ROY BLAKELEY,
LOST, STRAYED OR STOLEN

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Title: Roy Blakeley. Lost, Strayed or Stolen
Date of first publication: 1921
Author: Percy Keese Fitzhugh (1876-1950)
Date first posted: Sep. 13, 2019
Date last updated: Sep. 13, 2019
Faded Page eBook #20190934

This eBook was produced by Roger Frank and Sue Clark

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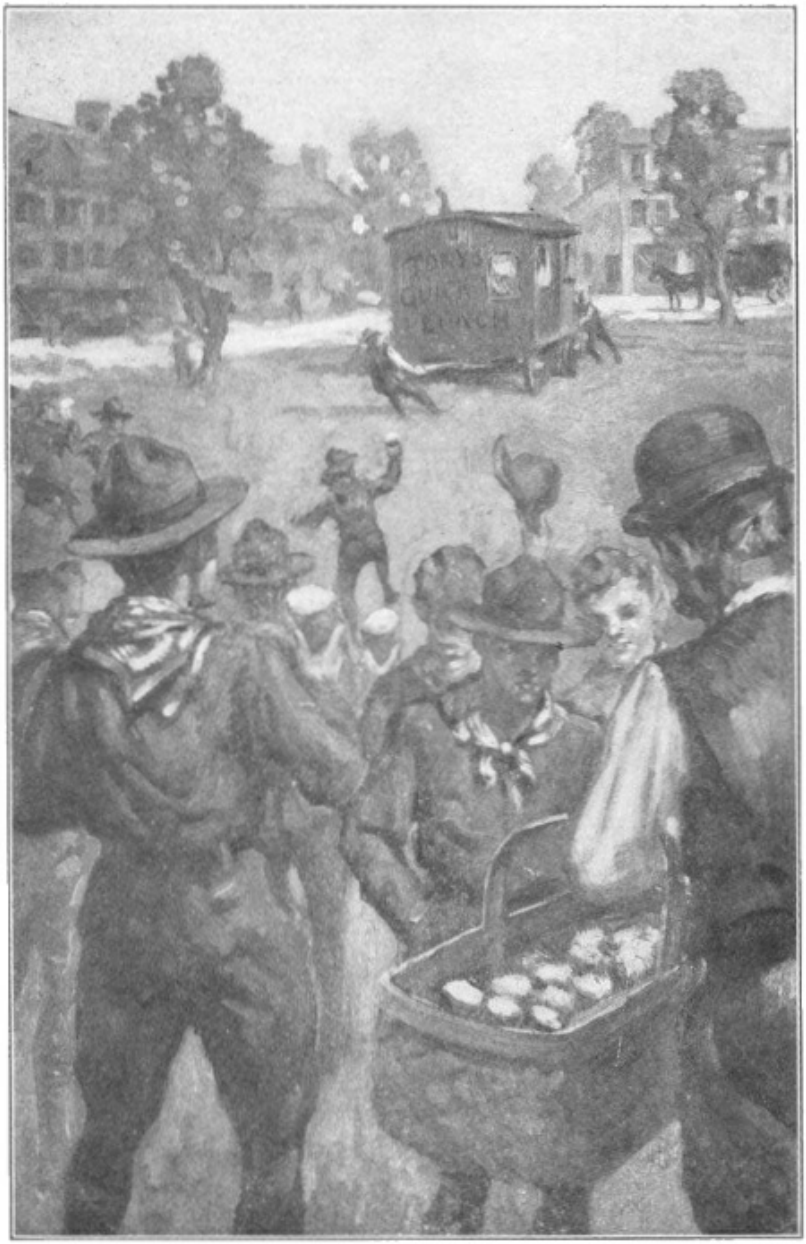

TONY’S OLD LUNCH WAGON CAME LUMBERING OVER TOWARD US.

ROY BLAKELEY
LOST, STRAYED OR STOLEN

BY

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of
TOM SLADE, BOY SCOUT, TOM SLADE AT BLACK LAKE, ROY BLAKELEY, ETC.

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Published with the approval of
THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

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ROY BLAKELEY, LOST, STRAYED OR STOLEN

CHAPTER I
LAW AND THINGS

One thing, anyway, I wouldn't say anything against the scout laws because they are good laws, that's one sure thing. Even fellows that disobey them have to admit that they are good. If there weren't any we couldn't even disobey them, so gee whiz, I'm glad they are in the Handbook. That's what they are for.

