

PEE-WEE HARRIS
AND THE
SUNKEN TREASURE

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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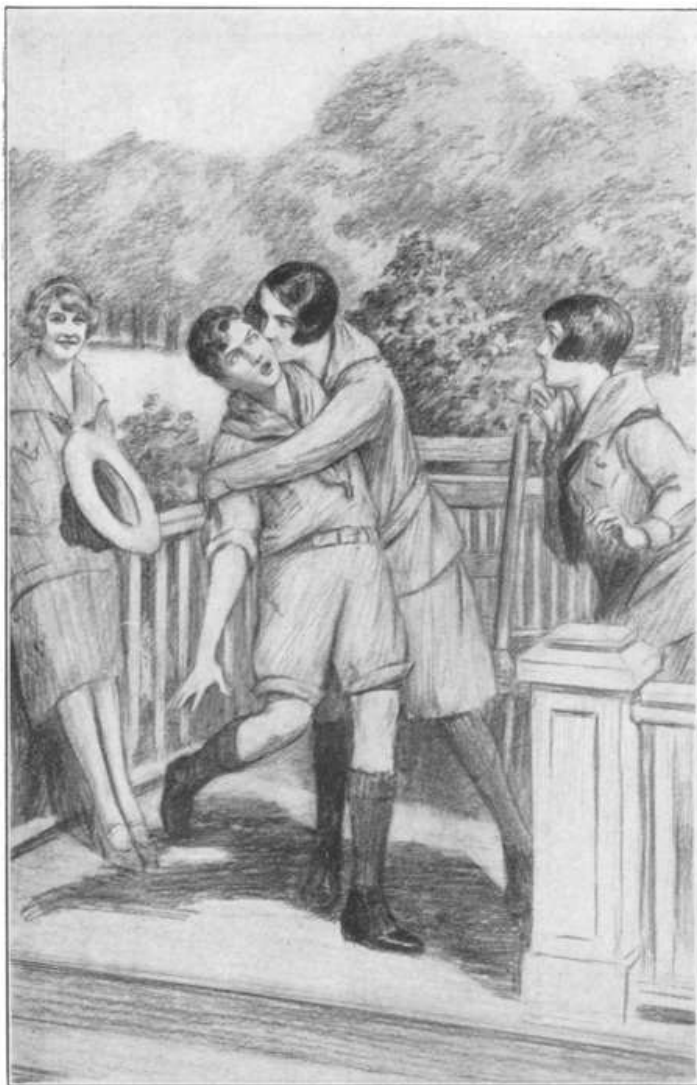
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PEE-WEE HARRIS AND THE SUNKEN TREASURE



MINERVA EMBRACED AND KISSED PEE-WEE WITH
UNCONCEALED ENTHUSIASM.

PEE-WEE HARRIS
AND THE
SUNKEN TREASURE

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
H. S. BARBOUR

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CONTENTS

- I [He Falls to Conquer](#)
- II [The Latest News](#)
- III [Unknown to Man](#)
- IV [Three Merry Maidens](#)
- V [The Promise](#)
- VI [The First Move](#)
- VII [A Lesson in Scouting](#)
- VIII [Plans](#)
- IX [Eleanor Gardiner](#)
- X [A Long Trail A-Winding](#)
- XI [Out of the Past](#)
- XII [The Clank of Oar-Locks](#)
- XIII [Girls Will Be Boys](#)
- XIV [Pop Corey](#)
- XV [The River Speaks](#)
- XVI [Through Pop Corey's Eyes](#)
- XVII [Chief of Staff](#)
- XVIII [Good Old Brent](#)
- XIX [Warde's Good Turn](#)
- XX [Friendly Enemies](#)
- XXI [Glimpses of the Past](#)
- XXII [Mortal Combat](#)
- XXIII [Davy Jones' Locker](#)
- XXIV [The Shadow of a Name](#)
- XXV [Suspense](#)
- XXVI [End of a Strenuous Day](#)
- XXVII [The Threshold of Hope](#)
- XXVIII [Words Speak Louder than Actions](#)
- XXIX [Actions Speak Louder than Words](#)
- XXX [Baffled](#)
- XXXI [The Last Giggle](#)

PEE-WEE HARRIS AND THE SUNKEN TREASURE

CHAPTER I

HE FALLS TO CONQUER

When the picturesque old court-house in Bridgeboro burned down, the catastrophe proved a blessing to two persons, Pee-wee Harris and the County Engineer. The County Engineer acquired a million dollars in the building of the large, new court-house, and Pee-wee got on the trail of an adventure which took him far afield and ended, of course, in unqualified triumph and glory.

Pee-wee was always lucky. If he fell out of a tenth story window, he would be certain to alight plunk in the middle of a huge apple pie or, perchance, a shock-absorbing sponge cake. His disasters were all triumphs.

Some boys run into good luck. Pee-wee invariably took a double-header into it. Sometimes he backed into it—accidentally on purpose. But head first or feet first, it made very little difference since his feet and his head were only two or three feet or so apart.

You could not say ever that Pee-wee was wrong side up, any more than you could say that a baseball is wrong side up. It is true that he often plunged headlong and blindfolded into his greatest achievements. But he took all the credit just the same. And if there was anything to eat he took that also. He was more than a scout; he was about six scouts, highly compressed.

We are not to follow in the trail of the County Engineer which led through a jungle of dubious politics. But we shall endeavor to keep up with Pee-wee even when his adventurous route takes us through mud. It was at least good clean mud, and not the mud of county politics. Our new court-house is an ornament to the town, but the biggest thing in town is Pee-wee.

This story begins on the morning after the fire. The old court-house burned down on Friday night, June third. It is important to remember that. All the Bridgeboro boys were there, Pee-wee included, and the scouts rendered much service to the authorities. It was a terrible disaster, such a fire as Bridgeboro had never before seen.

But when the show was over that was an end of it for Roy Blakeley and Pee-wee's other friendly enemies. They went on a hike bright and early Saturday morning. Pee-wee, having lost several golden hours of sleep at the fire, emerged rather late in the morning, and hit the trail into the dining-room where he partook of a huge, belated breakfast. Then finding himself alone in the world, he strolled down to the green to look over the ruins of the old court-house.

It was characteristic of Pee-wee to do this. The scene of such a dramatic

event held a certain fascination for him even after the excitement had passed. He loved to gaze at houses which had the reputation of being haunted. He followed ambulances and police patrols, and lingered at their destinations after these doleful conveyances were no longer to be seen. Houses which had been burglarized held a spell for him. Even the poor little house occupied by the Liventi brothers was viewed with awe by Pee-wee, because the parents of those swarthy youngsters “acted in real shows.” It was not until Pee-wee made acquaintance of the brothers that the little house lost its spell.

The scene of the fire was far from the spectacle of glory it had been the night before. Clad in roaring flames the old building had been an inspiring sight. But now there was nothing but damp ruin.

A few people stood at the rope which had been drawn across the green to keep the public out, gazing at the broken, charred and soaked wreckage.

How strange and out of place seemed all that paraphernalia of the old building, pulled or thrown out into the open in the battle with those demon flames! There was not much dignity to the judge’s bench as it lay there upside down in the soggy grass with one end of it smashed and a lot of saturated legal papers tumbling out of its broken drawer. Commitments, writs, indictments, warrants, affidavits—much the merry blaze and the shooting water had cared about these things!

Pee-wee being a scout (always in uniform) was a privileged character, and he was not reticent about letting the loiterers see this. With a pardonable touch of ostentation he stooped under the rope, to the gaping envy of several youthful members of the South Bridgeboro gang, and, unchallenged by the cop who was on guard in the enchanted precinct, strode into the very heart of the devastated area.

“I’m a scout and I got to do public services and things so that shows I got a right to go anywhere,” he tactfully advised the watchful officer.

Upon which declaration his foot became involved with a ladder which lay coily secreted amid the debris and he went kerplunk on his face.

“Anywheres yer loike,” said the subservient officer.

CHAPTER II

THE LATEST NEWS

“That shows how a scout has to be observant,” Pee-wee announced, his face bespattered with mud, his left hand nursing his right knee.

The cop did not see the force of this argument. The distant audience vented its envy in laughter. Then it became evident to the smiling officer that Pee-wee clutched a drenched newspaper in his other hand. He had pulled it out from under a rung of the ladder. It was wet and limp and muddy. But even in his prostrate and inglorious posture one of its headings had attracted his attention. In that brief, eventful moment while he lay studying astronomy (or at least seeing stars) he had read upon that soggy sheet the thrilling headline.

STRANGE MYSTERY ENSHROUDS THEFT

Pee-wee did not exactly like thefts, but he loved mysteries, particularly when they were *enshrouded*.

“Watcher got?” the cop asked smiling.

“I got a paper that somebody left here,” Pee-wee said, as he limped to a charred card filing cabinet and climbed upon it. It had been part of the furniture of the County Clerk’s office.

“There ain’t nobody been inside these ropes but firemen and you scout kids,” the policeman said.

“It’s dated yesterday,” Pee-wee said, “and the heading’s gone, but anyway it’s the *Bugle*, because anyway I can tell and there was a dandy robbery night before last; it was even better than this fire, what happened. Anyway, keep still because I want to read it.”

Thus admonished the officer had not the opportunity of observing that the robbery had not, so far as he knew, come under the notice of his department. He strolled over to the rope where a score or more of Bridgeboro’s younger set were contemplating the leader of the Chipmunks at a respectful and enforced distance. “Git away wid yez,” said the cop.

The crowd reluctantly departed, giving wistful glances at our hero as he sat enthroned like Nero amid the ruins of Rome, reading the newspaper. He had some difficulty in doing this since the wet sheet clung affectionately to his hands and arms and was continually subsiding languidly from its upright posture.

As this is the first striking picture we have of our hero in this singular chain of happenings, it may be worth while to pause and contemplate him enthroned

upon the debris of Bridgeboro's sensational fire. Scorning to hide his light under a bushel, he invariably wore his full scout regalia, and since a scout is supposed always to be prepared, carried his belt axe, not to be taken unawares by Indians or foreign foes.

I would not say that Pee-wee's head was round, but it was certainly as round as a baseball and had just as much inside it. He had a permanent wave and a permanent appetite, his hair being thick and curly, his appetite continuous and eternal. It could hardly be said that he ate between meals; rather the meals ran into each other, forming a sort of endless chain.

His scout stockings had a bizarre habit of descending his scout legs, especially when he ran. But they did not have far to go and were easily reached and pulled up again. There was a detour from his left trousers pocket which led down into his stocking and gumdrops were sometimes known to explore this byway. His favorite dessert was three helpings, his voice was devised by Providence upon the suggestion of a boiler factory, and he was imperial head of the Chipmunk Patrol.

As he sat perched upon the broken file cabinet, pausing before plunging into his enshrouded mystery, our hero contemplated a sorry picture of wreck and ruin. A smoky odor lingered in the soaked wreckage. And all about him was a disorder of fallen stones, crumbling plaster, shattered glass and the furniture and fixtures of the old building. It was not so very old, but it was a good deal older than the head Chipmunk.

Pee-wee had always stood in awe of the court-house as a place where desperate characters were tried and whence they were sent to prison or to death. He had always thought of a judge as a being of superhuman power. He knew a boy whose father was a court attendant and that boy was a celebrity in Pee-wee's eyes. He had sometimes chalked uncomplimentary comments on the sidewalk in front of the school, but he had never profaned the virgin concrete in front of the court-house. That might mean the electric chair.

He now surveyed the charred memorials of all this authoritative grandeur with a kind of spellbound gaze. How low was brought the majesty of the law! A few yards from where he sat enthroned some papers were kept from blowing about by a square stone which stood upon them like a huge paper-weight. These Pee-wee thought might be death warrants, or something of the sort, and he longed to inspect them.

But the enshrouded mystery of two nights previous held first claim and he pursued the delectable account with increasing wonder and excitement.

"Sometime between midnight and dawn yesterday," the article ran, "a bold robbery occurred at the Gardiner mansion on the river road about two miles below Bridgeboro. From all evidences the daring entry was skillfully planned. An iron strong box containing about seven thousand dollars in currency and

certain valuable papers was taken from a secret cupboard in the library of old Squire Gardiner. This cupboard was concealed by the paneling of the room and it is therefore supposed that the miscreants were familiar with the interior of the house and knew about the secret closet.

“Certain clues made the authorities hopeful of arresting the burglar or burglars, but these led nowhere and there seems no explanation to the affair which is likely to go down as one of the greatest mysteries of criminal history.”

Pee-wee paused in his reading to adjust the damp paper and to ponder on those last words—*one of the greatest mysteries of criminal history*. He recalled that on the night before, his father had been reading the paper and had said, “That’s a funny thing.” Then he had seemed on the point of reading something aloud when suddenly the first alarm was heard which heralded certainly one of the worst fires in local history. And the mystery at the Gardiner mansion had been absorbed by the greater and more immediate catastrophe.

But Pee-wee was not one to let the *greatest mystery of criminal history* die so ignoble a death and he read on with gloating eyes and bated breath: “In the morning preceding the robbery, old Squire Gardiner went to the city to be gone for two days leaving at home his young granddaughter Eleanor who made her home with him. She is fifteen years of age and an orphan. The only occupants of the house were the housekeeper, Mrs. Kenlake, and an aged, colored manservant, much trusted, who had been in the household for many years.

“A kitchen window was broken open and footprints across the grounds and down to the river showed that the iron box had been carried to the shore. A square impress in the soft earth near the brink of the stream showed where the box had been set down. It seemed conclusive that it was removed to a boat, but no trace of any boat could be discovered at the shore.

“Thus brought to a standstill, the authorities made inquiries of the drawbridge tender where the turnpike crosses the river a mile or so below the Gardiner mansion. This man, Haley Austin by name, said that after dark, about ten o’clock he thought, a good-sized launch had attempted to pass under the bridge on its way upstream. Its cabin bumped into the bridge and it could not pass, the tide being nearly at flood.

“Notwithstanding that there was a light in Austin’s shanty, the occupants of the boat did not summon him to open the bridge, but anchored their craft evidently with the intention of waiting till the tide had ebbed sufficiently for them to pass under. Austin called to them, asking if they wished to proceed upstream. The occupants of the boat seemed disconcerted at being noticed, but called that they were going up the river to troll for eels and that he might swing the bridge open if it wouldn’t be too much trouble.

“Austin thereupon opened the bridge and the boat passed up the river. He

said that it carried no lights, but that he could readily identify it by its rough wainscot cabin, which was a makeshift affair.

“Austin declared positively that this boat did not pass down the river again; he said he was willing to swear to that. He was equally certain that it passed upstream between nine thirty and ten o’clock when the tide was not more than an hour past flood.

“Upon this definite and encouraging information, the authorities made a complete investigation of every point up the river where a boat might be moored. The stream is not navigable except for canoes for more than three miles above Bridgeboro. Every cove was visited. No launch is to be found upon the river north of the drawbridge save the few readily identified as belonging to the boating fraternity. These are well known and are anchored at the boat clubs and at two or three private landings upon property abutting on the river. Yet Austin is positive that the launch he mentioned did not pass downstream again.

“Squire Gardiner is much shaken by the affair and it is feared that his great age will prevent him from recovering from the blow of losing so considerable a sum. When seen this evening, his young granddaughter Eleanor said that her grandfather talked ‘kind of crazy’ about his loss. The girl, who is fifteen, is the only heir to the old estate which is one of the familiar landmarks down the river.”

CHAPTER III UNKNOWN TO MAN

Here was a mystery after Pee-wee's own heart, a mystery for Boy Scouts to solve. It was not the less diverting because there was a young heroine connected with it. He wondered if she was a girl scout. He loved to show Girl Scouts what Boy Scouts (that is, real scouts) can do.

He forgot all about the fire. He had intended to linger in that devastated area feasting upon the ruins, prowling about, arousing the envy of less favored boys beyond the rope. But now he did not see the broken and saturated memorials of the old court-house at all. He saw a new court-house in which a pair of ruffians tracked by Boy Scouts were being sentenced to twenty years in state prison. He saw Eleanor Gardiner looking on, awed by the prowess of the scouts, and tenderly grateful to the head Chipmunk.

"Anyway, one sure thing, that's a lot of nonsense," Pee-wee said aloud. "Because anyway, if that boat didn't go back past the bridge again, then it's up the river and I know all the places up the river, *geeee whiz!* Because anyway, it's got to be somewhere." There was no doubt that it was *somewhere* and to Pee-wee it was as good as found. Here was just the sort of task that scouts revel in.

First he would go down to the drawbridge and see Haley Austin and make "double sure" that the boat did not return downstream after the robbery. If it did not, why then it was upstream. And Pee-wee knew upstream as he knew the pantry in his own home. Why, you couldn't possibly get farther upstream than North Bridgeboro with a power boat even at high tide! There was no escape for a launch upstream. Either Haley Austin was mistaken or else the boat was still upstream.

As for the authorities exploring all the possible hiding places upstream, Pee-wee had his doubts about that. He knew a place upstream, a dim, dank place completely enclosed by thick bramble bushes and utterly undiscoverable by passersby on the narrowing river. It was a kind of marine cave without any entrance upon the stream. For a third of a mile or more, thick interwoven brush covered the west shore. It was unbroken and almost as impenetrable as solid earth. Your sharp canoe could not nose into it. Paddle directly toward it and your narrow, pointed craft would push against it, then bounce gently back as if thrust by a woven spring. There was no suggestion of an entrance along the whole length of this natural revetment mattress of closely interwoven growth. And indeed there was nothing behind it but solid shore.

Yet there was a spot along the network of facing concealing the precipitous bank which would not resist much if you nosed into it. And it was not backed by solid earth. Push your boat through the gently resisting but parting brush and you found yourself in a little watery cave completely roofed by brush. You would be somewhat the worse from the scraping growth, but this admitted you into an enchanted spot quite removed from the world. It was as if Dame Nature kept an ill resort and cautiously opened the door upon a password.

This dank, dark nook was not approachable by land and the huckleberries which grew in the treacherous swamp beyond went to waste because there were none to venture into that tangled morass which stretched away west of the river.

In the little nook the water was green and still, and the leaves and rotted bits of wood that lay upon it looked as if they might have been there for years. Bullfrogs and lizards sat motionless in that eternal twilight and busy little skippers made their jerky, aimless pilgrimages to and fro.

It had to storm very hard for the rain to penetrate that solemn grotto.

And the authorities had investigated every place up the river where a boat might be moored. How smug and reassuring that sounded! Wonderful. Left no stone unturned as usual. Why Pee-wee had only chanced into that secret cove by the merest accident while paddling his canoe. Of course, he had told the scouts about it, but the place was not known to the world of men. And a man would stand a better chance of being struck by lightning than of finding it.

How, then, had the men with the launch found it? Here was a poser for Pee-wee. He had found an old cartridge in it, evidently somebody had sometime or other stumbled into it. Well, that was that. But here was the main point. An iron box with about seven thousand dollars in it had been taken from the old Gardiner mansion and carried down to the shore. Earlier that same night a launch had passed upstream, its occupants seeming disinclined to attract the notice of the bridge-tender. *It was positively stated that it had not passed downstream again.* Thereupon every possible mooring place upstream had been investigated and the boat had not been found.

Here indeed was a mystery. Perhaps Pee-wee was reasoning well when he assumed straightway that the mysterious launch might still be in his little cove. If its occupants had been afraid to encounter the bridge-tender and demand his customary service on their way upstream, might they not (now that he knew of their passing) refrain from returning and seek a hiding place up the river? And if they were known to be nowhere else, might they not be in that secret cove?

“That shows how much detectives don’t know,” he said, highly elated. “I bet maybe we can surely positively find that boat and maybe the money even, I bet we can.”

With this altogether scoutish enterprise in view and bubbling over with

enthusiasm to be about it, Pee-wee tore out the article (it did not occupy as much space in the paper as it did in his mind) and taking it home with him, pasted it in his *scout book* which was a weird collection of recipes for making hunter's stew, camp crullers, birchbark ornaments, Indian trail signs, and contained a list of his own triumphs in the scouting field. He felt that he was now well launched upon the greatest enterprise of his career and he could hardly wait for his comrades to return from their hike so that he could mobilize them for the first move which was a hike down to the drawbridge below the old Gardiner mansion.

CHAPTER IV

THREE MERRY MAIDENS

If Pee-wee had discovered a new species of bird or an Indian relic he could hardly have been more elated than when he emerged from his home after luncheon on that memorable Saturday.

And indeed it must be admitted that he had good reason to think that he was on the trail of an adventure. If the boat had not passed down the river, then it was still up the river. And if it had not been found up the river that was because the authorities had not looked everywhere.

“Gee whiz, that’s a dandy argument,” said Pee-wee, commenting upon his own chain of reasoning. “And I bet maybe they went into that cove because maybe they were scared to go down the river again, and I bet maybe they tried to escape across the swamp in back of it, I bet maybe they did. Gee whiz, if a thing isn’t anywheres and there’s one other place it’s got to be in that place, that’s one thing sure.”

By way of clinching this argument, he delivered a vicious assault upon a large apple he had brought forth from the luncheon table, as if perhaps he had hopes of finding the recreant launch hiding within it. “That’s logic anyway, and I bet I find them,” he said.

“For goodness sakes what have you got there?” a merry voice caroled almost in his ear.

Pee-wee glanced around the side of the porch and beheld Minerva Skybrow, moving spirit of the local Girl Scouts, standing at the porch rail. She was accompanied by two of her followers, Dora Dane Daring and Winifred Wilde and they looked very winsome in their khaki attire.

“Are we excused for trespassing?” Minerva asked. “We’ve been on a perfectly wonderful hike and we’re taking a shortcut home. See? We discovered the first daisies of the season. Aren’t they nice? We’ve stole a march on you boys.”

“Do you think we go hunting for daisies?” Pee-wee thundered. “Gee whiz, when we can go hunting for bandits and burglars and robbers, maybe even murderers, and things!” You would have thought that Pee-wee expected to gather these gems of the springtime in the neighboring woods.

“Goodness gracious!” said Minerva. “I hope you don’t bring any of them here.”

“I’m going to find where some robbers that stole seventy thousand dollars—maybe it was even less than that—I’m going to find out where they are

before to-day's over. Do you know the Gardiner mansion down the river; that big white house? I bet you know Eleanor Gardiner maybe?"

Pee-wee had intended to wait for the return of his comrades to make known his plans. It was for that reason that he had stuffed his trusty scout book into his pocket. He intended to read his newspaper clipping to them immediately upon their return. He felt that it would have a certain weight and importance pasted in that extraordinary journal from which he intended to read it aloud.

But, alas, Pee-wee had one of the failings of genius; he could not resist these blithesome damsels. He liked to exploit his prowess. He liked to advertise the wonderful proficiency of scouts and the hopeless limitations of Girl Scouts.

"What on earth is that dreadful book?" asked Dora, lifting it out of Pee-wee's pocket and glancing it over. "Oh look, it's funny! It tells how to make incense cones out of molasses cake and cologne and tooth powder and—oh look, it tells how to make glue out of tree gum and how to broil toads——"

"Toadstools!" roared Pee-wee. "That tells how you can tell the wrong kind—mushrooms are toadstools only different——"

"Oh isn't it interesting!" chirped Winnie Wilde, looking over her friend's shoulder. "It tells about a perfectly dear trail——"

"That's a deer's trail!" Pee-wee fairly screamed. "Don't you know what a deer is?"

"You're one," said Minerva. "You spelled it with an A. And oh, goodness me, here's something about school! I never knew fish went to school!"

"You think you're so smart!" Pee-wee roared. "Look at that article cut out of night before last's newspaper and you'll see how it's nothing to laugh about and the reason everybody's not so excited about it is on account of the big fire I guess, but anyway, maybe you think it's fun to get a—a—a—lot of thousand dollars stolen from you in the middle of the night by desperaters——"

"By what?" Winnie inquired gently.

"Desperadoes," Minerva said.

"You can read the article for yourselves, you're so smart," Pee-wee fairly shouted, "and see what happened and I know where maybe that boat that's got the iron box is because I know things that nobody else knows—I mean places. So if you want to see me do a good turn for a girl—then maybe she'll join the Girl Scouts, I bet she will—you can come with me down to the Gardiner mansion, I decided all of a sudden to go there first. I'll show you how scouts have got prowesses and resources and things, I will."

