

HERVEY WILLETTS

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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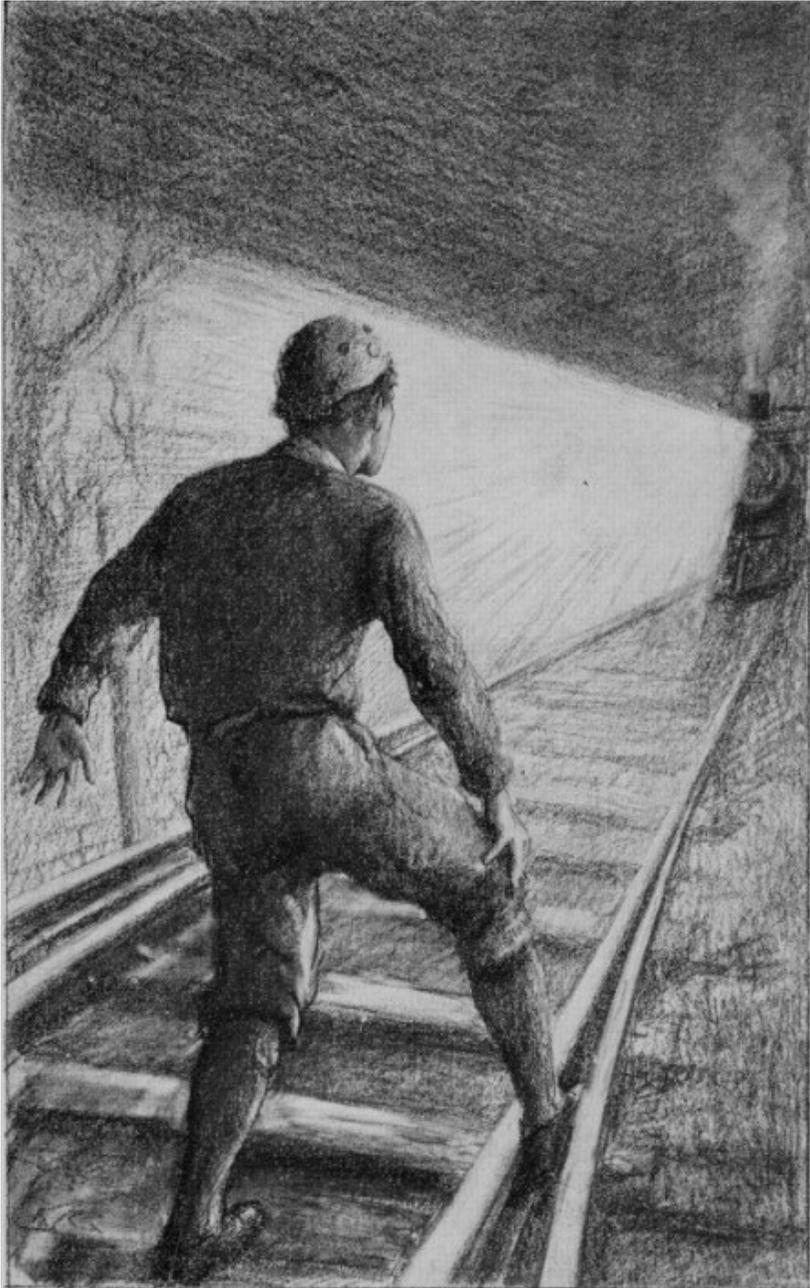
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HERVEY WILLETTS
HIS ADVENTURES



HERVEY, TREMBLING IN EVERY NERVE, FACED THE APPROACHING TRAIN.

HERVEY WILLETTS

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
HOWARD L. HASTINGS

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Here he is with his hat and his ruffled up hair.
Reckless, happy-go-lucky and new;
And because he is crazy and won't take a dare.
They liked him—and I like him too.

He's wild and all that and as blind as a bat,
And he drives them distracted it's true;
But one look at that hat and I say for all that,
I like him, that's all, I just do.

He's never at rest and he may be a pest,
And the gods cannot say what he'll do;
He can't take a test, yet above all the rest,
I like him—and you'll like him too.

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HERVEY WILLETTS

CHAPTER I

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

If Hervey Willetts were lacking many qualities which a scout ought to have (and it is to be feared he was), he certainly had one quality truly scoutish; he had nerve. It was not the sort of nerve commonly recommended to scouts, but it was one kind.

And indeed Hervey had all kinds. He was always brave, he was often reckless, he was sometimes blithely heroic. But he was always wrong. His bizarre courage never paid him any interest because, somehow or other, it was always mixed up with disobedience. Thoughtful boys saw this and were sorry for him. More, they had a sneaking admiration for him.

Once, in the wee hours of the night, Hervey saved a boy from drowning. He should have had the gold medal for that; but you see he had no right to be out swimming in the middle of the night. And there you are.

All his spectacular deeds went to waste so far as scout advancement was concerned. The deed was always clouded by the escapade. And sometimes, as you shall see, there was an escapade containing none of the ingredients of heroism. Hervey's heroic deeds were always byproducts.

He did not fit into Temple Camp at all. Why he had ever chosen it as the theatre for his stunts of glory was a puzzle. Many scouts, captivated by his effrontery, said kindly that Temple Camp did not fit into *him*. Assuredly there was misfit somewhere.

To give you an example of his nerve (and it is the episode on which this whole story hinges) he went back to Temple Camp the season following his summary expulsion therefrom. To appreciate the magnitude of his effrontery you must know something of the circumstance of his dismissal.

During that summer which had ended so ingloriously for him, he had pursued a course as free as life on the ocean wave. He was always in hot water. He would come strolling in late for meals, his outlandish little rimless hat at a rakish angle, swinging a stick or doing stunts with it for his own amusement as he ambled past the group assembled for camp-fire, or the after dinner stragglers lolling on the pavilion porch.

They seldom asked him where he had been. They knew he was on friendly terms with every farmer in the neighborhood, a crony at every rural wayside garage, the volunteer comrade of wandering pedlers, of gypsies, and even of tramps who made camp in secluded hollows and regaled him with dubious reminiscences. There was something about Hervey. . . .

Yes, that was the worst of it; *there was something about him*. Tom Slade was under the spell, and if Tom Slade liked you, you could go a long way along the trail of disobedience. It was not that Hervey was popular, in the sense that Roy Blakeley was popular. He did not grace the camp with his presence enough to be popular.

But was it not an amazing thing that he was so much liked even though he was so seldom among the big camp family? He had no friends, yet everybody was his friend. If ever a boy was a host unto himself, as they say, Hervey Willetts was that boy. Certainly he was never lonesome.

You know him; he was slender and good looking, with a kind of dancing devilry in his eyes. When they reprimanded him he looked at them as if he just did not understand. He was hopeless. There was an unconscious effrontery about him. The woods belonged to him. You could not scold him any more than you could scold a squirrel.

He certainly was not without feeling for he held in deep affection his little rimless hat cut full of holes and decorated with every sort of campaign and advertising button which had ever come his way. These little celluloid trinkets did not proclaim Hervey's principles. One of them said *Keep to the Right*, a thing which Hervey never did. Another (I know not its origin, nor did he) said *Be good and you'll be happy*.

Well, at all events, he was happy.

CHAPTER II

THE SENTENCE

Even the powers that be at Temple Camp were considerate of Hervey. They did not dismiss him as they might have done after any one of his unruly escapades. They bided their time, and as the season approached its end they became the more lenient. There was something ominous about their leniency; a kind of grimness about the way Mr. Benson greeted our hero upon his return after an all night absence. "Well, my boy, did you have a good time?" he asked with portentous cordiality.

Hervey was too guileless to read the handwriting on the wall. Another boy, conscious of his own delinquencies, would have recognized this sudden immunity from reprimand as too good to be true. But Hervey accepted it as in the natural order of things. He had never resented reprimands; he had ignored and forgotten them. He bore nobody any malice, not even the trustees. He went upon his way rejoicing. If he had any thought about the management at all, it was probably that it had at last come round to his own way of thinking. But probably he had no thought about these things at all.

Then came the end of the season with its boat races and swimming matches and distribution of awards. Against the background of these honors and festivities, Hervey seemed a lonely figure. But he was not lonely. It was his fate to arouse much sympathy which he neither deserved nor desired. There was really nothing pathetic about his being an outsider at camp. It was the camp that was the outsider, not Hervey.

Yet there was a certain pity expressed for him when little Harold Titus, the tenderfoot office boy from Administration Shack, came running down to the diving board where Hervey had condescended to grace a loitering group with his presence. These idle, bantering groups bespoke the closing of the season; they were significant of diminishing numbers and the end of pleasurable routine.

"You're wanted in the office, Hervey Willetts," Harold panted. "You got to go up there right away." Perhaps the breathless little tenderfoot felt a certain pride of triumph that he had been able to locate Hervey at all; it was a sort of scout stunt. Significant glances passed between the loiterers as Hervey departed.

He ambled in that way he had made familiar to all toward the somewhat pretentious rustic bungalow where the business of Temple Camp was conducted. He seemed never to proceed with any purpose; there was

something delightfully casual about him. He was a natural born explorer. A secreted, chirping cricket could detain him, and on this occasion he paused and accommodatingly laid his trusty stick against the ground so that an aimless caterpillar might ascend it.

The small tenderfoot glanced back, aghast at Hervey's leisurely progress toward his doom. "You better hurry up, it's serious," he called. And, imbued with a sense of his responsibility, he waited while our hero shot the caterpillar up into the foliage by a dextrous snap of his stick.

His ambling progress bringing him to Administration Shack, Hervey conceived the novel idea of ascending the steps on one leg. The tenderfoot messenger was appalled by the delay and by Hervey's thus casually pulling a stunt at the very portal of the holy sanctum.

There being several steps, Hervey found his bizarre ascent difficult, but his resolution increased with repeated failures. He often made use of a couplet which had detained him many times and interfered with the camp schedule:

Start a stunt and then get stuck,
Twenty days you'll have bad luck.

He was so engrossed with this present acrobatic enterprise (to the unspeakable dismay of the little boy who had summoned him) that he did not at first perceive Councilor Wainwright standing in the doorway smiling down upon him. Indeed he was not aware of the councilor until, triumphant, he hopped breathless into the official's very arms. The tenderfoot was appalled.

"Well, you succeeded, Hervey?" Mr. Wainwright commented pleasantly. "Suppose we step inside. I see you never give up."

"When I start to do a thing, I do it," said Hervey.

"Only sometimes you start to do the wrong things," the councilor commented sociably. "Well, Hervey," he added, dropping into a chair and inviting the boy to do the same, "here we are at the end of the season. How many rules do you suppose you've broken, Hervey?"

"I don't like a lot of those rules," said Hervey.

"No, I know you don't," laughed Mr. Wainwright, "but you see this isn't your camp. If you want to have rules of your own you ought to have a camp of your own."

"That's true, too," said Hervey.

"You see, Hervey, the trouble is you don't seem to fit. You're not bad; I never heard of you doing anything very bad. But you don't seem to work in harness. You're pretty hard to handle."

"You don't have to handle me, because I'm not around so much," said Hervey.

"Well, now, my boy," Mr. Wainwright pursued in a way of coming to the

point, “of course, this kind of thing can’t go on. There have been a dozen occasions this season when you might have been—when you *ought* to have been summarily expelled. That this wasn’t done speaks well for your disposition. It’s surprising how well you are liked by those who seldom see you. I suppose it’s what you might call the triumph of personality.”

Here was a glowing truth. And because it *was* true, because he really did have a certain elusive charm, Hervey seemed baffled at this declaration of his own quaint attractiveness. He did not know what a hard job poor Mr. Wainwright was having trying to pronounce sentence.

“A fellow wanted to hike to Westboro with me yesterday,” said Hervey, “but I told him he’d better ask the keepers; I wouldn’t get any fellow in trouble—nix on that.”

“But you got yourself in trouble.”

“That’s different,” said Hervey.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST STUNT

“Well, Hervey,” said Mr. Wainwright, “being one of the *keepers*, as you call us——”

“I’ve got nothing against *you*,” said Hervey.

“Thank you. Now, Hervey, we’ve been talking over your case for some time and it was lately decided that since the end of the season was close at hand there was no need of putting on you the stigma of dismissal. Tom Slade was responsible for that decision; he seems to like you.”

“He knows I wouldn’t take a dare from anybody,” said Hervey; “I don’t care what it is.”

“Hmph; well, he seems to like you. So you’re going home Saturday just like all the other boys. You will have finished the season. No disgrace. I don’t know whether you have any regrets or not. You have been a great trial to the management. We who have the camp in charge feel that we can’t again take the responsibility which your presence here entails. If you were with a troop and scoutmaster perhaps it would be different; perhaps you would have made a better showing under such influence. But you are a born free lance, if you know what that is, and this camp is no place for free lances, however picturesque they may be.”

“I have a lot of fun by myself,” said Hervey. “I stood on my hands on a merry-go-round horse in a carnival in Crowndale. I bet you couldn’t do that.”

Councilor Wainwright looked at him with an expression of humorous despair. “No, I don’t suppose I could,” he said.

“Isn’t that a scout stunt?” Hervey demanded.

“Why no, it isn’t, Hervey. Not when you follow a traveling carnival all the way to Crowndale and stay away for two days and identify yourself with wandering acrobats and such. Of course, there’s no use talking about those things now. But if you’re asking me, that isn’t a scout stunt at all.”

“Gee williger!” Hervey ejaculated in comment on the unreasonableness of all councilors and camp regulations.

“That’s just it, you don’t understand,” said Mr. Wainwright. “Scouting doesn’t consist merely in doing things that are hard to do. If that were so, I suppose every lawless gangster could call himself a scout.”

“I know a gangster that’s a pretty nice fellow,” said Hervey. “He did me a good turn; that’s scouting, isn’t it?”

The camp councilor looked serious. “Well, you’d better keep away from

gangsters, my boy.”

“You say a good turn isn’t scouting?”

“We won’t talk about that now, because you and I don’t see things the same way. The point is—and this is why I sent for you—you must never again at any time return to Temple Camp. You are leaving as the season closes and you are not openly disgraced. But you must tell your father——”

“It’s my stepfather,” said Hervey.

Mr. Wainwright paused just a second. “Well, your stepfather then,” he said. “You must tell him that your leaving camp this season has all the effects of a dismissal. Councilor Borden wanted to write to your father—your stepfather—and tell him just how it is. But for your sake we have overruled him in that. You may tell your stepfather in your own way——”

“Standing on my head, hey?” said Hervey.

“Standing on your head if you wish. The point is that you must tell him that you are forbidden to return to Temple Camp. And of course, you will have to tell him why. No application from you will be considered another season. Now do you understand that, Hervey?”

It was characteristic of Hervey that he never talked seriously; he seemed never impressed; it was impossible to *reach* him. It was not that he was deliberately flippant to his superiors. He was just utterly carefree and heedless. He talked to the camp officials exactly the same as he talked to other boys. And he did not talk overmuch to any one. “Bet you can’t do this,” was a phrase identified with him. “Do you dare me to jump off?” he would say if he happened to find himself one of a group assembled on the balcony above the porch of the “eats” shack. He could not just talk.

And now, in his disgrace (or what would have been disgrace to another boy) he only said, “Sure, what you say goes.”

“You understand then, Hervey? And you’ll explain to your—stepfather?”

“Leave it to me,” said Hervey.

Well, they left it to him. And thereby hangs a tale. This breaking the news was about the hardest job that Mr. Wainwright had ever done. If Hervey, the stunt specialist, had only known what a stunt it was, and how the other “keepers” had been disinclined to perform it, his sympathy, even affection, might have gone out to Mr. Wainwright on professional grounds. Even Tom Slade, afraid of nothing, found his presence necessary across the lake while Hervey was being “let down.”

At all events if any sympathy was in order, it was for the young councilor, not Hervey. The wandering minstrel ambled forth after the encounter and, pausing before the large bulletin board, took occasion to alter one of the announcements which invited all scouts to attend camp-fire that evening and listen to a certain prominent scout official “*who has seen many camps and*

brings with him several interesting books which he will use in narrating how he caught weasels and collected oriental bugs in the Mongolian jungle.”

When Hervey got through with this it read, *“Who has seen many vamps and brings with him several interesting crooks which he will use in narrating how he caught measels and collected oriental rugs in the Mongolian bungle.”*

The misspelling of measles did not trouble him.

Having thus revised the announcement he went upon his way kicking his trusty stick before him and trying to lift it with his foot so that he could catch it in his hand.

He felt that the morning had not been spent in vain.

CHAPTER IV THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

Hervey did not wait to hear the visiting traveler and naturalist. He took the noon train from Catskill and at Albany caught a train east which took him to Farrelton, the small New England city where he lived.

He did not waste the precious hours en route. Evading an all-seeing conductor, he sought the forbidden platform of the car and made acquaintance with a trainman who reluctantly permitted him to remain outside. He asked the trainman to “sneak” him into the locomotive and when told that this was impossible, he suggested overcoming the difficulty by matching pennies to determine whether the rule might not be broken. The trainman was immovable, but he relaxed enough to permit himself to hobnob with this restless young free lance on the flying platform.

“I bet you can’t walk through the car without touching the seats while the train is going around a turn,” Hervey challenged. “Bet you three cigar coupons.”

The trainman declining to essay this stunt, Hervey attempted it himself while the train was sweeping around a curve which skirted the foot of one of the beautiful Berkshire mountains. He succeeded so well that about midway of the car he went sprawling into the lap of a bespectacled young man who seemed greatly ruffled by this sudden avalanche.

Hervey rolled around into the seat beside the stranger and said, “That’s mighty hard to do, do you know it? Keep your eye out for another hill with a curve around it and I’ll do it, you see. Leave it to me.”

“You came very near not leaving anything to *me*,” said the young man, picking up his spectacles and gathering the grip and bundles that Hervey’s precipitate arrival had scattered on the floor.

“I went kerflop, hey?”

“You certainly did,” said the young man.

Since Hervey was in the seat he remained there a few minutes. “Oh, *bambino*, you’re a lucky guy!” he said, noticing the pasters on the stranger’s suitcase. “That’s where I’m going all right.” This was true only in the sense that Hervey intended to go everywhere. He had never planned to favor Montana at the expense of other states.

“I hope you won’t arrive there so roughly,” said the young man.

The word *roughly* caught Hervey and he glanced sideways at the young man rather more interestedly than he usually did at chance acquaintances. For

indeed all people were pretty much the same to Hervey. What he saw was a young fellow of perhaps twenty who gave the impression of being so correct in his deportment that his sudden discomfort made him look ridiculous. He was so utterly out of the spirit of Hervey's prank! Fate had certainly brought together an all-assorted pair. He was an oldish young fellow, a perfect gentleman assuredly; too nearly perfect for his age.

"Did you lasso any ponies out there?" Hervey demanded briskly, as if these exploits were Montana's single claim to importance.

"I don't think I even saw any," said the young man.

"Didn't even see any? They've got train robbers."

"Well, I couldn't exactly deny that."

"Were you running away from home?" Hervey asked, in his rapid fire fashion.

"I was attending a musical convention," said the young fellow.

"Oh, music. Can you play the harmonica?"

"I never tried."

"Bet your life I'm going to Montana; yop, soon as I get the price. And believe me, I know where I'm going to get it."

"You seem to be sure of everything," said the stranger.

"I'm going to collop it," said Hervey.

"That might be interesting if I knew what it meant," his companion observed.

"You don't know what collop means?"

"I must confess I don't."

"Good night!" ejaculated Hervey. "You know what bandits are, don't you?"

"You mean to be a bandit?"

"Jiminetty, they're not so bad. Look at Robin Hood; don't they write poems and operas about him and everything? You're supposed to know all about music, gee williger!"

This deft reasoning which seemed in a way to place music lovers in the category with outlaws did reach the young fellow's limited sense of humor and he smiled. "Well, you're certainly a queer youngster," said he.

Pity the boy of twenty who calls another boy a youngster!

"How much do I have to have to go to Montana?" Hervey demanded.

"Well, you have to have considerable."

"A hundred bucks?"

"At least."

"That's me, all right," said Hervey.

It was characteristic of him that his resolution to go to Montana had originated at the moment of his noticing the stranger's suitcase. It was also

characteristic of him to say that he knew how he was to obtain the money to go there, when in fact he had no such knowledge. Yet it was not exactly an untruth since he had many singular plans for earning money. Did not he intend to join a circus?

Moreover, it was characteristic of him that he did not linger in the seat. Soon the train entered another curve and that was his cue to depart almost as unceremoniously as he had arrived, leaving the strange young fellow staring after him rather curiously.

Hervey's second attempt was no more successful than his first. He would not check his staggering progress by using his hands because of a rhymed couplet which was part of his creed:

Try a stunt and make a rule,
Break it and you're one big fool.

Again he went sprawling, this time upon the lap of a kindly old gentleman, who smiled upon him and made a place for him on the seat.

"Maybe you think that's easy," said Hervey.

CHAPTER V

CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

When Hervey told the councilor at Temple Camp that he had a stepfather, he told something less than the whole story. He had both a stepfather and a stepmother. His father had died when he was very young and his mother had married a man named Walton who had been not only a good guardian but a very patient guardian to Hervey. Then, when he was old enough to feel a bereavement more keenly his mother had died, and after several years his stepfather had taken a second wife who had always been an affectionate stepmother to the twice orphaned boy.

So here was the odd situation of a boy living in the home of his childhood in the care of two people who were in no way related to him. It was characteristic of Hervey to get into odd situations and predicaments, and perhaps this position which he occupied in his own home in a fashion symbolized the position which he occupied in scouting and among boys generally. It was a position hard to duplicate, just as all of his stunts and resultant predicaments would have been hard to duplicate. He stood alone, or hung by his feet alone, or stood on his head. He was different, and everything about him was different. Of course, he did not regard having two step-parents as a stunt. But, you see, even in this he went a little further than most boys. He could handle two step-parents as easily as one, and he went upon his way rejoicing.

No sentimental pity for Hervey is justified by this step-parent condition in his colorful career. The worst that can be said of Mr. and Mrs. Walton is that they did not understand him. But then no one understood him. He, on his part, accepted them as he accepted everything. He had nothing against them; he had nothing against anybody. Scout rules, wandering peddlers, railroad conductors, scoutmasters, school principals, tramps, carnival actors, step-parents, were all the same to Hervey. He leaned a little toward carnival actors.

I have sometimes wondered whether he ever had any wistful thoughts of his own mother so lately gone from him. And what his story might have been if she had been spared. If he was capable of deep sentiment we shall have to find that in this narrative. He was certainly blithesome and content at this point of taking up the trail of his aimless and adventurous progress. Like the miller of Dee in the nursery rhyme, "he cared for nobody, no not he." *But he was incapable of malice.* Perhaps that was the keynote of his nature. And it was not a bad keynote.

It was to this home, a pretty little house in Farrelton in the Berkshires, that Hervey returned after his summer at Temple Camp. And he overlooked the trifling matter of reporting that he had been dismissed and forbidden ever to return to those scenes of his roving freedom.

Hervey was akin to those boys who point a suggestive finger in the direction an automobile is going in the hope of getting a lift. But his method was far better than that of most boys. It had an original quality all his own which motorists found it hard to resist.

He would saunter diagonally across the road with a nonchalant air of preoccupation the while tossing a ball into the air. This he would dextrously cause to drop into the car which he had designs on. His preoccupied manner of crossing usually had the effect of slowing up the car. The truant ball gave him the opportunity to request its return. For the rest he depended on his personality to get a ride. He figured that if he could bring a passing auto to a halt the rest would be easy, as it usually proved to be.

As he emerged from the railroad station on the day of his return, he espied a Ford touring car starting off. He had not his trusty rubber ball with him so he was forced to make the usual direct request. Perhaps his rather cumbersome suitcase won him favor from the somewhat hard looking young man who drove the car.

This young man did not look like the sort who think too seriously about good turns. He was poorly dressed and wore a cap at that villainous angle affected only by young men of the strong-arm persuasion. He had also (what seemed to harmonize with his cap) a livid scar on his cheek, and he sat in that sophisticated sideways posture at the wheel which suggested the taxi chauffeur.

“You going up Main Street?” Hervey queried, as he took his seat beside the stranger. “I’m going as far as Hart Street.”

“I got yer,” said the young man accommodatingly. “Yer one er dem boy scouts?”

“Scout in looks only,” said Hervey laconically, alluding to his khaki attire.

“Youse guys is a lot of false alarms,” said the driver. “What can yez do?”

“Give me a dare,” said Hervey.

“Sure, I’ll give yer a dare.”

“Just give me one and I’ll show you,” said Hervey.

His rather bizarre challenge caused the stranger, whose remarks had been altogether casual, to glance sideways at him rather curiously.

“You just give me a dare, that’s all,” said Hervey complacently.

It seemed as if the young man’s mood of banter had changed to one of inquiring interest. His criticism had been surly, but not serious; now suddenly, he flattered Hervey by a kind of lowering inspection.

“Sure, I’ll give yer one,” said he; “only yer mother don’t leave yer out nights.”

“Oh, don’t she,” Hervey sneered. “You just give me a dare—you just give me one. I refused to take dares from people that wouldn’t even ride in a Ford, I did.”

Still the young fellow scrutinized him. “Yare?” he queried cynically.

“Sure I did; I called a bluff from a cowboy and I chucked his dare in his face.”

“Get out.”

“You just give me one and see,” said Hervey.

“Well, if yer mother will leave yer out,” said the young man, “you meet me in the parking space in back of the post office at ten o’clock to-night and I’ll give yer a dare all right; I’ll give yer a good one. I’ll show yer you’re a flat tire.”

“You call me a flat tire?”

“Sure, you’re a blowout—all noise and no action.”

This was too much for Hervey. He forgot that this was the evening of his welcome home. He forgot that he had ever been to Temple Camp or that this tough young stranger meant nothing to him. He never approached toward acquaintanceship by the usual slow process. And his sense of discrimination was conspicuous by its absence.

“I’ll be there all right, you leave it to me,” he said.

“Ten bells,” said the tough young fellow.

“You leave it to me,” said Hervey.

CHAPTER VI THE INSPIRED DARE

That was Hervey Willetts all over, to make a ridiculous appointment with a stranger before he had so much as greeted his step-parents. And for such a purpose! Truly, he was hopeless.

The house in which he lived and in which he had been born was a plain house, immaculately white, with well kept grounds about it. It was a typical New England place; old-fashioned, a model of order inside and out, eloquent of simplicity and unostentatious prosperity.

Mr. Walton owned a large stationery store on the main street and his quiet, uneventful life was spent between this peak-roofed, white and green homestead and his attractive store which was a medley of books, post cards, pennants, Indian souvenirs and stationery. Mrs. Walton was not above waiting on customers in her husband's store, especially in the season when Farrelton was overrun with "summer folks."

On this momentous evening, the returning prodigal found his step-parents at home and he received an affectionate greeting. The occasion would have been favorable for telling about the ultimatum he had received at camp, but he did not do it. Next summer seemed such a long time off! Why worry about next summer when he had an appointment to "throw down" a dare that very night?

"Well, Hervey," said Mr. Walton, "we're glad you had a good summer. You didn't write often, but I always told Mum that no news is good news. And here you are safe and sound.

"And as brown as a mulatto," said Mrs. Walton, drawing him to her and caressing him affectionately.

"Now for school, hey?" said Mr. Walton pleasantly. "Next summer, or maybe the summer after that, Mum and I are going to have a jaunt, maybe. Will you let us go, Herve?"

"Sure thing, go as far as you like with me," said Hervey.

Mrs. Walton laughed, and drawing him close again, caressed him fondly. "Well, that's a long way off," said she. "Maybe you'll be entering Harvard by then; we're such slow pokes, dad and I. We'll probably end by not going at all. Europe seems so terribly far."

"Europe is nothing," said Hervey. "I'm going to Montana."

"Well, first you're going to school," laughed Mr. Walton.

"Pity the poor school," said Hervey.

“Oh, not as bad as that,” his stepfather commented pleasantly. “I kind of think you’re going to be different this fall. Not get into any scrapes, huh? Study hard, stay in the Scouts, and not give your mother any worries. What do you say?”

“You know me, Al,” said Hervey, which reply was not altogether explicit or satisfactory. But it moved Mrs. Walton to embrace him again.

“And you’re going to stay in the Scouts, aren’t you?” she asked.

“Of course he is,” said Mr. Walton. “They weren’t all as lucky as you, Hervey, to be up at a fine camp all summer. I saw Bert Alston yesterday. He was asking when you were coming back. I told him we wouldn’t know till we saw you.”

