

Goldfrap John Henry

The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal



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CHAPTER I

BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

Farmer Hiram Applegate had just finished breakfast. For this reason, perhaps, he felt exceptionally good-humored. Even the news he had read in his morning paper (of the day before) to the effect that his pet abomination and aversion, The Boy Scouts, had held a successful and popular review in New York and received personal commendation from the President failed to shake his equanimity.

Outside the farmhouse the spring sun shone bright and warm. The air was crisp, and odorous with the scent of apple blossoms. Robins twittered cheerily, hens clucked and now and then a blue bird flashed among the orchard trees.

As Hiram stepped out on his “vendetta,” as he called his verandah – or, to use the old-fashioned word and the better one, “porch” – he was joined by a rather heavy-set youth with small, shifty eyes and a sallow skin which gave the impression

of languishing for soap and water. A suit of loud pattern, new yellow boots with “nobby” toes, and a gaudy necktie did not add to young Jared Applegate’s general appearance.

“Pop,” he began, after a glance at the old man’s crabbed and wrinkled features, just then aglow with self-satisfaction, “Pop, how about that money I spoke about?”

Old Applegate stared at his offspring from under his heavy, iron-gray brows.

“A fine time to be askin’ fer money!” he snorted indignantly, “you just back from Panamy – under a cloud, too, and yet you start a pesterin’ me fer money as ef it grew on trees.”

“What d’ye want it fer, hey?” he went on after a pause. “More Bye Scut nonsense?”

Jared shook his head as if denying some discreditable imputation.

“I’ve had nothing to do with the Boy Scouts since the day I was kicked out of – that is, since I left the Black Wolf troop in New York.”

“Dum glad of it, though you never tole me what you quit for,” muttered the old man.

“But to get back to that money,” said Jared; “as I told you when I got back from the Isthmus, I need it. Need it bad, too, or I wouldn’t ask you.”

“Makes no diff’rence. What d’ye want it fer, – hey?” he repeated, coming back to his original question.

Jared decided that there was nothing for it but to tell the truth.

“To go over what I told you the other night once more, I’m in debt. Debts I ran up on the Isthmus,” was the rejoinder. “A chap can’t live down there for nothing you know, and – ”

“By heck! You got a dern good salary as Mr. Mainwaring’s sec’y, didn’t yer, an’ a chance ter learn engin-e-ring thrun in. You git fired fer misbehavin’ yerself an’ then yer come down on the old man fer money. I ain’t goin’ ter stand it, I ain’t, and that’s flat!”

The old man knocked the ashes out of his half-smoked pipe with unnecessary violence. Jared, eyeing him askance, saw that his father was working himself up into what Jared termed “a tantrum.” Taking another tack, he resumed.

“Sho, pop! It ain’t as if you weren’t going to get it back. And there’ll be interest at six per cent., too.”

This was touching old Applegate on a tender point. If rumor in and about Hampton spoke correctly, the old man had made most of his large fortune, not so much by farming, but by running, at ruinous rates, a sort of private bank.

“Wa’al,” he said, his hard, rugged old face softening the least bit, “uv course you’ve tole me all that; but what you h’aint tole me is, how yer a goin’ ter git ther money back, – an’ the interest.”

He looked cunningly at his son as he spoke. Jared hesitated an instant before he replied. Then he said boldly enough: —

“I can’t tell you just what the business enterprise is that I expect to go into shortly. I’m – I’m under a sort of promise not to, you see. But if everything goes right, I’ll be worth a good round

sum before long.”

“Promises ain’t security,” retorted the old man warily. “I – Gee Whitakers! Thar’s that spotted hawg out agin!”

Across the dusty road the animal in question was passing as the farmer’s eyes fell on it. In the center of the track it paused and began rooting about, grunting contentedly at its liberty.

At the same moment a humming sound, almost like the drone of a big bumble bee, came out of the distance. As he heard the peculiar drone, a quick glance of recognition flashed across old Applegate’s face.

“It’s that pesky Mainwaring gal an’ her ’lectric auto!” he exploded vehemently. “That makes the third time in ther last two weeks that Jake’s bin out when she come along. Ther fust time she knocked him over, ther second time she knocked him over, an’ now – ”

A smart-looking little electric runabout, driven by a pretty young girl in motoring costume, whizzed round the corner. The ill-fated Jake looked up from his rooting as the car came dashing on. Possibly the recollection of those other two narrow escapes was upon him. At any rate, with a scared grunt and an angry squeal, he whisked his stump of a curly tail in the air and dashed for the picket fence in front of the Applegate place.

But either Jake was too slow, or the electric was too fast. Just as the girl gave the steering wheel of the auto a quick twist to avoid the pig, one of the forewheels struck the luckless Jake “astern,” as sailors would say.

With an agonized wail Jake sailed through the air a few feet and then, alighting on his feet, galloped off unhurt but squealing as if he had been mortally injured.

“Goodness,” exclaimed the girl alarmedly, and then, “gracious!”

The quick twist of the wheel had caused the car to give a jump and a skid and land in the ditch, where it came to a standstill. Farmer Applegate, rage tinting his face the color of a boiled beet, came storming down the path.

“This is the time I got yer, hey?” he shouted at the alarmed occupant of the auto. “That makes three times you run over Jake. You got away them other times, but I got yer nailed now. Kaint git yer car out uv ther ditch, hey? Wa’al, it’ll stay thar till yer pay up.”

“I’m – I’m dreadfully sorry,” stammered the girl, “really I had no intention of hurting – er – Jake. In fact, he doesn’t seem to be hurt at all.”

There appeared to be good reason for such a supposition. Jake, at the moment, was engaged in combat over a pile of corn fodder with several of his fellows.

“Humph! Prob’ly hurt internal,” grunted the farmer. “Anyhow, it’s time you bubblists was taught a lesson.”

“Oh, of course I’m willing to pay,” cried the girl, and out came a dainty hand-bag. “Er – how much will satisfy Jake’s – I mean your – feelings?”

The old farmer was quick to catch the note of amusement in

the girl's voice.

"You won't mend matters by bein' sassy," he growled; "besides, your pop fired my boy down on the Isthmus an' I ain't feelin' none too good toward yer."

"I have nothing to do with my father's affairs," said the girl coldly, noting out of the corner of her eye Jared's figure slinking around the side of the porch; "how much do you want to help me get my car out of the ditch, for that's really what it amounts to, you know?"

Ignoring the quiet sarcasm in her voice, old Applegate's face took on its crafty expression.

"Wa'al, it's three times now you've run over Jake. Say five dollars each time, – that ud be yer fine for overspeedin', anyhow, – that makes it fifteen dollars."

"Fifteen dollars!" The girl's voice showed her amazement at such a figure.

"It ort'er be twenty," snorted old Applegate; "thar's ther injury to Jake's feelin's. You bang over him at sixty mile an hour an' scare him out'n all his fat an' six months' growth. Fifteen dollars is cheap, an' – you don't go till yer pay up, neither."

