must be done without the help of either."

"And we'll doot!" exclaimed Mike, "or we'll break a trace trying."

"How shall we go about it?" asked Alvin. "Whatever we do must be done without either of them, especially Uncle Elk, knowing it."

"And there's the rub."

Bring three bright-witted boys together and let them concentrate their mental energies upon the solution of a problem, and even if they don't succeed, they are sure to evolve something worth while.

"It is useless to apply to Mr. Hall," said Alvin, "for nothing could induce him to violate the confidence of another. But Uncle Elk holds the master key and can speak when he chooses."

"Which the same is the rule with most folks," commented Mike.

"Now, see here," put in Chester; "he has shown a fondness for you----"

"Can ye name any one of me acquaintances that hasn't?" interrupted the wag.

"Why can't you set to work and coax it out of him?"

"Begorra! haven't I tried more than once. I've hinted and asked him straight out until I'm in the fix of Phil Rafferty."

"What was that?"

"Phil took a notion that he could butt ivery other admirer of Bridget Mulrooney off the track. He kipt at it till one day he towld me he had a dim 'spicion that Bridget and her big brother Tarn and her dad of the same name, not forgitting Bridget her-silf, weren't as fond of him as they oughter be. They had dropped purty plain hints and the last time Phil called, Bridget remarked sorter off-hand like, that she niver wanted to see his ugly mug agin. Her brother kicked him off the porch and flung him over the fence and the owld gintleman set their dog on him, which the same nearly choked in trying to swaller the seat of his pants. Phil said he was beginnin' to 'spicion that the family took as a whole, didn't love him as they oughter. It's the same wid Uncle Elk and me. He's riddy to talk on anything excipt the raison them two

tramps was scared into taking a bath, and he won't throw any light on that p'int."

"Then there is no use of either of us trying."

"I could hev towld ye that long ago."

Once more it was Chester who showed the most subtlety.

"Uncle Elk knows that Mike is doing all he can to solve the puzzle; he knows he'll not stop trying till he learns the truth; if Alvin and I keep him company, he will understand that we have joined forces. It will be as easy for him to baffle us three when we are together as to defeat any one of us. Therefore we ought to separate and each push the hunt for himself."

"Ye've hit it!" exclaimed Mike, "and to encourage ye in good works and to show ye the honor ye oughter hev, I offers ye me hand."

He gravely extended his palm in the gloom and it was warmly shaken.

Let a party of boys engage in some plot--and the same is true of adults--and their chief fear is that it will be discovered and defeated by someone else more or less interested. No precaution must be neglected. It was agreed by our friends that no one of them should drop a word in the hearing of others that could rouse curiosity, and not to show by their manner that anything unusual was on their minds.

One question considered was whether Dr. Spellman should be taken into their confidence. He had witnessed the panic of the tramps and was as curious as the boys to learn its cause. Alvin disposed of the matter.

"I don't see how he can be of any help and he doesn't wish to leave his home too long since the trouble he had with the bums. Uncle Elk, for some reason, hates the doctor; the two would be pretty sure to meet if the doctor joined forces with us, and the consequences would be bad. Say what you please, Uncle Elk has a queer twist in his brain, and I dread doing anything that will excite him. Let us work independently of every one else."

"I'm wid ye," assented Mike, and Chester agreed.

This much decided upon, the particulars of the plan remained to be arranged. Mike proposed that he should saunter off alone to the western end of the lake, near where Alvin and Chester had gone in the canoe during the day, and there with no companion should set himself to learn what he could. The others would take the opposite course, which would lead them to the home of Uncle Elk. They had no intention of questioning the old man or even letting him know what they had in mind, but would employ their wits as opportunity offered.

Nothing would have been more pleasing than for Mike to use the canoe to reach the western end of the lake, but he decided that the safest course was for all three to let the boats alone. The hermit would doubtless be on the watch and would know the errand of the lads.

"Do we need to have signals?" asked Chester.

"What for?" inquired Alvin in turn.

"If one of us finds out something, he will want to tell the others."

"I don't see how the plan can work, for we shall be so far apart that any call we make will be heard by some of the Scouts and may give the whole thing away. Whatever comes to light can wait till we meet here after supper to-night."

Mike, who had been thoughtful for a minute or two, now spoke:

"We thought that being Mr. Hall's lips are closed, Uncle Elk is the only one that can explain the queer actions of Biggs and Hutt, but Uncle Elk isn't the only one."

"Who else can do so?"

"Biggs and Hutt."

"That is true," said Alvin, "but I don't believe they would show any more willingness than Uncle Elk. Besides, after such a fright as they got yesterday, they are probably miles away at this minute and still running."

"Which doesn't signify that they won't come back again. One would think they would have taken the warning Dr. Spellman gave them, but they didn't. I believe there is going to be more trouble with those two scamps," said Chester impressively.

"They've got to behave thimselves," added Mike with more feeling than he had yet shown, "or I'll git Mr. Hall to lead the whole troop agin 'em."

"You know the Boy Scouts are opposed to all violence."

"And so'm I, excipt whin it's yer dooty to lambaste the ither chap, as whin he drops a hint that he doesn't think ye're

able to doot. If Biggs and Hutt go to stealing or stepping too hard on us, do ye expect we're going to grin and bear it?"

"Without answering that question," remarked Alvin, "let me suggest that if any one of us happens to meet either or both the hoboos, he does his best to get an explanation from them. If you don't succeed, no harm will be done."

"Good counsel," commented Chester, "but I don't believe it will bring any result."

"We mustn't neglect anything----"

"Whisht!" interrupted Mike, suddenly laying his hand on the arm of this comrade.

All three became silent, and each distinctly heard faint footfalls from a point deeper in the wood.

"Some one has been listening," whispered Alvin, "but he couldn't have heard anything."

"And what if he did?" asked Chester; "we have no enemies in this part of the world."

Mike had started in the direction of the suspicious sound. He did not take time to soften the noise of his feet, and the stranger thus warned hurried away. Evidently he was a better woodman than his pursuer, for he got over the ground faster. Mike caught a glimpse of him in the star-gleam, as he emerged on the beach and ran off. A few minutes later the Irish youth rejoined his friends.

"Do you know who it was?" asked Alvin.

"No; he didn't spake nor look back. I thought it best to return to ye."

"Why?"

"I hadn't me shillaleh wid me, and I was in too much danger of overhauling the spalpeen."

CHAPTER IX -- An Unwelcome Guest

What may be called a minor mystery was settled within a few minutes after Alvin, Chester and Mike came out of the wood and sat down for a brief while on the porch. Most of the other Boy Scouts had gone inside for the night, though the murmur of voices showed the majority were awake. The laugh of Scout Master Hall was heard in response to some jest, he being, as has been said, as much of a youngster as the most youthful of the troop.

A tall form loomed to view in the starlight, and coming up the steps sat down beside Mike with a greeting to all three. He was recognized as Hoke Butler, a member of the Stag Patrol.

"If you had run a little faster," he remarked with a loud laugh, "you surely would have overtaken me, Mike."

"Why didn't ye slack up and give me the chance? Me legs ain't as long as yours."

"I did put on the brakes, but you turned back."

"I'd come to the belief that if ye didn't want me company, I shouldn't force mine upon ye, so I quit. What were ye doing in the wood behind us?"

"I was strolling behind the bungalow when I heard voices and was stealing up to learn who you were when you heard me, and for the fun of it I darted off as if I was scared half to death."

"What did ye think of the views of meself and Alvin and Chester as regards the nixt Prisident?"

It was a shrewd question and brought the desired answer.

"You talked so low I couldn't catch a word. Don't you know that when Americans talk politics they yell and generally end in a fight?"

"We hadn't got that fur; ye oughter kept still a little while longer and ye might hev took part in the shindy."

So the eavesdropping amounted to nothing, and so far no one besides the three knew of the plan which they had formed. A half hour later every Boy Scout in the bungalow, including Jack Crandall, was asleep.

The morning dawned clear, bright and sunny. Jack would not permit any one to stay with him, so his chair was wheeled out on the front porch, where he became absorbed in a work on ornithology, while his friends broke into small groups and wandered into the woods as fancy prompted them. Scout Master Hall strolled off with several members of his Patrol, the understanding being that it was to be another day in which each should do as he pleased.

Let twenty men, boys or girls be thrown together in close companionship for weeks, and likes and dislikes are sure to develop. There may be nothing in the nature of hatred, nor even an impatient word uttered. Naturally affiliations spring up, while others avoid one another, without suspecting there is a cause for the mild repulsion.

Alvin Landon, Chester Haynes and Mike Murphy were chums from the first and were nearly always together. Mike was popular with all because of his many fine qualities, aside from the marvelous treats he occasionally gave in singing. One boy formed so marked a fancy for him that Mike did not like it because he could not respond. This was Hoke Butler,--he who had tried to play the eavesdropper the night before. Something about him which could not be defined repelled Mike, and caused him to avoid or at least to try to avoid his company. Perhaps it was Butler's habit of boisterous laughter when no one else saw any cause for mirth, his disposition to slap the knee or shoulder of the boy nearest him, and his greediness at meals. Be that as it may, Mike did not like him, though too considerate to hurt his feelings by showing his sentiments.

Alvin and Chester were pleased, when they supposed all the boys had left the bungalow, to see Butler come up the steps, take his place beside Mike and give his knee a resounding slap.

"Hello, old chap! what are you going to do to-day?" he asked in his boisterous manner.

"I'm thinking of doing as the ither byes do,--stroll through the woods on the lookout fur ostriches, kangaroos, monkeys or anything that turns up."

"Good! that's me; I'll go with you!"

"Who said ye would?" asked the disgusted Mike, as Alvin winked at Chester.

"I did; didn't you hear me?"

"But ye don't know where I'm going."

"That makes no difference; I'm with you straight through."

The chance was too good for Alvin and Chester to let slip. The face of the former brightened with hypocritical

comradeship.

"Now isn't that fine? Mike, you're in luck."

"As Larry Bergen remarked when he found he had one finger left after the pistol busted in his hand."

"How nice it will be to have Butler with you the whole day!" Chester was mean enough to add.

"Aren't you three going together?" asked the surprised interloper.

"We are particular as to our company," said Alvin; "Chester and I travel together while Mike goes alone,--that is to say he would do so if you had not come along in time."

"That's me! I'm always glad to oblige."

"Thim chaps," said Mike, who was too game to wince though none the less resolved to baffle his chums, "are two babes in the wood; it will be mighty kind of ye, Butler, to go along and kaap an eye on 'em."

"Now, don't you see there are two of them, and it will be the same with you and me, which is the right way to divide up? Just the idea, old chap!" And Butler whacked the knee of Mike, who made a grimace at the grinning Alvin and Chester. "Tell you what, Mike, I took a shine to you from the first; we must be pals."

"You've hit it, Butler; we shall be glad to loan you Mike whenever you want him."

"That will be all the time," roared the interloper, "won't it, Mike?"

"It begins to look that way," was the lugubrious response of the victim.

Alvin and Chester rose to their feet, the former remarking:

"We'll see you at supper. Take good care of Mike, who is so innocent that he is sure to run into trouble unless you hold him back. Mike, be sure to obey him just as you do us."

And the two stepped from the porch and set off in the direction of the cabin of Uncle Elk, looking back in time to see their friend shake his fist at them.

"It looks as if I was caught," mused Mike, "as the man said when he stepped into a bear trap, but I'll aven up matters wid thim before they're much older."

"Isn't it time we started?" asked Butler, after the others had disappeared.

"Yis," replied Mike standing up, "but I can't depart widout me buckthorn cane. Bide here till I go into the house and git the same."

"I know where you left it leaning against the wall; I'll fetch it."

And before he could be anticipated, Butler darted through the open door and brought out the heavy stick.

"Always ready to do what I can for you, Mike; anything else?"

"Yis; I'll be obleeged if ye'll chase after thim spalpeens and ask Alvin Landon to send me that five dollars he borrowed yesterday."

"Of course; they haven't got far and I'll be back in a jiffy."

"Don't let him sneak out of it, but hang on till he coughs up."

"You bet I will!"

The obliging youth scooted off the porch and after the couple who had disappeared only a few moments before. Mike waited only until he was beyond sight, when he hurried in the opposite direction and dived among the trees, as if he were a criminal fleeing from an officer of the law.

Meanwhile the obliging Butler made haste to do as requested. He was fleet of foot, and had no trouble in overtaking Alvin and Chester, who were walking at a moderate pace, made still more moderate by their merriment over the clever way in which they had gotten the best of Mike.

"It isn't often we can do it," said Alvin, "but we caught him fair that time. Hoke will stick like a leech to him--hello! what's up now?" exclaimed the lad, as the sound of footsteps caused both to look around.

"Gracious!" gasped Chester, "it can't be Mike has persuaded him to go with *us*!"

"Hold on a minute!" called Butler.

The two halted and Alvin asked reproachfully:

"Why have you deserted Mike, when he wants you so badly?"

"I haven't deserted him; he and I are going to have a day's ramble together."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"He asked me to run after you and get the five dollars he loaned you yesterday."

"Chest, have you got any money with you?" asked the astonished Alvin; "I have only a Canadian quarter."

"I haven't even that. I did the same as you, and left all my funds in the house."

"You see what Mike is up to; it's a trick of his to get rid of this fellow."

Addressing the latter, Alvin added:

"That's what I call a low down piece of business; why didn't he ask us when we were at the house?"

"I reckon he didn't think of it; hurry up, please; I don't want to keep him waiting."

"Well, you can't help it, for we haven't a dollar between us. Hurry back to him and say for us that we shall settle with him to-night when you and he come back."

"Honest now, is that the best you can do?"

"It certainly is; if you don't hurry Mike will grow tired of waiting for you."

Alarmed at the probability, Butler dashed away like a deer, while Alvin and Chester hurried in the other direction with a view of being out of reach should the young man return.

But Hoke did not come back. He had set his heart on rejoining his chosen friend and bent his energies to that end.

After walking briskly for a half mile, Alvin and Chester slowed down and took matters more easily. They were so deep in the woods that they could see nothing of the lake, but they had become familiar with the route and were in no fear of going astray. When quite near the cabin of Uncle Elk, they saw three other Boy Scouts wandering among the trees, one of them with note book in hand. He was making entries and all were so engaged in the pleasant task that it was easy for Alvin and Chester to avoid being seen as they changed their course. Soon after they came in sight of the log structure where their old friend made his home. Halting while still among the trees, their position gave them a view of the front of the building and the upper part of the path which wound its way down to the lake. The latch-string was hanging outside the door with everything as still and motionless as the tomb.

"Well, now that we have arrived," remarked Alvin in an undertone, "what are we going to do?"

"I don't see that anything is to be gained by calling upon Uncle Elk, but, if he catches sight of us, we shall have to drop in on him. He is sure to treat us well."

"Hello! we are not the only ones," said Chester, as he and his chum stepped back behind the trunk of a large white oak.

The heads and shoulders of two men came into sight as they walked slowly up the path from the landing which they had evidently reached in a boat. A few paces brought them into plain sight, one directly behind the other and approaching the door of the cabin.

The first thought of the boys was that they were the tramps who had been making nuisances of themselves in the neighborhood for the last few days, but a second look made it clear they were not, for nothing in their appearance suggested the wandering vagrant. The striking fact about them was they were so similar in looks that it was evident they were twin brothers. The similarity extended to their clothing. They wore straw hats set well back on their heads, coarse shirts without tie or waistcoat, and dark trousers whose bottoms were tucked into a pair of boots that did not quite reach their knees. The two were of sandy complexion and each had a tuft of yellow whiskers on his chin, which was of the retreating order.

"They must be the men Mike heard chuckling together last night, though he did not see them," was the conclusion of Chester, and his companion agreed with him.

"And they seem as much pleased as ever."

Both wore a broad grin, and the one in front, half turning his head, said something which caused the other to laugh out loud.

Before the visitors reached the door, it was drawn inward by Uncle Elk, who appeared, staff in hand, as if about to start on a tramp through the woods. At sight of the young men, he paused and called:

"I am glad to see you, Asa and Bige; I was about to hunt you up, but this saves me the trouble; come in."

He shook the hand of each in turn and the three passed from sight, the host closing the door behind them.

"And now what shall we do?" asked the perplexed Alvin; "we have seen two strangers go into the cabin and they are

talking together, but we can't hear a word that is said nor learn a thing."

"That remains to be seen; let's follow them, as we have the right to do so long as the latchstring hangs outside."

This proposal would have been carried out had not the necessity been removed by the persons in whom they were interested. The door unexpectedly opened and the trio came out, Uncle Elk leading, staff in hand, and the others following in Indian file. They passed down the path toward the lake and were soon shut from sight by the intervening trees and undergrowth.

Alvin and Chester were sure their presence had not been noted, and they held back until safe against being seen. Then they moved stealthily down the trail to a point where they had a clear view of the smooth sheet of water. A hundred yards away, a small canoe was gliding at moderate speed toward the other side, its course such that it would reach shore--unless the direction was changed--some distance west of Dr. Spellman's home. In the boat were seated Uncle Elk and the couple whom he had addressed as Asa and Bige, one of them swinging the paddle with the grace of a professional.

Keeping out of sight, the two youths watched the course of the boat, which gradually veered to the left.

"Uncle Elk has left his own canoe on the shore and we can use it if we wish to follow them," said Alvin.

"I don't think anything would be more foolish. In fact, Al, it strikes me that so far our part of the business is a failure. Those folks are going into the territory of Mike and I hope he will have better success than we. He can't have less."

All the lads could do for the present was to watch and wait. The canoe grew smaller as it receded, and finally disappeared under the overhanging limbs and vegetation at a spot which the boys agreed was either where Mike Murphy had heard Asa and Bige laughing the night before, or very near the spot. And, admitting that such was the fact, what did it all amount to?

CHAPTER X -- A Sudden Separation

When Mike Murphy hurried off the opposite end of the porch of the bungalow, his single purpose was to rid himself of Hoke Butler, who had set his heart upon keeping him company for the day. It was a happy thought thus to send the youth to collect an imaginary debt from Alvin Landon, and it would seem could scarcely fail of accomplishing the end in view.

"The spalpeen can thraavel a good deal faster then mesilf, owing to the lngth of his legs, but I've got too good a start for him to find me among the traas."

Mike still walked fast, often glancing behind and more and more relieved that he failed to gain sight of a living person, or rather of him whom he dreaded to see.

"Hello, Mike, where are you?"

The youth appealed to almost leaped from the ground, for the familiar voice sounded much too near for comfort.

"I'm here just now," muttered Mike, "but I don't intind to stay. Worrar, worrar, is there no way of shaking ye loose?"

The shout was repeated twice and then ceased. It looked as if Hoke believed he was too far separated from his friend to reach him by calling, though he was not likely to give up the search for some time to come. Mike changed his course and in doing so came near losing himself. It was impossible in the circumstances to go far astray, but he was likely to waste a good deal of time.

Coming to a halt he took his bearings. He knew he was well to the westward of the bungalow and not far from the lake. He was sure also, after noting the position of the sun, of the course he should follow to reach the body of water. His plan was to keep along shore until he came to the western end of the lake, around which he would make his way if necessary, returning by the northern bank which would take him past the home of Dr. Spellman. The conviction, however, was strong with the young man that he would not be called upon to travel that far before gaining the knowledge which was drawing him onward as the steel draws the magnet.

When he had traveled far enough to bring him to the lake and still failed to catch the gleam of its surface, he halted once more and stared around.

"If I'm lost agin I'll hire some of the byes to lead me about by the hand, fur I ain't fit to travel alone--hello! there's one of 'em, that I'll question without letting him know I'm a stray lamb."

He had a glimpse of a moving body almost directly ahead, and knowing it was one of the scouts he called:

"I wish to remark, me friend, that it's a foine day; if ye agraa wid me I shall be plaised to have ye signerfy the same."

"Why, Mike, I'm so glad to see you again; you ain't mad because I got lost?"

"Oh, not a bit, as Jim O'Toole said whin the sheriff apologized for shooting him on the wing."

And Mike extended his hand to Hoke Butler as he came grinningly forward.

"How was it ye missed me?" asked Mike innocently.

"I'll be hanged if I can tell; I hurried back after talking to Alvin and ought to have found you, but somehow or other I didn't."

"Why didn't ye holler?"

"I nearly split my throat calling to you."

"Strange! I wonder if I'm getting deaf."

"Gracious! I hope not; don't say that or you'll worry me awfully."

"Did Alvin hand ye the five dollars?"

"Not a bit of it. Say, Mike, they must be blamed poor, for they had only a Canadian quarter between them. I don't think they amount to much."

