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The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol

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Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: John Henry Goldfrap
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8424-4677-9

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE EAGLE PATROL

By

Lieut. Howard Payson

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CHAPTER I

SCOUTS ON THE TRAIL

The dark growth of scrub oak and pine parted suddenly and the lithe figure of a boy of about seventeen emerged suddenly into the little clearing. The lad who had so abruptly materialized from the close-growing vegetation peculiar to the region about the little town of Hampton, on the south shore of Long Island, wore a well-fitting uniform of brown khaki, canvas leggings of the same hue and a soft hat of the campaign variety, turned up at one side. To the front of his headpiece was fastened a metal badge, resembling the three-pointed arrow head utilized on old maps to indicate the north. On a metal scroll beneath it were embossed the words: "Be Prepared."

The manner of the badge's attachment would have indicated at once, to any one familiar with the organization, that the lad wearing it was the patrol leader of the local band of Boy Scouts.

Gazing keenly about him on all sides of the little clearing in the midst of which he stood, the boy's eyes lighted with a gleam of satisfaction on a largish rock. He lifted this up, adjusted it to his satisfaction and then picked up a smaller stone. This he placed on the top of the first and then listened intently. After a moment of this he then placed beneath the large underlying rock and at its left side a small stone.

Suddenly he started and gazed back. From the distance, borne faintly to his ears, came far off boyish shouts and cries.

They rose like the baying of a pack in full cry. Now high, now low on the hush of the midsummer afternoon.

"They picked the trail all right," he remarked to himself, with a smile, "maybe I'd better leave another sign."

Stooping he snapped off a small low-growing branch and broke it near the end so that its top hung limply down.

"Two signs now that this is the trail," he resumed as he stuck it in the ground beside the stone sign. "Now I'd better be off, for they are picking my tracks up, fast."

He darted off into the undergrowth on the opposite side of the clearing, vanishing as suddenly and noiselessly as he had appeared.

A few seconds later the deserted clearing was invaded by a scouting party of ten lads ranging in years from twelve to sixteen. They were all attired in similar uniforms to the leader, whom they were tracing, with but one exception they wore their "Be Prepared" badges on the left arm above the elbow. Some of them were only entitled to affix the motto part of the badge the scroll inscribed with the motto. These latter were the second-class scouts of the Eagle Patrol. The exception to the badge-bearers was a tall, well-knit lad with a sunny face and wavy, brown hair. His badge was worn on the left arm, as were the others, but it had a strip of white braid sewn beneath it. This indicated that the bearer was the corporal of the patrol.

As the group of flushed, panting lads emerged into the sandy space the corporal looked sharply about him. Almost at once his eye encountered the "spoor" left by the preceding lad.

"Here's the trail, boys," he shouted, "and to judge by the fresh look of the break in this branch it can't have been placed here very long. The small stone by the large one means to the left. We'll run Rob Blake down before long for all his skill if we have good luck."

"Say, Corporal Merritt," exclaimed a perspiring lad, whose "too, too solid flesh" seemed to be melting and running off his face in the form of streaming moisture, "don't we get a rest?"

A general laugh greeted poor Bob or Tubby Hopkins' remark.

"I always told you, Tubby, you were too fat to make a good scout," laughed Corporal Merritt Crawford, "this is the sort of thing that will make you want to take some of that tubbiness off you."

"Say, Tubby, you look like a roll of butter at an August picnic," laughed Simon Jeffords, one of the second-class scouts.

"All right, Sim," testily rejoined the aggrieved fat one, "I notice at that, though, that I am a regular scout while you are only a rookie."

"Come on, cut out the conversation," exclaimed Corporal Crawford hastily, "while we are fussing about here, Rob Blake must be halfway home."

With a groan of comical despair from poor Tubby, the Boy Scouts darted forward once more. On and on they pushed across country, skillfully tracking their leader by the various signs they had been taught to know and of which the present scouting expedition was a test.

Their young leader evidently intended them to use their eyes to the utmost for, beside the stone signs, he used blaze-marks, cut on the trees with his hunting knife. For instance, at one place they would find a square bit of bark removed, with a long slice to the left of it. This indicated that their quarry had doubled to the left. The slice to the right of the square blaze indicated the reverse.

Suddenly Corporal Crawford held up his hand as a signal for silence. The scouts came to an abrupt stop.

From what seemed to be only a short distance in front of them they could hear a voice upraised apparently in anger. Replying to it were the tones of their leader.

"Seems to be trouble ahead of some kind," exclaimed Crawford. "Come on, boys."

They all advanced close on his heels – guided by the sound of the angry voice, which did not diminish in tone but apparently waxed more and more furious as they drew nearer. Presently the woodland thinned and the ground became dotted with stumps of felled timber and in a few paces more they emerged on a small peach orchard at the edge of which stood Rob Blake and a larger and older boy. As Crawford and his followers came upon the scene the elder lad, who seemed beside himself with rage, picked up a large rock and was about to hurl it with all his might at Rob when the young corporal dashed forward and held his hand up to stay him.

