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JUVENILE SERIES



Comrades Courageous

B. Hendick

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY PUBLISHERS CHICAGO

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T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, Publishers 623 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago

COMRADES COURAGEOUS

AN EIGHTH GRADE PLAY
IN TWO ACTS

BY

LINDSEY BARBEE

AUTHOR OF

*"At the End of the Rainbow," "The Call of Wohelo," "The Dream
That Came True," "The Empty House," "How Beth Won
the Campfire Honor," "Sing a Song of Seniors,"
"Let's Pretend—A Book of Chil-
dren's Plays," Etc.*



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

[1921]

COMRADES COURAGEOUS

FOR SIX BOYS AND FOUR GIRLS.

CHARACTERS.

(Named in order of appearance.)

PS 3503
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TOM	} Comrades Courageous
GEORGE	
FRED	
TED	
POLLY	<i>Who Plans It All</i>
PEGGY	<i>An Inquisitive Sister</i>
PATTY	<i>An Inquisitive Friend</i>
HELEN	<i>Tom's Older Sister</i>
ROB.	<i>Who Meets the Robber</i>
JIM	<i>The Intended Victim</i>

TIME—*The Present.*

PLACE—*A Deserted Cabin in the Woods.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About One Hour.*

ACT I. Interior of the Cabin.

ACT II. The Same.

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STORY OF THE PLAY.

The "Comrades Courageous"—four boys, Tom, George, Fred and Ted, whose families are residents of a summer colony—are camping in a nearby cabin and are planning to initiate a fifth member, Jim, who is to wait for them at a certain spot, blindfolded. Tom's sister, Polly, and her friends are exceedingly eager for the boys to make a comrade also of Rob, a newcomer in the colony, but objection is made to his admission. Jim, unable to meet the boys at the appointed time, telephones that he will come later. Polly receives the message. She substitutes Rob for Jim. Since the new comrade is blindfolded the boys do not guess his real identity. As his test for initiation they send him to keep vigil upon a lonely road where a bandit has recently held sway and where, on that very evening, the automobile bearing the mail from the station has been waylaid and the mail bag stolen. The adventure has a thrilling and unexpected ending. For the bandit with his booty really appears; and Rob, hidden in a clump of trees, strikes him down, recovers the mail, and returns victorious to the cabin.

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I. To the accompaniment of rain, thunder and lightning, the Comrades Courageous hold their first initiation.

ACT II. Still pursued by the elements, the initiate struggles back with a story to tell and a mail bag to display.

COSTUMES.

Tom, George, Fred, Ted and Rob wear rough sport clothes with belts, slouch hats, etc. Jim is in a dark wool suit with raincoat and cap. The girls wear pretty, dainty summer gowns.

LIST OF PROPERTIES.

Covered basket for REX.

Handkerchief for FRED.

Watch for GEORGE.

Umbrella for JIM.

Mail bag for ROB.

Cookstove, on which is a teakettle with a skillet nearby.

Rough table and four chairs.

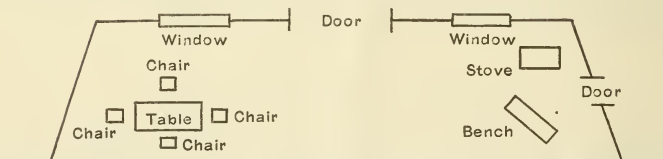
Wooden bench.

Dishes, knives and forks, cups and saucers, plate of meat
and pan of biscuits on table.

Small tallow candles.

SCENE - PLOT.

ACTS I AND II.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *L.*, left of stage; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

COMRADES COURAGEOUS

ACT I.

Perhaps you'll be disappointed when the curtain rises, for you see only a very unattractive little room in a very unattractive little cabin. But if you happen to be a boy you'll know in a moment that it is just the kind of place for a lark—that it is easy to imagine oneself a highway robber in possession or a shipwrecked sailor on a desert isle or a lonely hunter in his forest lair. And if you're not imaginative you realize just the same that it is a bully spot for your own particular crowd to camp; for, on either side of the rough door at center is an open window—uncurtained of course—while a small and worse-for-wear cook stove is in the corner at the left of the door. A door on the left leads evidently to another room and down stage from this door is a wooden bench. On the other side of the room, opposite the bench, is a rough table and around the table are four rickety chairs. The chairs are not unoccupied either; for TOM holds sway on the left with GEORGE opposite him while FRED is facing you and TED has his back to the audience. On the table you see the sad remains of what has been an evening meal. The boys wear the roughest of clothes—with an eye to the picturesque; for boots and red bandannas and hunting knives are in great profusion.

GEORGE. What's the matter with this meat, Tom? I can't cut it.

TOM (*using a hunting knife most dexterously*). Easiest thing in the world. (*As he makes a manful effort to masticate.*) It's—fine!

FRED. It's leather, that's what it is—just leather.

TOM. Then suppose that next time you cook it.

FRED. I intend to.

TED. These biscuits are bullets—real honest-to-goodness bullets.

GEORGE. That's because Fred forgot the baking powder. (*And he points an accusing finger at the offender.*)

FRED. What if I did? Baking powder isn't the chief part of biscuits.

TED. Well it's the part that shows the most.

FRED. Say, George, didn't you pour the dish water into the coffee pot by mistake?

GEORGE (*bristling*). What's the matter with the coffee?

FRED. That's what I'm asking you.

TED. It's natural for a fellow to expect his coffee to have some color and some taste.

GEORGE (*sarcastically*). Oh—is it!

TOM (*still more sarcastically*). Maybe Ted wants a percolator in camp.

A painful silence ensues—and, once more, a desperate assault is made upon the unfortunate repast. With renewed vigor, TOM whacks at the offending meat, GEORGE bites the bullet-like biscuits and FRED vigorously shakes the coffee pot.

