

# The Frontier Explorers

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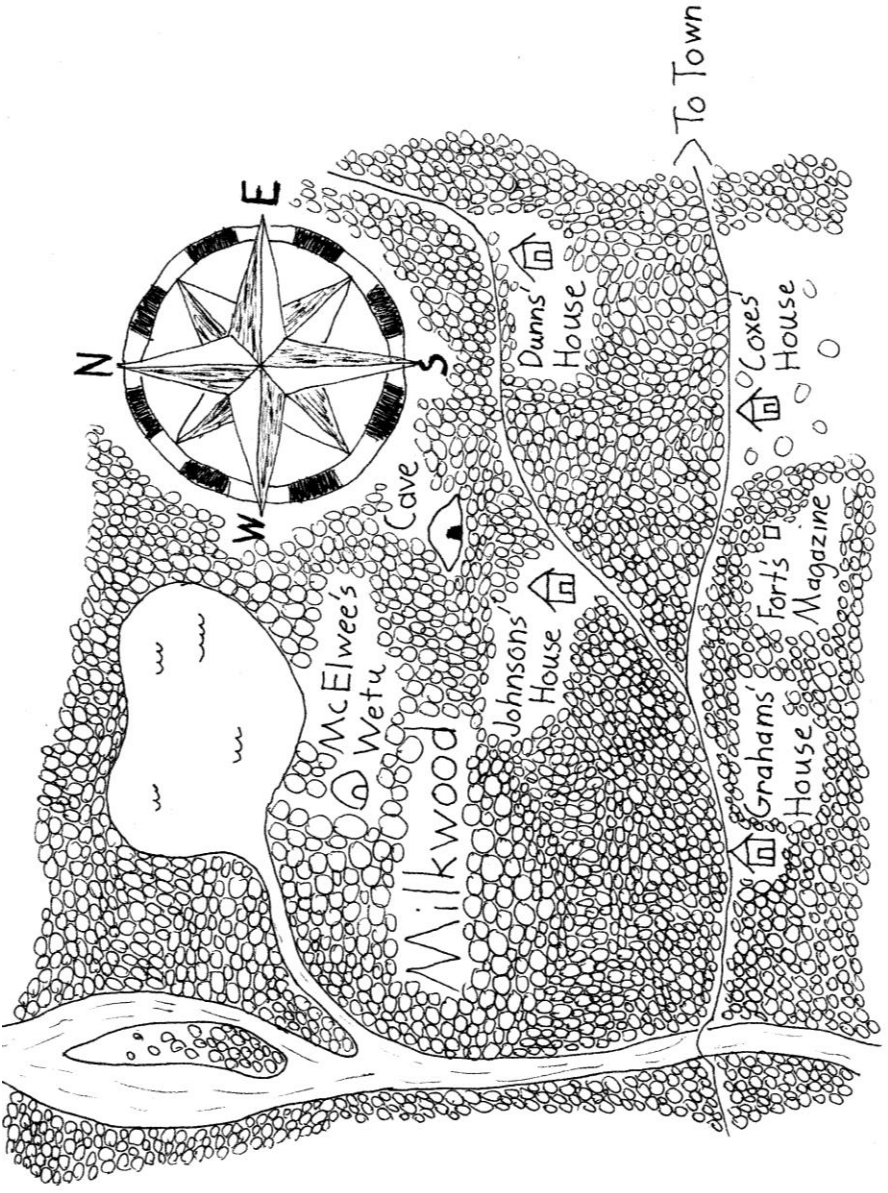




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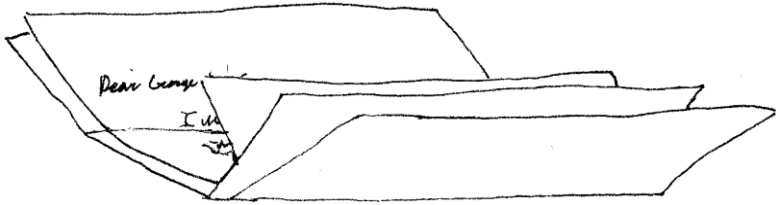
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## 1 TO THE FRONTIER

A piercing cry startled Tom Graham from his nap in the tree. Was it a wolf? Or maybe an Indian? Tom couldn't know for sure. But here on the frontier, a noise like that could only mean one thing—danger.

Slowly Tom turned his head to study his surroundings. If danger lurked nearby, he didn't want it aware of his presence. But he didn't see anything alarming. In fact, the only things moving were the birds preening themselves in the trees around him. Birds startle easily and if these weren't startled, then danger must not be that close.

Satisfied that his surroundings posed no immediate threat, Tom lowered himself to the ground. His afternoon nap had lasted much longer than he had intended, and the sun had begun to set. Soon night would arrive, which meant wild animals might come out. So Tom knew he must hurry back to his camp for safety.

Carefully he looked around to make sure that the dirt path leading to his camp was clear of peril. He knew that behind every shadow lay the possibility of something waiting to pounce on him. He tightened his suspenders and took out his pocket knife. At least if something did attack him, he would be ready.

As silently as he could, Tom crept forward, darting from tree to tree to stay as much as possible in the shadows. But after just a few paces, he noticed a set of footprints crossing his path—paw prints of a wolf.

All of a sudden, Tom heard a growl to his right. He whirled around and found himself face to face with a snarling wolf. With teeth bared,

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the wolf looked ready to fight. But Tom wasn't scared, because he knew what to do.

If Tom had been cornered, he would have fought the wolf with his knife. But he had a way of escape, so conflict was unnecessary. Instead, he calmly stepped away from the wolf so it would know that it wasn't trapped and would hopefully leave Tom alone. Still, if the wolf did attack him, he was prepared to defend himself.

The wolf continued to growl menacingly at Tom, but didn't advance. Finally, after Tom had separated himself from the wolf by a good distance, the wolf ran off.

"Whew, that was close," Tom said to himself. "That's why explorers shouldn't stay out in the wilderness at night."

Tom looked up and saw smoke rising in the distance. He smiled, knowing that the smoke plumes came from his campfire. He would soon arrive back home.

Just then a voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Tom, it's time for supper!" his mother called.

"Coming, Mother," Tom called back as he started walking toward his camp, which was actually his house. He sighed. He wished he could really explore the wilderness, instead of just pretending with the few scattered trees and the little mangy dogs around his home in the city. Pretending was hard, especially now that his sister, Mary, and brother, Ben, were not there to play with him. He blinked back tears as he thought about all the fun they had had together and how those days were forever gone.

Tom went inside and walked straight to the dining room where his mother busily set the table. His father sat at the table, reading the newspaper.

"Playing by yourself again, Tom?" Mr. Graham asked, folding and setting his paper down on the table next to him.

Tom nodded as he sat down next to his father. "All the rest of the boys only want to run around and wrestle. They just don't care about the wilderness like I do. Even if their families moved there, I don't think they'd want to go."

Tom sighed and Mr. Graham smiled. "Speaking of the frontier," he said, pulling an envelope out of his pocket and looking at his wife, "we just received this letter from Barbara and Jacob. It came all the way from the Wisconsin frontier!"

Tom got excited. "Uncle Jacob and Aunt Barbara live on the

frontier?"

His father nodded. "It appears so."

"They must have just moved," Mrs. Graham said. "Last time I heard, they were in St. Louis."

"They're always moving, with Jacob being a minister," Mr. Graham said as he opened the envelope and pulled out the letter. "And I'm not surprised that they went to Wisconsin. It's a good place, from what I've heard, and a lot of people are going out there."

"Well, if there are a lot of people out there, then I'm sure Jacob would go," Mrs. Graham said. "He'd go anywhere to tell people about God. But go ahead and read the letter—it's been such a long time since I've heard anything from Jacob or Barbara."

So Mr. Graham began reading the letter. "Dear George and Grace, and my nephew Tom. I must first of all express my sympathy for your loss. I heard from Barbara's mother of the tragedy that has hit your household and the households of many others in your city. We will dearly miss Mary and Ben."

Mr. Graham choked up at these words, and Mrs. Graham put a hand on his shoulder. The thought of losing Tom's siblings was still very painful for the Grahams.

After a moment, Mr. Graham composed himself enough to continue reading. "I have heard that the yellow fever is sweeping through many cities down south, where you are, and all along the Mississippi. Indeed, it came pretty close to us while we were still in St. Louis. Please do as we have done and come out here to the frontier where we are safe from that terrible plague. Of course, there are other dangers on the frontier, but unlike the fever, we know how to face them. I thank God that you still have a family—take advantage of that gift and come here before it's too late."

Something rose within Tom as he heard those words. If only they could go to the frontier, all his dreams would come true! He wouldn't have to pretend he lived in the wilderness anymore. Instead, he would be able to explore to his heart's content.

His father went on reading. "I have purchased some good property in Wisconsin near the banks of Indian Creek and built a cabin for us there. The nearest town to us is about ten miles away. Since that's also where the closest school is, Rachel has decided to start one in our home for the neighbor children. Also in our home, I have begun services on Sunday, since there isn't a church in the area yet. The rest

of the week I spend traveling around ministering to the people in the area.”

“To think that they don’t have a school or a church,” Mrs. Graham said.

“That’s often the way it is on the frontier,” said Mr. Graham. “It takes a long time to start civilization from scratch.”

Mrs. Graham sighed. “I’m just glad that we don’t have to go without them here.”

“So am I,” Mr. Graham agreed. “But what surprises me is that Rachel wanted to go to a place like that. She had a really good teaching job in St. Louis.”

“Well, I guess it just shows how much she’s like her father,” Mrs. Graham replied.

Mr. Graham nodded in agreement. Then he looked back down at the letter and continued. “There is so much good land out here. Great tall trees are everywhere, offering plenty of good timber for George to do his carpentry work. And not just that, but there are also many people out here that are longing for good furniture, the kind they left behind when they moved to the frontier. And I could really use some help, when I am finally able to build the church and school.

“As you can see, this land is full of opportunity for all of you, so I hope you will carefully consider coming. We anxiously await your response. Love, Jacob, Barbara, and Rachel Johnson.

“P.S. We are all very fine and healthy. The air out here is doing wonders for us all, especially for Barbara’s joints.”

Mr. Graham sat back in his chair and looked up at his wife. He didn’t say anything, but Tom could tell that they were still communicating with their eyes. After a moment, Mrs. Graham said, “I’ll go wherever you go, George.”

Mr. Graham nodded and smiled. “I’ll have to wrap up my carpentry business here first. And then I’ll have to go find some land to claim and build a cabin on it, before bringing you and Tom. It will probably take months before we can live there.”

“What about the yellow fever?” Mrs. Graham asked. “Can we afford to wait?”

Mr. Graham set the letter on the table. “Do we have any choice?”

“Isn’t there anywhere we could stay while you build our cabin?” Mrs. Graham asked. “Then we wouldn’t have to be apart so long.”

“There probably are places,” Mr. Graham replied. “But that’d be an

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extra expense that we can't afford. Jacob and Barbara would have had us, I'm sure, if they had room in their cabin."

Mrs. Graham picked up the letter and glanced through it. "They would have mentioned it in their letter, if that was the case. So I suppose we'll just have to stay and wait. And I guess that will give us a chance to adjust to the idea of leaving and to say goodbye."

"Then we're going?" Tom asked, breathless with excitement.

"Of course!" Mr. Graham smiled. "How could we refuse such an opportunity?"

Tom jumped up out of his chair and whooped, "Yes! We're finally going to the frontier!"

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## 2 THE HAUNTED WOODS

The preparation and the actual move for the family took many months to accomplish, after Mr. Graham had come back from building their cabin. In fact, mid-fall had already arrived by the time they sailed in a steamboat up the Mississippi to Wisconsin. They spent a few more days in a stagecoach going from the river to the town nearest their claim, and then traveled several hours in an ox-drawn wagon to reach their home.

The Grahams' new home was a small one-room log cabin. It had a stone fireplace and a loft, where Tom would sleep. His parents would sleep on the bed that sat in the main part of the cabin. The only other furniture was a table and some chairs.

"It's beautiful, George!" Mrs. Graham exclaimed, after having a look around the cabin.

Mr. Graham beamed. "I wasn't sure if you'd like living in something so small."

"It is small," Mrs. Graham said, "but that will just make it cozier."

Tom nodded, but didn't say anything. He had enjoyed the journey and seeing his new house, but he was anxious to go out in the wilderness to explore. Unfortunately, his family arrived at their home too late in the evening for any outdoor adventures. Still harder for Tom was the fact that he'd have to go to school first thing in the morning and wouldn't be able to explore until afterward.

The next day Tom woke up early so he could have extra time to enjoy the woods as he walked to school. He quickly had a bite to eat, grabbed the dinner his mother had prepared for him, and rushed out the door.

Tom had been told by his father the day before how to get to school. He only had to follow the path that went west from their house till he came to a fork in the road. Continuing west would take him back to town. So he took the north path which would take him right in front of the Johnsons' house.

As Tom walked, he looked at all the colorful trees and shrubs that thickly surrounded the path. The yellow leaves of the birch, the burgundy-orange of the white ash, the red-brown of the red oak, and the purplish-red of the white oak all added to the blaze of colors high above. But color also soaked the underbrush at his level with the red chokeberry leaves, the golden leaves and bright red berries of the winterberry, and the orange foliage of the black cherry.

Tom also noticed that the animals around him hardly seemed to care he watched them. Squirrels chattered and scurried around, gathering acorns and hickory nuts and bringing them up to their nests in the trees. Deer moved through the brush, also trying to get at the nuts, to eat them and fatten up for the winter. And up in the trees, countless birds of all different kinds sang merrily as they swarmed above.

As he looked up, he could just barely see bits of the clear blue sky peaking between the leaves. The sun shining through the colorful vegetation made the tree canopy look like a stained-glass window, but an ever changing one, because of the breeze that rustled the tops of the trees. Tom took a deep breath of the fresh air, sighed, and then laughed. He loved the outdoors here in the wilderness. Living here would be wonderful.

Suddenly, he heard children talking and laughing. A girl about his age ran out into the path ahead of him, which made him stop. Another girl, who also seemed about his age, ran out after her. Tom supposed they were playing tag. Both girls stopped when they caught sight of him.

"Oh, hi!" one of the girls called. "You must be the new boy, Tom. I'm Anna Cox!"

"Hi," Tom replied, surprised this girl already knew him. "How did you—?"



“We heard that you were coming,” Anna interrupted. “We’re your neighbors, you know.”

“Oh,” Tom said, just as a younger girl and a little boy ran up beside the other two girls.

“Why’d you stop playing?” the boy asked Anna. Then he noticed Tom. “Who are you?”

“That’s Tom,” Anna said. Then she looked at Tom. “This is my brother Peter and my sister Sarah. And this,” she said pointing to the other girl about Tom’s age, “is Lizzy Johnson. She’s staying with her uncle and aunt, the Reverend and Mrs. Johnson, until the rest of her family can come out here.” Then she looked at Lizzy. “The Reverend and Mrs. Johnson are Tom’s uncle and aunt, too.”

Lizzy and Tom looked at each other in surprise.

“Does that mean we’re cousins?” Lizzy asked.

“Not if you’re from the Johnson side,” Tom said. “My mother Grace is Aunt Barbara’s sister.”

“Oh,” said Lizzy, “My father is Uncle Jacob’s brother.”

“So you’re not cousins?” Sarah asked.

Lizzy and Tom shook their heads. “No.”

“Then are you brother and sister?” Peter asked, confused.

“No, silly.” Anna laughed. “They don’t have the same last names.”

“But you’re related,” Sarah put in.

“Not really,” Lizzy replied.

Peter put his hands to his head. “I’m all mixed up.”

“It’s like if our cousins on Ma’s side met with cousins on Pa’s side,” Anna tried to explain. “They are only connected because Ma and Pa are married, not because they were born that way.”

“Oh!” Peter said, letting his hands fall to his side.

“Does that make you cousins-in-law?” Sarah asked.

Tom shrugged his shoulders. “I guess.”

A pause came in the conversation so Tom tried to think of something to say.

“Where’s the rest of the school children?” Tom finally asked.

“Well, we’re all the children,” Anna said, “since Billy and Joe don’t like to be called that. They say they’re men. That’s why they do their own thing and Miss Johnson, our teacher, can’t get them to do much school.”

“Yeah,” Sarah added, “they’re bullies.”

“Not Joe,” Lizzy said, shaking her head. “Billy is, but Joe isn’t. Joe

doesn't bully anyone. He just, just..."

"Joe is Lizzy's brother," Anna told Tom. "He's staying with the Johnsons, too. And I'd agree that Joe isn't really a bully. He just does whatever Billy tells him to do."

"Yes, now he does." Lizzy sighed. "He didn't used to be that way. Back at home, we used to play and have fun together. But since we came here and he met Billy, Joe never wants to do anything with me. And out here I can't play with any of my old friends, either." Lizzy kicked the ground with her shoe, but then quickly looked at the Coxes. "Not that I don't like being with you..."

"We understand," Anna said and put her arm around Lizzy.

Just then they heard a woman's voice calling them. "Time for school, children! Time to get started!"

All the children started off into the clearing next to the path that surrounded the Johnsons' cabin. In the doorway stood a young woman in her late twenties. She looked thin and slightly pale, but she was smiling.

As they came up to her, Miss Johnson looked at Tom and said, "Hello Tom! You've grown so much since I last saw you. You were just a little boy then. I'm Rachel Johnson, your cousin and new schoolteacher." With that she showed Tom into the cabin.