I don't mean we want to disobey them. But anyway, this is what I mean, that even fellows that disobey them ought to be glad they are there, because if they weren't there they couldn't disobey them. That's what Pee-wee Harris calls logic. He says he knows a lot about logic, because his uncle has a friend whose brother is a lawyer.

There are twelve of those laws, and the one I like best is law number eight, because it says a scout has to be cheerful and smile a lot. I always smile except when I'm asleep, and I'm not asleep much, because a scout is supposed to be wide awake. When I'm asleep I never disobey any of those laws.

I'll tell you some more about the scout laws, too, only this isn't going to be a law book, you can bet. A scout is always supposed to do a given task. His dinner is a given task. He's supposed to do a good turn every day. Maybe you think those are hard, but they are easy. If a scout in my patrol had some gumdrops and I ate half of them so he wouldn't get sick, that would be a good turn. See?

A scout is supposed to save life, too. Once I saved Wig Weigand's life. He nearly died laughing at Pee-wee Harris, and I got there just in time to push the kid off the springboard into the water so he had to stop talking. That's one thing I'm crazy about. I don't mean talking, I mean swimming.

Especially a scout is supposed to be observant. That's one thing about the scouts my sister doesn't like. She's crazy about tennis, my sister is; tennis and strawberries. She's crazy about Harry Donnelle, too; he's a big fellow. That's why she doesn't like it about scouts being observant—I should worry.

But anyway, you needn't think that scouts are always smiling. Lots of times I laugh, *he he*, but I'm not happy. That's because we have a lot of trouble on account of not being able to keep our meeting place in one spot very long. Gee williger, Washington had a lot of headquarters and we only have one headquarters, but we have our headquarters in as many places as he did. Gee, there are a lot of people that have to move these days, but they don't have to move the houses they live in, that's one good thing. When you have to take

your house with you, that's no fun. Housing problems are bad enough, and transportation problems are bad enough. And besides, I hate problems anyway, especially in arithmetic. But, gee whiz, when you get a housing problem and a transportation problem all rolled into one-*good night*!

CHAPTER II
MORE THINGS (I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO CALL IT)

Now that chapter was about law and this one is about geography, kind of. Maybe I'll have one about civil government, too. I bet you'll skip that one, hey? Anyway, I'm glad we don't have uncivil government in school, because I guess that's worse. There's a civil engineer in our town and he's not so civil. A scout has to be civil, that's another law.

I guess before I tell you any geography, I'll tell you some history. That's my favorite study—history. I got nine points in that last term.

A couple of years ago, Mr. Temple, he's rich, he owns a lot of railroads—a couple of years ago he gave us an old railroad car to use for a scout headquarters. That car used to stand on a side up at Brewster's Centre, and it was used for a station until the railroad built a new station.

Then Mr. Temple told the railroad people to bring it down to Bridgeboro, where we live, but instead of doing that they took it 'way out west by mistake. Anyway, we were glad because we happened to be in it. I said, "I don't care how far it takes us as long as it doesn't roll down the Pacific slope and dump us in the ocean."

We had a lot of fun riding around the country in that car, because the railroad made a lot of dandy mistakes, and it was pretty nearly a week before we came rolling merrily, merrily on we go, into Bridgeboro. *Good night*, that was some ride. That shows you never can tell, because everybody said they never thought that old car had enough spirit to break loose and go tearing around the country. It had a kind of a fit, that's what Westy Martin said; he's in my patrol. The reason all that happened was because there was some kind of a mistake on a way-bill. That way-bill did us a good turn, all right.

So after we got back home all safe and sound, that old car stood on the tracks down at the Bridgeboro station and all the commuters were laughing at it. A lot we cared, because even people laughed at Christopher Columbus when he got home.

So now I'm going to leave that old car standing on the tracks at Bridgeboro station, because I have to go downstairs to supper. Oh, boy, I hope the six thirty-four express doesn't come along and bump into it while I'm eating. I bet you're all nervous and excited, hey?

