

Duffield J. W.

Bert Wilson at the Wheel



J. Duffield

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CHAPTER I

The “Red Scout”

“What dandy luck.”

“It’s too good to be true.”

“Who’d ever thought we’d have the luck to get it?”

“It can’t be true. I shan’t believe it till it gets here.”

“Anyway, it *is* true, and won’t we have the niftiest time ever?”

“Well, you might as well sit down, Bob. Running around like a hen with her head cut off won’t make it come any sooner.”

“Aw, how’s a fellow to sit still when a thing like that’s on the way? I wonder how long we’ll have to wait. What can be keeping him?”

A score of voices, talking singly, two together, all together, woke the woodland echoes, silent through the long winter and tardy spring, gone at last. Summer had come and with it the annual encampment of a score or more of manly, healthy youngsters, overflowing with animal spirits and vitality. For several years past, substantially the same group under the supervision of a Mr. Hollis, a gentleman of sterling character and considerable means, had gone into camp together for two or three weeks of the heated season. Brimming over with life, the boys always made the camp a lively place; but this summer a new and enveloping excitement seemed to have taken possession of everyone, and now all were plunged into a discussion of the cause of the hullabaloo, the voices rising higher and higher as each one sought to make himself heard above the rest.

Turning a bend in the road that brought the camp into view, Mr. Hollis, as he witnessed the excited gestures of the boys, and heard the volume of sound caused by every enthusiast trying to talk at once, instinctively quickened his pace, for it almost seemed as though a serious altercation were in progress; but as he came near enough to distinguish words and heard – “Six cylinders,” “Forty-eight horsepower,” “Chrome nickel steel,” “Wheel base one hundred and twelve inches,” “Diamond tires,” “Autometer,” “Safety treads,” “Grip treads” – he realized that nothing more serious was going on than a discussion of the relative merits of automobiles and their fittings. No wonder there was gesturing and loud talking. What boy would not rise to the topmost heights of enthusiasm at the thought of an automobile in which he was to have a personal interest? Such a delight had come to the camp, and since the announcement in the morning that on account of the long trips that the summer’s plans would make necessary, the boys would be allowed an automobile for their own exclusive use, nothing else had been thought or talked about; and each eager boy was impatiently awaiting the return of Mr. Hollis to learn the make and all other details of that most wonderful car.

Now, as he came into camp, the boys crowded around him and the wood rang with cheers as he told them that the car would arrive the following morning. A volley of questions overwhelmed him: “How large is it?” “What speed?” “What color is it?” “How many of us can ride in it at a time?” Question followed question in quick succession, until Mr. Hollis put his hands over his ears, and, refusing to answer any more, proposed dinner as a means of quelling the noise.

The boys could scarcely have told of what their dinner consisted that night, so great was their excitement. All were glad to turn in early as the surest way to bring the morning and the longed-for car. A full hour earlier than usual the lights were out and silence settled over the camp, broken only by nature’s mysterious night sounds. A belated rabbit homeward bound, keeping ceaseless vigil

with round bright eyes, encouraged by the unusual quiet, crept close to the door of the mess tent, and snatching a stray cracker from the grass, scurried joyfully away. At the distant menacing “Tu-whit, tu-whoo” of the night owl, the birds stirred uneasily and nestled closer under cover of the sheltering leaves. The quiet hours crept on till at last morning dawned and gave promise of a glorious day.

Frank Edgewood was the first to open sleepy eyes, and seeing a few clouds not yet dissipated by the early sun, woke the camp with the dismal wail: “Fellows, it’s going to rain.”

“Put him out,” “Smother him,” “Duck him in the brook,” came in a chorus; and Frank, taking to his heels, dropped the flap of his tent, with not a moment to spare.

“Run early and avoid the rush,” sang out Tom Henderson.

“To pass he had such scanty room,
The descending grazed his plume,”

chanted Dick Trent.

“Let’s forgive and forget,” said Ben Cooper.

“Be glad we let you live, Frank,” Bob Ward chimed in; and so the culprit, reassured, ventured out to breakfast.

Again the all-absorbing topic was renewed, two vital questions claiming them. What should they name their auto? Who would be able to run it? The first was easy enough, for almost from the first they had decided, the color permitting, to call it the “Red Scout.” The second was not so easy, for Mr. Hollis must be assured, for the sake of the general safety, that the driver should be fully capable. If only Bert Wilson were there, the question would be answered, for capable Bert in New York had studied the mechanism of automobiles and grown very proficient in handling them; but they were not sure that he would be able to be in camp with them this year. Expressions of regret were heard on all sides, for Bert had a very warm place in their hearts. His splendid qualities had easily made him their natural leader and his absence was far more keenly felt than that of any other fellow in the camp would have been.

Still, Bert not being there, they must choose someone else, so Mr. Hollis called for volunteers. Several answered, but their qualifications were rather doubtful, until Bob Ward said that he had had a lot of experience in driving his uncle’s machine, and felt very sure he could handle it. So it was decided that the next day Bob should take them on their first trip, which would be in search of a new camp site, the old one proving too small for this year’s requirements.

While the question as to who should be chosen to drive the automobile was being decided, Sam Fielding and Philip Strong, two of the younger boys, had placed a long plank over a big rock which rested under the shade of a low-branched tree, and thus improvised a capital see-saw. When the question was settled, there was a general movement among the boys, and one of them, thoughtless of consequences, jumped upon Sam’s end of the board. This added weight gave the other end a sudden jerk upward, and in a twinkling Philip was tossed into the boughs of the tree, where, his foot catching in a forked branch, he hung suspended, head downward, his jacket falling about and covering his head and face, while he yelled like a Comanche Indian.

In an instant the entire camp was aroused and Phil was quickly extricated from his uncomfortable position. At the sight of his astonished face, the whole camp went into paroxysms of mirth, while peal after peal of laughter made the woods echo again. Even Phil, now “right side up with care,” could not resist the contagion and joined in the merriment.

It was many minutes before a normal condition of things was re-established, but at last the boys fell to discussing the proposed change of camp.

“It’s a shame that we have to change,” said Charlie Adams; “I don’t believe we’ll have such bully times in the new camp as we have had here.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Tom cheerily; “we’ll have the dandiest fun, hunting new caves and things.”

“It will at least have the charm of novelty,” joined in Dick Trent – Dick was eighteen and sometimes used words and phrases so ponderous as to give him added dignity in the eyes of the other fellows. “Things will be altogether different this summer,” he went on; “having the auto will make a great change.”