"Why, it's simply extortion. I'll pay no such sum. Send your bill to my father. He'll settle it. And now help me out of this ditch, if you please."

"Now, don't you git het up, miss. Thar's a speed law on Long Island, an' by heck, you pay er I'll hev yer up afore the justice. Lucindy!" he raised his voice in a call for his wife; Jared had

vanished. A slovenly-looking woman, wiping her hands on a gingham apron, appeared on the porch.

“Lucindy, how many miles an hour? Jake’s bin run over agin,” he added suggestively.

“Wa’al,” said Lucindy judicially, “it looked like sixty; but I reckon h’it warn’t more’n twenty-five.”

“Humph!” snorted Applegate triumphantly, “an’ ther speed limit’s fifteen.”

“Why, I wasn’t going more than ten miles!” cried the girl, flushing with indignation.

“Huh! Tell that to ther justice. I’ll git my son to push yer machine out’n ther ditch an’ then I’ll hop in aside yer an’ we’ll drive into town.”

“You’ll do no such thing! Why, the idea! Take your hand off my car at once, or – oh, dear! What shall I do?” she broke off despairingly.

“You’ll drive me inter town or pay fifteen dollars, that’s what you’ll do,” declared Farmer Applegate stubbornly; “now then – hullo, what in ther name uv early pertaties is this a-comin’?”

Around the same corner from which the auto had appeared with such embarrassing results to its pretty young driver came three well-built lads. One of them was rather fat and his round, good-natured face was streaming with perspiration from the long “hike” on which they had been. But his companions looked trained to the minute, brown-faced, lithe-limbed, radiating health and strength from their khaki-clad forms. All three wore

the same kind of uniform, gaiters, knickerbockers, coats of military cut and broad-brimmed campaign hats. In addition, each carried a staff.

“Hullo, what’s all this, Rob?” cried one of them as they came into full view of the strange scene, – the ditched auto, the flushed, embarrassed yet indignant girl, and the truculent farmer.

“Consarn it all, it’s them pesky Boy Scouts from Hampton,” exclaimed Farmer Applegate disgustedly, as, in answer to the girl’s appealing look, the three youths stepped up, their hands lifted in the scout salute and their hats raised.

CHAPTER II

AN ANGRY FARMER

“Can we be of any assistance?” asked Rob Blake of the girl, whose alarmed looks made it evident that she was in an unpleasant situation. He ignored the red-faced, angry farmer, but took note out of the corner of his eye of Jared, who was peeping out at them from behind a shed. Apparently he had no wish to appear on the scene while his late employer’s daughter was there. To himself he muttered: —

“It’s that stuck-up Rob Blake, that butter-firkin, Tubby Hopkins and that sissy, Merritt Crawford. They’re always butting in when they’re not wanted.”

The girl turned gratefully to the newcomers. Rob’s firm voice and capable appearance made her feel, as did no less her scrutiny of his companions, that here were friends in need.

“Oh, thank you so much!” she cried. “I am Lucy Mainwaring, and you, I’m sure, are Rob Blake, leader of the Eagle Patrol. I’ve heard lots about you from my brother Fred, who is leader of the Black Wolf Patrol, First New York Troop.”

“Yes, I’m Rob Blake, this is Merritt Crawford, my second in command, and this is Tub – I mean Robert Hopkins.”

“I know all on yer,” growled out old Applegate, “an’ I tell yer to keep out of this. Just ’cause yer a banker’s son, young Blake, don’t

give you no right ter come interferin' where yer not wanted.”

“Oh, but they *are* wanted!” cried the girl, before Rob could say a word. “This man says that I ran over one of his pigs. Why, it’s absurd. I only just bumped the animal, and there he is over there now fighting for his breakfast.”

Her eyes fairly bubbled merriment as Jake’s raucous squeals rose belligerently from the neighborhood of the hog pens. Tubby spoke up.

“If he can eat, he’s all right,” announced the stout youth with his customary solemnity.

“But I’ve grazed the wretched pig twice before,” cried the girl, “and Mr. Applegate wants fifteen dollars or he won’t help me out of this ditch.”

“That’s right,” confirmed the farmer, “fifteen dollars er she goes afore the justice fer – fer running over Jake.”

“But she didn’t run over him,” retorted Rob, “and anyhow, fifteen dollars is an outrageous price to ask for your real or fancied injuries.”

“The hog’s injuries,” corrected the farmer.

“Same thing almost,” whispered Merritt to Tubby with a chuckle.

“Come on, boys,” said Rob, “let’s help this young lady out of the ditch.”

The girl turned on the power and the three Boy Scouts shoved with all their might at the rear of the machine. It quivered, started, stopped, and then fairly dashed up on to the road. So

quickly had it all been done that before the farmer could make a move the runabout was on the thoroughfare.

“Lucindy! Lucindy, let Towser loose!” yelled the old man as soon as he had recovered his senses.

The woman ran off the porch and in a few seconds a big, savage-looking bull dog came bounding out, showing his red fangs and white teeth.

The girl gave a little scream as the dog looked up at his master, apparently waiting an order to rush at the boys.

“Go on!” Rob said to the girl in a quick, low whisper, “we’ll be all right.”

“Oh, but I can’t! You’ve helped me – ”

“That was our duty as Scouts. Now turn on your power and get away. We’ll find a way to deal with the old man, never fear.”

Seeing that it was useless to remain, the girl applied the power once more and the machine shot out of sight.

“Consarn you pesky brats,” roared old Applegate, fairly beside himself.

“Sic ’em, Towse!” he shouted the next instant.

Rob had been prepared for some such move as this. As the dog, with a savage growl, sprang forward, he brought his staff into play. There was a flash of the implement, a quick twist, and the astonished Towser found himself spinning backward in the direction from which he had advanced.

“Don’t set that dog on us again,” cried Rob, in a clear, commanding voice, “if you do, he’ll get hurt.”

“Consarn you!” bellowed the farmer again, “air you aidin’ and abettin’ lawless acts?”

“As far as that goes, your hog had no business in the middle of the road,” was the quiet rejoinder.

“I’ll go to law about this,” shouted the farmer furiously, brandishing his knotted fist. But he made no attempt to “sic” Towser on the boys again. As for that redoubtable animal, he stood by his master, his tail between his legs. To use the vernacular, he appeared to be wondering “what had struck him.”

As there was nothing to be gained by remaining, the three Boy Scouts started off anew on the last stage of their “hike,” which had been one of twenty-four miles started the day before to visit a patrol in a distant town on the island. They struck off briskly, as boys will when home is almost in sight and appetites are keen. The farmer, seeing that nothing was to be gained by abusing them any further, contented himself by calling them “young varmints” and turned back toward his house.

The boys had not proceeded many paces when they heard behind them the quick “chug-chug” of a motor cycle. Turning, they saw coming toward them a youth of about Rob’s age, mounted on a red motor cycle which, from the noise it made, appeared to be of high power. As he drew alongside them they noticed that he, too, was in Scout uniform, and that from the handle bars on his machine fluttered a flag with a black wolf’s head on it. The newcomer stopped his machine, nimbly alighted and gave the Scout salute, which the boys returned.