Mike couldn't stand this slur upon his chums.

"Let me tell ye something that will make ye open yer eyes. Alvin Landon's father is one of the richest men in New York, and Chester's is almost as wealthy. They are worth millions upon millions of dollars, and the byes have all the money they want, but they are not such fules as you and me and don't throw it away, though they give a good deal of it to poor folks. So ye may rist aisy on that score, friend Hoke."

"Gee! I never suspected that. They don't put on any more airs than the poorest of the Boy Scouts."

"Which the same shows their sinse; they've always been that way and always will be. But this isn't tending to bus'ness. Do ye wish to keep company wid me till night?"

"You bet! I'm going to stick to you like a burr; I hope you haven't any hard feelings on account of my losing you for a little while. I really didn't mean it."

"It's mesilf that has no hard feelings, but I was thinking that if we don't get back to the clubhouse till night ye will be obliged to lose your dinner."

"I don't like that much, but I'll stand it for your sake. I'll even things up at the supper table. A Boy Scout should learn to suffer when it can't be helped."

"I've found out the same," replied Mike with a significance which his companion did not catch; "I hope we shan't starve to death."

"No danger of that," remarked Hoke, not absolutely certain that some such calamity did not threaten them.

Mike Murphy like a philosopher made up his mind to accept the inevitable. It seemed to be decreed by fate that he should have this young man as a companion throughout at least this day, so what was the use of kicking against it? Besides, it was not impossible that where there was so much eagerness on the part of Hoke to help, he might be able to do so in the strange task Mike had laid out for himself.

One pleasing fact about the intruder was that he never lost his way. He pointed out the direction in which the lake lay and Mike took care not to let him know he himself had believed that an altogether different course led to it. Pausing on the shore they looked out upon one of the most beautiful and romantic bodies of water to be found in a region which abounds with them. Both saw the canoe laden deeply with three men which was heading for a point to the westward of Dr. Spellman's home. The boys studied it closely, but the distance was too great to identify the old man, and his companions were strangers.

Mike had told young Butler nothing of his experience of the day before, nor did he do so now. Whatever Hoke was able to do in the way of aid he could accomplish as well while ignorant as if he knew everything.

"Would it be too far, Hoke, for ye to walk wid me round the end of the lake to the spot where the canoe wint from sight?"

"It's a pretty good walk, Mike, but it's nothing so long as I am with *you*. I can't think of anything I wouldn't do to please you."

"I could, but I'll not mintion it," grinned Mike as they resumed their course with Hoke in the lead.

The forenoon was half gone when they came to the western end of the lake and changed their course so as to follow the curvature that would take them to the northern shore. All the time they were in sight of the water, which they examined at intervals in quest of other boats. While the home of Dr. Spellman, as we remember, was invisible from the lake, it was easy to locate it by the thin wisp of smoke which filtered through the tree-tops. The same could have been said of Uncle Elk's cabin had there been any fire burning.

"I am thinking, Mike," remarked Hoke some time later, "that if you intend to go clean round the lake we haven't any time to throw away."

"We kin take all day and the night, should the same be nicissary, but there's no call to hurry and if ye find yersilf growing weary, ye have me permission to turn back whin the notion takes ye."

"We have gone so far that I don't see much choice in taking either direction. I say, Mike, isn't that something queer ahead of us?"

"I'd like to know where ye could be without something qua'ar being ahead of ye,--begora! I belave ye are right," added Mike in surprise. An object loomed up which he had not seen before nor had he heard any one speak of it, though he and others had been in the neighborhood more than once.

At a point where the undergrowth was plentiful and less than a hundred yards back from the shore, were the ruins of what probably had once been a fisherman or hunter's cabin. Long before the present time, some party had erected these rude quarters as a refuge during cold or stormy weather only to abandon them for more inviting protection. The ruins were simply four walls of logs hardly a dozen feet square and less than half as high. If there had once been a roof, it had disappeared long since. No door was visible from where the boys stood.

"It reminds me of the Castle of Donleigh, which I niver obsarved," remarked Mike after they had stood for some minutes.

"I think some one started to put up a cabin such as Uncle Elk did, but changed his mind before he built a roof. Maybe it

was Uncle Elk himself."

"Aither him or somebody ilse; let's look further."

Instead of going nearer, the two slowly circled the ruins, keeping a little way from them. When the circuit was completed the surprising fact became known that nothing in the nature of a door had been made by those who laid the logs. Manifestly the structure had been abandoned before it was half finished.

"It's easy to raise yourself high enough to look inside," suddenly remarked Hoke; "I'm going to have a peep. Wait here till I come back."

He ran to the side of the pile, with Mike slowly following. The latter gripped his shillaleh firmly, but was moving so slowly that he had not passed a third of the distance when Hoke inserted the toe of one foot in a lower crevice, sprang lightly upward and seized the topmost log with both hands. This raised his head above the barrier, and in the same minute Mike saw a hand thrust forward from the inside, grasp the collar of his companion's coat and violently yank him out of sight.

CHAPTER XI -- An Unsatisfactory Interview

Mike Murphy was never more astounded in his life.

"He oughter said good-bye before he took that dive," exclaimed the youth, who was not the one to stand idle when a companion, even one whom he did not specially fancy, was in danger. Mike's chivalry was roused, and with no thought of the consequences to himself, he ran to the help of the other lad. His shillaleh was firmly grasped in his left hand, and held ready for instant use, for nothing seemed more probable than that the weapon would be quickly needed.

Mike was sure that if he imitated Hoke, he would be seized in the same way. He therefore hurried lightly to the opposite side of the pile, where as silently as he could, he thrust the toe of his shoe into the crevice between the lower logs, gave a spring, caught hold of the upper tier, and drew himself upward.

Buzby Biggs, one of the tramps whom we have met, was sitting on the ground inside the crude cabin and punching his stubby forefinger into the bowl of his corncob pipe, with a view of tamping the tobacco and making it ready to light, when the sound of voices outside caused him to suspend operations. He rose to his feet, intending to peep through a small opening of which he knew when he heard the scratching made by Hoke's shoes as he climbed the low wall. Angered by the intrusion upon his privacy, he waited until the head of the lad rose to view, when he proceeded to act as has been described.

Hoke was too startled to make any outcry or resistance. The violence of his debut caused him to sprawl forward on his hands and knees and his hat fell off. He instinctively picked it up and replaced it on his head.

"What do yer mean by butting into a gentleman's private residence without ringing the bell or sending in your card?" demanded Biggs, who finding himself confronted by only one lad, could feel no misgiving as to his own safety.

"Gee! I didn't know *you* were here," replied Hoke, alarmed over the strange situation in which he was caught.

"That don't make no difference," replied the hobo, who seemed to be trying to work himself into a passion; "yer showed yer ain't used to perlite sassiety and I allers makes a feller pay for the privilege of coming into the castle of the Duke de Sassy."

Poor Hoke was scared almost out of his wits. He began fumbling in his pockets.

"How much is the charge? I haven't got more'n two or three dollars with me."

"In that case, it will take all and that ere watch which I persoom is tied to t'other end of the chain dangling in front."

"Why that would be robbery!" exclaimed the lad, indignant at the impending outrage.

"I wouldn't call it that, younker; rayther it's the toll yer hef to pay for crossin' this bridge. So yer may as well shell out first as last."

As Hoke stood, his back was against the side of the wooden wall over which he had just tumbled, with the tramp scowling and malignant, facing him. Thus, as will be noted, Biggs was on the side of the structure up which Mike Murphy had climbed so silently that no one heard him. Hoke in fact began to rally from his panic and was on the point of shouting for help when he saw the end of Mike's buckthorn cane, gripped in his left hand, slide up into view, instantly followed by the hat and red, freckled countenance of the Irish youth, who remained motionless for a moment, while he peered at the curious picture below him.

Before Hoke could utter the glad words on his tongue, Mike shook his head as a warning for him to hold his peace. The other caught on and did not look directly at his friend, but straight into the face of the tousled scamp. Mike was so clearly in his field of vision that Hoke saw every movement and even the expression of the face which was never more welcome.

The next instant one knee of Mike rested on the topmost log, then the foot slid over and he perched firmly on the top with his shillaleh transferred to his right hand.

The sight of his friend heartened Hoke.

"You can't have my watch and chain, and I sha'n't give you a penny! You have no more right here than I, and you daresen't lay a hand on me."

"What's that? what's that?" demanded the other, taking a step forward and thrusting out his ugly visage; "I guess it's time I teached you something."

"Aisy there, Misther Biggs; I think it's mesilf will hev something to say 'bout this."

The hobo whirled about and confronted the Irish lad, seated on the top of the wall and grasping his heavy cane.

"Where did *yer* come from?" growled the tramp, who ought not to have been frightened by the presence of two sturdy youths.

Mike made the Boy Scout salute.

"From Tipperary, county of Tipperary, Ireland. Would ye be kind enough to exchange cards wid me?" and he pretended to search in his pocket for that which he never carried. "Clarence, me noble friend," added Mike, addressing Hoke Butler, "ye may as well withdraw from this palatial residence, as me friends used to say when laving our shanty at home."

Hoke was instant to seize the opportunity thus presented. He clambered up the logs with the vivacity of a monkey, scooted over the wall, dropped to the ground and then made off at the highest bent of his speed. He did not seem to think he was deserting a friend in extremity and after that friend had been quick to rush to his relief.

A glance behind told Mike the truth, whereat he was displeased, though he did not show it by his manner. It was not so bad, however, as at first appeared. Hoke had run only a little way when the cowardice of what he was doing halted him as abruptly as he had started.

And then it was that an inspiration seized him. Questioning the wisdom of him and Mike bearding, as may be said, the lion in his den, Hoke made a pretence that help was near. He shouted at the top of his voice:

"Dr. Spellman! Here we are! Why don't you hurry up?"

It was pure good fortune that led Hoke thus to appeal to the only person whom the hobo held in dread, for the youth knew nothing of what had occurred previously. He was doubtful about calling upon Uncle Elk, and another Boy Scout did not seem a formidable enough reinforcement. Scout Master Hall would have served, but Hoke did not think of him.

Mr. Buzby Biggs heard the shouted words and could not forget that the physician was the owner of firearms and did not seem reluctant to use them. Although the two vagrants had been spared, it was doubtful whether mercy would be shown them again. Despite his attempt to bluff, the tramp could not repress a tremor in his voice.

"What's he calling that 'ere doctor fur?"

"I think he remarked a remark about telling him to hurry up. Av coorse ye will be glad to meet the dochter agin."

"Not by a blamed sight; him and me don't speak as we pass by."

"He prefers to spake wid his revolver, I belave."

Mike had been instant to read the trick of Hoke, and he helped all he could. Biggs was in such a fright he could not hide it. The last person in the world whom he wished to meet was the medical man. He turned to imitate the action of Hoke Butler.

"Howld on! None of that!" commanded Mike in such a peremptory voice that Biggs with hands on the logs in front and one foot raised, checked himself and looked around.

"What do yer want?" he growled; "hain't I a right to leave my home when I please?"

"Which is what Jimmy Jones said when the sheriff stopped him as he was breaking-jail. You don't want to bump up agin the dochter whin he has that pill box in his hand. See here, Biggs, I'll let you go on one condition."

"What's that?" growled the other.

"Yesterday when ye and t'other scamp was paddling off in the canoe ye stole, ye made a sudden dive overboard and swum fur shore; by yer manner I knowed ye wouldn't run the risk of taking a bath if ye hadn't been scared out of what little wits ye had."

"It would have been the same with yer, if yer'd seen what we did."

"If ye'll tell me what ye obsarved, ye may lave whin you choose and I'll give ye me pledge that Dochter Spellman won't harm ye."

"All right; I'll tell yer as soon as I git outside this place."

"You can't wait till then; ye must give me the sacret while ye are standing there. If ye don't I won't interfare wid the dochter working his will."

An expression of dread passed over the repulsive face and the man actually shivered.

"Wai, whin me and Saxy was going along in the canoe we borrered wid me paddling, I happened to look down into the clear water and my eyes rested upon--*the devil himself!*"

Mike Murphy was taken aback for the moment by this amazing reply. His first thought was that the hobo was trifling with him, but, if so, his acting could not have been better. Astounding as was his declaration the man believed his own

words which conveyed no meaning to the youth.

"Worra now, don't ye understand it?"

"No; do yer?"

"That clear water sarves like a looking glass. Whin ye looked down ye obsarved yer own image and I don't wonder ye took it for owld Nick."

"But Saxy seed the same as I did," replied the man, impressed by the not complimentary explanation of the lad who was perched on top of the log wall.

"It was his picter that he saan and aich of ye luks more like t'other than he does like himsilf."

Biggs shook his head. This wouldn't do.

"It wasn't like a man at all."

"What did it luk like?"

Mike was excited. He felt he was on the eve of clearing up the mystery which had baffled him and others, though not Uncle Elk, who would say nothing.

Instead of giving an intelligent reply to the question for a further bill of particulars, the tramp shuddered as before. There was a whine in his voice when he spoke:

"Didn't I answer yer as I agreed? What are yer kicking about?"

"Ye've got to do more than that afore I asks the docther not to p'int his gun this way and pull the trigger."

"Have yer ever seed the devil?"

"Not afore I looked upon yersilf."

"Then how do yer expict me to describe him? He was there right under the canoe and almost close enough to grab us."

"Did he hev horns and a spiked tail?"

Mike had heard the sound of footsteps behind him on the leaves. Some one was approaching and he was sure it was Hoke Butler coming back to his help.

Biggs made no reply to the frivolous question of the youth seated above him. The taint of superstition in his nature resented such treatment of a theme which had nothing but terror to him. Mike, certain that he commanded the situation and was about to learn that which he yearned to know, felt that he need not haste.

"Ye'll hev to do better than that, Signor Biggs, but as ye saam to prefer that the docther should take ye in hand I'll turn ye over to him."

And Mike turned to wink at Hoke Butler, but to his dismay, discovered in the same moment that his friend was not in sight, and the one who had come up behind him was Saxy Hutt, the other tramp.

CHAPTER XII -- Groping After the Truth

Mike Murphy's ready wit did not desert him at the moment when, as may be said, he discovered he was caught between two fires. One of the tramps was standing on the ground in front or below him, while the second was approaching from the rear or only a few paces farther off. And Hoke Butler, who should have been instant to rush to the help of his friend, was nowhere in sight.

"I say, dochter, why don't ye hurry up?" shouted Mike, as if calling over the head of the grinning hobo, whose eyes were fixed upon him with a dangerous expression, as if he had decided to even up matters for previous humiliations.

The peremptory manner of the lad produced its effect, and Saxy Hutt paused and looked up at him. A scratching, rattling noise caused Mike to turn his head. Biggs was furiously climbing the logs on the other side. Grasping the topmost one, he dived over, sprawling upon his hands and knees, instantly leaping to his feet, and making off at the speed he had shown in his former flight. He evidently believed in the near approach of the man whom he dreaded.

Mike swung around on his perch, so that his feet hung outside, and gazed calmly down upon the repulsive face.

"The top of the morning to ye, Saxy," greeted the lad; "I hope ye are well."

"Huh! yer needn't try that bluff on us," growled the scamp; "it won't work; thar ain't no doctor round these parts and I wouldn't care a hang if there was. I owe you one, younker, and I'm going to take it out of your hide."

To tell the truth, Mike was pleased to hear this declaration. Biggs, whom he regarded as the worst of the couple, had taken himself off and need not be considered further, so that it was one against one, and the youngster had a firm grip on his shillaleh. With a fair field and no favor Mike was content to let the best man win.

The tramp came nearer, clenched his fists and glared upward at the youth.

"Come down out of that and I'll wring your neck fur yer."

"Step a little closer, so I can reach ye wid a single jump."

Mike was actually gathering his muscles for a leap that would have brought on a fight as vicious as that of two wildcats, when the tense stillness was broken by the words:

"Right this way, doctor; you'll find them both here, your shots can't miss."

Now the peculiarity of this remark was that although plainly heard, it sounded as if the speaker meant that only the man at his side should catch his words. And it was at this juncture that Hoke Butler did a thing so clever that it won the everlasting admiration of Mike Murphy. The former dropped his voice several notes, so that one unacquainted with the facts, would have been certain it was another who was speaking.

"Show me a sight of them--just for a minute: that's all I ask!"

Mike heard and understood. Saxy heard and misunderstood,--that is he believed it was the physician who was looking for him with a loaded weapon in hand. He muttered an exclamation which it will never do to print, plunged around the log structure, and disappeared with a speed that must have quickly overhauled the other tramp.

Mike dropped lightly to the ground and confronted the chuckling Hoke.

"Worra! but ye did that well. Where is the dochter?"

"How should I know? I suppose he's at his home."

"What put it into yer head to make believe he was near us?"

"I don't know except he was the first person I thought of."

"Ye couldn't have done better if ye had took a month. I don't understand why thim tramps hang round so much whin they know what they're likely to git from Dr. Spellman."

Mike now told Hoke of the surprising incidents of the preceding day, when the hobos received the scare of their lives.

"This one who calls himsilf Biggs told me that whin he looked over the side of the canoe, he found himsilf face to face wid the devil."

"Do you think he did, Mike?"

"I have me doubts, as Jerry Jinks said whin Father MacMahon declared he was an honest man. Anyhow I haven't larned what I wanted to know, and we've got to look farther."

It was decided to pass around the western end of the lake, circling back in the direction of Dr. Spellman's home, past the

cabin of Uncle Elk and go on to the bungalow. This was likely to take most of the day, even if they were not delayed by some unexpected occurrence. Moreover, this course would take them by the spot where Mike had heard voices the night before, and where the hermit darted out from under the overhanging vegetation on his return, going so near the startled Mike that the two saw each other. The old man and his visitors appeared to have gone thither, and it would seem that something ought to be doing.

"Would you like to know what *my* idea is?" asked Hoke, when they resumed their tramping on the line that has been indicated.

"I'm that anxious to know that I won't take another step till ye explains the same."

And Mike, who was a few paces in advance, halted abruptly, wheeled about and faced his companion, who grinningly responded:

"It is that we keep going till we reach Dr. Spellman's house and accept his invitation to dinner."

"Suppose we don't get the invitation," suggested Mike.

"I should like to see him avoid giving it, even if the dinner hour is past, which it is likely to be before we can reach his place."

Mike's rugged health and sturdy strength gave him as keen an appetite as that of his companion, and a good meal would be as welcome to him as to Hoke. Moreover, the situation was such that they could hardly hope to reach the clubhouse before nightfall. He therefore inclined to the plan of calling at the house where they were sure of welcome, but it will be borne in mind that in order to do this, they would have to give over or at least postpone the investigation they had intended to make at the point where Mike had heard voices and seen Uncle Elk the night before, since this lay to the westward of the physician's camp.

Accordingly the youths turned deeper into the wood, going well beyond sight of the lake, intending to approach their destination by a circuitous course. Not wishing to run against Uncle Elk and the strangers, they made sure of not doing so.

You need not be reminded that one of the easiest things in the world is to lose your way in a wilderness. Mike Murphy seemed peculiarly subject to this misfortune, as has been shown in the previous pages. He kept in the lead, as he had done from the first, his friend quietly following and paying no attention to his own footsteps. By and by it struck Hoke that it was time they reached the doctor's dwelling. He looked searchingly ahead and around, but saw nothing except the tall, column-like trunks, with considerable undergrowth here and there. Naught that resembled the most primitive dwelling was in sight, nor was there a sign of any person having passed that way.

"Hold on, Mike!" he called abruptly to his friend, and the latter halted and looked back.

"I'm doing that, and what is it ye want of me?"

"Where are we?" asked the puzzled fellow.

"I'm thinking we're here, as I remarked when I fell off the house. What do *ye* think?"

"Of course we are somewhere near Gosling Lake, but I believe we have strayed off and are lost."

"It's mesilf that don't see how that can be, though I can beat any gentleman that walks on two legs in going the wrong way. The first time I started to go upstairs, I opened the cellar dure and bumped all the way to the bottom, and when I was faaling me way fur the cellar dure, I tumbled out the parlor windy. Then mither sent me on an errand to Widow Mulligan's and instead of stepping onto the porch, I put my fut over the well curb and didn't find out the difference till I hit the bottom of the well. So you see, Hoke, that that wakeness is my strongest p'int."

"Where do you think the lake lies?"

"I'm not as far gone as that; head that way and you'll walk straight onto the same." Mike pointed his shillaleh to the left, whereupon his friend laughed.

"Just what I expected; you're away off."

"What do *ye* make it,--since you saam to think you can make no mistake?"