“Well, we’re going to have a great time to-day, anyway,” said Bob Ward; “Mr. Hollis says we are to make a flying trip in the new machine, and I will have a chance, while the man who brings it is here, to study handling the car.”

As Bob finished speaking, a distant but distinct “honk-honk” sent each boy tearing down the road, where in due time a great, red, glistening car came up the turnpike like a gleaming streak of light, and, with a graceful curve to the side of the road, stopped. The car, *their* car, the “Red Scout” had come!

CHAPTER II

The Flying Auto

A group of the campers stood regarding the big red touring car rather dubiously.

“The fact is,” Bob Ward was saying, as he meditatively chewed a long piece of grass, “you never can tell when the fool thing is going to go back on you. I used to drive my uncle’s car a good deal, but I never could go very far without some part of the machinery breaking down. Uncle Jack said I was a Jonah and I guess I was, because he could run the pesky thing all over the country if I wasn’t with him, and it would go like a bird. One day I ran it into a fence and nearly got killed, so I took the hint and haven’t fooled with one since.”

“But we ought to make a try at locating a site for the new camp,” Frank Edgewood objected. “We volunteered, and we’ll be the laughing stock of the whole camp if we don’t succeed, besides breaking our word to Mr. Hollis.”

“Yes, I don’t see why you said you could do it, if you are going to get cold feet at the last minute,” said Jim.

“I haven’t got cold feet,” Bob defended hotly, then virtuously, “it isn’t because of my own danger that I hesitate, but I don’t like to drag you fellows into it with me.”

“If you don’t mind breaking your own neck, you needn’t worry about ours,” said Dave Ferris; “we’ll stay here while you take a little spin across country,” grinning wickedly. “Of course, if you should find a good camp location in the meantime, you could claim all the glory” – this last condescendingly.

Before Bob had time to retort, a cry of “Bert, Bert Wilson!” caught the boys’ attention, and they turned in time to see a young fellow take a flying leap over one of the fences and land in the midst of a group of excited, welcoming friends.

“Make believe we’re not glad to see you, Bert. We thought you wouldn’t be able to get off this year.”

“Tom Henderson spread that report. Where is he?”

“Wait till I get at him.”

“He ought to have a ducking,” and other undeserved threats were hurled at poor Tom’s innocent head.

“Hold on, fellows,” said Bert, laughing; “Tom wasn’t to blame. I didn’t know myself that I could make the camp till yesterday.”

At that moment the maligned Tom dashed up, nearly upsetting his friend in an ecstasy of delight.

“You’re a brick with a capital B and the best kind of a sight for sore eyes,” gasped Tom, getting his breath back by degrees. “I never was so glad to see anyone in my life. And you came just in the nick of time, too, to help us out.”

Then, dragging his friend away unceremoniously, Tom explained the situation in which he and the other volunteers found themselves.

“You will help us out, won’t you, Bert?” he asked appealingly.

By this time the rest of the volunteers had come up and were eagerly awaiting the decision. When they heard Bert’s hearty “Surest thing you know,” they went wild, and after giving him “three cheers and a tiger,” marched him off to the mess tent, there to partake of corn bread and maple syrup. This last had such a good effect on Bert as to lead him to say that the fellow who had never known the gastronomic delight of corn bread spread thick with maple syrup didn’t know what it was to live.

The dramatic arrival of Bert at the camp just when they most felt the need of him had been almost as unexpected to him as to the other campers.

Through the recommendation of Mr. Hollis, he had secured a position with a large manufacturing business in New York. There from the very start he had made good and his industry and ability were soon noted by his employer. It was not long before his salary was increased and larger opportunities afforded him, and he soon found himself treading the path that was bound to lead to success.

Of course, like every other healthy boy, he felt the need of friends and recreation. The first he found in Tom Henderson, with whom he struck up a great friendship. Another crony was Frank Edgewood, who worked on the same floor as himself. When the work of the day was done they were usually found together, either in each other's rooms or at some of the places of wholesome recreation of which the city offers so great a variety.

If Bert had one trait that stood out more prominently than any of the others it was his love for mechanics. Anything in the way of a clever mechanical toy, a puzzle, or a machine attracted him immensely. He wanted to "see the wheels go 'round." Especially was this true in the case of automobiles. The huge machine moving so swiftly, so noiselessly, with such a sense of freedom and the sensation of flying, drew him like a magnet. He scarcely dared to dream that one day he might be the actual owner of a motor car, but he did hope that some day or other his hand might be on the wheel, his foot upon the brake, while he steered the flying monster as it sped like a flash across the country.

His dream seemed perceptibly nearer being realized when Tom introduced him to the owner of a garage in the vicinity of his home. There he speedily became familiar with every joint and crank and lever of the great machines. He saw them taken apart and put together, he saw them brought in battered, broken, almost wrecked, and made as good as new. From theory to practice was not far. Little by little he was permitted to help in the minor repairs. After a while he was entrusted with short trips, at first in the company of an experienced chauffeur and at last on his own responsibility. It was not long before he felt capable to handle, steer, drive, and repair, and, if he had cared to do so, he would have had no difficulty in passing an examination and securing a license to drive a car.

His idea of recreation ran in the same direction. Whenever there was a motor meet anywhere within reach, especially on Saturday afternoon, which was a half holiday at the factory, Bert could be found, accompanied by either Tom or Frank, or both, watching with intense delight the exciting incidents of the race. The crowd – the start – the great machines flying by like streaks of lightning – the roar of the partisans of each car as their favorite took the lead, and above all the frantic excitement and enthusiasm at the finish as the victor flew across the line – all these things stirred his blood with inexpressible delight.

On another occasion he and his chums had visited the "Greatest Show on Earth." He had laughed at the clowns and had been thrilled by the acrobats. Every pore of his body had drunk in with delight the tremendous feats of skill and daring that appeal so strongly to a boy. But the one supreme thrill, the one he never forgot, the one that repeated itself over and over again in his dreams, was when the automobile with its daring operator starting from the very top of the immense building, amid the deathlike hush of the crowd, flew like a flash down the steep incline, sprang into space, turned a complete somersault, and, lighting on the further side of the gap, rushed across the arena. This was the climax of everything. Little else appealed to Bert; he talked of nothing else on the way home. There was no use talking, the "auto fever" was in his blood.

With this passionate delight in his favorite machine, Bert's feeling can be understood when he learned that the chief feature of the boys' encampment when the summer opened was to be an automobile "hike," the car itself having been kindly loaned by Mr. Hollis. At first, owing to conditions at the factory, he had feared that he would not be able to go at the time set for the encampment, and his disappointment was crushing. A quiet little talk of Mr. Hollis's with his employer, however, had adjusted things so that he learned at the last moment he would be able to go. We have already seen

how uproariously he had been received by his old companions when he came so unexpectedly into the howling mob of enthusiasts at the summer camp.