"Here, what's all this trouble?" he demanded.

"You just keep out of it, Merritt Crawford," said the elder lad, a hulking, thick-set youth with a mean look on his heavy features. "I'm just reading this kid here a lesson. This orchard is my father's

and mine and you'll keep out of it in future or suffer the consequences, understand?"

"Why, we aren't doing any harm," protested Rob Blake heatedly.

"I don't care what you are doing or not doing," retorted the other, "this is my father's orchard and you'll keep off it. You and the rest of you tin soldiers. I don't want you stealing our peaches."

"I guess you are sore, Jack Curtiss, because you couldn't get a boy scout patrol of your own! I guess that's what the trouble is," remarked Tubby Hopkins softly, but with a meaning look at the big lad.

"You impudent little whipper-snapper," roared Jack Curtiss, "if you weren't such a shrimp I'd lick you for that remark, but you're all beneath my notice. All I want to say to you is keep away from my orchard or I'll give you a trimming."

"Suppose you start now," said Rob Blake quietly, "if you are so anxious to show what a scrapper you are."

"Bah, I don't want anything to do with you, I tell you," rejoined Curtiss, turning away, with a rather troubled expression, however, for while he was a bully the big lad had no particular liking for a fight unless he was pretty sure that all the advantage lay on his side.

"It was too bad you didn't get that patrol of yours, Jack," called the irrepressible Tubby after him as the big youth strode off across the orchard toward the old-fashioned farmhouse in which he lived with his father, a well-to-do farmer. "Never mind; better luck next time," he went on, "or maybe we'll let you into ours some time."

"You just wait," roared the retreating bully, shaking his fist at the lads, "I'll make trouble for you yet."

"Well," remarked Rob Blake, as Jack Curtiss strode off, "I guess the run is over for to-day. Too bad we should have come out on his land. Of course he feels sore at us; and I shouldn't wonder but he will really try to do us some mischief if he gets a chance."

As it was growing late and there did not seem much chance of restarting the "Follow the Trail" practice, that day at least, the boys strolled back through the woodland and soon emerged on a country road about three miles from Hampton Inlet, where they lived.

While they are covering the distance perhaps the reader may care to know something about the cause of the enmity which Jack Curtiss entertained toward the lads of the Eagle Patrol. It had its beginning several months before when the boys of Hampton Inlet began to discuss forming a patrol of boy scouts. They all attended the Hampton Academy, and naturally the news that Rob Blake was going to try to organize a patrol soon spread through the school.

Jack Curtiss, as soon as he heard what Rob—whom he considered more or less a rival of his—intended doing he also forwarded an application to the headquarters of the organization in New York. As Rob Blake's had been received first, however, and on investigation he was shown to be a likely lad for the leader, he was appointed and at once began the enrollment of his scouts.

The bully was furious when he realized that he would be unable to secure an authorized patrol, and he and his cronies, two lads about his own age named Bill Bender and Sam Redding, had been busy ever since devising schemes to "get even" as they called it. None of these, however, had been effective and the encounter of that day was the first chance Jack had had to work off any of his rancor on Rob Blake's patrol.

Young Blake was the only son of Mr. Albert Blake, the president of the local bank. His corporal, Merritt Crawford, was the eldest of the numerous family of Jared Crawford, the blacksmith and wheelwright of the little town, and Tubby Hopkins was the offspring of Mrs. Hopkins—a widow in comfortable circumstances. The other lads of the Patrol whom we shall meet as the story of their doings and adventures progresses were all natives of the town, which was situated on the south shore of Long Island—as has been said—and on an inlet which led out to the Atlantic itself.

The scouts trudged back into Hampton just at twilight and made their way at once to their armory—as they called it—which was situated in a large room above the bank of which Rob's father was president. At one side of it was a row of lockers and each lad—after changing his uniform for street clothes—placed his "regimentals" in these receptacles.

This done the lads broke up and started for their various homes. Rob and his young corporal left the armory together, after locking the door and descending the stairs which led onto a side street.

"I wonder if that fellow Curtiss means to carry out his threat of getting even?" said Crawford as they made their way down the street arm in arm, for their homes were not far apart and both on Main Street.

"He's mean enough to attempt anything," rejoined Rob, "but I don't think he's got nerve enough to carry out any of his schemes. Hullo!" he broke off suddenly, "there he is now across the street by the post office, talking to Bill Bender and Sam Redding. I'll bet they are hatching up some sort of mischief. Just look at them looking at us. I'll bet a doughnut they were talking about us."

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed his companion. "By the way, I've got to go and see if there is any mail. Come on over."