"I never lose my bearings,--you can depend on me. *That* direction leads to the lake."

The joke of it was that Hoke instead of deviating more or less from the course pointed out by Mike, chose one that was the opposite.

"Are ye in aimest?" asked Mike.

"Never more so."

"I'm glad to lam that, for I don't like such jokes, as Jim O'Hara said whin the policeman broke his club over his head. Ye are wrong."

"I'm positive I am not."

"And I'm positive ye are,--and the only way to sittle the question according to common sinse is to toss up. What do ye say?"

"I don't see how that can settle any question; but have it your own way."

Mike took a Lincoln penny from his pocket and balanced it in his hand.

"If it comes down a hid, ye take my course; if a tail, yours."

Hoke nodded to signify he agreed, and the other flipped the coin aloft, each watching as it turned over rapidly and fell upon the leaves between them, but lo! it rested on its edge, being supported vertically against a pine cone. In other words it was neither a head nor tail, but a "cock."

Usage requires that in such a case a new toss must be made, but when Mike picked up the penny he shoved it into his pocket and shook his head.

"The maaning of that," he explained, "is that we are both wrong."

"How then shall we find the true course?"

"Make a guess, as I used to do in answering the taycher's questions--Hist!"

Before the experiment could be made, they were startled by hearing the report of a gun or a pistol from some point not far off, though the direction was different from either that had been indicated.

As they listened, a second, third and fourth report rang through the forest arches, followed quickly by two more, and all was still.

There might be several explanations of the incident, but it was idle to spend time in guessing, when it was easy to learn the truth. Mike, followed by his friend, walked rapidly toward the point whence the reports had come, and a few minutes later everything was clear.

Dr. Spellman was standing in a space free from undergrowth and practising with his revolver. With his knife he had gashed the bark off a sapling several feet above the ground, so as to show a white spot the size of a dollar. Standing a dozen or more paces distant, he aimed carefully and put the whole six bullets within a spot not more than two inches in diameter, three of them being bull's eyes.

"I couldn't do better mesilf!" exclaimed Mike, when he understood the feat.

"You can't tell till you try; I am not sure you are not an expert."

"Nor am I, though I have me doubts."

Having reloaded the weapon the doctor handed it to Mike, who slowly raised his arm to a level, shut one eye, and squinted some seconds over the short barrel, while the doctor and Hoke, standing a foot or two to the rear, kept their eyes upon the little white spot in the distance. Then a sharp crack sounded and the marksman lowered the pistol.

"Did ye obsarve where me shot landed?" he asked of his friends.

"I think it nipped the leaves somewhere overhead," replied Hoke.

"I scorn to notice yer slur: what do ye say, dochter?"

The physician said nothing, but walked to the sapling, the others trailing after him. Taking out his pocket knife, he began digging with the blade into the soft wood. From the very center of the white spot, he gouged out a pellet of lead, and held it out to Mike.

"That is yours; you made a perfect bull's eye."

"Av course; did ye doubt I would do the same?"

"Hooh! all chance! you can't do it again," called Hoke, uttering a truth that was as apparent to Mike as to the others.

"It's yer turn," replied the hero of the exploit; "do ye make the attempt yersilf; if ye can equal me, then I'll take me turn again."

CHAPTER XIII -- The Committee of Investigation

Lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place, though I have known it to do so, and Mike Murphy was too wise to try a second shot, when there was not one chance in a million of repeating his feat. With his loftiest air he proposed that he and Hoke should take turns in displaying their skill.

"I've made a bull's eye,--do the same or bettther and I'll take a whack and beat *that*,--and so it will go. Am I corriect, dochther, in me sintiments?"

"Undoubtedly; you can't refuse Mike's offer, Hoke."

The latter saw he was caught and accepted the weapon as if eager for the test, though it need not be said it was otherwise. A vague hope stirred him that the same exceptional success might reward his effort. He aimed with the care and deliberation shown by Mike, and then pulled the trigger five times in rapid succession.

"One of the bullets will be sure to land," was his sustaining thought, but nothing of the kind took place. Close examination by the three showed that Hoke had not so much as grazed the trunk of the sapling.

Neither Mike nor the doctor laughed, restrained from doing so by a chivalrous sympathy, for Hoke could not wholly hide his chagrin. Mike went so far as to say:

"Hoke, it was a chance shot on me part, and I couldn't do it agin in my life time."

"And now let us adjourn to dinner," said the doctor; "it is later than usual, but the folks will wait for me."

No words could be more welcome, but the fun of the proceeding was that the direction taken by the man showed that Hoke and Mike were both wrong--as the former had intimated--in locating the lake. The former grinned and the latter answered with a wink. The theme was one concerning which it was best to say nothing.

The call at the forest home of Dr. Spellman was so similar to what has been described that it need not be dwelt upon. Sunbeam showed her preference for the genial Irish youth, who certainly reciprocated her affection, as he did in the case of Nora Friestone, whom he had met the preceding summer farther up the Kennebec. The mother was always gracious and won the good opinion of every one with whom she was brought in contact.

When the meal was finished, and while mother and child were busy setting things to rights, the doctor talked with his guests. Mike made known all that had occurred since his previous meeting with the physician. The latter was much interested in the experience of that forenoon.

"I never saw that pile of logs, which is doubtless the remains of some fisherman or hunter's cabin that either was never finished or has been allowed to fall into decay. I must add one thing, however," said the doctor gravely; "I don't like the way those tramps are acting."

"It strikes me that about the only thing they are doing is getting scared half to death or swimming or running for life."

"But why do they stay in this neighborhood? The hobo doesn't take to the woods for long, though he may hide there when the officers make it too hot for him. What can there be in this part of the world that attracts them?"

"They may be looking for a chance to steal from the Boy Scouts," suggested Hoke.

"The last persons two hobos would tackle. What chance would they have against twenty vigorous, active, fearless youths, who despite their peaceful principles are yearning for stirring adventure?"

"Then it must be you, doctor, that they have designs upon."

"I half suspect as much; I have been considerate to them despite their insolence, more so than I shall be again if they annoy us further."

Turning upon the youths, Dr. Spellman asked a question that fairly took away the breath of the two Boy Scouts.

"Has either of you seen Uncle Elk and those tramps together?"

Hoke was not sure he understood the question. Mike was shocked.

"Why should they be together, dochther, unless the spalpeens called at his cabin for food? Ye know his latchstring is always out, but I've niver known of their being in his company."

"Didn't you hear them laughing or talking last night, along shore, and not far from this spot?"

"Be the same token I heerd two men, but they were not the tramps."

"How do you know that?"

"Uncle Elk told me so."

There was reproof in Mike's tones, for he resented the slightest reflection upon the hermit, whom he held in high regard. The doctor made no reply to the words of the youth, but smoked his cigar hard and seemed to be turning over something in his mind that was of a displeasing nature.

Mike knew of course of the unaccountable antipathy that Uncle Elk showed toward the physician who was spending his outing in this part of Maine. Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes were as much mystified as the Irish youth, and the doctor himself claimed to have no theory that would account for it. The last remark of the medical man sounded as if he reciprocated the dislike of the hermit. Not only that but doubtless he mistrusted him.

"You don't seem any nearer the solution of the tramps' behavior yesterday than you were at the time, and it looks to me as if you will have to wait until Uncle Elk is ready to tell you."

"There saams no ither ch'ice, docther, though I'm riddy to make another try for the same. Will ye jine us?"

"No; there will be danger of Uncle Elk and me meeting, and I am no more anxious for it than he is. I don't believe you will learn anything."

"We sha'n't by standing here, as Mickey Lanigan said whin the bull was charging down upon him--whisht! what have we now?"

Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes walked out of the wood and smilingly made the Boy Scout salute.

"Just in time not to be too late for dinner," was the warm greeting of Dr. Spellman, as he shook hands with the lads. They protested that they could not permit his wife to bother with preparing a meal, when the regular one had been finished a short time before, but the hospitable host would not listen, and I am compelled to say the objections of the guests were not very vigorous. All entered and crowded themselves as best they could into the limited space.

As the two ate, Mike and Hoke told them of their experience at the western end of the lake earlier in the day, while the new arrivals had their own interesting story to relate. They had seen two strangers enter Uncle Elk's cabin, only to depart soon after in his company, as the canoe was paddled away. The rather curious feature of this proceeding was that neither Mike nor Hoke, who had scanned the lake more than once, caught sight of the craft, and Dr. Spellman heard of it for the first time, though of necessity the canoe passed quite close to his home.

Whatever the thoughts of the physician may have been he kept them to himself. He had already expressed his distrust of Uncle Elk to Mike Murphy, who was quick to resent it, and it would be the same with Alvin and Chester, for they held the old man in too much esteem to listen with patience to anything in the way of censure of him.

It might have been difficult for the doctor to convince any unprejudiced person that there was the slightest understanding between the recluse or the vagrants. In fact, the only foundation for such a charge, not taking into account the mutual antipathy, was the knowledge which Uncle Elk showed of the cause of the hobos' panic. And yet there was a reasonable explanation of such knowledge, which would have acquitted the old man of any improper motive, and it was singular that it did not occur to Dr. Spellman.

The explorers, as they may be called, now numbered four. With warm thanks to the members of the family they bade them good-bye and set out to continue their quest.

It will be borne in mind that the spot which they were to visit lay quite a little way to the westward of Dr. Spellman's home. It was there that Mike Murphy had passed under the overhanging vegetation from which Uncle Elk soon afterward emerged, and where the Irish youth had detected the odor of a cigar and heard chuckling laughter. Mike and Hoke by pushing into the woods, and partly losing their way, had left this locality so far to one side that they saw nothing of it. The four now intended to make their way thither.

"Couldn't it be that Uncle Elk wint back, while ye were thramping to the docther's house?" asked Mike, as they straggled forward.

"There wasn't fifteen minutes at a time that we were out of sight of the lake," replied Alvin; "we surely should have seen him."

"He might have come back through the woods."

"That is true," said Chester, "but I see no reason why he should do so."

"Doesn't the same gintleman do lots of things for which we see no raison?"

"Far more than we can understand. Now I have been wondering whether he won't be offended by our trying to pry into matters which should not concern us."

"I think it is the other way," said Alvin; "he is amused by our curiosity, and doesn't tell us the secret because he enjoys our efforts to discover it for ourselves."

"And there's no saying how long his fun will last," commented Mike, who because of his previous visit to this section took upon himself the part of guide.

They had tramped less than half an hour when Mike halted and looked about him with a puzzled air.

"We oughter to be there," he remarked, "but it saams we're somewhere ilse."

Alvin pointed to where the undergrowth, a short distance in advance, was less abundant than in other places.

"There seems to be a wagon track that has been traveled lately."

Hurrying over the few paces, they found the supposition correct. There were the ruts made by wagon wheels and the deep impression of horses' hoofs. The greatest wonder was how any team could drag a vehicle through such an unbroken forest. Trees stood so close together that there seemed hardly room for a wheelbarrow to be shoved between, and yet a heavily laden wagon had plunged ahead, crushing down bushes and even small saplings, with the hubs scraping off the bark from large trunks, but ever moving undeviatingly in the direction of Gosling Lake.

"It's the trail of the chuck wagon!" exclaimed Chester; "it brings our supplies that are taken across to the bungalow."

"And this is the day for it," added Alvin, who had scarcely uttered the words when a thrashing of the wood was heard, accompanied by the sharp cracking of a whip and a resounding voice:

"Gee up! Consarn you, what's the matter with you? You're purty near there!"

Two powerful horses, tugging at a ponderous open wagon piled high with boxes of supplies, labored into sight, while the driver, a lean, sandy-haired man perched on the high seat, snapped his whip, jerked the lines, clucked and urged the animals to do their best, which they certainly did.

The boys stepped aside out of the way of the team, and saluted the driver as he came opposite and looked down upon them. He nodded, but nothing more, for his animals required his attention. Our young friends fell in or followed the wagon to the edge of the lake only a brief distance away, where the driver flung his reins to the ground and leaped down. He was bony, stoop-shouldered, without coat or waistcoat, and had his trousers tucked into the tops of his cowhide boots.

"Say, I see by your dress you b'long to the Boy Scouts," he remarked, addressing the whole party.

"We are proud to say we do," replied Alvin.

"And the Boy Scouts be proud to have us belong to 'em," added Mike.

"I should think they would be blamed proud of *you*," said the man with a grin.

"Your perception of the truth is wonderful, as me mither exclaimed whin Father Meagher said I was the purtiest baby in Tipperary."

"And you chaps believe in doing a good turn every day to some person?"

"Right again."

"What good turn have you done anybody to-day?"

"Modesty kaaps our lips mute," replied Mike, who for the life of him could not recall a single incident of the nature named.

"Wal, would you like to do *me* a good turn?"

"We certainly shall be glad," Alvin took upon himself to reply.

"Help me unload this wagon; the stuff is for the Boy Scouts, so you'll be helping yourselves."

CHAPTER XIV -- The Men Who Laughed

Before the party fell to work, the driver walked to the edge of the lake and tied his white handkerchief to the limb of a tree, which projected over the water. There was enough breeze to make it flutter, and the background of emerald brought it out with vivid distinctness. It was the signal to the bungalow that the chuck wagon, as they called it, had arrived, and the two canoes were to be sent across the lake for the supplies. Since it was expected at a certain time, our friends were on the watch for it. Within ten minutes after the piece of linen was fastened in place, the large canoes, each containing two persons, one of whom was Scout Master Hall, were seen heading for the spot where the provisions were awaiting them. It does not take a man and four lusty boys long to prepare a wagon load of such freight for shipment by water, and the cargo was ready a good while before the arrival of the craft.

The driver, who announced that he was "Jake," sat on one of the boxes, lighted a corn cob pipe and talked with the lads. Although he was rough of speech and at times inclined to profanity, the young men treated him with respect, and by their unvarying courtesy won his good will. He asked many questions and told them a good deal about himself; in short, they became quite chummy.

The two canoes had passed most of the distance when Jake abruptly asked:

"Have you seen anything of Asa and Bige Carter?"

"Who are they?" asked Alvin in turn, although he had heard the names before.

"I thought everybody knowed Asa and Bige; they're twin brothers, and two of the darndest chaps that ever lived."

This description, so far as it went, was not enlightening. Chester said:

"Those must have been the two men that called on Uncle Elk this morning and went off with him in their canoe. So far as we could see they look exactly alike."

"That's them," replied Jake with a nod of his head. "Did the three come this way in their canoe?"

"They seemed to be heading for this place."

"That settles it; they was Asa and Bige. I expected them to meet me here," and Jake peered around in the wood, but without seeing anything of his friends.

"What might ye maan by spaking of them as two of the darndest chaps that ever lived?" asked Mike, who, as did his companions, hoped they had struck a lead that might yield them something worth while.

"Why, they're just like a couple of Irishmen."

"Arrah now, but what model gintlemen they must be! It will be an honor for us to make their acquaintance."

Jake's reply to this was to snatch off his straw hat, throw back his head and roar with laughter. Determined to probe farther, Alvin asked:

"What is there peculiar about the twin brothers?"

"Now, you jist wait till you meet 'em and you'll find out. I'll only warn you to keep your eyes wide open, or they'll close 'em for you. Wal, the folks have about arriv."

All rose to their feet and greeted their friends who were now within a short distance. The water was so deep that the light craft were able to lie broadside against the bank. It required skill and hard labor to get a portion of the freight aboard, but in due time it was accomplished.

"We are pretty heavily loaded," remarked Scout Master Hall, "but the lake is smooth and we can easily make two or three trips. We can divide you four between us."

"It's blamed risky," commented Jake, "but I guess it can be did if you're all mighty keerful."

Mr. Hall insisted that he and his three companions should change places with the others, but this arrangement would have defeated the scheme Alvin and his chums had in mind. Without revealing their object, they begged off and secured a compromise by which Hoke Butler was to return in one of the canoes, while the trio would walk home. In truth, Hoke was so tired from his long tramp that he was pleased by the plan.

"But I won't go, Mike, if you're going to feel bad about it," he remarked before sitting down in the boat that was about to shove off.

"Av coorse me heart is nearly broke," said Mike, "but it's yer own comfort I'm thinking of, as Larry McWhymper said whin he put a brick in the bag for the cat he was drowning to set on and pass away comfortable. But I'm cheered by the

hope of meeting ye at supper time. Good luck to ye!"

The two craft, sunk almost to their gunwales, moved slowly across the mirror-like lake, reaching their destination without mishap, and returning for the last loads.

Jake looked at the three youths.

"You've got a mighty hard tramp afore you; if there was a road I'd take you home in my wagon."

"We don't mind it," was the cheery reply of Alvin.

"Besides, if we feel like resting our legs and using our arms, we can borrow Dr. Spellman's boat; his home isn't far off. Do you go back at once?"

"I've a great mind to; it would serve Asa and Bige right if I did, but I'll hang round a half hour or so and not a blamed bit longer, for I must git home afore dark."

"Then we shall bid you good bye," said Alvin shaking hands with the countryman, as did the others, all expressing the hope of soon meeting him again. Since it was he who regularly brought the supplies to this point, there seemed to be no reason why the mutual wish should not be gratified. Jake refilled and relighted his pipe, sitting on a fallen tree and showing by his vigorous puffs that he was not in the most patient of moods.

The three boys did not speak until sure they were beyond sight of Jake. Then they halted.

"Do you think he suspects anything?" asked Alvin, unconsciously lowering his voice.

"Why should he?" asked Chester.

"He suspects we're thramping for home," remarked Mike, "which the same is what we wish him to believe."

It will be understood that our young friends were resolute to learn all that was possible about the mystery that had tantalized them for the past day or two. Beyond a doubt the twin brothers were connected with it, and since Jake was awaiting their coming, it looked as if the boys had a fair chance of learning something.

They separated, and each began an approach to the driver and his team that was meant to be so cautious that Jake would not detect them. The very care used by each well nigh defeated its purpose. It fell to Alvin to catch the first enlightening glimpse of the countryman and that which he saw astonished him.

The Carter brothers must have been waiting near at hand for the departure of the boys, for in the brief interval since then they had come forward, loaded something in the wagon and covered it with a big sheet of soiled canvas. Whatever it was, its size was such that it filled the whole interior, and crowded against the seat in front. It towered several feet above the sides and suggested a load of hay, protected against a drenching rain.

"What can it be?" Alvin muttered, "and why are they so particular with it?" which questions were self asked by Chester and Mike, with none able to frame an answer.

Having loaded the wagon, the brothers proceeded carefully to tuck in the precious burden as if afraid jealous eyes might see it. Finally all was satisfactory and the three men climbed to the front seat. They had to sit snugly, but there was enough room. Jake was on the extreme right, where he could crack his whip without hindrance.

He glanced behind him, as if to make sure everything was right, jerked the reins, circled the whip lash which gave out an explosion like that of a fire cracker, and the sturdy horses bent to their task of dragging the wagon and its contents through the woods into the more open country, where the smoother highway made the task easy.

All three men crowded on the front seat were smoking. Jake stuck to his corn cob pipe, but each brother sported a cigar, which by a special arrangement with Porter, the druggist in Boothbay Harbor, they bought for two cents apiece,—far in excess of their worth, as any one would decide who tested them, or even caught their odor. With all puffing vigorously, one might fancy that they instead of the horses supplied the motive power.

From where Alvin Landon stood behind the trunk of a large tree and peeped out, he saw that the brothers were doing a good deal of laughing, as if they recalled some humorous incident. Bige gave the particulars to Jake, who was so pleased that he threw back his head and made the forest ring with his laughter.

Since the backs of the men were turned toward the boys, the latter did not fear to come together to discuss their next step.

"I don't see that we have learned more than we knew before," remarked Alvin disgustedly; "what do you suppose they have covered up in that wagon?"

"I have no idea," replied Chester.

"Let's folly the team till it gets back to Bovil or wherever the same may be going. Better still," added Mike, "we can slip

up behind, lift the lid, and get a peep at the cratur himself."

"How do you know what it may be?"

"I don't, which is why I want to find out, and the same is throe of yersilves."

They gave over the plan for more than one reason. There was no saying how many miles they would have to tramp, and they could not go far without being discovered by the men. Then the situation, to say the least, would become embarrassing.

"I have the belief that we are near the solution," said Alvin, "and we can afford to wait a day or two longer. We have several miles ahead and may as well place them behind us before nightfall. Come on."

Good taste suggested that having called upon Dr. Spellman so recently they should pass him by on their return to the bungalow. This was done and they reached home without further incident.

Meanwhile, the wagon with its mysterious load was lurching and plunging over the primitive road, the three men on the front seat retaining their places with no little difficulty, but they were used to such traveling and no mishap followed.