TOM (*with his fork half-way to his mouth*). We're having fried chicken at *our* house tonight.

GEORGE (*with feeling*). Gosh! (*And unconsciously he thrusts his meat from him.*)

TED. And mother promised *us*—muffins.

FRED (*almost in a whisper*). Muffins! (*Suddenly a biscuit wings its way across the room.*)

TOM. See here, fellows. You're not putting up a square deal.

GEORGE. Square *deal*! You mean square *meal*.

TOM. And you're not living up to your promise.

FRED. How can we live up to anything when there's nothing to live on?

TOM. A fellow can't learn to cook in one day!

TED. Or in two!

FRED. Or three!

GEORGE. Or four!

TOM. You knew all that when we planned to camp out. Nice sports you are!

GEORGE. The camping part is all right.

FRED. It's the grub that knocks us out.

TOM. And you wouldn't be thinking so much about grub if you didn't happen to know about all the good things on your family tables.

TED. Camping out is a funny sort of a proposition when a fellow's family is near enough to keep an eye on him.

TOM. But if we weren't near enough for that very thing there would be no camping out at all.

GEORGE. *That's a fact.*

TOM. Then let's make the most of it. (*Pauses.*) I'll propose a new resolution for the bunch.

FRED. What's that?

TOM. *Be a sport.* Will you back me up in that?

TED. Guess we'll have to. (*Pauses, in turn.*) I'll add another good resolution. *Swallow the grub.*

GEORGE (*groaning*). Eat, drink and be merry—if we can!

FRED. And most of all—let's cut out the knocking.

TOM. Now we're getting down to brass tacks. What shall we call ourselves anyway?

GEORGE. How would Knights of the Camp Fire do?

FRED. Rotten. Whoever heard of knights having anything to do with a camp fire?

TED. And who wants to wear all that tin armor stuff?

GEORGE (*on the defensive*). Modern knights don't wear tin armor.

FRED (*with a flash of inspiration*). How would Boy Bandits do?

TOM. With this section of the country making a specialty of hold-ups? We'd land in jail before we'd know what had struck us.

GEORGE. There's been a hold-up every week, hasn't there?

TOM. Three of them altogether.

GEORGE (*meditatively*). And nobody's been able to catch the man!

FRED. He sure has his nerve.

TED. Queer, isn't it, that he'd choose this little old summer resort for all his stunts?

FRED. Not queer at all. Everybody has to come from

the station in an automobile; and on that twisting, winding road a bandit has every chance in the world.

GEORGE (*suddenly*). I have an idea!

TOM. Then don't let it loose in this crowd—there might be a riot.

GEORGE. Let's initiate Jim by sending him after the bandit.

TED. What do you mean?

GEORGE. Just what I say. We're planning to initiate Jim, aren't we?

TED. Rather.

GEORGE. Then let's give him a sure enough job and make him play sentinel on the very road where all the hold-ups have been.

FRED. He might balk.

GEORGE. And be left out of this bunch? Not much.

TOM. When is he due?

GEORGE. Train's in now. I told him to wait back of that little clump of trees near the bridge until we came for him.

FRED. What else did you tell him?

GEORGE. To wear rough clothes and to use a handkerchief for a mask.

TED. He won't do it.

GEORGE. We'll make him.

TED. Maybe his family will kick.

GEORGE. His family won't be down until next week. He's Tom's guest until then.

FRED. Fine welcome he's getting.

GEORGE. He's being initiated.

FRED. Into what?

GEORGE. Something that hasn't even a name.

TED. Let's call ourselves the Bonfire Bunch. That fills the bill.

GEORGE. I don't see why it does. We haven't had a single bonfire so far.

TOM. I've thought of a bully name.

GEORGE. Let's have it.

TOM. Comrades Courageous.

FRED (*after a pause*). Sounds pretty flowery—but it will do, I reckon.

TED. It's all right as far as I am concerned.

GEORGE. Suits me.

TOM. Then *that's* settled. Comrades Courageous are we.

TED. After Jim is initiated there will be five of us—too bad we can't find somebody else to make the sixth. I like even numbers.

FRED. Isn't there somebody else to ask?

TOM. There's—Rob.

GEORGE. Well we don't want *him*.

TOM. What's the matter with him?

GEORGE. Sissy.

TOM. How do you know?

GEORGE. Any fellow with all that money, and with a silly tutor hanging round him all the time, is just bound to be sissy.

TOM. Oh—I—don't—know.

FRED. Oh, yes he is. And he has his own saddle horse, too.

TED. And his father has built the very biggest house in this summer colony. (*Pauses.*) We don't want him.

TOM. And he's probably so fond of himself and so fond of doing the proper thing that we'd bore him to death. (*Pauses.*) No—we don't want him.

And at this moment the ugly old windows are transformed into picture frames—for, unseen by the absorbed ones, two very pretty and frankly inquisitive faces appear at one opening—and a correspondingly inquisitive maid at the other. Suddenly, they disappear from sight and a moment afterwards a vigorous knocking shakes the old door.

TOM (*after a moment's silence during which the Comrades gaze inquiringly at one another*). Come in!

The door swings open and in walks a very pompous and very serious dog whose tail wags in a friendly fashion and who carries by its handle a large covered basket.

GEORGE. It's Rex. (*Rushes to him.*) Good old fellow! (*Sniffs eagerly at the basket.*) Kids, it smells like food.

PEGGY. Of course it's food.

And the boys behold in the doorway the three visitors of the window frames—PEGGY, POLLY and PATTY—daintily gowned, profusely ribboned and charmingly becurled.

POLLY. Mother thought that you might need it.

PATTY. There's chicken in it—and jelly—and cake—and dressed eggs—and—

TOM *Great!* If I hadn't eaten so much already I'd tackle it this minute. (*As he takes the basket from the dog.*) Give it up, old fellow. And come along to the bench, Patty—we'll put the eats between us. (*And they suit the action to the word.*)

POLLY (*contemptuously viewing the remains of the feast*). Is that all you had for supper?