The two lads crossed the street and as they entered the post office, although neither of them had much use for either of the bullies' two chums, they nodded to them pleasantly.

"You kids think you're pretty fine with your Eagle Patrol or whatever you call it, don't you," sneered Bill Bender, as they walked by. "I'll bet the smell of a little real powder would make your whole regiment run to cover."

"Don't pay any attention to him," whispered the young corporal to Rob, who doubled up his fists and flushed angrily at the sneering tone Jack Curtiss' friend had adopted.

Rob restrained his anger with an effort, and by the time they emerged from the post office the trio of worthies—who, as Rob had rightly guessed, had been discussing them—had moved on up the street.

"I had trouble with those kids myself this afternoon," remarked Jack Curtiss with a scowl, as they wended their way toward a shed in the rear of Bill Bender's home, which had been fitted tip as a sort of clubroom.

"What did they do to you?" incautiously inquired Sam Redding, a youth as big as the other two, but not so powerful. In fact he was used more or less as a tool by them.

"Do to me," roared the bully, "what did I do to them, you mean."

"Well what did you do to them then?" asked Bill Bender, as they entered the clubroom before referred to and he produced some cigarettes, which all three had been strictly forbidden to smoke.

"Chased them off my land," rejoined the other, lighting a paper roll and blowing out a cloud of smoke, "you should have seen them run. If they want to play their fool games they've got to do it on the property of folks who'll let them. They can't come on my land."

"You mean your father's, don't you?" put in the unlucky Sam Redding.

"Sam, you've got a head like a billiard ball," retorted the bully, turning on the other, "it'll be mine some day, won't it? Therefore it's as good as mine now."

Although he didn't quite see the logic of the foregoing, Sam Redding gave a sage nod and agreed that his leader was right.

"Yes, those kids need a good lesson from somebody," chimed in Bill Bender.

"I think we had better be the 'somebodies' to give it to them," rejoined Jack Curtiss. "They are getting insufferable. They actually twitted me this afternoon with being sore at them because I didn't get my patrol—as if I really wanted one. That Blake kid is the worst of the bunch. Just because his father has a little money he gives himself all kinds of airs. My father is as rich as his, even if he isn't a banker."

"I've been thinking of a good trick we can put up on them, but it will take some nerve to carry it out," announced Bill Bender, after some more discussion of the lads of the Eagle Patrol.

"Out with it, then," urged the bully, "what is it?"

In a lowered tone Bill Bender sketched out his scheme in detail, while Jack and Sam nodded their approval. At length he ceased

talking and the other two broke out into a delighted laugh, in which malice as much as merriment prevailed.

"It's the very thing," exclaimed Jack. "Bill, you're a genius. We'll do it as soon as possible. If that doesn't take some starch out of those tin soldiers nothing will."

Half an hour later the three cronies parted for the night. Sam went to his home near the waterfront, for his father was a boat builder, and Jack started to walk the three miles to his father's farm in the moonlight. His way took him by the bank. As he passed it he gazed up at the windows of the armory on which was lettered in gilt: "Eagle Patrol of the Boy Scouts of America."

"That's a slick idea of Bill's," said the bully to himself, "I can hardly wait till we get a chance to carry it out."

CHAPTER II

A CRUISE TO THE ISLAND

"Whatever are you doing, Rob?"

It was the morning after the consultation of Jack Curtiss and his cronies, and Corporal Crawford was looking over the fence into his leader's yard.

Rob was bending over a curious-looking apparatus, consisting of a bent stick held in a bow-shape by a taut leather thong. The appliance was twisted about an upright piece of wood sharpened at one end—which was rotated as the lad ran the bow back and forth across it.

Presently smoke began to rise from the flat piece of timber into which the point of the upright stick had been boring and depositing sawdust, and Rob, by industriously blowing at the accumulation, presently caused it to burst into flame.

"There I've done it," he exclaimed triumphantly, arising with a flushed face from his labors.

"Done what?" inquired young Crawford interestedly.

"Made fire in the Indian way," replied Rob triumphantly.

"I thought they made it by rubbing two sticks together."

"Only book Indians do that," replied Rob, "I'll tell you it took me a time to get the hang of it, but I've got it now."

"It's quite a stunt, all right," commented the corporal admiringly.

"You bet, and it's useful, too," replied Rob. "I'll put the bow and drill in my pocket, and then any time we get stuck for matches we'll have no trouble in making a signal smoke or lighting cooking fires."

"Say, I've got some news for you," went on young Crawford, "did you know that Sam Redding has entered that freak motor boat he's been building in the yacht club regatta? He's out for the club trophy."

"No, is he, though?" exclaimed Rob, keenly interested. "Then the crew and skipper of the Flying Fish will have to look alive. I know that Sam's father helped him out with that boat and put a lot of new wrinkles in it. I didn't think, though, he'd have it ready in time for the races."

