

PEE-WEE HARRIS
FIXER

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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Title: Pee-wee Harris: Fixer

Date of first publication: 1924

Author: Percy Keese Fitzhugh (1876-1950)

Date first posted: June 6, 2019

Date last updated: June 6, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190611

This eBook was produced by: Roger Frank and Sue Clark.

PEE-WEE HARRIS: FIXER



“GO UP THAT SIDE STREET!” ORDERED PEE-WEE.

PEE-WEE HARRIS: FIXER

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of
THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
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Published with the approval of
THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS : : NEW YORK

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Made in the United States of America

CONTENTS

- I [HE APPEARS](#)
- II [MUG](#)
- III [THE SOLEMN VOW](#)
- IV [THE NOON HOUR](#)
- V [QUEEN TUT](#)
- VI [THE SAFETY PATROL](#)
- VII [I AM THE LAW](#)
- VIII [THE PROTECTOR](#)
- IX [THE PARADE](#)
- X [THE FIXER](#)
- XI [PEE-WEE'S PROMISE](#)
- XII [CULTURE TRIUMPHANT](#)
- XIII [MISSIONARY WORK](#)
- XIV [SEEING NEW YORK](#)
- XV [IN FOR IT](#)
- XVI [THE REAL EMERSON](#)
- XVII [ALONE](#)
- XVIII [DEDUCTION](#)
- XIX [IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT](#)
- XX [THE DEPTHS](#)
- XXI [DARKNESS](#)
- XXII [ARABELLA](#)
- XXIII [IN THE WOODS](#)
- XXIV [ROBIN HOOD](#)
- XXV [A NEW MEMBER](#)
- XXVI [A FRESH START](#)
- XXVII [ACTION](#)
- XXVIII [NOT A SCOUT](#)
- XXIX [VOICES](#)
- XXX [WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK](#)
- XXXI [BOB, SCOUTMAKER](#)
- XXXII [THE NEW SCOUT](#)

XXXIII [OVER THE RADIO](#)

XXXIV [THE SHORT CUT](#)

XXXV [“DANGER”](#)

XXXVI [PEE-WEE TRIUMPHANT](#)

PEE-WEE HARRIS: FIXER

CHAPTER I HE APPEARS

Pee-wee Harris, or rather the left leg of Pee-wee Harris, emerged from an upper side window of his home, and was presently followed by the rest of Pee-wee, clad in his scout suit. He crept cautiously along an ornamental shingled projection till he reached the safety of the porch roof, where he stood pulling up his stocking and critically surveying the shady street below him.

The roof of the front porch was approachable by a less venturesome route than that of the ornamental coping. This was via the apartment of Pee-wee's sister Elsie, and out through one of her prettily curtained front windows.

But he had been baffled in his attempt to violate this neutral territory by finding the door to her sanctum locked. He had demanded admittance and had thereupon heard whispering voices within. A hurried consultation between Elsie and her mother had resulted in a policy fatal to Pee-wee's plans. Not only that, but worse; his honor as a scout had been impugned.

"Don't let him in, I locked the door on purpose." This from Elsie.

"I think he just wants to get to the porch roof," Mrs. Harris had said, to the accompaniment of a sewing machine.

"I don't care, I'm not going to have him going through here; if he sees my costume every boy in town will know about it and they've all got sisters. Everybody who's invited to the masquerade will know exactly what I'm going to wear. I might just as well not go in costume. You know how he is, he simply *couldn't* keep his mouth shut. What on earth does he want to do on the porch roof anyway? If he's not well enough to go to school, I shouldn't think he'd be climbing out on the front porch."

"I suppose it's something about his radio," Mrs. Harris replied in her usual tone of gentle tolerance. "He's going back to school on Monday."

"Thank goodness for that," was Elsie's comment.

"*That shows how much you know about scouts!*" the baffled hero had roared. "*It's girls that can't keep secrets!* If you think anybody'd ever find out anything from me about what you're going to wear——"

"Do go away from the door, Walter," Mrs. Harris had pled. "You know that Elsie is very, very busy, and I am helping her. She has only till Wednesday to get her costume ready."

Conscious of his prowess and resource, Pee-wee had not condescended to discuss a matter involving his manly honor. He would discourse upon that theme later when no barrier intervened.

He had returned to his own room and immediately become involved in a formidable system of rigging which lay spread out upon the bed and on the adjacent floor. The component parts of this were a rake-handle, two broomsticks lashed together, a couple of pulleys, several large screw-hooks, and endless miles of wire and cord.

This sprawling apparatus was Pee-wee's aerial, intended to catch the wandering voices of the night and transmit them to Pee-wee's ear. In the present instance, however, it caught Pee-wee's foot instead, the section of rigging which was spread upon the bed was drawn into the entanglement, and our hero, after a brief and frantic struggle, was broadcasted upon the floor.

This was the first dramatic episode connected with Pee-wee's radio. It was directly after he had extricated himself from the baffling meshes of his own handiwork that he had emerged from the window of his room, left foot foremost; which conclusively disproves the oft-repeated assertion of Roy Blakeley that Pee-wee always went head first.

CHAPTER II

MUG

Simultaneously with Pee-wee's appearance on the roof of the front porch the chintz curtains in his sister's window were cautiously drawn together so as to confound any attempt to look within. Pee-wee was too preoccupied to take note of this insult.

His eyes and thoughts were fixed upon a large elm tree which grew close to the sidewalk some yards distant across the lawn. The tree was stately, as only an elm knows how to be, its tall, thick trunk being free of branches to a point almost level with the roof of the house. At that height great limbs spread out over the sidewalk and shaded a large area of the Harris lawn. Pee-wee studied this tree with the critical eyes of an engineer.

He next drew out of the depths of one of his trousers pockets a ball of fishing-line, and out of the depths of the opposite pocket the detachable handle of a flat-iron. This he tied to the cord which he proceeded to unwind until he had released enough for his purpose. He frowned upon the distant elm tree as if he intended to annihilate it. Meanwhile, the muffled hum of the sewing machine could be heard through his sister's window.

Pee-wee now replaced the ball of cord in his pocket and threw the flat-iron handle into the branches of the tree. It fell to the ground with the attached cord dangling after it. He pulled it up and cast it again. Twice, thrice, it failed to find lodgment in the branches. If it had been a kite or a beanbag or one of those twirling, ascending toys, it would have stayed in the tree upon the first cast, out of pure perversity. But the flat-iron handle had not the fugitive instinct, it would not stay.

Not only that, but a new complication presented itself. Mug, the puppy who resided with the Harris family, made a dramatic appearance on the lawn below just in time to catch the flat-iron handle as Pee-wee was about to lift it.

"You let go of that!" Pee-wee shouted. "You drop that, Mug, do you hear?"

But Mug, more interested in adventure than in science, did not drop it. Pee-wee tried to pull it away but Mug rolled over on his back in the full spirit of this tug of war, and was presently so much involved with the cord that obedience to Pee-wee's thunderous commands was out of the question. For a few moments it seemed as if Mug might be hauled up bodily and made an integral part of the aerial.

Pee-wee endeavored by lassoing maneuvers and jump-rope tactics to

release the enmeshed pup, using the entire porch roof for his stage of action. He loosed the cord, imparted long wavy motions to it, jerked it, pulled it to the right, pulled it to left, but all to no avail.

At last the puppy extricated himself, and with no regard at all for his harrowing experience, immediately made a dash for the departing flat-iron handle, caught it, shook it, ran half-way across the lawn with it, shook it again, and darted around a bush with it.

The bush was not a participant in this world war. Pee-wee pulled with all his might and main, part of the bush came away, the puppy pounced upon the fleeing fragment, it dropped from the cord, and the puppy with refreshed energy caught the flat-iron handle again, bracing his forelegs for the tussle, his tail wagging frantically. Thus has every great scientist encountered hardships and obstacles.

“You get away from that now, do you hear what I tell you!” Pee-wee roared.

He might have pulled the cord away from his diminutive antagonist but that it caught in a crack between two shingles at the edge of the porch roof. The cause of science seemed to be baffled at every turn, and on the edge as well. If Mug rolled over on his back again all hope might be lost in new complications.

In desperation, Pee-wee glanced about him for something to throw at Mug by way of diverting his attention to fresh novelties. The puppy was already on his back, the cord wound around one of his forelegs. The roof was clear of all possible missiles. Pee-wee pulled out a loose shingle and hurled it down but Mug saw it not.

Then Pee-wee did something which showed his power of sacrifice. He pulled out of his pocket the sole remaining cocoanut-ball from a purchase of three—for a cent. It was heavy, and sticky, and encased in tissue paper. There was no time to take even a single bite of it.

“Here you go, Mug! Here you go, Mug!” he called.

The new temptation enabled Mug to extricate himself. He did not care for candy but he was a ready adventurer in the matter of sports. His preoccupation with the rolling cocoanut-ball gave Pee-wee the opportunity to crawl cautiously to the edge of the roof and disentangle the cord where it had caught.

He now hurled the flat-iron handle with all his might up into the branches of the distant tree and there it stuck. To make certain of its security he pulled, first gently, then harder. It held fast.

Having successfully accomplished this part of his enterprise, he cast a wistful glance down upon the cocoanut-ball which Mug was pushing about the lawn with his nose.

Just then the window of his sister’s room was flung open.

CHAPTER III THE SOLEMN VOW

“Walter, what on *earth* are you doing out there?” asked his distracted mother.

“I’m putting up my aerial, and if Anna kept Mug in the cellar like you told her to do, this cord wouldn’t have got all tangled up in the roof so I couldn’t pull it away from him and he got all tangled up in it too because Anna didn’t keep him in the cellar like you told her to do, I heard you. And I lost a good cocoanut-ball on account of her.”

“Walter,” said Mrs. Harris. “You shouldn’t be climbing and you shouldn’t be eating cocoanut-balls, when you’re just getting over the grippe.”

“I didn’t eat it, I told you!”

“Well, you come right in here and don’t you climb around on that ledge again.”

“Then I’m going to bring my stuff through here,” Pee-wee warned, as he climbed in through the window. “I’ve got the first part all done now and all I’ve got to do is bring the aerial out and tie it to the cord that’s on the roof of the porch and then all I have to do is to go down and then climb up the tree where the other end of the cord is and that way I can pull one end of the aerial out to the tree and after that all I have to do is to go up and drop a cord with a lot of hooks and things on it down onto the porch roof and get hold of this end of the aerial and pull it up to the attic window and then I’ll have the aerial stretched from the attic window to the tree where it can catch the sound waves, d’you see?”

“Good heavens!” said Elsie. “Talk of sound waves!”

Pee-wee now paused to glance about at the litter which filled his sister’s room. The multi-colored evidences of intensive manufacture were all about, on the bed, on the collapsible cutting-table, on and about the wicker sewing stand, in the jaws of the sewing machine. There was a riot of color, and a kind of atmosphere of cooperative ingenuity which even the masculine invader was conscious of. This was no ordinary task of dressmaking. A queer-looking specimen of headgear with a facsimile snake on the front of it testified to that.

The eyes of the rival manufacturer were attracted to this cotton-stuffed reptile, with projecting tongue made of a bent hairpin. He glanced at a motley costume besprinkled with writhing serpents, and among its other embellishments he recognized one as bearing a resemblance to the sphinx in his school geography.

Pee-wee had never inquired into the processes of dressmaking but here was a specimen of handiwork which caught his eye and set him gaping in wonder. Attached to the costume, which rivaled futuristic wall-paper in its motley originality, was a metal snake with red glass eyes. It was long and flexible. Pee-wee was a scout, a naturalist, a lover of wild life, and he gazed longingly upon this serpentine girdle.

“Walter,” said his mother, “I want you to promise me that you won’t say a word, *not a single word*, to *anybody* about the costume Elsie is going to wear at Mary Temple’s masquerade. I want you to *promise* me that you won’t even say that she has a big surprise. Do you think you can——”

“I don’t see why he can’t stay in the house another two or three days,” said Elsie, who was sitting at the machine. “If dad thinks he ought to stay home till Monday, he certainly won’t lose much by staying home till Wednesday. If he doesn’t go out, why then he *can’t* talk. I don’t see why you had to let him in.”

“Because I’m not going to have him endangering his life on that coping,” said Mrs. Harris.

“I might just as well send an item to the *Evening Bungle*,” said Elsie, with an air of exasperated resignation. The Bridgeboro daily paper was named the *Bugle*, but it was more appropriately spoken of as the *Bungle*. “*Every single* guest at the masquerade will know I’m going as Queen Tut long before my costume is ready,” the girl added.

“You shouldn’t have mentioned the name,” said Mrs. Harris.

“Oh, there’s no hope of secrecy now,” said Elsie. “He’s seen it, that’s enough.”

It was at this point that Pee-wee exploded. He spoke, or rather he roared, not for himself alone but for the Boy Scouts of America, which organization he had under his especial care.

“That shows how much you know about scouts,” he thundered. “Even—even if I knew—even if Queen Tut—and she was an Egyptian, you think you’re so smart—even if she was alive and came here—for—for a visit—and it was a secret—I wouldn’t say anything about it. Queen Tut, she’d be the one to give it away herself because she’s a girl—I mean she was—I mean she would be if she wasn’t a mummy, but girls can’t be mummies because they can’t keep still. Do you mean to say——”

“I’m sure we’re not saying a word, Walter,” said his gentle mother.

“Scouts never give away secrets,” Pee-wee continued vociferously. “Don’t you know a scout’s honor is to be trusted? It’s one of the laws. Gee whiz! A scout’s lips are, what d’you call it, they’re sealed!”

“Yours?” laughed his sister.

“Yes, mine. Do you think I can’t keep still?”

“I wish you would then, Walter,” said his mother.

“Well, then you better tell her not to say I’m as bad as the *Bugle* because, anyway, if anybody asks me not to give away a secret it’s—it’s—just the same as if you locked it up in an iron box and buried it in the ground. That shows how much she knows about scouts! Even—even if you wouldn’t let me bring my aerial through this room so as to get it out on the porch roof—even then I wouldn’t tell anybody what she’s going to wear to Mary Temple’s, I wouldn’t.”

This diplomatic feeler, intended to ascertain his sister’s attitude in regard to crossing her territory, was successful.

“What do you mean, bring your aerial through this room?” she asked.

“Don’t I have to get it out to the porch roof?” he asked. “Do you think I can carry it along the molding outside? Do you think I’m a—a caterpillar?”

“No, you mustn’t do that,” said his mother firmly.

“Well, then,” said Pee-wee conclusively. “Gee whiz, both of you claim to like music and concerts and things. If I get my radio up you can hear those things. Gee whiz, you can hear lectures and songs and all kinds of things. You can hear famous authors and actors and everything. All you have to do is come in my room and listen. Gee whiz,” he added wistfully, “you wouldn’t catch *me* giving away a secret. *No, siree!*”

“Walter,” said Elsie, trying to repress a smile. “If I let you bring your things through here will you promise me, word of honor, that you won’t tell Roy Blakeley or Westy Martin or Connie Bennett or any of their sisters or any boys or girls in school or anybody at all what kind of a costume I’m going to wear at Temple’s? The color of it or anything about it—or the snakes or anything? Will you promise? Because it’s going to be a *big* surprise.”

“Do you know what a solemn vow is?” Pee-wee demanded.

“I’ve heard of them,” Elsie said.

“Well, that’s the kind of a vow I make,” said Pee-wee. “And besides that, I cross my heart. You needn’t worry, Elsie; nobody’ll find it out. Because, anyway, scouts don’t tell. *Geeeee whiz*, you leave it to me. Nobody’ll ever know, that’s sure. You can ask Roy Blakeley if I can’t keep a secret.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Harris, “I think we had better go down and have some lunch and after that you can finish what you’re doing. I do wish you wouldn’t talk so loud, Walter.”

“In about a week, maybe not so long,” Pee-wee said, “I won’t be talking at all, I’ll be listening all the time. I’ll be listening to Chicago and maybe even to Honolulu, maybe.”

“You sound as if you were talking to Honolulu,” laughed Elsie. “You remember what I said now?”

“Absolutely, positively and definitely,” Pee-wee assured her.

CHAPTER IV THE NOON HOUR

The masquerade to be given at Temple's and the unique costume to be worn by Elsie were the subjects of discussion at luncheon. Pee-wee was too engrossed in his own enterprise to pay much attention to this feminine chat. He gathered that his sister's costume was considered to be something of an inspiration and a masterpiece in the working out. It was expected to startle the younger set of Bridgeboro and to be the sensation of the evening. Queen Tut, consort of the celebrated King Tut of ancient Egypt. Favorite wife of the renowned mummy.

Mrs. Harris and Elsie were rather hazy about whether his name had been Tut and whether he had possessed a Queen Tut, but anything goes in a masquerade. There would be masked Charlie Chaplins by the score; colonial maids, gypsy maids, Swiss peasant maids, pirates, and war nurses galore. But only one Queen Tut, leader of fashion in ancient Egypt. The great Egyptian flapper. . . .

Pee-wee hurried through his lunch and upstairs so that he might proceed with his work uninterrupted, while his mother and sister lingered in discourse about the great event. He was well beforehand with his exterior work, for the radio set was not yet in his possession. It was to be a birthday present deliverable several days hence. But the secret (held by women) had leaked out and Pee-wee had thereupon set about preparing his aerial.

He now gathered this up and dragged it into Elsie's room. The cross-bars were laid together, the connecting wires loosely wound about them. He struggled under the mass, tripped in its treacherous loops, brought it around endways so it would go through the door, and finally by hook or crook balanced it across the window-sill where he sat for a moment to rest. The operations on which he was embarked seemed complicated and large in conception. By contrast, Pee-wee seemed very small.

It was characteristic of him that his career as a radio-bug should be heralded by preparatory turmoil. For several days he had striven with saw and hammer in the cellar, rolls of discarded chicken-wire had been attacked and left for the cook to trip over, the clothes-line had been abridged, not a wrench or screw-driver or ball of cord was to be found in its place.

Pee-wee's convalescence from grippe had afforded him the opportunity thus to turn the house and garage upside down in the interest of science. He had even made demand for hairpins, and had mysteriously collected all the

package handles he could lay hands on. These wooden handles he had split, releasing the copper wires which ran through them and converting these into miniature grapnels with which he had equipped the end of a stout cord. This cord, not an integral part of his aerial, was nevertheless temporarily attached to it, whether by intention or as the result of tangling, one could not say. It dangled from it, however, like the tail of a kite.

The function of his cord, as Pee-wee had explained, was to elevate one end of the aerial to the attic window after the other end had been elevated to the tree. In that lofty position no voice, not even the voice of Honolulu, could escape it. The world (perhaps even Mars) would talk in Pee-wee's ear.

The operations (conceived while lying in bed) for elevating this wire eavesdropper into position were even more extraordinary than the aerial itself, and Pee-wee was now prepared to take the next important step in his enterprise. This was to fasten to the aerial the cord which he had lodged in the tree and thereupon to ascend the tree himself and pull the aerial up at that end. Following this, he would make his next public appearance at the attic window from which he would dangle his grappling line, catching the other end of the aerial and pulling it up at that end. It could then be drawn tight, adjusted, and made ready against his birthday.

He was anxious to get the acrobatic part of his enterprise completed before the return of Dr. Harris who might be expected to interpose some objection to the flaunting exhibition of broomsticks and rake-handle above the front lawn; and who assuredly would have been expected to veto the acrobatic feature of the work.

The doctor might be expected to return at one o'clock; every minute after that hour would be fraught with apprehension. It was now past twelve-thirty, as Pee-wee knew from the advance guard of returning pupils bound for the high school on the next block.

CHAPTER V

QUEEN TUT

Pee-wee shinned up the elm and was soon concealed amid the safety of the spreading branches. He was a monkey at climbing. He handed himself about, looking this way and that in quest of the flat-iron handle. Soon he discovered it caught on a stub of a branch like a quoit on a stake. The branches in its neighborhood were numerous and strong and he had no difficulty in approaching it.

He sat wedged in a comfortable fork of two stout branches, his foot locked in a limb just below him. An upright branch, like a stanchion, afforded the additional precaution of steadying himself with a hand, but that was not necessary. He was as safe and comfortable as if he had been on a merry-go-round with his feet in a pair of stirrups, his hand holding a brass rod.

Pleased with the coziness and safety of his aerial perch, he was moved to celebrate his arrival by eating an apple which he had thoughtfully brought from the dining table. And having finished the apple (and being only human) he was moved to drop the core plunk on the head of Emerson Skybrow, brother of Minerva Skybrow, who, being an exemplary youth and not having much appetite, was always in the advance guard of returning pupils. That studious boy paused, looked up curiously and proceeded on his way.

Pee-wee found it pleasant sitting high up in his leafy bower looking down on the unfortunates who had to go to school. He deferred his labors for a few minutes to enjoy the sight. He refrained from calling for fear of attracting attention from the house; his mother was likely to disapprove his ascent of the tree.

The straggling advance guard became more numerous, pupils came in twos and threes, then in little groups, until there was a steady procession toward the school. There were Marjorie Blakeley and the two Roberts girls going arm in arm—talking of the masquerade, possibly. There was Elsie Benton (big sister of Scout Dorry Benton) strolling along with Harrison Quinby—as usual. There were the Troville trio, so called, three sisters of the flapper type. Along they all sauntered, laughing, chatting. . . .

