

TOM SLADE PICKS A WINNER



BY PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

APPROVED BY THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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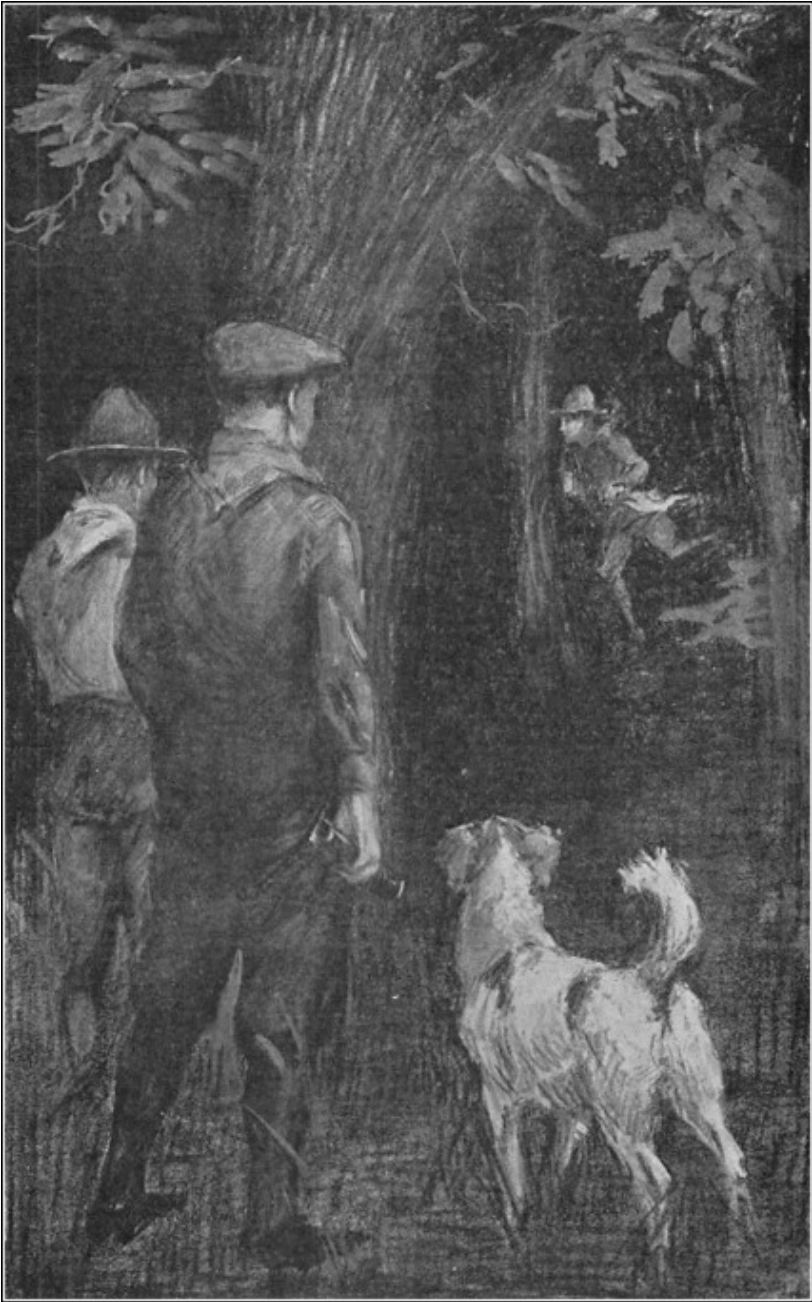
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TOM SLADE PICKS A WINNER



A DARK FIGURE GLIDED SILENTLY FROM BEHIND A TREE.

TOM SLADE PICKS A WINNER

BY

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of

THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
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TOM SLADE PICKS A WINNER

CHAPTER I

SUSPENSE

The boy lay in a large, thickly upholstered Morris chair in the living room. His mother had lowered the back of this chair so that he could recline upon it, and she kneeled beside him holding his hand in one of hers while she gently bathed his forehead with the other. She watched his face intently, now and again averting her gaze to observe a young girl, her daughter, who had lifted aside the curtain in the front door and was gazing expectantly out into the quiet street.

"Is that he?" Mrs. Cowell asked anxiously.

"No, it's a grocery car," the girl answered.

Her mother sighed in impatience and despair. "Hadn't you better 'phone again?" she asked.

"I don't see what would be the use, mother; he said he'd come right away."

"There he is now," said Mrs. Cowell.

"No, it's that Ford across the way," said the girl patiently.

"I don't see why people have Fords; look up the street, dear, and see if he isn't coming; it must be half an hour."

"It's only about ten minutes, mother dear; you don't feel any pain now, do you, Will?"

The boy moved his head from side to side, his mother watching him anxiously.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"I can't go to camp now, I suppose," the boy said.

The girl frowned significantly at their mother as if to beseech her not to say the word which would mean disappointment to the boy.

"We'll talk about that later, dear," said Mrs. Cowell. "You don't feel any of that—like you said—that dizzy feeling now?"

"Maybe I could go later," said the boy.

Again the girl availed herself of the momentary chance afforded by her brother's averted glance to give her mother a quick look of reproof, as if she had not too high an opinion of her mother's tact. Poor Mrs. Cowell accepted the silent reprimand and warning and compromised with her daughter by saying:

"Perhaps so, we'll see."

"I know what you mean when you say you'll see," said the boy wistfully.

"You must just lie still now and not talk," his mother said, as she soothed

his forehead, the while trying to glimpse the street through one of the curtained windows.

In the tenseness of silent, impatient waiting, the clock which stood on the mantel sounded with the clearness of artillery; the noise of a child's toy express wagon could be heard rattling over the flagstones outside where the voice of a small girl arose loud and clear in the balmy air.

"What are they doing now?" Mrs. Cowell asked irritably.

"They're coasting, mother."

"I should think that little Wentworth girl wouldn't feel much like coasting after what she saw."

But indeed the little Wentworth girl, having gaped wide-eyed at the spectacle of Wilfred Cowell reeling and collapsing and being carried into the house, had resumed her rather original enterprise of throwing a rubber ball and coasting after it in the miniature express wagon.

"He might be—dying—for all she knows," said Mrs. Cowell. "He might," she added, lowering her voice, "he might be——"

"Shh, mother," pleaded the girl; "you know how children are."

"I never knew a little girl to make so much noise," said the distraught lady. "Are you sure he said he'd come right away?"

"For the tenth time, yes, mother."

Arden Cowell quietly opened the front door and looked searchingly up and down the street. Half-way up the block was the little Wentworth girl enthroned in anything but a demure posture upon her rattling chariot, her legs astride the upheld shaft.

It was a beautiful day of early summer, and the air was heavy with the sweetness of blossoms. Near the end of the quiet, shady block, the monotonous hum of a lawn-mower could be heard making its first rounds upon some area of new grass. A grateful stillness reigned after the return to school of the horde of pupils home for the lunch hour.

Terrace Avenue was a direct route from Bridgeboro Heights to the Grammar School and groups of students passed through here on their way to and from luncheon. It was on the return to school after their exhilarating refreshment that they loitered and made the most noise. Sometimes for a tumultuous brief period their return pilgrimage could be likened to nothing less terrible than a world war occurring during an earthquake. Then suddenly, all would be silence.

It was on the return to school on this memorable day that the boys of Bridgeboro had witnessed the scene destined to have a tragic bearing on the life of Wilfred Cowell. But now, of all that boisterous company, only the little Wentworth girl remained, sovereign of the block, inelegantly squatted upon her rattling, zigzagging vehicle, pursuing the fugitive ball.

Arden Cowell, finding solace in the quietude and fragrance of the outdoors, stood upon the porch scanning the vista up Terrace Avenue and straining her eyes to discover the distant approach of the doctor's car. But Doctor Brent's sumptuous Cadillac coupe was not the first car to appear in this quiet, residential neighborhood.

Instead a little Ford, renouncing the advantages of an imposing approach down the long vista, came scooting around the next corner and stopped in front of the house. It was all so sudden and precipitous that Arden Cowell could only stare aghast.

CHAPTER II

A VISITOR

On the side of this Ford car was printed TEMPLE CAMP, GREENE COUNTY, N. Y. Its arrival was so headlong and bizarre that Miss Arden Cowell smiled rather more broadly than she would otherwise have done, considering her very slight acquaintance with the occupant.

Tom Slade, however, practised no modest reserve in the matter of his smiles; instead he laughed heartily at Arden and said as he stepped out, "Now you see it, now you don't. Or rather now you don't and now you do. What's the matter with Billy, anyway? I met Blakeley and he said they carried him in the house—fainted or something or other."

"He fell unconscious, that's all we know," said Arden. "He seems to be better now; we're waiting for the doctor."

"What d'you know!" exclaimed Tom in a tone of surprise and sympathy.

"Did—did that Blakeley boy say anything about his being a coward?" the girl asked, seeming to block Tom's entrance into the house. "Just a minute, Mr. Slade; did they—the boys—did they say he was a—a—yellow something or other?"

"*Naah*," laughed Tom. "Why, what's the matter? May I see him?"

"Yes, you may," whispered the girl, still holding the knob of the door; "but I—I'd like—first—I—before you hear anything I want you to say you know he isn't a coward—yellow."

"What was it, a scrap?"

"No, but it might have been," said Arden. Tom looked rather puzzled.

"Mr. Tom—Slade," the girl began nervously.

"Tom's good enough."

"My brother thinks a great deal of you—you're his hero. The boys who were on their way back to school think he's a coward. I think he isn't. If you think he is, I want you to promise you won't let him know—not just yet, anyway." She spoke quietly and very intensely. "Will you promise me that? That you'll be loyal?"

"I'm more loyal than you are," laughed Tom. "You say you think he isn't a coward. I *know* he isn't. That's the least thing that's worrying me. What's all the trouble anyway?"

Arden's admiring, even thrilled, approval was plainly shown in the impulsive way in which she flung the door open. She was very winsome and graceful in the quick movement and in the momentary pause she made for the

young camp assistant to pass within. Then she closed it and leaned against it.

"Well, *well*," said Tom, breezing in. His very presence seemed a stimulant to the pale boy whose face lighted with pleasure at sight of the tall, khaki-clad young fellow who strode across the room and stood near the chair contemplating his young friend with a refreshing smile. He seemed to fill the whole room and to diffuse an atmosphere of cheer and wholesomeness.

"Excuse my appearance," he said, "I've been trying to find a knock in that flivver; I guess we'll have to take the knock with us, Billy."

"I'm afraid he can't go to that camp," said Mrs. Cowell. "We're waiting for the doctor; I do wish he'd come."

"Well, let's hear all about it," said Tom.

"Let me tell him, mother," said Arden.

Tom winked at Billy as if to say, "We're in the hands of the women."

"Let me tell him because I saw it with my own eyes," said Arden.

She remained leaning against the street door and at every sound of an auto outside peered expectantly through the curtain as she talked. Tom had often seen her in the street and had known her for the new girl in town, belonging to the family that had moved to Bridgeboro from somewhere in Connecticut. Then, by reason of his interest in Wilfred, he had acquired a sort of slight bowing acquaintance with her. It occurred to him now that she was very pretty and of a high spirit which somehow set off her prettiness.

"Let me tell him, mother," she repeated. "Did you notice that little girl, Mr. Slade——"

"Why don't you call him Tom?" Wilfred asked weakly.

Here, indeed, was a question. An invalid, like an autocrat, may say what he pleases. Poor Mrs. Cowell made the matter worse.

"Yes, dear, call him Tom; Wilfred wants you to feel chummy with Mr. Tom—just as he does."

"Did you notice a girl in an express wagon chasing a ball?" Arden asked.

"A girl in an express wagon chasing a ball?" Tom laughed. "I never notice girls in express wagons chasing balls when I'm driving."

"Well," said Arden, "a boy in a gray suit who was eating a piece of pie or something—do you know him?"

Tom shook his head. "I know so many boys that eat pie," said he.

"He took the little girl's ball just to tease her," said Arden. "There was a whole crowd of boys and I suppose he wanted to show off. I was sitting right here on the porch. This is just what happened. Wilfred ran after him to make him give up the ball. Just as he reached him the boy—*ugh*, he's just a *bully*—the boy threw the ball away——"

"Good," said Tom.

"He knew he'd have to give it up," said Wilfred weakly.

"I bet he did," said Tom cheerily.

"Hush, dear," said Mrs. Cowell to her son.

"Just as he threw the ball," said Arden, "he raised his arm in a sort of threat at Wilfred."

"But he gave up the ball," laughed Tom.

"Yes, but Wilfred turned and went after the ball——"

"Naturally," said Tom.

"And all those boys thought the reason he turned and ran was because he was *afraid*—afraid that coward and bully was going to hit him. Ugh! I just wish Wilfred *had* pommeled him."

Tom laughed, for "pommel" is the word a girl uses when referring to pugilistic exploits.

"Just then he reeled and fell in a dead faint," said Mrs. Cowell. "Mr. Atwell, our neighbor, brought him in here unconscious. I don't know what it can be," she sighed; "we're waiting for the doctor now. It does seem as if he'd never come."

Tom looked sober. Wilfred rocked his head from side to side smiling at Tom, a touching smile, as he caught his eye. The clock ticked away sounding like a trip-hammer in the silence of the room. The mother held the boy's hand, watching him apprehensively. The little express wagon rattled past outside. The muffled hum of the lawn-mower could be heard in the distance. And somehow these sounds without seemed to harmonize with this drowsy mid-day of early summer.

Tom hardly knew what to say so he said in his cheery way, "Well, you made him give up the ball anyway, didn't you, Billy?"

"That's all I wanted," Wilfred said.

"He would have got it no matter what," said Arden.

"I bet he would," Tom laughed.

It was rather amusing to see how deeply concerned the mother was about the boy's condition (which manifestly was improving) and how the girl's predominant concern was for her brother's courage and honor.

"They just stood there—all of them," she said with a tremor in her voice, "calling him *coward* and *sissy*."

"But he got what he went after," said Tom.

"Do you believe in fighting, Mr.—Tom?"

"Not when you can get what you want without it," said Tom. "If I went after a rubber ball, or a gum-drop, or a crust of stale bread or a hunk of stone, I'd get it. I wouldn't knock down any boys——"

"Of course you wouldn't," said Mrs. Cowell.

"Unless I had to," said Tom.

"Oh, I think you're just splendid," said Arden.

“Didn’t I tell you that?” said the boy lying in the chair.

Just then an auto stopped before the house and Arden Cowell, who had been leaning with her back against the door all the time, opened it softly to admit the doctor.

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS

The Cowells were new to Bridgeboro and in the emergency had called Doctor Brent at random. He was brisk and efficient, seeming not particularly interested in the tragedy of the rubber ball nor the viewpoint of the juvenile audience.

His prompt attention to the patient imposed a silence which made the moments of waiting seem portentous. Out of this ominous silence would come what dreadful pronouncement? He felt the boy's pulse, he lifted him and listened at his back, he applied his stethoscope, which harmless instrument has struck terror to more than one fond parent. He said, "Huh."

"I think he must have been very nervous, doctor," Mrs. Cowell ventured.

"No, it's his heart," said the doctor crisply.

Mrs. Cowell sighed, "It's serious then?"

"No, not necessarily. He was running too hard. Has he ever been taken like this before?"

"No, never. He always ran freely."

"Hmph."

"No history of heart weakness at all, huh? Father living?"

"He died fourteen years ago but it wasn't heart trouble." Mrs. Cowell seemed glad of the chance to talk. "We lost a little son—it wasn't—there was nothing the matter with him—he was stolen—kidnapped. Mr. Cowell refused a demand for ransom because the authorities thought they could apprehend the criminals. We never saw our little son again. It was remorse that he had refused to pay ransom that preyed upon my husband's mind and broke his health down. That is the little boy's photograph on the piano."

The doctor glanced at it respectfully, then, his eye catching Arden, he said pleasantly, "You look healthy enough."

"She's very highly strung, doctor," said Mrs. Cowell.

"Well," said the doctor, in a manner of getting down to business, "sometimes we discover a condition that may have existed for a long time. We ought to be glad of the occasion which brings such a thing to light. Now we know what to do—or what not to do. He hasn't been sick lately? Diphtheria or _____"

"Yes, he had diphtheria," said Mrs. Cowell surprised; "he hasn't been well a month."

"Ah," said the doctor with almost a relish in his voice. "That's what causes

the mischief; he'll be all right. It isn't a chronic weakness. Diphtheria is apt to leave the heart in bad shape—it passes. Didn't they tell you about that? That's the treacherous character of diphtheria; you get well, then some day after a week or two you fall down. It's an after effect that has to work off."

"It isn't serious then, doctor?" Wilfred's mother asked anxiously.

"Not unless he makes it so. He must favor himself for a while."

"How long?" the boy asked wistfully.

"Well, to be on the safe side I should say a month."

"A month from to-day?" the wistful voice asked.

"You mustn't pin the doctor down, dearie," said Mrs. Cowell; "he means a month or two—or maybe six months."

"No, I don't mean that," the doctor laughed. Then, evidently sizing the young patient up, he added, "We'll make it an even month; this is the twenty-fifth of June. That will be playing safe. Think you can take it easy for a month?"

"I can if I have to," said Wilfred.

"That's the way to talk," Doctor Brent encouraged.

"He can read nice books," said Mrs. Cowell.

"Well," said the doctor, "I'll tell you what he mustn't do, then you can tell him what he can do." He addressed himself to the mother but it was evident that he was speaking *at* the boy. "He mustn't go swimming or rowing. He ought not to run much. He ought to avoid all strenuous physical exertion."

"You hear what the doctor says," the fond mother warned.

"Couldn't I go scout pace?" came the wistful query. "That's six paces walking and six paces running?"

"Better do them all walking," said the doctor.

"Then I can't go to camp and be a scout?" the boy asked pitifully.

"Not this year," said his mother gently; "because scouting means swimming and running and diving and climbing to catch birds——"

"Oh, they don't catch birds, mother," said Arden.

"They catch storks," said Mrs. Cowell.

"You're thinking of stalking," laughed Tom.

"Gee, I want to go up there," Wilfred pleaded. "If I say I won't do those things——"

"It would be so hard for him to keep his promise at a place like that," said Mrs. Cowell.

"Scouts are supposed to do things that are hard," said Tom.

"Yes—what do you call them—stunts and things like that?" Mrs. Cowell persisted.

"Sure," said Tom; "keeping a promise might be a stunt."

"Oh, I don't think it would be wise, Mr. Slade; I'm sure the doctor would

say so.”

But the doctor did not say so. He glanced at the young fellow in khaki negligee who had sat in respectful silence during the examination and the talk. They all looked at him now, Mrs. Cowell in a way of rueful objection to whatever he might yet intend to say.

“Of course, if the doctor says he can’t go, that settles it,” said Tom. “But I don’t want you to get the wrong idea about scouting. The main thing about scouting, the way we have it doped out, is to be loyal to your folks and keep your promises and all that. I thought Billy was going up there with me to beat every last scout in the place swimming and rowing and tracking—and all that stuff. I had him picked for a winner. Now it seems he has to beat them all doing something else. He has to keep his promise when you’re not watching him. It seems if he goes up there he’ll just have to flop around and maybe stalk a little and sit around the camp-fire and take it easy and lay off on the strenuous stuff. All right, whatever he undertakes to do, I back him up. I’ve got him picked for a winner. I say he can do *anything*, no matter how hard it is.

“The scouts have got twelve laws”—Tom counted them off on his fingers identifying them briefly—“*trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient* (get that), *cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent*. There’s nothing in any one of them about swimming and jumping or climbing. You can’t run when you stalk because if you run you’re not stalking. Billy’s a new chap in this town and I intended to take him up to Temple Camp and watch all the different troops scramble for him. Well, he’s got to lay off and take it easy; I say he can do that, too.”

“You got a doctor up there?” Doctor Brent asked.

“You bet, he’s a mighty fine chap, too.”

Doctor Brent paused, cogitating. “I don’t see any reason why he couldn’t go up there,” he said finally. “You’d give your word——”

“He’ll give *his* word, that’s better,” said Tom.

“Probably it will do him good,” said the doctor.

“I don’t want anybody up there to know I have heart trouble,” said Wilfred. “I don’t want them to think I’m a sick feller.”

“You’re not *sick*,” said his mother.

“Well, anyway, I don’t want them to know,” Wilfred persisted petulantly.

“Well, they don’t have to know,” said Tom. “I’ll get you started on some of the easy-going stuff—stalking’s about the best thing—and signaling maybe—and pretty soon they’ll all be eating out of your hand. You leave it to me.”

“Well then,” said the doctor, “I think that would be about the best thing for him. And as long as he’s going away and going to make a definite promise before he goes, we might as well make it hard and fast—definite. That’s the best way when dealing with a boy, isn’t it, Mrs. Cowell? Suppose we say one

month. If he keeps thinking all the time about doing things he's promised not to do, the country won't do him much good. So we'll say he's to keep from running and swimming and diving and climbing and all such things for a month, and not even to think about them. Then on the first of August he's to go and ask that doctor up there whether he can—maybe swim a little and so forth. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Wilfred.

"And do just exactly what he says."

"Yes, sir."

"He's there most of the time," said Tom. "Sometimes he's fussing with his boat over at Catskill."

"Well, wherever he is," said Doctor Brent, winking aside at Tom, "you go to him on the first of August and tell him I said for him to let you know if it's all right for you to liven up a little. Go to him before that if you don't feel good."

"I won't because I don't want any one to know I'm going to a doctor," said Wilfred.

"Leave it to me," said Tom reassuringly.

"May we come up and see him?" Arden asked.

"You tell 'em you may," said Tom.

As Arden opened the street door for the doctor to pass out, the clang and clatter of the little Wentworth girl's ramshackle wagon (it was her brother's, to be exact) could be heard offending the summer stillness of that peaceful, suburban street. She renounced her fugitive ball long enough to pause in her eternal pursuit and shout an inquiry about her stricken hero.

"Ain't he got to go to school no more?" she called.

It made very little difference, for school would be closing in a day or two anyway and the little Wentworth girl's mad career of solitary glory would be at an end. Her brother, released from the thralldom of the classroom, would reclaim his abused vehicle. And the hero who was to make such bitter sacrifices on account of his gallantry would be off for his dubious holiday at Temple Camp.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNSEEN TRIUMPH

A new boy in a town makes an impression, good or bad, very quickly. If he is obtrusive he forces his way into boy circles at once, and is accepted more or less on his own terms provided he makes good.

The rough and ready way is perhaps the best way for a boy to get into the midst of things in a new town or a new neighborhood. Modesty and diffidence, so highly esteemed in some quarters, are apt to prove a handicap to a boy. For these good qualities counterfeit so many other qualities which are not good at all.

No doubt the shortest path of glory for a new boy is to lick the leader of the group in the strange neighborhood. Next to this heroic shortcut, boastful reminiscences of the town from which he came, and original forms of mischief imported from it, do very well—at the start.

But Wilfred Cowell was not the sort of boy to seek admittance into Bridgeboro's coterie by any such means. He was diffident and sensitive. He began, as a shy boy will, to make acquaintance among the younger children, and for the first week or so was to be seen pulling the little Wentworth girl about in her wagon, or visiting "Bennett's Fresh Confectionery" with Roland Ellman who lived next door. He walked home from school with the diminutive Willie Bradley and one day accompanied the little fellow to his back yard to inspect Willie's turtle.

Following the path of least resistance and utterly unable to "butt in," he made acquaintance where acquaintance was easiest to make. Thus, all unknown to him, the boys came to think of him as a "sissy." Of course, they were not going to go after him and he did not know how to "get in" with them; at least he did not know any shortcut method. If he had stridden down to the ball field and said, "Give us a chance here, will you?" they would have given him a chance and then all would have been easy sailing. But he just did not know how to do that.

So he pulled the little Wentworth girl in her brother's wagon, and he was doing that before returning to school on this memorable day of his collapse.

It must be admitted that he looked rather large to play the willing horse for so diminutive a driver. He was husky-looking enough and slender and rather tall for his age. There was no reminder of recent illness in his appearance. He had a fine color and brown eyes with the same spirited expression as those of his sister. He came of a good-looking family. Rosleigh, the little brother who

had suffered a fate worse than death before Wilfred was born, was recalled by old friends of the saddened and reduced little family, as a child of rare beauty.