"The very idea!" said Miss Dora Dane Daring.

Pee-wee thrust his hand into the depths of his trousers pocket as if he were going to bring forth a few choice "prowesses" to show them. But all he

succeeded in excavating was a licorice jawbreaker. It was rather sticky and it brought the whole lining of his pocket out with it. Pee-wee thereupon deposited it where it would never again cause trouble; that was in his mouth, and he stood there with his left cheek bulging. He forgot all about his patrol.

“Dywantergo’n see wtmgoingterdo?” he demanded, wrestling bravely with his huge square of sugared concrete.

“I should say we do,” said Minerva Skybrow.

CHAPTER V THE PROMISE

Pee-wee triumphed, not only over the concrete jawbreaker, but over the three merry maidens. He always triumphed over everything and everybody. Except when he didn't. And even then he did.

It must be admitted that the three girls were impressed with the newspaper article; they were so much impressed that they were moved to be serious about it. Burglary, the loss of thousands of dollars, the whereabouts of desperate men; these, to be sure, were no matter for airy jesting.

Moreover, Minerva Skybrow was sensible of the fact that after all the big things in scouting are done by Boy Scouts. Look in the papers. Who finds the lost child? Who recovers the body of the drowned victim? Boy Scouts! Who helps the authorities and sometimes triumphs where they fail? Boy Scouts. You have only to read the newspapers. And Minerva had seen these things in the newspapers. Why, who was it that discovered the German wireless in Bridgeboro? The Boy Scouts.

It must be confessed that she felt a little chagrin at having been out in a gentle quest for early wild flowers while Pee-wee Harris, Chipmunk Patrol, First Bridgeboro Troop, B.S.A., was getting ready to solve a mystery and round up a couple of miscreants. She saw that this was no occasion for laughter. A daring robbery had been committed and the desperate business had ended in mystery. She thought of that young girl, Eleanor Gardiner, with the protection only of servants while her old grandfather lay perhaps dying. These daisy gatherers were good scouts and they became at once serious. The head Chipmunk had dealt them a mortal blow with that scout book which was "too funny for anything."

"So now you see," Pee-wee informed them darkly, "now you see the kind of things scouts do; they hunt for burglars and things. They know even places that detectives don't know about. I bet you my name is in the newspaper by tomorrow. So now you can laugh if you want to, because anyway, that's all girls can do—giggle."

They did not laugh. They looked at Pee-wee with frank admiration and they did not laugh. He had triumphed over their laughter. His breast swelled with pride even while his left cheek swelled with his terrible jawbreaker. He managed to work this into a position so that he could talk.

"Even if you're only girls, I'll let you help me if you want to," he said. "I was going to wait for my troop and then we'd make up a—a—you know—a

poss or something or other. But, gee whiz, that bunch, maybe they won't get back till midnight if Roy Blakeley all of a sudden starts some of his crazy stuff about hiking backwards or something. Once he said we could only turn to the left, that's the way he does. Gee whiz, I'm going to wait for *them*—not when he's with them. He's got a new idea about hiking the way the wind blows; he's crazy."

Minerva Skybrow looked straight at Pee-wee and her eyes were brimming with earnestness.

"Do you know what he says?" Pee-wee asked, his thoughts diverted to his arch foe, Roy. "He says mince-meat comes from a cow; that's what he told little Peter Tower. If I took him to hunt for a treasure maybe he'd say we should go on one leg or something like that, hey? He's so smart, he's crazy."

Minerva Skybrow continued to look straight into the eyes of the hero. It is said that opportunity knocks once on every person's door. This fine Girl Scout felt that here was a chance, a chance to do something really big. And in her spirit of adventure and helpfulness, Pee-wee became magnified to about ten times his size. He *had* a way of getting on the trail of big things. So had all those ubiquitous scouts. The public was always hearing of them. It was the same old story; woman's place in the home. The Girl Scout's place seems to be in the back garden or in the highly refined modern camp. And meanwhile, the Boy Scouts hunt for the lost child on the wild mountain and get their names in the papers.

The fine spirit of this splendid girl was hit hard by these reflections. And she looked straight at the sturdy little hero, greatest scout of them all. He who had been Bridgeboro's mayor for a day! It was true that in that official capacity he had closed up the bakeries and prevented the refreshments being delivered at the party. It was true that on his way to give a "big show" in Little Valley he had broken Little Valley's relay wire while performing a masterly exploit in the woods and had found the scene of the entertainment in darkness upon his sensational arrival. He had indeed seen his name in the papers then! But he was always doing things, and they were big things—enormous things.

Minerva Skybrow, scout of the Girl Scouts, gazed into his eyes seriously. There was pleading in her look.

"You just listen to me, Walter Harris," she said. "You're supposed to do good turns, aren't you?"

"Sure, I did some dandy ones," confessed the hero.

"Well then, you just listen. If you don't let us help you, we'll say you're just the meanest boy in this whole town, won't we, Dora? And I'm sorry we made fun of you. We want you to take us with you down to the Gardiner place. And we want to help. We need another girl in our troop and we want to meet Eleanor Gardiner and be friends with her. Maybe she needs friends—all alone

there with just servants! We have to do good turns too, remember that. If you let us help, you'll be doing a good turn by giving us a chance to do a good turn _____”

“Sure, that’s a dandy argument,” said Pee-wee.

“And then if I get my canoe out, will you let us all go up the river together to that mysterious place?” Winifred Wilde asked.

Pee-wee did not know about that. This mysterious cove was his trump card. His reasoning made it likely that the launch was there. Were the men there also? Could they have escaped through the marsh beyond the river, leaving their boat which had served its purpose? Now that Pee-wee was on the point of action with three feminine recruits, he wondered just what he should do on reaching the secret cove. Should they push their frail bark into that dank retreat and encounter—what? The thing was looming rather large and serious. But he knew that if he played his trump card and told the authorities they would take all the credit. No, he would not do that.

“Are you scared of bandits and murderers and things like that?” he asked darkly.

“We adore them,” said Winifred Wilde.

CHAPTER VI THE FIRST MOVE

It seemed rather a big enterprise for the head Chipmunk and three Girl Scouts. Perhaps Pee-wee would have been a little relieved if his expeditionary force had wavered at the appalling word *murderer*. But they did not waver. And Pee-wee was in for it. He found some comfort in the thought that the first move in their adventure was a call at the Gardiner mansion. He did not exactly know why he wanted to go there first, but he was quite agreeable to this peaceful mission as preliminary to the more hazardous invasion of his secret cove. He even became heroic.

"I tell you what let's do," he said. "Gee whiz, you got to be not scared no matter what happens."

"I don't see why we should be scared," said Dora. "We're not going to fight them. We're just going to find out if they're there; then if they are, we'll come home and tell the police, that's all. We can just paddle past the place and we ought to be able to tell if anybody has gone in through the bushes. We're scouts, aren't we?"

"I know ways to tell," said Pee-wee. "Scouts have to know things like that. A scout—I can tell even if a leaf is moved, I can. You got to know how to do that. You got to be observant. I bet you're glad you met me now, I bet you are, because I'm going to show you how scouts do. Didn't I tell you about a dandy mystery?"

"Oh, it's going to be just *thrilling!*" said Winifred. "And I'm not a single bit afraid. We're going to do something *real*. And we won't say a word about it till we can tell the stupid detectives just where to go. Because if that launch didn't go back down the river it *certainly must be somewhere*. That is a peachy argument."

"I invented it," said Pee-wee.

"What I'm thinking of first of all," said the earnest Minerva, "is to go and see Eleanor Gardiner and make her promise that if we're instruments in recovering that money, she'll join our troop——"

"We'll be instrumentable."

"And then," said Minerva, "if she's lonesome or needs any service——"

"Suuuure!" said Pee-wee with masterful conclusiveness. "We'll hike down there this afternoon. Gee whiz, it's only about three miles—you can walk that, can't you?"

"I'll say we can," said Dora.

"I'll show you the way scouts do," Pee-wee said. "And anyway, that shows how observant I was how I saw the newspaper all wet on the ground where the fire was." He did not say how he had been so observant as not to see the ladder he had tripped on. "That's the way scouts have to be," he added. "They got to know all about nature and they got to never miss anything. So now aren't you glad?"

Minerva Skybrow was naturally a serious girl, and of generous impulse. Her eyes were sober with the thought of service with a touch of real adventure following it. She threw her arms around Pee-wee in an impulse of gratitude which sent his scout hat to the ground, exposing his curly hair. And she kissed him with a kiss of unconcealed enthusiasm and admiration. It was to be hoped that the robbers would not subject him to such an impetuous assault.

"Walter Harris," said she, "you're just the wonderfulest little scout that ever lived. And you *do* know all about things, and you *are* observant, and you know lots and lots and lots about nature. And we're all four of us going to do a *perfectly splendid* good turn. And the Girl Scouts are going to do something really and truly big, thanks to you!"

Pee-wee rallied under the attack. "But anyway, you're scared of snakes, that's one thing," he said.

"Well we're not afraid *now*," said Winnie, "that's one thing too. And we'll show you if we're good for anything more than gathering wild flowers."

"Does one of you know how to paddle?" the doughty leader asked.

"We *all* know how to paddle and we *all* know how to swim," said Winifred. "So you needn't be afraid."

"Can you keep still and not say a word?" the hero demanded.

"Of course we can, silly!" said Dora.

Minerva was sober. Perhaps she was thinking more about her troop and about helpfulness than she was about the more adventurous phase of their enterprise. She had a finer sensibility than her two companions and perhaps her mind dwelt on the lonely girl in that big mansion; perhaps she pictured her a scout in khaki, a girl scout, recruited in a fine enterprise of adventure and helpfulness—thanks to Pee-wee.

"Let's hike down there first," she said, "and see her and ask all about the burglary, so we'll know all there is. Maybe there is more than came out in the paper. Then let's hike on down to the bridge and ask that man, whatever his name is, if he's perfectly, absolutely sure that boat didn't go down the river again. Then if we're perfectly sure it's up the river, we'll——"

"We'll find it!" shouted Pee-wee.

"Shh," said Winifred. "We don't have to let the whole neighborhood know about it."

CHAPTER VII

A LESSON IN SCOUTING

It was still early afternoon when the four adventurers set forth on their hike down to the old Gardiner mansion. Pee-wee felt the responsibility that was upon him. Face to face with his adventure he felt that it would be pleasant to have Tom Slade along; Tom Slade who was big enough, and old enough, and certainly heroic enough, to manage the affair. Tom would not be afraid to encounter a couple of hiding burglars.

It would, after all, be thrilling enough to play second fiddle to Tom and Brent Gaylong in such a risky affair. But the girls seemed quite ready for anything and Pee-wee was in for it for better or worse. He had never in his life been so deeply involved with that rival sex. On the way down he regaled them with reminiscences of scout stunts and achievements.

The old Gardiner mansion was one of the landmarks along the lower river. It had always been somewhat a place of mystery. Perhaps this was because it was very old and little was known about the Gardiner family. It was not within the town line of Bridgeboro. Grounds that must once have been very beautiful extended down to the river. The old mansion stood well back from the stream and in the memory of the Bridgeboro boys there had never been any other approach to it. It was not visible from the road which paralleled the river a quarter of a mile or so west of the stream. If it had ever been on a road that road had gone away and deserted it, as indeed everybody connected with it seemed to have done.

It was a neglected and falling relic of ancient glory, home of a family that had accumulated wealth in the old days when coastwise vessels ascended the river for their cargoes of fish and lumber. It stood aloof from the new life and the new order of things and had a touch of spookiness about it. Only those who patronized the river ever saw it. Chugging up the channel which skirted those dark, shaded grounds and seeing the old house with its funny cupola, it was easy to fancy it haunted.

And so, indeed, it was haunted. The ghost of a bygone splendor abided there. As to who else abided there few knew and none cared. The remnant of a fine old stock was petering out in it. And the only way to get to it, unless you trespassed from the river, was by a lane which led to it from the new road west of the river. The boys called the old place haunted and let it go at that. Other people never thought about it at all. Its return to life, so to speak, via Pee-wee's newspaper, was the only mention of it he had ever heard or seen. They

followed the road down and had some difficulty in finding the lane. Indeed, it was not until the master scout had climbed a tree and, closing his eyes, opened them suddenly upon the immediate landscape that the coy trail permitted itself to be discovered. This is a way of taking a trail by assault, as it were; and it was popular with Pee-wee.

“When you get up into the tree,” he said, “you just shut your eyes tight and count ten and then you open them, sudden like that (he gave a thrilling demonstration) and if there’s a place where even there used to be a path centuries ago, you can see it just for a second. And now I know where that path begins,” he added. “It’s right down there past that sixth tree—that’s an oak tree. Do you know how to tell oak trees? You can make dandy soup out of acorns, do you know that? Only it hasn’t got so much taste to it. But anyway, if you get lost in the woods you’re not supposed to have canned soup because you’re supposed to know about eating herbs. Even you can get moss to keep from starving. Gee whiz, do you think I’d ever starve?”

“No, I don’t believe you ever will,” said Dora.

“You bet you I won’t, because I know how to tell sassafras roots and I can make dandy smelling powder out of them only you can’t eat it, because there’s silver polish in it, but you don’t need silver polish because you can shine things by the sun if you know how. Gee whiz, the sun’s your friend all right. If you look cross-eyed when you’re up the tree sometimes you can see a trail even better. I bet you *you* can’t climb trees. I climb trees because I put up aials for fifty cents each, I made four dollars that way and I’m going to buy a compass because you can’t trust to squirrels telling you which way is north—they’re crazy—they build their nests on any old side of a tree, but one thing they can tell if it’s going to be a cold winter.”

“We think you’re perfectly wonderful,” Minerva managed to say as Pee-wee paused for air.

“One, two, three, four, five, six trees,” Pee-wee said. “Then we turn into the trail. I bet nobody went on it for years, hey?”

“I’m beginning to feel kind of spooky,” said Dora.

“Don’t you care, I’m with you,” said Pee-wee. “I’m not a-scared of ghosts, because anyway, there aren’t any. Gee whiz, they can’t eat, that’s what Warde Hollister says, and I’m not a-scared of anything that can’t eat.”

CHAPTER VIII

PLANS

He was none the less a scout for being excruciating. Had he not wrenched its secret from the bashful trail?

"Here's where we turn in," he said.

Sure enough, there was the faintest suggestion of a path across the fields toward the river. Once upon this they could follow it, but they never would have discovered it save from a vantage point above.

"I think it's just wonderful how you did it," said Minerva.

"I can do even better things than that," said Pee-wee. "So now you see what scouting is. Do you know how I can tell no one has been on this path for maybe two or three days? On account of there being cobwebs here."

"Ugh! I hate spiders," said Dora.

"They know a lot about music," Pee-wee said.

"They're the only insects that like to listen to music. I played a harmonica near one once but, gee whiz, he didn't seem to like it. Spiders have lots of brains, but they haven't got very good dispositions, that's one thing. Do you know the best kind of insects?"

"Do tell us."

"Crickets, you can train them. Even you can make one follow you."

He trudged along the narrow path leading the way, and regaling them with tidbits about scouting and woodlore.

"I wonder how the doctor came?" Minerva, asked. "There must be another way to the house."

"If you're up in an airplane," Pee-wee said, "you can see lots of paths all crisscross on the grass and different places, that you can't see when you're down on the ground. Birds see lots of things that we don't see; crows know a lot of things."

"I guess we have a lot to learn," said Minerva.

"Don't you care," said Pee-wee.

"Who's going to do the talking?" Minerva, asked.

"I'll do it," Pee-wee said, "because I'll be talking anyway."

"I hope you'll let us talk with Eleanor," she ventured. "If she wants one of us to stay, I want to be the one to do it. I can call up my house. I suppose old Squire Gardiner has a 'phone. Then the rest of you can go and get Dora's or Winnie's canoe and paddle up the river to that terrible place and see if there's any sign of anybody there. Only you mustn't go inside."

“Gee whiz, we won’t need to,” Pee-wee said. “If anybody went in there with a boat I’ll be able to tell, you leave it to me. Because I know just how the bushes are at that place. We’ll just paddle along near the shore, very quiet; I’ll show you how to paddle without making a noise, and you’ll all have to not say a word, even in whispers.”

“I think we can do that if you can,” Dora ventured to declare.

“I can not make a noise for six hours if I have to, when I’m stalking birds,” Pee-wee said.

“All right then,” said Minerva, “it’s going to be just simply wonderful, and oh, aren’t we glad we met you!”

“I’ll say we are,” said Winnie. “But oh goodness, isn’t it a spooky old place!”

They were approaching the house and could see beyond it the glinting river. The place seemed very lonely and desolate. From the river the old house had a certain fine dignity by reason of the great shade trees and the fair, passing stream. But without these romantic surroundings, it seemed just a sordid ruin.

“Think of a young girl like us living in such a place,” said Minerva. “I bet she doesn’t even go to school. With an old grandfather that kept his money in a box! I just bet he’s an old miser and doesn’t even get her the things she needs. It served him right to be robbed like that.”

“We’ll make him promise to get her a radio, hey?” Pee-wee said. “We’ll tell him if we get his money back for him, he’s got to get her a radio and I’ll put it up for her because I make a specialty of putting up aials and I won’t charge anything, so it will be a good turn. And then when she sees all about scouting, what it is, she’ll join your troop, hey, so that shows what scouts get for being observant, because if I hadn’t seen that newspaper——”

“Oh, it’s going to be just wonderful and you’re a dear!” Minerva said. “I want you all to promise to let *me* talk to Eleanor—about scouting, I mean. And I’m going to see if she can’t come and visit me. Maybe I’ll stay right here with her while you three go up the river. And then if that boat is in that place you can tell the police about it. Oh, it’s going to be just marvelous!”

“And maybe we’ll get our pictures in the Pathé News, hey?” Pee-wee said. “And, *oh boy*, it will be a good joke on my troop going off on a hike without waiting for me—a lot I care, because now see what we’re doing. And it shows how much detectives don’t know too, they’re so smart they don’t know anything.”

“This is just the biggest day in our lives,” said Minerva, “and you needn’t think we’ll flinch.”

“I bet you’re glad you trespassed across my lawn, hey?” Pee-wee said. “Anyway, I wouldn’t get mad. And now you see I bet you’re glad you met me,

hey. Will your mothers mind if your pictures are in the papers?"

"Indeed they won't."

"Oh goodness me," said Winnie. "I suppose I'll have to give them that perfectly horrid picture of me before I had my hair cut."

"Don't you do it," said Pee-wee. "I'll take your pictures with my camera and I'll have you kind of wild looking, as if you had been in a scrap and just got back from catching burglars. Even your dresses will be torn, hey? You got to be not scared to get your pictures in the papers, that's one sure thing. You leave it to me."

CHAPTER IX

ELEANOR GARDINER

“Maybe they won’t listen to us because we’re not grown up, hey?” said Pee-wee.

“They’ll have to listen if they care anything about their seven thousand dollars,” Dora suggested.

For just a moment they paused on the dilapidated old porch. One ancient chair stood near the door, favorite resting place of the old squire, the callers thought.

“I bet he’s a grouch, hey,” said Pee-wee.

Still they paused, hesitating to sound the dull, old brass knocker. Then Minerva lifted it and gave it a resounding bang. Instinctively she knocked loud for the place seemed so desolate and empty. They looked at each other and waited. They were in for it now, there was no backing out. Pee-wee seemed at last subdued by the serious character of their enterprise. They were launched upon the first quiet waters of what might prove to be a perilous and stormy voyage.

There was no sound from within.

“Maybe the old man will be mad, hey?” said Pee-wee.

“I’m not thinking about him, I’m thinking about that poor girl fifteen years old, living on a place like this,” said Minerva. “I mean she shall have some hikes with us.”

“And join our troop,” said Dora.

“And get out of this poky old place and have some fun,” said Winifred.

“Thanks to Walter Harris,” said Minerva.

A holy calm pervaded Pee-wee. This might end in his being knocked on the head by a desperate robber. Perhaps bound hand and foot and thrown into the treacherous swamp behind that secret cove he knew about. When Minerva gave another and still louder knock it seemed as if this were a knock on his own round, curly head. Yes, they were doing a big thing, perhaps a little too big. He realized now that a middle sized thing might be a little better.

Distant footfalls were now heard within the house. They seemed to be coming down a stair. Then they sounded nearer and nearer as they came along the lower hall. They were not the footfalls of a frolicsome girl of fifteen. Probably it was the squire or one of those old petrified heirlooms of servants groping toward the door.

“Listen,” whispered Minerva hurriedly. They listened, Pee-wee all eyes.

“Don’t anybody say where we *think* that boat may be,” warned Minerva. “Don’t anybody breathe a word about our plans. We don’t want this old miser to take it out of our hands. He’s got to consent to Eleanor—*shhh*—becoming a girl scout—*shhh*——”

“I’m *shh*ing,” whispered Pee-wee. “What?”

“Let *me begin* the talking,” said Minerva in a hurried whisper.

She had just time to say it, for even as she spoke the door opened slowly and there stood before them a little old lady in a shabby black dress with faded lace upon it, and with a sad and wrinkled face lighted by a faint, gentle look of inquiry.

“Does Squire Gardiner live here?” Minerva asked.

The little old lady gazed from one to the other of these young people from the outside world and her look of inquiry deepened. Perhaps she was not so very old, but to Pee-wee and these bright, rosy-cheeked girls she seemed old. If she was not so very old in years, at least she was old in cares. There was a gentle wistfulness about her, standing there as she did, with one trembling hand upon the door; standing in the shadow of a bygone time and contemplating these three young girls in their winsome khaki, and Pee-wee the Terrible with his jack-knife and his belt axe. An appalling scar ran from his mouth across his dimpled chin. It was an honored souvenir of his triumph over a strawberry jawbreaker. He wiped away the horrible stain and said, “Anyway, we’re sorry you got robbed if you’re that servant——”

“Squire Gardiner?” inquired the lady gently. “There isn’t any Squire Gardiner and I’m afraid I don’t deserve your sympathy for I haven’t been robbed.”

“Isn’t—doesn’t—” Minerva stammered.

“Isn’t this the Gardiner place? Doesn’t Eleanor Gardiner live here?”

“I am Eleanor Gardiner,” said the little old lady. “Squire Gardiner has been dead these many years—thirty years. That was long before you were born, my little man,” she added, smiling sweetly upon Pee-wee.

“Haven’t you even got two old servants?” Pee-wee ejaculated. “I bet you’re not. I bet you’re over fifteen, *gee whiz!*”

“Oh I bet I am,” said the little lady with a wistfulness that was very sweet and touching. “But just the same I’m the only Eleanor Gardiner who ever, ever lived here.” There was a winsome and gentle conclusiveness in her soft voice.

Minerva had been gazing at her steadily with her earnest, sober eyes, those eyes which the great hero of the First Bridgeboro Troop would have taken note of if he had been a little older. She moved the chair slightly as if to encourage their hostess to sit down, then stood close to her when she was seated.

“I don’t understand it at all,” said Minerva. “We expected to find Squire Gardiner and Eleanor and we thought she was about our age. My two chums

are fifteen, but I'm a little over sixteen——”

“I'm going on thirteen,” said Pee-wee, “and I'm going to get a bicycle. I'm head of a patrol, I am.”

Miss Eleanor Gardiner smiled at Pee-wee, then looked at the girls. “I live here quite alone,” said she. “It isn't often that girls and boys come to see me. My, how sweet you look in your pretty dresses all the same color.”

It was a pretty sight, Miss Eleanor Gardiner sitting in her rocking chair on that old porch with her new young friends ranged upon the railing before her; all but Minerva who perched upon an arm of her chair. The unknowing artist of this picture dangled his short legs from the rail, his outlandish scout book bulging his pocket and projecting out of it. Yes, it wasn't a half bad picture.

“You're a very pretty girl,” said Miss Gardiner, glancing sideways at Minerva and taking the proffered hand.

“I just don't understand, and I'm all flabbergasted,” said Minerva. She had colored somewhat, perhaps from her momentary embarrassment in this singular climax of their enterprise. I dare say she looked sweeter right there on the rocker of Miss Gardiner's chair than she would have looked in a pose of Pee-wee's creation “looking wild kind of” as if she had been catching burglars. She did look pretty.

“And there isn't any young girl like us by that name?” she asked incredulously. “And there isn't any Squire Gardiner or any old servants and wasn't this house *really* and *truly* robbed?”

