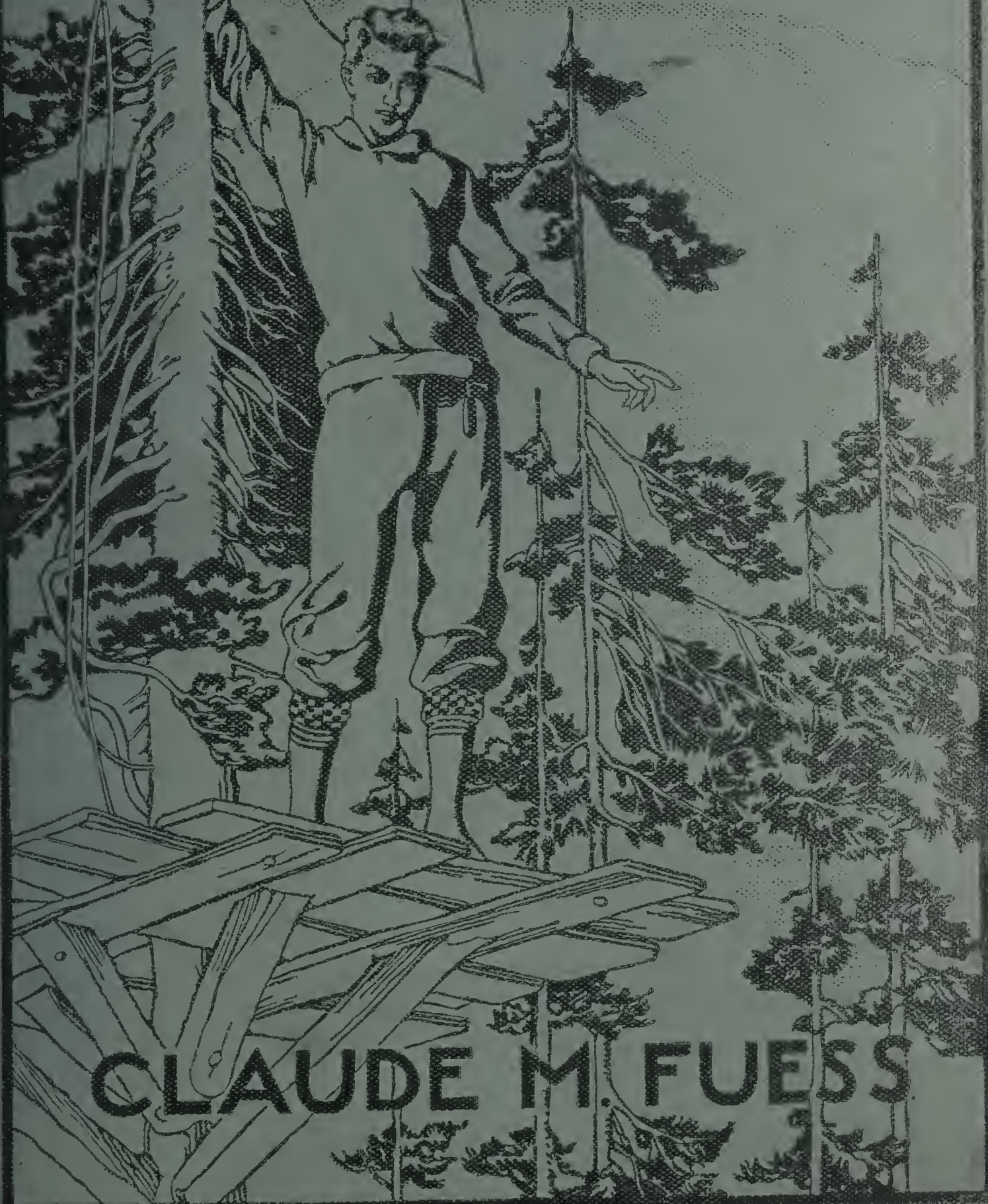


# PETER HAD COURAGE



CLAUDE M. FUESS



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DOTTERER

HERE THEY ALL THREW OFF THEIR BURDENS WITH SIGHS OF RELIEF.—Page 38.

# Peter Had Courage

A Story for Boys

By

CLAUDE M. FUESS

*Author of "All for Andover" and "The Andover Way"*

Illustrated by

LLOYD J. DOTTERER



BOSTON  
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

1929  
COPY 2



PZ7  
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PETER HAD COURAGE



Printed in U. S. A.

**Norwood Press**  
BERWICK & SMITH CO.  
NORWOOD, MASS.

SEP 20 '27 ✓

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Handwritten initials or signature.

*Affectionately Dedicated to  
My Nephews*





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# Peter Had Courage

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST FEAR

“ HI, Peter! ”

Young Peter Wadsworth, his round head just closely shaved at Chris Avery's "tonsonial parlors" in preparation for the approaching warm season, was sauntering along the chief thoroughfare of Deepwater village, carrying under his arm the two pounds of butter and the bag of salt which he had just bought for his mother at Burnet's grocery. It was a hot, sultry morning in late June, and the road was dry and dusty. As he heard a familiar voice, he stopped suddenly, and, looking around, saw a broad-shouldered, chunky youth in corduroy knickerbockers and khaki shirt running towards him, waving his arms wildly.

“ Hello, yourself! ” said Peter in reply, recognizing his friend, Aubrey Terry, who had been duly rechristened by his boy companions with the name of “ Leaky.” Leaky had a heavy shock of

coarse black pompadour hair, which, with his flattened nose and dark complexion, made him look like a descendant of Uncas or Sitting Bull. He was evidently a little older and stronger than Peter, but they exchanged salutations on terms of equality.

“ Say, Peter, what are you going to do to-day? Let’s go out to Bailey’s Pond for a swim. The water’s fine! ”

“ I guess I can do it all right. But I’ve got to mow the lawn this morning. I can’t get off till after lunch.”

“ Neither can I. I’ll bring Beady Bennett and stop for you and Gige on the way up.”

Leaky ran back to a rusty dented Ford, in which his father was waiting for him, and Peter walked slowly on, stopping reflectively now and then to gaze about or to greet a friend. To casual tourists, it must be confessed that Deepwater was just one more sleepy Central New York village which had seen better days. Motoring slowly through the business section, on the route which Peter was now taking, they would pass the dingy American Hotel, the Star Moving Picture Palace, Baldwin’s drug store and soda fountain with its fat proprietor always lounging in the



doorway, Nan Currier's millinery shop, its window adorned with depressing-looking hats, the brick Deepwater National Bank building, and the office of the *Deepwater Gazette*, and, with a scornful glance at the ugly Soldiers' Monument, would say to themselves, "What a hick town!" Although some of the broad side avenues, lined with stately elms, displayed fine old mansions and well-kept lawns, the passing visitor was more likely to be attracted by the row of loafers leaning against the stone wall in front of the library and commenting languidly but critically on the few passers-by. The salesman of shoes or vacuum cleaners did not need to be warned that this was a poor town for business; after one discouraged inspection, he took good care not to be stalled here for an evening. The solitary shoe factory of which Deepwater had boasted had long since breathed its last. Now the residents were mainly retired farmers from the surrounding countryside, who had moved into town to enjoy comfort after years of hard manual labor.

But Peter, as he walked, was not thinking of the industrial depression in his native village. To him the place was a paradise of delights. He loved his own home, with its flower garden and

shady orchard, at the western end of the settlement, on Wilmot Avenue. If he walked only a few hundred yards up the street and turned down a grassy lane, he could reach within five minutes a grove of tall cathedral pines. To the east was Tassel Hill, the highest point in the county, from which on clear mornings he could see the smoky city of Schuyler, twenty miles to the north. If he chose to ride his bicycle to the south, he might even skirt the edge of the gloomy Nine-Mile Swamp, or could turn off to the left, among the secluded hills, to Gorton Lake, the haunt of mighty pickerel and bullheads. Peter had little interest in the financial rating of Deepwater's merchants. What he cared about was the park, where he and his gang played "shinny" and listened to band concerts on long July evenings, or Bailey's Pond, on the banks of which he used to lie in the sun. There were spotted trout in the Big Creek, if only you were skilful enough to lure them out with rod and line, and there were faint trails through Osborne's woods to mysterious places known only to himself and his companions.

Peter's father was a physician, usually referred to in the village as "Doc." As a young alert

graduate of Amherst College and Harvard Medical School, he had opened an office in Deepwater, hoping to acquire some practical experience before he moved to a larger sphere of usefulness. Once there, he, as he expressed it, had never found time to move away, and he had remained for twenty years, marrying and raising a family: Peter, George, and their little sister, Vera, who has very little part in this story. Just why he had stayed, he would have been puzzled to explain. Possibly it was the consciousness that he was badly needed which led him to abandon his dreams of an international reputation as a bacteriologist and resign himself to doling out pills and powders, half wondering whether his efforts to cleanse the community were not futile. He had watched most of the active young fellows leave to seek more promising opportunities, while the indolent and the disabled and the poor lingered behind. There had been a period when Deepwater had had its famous citizens,—a Congressman, a popular novelist, even a Civil War general,—but now most of the residents were reconciled to obscurity. And yet Dr. Sidney Wadsworth did not complain; indeed he was rather proud of the position which he held, for, although



there were other medical men in Deepwater, it was he who was always called in when people were critically ill.

Everybody in Deepwater was acquainted with "Doc" Wadsworth's ruddy face, engaging smile, and mellow bass voice. His head was almost completely bald, except for a few stray wisps of reddish hair, the remnants of what had been, as he could prove by old photographs, a waving shock of auburn curls. He had a nervous, impetuous manner, and a quick habit of twisting his slender fingers, the result of abundant energy. In his practice he was untiring, but each August he insisted on taking his wife and children to an Adirondack camp which he had inherited and at which he stored up health for the other eleven months. Mrs. Wadsworth was a good-humored, motherly soul, constitutionally thin,—a living refutation of the doctrine, "Laugh and grow fat!" for she was chuckling most of the time, but still remained just bones and skin. Her happiest hours were spent in her home, with her children around her. Her husband was still to her an irrepressible scapegrace, who tracked mud into the hallway and left his shirts lying on the floor, and who needed to be taken care of like a baby. Perhaps

she was the only one who realized how much of a child at heart he really was.

Peter, at the age of ten, was a muscular boy, with chubby, freckle-spotted cheeks, large hands and feet, a broad, honest mouth, projecting ears, and a short turned-up nose, of the brand commonly known as "pug." His hair was so nearly red as to win him the title of "Brick Top" in some quarters,—although this nickname always meant a fight. On his pleasant countenance there was usually an expansive grin, and it was easy to believe, after a look into his blue eyes, that he was incapable of any deceit. Not that he wasn't full of mischief! He had a hand in every prank, and his teachers soon discovered that his apparently innocent smile concealed a dozen predatory projects. As a baby, he had been a victim of a painful and serious illness, from which it had taken him years to recover, and his mother still persisted in thinking him to be frail. In reality, however, he had completely outgrown his weakness, and his father, after a searching examination, pronounced him to be a fine physical specimen.

His younger brother, George,—who had been called "Gige" ever since he was old enough

to toddle about,—was decidedly different. He was thin and wiry, like his mother, with black hair and sallow complexion. He was less communicative than Peter and rather more serious. Peter seldom remembered an injury more than an hour or two; Gige would cherish it and stay sullen for days. Gige was brighter at his books and held first place in his classes almost without effort; Peter, although he was never low, had to work hard to keep up. Of course the two boys quarreled and even occasionally resorted to fist-cuffs, but, as they were less than two years apart in age, they enjoyed the same amusements and stood together against outsiders.

The world of which they were units was a genuine democracy. Peter and Gige knew every boy of their own ages in Deepwater, and made no distinctions because of color, clothes, or social standing. The son of the President of the Deepwater National Bank wore horn spectacles, talked in a high squeaky voice, and was commonly called "Sissy" Goodwin. Peter despised him. On the other hand, the heir of the negro janitor of the High School, "Rastus" Jackson, played the banjo gloriously and was one of Gige's regular playmates. It was a society in which each mem-



ber was measured by what he could do,—not by how much money he had or what his parents were.

By the time he was ten, Peter Wadsworth was already accustomed to bruises and minor injuries. During the preceding winter he had fallen off a “double-runner,” sliding down the Mill Street Hill, and had sprained his ankle badly. A few weeks later he had slipped from a precarious perch on top of an icy hydrant and had cut a great gash in his forehead, reaching home with his face covered with blood. To such accidents, however, he paid little attention, for he looked upon them as an inevitable part of life’s daily routine. He didn’t need outing classes and summer camps, with highly paid counsellors, to instruct him how to take care of himself in emergencies; indeed he and his coterie would have resented any insinuation that they could not be trusted even in the wilds of the Canadian Northwest, in the “great open spaces, where men are men.” As for fear, he as yet hardly knew what it was. He had never been whipped by his parents, and they had tried to bring him up completely unafraid. The goblins and bogey men which fill the minds of so many children had no terrors for him.

It was this kind of a healthy boy that sat on the front steps of the Wadsworth house, later on that same day, waiting for Leaky Terry to come along. Both Peter and Gige, having outgrown nursery control, were allowed to make excursions into the surrounding country. So it was that Mrs. Wadsworth raised no objection when they announced at luncheon that the lawn was all mowed and that they were going out to Bailey's Pond.

"All right, boys," she replied. "But remember that you haven't learned to swim, and keep out of the deep places."

"We will, Mother. But I'm going to be a regular Johnny Weismuller before this summer's over. I'll bet I could swim now if I had to."

"Well, don't try any experiments until you're sure," she cautioned. "It's better to be alive than at the bottom of the pond."

It was not long before Leaky appeared, accompanied by Beady Bennett, a delicate-looking boy, with a high forehead, horn spectacles, a long scrawny neck, and spindle legs, who was an authority on Indian customs and woods life. The four of them started off, hatless and coatless, on a slow dog-trot which brought them in just a few

minutes to Bailey's Pond, a small sheet of water, about a hundred yards long and thirty wide, with a dam at one end, near which it must have been about six feet deep. There were trees on all sides, and it was so secluded as to make an ideal "swimming hole." In later days, when he had seen Lake Como and Lake Louise and beautiful Dublin Lake at the foot of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire, Peter could never forget Bailey's Pond. It was there that the love of water entered his soul, and he could never afterwards see the shimmering surface of a lake through the pines without being stirred profoundly. Once he spent a long summer in the White Mountains, at Sugar Hill, where he could look across a wide valley to stately Mount Lafayette; but he cared little for the view, simply because there was no water, running or still, within his range of vision. As a middle-aged man, he could feel his heart beat faster as he stepped out of his cabin on Daicey's Pond, in Maine, with Mount Katahdin looming in front of him, and saw the water before him, cool and sparkling in the crimson dawn.

Bailey's Pond, when he revisited it years later, proved to be an insignificant half-stagnant pool,

filled with eel-grass and not very clean,—certainly not a sanitary place for a bath. But in Peter's boyhood it seemed like a noble expanse of water, the depths of which were filled with mystery. You could drop a worm-baited hook at the dam outlet and pull up bullheads one after another, with occasionally a small speckled trout. You could put together a raft of small logs and pole yourself to the narrow inlet among the waving cat-tails at the far end, where turtles used to lie sunning themselves on the flat stones, and where you could catch frogs with a bent pin fancifully decorated with red flannel. Or you could stretch yourself on the sand and let yourself get gloriously baked and tanned. When Peter read Tennyson's *Lotus Eaters* in college, he was carried back to the long July afternoons which he had spent on the shores of Bailey's Pond.

With the pond in sight, Peter began pulling off his shirt, and, when he reached the dam, he tore off his clothes with almost a single motion, taking care to leave them piled in a spot where he could watch them lest some malicious enemy soak the sleeves and tie them into knots.

"Come on, fellows," he shouted, as he dashed



along the trail to a projecting point of land near which the water was shallow. Although Peter and Gige could not swim, they were fearless and always ready to take a dare. Leaky and Beady, both good swimmers, plunged from the diving-board, at least four feet above the surface of the pond; and meanwhile Peter had found a broad, thick plank and was lying flat upon it, paddling himself with his hands like a side-wheel steamer. For a while he was content to float about among the little coves and among the lily-pads, where he could have stepped up to his knees in rich oozy mud. Then the noise and excitement at the other end proved irresistible, and, although he was not usually so venturesome, he made his way slowly into a section of the pond not far from the dam, where the water was well over his head. Gige meanwhile had returned to the shore to lie in the sun, and Peter lay drifting about, his hands flapping idly, watching with envy and admiration the older boys as they turned graceful somersaults from the spring-board. Suddenly a figure rose from the water in front of him and grasped the forward end of the plank for support. It was Fatty Morris, a fourteen-year-old boy who weighed almost two hundred pounds, and who

was trying to rest on the object nearest within his reach. Of course the board dipped, and Peter, surprised by the shock, lost his balance and rolled off into the deepest part of the pond. He promptly sank, but came up quickly and reached for the plank, but it was just beyond his finger ends. Then fear struck at his heart! He struggled violently and gasped painfully for air. But in spite of all that he could do, he felt himself sinking, sinking! Once more, with a tremendous effort, he fought his way to the top and shouted in a gurgling voice for help. Then things passed beyond his recollection!

Meanwhile everybody had been confused. Fatty Morris himself had noticed Peter's plight, but had stupidly struck out for shore. It was Gige who, standing on the bank, was the first to give an excited yell, "Look at Peter! He's drowning! He can't swim!" At once the attention of some of the older boys was attracted. One of them, clumsy "Ikey" Warren, shouted wildly, "Grab him by the hair! Grab him by the hair!"—a somewhat ridiculous bit of advice when it is recalled that Peter had just had his hair so thoroughly shorn that he was as bare on top as an escaped convict. But at least one on-



looker kept his presence of mind. Leaky Terry, who had been talking with two or three others on the bank, turned to see what was going on, and, seeing the situation, jumped in almost before his companions realized what had happened. In two or three strokes he had reached Peter and had caught him under the armpits, holding him up from behind while he managed to tread water. Fortunately for his rescuer, Peter had now lost consciousness and could not grapple with Leaky as drowning people often do. In a few seconds other assistants were near, and eager hands were extended to the two boys. When they were drawn to shore, Peter dropped, apparently lifeless, on the gravel.

Here was an ideal occasion for the display of the methods of resuscitation learned in Red Cross First Aid classes at school. There were numerous volunteers: some of them worked Peter's arms frantically up and down; others tried to turn him over and smack him lustily between the shoulders; a few insisted that his stomach should be kneaded. But before he was battered into pulp by the pounding which he was receiving, he opened his eyes, struggled with his rescuers, and said, with the little breath which he could muster,

“Say, leave me alone, will you? Quit punching me!” He then slowly sat up and looked around while the spectators watched him curiously to see what he would do or say.

“What’s the matter with you brutes?” he asked, bewildered for a moment by the crowd of which he was the center. “Oh, I remember! I fell off that plank into the water. I guess I’d have drowned if somebody hadn’t hauled me out.”

“That was Leaky,” said the round-eyed Gige, overjoyed at Peter’s recovery and eager to be heard. “He’s the one that dived in and pulled you to shore.”

“Much obliged, Leaky,” responded Peter, getting up a little unsteadily and holding out a hand to the embarrassed hero.

“It wasn’t anything,” muttered Leaky, as he seized Peter’s fingers gingerly.

“It was my fault, anyhow,” interposed Fatty Morris. “I tipped the plank over.”

“I’ll tell you one thing, Peter,” added Leaky. “You ought to learn to swim before you go out over your head.”

“I’m going to,” replied Peter resolutely. “Just watch me!”

It was characteristic of Peter that, even after

his disturbing adventure, he did not go back home,—in fact that idea never even occurred to him. Instead he lay for a while watching Ikey Warren, Charlie Webster, Fatty Morris, and some of the bigger boys who were amusing themselves by tossing the smaller fellows into the water and then plunging in after them. They would not have touched Peter, of course, but, after he had rested and regained his courage, he said to Ikey, “Why don’t you take me? I want to try that, too.”

“I guess you’ve swallowed enough of Bailey’s Pond for one day, young fellow,” replied Ikey, looking him over.

“No, I haven’t. I want to learn to swim. Give me a toss, won’t you, Ikey?”

“All right! You’ve got the right stuff in you,” said Ikey. Then he and Charlie Webster seized the youngster, one by the ankles and the other by the wrists, and swung him back and forth between them. “One! Two! Three!” they counted, and at the “Three!” out sailed Peter in a curve over the water, striking on his back with a resounding splash. Two or three excellent swimmers had meanwhile placed themselves close by, ready to assist him when he came to the surface.

As his head emerged, they reached out helping arms. "Let me alone," he gasped. "Let me alone! I can swim. I'll do it myself." Sure enough, he started off, paddling "dog fashion," making progress very slowly and working too hard, as inexperienced swimmers do, but nevertheless keeping up and actually moving forward a little with every downward shove of his arms. By a mighty effort of wind and muscle he reached the bank, about ten feet off, puffing like a porpoise. "Hooray!" he cried, as he drew himself up by an overhanging willow. "I can swim!" He had conquered the element which had nearly submerged him.

At dinner that evening Peter simply announced that he had learned to swim, omitting all the preliminary details of his afternoon adventures. Later in the week, however, the story was told at the Dalton Club, the town's association of male gossips, where Dr. Wadsworth happened to overhear it. When he had a convenient opportunity, he said to Peter, "Why didn't you tell me that Aubrey Terry saved your life?"

"I don't know," stammered Peter, looking a little surprised and ashamed. "I was afraid Mother might be worried."



“Weren’t you frightened, dear?” asked Mrs. Wadsworth, with a quaver in her voice.

“I sure was,” confessed the boy. “Pretty nearly scared to death.”

“But he went right in again,” piped up Gige, who had no intention of having his brother’s courage minimized.

“Why did you do that, son?” inquired Dr. Wadsworth.

“Well, Dad, I just hated to think that I could be scared by a little water. I don’t believe I was ever really frightened before. I had shivers run up and down my back every time I thought of going back into that pond. But I knew that, if I didn’t, I’d be a coward all my life. And so I did! And, Dad, I can swim a side-stroke now, and dive and float and tread water and everything!”

Before the summer closed, Peter was doing crude backward dives from the end of the spring-board and floating lazily on top of the water as if he had been amphibious. His process of instruction may not have been orthodox, but it was effective, and he soon lost all his earlier fear. With this inspiration, even Gige mastered the simpler strokes and dared to plunge in with the

others. Within a year, Peter could jump into the lake with an old suit of clothes on and then undress himself piece by piece, putting each article of raiment in a canoe as he removed it, until he was stark naked. Often at Lake Woodhull, where Dr. Wadsworth's camp was located, Peter would slip into the water before breakfast and swim out to Snake Island, a third of a mile off, and back again, just to get up an appetite for bacon and griddle-cakes. Dangerous? Perhaps! But Peter did not need to be told that people who avoid danger, and shrink from it, never know how to confront it when it appears.



## CHAPTER II

### THE LOG CABIN

NOT long after his eleventh birthday, which came in January, Peter, as a result of some reading, decided to organize a secret society to be called "The Followers of Deerfoot," named after that magnificent Indian chieftain who, it was said, could run all day without becoming weary and could kill a squirrel with a rifle at a distance of a hundred yards. Gige, after pleading vigorously, was allowed to join. The other members were Harold Webster,—better known as "Hal,"—Charlie's younger brother, a slender, light-haired boy, with a fascinating smile and an audacity far beyond his physical strength; Bill Emmons, a tall athletic lad, a little older than the others, who had come from New York City to spend a year with relatives in Deepwater and was, in many respects, the most sophisticated of the "gang"; little Jack Goodhue, the son of the richest man in town, and a lad of unquenchable curiosity, always prying into out-of-the-way

places; and Beady Bennett, who was indispensable because of his wide knowledge. After some violent disputes, Peter had been elected Grand Sachem and had insisted, with Beady's support, that the members should sign their names in red ink to a solemn oath of secrecy, couched in resounding polysyllables.

As spring drew near, it was recognized as essential that the Followers of Deerfoot should possess a lodge of their own, something more private than the loft of the Wadsworth garage, where the organization had been perfected. Just beyond Bailey's Pond was a stretch of forest belonging to Senator Webster, the father of Charlie and Hal, and bordering on his extensive estate. The old statesman had once been an important figure in New York State politics,—indeed had just barely failed to become Governor,—but he had now retired to meditate in his old age on the dramatic incidents of his past life. He was a dignified, kind-hearted old gentleman, whose presence in Deepwater still lent that village a certain prestige, and the *Gazette* always mentioned his name in an unctuous manner as if to say, "Look what our town can produce!" It was on a corner of his domain, then, that the Followers of Deerfoot,

after securing his consent, proposed to erect their permanent home. After much argument, they found a spot where a spreading pine rose more than a hundred feet into the air. At the very top Peter and his friends built a platform, hauling the necessary boards up by means of a long rope. The tip of the pine was carefully peeled and turned into a flagpole, the pennon on top of which could be seen clearly from the upper windows of the Webster mansion, a third of a mile off.

At the base of the lofty tree the boys undertook to construct a log cabin with their own hands. At shoveling sidewalks or beating carpets Peter and Gige were dilatory laborers, but they were tireless at the task of felling poplars. For hours they would toil at some thick log, until their hands were blistered and their backs were lame, working it into the desired shape and length. Then each had to be notched in accordance with the instructions in *The Boy Craftsman* and fitted into its right position.

It was no easy job to wield an axe or a hatchet all the afternoon on humid July days, but before school opened in the fall, the Followers of Deerfoot had a presentable habitation about ten feet

by six in size, with a flat roof made of boards covered with tar-paper,—the last article having been contributed by Jack Goodhue, the club magnate. The interstices,—the boys called them cracks,—between the logs were stuffed with moss, in what was declared by Beady Bennett to be the true frontier fashion. There was no window in the original design, and, when the members tried to light a fire in the ancient stove which they had rescued from a dumping-ground, they merely succeeded in almost strangling themselves with smoke. It was the thoughtful Beady who pointed out the advantages of a stovepipe. So a hole was cut in the roof, and, when Bill Emmons donated a section of stovepipe found in his uncle's cellar, the equipment was complete.

On wet days the gang would meet inside and talk over plans for the future or play checkers or sharpen their knives and hatchets. Sometimes the scholarly Beady would lie by the entrance reading some tale of outdoor life, for the members had collected a small library which filled a shelf on the wall. But the others were more active, and there was always something to do,—wood to chop, a leak in the roof to be mended, a lock and staple to be put on the door to keep out intruders,



or a new trail to be cleared. When all else failed or the Followers of Deerfoot were tired with the day's work, they could sit around and enjoy the sweet bliss of their untrammelled freedom.

It was a notable occasion when Mrs. Wadsworth, after repeated importunities, consented to allow her sons to sleep out in the cabin for a night. They had all been at Lake Woodhull for the month of August, and the parents had noticed with satisfaction the ability of the boys to handle themselves on camping expeditions. When they returned to Deepwater, she had confidence that they could be trusted; and her influence in such matters was decisive with the mothers of the other Followers of Deerfoot. Thus it was that, early on a Saturday morning in September, the gang assembled at the Wadsworth residence,—the two Wadsworths, Beady Bennett, Bill Emmons, and Jack Goodhue. Hal Webster planned to meet them at the rendezvous.

Each lad had a good-sized knapsack fitting over his shoulders, with a rolled-up blanket on top. The careful mothers had made certain that the food supply was adequate, and Mrs. Wadsworth had added a tin pail packed with hard-boiled eggs (in case the fire did not prove successful),

some cold chicken and tongue, and countless sandwiches, in addition to the bacon and oatmeal and cocoa which the campers planned to cook.

“Oh, Mother, we don’t need all this stuff,” protested Gige. “It’s awfully heavy, and besides we’ll never eat it.”

“You may be glad to have that pail of food later on,” responded the practical physician’s wife. “I never heard that there was any custom requiring campers to starve themselves when they didn’t need to.”

Hanging to the belt of each Wadsworth was a long shiny knife in a leather sheath, a gift on the preceding Christmas. Dr. Wadsworth had also made sure that each was provided with a water-proof match-box, a flash-light, and a pocket compass, besides a slab of milk-chocolate for use in emergencies only. As they trudged off up the street, each boy felt like a Daniel Boone or Kit Carson about to penetrate into the wilderness, and they all stood up very erect under their packs as old Lawyer Weller passed them with a “Hello, there, young pioneers!” Peter was aware before he had gone a hundred yards that his pack was heavy, containing, as it did, some kitchen utensils which his mother had placed in his



charge, such as a frying-pan, a kettle, and some forks and spoons. But nothing could have made him admit that it was too much of a burden for him, and he plodded along until Beady Bennett, his forehead dripping with perspiration, suggested at the gate to Slaughter Lane (so called because it led eventually to the village slaughter-house) that they had better rest for a moment. Not until then did Peter stop, lean up against the fence, let his knapsack drop on the top rail, and wipe his glistening brow with the large red handkerchief which he wore around his neck, in imitation of the cowboys about whom he had read.

“I’m glad that we don’t have to walk fifteen miles!” ejaculated Beady, who had thrown himself on the ground, pack and all, and was lying on his back, puffing vigorously.

“What’s the matter, you poor feeble thing?” asked Jack Goodhue, who, as the smallest of the party, had been assigned nothing extra to carry. He was a talkative little fellow, whom the others considered rather “fresh.” “This is nothing! I’ll bet that Dan’l Boone could go thirty miles a day without a rest, carrying all that you’ve got and a heavy rifle besides.”

“Yes, but he was a full-grown man,” answered

Beady, who was not to be disputed by a mere child like Jack. "Besides he didn't have to go to school the way we do most of the year. All he did was to live outdoors and hunt and fish and kill Indians. No wonder he was strong!"

"Well, if we stay here much longer gassing we'll never reach the cabin," interjected Peter, as he hitched his pack on his shoulders, climbed over the bars of the wooden gate, and stepped off down the grassy lane. The others followed his example with obvious reluctance, little Jack being the last. Not much farther along, Peter turned to the left into a woodland path, which wound in and out through the trees and then across the narrow creek which flowed into Bailey's Pond. In a few moments they came to a cleared area, and the cabin,—their home,—stood before them. Here they all threw off their burdens with sighs of relief, and proceeded to make a preliminary inspection of their property.

"Here's the gun all right," announced Peter, drawing out an air-rifle from a hiding-place under one of the outer logs of the cabin.

"And I've got the flag," added Beady.

"Why, where's the stovepipe?" inquired Jack.

They all stopped to look towards the roof, from which ordinarily at least a foot of rusty stovepipe was protruding.

“I’ll bet that Ikey Warren has hidden it,” said Beady. “He swore last week that he’d get even with us in some way for tying up his shirt when he was in swimming.”

“Well, it’s gone, anyhow,” declared Bill Emmons, who had been inspecting the interior. “Somebody has broken our padlock and carried off the stovepipe. And some of the books are scattered all over the floor. What a dirty trick!”

“How are we going to do any cooking?” inquired Jack Goodhue, ready with a question as usual.

“That’s easy enough,” answered Peter. “We can get along with an outdoor fire exactly as well,—maybe better. It’s a lot more like what real campers would do, anyhow.” As the Grand Sachem of the Followers of Deerfoot, he felt the necessity of asserting himself as the most intrepid and independent of the gang. It was one way of maintaining his prestige, and he felt the responsibility of leadership.

“Anyhow, I guess I’ll run up the flag and let Hal know we’re here,” said Beady, as he started

up the tall pine, clambering from branch to branch like Tarzan of the Apes until he had arrived at a lofty perch far above their heads. The others meanwhile occupied themselves in searching for the lost stovepipe and in putting their treasures in order. Each one had his own wooden bow and blunted arrows, a wooden tomahawk, and a rope lasso, thus combining the standard equipment of the cowboy and the redskin. Peter loaded the magazine of the repeating air-rifle with shot and aimed experimentally at a near-by birch. While they were thus engaged, they heard a faint yodel in the distance, with a peculiar tricky quaver. Each one sent back an answer, Beady from his watch-tower and the others from their station on the ground. Gradually the call came nearer and then, down a path from behind a clump of grey poplars, came a tall figure bounding along as if his soles had springs in them and whooping in a shrill voice.

“Hi, Hal!” shouted Peter in greeting.  
“How’s the boy?”

“Great!” replied the newcomer, now revealed as the missing Hal Webster, with his curly yellow hair, narrow shoulders, and long arms. “How’s Sitting Bull, the murderous chieftain of the



Sioux?" Never having been corrected in his pronunciation, he called it "Sooks."

"Fine and dandy! But I guess that brother of yours and Ikey Warren have pinched our stove-pipe."

"So that's what they were up to!" commented Hal. "Charlie told me at breakfast that we'd suffer for tying up his clothes, and maybe this is what he and Ikey have done to get even."

"Well, if he and his crowd come around here to-day, I'm going to turn the air-gun on them," threatened Peter.

"They'll be around, all right," said Hal. "I heard Ikey talking it all over with Charlie yesterday. And Leaky Terry and Fatty Morris will be with them. Leaky has always been sore because we didn't ask him to join us."

"Oh, don't let's worry about that now," cried Beady, who had descended from the platform and craved excitement. "Let's go swimming. I'll be first man at the dam." Off he dashed, the others at his heels, down the winding path to Bailey's Pond. The advantage which he had gained was decisive, and he was at the spring-board, with his shirt half off, before even the long-legged Hal could catch up with him. There, in the cool wa-

ter, the Followers of Deerfoot idled through the morning until the pangs of hunger began to disturb them, and, drawing on their trousers and shirts, they strolled slowly back to the cabin, somewhat less spirited than they had been two hours before. The time had now arrived for the experiment in cooking. Beady and Jack Goodhue collected some rocks and constructed an outdoor fireplace,—not without some excitement when Jack uncovered a nest of small garter-snakes under a stone and promptly took to flight.

“Come back here, you baby!” shouted Beady. “They’re just as harmless as turtles or frogs.”

“I won’t go near them!” exclaimed Jack. “I hate snakes. They’re all poisonous. I sha’n’t come back while they’re there.”

And he refused to help further until Beady, who loved natural history and all living insects and reptiles, piled the little snakes into a basket and dumped them out in a spot many yards away from the cabin. Then Jack came cautiously back, and the fireplace rapidly took shape. Hal and Bill Emmons, meanwhile, had gathered some dry birch bark and chipped some pieces from a rotting log. Soon there was a roaring fire, and Peter, who had often watched his mother at work in

the kitchen, prepared to cook eggs and bacon. He filled a frying-pan with bacon, sliced thin, and, after the blaze had died down, managed to get near the improvised oven. The sizzling meat gave out a pungent odor which interested all the spectators, and they were only mildly alarmed when Peter, in breaking eggs into the pan, managed to empty the fluid contents of two of them on the ground. Eventually the remaining eggs were properly opened, and Peter, judging from appearances that the cooking was finished, took hold of the handle to remove the frying-pan. The others were standing ready with their tin plates, like the members of an army mess. But Peter had forgotten that the pan was hot. Just as he was lifting it up, the heat struck his hand. With a howl of pain, he dropped the frying-pan, bacon, eggs, and all, right on top of the glowing embers. The meal was irretrievably ruined, and a groan of despair, mingled with imprecations, arose from the hungry Followers of Dearfoot.

“ Oh, you jackass! ” wailed Hal.

“ You colossal idiot! ” added Bill.

“ Peter, you’re a clumsy galoot! ” continued Gige, exercising the right of criticism to which any younger brother is entitled.

“ Oh, dry up, will you? ” responded Peter, still sucking at his scorched fingers. “ I’d like to see any one of you handle a hot thing like that. I pretty nearly burned my hand to the bone. You’re a fine bunch of kickers,—letting me do all the work and then complaining! ”

“ Well, you know it is rather a fix,” said Bill. “ What are we going to eat? There aren’t any more eggs, and I could devour a raw fish, fins, bones, and all.”

“ I wonder what Mother put in that pail? ” said Gige, thoughtfully.

“ I’d forgotten all about that! Let’s look! ” said Peter, rushing to take it from the pile and remove the cover. He had scorned it when his mother had placed it in his hands, but now he opened eagerly a number of packages neatly done up in oiled paper.

“ Look here, fellows,” cried Beady, who was watching the process. “ Here’s a whole lot of hard-boiled eggs! ”

“ Chicken sandwiches, too! ” put in Jack.

“ Say, this is wonderful! ” added Hal, after stretching out his hand for a sandwich and taking a huge crescent-shaped bite. “ Your mother is a corker! ”



From that heavy and bulky pack of his, Peter now produced some bottles of ginger ale and root beer. No one asked for tumblers. Each tribesman pulled off the tin cap by the aid of a convenient stump and then proceeded to imbibe the contents in the most primitive of styles, with mouth gaping wide and bottle turned upside down. The drink was warm, but nobody minded that. It was liquid, at any rate, and it tasted good, especially when it washed down chicken sandwiches.

“Believe me or not, I’m full up,” groaned Gige blissfully, as he struggled with his fifth egg.

“We’d better hang on to what’s left of the sandwiches,” suggested Bill. “We may need them for supper and even for breakfast if Peter keeps on upsetting the frying-pan.”

Peter directed a withering glance towards his critic, but could think of nothing to say which would be sufficiently scathing. Instead he lay down on the packed pine-needles and gave himself up to the delightful meditation which accompanies a full stomach. The others also were disinclined to energetic effort, and for half an hour the woods were quiet except for the occasional cry of a blue jay or the voices of the Followers

of Deerfoot as they chatted idly about their afternoon plans. Then the peace was broken by loud shouts coming from a point not very far off.

“There’s Ikey Warren and his gang,” said Peter, suddenly sitting up. “I knew that they’d be here before long. We’d better get away or they will try to beat us up. Where can we go?”