One feature only Wilfred had which was available to boy ridicule. His hair was wavy and a rebellious lock was continually falling over his forehead which he was forever pushing up again with his hand. There was certainly nothing sissified (as they say) in this. But in that fateful noon hour the groups of boys passing through the block paused to watch the new boy and soon caught on to this habit of his. Loitering, they began mimicking him and seemed to find satisfaction in ruffling their own hair in celebration of his unconscious habit.

It was certainly an inglorious and menial task to which Wilfred had consecrated the half hour or so at his disposal. The little Wentworth girl was a true autocrat. She threw the ball and he conveyed her to the stopping point.

How Lorrie Madden happened to get the ball no one noticed; he was always well ahead of his colleagues in mischief and teasing ridicule. Having secured it he put it in his pocket. He had not the slightest idea that Wilfred Cowell would approach him and demand it. No one ever demanded anything of Lorrie Madden; it was his habit to keep other boys' property (and especially that of small children) until it suited his pleasure to return it. He did this, not in dishonesty, but for exhibit purposes.

Knowing his power and disposition to carry these unworthy whims to the last extreme of his victim's exasperation, the boys upon the curb were seized with mirth at beholding Wilfred Cowell sauntering toward Madden as if all he had to do was to ask for the ball in order to get it. Such girlish innocence! They did not hear what was said, they only saw what happened.

"Let's have that ball—quick," said Wilfred easily.

"Quick? How do you get that way," sneered Madden, producing the ball and bouncing it on the ground.

"Give it to me," said Wilfred easily, "or I'll knock you flat. Now don't stand there talking."

These were strange words to be addressed to Lorrie Madden—by a new boy with wavy hair. Lorrie Madden who had pulled Pee-wee Harris' radio aerial down, "just for the fun of it." Lorrie Madden who returned caps and desisted from disordering other boys' neckties only in the moment dictated by his own sweet will. Yet it was not exactly the words he heard that gave him pause. Two brown eyes, wonderful with a strange light, were looking straight at him. One of these eyes, the right one, was contracted a little, conveying a suggestion of cold determination. No one saw this but Lorrie.

Then it was that Lorrie Madden did two things—immediately. One of these was on account of Wilfred Cowell. The other was on account of his audience on the opposite curb. To do him justice he thought and acted quickly, and with

well-considered art. He threw the ball away nonchalantly, at the same time raising his arm in a disdainful threat. And Wilfred, being the kind of a boy he was, turned quietly and went after the ball. In this pursuit he presented a much less heroic figure than did the menacing warrior who had sent him scampering. He looked as if he were running away from a blow instead of after a ball.

It was in that moment of his unseen triumph that the clamorous group across the way hit upon the dubious nickname by which Wilfred Cowell came to be known at Temple Camp.

“Wilfraid, Wilfraid!” they called. “Run faster, you’ll catch it! There it goes in the gutter, Wilfraid. Wilfraid Coward! Giddap, horsy! Giddap, Wilfraid!”

It was with these cruel taunts ringing in his ears that Wilfred was laid low by the old enemy—the only foe that ever dared to lay hand on him. Treacherous to the last, his old adversary, diphtheria, with which he had fought a good fight, struck him to the ground amid the chorus of scornful mirth which he had aroused.

CHAPTER V

A PROMISE

"But you got the ball," said Tom conclusively. They were driving up to Temple Camp in the official flivver which the young camp assistant always kept in Bridgeboro during the winter season. It was a familiar sight in this home town of so many of the camp's devotees and the lettering on it served as a reminder to many a boy of that secluded haunt in the Catskills.

"Yes, and I got a nickname too."

"You should worry; they'll forget all about that up at camp."

"Till they see me," said Wilfred.

"Some of them won't be there at all," said Tom. "It's only for scouts, you know. Of course all the local troop boys will be there—Blakeley and Hollister and Martin and Pee-wee Harris——"

"Is he a scout?"

"Is he? He's about eighteen scouts; he's the scream of the party. You won't see Madden; that chap's a false alarm anyway. I'm half sorry you didn't slap his wrist while you had the chance."

"He's got them all hypnotized, just the same," laughed Wilfred.

"They'll come out of it."

"Didn't any of them want to come in the flivver?" Wilfred asked.

Here was his sensitiveness that was always cropping out. He was afraid they had eschewed this preferable way of travel because they did not want to go in his company.

"No, they go all kinds of ways. Some of them hike part way, some of them go by boat, some of them go by train. Wig Weigand wanted to go along with us but I told him no. I want to have a chance to talk things over with you, Billy; two's a company, huh?"

"He knew I was going?" Wilfred asked.

"Sure, he did; that's why he wanted to go along."

"That's the fellow that wears a book-strap for a belt?"

"That's him; he's a shark on signaling. You got a radio?"

Wilfred was glad that there was one of the Bridgeboro sojourners who seemed favorably disposed to him.

"No, I haven't got much of anything," he said, feeling a bit more comfortable on account of this trifling knowledge concerning Wig-wag Weigand. "I wanted to go to work when we moved here; I thought as long as I was leaving one school I might as well not start in another. We've had some

job getting along as far back as I can remember; my dad didn't leave much. As long as Sis is going to business school I thought I might as well get a start. I don't know, I think I'd rather have a bicycle than a radio. Guess I'll never have either."

"They pass out some pretty nifty prizes in camp along about Labor Day," Tom said. "You never can tell."

"August first is my big day," Wilfred laughed ruefully.

"Go-to-the-doctor day, huh?" Tom chuckled. "We have mother's day, and go-to-church day, and clean-up day, and safety-first day, and watch your-step day— Well, you'll have the whole of August to make a stab for honors and things."

"Guess I won't need a freight car to send home the prizes," said Wilfred. "The best thing that's happened to me so far is the way you call me Billy; Sis says she likes to hear you, you're so fresh."

"Yes?" laughed Tom. "Well, you and I and the doc beat your mother to it, didn't we? Leave it to us. You went after something and got it. And I went after something and got it. We're a couple of go-getters. Didn't you mix in much with the fellows up in Connecticut?"

"There weren't any fellows near us," Wilfred said. "We lived a hundred miles from nowhere. I suppose that's why Sis and I are such good friends."

"You look enough alike," said Tom. "Well, you are going where there are fellows enough now, I'll hope to tell you."

"I wanted to go in for scouting a year ago," Wilfred said, "but there weren't any scouts to join. Now I feel kind of—I feel sort of—funny—sort of as if it was just before promotion or something."

Tom glanced at his protege sideways, captivated by the boy's sensitiveness and guileless honesty.

"I'm glad it's a long ride there," Wilfred added.

"Any one would think you were on your way to the electric chair," laughed Tom. And Wilfred laughed too.

"Will they all be at the entrance?" the boy asked, visibly amused at his own diffidence.

"No, they'll all be in the grub shack," said Tom. "That's where they hang out; they're a hungry bunch."

"Maybe I won't see so much of you, hey?" Wilfred asked.

"Oh, I'm here and there and all over—helping old Uncle Jeb. He's manager—used to be a trapper out west. You must get on the right side of Uncle Jeb—go and talk to him. He can tell you stories that'll make your hair stand on end; says 'reckon' and 'critter' and all that. Don't fail to go and talk to him."

"Will you introduce me to him?" Wilfred asked guilelessly.

"Will I? Certainly I won't. Just go and talk to him when he's sitting on the steps of Administration Shack smoking his pipe. Tell him I said for him to spin you that yarn about killing four grizzlies."

"What's his last name?" Wilfred asked.

"His last name is Uncle Jeb and if you call him Mr. Rushmore he'll shoot you," said Tom, a little impatiently.

"What patrol are you going to put me in?"

"Well, that's what I want to talk to you about," Tom said. "I think I'll slip you into the Raven outfit—they're all Bridgeboro boys, of course. Punkin Odell is in Europe and when he comes back in the fall, the troop's going to start a new patrol. Wig-wag Weigand is in that bunch——"

"The one that wanted to come with us?"

"Eh huh, and you'll like them all. As it happens, there's a vacancy in each one of the three patrols—Ravens, Silver Foxes and Elks. But I think you'll fit in best with the Ravens. Pee-wee Harris is easy to get acquainted with and when you know him you're all set because he's a fixer. So I think I'll slip you in with Pee-wee and Wig and that crowd. Now this is what I want to say to you while I have the chance. Don't you think you'd better let the crowd know that you're up there under a kind of a handicap?"

"No, I don't," said Wilfred definitely.

"Well, I'm just asking you," Tom said apologetically.

"That place isn't a hospital," said Wilfred. "I'm not going to have all those fellows saying I have heart disease——"

"You haven't," said Tom.

"All right then, I'm not going to have anybody thinking I have. I'm not sick any more than you are—or any of them. And I don't want you to tell them either. Do you think I want all those—those outdoor scouts thinking I'm weak?"

Again there blazed in Wilfred's brown eyes that light which had given Lorrie Madden his sober second thought; the same light bespeaking pride and high spirit which Tom had seen in the eyes of Arden Cowell while she was championing her stricken brother. It was a something—pride if you will—that shone through the boy's diffidence like the sun through a thin cloud.

"If you tell them, I won't stay there," he said, shaking his head so that his lock of wavy hair fell over his forehead and he brushed it up again with a fine defiance.

"All righto," said Tom.

"Remember!"

"Yes, but you remember to keep your promise to your mother and the doctor," Tom warned. "Because you know, Billy, I'm sort of responsible."

"I'll keep my promise as long as you don't tell," said the boy in a kind of

spirited impulse. “But don’t you tell them I’m—I’ve—got heart failure—don’t you tell them that and I’ll keep my promise. Do you promise—do you?”

“I think I can keep a promise as well as you can,” Tom laughed, a little uneasy to observe this odd phase of his young friend’s character. He hardly knew how to take Wilfred. It occurred to him that the boy was going to have a pretty hard time of it with this odd mixture of sensitiveness and high spirit. He was afraid that his new recruit, so charmingly delicate and elusive in nature, was going to bunk his pride in one place while trying to save it in another. But all he said was, “All right, Billy, you’re the doctor.”

CHAPTER VI

THE LONE FIGURE

Wilfred Cowell saw Temple Camp for the first time as no other boy had ever seen it, for he went there not as a scout, but to become a scout. It was not only new but strange to him. He saw it first as the Ford emerged out of the woods road which ran from the highway to the clearing. No car but a Ford (which is the boy scout among cars) ever approached the remote camp site. And there about him were the buildings—cabins and rustic pavilions and tents for the overflow. If the invincible little flivver had rolled twenty feet more it would have taken an evening dip in the lake.

Wilfred had not supposed that the camp would break so suddenly upon him. He would have preferred to see it from a distance, to have had an opportunity of preparing for the ordeal of introduction. But he might have saved himself the fear of public presentation, for Temple Camp was eating. And when Temple Camp ate it presented a lesson in concentration which could not be excelled.

Not a scout was to be seen save one lonely figure paddling idly in a canoe out in the middle of the lake. Wilfred wondered why he was not at supper. He felt that he would like to approach his new life via this lonely figure, to be out there with him first, before the crowd beheld him. Then he remembered that he was not to go upon this lake—except as an idle passenger. Might he not paddle? He might not row or dive or—but might he not paddle? Well, not vigorously—as the others did. But as that figure silhouetted by the background of the mountain was doing?

No, he would not get himself into a position where he might be expected to exert himself more than he should. He would eschew the lake and stick to the stalking, and the birch bark work. He was in the hands of the powers that be and he would keep his promise *to the letter*.

One thing Wilfred was glad of and that was that he and Tom had stopped for a little supper in Kingston. He would not have to enter that great shack whence emanated the sound of what seemed like ten billion knives and forks and plates.

“Sure you don’t want to eat?” Tom asked.

“No, I had plenty.”

“All right, come ahead then.”

Tom led the way to the administration shack where a young man in scout attire asked Wilfred questions, writing the answers pertaining to age,

parentage, residence, etc., in the blank spaces on an index card.

"Your folks are at this address all summer?"

"What?"

"They don't go away?"

"No, sir, they stay in Bridgeboro."

"You know how to swim?"

"Yes, I do."

"You want the bills or shall we send them to your folks."

Wilfred seemed bewildered. It was an evidence of how little he knew about scouting and the modern camp life of boys, that it had never occurred to him (nor to his mother either) that camps are often well organized and well managed communities, where bills are rendered and board paid. The boy flushed.

"That's all right," said Tom quickly; "I'll see you later about that."

"Yes, sir," said the scout clerk pleasantly.

"What do you mean you'll see him about it later," Wilfred asked rather peremptorily, as they went out. "I didn't——"

"Yes, you did," laughed Tom. "You heard me say you were my guest, didn't you? That was the idea all along; your mother understands it, anyway. Now look here, Billy; I've got a sort of a scholarship—understand? Never you mind about my relations with this camp. I can bring a fellow here and let him stay all summer without either you or I being under obligations to anybody—see? So don't start in trying to tell me how to run my job. All *you* have to do is to make good so I'll be glad I brought you up here. All *you* have to do is to be a good scout and you can do that by keeping the promise you made back home and doing the things your promise doesn't prevent you from doing—there are a whole lot of things, believe *me*; look in the handbook.

"Now you bang around here a little while till I let the resident trustees and Uncle Jeb know I'm here, and then I'll take you up to the Ravens' cabin; by that time they'll be through eating—I hope. Make yourself at home—that's where we have camp-fire, up there." He hurried away leaving Wilfred standing alone in the gathering twilight.

The boy strolled down to the lakeside and looked out upon the dark water. With all its somber beauty the scene was not one to cheer a new boy. Throughout the day that sequestered expanse of water was gay with life and the dense, wooded heights around it echoed to the sounds of voices of scouts bathing, fishing, rowing. One could dive from the springboard on the gently sloping camp shore and hear another diver splash into the placid water from the solemn depths of the precipitous forest opposite. You could make the ghost dive any time, as they said.

But now, with the enlivening carnival withdrawn and the community

adjourned to the more substantial delights of the “grub shack,” the lake and its surrounding hills imparted a feeling of loneliness to the solitary watcher, and made him uncertain—and homesick.

Through the fast deepening shadows, he could see that lonely figure paddling idly about in his canoe. Why did he do that during supper-time, Wilfred wondered. Was he not hungry? This thought occurred to him because, in plain truth, he was himself a little hungry—just a little. He had not been perfectly frank with Tom about the sufficiency of their hasty lunch in Kingston. He just did not want to face that observant, noisy assemblage. Perhaps the solitary canoeist was another new boy—no, that could not be.... Then Wilfred noticed that the distant figure seemed to be clad in white. This became more and more noticeable as the darkness gathered.

The boy on the shore had kept another little secret from Tom Slade. And now, before he exposed this secret to the light, he looked behind him to make sure that none of that gorged and roistering company were emerging. He knew nothing of scout paraphernalia and had brought nothing with him because he owned just nothing.

Excepting one thing—a pathetic equipment. He was so rueful about its appropriateness to scouting, and so fearful that it might arouse humorous comment, that he had kept it in his pocket. It was an old-fashioned opera-glass. When told that signaling and stalking were within the scope of his privileged activities he had asked his mother for this, thinking it might be useful. But there was something so thoroughly “civilized” and old-fashioned about it that he felt rather dubious about having it with him. What would those young Daniel Boones think of an opera-glass?

He now raised this to his eyes and focused it on the figure out on the lake. That solitary idler seemed to leap near him in a single bound. He happened to be facing the camp shore and Wilfred could see a pleasant countenance looking straight at him and smiling. Evidently he knew he was being scrutinized and was amused. Wilfred could see now that he wore a duck jacket. Then, smiling all the while, the stranger waved his hand and Wilfred waved his own in acknowledgment. It seemed as if he had made an acquaintance....

When Tom returned to take him to the stronghold of the Ravens, scouts were pouring out of the “grub shack” like a triumphant army returning from a massacre.

The young assistant, as Wilfred later found, was always in a hurry.

“All right now,” he said, “come ahead if you want to be a Raven.”

They started up through a grove where there were three cabins.

“Who’s that fellow out on the lake?” Wilfred asked.

“What fellow?”

“There’s a fellow out there in a canoe; he’s got a white jacket—I think—I

mean he's all in white."

"Oh, that's the doc; that's the fellow you've got a date with—later. Nice chap, too."

"Doesn't he eat?"

"Yes, but he's not a human famine like the rest of this bunch. I suppose he finished early. You often see him flopping around evenings alone like that."

"It seems funny," said Wilfred.

"Well, you're pretty much like him," Tom laughed. "I suppose he likes to get away from the crowd now and then—you can't blame him."

"He's young, isn't he?"

"Mmm, 'bout my age. Well, here we are; what do you think of the Ravens' perch? Artie! Where's Artie? Is Artie there? Tell him to come out and grab this prize before somebody else gets it. Aren't you through eating yet, Pee-wee? Put down that jelly roll and go and find Artie!"

CHAPTER VII

AN ODD NUMBER

If Wilfred Cowell felt unscoutlike with his prosaic old opera-glass, he might have derived some comforting reassurance from the various and sundry equipment of Pee-wee Harris, Raven. Though he had seen Pee-wee in Bridgeboro, he saw him now in full bloom and his multifarious decorations could only be rivaled by those of a Christmas tree. He carried everything but his heart hanging around his neck or fastened to his belt. His heart was too big to be carried in this way. Jack-knife, compass, a home-made sun-dial (which never under any conditions told the right time) and various other romantic ornaments suggestive of primeval life dangled from his belt like spangles from a huge bracelet.

It was this terrific cave-man whose frown was like a storm at sea, who brought forth Artie Van Arlen, patrol leader of the Ravens. With him came the rest of the patrol, Doc Carson, Grove and Ed Bronson, Wig Weigand and Elmer Sawyer. Wilfred had seen most of these boys in Bridgeboro.

Wilfred had beguiled his enforced leisure at home by memorizing the laws and the oath and by learning to tie all the knots known to scouting. So he was ready to enter the patrol as a tenderfoot and the little ceremony took place the next morning with one of the resident trustees officiating.

I have often thought that if Mr. Ellsworth, Scoutmaster of the First Bridgeboro troop, had been at camp that season, the events which I am to narrate might never have occurred. Tom Slade said that with Wilfred Cowell what he was, they had to occur. And Wilfred Cowell always said that whatever Tom said was right. So there you are. Tom Slade said that Wilfred was out and away the best scout he had ever seen in his life. Wilfred could not have believed that Tom was right when he said that, for he claimed that Tom was the greatest scout living. So there you are again. You will have to decide for yourself who is the hero of this story. You know what *I* think for it is printed on the cover of this narrative. I shall try to tell you the events of that memorable camp season exactly as they occurred.

But first it will be helpful, as throwing some light on Wilfred Cowell's character, to show you the first letter which he wrote home. He had promised his anxious mother to write home, "the very first day," and he kept his promise literally as he did all promises.

Dear Mother and Sis:—

I got here all right and had a good drive with Tom Slade. I guess

I won't see so much of him now. I'm writing the first day because I said I would, but there isn't much to tell because not much happens before a fellow gets started. Anyway I'm not writing this till evening so as I can tell you all there is and still keep my promise. I'm sorry you didn't say the second day because there's a contest or something to-morrow and I'm going to see it.

I'm in the Raven Patrol and they're all Bridgeboro fellows and I like them. I guess I ought to be in a patrol called the Snails, the way I take it easy going around. Anyway I'm thankful I don't have to keep from laughing because that little fellow named Harris is in my patrol. "My patrol"—you'd think I owned it, wouldn't you? This troop is sort of away from the rest of the camp and has three cabins in the woods. It's pretty nice.

I went on a walk alone to-day, the rest of my patrol had a jumping contest, they asked me but I said no. I guess maybe they thought it was funny. I went along a kind of a trail in the woods trying to sneak near enough to see birds. That's what they call stalking. I saw one bird all gray with a topknot on. Gee, he could sing. I looked at him through my trusty opera-glass and he flew away. Guess he thought I thought he was an opera singer. I made too much noise, that was the trouble. I'm too quiet for the scouts and too noisy for the birds. I wish I had a camera instead of an opera-glass, we're supposed to get pictures of birds. Don't worry, I'll take it easy. A fellow up here says I walk in second gear—that's when an auto goes slow. He asked me if I'd hurry if there was a fire. He's not in my patrol but he likes to go for walks so we're going to walk to Terryville some night when there's a movie show there. Little Harris says I should write letters on birch bark with a charred stick so if you get one like that from me don't be surprised.

Lots of love to both of you,
Wilfred.

You will perceive from this letter how Wilfred's promise to avoid all violent exercise dominated his mind; he never forgot it. He construed his easy-going life rather whimsically in his letters, but there seemed always a touch of pathos in his acceptance of his difficult situation.

One effect his very limited scouting life had, and that was to take him out of his own patrol. He might not do the things they did so he beguiled his time alone, wandering about and stalking birds in a haphazard fashion. Having no camera all his lonely labor went for naught. Still, he directed his deadly opera-glass against birds, squirrels and chipmunks and found much quiet pleasure in

approaching as near as he could to them. It was a pastime not likely to injure his health.

Yet he was proud of the vaunted prowess of the Ravens and the boys of the patrol liked him. They thought he was an odd number and they did not hold it against him that he was quiet and liked to amble here and there by himself.

He soon became a familiar figure in the camp, sauntering about, pausing to witness games and contests, and always taking things easy. He made few acquaintances and did not even “go and talk” with old Uncle Jeb as Tom had suggested that he do. He tried but did not quite manage it. Just as he was about to saunter over to Uncle Jeb’s holy of holies (which was the back step of Administration Shack) several roistering scouts descended pell-mell upon the old man and that was the end of Wilfred’s little enterprise.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIGHT UNDER THE BUSHEL

Wilfred was proud of his patrol; proud to be a Raven. His diffidence, as well as his restricted activities, kept him from plunging into the strenuous patrol life. But he asked many questions about awards and showed a keen interest and pride in the honors which his patrol had won. Yet, withal, he seemed an outsider; not a laggard exactly, but a looker-on. The Ravens let him follow his own bent.

Two friends he had; one in his patrol and one outside it. Wig Weigand took the trouble to seek him out and talk with him, and was well rewarded by Wilfred's quiet sense of humor and a certain charm arising from his wistfulness. His other friend was Archie Dennison who belonged in a troop from Vermont. This boy had somewhat of the solitary habit and he and Wilfred often took leisurely strolls together.

One day (it was soon after Wilfred's arrival in camp) he and Wig were sprawling under a tree near their cabin. The others were diving from the springboard and the uproarious laughter which seemed always to accompany this sport would be heard in the quiet sultry afternoon.

"I guess you and I are alike in one thing," Wig said, "we don't hit the angry waves. I'm too blamed lazy to get undressed and dressed again. About once every three or four days is enough for me. You swim, don't you— Yes, sure you do; I saw it on your entry card."

"I like the water only it's so wet," said Wilfred in that funny way that made Wig like him so. "They're always turning water on so you get more or less of it; I'd like the kind of a faucet that would turn it on wetter or not so wet. With the faucet on about half-way the water would run just a little damp."

"You're crazy," laughed Wig. "I'd like to know how you think up such crazy things. Where did you learn to swim anyway?"

"Oh, in Connecticut, in the ocean."

"That's quite a wet ocean, isn't it?" Wig laughed.

"Around the edges it is," Wilfred said; "I was never out in the middle of it. About a mile out is as far as I ever swum—swam."

"Gee, that's good," enthused Wig. "That's two miles altogether. Why don't you tell the fellows about it?"

"Tell them?"

"Sure, blow your own horn."

"It was no credit to me to swim back," said Wilfred; "I had to or else

drown. Call it one mile—you can't call it two."

"You make me tired!" laughed Wig. "Why, that was farther than across Black Lake and back. Were you tired?"

"No, just wet," said Wilfred.

"You're a wonder!" said Wig; "I don't see why you don't keep in practise. Just because you don't live near the ocean any more—*gee whiz!* Is a mile the most you ever swam? I bet you've done a whole lot of things you've never told us about. You're one of those quiet, deliver-the-goods fellows."

