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Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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The Boy Scouts of the Geological Survey

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CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN FEATHER

"This was a pretty fair catch, for a change," thought Ralph Kenyon, as he tied the limp animal to his pack-saddle, and reset the trap, hoping next time to catch the dead mink's larger mate. He ran a quick, appraising eye over the load slung across Keno's broad back. "Pretty good, eh, old boy?" he added aloud, stroking the velvety nose of his dumb companion on many a solitary hunt. "Now, Keno, you hang around, and browse on these young cottonwoods, while I do some figuring. I want to see what I'm likely to get for this next shipment of pelts."

The old horse, nothing loath, obeyed his young master's behest as promptly as though he had fully understood the words. Meanwhile, Ralph found a mossy spot on the shady side of a big gray, lichen-covered boulder, and, seating himself thereon, with his back comfortably adjusted to a depression in the rock, he drew a worn account book from a pocket of his corduroy coat. Moistening his thumb he began to turn the pages rapidly, until he came to the place where he had made the last entry in his accounts. With a stubby pencil, which he had taken from another pocket, he jotted down the new items:

"So far, one mink, six coon, three skunk, a gray fox, and seventeen rabbit skins. All told it ought to bring—let me see." He relapsed into silence, as he estimated the total, and then he sighed deeply. "Not very much," was his inward comment; "not anywhere near enough!"

Ralph felt that it was high time that he brought to a close his season's operations with trap and gun. The spring was unusually early this year, and the fallow truck patches were fairly clamoring for his attention. Yet he was reluctant to abandon his winter pursuit of

pelts and to return to the sterner and less thrilling labor of ploughing and planting and peddling vegetables.

Not that he was averse to hard work—far from it! Ralph Kenyon was as industrious, energetic, and sensible a young fellow as one would wish to know; yet, being a very average, normal lad, and at that age when love of freedom and adventure is foremost, he naturally preferred the varied life of a huntsman and trapper—even though his field of activity was not extensive—to the moiling occupation of a market gardener.

On the other hand, there were times when he thoroughly enjoyed the labor of wresting a livelihood from the soil, and he took pride in raising the choicest products that could be offered for sale. Such spells were most frequent in midsummer, when all nature was in a placid mood for growth; but in autumn and spring came livelier hopes and a stronger call to this lad, and in his own way he set about accomplishing the chief aim of his life, the great end to which these winter pursuits were but a means.

After the death of his father, which had occurred less than a month after his graduation from High School, Ralph had taken the responsibility of the small farm upon his eighteen-year-old shoulders, bravely putting aside his cherished plans for a course in the School of Mines until he could save the necessary funds from his individual earnings. That was a year ago. In the interval he had found an opportunity to study the principles of surveying, and for two weeks he had acted as guide to a party of university students doing research work in his native hills. For this service he had been paid twenty-five dollars—-which had been promptly banked as a nucleus of his college fund.

How simple and easy it had seemed, earning his way through the School of Mines, while talking with those enthusiastic young collegians and their professor! How well he remembered the things they had said, the advice they had given him! Yet now, after eight months of hard work, constant hunting in the woods, and rigid economy, he seemed no nearer the goal than he had been when the portals of High School closed behind him forever. In fact, just as he was now placed in his prospects he faced a bitter discouragement; he was on the threshold of a new calamity.

His mother, who took in fine sewing, had developed a serious eye trouble that threatened to put an end to her earning power, and to leave her totally blind unless she submitted to a very delicate operation within a few weeks. Of course, his mother's welfare was stronger than any other consideration with Ralph, but he had a vague idea that operations cost a great deal of money. At least, he had been told so by his nearest neighbor, Tom Walsh, a farmer who lived several miles from the town of Oakvale, which was the station from whence he would have to take his mother by train to New York. A day's journey, a week or more in the hospital, and incidental expenses—even with the aid of his precious hoard and the inadequate sum these furs would bring him—how could he ever raise enough to help her, in time?

