

est only second to Jabe Smith. But in this case fear and antagonism were almost absent. He watched the Boy from sheer curiosity, almost as the Boy might have watched him if given the same sort of chance. It puzzled Red Fox to see the Boy go so soundlessly through the woods, watching, listening, expectant, like one of the wild folk. And in an effort to solve the puzzle he was given to following warily in the Boy's trail, — but so warily that his presence was never guessed.

For weeks Red Fox kept studying the Boy in this way, whenever he had a chance; but it was some time before the Boy got a chance to study Red Fox. Then it came about in a strange fashion. One afternoon, some time after Red Fox had discovered and enjoyed the fallen plums in the orchard, he came upon a wild grape-vine on the edge of the valley, loaded with ripe fruit. Grape-vines were a rare growth in the Ringwaak region; but this one, growing in a sheltered and fertile nook, was a luxuriant specimen of its kind. It had draped itself in serpentine tangles over a couple of dying trees; and the clusters of its fruit were of a most alluring purple.

Red Fox looked on this unknown fruit and felt sure that it was good. He remembered the plums,