“Did you see the paper yesterday?” Pee-wee asked, at the same time hauling out his scout book. “You just read that article and *then* see what you say—you just see.”

“I'll still say I'm more than fifteen,” said Miss Gardiner sweetly. “I'm afraid nothing can change that.”

She took the open book and glanced over the memorable article while Pee-wee delivered a characteristic review of the circumstance of its discovery.

“Gee whiz, maybe the newspaper made a mistake,” he vociferated, his inventive mind in full swing. “Maybe they meant fifty-one years instead of fifteen, hey?”

“That would be nearer,” smiled Miss Gardiner as she read. There was an expression of quiet amusement on her wrinkled face.

“Because I went to the place where the fire was,” Pee-wee rattled on, “because I'm a boy scout, I guess you know what those are, and I thought maybe I'd find some things laying around that belonged in the court-house, because maybe you don't know how scouts are supposed to always keep their eyes open and their ears too——”

“And their mouths,” Dora ventured.

“I found a fountain pen there last night and it belonged to the truant officer

and I gave it to him, but anyway, I don't like him because he told on a feller I know that got to be a scout and he stopped playing hooky so that shows how scouting is better than truant officers and I found some other things too." He came up for air. "So then I went there to-day and I found the paper that that article came out of and it was all wet and it said how this house got robbed only, gee whiz, I can see you're more than fifteen. So we came here on account of how we have to do good turns and I'm showing them about scouting."

Miss Eleanor Gardiner continued her reading of the article with a smile upon her face. "So you're showing these young ladies about scouting, eh?" she said gently. "How is it that such a wonderful little scout didn't notice that last night and night before last the tide here in our river was *low* instead of *high*? This article says the tide was nearly high when the boat came up at about ten o'clock at night. Yet this week we have had low tides at night. My good, little scout boy, if you had been watching the river for thirty or forty years as I have, you would have known there was a mistake somewhere. I'm afraid the scout boys aren't very observant. Do you never go near the river? Well, well, perhaps after all I could get into your troop as a scout.

"All that this article says is true. But the article is over thirty years old. And you see I'm all that is left of the things and people mentioned here—the river and me. You should keep your brown eyes open and watch the tides, my little scout."

For half a minute, perhaps it was only fifteen seconds, Pee-wee was silent. He stared aghast; an unwonted calm pervaded him. His mouth opened, not to receive food, but in speechless consternation. The girls were too astonished to laugh at him. So for the moment he was saved.

"What—how—doesn't it say June second?" he stammered.

"June second many years ago," smiled Miss Eleanor Gardiner.

"Gee whiz, then!" he exploded in a burst of despairing self-defense. "I'd like to know how it got there where the fire was because I know I found it there, that's one sure thing. And I found it because I had my eyes open, *geeee whiz!*"

"Only you didn't know the tide was low in the river at ten o'clock at night, did you?" Miss Gardiner laughed.

"A scout is observant," said Dora.

"They see things that others don't see," said Winnie.

"And they know all about nature," said Minerva.

"They know all the secret hiding places on the river," chirped Winnie, "but they don't know about the tide. Oh, please hold me or I'll fall off the railing; I could just die laughing!"

They did not die laughing, but they came pretty near it. Miss Gardiner's chair rocked from the vehemence of Minerva's laughter. As for her two less

considerate friends, the porch rail shook under them and they almost lost their balance in their unholy mirth.

“Oh goodness gracious me, it’s just too funny for anything!” Dora gasped. “He never—never—he—he—never thought about the tide!”

“The first thing you know you’ll fall over backwards and you’ll tumble right into that rosebush,” our hero thundered. “Do you know there’s a rosebush there?”

“I see it, I see it,” wailed Dora. “A girl—scout—is—is—a girl scout is OBSERVANT!”

CHAPTER X

A LONG TRAIL A-WINDING

"I guess you were so interested in the robbery that you didn't think about the tide," Miss Gardiner laughed.

"Oh it's just too silly," said Minerva. "We came here to see a girl and get her to join our troop, and then maybe find your money for you. And scouts are supposed to always be on time and we're thirty years late. How in the world did he ever get hold of that old paper, that's what I'd like to know."

"Thirty years isn't so much," said Pee-wee.

"Well, I'm afraid that the robbers have got a pretty good start," said Dora. "I don't see how we can ever catch up with them now."

"That shows how much you don't know, you're so smart!" Pee-wee shouted. "A murderer got caught after forty years, I read about it. Lots of people don't get caught for a lot of years."

"If they're still up in that cave of yours they must be hungry, that's all I can say," laughed Winnie.

"That shows what kind of scouts girls are," the hero thundered. "You can eat water weeds, you can make dandy soup out of it and keep from dying; there's lots of elderberries up there too, only anyway, they're not there, because I was in that place about a month ago and they weren't there."

"How observant," said Dora.

"Did you happen to notice whether the tide was in there—being a Boy Scout?" Winnie asked innocently.

"But how did he *ever* hit on that old paper?" Minerva asked. "That's a mystery even if there isn't any other mystery."

"Anyway, I started a mystery anyway, that's one sure thing," Pee-wee vociferated.

"Well then, would you young people like me to end the mystery?" Miss Gardiner asked, placing Pee-wee's trusty book upon her lap and laying her clasped hands primly upon it. "I think the paper this article was clipped from was one that came from this very house. I think it must have come out of the corner-stone of the old court-house. And isn't it odd that it should come back to me after all these years? Well it's all true, and the mysterious disappearance of that boat was a nine days' wonder. They said it never went down the river, they were on the watch for it for a month. And it was never found up the river. My poor old grandfather—he was very old—died soon afterword; I always thought that the taking of his money hastened his end.

“He was very old-fashioned and kept large sums here in the house. There was no bank in Bridgeboro in those days. And I think, I don’t know how else to explain it—it seems very wonderful doesn’t it, almost like a ghost—I think that this newspaper that you found *must* have come out of the corner-stone of the old court-house——”

“It did,” shouted Pee-wee. “That’s just what it did, because now I remember how it was right near where a lot of the foundation stones were all scattered around and so I bet that’s the way it was all right and *geeeee whiz*, it’s better to find an old newspaper thirty years old than a new one, you ask anybody, you ask my scoutmaster, because anybody can get a newspaper that was printed yesterday, *geeeee whiz*, that’s no stunt, but it’s a stunt to find one thirty years old when——”

“When the tide was high,” suggested Minerva coyly.

“There’s a question I’d like to ask if I can get a word in edgeways,” said Dora. “I’m only a girl scout and I don’t know all about everything like boys do, but I was wondering if they had motor-boats so long ago.”

“They had naphtha launches,” said Miss Gardiner, “and that boat was a naphtha launch. Haley Austin down at the bridge—poor Haley, he must be dead twenty years—remembered seeing the little smoke-stack or whatever it was. The boat never again went downstream, he vowed it again and again. So the mystery still lives.”

“I discovered it!” shouted Pee-wee.

There was a little laughter, then a pause of just a few moments while Miss Gardiner rocked in her chair. Minerva perched upon one of the arm rests, her arm about Miss Gardiner’s neck. The other two girls sat on the rickety old porch rail, their arms over each other’s shoulders as girls do. The head Chipmunk sat apart, a defiant scowl upon his heroic countenance, as if he sensed the fact that he had lost prestige and was material for mirth and raillery. His diminutive legs dangled from the rail.

And so Miss Eleanor Gardiner, belle and heroine of a bygone time, rocked back and forth smiling pensively, and no one, not even Pee-wee, spoke. The old rocking chair was taking Miss Eleanor Gardiner on a long journey, a longer journey than ever Pee-wee had taken upon his adventurous and flaunted hikes. A long, long trail a-winding back to a day which loomed large in her uneventful life. And Minerva, good scout that she was, was with her on that journey, and rocked to and fro, to and fro, with her and said not a word. “Tell us,” was all she said finally.

“Would you like me to tell you about the time that old corner-stone was laid?” Miss Gardiner asked very sweetly. “There was a boy in the story too. Shall I tell you all about it?”

“Oh please do,” Minerva said enthusiastically.

“Your call here at this lonely old house brings back memories even if it doesn’t bring back my little fortune,” Miss Gardiner said. “Do you know I was considered a very beautiful young lady when I was fifteen?”

“I just bet you were!” enthused Dora.

“That shows girls are more stuck on themselves than boys are,” Pee-wee exploded.

CHAPTER XI OUT OF THE PAST

So there you have Pee-wee Harris all over. If he did not hit what he aimed at, at least he always hit something. And on this occasion he was particularly successful for he hit something thirty years distant. It turned out to be what he himself called a “dandy mistake”—one of the best he had ever made. For things had happened thirty years before, the like of which he had never known in his triumphant career of scouting.

“This old paper, oh how it brings the whole thing back to me!” Miss Gardiner mused. “And you come here with it like a little messenger out of the past,” she said to Pee-wee. “Sometimes I look from my windows that face toward the river and see you boys rowing and paddling there and it reminds me of the time when my brother and I used to swim and dive and go out in our little sailboat. That’s how I came to know the river, I’ve always called it my river, and that’s how I happen to be so well acquainted with the tide that comes and goes. I always know about the tide, when to expect it; I think you scouting boys should always keep in touch with the tide, it’s so sure and steady; it never fails. Last night and the night before it was very low at ten o’clock and it might have told you, if you had been friendly with it, that no launch could have come up the river as far as this.

“Well, no matter. Would you like to hear about the dark spot in my career? And then a bright spot? Oh I was a desperate character when I was fifteen!”

“Go on, go on!” was the chorused answer.

“I bet you weren’t a—a pirate,” Pee-wee said.

“Go on, go on!” the girls urged.

Miss Gardiner handed Pee-wee his precious scout book, arranged her lace apron on her lap and continued. She did not look much like a desperate character. “My brother Hamlin was nineteen; he was grown up, he was my big brother. He was the only boy then, and I don’t believe there have been any since, who could swim from North Bridgeboro down to the drawbridge.”

“Good night!” said Pee-wee.

“Was he tall?” asked Dora.

“He was tall and very dark; he had thick, black hair.”

“Oh,” said Dora.

“And he knew the river as no one else ever knew it,” Miss Gardiner continued. “He was always sailing or swimming or fishing or diving. He once dived from our old landing here and came up fifty feet distant. I used to sail

and fish with him; ah, those were the happy days.”

“Did he die?” Minerva asked.

“No, he didn’t die,” Miss Gardiner answered gently. “He ran away from home. You see he was a little wild. Once there was a big dredge in the river off our place. A gang of men lived on it; they were dredging the river. I suppose it was a fascinating place, that old dredge. They were a very rough set of men, I’m afraid. They were honest, hard working men, but very rough; they swore and caroused dreadfully. At night they played cards in their cabin and drank. Some of them had been sailors, Hamlin said.

“Oh how the poor boy adored that horrible, great dredge! He almost lived on it. My poor grandfather was always wrangling with him about it. I confess I often wished that I could peek into that old shanty on the deck and go about and see all the machinery and everything. There was a big scoop, a horrible thing with jaws like a dragon. And there was a great pipe that was floated on the water by rafts—pontoons, they called them. It extended way off onto the land beyond our stables and the mud in the bottom of the river was sucked up and driven through that great pipe. One of those men was a diver and he used to go down and attend to the pipes that were under water. I think he must have been a very brave man, but he was terribly coarse and profane. His name was Nat Harrigan. Oh, how poor Hamlin worshipped that man! How he cherished the man’s compliments about his swimming! He wanted to be a diver—poor boy.

“Our grandfather, the squire everybody called him, was a very strict man. He was always at poor Hamlin to keep away from that dredge. For my part, I just longed to go on it and he made me stay indoors a whole day because I said so. My heart yearned to see those husky old salts play cards and drink rum; I *longed* to hear them tell their frightful yarns.”

“Oh, I think you’re just wonderful!” Winifred said.

“Go on, go on,” urged Pee-wee, his nerves on edge.

“Oh, there isn’t much to it. Our grandfather forbade Hamlin to visit that dredge again and, of course, he did it on the sly. Grandpa had our boat chained and padlocked, but Hamlin swam out. Then came a terrible scene—oh, how well I can remember it. Our grandfather told Hamlin that if he visited the dredge again, he would turn him out of doors. The poor boy said that nature intended him for the water and he was going to be a diver—such talk! He said he would not go into his grandfather’s shipping office in New York and be a clerk. There were angry words and I was very much frightened. But I went and put my arms around Hamlin’s neck.

“Then one fine day soon afterward, Hamlin disappeared. I have never seen him from that day to this,” Miss Gardiner paused and the only sound that could be heard was the creaking of the old rocking chair and far off voices on the

river.

“Yes?” urged Minerva.

“We never saw him again, that’s all. He told me he was going away with Nat Harrigan. He disappeared the same day that the dredge left our river. Of course, it was easy to trace the dredge. A tug-boat came up and towed it to Red Bank on the Shrewsbury River where some dredging was to be done. All that work was done by the government. But Nat Harrigan had left the dredge. Such skillful and brave men are always in demand; he was not a permanent member of the dredging crew.”

“But couldn’t you trace him?” Minerva asked.

Miss Gardiner shook her head. “The men thought he had gone to the Mississippi to work for the Reclamation Service in connection with the levees. But the government could give us no clew to his whereabouts. We even heard that he had gone to Holland to do some very expert work on the great dikes, but that clew led nowhere. One day—I think it was just the day before the laying of the corner-stone of the old court-house—I received a postal card. I didn’t know, and I don’t know to this day, whether it had anything to do with my brother or not. Probably it didn’t. It was written in a foreign language and of course, I couldn’t understand it. The address was very crudely printed in an attempt to make it understandable.

“The robbery had occurred here only a day or so before and my grandfather was in a dreadful state—he wouldn’t hear his grandson’s name mentioned. I think he even suspected him of having something to do with the robbery but, of course, that was absurd.

“Suuuuure it was,” Pee-wee shouted reassuringly.

“I intended to get the card translated by somebody or other,” Miss Gardiner continued, “but there was great excitement in the house that day; my poor grandfather was ill; the trouble about Hamlin and then the robbery were too much for him. And I’m afraid I was thinking of the next day too,” she added, as if guilty. “That was the day they laid the corner-stone of the old court-house. I was the belle of the occasion.”

“Oh, wasn’t that wonderful!” Minerva encouraged.

“I was selected as the prettiest girl in the County and I wore my pink lawn dress,” said Miss Gardiner. “I had just graduated from the school and that was my graduation dress. The governor made a speech and the architect made a speech and there was a prayer and I was the one to lay the contents in the corner-stone. There were a number of things, papers mostly, a few coins of that year’s mintage, and a photograph of the old mill that formerly stood on the site of the new building.

“Just as I was hurrying from the house to go up to Bridgeboro with Judge Bentley’s people who called for me in their surrey, Mrs. Bentley called out to

me and said—well, first she said I looked perfectly lovely.”

“Oh, I bet you did,” Dora enthused.

“I had my hair in two long braids with two pink bows,” Miss Gardiner said. “We didn’t cut all our beautiful hair off in those days.”

“But it’s so convenient,” Winnie pled.

“And Mrs. Bentley called out to me from the surrey. ‘You’d better bring something to put in the corner-stone for future ages to see, young lady.’ Judge Bentley said—he called it right out—that he thought *I* was sweet enough for future ages to see——”

“Oh wasn’t that lovely!” said Minerva. “Well,” said Miss Gardiner laughing, “here I am for future ages to see. And not very many future ages bother about coming here to see me.”

“Gee whiz, there’s one future age that will come and see you again, and that’s me,” said Pee-wee.

“Well,” said Miss Gardiner, “I ran back to my room and there on my little, round table was the Bridgeboro paper containing the account of the robbery here. I hardly knew what I was doing, I was in such a hurry. I just grabbed the paper and my little autograph book; I thought that would be a good thing to put in, because it had the names of so many girls and boys I knew; I thought it would be like taking them all down through the ages with me. I thought that perhaps their great, great grandchildren might some day see those names written on those pink and blue pages. But, oh, we never thought our splendid new court-house would be antiquated and would burn down in less than forty years.

“So I put the newspaper and the autograph album in the corner-stone with the other things and then a man spread some mortar and laid another stone on top of it. And that was the end of the robbery until a wide-awake, little scout boy came here with that very same paper to start me off talking to a quartet of young people about the prosy old past. Oh, how well I can remember the band playing and the crowd standing all about as Judge Bentley lifted me down from a kind of a scaffold and said, ‘Now you and your young friends are sealed in the tomb.’ Do you know it sent a shudder through me when he said that!

“And he said, ‘Your robbery is fast in prison even if your robbers are not.’ But the very minute he set me on the ground, I just ran away all by myself behind a pile of stones and cried my eyes out, because I was thinking of Hamlin, just when vacation was beginning, and how we wouldn’t go sailing and fishing any more on our river——”

Miss Gardiner lowered her head and fumbling in one of the fastnesses of her black dress brought forth a handkerchief and just touched it to her eyes. And the only sounds that could be heard were the slow, steady rocking of her

chair and the faint, metallic music of oar-locks mingled with distant voices on the quiet river which was now glinting with the first wizard touches of the sunset.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLANK OF OAR-LOCKS

“Oh, I think it’s all just wonderful!” said Minerva, as the four made their way across the neglected grounds. “I just feel as if I were living then. If she can’t be a member of our troop, she’s going to be connected with it in some way, we’ll see to that. Do you know what I was thinking? I suppose it sounds crazy, but do you know what I was thinking? When she finished talking and we all just sat there not saying anything for a few moments, do you remember a kind of clinking sound away way off? Those were oar-locks on the river.”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” said Pee-wee.

“I was thinking,” said Minerva, “wouldn’t it be just *wonderful* if that was some one rowing to that old house, and if he rowed right up to the landing and got out and came around to where we were sitting and it turned out to be Hamlin Gardiner.”

“Goodness, you certainly have an imagination,” said Dora.

“I got one, too,” vociferated Pee-wee. “And besides you got to admit I’m the one that took you there and you got to admit I made a dandy mistake—you got to thank me, that’s one sure thing. Because I discovered her and even you get more than I said you would, because she’s older than fifteen. I found lots of scouts for other fellers’ patrols, you ask Roy Blakeley. And anyway, now you’ve got two dandy mysteries instead of one on account of her brother. So aren’t you glad I took you there?”

“We’re delighted,” said Winifred. “We’d like to make arrangements to get our mysteries wholesale from you. I suppose you charge more for antique mysteries.”

“That shows you’re crazy,” the hero shouted. “Anyway, one thing, just because they never found the robbers, that doesn’t show—anyway, just because it was over thirty years ago, that doesn’t show it isn’t a mystery even now. A mystery is a mystery until it stops being one, isn’t it?”

“What’s that?” Dora queried.

“Well that iron box is somewhere, isn’t it?” Pee-wee demanded. “And I bet she’s poor and I bet she’d like to have seven thousand dollars, gee whiz, I bet she would!”

“Well, I guess that boat went down the river again when nobody saw it, iron box and all,” said Minerva. “You can have that for *your* mystery if you want it.”

“We’ll give you the boat too,” Winnie chimed in.

“And your secret cave up the river,” said Dora. “Just leave us Miss Eleanor and we’ll be satisfied.”

“Do you want her brother too—that’s a mystery?” Pee-wee demanded. He took great relish in dividing the spoils.

“No, I think we’ll keep the brother, he was tall,” said Dora.

“And dark,” said Winifred.

“And reckless,” Dora added. “On the whole, I think we’ll keep Hamlin. You can have the tin box and the boat and the robbers. Only leave us Miss Gardiner.”

“All right, that’s a go,” Pee-wee said. You would have thought he was actually distributing booty resulting from their terrible enterprise. “Only you can’t come back and change your minds, that’s the way girls do; you can’t do that.”

“And you can have the tide too,” Dora mischievously added. “You and the tide really belong together.”

Pee-wee ignored this biting sarcasm. “And you can do whatever you want with your mystery,” he said. “And if I find the money——”

“Goodness, gracious, are you still hunting for that?” Dora asked.

Minerva emerged from a sort of reverie. Pee-wee amused her, but she seldom poked fun at him. “Oh, but wouldn’t that have been just wonderful?” she said, half musing. “If that sound of oar-locks——”

“Look!” shouted Pee-wee with such suddenness that they all started. “Look back there, down at the end of the grounds.”

They paused at the broken gateway through which they had just passed out from the neglected grounds of the old estate. In the distance a man was walking from the ramshackle landing up toward the house. They could see one end of a rowboat where it lay pulled up. The man carried something that looked like a huge grip. He paused for just a moment, glancing about him, out at the river, then up at the old-fashioned cupola on the house. Then he moved on again up toward the old mansion.

CHAPTER XIII

GIRLS WILL BE BOYS

In his excitement, Pee-wee forgot that any developments along the line of the long lost Hamlin were not in his department.

"I'll see if it's him! I'll see if it's him!" he shouted as he started back to the mansion. "I bet it is and I'll be the one to find him! You needn't wait for me if you don't want to."

He left them staring and the next time he met them face to face it was he himself who stared. But that is another matter. They did wait, for Minerva's imagination, as well as Pee-wee's, had conjured that stranger into the prodigal grandson come home at last to his lonely and reduced sister. But the vision was soon dispelled, for within half a minute from Pee-wee's disappearance around the side of the house he reappeared and shouted in a voice of thunder.

"It isn't him, it's old man Corey, the fish pedler, and his basket was covered with a black oil-cloth and it isn't a suit-case and now I know him 'cause once he took me in his boat and he knows a lot about that robbery—about how the launch didn't go back and he's going to tell me some things about it, so will you please telephone from one of your houses to my house and say if I don't get home to supper not to worry and they should save two helpings of pie for me and they should tell Roy Blakeley if they see him, that I got something to tell him so not to go to the movies." That was the last they saw or heard of the mighty leader of the Chipmunk Patrol, until the sequel of that day's anticlimax was known.

"Do you really think they'll worry if he don't go home?" Dora asked. "It must be nice and quiet there without him."

"He's simply a scream," said Winnie.

"What do you suppose he's going to do now?" Minerva asked.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Dora. "I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life as we three girls starting out to capture stolen treasure and ending all sitting around a nice, sweet, gentle little lady, and listening to her memories of long ago."

"She is better than burglars," said Minerva.

"Oh much," said Winnie. "A pair of robbers wouldn't be half so sweet; I think she's just *dear*. But oh, I would like to squelch that terrible Pee-wee. I'd like to annihilate, subdue, defeat, circumvent, circumnavigate and a few other things to him."

"I think it's just too funny," Dora said, giving way to uncontrollable mirth.

“He started out to swat crime a mighty swat and—oh, I think it’s just too excruciating! You don’t really suppose, do you, that he has the slightest idea of finding that old iron box or whatever it was? The money was probably spent ages ago. Probably the burglars died and went to heaven years ago.”

“That doesn’t make any difference to Pee-wee,” Minerva said. “And after all he did take us to that picturesque, old tumbling house and find Miss Gardiner for us.”

“He did it accidentally on purpose,” said Winnie. “It was a dandy mistake. Do you suppose she’s very poor?”

“Looks that way to me,” said Dora.

“Well then,” said the serious Minerva. “He took us there and brought us face to face with our opportunity. We can do her lots of good turns. For my part I’m perfectly satisfied with what he did and he’s welcome to his eternal mystery. We had our dream of glory and now we have Miss Eleanor Gardiner.”

“With the five and the one wrong side around,” said Dora.

“Can you picture us peeking into that fearful den, wherever it is, looking for robbers?” Winnie asked. “We wanted to do something big!”

“Just the same,” said Minerva. “I would like to do something big. I think the things we do in the Girl Scouts are wishy-washy. The Boy Scouts are always doing things. The way I feel now, I’d like to take a hike a thousand miles long and get lost and be pursued by a grizzly bear or stop a train that’s going to crash over a precipice or something or other. I’m just sick of having meetings! I’m getting to loathe the thought of camp-fire bedtime stories. Look at Miss Gardiner, the things she did. She had a little streak of the devil in her.”

“Goodness me!” ejaculated Dora.

“I will—I’m going to say *devil*,” said Minerva. “I want to visit a barge or a dredge or whatever you call it, where men are playing cards and drinking rum. Didn’t Miss Gardiner want to do just that? I’m sick and tired of the pesky Boy Scouts, rescuing people and all that. If we can’t rescue a kidnapped child then I’d like to kidnap one—I’d like to do something! I’m not going to string any more beads for Indian suits.—But I do just love Miss Gardiner.”