With another deep sigh, he replaced the worn account book, and rested his head against the mossy hollow in the stone, gazing disconsolately up through the branches of the trees at the jagged cliffs that towered high above the mountain trail for a while, nothing was heard in ravine or glade save the brawling of the crystal-clear brook that went dashing and tumbling over the stones of its rough bed, in a mad race to its fall of twenty feet or more, or the crunching of succulent twigs and leaves of cottonwood, or the snapping of dead wood, as old Keno moved leisurely about from one spot to another. Side by side, on a jutting crag that leaned far out over the brook, sat a splendid pair of golden eagles, joyously preening their plumage in the spring sunshine. The birds aroused no special interest in Ralph's mind, however, on this particular morning; he had seen them many times before, while rambling over the mountains with his father. But the sight of their glittering napes awakened memories of that loved and admired man.

"Dad used to say—and I guess he believed it, too—that iron in paying quantities lies just beneath the stones of our little farm," mused Ralph. "We might become rich, mother and I, if we could only get money enough to open up our mine."

One of the eagles, rare birds in that part of the Country, evidently alarmed or annoyed at the approach of some intruder on their domain, some animal or human being Unseen by Ralph, thrust out its head, opened its beak, and uttered a harsh shrill cry; at which its

mate walked forward to the very edge of the crag, poised there for an instant, and then, spreading wide wings, launched itself into the air and sailed swiftly out of sight. It returned, however, in a few minutes and rejoined its mate on the ledge of rock.

"Old King Eagle," called Ralph, whimsically, knowing well that his voice would not carry above the roar of the brook, "I wish you'd tell me where you get all your gold! I believe I'd go digging with my finger-nails this morning if I only knew where to begin!"

As if in answer to his appeal, one golden feather drifted down and lay glittering iridescently among the pebbles at his feet.

The lad sprang up with a laugh; then, going down on his knees, he began to dig at the exact spot on which the feather fell. Imagination had carried him for the moment to a point of almost superstitious energy. But the spell passed quickly. With a scornful laugh, he straightened his lanky form to its full height.

"Gee!" he exclaimed aloud. "I never supposed I could be such a fool!"

A low laugh sounded behind him, startlingly near, and, turning to glance over his shoulder, he beheld a tall, lean, swarthy young man dressed in a faded and soiled brown suit, with a soft felt hat pulled down over his eyes, and leggings like those often worn by woodsmen.

"Seven kinds of a young fool, eh?" remarked the stranger, shifting a long-handled axe and a heavy wooden mallet which he carried from his shoulder to the ground. "Well, you ain't no fool, boy, an' I know it, an' that's why I follered you up this trail. I want ter have a little confab with you to-day. Know who I am?"

"No, I don't know you," Ralph replied truthfully, "and I can't guess how you knew I was up here in the hills."

"Your ma told me. I stopped at your shack, about two hours ago, an' she told me you was out lookin' after your traps. Any luck?"

"Not much." Ralph did not wish the man to observe either the location of the traps or the valuable mink that dangled from Keno's saddle. "What did you want to see me for?" he queried, after a minute's pause, during which he eyed the woodsman quizzically.

"You're Ralph Kenyon, ain't you?" asked the other, evidently in some doubt.

"Yes. Who are you?"

There was a, blunt directness in Ralph's questions that seemed to disconcert the man who had expected to meet a rather shy, immature lad—certainly not one who bore himself with an air of calm self-possession and who wasted no words. He gave another low laugh that ended in a chuckle, and replied briefly:

"My name's Bill—Bill Terrill—perhaps you've heard tell o' me? I'm Old Man Walsh's nevvvy, your friend Tom's Cousin."

"I've heard of you," said Ralph, drily.

"Who told you, then?"

"Jack Durham—another cousin of yours."

"Oh! You don't mean the kid that joined that 'ere Boy Scout crowd over at Pi'neer Camp last summer, after—after— —"

"After you attacked the old man and him in the woods, one day. Yes, he's the one. He told me."

"You an' him pals?"

"Not exactly; he's much younger than I."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen next month."

"Old enough ter know better, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

"Better than ter go diggin' fer—well, gold, in these 'ere parts."