The cabin was quite a bit bigger than Tom's tiny one-roomed cabin. The front part of the home was set up like a school, while a curtain separated the back part of it, providing privacy for the family. Three benches faced a blackboard and a table that Miss Johnson used as a desk. Next to the table, Mrs. Johnson sat knitting in a rocking chair.

Mrs. Johnson was as delighted to see Tom as Rachel had been and also spoke of him as a little boy. Tom felt a little awkward until Miss Johnson showed him where to sit on the second bench where Anna and Lizzy sat. Peter and Sarah sat on the first bench.

School started out much the same as Tom's school in the city. But Miss Johnson had hardly begun teaching when Tom heard a commotion outside. Pretty soon, two big boys came noisily into the cabin and then took their seat on the last bench behind Tom. Tom guessed that these must be the infamous Joe and Billy.

"Joe, Billy," Miss Johnson said sternly, "we are working on arithmetic right now. I want you both to work out the problems that I wrote out on the blackboard."

Joe took out his slate and started writing, but Billy just crossed his

arms and smirked. Billy was a really big boy, and Tom guessed that Miss Johnson was too afraid of him to actually make him do anything. Anyway, he didn't do what she wanted. Tom went back to his work and soon heard snoring from the back. He turned to see Billy sleeping.

After that, school progressed without interruption and recess finally came. Billy and Joe went off into the woods somewhere, so Lizzy, the three Coxes, and Tom were left alone again. They sat down on the ground outside to eat their dinners.

"Where'd Billy and Joe go?" Tom asked, as the children opened their baskets and pulled out their food.

"Oh, probably to their hideout," Anna replied.

"In the Haunted Woods," Lizzy added, taking a bite of her apple.

Tom's eyes widened. "Haunted?"

Lizzy nodded seriously, but Anna shook her head. "I doubt it. Why would the boys go into the woods if it really was haunted?"

"Because Billy is the direct descendant of Billy Hood, so Billy Hood's ghost won't hurt him or his friends," Lizzy told Anna, while the rest of the children ate and listened.

"I don't believe it," Anna replied. "I think Billy's just making up stuff to scare the rest of us."

"No, Anna, it's true," Lizzy insisted. "Just last night I saw a strange glow in the woods and the outline of a man with a long beard—no one has a beard like that around here. That man has to be Billy Hood."

The children all stopped eating when they heard what Lizzy saw.

"What were you doing outside last night?" Anna asked.

"Joe went to Dr. Dunn's house for Aunt Barbara's medicine and I had to feed Shep," Lizzy said. "But I forgot to feed him until it was getting dark. I didn't remember until I heard him barking out there."

"Shep is Joe's hound dog," Anna told Tom.

"Yes, sorry. I forgot to tell you," Lizzy apologized.

Tom nodded. "Go on."

"Well, I heard Shep barking and thought he was just hungry. So I rushed out with his food as fast as I could. That's when I saw the outline of a man with a long beard. But it was only a moment before he disappeared."

"Wow!" Tom said. "That sounds like a mystery."

All the children continued eating after they had stopped to hear the suspense of Lizzy's story.

"Yes, but I still don't think it's haunted," Anna said.

“Then who do you think Lizzy saw?” Sarah asked.

“An Indian!” Peter cried, smiling widely.

“Indians don’t have beards,” Sarah said.

Peter’s face fell.

“I don’t know who it is, but that whole story about the robber Billy Hood is a fable,” Anna said. “Pa told me so.”

“Who is Billy Hood, anyway?” Tom asked.

“Billy Hood,” Anna explained, “is a character that Billy, the boy at school, made up to make himself feel more important. But I don’t think the story about Billy Hood is worth hearing or telling, so I’m not going to tell it.”

“But how do you know it’s not true?” Lizzy asked.

Anna replied, “Pa told me the truth about this place. Besides, I wouldn’t believe anything Billy says anyway, and you just believe it because Joe told you, even though you know that Joe likes to scare you.”

An awkward pause followed and Tom again felt like he needed to break the silence.

Tom wiped his mouth and closed his basket. “I think we should find out who this man is.”

“How would we do that?” Anna asked, finishing up her dinner as well.

“We’d go into the woods and see if we could find traces of him,” Tom said, “like footprints or broken twigs or something. Then we’d track him down ’til we found him.”

“Go into the Haunted Woods?!” Lizzy gasped.

“Anna doesn’t think it’s haunted,” Tom said.

“Yes, but it may not be safe,” Anna said. “I don’t know much about the wilderness.”

“I do,” Tom said.

Lizzy squinted at him. “But you just moved here.”

“From the city,” Sarah added, matter-of-factly.

“I’ve read lots of books,” said Tom, standing up. “And I’ve learned from experienced outdoorsmen. You’d be safe with me.”

“I’ll go with you, Tom!” Peter piped up, springing to his feet, as if he were ready to go at that moment.

Anna stood up and put her hand on Peter’s shoulder. “You’re not going anywhere without me.”

“Then you’ll come?” Tom asked.

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“Yes, if you're sure you can handle it,” Anna said.

“I'm sure.”

Sarah jumped to her feet. “Then I'm going, too, if Anna and Peter are.”

“Lizzy, what about you?” Tom asked.

“Of course I'm not going into the Haunted Woods,” Lizzy said, slowly coming to her feet. “I'd rather not find out who that mysterious man is anyway. I'd rather stay indoors where it's safe.”

“And boring,” Peter added.

Lizzy rolled her eyes.

“Well, then we'll just have to go without you,” Anna sighed.

“That's fine with me,” Lizzy said, flicking her hair back with indifference.

At that moment Miss Johnson came out to call the children back to class. Exploring the Haunted Woods to find the mysterious man had to be postponed until later.



### 3 BILLY HOOD

After school finished for the day and all the children trooped out into the sunshine, Billy walked up to Tom.

“Hey you! Follow me,” he said, jerking his head in the direction of the woods.

Tom hesitated and looked at Anna, but she just shrugged her shoulders. Since she didn’t seem to know what Billy might want with him, Tom felt nervous. He looked back at Billy, but didn’t move.

“I’m waiting,” Billy said, annoyed.

Tom swallowed hard and began to follow him. Joe came up behind Tom, following in the rear with Shep.

The three of them went into the woods, walking until they couldn't see the Johnsons’ house or any of the other children. Tom figured they were going northeast. Then Billy stopped and turned to face Tom. “We are about to enter into the lair of Billy Hood,” Billy said, “the keeper of the woods and protector of his treasure. Since you are not one of us, you must be blindfolded.”

Joe took out and tied a handkerchief around Tom’s eyes. Then he turned Tom around so that he lost all sense of direction. After that, they led him deeper into the woods. No one spoke as they walked, and Tom became more alarmed the farther they went. He started to feel like he was their prisoner.

After a while, Billy and Joe stopped. Shep whined, and Joe

whispered something Tom couldn't hear. Tom supposed that Joe had tied Shep to something. At the same time, he heard Billy striking flint and steel together, as if to light a candle. When they started walking again, Tom realized they entered a cave by the way the stone felt on his feet and how the sounds of the outdoors muffled and then faded.

They walked in the cave for a little while before stopping. Joe removed the blindfold and then Tom could see that they were in a small cavern. They must have been far into the cave, because he couldn't see any sunshine coming in. The only light gleamed from the candle that sat on the floor of the cave.

"What are you doing with me?" Tom bravely asked.

But no one answered him. Instead Billy said, "Tell him the story, Joe."

So Joe began. "A long time ago, in this part of the frontier, there was a town next to Indian Creek, called Gold Town. It was called that because they found gold in the river. Of course everyone wants gold, so hordes of people came here to get rich. That's why it became a town.

"Pretty soon the whole place was filled with people rich from the gold. Since they were rich, they were stuck up and didn't treat the poor well. So one man, Billy Hood, united the poor together and formed a band that plundered the rich of the town and gave the money to the poor."

Tom hadn't been sure what kind of story Joe was telling, whether it was supposed to be true or not. But when he heard the name Billy Hood, he remembered what Anna had said about that story being only a fable. Tom kept that in mind as he continued listening.

"The rich didn't like what Billy Hood was doing, so the sheriff of Gold Town got together a whole crowd of sharpshooters to go find Billy Hood's men and kill them.

"They went into the Haunted Woods (though it wasn't haunted yet) and came to this cave, where Billy's hideout was. They had a huge battle here and lots of people died. But since there were more of the sheriff's men than Billy's, all Billy's men got shot. But Billy escaped and no one ever saw him again."

"At least not as a living human," Billy added slyly.

Joe nodded and continued. "Because the sheriff thought he had cleaned out that nest of outlaws, and since the town needed more wood for buildings and things, they decided to take down the trees in the Haunted Woods. But every time someone would go into the

woods, he'd disappear and never come back. Or else, if he did come back, he wouldn't remember a thing that happened while he was in there. Those kinds of things only happen if a place is haunted, and who else would haunt it, but Billy Hood himself? So the people of this town grew so scared of old Billy that they plumb took off and left the town."

Joe paused a moment to catch his breath, so Billy finished for him. "Then the ghost of Billy Hood came out with his lantern and set the whole town on fire. And he burned it to the ground so that no one would come to live in it. Then he took all the gold and hid it in the woods. So now Billy doesn't mind anyone living here as long as they don't go into his woods and try to get his gold."

"But then why are we in his lair if he's still here?" Tom asked.

"He isn't in this part of the cave," Billy snorted.

"Still, I wouldn't want to be near him at all," Tom said.

"Of course not," Billy said, "if you were all by yourself. But with me, that's a different matter." He puffed out his chest in pride. "I'm the rightful heir to Billy Hood and all his treasure, and anyone I choose can have a part of it. All you have to do is take the secret oath to pledge allegiance to Billy Hood and his gang. You also have to share all your things with the gang and you have to give one valuable to me."

"Why do you need anything valuable if you've got all of Billy's treasure?" Tom wanted to know.

"Because you don't get something for nothing," Billy snapped. "You've got to pay to get in this gang. So what have you got?"

"I don't think I have anything," Tom said, showing the boys his empty palms. "Except my knife, and I need that."

"The payment doesn't need to be yours," Billy said in a low voice.

Tom didn't say anything right away and the silence enabled him to hear a dripping sound far off into the cave.

"What do you mean?" Tom finally whispered back.

"Take anything from anyone—they're all rich," Billy replied quietly, "and bring it to school tomorrow."

"You want me to steal?" Tom cried.

Billy crossed his arms. "If you want to call it stealing, you can," he said coolly. "I call it pillaging or looting or just plain taking. Me and Billy Hood have that in common. We steal from the rich and give to us poor people."

"Well, I'm not going to steal," Tom said, crossing his arms, "and I don't care to be part of your gang of wicked robbers."



“Fine!” Billy said with clenched teeth. “But remember, we still rule this land no matter if you’re for us or against us. Joe, blindfold him up!”

As Joe blindfolded Tom, he whispered, “I gave you a chance to be with us at the top. And you just ruined it. Now you’ll be stuck with girls and babies.”

Tom wasn’t sure what to say to that. He thought about saying that he’d rather be with girls and babies who were nice and good than bad boys that were older. But he decided not to, since both boys seemed angry at him and he didn’t know what they’d do if he made them even angrier.

They went a lot faster going out of the cave than they had going in. Since Tom couldn’t see where he stepped, he tripped and fell a couple times. Neither of the other boys helped him up. Instead, they just pushed him to keep going.

Joe stopped briefly outside the cave to get Shep and then moved on. Finally they stopped and spun Tom around until he was so dizzy he could barely stand up. Then they yanked off the handkerchief and ran away before Tom could follow them.

Tom had had enough of them and didn’t want to follow anyway. He looked around but couldn’t figure out where he was in the woods. That didn’t matter, though, because he could still use the sun to figure out which direction he needed to go to find the path.

Tom didn’t feel like exploring anymore that day. He had too much to think about. So Tom went straight home to be by himself. Having a home with only one room did not offer much privacy, but his bed in the loft was removed enough so that he felt like he was by himself.

Tom lay down on his bed and thought about his first full day on the frontier. It hadn’t turned out as he had expected, though not really in a bad way. He still couldn’t wait to explore the wilderness, now even more so with the added excitement of trying to figure out the identity of the mysterious man. He didn’t really think he was Billy Hood’s ghost. But then who could he be?

Pretty soon supper was ready and Tom’s parents asked how things went at school. So Tom told them everything that happened that day, like he did every day, since losing his siblings. After he finished, Mr. Graham said, “You did what was right, son, by not joining that group. But I’m sorry things have to be this way, not being able to play with the older boys.”

“But I’m sure Anna and Lizzy and the younger Coxes will be fun to be with,” Mrs. Graham said, passing the butter to Tom, who had just taken another slice of bread.

Tom nodded, taking the butter. “I think so, too. It will be fun exploring with them to try to figure out who this man is. Who do you think he is, Father?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Mr. Graham said. “I don’t know everyone around here. But no doubt it’s a new settler to the area. People are swarming here like flies. I wouldn’t be surprised if someone was looking to claim some land out in those woods.”

“So you don’t think that it was Billy Hood’s ghost haunting the woods?” Tom asked, taking a bite of bread.

Mr. Graham laughed. “No, I don’t. You see, the Bible says that the ghosts of people go to heaven or hell when people die. They don’t stay on the earth, so they can’t haunt anything.”

“Hmm,” Tom said. He didn’t really want the woods to be haunted, but he also didn’t like his father’s explanation that the man was just a new settler. Tom thought that a regular weak old man wouldn’t wander outside all alone at night, when the woods proved most dangerous. This had to be a special kind of old man, who was able to take care of himself, or no real man at all, like Lizzy said.

“I still think there’s some mystery there,” Tom said, “and I’m going to figure it out.”

“I don’t know if I want you going out in those woods alone, Tom,” Mrs. Graham said. “It could be dangerous out there with wild animals and Indians. Or you could get lost. Those woods are just not for children.”

Tom wiped his mouth with his napkin. “But I can do it, Mother. I won’t get lost and I can handle any wild animal.”

Mr. Graham laughed. “I think we ought to let Tom explore those woods, Grace. It’s not all that dangerous. As long as it’s daytime, the wild animals won’t bother him and there hasn’t been any trouble with Indians for years. Besides, the man can’t be far away if they saw him from Jacob’s house.”

“But going out there all by himself?” Mrs. Graham asked.

“No, certainly not all alone,” Mr. Graham replied.

“I’m not,” said Tom. “The Coxes are coming with me.”

“That’s good enough,” Mr. Graham said, pushing back his chair to relax, “as long as you don’t go too far and always come back before

night.”

“Well, if you say so, George,” Mrs. Graham said. “It’s all right with me, if it is with you. But Tom, did you say just the Coxes? What about Lizzy?”

“Lizzy didn’t want to come,” Tom said. “She’s too afraid that the woods are haunted. But I guess I could tell her that it can’t be haunted. Even though ... I think she’d still be afraid.”

“Fear is a hard thing to get rid of,” Mr. Graham said. “Many people fear. But as Christians, we don’t need to be afraid of anything. We know that we’re going to heaven, no matter what anything or anyone else does to us. And nothing else in this world really matters that much.”

Mrs. Graham stood up and started gathering dishes together.

“I’m glad,” Tom sighed. “I don’t ever want to be afraid.”

“That’s good, Tom,” Mrs. Graham said, pausing from her cleanup to look at him. “Not wanting to be afraid is the first step. Next you must decide not to be afraid.”

“What do you mean?” Tom asked.

“Wanting is only an intention, a hope, or wish that something good will happen to you,” Mrs. Graham explained. “But a decision is something you act upon. A decision is something that you will make happen.”

Tom cocked his head, trying to understand.

“Maybe an example would help,” Mr. Graham suggested.

Mrs. Graham thought for a moment. “If you want to make an apple pie, you still may not end up making the pie, like if you’re lazy. But if you decide to make pie, then you’ve made up your mind to actually do it and it will get done.

“Oh, I think I see,” Tom said.

“And It seems to me that you’ve already decided not to give into fear,” Mr. Graham said, slapping his son on the back, “the way you chose not to steal, even when those big boys could have done something mean to you. And also how you’ve decided to go into those woods that the other children say are haunted.”

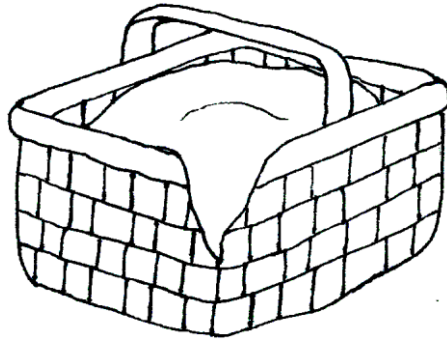
“That’s true,” Mrs. Graham said. “You are brave, Tom. Now go and help others to be brave, too.”

Hearing his parents talk about him that way made Tom feel good. But he really didn’t know if he had decided not to fear as his father had said. He felt that it was more that he hoped that he wouldn’t be afraid,

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than actually deciding. For now, he was just glad that he'd be able to go explore the Haunted Woods.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



#### 4 LOOTED

The next day was Friday, another school day. Since Tom didn't get up as early as the day before, he didn't have time to do anything but eat breakfast and go off to school.

When Tom got to the Johnsons' house, he saw Peter busy drawing something in the dirt and Anna watching him. Sarah and Lizzy must have already been inside.