"C. O. D." said Wilfred; "I mean F. O. B.; I mean N. O. T."

"*Yees*, you can't fool me," said Wig. "How far have you sw—"

"Swum, swimmied, swam?" laughed Wilfred, amused. "Well, about two and a half miles—maybe three."

"More like four, I bet," said Wig. "Why don't you go in now, anyway? I mean up here at camp."

"It's because my shoe-lace is broken and it's too much trouble unfastening a knot more than once a day."

"There's where you give yourself away," laughed Wig. "Because you can tie and untie every knot in the handbook."

"Yes, but this one isn't in the handbook, it's in my shoe."

"Oh, is that so? Well, this bunch is going to know about your swimming."

"A scout isn't supposed to talk behind another fellow's back," laughed Wilfred.

"I'd like to know when else I can talk about you," Wig demanded. "You're never here, you're always out walking with that what's-his-name."

"We're studying the manners and customs of caterpillars and spiders," said Wilfred. "Do you know that caterpillars can't swim?"

"Some naturalist," laughed Wig. "You make me laugh, you do. Even the single eye is laughing at you—look."

Wilfred sat up on the grass and stared at a small, white banner which flew from a pole that was painted just outside the Ravens' cabin. In the center of this banner was painted an eye which, as the emblem fluttered in the breeze, presented an amusing effect of winking. The ground around the pole was carpeted with dry twigs for an area of several yards, and this area was forbidden ground even to the Ravens. They might throw dry twigs within it and even extend its boundaries, but never under any circumstances might a Raven draw upon its tempting contents for fire-wood. One could not step upon those telltale twigs without causing a crackling sound. The Emblem of the Single Eye was sacred.

"I never heard the whole history of that," said Wilfred, gazing at the little emblem in a way of newly awakened but yet idle curiosity.

"That's because you're never around long enough for us to talk to you,"

Wig shot back.

“Thank you for those kind words,” said Wilfred.

“I mean it,” Wig persisted. “We’re prouder of that little rag than of anything in our patrol and I bet you don’t know the story of its past.”

“It’s not ashamed to look me in the eye anyway,” said Wilfred. “I bet it has an honorable past; explain all that.”

“Not unless you’re really interested,” said Wig with just a suggestion of annoyance in his tone.

“If the Ravens are prouder of that than of anything they’ve got,” said Wilfred soberly, “then I am too. I’m a Raven and I’m proud of it.”

“Why don’t you tell the fellows, then?”

“I didn’t know how—I mean—I—how do I know they want me to tell them that? Don’t they know it?”

“No, they don’t know it,” said Wig, “because they’re not mind-readers. And I’ll tell you something *you* don’t know too. They’re proud of you. They know you’re going to do wonders when you once get started, and they think they’ve got the laugh on every troop here because you’re in our patrol. You bet they’re proud of you, only, gee whiz, you don’t give them a chance to get acquainted with you. Pee-wee says that back in Bridgeboro he saw you throw a ball and hit a slender tree seven times in succession. Why don’t you tell the fellows you can do things like that?”

“Why don’t you tell me the story about that white flag?” Wilfred laughed.

“I will if you want to hear it,” said Wig.

CHAPTER IX

THE EMBLEM OF THE SINGLE EYE

"We took that little old banner early last summer," said Wig; "and we're the only patrol that ever kept it over into another season."

"What do you mean '*we took it*'?" Wilfred asked.

"Well then, *I* took it, if you want to be so particular," said Wig. "But I represented the patrol, didn't I?"

"I don't know—did you?"

"You'd better stick around and learn something about patrol spirit," said Wig. "If one scout in a patrol does a thing it's the same as if they all do it."

"Then I've been eating three helpings of dessert at every meal so far," Wilfred observed. "That's what little Harris does. I'll be getting indigestion from the way he eats if I don't look out."

"I have to laugh at you," said Wig, "but just the same you know what I mean."

"Yes, you bet I do," Wilfred agreed.

"You'll see how it is, it's always the patrol," said Wig. "You do the stunt, we all get the honor—see?"

"And you did the stunt?" Wilfred asked.

"Well, yes, if you want to look at it that way——"

"I want to look at it the right way," Wilfred said earnestly.

"All right; well then, suppose you—you're a fine swimmer——"

"There you go again; I never——"

"All right, suppose you should win the big swimming contest on August tenth——"

"When?"

"On August tenth—Mary Temple Day. You know her, don't you?"

"I don't know anybody," Wilfred said wistfully.

"Well, you know Mr. John Temple founded this camp, don't you? Well, she's his daughter. He lost a son by drowning once, so that's why he says every fellow should be a good swimmer. August tenth is Mary Temple's birthday and she's seventeen and she's a mighty nice looking girl—yellow hair——"

"A scout is observant," said Wilfred. "Now there's one thing about scouting I've learned."

"Well," said Wig, laughing in spite of himself, "she's always here on the tenth to give the prize. This year it's a radio set."

"Yes?" said Wilfred, interested.

"And I bet it will be a dandy."

"Well, how about the banner?" said Wilfred. "Tell me about that so I can forget about radio sets. That's what I'm crazy about and now you've got me thinking about one. Let's have the banner."

"Well," said Wig, "all I was going to say was, if you win that big contest the radio set——"

"There you go, reminding me again."

"The radio set would be yours," Wig said, "but the *honor* would be the patrol's. See?"

"All right, how about the banner?" Wilfred asked quietly, rolling over on his back and looking patiently up into the blue sky as if to remind his companion that he was listening.

"That's another camp institution," said Wig. "About three seasons ago ——"

"Once upon a time——" mocked Wilfred.

"Are you going to listen or not? Once upon—I mean about three seasons ago a patrol came here from Connecticut——"

"That's where I come from," said Wilfred. "And I'm going back there some day, too. Once a Yankee, always a Yankee, that's what they say."

"Well, this patrol came from New Haven."

"I lived only about five or six miles from there," said Wilfred. "I lived near Short Beach. I was going to join a patrol in New Haven once—only I didn't. I know people in New Haven. Go ahead."

"Well, these fellows brought that pennant from New Haven with them. You know Yankees are all the time boasting?"

"Many thanks," said Wilfred.

"Anyway, these fellows are. They planted that emblem outside their patrol tent and then started in saying how it was a symbol and how they always slept with one eye open and all that. That's why they had that eye on the pennant; that was the patrol eye, always open."

"I suppose that's why it was winking at me," said Wilfred; "it saw I came from Connecticut."

"Just wait till I finish," said Wig. "Those scouts claimed that nobody could take that thing away while they were sleeping in their tent—*couldn't be done*—you know how Yankees talk. Well, there was a fellow here named Hervey Willetts. That fellow's specialty is doing things that can't be done. If a thing can be done he doesn't bother doing it. Late one night he came walking into camp after everybody was asleep—that's the way he happened to notice that flag outside the New Haven patrol's tent. He didn't even know there was a challenge; he just tiptoed up to the little old banner and carried it to his own

patrol—just as easy! Oh, boy, you should have seen that New Haven outfit in the morning.”

“Well, that was the start. After that that little, old, one-eyed pennant belonged to any patrol that could get it—on the square, I mean. That’s the only contest award, as you might call it, that was started by the fellows here; all the events and prizes and tests and everything were started by the management—like the swimming event I told you about.”

“When’s that?” Wilfred asked.

“I told you—August tenth.”

“Gee whiz, I guess the bunch here think more about that little prize than they do of any award, handbook, camp or anything. Nobody awards it and makes a speech and all that stuff; it’s just a case of *let’s see you get it.*”

“If they’re asleep they don’t see you get it,” said Wilfred.

“Well, you know what I mean. There aren’t any rules about it at all except the patrol that has it has got to plant it *outside* their tent or cabin, without any strings going inside or anything like that. You can fix the ground around it with natural things, like you see we did; but you can’t hang a bell on it or anything like that. Any scout that can sneak up and take it without being heard or seen, gets it. If a scout wakes up and hears any one outside he can run after him and if he catches him before the fellow reaches his own patrol, the fellow has to give up the flag. He’s not supposed to fight. Of course, sometimes they do fight and get on the outs, but they’re not supposed to. The game is to get it and reach your patrol cabin with it without being caught. It’s got to be at night, after everybody has turned in.”

“How many patrols have had it?” Wilfred asked.

“Oh, jiminyes, maybe as many as ten, I guess. The Wildcats from Washington had it and Willetts walked away with it again about two o’clock one morning. Then a scout from Albany got it and his patrol kept it, oh, a month, I guess. Let’s see, the Eagles from St. Louis had it and the Panthers from somewhere or other had it, and, oh, a lot that I can’t remember. Then the New Haven fellows got it back again—some shouting the next day. They said it had made the round trip and was going to settle down for good where it ‘originally belonged’—you know how Yankees talk, all nice words and everything. *Originally belonged.*”

“Well, it was back home just seven days. Then, I woke up accidentally on purpose one fine day in the middle of the night and went down toward the lake for a walk—no shoes. There it was outside their stronghold, winking at me. The moon was up and the breeze was blowing and, honest, Billy, it was winking at me, that one eye. I sneaked up so quietly on my hands and knees that it took me about half an hour to go five yards; you’d think I belonged in the Snail patrol.”

"And you got it?" Wilfred asked.

"There it is, winking at me," said Wig proudly.

Wilfred raised himself lazily to a sitting posture observing the coveted and much traveled emblem of scout stealth and prowess. That single eye did seem to be winking at him.

"It knows me. I come from Connecticut," he said. Then he acknowledged its fraternal salute with a whimsical wink of his own.

"I bet you're proud of it," Wig observed.

"I wonder what it means, eyeing me up like that," Wilfred said.

"It means you're one of us," said Wig, with pride and friendship in his voice.

"Thanks," said Wilfred.

"And I bet you're proud of that banner, too."

For a few moments neither spoke and Wig seemed to be waiting for the reassuring answer from his friend. They had seen so little of Wilfred in the patrol and he was so quiet and diffident when among them, that Wig found it necessary to his peace of mind to be always trying to check up this odd boy's loyalty and patrol spirit.

"I bet I am," said Wilfred quietly.

Still he sat there, arms about his drawn-up knees, gazing with a kind of amusement at the airy, fluttering emblem and winking at it whenever the breeze gave it the appearance of winking at him. Wig watched him, amused too at the whimsical spectacle.

"The best part of it is just that," said Wilfred finally; "no one hands it out, it just has to be taken. I like that idea."

"Isn't it great?" enthused Wig.

"And it kind of started all by itself," said Wilfred.

"And stopped all by itself," said Wig. "It's going to hang out here for a large bunch of summers, that's what I told Yankee Yank.

"Yankee Yank, who's he?"

"Oh, he's the patrol leader of that New Haven menagerie; Allison Berry, his name is."

"*Allison Berry*?" Wilfred asked, astonished. "I know that fellow, I know him well. His father gave me this scarf pin that I've got on."

"What did he do that for?" Wig asked.

"Oh, for—just for——"

"What for?" Wig insisted.

"Oh, for swimming out and helping Al get to shore at Short Beach. Didn't I tell you I knew some fellows in New Haven?"

"Oh, so you saved his life?"

"Come on, let's go to dinner," said Wilfred.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE CAMP-FIRE

Wig-wag Weigand did not fail to advertise Wilfred to the patrol members that very evening. He did this while they sprawled about their cabin waiting for the darkness before they went down to camp-fire.

"He's one of those quiet, kind of bashful fellows," said Wig; "but, oh, boy, Tom Slade wished a winner onto us all right."

"Now you see him, now you don't," commented Grove Bronson.

"I suppose you don't know that a hero is always modest," Wig shot back, rather disgusted.

"I don't know, I was never a hero," said Grove.

"I was, a lot of times!" shouted Pee-wee Harris. "And they are, so that proves it. Do you think heroes don't have to go and take walks? That shows how much you know about them?"

"I never saw that fellow in a hurry," observed El Sawyer.

"Heroes don't have to hurry," yelled Pee-wee. "People that run for cars, do you call them heroes?"

"Well, speaking of heroes," said Wig. "That fellow came to Bridgeboro from Connecti——"

"I don't blame him," said Grove.

"All right," said Wig, "if you took as much trouble about him as I do, you'd learn something. He lived near a beach that's near New Haven, that fellow did and he thinks nothing of swimming a couple of miles or so." With the true spirit of the advance agent, Wig made it rather strong. "He used to live in the salt water, that fellow did. I had to pump it out of him——"

"What, the salt water?" Grove asked.

"No, the fact," said Wig.

"Oh."

"And I can tell you, even from what little he told me, that if we want the Mary Temple award in this patrol——"

"Yes?" queried Artie Van Arlen, suddenly interested.

"We'd better get busy with that fellow," said Wig. "You fellows wanted me to swim for it—but *nothing doing*. Not while he's around to see me lose it—nit, *not*. Why, did you notice that scarf pin that he wears?"

"He didn't even get a patrol scarf yet," said El Sawyer. "You'd think he'd do that much——"

"Keep still," said Artie. "What about the scarf pin?"

"Heroes don't have to have a lot of money," shouted Pee-wee.

"Will you keep quiet?" demanded Artie. "What about the pin?"

"It was a present for saving a fellow's life," said Wig, highly conscious of the impression he was making; "he swam out and saved the fellow from drowning."

"He told you that?" Grove asked.

"He didn't exactly tell me, he *admitted* it. The fellow he saved is here in camp and you can go and ask him. He's in that New Haven outfit we took the Single Eye from. Go and ask him if you want to—if you think one of your own members is a liar."

"Who said he was?" Grove demanded.

"Well," said Wig rather defiantly.

"I guess it's our fault if we haven't got better acquainted with him," said Artie, who was patrol leader.

"Now you're talking," said Wig.

"I'll be acting too, as soon as I see him," said Artie. "If he's what you say he is, I'm going to enter him for the contest——"

"We'll have a radio set! We'll have a radio set!" screamed Pee-wee. "We can pick up Cuba and——"

"It's about the only thing you haven't picked up," said Wig.

"It's funny," said Artie, "I've never seen him in swimming."

"Oh, he's bashful; can't you see that?" said Wig impatiently. "He doesn't mix in. Where have you fellows been to-day, anyway? Around here? Not much. If he had been in swimming you wouldn't have seen him."

Artie Van Arlen seemed to be thinking.

"All we know about him," said Grove, "is that he ran away when Madden was going to hit him back in Bridgeboro. He ran so fast he tripped and went kerflop."

"Madden is a false alarm," said First Aid Carson.

"Oh, what's all the argument about?" demanded Artie. "None of us saw that. I'd rather have him in the patrol than Madden, at that. If he's a crackerjack swimmer, I'm going to find it out—right away quick. You fellows leave it to me."

"All right," said Wig, "only don't enter me for that contest, that's all. He's the one——"

"Leave it to me," said Artie. "It's not you I'm thinking of, it's the patrol. If he's the one, in he goes. I'm not going to take any chances, just because *you're* hypnotized. I'll get hold of him to-night and chin things over with him. I think he's a pretty nice sort of fellow—only queer. He doesn't seem to have any pep—just wanders around."

"He's got an awful funny way of saying things," Wig said. "Gee whiz, it

was as good as a circus to see him sprawling here winking at that emblem; honest, he sees the funny side of things. You fellows don't know him."

"Well, who's to blame for that?" Artie asked, not unkindly.

"Leave him to me! Leave him to me!" Pee-wee shouted.

"No, leave him to me," said Artie. "One good thing, if he is a crackerjack swimmer nobody knows anything about it; it will be a big surprise—if Pee-wee can keep his mouth shut."

"Come on down to camp-fire," said Grove.

CHAPTER XI

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

Camp-fire was the place to hunt up a scout, if he was not to be found anywhere else. During the day, the members of the big woodland community came and went upon their wonted enterprises, and a particular one was apt to prove elusive to the searcher. But at camp-fire, one had but to wander around among the main group and then among the smaller and more exclusive satellite groups back in the shadows, to find any scout who had not been discoverable throughout the busy day. Even the blithe and carefree Hervey Willetts, the wandering minstrel of Temple Camp, usually sauntered in from some of his dubious pilgrimages along about eight-thirty, in time to hear the last of the camp-fire yarns.

In this sprawling assemblage, Artie Van Arlen sought for Allison Berry, patrol leader of the Gray Wolves from New Haven, Connecticut.

The Ravens' proud custody of the Gray Wolves' much coveted Emblem of the Single Eye had not impaired the mutual regard of these two patrols. They were housed at opposite extremities of the big camp community, and having each its own enterprises and associates, the respective members seldom met. But there was certainly nothing but the most wholesome rivalry between the two groups.

Artie found Allison Berry in a group of a dozen or more scouts somewhat back from the camp-fire, and he called him aside. The two sat on a rock outside the radius of warmth and cheer where they would not be heard or seen.

"Haven't seen you in a dog's age," said Artie.

"When I come you won't see me," said Allison.

"Is that so?" Artie laughed. "Well, it's up there any time you want it."

"Thanks for telling me," said Allison. "When we want it we'll just drop up."

"Any time," said Artie. "Say, Berry, I've got something funny to tell you. We've got a new member in our patrol who used to live near some beach or other down your way; he says he knows you. His name is Wilfred Cowell."

"*Get out!*" exclaimed Allison. "Why he—why the dickens didn't he come and let me know? I should think I do know him. Did he—where do you live anyway?"

"Bridgeboro, New Jersey. He only just moved there lately; we've only been up here since Friday."

"I saw the little kid; he said you were putting up the banner. Well—what—"

do—you—know! Will Cowell! Where is he anyway?”

“He went down to Terryville with another fellow to the movies to-night,” said Artie. “He’ll hunt you up, I guess.”

“I’ll—I’ll be glad to see him,” said Allison. He had intended to say that he would hunt Wilfred up, but had cautiously refrained because he preferred not to give any suggestion that he might visit the Ravens’ stronghold. “Christopher, I’ll be glad to see him,” he said.

“One of our fellows pumped it out of him that he’s some swimmer,” said Artie. He was too loyal and too considerate of Wilfred to say that his new member had volunteered this information. “We pumped it out of him that—you know that scarf pin he wears?”

“I ought to, my father gave it to him for saving my life,” said Allison. “You’ve got some scout there, boy.”

“Yes?”

“I’ll say you have.”

“Funny how you both happen to be here,” said Artie.

“Oh, this is a pretty big camp,” said Allison.

“Well,” laughed Artie, “we’ve got your old acquaintance and we’ve got your banner; you’ve got to hand it to us. Aren’t you afraid I’ll get your watch away from you, sitting here in the dark?”

“I’ve been intending to call,” said Allison. “But we’ve had so many things to do since we got here. I may drop around late some night next week.”

“You’re always welcome,” said Artie.

“You sleeping pretty well these days?”

“Oh, muchly.”

“We’re terribly busy just now getting our radio up,” said Allison. “We’re not thinking about much else.”

“What could be sweeter?” said Artie.

Allison Berry had managed this little chat very well, watching his step even in his surprise at hearing about Wilfred Cowell. So that Artie, when he strolled away, remained in sublime innocence of the fact that all the while (and ever since the Bridgeboro troop had arrived in all its glory) it was the intention of Allison Berry to take the Emblem of the Single Eye away from the Ravens late that very same night.

CHAPTER XII

ARCHIE DENNISON

Restricted as he was in his activities, Wilfred had been forced into the "odd number troop" at Temple Camp, which in fact was no troop at all. It was a name given to that unconnected element that seemed not to fit into the organized and group activities of camp. They did not even hang together, these hapless dabblers in scouting. They were the frayed edges of the vigorous scout life that made the lakeside camp a seething center of strenuous life in the outdoor season.

Some of these scouts, like Hervey Willetts, were young adventurers, going hither and yon upon their own concerns, rebellious against the camp routine. Most of them were backsliding scouts, quite lacking in Hervey's sprightly originality and vigor. The worst that could be said of most of them was that they were aimless.

One of these was Archie Dennison, a lame boy from Vermont. He was a pioneer, that is to say, an unattached scout in the lonely region whence he had come. Doubtless his lack of association with boys, as well as his lameness, had operated to make him the queer figure that he was. At all events, he enjoyed an immunity not only from participation in scout life, but also (what is more to be regretted) from chastisement, which might have been helpful in the development of his character.

He was a looker-on, a critic of scouting, and a severe censor. In school he was probably a monitor, finding delight in "keeping tabs" on other boys. And he did this instinctively at camp though no one had appointed him to such office. He had no affiliations and was more in touch with the camp authorities than with the boys. He liked to give information to the management.

It was rather pitiful that Wilfred Cowell should have drifted into a sort of chumminess with this boy, whose infirmity was the only thing that made him an appropriate pal for that high spirit which had accepted a hard lot with a patient philosophy and whose gentle diffidence and quaint humor were felt by all. Surely never before was there such grotesque union of the lovable and the unlovable.

Archie, fresh from a remote district, had discovered the movies in Terryville and had become a hopeless fan. Wilfred often accompanied him for two reasons; mainly because Archie walked at a leisurely gait and there was no call to spurts of strenuous activity which might prove embarrassing. His conscience was as good as Archie's but not so troublesome. The other reason

was that Wilfred saw the absurd side of the movies, even those pictures that were not intended to be funny.

On that memorable night that was to mean so much for him, Wilfred was walking home from Terryville with Archie. Their comments on the lurid picture had ceased with Archie's saying that he could have one of the screen characters arrested for wearing a khaki scout suit, the offender not being a scout.

"Oh, I guess not," Wilfred laughed, as they ambled along the dark road.

"I bet I could," said Archie, "because I read it. If you wear a scout suit and you're not a scout, I can have you arrested."

"You mean that you can't organize a troop and call yourselves boy scouts unless you are really registered as boy scouts," said Wilfred good-humoredly. "There is a kind of a law about that. I guess you couldn't stop a fellow from wearing a khaki suit. But I guess you couldn't buy a scout suit unless you were a scout. I don't know," he added in his good-natured, rueful way, "I never bought one."

"Didn't you ever have money enough?" Archie asked.

"You guessed right," laughed Wilfred.

"A scout has to notice things—I notice things," said Archie. "I read a lot about it, too. If you wear a scout suit and you're not a scout, I can get you arrested."

"I don't see why you want to be going around getting people arrested, anyway," said Wilfred, his wholesome good-humor persisting.

"Not if they do something they got a right not to do?"

"No, I don't think I'd bother."

"Do you call yourself a scout?"

"Well, a kind of a one," Wilfred laughed.

"If I was in your patrol, I'd get a scout suit because they've all got them and that's a good patrol."

"You bet it is," said Wilfred.

"Then why don't you get one?"

"Well, you see I'm not with them very much, so it isn't noticed."

"You're with me and I've got one."

"Well, you see," said Wilfred, still amused, "you've got a suit and no patrol and I've got a patrol and no suit."

"I'd rather have a suit, wouldn't you?" Archie asked. His lack of humor seemed almost ghastly by contrast with Wilfred's amiable and funny squint at things.

"Not than my patrol."

"Your patrol think they're smart because they've got the Emblem of the Single Eye, don't they?"

“Can we get arrested for that?” Wilfred asked.

“Are they mad at you, your patrol?”

“Not that I know of.”

“They’d never get the banner away from me if I had it, because I sleep in the dormitory and I’d stand it right near my cot and I’d tie a string to it and tie the string to my foot. I thought of that, isn’t it a good idea?”

“It’s a good idea but it’s against the rule,” laughed Wilfred. “Maybe you’d get arrested.”

“You couldn’t get me arrested for that. You couldn’t even get me a black mark for it.”

“Well, I don’t want to get anybody any black marks,” said Wilfred.

“Because you know you couldn’t.”

“Well then, I’m glad I couldn’t.”

“Does your father send you money? I bet my father sends me more than yours does.”

“My father is dead, so you’re right again.”

“My father’s got a big hotel on a mountain. He sends me five dollars every week. Rich people come to that hotel. Don’t they send you any money, your people?”

“My sister sent me five dollars,” said Wilfred. It was loyalty to his home and his sister that prompted him to say this, the same fine delicacy of honor that caused him to keep his promise to his mother and to do this without even a secret sulkiness in his heart. If his heart was to be favored at a tragic cost, at least it was a heart worth favoring.

“Haven’t you got any brother?” Archie asked.