In less time after his arrival than it takes to tell, Bert was clad in khaki and had obtained the ready permission of Mr. Hollis to take the boys on their desired expedition.

The fellows scrambled into their adored “Red Scout” with more haste than grace, while Bert was busy cranking it. Then with a cry of “All right back there?” and an answering shout of “You bet your life,” the great car started smoothly up the ascent.

As it quickened its speed and disappeared around a bend of the road, more than one of the boys at the camp wished he had been quicker to offer his services.

“If I’d only known that Bert would be here I’d been one of the first to volunteer, but I must say I wasn’t anxious to trust my neck to Bob’s safe-keeping. He doesn’t know any more about running an automobile than I do;” and when Jim said that he was saying a great deal.

Meanwhile the “Red Scout’s” passengers were having the time of their lives.

“Gee, it’s like flying,” said Frank joyfully.

“It’s a heap sight better,” challenged Tom. “Can’t you make it go faster?” he asked of Bert.

“I guess yes,” Bert shouted, as he put on more speed.

The automobile darted forward like a live thing and the boys were enraptured by the rapidity of its motion. It almost seemed to them as though the “Red Scout” were standing still and all the scenery were flying past. Hardly did the farmhouses come in sight than they were passed and lost in the distance.

Scores of timid little woodland creatures scurried away to the shelter of holes and empty logs, surprised and alarmed at the streak of red lightning that flashed by. Mother birds hovered protectingly over their fledglings, ready to defend them against the whole world if necessary, while excited squirrels scolded noisily from the treetops long after they had any excuse for it.

On, on they rushed along roads over which giant trees met, past meadow lands where cattle grazed lazily, over bridges, past sparkling brooks that formed miniature waterfalls as they rushed over the stones – on, on!

As they slowed up to take a sharp bend in the road they came face to face with another automobile dashing along at a reckless speed.

Fortunately both Bert and the driver of the other machine kept their presence of mind. Before anyone had a chance to realize what was happening, Bert had swerved the Scout way over to the right side of the road. There happened to be a fairly deep depression on that side, so Bert had the choice of two evils. He had either to crash squarely into the other automobile or he had to run the risk of having his own machine turn turtle. He chose the lesser danger and ran into the ditch. However, it wasn’t as bad as it easily might have been, for only the front and rear wheels of one side of the car were in the depression. Even at that they had come within a hair’s-breadth of being upset.

As soon as the boys could pull themselves together, they tumbled out of the car. The occupants of the other car were four men, who sprang out at once to see if they could be of service in any way.

“I think we’d better improvise a lever,” Bert suggested.

“That may look all right in print,” grumbled Bob, “but how are you going to do it?”

“I know how we can work it all right,” said one of the men. “See those big stones over there? Well, the first thing to do is to bring them over here.”

“Oh, I see what you mean to do,” Bert chimed in eagerly. “There are lots of big tree branches lying around. Looks as if they had been blown down in some storm. We can use them for levers.”

“Guess you’ve got the right idea, son,” said the man who had first spoken. “Now let’s get down to business.”

It was a work of time to place the stones in the right position and to pick out branches that would stand the strain. It proved a tremendous task to lift the heavy car. At times they almost despaired of moving it. However, it was that very desperation that gave them strength at last. Inch by inch, slowly,

carefully, they finally forced the great car upward, until with a sigh of relief they realized that the task was finished.

The boys dropped to the ground, exhausted by the unusual exertion. It doesn't take very long, though, for strong, healthy boys to recover from any strain, however great; so in a few minutes they were again in the car and ready to start for camp. It was too late to go further, and after thanking the men for their help they started back – slowly this time.

It was after dark when they reached the camp, and Mr. Hollis, although confident of Bert's resourcefulness, was beginning to be slightly worried when the wanderers appeared at last upon the scene.

In a very few moments the half-famished boys were seated at a most appetizing meal, to which they did full justice.

The rest of the fellows listened with the greatest interest, while Tom related the adventure. Bert and Mr. Hollis at a little distance discussed the events of the day and planned to renew the trip on the following morning.

It was only when everything was quiet in the camp and the boys were supposed to be asleep, that Tom, rising on his elbow, called out softly:

“Hello. Are you asleep over there?”

“Just turning the corner,” came a sleepy voice.

“Well, stay on this side for a minute. I was just thinking that in that wild ride we never even looked for a place to pitch camp.”

“Gee, that's so,” came the voice, a little less sleepy this time. “Well, of all the boneheads we're the limit. I always thought my head was hard, but now I know it's solid. Oh, well,” and again the voice grew sleepy, “we'll have plenty of time to-morrow to think of that. I'm too tired now. Good night. I've just got to – turn – the – corner.”

Where Tom promptly joined him.

CHAPTER III

The Copperhead

Bright and early next morning Bert awoke to find the sunbeams playing all over his tent. He noticed lazily what funny spots they made on Tom's sleeping face. Then, with a start, he remembered that Tom had grumbled the night before because they would have to get up early to catch a mess of fish for breakfast.

Thinking that he would wait a little while till Tom woke up, he rolled off his cot on to the floor so that he could command a view of the brook through the open tent flap. He had just made himself comfortable when an irritable voice hailed him from the direction of Tom's cot:

"That you, Bert? What are you doing awake at this unearthly hour?"

"Same as yourself, I suppose," came the calm reply.

"Humph! Well, you're not going to rout me out at five o'clock in the morning."

"Don't be a bear, Tom. We've got to help the fellows catch that fish and you know it, so the sooner we start the better. A couple of the fellows are down there now."

"Oh, well, I suppose we've got to, then, worse luck. They probably will guy us unmercifully, too, about yesterday. It's a wonder they didn't, last night," which was all the credit the boys got for trying to save the feelings of the reckless volunteers.

As the two comrades ran swiftly down to the water's edge, they noticed that Shorty – Philip Strong had been nicknamed Shorty because of his very small figure – was tugging hard at his line.

"Got a bite, Shorty?" they shouted, when they came within hailing distance.

"Bet your life, and it's pulling like a good fellow, too."

"Better let me help; I'm stronger than you," offered Bob, who was sitting a little distance down the bank and whose luck hadn't been of the best up to that time.

Now, a very sore point with Shorty was his lack of strength, and whenever anybody referred to it, no matter with what good intentions, he always bristled up as if at a personal insult. This morning that very touchiness proved to be his undoing, for, as he got to his feet, intending to inform Bob that he could do very well without any of his help, the fish gave a sudden jerk to the line that made Shorty lose his balance and tumble head-first into the water.