“My name is Fred Mainwaring of the Black Wolf Patrol of the First New York Troop,” he announced, “have you seen anything of a young lady driving an electric runabout?”

The boys exchanged amused glances. Then Rob recounted the scene in front of the farmhouse. He also introduced himself and his patrol mates. Fred Mainwaring, a fine-looking, curly-haired lad, appeared much diverted.

“That’s just like sis,” he exclaimed, “she’s always getting in trouble with that auto of hers; doing things she aut-n’t to, so to speak. Excuse the pun. It’s a bad habit of mine. She went for a spin this morning and wouldn’t wait for me, so now behold me in chase of her.”

After some more chat, during which Fred Mainwaring received a hearty invitation to visit the quarters of the Eagle Patrol in Hampton, the boys parted, very well pleased with each other. The young scouts of the Eagle Patrol already knew much about the Mainwaring family, Mr. Mainwaring having recently purchased an estate just out of Hampton. The newcomer to the community was preceded by an almost world-wide reputation as a skillful engineer. Many of the great problems in connection with Uncle Sam’s “Big Ditch” had been successfully solved by him, and, although just now he was at home on a “furlough,” he was shortly to leave once more for the Zone.

During the course of their brief chat Fred had informed the boys that he and his sister were to accompany their father on the return voyage, Fred taking the position of secretary.

“He had another chap before he came up from the tropics,” he informed the boys. “I guess he lives somewhere round here. Jared Applegate his name was. Had to fire him, though, for some sort of crooked work. I don’t know just what it was; but it must have been something pretty bad, for dad got mighty angry when he told about it. You see, in a way I feel responsible. Jared, who was working as a stenographer and typewriter in New York, belonged to my troop. I liked him after a fashion, and got dad to make him his secretary. It wasn’t till after he’d left for Panama that I accidentally found out that Jared, who had been treasurer of the troop, had been stealing small sums from time to time.

“I didn’t notify dad for fear of worrying him; but of course Jared was dropped from the troop. When dad got back from the Isthmus this time I asked about Jared and found out that he had been discharged. Just what for, I don’t know. Dad wouldn’t tell me.”

“We know something of Jared’s reputation about here,” rejoined Rob. “It’s none too good. By the way, that’s his father’s place back there where your sister had all the trouble.”

“I knew that his home was somewhere near Hampton,” was the rejoinder.

This conversation took place on the roadside not more than a few feet from a stone wall which bounded the outlying fields of the Applegate property. Behind this wall, if the four lads had known it, was concealed a listener to whom all their conversation was perfectly plain. Jared had watched the boys meeting from

the dooryard and had crept cautiously along behind the stone wall till he arrived at a spot opposite that at which the group was chatting. "Listeners never hear good of themselves," says the old saw. Jared assuredly proved its truth that fine spring morning.

An evil look passed over his countenance as he crouched behind the wall. His sallow face grew a pasty yellow, with anger. His shifty eyes glittered furiously as he heard his record discussed.

"So that's the game, is it?" he muttered to himself, as the boys parted company, Fred Mainwaring shooting off like a red streak on his machine. "Well, I guess that before long I'll have my innings, and when I do I'll make it hot for all of you, especially old man Mainwaring. I'll get even with him if it takes me a year; but I don't think it'll be that long."

He drew a letter from his pocket and glanced over it in the manner of one already familiar with a missive's contents, but who wishes, by a fresh perusal, to satisfy himself once more. This is what he read from the much-creased document:

"If you have what you claim we will talk business with you. It will be made worth your while."

The letter bore no signature nor address. It referred to a subject with which the writer, for an excellent reason, would not have cared to have his name linked. The "big ditch" project, the greatest of the age, perhaps of all time, had, inconceivable as it may seem, bitter and unscrupulous enemies. The person who had written that note to poor, sneaking Jared Applegate was one of

these.

CHAPTER III

ON A MISSION

While the three Boy Scouts are trudging back toward Hampton, we will take the opportunity to introduce them more fully to our readers who may not have met them before. Rob Blake, the son of the local banker in the seashore village of Hampton, Long Island, had, some time before the present story opens, founded the Eagle Patrol. The early days of its existence formed the basis of the first book of the series, for the lads flocked eagerly to its standard, and the Patrol was soon in a flourishing condition, with a well-equipped room above the local bank building, a fine, up-to-date structure. The adventures of the Patrol in camp and Scout life in general were various and exciting. The boys made some enemies, as was natural, for many boys wished to belong to their Patrol who could not be admitted; but in the end, thanks mainly to their Scout training, all things came out well for the Eagles.

In the second volume we found "The Boy Scouts on the Range." In this book full details of Scout principles as put into practice in a wild and lawless country were related. The pursuit of Silver Tip, the giant grizzly, popularly supposed to bear a charmed life, was an interesting feature of their experience in the West. Indians and cattle rustlers made trouble for the boys and

their friends, but, although the boys were several times placed in jeopardy and danger, they emerged with credit from all their dilemmas.

Still following the lads' fortunes, we found them in the third volume of the series, "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship," deeply interested in the subject of aerial navigation. They managed to give material aid in certain experiments that the government carried on at a lonely house on the sea coast near Hampton, and became involved in some thrilling incidents which still further put to the test their ability and cleverness.

In "The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp," the scene shifted to the Adirondacks, whither the boys went, primarily on a quiet camping trip. But they became involved in an exciting search for a long missing treasure, immured in an ancient and almost inaccessible cave in the heart of a wild region. How they won out against apparently insurmountable obstacles makes exciting and instructive reading.

"The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam," the fifth volume, related some surprising events that occurred when the boys' aid was called into requisition in connection with a new type of submarine which foreign powers were doing their best to appropriate, but which was intended for the United States Government. Readers of that volume will readily recall Rob's abduction and marooning on a desert island and the pernicious activities of a green motor boat which was used by the agents of a foreign power. Rob's marvelous swim across a narrow inlet,

through which the tide boiled like a mill race, and the interchange of Scout signals with astonishing results, are only two of the incidents that go to show that the Eagle Patrol was always to be relied upon to do its duty and live up to the strict letter of the inspiring motto, "Be Prepared."

For the next few days the lads of the Eagle Patrol were busy indeed with preparations for what was to them a very important piece of work. This was nothing more nor less than the placarding of the town with announcements that a team made up of the Eagles would play the Hampton nine in the first baseball game of the season, the proceeds to be equally divided. The Boy Scouts' half, of course, would go toward the general patrol fund for the purchase of equipment and so on.

Each of the lads had a duty to perform in this connection. Hiram Nelson, whose father was in the printing business, was to get up the posters, which were to be printed on big, yellow sheets. Andy Bowles, whose uncle conducted a livery stable, arranged for rigs to convey the young bill-posters around the country; while Tubby Hopkins, – since the duty was partly of a culinary nature, – undertook to make the paste. This, despite unkind remarks to the effect that, unable to restrain his appetite, he might be tempted to eat it! In this manner the different duties were distributed and each member of the patrol took an active part in the work.