“No; I had one before I was born—I guess I can’t say that, can I? I would have had one only he was kidnapped and I guess they killed him because my father wouldn’t give them all the money they wanted.”

“If I got kidnapped when I was a kid, my father he’d have given them a million dollars.” That seemed a rather high price to pay for Archie Dennison; still what he said might have been true.

CHAPTER XIII

GRAY WOLF

Not a light was to be seen when they reached camp, only a few dying embers in the camp-fire clearing. Even as they glanced at the deserted spot, one, then another, of these glowing particles disappeared as if they too were retiring for the night. Out of the darkness appeared Sandwich, the camp dog, wagging his tail and pawing Wilfred's feet, welcoming the late comers home without any sound of voice. Somewhere a katydid was humming its insistent little ditty; there was no other sound. The black lake lay in its setting of dark mountains like a great somber jewel. They talked low, for the solemn stillness seemed to impose this modulation.

They paused before the main pavilion where, for one reason or another, many scouts were housed in the big dormitory. Before this was the bulletin board at which Hervey Willetts had on a memorable occasion thrown a tomato which was old enough to be treated with more respect. A pencil hung on a string from this board. Wilfred lifted it and, in obedience to the rule, wrote on a paper tacked there for such purpose, his name and that of his companion and the time of their late arrival. They had overstepped their privilege by half an hour or so, but Wilfred wrote down the correct time by his companion's gold watch.

"We could say my watch stopped," Archie suggested hesitatingly.

"Only it didn't," said Wilfred.

"Do you want me to walk up the hill with you?"

"Sure, if you'd like to."

This seemed chummy and redeemed Archie a trifle in Wilfred's rather dubious consideration of him.

They started up the hill back of the main body of the camp and entered the woods which crowned the eminence on which the three cabins of the First Bridgeboro troop were situated.

"Your troop has got a pull to be up here," said Archie. "That's 'cause they come from where Tom Slade comes from. They get things better than the rest of the——"

"*Shh!*" Wilfred whispered, stopping short and clutching his companion's arm.

"What?" gasped Archie.

"Did you hear something?"

"No."

“Stand still a minute,” Wilfred whispered; “*shhh.*”

For a moment neither spoke nor stirred.

“Look—*shh*—look at that tree,” Wilfred scarcely breathed. “Is that a big knot or what? *Shh, will you!* I think it’s somebody behind the tree. Let’s have your flash-light Now step quietly.”

The tree Wilfred had indicated was some yards distant and beyond it they could see the dark bulk of the three cabins. As they advanced, Archie felt his heart thumping like a hammer. Wilfred felt no such sensation, but it did not occur to him that perhaps his own treacherous heart was at its job again, making itself ready to be worthy of his fine spirit, ready to back him up and stand by him when the world should seem to be falling away under his feet, and the future should look black indeed.

They advanced a few feet stealthily. Then, suddenly a dark figure glided silently from behind the tree and as it moved a little glint of something white (or at least it was light enough to be visible in the darkness) fluttered close to it. In his first, quick glimpse, Wilfred thought it looked like a bird accompanying the spectral figure.

“He’s got your flag! He’s got your flag!” Archie whispered in great excitement. “I know what it is, *go on after him, hurry up and catch him!*”

Wilfred stood spellbound. There, in the darkness of the night he stood at the parting of the ways, aghast, speechless. And he heard in his heart a silent voice, while two hands rested on his shoulders. “*You promise then? Honor bright? You won’t run or....*” Then the scene changed and his ready and troubled fancy pictured Wig Weigand sprawling on the grass with him while they gazed at that captured banner....

Then the petulant chatter of his companion recalled him quickly to the world of actual things.

“You’re afraid to run after him! Ain’t you going to chase him and get it? You got a right to—go on, run after him, quick; he’s half-way down the hill!”

Wilfred did not move.

“Ain’t you going——”

“Go on down to bed,” said Wilfred quietly, “go on, Archie.”

“Do you want me to tell? I got a right to tell you wouldn’t get it.”

“You don’t have to, but you can. Go on down to bed, Archie.”

“I don’t want to stay here and talk to you anyway,” said Archie.

“I’m glad you feel that way,” said Wilfred kindly; “it’s the best thing you said to-night. Here’s your flash-light, Archie, go on down to the pavilion now.”

The outraged spectator of this complacent treason did not linger to be told again. He was not built for dignity and as he limped down the hill, his contempt, as expressed in his bearing, suggested only the sudden pique of a

silly girl. In trying to be scornful he was absurd.

But Wilfred did not see him nor think of him, any more than he thought of the ants near his feet. He did not even ponder on the warning that duty must be done and the thing made public. He stood there alone in the darkness watching that black figure until it became a mere shadow and was then swallowed up in the still night. Still he watched where it had gone. Then he nervously brushed his rebellious lock of wavy hair up from his forehead and held his hand there as if to gather his thoughts. Then, in his abstraction and from force of habit, he felt his pocket to make sure the old opera-glass, his one poor possession, was there.

Still he stood, rooted to the spot, bewildered at fate, but accepting it as he accepted everything, tolerantly, kindly. He could not bear now to enter the cabin. So he stood just where he was; it seemed to him that if he moved he would make matters worse, he knew not how....

Came then out of the darkness Sandwich, the camp dog, wagging his tail and pawing Wilfred's feet and uttering no sound. How he knew that Wilfred was a scout it would be hard to say for the boy had no uniform. He did not linger more than long enough to pay his silent respect, then was off again upon his nocturnal prowling.

Wilfred stole up to the cabin but not quietly enough, for all his stealth, to enter unheard.

"It's just I," he said.

"Billy?" one asked.

"Yes."

"I thought it was somebody after the flag," said the voice.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER A CLOUD

Wilfred was forewarned of the tempest by a little storm which occurred early in the morning. They were astonished that he had not noticed the absence of the banner as he entered the cabin. That would have been an appropriate moment to tell them the whole business. But he did not tell them, he did not know why. He thought he would like to tell Wig alone, first.

"It must have been taken before he got in," said El Sawyer, "because after I heard him come in I was awake till daylight. Yet he didn't say anything about it."

"Gee whiz, don't you take any interest in the patrol?" Grove asked him scornfully.

Wilfred could only tell the whole thing or say nothing. He could not face that astonished and angry group; he wanted to tell what he had done, or failed to do, in his own way, at his own time. So he wandered away, which strengthened their impression of his lagging interest.

"He's just queer," said Artie, always fair.

"Queer is right," said Grove, sarcastically.

"I guess he was thinking about the movie play," said Pee-wee, always straining a point to champion a colleague. "Maybe—maybe he was studying the stars when he came in and didn't notice, hey? Lots of times I don't notice things when I'm studying the stars."

Wig said nothing. He wondered what was the matter with this likeable boy who had quite captivated him. "Oh, I suppose he was sleepy," he finally said, and was not convinced by his own haphazard explanation.

"I hope he doesn't get sleepy while he's swimming," said Artie.

"Or try to study the stars," said Grove. "Come ahead, let's go down and eat."

"Gee whiz, I'm not hungry for breakfast," said Pee-wee. This startling declaration alone shows what it meant to the Ravens to lose their flaunting banner.

"I bet the whole 'eats shack' knows about it by now," said Doc Carson. "Come on, let's go and get it over with. Where's he gone, anyway?"

"Strolling, I guess," said Grove.

The whole "eats shack" did know about it; it knew even more than the Ravens knew, for it knew the worst. Archie Dennison was basking in the limelight. And the matter was even worse than poor Wilfred had suspected, for

even before Archie had advertised Wilfred as a slacker the whole camp knew that the Emblem of the Single Eye had been taken by Allison Berry.

How it leaked out so quickly that Wilfred and the New Haven scout had known each other in Connecticut one can only conjecture. But the disclosure of this fact put Wilfred not only in the light of a slacker but in the graver light of a traitor as well. It was inconceivable that he would stand and watch a boy escape with that treasured emblem and do nothing.

The discovery of the triumphant scouts' identity explained the whole thing; Wilfred's heart was in Connecticut and he had not been able to bring himself to wrest a triumph from the boy whose life he had once saved. From the standpoint of the camp, what other explanation was there? To lose the emblem was bad enough. To lose it to its boastful, original possessors was worse. But to lose it while one of the Raven patrol stood looking on was incredible and made the crude banter at the breakfast board hard to bear.

A manly silence, prompted by scout pride, on the part of Archie Dennison and the whole sorry business would have been accepted as a salutary rebuke to the Ravens' prowess, and a corresponding triumph for the Gray Wolves. But now it was outside the wholesome field of sport, it was a shameful thing and the "eats shack" was not an agreeable place for the Ravens during breakfast.

"Hey, Conway," an exuberant scout called from one table to another. "In Connecticut you learn to sleep standing up."

"Oh, sure, ravens can walk in their sleep; didn't you know that?"

"Benedict Arnold Cowyard," another shouted.

Then, as a result of several poetical experiments somebody or other evolved this, which caused uproarious laughter:

"I love, I love, I love, I love;
I love so much to rest.
But the thing I love the most of all,
I love another patrol best."

One or other of the Ravens tried to stem this tide of wit but their angry voices were drowned in the uproar. Even Pee-wee's scathing tongue and thunderous tone could not stifle the unholy mirth. He was handicapped for he tried to eat and shout at the same time while the others accommodated their eating somewhat to their vociferous commentary.

"I suppose you know he got a peach of a scarf pin for saving that Berry fellow's life?" Wig shouted at the merry scoffers. It was a forlorn essay at loyalty to poor Wilfred, but it was not cheering even in his own ears.

"I suppose anybody can get rattled," Artie Van Arlen sneered. It was not for Wilfred's sake that he attempted this dubious defense; rather was it in pride for his patrol. He felt that if any defense could be made for a recreant Raven, it

should at least be attempted—in public.

But these impotent sallies were useless; the Ravens were buried under an avalanche of good-humored but cutting banter. Amid it all, Archie Dennison, proudly ensconced at “officials’ table,” derived a contemptible delight in witnessing the uproar he had created. His scout sense was so far askew that he contrived to see himself as the hero of the occasion.

Among the Bridgeboro scouts was one (I know not who, and it makes no difference) who evidently recalled the scene in Bridgeboro, of which perhaps he had been a witness. He was now inspired to revive the unhappy nickname which had rung in Wilfred’s ears when he fell unconscious on the sidewalk near his home.

“Wilfraid Coward, Raven!” he shouted.

“You better let up on that,” called Artie Van Arlen, but the entertainer persisted, judiciously omitting the word *raven*.

“Wilfraid Coward! Wilfraid Coward! Aren’t you afraid you’ll get arrested for speeding? Slow but sure—Wilfraid Coward! Wil——”

A certain stir among the clamorous diners made him pause and following the averted gaze of others, he beheld the subject of his wretched jesting standing in the doorway.

It was only in small matters that Wilfred was diffident. What ordeal he may have passed through in the few minutes he had spent alone was over now, and he entered the room without bravado but with a certain ease; he had the same look as when he had approached the bully, Madden. Shyness does not necessarily interfere with moral courage. His brown eyes were lustrous, his wavy hair in picturesque disorder, and he was conspicuous because he was the only boy who had no scout regalia.

He seemed lithe, even graceful, as he sauntered down between two mess-boards and around to another where the reviver of his nickname sat. You would have thought that Wilfred was waiting on the table and was asking his traducer if he would have another cup of coffee.

“You come from Bridgeboro, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yes, but I’m not in your troop, thank goodness,” the boy answered, addressing himself more to the whole assemblage than to Wilfred.

“What’s your name?” Wilfred asked, quietly.

“He wants to invite me to go walking, I guess,” the boy said aloud.

“Give him your card, maybe he wants to fight a duel with you,” some young wag shouted.

“You’re not going to hurt him, are you, Wandering Willie?” called another.

“Oh, no,” said Wilfred, blushing a little.

“Edgar Coleman,” laughed the boy.

“How long do you expect to be here?” Wilfred asked.

“Longer than you will, you can bet.”

“Thanks,” said Wilfred, and moved along to his own seat.

Many had finished breakfast and departed when Wilfred took his seat, and as he did so the two or three Ravens who still lingered contrived to finish quickly and were soon gone. So he ate his breakfast quite alone (so far as his comrades were concerned) and before he had finished there was not another boy in the room, except those who were doing penance for trifling rule violations by clearing the tables.

CHAPTER XV

TOM'S ADVICE

Wilfred did not seek out his own patrol; he avoided the cabin. Nor could he bring himself to seek out the Gray Wolves of New Haven and renew acquaintance with Allison Berry. It would sicken him to see the Emblem of the Single Eye proudly flaunted there. Besides, how did he know he would be welcome? If Berry remembered his own rescue at Wilfred's hands then it was for him to seek Wilfred out, so Wilfred thought.

One person Wilfred did seek out, however, and that was Tom Slade who, of course, knew all. The two strolled up into the woods away from the camp and sat on a stone wall which belonged to the Archer farm. Old Seth Archer and his men were out in the fields beyond raking hay, and Wilfred in his troubled preoccupation could hear the soothing voices of the workers directing the patient oxen, and occasionally a few strains of some carefree song.

"You see, Billy, you made your bed and now you've got to lie in it."

"You mean I have got to get out of it?"

"Well," said Tom, shrugging his shoulders; "what do you expect. If you've got two duties, do the most important one and explain why you can't do the other. Now that's plain, common sense, isn't it?" He ruffled Wilfred's wavy hair good-naturedly to take the sting out of what he had said.

"Why, Billy, you know what they think, don't you? Somebody started it and now they all think it. They think you deliberately let Berry get that emblem; they think you did it because he's an old friend. Now wait a second—don't speak till I get through. A traitor never gets any love anywhere. When Benedict Arnold turned traitor—*now wait a minute*—why even the English had no use for him. They accepted the information but not the man. Now even Berry and that New Haven bunch haven't got a whole lot of use for you. I suppose Berry'd be decent to you on account of what you did for him. But this is the way they see it—every last scout in this camp; you either were afraid to run after him or you deliberately *wanted* those fellows to get it. All right, now the only thing for you to do is to go to Artie Van Arlen—he's your leader and he's a mighty fine kid—you just go to him and tell him——"

"Tell him I'm a cripple like Archie Dennison?"

"No, tell him you're under the doctor's orders——"

"And he'll have to tell the patrol and all the troop—no sir, I'm not on any sick list," said Wilfred with a defiant shake of his fine head. "I don't go in the class with Archie Dennison, thank you!"

Tom gazed at him, amazed at his absurd stubbornness.

"You made me a promise, you know," Wilfred reminded him.

"Sure," Tom agreed, still scrutinizing him in perplexity.

"I have to get out of the patrol," said Wilfred.

"Well now, look here," said Tom, starting on another tack, "you're feeling pretty nifty, aren't you? No more pains or anything? You're looking fine, I'll say that. Why not see the doc and let him give you the once over, and if he says you're all right——"

"What's done is done," said Wilfred

"Yes, that's so," agreed Tom ruefully.

"I'm going to see the doctor on August first and not till then. Suppose he should tell me to lie on my back or something like that? Do you suppose I don't like to walk?"

"Well, I'm afraid you'll walk alone," said Tom.

"Well, that's what I've been doing right along," said Wilfred.

Tom tried to reach him from another angle. "I suppose you know the Ravens are planning to have you swim the lake for the record, don't you? In the Mary Temple event on August tenth? Wig-wag Weigand won't hear of anybody but you; he's got Artie started now. Don't you want to stick with that bunch and swim for it? I believe you would walk away with it in those arms of yours. All you've got to do is say you made a promise—these fellows up here all know what a promise means—they've got mothers, too. Let *me* tell them. What do you say?"

"I say no," said Wilfred. "If they want to misjudge me——"

"*Misjudge you?* Well, what the dickens do you expect them to do? They're not mind-readers. They'd care more for you than they would for that crazy, little white rag if you'd only tell them. The way it is now, you're going to lose everything."

"It's crazy for them to think I'm a traitor to them," said Wilfred. "I haven't seen Berry for two or three years. If a fellow would commit treason on account of living in a place, why then, he might commit treason on account of—on account of Hoboken, or Coney Island. The fellows that think that are crazy, and the others think I just got rattled and didn't start running in time, and let them think so."

"That's what you want them to think?"

"I'm not going to have them thinking that maybe I'll drop dead any time, and they have to treat me soft and kind."

"All right," said Tom, tightening his lips conclusively, "I don't think they're likely to treat you very soft and kind. I'd like to know where an A-1 fellow like you got your notions from. It wasn't from your sister, I bet."

It was funny how Tom had to drag in Wilfred's sister. One might have

suspected that he had some notions of his own.

“Well then, you’ll just have to paddle your own canoe,” he said finally. And he added, “I don’t know that I blame you for not wanting to be on the list with Archie Dennison. When are your folks coming up, anyway, Billy?”

“I was going to ask them to come up for the swimming contest on the tenth. I don’t know what I’ll do now.”

“Well, come and watch me chop some wood this morning, anyway.”

CHAPTER XVI

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

That was a great day for Wilfred. The consciousness of right, which is said always to sustain those accused falsely, did not comfort him. He knew that he was looked upon askance by every scout in camp, and that he was odious to his own patrol.

Tom's sensible advice only strengthened his stubbornness. He felt that it would be weak and inadequate to contrive an explanation after the event. His pride was now involved and he would maintain it at the expense of misjudgement. It was the same Wilfred Cowell who had let the boys in Bridgeboro believe he had run away from Madden, and tripped and fallen, rather than condescend to advertise the plain facts of the case. No one could ever really help such a boy as Wilfred; he would be his own ruin or his own salvation.

Tom, simple and straightforward, was puzzled at the boy's queer reasoning. But indeed there was no reasoning about it. Wilfred was the victim of his own inward pride, and this produced the sorry effects which in turn cut his pride.

"Hanged if I get him," said Tom.

Wilfred spent all morning with the young assistant manager who was making vigorous assaults against a couple of stumps in the adjacent woods. He was captivated, as he always was, by Wilfred's ludicrous squint at things which on this day had a flavor of pathetic ruefulness.

"The only thing I got so far in connection with scouting," he said, "is a time-table on the West Shore road. I think it will be very useful soon."

"Well, you're the doctor," said Tom, as he chopped away.

"I wish I were," said Wilfred, who was standing watching him. "I'd give myself a doctor's certificate right away quick, and start things."

"You seem to have started things all right," Tom laughed.

One bright ray shone upon the lonely and discredited boy that day. Allison Berry, patrol leader of the New Haven troop, looked him up and his talk must have sounded like music in Wilfred's ears. The leader's sleeve was decorated with a dozen merit badge, he seemed very much a scout, and Wilfred experienced a little thrill of pride at finding himself the recipient of hearty tribute from this fine, clean-cut, sportsman-like fellow.

"Well, you didn't pick me for a winner, did you?" he laughed at Tom, who kept busy at his chopping. "Didn't think I'd lift the flag from the old home

folks, did you?”

“Oh, I’m through picking winners,” said Tom.

“Yes? Well, you picked one in Will all right, didn’t you? May I sit down on this other stump? Do you know this fellow saved my life once in the dim, dim past, Slady? With one exception he’s the best swimmer this side of Mars. And that exception is a fish.”

“I hear you say so,” said Wilfred.

“If you’d been down at the lake this morning, you’d have heard me say so. I’ve been telling everybody you’re a hero.”

“Did you have to chloroform them to get them to listen?” Wilfred asked.

“Now look here, Will. You’re the same old Chinese puzzle that you were in Connecticut. Nobody here that has any sense believes you deliberately let me get that emblem; *treason*, that’s a lot of bunk. You got rattled, that’s what I told them. For the minute you didn’t realize; then *biff*, it was too late. You see I’m such a terribly fast runner—it’s wonderful.

“The old home folks, the Ravens, didn’t know what struck them. How about that, Slady? They had twigs all around. Why, do you know—this is what I told the bunch—do you know if I had been out with Archie Dennison, I would have been likely to do any crazy thing; I might even have committed a murder. You know, Will, it wouldn’t have done you any good anyway; you couldn’t have caught me; the case was hopeless. Well, how do you like New Jersey, anyway? I hear they don’t give you a holiday on Election; that’s some punk state.”

“It’s good to see you,” said Wilfred.

“Well, if you don’t like to see me, you have only yourself to blame; you’re the one that saved my life. I’ve been telling the whole camp about it, too. I’ve been telling them that maybe the reason you get rattled on land is because you really belong in the water. One fellow said you flopped last night. I said, ‘Well, what do you expect a fish out of water to do?’”

“Have you seen any of my—of the Ravens?”

“No, it would only make them sad to look at me. I was up there last night and nobody paid any attention to me.”

“They’ll call on you,” Tom said.

“When they wake up?”

“I’ve been peddling that radio set around all morning,” Allison continued. “I’ve been telling the crowd that if Will goes in for it, Mary Temple might just as well send it direct to him and not bother to come up—the contest is all over.”

“Oh, you’d better let her come up,” said Tom, busy at his task. “She’s a mighty pretty girl.”

“Yes?”

“Absolutely,” said Tom.

“Well, I’ll tell her Will got the wave in his hair from being so much in the ocean waves. What do you think of that wavy hair, Slade? Ever notice how he closes one eye on the road when he gets mad?”

“I never saw him mad,” said Tom.

CHAPTER XVII

TOM ACTS

The sensation did not persist long. The more serious among the scouts accepted the belief that Wilfred had been “rattled” and that the leader of the Gray Wolves had been too quick for him. The silly epitaph of “traitor” and the cruel nickname of “Wilfrayed Coward” were not often heard. But the loss of the Emblem of the Single Eye was a bitter dose for the Ravens to swallow. Allison Berry, though he was strong for Wilfred, did not spare the Ravens nor let them forget his bizarre exploit.

In the days immediately following, Wilfred spent much time with Tom and he was a familiar figure standing around watching his strenuous friend and helping in such tasks as did not require much exertion. It was remarkable (considering his all-around good health) how consistently he kept the promises he had made it home. It rather gave him the appearance of being aimless and indolent, and his easy-going habit seemed the more emphasized by the boisterous life all around him.

So serious was his unenlightened thought about “heart trouble” and so implicit his faith in the magic of doctors, that he actually believed the arbitrary date set by Doctor Brent would mark a sudden turning-point in his condition. Before the first of August he might drop dead; after the first of August he could not. No one knew it, but in the back of Wilfred’s mind was the thought that he might drop dead.

Boyishly he looked forward to August first as the day on which he would be liberated, not only from his promise but from this ghastly possibility. He thought of that casually determined date as most boys think about Christmas. Meanwhile, his heart beat strong and steady; the last rear guard of the old enemy had slunk away and he did not know it.

But he had lost out with the Ravens. His former glory as the rescuer of Allison Berry did not compensate them for the loss of their flaunting emblem. They thought it was a strange coincidence, to say the least, that the boy who had (they had to believe he had) saved Allison Berry from drowning should be the one to watch his former neighbor steal silently through the night with the treasure.

“Gee whiz, I wanted Mary Temple to see it when she comes up,” said Grove Bronson. “She said we couldn’t keep it through the summer.”

“Well, she was right,” said Doc Carson.

“Yes, she’s right, because we had a lemon wished upon us,” said Elmer

Sawyer.

"Suppose we had Archie Dennison wished on us?" said Wig.

"Oh, yes, things might be worse," Artie agreed. "We don't see much of Wandering Willie anyway; I don't know why he calls himself a member at all."

Of course, things could not go on in this way, and Tom Slade went up the hill and breezed up to the Ravens' cabin where he encountered Artie alone.

"What's the matter with you fellows anyway?" he demanded. "A lot of fuss because a new Scout doesn't start running just when he ought to! I want you to cut out the silent treatment. Here's a fellow who's a crackerjack swimmer——"

"We've never seen him in the water," said Artie.

"Well," said Tom, somewhat embarrassed by this sally, "you heard what he did."

"Yes, and we heard what he didn't do. If he's for the patrol why didn't he chase after Berry? If he such a wonderful swimmer why doesn't he go in swimming?"

"You'll know it when he does," said Tom, fully conscious of the weakness of his reply.