The boys, convulsed with laughter, fished him up, dripping and sheepish. Without thanking the boys for their help, Shorty zig-zagged up to the tent, making, it must be confessed, a rather sorry figure. When they finally had managed to get the line up they found that the cause of Shorty's undoing had escaped.

"Poor little Shorty, he's always getting into trouble," one of the boys said when he had breath enough.

Then, as the time was getting short, they all settled down in good earnest to their task and, before the camp was awake at half-past six, had caught a "corking mess," as they expressed it.

As each tent poured forth its several occupants, the fishermen took their mornings catch to the mess tent and went to report – some of them with sinking hearts, it is to be feared – to Mr. Hollis.

However, the leader was very lenient with the offenders, merely reprimanding their carelessness and cautioning them not again to forget that they had pledged their word of honor to render him the most absolute obedience in every particular.

Upon the boys eagerly promising that they wouldn't offend again and upon Bert's asking to be allowed to have another chance to find the camp site, permission was given and they sauntered away, filled with the happy anticipation of laurels still to be won.

Soon after breakfast the “Red Scout” was brought out and the original volunteers, their ranks swelled by three new recruits, Shorty among them, started off up the hill amid the cheers and good wishes of the fellows.

For an hour they rode steadily up hill and down dale until they saw far off through the trees the faint gleam of water. Running the auto into the woods for a short distance, they all jumped out and started to investigate.

The boys thought they had never seen the woods when they were as beautiful as on that day. They had not gone very far before Bert, who was in the lead, called back, “Come here, fellows and see this grove of chestnut trees. Isn’t it great?”

The boys all hurried forward and there, sure enough, was a regular colony of chestnut trees, their huge branches giving promise of abundant harvest, when the frost came.

“Say, fellows, its a shame not to be able to get any good out of these nuts that are sure to be so plentiful in the fall. Don’t you suppose we might arrange to stay until the frost comes?” Shorty asked.

“I should think we ought to be able to fix it up,” said Frank. “We can ask Mr. Hollis about it anyway.”

Then they started again, on the lookout for other finds. All the way along they came across numbers of clear, cold springs and never failed to test each one. More than once they had to cross brooks on stones that were not over steady and, at one time, a very loose one nearly caused Shorty another ducking.

At last they reached the border of the woods and looked out upon a sight that held them spellbound. There before them was a smooth, grassy stretch of ground, dotted here and there with beautiful, spreading oak trees. Sloping gently down, it stopped at the edge of a clear, transparent lake that reflected the radiant brightness of the sun. On the other side the ground was level for a short distance and then rose forming a small hill, richly carpeted with low shrubs and gorgeously colored wild flowers. Branches of trees drooped low over the lake, as if trying to catch their own reflections in its clear depths. Birds twittered and sang in the branches, joyously mingling their bubbling notes with the music of a rippling brook near by. It seemed as if the soft voice of Nature spoke to them in the murmuring of the trees, sang to them in the song of the birds, joyously called to them in the babble of the brook, smiled a welcome to them from the bright surface of the lake.

“Gee!” said Tom, drawing a long breath. “It sure is wonderful!”

“Wonderful!” Bert exclaimed. “It’s by far the most beautiful place I’ve ever had the luck to locate! Come on, fellows, let’s take a look around.”

So look around they did and found that every thing about this ideal spot was all they could possibly ask for – and more. After examining everything in sight they found that they were just about starved, so they sat down under one of the trees near the lake and spread out the contents of the lunch basket. After a feast of chicken, canned salmon, cornbread, maple syrup, and sweetened lemon juice, which, when mixed with cold spring water made a very tempting drink, they started off with the empty lunch basket, the latter being, as one of the boys remarked, “a heap sight lighter than it was when we started.”

“That’s all right,” said Frank, “but I feel a heap sight heavier.”

“You shouldn’t have eaten so much,” Shorty reproved him.

“If I’d eaten as much as you have, Philip Strong,” Frank retorted, “I wouldn’t be able to walk.”

“Speaking of eating,” said Shorty, sniffing the air inquiringly, “do any of you fellows smell cucumbers?”

“What’s the matter, Shorty? Has the little ducking you indulged in this morning addled your brains? Whoever heard of cucumbers in the woods?” said Frank contemptuously.

“I know it sounds foolish but it’s the truth just the same,” and Shorty stood his ground stoutly.

“Shorty’s right, boys: I noticed the cucumber smell quite a while ago and it seems to grow stronger the farther we go,” said Bert.

“By George, that’s so! I smell it myself, now.” “I do, too.” “So do I.” and various other exclamations of the same sort showed that Shorty was right.

The boys scattered all over trying to locate the odor, which was very strong at this time. Tom was the first to discover the cause of it. At his low, imperative, “Come here quick, fellows, but don’t make a noise,” they all ran to see what was the matter.

Excitedly he pointed to a long, copper-colored snake, that seemed to be watching a bird’s nest built low in one of the bushes. The mother bird was hovering distractedly over her nest, uttering shrill, excited cries that brought her mate to her side. Just then the snake coiled ready to strike and the boys looked around desperately for stones but Bert had gotten ahead of them. As soon as he had seen what was happening he had slipped noiselessly away to a brook they had just passed and, snatching up a heavy stone, had hurried back to the scene of the tragedy. So, as soon as the snake had its head in a position to strike he hurled the stone directly at it. Slowly and convulsively the snake untwined and finally lay still.

“It’s strange I didn’t think of that cucumber smell being caused by a copperhead,” said Bert; “I used to kill them every once in a while when I was at my uncle’s farm.”

Just then, Tom called their attention to the mother bird. “Doesn’t it almost seem as if she were thanking us?” And it really did seem so. The little bird had settled back on her nest with her black eyes fixed gratefully on her rescuers and making little, low, gurgling noises way down in her throat. Nearby on a low branch the father bird was swaying back and forth, pouring out his musical notes straight from a little heart bursting with gratitude and joy.

Leaving the happy family to its own devices, the boys took up the trail again. In high spirits, they chased each other over fallen logs and through the dense foliage, peered into squirrels’ holes and rabbits’ burrows, commented upon the appearance and habits of the sly little chipmunk and other interesting, woodland creatures.

Before they realized it they had come upon the “Red Scout” standing just as they had left it in its leafy garage.

While they were on the way home they examined the snake skin. It was a beauty of its kind. It was about a yard long and the sixteen copper-red, moccasin-shaped stripes were very clearly defined.