Shortly after reaching the smoother highway, Bige Carter with another laugh exclaimed:

"By jingo! there they be!"

"You're right; that's them," added his brother.

The two tramps, who have already figured to some extent in these pages, were descried as the team turned a corner, walking in the middle of the road. He who had lost his hat had managed in some way to secure another. Half of the rim was missing and his frowsy hair showed through the crown. As the rattle of wheels reached their ears, he who was known as Biggs looked around. Immediately the paths of the two diverged, one going to the right and the other to the left of the highway. Both limped as if the act of walking was painful. Naturally the team soon overtook them. Jake, who had been talking the matter over with his friends, stopped his horses.

"Whoa! wouldn't you gentlemen like me to give you a lift?"

"Now ye're shouting, boss," replied Biggs as he and his companion each approached a front wagon wheel, "but where are yer going to put us?"

"You won't mind setting on the bottom of the wagon in front of the stuff piled there?"

"Not a bit, boss; ye're a trump."

Resting one ragged shoe on a hub, the hobos clambered in and sat down behind the three men, who said nothing but tried to restrain their chuckling. They knew what was coming.

Biggs and Hutt drew up their legs and compressed themselves as much as possible. Still, with the best they could do they were cramped. It seemed to Biggs that a slight shifting of the freight behind them would help matters. He hesitated for a minute or two and then stealthily raised one corner of the canvas covering, his companion watching him.

Thus it came about that the revelation burst upon the two in the same instant. A howl of terror rang out from each, as they bounded to their feet and dived over the side of the wagon. They forgot their lameness, and ran in the direction of Gosling Lake as if they were contestants at Stockholm for the Marathon prize. That single peep under the canvas had shown the same appalling thing that drove them headlong from the canoe. It was actually near enough to touch them, and the wonder was that they were not smitten with a mortal dread.

As Jake and Bige and Asa rode on they were so convulsed with merriment that they surely would have fallen from their seats had not the highway been smooth and the pace of the horses a slow walk.

CHAPTER XV -- The True Story of a Famous Sea Serpent

"It is over thirty years ago," said Uncle Elk that evening to the listening Boy Scouts who were gathered in the bungalow, "that the whole country was thrown into excitement by accounts of a stupendous sea serpent which was repeatedly seen off the Isle of Shoals. You know that returning mariners have brought home stories of encounters in distant seas with similar monstrous reptiles. The reputation of many of these men for truthfulness, and the fact that more than one of them insisted that their eyes had not deceived them, led a good many to believe what they told. Nor am I prepared to say that some of the accounts were not founded on fact. In the remote past the land and sea were inhabited by creatures of such vast size that our largest quadrupeds are pygmies in comparison. While the land giants became extinct ages ago, it is not unreasonable to think that the oceans which cover three-fourths of the earth's surface still hold inhabitants of tremendous growth.

"But leaving all this discussion for the present, I am now about to tell you the true story of one of the greatest fakes that ever astounded thousands of persons and amused the dozen or so who were in the secret. In the summer of 1879--perhaps a year earlier or later--people everywhere became interested in the reports that an enormous sea serpent had been seen off the Isle of Shoals. These stories were repeated so often and so circumstantially that it was evident there was something in them. General attention was drawn to that famous resort, and hundreds of guests visited the Appledore Hotel for the first time and remained for weeks. The serpent was said to be fifty or seventy feet long, its tapering neck, tail and general conformation were so natural in appearance that there could be no doubt of its reality. It was black in color and moved through the water just as a creature of its kind might be supposed to do. The newspapers sent their reporters thither and some of them saw it. You may be sure that they did justice to the theme. No one dared approach the monster near enough to make a photograph, for none had the temerity to run the risk of rousing the ire of the monster. Excursion steamers from Boston were crowded with thousands eager to get a glimpse of the terrifying creature without incurring any peril, for whoever heard of a sea serpent attacking a ship? It may crush a small boat in its prodigious jaws, as the hippopotamus of the upper Nile has been known to do,--but a steamer is beyond its capacity. Many of the passengers carried revolvers, and a number had rifles. They begged the captain to take them close enough to give a chance for bagging such royal game, and he was more than willing to oblige, but somehow or other the opportunity did not offer. It was said that so many craft cruising about his haunts scared him off, and he did not show himself for days. Then, when the search grew less ardent, he would reappear and the excitement would be greater than ever.

"Picture the piazza of the hotel, the upper windows, and even the roof swarming with people, nearly all with small or large glasses pointed out over the water, searching and waiting minute after minute for a sight of the terrific creature. Maybe after the scrutiny had lasted for hours some one would shout:

"I see him! Yonder he is!"

"And every glass would be focussed upon the point a half mile or more away, and wild exclamations would follow. The serpent was in plain sight of every eye. The fore part was upreared three or four feet, and the most powerful binoculars revealed the enormous eyes and vast mouth, while at varying distances to the rear could be seen bulging curvings of the stupendous body, as thick as a cask. Its hideous head slowly circled about on the neck as if the creature enjoyed the sensation he created. Then he dropped lower in the water, and seemed to be reposing, occasionally disporting himself lazily, but often displaying his terrifying convolutions.

"Meanwhile the news had been telegraphed far and near, and thousands of eager people hurried to the Isle of Shoals for a sight which they would remember all their lives. If they arrived before darkness set in they probably were gratified, for the serpent appeared to be fond of showing itself by daylight, but it invariably vanished before morning and probably would not be seen again for a week, when the former scenes would be repeated.

"Scores took up quarters at the hotel, which they had never visited before, and stayed until the close of the season. Most of these were rewarded by a glimpse or two of the serpent, though a few were disappointed and in their resentment declared there was no such thing.

"Not the papers alone, but many of the magazines contained disquisitions on the bogy of the sea. Startling pictures based on the numerous descriptions were given, and caused many a shudder among those who had to depend upon such sources of information.

"One day a dudish youth loudly announced that any man was a fool who was afraid of a sea serpent. He intended to row out in a boat and to go nigh enough to empty his revolver into the frightful head. Incidentally he let it fall that he had a record as a pistol expert, and he invited any one who had the 'sand' to go with him for a near view of his fight with the creature that was making a deuced bore of itself.

"To the breathless amazement of the awe-smitten listeners, two young women, pretty of feature and with mischievous eyes, volunteered. He warned them of the risk they ran, but they replied that they were not afraid of anything that failed to alarm him, and any way they didn't believe the horrid creature would get a chance to harm them before their escort would pierce its brain with several bullets. This tribute to the young man's skill and bravery caused him to set his hat at a greater angle and thrust out his chest still more. Many of the spectators thought it their duty to protest, but the girls would not be dissuaded, and a few minutes later the boat put off with its three occupants, while every glass or unaided eye followed the movements of the craft.

"This was one of the times when the serpent was in plain sight a half mile away, and the young hero headed directly toward it. The girls laughed and chatted and were sure it was the greatest lark in which they had ever engaged.

"They noticed that as they drew near the creature their escort showed less enthusiasm and kept looking over his shoulder. It is not to be supposed they were free from a few tremors themselves, but, if so, they did not allow him to see it. They kept up their laughter and commented freely upon the timidity of the thousands who remained upon the hotel porch and watched the sea serpent from afar.

"More slowly the oars swayed until probably a couple of hundred yards separated the boat from that awful undulating monster. The young man ceased toiling and laid his hand upon the revolver in his hip pocket.

"You are not near enough to reach him,' said one of the misses.

"I am best on long shots,' he replied with another glance at that fearful head.

"Why, he has seen us! He is looking this way!' exclaimed the other.

"Are you sure of that?' he asked with chattering teeth.

"Yes; he's coming toward us! Isn't that splendid? All you will have to do is to wait until he is near enough and then shoot the horrid thing through the head as you said you would.'

"But the young man had heard enough. He whirled the boat around and rowed with might and main, never pausing until he reached the wharf, when he sprang out, and amid the laughter and jeers of the spectators rushed to his room, which he kept until the time came for him to leave the hotel.

"The sea serpent was seen at intervals all through the summer. It did not make itself too cheap, and a week or more would pass without its showing itself. It was observed late in the season, but finally disappeared for good. The Appledore House was crowded as never before, and ran to its fullest capacity for the two following summers because of the general expectation that the sea serpent would show up again, but it never did, and in due time became only a memory or was forgotten entirely.

"When you land at the dock at Boothbay Harbor and come up the slope to Commercial Street, turn to the left, walk only a little way and you will come to the large grocery store of Simpson and Perkins. In the upper hall of that store, as it used to be, the sea serpent of which I have been telling you was born and attained its full growth, preliminary to its removal to the Isle of Shoals.

"The author of its being was William Wilson, who died about ten years ago. He was an English sailor, who in middle life gave up the sea and settled in Boothbay Harbor, where for years he was the only rigger in the little town. He possessed great natural mechanical ability, and it was said of him that he could make anything. He was unusually skilful in plain and fancy sewing and in constructing all sorts of knickknacks. He turned his attention to house painting and in that developed real artistic taste. In short, he was a Jack-of-all-trades and good in each.

"One day a stranger who had heard of Wilson's versatility came to him with a proposition that he should construct him a sea serpent, for which he was willing to pay two hundred dollars. He explained its purpose and impressed upon the artist the necessity of keeping the thing an absolute secret,--since the discovery that it was a fake would defeat the very object of its being, which was to build up business for the hotel at the Isle of Shoals.

"Wilson agreed to construct the sea serpent in accordance with his own ideas of what it should be. His employer was quite willing to accept this proviso, for he knew the man's ingenuity and so the verbal contract was made.

"Wilson had a partner in the work, a Swede named Robert Alson, who is still living. These two used to saunter upstairs into the long hall which was their workshop, lock the door and devote themselves to the task, upon which they spent their spare hours throughout the winter. Like a true artist, Wilson would not hurry, and gave careful attention to the smaller details,--a fact which accounts for the perfect success of the extraordinary fraud.

"The sea serpent was exactly thirty-five feet long, and for convenience of shipment was made in three sections, which overlapped and could be readily sewn together. The material was strong canvas, painted a black color, with proper proportions. The tail tapered, as did the neck, the largest part of the body being about two feet in diameter. The head, eyes and mouth were not exaggerated, as would have been the fact with almost any amateur at the job. It was stuffed

with cork and oak shavings, so nicely adjusted that it would float partly on or just below the surface, with the curving neck lifting the hideous head two or three feet above the water. The small waves gave a lifelike motion to the thing, which made it seem to be moving slowly through the water, when in fact it never progressed forward or backward, for its position was held immovably by an anchor.

"When the serpent was at last completed it was securely boxed and shipped to Portsmouth, six miles from the Isle of Shoals. Then it was towed at night to the right place, anchored and left to do its duty, which, as I have told you, it succeeded in doing to perfection. It is strange that the imposture was kept up for month after-month, and that it was seen and inspected by thousands, and yet no one really penetrated the clever deception. It was towed to the anchorage at night, and taken away again the next night to a secure hiding place. Those who had it in charge were too shrewd to overdo the trick. When the attention of the crowds threatened to become too warm, the serpent disappeared and was not again seen for a week or more. The general belief was that it had gone out to sea, but after a time some strange attraction drew it back into the field of vision of the swarms of visitors to the Appledore Hotel. As I said, the sea serpent disappeared for good in the autumn and this particular one was never seen again--that is, in its native element. I do not know what ultimately became of it."

At this point in the narrative Uncle Elk paused, and it could be seen that he was smiling behind his beard.

"I now want to say something to you in confidence. You must be sure not to repeat it in the hearing of others. I gave you the names of the two men who built the sea serpent, but I have good reason to believe a third person had a hand in it. If you will question Keyes H. Richards, the proprietor of the Samoset House on Mouse Island, you will find that he knows all about it. I once asked him point blank if he did not have something to do with its construction, but I could not draw a direct answer from him. Therefore, I retain my suspicions.

"Last spring the twin brothers, Asa and Bige Carter of Boothbay, persuaded themselves that they could make a tidy sum of money by introducing a new sea serpent to the public. After they had completed it, they decided to make a preliminary test by bringing it to Gosling Lake and trying it on you Boy Scouts. They let me into the secret, and though much interested, I discouraged it. They lacked the artistic cleverness of Wilson and the trick was sure to be detected and quickly exposed. I met them on the shore of the lake and saw them tow it out a little way, and anchor it. It was not properly balanced, and while the body sank, the head rose to within a foot of the surface, but would not come any higher. When those two tramps happened to look over the edge of their canoe, you may perhaps imagine their terror at sight of the gently swaying monstrosity that seemed on the point of crushing the boat or them in its jaws. Never again will they be so overcome with blind panic.

"This incident, together with my earnest persuasions, induced the Carter boys to give up their scheme and to take away their sea serpent and consign it to oblivion."

CHAPTER XVI -- Zip

On the evening succeeding the interesting story told by Uncle Elk of the once famous sea serpent, the majority of the Boy Scouts were seated on the porch of the bungalow exchanging the day's experiences. The half dozen detailed to prepare supper were as busy as they could be, for they like their waiting companions were exceedingly a-hungered. Some had spent hours in fishing for perch, bass, salmon, pickerel and lake trout; others had strolled through the fragrant, resinous woods, studying trees and bird life, and all had added to their splendid reserve of rugged health, exuberant animal spirits, and that genuine happiness which comes only with an upright life, clean habits and the constant seeking of an opportunity to do others a "good turn."

The day had been an ideal one, overflowing with radiant sunshine, surcharged with ozone and with a sky of a crystalline clearness which Italy throughout all its historic centuries has never surpassed. The summer was drawing to a close; the nights were perceptibly longer, and there was a crisp coolness which increased after sunset and told of the coming of autumn and winter.

Scout Master Hall sat among his boys looking out upon the placid lake, the conversation rambling and not important enough to call for record. The chair in which Jack Crandall reclined while he talked had been carried inside by two of the Scouts, Doctor Spellman having advised that this should be done now that the weather was growing chilly.

Suddenly, Gerald Hume, of the Stag Patrol, who sat nearest to the end of the porch, said:

"Hello? we have a visitor."

A general turning of heads followed. Coming along the beach from the direction of Uncle Elk's home was a boy, probably fifteen or sixteen years old, rather tall for his age, dressed in khaki, with leggings, a close-fitting cap and short coat with belt around the waist. While his attire resembled in some respects that of the Boy Scouts, it was not the same. He swung a swagger or short cane in his right hand, and advanced with the elastic grace of an athlete. As he drew nearer it was seen that he had a pleasing face, with regular features, dark eyes and hair, and that air which while it cannot be described, yet reveals the polish and culture of the true gentleman.

Glancing aside at the boys who were busy with their culinary duties, he stepped lightly upon the porch and with a military salute called out:

"Good evening, boys; I am glad to meet you."

Scout Master Hall and every youth sprang to their feet and made the regulation salute, the leader advancing and offering his hand.

"And I assure you we are all pleased to welcome you. You are in time to join us at supper and of course will stay over night. Are you alone?"

"I am; my name is George Burton and my home is in the city of New York. I am spending a week or two at the Hotel Samoset on Mouse Island, but must soon leave to meet my folks on their return from the other side."

"Did you come from Mouse Island to-day?" inquired Scout Master Hall.

"I left there early this morning; crossed to Boothbay Harbor and then struck on foot, just as my brother and I did last summer in tramping through Switzerland. A farmer gave me a ride of several miles, when I resorted to shanks-mare again. Then I caught another ride--not quite so long as the former--until I came to the half-broken track through the woods, over which I believe the wagon labors that brings your supplies. I had heard that a party of Boy Scouts were stopping at the clubhouse, which I saw from the other side of the lake, so I skirted the sheet of water to this point."

"That makes a pretty good tramp for one day," remarked the Scout Master.

"I have done a good deal better, and I am sure it would not tax any one of you. You asked me a few minutes ago if I were alone; I am, but I expect soon to be joined by a friend."

Young Burton laughed at the surprised looks turned toward him.

"He is my dog, named Zip."

"He will be as welcome as his master," said Mr. Hall.

"I know that and I thank you for us both."

"It's mesilf that is wondering why ye don't kaap company," said Mike Murphy; "me dad explained to Father Hoogan, as his rason for taking me wid him wherever he wint, that he liked to have a pup at his heels whin he wandered round the country."

The visitor smiled at the Irish lad's drollery, and was on the point of answering the query, when the Scouts in charge of the dinner preparations announced that the meal was ready.

"We are all curious to hear your story, which we know is interesting," remarked the Scout Master as he and the boys rose to their feet, "but nothing can be so attractive just now as the meal to which we have just been summoned."

"I am of your opinion," replied Burton, moving off with the others to the table.

"May I ask when you look for the arrival of your friend Zip?"

The guest took out his watch and glanced at its face.

"It is now half-past six; he ought to be here by seven; I must allow him some margin."

Every one was puzzled, but made no comment. As the Scout Master had remarked, the question of satisfying their hunger dominated all others for the time.

Needless to say the whole party partook of the food with the satisfying enjoyment which waits on sound health and exuberant spirits. As Scout Master Hall quoted, all "ate like horses when you hear them eat," the feast enlivened by continuous chatter, jest and merriment. Jack Crandall's chair was wheeled to the table, and with a little help from his friends he did his part well. Less than half an hour thus passed, when the company adjourned to the front porch, the only absent ones being the half dozen who had to clean up and leave things ready for the morning meal. This work did not take long, and all were soon gathered together, the Scouts much interested in their guest, and what he told them about his dog Zip.

"He is a bloodhound," he explained, "not quite two years old. The breed is not specially noted for its intelligence, but its delicacy or power of scent would be unbelievable had it not been proved over and over again. I hope to give you some demonstrations by my own dog, who is of pure breed, and with more brains than the generality of his kind."

"Are you sure he will trail you to this place?" asked Scout Master Hall.

"There is not a particle of doubt about it. He has performed more difficult feats than that; in fact, I am trying to find something he cannot do, but so far haven't succeeded."

"Will you tell us the particulars of his present task?"

"I left Mouse Island this morning about seven o'clock on the *Norman II*, run by Captain Pinkham. Having made my arrangements with Manager Dodge, I explained to my friend Chester Greenleaf that Zip would be at the dock and board the boat at twenty minutes to two for the roundabout trip to Boothbay Harbor. I advised Greenleaf not to try to collect a ticket from Zip, as he might resent it, and the young man promised to bear the counsel in mind. All that was to be done was to take the pup to the wharf at Boothbay and leave him to do the rest.

"Zip didn't like the idea of being left behind at Mouse, but he knew what was expected of him, and stood quietly on the dock as with a lugubrious expression he watched me go. I waved my hand at him, and he wagged his tail in return, as much as to say I couldn't lose him in that fashion.

"Now," said Burton animatedly, "consider what Zip has had to do. He left Mouse Island at twenty minutes to two o'clock this afternoon and reached Boothbay Harbor at about half past two, which was fully seven hours behind me. I'll warrant he was the first one ashore, and in a twinkling picked up my trail and was speeding northward from the town. Two miles out he lost it for the time because I had a lift from a farmer, but Zip knew what that meant, and he loped on up the road, certain of discovering when I left the vehicle."

"Is it possible," asked Scout Master Hall, "that he could keep your scent while you were riding in a wagon?"

"I am not prepared to deny it, incredible as it may sound. A bloodhound has been known to trot twenty feet to one side of a trail along a broad highway, and not lose it for miles. Zip is so familiar with my scent that he may have detected it from the first. Be that as it may, he lost no time in nosing about the road, but detected the very spot where my foot again touched ground, and was after me like a thunderbolt. I had a second ride--not quite so long as the first--which brought me to the rough unbroken track over which your supply wagon brings your provisions. It was a long tramp to this place, and, as you know, the afternoon was gone when I arrived."

"Did you make any attempts to throw him off your track?"

"No, for it was useless. Had a canoe been at hand I might have crossed the lake in it, but that would have been unfair, for of course no trail can be followed through water, since in the nature of things none can be made.

"Since I have been specially interested in this breed of dogs," young Burton modestly added, "I may have picked up a few points that are not familiar to all of you."

"There is no question as to that," replied Scout Master Hall, "you have already proved it; you are telling us facts that are not only new to us but of special interest. All the boys feel as I do."

A general murmur of assent followed.