"Well, I can't make these fellows like him," said Artie. "I've done all I could. We treat him decent enough when he's around, only he's always wandering about. I should think he'd leave of his own accord."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Tom crisply. "Well then, if that's the way you fellows feel I'll take care of that for you. I was going to suggest that you put up with him till the first of the month—kind of a good turn—and then."

"And then?" said Artie.

"Oh, nothing, just *and then*," said Tom. "But I'll take him off your hands right away quick; don't worry."

This was the inglorious end of Wilfred Cowell's membership in the Raven Patrol. There was something pathetic in the lack of interest shown, even among the Ravens. He was not dismissed, no brazen infraction of camp rules was charged against him; he was just let out, and this thing happened without attracting any attention. No one in the patrol seemed to take any interest in him, even Wig was silent (he could not raise his voice against him) and the place he had occupied in the patrol did not seem vacant, for he had not stamped his impress on the patrol life.

Tom Slade, unwilling that his protégé should go home, waylaid Connie Bennett, patrol leader of the Elks, and used the big stick.

"You've got a vacancy, Connie," he said; "I want you to do me a favor and take Wilfred Cowell into your bunch. Now there's no use talking about him, just say will you or won't you do me the favor. I started the Elks myself before

you were out the tenderfoot class and in a way it's my patrol. Also Wilfred Cowell is my friend—I brought him here. He flopped in the Ravens and got in bad with them and now he's going to make a fresh start. Everybody has three strikes at the bat, you know."

"I hear he can swim some," said Connie; "I never noticed him."

"You tell 'em he can," said Tom. Then, drawing somewhat on his imagination, he put his arm fraternally around Connie's shoulder and added, "Why, look here, Connie, they've been keeping it quiet, you know, because they expected to enter him for the Mary Temple contest—*why, sure!*" he supplemented aloud. "No doubt about it. Nobody's seen him in—but you know what he did—over there in Connecticut. Take a tip from me, Connie, and enter him up for the contest on the tenth."

"We'll do that little thing," said Connie.

"He's a queer duck," Tom added, "now don't go and ask him to jump right in the water; sort of keep it under your hat. If he accepts, leave it to him—swimming's a thing you never forget. Leave it to him. Don't mind if he's kind of slow and easy-going. Why, you know Abraham Lincoln never hurried; always took his time—easy-going. But he got there, didn't he?"

"I'll say so," said Connie.

"The Ravens made a bull of things because they didn't understand him—see? His folks are coming up for the tenth—mother and sister."

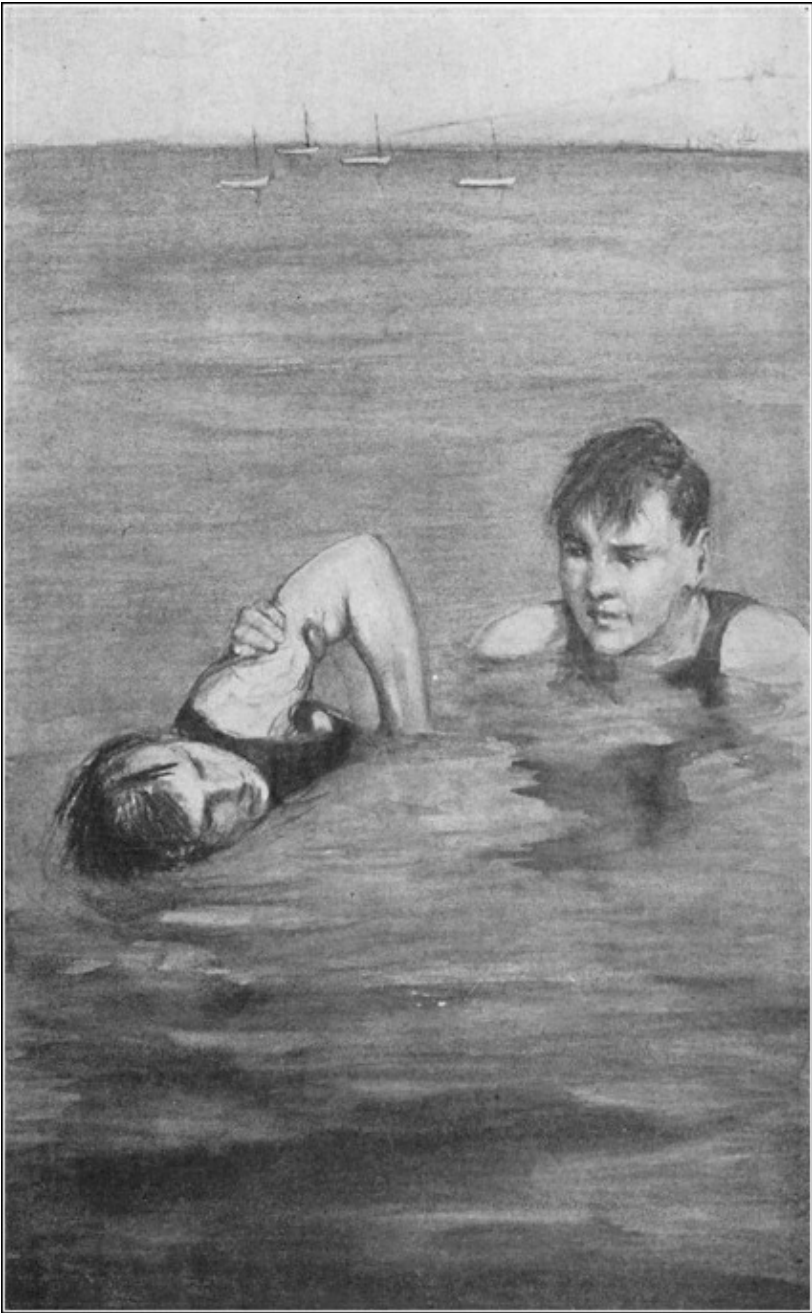
"How old is his sister?" Connie asked.

"Oh, she's too old for you."

CHAPTER XVIII

PASTURES NEW

No one save Wilfred himself, and Allison Berry, knew the full story of that rescue in the surf at Short Beach in Connecticut. Indeed Allison Berry did not know all about it; he only knew that he was screaming and sputtering, and sinking, when suddenly there was a grip that hurt his arm—and he was wrenched and turned about. And he ceased to feel that he was sinking. That way the little water-rat (as they called him) dexterously avoided the fatal grip of the drowning boy and turned him about and got him just as he wanted him and swam to shore. That was the little water-rat who lived in one of the cottages up in back of the beach.



SUDDENLY THERE WAS A GRIP THAT CUT HIS ARM.

No one was surprised (least of all the little water-rat's sister) for had he not

performed the feat of swimming out to the wreck of the old *Nancy B.* that was going to pieces on the rocks?

The little water-rat's sister did not know why they made such a fuss over him since he was born that way.

Well, Allison Berry, senior, had motored down from New Haven in his big limousine and proffered two hundred and fifty dollars, which was promptly refused. Then he presented the scarf pin. After the little water-rat got the scarf pin he got diphtheria, and after that the little family of three moved to Bridgeboro. Arden Cowell wanted to go to business school and be within commuting distance of the great metropolis situated on the banks of the subway.

Wilfred Cowell could swim at a rate of speed that was a marvel. At Bridgeboro he and Arden had planned to visit the thronging beaches at weekends and pursue their favorite pleasure at these resorts. Then had come Tom Slade with his glowing tales of Temple Camp. And then had come Wilfred's collapse, the sudden sequel of the treacherous disease from which he had suffered. Arden had sacrificed her young pal for his own supposed welfare and pleasure.

Wilfred had never talked about his swimming to any one save Wig and only briefly with him.

His diffidence and feeling of strangeness at camp had prevented his doing so. It may seem odd, but the sight of all the turmoil at camp, and the swimming and diving each day which amounted to a boisterous carnival, almost struck terror to the sensitive boy who had spent so much of his life alone. Surely, boys with fine bathing suits and such a delightfully yielding springboard painted red and all the superfluous claptrap of their pastime could swim better than he, a lonely country boy, suddenly confronted with all this pomp and circumstance. He was under promise not to go in, but he would probably have hesitated to do so in any case.

As a Raven, he had not thought seriously of being entered for the contest, though he probably would not have refused. But now he was making a fresh start. Allison Berry had proved a greater advertising agent than Wig, and Wilfred was resolved to redeem himself in the eyes of Temple Camp. He did not know anything about fancy diving and such things; he did not know how to participate in those riots of fun and banter which occurred on the lake; and he was timorous about those hearty boaters (good swimmers all of them) who did not leave the camp in darkness as to what they intended to do. Since Wilfred never said he would do a thing that he was not willing and able to do, he assumed that other boys were the same. If the Elks asked him to swim across the lake as fast as he could on August tenth, he would do it. And they did ask him.

"I understand that seven patrols are entered for it so far," said Connie. "But the only ones I'm afraid of are our own patrols—I mean the ones in this troop. The Rattlesnakes from Philly have a pretty good swimmer—Stevens, his name is. That fellow that wears the red cap, he's pretty good too; I think he's in an outfit from Albany, the June-bugs or something like that. The Ravens have got Wig and he's good. And the Silver Foxes—that's Blakeley's patrol—have got Dorry Benton who's a cracker jack if he shows up. He's supposed to get home from Europe in two or three days and then he's coming up. He's about the best of the lot. If you can beat Dorry, it's ours. I should worry about these other patrols, I've seen them all. Oh, boy, wouldn't I like to put it over on the Silver Foxes? Why, Blakeley and that bunch of monkeys are building a table for the radio already."

Connie and Wilfred were sitting on the sill of the cabin door. Connie had never mentioned Wilfred's inglorious exit from the Raven patrol; he was quiet, tactful, friendly. He seemed to accept Wilfred upon the usual terms, as if nothing peculiar attached to him. And all the other Elks took their cue from Connie.

They seemed different from the Ravens, more simple, less sophisticated. Most of them had been recruited from the poorer families of Bridgeboro. They seemed not quite as versed in scouting as the other two patrols of the troop. It could hardly be said that they looked up to Wilfred, yet they seemed to recognize in him something which they did not have themselves. Connie, alone, was of Wilfred's own station. It may have been that the Elks took a little pride in having this fine looking boy with his evidence of fine breeding and his quiet humor among them.

Be this as it may, they were a patrol of one idea, and that was to win the swimming contest. If this gentle alien among them could do that they would gladly worship at his shrine. They had not many merit badges in their group and they took a sort of patrol pride in Wilfred's scarf pin. Little Skinny McCord gazed spellbound at the changing opal, standing at a respectful distance.

"He got it gave to him, he did," he whispered to Charlie O'Conner. "He got it gave to him by a rich man."

The advent of Wilfred in this troop of plain, good-hearted boys, was accepted as an event. He would not have found it quite such easy sailing among the Silver Foxes. They made ready at once for the big coup—a master-stroke of "featuring" which would throw them in the limelight and win the smiles of that fairy princess, Mary Temple, and (what was more to the purpose) a sumptuous radio set. Opportunity had knocked on the door of the unassuming Elk Patrol. And Wilfred Cowell accepted his great responsibility.

He rose to the spirit of it. He was glad that the great event was some weeks

removed. He was sorry he could not begin practising, but he derived satisfaction from the thought that he could practise after the first of August. August first and August tenth loomed large in his thoughts now. He wrote home urging his mother and sister to come up for the big event. Each day he went down and scrutinized the bulletin board for new entries. He acquired something of the scout's way of talking in his familiar references to awards and troops and patrols.

"I see the Beavers from Detroit have entered that fellow Lord," he told Charlie O'Conner. "His name ought to be Ford, coming from Detroit," he added.

"We should worry," said Charlie confidently.

"They're all wondering what I'll look like in the water," Wilfred said.

"Let them wonder; maybe you'll go so fast they won't see you at all."

"I'm a little bit scary about that long-legged fellow in the Seal Patrol," Wilfred said. "That name *Seal* kind of haunts me. Ever seen a seal swim?"

"We're not losing any sleep," said Johnny Moran.

"You haven't noticed that we're losing our appetites from worry, have you?" Connie asked. "When I look at that scarf pin of yours that's enough for me."

"Well," said Wilfred, talking rather closer to his promise than he had ever done before. "After the—oh, pretty soon I'll start in practising a little. After the first is time enough."

"Oh, sure," agreed the simple and elated Charlie O'Conner; "only I'd practise down the creek, hey, where nobody'll see you? We'll keep them all guessing."

"Yes, but we don't want to leave anything undone," said Connie cautiously. "A radio set is a radio set." Then he added, "But don't think I'm worrying; all I have to do is to look at that scarf pin of yours—and I'm satisfied. What kind of a stone is that anyway?" he asked, scrutinizing the pin curiously.

"It's an opal," Wilfred said. "I guess that's why I never had much luck; they say they're unlucky, opals. I got diphtheria right after I got this. They say everything goes wrong with you if you have an opal."

That was the first reference that Wilfred had ever made to his recent illness and it showed, somewhat, how he was loosening up, as one might say, in the favorable atmosphere of the unsophisticated and admiring Elk Patrol.

"That's a lot of bunk," laughed Connie.

"Well, I don't know about that," Wilfred said in his whimsical, half-serious way. "As soon as I got that pin my mother lost some money, and my sister put some cough medicine in a cake instead of vanilla, and a looking-glass got broken on our way to Bridgeboro and that made things worse, and then I

started falling down——”

“Oh, nix on that, you didn’t fall down,” said Bert McAlpin. “That’s a closed book.”

“Oh, I mean in Bridgeboro, I went kerflop,” said Wilfred; “and my jacket got all torn and I had to stay home from school——”

“You don’t call that bad luck, do you?” Connie laughed.

“And the Victrola broke,” said Wilfred, “and I lost a collar-button and, let’s see—I didn’t get a radio.”

“You make me weary,” laughed Connie.

“It’s true,” said Wilfred.

“Yes—you make us laugh.”

“Well, I’ll tell you something queer,” Wilfred said more seriously. He was making a great hit with the Elks and it pleased him after all that had happened. They seemed proud of him and amused at his whimsical way of talking.

“Go on, tell us,” said little Alfred McCord. “Maybe he got ’rested by a cop.”

“It happened before I was born,” said Wilfred.

“*Good night*, his bad luck began before he was born,” laughed Connie.

“My father gave my mother an opal,” said Wilfred, “and right away after that my little brother was kidnapped and we never saw him again—I mean they didn’t.”

Something in his voice and manner imposed a silence on the clamorous, admiring group. He did not wait to hear their comments but drew himself aimlessly to his feet and wandered away in that ambling manner which he had acquired.

“Gee, I like to just listen to him, don’t you?” Charlie O’Conner observed.

“We fell in soft all right,” said Vic Norris. “He’s so blamed easy-going, I don’t know, it just kind of makes you feel sure of him, he’s so kind of—you know.”

“Yep,” said Connie decisively.

“It’s like when Uncle Jeb shoots,” said Bert McAlpin. “He’s so blamed sure he’s going to hit that he’s kind of lazy about it and he doesn’t seem to take any interest at all when he raises his gun.”

“But *biff*,” said Charlie O’Conner.

“*Biff* is right,” said Connie.

CHAPTER XIX

ADVANCE

I would like you to see the letter that Wilfred sent home.

Dear Mother and Sis:—

To-day I'm using my fountain pen instead of my opera-glass. I'm giving the birds of the air an afternoon off. My pen doesn't write very good—I guess it's the opal. But I won't take it off just for spite. I'm supposed to wear it so I will no matter what happens. I'm afraid I'm not going to drop dead. I feel fine. I can't find my heart when I put my hand there but I guess it's there all right. Don't worry, I'm keeping my promise, safety first that's what you say. Tom Slade's all the time asking about you, Sis. He said I didn't get my disposition from you.

What do you think? Al Berry is here with his patrol. I wish he'd keep still about me. He sneaked up and took a banner from the Ravens and I didn't run after him so I got put out. I didn't exactly get put out but they sort of said, here's your hat. There's a lame boy here and he makes me feel I don't want to let anybody know I have anything the matter with me 'cause they'll think I'm like him. Anyway there's nothing the matter with me but don't worry I'm keeping my promise no matter what, the same as I'm wearing my pin no matter what. I got that five dollars you sent me, Sis, and I'm saving it up for a scout suit.

I'm in the Elks now, and I have to swim in the contest. Don't worry it's not till August tenth. I'm going to see the doctor here on the first like Doctor Brent said. If he says my heart is still bad I'll blame it to the opal—only he won't say it. Anyway don't worry. If I say I'll do a thing I'll do it. I like these fellows. Mom and Sis you have to come up for the tenth. I'm glad I'll be in the water so I won't see the people looking at me. I can do things as long as I can forget that people are looking at me like when I was looking at Madden I didn't see the others. Anyway they won't be looking at me, they'll be looking at you, Sis. Tom Slade says I've got the same way of looking that you have. I told him a scout is observant—that's in the book. I send you a four leaf clover, Sis. I'm all the time looking on the ground and taking it easy, notice how I underline taking it easy, Mom.

Wilfred.

P. S. The four leaf clover and the opal don't speak to each other.

Wilfred liked the Elks so much that he did not ask any of them to walk down to Terryville with him where he intended to mail his letter. He wanted to walk there alone and think about his little triumph among them. They had fallen for him, as the saying is, and the realization of this was a balm to his spirit. One could not say the Ravens had not been good enough scouts to seek him out and find his winsome nature; they had been too scoutlike (as one might say) for that. That is, they were too busy with scouting. Now he was a decidedly large fish in a small pond. He was the "big thing" in the struggling Elk Patrol.

He wanted to feast upon his success with them, to let his imagination bask in the sunshine of this new favor that was his, after the ordeal of ridicule and disgrace. He felt so much at home with them! He was at his best with them. Well, there is a place for every fellow, if he can only find it. Wilfred wanted to indulge these solacing thoughts and that is why he walked down to Terryville alone.

But there was another reason. Terryville was a perilous place where scouts bought ice cream sodas and cones and candy. They treated each other to these. The Elks, however humble their standing in scout lore and prowess, were not remiss in these convivial obligations. Charlie O'Conner was notably prodigal on his pilgrimages to the rural center of iniquity. Wilfred had no money at all except his five dollar bill and this he wanted to save for a scout outfit. He would not let the others treat him. They liked him so much that he was afraid if he asked one they all might go. Then, he would have to let one after another treat him. So he went alone.

At Terryville something occurred which was destined to have a bearing on his future. Along the village thoroughfare he paused to look in a window where, among other varieties of apparel, scout raiment and paraphernalia were displayed.

He was gazing wistfully at these things when the sudden noise of a quickly braked automobile caused him to turn about, and he beheld an all too common sight. An old man, having just escaped being run down, had returned to the curb where he stood gazing intently at the procession of cars in the forlorn hope that he might discover a gap where a second attempt might be made. One after another the heedless motorists sped past in complacent disdain of this little village which chanced to be upon the state highway. If the village itself had wanted to cross the road it would probably have fared no better than the bewildered old man. Again and again he stepped from the curb and back again. Yet this old man had fought his way across harder places than this in his time.

Approaching the baffled pedestrian, Wilfred took him gently by the arm, raised his right hand warningly, then started across the street with his tottering charge, without apparently so much as a glance at the hurrying traffic. There was another squeak of quickly applied brakes and the shiny bumper of a car all but touched Wilfred's leg. But the car stood, and likewise the car behind it stood, and a man in a dilapidated Ford behind that who tried (as Ford drivers will) to make a flank move stopped also, and caused a jam in approaching traffic. But the Grand Army passed triumphantly across!

CHAPTER XX

ANOTHER PROMISE

The old man was very shrunken and feeble and like most aged people he had an impersonal way about him as though he saw the world but not its people individually. He seemed to take Wilfred for granted. He did not allude to the difficulty of crossing the street.

"I want to get my check," he said.

"Yes, where is it?" Wilfred asked him.

"It's in the post office; some months it's late but not usually. I got to go to Kingston for examination on the twenty-fifth."

"Oh, you mean your pension?" Wilfred asked.

"You know Doctor Garrison there?"

"No, I don't know anybody in Kingston," Wilfred said.

"He's the one I'll have."

"Yes, what for?"

"Pension raise. I put in an application; if I'm bad enough off I'll get it. It'll be raised from fifty to eighty. I can't see none out of this yere eye, this left one. I got a claim on total disable; can't work no more."

Wilfred was about to say that he hoped his charge might be "bad enough off." But he thought it would not sound well to say that.

"Two eyes does it sure," the old man said. "I only got a single eye. But I got rheumatiz, that oughter help. Trouble is gettin' there."

The words *single eye* used so innocently by this poor, little old man, made Wilfred wince a little, for he had ceased to think about the lost emblem.

"I gotta get t' the Kingston Hospital," said the old man. "If the doctor looks me over he'll pass me; I got a bad heart too. That's like ter be total disable, ain't it? I ain't hankerin' after bein' shook up by one of them buses; I got sciatici too—comes and goes. Them doctors is on the watchout on total disable work."

It seemed to Wilfred that this poor old man had more ailments than he really needed, that he possessed a small fortune in the way of infirmities. He took him to the post office and watched the poor, old, shriveled hand tremblingly open the long envelope in which Uncle Sam, without letter or salutation of any kind, enclosed his monthly check which was the sole support of the old veteran. The old man took particular pains proudly to explain to Wilfred that any merchant would cash that check; he even offered to demonstrate the government's credit by inviting Wilfred to witness the

transaction in the adjoining drug store. It was plain that he believed in Uncle Sam.

While his friend was in the drug store on this momentous monthly business, Wilfred stamped and mailed his letter home and listened to a few words from the loquacious postmaster touching the old man.

"Who is he? Oh, that's Pop Winters. He saw smoke in his day, that old codger. He lives in that little shack up the road where you see the flag out."

Going to the door, Wilfred looked up a by-road and saw a dilapidated little shack with a muslin flag flying on a rake-handle outside it.

"Does he live there alone?" he asked.

"Yes, but he won't long. I guess he'll go to the Home before winter. He can't live and buy coal on what he gets—not the way things are now."

"He expects to have his pension raised," Wilfred said.

"Gosh, he ought to," said the postmaster.

Wilfred took the old man home. In the single room which the little dwelling contained was an atrocious crayon portrait of "Pop," executed many years back, showing him resplendent in his blue uniform and peaked cap. There was an old-fashioned center table with a white marble top on which lay a copy of *General Grant's Memoirs*. There was a picture of Lincoln; the shrewd, kindly humorous face seemed to be smiling at Wilfred; he could not get away from it.

"I tell you what I'll do," Wilfred said. "I'll come for you on the twenty-fifth and take you to Kingston and bring you back."

"I wouldn't go in none of them automobiles," Pop warned.

"Oh, I haven't got an automobile, never fear," Wilfred laughed. "But I've got the use of a horse and buggy and I know how to drive; that's one thing I know how to do—and swim."

"I got maybe to wait all day," said the old man.

"All right, then I'll wait too."

The old man seemed incredulous. Yet, oddly, he did not ask Wilfred who he was or where he belonged. It was only the offer that interested him.

"More'n like you wouldn't come," he said.

"More'n like I would," said Wilfred. "You don't know me; if I say I'll do a thing, I'll do it. You've got so much trust in the government, I don't see why you can't trust me."

The old man seemed impressed by this masterly argument.

"You needn't be afraid I won't come," urged Wilfred. "I'll come with a buggy and all."

"At ten o'clock?" said the old man.

"Earlier than that if you say."

"If you say you'll come and you don't, I got to wait a year for

examination.”

“Yes, but didn’t you hear me say I *will* come?”

“I’ll be lookin’ for you,” said the old man. Wilfred watched him totter over to a calendar and laboriously pick out the twenty-fifth of the month. Then, with shaking hand he marked a cross upon the figures with a lead pencil. The shrewd, kindly eyes of Lincoln seemed to look straight at Wilfred as if to say, “Now you’re in for it.”

CHAPTER XXI

A BARGAIN

Wilfred was not the first nor the last guest at Temple Camp to be a plunger in the seething metropolis of Terryville. Many were the empty pockets that Main Street had to answer for. But he had done worse (or better) than squander his little fortune in riotous living; he had pledged himself to do something for which sufficient funds might not be available.

He was glad that old Pop Winters was prejudiced against automobiles, because he himself was prejudiced against the taxi rates for these. He realized that he was doing good turns on a rather dangerous margin. Suppose he could not get a horse and buggy for five dollars? No incentive could induce him to borrow money; it was not in the Cowell blood to do that. Well, he was in for it, and he would see....

