

V

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

ON the way to God's Country at last! Already Chad had schooled himself for the parting with Jack, and but for this he must—little man that he was—have burst into tears. As it was, the lump in his throat stayed there a long while, but it passed in the excitement of that mad race down the river. The old Squire had never known such a tide.

"Boys," he said, gleefully, "we're goin' to make a record on this trip—you jus' see if we don't. That is, if we ever git thar alive."

All the time the old man stood in the middle of the raft yelling orders. Ahead was the Dillon raft, and the twin brothers—the giants, one mild, the other sour-faced—were gesticulating angrily at each other from bow and stern. As usual, they were quarrelling. On the Turner raft, Dolph was at the bow, the school-master at the stern, while Rube—who was cook—and Chad, in spite of a stinging pain in one foot, built an oven of stones, where coffee could be boiled and bacon broiled,

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and started a fire, for the air was chill on the river, especially when they were running between the hills and no sun could strike them.

When the fire blazed up, Chad sat by it watching Tall Tom and the school-master at the stern oar and Rube at the bow. When the turn was sharp, how they lashed the huge white blades through the yellow water—with the handle across their broad chests, catching with their toes in the little notches that had been chipped along the logs and tossing the oars down and up with a mighty swing that made the blades quiver and bend like the tops of pliant saplings! Then, on a run, they would rush back to start the stroke again, while the old Squire yelled:

"Hit her up thar now—easy—easy! *Now!* Hit her up! Hit her up—*Now!*"

Now they passed between upright, wooded, gray mountain-sides, threaded with faint lines of the coming green; now between gray walls of rock streaked white with water-falls, and now past narrow little valleys which were just beginning to sprout with corn. At the mouth of the creeks they saw other rafts making ready and, now and then, a raft would shoot out in the river from some creek ahead or behind them. In an hour, they struck a smooth run of several hundred yards where the men at the oars could sit still and rest, while the raft shot lightly forward in the middle of the

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stream; and down the river they could see the big Dillons making the next sharp turn and, even that far away, they could hear Jerry yelling and swearing at his patient brother.

"Some o' these days," said the old Squire, "that fool Jake's a-goin' to pick up somethin' an' knock that mean Jerry's head off. I wonder he hain't done it afore. Hit's funny how brothers can hate when they do git to hatin'."

That night, they tied up at Jackson—to be famous long after the war as the seat of a bitter mountain-feud. At noon, the next day, they struck "the Nahrers" (Narrows), where the river ran like a torrent between high steep walls of rock, and where the men stood to the oars watchfully and the old Squire stood upright, watching every movement of the raft; for "bowing" there would have meant destruction to the raft and the death of them all. That night they were in Beattyville, whence they floated next day, along lower hills and, now and then, past a broad valley. Once Chad looked at the school-master—he wondered if they were approaching the Bluegrass—but Caleb Hazel smiled and shook his head. And had Chad waited another half hour, he would not have asked the question, even with his eyes, for they swept between high cliffs again—higher than he had yet seen.

That night they ran from dark to dawn, for

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the river was broader and a brilliant moon was high; and, all night, Chad could hear the swish of the oars, as they floated in mysterious silence past the trees and the hills and the moonlit cliffs, and he lay on his back, looking up at the moon and the stars, and thinking about the land to which he was going and of Jack back in the land he had left; and of little Melissa. She had behaved very strangely during the last few days before the boy had left. She had not been sharp with him, even in play. She had been very quiet—indeed, she scarcely spoke a word to him, but she did little things for him that she had never done before, and she was unusually kind to Jack. Once, Chad found her crying behind the barn, and then she was very sharp with him, and told him to go away and cried more than ever. Her little face looked very white, as she stood on the bank, and, somehow, Chad saw it all that night in the river and among the trees and up among the stars, but he little knew what it all meant to him or to her. He thought of the Turners back at home, and he could see them sitting around the big fire—Joel with his pipe, the old mother spinning flax, Jack asleep on the hearth, and Melissa's big solemn eyes shining from the dark corner where she lay wide-awake in bed and, when he went to sleep, her eyes followed him in his dreams.