Pee-wee, suddenly recalled to his duties, shook off his mood of contemplative reverie and reached for the flat-iron handle. Never in all its homely, domestic career had that flat-iron handle been cast for such a sensational role. Pee-wee held the cord which ran to the porch roof. He agitated it, moved it clear of leafy obstructions, pulled it taut, shook it away

from a branch which rubbed against it, and began pulling vigorously.

Across the distant window-sill of his sister's room tumbled the cumbersome aerial and fell on the porch roof. Elated, Pee-wee pulled. Soon he heard laughter below and looked down on the increasing group whence the laughter emanated. He saw Crabby Dennison, teacher of mathematics, standing stark still some yards beyond the tree, looking intently across the Harris lawn.

Directly beneath him the group had increased to the proportions of a crowd. And they were all laughing. Pee-wee gazed down at them, the while pulling hand over hand. Assured of his success, it afforded him pleasure to look down upon the curious multitude who seemed to have forgotten all about school.

It is said that Nero fiddled while Rome was burning. Thus Pee-wee pulled.

Suddenly a chorus of mirth arose beneath him, interspersed with flippant calls, the while the merry loiterers looked up, trying to espy him in the tree.

"Look what's there!"

"Who's running the clothes-line?"

"Where is he?"

"Did you *ever*?"

"What on *earth*——"

"It's an oriental ghost."

"It's a jumping-jack."

"It's just an ad."

"I never saw anything so——"

Pee-wee peered through the sheltering foliage toward the house and beheld a horrifying spectacle. Hanging midway between two sagging lengths of cord was his aerial. Depending from this was a motley apparition which he perceived to be his sister's masquerade costume, revealed in all its fantastic and colorful glory to the gaping multitude. No Bridgeboro girl ever did, or ever would, wear such a costume in the streets; its bizarre design proclaimed its theatrical character.

It depended gracefully, naturally, from the treacherous aerial, as if Queen Tut herself (minus her head) were being hanged. No seductive shopkeeper could have displayed it more effectively in his window. Pee-wee stared dismayed, aghast.

"Oh, I know what it is," caroled a blithe maid below; "it's Elsie Harris' masquerade costume; I just *bet* it is."

It was a safe bet.



PEE-WEE BEHELD THE DANGLING COSTUME

Cold with horror, Pee-wee gazed upon this result of the ghastly treachery of his aerial. As far as he was able to think at all he believed that some truant end of wire had caught the royal robe and dragged it forth. There were many truant ends of wire. Perhaps one of the wire grappnels contrived from a package handle had coyly hooked it as the aerial crossed the window-sill. At all events it was hooked. And there it dangled above the Harris lawn in the full glare of the sunlight and in full view of the enthralled multitude.

They did not scruple to advance upon the lawn.
“Isn’t it perfectly *gorgeous!*” one girl enthused.

“What on earth do you suppose—— There’s one—I bet it’s Walter Harris up in that tree,” said another.

“Did you ever in your life see such a perfectly sumptuous thing?” chirped a third.

“Oh, I think it’s a *dear*,” said still another.

For a few moments the clamoring people were so preoccupied with the splendor of the dangling robe that they neglected to investigate the machinery which had brought it thus into the public gaze until a thunderous command from up in the tree assailed their ears.

“Don’t you know enough to go to school?” Pee-wee roared. “Gee whiz, didn’t you ever see an aerial of a radio before? Anyway, you’re trespassing on that lawn! Get off that lawn, d’you hear? You can each be fined fifty dollars, maybe a hundred, for trespassing on that lawn. Don’t you know enough to go to school?”

He pulled the cord in the hope of lifting the display above the reach of the curious, and immediately discovered the total depravity of his whole tangled apparatus. The cord was now caught somewhere below him in the tree and his frantic pulling only communicated a slight agitation to the dangling garment as if it were dancing a jig for the edification of its gaping audience.

The heavy cords, with the tangled mass of collapsed aerial midway between tree and house, sagged at about the curve of a hammock with the flaunting royal robe almost grazing the lawn. It was easily approachable for critical feminine inspection and as Pee-wee looked down it seemed as if the whole student body of the high school were clustered about it in astonishment and admiration. He could single out many of his sister’s particular friends, Olga Wetherson, Julia Stemson, Marjorie Blakeley.

“Get away from there!” he shouted, baffled by the treacherous cord and having no resource save in his voice. “Go on now, get away from there, do you hear? You leave that dress alone! Don’t you know you’ll be late for school? Don’t you know an accident when you see one? Do you think that dress is there on purpose? Go on, get off that lawn—that—that costume isn’t supposed to be there——”

The face of Elsie Harris appeared in the window, a face gasping in tragic dismay. Her mother’s face presently appeared also. They could not see the hero in the tree but they saw the exhibition and the crowd. And they could *hear* the hero.

“Tell them to go on away,” he bellowed. “It’s an accident; can’t you see it’s an accident that happened behind my back when I wasn’t looking and how could I help it if it got caught when I wasn’t there and didn’t know anything about it——”

“Oh, I think it’s just gorgeous, Else,” caroled Olga Wetherson. “How did

you ever think——”

“Go on to school!” the hero thundered, “and let that alone. Don’t you know accidents can happen to—to—even to the most—the smartest people? Don’t you know that that isn’t supposed to be there on purpose?”

This was shouted for the benefit of his mother and sister and intimidated his line of defense. But Elsie heard him not. One horrified glance and she had withdrawn from the window and buried her face in the pillows of the bed, clenching her hands and weeping copiously.

“Walter,” called his mother, “you come in the house at once.”

“Do you blame me for something that happened when I wasn’t there?” he shouted. “Do you say I’m to blame for something that happened behind my back? Gee whiz, do you call that logic? Hey, Billy Wessels, you’re in the senior class, gee whiz, is that logic—what happened behind my back when I wasn’t there to stop it? Can I be in two places at once?”

“Walter, you come down out of that tree and come in the house at once.”

“Do you say I’m to blame?” he roared.

“I say for you to leave whatever you’re doing and come in the house—*at once.*”

“Gee whiz.”

Mrs. Harris closed the window and turned to her daughter who still clutched the pillow as if it were a life preserver, and shook her head as if she could not look or speak, and sobbed and sobbed and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER VI

THE SAFETY PATROL

Having entombed Queen Tut more effectually than ever the ancient Egyptians did, Pee-wee returned to school the following Monday. A lengthy conference between Elsie and her mother had resulted in the decision that the girl should go to the masquerade as Joan of Arc.

“Perhaps her martial character will protect her from annihilation,” said Mrs. Harris wistfully.

“I feel,” said Elsie, looking through tear-stained eyes, “as if I’d like to go as Bluebeard and kill every one I see—including all the small brothers. I would like to go as Attila the Hun and massacre all the boy scouts in Bridgeboro. Then I would seek out Marconi and assassinate him because he invented the radio—if he did.”

“Poor Queen Tut,” said Mrs. Harris amiably, launched upon the new costume. “Poor Walter.”

Poor Walter needed very little sympathy. He had gone to pastures new where fresh glories awaited him. Having triumphed over the grippe and Queen Tut, he presented himself at grammar school Monday morning. His aerial masterpiece remained where he had left it when peremptorily summoned to the house, festooning the lawn, minus its ornamental appendage.

Upon Pee-wee’s arrival at school, his teacher sent him to Doctor Sharpe, the principal, who wished to confer with him upon important matters.

“Harris,” said he, turning in his swivel chair, “I’m glad to know that you’re feeling better.”

“Yes, sir,” said Pee-wee.

“You had quite a time of it, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” said Pee-wee, with more truth than the principal suspected.

“Walter, I suppose you know of the plan we’ve adopted here of having selected pupils act as traffic officers during the rush hours, as I might call them, when the boys and girls are coming and going in the neighborhood of the school building.”

“Yes, sir,” said Pee-wee, hoisting up one of his stockings.

“The idea is to safeguard the pupils, especially the smaller ones, from careless drivers. The boys appointed to take this responsibility are of course pupils in good standing—intelligent, keen-witted, resourceful. They wear badges and have the cooperation and backing of the police.”

“They have whistles, don’t they?” Pee-wee asked.

Already he saw himself, or rather heard himself, blowing his lungs out in autocratic warning for the traffic to pause. His roving eye caught sight of something on Doctor Sharpe's desk which gladdened his heart. This was a huge, celluloid disk or button as large as a molasses cookie and equipped with a canvas band to encircle the arm and hold it in place. If it had indeed been a molasses cookie, Pee-wee could hardly have contemplated it with deeper yearning.

"I was an official in the clean-up campaign," Pee-wee said. "I made 'em clean up Barrel Alley. I cooperated with the police, I did. Once I even got a man arrested for throwing a pie in the street. Gee whiz, that isn't what pies are for."

"I should say not," smiled Doctor Sharpe.

"So I know all about being a public official, kind of," said Pee-wee.

"Well, that's just what I thought. And besides you're a scout, I believe?"

"You said it."

"And I always lean toward scouts when it comes to a question of responsibility, public duty——"

"That's where you're right," said Pee-wee. "Because scouts, you can always depend on them. If a scout says he'll keep a—anyway, gee whiz, they're always on the job, I'll say that."

"Well, I'm going to appoint you a traffic officer," said Doctor Sharpe, "and you're to wear this badge and act in accordance with these instructions." He handed Pee-wee a carbon copy of a typewritten sheet. "Read it now and tell me if you think you can assume these duties. I've heard of your work in the clean-up campaign and that's why I thought of you. We need one more officer."

"Did you hear about me—and the dead rat," Pee-wee inquired. "I'll read it," he said, alluding to the paper, "but anyway, I accept."

The typewritten sheet read as follows:

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SAFETY PATROL

Officers of the safety patrol are to be at their designated stations from 8.30 to 9.15 A.M.; and from 12 to 12.15 P.M.; from 12.40 to 1.15 P.M.; and from 3 to 3.30 P.M. Officers of the Safety Patrol are expected to carry their lunches as they will not have sufficient time to go home.

The duties of the officers are to insure the safety of pupils approaching and leaving the school, to warn, and when necessary detain traffic in the interest of safety.

Boys acting as officers of this patrol are to use their whistles and the uplifted hand in controlling traffic while on duty and their authority must be obeyed by drivers of vehicles in the school

neighborhood. They shall report to the principal any flagrant disregard of their authority by drivers, taking the license number of the vehicle. They will have the full cooperation of the police officer stationed in the neighborhood.

Officers of the safety patrol will give their especial attention to the smaller children, escorting them when necessary. Theirs is the responsibility of keeping the street and neighboring crossings clear during the approach and departure of pupils, especially those of the lower grades.

Their teachers will permit them to leave the classroom early and no punishment for tardiness shall be incurred by their remaining at their posts, as provided, after the bell rings.

Roswell Sharpe,
Principal.

Pee-wee received the badge as if it were a Distinguished Service Cross tendered by Marshal Foch, or the Scout Gold Cross for supreme heroism. It looked not unlike a giant wrist-watch on his small arm. At the same time an authoritative celluloid whistle was handed him. He could not bear to conceal this in his pocket so he hung it around his neck by an emergency shoe-string which he carried.

He saw visions of himself frowning upon the proud drivers of Pierce Arrows and Cadillacs. He saw the baffled chauffeurs of jitney buses jam on their brakes when his authoritative hand said (as Marshal Joffre had said), "*They shall not pass.*" He saw himself the escort and protector of golden-haired Marion Bates, who had laughed at him and called him "Smarty."

As he passed out through the principal's anteroom, he noticed sitting there Emerson Skybrow, the boy on whose head he had let fall an apple core. It was a fine head, filled with the most select culture and knowledge. That was why Pee-wee had dropped the core on it. Emerson was not a favorite in the school, much less with the scouts. He said "cinema" when he meant the movies, he said "luncheon" and "dinner" instead of eats, he took "constitutionals" instead of hikes, he took piano lessons, and he spoke of shows as "entertainments" or "exhibitions." There is much to be said for such a boy, but he is almost certain to have apple cores dropped on him.

Emerson was not popular, but he was useful. He was not nery, but he was self-possessed. He talked like a grown person. It is significant that he had not been appointed to the safety patrol. But he was always getting himself appointed monitor. He distributed and gathered up books and pencils in the classroom, he "opened the window a little at the top" with a long implement, he could always be counted on for poetical recitations.

On the present occasion Emerson had been sent as a delegation of one, representing the entire student body, to prefer a particular request of the principal. It had been shrewdly considered that any request made by Emerson must be regarded as eminently proper and respectable. Emerson was never late to school and seldom absent. Therefore, a request involving an interruption of school routine in the interest of mere entertainment would command attention in high places if made by Emerson.

That is why he had been delegated to approach Doctor Sharpe and request that lessons be suspended for half an hour on the following morning in order that the pupils might beguile themselves with something altogether unorthodox in the humdrum daily life at school.

That was why Emerson was waiting in the anteroom.

CHAPTER VII

I AM THE LAW

The two outstanding features of Tuesday were the observance of Pee-wee's birthday and the appearance of the circus in town. The circus gave two "stupendous performances." Pee-wee gave one memorable performance.

The early morning of that festive spring day found him harassed with perplexity. His troubles were financial. He awoke early and lay for a little while allowing his mind to dwell on the radio set which he knew his father intended to give him. He had extracted that much information from his father, but he had not been able to extract the gift. Doctor Harris had old-fashioned ideas about birthdays.

Pee-wee's mother had been won over and had given him her personal gift of a dollar, most of which already had found its way into circulation via Bennett's Fresh Confectionery on Main Street. As for his sister Elsie, Pee-wee felt it would be rash to expect anything from her in the way of a present!

He had exactly fifty-two cents. Purchases necessary to install his radio set would require forty-seven of this, leaving five cents which would be of no use, except to enable him to drink his own health in an orange phosphate at Bennett's. Or he might wish himself many happy returns of the day with an ice cream cone.

In any case he could not go to the circus, unless he postponed the installation of his radio till such time as his circumstances improved. He considered this alternative and decided that the radio must be installed for immediate operation, circus or no circus.

The faint hope which he had dared to indulge that Elsie might forget the episode involving a scout's lack of secrecy in the glow of the birthday morn proved entirely unjustified. She did not even come down to breakfast. Having carefully laid his precious gift on the table in his room, and feasted his eyes upon it as long as his official duties would permit, he emerged with his school books, the while whistling audibly in the forlorn hope that the new Joan of Arc might hear him and relent. After this all hope was abandoned.

Renouncing his lingering dream of an evening at the circus and consoling himself with thoughts of his radio, he hurried to school with the more immediate joy of his official position uppermost in his mind. He reached the scene of his public duties promptly at eight-thirty and immediately put on his costume, consisting of his celluloid badge and his dangling whistle.

The public school was on Terrace Avenue and filled the entire block from

West Street to Allerton Street. Pee-wee's stand was at the intersection of Allerton Street and Terrace Avenue. Here, for half an hour, he raised his hand, blew his whistle, beckoned reassuringly to the small children who paused uncertainly at the curbs. Occasionally he honored some little girl by personally conducting her across the street.

"Stop, d'you hear?" he thundered at a bus driver who had declined to take him seriously. "D'you see this badge? If you don't stop, you see, I'll have you fined—maybe as much as—as—ten dollars, maybe."

And upon the cynical bus driver's pausing, the autocrat leisurely escorted little Willie Hobertson, whose leg was held in a nickel frame, across to the school.

He stopped Mr. Runner Snagg, the auto inspector, who was speeding in his official car. Here authority clashed with authority, but Officer Harris won the day by boldly planting himself in front of the inspector's roadster the while he beckoned to a group of pupils.

"You thought you'd get away with it, didn't you?" he shouted. "Just because you're an inspector you needn't think you don't have to obey the law—geeeeeee whiz!"

Lacking the size and dignity of a regular policeman, he made up for it by abandoning himself to approaching traffic, standing immovable before vehicles, sometimes until the very bumpers and headlights touched him. They stopped because he would not budge.

Perhaps he erred a trifle on the side of dictatorship that first morning, but the pupils all reached school in safety, and without confusion or delay. He stopped everything except the flippant comments of older boys who were guilty of *lèse majesté*. But even these he "handled," to use his own favorite word.

"Look who's holding up the traffic!"

"Hey, mister, don't run over that kid, you'll get a puncture."

"Look at that badge with a kid tied to it."

"Look out, kid, you'll blow yourself away with that whistle."

Pee-wee's cheeks bulged as he blew a frantic blast to warn Mr. Temple's chauffeur, who was taking little Janet Temple to school in the big Temple Pierce Arrow. Fords and Pierce Arrows, they were all the same to Pee-wee. He would have stopped the fire engines themselves.

"Hey, mister, look out, there's a boy behind that badge," a mirthful onlooker called.

"Cheese it, kid, here comes President Harding."

"Here comes the ambulance, Pee-wee. Don't blow your whistle, you'll wake up the patient."

"Hey, kid, here comes a wop with a donkey, blow your whistle. Hold up

your hand for the donkey.”

“Hold up your own hand!” Pee-wee shouted. “He belongs to your family.”

“Hey, Pee-wee, tell that sparrow to get off the street or he’ll run into a car and bust it.”

“Stand on your head, kid, that’s what I’d do!”

“You haven’t got any head to stand on!” Pee-wee shouted.

By nine o’clock all the pupils were in school except a few tardy stragglers. For ten minutes more these kept coming. Pee-wee held his post.

It was about nine fifteen and he could hear the singing within, when he reluctantly decided that it was time for him to relinquish his enjoyable occupation. The boy up at the next street intersection had already disappeared.

But one thing, or, to be more exact, two things, detained Pee-wee at the neighborhood of the post which he had graced with such efficiency. One was the sound of distant music. The other was the approach of a dilapidated motor truck, heavily laden with bales of rags and papers. It was this truck, rather than the faint music in the air, which attracted our young hero.

CHAPTER VIII THE PROTECTOR

The truck came lumbering along Terrace Avenue, its huge load shaking like some Dixie mammy of vast dimensions. The piled-up bales and burlap sacks were agitated by each small huddle in the road; the vast, overhanging pile tilted to an alarming angle. In a kind of cave or alcove in this surrounding mass sat the driver, almost completely enclosed by the load.

Pee-wee had no intention of interrupting the progress of this outlandish, bulging, tipsy caravan. The responsibility for what shortly happened is traceable to little Irene Flynn, who was hurrying to school in frantic haste, being already twenty minutes late. When Pee-wee's eyes were diverted from the advancing load to her spectacular approach, she was almost at the curb, panting audibly, for she had run all the way from Barrel Alley.

In the full glory of his authority, he planted himself immovably in the middle of the cross street and raised his autocratic hand, at the same time beckoning to little Irene to proceed across Terrace Avenue. With cynical assurance of his power, the truck driver disregarded Pee-wee, and was presently struck with consternation to find himself within fifteen feet of the little official, and the official still immovable. Other drivers, finding Pee-wee a statue, had driven around him and gone upon their way, to his chagrin.

But the driver of the truck could not do that, for in deference to his top-heavy load, he must keep a straight course. He therefore jammed on both his brakes with skilful promptness; the load shook as if stricken with palsy, a bale of rags rolled merrily off like a great boulder from a mountain, then the whole vast edifice swayed, collapsed, and was precipitated to the ground. A jungle of bales, sacks and huge bundles of loosely tied papers and rags decorated the middle of Terrace Avenue. It seemed inconceivable that any single truck could have contained so much. The street was transformed into a rubbish dump.

It is said that music has charms to soothe the savage beast, but the swelling strains of an approaching band, which could now be distinctly heard, did not soothe the driver of the truck. Pee-wee had entertained no idea that he was as many things as the driver called him. The number and character seemed also to astonish little Irene Flynn, who stood beside her protector in the middle of the street.

“Yer see wotcher done?” bawled the man. “All on account o’ that there blamed kid! I’d oughter ran over yer, that’s wot I’d oughter done, yer little _____”

“Just the same you didn’t,” said Pee-wee. “Why didn’t you stop when I first raised my hand? Gee whiz, can’t you see I’m a—I’m in the official patrol? Maybe you think I didn’t mean what I said when I motioned. Now, you see, you’ve got only yourself to blame. Gee whiz, that shows what you get for defying the law—geeee whiz!”

“It serves him right,” little Irene whispered to Pee-wee, as if she were afraid to advertise her loyalty. “It serves him a good lesson.”

Pee-wee would have withdrawn from this scene of devastation, escorting Irene, except that the approaching music grew louder and louder, and he and his little charge paused to ascertain the occasion of such a festive serenade. He was not long kept in doubt. Around the corner of Broad Avenue, which was the first cross street beyond Allerton, where Pee-wee was stationed, appeared a proud figure in a towering hat, swinging a fantastic rod equipped with a sumptuous brazen sphere.

“Oh, look at the soldier man, he’s got a barrel on his head, like,” gasped little Irene in awestruck admiration.

“It’s a drum-major,” said Pee-wee, staring. “Gee whiz, the circus is coming!”

Even the irate driver of the truck paused in the midst of the chaos he had wrought to gaze at the imposing spectacle which emerged around the corner and advanced down the wide thoroughfare of Terrace Avenue. Behind the red-coated band Pee-wee beheld three pedestrians walking abreast, and he knew that they would not be obedient to his raised arm. These were huge elephants, complacent, serene, contemptuous of the law.

“Oh, look—*look!*” gasped little Irene. “They’re efilants, they’re *real* efilants! Will they eat you?”