## CHAPTER III

### AN ORDEAL BY FIRE

IF there must be a villain in this story, it will have to be Ikey Warren, the chief persecutor of the Followers of Deerfoot. Ikey, who was at this time about thirteen,—just enough older than Peter to feel himself very much superior,—was a rather sluggish, ungainly lad, slightly bow-legged, of undeveloped mentality, who found his most exhilarating pleasure in tormenting boys smaller than himself. The son of the janitor of the town hall, he wore ragged clothes, and, after May first, he went barefoot all summer long. He was awkward, but very strong, and no one of the Followers of Deerfoot had dared to meet him in a square fight. Being naturally a bully, he spent most of his spare time in devising trouble for Peter and his gang. Somehow Peter seemed to be constantly coming into contact with Ikey, and he usually bore some black and blue spots which

were the result of an encounter. It is unnecessary to add that Peter hated the very sight of this formidable enemy.

On this particular afternoon, Ikey, who had some qualities of leadership, had persuaded Charlie Webster, Leaky Terry, Fatty Morris, and Sliver Fox,—all fellows of his own age and size,—to join him in making an attack on the Followers of Deerfoot, and it was Ikey and his friends whom Peter had heard coming down the path from the Webster home.

“We’re going to catch it now,” cried Jack Goodhue, panic-stricken. On one previous occasion he had been captured and ducked in the pond until he thought his breath would never come back.

“I can hear Charlie’s voice,” said Hal, as the noise increased. “The whole bunch must be coming. Let’s duck inside the cabin where we’ll be safe.”

Like a flock of frightened sheep, the boys rushed for the cabin door and dove inside just as Ikey and his gang came into view.

“There they are, the little critters!” shouted Ikey in his deep bass voice. “Come on, my brave men, we’ll get them now!”



He and the others dashed up, only to stop abruptly as they saw Peter kneeling behind the threshold with a wooden hatchet in his hand, looking ready to smite any assailant.

“Come along, you big bullies!” he said without flinching. “I’ll knock the first fellow over the head. You needn’t think you’re going to spoil our fun to-day.”

Peter was so well armed and occupied such a strategic position that Ikey called his band together for consultation, the five of them standing in close conclave, like Satan and his fallen angels, always with a watchful eye on the door. Finally, after much whispering and shaking of heads, they withdrew, as if unwilling to continue the attack against such odds. Observing them as they disappeared to the rear of the cabin, Peter spoke to his comrades, “Keep absolutely still, fellows! They’ve got some scheme in their minds, but I can’t tell exactly what it is. Can’t you make a peep-hole in the back, Hal, and see what’s going on?”

For a short period, while Hal tried to poke his way with his knife through the densely-packed moss, the prisoners made no sound except for an occasional hoarse remark from the two smaller

lads, Gige and Jack. Then Beady, whose senses were extraordinarily acute, said, "Don't you smell smoke?"

Hal sniffed for a second or two, and then replied, "Yes, there's something burning."

"It's probably just our fire outside," said Bill Emmons.

"No," answered Peter, looking through the door. "That blaze was out long ago. It comes from somewhere else."

"There it is!" said Jack Goodhue, pointing to a corner of the cabin. "Those bullies have set fire to the house. Can't you see the little puffs of smoke coming in through that hole? They've lighted the moss in the cracks, and we'll have to get out!"

The others, gazing in the direction of Jack's finger, could see that he was telling the truth.

"What can we do?" wailed Gige, who was easily terrified. "If we run out now, they'll capture us, and if we stay here, we're going to be roasted alive!"

"Maybe the stuff won't burn," suggested Bill Emmons, the one consistent optimist of the party. "It's damp, anyhow, and the logs are all green." But even he could not help recognizing that their

quarters were filling with thick smoke and were slowly becoming decidedly uncomfortable if not unendurable.

“ I guess we'll have to make a dash for it,” concluded Peter, after a careful survey of the situation. At that very moment he saw the five gleeful conspirators outside directly in front of the door, carrying ropes with which they evidently intended to bind their victims.

“ Come out, you shrimps! ” shouted Charlie Webster, delighted at the discomfiture of the Followers of Deerfoot. “ Come out, or you'll be roasted to a crisp! ”

A decision had to be reached very soon, for the small cabin was becoming altogether too hot and smoky for comfort. There was the additional danger that the tar-paper on the roof might ignite at any moment. Peter consequently resolved that the time had arrived for a desperate rush to safety. Without abandoning his post or indicating that anything unusual was about to happen, he issued a few whispered instructions to his loyal adherents. Then, without any warning, the six boys leaped rapidly out, headed by Peter. As they appeared, a whole fusillade of weapons was hurled in their direction, and Beady Bennett fell

as if struck down by a bullet. Seeing him drop, his companions halted, and the older gang, wondering what had occurred, ceased their attack. Beady sat up, the blood pouring from a cut over his eye, and Ikey Warren, alarmed at this casualty, stood over and said roughly, "What's the matter, you cry-baby? What are you howling that way for?"

"I'm not howling! Leave me alone! I'm all right!" sobbed Beady, the tears mingling with the blood on his face. But Peter, stepping to his side, saw that his friend had received a long, ragged-looking gash.

"Get some water, will you?" he said in an authoritative voice to Jack Goodhue. "Hurry, we need it right away!" Then he took out a clean handkerchief, which he carried in an inner pocket, and, wiping off the blood, saw that the cut, ugly though it was, was fairly straight with no rough edges.

"You're a sweet gang of thugs," he said contemptuously to Ikey, who was standing, silent and nervous, not knowing exactly how to behave. "Look here," he added, picking up a triangular piece of glass from the ground. "One of you brutes threw that. Why, you're a regular bunch



of assassins! Why didn't you bring along a stick of dynamite and do the job up in the right way?"

"Gosh, Peter, I didn't know there was any glass in the mud I threw,—honest, I didn't! I didn't mean to hurt the kid. I'm sorry!"

"Being sorry won't do much good now," commented Peter. Just then Jack returned with a kettle of water from Bailey's Pond, and Peter, who inherited some of his father's deftness with his fingers, bathed the wound carefully. Meanwhile Ikey and his band, seizing a convenient opportunity, sneaked quietly away as if rather ashamed of their part in the affair. Upon examination, Peter could see that the wound was more bloody than dangerous. He had with him in his knapsack a small first-aid kit, in which he found some antiseptic and a roll of gauze bandage. Soon Beady, who had suffered very little pain at any stage of the proceedings, was walking around like a slightly damaged battle hero, the outward evidences of his disaster making him pleasingly conspicuous.

While this surgical work was going on, Hal and the others had been extinguishing the smouldering moss and repairing the ruin caused by the conflagration,—which fortunately had not been

blazing long enough to do much real harm. This business of rehabilitation having been concluded, the six boys held a conclave to consider plans of revenge.

“I wish that we could get even with that Ikey Warren,” began Hal, expressing a thought which was in the minds of all. “He’s the one who is responsible. The others just followed him.”

“If we could only separate him from the others,” continued Peter thoughtfully, “we could make him suffer, and the rest of his gang couldn’t help him out.”

This remark was the prelude to others, and before long a plot had been prepared which was at once put into operation. The six Followers of Deerfoot, with Beady in the rear, bandage and all, moved stealthily down the trail to Bailey’s Pond, where their enemies had gone for a swim. There was a large Saturday afternoon crowd at the dam, but, looking from their hiding-place behind a clump of bushes, Peter and his friends could see Ikey walking about like a monarch. Then, leaving the others in ambush, little Jack Goodhue, with his face as innocent as a baby doll’s, stepped out and walked casually up to Ikey. No one paid any attention to Jack, and he

was completely unobserved as he said, "Ikey, could you come up and see Beady a minute?"

"What's the matter?" asked Ikey, his eyes turning towards the little fellow.

"I don't know, but he'd just like to talk with you."

"All right, I'll come right along."

And so Ikey, disturbed at this message and fearing that something serious might have happened, followed Jack down the path. He was entirely naked, and the stones cut his bare feet so badly that, after he had walked fifty yards, he said to Jack: "Guess I'll go back and get my shoes. I'll be lame if I don't."

He turned towards the pond, and just then a familiar voice said, "Oh, no, you don't!" and five sturdy little figures leaped upon him simultaneously from a thick covert near the path. Ikey instinctively screamed for help, but his cries were smothered by two very dirty hands held over his mouth. By sheer weight of numbers he was dragged to the ground and held down in spite of his violent struggles.

"Gr-r-r-r!" he gurgled, helplessly endeavoring to break away or at least to let his companions know of his predicament.

“Gag his mouth, Hal,” said Beady, handing him a wad of old cloth, which was stuffed relentlessly down the victim’s throat. It smelled of kerosene, and was very unpleasant to the taste. Then little Gige, with a feeling very like rapture, tied Ikey’s feet together with a piece of rope, and lashed his wrists tightly behind his back. When this job was done, Ikey was trussed most effectively and could only writhe in despair and glare with baleful eyes at his captors.

“Now let’s carry him farther away where nobody will bother us,” ordered Peter, and they all bent down to lift the helpless body. With no small difficulty and much labor, they transported the thoroughly alarmed Ikey back into the forest to a clump of tall birch-trees, where, standing him upright, they proceeded to bind him with stout cords to one of the larger trunks so that he could barely move a muscle. There he was, without a stitch of clothing, tied fast to a tree, with the flies and mosquitoes already commencing to buzz around him.

“Let the torture begin!” shouted the exultant Beady, smiling grimly at his foe. Then, with a piece of burnt wood which he had picked up from the fire, he smeared the outraged Ikey’s



face with charcoal, imprinting also strange symbols on his bare chest and arms. "How do you like that, you glass-thrower?" he asked, while the tears gathered in Ikey's eyes at the ignominy which he was enduring.

"Let's hurl the tomahawk at the dog," said Gige, recalling an incident in an Indian story. And before the others could restrain him, the thoughtless youngster had taken aim with his wooden weapon and thrown it, barely missing the captive's ear.

"Stop that, kid," bellowed Peter, rushing to his brother's side and seizing his arm in no gentle grasp. "I don't want to have Ikey killed. Let's reserve him for some terrible ordeal by fire. How would it do to burn him at the stake?"

"Hooray!" chirped Jack Goodhue, ecstatically. "Let's get some dry kindling together." And at once he and Bill Emmons ran off to tear the bark from some of the fallen birches in the immediate vicinity.

The others meanwhile, with a suspicious silence and solemnity, gathered a pile of dry wood and spread it at Ikey's feet.

"Now," announced Peter, "we'll leave him for

five minutes to repent of his sins before we apply the torch.”

With sober expressions on their faces, the torturers marched off to convenient vantage points, from which they could watch Ikey's conduct without being detected. Believing that they had really moved out of sight, Ikey commenced the struggle to release himself. According to established tradition he should have been able to gnaw his deerskin thongs with his powerful teeth and thus bite his way to freedom; but the ropes, unfortunately for melodrama, were hard and tough, and he could not bend his head enough even to touch them with his tongue, if that organ of speech had been movable. As it was, the gag effectually blocked all plans of that sort. Finally, after the concealed Followers of Deerfoot had satisfied their desire for revenge, they returned and stood around their victim.

“The fatal hour has now struck,” declared Peter, gazing ominously at Ikey and speaking in tones as nearly sepulchral as he could make them sound. “But before we ignite the wood, I'm going to give the prisoner one last chance. Ikey, if you will agree to return our stovepipe at once, wink your left eye.”

Ikey's left eyelid began to move violently and enthusiastically up and down.

"Will you promise not to yell if we take your gag out?"

Once more the winking went on with energy. Peter had evolved this scheme from the reading of a battered copy of Dumas's *The Count of Monte Christo*, especially the scene in which the aged M. Noirtier, paralyzed and immovable of body, expresses his wishes in a similar way.

"All right! Take out the gag, Gige."

When this impediment to speech had been removed, Peter took a stand in front of Ikey and spoke slowly, "Ikey, we've endured a great deal of abuse from you and your gang of desperadoes. Are you prepared here and now to promise faithfully that you will leave us and our cabin alone in the future?"

"Yes, I promise," answered Ikey, so worn out and frightened that he could hardly articulate. "I promise with all my heart. Please let me go!"

"Well, we'll spare you this time," said Peter, "but remember, if you break that oath, the Lord will strike you dead,—and the Followers of Deer-foot will pursue you as if you were carrion."

Peter had no idea what "carrion" was, but it sounded like a good word.

The ropes were untied one by one, and Ikey, unable for a few seconds even to stand alone, sank down helplessly on the ground. The Followers of Deerfoot looked a little aghast, but Ikey quickly recovered himself and got up. "You'd better go down to the brook and get washed off before you see the others," said Peter. "Here's some soap. Then they'll never have to hear what happened to you."

"Thank you," replied Ikey humbly, in the manner of one whose spirit has been chastened. And he walked off slowly towards the pond, his head bowed down and his posture indicating deep dejection.

"What do you think he'll do?" asked little Jack Goodhue, a bit apprehensively.

"Oh, he'll keep mum, all right," answered Hal, who knew Ikey's temperament. "He won't want anybody to hear what has happened to him, and I'll bet that he never utters a word."

Hal was right. Ikey cleaned himself up at the brook, and then, after resting for a few minutes, returned quite nonchalantly to his friends and crawled into his clothes before they could notice



the welts on his wrists and ankles. Nobody from that day to this has heard him allude to his adventures that day in the woods; but he never again personally molested the Followers of Deerfoot, and, when his comrades suggested an attack, he did his best to dissuade them. Furthermore, the lost stovepipe was back in place before another Saturday had passed by.

The jubilant Followers of Deerfoot spent the rest of the afternoon reclining beneath the branches of the great pine and discussing, as boys will, the excitement of the day. When the supper hour drew near, Peter was more careful of the frying-pan and managed to cook several slices of bacon without a mishap; and slices of bread from the loaf which Mrs. Wadsworth had thoughtfully added to Peter's load were toasted over the embers on long sticks. There was some dirt in the provender, it is true, but nobody complained. When this course was over, those who were still hungry filled up on sandwiches and bananas. The dishes were washed at the inlet to Bailey's Pond, and then Peter and Hal, disregarding the advice which they had so often received not to bathe on a full stomach, had a long swim under the light of the stars. When they

made their way back to the cabin, there was an autumn chill in the air, and all five were glad enough to warm themselves around the crackling fire.

“Going to sleep inside or out?” inquired Hal of Peter.

“Oh, I’m just going to roll up here on the ground,” answered that daring woodsman quite casually, as if that had been his practice for many years in the wilderness. “I don’t want to go inside on a glorious night like this.”

“But there are balsam boughs in there,” said Gige. “I cut a pile last week, and they’re just as soft as any mattress. Besides, there are some pillows there, too.”

“What do I care!” said the sturdy Peter disdainfully. “The open air for me every time! I’ll just dig out a little hole for my shoulder and another for my hip, and I’ll be perfectly comfortable.”

“Don’t you believe it!” was Hal’s comment. “I tried that once, and it isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be!”

“Well, go inside if you want to,” replied the obstinate chieftain. “I know what I am going to do.” And when his followers a few moments

later crept one by one into the cabin and sank down to slumber on the aromatic evergreens, he remained behind, quite conscious of his own daring. First selecting a level place on the leeward side of the fire, as he had been instructed to do by Indian stories which he had read, he found a tablespoon and gouged out some earth at the spots where his hip and his shoulder would presumably strike, and then, rolling himself up in his big brown army blanket, prepared to drop off to sleep. Then he remembered that he had forgotten a pillow and had to get up and fumble around in the darkness for his heavy woolen sweater, which he folded into a compact mass and adjusted under his head.

Inside the cabin the low murmur of voices gradually died down and after a few minutes ceased altogether. Apparently all the tired Followers of Deerfoot had been lulled to pleasant dreams by the fragrant odor of the soft balsam boughs. Meanwhile their gallant leader lay gazing meditatively at the fire as it flickered lower and lower, until all the flames had been superseded by a bright glow. There was hardly a sound except the deep bass of some grandfather bullfrog from the marsh at the upper end of

Bailey's Pond. For a time Peter was perfectly quiet, thrilled by the romance and mystery of the night. Then his shoulder began to ache, and he tried to obtain relief by turning on his other side. In this new position the holes for his hip and shoulder did not seem to fit properly, and the ground, which he had not noticed at first, felt hard, like a section of paved road. The shadows about him seemed to deepen, and he could hear from their depths little noises as if animals were creeping closer. An owl,—he thought it was an owl,—hooted in a tree not far away; a dog howled in the distance; and once he was sure that he could see in the darkness the fiery eyes of some wild beast, shining like the eyes of the old she-goat which Robinson Crusoe discovered in the cave. Peter was no coward, but he shivered a little as he looked and listened, and he lay with body tense and every nerve tingling.

His arms and legs did not seem to be at all comfortable, and, to get relaxation, he sat up for a moment, stretched himself, and lay down on his back, gazing directly up through the trees where the stars should have been,—but they had disappeared, and a wind was rising, evidently the forerunner of a storm. Now his improvised pil-



low began to cause trouble. Buttons in unexpected places pressed into his neck and ear, and the rough wool so irritated his skin that he commenced to itch in several places. Then new and peculiar sounds disturbed his rest. Once a limb fell from a tree with a crash, and Peter could hear the underbrush crackling as a heavy body forced its path through. As a climax there came the low rumble of thunder, much more ominous at night than it had ever been in the shelter of his home during the day. Little flashes of lightning illuminated the sky leaving the darkness denser than before. He could feel the sudden calm, the oppressive silence, which invariably presage a tremendous storm.

Peter had not bargained for this disturbance. What did hunters and trappers do, he wondered, when they slept in the open and saw rain approaching? Here he was, right under the tallest pine for rods around,—a tree which the lightning was sure to strike! What should he do? There was one faltering second of indecision and hesitancy. Then he stood up, hunted for a piece of dry bark to fling on the dying fire, and, by its sudden flaring, crept to the door of the cabin and groped his way inside, stumbling over the inert

and slumberous bodies of his friends. Even in those crowded quarters he was able to find space for himself, and he immediately felt more courageous. Psychology must explain why it is that anybody,—man or boy,—is less apprehensive with his comrades around him than he is when he is alone. At any rate, it is a fact that Peter had now left fear behind him and could await the coming of the storm with curiosity rather than alarm.

The lightning was now sharper and more frequent, and the thunder growled more menacingly. One brilliant flash illuminated the whole interior of the cabin, followed by a roar as if the heavens were collapsing. Then came rain,—at first big isolated drops, hitting with a thud upon the roof, and then a gradually increasing downpour in a musical rhythm over Peter's head. Excited by the storm, Peter sat up, and felt instinctively that the others in the cabin were also aware of what was going on. For a moment, he listened apprehensively.

“Hi, Hal, are you awake?” he heard Beady ask in a gruff whisper.

“Sure I am,” responded Hal in a tone equally low. “But where's Peter? He'll be drowned out

there. Guess I'll go out and hunt the poor fish up! ”

“Much obliged, old top,” interposed Peter, “but the fish will be all right, thank you! I came in when the rain began. I wasn't going to let myself get soaked with a shelter near at hand.”

“Do you think the lightning will strike us?” queried little Jack Goodhue, thus proving himself to be awake.

“Of course not. The chances are a million to one against it,” answered Peter, who now regained the leadership which he considered to be justly his. “Storms like this aren't really dangerous. You can tell by the time between the flash and the peal of thunder that the lightning is a good distance off. I'd have stayed out in the rain if I'd brought my rubber poncho. A little wet doesn't hurt anybody.” His bravery returned just as soon as he observed that the others were a little alarmed.

The rain was now beating down with force on the cabin and blowing in at the open door. It was quite obvious that the roof was leaking here and there. Beady had taken out his flash-light and illuminated the quarters where the boys sat huddled together, determined not to permit their

fright to reveal itself. Only Peter lay down, and, with carefully assumed indifference, pretended to go to sleep. Slowly the thunder receded into the remote distance, and the rain fell with less force. One by one the boys, tired with their midnight vigil, fell back on the balsam boughs. Soon everything was still around the cabin. The Followers of Deerfoot had passed safely through another ordeal.



## CHAPTER IV

### ALONE IN THE WOODS

IT was Peter who first raised his head on the following morning, rubbed his eyes in faint recollection of the preceding night's storm, and then crawled to the door to investigate the weather. It was chilly, but, seeing the sunlight glistening on the dripping leaves, he roused his cohorts with a shout, "All up for a swim! Come along, you sleepy heads! Everybody out!" Ruthlessly he proceeded to drag the lethargic Followers of Deerfoot out into the open, where they stood blinking, still half-asleep, Beady looking grotesque with his bandage drooping down over his nose. Peter's enthusiasm was infectious, and soon, in spite of their shivering bodies, they were dashing down the path to the pond. "First duck under!" cried Peter, as he took a flying dive from the spring-board into the muddied water; and he felt a great surprise as he plunged beneath the chilly surface.

"Me next!" roared Hal, as his bony figure

leapt in Peter's wake. Even Beady, tearing off his bandage, jumped with a mighty splash, and they were all soon floundering around like aquatic creatures, climbing on one another's backs and ducking each other furiously.

"This is the life!" exulted Peter, as he reached the bank and proceeded to dry himself by the simple process of slapping and rubbing himself fiercely in the morning sun.

"You betcha!" added Beady, who had already forgotten his wound. The pains of youth are seldom lasting, and the ghastly cut of yesterday was healing rapidly in the open air.

It took some time to build a fire and prepare breakfast, for the wood was wet after the shower, and even the birch-bark did not ignite readily. Eventually, however, the six hungry boys managed to fill their empty stomachs with cereal and condensed milk, bacon, and some of Mrs. Wadsworth's sandwiches, the supply of which seemed inexhaustible. Then came the problem of how best to employ the day: Gige, Bill, and Beady decided to go with Hal to the Webster farm and amuse themselves with the Shetland pony, Prince, that, in spite of his twenty years, could still furnish no small amount of excitement.

Off they went, about nine o'clock, leaving Jack Goodhue behind with Peter. When they arrived at the stable, they led the pony out into the yard and practised riding him bareback at a stiff pace round and round the fenced-in enclosure. Now and then one of the lads would fall off the pony's slippery back, but the turf was soft and nobody was hurt. Occasionally Prince would lift his heels in a threatening manner, but he was too much of a gentleman to kick any of the youngsters. When the stable man, Mike Blossom, was off doing his morning chores, the Followers of Deerfoot produced their rope lassos and practised on Prince as he came cantering about the ring; and, when one of them was lucky enough to catch him around the legs so that he was tripped up and thrown, the animal completely lost his temper. Recovering himself, he charged at the youngsters and there might have been trouble but for the return of Mike, who stepped up and calmed the angry pony.

“Get out of here, ye young divils!” said Mike, whose patience was decidedly ruffled. “Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, tormentin’ a poor hilpless baste! Move on, now, before I chuck yez out!”

“Oh, Mike, have a heart!” said Hal, trying cajolery. “We didn’t mean to hurt Prince.”

“Oh, no, ye didn’t!” answered Mike with elaborate irony. “Ye were just tryin’ to make life pleasanter fer him, wasn’t yer? No, sir, ye’ll git out of here,—now!” And he made a motion with the horse-whip which he was carrying in his hand.

Seeing no prospect of further amusement here, the boys went into the huge Webster barn, almost as big as a circus tent, with its great cross-beams. At this time in the autumn it was nearly full of hay, and the adventurers, headed by Hal, crawled out gingerly on a beam not over a foot square and then, balancing themselves carefully, jumped down to the hay below, sometimes from a height of fifteen feet. It was exhilarating, but Gige always climbed out with prickles in his hair and an irresistible desire to sneeze. When this pastime was exhausted, the four went out to shoot at a target with Hal’s twenty-two rifle, which he was not permitted to carry away from the house,—not since poor Mrs. Webster had discovered that Hal and “Mucker” Wright had fought a duel with air-guns, with the result that her son had come home with a “B-B” shot neatly im-



bedded in the flesh at the back of his hand. There had been no serious consequences from this wound, except that Hal's mother had to go to bed for a week from nervous exhaustion; but Senator Webster had spoken a few words to Hal in a tone which the lad could not have helped understanding. Target-shooting, however, was now allowed, and the four boys had an exciting competition, ended only by the discovery that it was twelve o'clock and time for the noon meal. They raced back to the cabin at top speed; and there, sitting on a log in the clearing, was little Jack Goodhue, alone and in tears. Peter, he lamented between sobs, had gone away and had not come back. "He's lost, I guess," was all he could stammer at first, but soon the full story came out.

The Grand Sachem, meanwhile, was having his fill of sport. Jack Goodhue had begged for weeks to be taken fishing, and Peter, although the season was nearly over, had at last agreed to accompany him down the little brook that flows out of Bailey's Pond. Both boys owned steel rods which had been presented to them on the previous Christmas Day,—bait-rods, strong and well adapted to the primitive kind of angling

which Deepwater streams afforded. Peter had brought with him an ancient tomato-can stuffed with worms,—long wriggly night-walkers, almost as big as small snakes, which he had dug up in rich earth so near the Wadsworth asparagus bed that the doctor would have been horrified if he had seen Peter at work in that vicinity.

When they reached the dam, from one corner of which the water was pouring out of a sluiceway into a brook that ran merrily off down the valley, they fitted their rods together, and Peter, instructing Jack as to the proper method of stringing a worm on a hook, was delighted when his pupil, who had dropped his bait rather clumsily into a mass of bubbles below the dam, actually jerked up a small trout,—the first that the little fellow had ever caught. With this encouragement, Jack was ready for any adventure. Even Peter had never gone much more than a hundred yards down the creek-bed, but he had supreme confidence in his own skill as a woodsman, and Jack trusted him completely. So, after Peter had given the necessary instructions and explained to Jack how to know the most likely pools, they started into the forest, Peter on the right bank and Jack on the left, casting their

hooks now and then into promising ripples. For a while they kept together, but Jack caught his line in some bushes and had to get it disentangled; meanwhile Peter, who was having excellent luck, went along quite rapidly, hardly thinking of anything except the next moss-covered log or foam-marked eddy. When the creel which he was carrying seemed to be filling up, he stopped for a moment to glance at his wrist-watch. He had been gone nearly two hours! Aware that it was time to turn back, he looked around for Jack, whom he had entirely forgotten. The little fellow was nowhere in sight! Disconcerted, he gave a shout, and then emitted the shrill whistle which had been adopted by the Followers of Deerfoot as their official signal. There was no answering call! More vigorously he blew, with his fingers between his teeth, in the penetrating fashion which had aroused the admiration of his fellow members and the censure of his mother. Still there was nothing to be heard in reply,—and he was sure that his whistle could be heard a mile off.

Peter had sense enough to pause for a moment's reflection. He must have come, he estimated, at least two miles down-stream, into a

part of the country with which he was unfamiliar; but it would, of course, be a simple matter for him to retrace his steps until he reached the dam and the pond. What really embarrassed him was the fact that he had no clear idea as to whether Jack was above or below him, and Peter felt himself responsible for the safety of his younger companion. Recollecting that he had walked along between the pools at a fairly rapid pace, Peter concluded that Jack must be above him, and accordingly started up-stream, hurrying as fast as possible in order to catch him. When he had progressed perhaps a quarter of a mile, he came unexpectedly to a junction of two smaller brooks of almost exactly the same width and volume. They led in different directions, like the arms of the letter "Y," and Peter could not remember the place at all. He must have been so much absorbed in fishing that he had passed it without its making any impression upon his mind.

What should he do? For a second or two he could feel his heart thumping hard against his ribs, and there was a kind of panic in his soul. Consider that he was only eleven years old,—not an experienced guide or trapper,—and that this



was a new experience for him! Fortunately, however, he was intelligent, and he had been trained not to be frightened easily. Reason came to the rescue. He could not recall having crossed any stream since his departure from the dam; therefore, he argued, he must follow the branch to his left. And so, with confidence regained, he went ahead once more, watching constantly for some landmark which would justify his decision.

For ten minutes by his watch Peter trudged along, whistling from time to time to attract Jack's attention and hoping at any moment to hear an answer. Then he heard in the distance the noise of falling water, and, moving rapidly ahead, saw before him a small cataract at least six feet high,—so unusual and so impressive that Peter was sure that he could not have passed it on the way down without noticing it. Now at last he was really discouraged, for there could be no doubt that he had taken the wrong path. He paused to inspect his equipment. What were his resources? He had nothing with him of any importance,—no matches, no compass, no knife, no food,—nothing except about twenty small trout. And Peter, hungry though he was, had no appetite for raw fish. His father had re-

peatedly warned him never to enter the woods without being prepared for emergencies; yet, like the worst sort of tenderfoot, he had completely neglected every precaution. He had even left his knife somewhere in the cabin! Worse than this, he was sure that Jack Goodhue was fully as badly off as he, with the additional handicap of being younger and less experienced in meeting difficulties. It was certainly an unfortunate situation!

Disconcerted and troubled though Peter may have been, he was not without courage. Looking around, he saw that he had arrived at a region of low hills, and he noticed ahead of him what resembled a deep gorge between high rocks. He was inclined to wish now that he had gone on down-stream originally, in which direction he would have been sure of coming ultimately to the Big Creek, which drained the valley in which Deepwater was situated. But then he remembered that he could not have deserted Jack Goodhue,—Jack, who might be wandering helplessly about at that very moment, wondering where his companion could have gone to. . . . As he thought things over, a kind of panic overwhelmed Peter, and turning, he ran down the bed of the

brook, stumbling over stones and falling into pools in a fit of terror. This mood, however, endured only a few seconds. Stopping short, he regained his composure. "You big fool," he said aloud, talking to himself. "You aren't far from home. All you've got to do is to stick close to the stream. Even if you do have to stay out all night, you can live until a rescue party reaches you; and you can try eating moss if you get hungry." Reassuring himself in this fashion, Peter walked on more slowly, reaching the now familiar "Y" at precisely twelve o'clock, just before Hal, Beady, Bill, and Gige, on their return to the cabin, found Jack worrying about a companion who had not come back and must, therefore, be lost in the forest.

Peter now felt less perturbed in his mind. After all, the problem was a simple one. All he had to do was to keep on up the other branch of the brook until he arrived at Bailey's Pond. A rest of a few moments gave him new spirit, and he went on bravely. He had advanced only a hundred feet when he recognized a pool where he had had exceptional luck; indeed he actually picked up, near the fallen log where he had stood to make his casts, a small trout which he had

discarded as under the legal length. At last he was on the way home!

Peter now took a more leisurely pace, convinced that he could not go wrong. To his satisfaction he saw that the trail which he had made through the bushes was still not difficult to follow. With Jack Goodhue still on his mind, he whistled every two or three minutes, to be rewarded, after he had been walking for some time, by a loud shout in reply. His own cries now redoubled in vigor, and he was soon confronted by Hal, who greeted him wildly, "Where in the world have you been?"

"Have you seen Jack?" responded Peter, asking another question in reply.

"Here I am, Peter," said a high voice, and Jack Goodhue himself appeared, followed by Beady and the others of the party. "I've been back at the cabin for hours. I called to you two or three times and you didn't answer, and so I just came back up the creek. I thought that you'd be right along, but you didn't come, and then I was scared. That's why we all started out hunting for you."

"Huh!" said Peter, a trifle disgusted. "Got anything to eat?"



“Here’s a piece of milk chocolate,” said Beady, drawing a slab from his pocket.

Peter did not delay in making the necessary connection between himself and the food that was offered him. When he had devoured it to the last crumb and had swallowed a drink of water from the brook, he was ready to talk, and recounted his experiences with a good sense of their dramatic value. The audience listened intently, but not always with full approval of the speaker’s actions.

“Why,” commented Hal, “any tenderfoot ought to have figured that out. You must have crossed the right-hand branch there at the fork.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” answered Peter sarcastically. “If you had been there, you’d have solved that problem and forty others, I’ve no doubt. But there are moments when some of us get worried, and then it isn’t so easy to think straight. I had Jack on my mind all the time. Thank Heaven, he’s safe!”

The weary Followers of Deerfoot slowly wandered back to their headquarters, where Peter led the others in cleaning up all the food which remained. It was now almost five o’clock, and the boys had promised to get back home for sup-

per. They packed up their blankets and kitchen utensils rather unenthusiastically, but with the pleasing realization that their heavy loads of the day before had been lessened through a prodigious consumption of edibles. At the dam they all said "Good-bye!" to Hal, whose path led off in another direction, and the five others took the road back to Slaughter Lane and Wilmot Avenue. That night the Wadsworth boys crept off early to bed and a long restful sleep before school the next day.

Peter did not tell his parents immediately about his adventures as a lost sportsman. Gige, however, betrayed the affair accidentally, and then Peter had to confess the whole story. Dr. Wadsworth listened attentively to all the details. He realized that it would be a mistake to lecture Peter too harshly, but he did take him aside one morning and explain to him once more the wisdom of preparing for emergencies whenever the boy planned to enter the woods.

"I've known too many cases where boys have died because they were careless about carrying matches and a compass and a supply of rations," he said. "There was young Mathewson, who was lost on Mount Monadnock and frozen to death

almost within sight of shelter. If he had had just a few matches, he could have taken refuge under some rocks and built a fire. And don't you remember the man from Hamilton who got caught in Nine-Mile Swamp and just roamed around in a circle until he was worn out? It's always sensible to do as experienced guides do,—never go far away from camp without being equipped to spend at least one night in the open."

"Thanks, Dad, for being so decent," said Peter. "I know I made a bad mistake, but I've really learned a lesson, and you won't find me being careless again. And I hope that I'll have sense enough in the future not to be afraid. If I hadn't let myself get frightened, I should have been all right."

"Most of the things we worry about never happen, anyway," concluded Dr. Wadsworth, with more seriousness than he ordinarily displayed. "That's a good reason why we should all conquer our fears!"

"I've learned a lot about that this summer," was Peter's answer. "The chief thing I'm afraid of now is being afraid,—and I'll get over that by Christmas!"

## CHAPTER V

### THE FIGHT

PETER WADSWORTH had reached a period when life was getting more complex and puzzling. Up to his eleventh year he had been almost care-free, and, with few serious problems to solve, he had enjoyed himself hugely, like some young and healthy animal. Plans,—usually agreeable,—had been formed for him by older people, and he had followed them out without much thought. Now new ideas were forcing themselves on his mind, almost compelling him to pay attention to them. He was beginning to see that life, in a certain sense, is made up of tests of courage. He felt strange apprehensions, which he was ashamed to confess to his father and mother. Vague fears brought shivers up and down his spine, often in the middle of the night. He found himself meditating on the meaning of big words, like *infinity* and *eternity* and *immortality*. . . . But all these matters he kept to himself, and his parents merely noticed that he was evidently growing



very rapidly, and insisted on feeding him malt and cod-liver oil!

Only a few days after Christmas, Peter began to feel very tired, and, on his twelfth birthday, he was flat on his back in bed, with a high temperature. He had contracted scarlet fever! Even Dr. Wadsworth seemed helpless against the dread disease, and nothing availed much except the tender care of Peter's mother, who hardly slept until her boy was out of danger. Although he did not realize it, there were moments when he was very near death, and his recovery had almost the aspect of a miracle. But somehow he pulled through, and there followed several weeks of convalescence, during which he slowly regained his strength, while his mother read to him or he watched the snowflakes pile higher and higher in the street. As he lay back in a big chair, gazing idly at the pedestrians battling their way through the heavy drifts, he came to the conclusion that life itself is largely a fight,—a fight against diseases and meannesses and selfishness and fears. One of the books which Mrs. Wadsworth read to him was *Fortitude*, by the English novelist, Hugh Walpole, and it had one sentence which Peter never forgot: "It isn't life that mat-

ters, but the courage we bring to it." It might be claimed, with truth, that those weeks of apparent laziness taught Peter more than all the years he had spent at spelling and arithmetic,—although it may be heresy to say so.

One of the resolutions which Peter made as he sat thinking was to bear suffering without flinching or complaint. Without knowing it, he became a stoic, with the motto, "Grin and bear it!" When he had entirely recuperated and was back in school with his friends, he had a chance to carry his philosophy into practice. Across the street lived the Jewett family, who kept a huge mastiff to guard their house from intruders. One afternoon this dog, excited by something, rushed at Peter and bit him in the leg. The boy immediately ran home and displayed the wound to his father, who shuddered a little as he saw that the animal's teeth had drawn blood.

"I'll have to cauterize this, my boy," he said quietly.

"What's that, Dad?"

"Oh, I'll just have to burn it to keep any possible infection from spreading. It'll hurt a little. Can you stand it?"

"Sure I can. I won't even utter a murmur."

And even when the pain was most severe, Peter merely clenched his teeth and said nothing,—not even when the tears unexpectedly filled his eyes. Dr. Wadsworth proudly told his friends about it at the Dalton Club that evening, “Why, the kid acted as if he were having fun out of the operation,—didn’t whimper once!”

All this is but a prelude to an incident which happened early in the following summer, a year after the time when Peter was nearly drowned. Those who are unfamiliar with American small town life will probably not comprehend the perfect equality which governs boy society. Peter, whose father was a college man and a graduate of Harvard Medical School, was on intimate terms with the son of a Jewish tailor, a lad who was known as “Goldy”; and Rastus Jackson, the little kinky-haired colored boy, used to walk back and forth to school with Gige. If a fellow could play games fairly well and was a “good sport,” his friends asked no questions about ancestry. When Peter had parties, even his mother could not always discriminate as she would have liked to do. Born and educated in Massachusetts, she had faith in what she called “good blood,” and she was frequently shocked by Peter’s choice

of companions. She was able, of course, to draw the line against those who used rough language,—in her presence,—but even this was not always a satisfactory basis of discrimination. Goldy Goldberg, for example, was unfailing in his polite attentions to his hostess and almost Chesterfieldian in his speech and manner; while Walter Sanger, one of the aristocratic summer colony in Deepwater, had a vocabulary which astonished Dr. Wadsworth and led his wife to threaten to wash the lad's mouth out with Ivory Soap.