“That’s me,” said Hervey. “I’ve got nothing against the Scouts.”

“Well then, I hope you’ll stay more among them,” said Mr. Walton. “They’re a good sort.”

“They don’t stay among me very much,” said Hervey. “What’s fair for one is fair for the other.”

Mr. and Mrs. Walton glanced at each other laughing.

“Well, of course the scouts didn’t join *you*; you joined them,” said Mr. Walton. “You put the cart before the horse, so to speak.”

“Oh bimbo, there’s one horse up there I’d like to ride,” said Hervey. “That’s what I want to do, ride a horse.”

During the evening, he strolled out to “see if any fellers were around,” as he said, and at ten o’clock he wandered into the public parking field behind the post office. He did not more than half expect to find his chance acquaintance there, but he was not going to be a quitter in this sacred matter of not taking dares. In these matters, at least, he was a model of honor and punctiliousness.

There were but a few cars parked in the dark field. Entrance to this convenient, though poorly patronized place was from Main Street and motorists were required to make their exit through a lane which led out between buildings into Piper Street. Here, almost directly opposite the exit, was the Farrelton Fire House.

Hervey found his outlandish friend sitting on a fence which bordered the lane. The stranger looked atrocious enough in the darkness and even Hervey, who took everything as it came, was momentarily conscious of the utter absurdity of this tryst. He would go to any length to confound one who “gave him a dare.” But he had never before gone to so much trouble to hear the dare pronounced. And at such a time!

“Well, am I a flat tire?” he asked.

“Wait till I see how you roll,” said the challenger.

“I wouldn’t take a dare that I’d do something mean for anybody,” said Hervey, “or like if you wanted me to do an errand or something like that — I

wouldn't call that a dare. It's got to be a stunt."

"Yer startin' ter hedge?"

"No, I'm not starting to hedge, only it's got to be a stunt. Suppose you dared me to go and buy you a pack of cigarettes. *Nothing doing*, I'm not so easy as that."

"Suppose I dared yer to bust a winder."

"Maybe that would be different," said Hervey.

"Suppose I dared yer ter—ter—tie a tin can on one uv them cars."

"Maybe that would be all right," said Hervey.

"Yer ain't such a bad kid. Suppose—no, gee, yer only a kid."

"Go on, what is it?" Hervey urged.

"I dare yer ter—ter get a bottle and bust it up and throw it down in front of one uv them cars—dat big Packard over dare."

"No, sir, what's the use of cutting somebody's tire? Anybody could do that. You call that a stunt?"

"Yer scared a gettin' caught."

"I'm not as scared of getting caught, but what's the good cutting somebody's tire? Gee, he might be a nice feller, how do I know?"

"I dare yer ter go down ter New Street and—leave us see—I dare yer ter go dare and ring de fire alarm box. *Dare's a hot one for yer*. All dem fire guys gits is a good run for nartin'. Give 'em somethin' ter keep 'em from fallin' asleep. *Dare's a pippin' fer yer—take it or leave it. Put up or shut up. Baby, dare's a knockout!*"

Hervey did not know whether this was a "pippin'" or not. It certainly appealed to him as a knockout. To him it seemed to contain none of the ingredients of meanness. He had a system of moral reasoning quite his own. He would not damage any one's tire. Breaking a window did not seem so bad. Sending in a false fire-alarm was certainly an inspiration. Nobody's property would be damaged. There would just be a big rumpus over nothing. He had to confess that it was the kind of a thing to be "dared" to do. It was harmless, yet a thing that most boys would not risk. It seemed a pretty good dare; a sudden inspiration of the stranger's.

"You mean where the new houses are?" Hervey asked.

The tough young fellow stood pat upon his inspiration and did not deign to discuss details. "*Dare's a hot tamale fer yer*," was all he said.

"There's fire boxes nearer than that," said Hervey, flirting with the idea.

"Yed hedgin'? Give 'em a good run. *Dat's some sizzlin' tamale!*"

It did seem a sizzling tamale.

"Come ahead," said Hervey.

"Nah, wot'll I come ahead fer?" said the stranger. His attitude seemed to be that the genius of this enterprise, the originator of the stunt and propounder of

the inspired dare, should not go to any trouble in the matter. “If yer pull it, I’ll be wise to it all right,” he said. “Won’t I hear de fire whistle? I’ll be here when de big noise starts; I’ll be hip to it, don’t never worry ’bout me.”

That was very true. The striking effect of Hervey’s stunt would be visible and audible throughout the length and breadth of that small town.

“I told you I wouldn’t take a dare from anybody, didn’t I?” he said.

“It’s up ter you,” said the genius of the big dare.

CHAPTER VII

GONE

The funny part of the whole business is this; that if Hervey had hunted up Bert Alston that night, he might have gone trailing in the woods north of Bridgeboro. He might have hunted for Skinny Grover who had been appointed to hide and baffle his pursuers. *And if he had trailed Skinny Grover he would have been the one to find him.* There is not the slightest doubt of it. And it would have been a stunt. A sizzling tamale, even. But you see no one dared him to do that.

As it was, he hastened up Main Street to Van Doran's Lane and through this till it petered out in the fields down by the river. Beyond these fields was New Street, a straggling tentacle of road which reached away from town in a sweeping curve, skirted the river for half a mile or so, then ended abruptly.

It was toward the dead end of this detached street that Hervey was taking a short-cut. The neighborhood looked remote enough beyond the area of intervening meadows. First he could see only the broken line of lights which identified the houses. Then, as he approached nearer these houses emerged slowly out of the darkness.

There was no sign or sound of life about as he entered the street crossing the grounds between two cottages. Then a dog barked. It was only a perfunctory bark and Hervey made his way up the street till he came to a sturdy post surmounted by a fire-alarm box. It marked the end of the postman's route along this lonely street and was decorated with a dozen or more unsightly mail boxes belonging to the residents living beyond this point.

Glancing cautiously about as he advanced, Hervey crept up and opened the little metal door of the fire box. The lights in a nearby house went out. He heard the slamming of a door. He paused, listening intently. Somewhere in the darkness nearby was a creaking sound. Nothing but some rusty clothesline pulley probably, but it made him hesitate. Suddenly, he gave the little metal handle a turn, then ran pell-mell down into the fields. He had done it.

Yet nothing happened. He ran and ran. Then suddenly, he paused in his steps as the deafening peal of the fire whistle smote his ears. It shook the night with its ghoulissh siren call. Its uncanny variations filled the darkness with horror. And just because of the turning of a little handle! It moaned and cried and seemed to be calling to the dead to rise. Four slow, variated, suffering wails. Then a pause. Then three long screams of anguish. Then silence. *Forty-three.* New Street district.

The sound of the clamorous siren affected Hervey strangely, as if a flood light had been thrown upon him. He stood in the dark field, unable to budge. Then he got hold of himself and ran desperately. As he glanced hurriedly back, he saw lights reappearing in the houses where sleep had reigned. Then he heard in the distance the piercing gong of the speeding engines. He could see the luminous headlights advancing along the sweeping curve of that runaway street. For just a moment they shimmered up the frog pool along the distant road and, looking back, Hervey saw clearly the familiar little spot with the willow tree overhanging it. Then he heard voices, thin and spent in the distance.

He did not pause nor turn again, but ran with all his might and main till he reached Main Street where he found it strangely difficult to walk with a leisurely air of unconcern. A man whom he passed turned and glanced at him and he was seized with a momentary terror. He passed some boys running to the fire. He liked fires, real fires, and in different circumstances it would have been his delight to join them. He would have been able to sneak inside the fire lines and have an advantage over other boys.

Even Hervey, who had no sense of values, was vaguely conscious now of the lack of proportion in this whole affair. To do so much at the idle behest of a dubious chance acquaintance! And to what end? To prove what—and why? There was no rhyme nor reason in the thing. Hervey was of course, incapable of formulating these thoughts. The nearest he got was just to feel silly. He was not naturally mischievous, much less vicious. But he could not take a dare. Alas for all the fine spirit and energy that went to waste!

And here was the anti-climax of the whole crazy business. His challenger was not waiting for him in the parking space. There was no triumph, no “*Well, what do you say now?*” There was no gloating over the humbled dare giver. He had gone away. Evidently he had no sporting interest in the matter at all. Hervey had thought to give the genius of the “hot tamale” a chance to purge his soul of shame by letting him treat to ice cream sodas. But our hero was not permitted flauntingly to enjoy his triumph. Therein lay the only “kick” in the enterprise. It was reduced now to the level of a mischievous prank. No achievement, no victory, no public recognition. No recognition even from a young tough who meant just nothing at all in Hervey’s young life.

Well, there you have Hervey Willetts.

CHAPTER VIII

SAFETY IN SILENCE

But there was a triumph, though it was not Hervey's. The daredevil had not even the doubtful glory suggested by that name. He was just a dupe. The next afternoon the *Farrelton Call* bore the following glaring headline on its usually modest front page:

DARING ROBBERY AT FIRE HOUSE

THIEVES BREAK INTO SAFE AND TAKE CARNIVAL
FUND AMOUNTING TO FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS

FALSE FIRE-ALARM THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN USED
BY ROBBERS. NO CLEW TO MISCREANTS.

"Shortly after ten o'clock last night," the article ran, "the Farrelton Fire House was entered by one or more burglars who forced the little, old-fashioned safe and stole a sum slightly less than four hundred dollars. Most of this money constituted the fund belonging partly to the exempt firemen's organization and partly to the active service men, and was intended to be used to finance the Firemen's Carnival to be held in Stebbin's Field. No one was in the fire-house when the robbery occurred.

"A few minutes after ten last night, an alarm was sent in from the fire-box in the outlying section of town where New Street was lately extended. It was a false alarm and there is no clew which affords any hope of identifying the sender.

"It is thought by the police that the alarm may have been sent by a confederate of the burglars in order to empty the fire-house of its occupants at a particular time. If this was the case, it would argue that the crime was executed by men familiar with facts about the fire-house.

"Charlie Winthrop, driver of the engine, is on vacation and his place is being filled by one of the other men, Fred Corway. Corway, who was injured in the McElroy fire last year, usually remains in the fire-house when an alarm is received.

"But last night, there being still another man absent because of illness, Corway went out with the others. It is believed that the robbery was planned by some one who knew that the fire company was short-handed. The robbers may have sent in the alarm in the hope of completely emptying the building, or at the worst of having but one crippled occupant to deal with.

"The police are following up several rather unpromising clews which they refuse to divulge. Chief Bordman persists in the belief that the job was done by local talent and points to the fact that very little money is kept in fire-houses and also that the projected carnival is not known about outside of Farrelton.

"When seen this morning, County Detective Burr said, 'It looks to me like a home town affair. Burglars don't ransack fire headquarters, because there usually isn't anything worth stealing in such places. They must have known about this money. And they probably had some hopes of clearing out the place for a while with a false alarm. It looks to me as if they had inside knowledge. They probably knew the safe was an out-of-date affair, too. They had

to work quick. And the quicker we work clearing a lot of young loafers away from the neighborhood of the fire-houses and other hang-out spots in this town, the better it will be.”

The same issue of the newspaper carried an editorial hurling blame this way and that. The police should watch the lunch wagons which were infested with young loungers. The fire-fighting contingent was “disgracefully inadequate.” The remote end of New Street had never been policed. And so on, and so on. Presumably the *Farrelton Call* was the only thing properly conducted.

Hervey read this article with mounting interest—and agitation. His blithesome, devil-may-care nature was for the first time surprised into something like soberness, not to say apprehension. Spectacular stunts and dares were all very well—except for the upkeep.

But the robbery, to which he seemed an accessory, did not entirely obliterate another shock with which the gods had visited him. He had intended to ask permission to dive from the top of the dizzy ladder which would be held by sloping wires above a perilously small tank of water at the carnival, and failing to obtain permission he had intended to do it without permission. But now he could not do it. He had knocked down the spectacular ladder on which he had intended to climb up; for there probably would not be any carnival. Farrelton had always been too tame for Hervey and now he had, it seemed, killed the most promising diversion which the brief pre-school season offered.

Of course, he had no intention of telling the authorities about his encounter with the young fellow of the Ford car. He could not give them a clew without incriminating himself. He made sure of this by certain questions casually propounded to his stepfather that evening at supper.

“Well, I hope they catch the whole crew of them,” said Mr. Walton. “They’re potential murderers. If they had found the lame fireman there they would have killed him if necessary. That kind stops at nothing.”

“Mr. Tonelson who was here about the apples this afternoon thinks there was only one man,” said Mrs. Walton. “And he thinks *he* was an amateur.”

“There were two of them anyway,” said her husband. “There was the one who sent in the alarm.”

Hervey, eating his dessert, was all ears. “Ringin an alarm box isn’t—jiminies, a fellow that does that isn’t a criminal, is he?” he ventured.

“He is if he’s working with a burglar,” said Mr. Walton. “He’s an accessory. You know what that is, don’t you?”

“Like something you put on an automobile?” Hervey said.

Mr. and Mrs. Walton laughed heartily. “He’s a confederate,” said Mr. Walton.

“Well, I certainly hope they’re caught and sent to jail,” said Mrs. Walton,

whose gentle voice and manner seemed to belie any unkind thought, even toward robbers. “To think the carnival was to raise money for the Children’s Home! It almost seems as if they had stolen the money from little waifs and crippled children. Why, there are two little blind tots in the Home.”

Hervey did not like the sound of that; it made him feel uncomfortable, contemptible.

“They might better have turned over the four hundred dollars to the Home,” said her practical husband.

“Oh, they didn’t know,” said Mrs. Walton. “But it’s unspeakable.”

“You never loiter around with any of that crowd down at Huyler’s or the lunch wagon, do you, Herve?” Mr. Walton asked suddenly.

“Such a question!” his wife exclaimed in surprised reproof.

“Well, I’m glad he doesn’t.”

“Of course, he doesn’t,” said Mrs. Walton.

“Anyway,” said Hervey, feeling very uncomfortable, and fearful lest he say too much, “I don’t see how a fel—a man that sends a false alarm is a—like a murderer. How do they know the burglar had anything to do with that?”

“Yes, how do they know that?” queried Mrs. Walton as a sort of affectionate compliment to Hervey’s reasoning.

“Well,” said Mr. Walton, “they put two and two together. I guess they know their business. I didn’t say a man who sends in a false alarm is a murderer—necessarily. Considered by itself it’s just malicious mischief. I suppose it’s a misdemeanor, if you want to be technical about it,” he added.

“I bet you couldn’t go to jail for it,” Hervey ventured cautiously.

“I bet you could,” said Mr. Walton.

Of course, Hervey knew that what he had done was reprehensible. He had not thought of it in that light, for that was just Hervey, but in the light of the robbery, he thought about it a good deal. He had put out this feeler to his stepfather in order to get Mr. Walton’s reaction.

He was not afraid that he would be implicated in the robbery, though he felt mean to think that he had been an innocent participant in an affair which his mother had branded as contemptible and unspeakable. Mrs. Walton did not ordinarily use those terms. It seemed to Hervey that she had called *him* contemptible and unspeakable. And he knew he was not that.

He had thought that if he could ascertain with certainty that his “stunt” was quite innocent, he might tell the authorities or Mr. Walton about his encounter with the young tough. But if he had been guilty of malicious mischief (appalling phrase) and could go to jail for it, why then he had better hold his peace. Here again fate baffled him for he would have relished an opportunity to track a real robber. But, he reassured himself, he was not concealing facts about the robbery. He was just concealing the little episode of his stunt.

If you call it a stunt. . . .

CHAPTER IX STRANDED

Before the meal was over Mr. Walton swept aside the whole subject and in pleasant contrast to those sorry matters observed cheerily, "I hope you're going to stick with the Scouts, Herve. They represent about the best we've got in boys in this town. That Burroughs chap was in the store to-day wanting a jack-knife and he was asking when you were coming back. You didn't get in touch with the troop yet, hey?"

"They spend too much time making plans," Hervey said.

"Well, they have a lot of fun when they carry their plans out, don't they?"

"Sure, playing games."

"What's the matter with games?"

"Jiminies, they never want to do what I do."

"Then why don't you do what they do? What a half a million boys want to do is better than what one boy wants to do, isn't it? It seems to me they do some pretty big things. I notice they get their names in the papers."

This remark about getting one's name in the papers was not altogether pleasant to Hervey. He was somewhat in fear of that very thing. "Sure, that's all they do," he said. "Didn't I beat them all running to East Farrelton? And I didn't get anything out of it. Nix on that outfit."

"I think that was a shame," said Mrs. Walton.

"Sure, it was no fair," said Hervey.

"Your scoutmaster told me you cut across Allen's farm," Mr. Walton observed, smiling. "And that's private land you know, Herve."

"He's a sap," said Hervey. "I got there the quickest way and beat them all, and then I get a comeback. You're supposed to be resourceful and then when you're resourceful and crawl under barbed-wire fences and all that and beat them by twenty-one minutes, they give you a call-down instead of a reward. Old man Allen never made any kick."

"Probably he didn't know about it," said Mr. Walton.

"Well then, it didn't hurt him," said Hervey.

Mr. Walton whistled softly and looked ruefully into space.

"I haven't much sympathy for men who use barbed-wire," said Mrs. Walton in her gentle way. "Whenever I think of barbed-wire it reminds me of the war."

"Sure, and they're always shouting about cruelty to animals and all that bunk," said Hervey. "A lot of cows get cut on barbed-wire fences. I know a

cow that cut his throat that way. Nix on the Scouts.”

“Is there anything in the Scouts’ book favoring barbed-wire fences?” Mr. Walton asked. “Anyway, we’re not talking about barbed-wire, we’re talking about scouting.”

“I know that cow personally,” Hervey said.

“Well, I think it’s *inhuman*,” said his mother.

Poor Mr. Walton glanced from one to the other with an amused expression.

“Maybe I won’t resign,” said Hervey, “but I’m not going to bother with them a whole lot. I get plenty of fun, all right. Whatever they do I can beat them at it.”

“Well, then, I should think you’d stay with them and get the glory,” said Mr. Walton, rising. As he left the table he clapped Hervey on the shoulder by way of showing that the discussion had been altogether friendly. “You and Mum are a great pair,” he laughed. “The next time the Boy Scouts find a lost child, I’ll let you know about it, Herve.”

“Believe me, they can’t even find *me* half the time.”

“And that’s true enough, I guess,” said Mr. Walton.

Hervey spent the next day on one of his lone, aimless hikes. He made a picturesque figure as he went down the main street of Farrelton, wearing that outlandish cap which he always wore, the brim cut entirely away, the felt crown full of holes and advertisement buttons. His progress had a wanton air about it; it was evident that he had no destination. He poked the stick which he always carried into an over-ripe apple that he happened to see along the road, and dextrously discharged it against a house. It struck a window which made it necessary for him to accelerate his pace to a point of safety in a crossroad.

After a while he got a lift as far as Tanner’s Corners and proved entertaining to his motorist host. It was characteristic of him to proceed without the faintest thought of how he could get home; he could never see more than a few yards ahead of him. And he never considered the increasing distance behind him. In the present instance this distance stretched out to about fifteen miles. For when he learned that the motorist was going to Tanner’s Corners, of course he decided that he was going there too.

It proved a good destination, for there he witnessed a prolonged and exciting ball game on the village green. This did not end till dusk and while it was on our wandering hero gave not so much as one thought to home nor how he was to get there. The gathering darkness found him stranded; he had no money to pay his fare on the eight-seven northbound train nor to buy himself so much as a morsel of food.

Strangely, he had a feeling that his predicament was somehow part and parcel with his adventure of the previous night. He had not entirely forgotten that, nor even attained to a state of mental composure regarding it. He had been

connected with something contemptible and unspeakable (those were his mother's own words) and he did not like the words at all. He felt a little resentful toward her that she had used them. For what had *he* done that was so very bad? Well, he had done this; he had placed himself in a position where he could not tell what he knew about that young ruffian who had evidently been a stranger in Farrelton. He could not tell because of his own "malicious mischief." He was not quite sure about malicious mischief, but his father's words about it had not been reassuring. It was evidently a pretty serious matter and now, hungry and somewhat perplexed in this distant village, he had the feeling that somehow he was a fugitive.

But, of course, that was absurd; he had simply gone off for the day. And now he was in a predicament as he had been at Temple Camp dozens of times before. So far as his little escapade of the fire-alarm was concerned, he had only to keep silent. The only real worry that he had was about getting home. There was not the slightest reason why he should feel contemptible nor why he should feel like a confederate, much less a fugitive. But how about that ten miles that had seemed so short and pleasant in an auto? That was Hervey all over. . . .

He strolled over to the railroad station and gazed wistfully at the train which was ready to start at eight-seven. The cars were lighted and looked cheery inside. A few passengers were already seated; they looked very comfortable as they sat reading or just waiting. Hervey strolled through the train to see if any Farrelton people were on it.

If so, he would have considered asking for a loan of his train fare. But he encountered no familiar faces. Then it occurred to him that this was just as well since he would not want his trip to Tanner's Corners mentioned in Farrelton. He did not know just why he felt that way. It had something to do with that feeling about being a fugitive—about getting away from something or somebody.

Another thought occurred to him; he might hook a ride to Farrelton. He had never done such a thing on a railroad, but a couple of tramps who had made a squalid camp in the woods near Temple Camp had discussed in his presence the technique of riding under rolling stock. He could crawl in on the wheel trucks and be quite concealed. He remembered how one of those atrocious hoboos had mentioned the deafening clank and rattle which assaults the rider's ears in such position. "De best dope is ter get sideways an' hook yer foot onter de chain," one of the hoboos had said. Hervey was not above trying that.

But his opportunity was spoiled by a trainman who presently took his stand on the platform calling, "*Farrelton, North Farrelton, Woodsedge, Meadow Junction, change for Boston.*" He had an eagle eye, and besides, the passengers

were numerous on the platform now. Hervey realized that crawling in under a car was not so easy. Small as he was, he had not the technique of a hobo.

So he decided to walk the tracks to Farrelton. That would be the shortest route, shorter by two or three miles than the road. He would have to negotiate a trestle, but he did not mind that. The trestle was some distance away and he never worried about things that were at a distance. What troubled him most of all was that he was hungry. He did not admit that he was worried about anything else.

What was there to worry about?

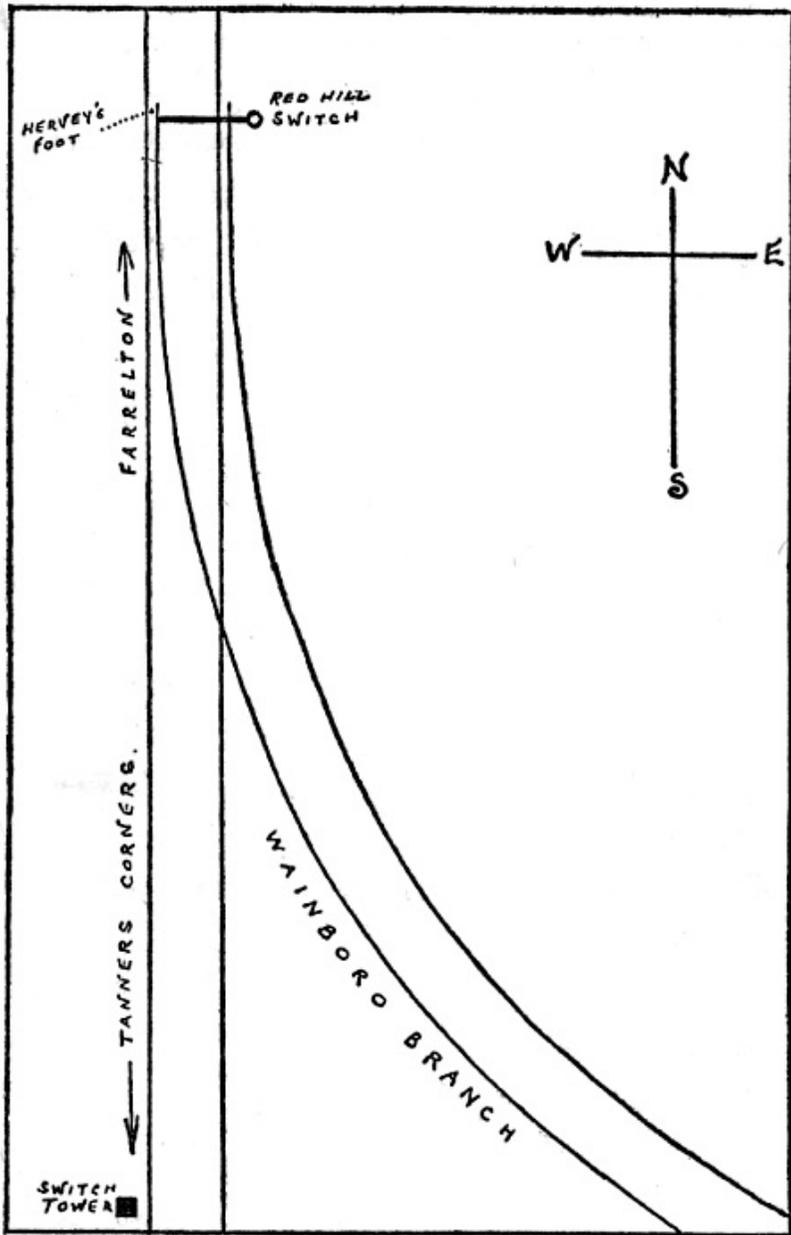
CHAPTER X

TRAPPED

Hervey started north along the tracks in the darkness. Walking railroad tracks is not so easy. The ties are not placed for the convenience of the hiker and somehow he can never get into a good steady pace. Hervey tried walking outside the tracks, but the ground was uneven and he could not make good time. He was a little sorry he had not gone by the road. Besides, he had to keep glancing behind him for the train which would soon come thundering along.

After a little while he passed the switch tower and noted the cheery light up in its little surmounting enclosure. He would have liked to climb up that narrow ladder and make friends with the towerman. That would have been right in his line. But even he was impressed with the necessity of not losing time now. He wondered if anything (he did not know exactly what) had happened in Farrelton since morning. They might possibly have caught the originator of the hot tamale stunt and he might have involved Hervey in a confession. But Hervey had faith in that worthy's ability not to be caught. It was very dark and lonesome in the woods, but the shiny steel tracks somehow kept him cheery company as he trudged along through the silent night.

Pretty soon he noticed there were four rails beneath him instead of two. Two of these came into the main line in a sweeping curve from the southeast, and Hervey reflected with satisfaction that he had reached the convergence of the Wainboro branch with the main line. Well, he had already hiked about three miles. The rails of the branch line had passed the point of curvature and ran even with those of the main line; that is, the left rail of the main line and the left rail of the branch line ran parallel three or four inches apart. You may see this by glancing at the sketch. A few yards ahead, as you will see, was Red Hill switch.



Hervey was amusing himself by walking these two rails, one foot on either rail, when suddenly the piercing scream of the locomotive caused him to jump aside. The flaring headlight of the northbound train illuminated a little area of woodland as it moved swiftly toward him; it seemed to carry along a patch of glimmering forest. On, on it came, invincible, resistless, utterly heedless of the

poor little hiker as it thundered by. What a clang and clamor in the solemn night. What a mere trifle, its rush to Farrelton! What a wearisome journey to poor Hervey!

He resumed his rather interesting exploit of walking on the two rails. At least, the train was off his mind. Suddenly, the right hand rail moved, his foot slipped, he felt a pinching then a twinge of pain; he tried to pull his foot free, lost his balance and fell. This strained his ankle and caused excruciating pain. He scrambled to his feet, pulling, jerking, squirming his foot while instinctively he cast a terrified look north and south along the track. Then he stood panic-stricken, listening. There was no sound except the steady hum of a locust and the all but inaudible clang of the rushing train. Spent by the increasing distance, this seemed to have merged into the lesser voices of the night, low, far away, steady. Hervey's right foot was held as in a vise. Red Hill switch had caught him in its iron grip. Like a great, lurking crocodile, it held his poor foot fast in its cruel, locked jaws.

Hervey would perform any stunt conceivable, requiring only the incentive of a dare, and not always that. He was not afraid of peril. But now he was struck dumb with terror. With trembling hands he tried hurriedly to unlace his imprisoned shoe, but he only succeeded in getting the shoe-string in a hopeless knot. He tore at it and broke it by main strength and tried to pull his foot free of the shoe. He looked, listened. Was that an oncoming train? No, just the faint distant clanking of the train that had passed. There was reassurance in the far-off whistle. It was a receding whistle, not an approaching one. He wished that he had a time-table and a flashlight or a few matches. What was the new sound? He listened. Nothing.

