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Turgenev Wallage Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
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Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
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The Scranton High Chums on the Cinder Path

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CHAPTER I

THE FIVE NUT FORAGERS

The bright October sun was half-way down the western sky one Saturday afternoon. Two-thirds of the Fall month had already gone, and the air was becoming fairly crisp in the early mornings.

All around the forest trees were painted various shades of bright scarlet, burnt umber brown and vivid gold by the practiced fingers of that master artist, the Frost-King. Flocks of robins and blackbirds were gathering rather late this year, preparatory to taking their annual pilgrimage to the warm Southland. They flew overhead at times in vast numbers, making a tremendous chatter.

A noisy bunch of crows cawed unceasingly amidst the treetops as a large, lumbering old automobile passed along the country road, the same filled with lively boys, and also a number of sacks stuffed to their utmost capacity with what appeared to be black walnuts, shell-bark hickories, butternuts, and even splendid large chestnuts. Apparently, the strange and deadly blight that was attacking the chestnut groves all through the East had not yet appeared in the highly favored region around the town of Scranton, in which place the boys in question lived, and attended the famous high school where Dr. Carmack, also supervisor of the entire county schools, held forth.

The five tired lads who formed this nutting party we have met before in the pages of previous stories in this series; so that to those who have been fortunate enough to possess such books they need no lengthy introduction.

First, there was Hugh Morgan, looking as genial and determined as ever, and just as frequently consulted by his comrades, because his opinion always carried considerable weight. Then came his most intimate chum, Thad Stevens, who had played the position of back-stop so successfully during the summer just passed, and helped to

win the pennant for Scranton against the other two high schools of the country, situated in the towns of Allendale and Belleville.

Besides these two, there was included in the party a tall chap who seemed to be acting as chauffeur, from which it might be judged that he had supplied the means for taking this nutting trip far afield; his name was Kenneth Kinkaid, but among his friends he answered to the shorter appellation of "K.K." Then came a fourth boy of shorter build, and more sturdy physique, Julius Hobson by name; and last, but far from least, Horatio Juggins, a rather comical fellow who often assumed a dramatic attitude, and quoted excerpts from some school declamation, his favorite, of course, being "Horatio at the Bridge."

It was "K.K." who got up the annual foraging expedition on this particular year, and promised that they should go in style in the antiquated seven-passenger car belonging to his father, who was a commercial traveler, which car "K.K." often used, when he could raise the cash to provide sufficient gasolene at twenty-five cents per gallon. But on this momentous occasion each fellow had chipped in his share pro rata; so that the generous provider of the big, open car was not compelled to beg or borrow in order to properly equip the expedition.

For ten days and more previously some of the boys had industriously interviewed the farmers who stood in the market-place during the early mornings, selling the products of their acres. Doubtless numerous good mothers wondered what caused such an early exodus from warm beds those days, since farmers had a habit of getting rid of their produce at dawn, and driving off home while most schoolboys were indulging in their last nap.

But, by various means, they had learned just where the nuts grew most plentifully that season; and quite a list of available places had been tabulated: to the Guernsey Woods for blacks; plenty of shag-barks, and some sheilbarks to be gathered over at the old Morton Place, where no one had lived these seven years now; and they said the chestnuts away up in that region miles beyond the mill-pond was bearing a record crop this season, as if to make amends for lean years a-plenty.

Scranton was one of the few places where the boys still yearned after a goodly supply of freshly gathered nuts to carry them through a long and severe winter. Somehow they vied with one another in the gathering of the harvest of the woods, and often these outings yielded considerable sport, besides being profitable to the nutters. On one momentous occasion the boys had even discovered the hive of a colony of wild bees, cut the tree down, fought the enraged denizens by means of smoke and fire, and eventually carried home a wonderful stock of dearly earned honey that would make the buckwheat cakes taste all the sweeter that winter because of the multitude of swellings it cost the proud possessors.

Hugh had been coaxed to join the party; not that he did not fully enjoy such enterprises, but he had laid out another programme for that afternoon. All through the morning these same lads had been hard at work on the open field where Scranton played her baseball games, and had such other gatherings as high-school fellows are addicted. Here a fine new cinder path had been laid around the grounds, forming an oval that measured just an eighth of a mile, to a fraction.

