

The Timber Trail



Maristan Chapman



The Timber Trail

by Maristan Chapman



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Also by Maristan Chapman

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For

Herbert, Montgomery,
John and Ann



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1. Dale Is Worried

IN the town of Glen Hazard, which is set down in a deep valley in the Over Hill country of Tennessee, there was a great stir among the citizens.

The mountain people, who live among the far spreading hills, had come in from their homesteads this September day. They were crowding into Gillow's General Store for news, or walking about on the cinder patch by the water tower. Many of them were speaking in low growls. There was trouble betwixt the Glen Hazard people and an outland lumber company.

Dale Gillow, the son of the store owner, was out in his workshop, at the end of the yard, and with him were his friends Vester Lane and Sadler Jones, and their dog Rock Bottom.

Rock was a wise hound, with big floppy ears and a stump of a tail. He restlessed about and asked with his eyes what all the excitement was, for he knew very well that there was something gone amiss when his boys sat huddled together without playing or laughing.

The boys were talking about Dale's grandfather, Oak Gillow, who was in danger of losing his forest trees.

"I wouldn't care, efn it was any person save Gramp," Dale said. "These outland timber cutters can quarrel with our folk and get beaten, but whilst the big fuss is going on, Gramp is likely to lose all his lands and properties."

"Me, I'd like to help Gramp," Vester Lane said, "but I sure crave to go north on that silver trip."

In the early part of the summer holidays, the three boys had gone treasure hunting up on Wild Cat Ridge* and found some old silver that was to be sold to a man in Boston. For weeks the boys had been waiting for a letter to say they could take the trip north with the silver. They had talked of it and planned for it, and Vester and Sadler still had it in head to go. But Dale was in two minds about the trip, now that he had this timber quarrel to study about.

He said: "Unless happen the money we'd get could help Gramp, it wouldn't be much use. That John Nolan, who's foreman of the lumber gang, might steal all his trees whilst we were gone."

*See *Wild Cat Ridge*, by Maristan Chapman.

2. Up at Gramp's

AT breakfast next morning, Dale said to his father: "I'd crave for you to tell me concerning Gramp's trees. Maybe on this trip we can figure a way to help."

"Hit's no affair for boys to meddle in," Mr. Gillow answered. "The best help you can be is to keep out o' the way till school starts. Surely to goodness you might strive to keep out o' mischief for just one week."

Beth Gillow bounced in her chair and shook her golden curls. She said: "I wish Gramp had bid me go with the boys. All time I got to stay around home. I get told little girls can't go camping, and little girls can't hunt treasure—only I did help, didn't I, Dale?—and they can't sit up late, or . . ."

"You talk a sight," said her father. "Mother ought to take a tuck in your tongue for every time she lets one out o' your dress."

"But I did help with the treasure hunt," Beth went on. "And now Squirrel Misery is in jail, I could go up to Gramp's by myself and not get run off with."

Squirrel Misery was a bad mountain man, who had tried to keep the boys from getting the silver treasure and now had ended up in jail for trying to steal and melt down the goods.

"Who'd want you?" Dale asked Beth. "You must think you're worth a heap." He twiddled two fingers at her across the table, and she made a face at him for answer.

"There's worse than Squirrel Misery abroad in the hills, I'm fearing," Mrs. Gillow put in, after shaking her head at Dale. "I'm in two minds about letting you go to Gramp's. Happen you might come across that John Nolan."

But Mr. Gillow said, "Fiddlesticks and Irish 'taters, Mother! This timber trouble's not likely to harm the boys. Hit's all talk and lawsuits. The Squirrel, now, was a danger. But he's out o' the way, and John Nolan looks for bigger game than Dale Gillow. Who's that tramping out there?"

The inside door, that led to the store, opened just wide enough to let through a freckle-faced, red-haired boy of about Dale's age, who stood grinning there as if he had opened the door just to be opening it.

“And how’d we stop him?” asked Vester. “Nolan’s so big he could carry you around in his pocket. We’d as well be traveling.”

Sadler Jones had his nose in a book. He stopped reading and said: “Our folks’d not let us get in this quarrel. School starts pretty soon. We’ve just got time to go the trip.”

“Let’s us not start a fuss amongst ourselves,” Dale said. “That’d be a poor way o’ spending our last free days of holiday.”

Dale was standing by his bench, his long thin figure bent over his work. He was mending a fishing reel. As he filed a spindle, his fair hair fell forward over his forehead, and his intent eyes were watching the smooth motion of the file, but he was not thinking about the job at all; and before he was aware, he had filed off too much. He flung down the file, tossed away the spoiled brass rod and went over to the armchair by the old iron stove.

He curled his long legs under him and pulled Rock’s ears thoughtfully, while he studied on a notion.