GEORGE. *All!* What would we want with any more? (*Draws out a chair.*) Sit down, Polly. (*And POLLY, dusting the chair with her handkerchief, carefully settles herself.*)

PEGGY (*as FRED draws out the other chair for her*). It looks just like dog meat. Why, Rex wouldn't touch it!

TED (*sprawling with REX in the middle of the floor as FRED and GEORGE seat themselves in the two unoccupied chairs*). Anything that's good enough for us is good enough for you, isn't it, old sport?

PATTY (*tiptoeing to the door at left and peering in*). Do you sleep in—there? (*Shudders.*) Ugh!

TOM. When it rains we do.

PATTY. It's rained every night, hasn't it? (*And she tiptoes just as carefully back to her place on the bench.*)

PEGGY They've been camping out only three days—and they talk as if they were old timers.

POLLY. I don't see why they call it camping out when they're all huddled in this—perfectly—awful—place. (*Disdainfully.*) I wouldn't stay here a minute!

TOM (*with the frankness of the average brother*). Wait until somebody asks you.

PEGGY. And I have an idea that all the food you get is

what your mothers send you. (*And again she scornfully regards the melancholy mess.*)

GEORGE. Oh—is—that—so—smarty? (*By which courteous remark one infers that GEORGE is PEGGY's brother.*)

FRED (*patronizingly*). You girls can't understand camp life—you just can't understand it.

POLLY. Maybe we can't—but there's nothing the matter with our eyesight. (*Glances around.*) And if *this* is camp life—well—

TED. Roughing it is just what we like.

TOM. And if we choose to spend our vacation in this cabin, why—

POLLY. Spend your vacation! (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Oh!

TOM. What do you mean by saying *Oh*?

POLLY (*teasingly*). Just—*something*!

TOM. You make me furious when you act like that.

POLLY (*saucily*). What's it to me?

TOM. And you needn't act as if you knew so much.

POLLY. But I *do* know that mother isn't going to let you stay here any longer.

TOM. That isn't so.

POLLY. Oh, yes it is.

PEGGY. And mother has it in for George, too.

GEORGE (*bristling*). What do you mean by that?

POLLY. Just—this. All of you boys are to stay at home at night.

PEGGY. On account of the hold-ups.

TOM. Stuff—and—nonsense.

GEORGE. Aren't we big enough to take care of ourselves?

FRED. *Four* of us?

TED. Five, you mean.

PATTY. Who's the fifth?

TED. Jim. We're initiating him tonight.

PATTY. Initiating him into what?

TED. Into this club of ours. We call ourselves Comrades Courageous.

PEGGY (*after a pause of astonishment*). I never heard of anything so silly.

GEORGE. That will be enough from you, young lady.

FRED. Jim's probably waiting for us this very moment.

POLLY. But he isn't. (*Suddenly she stops.*)

TOM. Isn't—what?

POLLY. Nothing. (*Quickly.*) Look here—why don't you take in the new boy?

TOM. What new boy?

POLLY. Our neighbor—Rob.

GEORGE (*sarcastically*). The highflyer.

PEGGY. He isn't, either. He's just fine.

GEORGE. How do you know?

PEGGY. We all talked to him this morning.

POLLY. And he's just as nice as he can be.

TOM. Oh—*is* he?

PATTY. It isn't fair to be mean just because he has a lot of money.

FRED. Who's being mean? We're just letting him alone.

POLLY. And he's just crazy to get in with you boys.

TED. Hinting for an invitation won't get him one.

PATTY. Boys are so hateful.

TOM. And girls fall for any old thing.

GEORGE (*uneasily*). Hadn't we better go for Jim?

PATTY. Go for him? Why doesn't he come here?

GEORGE. Because when we initiate people we go for *them*.

PEGGY. What are you going to do to him?

GEORGE (*mysteriously*). Oh—lots of things.

PEGGY (*snappily*). Thanks for telling me so much about it.

GEORGE. You're welcome.

POLLY (*who has been laboring under much excitement*). If a boy's initiated he's in for good, isn't he?

TED. Of course.

POLLY. Where is Jim supposed to wait for you?

FRED. In the clump of trees near the bridge.

POLLY. How is he dressed?

TOM. What's it to you?

POLLY. I just want to know.

FRED. Why in rough clothes of course—with a handkerchief for a mask.

PEGGY. For a *mask*?

FRED. Like this. (*And he illustrates by flaunting a grimy handkerchief.*)

PATTY. My—what a dirty handkerchief!

PEGGY. They're roughing it, Pat—roughing it.

GEORGE. See here, Peggy, if you can't be civil you can go home.

POLLY (*rising*). *I'm going now.*

PEGGY. Polly!

POLLY. Yes—I am. I can't wait another minute. (*And off she runs to the door.*)

TED. What's your hurry?

TOM (*with brotherly solicitude*). Stay—do stay—please stay.

POLLY (*at door*). And maybe you think you won't initiate Rob!

GEORGE. *Rob?*

POLLY. But *I* say—you've got to!

TOM. See here, Polly. I can't help your being my sister but I *can* draw the line on taking any orders from you.

POLLY. You've just got to! That's all. Come on, Rex. (*As the dog follows her she goes off, slamming the door, and a moment later she is seen hurrying past the window.*)

PEGGY. What on earth's the matter?

TED (*rising and taking the chair vacated by POLLY*). Maybe she's hurrying off to ask Rob to join the crowd.

PEGGY. But we had intended to stay—oh ever so long.

FRED. I wonder if I'd better see that she reaches home all right. (*Strolls to window.*) It's getting dark.

TOM. Not dark enough to make any difference. She'll be at the house in five minutes—and, anyway, she has Rex.

