



Saturday And Nothin' To Do

by Sherry Stoddard

FRED sat under the tree and looked at his feet. His sneakers had holes in them. His mother hated the dirty old shoes, but she was at home now. Anyway, he liked them. Anyway, how could a kid keep shoes clean? You had to wear shoes, and you had to walk around in dirt, so what was all the trouble about?

He felt a pebble buried in the matted grass, a stony lump pressing into his firm, young palm. He picked the pebble out of the grass and rolled it between his fingers. Streamers of Saturday sun floated through the dry leaves of his tree, ribboning him in warmth. At the toe of his left shoe, a spot of red sock stared at him through frayed canvas. He tossed the pebble lightly at the bright hole; it started between his feet, but he clamped them together, catching the stone before it could again disappear into the grass. The flight of the pebble interrupted his gaze.

“What a nothin’ day. All kinds of nothin’. Nothin’ home, nothin’ here. Nothin’, nothin’.” The word began to sound queer as he mouthed it again and again. “What’s a guy supposed ta do, anyway?” Groaning with exaggerated gusto, he kicked the pebble from between his feet, following the short path with his eyes, and heard a light click as it bounced off

a rock. "Heckuva way to spend Saturday. Not a darn thing to do."

Only the leaf-rattle of his dry tree, only the brown autumn smell of the woods, only the rough scratch of bark against his back — only these kept him company, and for a young boy, this is not enough.

He drew the dirty sneakers up to his body and pulled himself easily to his feet. Thumbs tucked lazily in his back pockets, he ambled farther into the woods, tearing furrows in the grass with his toes. Thickening shadows muted the sun; the long trees grew longer, and the fat rocks grew fatter. And the boy shuffled his boredom slowly through the patched darkness.

Without warning, his probing toe caught on a half-buried stick, and as he stumbled, hot pain scraped his ankle. Tumbling forward, the nimble body quickly regained balance, and the boy spun around to see the trap that had caught him. Dropping to his knees in the grass, he uncovered the rusty spearhead of a nearly-rotted arrow, lost by a huntsman of a month past, perhaps a year past. He tugged at the shaft and yanked it from under a fallen log. Warped wood shaped the arrow into a curious bend. A few feathers, hanging from the end of the arrow, hinted dully at the proud colors it had worn when new, but muddied crimson and a faint trace of green were all that remained.

The boy delicately explored the arrow, feeling the sharp tip with his forefinger, running the length of the rough shaft with his hand, pulling gingerly at the ragged feathers. The light of curiosity that shone in his eyes gradually brightened as his imagination stirred. Exciting ideas painted the dull woods in all-new colors. Leaves began to glow with the rainbow-hue of an Indian headdress; the soft rustle of dry grass was translated to the low whisper of an unknown watcher; the boy's trees became the pillars of a dense forest. He jumped to his feet, and carefully inspecting the scene, focused his attention upon a Summac Indian, growing behind a shaded rock. He sailed the arrow toward his target, but the bend in the shaft carried it far off course. It slipped into a tuft of weeds and hung crippled above the ground. He scrambled after the weapon and, gently pulling it from its bed, took aim on another member of the tribe. This time the

arrow plunged into a bed of decayed leaves, layered around the trunk of a tall oak.

And so the boy waged war upon the forest, aiming and sailing and scrambling after his arrow, defending his reputation as the conquering white man. The dark foliage was charged with Indian lore, the woods inscribed with the mark of a past history. The sun became flame; the rocks became teepees; the shadows became silhouettes of mysterious movement.

And when he came to the gurgling stream, he saw a torrent of raging foam. He must forge to continue his exploration. With a mighty effort, a conquering white man's effort, he flung the arrow over the rushing current. But the small white hunter missed his mark, as the bend in the arrow betrayed its course and directed it down stream. The boy watched unbelievably as it glided swiftly into the water. He chased furiously after it, and helplessly watched it slide over a moss bed, into a cleft between two rocks. He stretched his small arm into the hole, but the opening narrowed, and the trapped arrow was just out of reach. He pushed and scratched and dug at it with a stick. He talked to the arrow and pleaded with the rock. He soaked his shirt to the elbow and scraped the knuckles of his hand; but the warped, rotted, ageless weapon was lost.

The Indians were lost, and the teepees were lost. The war-paint of the leaves faded to the earthy hue of autumn. The forest thinned to a few trees with dirty bark and twisted limbs.

The boy turned from the stream and headed unhappily out of the woods. "Nothin' but nothin'. Not a darn thing to do. What's a guy supposed ta do, anyway?"