On his way through Main Street he paused for a final, wistful look at the scout regalia displayed in the store window. He had put an end to those hopes. Well, you can't do everything. On his journey along the quiet road, he thought of the contest, the big event at camp, except for the closing carnival. And he let his thoughts dwell pleasantly on his new comrades, the generous, elated, simple-hearted Elks.

He had heard the Elks ridiculed good-naturedly as a sort of ramshackle patrol, without medals or distinction. They had only four merit badges among them. He would try to bring them into the limelight. He rather dreaded appearing in an "event." However, he could so concentrate his mind on his single aim that he would not see the throngs—just the same as when he had looked at Madden.

Well, thought he, for a boy who had made such a bungle at the start, he was doing pretty well. He had a date with Pop Winters for the twenty-fifth, a date with the "doc" on the first, and on the tenth a date with Temple Camp. On that last day the world should hear of the Elk Patrol. And through all, he would have kept his original promise; not compromised with it, or sidestepped it, but just kept it, without trying to beg off or have it modified. That was the way to do things. Remembering the way those eyes of Lincoln had looked at him, he was glad, *proud*, that he had done that way....

That, indeed, had always been Wilfred's way. He had never tried to bargain with his mother or to weary her into surrender. He respected his word. And he accepted consequences.

Instead of cutting up through the camp grounds, he went down the by-road

to the Archer farm. There was nothing unusual in his request for a horse and buggy for July twenty-fifth. Mr. Archer kept a horse and buggy especially for hire by the "folks over t' th' camp." The buggy was as old as Pop Winters and the horse was so docile that a horse on a merry-go-round would have seemed wild in comparison.

"I thought I'd ask you in plenty of time," Wilfred said to Mr. Archer.

"Well, I d'know but what that'll be all right," old Mr. Archer drawled, pausing and leaning on his rake. He availed himself of the brief recess to mop his beady forehead. "You youngsters allus used me right. You drive I s'pose?"

"That's one thing I know how to do," said Wilfred.

"You hain't cal'latin' on pilin' a whole mess o' youngsters inter the buggy, be you?"

"Just myself and an old man in Terryville," Wilfred said. He told Mr. Archer the facts. "It isn't the driving that's worrying me," he concluded, "but I've only got five dollars—and—eh—I'm afraid—I guess that isn't enough, is it?"

"Well, I allus git eight dollars for the day," Mr. Archer pondered aloud, "but I d'know as I'll charge you that. You seem ter be a kind of right decent youngster. You come over and git the rig—when is it?"

"On the twenty-fifth," said Wilfred.

"And we'll say five dollars, on'y don't you go lettin' on ter them folks ter the camp what I done; that's just twixt me and you. I got a kind of a likin' ter you, that's why."

"That's just the same with me," Wilfred laughed. "I've got a kind of a liking to him—Pop Winters, I mean. I was good and scared coming home; I was afraid I'd made a promise I couldn't keep, maybe."

"Well, yer hain't sceered now, be ye?"

"Do—do you want me to give you the five dollars now? I guess I will because maybe I might lose it."

"No, if you give it ter me I might spend it," said Mr. Archer.

"Well, anyway, I guess I won't lose it," said Wilfred, "because I've got it pinned to my shirt, inside."

"I wouldn' know ye was one of them scouts, ye don't wear none of them furbishings," Mr. Archer commented.

"I'm going to get a scout suit next summer, I guess," Wilfred said.

He did not know it but this was his second triumph—pretty good for a boy who had been called Wilfrid Coward, and edged out of a scout patrol. But he knew the little triumph he had won among the admiring Elks and his thoughts now were bent on making that triumph good and redeeming himself in the eyes of the whole camp. He dreaded the big event, as a diffident boy would, but he would think of the contest and not the crowd. He would look straight at the

thing he was to do.

Of one thing he was resolved; if—*if*—he won the radio set, it must be installed in Connie Bennett's house when they returned to Bridgeboro. Connie was patrol leader. And besides that, Wilfred's home was so small that there really was no place in it for the patrol to assemble.

"There I go counting my chickens before they're hatched," he laughed to himself, as he made his way over to the camp.

CHAPTER XXII

SHATTERED DREAMS

Wilfred's path to the Elks' cabin took him past the main pavilion where there was always much life. Here scouts sat lined up on the long veranda, tilted back in their chairs, looking out upon the lake. This was the center of camp. It was difficult for any scout to pass this spot without subjecting himself to mirthful comment. It was the spot most dreaded by Wilfred. Here he seemed always to be passing in review.

Here were still to be heard the faint echoes of those slurring gibes which rang in his ears after the Gray Wolves had captured the emblem of the Single Eye. Sometimes a loitering group would hum a derisive tune in time with his footsteps. And now and then he could hear, as he passed, the name Willie Cowyard, which was as close to his more degrading nickname as they cared to venture.

As he approached this spot now, he noticed a clamorous group before the bulletin board. Among the voices he could overhear disconnected phrases.

"Suits us all right."

"Have it over with."

"Have it over with is right."

"By-by, baby."

"The sooner the quicker."

Wilfred's sensitive nature construed these stray bits of comments to mean something about himself; he thought that perhaps he had been dismissed from camp.

"Any time," he heard a laughing voice say.

"A lot we care!"

"Willie or won't he?"

"He ought to be named *Won't he*."

This was enough for Wilfred—he had been dismissed from camp. He had not fulfilled the requirements of the "scholarship" of which Tom Slade had spoken. He had not made good as a non-pay scout. He could not pass that spot now, unconscious of the mocking throng. His sensitiveness overcame his common sense. He took a circuitous route and avoiding his own cabin strolled up through the woods to the road. The habit of ambling had become second nature to him and "taking it easy" gave him an appearance of aimlessness which put him in strange contrast with the strenuous life all about him. There was something pathetic in his self-imposed isolation.

At the roadside was a crude bench where the camp people waited for the Catskill bus, and Wilfred seated himself on this. Soon the bus came along bringing a “shipment” of new scouts. Doc Loquez, the young camp physician, alighted too, hatless and conspicuous in his white jacket; he had evidently been to Catskill.

Wilfred lived in perpetual dread of this brisk young man, fearing that if he encountered him he would be ordered to bed or given a big bottle of medicine which people might see at the “eats” boards or in patrol cabin. But he was in for it now. The doc gave him a quick, inquiring glance and sat on the bench beside him.

“What’s the matter with you? Not feeling right?”

“Sure, I am,” Wilfred said.

“Let’s look at your tongue.”

The doc scrutinized him curiously with friendly brown eyes. He was so prompt in waiving professional formality that it seemed to Wilfred as if he had known him all his life. How foolish he had been to avoid this boyish, fraternal, offhand young fellow.

“Whenever I see a scout wandering around by himself,” said the doc, “I always waylay him. Let’s see, you’re the chap that’s going to win the Mary Temple contest? One of your—Elks, is it?—he was telling me you’re going to give the camp a large sized shock.”

“I guess they’re shocked enough already,” said Wilfred.

“You’re the boy they mean, aren’t you?”

“I’m going to swim for it; I don’t know if I’ll win it.”

The young doctor threw his head back with fine spirit and as he arose gave Wilfred a rap on the shoulder as if to say that the contest was won already. “You’ll win,” he said cheerily.

There was something in that spirited look of friendly confidence which went to Wilfred’s heart; all the more because the young doctor had no reason for his generous faith. In the quick sparkle of those brown eyes had spoken defiance, triumph, inspired approbation. It reminded Wilfred of his sister’s look bespeaking a kind of challenge to any one who mistook his diffidence for weakness.

And that made him remember that his mother and Arden were coming up for the tenth. And that reminded him that he was a fool to think that the crowd around the bulletin board meant anything in his young life. As if a guest at camp would be dismissed in any such way—by announcement on the public bulletin! The brisk young doctor with his hearty confidence had awakened Wilfred. As if the guest of Tom Slade were not secure at camp! Silly....

Why, of course, he was going to swim in the contest. And was not everything bright ahead? There was no patrol at camp, and he knew it, that

idolized one of its members as the Elks idolized him. It was not one of the crack patrols, but it idolized him. And he was proud and elated. He was sorry he had not joined those boys and read the new entries or whatever was posted on the board.

He strolled back that way again, affecting a sort of easy nonchalance. This was easy because the group had melted away; even on the pavilion veranda only two or three boys remained, sitting in a row in tilted chairs and beguiling themselves by knocking each other's hats off.

Wilfred stood alone before the bulletin board, observing the several notices fixed to it by thumb tacks. He glanced at the list of visitors to camp, scout officials, parents. There was an announcement of a movie show to be given in the pavilion. His eye fell upon a notice typewritten on the Temple Camp stationery and he stood transfixed as he read it:

Owing to the departure of John Temple and family for Europe on August Second, the date of the Mary Temple swimming contest has been changed to July Twenty-fifth. The management feels certain that the Scouts of camp will be agreeable to this change of date and make their preparations accordingly, in order that Mr. Temple and his daughter may be present at the event. Miss Mary Temple is anxious to tender the award in person as heretofore.

A boy sauntered up behind Wilfred and paused, half-interested, to read the latest news. But Wilfred did not turn, and heard him only as in a dream. The sounds of merrymaking on the lake seemed like sounds out of another world. He heard the discordant voices of the boys on the veranda who were knocking off each other's hats; yet those voices seemed vague, like sounds not human, in which no one is interested. He gazed transfixed—aghast. "*July twenty-fifth,*" he repeated in a kind of trance.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOWEST EBB

Then he turned away and found that the boy who had paused behind him was the Gray Wolf, Allison Berry.

"I didn't know that was you," said Wilfred abstractedly.

"Oh, I can come right close to people and they don't know it," Allison said. "Anybody could tell you're an ex-Raven, you're asleep. Well, you haven't got so long to wait to see the camp eating out of your hand, have you? You're not going to do a thing but give this bunch a large sized shock."

"Shock—yes, I guess so," said Wilfred.

"You've got them all guessing," said Berry. "I guess you practise down the creek or somewhere, don't you? Everybody's wondering where you go when you wander away; they think there must be a secret lake in the woods or something. Jiminy, it reminds me of a prize-fighter in his training quarters—*keep away!* I told them you have a *new method*—it's got them lying awake nights."

"I guess you could sneak up on them just the same, awake or asleep," said Wilfred abstractedly.

"Ever yours sincerely," laughed Berry. "Now that I've put it over on the raving Ravens, I can die in peace. The only thing I'm sorry about is Wig Weigand—do you know he's a blamed nice fellow? And he's strong for you, too. He's the only one of that crew of Rip Van Winkles that won't say anything against you—just keeps still."

"Yes?" said Wilfred wistfully. "I was sort of special friends with him."

"Sure, I know you were. He's going to swim for the Ravens (if they're awake) and honest I believe he hopes you win. I wish we could stay for it, I know that. Oh, wouldn't I like to be here to rout for the little Short Beach water-rat!"

"You mean you fellows are going home?" Wilfred asked, surprised.

"To-morrow," said Allison. "We just came to get the flag, you know. You know a Yank can't stay away from Yankeeland long; we're going to spend August in a camp in Connecticut. Oh, boy, won't my folks be surprised to hear I met you here! Anyway, I'll see you here next summer—this is some camp, I'll say that. Can't you take a run over to New Haven and visit me at Christmas? Dad would go daffy to see you."

"I can't run as well as you can," said Wilfred.

"Oh, is that so? Well, then swim to New Haven, you can do that."

"I guess I'll say good-by now," Wilfred said, extending his hand, "in case I don't see you again to-day. I suppose you're going on the early bus?"

"Sure—while the Ravens are sleeping peacefully. You might have been a Gray Wolf if you hadn't moved away and become a Jersey mosquito. Remember now, write and tell me about your winning the contest—and remember you're coming to New Haven in the holidays. And I'll promise not to take anything away from you while you're asleep."

The Gray Wolf proffered his left hand, three fingers extended, for the scout handclasp which is known wherever scouts are known in all the world. And Wilfred (who hardly knew whether he was a scout or not) could not resist that fraternal advance. And so he shook hands, in the way that scouts do, with the boy whose life he had once saved by an exploit which had rung in the ears of the whole countryside.

"I don't know what I'll be doing, maybe I'll come," said Wilfred. He meant that he would try to if he could afford to. "Anyway, give my regards to your mother and father. I'd like to be living at the beach again, I know that."

"You remember Black Alec that sold the hot dogs? He's still there. I'm going to tell him I met the water-rat. Don't you remember he's the one that started that name?"

"Tell him I sent my regards," said Wilfred.

He could not bring himself to part with this old acquaintance who recalled the happiest days of his young life, days of pleasure and achievement and triumph. He longed for the little cottage near the beach where he and Arden had played as children, and for the boisterous surf in which he had been so much at home.

It seemed that with the departure of Allison Berry, the last vestige of hope and happiness was going from him. He could not stir. So he let Allison go first and watched him as he sped around the pavilion, turning to display an odd conception of the scout salute and to wave his hand gaily. Then the Gray Wolf who owed his happy, triumphant young life to this stricken boy without hope, without even a scout suit, was gone.

Wilfred wandered up through the woods away from camp. What should he do now? At all events he wanted to be alone. In the stillness he could hear the sound of hammering far away, and gazing from an eminence on which he stood, he looked across the lake where tiny figures were moving. The sound of the hammering was spent by the distance and each stroke sounded double by reason of the echo. He pulled out his opera-glass and studying the farther shore made out that they were busy about what seemed to be a rough float. It was from this float that the swimmers would start in their race toward the camp shore. Preparations were under way.

He sat down on a rock, utterly disconsolate. His humorous, philosophical

squint did not help him now. Fate was against him—he was a failure. He could not swim in this contest. It was curious how his mind worked. He believed that old Pop Winters had been made to cross his path in order to strengthen him in keeping his promise to his mother. Perhaps he would weaken—it was only six days from the twenty-fifth to the first—so he had been given a solemn obligation to perform on the momentous day of the race. It was all fixed.

Well, as long as his obligation lay along the line of homely, kindly deeds—the keeping of promises, the doing of good turns—he would renounce all thoughts of spectacular exploits. He resented the shrewd maneuver of Providence in giving him an extra reason for keeping his word. “I intended to keep it anyway,” he said. He became very stubborn in his resolution now. Nothing would induce him to break his promise, he would keep it to the *day*, just as an honest man pays a note *on the day*. And he would not let his bad luck bully him into going around saying that he had “heart trouble.” He would not “play off sick” at this late date. That was Wilfred Cowell all over.

“Anyway, there’s one thing I don’t want any longer,” he said to himself. “One just like it brought my mother bad luck. My brother was kidnapped and my father died and we lost our money. I don’t want this blamed pin any more—as long as I can’t swim or do anything. I believe in bad luck, I don’t care what fellows say. It brought me bad luck ever since I was here, that’s sure. I believe what people say—that they’re unlucky.”

Sullenly he pulled the opal scarf pin from his tie and was about to cast it from him into the thick undergrowth. “The only luck I’ve had,” he said with cynical despair in his voice, “is Al Berry going away; anyway he won’t be here to know I flopped again—that’s one good thing anyway.”

His hand was even raised to cast away the little testimonial of his heroism when suddenly he noticed a strange thing. At first he thought it was not his own scarf pin that he held, so changed was the opal in color. Instead of showing its varying, elusive glints of beauty, it was opaque and of a dull and cheerless blue, like Wilfred’s own mood. Yet sometimes this same uncanny stone had flamed with glory. And it would flame with glory again, all in good time, for in its mysterious depths the wondrous opal heralds good or evil, sorrow or joy, and when it dazzles with its myriad flickering lights, you may be sure that health and good luck are on the way, and that all is well.

Wilfred was so astonished at its loss of color that he replaced it in his scarf. Then he started with a kind of forced resolve for the Elks’ patrol cabin.

CHAPTER XXIV

STRIKE TWO

Connie Bennett and Charlie O'Conner were busy setting a long stick upright from the cabin roof as Wilfred approached.

"No time like the present, hey?" said Connie. "If we don't need an aerial we can fly our pennant from it."

"What do you mean *if we don't need an aerial*?" Charlie asked. "How do you get that way?"

"He's like Pee-wee Harris," said Connie; "he's absolutely, positively, definitely sure."

Wilfred watched them for a few minutes, utterly sick at heart.

"This is only temporary for August," Charlie called down from the roof. "Hand us up that other stick, will you?"

"I've got something to tell you," said Wilfred, "and I won't blame you for getting mad. I can't go in the contest."

Connie looked at him amused. "You joke with such a straight face——"

"I mean it," said Wilfred earnestly; "I can't do it. There's no use asking me why. I can't do it and you've got a right to call me a quitter—or anything you want."

"What do you mean?" Connie asked, caught by his earnest tone. Charlie O'Conner slid down off the roof and stood, half-laughing, half-apprehensive.

"I mean just what I said," said Wilfred soberly. "I found out I can't swim in the contest. You'll have to let one of the other fellows do it; Bert McAlpin ____"

"Cut it out about Bert McAlpin," said Connie. "What's the idea, anyway? Are you kidding us?"

"No, I'm not," Wilfred said earnestly. "I can't do it and I mean it and you can call me a quitter."

"If you mean it, I'll call you something more than a quitter," said Connie testily; "I'll call you a——"

"A what?" said Wilfred, the lid of his left eye half-closing and quivering in that way of his.

"Cut it out," said Charlie, "quitter is bad enough. Calling names isn't getting us anything."

"It might get you something," said Wilfred.

"Will you cut it out!" said Charlie impatiently. "What's the idea, anyway?"

"The idea is that I can't swim in the contest," Wilfred said, "and I came to

tell you, that's all."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" Connie sneered. "I guess you can't swim at all, that's my guess. Nobody ever saw you swimming."

"Go on, he's fooling!" said Charlie.

"No, he isn't fooling either," Connie shot back. "If it had been left for the tenth, he wouldn't have told us yet. But now it's only a few days off he *has* to tell us. Thanks very much for telling us in time, we'll manage to put somebody in."

"I'd like to know who?" Charlie asked.

"Oh, never mind who," said Connie disgustedly; "somebody that isn't a bluffer. We're satisfied, go on and get out of the patrol——"

"I expected to do that," said Wilfred mildly.

"You can bet you did," Connie shot back. "You will if I'm patrol leader!"

"What's the reason anyway?" Charlie asked, puzzled.

"Reason! How could there be any reason?" Connie repeated angrily.

"I'm not giving any," Wilfred said.

"Why not?" Charlie asked.

"Oh, just because—because I'm unlucky," said Wilfred in a pitiful despair that they did not notice.

"Unlucky?" sneered Connie. "That's a good one. *You're* unlucky! How about us, for taking you in?"

"Sure, for taking pity on you," said Charlie, aroused to anger. "That's what we get for doing a favor for Tom Slade——"

"You needn't say anything against him," said Wilfred.

"I'd like to know who'll stop me," said Connie. "Not you." Then he paused, incredulous. "Are you kidding us, Billy Cowell?" he asked.

"I told you," said Wilfred hopelessly.

"All right," said Connie with an air of shooting straight. "As long as you told *me*, I'll tell *you*. You had every scout in this camp laughing at the Ravens; you stood and let a fellow walk away with their emblem—that they were so crazy about. You never did anything in that patrol—all you did was get Wig Weigand hypnotized. Hanged if I know what he sees in you——"

"He does?" Wilfred began.

"Then you get edged out and Tom Slade takes pity on you and we have to be the goats. You got away with it here because we're simps—we're easy. You know as well as I do, Cowell, that these fellows are easy—and friendly. Do you think I don't know what kind of a patrol I've got? Just because some of them live in South Bridgeboro—you know what I mean. But they're a fair and square crowd all right, I'll tell you that——"

"I know they are——"

"They don't care what you think or know," snapped Connie. "But I'll tell

you what *I* know—I know you don't know how to swim. You got into this patrol because you couldn't get into any other. Nobody ever even saw you with a bathing-suit on. We heard that Allison fellow around camp shouting about you, that's all I know. He must be crazy or something."

"He's crazy in that way—for shouting about me," said Wilfred quietly. "He won't shout about me any more, because he's going away to-morrow."

"Why don't you go with him?"

Wilfred gulped, his eyes brimming. If Arden could have seen him then she might have strangled Connie Bennett. "You wouldn't——" he began weakly.

"Oh, cut it out," said Connie disgustedly. "If you're not a swimmer you're not a swimmer, that's all. You bluffed it as long as you could; thanks for telling us in time. Now go on inside and get your stuff and chase yourself away from here. Slade said you struck out once; now you struck out again. You're some false alarm, *I'll* say!"

For a moment Wilfred hesitated, but there was nothing he could say. He went into the cabin and got together his few things, undergarments and his old overcoat (he had no scout possessions) and packed the suit-case that Arden had contributed to the big enterprise of a summer in camp. On an end of this were painted the letters A. D. C. standing for Arden Delmere Cowell. As the twice discredited boy emerged with this, looking pitifully unlike a scout, Charlie O'Conner's rather cumbersome wit was inspired to say, "Good initials—Abandon Duty Cowell."

Wilfred paused and looked at him, angry and irresolute, then went on. What would the spirited, brown-eyed Arden have said if she could but have known that her initials had been used to manufacture another brutal nickname for her pal and brother?

CHAPTER XXV

NEW QUARTERS

His first thought was to go to the Archer farm, but he realized that he had no money to do that. And if he were going to keep his promise to old Pop Winters, he must not go home; indeed he had not the money to do that either, for his precious five dollars was pledged.

Other boys had been discredited at Temple Camp, but these had fallen foul of the management, not of the scout body. No guest at camp had ever presented such a pitiful picture as Wilfred, as he stood irresolute in the woods below the Bridgeboro cabins with nothing whatever about him to connect him with scouting. In the woods he looked singularly out of place in his plain suit, his suit-case in one hand and his overcoat over the opposite arm. Most boys departing from Temple Camp went away resplendent in scout regalia and howling out of the windows of the Catskill bus.

He went to the commissary shack where Tom Slade had lately been busy assorting and piling camp provisions and paraphernalia. In the semidarkness of this place he encountered Tom alone and told him all there was to tell.

"Why the suit-case?" Tom asked.

"I had to take my things away from there."

For some reason or other, which no living mortal can explain, Wilfred had not told Tom nor any one else of his kindly plan in connection with Pop Winters. He was not ashamed of what he was going to do, but he seemed ashamed to tell of it.

"Well," said Tom, lifting himself up onto a packing case and forcing a patience which he did not feel, "that's strike two. And I thought when we came up here that you were going to knock a home run."

"I guess *home* is the right word," said Wilfred.

"Yes, if you want to be a quitter," said Tom.

"There don't seem to be any more patrols for me to go into," Wilfred observed cynically.

"You didn't think it worth while to tell them, did you?" Tom asked wearily. "I mean that you have something the matter with you."

"There's nothing the matter with me," Wilfred said proudly. It was odd how such a fine spirit could bear misjudgment and humiliation. He seemed to feel that the greatest disgrace of all was having some physical weakness. "Do you think I'm an Archie Dennison?" he demanded.

"No, not quite as bad as that," Tom laughed.

"It's only on account of you I feel bad; I don't care about anybody else," said Wilfred.

"I should think you'd care about the Elks," Tom said rather coldly; "they're pretty nice fellows. You left them up in the air—guessing. What do you expect? Do you think everybody is to be sacrificed just because you don't want folks to know you have to be careful about your health?"

"Don't you worry about my health," said Wilfred.

"Well," said Tom, "talk isn't going to get us anywhere. I have to take you as I find you. You're here on my award——"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're here as my guest. And I'm not going to have my guest pulling out before the game's over. I'm not going to have you going home and let your sister think you're a quitter."

"You seem to think more about my sister than you do about me," said Wilfred.

This was a pretty good shot and it silenced Tom for a moment. "Well," he finally said, "I don't seem to get you, but I suppose it's my fault. I don't know any patrol I could wish you onto now; you're queered. The best thing you can do is to bunk in the pavilion and just hang around and help me, and along about the first drop in and see the doc. Wasn't that what Doctor Brent said? He may tell you you're all right, but you see, Billy, that won't square you with the crowd. You've flopped twice——"

"They say three strikes out," said Wilfred, with rueful humor.