As soon as Anna saw Tom, she rushed over to him. "What did Billy and Joe want with you yesterday?" she asked.

Tom looked around cautiously to make sure Billy and Joe weren't nearby.

"They aren't here," Anna said. "They're almost always late."

Tom shook his head. "How can they get away with that? And why does Miss Johnson just let Billy sleep in school?"

"Well, Miss Johnson couldn't really make Billy do anything," answered Anna. "But it's really more Billy and his parents' loss than anyone else's."

"What do you mean?" Tom asked.

"I mean that Billy's missing out on his education and it's Billy's parents that are paying for it." Anna shrugged. "As long as he doesn't disturb the class too much, Miss Johnson is fine with getting paid for Billy sleeping."

"Oh, that makes sense."

“So what did they want you for?” Anna asked again.

“They wanted me to be a part of their gang,” Tom said.

“Are you?” Anna asked.

Tom shook his head. “No, I would’ve had to steal. The whole gang was about Billy Hood and he’s all about stealing, and that’s nothing I want to be a part of.”

Anna smiled. “That’s good. You did the right thing. I remember Pa explaining to me that if you are friends with bad people, you might become bad, too. I guess that’s what is happening with Joe. But that must be hard not having any boys closer to your age to play with.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders. “I guess I’ve learned to live without.”

Anna opened her mouth to say something, but just then Lizzy ran up to them from the house.

“What did they do to you?” Lizzy asked Tom.

“Billy and Joe wanted Tom to join their gang,” Anna told her, “but they wanted him to steal, so he refused.”

Lizzy’s eyes opened wide in amazement. “You refused Billy and you’re still alive? He didn’t punch you or anything?”

“No,” Tom said. “Does he usually punch people?”

Lizzy shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I’m never around him. It just seems like something he’d do.”

“You always think the worst of everything, Lizzy,” Anna said. “You think Billy’s a murderer, that man in the woods is a ghost, and the woods are haunted. What will you think of next?”

“Well, I just want to be prepared for the worst,” Lizzy said.

“Oh, Lizzy,” said Tom, “that reminds me. My father told me the Bible says that when people die, their ghosts go to heaven or hell and don’t stay on the earth. So you don’t need to be afraid that the woods are haunted or that the man is a ghost.”

Lizzy shrugged her shoulders. “I suppose so. But even if it isn’t haunted in the usual sense, then it’s probably haunted in other ways. There are probably real robbers and thieves living in there.”

“The only robbers in those woods are Joe and Billy,” Anna said.

“Joe’s not a robber.” Lizzy crossed her arms.

“All right, then, just Billy,” Anna replied.

“Even so, those woods are bound to be dangerous and I’d be afraid to go in there anyway,” Lizzy said stubbornly.

“You shouldn’t be afraid, Lizzy,” Tom said, remembering how his mother had wanted him to help people be brave. “Christians don’t

need to be.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Anna said. “Jesus said not to fear even those that kill us, so we shouldn’t be afraid if someone or something hurts us, either.”

At that point it was time for school. Billy and Joe arrived late again, just like Anna had predicted. After starting arithmetic, Tom heard them talking loudly outside. He tried to concentrate on his work, but couldn’t. Arithmetic was hard enough for him without distractions.

When the boys came in, Miss Johnson sternly told them what to work on. And again Joe did his work, but Billy just sat back and slept. Tom wondered what Billy did at night, that he could spend the whole day at school just sleeping.

Tom hoped things would continue to go as they had the previous day, that Billy and Joe would leave at recess.

But once all the children got outside, Billy ushered them behind the cabin where there were no windows. Tom didn’t know what was going on, but he followed anyway.

As they went, Anna whispered to him, “Billy must not have gotten a dinner today.”

Everyone except Joe stood in a line in front of Billy and uncovered their dinner baskets. Billy came over and grabbed Peter’s first and started rummaging through the contents, looking for the best food. He took out a gingerbread man and gave the basket back to Peter. Peter tried not to cry, seeing his favorite part of the meal taken away from him.

Next, Billy looked through Sarah’s basket. All the while, no one said anything. Tom’s jaw dropped. Why was everyone just letting Billy take things from them? Taking just wasn’t right, and Tom knew it.

But he hesitated to do anything. Billy was a really big boy, and Tom didn’t know what would happen if he told him to stop. But then he realized that he was afraid and he didn’t want to be afraid. And how could he help others to be brave, if he himself gave in to fear?

Tom braced himself for the worst and said, “What’s going on here?”

Billy looked at Tom and smiled. “I’m looting from those who are more fortunate and giving to the less fortunate—me. So keep quiet. You’ll get your turn soon enough.”

But Tom didn’t keep quiet. He couldn’t. He knew that if he stopped and let Billy intimidate him into obeying, he’d always fear and obey



him. And that wasn't right. Just like what Anna had said earlier, Jesus said not to fear man.

"You'd better give those things back," Tom said.

Billy stopped his rummaging again and looked at Tom. "Or what?" Billy sneered.

"Or—I'll tell my father what you're doing," Tom said. "And you'll get in trouble."

Tom was smart enough to know that he couldn't handle Billy by himself. But he knew that his father could—and that he would, too, if he needed to.

But as soon as the words came out of Tom's mouth, Billy dropped Sarah's basket, took a step toward Tom and hit him so hard in the stomach that it knocked the breath out of him. Tom fell to the ground, clutching at his stomach and gasping for breath.

"If you tell your father," Billy said with clenched teeth, "I'll beat you up so bad no one will know who you are. Do you hear me?"

Tom lay on the ground, still gasping for breath. Over and over again, in rhythm with the physical pain he felt, he kept thinking, "What went wrong?" He knew that Billy was mean and that he was big enough to hurt him. But somehow, he had thought that Billy would do the right thing.

Billy kicked Tom. "Do you hear me?" he yelled out.

Tom focused his attention on Billy and nodded glumly. He couldn't think straight with the pain in his stomach and the difficulty breathing. No one had ever hit him like that before. The physical pain, along with the emotional trauma, shocked him and made him feel like crying. Instead, he gritted his teeth and forced himself to sit up.

Billy nodded, convinced that Tom wouldn't cause him any more trouble, and picked up Sarah's dinner basket. He then continued looking through Anna's, Lizzy's, and Tom's baskets. When he seemed satisfied with everything he got, he sat down with Joe, who had his own dinner, a little way from the rest of the children to eat his stolen goods.

Tom gave the remains of his dinner to the others, telling them he didn't feel like eating, and walked away from them to sit by himself. Instead of feeling brave for confronting Billy, he felt humiliated. So he didn't want to talk to anyone. But Anna came over after she had finished eating and said, "I know you probably don't feel like it, but you were brave to stand up to him."

“I didn’t, though, in the end,” Tom mumbled without looking up. “I gave way to fear.”

“But you did more than any of the rest of us would do,” Anna insisted.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

Anna gently touched his shoulder as she said quietly, “God blesses those who stand up for the helpless.”

Miss Johnson came out to tell everyone that it was time to resume school.

“Tom, is something wrong?” Miss Johnson asked as Tom made his way into the house.

Out of the corner of his eye, Tom could see Billy looking at him. He knew that if he told, he could be sure of some more humiliation after school. So he gave into fear.

“I—I’m okay.” Tom said and went to sit down at his place, glad when Miss Johnson didn’t say anything else. Billy nodded at Tom with satisfaction, as if approving of his not telling, making Tom feel even worse.

Nothing else happened at school that day, and since he didn’t feel like staying and talking, he just headed straight for home. But as he trudged along the path, he realized he’d have to tell his parents what happened. He felt embarrassed about the beating he got, but that wasn’t the main reason he dreaded telling his parents. He knew his parents would do something about school so that no one would get hurt again. That would be good in a way, but then he might get even more beat up by Billy. There just didn’t seem to be a solution to the problem.

Tom waited around outside until he had to go in for supper. When he did, his parents asked him how things went that day. Slowly, the story spilled out until he had told everything.

“Son, I’m proud of you for standing up to Billy for the rest of the children,” Mr. Graham said. “And you did the right thing by telling us. Now it’s time for me to do something about it. I’ll talk with Billy’s father tomorrow.”

Tom feared this would happen. “But then Billy will beat me up!”

“Don’t worry about it, son,” Mr. Graham said, smiling down at Tom and putting his hand on his shoulder. “I’ll take a break from building my workshop and start working on Reverend Jacob’s stable that he’s been wanting me to fix. I’ll come over there and work on it

while you're at school next week. Billy won't hurt you as long as I'm around."

"But it won't take the whole school year to fix," Tom said.

"By the time I'm done with the job," Mr. Graham replied, "things will all be worked out. I promise."

"Your father will protect you, Tom," Mrs. Graham said. "So you don't have to fear." Then she smiled. "This reminds me of yesterday's conversation."

"So it does," Mr. Graham agreed. "Tom, remember, you have something that others can't take away—your salvation in Jesus. You don't have to fear."

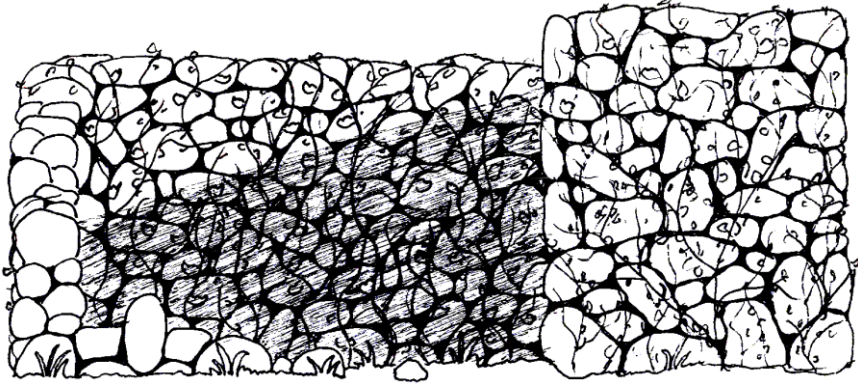
Tom nodded. He knew he didn't need to be afraid, but having courage was so much harder. He thought about how his mother had told him just to decide to be brave, no matter what. So that's what he did. He firmly decided that he wouldn't fear anything—not Billy, nor the Haunted Woods, nor the mysterious man—because he knew he didn't need to. Tom figured choosing not to fear now would prove easier, than later when he was already afraid.

"Perhaps, George, it would be better to wait and talk it out with the Coxes and the Johnsons before you go to Billy's parents," Mrs. Graham said, "since their children were involved, too."

Mr. Graham stroked his beard. "That is true that Cox has been here longer than I have. So has Jacob. And they'd probably like to hear what's been going on. All right, I'll wait and talk with them first. Sunday should work. Anyway, I hoped to put up a little footbridge over Indian Creek tomorrow. Would you like to help me with that, Tom?"

Tom smiled and nodded. He had been planning to go exploring on Saturday, but with all that happened, he just felt like being with his father.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



## 5 FORT MCELWEE

On Sunday, the Grahams and the Coxes went to the Johnsons' house for church. Another younger couple, Doctor Dunn and his wife, also came. The setup was pretty much the same as it was for school, except that a pulpit stood in the front, instead of the table.

That day Reverend Johnson taught on boldness. He talked about how the apostles Peter and John went to preach about Jesus in the temple and were taken by the Jewish leaders. The apostles were told to stop preaching, but they wouldn't, because they knew they ought to obey God rather than man. As a result they were let go, but not after they were first beaten. They went home, praising God that they got to suffer for his sake, and praying that they would continue to be able to preach in boldness.

"Why were the apostles able to contend with the religious leaders of their day with courage?" Reverend Johnson asked his congregation. "How could they, knowing that they might suffer, bring themselves to refuse their leaders' request?"

Reverend Johnson paused for effect. "It is because of fear that they were able to have courage. But fear of the right kind. They knew Jesus' words in the book of Matthew, chapter ten, verse twenty-eight, 'and fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' They feared God, who could cast them into hell, more than they feared

man, who could only kill the body.

“Jesus commanded his apostles to ‘go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’, but the religious leaders told them to stop. The apostles had a decision to make: obey God or obey man. Because their fear of God was greater, they obeyed God.

“You also have commands from the Lord. But do you fear him enough to obey his commands, rather than obeying man? Do you obey God to ‘love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind’ or are you ‘lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God’? Do you obey God to ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’ or do you ‘hate thine enemy’? Do you obey God when he says ‘Thou shalt not steal’ or ‘Thou shalt not envy’? Or do you ‘lust, and have not’ or ‘kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain’?

“Therefore, my brethren, let us with one accord obey God as his people. Let us ‘lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.’ And let us say as Joshua said, ‘but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.’”

Tom wondered whether the instance with Billy on Friday influenced Reverend Jacob to talk about fear and boldness. In any case, he felt encouraged that he had done the right thing by being bold and standing up for what was right.

After church, the Dunns left, but the Coxes and Grahams stayed. Reverend and Mrs. Johnson had insisted that the families stay and talk about what had happened to Tom and how to deal with Billy taking their children’s dinners.

Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Cox came over to the children with some packed dinners and told them to go off and eat wherever they wanted, as long as they all stayed together. Obviously, the grownups didn’t want them around when they talked about school. But that was fine with them, because the children really didn’t want to hear them talk about it anyway.

When the children got outside, Anna looked at Tom. “You told?”

Tom nodded. “I had to. I wasn’t going to lie about it.”

“I suppose it is the right thing to do,” Anna said. “The Bible does say not to lie.”

Tom nodded. “But I’m wondering why you didn’t tell your parents Billy was taking things. Even if Billy would beat up a boy, he surely wouldn’t beat up a girl, would he?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he did,” Lizzy said.

Anna frowned at Lizzy. "Of course he wouldn't! Just think how angry everyone would be at him, especially his parents."

"Then why didn't you tell, if you weren't afraid of him?" Tom asked.

"I didn't say I wasn't afraid," Anna said, "only that he wouldn't beat me up."

"But then—" Tom started to say. But he noticed the look on Anna's face showed she didn't want to talk about it anymore, so he stopped.

"I'm afraid of Billy," Lizzy said, matter-of-factly. "And I'd be afraid of him even more if I were you, Tom. When he hears about this, no doubt he'll try to beat you up."

"He won't beat me up," Tom said, "at least not anymore."

"He won't?" everyone asked at the same time.

"No," Tom replied. "My father will keep me safe. He's going to work on Uncle Jacob's stable while we're at school to make sure we're all right."

Sarah sighed. "I'm glad."

"So am I," Lizzy said.

"Me, too," Peter added.

"We're all glad for you, Tom," Anna said. "And that means things should get better for all of us. We will get to eat all of our own dinners again!"

"That will be nice," Sarah said.

Just then someone's stomach rumbled.

"Speaking of eating," Anna said, "where are we going to eat?"

"Let's just eat here," Lizzy said, looking at the clearing around the Johnson's house.

"We always eat here," Peter whined. "Let's go somewhere different."

"Let's eat in the old fort," Anna suggested. "Tom hasn't seen that yet. Have you, Tom?"

"No, I haven't," Tom said. "Is it far?"

"No, it's just on our claim," Anna said, "along the road."

"I don't remember seeing any fort." Tom scratched his head. "But then again it was night when I passed by your house, so I probably wouldn't have noticed it."

"It's not really a fort anymore, you know," Sarah said.

"What is it then?" Tom asked.

“It’s creepy,” Lizzy said.

Anna rolled her eyes. “It’s only ruins now, but it used to be a settlement to protect against—”

“Indians!” Peter finished for her.

“Yes, Indians,” Anna said. “I’ll tell you all about it on our way there.”

Tom looked at Lizzy. “Are you all right with going?”

Lizzy shrugged her shoulders. “I guess. I’ve been there before. I just don’t like it. But I’ll go if you all want to go.”

“Then let’s go!” Peter yelled, running out to the road.

“Peter, come back!” Anna called after him. “We’re supposed to stay together.”

Peter ran back to the rest of the children and they all started walking together.

“So when did they make this fort?” Tom asked.

“I don’t know,” Anna said. “I don’t think Pa knows, either. But it was a long time ago, back when there were—”

“Indians!” Peter cried happily.

“Shhh,” Sarah told Peter.

“Yes, and the settlers needed protection,” Anna said. “So they built the fort and named it after the man who led them, William McElwee.”

“Who had married an Indian princess,” Sarah added, clasping her hands and looking off dreamily. Peter looked disgustedly at her.

“Well, at least some people say that,” Anna said. “Anyway, their relations with the Indians weren’t very good so one day—”

“The Indians attacked!” Peter yelled as he began to act out the attack by pretending he had a tomahawk.

Lizzy and Sarah both shushed him and Sarah told him, “Let Anna tell the story.”

Peter frowned, but quieted down.

Anna continued. “The fort was attacked by Indians and everyone was killed. Afterward, the Indians burned the fort to the ground.”

“So Billy was right about that—there were people here and there was a fire,” Tom said.

Anna nodded. “Billy made up his story of Billy Hood, taking things that really happened and mixing it with things he thought were more exciting.”

“I think the story is pretty exciting as it is,” Tom said.

The children reached the road that the Grahams and Coxes lived



on and turned to go the opposite way from Tom's house, which was the way to the Coxes' house and to town.

"So if it all burned down, what's left?" Tom asked.

"Well, the logs of the stockade that made up the walls of the fort all burned down or have decayed since then," Anna said. "But the ruins of a smaller stone wall that was within the fort are still there. Pa said that was probably where they stored the gunpowder and ammunition."