“Pee-wee is the cause of your downfall,” said Dora. “Now you’ve got to do something *big*.”

“I’d just like to do *him*!” said Winifred, giving a demonstration of a vigorous shake.

“That wouldn’t be doing anything very big,” Dora laughed.

“I suppose he’ll be going up to that old Temple Camp pretty soon, his wonders to perform,” Minerva said.

“I tell you what let’s do on the way home,” said Dora. “Of course, it won’t be like tracking burglars or finding stolen treasure or anything like that——”

"I don't care, I want to do something wild," said Winnie; "I want to get lost or something. Couldn't we get on the wrong street and almost starve?"

"There are candy stores and bakeries all over," Minerva said hopelessly. "We'd end by buying some chocolate bonbons. I wish we could get on some dark road and meet a rat."

"Oh horrors!" said Winnie with a shudder.

"Now listen," Dora finally succeeded in saying. "Let's turn into County Place and visit the ruins of the court-house—now listen, don't interrupt—and maybe we can find that autograph album——"

"Such a wild adventure!" said Minerva. "Girl Scouts find an autograph album—heroic rescue of an autograph album! Recovered at the peril of their lives!"

"Well, you can laugh," said Dora, "but you're the very one that wants to do something for Miss Gardiner. You can see how she just lives in the past; she lives on fond memories."

"I should think she'd be frightfully hungry," Winifred laughed.

"Oh, all right," said Dora, "go on talking nonsense, both of you. I thought you wanted to be Girl Scouts."

"We want to be Boy Scouts," said Winnie.

"Well," Dora persisted, "I think that if we can just find that old autograph album with all those old names in it and take it to Miss Gardiner, she'll be perfectly delighted; it will just call up the past to her—I talk like a book, don't I? Anyway, what do you say?—let's do it."

"While Harris the Chipmunk hunts for an iron chest with seven thousand dollars——"

"Bucks, not dollars," suggested Winifred.

"Well, buckarinoes then," Dora said. "And a tall chance he has of finding it; he has a better chance of being struck by lightning."

"Probably he knows a way of being struck by lightning," Minerva said. "I suppose girls used to think the world of their autograph albums; I'm sure I don't care two snaps about one."

"That's because you have no sentiment," said Dora. "I just bet you Miss Gardiner would be just tickled to death to see that old album again and read all those old names and verses again."

"When you get married and live upstairs

Don't get haughty and put on airs.

Your true friend,

Sally Sweetmeats.

"But just the same I bet she'd like to see it again and I think it would be perfectly scrumptuous to find it and take it to her. And I'd call that scoutish, I

don't care what you call it. And we stand just as much chance of finding it as Pee-wee did of finding that perfectly lovely old newspaper."

"All right, let's do it," said Minerva; "it *would* be nice. I can just picture her face when we hand it to her."

"It's settled then," said Dora.

"You mean it's a go," said Winifred. "Here's where we step out."

"Well, I think we'd better step up," said Minerva, "it's getting late."

"What do we care?" Dora said, her enthusiasm mounting. "I'd much rather visit that place in the pitch dark."

"You're crazy," said Minerva.

"That's what Pee-wee said," laughed Dora.

CHAPTER XIV

POP COREY

As for Pee-wee, he had deserted his girl scout followers with a clear conscience. Not with a clear conscience only, but with a brain overflowing with new plans. With his last heroic command that they save him a second helping of pie after their desperate adventure, he put them out of his mind entirely.

He felt that he had more than kept his promise to them. He had admitted them to collaboration in an enterprise brimming with peril and had given them more than value received for their trustful allegiance. He had not taken them to his mysterious cave along the river nor made them participants in a skillful and daring capture. He had not led them to Police Headquarters to reveal the whereabouts of a band of outlaws. But had he not supplied two “mysteries,” even if he had not solved any? He had given them full and heaping measure. Surely a “mystery” thirty years old was better than just a common-place, present day mystery. And had he not thrown in the lost brother, the tall, dark reckless Hamlin Gardiner? He had not exactly thrown him in for he did not have him to throw in. But he had thrown in the *missing* brother—he had thrown in another mystery, no extra charge. He had presented Miss Eleanor Gardiner to the Girl Scouts, a fine suitable gift to the local Girl Scout organization. They could make a nice bedspread for her if they cared to.

As for the hero’s own plans, they did not include the girls; those plans were far too aspiring and adventurous for female cooperation. Exactly what Pee-wee might have done if he had not encountered old man Corey it would be futile to consider. He did encounter old man Corey, the fish pedler. He encountered him in the course of one of the dandiest mistakes he ever made. He thought old man Corey was the prodigal son returning. When he met him face to face, he saw it was old man Corey and he said, “Gee whiz, I thought you were somebody else, but you’re not, that’s one sure thing.” Old man Corey admitted that he was not.

It was just when Pop Corey was emerging from the kitchen of the house (which was on the side fronting on the river) that Pee-wee accosted him. Everybody knew Pop Corey, and Pee-wee in particular knew him. There wasn’t a traffic cop, or a lunch wagon proprietor, or a railroad gate-tender, or odd character for miles around whom Pee-wee didn’t know. And old man Corey was certainly an odd character. He was one of those picturesque ne’er-do-wells who are found in country districts, remnants of the race of hermits,

who prefer to live in remote places by themselves and to earn their livings in hand-to-mouth fashion.

Pop Corey lived in a dilapidated little shack close to the river, half a mile or so below the drawbridge and he caught and sold crabs in seasons when the crabs were running. He was always building a rowboat, and whenever he finished one, he would manage to sell it; then he would set to work on another one. Sometimes, when he was lucky, he caught perch and sold them. He did not peddle, he had regular customers. His shanty was on the edge of the meadows which border the river down that way and he must have been pretty tough or the mosquitoes would have eaten him up long before he reached his present age of eighty-one. He was a Civil War veteran and had an American flag floating on a long pole above his little house.

“Do you want me to row home with you?” Pee-wee asked. “Then I can cut across on the path across the meadows and go home on the bus. I’d have to hike home from here.”

“F your a mind ter,” said old man Corey. “Yer visitin’ with the old Missie?” He called Miss Gardiner the old Missie, because she seemed old, though she was many years younger than he.

“I found an old newspaper that came out of the corner-stone of the court-house,” Pee-wee said, as they rowed down the river. “Gee, it was all about a robbery at that old house a good long time ago. There was a whole lot of money stolen in an iron box only I thought it was day before yesterday and I was going to let some girls help me find it and get the thieves arrested, only now I can’t do it. Those thieves came up the river in a boat and it didn’t go down the river again so I knew where it was, but now I know it isn’t there, because I was in that place only about a week ago and it wasn’t there and it wouldn’t be anywheres around here after thirty years, you bet. So anyway, I guess it went back down the river again only nobody saw it. I bet I’ll be late for my supper, hey? Anyway, I bet those girls would have been scared if we had found the robbers—I bet they would. Gee whiz, if you’re scared of snakes you’ll be scared of robbers won’t you? One thing, anyway, a scout is supposed to be wide-awake, but I bet that bridge-tender went to sleep that night, that’s what *I* bet.”

The old man, paddling with one broken oar in the stern of his dirty old boat, contemplated Pee-wee with interest. If his sense of humor had been strong, which it was not, the sight of the little scout with his scout hat on the back of his curly head might have amused him.

“Well now, sonny,” said the old man, “yer ain’t gone ter overhaul them swabs ’cause more’n likely they’s dead and havin’ their deserts by now. But that there boat never did go back down the river again; leastways not in the flesh as the feller says. But the ghost of it went back down, or my name ain’t

Lef Corey.”

Whether it was the mention of desserts or the mention of ghosts which caused Pee-wee to sit up and take notice cannot safely be averred, but he sat up, mouth gaping, eyes staring.

“Yes sir, sonny,” said the old man, “if yer want ter know all ’bout that there queer business you come to the right place ’cause it was me and no other as shot straight at that devil’s launch and never hit nothin’. Now jes’ suppose you wuz settin’ where you are an’ I shot right plunk at yer an’ the shot never hurt yer none. Now what would yer say? Would yer say yer wuz a ghost?”

“Oh boy!” said Pee-wee with fearful interest.

“Well, sonny, I’ll tell yer how it wuz ’long as you wuz figgerin’ on it happenin’ jus’ the other day. Le’s se, that wuz forty—on, ’bout thirty year back, wuzn’ it?”

“And gee whiz, I was going to try to get that iron box, I was,” Pee-wee said.

The old man cocked his head ruminatively, “Well now,” said he, “mebbe yer can. Then again, more like you couldn’.”

At this Pee-wee sat up, staring, and his gaping astonishment continued as the old man talked.

“Le’s see, ’twuz just about—mebbe a little after ten o’clock—Haley Austin who wuz bridge-tender, he comes down to my shack all fussed up. He comes over the bridge and down the edge of the meadows along the river. Me’n him used ter play cards nights once in a while. Now, sonny, I’m a goin’ to tell yer jus’ what happened that night and what I think, an’ that thinkin’ is jus’ as good now as it were then. I never said no word of it ter Haley ’cause he wuz a grabbin’, selfish, one legged ole skinflint, that’s what he wuz. And I ain’t never said a word of it ter nobody till now. An’ these here folks ’round here is a lot of dumb fools. Haley, he’s dead’n gone huntin’ after his other leg I reckon, an’ the ole squire he’s pokin’ roun’ in hell fer his pesky ole iron box what he hadn’t oughter never kept ter home, I says.”

They had come to the point along the river where the old man’s shanty stood. Pee-wee was so engrossed that he did not know they were in among the swamp grass till a long wisp of it caught him in the face. A startled bird arose out of the marsh with much noisy fluttering and flew away.

From this point a path of trodden ashes led to the shanty a few yards distant. And from the shanty a single row of rotten boards, their supports long sunken in the oozy meadows, led up into the world of men where you could get a bus for Bridgeboro. At high tide there are few places in the world so cosy and sequestered and still as these little openings made in the yielding marsh growth by some obtrusive rowboat.

“Go on,” said Pee-wee, “tell me the rest. What do you mean, even now

maybe I could find it?"

CHAPTER XV THE RIVER SPEAKS

“Haley Austin, he come down here ter my shack,” the old man continued, “and he says there wuz two swabs went up the river in a launch. He says they wuz fer gettin’ by without no one seein’ ’em; he says they wuz waitin’ fer the tide ter drop some, so’s they could go under the bridge. He says it looked suspicious like. ‘They’ll go right under comin’ back,’ he says, ‘’cause the tide’ll be still lower.’ I says to him we’d watch fer ’em. Thinks I when they comes back we’ll give ’em a call, ask ’em fer some matches or suthen or other and see how they acts.

“So we settles down ter playin’ poker, me and him, and we keeps our ears open. The water was gettin’ lower and lower all the time so a boat comin’ down would be forced over toward this here shore where the channel runs. I done enough of sentinel duty in my time ter know what I sees and what I don’t see. *And that boat never come back down the river that night.* An’ it never come down the next day, nor any other day nor any other night; it jus’ never came back down the river again. And it wuzn’ up the river neither; there ain’t no *up the river* when you get upstream a piece or so. Why yer can search it like yer can search a house.”

“Gee whiz, I know you can,” said Pee-wee “There’s only one place where it could have gone and nobody knows about that place only just a few of us fellows, and I was in there only a week ago. And I guess those robbers would have known about that place——”

“They never was there, sonny,” the old man interrupted. “You listen ter me and have a mite of sense which is more’n ole Squire Gardiner done when I talks to him. He says big and loud—that was him all over—he says me and Haley was drunk and never see the boat go back down the river. All right, thinks I, it wuzn’ my seven thousand dollars nohow; I jus’ leave be drunk as sober, makes no difference ter me I says. ‘You get me drunk without givin’ me no liquer, that’s like yer cheap ways.’ That’s what I says ter him. ‘All right,’ I says, ‘the boat went back down the river.’ Well then, pretty soon the nine days wonder come to an end. I wuzn’ no poorer ’cause I couldn’ be. And the squire wuz’n any more sour and pesky and miserly than ever, ’cause *he* couldn’ be.

“But all the while, sonny, somethin’ *did* happen. I never says nuthin’ about it ter nobody, ’cause what Pop Corey says don’t count.”

“Gee whiz, it counts with me!” Pee-wee fairly shouted.

“Well then, what become of the boat? Nobody knowed; it wuz a nine days’

wonder. But I knowed.”

Pee-wee stared.

“Long about the second or third night after the robbery,” old Corey continued, “I wuz settin’ in front of my shanty here, smokin’. There wuz an ooze pond, as we used to call ’em, over ter the left there, ’bout twelve or so foot in from the shore; one of them—pockets some folks calls ’em—where the water don’t go out as fast as it comes in; takes its time drainin’. No yer needn’ look, ’tain’t there no more.

“Well, the frogs wuz croakin’ in that place like’s if they wuz havin’ a circus. I was throwin’ hunks of driftwood over there ter stop ’em. But they starts right up again every time. Drownin’ Dans we used ter call ’em, ’cause that’s jus’ the kind of gasp a person gives when he goes down the last time. Well, I guess there wuz a thousand of ’em. All of a sudden a big chunk of wood I throws goes kersplash inter the water and jus’ that very minute there wuz two stary eyes lookin’ straight at me outer that ooze pond. I couldn’ see nothin’ but jus’ them two eyes.”

“What—what was it?” Pee-wee all but gasped. “*Gee whiz*, what did you do?”

“I’m tellin’ yer,” the old man smiled. “Well, all I seed wuz jus’ them two eyes—starin’; they wuz starin’ plunk, straight at me; they wuz in a head, and that there head wuz right in the middle of a little patch of light.”

“Ooooh *booooy!*” said Pee-wee, his eyes wide, his whole small body fairly writhing with eagerness. “Go on, go on.”

“Well now, what do *you* say?” the old man queried. “You’re one of them scout kids, so all creation smart.”

“Was it a ghost?” Pee-wee asked with bated breath.

“Well now, you’re some fine kind of a Boy Scout,” the old man taunted. “Ghost, nah! Don’t they learn yer how ter put two and two tergether in them camps?”

This was the second assault in one day on Pee-wee’s glory as a scout. He might have detected a discrepancy in his precious newspaper article if he had been observant of the tides, as certainly a scout living near a river should be. His shining glory had been smeared by a sweet little lady, far beyond the scouting age. And now here was this keen old man laughing at his suggestion of a ghost.

“Well, sonny,” said old Corey, “I jus’ goes inside and pulls on my long rubber boots and I say ter myself I says, ‘Well, there’s one of them swabs like enough, drowned and come down the river on the tide,’ ’cause you see, sonny, if that there launch didn’ never go back downstream, and wasn’ upstream, why then there wuz ony one other place fer it ter be, and that wuz at the bottom of the stream. Now yer never thought of that, did yer?”

Pee-wee gaped, then emitted the longest *gee whiz* in the history of his young career. It was long enough to go over into the next chapter, occupy the whole of it, and overlap into the chapter following. We will not attempt to set it down, but begin the next chapter with what he said immediately afterwards.

CHAPTER XVI THROUGH POP COREY'S EYES

"I—never—thought—about—that!" ejaculated Pee-wee.

"Nor anybody else nuther," said old Corey. "None of yez got enough sense ter keep a toll-gate. Yer highferlutin', wild west youngsters, yer ain't got no more sense than folks had thirty year back. I thought what mightier happened even before I see that dead man. But when I see him bobbin' there, I says, 'That's where the boat went, dead sure—down ter the bottom and he's come up in the dark like the thief he wuz and he's gone down with the tide and let him go; such like is no good dead or alive.'"

There followed a pause; Pee-wee could not speak; the ghastly picture of that dead man bobbing in the old ooze pond, gripped him and held him in silent awe. Instinctively he glanced around to where he thought the old tide puddle had been, but there was no sign of it. It was a thing of the past, like the old Gardiner robbery.

"Do you mean the boat sank right around here?" he finally asked.

"How do *I* know where it sunk?" old Corey said. "But wherever it sunk leastways one of them robbers went down along with it. I goes over and hauls him around, he wuz heavy as a load of coal, and his old head bobs this way and that and he looks at me funny jus' if he wuz sayin' I should go ahead, he wouldn' care. I turns him over, but there weren't nuthin' to lay him on, ony oozy meadow grass, but I fetches a bunch o' skeleton keys outer his pocket an' I says, 'That's you all right my rogue, or leastways one of yez.' And I jus' give him a shove and off he goes inter the river rollin' jus' awash, he was so loggy. I see how his legs wuz messed up in some busted steerin' rope an' I says 'So yer got ketched after all, huh?'"

For the moment, Pee-wee could not rid his mind of the gruesome picture of that drowned man rolling heavily out of the little, still refuge into which it had drifted and down on the hurrying tide. To where? It seemed odd that he should seek a hiding place, he and his telltale keys, after he was dead. Even across that span of thirty years, Pee-wee could see those glassy eyes fixed upon him. Not for worlds would *he* have thrust his hand down into the wet pocket of that horrid apparition. Old man Corey seemed almost supernatural in his ghoulish sufficiency.

And when the old man spoke, for a moment his flinty old voice sounded to Pee-wee as if it came out of another world. He sat up with a start, then listened.

"So yer see she just sunk an' nobody had the sense to think about that. But

I dunno where, and I didn' care a gosh darned continental."

"Maybe the other one got away with the money," Pee-wee suggested. "Maybe he even killed the one you found, maybe. That's the way pirates used to do."

"Mebbe," said old Corey, in a way to imply it was all the same to him. "But I kinder thinks mebbe they both on 'em got drowned. Least-ways, I don't see how anybody could swim with an iron box more'n a foot long. So whatever become of his pal, I says that there box is some'ers on the bottom of the river. Now there yer got the whole story, what's knowed and what ain't, as the feller says. And yer oughter had sense enough ter know it didn't all happen a couple of nights ago 'cause the tide was dead low at ten o'clock. Yer ain't got no more sense in yer head than folks had thirty year ago. Gol tarnation, I do'know what folks has heads fer! There ain't nuthin' into 'em. So there's yer mysterious mystery knocked in the head fer yer an' I've shot better brains out, back in sixty-two, than them *deetectives* had thirty year back or the Boy Scouts got terday, I did. Why a eel's got more sense 'en most folks! Now yer better run along 'en ketch yer bus an' git home 'fore yer daddy starts huntin' fer yer ter give yer a good wol-lopin'."

Old man Corey's contemptuous commentary on his fellow man left Pee-wee somewhat flabbergasted. He was a fine old cynic, Pop Corey, looking down from his lonely empire on the marshes, on all the fussing, futile activities of the world. Even its lesser laws did not trouble him greatly.

"Didn't you tell anybody?" Pee-wee asked. "Didn't you go and tell Squire Gardiner?"

"He had me drunk by his way of it, so I stays drunk. I jus' gives the ole thing I see a good kick and starts it out inter the river an' away he goes, rollin' and half floatin' and half sinkin'. An' I says the ony thing this here river's got into it fer me is eels and fish and leaves the folk up in Bridgeboro go hang. In two days I forgot all about it. Now, sonny, yer better be gittin' home."

Poor Pee-wee could exploit his glory to the three girls, but he was no match for this terrible old man of the river, whose scorn was so heroic that he had never revealed the probable, or at least possible resting place of that iron box somewhere at the bottom of that familiar stream. It seemed that the head Chipmunk had received two resounding whacks that day, one from a sweet, little old lady (she seemed old to him) and one from a very aged veteran who regarded him and everybody else with lusty contempt.

Yet the Boy Scout in him arose to the surface. "If you find a dead body you got to tell the authorities," he said; "gee whiz, you got to do that. And you had a right to do a good turn to Squire Gardiner too, you did, so maybe he could get his money back, geeeee whiz, anyway, that's what you ought to have done. You left that iron box—maybe, you don't know—you left it in the bottom of

the river.”

“I done that so the Boy Scouts could go get it,” said the old man with telling irony. “I hears how they goes an’ fetches home babies what was kidnapped, an’ dives an’ saves folks from gettin’ drowned an’ all, so I says they’s the ones fer this job—’specially ’cause they knows all about the tides.”

“That shows how much sense you haven’t got!” Pee-wee thundered. “Because—that shows—because there weren’t any Boy Scouts then. Anyway, if they were they were only getting started and—and—they didn’t get to be heroes yet, and anyway, I bet you didn’t know anything about them then, I bet you didn’t—so that shows. And anyway, besides, you broke the law, you did _____”

“I never touched no law; how could I bust it?” said the old man.

“Do you call that an argument!” Pee-wee fairly screamed.

CHAPTER XVII

CHIEF OF STAFF

At least this much may be said for Pee-wee's activities; he had ascertained that the metal box of his precious newspaper article was very likely to be even still at the bottom of the river. He had learned of this probability from an old man who had been too proud and independent (and lawless if you will) to report what he had seen until the curly-headed little scout had aroused him to reminiscence.

Perhaps if old Squire Gardiner had gone around with Pee-wee's particular kind of smile, making friends instead of enemies, the whole neighborhood might have turned out in force thirty years before, dragging the river for his stolen treasure. And the fate of the boat might have become known.

Our hero was now doubly glad that he had got rid of the girls. For one thing, girls cannot (he was now very decided about this) hunt for sunken treasure. Even the convenient elimination of the scoundrels by good old Father Time did not relieve the enterprise of its perils. But his conscience was clear. Had he not presented Miss Eleanor Gardiner to the girls as a sort of consolation prize? Miss Eleanor and her tall, dark, reckless brother? He was not a very tangible gift, to be sure (he might be dead these many years), but he was a dandy mystery. The girls had fared very well at Pee-wee's hands (considering how they had dimmed his glory with ridicule) and now he was going to forget them and get down to business. He did not know just where.

Moreover, girls tell, and Pee-wee wanted this thing kept a secret. He did not think he was under any obligation to reveal what old Pop Corey had contemptuously neglected to tell thirty years ago. That iron box was somewhere at the bottom of the river and he was going to find it. He was going to restore it to Miss Eleanor Gardiner. He did not know exactly how he was going to do this. He was not willing to consider the possibility of the other burglar getting away safely with his booty. He was going to find the treasure.

Of course, old man Corey wouldn't say anything more to anybody, Pee-wee knew that. The thing wasn't of enough importance to him. Everything was all right for full speed ahead, the girls were out of it, nobody knew anything about it, and there was the old box somewhere. But where? Pee-wee ate three helpings of pie at his belated supper that evening to fortify himself for his great, adventurous quest. He felt like one of the crew in Treasure Island. Then he emerged onto the porch munching a cooky, a holdover from his sumptuous repast. With this cooky held firmly between his teeth (in lieu of a murderous

dirk) he looked, perhaps, not unlike a pirate of old on desperate venture bent.

Of course he was going to take the scouts into his confidence. A scout is a brother to every other scout and when the First Bridgeboro Troop, Ravens, Silver Foxes, Elks, and Chipmunks got down to business, something would surely happen. But Pee-wee was going to be the boss of it. He was going to lead the boy scouts to glory the same as he had led the three girls scouts to glory. He was the grand distributor of glory—and mysteries.

It must be confessed that the enterprise seemed at least plausible. The fact that the boat never returned down the river, together with the fact that a drowned man with skeleton keys in his pocket had been seen, justified the inference that the boat had sunk. What other explanation was there? It had probably not gone north of the old Gardiner mansion. And since it had not returned south as far as the bridge it seemed a likely deduction that from some cause or other, unknown, it had sunk in the river between these two points. That would give the searchers something less than a mile of river to cover in their operations. The reader would do well at this point to glance at the rough sketch of the Bridgeboro River here included.

The Bridgeboro River, like Pee-wee himself, was small, but interesting. North of the drawbridge it was narrow, in places not more than fifteen feet across. South of the bridge it widened out toward the bay, but its lower reaches do not concern us. Between the Gardiner mansion and the bridge (the scene of Pee-wee's immortal quest) the river was, of course, lower at ebb tide, but not much narrower since it flowed between almost precipitous banks which fell away into meadowland farther down in the domain of old Pop Corey.