Pee-wee was too absorbed with the motley spectacle to answer. Behind the elephants came rolling cages, and amid the strains of martial music he could hear a mighty intermittent roaring—savage, terrible. Little Irene grasped his arm.

“Don’t you be scared,” he said. “I won’t let them hurt you.”

CHAPTER IX THE PARADE

Pee-wee was a true circus fan, but he was first of all a traffic officer. He knew that the parade could not easily pass this litter. Zigzagging his way through the chaos of crates and bales and bundles, he headed off the imposing procession before it reached the corner. He seemed a very small rudder to such a large ship, but he pointed up the side street, displaying his badge ostentatiously, and shouting at the top of his voice.

“You can’t pass here, you’ll have to turn up that street! Go on, turn into that street and you can come back into Terrace Avenue, the next block below. Hey, go up that side street!”

Without appearing to pay the slightest attention to him the drum-major, swinging his stick and looking straight before him, inscribed a wide, graceful turn into Allerton Street, and was mechanically followed by his red-coated band. They were blowing so prodigiously on their instruments that they seemed neither to know nor care which way they went and were steered as easily as a racing shell.

It is true that one of the elephants seemed sufficiently interested to pick up a bale of rags, which had rolled somewhat beyond the center of disorder, and hurl it onto the sidewalk, but he swung around with his companions.

Following the elephants came the camels and they too swung around; it was all the same to them. Followed an uproarious steam calliope which made the turn with a clamor to wake the dead. Then came the rolling cages with their ferocious tenants. And all these turned into Allerton Street following the calliope which followed the camels which followed the elephants which followed the band which followed the drum-major who followed the direction authoritatively indicated by Pee-wee Harris.

“Come on, anyway, I’m not going into school yet, because I’m going to see it,” Pee-wee said to Irene.

“I’ll get the blame on me ’cause I got late,” little Irene protested, as she followed him to a point of vantage on Allerton Street.

“You got a right to see the parade, *gee whiz*,” Pee-wee said. “You know Emerson Skybrow? He never does anything wrong and he got ninety-seven in arithmetic, and even he’s going to see it, I heard him say so. So if he’s late on purpose, I guess you can be. Anyway, I’m an official.”

This last reminder was what proved conclusive to little Irene; in the protection of the law, she could not do wrong. She had seen her valiant escort

deflect a whole circus parade; surely he could handle Principal Sharpe. She clung to him with divine faith and they turned the corner into Allerton Street which was now thronging with people. They were mostly either too old or too young to go to school; there was a noticeable absence of children.

Pee-wee led the way to the hospitable porch of the Ashleys, where Mrs. Ashley and her married daughter had hurriedly emerged, lured by the thrilling music. The married daughter held her baby in uplifted arms saying, "See the pretty animals." Neighbors presently availed themselves of the spacious Ashley porch which became a sort of grandstand for the neighborhood.

People who had not thought enough about the parade to wait on Terrace Avenue were ready enough to step out or to throw open their windows, now that the motley procession was passing their very doors. In less than half a minute the quiet side street was seething with excitement. Women hurried, babies cried, lions roared, the steam calliope drowned the stirring music of the band, a gorgeous float bearing a fat woman and a skeleton lumbered around the corner.

Little Irene Flynn was somewhat timid about the proximity of wild beasts, but this feeling was nothing to her excitement at finding herself upon the porch of the sumptuous Ashley residence. But apparently her hero was not in the least abashed at finding himself in such a distinguished company. He and Irene sat side by side on a lower step, watching the parade with spellbound gaze.

"I'm the one that fixed it so you could all sit here and see it," Pee-wee announced for the benefit of the company. "I made it turn the corner."

"Really?" asked Mrs. Ashley.

"Absolutely, positively," said Pee-wee; "you can ask her," alluding to Irene.

"Yes, ma'am, he did," Irene ventured tremulously.

"I'm on the school traffic patrol," Pee-wee explained, "and I have charge of the traffic up on the corner. I stopped a truck so she could get across the street and it served the man right because he wasn't going to stop, but anyway he had to stop because I got authority, so then his whole load fell over and it served him right."

"It just did," said a lady.

"So then I told the—did you see that man with the big, high hat leading the band? I motioned to him to come down this way and turn through the street in back of the school and do you know how it reminds me of the Mississippi River?"

"I can't imagine."

"Because all of a sudden it changes its course, did you know that? And you wake up some fine morning and it's not near your house any more. Maybe it's a mile off."

“Isn’t that extraordinary!”

“That’s nothing,” said Pee-wee. “Islands change too; once North America wasn’t here, but anyway I’m glad it’s here now because, gee whiz, I have a lot of fun on it, but anyway if it hadn’t been for me you wouldn’t all be sitting here watching the parade go by, that’s one sure thing.”

“We ought to give you a vote of thanks,” some one observed.

“It’s what you kind of call a good turn that happens by accident,” Pee-wee said. “You know scouts have to do good turns, don’t you? They have to do one every day. Anyway, gee whiz, I’m glad that truck broke down. If a circus parade turns, that’s a good turn, isn’t it—for the people that live on the street where it turns?”

“Oh, absolutely, positively,” laughed an amused lady.

“There goes a leopard,” Pee-wee said. “I know a way you can catch a leopard with fly-paper, only you got to have a lot of it. Leopards have five toes, do you know that? I can make a call like a leopard, want to hear me? Scouts have to know how to imitate animals so as to fool ’em.”

“Can you imitate a cataclysm—a vocal cataclysm?” asked a young woman.

“Is it an animal?”

“No, it’s something like a volcanic eruption combined with an earthquake.”

“*Suuure*, I can imitate it.”

“Well, don’t, you’ll only drown the music.”

“Shall I keep still so you can hear the tigers roar?” he asked.

“No,” she said, “we don’t care if the tigers don’t.”

“Gee whiz, they should worry,” said Pee-wee.

They seemed not to worry as they paced their narrow cages. Following them came gorgeous chariots drawn by spirited horses, resplendent in gold harness and driven by men resembling Julius Caesar. Came a clown driving a donkey, then more floats, then two giants, then some midgets in a miniature automobile.

Little Irene watched, spellbound. Pee-wee divided his attention between the pageant and the company, which seemed to enjoy him quite as much as it did the spectacular procession. He seemed to have appropriated the parade as his own private exhibition.

“I suppose you’d have arrested the whole parade, elephants and all, if they hadn’t turned into this street,” a lady said.

“They got a right to do what he says,” said the admiring Irene.

“Do you see my badge?” Pee-wee asked, displaying it. “I got a whistle, too.”

The parade moved but one block along Allerton Street then turned into Carlton Place which paralleled Terrace Avenue, then to the next cross street,

and so into the thoroughfare of Terrace Avenue again, where restless and increasing throngs awaited its coming.

CHAPTER X

THE FIXER

Inside the school, also, an excited, expectant throng waited. Special permission had been given to the whole student body to view the parade and every one of the many windows facing on Terrace Avenue was filled with faces. Teachers (who are universally referred to as *old* by their pupils) were young again in those slow, expectant, listening moments. "Old" Cartright, "Old" Johnson, "Grouchy" Gerry, "Keep-in" Keeler were all there, with their clustering, elbowing charges about them, waiting to see the parade.

The large windows of the gymnasium were packed. So were the windows of the big assembly room. "Old" Granger, the music teacher, seemed almost human for once, as he actually elbowed his way to a front place where Doctor Sharpe smilingly awaited the coming of the great show.

The weather was too brisk for open windows, but the several hundred waiters heard the muffled strains of music, three blocks, two blocks, one block off, and in the renewed excitement and suspense many noses grew flat in an instant, pressed eagerly against the glass.

One block away. Half a block away. The great bass drum sounded like thunder. They could hear the complaining roar of a monarch lion. The frightful but rousing din of the calliope (eternal voice of the circus) smote their ears. Louder, louder, louder sounded the music. In a minute, half a minute, the motley heralds of the fantastic, gorgeous, roaring spectacle would show themselves.

Then the music seemed a trifle less stentorian and, presently becoming more and more subdued, was muffled again by distance. The lion was either losing his pep or retreating. His roar seemed less tremendous—at last he seemed to speak in a kind of aggrieved whisper.

Even the terrible calliope modified its shrieking and discordant tones. It seemed to be receding. Could the *Evening Bungle* have committed the greatest bungle of all its bungling career and misstated the line of march? Impossible, perish the thought! Where but down the fine, broad thoroughfare of Terrace Avenue would a circus parade make its ostentatious way? The pupils waited, patient, confident, all suspense. The procession had paused. . . .

They waited five, ten, fifteen minutes, till the calliope had ceased entirely to shock the air with its outlandish clamor and the lion had ceased to roar.

Twenty minutes.

Then, suddenly, a procession appeared indeed before this thronging

grandstand of the school. It consisted of two people, little Irene Flynn and Scout Pee-wee Harris. But it was not without music, for he was demonstrating the powers of his official whistle for her especial edification, his cheeks bulging with his official effort.

Straight along the thoroughfare they came, the eyes of the waiting multitude upon them. They ascended the steps of the large central entrance, then disappeared to view and presently reappeared in the main corridor and entered the adjacent office of the principal, which awful sanctum had been invaded by a score of pupils and teachers who still crowded at the windows.

"I had to stay as late as this on account of making the parade turn into Allerton Street," said the small official, "because I made a truck driver stop on account of his being—maybe—he was going to run over Irene Flynn, but, anyway, I made him stop and his load went over—gee whiz, awful funny—all over—and so then I made the parade turn into Allerton Street and we stayed to watch it and, *oh, boy*, it was peachy. There were wild animals and chariots with men in kind of white nightgowns in 'em and clowns and elephants and zebras and fat women and skinny men and dwarfs and a kind of a man only not exactly a man that they held by a chain and he was wild and uncivilized like—you know—like scouts, and he growled and looked like a monkey, and, gee whiz, they had two giraffes and a lady with a beard like Smith Brothers' cough drops, and I sat on Mrs. Ashley's porch and a boy that sits in a window because he's sick saw the parade, so that shows how I did a good turn, even Mrs. Ashley said so, and they had snakes in a glass wagon—gee whiz, you ought to have seen all the things they had! Wasn't it dandy, Irene?"

"You saw the procession?" said "Grouchy" Gerry.

"Oh, boy, did we! Gee whiz, you ought to have seen it. We saw it all from beginning to end, didn't we, Irene? And, anyway, she has to be excused on account of a parade being something special. Oh, boy, if you had seen it, you'd have said it was something special——"

He paused for breath and in the interval a boy student sank into affected unconsciousness across a table. Another staggered to the wall, leaning limp and helpless against it. A girl buried her head on another girl's shoulder, silently shaking. Principal Sharpe managed to reach his revolving chair, swung around in it away from the scene of anguish, leaned forward, placed his two hands before his face, and said nothing. Miss Rossiter, proud teacher of our hero's own class, gave one look at him, an inscrutable look, then glanced at another teacher, turned around and laid her face gently on the top of the Encyclopedia Britannica case in a kind of last abandonment of laughing despair.

"He—he—boasts—he——" she tried to speak but could not. "He c-claims that his sp-ec—specialty is—f-f-fixing—fix—fixing. Oh, *dear*, I have —

a—a—*headache!*”

“So didn’t I fix it all right?” demanded Pee-wee proudly. “Gee whiz, you can leave it to me to handle traffic out there, because I’m not scared of them. Oh, boy! You should have seen those elephants!”

That afternoon, in composition hour, the pupils did not (as has been planned) write upon the theme of “*What impressed me most in the procession.*” One waggish boy did, indeed, place that heading at the top of his composition sheet and wrote nothing whatever underneath it, which seemed a truthful enough composition when you come to think of it. But he was kept in after school for essaying the rôle of humorist.

CHAPTER XI

PEE-WEE'S PROMISE

Emerson Skybrow was also detained after school that afternoon, but not for being a humorist; far from it. Life was no jesting matter to Emerson. He remained for the wildly adventurous task of sharpening the lead pencils used in his class. He was a sort of chambermaid in the room which he adorned.

But he did not remain long enough to complete his task for there were important matters on for the evening. Emerson was going to a show, or, as his mother preferred him to say, an "exhibition." He tried to remember to say this and succeeded very well. In the case of a circus, he could not very well say *exhibition*. But he could not say show. So he compromised and said *circus exhibition*. But he ran plunk into a catastrophe on his way home which all but proved fatal to his plans.

Meanwhile Pee-wee, fresh from his latest triumph, proceeded at once to Main Street and to the "five and ten" where he began a purchasing debauch at the hardware counter. Having fifty cents, he bought ten different things, or rather lots, at five cents each. These appeared to represent plans both novel and far-reaching in the field of radio equipment.

He counted out three dozen screws for a nickel; he purchased two brass handles evidently intended for bureau drawers, at the same price. He purchased a roll of tire tape and a half-dozen brass screw eyes. His resources thus diminished to twenty-five cents, he pursued a more conservative policy in his inspection. He finally bought three boxes of copper staples for a nickel and allowed his eyes to dwell fondly on a compartment full of ornate picture hooks, thirty for five cents. He paused to consider how he might use these and having found a place for them in his new field of scientific interest, he counted out thirty; then the salesgirl recounted them and put them in a paper bag.

The remainder of his capital was spent at the counter where radio parts and accessories were sold. He bought six little brass rods. He did not know exactly why, but they looked tempting and had a mysterious suggestion of electrical apparatus about them. In this carnival of temptation, he was strong enough to reserve one lonely nickel for an ice cream cone on the way home. It was, perhaps, the most sensible of all his purchases for at least he knew how he was going to use it.

He started home penniless. No millionaire or United States president could ever, in his struggling days of early youth, have been a poorer boy than Pee-wee.

And now in his state of financial ruin, flamboyant circus posters confronted him on every hand. They called to him from fences and shop windows. He knew that the afternoon performance was already under way. A fitful hope still lingered in his mind that something would happen to enable him to see the evening performance. Warde Hollister (Bridgeboro's most confirmed radio-bug) was coming the following day to bring order out of chaos in the matter of Pee-wee's aerial and to hook up the apparatus. Until then he could do nothing.

He paused now and again, gazing wistfully at the seductive posters. One of these showed three elephants playing a game of one-o'-cat with a monkey for umpire. Another showed a pony walking a tight rope. Still another showed the clown's donkey appropriately cast in the role of traffic cop.

On the way home he resolved upon a policy which from previous experience seemed to hold out some prospect of success. He would prefer no requests but would enthusiastically relate to his mother the unexpected glories of the great show, leaving it to her own conscience what she would do in the matter. But his mother and sister had both gone to the city in the interests of Joan of Arc, leaving the dismal message that they might not be home for supper at the usual time. As for Doctor Harris, he was absent on a case and his return was problematical. So Pee-wee withdrew to his room where he drowned his sorrow by feasting his gaze upon the waiting apparatus.

After a little while he went forth intending to visit the scene of the circus and enjoy such external features of the "great exhibeeshun" as might be free. On his way through Grantly Place he came upon Emerson Skybrow standing before a vacant store. This had lately been a drug store but had proved ill-advised in that purely residential section. The circus man, however, had filled its dusty windows with flaring posters of "The world's most stupendous exhibition."

In the sidewalk before the windows of this store was an iron grating of several yards' area which opened upon a shaft leading into the cellar. As Pee-wee approached, Emerson was standing upon the grating looking intently down into the shaft below. Something evidently had happened and it seemed likely to have been incidental to his inspection of the posters in the window.

"What's the matter?" asked Pee-wee.

"It's plaguy exasperating," said Emerson.

"What is?"

"This infernal grating; I dropped my tickets down; you can see them down there."

Pee-wee looked down, and amid the litter of soiled and crumpled papers at the bottom of the shaft saw a small, fresh-looking, white envelope.

"I can't go to the exhibition without them, I know that," said Emerson,

annoyed. “And I can’t get them, that’s equally certain.”

“What d’you mean *you can’t get them?*” Pee-wee demanded. Then in a sudden inspiration, he asked, “How many tickets are there?”

“Just two,” said Emerson, preoccupied with his downward gaze.

“You—you going with your mother or your sister?”

“Goodness, no, they’re too busy getting Minerva ready for the Temple’s masquerade.”

“You—you—maybe—I bet you’re going to take a girl. Hey?” Pee-wee’s interest was beginning to liven up. “I—gee, I bet you’re not going alone.”

“It looks as if I were not going at all,” said Emerson.

“Anyway, if you asked me to go, I wouldn’t refuse,” said Pee-wee, casting a wistful eye upon the posters.

“I’m sure you’d be only too welcome,” said Emerson.

“*Gee whiz*, do you mean it?” Pee-wee gasped.

“It isn’t much of an invitation though,” said Emerson, “with the tickets so near and yet so far——”

“You call that far?” Pee-wee shouted, his hope mounting. “But anyway, I bet you’re only fooling; because—I’m not a pal of yours. Are you fooling? Do you mean it, *honest?*”

“Even if I had the tickets,” Emerson assured him, “I couldn’t go unless I found a boy to go with me; my mother doesn’t want me to go alone. So it would be a favor on your part.”

“Geeeeeeeeeee *whiz!*” said Pee-wee. “Will you promise to take me with you if I get the tickets?”

“Would you promise to go?” Emerson asked. “What are you talking about?” Pee-wee vociferated. “*Would I promise to go! Oh, boy! You just get a picture of me refusing!*”

“You’d have to ask your mother, but anyway I don’t think you can get the tickets.”

“You should worry about my mother,” said Pee-wee excitedly. “You leave her to me; handling mothers is my middle name—fathers too. And sisters and everything. Don’t you worry, I can go and I promise to go absolutely, positively, cross my heart. And I’ll get the tickets too.”

“I’ve already asked three boys and none of them could go,” said Emerson. “Two of them didn’t care to——”

“*What?*” gasped Pee-wee.

“The other two were not allowed to.”

“I want to and I’m allowed to both,” Pee-wee said with increasing elation. “And I promise absolutely and definitely and positively and double sure to go, so there! *Gee whiz*, I know how it is with those fellows, they just, you know, kind of——”

“I know I’m not popular,” said Emerson.

“Oh, *boy*, you’re popular with *me*,” said Pee-wee.

CHAPTER XII

CULTURE TRIUMPHANT

It was never clearly determined what was the nature of the part Emerson played in this matter. Pee-wee's scout comrades believed that he used the "fine Italian hand" and effected a masterstroke of quiet diplomacy. His parents and his teacher, however, protested that he was simply preoccupied and absent-minded and that his grand coup was attributable to these poetical and intellectual qualities.

He sat upon the step of the closed-up store watching Pee-wee's frantic and resourceful activities with a certain detachment. He did not join the little scout nor render him any assistance either of a practical or advisory character. He seemed altogether too well bred to sit upon a door-step. Nor did he seem particularly edified by Pee-wee's running comment as he made ready to give a demonstration of his scout resourcefulness.

"Gee whiz, you needn't be afraid I won't go," Pee-wee reassured the complacent watcher. "Because scouts they always keep their words; no matter what they say they'll do, they've got to do it. That's where you make a mistake not being a scout. Because if you were a scout, you'd know just how to get those tickets."

He had unwound a sufficient length of twine from a ball he had carried in his pocket since his encounter with his aerial, and now he made a mysterious, hurried tour of all the neighboring trees, feeling them and inspecting them critically.

"I bet you wonder what I'm doing," he said. Emerson did wonder, but he said nothing.

Visions of the "Great Exhibeeeshun" acted like a stimulant on Pee-wee, impelling him to frantic haste in all his movements.

"You'll get all over-heated," Emerson observed.

"What do I care!" said Pee-wee.

Having found a tree to his liking, he brought forth his formidable scout jack-knife and scraped some gum from a crevice in the bark and proceeded to smear this upon a small stone which he had fastened to the end of the twine.

"Now do you see what I'm going to do?" he asked proudly. "Maybe you didn't know that that's scout glue and it's better than the kind they have in school."

It seemed to suit his purpose very well, for he lowered the stone down into the shaft directly above the precious little envelope. But he had aimed amiss

and it settled on a faded scrap of brown paper which he hoisted up. On one side of it was written, "Leave two quarts to-day." Aged, faded missive of some neighboring housewife to an early milkman.

He tried again, lowering the sticky little stone slowly down, straddling the grating directly above the envelope. And this time the gummy weight settled nicely upon the prize.

"I'll go home and get washed up and have supper," cried Pee-wee excitedly; "and I'll be at your house at seven o'clock, hey?"

Detaching the little envelope from the clinging stone, he took the liberty, in his excitement, of opening it for a reassuring glimpse of the precious tickets. Scarcely had he glanced at them when a look of bewilderment appeared upon his face. He scowled, puzzled, and inspected them still more closely. New York academy of design, they read. In a kind of trance, he read what followed: TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 16TH. ADMIT ONE. EXHIBITION OF MEDIEVAL PAINTING AND TAPESTRIES.

He looked down into the depths of the shaft which had yielded up these admission cards. "I fished up the wrong envelope," he said.

"No, you didn't," said Emerson.

"What d'you mean," Pee-wee demanded. "Do you know what they're for?"

"Of course I do," said Emerson. "They're for the art exhibition in New York—medieval art."

"What d'you mean, *medieval art*?"

"You'll see when you go."

"I'll what?"

"Didn't you say you'd go? Didn't you say on your honor? Didn't you cross your heart?" Emerson asked. "You even said absolutely, positively."