When he awoke, the day was just glimmering

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over the hills, and the chill air made him shiver, as he built up the fire and began to get breakfast ready. At noon, that day, though the cliffs were still high, the raft swung out into a broader current, where the water ran smoothly and, once, the hills parted and, looking past a log-cabin on the bank of the river, Chad saw a stone house—relic of pioneer days—and, farther out, through a gap in the hills, a huge house with great pillars around it and, on the hill-side, many sheep and fat cattle and a great barn. There dwelt one of the lords of the Bluegrass land, and again Chad looked to the school-master and, this time, the school-master smiled and nodded as though to say:

“We’re getting close now, Chad.” So Chad rose to his feet thrilled, and watched the scene until the hills shut it off again. One more night and one more dawn, and, before the sun rose, the hills had grown smaller and smaller and the glimpses between them more frequent and, at last, far down the river, Chad saw a column of smoke and all the men on the raft took off their hats and shouted. The end of the trip was near, for that black column meant the capital!

Chad trembled on his feet and his heart rose into his throat, while Caleb Hazel seemed hardly less moved. His hat was off and he stood motionless, with his face uplifted, and his grave eyes fastened on that dark column as though it rose from

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the pillar of fire that was leading him to some promised land.

As they rounded the next curve, some monster swept out of the low hills on the right, with a shriek that startled the boy almost into terror and, with a mighty puffing and rumbling, shot out of sight again. The school-master shouted to Chad, and the Turner brothers grinned at him delightfully:

“Steam-cars!” they cried, and Chad nodded back gravely, trying to hold in his wonder.

Sweeping around the next curve, another monster hove in sight with the same puffing and a long “h-o-o-ot!” A monster on the river and moving up stream steadily, with no oar and no man in sight, and the Turners and the school-master shouted again. Chad’s eyes grew big with wonder and he ran forward to see the rickety little steamboat approach and, with wide eyes, devoured it, as it wheezed and labored up-stream past them—watched the thundering stern-wheel threshing the water into a wake of foam far behind it and flashing its blades, water-dripping in the sun—watched it till it puffed and wheezed and labored on out of sight. Great Heavens! to think that he—Chad—was seeing all that!

About the next bend, more but thinner columns of smoke were visible. Soon the very hills over the capital could be seen, with little green wheat-fields

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dotting them and, as the raft drew a little closer, Chad could see houses on the hills—more strange houses of wood and stone, and porches, and queer towers on them from which glistened shining points.

"What's them?" he asked.

"Lightnin'-rods," said Tom, and Chad understood, for the school-master had told him about them back in the mountains. Was there anything that Caleb Hazel had not told him? The haze over the town was now visible, and soon they swept past tall chimneys puffing out smoke, great warehouses covered on the outside with weather-brown tin, and, straight ahead—Heavens, what a bridge!—arching clear over the river and covered like a house, from which people were looking down on them as they swept under. There were the houses, in two rows on the streets, jammed up against each other and without any yards. And people! Where had so many people come from? Close to the river and beyond the bridge was another great mansion, with tall pillars; about it was a green yard, as smooth as a floor, and negroes and children were standing on the outskirting stone wall and looking down at them as they floated by. And another great house still, and a big garden with little paths running through it and more patches of that strange green grass. Was that bluegrass? It was, but it didn't look blue and it didn't look like any

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other grass Chad had ever seen. Below this bridge was another bridge, but not so high, and, while Chad looked, another black monster on wheels went crashing over it.

Tom and the school-master were working the raft slowly to the shore now, and, a little farther down, Chad could see more rafts tied up—rafts, rafts, nothing but rafts on the river, everywhere! Up the bank a mighty buzzing was going on, amid a cloud of dust, and little cars with logs on them were shooting about amid the gleamings of many saws, and, now and then, a log would leap from the river and start up toward that dust-cloud with two glistening iron teeth sunk in one end and a long iron chain stretching up along a groove built of boards—and Heaven only knew what was pulling it up. On the bank was a stout, jolly-looking man, whose red, kind face looked familiar to Chad, as he ran down shouting a welcome to the Squire. Then the raft slipped along another raft, Tom sprang aboard it with the grape-vine cable, and the school-master leaped aboard with another cable from the stern.

"Why, boy," cried the stout man. "Where's yo' dog?" Then Chad recognized him, for he was none other than the cattle-dealer who had given him Jack.

"I left him at home."

"Is he all right?"

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"Yes—I reckon."