To be sure, the search would be like that for a needle in a haystack, but there was one consideration which might simplify it and make it something better than hopeless. It was a sunken boat that Pee-wee was to locate, not simply a sunken box. The box, if in the river at all, would be in or near the boat. It was this fairly hopeful consideration which removed Pee-wee's enterprise from the realm of absurdity and imparted to it a minimum chance of success. And it was just this delightfully faint prospect of success which aroused the adventurous spirit of Brent Gaylong.

Brent was a "big feller" hovering between the scout age and the scoutmaster age. He was, at the time, a sort of assistant scoutmaster in the troop. He was a particular friend of Tom Slade and all the scouts liked him immensely though Pee-wee looked a little askance at him because he had not always the proper reverence for Pee-wee's enterprises. He had a humorous squint which always jarred and sometimes enraged the frowning Chipmunk.

Still Pee-wee went to him because (to put it plainly) he did not know how to begin, and he desired the advice and cooperation of a "big feller." He might have accosted Tom Slade in this tremendous matter, but Tom was rushing back

and forth between Bridgeboro and Temple Camp, engrossed with the preparatory labors of the camping season and he feared that an appeal to the young camp assistant would secure him no more than one of those rough, familiar touslings of his curly hair. So he went to Brent with his treasure. I say *with his treasure* because, so far as Pee-wee was concerned he actually had it. All that remained was the labor of bringing it home. But he did not know exactly how he was going to do this.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOOD OLD BRENT

The Gaylongs did not care much about treasure since they already had some. But they adored Pee-wee. When he dropped in they did not go to the movies. "You can get thirty cents worth just staying at home," Georgia Gaylong said.

"I got something important I want to tell him," he announced to Georgia as he stood framed in the open door. "It's a mystery—it ain't exactly a mystery, but it's something like one, only better."

"Couldn't you tell me?" Georgia ventured.

"I wouldn't tell any girls," the hero declared with unblushing frankness. "Even I didn't tell my own troop yet, so if I didn't tell them, gee whiz, you bet I wouldn't tell girls. I did a good turn to some Girl Scouts—I gave them a dandy mystery, and an old lady too—and all they could do was laugh. Laughing isn't doing things, that's one sure thing. Anyway, this thing that I'm going to tell Brent about is the kind of a thing girls couldn't do."

"I think you're too hard on us girls," Georgia said.

"Gee whiz, they can do things that you do indoors all right, anyway, I'll say that much," said the hero magnanimously. "But anyway, they giggle a lot, and they're no good in things that have something to do with killing and all that." He included the ghastly dead robber of thirty years before as in some way a part of his present adventure. *He* had seen those glassy eyes, through the lens of old Pop Corey, and what he had seen would be too much for any girl. "I bet you're scared of dead people," he said; "especially if they have their eyes open. I bet you're scared of caterpillars too."

"Horrors!" said Georgia. "Dead people and caterpillars—with their eyes open——"

"Not the caterpillars," Pee-wee said. "Because anyway, caterpillars *can't* shut their eyes—that shows how much you don't know. They haven't got any eyelids; they can't even wink. You got to know those things when you're a scout."

The thought of a caterpillar winking was too much for Georgia; she had not a proper respect for scouting and when her brother came sprawling down the stairs, he found her the victim of hysterical mirth with Pee-wee scowling darkly while he vainly strove to drive home another tidbit of scout wisdom.

"Yes, and you laugh, but I bet you don't know that some kind of big caterpillars have eyeglasses that they wear, kind of gauze like——"

But this was as far as he was able to proceed. Georgia Gaylong, having the family failing of humor, fell backwards into a large chair screaming uncontrollably. "Oh, I think he's just a sc—a sc—a sc——"

"Scout," thundered Pee-wee; "you can't even say it."

"A sc—a scream!" Georgia managed to emit as she kicked her legs in unmaidenly joy.

"That shows how you got to not blame me, because I don't let girls into things," Pee-wee confided to Brent, during the final spasms of his sister's hilarious attack. "Now you see all they can do is laugh at zoology that scouts got to know about. That's all they're good for, just to giggle—at zoology and things."

"They'd even giggle at physiology," said Brent.

"Geeeee whiz, they'd even giggle at—at—at geology—about rocks and Indian relics and everything," said Pee-wee.

"That's what they need, a few rocks accurately aimed with the sure aim of the scout," said Brent.

"I'll say so!" Pee-wee agreed vehemently.

Brent was long and lanky and gave the impression of not knowing what to do with his legs. He was forever sprawling them over the adjacent furniture, not together, but separately; when he sat at ease he sprawled in every direction and looked not unlike a devil fish. He wore steel spectacles which gave him something of a professor air and these had a way of descending to the middle of his long nose, like Pee-wee's stockings on his diminutive legs, and this posture of his spectacles added to his youngish-professor look a certain piquant aspect of humorous severity which had made him popular with all the boys.

If he had worn large horn spectacles all the charm would have been lost. How such a young fellow ever happened to wear these old-fashioned spectacles it would be hard to say. But they certainly helped to radiate Brent's drawling humor.

Physically Brent was lazy, and this gave piquancy to his professed love of adventure. The very thought of his doing anything strenuous and wild was enough to arouse laughter. But he claimed that he was bored by the workaday world and longed to escape from prison. "He can't even get into one," Pee-wee had once said. And Brent had answered, "You shouldn't laugh, I'm more to be pitied than blamed." He consistently disregarded Mr. Ellsworth's advice that he take exercise, saying that he wasn't going to take anything that didn't belong to him. With such high principles, he was not in much danger of getting into prison.

Sprawling on a wicker chair on the porch and overflowing onto the rail as well as the swing seat, he listened to the unabridged narrative of Pee-wee's recent activities.

“Don’t you think I did all right to cut those girls out?” the leader of the Chipmunks asked in conclusion. He was a stickler for principle, this sturdy little scout, and an unpleasant feeling that he had been a deserter was insinuating itself into his mind. “Because anyway, now you see what they’re like and anyway, didn’t I take them to Miss Gardiner and they’re going to be friends with her and maybe they’ll knit her a sweater, hey, and besides, anyway, suppose we should be pulling up that iron chest and we were in a boat and they were with us and all of a sudden when they saw the chest they started jumping up and down and hollerin’, ‘*Oh goody!*’ (He paused for air.) Wouldn’t that upset the boat, especially if they started laughing crazy like your sister?”

“Yes, but you should have killed those three girls,” Brent said; “they may talk. Dead girls tell no tales. They giggle no giggles either. You should have killed them, but it’s too late now. Let them knit their sweater.”

“Now you’re going to talk crazy,” Pee-wee said; “and if you do, I’ll go and get Tom Slade. Are you going to be serious or not? Now you can see there’s a box with a lot of money in it in the bottom of the river, can’t you?”

“I can’t see it, but I know it’s there,” said Brent. “Something tells me that it’s there——”

“Didn’t I tell you!” shouted Pee-wee.

“As I understand it,” said Brent, “we will restore the stolen box to Miss Gardiner just as the three girls are about to proffer the knitted sweater. We will sweep them aside and advancing, say, ‘Hah, hah! The Boy Scouts have found your buried treasure. Now giggle if thou wouldst’—or something like that.”

“Will you have some sense!” Pee-wee fairly screamed.

“All right, Sir Harris,” said Brent. “I’m for the sunken chest; whether it’s there or not, I’m for searching for it. But don’t you think a full four patrol troop is too many boys for the enterprise? Thirty-two scouts! How are we going to manage them all? What are we going to do with the giants in your patrol? They’ll be falling into the water and getting drowned and interfering with the work.

“Now I have a suggestion. The troop is going up to camp in a week or so. We’ll just ask five or six scouts to stay behind for a few days, we’ll pass them the word what it’s all about, and after the bunch has gone, we’ll get busy. About the only thing I can think of to do is to drag the river, but we’ll do that and see if we get anything in the way of a comeback. If we don’t get any gold maybe we’ll get some gold-fish. After we have dragged the river, we’ll see what we do next. I think we stand at least one chance in ten——”

“We stand more than that! We stand one in a hundred!” Pee-wee shouted.

CHAPTER XIX

WARDE'S GOOD TURN

That was a big scoop, the recruiting of Brent Gaylong. And it reflected Pee-wee's foresight and wisdom more than you suppose. For with Brent along, no obstreperous parents would withdraw their sons from the mysterious activities at the river. A "big feller" was required for diplomatic as well as other reasons.

Pee-wee was delighted. He felt that when he had stumbled at the scene of the court-house fire, he had made a "dandy kerflop." It was, in a sense, his initial descent in quest of the treasure chest. He was glad that he had afforded Minerva and her friends a graceful exit. This was going to be much better than going up the river in search of the living robbers.

"Sure, and I tell you what let's do," he said, enthusiastically acceding to Brent's suggestion. "We'll take the scouts in my patrol on account of me being the leader of it only, one thing, we'll ask Warde Hollister, hey? Even if he is in the Silver Foxes, we'll ask him because he's a dandy swimmer and he can dive and everything—even he can eat a cracker under the water, that fellow can. And he's kind of a big fellow too. But, gee whiz, not Roy Blakeley—no sireeeee! He's too much of a jollier and he's always acting crazy. Only just Warde from that patrol, hey, and I'll tell you why?"

"You told me already," Brent said.

"I got another reason," Pee-wee vociferated. "You got to do good turns, haven't you?"

"Absolutely," said Brent.

"That comes first. Gee whiz, if we're going to do a great big good turn for Miss Gardiner and maybe save her from going to the poorhouse, we got to do little ones too, haven't we? That's one thing sure. And I got to do a good turn to Warde Hollister, even if he is a Silver Fox——"

"We should pity, not condemn him," said Brent.

"Sure we should, because he saved my life up at Temple Camp, that's why we should pity him——"

Brent burst out laughing.

"Because he can't help being a Silver Fox," Pee-wee concluded.

"All right," said Brent, "we'll just have your patrol and Warde Hollister——"

"Because I got to do him a good turn," said Pee-wee.

"And nobody else," said Brent. "That just makes ten scouts. We'll each get

something less than a thousand dollars—probably a good deal less—but we’ll be out in the fresh air. When we’re under the water.”

“We’re going to give that box to Miss Gardiner without opening it,” Pee-wee said.

“Oh yes, so we are. Just as she’s about to go to the poorhouse,” said Brent.

“So I’ll ask Warde, hey?” said Pee-wee.

I do not know how it got about among the members of the troop that something big was under way. They were not so successful as to find out what it was and when they asked Brent, “Hey go on, will you tell us?” he only glared at them over the top of his spectacles and said, “I told you, we’re going to plant some spaghetti near the river and see if we can raise it. It has never been successfully grown outside of Italy. We hope you have a pleasant trip to Temple Camp; we expect to be up later.”

This was even before Pee-wee spoke to Warde. “I’m going to let you into it,” he said, “only don’t tell anybody. I wasn’t going to have anybody outside my patrol only I got to do you a good turn and I didn’t count the two gumdrops I gave you. We’re not going to plant spaghetti; we’re going to hunt for an iron box that’s got seven thousand dollars in it. So will you stay and help us? Maybe you might even get your picture in the Pathé News, maybe you might.”

Far be it from me to say that any arm longer than Warde’s was responsible for the terrible thing that presently happened. I have no reason to think that Roy Blakeley, the laughing demon of the troop and official leader of the Silver Fox Patrol, *knew* of the good turn which Pee-wee owed Warde. I only know what happened.

“Sure, I’ll stay,” said Warde; “Temple Camp can wait. If it can’t, let it go away. We’ll start a new kind of a hike after it.” That sounded like a Silver Fox, polluted by the levity of Roy Blakeley.

“Are you going to act crazy?” Pee-wee demanded.

“Not so you’d notice it, kid,” said Warde. “My middle name is Service. Only I’m in trouble. Brick and Slick Warner” (these were the Warner twins, Silver Foxes) “took me to the circus in New York and I want to do them a good turn before I go to camp; I made a resolution I would.”

“Did you cross your heart?” Pee-wee demanded. “Because if you did you’ve got to do it.”

“That’s just the trouble,” said Warde.

“All right,” said Pee-wee, “you can bring Slick and Brick with you, but I wasn’t going to ask any of your patrol except you. Only, gee whiz, you got to do a good turn, that’s one sure thing. Let’s go up and tell them, hey?”

They tracked Brick and Slick to Bennett’s Fresh Confectionery, whither they were reported to have gone with their patrol colleague, Will Dawson. The distinguished Chipmunk sat along the soda counter with the four Silver Foxes

and partook of a scout smash. The reader is not to infer that this was a blow administered to our hero by another scout. It was an ingenious concoction of the shrewd proprietor to catch the scout patronage and consisted of two spheres of ice cream with a gory substance dripping over them on top of which was half of a banana sliced lengthways, on the top of which was the kernel of a nut, on the top of which again perched a maraschino cherry. It was a sort of edible skyscraper. Pee-wee made a masterly attack upon this; he was the equal of any Silver Fox at this sort of game even if he was not up to those roisterers in duplicity and guile.

“Oh boy, would we like to join?” enthused Slick Warner. “Sure we would. There’s never anything doing up at Temple Camp the first week or so; they have us painting rowboats and taking down the winter shutters and everything.”

“How about me?” asked his red-headed brother, Brick.

“Sure, you too,” said Pee-wee. “On account of you being twins it means both of you.”

“Only Will Dawson, he’s visiting us on account of his mother and father being in Europe,” said Slick. “Jiminies, where we go, he’s got to go.”



PEE-WEE WAS SO EXCITED THAT A SPOONFUL OF SMASH
WAS DETOURED DOWN WARDE'S NECK.

Will Dawson sat silently, consuming his pineapple soda. A becoming coyness characterized his intent demeanor; he thought only of his soda. If there was a mischievously calculating Silver Fox look in his eye, Pee-wee did not see it.

“Are you staynig at Warner’s?” the head Chipmunk craned his neck to ask him.

“Sure, I am,” said Will.

Pee-wee paused to consider, taking a huge spoonful of his scout smash. If only ten scouts were to embark upon his great enterprise, then indeed it seemed that the Chipmunk contingent was diminishing as rapidly as the delectable edible in front of Pee-wee. They were melting away. At this point he thought it advisable to stem this swelling torrent of Silver Foxes.

“Just because you’re visiting there, that doesn’t matter,” he said, a dripping spoonful poised in air. “Gee whiz, that shows how much you know about things, because anyway, suppose Brick and Slick should get a licking from their father, does that mean Will Dawson has to get one too, just because he’s visiting there? *Geeee whiz!*”

“Sure it does,” said Slick. “That’s a scout rule; united we stand, divided we sprawl.”

“You learned that from Roy Blakeley!” Pee-wee roared along the line of scouts. “You’re crazy.”

“We may be crazy, but we know a scout’s duty,” said Brick.

Pee-wee was so excited that a spoonful of smash en route to his mouth was detoured down the neck of Warde Hollister. “I’ll leave it to Warde!” Pee-wee shouted.

Warde wriggled as the icy substance dribbled down his back. “I don’t want it,” he said.

“I mean about the argument,” Pee-wee roared. “I’ll leave it to Mr. Bennett.”

Mr. Bennett, smiling genially behind his counter, declined to take sides in such a serious matter. Will Dawson remained discreetly silent, engrossed with his soda.

“Silver Foxes they’re all the same,” Pee-wee shouted in the interval between two heaping spoonfulls.

“They’re scouts and they’re loyal,” said Slick. “They have to be hospitable _____”

“That isn’t what you call being hospitable!” Pee-wee thundered. “But anyway, I wouldn’t talk to you about it because you’re crazy like Roy Blakeley, no wonder, and he’s worse than any of you. Anyway, you can bring Will if you want to and that makes four Silver Foxes and if you start getting funny, you’ll get chased home. I don’t have to be so terribly hospital if you start getting funny!”

“Thanks, kid,” said Will Dawson, looking along the line to Pee-wee.

It was the only word that Will Dawson had said.

CHAPTER XX

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

Pee-wee was reconciled to the inclusion of Will Dawson because, as Brent pointed out, Will was the only boy in the troop who had a seine. His people were of the old Bridgeboro stock and his father remembered the good old days when shad were caught in the river.

“You see, kid,” Brent said. “I’ve been thinking of this business a good deal and it seems to me that about the only way we can start is to drag the river. I don’t want to throw any cold water on your iron chest; there’s probably enough on it already, to say nothing of mud. But I’m with you to the bitter end. This is the way I figure, Sir Harris. We’ve at least got as much sense as people who hunt for Captain Kidd’s treasure.”

“*Suuuure* we have!” enthused Pee-wee.

“Now if anything as big as a power boat sank around these parts thirty years ago, there’s a chance of some part of it, some considerable bulk still remaining—part of the hull, the engine, the funnel or something or other. And if we can get a clew to where that is, why the box may be around there too. If the box had been dropped in the river it would sink in the mud. But if it went down in the boat, why it may be in the remains of the boat yet for all we know. If we can only find out where those remains are. Savvy? People laughed at Christopher Columbus and he was smarter than we are.”

“*Suuuure* he was,” Pee-wee agreed.

“So I’m glad you took Will Dawson in. That lets out, let’s see, four of your Chipmunks; just as well, they’re only kids. Now you tell Will we want the old family seine. And you tell him and the rest of them to keep their mouths shut about what we’re going to do. We’ll just wait till the bunch goes to camp, then we’ll get busy.”

“Yes, but we don’t want any more Silver Foxes,” said Pee-wee. “Gee whiz, you know what *they’re* like—no siree! They’ll make a circus out of it. Because anyway, it’s serious, isn’t it?”

“Well,” said Brent, “we had to work through three Silver Foxes to a fourth in order to get the dragnet. We had to work up to it. Now we’ve got four Silver Foxes and they’re not as bad as the other four; things might be worse. I dare say Columbus had to take along some excess baggage to get the ships he wanted. We adventurers have our troubles.”

“As long as we don’t have to take Roy Blakeley,” said Pee-wee.

“That’s right, things might be worse,” said Brent.

Pee-wee went down to Will Dawson's home, happy in the fact that he was getting down to business. Every great venture has its trials and he praised himself that in becoming a great adventurer, he remained still a good Boy Scout. "Gee whiz, you got to do good turns, anyway," he said to himself.

At Will Dawson's there were two gateposts and Will was perched upon one of these while upon the other sat no less a personage than the famous leader of the Silver Foxes, Roy Blakeley. It seemed to Pee-wee that they were expecting him; they had an air of being ready for him. Roy was diverting himself by trying to balance a stick upon his nose and he seemed deliberately heedless of the hero who approached Will and whispered in his ear. Roy's manner seemed to say, "Go ahead, I'm busy, and minding my own business." Never before was anybody so intent upon the serious business of balancing a stick upon his nose.

"The trouble is, kid," said Will Dawson, "that seine—blame it all, my father's always getting me in trouble—that old seine belongs to several of us, Westy Martin, Dorry Benton, Hunt Manners and Roy Blakeley. They were all doing a good turn helping me clean out our attic and we dragged it out and put it in the stable and my father said, 'I guess I'll give that old seine to you kids.' That's just what he said, isn't it, Roy?"

"He said he was glad to see us do good turns," said Roy carelessly, as he still tried to balance the stick. "That's the kind of scouts the Silver Foxes are. They always stick together and help each other." He upturned his face and bent back in a supreme effort to balance the stick. He was the very picture of unconcern. His trim figure made him an appropriate ornament for the pedestal on which he sat. He might have been taken for an artistic symbol of innocent merriment. There was a kind of dancing mischief in his eyes which consorted ill with the dutiful pronouncement which he carelessly threw out. "They have to stay all separated together, no matter what they really want."

"I know what you mean!" Pee-wee thundered. He was aroused at last. "And anyway, just because you sit up there like a monkey that doesn't show you can fool me, because I know you asked Mr. Dawson to give it to you fellers just because you kind of knew I was coming around to ask for it and that's a lot of stuff especially made up about all sticking together, you think you're so smart the way you fix things just because you want to stay in Bridgeboro on account of Brent being partners with me and I have to get the whole Silver Fox Patrol wished onto me. You think you can make me think you're not to blame, but you are just the same sitting there trying to make a stick stand on your nose—do you call that looking innocent?"

Roy did not speak until he had achieved a momentary success in his balancing. Then he called across to Will, "Did you ever hear about the time Pee-wee woke up in the middle of the night and found his mouth open and he

had to get up and shut it?”

“You might as well say if I have to let the whole five of you in!” Pee-wee said in high disgust.

“A scout’s honor is to be trusted,” said Roy. “If five scouts promise to stick together, even if they don’t want to, they have to make a sacrifice and do it. I’ll even put off going to Temple Camp, that shows what kind of a——” He suddenly became engrossed in his balancing enterprise. “United we stand _____”

“I heard you say it eighteen million times!” Pee-wee screamed.

“I only said it fifteen million,” said Roy.

CHAPTER XXI

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

Pee-wee got the seine with the whole Silver Fox patrol caught in it. It was a pretty big catch. It has been alleged that the Silver Foxes managed it, but "Oh, far be it from it," as Roy said.

Probably it was just as well that things worked out that way. The Chipmunks were a miscellaneous set (a rummage sale patrol, Roy called it) and Brent might have found them hard to manage. The very next day two of them, the Liventi brothers, went away with their parents to do their musical act for a brief season at some resort. Eddie Carlo decided to go into the mountains with his mother and to Temple Camp later. Only one of that budding outfit was available for treasure hunting and that was Ben Maxwell who did remain upon the scene.

It did not make much difference to Brent who remained. He believed that in a day or two the despairing searchers would follow their companies to camp. He was always for trying out Pee-wee's schemes, because he thought it a pity that such a sturdy adventurer should be without the necessary backing.

Yet in this instance, Pee-wee's luck prevailed and something (even if not all that was hoped for) did happen within a very few days.

They began dragging the river at a point about fifty yards north of the old Gardiner mansion which stood lonely and forlorn in its dim grove, its single occupant never dreaming of the purport of the operations so near at hand. The bordering trees were reflected inverted in the clear water, the birds made a great chorus in the thickening foliage, now and then a fish jumped, startling the workers, or a twig fell from overarching boughs and started away with a kind of businesslike intentness upon the hurrying tide. The Silver Foxes, philistines though they were, were glad to be in that secluded neighborhood, in partnership with the familiar river which they loved.

Dragging a river is a thing that is easier to talk about than to do. It is slow work, subject to many snags and interruptions. But natural conditions were favorable to the work. The stream, for some distance here, was narrow though deep, and it was not a difficult matter for two groups of scouts to manage the net from opposite shores. There would have been much relish in the work if the prospect of success had been better.

To any one but Pee-wee, these strenuous efforts would have seemed a waste of time. To the Silver Foxes who were on the scene in full force, the fun of what they were doing fully justified their strenuous exertions. They had won

their place upon the scene by dubious strategy. It cannot be said that they were deeply impressed by the seriousness of the operations under way.

As for Brent, he superintended the work with a gravity which did honor to Pee-wee's most adventurous dreams. Sprawling in a rowboat in midstream, he stayed his drifting bark with a broken paddle while he directed the striving group on either shore as they dragged the sunken net southward along the river bottom. He wore a red Turkish cap with a surmounting tassel.

They worked steadily all the first morning and advanced about fifty feet. Two or three times the net encountered slight obstructions which gave a thrill to the workers. Then they would tighten and slacken the net, working it as best they could, trying to determine whether the sunken obstacle had much bulk and whether it was firm or yielding. Once a black, muddy object appeared up on the surface. It had so little buoyancy that it floated, almost submerged. Brent paddled over to it amid great excitement from the shores and looking severely at it over his spectacles, poked it with his paddle.

"Maybe it's it! Maybe it's it!" Pee-wee shouted, heedless of the fact that an iron box could not possibly float. "I'm the one that saw it first! Don't let it sink again!"

"It seems to contain a bottle," Brent said, reaching into it——

"See if there's a communication in the bottle," Pee-wee ordered.

"There's nothing but a snail in it," said Brent. "I suppose he boards there."

"Maybe it held rum, hey?" Pee-wee shouted.

"I think it held pickles or olives," said Brent. "It looks to me like a mayonnaise bottle. Do pirates use mayonnaise?"

"I don't think so," Roy called. "I think they used to use French dressing. It can't be pirates."

"Will you keep still being crazy!" Pee-wee yelled. He seemed on the point of plunging into the water for a personal, official inspection of the box. "What's inside the box?"

"I bet it's full of emptiness," said Roy. "That's probably why it sank——overloaded."