As soon as they reached camp they gave in their report to Mr. Hollis. The boys all crowded around, eager to hear about the snake and camp site. The heroes of the day were deluged with questions. “How did you get it?” “Have you found a good place for camp?” “Where is it?” “What does it look like?” “Tell us all about it.”

Finally, Mr. Hollis, seeing how tired and hungry they were, came to their rescue, proposing that they eat their supper first and save the tale of adventure until the camp council. At first they agreed rather hesitatingly but, as an appetizing smell issued forth from the mess tent, they found that they couldn’t get there fast enough.

After supper the boys made a roaring fire and squatted around it, waiting for the roll-call. Then Mr. Hollis called the roll, beginning with Adams and ending with Taylor. As everybody was there, the reports were called for. Every boy reported his adventures and experiences during the day; all of which would have been intensely interesting to the boys as a rule, but they were so anxious to hear Bert’s report that they passed over the others rapidly.

When at last Bert’s turn came, they all crowded forward with eager interest, and they were not disappointed. Bert told his story simply and well, and was not once interrupted.

When the tale was finished the boys fairly exploded. Cries of “Isn’t it great?” “Everything is sure going our way this year,” mingled with “How did you manage to get the stone without the snake hearing you?” “What are you going to do with the skin now that you’ve got it?” And to all Bert gave a satisfactory answer.

It was a long time before the boys could quiet down and even then they felt like hearing something exciting.

“Who can tell a good ghost story?” Bob asked.

“Dave’s the boy. Come on, Dave, put on your thinking cap.”

Dave Ferris had been elected official story teller at the beginning, because he always had a stock on hand, and they were generally thrilling tales of adventure or weird ghost stories, the kind that boys always revel in.

Dave was silent, thinking for a little while. Then he said, “All right boys, here goes. Are you ready?”

To a chorus of “Sure thing, fire away, and break the speed limit,” they all gathered closer together around the fire and Dave began his story.

CHAPTER IV

The Challenge

Dave certainly could not complain of a bored or indifferent audience. Even Mr. Hollis was absorbed and listened with a smile on his kindly face. He was always intensely interested in anything the boys said or did, and was never happier than when he saw that they were especially enjoying themselves.

Dave had just reached the most thrilling part of his story, and in their imaginations the boys could hear the wailings of the ghost and the clanking of his chains. He was describing the awful appearance of its sunken fiery eyes, when Shorty happened to glance apprehensively around and immediately emitted a blood-curdling yell.

"The ghost! The ghost!" he stammered, pointing in the direction of the road. All leaped to their feet and followed the direction of Shorty's trembling finger, and for a moment even Bert Wilson felt a queer little tightening sensation about the heart, for there, apparently coming directly toward them, were the fiery eyes that Dave had just described with such gusto.

"Why, you simps," laughed Bert, "that's no ghost, or if it is, it is the most solid spook I ever heard of. Those are the acetylene lamps of another auto," and as he spoke he exchanged significant glances with Mr. Hollis.

Somewhat ashamed of having been so startled, the boys now fell to guessing at the mission of the strange car. They had not long to wait. In a few minutes they could hear the purring of its exhaust, and soon a great gray automobile dashed into camp and drew up in front of the fire.

From it descended a genial looking man, apparently of about the same age as Mr. Hollis, followed by five clean cut young fellows.

Mr. Hollis and Mr. Thompson, as the new comer's name proved to be, evidently knew each other and shook hands heartily. Meanwhile the camp boys mingled with their unexpected guests and with the freemasonry of youth soon became chummy.

The only fault perhaps that could be found with the new arrivals was that they seemed to be a trifle overbearing, and evidently thought that their car, which they called the "Gray Ghost," could beat any other automobile ever made.

It is needless to state that Bert's crowd felt the same way regarding the "Red Scout," so that the boys were soon engaged in a heated argument concerning the respective merits of their cars.

"Why," maintained Tom, hotly, "you fellows have no idea what our 'Red Scout' can do in the way of speed and hill climbing. Just to-day we were out on a run and, though I didn't actually time it, I am dead sure there were stretches where we did as well as a mile a minute. What do you think of that?" he asked triumphantly.

Indeed, this seemed to cool the visitors down somewhat and they exchanged surprised glances. But they soon recovered their confidence and went on to describe the speed qualities of their car with ever-increasing enthusiasm.

"It was just a short time ago," said one whose name turned out to be Ralph Quinby, "that we took the 'Gray Ghost' around the old race track just outside the town, and we averaged over fifty miles an hour. We could have gone much faster too, only Mr. Thompson would not let us. I'll just bet your auto couldn't go as fast as that."

It was now the turn of their hosts to look doubtful. They were sure, however, that the "Red Scout" could hold its own with any other car, and as they thought of their idolized driver, Bert Wilson, their confidence came back with a rush.

"Well," replied Tom, drawing a long breath, "you fellows evidently think you could win in a race and we just *know* that we could, so I guess the only way to settle the dispute is to run off a race

somewhere and prove which is the better machine. I know we'd be willing if you would, wouldn't we, boys?"

There was a chorus of approving shouts from his companions, but the visitors only smiled in a superior fashion, and evidently thought there could be but one conclusion to any race in which their car was entered.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hollis and Mr. Thompson were holding an earnest conversation in which the latter seemed to be urging some point about which Mr. Hollis apparently hesitated. In fact, Mr. Thompson was trying to get Mr. Hollis to give his consent to a race between the cars owned by the two camps. But the latter thought that it would involve too much risk for the boys who drove the machines.

"You see, it's this way," he was saying, "you and I, Thompson, are responsible for the safety of these boys. We both feel toward them as though they belonged to us and if anything happened to them we would never forgive ourselves. It seems to me too big a risk to take merely for the sake of seeing who owns the faster car."

"Yes, you're dead right there, of course," returned Mr. Thompson, "but then I don't think the risk is so great as you imagine. I have seen the track they would use, provided the race was run, and I think there would be little, if any, danger. The track has not been used for several years and most of the fence is missing, so that if they ran off the course itself, it would only be a matter of running over the grass until they stopped. You know me well enough to realize that I would not sanction anything that contained too large an element of peril. As for the slight risk that undoubtedly exists, it seems to me that it would not hurt the boys to take it, and it would teach them self-reliance and confidence."

"As far as that goes," said Mr. Hollis, smiling reluctantly, "my boys have too much confidence in themselves and I have to be constantly curbing their tendencies toward taking chances. However, I have every confidence in your judgment, so I suppose I might as well consent this once. I wish to have it understood, however, that this is the last as well as the first race they ever run, win or lose."