FRED. But suppose the bandit—

TOM. Don't be silly. It's too early for him.

PEGGY (*half rising*). Perhaps we'd better go, too.

PATTY. But, Peggy—we haven't had refreshments yet.

TOM. Refreshments? Where do you expect to get them?

PATTY (*pointing to the basket*). We thought that—maybe—you'd give us some.

FRED. But you've had your dinners.

PATTY. Of course.

TOM (*drawing basket to him*). And this is to help us out.

PEGGY. But you surely won't let us go home without anything to eat.

GEORGE. Why won't we?

PEGGY. Because it isn't polite.

GEORGE. Nobody asked you to come in the first place.

PATTY. *That* isn't polite, either.

GEORGE. Just as polite as asking for things.

PEGGY. We didn't ask—we only suggested.

PATTY. And, anyway, we brought it to you.

GEORGE. Rex brought it.

FRED (*hastily*). Oughtn't we to go after Jim?

TED (*rising*). It's way past train time—and—

FRED. And if we don't hurry he may think we're not coming—and move on. (*Stands by door.*)

TOM. He wouldn't dare.

PEGGY. Why wouldn't he dare? Your old club isn't so much.

PATTY. And I should think that—(*PATTY stops suddenly, for there is the sound of galloping hoofs, and the sound comes nearer and nearer.*) What's that?

FRED. Somebody's in a hurry. (*Then "Whoa" shouts a thundering voice outside and the horse stops. And "Who's in there?" calls the voice.*)

PEGGY (*hurrying to PATTY*). O-h-h! I'm scared!

TOM (*rising and hurrying to the door*). Something's wrong.

GEORGE (*following him*). I'll go with you.

(*Again the voice calls "Who's in there?"*)

TED. Hurry up. (*And he joins them.*)

FRED *opens the door and peers out. The other three boys crowd behind him.*

TOM. What's the matter?

THE VOICE. Matter enough. The mail bag's been stolen.

GEORGE. Who did it?

THE VOICE. Who's doing all the meanness in this part of the country?

FRED. The bandit?

THE VOICE. Who else? Held up the machine in broad daylight.

TED. And got away with it?

THE VOICE. Got away with the mail bag—what's worse?

TOM. Can't somebody do something?

THE VOICE. Doesn't look like it.

GEORGE. I'd like to get a whack at him.

THE VOICE. He's more likely to get a whack at you. That's the reason I stopped to warn you kids.

GEORGE. *Warr* us?

THE VOICE. About the bandit.

FRED. What's it to us?

THE VOICE. A whole lot if he comes breaking in upon you.

TED. But this is *our* cabin.

THE VOICE. How's he to know that? Any old cabin would look pretty good to him if he's trying to keep out of sight.

TOM. We're not afraid.

THE VOICE. Maybe not—but the best place for you young fellows is home.

GEORGE. But we don't want to go home.

THE VOICE. That's your business, of course—but you've been warned. So if anything happens it's your own fault.

FRED. Thanks just the same for putting us wise.

THE VOICE. Oh—that's all right. So long.

(And in a few moments the noise of the hoofbeats dies away. The boys come back slowly and make their way to the table, save TOM, who stands protectingly behind the two maidens who are huddled together on the bench.)

PEGGY. Oh, I wish that we'd never, never come!

PATTY. And how shall we ever get home?

FRED. Ted and I'll go with you. We're starting after Jim anyway.

PEGGY. *Jim?* Surely you won't try that silly initiation after all *this*.

GEORGE. *Why* won't we?

PEGGY. With this dreadful bandit running around loose?

GEORGE. He won't touch *us*.

TOM. And we don't intend to change *our* plans just to accommodate him—do we, fellows?

TED. Not much.

PEGGY. Just the same you may be *forced* to change your plans.

GEORGE. And what do *you* know about it, smarty? (*Advances threateningly.*)

PEGGY. Well, I know what mother and father will say.

PATTY. Oh, do stop quarreling, Peggy—please—and let's go home.

FRED. Better go while the going's good. (*Moves to door.*)

TOM. How long before you'll be back?

TED. We can make it in ten minutes easily. (*Joins*

FRED.)

TOM. Even if we see that the girls get home safely?

TED. Sure we can. The place where Jim is waiting isn't very far off, you know.

TOM. All right then.

PATTY. Oh *do* let's go on—please.

TOM (*taking the basket*). But we haven't had refreshments.

PATTY. We don't *want* refreshments.

TOM. Changed your minds, haven't you?

PEGGY. And so have you. Ten minutes ago you wouldn't have offered to feed us.

TOM. That was—ten minutes ago.

PEGGY. And you wouldn't be so generous now if you thought we'd stay long enough to eat it.

PATTY (*wailing*). Oh why are we staying at all?

FRED. I'm sure I don't know. We're waiting for you.

PATTY (*hurrying to them*). Then *do* come along, Peggy.

PEGGY (*following, but unable to resist a parting shot*).
Anyway—I'll tell.

GEORGE (*tauntingly, as the door closes behind the four*).
Tell away!

TOM (*thoughtfully, as he seats himself on the bench*).
I wonder if we'd better go on with it?

GEORGE (*standing before him*). With *what*?

TOM. With that stunt of sending Jim to act as sentinel.

GEORGE. We'll never again get so good a one.

TOM. Never. (*A pause ensues.*)

GEORGE. And the old bandit won't come back to that particular spot—tonight, anyway.

TOM. Of course not.

GEORGE. Jim might balk.

TOM. Fellows don't balk at initiation.

GEORGE. Well, this bandit business makes it a bit different from a regular initiation.

TOM. Jim hasn't been here—so he won't be so worked up over the hold-ups as we are.

GEORGE. Then we'll do as we planned?

TOM. Let's. It won't hurt him.

GEORGE (*after a pause*). Funny about this bandit, isn't it?