The boys had heard about the troubles brought upon Glen Hazard by the unfriendly lumber people who were always quarreling with the mountain men. The Glen Hazard folk called these outland men “timber tearers” because they tore up and laid waste all the forest in getting out a few special trees. Moreover, many of them were rough men who did not behave themselves, so that quarrels broke out. All manner of mischief was afoot that the boys did not clearly understand.

But today, from the talk among the Glen Hazard men, they had learned that the head of the lumber company was coming to town, and most likely a bad matter would be made worse in consequence.

Dale wished he could tell the head of the company about Gramp Gillow’s side of the quarrel, and make him see reason, but his mind bumped up against a hard wall. Such a big man would not pay attention to a boy. Dale thought: “Likely I’ll not even get to see the man.”

“Leave my tools be!” he called to Vester, who was pounding on the bench.

Vester threw down the hammer and nail he had been playing with and said: “Well, let’s *do something*. Just sitting here won’t help.”

Sadler now looked up from his reading to say, “Ves, you all time craving to be doing, ere you’re knowen what! We got to

plan. Lie still, Rock! My foot wasn't born to scratch your back with!"

"All of you keep still," Dale Gillow said "My mind can't work with you going on, and I've 'most got a notion." He went back to the bench and picked up the reel again.

"Come on!" Vester said, jumping to his feet. "Let's us go outdoors and listen what the men are saying."

Vester was a thin, jumping-jack of a boy. His bright brown eyes shining in his sunburnt face, and his scrubby, tow-colored hair gave him an eager, restless look. He never could bear to sit around, but always wanted to be stirring. He now started toward the door in such haste that he fell over Rock Bottom.

"Ki-yipe!" Rock Bottom cried out. And then gave a forgiving "Wurf!" as Vester stooped to pat him and tell him he did not mean to step on his paws.

Sadler Jones, who was so plump that he looked like a round parcel in his khaki pants and shirt, uncurled from a box by the window, threw down the *Boy Scouts Handbook* and said lazily: "You all time *going*, and got no notion *where*. Efn you got rich, I bet you'd buy a hundred-mile-an-hour automobile just to *go* in." He yawned until his dark eyes were quite shut and almost disappeared in his chunky cheeks. Then he slicked his smooth black hair, shook himself, and went back to the book.

"I'd sooner go," Vester retorted, than sit and read till I got bitter, 'n' bigger, 'n' bigger, 'n'. . . ."

Sadler threw the book at him.

Dale Gillow went on quietly with the fishing reel he was mending. He had a gift for making and mending things, so the boys called him "Fix-it," and laughed at him for picking up all sorts of scraps and pieces and patching the bits into odd, homemade gadgets. Dale finished pounding a sprung ratchet wheel on the heel of the vise that was bolted to the bench. Then he raised his thoughtful blue eyes and looked from Vester to Sadler.

"You two ought to be put in a bag and shook up," he said. "Then maybe Vester would catch some book learning and Sad would get some 'go' to him. I guess I've done all the tinkering I can till I get me some brass screws. Let's go over to the store. We'll maybe pick up news about the timber trouble; and the mail will run directly."

Vester was gone right away, and Sadler got up and dragged himself toward the door, with his nose in his book he'd picked up.

By the time the mail train had roared on its way, Dale was ready to follow the boys and walked across the yard toward his father's General Store with a sober tread, with Rock Bottom trotting beside him.

Dale had a sudden feeling of happiness. It was as if he came awake all at once and felt the world. He took a long breath of the sharp evening, that smelled of withered grasses and turning leaves; he looked up at the hills that rose steeply on each side of his mountain home and was glad he was a Glen Hazard boy. He looked all around his town, as if he saw it for the first time.

Glen Hazard was a tiny place, squeezed down in a valley between Red Hill on the east, and Cragg Hill on the west. Through the middle of the town ran Black Wolf Creek, and beside the creek was a railroad track. On the west side of the creek was a county road leading north and south and hugging the base of Cragg Hill; and other narrow twistical roads led up the sides of the hills into the high country. A water tank stood on tall legs in the middle of the cinder patch between the store and the depot, and there were stacks of sawed lumber waiting by a train of freight cars.

It never entered Dale's mind that Glen Hazard was a very small town and that the houses that clung to the slopes or nestled by the creek, facing all sorts of ways, were funny little gray boxes. It looked all right to him, and it smelled right, and if he had been given his choice of all the world, he would have chosen to live here, deep in the mountains of east Tennessee. The funny thing was that he had not known this until this very evening. The feeling came over him all at once, like a big strong awareness.

He was glad of the citizens who were stirring homeward. Some greeted him with: "Hi, Dale Gillow!" And some said: "Fair night, and a bright sun tomorrow!" Dale answered "Hello!" and, "Hi, there!" But he answered as if in a dream.

A shout from Vester Lane woke him up. Vester was capering on the store porch and calling out: "There's a letter come about the silver!"

Dale stopped his moseying and called back: "Wait awhile! I'm on my way." He strolled slowly across the yard, while Vester Lane kept shouting: "Come on! Come on!" It was queer, Dale thought,