"That suits me all right, so I guess we can consider it settled," answered Mr. Thompson, "what do you say to going over and having a look at the machines? You haven't seen our car yet, have you?"

"No, that's a pleasure still in store for me," replied Mr. Hollis; and the two men rose and strolled over to where the cars stood, their brass work glittering in the light of the dancing campfire.

By this time most of the boys had gathered around the cars, but they saluted and made way respectfully for their leaders as they came up. They both smiled when they saw Bert and Ralph Quinby, for they were so engrossed in the discussion of the respective merits and appliances of their cars that they did not even notice the coming of their leaders.

Such terms as "gear ratios," "revolutions per minute" and "three point suspension" filled the air, and Mr. Hollis whispered to Mr. Thompson: "I'll wager that those boys saturate their handkerchiefs with gasoline, so that whenever they get a block away from a machine they can smell gasoline and feel at home again."

"Wouldn't be surprised if they did," laughed Mr. Thompson.

"Here, you fellows come out of your trance," called Dick, and Bert and Ralph turned quickly around and saluted.

Their leaders returned the salute, and Mr. Thompson said: "Well, I suppose both you boys think you have a pretty fast machine there. How would you like to have a test of speed?"

There was a chorus of excited cries and exclamations from the boys, and their leaders smiled indulgently.

Bert stepped forward and said: "I think, sir, that I speak for Mr. Quinby as well as myself when I say that nothing would suit us better." Ralph gave a nod of assent and Bert went on: "We will both promise to be cautious, and I think if we take proper precautions we will be able to run off a good race without an accident. How long do you think the race ought to be?"

"How long is the track that you propose using?" inquired Mr. Hollis.

"Why, it's just one mile, isn't it Ralph?" asked Mr. Thompson.

“Yes, sir,” replied Ralph.

“Well, it seems to me,” said Mr. Thompson, “that ten miles, that is ten full laps around the track, ought to be about right. Will that be satisfactory to you, Mr. Hollis?”

“Yes, I can see no objection to that,” replied the latter, “what day shall we have the race?”

“How would a week from today suit you?”

“Let me see, that will be Tuesday, won’t it? I guess that will be satisfactory to all concerned. How do you boys feel about it?”

They voiced a unanimous assent to these arrangements, and both sides started discussing the various chances and possibilities of the contest, but with perfect good humor and friendly feeling.

It was now getting late, however, and the discipline of the camps could not be too much relaxed, even in the face of such an important event as this. Accordingly, hearty farewells were exchanged, and the visitors climbed into their big gray car.

All the boys gathered around expectantly to note the behavior of the car when it started, and it must be admitted that even Bert Wilson’s expert eye could find no defect in the handling or running of the rival machine. Ralph started it smoothly and without a jerk, and soon all they could see of it was the angry gleam of its red tail-light.

As they turned away to prepare for sleep, Jim remarked: “Aw, I bet we’ll have a walkover in that race.”

Bert knew better, however, and was convinced that he would have to use every ounce of power that the “Red Scout” possessed to beat the “Gray Ghost.” But one thing he was sure of, and that was that whoever won it was going to be a mighty close race. He did not make the mistake of underrating his rival, as so many boys in his position would have done, but made up his mind to do the very best he could, right from the start.

For a long time he stood staring at the “Red Scout,” and then raised its shining hood and patted the spotless cylinders.

“I guess we can do it, old boy, but you will have to stand by me and work as you have never worked before,” he said, and gently lowered the hood and walked off toward his tent.

CHAPTER V

The Hoboes and the Bees

Early in the morning the boys began to break camp and start for the new location. Groups of three or four were detailed by Mr. Hollis to accomplish certain tasks and they started to carry out his directions right merrily. Some were sent to store the provisions and cooking utensils; others to take down the tents and gather together their blankets and other bedding; still others got together the fishing tackle and all was done to the accompaniment of songs and jests and laughter, so that before they knew it everything was ready to dump into the old farm wagons they had hired for the purpose. When everything was packed in the wagon that would possibly go in, Mr. Hollis selected Tom to ride beside the driver and show him where to go.

After the wagon had started off, some of the boys' own personal belongings that were left over were put in the "Red Scout" and seven of the fellows scrambled in somehow – trust boys to find room if there is any to be found – and started away after the wagon. They soon passed it and went on until they came to the turn in the road where the lake could be dimly seen through the trees. There Bert stopped and the boys got out, taking the packages with them. Shorty had been detailed to lead them to the lake and then to come back and wait for the farm wagon.

Then Bert went back to pick up Mr. Hollis and Dick Trent who had stayed behind to see that nothing had been forgotten.

On the way back he passed the wagon and hailed Tom with a "How are you getting along, old man?"

"Pretty badly, I thank you. I wish Mr. Hollis had picked out somebody else for this job – someone who didn't care if he spent hours getting nowhere," Tom replied sourly.

"Cheer up, the worst is yet to come," laughed Bert. "Never mind, even the worst trials have to end some time," he added consolingly and started off again while Tom looked enviously after the red car, now fast disappearing in the distance.

When Bert reached the old camp site, now looking very bare and forlorn, he found Mr. Hollis and the boys waiting impatiently for him. Mr. Hollis and Dick got in, followed by six of the boys. Bert promised to come back for the rest right away and the "Red Scout" started off with its second load. In a little while, for Bert had found a second and much shorter road to the lake, they came once more to "Campers' Crossing" as the boys had named it. There they found that the wagon had just arrived with its load, but the boys had delayed unloading it until Mr. Hollis should reach the scene of action. In a minute the Camp Master had taken charge and the boys were busy unloading and carrying everything to the camp.

Once more Bert started back with the reliable "Red Scout" for his last load. When he got to the old camp the boys greeted him with the news that Jim Dawson had disappeared and couldn't be found anywhere.

"He was here just a few minutes ago," said Steve Thomas. "But when I went to ask him a question just now he was gone. We have hunted high and low but we can't find a trace of him."

Bert was troubled at first, but suddenly a thought struck him and his face lighted up as he exclaimed: "I think I can explain the mystery. Follow me, fellows."

He led them through a dense thicket to the side of a hill, covered with underbrush. Pulling a bush aside, he disclosed to the boys' astonished gaze, a great, black hole which was evidently the mouth of a cave.

"Come on out, Jim," Bert called. "We don't want to keep Mr. Hollis waiting *too* long, you know."

Jim Dawson was one of those hungry boys who never can get enough to eat, so, having discovered the cave one day, while chasing a butterfly, he had secretly brought food there in a tin box, so that if he chanced to get hungry, he always had something to eat at hand.