CHAPTER III
PEE-WEE STARTS THE BALL ROLLING

I guess the railroad men weren't going to take any more chances with that car. Anyway, they put it on a track and then Mr. Corber—he's section superintendent—he asked us what we wanted to do about the car. He asked us where we wanted it put. Believe me, that wasn't an easy question to answer, because you can't put a railroad car anywhere you want to put it. A railroad car is like a scout, because it can follow a track, but if there aren't any tracks how is it going to get anywhere? But one thing, you can bet we didn't want to have our scout meeting place down right next to the railroad station, because scouts are supposed to study nature and a lot of fun we'd have studying commuters.

Pee-wee said, "The station is all right; I vote to leave the car right where it is."

"That's because it's near Bennett's," I told him, because he usually parks all through vacation at Bennett's Confectionery. He's the one that put the scream in ice cream. Harry Donnelle endowed a stool in Bennett's just for Pee-wee—it's kind of like a bed in a hospital or a scholarship, or something or other like that.

The rest of the fellows said, "No, siree, the river for us! We want it moved down near the river! Let's move it to Van Schlessenhoff's field!"

Now comes the geography part; it's about Bridgeboro and that field. Mr. Van Schlessenhoff had a lot of land but he cut it all up. It's a wonder he didn't cut his name up, too, hey? He could have got a whole lot of nice little names out of it. Once he owned most all of Bridgeboro, that man did. He owned nearly the whole alphabet, too. Jimmy, he takes up nearly the whole telephone book, that's what Connie Bennett says.

Years and years and years and years and years and years ago—even before I was born—that man's father had a sawmill down by the river. He never said anything but just sawed wood. When he died he was awful poor. He didn't leave anything to his son but his name, that's what my father said. Gee whiz, that was enough.

Anyway, Mr. Van Schlessenhoff is a mighty nice man. He owns some lots and things, and he wouldn't sell one of his fields for the town to build a school on. So you can see from that what a nice man he is.

He owned that field down by the river that we were talking about. There is an old railroad track from that field right up to the Bridgeboro station, so they could send lumber away. It's all old and rusty and broken in lots of places, and

the piles are all kind of rotten where it goes across Cat-tail Marsh. Up in town it's all buried in the dirt, sort of, but you can see the old rails good and plain where they go across Main Street. You can find those rails where they go across Willow Place, too, and they run right under Slausen's Auto Repair Shop and across the yards in back. You can pick out those rusty old rails underneath the long grass all the way across the Sneezenbunker land and almost right up to the station. One Saturday we picked them out all the way, just for fun. I guess there wasn't much to Bridgeboro when those tracks were used.

So that's all there is about history and geography in this story. The rest of it is all adventure. That's my favorite study—adventure.

That same night that we got back from our wild ride we decided to go and see Mr. Van Schlessenhoff and ask him if he'd be willing for us to move our car down to his field by the river, and have it there for a meeting place.

He was awful nice. He said he'd be glad to do it because he liked the boy scouts, but that there was one reason why he couldn't. He said that reason was because he was going to put that field in the market.

Then, all of a sudden, up spoke our young hero, Hon. Pee-wee Harris, and he said, "You take my advice, Mr. Van Schlessenhoff, and don't put that field in the market. You leave it where it is, right down there by the river; that's a dandy place."