"A magazine?" Tom asked.

Anna nodded.

"That makes sense," Tom said. "Stone would protect the gunpowder from catching on fire and blowing up the place."

They came to the edge of the Coxes' claim, which had been cleared and plowed as a field. The fort lay just west of the clearing in the woods.

"Pa knew better than to try to make this into a field," Anna said, "because he'd have to move all the stones. So he just left all the woods here. I think I like it better this way."

"Me, too," Tom agreed.

"I think it makes it look creepy," Lizzy said, shivering.

Anna rolled her eyes. "See the stone wall in there?" She said, pointing toward the woods. "It's kind of hard to see, since it's all covered with vines and moss."

Tom squinted. "Yes, I see it, but I would like to have a closer look."

"I wouldn't," Lizzy said. "Anna dragged me up there once before and I'm not doing that again."

"You went up on top of it?" Tom asked, eyes widening. Climbing on the wall sounded even more fun than just looking at it.

"Yes, one wall has crumbled down so that you can climb it. Then you can easily walk up to the walls that are still standing," Anna said. "It's a lot of fun being up there—it's probably eight feet tall!"

"Well, you can have all my fun." Lizzy sat down on a stone by the side of the road. "I'm going to eat my dinner."

Sarah sat down next to Lizzy. "I am, too."

Anna looked at Tom. "Do you still want to go on up?"

"That won't be staying together," Tom said.

"We'll still be able to see each other from up there," Anna replied.

"Well, all right." Tom nodded. "Let's go."

"I want to go, too," Peter said.

"You're too small to get up there," Anna said, putting her hand on

his shoulder, “and I wouldn’t want you falling off and getting hurt. You stay here.”

“But I never get to go anywhere fun!” Peter whined, pushing Anna’s hand off his shoulder.

“You’ll come with us when we go into the Haunted Woods,” Tom said, “and that will be fun.”

Peter brightened up a little bit after that and sat down to eat with Lizzy and Sarah.

Anna and Tom went to the magazine, carrying their baskets. There wasn’t much to look at—it just looked like a little ruined courtyard—so they were soon ready to go up on the wall. Anna showed Tom the place to get up, and then they both climbed to the top. Some of the stones shifted when they walked on them, so they had to go up carefully. Finally, they got to the highest part of the wall and looked out across the Coxes’ pasture land, which was dotted with cows.

Anna and Tom sat down on the wall and began eating their dinners.

“This is all so much fun,” Tom said, “living on the frontier. I wish Mary and Ben, my sister and brother, were here. They would’ve loved this and we would’ve had so much fun together here.”

“Where are they?” Anna asked.

Tom sighed. “They died ... from sickness, only a couple months ago.”

“Oh.” Anna looked down. “I’m sorry.”

No one spoke a few moments, but then Anna said, “My ma died from sickness, too.”

Tom looked at her in surprise. “But—”

“That isn’t my real ma that you met,” Anna said. “I mean, she just married Pa last year. My ma died when I was seven.”

“What happened?”

“It was in the winter,” Anna began, “when Pa was away several days to sell his animal skins. Ma was chopping wood, when something scared her and she accidentally cut herself with the ax. I don’t think it was that serious. At least I don’t think she thought so. She just wrapped it up and kept going, since she had so much to do caring for us.

“The next day she woke up sick. She knew that the cut had become infected and needed a better bandage, but she was already too weak to do it herself. So she gave me directions on how to bandage it and then how to cool her down from the fever. I think I followed everything she said. At least I tried to. But she kept getting worse and worse and

Pa still didn't come back."

Tom was so into the story that he forgot to eat. But then his stomach rumbled, reminding him to eat.

"I don't know how long it lasted—days, I think," Anna continued. "I just stayed up and continued doing the same things over and over. I hoped Ma would get better, but her fever got worse. Eventually, Pa did come home, but it was too late to save her. I always wondered whether I did everything all right, if maybe I did something wrong and that killed her. Or that I could have done something better and kept her alive. But now she's gone and all I have is this locket to remember her by." Anna fingered the locket around her neck.

"I know how you feel," Tom said. "I wondered the same thing with my sister and brother, whether I could have done something that would have saved them, even though I know there was nothing I could do. But all that is in the past and there's nothing we can do about it. Now we need to just move on."

"But how do you move on?" Anna cried. "How can I just accept that I might have killed my ma?"

Anna tried hard not to cry and Tom pitied her. He saw just how much the regret of her past gripped her and wished he could help her.

"I'm not like you, Tom," she went on. "You're brave. You stood up to Billy. But I'm not brave. I didn't stand up to Billy when I knew I should. I know I shouldn't care, but whenever I do something he doesn't like, he reminds me what happened and says what a bad person I am. As long as I do what he wants, he doesn't talk about it. I know it's not a good reason not to do what's right, but it just hurts so much when he brings it up."

Tom shook his head in disbelief at Billy's meanness.

"So you see," Anna continued, "when I try to be brave, I just mess things up."

"But don't you see?" Tom said. "We both did the right thing: you when you helped your mother, and me when I stood up to Billy. And both things turned out painful. You lost your mother and I got punched. But you did your best and did what's right—you couldn't do anything more."

Anna didn't reply, just continued looking out into the pastures before them. Tom knew that Anna was still in pain, but he hoped that his words helped. He didn't know anything else to say that could help her. But he wanted her to know that he cared about her and her pain,

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so he put his arm around her.

Anna looked at Tom and smiled sadly. “Thanks, Tom. I’m glad I have you for a friend.”

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



## 6 INTO THE HAUNTED WOODS

The next day was Monday, a school day. Tom felt a little uneasy about seeing Billy, even with his father coming with him. But there was nothing to fear, because Billy didn't come at all that day. So Mr. Graham decided to go back home to work on his own projects.

Joe still came, though, and actually arrived on time. But he didn't seem like himself. He actually did what he was supposed to do and didn't talk at all to any of the other children. At recess he went off by himself.

Also at recess, Tom brought up to the other children, the subject of trying to find the mysterious man.

"We better go soon, before it gets too cold," Anna said, looking up. "Already the leaves are starting to fall off the trees."

The rest of the children followed her gaze, and Tom noticed how most of the leaves had already turned brown. He knew Anna was right that time was limited before the cold weather set in.

"Let's go today!" Peter said, marching around the rest of the children.

Tom looked at Peter. "I agree. Let's go after we finish school."

Anna nodded, and Peter started jumping around the children. "Yay! We're going today! We're going today!" he said in a sing-song voice.

"You're all crazy," Lizzy said, "marching into the Haunted Woods

to find a mysterious man who could be dangerous.”

“It’s not haunted,” Tom reminded her.

“We need a new name for the woods,” Sarah said.

Everyone nodded, but Lizzy.

“But I think we should wait until we know more about the woods before naming it,” Tom said, “Let’s explore it a couple days first.”

“That’s probably a good idea,” Anna agreed.

“So it’s decided that we go after school?” Tom asked.

Anna nodded. “I don’t think we should waste another day before finding out who that mystery man is.”

Tom looked at Lizzy. “So Lizzy, where do you think you were when you saw the man?”

Lizzy pointed to a spot. “Right about there, I think.”

Tom walked to the place where Lizzy was pointing. “Here?” Tom asked when he got to the spot.

She nodded.

“Peter, could you get me a stick?” Tom asked.

“What kind?” Peter asked.

“A straight one about two or three feet long.” Tom spread out his hands to show how long he wanted the stick.

Peter found one and handed it to him. Tom took the stick and sharpened the edge with his pocket knife. Then he stuck the sharp end of the stick into the ground where he stood. “Now we have a reference point, so we’ll always remember where Lizzy was when she saw the man. So, Lizzy, in which direction did you see him?”

“Oh, I don’t remember. All I remember is that it was in the woods.”

Tom scratched his head. “That makes it harder then, since the woods go west to north from your house. I guess we should just start with going due west.”

Peter spun around, trying to figure out which way was west. After a couple times he became dizzy and discouraged. Then he looked at Tom. “Which way’s west?”

Tom smiled. “That’s easy. Every day the sun rises in the east, then goes overhead and to the south, and then sets in the west. Since we know what time it is, we know where the sun is on its path and that means we know what direction it is from us. Since it’s noon, the sun is due south. So that way is west.”

Tom pointed toward the woods, and Peter smiled. But by then it was time to go back to school.

After school, Tom and Anna tried to talk Lizzy into coming with them into the woods, but she refused. Instead she stayed indoors and worked on her knitting.

“She’s such a lady,” Anna said in disgust. “She doesn’t want to have any fun.”

Peter wanted to go straightaway into the woods, but Tom told them all that they needed to organize the expedition for the best results.

“Tom, I think you should be Captain of our expedition,” Anna said, “since you know the most about expeditions and the wilderness and things like that.”

“I think so, too,” Sarah agreed. “And I think a boy should lead—expedition leaders are always boys.”

“I’m a boy,” Peter said, proudly.

“Yes, but you’re little,” Sarah said.

Peter frowned. “I am not! I’m big!” As he said so, he put back his shoulders, puffed out his chest, and smiled. “See?”

The rest of them laughed.

“She means that you’re younger than Tom,” Anna said. “And that’s why Tom should lead. He’s the one who thought of doing this anyway.”

So they all decided that Tom should lead as Captain, with Anna as Lieutenant (since she was the oldest of the Coxes) and Peter as Private. Sarah didn’t want to be a soldier or an explorer in the usual sense. Instead, she wanted to be an Indian guide, so the rest let her.

“What do you say we start now, Captain,” Anna asked Tom with a salute.

“I say, Lieutenant, that we should start without further delay,” Tom replied.

“Then let’s go!” Peter cried and ran off.

“Wait, Peter!” Anna called after him. “You don’t get to go first—the captain does.”

Peter walked back grudgingly.

“Actually,” Tom said, “the Indian guide should go first. Sarah, you need a better name than just ‘the Indian guide.’”

Sarah started walking toward the woods. “I’m still thinking of one.”

Tom followed next, then Peter, then Anna. But after looking into the woods, Sarah decided that she didn’t want to go first, so she and Tom switched places. In the new order, they all set off into the woods, eager and excited to find Lizzy’s mysterious man.



Inside the Haunted Woods, the air seemed to stifle both light and noise much more than on the path. The trees would've covered up the entire sky had not some of the leaves already fallen from them. And though the birds and squirrels still flitted around making their own noises and rustling the leaves on the ground and in the trees, somehow the sound seemed more muffled. Even the air felt a lot more still than when they walked on the path.

Tom glanced behind him at the other children and saw that they all looked uneasy. The woods seemed quite eerie, making even Tom a little jumpy.

Suddenly, he heard a loud crack and saw something large bolt away from the children not far away. All the children jumped and stood motionless. But when Tom looked closer, he saw only a couple of deer.

He looked back at the Coxes and saw that their eyes were all wide with fright. He smiled. "It's just a couple of deer—nothing to be afraid of."

Anna smiled weakly. "Yeah, just a couple of deer."

"You know what we need?" Tom said. "We need a song."

"What kind of song?" Anna asked.

"A marching song," Tom said, turning around and beginning to march. The others followed him.

Tom started whistling a tune, first just to himself, as he worked it out and then loudly so the others could hear him.

The tune was simple, one that the other children soon learned and started whistling along. But not Peter. Unfortunately, try as he might, he could not whistle. So he hummed instead.

Just then, Tom stopped whistling and began to sing to the tune he had whistled:

The Frontier Explorers, that's who we are,  
Marching through the woods no matter how far.  
We will never stop no matter how rough,  
We are explorers and that means we're tough!

After finishing, Tom sang the verse again. On the third time, the Coxes sang with him. They sang the song several more times until Anna said, "Make up another verse, Tom!"

"Yes! Another one!" Sarah and Peter agreed.

Tom smiled back at them and then grew quiet for a moment. Soon

he began the second verse:

The Frontier Explorers, that is our name.  
Exploring the frontier, that is our game.  
That means we find amazing things.  
Fun and pleasure is what it brings.

Everyone cheered and sang with Tom. After learning the second verse they had to sing both verses together. Finally, after marching and singing and laughing, they had to take a break. So they all sat down on a moss-covered log that they found.

“You know, Tom?” Anna asked.

“What?”

“That song was just the thing we needed,” Anna said. “I don’t feel afraid anymore.”

Tom smiled.

“Me neither,” Sarah said.

“I wasn’t afraid,” Peter said. Anna and Sarah rolled their eyes.

The children grew silent as they caught their breath.

Suddenly, Peter asked, “What are we looking for?”

“We’re looking for the old man Lizzy saw,” Anna told him.

“Oh,” Peter said, starting to pick at the moss on the log. “What does he look like?”

“He’s an old man with a beard,” Anna replied.

Peter succeeded at pulling up a clump of moss and promptly smashed the mass to his mouth. “Like this!” he said, smiling.

Anna and Sarah looked horrified at him. Sarah took it off his face and Anna wiped off the dirt. “Don’t do that, Peter,” she said.

Peter just grinned as his sisters cleaned him up and Tom couldn’t help laughing.

After a moment Peter asked, “He’s not Billy Hood, is he?”

“No,” Anna said, “Billy Hood doesn’t exist.”

“But we’re not just looking for the man,” Tom said, “we’re also looking for traces of him, like a footprint or a broken twig or a piece of ripped clothing.”

“Oh,” Peter said.

Tom stood up. “Well, I’m ready to continue!”

The others stood up and agreed.

So they all continued to walk, but they didn’t find any obvious clues.

Tom saw some disrupted dirt and leaves, but that was just from deer looking for food. He didn't see any deer there, though, just tracks from them. In fact, each child started mentioning that they didn't see many animals at all, and Tom said that was because they were making too much noise. After that, everyone tried to move more quietly, but Peter often forgot.

After a while, they began to hear the bubbling and gurgling of running water. And in a few more steps, they came to the bank of a creek.

"We can't go any farther," Peter said.

"It does look deep," Sarah said, looking down into the water.

"I wonder if this is Indian Creek," Tom said. "I say we should trace this creek back south to see if it is Indian Creek. If it is, we'll come to the little footbridge on the edge of my father's property."

"You're the Captain," Anna said. "We'll follow your orders."

"But I thought we were looking for an old man." Peter frowned.

"We were, but not anymore," Sarah said.

"I don't think that old man could cross this creek," Tom said, "unless he went on a bridge or in a boat. I think it's safe to assume that he's probably from farther north in the woods."

Tom picked up another stick, sharpened it, and stuck it in the ground. "This is where we stopped going due west and started following the creek to the south, to discover whether it is indeed Indian Creek." Tom turned and started marching along the creek bank. All the rest followed him in their proper order.

"I know what I want to be called," Sarah suddenly announced.

"What?" all the rest asked.

"Rippling Water," she said dramatically, "named after Indian Creek, since I am an Indian and I live by it."

Instead of marching, Sarah started trying to walk gracefully, almost like she was dancing.

Peter frowned, then looked at Anna. "Do real Indians live by Indian Creek?"

Sarah glared at him, but he didn't see.

"Not anymore," Anna answered.

"I want to see an Indian," Peter said.

"I would, too, as long as he's nice," Sarah clasped her hands together in front of her and looked off dreamily. "Then I'd marry him and become an Indian princess!"

Peter made a face at Sarah's fantasy.

"Have you seen Indians here before?" Tom asked.

"We used to, more than we do now," Anna said.

"Were they peaceful?" Tom asked.

"I think so," Anna said. "At least I don't ever remember Pa having any trouble with them. I think if we ever did see some, they'd probably only be nice ones."

The children continued walking along the creek for some time. The flowing water had a soothing, calming effect on them, so that they didn't feel like talking to one another as much. Instead, they listened to its music in harmony with the wind whistling in the trees above.

Suddenly they heard the heavy thud of an ax.

"That must be my father! I knew it had to be Indian Creek!" Tom started walking faster till he almost ran through the woods. He would have run, if there hadn't been so many brambles in his path.

Soon Tom came out to the clearing, just in time to see his father swinging his ax down onto a log. With several swings each, Mr. Graham notched the ends of the logs that were piled around. Tom ran up to him.

"Hello, Father."

"Hello, Tom." Mr. Graham sunk his ax into a nearby stump and sat down on the log he was working on to rest. He was breathing hard and sweating despite the cool weather.

"What happened to your search party?"

Tom looked behind him and saw the other three Coxes just coming out of the woods. He ran over to them to help them through the last brambles and then they all walked back to Mr. Graham.

"Remember, Tom," Mr. Graham said. "Always stay with your company. It's your responsibility."

Tom nodded. "Yes, sir."

Mr. Graham smiled. "So did you find your man?"

"No, we didn't," Tom said. "We went due west from the Johnson's house and then south when we hit the creek. So I figure that the man must be farther north."

Tom's father nodded. "That sounds reasonable. Just don't go too far north. Those woods go a long way. Remember that each step you take away from the path will take another one to get back to it. I want you to be sure you can get back before dark."

"Yes, sir," Tom said.

“What are you doing?” Peter asked Mr. Graham, as he sat down on the log next to him.

“I’m building a workshop for myself,” Mr. Graham replied. “Once I notch each of these logs at either end, I’ll be ready to put it up.”

“Pa did that,” Peter said, “and he’s really good at it.”

“I’m sure he is,” Mr. Graham said, “and I’ll get him to help me put it up, when I’m ready.”

Peter smiled.