He tugged and wrenched and wriggled his squeezed foot. The pain was intense, but it was nothing to his frantic fear. If he only had time; if he could only be sure that he would have a little time. *And could know how much time he would have to—what? Act? Plow?* But the knowledge that he would have half an hour, twenty minutes, would give him time to think. Now every distant sound was conjured into the sound of a distant train; the rustle of branches startled him.

The wild thought occurred to him that a fox caught in a snap-trap will sometimes gnaw its own leg off to get free. But he had not the courage nor the ability of a fox. If he only had a few matches he might reach about and collect enough dry grass to start a blaze. There was an old dried tie lying near; he might get that afire and thus warn an approaching train. But he had no matches. He had told Corby Lindman up at Temple Camp that he didn't bother with matches, that all the farmers knew him and he could always get food and didn't want to cook. As for signal fires, he never got lost. Well, here he was without matches. And he could not think of any other means of escape from

horrible death; death which might be rushing toward him then and would overtake him any minute. He listened, his face twinging with agony. What—what was that? Why, it was only a hawk crying as when startled into flight. What had startled the hawk into flight? He would go insane and scream in a minute. . . .

But no one would hear; the signal station was about a mile distant. It took care of the Wainboro Branch and the lumber camp siding. What a cruel thing it would have been to *dare* Hervey to get free! Would that, perhaps, have given him an inspiration? The only inspiration he had was to scream so that it pained his chest and made his head swim. The only answer was the soft, mocking echo of his own voice in the dark woodland.

CHAPTER XI

THE JAWS OF DEATH

What had happened was this. The switch had been standing open so that the northbound train might pass. Then it had been closed so that a Wainboro train moving south would be carried onto the branch. For a few moments, Hervey was so frantic with terror that he was controlled more by instinct than thought. He could only listen in panic fright and watch for the appalling sight of a headlight. He did nothing, not even think.

But now he collected his thoughts and attained to something like composure of mind in the reassuring remembrance that a southbound train stopped at Farrelton every night at about half past nine or a little later. That would be the Wainboro train for which the switch had been closed. He tried to remember just how it was. The first show at the movies was out at nine—*about* nine. He was a frequent patron of the first show. On his way home from the early show, he always crossed the tracks and often, if not usually, the gates were down while a *southbound train went by*. Sometimes he stopped for a soda or an ice cream (precious moments those seemed now) and still was interrupted by the lowered gates. That would mean that he had at the very least half an hour before the death dealing train would come thundering along.

Well, what should he do in that half hour, more or less? There was but one thing to do and that was to keep wrenching and pulling in the hope of freeing his foot. But he knew it was a vain hope. Perhaps in two cases out of three a foot so caught could with much pain be released. But he could not budge his foot. It was wedged to the crushing point below the heavy flange of the converging rails.

Well, at least he had a half hour or so. He wished that he had not swapped his scout knife for a belt buckle; he might then cut away the upper of his shoe and perhaps loosen his foot enough to wriggle it free. Any effort would be better than just waiting. He shouted again, but his own voice shattered his morale and brought him to the very verge of hysteria and collapse. Five minutes passed; ten minutes. It was very quiet in the woods. A small creature, glorying in its freedom, darted across the tracks—a quick fleeting shadow. Somewhere in the distance an owl was hooting.

Fifteen minutes passed. Time, which had never meant anything to Hervey, was precious now. He thought of the minutes as a miser thinks of his gold. He reflected that if he leaned far over toward the west, he might not be killed, only mangled and then released like a poor footless animal from a trap. He would

not be able to walk; most likely he would bleed to death. If he could shout loudly enough perhaps some one in the train would hear him and he would be taken to Wainboro—to a hospital. He resolved that he would scream at the top of his voice just before the ghastly thing happened.

Twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes. Perhaps there would be a doctor on the train. Hervey had always laughed at the first aid scouts and had called their bandage work bunk. But this scout without any jack-knife or matches did not laugh now. He was not a boy of strong imagination, but all these horrifying, crowding thoughts aroused him to a state of panic and he yelled frantically again and again till his voice failed him and he went to pieces completely and sobbed in bewilderment and ghastly fright as the precious half hour closed up relentlessly, just as the switch had closed. Another five or ten minutes elapsed; anything might happen now.

He tried to steel himself for the inevitable. But Hervey was not sublimely courageous; the serenity of the hero dwelt not in him. He was just a daredevil. At Temple Camp they understood this perfectly. He did reckless things and got away with them. He was all right as long as there was a spectacular though perilous way out. But he had not that bravery of character which faces danger serenely. Still I wish to give him full credit as we follow him in the winding and sometimes dubious trail of his career. I like him so much that it is agreeable to record that in those tense moments, when grim death was upon him, a gentle thought entered his scatter-brain. It came in the last few precious moments. He wondered whether in a little while, “all of a sudden” as his thoughts phrased it, he would see his own mother face to face. Then, as if in answer, the modulated roar of an oncoming train broke the stillness.

Louder and louder grew the sound until it ceased to be a distant part of the night chorus and came out bold and strong for what it was, the voice of a thundering, heedless, steel monster, crying down the myriad sounds of the woodland with its alien, metallic clamor. On, on, on it came and a patch of mellow brightness appeared as the headlight came in view around a turn to the north and bore swiftly down upon him.

And Hervey Willetts stood and faced it. He called, but he knew that no one would hear amid all that clank and clamor. There was a bare possibility that the engineer might see him, but if so he would do no more than blow the whistle. Should he lie down? Then, if seen, he might be thought to be dead or unconscious and the train would be stopped. A forlorn hope. And he could not lie down without breaking his ankle.

So, trembling in every nerve, his heart beating like a sledge-hammer, he stood and faced the approaching light. He keyed himself to do it as a stunt—as if he had been dared to do it. There was pathos in the rakish angle of his outlandish hat, which usually bore a suggestion of bizarre defiance. On, on, on

came the thundering locomotive, painting the rails silver with its blazing light, setting the ties in bold relief so that they seemed like rungs of a great ladder.

On, on, on it came. It was so big and Hervey was so insignificant! Roaring and rushing it bore down upon him. Then suddenly, the sound of its onrush seemed to change. It was less aggressive, less appalling. Was it slowing down? Presently his terrified gaze beheld that area of light standing stationary and up the line he could hear a restless pulsating. The train had stopped, perhaps a hundred yards from him. The blazing light was steady; it did not grow larger; it was not moving. He was *sure*. *It was not moving*. It illumined a certain crooked tree and continued to illumine the same crooked tree. And the many toned woodland orchestra of the dying summertime could be heard again; low, drowsy, incessant.

Then, slowly, with a kind of diabolical politeness, the gripping switch opened and Hervey felt the balm of infinite release from pain as he lifted his foot out from between the iron jaws which had held it. There followed an interchange in the language of the railroad, an interchange fraught with sure meanings which the unnerved boy did not understand. Four piercing screams from the restive engine, the sudden appearance of a white light in the other direction, toward Tanner's Corners, then two more deafening screams. Then the sound of jostling cars and a long, slow puff as the monster strained under the initial pull of starting. Then long, slow, steady puffing. The illumined tree withdrew into the bordering darkness; the big headlight was moving along.

And the boy stood watching as the train moved slowly along the main line southward toward Tanner's Corners. What was it all about? Why had the switch closed in the first place? He only knew that he was free. Bruised, suffering, but *free*. Soon he was quite alone in the quiet woods. A cricket was chirping close at hand as if nothing whatever had happened. They are such preoccupied creatures, these little crickets.

CHAPTER XII

HELD

Hervey never knew that it was a special train to which he owed his life. Twelve minutes after it had passed southward along the main line, the regular Wainboro train passed over the reclosed switch and off to the southeast along the branch. On any other night our blithesome wanderer would have been left mangled, probably dying, beside the tracks. As it was, his foot was sorely bruised and he was thoroughly shaken from his experience.

Crippled as he was, the balance of his journey home seemed long and wearisome. When he passed through the little village of Weston's Green, he knew he was more than half way. Yet here he must pause in limping pursuit of a cat that scampered under the milk can platform. For five minutes he poked his stick under this refuge for no better reason than to see the cat make a frightened exit. He threw his stick after the startled fugitive and replaced it with a rail which he wrenched out of a picket fence. Having completed this nocturnal assault on the sleeping village, he set forth again along the tracks for Farrelton.

It was midnight when he limped into the living room of his home where his stepfather sat beside a marble-topped center table at which he had been reading fitfully during the long hours of waiting.

"Well, Hervey," he said, with a note of discouragement in his voice, "your mother has only just gone to bed; wait here a minute."

He went quietly upstairs and presently returned, closing the door. It seemed to Hervey that this had been to announce his own return to a worried mother.

"Well, Hervey, where have you been?" Mr. Walton resumed his seat, speaking not unkindly, but with a look of patient resignation at his stepson.

"I was down at Tanner's Corners," said Hervey blithely. "I got a hitch there; there was a ball game and, oh bimbo, it wasn't over till nearly dark—*some game*"

"Hmph. Did you go there on account of the game?"

"No, I bumped into it."

"Just went there, eh?"

"I got a dandy ride. Oh bimbo, I wish we had a car!"

Mr. Walton was one of those conservative, old-fashioned men who did not care about a car.

"You had no money?"

"Nope, I walked the tracks home and I got my foot caught in a switch and

believe *me*, I had one narrow escape all right. The switch opened just before a train came along, gee I'm lame yet! Some adventure with the capital A underlined."

"Is your foot cut?"

"No, but jimmies, it was pinched—*good night!* It's getting all right now."

Mr. Walton studied him a few moments and seemed to be debating whether to take a serious view of the mishap. Finally he struck a balance between Hervey's rattle-brained narrative and the evident facts of the case. "Let me see your foot," he said.

Hervey blithely removed his shoe and Mr. Walton felt of the foot.

"See, it's all right now," said Hervey, wriggling his toe.

"Well, so you walked home."

"Sure, some walk."

A pause followed. Mr. Walton pursed his lips and seemed to be thinking. He was a serious man, thin and raw-boned, and of all things fair and considerate. His policy with Hervey had always been fraternal rather than paternal. He suggested rather than commanded. His manner was always that of a comrade. He had thought of this motherless boy when he married again. He was a typical New Englander and not given to levity, but he had a quiet, half smiling appreciation of Hervey's nature. He was disposed to leniency as far as his New England conscience would permit.

"Well," he said, "I don't think anything you've done to-day justifies the worry you have caused your mother to-night. If you had asked me I'd have given you the fare to and from Tanner's Corners. Then you would have been home for supper."

"I didn't know I was going there till I got there," said Hervey in his blithesome way.

"And you didn't know how you were going to get back at all," Mr. Walton paused, considering. "Well Hervey, you've been back two nights and out both of those nights. Eleven o'clock, and now, to-night, after twelve o'clock. Before you came down from camp, I made up my mind that I'd give you a chance to act like other boys; I thought maybe you'd be a little different after your summer up there. But if you're going to go on causing us worry, if you're going to be just heedless and never use your balance-wheel, why we've just got to do something, Hervey. At night, you've either got to be at home or we must know where you are. And you must be here at meal time, always."

"Believe me, I could say it with eats right now."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, your mother is getting up out of bed to come down and get you some supper; of course, we can't expect Myra to stay up till midnight. So you see your mother has to get up. What do you think about that, Hervey?"

"I bet you Myra would do it. Didn't I climb down the old well-hole looking for her wrist-watch?"

"Didn't you promise me you wouldn't cause your mother any worries? Didn't you promise me you'd be thoughtful and obedient just as you would with your own mother? Didn't you?"

Hervey was sober for a moment. And in the pause Mrs. Walton could be heard descending the stairs. She entered with a shawl about her and embraced the boy and brushed his hair back affectionately and said, "Never mind about anything now till you've had a nice warm supper." Then she went out into the kitchen.

"Well, Hervey," said Mr. Walton, "while you were getting a hitch to any one of the points of the compass, a couple of boy scouts found out who sent in that false fire-alarm the other night."

"What?" gasped Hervey. "They found—did they get the robber too? What fellers?"

He seemed so excited that Mr. Walton looked at him rather curiously, for he knew Hervey's propensity for losing interest in every matter which had become a day old.

"Why, let's see; Hobson—isn't there a Hobson boy?"

"Sure, Craig Hobson."

"Well, he and another boy were sitting on a porch over there on New Street the other night not far from the fire-box. Let's see, I think the paper said—Lewis?"

"Yop, Kinky Lewis," said Hervey. "He's in the same patrol with me; I think he's patrol leader."

"You *think*? Don't you *know*?"

"I should worry—go on, what did they see? If those fellers——"

"Just a minute—you asked me. A boy named McCullen is the one they saw. He was fooling around——"

"Oh," gasped Hervey in relief.

"He was fooling around the fire-box and these scouts saw him," said Mr. Walton. "They knew him by a cap he wore. They thought he must have heard them, because all of a sudden he ran away. They went down to the police station to-day and told the chief about what they saw and they helped him find this young what's his name. It's all in this afternoon's paper. They've got the little rascal in the lockup and they're going to hold him so in case they make an arrest for the robbery, they'll have him to identify the criminals."

"Chesty McCullen, I know him," said Hervey excitedly. "His father goes fishing; once he let me use his father's boat——"

"Is that the way he makes his living—fishing?" asked Mr. Walton.

"Sure, he's only got one eye. Most of the time he's drunk, but the rest of

the time he goes fishing.”

“Hmph.”

“Sure, Chesty, I know him; he gave me a fishing-reel.”

“Well, I guess that’s the boy,” said Mr. Walton. “I take it they’re a poor lot. The point I wanted to make, Herve, is that you told me—as much as said that scouts don’t amount to anything. Now you see here are a couple of wide-awake fellows who saw something and rendered a service.”

“Not to Chesty McCullen, they didn’t.”

“No,” Mr. Walton chuckled, “but to the authorities, to the town, to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. That’s worth doing, isn’t it? You remember you said anything a scout could do, you could do something better——”

“Do you mean you dare me to?” Hervey vociferated.

“No, heaven forbid. Only I’d like you to remember that while you were off and your mother and I were worrying about where you were and what you were doing, these two scouts *did something*.”

“Telling on somebody isn’t doing something.”

“Oh yes, it is.”

“How do they know he did it?”

Mr. Walton shrugged his shoulders.

“If it comes to that,” persisted Hervey.

“They’re holding him,” said his father, with a little conclusive gesture of his hand.

“They’re a couple of tin-horns, that’s what they are,” said Hervey.

“Well, you’d better go in and get your supper,” said Mr. Walton.

CHAPTER XIII

A NOISE LIKE A SCOUT

If Hervey felt a twinge of meanness that he had unwittingly assisted in the robbery (albeit indirect) of blind orphans, he felt a fresh twinge now in the thought that he was safely out of the whole affair, thanks to poor little Chesty McCullen. He had only to keep still now and he was all right. The glory of his stunt, or the shame of it, had fallen on other shoulders. Poor little Chesty had not much on his shoulders except this shame. But, anyway, Hervey was out of it. Thinking of the switch and of these developments during his absence he told himself that he was lucky.

One would think that such a lucky boy would be happy and would sleep peacefully. But notwithstanding that he was dog tired, somehow he could not fall asleep. After he had lain in bed about an hour and was sure that the household was asleep, he crept downstairs and looked about in the living room and dining room for the newspaper. He had never before descended like this at such a late hour, and the rooms looked strange to him. They were so empty and quiet with the dead stillness of night. He had an odd feeling that he had no right to be prowling around like this; he thought it seemed like a burglar.

Once upstairs again he closed his door softly, turned on the light and read:

BOY SCOUTS FIND ALARM SENDER

“A new development occurred in the fire-house robbery matter to-day when two boy scouts of the local scout organization appeared at police headquarters and communicated to Sergeant Wade that they had seen a boy of town loitering about the fire-alarm box on New Street at about the time the false-alarm was sent in. They were certain from the sounds which they could hear on the porch where they sat, that this boy, Chesty McCullen by name, was tampering with the box. He ran away as they approached him and they walked as far as the corner to see which way he went. It was while they were there watching him that they heard the fire whistle, and soon the engines were on the scene. These scouts were Warner Lewis and Craig Hobson.

“The McCullen boy was brought to police headquarters later to-day and questioned. He denied that he sent in any alarm, but admitted being near the box. He could give no reason for loitering there. He protested that he had not gone there at the instigation of any one. The boy is of the rough element in East Farrelton, his father a ne'er-do-well who has several times run foul of the law. The boy has an elder brother who is absent from home and the family have no explanation to offer for his absence, and protest no knowledge of his whereabouts.

“The McCullen boy is being held by the police in the hope that he will break down and identify any suspect who may be apprehended in connection with the robbery. The police are following up several clues at that end of the case.”

Yes, Hervey was out of it. But just the same he did not sleep very well. After breakfast he did the thing which naturally was his first inspiration. He strolled past the little jail, casting a weather eye on it to determine whether an adventurous attempt might be made to free Chesty McCullen. The enterprise did not seem promising and his vision of himself perilously ascending a rope melted away.

He sought out Warner Lewis and Craig Hobson. They were pals and always together, and easy to find. Warner lived on New Street and it was from the vantage point of his porch that the two had seen and identified the McCullen boy. These two scouts, who were not as fortunate as Hervey in their opportunities for summer scouting, had a tent on the Lewis lawn. They had envied their errant comrade his summer at Temple Camp. They wondered why he did not talk more about it.

Hervey sought out these two because, by a queer sort of reasoning, he thought that he could drug his own conscience and somehow help the McCullen boy by roundly denouncing the pair for what they had done. It was not as good as a jail delivery, but it was something. He did not greet these troop colleagues as scout greets scout.

“I suppose you think you’re big, getting your name in the papers,” he said.

“Look who’s here! We thought you were dead,” said Craig Hobson.

“I’d rather be dead than be a squealer,” said Hervey. “Anyway, you didn’t see Chesty McCullen ring that fire-alarm—I bet you fifty dollars you didn’t.”

“Listen who’s talking, you haven’t got fifty dollars,” said Warner Lewis. “I dare you to dare me to dare Craig Hobson to dare you to show it to us.” This was intended as a burlesque on Hervey’s well known propensity and it struck home.

“I dare you to swear that he was the one that did it,” Hervey fired up. “I dare you to cross your hearts that he did.

Every feller knows the rule
Take a dare and you’re a fool.”

“I dare you to double dare yourself to come to scout meeting sometime or other in the next year,” said Warner Lewis. “I dare you to knock a chip off my shoulder—that’s him, the way he talks.”

Craig Hobson was not so addicted to ridicule. “What’s the matter about seeing Chesty McCullen like we did?” he asked.

“Because you didn’t see him do it,” said Hervey.

“Sure, he did it,” said Craig in a way of friendly argument. “He was right there and ran away and five minutes after that the whistle blew; maybe ten minutes.”

“That shows what kind of a scout you are,” said Hervey.

“Listen who’s talking about scouting,” laughed Warner Lewis.

“If he turned in the alarm the whistle would blow in *one* minute,” Hervey shouted in Craig’s face. “You ask any of the firemen, because I know them all; I even know the fire-house dog, he followed me all the way to Hermit’s Mountain one day. I even slept in the fire-house. I bet you that alarm was sent in about, anyway five minutes after he was there—I bet you. I bet it was sent in while you were standing up at the corner watching where he went—I bet you.”

“Gee, some bets!” said Craig. “I bet that in a couple of days or so, or in a week maybe, they’ll arrest somebody for that robbery and I bet Chesty McCullen will admit it was the one that told him to send in the alarm.”

“I bet you he won’t,” Hervey shouted.

“I bet you he will,” Craig shouted.

Hervey was aroused to high excitement. Ordinarily he was too amiable, or perhaps too little interested in such matters, to get into disputes with other boys. He was for action rather than argument. He was too free and easy to quibble. And as for scouting, he was the last one to be discussing its nice points with scouts in good standing. He was not aroused about any such matter now. He was thinking of poor little Chesty McCullen and trying to square himself with Chesty by vigorously defending him.

“You’re a couple of tin-horn scouts,” he shouted. “Such swell detectives, you get your names in the papers catching criminals and everything, you make me laugh! If anybody rings the fire-alarm the whistle will blow inside of *one minute*. You even admit it didn’t blow for maybe ten minutes. How do you know what happened in those ten minutes. Could you watch where Chesty was going and watch that fire-box too? You’d have to have eyes in the back of your head and you haven’t even got eyes in the front of your head!”

“Listen, Herve,” said Craig, becoming serious and very friendly; “cut it out; what’s the use scrapping? The cops said what we did was all right. Why don’t you be a scout yourself? You never come to meetings, you never go round with us, you never chip in, you don’t bother about merit badges or anything—gee! Now when Warner and I do something like scouts are supposed to do, you come around and jump all over us. What are you sore about, anyway? We saw Chesty there, and we saw him run when he heard us, and we went to the police station and told about it. Jiminy crinkums, what are you so sore about, Hervey?”

Ah, that was it! *What was he so sore about?* This young free lance who did not take any interest in the concerns and doings of other boys. Why all this pother? And what was the matter with these two good-natured scouts who had been content to camp on the Lewis lawn while Hervey Willetts was driving the management to distraction up at Temple Camp? They were pretty good scouts.

Suddenly, Hervey must descend upon them with technicalities and storming denunciation. *What was he so sore about?*

"I never knew you took so much interest," said Warner Lewis. "Will you stay and help us cook lunch? We've got some spaghetti."

"Do you say it wasn't mean to get that kid arrested?" Hervey demanded.

"We didn't get him arrested, we only went and told what we saw," said Craig. "Any one would think he was your brother."

"He let me use his father's boat," Hervey said. "If I stay and eat with you will you go with me to-night and the three of us will set him free? I know how we can do, I'll show you! all we need is a rope."

Craig and Warner laughed heartily. "Come out of it, Herve," Warner said.

"All right!" thundered Hervey. "*I'll show you who's a real scout! I'll show you how to track a feller! I'll show you how to get your name in the papers!*"

"I don't see what you're so sore about?" repeated Craig.

"I'll show you how to make a noise like a scout!" Hervey fairly yelled.

"Go ahead, now you're talking," said Warner.

"I'll do more than talk," Hervey screamed at him. "I can—I told my father whatever a scout can do, I can beat him at it! I can do anything that any scout in any troop can do, and then I can take him out and lose him!"

"Goodness me," said Warner.

"I'll smash your little stunt for you—you see," said Hervey with gleaming eyes. "Do you dare me to? *Do you dare me to?* Do you say I can't set Chesty McCullen free—do you dare me?"

"There you go with your dares," said Craig.

"Do you dare me to; do you say I can't?" Hervey demanded with a steely look.

"Yes, we dare you to, and we say you can't, and we say you're a fool," said Warner.

"I'll make a noise like a scout for you!" shouted Hervey.

That was pretty good. It would be hard to analyze Hervey's impulses in all his boastful excitement, and to say whether he was sore at those two boys or sore at himself. He himself hardly knew what was the matter with him. But he was going to trample those two boys in the dust and make a noise like a scout. Not for a moment did he admit that he was going to hit the scout trail with a vengeance and cleanse his own soul of a yellow stain that was upon it.

CHAPTER XIV AT THE BAR

"If you fool around that jail, you're crazy and you'll get yourself in trouble," Craig called after him.

"I'll free him," shouted Hervey. "I'll have everybody in town laughing at you—a couple of half-baked detectives! You must have been reading *Young Sleuth, the Boy Detective*. I'll show you."

"You're a fool, Herve," was the last he heard.

It was odd how, even at his best and on the right trail, he must work differently from other boys and quite alone. He might have sought the advice and co-operation of these good scout comrades. But he must make them out worse than himself and leave them astonished and bewildered. He must get things all askew in his mind and conjure an honorable act into a sort of stunt. The throwing down of a dare! He could not just do the right thing for its own sake. Yet he could not bear the lashings of his own conscience. We can only follow in his trail and see where it leads. And it leads through strange and devious ways, I promise you.

In this episode of his story it led to a good destination—the police station. There was nothing contrite or remorseful about him as he faced the elevated desk at which the sergeant sat facing him. The frowning officer gazed down upon him and took in at a glance the brown face, the dancing, daredevil, gray eyes, the huge hole in his stocking. He fixed a quizzical look of scrutiny on the rimless hat, Hervey's most treasured and original possession, which seemed to set him apart from all other boys on the face of the earth, embodying as it did the very essence of the bizarre. The sergeant leaned forward and read with interest the largest tin button on that perforated felt crown—*Be good and you'll be happy*, and another which said *Keep smiling*.

"You better take your hat off," he said.

Hervey took off his hat.

"Well, young feller, what's troubling you?"

"I came to tell you that I'm the one who turned in that false alarm," said Hervey. "I did it because a feller that I met dared me to. Maybe he was a burglar, but anyhow you got to prove it to me first. Maybe the police are only fools thinking he's a burglar. Those two scouts are a couple of fools because they admit they were up at the corner and they didn't even see me, they're such punk scouts. I can show you my own tracks in the field. So you better let Chesty McCullen go home, because he didn't do it."

“Go easy, young feller,” warned the officer, “you’re puttin’ too many fools in your talk. So you sent in the alarm, huh? What’s your name?”

The chief strolled in, leaned against the desk and listened while Hervey told the story of his encounter with the stranger who had thought up the hot tamale stunt. Then this scout who was no scout, or this happy-go-lucky boy who was one (suit yourself) was held on the charge of malicious mischief.

“So that’s what you call a hot tamale, is it?” the sergeant asked.

“It’s a hot tamale,” said the chief. It was not clear whether he was characterizing the stunt or the fact of Hervey’s coming and giving himself up. That was a pretty good hot tamale. The chief was in about the same uncomfortable predicament that Councilor Wainwright was in when he dismissed Hervey from Temple Camp. But like Councilor Wainwright he had his duty to perform.

So Hervey was held on the charge of malicious mischief and they called up Walton’s Stationery Store and told poor Mr. Walton about it. And meanwhile, they liberated little Chesty McCullen and told him that he had better not loiter around on corners and near fire boxes. He went scuffling home where his poor, scrawny, overworked mother was relieved to learn that her elder son, absent from home, was no longer wanted. Thus Chesty McCullen got a sort of a backwash from scouting; he was later to be borne upon its rising tide.

Poor Mr. Walton hurried to the station, a lanky, elderly man with a troubled countenance. They knew him and respected him. He was more troubled than Hervey, for Hervey was triumphant, whereas Mr. Walton was just humiliated.

“Well, Hervey,” was all he said.

“He came and told us of his own accord,” said the chief. “He’s a little devil, but a white one.”

Mr. Walton nodded.

“They’re so smart, *not*; thinking they can send a feller to jail,” said Hervey. “They dared me that I couldn’t set him free, so who’s got the laugh?” Mr. Walton did not have the laugh, at all events. He listened soberly as they told him that Hervey would have to be taken before the recorder for proper disposition of the case. Such things get around like wildfire and even before the little party with the culprit had started for the recorder’s court, a couple of reporters were upon the scene, scenting perhaps some move in the more important end of the case. Instead of a burglar they saw only a rather bewildered boy as the center of attraction. And they listened and made the most of it as Hervey gave a description of the stranger for whom he had performed. It may be told now that that stranger was never found; nor was it ever proven that Hervey had played the dupe and all unconsciously been an accessory to a major crime.

As for his own excursion in the dangerous field of malicious mischief, he was lucky as he always claimed to be. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Walton suffered more keenly than he.

“Of course this kind of thing can’t be tolerated,” said the recorder. “Tampering with the public emergency apparatus is a serious business.” Hervey had never supposed that he had done that. He knew he had sent in a false alarm. But “tampering with the public emergency apparatus”—that sounded pretty big. It had been even a greater stunt than he had supposed. Mr. Walton could only stand and listen. The recorder was a young lawyer and liked to hear himself talk and see people hang with suspense upon his words. Let no one say that the law is no respecter of persons. Poor Chesty McCullen would have been fined for this offense and his father would not have been able to pay the fine and Chesty would have spent a week or two in jail. He owed more to Hervey than to the law.

“I think,” the recorder said, addressing Hervey, “that you have had a good lesson. I think you realize the seriousness of what you did.” (He was never more mistaken in his life.) “I think you are sufficiently punished,” he added.

“Those fellers are punished too,” said Hervey.