"Well, they're not likely to give you another chance at the bat," said Tom. "You can't blame these fellows——"

"I blame two of them," said Wilfred, grimly.

Tom ignored this dark reference. "Well," said he, "they won't do any worse than ignore you; you just bat around and amuse yourself and keep up your stalking, that's good, and get some benefit out of the country. I don't want you chasing home, I know that."

This, then, was Wilfred's lot during the days that immediately followed. He slept in the pavilion among the unattached boys, and a queer lot they were. Some of them were very young, others very delicate; all were under the particular care of the management. They were immune from the exactions of troop discipline and obligation. But it would be unfair to them to say that they were of the brand of Archie Dennison. Nothing was likely to happen to ostracize Wilfred from this group.

As for the other boys, they looked on him with contempt; the banter stage was past and the whole camp body joined with the Ravens and the Elks in ignoring him. They did not think of him so much as a traitor or a coward, but as a "bluffer." Allison Berry, the only one who might have disproved this

belief, was gone, and his vociferous defense of Wilfred forgotten. Wandering Willie was just a bluff, a boy who had pretended that he was a swimmer when in plain fact he could not swim or do anything else. Temple Camp was no place for bluffers. To bluff the honest and simple Elks seemed peculiarly contemptible.

Wilfred was not accorded the tribute of being disliked, he was simply ignored. He was one of the pavilion crowd—he was nothing. When scouts did speak of him they called him Wandering Willie, which was a harmless enough nickname.

CHAPTER XXVI

JULY TWENTY-FIFTH

On July twenty-fifth, when the camp was in gala array for the big event, Wandering Willie walked over to the Archer farm. Standing on the same eminence where he had sullenly resolved to throw away the scarf pin which commemorated his one great exploit, he looked down upon the camp which was gay with pennants and streamers.

The springboard which overhung the lake was festooned with bunting and the lantern-post looked like a stick of peppermint candy with its diagonal winding of red, white and blue. Far across the lake was a tiny area of color, indicating the spot where the swimmers would start for the swim to the camp shore. This annual event was not a race but a contest; he who swam across in the shortest time won the prize.

Wilfred took out his old opera-glass and scanned the lake. About in the center was a little patch of white which was always visible in windy weather. It was only just visible now. He had seen it before and knew it to mark the position of a hidden rock. Swimmers sat upon this concealed resting place sometimes and looked queer, as if they were sitting in the water. By reason of the surrounding mountains the lake was subject to sudden gusts and at such times the black water above the rock was churned into spray. The least dash of white was visible now, though the day bid fair to be mild and sunny.

Wilfred had often longed to swim out and sit upon that coy, retiring rock. It was a favorite spot and surely held no perils for swimmers and canoeists, there in the middle of this small lake. There must have been a crevice in that submerged mass, for some one had planted a stick there from which flew something white, which on scrutiny Wilfred saw to be a jacket. He thought it must have been put there to warn the swimmers against the temptation to rest a second at the spot.

As he approached the Archer farm, Wilfred unbuttoned his shirt and unfastened his precious five dollar bill which had been securely pinned. The safety-pin which had been used for this purpose was no more and he had lately fastened his little fortune in with his scarf pin. He had found it agreeable not to display this. As he looked at it now the opal seemed of a dozen varying hues and filled with fire. It seemed another stone than the one he had worn in the time of his trial and impending disgrace. What could that mean?

He was able now to do what he had always boasted he could do—fix his mind on what he was about, to the exclusion of all other things. And he looked

forward to this good turn he was about to do with happy anticipation. He could not have stayed at camp that day. He paid Mr. Archer in advance and was glad to get the five dollar bill out of his possession; the custody of it had caused him much anxiety. As he drove leisurely along the quiet country road, his self-respect seemed to take a jump; he felt important, elated. The consciousness of the kindly business he was about exhilarated him.

It was midsummer, though the history of Wilfred's ignominy at camp had the effect of making him feel that the summer was almost over. But the birds did not seem to think so, for they sang with a wealth of melody amid the thick foliage, and now and then a gray rabbit paused in the road, cocked its ears and went scurrying into the thicket. The lazy horse jogged along at his wonted gait, the old buggy creaked, and the steady sound of horse and carriage seemed a very part of Nature's soothing chorus on that drowsy summer morning.

Pretty soon a deep, melodious horn sounded, and a big red touring car, resplendent in nickel trimmings, came around a bend. A chauffeur drove it, and in it sat a distinguished-looking, elderly man, a lady, and a young girl with a profusion of golden hair. The car bore a Jersey license. They must have started early or done some speeding to reach the festive scene of the big contest so early. The girl, being in the spirit of the day and thinking Wilfred a country boy, waved her hand to him, and the dishonored scout took off his hat as the ill-assorted vehicles passed.

At Terryville, old Pop Winters was waiting and his evident misgiving about the arrival of his young friend was not complimentary to Wilfred.

"Think I wouldn't come?" Wilfred laughed.

"You can't never tell with these youngsters," said Pop.



WILFRED DRIVES POP WINTERS TO KINGSTON.

At the big hospital in Kingston the doctors were examining applicants for

increase in pensions and Wilfred's sense of humor was touched by the presentation of ailments as credentials. It was an eloquent and pathetic reminder of how the old veterans are dying away. Some of them, crippled and enfeebled, had hobbled to the place unescorted. Wilfred was glad and proud of what he had done. It was a good turn really worth while. He had seen many that were not. No verdict was rendered by Uncle Sam's examining physicians (that would come later), but it seemed to Wilfred that with the rheumatiz, "heart-ail," sciatici, lameness, and the loss of sight in one eye, Pop Winters ought to come off with flying colors.

"And what's the matter with you?" the examining physician shot at Wilfred by way of a pleasantry. "You want a pension?"

"I guess I'm all right," said Wilfred. "I'm supposed to have heart trouble—I had diphtheria."

"You look husky enough," said the doctor pleasantly. "When did you have diphtheria?"

"Oh, about three months ago. I'm staying at a scout camp up this way. Maybe you can tell me if it's all right for me to run and jump yet—and do things. They said around the first I better ask the doctor. I wouldn't run or dive or anything like that before the first anyway. But I guess there's no harm in my asking as long as I'm here. I couldn't pay you any money because I spent my five dollars to bring Mr. Winters here in a buggy."

The doctor seemed greatly taken by this boyish frankness. "Well, we'll see if you can hop, skip and jump," said he, applying the stethoscope which was still in his hand. Wilfred stood straight, threw back his shoulders and down went that wavy lock of hair. He looked a fine enough specimen of a boy, tall, slender, with a spirited pose of his head. "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't live a couple of hundred years, with careful nursing," said the doctor.

"You mean there's nothing the matter; I'm all right?"

"Far as I can see; you just had after effects and so you had to play safe for a while. You're all right now. Feel all right, don't you?"

"Sure I do, only I made a promise I wouldn't be lively and all that for a month. The month is up on Tuesday. It seems kind of like Christmas."

"Christmas, eh?" laughed the doctor.

"You'd think so if you did like I did."

"And you didn't jump or run once?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you're some boy."

"I was thinking about soldiers," Wilfred said. "You saw a lot of them here to-day—veterans. They have to mind exactly, don't they? I mean when they were in service they did."

"Exactly?"

“I mean do a thing just exactly like they were told to—they couldn’t get it changed—soldiers couldn’t.”

“Oh, you mean discipline?”

“I guess—yes, that’s what I mean kind of. If you start to do a thing you’re supposed to do it.” The doctor did not quite understand Wilfred’s drift; he thought him an odd boy, but rather likeable. He was good-naturedly puzzled at the odd and irrelevant thoughts that Wilfred had tried to express.

“Anyway, you say I’m all right, do you?”

“Surely; you might as well see the doctor up there like they told you to, though.”

“Do you think Mr. Winters will get his raise.”

“Shouldn’t wonder.”

“Well, anyway, I’ll say good-by,” said Wilfred.

CHAPTER XXVII

STRIKE THREE

If the first of August seemed like Christmas, the days immediately preceding it did not seem like the joyous days before Christmas. Wilfred wandered about, watched birds with his opera-glass, took leisurely walks, and once he hiked into Terryville and called on old Pop Winters. Perhaps he walked a little more vigorously than before; once he permitted himself to run a little to get a hitch on a hay wagon. But he did not join in any strenuous games. That was easy, for no one asked him to. He was ostracized from the vigorous life of camp, an outsider, a lonely figure. But just the same the mountain air had put its mark upon him; he was brown and full of an excess energy.

To this day they will tell you at Temple Camp of the storm which blew the shutters off the cooking shack on the night of July thirty-first, that year. A wind-driven rain beat against the tents all night, filling the drain ditches, and driving the occupants into the pavilion and the commissary shack. You could hear the boats banging against each other at the landing all night. The big swimming contest had been won by a scout in the Fox patrol from Ohio and the aerial which they had proudly erected outside their tent to bring the wandering voices of the night to their prize receiving set, was wrecked utterly. In dismantling the camp of its gala decorations, the boisterous elements had saved the scouts this task. The gay bunting was torn from pavilion and boathouse and plastered here and there, or carried away altogether.

Such was the end of all that gala splendor in which the Mary Temple contest had been celebrated. Of all the artistic drapery of flags and streamers only a few drenched and plastered shreds remained, their colors running, their loose ends flapping in the gale. Such was the scene which greeted Wilfred Cowell on August first, a day destined to be memorable in the annals of Temple Camp. There was a certain fitness in his rising early that morning and sallying forth amid the drenched litter, for he had wrecked the hopes of his patrol, even as the storm had wrecked these festive memorials of the big event. And he was running amuck, even as the furious demon of the storm was.

It was not yet breakfast time when he was to be seen trudging through the rain past the cooking shack and through Tent Lane, as they called it. He wore his overcoat with collar turned up. Several scouts who were contemplating the weather from the shelter of Administration Shack noticed him and one observed that Wandering Willie was out for a stroll. The quarters in Tent Lane consisted of a row of tents pitched on a long platform under the shelter of a

long shed. At the seventh tent, Wilfred paused. Within were the sounds of belated rising and hurried dressing. He stooped and knocked on the platform and there followed a quick silence within.

"Is Edgar Coleman in there?" he asked. And without waiting for the obvious answer he added, "He's wanted out here."

Edgar Coleman, never prepossessing, looked anything but natty as he emerged from the tent, his hair as yet unbrushed, the evidences of recent slumber still upon him. Those of his comrades who were sufficiently interested crowded in the opening to the tent, staring.

"I want to get this over with early in the morning," said Wilfred; "stand outside, the rain won't hurt you. I'm not afraid of it and you called me a coward. You remember that morning at breakfast—when you called me Wilfrid Coward? You thought I wouldn't hit back just because I took my time about it." In an easy, businesslike way he unbuttoned his old overcoat, brought forth a piece of paper, a lead pencil, and four thumb tacks; these he handed to the astonished Coleman.

"Go in your tent and write an apology for what you called me," said Wilfred; "then go and put it up on the bulletin board. I don't care when you do it as long as you do it before you go in Eats Shack. You might as well finish getting dressed."

If Edgar Coleman had been as observant as scouts are reputed to be, he might have been assisted to a decision (however humiliating) by Wilfred's right eye, which was half-closed, the lid quivering. But he did not avail himself of this grim sign. Instead he thought of the audience (always a bad thing to do) and for their edification, he said in a voice that had a fine swagger in it:

"Say, how do you get that way, Willie?" And by way of completing his scornful amusement he cast tacks, paper and pencil to the ground.

He did not have to stoop to pick them up, for like a flash of lightning he went sprawling on the ground himself. Speechless, aghast with amazement, he raised himself, holding one hand against a mud-bespattered ear. And in that brief moment he saw more stars than ever boy scout studied in the bespangled firmament.

"Hey, what's the idea?" he demanded in a tone of injured innocence.

"Pick up the pencil and the tacks," said Wilfred coldly. "I'll give you another piece of paper; pick them up, *quick*. You fellows keep away from here."

For a moment Edgar Coleman paused; then, all too late for his dignity, he saw that half-closed, quivering eye, loaded with a kind of cold concentration. He felt of his bleeding ear and glanced down at his mud-smeared clothes. He was about to make an issue of this incidental damage, but a good discretion (prompted by that quivering eye) deterred him from debate or comment.

“What do you say?” asked Wilfred grimly.

“I suppose you’re going to tell everybody,” Edgar Coleman ventured.

“I’m not going to tell anybody about this,” said Wilfred, “and I’m sorry about your clothes. I’m not so sorry about your ear; you’d better put some iodine on it,” he added. “Everybody’ll know that you apologized to me and that’s all they need to know. All *you* have to know is that I do things just when I happen to want to do them. I just as soon be good friends with you after this. If your patrol doesn’t tell, I won’t. Here’s another piece of paper and you might as well make the apology so everybody’ll understand it; just tack it on the board. If it leaves everybody guessing I don’t care. Have you got some iodine?”

CHAPTER XXVIII

VOICES

When Wilfred mentioned to Tom Slade that there were “two of them” whom he blamed, he referred, of course, to Edgar Coleman. The other was Charlie O’Conner. He bitterly resented Charlie’s origination of the nickname Abandon Duty Cowell, because it seemed to involve his sister. But he realized that from the standpoint of the Elks he *had* abandoned his duty and he could not (indeed he did not have it in his heart) subject Charlie to the same bizarre style of discipline that the astonished Coleman had suffered. So he kept away from the Elks.

Wilfred had no desire to win prestige through the vulgar medium of fighting and he loyally refrained from mentioning the little episode in Tent Lane to any one. In this, he was as characteristically faithful as he had been in keeping that harder promise to his mother. If any one had put this and that together and found a connection between Edgar’s ear and the respectful notice that appeared upon the bulletin board, no one mentioned it.

The apology was skilfully couched in such terms as to make it seem voluntary, as if a scout’s conscience (or perchance an autocratic scoutmaster) rather than a scout’s fist, had been at work. So Wilfred, as usual, achieved no prestige from his triumph, and was still Wandering Willie, a misfit and a joke in camp. But he kept his promise to Edgar Coleman.

All that day it rained and the auspicious date in Wilfred’s life passed, leaving him only a secret triumph. Among the trustees and scoutmasters and “parlor scouts” it was thought that Edgar Coleman was a very nice boy to prostrate himself in expiation of a harsh word thoughtlessly uttered. And so on, and so on.

But there was one other thorn that stuck in Wilfred’s side, and now that he had his long-awaited legacy of freedom, he resolved to remove it. There was one person in camp, and only one, to whom he was willing to confide the reason of his long-standing disgrace. That was young Doctor Loquez. He believed now that the seeing of the doctor was merely perfunctory, but it was an incidental part of his promise, and he would terminate his ordeal in the way he had been instructed to.

Besides, he remembered the incident of meeting the genial young doctor at the roadside and of how Doc had said, “You’ll win,” in that cheery, confident way of his. Well, he had not won, he had not even swum, or been present at the big event, and he would like this cordial young champion of his to know why.

In point of fact, the young doctor had not borne the episode of their meeting in mind at all, he had told a dozen boys that they would win, and he surely had not held Wilfred to any obligation. But Wilfred, sensitive and of a delicate honor, felt that he must explain his failure to take care of this responsibility. Perhaps it was because no one ever praised him or expressed any hopes for him that he cherished the doctor's casual compliment. Poor Wilfred, it was all he had.

I am to tell you this just as it occurred, as I heard it from Uncle Jeb, and later from Tom Slade—when he was able to talk. And from Doctor Anderson, father of the Anderson boy in the Montclair outfit, who chanced to be visiting camp. I exclude the highly colored narrative of Pee-wee Harris, he being a warrior rather than a historian.

It was a little after six o'clock on that tempestuous night that Wilfred strolled over to Administration Shack to see the doctor. Where he had been throughout that gloomy day of driven rain and creaking tent poles, and banging shutters, no one knew. He was certainly not with any of the groups nor in the main pavilion where the more philosophically disposed had spent the long day in reading and playing backgammon and checkers.

Brent Gaylong, long, lanky, and bespectacled, who had no prejudices nor active dislikes, said afterward that he saw Wandering Willie standing in the woods during a freakish hold-up of the rain and that he had paused to speak to him. He had pulled up the boy's shabby necktie to glance at the opal pin which seemed all out of place in Wilfred's poor attire. And he had noticed how lustrous was the stone, darting fiery colors like something magical. "That's some peach of a pin," he said he had observed to Wilfred.

It was not until afterwards that a scoutmaster at camp declared he had heard that an opal becomes pale and lusterless simultaneously with its owner's ill-health or misfortune, and that it flames with glory as the soul is fired with sublime inspiration or heroism.

Be this as it may, Wilfred went through the misty dusk toward Administration Shack, immediately before supper-time. The boys sitting in a row in the shelter of the deep veranda saw him.

"What's Willie Cowyard doing out in the rain?" one asked.

"Don't you know he's a fish?" another answered.

"At home in the water—*not*," another commented.

Then their attention was diverted to something else that they had been watching.

No one was in the doctor's apartment when Wilfred entered it. It was the little bay window room in Administration Shack. As he sat waiting, the rain beat against the four rounded adjoining windows affording him a wide view of the dismal scene outside. He felt nervous and expectant, he did not know just

why. The cold, white metal furniture, the narrow, padded top, enameled table jarred him.

Hanging on its iron rack in a corner the skeleton, used for athletic demonstration, grinned at him, as if in ridicule of his application for full athletic privilege. The boisterous wind, wriggling through some crevice about the windows, stirred the bony legs ever so slightly; it seemed as if the thing were about to start across the room.

If Wilfred had not already received assurance that he was sound and well, he would have been troubled by the gravest apprehensions now. Even as it was the paraphernalia of the little room made him feel that something must be the matter with him. He waited anxiously, fearfully. But the young doctor did not come. And meanwhile the wind and rain beat outside.

Fifteen minutes, half an hour he waited, but the doctor did not come. Outside things became less tangible. The part of the lake that he could see seemed dissolving in the misty gloom and he could not distinguish the point where the opposite shore began. It seemed as if the lake extended up the mountainside.

Nervous from waiting, he removed his pin to adjust his scarf. The opal shone with a score of darting, flaming hues. The marvelous little gem looked the only bright thing in all the world; its mysterious depth seemed consumed with colorful fire. As he waited there flitted into Wilfred's mind the old couplets that Allison Berry's father had laughingly repeated when he presented the pin:

When it grows pale
Grief will prevail.

When it turns blue
Peace will ensue.

When it turns red
Great things ahead.

At all events the prophetic little gem was not in sympathy with the weather. Wilfred stuck it back in his scarf.

Just then he could hear voices upraised outside; he thought supper must be ready, though there was no summoning horn. One voice shouted, "Come ahead, hurry up." There was nothing particularly significant about this since they always "hurried up" at meal-time. He thought he might as well go to supper and see Doc afterward. He always dreaded going to meals, for at those clamorous gatherings his loneliness and unattached character were emphasized. When the boys spoke in undertones he always fancied that they were speaking of him. He often construed their casual, bantering talk as having

some vague reference to himself. But he rendered himself less conspicuous by going in with the crowd, so for this reason he gave over waiting and started for the “eats shack.”

Scarcely had he emerged into the rainy dusk when he saw that it was not the summons to supper that was causing all the commotion. Something unusual was evidently happening.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN IT TURNS RED

One would have supposed that Wilfred, discredited and sensitive though he was, would have joined the excited throng which he saw running shoreward from the pavilion and from all the neighboring tents and cabins. For what he saw in the middle of the darkening lake was enough to obliterate animosity. Surely in those terrible moments they would not trouble themselves to look on him askance. But he remained apart as he had always done, an isolated figure on the shore, as clamorous, excited scouts by the dozen crowded on springboard and shore.

Out in the middle of the lake something was wrong. In the gathering darkness, Wilfred could see what he thought to be the camp launch, and a voice, made almost inaudible by the adverse wind, was calling. It seemed as if it came from beyond the bordering mountains though he knew it must come from the lake. Everything was hazy and the launch looked like the specter of a launch haunting the troubled waters.

Then he noticed something else drifting rapidly nearer by. Dumbfounded, he saw it to be the landing float which must have slipped its moorings. With it were half a dozen rowboats banging against each other, their chains clanking. The mass was being carried headlong across the lake. A quick inquiring glance showed Wilfred that not a single boat was at the shore.

He was about two hundred feet alongshore from where the increasing crowd was; the scene was one of the wildest panic. From the excited talk he surmised that Hervey Willetts, the most notorious of the "independents" was about to pay the fatal penalty for taking the launch without permission.

"Run along the shore, you'll find a boat somewhere!" an excited voice called.

"Lash a half a dozen planks together; get some rope, some of you fellows—*quick!* Get a couple of oars!"

"We can scull to the float."

"Scull *nothing*; look at it, it's driving toward East Cove. We'll scull right for the launch!"

"Here, you kids, don't try to run around to the cove, you'll never make it. Get more rope and pull that other plank loose—hurry up! The wind will help us."

Far across the water in the deepening, misty twilight, arose the voice, robbed of its purport by the adverse wind. And close at hand, among the

frantic group, a clear cut, commanding voice.

“Slip the rope under that next plank—that’s right—now tie it—quick—and lash it to this one—so! Now pull the whole business around.”

Amid all this excitement the lone figure that stood apart beheld a striking spectacle. A form, black and ghostly, stood barely outlined at the end of the diving-board.

“Don’t try that,” an authoritative voice called. But it was too late. The figure went splashing into the angry water. Little did Wilfred dream that this was the boy who had won the radio set in the Mary Temple swimming contest. The voice out on the lake, strained in its frantic last appeal, could be heard now.

“Heeeelp! Heeeelp!”

Removed from the throng, unseen, Wilfred Cowell kneeled, tore his shoe-laces out one after another and pushed off his shoes. He cast off his wet overcoat, his jacket, and wrenched away his scarf and collar. He did not know whether the pin that went with them was filled with new and lurid radiance, but may we not believe that it was? He stepped into the water and was soon beyond his depth.



WILFRED TORE HIS SHOE-LACES OUT AND PUSHED OFF HIS SHOES.

Swiftly, steadily, evenly, he swam. With each long stroke he moved as if from the impetus of some enormous spiral spring. Some one in the crowd

espied him and a hundred eyes were riveted upon that head that moved along, widening the distance between it and the shore with a rapidity that seemed miraculous. Who was it, they wondered? He seemed to glide rather than swim.

Out, out, out, he moved toward the shadowy mass in the middle of the lake, rapidly, steadily, easily. Straight as an arrow he sped, and neither wind nor choppy water deterred nor swerved him. In the gathering shadows they could see one arm moving at intervals above the churning surface, appearing and disappearing with the cold precision of machinery.

They watched this moving head, marveling, as the distance between it and the shore widened. Nothing like this had ever been seen at Temple Camp before. The boisterous waves of the great salt ocean had supported this invincible form and carried those tireless, agile limbs up upon their white crests. But nothing like this, nothing approaching to it, had ever been seen at Temple Camp before. This wind-tossed lake, uttering its threat of death to that bewildered, frantic throng, was like a plaything in his hands. No fitful gust seemed to affect his steady fleetness.

With a quickness and ease that seemed absurd, he reached past and outstretched the other swimmer. The exhausted boy, with a courage greater than his strength, was glad enough to turn and seek shelter on the improvised raft which was now moving through the water under the difficult propulsion of several loose swung oars. From this they called to the mysterious swimmer to beware of his peril but he heeded them not, except to widen the distance between them and this lumbering rescue craft.

Soon the widening distance and the falling darkness made it impossible for those upon the raft to see him at all. Thus he disappeared before the straining vision of those followers who saw him last, and the boy who had won the Mary Temple contest sat panting on the makeshift raft as the fleeting specter dissolved in the night and was seen no more.

And still the voice far out called, "*Heeelp!*" and the mountain across the lake mocked its beseeching summons in a gruesome undertone.

So, Wandering Willie, alone and unseen as usual, sped headlong in his triumphant race at last. No one "rooted" for him, no one cheered him.

But in the wet grass on shore far back where he had started, a sparkling gem, companion of his; loneliness and cheery reminder of his former exploit, blazed with fiery radiance in the black, tempestuous night.