Among Peter's neighbors on Wilmot Avenue were "Mucker" Wright, the son of the local blacksmith,—there were still enough horses in the village to make a blacksmith necessary,—and Frank Green, whose father kept a small fruitstand on Main Street. Mucker was a heavily-built, bull-necked boy of about Peter's age, with thick lips and a rather dull and brutish appearance. He was a little knock-kneed and walked with a shuffle, as if he had difficulty in lifting his large feet. The name bestowed upon him at birth was Ignatius,—obviously too fantastic for his companions, who, with no little discernment, had dubbed him "Mucker." As for Frank, he was a lanky and cadaverous youth, thin in the



arms and legs, but possessing some natural gifts which made him the best baseball pitcher of his age in Deepwater; but his many home duties, together with his father's insistence that most of his hours out of school should be devoted to waiting on customers at the fruit-stand, prevented him from being available as often as the other members of the nine would have wished. Peter felt very sorry for Frank, principally because he was allowed so little freedom. As for Mucker, Peter disliked him heartily, but he could not help respecting his physical prowess. Mucker was clumsy, but he struck a vigorous blow, and his authority among the Wilmot Avenue "gang" was unquestioned.

Now Dr. Wadsworth, although he was absorbed for most of the day in the complicated details of his extensive practice, had definite theories about educating his sons. When Peter was ten, he received for his birthday a pair of boxing-gloves, and every night before he went to bed his father came into his room, made him put them on, and then proceeded to initiate him into the fundamental principles of the art of self-defense. He taught him how to stand firmly on both feet, with his left foot ahead of his right

and his left arm and clenched fist extended, his right bent over to protect his chest and abdomen. He showed him how to shift his weight from one foot to another and how to strike out at the proper moment, as well as how to guard himself against a counter-attack. When the lad grew a little taller and stronger, Dr. Wadsworth put on the gloves himself and gave him some practice in sparring. The physician, who had been known to his college classmates as Sid, the Slugger, had been the middle-weight champion of his day at Amherst, and, in spite of the weight which he had since accumulated, was still amazingly speedy and light upon his feet.

As soon as Gige was old enough not to be afraid, the father matched the two boys against each other and trained them to endure pummeling without a whimper. Sometimes, to Mrs. Wadsworth's hardly-concealed horror, one of them would appear at breakfast with a discolored eye or a cut on the cheek. But Dr. Wadsworth was always ready with an excuse.

"Oh, that's all right, my dear," he would say. "We mustn't turn the lads into mollycoddles. Just remember that your great hero, Teddy Roosevelt, used to box all the time at Harvard

and even was known to put on the gloves in the White House. Why, I can recollect that an old prize-fighter, Dwight Newport, at Amherst, used to knock me out about twice a week, and I enjoyed it. It won't hurt the boys a bit,—it'll probably do them a world of good."

And so Peter and Gige, in a normal healthful way, became very fond of boxing, and, being well able to take care of themselves with their fists, were seldom molested at school by bullies. As very small youngsters, they had their usual number of battles with their contemporaries, and neither one ever ran from an opponent of his own size. When they reached the higher grades, fights were fewer, presumably because of the gradual taming of their animal natures by the softening influence of civilization and society.

Although he was not at all a literary person,—he was too much interested in life itself,—Dr. Wadsworth had read aloud to Peter and Gige some classic tales of famous fights,—books like Conan Doyle's *The Croxley Master* and *Rodney Stone*, Hazlitt's *The Fight* and Jack London's *The Game*. Sometimes he would reminisce about matches which he himself had seen, and, when a famous match was to occur in New Jersey, Dr.

Wadsworth discovered that business called him to New York,—and came back with a wonderful story of the way in which the winner had out-boxed and overpowered his adversary throughout the contest. He instilled into the souls of his sons the idea that it is a poor sort of man who will not defend himself or others against injustice or wanton attack. “Everybody wants to avoid a fight,” he used to say with conviction. “But there are bound to be occasions when you may not, with honor, be able to escape one, and then it’s a comfortable feeling not to be altogether helpless. Besides, boxing is splendid exercise, and a fine manly pastime. I hope that you’ll keep it up as long as you can stand it.”

It was just before the Fourth of July, that anniversary so dear to the hearts of all American boys. In the early afternoon of a warm day, Peter and Gige were on their front porch counting their firecrackers, torpedoes, and sky-rockets, which had been purchased that morning with money saved from their allowances. As they sat there wondering what to do next, Frank Green came along on his way up the street, accompanied by Pat Nolan, an older and bigger boy who lived on a farm a mile or two from town.



“Hi, Peter,” shouted Frank, as he paused opposite the house. “Come along up to Mucker’s barn and see the fun. There’s going to be lots of excitement.”

“What’s up?” inquired Peter, getting up and going out to meet the passers-by.

“Oh, just some fun. Bring Gige along and come on. You’ll see what’s doing when you get there.”

“Just wait a minute until I put some things away and I’ll be right up.”

“All right! And if you’ve got any firecrackers, we can use ’em,” added Pat. Pat was generally supposed to be a little “simple,” and his uncouth appearance was accentuated by clothes which were much too small for him. The youngest of five brothers, he had inherited the cast-off coats and trousers of the older boys, and he always looked as if he had been put together by patchwork. In spite of his age,—he was fifteen,—he was in Gige’s class at school. Gige and Jack Goodhue delighted in telling Pat the most extravagant yarns, all of which he swallowed without the slightest suspicion that he was being victimized. When any pranks were played in school, he usually was the one to be blamed,

for he was so slow that he could not help being caught.

Peter and Gige deposited most of their treasures in the house, selecting only a choice few of the noisier firecrackers, and then ran after Frank and Pat up the street to Mucker's house, which was almost the last building before open country was reached. It was an unattractive ramshackle affair, with the paint worn off the boards and the chimneys almost ready to topple. The barn in the rear, which was even more decrepit, was used chiefly to shelter the Wrights' Ford, but was now empty except for a circle of six or seven boys, who shouted a clamorous welcome.

"Good for you, Peter!"

"That's the stuff! Got any firecrackers, Bo?"

"Now we're all set for the fun!"

Peter, looking around for the source of all this turmoil, could see nothing but a rather frightened collie puppy, which Mucker was holding on a rope. Seeing Peter, he said to him, "Gee, this'll be sport! We're going to tie a tin can and a pack of firecrackers to this pup's tail and then set 'em off! Say, won't he be a scared Fido!"

"Just wait till they start to pop," said Frank

Green, with a grin. "I'll bet he breaks all records down the street."

"Here, you get the firecrackers ready," said Mucker to Peter. "Frank and I will hold the beast."

So far Peter, a bit bewildered, had said nothing. He had always been allowed to own a dog, and his latest pet, a fine Irish setter named Bob, had been killed by an automobile only a few weeks before. This stray animal that Mucker had picked up reminded him a little of the one that he had lost. He stepped over and commenced patting the puppy on the head. The dog ceased to shiver and looked gratefully up into Peter's eyes. It didn't look as if it had a long pedigree, but its face was intelligent and it seemed affectionate. Soon the puppy rolled over on his back to have his stomach scratched and stared up appealingly at Peter.

Peter turned to Mucker. "Do you mean to say that you're going to tie firecrackers to the tail of this helpless pup and then set them off?"

"Sure we are. What did you think we were going to do,—put him on our baseball team?" This was Mucker's idea of wit, and some of his satellites laughed.

“Well,” said Peter, slowly but decisively, “you’re not going to do it while I’m around! It’s a mean cruel trick! The poor thing would be frightened to death,—to say nothing of the burns it would get. I’m no angel, but I won’t stand for that!” He could not have explained why he took the dog’s part so vigorously. It was just instinct, the natural sympathy of a boy who loved animals and could not bear to see them suffer. His mother, who was always feeding stray cats and scattering seeds on the lawn for birds in winter, had taught him, through her example, the lesson of kindness to all living things.

“So we’ve got a sissy with us, have we?” sneered Mucker, his ugly face twitching with rage. “You’d better go and play with the girls. Here, you guys, we can do without him. And Gige, if you don’t like it, you can run along with your big brother and have a game of dominoes.”

He started to tie the string to the puppy’s tail, and the others gathered around to watch the process with eagerness in their eyes,—all except Peter. He hesitated a moment, and then, as he saw what Mucker was doing, he spoke, “Stop that, you big bully!” There was a tone in his



voice which compelled attention, and everybody turned to gaze at him.

“You come and make me stop,” responded Mucker. “If you try to interfere with me, I’ll pound that face of yours into a pulp.” He continued to manipulate the string.

Peter, his face a little paler than usual, stepped closer, and Mucker, noticing his expression, stood up and dropped the rope which he had been holding.

“Want to get a licking, don’t you?” he said. “Well, I’ll take a few minutes off to give it to you.” He began rolling up his sleeves,—the customary Deepwater preliminary to a fight.

“Wait a second,” said Peter. “I’m not trying to pick a fight with you, Mucker.”

“Going to quit, are you?” replied Mucker, an expression of contempt on his face. “I thought you’d change your mind. You’re yellow all through! If you don’t make yourself scarce, I’ll whip you out the door.”

The spectators, including Gige, Beady Bennett, and some six or seven smaller lads, were grouped together awaiting the outcome with that eagerness which is invariably displayed by those who are certain not to be drawn in as participants.

Gige was ready to cry, but held back his tears as best he could, trembling for the fate of his brother.

“Don’t fool yourself, Mucker,” said Peter coolly. “I’m not going to run away or even be whipped off the premises. I merely wanted to say that, if you insist on fighting, we might as well do it according to rules, with regular rounds and officials and all that sort of thing. Gige can be my second, and Frank will be yours. We can fix up a ring right here in the barn,—and you needn’t worry about my trying to escape. I’ll be here just as long as you will.”

“Aw, lay off all this ladylike stuff,” growled Mucker, who did not understand why a fight should have rules and restrictions of any kind. “I don’t need no second to help me lick you. Why don’t we just go to it until I’ve made you quit? That’ll happen quick enough!”

“Peter’s right, Mucker,” interposed Beady, who, as usual, was well up on the rules of every sport. “Why not let Pat Nolan be referee? He’s the oldest fellow here. I can explain to him about fouls and clinches and all that. It’s just as easy to do the whole thing in the proper way.”

“I’ve got some eight-ounce gloves down home if Mucker wants them,” added Peter.

“What do we want of gloves?” asked Mucker in his hoarse voice. “Does everybody think this is going to be a pink tea? Guess you’re afraid to stand up against bare knuckles, aren’t you, Peter?”

“No, not exactly,” said Peter, smiling enigmatically at his opponent. “I’ll go just as far as you want to,—only I somehow thought that you would like to observe the usual practice. Prize-fighters always wear leather gloves, you know. Even Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney didn’t use their bare fists.”

“Well, this ain’t no boxing-match. This is a fight,—and to the finish, too. And, what’s more, I’m going to put you to sleep so fast that you won’t even know that the scrap is over. You’ll last just about one round!”

Peter sensibly made no answer to this announcement, but little Gige, in spite of his confidence in his brother, could not help shuddering. Meanwhile, under Beady’s skilful direction, a “ring” about ten feet square had been measured off on the floor and shut in by boxes and barrels which the boys found back of the barn. Peter,

following the example set by Mucker, took off his shirt and undershirt, showing a skin which was tanned almost to a mahogany brown by exposure to the sun during many excursions to Bailey's Pond. As the competitors stood up together in the ring, it was apparent that Mucker was the taller and heavier; but Peter was lean and lithe, and evidently in better physical condition. Mucker's flesh was white and flabby, and he looked very soft. Nevertheless his advantage in height and weight made it seem as if the odds were in his favor.

The two seconds, looking very important, had contrived to find some pails, and Frank Green produced two old sponges which had been used to clean the Wright automobile,—decidedly unsanitary but very realistic. As is always the case, the spectators were eager to volunteer their services in any capacity which would promote the fight without any danger to themselves. When everything was in readiness, Beady, who was a stickler for the conventions, stepped into the center of the ring and motioned to the crowd to be quiet. Then he spoke, "Ladies and gentlemen,—or rather just gentlemen,—the contest this afternoon will be between Mucker Wright, the Iron



Man of Deepwater, and Wild Pete Wadsworth, the Wilmot Avenue Terror. The rounds will be two minutes long, and the battle will continue until one of the boxers throws up the sponge. The referee is Pat Nolan, the Farmers' Pet!" Beady then sat down on a barrel at one side of the ring, and Pat Nolan, holding in his hand Peter's Ingersoll watch, borrowed for the purposes of timing, stood up and said, "Are you ready?" Both boys answered, "Yes." "All right, go ahead!" said Pat,—and the fight was on!

Peter stepped from his corner to shake hands with his opponent as he had been taught to do; but, while he was advancing with his face quite unprotected, Mucker drew back his right fist and hit him on the jaw so forcibly that Peter stumbled and fell.

"Yeah! Good work, Mucker!" shouted a group of the spectators, the majority of whom were evidently for the bigger boy.

"You coward!" cried little Gige, unable to restrain his anger. "You dirty coward! Couldn't you see that Peter was trying to shake hands with you?"

"Forget it!" retaliated Frank Green, holding

him back. "Who ever heard of shaking hands in a real fight?"

"What do you say, Pat?" asked Gige. "Wasn't that a foul?"

By this time Peter had recovered and was standing rather shakily on his legs. Up to this moment there had been a smile on his countenance; now his blue eyes were blazing with rage. On his jaw was a red spot, showing where Mucker's knuckles had struck.

"Never mind, Gige," he said, with a slight tremor in his voice. "Get back in your corner. This isn't over yet."

"Had enough, kid?" asked Mucker arrogantly. "I don't want to kill you, you know."

"Let's go right ahead," replied Peter, who had now fully regained his equilibrium. "You'll soon see whether I'm done for."

Pat Nolan, who had looked on in a puzzled way during this interchange of amenities, now took charge of affairs once more. "Start again!" he cried. "Go right to it, both of you!" Peter stepped forward, this time with his arms in front of him in approved championship style, his body slightly crouched. He circled on his toes around the suspicious Mucker, waiting for an opening.

“Don’t dance around me, you spider,” said Mucker, as he waited for Peter to come closer. “This is no ballroom. I want action.”

Just then Peter, with incredible quickness, leaped forward. His left fist, almost before Mucker could finish speaking, caught him squarely on the nose, with all the power of Peter’s shoulder and body behind it, and his right, following at the same second, went straight to his opponent’s projecting stomach. Mucker was doubled up with pain, and a ruddy stream began to pour down over his mouth and chin. Madened, like a bull in a ring, he rushed at Peter, swinging his arms like the wings of a windmill, raining blows which Peter had no difficulty in dodging. His dexterous foot-work kept him out of Mucker’s reach, and he whirled this way and that, always guarding himself against those terrible arms. At last, when Mucker plunged at him with both fists incautiously spread wide apart, Peter stepped in and drove a vigorous thrust at the other’s right eye. Temporarily blinded, Mucker put his hands up to his face and stopped, just as Pat Nolan called “Time!” “Great work!” shouted Peter’s friends, now increasing in number as his prowess became evi-

dent. Frank Green led the dazed Mucker back to his corner, where, as he lay back in a chair, his supporters bathed his face solicitously and proffered the customary advice. . . . “Don’t rush at him, Mucker. Wait for him to come to you. Can’t you see that he’s clever with his feet? You’ll get him if you can just land that right of yours once.” . . . Meanwhile Mucker was recovering his wind, which had been damaged by too many cheap cigarettes. His eye was turning a peculiar hue of green, and his nose, although the crimson tide,—as journalists say,—had ceased to flow, was swollen to a grotesque size. Peter’s blows were clearly no gentle love-pats!

Peter, on the other hand, was uninjured except for his sore jaw, and he was in a position to judge his opponent’s maneuvers very fairly. “I’m absolutely all right,” he said, replying to anxious queries from Gige and Beady. “He’s just a big lumbering bull, without any science at all. It’ll be easy to keep out of his way.”

All these remarks went on during the intermission of one minute. Almost before either fighter could realize it, Pat Nolan cried, “Time’s up, men!” The alert seconds shoved their principals into the ring. Mucker was clearly more wary now



and somewhat disinclined to come to close quarters,—for which reluctance he could not very well be blamed, considering that his left eye was almost closed and that his head was none too steady. However he was no “quitter,” and he moved cautiously forward, stubbornly determined to make one ferocious uppercut end it all. He was still breathing rather heavily from his exertions; while Peter was light on his feet as he pranced exasperatingly around his opponent. Peter waited a few seconds to see what Mucker’s plan of action was to be; then, realizing that it would be good strategy to force the fighting, he dashed quickly in and struck Mucker on his sore nose so hard that the latter could not help groaning a little with the pain. His rage getting the better of him, he tried to seize the crafty Peter in a clinch, but Peter easily avoided him and swung his right to Mucker’s damaged eye. This time Mucker dropped his arms and looked despairingly around him, and Peter disdainfully flipped his left hand on his adversary’s bruised nose.

The little crowd of boys were at this point wild with excitement. “Kill him, Peter!” yelled one group of partisans, with the bloodthirstiness of youth. “Soak him, Mucker! You can get him

yet!" responded Frank Green, rather half-heartedly, for it was evident that their man was weakening badly.

As Peter stepped forward, apparently ready to administer the *coup de grace*, Mucker sank awkwardly down on his knees, not knocked out, but simply dazed by the pounding which he had received.

"He's had enough, I guess," said Peter, as he waited patiently for Mucker to rise. But Mucker was indisposed to get up, in spite of the urging of his attendants.

"I'll count you out if you stay there," said Pat Nolan, who was not familiar with the policy which a referee should follow under such peculiar circumstances. Mucker could do nothing but shake his head, and finally Frank Green, helping him to his feet, led him back to his corner, where he sat in the chair, rubbing his sore nose and blinking his eyes. Frank tried to induce him to return, but Mucker turned on him and said in an angry tone, "Go in with him yourself if you're so eager to have a fight. I'm through."

Perceiving the real state of affairs, Pat Nolan now stepped into the ring and announced, "Fight awarded to the Wilmot Avenue Terror in

two rounds!" Peter walked across the enclosure to speak to his rival.

"Shake hands, old man," he said. "It wasn't a fair match, you know. You've never had any lessons in boxing, and I have. And besides, you aren't in training."

"No, you licked me square enough," said the battered Mucker, extending his own begrimed paw. "And you're some scrapper, kiddo, I'll say that! I wish you'd teach me some of them tricks."

"Sure I will," answered the large-hearted Peter. "And when you learn them, you'll be a tough man to beat."

Putting on his clothes, Peter then started home, taking Gige and Beady with him, amid the congratulations of the spectators. The unkempt-looking collie which had been the innocent cause of all this excitement followed them, as if recognizing intuitively that he had some friends.

"Come along, pup," said Peter, stopping to pat the poor animal. "We'll take you home and give you a bath. You need it, all right."

"Say, Peter," commented Beady, as they walked along, "you sure made a monkey of that fellow."

“It wasn’t really very hard,” confessed Peter modestly. “He’s big and heavy, but he hasn’t any science. I honestly believe that Gige here could get a decision over him in a fair boxing match. But he’s got a wicked wallop if he ever has a chance to use it, and that first punch of his nearly knocked me out.” He put his hand reflectively up to the tender place on his jaw.

When Peter displayed the new canine acquisition to his parents, they demurred somewhat, but eventually agreed that he could keep the puppy, if he provided a bed for him in the garage.

“I’m going to call him ‘Rip,’ Mother,” said Peter at the dinner table. “Short for Euripides, you know!”

“How did you get hold of him?” asked Dr. Wadsworth, who had just come in.

“Oh, Dad,” said Gige, unable to restrain himself, “Peter had a regular fight with Mucker Wright and knocked him out in the second round!”

“Why, Peter,” said Mrs. Wadsworth reproachfully, “have you been fighting like a common rowdy?”

“Not exactly, Mother,” replied Peter, hastening to explain the circumstances. As he proceeded



with the narrative, Dr. Wadsworth's eyes were sparkling with pride and satisfaction.

"But," interposed Mrs. Wadsworth, "couldn't you reason with the Wright boy and explain to him how cruel it was to torture a poor dumb animal? That would have prevented your fighting."

"Now, my dear," said Dr. Wadsworth, "don't bother the boy. He did exactly the right thing, and we ought both of us to be very proud of him for it."

"Did he hurt you very much, dear?" inquired his mother solicitously.

"Not much," replied Peter. "He caught me once on the jaw, but it doesn't pain much."

"And say, Dad, you ought to see Mucker," burst out Gige. "He's got an eye that's all green, and his nose covers his whole face. He won't dare come out on the street for a week."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Wadsworth. But Peter felt, what Dr. Wadsworth knew, that these were mere conventional words, and that she too was really glad of Peter's conduct,—although, like a woman, she didn't want to admit it.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

INDEPENDENCE DAY, as observed in a small community like Deepwater, is an important occasion, especially for the young, who, by common consent of parents and police authorities, are permitted a liberty of conduct which they enjoy at no other time during the year. Patriotic gangs of small boys roam the streets on the night of the Third, shooting off firecrackers and making a tumult without much fear that the constable will do more than warn them not to become too lawless. The fun is all harmless, and no damage is caused to property. Then, at midnight, comes the great bonfire in the central square, for which wood has been carried all day long, most of it supplied in the form of discarded barrels and boxes by the local merchants. Peter had been promised that, when he was twelve, he could stay up for the bonfire, and he had been looking forward for weeks to the "night before." Not even his sore jaw could prevent him from departing

rather ostentatiously, right after dinner, to join the members of his gang in the park. Little Gige, still considered too young for such dissipation, sat on the front porch, with Rip at his side, watching his elder brother enviously.

“You’ve got your old trousers on, I hope,” said Mrs. Wadsworth, as he walked off.

“Yes, Mother.”

“Don’t get burned, will you?”

“No, Mother, I won’t.” This was said in a tone indicating slight traces of annoyance.

“And don’t stay out after one o’clock, my boy.”

“I’ll try not to, but don’t sit up for me,” answered Peter, trying with difficulty to be patient, but strolling on down the street with the nonchalance of a man about town going to his club.

Peter was to meet Beady, Hal Webster, Leaky Terry, and some older boys in the center of the park, a circular dirt space where the Deepwater Military Band played on extraordinary occasions. Among those to appear was Mucker Wright, black eye, swollen nose, and all, who greeted Peter rather sheepishly when the latter came along.

“Let’s forget it,” was Peter’s salutation.

“There’s no use in staying mad, is there?”

“Of course not,” responded Mucker, who was only waiting for an opportunity of reconciliation. “You trimmed me, all right, and I don’t bear any grudge against you. Shake!” And his hand was extended in amity to meet Peter’s. Thus the quarrel was patched up, and the two were again bosom friends,—so much so that when Hal Webster commented sarcastically on Mucker’s peculiar facial swelling, Peter turned on him, saying, “Shut up, will you! That’s all over now.” Hal, familiar with Peter’s reputation as a pugilist, said no more upon the subject.

It was a delightfully warm summer evening, without the slightest sign of a chill in the air and yet not oppressive. The boys played games in the park until the shadows grew longer, and then they turned to the business of transporting fuel to the big pile of combustibles already assembled.

“This is the biggest one for five years,” said Mucker, as he helped to hoist an enormous barrel, which, from the smell, had once contained tar, up to stronger arms nearer the top of the pyre.

“It’s the first I ever saw,” admitted Peter, “and it looks tall enough to me. They’ll be able to see the blaze as far as Schuyler, I’ll bet.”



Soon this form of exertion palled on the members of the gang, who drew together for consultation. Various plans of action were suggested, only to be debated and rejected. At last Beady, whose active mind was always ready with some scheme, cried, "Let's have some fun with old Filkins! He'll give us some excitement." Mr. Filkins was a notorious old curmudgeon, who, as a confirmed bachelor, hated boys and all their works, and had aroused their enduring resentment during the previous winter by forbidding them to coast down the steep hill back of his house. He had an uncontrollable temper, and was, as the boys knew only too well, always ready to vent his rage on trespassers. The sun had now gone down and the stars were out. The boys were mysterious figures as they moved up Sanger Street to the thick lilac hedge which shut off the Filkins residence from the road. Scattering, they found their way through the bushes to a point near the broad piazza, where they held a whispered consultation on the important question as to who should be deputed as the gang's representative. The choice fell on Beady, who stole up the steps in his rubber-soled shoes and pulled the door-bell so hard that the ring seemed to resound through the

night air from an open window on the veranda. Then he slipped back to await developments. After a considerable interval, a light appeared. Mr. Filkins himself fumbled at the door and stood there gazing out into the darkness, the glow from the lamp which he carried streaming over his white hair and long patriarchal beard.

“Drat those young ’uns,” Peter could hear him say, as he raised the lamp and seemed to be listening intently. Then he muttered in an angry voice, “Darn ye, jest wait till I ketch ye, ye little imps of Satan!”

There was a spontaneous cackle from behind the rose-bushes where the boys lay concealed, and the old man, hearing the tittering, said in a louder voice, “I’ll get a gun! I’ll set the police on ye! I’ll have ye locked . . . .”

Just then Hal Webster threw a pack of small firecrackers to the foot of the steps, where they began sputtering with little sharp detonations. Astonished at the noise which they made in the quiet night, the conspirators fell into a wild panic; Hal Webster started to run, and, in the confusion, even the usually unperturbed Peter took the alarm and fled as fast as he could go. Once he sprawled over a root and measured his

length on the ground, with a violent tingling in his toes. Not until he had emerged from the Filkins estate and was well down Sanger Street, in the shadows of the maples around the edge of the park, did he cease his flight and lie down on the grass to regain his breath. In five minutes he was himself again and strolled to the gravel circle in the middle of the triangle, where a hasty search soon showed him his other companions in mischief. Some of them were still puffing, and Beady was a little frightened as to the consequences of his daring, but they were all elated over the exploit.

“I shouldn’t have done it,” explained Peter to his mother the next morning, “if he hadn’t been the meanest man in town. Dad says that he practically stole all his sister’s money, and he never has been known to give away a penny to anybody or anything.”

“Yes, my boy,” Mrs. Wadsworth answered, “but that doesn’t justify you in plaguing the old gentleman, does it?”

“Well, Mother, I can’t say that I am sorry. We didn’t hurt him a bit, and it was all good fun. If anybody had done the same thing to Dad, he’d have laughed over it.”

“Oh, that’s different, of course,” replied the mother, unable to find a satisfactory answer. And the conversation stopped at that point.

For a while the boys rested in the darkness, talking it all over in subdued tones, all wondering whether Mr. Filkins would find out who they were and have them brought up before a judge. But such energy cannot long remain dammed up, and there was soon a stir among those who, like Peter, wanted to be on the move again.

“Say, fellows,” said Peter, suddenly sitting up and speaking excitedly, “what do you think of carrying off the Congers’ iron dog and putting it in the school-yard?”

Here was a brand new idea! Colonel Montague Conger occupied an imposing stone house on Norcross Avenue,—a place which, with its stone front and tall white pillars, was one of the show spots of the village. Around it was a spacious lawn, always carefully mowed in summer, and in the middle, in a conspicuous position, was a huge mastiff, with tail protruding out straight into space and an attitude of calmness combined with pride and reserve,—a beast constructed, however, not of flesh and blood, but of iron. Between the lawn and the street was a metal fence, effectually



shutting out casual visitors, so that Peter had never been able to make a detailed inspection of the animal's anatomy. It had long aroused his admiration, however, and he had frequently studied it meditatively from a distance. He and Gige had often discussed whether or not it was hollow, but that important question had not yet been positively settled by the disputants. Altogether, the Congers' dog was a fascinating subject for speculation,—and investigation.

“It's too heavy,” responded “Goldy” Goldberg, who was the laziest of the clan. “We could never even lift it, to say nothing of carrying it off.”

“I'll bet we could,” said Hal. “It can't be so terribly heavy. Mert Foster, the man that works for Colonel Conger, told me that he thought he could lift it off the pedestal,—and there are pretty nearly a dozen of us.”

“We can try it, anyhow, even if we have to give it up,” said Peter, who, as usual, was forming a plan. “There's a way of getting into the garden from White Street, back of the garage, and, if we're quiet, nobody'll ever know what we're doing. It's worth while going up to have a look.”

“Suppose Patsy Fry, the cop, catches us!”

suggested Beady Bennett, introducing a note of pessimism into the council.

“Oh, our dads will fix it all right with him,” said Peter, confidently. “My father gives him medicine for his cough, and I guess he won’t put us in the lock-up unless we commit murder or highway robbery or something really bad like that.”

There was some very sensible argument against Peter’s proposal, but at last the more venturesome spirits had their way, and the little band of plotters started off on their nefarious errand. It was now well past ten o’clock, and the night had become dark. The boys went through the center of the village, taking another look at the huge pile of barrels, and then on past Beady Bennett’s home and up White Street. When they came to a narrow roadway just beyond an electric arc light, Peter turned down to the left, going past a small garage belonging to the Widow Andrews and then through her vegetable garden, at the rear of which was a stone wall bounding the Conger estate. It was not difficult for the agile youngsters to climb this barrier one by one and drop lightly on the other side. Then Peter groped his way along in the darkness, followed by

Hal, Mucker, Beady, Leaky, Goldy, and two or three others, each clinging to the one in front of him so that the band might not be separated. Past a grape arbor and under some apple-trees they went until they emerged in a broad open space, beyond which they could see the dark mass of the Conger house. Peter pointed to a vague figure which could be dimly descried in the starlight. "There's the pup!" he whispered to those behind him. "Now we'll see about hauling him out."

Dropping to their hands and knees in imitation of Peter, the boys crept out on the lawn, moving silently towards their goal. When they reached the statue, they gathered around it, seized it where their hands could find room, and, when Peter gave a low signal, began to lift. He and Mucker, the two strongest, had taken strategic positions, and Peter found himself grasping the projecting iron tail and straining with every muscle.

"Work, you terriers!" he grunted, as he took another hold. "She's coming! I can feel her giving way!"

There was an unexpected sharp cracking sound, and Peter felt himself falling unexpectedly over

backwards. The statue, which had been imbedded in solid concrete, was practically immovable, but the tail had broken off in his hands, leaving the body of the animal intact. Peter's involuntary cry of surprise, accompanied by his sudden movement, frightened his companions, who, in their nervousness, turned and scurried like rabbits in all directions. Peter, picking himself up from the grass and trying to recall what had happened, caught a faint outline of shadowy forms vanishing into the denser obscurity of the trees. It was obvious that he had been deserted by his allies.

All responsibility for their safety being removed, Peter realized that he must look out for himself. While he was hesitating, wondering just what to do next, he saw lights coming on gradually in the house not far away. Evidently the noise which the gang had made had aroused some of the Conger family, and there was about to be an investigation,—possibly with disastrous consequences to Peter Wadsworth unless that individual made a rapid exit. Crawling abjectly on his stomach, the metal tail still in his hand, he reached cover behind a spreading rhododendron, and there awaited developments. In a second or



two the veranda was brightly illuminated, and a tall, erect gentleman, with grey hair and a Van Dyck beard, clad in a gorgeous dressing-gown, seemed to be directing a search. Two or three men-servants were flashing torch-lights about the lawn, and soon one of them exclaimed, "They've been here, Colonel Conger! Some ruffians have been trying to carry off the dog!"

One of the "ruffians" thus mentioned was Peter, who, concealed in a spot not over forty feet away, could hear every word of the conversation distinctly, and his teeth chattered as if he had been out in a February storm.

"Well! Well!" said the Colonel, coming down from the steps to investigate. "Where do you suppose they have gone?"

"Oh, they've all vanished by this time, sir," replied a servant's voice. "But look, here's a notebook that one of them must have dropped in his flight."

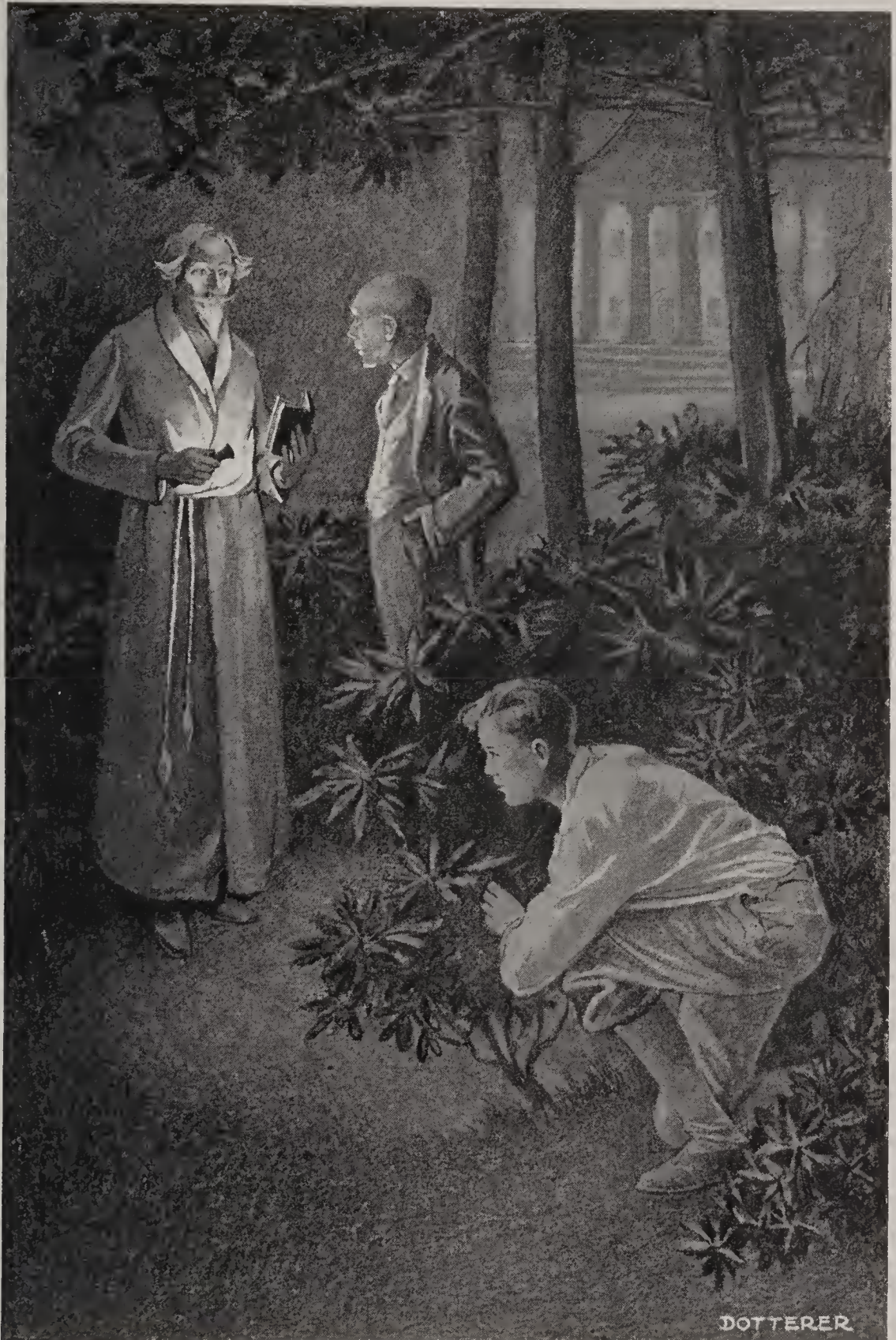
At this a clammy sweat began to rise on Peter's forehead. He felt in his pocket for the little memorandum book which he usually carried. It was gone! He would be caught now without any question! As if hypnotized, he watched Colonel Conger as the latter took the little red-covered

volume in his hand, glanced at it for a moment by the glow of his flash-light, and chuckled audibly.

“ We have a clue, all right,” he said. “ And now I think that we might as well go to bed. I don’t believe we’ll be bothered again this evening. We can take whatever measures are necessary in the morning.”

The investigators retreated to the shelter of the house; the lights were gradually extinguished, until the only illumination came from the bedrooms in the second story; and still Peter Wadsworth remained concealed behind the mass of foliage. For once in his brief career he was really completely alarmed. His father had taught him not to be afraid of physical peril, and he had not shrunk from confronting Mucker Wright in combat; but this was something new! Although he did not fully comprehend it, his conscience was beginning to function. Shivering in the warm night, he stole from his hiding-place out to the street, walking down the Congers’ front walk hardly caring whether he were observed or not; and then he proceeded disconsolately back to the square, with all his enthusiasm for the coming fire dead in his heart. He had been detected in





“WE HAVE A CLUE, ALL RIGHT.”—Page 122.





a criminal act and would undoubtedly be put in jail. The disgrace to his family would be terrible, and his mother and father could never forgive him. All his jaunty self-confidence had evaporated. For a moment he dallied with the idea of running away and shipping before the mast, as Richard Henry Dana had done, but his common sense warned him that this would probably break his mother's heart. No,—the only right procedure was to accept the penalty like a man, without whimpering.

So engrossed was he in his own gloomy meditations that he had hardly bestowed a thought upon the others; but, when he reached the Presbyterian Church, there were Beady, Hal, Leaky, Mucker, and the rest all chattering away like magpies. He was greeted by loud and sincere cries of welcome.

“Where've you been, old top?”

“Wasn't that a wonderful stunt? I'll say it was!”

“Say, that dog'll be a sight to-morrow morning when the family have a look at it!”

To their astonishment, the usual exuberant Peter made no responsive laugh. Instead he only smiled so wretchedly that Beady paused in the

midst of his chuckling and inquired, "What's the matter, Peter? Did you hurt yourself?"

"No, I'm perfectly all right," responded Peter, in a tone which completely gave the lie to his words.

"Did the old boy catch you?" asked Hal eagerly,—almost hopefully.

"No, I got away easily enough. But the Colonel found my note-book—I saw him pick it up and look at it,—and I'll be pinched to-morrow, all right."

"What's that in your hand?" inquired Mucker.

Peter looked down. He was still carrying the iron tail. He had walked all the way down Main Street with that telltale evidence in his hand,—a hard metal object at least eight or nine inches long. Fortunately he had passed nobody that he could remember.

"Well, you certainly ought to win the prize for dumbness!" commented Hal. "Why don't you get rid of the evidence? What's the use of advertising it to the whole town?"