“But if you are ever brought here again,” the recorder continued, “this affair will be remembered and it will go hard with you.” He glanced significantly at Mr. Walton, as if to say that he thought a little warning of that sort was a good thing. “Now young man, you go home and look out who you make friends with and don’t try to show off.” He did Hervey an injustice there, for most of our hero’s exploits were performed when he was quite alone and he never “showed off.” If that were all there were to it, it would be easy to comprehend him.

Out of his mortification Mr. Walton, always fair, must say one last word. “I think, your Honor, that it is to his credit that he came here and gave himself up just when his safety seemed assured. I’m not quite sure about his motive, but I suppose we ought to judge people by their acts and get at their motives that way.”

“I’d rather you’d try to work out his motives than I,” smiled the young judge. And Mr. Walton bowed acknowledgment.

He said not one single word to Hervey except to lay his hand on the boy’s shoulder as they left the place. Perhaps it meant that he was pleased that in the big essentials his stepson had not been tried and found wanting. But he seemed disheartened and if Hervey had been approachable through the channels of sentiment, he would have felt a little twinge as this plain, kindly man went off down the street, back to his stationery store.

CHAPTER XV

CHESTY, AMBASSADOR

There was time enough that afternoon for Hervey to stage the climax of the latest dare. He wished to do this before the evening paper appeared. It was not by way of showing off, but according to the ethics of dares and stunts the performer must always report and confound his challenger. It is amusing how punctilious Hervey was in such matters.

He was probably the only boy in the upper world of Farrelton who knew where to find Chesty McCullen. But Farrelton had an underworld too, a sprawling group of hovels down by the river, and here Chesty lived. The neighborhood was one of Hervey's familiar haunts. Chesty, now thoroughly aroused to the perils of Farrelton, could not have been dragged there by wild horses, but for Hervey he would do anything.

"I set you free," said Hervey, "so you have to pay me back. You have to go up to New Street and see Warner Lewis and Craig Hobson and tell them I sent you. You must only just say to them that they dared me I could get you out of jail so now they got their answer. Seeing is believing, you tell them that. You'll see a tent on the lawn of one of those houses near the fire-alarm box; that's where they are. And you can tell them they're a couple of sap-headed fools and they can take their scout troop and go to blazes with it. You just tell them that. You say I sent you because seeing is believing and they get their faces washed with their own dare."

Chesty did not know about this errand, undertaken so soon upon his release from jail. But he could not refuse Hervey and he had not the wit to inquire why his hero did not deliver this high-handed address in person. It may be assumed that Hervey had his reasons; perhaps he thought that the effect would be better with himself withdrawn from the scene.

He was on time for supper that evening and did not venture to absent himself afterward. Instead he waited for the talk which all through the meal he suspected his father was reserving for a quiet session in the living room.

"Now, Hervey," said Mr. Walton, "this matter is closed. You did right to go and give yourself up—I don't want to hear your reasons. What you did was right. And I think that you did it because you couldn't get comfortable till you did. So we won't give too much credit to your dare or your stunt or whatever it was. I——"

"Just the same I'll never do anything for the scouts," Hervey flared up. "I'm through with that bunch for good and all. They got Chesty McCullen in

jail; one of those fellers is a monitor in school, so that shows you what kind of a feller he is. Nix on that outfit. I'm going perch fishing with Chesty tomorrow and I'm going to blow him to a soda too. He's a poor kid and look what he got—*some deal*, I'll say. That kid can beat any of that bunch swimming."

Mr. Walton listened soberly, his lips pursed. "But you see if you hadn't sent in the false alarm, Chesty wouldn't have got in trouble. You got him out, but you also got him in. Isn't that so, Herve?"

"I never squealed; no siree, I never did that."

"Well, the matter is closed now anyway, Herve," Mr. Walton said, despairingly. "I'm sorry you're dropping out of the Scouts. But of course, I'd rather you'd drop out altogether than be a scout slacker. So you'll just have to suit yourself. Now what I want to say to you is this. You mustn't get into trouble again. Last year you caused us a great deal of worry and I sent you up to Temple Camp thinking you'd find a suitable field of enjoyment there. So far I haven't heard you say one word about your summer at Temple Camp. In the spring you encouraged Mr. Allerton's dog to follow you for miles and he got run over and I had to settle with Mr. Allerton. You got in trouble for some absurdities last Hallowe'en, taking furniture from porches.

"Now you heard the judge say that if you ever came before him again, it would go hard with you. I just want to tell you, Herve, that in such a case you can't count on me; you'll have to take the consequences. I don't mean that I'd let you go to jail; I know you wouldn't commit a crime—be dishonest. But if it should ever seem advisable to send you away to some sort of military or training school, perhaps, where you will be under rigid discipline I would not discourage such a course. There are places where they send boys who are hard to manage. I think school opens a week from Monday, doesn't it?"

"Yop, but Hairpin Wilkens isn't going to teach mathematics this year, that's one good thing."

"And you've left the Scouts?"

"I threw them down flat," said Hervey. "But, one thing, I'm going to show Chesty McCullen a good time; look what he was up against—*oh bimbo!*"

"I think that's a good idea, Herve," said Mr. Walton. "Why don't you take him to the movies? Isn't there a cowboy play at the Lyric?"

"Nix on looking at that stuff; it only makes me want to get out on a mustang. That's what I want to do most of all—ride a horse, a good wild one. Montana, that's where I'd like to go. Don't you think the train robbers are all dead—they're not."

"No, I don't suppose so."

"I want to go on a ranch, that's what I want to do."

"Yes, but even on a ranch you'd have to obey orders. Ranches are run by

rules. The whole world is run by rules, Herve.”

“Some punk rules, I’ll say.”

“Either you’ve got to do the world’s way, or else you’ve got to make the world do your way—and I’m afraid you can’t do that. Isn’t that so, Herve?”

“Bet your life,” said Hervey.

“Well, you take Chesty out and give him a good time; I think that’s a fine idea.”

“Sure, after being in jail like that,” said Hervey. The very idea of imprisonment was terrible to Hervey. To be confined, kept in; it was horrible, unbearable. He was the grand champion of freedom.

CHAPTER XVI TO PASTURES NEW

The next morning Hervey went hunting for Chesty McCullen. He explored the neighborhood of Chesty's wretched home and was finally driven to make inquiry at the very portals. He had never been squeamish about the character of his companions nor the scenes into which his casual acquaintanceships led him. But he could not fail to notice the squalid environment which was so different from that of his own home. He never thought of anything he did in the light of a good turn (that would be to pay a tribute to the Scouts), but he was going to show Chesty McCullen a good time and "blow him to soda," because Chesty had been the unhappy victim of scout bungling.

But Chesty was not to be found. His poor, scrawny mother, busy with the washings that she took in and exhaling an odor of soap suds, told Hervey that he had gone away early, she didn't know where. She thought he might have gone to bring home a "washing", but she corrected this supposition on seeing his ramshackle cart in the yard. Hervey himself had often seen this outlandish vehicle on its two wobbly wheels. It was so inseparable from its maker and owner that it even looked strange standing in the cluttered back yard quite apart from its motive power. Hervey had never seen it at home before; poor Chesty was always pushing it around town with "washings" or miscellaneous kindling wood piled into it.

He went away disappointed, not knowing what to do. He had (in his own view) outlawed himself from the Scouts, and on the other hand he could not venture forth on any adventurous escapade. He knew that for a while he had better walk the straight and narrow path, and not get into any kind of trouble. His stepfather had been considerate with him, but just the same he sensed a certain something in Mr. Walton's demeanor which boded ill for any bizarre and illicit enterprises. It seemed to him that his stepfather had resolved to let this little matter of the fire-alarm dare pass and to concentrate his anger and action on the next venture. There was something ominous in his very leniency, which Hervey had not failed accurately to construe.

That morning he occupied a place on the swinging crane of a steam shovel that was relentlessly digging an excavation for a new building on the business thoroughfare. He continued so enthroned, a picturesque figure it must be admitted, until the boss of the job came along, overruling the good-hearted workmen and ordering Hervey from those delightful precincts of dirt and disorder. Ejections of this sort were nothing new to Hervey.

At luncheon Mr. Walton was so casual and friendly in his talk that the boy more than ever conceived himself to be on probation. There were no threats, no warnings. But somehow he felt that his next transgression would be followed by vigorous consequences. This seemed to be in the home atmosphere.

In the afternoon he wandered forth and was lucky in seeing a special bus parked near the station. Along the side of it was a canvas sign that read:

FARRELTON BASEBALL TEAM
JUNIOR BUSINESS MEN'S ASSOCIATION

He lost no time in making inquiries of the waiting driver and, on learning that the young business men's team was to play the Hanniford team at Farrelton Junction grounds, he asked if he might join the imposing caravan.

"Guess they'll have a full load, sonny," said the driver. "The band's going and a lot of the merchants."

"Well, my father's a merchant," said Hervey.

"Anybody from your father's place playing?"

It was suggestive that the rather old-fashioned establishment of conservative Mr. Walton was not represented on this gala occasion. The team was made up of young men who were clerks in the Farrelton stores and the band also was part of this young business men's organization. They were having a half holiday to beat the Hanniford team. Wistful boys stood gazing at the special bus; some, no doubt, would hike to Farrelton Junction. Hervey alone sought acceptance into this merry adult company.

"Don't I know Mr. Holmes? Don't I get ice cream in his store?" he demanded. "Do you bet he won't let me get in? Do you dare me to get in now?"

"Come ahead in," called a burly young fellow in the bus. He was resplendent in a gray baseball suit with F.B.T. on it. "Come on, *I* dare you to."

In went Hervey and down into a seat and the burly young fellow's arm was around his shoulder.

"Do you take it back?" Hervey demanded.

"What?"

"The dare; do you take it back?"

"Where did you come by that hat?" the ball player asked. "So you want to root for the J.B.M.A. huh? All right, youngster."

You see how it was with Hervey? Other boys, standing enviously outside, could only stare aghast. Then one ventured to try Hervey's method and failed utterly. And there you are.

Soon the bus was crowded with ball players, business men, and the band. Hervey was the only boy. It started off with a deafening Sousa march leaving

the stay-at-homes cheering.

In the mellow evening of that same day the bus returned bringing a load somewhat less exuberant, for Hanniford beat the Farrelton team eleven to one.

That one, however, was a home run. And it is with this home run that we are now concerned.

CHAPTER XVII OVER THE TOP

There probably was never a boy in the world who rendered so much gratuitous service to his elders as Hervey Willetts. It was not exactly the spirit of service that impelled him. Next to being alone he liked to be mixed up in the manual activities of men and he was wont to constitute himself a sort of utility boy in their labors. Whenever the red wrecking car from the Mohawk Garage arrived upon the scene of a smashup, you would be pretty sure to see Hervey perched upon the seat with the mechanic. His boast that he knew the firemen was well made; he had many times been allowed to ride to fires on the bellowing apparatus. To paraphrase the familiar song *Hervey had no rights at all, but he got there just the same*.

Exactly why he preferred to loll out in the field chasing the balls which escaped the fielders, rather than to pitch or catch on a younger boys' team, I do not know. He could not get a very good view of the game from his self chosen and remote post. But so it was, he sprawled out there during the whole progress of the game, occasionally running after the fugitive ball, which the players seemed willing enough to let him do.

At intervals, as the spirit moved him, he encouraged caterpillars to walk onto a stick, then dexterously projected them to a selected spot. He seemed captivated by this novel form of outdoor sport. Once a caterpillar alighted on his head and it was quite a stunt without the aid of sight to lay the stick in just the right spot for the caterpillar to proceed upon it. He missed several balls doing this, but no one seemed to care. His contribution to the game was quite voluntary.

Suddenly came the home run, knocked by the young man who was teller in the Farrelton Trust Company. At that moment the score stood three to nothing in favor of Hanniford. Amid frantic cheering the ball sped over the heads of the outfielders, over Hervey's head—over a fence even—a fence which no aspiring ball had ventured to sail over in many a long month. And around went the runner, amid deafening yells, past first, past second, past third—and home. It was a spectacular run.

Pell-mell after the ball went Hervey. Before he had reached the fence the pitcher was fondling another ball; there was to be no interruption on account of a lost ball, but if he wished to go after it they would be glad to have it back. Up the high iron fence he scrambled, slipping, straining and catching his trousers on the ornamental pickets. He stood between pickets, balancing himself. If he

didn't jump he would fall. And he had better take care that one or other of his feet did not get caught between those ornamental arrowheads when he did jump. He swayed, swung his arms to get his balance, and jumped. But he was afraid to give a springing jump for fear his feet would catch in the narrow space between those gilded arrowheads.

So he did not jump clear of the trim row of hydrangea bushes which bordered the fence within. Instead he went sprawling down into it and a shower of snowy flakes from the huge flowers besprinkled his clothing and floated away on the air. For a few seconds he literally swam in the yielding bushes, scattering the flaky petals as he trod down the gorgeous clusters. "When you see those things you know school is going to open," Roy Blakeley of Temple Camp had told him.

But now something even more tragic was going to happen. For a few moments his sprawling legs did not even find the ground. Then one landed on the damp earth underneath the spreading shrubs and he strode out opening and tearing the flowered branches by main strength. He emerged in the very teeth of a huge dog that had run up barking furiously. In sheer self-protection, he backed into the shrubbery and damaged it still more, the dog advancing menacingly, the while barking with increasing excitement. The beast seemed in a very delirium of rage.

Intent as the dog was on challenging Hervey's progress, the safest course seemed to be to mount the fence again. In having recourse to this retreat he trampled the bushes still more till he had made a sorry wreck of them. The dog's frantic barking increased till he seemed beside himself with wrath. What might have happened if he had remained master of the situation it would be harrowing to describe, he was deterred from further aggression by a bulky, youngish man in a pair of overalls who came briskly along a flower-bordered walk and dragged him by the collar, then gave him a kick.

He was quite as brisk and vigorous with Hervey as he had been with the dog, reaching across the bushes, grabbing him by the collar, and hauling him out into the path where he continued holding him in a firm grip.

"You let me go," said Hervey, his anger rising with this indignity. "I'm not going to beat it, but you let me go. You needn't think I'm like a dog, you big — You let me go, do you hear!" He accompanied his demand with a vigorous kick in his captor's shins.

"What are you doing in here?" the young man demanded angrily. "Do you see what you did. I suppose you're the youngster that was in here last night after grapes." He held his captive at arm's length, though indeed Hervey did not repeat the vicious assault with his feet.

"I came in after the ball," he said.

"Yes, and did you see the sign out there as big as a house, or are you

blind?”

It was quite like Hervey that he had seen no sign; he seldom saw them.

“Look at what you’ve done,” said his captor. “How much damage do you suppose you’ve done there? Look at *that*. Look at that other bush. Look at those two there. You’d think an earthquake had struck them. Do you think you can do fifty or a hundred dollars’ worth of damage to get a baseball? What do you think of this?” he added, turning to another man who had just appeared. The man shook his head dubiously. “Well, he’s going to learn his lesson this time.”

“It’s the first time I was ever in here,” said Hervey fearfully.

“And it will be the last,” said his captor. “You heard what the governor told me before he left, Jake, that I should have the law on any more trespassers? I’m expected to run this place, look after fifty acres—cows, horses, poultry, and oversee three acres of this fancy stuff—*and look at it!* Who got blamed about the rhododendrons—you remember? I’ve got to be superintendent and detective and everything else here. Go get Charlie and tell him to come and fix these things up. You’d think a cyclone hit them.”

“I didn’t mean——” Hervey began.

“Oh, I know,” the man snapped. “You didn’t know private property has to be respected. Well, I’m going to do what I was told to do, then maybe you’ll learn a lesson. Every time anybody comes over that fence he lands on my head, it seems. I’m the one to get the blame. You go get Charlie; I’ll take care of this kid.”

If Hervey had not been too fearful to think he might have surmised that the anger of this man, evidently superintendent of a large estate, had not been aroused simply by this particular instance of trespass, even with its destructive accompaniment. The man had evidently been harassed by trespassers on the one hand and by his employer on the other. Hervey had precipitated himself into those beautiful gardens at a most unpropitious time. He was evidently to be the terrible example to others who had made free in those fruited and flowered precincts.

“All right, sir; you come along with me,” said the superintendent briskly.

CHAPTER XVIII

GUILTY

“Can’t you take me to the man that owns this place?” poor Hervey asked, as his captor strode along, holding him by the sleeve.

“I’d have to take you all the way to Europe to do that,” the man answered with a kind of brisk pleasantry. “Switzerland and gosh knows where all. And all I got is two men on the grounds.”

The unfortunate captive ventured to take advantage of this faint sign of relenting. “If I promise never to——”

“You promise that to the man I’m going to take you to,” the superintendent interrupted. “I’ve got nothing to do with it.” He seemed not a bad sort, but rather a man keyed up to perform a plain duty. “I was on the grill, now it’s your turn,” he said. “I’ve got the harvests to get ready for and grading down the terraces and it seems I’ve got to look out for every grape-stealing fence climber in the state.”

Hervey tried another tack with this much-harassed man who talked shop so freely with him. “Bimbo, I feel sorry for you,” he said.

The man glanced sideways at him. “Well, I reckon nobody’s going to kill you,” he said.

He hurried along winding gravel walks, Hervey running to keep up with him. Soon they passed along the side of a great brick mansion covered with ivy. The windows on the ground floor were boarded up. The lawn which they crossed was shaded by mammoth elms and at a pretty granite bird bath, a robin was leisurely taking a drink, pausing like an epicure after each draught. Hervey wished that he was to be taken before the owner of this princely estate; somehow he felt that he would stand a chance with a gentleman of such wealth. He knew that wealthy gentlemen helped the Boy Scouts. But then he was no longer a scout. . . .

With brisk concentration on a palpably unpleasant task the responsible custodian of the place passed out into the road and along it for perhaps a hundred yards where there were several houses, a couple of stores and a square white church. This was all there was of Farrelton Junction. Down in the woods was a tiny railroad station. The superintendent conducted Hervey to a white peak-roofed house almost exactly like the one he lived in. Like most New England houses it was porchless and severe. But it looked as if it had been painted only that very day. On the front door a modest sign proclaimed it to be the home of *Alden Snibbel, Justice of the Peace*. Hervey was relieved that this

time it was not a police station he was to enter.

Mr. Snibbel himself opened the door and immediately a delicious odor of cooking pastry was wafted to Hervey. Mr. Snibbel was coatless with suspenders conspicuously visible. He was lanky and had a sandy mustache. He was in need of shaving. He was easy and pleasant. There was no suggestion of authority or the law in the plainly furnished room where Hervey and his captor sat down on a hair-cloth sofa. A parrot in a cage said, "Here we are. Stay to dinner." Hervey felt reassured; it was not so bad. Mr. Snibbel sat down at a flat desk and this was the only suggestion of legal formality in the whole scene.

Best of all, Hervey's captor addressed Mr. Snibbel by his first name. "Sniffs pretty good, Allie," said he.

"The wife's making pies," said the justice. "Get your radio fixed all right?"

"Had to get a tube up to the Center. Well, here's the first catch—hook, bait and sinker. Didn't notice the sign a mile big, sprawled down into the flower hedge; says he was after a ball."

The justice of the peace glanced at Hervey, then back at the complainant.

"I'm doing just what General Pond told me to do," said the superintendent. "I'm bringing this youngster here for trespass. The general gave me his orders; no matter who it was, he said."

"Yes, he was complaining to me," said the justice casually. He seemed to ponder for a few moments, then asked Hervey his name, where he lived, if he attended school, etc. And Hervey told him how he had not intended to trespass; how he was just pursuing the ball. He said he was sorry he had done any damage. He protested that he had not seen the sign.

"Well, if you think he's punished——" the superintendent said. It was amusing how at the point of sentencing he seemed to waver and relent.

"I think it just simmers down to a plain case of trespass," the justice drawled impersonally and not unkindly. "He didn't intend to do any damage. He's responsible for that, of course, but I sort of think that just a little taste of the law and he'll stay out of people's grounds; I think then he'll pay more attention to signs. You don't want to make a charge of destroying property? Just trespass—that's unlawful entry."

"No, I'm not the man to pile it on."

The justice seemed to pause and consider. Then suddenly, as if to make an end of the matter, he said, "Well, there's no use of property owners putting up signs if a boy that doesn't care enough to take notice comes along and just goes where he wants to. And besides, a fence around private property is sign enough. You saw the fence, I reckon."

"Yes sir," said Hervey, in panic apprehension.

"Hmm. And if the authorities don't stand ready to enforce the law, there's not much use of anything." He glanced at General Pond's superintendent in a

way of pleasant query, as if to ask whether this was not fair and reasonable.

“Seems so,” said the superintendent.

“Well, I’m going to fine you five dollars,” said the justice. “And that really isn’t five dollars fine, because it includes the costs. You know what costs are? Well every time a boy breaks the law and gets caught it costs the community money. So the boy has to pay this; that’s only fair. *Five dollars fine including costs*,” he added conclusively.

“I haven’t got five dollars,” Hervey said pitifully. “So do I have to go to jail?”

The justice glanced at the superintendent who seemed uncomfortable. I suspect that glance deterred the man from offering to pay the fine. Alas, he was paying the penalty that every man who dealt with Hervey had to pay; he was feeling contemptible for doing what was right.

“Oh bimbo, that’s a lot for a feller to have,” said Hervey. “Will you please not send me to jail—please?”

The justice studied him. It was perfectly evident that he was resolved to make him an example, but also that was disposed to temper his judgment with consideration. “No, it don’t need that you go to jail, I guess,” he drawled: “not if you’re honest. I’ll parole you till twelve o’clock to-morrow. If you don’t come and pay your fine then, we’ll have to send for you. You have parents, I suppose?”

“Y—yes—I have.”

“Very well then, you come here to-morrow not later than twelve o’clock and pay your fine. And I think then you’ll have had your lesson.” The official glanced significantly at General Pond’s man as if to say he thought that was the best solution.

And General Pond’s man made a wry face, as if to say that he supposed so.

As for Hervey, he was so thankful to go free that he did not for the moment concern himself about the fine. His captor did not accompany him, but stayed behind to look at the justice’s radio set. He went out into the road with Hervey, however, and showed him how he could get back to the ball field without crossing the Pond estate.

“Does parole mean that you’re—sort of—not free yet?” he asked.

“That’s it, sonny,” said the superintendent. “Long as you don’t fail you’re all right. You just tell your father. Every kid is entitled to one flop I suppose; they say every dog is entitled to one bite. And now you get your lesson. Scoot along now and I hope your team wins.”

CHAPTER XIX THE COMEBACK

That was all very well but, you see, this was not Hervey's first flop. It was his second one in three days. He was very subdued going home in the bus, and refrained from telling any one of his adventure beyond the fence. It was important that his father should not hear of it.

Not that his father would think the affair so terrible, considered by itself. It was against the background of his father's mood that it seemed so bad. At all events it was very unfortunate. His father was in no humor to consider all the circumstances. If he knew that Hervey had been arrested and fined, that would be enough. Hervey could not tell him after the warning he had so recently received.

But he must get five dollars, and he knew not what to do. Five dollars seemed a good deal of money to get without giving a pretty good reason. And he had to get it within a brief, specified time. Failing, he had visions of an official from Farrelton Junction coming to get him.

He was very quiet at the supper table that evening and afterward asked Mr. Walton if he might go out for a while. He had thought that he might confide in his stepfather and take a chance on the consequences, but he could not bring himself to do that. He thought of his stepmother, always kind and affectionate, but he was afraid she would be agitated at the knowledge of his predicament and take counsel with her husband. Here again Hervey did not quite dare to take a chance. He thought of Myra, the hired girl. But Myra was spending the night with her people and Hervey did not like to seek her there.

He went down in the cellar and got out his bicycle, the only thing of value that he possessed. He took it out the cellar way and rode it downtown to Berly's Bicycle Shop. It would probably be some days before either Mr. or Mrs. Walton would ask about the bicycle, and Hervey's thought, as usual, did not reach beyond the immediate present. He did not like the idea of selling his bicycle; it had never seemed quite so dear to him as on that very ride downtown. But this was the only solution of his problem.

Mr. Berly looked the machine over leisurely. "How much do you want for it?" he asked.

It had never occurred to Hervey to ask for more than the sum he needed, but now he realized that he might sell the bicycle and be a millionaire in the bargain. "Would you give—twelve dollars for it?" he ventured timorously.

Mr. Berly scrutinized him. "Your parents want you to sell it?" he asked.

“Don’t it belong to me?” said Hervey uncomfortably.

“Well, I think you better ask your folks about it first,” the dealer said. “See what they say, then if everything is all right you come back here and I’ll give you the right price for it.”

Hervey’s hopes were dashed. He rode his bike down the street with an odd feeling of being both glad and sorry. But mainly he was worried, for time was precious and he knew he must do something. He stopped in front of the home of Harlem Hinkey and gave his familiar call. He hoped Hinkey would come out, yet somehow he hoped he wouldn’t come out. He hardly knew how he would approach the subject with Hinkey.

The Hinkeys had a great deal of money and supplied their son rather too liberally with it. They had lately moved from New York, and since Hinkey was unpopular and Hervey was an odd number, they had struck up acquaintance. Hinkey was a devotee of the practical joke and his joy was always in proportion to the discomfort of his victims. He boasted much of his imperial status in Harlem where he had held sway until his father took over a motion picture theatre in Farrelton. He came sauntering out in response to Hervey’s call. And all inadvertently he made it easy for Hervey to begin.

“You want to go down to the show?” Hinkey asked.

“I would except for this blamed old bike,” said Hervey. “Bimbo, I’d sell the darned thing for five dollars, it’s such a blamed nuisance.”

“What are you riding it for then?”

“I’m just bringing it home from Berly’s Bicycle Shop,” said Hervey. “I never use it much. Places where I go, you couldn’t ride a bike. If you should meet any one that wants to buy a bike, let me know, will you?”

“Sure,” said Hinkey, uninterested.

“Do you want to buy it?” Hervey asked, emboldened.

“What would I want to buy it for when I drive a car?” Hinkey asked.

That was Hervey’s last hope. He rode his bike home, put it in the cellar and went upstairs to his room. He had many times disregarded the law, but he had never before found himself at grips with it like this. And all because he had been just a little heedless in pursuing a ball. He thought that the whole business was monstrously unfair.

What had he done that was so bad? It never occurred to him that the whole trouble was this—that he had got himself into a position where he could not move either way. He could not run the risk of making a confidant of Mr. Walton in this small matter because of other matters. This matter was serious only because he had made it so. He was in a predicament, as he always was. Once he had hung from a tree by his feet and could not let go nor yet regain hold with his hands. And there you have Hervey. Mental quandaries or physical quandaries, it was all the same.

Well, there was one thing he could do which he had many times thought of doing; he could run away from home. That seemed to be the only thing left to do. He had many times made unauthorized excursions from home, but he had never run away. Happy-go-lucky and reckless as he was, he could not think of this without a tremor. But it was the only thing to do. He would not go to jail even for a day, he could not pay his fine, and he dared not tell his stepfather of his predicament. He resolved to run away.

Once resolved to do a thing, Hervey was never at a loss. He would go away and he would never return. He would go that very night. Since he was unable to meet the situation he had a feeling that at any moment something might happen. Yet he did not know where to go. Well, he would think about that after he got in bed and would start off early in the morning; that would be better. There was a circus in Clover Valley. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to hike there and join the circus? Surely they could give him a job. And pretty soon he would be miles and miles distant. He had had enough of Farrelton and all this business. . . .

He started to undress, but he was not altogether happy. Suppose everything did not go right? He had no money—oh well, a lot he cared! He sat on the edge of the bed unlacing his shoes. No promptings of sentiment stood in the way of his resolve. But running away from home without any money was a serious business and he wondered just how he was going to manage it. He would like to go to sea, only in this inland city——

He was startled by the banging of the front door knocker downstairs. The sound broke upon his worried cogitations like a hundred earthquakes. Who could that be at half past nine at night? He heard footfalls in the hall below, then muffled voices. He crept to his door, opened it a little, and listened. He was trembling, he knew not why. That justice man had given him till the next day; if—— Why it wouldn't be fair at all.

Yet he distinctly heard the word *punished* uttered by a strange voice. His heart was in his mouth. Should he climb out through the window and jump from the roof of the kitchen shed, and then run? What were they talking about down there? He heard the word *police*. Perhaps they knew he could not get the money and were taking no chances. Then he heard the gentle voice of his stepmother saying, "The poor boy." That was himself. He rushed to the window, threw up the screen, put one foot out. He heard footfalls on the stairs. They seemed to come half way up, then paused.

"Hervey, dear," Mrs. Walton called.