"Then I'd like to have him back again."

Chad smiled and shook his head.

"Not much."

"Well, he's the best sheep-dog on earth."

The raft slowed up, creaking—slower—straining and creaking, and stopped. The trip was over, and the Squire had made his "record," for the red-faced man whistled incredulously when the old man told him what day he had left Kingdom Come.

An hour later the big Dillon twins hove in sight, just as the Turner party was climbing the sawdust hill into the town, where Dolph and Rube were for taking the middle of the street like other mountaineers, who were marching thus ahead of them, single file, but Tom and the school-master laughed at them and drew them over to the sidewalk. Bricks and stones laid down for people to walk on—how wonderful! And all the houses were of brick or were weather-boarded—all built together, wall against wall. And the stores with the big glass windows all filled with wonderful things! Then a pair of swinging green shutters through which, while Chad and the school-master waited outside, Tom insisted on taking Dolph and Rube and giving them their first drink of Bluegrass whiskey—red liquor, as the hill-men call it. A little farther on, they all stopped still on a corner of the street, while the school-master pointed out to Chad

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and Dolph and Rube the Capitol—a mighty structure of massive stone, with majestic stone columns, where people went to the Legislature. How they looked with wondering eyes at the great flag floating lazily over it, and at the wonderful fountain tossing water in the air, and with the water three white balls which leaped and danced in the jet of shining spray and never flew away from it. How did they stay there? The school-master laughed—Chad had asked him a question at last that he couldn't answer. And the tall spiked iron fence that ran all the way around the yard, which was full of trees—how wonderful that was, too! As they stood looking, law-makers and visitors poured out through the doors—a brave array—some of them in tight trousers, high hats, and blue coats with brass buttons, and, as they passed, Caleb Hazel reverently whispered the names of those he knew—distinguished lawyers, statesmen, and Mexican veterans: witty Tom Marshall; Roger Hanson, bulky, brilliant; stately Preston, eagle-eyed Buckner, and Breckenridge, the magnificent, forensic in bearing. Chad was thrilled.

A little farther on, they turned to the left, and the school-master pointed out the Governor's mansion, and there, close by, was a high gray wall—a wall as high as a house, with a wooden box taller than a man on each corner, and, inside, another big gray building in which, visible above the walls,

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were grated windows—the penitentiary! Every mountaineer has heard that word, and another—the “Legislatur’.”

Chad shivered as he looked, for he could recall that sometimes down in the mountains a man would disappear for years and turn up again at home, whitened by confinement; and, during his absence, when anyone asked about him, the answer was—“penitentiary.” He wondered what those boxes on the walls were for, and he was about to ask, when a guard stepped from one of them with a musket and started to patrol the wall, and he had no need to ask. Tom wanted to go up on the hill and look at the Armory and the graveyard, but the school-master said they did not have time, and, on the moment, the air was startled with whistles far and near—six o’clock! At once Caleb Hazel led the way to supper in the boarding-house, where a kind-faced old lady spoke to Chad in a motherly way, and where the boy saw his first hot biscuit and was almost afraid to eat anything at the table for fear he might do something wrong. For the first time in his life, too, he slept on a mattress without any feather-bed, and Chad lay wondering, but unsatisfied still. Not yet had he been out of sight of the hills, but the master had told him that they would see the Bluegrass next day, when they were to start back to the mountains by train as far as Lexington. And Chad went to sleep, dreaming his old dream still.

VI

LOST AT THE CAPITAL

IT had been arranged by the school-master that they should all meet at the railway station to go home, next day at noon, and, as the Turner boys had to help the Squire with the logs at the river, and the school-master had to attend to some business of his own, Chad roamed all morning around the town. So engrossed was he with the people and the sights and sounds of the little village that he came to himself with a start and trotted back to the boarding-house for fear that he might not be able to find the station alone. The old lady was standing in the sunshine at the gate.

Chad panted—“Where’s——?”

“They’re gone.”

“Gone!” echoed Chad, with a sinking heart.

“Yes, they’ve been gone——” But Chad did not wait to listen; he whirled into the hall-way, caught up his rifle, and, forgetting his injured foot, fled at full speed down the street. He turned the corner, but could not see the station, and he ran on about another corner and still another, and, just when he was about to burst into tears, he saw the