"It doesn't really make much difference that I can see," remarked Peter sadly, although he could not help being somewhat amused by his careless-

ness. "They'll get me, anyhow, no matter where the tail is. They know I took it."

"You'd better put the old tail where nobody will see it," suggested Beady. "That's just common sense. What's the use of running a bigger risk than you need to? You look funny enough walking around with that in your hand."

And so Peter, perceiving the wisdom of this advice, thrust the heavy piece of metal under his coat, which he carefully buttoned up over it. Even then he was in terror of discovering that some sharp eye had detected the subterfuge. He accompanied the others to the pile of barrels, wanting all the while to be in some less conspicuous place where he could think out his problem. When they passed Patsy Fry, the town constable, of whom Peter had been so contemptuous not long before, the boy could make no response to Patsy's cordial "Hello, young feller, havin' a good time?" As if fascinated by some lure, he stared at Patsy's policeman's "billy," which the latter was twirling carelessly in his fingers, and slunk away into the shelter of the maples.

Exactly at midnight the bells in all the church steeples in Deepwater began to ring out lustily,

pulled by the willing hands of volunteers. As the first peal sounded, some master of ceremonies touched off the kerosene-sprinkled shavings and excelsior at the base of the pile. Almost instantaneously the blaze shot high up into the air, and soon the entire square was illuminated by the flames, the tar barrels sending forth here and there clouds of dense black smoke with an agreeable smell. Peter, avoiding publicity, shoved himself back where the glow was less bright. Ordinarily he would have been delighted at the spectacle and would have danced joyously about it as his friends were now doing. For the moment, however, his mind was absorbed in other cogitations, principally in wondering what the dawn would bring,—the lock-up, perhaps, and a cell with iron bars. There was no lustre in his eyes and no gladness in his heart as he looked furtively about. His conscience was becoming oppressive; or, to put it in another way, his fine ancestry and good home training were beginning to tell.

For half an hour the fire burned fiercely, sending its intense heat far up the avenues entering the square. Then it slowly died down. Whole sections of the pile unexpectedly collapsed, and



by one o'clock the once impressive mass of combustibles had sunk into a low circle of red embers. Without even saying "Good-night!" to his friends, Peter slipped away and trudged home, his head held low. A few of the bystanders, recognizing him as "Doc" Wadsworth's boy, made facetious remarks, such as "Does your mother know you're out, young fella?" and "Aren't you afraid you'll get lost, bub?" but he who was usually so quick with the appropriate retort now just plodded stolidly along, a pathetic figure to those who could have understood his inner emotions. When he opened the front door and stole softly up the stairs, Mrs. Wadsworth called from her room, "Is that you, Peter?" and he answered, "Yes, Mother," as if nothing had occurred out of the ordinary. But once on his bed, he rolled and tossed nervously for hours, endeavoring hopelessly to efface the memory of the horrible thing that had happened.

He was awakened by Gige, who tore off his bedclothes and bellowed lustily in his ear, "Get up, lazybones, get up! It's after seven o'clock, and I want to hear all about the fire!" Slowly Peter came back from a dream world, peopled by green and tentacled monsters, to this very solid

and substantial earth, with its possibilities of condign punishment. He was not sure, when his eyes had fully opened, that the change was for the better.

With difficulty, Peter emerged safely from the trying ordeal of a family breakfast. Although he had secreted the tail under a pile of shirts in the lower drawer of his bureau, he still felt as if everybody must know that he had it in his possession, and he replied abstractedly to the many questions propounded by his parents regarding his experiences on the previous night; indeed they seemed, to his sensitive nature, to be conducting what resembled a cross-examination in some court of justice,—for he had read about such trials in the newspapers. Mrs. Wadsworth detected her son's reticence, of course, but attributed it to his unwonted dissipation of the evening before. She contented herself by saying, as the lad got up to go out, "Well, Peter, you're pretty much worn out from lack of sleep. Please be quiet to-day and get rested."

"Yes, Mother," answered Peter in his most dutiful voice, all the while praying inwardly that he might be let alone. If parents could only understand how their sons hate to be admonished

or catechized! The one basic desire of the thoroughly normal male, young or old, is not to be questioned about his actions. The inquiries are always so foolish anyhow! "Did you have a good time, dear?" "You're taking your rubbers, aren't you?" "Why didn't you go with Willie?" . . . And all the while you really wanted to answer,—only it was discourteous,—that you were being bored to death, or that rubbers on a dry day were absurd, or that Willie was the one boy in Deepwater that you heartily detested!

Once out in the park shooting off salutes in the open air, Peter was in a better mood, but only because his mind was for a few moments diverted by noise and excitement. He honestly was expecting at any second to see Patsy Fry approach in his blue coat with brass buttons and silver badge, and to be seized by the collar and led off to the village lock-up,—that horrid place in the basement of the Town Hall which he had once timidly investigated in those far-off days when he had not been an offender against society and had nothing to fear.

The memory of certain morbid stories by Edgar Allan Poe lingered in Peter's mind, and he shud-

dered. A struggle was going on in his soul, involving an important moral issue. To confess or not to confess! In the making of a decision all sorts of factors played their part; he was afraid of punishment, of course, but he was equally disinclined to face Colonel Conger with the tale of his bad deed. All the morning he entered into games with Beady, Mucker Wright, Frank Green, and the other boys who gathered in the park to celebrate the holiday. Then Hal came along and took Peter aside to discuss developments.

“I rode down Norcross Avenue on my way here,” he reported, “and the dog was still there all right. You could hardly tell from the road that his tail was gone. What did you do with it, anyhow? If they had it, they could solder it on easy enough.”

Peter was not disposed to be communicative, but he listened to every word and pondered it in his heart. About the present location of the tail he divulged nothing whatever.

“Have you heard anybody speak about it?” he asked, trying to conceal his anxiety under a superficial nonchalance.

“Not a person,” responded Hal. “You can be sure old Colonel Conger won’t do anything.



He'll just think some hoboes were having some fun. It won't take him long to forget the whole affair."

Before Hal, Peter managed to look completely unconcerned. All the while, however, his memory was vividly recalling the scene when Colonel Conger had picked up the lost note-book and smiled grimly. Peter had reason to believe that no hobo would be suspected.

As he quietly withdrew and went slowly back to his home, Peter thought the matter over. "He must be playing with me," he said to himself. "He's probably waiting now to see what I'm going to do,—whether I'm going to bring back the tail myself or wait for him to speak." Suddenly a new idea came to his mind,—why not forestall the old gentleman and confess everything to him? At once he imagined himself walking up the long path from the street to the Congers' front porch, and he shivered involuntarily. Still he lingered over the plan, considering it from many different angles. When he reached the house, he went to the kitchen for a glass of milk and some fresh-fried doughnuts. There it was that he made a resolve to tell the whole story to Colonel Conger. "He can't do any more than tell Dad," thought

Peter; "and anything is better than waiting to see what's going to happen."

Of his own accord Peter went up to his room and put on a white shirt and a clean starched collar,—an act which might have alarmed his mother if she had been a witness of it, but luckily she was occupied at that moment in the kitchen. Then, with the iron tail neatly concealed in the inside pocket of his coat, he mounted his bicycle and rode unconcernedly off down the street, taking a roundabout route by the race-track and the railroad station so that he would not be observed by inquisitive friends. Coming down Norcross Avenue from the opposite end of the village, he soon reached the conspicuous Conger Mansion, with its smooth, green lawn behind the spiked fence. As Peter dismounted and leaned his bicycle against a post, he was seriously tempted to run off without performing his errand. When he glanced casually at the great mastiff standing there so haughtily, he felt that his owner would never condone what he had done to mar the dog's symmetry.

Peter's feet dragged slowly up the granolithic sidewalk to the imposing entrance, with its heavy white pillars and massive portico. Even when

he had actually rung the bell, looking utterly miserable as he did so, he was on the point of breaking all his good resolutions and vanishing around the side of the house. "Coward!" he muttered to himself. "Take a brace, can't you?" And just then the door opened, and Colonel Conger himself appeared,—a straight-backed man of military bearing, with a moustache and little Van Dyck beard of fiery red and a whimsical expression on his face. He had been a sergeant in Colonel Roosevelt's Rough Riders at San Juan Hill during the Spanish War, and this record had enabled him to secure a commission as Colonel in the Quartermaster Corps during the World War. His income being ample for his needs, he had settled down to a life of scholarly reading and research in his library, being commonly supposed to be engaged on a *History of Deepwater, with Notes on its Founders*. As he stood in the doorway, with a pipe in his hand, he looked a little puzzled at the frightened figure before him,—whom he did not at once recognize.

"Why, hello, young fellow," he said, in a deep rich voice which seemed to come out of some cavern. "What can I do for you? Will you come in?" The tone was kindly enough, but it rolled



out from so great a height and Colonel Conger looked so burly that Peter's timidity increased.

"Please, sir—please, sir —— I—I—that is," here Peter faltered for a second and then, encouraged by the Colonel's pleasant eyes, went on, "I want to bring this back to you." Fumbling inside his coat, he took out a package wrapped in a newspaper and held it out, while his eyes filled with tears. There he stood, waiting for his doom.

"What in the world is this?" asked Colonel Conger, much puzzled, as he took the parcel and unwrapped it. Then, as he examined the contents, comprehension came to him. "Why, where did you pick this up?" he inquired. "It's the tail of our Fido, isn't it?"

"Ye-ye-ye-yes, sir, it is," stuttered Peter. "I broke it off last night,—and—and—and I thought I'd bring it back and tell you about it. We didn't mean to bust it, sir, only the dog wouldn't lift up,—and,—here's all the money I've got, sir, to put it back again." Peter handed out a small purse to Colonel Conger, and then broke down completely.

He fumbled in his trousers pocket for a handkerchief to dry his tears, but none was available.



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The older man, seeing his predicament, drew out his own of white silk and let him have it.

“Look here, my boy,” he said, putting a large friendly hand on Peter’s shoulder. “You come in my study and we’ll discuss this affair a little in solemn conclave.” The still sobbing lad stepped inside, not forgetting to wipe his shoes on the mat as he had been taught by his mother to do, and soon found himself in a large cool room, lined with more books than Peter had ever seen at once. He sank into a huge leather chair so far that he was sure that he would go through the floor. When he had recovered sufficiently to be able to gaze at his surroundings, he saw Colonel Conger smiling at him from the sofa. The expression on the Colonel’s countenance was so reassuring that the boy gradually dried his eyes and regained his composure.

“Let’s see,” he said, “you’re Peter Wadsworth, the doctor’s son, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir, I am.”

“Your father and I are good friends. He often drops in here for a chat about books.”

“I’m awfully sorry, sir, that I tried to carry off your iron dog.”

“Look here, my boy, I’ll tell you a secret, only

you mustn't breathe it to any one. You see Mrs. Conger has always liked that dog, and I've always hated him. You've really done me a big service, for she said at breakfast that, now that the tail was broken off, we might as well have the remainder of the animal carried away; so, if we can keep her from finding this tail, I'll be a happy man. Suppose we hide it somewhere." He opened a deep drawer in his desk, and thrust the piece of metal as far back in as he could reach. "There," he said, "nobody can possibly find that. We can both sleep easier now; only don't you ever dare to let the secret out!"

Peter was incapable of speech! He was unable to do more than gaze in bewilderment at Colonel Conger. Could he possibly be hearing correctly?

"And now," added his host, "we're partners in crime! And I feel that I ought to reward you for what you've done to get rid of that foolish looking lawn decoration. Look here, suppose you take this silver dollar and buy yourself some fireworks for to-night. There must be something you need, isn't there?"

Peter stared at the shining circle in Colonel Conger's hand. "Why," he protested, "you don't

understand, I guess! That was a mean trick that I did when I tried to carry off your dog! I don't deserve anything as a reward. Instead I ought to be shut up and fined for damaging your property. Don't you see, sir?" He looked as if there might be another outburst of tears.

"Oh, don't have that on your mind, Peter. It's what any high-spirited boy is likely to do on exciting occasions. I've done many worse things myself. And I'm proud of you because you came and owned up. Not one boy in a hundred would have done that."

Peter silently took the silver dollar and looked up at the Colonel with affection and admiration in his eyes.

"You're a brick, sir!" he stammered. "I'd just like to hear any of the kids say anything mean about you! I'd hammer him!"

To this obviously sincere compliment, even Colonel Conger could make no suitable reply. He did, however, press a button and asked the servant who appeared to bring some cakes and ginger ale. In a few minutes a tray was placed at Peter's elbow on which he saw all sorts of delicacies; and the boy, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles, soon forgot all his troubles in the en-



joyment of an amazing chocolate cake with pink frosting. Soon he was chatting away quite unembarrassed, answering the Colonel's queries and propounding some of his own.

When the boy, with an appetite which made his host envious, had devoured six cakes and two bottles of ginger ale, the Colonel said, "Now, don't you worry about that old dog. You come along in three or four days and you'll see that he has disappeared,—banished to some dump heap. And then you'll know that you did me a mighty good turn in helping me to get rid of him. And don't you ever dare, under penalty of twenty years in Sing Sing, to tell Mrs. Conger or anybody else where that tail is now!"

As Colonel Conger was ushering him out the door, Peter stopped, looked up at him, and said, "I'll never forget, sir, how kind and forgiving you have been." He was no longer a timid and fearful little boy, but a worshipper turning to his idol and trying to express his gratitude. It was a very gay and care-free Peter who waved a farewell to the Colonel from the street and rode off at top speed on his bicycle. No longer was he ashamed to look his friends in the eyes. He waved a casual greeting to Patsy Fry, the con-



stable, as he passed him in the square. When he rejoined his companions in the park, he had regained all his customary exuberance. His unusual holiday attire made him the butt of some coarse raillery, but he endured it all good-naturedly.

“I wonder what that old dub, Conger, is going to do about his dog?” asked Beady, quite innocently, when they were lying on the grass resting from their game of “shinny.”

Peter sat up at once, and addressed his friend. “Look here, Beady,” he said impressively. “That gentleman’s name is Colonel Conger while I’m around, and don’t you forget it. Whoever makes fun of him has got to settle with me.”

“Gosh!” murmured the startled Beady. “What’s the old,—I mean what’s the Colonel done for you? He hasn’t handed you a thousand dollars, has he? Why this sudden rushing to his defense?”

Peter made no reply, and the subject was not pursued further, either then or at any later date, for Peter’s attitude did not encourage discussion; instead he and Gige went home to luncheon, at which his mother was worried about his poor appetite, little realizing on what sugary viands her

son had been feeding. When, a few days afterwards, the familiar iron dog disappeared, pedestal and all, the Followers of Deerfoot commented on the news, but still Peter, in spite of questions, only looked mysterious and said nothing. Not until long afterwards did he tell the full story to his father and mother.

Meanwhile he allowed himself to speculate on some interesting problems. "I sure am glad that I wasn't afraid to go to Colonel Conger and tell him what I had done! If I hadn't owned up, he might have set the constable on me. Honesty is the best policy, all right! But it wouldn't have been decent, anyhow, not to have confessed. No matter whether you get cakes and ginger ale and a silver dollar or not, it's better to face the music. Somehow you feel cleaner inside." In education, actual experience is worth pages of talk!

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ABOUT four miles to the south of Deepwater, part way up a high hill and well back from the highway to Bridgeton, stood the deserted Merrill House, always an object of interest to the older inhabitants of the vicinity. Sometimes on their wanderings after birds' eggs or on fishing expeditions to Gorton Lake, Peter and the other Followers of Deerfoot had ridden by it on their bicycles and had looked fearfully up its driveway to the crumbling chimneys just visible through the trees. Around it everything was decay and desolation: the grass was sprinkled with weeds and never mowed, even for hay; the gnarled apple and pear trees had not been trimmed for many years; the house itself, with its broken windows and falling shingles, looked hardly habitable, even for tramps. Everybody in the Deepwater school was sure that the place was haunted, and there were few farmers who cared to drive past it after dark.

Once, in a reminiscent mood, Dr. Wadsworth had told Peter and Gige the dramatic story of this miserable farmhouse. Twenty years before, when he had first settled in Deepwater, a band of desperadoes, commonly called the "Loomis Gang" because most of them belonged to that family, had terrorized the surrounding country. It was known that they had their headquarters in the Nine-Mile Swamp, a great tract of boggy woodland which stretched along the valley. No roads crossed it, and it was reputed to be impassable because of the marshes which were scattered through it, ready to swallow up the unwary explorer. Once Dr. Wadsworth had seen a wildcat which had been shot at the edge of this wilderness; but only the most venturesome of hunters and trappers ever wandered far into its mysterious depths. From this forbidding rendezvous, the outlaws, headed by their notorious leader, Plum Loomis, would emerge at uncertain intervals to steal the horses of the neighboring farmers, sending off their plunder by a secret route across the border to Canada to be sold. Plum, according to Dr. Wadsworth, was a little insignificant-looking old man, with a grey goatee and a queer trick of twisting the corners of his mouth



as he chewed tobacco. He was not at all an awe-inspiring personality on the rare occasions when he appeared in Deepwater to buy provisions or get his mail.

One of the Loomis girls,—usually called “Sis,”—actually attended school in Deepwater for a time, until it was discovered that she was carrying off, concealed skilfully on her person, the clothes and jewelry of her mates. The gang itself, however, seemed disposed to leave Deepwater alone, but finally, on a dark autumn night, some of the more daring members rode into the village, broke into two stores, and made off with several thousand dollars' worth of property.

This was too much for the patience of the Deepwater citizens. On the next afternoon a posse, headed by young Sheriff Scanlon, was formed to drive the bandits from their lair. A group of adventurous spirits joined the vigilantes, including young “Doc” Wadsworth, then unmarried, and Hal's father, “Rob” Webster, who was then Town Clerk and just starting on his political career. Armed with revolvers and shotguns and riding the best horses that the community could furnish, they penetrated into the very heart of the swamp, surprised the women,—

who were like gypsies,—and regained a considerable portion of the stolen booty. As Dr. Wadsworth described it, it was much like the attack on the Doone Valley, in Blackmore's romance *Lorna Doone*, one of Peter's favorites. The sheriff and his party burned the rough wooden shacks to the ground. Meanwhile the robbers themselves had scattered, and many of them escaped. Old Plum Loomis, however, dashed out of one of the burning sheds and rode away on his white horse, pursued by Sheriff Scanlon and a few of his comrades. The bandit leader, finding that his animal was lame and could go no farther, turned in at the Merrill House, then occupied by his sister, "Meg" Merrill. As he reached the veranda, he wheeled about and fired his pistol, killing the sheriff instantly. Before he could shoot again, the others were upon him, and he was soon bound fast.

So angry were the members of the posse at the death of the sheriff that they resolved to execute Plum on the spot. Putting a halter around his neck, they stood him on a box under an apple-tree and threw the rope over the limb above. Then and there, with "Rob" Webster presiding, they held an impromptu trial, called witnesses,

and pronounced the victim "Guilty!" The self-appointed judge then declared the prisoner sentenced to death. Of the events which followed, Dr. Wadsworth had been an eye-witness, and he told the tale most effectively.

"Make your last speech if you have anything to say for yourself," said Webster, "for you're going to pay the penalty now for all your evil deeds."

"Gentlemen," said Plum, polite as always, gazing watchfully around on the crowd of which he was the central figure, "I have just one word to speak. Me and my kin have got red blood in our veins. Give us a war, and we'd all be colonels and generals,—and you know it! In peace-time we've got to have action. String me up if you want to. I'm sorry I killed your sheriff, but you'll get no whimper from me. I'm an old man, anyhow, and I guess I've lived out my days."

As he finished, two of the vigilantes kicked the box away, and the soul of Plum Loomis went to meet its Maker. The bodies of Sheriff Scanlon and the outlaw murderer were carried back to Deepwater, and the courts never investigated the illegal execution of the bandit chief. Eventually the entire gang, their leader gone, dispersed: two

or three were captured and served sentences in the penitentiary; others fled to Canada or escaped to the Far West; a few repented of their crimes and settled down to quiet lives on farms in the adjacent counties. But never, so far as neighbors could tell, had any Loomis ever come back to the Merrill farm. Mrs. Merrill, who was a widow living alone, was gone on the day after the killing, and no one had ever seen her since.

Thus it was that the house had stood there season after season, enjoying an evil reputation which prevented even sneak thieves from breaking in. No one had rented it. No one had investigated the title. Once Dr. Wadsworth, passing in his Dodge sedan one Sunday afternoon, turned up the grass-grown driveway before his wife could protest and pointed out to the boys the limb to which Plum Loomis had been suspended.

“The farmers have a wild yarn that the tree has never borne any apples since,” he observed, “but it’s covered with buds now. I have an idea that there will be plenty of fruit on it in the fall.”

“Ugh!” said Mrs. Wadsworth with a shudder. “I shouldn’t want to eat any of it.”

“I should,” put in Peter emphatically, al-



though he was then only a child. "And now, Daddy, show us the place where Sheriff Scanlon was killed."

Dr. Wadsworth then had to point out the exact spot where the murdered sheriff dropped lifeless from his horse, and the little boys tried to find stains of blood on the ground, although the rains and snows of many years had washed away all traces of the crime. The visit made a lasting appeal to the imaginations of the young Wadsworths, and they often referred to it as they grew older.

On a Saturday in late September, a few months after Peter's adventure with Colonel Conger, a little party, consisting of Peter, Gige, Beady, and Jack Goodhue, had started off early in the morning to hunt for woodchucks or rabbits or even humble chipmunks with air-rifles. They had eaten their lunch at Gorton Lake, and, on their walk back, had stopped to rest for a moment at the foot of the long slope leading to the Merrill House. The morning had been sunny and bright, but dark clouds had appeared about noon, and the afternoon was grey and a little chilly.

"Let's go up and see whether there really are any apples on that tree," suggested Peter, ex-

plaining to Beady and Jack the weird legend about the limb on which Plum Loomis was hanged.

“Oh, Peter, let’s not go there now!” protested Gige. “There may be all sorts of spooks around, and ghosts don’t like to be interfered with.”

“Spooks your eye!” ejaculated Peter, to whom a little opposition invariably served as a stimulus. “Who’s afraid? If you want to go back home, trot ahead! You know the road, every inch of it. I’m going to look that house over if I have to do it all alone.”

“I’m with you, Peter,” said Beady. “You can’t scare me,—not by a long shot!”

“Me, too!” added Jack Goodhue, the youngest of the group.

“Shucks! I’m not afraid,” said Gige. “Only if you get into any trouble, don’t blame me. I’m coming along, and I’ll bet I’m not the first man to run. Wait and see!”

Peter’s reassuring air of intrepidity was partly assumed for the occasion. As the Grand Sachem of the Followers of Deerfoot, he could not, of course, allow his courage to be questioned. But it must not be inferred that he felt entirely at ease as he reached the driveway and turned in at

the left, his faithful companions at his heels. Somehow the day seemed to get darker and the clouds more sombre as he approached the house itself. In spite of his plucky self-control, he had cold shivers up and down his spine, and disconcerting tales of ghosts and goblins came vaguely to his mind. But, like many another leader of men, he strengthened his resolution to meet the emergency and kept on, hoping that he seemed outwardly unperturbed,—as indeed he did seem to be.

Jack and Beady soon acknowledged that Peter had not at all exaggerated the desolation of the Merrill House. Hardly a pane of glass was left intact; one end of the piazza had fallen in, and shingles from the roof were scattered over the ground; goldenrod and fireweed were growing right up to the front door.

“Heavens! What’s that?” suddenly cried Gige, and started to run. A clumsy black creature scuttled through the thick grass in front of them and vanished under the barn.

“Come back here, you boob!” called Peter. “It’s nothing but a stupid hedgehog. There used to be hundreds of them up at Lake Woodhull. They always live around deserted houses and

lumber camps. They're about as dangerous as a baby rabbit! ”

“ He'll throw his spikes at us,” protested Gige, still hovering in the driveway ready to beat a retreat.

“ That's all a yarn! They can't throw their spikes at all. Besides they always run away if you make a motion. Last summer our dog, Echo,—the one that was run over this spring before we got Rip,—tried to eat one of them for breakfast, and the poor pup got filled with prongs. That's what you're thinking of. But even that wouldn't have happened if the fool dog hadn't jumped right on top of the hedgehog. You're not going to do that, I hope.”

Gige came slowly back, not quite certain whether Peter was telling the truth or not, but somewhat reassured by the calm attitude of Jack Goodhue. Peter kept his air-rifle in readiness, and soon, seeing another rustle in the grass near a pile of boards, took aim and fired. The others, not including Gige, rushed up, and there, sure enough, was a small porcupine, which Peter had killed with a lucky bullet. After waiting to see whether the animal made any movement, Peter gave him a defiant and contemptuous kick.



“Guess he won’t trot around much more and scare little boys,” he said, smiling at Gige. “Come on! Let’s have a look at the apple-tree.”

As they walked to the spot where the notorious Plum Loomis had once paid the penalty for his misdemeanors, Peter could see that the tree was loaded with reddening fruit,—evidently a variety of early apple. He looked up at the large limb, perhaps nine or ten feet from the ground, from which, according to his father’s story, the outlaw had once dangled

“Hello!” cried Peter ecstatically, “there’s an old piece of rope in plain sight.”

The others crowded up to investigate. There, adhering to the rough bark, was what undoubtedly had once been a section of heavy tarred rope. It was probably not part of the original noose, but to the boys it was quite satisfactory as an exhibit, and their nerves were all on edge.

“Look,” said Beady pointing up. “Can’t you see ripe apples on the very limb where old Plum died?”

“I dare anybody to eat one of them!” said Jack, a trifle timidly.

“Why not?” inquired Peter in his most scornful manner; and, accepting the implied challenge,

he shinnied up the trunk and crawled out on the fatal branch. "Look here, I'm going to give you some." He threw down some of the red-streaked fruit to those below, and then sat dangling his feet right over the spot where Plum must have swung and biting into an apple as if such experiences were mere matters of every-day routine with him. A brief tasting convinced the hungry youth that the execution of the bandit had not helped the quality of the fruit. It was sour and bitter to the taste, and he was glad to throw it aside after a few mouthfuls. As he sat perched in the air, Peter recounted the details of the story again for the benefit of an appreciative audience, until he made them shudder by the realism of his narrative.

"Let's have a glance inside," suggested Beady, in a tone which indicated a touch of bravado. Peter's tantalizing courage had inspired Beady to a rivalry in audacity.

"Hadn't we better go along home?" asked Gige, pointing to a black bank of clouds. "There's some kind of a fierce storm coming, and we're liable to get wet."

"What difference does that make?" objected Peter, not to be outdone by any assertive com-

petitor like Beady. "If it's really a hard down-pour, we can stay here all night."

Jack Goodhue took no part in the conversation. If he had dared, he would have deserted the party then and there, but he was not exactly sure of the road home. And so he metaphorically gritted his teeth and followed Peter as that unflinching adventurer dropped from his seat on the apple-tree limb and led the way to the front door of the house. It was locked! Then they experimented with one or two of the windows, but they had evidently been fastened on the inside.

"Let's have a look around back," suggested Peter. "Perhaps something is open there." But all the windows at the rear were closed in the same fashion. It did seem a bit absurd to have the window frames locked when all the panes of glass were shattered.

"Well, there's only one sure method of entrance, and that's to crawl through some of this glass," Peter concluded. Picking out a window opening into what had once been the kitchen, he broke the sash with a well-directed blow from a stone and then crept gingerly through the jagged edges. Once inside, he unfastened the lock and lifted the window for the others to enter in a

less perilous way. Jack, who brought up the rear, would have relinquished a whole month's allowance if only he could have been safe at home.

“My, what a lot of furniture!” exclaimed Beady. “There's a perfectly good stove still here in the kitchen and a pile of dishes over there in the closet. It looks as if somebody was keeping house here even now. Keep your eyes open, fellows, for trouble!”

“Maybe ghosts have to eat,” said Beady in a sepulchral voice which made Jack and Gige tremble at the thought.

With Peter at the head, the four boys strolled excitedly through the rooms, discovering new treasures in each and stopping here and there to point out to each other the attractiveness of a chair or a picture. It certainly looked as if the former residents had been suddenly driven forth, by pestilence or fright, and had never cared to return to claim their own. Now and then Peter would open a closet or pull out a bureau drawer merely to gratify an innocent curiosity.

As they were investigating one of the up-stairs bedrooms,—a large square chamber with a great double bed, evidently once occupied by the



owner,—Gige, reaching carelessly back into the deep drawer of a roll-top desk, struck something hard with his fingers.

“Look here!” he cried. “Here’s something that feels like a wooden box!”

Drawing it out from its place of concealment, he carried it over to the window, where the others gathered round to inspect the find. It was a small, oblong case, about five inches by eight, neatly made of some kind of light-colored wood and with some carved figures on the top. There was a key in the lock, and, opening it, Gige lifted the cover. Much to his disgust, it was filled, not with gorgeous jewels or Spanish doubloons, as he had hoped, but with old papers, which he rejected at a glance as worthless. “I might have known that nobody would have left anything valuable in a desk drawer,” he said, as he deposited the box contemptuously on the table and turned to something else.

Peter picked it up after him, took out a few of the documents inside, and examined them closely. Then he went nearer the light, where he could look at them more carefully.

“See here!” he said excitedly. “There are some mighty queer-looking stamps on some of

these envelopes, and I shouldn't be surprised if a few were very rare. I'm going to take these home and have Moms find out what their value is. They aren't ordinary issues, I'm sure of that. Maybe we've got a treasure after all." Peter had been a stamp collector for some years, aided and abetted by his mother, to whom philately and genealogy were not merely hobbies, but passions.

"Here, those are mine," objected Gige, who had heard Peter's remarks and was now more eager to claim what he had just discarded as worthless. "I found 'em, didn't I?"

"I'm not going to keep them," explained Peter. "You can have whatever money they bring. But I'll just leave them in my pocket safe until we can show them to Mother. She'll be interested, all right." He shoved the package of old papers inside his coat, and the party continued on their tour of exploration.

When they had finished the second story and the attic,—which was dark and full of rats,—they returned to the kitchen, where Beady's sharp eyes spied a door in the corner back of the stove. He opened it and cried, "Come here, Peter. Look how dark it is down there! I wonder if there's

anything worth hunting for in the cellar? Maybe there's a skeleton buried in the floor! I dare you to go down, Peter!"

"Dare yourself!" was Peter's reply. "I've never let anybody stump me yet!" Without further preliminaries or debate, he began the descent, feeling his way bit by bit while the others cautioned him from above. He had gone only two or three steps when he uttered a startled cry; there was the noise of cracking wood, and, in a second, a dull thud on the floor below.

"What's the matter?" inquired Gige anxiously. "Are you hurt, Peter?"

"Oh!" groaned a voice from below. "How my leg hurts! And I can't seem to move it at all! I guess it must be busted!" He moaned again as if in agony.

"Wait a minute and I'll be with you," said Gige, starting down to assist his brother.

"Don't do that, you fool!" said Beady, holding him back by the coat-tail. "There'll only be two of you hurt instead of one. There must be some other better way of entering the cellar. You wait here while Jack and I go outside and have a look."

Beady and Jack unbolted the kitchen door and

rushed out. To their left was a bulkhead, apparently leading under the house. By dint of some tugging and more pounding with stones, they managed to knock out the staple and lift the door up, thus throwing some light into the cellar where Peter was lying. They could see at a glance what had happened. The stairs had rotted away and Peter had dropped some eight feet to a stone floor, his leg doubling under him in such a way that it had apparently been sprained or broken.

“You’ll have to carry me, I guess, fellows,” said Peter, in a rather plaintive tone, as he raised himself up on his elbows. “That leg hurts like the dickens!” Gige meanwhile had joined them, and the three lifted him up so that he could move along resting on the shoulders of Beady and Gige, his injured leg dangling helplessly. With this assistance he finally reached the piazza steps, where they all stopped to consider what it was best to do.

In the excitement of the last few minutes, nobody had paid much attention to the ugly black clouds which had been massing in the south. Autumn thunder-storms are rare in central New York, but occasionally there is one of exceptional



severity. Now, as Peter leaned against a post, there was a sharp flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder which reverberated sonorously among the surrounding hills.

“Wow!” said Peter, as his leg gave a sharp twinge. “We’re going to have a cloudburst! We ought not to try to move anywhere until this is over. Let’s get back in a corner here and watch what’s doing.”

The smaller boys now brought out two chairs, in one of which Peter could sit while his injured leg rested on the seat of the other; and they awaited, with some trepidation, the beginning of the downpour.

“I’d rather be here than inside, anyhow,” said Jack Goodhue, his voice not altogether firm. The flashes were now intensely bright, and the thunder was like crashes of artillery.

“I’m wondering what Moms will think,” said Gige, looking at his wrist-watch. “It’s almost six o’clock now, and we are due back for dinner at six-thirty.”

“Oh, Dad’s got plenty of common sense,” replied Peter. “He’ll know that we went in somewhere to seek shelter from the rain.”

“But how can we ever manage to take you

home at all?" asked Beady, as a zigzag streak of fire illumined the landscape.

"Just get me down to the main highway and wait for a car to come along,—that is, when the storm is over. Or one of you can trot along to the nearest house and telephone. Then Dad or Mother will drive up after me. That part's easy! But say, how that leg of mine does ache!"

The storm was now more impressive. Although it was long before sunset, it was almost as dark as if it had been midnight, and the boys could see only a few feet away from the piazza. Flash succeeded flash, rumble followed rumble, with a quickness which was ominous. Then there came a sudden stupefying calm. For a moment there was neither wind nor rain. Everything was silent, as if the motion of the earth had ceased. Then, with terrific violence, a tornado descended! There was one blinding flash which turned the whole sky into flame, and a grinding crash as if the forest were falling—and afterwards a gust of wind which nearly blew the boys from their seats. They shrank far back into the corner of the piazza, huddling together through a terror which no one cared to dissemble except Peter. Gige was honestly and unaffectedly in tears. Jack was

clinging in desperation to Beady, who, in his turn, kept murmuring, "We'll never get out of this!" Only Peter, in spite of his pain, endeavored to cheer his comrades by saying, "It's almost over now, fellows. We're through the worst of it!"

He was right. The onslaught of the storm was as brief as it had been alarming. Lighter streaks slowly appeared in the darker clouds, and the rain, which had never been heavy at any time, slackened to a mere drizzle. Soon the boys could see through the mist that the apple-tree where Peter had been sitting only a short period before had been shattered by a bolt of lightning. The very limb from which Plum Loomis's body had dangled was broken off from the trunk and was lying on the ground only a few feet from the piazza. They must have had a very narrow escape from being struck.

And they were still in a most unpleasant situation. Peter, whose leg was throbbing with pain, could hardly restrain himself from moaning aloud; yet he knew that, if he did, the others might lose their nerve. When the rain had ceased, he looked at his watch,—it was nearly seven o'clock, long past the Wadsworth dinner

hour. His mother, as he was well aware, would be much worried, and he was eager to relieve her anxiety. Just then a cloud lifted in the west, and a glow of color appeared to cheer him up. Crippled though he was, he took command by sheer force of will, and gave instructions as to how he was to be carried to the road. Obediently Beady and Gige bent over while he put his arms around their shoulders. Then, leaning on them as much as he dared, he moved along very slowly, resting often against trees or fences, until they all reached the highway.

“Now I’m absolutely all right,” he said. “Jack can stay here with me to keep me company while you two go along until you meet somebody in a car or come to a farmhouse. If you telephone to Dad, just tell him I have sprained my ankle and need a ride home. Don’t you dare, whatever you do, to say I’ve broken my leg, or Mother will be worried sick.”

So Beady and Gige ran off at top speed, leaving Peter and Jack behind, the latter resting against a large boulder by the side of the road. Peter divided with Jack the large slab of milk-chocolate which he regularly carried on such expeditions, and they waited patiently, Peter being



careful not to indicate in any way to Jack how excruciatingly painful his leg was getting to be. At last, when Peter's watch showed half-past seven and the twilight was slowly deepening into night, Beady's form appeared in the dusk.

"Your father will be here very soon, I think," he said. "Say, but it was a long trip to a house,—pretty near a mile, I guess! And then we had to explain exactly where you were, and it took a good deal of time."

He had hardly finished this sentence before the Wadsworth family Dodge could be heard pounding up the hill in second speed, having covered the four miles from Deepwater at a speed which broke all the State laws. Both Dr. Wadsworth and his wife were there, the latter having insisted on coming. When the physician recognized Peter by the side of the road, he stopped his car and leaped out, followed by Mrs. Wadsworth with her husband's medicine kit.

"My poor boy!" she exclaimed rushing up to him and kissing him. "Are you badly hurt?"

"Not very much, Moms,—just a busted leg." And then Peter Wadsworth did the unexpected. He fainted away, for the first time in his life.

Dr. Wadsworth had first-aid measures with

him in his bag, and the lad, assisted by some spirits of ammonia, soon returned to consciousness,—not, however, until his mother had been nearly frightened into hysterics. Without troubling to make more than a cursory diagnosis, the physician lifted his patient into the rear seat, told the other lads to crawl in wherever they could find room, and ran back at a rate of forty miles an hour. In fifteen minutes after they reached home, Peter was comfortable in bed, with Dr. Wadsworth massaging the wounded leg.

“It looks to me as if you had broken two small bones, but I’ll be more certain after I’ve taken an X-ray,” he declared, after his inspection. “But they’ll heal all right.”

“Shall I ever be able to run again?” inquired Peter, with an anxious look.

“Of course you will. You’ll be on your feet just as well as ever in two months. But you’ll have to lie quiet for a while to let the fractured bones knit thoroughly.”

“You’re a lucky pup,” said Gige to Peter later in the week, after Dr. Wadsworth’s preliminary diagnosis had been confirmed by the X-ray photograph and the bones had been set. “Out of school and nothing to do but sit around in

bed and eat jellies and ice-cream and read and sleep. What a cinch! ”

“ I’ll swap places with you any time,” replied Peter. “ Do you think it’s any fun to lie cooped up here while the football practice is going on? ”

“ No, I suppose not. But then you won’t have any studies to prepare.”