Mr. Graham stood up. “Well, I think it’s time I wrap up for today. It looks like it’s about time for supper and I think you Coxes should be getting along home. You wouldn’t want to be late for supper. Say hello to your folks for me.”

The Coxes said goodbye and followed the path to their house.

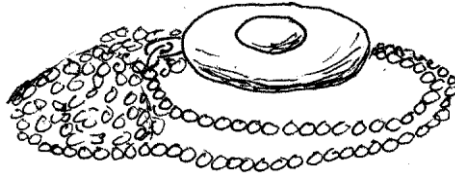
Mr. Graham picked up his ax and started walking toward his cabin. “So what did you think of your first exploration of the frontier?”

“It was so much fun,” Tom replied, as he walked beside his father. “It’s just what I always dreamed it would be!”

“I’m glad,” Mr. Graham said. “This land surely is a land of opportunity. I certainly am thankful to God for our opportunity to take part in it.”

“Me, too,” Tom said.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



## 7 THE LOST LOCKET

The next two days were a disappointment for the explorers. The weather was simply miserable. Rain sometimes drizzled and sometimes poured, but it never stopped. All that water quickly turned the dirt roads into mud, making the walk to school very uncomfortable. The wind made traveling even worse by chilling the soaked travelers. By the time the children entered the Johnsons' house, they were convinced they did not want to go tramping through the woods in this weather. They would just have to wait to explore.

But being inside didn't stop them from thinking or talking about their explorations to figure out the identity of the mysterious man. They talked about exploring so much those two days that even Lizzy started to become interested. All the rest of the children hoped that she would join them in their next expedition.

But there was still school those two days to occupy much of their time. Billy didn't come, but Joe still did. The children tried to include Joe in their conversations, but he didn't want to be included. He would just go off into the rain, they supposed to Billy's cave.

Finally, on Thursday, the rain stopped and the sun appeared. The warm sunshine dried the muddy roads, and the children were ready to explore.

But as always, school came first. And since the weather brightened up, Mr. Graham went with Tom to work on Rev. Johnson's shed. On the way they met the Cox children and Tom talked with them about

their future exploration for the day. When they got to the Johnson's land, Mr. Graham went to the shed and the children went to the house. Lizzy was sitting by herself on the front porch, staring off into the distance with a blank look on her face.

"Hello, Lizzy," Anna said as the children walked up to the house. "Are you all right?"

"Hello, everyone," Lizzy said quietly as she looked up at them. Tom noticed she had circles under her eyes from lack of sleep. She sighed. "Joe hasn't been back since school yesterday."

"He hasn't?" Anna asked. "Has anyone gone looking for him?"

Lizzy shook her head. "No one's worried about where he is—he's with Billy in their cave. But I'm worried about him, because Billy's leaving."

All the children gaped at hearing the news. Their speechlessness almost made Lizzy smile in spite of her mood. After a moment, Anna regained her voice. "Billy's leaving?"

Lizzy nodded.

"But that's good, isn't it?" Sarah asked. "Then Joe won't become bad like Billy."

Lizzy nodded. "In that way it's good. Hopefully, he'll find better friends than Billy. But that's just it. Billy was his only friend. He's never been so sad and angry before as he has been these last couple days. I'm just not sure what he'll do."

"Maybe he'd like to go exploring with us," Tom suggested.

"He probably would like to," Lizzy said, "but not with you. He's mad at you."

"Why's he mad at me?" Tom asked.

"Because you told on Billy and Billy got in trouble with his folks," Lizzy said. "And so Billy's folks decided to send Billy off to town to work as an apprentice. If he's busy working, he won't get into trouble. So it's because of you that Billy is leaving and that's why Joe is upset."

"Oh." Tom looked away.

Anna put a hand on Tom's shoulder. "Don't feel bad, Tom. You did what you needed to do. What happened because of it isn't your fault."

Tom nodded. "Yeah, I know. I just wish it didn't have to turn out that way."

Anna looked back at Lizzy. "Do you know when Billy's leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning," Lizzy replied.



“So we better be on the lookout for him,” Anna said. “He might want to get revenge before he goes.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Lizzy said. “Tom, you especially need to be careful.”

“My father’s here,” Tom said. “He won’t let me get beat up.”

Thankfully, nothing happened during school or recess. Neither Billy nor Joe showed up for either. Gradually, the children forgot about them and started preparing themselves for the expedition. By the time school finished for the day, they only thought about trying to find that mysterious man again.

“Well, Captain, do you think we better be off?” Anna asked Tom.

“Yes, Lieutenant, we should do so immediately.” Tom turned to Lizzy. “Lizzy, do you want to come?”

Lizzy hesitated.

“Come on, Lizzy, there’s nothing to be afraid of,” Anna said. “There’d be five of us and you can be in the middle.”

“Tramping through the woods isn’t something that I really like to do,” Lizzy said slowly, “but it is more fun being with you all, than being by myself. So...I guess.”

Everyone cheered and Lizzy added, “But I wish Joe was here with us—and Shep. They’d both keep us safe and Shep would probably be able to find the man much easier than us.”

“That’s true,” Tom said. “It’s a pity we’re not on friendly terms with Joe.”

“Who’s Lizzy going to be?” Peter asked.

“You mean what’s her role in the expedition?” Tom asked.

Peter nodded.

“I don’t need to be anything,” Lizzy said.

“If you aren’t anything, then you’re our prisoner!” Peter said happily, grabbing her hands and pulling them behind her back.

“Peter!” Anna said reproachfully. “Be nice to Lizzy and let go of her. She doesn’t have to pretend if she doesn’t want to. Besides, you wouldn’t take a prisoner on an expedition.”

Peter let go of Lizzy’s hands and looked down shamefully.

Lizzy ruffled Peter’s hair. “That’s okay, you didn’t hurt me. But I still don’t want to be your prisoner.

Peter smiled.

“How about we’re escorting her to her destination to keep her safe,” Tom said.

“She wants to be reunited with her long-lost Grandpa!” Sarah said.

Lizzy made a face. “I don’t want that creepy old man for a Grandpa.”

“Like I said, Lizzy doesn’t have to pretend if she doesn’t want to,” Anna said.

“But that’s not as fun,” Sarah whined.

“You can still pretend, Sarah,” Tom said, “even if Lizzy doesn’t.”

That satisfied everyone, so they all trooped off, now with Lizzy in the middle, to the stick that marked the spot where Lizzy saw the old man. The stick had disappeared from when the storm had raged the last couple days, so they had to put a new one in the same spot. This time instead of heading due west, they decided to go due north. Tom checked the sun to figure out the direction to go in and marched off.

They walked for only a little while into the woods, before their way was blocked by highway robbers—also known as Billy and Joe. All the children looked at each other uneasily, but especially at Tom. Tom started to sweat, knowing he was the leader and must set the example for the rest of them.

“Cut them off, Joe,” Billy said and Joe circled round behind the expedition.

“So,” Billy said, looking at Tom, “you didn’t get enough of me last week, did you, that you told on me.”

Billy slowly walked toward the group.

“Billy, if you hurt me, my father will know about it,” Tom said. “He’s just over by the Johnsons’ shed and if I yell, he’ll hear me and come.”

Billy laughed menacingly. “No, he won’t. He already packed up and left.” Billy laughed again. “Joe here told him I left already.”

Everyone looked back at Joe, who stared at the ground. He looked ashamed, and Tom felt sorry for him. He couldn’t imagine doing everything someone else told you, even when you didn’t want to do what they said.

“So if you yell, maybe Miss Johnson will hear you, but what’s she going to do? Run to get your Pa?” Billy laughed. “Can you imagine her running?” A fit of laughter took control of Billy a few moments, while the rest of the children exchanged amused glances. Billy didn’t seem so mean when he laughed that way. Somehow, he just seemed like a normal boy. But then he suddenly stopped, as if he had read the others’ minds, and a frown appeared on his face. “So now I’ll take care of you

for good, you little tattletale.”

Billy walked up to Tom’s face and glared.

For an instant, Tom had a sickening feeling in his stomach. But then he remembered that he didn’t need to fear Billy. Even if Billy killed him, which he knew he wouldn’t, he shouldn’t be afraid. That’s what Jesus had said. So Tom stood up straighter and said, “I don’t lie like you, Billy. My parents asked me what happened and I told them, like I should.”

“Well then maybe this will shut your mouth,” Billy said and punched Tom’s lip, knocking him to the ground. “Because of you, I have to leave, just when I was getting comfortable here.” Billy kicked Tom in the stomach. Tom winced in pain, but tried to get up. Billy just pushed him back down.

“Don’t like that?” Billy sneered. “Then you shouldn’t have told.” Tom tried to stand up again, but Billy shoved him to the ground.

“That’s enough, Billy,” Joe said from behind the others.

“Be quiet, Joe,” Billy said. “He didn’t learn the last time, so we’ve got to teach him who’s in charge.” With that he kicked Tom again. This time Tom didn’t try to get up. Satisfied with his work, Billy then looked at the other children. “And since you all have been following this loser,” Billy jerked his head at Tom, “I guess I need to teach you all who’s boss, too.”

Tom moved to try to block Billy as he walked toward Lizzy and the Coxes, but Billy knocked him down again. The others all huddled together, too scared to do anything. But then Anna stepped up to Billy.

“Stop it, Billy,” she said, voice quavering.

Billy got in Anna’s face and said quietly, “Did you think I forgot what you did?”

“I’m not afraid of you anymore.”

Billy cocked his head, cruel smile still on his face. “You should be.”

Before Anna could respond, Billy reached for and yanked off the locket that hung around her neck. Then he turned around and threw it as hard as he could farther into the woods. Tom saw what was happening and jumped up to try to catch it, but wasn’t quick enough.

“No!” Anna screamed and the rest of the children gasped, as they saw the tiny locket disappear into the woods. “That was Ma’s,” she whispered as a tear slid down her cheek.

Billy grinned wickedly at her.

“Come on, Joe,” he said, turning to leave and motioning Joe to

follow him. "We've done enough now. Let's leave them to tend to their wounds."

Billy started walking away, but stopped to pick something up. He looked back and grinned his evil grin again, then continued off. For a moment Joe stood observing the scene. He almost looked as if he would rather have stayed with the others than go with Billy. But after a pause, he ran after him.

"I wonder if Billy's cave is close by," Tom said out loud, but more to himself, as he watched Billy and Joe leave. "Why else would they be here?"

Then he turned to Anna. "I'm sorry, Anna. I should have stopped him."

Anna looked away from where the locket had gone and toward Tom. Then she nodded and sighed, a very sad sigh. "Are you hurt a lot?"

"I don't think so," Tom said, feeling around on his body where Billy had hit and kicked him. He found a few tender spots, but nothing that wouldn't heal soon. "Just some bruises, I think." He felt his lip. "At least my lip isn't bleeding."

Then he looked around at all the sad faces. "Come on, troop. We have to find that locket."

Everyone looked at him in surprise.

"You're not too hurt?" Anna asked.

Tom shook his head, "No, not too hurt. We've got a job to do. So let's hop to it. Private Peter, find two long sticks like the ones we used to mark the trail, but try to find taller ones."

"Why two?" Peter asked as he started picking through the sticks around them.

"Because we need two to establish the line that Billy threw the locket in," Tom said. "The first one will go where Billy stood. Then the second one will go a little ways from the first, in the direction that Billy threw the locket." Tom took the sticks from Peter. "As long as we stay in line with those sticks, then we'll always have a reference to keep us on the same path." He reached into his pocket for his knife but didn't feel anything. "Now where's my knife? I know I had it to sharpen that other stick, just a minute ago."

"Maybe you dropped it," Sarah suggested.

"You had it in your hand when Billy came," Peter said. "I remember."

“That’s right,” Tom said. “And I probably dropped it when he hit me.”

Tom dropped back down to his knees to search around on the ground.

“Then it’s probably not there,” Lizzy said. “I saw Billy pick up something shiny, just before he left.”

“Me too,” Peter said. “I think that was your knife.”

“Oh,” Tom said in disappointment. He sighed and stood up. “You’re probably right. That sounds like something he would do. Well, I can probably sharpen them without a knife.”

“I’m sorry, Tom,” Anna said.

Tom shrugged, trying not to show how disappointed he really felt. “It’s not as bad as you losing your locket.”

Tom took the two sticks and rubbed them on a small stone he found nearby. Slowly they wore away till they were sharp enough to drive far into the ground.

“Now, Lizzy,” Tom said, “can I have those two ribbons in your hair? Those we’ll tie on the tops of the sticks so we’ll see them from far away.”

She gave them to him, and Tom tied them to the sticks. “Now are we ready? Then let’s go!”

Off they walked, keeping the sticks in line behind them as they went. After they had walked some distance, they started looking around on the ground. The time and place was terrible for losing a small item such as a locket. The leaves in the woods had already mostly fallen off the trees and thickly layered the ground. Their only hope was that the sun would reflect off of the locket and they would see the reflection. But clouds gathered in the sky, and the sun wasn’t as bright as they needed.

“Maybe we should get a lantern,” Tom said, “so we can better see where we’re looking.”

“I guess I’ll go get one of ours,” Lizzy said, “since my house is just over there.” She waved her hand back south.

“That’s a good idea,” Anna agreed and then suddenly exclaimed, “Oh, I forgot!”

“What?” everyone asked.

“I was going to help Ma bake extra food for Doctor Dunn,” Anna said. “His wife left to visit her sister for a week. Ma wanted him to have fresh food, so she and I offered to bake extra for him. We talked on

Sunday before church, before we had decided to explore the woods. I guess I better go home now.”

“I’ll cook for you,” Sarah offered.

“You will?” Anna raised her eyebrows.

“Yes.” Sarah nodded. “I know how much that locket means to you, so I really want you to find it. Plus, to me, cooking actually sounds more fun than looking for it.”

Anna hugged Sarah and smiled gratefully at her. “Thanks, Sarah.”

“Ouch!” Peter cried.

The rest of the children looked at Peter and saw that he was snagged in a thorn bush.

“Peter! Why are you in that thorn bush?” Anna asked, rushing over to him. “You’re all scratched up.”

“Oh! And you’re bleeding!” Sarah said, pointing to one particular scratch on Peter’s arm.

Peter had seemed fine until then, but he gasped when he saw blood and started crying. The children helped him out of the bush and tried to comfort him.

“Sarah, you better take him home with you,” Anna said.

“Shouldn’t we try to stop the bleeding?” Sarah asked her.

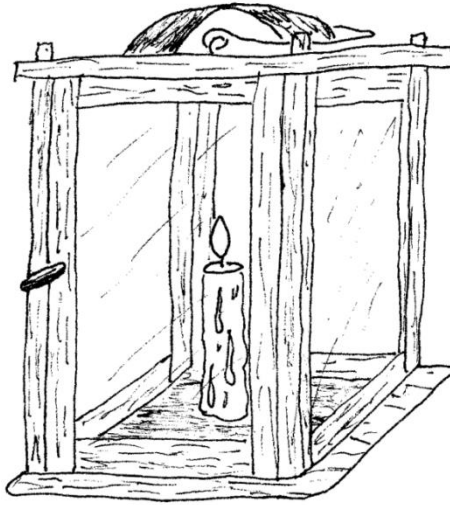
Anna shook her head. “It’s barely a cut and will stop bleeding soon. Ma will take care of it better at the cabin than we can here, anyway.”

“You could go with me to my house and Rachel would take care of it,” Lizzy suggested.

They all agreed that was a good idea and Lizzy, Sarah, and Peter headed back to the Johnson’s house, which could be seen in the distance through the trees.

“I’ll be back in a bit with the lantern,” Lizzy called back, leaving Anna and Tom to continue looking for the locket.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



## 8 LOST IN THE HAUNTED WOODS

Soon Lizzy appeared with a lantern, and she, Tom, and Anna continued to hunt for the missing locket. They searched the ground as carefully as they could, pushing the leaves aside in case the locket had slipped to the ground below. Lizzy held the lantern in such a way so that they could all use the light. They looked and looked for the locket, slowly getting farther and farther away from the reference sticks.

As they searched, the light from the sun continued to fade and they began to rely on the lantern light more and more. At first their surroundings grew dark just because of the gray clouds coming in and blocking the sun. But as time went on, the sun started to set. The children were so intent on finding that locket that they thought the darkness grew just because of the clouds. As the light faded and the children moved farther from where they started, the reference sticks got harder to see, forcing them to rely on their memory for where they were.

Suddenly, a wolf howled in the distance. All the children jumped, and they looked at each other as they realized their mistake in staying out so late.

Another wolf howled, this time much closer. The children were frightened and didn't know what to do.

"T-Tom?" Anna whispered. "Wha-what should we do?"



Tom swallowed hard. "Just stay calm. Everything will be all right. Wolves don't usually attack people, especially since we've got light."

Another wolf howled not more than thirty feet away. Lizzy screamed and dropped the lantern. With a whoosh, the wind from the drop snuffed out the candle in the lantern.

"Or not." Tom picked up the lantern.

"I'm sorry," Lizzy squeaked.

Anna reached over and hugged her. "That's okay. I know you're scared—so am I. But Tom will take care of us."

Tom looked around nervously and saw several beady eyes gleaming in the darkness. He was pretty confident that he could've gotten them out of the woods with light, but he doubted he could without it.

"So what should we do, Tom?" Anna asked. She no longer seemed so afraid, probably because she was convinced Tom could get them out of the situation.