He did not answer, but in a sudden impulse sprang back into the room and grabbed his outlandish, rimless hat from one of the posts of his old-fashioned bed.

"Hervey, dear?"

She opened the door just as he sat straddling the window-sill ready to slide off the little shed roof.

“Here’s a letter for you, Hervey; a young fellow just left it. What on earth are you doing, my dear boy? You’ll have the room full of flies and moth millers.”

He came back into the room, tore open the envelope which his astonished stepmother handed him, and the next thing he knew he was reading a note, conscious all the while that part of it had fluttered to the floor.

DEAR HERVEY:—

I was mighty sorry to learn that you’ve given us up. Craig Hobson told me and he seems to think it wouldn’t be worth while talking to you. Of course, it’s better to be out of the Scouts than to be in and not interested. He says *you can’t be in anything and maybe after all he’s right.*

You care so little about our thriving troop that I dare say you have forgotten about the Delmore prize of five dollars to every boy that introduces another boy to scouting. Chesty McCullen went to give your message to Craig and Warner this morning and stayed at their lawn camp and ate spaghetti and begged to be allowed to take your place in the patrol. Of course, nobody can take the place of Hervey Willetts, but Chesty is all dolled up with a clean face and we’ve taken him in and of course, we feel that you’re the fellow that wished him onto us.

So here’s the five dollars, Herve, for introducing a new member into the troop and please accept my thanks as your scoutmaster, and the thanks of all these scouts who aren’t smart enough to make heads or tails of you. And good luck to you, Hervey Boy. You’re a bully little scout missionary anyway.

Your scoutmaster,

EBIN TALBOT

Hervey groped around under the bed and with trembling hand lifted the crisp, new five dollar bill. And there he stood with a strange feeling in his throat, clutching the bill and the letter while gentle Mrs. Walton lowered the wire screen so that the room wouldn’t be full of flies and moth millers.

“Well! Now aren’t you proud?” she asked.

He did not know whether he was proud or not. But he knew that the crazy world was upside down. He had sent Chesty to denounce the Scouts and Chesty had remained and joined. And the Scouts had sent five dollars and called him a *missionary*.

“A missionary! Think of that!” said Mrs. Walton.

“It’s not so bad being a missionary,” said Hervey. “That isn’t calling names. Bimbo, they go to Africa and Labrador—it’s not so bad being called one.”

“Well, you’d better take your hat off and go to bed now,” said his stepmother.

“You don’t think I’d let ’em call me names, do you?” Hervey demanded. “That’s one thing.”

“I don’t see how you can hit them,” laughed Mrs. Walton, “they seem to have such a long reach. It’s hard to get away from them.”

It certainly was a knockout.

CHAPTER XX OMINOUS

“Well, that’s a pretty good joke,” said Mr. Walton at the breakfast table. “You take my advice and save it for next summer up at camp, Herve. I think after this we’ll call you the missionary, eh mother? Shall we call him the missionary? The scout worker! Toiler in the scout vineyard!” Contrary to his custom, Mr. Walton leaned back and laughed.

“The boy who brought the letter,” said Mrs. Walton, “told me Mr. Talbot thought it was fine that Hervey went to the police and saved an innocent boy from being punished. Poor little Chesty McCullen——”

“I can only hope he proves worthy of the young missionary who converted him,” Mr. Walton interrupted.

So that was the sense in which those appalling words, overheard by Hervey, had been used.

“I was going to take him and give him a good time,” said Hervey.

“I think you’re giving him the time of his life,” said his stepfather.

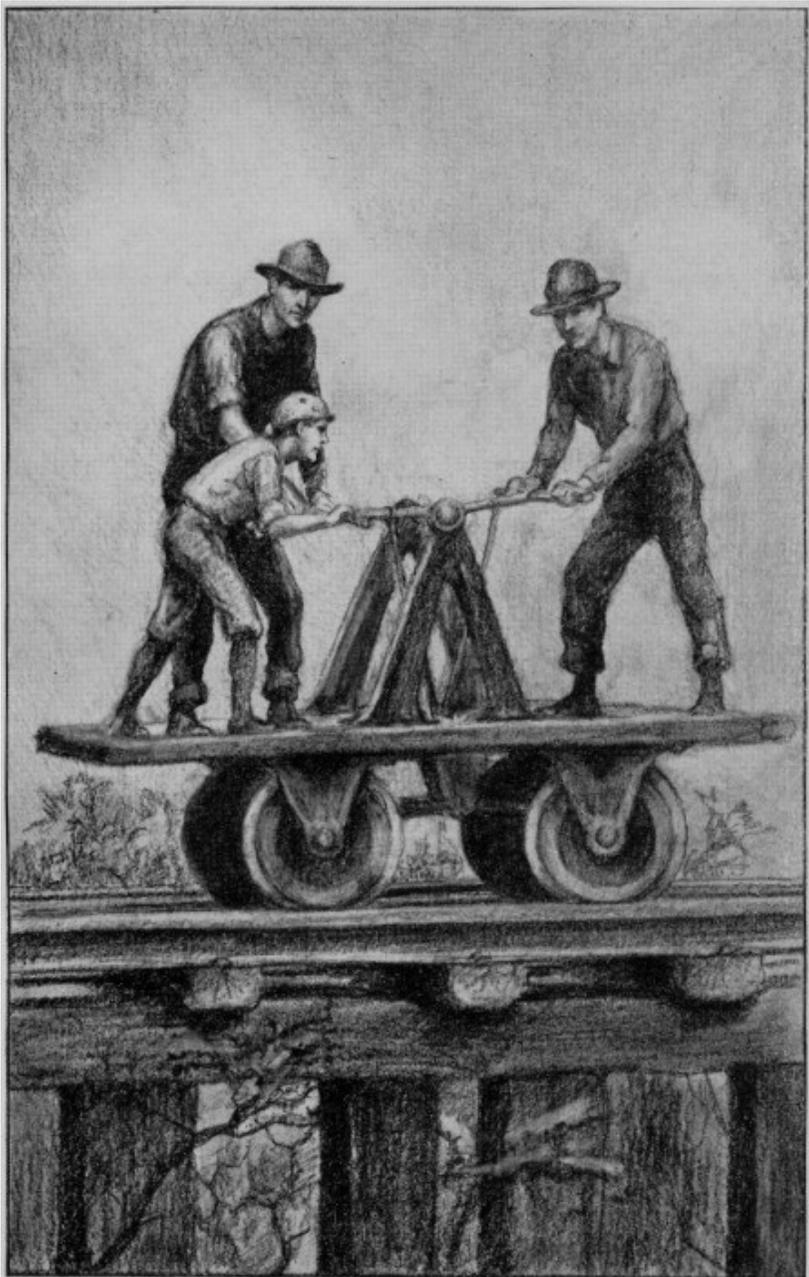
When Hervey went forth after breakfast the world looked bright. A few days were still to elapse before the opening of school and he was never at a loss for something to do. He did not keenly feel Chesty McCullen’s desertion to the enemy’s camp. And I am sorry to say that he was not deeply touched by the receipt of the much needed five dollars from the Scouts. Hervey could never be won by sentiment. He said he was lucky and there was an end of it as far as he was concerned. Here he had recognition for doing a clean, straightforward thing (for he had not one streak of yellow in him), but he took no pride in it. And when they were thrilled at his essential honor, he was not even grateful. He went upon his way rejoicing. He did not know anything about honor because he never did anything with deliberation and purpose. He had the much needed five dollars and that was all he thought about.

He went to Farrelton Junction that morning and paid his fine, and on the way back he drove a frightened cat up a tree and climbed up after it. It may be observed in passing that he was the sworn enemy of cats. To get one at bay and poke his stick at it and observe its thickened tail and mountainous back was his idea of high adventure. The frantic hissing was like music to his ears. He might have had the stalker’s badge, the pathfinder’s badge, and half a dozen other badges for the mileage and ingenuity wasted on cats.

On that very day he made a discovery which was to keep him right side up for several days. During that time Farrelton and his home saw but little of him.

It was the calm preceding the storm. He discovered along the railroad tracks near Clover Valley, a crew of workers engaged in lengthening a siding. They had been brought from distant parts and made their home in a freight car which was converted into a rolling camp. It had a kitchen with an old-fashioned stove in it and pots and pans hanging all about. Partitioned off from this was a compartment with delightfully primitive bunks. The workers hung out their washing on the roof of the car.

Best of all there was a little handcar at their disposal, which was worked by pumping a handle up and down. By this means they could move back and forth from the village of Clover Valley, about two miles up the line. Between two o'clock and five-nineteen each day, this little car was safe on the line and they used it to get provisions from the village. Hervey loved this handcar as no mortal ever before loved an inanimate thing. To propel it by its creaky pump handle was a delight. And the old freight car in which those half-dozen men fried bacon and played cards approximated nearer than anything he had ever seen to his idea of heaven.



IT WAS HERVEY'S DELIGHT TO HELP PROPEL THE LITTLE HANDCAR.

These rough, burly men accepted him as they would have accepted a stray dog and called him a mascot. He hiked to their camp each day and stayed

among them till sunset. He wandered about and climbed trees and ate with them and fetched saw or sledge-hammer, and was always on the handcar when it went down the line to Clover Valley for provisions. When he told the men his name was Hervey, they dubbed him Nervy and he was fated to deserve the name. Of course, they liked him. He was serviceable when he wanted to be and it was all right when he elected to beguile himself in the dense woods that bordered the tracks.

It was unfortunate that Hervey could not have continued this harmless pastime which was interrupted by Harlem Hinkey. On a certain fateful evening he went to the second show with this young magnate who treated him to ice cream soda on the way home. This delayed his arrival till about eleven o'clock, and Mr. Walton was greatly annoyed. He had an old-fashioned idea that a boy should be home early at night, though occasionally he relaxed in this respect provided Hervey asked permission. But asking permission was a thing that Hervey did not know how to do. He breezed into the living room on this particular night presenting an amusing contrast to the ominous deliberation of his stepfather who leisurely folded his paper, laid it down precisely and addressed him.

“Where have you been, Hervey?”

“I went to the second show with a feller—*some* picture! Bimbo, all about ranches. That’s where I’d like to go—out west.”

“I wish you wouldn’t throw your cap in a chair, Hervey, dear,” said Mrs. Walton. “Can’t you hang it in the hall as you come in?”

He disappeared into the hall, and as he did go, Mr. Walton with a quietly determined look said, “I want to talk to Hervey alone a few minutes.” Mrs. Walton, with a gentle show of apprehension, went upstairs.

CHAPTER XXI

DISTANT RUMBLINGS

“Now Hervey, where have you been?”

“Gee, didn’t I tell you? I went to the second show.”

“It’s after eleven o’clock,” said Mr. Walton, “and you know you musn’t stay out till that time without our knowing where you are. If you want to go to the movies you must go to the first show. Wasn’t that understood? Now school is beginning——”

“In New York the fellers stay out till twelve, even one,” said Hervey. He had up-to-date information from Harlem Hinkey on this point.

“Well, they don’t here,” said Mr. Walton crisply; “not in this house anyway.”

“Isn’t it my house—when I grow up?” demanded Hervey.

This was high-handed to the point of insolence, but Mr. Walton was not angered. Instead he seemed thoughtful. He would have been justified in feeling hurt, for he had always been generous to this boy whose own mother had left just nothing except the house which would be Hervey’s some day. Mr. Walton had improved it and cleared it of a mortgage, thinking only of its future owner.

“I’m sorry you said that, Herve,” he remarked, “for it makes it hard for me to deal with you as I’m sure I ought to—as I promised I would. That is, with the single thought of your own welfare. Somehow I always feel that I have not full authority over you. I feel I have the right to help you and guide you, but not to punish you.”

“Sure, I don’t blame you,” said Hervey.

“Of course, this place is to be yours. But you want to be worthy of it, don’t you?”

“Believe me, I want to get away from it and go out west,” said Hervey; “there’s no fun in this berg. A feller I know says so too. And I know how I’m going to get the money too—I do.”

He was probably thinking of employment in the circus which was doing a three day stand in Clover Valley. Perhaps he had also some idea of identifying himself professionally with that camp of railroad workers whose duties sometimes took them far afield.

“Bimbo, you can have the place if you want it,” he said flippantly. “What’s the use of having it if I can’t stay out of it nights. Anyway, you’re not my father, are you?”

Still Mr. Walton kept his composure. “I think some boy has put that idea

into your head," said he. "You never said that before. I don't think that comes from your heart, Herve."

"Well, I'm not going to start going to school anyway. Lots of fellers my age do other things. Jiminies, I can't stand that old four-eye Keller; he razzed me all last term. You say the Scouts and fresh air are good. Is it good to keep a feller in school till five o'clock. Bimbo, do you call that fresh air? *Good night!*"

Still Mr. Walton, unruffled, patient, reasonable, seemed to be trying to understand this boy and to be fair with him. He watched him with a keen scrutiny in his kindly, tired eyes. His forbearance seemed inexhaustible.

"Hervey," said he finally, "why did you try to sell your bicycle?"

Hervey was quite taken by surprise. "M—my—why did I try to—when did I try to sell it?" he stammered.

"You tried to sell it to Mr. Berly," said Mr. Walton. "I met him to-day and he told me so."

"He—*he said that?*" Hervey was right on the edge of a lie, but he sidestepped it. "Gee, what good is it?" he said.

"You said only last week you were going to take a long ride on it. Don't you remember—at the supper table—when Mrs. Tennet was here?"

"As long as I can't go anywhere and stay out, what's the good of it? Riding around the green isn't any fun."

Mr. Walton disregarded this insincerity. "And that's why you tried to sell it? The bicycle that your mother promised you when you reached fifteen, and which I gave you in memory of her—to carry out her wish?"

Hervey was silent. For a moment he seemed to be reached.

"You didn't think you could get enough for it to take you out west, did you? When you're old enough if you want to go out west, I'll give you the money to go. I'm afraid you'll never find what you want out there, but if you want to go, I will be willing—when you get through school. I can't make you stay in the Scouts——"

"Good night on that outfit," Hervey interrupted.

"But of course, you must finish school—and high school."

"*Goooood night!*"

"And I want you to think about what you've said to me to-night," said Mr. Walton soberly; "about this being your house and about my not being your father. And about trying to sell your bicycle that was really like a present from your own mother—her wish. I want you to ask yourself whether you—I think you call it playing a game, don't you——? Whether you're playing the game right with me, and with Mumsy, who worries so much about you. But whether you think of these things or not you must be ready to go to school when it opens. And you must be in the house each night at half past nine. You must

pay as much attention to what I tell you as to what some chance acquaintance tells you. You see, Hervey, I'm giving you credit for not originating some of these things you have said to me. Good night."

Hervey did not move away. He was just embarrassed enough to avoid drawing attention to himself by leaving the room. He did not feel like saying good night, and he did not like to go without saying good night. It was not an unworthy embarrassment and Mr. Walton respected it. He rose, a gaunt, bent form, and went out into the kitchen. Hervey could hear him winding the old-fashioned clock that stood on the shelf over the stove. Then he could hear the woodshed door being bolted. Still he stood just where he was. Mr. Walton came slowly through the hall and Hervey could count his slow footfalls on the stair. When the coast was clear he went upstairs himself.

CHAPTER XXII

WORDS AND ACTIONS

Hervey did not ponder upon any of those matters. There was no action in pondering, and he believed in action. He had never intended to rebel against going back to school; his remarks along that line had been quite casual. First and last, he had a good deal of fun in school. I suppose you might call playing hooky part of the fun of going to school.

Nor did he have any serious intentions at that time of going west. His remarks on that score had also been quite casual. The thought that did linger with him was that New York (especially Harlem) must be a wonderful place. For the honor of Farrelton and Massachusetts, he was resolved that Harlem Plinkey's face should be washed with the very first dare he offered. Harlem Hinkey was all that was left now before the opening of school.

For several days Hervey walked the straight and narrow path, and though he roamed at large in the evenings, he was always home on time. He was a deft performer on the harmonica and could play *Home Sweet Home* in funeral time, in march time and in waltz time. He would sit on the counter in his father's store on evenings when Mr. Walton was at home and play for the two salesgirls to dance. They liked him immensely and adored his outlandish hat.

He was on his way home from one of these impromptu affairs one night when he encountered Harlem Hinkey standing in front of the Hinkey million dollar theatre.

"Want to go in to the second show?" Hinkey asked.

"Nope, I've got to be home before ten," said Hervey.

They walked up the street together and turned into Milligan Street which ran through to Hart Street on which Hervey lived. Another block and he would have been safely at home. Milligan Street was but one block long; it was dominated by the big square wooden Congregational church which had stood there a good hundred years before any of the chain of Hinkey million dollar theatres had been dreamed of. Its white bulk and the massive roof-high pillars before its spacious portal loomed in the darkness.

"Is that where the kids meet?" Hinkey asked. He meant the Scouts, but he never paid them the compliment of calling them by that name.

"Yop," said Hervey, "only they're not meeting there to-night. It's the Farrelton band. They practise in the Sunday School room. There go a couple of them now."

As he spoke a couple of young men hastened along the board walk beside

the church and into the lighted extension.

“*Oh, listen to the band,*” Hinkey sang rather aggressively. “Come on, let’s sit down; you don’t have to go home yet,” he said.

Adjacent to the church was a long, ramshackle shed, reminiscent of a time when people sheltered their horses and carriages during service. Near this was a rail where horses had once been tied. In days gone by many were the sermons punctuated by the restive stamping of these horses from near and far about the countryside.

“I bet you I can walk on that,” said Hervey. “I bet you I can go the whole length of it on one foot. Do you say I can’t?” After a stumble or two, he proved that he could. “Come on, let’s sit on the rail; I don’t have to get in till ten.” Nine-thirty was the limit set, but Hervey had made it ten and Mr. Walton had not taken official notice.

“Me, I can stay out all night,” said Hinkey. “You’re lucky. I bet when you went to Coney Island you stayed that late.”

“They were lucky if they saw me back the next day,” said Hinkey.

“Did you go on the boat? I bet you wouldn’t stand on the rail of that.”

“I bet I did.”

“Not when it was going?”

“Sure I did.”

“Oh bimbo. Let’s see you walk this rail—on one foot.”

“I wouldn’t be bothered,” said Hinkey.

“I bet you were never up in the tower of that Woolworth Building.”

“I bet I was. I bet I know the man that owns it.”

“I bet you wouldn’t stand on the rail up there—oh boy!”

“I bet I would.”

“I bet you wouldn’t.”

“I bet I would only there’s a man that won’t let you.”

“I bet I could do it when he didn’t see me,” said Hervey. “Will they let you walk through that tube under the river?”

“Sure, and Election Day is a holiday over there too. This is no good of a state.”

“I bet you don’t get forefathers’ Day over there,” said Hervey. “So that proves you’re a fool.”

“I bet if you saw Coney Island you’d want to stay there.”

“Oh bimbo!” said Hervey. “Do they have loop-the-loops there?”

“Suuure they do, and I looped them too.”

“Not without being strapped in, I bet you didn’t.”

“I bet I did.”

“I bet you can’t prove it.”

“I bet I can only the feller is in New York.”

“When you stayed away at night, I bet you didn’t stay with gipsies. I did.”

“I bet I helped to arrest gipsies,” Hinkey said.

“That’s nothing, I bet I got arrested,” said Hervey.

“I bet you never did.”

“What do you bet?”

“I bet you a ride in my car.”

“Where to?”

“You got arrested! I have to laugh.”

“You think only fellers that live in New York can get arrested?”

“Here comes another band player,” Hinkey said, and raising his voice in a way of mockery, he paraphrased the familiar song.

“Oh listen to the band,
Oh don’t you think it’s punk.”

“He walks cissified,” he concluded. “Look, he’s got a satchel.”

“He’s got a cornet or some kind of a trumpet in it,” said Hervey. “One of them has a long bag with a saxophone in it—I saw it once.”

“Oh listen to the village band
Oh merrily they make a noise like tin pans.”

sang Harlem Hinkey, and he whistled a kind of insolent accompaniment as the young man came tripping diagonally across the street. It must be confessed that this late arriving member had a decidedly effeminate trip as he came hurrying along and there was a crude humor to Hinkey’s accurately timed mockery.

“He doesn’t see us,” whispered Hinkey. “I tell you what let’s do; let’s sneak up behind and trip him up and grab the bag and then we’ll beat it around the side and we’ll blow the trumpet good and loud through the window. Hey? We’ll give them a good scare. See them jump, hey?”

This was a crude enough practical joke, to be sure. It was characteristic of Hinkey; it was his particular style of mischief. It had not any of the heroic quality of a stunt. It was not in the class with Hervey’s deeds of glory. To do our hero credit, to give the devil his due as they say, he would never have originated this silly joke. But it was not in his nature to back out of anything. He always moved forward.

“You trip him up and I’ll grab the bag,” he said. “Then I’ll beat it around and climb up on the window sill and I’ll give it a good loud blow. I can climb up there better than you can, I bet you.” It was amusing how in this wanton enterprise his thought focused upon the one really skilful feature of it—the vaulting on to the high window ledge. “Oh bimbo,” he added with relish.

There was something inviting in the thought of tripping up a young fellow

with such a mincing gait. If it were ever justifiable to trip *anybody* up he would be the sort of fellow who ought to be tripped. The two boys made a masterful and silent flank move to the rear of the hurrying figure. But when it came to tripping him, Harlem Hinkey fell back and it was Hervey who, dextrously projecting his foot, sent the young musician sprawling.

Things happened with lightning rapidity. Aghast at the magnificent execution of his inspired plan, Harlem Hinkey withdrew precipitately from the scene. Hervey's ready skill and promptness and the thudding descent of the victim had exhausted his courage. And there was Hervey, already around the corner with the bag. He had not advanced to the wing of the church for the very good reason that the rumpus had attracted attention within and already a young man with a flute in his hand was emerging from the doorway. He and his companions had been waiting for their dilatory member and now they beheld him sitting on the pavement nearby, nursing a bleeding knee while Harlem Hinkey went scooting down the street.

Around the corner, safe from the excited group, Hervey Willetts walked quickly with a simulated air of unconcern. He was good at this sort of thing and could adopt a demeanor of childlike innocence immediately after any stunt which had not the sanction of the law. A doctor hurrying with his little black bag, intent on an errand of mercy, could not have been more unconcerned than was our hero as he hastened along Hart Street. He could not afford to run because Cartwright, the night cop, was sauntering along on the other side of the way.

CHAPTER XXIII

DIPLOMACY

Instead of making the big noise our hero, deserted by his confederate, was using all his finesse not to attract the attention of the sauntering cop. At the corner Cartwright paused, glanced about, then crossed and strolled along a few yards behind Hervey. The official was quite unconcerned, but Hervey's guilty conscience told him that he was pursued. If he looked around or started to run, disaster might ensue. So he kept up the air of a respectable home-going citizen and did it to perfection.

He might have been a Boy Scout carrying some one's satchel as a good turn. He heard a voice behind him and feared it might be the outraged band member heading a posse to recover his instrument. Whoever it was, the person walked with the policeman and spoke of the weather.

Coming to his own house, Hervey opened the gate and felt relieved to be within the fenced enclosure. The gravel walk with its bordering whitewashed stones seemed to welcome him to safety. It was characteristic, oh how characteristic of Hervey, that he was not in the least troubled about how he was to return the satchel to its unknown owner. His only concern was his immediate safety. He would not lay it down to be lost to its owner. And he could not seek the hapless victim without giving himself away. So he entered the house cautiously, went upstairs and laid the satchel in his own apartment, then descended to the living room where his step-parents sat reading beside the marble center table. He had overstepped his time by about fifteen minutes, but Mr. Walton seemed never disposed to quibble about small infringements.

"I was at the store," said Hervey.

"They busy?"

"Sure, people buying things for school. Grouchy Greenway was in, he bought a lot of homework paper—pity the fellers in the third grade. Ruth Binney's scared of that ladder that rolls along—oh bimbo, that's my middle name. I can take a running jump and ride it all the way to the back of the store." He did not mention that he played the harmonica for the girls to dance; he was a good sport and did not tell tales out of school.

"I think Ruth and Annie Terris will miss you when you go to Montana," said Mr. Walton playfully.

"Such nonsense," said Mrs. Walton. "Don't put those ideas back into his head."

"I may go sooner than you think," said Hervey.

He stood in the doorway to the dining room, pausing before making his late evening attack on the apple barrel. A blithe, carefree figure he seemed, his eyes full of a kind of gay madness. One rebellious lock of hair sprawled over his forehead as he suddenly pulled off his outlandish hat in deference to his stepmother. He never remembered to do this as a regular duty; he remembered each time separately, and then with lightning inspiration. He could not for the life of him adapt his manners or phraseology to his elders.

“You know me, Al,” he said.

“Are you going to wash your face when you go in the kitchen?” Mrs. Walton inquired.

“Sure, is there any pie?” he asked.

They heard him fumbling in the kitchen, then trudging up the stairs.

“I think it would be just as well not to harp on Montana,” said Mrs. Walton. “It’s odd how he hit on Montana.”

“One place is as good as another,” said Mr. Walton. “I’m glad it’s Montana, it costs so much to get there. If he had Harlem in mind, or Coney Island, I might worry.”

“He talks of them both,” said Mrs. Walton. “Yes, but I think his heart is in the big open spaces, where the fare is about a hundred dollars. If it were the Fiji Islands I’d be content.”

“Do you think he’d like to go to Europe with us next summer?” Mrs. Walton asked. “I can’t bear to leave him alone.”

“No, I’m afraid he’d want to dive from the Rock of Gibraltar,” said Mr. Walton. “He’ll be safe at Temple Camp.”

“He seems to have just no balance-wheel,” Mrs. Walton mused. “When I look in his eyes it seems to me as if they saw joys, but never consequences.”

“Sort of near-sighted in a way, eh?”

“I do wish he had stayed in the Scouts, don’t you?”

“No, I don’t,” said Mr. Walton in a matter-of-fact way. “He didn’t see it. Some day he’ll see it, but it won’t be because anybody tells him. The only way Hervey can learn that a tree is high is for him to fall out of it. That’s what I mean by his being near-sighted in a way.”

“Do you think those railroad workers are a good set?”

“Oh, they’re a good lot; good, strong men.”

“Well, I don’t care for that Hinkey, do you?”

Mr. Walton did not go into raptures over anybody from New York. He was a good New Englander. Nor had he been carried off his feet by the “million dollar theatre.” But being a true New Englander he was fair in judgment and of few words, especially in the field of criticism. His answer to this last question was to resume reading his book.

CHAPTER XXIV IN THE SILENT NIGHT

In his own room Hervey opened the satchel which circumstances had caused him to carry home. He thought that since kind fate had brought the opportunity, he would like to give one exceedingly low blast on a real musical instrument. He was astonished to find that there was no musical instrument in the satchel, but a tin box containing a small account book, a number of bills with a rubber band around them, and an envelope containing some loose change.

He contemplated this treasure aghast. Counting the bills he found them to be in amount a trifle over a hundred dollars. Never before had he handled so much money. He was a little afraid of it. He shook the sealed envelope which was fat with coins; that alone seemed to contain a fortune. He glanced at the book and found it to full of figures, entries of receipts and expenditures. On the flyleaf was written:

Farrelton Merry Medley Serenaders,
Horton Manners, Treasurer.

He was greatly excited by this revelation. Here was a serious business, a very grave consequence of a mischievous act. To be sure, the bringing home of the satchel that did not belong to him would have been the same in any case regardless of its contents. But just the same the sight of so much money come into his possession in such a way, frightened him. He had not thought of such a thing as this. You see Hervey never thought at all—ever.

But he thought now. He had “colloped” (whatever that meant) the treasury funds of this musical organization and he felt uneasy that he should have to be the custodian of such a princely sum over night. *Money that did not belong to him!* Would his wanton act be construed as just harmless mischief? He had always wanted to have a hundred dollars, but now he was almost afraid to touch it. He replaced the box in the satchel and put the satchel under his bed. Then he pulled it out again and put it in his dresser. Then he closed and locked the window. When he was half undressed, he took the satchel out of his dresser and stood holding it not knowing where to put it. Then he put it back in the dresser.

He thought of going downstairs and telling his stepfather and getting this awful fortune off his hands. But then he would have to tell how he had come by it. Well, was that so very bad? Tripping a fellow up? But would any one understand? He was very angry at the deserter Hinkey. And he was equally

angry that this dextrous little tripping stunt should bear such consequences. It seemed to him that even poor Horton Manners had taken a mean advantage.