“ Oh, no, not at all! ” answered Peter ironically. “ I overheard Mother telling Dad that you can begin to-morrow morning bringing home my lessons to me. Then I’m to do them each day, and she’s going to hear me recite. That’s joyful news, isn’t it? ”

“ Well, that is tough, I’ll admit, Peter! Seems to me they ought to let a fellow have a busted leg in peace without adding anything else to his misery.”

On the morning after the accident, when Mrs. Wadsworth was folding Peter’s clothes away, she noticed in the coat pocket a package of old envelopes.

“ What have you here? ” she asked, coming to the bedside with the discovery.

“ Oh, I’d forgotten all about those. They’re some old things that Gige came across in a desk drawer in the Merrill House. I remember that I

saw what looked to me like some rare stamps and so I brought them home to you. Probably you'll think that I was foolish."

Mrs. Wadsworth glanced through the papers, which were tied together with a string. "Why!" she burst out, with elation in her tone. "There are some wonderfully rare stamps here. I can tell that right away. Somebody who knows what stamps are made this collection, and most of them are valuable,—on the original envelopes, too! I'll have to get out my catalogue to-night and see what they're worth to a dealer. Here are four right off that we haven't in our collection. I wonder who can possibly have a claim on these? Somebody ran off and left behind a small fortune."

"I don't know. Of course Gige is the one who found them, and he deserves all the credit. He just turned them over to me to keep for him. Do you think that some descendant of the Loomis family will have a right to them?"

"We'll probably have to advertise, but I'm almost certain that no one has lived in that house since Mrs. Merrill left there more than twenty years ago,—and she's never been heard from since!"



That evening, in Peter's bedroom, Mrs. Wadsworth spread her large dealer's catalogue out on a table and went over the envelopes very systematically. Back in the 1860's somebody had made a practice of saving unusual stamps from various foreign countries, and it took her some time, even with the aid of Gige and Dr. Wadsworth, to make an itemized list of the rarer specimens. When she had checked them off, with the trade value after each,—occasionally pausing to express her delight at some excessively rare stamp,—she added up the total amount, which made \$1,462.

“That can't be, my dear,” said her husband, with the customary skepticism of those benighted persons who are unacquainted with stamp values. “It's ridiculous to say that those old postage stamps are worth as much as that.”

“Ridiculous or not, it happens to be a fact,” answered Mrs. Wadsworth, with a slight acidity in her voice, attributable, perhaps, to resentment at her husband's scoffing tone. “And the chances are that the price has risen since this catalogue was printed two years ago. There are some people who appreciate things like these, even if you don't.”

“ I hope that nobody comes along to put in a claim for these,” said Peter.

“ We’ll have to do our best to find the owner,” replied Dr. Wadsworth. “ After all, we have no legitimate right to them.”

With his usual scrupulous honesty, Dr. Wadsworth devoted himself assiduously to running down the owner of the package of envelopes. He consulted old residents, advertised in the *Deep-water Gazette*,—published every Friday,—and then even went himself on a tour of investigation through the Merrill House in quest of clues. He was able to ascertain that the title of the house itself rested with Mrs. Merrill still, but no taxes had been paid on it for more than twenty years, and the lady in question, according to those best informed, had died in Canada some time before, leaving no descendants. After at least six months of searching, Dr. Wadsworth accepted the theory that the find was indeed “ treasure trove.” Mrs. Wadsworth, like a true enthusiast, would have liked to retain the rarer stamps in her own collection; but in the end she concluded that it would be foolish to do this, and she sold them to a dealer for \$1,860. The money was placed in the bank to the credit of Peter and

George Wadsworth,—for Gige had insisted that the spoils should be divided with his brother. With the interest from this not inconsiderable fund, Mrs. Wadsworth allowed the boys from time to time to purchase certain articles which they wanted badly, such as a canoe on Lake Woodhull, new tennis rackets, and finally the luxury of a pony.

“Even if I did break my leg, that expedition paid for itself,” said Peter one day in November, when he was just commencing to get around on crutches.

“Yes, I fancy it did,” was his father’s answer. “And it ought to be valuable in teaching you not to investigate dark and unknown places without first looking them over with a flashlight.”

“Maybe that’s true,” admitted Peter. “But the best lesson was not to be afraid of haunted houses. Most of the things we’re scared of turn out to be harmless, don’t they, Dad?”

“That’s a profound and far-reaching truth, my son,” said Dr. Wadsworth. “Some stupid people never learn it at all, and most of us don’t understand it until we’re old, and it’s too late. You’re lucky if you’ve learned it young!”

It remains to be added that Peter's leg was entirely healed by Christmas, and that he was snow-shoeing before the winter was over. But it was a long time before his dreams ceased to be haunted by the spectre of old Plum Loomis, dangling helplessly in mid-air while the lightning flashed upon his pallid face.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A MORAL ISSUE

THERE are very few people in this world of ours for whom life is just one dramatic episode after another. Most of us lead rather commonplace existences, fortunate if we can secure two or three thrills in a twelvemonth. Even soldiers in the regular army have long periods when no war is going on and they must drill monotonously through tedious hours; and we may be sure that Sherlock Holmes, the great detective, was not perpetually in quest of absconders and murderers. In dwelling at length on some spectacular incidents in the youthful careers of the Wadsworth boys, we may have created the impression that all their waking moments were crammed with excitement. As a matter of fact, there were often weeks when, as they complained to their unsympathetic parents, there was "nothing to do." And then, too, there was school,—school, which occupied almost three-fourths of the year and had its full share and more of irksome tasks and

routine duties. To present a faithful picture of Peter's boyhood, we must not omit some of the events which happened in the dingy brick school-house on the corner of White Street and Stafford Avenue, where Peter and Gige were pupils from September to June,—with time taken out for sickness and holidays.

In school, as Peter knew it, there were all sorts of boys and girls. Some were industrious, and others were lazy. A few were shy and quiet, like Clarence Marvin, who never spoke unless he was spoken to and who blushed a radiant pink when any girl looked at him. Most of them were straightforward, but there were also those who were untrustworthy. It was precisely like any complex community of grown-ups, in which good and evil, meanness and generosity, were thrown together. Peter was early obliged to form his judgments regarding the personalities and the possibilities of the children around him. Some of them, like Beady Bennett and Hal Webster, he liked instinctively, recognizing half-unconsciously that they were of his own kind in background and breeding. To the girls he was supremely indifferent, playing with them, of course, when courtesy demanded it, but otherwise not at-

tracted by them in the slightest. Rarely there would appear somebody whom Peter cordially disliked, usually for some coarse streak revealed in the close intimacy of the playground.

Among those whom Peter had accepted as natural enemies had been Mucker Wright,—but Mucker, after the fight, had shown himself to be a simple, guileless soul, whom no one could possibly hate. Another was Shifty Pell, a thin-faced, sharp-nosed boy, with a slight cast in one eye, who resembled a ferret and was always ready to “tell teacher” when he could gain prestige by doing so. A third was our old acquaintance, Ikey Warren, who was still the leader of a gang of boys a year or more older than Peter. With his heavy awkward body and his raucous voice, he was a nuisance to his instructors, and he was always falling over benches or dropping things on the floor. In spite of his superior age, he was in the same class with Peter, and, being larger and stronger, took delight in tormenting him. If this were the sentimental type of school story, I should be compelled to describe the diminutive Peter as rising up like David and defeating the Goliath, Ikey, in a stand-up battle. But this is a true tale, and I am therefore obliged to confess



that, on the two or three occasions when Peter,—who had plenty of courage,—had fought back, he had been unmercifully beaten. Ninety pounds of nervous energy can do little to overcome a big hulk of approximately one hundred and forty pounds of bone and muscle.

There is a legend to the effect that all bullies are cowards, and it may be generally true; but Ikey Warren was afraid of nothing. Although his chief pastime was annoying those younger and smaller than himself, he had never been known to run away from a fight, even with a much more powerful adversary. Indeed he had certain qualities of leadership which enabled him to gain a following, and there were always some smaller lads who attached themselves to him, glad to be his satellites and knowing that he would protect them just as a feudal lord in the middle ages looked out for his serfs. Whenever Peter was startled by an unexpected snowball in the back of the neck or tripped by a cord drawn across his path, he could be sure that Ikey Warren had something to do with it,—for Ikey, like most bullies, was very fond of practical jokes.

Once Ikey and his gang,—which included Charlie Webster, Leaky Terry, and Fatty Mor-



ris, as well as some smaller lads,—caught Peter when he was off his guard and tossed him in a blanket, to the imminent danger of his life, but the victim of their fun had never whimpered nor begged for mercy. On another momentous occasion, when he was setting out for a party in his first long cream-colored flannel trousers, they had splashed mud on his immaculate garments until, in sheer rage and despair, he had rushed at them and dragged them down with him, to the ruin of his fine apparel. This was Ikey's idea of amusement, and, needless to say, it made no appeal to Peter. Every once in a while Peter would defy the bully and strike back, only to have a circle formed for a fight; and he usually emerged with a bloody nose or a torn shirt. It is no wonder that Peter and his allies went around together, making up a gang which even Ikey did not care to attack single-handed. Ikey had some discretion, and he could not forget the time when the Followers of Deerfoot had tied him up to a tree and tortured him until he had craved pardon for his sins.

The Followers of Deerfoot were themselves far from being little angels. If there was any disturbance going on, they were likely to be partici-

pants in it, as Principal Harlow was well aware; and they were often detected and punished for their deviltry. "Your boys," said the Principal to Dr. Wadsworth at the Dalton Club one day, "can think up more mischief than any four others in school, but I've never yet caught one of them in a lie. That's why I can't help liking them in spite of all they do."

"Don't have any pity on them," Dr. Wadsworth replied. "If they get into trouble, you'll not find me interceding for them. They must take their punishment. They know that."

It was Peter, for one thing, who conceived the not altogether original idea of purloining the laboratory skeleton and hanging it conspicuously over the middle of Stafford Avenue on the morning of Commencement Day; and it was he also who, under the Principal's vigorous cross examination, admitted his guilt and bore his punishment manfully. One of the Algebra teachers, Miss Arnold,—commonly called "Benedict," or "Benny," through an inevitable historical association of names,—was the butt of many pranks. The boys would scribble doggerel on the blackboard, describing some of the peculiarities of her physiognomy, and she would erase it sorrowfully

when she entered her classroom in the morning. Sometimes the tears would come to her eyes as she read the cruel things which they had written, but she would never report them to the Principal. Their failure to provoke a reaction was decidedly discouraging to the conspirators. "What's the use of bothering old Benny?" Peter would ask. "She never gets mad. She never scolds us. All she does is look grieved, and I can see that she is ready to cry. There's no fun pestering a woman like that." The consequence was that in the end Miss Arnold was left severely alone, through a conception of chivalry which she found it impossible to understand. And when two or three new boys tried to be "fresh" in her classes, Peter and his gang administered a form of treatment which compelled the culprits to appear before her one afternoon and apologize.

"Why, boys, how manly of you!" she exclaimed, evidently much pleased that their consciences had pricked them. "What led you to come and beg my pardon?"

"Well, Peter Wadsworth said he'd smash my face in if I didn't," confessed the spokesman of the three sinners in front of her. It was a naive



admission, and Miss Arnold hardly knew how to receive it, but she made some commonplace reply, smiling to think that the hitherto incorrigible Peter had now become her defender. When she called him to her desk after school and thanked him for his intervention, Peter blushed and stammered, "I'm sorry those kids told you that, Miss Arnold. But you've been mighty white to me, and I'm not going to have any of those smart alecks bothering you."

"I'm proud to have your support," said Miss Arnold. Then Peter, as embarrassed as if he had been the criminal, fled precipitately, glad to be freed from an interview which promised to become sentimental.

On Friday afternoons during the Winter Term there was usually a program of so-called "Declamation Exercises." The boys and girls selected for the sacrifice, garbed in their richest attire, ascended the platform in the assembly hall and spoke "pieces," in the delivery of which they had been coached for weeks. It was a somewhat formal affair, always anticipated with pleasure by the audience. Principal Harlow, a young man only a year or two out of college, sat behind his desk on the right of the stage, twirling the long



drooping moustaches which he had grown to make himself look dignified, with the other instructors, —all women except Mr. Peck, the first assistant, —seated stiffly in high-backed chairs at the left. It was an ordeal, not only for the speakers but also for the listeners, who were frequently thrown into gales of laughter by some peculiarity of one of the entertainers. When little “Goldy” Goldberg, Peter’s friend, recited in a squeaky nasal voice a rhetorical farewell purporting to have been uttered by the Indian chieftain, Black Hawk, to his tribesmen, the boys could not restrain their mirth.

“Ye all remember in how many hard-fought battles I have led you against our ancient foe, the pale-faces!” declaimed Goldy, raising his right hand to heaven; whereupon Peter burst into a wild and involuntary guffaw, which was the signal for giggles all over the room. The Principal, assuming his most forbidding manner, arose and reproved the audience for their discourtesy. But when Goldy attempted to begin again, he caught a glimpse of Peter’s seething countenance and was unable to do more than stand helpless, his mouth open in the broadest of grins. Needless to add, Peter was reminded of his part in the

commotion by Principal Harlow in a private interview after the session was over, and emerged with a sober expression and tears glistening on his cheeks.

On one memorable Friday in late March, while the snow still covered the Deepwater hills, it became the turn of Beady Bennett and Leaky Terry to make a public appearance before their mates. Beady, who liked what was dramatic, had chosen the eloquent address of Wendell Phillips on Daniel O'Connell, the Irish patriot; while Leaky had selected a passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, his mother's favorite poem. Both appeared after lunch attired in blue serge suits, with stiff linen collars,—unheard-of except on momentous occasions,—and neatly-tied cravats, and they moved with a care and discretion indicative of a desire to avoid all rude physical contacts until after the exhibition was over. Beady's usual serious expression had deepened into a funereal gloom; while Leaky, with his flattened nose, big waving ears, and black hair plastered down smoothly with some oily substance, looked like a stranger from another clime,—possibly an Egyptian or a Greek. There were audible comments, not always favorable, on their garb, to-

gether with bets as to which one would break down. To all the criticism the two victims made no response, except to threaten dire vengeance after the show was over. Taking their customary seats, they sat studying their "pieces" during the recess while their friends were out playing leap-frog in the yard. Decorated and immaculate though they were, like the human sacrifices of some Aztec ceremonial, they looked miserable indeed, and it was recognized by even hardened reprobates that no torture could possibly increase the suffering which the two were undergoing.

When recess was over, the school gathered in the main hall, where Mr. Harlow made a few preliminary announcements. Then, while the audience waited expectantly, he opened the program of the afternoon, introducing the first speaker as "Ralph Austin Bennett." He then remained standing, while Beady rose from his bench and, in a manner visibly disconsolate, proceeded with creaking shoes down the long aisle to the platform, where he bowed low to the Principal, his long arms dangling helplessly at his sides, and then turned sideways to his audience so that he looked at them over his left shoulder, fixing his eyes grimly on a chandelier in the rear

of the room. His attitude expressed determination as he shut his eyes and, in a low voice, began the famous oration, rushing along as if his sole aim were to complete it within a stipulated period, and occasionally waving one arm, or both, in what might have been interpreted as a gesture, although the motion seemed to have no connection with what was being said. As he progressed, he gained confidence, his voice grew unconsciously louder, and his manner became more resolute.

“And I could hear,—and I could hear . . .” Memory, hitherto so reliable, was now failing him at a critical moment, and the prompter in the front row was getting ready to do her work of mercy. “And I could hear,” he faltered again, his body tense under the strain.

“B-r-r-r-r!” Something that sounded like a muffled bell was ringing through the hall! A hidden alarm-clock! Beady, his attention diverted, looked around him hopefully,—here was almost a divine interposition! The boys and girls commenced to titter and glance knowingly at one another. The Principal stood up, a frown on his face as he listened. Then the clanging noise stopped as quickly as it had begun, and Mr. Harlow, turning to the puzzled Beady, said,



“Continue, Ralph, and disregard the interruption.”

Disappointed in his expectations, Beady faced his audience once more, an expression of resignation showing in his eyes, and repeated, “And I could hear . . .” “B-r-r-r!” whirred the hidden bell again! It was evidently of the intermittent variety, adjusted to ring at intervals of half a minute or more. This time Principal Harlow, biting his lips with vexation, stalked across the platform and traced the sound readily to a ponderous wall-clock which hung high up on the left of the stage. As he reached a point just beneath, the noise again ceased, and the students chuckled with mirth, their smiles fading rapidly away, however, when he swung about on his heels and glared ominously at the offenders. The Principal now called two of the Seniors, Ernie Hill and Roddy Tower, whispered to them a moment, and then waited while they went outside and returned bearing a step-ladder. Upon this rather insecure support, with the two boys holding the base, he ascended, while those in the audience held their breaths, some of them hoping that he might topple. He was a tall, thin man, with a long neck, who looked seven feet high as he stood on one

of the steps reaching towards the clock. As he opened the lower compartment, the bell rang out once more with a brazen tone, and the Principal, startled, swayed just for a second as if he might fall; but he regained his equilibrium and, groping about in the interior, dragged out a large "Big Ben," which had been secreted inside. His prize held conspicuously in his hand, Mr. Harlow descended gingerly from his lofty perch, walked quickly to the window, and, raising it, hurled the offending timepiece out into the snow, where, a few seconds later, it could be heard faintly tinkling its last gasp. Peter wanted tremendously to applaud, but he was restrained by a conviction that Principal Harlow was in no tolerant mood,—and he was right!

Vengeance having been thus summarily inflicted on the unlucky clock, the Principal, very red in the face, once more took his place at his desk. Beady had meanwhile discreetly retired to his regular seat, and the Principal, having forgotten that the Daniel O'Connell oration had not been completed, straightened his necktie, smoothed down his coat collar, and then announced, "We will now continue our afternoon's program with a recital from Tennyson's *In*

*Memoriam*, to be given by Aubrey Terry.” Leaky, thus summoned by the inexorable call, somehow stumbled to the platform, accomplished a ludicrous bow, and, standing in a hazardous posture only an inch or two from the edge, shouted in a stentorian voice:

“Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the . . .”

Principal Harlow started up as if he had been seized with a sudden abdominal pain; a loud guffaw echoed through the room; and, as if in occult response to Beady’s impressive injunction, there was a tinny “Whirr!” from a new location, this time in the rear of the room. All heads turned automatically in the direction of the sound, and Leaky, his poem thus amazingly interrupted, stood sheepishly gazing about him, trying to keep from looking at Peter Wadsworth’s face, which was twitching with strange contortions.

The Principal, his lips firmly compressed, was obviously very angry. Striding down the middle aisle while the clanging continued, he arrived at the rear seats just as the noise stopped abruptly. He now realized, however, that he was dealing with an intermittent alarm, and accordingly



waited patiently for a moment until the ringing recommenced, this time from the top of a bookcase, behind a pile of discarded magazines. Extending his long bony arm, Mr. Harlow produced another "Big Ben," and stepping towards the still open window, threw it out into the cold to join the first.

Principal Harlow was not a man who was easily discouraged or beaten. Regaining his seat upon the stage, he glared at the apparently innocent Leaky and then faced his pupils, saying, "Perhaps we can now proceed . . ." "B-r-r-r!" For the third time a strident ringing broke off his remarks. He now made no effort to disguise his rage. Pausing long enough to locate the source of the noise, he stepped to the grand piano in the corner and extracted one more alarm-clock, which quickly followed the others out into the drifts. By this time even the teachers were convulsed with laughter, and it was clearly impossible to enforce order under such conditions. Gaining control of himself by an effort, Mr. Harlow announced in a loud voice that the exercises were over for the afternoon. As he finished his sentence, another outbreak of bells smote the air, and there was a wild howl of glee from the school,



in which even Mr. Peck and Miss Arnold joined. Mr. Harlow, however, did not even smile. He motioned the pianist to her station, and the boys and girls marched out in their customary formation, habit keeping them in good order. When they reached the vestibule, however, the storm broke, and there was a wild clamor,—the consequence of the repression which they had endured within the hall.

“Gee, wasn’t that awful?” gasped Beady, who was almost in a state of collapse. “I’ll bet I’ll never have to speak that old piece again.”

“Say, wasn’t old Harlow hot?” ejaculated Peter. “Somebody’s going to catch it, all right. He’s almost crazy mad! I could actually see the fire darting from his eye!”

“Who did it, anyhow?” inquired Leaky, his once neat attire now all crumpled after a wrestling match which he had been carrying on with Charlie Webster.

“I don’t really know,” answered Peter. “But I saw Ikey Warren around the school porch last night, and he told me he was fixing up something good for to-day. I guess this must be it.”

“You young tattle-tale!” interrupted Ikey, who had come along just in time to hear Peter’s

words. "How dare you say I had anything to do with it? If you open your head about me, I'll beat you so that you will never walk again!"

"I haven't said anything, have I?" asked Peter. "I just told Leaky that I saw you here at the door last evening. That's true, isn't it? Your conscience must be bothering you! What difference does it make, anyhow? If you did do it, I think it's a mighty good joke."

"Sure I did it," boasted Ikey, somewhat placated by Peter's explanation. "But there's no need for you to give me away, is there?"

"Don't you worry," replied Peter, his eyes getting hard in their glance at Ikey. "I'm not a talebearer. Don't be afraid!"

Every student in the school,—except possibly Ikey Warren,—told the story of the bells to his family that evening, and by the next day it was all over town. Members of the Board of Education, meeting Principal Harlow on the street, would grin broadly and say, "I understand you had a new kind of bell-ringing in school yesterday," or "Well, Prof, you certainly damaged some alarm-clocks, from all that I hear." After several witty greetings of this sort, the Principal lost his temper completely, and his sense of

humor disappeared. When he stopped at Green's fruit store to buy some bananas and the genial proprietor, rubbing his hands, said, "Why, Professor, you sure pulled off a comedy yesterday! My Frank hasn't stopped laughing yet. Have you caught the villain?" Mr. Harlow snapped out sharply, "That's none of your business!" and left the store without making a purchase, leaving Mr. Green standing nonplussed gazing after the usually cheerful pedagogue.

On Saturday afternoon and Sunday, the Principal quietly began an investigation. Having read many of Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes, he followed out the procedure of that great detective, not ignoring the smallest details in his quest. Catechizing the janitors, he found one who admitted that just before seven o'clock, on the preceding Thursday evening, he had seen Peter Wadsworth standing near the rear porch of the school building talking with another boy, whom, however, he did not recognize.

Now Mr. Harlow knew Peter very well, and liked him. He was also aware of Peter's propensity for mischief-making, and he could easily believe that the boy might have concocted such a scheme as that of the bells. His suspicion was

confirmed when, in wandering through the deserted school-building on Sunday, he found in the top of the piano, where one of the alarm-clocks had been placed, a handkerchief with a large "W" in the corner. With this information at his disposal, he resolved to put the lad through a form of "Third Degree."

When the session opened on Monday morning, everybody was in an expectant mood, wondering what the Principal would have to say. Much to the disappointment of the school, however, the preliminary exercises passed without any announcement, and classes were conducted as usual, —not without a good deal of whispered comment as the boys and girls passed from one recitation to another.

At nine o'clock, after Peter's recitation in English, he was handed a note ordering him to report immediately at the Principal's office. Somewhat puzzled, but not at all alarmed, he told nobody, but went at once to the little room at the left of the platform, where Mr. Harlow held court. He found that gentleman apparently busy at his desk. He looked up, snapped out a curt "Sit down, Wadsworth," and then went on with his writing.



Now Peter had always looked upon Mr. Harlow as a friend. The teacher had dined frequently at the Wadsworth home, and he and Dr. Wadsworth had belonged to the same college fraternity. Mr. Harlow had always called the boy "Peter," and, when the lad heard himself addressed as Wadsworth, he felt sure that something must be wrong. As he sat there waiting for the ordeal, Peter wondered what he could have been summoned for. Usually his conscience was far from clear, but recently he had been studying hard for the examinations at the close of the term, and he had kept surprisingly free from mischief. . . . It was easy to see that the Principal was in no amiable mood. Finally he thrust the papers aside and glanced sternly at Peter, with a frown wrinkling his forehead.

"Oh, yes," he said, as if he had seen Peter for the first time. "I thought, Wadsworth, that you might be willing to own up about the bells."

"The bells!" said Peter, a little confused. "I don't know what you mean, Mr. Harlow."

"You might just as well confess, Wadsworth," went on the Principal. "You see I know all about it."

"Know all about what, sir?" asked the boy.

“Young man, do you mean to say that you don’t understand me? I have discovered who was responsible for putting those alarm-clocks around the hall last Friday.”

“Who was he?” asked Peter innocently, still unsuspecting.

“You young scoundrel, you know you did it yourself!”

“Me?” gasped Peter, so startled that he forgot his grammar.

“Yes, you, of course,” repeated Mr. Harlow. “I know all about it.”

“But I had nothing to do with it, Mr. Harlow,” protested Peter, righteously indignant at being condemned without a hearing. “I don’t pretend to be a saint, but I had nothing whatever to do with those bells.”

“Look here, Wadsworth,” almost shouted the irate teacher. “Weren’t you hanging around the back porch of the schoolhouse about seven o’clock on last Thursday evening? Do you deny that?”

“Yes, I was there for a minute or two,” admitted Peter, after a little reflection. “I wasn’t exactly hanging around, though. I was on my way home from coasting up on Railroad Hill.”

“What were you hanging around,—as you call it,—for?” asked Mr. Harlow.

“Just talking, that’s all.”

“Who with?” asked the Principal, himself disregarding the rules in the grammar book.

“Why, with ——” Peter paused for a second. If he revealed Ikey’s name, the latter might be drawn into the affair.

“Go on,” said the teacher.

“I—I can’t tell you, sir,” declared Peter resolutely.

“You must!”

“I can’t do it, Mr. Harlow. I’m sorry. But I will give you my solemn word of honor that I had nothing to do with the bells.”

“If you didn’t, what do you make of this handkerchief?” He handed Peter a rather dirty piece of linen. “Isn’t that a ‘W’ in the corner?”

After examining the handkerchief, Peter was obliged to admit that the Principal was right. “But that isn’t my handkerchief, for all that; my mother can prove that.”

“I found it in the piano top, near where one of the bells was placed,” said Mr. Harlow. “Do you know whose it is?”

Peter made no reply.

“ Did you hear what I asked you? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Why don’t you answer? ”

“ I don’t care to, Mr. Harlow.”

“ If you don’t answer, I shall have to take your silence as a confession of guilt.”

“ That’s too bad, sir, for I’m not guilty. If you insist on punishing me, I’ll have to stand it, I suppose. But I didn’t do it.”

There was something convincing in Peter’s manner, and Mr. Harlow, who prided himself on his skill in character analysis, was beginning to feel that he had made a mistake in judgment. Nevertheless he had to carry through his plan of action. Rising, he said:

“ Wadsworth, I can’t accept your statement. You refuse, for some reason, to tell me with whom you were talking on Thursday afternoon at the school building. You do not seem able to explain the significance of the handkerchief with the ‘ W ’ in the corner. You also decline to answer my question as to who hid the clocks in the assembly hall. You are either guilty yourself or you are shielding the real culprit. In either case you deserve punishment. I will give you just twenty-four hours to decide to tell me what



you know of the affair. After that, if you don't confess, I shall be obliged to assume that you are the guilty one. You may go now and think it all over."

Peter started to protest once more, thought better of it, and then retreated, very much down-cast. All through the morning his mind was pre-occupied, with the result that his teachers, to their astonishment, had to propound their questions a second time,—an unprecedented situation with Peter Wadsworth. At luncheon he sat glum and silent, and his mother inquired solicitously whether he felt ill. The fact was that he was debating inwardly what it was honorable to do. He had no desire to be accused of committing a deed for which he was not responsible; and yet his mind was made up that he would not say a word which would bring Ikey into the case. Rather than tell on a classmate, he would bear the full brunt of the punishment himself. Peter's attitude may not have been in accord with the best legal procedure, but he was sure that he was right. He would not tell a lie; on the other hand, he would decline to give any information which would incriminate one of his comrades.

Peter was still pondering over the problem

when, on his way home from school in the afternoon, he saw Ikey Warren coming to meet him, evidently eager to learn what had happened,—for the news of Peter's inquisition had spread rapidly.

“What did he say to you, Bo?” inquired Ikey, a shade of anxiety in his voice.

Peter gave a succinct account of the interview, omitting all the irrelevancies.

“But what are you going to say when he calls you in to-morrow?” asked Ikey, not concealing his agitation.

“Take my punishment, of course,” answered Peter, a trifle disgusted. “What's the matter? Are you afraid that I'm going to give you away? Well, I'm not! Don't worry. Nothing will touch your miserable skin!” With these words, he turned away, eager to be by himself with his own gloomy thoughts.

Ikey was about to answer with an insult or a threat, but he stopped before it could escape his lips. The situation was one which he could not comprehend. Here was a fellow who was going to take a whipping rather than betray him,—him, Ikey Warren, who had often treated Peter with cruelty. Ikey was accustomed to abuse. It was

fair treatment and kindness which he could not understand. Suppressing his growls, he slouched off down the street, much perplexed in his sluggish intellect. A few rods farther on he was confronted by one of his satellites, Shifty Pell, who saluted him gleefully. "Gosh, Ikey," he began, "have you heard the latest? Peter Wadsworth's going to get licked for hiding the clocks! I'm mighty glad of it! He's always preaching to the rest of us. I guess he'll get his now!"

Ikey ordinarily tolerated Shifty and was pleased with his adulation, but he could not endure his meanness at this time.

"Get out of here, you vulture!" he cried. "Haven't you any decency at all? Peter Wadsworth's better than twenty yellow hounds like you! He's a regular fellow! You're nothing but a vile-minded cur!"

Shifty, not unnaturally, was astounded by this treatment at the hands of his former guide and mentor; then, noticing signs that indicated increasing irritation, he wisely decided to move on, shaking his head in wonderment at the transformation which had taken place in Ikey.

Ikey, during the next few hours, went through a painful moral struggle,—the first which he had

ever experienced. A situation had developed of which he had never dreamed. Somebody was about to sacrifice himself for him! He,—Ikey Warren, the tough egg,—would escape punishment for his offense because Peter Wadsworth, an innocent person, chose to accept the blame. All night long Ikey tossed restlessly on his bed, unable to sleep, his mind filled with unpleasant images. Although he had no conception of the fact, it was a crisis in his career. There was something good in Ikey Warren, and it was beginning to show. But even when he was on his way to school in the morning and had joined his gang, he had not consciously decided what his policy was to be.

At nine o'clock the fatal hour arrived when Peter was again due in Principal Harlow's office. As he passed Ikey's desk, the latter rose and followed him out. When Peter entered the Principal's sanctum, Ikey was only a few steps behind, carried along by an impulse which he could not understand and dared not resist. When Mr. Harlow looked up, he saw Peter directly in front of him, and to the rear some three paces was Ikey, eager to arrest his attention. The Principal stared in a vexed manner at Ikey.



“What are you here for, Warren?” he asked. “It was Wadsworth that I was expecting.”

At these words, Peter looked around and saw Ikey. “You don’t belong here, Ikey,” he said in his turn. “Please let me stay here alone. Go on back, will you, Ikey!”

“No, I won’t,” announced Ikey, almost brutally. “I came here to tell you, Mr. Harlow, that Peter didn’t have anything to do with them bells. I was the guy that was talkin’ with Peter near the porch, and I hid the alarm-clocks. You’d better let him go, ’cause he didn’t know nothin’ about it till it was all over.” In his excitement, Ikey relapsed into the kind of speech to which he was accustomed in his home.

The Principal was dumfounded. He was near enough to his own school and college days to realize that he was face to face with an unusual situation,—one revealing some extraordinary traits of character in the protagonists and which must be handled carefully.

“So you hid the clocks all yourself, did you?” he asked Ikey, mainly in order to gain time for reflection.

“Me and a couple of other guys,” admitted Ikey. “But I did all the plannin’, and I’ll take

whatever's comin' to me, see! Peter wasn't anywhere around."

"You're a fool," commented Peter. "Nobody would ever have found you out if you hadn't owned up."

"Aw, I ain't goin' to have any guy get licked for what I did," responded Ikey. "I guess I'm tough enough to take my punishment. Let him go, Mr. Harlow, won't you?"

"Wait a minute," said the Principal. "You two boys interest me a good deal." He motioned them to take chairs, and they sat down, both visibly embarrassed. "As I understand it, you wouldn't tell whom you were talking with at the porch because you were afraid that Ikey would be caught. That's it, isn't it, Peter?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"And now you, Warren, are owning up because you don't want Wadsworth punished for your misbehavior,—is that right?"

"Sure, that's the dope!"

"Well, I suppose I ought to take some action, but I can't do it. You've both shown good stuff, and I'm going to call the whole affair forgotten."

"Do you mean that you're not going to punish me at all?" asked Ikey incredulously.

“That’s just it,” replied Mr. Harlow. “We’ll just ignore all that has happened. And now let’s shake on it.” He held out his hand, first to Ikey, who held it languidly as if he were in a trance, and then to Peter, who gave it a good substantial grip.

“You certainly have given us a square deal,” said Peter.

“I’ll tell the world you have!” broke out Ikey, with equal fervency.

“And now I suppose that there are classes waiting for you,” said the Principal. “This interview has lasted about long enough.” And he slapped each boy on the shoulder as the two departed into the hall.

As he sat at his desk after they had left him, Mr. Harlow thought over his conduct without being satisfied with himself. “I am sure now that I’ll never make a schoolmaster,” he said to himself disconsolately. “I’m too easy! I don’t know what discipline is, and the boys are going to find my weakness out after this affair. But I couldn’t do anything else but let those two fine chaps off!”

It is a pity that he could not have overheard a brief conversation two or three days later be-

tween Dr. Wadsworth and his son. Somehow the tale had leaked out,—largely because the grateful Ikey had let everybody know about Principal Harlow's justice,—and the physician had made inquiries from Peter, eventually eliciting the whole story.

“Well,” said the father, when he had listened attentively to Peter's narrative, “I should say that Principal Harlow was a man,—what you boys call a ‘regular fellow.’”

“He surely is. And the funny thing is that Ikey, who never liked him, has been telling all the fellows that any guy who tries any trick on Mr. Harlow will have to fight him afterwards. I guess the school will be quiet enough this spring! I know that I couldn't possibly do a mean thing to a man who's as square as that!”

“How do you like Ikey now, son?”

“Say, Dad, he's got lots of good stuff in him. I'd like to take him to Lake Woodhull this summer when we go. The poor fellow has never been away from home, and it would do him good.”

Dr. Wadsworth smiled non-committally; but he was pleased at Peter's spirit, and, when vacation time arrived, Ikey went with the Wadsworth family as a member of their party.





DOTTERER

“AND NOW LET’S SHAKE ON IT.”—Page 201.



## CHAPTER IX

### GIGE GOES FISHING

To Peter and Gige every season had its special delights, and each, while it lasted, seemed better than any other. They had fishing in the spring, swimming, tennis, and baseball in the summer, football and hunting in the autumn, and skating, skiing, and coasting in the winter. Sometimes the Followers of Deerfoot debated the question as to which month was the best, and it was a hard problem to decide. But the really great event of the year for the Wadsworth family was the August spent at Lake Woodhull, in the Adirondacks, or what they called the "North Woods." As early as Christmas the two boys began, on stormy afternoons, to sort out their fishing tackle, —the steel rods, the trolling lines, the flies, and all the complex paraphernalia necessary for the sport of angling. The accumulation of Christmas and birthday gifts had equipped each boy with a knapsack, a hunting-knife, a hatchet, a canteen, and all the various useful articles required in

the woods. Both were well-read in forest lore, such volumes as White's *The Blazed Trail* and Hubbard's *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* being the favorite literature of the family.

Peter was now thirteen and Gige eleven. The older brother, in spite of the injury to his leg during the previous autumn, had come through the year with a creditable record in his studies, and Gige was, as usual, at the top of his class. Dr. Wadsworth believed in rewarding achievement; and so, with part of the "Stamp Fund,"—the money for which had come to Mrs. Wadsworth just before school closed,—he bought for his sons a fine sailing canoe, which was shipped at once to Lake Woodhull so that it might be ready at the camp when they arrived. When Mrs. Wadsworth, with a mother's characteristic caution, remonstrated with her husband, pointing out that such a frail craft would be dangerous on a body of water as large as Woodhull, he stood his ground. "The lads can swim pretty well for their ages, and they're used to taking care of themselves. We mustn't pamper them, you know. It's our duty, whether we enjoy it or not, to train them to overcome fear of every sort." So the matter was settled. The boys had their



own canoe, and they were eager to master the art of navigating it.

On a Monday morning at the close of July, with a blazing sun pouring down its heat on the little village, the Wadsworth family were assembled at the railroad station to take the eight-fifteen train to Schuyler, the junction city where cars had to be changed for the north country. Having turned his practice over for the time being to a fellow physician, Dr. Wadsworth left absolutely care-free, and he was as happy as either of his sons. Provisions of all sorts had been ordered in advance and sent ahead by express, but there was still a big pile of luggage to be transported. Ikey Warren had been invited by Mrs. Wadsworth to be the guest of the family for the month. Ikey's mother, who was struggling to bring up nine children, had demurred for a time, chiefly because she realized that her boy had no suitable clothes. But Mrs. Wadsworth had tactfully taken care of that question, and now Ikey was on the platform with Beady Bennett, who was also to accompany them for his first trip into the woods. Both Ikey and Beady looked in amazement at the material which was stacked up around them,—trunks and suit-cases, of course,

but also rolls of blankets, duffle-bags, creels, and mysterious boxes like those which miraculously appeared in the possession of the Swiss Family Robinson after their famous wreck on the island. Many of Peter's gang were on hand to see the party off, and there was a good deal of chaffing before the train rolled in from Bridgeton on its way up the valley. There were some last "Good-byes!" Dr. Wadsworth looked around to see that all the baggage was properly loaded, and the great month had begun.