TOM. I don't see anything funny about it.

GEORGE. You know what I mean.

TOM. Well, you'd think that *somebody* would get a line on him.

GEORGE. Wouldn't you? (*Both boys gaze into space.*)
You know, Tom, *I'd* like to be a bandit.

TOM. So should I.

GEORGE. Of course I'd never keep all the things I took.

TOM. Neither would I. And I'd waylay just the rich people.

GEORGE. Of course. (*Pause.*) It *would* be fun.

TOM. Wouldn't it, though? To wear a slouch hat—and a mask!

GEORGE. To hide behind a big tree—and wait—and wait!

TOM (*excitedly*). Until you hear someone coming along the road!

GEORGE. And then to jump out—to point a pistol—and to yell!

HELEN. *Boys!*

For, during this meditation, TOM's older sister, HELEN, has thrown open the door and stands majestically upon the threshold. A raincoat is thrown over her dainty summer gown, and the glance which she casts upon the engrossed pair is not a serene one.

TOM (*as he and GEORGE come back to the realities of life*). Gee—Helen—why can't you knock?

HELEN (*with a withering look around the room*). You're to come home.

TOM. Who said so?

HELEN. Father.

TOM. Why?

HELEN. Because there's been another hold-up.

TOM. That has nothing to do with us.

HELEN. Well, father seems to think it has.

GEORGE. And why would anybody hold *us* up?

HELEN. Don't ask silly questions, George. *You're* to come home, too.

GEORGE. I won't do it. (*Sits by TOM.*)

HELEN. And what's more—you're to accompany *me*.

TOM. Without Fred and Ted? Not much.

HELEN. Where are they?

GEORGE. Taking the girls home.

HELEN. Then they'll soon be back. I'll wait until they come. (*And she enters seating herself very gingerly near the table.*)

TOM. You'll wait a long time, then. They are doing something else after they leave the girls.

HELEN. How provoking! Then you two must come along—I can't stay any longer.

TOM. But, Helen—we can't.

GEORGE. And I'm not coming at all, I'll have you know.

HELEN. Don't be saucy, George.

TOM. Please let us alone.

HELEN. But father won't like it. And mother will be nervous.

TOM. What's the use of being nervous? That bandit is a hundred miles away by this time.

HELEN. Well—if you won't come now—will you promise to be in by bedtime? (*Rises.*)

TOM. We have other plans for tonight.

HELEN. But it's beginning to rain. And what can you do in the rain?

GEORGE. Lots of things. We're used to it.

HELEN. Will you promise?

TOM. I don't like to promise.

HELEN. Perhaps not. But I shall not stir a step until you do.

TOM (*very reluctantly*). Then—I'll promise.

HELEN. Now, remember. By bedtime.

TOM. Sure.

HELEN. And you may thank your lucky stars that I was sent for you. Nobody else would have let you off so easily.

TOM. Don't let dad come.

HELEN. No danger. He and mother have gone to a dinner. *That's* the reason I'm letting you stay.

TOM. You *are* a good old scout, Helen.

HELEN. And since I'm a scout, this is my act of kindness for today. (*Looks about.*) Mercy! What a hole!

GEORGE. We like it.

HELEN. No accounting for tastes. (*Turns at door.*) Remember your promise now.

TOM (*raising his hand*). We swear!

HELEN. In before bedtime! Or twelve o'clock will find you in a worse condition than Cinderella! (*And off she goes.*)

GEORGE (*as he strides back and forth*). Now you've gone and done it.

TOM. Done what?

GEORGE. Spoiled our fun.

TOM. *Spoiled* it? You're crazy. If it hadn't been for me we should have had no fun at all.

GEORGE. Then what made you promise that we'd be in at bedtime?

TOM. Bedtime in summer is apt to be pretty late.

GEORGE. And then to *promise*.

TOM. But if I hadn't promised she would be sitting here yet.

GEORGE (*reflectively*). That's so.

TOM. And suppose the fellows had brought Jim while she was here. How would we explain it?

GEORGE. Gee—I never thought of *that*.

TOM. Well I *did* think of it and the only way to get rid of her was to promise.

And at this particular moment three resounding raps on the door are heard.

GEORGE. There they are. (*The boys cross hurriedly to the other side of the room.*)

TOM. Enter!

The door opens and TED and FRED—rather rain-spattered—enter escorting the victim between them. The newcomer is also in rough sport clothes with a large handkerchief tied across his eyes and covering part of his face. By this time it has grown quite dark in the room.

FRED (*quite pompously as the three advance to C.*). Hail—Comrades Courageous.

GEORGE (*not knowing what else to say*). Hail!

TOM (*coming to the rescue*). Did the candidate resist?

FRED. Not at all.

TOM. Is he aware of the importance of the step he is taking?

TED (*who, unfortunately, is very literal*). I don't know whether he is or not. He can't see where he is stepping.

GEORGE. Suppose we let him answer for himself.

THE CANDIDATE (*after an awkward silence*). What do you want me to say?

GEORGE. Tell us why you wish to join this organization.

THE CANDIDATE. Why—why—well—just because I want to join.

GEORGE. That's no reason.

THE CANDIDATE. I don't know any better one.

GEORGE. Why don't you say something about our aims—our pursuits?

THE CANDIDATE. I would if I knew what they were.

GEORGE. Why—why—

THE CANDIDATE. What *are* they?

TOM (*importantly*). Just what the name implies—Comrades Courageous.

THE CANDIDATE. *Oh!*

TOM. Everybody who joins this organization must—must—(*hesitates*)—well—must do something that's down-right brave. (*Pauses.*) Do you still want to join?

THE CANDIDATE. Why, of course.

GEORGE. Maybe you won't when you hear what you have to do.

THE CANDIDATE. Why not?

GEORGE. Because it's hard.

THE CANDIDATE. I'd rather do a hard thing than an easy one.