CHAPTER XXX

JAWS UNSEEN

Darkness had fallen when Wilfred reached the submerged rock. There was no voice now, and only the sound of the beating water answered his own call. The launch was not to be seen but the end of its long flagpole projected a few inches out of the lake marking its watery grave.

Wilfred clutched the flagpole and tried to get a foothold on the sunken launch. One foot rested on a narrow ridge; he thought it was the coaming. Then the pole broke, his foot slipped, and he fell heavily into the cockpit of the launch.

If he had been as familiar with the launch as other boys at camp, he might have realized where he had fallen. But he gave no thought to that. His groping hand encountered something hard and he grasped it in an effort to extricate himself and get into unobstructed water. The thing he had grasped moved and instantly he felt a sensation of crushing in his arm, then a tearing of the flesh and excruciating pain. He had turned the fly-wheel of the engine and as his hand slipped around with it his forearm became wedged between the moving wheel and the engine bed. The rim of the heavy iron wheel was equipped with gear teeth to mesh with those of a magneto and these sawed into his arm like the teeth of a circular saw.

Screaming with the sudden pain, he pulled his arm loose, the wheel moving easily back again to the compression point. He thought some horrid, lurking creature of the depths had bitten him and he swam to the surface, in a panic of fear, and agonized with pain. He did not dare to use his one sound arm to feel of the other for fear of sinking again into that submerged jungle. The wounded arm was all but useless, the hand had no strength, and he was suffering torture. Besides, he felt giddy and kept himself from swooning by sheer will power, strengthened by the imminent peril of drowning.

Yet the few seconds that elapsed before he won the doubtful shelter of the rock were fraught with even greater danger than he knew, and it was in a half-conscious state that he wriggled onto the slippery, unseen mass and lay across it, swept by the dashing water, panting, suffering, and trying to keep his senses. It was only the same Wilfred Cowell who had made a simple promise to his mother—the same Wilfred Cowell cast in a new but not more tragic role....

What he set out to do, he would do though all the world of boys cast stones at him and the earth fell away beneath his feet. *What he set out to do, he would*

do. And stricken here in the darkness, amid the angry elements, he kept his line of communication with actual things open by the sheer power of his will. There was a moment—just a moment—when he thought the slimy points of rock across which he lay were an airplane and that he was being borne upon its mounting wings. But he shook off this demon tempting him into oblivion and kept his senses.

He felt very weak and giddy, the hand of his wounded arm tingled as if it were asleep, his elbow seemed to have lost its pliancy and his whole forearm throbbed, throbbed, throbbed.

With his sound arm he swept the neighboring water in a gesture of petulance, the petulance of pain, that gesture of despair and impatience seen in hospitals when an impatient arm is raised and dropped idly on the bed-clothes. But Wilfred's arm fell upon something else—a human form.

The startling discovery acted, for the moment, like a potent drug. He rolled over and, bracing his feet among the crevices in the rock, moved his hand across a ghastly upturned face with streaking hair plastered over it. Here, then, was the delinquent who had taken the launch contrary to rules and gone forth in it challenging these boisterous elements. The face was not recognizable as any that Wilfred had ever seen. It might have been Hervey Willetts; Hervey had never bothered much with Wandering Willie Cowyard.

The importance of knowing the full truth gave Wilfred the strength to ascertain it. He had never felt a pulse. But he had lain and stood patiently while doctors had listened at his back and at his chest as if these parts of his body were keyholes. He knew, if anybody did, how to find out if a heart were beating; he was a postgraduate in this.

So there upon that lonely, wind-swept clump of rock, he laid his ear against the chest of the drenched, unconscious figure, and listened. He moved his head in quest of the right spot. Again he moved it but no answering throb was there to relieve the fearful panting of his own anxious heart. The wind moaned on the mountaintop and swept the black lake and lashed it into fury. Somewhere on the troubled waters voices could be heard—voices on the raft that had been borne off its course; and now in the complete darkness its baffled crew knew not where to steer. Far off on shore were the lights of camp, and tiny lamps moving about—lanterns carried by scouts in oilskins.

Then it was granted to Wilfred Cowell to learn something; not all, but something. The heart of that unconscious form was beating.

How can I say that Wilfred chose wisely not to call aloud and guide the all but frenzied searchers to this perilous refuge? Perhaps some silent voice told him that this was his job and his alone. Perhaps, being himself half-frenzied with pain, he knew not what he did.

"I—I came," he murmured in his weakness, "and I'll—we'll—swim—go

back—findings is—is—is—*keepings*.”

How do I know where people get the strength to do sublime things—or the reasons. Perhaps every scurrilous word and look askance that he had known at camp came to his aid now and made him strong. Perhaps Wandering Willie and even Wilfraid Coward helped him; who shall say? Or perhaps his boyish utterance there in that lonely darkness, that *findings is keepings*, was in some way a support. This limp, unconscious form belonged to *him—it was his!*

And he would bear it to shore. Or they would go down together....

CHAPTER XXXI

THE HOME RUN

They were sweeping the nearer waters of the lake with the search-light whose limited range did not reach the scene of the disaster. And they were bellowing through the megaphone to the anxious rescue party on the raft that they could not pick out the spot; they were engrossed in these futile activities when the search-light picked out something else—something moving slowly, steadily, toward shore. A face, ghastly white in the surrounding blackness, was pictured by the long, groping column of dusky light. Forward it moved toward the shore, slowly, steadily.

A slight adjustment of the long column revealed a less ghastly picture, a picture the meaning of which scouts knew well enough. Bobbing alongside the advancing face was a head which seemed to have no connection with the nearby countenance. But the boys of Temple Camp could see in their minds' eyes what was not visible under the water. *That bobbing head was being held above the surface*; the unseen body to which it belonged rested upon the buoyant support of an outstretched arm. Nothing held this unconscious form, it just rested easily upon the arm and moved along. There was something uncanny about it; stark and appalling, it seemed to be riding on a spring.

The scouts had read about this sort of thing, this use of a single upholding human arm. But none of them had ever successfully practised it. Now in the darkness of that wild night they saw the feat demonstrated, saw an apparently lifeless form, a dead weight, given the little balance of support to keep it up and guide it through the rough water. And the swimmer seemed hardly embarrassed by this load.

What the gaping crowd did not know was that the arm which acted as a girder was torn and bleeding and throbbing with grievous pain. What they did not know was that the same quiet, unobtrusive will that had caused Wilfred Cowell to stand still in the night and let another escape with the Emblem of the Single Eye, was supporting him now amid storm and darting agony. No search-light could show that. For how could any search-light penetrate such a nature as his?

In a fine impulse, eloquent of admiration, several of the boys waded out chest deep and relieved the swimmer of his burden. That was how it happened that the hero reeled shoreward through the shallow water quite alone. With his torn and bleeding arm hanging at his side, he stumbled, caught himself, and went staggering up upon the grass, then fell heavily to the ground in a dead

swoon. And so again, just as when he collapsed before his own home in Bridgeboro, he was only half-conscious of the clamorous voices speaking his nickname as he sank into oblivion on the soft, wet grass.

They spoke it in tones aghast as they crowded about him, "*It's Wandering Willie.*" Some of them had not lingered at the other center of interest long enough to learn that it was the young doctor of camp whom Wilfred had saved. Nor to inquire the whys and wherefores of the young man's unknown excursion in the storm. He was not dead, nor like to die, and the trend of excited interest and curiosity was toward that swelling, clamorous throng that closed in around the prostrate boy whom they had carried into the shelter of the pavilion.

One boy, unscoutlike in his rough determination, elbowed and wriggled his way through the crowd, and braving the frown of Doctor Anderson (who fortunately was visiting camp) kneeled over the dripping, outstretched form.

"Is—he—he alive?" he asked.

"Yes," said the doctor quietly; "open a space here, you boys; let's have some air."

But the boy persisted. "Is—will——"

"I think so, it depends," said the doctor.

"Do—do you know me?" asked the boy, foolishly addressing the unconscious form; "it's Wig—just—if you'll——"

Obedient to a new presence, as they had not been to the doctor, the group fell away to let an aggressive, striding young fellow pass through.

"You run along and help them get the stretcher for Doc, Wig," said Tom Slade; "move back, you fellows."

He sat down on the edge of the wicker couch on which they had laid the scout of no patrol while the scouts of all patrols lingered as near as they dared. The doctor, busy with the mangled arm, was preoccupied to the point of precluding questions. A scout came running with cotton and bandages. Two others brought the stretcher from Doc's sanctum, and stood waiting.

Another boy, visibly pleased that his inspiration was serviceable, handed a new croquet stake to the doctor. He had brought it and stood waiting with it. He saw it roughly taken from him and twirled around in a bandage above the elbow of the stricken boy's arm.

Tom, helpless in the face of professional routine and efficiency, sat quietly, and, there being nothing else for him to do, he stroked the forehead of the unconscious boy, and pushed up the strands of saturated hair, just as Wilfred had so often brushed the rebellious wavy locks up from his forehead.

Suddenly the eyes opened—roving, staring. And in their aimless moving they espied Tom.

"Erigh?" a low, half-interested voice asked.

"Sure, you're all right," said Tom gently.

Then there was a pause.

"Right—orright?"

"Sure, Billy—be still. You'll be all right."

The eyes were fixed on Tom in a weak but steady look of inquiry. There was a wistfulness in that barely conscious look.

"Why, sure, you're all right," laughed Tom.

"I don't—I mean—not—I don't mean that. I mean don't—don't mean will I get well—all right. I mean will I do? Now will I do?"

Tom's brimming eyes looked at him—oh, such a look.

"Yes, you'll do, Billy."

The eyes closed.

Then an interval of silence during which the doctor worked steadily, unheeding of the gaping throng standing at a respectful distance. Tom sat silently, watching him.

"He's pretty weak," the doctor said. "I don't see how he did it; he's lost a lot of blood. Anybody connected with him up here? Just hold that loose end—that's right."

"Only myself," Tom said, his hope sinking at the ominous question. "I found him, he's mine. No, none of his people are up here. He has a mother and sister. Had I better send for them?"

"I think it would be best," said the doctor quietly.

Tom arose, his heart sinking. He thought of Wilfred, a lone figure in the camp, wandering about, unheeded, and now perhaps dying far from his own people. He blamed himself that he had brought Wilfred to camp.

"Shall I say—shall I just tell them to come up?"

"Hmm," said the doctor, still busy, "that's right, yes. He's pretty weak from the loss of blood."

"Could I be of any use in any way?" Tom asked, hesitatingly.

"You mean you want to give your own blood?" the doctor asked bluntly.

"Yes, I do—I meant that."

"Well, you'd better send for his folks anyway."

"I'll wire them," Tom said.

It was strange to see Tom so dependent and obedient, he who always breezed in here and there with his cheery, offhand manner of authority. He seemed different from the scouts as they opened a way for him to pass through. But one sturdy, fearless soul ventured to address him.

"Anyway, one thing, you picked a winner, that's sure; gee whiz, you did that, Tom. I ought to know because I picked lots of them myself. Gee whiz, you picked a winner all right."

Tom cast a kind of worried smile at Pee-wee as he hurried away. But it was

better than no smile at all.

CHAPTER XXXII

TOM'S BIG DAY

Several days had passed and Wilfred was lying in the tiny hospital ward of four beds in Administration Shack. He was the only patient there, which made the sunny apartment a pleasant sitting room for Mrs. Cowell and Arden. Just as when we first met this little family, they were waiting for the doctor now. And just as that memorable day, the first to arrive was not the doctor but Tom Slade. He had given of his own life's blood to save this boy whom he had made a scout and the badge of this divine service was bound on his own arm, fold over fold, concealed under the loose-sleeved, khaki jacket which he wore.

"I have two disappointed children, Mr. Slade," said Mrs. Cowell. "Wilfred bewails his loss of the radio set and Arden wanted to give her own blood to her brother."

"Well, I beat her to it," said Tom in his breezy way. "How do you folks sleep over in the guest shanty? Did you hear that owl last night? What's this about the radio, Billy?" he added, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"I wanted the Elks to have it."

"The Elks have forgotten all about it," laughed Tom. "They're busy fighting with the Ravens over which patrol really can claim you. I told them you weren't worth quarreling over. How about that, Arden?"

"You seem to be very happy this morning," Arden commented.

"That's me," said Tom. "This is my big day."

"It'll be my big day when I get up," said Wilfred.

"Well, I hope you don't get up very soon," said Tom.

"And why not, Mr. Sl—Tom?" Arden asked.

"Because you're going home when he gets up. To-day we swap horses in the middle of the stream—as Abe Lincoln said we shouldn't hadn't outer do."

"Oh, is the young doctor coming?"

"That's what he is—with bells on. Doc Anderson beat it this morning—had a patient in Montclair dying of the pip, or something or other. That kid of his wants Billy in his patrol, too; they all want him. But Doc's going to get him first. I'm afraid I'll have to fall back on you for a pal, Arden. How 'bout that, Mrs. Cowell?"

Mrs. Cowell only laughed at him, he seemed so buoyant. "Is the young doctor quite recovered?" she asked.

"Oh, sure."

"He told me I'd win the race, too," said Wilfred.

"Yes? Well, that shows you can't believe what doctors say."

"They say he's very good looking," Arden observed.

"Sure thing—got nice wavy hair like Billy. The boys have gone to row him over. I'll laugh if he makes Billy stay in bed six weeks more; hey, Billy? The crowd will kill him if he does that. That would give you and me plenty of chance to go fishing, Arden."

"I think I'd die with rapture if I ever caught a fish," said Arden.

"Oh, the Cowells don't die as easy as all that," said Tom; "they're a tough race. What do you say we bat over to the cove to-morrow while Billy's having his nap?"

"Don't the Elks really mind about not having the radio?" Wilfred asked.

"Now look here, Billy," said Tom, becoming serious. "You remember how we said 'three strikes out'? Well, you knocked a home run. You're the hero of Temple Camp—these fellows are crazy about you. Now listen, I'm going to tell you something. You're going to take the prize I give you and you're going to be satisfied with it. See? I'm going to tell you something, Billy. That launch that Doc used might have been mine. I did a little stunt here once——"

"What was it?" Arden asked.

"I'll tell you when we go fishing," said Tom.

"A rich man wanted to give me that launch. I told him if he was as crazy as all that, I'd rather have the money it was worth so I could start a little fund up here for the benefit of scouts that aren't—well, you know what I mean—a sort of scholarship, that's what I call it. Now where's the launch? Doc took it to go over to see his grandmother who was sick, and coming back—zip goes the fillum. But my little fund brought you here and kept you here—and I've got you instead of the launch. There isn't any launch but you're here. You did something bigger than save that goggle-eyed flag or win the race. And the best part of the camp season is still before you."

Tom paused, and as he glanced about from the bedside toward Arden and her mother, they could see that he was deeply affected, and strangely nervous. Twice he tried to go on and could not, "You needn't say any more, Tom," said Arden; "he understands. If he has made himself worthy of you and your generosity, he has done a—a big stunt. I used to—I always said that Wilfred could do anything——"

"Yes."

"But to make himself worthy of such a friend as you! Yes, he *is* a hero," she added low and earnestly. Mrs. Cowell only gazed with silent admiration at the young fellow who sat on the bed with his head averted toward them.

"It isn't a question," said Tom, turning again to the boy, "of what the Elks might have had if you had been a flapper. I'm not thinking about the Elks or the Ravens or any of them. I'm thinking about what sort of a prize *you* should

get. We always give awards here, Mrs. Cowell.”

Tom paused. He seemed nervous, anxious—perplexed. He arose and sauntered over to the window and looked out upon the still water of the lake flecked by the early August sunshine. A great joy was in his heart and he knew not how to hold it.

“You see, Wilfred,” he said, “nobody at Temple Camp ever did anything like you did. So the ordinary awards don’t fit. So I had to rise to the occasion as you did. I had to find a big prize. You had your big day; now this is mine. I don’t want you people to think I’m crazy; I guess you know I usually know what I’m doing—I picked Billy. So don’t think I’ve gone out of my head. I’ll tell you—they’re rowing across now, but I’ll tell you now——”

He paused and in the still, drowsy summer morning could be heard the clanking melody of distant oar-locks, the gentle ring of metal, as a rowboat moved across the golden glinted lake.

Tom spoke, “Doc Loquez, who is coming back to camp and will be here in a few minutes—the one you—the one Billy saved—he’s your own lost son, Mrs. Cowell. He’s Billy’s and Arden’s brother. He’s Rosleigh.”

Mrs. Cowell stared blankly at him.

“What do you mean? How do you know?” Arden gasped.

“I’ll tell you when we go fishing,” said Tom. “Just wait a minute, they’re at the landing. There’s Doc now. I picked him too, last summer, and he’s another winner.”

He strolled over to the door which opened on the veranda and stood waiting. They could hear the young doctor call back to the boys, “Thanks, you fellows.” His voice sounded gay and fraternal. The speechless mother and daughter waited, listened, spellbound. The suspense was terrible. Only Tom seemed calm now. They could hear the clanking of a chain and the knocking of oars, all part of the romance and music of the water.

“Haul her up a little,” some one said.

Then there was silence.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

It was a tense moment, fraught with misgivings and incredible gay expectancy; his own nervous demeanor rather than his words *must* mean something.

Then the young doctor breezed in, but he was himself nervous and self-conscious. He went straight over to Wilfred. Arden was sitting now upon the bed near her brother. Tom was striding the floor, his face wreathed in smiles. So Mrs. Cowell saw her three children grouped together and there was no mistaking their resemblance to each other. She arose nervously, stared for just a moment in speechless incredulity. Then Rosleigh Cowell was in her arms. Laughingly he tried to submit to her clinging embrace the while Arden held one of his hands and Wilfred the other. It was an affecting scene.

Tom Slade stood apart gazing with brimming, joyous eyes at the picture of which he had been the artist. He had performed his great exploit and now he seemed on the point of tiptoeing out of the room when Wilfred caught him in the act.

"This is just a family party," said Tom.

"You thought you could sneak away, didn't you?" said Wilfred.

"I think you're one of our little family party," Arden said prettily.

"I was just going to bang around and see if I can find any more Cowells," Tom said. "What do you think of me as a stalker and trailer?"

"Oh, just to think," said Mrs. Cowell, gazing still with incredulity and yet with weeping tenderness at the son whom she had not seen since childhood, "just to think that Wilfred saved his life and then Tom——"

"He hasn't told us yet," said Arden.

So then Tom and Rosleigh together pieced out for them the tale which ended in this happy climax. Mrs. Cowell clung to her son as if she feared he might run away, kissing him at intervals during the much interrupted narrative, as if to assure herself of his reality.

It was a strange story, how a small, bewildered child, deserted by a band of gypsies near the little village of Shady Vale across the mountain had wandered onto the premises of "Auntie Sally," as the village knew her twenty years ago. That was a lucky trespass. For Auntie Sally was eccentric and kindly and lived alone.

After first trying to shoo the little boy away with her kitchen apron and a churn stick, she had weakened so far as to tell him that he had a very dirty

face, which she proceeded to wash with disapproving vigor. The poor little boy swayed like a reed beneath her vigorous assaults until his face was as shiny as one of Auntie Sally's milk pans. That was the first thing she did for him—to wash his face. Then she gave him a piece of mince pie and put him to bed.

Aunt Sally Loquez did not make extensive investigations to discover the identity of her guest. She did not go out much and never saw the newspapers. She evidently believed in the good precept that Wilfred had uttered in the time of his great trial, that findings is keepings. She kept the little stranger and became his "granny" and brought him up. She had a mania for washing his face, but otherwise his was a happy childhood.

Auntie Sally had money and when her adopted grandson was old enough she gave him his wish and sent him to college to be a doctor. When he emerged from college he returned to Shady Vale to spend the summer at the little old-fashioned home of his benefactress. And it was then that he heard of the position which was open for a young doctor in the big boys' camp over the mountain. Twice a week, sometimes oftener, young Doc Loquez went over to see his "granny." He was unfailing in his attentions to the sturdy, queer old woman, who had given him a home and later a start in life. Gay, buoyant, immensely liked, he never for a moment forgot that little home of his happy boyhood in the village across the frowning mountain.

Then came the first of August, that day forever memorable in the annals of Temple Camp. In the storm and gloom of that afternoon a 'phone message came to him that the stout heart of old Auntie Sally had given away and that she would have none to attend her but the only doctor in the world. That was when the fine young fellow whose face she had so mercilessly scrubbed, went down to the lake and all unheeding of his peril started across the angry water in the camp launch. He was on his way back when the launch, careering at the mercy of the wind, struck the rocks broadside and sank with a great tear in her cedar planking.

You know the rest; how these brothers who had never before seen each other met in storm and darkness in the middle of Black Lake, both stricken, and how Wandering Willie set the camp aghast with his sublime prowess and heroism. New scouts at Temple Camp often wonder why that submerged peril is called Wandering Willie's Rock. Then at camp-fire some one asks and the whole story is told again, just as I have told it to you.

It was Tom Slade who took the young doctor over to Shady Vale so that he might recover from his own shock in the home where his aged benefactress lay. And then it was that Auntie Sally, thinking she was about to die, told Tom all she knew about the little waif who had wandered onto her grounds, bewildered, and with a dirty face.

She showed Tom (she seemed afraid to talk with Rosleigh about these

matters) a little trinket that the lost child had worn around his neck, a thing of no value save that it had the initials R. C. engraved upon it. This little locket she had hidden away, thinking perhaps to lull her own conscience into the belief that there was no means of establishing the identity of the one little blessing which she could not bear the thought of losing.

"I'd know as I care now," she said, "if he's got folks as'll care for him as I did—if you can find 'em. Leastways what he is I made him. I had him as long as I lived. Long as I ain't goin' to be 'bout no more...."

And so Tom with the instinct of the true scout, had made inquiries which had resulted in establishing the identity of the waif.

"And no one could doubt it after seeing you all together," he said.

"And Auntie Sally?" Arden asked. "Did she——"

"Do you think he'd be sitting here laughing if she had?" Tom asked. "But she can't live alone over there any more. They're talking about getting her into a Home. I was—I was thinking if we—you and I go fishing, Arden—that we might hike over the mountain and see her. If you think you could."

"I can do *anything*," said Arden, shaking her pretty head with pride and spirit.

"It runs in the family," said Tom.

"I'm the only one that hasn't done anything so far," said Arden. "Now it's my turn. You can go with me if you want to. I'm going to Shady Vale *at once* and arrange to have Auntie Sally taken to Bridgeboro—she's going to have the big room with the bay window. How can you look me in the face, Tom Slade, and tell me they're talking of getting her into a Home? It's outrageous! That shows what *brutes* men are! I'm going to row across—now, this instant—and hike over the mountain to Shady Vale and arrange to have her brought to Bridgeboro. We've already found a home for her, thank you. The large alcove room, mother; it will be just——"

"I understand you were going to have a radio in that room," said Tom.

"There isn't any radio," snapped Arden, "and I hate them anyway. I thank you very much—now I have a chance to do something."

"You'll have to push through an awful jungle up there," said Tom. "If you really want to go we could drive around the long way in the flivver."

"I prefer the jungle, thank you. You needn't go if you don't want to."

"You'll get your dress all torn."

"My brother got his arm all torn."

"Seems to run in the family," said Tom.

"You can go if you care to," she said, "only you're not going to have anything to do with the arrangements. Mother's got Rosleigh, you've got Wilfred—you said so. And Auntie Sally belongs to me and you'll be kind enough not to—findings is keepings, that's what you said yourself."

“Don’t you let him fool you, Arden,” said Wilfred. “All the time he was kind of fixing it so you’d say we’d have Aunt Sally to live with us.”

“Do you believe that?” Tom demanded.

“I’d believe anything of you,” said Arden. “I know one thing and that is that *I’m* going to manage about Auntie Sally—I think that name is just adorable! And I’m going to hike over the mountain—*now*—to Shady Vale. Oh, I think it’s just like a movie play, isn’t it, mother? If you want to accompany me, Tom, you’re welcome. But you needn’t go—if you’re *afraid*.”

He wasn’t exactly afraid; he was a great hero, Tom was.

THE END

[The end of *Tom Slade Picks a Winner* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]