A blush overspread Ralph's freckled face, but it faded as quickly as it had come, and he continued to stare at Bill Terrill.

"I wasn't digging for gold," he said quietly.

"Of course not! I was only joshing you, boy! Say, what I wanted ter see you about is this: there's some dispute between the what-d'-you-call-uns?—executors?—of your dad's will and Old Man Per-

kins, who owns the farm next ter yours, about the boundary lines. Old Man Perkins, he claims — —"

"He has no claim whatever!" interrupted Ralph, vehemently. "That old dispute was almost settled before my father's death. Dad had our farm surveyed, charted, and the boundaries marked. I can show you the stone on the northwest corner; it's only a few yards away, over there."

"Well, Perkins is havin' *his* acres surveyed now," said Terrill, "an' I'm one of the crew that's doing the job fer him. I'm axeman. You see, I've reformed consid'r'ble since — —since last summer, and I j'ined a surveyin' crew; axeman now, rodman later, if I'm good, an' — — —"

"But why did you want to see me? Was it about this boundary question?"

"Oh, you admit there is some question about it, after all?"

"Are you trying to pump me, Terrill?" asked Ralph, shrewdly suspicious. "If you are, you won't get any satisfaction until I've seen our lawyer. It seems to me you're playing detective instead of surveyor, and you don't do it very well! You had better stick to your job, and the axe!"

Terrill grinned.

"If it turns out that your pa made some mistake or was — —er — —too cock-sure about the lay o' this land, what d'you think Old Man Perkins would do about it?" he inquired meaningly.

"Prove his claim, and take part of our present farm away from us, of course," Ralph retorted. "But there is no mistake. The land is ours."

"And if it is, would you be willing to sell — —"

"Not a square foot of it — —to Perkins."

So saying, Ralph picked up his cap, and carefully brushed off the clay and leaves. As he did so, the shining feather caught his down-cast eyes once more, and this time he stooped, picked it up, and deliberately stuck it under the band of the inside of his cap. Then he secured the faithful Keno, and, without another word to Bill Terrill,

who had moved away whistling defiantly, he tramped homeward, in a rather gloomy mood.

CHAPTER II

A TIMELY SUGGESTION

Doctor Kane, the kindly physician from Oakvale, was just coming down the path from the Kenyon farmhouse as Ralph rode into the yard. He paused beside his car, seeing the lad dismount hastily and come forward with an anxious appeal in his brown eyes.

"How -- how is she to-day?" Ralph asked, when he had grasped the doctor's outstretched hand. "Her eyes -- are they -- --"

"No better, and no worse," replied his friend; and again the doctor explained the situation in simple terms that Ralph could understand.

"What will the operation cost?" Ralph asked desperately.

Doctor Kane pondered for a moment.

"Well, if she will consent to go before a clinic, I think I can get her off with a hundred and twenty-five dollars, including hospital fees," he replied. "I'll be glad to go with her to the city, Ralph, and pay the car fares."

Ralph knew he meant by "car fares" traveling expenses, for he was familiar with Doctor Kane's habit of belittling his many charitable acts. He knew also that, if necessary, the doctor would gladly lend him the sum of money which stood, a tangible barrier, between his mother and total darkness; but with a sense of indomitable hope and modest pride, he had resolved not to ask for that favor, which, he realized, would be no small one, except as a last resort.

"You're awfully kind, sir," he responded warmly. "I appreciate -- --"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Doctor Kane. "It will be a pleasure for me to do anything I can for your mother and you, my boy. Your father was one of the best friends I ever had, and some day I'll tell you

how I came to owe him a debt which I shall never be able to repay. Just call on me if I can help out, won't you?"

He closed the gate and went forward to crank up his runabout, but Ralph detained him a few moments longer, to tell him about the encounter with Bill Terrill. When he had finished, the doctor advised him to pay no attention to the vague overtures made by Silas Perkins' hireling, until the doctor himself had referred the matter of the survey to the coexecutor of Mr. Kenyon's will. After that, it would be time to consider a sale, definitely.