There was always plenty of excitement in Schuyler, for they had to wait two hours for a train north, and Dr. Wadsworth took the boys sight-seeing. This year much of the time was spent in visiting a sporting-goods store, where he could not resist the temptation to invest in some spinners of a new design for lake trolling and a few additional flies. At eleven-thirty they were off again, and the four boys had the unaccustomed delight of sitting together at a table in the dining-car, with full permission to order what they pleased. At two o'clock they reached Merton Station, where they got off and helped the baggageman to load their stuff on a small steamboat. On this craft they went eight miles down

Merton Lake to Parson's Landing, where they and their supplies were dumped unceremoniously on a small trembling dock. Here they were met by a buckboard,—a rough and uncomfortable wagon with heavy wheels and springs,—which was to take them the six miles over a ruddy corduroy road to Woodhull Lake itself. Mrs. Wadsworth and little Vera, then only eight years old, took a seat in the buckboard beside old Jim Blaine, the driver; but the others walked ahead, leaving the clumsy vehicle, loaded down with their baggage, to follow them at a more leisurely pace.

It was here that Ikey and Beady first learned how long a mile in the woods can be. After they had covered perhaps a third of the distance, Beady said to Peter, "We must be almost there, aren't we? I'm sure we've gone more than six miles." He was chagrined to find that Dr. Wadsworth only laughed and offered to let him wait for the buckboard. Eventually, when Beady had concluded that there was no such place as Lake Woodhull, they descended a long gradual slope, at the end of which they saw the blue water glistening through the trees,—a welcome sight to boys whose legs were tired!



“There’s Ed Locke with the motor-boat!” shouted Gige, as he ran down to the edge of the lake and shook hands with a tall, rangy, swarthy man, dressed in long khaki trousers and a brown flannel shirt.

“And he’s got Kerry, his dog, with him!” added Peter, as he heard a welcoming bark.

Ed Locke was a guide who had built some years ago a small cabin on Lake Woodhull and lived there, summer and winter, all by himself. He took care of Dr. Wadsworth’s camp, filled the ice-house, and repaired the dock every spring. He seemed to the boys like a second Jesse James, but, as a matter of fact, he was a shy, gentle sort of person, who had returned from the World War to find that his sweetheart had married another man and had thereafter chosen to live in the wilds, away from civilized life. He spoke very little and seemed to shrink from society; but he was willing to help Dr. Wadsworth because he liked him and the boys.

While they waited for the buckboard to come, the youngsters chatted with Ed and looked about them. Ikey gazed in amazement at the long stretch of water, extending in front of him farther than the eye could reach. On the left the shore



was rocky, rising up gradually several hundred feet to a long ridge, which Ed Locke referred to as Panther Mountain. On the right, the bank seemed lower, and there were large areas of dead trees, standing bleak and bare and ghost-like out of the water. The shores on that side were evidently swampy for some distance back from the lake itself. Nowhere, except on the rough wooden dock at the landing, were there any signs of human habitation. Ikey felt like some pioneer entering a wilderness and about to confront unknown perils.

Shortly after six o'clock, the buckboard, with brakes creaking and its two horses flecked with foam, drew up at the end of the trail, and the luggage was once more transferred to a boat, everybody pitching in and helping. Dr. Wadsworth was particularly pleased to see that Ikey, about whose zeal he had some doubt, was the most energetic of the four boys when it came to hard labor. In half an hour they were ready to start on the four-mile voyage down Lake Woodhull,—the last stage of their complicated journey. With a sputtering and coughing the motor-launch puffed away from the dock.

“Hooray!” cried Peter, after they had chugged

along for ten minutes, "I can see the end of Snake Island!"

"What's that?" asked Beady.

"It's in the middle of the lake, just across from our camp," explained Gige. "We named it that because Dad killed a big snake there when we were little kids."

Peter and Gige were kept busy answering questions of this sort, and Dr. Wadsworth, when they heard a peculiar mournful cry coming from the distance, had to explain that it was not a child in distress but merely a loon. Before long they rounded a point on the left, and Ed Locke pointed out to Ikey his own modest camp, almost hidden in a grove of pines. As they drew nearer to the island, they could see that it was very rocky, and Gige told Beady that there were many caverns there to be explored.

"Our cabin's just around that big granite promontory," said Peter to Ikey. "We're almost there now! I'm excited!"

In only a few minutes more they had entered a narrow part of the lake, between Snake Island and the left bank, with Panther Mountain towering above them, and Gige, with a shout of delight, pointed to the shore, where, in the half-

darkness, they could see a small dock extending into the water.

“There’s the sailing canoe!” cried Gige, as they approached the landing-place. When they were safely moored, Peter and Gige could hardly keep from unpacking it at once, but Dr. Wadsworth, as commanding officer, indicated that there were other more pressing jobs to be done, and the canoe must wait.

“It’s getting late, boys, and we’ve just time to get settled before dark. First of all, let’s all carry this duffle up to the porch and unlock the cabin. Then we’ve got to find some wood, carry water from the well, start a fire, make the beds, and unpack the food,—that is, if we expect that Mother is going to let us have any supper. Now, everybody get down to business, and we’ll have it done in no time at all.”

The Wadsworth camp was a small and compact cabin built of logs, but lined with boards, and containing a dining-room, a kitchen, and four bedrooms, in addition to a large living-room heated by a huge stone fireplace. It stood perhaps a hundred feet back from the lake, almost at the base of Panther Mountain, with Snake Island about a quarter of a mile away from the

shore in front. There was just one other cabin on the lake,—that occupied by Ed Locke,—but only two miles from the foot, over a well-trodden trail, was a luxurious lodge belonging to the Herkimer Club, of which Dr. Wadsworth was a member. The Wadsworths, as a family, preferred to live simply, and all the labor around the camp was performed by the occupants, Dr. Wadsworth himself acting usually as cook. In the daily routine everybody had his allotted task,—chopping wood, washing dishes, making fires, or attending to the beds,—and no visitor was welcome who did not do his share cheerfully. A deep well provided the coolest and purest of water; there was an ice-house which was kept full; and the Herkimer Club launch brought mail and supplies each day from the outside world. It seemed primitive, but within fifteen miles in any direction there were huge hotels, with all the comforts of a New York caravansary.

Beady and Ikey, although unaccustomed to such camping, learned rapidly from the others. In just a few minutes after their arrival, the smoke was curling up from the chimney, and Mrs. Wadsworth was busy over the stove with Vera as her assistant. Peter opened boxes of pro-



visions, while Gige placed the bags and cans away on the shelves. The grass-grown path from the kitchen to the well was soon trampled by many feet, and the chairs were brought out on the piazza. By the time the stars were twinkling, the savory odor of broiled ham was permeating the dining-room, and Ikey realized that he had never been so near starvation. There was a jolly supper, a little hasty dish-washing, and, by ten o'clock, the cabin was quiet except for the gentle breathing of the weary campers, all fast asleep.

At six-thirty the next morning, with the sun pouring in at the eastern windows, Peter, following a custom with which all visitors soon became acquainted, leaped from his bed, emitted a succession of blood-curdling whoops calculated to rouse an Egyptian mummy from his long slumber, and rushed outdoors and down the path to the diving-board, followed quickly by Ikey, Beady, and Gige, Dr. Wadsworth coming more decorously in the rear. The spring-board had been placed on a high granite rock, at least eight feet above the dark water below, and Peter, casting off his pajamas, was out on the end before even the alert Gige could catch him. Standing there a second, poised like Mercury, he shouted,

“Here goes nothing!” and, springing into the air, came down head foremost in a graceful curve to the placid surface of the lake. “Wow!” he shrieked, as he emerged, shaking the water from his hair and eyes. “Oh, but that’s cold! It’s just like the Arctic Ocean! You’ll freeze, Gige!” But the smaller lad was too familiar with this type of complaint to be much alarmed. In a short time he and the others were in with Peter, and, when Dr. Wadsworth arrived, he saw them all plunging about like a school of well-tanned porpoises. Without hesitation, he described a dive which was technically perfect, striking in the very midst of the youngsters and scattering spray in all directions. Soon he was ducking them unmercifully, and they were all climbing on his back at once, like a crowd of slippery seals. But they didn’t linger long at that hour in the morning. “Everybody out!” he called, and they clambered up on the rocks and sprinted back in a mad race through the birches to the cabin, to rub themselves down briskly with coarse towels and get breakfast under way. The standard costume at camp was an athletic shirt and running pants, with a pair of canvas slippers on the feet and a sweater if the weather was cool. When the

mosquitoes were biting, it was not always comfortable, but Dr. Wadsworth was enthusiastic for it on the ground that it gave free play to the limbs.

Breakfast offered Ikey and Beady their first taste of Adirondack pancakes with maple syrup, and they were reluctant to admit that their capacity was limited by any physical restrictions. There came a moment, however, when they could swallow no more; and everybody then proceeded to wash and dry the dishes. This ceremony over, the boys were allowed to unpack the new sailing canoe and launch it in the water, little Vera breaking a bottle of ginger ale over the stern as it slid into the lake. It did not take the four lads, operating together, very long to have the tiny craft ready for a trial; but no one of them had ever managed a sail, and they could do nothing until Dr. Wadsworth had finished his chores and was prepared to embark. It was he who, about ten o'clock, took Peter out for the first run and instructed him in the proper method of manipulating the canvas. There was only a light breeze that morning, and the canoe glided along smoothly before the wind. Peter's father pointed out that a sailing canoe, even under the best of



conditions, is a delicate craft to guide and that the boys must never go out in her except in their bathing-suits, prepared to be upset. He also demonstrated to Peter that, when a boat of that kind is overturned, it is wiser for the occupants to make for the canoe and cling to it than it is to set out for the shore. All this he explained while Peter and he were circumnavigating Snake Island, which stretched for a mile at least down the center of the lake. In his short lesson, Peter mastered the basic principles of tacking, and was able to come about without tipping over,—to the immense admiration of his friends who gazed at him from the dock until the canoe had disappeared at the other end of the island. When the two returned and were safe on shore, Dr. Wadsworth praised him for his quickness in learning, but made him promise not to go out without him for at least a week, during which probationary period the lad could acquire experience and confidence.

While they were all impatiently awaiting the close of this period so that they could take out the *Atalanta*,— so christened by Mrs. Wadsworth because of her supposed speed,—Peter painted the name on the bow and went out with his



father whenever the latter was at leisure. Peter soon reached the point where he thought himself master of the seas and would have been ready to accept a position as first mate on a yacht. Meanwhile the others had to resort to their own pastimes for diversion.

On the first grey morning Gige brought out the fishing tackle and invited Beady to accompany him on an expedition to secure some trout for dinner. At eleven,—almost twelve,—Gige felt that he was an accomplished woodsman, and Beady, who was a year older, had read extensively about the wilds. Nevertheless Mrs. Wadsworth cautioned them about staying on well-marked trails and insisted that they should carry a compass, a hatchet, and some matches as part of their equipment. With Gige as guide, the two took the trail back of the ice-house, followed it without difficulty for a mile or more around the base of Panther Mountain, and then met a turbulent little brook, which they fished down for a considerable distance with only fair luck. After walking for half an hour, they found themselves in a clearing, where the stream broadened out into a glorious pool,—just the sort of a home which big square-tails would be likely to select. Al-

though he did notice through the trees a deserted building of some kind, Gige, in his excitement at his discovery, paid no attention to it. He was too much occupied in picking out the most strategic position from which to make a cast. A true fisherman becomes oblivious to many things.

With the manner of an experienced Izaak Walton, Gige selected a brand-new leader, carefully attached three flies,—a Silver Doctor, a bright Montreal, and a Dun Hackle,—and, stepping out of the forest into the long grass, made a dexterous cast. “Swish!” The water was boiling around his lure, and his tackle seemed furiously alive! He struck sharply, as he had been taught to do, and was certain that he had made a kill. Warned by an expert father, he did not hurry, but skilfully maneuvered his hooks to the shore, where he discovered, to his amazement, that he had taken three trout,—one on each fly! They were small, it is true,—not more than eight inches long,—but they were over the legal limit, and Gige’s mouth watered as he pictured them deliciously fried in corn-meal and bacon. Motioning to Beady to hurry, he cast again, with precisely the same delightful result.

“This is a magical pool!” he whispered to his

companion, as he disengaged three more wet and glistening fish from the hooks. "We'll fill the creel in no time."

Soon Beady had his flies adjusted, and, although his cast was less graceful than Gige's, the result was the same.

"I'll bet that nobody has ever dropped a fly into this pool before," he said to Gige. "Why, these fish are crazy for food! I never dreamed of anything like this! And right close to civilization, too! It's certainly queer!"

They were both preparing to cast once more when Gige saw a stalwart figure running towards them from the other side, waving his arms madly and apparently in no placid mood. As he drew nearer, Gige could hear him shouting, "What are you young jackasses doing here?"

"Why, just fishing!" answered Gige, as if he were astonished at such a foolish question.

"Don't you realize that you are breaking the law?"

"No, I didn't," replied Gige, his chin dropping. "We've got licenses, all right, and this isn't the closed season, is it?"

"Look here, young fellow, can't you understand that this is the private hatchery for the

Herkimer Club? I'm the caretaker, and it's my job to watch out for trespassers like you."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. This pool is where all our small trout are kept before we place them in the club streams."

"Then that's why it's so full of fish!"

"Yes, you'll get the point in a minute or two! You didn't suppose that this was just an ordinary pool, did you?"

"Well, we just came down the little creek that flows into it, and we took it for granted that it was a bully good fishing-place which nobody had happened to come across."

"You can tell that cock-and-bull story to the judge," said the caretaker. "You may be only boys, but you're old enough to know better. Besides, you're intruding on the club property, anyhow, when you fish on the streams. You'll have a big fine to pay for this day's sport!"

"A fine! Why?"

"There's a fine of five dollars for each fish taken out of this protected water. If you haven't at least fifteen, I'm not a good guesser. Come along with me over to my cabin."

For a second or two Gige considered the possi-



bility of taking to his heels and escaping. But he noticed that the caretaker, who was decidedly muscular, had his eye on him all the while and that he carried in his belt an ominous-looking revolver.

“I’ll just take those creels,” said the man, giving him a suspicious glance. “We’ll have to count the fish to see what the fine will be. And don’t try any monkey-work! I’m special constable for this district.” He threw back his coat, revealing a large silver badge pinned to his shirt.

Beady, who had been much too frightened to say a word, was ready to burst into tears, but trudged along behind. He had a mental picture of himself, unable to pay the fine imposed and incarcerated behind prison bars, with his horrified parents coming shamefacedly to visit him as he sat there in convict’s stripes. What an idiot he had been! How could any one but a fool help knowing that such a pool must have been specially stocked! He had shown no intelligence whatever,—and now it was too late!

They now were following a trail over a wooden bridge and around the pool to the wooden shanty which Gige had noticed vaguely on their first entrance to the clearing.

“Dump those fish out here,” ordered the warden, pointing to the steps in front of the door. The boys obeyed, not without a sense of shame as they saw spread out before them, side by side, the fruits of their indiscretion. The constable counted them one by one as they were placed on the boards. “Twenty-six in all, I make it,—no, twenty-seven!” he said, as he turned the creels bottom up and let one more poor dried-up trout fall to the ground. “Let’s see,—that’s a hundred and thirty-five dollars, ain’t it?”

Gige nodded gloomily to indicate that the computation, so far as he was concerned, was correct.

“Got any money with you?” inquired the warden.

Gige reached in his pocket and drew out some coins. “Here’s sixty-eight cents,” he announced, as he counted his change. “And maybe Beady’s got some more.”

“All I have here is forty cents,” said Beady, after his inspection had been completed.

“Well, that won’t help much, will it? What’s your name, young fellow?”

“George Wadsworth, your honor.”

Again the warden looked suspiciously at Gige, but the small boy’s expression acquitted him of

any attempt to ridicule the officer. "What are you doing up in this country, anyhow? Does your father know where you are?"

"Dad has a camp over at Lake Woodhull. It isn't very far away."

"What, are you 'Doc' Wadsworth's kid?"

"Well, my dad is a doctor, and his name is Sidney Tuttle Wadsworth."

"Humph!" grunted the inquisitor. "You ought to have inherited some of his brains. He's a real fisherman! He wouldn't have cast flies into a hatchery pool!"

"You bet he is," said Gige, who had now regained his composure somewhat. "It wasn't his fault, either, that we came here. You see he let me and my friend, Beady Bennett here, go off fishing, and we saw the little brook up above, and then walked down it,—and then, all of a sudden, this big pool appeared,—and,—well, I guess the truth is that we didn't do any thinking. But I've got some money in the bank that's all my own,—money from some postage stamps Dad sold for me,—and, if you'll let us go back to our cabin, I'll bring it to you as soon as I can get it from the Deepwater Bank. I will, honest Injun, cross my heart and hope to die!"

“So you’re Doc Wadsworth’s kid, are you?” said the warden meditatively. “That’s queer! You may be interested to know, my boy, that your father saved my life once.”

“Is that so?” said Gige, his eyes opened wide. “How was that?”

“Well, it was like this, son. About twenty years ago, before you or your chum here was born, I used to guide for some of the sports up in this country,—and it was a lot wilder then than ’tis now, I can tell you. One day a city dude wanted me to go with him from the Herkimer Club lodge up Panther Mountain. It ain’t very far, but the trail wasn’t cut out proper in those days, and we planned to spend the night on top. We got up all right, but coming down the next morning I slipped over a cliff and fell about fifteen feet. Somehow I cut my leg pretty bad on a hatchet I was carrying, and I thought I was goin’ to bleed to death then and there. The dude I was with hadn’t any brains,—all he could do was just yell an’ yell for help,—and just at that critical moment along came your dad. He saw what the trouble was right away and made what he called a ‘turnyket’ to stop the bleedin’. He told me later that if he hadn’t happened along,



I'd have been a dead corpse in less than ten minutes. Well, he fixed me up, and he and that tenderfoot carried me somehow back down the mountain to his shack. I was mighty near a week getting my strength back, and he tendin' to me all the time. I guess I won't forget that in a hurry, even if I haven't seen him for nearly ten years."

"Why don't you come along and visit him while I get the money for the fines?" suggested Gige.

"Fines!" exclaimed the constable indignantly. "Do you think for one second that old Mike Marlin would take money from Doc Wadsworth's kid? He wouldn't accept a cent for fixin' my leg! You bring those fish over here and we'll dump 'em down a deep hole where nobody'll ever see 'em. Only don't you ever breathe a word to anybody about what you've done!"

Much relieved, Gige and Beady gathered up the poor shriveled trout and obediently dropped them into a cavity underneath a fallen tree-trunk; then Mike filled the hole with moss and leaves.

"There!" he said, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his large red handkerchief. "I'm glad that's done! An' don't

either one of you ever fish a pool like that again without making sure that there ain't a warden guarding it. An' when you get back, you tell your Dad that you saw ol' Mike Marlin. Can you remember all that?"

"You bet I can," answered Gige. "An' I'm going to tell him what a corker you've been to us."

"Don't you dare tell him about those fish, young fellow," cautioned Mike. "That's a secret among us three. You just mention casual-like that you saw me down at the Hatchery. Mebbe he'll be over here some of these days and look me up."

Gige shook the huge paw of the warden in his, and Beady went through the same ceremony, mumbling his gratitude in an embarrassed fashion. Mike pointed out to them a trail leading back up the stream to the main path to the Wadsworth camp, and they said "So long!" and started on the return trip.

"That fellow's a prince," announced Beady, as they walked off happily through the woods.

"That's what he is," responded Gige. "We're lucky, all right. I don't know what would have happened to us if he hadn't known Dad."

It was an easy stroll back to Lake Woodhull, which they reached in time for luncheon; and they were a little ashamed when Peter and Ikey, looking in their creels, found them empty. They made no explanation, however, and attention was diverted from them when Dr. Wadsworth heard about Mike Marlin and told the others the tale of the adventure on the mountain. Within a week Dr. Wadsworth himself went to call on Mike and heard from him the full story of Gige's poaching expedition.

"Say, Doc," said Mike, as he finished his description, "they were the scarest kids I ever saw,—but they didn't ask for any favors,—not them! They were game to take their medicine without a murmur. That's what I liked about them. They didn't scare for a cent! They're your kids all right!"

"Only one of them is, as a matter of fact," explained Dr. Wadsworth. "The other is a lad called Bennett. But they're both plucky, I think."

"I *know*," said Mike, stressing the verb. "You won't have any trouble raising that youngster. He can take care of himself."

Nothing that Mike could have said could have pleased Gige's father more.

## CHAPTER X

### A RESCUE

THERE was no possibility that time would hang heavy on the hands of any of the Wadsworth party. Mrs. Wadsworth, of course, had plenty to do around the cabin, and she enjoyed trolling for lake trout, with Vera holding the line between her fingers, while her husband rowed slowly up and down in favorite fishing places. The boys, when the necessary work was done, had their choice of many pastimes: often they explored Snake Island, tracing caverns far back into the rocks and finding unexpected hollows into which no light could penetrate; twice they climbed Panther Mountain, once with Dr. Wadsworth as a guide and once, to their delight, absolutely by themselves; they took trips to the three Herkimer Club lodges, where they saw fat ladies in knickerbockers and city office men imagining that they were roughing it in high leather boots,—most uncomfortable, as one of them confessed to Peter,—



and riding-breeches. Often they fished the woodland streams, and always with success,—although not with the results achieved by Beady and Gige on their first expedition. On rainy days, Mrs. Wadsworth would produce a stock of stained and yellowed magazines for them to read, but most of them preferred to make repairs on their clothes or their fishing tackle. In the evening, the boys would bring out their mandolins and banjos and strum college songs and jazz melodies, or they would play games with cards on the big living-room table. No one, unless he were off on a trip, failed to be on time for meals. After a week of this sort of treatment they were all as red as Indians, and even Ikey looked as if he had been turned into a new person. His unhealthy flabbiness and pallor had disappeared, leaving him a brown, muscular animal like the others.

Ikey's choice among sports was sailing. During the first few days he went out frequently with Dr. Wadsworth, displaying much aptitude in the art of handling the treacherous little craft. Dr. Wadsworth, who had seldom been thrown into contact with him before, grew to like the lad and encouraged him to take care of the boat himself.

“There’s only one real danger on a lake like this, and that’s a squall,” he used to say. “Storms come up mighty quickly, and, when you see suspicious clouds, the right procedure is to head for shore and wait patiently for trouble to pass. This kind of a vessel isn’t intended to weather a heavy gale. And remember, if you do get tipped over, cling to the canoe. You can always hang on until you drift to shore; and that’s better than being drowned.”

Just a week after their arrival, when Peter and Ikey had each been out several times with Dr. Wadsworth and had shown some skill in navigation, he granted them permission after luncheon to take the long-anticipated voyage by themselves. It was a glorious afternoon, perhaps a little sultry, but with a light breeze which mitigated the heat, and the two lads, clad only in their bathing-suits, were on the lake burning themselves even blacker in the torrid sun. There were little ripples up and down the water, and the wind was from the south,—a perfect combination for sailing.

“I don’t see anything very perilous about this,” commented Peter, who was lying comfortably in the bottom of the canoe, watching the

clouds on Panther Mountain while Ikey managed the steering.

“Your dad exaggerated the danger a little, I guess, in order to make us careful,” replied Ikey, as he tacked successfully and steered for the other shore.

For an hour they contented themselves with keeping fairly close to Snake Island, not eager to run any unnecessary risks. Then they headed for the wider part of the lake to the south, where it was a good two miles across. They were scudding along merrily before a spanking breeze when suddenly the wind seemed to die down, and they were left becalmed in the very middle of the lake. Even the little ripples ceased. Peter sat up and looked around him.

“See, the sail’s just barely flopping!” he said. “And look at that cloud there at the landing. There’s something funny about the weather. Maybe we’d better move on!”

The boys studied conditions for a moment, and then Ikey said, “Yes, we’d better paddle to shore as your dad told us to do. Seems to me as if a storm were brewing. Get me a paddle, will you?”

Peter reached under the seat, fumbled around

for a while, and then devoted both hands to the search. Finally he said, "I can't seem to find any paddles here!"

"What! No paddles!" cried Ikey. "Why, your father always keeps them right there on the bottom,—two of them,—all ready in case of any emergency."

"Well, we have the emergency, all right, but no paddles," replied Peter positively. "I'll bet that Gige took them out this morning when he started with Beady in the big canoe for the island. I'm almost sure I saw him do it. And of course he forgot to put them back!"

"That makes a fine mess," exclaimed Ikey.

"What'll we do?" inquired Peter irresolutely. "There's a big wind coming up, and we're a good way from shore."

"I know one thing," announced Ikey. "We've got to furl the sail and trust to luck without. If a tornado ever hits us with this canvas flapping around, we'll be overboard in no time."

"We'll be over, anyway, I guess, without any paddles," said Peter, looking at the nearest bank almost a mile away. "But of course we're better off without any canvas. Let's take it down quickly."



It was simple enough to accomplish this; and then the boys did their best, by paddling with their hands over the side, to make the canoe move to their own quarter of the lake, towards the west. The boat did progress, very slowly, in response to their vigorous efforts, but, as they were laboring, Ikey heard the low rumble of thunder, and, glancing up and wiping his forehead, was astonished to see how black the clouds had become in the south. It was the direction from which the heaviest storms usually arrived.

“We’re going to get ducked, all right, Peter, old top,” he said. “It’s lucky we’ve nothing but our bathing-suits on. If we go over now, we must just clutch hard at old Mister Canoe and then drift along with it until the breaking waves stop dashing high!”

It is a real tribute to the training which Dr. Wadsworth had imparted that neither boy showed the slightest trace of alarm. While both doubtless comprehended that their situation might be serious, they did not let themselves become hysterical. Even before Peter had a chance to answer, a drop of rain hit his shoulder, and he began to feel the force of the storm. Magically, the oppressive calm became a whirl of wind,—on

a smaller scale much like the gale in a book by Joseph Conrad called *Typhoon*, which Peter had come across in a paper-covered edition on the book-shelves in the camp. Sudden swirls swept the little canoe this way and that, and Peter realized that, if the sail had been up, their light craft would have been upside down in a few seconds. As it was, it was tossed about and slowly filled with water, but it did not capsize. The thunder rolled louder over Panther Mountain; the skies darkened ominously, and white-caps appeared on the disturbed lake; and then came a furious blast of wind and rain, as if the heavens had concentrated for one terrific effort. Peter reached silently to Ikey and shook his hand. He had seen this gesture in the movies, and liked it! He was bound to admit that he looked upon their chances of escape as almost negligible, and he proposed to die hard, like Tom Mix or Bull Montana. But he did not lose his head, even in this crisis! He had observed in the darkness that the canoe was being driven at a rapid speed north towards Snake Island, which was now hardly a quarter of a mile off.

Floundering in the trough of the waves, the canoe was now nearly full of water, and Peter





FLOUNDERING IN THE TROUGH OF THE WAVES, THE CANOE WAS NOW NEARLY FULL OF WATER.—Page 234.





was sitting in a puddle. It no longer poised lightly at the crest of the whitecaps, but floated dead, like a log. There was nothing with which to bail, and it was clear that it would soon founder.

“We’d better jump over now while we can,” shouted Peter to Ikey. “We’ll hang on to the canoe, and it’ll float easier without our weight in it. We’ve got to get into the water, anyhow, before very long.”

Ikey nodded a silent approval, and the two lads climbed as gently as possible over the side into the choppy waves. The rain was coming down now like a waterfall, and the whitecaps were running so high that Peter felt as if he were rising and falling at least ten feet,—actually it was probably about four! As he clung there, it occurred to him that he ought to pray, but he had to work so desperately hard to retain his grip on the sides of the canoe that no words would come.

Meanwhile, however, he had not forgotten the island, and, as he turned his head in that direction, he could see what he had already suspected,—that they were being swept past the southernmost end,—a point of steep rock which they had named Cape Horn,—at a high speed, the shore

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being not much more than a hundred feet away. Peter's mind was of the type which functions clearly in an emergency. If they kept on as they were progressing, they would soon pass by Snake Island and be out in the broadest portion of Woodhull, exposed to the full sweep of the storm in a position where the chances of rescue would be very slender indeed. If they should, as a last resort, leave the canoe and strike out for the bank, they might conceivably reach land,—and safety!

It was a moment for quick decisions. Ikey was facing away from Snake Island, and it was not easy to make him understand while the elements were howling; but Peter finally managed to elucidate his scheme. Ikey, who, although older and heavier than Peter, was not so good a swimmer, hesitated for a second, but then gritted his teeth, dropped his hands from the canoe, and started with a crawl stroke for the shore, Peter close behind him. It was hard work, for the wind and the waves carried them north along the coast, and they had to combat an unpleasant cross current. Slowly, very slowly, they made progress in a diagonal course, Peter holding himself back for the slower Ikey.

When they were still perhaps fifty feet from the bank, Ikey turned and glanced imploringly at Peter; he had spent his last ounce of strength and could see no way of keeping up longer. Then Peter, still comparatively fresh, reached his side in a stroke or two and shouted, "Put your hand on my shoulder!" Ikey, frightened though he was, nevertheless recalled still the instructions which he had received in the Life-Saving Class at Deepwater and had presence of mind enough to obey orders. As Peter drew nearer, Ikey reached out his hand to his friend's broad back, trying to rest it there as lightly as possible.

In experiments on Bailey's Pond, Peter had often done this very thing, but now conditions were different. He struggled on, as if impeded by a great weight. He could see the bank close at hand,—very close,—but he felt that, encumbered as he was, it would be impossible for him to reach it. At last, when he was twenty feet away, a wave filled his mouth with water, and he sank,—only to have his feet touch a muddy bottom! The lake at that point was shallow for some yards from the shore, and he had been swimming for two or three minutes in water which could have been only up to his shoul-

ders. A great thrill went through him as he felt something more or less solid beneath his feet, and, seizing Ikey by the arms, he literally dragged him in to shore. There the two boys lay, completely exhausted, oblivious of the wind and the rain.

After perhaps five minutes, when they were able to stir their limbs, they found that the wind was abating and that the heavy rain had turned into a drizzle. Gradually the boys regained their breath, and soon Ikey sat up on the gravelly shore, looking very much washed out, and said, "Look here, Peter, you saved my life! I'd have gone down sure if you hadn't helped me at just the right moment."

"Oh, forget it," replied the embarrassed hero, sitting up in his turn and stretching his arms as if to see whether they were still there. "I don't believe it was over your head there, anyhow."

"Yes, it was!" protested Ikey. "I went down once four or five feet, and there was no bottom. I'm not going to kiss your hand or anything like that, but I shall never forget what you did."

"Well, now that that ceremony is over, I feel just like Robinson Crusoe after the shipwreck. Don't you?"



“Yes, I guess so. But I’ll bet that he had some clothes, and we haven’t,—and it’s cold here.” He shivered a little as he spoke, for his teeth were chattering.

“Come on, let’s get to the other side of the island,” urged Peter. “We’ll build a fire there as a signal.”

“With what, oh, wise one?” asked Ikey satirically. “With damp sticks and a bathing-suit, I suppose!”

“That did sound a little crazy,” confessed Peter. “But anyhow we ought to reach a place where they can see us when it clears.”

So, in their bare feet and with bushes scratching their legs, they laboriously struggled around the southern end of the island and across the rocky top of Cape Horn to a point where they could detect the Wadsworth cabin through the mist. It was just dark enough, however, to keep them from securing a clear view of anything at that distance. Climbing to the peak of the tallest rock around them, they shouted in unison, giving the peculiar yodel which was employed by the Followers of Deerfoot; but the wind was now from the west, and their combined voices could not carry across the intervening space. It looked

as if they might have to spend a cold and uncomfortable night upon the island.

“I shouldn’t mind so much if it were not for Mother’s worrying,” explained Peter. “If they explore the lake and find the canoe upside down, they’ll think we’ve been drowned sure, like the boys in *Tom Sawyer*; and then they’ll begin to drag Woodhull for the bodies. That isn’t very pleasant. Perhaps when it quiets down a bit I can swim back to camp.”

“I’m pretty tired,” confessed Ikey. “As I feel now, I’d a good deal rather wait until morning. There are berries here,—I saw them yesterday when we were exploring! And I’m almost certain that we left some matches in the Robber’s Cave when we ate our lunch there. We’ll be fairly warm in there with a fire.”

“I’ve got it,” said Peter, who did not seem at all satisfied with Ikey’s easy solution of their problems. “Why can’t we take a log or a big board, if we can find one, and push it across. It’s only a little distance, after all, and, even if you do get tired, you won’t sink. Let’s try it!”

“Noble idea!” said Ikey, as the goose-flesh tickled his skin. “The water will be warmer

than this, anyway. Let's go on a board-hunting expedition."

Hurrying down from their exposed lookout, the boys limped along the shore, investigating the driftwood. At last Peter saw a huge maple log, at least ten feet long and a foot in diameter. It was water-soaked, but still floating, and he viewed it with some satisfaction.

"It's just what we want," he declared, as he pushed it out into deeper water. "It won't sink under us, and we can sit astraddle of it and paddle it along with some boards. We'll be back home in no time at all!"

An ancient cracker-box thrown up by the storm furnished the desired paddles, and the two lads were off once more on a new voyage, moving slowly but steadily and safely to the western shore. When they had achieved half the distance, they heard a tremendous shout and saw a row-boat coming up the lake from the south. As it drew nearer, they were glad to see that it held Mrs. Wadsworth and the two boys, Gige and Beady.

"Thank Heaven, you're not drowned!" exclaimed Mrs. Wadsworth, with a great sigh of relief, as they approached. "We've been out

hunting, and we couldn't find you or the canoe anywhere. I've been really worried."

"Dad's out in the motor-boat with Ed Locke," cried Gige, who was greatly excited. "They've gone to the head of the lake while we stayed at this end."

Peter and Ikey were glad enough to abandon their sluggish log and transfer themselves to the more comfortable rowboat. On their way in, they told the story in broken sentences, interrupted by the exclamations of their auditors. As they stepped on the wharf, they could hear the motor-boat puffing, and soon Dr. Wadsworth, with Ed Locke as his companion, appeared, towing the sailing canoe behind them. His relief when he saw Peter and Ikey was unbounded; but he said little about the suspense to which he had been subjected. Instead he hustled them off to get rubbed down and properly clothed.

"Well, boys," began Dr. Wadsworth, as Peter and Ikey an hour later sat drinking hot coffee in front of a roaring fire in the living-room, "you showed yourselves to be very resourceful. I'm proud of you!"

"Peter deserves all the credit," interposed Ikey. "He saved my life, and it was his



brain that thought out the plan for getting to shore."

"Rats!" was Peter's comment. "If you hadn't had the intelligence to keep cool, we'd have both been at the bottom of the lake."

"So far as I can see," observed Dr. Wadsworth, "the fact that you both could swim helped a little, didn't it?"

"I'm glad you let us learn to swim early," said Peter gratefully. "And you were absolutely right about sticking by the canoe when it went over."

"It's pleasant for us parents to hear that we didn't entirely fail in bringing you up," said Mrs. Wadsworth. "And now I suggest, as a mother, that you pile into bed for a rest from your exciting day."

Neither boy protested against this ruling, and within fifteen minutes the house was a dormitory. But for many months to come the boys had stories to tell of their adventures in the storm

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PANGS OF DESPISED LOVE

SUMMER went by, and the Wadsworth family returned from their vacation at Lake Woodhull, very much refreshed. There was a brief interval before school began once more, and then came the long delightful autumn, with its nut gathering and its football and its crisp cool days. It did not end until the boys listened in on the account of the Harvard-Yale game which came through the air to the radio set which had been bought with the Stamp Fund.

When winter descended upon Deepwater, it fell with certainty and lingered long. About Thanksgiving time the oldest inhabitants began to look for the first snowfall, and by Christmas the ground was usually covered to a depth of a foot or two on the level, not to be clear again until the coming of April, when the streets were filled for two or three weeks with slush and mud. Through January and February, storms were frequent, often so severe as to be called blizzards, and the drifts were sometimes very high. Dr.

Wadsworth had no "hired man," and, being himself an indefatigable worker, believed that every boy should be brought to perform certain definite tasks. Thus, when Peter was only eight or nine, he had to master the technique of the snow-shovel,—a small one, adjusted to his size and strength,—and assist his father to clear the sidewalks and piazzas. The two of them, father and son, were regularly out before breakfast, piling the snow on either side of the front walk until it was over Peter's head. After one unprecedented storm, Peter discovered one morning that there was a drift on the north side of the house up to the second-story window, and he actually later in the day slid on his toboggan from his room to the ground,—a vertical distance of twelve feet when the snow had melted. When the drifts were as big as this, the Followers of Deerfoot resorted to tunneling, sometimes constructing a system of excavations which resembled the interior of a mine.

Peter and Gige were not brought up, like some lads of the present generation, to dread the winter. When the snow was not too deep, there was skating on Dead Pond, a stagnant body of water beyond Curtis's Woods, at the end of the street,

which froze early in the season and was always safe. It was far from being like a city skating-rink. The boys had to clear the pond themselves, and it was frequently a difficult job. This done, they would build up a fire beside some fallen log at the edge of the ice, where they could take refuge when hands and feet were congealed. There would be glorious moonlit evenings when Dr. Wadsworth and his friends at the Dalton Club, lured by the fascination of romance, would join the boys, and there would be a gay gathering on the pond. But there were also long periods when the accumulation of snow was too deep and heavy to remove, and skating had to be abandoned for other pastimes.

There was nearly always coasting down Mill Street or Railroad Hill, where automobiles passed only seldom. The sleds were big "double-runners," or "bobs," constructed at the local carpenter's shop, and holding seven or eight people closely packed. A few of the more elegant of these sleds were steered by a wheel taken from a discarded Ford, the steersman sitting up like the driver of an automobile. The majority, however, were controlled by ropes, and often the pilot would lie on his stomach,—in the style known



locally as "belly bump,"—gripping the runners of the front sled and guiding it with his arms. When the roads had been packed down, these "bobs" could go literally like the wind, the passengers yelling madly all the way down to warn pedestrians of the approaching menace. It was a somewhat hazardous sport under some conditions, but parents rarely investigated it, and the children were left very much to themselves after school hours until supper time.

