

SKYLINES

POINTS



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Mr. Spenser never dreamed that his order to Lou and Mike would become a matter of life or death. . . .

A Friend Indeed

by John Durham

Mike was scared. He had told himself that a long time ago — last night. The longer the rain beat down on the shed, the more scared he got. He sat humped up in his corner. Lou Sampson lay inside a sleeping bag in his corner. Rain kept dripping through four holes in the roof of the shed.

“How are you feeling?” Mike asked.

“Just great.” Lou spoke coldly. “I just wish it would dry up. Then maybe I could get outside and do some pushups.”

“They’ll find us pretty soon.” Mike didn’t believe what he was saying. He just wanted to make Lou feel a little better if he could. He didn’t like the guy much, but Lou was sick.

“They won’t find us,” Lou said. “How can they? They don’t know where we are. If they did, how could they cross the creek?”

Mike sat there for a while. Outside, the creek roared. He got up and looked outside the shed. The water boiled down the thirty-foot-wide gulch. The muddy water lapped at the bank ten feet below the shed. On the far bank, it dashed against the trunks of the pine trees. It was still getting higher!

"It doesn't look good," Mike said.

"You can say that again," Lou said. "No, *don't* say that again."

Mike made a face. "Maybe the rain will stop," he said, trying to sound sure.

"Maybe the United States Marines will come over the hill in ten minutes too," said Lou.

Mike laughed at the joke, but not much. "It was dumb to get separated like that. You and your miners. I bet Mr. Spenser could kill both of us."

"He won't have to."

"Yeah." Mike sat on his backpack thinking. He had thought he had troubles before! After the last meeting of the Explorers' Club, he and Lou had been caught fighting. Mr. Spenser had almost refused to let the boys go on the camping trip. Now Mike was stuck up in the mountains with the one kid in the club who had always given him trouble. "Some luck," he thought.

"Listen to that rain," Lou said.

"I hear it."

"Are you just going to sit here?"

"What do you want me to do? Fly across the creek? There's a cliff on this side. And there's water between us and the other side."

"I wish I weren't sick. That's what I wish."

"I wish you weren't sick, too. But it's not going to help for us to fight about it. Is it?"

The boys were in a shed that had been built by miners a long time ago. The miners had sluiced gold out of

the foot of the cliff behind the shed. The heavy wooden sluice — a wooden box on wooden legs — still stood there, out in the rain. The boards of the sluice and the shed were weathered and split.



Yesterday the stream had been just a little clear water over gray, polished stones. Mike and Lou had split off from the group to search for minerals. Then they'd found this spot.

They didn't pay much attention when rain started far up in the mountains. They were too busy banging away at the foot of the cliff above the creek.

But the creek rose fast.

Mike looked back at the water once, early in the afternoon. "Hey," he said, "that creek is rising."

"No problem," Lou said. "I only have to find some quartz with gold in it. Just one little piece."

"Man, that water is coming up," Mike told him.

"Don't be a cop-out."

"They don't even know where we are."

Lou turned and faced him. "Listen," he said, "Mr. Spenser ordered me to make friends with you. Right?"

Mike nodded. "I don't like it any better than you do."

"Well, we're stuck with each other. That's bad enough." Lou made a face. "Don't make it worse by being chicken."

"It's not chicken to want to go on living."

"Come on," Lou said. "Help me bang this big rock out of here. I see a tip of quartz in there. I have to get it out."

So Mike banged at the face of the cliff with his geologist's hammer. He got interested in the thing. They worked for an hour, cutting around the big rock. They hardly noticed when rain began to fall.

When they got the quartz out, the rain was slow but steady.

"Look," Lou said. "What'd I tell you? See that little line of dull yellow?"

"I see it."

“Well, that’s gold. That’s *gold*.” Lou laughed. “I’ll bet there’s an ounce in there. That’s a lot of gold.”

“Yeah,” Mike said. “Look behind you. That’s a lot of water.”

Lou turned. “Wow,” he said. “That’s bad.”

It was bad all right. Water, now three or four feet deep, covered most of the stones in the creek bed.

“It’s a long way from being over our heads,” Mike said. “Let’s get our packs on and get out of here fast!”

“Yeah. Yeah. We better get with it.”