"Well, since we don't have light," he replied, "and unfortunately I don't have my tinderbox, I think it would be better to stay here and wait for our parents to come after us."

As Tom spoke, they heard a deep rumbling noise coming from one pair of gleaming eyes.

"Wait here with the wolves?" Lizzy cried.

"It'd be almost impossible to find our way back in the dark and the wolves could be anywhere in the woods," Tom said. "Since we have to stay, we have to make the wolves scared of us. So make a lot of noise and move around."

Both girls just looked at each other not really knowing what they should do. Tom stooped to the ground to feel for something. When he found what he was looking for, he stood up and whistled so loudly that Anna and Lizzy both jumped and had to hold their ears. Tom noted with satisfaction that the growling had stopped—the wolves were no longer coming toward them.

"What did you do?" Anna asked Tom with a gasp.

"I whistled using an acorn cap," Tom said. "I'll have to show you how to do it later. But hurry up and make some noise."

Lizzy was too scared to make much of any noise, but Anna began to sing and Tom continued whistling. After only a few moments Anna said, "Hey, look! Look over there! There's light from a lantern! We're saved!"

"But—but what if it's him? The mysterious man in the woods?"

Lizzy asked trembling.

“Come on, Lizzy, is he worse than wolves?” Tom said.

Lizzy didn't reply.

“Let's keep making noise,” Tom told Anna.

The light started moving faster in their direction and Tom noticed the gleaming eyes of the wolves disappear. As the light came closer, the one who held it became clearer. It was the old man with the long beard.

Lizzy trembled, cowering into the shadows, and whispered, “It is him!”

“Come on, Lizzy. Be brave,” Anna said with uncertainty. “Better call out to him, Tom, to make sure he knows we need help.”

Tom swallowed hard, beginning to feel nervous, too. “Hello there!” he called out to the man.

“Hello there!” the man called back. “Are you in trouble?”

“Yes, we're lost and we need to know how to get back to the road,” Tom replied.

“Well, wait a minute and I'll be there,” the old man called back.

Slowly through the bushes and brambles, he made his way toward the children. The more they all waited for him to come, the more nervous they became.

“Why, you are all just children,” the old man said, coming up to them and looking at them with the light from his lantern. “Children these days!” he muttered to himself. “Staying out at night all alone, especially with wolves! And without even the light from a lantern.”

“We have a lantern,” Tom said, holding up Lizzy's lantern. “It just went out.”

“Well then, you'll want to have that lighted,” the old man said, taking and lighting the lantern with his own. “So did you say you're looking for the road down south of here?”

“Yes, sir,” Tom replied.

“And you're lost?”

“Yes, sir,” Anna said.

“Well, then,” the man said, “I can take you there, eventually. I'm not as young as I once was, so I might take a while.” The man handed the lantern back to Tom and then he smiled down at the children, a natural, easy smile, which put them much more at ease with him. “But in the meantime we can talk. I don't often meet people in the woods, so I'd love to hear all about you and what's going on around here.”

They all started off and as they walked, the children told the old man about themselves and their families and their neighbors. He seemed interested in everything they told him and soon they chatted with him like old friends. It surprised Tom that he didn't seem to know much about any of what went on in the area, making him wonder all the more who he really was.

Finally Anna asked him, "So where do you live?"

"I live in this wood," the man said. "Milkwood is what I call it. That's because I pretty much just live off of the milk from the cows I raise here."

"You raise cows in the woods?" Anna asked, surprised.

The old man laughed. "Yes, in the woods. You can make pretty good pastures in the woods by burning off all the brambles and leaving the trees. Grass will grow and, as long as I continue to graze my cattle in them, the brambles won't. It's actually easier to have cows in the woods than in the paddocks people normally have, because the cows don't need any other shelter besides the trees. All I have to do is milk the cows to take care of them."

"But do you fence them in?" Anna asked.

"No," the man replied. "The cows won't go far from me. Watch out here's a thorn bush."

The children all dodged the thorn bush as they continued walking.

"But what about wolves?" Tom asked.

"Wolves don't like cattle," the man said. "I personally think it's because cows just aren't scared of them. You see, wolves like to chase their prey. So since cows don't run from the wolves, the wolves don't see them as prey. Every once in a while I will lose a calf from bolting from a wolf. But most of the time the cattle stick together and just ignore the wolves."

"So do you have a house somewhere in the woods?" Anna asked.

"Yes, but not in the ordinary sense," the man said. "I move around for the different seasons. I'm getting ready to move to my winter dwelling now."

"Isn't that what the Indians do?" Tom asked.

The old man nodded. "Yes, some of them."

"Are you an Indian?" Anna asked.

"I guess you could say so," the man said, stroking his beard. "But then again, not really," he added somewhat sadly.

The children didn't know how to respond to this, so they kept quiet.

Tom figured he must be part Indian and part European. At least, he wasn't all Indian with that beard of his.

"I'm alone in the world," the man said in a different kind of voice, almost as if he were talking to himself. "Pretty much always have been. Always will be. I'm cut off from all my fellow man, not an Indian, not a White Man."

The man got quiet, seeming to forget what he was doing or that the children were even there. The children looked at each other in wonder. But in just a few strides, they came to the road, and the man seemed to wake up. "You know where you are now?"

Lizzy and Anna shook their heads, but Tom knew and said, "Yes, sir."

"Well," the man said, "it was nice talking to you all. I really have enjoyed your company this evening."

"We have, too," Anna said.

"Yes," Tom added. "It sounds like you have a wonderful life in the woods!"

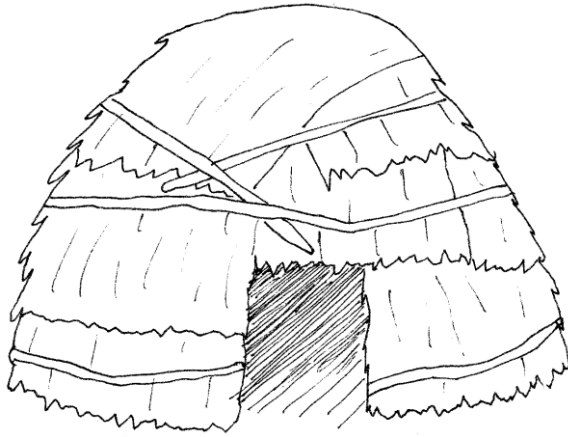
The old man laughed. "Well, if you're interested, you can come out and see it. Just come to the same place where we met today and I'll take you there tomorrow."

All the children gasped, and Tom knew the others were as excited as he was to see the man's unusual homestead. So they promised they would all come back after school.

"Well, goodbye," the man said, turning to leave.

Anna put her hand on his arm to stop. "Please, we don't know your name."

The man paused, seeming to think to himself. Slowly, he looked at each of the children in turn. Then all at once, as if his mind had just been made up, he said, "Tobias McElwee," and then disappeared into the woods without a trace. Tom, Anna and Lizzy all looked at each other in amazement, both from how quickly he disappeared and because of the name. Could he have something to do with Fort McElwee? Tom didn't know, but he had to find out.



## 9 MILKWOOD

That night, the children sure had an exciting story to tell their families. Their parents expressed their worry that the children were alone outside at night with the wolves. In fact, just before they came back, Mr. Graham and Mr. Cox had met together to prepare to search for them. Everyone was glad it hadn't come to that.

At school the next day, the children couldn't stop talking about what had happened the night before. Peter and Sarah were sad that they had missed out, but they greatly enjoyed hearing all about it. They all tried to concentrate on school, but it was impossible. Finally, Miss Johnson let them out early. She said that would help keep them from staying out so late, like the night before.

When they all trooped out into the sunshine, Lizzy said, "What about them?" pointing at Peter and Sarah.

"What about us?" Sarah asked, looking offended.

Anna looked at Lizzy questioningly. "Yeah, what do you mean?"

"Well, should we let them come?" Lizzy asked.

"Why not?" Tom asked.

"Yeah, what's wrong with us?" Peter put his hands on his hips.

"Nothing's wrong with you," Lizzy said, beginning to grow frustrated. "I just don't know if Mr. McElwee would like it. He didn't seem like he liked people that much."

"He didn't seem to mind us," Anna said.

“Yes, but he had to save us and then he got to know us,” Lizzy said. “What if he doesn’t like that we’ve brought more people? He didn’t say that they could come, only us.”

“You’ve got a point there,” Tom said. “It might seem like we’re being rude or taking advantage of his kindness. It probably would be better if just we three go.”

Sarah’s and Peter’s shoulders sagged, and their faces showed a look of hurt.

Anna sighed. “I guess you’re right. After all, you’re captain of this expedition.” She put her hands on Sarah’s and Peter’s shoulders. “I’m so sorry. I wish you both could come, but I think Tom’s right.”

Tom looked quietly at the two younger Coxes. He felt really bad, but thought that leaving them behind was the best thing to do.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll never get to go,” Tom said.

“That’s true,” Anna agreed. “We can ask Mr. McElwee today if you can come tomorrow.”

That pleased Peter and Sarah enough to let the older children go without them into the woods.

The weather was fresh but a little cold. The clouds hid the sun, but Tom knew by the look of them that it wouldn’t rain. Finding their way was a little more difficult without the sun, so Tom had to rely on his reference sticks.

When they got to the reference sticks for the locket, Anna sighed and Lizzy took her ribbons off them. She didn’t want them ruined in the weather. Tom felt like taking off the ribbons was a sign of defeat, that they’d never find the locket. But he didn’t say anything, just kept marching forward, looking for signs of the old man.

They continued to march and look for Mr. McElwee, but they probably wouldn’t have found him if he hadn’t shown himself. As they passed a large tree, the man quietly walked out from behind it and stood in front of them. The sudden appearance of the man somewhat startled them, especially Lizzy, though he looked a lot less menacing in the sunlight than in the lantern light.

He looked old and had many wrinkles and creases in his skin. He had long gray hair and a long beard. His clothes were all brown leather and looked much like what one would expect an Indian or mountain man to wear. He wore no hat and, at his side, he wore a pack and a canteen.

He smiled at the children and, without saying a word, beckoned

them farther into the woods. They followed him without speaking and noticed how softly he tread the ground. Anna, Lizzy, and Tom all tried to walk as quiet as he was, but they weren't able to. They all had shoes on, unlike Mr. McElwee, who wore moccasins.

As they continued deeper into the woods, the forest seemed to change. Instead of many little trees cramped together with a few scattered big trees, there were just several big trees spaced quite far apart, which created just one green canopy high in the air. Instead of brambles, grass grew there.

"This does look like a good place to graze," Anna said.

The old man looked back and smiled. "It takes many years to grow and nurture a forest."

After walking a while more, Mr. McElwee stopped and said, "Listen."

The children all stopped and listened, and they heard the lowing of cattle not far away. Mr. McElwee smiled, and they smiled back at him.

"Ah, that is the sound of home," he said with a sigh.

Soon the cows came into view. They were mostly reddish-brown with white splotches on them and had little curly horns on the top of their heads. They all looked up when the children came into view, but soon went back to grazing the grass and greens that grew around them.

"They're shorthorn cattle," Mr. McElwee said, walking up to one cow and stroking her back. The cow continued to eat, ignoring his presence. "Perfect for milk and for meat when they get old. Come on over, one at a time, and pet them. They're gentle and won't hurt you, as long as you don't startle them."

Anna walked up to the one that Mr. McElwee stood beside and stroked her with him. Then she smiled up at the man and at Tom and Lizzy.

Tom went up to the cow next. As he approached her, she looked up at him, still chewing the grass in her mouth. He lifted up his hand to pet her head, but he was too sudden, and she stepped back a few steps.

"Easy there, Bella," Mr. McElwee said softly. "Easy."

The cow stopped but continued to look suspiciously at Tom. Tom stepped forward with his hand outstretched. She quivered a little as his hand came closer to her, but instantly stopped when he put his hand down and stroked her head. After a few strokes, Bella nuzzled and licked his hand. Tom laughed and looked around at the others. Lizzy

had come up beside Anna and also petted the cow, looking as if she were enjoying herself.

“Come and see my house,” Mr. McElwee said, beckoning his guests farther into the woods. In front of them stood what looked like a small hut made of grass.

“It’s called a Wetu,” Mr. McElwee said, pronouncing it WEE-too. “I make it by taking several little cedar trees, called saplings, and putting them in holes around in a circle. Then I tie them together at the top and that makes the frame. Then, for my summer one, I weave cattail mats and tie them to the frame. The grass allows the air to move through the Wetu, but protects from the rain.”

“What about in the winter?” Tom asked.

“I use bark instead of the grass mats,” Mr. McElwee said. “No wind will pass through that.”

In front of the Wetu, and inside, there was each a circle of stones, where the man could build a fire.

“You don’t have a chimney,” Anna pointed out.

“No,” Mr. McElwee said. “But see the grass mat above the fire pit is propped open to let the smoke out.”

There wasn’t much else inside the Wetu, except what looked like a bench all the way around along the wall. There were also many things hanging up, such as cowhides and dried herbs.

“You don’t have much,” Anna said.

“I don’t need much,” the old man replied. “Come around outside, and I’ll show you the rest of my place.”

They all walked outside a little ways and came to a door in the side of a hill. Mr. McElwee unlatched and opened the door.

“Now this is the more European side of my homestead,” he said. “This is my cheese cave. All my extra milk goes in here.”

The cave looked much like a pantry, except it was filled entirely with big wheels of cheese all in different stages of ripening, and in different colors ranging from yellow to white to blueish-green.

Mr. McElwee shut the door and they walked a little farther to a pond filled with ducks all quacking merrily. When they saw the group coming, the ducks surrounded them, hoping they had some food. Mr. McElwee pulled some cracked acorns out of his pocket and gave them to the children to feed the ducks.

The ducks loved the acorns, and the children loved feeding the ducks. But pretty soon they ran out of acorns and the ducks lost



interest. Mr. McElwee sat down on a log that looked out over the pond, and the children sat down next to him. The pond looked so pretty with the ducks swimming happily on it. And since the clouds had cleared away, they could see the sun setting, which also added to the beauty of the view. All was so peaceful there. They all sighed and wished the day would never end.

“So how did you come to live here?” Anna finally asked.

The old man sighed. “It’s a sad story, but it would probably be good to have it told. Unless you’d rather not hear a sad story?”

“We all have experienced sadness in our own stories,” Tom said. “We know it’s just a part of this life.”

“And like you said,” Anna added, “it’d do you good to tell it. It’s hard not being able to tell someone your sadness. It’s like keeping the cows in the barn, when the grass is green in the pasture.”

Mr. McElwee laughed. “Well then, I guess I better start at the beginning. My father, William McElwee—”

“Your father was the man who built the old fort?” Anna interrupted, eyes wide with surprise.

“Yes, he was,” Mr. McElwee said. “I see you know at least some of the story.”

“Then is it true he married an Indian princess?” Lizzy asked.

Mr. McElwee cocked his head to one side. “I don’t know about a princess, but I do know my mother was an Indian. She was from the Wampanoag tribe that lived far east of here. She was one of the few that remained.”

“So do you know how to speak the language?” Tom asked.

“No,” the man replied. “Unfortunately, my mother didn’t teach me. I don’t think she even knew the language very well, being around and talking with the English so much of her life. I never even heard her Wampanoag name. She just always went by Catharine.”

“So how did your father and mother end up here in the west?” Anna asked.

“Well,” Mr. McElwee said, shifting his position on the log, “my father married my mother back East, but he grew discontented with where he was. He wanted to go out and tame the wilderness. The colonies had just acquired this land from the British, so he scouted it out and found it perfect for his and other like-minded settlers’ needs.”

“That would have been in 1783,” Tom said. “That was part of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War.”

Mr. McElwee nodded. "But it was still very dangerous here, for the British and the Indians who sided with the British were still occupying it. My father knew the danger, so he built the fort to live in."

"How did they get food?" Anna asked. "By hunting?"

"I think some of the food came from hunting," the old man said, "but most of it came from farming."

Anna raised her eyebrows. "They farmed in that little fort?"

"No," Mr. McElwee said, "not inside, but outside. That's what made things so difficult. They had to plow the land while holding their muskets. My father also brought cows, letting them graze outside in the day and bringing them in at night."

"So did the Indians attack the fort?" Tom asked.

"Yes," Mr. McElwee said, "and burned it to the ground."

"But you escaped," Anna said.

"My mother and I did," Mr. McElwee said. "My father must have known that things would not go well when he saw the army of Indians. He put us on a horse in the midst of the cattle. Then he frightened all the cattle to stampede. He knew that the Indians would not be able to get at us while we were in that mob. In fact, I don't think the Indians even noticed that we were among them." He paused, smiling thoughtfully.

"So what happened next?" Lizzy asked impatiently.

Mr. McElwee smiled at her. "The stampede continued for quite a while into these woods before the cattle finally quieted down. The idea was that once we were in the woods, my mother, being an Indian, could easily hide herself from the Indians who were attacking the fort. If things did turn out all right, she would come back. I don't know how long she stayed hidden till she went back and found that everyone else in the fort, including my father, had been killed in the attack."

"Oh," Anna said and all the children looked at each other sadly. "I'm so sorry."

The old man nodded his head and continued. "Then she decided to live and raise me in the woods. She was afraid of people. Afraid of the Indians who had killed her husband and afraid of the White Men who seemed to hate all Indians like herself."