Pee-wee stood gaping at him. "Didn't you say they were for the circus? I'll—I'll leave it to——" He looked about but there was no one to leave it to.

"I certainly did not," said Emerson calmly. "I said the *exhibition*."

For a moment the entrapped hero paused aghast. "Now I know why you couldn't get anybody to go with you," he thundered. "Now I know!"

"You're not going to back out, are you?" Emerson asked. "You promised to go. Are you going to keep your word?"

"What do I care about medium paintings or whatever you call them?" Pee-wee thundered. "Anyway, besides I have no use for academies or designs or mediums——"

"Medieval," said Emerson.

"Or that either," shouted Pee-wee. "Anyway, besides if I made a mistake—you can't deny you were looking at the posters—let's hear you deny it because you can't! I got no use for medium pictures or any other kind. No wonder you

couldn't find a feller. Geeee whiz!"

"Are you going to break your promise?" Emerson inquired with unruffled calm. "You said scouts always do what they promise."

"If they promise a thing that turns out to be different from the regular thing," Pee-wee fairly roared, "if they promise—do you mean to tell me medium pictures in an academy are the same as a circus—if they promise do they have to live up to something different just because they weren't thinking about it when the other feller said—kept back something—can you promise to do a thing that's kept back when you—geeeeeeee whiz!"

"I never said anything about the circus," said Emerson. "I saw it in Little Valley. I'd like to know whether you're going to be a—a quitter or not. That's all."

"You call me a quitter?" thundered Pee-wee.

"I don't know what to call you yet, not till I know if you're going to back down."

"Well, I'm not going to back down," said Pee-wee, sullenly.

"Thank you," said Emerson.

Pee-wee took his way homeward in a mood there is no word terrible enough to describe. His face bore a lowering expression which can only be likened to the awful minutes preceding a thunderstorm. The scowl with which he usually accompanied his famous sallies to his jollying comrades was intensified a hundredfold. He kicked sticks and stones sullenly as he went along. He was in for it and he knew it.

He was to meet the terrible Emerson at the Bridgeboro station for the seven-twenty train into the metropolis unless some just fate dealt a vengeful blow to Emerson in the meanwhile. Emerson had explained that he was to defray all expenses. The only thing which would save Pee-wee now seemed an earthquake or some such kindly interference.

Entering the house, he slammed the front door, stamped upstairs and entered his own room for a few moments' inspection of his radio before he put on his gray Sunday suit and white collar. He was engaged in this hateful task when the maid called up that Roy Blakeley wanted to see him. And her announcement was promptly followed by the exuberant voice of the leader of the Silver Foxes.

"Hey, kid, come on around to my house to supper. I'm going to blow you to the circus for a birthday present. I've got two dandy reserved seats right in front. Come on, Westy's going, and Warde and Artie and Connie. We're going to give you a regular birthday party!"

CHAPTER XIII

MISSIONARY WORK

Pee-wee was a good scout, and a good scout is a good loser. He accompanied Emerson to the city and to the exhibit of medieval art. Emerson, having passed his time entirely among his elders, was the kind of boy who enjoyed the things which appeal to grown people. Yet the pictures in the exhibit seemed too much even for him.

“Gee whiz, we might have gone to a movie show,” said Pee-wee, as he followed him dutifully about; “they have dandy ones here in the city.”

“It’s sort of dry, I admit,” said Emerson. “I don’t like it as well as the Metropolitan Museum.”

“Is that where they have skeletons and mummies and things?” Pee-wee asked. “I heard they have mummies of Egyptians there. Did you ever hear of Queen Tut? My sister was going to be Queen Tut at the masquerade only she changed her mind and decided to be—something else. Gee whiz, there’s no pep to this kind of a show. I don’t see anything in those bowls and things.”

“That’s medieval pottery,” said Emerson. “That one looks like a thing the cook baked beans in,” said Pee-wee, alluding to a bulging urn. “Oh, boy, I’m crazy about those, ain’t you? At Temple Camp we have those lots of times.”

“I guess we’ve seen about everything,” said Emerson.

“I bet you don’t like things like this as much as you think you do,” said Pee-wee, encouraged to find some flickering spark of boyhood in his companion. “I bet you’d like to be a scout if you only once got started, because I can prove it—do you know how? Because you said you liked some of those pictures because they’re so barbarous and that shows you like things that are barbarous and that’s how scouts are, kind of. If you like things that are barbarous, I should think you’d like to be barbarous yourself. If you want to join, I’ll show you how, because I’m one.”

“I meant I enjoyed the pictures because they were so outlandish,” said Emerson.

“Scouts are outlandish,” Pee-wee vociferated.

“I don’t think I’d care for camping,” said Emerson.

“Not even getting lost—in the wilderness?” Pee-wee demanded.

Emerson seemed to think that he would not care greatly for that either. He was a queer boy.

“Scouts always have to have their wits about them,” Pee-wee said. “They have to be prepared and be observant and all that. Did you ever go away and

forget to take matches? Scouts don't care if they do that, because they can get a light with two sticks; they don't care."

"If they have their wits about them, I shouldn't think they'd forget to take matches," said Emerson, sagely.

"Maybe sometimes they don't always have their wits," said Pee-wee, "but if you've got resources and—and—and forest lore and things like that it doesn't make any difference. See? Gee whiz, I admit you know all about the city and subways and trains and all things like that. But anyway I bet you'd like being a scout, I bet you would."

"I think I'd rather have my wits about me," said Emerson. "Sometime when I haven't my wits about me, perhaps I'll join the scouts."

"Will you promise?" said Pee-wee.

"Well, you kept your promise with me," Emerson conceded.

"That's because I'm a scout. See?"

"Well, if I ever lose my wits I'll promise to become a scout," said Emerson, amused in spite of himself.

Little did he know that the sequel of that promise was to prove more terrible than the sequel of the promise which Pee-wee had made.

"Absolutely, positively, cross your heart?" Pee-wee demanded.

It seemed altogether unlikely that the prim, level-headed, cultured little Emerson would ever lapse in the matter of poise and sanity. But Pee-wee had at least that one forlorn hope to cling to, so he clung to it.

CHAPTER XIV SEEING NEW YORK

The difference between Pee-wee and Emerson Skybrow was illustrated by the contents of their respective pockets.

Pee-wee carried with him as regular equipment a piece of chalk for marking scout signs, the broken cap of a fountain pen used to simulate the call of a sea-gull, a cocoon containing a silkworm (daily expected to emerge in wingful glory but which never did), a scout jack-knife, a compass, a nail for converting his watch into an emergency sun-dial, an agate handle of an umbrella, a golf ball, a receipt for making scout-scrapple (a weird edible) written on birch bark, and a romantic implement which no scout should be without, a hairpin. Some of these things were rather sticky from recent proximity to gum-drops; the compass seemed almost sugar-coated.

Emerson carried in the inside pocket of his jacket a respectable leather wallet with his name stamped in gilt upon it. In this he carried five new one-dollar bills, a ten-trip ticket on the Erie road, a tiny calendar, some engraved cards and a railroad time-table. This latter he now unfolded and found that the next train on the Bridgeboro branch left Jersey City at ten twenty-two. This left time enough for a little sightseeing, and they lingered in the city.

Emerson did things handsomely. He treated Pee-wee to soda in a gorgeous emporium and bought some candy as well. He seemed quite at home in this night life of the metropolis. Pee-wee found him companionable and generous. All the unfavorable things which he had thought about Emerson simmered down to a certain unfortunate habit the boy had of talking well and using words that grown people use. It seemed an insufficient reason for disliking him that he called a "cop" a policeman.

Pee-wee felt a little under his protection as they hiked down Broadway looking in the brilliantly lighted windows and finding free entertainment everywhere—in the electrical displays, the vociferous merchants who sold things ("while they last for a dime, ten cents") out of the leather valises which they hurriedly closed and departed at the approach of a policeman.

Particularly they enjoyed a man on stilts with the placard of a restaurant on his back proclaiming the delights of wheatcakes and coffee. This man sat on the roofs of taxicabs and was followed by an admiring throng. Emerson suggested that they sample the wheatcakes and coffee.

Emerging from the restaurant, they strolled down to Herald Square and gazed at the woodland camp settings in the illuminated windows of the

mammoth stores. They spoke seductively of spring, these displays. One showed a campfire with wax scouts sitting about; the cheerful blaze consisted of sparkling red paper crumpled upon real logs. Another wax scout was sitting in a canoe, staring with ghastly fixity upon the street. An open lunch basket stood on the painted ground.

“That’s just the way scouts are,” Pee-wee said. “So now wouldn’t you like to be one?”

“They look rather stiff,” said Emerson. He was not without a sense of humor. “You mean that scouts are dummies?”

“What d’you mean, *dummies*?” roared Pee-wee. “That shows just the way they live in the woods when they go camping. If that scout in the canoe wants to know what time it is, do you know how he can tell?”

“By looking at his watch,” said Emerson.

“*Naaaaah*, by the stars; he can tell by the consolations—stars all in crowds, sort of. Anyway, you’d make a dandy scout, do you know why? Because you like to eat. Do you know how to save yourself from drowning?”

“By not going in the water,” said Emerson.

“Nope,” said Pee-wee. “Scouts, the more they go in the more they don’t get drowned. They have to know how to track animals too, and stalk birds and everything. They have to sneak up on birds when the birds aren’t looking——”

“I wouldn’t call that honorable,” said Emerson.

“*You’re crazy!*” Pee-wee shouted. “That hasn’t got anything to do with a scout being honorable; that’s stalking. You can be—stealthy, can’t you? Suppose you were out in the woods where you couldn’t—where you couldn’t get any—any wheatcakes and coffee, maybe; then what would you do?”

“I’d go home.”

“Suppose you were lost. Suppose you were going to starve. Can you tell mushrooms from toadstools?”

“Would that help me to get home?” Emerson asked.

“It would help you to know what to eat,” said Pee-wee contemptuously. “Gee whiz, if you’ll say you’ll join, I’ll get you into my patrol. Will you?”

“When I lose my wits,” smiled Emerson.

CHAPTER XV IN FOR IT

They went through the Hudson Tunnel and hit the endless trail which runs through a concrete passageway to the old Erie station.

“You can’t get lost on that trail,” commented Emerson.

Indeed the neighborhood seemed to offer little prospect of adventure. Yet, as the sequel proved, it was not without possibilities. Emerson led the way to the ten twenty-two train and graciously invited Pee-wee to sit by the window. Not only that, but he purchased a slab of milk chocolate from a man who came through the train.

In a few moments they were rattling through the country and a brakeman whom they had not heard before was saying, “Westfield and Springvale Express. The first stop is Westfield.”

“*Gooooo niight!* It doesn’t stop at Bridgeboro,” Pee-wee said. “Now see what you—what we did. We’re on the wrong train.”



“GOOD NIGHT, WE’RE ON THE WRONG TRAIN!”

“Apparently,” said Emerson, consulting his time-table. “We should have taken the ten forty-two. I didn’t notice that this train doesn’t stop at Bridgeboro. It’s provoking, it’s my fault; I should have had my——”

“I know what you’re going to say! I know what you’re going to say!” Pee-wee shouted at the top of his voice. Every one in the car turned to stare. “You’re going to say you should have had your wits about you and I’m glad you didn’t, because now you’ve got to join the scouts, and that’s one good thing about the Erie Railroad anyway, *oh, gee whiz*, we’re going to go right past Bridgeboro, and I’m glad, and I’ll show you the way home through the

woods from Westfield because I got a compass, so now you got to be a scout, so will you? Because on account of your honor you're to be trusted, so will you? Oh, boy, I bet you'll like hiking home through the woods!"

"I don't see how I made such a mistake," said Emerson, frowningly inspecting his time-table, for all the world like an experienced traveling man.

"Don't you care, don't you care!" cried Pee-wee. "It's a dandy mistake; I've made lots of dandy ones but, *oh, boy*, that's even better than any of mine because now you've got to keep your word just like I did, but anyway I want you to join because now I like you, so you've got to join, so will you?"

"I suppose I'll have to," said Emerson ruefully.

"Sure you have to," said Pee-wee, his lips painted with soft chocolate. "You took me to the city so now I'm going to take you through the woods in the dark, but don't you be scared, because anyway if you try to go in a straight line in the woods you can't do it on account of your heart beating on your left side, so you go round in a circle like a merry-go-round, but don't you care because we have to go south from Westfield and I can tell the south by the way moss grows on the trees—you'll see. And I bet you'll say you're glad you got to be a scout; gee whiz, I hope the engineer doesn't stop at Bridgeboro by mistake or maybe on account of a freight or something. Anyway, as long as it's not supposed to stop, we wouldn't have any right to get out anyway, would we? Because that would be kind of sneaking."

"I guess I'm in for it," said Emerson.

"Sure you're in for it—don't you be scared. We could go home by the road from Westfield, but that's longer, so we'll take a short-cut through Van Akren's woods, hey?"

Pee-wee had a terrible fright when the train slowed down as it approached Bridgeboro. He was prepared to restrain the gentle Emerson by main force from violating the time-table. But the train gathered speed again and went gliding past the familiar station on which the baffled Emerson bestowed a lingering and wistful gaze. He was indeed, as he had said, in for it.

And being in for it, he resigned himself to the inevitable like a good sport. At Westfield he agreed to the hike back through the woods, and though his attitude was one of good-humored reluctance, there seemed no doubt that he meant to keep his word with Pee-wee.

"Gee whiz, I didn't make you lose your wits," the little missionary said. "You can't say I'm to blame, but anyway I'm glad of it."

"As long as it had to happen, I'm glad it happened with you along instead of some one else," said Emerson. "You deserve to win because you kept your word and went to the city with me when you didn't want to. You'll see I can make good too."

They hiked into the woods south of Westfield and were soon enclosed by

the dark, stately trees and the silent night. In a marshy area near the indistinct trail which wound away among the trees could be heard the steady, monotonous croaking of frogs, those nocturnal heralds of the spring. Somewhere in the distance an owl was hooting. Yet these sounds seemed only to emphasize the stillness. They were startled by every twig that crackled under their feet.

“When scouts don’t want to make any noise, they wear moccasins,” said Pee-wee; “I’ll show you when we go to camp. Oh, boy, you’ll see scouts from all over the country up there. Maybe you kind of won’t like it at first but after a while you will. I bet you’ll be crazy about stalking; I bet you’ll be dandy at it. Signaling too. Anyway, I admit I had fun to-night in the city, and, gee whiz, I like you too, that’s one sure thing. It seems kind of as if I know you now; you treated me dandy, I’ll say that. Good night, I knew all about circuses anyway, so what’s the difference, but anyway I didn’t know you; but now I do.”

But he did not quite know Emerson. For it was not just that Emerson did not understand tracking and stalking and signaling. He did not understand how to get acquainted and to make himself liked. He did not know how to speak the language of boys—that language which is the admission card to their vast fraternity.

That was the tragedy of Emerson Skybrow. He said *policeman* and *cinema* and *exhibition* and talked about going for *constitutionals*, and those things stood in his way. It was necessary for some boy to look behind these things and to discover the real boy who knew how to be generous and kind and friendly. And that boy had never come along and Emerson was lonely and isolated.

That was the tragedy of Emerson Skybrow.

CHAPTER XVI THE REAL EMERSON

There was a pathos in his answer to Pee-wee's explosive enthusiasm. "I'll join if you think they'd like to have me," he said.

"What d'you mean, *like to have you?*?" Pee-wee demanded. "I'm the boss of that patrol. I'm not the patrol leader, but just the same I've got a lot to say about it. Gee whiz, I'd like to hear anybody say they don't want you. *Just you let me hear them say it!*"

"I should think any one would like to have dinner in the woods," said Emerson, with a frankness that was pathetic.

"You don't say *dinner*, you say *grub*," said Pee-wee. "Or if you want to, you can say *eats*. Some scouts say *feed*. But I like eats best, don't you?"

"You seem to be an authority on the subject," said Emerson.

"That's why you don't get in with fellers, because you talk so grown-up, kind of," said Pee-wee, referring to this nice observation of his friend.

"I suppose it doesn't make much difference what you call it, as long as you eat plenty," laughed Emerson.

"*Oh, boy*, I'm the one to do that," said Pee-wee. "You just watch me when we get there. You're going to go, ain't you?" he asked, in a sudden burst of apprehension.

"If they'll let me," said Emerson. "I don't know how they'll feel about it."

"There's a place in my patrol, too," said Pee-wee, ignoring these misgivings. "My patrol's the Ravens; you have to learn to make a noise like a raven. Do you know ravens can talk? Just like parrots, they can. They talk all the time."

"Is that why you're a Raven?" Emerson asked.

"The Silver Foxes in my troop, they're all crazy," said Pee-wee. "Gee whiz, those fellers tried to tell me that your favorite book is Webster's dictionary. They're a bunch of jolliers in that patrol."

"Roy Blakeley—he's their patrol leader—he says that a civil engineer means an engineer that's polite; that shows how crazy he is, and they have him for leader. He says that goldfish are sun-fish that got sunburned. He tried to make me think they didn't choose you for the traffic patrol, because you're too rough. No wonder he can't get a new member for his patrol because, gee, there are no more fellers in Bridgeboro crazy enough. They ought to be the loons instead of the Silver Foxes, that's what I told him."

"Warde Hollister, he's in that patrol, he says you ought to start the Rabbit

Patrol but, oh, boy, I'm glad there's a place in my patrol and I bet you'll like us too. You know Artie Van Arlen? He's leader in my patrol. And you know Bert Carson? The feller whose sister has a birthmark on her neck? It's the shape of Cuba, but anyway we call him 'Doc' because he studied first aid—he's in my patrol."

Pee-wee paused, breathless, and for a few minutes as they followed the narrow trail no word was spoken.

"Do you like being in the woods?" Pee-wee asked.

"Yes, I do," said Emerson.

Missionary and propagandist though he was. Pee-wee was not strong on tact. His unguarded talk, intended only to encourage, had chilled the budding interest of his friend. So that was the way they talked! His favorite book, the dictionary. . . . Too rough for the traffic patrol. . . . He should start the Rabbit Patrol. . . .

"Gee whiz," said Pee-wee, as he tramped doggedly along, "they'd never call you Arabella any more when you join the scouts, that's one thing sure."

Emerson had been hailed by this name, but he had never thought that he was known by it among the boys of Bridgeboro. He had not known (for such a boy never knows) that his nice phraseology was material for mirth. He had not known that his mincing walk and adult manner were ironically characterized as "rough." The Bridgeboro boys had not often made fun of him to his face; particularly the scouts had not. But just the same, they had left him out of their lives and plans, and among themselves (as he now saw) his name had been a byword for effeminacy.

It is fatal for a boy to talk too well and use an approved phraseology. It was this misfortune which had won for Emerson his various posts of monitorship in school. And by a universal law no monitor can be popular. That was the pathos of it, that he was ostracized without really knowing the reason. But now he was beginning to see a little of the light in which the boys regarded him.

He had walked as far this night in the city as anybody could be expected to walk, and there was nothing against him on that score. He had also shown that he was human by partaking liberally of soda and candy, and there was nothing against him on that score. He had shown himself manly and self-reliant in the city, quite the leader. But he had "treated" Pee-wee instead of "blowing" him. He had talked of "seeing the sights" instead of "piking around." Pee-wee's enthusiasm ignored these defects, but would the boys see Emerson for the really generous, first-rate fellow that he was?

He did not ask himself this question, for he did not know that he was a generous, first-rate fellow. He only knew that he didn't fit in, and he wondered why. That was why he felt shaky about joining the scouts and going to camp with them. When he had spoken of the "great outdoors" to several of them,

they had laughed at the phrase. When he had once asked Connie Bennett where he was going in his “natty regalia,” Connie had answered, “To a pink tea, Arabella.” It was the “natty regalia” business which had done the mischief. But why? And how was Emerson to know?

There is only one way for a boy like Emerson to deal with a group of boys and that is with some sort of a knock-out blow.

CHAPTER XVII ALONE

They picked their way along the trail which was as “easy as pie” to Pee-wee, as he remarked to his companion. It must have been easy indeed, for it was well known that pie was like child’s play to him. They emerged from the woods at North Bridgeboro, a couple of miles above the larger town and separated from it by Van Akren’s woods, a familiar resort in the summer time.

A lonely lunch wagon stood near the little railroad station, a cheerful light showing through its incongruous stained-glass windows. Above it was a sign which read HAMBURGER MIKE’S EATS. Pee-wee knew Hamburger Mike and sang his praise.

“Did you ever eat hamburger steak in there?” he said innocently.

Emerson had not. “He seems to specialize on that article of diet,” he commented.

“You said it,” enthused Pee-wee.

“Shall we buy some?” Emerson asked.

But Pee-wee was filled to capacity. “No, I was only telling you,” he said. “Lots of times we hike through these woods on Saturday and get some eats there.”

“You needn’t hesitate if you’d like some,” said Emerson. “You went into the city with me as my guest, you know.”

“Yop, and I had a good time, too.”

“I’m glad you found it enjoyable,” said Emerson. “I enjoyed it, too. You’re certainly entertaining.”

“You ought to hear me when Roy Blakeley is trying to jolly me,” Pee-wee boasted. “I can handle the whole crowd of them.”

“I should like to hear you,” said Emerson.

“You will,” said Pee-wee. “Up in camp is where I handle that bunch. Remember you said you’d go.”