All through the livelong day on Saturdays, and in the afternoons during weekdays, boys in strange-looking running costumes of various designs could be seen diligently practicing at all manner of stunts, from sprinting, leaping hurdles, engaging in the high jump, with the aid of poles; throwing the hammer; and, in fact, every conceivable exercise that would be apt to come under the head of a genuine athletic tournament.

For, to tell the secret without any evasion, that was just what Scranton designed to have inside of another week—-a monster affair that included entries from all other schools in the county, and which already promised to be one of the greatest and most successful meets ever held.

Hugh and his chums were every one of them entered for several events; indeed, it would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack to try and find a single Scranton boy above the age of ten, and sound of wind, who had not taken advantage of the generous invitation to place his name on the records, and go in for training along a certain line. Those who could not sprint, leap the bars,

throw hammer or discus, or do any other of the ordinary stunts, might, at least, have some chance of winning a prize in the climbing of the greased pole, the catching of the greased pig, the running of the obstacle race, or testing their ability to hop in the three-legged race, where each couple of boys would have a right and left leg bound together, and then attempt to cross a given line ahead of all like competitors.

So even when they started out after lunch the whole five were a bit tired; and a vast store of nuts, like the one they were fetching home, cannot be gathered, no matter however plentiful they may be on ground and trees, without considerable muscular effort on the part of the ambitious collectors.

Consequently, every fellow was feeling pretty stiff and sore about the time we overtake them on the way home. Besides, most of them had zigzag scratches on face and hands by which to remember the wonderfully successful expedition for several days. Then there was Julius Hobson with a soiled handkerchief bound around his left thumb, which he solicitously examined every little while. He had, somehow, managed to catch a frisky little squirrel, which, wishing to take home, he had imprisoned in one of his side pockets that had a flap; but, desirous of fondling the furry little object, he had incautiously inserted his bare hand once too often; for its long teeth, so useful for nut cracking, went almost through his thumb, and gave him such an electric shock that in the confusion the frightened animal managed to escape once more to its native wilds.

Hugh, as he went along toward home, was really taking mental notes concerning the lay of the land, and with an object in view. He was entered for the fifteen-mile Marathon race (an unusually long distance for boys to run, by the way, and hardly advisable under ordinary conditions), and one of the registering places where every contestant had to sign his name to a book kept by a judge so as to prove that he had actually reached that particular and important corner of the rectangular course, had been the quaint little old road tavern just half a mile back of them.

"You're wondering just why I'm so curious about the country up here, I can see, fellows," Hugh was saying about the time we meet them, "and, as we all belong to the same school, and our dearest

wish is to see Scranton High win the prize that is offered by the committee in the Marathon, I don't mind letting you in. I know something about this country up here, and have traced on a surveyor's chart the ordinary course a fellow would be apt to take in passing from the second tally post, that old tavern back of us, along this road to the canal, and from there across the old logging road to Hobson's Pond, where there's going to be the last registering place before the dash for home. Well, I've figured it out that a fellow would save considerable ground if he left this same road half a mile below, and cut across by way of the Juniper Swamp trail, striking in again along about the Halpin Farm"

His remarks created no end of interest, for there were several others among the bunch who had also entered for that long-distance race; and, naturally, they began to figure on how they might take advantage of Hugh's discovery. It was all for the honor and credit of good old Scranton High; so that it really mattered little just which fellow crossed the line first, so long as he "saved the bacon."

"It sounds pretty fine to me, Hugh," said Julius, "only I don't like one thing."

"What's that, Julius?" demanded the Juggins boy.

"By following that Juniper Swamp trail and the old road Hugh mentions, we'd have to pass close to that deserted stone quarry; and say, the farmers all vow it's sure haunted."