"Several times people did come into the woods and find us, usually fur trappers. My mother was always very kind to them and gave them food and milk—milk that was drugged with a certain herb. When the fur trapper was drugged, she'd lead him out and he'd forget anything

that happened to him. I've done that a couple times myself, since my mother died."

"That sounds like what Joe said Billy Hood would do," Tom told the other children. "Do you think Billy knew that happened?"

"Maybe," Anna said. "Like I said, he made that story up from real things. But go on with your story, Mr. McElwee."

"My mother knew how to forage for food and herbs but couldn't provide me with meat to help me grow," Mr. McElwee continued. "She was a woman, of course, and hadn't learned how to hunt. Fortunately for us, those cows were still around. So she milked them and that provided me with good nourishment. Eventually, when I was old enough to help her, we butchered some of the cattle for meat and we were able to use their skins for clothing."

"So you lived all your life with only your mother?" Anna asked, astonished.

Mr. McElwee nodded. "Yes, just about, at least until she died."

"Then you must have been lonely," Anna said.

"I was," Mr. McElwee replied. "It was hard. But my mother knew it would be, and before she died, she advised me to return to the White Men. She thought I was enough of a White Man to be able to live among them. But the trouble was, I had lived so much of my life already in such a different way. I knew that my ways would not be liked, that no one would ever accept me the way I was."

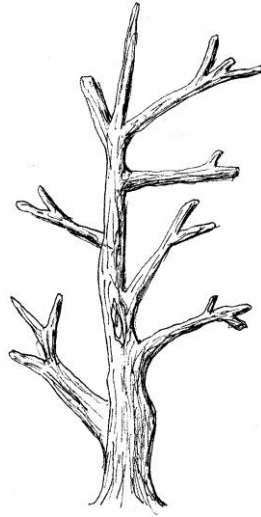
"We accept you," Anna said.

"Yes and I think many other people would, too," Tom added. "It's true that there are a lot of nasty people out there, but there are a lot of good people, too."

"Maybe," the man said. "But I could still never go to the White Men."

Mr. McElwee looked up at the setting sun, just barely showing itself over the horizon.

"Oh, the sun's almost set and you have to get home," Mr. McElwee said, standing up. All the children stood up, too. "But I have one more thing to show you before you go."



## 10 AT THE TOP OF A TREE

Mr. McElwee led the children back the way they had come through the woods, past his Wetu, his fire pit, his cows, and back to the woods with brambles and small trees. They continued walking through the woods till the children noticed things starting to look familiar. Instead of the leaves on the ground being all packed down nicely, they were all messed up, allowing some bare spots of dirt to peek through.

“This is where we were yesterday, looking for the locket,” Tom said.

The old man nodded. “You were so close to finding it, too. You just were looking in the wrong direction.”

“But I made sure that we were looking in line with Billy’s throw,” Tom said.

“And you did,” Mr. McElwee said. “But you were looking down, not up.”

He stopped and pointed up into an old dead tree. The children looked to where he was pointing and saw Anna’s locket caught on one of the branches.

“How did you find it?” Anna asked. “And how did you even know I lost it? We met you after we stopped looking for it.”

Mr. McElwee smiled a mysterious sort of smile and said, “I saw the reflection of it when I was coming back to my house after showing you the path.”

Tom noticed he didn't exactly answer Anna's question, but he decided not to ask further.

"Do you think it will fall down if we throw something at it?" Tom asked.

"I don't think so," Mr. McElwee said. "I tried that this morning."

"Then how are we going to get it?" Anna asked.

"I think this is a job for Tom here," the man said, putting a hand on Tom's shoulder. "You can climb a tree, can't you, son?"

"Yes, sir," Tom said and then to Anna, "I'll get it down for you, Anna."

Anna smiled. "Just be careful."

"I agree," Mr. McElwee said as he boosted Tom up to the first branch. "This tree has been dead for some time and those branches may not be sturdy. Check your weight on them first before committing. We don't want you to hurt yourself."

Tom climbed as carefully as he could, but still he knocked down quite a few branches trying to find a sturdy one. Mr. McElwee had Anna and Lizzy stand back, while he stayed close to help Tom choose his branches.

"I wouldn't step on that one, Tom," he would say. "That looks a little rotted underneath." And Tom would avoid the branch. Or he would say, "Try that one—that one looks pretty strong," and Tom would try the limb and see if it was sturdy.

Slowly Tom climbed up the tree till he reached the branch that the locket rested on.

"Better hold onto that branch above you," Mr. McElwee said. "As you walk farther out on the branch, it isn't as strong. We wouldn't want you to fall from that height, if it broke from under you."

Tom held to the branch above him as he inched his way out to the locket. Tom didn't fear heights, but standing on that branch so high up made him feel a little dizzy. As long as he didn't look down, but just focused on the locket, he would feel fine.

Several tense seconds passed as Tom made his way slowly across the branch. Lizzy and Anna both held their breaths. Everyone watched silently.

Suddenly the branch Tom was standing on groaned and then made a loud CRACK! as it gave way. Tom held onto the branch above him as he felt the branch beneath his feet fall away. It fell, bouncing against other branches and knocking them down along with a lot of dust and

bits of wood. Mr. McElwee shielded his eyes from the dust and didn't see a huge piece falling towards him. The piece hit him right on the head and he crumpled to the ground.

Lizzy and Anna both screamed at the sight of Tom hanging on the limb and Mr. McElwee on the ground. Tom wasn't hurt and quite easily swung himself up to sit on the branch he had been holding. He knew this one wouldn't give way because it was so big.

He looked down and saw the girls rush over to Mr. McElwee. Quickly, they brushed debris off of him to see what had happened. His eyes were closed.

Anna knelt down and put her ear on his chest to see if his heart was still beating.

"Is he all right?" Tom called down.

"No," Anna said. "I think he must be knocked out and his head is bleeding from a cut."

"Then one of us needs to go get help and one of us needs to bandage his wound," Tom said, looking down at all the branches around him for one that he might step down on. He saw a small one that he thought might allow him to get at a bigger one below. Slowly, he let himself down on the branch and carefully let the branch take his weight. But before he put more than half his weight on it, the limb snapped and his legs were in the air again. As fast as he could, he pulled himself back on the branch he had been on.

"It's no good," he said. "I can't get down. There's just no branch I can reach from here and this tree's too big and rough to slide down. You're both just going to have to do it."

Lizzy and Anna looked at each other, but neither did anything.

"Come on," Tom said, "we don't have much time. He needs your help."

Tom looked at the sky and saw that the sun had set, though light still came from the west. He didn't say so, but he thought that if someone didn't go soon, the forest would grow too dark to find their way back. And then, there was the possibility of wolves.

"I don't know how to bandage a wound," Lizzy said quietly. "That means you will have to."

"I can't," Anna said. "I'll kill him, if I try!"

"No you won't, Anna," Lizzy said. "You're good at it. You told me you bandaged up Peter's leg and it healed."

"But that was just a scratch," Anna protested. "This—he could

die.”

“He could die if you don’t do something,” Tom said from up in the tree. “Listen to me, Anna. I know you’re afraid things will happen like they did for your mother and that you will be blamed for this man’s death if he dies. But that’s not true. The only one who ever blamed you for your mother’s death is yourself. You can do it. At least you must try and do your best. The rest we’ll have to leave in God’s hands.”

Anna didn’t say anything, so Tom continued. “Since Anna is going to bandage Mr. McElwee, that means you’ll need to go get help, Lizzy.”

Lizzy looked up at Tom with terror in her eyes.

“Me? But—but I can’t go out there alone!” she cried. “Not in the Haunted Woods. And—and it’s getting dark and there’ll be wolves and and ... Oh Tom, I can’t! I just can’t!”

Tom looked down at Lizzy and saw her fear and felt sorry for her. He knew how she felt, but she had to do it. “You must, Lizzy,” Tom said. “Mr. McElwee needs you to do it. And if you hurry, you’ll get back to your house before dark and nothing will bother you.”

“But I don’t know the way!” Lizzy said, starting to cry. Anna put her arm around her.

“Just keep the sunset to your right and you’ll find the road,” Tom told her. “Once you find the road, go left on it until you find your house.” But Lizzy didn’t seem to hear. “Lizzy, you can do this, too, just like Anna can bandage Mr. McElwee. You both have what it takes. You can conquer this fear. Remember the apostles? They had courage to do what’s right because they knew God and wanted to do what he wanted them to do. You both know God like the apostles did, so you can have the courage like they had, too.”

Tom ran out of words to say, but still neither Lizzy nor Anna moved. He couldn’t think of anything else to do to help them. He wished he could do something for them, but he couldn’t. Then he realized God could. So he prayed aloud: “God, we need your help now to have the courage to do what we need to do. Give Lizzy and Anna the courage to face their fears. Give Anna wisdom to bandage the man correctly and Lizzy the safety to come back all right so she can get help. Thank you for watching over us and protecting us. Amen.”

Determination came into the eyes of both Lizzy and Anna as they stood up. They looked at each other, knowing what they had to do.

“We can do it, Lizzy,” Anna said.

“With God’s help, Anna,” Lizzy said.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS

They hugged each other one last time before Lizzy ran off to get help and Anna knelt down to bandage the man.



## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS



## 11 BEING BRAVE

Lizzy ran and ran through the woods, trying not to think about what lurked behind the many shadows of the trees she passed. Darkness grew around her as the sunset slowly faded away. She tried not to let the darkness creep into her soul. Silently, over and over again, she prayed for help.

The run seemed longer than reality for her. It seemed like a never-ending nightmare, one where you fear someone is chasing you, but you don't know if he's really behind you. But finally, the woods fell away and she came to the path. She turned to the left and continued to run all the way to her house.

Happiness filled her at the sight of the merry yellow light of a fire through the windows of her house. The glow of the cabin seemed to take the fear out of the night. Quickly, she went inside.

"Lizzy, there you are!" Rachel, her cousin said reproachfully. "You missed supper again and I even let you out of school early! Father was just thinking of going out to look for you."

"Is everything all right, Lizzy? You're all out of breath," Reverend Johnson said.

"And you look pale," Mrs. Johnson added.

"No, everything is not all right," Lizzy said. "Someone must hurry and get the doctor. The old man out in the woods is badly hurt and needs help and Anna's bandaging his head and Tom is stuck in a tree."

The reverend started up and grabbed a lantern. "I'll go get the doctor and you and Rachel go bring Mr. Cox and Mr. Graham here."

"But Lizzy has just come in from running through the woods. She should stay here and rest," Mrs. Johnson said.

"I'll be fine, Aunt Barbara, really," Lizzy said.

"Well, if you think so," her aunt said, doubtfully.

"So you both will go get Mr. Cox and Mr. Graham and when I come back with Doctor Dunn, we'll all go off to find Tom, Anna, and this old man. All right? Then let's go!" Reverend Johnson went outside to saddle his horse and soon hurried off to Doctor Dunn's house.

Lizzy grabbed another lantern and rushed off with Rachel to go first to the Grahams and then to the Coxes.

Lizzy felt somewhat tired from her run, but she hardly noticed it with her worry for the others in the woods. She couldn't imagine staying in the woods at night again, especially with the wolves. The thought of those wolves eating up her friends gave her extra strength to go even faster. She was glad that at least Tom and Anna had each other. She was glad she had Rachel with her.

When they had been on the path for only a few minutes, they saw two men with lanterns coming toward them. They were Mr. Cox and Mr. Graham.

"Hello, there!" Mr. Cox called out. "Is that you, Lizzy?"

"Yes, it is," Lizzy called back. "Please hurry! The man in the woods is hurt bad and Anna's bandaging him and Tom's stuck in a tree!"

The two men caught up to the two girls. "What's happened, Lizzy?" Mr. Cox asked.

"The man in the woods is hurt bad, Anna's bandaging him, Tom's stuck in a tree and we have to hurry to help them!"

"Is someone fetching the doctor?" Mr. Cox asked.

"My father is," Rachel said.

"What about a rope for Tom?" Mr. Graham asked.

"There's one in our shed," Rachel said.

"Good," Mr. Graham said.

"Can we go now?" Lizzy asked, impatient to get back to the house.

"Yes, and on the way, why don't you tell us exactly what happened," Mr. Cox said.

Once they reached the house, they didn't have to wait long for Reverend Johnson and Dr. Dunn. The doctor was used to these quick responses, even at night. So Mr. Cox, Mr. Graham, Reverend Johnson,

Dr. Dunn, and Lizzy all went out into the night to rescue those lost in the woods. The problem, as Lizzy soon realized, was that she didn't know how to find her way back to Tom and the others.

"How did you find your way to the path, Lizzy?" Reverend Johnson asked.

"Tom told me to keep the sunset on my right and then I'd find the path," Lizzy said. "And then when I found the path, I was to go left on it till I reached my house."

"That's pretty smart thinking on Tom's part," Mr. Cox said.

"And he must have had a good sense of direction," Dr. Dunn added.

"Tom always did," Mr. Graham said proudly. "So it sounds like Tom's due North from somewhere on the road."

Reverend Johnson put a hand on his niece's shoulder. "Lizzy, do you remember where you came out onto the road?"

Lizzy shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "No. It was just somewhere in the middle."

"That's not going to be easy," Mr. Graham said. "The north star will get us going in the right direction, but it will be hard to stay on track in those woods."

"Well," Mr. Cox said, "let's just make a guess and hope that they see our lanterns or hear us calling."

"I know," Lizzy said, "Shep can find them!"

"Shep is with Joe," Reverend Johnson said, "and I suppose they're still in that secret cave of theirs."

"I can find them, Uncle Jacob," Lizzy said.

Her uncle raised his eyebrows. "You know where their cave is?"

"Not exactly," Lizzy said, "but yesterday when we ran into Billy and Joe, Tom said he thought that maybe their cave was nearby."

"Is it far?" her uncle asked.

"No, not very," Lizzy replied. "We met them just a couple hundred feet into the woods past your house."

"All right, Lizzy," Reverend Jacob said. "You go see if you can find him. I'd go with you, but I'm afraid I might scare him off. You seem to be the only one who has been able to really talk with him lately. I'm sorry that you have to go by yourself, but you needn't be afraid, if it's only a couple hundred feet, because we'll still be able to see and hear each other if you need help."

Lizzy paused as fear rose within her heart once more. She hadn't

thought about having to go alone into the woods again . . . and at night, even though she wouldn't have to go far. But since she had done it before, she knew she could do it this time. So she gritted her teeth and walked off into the woods alone.

"Joe! Joe!" she called out. "It's me, Joe! It's Lizzy!"

Calling out not only would hopefully get Joe's attention, but it also made Lizzy feel better. Plus, her voice also blocked out the other creepy noises she might have heard.

She looked behind her and saw the men standing on the path watching her. Her uncle Jacob waved to her encouragingly. Lizzy looked forward again and continued on.

Suddenly, a twig snapped behind her. She bit her lip, trying not to scream. Now she was scared, really scared. She knew something big lurked behind her and could just imagine it being a wolf. Then she wondered why she had even come out here. Why had she put her life in danger again? But she knew that going was the right thing to do. So she turned around to face whatever was behind her.

Lizzy gasped. "Joe!"

"Lizzy? What are you doing out here?" Joe asked, coming toward her. He was holding onto Shep's collar, but seeing who it was, he let him go. Shep bounded over to Lizzy and licked her face. Suddenly, all her fear vanished, as she was once again in friendly company.

"I've come to find you," she said. "There's a man in the woods that's hurt, Tom's stuck in a tree and Anna is with them. We need to find them quickly before the man gets any worse or wolves get at them. I thought that Shep could find them."

Joe didn't say anything for a moment, but just looked at his sister.

"What is it, Joe?" Lizzy asked.

"You came out here, in the Haunted Woods, all by yourself?" Joe asked, as if he just couldn't believe that she had actually faced her fear of the woods.

"Yes, Joe," Lizzy said, "I don't have to be afraid, because I'm a Christian. But we must go now—I'll tell you all about it later."

Joe nodded and followed Lizzy back to the search party. When Joe, Shep, and Lizzy reached them, Reverend Johnson smiled and said to Lizzy, "You did it, Lizzy! I'm proud of you!" And to Joe he said, "And it's good to see you again, Joe."

"Now let's get going," Mr. Graham said. "Does your dog have their scent, Joe?"

“Oh,” Lizzy said, “I didn’t think about that. I don’t have anything of theirs.”

“Do either of you have anything of Anna’s or Tom’s?” Reverend Johnson asked Mr. Graham and Mr. Cox.

Both men shook their head. “But it wouldn’t take too much time to go get something,” Mr. Graham said.

“There’s no need,” Joe said quietly. “I’ve got something.”

He pulled out a knife, one that Lizzy recognized as Tom’s. “But that’s Tom’s knife! Where did you get Tom’s knife, Joe?”

Joe knelt down to show Shep the knife. “From Billy. I just haven’t had a chance to get it back to Tom.”

Lizzy was surprised to hear that Billy would’ve given it to Joe. She knew that anything Billy stole, he kept to himself. She guessed that maybe there was something else going on.

Shep sniffed the knife a couple times, while Joe spoke some quiet words to him. Then Shep howled and ran off. Everybody started off after him into the woods.

“Slow down, Shep!” Joe called. That made Shep come back to circle around the party, baying and howling, and then he ran off again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, Anna bandaged Mr. McElwee, while Tom watched from the tree. He was annoyed that he couldn’t do anything to help. He didn’t want to even talk, for fear his voice would break Anna’s concentration.