Bert had discovered the cave and its secret long ago but he was not given to tale-bearing and so had kept his own counsel.

As Bert spoke, a sound was heard inside the cave, and, in a minute, out came the culprit with an accusing piece of cornbread in his hand, blinking like an owl brought suddenly into the glare of the sun.

At the look of complete surprise and dismay on his face the boys burst into a shout of laughter.

“Oh, you lemon,” gasped Steve. “You full-sized lemon! How did you ever manage to get away with it?”

“No wonder we have been short of grub, lately,” Dave said, holding his sides as if he were afraid he would burst.

“Aw, I don’t see why you can’t leave a fellow alone,” said Jim, sulkily. “I only brought grub here that belonged to me.”

“Don’t be sore, Jim,” Bert said, good-naturedly. “I wouldn’t have disturbed you if we hadn’t been in a hurry. That reminds me that we’ve wasted a good deal of valuable time, already. I guess we had better be getting along.”

At that they all started back on the run and soon had Jim in such a good humor that he even told them how he had escaped being found out by a narrow margin many a time, and that nobody but Bert had even suspected the cave’s existence.

They all piled into the “Red Scout” in a hurry because they feared that Mr. Hollis would worry on account of their prolonged absence.

They arrived at “Campers’ Crossing” just in time to carry the last barrel of provisions. When they reached the new camp the boys were surprised to see how much had been done in their absence. The tents had been set up and from the mess tent came the clattering of utensils and the savory odor of creamed salmon on toast.

Soon, the call to dinner was heard, and the boys all gathered around the table, chattering like magpies.

“It seems as if we’d always camped here,” said Shorty. “There’s something about the place that makes you feel at home right away.”

“It’s the classiest place I’ve ever been in,” Dave Ferris declared, enthusiastically. “It makes you imagine that Nature might have had a little time on her hands and devoted it to making this one spot a little paradise.”

“Hear! Hear!” Tom cried, clapping his hands in mock praise. “Dave will be a poet if he doesn’t look out. Give us some more, old man, the sample’s good.”

“You’d better be careful how you

“Beard the lion in his den
The Ferris in his hall,”

said Dick Trent, warningly. “He won’t favor us with any more stories if you are not careful how you offend him.”

“I’d just as soon he’d spout all the poetry he wants to if it relieves him any, as long as he doesn’t forget how to tell stories,” Shorty remarked as he contentedly munched a piece of toast.

“How very kind of you,” said Dave, sarcastically. “I thank you with all my heart for your liberality.”

“My which? Say, Dave, if that ever belonged to me, I call you all to witness that I disown it from this time on. It’s no friend of mine from this time on.”

“You’d better hang on to it, Shorty. It’s the best kind of thing to have around at times,” said Mr. Hollis, as he rose to leave the table.

In the afternoon scouting parties were sent out in all directions to find out the nature of the surrounding country. Steve Thomas, Bert, Tom, Bob, Shorty, and Jim Dawson were sent off to scour the woods in an easterly direction from the lake.

For a considerable distance they tramped along, talking of the different plants and shrubs they came across and naming the birds they saw in the trees. They threw peanuts to the squirrels that peeped inquiringly at them from branches over their heads or ventured shyly from the shelter of their holes. They imitated the clear notes of the birds until the little songsters paused to look wonderingly at these strange creatures that could not fly and yet sang like themselves. Timid little rabbits watched the boys with soft, brown eyes, not knowing whether or not to sally forth from their security even for the tempting carrot that Bert held out so coaxingly. When he threw it at a distance, however, one little fellow, braver than the others, his appetite overcoming his fears, ran forth quickly, snatched the carrot and scurried back in a panic to his burrow, where, with his bright eyes fixed on these humans who had been so kind to him, he ate contentedly.

Suddenly the quiet woods rang with shouts and cries, the barking of a dog and the noise of people running to and fro furiously. Alarmed, the boys started on a run for the place from which the cries seemed to come. They fairly gasped when they came upon the cause of all the commotion. Three men, of the roughest order, were dancing distractedly around, trying to beat off a swarm of bees that surrounded them, and yelling like mad, while a big collie dog, wild with excitement, barked with all his might.

“Say, this is better than a circus,” Shorty shouted, “only I’m glad that those hoboes and not I are the whole show now.”

“Shut up, Shorty. The question now, is, what we can do to help the poor fellows out,” said Tom; then, turning to the tramps, he yelled, “You’d better make a dive for the brook and get under water. It’s right through the trees to your left,” he added, as the men, now nearly crazy with pain, started to follow his advice.

Rushing frantically to the brook, they plunged in head first, while the bees, deprived of their prey, flew off angrily into the woods to search for new victims upon whom they might vent their spite. When the tramps came up, dripping from the water, they were a sight to behold. Their faces were swollen so that their eyes seemed to be mere slits and their ears appeared to be twice their natural size.

The boys at once ran to get mud to put on the red, angry wounds. The tramps submitted with indifferent grace to the treatment, grumbling that they “didn’t see what good being all smeared up with mud was going to do.”

As soon as the boys had done what they could to ease the pain, the tramps declared that they would have to be moving on “because them pesky critters might come back to finish up their business.”

So the boys watched the strange company of sullen, muttering men disappear through the trees. As they were lost to view, the comical side of the adventure struck Shorty and he began to laugh and the longer he laughed, the harder he laughed. The others caught the infection and in a second the woods were ringing with the unrestrained roars of the boys. They laughed until they could laugh no more and then lay on the grass, gasping for breath.

“Oh, they did look *so* funny!” said Shorty between gasps. “I never shall forget that sight until my dying day.”

At that minute Bert sat up suddenly, exclaiming, “Fellows, look who’s here!”

With one accord they turned and saw the collie which they had entirely forgotten, sitting near and regarding them with inquiring, wistful eyes.

“Come here, Beauty,” Bert called, and the dog came unhesitatingly and stuck his cold, black muzzle in Bert’s hand.

“Did they desert you, old fellow?” Bert asked, putting his arm around the dog’s neck.

The collie waved his beautiful brush and, lifting his soft eyes to Bert’s face saw something there that made him his slave forevermore. For the collie, with true dog instinct, had recognized that in Bert he had a friend.

“I wonder where those tramps got him.” “Probably swiped him.” “Doesn’t look as if he’d had very good treatment.” “He doesn’t and it’s a shame, too. Isn’t he a beauty?” were some of the comments of the boys as they gathered around the dog, patting his head gently. The collie waved his tail and in his eyes was a great longing for sympathy and love. And you may be sure the boys gave him what he asked for.