"You are more complimentary than I deserve. While the bloodhound is not the most common breed of dogs in this country, I suppose most of you are familiar with his looks and history. They were once used in Cuba to track escaping prisoners and runaway slaves, and probably served the same purpose in some parts of the South before the Civil War, but in our country they were employed simply to track the negroes and were trained not to harm them, for, aside from the cruelty of the act, it was against the interests of the slave owner to injure his own property. In Cuba, the bloodhounds were like ravening tigers. The poor wretch in threshing through the thickets and swamps heard the horrible baying fast drawing nearer. His only escape was to leap among the limbs of a tree, and climb beyond reach of the brutes. If he was tardy in doing so, the black terror that burst through the undergrowth buried his fangs in his throat the next instant and never let go, no matter how desperately the man fought."

"How was it when the poor fellow reached a perch?"

"The dogs sat down and waited until the pursuers came up and claimed the prisoner."

"Suppose the slave took to water?"

"He was pretty sure to do that sooner or later, but it rarely availed against the marvelous scent of his enemies. After a time the man had to leave the creek or river, as it might be, and with two or three or more bloodhounds trotting along the bank with their muzzle to the ground, they were certain to pick up the scent with little or no loss of time.

"This peculiarly Spanish product became famous during the war with the Seminole Indians of Florida some seventy years ago. You know that those redskins retreated into the swamps and everglades where our soldiers could not follow them, or, if they followed, could not find them. The war dragged on year after year until the patience of the government was worn out. In its perplexity a number of Cuban bloodhounds were imported; and, although our officers took pains to declare that the dogs would be used to track and not to rend the Seminoles, an indignant protest went up against the barbarity of the act.

"But," added young Burton with a laugh, "the crime, if it were such, worked its own remedy. Somehow or other the Indians learned to make friends with the black brutes which came to them in the swamps, and they trained them with so much skill that they used them to hunt down the stray soldiers and former owners. The use of bloodhounds in the Seminole war proved a farce."

The guest suddenly ceased talking for a moment and said:

"It is time I heard from Zip."

"Some accident may have befallen him or perhaps he has gone astray."

"Both are improbable--listen!"

CHAPTER XVII -- Wonderful Work

Absolute hush followed the exclamation of young Burton and, as all were intently listening, there sounded through the soft stillness of the night a strange, piercing cry,—the baying of a bloodhound following the trail of a person. It was neither a bark nor a growl, but a mixture of the two,—a deep howl that might well fill a fleeing fugitive with shivering fear.

"That's Zip," said his pleased owner; "he will be here in a few minutes."

"He has a remarkable voice," said Scout Master Hall; "I never heard the like."

Mike Murphy, who had been one of the most absorbed of listeners and was seated near the guest, rose to his feet and emitted a cry which, so far as the listeners could tell, was an absolutely perfect imitation of that of the dog.

"That's wonderful!" exclaimed Burton; "it would deceive any one except the dog himself."

"And why not him?" asked Alvin Landon.

"Because he does not answer—there he comes!"

In the dim moonlight, as every eye was turned in the direction of the beach leading toward Uncle Elk's cabin, the Scouts saw a black, medium sized dog approaching at full speed, his sturdy figure rapidly assuming definite form. It was to be noted that Burton had come through the wood itself, whereas the animal was traversing the beach, where the way was more open, yet he was keeping to the trail as unerringly as an arrow driven from the bow.

"Hide yourself," whispered Mr. Hall.

"There is no place where I can hide from him."

The next instant the hound with undiminished speed bounded up the steps at the end of the porch, dashed between the boys, and impinged with such force against his standing master that he was knocked backward for a pace or two. Bending over, Burton patted the big head, and Zip in his excess of delight bounded round the youth and wagged his tail so hard that it swayed his haunches correspondingly, and it really seemed an instance of the tail wagging the dog.

"Don't you think Zip will appreciate something in the form of a meal?" asked Mr. Hall.

"He certainly will; a dog is always hungry, and more than half a day has passed since he ate; nothing suits him better than raw meat."

"We have a supply, and he shall feast to his heart's content."

So he did, the food being brought out and placed in front of the canine guest, who would have eaten a good deal more had his master permitted. Meekly accepting the decision, Zip lay down at young Burton's feet, contented and happy throughout the remainder of the evening, and glad to stay outside until the youth rejoined him in the morning.

"You know what matchless policemen the Belgian dogs make in that country, in France, and in New York and other cities. Some three years ago Long Island became so pestered by thieves that Robert E. Kerkham, superintendent of the railway police, saw that something drastic had to be done. The thieves dynamited station safes, burglarized private dwellings and more than once killed and injured railway policemen while they were trying to arrest the criminals. Those men used fleet horses and automobiles, and despite everything that could be done, grew bolder and more successful.

"Superintendent Kerkham, finding that his patrolmen were powerless, decided to call in the help of dogs, with whose striking success abroad and at home he was familiar, but he made a new departure by taking bloodhounds instead of the usual police dogs, for the former would not only guard property but would track the thieves. He bought a pair from the stock imported from England more than twenty years ago. These are of the purest blood, and superior to all others. Zip is from the same stock. A peculiarity of this dog is that in no circumstances will he take up a doubtful trail, but will pick up the true scent, no matter how faint, and never abandon it so long as it actually exists. They know not the meaning of fear, and will stick to their work so long as they can move or breathe. Some of those dogs have pedigrees that reach backward to the time of William the Conqueror.

"The couple which Mr. Kerkham purchased are named Bob and Nellie. They had to be trained, but they learned fast. They will take the scent from any article that has been lately handled by the person they are after."

"How old a trail will serve them?" asked the Scout Master.

"Of course the freshest scent is the best. Zip was all of seven hours behind me to-day. I have tested him on double that time and he seemed to have little or no difficulty. They have taken a trail twenty-four hours old, and precisely what it is that guides them in such a case is more than any one can understand. A man is known to have left a house at a certain time, and twenty hours later it is decided to pursue him with the aid of a bloodhound. A glove, or hat, or shoe that he is

known to have worn is held in front of the dog; he sniffs at it, dashes out of doors, circles back and forth and around the grounds until he strikes the corresponding scent; up goes his head, his tail wags and he bays his pleasure. A hundred yards farther, and he drops his nose to the ground to make sure he has not lost his clue.

"Perhaps the scent grows faint or disappears. In that case he runs back and circles about until he picks it up again, when he is off once more. You must remember that while all this is going on there is a man tugging at the leash, for this is necessary to protect the thief. As the trail grows fresher, the fierce eagerness of the hound increases; he knows he is close upon his quarry and sharp words and powerful pulling are necessary to prevent him from bounding straight at the throat of the cowering wretch. Should he start to run it is almost impossible to restrain the dog, but when he sees the criminal is under arrest, he is satisfied, becomes quiet, and is ready to tackle the next job."

"Will you tell us of some of the exploits of Bob and Nellie, who you say are perfect specimens of their kind?"

"I cannot recall a quarter of them. One thing that Bob did was astonishing because it was at the beginning of his training and the scent was fourteen hours old. He caught it from a bag which the thieves had used to wrap about their hands in breaking a window. As true as the needle to the pole, Bob led his master through alleys and side streets, across vacant lots, along the purlieu of a straggling village to a house near the highway. This was circled once, and then he dashed to a barn at the rear, through the open door, and sprang at a young man who was engaged in skinning a muskrat he had trapped.

"The fellow was indignant and denied all knowledge of the crime, declaring that he did not know where the freight house was located, but Bob's trainer was certain the dog was right, and searched the place. All the missing property was found in a trunk, and the thief is now in Sing Sing, convicted on the testimony of the dog.

"Last summer a farmer in Kansas was murdered and a pack of hounds were put on the trail. They led the trainers and officers through a broken country for six miles, never hesitating or turning aside for a minute, until they reached a house where a man lived who had never been suspected. He was arrested, corroborative evidence obtained, and he was convicted by the Supreme Court of the state and executed.

"One night the safe of the Hicksville station on the Long Island Railroad was blown open and the contents stolen. Three of the dogs were brought up the next day a little before noon and put on the trail, about twelve hours after the robbery had been committed."

"It seems to me," remarked Scout Master Hall, "that in all such cases the hounds are very liable to blunder."

"Why?"

"There must be a good many tracks about the premises; how can they differentiate those of the thieves?"

"They took the scent without the least difficulty from the window through which the robbers had entered and from the articles they had handled. Tugging at their leashes, the hounds led their masters up the railway track for an eighth of a mile, and then turned off across the open country to the trolley track, which they followed to the next stop, where the trail ended. Inquiries brought out the fact that the car had stopped there about midnight,--something which it rarely did. Having boarded it, the thieves made their escape, and that became one of the few instances in which the skill of the bloodhounds came to naught.

"But the dogs were not allowed to rust for want of work. Long Island gave them plenty to do, and continues to do so. When word came to headquarters that the station at Warwick Street on the Atlantic Division of the railway had been broken into and robbed, the dogs were put on the job with the least possible delay. They found the trail without trouble, and skurried down Atlantic Avenue to Logan Street, where the canines halted for consultation, since they had to face new conditions.

"These wonderful brutes had been instant to detect that two thieves were concerned in the crime. At the point named, the trail divided, and of course the pursuers did the same. Our old friend Bob trotted along until he reached No. 129, where he sat down, threw up his head and began howling. Jim, the other dog, kept on to No. 219, where he joined in the dismal chorus. The two were on the same side of the street, not very far apart, and must have made a striking picture, as from their different stations they serenaded some persons within. I can't help wondering," added young Burton with a laugh, "whether the thieves noticed that howling, and peeping out of the windows suspected what it meant.

"The trainers thought it possible a mistake had been made, and the dogs were taken back to the station and given the scent again. They followed it as unerringly as before, but oddly enough when they came to the forking of the trail, Bob and Jim changed places. It was as if one had proposed the shift to the other, who accepted it offhand.

"Doubting no longer, the officers arrested a schoolboy in each house, whom the dogs identified. They confessed their guilt, and one was sent to the Juvenile Asylum at Dobbs Ferry and the other to the Elmira Reformatory.

"Now," said Burton, whose enthusiasm was natural, "can any one understand what it is that guides the bloodhound? Of course it is some sort of emanation, but how subtle it must be, and how fine the sense that can identify it among

scores of others! In the incident I have just related, the trail led through busy streets, where hundreds of men, women and animals had trodden upon the invisible footprints, each with his or her peculiar odor, which lingered for hours, and was as distinct to the dogs as the call of a megaphone is to us. It is beyond my comprehension."

"It is beyond the comprehension of any one," added Mr. Hall. "Bertillon has proved that the thumb prints of no two persons are the same, and so the scent of every one has a peculiarity of its own, but that doesn't lessen our wonder.

"There is no end to the proofs that have been given of their miraculous power."

"The dogs, I suppose, seem to enjoy tracking a criminal?"

"It is their delight. Although not credited with a high order of intelligence, they know as well as their trainers what is expected of them, and enter into it with as much gusto as you boys do your vacation."

"Is a criminal when overtaken by the dogs in danger of being hurt by them?"

"It depends upon himself. If he continues to run and puts up a fight they will attack him. If he quietly submits, they will mount guard and hold him unharmed until their master comes up and takes the criminal into custody. Then the dogs, seeing that that particular task is finished, show by their behavior that they are as eager as ever for their next job. But, for safety's sake, they are generally held in leash, master and dog keeping company."

"How is it with Zip?"

"He always runs free, and will not harm a fugitive unless ordered to do so. You understand that he and I are chums, and I have never used him to chase a criminal. He roams through the country, and I keep him on edge by such tests as to-day. He is so familiar with my scent that he will pick it up instantly, without first sniffing articles I have worn. The other day I played a mean trick on him. I left him at the Samoset House on Mouse Island and started for Boothbay Harbor on the steamer *Wiwurna*, but instead of getting off at the wharf, I slipped over the gunwale at the rear, and Captain Free McKown took me on board his motor boat *Edith* which was lying near, and started back to Mouse Island with me. Just before reaching the dock I met the *Norman II* starting for Boothbay and seated on his haunches at the prow was Zip. I was not expecting to see him and I should have got out of sight, but he discovered me and emitted the most dissatisfied howl I ever heard. It said as plain as so many words, 'You played me a low down trick, and I don't like it.' He would have sprung overboard and tried to swim to me, had I not forbidden him. Perforce he went on to Boothbay and came back on the *Norman II*. I was in my room when he scratched on my door and I admitted him. He was so mad that he refused to eat the meat prepared for him, and pouted the rest of the day. I apologized and coaxed, and by night had won back his favor and the cloud between us passed away."

CHAPTER XVIII -- A Match of Wits

It may be said that Zip had become the hero of the Boy Scout camp on Gosling Lake. He belonged to the finest breed of bloodhounds in the world and had given an illustration of that gift of his species which approaches the miraculous. The stories told by his master of his other exploits, and of what had been done by his kind on Long Island and elsewhere, were absorbingly interesting. As young Burton remarked, his study of this canine species had given him more knowledge than could have been the case otherwise, and he naturally did most of the talking on that cool August night in front of the bungalow. The bloodhound is one of the most dignified of dogs, and resents anything in the nature of familiarity by strangers. Alvin, Chester, Mike and several others tried to make friends with Zip, but he showed them plainly that he preferred to be left to himself.

"Ef it was meself that was as partic'lar as him to selict me associates," said Mike, "I should faal mighty lonely, as Jim O'Toole remarked after he had been lost for six weeks in the woods. I'll remimber yer coolness, Zip," he added, shaking his finger at the dog nestling at the feet of Burton, "and to-morrer ye'll faal so ashamed, after ye try to match wits wid me, that ye'll resign as a bloodhound and become a poodle dog for the rist of yer days."

"Don't boast too soon," said the guest; "I'll put my stake on Zip every time."

"And so will I," added Alvin; "if Mike was half as smart as he thinks he is, we should all be fools compared with him."

"Some folks don't naad the comparisin to show they're lacking in the first ilimints of sense," retorted the Irish youth with fine sarcasm.

It was quite late when the boys retired for the night. No one would have objected to the presence of Zip in the bungalow, but his master preferred that he should spend the night outdoors, and he was waiting there the next morning when Burton, the first to arise, came out to have a romp with him before breakfast.

It was about eight o'clock that the whole party of Boy Scouts including their guest gathered on the front porch, eagerly interested in the test that was to be made of the skill of Zip the bloodhound in following a scent. Every one was on the *qui vive*, for the novelty of the proceeding appealed to them.

The arrangements, simple of themselves, had been made while the party was at breakfast. Three trials were to take place, involving that number of Boy Scouts. Each was to plunge into the woods and use every device possible to hide his trail from the dog, which was to take up his task an hour after the fugitive, as he may be called, left the bungalow.

The first runner was the diminutive Isaac Rothstein, the second, the tall, long-limbed Hoke Butler, and the third Mike Murphy.

"There is only one condition," said young Burton, when everything was ready; "you must not make any use of the lake. Zip can track you only to the edge."

"The lake is the only water shut out?" remarked Hoke Butler inquiringly. The guest hesitated a moment, suspecting some intended trick by the questioner.

"That is all."

"How about the Sheepscoot River?" asked Mike.

"If an hour's start will enable you to reach that stream ahead of Zip, you win."

Scout Master Hall turned to Isaac, who was standing in the middle of the group on the porch. The bright-eyed youth nodded.

Burton spoke to the hound which, knowing what was expected of him, came forward and sniffed around the Boy Scout's feet and ankles. He did this for only two or three seconds, when he backed off and took his place beside his master.

"That means he is ready if you are."

"I am to have an hour's start?"

"More if you wish it."

"That's enough, and you are sure he will not attack me?"

"Have no fear of that, but I suggest that you do not tempt him."

"What do you mean by that?" asked young Rothstein.

"Don't tackle *him* first; and when he comes up with you, as he is sure to do, stop running. The Belgian dogs have a

trick of dodging between the legs of a fugitive and tripping him, but the bloodhound prefers to drag him down."

"In other words," said Mike, "whin the dog gits ye down, and has his paws on yer breast, and is hunting out the best place to begin his feast, h'ist the flag of truce."

Isaac, accompanied by Scout Master Hall and several of the boys, passed into the bungalow, closing the door behind them, and went out of the rear door which was also shut. The dog remained on the front porch with his master and the other scouts, each party out of sight of the other. A few minutes later, Isaac's friends rejoined their comrades, Burton and several of the Scouts glancing at their watches to note the time. Zip lay at his owner's feet, with his nose between his paws, as if intending to pass the interval in sleep.

Before starting, Isaac was asked to explain his plan. He replied that it was merely to do everything he could to puzzle his pursuer, and he was confident of succeeding. It was useless to make any effort at the start, and he walked away at his ordinary pace, quickly disappearing among the trees.

The moment, however, he was out of sight he began the precautions he had decided upon before starting. He turned at right angles, walked rapidly for a hundred yards, then changed again to the same extent. Since the shift each time was to the right, this made an exact reversal of the course upon which he set out, and being kept for a little while took him back to the bungalow, a rod or two from his starting point. No one saw him, since every one was at the front. Thus he made a second get away, which delayed him for a few minutes.

Isaac chuckled, for he was sure he had played a cute trick upon the dog, which he believed would be puzzled thereby, and yet you and I can readily see that there was "nothing in it" at all.

Again the youth dived in among the trees, or broke into a rapid run, going straightaway, but taking as long steps as he could. Then he zig-zagged, first to the right and left, describing irregular circles which assuredly would have led him astray had he not caught glimpses of the lake now and then, and thus knew the course he was following, which in the main was toward the cabin of Uncle Elk.

He kept note of the time, and just before the hour expired made a long sweeping curve to the right, which brought him back to the opposite end of the bungalow from his starting point.

"Hurrah!" he called as he bounded up the steps among his friends; "where's Zip?"

"On your trail," replied his owner.

"Don't be too sure of that; I've given him the task of his life."

"Undoubtedly the easiest one; now that you have returned," said Burton, "you may as well tell us everything you did."

Isaac described his course from the first,—how he had actually started twice, often shifting and finally making a big curve, still marked by abrupt changes that were sure to baffle the keenest nosed bloodhound that ever tracked a fugitive into the depths of the Everglades.

"You couldn't have given Zip an easier task," said Burton; "when he left here a short time ago he circled about the clubhouse, and in three minutes at the most took your scent."

"But didn't the two trails puzzle him?" asked the astonished Isaac.

"There was a difference of a few minutes in their making and he took the freshest."

This sounded so incredible that the guest qualified his assertion.

"Even if he accepted the older scent, it led him straight to the second. All your circlings and doublings availed you nothing; you never perplexed him for more than an instant."

"How can you know that?"

"There's your answer."

Burton nodded toward the steps up which Isaac Rothstein had come some time before. There was Zip, who without baying or making any kind of outcry, galloped over the porch and directly to where the astounded lad was sitting. Stepping a pace or two away, he looked up at the youth and then walked over to his master and sat down beside his chair.

"You can translate his remarks," said the latter. "Words could not be plainer: 'There's the young man who thought he could fool me, but never was he more mistaken.'"

Isaac joined in the clapping of hands. Zip preserved his dignity and paid no heed to strangers. All he cared for was the good opinion of his master and he knew he had that.

"Next!" called Burton, and the tall, stoop-shouldered Hoke Butler rose to his feet.

"I don't want any help," he remarked with a wink toward Isaac Rothstein, as Zip sniffed about his feet; "stay right where you are. Mr. Burton, a half hour start will be enough for me."

"As you please, but you may have two hours if you wish."

"And we'll save our bouquets till Zip throws up the sponge," said Mike, "or rather until I tries me hand with the intelligenint canine."

Instead of leaving the bungalow from the rear, Hoke walked deliberately down the eastern steps, and sauntered off where he was in plain sight of all until he entered the wood which approached to within a few rods of the lake. He had given no one a hint of the scheme he had in mind, but the feeling was general that whatever its nature it was original, and more than one-half suspected he might outwit the remarkable dog. In this list we must not include George Burton.

Now Hoke had learned that it was useless to try to throw Zip off the scent by any such artifices as young Rothstein had used. As the guest declared, the tracker had not bothered the dog to the slightest extent. It therefore would be folly for the second fugitive to repeat the experiment. He had no thought of doing so.

Mention has been made in the preceding pages of a brook which ran near the home of Uncle Elk. After a devious course this emptied into Gosling Lake at a point about halfway between the cabin and the bungalow. Hoke rested his hopes upon this little stream.

"Burton barred the lake," chuckled the youth, "but he didn't say anything of this stream, though I was awfully afraid he would. I guess he doesn't know about it,--yes, he does, too, for he had to cross it on his way to the bungalow, but he forgot it. He can't kick when he finds I have made his dog sing small."

Allured by the single purpose, Hoke pushed straight on, turning neither to the right nor left. Recalling that he had shortened the time Zip was to wait, he broke into a lope. His build made him the fleetest runner in camp, and it did not take him long to reach the stream. He had crossed it so many times that the lower portion was familiar, and he turned as if to follow it to its source in the spring near Uncle Elk's cabin.