He resolved that he would hunt up the musical treasurer in the morning and return the satchel to him. He would hang on to it pretty carefully going down the street, too. He did not know Horton Manners, but he could find him. Of course, he would have to tell the man that he was sorry he had tripped him up. And his explanation of why he had carried the satchel home might sound rather queer. He was not too considerate of the tripping treasurer. He was doomed to a sleepless night on account of that "bimbo." It was odd, more than it was significant, that Hervey, who was afraid of no peril, was in panic fear of this hundred and some odd dollars. He was just afraid of it.

Several times during that long night, he arose and groped his way to the dresser to make sure that the satchel was safe. In the wee hours of the night he was sorry that he had not hunted up Horton Manners immediately after his escapade. But then he might have got home too late. On every hand he seemed confronted with the high cost of mischief.

He wondered if the tripping treasurer was searching for the culprit with the aid of the police. He felt sure that no one dreamed he was the culprit. Would they, might they not already, have traced Hinkey? And what would Hinkey say? He had a reassuring feeling that Hinkey could not be identified as one of the culprits. *He* certainly would not tell on Hinkey. And he hoped that Hinkey would not be incriminated and tell on him before he had a chance to return the satchel. But surely Mr. Horton Manners had not gone home and to bed, doing nothing about the theft of more than a hundred dollars. To the young treasurer the affair was a plain robbery. Of course, Hervey could not sleep when his imagination pictured the whole police and detective force of the town aroused by a bold hold-up.

In the hour just before dawn Hervey, in his troubled half-sleep, heard a knocking sound. Trembling all over, he pulled on his shirt and trousers, crept stealthily downstairs and with a shaking hand and pounding heart opened the front door.

CHAPTER XXV

LIFE, LIBERTY—

No one was there. Hervey looked out upon the dissolving night; already the familiar scene was emerging in the gray drawn—the white rail fence, the gravel walk with its bordering whitewashed stones, the big whitewashed tub that caught the rain-water from the roof trough. He smelled the mist. There was no one anywhere about; no sound but the slow dripping into the tub. Drop, drop, drop; it was from the rain of two or three days ago. How audible it was in the stillness! He crept upstairs again and went to bed. But he did not sleep. He wished that dreadful satchel were off his hands. Over a hundred dollars!

He arose in the morning before the household was astir and stole out with his guilty burden. He knew that Kipp's Railroad Lunch was open all night and that it had a telephone. He would look in the telephone book for Manners. That way he would find the address. He thought of leaving the satchel at the Manners' door, ringing the bell, and running away. The recovery of the money would end the trouble. But suppose the satchel should be stolen again—not *again*; but suppose it should be stolen? Of course, it had not been stolen before. . . . Just the same he was desperate to get it off his hands.

Things looked strange about the station so early in the morning; there were so few people to be seen, and no shops open. Somehow the very atmosphere imparted a guilty feeling to Hervey. He felt a little like a fugitive.

He could not find the name of Manners in the 'phone book and thus baffled, he felt nervous. For while he was losing time, the victim and the authorities were probably not wasting any time. He thought he would wait in the station a little while and try to decide what to do. He knew that the family of Denny Crothers, a scout, was identified with the big white church. There was an idea! Denny would know where Horton Manners lived, or could soon find out. Perhaps he might even take Denny into his confidence. It is worth considering that in his extremity he was willing not only to use, but to trust, this scout whose troop he had repudiated.

Well, he would sit in the station a little while (it was still very early) and if he could not think of any other plan, he would go to Denny's house. It would seem strange to the Crothers, seeing him there so early. And it would seem stranger still to Denny to be approached by an arch enemy. But Hervey's troubled thoughts could not formulate any better plan.

The station was not yet open and he strolled back and forth on the platform where a very few people were waiting for the early train—a workman wearing

a reefer jacket and carrying a dinner-pail, a little group of girls who worked in the paper mill at Brierly, and a couple of youngish men near the end of the platform. These two were chatting and one of them gave a quick glance at Hervey. It seemed to him that the talk which followed had reference to himself. He wished that the station would open, for it was a raw fall morning; there was a penetrating chill in the air. He wanted to sit down; he was tired of holding that dreadful satchel, yet he would not set it down for so much as a moment.

Suddenly, a rattling old car drove up and a brisk young man in an overcoat got out and dragged two huge oilcloth grips to the platform. He looked as if he might be a salesman who had completed his assault on Farrelton. He stopped and lighted a cigarette, and while he was doing this the two men strolled over and spoke to him. He seemed annoyed, then laughed as he took out some papers which the two men examined. Hervey overheard the word *hardware*. And he overheard one of the men say, "K.O., Buddy." They handed back the papers, nodded sociably, and moved away. It seemed by the most casual impulse that they approached Hervey. But he trembled all over.

"You're out early, kiddo," said one of them. "Waiting for the train?"

Why, oh why, did he flush and stammer and answer without thinking? "No—y-yes—I guess it's late, hey?"

"Guess not," said the man with a kind of leisurely pleasantry. "What you got in the bag, kiddo?"

"Bimbo, do I have to tell *you*?" Hervey demanded with the air of one whose rights are outraged.

"Might be just as well," said the man. "What's your name anyway?"

"My name is Hervey Willetts and you let go of that!" Hervey shouted, tugging at the satchel. "You let go of that, do you hear!" He not only pulled, but he kicked. "You let go of that or you'll get in trouble, you big——"

He was the center of a little group now; it was astonishing what a number of persons were presently on the scene considering the few early morning stragglers. The men put a quick end to Hervey's ill-considered struggle by taking the satchel while one held him firmly by the collar. There is not a decent person in the world but rebels against this collar grip which seems the very essence of effrontery. Few boys so held will fail to use that potent weapon, the foot, and Hervey, squirming, administered a kick upon his captor's shin which made the burly fellow wince and swear.

But it was all to no avail. They opened the satchel and noted its contents. Hervey's sense of indignity now quite obliterated every other feeling. His struggles subsided into a wrathful sullenness; he could not, or he would not, explain. He knew only that he was being held and that fact alone aroused the demon in him. Of course, if Walton could not manage him, and the Scouts

could not win and hold him, it was hardly to be expected that these low-bred detectives could get closer to him than to hold him by the collar. A dog would have understood him better. He was not the kind of boy to grab by the collar.

These two detectives, apprised of the “robbery,” had taken their stand at the station to note if any suspicious looking strangers were leaving town on the first train. The boy had almost escaped, because of his youth.

And *escape* was the one thought in his mind now. Twice he might have explained; first to his good stepfather, and again to these minions of the law. But they had the grabbing instinct and (oh, the pity of it) had diverted his thoughts from honest restitution to a maniac desire to beat them and baffle them, to steal indeed his liberty if nothing else, and let the satchel with its fortune go hang! He *would* steal; yes, he would forget all else now in this crazy mixup! He would steal what was the very breath of life to him—*his freedom*. He forgot the whole sorry business in this dominant thought—Horton Manners, the satchel, everything. They had grabbed him by the collar and he could feel the tightness in his neck.

As long as the squirrel has teeth to bite, *he will bite*. You cannot tame a squirrel. The fact that he is caught stealing in your tree is quite a secondary matter. Hervey Willetts never thought of stealing anything in his life—but just the one thing.

Freedom!

So he did a stunt. With both hands he tore open his shirt in front, and as he felt the loosening grip in back he sprang forward only to feel a vice-like hand catch hold of his arm. And that hand he bit with all his vicious might and main. Like lightning he dodged both men and was off like a deer while the circle of onlookers stood aghast. Around the end of the freight platform he sped and those who hurried there beheld no sign of him—only a milk-can lying on its side which he had probably knocked over.

Off bounded one of the detectives; the other lingered, sucking the cut in his hand. He didn't know much about wild life, poor man. This was a kind of stealing he had never seen before—the only kind that interested Hervey Willetts. The only *thing* that interested him—freedom. As long as the squirrel has teeth to bite, he will bite.

You cannot tame a squirrel.

CHAPTER XXVI OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

But they caught him, and caged him. They found him in the camp of railroad workers near Clover Valley where he had spent a week or so of happy days. And they left nothing undone. They investigated the histories of that rough and ready crew, for they were after the man higher up, the "master mind" in back of the robbery.

They unearthed the fact that one of them, Nebraska Ned, had been a sailor and had deserted his ship to assist in a revolution in South America. It was then that Hervey made a most momentous decision. He abandoned Montana quite suddenly and chose South America as the future theatre of his adventurous career.

No master mind was discovered, not even the true master mind, Harlem Hinkey. He was not implicated and he neglected to uphold the chivalrous honor of Harlem by coming forward as the originator of the prank which had such a grave sequel. In the hearing in court, Hervey never mentioned his name. And there you have Hervey Willetts. You may take your choice between the "million dollar theatre" and South America.

There was a pathos about the quiet resignation, the poise and fairness in face of all, which Mr. Walton presented in that memorable scene at the hearing. I like Mr. Walton, good man that he was. He sat, a tall, gaunt figure, one lanky limb across the other, and listened without any outward show of humiliation. His tired gray eyes, edged by crow's-foot wrinkles singularly deep, rested tolerantly on the prim young man, Horton Manners, who was having his day in court with a vengeance.

And Hervey, too, looked upon the young treasurer musician with interest, with dismay indeed, for he recognized in him the very same young man into whose lap he had stumbled on the train coming home after his triumphal season at helpless Temple Camp. Horton Manners looked down from his throne on the witness box, gazing through Hervey rather than at him, and adjusted his horn spectacles in a way that no one should do who is under fifty years old. He held one lapel of his coat and this simple posture, so common with his elders, gave him somehow the absurd look of an experienced business man of about twenty-two years.

He was not in the least embarrassed. He testified that he was treasurer of the Farrelton Band and confessed that he played a small harp. If he had said that he played a drum nobody would have believed him. He said that he had

lived in Farrelton but a short while and made his home with his married sister. Then, on invitation of the likely looking young man representing the prosecutor, he told how Hervey had mentioned on the train that he was going to Montana and that he was going to “collop” the money to get there.

“And when did you next see him?”

“Not till this very day; in fact—here in court.”

“When he spoke of Montana, did he ask you how much it would cost to get there?”

“He did, and I informed him that it would cost at least a hundred dollars. I advised him against going.” There was a slight titter of the spectators at this.

“I think that’s all, your Honor,” said the interrogator. “Since the boy admits he took the satchel, we need not prove that.”

“Just one moment,” drawled Mr. Walton, drawing himself slowly to his feet. He had employed no lawyer, and would not, unless his stepson were held for trial on the serious charge of robbery.

“You say you live with your married sister?” he drawled ruminatively.

“Mrs. Winton C. DeGraw, yes.”

“Then your name would not be in the ’phone book?”

“Presumably not.”

“Hmph.”

“I don’t see any significance in that,” said the young prosecutor.

“I simply want to find out if my boy has told me the truth,” said Mr. Walton. “This isn’t a trial, of course. When I have satisfied myself about certain matters I will ask the court to hear me. One more question, Mr. Horton—I mean Mr. Manners. Do you know the meaning of the word *collop*?”

“I never investigated it.”

“Well, I *have* investigated it,” said Mr. Walton, with the faintest twinkle in his eye. Hervey looked rather surprisedly at his stepfather. “It does not mean to steal. It means to earn or to get by the performance of a foolhardy act—what boys call a stunt. Do you know what a stunt is?”

“I suppose when I was knocked down——”

“You mean tripped.”

“Well, tripped. I suppose that was a stunt.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Walton. “That’s all it was and nothing more. I have talked with boys and I find that if a boy jumps from a high fence to get another boy’s jack-knife, he *collops* it. It’s a long time since you and I were boys, Mr. Horton Manners,” Mr. Walton added with a smile. “Do you really want to charge this youngster with a felony?” he continued in a tone of quiet kindness. “Isn’t the case hard enough without that? Did you never perform a stunt?”

Oh, Hervey Willetts, if you had no thrill in that moment for the patient, kindly, harassed man—your friend and counselor; then indeed was there no

hope for you! But he had a thrill. For the first time in all his life his eyes filled and brimmed over as he looked at the man who wanted only to make sure of him, to know that he was not dishonest; who could stand for anything save that.

“I think, your Honor,” said Mr. Walton quietly, “that this affair simmers down to a piece of mischief with an unintendedly serious consequence. I know, of course, about the recent affair of the fire. My boy gave himself up because he would not be despicable. He does not lie, much less steal. I believe the story he told me; that he thought the satchel contained a musical instrument and that he intended to blow it and cause panic to those gathered in the church. He saw the police officer, thought he was watched, and carried out the part of innocence by bringing the satchel home. It proved an elephant on his hands, a guilty burden to one really innocent. He told me he could not find this young man’s name in the ’phone book and it develops that the name is not there. I have here two men who saw him looking in the ’phone book in a lunch room near the station——”

The judge interrupted and surprised him. “I think we need not prolong this,” said he. “I think the boy had no intention of committing a serious crime, or any crime at all. I believe the story he told when arrested. I’d like to think the consequence will prove a lesson to him. But do you think it will?”

“I’m afraid it will not,” said Mr. Walton. “And I may say now that it is my intention to send him somewhere where he will be under rigid discipline. I think I may be left to deal with him.”

“Well, the charge of robbery is dismissed,” said the judge. Then he appeared to ruminate. “But the boy is still with us and there’s the problem. This is the second time he has been brought into court. He kicked up quite a rumpus and bit an officer. Where is this kind of thing going to end?” He seemed kindly and spoke rather sociably and not as an official. “Why don’t you put him in the Boy Scouts?” he added.

“The Boy Scouts haven’t given him a knockout blow yet,” smiled Mr. Walton. “I’m always hoping they’ll reach him. But I suppose they’ll have to do a stunt that pleases him. Meanwhile, I’m going to send him to a military school. It seems like a confession of defeat, but I’m afraid it’s the only thing to do.”

The judge turned to Hervey. “You’d better go home with your father,” said he. “And you take my advice and get into the Boy Scouts while there is time, or the first thing you know you’ll land in a reformatory. So you want to go to Montana, eh?”

“Sure, they have train robbers out there?” said Hervey.

“And how do you like having a hundred dollars that doesn’t belong to you?”

“Nix on that stuff,” Hervey said gayly.

“Yet you like train robbers.”

“Bimbo, that’s different.”

Mr. Horton Manners, still sitting like an owl on the witness stand, gazed at Hervey with a look of utter bewilderment.

“But in South America they have rebellions,” said Hervey.

“Well, let us have no more rebellion here,” smiled the judge.

And he winked at Mr. Walton.

CHAPTER XXVII AT LAST

Of course, Hervey was never in any danger of being sent to prison for robbery. As soon as he was arrested and made to tell his story, Mr. Walton annoyed, but unruffled, saw the thing in its true light. He went to the all night lunch room near the station and made sure that Hervey had gone there; then he verified the boy's statement that the name of Manners was not in the 'phone book.

Quietly he even inquired among boys the meaning of *collop*. And he learned on the highest juvenile authority that it did not signify stealing nor an intent to steal. But Horton Manners had made the charge of robbery and so the whole business had to be aired in court. Mr. Walton was a man of few words; it would be interesting to know what he really thought of Horton Manners.

As for Hervey, he quite forgot the affair within an hour of the time it was over. He had been appalled to find himself the custodian of a hundred and more dollars, but now that he had got it off his hands, he went upon his way rejoicing. He never looked either backward or forward; the present was good enough for him. It is significant that he bore no malice toward Horton Manners. Once or twice he referred to him as Arabella; then he forgot all about him. He could not be bothered hating anybody; nor caring a great deal about anybody either.

A few prominent townspeople financed the Firemen's Carnival and it was held after all. Shows and acts were engaged, the merry-go-round revolved to the accompaniment of its outlandish music, the peanut and lemonade men held form; you could see the five-legged calf for "a dime ten cents," and Biddle's field presented a gala scene. The boys of Farrelton went round and round trying to stab the brass ring, they drank red lemonade and time after time gazed spellbound at the five-legged calf.

Hervey did not care about seeing the five-legged calf unless he could sneak in under the canvas fence, and he could not manage that because of the man who kept shouting and slapping the canvas with his stick. In common with all the other boys he was thrilled at the sight of Diving Denniver who ascended a ladder to a dizzy height and dived from it into a small tank directly below. Diving Denniver did this thing twice a day, and his night performance was the more thrilling because it was in the glare of a searchlight whose long beam followed him in his slow ascent of the frail looking ladder and showed him in a circle of light when he paused for one thrilling moment at the top. He earned

his living in this way, going around exhibiting at carnivals and amusement parks, and he was the big feature of the Farrelton carnival.

Hervey was not content simply to behold this daredevil exploit. He saw it twice in the daytime and once at night, and he could not stand the strain of being restricted to the enjoyment afforded a gaping audience. That is where he differed from other boys. It was this something in his nature that prevented him from reading boys' books; he could not intrude into the hair-raising adventures and so he had no use for them. The most thrilling stories were utterly dead stuff to Hervey.

But here he could intrude. It was after he saw the night performance that he felt the urge to penetrate to the hallowed spot whence that enchanted daredevil emerged in his theatrically cautious ascent of the ladder. The nature of the spectacular feat required that it be performed at a distance from the body of the carnival. As soon as the band started playing *Up in the air mid the stars*, the long column of light was directed on the ladder which appeared as if by magic a hundred yards or so from the thronged area of the carnival. Every eye was then fixed with expectancy as a white figure arose into view, moving up, up, up, to a little surmounting platform. Then the sensational dive, after which the pleasure seekers ate, drank and were merry again.

But Hervey could not go back to any merry-go-round after that, and red lemonade had no solace for him. He wandered off from those festoons of electric lights, away from the festive groups, into the darkness. Before him, down near the edge of Biddle's field, was a tiny light. Soon he came to a rope fence which cut off the end of the field from the public. Beyond this were wagons and huge cases standing in the darkness, the packing and transporting paraphernalia of the motley shows. In a monstrous truck that stood there the multi-colored prancing horses of the merry-go-round would be loaded and have a ride themselves.

On an upright of this rope fence was a sign which read POSITIVELY NO ADMITTANCE. Hervey entered just where the sign was placed. A hundred or so paces brought him to the holy of holies, a little tent at the foot of the towering, slender ladder. In the darkness its wire braces, extending away on each side to their anchorages in the earth, could not be seen. Almost at the foot of the ladder was a tank perhaps fifteen or eighteen feet square. Close by the tent was a Ford sedan, and Hervey crept reverently up to it and read the words on the spare tire cover DIVING DENNIVER. On the lower part of the circumference was printed THREE HUNDRED FOOT DIVE. Diving Denniver believed in advertising. In that tent lived the enchanted mortal.

Hervey lingered in awe as a pilgrim might linger at a shrine before entering. Then he walked rather hesitatingly to the open flap of the tent. On a mattress which lay atop a huge red chest reclined Diving Denniver in a bath

robe. The chest had DIVING DENNIVER printed on it, as also did a large leather grip, which bore the additional information WONDER OF TWO CONTINENTS. If the world could not see Diving Denniver on his dizzy perch, it at least could read about him. Besides the makeshift divan the tent contained a rough table formed by a red board laid on two saw horses.

On this was a greasy oil-stove and one or two plates and cups. In his illicit wanderings, Hervey had at last trespassed through the golden gates into heaven.

“I was walking around,” said he, rather unconvincingly.

Diving Denniver, a slim young man of about thirty, was smoking a cigarette and looking over a magazine. It seemed incredible that he should be thus engaged so soon after his spectacular descent.

“Bimbo, that was some pippin of a dive,” said Hervey. Then, as Diving Denniver made no attempt to kill him, he ventured to add, “Oh *bambino*, that’s one thing I’m crazy about—diving.”

“Didn’t the cop see you?” the marvel asked.

“Leave it to me,” said Hervey. “There isn’t any cop there anyway. Cops, that’s one thing I have no use for—nix.”

“Yere?” queried Diving Denniver, aroused to slight amusement.

“Do you—do you feel funny?” Hervey ventured as he gazed upon the wonder of two continents.

“Where did yer git that hat?” asked the god of the temple. “What’s all them buttons you got on it?”

“I climbed way down a cellar shaft to get one of those buttons,” said Hervey, anxious to establish a common ground of professional sympathy with this celebrity. “That’s the one,” he indicated, as he handed Denniver his hat; “the one that says VOTE FOR TINNEY. He didn’t get elected and I’m glad, because his chauffeur’s a big fool; he chased me, but he couldn’t catch me. Some of those holes I cut out with a real cartridge shell, like you cut cookies. I bet you feel funny, hey?”

“Yere?” said Diving Denniver, examining the hat. “Well, do you think yer could go back up there where the big noise is and then come back here again—without gettin’ stopped?”

“You mean you dare me to?”

Diving Denniver roused himself sufficiently to reach over to a box and grope in the pocket of a pair of ordinary trousers, the kind that mortals wear. Then he tossed a quarter to Hervey. “Chase yourself back there and get a frankfurter,” he said; “get a couple of ’em. And don’t leave the cop see yer.”

So the wonder of two continents ate frankfurters—and scorned cops. More than that, he and Hervey were going to eat a couple of frankfurters together. At last Hervey felt that he had not lived in vain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAW AGAIN

Hervey felt that he and Diving Denniver were pretty much alike after all. The wonder of two continents beat all the boy scouts put together. And he had now a fine precedent for his repudiation of authority. Diving Denniver cared naught for cops and signs. Hervey would have been glad to go into any court and cite this high authority, confounding the powers with this frankfurter episode. He was sorry he had not told Diving Denniver of his swimming across the lake at Temple Camp (during rest period which was against the rules). Instead of an honor he had received a reprimand for that. He was a little afraid that some of the other boys would visit the wonder in his tent, but in fact there wasn't much danger of that. The wonder was too much off the beaten track for most boys. Their thoughts did not carry behind the scenes.

Hervey was now in much perplexity whether to witness the thrilling exploit from the audience the next night or to view it from the sanctum of the hero. In either case he intended to visit the remote scene of enchantment with two frankfurters. He decided that he would not demean himself by gazing at his hero with the idle throng. He even negotiated an extra hour out from Mr. Walton in anticipation of his second visit to the hermit of the ladder.

He could not possibly reach the place in the daytime, and besides, he had to take up some bulbs for his stepmother the next day. For this and other services he was to receive fifty cents. Twenty-five of this would pay his admission to the carnival. With the other twenty-five he intended to furnish forth a banquet of frankfurters for his hero and brother daredevil. He could not afford to go twice in the day. He had some thought of effecting an entrance over the high fence into the field and having his entire fifty cents for the post-exploit feast. But reckless as he was, he was cautious in this matter of reaching the tent—there was so much at stake! So he decided to go respectably in through the entrance and then cross the rope fence where the “Positively No Admittance” sign was placed. It was not often that he showed such a conservative spirit.

At half past eight, he found Diving Denniver strolling around in his bathrobe outside the tent. Within, the odor of fried bacon and coffee still lingered.

“You back again?”

“Sure, I want to see you from right here, and afterward I'm going to go and get some more frankfurters. After you're finished will you let me go about ten

or fifteen steps up the ladder and try it?"

Diving Denniver did not trouble himself to answer, but he ruffled Hervey's hair good-humoredly as he ambled about smoking his cigarette. "Much of a crowd over there?" he asked.

"*Oh bimbo*, they're all waiting. They stop dancing even when you go up," Hervey said.

"You're a pretty slippery kid, all right, ain't yer?" Denniver said. "Ain't there no guy up there at the rope?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when both he and Hervey became aware of a policeman who had just come around the side of the tent. But Hervey, though astonished, was not perturbed, for he believed that the wonder of two continents would protect him. One word from Diving Denniver and he would be safe. He even ventured a defense himself.

"I'm going to do an errand for him," he said.

"You can ask him yourself. So I've got a right to be here."

But it appeared that it was Diving Denniver with whom the officer had business. "Are you Charles McDennison?" he asked.

"Yere, what's the dope?" the wonder asked, with a kind of weariness in his voice.

Hervey was astonished, not to say shocked, that Diving Denniver acknowledged the name of Charles McDennison.

"Let's look at your permit," said the officer.

Mr. McDennison entered the tent, presently emerging with a paper.

"That's no good here and you know it's no good," said the officer. "Wainboro! And a year old too. Why didn't you come and get your permit when you got to town? You've been in this game long enough to know you've got to do that. All these concessions have permits, except those under carnival management."

"Some towns—" began McDennison.

"Never mind about some towns. You know you've got to get a permit in this town. Why didn't you do it?"

The harassed performer began again, "You guys——"

"Never mind about that now," said the officer. "I was sent here to see your permit and to bring you down to the office if you didn't have it. You know all about it; you were at the Elks' Fair three years ago. You better come along and get your permit, Charlie. You'll have to take care of a fine, too."

"You don't mean now?" the diving wonder asked. "Ain't you going to leave me do my trick? I go on in about five minutes. You fellers sure got the knife in us. If I belonged in this here town——"

"Come on, McDennison," said the officer in a way of quiet finality. "You know the game as well as I do. We're not interested in your trick, only your

permit. Come on, get your duds on. I guess you've been through all this before. Come on, speed up."

Diving Denniver cast his cigarette from him, bestowing a look of unutterable contempt on the officer. In that sneering scorn he seemed to include the whole of Farrelton and all constituted authorities the world over. And Hervey joined him in his contempt and loathing. Diving Denniver *had* been through all that before. He knew the permit towns and the non-permit towns and the towns where a "tip" would save him the expense of a permit. Hervey had not dreamed that this enchanted creature ever had to do anything but dive, he did not know that the wonder of two continents had hit Farrelton penniless.

I will not recount the language used by Diving Denniver as he pulled on a shabby suit of clothes and threw a funny little derby hat on the back of his head. How prosaic and odd he looked! But his language was not prosaic; it was quite as spectacular as his famous exploit—his trick, as he called it. Poor McDennison, it was all he had to sell—his trick. And sometimes he had so much trouble about it.

A funny little figure he made trotting excitedly along with the officer, his derby hat on the back of his head bespeaking haste and anger. He smoked a cigarette and talked volubly and swore as he hurried away, leaving Hervey staring aghast.

Such a troublesome and distracting thing it is to be a wonder of two continents.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WHITE LIGHT

Well at all events, Hervey might now inspect freely the sanctum of the diving wonder. His enthusiasm for the hero was not dimmed. Even the derby hat had not entirely covered up Diving Denniver. Here was just another exhibition authority. That a cop should make so free with Diving Denniver, even calling him Charlie!

Hervey went into the tent, and stood looking about. Muffled by the distance he could hear the frightful monotonous music of the merry-go-round playing *Little Annie Rooney* for the millionth time. On the red board were strewn the leavings of Diving Denniver's supper. The smutty little oil-stove reeked of kerosene. A long, up-ended box did duty as a washstand and on this, beside a tin basin, was the photograph of a girl. A couple of candles burned and sputtered. On the tent pole hung a broken mirror.

Diving Denniver's bathrobe and his white bathing suit trimmed with gold braid lay on the converted couch just as he had thrown them in his hurry and anger. The very bathrobe, half off and half on the couch, seemed eloquent of his high disgust at the tyrannical interruption of his work. Hervey surmised that he would speak with the management of the carnival on his way out; he wondered why the two had not gone in that direction. But in truth the diving wonder did not love his public enough to consider it in his sudden dilemma. He never went up when the wind was strong. And he was not thinking of the expectant throng now.

Hervey longed to don that gorgeous exhibition suit. Could he slip it on in a hurry? With him it was but one step from impulse to action and in a few seconds he had thrown off his suit and was gazing at himself in the dirty old mirror, clad in the white and gold habiliments of the international wonder. How tightly it fitted! How thrillingly professional it made him feel! What a moment in his young life!

Suddenly, something very extraordinary happened. The trodden grass at his feet shimmered with a pale brightness. Clearly he saw a couple of cigarette butts in the grass. It was as if some one had spilled this brightness on the ground. Then it was gone. And there was only a dim light where the candles sputtered on the makeshift table. That was a strange occurrence.

He stepped out of the tent and there was the patch of brightness near the Ford sedan. How plainly he could read the flaunting words on the spare tire, **THREE HUNDRED FOOT DIVE**. Then suddenly, the square tank and the

foot of the dizzy ladder were bathed in light. A long, dusty column was poking around as if it had lost something. The sedan was again illuminated. The bright patch moved under the tent and painted an area of the canvas golden. Was it looking for Diving Denniver, the wonder of two continents, to come forth and make his three hundred foot dive?