Rather to Rob's surprise, and likewise to the astonishment of the other lads, Jared Applegate's name appeared as pitcher

for the Hampton team. But, after all, there was nothing so very astonishing in this, for Jared, before he left for New York, had been a clever pitcher on the Hampton Academy team, which had beaten some of the best ball players on Long Island. Sam Lamb, the regular pitcher for the Hamptons, it was later learned, had sprained his wrist in jumping on a moving train, and Jared had eagerly volunteered to take his place. He had made open boasts about the town that he meant to “knock some of those tin soldier kids higher than so many kites.”

“Let him do his best,” was all Rob had said, when Andy Bowles, the diminutive bugler of the Eagles, brought him this information.

When not engaged in preparations for “billing” the surrounding country, which occupied almost all the time they could spare from their studies, the Scouts practiced hard and faithfully. They had a good team, but they had to admit that the town boys, too, played very good ball. As the day for the contest, a Saturday, drew near, excitement began to run high. Jared never spoke to any of the Scouts, all of whom, by this time, knew of his disgrace while a member of the Black Wolf Patrol. Possibly he did not wish to run a chance of being snubbed; but be that as it may, when he passed any of the uniformed youngsters he kept his eyes on the ground. This did not prevent him, however, from hanging around when the Scouts were at practice and making all sorts of contemptuous remarks concerning their play.

The Saturday before the game, the lads started out in different

directions to put up their bills. Those whose duties lay within easy distance of Hampton went on foot; but the others took rigs. Among the latter were Rob, Merritt and Tubby Hopkins. With them they carried a good thick bundle of bills, plenty of paste and long-handled brushes. It was a beautiful day and they were in high spirits as they drove along the pleasant country roads.

Their way took them by Farmer Applegate's place.

"Let's plaster up a few on the old grouch's barn," suggested Merritt with a laugh.

"No; I don't want to do that," declared Rob positively, "although he isn't entitled to much consideration. It was a shame the way he treated Fred Mainwaring's sister."

"Such a pretty girl, too," chuckled Tubby, with a mischievous look at Merritt. Rob intercepted the glance and turned red, at which both his companions teased him more than ever. Luckily for Rob's peace of mind, however, at this juncture something occurred to cause the current of Tubby's thoughts to flow in another direction.

Beyond the farm buildings a spotted pig was nosing about contentedly in the middle of the road. As his eyes lighted on the porker, Tubby gave a shout of delight.

"We can use him," he cried delightedly.

"There you go again. Always thinking about something to eat," snorted Merritt.

"Not this time," retorted Tubby indignantly; "anyhow, I've never heard of your being absent at meal times. But on this

occasion it's alive and in his proper person that Jake is going to be useful to us."

"In what way?" asked Rob.

"As a living advertisement," chuckled the stout youth, his round cheeks shaking as he eyed the unsuspecting Jake.

CHAPTER IV

SOME UP-TO- DATE ADVERTISING

By the time the buggy drew up alongside Jake, who was too engrossed in his rooting operations to perceive it, or at any rate to bestow any attention upon it, Tubby had disclosed his plan to his chums, who hailed it with shouts of delight. From his pockets the fat boy produced an apple and a bit of cake. Tubby never traveled far without provisions. "Keeping in touch with his base of supplies," he called it.

It spoke volumes for his enthusiastic belief in the success of his plan that he was willing to offer both of these to Jake as soon as he had alighted from the buggy. Close behind him came Rob and Merritt, the latter with the horse's hitching rope in his hand.

"Come, pig! pig! pig! Nice Jake!" warbled Tubby in the most dulcet voice he could assume.

Jake looked up. His small eyes twinkled. Unsuspectingly he sniffed the air as he perceived a rosy apple temptingly held out toward him.

"It's a shame," laughed Rob, half contritely, "if he hadn't caused a lot of trouble for a mighty nice girl I wouldn't stand for it."

"Pig! pig! pig!" chortled Tubby persuasively.

“Unk! unk! unk!” grunted Jake, wiggling his tail.

“Wonderful how they understand each other, isn’t it?” remarked Merritt with a grin. But Tubby was too intent on what he had in hand to resent the gross insult.

Closer and closer shuffled Jake, his greedy little eyes on the apple. All at once he appeared to make up his mind in a hurry. He made a dart for the tempting bait.

“Now,” yelled Tubby.

Quick as a flash, as soon as he heard the preconcerted signal, Merritt flung the looped hitching rope about the pig’s neck. Jake gave a squeal and wriggled with might and main, but his ears held the rope from slipping off.

“Give him the apple to keep him quiet,” suggested Merritt, as Jake squealed at the top of his voice.

Tubby proffered the apple and instantly Jake forgot his troubles in devouring it. In the meantime Tubby slipped to the wagon and selected a poster or two and a brush full of paste. Returning, amidst shouts of laughter from his fellow conspirators, he plentifully “shampooed” Jake with paste, and then slapped the gaudy yellow bills on till it appeared as if the astute Jake had enveloped himself in a bright orange overcoat.

“Now cut him loose,” ordered Rob, when Tubby, with all the satisfaction of a true artist, stepped back to view his completed work.

Merritt slipped the noose, and off down the road toward the farm dashed the gaudily decorated Jake, conveying the news to all

who might see that on Saturday, April – , there would be a Grand Baseball Game at Hampton, Boy Scouts of The Eagle Patrol vs. The Hampton Town Nine.

As the boys, shouting and shaking with laughter, watched this truly original bit of advertising gallop off down the road, the one touch needed to complete the picture was filled in. From his dooryard emerged the farmer. The first thing his eyes lighted on was Jake. For one instant he regarded the alarmed animal in wonderment. Then, with a yell, he rushed into the house.

“Ma! ma! Lucindy!” he bellowed at the top of his voice, “Jake’s got the yaller fever, er the jaunders, er suthin’. Come on quick! He’s comin’ down ther road like ther Empire State Express, and as yaller as a bit of corn bread.”

At this stage of the proceedings the boys, their sides shaking with laughter, deemed it prudent to emulate the Arabs of the poem and “silently steal away.”

Looking back as they drove off they could see Lucindy and her spouse engaged in a mad chase after the overcoated Jake. Even at that distance the latter’s piercing cries reached their ears with sharp distinctness and added to their merriment. Rob alone seemed a bit remorseful at the huge success of Tubby’s novel advertising scheme.

“Applegate’s a pretty old man, fellows,” he remarked, “and maybe we went a bit too far.”

“Well, if his age runs in proportion to his meanness, he’ll outlive Methuselah,” declared Merritt positively.