If Dr. Wadsworth had known that Peter had been dubbed "Dare Devil" because of his willingness to undertake any feat to which he was challenged, he might have worried about his offspring, but this was a subject upon which Peter himself was reticent. Fortunately, outside of the inevitable minor bruises and sprains, the boys escaped without serious injury, even when Peter, to avoid an automobile, deliberately steered a crowded "double-runner" away from the road and over a fence to the Big Creek, where, the ice being thin, it broke through, leaving the alarmed passengers in two or three feet of chilly water. Acting on Peter's advice, they all ran home as fast as their wet clothes would permit, and no cases of pneumonia resulted.

Another winter recreation was sleigh-riding. On some clear and nipping February evening, Peter and his friends would secure their parents' permission, and, after asking one of the attractive young women teachers to be a chaperone, would engage a heavy "pung" drawn by two horses from the Deepwater stable,—in country villages like Deepwater there are still stables and horses! Straw would be spread over the bottom, and the boys and girls would then pack themselves in, one of the older and more sophisticated boys constituting himself the guardian of the chaperone. To the merry jingling of the bells and the singing of the members of the party, they would drive to Danville, a village five miles away where there was an inn which could serve a simple supper of oyster stew and crackers and pie. After filling up on hot food and drink, the young people would then start back again, sitting close together to keep warm. It was simple, harmless amusement, but Peter liked it less than other sports because it involved girls,—and Peter did not care for girls!

To Peter Wadsworth at fourteen, the vilest insult which could be offered was to be called a "sissy." During the preceding summer and

autumn he had grown taller and heavier, and his voice had begun to change, turning in a strange manner from a shrill treble to a gruff bass, which he could not control. A fluffy down, appearing on his smooth cheeks, had led his father to present him at Christmas with a safety razor, and accessories, and Gige had been much amused to see his older brother using these articles. Peter's efforts were devoted to preserving his masculinity. In his circle the epithet "sissy" always meant a fight, unless the recipient were a coward,—and even then he was usually goaded into battle by some of the many devices known to boys. He hated anything that smacked of effeminacy, even protesting against "dressing up" for parties in a stiff linen collar on the ground that this form of decoration was "sissified." He did his best to brush his naturally curly hair down straight. Even washing his face and hands and cleaning his teeth seemed to him decidedly unmasculine habits, against which he was inclined to rebel. As for deliberately seeking the society of any of the girls in the school, that seemed to him to be ridiculous. Girls were silly creatures, who couldn't play football or baseball, and who spent most of their time giggling and whispering to-



gether. When one of them smiled alluringly at Peter, he fled like a coward. And he would have gone a mile out of his way to avoid walking with one of them to school.

When he had come back to Deepwater from Lake Woodhull, Mrs. Wadsworth had made arrangements for Peter to take piano lessons from Miss Reilly,—and how he hated it!

“Aw, Moms,” he would groan in despair, “real fellows don’t play the piano. I hate to have Mucker and Ikey think that I’m nothing but a sissy!”

“But, my son, there’s nothing silly about music. Look at Paderewski,—he became President of Poland! Doesn’t Dad play the piano himself? Nobody ever called him effeminate!”

“Yes, but none of the other guys do it.” This is always, with a boy, the supreme convincing argument. To be different from the others is not merely an indiscretion but a crime!

“But, Peter, if you keep practising now, even though it may seem like hard work, you’re going some day to get lots of pleasure from it. And when you’re in college, you’ll be mighty glad that you can play while your friends sit around and listen.”



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“ But they’re all girls in Miss Reilly’s class! ”  
This was said in the most contemptuous of tones.

“ Well, you’ve got to do it,” said Mrs. Wadsworth with firm, decisive tones. “ I know what’s best for you, and there’ll be no more argument.”

When Mrs. Wadsworth spoke in this way, even to her husband, discussion ceased. Peter continued to take his lessons regularly on Thursday afternoons, but there may be some question as to the quality of enthusiasm which he displayed in practising. A close observer might have noticed that, when Mrs. Wadsworth was within hearing, Peter ran scales vigorously, if not always accurately; but when she disappeared again into the kitchen, the listless mood returned and he dallied with the keys in the spirit of one to whom Schubert and Beethoven and Liszt meant nothing except toil,—futile toil.

When Peter had passed his fourteenth birthday, in January, his mother suddenly announced that he was enrolled in Miss Timian’s dancing-class. Against such tyranny Peter’s rebellious spirit protested.

“ Say, Moms, have I got to go to that old dancing-class? That’s awful! All the other guys will call me a perfect lady! ”

“ Oh, no, they won't, dear. The little Bennett boy is going, and the two Webster boys, and Aubrey Terry, and plenty of others that you associate with. We mothers have talked it all over, and it's settled! ”

“ Are there going to be any girls there? ”

“ Of course! You can't have a dancing-school without girls! Mildred Wilson and Agnes Allen and Lulu Peck and Blanche King,—all the little girls you know will be there.” How Peter hated to hear his mother refer to “ little boys ” and “ little girls ” ! Was he not grown up? He always referred to the Followers of Deerfoot as “ fellows ” or “ guys ” or “ men. ”

“ That's terrible, Moms! And I suppose we'll have to dance with them,—that homely Betty Fisher and all the rest! ”

“ That's what a dancing-school is for,—to teach you how to get along with girls! ”

“ Gee, Moms, I don't ever want to see a girl! I just want to play with boys. I hate girls,—all of 'em! They haven't any sense! ”

Mrs. Wadsworth was a trifle flustered at this wholesale condemnation of her sex, but she still insisted, and to the dancing-school Peter went, garbed neatly in a blue serge suit,—his Sunday

best,—a white collar and new shiny patent leather slippers. He had never felt more uncomfortable in his life. Sure enough, on that first momentous Friday afternoon, most of his friends were present,—Beady, Leaky, Charlie and Hal Webster, even Goldy Goldberg,—all except Mucker Wright, Frank Green, Ikey Warren, and a few others whose families despised the social graces. The outsiders, or pariahs, like Mucker jeered at the prospective dancers as they entered Grange Hall, but Peter kept his fists clenched and threatened dire vengeance on any one who molested him.

Miss Timian had a difficult task. The mothers who sat, like Mrs. Wadsworth, and watched their children going timidly and awkwardly through the rudimentary steps had to admit that she was very patient,—very, very patient. The girls, of course, were tractable and looked pretty in their white dresses; but the boys were repeatedly shoving one another about and making half-audible remarks of a tenor not flattering to the young ladies who were present. When Peter was instructed by Miss Timian to put his right arm around the waist of Miss Elizabeth Fisher, who lived down the street from his house and loved to stick her tongue out at him as he went by on the



way to school, his face assumed an expression of martyrdom, and he encircled the lady as if he were caressing a poisonous serpent; while she looked as innocent and demure as the little angel which she wasn't! As Peter moved clumsily through the unfamiliar motions of the dance and even trod heavily on her toes, she turned, looked in his fiery eyes, and said in a low voice, "Why, Peter, you're just as light as a fairy!" Peter's teeth ground against each other in despair, for there was no escape! The walls were lined with proud parents, each one gazing fondly at her own son or daughter and incidentally commenting on the offspring of others. Betty Fisher's mother, for instance, leaned over to Mrs. Bennett and said, "What an awkward uninteresting boy that Peter Wadsworth is! He doesn't seem to have the slightest bit of grace."

"Oh, he's at the unmanageable age," responded Mrs. Bennett, who had herself brought up six boys, of whom Beady was the youngest. "He'll get over his shyness in a year or two. Then you won't recognize him,—and his mother won't! And your Betty will be a whole lot kinder to him then than she is now."

Somehow Peter survived this initial ordeal,



mainly because he had the support of some companions in misery, and there was less complaining as the winter went on. Dancing-school was held every week, and Peter regularly begged to be excused; but his objections gradually became less persistent. It was in late February that Mrs. Wadsworth, on a certain Thursday evening, paused in her sewing and recollected that something was missing in the usual routine of the house. Yes,—Peter had not favored her with his customary tirade against dancing-school and girls! For the first time within her memory, he was apparently submitting to his lesson without a protest. And then it occurred to her that she had not recently attended the dancing-school to see how things were getting on. It was her duty as a mother to watch what progress her son and heir had been making.

When Mrs. Wadsworth, on the following afternoon, entered Grange Hall and took her seat beside Mrs. Webster and Mrs. Bennett, she was astounded to see Peter gliding not ungracefully over the floor in a fox trot, holding in his arms a little curly-headed girl whose cheek dropped almost intimately towards his shoulder. When the couple came in her direction, Mrs. Wadsworth

recognized her as Kitty Adams, the daughter of the minister of the First Presbyterian Church,—a girl who had only recently come to town when her father had accepted a new pastorate. Mrs. Wadsworth had seen her, but had paid little attention to her before. She was fully two years older than Peter, but no taller. “Just a little overdressed!” thought Mrs. Wadsworth, as she inspected the silk stockings, the carefully arranged blonde hair, and the blue gown with its broad sash. But instead of bursting out, she sat down for a moment beside Miss Timian and congratulated her on the fine progress made by her pupils.

“Peter is dancing again with the little Adams girl, I see,” she remarked casually, as if it were a matter of indifference to her.

“Oh, yes,” answered the teacher. “He seems to choose her as a partner most of the time. In fact, she’s the only one that seems to be able to make him keep step as he ought to do.”

When the music for that dance had ceased, Kitty came with Peter back to Miss Timian, where Mrs. Wadsworth smiled at her and shook her hand. Peter meanwhile had on his countenance an expression so completely fatuous that

his mother could hardly restrain herself. But she managed somehow to keep her self-control and said, "You dance very well, Kitty."

"She's the best dancer here, Mother," interposed Peter, in a manner which admitted of no debate.

"Oh, Peter, you're such a flatterer," simpered the Adams girl, her eyes rolling in what she must have thought to be a most seductive way,—a way indicating a sophistication which amazed Mrs. Wadsworth. Just then the violin struck up once more, and Peter swung off with Kitty as his partner again. To Mrs. Wadsworth's cautious inquiries, Miss Timian replied, "He simply won't dance with any one else; and, just as long as he seems to be improving, I've let him continue. Peter had a fight last week with another boy who wanted to dance with Kitty twice in succession. When she can't dance with him, he just stands in a corner and looks sad."

Here was news for Mrs. Wadsworth! And then she recalled one or two suspicious facts which had come to her notice. Peter, who had always objected to putting on neat clothes, had recently been detected in the act of carrying off one of his father's gaudier neckties to wear on Sunday to

church, and he had begun to ask questions about a new spring suit,—with long trousers and turned-up cuffs. Incidentally she had seen him once or twice actually blacking his shoes,—a performance hitherto unheard of! Taken separately, these incidents meant nothing at all; the cumulative effect, however, as she looked back over the past month, was startling. And then corroborative evidence came to her mind. She remembered that he had accepted invitations to several parties at which girls were to be guests,—accepted without a single word of grumbling. Surely she had been a blind mother! She watched Peter's face as he passed her again,—it expressed the very ecstasy of idiotic contentment! He had unmistakably changed!

Now Mrs. Wadsworth was a very sensible and tactful woman. Some mothers might have indulged in caustic criticism, thus only confirming Peter in his affection. Instead she just asked a few questions, never indicating that she was disgusted with his choice. A few days later she suggested to Peter that it was time for him to give a party to pay back some of his social obligations.

“That's bully, Moms!” said Peter joyfully.



“Should you like to have girls or not?” asked Mrs. Wadsworth, feeling her way.

“Yes, I guess so,” answered Peter, with assumed carelessness.

“Whom do you want?”

“Oh, Mildred Wilson, of course, and Lulu Peck, and the others in that set. And I suppose we’ll have to invite that awful Betty Fisher. And don’t you think we might have that pretty new girl, Kitty Adams?”

“You may pick any one you want. This is your entertainment,” said Mrs. Wadsworth, smiling at Peter’s effort to imitate the ostrich,—thinking that he was wholly concealed when only his head was hidden in the sand.

And so Kitty Adams came, dressed, in Mrs. Wadsworth’s prejudiced eyes, very elaborately, with a gorgeous pink sash and gigantic pink bows in her hair. “She must have a very foolish mother,” thought the hostess as she looked down at the pale cheeks of the little girl and heard her say, “Good-evening, Mithuth Wadsworth.”

“O dear, she lisps!” thought Mrs. Wadsworth. “How horrible! And, judging by her build, she can’t take any exercise. She’s just a ridiculous doll. I thought Peter would show more intelli-

gence." But Mrs. Wadsworth kissed her, a little astonished to find her reeking with cheap perfumery, and then turned to her other guests, wondering what blindness it is which makes males select women whom other women cannot respect or like.

The party was in most respects a complete success. The boys and girls played games, danced, and ate with the minimum of interference from their elders, who came on the scene only when the murmur of the guests became pandemonium. Peter devoted himself mainly to Kitty, who did not care to participate in the more active diversions of the others. Instead she sat in a corner, neatly immaculate, each curl in proper position, criticising the conduct of the others, while Peter sat near in an attitude of dumb adoration. Dr. Wadsworth, who had not observed this phase before, said to himself, "The boy is certainly degenerating into an idiot!" And it was peculiar that Peter, who had once been the noisiest, the most enthusiastic, of his gang should now have become so subdued and retiring, as if he were Samson shorn of his locks and deprived of his strength. If he had been a little less formidable physically, some of his own crowd would

have ridiculed him out of his infatuation; but he was still a dangerous antagonist, and even his closest friends, like Beady, did not dare to interfere beyond smiling significantly when he did something particularly absurd.

It was later that evening that the crisis in Peter's madness arrived. When the time came for farewells, Peter put on his overcoat and stepped to Kitty's side to escort her to her home on the next street. Dr. Wadsworth opened his mouth to say something, but his wife pulled his coat-sleeve, and he desisted. As the boy and girl walked along together under the February moon, with the snow-drifts gleaming white around them, the sentimental Peter said to the fur-clad figure at his side, in his shy fashion, "Some day I hope we'll have a home of our own, Kitty."

"What in the world do you mean, Peter Wadsworth?"

"Why, just that we'll get married and all that!"

"Oh, you're too young to think of getting married," replied Kitty, carelessly and cruelly. "You're only fourteen, and you won't even be through college for seven or eight years. Besides I'm going to marry Tommy Hawkins."

“ Who’s he? ”

“ He’s a fellow I uthed to know in Spwingfield before I came here. He’s thwee years older than I am, and he’s in Harvard now. His father’s a millionaire.”

“ Do you l-l-l-love him? ” asked Peter.

“ I guess so. He’s awful good-looking and nice,—and he’s a wonderful hockey player! ”

“ But you let me kiss you the other night after the Bennett party, didn’t you? ”

“ That didn’t mean anything, silly! You’re just a kid, a lot younger than I am! Why, I’ll be married before you’ve even entered college.”

“ But, Kitty, I thought you were going to be my girl for ever and ever.”

“ Ridiculous! You’ll forget about me in two weeks. I’m much too old for you; and besides your family haven’t any money.”

Peter’s romantic nature had nothing to reply to such practicality. He had never given a thought as to whether Kitty had a cent to her name. He loved her, and would love her as long as he lived. Then Kitty laughed,—the supreme insult!

“ You poor boy! ” she said. “ You do look as if you had lost your last friend! And I was having such a good time flirting with you.”



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“ Flirting! ” answered Peter in a voice intended to be scathing. “ Flirting! ”

“ Yeth,” she lisped in reply. “ That’th all it wath! ”

What more could Peter do? His heart was broken,—he had almost felt it crack at her light words. He went a few steps farther with her to the gate of the Adams house and was about to burst out in denunciation of her infamy, when the door opened and her father,—a tall, scholarly-looking man, who did not understand his daughter,—appeared.

“ Good-evening, young sir,” he said. “ Thank you for escorting Kitty home.”

Peter was completely inarticulate. To the Reverend Mr. Adams’s astonishment, the boy simply turned his back without a word and walked off. As he strolled slowly back, oblivious to the beauty of the moonlight, he was convinced that life had nothing more to offer him. The hero in a book which he had recently read had muttered at some such moment, “ I have lived and loved! ” “ That’s the way it is with me,” thought Peter, “ I have lived through a great deal in my short career,—and I have loved as few men have ever done! ” Women were deceivers;

life was a delusion; beauty was a snare. He had tasted the grand passion and found it ashes. Well, he would go on as best he could, even though all the zest was gone. He would live life to the end, a proud and broken man.

He had expected to toss feverishly on his bed, muttering the name of his loved one at intervals; but somehow his rest was sound, and he woke up the next day with his soul full of resentment rather than of despair. A boy of fourteen cannot remain gloomy very long, even when he is crossed in love. It was only a day or two before Mrs. Wadsworth, with her shrewd mother's observation, began to notice symptoms of recovery in her enamored son. He was less particular about the hue of his cravats; his shoes remained unpolished from morning to night; his hair was allowed to go uncombed. Even his gentleness,—which had disturbed his mother greatly,—was reverting to his former boisterousness. Once more he began to complain of dancing-school. Then one day she happened to overhear a conversation between Peter and his brother, Gige.

“What's the matter with Hal nowadays?” Gige was inquiring.

“Oh, he's in love with that Betty Fisher!”

said Peter in a disgusted tone. "He's always writing her notes and trying to walk home from school with her. He's a poor saphead! If he knew what she really is, he wouldn't behave so foolishly."

"By the way, what's become of Kitty Adams?" asked Gige a moment or two later, as if an idea had just occurred to him.

"That light-haired girl? I don't know. She's still around, I guess."

"You used to see her all the time," said the canny younger brother. "What's the matter, Peter? Did she give you the hook?"

"Look here, Gige," said Peter sternly and earnestly. "You cut out gossiping about her or you'll be sorry! Maybe I was a fool,—I'm ready to admit it,—but that's my business. Just let me give you a little advice,—don't get mixed up with women who are older than you are! It doesn't pay." He spoke with the assurance of a disillusioned man of the world.

"Why not?" inquired Gige innocently, in a manner calculated to invite confidences.

"Just because I say so. I'm wise to all their games." At that point Mrs. Wadsworth thought it best to enter and interrupt the conversation.

She was sensible enough to understand that Peter had been inoculated against such infatuations for some time to come,—just as children are vaccinated for smallpox. He would be a normal masculine animal at least for another year or two.

There was only one more session of the dancing-school. Andy Benton was a boy two years younger than Peter, and therefore in Gige's gang, but Peter knew him well and used to see him often. He was a frail-looking lad, with white cheeks and thin legs, who rarely joined with the other boys in their rough sports. Everybody liked Andy, but he was no match for any fellow of his own age in an outdoor game. His father, Mr. Augustus Benton, was one of the richest men in Deepwater, and Andy was an only child, spoiled, of course, for he always had plenty of money to spend and he was eager to treat his friends in his generous way.

On a Friday afternoon in March, Andy did not appear at the dancing-school, and Miss Timian explained that he was not well. When Peter walked by the Benton house the next morning, he saw there a square yellow placard with the words "Quarantine" printed on it; and that noon his father asked him several questions as to when he



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had last talked with Andy. Dr. Wadsworth seemed much relieved when he was told that neither Peter nor Gige had seen Andy for some days.

“The little fellow has spinal meningitis,” explained the physician to his wife. “And he hasn’t any resistance at all against disease. Things are going badly with him.”

Three days later Dr. Wadsworth appeared at dinner in the evening looking very serious.

“Your little friend, Andy Benton, died this afternoon,” he said, trying to speak in a natural voice.

“Isn’t that too bad!” exclaimed Mrs. Wadsworth. “He’s the only child the Bentons have too, with all their money! Peter and Gige must send some flowers to the funeral.”

Peter up to this moment was quite unfamiliar with death, except with animals. His father, during his duties as a physician, had naturally spoken from time to time of the passing of different people in the village. But Peter had never really confronted it as a factor in his own daily life. Coming home from school the next morning, he noticed the white ribbons on the door and inquired as to their significance. The children

who had known Andy spoke in hushed voices, as if something deeply mysterious had touched them. Principal Harlow addressed the entire school, telling them of Andy's death and asking the girls and boys to bring money with them the next day to buy a wreath for their lost friend. Then, on the afternoon of the funeral, school was closed.

Peter was not allowed to attend the funeral services, and it was not altogether easy for him to imagine what had happened. He tried to picture little Andy as he would look, cold and still, in his coffin, but it was difficult. For a day or two his mind was obsessed by the terror of death, and his face had a solemn expression. Then the mood passed, as such moods will with the young, and he was again his usual cheerful self,—a boy who had been disillusioned in love and had seen death take away a companion, but who, in spite of these tragic experiences, could still find something to live for. After all, spring had come,—and it was impossible to be despondent during a Deepwater spring!

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GREAT RACE

A HAPPY combination of a good physical inheritance with a regular outdoor life had made Peter and Gige Wadsworth into healthy and muscular boys. Peter had not been brought up to be an idler. We have already described how hard he worked shoveling snow in the winter; and, in the summer, there was the lawn to mow once a week and the car to wash and other chores to do. There was a period of two weeks or more during July, furthermore, when Dr. Wadsworth insisted that the lad should go haying. He was given a job under a kind-hearted farmer, Fred Tynan, a friend of Dr. Wadsworth's, and rode to the field each day on his bicycle, a distance of two miles. Dr. Wadsworth was in most respects an indulgent parent, but he had theories, one of which was a resolve that his boys should learn what it means to toil with one's hands. When Peter found that it took him all day and a prodigious amount of sweat and exertion to earn two dollars for him-

self, he became much more careful about money. He could translate candy and ice-cream soda into terms of hours spent pitching hay, and he quickly balanced one against the other. All the while, moreover, he was developing his muscles and storing up energy for future emergencies.

In all sports Peter was a natural leader. His was an active and original mind, restless and constantly seeking new channels of entertainment. It was he usually who conceived plans for amusement and carried them through. There were the traditional games which could be played at recess on the hard baked playground at school. "Pom-pom-pullaway" was one which could be easily and quickly organized, and leap-frog was another pastime of which the boys seldom became tired. "Shinny,"—played with an old tin can and heavy sticks with a knob at the end,—required more of an equipment and was reserved for the dirt circle in the center of the park. It was no gentle game, for the sticks were flying in all directions, as in ice hockey, and bruises and cuts were very common. Marbles and Mumblety-peg had their respective seasons, and were followed by various crude forms of baseball, such as "One Ol' Cat!" and "Choosin' Up Sides!"



Of such an aristocratic sport as golf, Peter knew nothing until he went away to "prep" school.

Peter had more daring and aggressiveness than most of his comrades in Deepwater. He was an extensive reader, and, although he had as yet never seen a college, he kept in touch with inter-collegiate contests, in the newspaper and over the radio, and had taken from the village library all the available stories on school athletics, including books by Ralph Henry Barbour, Owen Johnson, A. T. Dudley, and others. Soon after he was born, his parents planned to send him to Andover, and he had begun looking forward to that school as soon as he was able to walk about. It was arranged that, when he graduated from grammar school, he was to enter that famous old Massachusetts institution. It is no wonder, then, that he pondered long over the rules for baseball, football, and other sports, and thrilled with delight when he heard that Andover had beaten her ancient rival, Exeter, at one of them.

It is characteristic of Peter that, when he was only twelve, he organized a grammar school baseball nine and arranged games with schools in the vicinity. There were plenty of difficulties to be overcome: Frank Green, the best pitcher, was

never sure when he could get away from his father's fruit-stand on Saturdays; and Ed Ballou, the one fellow who could wear a mask and catch behind the bat, often had to work at home when his services were badly needed elsewhere. But there were occasions when, through sheer persistence, Peter assembled seven or eight fellows, and then the team would ride on bicycles to Ridgefield Center to play a similar group of farmer boys. Peter's own position was first base, but he was not instinctively a ball-player, like Ed Ballou, and his errors were disgracefully frequent. Mistakes, however, were not really counted, especially on a diamond filled with depressions, where a grounder would invariably bound in the direction least expected by the fielder. The scores were high in these contests, and they frequently broke up in a fight, one side or the other claiming a victory because of some breach of the rules.

It was Peter, also, who organized the first regular football eleven in the Deepwater Grammar School and actually had the enterprise to schedule a game with the Ludlow Falls Grammar School, four miles away. Mr. Harlow, the Principal, had tried to teach the boys some of the rudiments of

the game, and they had reached the point where they had mastered their signals and considered themselves invincible. Some of them had been allowed by their parents to order from Sears, Roebuck some very gaudy sweaters, with broad alternating stripes of yellow and black; and it must be stated that, as they drove off to Ludlow Falls packed tightly together in the school motor-bus, they looked quite formidable. Even in practice they performed creditably before the small crowd of spectators. . . . But when the game started, their ignorance and incapacity were revealed. Peter, playing left end, was startled after the kick-off to see a towering figure descending upon him, his nose-guard making him resemble some dreadful and brutal savage. Even in that agonizing moment, the boy's courage did not desert him. He made an ambitious but futile dive at the legs of his flying opponent, and then sat up to see the Ludlow Falls boy,—who later became one of the great college backs of his generation,—bowling over man after man and finally placing the pigskin over the Deepwater line for a touchdown.

It was a disconcerting, ignominious, but illuminating experience for Peter. The Ludlow Falls



eleven, trained by a coach from Hamilton College, knew tricks which the Deepwater boys had never seen, and the latter were absolutely helpless. When the game was over, with the score 87 to 0 against Deepwater, Peter was a wise and less confident youngster. The journey back home was very quiet, and the members of the eleven, sore both in body and mind, had little to say. But Peter's eleven played no more games with outside teams that autumn.

It was during the spring following his painful love affair that Peter gained enduring fame for himself by being mainly responsible for the first track meet ever held in Deepwater. During the Easter vacation, one of his cousins, a boy who had been christened Charles Montague Hazen, but who, because of a reputation for garrulity, was commonly called "Windy," spent a few days at Deepwater. He was then a Sophomore at Dartmouth and had been trying out for the shot-put on the varsity track team. He brought with him on his visit a sixteen-pound shot, carried in a canvas bag, and spent part of each morning, even in the slush and mud, practising in the Wadsworths' garden. Peter, you may be sure, gazed with the keenest interest at his costume,—the



athletic shirt, the short running-drawers, and the spiked shoes,—storing all the information away for future use.

Windy kindly undertook to give Peter some lessons in the technique of his event, explaining to him first that the globe used by boys of "prep" school age weighed only twelve pounds. Peter, however, was well-enough developed so that the heavier shot did not trouble him, and he soon, with Windy's coaching, managed to hurl it a creditable distance. Meanwhile from Windy's incessant conversation he picked up a large number of facts about track sports and the proper method of conducting a meet. Peter listened in admiration, treasured all Windy's remarks, and pondered on them before going to sleep at night. He sent for a catalogue of sporting goods and examined the pictures with delight. When Windy's stay was over, Peter was like a man who is familiar with a foreign country from the perusal of guide-books, without even having set foot upon its soil.

On the outskirts of Deepwater was a half-mile dirt track, the survival of an earlier period of grandeur, when the village used to have its three days of horse-racing every autumn. In the days

before Peter was born, moreover, it had been the scene of the annual County Fair. During the weeks devoted to horse-racing and the fair, crowds of sharpers, gamblers, and fakirs congregated in Deepwater, giving the little place a cosmopolitan aspect. . . . Now the old days were gone. Automobiles had largely replaced horses, and racing, except at resorts like Saratoga, had been abandoned. The county fair had been transferred to a more enterprising center. The track itself meanwhile had filled with weeds and grass, and the high wooden fence which had once surrounded it had fallen in at various points. The grandstand, however, was still in good condition, and the track itself could be restored to use by a vigorous employment of the rake and hoe. Indeed there had been a time within twenty years when bicycle races had been held there, and occasionally there would be a ball game on the grass enclosure between a Deepwater team and that of some rival town.

It was while Peter was driving with his father past the rather imposing entrance to the fair grounds that the big idea entered his mind. When school opened for the spring term, he was ready with his project.

“Look here,” he said on the first day to Beady, Mucker Wright, and a few others who were sitting idly on the stone steps waiting for the doors to open. “Why don’t we start a regular track team and challenge Clayton and Ludlow Falls to a triangular meet here in Deepwater? We can get permission to use the old race-track, I’ll bet, and we can ask the storekeepers to furnish prizes.”

“Didn’t you get enough of a trimming with your famous football team two years ago?” asked Mucker, grinning broadly.

“Oh, that’s different,” responded the enthusiastic Peter. “We didn’t really know a thing about football. No wonder we were beaten.”

“Well, when it comes to that, does any one of us know anything about training for track work?”

“I’ve been picking up a few ideas from Windy Hazen, my cousin; and besides, Len Peck used to be on the track team at Yale. He told me so.” Len Peck, thus casually referred to, was the dignified Assistant Principal in the High School, who was fresh from college and who liked to mingle with the older boys as one of them.

“My dad ran the mile when he was at Am-

herst, I know," added Peter. "But I guess he's too old to do it now. Anyhow, he could hand us a little advice as to how to get started."

"I don't see why we couldn't get together enough fellows for a respectable team," added Hal Webster. "I'm for the plan. I'm going to ask Dad to-night whether he won't let me buy a vaulting-pole so that I can go out for the pole vault." The Webster family were well-to-do, and the two sons always seemed to have money sufficient to satisfy all their desires.

"Why don't we write Clayton and Ludlow Falls right off?" asked Beady Bennett, whose mind had a practical bent. "If they accept, we can go ahead with our plans."

"Let's call a meeting after school and settle everything then," suggested Leaky Terry, the politician of the group. "We can elect a captain and a manager and appoint a committee to run the meet."

It was not difficult, with all this fervor, to proceed to business. Len Peck, when consulted, proved to be an invaluable mentor, even consenting to call the older boys in the grammar school together that afternoon and explain what had been suggested. When he had outlined the



details of the plan, Peter took charge of the meeting. A series of ballots showed that Peter, who was popular, had been elected unanimously as captain; while the managership, after a close contest between Beady and Leaky, fell to the latter.

Mr. Peck then pointed out that certain apparatus would have to be purchased at once,—a twelve-pound hammer, a shot, some vaulting-poles, a discus or two, some javelins, and other minor pieces of equipment. He advised against holding hurdle races, which, he said, were too difficult in technique for them to attempt within the short time at their disposal. The old abandoned track would have to be hired from the proper authorities and cleaned up by the boys themselves. Each prospective contestant would have to purchase a running-shirt and drawers and, if possible, special shoes,—though it would be quite feasible to wear sneakers. He borrowed Peter's catalogue, with its alluring pictures of various articles which were needed, and then added that he would be glad to advance the sum necessary to secure some of the equipment right away,—this money to be repaid later from the gate receipts, if there were any.

Leaky, in his responsible position as manager, sent off a carefully concocted letter that evening to the two schools in Clayton and Ludlow Falls, placing a formal invitation before them, and for two or three days the boys were on edge, awaiting an answer. On Friday there arrived in the same mail two replies, couched in formal language, but indicating that both schools were ready to agree to the proposal. The Clayton representative suggested a conference of managers during the following week, and this was duly arranged by telephone. Meanwhile Peter, with Beady and Hal Webster as his assistants, started out to seek prizes. With an audacity which amazed his helpers, he decided to begin with Colonel Conger. Leaving them on the street, he walked right up the front walk, rang the bell, asked the butler for Colonel Conger himself, and was ushered into the library in which he had once spent such an unhappy ten minutes. It was not long before the master of the house entered and greeted him like a long-lost friend.

“Why,” he said, “here’s the prodigal son at last! We certainly ought to kill the fatted calf! I thought that you were never coming to see me again.”

“It’s a kind of a business visit this time, sir,” said Peter, feeling a little embarrassed now that he was actually face to face with the Colonel.

“Are you in any trouble?” asked his host, smiling genially. “Have you broken any more of my household belongings?”

“Oh, no, sir,” protested Peter. “Not at all! But I do want to ask you for something, sir.”

His speech at last released, Peter then proceeded to tell the older gentleman something about his scheme, dwelling at some length on the details.

“What event are you going in?” inquired the Colonel, when he had heard all about the plan.

“I haven’t exactly settled that yet,” answered Peter soberly. “I’m going to try the shot-put, of course, and the hammer-throw and the one-hundred-yard dash and perhaps the broad jump and possibly the ——”

“Stop, stop!” cried the Colonel, simulating bewilderment. “Aren’t you going to let any of the other fellows have a chance? Are you planning to win the meet all by yourself?”

“Well, you see I don’t really know whether I’m worth anything in any of the events,” said

Peter, who had sense enough to realize when he was being "jollied." "I'm going to take a chance with them all, one by one, until I find out which one I can do the best in."

"Don't be too ambitious, my boy," advised the Colonel. "Select one or two contests and stick to them. Trust an old stager,—these miscellaneous chaps that spread themselves out over a number of races usually do poorly in them all. But you didn't drop in to have me preach a sermon to you, did you? I'll tell you what I'll do, for the sake of old times. I'll give you ten dollars to buy a prize for any event which you select. You can't offer money prizes, as you know, or you'll all be rated as professionals,—and that might be embarrassing later when you're running for Yale! But you buy a baseball glove or a tennis racket or whatever you want,—even a small iron dog,—and put it up as the first prize in some event in which you're going to take part. That's my only stipulation,—you must be one of the competitors."

After making this rather long speech, Colonel Conger drew out a fat pocket-book, extracted a crisp yellow ten-dollar note, and handed it to Peter.



“But this is altogether too much, sir,” said Peter, now covered with confusion. “One dollar is quite enough.”

“You’d better take what’s given you and say nothing,” responded the affable Colonel. “It’s your business now to go out and earn the reward.”

“Thank you ever so much, sir,” answered Peter. “And I’ll say that your prize will be the best one offered.”

“I suppose you’ve noticed that the dog has vanished,” said Colonel Conger, as he stood with Peter in the door and pointed towards the lawn. Again Peter became very red and could think of nothing whatever to say. He was always ashamed when he remembered his part in carrying off the tail of the statue.

Colonel Conger was not desirous of prolonging the agony, and hastened to put his strong hand on the youngster’s shoulder. “That’s all right,” he said. “If you display half the strength in the shot-put that you employed in breaking off Fido’s tail, you’ll get first place for Deepwater.”

After this auspicious beginning,—with which Peter’s coadjutors were duly impressed,—the job of collecting prizes seemed easier. Most of the

merchants, responding to the enthusiasm of the solicitors, smiled upon the lads and were willing to be on the list of donors,—especially since their names were to be printed on the program. Some of them, it must be confessed, improved the opportunity to rid their shelves of articles which, for one reason or another, were no longer saleable. But, when the inventory was taken, the committee had a self-raising umbrella (of red silk), a suit-case (made of imitation leather), a tall oil lamp and stand (of a fashion in vogue thirty years before), several jack-knives, three boxes of candy, an air-gun, two neckties, a ticket good for ten gallons of gasoline at the local garage, twenty pounds of sugar, and even a small radio set (contributed by the local electrician, who was much interested in sports),—quite enough to provide prizes for first, second, and third places in each event. With the ten dollars presented by Colonel Conger, Peter, after consultation with the others, ordered a tennis racket from Sears, Roebuck, at the same time informing the committee of the Colonel's stipulation,—that the tennis racket must be offered as first prize in some event in which Peter was to be a competitor.

It now became essential to interview the of-

officials of the Deepwater Race-track Association, who never met except to approve the acts of the Treasurer. Dr. Wadsworth was able to help the boys by bringing them himself to the house of the Treasurer, a well-known village character known to everybody, old and young, as "Charlie" Bacon,—a genial sportsman, who had seen better days and who welcomed anything in the way of excitement, especially when it involved a race. He gladly allowed the boys to use the track without charge and volunteered himself to act as judge at the finish,—a position which he had occupied hundreds of times in trotting races in years gone by. He was a stout man, with shoulders strangely humped as the result of disease, but he still kept the spirit of his youth, and his weary eyes sparkled as he recalled some of the incidents which had happened on the old track. When his consent had been secured, the boys, headed by Leaky and Peter, brought hoes and rakes to the field after school and began the task of removing the weeds and grass from the track, displaying an energy which would have startled their parents. Leaky, who swept off his front porch grudgingly and complained when he was asked to bring up wood for the fireplace, proved to be a



Trojan at weeding the track,—thus justifying his selection as manager of the team.

It was no simple problem for Peter to select one or two events as worthy of his ability. Each contest had its own peculiar charms, and there were rash moments when he felt that he desired to enter them all. By a process of elimination, however, he was enabled to reach a conclusion. He soon discovered that Mucker Wright could easily defeat him in the weight events, putting the shot, almost without practice, at least three feet beyond any mark he had established. Disappointed, he experimented with the jumps and the pole vault, only to find that he had formidable rivals, who could beat him without any apparent effort. Beady Bennett, for instance, who wore horn spectacles and looked not at all like an athlete, proved to have exceptional skill in the pole vault, at which event he had practised in his back-yard with a bean-pole and the family clothes-line. In the sprints, little Jack Goodhue, who was four inches shorter, had greater speed than Peter, who got started very slowly. Indeed it looked for a day or two as if Peter would have to content himself with being a spectator at the meet which he had planned.



On the next Saturday afternoon Peter, very disconsolate, started out with six or seven other aspirants to jog around the half-mile track. Most of the others were older than he,—big, slow-minded boys who had come in to the grammar school from farms in the vicinity,—and he expected to struggle in last,—for the conceit had all been taken out of him. When the distance had been half covered, Peter was fourth in the line and feeling as if he could hardly move more than a few yards farther. Then, quite suddenly, he could feel his “second wind” coming, as it had often come when he had run around the park as a very small boy. His strength renewed, he was encouraged to try to pass his competitors. With an ease which seemed incredible, he ran by them one by one, until only Roddy Osborne, a tall, long-legged classmate of his, was ahead of him. As they rounded the last curve to dash down the long home-stretch, over which so many horses had trotted furiously in the past, the two lads were side by side; but in the last fifty yards, Peter’s superior endurance told, and, struggling furiously, he drew slowly ahead, finishing at least five yards in front, while his rival, exhausted, staggered across the line.