“You’d better ask your friends about it first,” said Emerson.

“*Gee whiz*, you promised, didn’t you? You’re not going to break your word?”

“I think no one could accuse me of that,” said Emerson.

“Well then,” said Pee-wee.

From North Bridgeboro to Bridgeboro the trail through the woods was more traveled and easily distinguishable. Here was a true wood interior, filled with stately trees and free of underbrush. Here and there a soggy pasteboard

box or rusted can or dirty, empty bottle bespoke the visits of the only species of animal that defiles nature. But for these discordant mementos the woods were beautiful, solemn. There was no moon, but the sky was crowded with stars and the night was not too dark.

“Gee, don’t you say it’s nice in here?” Pee-wee encouraged.

“Indeed it is,” said Emerson. “It’s certainly a contrast to the city—to Broadway.”

“Will your mother and father be mad?” Pee-wee asked.

“Oh, no, they’ll think we’re coming on the late train. They wouldn’t worry till after that.”

“Do you know where this path brings us out?” Pee-wee asked.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” his companion said.

“It brings us out on the state road. The state road runs right along the edge of these woods. Even if this path wasn’t here I could find the way all right. Listen, can you hear voices—way far off? Those are in cars on the state road.”

“I hear voices, but I don’t hear any cars,” said Emerson.

“Maybe there are some people walking on the road, hey?”

“It sounds to me like calling,” said Emerson.

“When we get to the state road, we follow it right down into Main Street,” said Pee-wee.

“We will have made quite an evening of it,” said Emerson.

“Oh, boy, you said it,” commented Pee-wee.

The direction in which they were going, as Pee-wee had said, was toward the state road which bordered the woods. The woods path came out into that road and once upon the road, their journey would be nearly over.

Pee-wee was not at first excited by the distant voices, for the course of the road seemed to explain them. But, as his companion had observed, there was no sound of autos. Moreover, since the voices were loud enough to be heard at such distance, they certainly were not in the ordinary tones of casual passers-by. Yet casual talking is often strangely audible through woodland in the night.

Pee-wee (not without a certain ostentation of wisdom) placed himself against the trunk of a tree and listened intently. “Do you know why I’m doing this?” he asked.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” Emerson confessed.

“Sometimes the tree catches sounds and they come down the trunk and you can hear better. It’s woods lore, that is.”

But like most of Pee-wee’s “woods lore” it did not work. Emerson waited patiently and rather curiously. Then they resumed their journey.

“Anyway, there are voices calling, that’s one sure thing,” said Pee-wee. “I think they’re in the woods, that’s what *I* think. Anyway, you’re not scared, are you?”

“Indeed, no,” said Emerson.

They had not gone many more yards when all doubt of the presence of others in the woods was dispelled by voices indistinguishable in the distance and others, clearly audible, which seemed to be approaching.

“We have it easiest,” they heard a voice say. An answering voice said something in which the word *compass* was distinguishable. Then suddenly two brown forms appeared trotting toward them along the path. They proved to be Roy Blakeley, leader of unruly Silver Foxes, and Connie Bennett, leader of the Elks.

“Well—I’ll—be,” ejaculated Roy, stopping suddenly. “That you, kid? What in blazes are you doing here?”

“Not out trailing lightning-bugs, are you?” Connie asked.

Neither of them paid any attention to Emerson, but he volunteered an answer to their question. “We took the wrong train from the city on account of my own silly mistake and we’ve come afoot from Westfield.”

“Afoot, hey?” said Connie. It cannot be said that he quoted Emerson’s word in a way of ridicule. Yet there was a note of ridicule in it, too. “Well, you’d better *come afoot* with us,” he said, ignoring Emerson and turning upon Pee-wee.

“Little Margie Garrison is missing and we’re combing the woods. All the scouts in the troop were rounded up; we got calls as soon as we got home from the circus——”

Roy, breathless and excited, interrupted him. “We cut into the woods in pairs about four hundred feet apart; we’re all cutting straight north. Ed Bronson and Westy are right through there; you can hear them. Hey, Westy!” Roy raised his voice. “What d’you know, here’s the kid on his way back from Westfield.”

“Good night! The animal cracker,” Emerson heard a distant voice say.

“Hurry up, give us a cooky or something, kid,” said Connie.

“Look in his inside pocket for emergency crullers,” some one in the distance shouted.

Emerson felt very much an outsider. Perhaps they would not have so completely ignored him but for their preoccupation and the urgency of their errand. But the effect of all this upon him was a pathetic consciousness of the fact that they regarded him as superfluous and inefficient in their hurried and serious business.

“Come ahead, kid, you can ’phone home from North Bridgeboro,” said Roy hurriedly. “The whole troop is out. Your patrol is mostly over toward the west; come on and keep your eyes peeled. Connie has to watch his compass so we won’t go crooked. What d’you say? Let’s go, Connie.”

Pee-wee could not resist. “Come on,” he said to Emerson.

To do him justice, he did not intend to desert his new friend. Probably he assumed that no boy living would hang back in such an enterprise. The worst that can be said of him is that he forgot to look behind him. Nor did Emerson hold back because he lacked interest and desire. But he saw that he was an outsider, superfluous, disregarded. In the intense preoccupation of this hustling, fraternal company, his detachment from them seemed hopeless. Perhaps he had not the initiative to push into this exciting enterprise where his presence would hardly be known. . . .

The next thing that he knew he was standing alone in the woods, listening to distant and receding voices. Only a cheery little cricket was there to keep him company. He seemed very far from joining the scouts. He bore no resentment toward Pee-wee. He looked at his gold watch to see what time it was. Then, from force of habit, he felt to see if his neat, leather wallet was in place. There were only two crisp bills in the wallet now; the rest had been spent in the entertainment of his exuberant little friend.

Poor Emerson was no pathfinder (the very thought seemed to suggest laughter) but the kindly path would guide him to the state road, and from there he could find his way home easily enough. As he made his lonely way along the path, he could still hear voices, spent by the distance, farther and farther off. He thought the different groups were calling to each other. He fancied those two aggressive, resourceful, hurrying, purposeful patrol leaders jollyng Pee-wee.

He picked his way along the path and was soon upon the state road. He looked funny walking along through the country in the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEDUCTION

Emerson knew that scouts were always called out whenever any one was lost. He wondered whether they had investigated the neighborhood of the circus. Though he had not been included in their organized search, there was no harm in his thinking about the affair and forming theories as he went along. No one could “guy” him or interfere with him in that purely academic pastime.

He had never before been brought so close to a possible tragedy. He felt the excitement, the thrill of it, though the door had been so heedlessly slammed in his face. Poor Emerson’s adventures were mostly in his mind where no one could see them—and make fun of them. It was not a bad sort of mind.

As he hurried along with his funny, prim walk, he decided that the “public authorities” had certainly not failed to consider the perils which accompany a visiting circus. They would certainly investigate that field of major importance, leaving the less important field to the scouts. There was, as he saw it, an affinity between scouts and woods, and the woods would naturally be the scene of their quest. He wondered if there were any particular reason for supposing that little Margie Garrison had gone into the woods. He assumed that the scouts knew what they were about. . . .

As he took his lonely way homeward, he did not put himself out of sorts by any feeling of resentment toward these scouts whose organization he had consented, and really desired, to join. He was quite without malice. Pee-wee would be disappointed and he was sorry for that. But even Pee-wee must see. . . .

So this gentlemanly young pedestrian indulged in a little mental investigation all his own. He did not know that scouts were supposed to be strong on this sort of thing, deducing and the like. For some incomprehensible reason Pee-wee had neglected to tell him that.

He eliminated the circus and the woods as being in competent, experienced hands, and let his thoughts wander to the school, which was the field where he shone. There, indeed, was his happy hunting ground, where he collected not stalking photos but lead pencils.

Idly, he did not know exactly why, he recalled all the events of the day in school. Thoughts came to him, were considered, forgotten. If little Margie Garrison had been disappointed at not seeing the parade (Pee-wee and Irene were evidently the only pupils in Bridgeboro who had seen it) why then might she not have wandered to the circus grounds after school? Well, the police, at

all events, had looked after that end of it. Well, then, where did little Margie go? And why?

As Emerson thought these thoughts and pondered on them a great hubbub of searching and calling and meeting and separating and planning and replanning was going on in the woods. Oh, if she were there they would find her, these scouts!

But why would she have gone there? She must have first walked more than a mile along the road. So Emerson Skybrow, alias Arabella, worked too, in his own way, all by himself.

The last he had seen of little Margie was in the assembly room that morning, and as he recalled the fact, a very vivid picture was presented to his mind. She had sat two or three rows in front of him across the aisle. She was always conspicuous by her red hair.

The occasion had been one of those hurried musterings ordered by gongs in the several class rooms, which usually heralded the appearance at school of some minor celebrity or state educational official. These horrible occurrences came like thunder-showers and were soon over. All classes were herded into the assembly room, the principal introduced "Some one whom you will all be glad of the opportunity to hear," the speaker spoke, the pupils became restless, the principal asked for a vote of thanks, the student body joined in an unanimous lie, filed back to their class rooms, and the agony was over till the next minor celebrity hit Bridgeboro. Emerson was probably the only one who liked these frantic mobilizations for no cause whatever.

On the morning of this memorable day the occasion had been the visit of a "distinguished English botanist," Miss Flowerberry, of Oxford or some place or other, who was visiting in Bridgeboro. She discoursed upon the English ivy which she said spread over the ancient ruins of England like a coverlet of green. She explained the romantic attachment between ancient ruins and ivy, and said that it was on such picturesque memorials of the past that the ivy clings. . . .

How vividly now poor Emerson recalled a most trifling thing which had happened. He had seen Margie Garrison turn and whisper to a girl who sat behind her. It seemed as if something the lady had said gave her an inspiration which, in the full flush of the idea, she had communicated to the girl behind her.

It was all so trifling and insignificant that he had given no more thought to it than he would have given to a fly buzzing about the assembly room. But now, one thought producing another, his mind reverted to it. Something had been said which caught the quick interest of a languid listener who had thought enough about it to whisper it to another.

Well, what of it? Nothing except that on the road between Bridgeboro and

Little Valley was the old Van Dorian ruin, subject of many a kodak snap-shot, spooky, romantic, ivy-covered.

Might it have been that which Margie Garrison whispered to the girl behind her? “Oh, I know where there’s lots of it—Van Dorian’s ruin.” She might have said something like that.

Was anybody looking after the Van Dorian, ruin?

CHAPTER XIX IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

Emerson had still an hour before the arrival of the last train at Bridgeboro. He knew that his people would not be concerned until after that. Stranger to boys though he was, he had a certain self-reliance. Perhaps this was the result of his lonely habit of life. He was also thoughtful. It was only the flaring, rough and ready qualities of scouthood that he lacked; and the boy talk.

In Bridgeboro he went into the only place which was open, the Union League Club, of which his father was a member. Here he telephoned to Doctor Harris and said that Walter was with the scouts, searching the woods. He did not say *combing* the woods. They thanked him and promised not to worry about the busy hero. Emerson mentioned that he was going toward Little Valley on this same business but did not say why.

He then went up Main Street into Ashburton Place and thence to the Little Valley road. He looked singularly unlike a scout in his natty, conventional suit and shallow-crowned, telescoped hat.

His walk seemed to match his way of talking, although one could not possibly say anything worse about it than that it was a gentlemanly walk. Yet boys walked behind him and crudely mimicked him. It seemed strange for him to be upon such an errand. It was unlike the adventurous quest of the scouts in this, that it had originated wholly in his mind. Oddly enough, it was evolved from a trifling incident observed in school.

Soon he was beyond the last house in Bridgeboro and outside its boundaries. The Van Dorians had been a penurious race and when they died they seemed to have taken the village with them.

But the Van Dorian mansion, destroyed many years before by fire, seemed reincarnated into a thing of picturesque beauty, where it sat well back from the road, its jagged ends of masonry and broken turrets softened by the poetical hand of time and covered with a winding robe of ivy. Small wonder if this old ruin were thought of by one who had been reminded of the romantic English ivy.

But no one would ever have thought of Emerson Skybrow climbing about those broken walls and exploring the littered interiors which lay open to the starlight. He entered through an irregular gap in the masonry which probably had once been a doorway of the old stone mansion. Here was a spacious unroofed interior level with the outer ground. A rank profusion of weeds poked up through the rotted remnants of flooring and all but covered the crumpled

masses of copper which had once been part of the roof.

The sound of his own feet moving about in this long deserted place affected him strangely. It seemed as if they were the feet of some one else, unseen but near him. When his foot encountered a crumpled piece of old copper concealed in the weeds, it emitted a kind of flat ringing sound as if the ghost of some cheery old dinner bell were faintly trying to call the departed household to supper.

Emerson was not in the least timid. It is customary to associate timidity, even cowardice, with such demeanor as his. It is true that he did not face the horde of mockers and force an issue with them. But that was because he did not fully realize that there was any issue or that he was regarded with such humorous disdain. If he was too “grown-up” (and unfortunately he was) he had at least the poise and self-possession of a grown person. Any one of the Bridgeboro boys would have found something excruciatingly funny in this little gentleman tripping about in that grim old ruin. But none of them would have been less sensitive to the ghostly surroundings than he.

He paused in his exploration of the chaotic place and glanced about. Some small creature of the night, a rat, perhaps, scurried away, breaking the solemn stillness with its flight.

“Is there any one here?” Emerson asked aloud. He waited a few seconds, then spoke again, his voice emphasized by the stillness and darkness. “Is there any one here?”

There was no answer but a flutter of the drooping ivy which hung on a broken chimney near by.

CHAPTER XX THE DEPTHS

And now Emerson became troubled with doubts. He saw his quest as something absurdly romantic—like an adventure in the “cinema.” What relation was there between a public speaker’s mention of ivy, and a small girl turning and whispering to her neighbor, and this spooky old ruin? “There isn’t any logical connection,” said Emerson in his prim, nice way.

He emerged and clambered up a heap of masonry which might once have been a flight of stone steps. It brought him to the top of a wall which was one of four forming a square enclosure like a great well. These walls were fairly even on top and wide enough to walk on.

The bottom of this enclosure, which might once have been a vault (possibly a wine vault) in the cellar was perhaps ten feet below the level of the ground; the top of its walls was perhaps five or six feet above the level of the ground. So that Emerson, where he stood, looked down into a dank enclosure about fifteen feet deep.

As he stooped forward slightly, peering down into the depths, he looked exactly as he had looked that very morning when Pee-wee had encountered him gazing down through the grating in front of the vacant store. He had said then that the loss of his tickets was “exasperating” and he might have used the same word now, as he looked into the baffling enclosure and saw no way to explore it.

At the bottom of this fearful place was water with stars reflected in it; it seemed to cover the whole area of the enclosure, save at one place near a corner where a disorderly heap of stone projected above the surface like a tiny volcanic island. It was probably the material which had once formed a flight of steps into this dungeon. At all events there was no other way of descending.

Two things, and only two, could Emerson see in the bottom of that dark pit. These were the broken end of a board projecting slantingwise out of the water, and another piece of board with a broken end floating on the surface. The end which was sticking out of the water was moving slightly. Or perhaps it was only the faint, uncertain flicker of light which made it seem to move.

Instantly the thought occurred to him that the length of this board below the surface must be considerable if it were embedded in mud, for otherwise the tendency would be for the bottom to release it and let it float. But perhaps it was caught among rocks instead of in mud. Anyway, it seemed as if the two fragments had formed a single timber. If the fragment which projected at a

tipsy angle out of the dark water was not very long below the surface, then it seemed likely that it *had not been there very long*. It could not long have remained in that freakish position.

All this occurred to Emerson, who had never supposed that he would make a scout. He walked around on the wall looking down to see if from any other viewpoint other objects might be visible below. He presently made a discovery which was conclusive. Then another not so conclusive.

Reaching the opposite side of the square, he noticed upon the flat masonry at his feet a slightly discolored area about ten inches wide. Its position on the wall was like that of a diagonal stripe. He stooped, not without some tremor, for stooping seemed a risky business, and poked a little dark spot upon this area. Something prompted him to strike a match and examine it. It proved to be a dead slug, one of those flat, loathsome little creatures that scurry out of their damp concealment when a plank is lifted from the ground. This one, however, had met his doom in a larger catastrophe.

Around the corner was another such area on the wall corresponding to the one first discovered. *A board had lain across the corner at this place*. The fact that the little slug was still upon the masonry would seem to indicate the very recent taking away of the board. And the position of one fragment of the board in the water appeared to confirm this supposition in Emerson's mind.

He felt pretty certain now what had happened. Some one had walked along that board to cut off a corner in the journey around. And the board had broken. Yet Emerson had seen nothing below but the two pieces of board and the water.

It was then that he made his second discovery.

CHAPTER XXI DARKNESS

It happened at that very minute that Pee-wee, trotting breathlessly along through the woods, trying to run and talk at the same time, was telling Roy and Connie Bennett how he had recovered those dreadful tickets by the application of his wonderful "scout resource."

"Gee whiz, believe me, he never could have got 'em, because he doesn't know any scout tricks," he panted. "But anyway I showed him how you can get gum out of trees, and I had a good time with him anyway and he treated me fine (interval of panting) and anyway, I'm sorry he didn't come along. I—I—I'm sorry because I l-l-like (more panting) him."

"He'd have dropped out anyway and got lost in the woods, kid," said Connie. "I wouldn't take him unless he brought his go-cart."

"I—jus—jus—just the s-s-same I like——" Pee-wee panted.

"Listen, there's Westy shouting," said Roy.

They paused to listen, then tramped on again, looking sharply to the right and left as they made their way in a bee-line through the dark woods.

The match Emerson had lighted reminded him of something; and the thought having occurred to him, he did not hesitate. He removed his wallet to his trousers pocket, slipped off his neat jacket and ignited the lining of it with another match. It stubbornly refused to burn, so he took the precious Erie timetable out of his wallet and ignited that.

With this torch he was enabled to encourage the jacket to burn more hopefully. He swung it to and fro to fan the doubtful blaze and soon it was a mass of flame. For a brief moment it showed the boy in bold relief, standing there on the narrow wall of masonry surrounded by the night. His white pique shirt with starched cuffs attached gave him an appearance of polite negligee which did not ill become him.

He tucked his neat four-in-hand scarf into his shirt front to prevent it from catching fire, and bent far forward to keep the spreading flame well away from him. Then he threw the blazing jacket into the enclosure. It dropped where he intended it to, on the end of the timber which slanted up out of the water.

The interior of the walled-in hole was instantly illuminated. Emerson saw that the water reached to the very edges; there was no telling how deep it might be nor what was beneath it. Odds and ends of debris floated in it; twigs, a soggy, half-recognizable cap, a bobbing baseball. Evidently these treasures had

not beguiled their owners to venture into that perilous place.

One thing more he saw in the fitful light. Close to the little, hobble island was a dab of red and near it something of another color, foreign to its immediate surroundings. He thought it was the sleeve of a garment. Something that might be a hand was visible at the end of it. But the position was unnatural for an arm; there was something appalling in the way it lay. Then the jacket, reduced to a charred mass with a few unburned shreds, tumbled off the board into the water and all was darkness.

Emerson listened but there was no sound save the sizzling of the last burning remnant as it was swallowed in the black water.

CHAPTER XXII

ARABELLA

Clouds were now bespreading the sky, obscuring the myriad stars, and bringing with them a freshening breeze. The boy who thought they would not want him in the scouts stood upon the wall, his shirt blowing and flapping against his slender form. He was just a dash of white in the enveloping blackness.

Some day a sculptor will carve a statue of a scout. But it will not be the figure standing there that night in the darkness, his hair blowing, his spotless white shirt agitated by the heightening wind. It was ironical that this fine, heroic picture with its touch of wildness and impending recklessness, was in the darkness, and isolated where it could not be seen. For that was the way it was with Emerson; no one saw him, no one really knew him. And so the stirring picture was wasted. . . .

Should he hurry to the nearest house for aid?

He gazed around but there was no light anywhere in that forsaken neighborhood. He looked below into the enclosure, then away again, and for a moment, several moments, seemed uncertain, fearful, bewildered. Then the monitor of the spelling books, knight of the lead pencils, Arabella, the teacher's pet, fixed his eyes upon the projecting end of board for whatever doubtful safety it might afford him, and leaped straight for it into the black, watery hole.

A sudden, painful contact, a splash, a frantic grasping for something, anything; a warm, wet feeling on his throbbing forehead, a tingling in his finger-tips, a sinking, sinking——

Then oblivion.

When he came to his senses, the stars were looking down at him, silent watchers known to scouts, the only comrades who saw what he had done. The clouds had cleared for Emerson Skybrow and he saw the light. These stars would guide him many times and oft; they seemed even now to be waiting for him.

He was lying half-submerged on rocks and mud. The plank which he had alighted on was floating. One of his eyes was glued shut and he had to use a trembling hand to open it. He stretched his arms and legs and found that he was not helpless. He felt of his forehead and it was shocking to the touch, as if something terrible had happened there. But this was only a cut, extensive

rather than deep, and incrustated with blood. But it had ceased to bleed. He felt strange and his head ached cruelly and when he got to his feet, he found that he was weaker than he had supposed.

For a moment, he reeled and caught himself just in time to keep from falling. He glanced about bewildered, pressing his wounded forehead and wondering where he was. "I think I must be dreaming, I—I don't—I seem to have lost my bearings completely," he said in his nice way.