He found it of varying width. It was so narrow where a regular path had been made by the passing back and forth of the hermit and his friends, that nothing in the nature of a bridge was used. A long step or a moderate jump served.

Nowhere did the depth seem to be more than a few inches, except where a pool or eddy occasionally appeared; but as Hoke Butler picked his way along the bank, he was pleased to note here and there a considerable expansion.

"That's good!" he said to himself; "it will make it all the harder for that dog."

He now put his scheme into operation. Without removing his shoes, he stepped into the brook, sinking halfway to his knees, and began walking up the bed of the stream. The water was as cold as ice, and he gasped at first, but became quickly accustomed to it. The bottom was so irregular that he progressed slowly, and more than once narrowly escaped falling. Here and there boulders protruded from the shore and he steadied himself by resting a hand upon them as he labored past. Those that rose from the bed of the stream itself and around which the current foamed, afforded convenient stepping stones and were turned to such use.

"Of course that wouldn't do on land," he reflected, "for the dog would catch the scent, but he can't know I'm in the water, and will be hunting elsewhere for my trail. He'll be the most beautifully fooled dog in Maine."

CHAPTER XIX -- The Final Test

"Mr. George Burton may think he has a mighty smart dog," reflected Hoke Butler, as he picked his way up the small stream, "and he isn't any slouch, but there are some things he can't do, and one of them is to follow a fellow's trail through the water. Funny that when Burton shut us off from the lake he forgot this brook. Since he didn't mention it, I have the right to use it.

"Now," continued the logical young man, "while I keep to the water I don't leave any scent; I'm like the fawn which the hound can't track through the woods, and when Zip comes to the point where I stepped into the water, he'll be up against it--hello!"

He had come to a place where the brook expanded into a pool and more than fifty feet across. Opposite to where he halted, the foaming current tumbled over a series of boulders, and then spread out into the calm expanse, whose outlet was the small stream which Hoke had ascended to this point. The water lost a good deal of its limpidity, so that the bottom could be traced only a little way from where he stood.

"That's bully!" exclaimed the Scout, after brief reflection; "I'll walk across the pond--it can't be deep--and step ashore on the other side, Zip won't come within a mile of the spot."

He began wading, cautiously feeling each step before advancing. Since the depth was unknown he could not be too careful, though confident that the little lake was shallow in every part.

Half across the icy water reached to his knees. He pressed slowly on, thrusting out a foot and making sure of a firm support.

"It ought now to grow more shallow," he reflected as he felt his way forward; "when I get to shore I may as well go back to the bungalow and wait till Zip returns disgusted. I guess Burton can take a joke when it's on him, and he'll laugh with the rest of us----"

At that instant, Hoke stepped into an unseen hole and dropped out of sight. The sudden clasp of the icy element made him gasp, and when his head popped up, he spat and struck out frantically for land. It was remarkable that the only spot in the pond where the water was over his head was barely two yards across, and beyond it the depth was so slight that while swimming, one of Hoke's feet struck bottom. He straightened up, and strode to land, shivering in his dripping garments.

"Who'd have thought that? I didn't dream of anything of the kind--where did *you* come from?"

This angry question was addressed to Zip, who thrust his muzzle against Hoke's knee, looked up and wagged his tail.

"I'd like to know what led you here, when you hadn't any scent to follow."

"It was his nose," remarked young Burton some time later, when Hoke having exchanged his wet clothing told his story to the laughing group on the piazza.

"I left no scent when I stepped into the brook," replied Hoke.

"Therefore he knew you were in the brook; and set out to find where you had left it."

"He had to follow both sides in turn."

"Not at all; from one bank he could detect, without the least difficulty, the scent on the other side. He failed to take it up, and therefore knew you had still kept to the stream. If you had not been in sight when he reached the pond, he would have circled around it and nothing could have prevented his discovering your trail within the next few minutes. But he saw you feeling your way across, and the direction in which your face was turned told him where you would come out,--so he trotted around to welcome you when you reached land."

"Why didn't he jump in to help me out of the hole?"

"The bloodhound is content to leave that kind of work to his brother the Newfoundland, and a few others. You are ready to admit, Hoke, that there are bigger fools than Zip."

"Yes,--and here sits one of them. Mike doesn't seem to care to match with him."

"There's where you're mistook, as Bridget Lanigan said when she picked up a red hot poker thinking it was a ribbon she had dropped from her hair. Come, boys."

Mike sprang from his seat and addressed Alvin and Chester. There was much chaffing as the three passed into the bungalow and out at the rear. Zip had taken his place beside his master's chair, where he sat with his long tongue hanging far out, his mouth wide open, and his big ears dangling below his massive jaws. He manifested no further

interest in what was going on around him, though he must have understood everything.

The agreement with Mike was that the dog should remain on the piazza with his master and the other scouts until a full hour should have passed. Then he was to be allowed to smell of a pair of shoes which the fugitive left behind him. These belonged to Alvin Landon, who had brought some extra footwear. They had been worn by Mike for several days when he replaced them with his own, which he had on at the time he left the bungalow. Thus far everything was plain and above board.

"I don't know what Mike has up his sleeve," remarked young Burton; "no doubt it is something ingenious, for he and his two chums have been whispering and chuckling a good deal together, but Zip will defeat him as sure as the sun is shining in the sky. You have noticed that my dog does very little baying,—or rather, Isaac and Hoke have noticed it."

"But he gets there all the same," laughed Rothstein; "I should like to know what plan Mike has in mind."

"We shall learn when he comes back and we hear his story."

Prompt to the minute, Burton directed the attention of Zip to the pair of shoes that had been placed on the ground at the foot of the steps.

"Find him," was the command of his master, and the hound fairly bounded out of sight around the corner of the building. He bayed once as he picked up the scent, and then vanished like a bolt from a crossbow. The crowd of Boy Scouts resumed their chat and awaited as patiently as they could the issue of the novel test.

Meanwhile, Mike Murphy and his two chums set to work to carry out the scheme which they had formulated, and which each one was confident must result in the humiliation of the wonderful dog and his owner. With abundance of time at their command they did not hasten, but walked with a moderate pace to a point some two hundred yards from the bungalow. They had straggled along side by side, without trying to make their trail hard to follow, and now halted.

"This is far enough," remarked Alvin, as the three peered around without seeing any one.

His companions agreed. Then Alvin and Mike sat down on the ground and exchanged shoes. Not only that, but the former stooped and the latter mounted his back, his arms loosely around Alvin's neck with his legs projecting in front and supported by the crooked elbows of his carrier. Then he resumed his walk with Chester trailing behind.

When the distance from the bungalow had been doubled, Alvin asked:

"How much do you weigh, Mike?"

"A hundred and forty-three pounds--when ye started."

"I think it is about a ton now; how far do you expect me to carry you?"

"Not far,—say two or three miles."

"I rather guess not; Chest, it's time you took a turn."

"Oh, wait awhile; you have only just begun."

"This isn't as much fun as I thought," growled Alvin, resuming the task that was fast becoming onerous.

"I'm enjoying mesilf, as Jerry Dunn said whin he tackled three p'licemen. When I git tired I'll sing out, and we'll make a change."

Chester's sense of justice led him soon after to help in shifting Mike to his own shoulders, and the progress was resumed much the same as before.

You will perceive the trick the boys were playing upon the bloodhound. Mike had not only changed shoes with Alvin Landon, but his new ones were not permitted to touch ground while they traveled a fourth of a mile through the unbroken woods. Moreover, for this distance the leaves were trampled by Mike's shoes, but they were on the feet of Alvin.

The next step in this curious mixup was for Alvin, still wearing Mike's shoes, to diverge to the left, while Chester, with Mike on his shoulders, went a considerable distance to the right, where he halted and the Irish youth slipped to the ground and stood in the footgear of Alvin, who was so far away that he could not be seen among the trees.

All this was prearranged, as was that which followed. Mike started off alone, aiming to return to the bungalow by a long roundabout course, while the other two came together at a new point, and made their way by a more direct route to where their friends were awaiting them.

"I wonder that Zip doesn't show up," said Alvin, when they caught sight of the building, and he looked back; "it is considerably past the hour, and he ought to be in sight."

"It can't be he was sharp enough to detect our track."

"Impossible!"

And yet that is precisely what he did do, and later, when all were gathered on the piazza, including the dog, who arrived less than ten minutes after the astounded Mike, George Burton complacently explained how it had all come about.

"It was an ingenious scheme, Mike, and deserved success, but it did not bother Zip for more than a few minutes. If a dog can smile, he must have grinned when he penetrated your strategy. You made one mistake which was natural."

"It looks to me as if our greatest mistake was in thinking the pup didn't know more than ten times all of us together," said Mike with a sniff.

"That, too, was natural in the circumstances, but when you changed your shoes with Alvin, then was the time you three should have parted company. Instead, you stayed together, and Zip kept to the trail, for it was the only one for him to follow. Had you separated, he probably would have followed Alvin for awhile, but not long. He would have detected the deception, run back to the point of separation and hit the right one."

"But he virtually did that afterward," remarked Scout Master Hall.

"A proof of the truth of what I said. No doubt Zip trailed Alvin for a little way or until he discovered that the scent had changed and he was on the wrong track. Then he turned back and hunted out the right one."

"If that explanation is correct," said the amazed Mr. Hall, "it proves that the bloodhound was able to detect the emanations, or whatever it was that exhaled from Alvin's feet, and could be differentiated from Mike's even though it must have passed through the leather worn for days by Mike."

"Unbelievable as it sounds we have to admit it, but," added Burton, "we mustn't lose sight of what doubtless was a contributing factor. It was not Mike's shoes alone that told the secret, but his clothes. He brushed the trees and limbs when carried on the backs of his friends, and while walking. It was that which was probably the surest clue to Zip, as it was with Isaac and Hoke, and made it impossible for any one of the three to mislead the dog."

CHAPTER XX -- Speed the Parting Guest

George Burton and his dog Zip had won golden opinions from the Boy Scouts, who urged their visitor to spend several days with them, but he declined, saying he would set out on his return to Mouse Island directly after dinner, which was eaten at one o'clock. Truth to tell his tastes differed from those of his new friends. He cared little or nothing for bird lore, or the study of trees, or roughing it in the woods. But he was an athlete, who could outrun any one of the Boy Scouts and last longer on a tramp. He was putting himself through a course of training, with a view of making the football team when he should enter Princeton University, for which he had already matriculated. His sole companion on his long runs or the hours devoted to hardening his muscles was Zip, between whom and himself, as had been shown, there was a strong affection.

Accordingly, while the afternoon was quite young, Burton shook hands with all his friends, promising soon to see them again, and stepped into one of the canoes moored in front of the bungalow. He sat on the bottom with Zip between his knees, while Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes manipulated the paddles. Mike Murphy sat in front of Burton and assumed the airs of a captain. Burton had intended to pass around the eastern end of the lake, and over the rough trace to the highway, and so on to Boothbay and Mouse Island, thus reversing this tramp of the day before. Considerable of this long course could be saved by using the boat.

"I don't see how you can reach Mouse Island before night," remarked Alvin as he slowly swung his paddle.

"I can't."

"Then why not stay with us and make your start in the morning?"

"What's the difference? The weather is clear and cool, and the moon is near its full. I can reach Boothbay Harbor some time in the evening and stay there over night, and hire a launch to take me to Mouse. Or if I feel lazy, I can find accommodations at Bovil, which you know is a little village between that frightful road over which your supply team labors and Boothbay. Zip and I don't mind a little thing like that."

"Hello!" exclaimed Chester, "are we never to be rid of those pests?"

On the shore of the lake to their right, two men were seen standing with their attention fixed upon the canoe and its occupants. The distance was so slight that the three boys instantly recognized them as their old acquaintances,--Buzby Biggs and Saxy Hutt. It would have been thought that after their recent experience they would have lost no time in getting out of the neighborhood, but it will be remembered that when they leaped in a panic from the wagon of our old friend Jake, instead of running away from Gosling Lake, they headed toward it.

Zip was quick to identify the vagrants. Looking toward them he emitted a throaty growl.

"He hates tramps so, that I have to restrain him when we meet them."

"And why do ye restrain him?" asked Mike from his place in the boat. "Why don't ye gratify his appetite for such spalpeens, though I'm thinking he runs risk of being p'isoned?"

"So long as the tramps keep out of mischief I am willing to leave them alone."

"But that is what they don't do; they seem to have a spite against Doctor Spellman and his family."

"Against Doctor Spellman!" exclaimed Burton; "you don't mean Doctor Wilson Spellman?"

"That's his name."

"Where is he?"

Alvin lifted his paddle and pointed a little away ahead and to the right.

"He has put up one of those patent houses among the trees, where you can't see it from the lake, though we observe the smoke from his fire now and then. There he and his wife and little girl Ruth are spending several weeks in the most sensible manner possible."

"Why, he's my uncle," added the surprised and delighted Burton; "I knew he had gone on an outing in Maine, but thought it was at the Rangely Lakes. Now, as the expression goes, isn't that 'funny'?"

"You will like to call on him?"

"Most certainly; I'm very fond of him, and of Aunt Susie and Ruth."

The boat was sheered toward land at a point where the canoe of the physician was seen drawn up the bank. The two tramps stood so motionless and fixed in their attention that they suggested a couple of scarecrows. Mike turned his

head and grinned.

"Head the boat toward them, as if ye intinded to call and lave yer cards."

The bow was whirled further around, and pointed straight for the vagrants. Zip was tremulous with eager expectation. Resting his paws on the gunwales, he twitched his ears and growled. One good look at the canine was enough for the men. They turned about and dived among the trees as terrified as when the bullets of Doctor Spellman's revolver whistled about their ears.

"Howld on!" shouted Mike, "till we can talk politics wid ye, and thry to agraa as to whether the Bool Moose ought to be the next President."

But the scamps paid no heed, and Mike looked commiserately at the dog.

"'Tis a cruelty thus to disappint ye, Zip, as me dad said whin he walked five miles to have a shindy with Terence Googhagan, and found he'd been drowned; but ye may git a chance at 'im later on."

A few minutes afterward the nose of the canoe slid up the bank, and the boys stepped out. It being early in the afternoon, Doctor Spellman was seated in his camp chair in front of his house, smoking a cigar and looking over the *Boston Globe*. His wife, having set things to rights, had come forward to join him, with Ruth directly behind her.

The meeting was a pleasing one. When Burton remarked that he had time for only a call, the doctor and his family put so emphatic a veto upon it, that he was obliged to yield and agreed to remain until morning.

After mutual inquiries and answers had been made, Burton told of the forenoon's test of Zip's marvelous power of scent. The story was so remarkable that even Sunbeam, as she sat on Burton's knee, silently listened. The two were old friends. The little girl was the only one besides his master whom the hound would allow to become familiar with him.

"I wish I had a dog like him," remarked the doctor.

"That is impossible, for there isn't another like him," replied the owner.

"I have been so annoyed by a couple of tramps that I should like to get Zip on their track and have him drive them out of the neighborhood."

Alvin and Chester had told the guest of the doings of the nuisances, and there was laughter at their panic when, looking over the side of the canoe, they saw the frightful head of the sea serpent, apparently in the act of rising up to crush the boat or them in its jaws.

"I can't understand why they persist in staying in these parts, after the hints they have received," said the doctor.

"Can they have any special design in view?" asked Burton.

"I have thought of that, but can't imagine what it is. All such pests are thieves, but that is the worst that can be said of them. There is nothing in my home that is specially tempting; they know I have a gun and a revolver,--and that I am quite ready to use it if they give good cause. Yet when I kill a man," added the doctor with a grim smile, "I prefer to put him out of the way in my professional capacity. There are no unpleasant consequences to myself."

"Couldn't one of the spalpeens be ill?" suggested Mike. "He may be trying to screw up his courage to the p'int of asking ye for a prescription."

"He will find me ready, and I'll charge him no fee."

At this moment, the physician supplemented his words by a remark which, in the light of after events, was singular to the last degree.

"George, I have arranged a system of signals with my young friends here."

"I don't catch your meaning."

"When young Jack Crandall broke his leg some time ago, there was no telling what complications would follow. It was therefore agreed that in case I was needed in a hurry, some of the Boy Scouts should fire one of their revolvers several times in quick succession. Then I would paddle to the bungalow as fast as I could."

"Could you count upon hearing the reports?"

"Yes,--as a rule; there is nothing to obstruct the sound on the water, unless it might be a strong wind, and as to that we shall have to take chances. My signal may vary."

"*Your* signal," repeated the astonished nephew; "what need can you have for anything of the kind?"

"Probably not any, and yet there's no certainty that I shall not. I brought some fireworks for the amusement of Stubby. Among them are a dozen sky rockets. If we should find ourselves in need of help at night, three rockets sent up in the sky will notify the Boy Scouts, who I know will make all haste hither, and a score of such young fellows form a force

that even a half dozen men dare not despise. If I need them after they have retired I can use my rifle or revolver the same as they would use their weapon."

"Suppose the emergency should happen in the daytime?"

"We have our firearms to appeal to; with them we can duplicate the call of the Boy Scouts."

"I suppose the system is the best that can be devised," said Burton, "and yet it strikes me it is as likely to fail as to succeed."

"Why?"

"For your rockets to serve, some of the boys must see them,--and what certainty is there that they will do so?"

"Of course there's the possibility that they may not,--but until Scout Master Hall and his charges retire for the night, all or a majority of them are on the piazza and some of them would be certain to observe the rockets as they streamed upward, leaving a trail of fire behind them."

"But why talk of *your* needing *our* help?" asked Alvin; "it strikes me as absurd, though the reverse of the rule is sensible."

"I may as well confess that I feel uneasy over the persistent hovering of those tramps in the neighborhood. I fear to leave wife or Ruth alone, and I never do so even for a short time without making sure my revolver is loaded and at her instant command."

"When you come to the bungalow, you can bring Sunbeam and her mother with you," said Chester Haynes, "as you have generally done."

"That is my rule, but it leaves the house without the slightest protection, and those tramps, if they wish, can work their own sweet will."

"You did not visit us to-day, doctor."

"Crandall is getting on so well there's no need; he moves about so readily on those crutches you fellows presented him that his rapid recovery is assured. If to-morrow is fair, you may expect us over to dinner."

Alvin and Chester felt that this visit really belonged to young Burton,--so, after remaining a brief while longer, the three bade them all good-bye and paddled back to the bungalow, which they reached in the latter part of the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXI -- Call For Help

On the evening of one Thursday in August, Scout Master Hall and the members of the three patrols composing the troop of Boy Scouts were lounging on the piazza of the bungalow or clubhouse which stands on the shore of Gosling Lake in Southern Maine. It was the day succeeding the departure of George Burton and his bloodhound Zip.

The hours had been busy ones for our young friends. There had been fishing, strolls through the woods, investigation of the different kinds of trees, the study of birds, besides a "deer hunt." I hasten to say that this was not a real hunt, a dummy being used with bows and arrows as weapons. This is one of the most popular forms of amusements among Boy Scouts, who enjoy it to the full.

So when the youths came back to headquarters, they brought keen appetites, overflowing spirits and healthy tired bodies. The gathering on the piazza was a pleasing reunion of all the members. There were experiences to be told, good natured chaffing, the laying of plans for the morrow, and now and then Mike Murphy, in answer to the unanimous demand, sang for them. As I have already said, this remarkable youth, despite his unrestrainable waggery, would never sing anything of a frivolous or "rag time" nature, but inclined to sentimental or religious themes. When that marvelous voice of his, like the notes of a Stradivarius violin in the hands of Ole Bull, or Spohr, or Kubelik, was wafted across the placid lake, it was easy to believe the story of the sirens of Lorelei.

Thus the party was grouped on the night I have named, and the hum and chatter of conversation was at its height, when Scout Master Hall exclaimed:

"Look!"

Every voice was instantly hushed. In the gloom the leader's arm which he had instinctively extended could not be seen, but naturally all who were not already looking out upon the water did so. Every one was in time to see a swift ascending rocket turn and break into a shower of sparks as it dived downward again.

It was still in sight when a second whirred upward for two hundred feet or more, leaving a streaming, dazzling trail as it circled over, exploded and the stick plunged downward in the darkness.

Every one held his breath. Most of them rose and stared. It might be that the physician was sending up the rockets to amuse his daughter. If there were only two, they would mean nothing more; if there was another---

"There it is!" gasped Scout Master Hall; "something is wrong at Doctor Spellman's!"

It was the signal which had been agreed upon in the event of their friend finding himself in urgent need of help.

