

The Cave



Did you drink the last of the milk?



Now don't jump to conclusions!

Bandit

BY RAY GOLDRUP

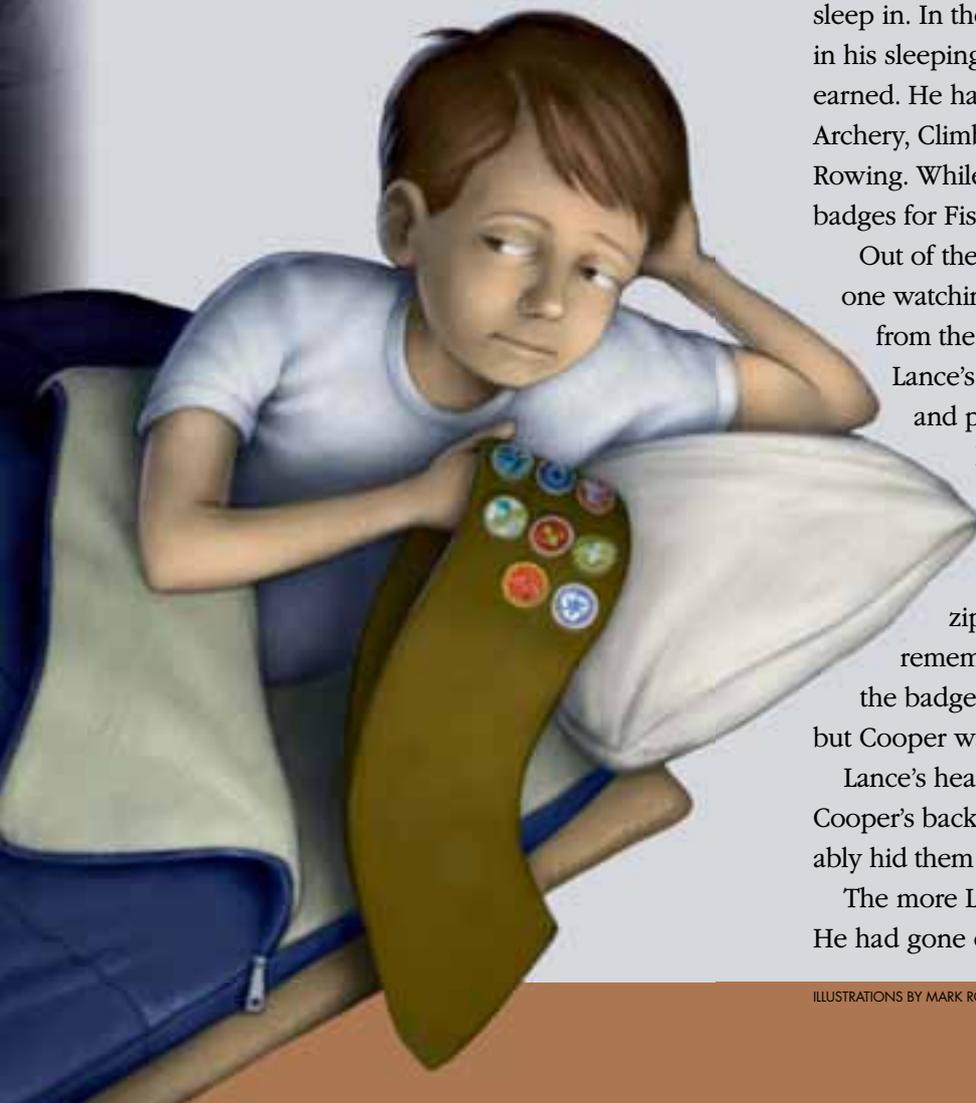
(Based on a true story)

Look up the following scriptures:

Exodus 23:1; Luke 6:37; D&C 11:12.

Circle the one you think fits the story best.

Lance looked around the Scout camp at the beautiful scenery—jagged mountains, green forest, and the still surface of the lake. His view was interrupted as Cooper, a new member of his Scout troop, walked by lugging his gear. Cooper hadn't said a word during the drive up to the camp. Lance thought Cooper seemed secretive. Did he have something to hide?



“Maybe it’s just because he’s new to the troop and doesn’t really know anyone yet,” Lance thought.