It found the tank and the ladder again and made them glowing and resplendent. Then there was wafted on the air the robust sound of the band playing real music. It drowned the tin-pan whining of the merry-go-round and sent its rousing strains over the fence which bore the forbidding sign. What a martial tumult! It made the cane ringers pause, sent the carriers of kewpie dolls to a point of vantage, and left the five-legged calf forlorn and alone. Louder and louder it sent forth its rousing melody.

Come take a ride o'er the clouds with me
Up in the air mid the stars.

Hervey Willetts stood petrified. He was in the hands of the gods—or the devils. I have sometimes wondered if he ever, *ever* thought. Behind every act, good or bad, there is some kind of intention. And I have told you about boys whose intentions were not of the best. But what of this boy? There was just never anything behind his acts. No boy could catch him. Yet the band and the waiting light caught him. And what did they do to him? The light seemed to be waiting for him, there at the foot of the ladder. All else was darkness. Only the area of brightness bathing the ladder and the big tank with its metal corners. It seemed to say, “Come, I am going up with you.” And, God help him, he went to it as a moth flies to a flame.

When he had ascended a few feet, he remembered that Diving Denniver went up very slowly seeming to test each rung. He knew now that this had been for effect and to make the climb seem long. For the rungs were sound and strong. Also the performer had occasionally extended his arm. The substitute realized that there had been good reason for that, for the breeze was more brisk as he ascended and he knew that the diver had thus held out his hand by way of keeping tabs on the breeze.

The small tank permitted no divergence from the straight descent. To land outside it——

He went up slowly, but did not pause at each rung. He could be reckless, but not theatrical. But he did hold out his hand every few feet and the gay breeze cooled his sweaty palm. Was the wind too strong? What would Diving Denniver do? Go back? But in any case Hervey could not do that. He never turned back.

He continued ascending, up, up, up. He could feel the ladder sway a little. When he was about half-way up, the breeze made a little murmur where it was

cut by one of the wires extending off slantingways, far off down to the earth somewhere. It was funny how he could see these wires in the circle of light that had accompanied him in his long climb, but could not follow them with his eyes to their distant anchorages. Each wire disappeared in the darkness, and he had an odd fear that they did not go anywhere. He saw the lights of the carnival, but no human beings. Were they gazing at him—hundreds of upturned faces?

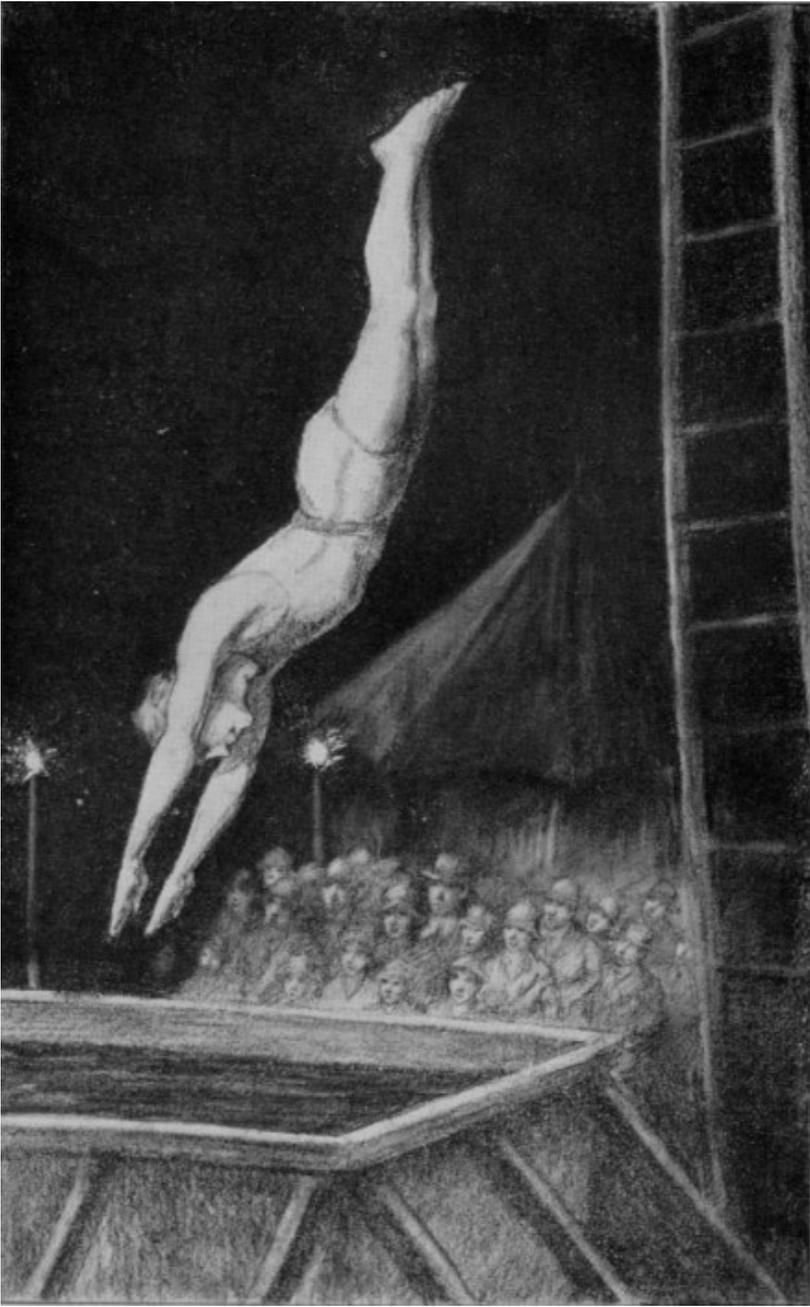
Up, up, up he went. Was there no end to it? Now he did really feel the force of the breeze. Was it too strong? How could he decide that? He could hear the band, but he knew it would cease playing when he reached the top. In that one brief moment of suspense it would cease playing. His companion light moved with him like a good pal. And beyond and below all was darkness except for the lights of the carnival.

Up, up, up he climbed. And he came at last to the little platform at the top, as big as the top of a stepladder. It was just a little shelf fixed to the fifth or sixth rung from the top. But the part of the ladder above that would serve as a back and he could lean against it. By fancying the ground was right below him, by eliminating the distance from his mind, he was able to squirm around and get onto this tiny shelf. He did not know how Diving Denniver did this, but he managed it.

Standing on the little shelf and leaning back, he could feel the ladder shake under him. Of course, there were several ladders clamped together and the extending wires could not hold the towering structure absolutely taut. But it was steady at the top.

Far below him was a square frame of lights marking the sides of the tank which had been illuminated during his ascent. Within it the water shimmered. His senses swam and he closed his eyes, then opened them and got control of himself. A straight down dive would do it. Would it? Yes, he was sure. He let go the ladder and laid his two hands palm to palm above his head.

There was no music now.



HERVEY MADE THE GREAT DIVE.

CHAPTER XXX

STUNT OR SERVICE

The next thing he knew he was lying propped up against a tree and people were crowding about him. He knew this was not in tribute to him for he heard a voice say, "Some crazy little fool, all right."

"Did you 'phone?" he heard some one ask.

"Yes, he'll be here soon."

"He isn't the regular one, is he?" another asked.

"Don't ask me," another answered; "I just followed the crowd."

All the while a boy in a scout suit was moving his hand around near Hervey's foot. Emerging from his stunned condition, Hervey had an odd impression that this boy was stirring something in a bowl. Far off was the monotonous, incessant music of the merry-go-round. Then, as Hervey blinked his eyes and brushed his soaking hair back with a wet hand it seemed as if this boy were playing the music, for his hand moved in time with that muffled clamor. Hervey lapsed off into unconcern again and closed his eyes. It was only giddiness. When he opened them again, he watched the boy with a kind of detached curiosity. He felt a tightening sensation in his leg. Then he realized that the boy had been drawing a bandage tighter and tighter around his calf by revolving a stick. Still Hervey was only vaguely interested.

"Stopped?" some one asked.

"Yep," said the boy. He sat at Hervey's feet with hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Soon he arose and stood looking as if to ascertain on his own account if some one were coming.

"Who are you looking for?" Hervey asked weakly.

"The doctor," answered the boy. He was a tall boy. As he stood looking, he kicked something with his foot.

"What's that?" Hervey asked.

The boy picked it up and dangled it in front of him, laughing. It was just about recognizable as the body of a kewpie doll, and it was a ghastly sight, for the head hung loose and the body was mangled and out of shape. "Glad you're not as bad off as that, hey?" said the scout. "I won that blamed thing ringing canes and I got—I bet I got three yards of cloth off it; there goes." And twirling it cruelly by one leg, he hurled it gayly over the heads of the throng.

"You people get away from here, go on," said the robust voice of a policeman. "Go on, all of yer, get away from here; he ain't hurt much. Go on, chase yourselves, you kids."

“He can’t chase me anyway,” said Hervey.

“That’s a good one,” laughed the boy. “Nor me either; I’m the surgeon general or whatever you call it.”

“You can’t chase me,” said Hervey to the policeman. “That’s where I’ve got the laugh on you.”

“If I was your father, I’d chase you to the padded cell,” the policeman commented, then busied himself clearing away the loiterers.

The scout examined his twisted bandage and gave it one more twist. Then he sat down on the ground beside Hervey. Two or three men and the policeman lingered about, but did not bother these two.

“That was some crazy stunt all right,” said the scout.

“Did I—where did I fall?” Hervey asked.

“You went in the tank, but only just, I guess. Your foot must have knocked the edge; four of the electric bulbs were broken. I don’t think there’s any glass in your foot; anyway, I stopped it bleeding. Gee, boy, I did murder that kewpie doll! How the dickens did you happen to do that, anyway?” Hervey told him briefly.

“*Good night*, some daredevil! I dived to-day, but I had the whole river to dive in. Me for that tank stuff—not.”

“Are you a scout in this town?” Hervey asked. “Yep, South Farrelton. I was here last night and I had my fortune told and the old woman told me I’d be lucky. I was all right. And believe me, so were you.”

“How were you lucky?” Hervey asked.

“Oh, things came my way. I’m here with my patrol to-night; I guess the cop chased them—good thing. They’d have trampled all over you.”

“They’re always chasing people,” Hervey said. “They came and got that diving wonder even, they’re so blamed fresh. And he’s a wonder of two continents. Anyway, I’m always lucky.”

“I’ll say you are!”

“I’m going out to Montana, maybe to South America. I bet you can do what you want down there. They weave Panama hats under the water; gee, I bet I could do that. I always land right side up, that’s one thing about me.”

“It’s a darned good thing,” said the scout.

Hervey did not bother to ask him his name, but the boy told him; it was Wyne Corson. “That’s a good first name, hey?” he said. “Wyne? It’s better than *lose*. There’s a scout in our troop named Luze—they call us Win and Lose. He’s a Hungarian on his great granddaughter’s side, I guess. Here comes the crowd back; I guess the doctor’s coming.”

The doctor came and kneeled down, brisk, smiling and efficient. He seemed not to take any interest in the spectacular exploit, only in the injured foot. “Well, I guess you’re all right,” he said after treating and bandaging the

foot. "You won't be able to run any marathon races to-morrow."

"Can I the next day?" Hervey asked.

"No, you can't the next day," the doctor laughed. "Who's going to take you home?"

Then he offered to do it himself and Wyne Corson got the hero's brown shirt and knickerbockers from the tent and maneuvered him into them. He even placed the treasured hat on his head at an unconventional angle. He seemed to have an inspired appreciation of Hervey's bizarre character. Then they helped him to the waiting car. Gaping stragglers watched the self-appointed understudy of the diving wonder as he limped between the doctor and the scout, past the enclosure of the five-legged calf, and around the festooned platform where the merry dance was on. Whirling couples paused to stare at him and one girl ran out and boldly inspected the celebrity from head to foot. "Oh, he has the brightest eyes," she confided to her waiting partner, "and the funniest little hat with all sorts of buttons on it. Do you know who he reminds me of? Peter Pan."

At the doctor's car half a dozen scouts stood about gazing at Hervey. They hardly knew what to make of him, but they had a kind of instinctive respect for him and showed it. I am not sure that this was just on account of his daredevil exploit. There was something about him and that's all there is to it. Good or bad, he was different.

"Did I do the right thing?" Wyne Corson ventured to ask the doctor. He had hoped he might be asked to accompany Hervey, but apparently this was not to be.

"Oh yes indeed—the *only* thing," said the doctor. "You were on the job and efficient and clever. That's the kind of thing I like to see."

"You ought to have seen what *he* did," Wyne ventured. Was he falling for this cracked-brained youngster too?

"I don't believe I'd care to see that," said the doctor with brisk good-humor.

And there stood Wyne Corson with his scout comrades about him. They did not comment upon his efficiency nor the doctor's ready compliment.

"Did he talk to you? What did he say?" asked one.

"Where does he live?" asked another.

"Is he friendly, sort of?" asked a third.

"For the love of Christopher, why didn't you talk to him yourselves?" laughed Wyne. "He wouldn't eat you up. Come on, I'm going to treat to ice cream again, then let's go home."

CHAPTER XXXI

HOPELESS

He sat in a big old-fashioned chair in the living room with his injured foot upon a stool, in deference to the powers that be. There was a knock on the front door and presently young Mr. Ebin Talbot, scoutmaster, poked his head around the casing of the living room in a way of mock temerity.

“May I come in and have a look at the wonder of wonders?” he asked. “How are we; getting better?”

“It hurts a little when I stand on it.”

“Then the best thing is not to stand on it, hey? Like the advice to a young man about to stand on his head on a steeple—*Don't*. Good advice, huh? Well Herve, old boy, I've got you where I want you at last; your foot's hurt and you can't get away from me. Did you ever hear the story about the donkey that kicked the lion? Only the lion was dead. Well, I'm the donkey and you're the lion; I've got you where you can't jump down my neck. Do you know that was a crazy thing you did, Herve? You just put yourself in my power. Maybe you did it so you wouldn't have to go to school, huh? Where's your dad?”

“He's at the store.”

“Have you heard about this conspiracy to send you to military school?” Poor man, he was trying to reach Hervey by the good pal method. He drew his chair close and spoke most confidentially. “I think we can beat it,” he said.

“Leave it to me,” said Hervey.

“You're not worrying?”

“I'd be there about three days,” said Hervey.

“I think you'd be there about three years, my boy.”

“What do you bet? Everybody's calling me a crazy daredevil. Do you think I wouldn't be enough of a daredevil to get away from a military school? Bimbo, that's a cinch.”

It seemed to be something that Hervey was quite looking forward to; a lure to new adventure. Mr. Talbot went on another tack.

“Well, I thought if we could slip you into the Scouts in time, we could beat your dad to it.”

“I'll beat them all to it, all right,” said Hervey vaguely. “They arrested that wonder—even of two continents he's a wonder—but I gave them a good run. I nearly bit that feller's hand off when he grabbed me. Do you dare me that I won't get away from military school?”

“Oh goodness no, but listen, Herve.” He became soft and serious. “You

can listen, can't you? You haven't got anything else to do—now. You know that boy who put the jigamerig around your leg?"

"Carter—something like that?"

"You don't remember his name, Herve? Wyne Corson. That fellow is in the troop they've got down in the south end; they've got quite an outfit. One of them—he's just a kid—wants to have a hat like yours. When you jumped, you jumped right into the hearts of the Raccoon Patrol; you didn't hit the tank at all. Well, that fellow was—now listen, here's a knockout for you. Do you know how those fellows happened to be at the carnival last night?"

"Do you think I bother ringing canes?" said Hervey.

"Well, it's good he won a kewpie doll, now isn't it? But that's not the knockout. He won a prize yesterday and he was giving his patrol a kind of a blowout last night at the carnival. I think there's going to be a shortage of popcorn for the next forty-'leven years."

"Well, yesterday morning he was up the river with that scout—that little stocky fellow; did you notice him?"

"No."

"Well, he noticed you. They were up on Blackberry Cliff; as near as I can make out they're always out for eats. There was a girl in a canoe down below; she belongs in that white house right across from the cliff. What I'm telling you is in this afternoon's paper—you can see it. Well sir, the canoe upset, and this Wyne, he dived from the Cliff—that's pretty high, you know, Herve, and he got her and swam to shore with her—*now wait*. Here's the punch. He gets the Ellen C. Bentley reward for this year. You remember nobody got it last year. He goes on a trip to California next summer—six weeks. Naturally he was feeling pretty good last night. And he never told you a word about it! Think of those two things that scout did yesterday! Dived from a cliff and saved a life, won a trip across the continent, then put a what-d'ye-call-it around your leg when you might have bled to death after making a crazy dive that didn't get you anything—not one blessed thing."

"Do you think I didn't have any fun?"

"Hervey, boy, why did you do it? Why—*why* did you do it? A crazy fool thing like that!" Hervey was silent, a trifle abashed by the seriousness and vehemence of his visitor.

"Why did you do it?"

"I—I couldn't help it."

Young Ebin Talbot just looked at him as a wrestler might look, trying to decide where to take his adversary. "I guess so," he said low and resignedly.

But he was not to be beaten so easily. "Hervey, there are only two boys in this town who could do what Wyne Corson did, and he is one of them and you're the other one. Why are you never in the right place at the right time?"

Hervey flared up, “Do you mean to tell me I don’t know any one who could do that—what Wyne Corson did? Do you bet me I don’t?”

“Oh, for goodness’ sakes, Hervey! You did a hair-brained thing, a big stunt if you will; and Corson did a heroic act. And here you are making bets with me about something of no importance. What’s the matter with you? Why I was paying you a compliment!”

“You said I don’t know anybody who could swim out like that. Do you say I can’t—do you dare me——”

Young Mr. Talbot held up his hand impatiently. Hervey not only never did the right thing, but he even couldn’t talk about the right thing. Like many men who are genial in hope, he was impatient in failure. He had not Mr. Walton’s tolerant squint.

“Please don’t dare me, Hervey. Dares and stunts never get a boy anywhere.”

“How do you know how many fellers can do a thing?” Hervey demanded.

“Well, all right then, Hervey, I don’t,” said Mr. Talbot rising. “But let me just say this to you. I know you could do what Corson did yesterday and it was a glorious thing, and brings him high reward. Also, if it’s any satisfaction for you to know it, I believe you could find a way of escaping from a military school. You see, I give you full credit. I think there is hardly a single thing that you could not do—except to do something with a fine purpose. Just to stand on your head isn’t enough; do you see? The first time you do a brave, reckless thing *for service* you’ll be the finest scout that ever lived. None of them can touch you on action, but action means nothing without motive. It’s just like a car jacked up and the wheels going round; it never gets anywhere.”

“Didn’t I do a service to Diving Denniver?” Hervey demanded.

“Well, did you? Honor bright; did you? Did you want to help him? Was that the idea? Come on now, Hervey. Fair and square, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“You did it because——”

“Didn’t I tell you it was because I couldn’t help it?” said Hervey angrily.

CHAPTER XXXII UPS AND DOWNS

Young Mr. Talbot gave Hervey up. I think he lost patience too readily. As for Mr. Walton, he was past the stage of quiet argument with his stepson. He was as firm in resolve as he was patient in discussion. And never was Hervey more bent on action than was his harassed guardian from the moment he was apprised of the carnival escapade. Even gentle Mrs. Walton, who had pled after the satchel episode, thought now that it was better for Hervey to go to military school than to break his neck.

“Well, he won’t even break rules there,” said Mrs. Walton.

As for Hervey, he was not worrying about military school. He never thought or worried about anything. He would meet every situation as it came. He was not staggered by Wyne Corson’s opportunity to go west. To give him credit, he was not selfish or envious. He forgot all about Wyne Corson.

One matter he did bear in mind and it was the very essence of absurdity. With his own narrow escape to ponder on, and Wyne Corson’s splendid deed to thrill him (if he was capable of a thrill) he must set off as soon as he was able to prove his all-important claim that there was another individual capable of doing what Mr. Talbot had said that only he and Corson could do. He accepted the young scoutmaster’s declaration not as a compliment, but as a kind of dare. That is how his mind worked and I am giving you just the plain facts. I told you in the beginning that no one understood him.

But now he was to receive something as near to a shock as he had ever received. He sought out Diving Denniver in his sanctum and approached him rather sheepishly (for him) for he knew not how his feat had impressed the wonder of two continents. It was the last day of the carnival, the matter of the permit had been adjusted, and Diving Denniver was that evening to dive for the last time in Farrelton. On this occasion he wore his regular clothes and his little derby hat was on the back of his head as he packed his trunk in anticipation of departure.

“Hello,” said Hervey.

“Hello, yer gol blamed little fool.”

“Well, I did it, didn’t I?” said Hervey defensively.

“Sure you did it, but you were just lucky. You’re just a crazy kid, that’s all. That there kid that’s got his name in the papers fer savin’ a girl’s life, now he’s a regular guy, he is. If you want to jump why don’t you get in the big parade, kid?” He folded some clothing and did not pay much attention to Hervey as he

talked. "If yer want ter pull the big stuff why don't yer get in with them guys. This here ain't narthin'."

"Do you know what a scoutmaster told me?" demanded Hervey, somewhat aroused. "He said that only two fellers—me and that other feller—could dive off that cliff and swim to shore with a girl. So as long as you're a friend of mine will you come and show him that you can do it? Just to show him he's not so smart. Then he'll see you're a friend of mine, and he'll see you can do it. Hey? So I can put it all over him. Hey?"

"Naah, cut that stuff, kid. Why wuz yer thinkin' I can swim and save lives? I ain't much on swimmin', kid." He reached over to where Hervey sat dangling his legs from the makeshift table and good-naturedly ruffled his hair. "Yer got me wrong, kid. What's bitin' yer anyways? This here is a trick, that's all it is. I know me little trick. Why wouldn' I? I been doin' it fer seven years. There ain't narthin' to it when yer once get it right. Did yer think this here wuz a kind of an adventure like? Hand me them two saucers, will yer. Listen here, kid. Here's how it is. When yer know how ter do it there' ain't narthin' to it; see? An' if yer try it when yer don't know how, yer a blame fool. I bet yer kin swim better'n what I can, at that. I jus' do me turn, kid. See?"

Hervey was staggered. "Ain't you the wonder of two continents?" he asked. "Don't you say it yourself?"

"Sure thing, and I'm sorry I didn't make it five continents when I wuz printin' it. What's a couple of continents more or less? Pull that there broken glass down and let's have it, will yer? Yer don't think yer done narthin' big do yer?" He paused and faced Hervey for just a moment. "Dis here is just a trick, kid. Go on and join them kids what's doin' the divin'. Come out o' yer trance, little brother. You'ze got the makin's of a regular hop, skip and jumper, yer has. Wuz yer old man sore at yer?"

Hervey felt as if the bottom had fallen out of the earth. Not that he wanted praise and recognition; he never craved those. But what he had done was just nothing at all. He was no more a hero than a man who tried to commit suicide is a hero. And the wonder of two continents was just a good-humored, tough little young man who knew a trick! How brave and splendid seemed the exploit of Wyne Corson now! That was not a trick.

"You beat it home now," said McDennison, "and don't go inter no business what yer ain't got the dope on. A kid like you oughter had that trip ter the coast. Look at me, I ain't got the carfare ter open up in Bridgeburgh Fair."

Hervey went away, not exactly heavy-hearted, for he was never that. And not exactly thoughtful, for he certainly was never that. But disgruntled. And even that was unusual with him. He might have had that trip to the coast. Or at least on a dozen different occasions, he might have won such a reward. But for all his fine bizarre deeds he got just nothing; not even honor. And the pity of it

was he could not figure this out. He never remembered what anybody told him; he never pondered. Yet I think that poor Diving Denniver did some good; I think he almost reached him.

On the way home, he was saved from any of the perils of thought by the allurements of action. Near the entrance to the carnival was a basket full of booklets about *Farrelton the Home Town*. There was a sign above this basket which read. FREE—TAKE ONE. Hervey did not take a booklet, but he took the sign. It was an oblong wooden sign and had a hole in it to hang it up by. By inserting a stick in this hole, he could twirl the sign around as he ambled homeward. He became greatly preoccupied with this pastime and his concentration continued till he reached the *Aunt Maria Sweet Shoppe*. Here were bottles of honey and tempting jars of preserves standing on a display shelf outside, and he coyly set the FREE—TAKE ONE sign on these, proceeding homeward with that air of innocence that he knew how to affect.

Crossing the deserted Madden farm, he discovered a garter snake. It was a harmless little snake, but it filled its destiny in Hervey's life. It was necessary for him to lift it on the end of his stick and, before it wriggled off, send it flying through the broken window of the Madden barn. This was not easy to do, because the snake would not hold still. With each cast, however, it seemed to become more drowsy, until finally it hung over the stick long enough for Hervey to get a good aim and send the elongated missile flying through the broken, cobweb-filled window.

The shot was so successful that Hervey could not refrain from giving an encore. One good sling deserved another. So up he vaulted to the sill of the old window, brushing ancient cobwebs out of his eyes and hair, and down he went inside. But he went down further than he had expected to, for the flooring was quite gone from the old barn and he alighted all in a heap on a pile of dank straw in the cellar.

Four unbroken walls of heavy masonry arose to a height of ten or twelve feet. Far above him, through the shrunken, rotted shingles, little glints of sunlight penetrated. A few punky boards strewn in this stenchy dungeon gave evidence that the flooring above had rotted away before being entirely removed. Perhaps there had been an intention to lay a new flooring. But it was many years since the Maddens had gone away and now there were rumors that the extensive farm land was to become a bungalow colony.

As Hervey lifted one of the punky boards it broke in the middle and fell almost in shreds at his feet. A number of little flat bugs, uncovered in their damp abode, went scooting this way and that after similar shelter. The snake too, recovered from the shock of being a missile, wriggled off to some agreeable refuge amid the rotting litter of that dank prison.

CHAPTER XXXIII

STORM AND CALM

Hervey's fortunes were never at a lower ebb than when he stood in that damp cellar as the night came on and tried to reconcile himself to sleeping on the straw. Even the morrow held only the hope that by chance some one would discover him in his dreadful dungeon. It was not until a rotten board, laid diagonally against the foundation, had collapsed with him that he gave up and threw himself down with a feeling as near to despair as his buoyant nature had ever experienced.

Through the cracks and crevices of the shingles high overhead, he watched the light die away. A ray from the declining sun streamed through the window from which he had fallen, lingered for a few moments, then withdrew leaving the place almost in darkness. Such a price to pay for a merry little game with a snake!

Meanwhile, events occurred which were destined to have a bearing on Hervey's life. At about half past nine that night, young Mr. Talbot emerged from the Walton house and encountered Wyne Corson coming in through the gateway. They both laughed at the encounter.

"Missionary work?" Mr. Talbot inquired.

"You beat me to it?" laughed Wyne.

"No, I'm through," Mr. Talbot said. "He isn't even home; nobody knows where he is. No, I'm through working on that prospect, and I wouldn't waste my time if I were you, Corson. He's going to military school and I guess that's the best place for him."

"The fellows in my troop are crazy about him," said Wyne.

"They might better be crazy about you," Mr. Talbot answered. "If they're as crazy as all that, they're better off without another crazy fellow in their troop. Come on, walk along with me; there's no one inside but Mr. and Mrs. Walton and they've decided to send him to Chestnut Hill School."

"Jiminies, but that chap has possibilities all right," said Wyne, as they walked down the street together.

"Impossibilities, you mean. Why they don't even know where he is to-night; hasn't been home since noontime. You know I had him in my troop; I know something about him."

"Two fellows in my patrol are so nutty about him that they waited around here in front of his house to-night just to get a squint at him. I don't know, there's kind of—oh, I don't know—something about him; don't you think so?"

“Oh, there’s plenty about him,” laughed Mr. Talbot, “and I know a few things that nobody else knows. You take my advice and keep away from the buzz-saw. The name of Hervey Willetts means trouble. Corson, when you talk to him and deal with him you get just absolutely no comeback; there’s nothing to work on.”

“Yet look what he did.”

“Does that kind of thing ever get anybody anywhere?”

“That’s some funny hat he wears, hey?”

Mr. Talbot threw up his hands good-humoredly. “I see he’s got you,” said he.

Wyne laughed, “Oh, I don’t know; you just can’t help liking him. He’s different from any fellow I ever knew. He asked the doctor how much it costs to get tattooed.”

“Well, there’s one thing he hasn’t done yet; I’m surprised at that. What does he want; mottoes on his arm like on his hat?”

“The doctor seemed to like him,” said Wyne.

“Oh, I don’t doubt that.”