It seemed as if several minutes passed before, through the tomb-like hush, stole a faint popping sound,--the report of the explosion ending its journey across the lake.

The dull, almost inaudible call acted as if it were a bugle blast. The whole party dashed off the porch and at headlong speed to the two canoes drawn upon the beach. Even Jack Crandall swung to the steps, and debated a moment whether he should not join the party of rescue, but his common sense told him he would be only a hindrance, and he reluctantly stayed behind and watched the shadowy forms of his friends as shown in the star gleam, the moon not yet having risen.

"He has called for us," said Scout Master Hall, "and there isn't a minute to lose!"

Standing on the edge of the lake he gave his commands as coolly as an officer marshaling his forces for a charge. In a twinkling the two boats were afloat in the deep water which came close to the bank.

"There are twenty-one of us; each canoe will carry no more than eight; the other five must hurry along the shore to the doctor's house."

The lads stood breathless, waiting for the leader to name those who must walk. He promptly did so:

"Isaac Rothstein, Hoke Butler, Gerald Hume, Arthur Mitchell, Gordon Calhoun."

It was a keen disappointment to the five, but there was not a murmur.

"Come on, boys," called Hoke; "if we do our best we shall not be far behind them."

His long legs carried him at a pace that made it hard for the others to equal. In Indian file the procession, with him in the lead, loped along the beach and was speedily swallowed up in the obscurity.

The crews of the canoes worked like beavers. In a twinkling the boys had adjusted themselves and in each boat the two who were handiest with the paddles plyed them vigorously. Scout Master Hall was seated in the stern of one, among his companions being Mike Murphy, Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes.

At the moment the two craft put out from shore, Mike Murphy repeated the exclamation--

"Look!"

The startling performance of a few minutes before was repeated. One, two, three rockets streamed upward in the heavens, curved over, exploded and plunged downward among the trees.

"What can be the trouble?" was the question which everyone of the rescuers asked himself, as the oarsmen threw their energies into the task, and sent the heavily-laden craft with the utmost speed across the lake toward the home of their friend.

Alvin and Chester swung the paddles in their canoe, which speedily assumed a slight lead. There was little or no conversation, but each Boy Scout was busy with his thoughts, and burning with curiosity to learn the cause of the strange night call across the lake. Since every one knew of the doings of the two tramps, who had been lurking in the vicinity for several days and had been seen the previous afternoon, it was natural that suspicion should turn to them.

And yet it was hard to imagine a situation in which so plucky a man as Doctor Spellman, who owned a revolver and a repeating rifle, would have any fear of two unarmed vagrants. Impulsive by nature, and already resentful toward them, he would stand no nonsense at their hands.

And for a third time were three signal rockets sent streaming aloft, before the canoes had passed half the distance between the bungalow and the home of the physician. The urgency of the summons filled all with anguish. Mike and the Patrol Leader offered to relieve Alvin and Chester with the paddles, but they would not listen and bent resolutely to their task. The other canoe had pulled up alongside, and the two kept abreast with barely ten feet separating them.

The cause of the call of distress was revealed with startling suddenness and before the craft reached land. Through the gloom, Mike Murphy caught the vague outlines of a man and woman on the beach, and he shouted:

"What's the matter, docther?"

The reply of itself was a partial answer:

"Is Ruth at the bungalow?"

"She hasn't been there since ye brought her over the other day."

"Then heaven save us! she is lost."

It was the mother who uttered this wail, as she convulsively clasped her hands and walked distractedly to and fro.

The boys leaped out of the boats and gathered round the grief-smitten couple.

"Tell us what this means," said Scout Master Hall, as he sympathetically clasped the hand of the physician, who spoke with rare self-command, though his wife began sobbing as if her heart was broken:

"We did not miss her until about an hour ago; I sat in front of the house smoking and talking with wife, when she remarked that it was time Ruth was in bed. I called to her, but there was no answer. Thinking she had fallen asleep inside, I lighted a match and looked around, wife joining me. A brief search showed she was not there. We hurried outside, and I shouted again.

"By that time we were in an agony of distress and wife was sure something dreadful had happened to her. As soon as we could command our wits we found that neither of us had seen her for nearly two hours and the thought struck us both that she had wandered off to the bungalow. If she had kept along the beach and walked steadily she would have had time to reach you, but there are so many other awful chances that I dared not trust to that, so I appealed to you."

"And you did right; there is nothing that is possible for us to do that we will not do," was the response of Scout Master Hall.

"She may still be wandering along the beach on her way to the bungalow."

"Five of our boys are hurrying over the same course to this point, and will be sure to meet and bring her home."

"Unless she has strayed off in the woods and been lost."

"Let us hope that such is the fact, for then she will be safe and suffer only slight inconveniences."

"Oh, it is worse than that," moaned the mother, still pacing to and fro and wringing her hands; "she has fallen into the lake and been drowned."

"I cannot believe that," said the Scout Master, following the remark with such tactful assurances that the mother regained a part of her self-command, to the extent even of feeling a faint hope that all was well with her child.

The conduct of the youths was admirable. When they spoke it was in whispers and undertones, but every heart was filled with the sincerest pity, and all were eager to do everything they could for the smitten parents.

The Boy Scout does not content himself with words: his mission is to do a good turn, and where every minute was beyond value none was thrown away.

Scout Master Hall assumed charge. He directed six of the boys to take the back trail, as it might be called,—that is, around the eastern end of the lake to the bungalow. This would insure their meeting Hoke Butler and his companions, who in turn would meet the missing child if she had wandered over the same route. The six to whom this task was entrusted were under the charge of Mike Murphy.

The same number of boys were ordered to follow the opposite direction,—that is, to skirt the lake to the westward,—each of the two searching parties to keep it up until they came together at the bungalow. This arrangement left four Boy Scouts, including Mr. Hall and not mentioning the father and mother. The leader proposed that he, one of the lads and the parents should separate, plunge into the woods and pursue the hunt independently of one another. Since for a time the search must be a blind one this plan was as good as any that could be suggested.

The Scout Master took Alvin and Chester aside.

"I have selected you for a special work," he said. "You are fleet of foot, cool-headed and have good judgment. The doctor has made no reference to those tramps, and yet I know he suspects they have stolen Ruth, and intend to hold her for ransom. I believe it is either that, or she has wandered off and fallen asleep in the woods,—with the possibility that she is drowned.

"I want you to make your way as quickly as you can to the little town of Bovil, where I think there is a telephone. If the tramps have kidnapped the Sunbeam, they will try to get out of the neighborhood. Telephone to the officers at Boothbay Harbor and other points, and get word to Burton at Mouse Island as soon as possible, and ask him to make all haste here with Zip. He'll do it."

CHAPTER XXII -- Groping In the Dark

Five distinct parties were engaged in searching for the missing child, Ruth Spellman. Hoke Butler and his companions had left the bungalow on foot, because there was not room in the two canoes for them. Knowing nothing of the cause of the doctor's appeal for help, they made no hunt until, when the greater part of the distance was passed, they met Mike Murphy and his friends. These had advanced at a slower pace, for they were hunting for that which they dreaded to find, and they meant to neglect nothing.

When the two parties came together, a brief explanation made everything clear. Inasmuch as the larger part of the beach to the eastward had not been examined, it was agreed that the coalesced companies should return at a slower pace to the bungalow, and then, if nothing resulted, reverse and push the search all the way to the house of Doctor Spellman. This would be covering the ground twice, and it would be done effectively.

"Do you think she has been drowned?" asked Hoke of Mike.

"I do not, for it's unraisable that she should be. The Sunbeam is afeard of the water and would not step into it. If there was a dock or a pile of rocks where she could have fell off, she might have done the same, but there's nothing of the kind, and the little one couldn't have slipped into the lake while walking along the shore."

It may be said that this theory was accepted by every one except the parents and they were inclined toward it. It was their anguish of anxiety which warped their reasoning and made them fear at times that that precious form was drifting in the embrace of the chilling waters, and would never again respond to their loving caresses.

While scrutinizing every foot of the way, each member of the two parties scanned the moonlit lake, as far as the vision extended, urged by a fearful fascination that scattered cold reasoning to the winds.

Suddenly Hoke Butler, who was slightly in the lead, stopped short, pointed out on the water and asked in a startled undertone:

"Isn't something floating out there?"

All grouped about the speaker and peered in the direction he indicated.

"Ye're right," whispered Mike, swallowing the lump in his throat; "can it be Sunbeam?"

The surface of the lake was as placid as a millpond. Barely a hundred feet from shore a motionless object was seen floating, but it was so low that for a time it could not be identified.

"I'm thinking," added Mike, "that she would not float for a day or two, but bide ye here till I swim out and make sartin."

He began hastily disrobing, but before he was ready for the plunge Hoke exclaimed:

"It's the branch of a tree."

Now that the assertion was made, all saw that it was true. The identity of a limb with its foliage was so evident that they wondered how even a momentary mistake had occurred. The advance was resumed, and in the course of the following hour the boys reached the bungalow, where Jack Crandall was seated on the piazza with his crutch leaning beside him. It need not be said that he was shocked beyond expression by the news.

"How I wish I were able to join in the search," he lamented, "but I can only sit here and wait and pray for you."

"Do you think it likely she has been drowned?" Hoke asked.

"No; and yet it is possible. She may have slipped while walking on the edge and a child like her is so helpless that it would be all over in a minute or so. Keep up your hunt until she is found and don't forget to scan every part of the lake you can see."

Jack made no reference to Biggs and Hutt, the tramps, for he knew very little about them. Mike, like his intimate friends, had them continually in mind, but the same strange dread that for a time restrained them, held his lips mute. He did not want to believe they had had any hand in Sunbeam's disappearance, and yet the conviction was growing upon him that they had kidnapped and would hold her for ransom.

"And if the same proves true," he muttered with the old glint in his eye, "it's mesilf and the rest of the byes that will do the biggest kind of a good turn consarning the spalpeens."

For the second time the beach leading from the bungalow eastward to the temporary home of Doctor Spellman was traversed, and the search if possible was made more rigid than before. With so many at work, a number tramped through the woods bordering on the open space, though that seemed useless since in the gloom their eyes were of little help. They did not forget to call the name of the lost one, Mike taking upon himself this duty. He used her right

name as well as those by which he and other friends knew her, and his clear voice penetrated so far into the still arches that it was heard by other searchers who, though they shouted as loud, were not audible to him and his companions.

Gradually they approached the desolate home, arriving there about midnight. They had not come upon the slightest clue and no one was found in the house, nor was any light burning. All were pretty tired, for the tramp was a long one, but they were as ardent as ever to do their utmost to find the missing child.

"There's no use in going back to the bungalow," said Mike, as the group gathered in the little clearing; "it strikes me we may as well turn into the woods."

It must have been about this time that the searching party which had gone to the westward completed the circumvallation and joined Jack Crandall seated on the piazza,—listening, watching and praying that all might be well with the lost child. These boys had been as painstaking and thorough as Mike and his friends, and were equally unsuccessful. Not the faintest light upon the mystery had come to them.

"I don't think it possible she took that direction, unless it may have been for a short distance, for there was nothing to attract her thither. In visiting us she was always brought across the lake, though I heard her father say they had followed the beach once or twice. The distance is less."

"We fellows can't go to bed," said Colgate Craig, "until the little one is found."

"You have had a long tramp and must be pretty tired."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Robert Snow sturdily; "we'll keep it up all night, if there's the least chance of it doing any good."

"The trouble is," said Jack, who had learned the particulars of what had been done from Mike Murphy, "Mr. Hall has made no plans beyond what all of you were to do first. You with Mike's party have gone round the lake, and a part of the distance—the most promising as it seems to me—has been covered twice."

"Do you think there is any use of our retracing our steps?"

"Not the slightest; wherever Ruth may be found, it will not be in that direction."

"Where do you advise us to go?"

"Follow Mike's party; that will be the third time the ground has been traversed."

"What do you think has become of Sunbeam, as Mike calls her?"

"It seems to me she has strayed only a little way from home, grown weary, sat down to rest and fallen asleep."

The counsel of Jack Crandall was followed. Thus the major part of the searchers were soon pushing through the woods in the neighborhood of Doctor Spellman's home. It will be recalled that he, his wife and Scout Master Hall, set about this task upon the first breaking up of the Boy Scouts to prosecute their separate lines of work. Although they parted company directly after leaving the others, the three kept in touch with one another, and after a time husband and wife joined, with Mr. Hall just far enough away to be invisible.

The Scout Master left it to the parents of Ruth to call to her. They did this at brief intervals, and they did not listen more intently for the reply which came not than did he. When an hour had been used without result, the three came together in a small open space lighted by the moon.

The mother, although distressed beyond description, was become more composed.

"What do you think, Mr. Hall?" she wearily asked.

"I judge that, like all healthy children, Ruth is a sound sleeper. What more likely than that when worn out, she has lain down on the leaves like another Babe in the Wood, and will not open her eyes until morning? Am I not right, Doctor?"

"Undoubtedly, provided she has been permitted to do as you say."

"I do not understand you."

"What is the use of our keeping silent, when the same fear is in all our hearts?"

"I still fail to catch your meaning."

"Wife, and you, and I believe she has been kidnapped by those tramps."

The mother gave a gasp and low moan. Covering her face with her hands, she sobbed:

"That's what I have feared from the first."

"I cannot deny that the dread has been with me," said the Scout Master, "yet I have hoped and still hope we are mistaken."

"I see no room for such hope."

"But, even if so, it should be an immeasurable relief. It means that she has not fallen into the lake, nor is she in danger from a night's exposure."

"But think of her being in the power of those hideous creatures," wailed the mother.

"If they have stolen her it is for the purpose of ransom. They will take the utmost care that not the slightest harm befalls her, since it would defeat their scheme."

"And this is the twentieth century!" was the bitter exclamation of the physician. "If the probability occurred to you and me, why did we not take steps to baffle them instead of wasting our time in groping through the darkness of the woods?"

"I did do so."

"Now it is I who do not understand."

"Two of the fleetest of the Boy Scouts,--Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes,--are at this moment making all haste to the village of Bovil, on the road to Boothbay Harbor. If they can reach a telephone, they will communicate with officers in the surrounding towns and villages, asking for the arrest of the tramps on sight. Those boys will not waste a minute."

"Thank heaven for that."

"Furthermore, at the earliest moment they will 'phone your nephew, and you need not be told that he and his dog Zip will be equally quick in getting on the job."

"*That* gives me more hope than anything that has happened since my child disappeared," was the declaration of Doctor Spellman, whose wife shared in the pleasurable thrill.

CHAPTER XXIII -- A Fortunate Meeting

Scout Master Hall was right when he said Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes would not waste a minute in carrying out the task he had given them. They were determined to secure the arrest of the men who it was believed had kidnapped the little daughter of Doctor Spellman, before they could leave that section. In addition, they aimed to get the help of George Burton and his bloodhound.

This last was far more important than the other, and would insure the discovery of the fate of the child. If Zip was allowed to take the scent within twenty-four hours after she left home--and possibly a little later--he would never lose it.

It was four miles over the rough broken trace to the highway, and then two more of smoother traveling would bring them to the straggling town of Bovil, where they hoped to secure telephonic communication with Boothbay Harbor and other near by towns. If that could be done, they could reach Samoset Hotel, on Mouse Island, by the same means. It would be like young Burton to start at once. He could be taken quickly across to Boothbay in a motor-boat, where he knew the right course to follow, since he had been over it with Zip. He would have to ascend the Sheepscoot and walk three miles to reach Bovil, but if a midnight start was made, he ought to reach the village at daylight and soon after.

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock that Alvin and Chester came in sight of the score of buildings which make up the village of Bovil. When they passed through it on their way to Gosling Lake, they paid so slight attention that they could not recall whether it had an inn. Vastly to their delight, however, they came upon the old-fashioned structure near the center of the place, and it was the only one in which a light was burning.

"That's luck," said Alvin, as the two ascended the steps, pushed open the door and entered the roomy office, with its unpainted desk, broad fireplace where no wood was burning, a bench without any back, several rickety chairs, and showy posters on the walls for the information of travelers by boat or rail.

Staring around the room, by the dim light of the kerosene lamp suspended from the middle of the ceiling, the youths at first saw no person, but heavy breathing directed attention to a settee at the other side, upon which a young man was stretched at full length, with his coat doubled under him for a pillow. He was the model watchman, who was aroused only by vigorous shaking. By and by he glumly assumed a sitting posture, and blinked at the disturbers.

"What do you want?" he demanded sourly.

"Can you get us a room?"

"Spose so. Why didn't you come earlier?"

"Because we came later," replied Chester; "have you got a telephone in the house?"

"Course we have,--what of it?"

"We want to use it at once to call up Boothbay Harbor."

"This ain't no time to bother with such things; you'll have to wait till morning. What bus'ness had you to wake me up?"

"See here," said Alvin, who was in no mood for trifling, "we have come a good many miles to reach a telephone; this is a case of life and death; we haven't a minute to spare."

"Don't make no difference; you'll have to wait till to-morrer morning."

"Give me the number of the Chief of police at Boothbay."

As Alvin made the peremptory request, he slipped two silver half dollars into the bony hand of the young man. This effected the purpose intended. He became wide awake on the instant, stepped briskly to the desk, caught up the receiver of the instrument, asked and answered several questions, and after a brief wait, nodded to Alvin, who with Chester stood at his elbow.

"Here you are," he said, passing the receiver to the former; "Art Spofford is the chief of police at Boothbay, and he's at t'other end of the wire."

Artemus Spofford, or "Art" as he is called by every one, was courteous, and replied that no tramps had been seen in town for several weeks, but he and his officers would be on the alert and arrest and hold any vagrants answering the description. Not only that, but he volunteered to communicate with the neighboring towns and see that every possible precaution was taken.

"Leave it to me," he added; "don't mix in; I can attend to it better than you; how shall I reach you, if we scoop in the gentlemen?"

It was agreed that Art should 'phone to Bovil, where some of the Boy Scouts would call at intervals of a few hours to get any message left for them. This arrangement was the most convenient for all concerned.

It took some trying minutes for Alvin to get Hotel Samoset on Mouse Island. It looked as if Everett Ham, the night clerk, was also asleep at his post, but I must not do the faithful young man that injustice. He responded after a time, and an understanding was speedily reached.

"Is George Burton staying at your hotel?"

"Yes; he has been here for a week."

"Please call him to the 'phone as quickly as you can; this is of the utmost importance; don't delay for a moment."

"Hold the wire."

With his ear to the receiver, Alvin Landon plainly heard by means of the marvelous invention the hurrying footfalls of Clerk Ham as he dashed out of the office, along the hall and upstairs to rouse Burton. Sooner than was expected he was back at the instrument.

"Hello! are you there?" he called.

"Yes; where is Burton?"

"He isn't in the hotel."

The boys were dumfounded for the moment.

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes; I've been to his room; he isn't there; then I remembered he went off two days ago and hasn't been back since."

"Didn't he leave any word as to where he was going?"

"He never does; he and that dog of his are on the tramp all the time."

"Then you can't help me to locate him?"

"I wish I could; there's only two things he's fond of--that is scouting through the country with that dog of his, and going to clambakes. Capt. Free McKown says he's looney on clambakes and eats as much as any two men."

"Well, Mr. Ham, will you be good enough to give a message to Burton the first minute you see him?"

"I surely will."

"Tell him to make all haste to his uncle on Gosling Lake--Got that? That their little girl is lost, and her parents are distracted with grief--Get that? And they beg him to come as quickly as he can--Get that?"

Ham repeated the substance of the words, and then rang off.

"We may as well go to bed," said Chester to the clerk, who had sauntered back to the settee and sat down. He lighted a tallow candle and led them upstairs to a roomy apartment, where he bade them good night, pausing at the door long enough to say:

"There's only one other chap staying with us; he's at t'other end of the hall. Do you want me to call you in the morning?"

"No; we shall wake early."

"That's a bad setback," said Chester dejectedly, as the two began preparing for bed; "we never dreamed that Burton would be away from Mouse Island."

"And with not the remotest idea of where to look for him. He left his uncle's house this forenoon, and may be miles inland, without our being able to get track of him for a week. I can't help feeling that Zip is the only one that can solve the puzzle, and it won't take him long to do so."

"No one who knows the dog can doubt that. If Sunbeam has managed to fall into the lake, he will lead us to the spot. If those scamps have stolen her, she will be found within an hour or two,--and then may the Lord have mercy on them!"

"Chest, do you believe they are mixed up in this business?"

"I can't help suspecting it."