The road they followed gradually led into a by-track that joined the main road they had left with one that traversed the north side of the island. It was sandy, and at places along its course high banks towered on each side of it. At length they emerged from one of these sunken lanes and found on their right an abandoned farm. Quite close to the roadside stood a big, rattletrap-looking barn. It had once been painted red, but neglect and the weather had caused the paint to shale off in huge patches, leaving blotches of bare wood that looked leprous with moss and lichen.

“What do you say if we leave a few souvenirs pasted up there?” said Merritt.

“Well, it wouldn’t hurt the looks of the place, anyhow,” decided Rob. “I doubt if many people come along this road anyway; but I guess we might as well get busy.”

“Well, you two fellows can do the work this time,” declared Tubby, stretching out luxuriously in the rig.

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to drive down the road and hitch up in the shade of that tree and take a nap.”

“That’s pretty cool!” exclaimed Merritt.

“I know it is, at least it looks so,” responded Tubby.

“Seems to me it’s up to you to do some work, too,” protested Merritt.

“As if I hadn’t just done a big job in labeling that pig,” replied Tubby, yawning; “it’s your turn now.”

Seeing that it was useless to try to turn Tubby from his determination to rest, which, next to eating, was his favorite occupation, Rob and Merritt took up their brushes, paste and a roll of bills and set out for the barn. Tubby watched them languidly a minute and then drove off along the sandy track while the other two clambered up a bank.

From the road the barn had appeared quite close; but when they reached the top of the bank they found that, actually, it stood back quite a little distance beyond a strip of grass and weeds. The boys waded through these almost knee-deep, and finally reached the side of the old barn. They set down their buckets and brushes and unrolled some bills preparatory to pasting them up.

Suddenly Merritt raised a warning finger. Rob instantly divined that his chum enjoined silence.

“Hark!” was the word that Merritt’s lips framed rather than spoke.

Inside the barn some one was talking, – several persons seemingly. After a minute the boys could distinguish words above the low hum of the speakers’ voices. Suddenly they caught a name: “Mainwaring.”

“I guess maybe we might be interested in this,” whispered Rob.

By a common impulse the two Boy Scouts moved closer to the moldering wall of the old barn.

CHAPTER V

A BIG SURPRISE

Time and weather had warped the boards of the structure till fair-sized cracks gaped here and there. The boys made for one of these, with the object of peering into the place and getting a glance at its occupants. At first they had thought that these were nothing more than a gang of tramps, but the name of the engineer, spoken with a foreign accent, had aroused them to a sense that, whoever was in the old barn, a subject was being discussed that might be of interest to their new friends.

Applying their eyes to two cracks in the timbers, they saw that within the barn four persons were seated. One of these they recognized almost instantly as Jared Applegate. By his side sat a youth of about his own age, flashily dressed, with a general air of cheap smartness about him. The other two occupants of the place were of a different type. One was heavily built and dark in complexion, almost a light coffee color, in fact. His swarthy face was clean shaven and heavily jowled. Seated next to him on an old hay press was a man as dark as he, but more slender and dapper in appearance. Also he was younger, not more than thirty, while his companion was probably in the neighborhood of fifty, although as powerful and vigorous, so far as the boys could judge, as a man of half his years.

“You say that you have duplicates of Mainwaring’s plans, showing exactly the weakest points of the great dam?” the elder man was asking, just as the boys assumed positions of listening.

Jared nodded. He glanced at the more slender of the two foreigners.

“I guess Mr. Estrada has told you all about that,” he said.

“Of course, my dear Alverado,” the dapper little man struck in, “you recollect that I spoke to you of Señor Applegate’s visit to me at Washington.”

Rob started. The name Estrada, coupled with a mention of Washington, recalled to his mind something that sent a thrill through him taken in connection with the words of the man addressed as Alverado.

Estrada, – José Estrada! That was the name of the ambassador of a South American republic that had several times been mentioned as being opposed to Uncle Sam’s plans on the Isthmus. What if – but not wishing to miss a word of what followed, he gave over speculating and applied himself to listening with all his might. Jared gave a short, disagreeable laugh.

“You can just bet I got duplicates of all the plans,” he chuckled, “I had an idea that Mainwaring was going to fire me on account of – well, of something, and so I went to work and copied off all of his private papers I could. You see, it was common talk on the Isthmus that the place was alive with spies, and I figured out that anybody who was interested enough to hire spies must be

mighty anxious to get at the real plans of the canal, and willing to pay big for them, too," he added with a greedy look on his face, which for an instant gave him a strong likeness to his father.

Rob and Merritt exchanged glances. From even the little that they had heard it was plain enough what was going forward in the barn. There was no doubt now that Jared was bargaining with representatives of a foreign power that had good reason to dislike Uncle Sam; no question but that Mr. Mainwaring's plans, or at least copies of them, were in the hands of an unscrupulous young rascal who was willing to sell them to the highest bidder, without caring for what nefarious purpose they were to be used.

The Boy Scouts' blood fairly boiled as they heard. They had always known Jared to be weak, unprincipled and dishonest, but that he would descend to such rascality as this was almost beyond belief. Merritt in his anger made a gesture of shaking his fist. It was an unfortunate move. A bit of board on which one of his feet rested gave way with a sharp crack under the sudden shifting of his weight.

Instantly the men in the barn were on the alert.

"What was that?" cried Estrada sharply.

"Nothing. A rat, I guess; old barns like this are full of them," rejoined Jared, striving to appear at ease, but glancing nervously about him.

"A rat, bah!" exclaimed Alverado, puffing out his fat jowls till he looked like a huge puff adder. "That was not a rat, *amigo*, that was a spy. This barn is not as secret a meeting place as you led

us to believe.”

“Come on, Merritt,” whispered Rob, “grab up everything and run for it. They’ll be out here in a minute.”

Swiftly they gathered up their paste, brushes and bills, and crouching low ran toward what had been a smoke-house. Hardly had they darted within its dark and odorous interior when the conspirators in the barn came rushing out, looking in every direction. In Alverado’s hand something glittered in the sunlight. The two Boy Scouts peering out through a knot-hole had no difficulty in recognizing the object, with an unpleasant thrill, as an automatic revolver.

They now saw, too, something that they had been unable to perceive from the back of the barn. This was a big, red touring car drawn up close to the antiquated structure. But they had no time to waste in looking at the car. The movements of the searching party engrossed their attention too deeply.

“Scatter in every direction,” they heard Alverado order, “we must find out if anyone has been here listening, or if our ears deceived us.”

There was no doubt but that the search was to be a thorough one. Even the chauffeur of the car, which, the boys noticed in a quick, fleeting glance, bore no number, joined in the search. They rushed about like a pack of bloodhounds in every direction.

“This is getting pretty warm,” whispered Rob; “it’s plain those chaps are thoroughly alarmed and don’t mean to leave a stone unturned to find us.”

“Oh, that unlucky board!” groaned Merritt remorsefully. “I’m a fine specimen of a Scout to make such a mistake as that, – at such a critical time, too.”

“It was unfortunate; but accidents will happen,” rejoined Rob quickly. “But it’s no use crying over spilt milk.”