But soon he was in full possession of his wits; he remembered leaping, and he realized why he did not have his jacket on. He wondered how long he had lain unconscious. Long enough for the clouds to have passed and for the friendly stars to resume their watch in the sky, at any rate.

"This is certainly a predicament," he said, looking about. From sheer force of habit he brought his left hand up to his bedraggled scarf and pinched it into proper adjustment in the opening of his soiled, wilted collar.

Suddenly it came to him in a flash why he was there. One misgiving was dispelled; the water was not deep. If it had been, he certainly would have been in a "predicament" for he did not know how to swim.

He stumbled through the shallow water, encountering rocks and sinking almost knee-deep in mud, and sat upon the little huddle of fallen masonry which was the only dry spot in that horrible prison. He lowered his throbbing forehead to his hands and sat thus for a few moments to regain possession of his fitful senses. Then he was startled into activity by sudden recollection of the urgency of his errand.

He seemed quite himself now, but weak and shaky. Tremblingly, in a panic of fearful apprehension, he looked for the dash of color which he had seen from above. There it was, a mud-stained sleeve, almost at his feet. He could not bear to touch the white hand that projected from it. Rather than do that, he felt of the other little spot of color near it, which also he had seen from above. It was a mass of disordered hair upon the water close to the debris. If the head which it covered lay face down then his reckless plunge and suffering had gone for naught.

He could not bring himself to move that spreading, undulating mass of hair. He found it easier to feel of the mud-smearred hand. If the one to whom that mud-stained hand belonged could have known that it was "Arabella" Skybrow clasping it, she would have been the most astonished little girl in the world.

Would she ever know? Or was she past all knowing? Was even she, the little red-headed subject of his heroism, not to see him as he really was?

He felt of the little hand where it lay upon the stones and it was cold. For a moment he hesitated, breathing in quick, spasmodic, panicky breaths. He was prepared for what he expected to see. But he must pause just a moment to calm

his nerves and muster the courage to look—to face it. Then he reached down and lifted the mass of hair which rested like a clump of seaweed on the shallow water. Meanwhile, the friendly stars smiled down upon him.

CHAPTER XXIII IN THE WOODS

They shone, too, upon the scouts who tramped through the woods that night. And the boys who had not compasses used the stars to guide them in their bee-line course northward. Most of these traveling units consisted of two scouts so that observation might be kept both to right and left as they trotted northward. Some of the parties, however, consisted of three, even four, scouts.

It was nice, skilfully geometric, how they made a sort of checker-board of the woods and covered the whole area. For almost a mile, which was the breadth of the wooded area, they moved in a score or more of straight lines, pausing here and there for incidental investigation, but for the most part keeping a straight course.

Neighboring units were always within call and the woods echoed with cheery, hopeful voices. Now and again a sudden shout far to east or west brought all searchers to a stop; there would be a moment of suspended elation, then the parties would trot on again. Every huddle of the ground, every object apparently foreign to the woods, every stump and rock was noticed, and investigated. There was probably not a yard of territory in those dark woods that was not seen that night by the prying eyes of scouts. The object of their quest made the work serious, yet there was much badinage back and forth between neighboring parties.

Roy and Connie, with their new recruit, Pee-wee, followed the woods path and their progress was easy. Now and then, as they went along, they could see a quick, brief light to east or west where other scouts were verifying their direction with compass and flashlight.

Pee-wee used both compass and flashlight in spite of the path; he was nothing if not thorough. The familiar path might change its mind and alter its accustomed course; Pee-wee was for safety first. He jogged along with his compass in one hand and Roy's flashlight in the other, eating an apple (gift from Connie) which he managed to hold also, and talking volubly at the same time.

In addition, his frowning gaze penetrated the woods now to one side, now to the other, and occasionally he confirmed the accuracy of his compass by a searching look heavenward where one of his particular friends, the Big Dipper, resided. So it may be said that every movable part of Pee-wee was in action—particularly his jaws.

“Gee, I have to take the blame because he went back, that's one sure

thing,” he said. “Gee whiz, I thought he’d follow me.”

“You should have known him better than that, kid,” laughed Connie. “Can you picture him on a trip like this?”

“Don’t make me laugh,” said Roy.

“Now maybe he won’t join,” said Pee-wee. “I had him all worked up to the point where he was going to join.”

“Don’t you believe it, kid,” laughed Connie again. “You stand a better chance of being struck by lightning than getting that Mary into your patrol. What do you want him for, anyway? They’d only guay the life out of him up at camp.”

“You don’t know him like I do,” Pee-wee protested. “He’s a nice feller. Gee whiz, I didn’t want to go with him but I promised to, so I did——”

“After half a dozen other fellows passed it up,” said Connie. “You were a little brick, kid, to let him wish himself on you like that.”

“Some good turn,” panted Roy, as they jogged along.

“He treated me,” said Pee-wee; “he treated me to a lot of things.”

“Yop, I’ve seen that wallet,” laughed Connie. “He keeps calling cards in it.”

“He keeps dollar bills in it,” said Pee-wee.

“You love him for his money,” said Roy.

“He loves him for his wheatcakes,” said Connie.

“You make me tired!” roared Pee-wee. “That shows how much you know about propa——”

“Oh, he’s proper all right,” said Connie.

“I mean propaganda,” Pee-wee roared. “That shows how much you know about being a propagandist and getting new fellers. Anyway, I like him and I don’t care what you say. He treated me fine in the city, and he’s all right.”

“For collecting lead pencils,” said Connie.

“I heard he does embroidery work,” said Roy.

“Is that any worse than birch-bark work?” Pee-wee thundered, not without a real touch of his boasted logic. “What’s the difference between making fancy things out of cloth or out of wood? Gee whiz! You make napkin-rings, don’t you?”

“You love him for his riches, kid,” laughed Roy.

“You make me sick,” Pee-wee panted, as he buried his teeth in his apple.

“I’ll tell you how it is, kid,” said Connie more seriously. “It isn’t a case of what *you* want. You’re all right, kiddo, as far as that goes. But he won’t join because it isn’t in him to join. If he joined, he’d drop out.”

“Look at Tom Slade!” Pee-wee shouted, speaking while he held the apple with his teeth in order to throw a light on his compass.

“Tom was a hoodlum if that’s what you mean,” said Roy. “He wasn’t a

sissy. You've got something to work on with a hoodlum. If Arabella wants to hit the great outdoors, as he calls it, let him join the Camp-fire Girls. Forget it, kid; it's all right to be friends with him but for goodness' sake pike around and get somebody else to join your patrol. You'll never get Arabella, take that from me. He just wouldn't fit in, and he wouldn't join anyway."

"It isn't so easy to get fellers," said Pee-wee, reminiscent of his dubious experience as a missionary. "Who could I get, tell me that—you're so smart."

"What's the matter with Toby Ralston?" Connie queried.

"There you are," agreed Roy, "and you'd get two scouts in one. You'd get Robin Hood, too."

"Oh, boy! Some scout!" said Connie.

CHAPTER XXIV

ROBIN HOOD

They emerged into the road at North Bridgeboro where other scouts were already straggling after their fruitless quest. None of the parties had anything to report except that they were tired. Pee-wee reported, also, that he was hungry. They gathered on the dark platform of the little North Bridgeboro station, considering what to do next.

Across the road from the station were the country store, the grain and feed yard, and several other stores and buildings, locked and in darkness. In all that rural solitude only one bright spot was to be seen, the dirty stained-glass windows of Hamburger Mike's "eats" wagon.

"Let's go over and get some pie and coffee," one of the disheartened searchers suggested.

"Let's follow the road back to town," another proposed.

Some who did not care to regale themselves thought it would be well to do that in the forlorn hope that some clue or information might come to them along the road. Since they had no clue, one way was as good as another.

Roy, Pee-wee, Connie and several others decided to get something to eat at Mike's before returning through the woods, where they would make a supplementary search. What else could they do? The whole thing seemed so hopeless. It was in Hamburger Mike's that Pee-wee's party encountered Toby Ralston.

Toby lived in North Bridgeboro. He was a quiet, easy-going, country boy, familiar in the thoroughfare of the larger town some two or three miles below; one of those boys who seemed never to go home, notwithstanding that he was not in the least adventurous or wayward. He was the kind of boy (and there are many such) who attaches himself to some place of doubtful interest and makes it his accustomed headquarters.

Now and then, a boy is found who likes to hang out in a garage, or perhaps at a fire house, and identify himself with the place as a cat does. Usually he renders much gratuitous service for no comprehensible reason. Such boys may be said to have the local habit.

Toby Ralston was one of those boys. Why he had never joined the scouts is an interesting question. The scene of his altogether innocent lounging was Hamburger Mike's lunch wagon. Hamburger Mike never closed up. Trains might come and trains might go, the stores might close, the villagers go to bed, the neighborhood of the station become a deserted wilderness; but the light

always burned in the dirty stained-glass windows of Hamburger Mike's lunch wagon. Surely, on the day of judgment, Hamburger Mike would be the last to turn out his lights.

It is not on record that Mike ever gave Toby Ralston a cent for helping to wash dishes and drawing coffee out of his nickel cylinders, or putting new menu cards in the greasy menu card frame. But Toby did these things every day and usually until midnight. And while he was thus engaged his side partner, Robin Hood, waited patiently for him.

Robin Hood was a magnificent police dog. His noble posture as he sat in the dingy place made the lunch wagon look squalid and mundane enough. Robin Hood disdained the place with the disdain of a true aristocrat. It was perfectly evident that he did not approve of his young master's attachment to this greasy, smoky, stuffy emporium. Hour in and hour out, he would lie waiting patiently, and when his lord went forth, he would slowly rise, stretch his legs and go too.

Robin Hood's gray wolfish hair and wild eyes and upright ears were familiar on the streets of Bridgeboro and the staring admiration which he aroused seemed a matter of no concern to him whatever. He was oblivious to every one but Toby. He received petting from others as if it bored him; and occasionally, when it was excessive, he showed resentment.

He paid not the slightest attention to these scouts as they entered and lined up on the row of revolving stools before the greasy counter.

"Here's your chance to join the scouts, Toby," said Connie Bennett. "There's a vacancy in the animal cracker's patrol."

"What's up?" Toby asked, as he slid a plate of pie along the counter so that it came to a stop directly before Connie. "Want coffee—you fellows?"

Hamburger Mike himself waited on the others, then went back to his corner and resumed the reading of a newspaper.

"Here's your chance," repeated Connie. "Do you know what brings us up here this late? You know Margie Garrison, don't you? Red-headed? She hasn't been seen since four o'clock this afternoon—lost. We've been combing the woods for her. Nothing doing. You're always saying you're going to join and you never do—*gee williger*, this coffee's hot. She was seen in Westover's field this afternoon and nobody saw her after that. Bring Robin Hood along and we'll trail her; what d'you say? Say you'll join the scouts and we'll keep the job in the family. If we find her, won't it be some tall sensation?"

"Robin Hood could never trail her," said Roy, drinking coffee.



“ROBIN HOOD COULD NEVER TRAIL HER!” SAID ROY.

“Oh, is that so?” Toby sneered.

“Yes, that’s so,” said Westy Martin.

“Now, you tell one,” said Toby, turning to Pee-wee.

It was half a minute before Pee-wee was able sufficiently to get the upper hand of the pie he was eating to speak coherently. But he was able to think meanwhile. And a great light suddenly burst upon him. What a glorious acquisition to his patrol Toby and this magnificent dog would be. He had heard about dogs tracking fugitives. He had seen them thus employed in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. He had seen them in the movies. But the idea of a dog attached

to his own patrol, leading the way to a poor, little lost girl in the dead of night—this was something beyond the range of his fondest dreams. Here would be adventure and glory. That was some inspiration of Connie's, he thought.

When he was able to speak it was Roy, who sat next to him, whom he addressed. His conscience may have troubled him a little, for he spoke in an undertone. Roy, despite his habit of victimizing Pee-wee with unholy banter, was after all his friend—his closest friend.

“Do you mean—do you really think he won't—that when it comes down to it he won't join?”

“Who, Arabella?”

“Do you mean it?”

“*Good night*, kid, have some sense on your birthday. Why didn't he come with us if he was willing to be one of us? What did he do? Turned around and walked home. There you are; what more do you want?”

Pee-wee was thoughtful. As he could not decide what he wanted to do or say, he fell back on doing something which he was absolutely positive he wanted to do. He bespoke two sugar crullers with which to finish his coffee.

And meanwhile, the talk went on.

CHAPTER XXV

A NEW MEMBER

“Come ahead, Toby; eventually, why not now?” asked Westy.

“*Eventually*,” mocked Dorry Benton. “Sounds like Arabella.”

“Don’t worry about him, he’s home in bed,” said Connie.

But Pee-wee, for one, did worry about him. He could not get him out of his thoughts. He recalled how ready Emerson had been to treat him, and how pleasant he had been in his own prim way. Yet now, among his own comrades, rough and ready and bantering, Pee-wee really did feel more at home. And he saw Emerson as a boy quite impossible in such company. Right and left, they were ridiculing his schemes and ideas about poor Emerson. And then there was Robin Hood. . . .

As he finished, he slipped down from the stool and went over and patted Robin Hood. The splendid animal paid not the slightest attention to him.

Hamburger Mike glanced over the top of his paper. “He wouldn’ make frens widcher,” he informed Pee-wee. “Dem perlece dogs got no use for nobody ’cepten’ dere owners.”

“You do something big and he’ll pay attention to you,” said Toby. “In the war, Bob would go to anybody that had the distinguished service cross, wouldn’t you, Bobby—hey, Bobby?”

Robin Hood glanced slowly around at his young master, then away again. He did not look as if he were likely to pay much attention to any one else.

Pee-wee could not own this dog, but he might have him in his patrol. And probably the scouts were right about Emerson. . . . He forgot his radio, he forgot Emerson, he forgot everything in the new scout plan which Connie’s inspiration had suggested.

“I’d like to put one over on the police,” he heard Dorry say.

“Boy Scouts Successful in Search with Police Dog,” he heard Westy say, suggesting a possible heading in the Bridgeboro *Daily Bungle*.

“If—if you really want to join,” said Pee-wee, his conscience still causing him to speak in a halting way, “gee whiz, I’ll only be too glad, and I guess Artie will too; won’t you, Artie?”

“You bet,” said Artie Van Arlen, titular head of the Ravens. Like many titular heads, he was subject to a boss. And it was the boss who was speaking.

“If I go with you to-night and let Bob help, it means I’m in on it?” said Toby conditionally.

“You said it,” encouraged Roy. “Same as Pee-wee; member in good

standing, only he doesn't stand very high."

"Will you? Say the word," Connie encouraged.

"And you can go to camp and everything," Pee-wee shouted, his conscience reconciled or drugged at last. "To-night—right now—we'll—I tell you what we'll do—we'll take Bob—we'll—listen—we'll take Bobbin Hood—I mean Robin Hood—and we'll go to Garrisons, hey, and start from there. We'll give him the scent, and, oh, boy, we'll rescue her, I bet, before morning and it'll be in the New York papers and everything—and I tell you what we'll do—we'll change the name of our patrol from the Ravens to the Police Dogs—hey? Won't we, Artie? So will you join? Will you come ahead?"

"I don't mind," said Toby.

"*Good night*, we found a scout, now we ought to find Margie Garrison," said Connie. "Some big night, hey?"

"*Oh, boy, you said it!*" vociferated Pee-wee.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FRESH START

It was wonderful what fresh inspiration the presence of Robin Hood gave to the rather disheartened searchers. In the seething mind of Pee-wee all else was forgotten at this adventurous turn of their enterprise. He was all excitement. The scouts would triumph and be the heroes of the town; their exploit would be heralded abroad.

To discover the lost child in the woods would have been an achievement. To track her with a police dog and carry her home to her distracted parents; to witness the consternation of the police; there would be adventure and glory! To Pee-wee it was as good as done.

He had begun to feel the fatigue of this eventful day; a dull weariness had set in as they concluded their search of the woods. But now, in the flush of the new adventure, he seemed invigorated. He forgot everything and could think only of what they were going to do. The hour was late but that made it all the better.

It was in high spirit of elation that he ran to Toby's house with him to get the dog leash; he would take no chances with freakish parental objections. If necessary, he would meet Mr. and Mrs. Ralston single-handed. But no obstacles were met there; Toby was happy in the possession of easy-going parents who did not require any strenuous representations of scout duty to release their son to a nocturnal enterprise.

All was hurry and excitement now; the air seemed charged with expectation. The seven scouts who, with Toby, constituted the party hurried into the woods, Robin Hood securely leashed and enforcing his autocratic will by pausing to sniff here and there, then dragging his young master willy-nilly after him. Only Hamburger Mike seemed undisturbed. His next call to service would be when the milk train stopped at four o'clock in the morning. No one should go wanting for refreshment while Hamburger Mike lived.

In half an hour, they were back on the state road and hurrying into Bridgeboro. The town was dark and deserted. A lone auto sped up Main Street as they crossed, and its swift passing seemed to reduce the sleeping town to insignificance, so much greater is a speeding auto to a sleeping town in the still, small hours of night.

They hurried through Terrace Avenue where the school (scene of Pee-wee's famous coup) seemed like a thing dead. Not a sound was there, nor a soul upon the street. They turned into Elm Place, then to Carver Street and to

the cottage of the Garrisons. Here, at least, were signs of life. The interior was illuminated, the front door wide open, and a little group upon the porch. It looked strange at that hour of the night, and in the surrounding solitude, to see the bright oblong area caused by the open door, and the hatrack and stairs within. It spoke pathetically of waiting and trouble and suspense.

Mrs. Garrison was there, and her elder daughter, and a couple of neighbors with shawls thrown about them. They seemed to have been just standing on the porch. Mr. Garrison was out somewhere with others, pursuing inquiries. The mother's anxiety, which had mounted all through the evening, was heartrending. Disappointment after disappointment she had met; 'phone call after 'phone call had dealt her blows as from a hammer. Still she waited with these comforting, patient, hopeful neighbors in the still night air. She was too distraught to sit inside and wait for the ringing of the door-bell.

"Let me do the talking, kid," said Westy out of his familiar knowledge of Pee-wee. It was always Westy to talk in a case like this.

"Oh, the scout boys!" said Mrs. Garrison.

"Mrs. Garrison," said Westy, "we—we didn't find her in the woods. Is there any news?"

"No, dear—you're good boys, all of you," she said, wringing her hands.

"We've got a police dog here," said Westy, "and we know about her being in Westover's field this afternoon. She cut across the field on her way to Stella Henry's house—I know the path. Let's have something that belonged—belongs to her, will you? A dress or something; stockings would be good."

There was no chance to talk; he pinned her down to the vital requirement; and seeing them all, restless, ready, efficient, she hurried into the house and brought out some articles of clothing, weeping as if they belonged to some one dear, and lost indeed.

"You call up our houses and tell them," said Westy hurriedly. "You know us all I guess—Blakeley, Van Arlen, Bennett, Benton, Harris, Carson and—that's all. See you later."

They were gone, Robin Hood dragging, pausing, dilly-dallying; his young master pulling, then running after him.

The field where little Margie had last been seen was a corner lot which afforded a short-cut to the door of the house next to it. It was known that she had called at that house for a girl friend and, not finding her at home, had cut through the lot again and entered the bordering street. No one had been found who had seen her after that.

It was in this field that Robin Hood took upon himself the responsibility of the search and became master of the situation.

CHAPTER XXVII

ACTION

And meanwhile the last of the passing clouds disappeared for Emerson Skybrow and the myriad stars shone pleasantly upon him, deep down in his black prison. He separated the strands of soaked hair which lay still upon the water and beheld a face which for the moment he did not recognize. The eyes were closed; the face, as near as he could tell in the starlight, mud-smeared and ashen pale. It looked ghastly, appalling, this face, with apparently no body connected with it. But Emerson presently realized how it was.

The body lay barely submerged, face up, and the head lying upon the debris close under the exposed pile was partly out of water. The disordered hair had covered the face instead of the back of the head. Whatever the victim's fate had been it seemed unlikely that it had been that of drowning.

It was several moments before Emerson realized that there was a way of determining whether life existed. And then (notwithstanding the universal ease with which boy scouts are represented as making these determinations) he found the matter not easy.

A more coy and elusive thing than the pulse is hardly imaginable, when the search is made by an amateur. He tried both wrists; then, appalled at not discovering cheery little pulsations, groped under water and tried to feel the victim's heart. With the knowledge of first aid that many scouts have, he would have known that the closed eyes were a good sign; there was no fixed stare up into the night.

At last, he was rejoiced to find the pulse; he lost it, then found it again. It seemed such a trifling thing, that half-palpable beating, to signify so much. The assurance it gave him aroused him to quick effort. He was not alone, in that frightful hole, with only death for his companion.

He looked about him, hardly knowing what to do. But whatever he did it would be necessary first to lift the victim out of the water. This he did as gently as he could, lifting the small form under the armpits, and pulling it up onto the debris. The eyes opened and closed again.

"Margie—you're—all right—I'm—I'll take care of you," he said fearfully. "Can't you speak?"

If she could only speak and understand, that would encourage him so much. For a moment, he paused bewildered, not knowing what to do. No injury was visible upon the little form. He did not know how to look for injuries that might be expected from such a fall; broken limbs, a fractured

skull. He was all at sea, helpless. He looked up out of that frightful place that enclosed him in its four walls. There was more pathos in his well-expressed despair than there could have been in the language of panic fear. "I don't see what I can do in this dilemma," he said. "I dare say I'd better call at the top of my voice for assistance."