GEORGE. Oh—*would* you! Well—just listen to this.

TOM (*excitedly*). There's a bandit around here.

THE CANDIDATE (*coolly*). Of course. Everybody's heard of him.

TOM. And there have been four hold-ups on this very road.

THE CANDIDATE. So you want me to be the bandit and pull off the fifth?

GEORGE (*in astonishment*). Whatever put that into your head?

THE CANDIDATE. Oh, I'd just as soon do it if you'd promise to get me out of jail.

TOM (*with great dignity*). We don't ask our prospective members to break the law.

THE CANDIDATE (*bowing*). My mistake.

TOM. There's a very lonely place on this road where it winds and twists—

THE CANDIDATE. Near the river? I know it.

TOM. Well, you're to act as sentinel at that very place, for an hour.

THE CANDIDATE. Shall I go right now?

TOM. In a moment. (*Pauses.*) It's where most of the hold-ups have occurred.

THE CANDIDATE. That's all right with me.

TOM. And, after you've watched there for an hour, you're to come back and report.

THE CANDIDATE. Do I have a gun?

TOM. Only a heavy stick.

THE CANDIDATE. A stick's just as good.

GEORGE. You seem cool about it.

THE CANDIDATE. Why not? I'm willing to do anything to join.

TOM. Your guards will take you to the place and leave you. You will take off your bandage after they have gone and will keep vigil for an hour. Have you a watch?

THE CANDIDATE. Yes.

TOM. At the end of the hour you will return to us and—and—well, you'll be a member then.

THE CANDIDATE. I'll be here.

(*And, at a motion from TOM, the victim is led out of the room by FRED and TED. No one speaks. Only an occasional clap of thunder and the sound of the wind and rain breaks the silence. GEORGE crosses to the door, opens it and peers out.*)

GEORGE. Gee, but it's a bad night!

TOM (*thoughtfully as he stands at center*). And I wonder if that bandit is any place around!

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE: *Same as Act I. A few sputtering candles light the room and show TOM and GEORGE seated near the table and FRED and TED on the bench. The four are apparently disconsolate. A deep melancholy seems to pervade.*

GEORGE (*glancing at his watch*). Queer how time drags when you're waiting. I could have sworn a half hour had passed since I last looked at my watch, and it's only a measly little old ten minutes.

TOM. Are you sure that we told him to come back in an hour?

GEORGE. Of course I'm sure. Why, you're the one who told him.

TED (*thoughtfully*). I never saw Jim act *that* way before.

GEORGE. *What* way?

TED. Anxious to do everything we told him.

FRED. And so quiet, too. Ted and I both spoke of it.

TED. Why, he never said a word all the way.

FRED. And that isn't like Jim. He usually jabbars every minute.

TOM. People don't jabber when they're being initiated.

FRED. Well, anyone would expect it from Jim.

GEORGE. Maybe he was really scared.

TED. He didn't act it.

FRED. And that isn't like Jim, either. He's generally as nervous as a jackrabbit.

TOM. I'm getting worried. (*Rises and goes to door.*) He should have been back long before this. (*Opens the door, peers out and then turns.*) Hush! Did you hear anything? (*For a moment all are quiet.*) Guess I imagined it.

GEORGE. You're beginning to get on my nerves, Tom. (*Pauses.*) Do you really think something has happened? (*Joins him.*)

TOM. I'm not sure what to think. But I do know that he ought to be back. (*After a moment.*) Two whole hours; that's too long a time for him to stay away.

TED. And it isn't like Jim to stay any longer than he has to.

FRED. Not a bit of it.

GEORGE (*after a pause*). Wasn't it somewhere near the place we left him that a man walked straight off the bluff into the river?

TED (*in horror*). You don't mean that—

TOM. Nobody means anything. We're just—supposing. (*Stands back of chair.*)

FRED. And it was on that same road that a fellow got knocked in the head. (*Pause.*) They found the body in a clump of trees.

TED (*still horror-stricken*). And suppose the bandit *did* come back! *Gosh!* It makes me sick to think about it.

TOM. There's no use in thinking of any of it. Jim's probably taking his time.

TED. In that lonesome place, in the rain, and all by himself? Not much.

GEORGE. Maybe he's scaring *us* by staying away. (*Strolls to table.*)

TED. He would scare himself more than he would scare *us*.

FRED (*cheerfully*). Like as not he's enjoying the quiet.

TED (*ironically*). Yes, he is—*not*.

TOM (*sitting*). Honest to goodness, kids, I'm worried. And I'm ready to own up that we shouldn't have sent him there.

GEORGE. Rather late for us to own up. (*Perches on table.*)

TED. And if anything *has* happened, what will become of *us*?

FRED. We'll go to jail, that's where we'll go.

Again the pall of melancholy descends. Each sees for himself a blighted future.

TED (*weakly*). What will they do to us?

FRED. Who're *they*?

TED. The judge—and the jury—and—

GEORGE. Life imprisonment, I guess.

TED (*in a whisper*). Life imprisonment! Just think of all the years ahead of us. (*Plaintively*.) It's darned hard to be so young!

TOM. Of course it might be (*hesitates*)—the other thing.

FRED. Well, I'd rather die and get through with it.

GEORGE. Sometimes they send *young* criminals to the reform school, don't they?

TED (*brightening*). That wouldn't be so bad.

TOM. It strikes me that we're pretty hard-hearted to sit here talking about ourselves, when poor old Jim—(*pauses*).

There is a prolonged silence.

GEORGE (*solemnly*). Jim was a good old scout, always ready for a lark.

TED (*gloomily*). I wish he hadn't been so ready for this one.

TOM. And he was so willing to divide his last cent with any one of us.

TED (*who evidently speaks from experience*). Not always.

FRED. And we never had to urge him to do anything.

TED (*half to himself*). Or anybody.