“What are we going to do?”

“I’m trying to think.”

“Perhaps there is a chance that they will overlook us.”

“No danger of that, I’m afraid. From what little I saw of Mister Alverado he appears to be a very painstaking gentleman.”

“They’re searching the house now.”

“Yes, that will take them some time; but you can depend on it that when they’ve finished they’ll search the outbuildings.”

“Yes; and they’ve left that chauffeur on guard outside, too. Not a chance of our getting out of here.”

“Unless there’s another door.”

“Cracky! Maybe there is. Let’s look. But we’ve got to hurry up. Hark!”

“They’re coming out of the house and pointing over here,” cried Rob the next instant.

Both boys desperately sought to find some way out of the old smoke-house other than by the door by which they had entered. But no exit offered. Suddenly Rob had an inspiration. The smoke-house was roofed like an inverted V. The roof was covered with shingles. Apparently they were rotten, for in places the light came through. One side of the roof faced toward the

abandoned farmhouse; the other faced back upon some fields. Rob thrust his fist with some violence against the shingles on the side of the smoke-house roof that faced the fields. To his joy the shingles gave way almost like rotten cardboard.

“Hurrah! We’ve found a way out,” he cried exultingly, although he was careful not to raise his voice much above a whisper. He rapidly enlarged the opening till it was big enough to crawl through. Luckily the search party had paused to examine a corn crib that lay between the smoke-house and the farmhouse, so that the boys had a few seconds’ grace.

“Now then, through you go!” breathed Rob as soon as he had pitched out the bills.

Merritt scrambled through with Rob close on his heels. The apex of the roof, of course, screened them from view of the party now approaching the old smoke-house. It was a drop of not more than three feet to the ground, for the walls were low, and Rob had, of necessity, punctured the roof near the eaves.

Ahead of them lay a meadow with a patch of woods beyond. Rank brush and tall weeds intervened. But they had to make a dash of some hundred feet across an open space. Somehow, just how they never knew, they got across it and plunged into the brush, making for the woods beyond.

At the same instant Alverado and the others entered the smoke-house.

CHAPTER VI

BASEBALL

“Of course they guessed how we made our escape, Rob.”

Merritt spoke as the two lads lay crouched in the thick brush far removed from harm’s way.

“Naturally. The fresh breaks in the roof would show them that. But, beyond that, they are none the wiser as to our identity, of which I am heartily glad.”

“I can understand that. You don’t like the look of things.”

“Merritt,” Rob spoke very soberly, laying his hand on the other’s arm, “it looks to me as if we’ve stumbled on a monumental plot against Uncle Sam’s canal. I don’t know much of politics, but I do know enough to realize that there is a certain South American republic that thinks that the Canal Zone was stolen from her by trickery and deceit. I’m sorry to say, too, that I’ve heard that there are interests right here in the States that agree with her – people who think that the opening of the canal will result in enormous losses to freight, and who would like to see the canal completion delayed at all costs.”

“I see. You think that the two dark men were representatives of that republic you mentioned.”

“I *know* one of them was,” snapped Rob; “he is its representative at Washington.”

“Wow! Say, Rob, this is a big thing we’ve stumbled upon. We must bring it to the attention of the proper authorities.”

“That’s our duty as Scouts.”

“Of course. But what steps do you propose to take?”

“I don’t just know yet. We must see Mr. Mainwaring, of course, first. It will be for him to decide. But – horrors, Merritt! – we’ve forgotten all about Tubby. He’s asleep in the rig. Look, Jared and his friends are piling into the auto. If they go down that road they are sure to discover him. They may do him some injury.”

But the next instant both the anxious lads drew a sigh of relief. Instead of taking the by-road, the auto struck off across lots along a barely perceptible and weed-grown track. In a few moments it was out of sight and the coast was clear. Then, and not till then, the two Boy Scouts set out to rejoin Tubby. They found that rotund youth blissfully sleeping, while the old nag cropped grass at the roadside. They awakened their stout comrade and soon took the lees of sleep out of his eyes by relating all that had passed within the last hour. Tubby heartily agreed that the first thing to be done was to put Mr. Mainwaring on his guard.

Naturally there was no more thought of bill posting, and filled with a sense of the duty that lay before them the three Boy Scouts drove rapidly back to Hampton. But there a disappointment awaited them. Mr. Mainwaring had been called away on business. He had gone west and would not be back for a week or more. So for the present the scene in the barn had

to be forgotten, while more immediate matters were attended to. During the ensuing week nothing was seen of Jared, but the Saturday afternoon of the game found him “warming up” on the ball field with the orange and black of the Hampton team on his back.

Rob and Merritt fairly boiled over with indignation as they watched him. But they decided not to say anything to him that might put him on his guard.

“We’ll give him all the rope he wants,” declared Rob. Later he was bitterly to regret the adoption of this policy.

The grounds began to fill up early. The game aroused widespread interest in that section of Long Island. As the local paper put it, “red-hot ball” was looked for. Enthusiastic young ladies were there by the score, waving flags from the bunches on sale about the field by hawkers. The grand-stand filled early. Rob’s team-mates noticed his eyes frequently straying in that direction.

“Looking for Lucy Mainwaring,” whispered Tubby to Merritt with a grin on his round and blooming countenance.

Finally the game was called and soon both teams were on the field. Hiram, captain of the Eagles, won the toss and chose to go to bat first. The game was started. Nelson promptly struck out. He could not help making a wry face as he threw down the willow.

A broad grin was on Jared’s face. He went through all sorts of antics, as Andy Bowles came to bat with a look of grim

determination on his face.

Jared was good; that was a fact which admitted no blinking, as the Eagles had to acknowledge. Andy was given first base on balls, tried to steal second, was thrown out and retired disgruntled to the bench. The Hampton rooters began to give their war cry. The Eagle supporters replied to it bravely. It was early in the game to be making any predictions. Rob was third batter. He struck out. Jared's delight was ill-concealed.

"I'll shut 'em out," he bragged loudly, not caring who heard. "I'll show the tin soldiers some pitching."

The Eagle supporters had to admit that things did not look very roseate, but they consoled themselves by recollecting the fact that practically the game had only begun.

Hampton now went to the bat. Merritt occupied the pitcher's box. He had injured his arm somewhat in practice, but it was agreed, after a consultation, to put him up as first pitcher, holding Rob in reserve till they got the Hampton's gait. Merritt showed wonderful form. In one, two, three order he struck out Hampton's batters, including Jared.

Great was the delight of the Eagles and their friends.

"Good boy, Merritt! Good for you! Kr-e-e-e-ee-ee!" was heard on all sides as the Hamptons came running out to take their positions in the field.

Merritt felt a glow of pleasure as Rob congratulated him.

"I hope I can keep it up," was all he said.

"I hope so, too; but I'd like to have a chance at Jared,"

responded Rob.