But some unseen force kept him from doing that. No one would have heard him anyway. Yet a certain persisting self-reliance and a strange fear of his own voice rising out of that dark hole into the lonely night, was what deterred him from calling. He was not afraid to be there, but, oddly, he was afraid to call.

Then, a reassuring thought came to cheer him. The girl had fallen in the mud, save that her head was somewhat elevated on harder substance. And her head showed no sign of injury. It seemed unlikely that she was otherwise injured. Perhaps then, her unconsciousness was just the unconsciousness of utter exhaustion, which had followed the first shock.

Limping through the shallow water, he procured the longer of the two pieces of board and laid this at an angle against the wall, its lower end resting securely on the exposed debris at the bottom. Placed in this position, the upper end of the plank was within about four feet of the top of the wall.

Emerson had never done much climbing and it was fortunate that his essay at this manly sport was made in private. He looked queer and frog-like, scrambling up the plank. He made little progress until he discovered the important part played by the knees in such an undertaking. Then he was able to ascend slowly, laboriously. The scouts would have said he looked funny climbing; fortunately, he could not see himself as others would have seen him.

At the upper end of the plank his experimenting to get away from it would have been ludicrous if the occasion had not been serious. He was within four feet of the top of the wall, yet he could not disconnect himself from his slanting support and get a hold anywhere else.

At last, by a hazardous gymnastic effort, he managed to get an uncertain hold on a rock doubtfully embedded in the crumbling plaster on top of the wall. He then ventured to rest one foot on the ragged end of the plank and succeeded in lifting himself to a standing posture. He felt a certain sense of elation along with his tremulousness. There is a kind of fascination in the knowledge that safety, even life, hangs by a thread. Emerson stood upon his uncertain foothold, reaching above him and clutching the rock on the wall. What to do next, he could not imagine. He could not regain the safety of the plank. Neither could he pull himself up onto the wall.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOT A SCOUT

What he did, he did in a kind of impulse of reckless endeavor. He knew that if he went down, he would not this time fall in the mud, but on the pile of rocky debris. Claspings the rock above with both hands, he succeeded in getting one leg upon the wall, then the other. For just two or three seconds, his peril was frightful, until he got his whole weight upon the wall. Then he was lying safely on top of it.

At this spot there was a sheer descent upon the outside. He might have risked a jump, for the depth was not so great as within. But he was chafed and sore from his frantic effort and lame from his earlier fall. So he limped around to the point where the remains of the stone steps were and descended there. If it had not been for the unconscious child within, he would have experienced the exhilaration of Monte Cristo at being out in the world once more.

But what should he do now? The nearest house, he knew, was a mile off, and it would take him long to limp that distance. Moreover, he was now conscious of a certain personal quality which he had always exhibited in an insignificant way.

This was his self-reliance, destined to be the making of him. As long as Emerson could remember, he had been the butt of ridicule by boys. Sometimes, he had been the victim of rough usage. But he had never told of this at home nor committed the unpardonable sin of making an ally of his older brother; "big-brother stuff" he had eschewed. He had begun when very young going into the city alone, and attending select matinees, lectures and exhibitions. Very early, he had begun carrying his wallet with the means to finance these trips. Once, when a mere child, he had been lost, and he had gone and told a policeman.

These things, and things like them, had won him only ridicule at the hands of boys. And his queer, adult phraseology had aroused unholy mirth. It would hardly do to say that a boy should not be too refined, yet extreme refinement in a boy is apt to tell to his disadvantage. At all events, it had been so with Emerson.

But the spirit of self-reliance, if it exists, will manifest itself in large ways as well as in small ways, given only the occasion. And Emerson Skybrow, baffled, lame, distraught, would not go to the nearest house and put his business into some one else's hands. He had not stumbled upon little Margie Garrison, he had gone seeking her. Well, he would see this thing through or

know the reason why. That was his own phrase, “or know the reason why.” They had often laughed at him when he said he would do this or that *or know the reason why*. Scouts are so fond of laughing that sometimes they laugh too soon. . . .

He limped along the road to a small bridge some hundred feet distant. His exploit with the broken plank had given him an idea. With a plank of adequate length he might get the child out of that hole; then he would carry her to the nearest house; he would carry or get her there somehow.

The flooring lay loosely across the bridge; he had heard it rattle under a speeding auto while he was in the sunken enclosure. He found that the top layer of loose planks was supported by a still older flooring underneath. He could remove a plank without causing peril to travelers. These flooring planks extended out beyond the width of the bridge on either side in disorderly, irregular lengths, and he selected the longest. It was a heavy, thick timber and hard to manage. But it was easily long enough for his purpose.

He tugged and dragged at this unwieldy burden, pausing at intervals to rest, until he reached the enclosure. Here he slid it over the edge of the wall until it dropped by its own weight into the hole. Reaching from the bottom of one side to the top of the other, it was at an angle of less than forty-five degrees; easy enough to ascend, he thought.

His hopes now ran high. And besides, good news awaited him as he went cautiously down the plank, letting himself descend backward on hands and knees. He heard the child stirring. Then he heard her speak. Her voice sounded strangely clear and out of place in that black dungeon, calling for her mother. “Mother, my back aches and I got a pain,” she said weakly. It seemed like any other child awaking in the night. “It’s all water,” she said faintly.

Then Emerson spoke to her. “It isn’t your mother, it’s Emerson Skybrow; you fell in here and I found you. You needn’t be afraid because I’m going to get you out of here and take you home. I guess you came here after ivy, didn’t you?”

“You’re the boy they call Sissie Skybrow,” she said; “I know you.”

“Yes,” he said. “You needn’t be afraid.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid of *you*,” she said, half noticing him as she rocked her head in discomfort from side to side. “Nobody’s afraid of *you*.”

She was but a small child, and suffering; she did not mean to hurt him.

“I want to get you on this board,” he said; “and then maybe I can help you up. Do you think you can sit up? I guess you’re not hurt very much, are you?”

“There were people trying to chop me with axes,” she said, as he gently encouraged her to a sitting posture. “They came on a ship.”

“Well, you’re better now,” he comforted.

“I like you,” she said. “I don’t care if a lot of smarties don’t. They’re sillies

calling you a girl's name; boys don't have girls' names."

"No," he said; "I'm going to help you get on the board now."

But this was more difficult than he had supposed, for she closed her eyes again, seeming to hover in the borderland of consciousness. And whatever her actual condition, he saw that she could not cooperate in her own rescue. The angle of the plank was too steep to permit walking up, even assuming that she could help herself. She was a dead-weight and might remain so for hours.

What he did entailed somewhat rough handling and all the strength he had, besides considerable risk. But he did it and succeeded in it. He got the little body onto the shorter piece of broken plank and bound it there like an Indian papoose bound to a board. For this purpose, he used his own shirt and the light coat which the child wore. She was conscious in a weak, half-interested sort of way, and made no objection to this novel treatment. It was curious how her undirected, wandering thoughts reverted to Emerson in his familiar role of "sissie" and "teacher's pet."

"They said you play jacks," she said, and seemed not particularly interested in an answer.

He got his burden onto the slanting plank and pushed it up little by little. It was hard to push and care was required to keep it from going over sideways. But if it did not move easily, at least it did not backslide easily. He got it forward a few inches, then rested, letting the weight of it press against him while he straddled the plank and locked his legs beneath it to keep from sliding. Then he advanced it a few inches and moved up himself.

Before he had pushed his burden far, it occurred to him to slip a lead pencil under the makeshift car and this roller enabled him to advance it more easily. It seemed a risky business as slowly, inch by inch, he progressed higher and higher, guiding his burden carefully to avoid side movement. Reaching the top, he found it easier to attain the wall than before. Now he was able to lift the child and half drag, half carry her, down the slope of masonry which had once been a flight of steps.

To do this thing, he had strained every nerve and every muscle in his body. He was bare to the waist, and covered with splinters, cuts and bruises. His natty trousers were in shreds. And this was Emerson Skybrow—"Arabella."

As he bore his burden down the chaos of stone and ancient crumbling mortar, away from the scene of his harrowing adventure, he breathed in great gulps, pausing now and again to get his breath. His chest heaved, his wet hair fell streaking over his eyes, he reeled, he staggered, he paused exhausted, with the child clinging to his knees.

It was while pausing in this attitude some yards in from the road, with the child clinging to him as he tried to get his breath, that he heard voices in the distance. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

VOICES

In the field where little Margie Garrison had been last seen, the scouts gave Robin Hood the scent. He found much difficulty in following it across the broad thoroughfare, but once in the open fields beyond, he jogged along steadily, pulling his young master after him. It was significant that poor Emerson did not know this short-cut to the old ruin, by which he might have eliminated a mile or more in his journey thither.

They led the way across fields on the edge of town and the dog had no doubtful pauses, save once at a cross-road where for a few seconds he moved about beset with perplexity. Then he was off again through the sparse woods between the outer reaches of Bridgeboro and Little Valley.

To Pee-wee, this following a dog upon the scent was the very essence of scoutish adventure. His legs, which relatively were not so long as his tongue, were kept in a continuous state of intensive labor, keeping up with Toby, whom he had appropriated as his own. Meanwhile, his tongue (always equal to any occasion) labored unceasingly. The others of the party having tasted the novelty of tracking with a hurrying dog, followed at a distance.

“One thing sure anyway, you can bet,” said Pee-wee, with such breath as he could spare. “I’m glad I went back with them to North Bridgeboro, gee whiz, I’m glad of that, you can bet. And you can bet I’m glad there’s a vacant place in my patrol, because Wig Weigand went away to live in Vermont and his father has a big farm there with fruit orchards and everything and I’m going to visit him there next Christmas vacation, because in the summer I go to Temple Camp and you’ll go there too. So will you take Robin Hood?”

“Where I go he goes,” Toby said.

“Gee whiz, I don’t blame you,” said Pee-wee. “Anyway, I’m glad you’re in my patrol. I was going to get a feller named Skybrow; maybe you know him, they call him Arabella. But anyway I guess he wouldn’t have joined anyway, that’s what Roy and the fellers say. But anyway after this I’m going to be friends with him, but just the same I’m glad you’re in my patrol. I saw you a lot down in Bridgeboro; once I was in Bennett’s drinking soda, you get a dandy soda there, and I saw you go by with Robin Hood and a girl that was buying candy said what a mag—what a mag—what a mag—nif——”

He paused a moment; came up for air.

“Well, you’ve got the both of us wished on you now,” said Toby.

“And Robin Hood’ll have the Pathfinder’s badge too,” said Pee-wee,

“because I can fix it, because I know how to fix things; you leave it to me.”

He paused only when the dog paused, excitedly preoccupied with some baffling difficulty in the scent.

“All right, old Bob,” Toby encouraged.

The dog paused long enough in his intense preoccupation to lick the hand of his young master. But he seemed quite oblivious to the praises and friendly strokes of Pee-wee, and of the others who had come up.

“They never bother with any one but their owners, that kind, do they?” Connie asked. “That’s what I heard.”

“Didn’t you hear Toby say he bothered with heroes in the war?” Artie demanded.

“Sure, he did,” said Westy Martin.

“He used to invite them to his headquarters to supper and everything,” said Roy. “Didn’t he, Toby?”

“That’s all right,” said Toby. “He knows something big when he sees it.”

“Sure, that’s why he doesn’t see Pee-wee,” said Roy.

They were off again, following Robin Hood, who strained at his leash, causing Toby to stumble along.

“You’re crazy!” Pee-wee yelled. “I know what he means; he means heroes; he can see them with——”

“Opera-glasses,” said Roy. “Right the first time as usual.”

“Don’t you mind him,” Pee-wee panted, addressing Toby. “Didn’t I tell you they’re all crazy in that—anyway, listen. It means—I know what you mean because if you do something kind of very brave like, then he won’t be stuck-up, but he’ll kind of notice you; I bet that’s what you mean—hey?”

“Yop,” said Toby.

“And anyway, I bet he’ll notice me if he——”

“Has a magnifying glass,” said Roy.

“—if he’s in my patrol,” thundered Pee-wee; “because I bet he’ll be friends with the fellers in my, in our patrol, won’t he, Toby?”

“Yop, guess so,” said the taciturn Toby. “He knows who’s worth noticing all right.”

It was this last remark which Emerson Skybrow, scarred, bleeding, gulping with overwhelming fatigue, and standing half-naked in the darkness, heard in the unseen distance.

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

Then suddenly, Robin Hood, liberated, bound toward him, panting, triumphant. He had evidently broken loose in his excitement as he had neared his goal, for the leash dangled after him.

And thus it was that the scouts came upon Emerson Skybrow who stood with one arm around the little girl, while Robin Hood clambered upon him. It was the kindly irony of fate that Emerson was the first person to whom the dog had paid the slightest attention.

“Well—I’ll—be——” Connie Bennett ejaculated, then paused in speechless consternation. “What—do—you—know! It’s Arabella!”

“There’s Margie, too,” said Westy.

“What the dickens——” Dorry Benton began, but was unable to say more.

Arabella was stroking the dog nervously and withdrawing slightly as if to modify the vigor of the animal’s aggressiveness. He seemed perturbed by a doubt of whether the dog was friendly or not. And meanwhile, he tightened his arm about the little girl, his prize, while she clung to him with a new and panic fear.

“It seems to be a great surprise,” said Emerson in his nice way, a way which ill-accorded with his almost primeval look. “It’s very easily explained,” he continued, backing and endeavoring by gentle dissuasion to free himself from the dog’s insistence.

“He won’t hurt you,” said Toby.

“He’s rather rough,” said Emerson, using the word which, of all words, was sure to arouse mocking ridicule. But only a dead silence greeted his rather mincing phrase. And meanwhile, Robin Hood, the scout, clambered upon him until he was drawn away by main force.

“I want to go home,” wept the little girl. “I want to go home to my mother; I’m afraid of him, he’ll bite me. You said you’d take me home, I don’t want to play with all these boys.”

“I said I’d take you home and you can depend on me,” said Emerson. She seemed to think she could, and ceased crying and clung to him more tightly.

“How the dickens did *you* happen to get here?” Connie asked, with anything but a flattering note of incredulity in his voice. The slur of it was somewhat modified by Westy who asked, “Where in all creation did *you* come from, Skybrow?”

It would have been tribute enough to Emerson to be called by his first

name; to be called by his last name was hardly believable. Self-possession was always one of his strong points. He had never been able to show it with these boys, because they would have laughed him down with banter. But now he had them at a slight disadvantage; they were so astonished that they would listen. One of them (the fairest of the lot) had even surrendered to the extent of calling him Skybrow. Emerson took advantage of the occasion, and his appearance if not his manner of talk seemed to command attention.

“Since you ask me,” said he, “I came here to find Margie Garrison. I found her in the bottom of this cellar, or whatever it is. I suppose every one of you fellows, scouts, I guess you all are, were in the assembly this morning when that lady spoke about ivy and ruins. I should think it might have occurred to you that maybe Margie Garrison came out here to get some. Girls are always getting wild flowers and such things to take to their teachers. I guess you’ve all noticed that much,” he added, as a kind of side dig.

“So I came here and found her and jumped in and we had quite a time of it getting out; I used a long plank from the bridge. I ’phoned to your house, Harris, and told them you were out with the searching party. I wish we could get an auto to take her home. I don’t think there’s anything much the matter with her except she’s pretty well shaken-up. You had a lot of running for nothing; it seems a pity.”

“I don’t want to go with them, I want to go with *you*,” cried little Margie, clinging to him. “Because you’re not afraid.”

Exhausted, he sat down upon a rock, and Robin Hood, seeing his chance, approached him again and laid his head upon the torn trousers, looking up.

“Here, Rob,” said Roy.

“Let him alone,” said Pee-wee. It was the first word he had spoken.

“He knows, all right,” said Westy.

“You bet he knows,” Toby boasted. “Didn’t I tell you?”

Robin Hood seemed to know indeed, for heedless of the gaping boys, who were silent because they were all at sea and knew not what to say, he wriggled his head up till it lay against the bare, scratched shoulder of “Arabella” Skybrow. The boy did not stroke him, for one hand held that of the little girl he had rescued, while the other was pressed to his wounded, throbbing forehead. But the dog seemed to be content.

And so for a moment, they all stood about in a kind of awkwardness. And no one spoke, not even Pee-wee.

CHAPTER XXXI

BOB, SCOUTMAKER

It was Westy who spoke first. Just the same as it had been Westy to speak for the others at the stricken home of this child whom Emerson Skybrow had rescued. And what impelled Westy to break the silence was the sight of Pee-wee gone to pieces, all his boisterous enthusiasm ebbed away. A pitiable sight he was as he stood there, trying bravely not to show his feelings. Of all the botches he had ever made (and he had made many) this was the worst. Within twenty-four hours the local paper of Bridgeboro would have the name of Emerson Skybrow in glaring headlines. And he had lost him. A deed worthy of the scout gold cross had been done by this boy to whom a little girl and a noble dog paid the tribute of their trust and love.

As by a miracle, the boy who had “treated him fine” in the city was transformed into a rugged hero before his eyes. No wonder he saw that scarred and ragged figure as through a haze! No wonder the irrepressible Roy Blakeley kept his mouth shut. No wonder Westy, always kind and thoughtful, had to speak for the “boss” of the Raven Patrol. There is dignity in a boy’s last name and Westy paid Emerson this tribute in addressing him.

“Some searching party,” he said, quoting Emerson’s own phrase. “Some scouts, I’ll say! Skybrow, I’ll be hanged if I wouldn’t hide my little old face in shame, if it wasn’t that I like to look at you. Give us your hand, will you?”

“I’ll be very glad to,” said Emerson. “It’s pretty muddy, I’m afraid. Is this a new member of your troop, Harris? I’ve often seen you with the dog,” he added, addressing Toby. “They were lucky to find you.”

“What do you mean, new member?” Toby demanded. “Don’t pick on me, I’m out of it. Put me on the waiting list if you want to. There’s your scout, *right there*. Bob picked him out for you. You’ll find me up at Hamburger Mike’s any time you want me. If I’m not there, I’ll be talking to the girl over in the station.”

“That’s the talk,” said Westy. “Now we *know* you’re a scout and you’ll get tagged before long. Before we go any further, let’s get this thing settled. I hear a car coming, and I want to try to stop it and see if they’ll take us back to Bridgeboro. You’re wished onto the raving Ravens, you understand that, don’t you?” Westy asked Emerson.

“Why—eh, I promised in a way——”

“Yes, well, you’re going to keep your word, aren’t you?” Westy insisted. “If you’re willing to tie up with a bunch of simps like us. What do you say,

Skybrow? We can talk it all over afterward, but just say the word now—on account of the kid.”

“I kept—I kept my—promise to you,” said Pee-wee, speaking with difficulty. “Gee whiz, I should think you’d be willing to join us because anyway, we’re not such *terrible* simps and anyway, maybe you can sort of teach us, kind of.” The sound of an auto was heard in the distance.

“Come on, Em, say the word,” said Connie.

“You’re very kind,” said Emerson.

“Is it yes?” demanded Artie.

“Why if, I’m sure——”

“Say yop,” said Pee-wee.

“Yop,” said Emerson Skybrow.

“Now to stop the auto,” said Westy. “Seems to be coming along pretty fast; I bet he doesn’t pay any attention——”

“Leave it to me! Leave it to me!” Pee-wee thundered. “I know a way to stop it! Leave it to me. Gee whiz, didn’t I even stop a circus parade?”

“Oh, absolutely, positively,” laughed Roy.

“And don’t forget Queen Tut,” said Dorry Benton.

“Oh, posilutely not,” laughed Roy again.

“Don’t worry about the auto,” said Connie.

“Leave it to Pee-wee,” laughed several voices in chorus.

“Safe in the hands of the fixer,” shouted Roy joyously. “Goooooood niiiiight.”

CHAPTER XXXII THE NEW SCOUT

From the adventure just narrated you might suppose Emerson Skybrow rather than Pee-wee to be the hero of this faithful chronicle. Such, however, is not the case. Emerson was in truth a hero, but he was Pee-wee's property by right of discovery.

"Didn't I invent him?" Pee-wee demanded in a thunderous voice of challenge.

Poor Emerson was in for it now and the next night he went up to Pee-wee's house to take his first lesson in scouting and to listen to Pee-wee's radio.

Since the unhappy episode of the Queen Tut costume, Pee-wee and his sister had not been on cordial terms; indeed the relation was so strained that our hero contemplated the prospect of having a boy come to see him not without some trepidation. He selected the following night (which was Wednesday) because he knew that Elsie in a hastily devised Joan of Arc costume would be absent at the masquerade. Queen Tut had died a sudden death and in her place "The Maid of Orleans" had appeared as a sort of understudy.

Since Pee-wee's brief illness a reform movement had been instituted in his home looking to the avoidance of any more holidays from school. A feature of this brutal program was the closing of the pantry against late raids. "This continual eating, especially at night, has got to stop," Doctor Harris had said.

Pee-wee knew that neither of his parents would enforce this rule and that it would presently become a dead letter. But he feared that Elsie, capable of any atrocity now, would spy on him and shame her indulgent parents into making good their resolution. Pee-wee could "handle" his mother and father, but he could not in that critical time "handle" his infuriated sister. If she heard him go downstairs at the significant hour of ten or eleven she would balk his project, appealing to the powers higher up, out of pure spitefulness.