GEORGE. And it would be pretty fine if we could hear his jolly old whistle again.

(Sometimes strange things happen. For at this very moment comes the sound of a shrill whistle from outside the cabin.)

TOM (*jumping up*). That's Jim's whistle. (*They all rise.*)

GEORGE. Pretty time of night for him to be coming in upon us!

FRED. And darn mean of him to scare us up like this.

TOM. He needn't be too cock sure of being initiated.

TED. And a minute ago you were saying all sorts of nice things about him.

Three knocks on the door and TOM throws it open. There stands JIM very spick and span with an immaculate

raincoat over immaculate clothes, and only a dripping umbrella to spoil the general effect.

TOM. Well, you're late enough.

JIM. Couldn't help it.

GEORGE. Why on earth did you change your clothes?

JIM (*puzzled*). Change my clothes?

GEORGE. The last time we saw you you didn't look so spruce.

FRED. And I must say that it's pretty uppish of you to keep us waiting while you doll up. (*Returns to bench.*)

JIM. I don't know what you mean. (*Comes to center.*)

TED. Your walk by the river must have touched you—up here. (*And he significantly touches his forehead as he crosses to right of stage.*)

JIM. I didn't walk by any river. I came straight over in the first auto I could lay my hands on.

TOM. Maybe the bandit laid his hands on it, too. (*Sits by FRED.*)

JIM. *What* bandit?

TOM. Don't act innocent. We told you all about him.

FRED. Or maybe you found him such excellent company that you couldn't get off to us.

TED. Or maybe you sneaked home and didn't do what we told you to do.

JIM. Are you fellows all nutty?

TOM. Just interested in you.

GEORGE. Suppose you give an account of yourself since the last time we saw you. (*Sits by table.*)

JIM. Why do you all keep saying "the last time we saw you"?

FRED. Because you were rather—different—then.

TED (*chuckling*). And we thought for a while that it *was* the last time sure enough.

JIM (*still more puzzled*). I don't know what you mean—honest I don't.

TOM. Perhaps you don't know that you've been initiated.

JIM. I *haven't* been initiated.

GEORGE. Oh, *haven't* you? Then what did you think we were doing?

FRED. And why did you stand—right there—(*points*) and tell us you'd do anything we asked you to do.

JIM. I never stood—right there—(*points*) and I never told you that I'd do anything you asked me to do.

TED. Then—you don't belong to our bunch, do you?

JIM. I haven't been initiated, if that's what you mean.

TOM. Oh, *haven't* you? Then how do you account for the little performance earlier this evening?

JIM (*hopelessly bewildered*). *What* little performance?

GEORGE. What's the matter with you, Jim?

JIM (*crossing to table*). And what's the matter with you? (*Pounding the table*.) I've just come, I tell you.

FRED (*jeeringly*). *Just come!*

JIM. I couldn't get the early train. (*Turns.*) I telephoned you, Tom.

TOM. *Telephoned* me?

JIM. Of course. Polly took the message. Didn't she tell you? (*Leans on table.*)

TOM. Nobody told us anything.

JIM. Then you must have thought it queer that I didn't show up in the place you had told me to be.

TOM. We thought—well, go on with your story.

JIM. There isn't any story. I just had to wait until the later train, and came straight to the cabin hoping you'd be here.

GEORGE. But why didn't Polly tell us?

JIM. I can't imagine. She said she would. (*Sinks into chair.*)

FRED. She was right here, too.

JIM. Say fellows, you'll give me another chance, won't you? I still want to be initiated—honest I do.

TOM. We'll do it tomorrow.

TED. And in the meantime it would be interesting to know who it is that we've just been initiating.

JIM. What do you mean?

TED. Just this. (*Sits on table.*) Fred and I found

someone—we thought it was you—in the place by the bridge. And—well, we initiated him.

JIM. Who was it?

TOM. We'd like to know.

JIM. And how did he happen to be *there*?

GEORGE. Ask us something easy.

JIM (*whistling*). What a mixup!

FRED. Rather.

JIM (*with a fine disregard of grammar*). But couldn't you tell that the fellow wasn't *me*?

TED. How could we? He had a handkerchief 'way over his face, it was dark and rainy, we were naturally expecting you.

TOM. And, anyway, we initiated him.

GEORGE. Some stunt we gave him just the same.

JIM. What?

GEORGE. To act as sentinel right at the place where all the hold-ups have happened.

JIM. *Gosh!* Are you going to give me anything as hard as that?

TED. Probably harder. We're mad now.

TOM. Polly knows something about this.

JIM. I bet she does.

TOM. And I'll settle *her* in short order.

GEORGE. Don't you remember how she jumped up all of a sudden and hurried home?

FRED. Of course.

TED. And seemed so anxious to get Rob in the crowd?
(*As an idea strikes him.*) *Fellows!* (*Jumps down.*)

TOM (*as the same idea comes to him*). I wonder—

There is a light tap upon the door, and then another. TOM opens the door with a flourish, and there stands ROB, greatly disheveled, very wet, very weary, a bloody gash across his forehead and one arm hanging limply at his side. The boys crowd on either side of him.

ROB (*limping into the room and leaning against the wall*). I'm back, but I'm late. (*As he gazes upon the as-*

tonished crowd.) Won't you—forgive me—for not letting you know—that I—wasn't Jim?

TOM. You're hurt. (*And he helps him to a chair and stands by him while JIM stands back of another chair.*)

ROB (*rather weakly*). Ran against a tree coming back and cut my head. And as to this arm—well, I'll tell you about *that* later. (*GEORGE and FRED seat themselves on bench.*)

JIM. Tell us first how you happened to be—*me*?

ROB. Polly helped me out.

TOM (*triumphantly*). I knew it!

ROB. She received Jim's telephone message and came on here to let you know.

GEORGE. But she didn't let us know.