"Don't let anyone bunco you, my boy," he added, as he climbed into his car and grasped the steering-wheel. "By the way, Ralph, I saw my friend Professor Whalen in Oakvale, the other day. He told me he sighted a fine pair of golden eagles up here in the mountains, recently, and would willingly give a hundred and fifty dollars for that pair, if they're as good as he thinks they are. He wants them for a gift to his college museum. There's a chance for you!"

"So much—-for a pair of eagles!" exclaimed the boy. "Did he really mean it?"

"I'll bet he did! You don't know what a good sport Whalen is when he strikes any thing out of the ordinary in that line. If I were you, Ralph"—-here the doctor leaned over the side of his car, and spoke earnestly—"I'd try to locate their eyrie and capture them, dead or alive, Or, it might be worth your while even to lead the professor up to a place where he could get a safe shot at the birds. He talked of coming up here some day this week. I tell you what I'll do; I'll send him here to you, and you can guide him."

"No, no!" protested the lad, eagerly. "Just give me his address, and I'll do my best to get the pair for him and bring them to him in the village."

"You can ride over with me and see him, the next time I come up here," said the doctor. "Good luck, Ralph!"

"Thank you, sir! Good bye!"

When the automobile skidded out of sight, leaving a cloud of dust, Ralph remained standing by the gate, warmed by a new hope which the doctor's suggestion had kindled in his mind. No longer

did the hundred and twenty-five dollars seem unattainable, no longer did clouds of gloom and anxiety hide their silver lining! Here was another way of earning money for his mother's desperate need: an uncertain, difficult, even dangerous way, to be sure, but one well worth trying. Yes, he would make the attempt, even though he hated to take the lives of those splendid creatures of the air. He determined to get those eagles for the professor.

Full of this plan, he led Keno to the stable, unsaddled and fed him, and then, while waiting for his mother to call him in to dinner, skinned the mink he had trapped. His active mind was busy devising the best way of securing the prize.

In the house, he found his mother less dejected than usual; doubtless the doctor's visit had had a cheering effect upon her. However, Ralph said nothing to her of his new hopes, because, after all, they might prove too slender to build upon; they might lead only to disappointment. He plunged at once into a lively account of his morning's hunt, and from that he went on to discuss with her the first steps to take in the early planting.

The next morning Ralph was up before sunrise. Instead of bringing his trapping to an abrupt end, he decided to get up at an earlier hour than before, in order to have time for his daily rounds of visiting the traps. He did not know which day the professor might choose for coming in quest of the golden eagles, and he was determined that no one should get ahead of him.

"After all, he can't come hunting up here on our land without my permission, for that would be trespassing," reflected Ralph. "And if he should turn up, I can tell him that I'm on the job, myself."

Two busy days passed. While attending to his traps, in the early hours, Ralph never once allowed his rifle to lie beyond his reach; yet a third day went by, and he had no chance for a shot at the coveted birds of prey. Several times he caught sight of them hovering above the gray cliffs where he knew they were preparing to build a nest, but each time they were too far away to risk a shot.

And still no sign of the professor, or of anyone else in pursuit of the eagles. Had the professor gone away from Oakvale, or, on a hint from Doctor Kane, was he merely waiting and giving Ralph every

chance to earn the money? If the latter were the case, it was quite unlikely that Professor Whalen would share the secret of his discovery with any other possible hunter.

Several miles away from the Kenyon farm, on the shore of Pioneer Lake, which was separated from the farm by the rugged slopes of old Stormberg and the adjacent hills, was a fair-sized camp which bore the same name as the lake. It was occupied every summer by a troop of Boy Scouts under the leadership of an ex-officer of the United States Army. In fact, Pioneer Camp was well known in that section of the country, and Ralph had often heard of it from Tom Walsh and Tom's young cousin, Jack Durham, who had joined the troop. At one time, before his father's death, Ralph had longed to become a member of the troop; but one duty or another had prevented him in the summer, and now it seemed out of the question. Daily work, the necessity of earning a living for his mother and himself, and the management of his farm, demanded all his attention, and gave him no time for play.

