

CAMPING OUT

As twilight slowly faded into dark, and the stars began to glitter overhead, they stretched out and watched the fire die down, listening to the sounds of the night—the cicadas and the night birds, and the rippling of a nearby stream.

“Boy, this is the life,” James said.

“It certainly is,” Jack said dreamily.

“Hey, Jack, I’m still curious,” James said after a while. “You had a good thing going at the ranch; why *did* you decide to come along?”

Jack thought for a moment. The question was unexpected.

“Well, since you’re basically a greenhorn when it comes to travel, and I’ve been doing it all my life, I figured you could probably use a little help along the way,” he said teasingly.

James raised up on his elbows and gave him a stare.

“You’ve got to be kidding!”

Jack laughed.

“I just thought it would be a fun thing to do.”

“Yeah, but you’d said you were tired of moving around—you were all set to settle down at the Circle T.”

Jack smiled to himself in the dark.

“You know, I’ve sort of wondered about that myself,” he said. “The only thing I can figure out is that it just didn’t seem right for you to be taking off without me.”

He paused.

“I guess I’ve just got to thinking of *you* as family,” he admitted.

For a few minutes, quiet reigned.

“Thank you,” James said then in a low voice.

As it grew late, only the night noises of the forest and the distant sound of an occasional car, speeding by on the highway, broke the silence. The campground, located about a quarter of a mile from the road, was deserted except for themselves.

“Anyway,” Jack said. “I’m still young. There’ll be plenty of time to settle down later and, like you said, this is good experience. Working at the Circle T, and now camping out like this! No telling what we’ll decide to do next!”

“That’s for damned sure,” James laughed.

“I wonder if there are any bears around here.” Jack mused a few minutes later.

“We’re in bear country,” James said. “Stands to reason there would be. Doubt if they’d be bold enough to come into camp. I don’t know though—you hear all kinds of stories.”

“I wonder if the manual says anything about bears, and what to do if one shows up,” Jack said.

“It’s a little late to check the manual now,” James said. “We’ll just have to hope they keep their distance—for tonight anyway; we don’t even have anything to protect ourselves if one does show up!”

“Except two pairs of long legs!” Jack said.

“We’ll just have to hope they’re fast enough!”

James’s remark so amused them that they burst out laughing hilariously.