"Just like you're overloaded with nonsensical nonsense!" Pee-wee screamed. "Even if you found Captain Kidd's treasure, I bet you'd have to act crazy. I bet you don't even know about Captain Kidd, I bet."

"Who is he?" Roy asked.

"You don't even know he's dead!" Pee-wee roared.

"I didn't even know he was sick," said Roy. The box was of heavy wood, rotted and slimy. Probably it was its copper lining that held it together. Doubtless it had been used to keep fish alive in by some fisherman of former days. Logy and slimy as it was, it had a certain romance, dislodged from the embracing mud of who should say how many years, and coming slowly up

into the light of another day. Like a specter it did not stay long, but withdrew again into its unknown grave. Yet the dead thing served its purpose, for it kindled interest and even hope among the Silver Foxes who had come to amuse themselves at the expense of the hero. What would they see, Brent wondered, if they could explore the bottom of this river as one explores a street? What stories it might have to tell! Commonplace enough was that old box with nothing but a bottle in it. Yet it did seem like a ghost. Such a wondrous, conjuring thing is Time.

CHAPTER XXII

MORTAL COMBAT

They started a fire under a spreading willow and roasted frankfurters and felt less silly about the whole affair, because that trophy of the mud had shown its rolling bulk to them for just a few short moments.

“If we can get along a hundred feet this afternoon,” said Brent, “why in a couple of days we ought to be about opposite the old Gardiner place. And that’s where we can hope for some results. I only hope the kids up in town won’t hear about this and come down here. This is just about as good as camping. Treasure hunting must have been very hard in the days before thermos bottles. Can you spare another hot dog, Roy? They’re sure good cooked over a wood fire.”

Roy was always cook. Pee-wee’s culinary accomplishment was a joke (sometimes it was no joke), but Roy did know how to make bivouac suppers and hike lunches as no other scout in the troop did. And Brent looked funny enough sitting with his back against the tree, his long legs drawn up, a thermos bottle held between his knees, and a hot frankfurter in a roll held in his hand.

“Say it with eats,” said Roy, handing him another frankfurter. “Sit down on the ground, kid, and let your feet hang over, and have another frank. Do you like your hard boiled eggs soft or do you prefer them boiled in cold water? Which side do you like your bread buttered on, the inside or outside? You’re the big boss and we want to please you. The Silver Foxes aim to tease—I mean please. Now aren’t you glad you brought us with you? Don’t talk with your mouth full, but say yes with your eyes then you won’t have to stop eating, will he, Brent? Every minute counts. What’s the difference between a ham sandwich?”

It was pleasant sprawling around that fire, eating and listening to Roy as he rattled on the while he distributed the frankfurters and the miscellaneous contents of a camp basket. “We’re having fun just the same,” he said, “even if we don’t stand a very tall chance; no wonder, we haven’t got a very tall leader—here’s a couple of ginger snaps, kid. Who likes cheese? Gee, what a hungry bunch. To-morrow I’m going to make a hunter’s stew if our cook goes out tonight so I can swipe some flour. Otherwise, I’ll use Indian meal named after the Indian motorcycle—oh here’s a fig newton, I wonder how that got in here. Me for treasure hunting, that’s what I say. It’s a funny thing how you drag a river and yet it stays right where it is.”

“That’s nothing,” said Dorry Benton, one of the most silvery of the Silver

Foxes, “look at a lake, it’s completely surrounded by land. It’s like a pancake; how can you find the beginning of it?”

“Mmm, yum yum!” said Westy Martin. “Pancakes.”

“You can’t start eating one,” said Roy, “because you, don’t know where it starts—that’s logic.”

“I can start eating one,” Pee-wee shouted.

“Let’s see you do it then,” said Roy.

“There isn’t any here,” Pee-wee said.

“Well then, how can you do it?” said Roy. “A scout is supposed to be truthful, I’ll leave it to Brent. Can anybody find the beginning of a pancake? I ask you?”

“You have to be very smart,” said Warde Hollister.

“Like us,” said Roy.

“You’re all crazy,” Pee-wee shouted; “just like you always are, especially when you’re eating lunch, I’ll leave it to Ben Maxwell.”

“*Good night!*” said Roy, “he’s leaving some lunch to Ben Maxwell. I wish I had my kodak. You’re lucky, Ben.”

“I mean I leave the argument,” Pee-wee shouted.

“Take it or leave it, it’s all the same to me,” said Roy. “Will you have a jelly roll—only you have to eat the jelly first, it’s inside.”

Presently the whole jelly roll was inside—of Pee-wee.

“That’s the end of the argument,” said Roy. “But anyway, if Pee-wee’s a scout like he claims to be, I bet he can’t tell how the seeds get inside of an apple.”

“They’re already in it,” Pee-wee shouted. “Gee whiz, even you’re getting worse all the time. Now Ben Maxwell can see what you’re all like.”

“Do you call that an answer?” Roy said.

“They get in because they *are* in!” Pee-wee fairly screamed, in the interval between two bites of a frankfurter.

“All right then, how did the apple get inside of them?” Hunt Manners asked. “Roy is right, he knows all about scouting. He knows his handbook.”

“I know all about apples!” Pee-wee roared.

“That’s another thing,” said Roy. “If the handbook tells how to do feats, why do they call it the handbook? Why don’t they call it a feat-book? Why are the scout laws like crullers, I’ll leave it to Brent? Because you get a dozen of them.”

“And they’re all good,” said Westy.

“Speaking of crullers,” said Roy, “if you——”

“How about speaking of the work this afternoon?” Brent broke in. “Are we here in the interest of crullers or in the interest of sunken treasure? Give me one more frankfurter.”

"I haven't got one, here's two," said Roy. "Sure, let's talk about something or other."

"That shows you admit you haven't been talking about anything," Pee-wee thundered triumphantly. "All the time while you're talking and not saying anything, maybe an old lady is almost going to the poorhouse—a lot you care about doing something big. Even my sister says you don't know anything in your patrol, and girl's don't know anything, so that shows you don't know anything with something left over, even! Even less than not anything you know."

"Do you call that being chivelarious to girls?" Roy shot at him.

"That's got nothing to do with shivelling," Pee-wee said. "That's why you got to be chiviler—chivalry—to them, because they don't know so much. I could have had three girls help me hunt for that iron box only I don't want girls because they can't do things that have something to do with adventures."

"Explain all that," Warde encouraged.

"Well now look here, friends, Romans, countrymen," said Brent. "The girls are out of it. And if *we're* going to do something that has something to do with adventures, we'd better plan out our work a little. Have we all finished eating?"

"All except Pee-wee," said Hunt Manners.

"Who's the best swimmer and diver here?" Brent asked.

"I am," said Roy.

"I'm the one that taught him," said Warde.

"I am," said Will Dawson, "I duck for apples on Hallowe'en."

"Sure, he plunges into a book every now and then," said Roy. "The best swimmer next to myself is Westy and Dorry, and Hunt and Will, and Brick and Slick and Warde. We're all better than each other. I'm the best one of all on account of being patrol leader. I swim with my ears open. Lots of times I dived for canned salmon, didn't I, Warde? But I don't swim in fresh water, I'm afraid I'll get too fresh. Which one of us do you want, and if so, why not?"

"You're not going to take any of them!" Pee-wee shouted excitedly at Brent. "That's the way they got in with us so as to come here. One says another something and he says it about another how they got to help each other and they all stand in together and all of a sudden you have the whole crazy patrol wished onto you—geeeeeee whiz!"

"United we stand——," Roy began.

"I know what you're going to say!" Pee-wee fairly yelled at him. "You're going to say *divided we sprawl* and I heard you say it two hundred, thousand, million, billion times. And it shows what you are, what a crazy motto you have. Even my father says you're like soda water, always sparkling up and he's a doctor so he knows!"

“I’m glad I’m like a soda,” said Roy. “Tell your father many thanks, the pleasure is mine.”

“All you did so far, you started me thinking about pancakes,” said Pee-wee.

“Now he won’t be able to work,” said Roy.

CHAPTER XXIII

DAVY JONES'S LOCKER

"Well, this is my idea," said Brent.

"I invented it how we should come and drag the river," vociferated Pee-wee.

"He thinks he's Marconi and Edison," said Dorry.

"And anyway, one thing," said Pee-wee, "if there's going to be swimming and diving, Ben Maxwell is going to be the one to do it, because he's in my patrol and anyway, he's the best diver. Gee whiz, I got *one* of my patrol here anyway."

Ben Maxwell, tall, modest and with a sense of humor, smiled at his diminutive chief and winked at Roy. He was the big thing in the Chipmunk Patrol.

"He's more to be pitied than scolded," said Roy.

"Now you kids listen," said Brent. "I thought it was a pretty good joke and a pretty good pastime coming down here to do this. But I'm beginning to think maybe we'll turn up something at that—keep still, all of you. Now suppose we go to work with more plan. And this means this afternoon and to-morrow and the next day—as long as we keep it up. There are eight Silver Foxes and two Chipmunks. Suppose four of you Silver Foxes handle the net on one shore, and four on the other. Pee-wee will hang out in the boat with me."

"The lunch basket will hang out on the shore with us," said Westy Martin.

"And Ben Maxwell will get his bathing suit and put it on and stay in the boat with Pee-wee and me," said Brent.

"If the worst comes to the worst, he can jump out," said Roy.

"Now every time you fellows strike a snag that doesn't come away, you have to play the net a little you know; but if the net gets against anything that won't pull loose why instead of forcing it and tearing the net, we'll let Ben dive and see what's down there if he can. What we're aiming to do now is not to get something—a box. That's just a waste of time. We're trying to *locate the remains of an old boat*. If we can do that, then it's a question of diving and searching in earnest at that spot. I guess we'd all have to take turns then. Now I'm going to keep the boat about in the middle and I'm going to direct you fellows on the shores. When I say *easy*, you go easy. And you're supposed to tell me when you feel any resistance. Don't force things; we're just sort of groping along on the bottom, that's the idea. Let's try to get downstream as far as the big elm down there. Then we'll knock off till to-morrow."

“Right,” said Warde Hollister.

“We get you,” said Hunt Manners.

“All right, how are you going to divide; same as this morning?” Brent asked.

“I’ll go with Roy,” said Westy.

“Same here,” said Warde.

“Us too,” said Brick and Slick.

“I’ll go with Roy,” said Will Dawson.

It ended in Roy, Westy, Warde, and Dorry going together, the other four taking the opposite shore. Pee-wee, grand promoter of the enterprise, straddled the bow of the boat, his scout hat on the back of his curly head, his bare legs dangling in the water. Brent sat in the stern keeping the boat in midstream and always a few feet ahead of the workers on shore. Ben Maxwell made a fine picture of a scout in readiness for service as he sat in his blue bathing suit on the middle seat, waiting.

And however slim the prospect seemed of sensational developments, the scene had a look of determination and efficiency. And so exhilarating is work that this systematic effort that was going forward of itself insinuated a kind of hopefulness, even confidence, into the minds of the workers. Their cheery, bantering voices were a steady accompaniment of the work, and now and then some merry exchange of repartee across the water enlivened their strenuous exertions. Pee-wee’s heroic form could be seen inverted in the water; there seemed to be two Pee-wee’s (horrible thought) one of them upside down which was natural enough for a scout who so often, as they said, stood on his head and talked through his feet. Now and then his voice arose in thunderous command, seconding the orders of Brent, who seemed to enjoy himself immensely. Never before was treasure hunting superintended with such languid ease.

Occasionally some bit of rotted wood, disturbed by the passing net, arose logily, and Brent would paddle over and examine it to see if it bore any sign of coming from a boat. Such stray bits, coming to the surface as if aroused out of a long sleep, were all identified in the negative.

One was clearly a timber from an old float. Another had a rusted chain attached to it on the other end of which dangled a closed muskrat trap. Perhaps one of those creatures, crippled by those sprung jaws, had dragged away the trap along with a bit of the wooden security to which it had been fastened. There was no sign of a muskrat now, only that slimy memorial of its heroic struggle. The waterlogged remnant had only the momentary buoyancy given it by the impetus of the net. And it sank drowsily again with the weight of its rusted pendent.

Once the workers paused, and let go the net at one shore, the others hauling

it across to examine it. A myriad of slimy eels wriggled out from it and half a dozen sprightly little perch flopped free of it and into the water before it was too late. A lumbering turtle extricated itself from its muddy meshes and waddled off as if such things happened to him every day. They drew an end of the heavy net back across the stream and resumed their slow journey along the banks. It was somewhat easier to handle relieved of its weight of accumulated mud.

Then, in a little while, something which sent their hopes soaring did actually happen.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SHADOW OF A NAME

It was late afternoon. The sun, which had been a steady onlooker in its journey across a clear blue sky, was passing down to the distant hilltops, bathing them in a crimson glory, and glinting the quiet river with a playing light that had no warmth in it. In the witchery of this pre-twilight the inverted images of the bordering trees seemed to shiver and wriggle in the darkening water, as if they felt the chill of evening. Now and again a little perch or a sunfish popped out of the water and seemed a darting glint of gold in this conjuring light.

And there were other evidences of evening too. The workers were growing tired. Pee-wee made no secret of his hunger. Ben Maxwell, his blue bathing suit seeming bluer still in the mellow light, laid his sweater up over his shoulders as a slight concession to the increasing chill. This yellow sweater gave Ben a picturesque conspicuousness as he sat in the boat. He had been quiet and smiling all day, loyal to his little chief yet loyal to his sense of fun. Since “eats,” which was always a bantering time when Roy was present, he had listened to a good deal of raillery from the shores to the effect that his appointment was in the way of a sinecure, that all he had to do was smile and look pleasant. Roy had even improvised a slurring song.

Everybody works but Maxie,
All he does is float.
The Silver Foxes pull like mad,
While he sits in the boat.

Pee-wee had resented these joyous slurs in tones of thunder, to the amusement of Brent and Ben. He had even “invented” a song to hurl back as a deadly missile. But he always fell down in such business and had to make up in vocal power what he lacked in literary sprightliness.

But now, somehow, it seemed as if Ben were the only one of all that group to stand up. Nature, knowing her business, threw a spotlight on him leaving all the others in shadow.

“Jiminy crinkums!” said Roy, “there’s one Chipmunk big enough to see, *I’ll* say. Are you getting tired of doing nothing, Maxie? Why don’t you get busy and shovel some of the air out of the boat?”

“Sure, do something and you won’t be cold,” Westy called.

It did not take much to start the Silver Foxes. “Hey, Maxie,” shouted Roy, “why don’t you get a job as traffic cop at the North Pole?”

“Why don’t you get a job as traction boss in an airplane factory?” Brick Warner called.

“Sure, why don’t you get a job raking up dead leaves in the Sahara Desert?” Roy shouted again. “Why doesn’t he get a job as schoolteacher in vacation?”

“He’d make a dandy fireman for the Atlantic Ocean,” Will Dawson broke in.

“Sure,” called Dorry Benton, “he ought to get a job washing dishes during a famine.”

“Don’t speak of famines, you’ll get Pee-wee started,” said Roy.

“If he ever saw a famine he’d eat it,” said Warde. “Nobody else would get a bite.”

“That shows how much of a crazy fool you all are!” Pee-wee shouted. He had withdrawn his straddling legs from the water and looked less imposing as a figurehead, as he sat on the little triangular bow seat pulling his stockings on. “You’re all crazier than each other. Why don’t you get jobs as—why don’t you _____”

“Hey, kid, why don’t you get a job as bellows in a blacksmith shop?” Roy called.

“Why don’t you fellow get on the job and watch what you’re doing?” Brent Gaylong called to them. “Easy there, you’re up against a snag. Don’t pull too hard——”

“We can’t pull it at all,” Warde called. “It kind of gives, but we can’t get it past something or other.”

“How does it feel?” Brent called.

“Feels cold,” Roy said.

“*He means the net!*” Pee-wee screamed at him. “Haven’t you got any sense? Why don’t you get a job having some sense about what you’re doing?”

“Those are harsh words, young Harris,” called Dorry.

“Hey, kid, your stocking reminds itself of a corkscrew,” Roy called.

“Now wait a minute,” called Brent. “Are we working or are we fooling?”

“Answered in the affirmative,” said Roy. “What shall we do?”

“Just pull a little,” said Brent, “easy—easy.”

“It’s caught,” said Warde.

“It’s caught good and fast now,” said Will Dawson.

“All right,” said Brent, “we’ll have to investigate. You fellows over there on that shore, play it a little; just sort of jerk it—just a little. Fast? All right. Sit down and rest, all of you.”

“The pleasure is ours,” said Roy. “A scout is obedient.”

“Do you want to dive, Ben?” Brent asked.

“Sure enough,” said Ben.

Suddenly the terrible voice of Pee-wee assailed the ears of the several groups like the voice of a cannon. "Oh look! Oh look!" he shouted excitedly. "There's a piece of wood or something—floating. Look! Go over to it, Brent. It's shaped kind of—*look*—it's shaped kind of slanting like, like the stern of a boat—that shows how Chipmunks are observant—look at it!"

There certainly had not been any floating object on the still water but a moment before. The tide was at flood in the narrow, woods-bordered channel, neither ebb nor inflow could have brought that floating object in its drifting course to their neighborhood. It was in that brief hour, coming twice in the twenty-four, year in and year out, when the full river was as placid as a mountain lake. And an odd phenomenon presently made that floating object very plain to view. It passed into a little area of shimmering light and was clearly outlined. It seemed as if the departed sun threw a spotlight on it the same as it had on Ben Maxwell sitting ready and waiting in the boat.

Brent paddled over to it and picked it up, the groups on either shore watching eagerly. Even Roy's heedless exuberance was stilled as all eyes were fixed upon the boat where Brent was looking severely through his funny spectacles at the thing he had picked up. Pee-wee's eyes were starting out of his head. Ben Maxwell dropped the sweater from his shoulders and leaned over near Brent.

The board was about fifteen inches wide and was longer at one edge than at the other; that is, its two ends slanted. It was held from warping by two stout cleats, copper riveted. It was covered with clinging slime. Yet it had more buoyancy than those other objects which a mere touch could send again to their dark graves. They thought it might be of cedar, that defying wood which water cannot rot.

"It's the stern piece of a boat," Pee-wee breathed in a solemn voice of dramatic revelation. "I'm the one that saw it."

Brent cut into it with his knife and its fibrous substance was gray. It had lost only its whiteness; soiled through and through, it was still fresh.

"It's cedar," Pee-wee said almost reverently; "gee whiz, I know cedar—that's a part of scouting."

"But they don't make stern pieces out of cedar, kid," Brent said. "I think they use oak. The sides they make out of cedar, but not the stern or the ribs; it isn't hard enough."

Pee-wee's spirits fell. "But look at the shape of it," he pleaded.

"Yes, sure enough," said Brent, his attitude always open-minded.

There was a tin bailing scoop in the boat, a sort of shovel, and Brent held the boat in the water while he scraped away the slime with this.

"Anyway, it isn't just a broken board or something like that," said Pee-wee. "Gee whiz, somebody made it."

“Sure enough,” said Brent, holding it in the water as he scraped. The groups on shore lolled and watched.

“Which is the other end of a boat?” Roy inquired of his group. “Hey Slick!” he shouted across. “Which is the other end of a boat?”

“Can’t you even get excited?” Pee-wee roared at him. “Do you know maybe what’s going to happen?”

“Look here, kid,” said Brent; “never mind them. What do you think of this, Benny?”

Brent had cleaned the board enough to expose an indistinct row of marks across it. It seemed to him that the board might once have been painted and that these faint marks were the remains of lettering. If the paint wears off or is removed from a wooden surface, such indistinct indications of former lettering remain indefinitely, notwithstanding that the letters were painted upon the body paint. They seem to cling to the wood in spectral array after all their own paint and the background paint has gone. You can sandpaper them out, but neither time nor chemical may restore the unbroken smoothness where lettering has been. I know not why this is so, but it is.

Now along this line of indecipherable markings, somewhat to the left of the middle of the board, Brent was able to make out what he thought had been the letters E S. Scrape and clean the board as he would, he could find in that line of marks only the suggestion of two letters. But they showed him that these faint markings had originally been a printed word or words.

“E S,” he mused. “Might have been Esther, hey?”

“Or Estelle,” said Ben.

“Listen, *listen!*” said Pee-wee, excitedly grasping Brent by the arm and perilously tilting the boat. “Now I know! It wasn’t the stern piece; you’re right they don’t make them out of cedar. It wasn’t the stern piece, it wasn’t the stern piece! But it was the back of the stern seat; they make those out of light wood, and they put cleats on them, and they print the name on them, lots of times they do. You can slide the back out if you want to——”

“Rowboats,” said Brent.

“And launches too, I’ve seen them that way,” Pee-wee urged, beside himself with excitement. “I just happened to think.”

“Hanged if he isn’t right,” said Ben.

“Now we’ve found it—the very first day—now we’ve found it!” Pee-wee shouted. “And its name was Esther or maybe Estelle or maybe Excelsior, no because that has an X, but anyway, it was Tessie, maybe there was a T in front of that E——”

“Maybe there was a P in front of the E,” called Roy, “and it was named Pest, after Pee-wee.”

“They named them girls’ names—even now they do,” Pee-wee shouted.

“Maybe it was Minerva Skybrow,” called Roy. “Look out, you’re tipping the boat.”

“Maybe it was named Dora Dane Daring,” called Warde.

“Maybe it was named Winnie Wilde,” called Will Dawson.

“Maybe it was named FOOL after you,” Pee-wee shot back. “Even when something is going to happen, you can’t get serious. It’s the back of a stern seat and it had a name—oh booooooy! Now we’re going to find it!”

It did look pretty good, but Brent was calm. And when he spoke to Ben you would have thought he was asking him to hunt for a trial balance instead of a romantic, sunken wreck.

“Do you want to dive and pike around down there?” he asked.

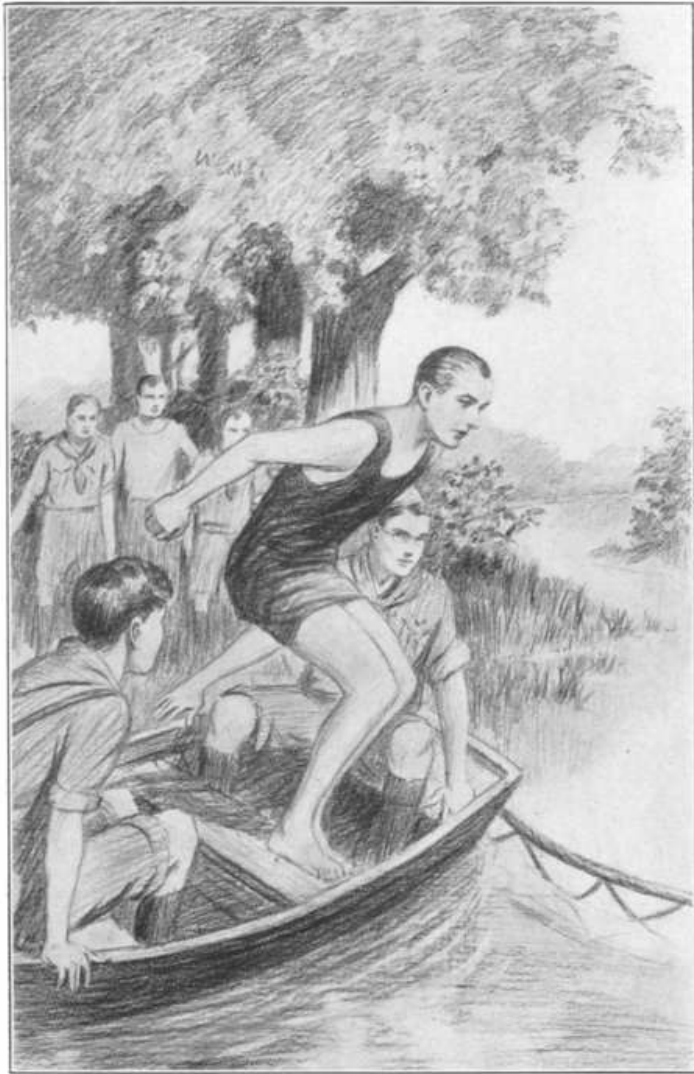
“Sure, he’ll only get tumbled out in a minute anyway, if you don’t make that kid sit down,” called Warde.