“I thought I might get him into my troop——”

“You’re wasting your time, boy. Listen.” Mr. Talbot put his arm over Wyne’s shoulder as they walked along the street together. “Now I’m going to tell you something and you mustn’t ever mention it—to anybody.”

“Yes, but you can’t tell me there’s never anything to get hold of. When I was trying to save that girl the other day, I thought there wasn’t anything to get hold of. Well, I got my fingers in her mouth and I grabbed hold of her chin. I found something to get hold of all right.”

“And you’re going to California. You’re the biggest hero that’s ever come under this local council.”

“Yes, because I found something to get hold of.”

“Listen, my boy. Do you think I haven’t tried? Why we had him in our troop. All last summer he was up at Temple Camp——”

“That’s some camp, I guess.”

“I’ll say it is. He’s the only boy in my troop who was lucky enough to go up there. You know, Corson, Mr. Walton is one of the finest men that ever lived—*absolutely*. He’s strong for Temple Camp. You know it costs something up at that ranch—oh yes. He had Hervey up there all summer and the little devil was dismissed at the end of the season. He just did as he pleased all summer. When they were closing up they let him down easy; told him never to come back. And they meant it. Mr. Walton doesn’t know anything about this. And Hervey doesn’t know I know. It came to me indirectly from a scoutmaster in Clover Valley who had a patrol up there. I wrote up to camp, saying I was Hervey’s scoutmaster, and asked them about it. You ought to see

the letter I got back. Now Mr. Walton tells me he's going to send Hervey up to Chestnut Hill Military Academy for the fall and winter and next summer up to Temple Camp——”

“Good night!”

“Interesting? I just smiled. I thought I wouldn't say anything; just let matters take their course. If I can't help Hervey, at least I don't want to hurt him. Mr. and Mrs. Walton are going to Europe next summer and Hervey's going up to Temple Camp. I think Mr. and Mrs. are entitled to a vacation.”

“But Hervey can't go up there,” Wyne said.

“Oh, can't he! Leave it to him.”

“Does he know he's going to be sent up there?”

“I dare say.”

“I bet he's worried.”

“I bet he isn't. He doesn't know that word is in the dictionary.”

Wyne shook his head.

“I'll tell you just what Hervey'll do if you want to know,” said Mr. Talbot. “He's not giving Temple Camp a thought. They didn't fire him; he fired them. He's forgotten all about it. But you know he's lucky; he always says he's lucky. When Mr. Walton sends him up there he'll go and he'll trust to luck. He can't say that he's forbidden to go, not now. He'll go up there—he's just reckless enough to do it—and he'll trust to doing some big daredevil stunt and being allowed to stay.”

“And he'll succeed, too, I bet,” said Wyne.

“No, he won't succeed. They're not falling for things like that up there. He'll be just packed off home as soon as he gets there. And I don't know what he'll do. Mr. and Mrs. Walton won't be here; the house will be closed up. But I'm not going to poke my nose in Hervey's concerns. It's like putting your hand in the fire, you just get burned. There's nothing to get hold of with Hervey; he's got to make his own trail. Why look at to-night! Where do you suppose he is?”

Wyne shrugged his shoulders. And so they walked along in silence for a few minutes.

“But I had to laugh how he wanted to know about getting tattooed,” Wyne said finally. He was thinking about Hervey. It was not just that he wanted to help him either. “I've often noticed him on the street; he never seems to be in a hurry. He's always kind of fooling around as he goes along.”

“Oh, he has no idea of time at all,” said Mr. Talbot. “That's where military school's going to do him good. He wanted to bet me he'd escape!”

“Well, I bet he will,” said Wyne.

“No siree!”

“I don't know, I kind of think he'd do anything he tries to do.”

“Hmph, well he usually tries to do the wrong things,” said Mr. Talbot. “But he’s going to do the things that other people want him to do for a while now,” he added with a chuckle.

“Just the same I bet they liked him up there—at that camp.”

Mr. Talbot laughed, it was so palpable that Wyne Corson was under Hervey’s spell.

“What’s the matter?” Wyne asked, with just a suggestion of testiness.

“Nothing. I don’t think they saw a great deal of him up there, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Honest, do you think he’ll go up there next summer?”

“He will if you dare him to.”

“No, honest, do you?”

“Of course he will,” Mr. Talbot smiled, then added more seriously. “What else can he do?”

“Jiminies!” said Wyne with a kind of sorrowful shake of his head. “Some fix he’s in; I bet he’s worrying.”

“Yes, that’s the trouble with him,” said Mr. Talbot. “He just wore himself to skin and bone last year worrying about the national debt. I don’t think I’d lose any sleep over him,” he added seriously; “he isn’t worrying at all.”

“But what’s he going to do?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure; stand on his head I suppose. Well, here we are; come in a minute and I’ll show you some scout pictures.”

They lingered for a few minutes in front of Mr. Talbot’s house. “Wait a second, I’ll see if I’ve got a booklet about Temple Camp,” he said. “Maybe you’d like to glance it over. I wish you’d come in.”

“No, I’d better scoot, I think it’s going to rain,” said Wyne.

“Was that thunder?” Mr. Talbot asked. “All right, just wait here a second.”

As Wyne waited, the rumbling of distant thunder could be heard in the sky. He held out his hand, but felt no drop of rain. Presently a flash of zigzag lightning lit the sky and one of the blinds of the Talbot house blew shut, then open again. Soon he was hurrying home to South Farrelton with the Temple Camp booklet stuffed in his pocket and was scarcely indoors when the storm which had been threatening broke in full fury. Wyne’s parents and sister had retired, but his mother called to him to know if he had got wet, and asked him to go up and shut the attic window for the rain seemed to be blowing from the north.

Wyne paused in the dark attic for a few moments, listening to the torrential downpour on the shingles and looking out of the window which was streaming with rain. He wondered where indeed Hervey Willetts could be so late at night. Why did his thoughts dwell on Hervey Willetts? There were fine, brave scouts in his own troop. He went downstairs to his own room, stirred by the heroic

fury of the maddened elements and, as he entered, a deafening peal of thunder smote his ears. It seemed to shake the house in its tumultuous frenzy. That was the climax of the storm.

It was odd how two things strangely related to each other occurred immediately upon the waning of that spasmodic storm. And how each of those things was characteristic of the boy concerned in it. At about the same time that Wyne Corson propped himself comfortably up in bed for a leisurely perusal of the beautifully illustrated Temple Camp booklet, Hervey Willetts scrambled up a broken rafter of the old barn roof which had been struck by lightning and had fallen into his dank and streaming dungeon.

Oh, he was lucky! Just as he always said he was, *he was lucky*. But he did not know of his greatest luck. He did not know that a boy down in South Farrelton was sitting propped up in bed looking at the pictures of lake and cabin and reading about the rules and awards and all the pleasurable routine of a great scout community in the sequestered woodland of the Catskills.

Wet, hungry and exhausted, with a stern military school staring him in the face, Hervey Willetts was luckier than he knew. Reading, looking at books even, was something that he never did. He had never even seen that familiar booklet about Temple Camp! Yet that little booklet was destined to influence his future. It is funny, when you come to think of it, how that pretty, tasseled prospectus was to deal this doer of mighty deeds a knockout blow. He had blithely disregarded every by-law and rule that it contained. He had repudiated it in toto. And now, out of its own prosy printed matter, it was to strike him back with a fine retaliatory swat.

CHAPTER XXXIV SUMMER PLANS

Mr. Talbot had spoken correctly; Hervey went to Chestnut Hill Military Academy. Also Hervey had spoken correctly; he escaped. He was sent back and remained till the Christmas holidays. It is not pleasant watching a caged squirrel and we shall not follow his troubled career when he marched in line and saluted and went “in formation” to Chestnut Hill village twice a week, once to church and once to the movies.

Under the influence of Mrs. Walton and the Christmas spirit, Mr. Walton allowed Hervey to return to school in Farrelton after the holidays and Chestnut Hill saw him no more. But he remembered it and walked a fairly straight and narrow path till early summer. Only once did he fall from grace and that was when he hiked to Centervale in quest of a retired sailor who was said to be an expert at tattooing. He did not find the artist, but he got a ride in an airplane to Commonwealth landing field (twenty miles out of his way) and had to sleep in a shed that night.

As summer approached, Hervey’s home presented unmistakable signs of the tremendous enterprise of his old-fashioned, home-keeping step-parents—the long projected trip to Europe. For the first time, Mr. Walton would entrust his book and stationery store to a competent young assistant, Snoopy Seeley as Hervey called him, because he conscientiously saw to it that the girls attended to their work. There were no late dances in Walton’s Book and Stationery Store after the advent of Snoopy Seeley. But for all this young man’s horrible dependability, poor Mr. and Mrs. Walton contemplated their vacation with the true home-keeper’s dread and anxiety.

“Well, there are no worries about Hervey, anyway,” said Mrs. Walton. “Temple Camp is the one place where he really did seem to get on. I’d be dreadfully nervous about going if it weren’t for that. I do believe you and I are more nervous about this than Hervey is.”

“We are no such experienced travelers as he is,” said Mr. Walton.

“You’re going to talk to him, aren’t you?”

Mr. Walton talked to him and found that so far as Hervey was concerned everything was quite all right; he would have been glad to give his permission for them to go to Mars. He was not the one to curb the freedom of any aspiring soul.

“And you won’t mind being alone; I mean up at Temple Camp?” Mr. Walton asked him.

“Sure thing, go as far as you like,” said Hervey. Did he recall the circumstances under which he had been sent home from camp? And if so, did not his position now trouble him the least bit? It would be hard to say. “Sure, I’ll stay up there till you come back,” he said; “you should worry.”

“I’m sure I will,” said poor Mrs. Walton.

“You don’t think it’s necessary for me to write up there?” Mr. Walton asked.

“Sure not,” said Hervey gayly, “they know me.”

“Well then, I’ll give you a check for July and I’ll mail them another check on the first of August. I guess that will be all right.”

“Posilutely O. K.,” said Hervey. He was nothing if not compliant and accommodating.

Mr. Walton, always thoughtful and deliberate, paused considering. “I think it would be best for you to go up next Saturday, then we’ll know you’re settled there before we go.”

“Believe me, I’m never settled,” said Hervey.

“Well, as near settled as it’s possible for you to be; that better?” Mr. Walton queried.

“Sure thing.”

“Then he wouldn’t be able to go to Boston and see us sail,” said Mrs. Walton.

“That’s where you said something,” said Hervey. “I’m going to Boston, that’s settled.”

“No, I think we’ll settle it the other way,” Mr. Walton reflected. “You better go up next Saturday, Herve. Boston is too slow for you anyway. Seeing folks sail isn’t much pleasure.”

“I bet I could be a stowaway, hey?”

“You go up to camp next Saturday,” said Mr. Walton. “That councilor, what’s his name——”

“Wainwright, he’s a nice feller,” said Hervey blithely. He bore no malice.

“Well then, let’s see, I’ll give you a check for three weeks in July and you can tell Mr. Wainwright I’ll send another check the first of August. Now when you get up there if everything isn’t all right you can write me here. But it isn’t as if you were going to a strange place; they all know you,” he added.

Hervey made a flourishing motion with both hands as if to say that all was well, that peace and perfect understanding prevailed. “They know me and I know them,” he said with the greatest of good cheer.

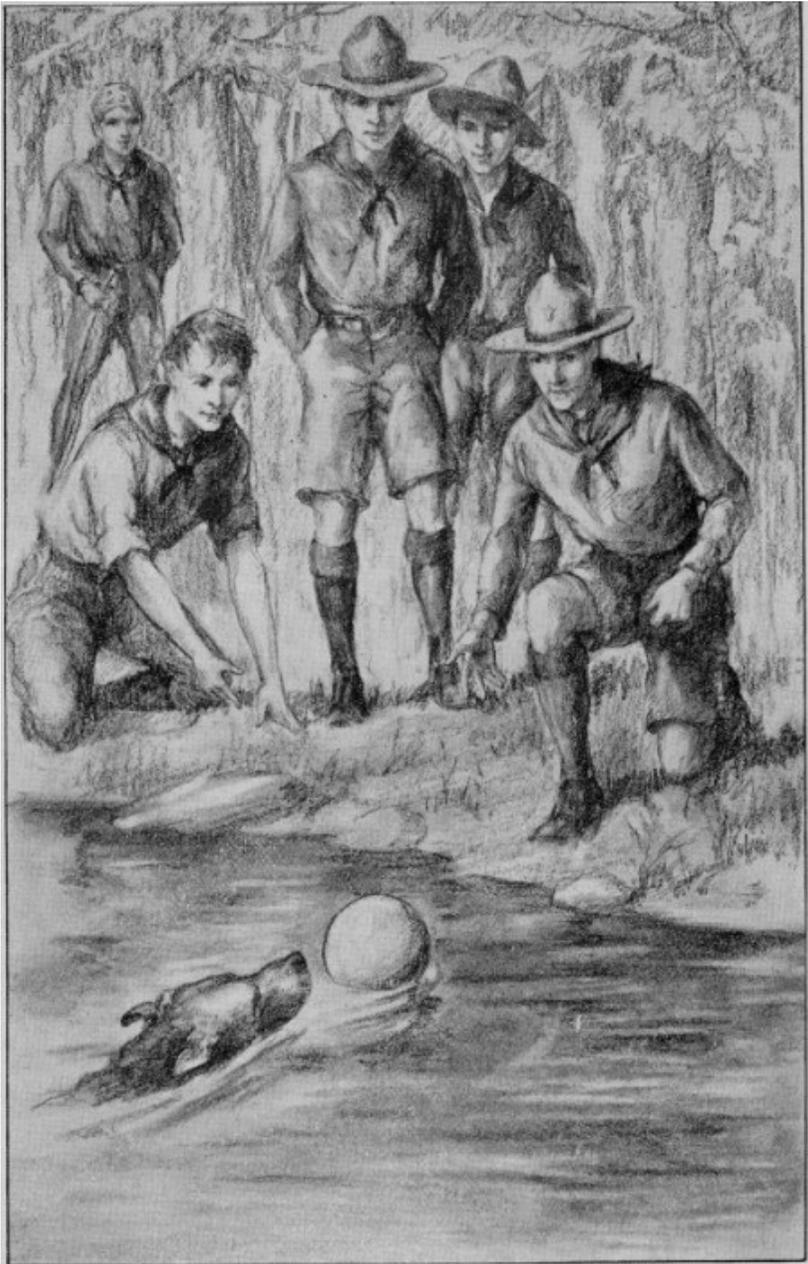
CHAPTER XXXV HERVEY'S LUCK

He went to Temple Camp with a check and his nerve, and neither did him any good. I have sometimes thought that this blithesome piece of effrontery marks the high spot in Hervey's career. But I am at a loss to account for it. Of course, he was not without reasoning faculty or memory. I think it was just that he took everything as it came and never burdened his mind with anything. His nature refused to consider two things at once. He could not think of an act of one day in the light of its consequences on another day, much less another season. I cannot follow his reasoning, if he had any; I can only follow his acts. He could hardly have forgotten his dismissal; perhaps, if he thought at all, he thought the management would have forgotten it.

Officially Temple Camp did not pay him the compliment of being shocked by his bizarre reappearance. But the scouts who had been there the previous summer noticed him and commented on the circumstance of his unexpected presence. He was a conspicuous figure in his fantastic hat, as he wandered aimlessly about, and several tenderfeet who had never seen him before were inspired to follow him and look on while he scaled flat stones into the lake. After a while they began selecting stones for him.

Little Harold Titus, the office boy in Administration Shack who had originally summoned the prodigal to his doom, saw him engaged in this idle pastime and was struck dumb with consternation. Many who had known him the previous summer greeted him cheerily; they either forgot or avoided the incident of his dismissal. Some had never known of it. New boys noticed him as an odd, picturesque figure ambling about the camp grounds with a group of tenderfeet behind him.

One of these admiring youngsters had a large hollow brass sphere as big as a cocoanut, which was somewhat the worse for being knocked about. It had a hole in it which was plugged up by a cork. He was only too glad to proffer this to the enchanting stranger and Hervey amused himself and the others by hurling it into the lake and watching the camp dog bound in after it and push it ashore with his nose. There were limits to his effrontery and he thought it the part of wisdom thus to occupy himself at a distance from the center of things.



HERVEY AND THE OTHERS AMUSED THEMSELVES WITH THE DOG
AND THE BALL.

Of course he had not registered for assignment to quarters, and even he contemplated not without uneasiness his entrance to the grub pavilion at

dinnertime. Temple Camp was a big place and of an open hospitality to visiting strangers who made free upon the grounds. But, of course, Hervey knew that he must face the “keepers” sometime and he was a little chary about the noonday meal. Had the camp authorities forgotten their ultimatum? He was carefree enough to hope so. Dinnertime would furnish the test.

“What’s this thing, anyway?” he asked after the twentieth or so recovery of the bobbing sphere.

“If you were here last week you’d know,” a tenderfoot piped up. “Do you see that big log cabin away up there past the eats pavilion? That’s Administration Shack. (Hervey had good reason to know that) And do you see the flagpole up on top of it? Well, this brass ball got knocked off the top of that by lightning. There’s a kind of an iron bar sticking in the top of that pole—it sticks on there or screws on or something. The pole got struck by lightning and it split the wood and the bar with the ball on it came down kerplunk. Worrie Bannard, he’s in a troop from Ohio, he found it and gave it to me. Do you know what Tom Slade says? Do you know who he is, Tom Slade? He’s assistant manager and he’s better than the head managers—do you know what he says? He says no feller here has got enough adventure to him to climb up and put that ball where it belongs. *Ooooooh*, I’m glad I haven’t got enough adventure for that!”

It was quite like Tom Slade to say that and he had not intended to be taken seriously. But Hervey took it as a dare given by proxy. Well, he would not take a dare from anybody; certainly not from Tom Slade, champion of adventure and moving spirit in the big camp family. Why, that amounted to an official dare! And of course, if he did that thing upon the incentive of Tom Slade’s dare, why he would be welcome to stay at camp. That was the way that he reasoned—if one may say that he reasoned at all. He would do a magnificent stunt and Temple Camp officially would fall at his feet. Tom Slade would be his champion and sponsor. He could go into the eats shack not only registered but lionized. Yes, he was lucky.

“Give me the ball,” he said.

“You’re not going to do it?” the diminutive holder of the ball gasped.

“Don’t make me laugh,” said Hervey, contemptuously.

“It—it kind of fits on,” the astonished youngster informed him, “but——”

“Leave it to me,” said Hervey.

They followed him up the path around the storehouse cabin and past the main pavilion where a row of scouts sat with their feet up on the railing. The very sight of Hervey seemed to inform them that some blithesome, illicit enterprise was under way and a few of them joined the little group.

As for Hervey, being a true artist, he was quite oblivious to his audience. Being an outlaw in camp, he even carried himself with a certain swaggering

independence and disdained to glance at the big bulletin-board in front of Administration Shack. He had worried a little about returning home and telling his stepfather what he should have told him the year before. But now he was not worrying. Would not he have Temple Camp eating out of his hand? If he had looked at that bulletin-board (the same which he had formerly disfigured) he might have seen something there to arrest his attention. But his thoughts were on high.

Things were certainly breaking favorably for him.

In less time than it takes to tell it, he was on the porch roof, then on the main roof of Administration Shack. Then he was shinning up the slender flagpole to the gasping consternation of the increasing crowd below. He could not hold the brass ball while climbing, so he laid it in his hat and held his hat in his teeth. The slender pole bent and swayed as up he went. If ever sheer rashness is eligible for reward, I suppose Hervey was a likely candidate. The bantering absurdity of Tom Slade's remark was only too plainly shown by the swaying pole as that nimble figure, hat in teeth, ascended its tapering length.

Breathlessly the throng watched as the pole bent this way and that as if uncertain in which direction to break and send its victim crashing to the slanting roof, then mangled to the ground below. Breathlessly one or two of the more keen-eyed observers saw those legs tightening around the pole, saw one arm move loose.

He got the brass sphere in one hand and let his hat fall to the ground. It tumbled off the roof and was picked up by a tall, quiet boy who stood somewhat apart from the throng. They saw a hand groping at the very end of the pole, saw the brass ornament in place, saw that nimble figure slide down to the roof, then off its edge into the midst of the spellbound watchers. He was a hero; to them he was anyway.

"Hervey Willetts, you're wanted in the office," said a matter-of-fact voice. It was young Winthrop Allbright, the bespectacled young gentleman who was always digging in card indexes and writing in a big flat book in that awful sanctum. He held a fountain pen as if he had been but momentarily interrupted.

CHAPTER XXXVI REACHED?

And so for the fourth time Hervey Willetts stood at the bar of judgment. He stood before the cage window in Administration Shack, hatless and with a long rip in his trousers. His mad, gray eyes, full of dancing light, looked through the filigree work at Councilor Easton. He would have preferred to see his old friend Councilor Wainwright, though of course it would have made no difference. The councilor had come over to the window at which young Mr. Allbright sat to speak to Hervey. He was not unpleasant, but cruelly brief.

“Hervey Willetts, there is no correspondence here affecting the arrangement by which you left last fall. I hope there is no misunderstanding on your part. Who sent you here?”

“My—my stepfather.”

“Hmph. Your stepfather isn’t in your confidence, I suppose?”

“Tom Slade said that anybody who put the brass ball on that flagpole——”

The councilor interrupted him, “Have you money enough to go home, Willetts?”

“I’ve got a check for three weeks that my stepfather gave me, and I’ve got ten dollars. But doesn’t it make any difference what I did——”

“Not a bit, my boy. The camp bus is going down to Catskill to meet the early afternoon train. You’d better go along and get the two-fifty for Albany. You can get a late afternoon train at Albany for Farrelton, I think. You may have your dinner here.”

Hervey stood motionless at the window. He felt much as he had felt on the night Mr. Walton had talked both severely and feelingly to him, and he found it easier to stand right where he was than to make a move. He knew now that half a dozen or so obtrusive boys were lingering in the background and he, the hero of the flagpole, could not turn and face them. The attitude of the management toward him was not such as to arouse consideration for his feelings and these boys were allowed to remain.

Well, he must go back to Farrelton and throw his bombshell into the household just as his good step-parents were in the throes of preparation for their holiday. I am glad to say that his heedlessness and buoyancy were not so great that he could contemplate this with equanimity. He would have been emboldened to refer again to his daredevil exploit, but the inexorable attitude of Councilor Easton chilled his forlorn hope.

“Is there anything we can do for you now before you go,” the councilor

asked with a kind of cold finality.

“Is—can I—could I——”

It was just at that moment that the tall boy who had caught Hervey’s grotesque hat as it fell from the roof stepped up beside the window and handed it to him. And Hervey, to his dismay, saw that it was Wyne Corson. I think it quite characteristic of Hervey that it never occurred to him that this scout from his own home town was supposed to be sightseeing in California at that time. He had forgotten all about that.

“There is something you can do for *me*,” said Wyne. “Might I speak to you a minute, Mr. Easton?”

“Surely,” said the councilor, and he added smiling. “It’s customary for scouts to address the management as Councilor or Trustee, and not use the name.”

“Excuse me, I’m new at this camp,” said Wyne.

“I’ve only been here about ten days. I came up here to do a job and I did it and there’s not much snap to it. I see it’s up on the bulletin board.”

“Yes?”

“I won the hospitality award; I’m the one that swam around the lake without landing last Tuesday. I didn’t get any notice yet, but I suppose it’s all right. The booklet says the Home Circle Swim is once around the lake without landing and the Warring Memorial Hospitality award is for that. It’s on page thirty-two where it tells about the special awards.”

“Horace Warring lost his life in the lake,” said the councilor in a low voice, “and his parents established this award. We think it’s about the most beautiful of the camp awards.”

But Wyne Corson seemed interested in nothing but his point. “Well, this boy, Hervey Willetts, is the one I choose to have for my guest till the end of the summer.”

The councilor shook his head ruefully, as Hervey (let it be said to his eternal credit) gazed at this South Farrelton scout with brimming eyes.

“I’m afraid you’re a bit impulsive,” said the councilor.

“That’s a good one,” laughed Wyne. “I think you’ve got me mixed up with Willetts. I won a trip to California and had it changed to a summer at Temple Camp after I read the book. I did that so I could get here before Willetts and win the Warring Memorial award and be ready for him when he came. I knew blamed well he’d show up—I got his number.” He paused a moment while the councilor looked rueful and shook his head. “The book doesn’t say anything about what sort of a fellow I can have, or anything about him. It just says I can *have as my guest for the balance of the summer anybody between the ages of twelve and eighteen of my own choosing. And he shall be recorded as my honor guest.* That’s all there is to it and I choose Hervey Willetts. If he goes

away I have to go, too.”

“Why do you choose him?” the councilor asked.

“Oh, I don’t know; just because I do, that’s all. Do I have to say why?”

“No, I don’t know that you do,” Councilor Easton said, not displeased at Wyne’s vehemence, which almost bordered on impertinence. “But, of course, this is a very unusual thing and I must confer with the management.”

“Will you let Tom Slade have a vote?” poor Hervey asked.

“Tom Slade knows all about it,” said Wyne. “If you only stood on as solid ground as I do most of the time, you’d be all right. Will you put down Hervey Willett’s name, Councilor? He’s the one I choose. I’m going by just what the book says about the Warring Memorial award. It says *any boy*——”

Suddenly, Wyne Corson was interrupted and beaten into silence by a tremendous voice from a diminutive spectator, conspicuous because of a licorice smutch near his mouth. It was the mighty voice of Pee-wee Harris! “It’s a dandy argument and it’s a teckinality,” he shouted. “And it shows how the camp can’t do anything even if it wants to, because if a thing is printed in writing you can’t get around it and that settles it and I know, because my uncle knows a man who’s a judge! And maybe even I’ll have Hervey Willetts in my patrol as an honorary member, maybe!”

Even amid the laughter, Hervey looked at Wyne Corson, bewildered, uncertain, with glistening eyes. Was he grateful? Was he reached at last? No, not by scouting. But by a scout? That would be something. Here was a strange kind of a stunt! Such a stunt as he himself had never performed. A stranger had come to Temple Camp and deliberately set about beating it with its own weapons. He had brought with him just no more than a booklet with certain passages in it marked with a lead pencil. He had planned and wrought. How tawdry seemed that daredevil climb up the flagpole now! How rash and futile that dive at the Farrelton Carnival! How silly that stunt of sending in a false fire alarm! How much finer to *use* one’s head, than just to stand on one’s head!

And did Hervey think of these things? Not just in the way they have been set forth. But he felt cheap and inadequate. His latest stunt had been officially ignored with a kind of brief contempt. But this boy from South Farrelton had stepped up with his booklet and the record of his three mile swim around the lake and Temple Camp could not answer him back—was helpless. What is a stunt anyway? Here was a matter of a hundred and fifty dollars or so; a matter involving a clash between an ultimatum and the right of a winner to his award. And Wyne Corson had triumphed over Temple Camp. And Hervey Willetts, diver of dives, and ringer of alarms, and snatcher of satchels, was to stay and spend the summer in these familiar scenes. And his guardians would go to Europe never knowing. What is a stunt anyway?

He wandered forth and picked up a stick and started along the trail that

went around the lake. But he glanced back (something he never did when starting out) and Wyne Corson followed him. And so they ambled through the bordering woods together.

“Will you show me how you swam around where the outlet is?” Hervey asked. “Bimbo, there’s some current there.”

“That was easy,” said Wyne. “We haven’t got time to hike all the way around now. Listen!” As he spoke the dinner-horn from camp sounded and echoed from the hills across the lake.

“The dickens with that,” said Hervey. “We can get our dinner an hour late all right; I know the cook; leave it to me.”

He jumped up, grabbed the limb of a tree and swung across one of the many brooklets that flowed out of the sombre lake and wriggled away among the flanking hills. “Can you do that?” He went on ahead and jumped across a tiny cove. “Come ahead,” he called back as he went upon his way rejoicing. And pretty soon, Wyne caught up with him and laughing said, “I see you’re going to get me in trouble in this old camp.”

“Well, then we’ll only go a little way and back,” said Hervey. Magnanimous concession! “I don’t care about the soup anyway.”

So, picking his way with difficulty through the briery thicket along the lakeside and getting over obstructions as only he knew how to do, he went upon his way rejoicing and paused after a little while for Wyne to catch up with him. Then they both went on their way rejoicing. And pretty soon they started on their way back—rejoicing. And that was quite a stunt for Hervey when you come to think of it. For no one had even dared him to return for dinner!

END

[The end of *Hervey Willetts* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]