All this was easily to be avoided by inviting the new hero on the evening of the great masquerade, and thereby other adventures ensued confirming Pee-wee's right to the title of "fixer." Queen Tut was dead but the dreadful radio still lived.

"I'm sure I should be very glad to listen in," said Emerson politely, "and it's very good of you to ask me."

Emerson was the kind of boy who voluntarily wiped his feet before entering a house, but even this defect could not dim his glory now; he might be

a little gentleman, but he was still a hero.

"I guess every one in town has gone to the masquerade to-night," he observed, pausing in his encounter with the doormat. "Shall I hang my hat here?" he added, as he stepped in.

"Come ahead up into my room," Pee-wee said, leading the way, "and I'll show you some things in the handbook; I'll show you a woodchuck skin too. I know a lot of things about scouting. Do you know how to tell the time if you're out in the woods a hundred miles from anywhere?"

"By looking at my watch?" Emerson ventured.

"That shows how much you know about scouting," Pee-wee said. "Suppose the mainspring should break; then what would you do? You can tell time by a nail if you know how."

"Well, I'm in for it now," said Emerson, looking curiously about Pee-wee's room. "I want to learn all there is."

"The troop's just crazy about you," said Pee-wee. "But anyway, I'm the one that discovered you. All these stones and things, and these cocoons and everything, they all came from up around Temple Camp—I picked 'em up in the woods. Gee whiz, we won't bother with the radio now, hey? Because they're having a lecture about agriculture; that man he talks every Wednesday night; he gets through at about nine o'clock and after that to-night there's a sympathy orchestra——"

"You mean symphony?" Emerson asked.

"Sure, and after that a man's going to tell about how they catch salmon but anyway what do I care about that? If I have a can opener, that's all I care about. But anyway, if I didn't have one it wouldn't make any difference even if I was in the middle of the Rocky Mountains, because I can use a pointed stone to open a can but if I didn't have a can of salmon I wouldn't starve anyway; gee whiz, I wouldn't starve no matter what."

It is a pity that the dissertation which Pee-wee gave Emerson on the subject of scouting could not have been broadcasted. He found Emerson a good listener and a likely pupil. The new boy, turning the pages of the handbook thoughtfully, asked questions which showed an intelligent interest and which Pee-wee was sometimes at perplexity to answer. Here was a scout in the making indeed.

At about ten o'clock Pee-wee suggested refreshments, and, going downstairs, presently reappeared with a dishful of cookies and a couple of apples. And Emerson was forced to agree with Pee-wee's pronouncement that there was no likelihood at all of him starving.

CHAPTER XXXIII OVER THE RADIO

The latter part of the evening was given over to the radio, and the two sat listening in with the receivers on their ears.

O.U.J. was furnishing a varied program that evening. Pee-wee liked O.U.J. for the performers were a happy, bantering set, seeming to make the distant listener one of their own merry party. Moreover, O.U.J. was a night owl pursuing its wanton course of song and laughter after other stations had said good night and gone to bed. Evidently Plarry Blythe who sang songs and jollied the silver-tongued announcer had no home; at least he never went to it.

Emerson had never listened to a radio and he found it novel and entertaining. The ear pieces did double duty for they not only transmitted the voices of the night to Emerson but they effectually shut off Pee-wee's voice as well. He talked but Emerson did not hear him.

It must have been nearly midnight and time for all respectable broadcasting stations to be home and in bed. Certainly it was time for Pee-wee to be in bed. But O.U.J. kept it up, and as the hour grew later they sang the latest songs. Lateness was their middle name. At last the Jamboree Jazz Band struck up. This outlandish and earsplitting group, compared with which the noises of a boiler factory were like a gentle zephyr, usually heralded the conclusion of the program. Pee-wee liked the Jamboree Jazz Band. Emerson, educated to good music, listened with rueful amusement.

Suddenly, in the very midst of the *Jumping Jiminy One Step*, the Jamboree Jazz Band ceased to play. For a few moments a holy calm seemed to have fallen upon the still night. Then came a series of weird squeaks and plaintive wails as if the spirits of the air were uniting in an uncanny chorus. One of these spirits seemed to have gone completely out of its head, shrieking uncontrollably.

Schooled to such a contingency, Pee-wee's hand sought the little knob by which the unseen performers might be lured back to their duties.

But the weird voices only screamed the more discordantly. Then they ceased altogether. With both hands Pee-wee tried desperately to find the music but his frantic efforts were of no avail. The Jamboree Jazz Band was as silent as the grave. *The Jumping Jiminy One Step* had stepped away altogether.

"What's the matter?" Emerson asked.

"Wait a minute," Pee-wee said, frantically preoccupied with the mechanism.

But the *Jumping Jiminy One Step* had evidently jumped too far and he could not overtake it.

“They stopped right in the middle,” said Emerson.

Then suddenly Pee-wee caught the friendly, ingratiating voice of the announcer at O.U.J. Nothing could ruffle that gentlemanly tone. He would have announced the end of the world in a voice of soft composure.

“Listen!” said Pee-wee, “he’s saying something.”

He was certainly saying something. He had evidently begun saying it before Pee-wee had succeeded in arresting that soft voice. From the rather startling nature of his announcement (or such of it as our listeners-in heard) it seemed likely that the Jamboree Jazz Band had been summarily silenced in the interest of this important matter. The boys listened attentively, Pee-wee spellbound as the voice continued:

“. . . and the police department of New York will be glad of any information that might be helpful in running down this car.”

“Listen!” Pee-wee gasped in a tragic whisper. “He’s finished, we missed it,” said Emerson. But the announcer continued, hesitating now and then, as if putting into his own words a request made from some other source, “Every effort is being made to head off this car in Westchester County in this state but it is thought not unlikely that the thieves may have crossed one of the Jersey ferries with it, probably an uptown ferry, and be heading through northern New Jersey. If the car was stolen by gypsies, as is suspected——”

Here the announcer’s voice was drowned in a riot of irrelevant sounds characteristic of Pee-wee’s radio set, and when our hero succeeded in catching the voice again, the announcer was concluding his thrilling appeal to listeners—in New Jersey. “The car was a Hunkajunk six touring car thought to be occupied by gypsies, the license number is 642-987 N.Y. but the number may have been obscured to prevent identification. Any information concerning this car should be telephoned at once to the police authorities where the car was seen. This is station O.U.J., New York City. Please stand by for continuation of our regular program.”

CHAPTER XXXIV THE SHORT CUT

But Pee-wee did not “stand by” for continuation of the regular program. The Jamboree Jazz Band had no more charms for him.

He had heard and read of startling announcements being made over the radio, of interruptions in deference to appalling S.O.S. calls, of appeals for cooperation and assistance from the constituted authorities here and there. But never in his wildest dreams (and his dreams were the wildest) had he, Walter Harris, ever been asked, directly and indirectly to cooperate in the apprehension of a fugitive criminal. He felt now that in a way he had been appointed a member of the great metropolitan police force and that a terrible responsibility had been placed upon him.

“That’s very interesting,” said Emerson, unmoved by the dramatic character of the announcement.

“Interesting?” roared Pee-wee. “Do you call it interesting if—if—if a lot of gypsies steal a car and we have to be on the lookout for them? Do you call it *interesting*, just kind of, if we have to hurry out of here to circumspect thieves?”

“Do you mean circumvent?” Emerson asked.

“I mean *foil!*” Pee-wee shouted. “Come ahead, we have to catch them, hurry up, where did I leave my cap?”

“I don’t know,” said Emerson, arising dutifully but reluctantly. “You said scouts always know where they leave things.”

“In the woods I said,” roared Pee-wee. “If a scout hides something in the woods he can always find it. Caps are different,” he added, instituting a frantic search for his ever elusive cap.

“I should think the best place to keep it would be on your head,” Emerson commented, “then you’d always know where to find it. Mine’s downstairs on the hat rack.”

Pee-wee presently apprehended his cap on the top of the bookcase and then hurried downstairs intent on apprehending the fugitives from New York. Emerson followed with a calmness quite disproportionate to the dramatic character of their errand. He had just begun thoroughly to enjoy the broadcasting and was listening in with quiet interest when suddenly he found himself launched again upon the sea of adventure.

Having accustomed himself to the clamor and turmoil of the Jamboree Jazz Band and begun to enjoy the novelty of the distant, unseen entertainment, he

would have preferred to let well enough alone. But he was beginning to learn that one who followed Pee-wee must be prepared for anything or must be willing to do anything whether he is prepared or not.

“What are we going to do?” Emerson asked as they hurried along the dark street.

“We’re going to take a short-cut to the state road,” Pee-wee answered, “because that’ll surely be the road they’ll take.”

“Why will it?” the reasonable Emerson asked.

“Because it will be. We’re going to lie in ambush along the road just where it leaves town where we can see every car that comes along. Do you know where Lanky Betts keeps his frankfurter stand in the summer? We’re going to hang out there. That little shack is open,” Pee-wee panted as they ran, “and we can wait inside of it because the door is broken and we can get in and it’ll be all right because I know Lanky because I buy lots of frankfurters from him when the shack is open and root beer too—you get great big ice cream cones there.”

Emerson was not too hopeful of a triumphant sequel to their midnight excursion into the detective field; he felt that it was a long call between the rather inconclusive information of the broadcaster and the actual halting of the criminals in this neighborhood. But the mention of frankfurters touched a responsive chord in his nature, for the night was chill and raw and even the lowly frankfurter appealed to him.

“It’s a pity we can’t get something to eat there now,” he observed.

“We’re not supposed to be thinking of eats now,” panted our hero.

This was rather odd, coming from Pee-wee.

CHAPTER XXXV

“DANGER”

“I didn’t tell you all I’m going to do,” said Pee-wee darkly. “I didn’t tell you all the plans I have.”

This rather startling pronouncement prompted Emerson to say, “You’d better tell me the worst.”

“You’ll see,” said Pee-wee.

On arriving at Lanky Betts’ deserted shack, Emerson was somewhat caught by the spirit of their adventure. Pee-wee had at least brought him to a good waiting place. The rough, little refreshment stand had that forlorn look which all such roadside dispensaries have during the closed season. But the spirit of the frankfurter haunted it and it soon became evident to the patient Emerson that here Pee-wee was on familiar ground.

“Maybe you didn’t know I was here last Saturday,” said Pee-wee. “I was here with Lanky when he brought his stove and a lot of things and I helped him to bring them. Do you see that can? That’s got red paint in it so as he can paint his signs. Do you know why he uses red paint?”

“So he can paint his signs,” said Emerson.

“He paints ’em in red so everybody’ll know the frankfurters are hot; gee whiz, he knows how to make you hungry, that feller does.”

“He’s made me hungry already,” said Emerson.

“Are you hungry?”

“I think it makes you hungry being out in the chill air, don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” said Pee-wee; “gee whiz, I’m always hungry. But don’t you care, because afterwards we’ll get something to eat. Do you know what I’m going to do? Now you’ll see all the ideas I had. I’m going to paint the word Danger on a board, good and big, in red letters. See, I got my flashlight to work by; a scout has to remember things. So hurry up, you open the can while I get a board.”

There is reality in action. And such desperate action as Pee-wee’s was bound to be convincing.

Even the quiet Emerson could not fail to be captivated by the situation, and all of Pee-wee’s frantic preparations for his epoch-making coup had the true ring of adventure. It was not like sitting home talking about catching bandits. Here they were in a little, deserted, rough board shack on the outskirts of town, bordering the likeliest exit from the metropolitan area. And this within ten or fifteen minutes of the sensational appeal broadcasted from station O.U.J., New

York.

Surely, Emerson felt bound to acknowledge, it was not at all unlikely that the gypsies in the stolen car might pass here, and if he and Pee-wee could but stop them a great triumph would be theirs. A great triumph was Pee-wee's already, for his enthusiasm and concentrated efforts proved contagious. Picking up an old rusty knife, Emerson proceeded to dig a hole in the top of the can of red paint while Pee-wee hauled forth an old board which was part of the detachable architecture of the shack.

"Now while I paint Danger on the board," said Pee-wee excitedly, "you take that old chair and stand it in the middle of the road and then we'll stand the board against the back of the chair."

Within five minutes Lanky Betts' rickety old kitchen chair in which he was wont to sit tilted back against the shack waiting for trade was cast in the heroic role of easel for a board on which the arresting word Danger was painted in huge red letters. So liberally had the paint been used in Pee-wee's frantic haste that the letters had pendants of dripping red below them, imparting an artistic effect to Pee-wee's handiwork.

But the whole thing looked like business and the general effect of something impending was heightened by the appearance of Pee-wee himself lurking in the doorway of the shack clutching in one hand the rusty knife, dripping red, with which Emerson had opened the paint can, and in his other hand another weapon equally dangerous, which he had rescued from a grocery box under the counter. This was an ice-pick used in the good old summer-time to reduce the ice to fragments in the genial freezers containing chocolate, vanilla and raspberry cream. But now it was to be used for a purpose less kindly.

"Now I'll tell you the way we'll do," said Pee-wee. "We'll sit inside here all quiet like and every car that stops we'll see if it's a Hunkajunk six, and if it is and it's got gypsies in it, I'm going to sneak around in back of it and jab this ice-pick into one of the rear tires and then run. While I'm doing that—do you see that house up off the road? There's no light in it but you can see it."

"I see it," said Emerson.

"As soon as I sneak around in back of the car you run up to that house for all you're worth and ring the bell and bang on the door and everything and wake them up no matter what and tell them to 'phone down to Chief Shay that we stopped some bandits stealing a car. I'll come running up to the house by a roundabout way and I'll meet you there. See? They won't be able to drive the car, not very fast anyway, and before they could change a tire or drive half a mile the Bridgeboro police will be here."

This plan seemed sound and scientific. Nobody whose armament was limited to an ice-pick could have planned better. There was at least an even

chance that the auto thieves would come this way and unless they were very near-sighted or very reckless they would certainly pause before Pee-wee's flaunted warning. If Emerson had been skeptical at first he was now convinced that the chances were at least fair and that the plan of campaign was masterly.

In short there was not the slightest reason why the moon should have smiled down upon these brave preparations. But the moon did smile. Pee-wee did not smile, however. He scowled. He scowled the scowl of a hero as he laid aside the knife dripping with gore, and felt tenderly the point of the deadly ice-pick.

Perhaps it was a wonder the moon did not laugh out loud.

CHAPTER XXXVI PEE-WEE TRIUMPHANT

In a little while the boys were rewarded by the appearance of a pair of headlights coming around the bend in the road.

“You be ready to run up to the house and wake them,” whispered Pee-wee, clutching his ice-pick.

“Suppose they haven’t a ’phone,” said Emerson.

“They have,” said Pee-wee; “a scout has to notice things. Don’t you see the wire branching over that way?”

Emerson thoroughly liked Pee-wee but now he was beginning to have a wholesome respect for his friend’s prowess and resource. Why should the fugitives not come this way? And if they did, had not Pee-wee provided for all contingencies? Had he not even taken note of the ’phone wire stretched from the main lines along the highway to the distant house? And his disinclination to arouse the occupants of that house till necessary suggested both self-reliance and consideration for others. Yes, to be sure, thought Emerson, he was in the hands of a bully little scout.

“I think you’re very clever,” said Emerson.

“Even I’ll get you something to eat afterwards too,” said Pee-wee, “because you know Schmitt’s Bakery on Main Street. By the time we leave here the bakers will be starting to work in the cellar and I know them and I know how to get in the back way and they’ll give us some hot rolls. Do you like hot rolls? Do you like buns? *Shhh*, here comes the car.”

The car proved to be a roadster and the driver of it was not a gypsy. Pee-wee removed the sign with a few words of explanation and the car went ahead. Another car came, and still another, then a long interval with no cars.

“Gee whiz, I’m hungry too, I’ll say that,” said Pee-wee.

“Don’t say it,” said Emerson.

Pretty soon they were rewarded by the sight of another pair of headlights coming around the bend. As the car approached its dimmed lights suddenly flared up and set two bright columns straight against the warning sign.

Slowly, with its great nickel headlights glaring, the big machine moved forward toward the obstruction. It stopped, then advanced very slowly a few feet more. Then, with heart thumping, Pee-wee beheld something which made his blood run cold—a bright-colored shawl with spangles that shone brilliant in the moonlight and a dusky woman with a bandage around her forehead.

But this was not all. For sitting at the wheel was the most villainous

looking man that Pee-wee had ever seen, a man with a mustache of a pirate or a Spanish brigand. There was murder in his slouch hat and the scarf which was knotted about his throat (when taken in conjunction with this hat and his atrocious mustache) suggested a man who would not be satisfied with murder; who would be satisfied with nothing less than torture and massacre. He was Bluebeard and Captain Kidd and all the thieving, kidnaping gypsies of the world rolled into one horrible, appalling, brutal spectacle!

And then Pee-wee realized that he was face to face with the escaping gypsies and the Hunkajunk car. He was terrified, trembling. But he would not shirk his perilous duty now.

“Run to the house,” he whispered to Emerson; “try not to let them see you; crawl on the ground for a ways. Hurry up.”

Scarcely had he said the words when he lowered himself to the ground and, crawling through the tall grass which bordered the road, came around to the back of the car. The pulsating engine helped to drown the slight sound of his cautious movements but his heart beat against his chest like a hammer until he had emerged from his concealment and stood trembling but unseen except by the little red eye of the tail-light. Then, his hand shaking, but his resolve unweakened, he raised his arm and with all the furious vigor of an assassin plunged his deadly ice-pick to the very heart of the innocent cord tire which immediately began breathing its last in a continuous hissing sound while our hero started to run.

“Goodness me we’ve got a flat!” called the merry voice of Pee-wee’s sister, Elsie.

She was nestling in the rear seat between Carmen and Napoleon and on the front seat sat Charlie Chaplin close by the terrible gypsy brigand so as to make room for Martha Washington. Elsie was very sweet in her Joan of Arc costume, far too sweet to have had as an escort the gypsy king whose kindly task of taking the party to their several homes the champion fixer had so effectually baffled.

Ssssssssssss, went the tire.

“We’ve got a puncture,” said Napoleon.

“Sure as you live,” said Charlie Chaplin.

“That was a new tire, too,” said Harry Bensen, the gypsy king, as he got out to inspect the damage.

“Isn’t it exasperating!” said Carmen alias Ruth Collins.

“Now I suppose we’ll *simply never* get home,” chirped Martha Washington alias Marjorie Dennison. “And I want you all to stop at my house for a cup of coffee, it’s so chilly.”

Slowly, fearfully, the mighty hero retraced his steps. The hurrying Emerson, too, had heard the merry voice of Elsie Harris and then the others

and he paused midway between the road and the dark house, and then returned curiously.

“What on earth are you doing here?” Elsie asked of the abashed hero. “And Emmy Skybrow too! You both ought to be home in bed.”

“I—we—we got an—a call over the radio,” Pee-wee stammered. “It was broadcasted that a stolen car with gypsies in it was maybe coming this way so we laid keekie for it and I thought Harry Bensen was a gypsy like the announcer said so that shows anybody can be mistaken so I punched a hole in the tire with an ice-pick because then if it had been stolen—the car—we’d have caught them, wouldn’t we? So I jabbed a hole in it with an ice-pick but anyway I was mistaken. But anyway if you’re going to Marjorie Dennison’s for hot coffee we’ll go with you, and we’ll help you change the tire too, because, gee whiz, we’re good and hungry.”

We need not recount the comments of the several members of the masquerade party, particularly the rather pithy observations of Pee-wee’s sister Elsie who had previously suffered at his hands. It will be quite sufficient to say that Harry Bensen, the gypsy king, was a good sport and a staunch admirer of Pee-wee. They put on a spare tire and then took the unhappy heroes into the car and made good speed for the Dennison place in East Bridgeboro.

But in fact Pee-wee was not unhappy, only Emerson was unhappy. For Pee-wee was, as usual, triumphant. He sat on the front seat wedged in between Harry Bensen, the gypsy, and Martha Washington. Charlie Chaplin sat upon the top of the door to make room for him.

“Didn’t I tell you I’d fix it for you?” Pee-wee demanded of Emerson who squatted unobtrusively on the floor in back. “Didn’t I say I’d get you some eats? Now you’re going to have hot coffee and cake maybe and everything. Didn’t I say I’d fix it for you? Gee whiz, if a scout says he’ll do a thing he does it.”

“Even if he has to use an ice-pick,” said Harry Bensen, the gypsy king.

“I’d like to be a scout,” said Ruth Collins.

“Gee, it’s great being a scout,” said Pee-wee.

“It’s not so great being a scout’s sister,” said Joan of Arc.

“Joan of Arc carried a sword,” said Harry Bensen, nudging Pee-wee, “and a scout carries an ice-pick. I don’t believe you could use an ice-pick with such deadly skill.”

“The way I feel now I would like to use an axe with deadly skill if I had one,” said Elsie.

“What a bloodthirsty family,” laughed Harry Bensen.

“Are you hungry?” Pee-wee asked, looking around and peering down at the silent Emerson. “Now you’re going up to Dennison’s and I fixed it for you and you’re going to have eats just like you wanted, so gee whiz, you can’t say

I'm not a fixer."

"*Fixer* is right," laughed Harry Bensen.

END

[The end of *Pee-wee Harris: Fixer* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]