"I don't, even though their hanging about Doctor Spellman's home has a bad look. Those kidnappings are done in the cities,--not in the open country like this; and then think for a moment of the conditions. For two tousled bums to steal a little girl, and compel her father to pay a ransom for her,--here in the Maine woods, within a few miles of Boothbay Harbor,--why the thing is preposterous."

"Has it occurred to you that they may be connected with others? They may be agents of the Mafia or Camorra or some regularly organized gang of kidnapers."

This was new to Alvin, and disturbed him painfully. What was improbable about it? The persistency of Biggs and Hutt in prowling about the lake suggested a strong motive,—such as that of earning a big reward through the commission of some such crime as indicated.

"I tell you, Chest, none of us has gone the right way about this business. Suppose Chief Spofford or some other officer succeeds in arresting the two tramps, what good will it do? They are not such fools as to walk into a town with a little girl in their charge. They would be called to account on sight without any request from her friends. As we agreed, we must pin our faith on the bloodhound, and we may not find him for days, when the trail will be so cold that even he cannot follow it."

The two felt that for the present they were at the end of their rope. They had done all they could to set the wheels in motion for the arrest of the tramps who were under suspicion, and the dread was strong with them that if such arrest could be brought about it would affect nothing. Any plan for the kidnapping of the little girl would be so cunningly laid by master minds that their agents would never walk into a trap, no matter how skilfully set.

"We must find Burton and his dog," was the last remark of Alvin. His companion murmured assent and then the two sank into the sleep of weariness and sound health, because of which they did not awake until the young man who had received them the night before hammered on the door and shouted that breakfast would be ready in ten minutes.

With self-reproaches they bounded out of bed, hurried through their preparations, and went down stairs two steps at a time. The meal was on the table, and for the moment they were the only guests, with the young man referred to acting as waiter.

The boys had hardly seated themselves when through the open door entered a third guest, accompanied by a black, sturdy, long-eared dog, and the name of the youth was George Burton and that of his canine companion Zip.

CHAPTER XXIV -- "The Latchstring Was Inside!"

The meeting was a joyous one. Alvin and Chester sprang to their feet and grasped in turn the hand of their astonished friend, while Zip, never forgetting his dignity, looked on as if he understood it all, as quite likely he did.

"I didn't leave Uncle Wilson's until after dinner yesterday," said Burton, "and as Zip and I were in no hurry, it was growing dark when we got here. Somehow or other, I fancied the looks of this old-fashioned inn and decided to stay over night, but what is it brings you here?" asked the young man as all three sat down to the table.

And then Alvin told his astounding story, to which Burton listened with breathless interest.

"How dreadful!" he exclaimed; "it distresses me more than I can tell. It was fortunate indeed that I decided to stop here, for I may not return to Mouse Island for several days. I reckon we shall do some tall traveling to Gosling Lake."

They did not linger over their breakfast. Burton tossed a few mouthfuls of meat to the dog, which sat on the floor beside his chair. As a rule, when off on one of his tramps, the hound shared his room, though he did not do so at the bungalow, which explained why Alvin and Chester saw nothing of the animal when they arrived several hours before.

"It isn't any use to theorize," remarked Burton, as the three paid their bill and hurried out of the inn, "for at such times you are more likely to be wrong than right. Ruth may have fallen into the lake and been drowned, without her body being found for several days; it may be that those tramps belong to an organized gang and have stolen and hidden her, but in that case," added the young man with a flash of his eyes, "they forgot to reckon with Zip; and if so, they will soon learn their mistake."

"The general belief when we left last night," said Chester, "was that she had simply wandered off in the woods until tired out, when she lay down and fell asleep."

"That sounds reasonable, but I can't shake off the fear that it is not the right explanation."

It need not be said that while the three boys were hurrying over the highway and along the rough path with the eager Zip, who knew that something was in the air, keeping them company, the Boy Scouts and Doctor Spellman and his wife were busy.

Their aimless groping through the wood was kept up until far beyond midnight, when the physician compelled his wife to return with him to the house and lie down for a brief rest. Scout Master Hall suggested to the members of the troop to return to the bungalow, he accompanying them, where they too secured sleep, and ate their morning meal at daylight. The agreement was that all should assemble at an early hour at the doctor's home, where a decision would be made as to what was next to be done.

If the child, as all prayed was the case, had simply gone astray in the woods, she would awake at an early hour and renew her effort to find her way home. With so many persons wandering here, there and everywhere she must hear their calls and her rescue could not be long delayed. If such proved not to be the case, and she had not been drowned, it would mean the worst. She was the victim of the most atrocious miscreants who lived,—for no crime is more merciless and unforgivable than the kidnapping of the pet of a household, and giving its parents the choice of paying an enormous ransom or never seeing it again.

Now, it may have struck you as strange that no reference has been made to Uncle Elk in the consternation which followed the discovery that Ruth Spellman had been lost or stolen. In knowledge of woodcraft none of the searchers could be compared to him, and yet no one had asked his help. The reason was simple. With all his skill in the ways of the forest, he could do no more, so long as the night lasted, than the youngest member of the Boy Scouts. He could join in the aimless groping and shouting, but with a score already doing their utmost, he would simply be one among them.

Although morning brought a change of conditions, it would seem that they were still unsurmountable, for what Apache, or Sioux or Shawnee (unless he were Deerfoot) could trail a little child through the forest, when her almost imperceptible footprints had been repeatedly crossed by other feet?

"I think we ought to appeal to Uncle Elk," said Scout Master Hall to the parents, after the scouts assembled at the Doctor's home had scattered to press their hunt harder than ever. "None of us can equal him."

"You know that for some cause which I cannot fathom, he has formed an intense dislike for my wife and me," said the perplexed father.

"But it is impossible that it should include the little one. At such a time as this no heart has room for enmity, no matter what fancy may have dictated."

"I am willing to be guided by your judgement," replied the doctor, after his wife had joined in the plea. "If Ruth has slept alone in the woods, she must have awakened an hour or two ago and ought to have been found. I don't see how the old hermit can help us, but we must neglect nothing. Come on."

But Mike Murphy had anticipated their action. We know what unbounded faith he held in Uncle Elk, and more than once he had felt inclined to go to his cabin. With the coming of morning he decided to do so.

Consulting with Patrol Leader Chase, Mike found that he had formed the same decision. Accordingly the two withdrew from the others without attracting notice and made their way together to the cabin of their old friend. This was so far removed from the zone of active search that none of the other Scouts was met.

"If he can't help us, no one can," said Chase.

"There's only one cratur that can thrack Sunbeam through the woods, and his name is Zip," replied Mike. "If I hadn't seen with me own eyes what he can do, I wouldn't belave the same. Wal, here we are!"

They had reached the little clearing in the middle of which stood the familiar cabin, as silent and devoid of all signs of life as ever. Without hesitation, Mike led the way up the path, placed his foot on the small steps, and was about to reach up to draw the latch, when he recoiled with a gasp.

"Do ye obsarve that?" he asked in a startled whisper.

The latchstring was inside!

Never since the leathern thong was first shoved through the little orifice above the tongue of iron had this occurred, by day or night.

The two boys stood for several minutes staring at the blank door, and then looked in each other's face. Not the slightest sound was heard from within.

"What does it mean, Mike?" asked the Patrol Leader in a still lower whisper.

"It maans 'no admittince'; this is no place for us. I can't guess what raison Uncle Elk has for shutting ivery one out, but he's done it, and we must respect it."

They turned away, hurrying in the direction of Doctor Spellman's house, and had almost reached it when they met the physician, his wife and Scout Master Hall, to whom the two boys told the astounding news. In other circumstances they would have theorized as to the cause of Uncle Elk's unaccountable action, but there was only one theme that filled every mind.

"It shuts us off from any aid by *him*," remarked the doctor; "we can only keep up the search and wait for the coming of my nephew and his dog,—but," he added bitterly, "that may not be for days, when even he can do nothing."

A ringing shout caused all to turn their heads and look along the beach toward the northern side of the lake. Three boys were coming toward them on a run, and a few paces ahead of them, as if he were their leader, galloped a black dog.

"God be thanked!" exclaimed the mother clasping her hands. "It's George and Zip!"

"Not forgitting Alvin and Chest, the two best boys that iver lived, barring only mesilf."

The next minute the parties were mingling, and greeting one another. Alvin, Chester and young Burton were panting, for they had not let the grass grow under their feet on the way from Bovil to Gosling Lake, but they were still good for much more of the same kind of work.

"Zip is ready," said his master, "and we are near the house. Let's make a start, for we are soon to learn the truth."

The news of the arrival of Zip quickly spread by means of shouts and calls to the scattered Boy Scouts, who began flocking to the quarters of Doctor Spellman, until very nearly the whole troop were gathered there. In answer to the request of Burton for some article of wearing apparel recently worn by Ruth, the mother with a calmness that impressed every one, brought forward a pair of chubby shoes, which the little one in an effort to "break them in" had kept on her feet until late in the afternoon, when they irked her so much she changed them for an old pair. Burton held them out to Zip, who sniffed several times and then turned his head away to signify that he had learned enough.

"Now, get to work!" commanded his master.

The scent was perhaps fourteen hours old when the Boy Scouts assembled in front of the wooden structure, saw Zip begin trotting to and fro with his nose to the ground. Suddenly he bayed slightly, and started down the slope in the direction of the lake.

"He's hit the trail!" said the excited Burton, dashing after him; "not too fast, Zip."

The youth never used a leash. The hound wore a handsome collar with his name and the address of his master

engraved on it. His voice was sufficient to restrain Zip if he traveled too rapidly.

But the dog at his slowest traveled so fast that the boys had to trot to keep pace with him. His master by common consent took the lead, with Alvin, Chester, Mike and the others at his heels. Zip would have drawn away from them all had not his master sharply restrained him. The doctor was well to the rear, in order to keep company with his wife.

The hound went straight toward the water, but a few paces away turned to the left, taking a course which if continued would lead him to the bungalow. This was kept up for more than a hundred yards, when he abruptly stopped and throwing up his head looked off over the lake, without emitting any sound.

The mother with a moan staggered and would have fallen had she not been caught in the arms of her husband.

"That means she is drowned!" faintly whispered the stricken wife. "O Wilson! I cannot bear it!"

"No, my dear; he has gone forward again; be brave; hope is still left."

Zip now led the company along the beach, at the same steady trot, with his master almost near enough to grasp his collar, and checking him now and then when he went too fast. There could be no doubt that he was following the scent, from which nothing could divert him.

But whither was it leading?

The run was a long one, always within a few paces of the water, until a point was reached opposite the path which led to the cabin of Uncle Elk. Here, to the astonishment of every one, the dog turned off and went up the slope.

"What can that mean?" was the question which each one asked himself.

And with more amazement than before, the procession of pursuers saw Zip follow the path across the clearing to the door of the cabin, where he stopped, threw up his nose and bayed. It was notice that he had reached the end of the trail.

Ruth Spellman was inside the log structure.

In a twinkling the whole company was grouped around the front of the building.

"Why don't you go in?" demanded the Doctor, pressing impatiently forward.

"You forget the latchstring is inside," reminded Scout Master Hall.

"What difference does that make? Is this a time to hesitate? Let's break in the door! Make room for me and I'll do it!"

Mike Murphy, Alvin Landon and Chester Haynes ran to the little window a few paces beyond the door and peered through the panes.

"Sunbeam is there!" shouted Mike, "and nothing is the matter with her!"

Before he could explain further, there was a crash. The impact of Doctor Spellman's powerful shoulder carried the staple which held the latch from its fastenings and the door swung inward. Through it swarmed the Boy Scouts, the physician and his wife in the lead.

In front of the broad fireplace, where the embers had long died, sat Uncle Elk in his rocking chair, silent, motionless and with head bowed. Seated on his knees, with her curls half hiding her pretty face and resting against his massive chest, was Ruth Spellman, sleeping as sweetly as if on her cot at home.

With a glad cry, the mother rushed forward and flung her arms about the child, sobbing with joy.

"O my darling! Thank heaven you are found!" and she smothered the bewildered one with kisses and caresses.

Suddenly Doctor Spellman raised his hand and an instant hush fell upon all. He had lifted the limp arm of the man and placed his finger on the wrist. The professional eye saw that which escaped the others. He said in a solemn voice:

"Uncle Elk is dead!"

CHAPTER XXV -- And the Last

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to show that Elkanah Sisum was a man of excellent birth and superior culture. He possessed moderate wealth, and when admitted to the bar his prospects could not have been brighter, but misfortune seemed to have marked him for its own. It delivered the first crushing blow by taking away the beloved wife of his young manhood, and leaving him an only child,—Ruth, who was as the apple of his eye. At eighteen she married a worthy young man who was admitted as a partner in the law firm and displayed brilliant ability. Unto the couple was born also a single daughter, named for its mother.

Sisum never remarried, but lavished his affection upon his daughter and especially the grandchild Ruth, whom it may be said he loved more than his own life. Thus things stood until the little one was nearly five years old, when she showed alarming signs of sinking into a decline. Her parents decided to take her on a long sea voyage in the summer time. The understanding was that they were to be gone for several months, but they never returned. Their steamer was not heard of again.

It was years before the grandfather gave up hope. The long brooding over his grief and the final yielding to despair,—slow but final,—produced a strange effect upon his mind. Only his most intimate friends saw that his brain was affected; others met and talked with him daily with never a suspicion of the fact. He had come to the gradual but fixed belief that although his dear ones had left him for the land of shadows, yet somewhere and at some time in this life his grandchild would come to him. She might not remain long, but she would reveal herself unmistakably before Uncle Elk himself passed into the Great Beyond. It was the centering of his thoughts and hopes upon this strange fancy that was actual monomania. Scout Master Hall detected it, though none of the Boy Scouts dreamed of anything of the kind. As the delusion fastened itself upon the old man, he formed a distaste for society, which of itself grew until it made him the hermit we found in the Maine woods during this summer. There he spent his hours in reading, and in studying animal and bird life,—trees and woodcraft. He never lost his gentle affection for his fellow men, and at long intervals visited his former acquaintances; but, though he left his latchstring outside and gave welcome to whoever called, he preferred to make his abiding place far from the haunts of men.

What mind can understand its own mysteries? While the current of life was moving smoothly with the old man, Doctor Spellman put up his summer home on the shore of the lake not very distant from the cabin of Uncle Elk. The latter set out to call upon them almost as soon as he learned of their arrival. While too far for the couple to see him, he caught sight of them sitting in front of their structure, the doctor smoking and the wife engaged in crochet work. Their child was playing with a doll indoors, and Uncle Elk saw nothing of her, nor did he learn of her existence until several days later, when occurred the incident that will be told further on.

It was that sight of the man and woman that gave a curious twist to the delusion of the hermit. He was startled by the woman's striking resemblance to his own daughter who had been lost at sea years before. He formed a sudden and intense dislike of the man who had presumed to marry a person that resembled his child, and it was painful to look upon the wife who bore such a resemblance. No brain, except one already somewhat askew, could have been the victim of so queer a process. Such, however, was the fact and of itself it explains a number of incidents that otherwise could not be explained.

It will be noted that thus far Uncle Elk had not seen the little child who was the image of her mother, and since the parents quickly learned of his strange antipathy and took care to avoid meeting him, it is unlikely that in the ordinary course of events he ever would have come face to face with the little one.

Now nothing is more evident than the absurdity of my trying to describe the mental ordeal through which this man passed on that last and most memorable night of his life. I base what I say upon that which Doctor Spellman told me as the result of his painstaking investigation, during the succeeding months, of the most singular case with which he was ever concerned, and even the brilliant medical man could not be absolutely certain of all his conclusions. However, they sound so reasonable that I now give them.

Throughout the afternoon, Uncle Elk was depressed in spirits, as is sometimes true of a person who is on the eve of some event or experience of decisive importance to himself. He was subject to a peculiar physical chilliness which led him to kindle a fire on his broad hearth, in front of which as the night shadows gathered, he seated himself in his cushioned rocking chair. As time passed he gave himself over to meditation of the long ago with its sorrowful memories.

He had sat thus for some time when he was roused by the twitching of the latchstring. He turned his head to welcome his caller, when he was so startled that at first he could not believe what his eyes told him. A little girl, of the age and appearance of the one who had gone down in the depths of the fathomless sea, stood before him.

"Good evening," called the child in her gentle voice; "how do you do?"

"Who are you? What's your name?" faltered the astounded old man.

"I am Ruth," she replied, coming toward him with the trusting confidence of childhood.

This was the name of the loved one who had left him in the long ago. The resemblance was perfect, as it seemed to him. *It was she!*

He rose to his feet, reached out, clasped her hand and touched his lips to the chubby cheek.

"God be praised! You are my own Ruth come back to me after all these years!"

That poor brain, racked by so many torturing fancies, accepted it all as truth.

"I am so tired," said the wearied little one, "I want to rest myself."

He tenderly lifted her in his arms and carried her behind the curtains, through which the firelight shone, laid her on the couch with her head resting on the pillow, and drew the coverlet over her form. At the end of the few moments thus occupied he saw that she had sunk into the soft dreamless sleep of health and exhaustion.

He came back to the sitting room. The outer door stood ajar, as it had been left by the infantile visitor. As he closed it he did an unprecedented thing,—he drew in the latchstring. He wanted no intruders during these sacred hours. Then he seated himself as before and gave himself up to musings and to wrestling with the problem which was really beyond his solution.

There must have been moments when he glimpsed the truth. That which he had lifted in his arms was flesh and blood and therefore could not be the Ruth who had stepped into the great unknown many years before. Yet she looked the same, and bore her name. Could it not be that heaven had permitted this almost incomprehensible thing?

He sat in front of the fire, which was allowed to smoulder all through the night. It is probable that he rose more than once, drew the curtains aside and looked upon the little one as revealed in the expiring firelight.

"Whatever the explanation, it means that *my* Ruth and I will soon be together. If it is not she who has come to me, I shall soon go to her."

Unlocking a small drawer of the table, he drew out a large, unsealed envelope, unfolded the paper inside, glanced at the writing, returned it to the enclosure and laid it on the stand where it could not fail to be seen by any visitor, and then resumed his seat.

"By this time," said Doctor Spellman, "the brain which had been clouded probably became normal. He knew that my Ruth could not be his Ruth. He must have seen that she was the child of the man whom he intensely disliked because I had presumed to marry a woman who resembled the daughter whom he had lost."

When daylight returned, Uncle Elk after a time aroused himself. He did not renew the blaze on the hearth, but once more drew the curtain aside. Ruth Spellman still slept. As gently as he had laid her down, he raised and carried her back to his chair where he resumed his seat, with the curly unconscious head resting upon his breast, and after a time, he closed his own eyes, never to open them again.

In the presence of death all was hushed. The Boy Scouts bowed their uncovered heads, and as they stood in the crowded room gazed in awe upon the gray head and inanimate form in the chair. Even the overjoyed mother who had clasped her loved child and lifted her from the lifeless arms suppressed her glad croonings, while the bewildered Ruth gazed upon the strange scene with hardly a glimmering of what it all meant.

For the moment, Doctor Spellman was the professional expert. In a low voice he addressed the Scout Master and the young friends who looked into his face and listened.

"Uncle Elk passed away several hours ago,—his death from heart failure was so painless that it was like falling asleep, as was the case with our child. This looks as if he had left a message for us."

As he spoke, the doctor picked up the large unsealed envelope and held it up so as to show the address,—"To be opened by whosoever finds it after my death."

Drawing out and unfolding the sheet, the physician read aloud:

"It is my wish to be buried on the plot between my cabin and the brook. Over my grave a plain marble stone is to be erected with the inscription, 'Elkanah Sisum. Born January 23, 1828; died ---' Add nothing to the date of my death. Inclosed are enough funds to pay the expense. Whatever remains, which is all the money I possess, I desire to be presented to the Sailors' Snug Harbor, New York."

Having finished the reading, the physician added:

"The coroner must be notified and the proper legal steps taken. We should get word to Boothbay Harbor as soon as possible."

"I will attend to that," said George Burton, "and start at once."

The wishes of Uncle Elk were carried out in spirit and letter. The clergyman who came from Boothbay Harbor preached a touching sermon, and a score of men who had known the old man for years came out to the cabin to pay their last respects. The evidence of Doctor Spellman was all the coroner required, and there was no hitch in the solemn exercises.

Mike Murphy, when he could command his emotions, sang "Lead, kindly Light," with such exquisite pathos that there was not a dry eye among the listeners. The grave had been dug by the Boy Scouts, who stood with bared heads as the coffin was slowly lowered into its final resting place. A few days later all departed for their homes, carrying memories of their outing in the woods of Southern Maine, which will remain with them through life.