ROB. Because, after finding out what you were planning to do, she thought it would be a good joke to substitute me for Jim.

FRED. She even asked how Jim was to be dressed.

ROB. Of course. Didn't I answer the description pretty well?

TED. So well that not a one of us suspected that it wasn't Jim. (*Sits on floor at C.*)

ROB. I thought of course that you'd find out. But I *did* make my handkerchief cover most of my face and I didn't talk much.

TOM. And it was too dark to recognize anybody.

ROB. Not half so dark as it was after you boys left me. (*Pauses.*) It was pretty lonely, too, for the rain came down in sheets, the wind was howling, and very few cars were passing.

TED. It's gloomy, all right.

FRED. And the very place for an adventure.

ROB. You bet it is.

TED. Did you have one?

ROB. Well, rather.

TOM. Tell us about it.

ROB (*after a pause*). Well, I waited around for a long,

long time, and suddenly I heard a noise back of me, and when I turned—(*hesitates*)...

TED (*eagerly*). Yes?

ROB. A flashlight shone and I saw a man leaning over something.

TOM. A corpse?

ROB. Nothing so bad as that.

GEORGE. Weren't you scared?

ROB. For a moment, yes. Then I realized that he wasn't up to any good.

TED. Not much time to realize anything.

ROB. I should say not. So I jumped out and hit him a good blow with my stick.

FRED. He might have shot you.

ROB. He tried to. But I struck the pistol out of his hand with my arm, and before he had a chance to get me I hit him over the head. (*Pauses.*) It knocked him senseless.

TOM (*rather skeptically*). And nobody was around?

ROB. Not a soul. (*Pauses.*) That bothered me, for I knew he'd come to and that I wouldn't have a chance with him if he did.

JIM. What did you do?

ROB. Nothing. But luck was with me; for at just that moment a machine came tearing along the road. I jumped out, hailed it, and—

GEORGE (*impatently*). And what?

ROB. Once more I was almost shot. (*Laughs.*) They took me for the bandit!

TOM. Who was it?

ROB. The hotel manager and one of the hotel guests; so it was all right. They bundled the man into the car and carried him off.

FRED. Where?

ROB. To jail.

TED (*reflectively*). Just where we thought *we'd* be.

TOM. Look here, Rob, you're stringing us. (*Crosses to left.*)

ROB. I'm not stringing you. It's the truth. I swear it.

GEORGE. Do you think we're likely to believe that you knocked a man silly—and all by yourself?

ROB. Ask the hotel manager.

TOM. And how did you know that he needed to be knocked over.

ROB. I knew all right.

GEORGE. Why, the man may have been just a harmless traveler.

ROB. Oh, no, he wasn't.

TOM. Then who *was* he?

ROB (*very dramatically*). The bandit!

GEORGE. *What?*

TOM. How are you *sure*?

ROB. Because he was leaning over the mailbag!

GEORGE. Can you prove it?

ROB. Look outside the door and see.

(FRED and TED make a dive for the door. They return bearing between them a United States mailbag.)

FRED. It is the mailbag!

ROB. Of course it is.

TED (*as they kneel at center and breathlessly open the bag*). Why, it's empty!

ROB. Why not? I dumped the mail into the car and begged for the bag just to show that my story was true. (*There is a long pause.*) And here I am. (*He looks anxiously around.*) I suppose I shouldn't have worked my way into the crowd like this. Maybe it wasn't the straight thing to do; in fact, now that I've had time to think about it, I *know* it wasn't. But I couldn't let the chance go by.

TOM (*after a moment*). I take back everything I said. It's the bulliest story I've ever heard. (*Crosses to ROB.*)

GEORGE. And you're just the bulliest fellow I've ever met.

ROB (*eagerly*). Then you'll take my apology?

TOM. If there's any apology, it ought to come from us.

GEORGE. That's where we made *our* mistake.

FRED. And not one of us has ever done so brave a thing as what you've done tonight.

ROB. Then you really want me?

TED. *Want you? (Rises.)* Well, rather. *(Holds out his hand.)* Here, shake.

ROB. *(as he takes the outstretched hand).* Is this the grip?

TED. You bet.

JIM. Say, I seem to be left out of all of this.

TOM. Wait till tomorrow night—just wait.

GEORGE. And you'll have five putting you through—

FRED. Instead of four.

TED. Won't it be a lark?

ROB. And aren't there lots of good times ahead of us?

JIM. We ought to celebrate, we really ought.

TOM *(as a sudden thought strikes him)*. We will!
(Runs over to the basket which is still on the bench.)
Here's something to make us celebrate. *(As he looks in.)*
Fried chicken, cake, jelly, dressed eggs. Line up, fellows!

GEORGE. What's the first thing to celebrate?

FRED *(rising)*. Ourselves, of course. Comrades of the open road!

GEORGE. Comrades light-hearted!

TED. Comrades loyal!

TOM. Comrades adventurous!

JIM *(with a flourish)*. And comrades courageous!

(And while the curtain falls the boys crowd about Tom as he opens the basket.)

CURTAIN.

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Watch, a Wallet, and a Jack of Spades, 40 min.	3	6
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Wrong Baby, 25 min.	8	

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For Love and Honor, 20 min.	2	1
Fudge and a Burglar, 15 min.	5	

	M.	F.
Great Medical Dispensary, 30 m.	6	
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Her Hero, 20 min.	1	1
Hey, Rube! 15 min.	1	
It Might Happen, 20 min.	1	1
Little Miss Enemy, 15 min.	1	1
Little Red School House, 20 m.	4	
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Pete Yansen's Gurl's Moder, 10m.	1	
Quick Lunch Cabaret, 20 min.	4	
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Darktown Fire Brigade, 25 m.	10	
Good Mornin' Judæ, 35 min.	9	2
Hungry, 15 min.	2	
Love and Lather, 35 min.	3	2
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