But he couldn’t help wondering if Cooper could be trusted. Earlier, Cooper had taken another Scout’s pocketknife. The knife’s owner, Cameron, stopped him. “Hey, that’s my knife,” he said.

Cooper looked down. “I have one just like it,” he said. “I thought it fell out of my bag.”

“Why don’t you check your bag?” Cameron suggested.

Lance thought Cooper pretended to look surprised when he found his own knife in his bag. “Oh, sorry,” Cooper said. He handed Cameron’s knife back to him and walked off.

Even though Lance could hardly wait until the next morning to start earning more merit badges, he was also excited about the large cave they were going to sleep in. In the light of the flickering campfire, Lance lay in his sleeping bag admiring the badges he had already earned. He had badges for Environmental Science, Archery, Climbing, Leatherworks, Swimming, and Rowing. While at Scout camp, he planned on earning badges for Fishing, Canoeing, and—

Out of the corner of his eye, Lance noticed someone watching him. It was Cooper. He was lying apart from the others in the dimness of the cave, eyeing Lance’s badges. Lance folded his merit badge sash and put it next to his backpack. Then he turned his back on Cooper and went to sleep.

The next morning, Lance’s Environmental Science and Archery badges were missing! He wished he had zipped his sash inside his bag. Then he remembered how Cooper had been looking at the badges the night before. Lance looked around, but Cooper was nowhere to be seen.

Lance’s heart beat quickly as he searched through Cooper’s backpack. The badges weren’t there. “He probably hid them in a less-obvious place,” Lance thought.

The more Lance thought about it, the angrier he got. He had gone on Scouting activities with the other boys,



and nothing like this had happened before. Lance knew Cooper had taken his hard-earned badges.

Outside the cave, Lance saw the Scout leader, Brother Maxwell. Lance approached him and asked him where Cooper was.

“He just went through those trees to take pictures of the sunrise,” Brother Maxwell said. “Can I help you with something?”

Lance explained what had happened. “Cooper has been acting suspicious ever since we got here. First he took Cameron’s pocketknife, but Cameron got it back. Now he’s taken two of my badges. I know it was him because of the way he was staring at them last night. He’s so quiet, like someone who has something to hide.”

Brother Maxwell laid a hand on Lance’s shoulder. “We can’t accuse anyone without proof, Lance. Maybe he’s shy because he’s new to the group. And maybe he was staring at your badges because he’s looking forward to earning some of his own. Let’s go take a look in the cave and see what we can find.”

“I already did, Brother Maxwell,” Lance said. “I looked everywhere, including in Cooper’s stuff. He’s probably taking that walk so he can hide the badges

until we’re ready to leave.” Lance suddenly saw Cooper step out of the trees, carrying a camera. “There he is,” he said. “Let’s go ask him.”

“Not yet, Lance,” Brother Maxwell said. “First we’re going to have a look in that cave.”

Inside the cave, Brother Maxwell examined Lance’s sash and studied the area around Lance’s backpack and sleeping bag. “Well,” he finally said, “you’re right about there having been a cave bandit here last night, Lance. But I think you’re wrong about who it was.”

“What do you mean?” Lance asked.

“Judging from the tiny paw prints in the dirt, those merit badges were probably chewed off your sash by a pack rat.”

Lance’s mouth dropped open. “A pack rat?”

Brother Maxwell nodded. “They like to collect objects such as watches, buttons, or, in this case, merit badges.”

“But I’ve got to find those badges!”

The Scout leader smiled. “If we can find the rat’s nest, we’ll most likely find your missing badges.”

After breakfast, everyone searched the area. Before long the bandit’s nest and Lance’s badges were found.

Lance apologized to Brother Maxwell. “I was wrong to accuse Cooper, and to judge him. It must be hard to be the new kid in the group.”

When Lance went back to the cave, Cooper was inside. Once again, he eyed the badges as Lance tucked them inside his bag.

Lance straightened up and turned to Cooper. “I’m going to try to earn my Canoeing badge today. Want to come?”

Cooper looked at the ground, but there was a shy smile on his face. “Sure. I’d like to try too,” he said.

Lance grinned as he and Cooper ran out of the cave into the bright summer afternoon. ●

“Don’t judge. Leave judgment to the Lord, the perfect judge.”⁴

Elder Lynn A. Mickelsen of the Seventy