“I wouldn’t sit down for you!” Pee-wee screamed. “I wouldn’t sit down even if—if—the president of the United States asked me to—so now!”

“Fancy that,” said Dorry.

“All right, Benny?” Brent asked.

Ben had already risen and was standing on the middle seat. He seemed unusually tall on that slight elevation. His bathing suit looked very blue in the twilight. He laid his hand good-humoredly on Pee-wee’s curly head, pushing it down as if to say that two could not stand in the boat; and the hero subsided silently, quelled at last by this show of imminent action.



BEN MADE A WHIMSICAL SALUTE, THEN DIVED.

“He’s in my patrol, he is,” he permitted himself to say.

Ben winked at Brent who looked calm and businesslike and very funny. Then he glanced about the water as if to pick his underwater direction in advance.

“Atta boy, Benny,” came from the shore.

Ben made a whimsical salute to them, then dived. They remembered that last funny motion afterward. The splash startled a large bird which perhaps had

settled itself for the night, and it rose and flew away in the gathering dusk. All were silent now—and waiting.

Ben did not reappear.

CHAPTER XXV

SUSPENSE

Even Roy was sober now. No one could say how long they waited; the seconds seem like hours in such suspense. They watched the unruffled water; oh, how calm it seemed. How ominously smooth and unbroken. The mystery of the water! Even a narrow river like that one. It opens and closes, exposing no remnant of its cruel triumph. If a boy falls from a tree and is killed, you see him there, dead.

Dead!

It must have been twenty seconds, it might have been thirty. Half a minute, perhaps even more. The old waterlogged timber, the broken board with its pendent trap, these had so imbibed the property of the river that they were of its very substance and could not leave it. Stealing up like thieves in the night they had sunken slowly down again—to what? Heavy, slimy, dead, they had gone back to their horrid graves.

And a boy, a live, cheery boy. He too might become a heavy thing, a part of that silent fraternity down there in the muddy depths. Must they search for a boy instead of a treasure? There ran through Pee-wee's mind the ghastly picture of that dead thief many years ago, who had stared at old Pop Corey out of the tide pocket. And Ben Maxwell, member of his own patrol, had stood there in that boat but a few short moments before waving to the groups on the shore.

Like lightning, Roy Blakeley pulled off his shirt and his shoes, swung himself up on an overhanging bough and, balancing himself upon it long enough to dive, disappeared in the river. It was all so quick that his companions hardly knew what was happening till they heard the splash. Five seconds, ten seconds elapsed. No sound, no sign. Then a twig, probably broken off by Roy's foot, fell from the overhanging bough. So tense was the suspense that every eye was drawn to where it fell, making a widening circle in the still water.

More time elapsed; it seemed like hours to the watchers. Only one of them spoke aloud; Will Dawson called to Brent, saying, "What can we do now?" Brent did not answer, only watched the water. Ben's yellow sweater hung over the side of the boat, a patch of bright color in the fading light.

Then a slight disturbance of the water and Roy appeared, sputtering. He threw his arms apart as if to say there was nothing to report. Then he swam over to the boat and hung on outside it. There was always a look of devilry

about Roy and even the dripping appearance of his face and the plastering effect of the water on his hair, could not destroy that bantering aggressiveness which dwelt in his countenance. He did not mean to be flippant when he said the water was very wet—it was just Roy.

“Nothing?” Brent asked.

“No, it’s all muddy and thick down there,” Roy sputtered, panting heavily; “no—no sign of him. Listen kid, you’re not to blame because—you invented—you know what I mean—started—gee, I swallowed a lot of water. You’re not to blame. I’ll be the one to go and tell his folks—you—you don’t have to. You—now—just don’t get excited, kid; it won’t do any good.” He reached one arm into the boat and patted Pee-wee’s knee. “I’ll—I’ll go down again—just a second——”

Thus the eternal war between Roy and Pee-wee; a war of words, but never of actions. A very world war of windy ridicule and scoffing laughter and withering retorts. Wrath unspeakable! And in a show-down, good turns. It was a funny war.

“Hey, you fellows, run that boat over here,” called a voice. “You don’t expect me to swim out to it, do you?”

Westy, Warde and Dorry turned and looked into the woods edge along the shore where they were standing. They had ceased sprawling on the ground in a sort of deference to the tragedy which had occurred. If they could do nothing more, at least they had ceased to take their ease. Already the boys on the opposite shore were shouting, “Ben! Look, it’s Ben!”

He was standing on the shore about fifty feet from where the net, tied now to trees on either side, lay across the bottom of the stream.

“It’s Ben, it’s Ben!” shouted Pee-wee, almost falling from the boat in his excitement. “Anyway, I knew he couldn’t get killed, I did!” Pee-wee was always strong on prophesy after the event.

Standing as he did, a little distance from the groups, Ben seemed appropriately apart from them. He stood out in sharp outline against the background of darkening woods, silhouetted there, and looking very tall. His bathing suit was much torn and a handkerchief tied around an arm showed a streak of color where blood had soaked through. But he was laughing. “H’lo chief,” he called to Pee-wee. Then he picked his way along the shore to where Westy, Warde and Dorry stood. And meantime, Brent paddled to the other shore and took Will Dawson, the Warner twins and Hunt Manners across. So there they were all together at the end of that strenuous day.

“Did I give you a scare?” laughed Ben.

“Worse than that, you gave me a bath,” said Roy.

No one paid any attention to the Silver Fox leader except Brent who, leaning against a tree, laid his arm over the shoulder of that provoking

merrymaker and patted his soaking hair.

“Well, there’s nothing down there but an old tree,” said Ben. “The branches are so slimy you’d think they were eels; I got all mixed up in them; they stabbed me in the eyes and everything. Christopher! I thought I was caught by a devilfish. I got free of all that mess and came up just around the bend. I feel like a submarine—all I needed was a parachute or a periscope or whatever they call it. I bet Pee-wee couldn’t hold his breath as long as I did. Well, it’s nothing but a tree, I found out that much. But I loosed the net so we can pull it past now. Then I took a squint along the shore around the bend to see if I could see where the tree stood. There’s a kind of a hollow around there—just a kind of shallow, round hollow——”

“Is the grass growing in it?” Pee-wee demanded.

“Yes, the grass is growing in it,” Ben laughed.

“Then that shows it’s a long time since that tree blew down, maybe ten years.”

“If it stood there,” Ben laughed.

“Sure it stood there,” vociferated Pee-wee “I saw those hollows, lots of them; that’s how you can tell where trees used to be and if a big tree falls down it takes fifteen years for that place to fill up again so you can’t even tell it. But even then if you’re a scout you can tell it.”

“Fancy that,” said Will Dawson.

“Yes, but how long is fifteen years?” asked Roy. “If you’re a scout you’ve got to be able to tell that; I leave it to Brent.”

“Now you start being a fool about scouting,” Pee-wee shouted at him.

“If fifteen years is longer than you are, how can you tell it?” Roy came back with his wonted buoyancy.

“Wrong the first time. Did the tree look as if it used to fit in that hollow?” he asked Ben.

“Will you not talk for about two minutes!” Pee-wee roared. “You don’t know so much about scouting that even you thought a hole where a clothespole was was a woodchuck’s hole and you told Skinny McCord to set a trap in it. Now you’re starting to fool because Ben Maxwell is a hero and he went down and found that tree and that’s more than you did and he’s in my patrol so now you see what kind of scouts I got that can get mixed up with old trees even under the water and find out things and not get killed while you’re talking a lot of nonsense. I leave it to Ben if he didn’t get killed—almost. Even the fellows that read the crazy stories you’re all the time telling say you’re crazy like. Anyway, (he turned to Brent) I bet he’s got to admit that Ben is better than all the Silver Foxes put together, you don’t even know what a silver fox looks like—geeeeeeeeeee whiz! And——”

“Just a second,” said Brent. “When Roy dived, the water was all stirred up

and muddy, because Ben had stirred it up. That's why he didn't see the tree, or even where he was going. He didn't go down to hunt for a boat, he went down *to save a life*. I don't care whether he knows what a silver fox looks like or not. A Silver Fox looks blamed good to me! He wasn't so terribly keen about finding a lot of money when he and his bunch came down here. But when it comes to rescuing a Chipmunk, he was *there*. All you're thinking about is treasure. All Roy was thinking about was Maxie here. How 'bout it, Maxie?"

"Right," said Ben, as with a fine show of goodwill he gave Roy his hand.

"That's the best shake I ever had next to a milk shake," said Roy.

"You didn't get me, but thanks," said Ben.

"I'll get you yet," said Roy.

"I had more fun to-day not finding a treasure than I ever had before," said Ben; "just listening to you."

"The pleasure is yours," said Roy.

"Wasn't I the one to let the Silver Foxes come?" shouted Pee-wee. "I leave it to Brent, wasn't I the one to bring them, Roy and all? If it wasn't for me, Ben couldn't have dived and Roy couldn't have dived to save him—so that shows."

So you see Pee-wee was the hero after all!

CHAPTER XXVI

END OF A STRENUOUS DAY

They kindled a fire on the wooded shore and Ben put on his suit while Roy dried his clothing. With his khaki shirt and Silver Fox scarf restored to his trim figure, he looked like the same old Roy.

It was pleasant sitting there in the dusk for a little idle chat before they went home. The dancing blaze was mirrored in the water and sent a myriad of reflected sparks darting about under the black surface when Warde poked it. They looked like an electric sparkler held under the water.

“If I had some eggs I’d fry some ham and eggs—if I only had some ham,” said Roy. “If I get home after eight I have to get my own supper, the pleasure is mine, I should worry. There’s one frankfurter left; I wonder if I can cut it into eleven equal parts? I guess we better draw lots and eat somebody like the cablegrams in the Cablegram Islands. Will you have this frankfurter, kid?”

“What I’m wondering about,” said Brent, “is this blamed board or panel or whatever you call it. It came to the surface, that’s sure. And I still think it was part of a boat. I can’t get it out of my head that there’s the remains of a boat down there.”

“Nix,” said Ben.

“Stand the blamed thing up against this tree and let’s look at it,” said Roy.

“It’s those marks and the E S on it that’s got me thinking,” said Brent.

“A scout knows how to read in the dark if he’s got a light,” said Roy. “Deny it if you dare. Come over here now and look at that blamed thing in the light of the fire. NO TRESPASSING, that’s what it says. I bet it was nailed on that tree and the net maybe broke it loose. Maybe the nails were rusted away and it was just caught under a branch or something. Maybe it was part of a boat once, at that. But I bet it was nailed on that old tree to keep people from going ashore there and fishing, and that proves that the fishing is good right there. That shows how a scout can get something to eat. Who’s got a safety pin? I wonder if fishes eat hot dogs? What do you say we have supper as long as we’re here. I bet there’s a good fishing pole right where that tree was. Shall we try to catch some perch?”

“Answered by a unanimous majority,” said Dorry.

“That shows what a wonderful scout I am,” said Roy.

“You’re the life of the party,” said Brent.

“I’ll say so,” said Ben.

“Just the same a lot of people said you were crazy,” Pee-wee piped up.

"They don't have to say so, I admit it," said Roy. "But anyway, I can read signs."

"So can I," shouted Pee-wee.

"Sure, soda water and ice cream signs," said Roy. "Are we going to find the treasure again to-morrow? Boy, I'm having the time of my life finding that treasure!"

"I don't see why we shouldn't go on hunting," said Brent. "We know now how to work; it's not so hard."

"Not for me," said Roy.

"I have to sit in the boat with Pee-wee," said Brent.

"Anyway, we've found out that there's a bottom to the river," said Roy. "Sure, we'll leave the net right where it is, it'll be all right with the ends fastened to the trees, and we'll start in the first thing in the morning. We'll bring more eats to-morrow."

"I'll do the diving to-morrow," said Warde.

"I'm getting keyed up to this thing," said Brent. "I believe this old river has got something to say."

"Sure, that's why it has a mouth," said Roy. "Pee-wee would make a good river. But there's one thing about this river I like, it's got two shores to it. Gee, it would be bad if it didn't have any shores."

"I hate to think of it," said Brent.

"Don't think of it," said Warde. "But that isn't any worse than a mountain without any sides to it; the kind they have in Denmark; only a summit and no sides."

"I've heard of those," said Roy. "They must be very hard to climb up."

"They are very hard," said Brent. "They use a kind of a ladder that only has one end to it."

"Oh, so that's the way," said Westy. "Pee-wee ought to have one of those when he goes up in the air."

"That's a very good suggestion," said Roy. "Pee-wee is all right when he's right side up, but that's no reason why he should tell his patrol that you get the archery badge by building arches. That's no way to talk to a tenderfoot."

"I know what you mean!" thundered Pee-wee, "and I didn't tell him that—you mean Eddie Carlo and anyway, he's not so tender—he's a second class scout, you're so smart sprawling on the ground and being a dunce."

"I can do it just as well standing up," said Roy.

"You couldn't have any sense if you stood on your head and feet both at once," bawled Pee-wee.

"Answer me one question twice," said Roy. "Didn't you write to *Boy's Life* and ask how many plums you have to eat to get the plumbing badge?"

The group were now in uproars of laughter. The fire danced merrily, Roy

was soberly distributing eleven even slices of the one remaining frankfurter; Brent looked like some studiously minded pirate chief as he sat against a tree looking over the top of his spectacles at his minute portion of frankfurter which was of about the size of a gumdrop. He was funny. Roy was amusing in his irrepressible mirth and banter. But Brent was just funny; he was funniest of all when he said nothing. Good old Brent, they called him and that was a good name.

“Now we know how it must have seemed to shipwrecked mariners and pirates out of luck,” he said. “Each with a tiny morsel between himself and starvation. Suppose we do that to-morrow—really starve. Let’s play the game right. Wouldn’t it make it snappy if we just have one biscuit to-morrow and divide it among us. Then we’ll feel as if we were really on an adventure. I’ve often tried to almost starve to death, but I never could. Do you suppose Daniel Boone started into the wilderness with a thermos bottle? To-morrow let’s have starvation staring us in the face.”

“Not in my face,” said Pee-wee. “You don’t have to not eat to have adventures. You’re as crazy as Roy is. Gee whiz, all you think about is crazy stuff; I’m the only one that’s thinking about finding a box with a lot of money and taking it to Miss Gardiner. You just keep fooling all the time—even you that I let be boss with me—you’re as bad as any of them. We’ll never find it if you don’t get serious.”

“I want it to be serious,” said Brent. “That’s why I’m suggesting that we almost starve to-morrow. To-day we had a big scare. To-morrow we’ll feel the pangs of hunger or something like that.”

“That’s a very good suggestion,” said Roy.

“Then if there was only a rival party hunting for the box we might have some real Treasure Island stuff,” said Brent. “Maybe those girls will show up yet with a map or something and we can steal it from them while they’re sleeping——”

“All they can do is giggle,” said Pee-wee, disgustedly.

“Good idea,” said Westy, “we’ll steal it from them while they’re giggling.”

“Absolutely, positively,” said Roy. “We’ll have Pee-wee talk to them so they’ll giggle and meantime, Brent and I will steal up and get the map. In *Treasure Island* they got the map while the other bunch was drunk; we’ll get it while they’re giggling. It’s the same only different. I bet those girls know where the box is all right.”

“Their giggling will be their undoing,” said Brent; “there’ll be a lesson in it.”

“Don’t talk about lessons,” said Roy.

“A lot you don’t know about lessons,” Pee-wee roared at him. “Even *Treasure Island* you don’t know about, because it wasn’t that way, you’re so

smart!”

“He says I don’t know about *Treasure Island*,” said Roy. “Can you beat that? He doesn’t even know that old *John Silver* in the story was named after the Silver Fox Patrol, I’ll leave it to Westy. Anyway, I’d rather be myself than Robert Louis Stevenson,” said Roy.

“That’s because you’re so stuck on yourself,” Pee-wee shouted.

“It’s because I’m alive and Robert Louis Stevenson is dead—no sooner said than stung,” said Roy. “Did you ever hear about the time Pee-wee went into a book store and said he wanted to get *Kidnapped*? He’s just as bad as Brent—the things he wants.”

“Speaking serially,” said Brent, “I think it would be a good idea to have those three girls along. They were in at the start; let them be in at the finish _____”

“They’re finished already,” said Pee-wee; “I finished them. What do you mean, having girls along? What would they be doing while we’re dragging the river and hunting for a sunken boat?”

“Giggling,” said Slick Warner.

“Geeeee whiz!” Pee-wee drawled disgustedly.

“Woman’s place is with the dragnet,” said Brent. “I think I’ll drop in at Minerva’s house to-night and ask if she and her two trusties won’t join us tomorrow. They had Pilgrim Mothers as well as Pilgrim Fathers. What do you say we round up the terrible trio? Maybe it will change our luck. Pee-wee had them all keyed up to doing something big and then he left them flat.”

“Sure, do you call that being a chivaler?” Roy demanded.

“Just for the fun of it we’ll get them,” said Brent. “The three of them will be tickled to death. You’ve heard of coeducation; this is a new coadventure. Co-eds and co-ads—I invented it.”

Pee-wee listened to this talk with growing apprehension. He was a little afraid that Brent’s whimsical habit and irreverent attitude toward the adventure, might lead him into making good his preposterous threat. And Roy and the other Silver Foxes (who were on the trail of fun rather than of treasure) would encourage him. But the hero would not permit them to make their adventurous quest any more ridiculous than they had already made it with their nonsense.

“If you do it,” he said with a black ominousness in his voice, “if you do it, I’ll chase you all——”

“Like you did the poor girls,” said Will.

“And I’ll get the scouts in East Bridgeboro to help me,” Pee wee continued. “Gee whiz, you can talk all the nonsense you want to, but if you do that it’ll show you’re crazy, because girls can’t do anything like this and you can’t make a fool out of me, you can’t, by starting a lot of screaming and

giggling and jolly; that's all you want to do, *I* know. You'll start a circus here, then you'll be satisfied—all you want is to have a lot of crazy stuff and show off before girls how you can talk. If girls are afraid of wasps and snakes and things like that and—and—and even June-bugs—gee whiz, do you think they'd look at anybody staying down under water hunting in a wreck, maybe?"

"They wouldn't look at him while he was down there," Warde said.

"That shows you're crazy!" thundered Pee-wee. "You try to talk like Roy. Gee whiz, didn't I find Miss Gardiner for them? And they're going to do her a lot of good turns and maybe kind of have her be the boss of them like a despot—I mean a mascot—in their troop, that's what they said. So if you do that—you'll see," he concluded darkly.

"You mean we'll hear," said Roy.

"You mean you're crazy!" Pee-wee shouted.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE

Roy and Warde and Dorry did attempt to do this forbidden thing. Of all the Silver Foxes they were the most silvery. They were the archjolliers of that exuberant patrol. It was with these three, more than with any others, that the head Chipmunk was forever drawing his weapon in "mortal comeback." Roy was the presiding genius of this sprightly enterprise which seemed likely to end in a terrific explosion. But, as usual, Pee-wee's luck prevailed.

Late that evening, after a belated supper, these three scouts on mirthful business bent sallied forth to the beautiful home of the Skybrows on Blakeley's hill. They were out for a joke the next day and would make allies of Pee-wee's repudiated followers. But a servant told them that Minerva had gone off on an automobile tour with Mr. and Mrs. Wilde and Winifred. This information was confirmed at the Wilde's and the trio, not knowing Dora well enough to solicit her aid as a confederate, abandoned their unholy scheme and repaired to the second show at the movies. Thence to Bennetts and thence home. Thus a terrible climax was averted by fate.

"We should worry," said Roy.

"We could have had a lot of fun," said Dorry.

"There's plenty left," said Warde.

"How long are we going to keep on not finding the box?" Dorry asked as they lingered in front of Roy's porch.

"We should bother our heads," said Roy. "It's a lot of fun anyway. I'm going to make some flapjacks to-morrow."

"I'll bring some potatoes and we'll roast them," said Warde. "What's the use of quitting?"

"I'm in till the finish," said Dorry.

"Same here," said Roy. "So long, see you later."

The work next day progressed without any unusual incident. Brent brought a couple of crossword puzzles to do while manning the flagship, as he called it. Roy came with a challenging smile, some flour and chocolate and egg powder. Warde brought a bag of potatoes with a couple of loaves of bread casually thrown in. Pee-wee, to the consternation of Terrace Avenue and Main Street, wheeled a wound-up garden hose to the scene of action. He had conceived the novel idea that, if the elusive hull were located, an end of this hose in the mouth of the diver, the other end in the boat above, would enable him to breathe while prosecuting his investigation of the neighboring depths. He

injected the nozzle of the hose into Ben's mouth and made him purse his lips on either side to secure a perfect fit and make the joint watertight.

"Can you keep your mouth that way?" he demanded.

"Not while I'm laughing," said Ben.

"It's Roy Blakeley's making you laugh," Pee-wee said. "If you start doing things like that you're going to get discharged," Pee-wee said darkly.

Accessory to this hose was a revolving sprinkler in which Roy found much amusement. "Look, you can make it go round by blowing through it," he said. "Pee-wee can talk through it and what he says will come out in four places and keep whirling around too. Everybody'll hear. He can broadcast with it. Look, everything he says, he says four times. Here you go, kid."

But Roy held it long enough to give a vivid demonstration to this aid to talking. His cheeks bulged, his face reddened.

So early in the day this comedy enraged the hero. "Will you put that down!" he screamed.

"Good idea," said Roy, pausing in his herculean efforts.

"Why don't you get a job blowing up flat tires?" Pee-wee thundered at him.

The group were in uproars.

"Look," said Roy, "if we put this on the end of the hose that's in the boat and Ben finds the box, he can shout up and the big news will go in every direction. We won't even have to put it in the newspapers—not even the ones that were printed thirty years ago."

"Will you shut up and lay that down!" Pee-wee fairly screeched at him. "It belongs to my father, so now will you put it down. Are you going to start dragging the river or are you going to keep up being a fool?"

"Answered in the affirmative," said Roy. "I'll take a little of both. Let's get serious and get down to business."

This was only a little prelude to the labor of the day. The work went on merrily with the silver thread of jolly and banter running in and out through it, Pee-wee always holding his own. Now and again the net caught on some sunken obstacle, twice in a way to arouse the hope that something bulky might be holding it below. Once Ben dived, once Warde. Each was able to stay down long enough to make sure there was no old hull on the bottom. And so the work went on. They had a sumptuous luncheon cooked by Roy; flapjacks (scout style) with Silver Fox sauce (a creamy, sugary concoction) and potatoes roasted till their savory skins were like shells and deliciously charred. They roasted marshmallows, too; and they roasted Pee-wee, and Pee-wee double quartered and roasted them till they were done to a turn. But they did not locate any sunken hull, and it was not necessary to use the garden hose.

At the end of the day they lolled on the shore, the boat drawn up, the ends

of the heavy net tied to trees to keep them from drawing into the river. They had advanced downstream perhaps three hundred feet or more. If the quest had been characterized only by the feverish anxiety of treasure hunters, perhaps they would have been disheartened. For it had been strenuous work with only now and then some little episode like the rising of an old log, the catching of a water-rat in the muddy meshes, or the fun of diving, to relieve the monotony. But they had been too busy with the fun of the thing and the hurling back and forth of banter, to feel much disappointment. It was all in the game. And it was pleasant resting on the shore for a little while before going home.

This was the witching time of jollying and "mortal comeback."

"Well," said Roy, "I'd just as soon be doing one thing as another, even more so."

"One thing's even better than another," said Warde.

"Not so much better," said Roy.

"What are things for anyway, except to do?" said Dorry.

"Well," said Brent, "I've got a kind of a hunch we ought to stick it out for a few days."

"Sure, the first hundred years is the hardest," said Roy.

"To-morrow we'll be off the old Gardiner place," said Brent. "That's where we ought to get a comeback if anywhere. I hope your friend Miss G. won't come out and ask us what we're doing," he added, turning to Pee-wee.

"Sure, she won't," said Pee-wee. "Gee whiz, she won't bother us, don't worry. She stays in the other side of the house, and anyway, look how far it is up from the river. Gee whiz, it's just like dead around there. It's even kind of spooky, it's so dead."

"We should worry about her," said Roy. "If she chases us away maybe she'll lose seven thousand dollars, the pleasure is hers. And if she doesn't chase us away, she'll lose it anyway."