On the fourth day of Ralph's new hunt, he was obliged to drive over to Oakvale to bring home groceries and provisions as well as seeds which he had ordered. In the town market he saw Doctor Kane talking to a tall, bronzed, soldierly-looking man who wore a khaki uniform with the Scout Masters' badge embroidered on the coat-sleeve. Accompanying this man was a half-breed Indian, known in that vicinity as Joe Crow-wing, or "Injun Joe," the guide and chief woodsman of Pioneer Camp. The half-breed hung about in the background, conversing with two lads also dressed in scout uniform.

Catching sight of Ralph, the doctor beckoned to him.

"Come here, my boy," he said, in his cordial way, as the young fellow approached, "I want you to meet Scout Master Denmead, who's up here arranging for the opening of camp next month. Denmead, this is Ralph Kenyon, a very particular friend of mine."

"Glad to know you, Kenyon," said the Scout Master, grasping Ralph's hand. After talking with him for a few minutes, he called the two other boys over from the counter on which they were sitting

and introduced them to Ralph as Tom Sherwood and Arthur Cameron.

"Aren't you fellows up here earlier than usual?" asked Ralph, presently, finding his habitual reserve wearing away.

"Yes, we are," replied Tom Sherwood. "You see, we graduated from Hilltop last February, and when we found out that the Chief was coming up here, we asked him to take us in tow for a while before camp regularly opened."

"He's going to give us a course in geology," added Arthur Cameron, "and we're going to make a survey around here this summer."

"Geology!" repeated Ralph. "That's my pet subject. Some day, you know, I'm going to study mining engineering."

"That so? Well, come along with us for a 'prelim,'" suggested Arthur, in the true scout spirit of friendliness.

Ralph sighed and shook his head.

"Wish I could!" he admitted. "Haven't time to spare, though."

"Studying?" queried Tom.

"No, working" And Ralph stated briefly and frankly the nature of his work.

"Like it?" again inquired Tom, who was always interested in people and their occupations.

"I don't mind the work itself," said Ralph, "it's not half bad, you know. But selling vegetables in the village market, and haggling with stingy buyers over the price of cabbages and green peas, is what gets my goat!" He laughed ruefully. "I guess I'll have to be jogging on my homeward way," he added. "So long! Come over and see me on the farm, if you're ever along that way. I'll show you my traps and perhaps we can go out on a little hunt—er—-that is, if you— --"

"Thanks; we will," said Tom. "But we don't hunt animals to kill; it's against scout rules in our troop."

"We hunt 'em with a camera," Arthur explained.

"Oh, I see. Well, so long."

The three lads shook hands.

"So long! Hope we'll meet again soon."

Ralph then took his leave of Denmead and Doctor Kane, and went on his way, with a new idea buzzing in his mind: so they were going to make a survey of that locality! He could invite them to investigate his land, and—-what if his father's hopes and beliefs should prove to be founded on bed-rock? Bed-rock, rich in ore? Could it be more than a dream? If they should discover any iron, anything—-they were nice fellows—he could trust them. Very decent chaps to know, perhaps to have as friends. And they didn't approve of trapping or shooting! Against scout rules, eh? And was he—-oh, well, it was fair play, and he needed whatever extra money he could earn. Those eagles! Yes, he must not lose any more time. The eagles would have to be the prize of his marksmanship, even though he winged them against his will.

At the end of that week he told himself that he would have to get the birds that day, or give up the hunt for them, and devote his entire time to the gardens. He resolved to spend the whole day in the neighborhood of Eagle Cliff, as he called it; for get them he would, then or never, before going back to the presence of his patient, pathetic, brave little mother.

Accordingly, about five o'clock in the morning, he led the faithful Keno from his stall, and rode slowly down the dusty road until he came to a point where the narrow bridlepath branched off the road and wound upward into the silent woods. Following this path until it became indistinguishable on a thick carpet of moss and leaves and coarse fern, he reached the big boulder at last; there he left Keno safely tied and hidden in a clump of alders. Then he went on, several rods down the trail, and took up his position directly across the stream from Eagle Cliff.