First Anna propped up Mr. McElwee’s head, using the branch that had fallen. Then she took out her handkerchief and, with some water from Mr. McElwee’s canteen, cleaned the wound. After that she rinsed out the handkerchief and bound his head with it. Tom watched all this from up above, squinting into the fading light to see below him.

As she finished up, Mr. McElwee groaned and opened his eyes. “What—What happened?” He brought his hand up to his head and winced as he felt the wound. “Oh, that’s right—the branch broke.”

He put his hand back down to his side and closed his eyes. “And everyone’s all right?”

“Yes, you’re the only one who got hurt,” Anna told him, “but I

bandaged your head the best I know how. And we've sent for help to bring you the doctor."

"Sent for help?" Mr. McElwee said absentmindedly. Then he sat up in alarm. That seemed to hurt his head so much that he winced and fell back down. Anna tried to cushion his fall. The old man just groaned.

"Is your head hurting a lot?" Anna asked.

"Not as much as the thought of seeing White Men again," Mr. McElwee moaned.

"But why?"

"White Men are different," Mr. McElwee said. "They won't accept me or my ways. I'd rather not go through the hurt of rejection."

Tom couldn't stay quiet any longer. "Sir, I don't mean to be rude, but your logic isn't reasonable."

Mr. McElwee started at the sound of Tom's voice. But Anna motioned that he was still stuck up in the tree.

Tom continued. "It's true that some people may not accept your ways. But that doesn't mean you have to be afraid of them. Who cares what anyone thinks? Let them think what they will. You just be yourself."

"Besides," Anna said, "the people who are coming to help you are our friends and family—the nicest people in the world. They won't make fun of you."

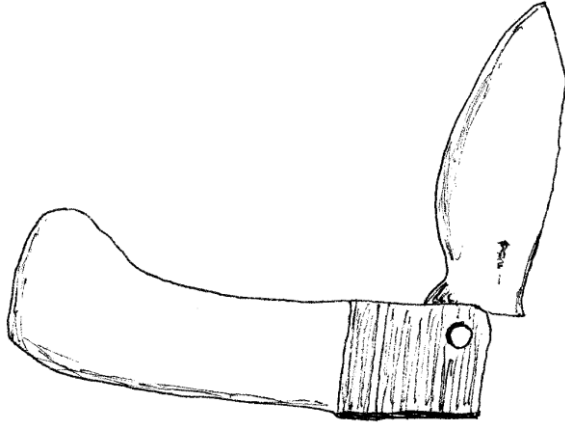
Mr. McElwee just sighed and closed his eyes. "I guess you're right," he said sleepily.

"You just rest until they get here," Anna said. Then she looked up and put her finger to her lips to let Tom know to be quiet. Then she smiled at Tom, as if to say "We did it!" and Tom smiled back. He could just barely see her in the fading light. While Mr. McElwee slept, night completely fell, leaving them in total darkness.

Not long after that, Tom heard a hound baying, which he supposed was Shep, followed by a yell he knew to be his father's. He smiled, knowing Lizzy had done her work and help had come.

## THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS





## 12 SAVED!

As soon as Tom heard his father yelling, he started to yell out as loud as he could. When Anna heard Tom yelling, she started to as well. Everyone in the search party made even more noise, so there was quite a racket as the search party came to them.

Lizzy reached them first and right away went to hug Anna.

“We did it!” Lizzy cried as the girls embraced. They stayed there for a while just holding each other, as the rest of the searchers came.

Right away Dr. Dunn knelt to take a look at Mr. McElwee, while Mr. Graham tossed the rope up to Tom. While Tom climbed down, he heard Dr. Dunn say that Mr. McElwee’s wound wasn’t too bad.

“Nicely bandaged, by the way,” the doctor told Anna who had come over to him to hear what he had to say. “If you keep that up, I’ll soon be out of a job,” he laughed.

Anna didn’t say anything, but just stood there beaming.

“This man shouldn’t be walking around tonight,” Dr. Dunn told Mr. Cox, Mr. Graham, and Reverend Johnson. “So we’ll need to make some sort of makeshift stretcher.”

The three men went off quickly into the woods to find two long poles. The children meanwhile gathered a lot of branches and leaves to put on top. After the men built the stretcher, they helped Mr. McElwee on it. They decided that Mr. McElwee should not stay alone in his condition, so Reverend Johnson offered to let him stay for the

time being at his house. "Plus," he said, "my house is the closest."

So they all went back to the Johnsons' house, and from there everyone went to their own homes. But before they left, all the children promised Mr. McElwee that they'd return to check on him in the morning.

The next day was Saturday, so there was no school. But all the children went to the Johnsons' house anyway, like they had promised. This was the first time that Sarah and Peter saw Mr. McElwee.

He was lying in a bed, but was awake. He smiled when he saw the children come in. They all went to his bed, and Anna introduced Sarah and Peter to him.

"So are you really an Indian?" Peter asked Mr. McElwee.

The old man smiled. "I look like one, don't I?" he asked, referring to his all-leather outfit.

"Kind of," Peter said, "but Indians don't wear beards."

"But how do you know?" Mr. McElwee asked. "Have you ever seen one?"

Peter frowned and cocked his head. All at once he stopped frowning and shook his head.

"And even if they didn't have beards," said Mr. McElwee, "how do you know they don't just shave them off?"

Peter didn't know what to say to that, so instead he said, "If you're an Indian, that means Sarah has to marry you."

Sarah looked at the old man in horror. She didn't have this in mind when she said she wanted to marry an Indian to become an Indian princess.

"Actually, Peter," said Mr. McElwee, chuckling, "I'm half Indian, from my mother. So Sarah, you don't have to marry me. You can wait till you find a full-blooded Indian ... and a younger one, too."

Sarah breathed a sigh of relief. "So then your mother really was an Indian princess?"

"Of course," Mr. McElwee said, eyes twinkling. "Why else would a White Man marry into an Indian family, if not for an Indian princess?" He winked at the older children.

Sarah jumped up and down. "I knew it! I knew it!"

Peter started jumping up and down with her, but then he tripped and fell over a chair right as Mrs. Johnson came in. Peter quickly got up and apologized, when he saw Mrs. Johnson's hands on her hips. She couldn't hide the slight smile when she said it was all right, but that

it'd be best to keep jumping an outside activity. All the children nodded and Mrs. Johnson left the room again.

"Now I'm not really feeling up to going to Milkwood today," Mr. McElwee told the children, "so I was wondering if you all would milk my cows for me. I'm sure they're pretty anxious to be milked by now."

All of the children nodded excitedly and said they would. Seeing Mr. McElwee's homestead would be lots of fun.

"Do you think you could find your way there, Tom?" the old man asked.

Tom nodded. "It's pretty much straight Northwest from here."

"That's right," Mr. McElwee sighed, laying back his head and closing his eyes. "And after you milk the cows, you might as well show these two youngsters around my home. Right now I think I'll rest a little bit."

The Coxes all ran out the door shouting to each other with excitement, but Tom stayed behind to talk with Lizzy.

"Have you seen Joe?" he asked.

Lizzy shook her head. "No, I think he went back to his cave after he helped us find you last night."

Tom sighed. "I was hoping he would want to come with us today, since he was so helpful."

"I know. I was hoping so, too. I guess we just have to give him some time."

Tom nodded. "Yeah, you're right."

From outside they heard Peter squeal with laughter.

"Well, I guess we'd better get out there," Tom said. "Mr. McElwee will never be able to sleep with all the noise they're making."

They both smiled and went out to find Peter and Sarah jumping and yelling with excitement and Anna struggling in vain to quiet them. Tom, as Captain, settled them down as he arranged them into their proper ranks for marching. Once everyone was in their place, Tom led them into the woods to Mr. McElwee's home.

While marching, Sarah suddenly spoke up. "Mr. McElwee said something about a Milkwood. What is that?"

"That's what Mr. McElwee calls these woods," Anna said.

"Why?" Peter asked.

"Because he lives mainly off of the milk from the cows he raises here," Anna replied.

Sarah frowned questioningly. "In the woods?"

“Yes,” answered Anna. “I thought it was strange, too. I think these are probably the only woods that produce milk in all America!”

“In the whole world!” Peter exclaimed, throwing his hands up in the air.

Everyone laughed.

“It certainly does make a good name,” Lizzy said.

“Yes, it does,” Anna agreed.

“Then let’s officially call these woods Milkwood, and not the Haunted Woods anymore,” Tom said.

“You’re the captain,” Anna said.

So it was settled. No more would that forest be called the Haunted Woods. Instead it would now be called Milkwood.

Suddenly, Tom saw something disappear behind a huge tree several yards away to his right. He knew it wasn’t an animal—an animal would scamper away when frightened, not hide behind a tree. It must have been a person, Tom thought, but a person not full-grown, judging by the size of the shadow.

He held up his hand to signal for the rest of the children to stop. But they weren’t paying attention, and they all bumped into him and each other.

“You’re supposed to stop when I hold up my hand,” Tom said.

“I didn’t see it,” Sarah said.

“We were looking at the pretty flowers,” Lizzy said, pointing at the flowers.

“I wasn’t,” Peter said proudly. “I was closing my eyes!”

“Why were you closing your eyes?” Tom asked.

Peter shrugged his shoulders. “I wanted to.”

“And I was watching him, trying to keep him from tripping or running into something,” Anna said, “except I didn’t stop him from running into Lizzy.”

Tom put his hands up in the air. “You’re a pitiful troop.” Then he laughed. “But that makes things interesting.”

“So why did you stop us?” Anna asked.

“I thought I saw something in the woods,” Tom said. “I think I know what it is, but I’m going to make sure. I want you all to stay here.”

“You don’t want us to come and protect you?” Sarah asked.

Tom smiled. “No thank you. You can stay here and look at the flowers.”

Sarah, Lizzy, and Peter instantly became preoccupied with their surroundings, but Anna looked at Tom questioningly. Tom smiled to show her everything was all right and went to investigate the figure in the woods.

As quietly as he could, Tom tiptoed to the tree he saw the figure disappear behind. Once he was there, he saw it was Joe. Joe started at the sight of Tom.

“Sorry to scare you,” Tom said, “but you don’t have to follow at a distance—you’re welcome to join us, if you’d like.”

Joe looked down. “Do the others know I’m here?”

Tom shook his head. “They know I saw something, but I didn’t say what. They’re busy looking at the flowers.”

Joe didn’t say anything, and Tom glanced back at the others. Lizzy and the two younger Coxes were still looking at something on the ground, but Anna was watching him.

When he looked back, Joe spoke up. “Look, Tom. I’m really sorry—sorry that Billy did those things to you all those times. He shouldn’t have. It was just plain mean.” He took a deep breath. “And I hope this will show that I really am sorry.” He took something out of his pocket and handed it to Tom without looking up.

“My knife!” Tom exclaimed as he accepted it from Joe. “Where did you find it?”

Joe stuck his hands back in his pockets. “Billy stole it from you that day he hurt you last. I told him he shouldn’t have taken it and made him give it to me. He didn’t believe me, that I would give it back to you. He thought I was just like him, but I wasn’t. I’m not.

“I never liked how he treated people, but I went along with it because I wanted a friend. But, you know, he wasn’t a good friend. When you came, I saw that you would be a good friend, so I convinced Billy to let you in our gang. But then you chose to obey the Bible, instead of having us as friends.”

Joe paused and continued to look at the ground. “I used to obey the Bible and stuff. But I guess I just wanted a friend more. Not like you, Tom. You do what’s right no matter what. You’re brave and when you’re around, everyone becomes brave, too. I realized that Billy was only ever brave because he was big, but that’s not how you were brave.”

Tom nodded. “We couldn’t have been brave if it had just been us.”

“I know that now. I know now that it was God,” Joe said.

“Yes, because we know God and believe his promises to us,” Tom said, “we don’t have to fear anything in this life.”

“I know,” Joe said, “and I want that, too. So from now on I will follow Jesus. And since I’m doing that, I want to ask you to forgive me for what I’ve done to you and the others.”

Tom smiled. He wasn’t sure what to say. Everything was all right and he wanted Joe to know it. Suddenly they heard a twig snap just behind the tree. It was Anna.

“Hi, Joe,” Anna said, coming around the big tree. “I was wondering what you were doing,” Anna said to Tom.

“I’m sorry, Anna, what you had to go through because of Billy and me,” Joe said.

Anna smiled. “I forgive you. We all forgive you. And everything’s all right, Joe, and we’d love for you to join us. We’re going to Milkwood, Mr. McElwee’s homestead.”

“And not just join us today,” Tom said, “but also join us every day that we explore the woods!”

Slowly Joe smiled back at them—the first time Tom had ever seen him smile.

“Well, before I do that, you need to have this,” Joe said as he pulled out Anna’s locket.

Anna gasped and took it. “I can’t believe I forgot all about that. I guess with all that happened, it just slipped my mind.”

“Shep found it on the ground last night,” Joe said.

“I guess it fell when the branch did,” Tom said.

Hearing Anna gasp and noticing that she had left them, the other three came to see what was going on. Lizzy was ecstatic to see her brother and even more so to hear he would join them.

“So who’s he going to be?” Peter asked.

“Should he be captain, since he’s the biggest?” Sarah asked.

Joe shook his head, “I don’t deserve that. Besides, Tom has already proven himself to be the best leader here.”

“So who’s he going to be?” Peter asked again.

“How about we figure that out later,” Tom said. “I’m sure we’ll have plenty of time to think it over. Right now we have a job to do—milking those cows!”

All the children, including Joe lined up behind Tom as he faced the direction to Milkwood. Then they all started marching forward as Tom called, “Come on, Frontier Explorers. Let’s go!”

THE FRONTIER EXPLORERS

**THE END**





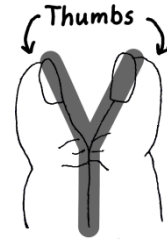
## INTERESTING FACTS

- In 1783, the United States acquired the Wisconsin area in the Treaty of Paris, the treaty that ended the Revolutionary War, but it wasn't until after the War of 1812 that people began settling it.
- In 1832, Sauk Indians tried to move back to their homeland after having been ordered by the U.S. government to leave. The U.S. military fought the Sauk in Wisconsin and Illinois and eventually defeated them. After that, there was peace between settlers and Indians in Wisconsin.
- Laura Ingalls Wilder's grandparents, Henry and Charlotte Quiner, moved to Wisconsin when it was still the frontier in the 1830s. Their first child born in Wisconsin was Caroline, Laura's mother, said to be the first non-Indian baby born in the Milwaukee area.
- In the late 1700s to early 1800s, doctors couldn't figure out yellow fever's cause or cure, so many people fled from the diseased cities. Later, doctors discovered that it was a tropical virus transmitted by mosquitoes and brought over by ships to America.
- The noon meal used to be called “dinner” and was often brought to school in pails or baskets by the children.
- In 1783, the Shorthorn cattle breed from Great Britain was one of the first breeds to be imported to America.
- The most basic folding pocket knife is the peasant knife, dating back to the pre-Roman era.
- Though the Wampanoag Indians befriended the pilgrims at Plymouth, their relationship eventually went downhill, resulting in a war that left few Indian survivors. Of the survivors, many women married Europeans, because of the lack of their own men.
- The Wampanoag *wetu* type house was called *wigwam* or *wikiup* (*WIK-ee-up*) by other tribes.



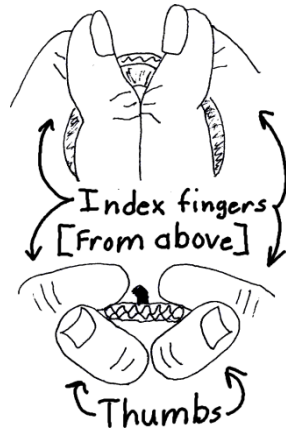
# HOW TO WHISTLE AN ACORN CAP

1. Put your thumbs together to form a “Y” shape.



2. Place the acorn cap behind your thumbs with the inside of the cap facing you and your thumbs.

3. Wrap your index fingers around the acorn cap to keep it in place.



4. Put your lips on your thumbs at the joint and blow.

5. Adjust the “V” while you blow until you hear the whistle.





# The Frontier Explorers

Eli Vandersaul

The Fron-tier Ex-plor-ers, that's who we are,  
Mar-ching through the woods no mat-ter how far.  
We will ne-ver stop no mat-ter how rough.  
We are ex-plor-ers and that means we're tough. The  
Fron-tier Ex-plor-ers, that is our name. Ex-  
plor-ing the fron-tier, that is our game.  
That means we find a-ma-zing things.  
Fun and plea-sure is what it brings.

4  
6  
8  
10  
12  
14  
16

93

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a song titled 'The Frontier Explorers' by Eli Vandersaul. The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of ten staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, followed by a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'The Fron-tier Ex-plor-ers, that's who we are, Mar-ching through the woods no mat-ter how far. We will ne-ver stop no mat-ter how rough. We are ex-plor-ers and that means we're tough. The Fron-tier Ex-plor-ers, that is our name. Ex-plor-ing the fron-tier, that is our game. That means we find a-ma-zing things. Fun and plea-sure is what it brings.' The score includes measure numbers 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16. A page number '93' is located at the bottom of the page.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eli Vandersaul is a Christian writer from St. Louis, Missouri. Disillusioned with the quality of modern Christian fiction, he set out to write believable stories that naturally have Christian themes. To find out more about him, visit his website at [elivandersaul.com](http://elivandersaul.com).