Tired out, the boys finally went back to camp, followed by their new friend who soon became a favorite with everyone. That night Don, as they called the dog, sat with the rest around the camp fire and answered whenever they spoke to him with a wave of his silver brush. Bert made him a bed on the floor of his tent and Don gladly took possession of it. Just before he got into bed Bert put his hand on the dog’s head, saying, “I guess we’re going to be good friends aren’t we, old fellow?”

And Don, looking up in his master’s face, with eyes that held a world of gratitude and love, answered to Bert’s entire satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI

Shorty Goes to the Ant

The next morning, when the boys drew aside the flaps of their tents, the sky was dark and lowering. A good many anxious glances were thrown at the clouds and open disapproval of the outlook was not slow in breaking out.

“Gee, what a fearful day,” said Jim.

“You bet it is,” chimed in Shorty.

“That’s our luck,” wailed Dave, “just when I wanted to go to town to get a new blade for the jack-knife I broke yesterday.”

“Oh, come off, you pessimists,” sang out Bert, who had just plunged his head in a bucket of cold water and now was rubbing his face until it shone, “somewhere the sun is shining.”

“Heap of good that does us,” grumbled Shorty, “but say,” as he turned to Bert suspiciously, “what sort of thing was that you called us?”

“I said you were pessimists.”

“Well, what does that jawbreaker mean?”

“Why,” said Bert, who could not resist his propensity to tease, “that means that you are not optimists.”

“Worse and worse and more of it,” complained Shorty.

“That’s just as clear as mud,” echoed Jim.

“Well,” said Bert, tantalizingly, “listen my children – ”

“Listen, my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,”

chanted Frank, who had recited that identical poem in his elocution class at the last term of school.

A well-aimed pillow made him duck, and Bert resumed:

“You see, Shorty, it’s just like this: The optimist is the fellow that sees the doughnut. The pessimist sees only the hole in the doughnut. Now, for my part, there is no nourishment in the hole, but there’s lots of it in the doughnut.”

“Aw say, don’t make a fellow’s mouth water,” said Shorty, before whose practical vision rose up his mother’s kitchen, fragrant with the smell of the crisp, brown, sizzling beauties, as they were lifted from the pan, “and me so far from home.”

If there were no doughnuts at the breakfast to which all hands came running, their place was more than taken by the golden corn bread and the savory bacon that formed the meal to which they sat down with all the enthusiasm of hungry boys. The food disappeared as if by magic and the table had been replenished more than once before the boys cried enough. Many a sated millionaire would have willingly exchanged a substantial part of his hoarded wealth for one of those unjaded appetites. But in pure, undiluted satisfaction, the boys would have been the losers by the exchange.

That very thought struck Mr. Hollis as he watched the havoc made at table by these valiant young trenchermen, and, turning to Dick, who sat at his right, he spoke of the starving King Midas. Jim, who overheard the name, which, as he said “was a new one on him,” wanted to know who Midas was, and how, if he were a king, he couldn’t get grub enough to keep him from starving. The boys, who had by this time taken the first keen edge off their appetite, were equally eager to hear the story, and Mr. Hollis went on to tell about the avaricious king of the olden time who could never get enough, but was always asking the gods for more. After a while they became wearied and disgusted

and granted his request that everything he touched should turn to gold. The king was delighted at this beyond all measure. Now, at last, he was to have his heart's desire. He put the gift to the test at once. He touched his sword and it changed to gold. That was fine. He stroked his beard and every hair became a glistening yellow spike. That wasn't so fine. He began to get a little worried. Wasn't this too much of a good thing? Well, anyway there was no use in fretting. He would go to dinner and get his mind off. But when he touched the food, it too became gold. He lifted a goblet of wine, only to find that it held molten metal. In the midst of plenty, he was starving. Upon his knees, he begged the gods to take back their fatal gift, and, thinking he had learned his lesson well, they did so. His gold vanished, but, oh, how delicious was the first taste of food. "And to-day," concluded Mr. Hollis, "there is many a millionaire whose gold doesn't give him the pleasure that a square meal gives the ravenous appetite of a healthy boy."

"Well," said Tom, expressing the general sentiment, "I'd sure like the money, but, oh, you corn bread."

After breakfast, the boys broke up into separate groups. One went off under the guidance of Mr. Hollis to gather some fossils that were to be found in great abundance in the limestone that jutted out from a quarry at a little distance from the camp. Another group of the fellows with Dick in charge, who were especially interested in bird and insect life – the "bug squad" as they were commonly and irreverently referred to in camp – went to a little clearing about half a mile away that was especially rich in specimens. The day before, Tom had secured an uncommonly beautiful species of butterfly that topped anything in his experience so far, and the other boys wanted to add one to their rapidly growing collection. Whether the lowering day had anything to do or not with the absence of these fluttering beauties who love the sunshine, their search was without result, and after two hours spent in this way they threw aside their butterfly nets and sat down in the shade of a spreading beech to rest and as Shorty called it "to have a gabfest."

Almost directly beneath the eastern branches was a large mound nearly three feet above the surrounding level and perhaps twenty feet in circumference. As Shorty flung himself down on the centre of the mound, a curious expression came into the eyes of Dick. He glanced quickly at Frank, who returned his look and added a wink that might have aroused suspicion in Shorty's mind, had not that guileless youth been lying stretched out at full length with his hat over his eyes. The warmth and general mugginess of the air saturated almost to the raining point, together with the constant activity of the last two hours, had tired him out, and after a little badinage growing less and less spirited, he began to doze. The other boys who had been given the tip by Frank and Dick, let the conversation drag on purpose, and with a wicked glint of mischief in their eyes watched the unsuspecting Shorty slip away into the land of sleep. Soon his arms relaxed, his chest rose and fell with his regular breathing and horrors! an undeniable snore told that Shorty was not "faking," but was off for good.

From being a spot of perfect peace and quiet, the mound suddenly burst into life. From numberless gates a swarm of ants issued forth and rushed about here and there to find out the cause of this invasion. The weight of Shorty's body and his movements as he composed himself for sleep had aroused them to a sense of danger and they poured out in thousands. Soon the ground was covered with little patches of black and red ants, and as though by common consent they began to surround the unconscious Shorty. Some crept up his legs, others his arms, while others climbed over his collar and slipped inside.

First, an arm twitched violently. Then a sleepy hand stole down and scratched his leg. The boys were bursting with laughter, and Tim grew black in the face as he crowded his handkerchief into his mouth. Shorty shook his head as a horse does when a fly lights on it. Again he twitched and this time seemed to realize that there was something wrong. Still half asleep, he snapped:

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