CHAPTER II

ON THE OLD QUARRY ROAD

When Julius made this assertion, the other fellows looked at each other in what might be said to be a queer way. In fact, they had all heard certain absurd stories told in connection with the old quarry that had not been worked for so many years that the road leading to it across country had grown up in grass and weeds. Some adventurous boys who went out there once declared it was a most gruesome place, with pools of water covered with green scum lying around, and all sorts of holes looking like the cave Robinson Crusoe found on his island home to be seen where granite building rocks had been excavated from the towering cliffs.

It was K.K. who laughed first, actually laughed scornfully, though Julius took it all so seriously. Thad Stevens followed with a chuckle, after his peculiar fashion.

"You give me a pain, Julius, you certainly do," ventured K.K.

"To think," added Thad, assuming a lofty air of superior knowledge, "of a fellow attending Scranton High believing the ridiculous yarns these uneducated tillers of the soil and their hired help pass around, about there being some sort of a genuine *ghost* haunting the old quarry -- why, it's positively silly of you, Julius, and I don't mind telling you so to your face."

"Oh, hold on there, fellows!" expostulated the other boy; "I didn't say that I really and truly believed any of those awful stories, did I? But so many different persons have told me the same thing that, somehow, I came to think there *might* be some fire where there was so much smoke. Of course, it can't be a ghost, but, nevertheless, there are queer goings-on about that deserted quarry these nights -- three different people, and one of them a steady-going woman in the bargain, assured me they had glimpsed moving lights there, a

sort of flare that did all sorts of zigzag stunts, like it was cutting signals in the air."

"Hugh, do you think that could be what they call wild-fire, or some folks give it the name of will-o'-the-wisp, others say jack-o'-lantern?" demanded Horatio Juggins, who had been listening intently while all this talk was going on.

"I'd hardly like to say," replied Hugh thoughtfully. "As a general thing that odd, moving light is seen in low, damp places. Often it is noticed in graveyards in the country, and is believed to be induced by a condition of the atmosphere, causing something like phosphorescence. You know what a firefly or lightning bug is like, don't you, Horatio? Yes, and a glow-worm also? Well, they say that there are black-looking pools of stagnant water lying around the old quarry; and yes, I think the lights seen might come from just such conditions."

"That sounds all very well, Hugh," continued Julius, "but what about the terrifying cry that sometimes wells up from that same place?"

"A cry, Julius, do you say?" exclaimed Horatio, his eyes growing round now with increasing wonder and thrilling interest, "do you really and truly mean that, or are you only joshing?"

"Well," the narrator went on to say soberly, "two fellows told me they'd heard that same shriek. One was hunting a stray heifer when he found himself near the quarry, and then got a shock that sent him on the run all the way home, regardless of trees he banged into, for it was night-time, with only a quarter-moon up in the western sky. The other had laughed at all such silly stories, and to prove his bravery concluded to venture out there one night when the moon was as round as a cartwheel. He got close to the deserted workings when he too had a chill as he heard the most outlandish cry agoing, three times repeated, and--well, he grinned when he confessed that it took him just about one-fifth the time to get back home that he'd spent in the going."

"Whee! perhaps there may be some sort of wild animal in one of the caves they tell about up there?" ventured Horatio. "I'm not a believer ghosts, and I don't consider myself a coward, either; but all

the same it'd have to be something pretty big to induce me to walk out there to that same lonely quarry after nightfall. Now laugh if you want to, K.K."

"Well," interrupted Hugh, just then, "we're approaching the place right now where that old quarry road I spoke of starts in. I'd like ever so much to take a look at that same quarry, by daylight, mind you. Is there any objection, fellows, to our testing out that road right now? It used to be a pretty fair proposition I've been told, so far as a road goes, and I think we could navigate the same in this car. K.K. how do you stand on that proposition, for one?"

"Count me in on anything that promises an adventure, Hugh," came the prompt reply. "There is plenty of gas in the tank, and if we do get a puncture on the sharp stones we've got an extra tube along, with lots and lots of muscle lying around loose for changing the same. That's my answer, Hugh."

"Thad, how about you?" continued the shrewd Hugh, well knowing that by making an individual appeal he would be more apt to receive a favorable response, because it goes against the average boy's pride to be accounted a weakling, or one addicted to believing old wives' fairy stories of goblins, and all such trash.