CHAPTER XXVIII

WORDS SPEAK LOUDER THAN ACTIONS

The next day brought no success and when they laid off toward evening they were somewhat discouraged. The exhilaration of work had kept up their spirits. Now in the light of another day's failure the whole enterprise seemed Utopian, absurd. There were too many *ifs* connected with it. If the boat had sunk (no one had seen it sink) why might it not have withdrawn into enveloping mud, or rotted away to nothing? Thirty years is a long time. Then, if only a few waterlogged remnants remained on the bottom, the net might have gone over these, or carried them a space and released them again. It was Pee-wee's enthusiasm at first, and the novelty of the work later, which had given them momentum to go on.

Now as they sat on an old stone wall near the shore, they realized (Brent in particular) that it was not Pee-wee's enthusiasm, but Roy's irrepressible spirits, which had kindled a kind of false hope and kept it alive.

And if they should find the remains of the old boat, what then? The precious metal box might be there and it might not. Only one of the thieves was accounted for. And was even his identity fully established? Then if the boat had rotted and fallen away to a few scattered remnants, might not the heavy box have sunken into the mud, forever beyond the reach of a groping dragnet? Would sensible men have started such a blind search as this? Brent asked the question.

"We're not sensible men," said Roy.

"You're sensible idiots and that's why maybe we didn't find it," Pee-wee piped up. "You wouldn't get serious about it, that's why. I know a lot of fellows would be glad to hunt for sunken treasures. Anyway, you got in under false intentions——"

"You mean pretenses," said Westy.

"You got that word out of a book," Pee-wee shouted.

"Let's have a large chunk of silence," said Roy. "I'm speaking serially; I know where we can find treasure. Absolutely, positively, undoubtedly, I know where we can find treasure."

"Where?" Pee-wee demanded.

"In the dictionary," said Roy, "under T—I'll leave it to Brent."

"You can find *fool* in the dictionary too," said Pee-wee with resounding sarcasm.

"Speaking of scouts, do you know where there's a fine example?" said

Roy. "In an arithmetic. It's nice sitting around here, hey?"

"Well, we're on the Gardiner land," said Brent; "part of the old estate anyway. Old squire had a lot of real estate one time, I guess."

"He had a lot of real estate and imitation estate," said Roy. "To-morrow we'll be right off the old house. I say let's stick it through to-morrow. To-morrow I'll dive."

"But, anyway, if you find anything my patrol gets the credit," said Pee-wee. "Because I'm the one that found out about it and started the whole thing."

"We're talking about finishing it now," said Brent, with a tactfully inquiring glance at Pee-wee. "I suppose we want to go to Temple Camp; there's a lot of fun waiting up there."

"Tell it to wait till we get there," said Roy.

"All you'll do when you get there," said Pee-wee, "is to jolly tenderfoots and tell them that elderberries are ones that have grown up and send them out to hunt for younger berries, you think you're so smart telling little Ralph Arnold that watermelons grow under the water and he went diving to get one. Geeeee whiz, even Mr. Carson said you were a monkey on a stick. Honest Ben, I cross my heart, that's what the trustees call him—a monkey on a stick! He goes around with Hervey Willetts and that fellow says that a place is a thing to go away from, so that shows they're a good pair."

"Diving for watermelons is as good as diving for iron boxes," said Roy. "They're each crazier than each other. Pee-wee's all right only he misses on high speed; he needs to have his valves ground, he's losing compression. I'll tell you the best thing to dive for."

"Explain all that," said Warde.

"Dive for fun, you always find it," said Roy.

"Do you call fun a treasure?" Pee-wee bawled at him.

"Blamed if I don't think so," laughed Brent. "I guess it's all the treasure we are going to get. We should have had the girls along to change our luck."

"That shows how much you don't know," the head treasure hunter shouted at the top of his lungs. "Winnie Wilde has got red hair and red hair is bad luck. If I say I won't have girls, I won't have them, and you needn't talk about it, because I won't have them, because I won't!"

"That's a dandy reason," said Dorry.

"Pee-wee talks by long division," said Roy. "He puts his adjectives before his proverbs. He doesn't know the difference between a confounded sentence, I'll leave it to Warde."

"I know a compound sentence from a compound fool!" roared Pee-wee. "And a compound fool is two fools in one—you're so very—you're so much of a monkey!"

"Just the same I never wanted to name a patrol after a mock-turtle," said

Roy. "He must have been reading Wallace in Underland."

"Even *Alice in Wonderland* has more sense than you have," said Pee-wee.

"Will you listen to what he's saying about girls *now!*" triumphed Roy. "He's saying they've got a lot of sense. He admits they can have adventures—I leave it to Brent—he admits it!"

"Well how about adventures under water to-morrow?"

"Sure," said Roy, "it's no crazier than *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through a Drinking Glass*."

"What are you talking about?" Pee-wee screamed.

"I'm talking about *Through a Drinking Glass*, it's dedicated to a lemonade, it's the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*," said Roy. "He's head of the Chipmunk Patrol and he doesn't know what lemons are."

"Do you say we're lemons?" the hero roared.

"Yes, but you're pretty small ones," said Roy. "You can hardly see them with the naked eye."

"They're lemondrops," suggested Brent.

"Are you going to talk about the way we're going to do to-morrow or not?" Pee-wee demanded.

"Sure, let's all talk at once," said Roy.

CHAPTER XXIX

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

The next morning they were dragging the heavy net through the straight, deep stretch of water which bordered the land immediately surrounding the old Gardiner house. The old estate had extended farther up and down the river, but the land had been sold off for small sums as Miss Gardiner's means decreased. This bordering woodland had never been put to any use by its purchasers.

The old house with the few neglected acres still belonging to it was a typical instance of a fine old estate shrunken and going to decay. From a broken landing a beaten path led up through the overgrown grounds to the old house which stood aloof and gloomy about three hundred feet from the shore. You could not see the whole of it by reason of the trees. From the river there was never any sign of life there. There seemed not much danger of the one, poor, frail little occupant of that forlorn abode coming down to make inquiries of these joyous adventures. What would she have thought if she had known that they were engaged upon what seemed a hopeless quest in her interest? Somehow their proximity to the house, which was real, made their enterprise seem the more Utopian.

They had not been working an hour in this neighborhood when something happened which caused the monkey on a stick to subside into soberness. It came all of a sudden and Pee-wee loomed large enough among them as a sturdy leader indeed.

"She caught?" Brent called from the boat. "Don't pull too hard. Stop, wait a second."

"She's caught on a snag or something or other," called Westy.

"Want me to dive?" Ben asked.

"No, wait a minute," said Brent. "Let's not take any more chances with sunken trees; you get mixed up with one of those and you may never come up."

From the opposite shores the two groups pulled and manipulated the heavy net while Brent, resolved not to authorize diving upon a false alarm, paddled over to the shore where Roy, Westy, Warde and Dorry were working. Pee-wee in the boat scanned the water intently for any stray object which the jerking of the net might release and send to the surface. Brent jumped out and hauled the boat up.

"Let's get hold of that thing a second," he said. With the others he pulled and jerked.

"I just as soon go down," said Ben.

"You do what Brent tells you," said Pee-wee.

"All right," said Brent, "you fellows over there let go, but keep hold of the rope so you can pull the net back. Now let's pull her in if we can. Give a jerk—one, two, three."

The net held, then gave way so that Westy stumbled back against a tree.

"Pull her in," said Brent.

Slowly they hauled the heavy, mud-smearred net upon the shore, the while there was a great scurrying from it by a multitude of the little denizens of the river. A bullfrog made a heroic jump from it to a rock where he paused gaping in stupid wonder at the upheaval which had brought him into the light of day.

"What's that? What's that?" Pee-wee called excitedly, as he jumped from the boat.

A cylindrical object about three feet long and covered with mud had fallen free from the net and made a dully metallic sound as it fell upon a rock. Pee-wee had it in his possession almost before the others had seen it.

"It's hollow," he said, "I bet it's something."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Warde laughed.

"I mean something serious," scorned Pee-wee.

They watched him as he tugged his slimy burden to the boat and held it over the edge to wash away the mud. Then it was revealed as a heavy copper pipe about six inches in diameter and ornamentally finished at one end. Patches of rust discolored even the resisting copper, but the metal was too thick to have collapsed in the rotting process.

"Look what's on it, look what's on it, look what's on it!" Pee-wee shouted, jumping in a very ecstasy. Heedless of his scout shirt he was rubbing his sleeve against the metal. "Oh, look what it says! *Speed*—it says—*naphtha*—come and look—*Speedwell Naphtha Launch Company, Racine, Michigan!* It's cut in the pipe—look, look, *look!*"

There it was. Crowding around Pee-wee they all saw it, while he clung to his precious clew as if he feared they would try to take it from him.

"I'm the one that found it, so now you see if I had a lot of sense, and it's part of a naphtha launch—*look!*"

"Guess you're right, kid," said Brent.

The others stared, even Roy was silent. Ben paddled over and brought the other Silver Foxes from the farther shore. Pee-wee was triumphant. Out of the depths of that river had been brought what seemed once to have been the upright exhaust of one of those old type motor-boats. And its recovery created this surmise; being heavy it would have sunk in the soft bottom if it had not been resting on or in something else, large and flat enough to resist the mud.

"Looks pretty good," Brent confessed. "I'd like to get a squint down there."

The blamed thing must have been laying on something flat, it's so heavy. I wonder how long a hull can last under water."

"I'll tell you, I'll tell you!" Pee-wee shouted. "Because I know all about it—and it's down there—because—do you know Benedict Arnold?"

"Never met him," said Roy.

"I understand he's dead," said Will Dawson.

"He was a traitorer," said Warde.

Pee-wee could hardly speak, he was so excited. "Up at Ticonderoga—I was there, I was there in our car—up there is the old hull of a boat that belonged to Benedict Arnold on Lake Champlain away back in the Revolutionary War, and you can see it, they've got it up on land, so that shows."

"Blamed if you're not right, kid," said Brent. "I saw it when I was up there. It's all falling to pieces and they've got it propped up. If an old hull under water can last a hundred and fifty years or so and still hold together well enough to be hauled ashore why it looks pretty good for us. I'm glad you thought of that, kid. We'll find out what's down, there, by gum! I remember that old hull up there—the *Revenge*."

"That's it," said Pee-wee excitedly. "It belonged to Benedict Arnold."

"That's enough for us," said Roy. "The Silver Foxes don't want anything to do with a traitor. United we stand——"

"Shut up!" roared Pee-wee. "If you don't want to help you needn't; you can all be discharged! If you start being crazy again now you'll get chased home."

"Like the poor girls," said Roy.

"Come on, cut it out, let's get down to business," smiled Brent.

CHAPTER XXX

BAFFLED

It was Ben Maxwell who dived. It was right that he should, for he was of the hero's patrol.

"You better take the hose to breathe through while you're hunting," Pee-wee said.

"If the hose won't do, we'll get a watering pot," said Roy.

But Pee-wee was beyond the winged darts of ridicule now. He sat alone in the boat gazing at the river. The others waited too, in real suspense. They had confidence in Ben. Chipmunk though he was, they took him seriously. This time they had no fear for his safety. Soon he rose, sputtering.

"There's something down there all right," he said, as he sat on the edge of the boat. "I couldn't get down there to touch it. It's pretty deep right here, do you know that? I guess I was three or four feet from it, at that. It looked like a great big fish laying sideways. It was dark, I could hardly see it against the bottom; sort of just an—oh, I don't know, a kind of an outline." He wrung the water from his dripping hair and tried to clear his ears of it. "Some cellar to this old river, all right."

"Do you think it might have been the skeleton of a boat?" Brent asked.

"It was kind of that shape only flattened out; that's the way it looked," said Ben. "Just wait a minute, I'm going to dive again."

"I'll go down," said Warde.

"No, you won't," snapped Pee-wee. "It's going to be one of my patrol to do it. I'm going to have it so I can say we got it. Ben's the best diver in the whole troop, you can't deny it, and if he does it it's just the same as if I do it, because a patrol is just like one scout, you ask Mr. Wentworth."

Warde, ready for any service, smiled in obedience to these words from the Throne.

"Gee whiz," said Pee-wee in great excitement, "didn't Peary be the one to go ahead of the others to the North Pole when he got there, because he was the boss of it?"

"He didn't even take Benedict Arnold," Roy ventured.

"I'm the one that did it all," Pee-wee announced, still clutching his precious exhaust pipe. "You got to thank me because I let you come, because I'm the one that thought it up, and I'm the one that saw this pipe, and now we're going to get the box with the money, I bet we are, and I'm the one."

"We better keep still or we'll get left the same as the girls did," said Tom

Warner.

“Poor girls,” said Westy.

“The pleasure is theirs,” said Roy.

Ben dived again and this time he was gone long enough to make the others a trifle anxious. “We ought to take turns at this,” Brent said.

“No, we don’t!” snapped Pee-wee. “Because Ben’s going to find out, you see. The Chipmunks are going to be the heroes of this and Ben’s going to be the one to have his picture in the paper.”

“Yes, like the poor girls—not,” said Westy. “They were going to be in the Pathé News. *Good night!*”

“Will you shut up and be serious about what we’re doing!” Pee-wee shouted. “They’re out of it and if I say you’re out of it, you’re out of it, too.”

Presently Ben arose, and even as he swam, ducking his head to clear it of the thick water from below, his face wore a smile. He swam over to the boat where they were all sitting about and clambered into it, exhausted, but plainly happy.

“Well, there’s an old boat down there,” he panted; “if you call it a boat. Trouble is, blame it, you can’t stay down long enough. It’s a sort—sort of like a dream, the way you see it. I couldn’t get hold of anything, it’s flat just like if a steam-roller ran over it. But it’s the shape of a boat all right. All the planks are warped out and the ribs stick out each side like a fishbone. I suppose the keel still holds them, but I couldn’t see the keel. There are sort of two rows of ribs sticking up out of the mud, you can only see the ends. Boy, you’ve got to look quick, believe me.”

Brent thought he could visualize the thing Ben had seen in that precious, fleeting moment while he was diving. What he had seen, he had seen on the wing, as it were; it had been but a glimpse.

But in the choppy description he had given, Brent saw it. Perhaps he saw it better because he had viewed the old warped and spreading hull of Benedict Arnold’s ship the *Revenge* which was on display on the shore of Lake Champlain at old Fort Ticonderoga. That historic old boat had been found warped and spread; almost flattened, in the bottom of the lake. And you may see it any time you visit that historic shrine. The rotted and bleached hull with daylight gaping between the separated planks is held up by props from the ground, for the ribs are too rotten to hold it together.

“Well, what are we going to do?” said Brent. “We’re baffled in the moment of triumph.”

“I’m not baffled!” Pee-wee shouted. “Why can’t he take the hose down and breathe through that? Gee whiz.”

Brent laughed and shook his head thoughtfully. “Any sign of the engine?” he asked.

“Couldn’t see any,” said Ben. “Probably the hull is all rotten and the engine went down through it into the mud.”

“Hmph,” mused Brent. “Like enough that old box is somewhere down there in the mud, but how in tarnation to find it has got me. We’re no nearer to it than we were before.”

“If we know where it is, we’re nearer to it, aren’t we?” Pee-wee thundered at him.

“I’m going to dive again,” said Ben. “Maybe I can find out something more.”

He came up no wiser than before, except that he was nearer certain that the black sticks which stuck out of the bottom roughly inscribed the form of a boat. He said that running lengthwise through the center of these curving rows was a depression which he tried unsuccessfully to touch. He had got hold of one of the projecting ends of a rib, but it was too slimy, he said, for him to get a pulling hold on it. He thought it swayed a little, but he could not be sure of that.

And that was just every last bit of knowledge they could get of that slimy skeleton sticking its black ribs out of the muddy bottom of the river. Pee-wee made a noble concession and consented to Warde’s diving, but Warde, though a good diver, did not even see the bottom. Then Westy, Hunt and Will dived in turns. Only one of them, Westy, got so much as a glimpse of those projecting ribs. Clearly Ben Maxwell was the best diver among them. They were triumphant (if you call it triumph) but they were at a standstill.

“We’ve made a fine success of our failure,” said Brent. “Now I’m good and mad. What do you say we eat and while we’re eating one of you fellows go up to town and get a grappling hook; Charlie Elwell’s got a grappling hook, I’m pretty sure. Ask his wife to let you look in the cellar.”

“Now we’re going to get it! Now we’re going to get it!” Pee-wee shouted, “and I’m the one——”

“I don’t think we are,” said Brent. “A grappling hook might get hold of a dead body or anything soft. But an iron box—nix. Probably it’s way down in the mud. Still we’ll try it. What else can we do?”

“If we only knew some nice, big fish who would be willing to pike around down there for us,” said Roy. “Trouble is, I don’t know a single fish.”

“If he was a big fish he wouldn’t be a Chipmunk anyway, and the kid wouldn’t let him do it,” said Dorry.

“You don’t happen to know any turtles, do you?” Will asked.

“I once knew a turtle, but he was very snappy,” said Roy. “He believed in life, liberty and the pursuit of snappiness. He lived up in Black Lake; I haven’t seen him for a long time. Blame it all, I wish we knew a mermaid.”

“Pee-wee wouldn’t let her help on account of her being a girl,” said Westy.

“That’s so, I never thought about that,” said Roy.

CHAPTER XXXI THE LAST GIGGLE

They anchored in midstream and worked all afternoon with a grappling hook. Once Ben went down and released a rubber ball so that its appearance on the surface might show them the right spot, and it proved that they were working directly above the old hull. He was only just able to see it, the water was so stirred up, by the grappling hook. Once they got hold of something which seemed to give way and a sliver of cedar wood came to the surface. The water was black in the area where they worked. Those who could not stay in the boat lolled on the shore, watching and chatting.

Four o'clock came, and five, and they had accomplished nothing. The river was riled with mud; the monotonous work began to pall. Surely it was like hunting for a needle in a haystack. So near and yet so far.

Suddenly a merry laugh rang out, which recalled the party to the living world which they had forgotten. It was so quiet and remote down there at the river. All they had seen were dead and rotted things, slimy trophies of that oozy bottom and mud. Then suddenly a merry, girlish laugh. Not from the bottom of those enveloping depths. Ah no! But from the winding path which led down through those overgrown, neglected grounds, to the river. And there was Minerva Skybrow, tripping down, and laughing as she came through the long grass. She turned and beckoned to her two friends to follow her.

She looked rather more winsome than any mud-besmeared treasure box would have looked. She was very much of the joyous world and she fairly radiated happy excitement as she approached the hero and his striving crew. "Come on, come on," she called, turning to hasten the faltering steps of Winifred Wilde and Dora Dane Daring. "It's them, it's Pee-wee and a lot of scouts! Oh hurry up!"

The hero sitting on the shore among the larger group of his followers, could only stare.

"We're discovered," said Roy.

"I just bet you are," said Minerva joyfully.

"We saw you from way up at the house and we wondered what on *earth* you were doing here. Goodness, gracious, is somebody drowned? Oh horrors."

"Nobody's drowned," said Pee-wee, "but we found out where maybe that iron box with all the money in it is, that belongs to Miss Gardiner, and you needn't go and tell her either, just because you came down here and saw us; and we're going to get it for her."

"And that means maybe," said Roy.

"Oh, isn't that scrumptuous!" said Dora.

"It's like a romance!" said Winnie.

"It's a pretty muddy romance," said Brent.

"Well *our* adventures are like a romance anyway," said Dora.

"I hope you don't want me to help you," said Brent. "I'm going out of the romance business. We located an old sunken motor-boat here and we have reason to think that an old stolen box——"

"Silly! Don't you think we know about it being stolen," said Dora.

"All right," said Brent, "but hereafter I charge ten dollars a day with overtime to work on adventures. I've joined the treasure hunter's union. If you want me to be matron on a wild adventure, it's going to cost you money."

"And you can't help us here either," said Pee-wee authoritatively.

The girls stared at each other, then Winifred Wilde burst out laughing. "Did—you—ever—hear—of—such—a—thing—in—all—your—born—days?" she ejaculated. "Tell them, just tell them!"

"Tell *him*, you mean," said Dora. "Tell Pee-wee Harris, who does such *big things*. Do you know what we did—keep still, don't you *dare* speak—do you know what we did, Walter Harris?"

"Don't you dare lay hands on him," said Brent. "I won't stand by and see it done."

"If you want to do that, we'll go away," said Roy.

"Oh, you're just too silly, all of you," said Dora. "Listen—*listen!*"

"Am I saying anything?" Pee-wee shouted.

"No, but you're going to," said Dora.

"All you can do is giggle," said Pee-wee.

"Of course, we giggle!" said Winnie. "He giggles best who giggles last. The last day we saw you, Walter Harris—keep still, don't you dare speak—the last time we saw you, we went right to the ruins of the old court-house and _____"

"Let me tell him," broke in Dora.

"Let me tell him," chimed in Minerva.

"You just keep still and let *me* tell him," said Winnie. "We found that old corner-stone and we found Miss Gardiner's album and—listen—in the album was that post card in a foreign language, and we had it translated and it was from one of those men on that old dredge and it told us where Nat Harrigan was and it said that Hamlin Gardiner was with him and we—we—WE—just think of it—WE—made my father drive us to the place where Nat Harrigan died, and we found out—*oh, such scouts we are*, we found out where Hamlin had gone to live, and we found him, we found him, *we found him!* He's a man now, oh ever so many years old, but we found him, *and he's a famous diver!*"

So now!”

“Just a minute,” said Roy; “please excuse me while I faint.”

“Tell my parents that I died laughing,” said Warde.

“Good-by forever,” said Dorry, lying back upon the ground. “I hope the troop will miss me now I’m gone.”

“Farewell, grappling iron,” said Will Dawson, dying also; “this is too much. Plant some dandelions on my grave.”

“A diver?” said Brent, aghast. “You don’t happen to have a bottle of smelling salts with you? I feel faint.”

Meanwhile, the dead body of Roy Blakeley rolled and kicked upon the grass, while the other scouts died one after another. All but Pee-wee; he sat petrified, but not dead.

“A—a real—diver that dives?” he gasped.

“Oh yes, when he starts to do a thing he does it,” said Dora. “And he’ll dive,” she added sweetly, “and get that box if it’s down there. He’s been at the bottom of the ocean. Don’t you want to come up there and meet him? He’s just perfectly wonderful! He’s up there with Miss Gardiner now and she’s just *literally* hugging the life out of him. And he was telling us as we drove to Bridgeboro of how he’s dived for pearls, and he’s rescued people, and gone down and explored wrecks miles and miles——”

“You can’t go down more than two miles,” poor Pee-wee said, in forlorn defense.

“Oh yes, *he can*, because he’s a prodigy,” said Dora. “And they send for him all over the world and he’s not a bit conceited and he wears a big thing on his head and he’s going to show it to us, and we traced him out and found him and brought him back with us, didn’t we Minerva. And he’ll get that iron box just as easy as picking up a pin—you see. And *we*, *WE*, will get oceans of credit. So if you want to notify the Pathé News and the newspapers, that will be just dandy, because a Boy Scout is supposed to be of service.”

“I think if I had a chocolate soda maybe I’d pull through,” said Roy.

“Well, you can stay there and kick and be dead all you want to,” said Dora. “But the rest of you are coming up to the house to meet Mr. Hamlin Gardiner, the famous diver, whom *we* found. And we can talk and make plans for getting that old iron box.”

“I’ll talk,” said Pee-wee aroused at last.



“YOU JUST KEEP STILL AND LET *ME* TELL HIM!” SAID WINNIE.

“Yes, and we’ll giggle,” said Minerva.

I need not tell you of the very extraordinary detective work done by those three merry maidens. They did something very big and Bridgeboro rang with their praises. I will not detain you with an account of a long automobile ride to find a man grown famous in his adventurous profession, who had never returned home because he had supposed his sister dead. Nor need I tell you in detail of the joyous meeting of these two companions of the old days on our beloved river. For this is Pee-wee’s story, and in Pee-wee’s stories the girls must always take a back seat.

But I will detain you just a minute longer to tell you that Hamlin Gardiner, expert diver, had a tug come up the river with all the fascinating paraphernalia of his adventurous and perilous vocation, and that he brought up the iron box out of its slimy grave in two feet of mud. Pee-wee was there when he did it. But the three girls were not ordered off the tug.

END

[The end of *Pee-wee Harris and the Sunken Treasure* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]