“Gee whiz, Peter!” he exclaimed, as his breath gradually came back. “I didn’t know you could run like that!”

Mr. Harlow, who had been watching the finish, came up to Peter, who was panting but still standing upright, and said, “Well, young fellow, I suspect that we’ve found your event at last. That was a mighty fine race you just ran. Have you ever tried that distance before?”

“Never around this track, but I’ve run around the edge of the park dozens of times. Once I did it forty-two times without stopping.”

“That must be at least five miles,” said Mr. Harlow, making a rapid calculation. “I shouldn’t be surprised if we could make a middle-distance runner out of you.”

“Well, I’ve tried everything else, sir, and I have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I’ll put down my name for the quarter and the half, if you’ll let me.”

Thus it was that Peter Wadsworth appeared on the official program as an entrant in the middle distance runs. So, too, the prize for the half-mile was published as “One Tennis Racket, Contributed by Colonel Montague Conger.”

During the month which intervened before

Memorial Day, when the great meet was to be held, Peter devoted himself steadily to training under the guidance of Len Peck. First he insisted that his father should examine him to make sure that his heart and lungs were in good condition. This the physician did most solemnly, taking him into his inner office, testing with a stethoscope and other instruments, and finally pronouncing the candidate sound and healthy. Then he asked Mr. Peck to prepare for him a schedule involving only a small amount of actual running each day, but including practice in starting and sprinting. Once a week, on Saturday morning, he ran a full half-mile, and was gratified to hear Mr. Peck say that his time was improving. Mrs. Wadsworth, for her part, was delighted to see that her older son declined cake, candy, and cookies, and seemed to have an abnormal passion for large quantities of beefsteak and eggs. Nor was there any difficulty about inducing him to go to bed early. Of his own accord he went up-stairs each evening on the stroke of nine from the bells in the Masonic Temple on the corner,—thus obeying the instructions which he read in a book of advice to prospective runners.

In his proud position as manager of the Deep-

water team, Leaky had met with representatives from Clayton and Ludlow Falls in a conference in Principal Harlow's office, and a system of scoring had been agreed upon, with first place counting five points, second, three points, and third, one point. There were to be eleven events: the 100 yards, the 220 yards, the quarter-mile, the half-mile, the broad jump, the high jump, the pole vault, the shot-put, the hammer-throw, the javelin-throw, and the discus-throw. There were thus ninety-nine points in all, and the school winning fifty points was certain to win. The officials were chosen from people located in the three different villages, each manager picking several. A banner was to be awarded to the victorious school.

Nothing at last remained but to await the great day. On the evening before, Peter could hardly sleep, so eager was he to see what kind of weather the dawn would bring. He sank into slumber over a copy of Longfellow's *Courtship of Miles Standish*, and, when next he opened his eyes, the sun was pouring in at the east window, and, looking out, he could discern no sign of a cloud. It was evident that they were to have a glorious spring afternoon.



Obedient to orders from Len Peck, Peter dressed in a leisurely way and did not hurry over his breakfast of cereal and toast. In the morning, with the other Followers of Deerfoot, he watched the parade of the local post of the American Legion on the march to the cemetery to decorate the graves of fallen comrades. The line of men in uniform made a profound impression on Peter, who had been too young to realize what the World War was all about, but who could appreciate the significance of the flags and the four or five ex-service men who wore wound stripes. When the procession had passed, he went back to the house and read the latest copy of *Popular Mechanics* for the remainder of the morning. Lunch, at his special request, was held at twelve o'clock, and by one he was at the track, where he found Leaky and his assistants selling tickets and seating the crowd. . . . Peter had wondered whether anybody would come to the meet. Now he was elated to find all Deepwater lining up at the ticket booth, including even Colonel Conger, who looked very impressive with a carnation in his lapel and a gold-headed cane in his hand.

It was not long before the teams from the two

rival schools made their appearance, accompanied by many "rooters" from Clayton and Ludlow Falls. Clayton was ten miles to the north, on the main highway to Schuyler; Ludlow Falls was barely four miles away to the west, over a range of low hills. The two towns had apparently resolved to support their respective teams, and were doing it noisily, judging by the cheering which Peter could hear.

Down in the dressing-rooms under the grandstand, where once jockeys had congregated, Peter discovered the Clayton and Ludlow Falls athletes and gazed at them a little curiously as he passed on to the rooms assigned to himself and his teammates. Here he met Mucker Wright, Beady Bennett, Roddy Osborne, and the other star performers from Deepwater; and, while they were changing into their running costume, Len Peck appeared to bestow a final sentence or two of counsel. Meanwhile the usual eleventh-hour gossip was going on.

"Have you seen that big guy from Clayton?" asked Beady. "His name is Newton, and he's got an arm like the hind leg of a bull! He must be a wonder in the shot-put! Mucker won't have a chance against a giant like that!"

“Don’t you believe it,” said the sturdy Mucker, bending his arm to disclose his mighty biceps. “But I am worried about the pole vault. A fellow from Ludlow Falls told me that their man, Gordon, can go nine feet, six, in the pole vault. That’s better than you can do, Beady, even if you have luck with you!”

“Oh, cut it out, will you?” growled Peter, prepared to be a real captain and encourage his men. “I’ll bet they’re talking the same way about us! Don’t let’s be afraid of them! They’re not a bit better than we are,—not a bit! That guy Lester Newton isn’t an ounce heavier than Mucker,—I saw him myself back there in the corridor.”

“Anyhow, Len Peck has it all figured out that we can win if each one of us does as well as he has done,” put in Jack Goodhue, who had won the respect of the others ever since his sprinting powers had been revealed. “And he’s got some inside dope on what their men have done as compared with us.”

In a minute or two the call for the one-hundred-yard dash was sounded, and the team ran out, most of them in blue running-shirts and white trunks, and a few with blue sweaters on

which had been sewed a large white "D." When Dr. Wadsworth learned of Peter's interest in running, he bought for him a fine pair of spiked athletic shoes; the majority of the team, however, had only canvas sneakers with rubber soles. In his running costume, Peter looked a little thin, but his body was hard and muscular. He was in what is usually described in sporting stories as "the pink of condition."

As he stepped outside into the sunlight, blinking his eyes after having been in the semi-darkness, he gazed towards the grandstand, which seemed to be packed with gaily-dressed people. In the front row, directly across from the finish line, he could see his mother and father, who were waving their hands at him. "We're going to make some money, anyhow," he thought, as his eye passed from one crowded bench to another. Then he turned to the field itself. There was almost no wind blowing, and, as he stepped on the dirt track, he could feel it grate beneath his feet. A college runner, accustomed to a cinder path, would have scorned this hard-baked surface, but to Peter the footing seemed perfect. His heart swelled with pride as he glanced around him, like a Spartan athlete in a Greek stadium,



and reflected that these spectators had come to see *him* run.

It would be inaccurate to state that the program of events was carried out without difficulties. Possibly critics familiar with intercollegiate games might have laughed at some of the unorthodox proceedings which took place during the afternoon. The Clerk of the Course, however, a young Hamilton College graduate, and Mr. Peck between them managed to keep things moving. Somehow the runners did get off from the mark, the throws of the weight men were measured, and everybody had a good time in the sun.

Peter, his mind intent on his own part in the schedule, had little opportunity of watching what was happening. He did hear that Lester Newton, from Clayton, although clothed in long trousers, had completely outclassed Mucker Wright in the hammer-throw; and he was near the finish when little Jack Goodhue, a ferocious expression on his usually bland countenance, had to take second place in the one-hundred-yard dash to Rogers, of Ludlow Falls. Other Deep-water men, however, were doing unexpectedly well, including Hal Webster, who, in spite of his

long legs,—or perhaps because of them,—had captured first place in the broad jump.

When the quarter-mile was called, Peter strolled slowly with the other runners to the starting point at the back stretch of the track, chatting on the way with “Nig” Bristol, a boy from Clayton whom he had met at parties in Deepwater and who had been at one time particularly interested in Kitty Adams. It would be inadequate to say that Peter was terrified. Actually, he was frightened as he had never been before. He kept saying to himself, “Brace up, you fool!” but he could not quiet the rapid pulsating of his heart. As he stole furtive glances at his competitors, they looked far stronger than he, and he contemplated sadly the prospect of coming in last. . . . And then he remembered what Len Peck had told him and said, “Why, they’re just as scared of me as I am of them! I can beat Roddy Osborne, anyway! I won’t be the last man in!” So comforting was this thought that he took courage; and later, as he dug a hole for his toe in the track, he could see that Nig Bristol’s knees were shaking and that he was quite pale.

“Get on your marks!”

“Get set!”

The interval between these stern injunctions seemed interminable. Why wouldn't the pistol sound?

“Crack!” The noise of the pistol was authoritative and roused Peter to immediate action. As if he had been some automatic machine, his legs, almost without his volition, began carrying him along with the others down the course. Strangely enough, as soon as he was in motion, all his timidity vanished! His coolness returned! His brain operating with perfect clearness, he moved on steadily with even stride, keeping pace with the three who were ahead of him,—Nig Bristol, Roddy Osborne, and an Unknown, wearing the insignia of Ludlow Falls.

As they rounded the broad curve at the western end of the track, Peter drew up with the leaders, and the four sprinted on almost abreast, the others being left more and more in the rear. Peter passed Roddy without much difficulty, and then moved foot by foot by the Unknown. He and Nig were now battling it out side by side. Twenty yards from the tape, Peter forged ahead by a few inches, but he could not resist the temptation to turn his head to see where his opponent

was, and, in that instant, Nig threw himself forward with a convulsive lunge which gave him the victory by half a foot. It had been a splendid race, and Peter, as he stopped and endeavored to regain his wind, could hear the crowd in the stand still cheering.

Leaky and Charlie Webster, who were not participants, held him up, and Gige threw a blanket around his shoulders. Dozens of friends appeared at once, all eager to congratulate him, but the boy shook them off. His father then came along and gripped his hand, saying, "Good work, Peter, you gave that fellow a run for his first place!"

"I was terrible, Dad," replied Peter. "I'm ashamed of myself. If I hadn't looked around, I'd have beaten him. I did the very thing that Len Peck warned me never to do,—and it cost Deepwater the race!"

"Cheer up, my son. You ran a bully quarter. There's no disgrace in that, and you added three points to the Deepwater total."

When Peter reached the dressing-room, he ignored everybody but "Mose" Jackson, the negro man-of-all-work whom Len Peck had engaged to rub down the Deepwater team.

"Mose," he said in a dolorous voice, "I'm no



good,—but somehow I've just got to win that half-mile. Can't you massage those leg muscles of mine so that I'll just fly around the track?"

"Yes, suh, I'll jest do that thing," said Mose, as Peter lay down on the big table. Then Mose poured out some witch-hazel and a peculiarly odorous brand of liniment and proceeded to knead the taut muscles of Peter's calf and thighs. Under this treatment the boy felt better at once. As he lay there, people were rushing back and forth to bring the news. "Clayton is ahead!" "Beady Bennett has a cinch in the pole vault,—he's just gone nine feet, six!" "Ludlow Falls has taken all three places in the high jump!" "Hooray, we've got first in the javelin!"

When his tense muscles had somewhat relaxed and Peter lay back to rest, he saw Mr. Peck approaching. Looking at him sharply as if to see what condition he was in, Len said, "Well, Peter, it seems to be up to you! As nearly as I can figure it out, Clayton and Deepwater are tied with 31 points apiece, and Ludlow Falls has 30. Everything depends on this half-mile. If you can get first, we win hands down. If Nig Bristol beats you, Clayton takes the banner. If some Ludlow man comes in ahead of both of you, the meet may

be a tie. That's exciting enough, isn't it? It sounds like some melodramatic school story,—but it's the truth!"

Peter wasted none of his strength in talking, but he heard every word that was said. Bristol would be his chief rival,—he was sure of that. There was no Ludlow Falls man who could equal either Bristol or himself. Peter also was confident that the half-mile was his best distance, but he could not be sure how tired he was going to feel when he began to move around again. Which boy would be the more exhausted after that hard quarter? Nig was older than he and taller, but somehow Peter felt that his rival had less endurance.

"First call for the half-mile run!" Mose stopped his rubbing, and Peter stood up, stretching his legs carefully, glad to notice that the muscles did not feel weary. As he walked out, wrapped in a blanket, to the starting-line just in front of the grandstand, he could hear the plaintive appeals of his supporters, "Oh, you Westcott!", "Go it, Peter!", and "Beat him, kiddo!" He saw Nig Bristol approaching and heard him say in a low tone, "Guess I'll have to trim you again, Peter!" Peter made no reply,

but grinned at him solemnly and winked his right eye, much to Nig's amazement. Then he set his heavy jaw in a determined way.

There were nine entries in the race, only two of which were from Deepwater,—Peter and Roddy Osborne. Realizing that Roddy could not possibly win, Mr. Peck had instructed him to set a sharp pace from the start, in the hope of killing off some of the other contestants during the first quarter. As soon as the pistol cracked, then, Roddy, who was next to the pole, was off at a fast speed, as if he hoped to run his competitors off their feet. Three of the others followed him, but Nig and Peter stayed behind, content to let their rivals do the fighting for the first five hundred yards. Peter saw that Nig had been carefully coached by an expert who knew racing technique.

As they dashed up the back stretch, with half of the race over, Roddy was plainly weakening and running with heavier strides. On the upper curve, Peter and Nig, who had been going along easily about five yards in the rear, gradually diminished the distance between them and the leaders, so that, when they entered the long straightaway, they were well in the lead. The



spectators, although Peter did not know it, were almost mad with excitement, waving hats and handkerchiefs, climbing up on the seats, and shouting at the top of their voices. But this time Peter was oblivious to everything except the fact that Nig was running neck and neck with him. Then, inch by inch, he could see himself forging ahead! Nearer and nearer came the tape at the judges' stand! Peter's head felt as if it would burst and his legs were like clogs! Like an inspiration came the resolve, "I must win!" He could almost see Nig's head at his shoulder, but he did not look around as he had done in the quarter-mile; instead he made one tremendous effort of will and legs and lungs! It was enough! He almost dived over the line, a winner by two yards!

Peter had tasted the fruits of success before, but never to this degree. A group of his friends lifted him to their shoulders and carried him,—too breathless to resist,—over to a point in front of the grandstand, where the Deepwater supporters gave a resounding cheer. When he succeeded in reaching the dressing-room, he was followed by a crowd who would have gone inside and watched him put on his clothes if Mose Jack-



son had not seized a broom and ordered them away.

“Leave the kid alone!” he cried, waving his weapon menacingly. “Can’t you let him have no privacy?”

Inside, however, his teammates were gathered, and they all came up to shake his hand.

“That was a splendid finish, Peter,” said Len Peck. “And your time was exactly 2.31,—a fine record for a lad of your age! In four years you ought to be doing it in close to two minutes. And it’s mighty appropriate that the captain should win his own meet!”

Peter dressed and showed himself outside in the sunlight just in time to receive the banner which was awarded to the victorious school. Principal Harlow made a short speech, commending all the participants, but adding that the highest praise should go to “the little fourteen-year-old distance runner, Peter Wadsworth.” Then there were more cheers, and Peter came modestly forward to accept the prize. There were shouts of “Speech! Speech!” but Peter was absolutely tongue-tied,—a new sensation for him. He finally walked off, by Dr. Wadsworth’s side, the big banner tucked away under his arm.

While the two were walking down Sanger Street on their way home,—Mrs. Wadsworth having gone with some friends in a car,—a big Cadillac automobile stopped by the side of the road, and Colonel Conger, leaning out, called to him.

“Young man,” said the Colonel, “did you win that prize I gave?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Peter, who was rather shy in front of his father. “I guess I did. We bought a tennis racket with the money and put it up as the prize in the half-mile. It must be mine now.”

“Good,—that’s what I’d hoped! But I don’t want to delay you and your father. All I wanted to say is that I’m still glad that my iron dog had to go! If it hadn’t disappeared, Deepwater might not have won! But I almost forgot that we have some secrets from your father. By the way, Doc, you’ve got a fairly decent son.”

“So they all tell me,” replied Dr. Wadsworth smiling. “He must inherit his good qualities from his mother!”

“Look here, Peter,” concluded the Colonel, “you just come around soon and tell me how you felt. Will you?”

“I sure will,” said Peter. And he did.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN EXPERIMENT IN CHEMISTRY

DURING the spring while Peter was in training for the track meet he seemed to grow like a mushroom. He did not put on weight, but it looked to his watchful mother as if he were taller each morning than he had been on the evening before. His light grey suit, which had fitted him so perfectly just a year ago, now made him resemble the famous Ichabod Crane, whose arms "dangled a mile out of his coat-sleeves." It was all very annoying to Peter, especially when his spinster aunt Mabel, motoring out from the city of Schuyler, would kiss him and say, "Why, darling, how you have grown! You're getting to be a big boy now!" Ceremonies of this sort aroused in Peter a mad desire to rush out away from the house and beat his head against a stone wall. He hated to be kissed! He hated to have attention drawn to his height! He hated publicity! Everybody who has ever been a boy will under-

stand his emotions perfectly and sympathize with them.

When it became obvious that Peter would have to have some additions to his wardrobe, there was a prolonged and heated discussion in the Wadsworth household. Peter insisted that he must have a suit with long trousers.

“Why, Moms, I’m over five feet, six inches tall, and every other fellow of my age has been wearing long pants for a year. Besides, if I’m going to Andover next fall, I’ll look foolish appearing there in a pair of knickerbockers. The fellows will make a monkey out of me!”

“But, Peter, I hate to have you begin to be grown up!” It was the despairing cry of the mother who is beginning to realize that the time has arrived when the fledgeling must fly from the nest.

“Oh, Moms, you’ll still have Gige and Vera. Besides, I can’t stay a baby forever, can I?”

“What do you think, dear?” Mrs. Wadsworth asked her husband.

“You’d better let the boy have his way, Irene. He’s old enough now to judge for himself what’s best. I’ll motor him to Schuyler to-morrow and fit him out.”



“Not without me,” replied Mrs. Wadsworth, in a positive tone which her husband had learned to respect.

Thus it was that, on the following Sunday, Peter marched to church clad in his first pair of long trousers and feeling most self-conscious. As he met a friend or two, he was like a pugnacious bulldog, always ready for a fight. His whole attitude seemed to say, “If you speak, I’ll knock your head off when I get you alone with my old clothes on.” On the way he saw Colonel Conger, dressed immaculately in a cutaway coat and carrying his customary gold-headed cane.

“Good-morning, Peter,” he said ceremoniously, taking off his hat to Mrs. Wadsworth. “You’re adorned with unusual elegance on this fine June morning, aren’t you? Don’t I detect an addition to your wardrobe? You look like a Beau Brummel!”

Peter became flustered, as indeed he always seemed to do in Colonel Conger’s presence. The Colonel, on his part, realized at once that he had made a mistake in calling attention to Peter’s clothes. “Pardon me! I didn’t mean to comment on your attire. But you do look fine. Who would ever imagine, from looking at you to-day,

that you ran a half-mile in 2.31 two weeks ago?"

"That's all right, sir," responded Peter. "I don't mind a bit having *you* laugh about my long trousers. But I'll beat up any *fellow* that tries it."

"You mustn't be so sensitive, my boy," said the Colonel. "If you start trying to lick everybody who laughs at you, you'll be fighting most of your life. The best way's to pay no attention to critics. A man can waste a lot of time in useless controversy."

"You're right, of course, sir,—only it's hard for me to keep my temper sometimes."

"That's something you'll have to learn, Peter, if you expect to get along with others. There's some good advice,—better than you'll hear in church from Parson Adams,—and I won't take up any collection either."

Peter chuckled. "I'll try to practise it, sir. But I won't absolutely promise not to lick Frank Green to-morrow if he dares to laugh when I go by his fruit-stand."

Through this ordeal, like so many others, Peter passed safely, with nothing more irritating than a few remarks by older people he met, "Why,

if this isn't Dr. Wadsworth's boy in long pants! It seems only yesterday that your mother wheeled you by here in a baby-carriage!" Even these observations stopped in a week or two, after some new sensation had appeared. When he wore the suit on the stage at Commencement, in the grammar school, it aroused no excitement whatever. In some respects Peter was distinctly disappointed, especially when none of the girls made a comment. His mood was jumbled,—he didn't want to be noticed, and yet he did,—and nothing would satisfy him.

When the hurry of Commencement was over, Peter and his friends behaved like young colts let loose in a pasture. Like most average boys, Peter was keenly interested in everything mechanical. He knew all the parts of the family Dodge much better than Dr. Wadsworth did, and once, when the car stopped on the road and refused to budge, Peter had discovered the trouble, and, after screwing and unscrewing some sections of the carburetor, had persuaded the machine to start. Mrs. Wadsworth, like every mother, saw positive indications of genius in these perfectly normal manifestations of youth and confidently predicted that Peter would be the legitimate suc-

cessor to Marconi and Edison; but his father dampened her ardor by pointing out that every young male is at certain periods absorbed in the miracles of science. At Peter's request, however, Dr. Wadsworth allowed him to use a room on the second floor of the garage as a work-shop,—or what Peter liked to call his "laboratory."

In this lair, Peter brought together an extraordinary collection of miscellaneous articles,—worn-out sections of automobiles, batteries of all kinds, old iron carried home from junk heaps, radio parts, chemicals of different sorts procured from the school laboratory, tools which had been picked up here and there, all mixed in together, without any order or system. By tacit agreement, Dr. Wadsworth kept away from this treasure-house, but once, when he had been obliged to go up-stairs in search of an oil-can which Peter had abstracted from the car, he had been overwhelmed by the amount of material which the boys had accumulated. Peter and Gige had actually built a radio receiving set of their own on a model which they had found in *Popular Mechanics*; and their latest achievement had been to purchase a rusty old Ford motor for four dollars from the local garage man and set it going.



Whenever electric light wires went wrong or fuses blew out in the Wadsworth house, Mrs. Wadsworth had learned first to apply to Peter, who was ordinarily able to diagnose the difficulty and repair the damage.

Among the boys who were especially interested in Peter's laboratory was Ikey Warren. He wore trousers which had been patched, shirts which were frayed at the collar, and shoes which were often in need of repair; but everybody excused his garb, knowing that his father earned very little as janitor of the town hall and had trouble in providing for his family of a wife and nine children. Ikey, as we have seen, had begun by being a bully, fond of plaguing younger and smaller boys. But his experience with Peter at the time of the alarm-clock episode had changed his point of view; and, after Peter had practically saved his life at Lake Woodhull, Ikey had abandoned his old practices. He and Peter, having discovered a kindred interest in machinery and chemistry, had become close friends. They used to work together, whenever Ikey had any leisure from his multitudinous home chores, on some problem of construction or investigation, and their families would have been horrified at some

of their experiments. Although Ikey looked rather disreputable and ignored the conventional laws of grammar, he had an unmistakable gift for handling tools and he succeeded sometimes when Peter had failed completely.

On one rainy afternoon shortly after school had closed Peter and Ikey were busy in the laboratory together. Peter had been awarded at Commencement a prize of five dollars for the best essay on the habits of the bluebird,—a subject which he had studied with much care during the early spring,—and Dr. Wadsworth had decreed that the boy could spend the money just as he pleased, without consulting his parents. Nothing could have delighted Peter more! He had promptly visited the local drug store, where he invested in a considerable supply of chemicals, proposing to conduct some original experiments. Later he had confided his ambitions to Ikey, and the boys were now engrossed in the pursuit of knowledge.

For a while they were contented with reactions about which they knew something, such as making tests with litmus paper for acids and alkalis. A small toy chemical set amused them for a few minutes, but proved to be too simple.

“Let’s be real investigators,” Peter now suggested to Ikey. “I’m tired of this amateur stuff! Let’s try mixing together all sorts of liquids to see what will happen. Maybe we can find a brand-new compound and make our fortunes!”

Their first experiments proved to be harmless enough, although they did succeed in producing a small quantity of chlorine gas which sent them coughing to the windows for a breath of fresh air. For half an hour they kept on, pouring one smelly mixture into another and observing the strange results,—the white precipitate in the bottom of the glass, or the heavy black vapor, or the picturesque bubbling inside the test-tube. There was a pail of gasoline on a bench which they had been using for cleansing purposes and had forgotten. Peter, at one stage of the proceedings, lighted a match to test a yellow gas which was pouring from the neck of a retort. As he brought it near the vapor, there was a terrific explosion, and a second later the gasoline, ignited probably by some spark, burst into flames. Peter, stunned by the sudden shock, fell to the floor unconscious. . . . Ikey had been busy at the other end of the room, which was perhaps ten feet by twelve in size. Hearing the tremendous noise, he turned



just as Peter dropped and the gasoline flared up. His first instinct was to seek a place of safety, and he took a step towards the door leading to the staircase. But a stronger impulse checked him and led him to rush to Peter's side.

"Peter! Peter, old man!" he cried, shaking him vigorously. But his friend made no response. Looking around him, Ikey could see that the flames from the gasoline were spreading rapidly, and the dense fumes were making it hard for him to breathe. In half a minute it might be difficult, if not impossible, for him to escape. Seizing Peter under the arms, he dragged him along the floor to the stairway and then down the steps. At the foot there was one ghastly second when it seemed as if the door had locked itself by a spring; but it proved to be only a tight latch, which yielded to Ikey's vigorous pressure, and he and his burden almost fell onto the concrete floor of the garage. Ikey, however, did not stop there. Pulling the prostrate Peter along out into the drizzling rain, he opened the kitchen door and shouted to Mrs. Wadsworth, "Help! Help! Come quick! Peter's hurt and the garage is on fire! Come quick!"

It seemed hours before Mrs. Wadsworth, who



had been sewing in her room up-stairs, came rushing down in response to his cries. Meanwhile Ikey had recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to fill a bucket of water and pour the contents over Peter's head,—an act which he was performing just as Mrs. Wadsworth entered the kitchen. Reviving under this deluge, Peter opened his eyes and lifted his hand to protest.

“What are you doing to me, anyhow?” he asked feebly, not quite sure where he was. Then it all came back to him. “Something exploded, didn't it?” he inquired, as his mother came nearer. Then he sat up, facing the doorway, which was open towards the garage. “Why, the whole garage is on fire!”

“Are you all right, Peter?” demanded Mrs. Wadsworth, who was much more concerned about her son than about any mere building.

“Sure I am! Just a little bit damp, that's all!” returned the boy, who was now sitting up, feeling ruefully of his wet hair and shirt. “Is the fire department coming?”

Ikey, relieved to see his friend returning to life, now leaped to the telephone and almost bellowed to the operator, “Fire at Dr. Wadsworth's! Turn in the alarm quick! Hurry!” Then he rushed

out to the street to call for help. As he ran along in the rain, he could hear the shrill calliope whistle and the bell of the fire alarm begin to sound. Indeed he had hardly reached the next corner and stopped two Deepwater citizens to notify them of the accident and ask their assistance before the automobile fire-engine of which the village was so proud had come flying up the street and driven into the Wadsworth yard. Men, women, and children, appearing from all points of the compass, followed running in its train. There is nothing quite like a good fire to draw a crowd in a small village.

Now that aid had arrived, Ikey dashed back as fast as his legs could carry him, returning in time to see the streams of water from the hose playing on the flames and to explain in a broken way to Dr. Wadsworth just what occurred. It was not long before the combination of rain and the fire department had extinguished the blaze, leaving only the shattered panes of glass and some charred wood inside as evidence of the disaster.

Ikey, who was now a bit disturbed regarding his part in the affair, was turning to walk away when he heard Dr. Wadsworth calling to him from the porch.

“Come in, won’t you, Isaac?” he asked, as the boy approached. “I want to talk to you a minute.”

Even more disreputable in appearance than usual, Ikey went back reluctantly and was ushered by Dr. Wadsworth into the living-room, where he saw Peter lying on a sofa, apparently uninjured but still a little weak from the effects of the poisonous gases and the explosion.

“So far as I can ascertain,” said Dr. Wadsworth, motioning Ikey to take a seat, “you must have saved Peter’s life. He was completely unconscious there, and, if you hadn’t hauled him out of the garage, he would have been suffocated and ultimately burned to death.”

“Sure I would!” cried Peter, sitting up in his excitement. “Why, Ikey is a regular Carnegie medal hero, like the fellow that saved three children in the big fire in Schuyler last year! All I remember is that I was pouring some stuff from one bottle to another and lighted a match to see what would happen! Then there was a booming crash, and the next thing I knew, I was in the kitchen, with a whole flood of water almost drowning me!”

“That’s nothin’!” said Ikey bashfully.

“ Didn’t you haul me out of Lake Woodhull last summer when I was sinkin’ to the bottom? That’s what I call heroism! It was easy enough draggin’ you down-stairs! I don’t want no medal for that! ”

“ Well, you will let me thank you, won’t you, for helping Peter and for turning in the alarm and saving my garage from going up in smoke? ”

“ Sure, if you want to,—only I ought not to get credit for more than I did do.”

“ All right, Isaac, I’ll try not to worry you with thanks. And now why don’t you go home at once and change your clothes? You’re all wet! How stupid of me to have kept you here! Take this umbrella.”

He thrust the family silk umbrella on the shabby, uncomfortable lad, who felt very ill at ease as he left the Wadsworth house and walked down the street, holding the unaccustomed protection over his head. He should have been proud of his achievement; instead he was just a little ashamed of his shyness, his stammering, and his poor clothes. He certainly did not picture himself as an heroic personage

But there were people who recognized what he was. Dr. Wadsworth saw to it that the *Deep-*



*water Gazette*, in its issue for the following Friday, had a full story of the affair and the part taken in it by Ikey Warren, under a big double-column heading "DEEPWATER BOY PERFORMS ACT OF HEROISM." Meanwhile Dr. and Mrs. Wadsworth had called on the Warren family and had delighted Mrs. Warren with their praise of her son. Ikey found himself all at once a famous character. Men and women whom he had never seen stopped him on the street and shook his hand, until he was almost weary of being reminded of his fine deed. The *Schuyler Observer*, commenting editorially on Ikey's presence of mind, started a movement to have him awarded a medal for courage. Indeed Mrs. Warren, for perhaps the first time in all her fifty years, had something to be proud of.

On the following evening, while the members of the Wadsworth clan were sitting comfortably in rocking-chairs on their broad veranda, as was the universal Deepwater custom in the summer months, Dr. Wadsworth began asking some questions.

"Is Ikey Warren going on to the high school next fall?" he inquired.

"No, I don't think so," said Peter. "His

father says that he must go to work. He has a job in Lawrence's drug store, commencing September first."

"Has he done pretty well in his studies in grammar school?"

"Sure, he's been a good student. Sometimes he uses poor grammar when he's talking with the fellows, but his record in his classes is fine. I think he stands higher than I do."

"Well, son, I've been talking with Colonel Conger this afternoon. He hasn't any children, as you know, and he is always looking for some bright boy to help. Now it seems to me that it's a shame for a clever youngster like that not to have an opportunity for an education. Colonel Conger is ready to put up a considerable sum of money,—and I can add something to it,—to help him get started in Andover with you when you go; then, if he makes good, he can do a little to work his way through 'prep' school and college. What do you think of that?"

"That would be marvelous! It would be great to have Ikey enter Andover with me. Couldn't I turn over my share of the Stamp Fund to him?"

"That won't be necessary, I think, my son,—

but it's generous of you to propose it. The only problem now is to get him into Andover. I'm going to write to the Head to-morrow,—he used to be in college with me, you know. Perhaps, if he learns the full story about Ikey, he may be inclined to stretch the entrance rules a little."

Dr. Wadsworth paused in the midst of his calls the next day to stop for a few minutes at the Warren house for a confidential chat with Ikey's mother,—a thin, worn-looking woman, who looked as if life had proved a heavy burden to her. At the physician's proposal, she appeared incredulous, but, when she comprehended what the plan involved, her face was wreathed in smiles. It did not take long to win her approval, for Ikey had been the best-beloved of her children. Her approval secured, Dr. Wadsworth was fortified for his interview with Mr. Warren, whom he found running a vacuum-cleaner up and down the aisles of the town hall. After explaining the broad features of the scheme, he went on, "And now I propose, with your consent, to have a tutor with my family at Lake Woodhull this summer and to invite Ikey to come along and study with Peter for a month, brushing up on his mathematics. Then they'll both be

better fitted to enter Andover, which isn't an easy school to get into or stay in. Colonel Conger and I will see that Ikey has all the money that he requires for the first year. By that time he will be settled, I am sure, and will find some work which will help him to earn his way. At any rate, we're prepared to back him just as long as he keeps up with his class. I have the utmost confidence in your son, Mr. Warren, and I believe that he needs only a push to set him going on a creditable career."

"You're so kind that I hardly know what to say," replied Mr. Warren, his eyes suffused with tears. "I can never pay you, of course,—somehow I've been a failure,—but, if you think that the lad deserves it, I'm ready to let him go."

"He has saved the life of my oldest son, Mr. Warren," said Dr. Wadsworth, with equal emotion. "For that I owe him and you more than I can ever give in return."

So it was that the matter was definitely settled. Andover's Head sent back a most encouraging letter, in which he agreed to start Ikey with a scholarship, which, so long as he maintained a satisfactory standing, would pay his full tuition. He also promised him a position as waiter at the



Academy dining-hall. It was thus definitely settled that Peter Wadsworth and Ikey Warren should start for Andover together in September and should occupy the same room in one of the dormitories. Colonel Conger, on one memorable day, took Ikey and Peter to Schuyler in his big Cadillac car and fitted Ikey out with a complete outfit of new clothes, as well as a trunk, a dressing-case, and other necessities. The boy was so bewildered that he was speechless, but his eyes shone with gratitude towards his benefactors. Colonel Conger said to Dr. Wadsworth that night, on his return, "Look here, Doc, I just want to say one thing,—the greatest pleasure in life is giving, not getting! I've had more fun in making that Warren boy happy than I ever had in piling up a fortune. I should be heart-broken if he didn't do well."

What Ikey felt on the subject may be deduced from his final remark to Peter as he left him, "Peter, if I don't make good at Andover, I'll never dare look your father and Colonel Conger in the face again! I'm going to work like a dog to justify their confidence."

When Peter told this to Dr. Wadsworth, the latter was sure that his son was to be in good company on his first months away from home.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN END AND A BEGINNING

ON a bright, crisp morning in mid-September the platform of the Deepwater railroad station,—or “deepo,” as it was commonly called,—was rather more crowded than usual. The customary group of incorrigible loafers had assembled to meet the train going north to Schuyler, hoping for some excitement, something to break the monotony of their dull existence. But on this particular Monday there were, in addition, several boys of fourteen or fifteen years of age, who had gathered for some special purpose and who kept looking around for somebody to appear. Soon a Dodge sedan drove up, and there descended from the front seat a young fellow whom everybody hailed as “Peter.” . . . “Atta-boy, Peter!”, “Hi, Bo!”, “We’re with you, old top!”,—these were some of the greetings which met his ears. He was evidently very popular in the village which he was leaving.

As Peter Wadsworth took off his hat and

looked around, his coarse reddish hair, which had been neatly brushed only ten minutes before, stood out in all directions like a feather duster, and his amiable grin grew broader. Behind him, from the rear seat, stepped out a heavier, more awkward lad, with a homely but honest face, who was hailed as "Ikey." He was somewhat less at ease than Peter, and not quite so sure of what he ought to do; but he was equally well-liked, and was soon shaking hands with a dozen or more friends.

The others to emerge from the sedan were Gige, now a tall, thin bean-pole of a boy, little Vera Wadsworth, a girl with light hair and promise of much beauty, and their parents. Mr. and Mrs. Warren had not cared to come to the station, but instead had given Ikey their good wishes at their home. They could not help feeling that, in allowing Ikey to go to school with Peter, they had said "Good-bye!" to him forever.

Several large pieces of baggage were unloaded and placed on carriers to be ready for the train. When Dr. Wadsworth had purchased the tickets, he drew Peter away from the friends with whom he was conversing, and walked with him to a quieter spot near the freight office. Handing him

the tickets for himself and Ikey, he said, " Now, my boy, I suppose you think you're in for a farewell sermon, like the ones fathers always give in boys' stories,—but I'm not going to preach. I'm sorry that I can't possibly leave my practice long enough at this time of year to see you safely settled, but I am counting on Ikey and you to manage for yourselves,—you can do it all right. I really have only one warning,—don't you ever be afraid of anything or anybody as long as you're doing your best and playing the game! It's fear, more than anything else, that ruins men! That's what I find in my practice! Now you've had some adventures in your life already, even though it isn't very long,—some pain, some failures, and plenty of mistakes,—and you'll have plenty more; but always remember that it's fear that turns men into liars and cheats and mean cusses generally. You just keep your back straight and your head up and look people in the eye,—and you'll succeed. And whatever trouble you get into, don't you be afraid to tell me right off,—no matter what it may be! . . . And now Good-bye, and Good Luck! "

Peter shook his father's hand warmly and turned away. Theirs was not a sentimental fam-



ily, but there was a suspicious-looking moisture in his eyes, and he needed to bite his lip to keep from breaking out. A minute later the north-bound train whistled at Ridgefield Center. Peter rushed back to kiss his mother and Vera. The engine puffed slowly up to the platform, and Peter and Ikey climbed the steps to the car.

“ Good-bye, everybody! ” he shouted, as he and Ikey waved their hands at their friends.

As the train, rounding the curve at Union Street, turned east and vanished from sight, Dr. Wadsworth, taking his wife’s arm and leading her back to the Dodge, said, “ I wonder what he’ll be like four years from now, when he graduates from Andover? ” . . . And Mrs. Wadsworth could only say, “ I wish I knew! ”









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