"Oh, count me in, Hugh," responded the other, with an indifference that may possibly have been partly assumed; but then Thad Stevens was always ready to back his enterprising chum, no matter what the other suggested.

"Horatio, it's up to you now!" Hugh went on remorselessly, as K.K. stopped the car at a signal from the other, and faint signs of what had once been a road were to be distinguished just on the left.

"Majority rules, you know," said the wise Juggins boy, "and already three have given their assent; so it's no back-out for little Horatio."

"Course I'll agree, Hugh," quickly added Julius, when he saw that the other had turned toward him. "I'm just as curious as the next fellow to see that old haunted quarry --in the daytime, of course. Besides, everybody knows there isn't any such thing as a ghost. All such stories, when they're sifted down, turn out to be humbugs. Sometimes the moving spectre is a white donkey browsing along-

side the road. Then again I've heard of how it was a swing that had a white pillow left in it by the children, and the night wind caused it to advance and retreat in a *terrible* way. Hugh, let's investigate this silly old business while we're on the spot."

And by these wonderfully brave words Julius hoped to dissipate any notion concerning his alleged timidity that may have lodged in the brains of his chums.

So K.K. started up again, and by another minute the old car had passed in among the trees, with the overgrown brush "swiping" against the sides every foot of the way. It was necessary that they proceed slowly and cautiously, because none of them had ever been over that long disused road before, and all sorts of obstacles might confront the bold invaders of the wilds.

Hugh was using his eyes to good advantage, and at his advice the others did the same. It was a good thing the car was old, and that it mattered nothing how those stiff branches scraped against the sides during their forward progress. K.K. knew how to manage, all right, and, although the trail was quite rough in places where the heavy rains had washed the earth away, and left huge stones projecting, he was able to navigate around these obstacles successfully.

Twice they came to low places where water ran, and there was some danger of the heavy car becoming mired. At such times several of the boys would jump out, and after investigating the conditions perhaps throw a mass of stones and pieces of wood in, to make what Hugh called a sort of a "corduroy road" across the swampy section of ground.

It was all very interesting in the bargain, and, for the time being, the boys even forgot the fact that they were exceedingly tired.

Then they seemed to be gradually ascending a grade, where the road turned out to be somewhat better.

"I imagine we're getting close to the quarry now, fellows," Hugh informed them; "if what I was told is true. It will lie over here on the right, and only for the dense growth of trees with their foliage still hanging on, we might see the cliff forming the background of the quarry right now."

Julius and Horatio looked around them with increasing interest, and perhaps a slight flutter of unusual vigor in the region of their hearts. It was about as gloomy a scene as any of them had ever gazed upon. Years had elapsed since work in the stone quarry had been abandoned, and Nature, as usual, had done her best to hide the cruel gashes made in her breast by man; the trees had grown and spread, while bushes and weeds extended their sway so as to almost choke everything around. The distant cawing of the crows sounded more gruesome than ever amidst such surroundings; but there was no sign of bird-life to be seen. It was as though the little feathered creatures found this region too lonely even for their nest building. Not even a red or gray squirrel frisked around a tree, or boldly defied the intruders of his wilderness haunt.

"There, I just had a glimpse of the place through an opening!" suddenly announced Hugh; "I calculate that we'll soon come in plain sight of the whole business, for this road leads straight across the dumps, I was told, and then on again in the direction of Hobson's Pond."

The sun was passing behind the first cloud of the whole day just then. Somehow the added somber conditions had an effect on all the boys; for, with the temporary vanishing of the king of day, the shadows around them appeared to grow bolder, and issue forth from their secret retreats.

"Ugh! this is certainly a fierce place for a fellow to visit, say around midnight," K.K. was forced to admit, for he was the essence of candor at all times.

"Wild horses couldn't drag me up here at such a time as that," said Horatio, as he looked ahead, and shivered, either with the chill of the air, or from some other reason, he hardly knew himself.

"Hugh, would you try it if someone dared you to?" demanded Julius suddenly, taking the bull by the horns, so to speak.