The boys referred to the coming motor-boat races which were to take place shortly on the inlet at Hampton. Like most of the other lads in the seashore town, Merritt and Rob had a lot of experience on the water and some time before had built a speedy motor boat from knock-down frames. The Flying Fish, as they called her, was entered for the main event referred to, the prize for which was a silver cup, donated by the merchants of the town. There were several other entries in the race, but Rob and his crew, consisting of Merritt and Tubby Hopkins, confidently expected the Flying Fish to easily lead them all.

"I wonder if the Sam Redding can show her stern to the Flying Fish?" mused Rob. "I'd like to lake a good look at her."

"Let's go down to Redding's boat yard," suggested Merritt; "she's lying there on the ways. I don't suppose any one would object to our sizing her up."

Rob hailed the suggestion as a good one.

"We can call in for Tubby on the way," he said, as he darted into the house after his hat.

The boys dropped in at Tubby's house on their way to the waterfront, and received from the stout youth some additional details regarding Sam's boat.

"She's a hydroplane," volunteered Tubby, "and Tom Jennings, down at the yard, says she's as fast as a race horse."

"A hydroplane?—that's one of those craft that cut along the top of the water like a skimming dish, isn't it?" asked Merritt.

"That's the idea," responded Rob. "They're supposed to be as speedy as anything afloat in smooth water."

Thus conversing they reached the boat-building yard of Sam Redding's father and were greeted by Tom Jennings, a big good-

natured ship carpenter. "Hullo, Tom! Can we see that new boat of Sam's?" inquired Rob.

"Sure, I guess there's no objection," grinned Tom, "come right this way. There she is, over there by that big winch."

Report had not erred apparently as to the novel qualities of Sam Redding's speed craft. She was about twenty-five feet long, narrow and painted black. She was perfectly flat-bottomed, her underside being deeply notched at frequent intervals. On the edge of those notches she was supposed to glide over the water when driven at top speed.

"She certainly looks like a winner," commented Rob, as he gazed at her clean, slender lines and sharp bow.

"She's got wonderful speed," Tom Jennings confided. "We tried her out the other night when no one was around. But I don't think that in rough water she'll be much good."

"No, I'd prefer the Flying Fish for the waters hereabouts," agreed Rob, "it's liable to come on rough in a hurry and then a chap who was out in a dry-goods box, like that thing, would be in trouble."

"What are you calling a dry-goods box?" demanded an indignant voice behind them, and turning, the lads saw Sam Redding with a menacing look on his face. A little way behind him stood Bill Bender and Jack Curtiss.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Sam," said Rob. "I really admire your hydroplane very much, and I think it will give us a tussle for the trophy, all right; but I don't think she'd be much good in any kind of a sea-way."

"That's my business, you interfering little runt," snapped Sam, who, with Bill Bender and Jack Curtiss to back him, felt very brave; though ordinarily he would have avoided trouble with the young scouts. "What are you doing spying around the yard here, anyhow?" he went on insolently.

"We are not spying," indignantly burst out Merritt. "We asked Tom Jennings if we couldn't look at your hydroplane, as we were naturally interested in her, and he gave us permission."

"Well, he had no business to," growled Sam; "he ought to be attending to his work instead of showing a lot of nosy young cubs my new boat."

"They are capable of stealing your ideas," chimed in Jack Curtiss, "and putting them on their own boat."

"That's ridiculous," laughed Rob, "as I said I wouldn't want to have anything to do with such a contrivance except on a lake or a river."

"Well, you keep your advice and your ideas to yourself, and get out of this yard!" roared Sam, waxing bolder and bolder, and mistaking Rob's conciliatory manner for cowardice. "I've a good mind to punch your head."

"Better come on and try it," retorted Rob, preparing for the immediate onslaught which it seemed reasonable from Sam's manner to expect.

But it didn't come.

Muttering something about "young cubs," and "keeping the boat-yard gate locked," Sam turned to his chums and invited them to come and try out his new motor in the shop.

As the three chums had no desire to "mix it up with Sam on his own place," as Tubby put it, they left the yard promptly, and walked on down the water-front to the wharf at which lay the Flying Fish, the fastest craft in the Hampton Motor Boat Club. Rob's boat was, to tell the truth, rather broad of beam for a racer and drew quite a little water. She had a powerful motor and clean lines, however, and while not primarily designed solely for "mug-hunting," had beaten everything she had raced with during the few months since the boys had completed her. The money for her motor had been given to Rob by his father, who was quite indulgent to Rob in money matters, having noticed that the lad always expended the sums given him wisely.

"Let's take a spin," suddenly suggested Tubby.

"Nothing to prevent us," answered Rob; "we've got plenty of time before dinner. Come on, boys."