The Eagles now came to the bat, Rob leading. Rob was not only a good pitcher but a sure batter. Whiz-z came Jared's ball. Rob met it and promptly drove a humming liner into right field. It was a safe base hit.

"Oh, you Eagles!" chanted the crowd; those of them who were not lined up for Hampton, that is.

Rob watched his chance and stole second, to the huge delight of his team supporters. An ugly look was on Jared's face. The next batter, Merritt, received first base on four balls. Cheers and yells greeted this. Jared's countenance grew blacker and blacker. He bit his lip impatiently.

Suddenly Rob played dangerously off second base. The Hampton second baseman was close to him. It was a daring move. Jared saw it in a flash. The catcher's signal came. He threw the ball to the Hampton short stop on second base.

But Jared's chagrin at the way his pitching was being "knocked about" unsteadied his aim. He threw wild. The ball passed above the short stop's outstretched finger tips. Rob darted off for third base like a jack rabbit.

The right fielder got the ball and shot it to third base, but, although the ball and Rob seemed to arrive simultaneously, Rob was hugging the bag contentedly in the nick of time. This was a quick, stirring bit of play and brought yells from the crowd, among whom criticisms of Jared were freely expressed. He grew pale with rage and chagrin.

Paul Perkins now came to bat. The dreamy lad struck out. His apparent unconcern made the crowd laugh. They laughed even more when Tubby, having struck out also, calmly picked up a bit of pie he had been munching when he came to bat and marched to his seat contentedly chewing it.

At this stage of the game two were out, Merritt was on second and Rob on third.

Now came the turn of Ernest Thompson, a big-eyed, serious-looking lad, one of the first recruits to the Eagle standard and a first-class scout. Jared was now on the broad grin. Thompson looked easy.

“Look out, baby-face,” chuckled Jared, poising himself.

An in-curve shot from his hand. Ernest gazed at it in an uninterested manner and allowed it to go by.

“Strike one!” came the sonorous voice of the umpire, who was Sim Giles, the postmaster.

“Oh-h-h-h-h!” yelled the crowd.

The next ball was of the same character. This time Ernest struck at the ball. He missed and the crowd yelled again. Jared began to regain self-confidence.

“Strike two,” was the cry.

The third ball was high.

“Ball one,” declared Sim.

Then came an out-curve. But it was too far out. Jared was a rather ragged pitcher.

“Ball two,” called Sim.

Suddenly Jared threw to third base. But, quick as he was, he didn't catch Rob off.

"How's that?" yelled Higgins, the Hampton third baseman, as he touched Rob.

The umpire merely waved his hand in what he deemed a professional manner.

"A thousand years late," chuckled Rob to Higgins.

Jared heard him and flashed him an ugly look. Hatred gleamed in his eyes. Rob watched him narrowly and again stole off third.

Bang! – came a swift straight ball at the dreamy Ernest. But he was not in "a trance," as Jared had scornfully thought. Crack! – went a hot grounder to short stop. Merritt stood fast at second, but Rob, like an arrow from a bow, shot off for home. The short stop fired in the sphere to the catcher as quickly as he could. But before the ball got there, Rob, his legs working like pistons, had passed the home plate.

What a roar went up then! Flags waved and cheers resounded among the Eagle sympathizers.

As the cheering died away the catcher, Hollis Powers, walked into the diamond to confer with Jared, who showed by his passionate gestures that he was mad clear through.

"Look out or they'll knock you out of the box," yelled some one.

This did not tend to improve Jared's temper. But, nevertheless, he struck out the next batter, Simon Jeffords, which helped in

part to restore his balance. The Eagles then retired to the field.

“How do you feel, Merritt?” was eagerly asked by his comrades before he took the pitcher’s box.

“All right, so far. You’ll know soon enough when my wing gets sore,” was the reply.

Apparently Rob was not destined to pitch that day. Merritt struck out the first two batters, fielded a hot liner and threw out Jared before he got to first base. Jared was certainly piling up his list of grievances against the Boy Scouts. To add to his ill-feeling he had recognized Fred Mainwaring, nodded to the latter and received the cut direct. The fact that Lucy Mainwaring was a witness to this snub did not improve matters.

“Good boy, Merritt!” yelled the Eagle supporters in a frenzy of delight.

The third inning commenced with the Eagles at the bat. But now Jared appeared to have on his throwing clothes. The Scout batters couldn’t hammer his pitching at all.

In fact, all that occurred while they succeeded each other at the bat was a monotonous succession of calls from the umpire:

“Strike one. Strike two. You’re out.”

The Hampton villagers began to pluck up heart. They gave Jared warm support and cheers for his really excellent work and that of his team-mates. To the somewhat blank astonishment of the Eagles, they had not been able to find Jared’s pitching at all in this inning. It began to look as if they were by no means to have things their own way.

CHAPTER VII

A TEST FOR THE EAGLES

But Jared was to score still further. He came to bat confidently at the end of the third inning. With two of his side out and none on bases, he knocked a beautiful homer into left field. It was a really fine drive. The Hampton contingent went wild. The faces of the Eagle supporters, too, were cheerful, but anxious. As for Jared, he beamed, and then as his eyes met Rob's, he gave the latter a malevolent glance.

At the end of the third inning each side had scored one run. The Eagles made no runs in the following three innings, while Hampton scored two, so that, when the seventh inning began, things looked rather gloomy for the Scouts. The score then stood three to one in favor of Hampton and the town players fairly swelled with confidence.

It was already painfully evident that, exercise his will power as he would, Merritt's arm was getting sore. He had put redoubled efforts into his work but the score showed with how little success. At the beginning of the seventh, he told Captain Hiram that he thought the Hamptons had "found" his pitching, but he consented to stay in the box for one more inning.

The inning commenced with Merritt at the bat. He was given first base on balls. Paul Perkins made a base hit to left field. He

got safely to first with Merritt hugging second. Tubby Hopkins once more struck out with the same cheerful grin on his round countenance. Hiram sent a slow grounder to Jared and was promptly thrown out at first, but Merritt reached third, and Paul second, very nicely.

Rob Blake now came to the bat. Jared determined to strike him out if it were humanly possible. After a lot of posing which he thought gave him quite a professional air, Jared delivered the best ball in his répertoire, a swift and vicious in-curve. It fairly hissed through the air.

Crack!

Rob's willow collided with the sphere and away it sped far into right field. Merritt and Paul scored amidst tremendous enthusiasm; hats were thrown in the air. Things once more looked rosy for the Eagles. Rob was easily the favorite of the moment.

As for Jared, his feelings were not enviable. He felt that he would gladly have allowed the others to score if he had only been able to shut Rob out. He struck out the next batter, and then Hampton went to bat.

Merritt's arm felt better and he went to the box without the misgivings that had assailed him earlier. But with the first ball he pitched he knew that he had deluded himself. The batter hit a fly to right field and was caught out. Merritt, summoning every ounce of resolution he could muster, struggled on right manfully. But it was a hopeless cause. Base hits were made with absurd ease. Jared was caught out on a fly. Finally there were two out

and two on bases.