"I don't think I would, on a dare," replied the other calmly, yet deliberately, as he smiled at the speaker; "but if there was any good and sufficient reason for my doing the same, I'd agree to come alone, and spend a whole night in the deserted quarry. However, I'm not particularly *hankering* after the experience, so please don't

try to hatch up any wild scheme looking to that end. If you want to come, Julius, you're welcome to the job."

Julius shuddered, and looked a bit pale at the very thought.

"Oh! I wasn't even dreaming of it, Hugh," he hastened to declare. "I'd much prefer to being asleep in my own comfy bed at home when midnight comes around, and the last thing on earth you'd catch me doing would be out hunting spooks."

It was just as Julius finished saying this that they received a sudden shock. A loud and thrilling sound, not unlike a human shriek, came to their ears, filling each and every boy in the car with a sense of unmitigated horror. It was so exceedingly dreadful that K.K. involuntarily brought the auto to a full stop, and then turned a face filled with mingled curiosity and awe upon his comrades.

CHAPTER III

TALKING OF GHOSTS

"That was no crow cawing, boys, believe me!" ejaculated K.K.

"Crow! Well, I should say not!" added Horatio instantly. "If you asked me right to my face I'd mention a donkey braying. Gee! but it was fierce!"

"But what would a donkey be doing away up here at the old quarry, where there hasn't been a stroke of work done these many years; tell me that?" demanded Julius defiantly.

"I don't believe it was a donkey," said Hugh, shaking his head, as though he, too, found himself exceedingly puzzled; "but I'm not in a position to explain the thing. That was certainly a queer noise, for a fact."

"Extraordinary!" assented Thad Stevens.

"Well, I should call it perfectly awful!" Horatio clipped in.

"Horrible would be a better word to describe it," eagerly followed Julius, who, it must be confessed, was trembling all over; of course, not with fear, or anything like that, but just because of excitement, he assured himself.

"And," continued the sensible Hugh, "if that's the sort of noises these farmer folks have been bearing right along, I don't wonder some of them have been nearly scared out of their wits. It was bad enough in broad daylight, with the sun shining; so what must it have seemed like in the moonlight, or when it was pitch dark?"

"Wow! excuse me from coming up here after dusk," muttered Julius. "I'm no ghost-hunter, let me tell you. I know my weak points, and seeing things in the night-time used to be one of the same. They had a great time breaking me of it, too. Even now I sometimes dream of queer things when I've got the nightmare, after eating too

big a Thanksgiving dinner; and when I wake up suddenly I'm all in a sweat, and a poor old moth fluttering at the window will give me a start, thinking it's the tiger getting in my East Indian bungalow."

"Well, what's the program, Hugh?" asked K. "Shall I start up again, so we can continue our journey along this tough old road; or do you want to get out, and take a hunt around the quarry for the thing that gave those yawps?"

"Get out?" repeated Julius, in a sudden panic; "not for Joseph. Don't count on *me* for any such silly business. I came up here to get walnuts and such; and I'm meaning to stick close to my engagement. Side issues can't tempt me to change my mind. Guess I know when I'm well off."

"It's been several minutes since we heard that sound," Hugh went on to remark; "and, so far, it hasn't been repeated."

"Oh! it came three times, you remember, Hugh," suggested K.K.; "and, like in baseball, I reckon it's three times and out. Whatever it was let out those screeches it's certainly quieted down. How about going on now, Hugh?"

"If I was alone," mused the other, "I really believe I'd be half tempted to take a prow around, and find out if I could what all the row meant. I never like to pass anything up, when my curiosity is excited."

"Oh, come back again some other time, Hugh, when you're not booked for getting home!" sang out Horatio. "If you put it to a vote I don't believe anybody in this bunch would seem wild to back you up right now. Fact is, I can hear our supper-bell calling me ever so loud. Hey! boys, how about that?"

"Let's get a move on!" Julius hastened to reply, so that there could be no mistaking his sentiments, at least.

Julius was followed by K.K., although the latter shrugged his shoulders as he added:

"Perhaps it looks timid in us doing what we mean to, but really this is none of our business, and we might get in some trouble bothering around here. I read about a house that was said to be haunted, which story a daring reporter said he'd investigate. He spent a night