Higgins came to bat and made a second home run amidst yells of delight from the Scouts' opponents.

It began to look like grim defeat for the Scouts. The Hampton contingent was jubilant. Jared danced mockingly about whenever he could catch the eye of a Boy Scout.

The next Hampton batter struck an easy fly to left field which was caught by Paul Perkins. The Scouts now came to the bat, beginning the eighth inning. The score was six to three in Hampton's favor. Things looked black, but with the true Scout spirit the lads of the Eagle put the best face possible on matters. They noted Jared's leering face without a sign that they saw his malignant triumph.

Jared struck out the first three Scout batters with ridiculous ease. When the Hamptons came to the bat, the Eagles made a change in pitchers. It was Rob, cool, self-confident and determined, who occupied the box. This followed a consultation at which it was agreed that, splendidly as Merritt had done, his arm had gone back on him.

As Hiram adjusted his catcher's mask and Rob took his new position, things grew very quiet. It was palpable to all that the change of pitchers denoted a crisis in the game for the Scouts. Rob faced the first batter without indulging in any of Jared Applegate's antics. Hiram signaled for a swift one. He braced himself as he saw it coming. He knew that Rob was a swift pitcher with a mighty right.

“Strike one!” yelled the umpire a fraction of a second later.

Jared, at the bat, looked angry and puzzled. He wondered why they hadn’t put Rob in the box at first. He did not know that Rob, while a splendid pitcher, was not to be relied on through a long game as was Merritt. Another thing he didn’t know was that Rob had determined with a grim resolution to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, if possible. That’s a feeling that will carry any boy, or man either for that matter, a long way.

Hiram signaled for another cannon-ball. It was plain that those were just the kind of missiles that were not at all to Jared’s liking.

The ball shot from Rob’s hand apparently without effort. But it shot over the plate like a bullet.

“Strike two!” bellowed the umpire.

“Oh, you Rob!” yelled his friends.

“K-r-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee!” shrilled the Scouts.

But Rob took no notice; nor did he regard Jared’s look of hatred, oddly mixed with worry. Rob’s pitching bothered him. He wanted no more off that plate.

But whi-z-z-z-z-z-z! came another “cannon ball” like a high powered projectile burning up the atmosphere. Jared swung wildly an inch too high.

“Striker’s out!” came the call of Jared’s doom from the umpire.

It was a furiously angry youth that strode to the bench.

“Thought you were going to make ducks and drakes out of him, Jared?” grinned one of his fellow players.

“So I was. I was just trying him out,” grunted Jared disgustedly.

The next two batters couldn't handle Rob's pitching at all. The game began to look as if it might be retrieved after all.

“Blake! Blake! Blake!” chanted the crowd as Rob walked toward the batters' bench.

Merritt was first at bat for the Scouts in the ninth inning. Jared began to pitch with as good an imitation of Rob's speed as he could muster. Merritt let the first ball sing past him.

“Ball one.”

The second, also, went by in similar manner.

“Ball two!” sang out Sim in his high, nasal voice.

Jared pulled himself together. He sent the ball humming right over the home plate. Merritt swung at it and made a safe base hit to right field. Then came Hiram. He struck out. Jared and the Hamptonites began to feel better. Jared was still holding the Scouts down and they had a safe margin of runs.

Paul Perkins struck out this time. Then came Ernest Thompson, who dreamily submitted to the same process.

Rob Blake now came to the bat. His exhibition of pitching just previously earned him a round of applause. Jared looked positively bilious. He had actually been holding himself in reserve for Rob. It was his intention to shut him right out. Rob ignored Jared's first ball.

“Ball one!” was the cry.

“Ball two!” followed in rapid succession. Rob smiled easily.

Jared's dislike of the boy at the bat was making him irritable and uneasy.

But he rallied his skill and threw what looked like an easy pitch. Rob struck at it but fanned the empty air.

Jared grinned, the Hamptonites yelled and the umpire called.

—
“Strike one!”

“All right for you, Mister Casey at the bat,” snarled Jared, “watch out for this one.”

It came like a flash, a tricky, wavy curve. Rob swung with all his strength and – missed!

“Strike two!”

A groan went up from the Scout supporters. Their chances of victory looked slim indeed now.

“Wake up! You're in a trance!” scoffed Jared, grinning at Rob. “Get out of the straw.”

“The straw in the red barn!” suddenly flashed Rob, in a low, but far-reaching voice. It was pregnant with meaning and Jared turned white as death. He fumbled the ball with trembling fingers.

“W-w-what do you mean?” he managed to gasp.

“Play ball!” yelled the crowd impatiently.

Jared, his fright still on him, pitched. He made a wild fling. Rob trotted to first base. Merritt boomeranged to second.

Simon Jeffords got his base on balls, advancing Rob to second and Merritt to third. Everybody began to sit up and take renewed

notice. A home run now would add four to the Scout score. Could they get it? Jared had shown that he could hold them down. Could he still keep up his gait?

And now out strolled Tubby Hopkins. He paused first to insert a huge chunk of chewing gum in his capacious cheek and then, not noticing in the least the laughter and joking that greeted his appearance, he lounged to his place, his jaws moving rhythmically.

“It’s up to you, Tubby. Bring home the bacon!” some one yelled.

“He’s got the bacon with him,” shouted some other humorist. Jared fixed his eyes quizzically on Tubby.

“Like a bottle of anti-fat, kid?” he sneered; and then, “Oh, what I won’t do to you! How do you like ’em?”

Tubby stopped chewing an instant. His large eyes opened wide as if he had just heard Jared’s voice.

“Oh, I like ’em Panama fashion, if you’ve got any of those about you to-day,” he said with a cherubic smile.

Zang! came the ball. It was as swift as any that Jared had yet thrown. He would have liked to see it knock the disconcerting fat youth on the head. But it did no such thing. With an agility unsuspected except by those who knew him, Tubby swung viciously at the spheroid.

“Bin-go!” yelled the rooters.

Off into left field a hot liner whizzed its way.

“Go on!” shrieked the Eagles and their supporters, dancing up

and down in excitement.

Off darted Merritt from third. He shot across the home plate an instant later and scored amidst loud cheering. Hot after him flashed Rob, with Simon close behind. Excitement rose to a point where it was almost unbearable.

Tubby had shot like a stone from a sling the instant he made his hit. And now more like a steam roller the fat youth cavorted over the bases while the crowd went crazy. Pandemonium reigned.

“Home! Home! Home!” shrieked the raucous crowd in a frenzy.

Boys hugged each other and the Scouts danced up and down.

Tubby, with amazing speed, his short fat legs working like piston rods, flashed by first, second and third bases. The next instant a yell went up that split the air. A rotund form sky-hooted across the home plate and then, tripping up, went rolling like a tub of butter into the arms of Rob and his team-mates. Tubby had made one of the most sensational plays ever seen on the Hampton field, and foes as well as friends generously applauded the fat boy. But he paid no attention to the plaudits.

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