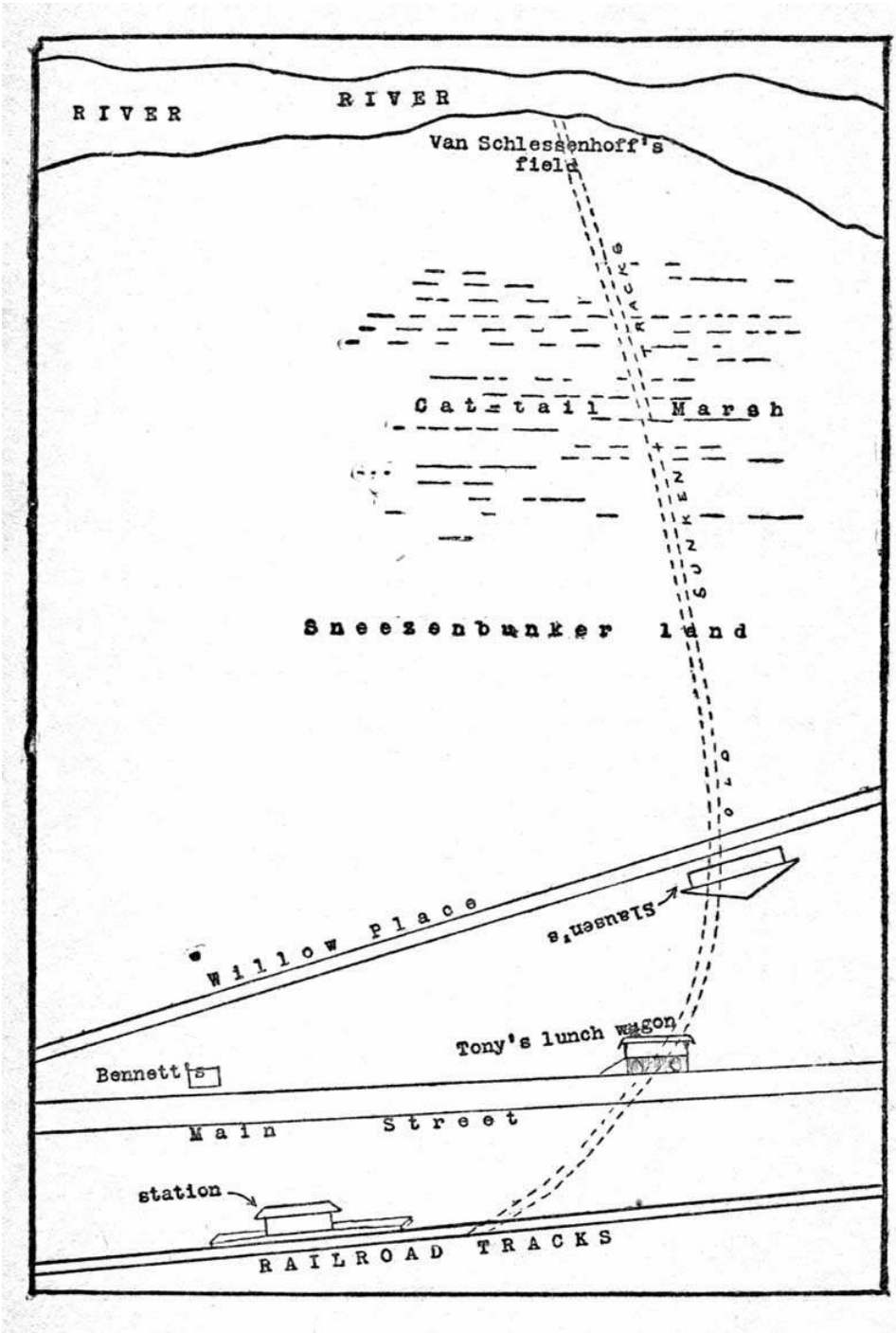
Mr. Van Schlessenhoff laughed so hard that he said he guessed it would be all right for us to go ahead if we could navigate the car, because maybe he would leave that field right there and not put it in the market after all.

So you can see how all this crazy stuff was started by Pee-wee. He set the ball rolling—I mean the car. And oh, boy——

CHAPTER IV
WE TRY DIPLOMACY

I made a map. It isn't much good and it doesn't show all the streets in our town, but it shows the streets that old track crosses. On Main Street, almost opposite the station, is Bennett's. I put that in because I thought maybe you'd like to know where it is. It hasn't got anything to do with our adventures in this story, but it's in the story a lot, just the same.

When that old track was new I guess there wasn't any Willow Place; I guess Main Street didn't amount to much either. There wasn't any building where Slausen's is, that's sure. And Tony's Lunch Wagon wasn't there, that's sure. They didn't have any big grammar school in Bridgeboro then. Those were the happy days.



Now the first night after we got home after our wild ride, we had a troop

meeting to see if we could think up any way to get our car from the station over to Van Schlessenhoff's field. Because what's the use of having a home if you haven't got any place to put it? Be it never so humble, you've got to have a place to put your home.

We had that meeting right in the car near the station. Pee-wee said that he'd be a committee to go out and look at the tracks. All he wanted was a chance to go over to Bennett's.

I said, "This is no time for ice cream cones with the transportation problem staring us in the face. It's bad enough to be put out of your home, but to have your home put out, that's worse. You don't suppose the railroad is going to leave this car here, do you?"

"We'll be convicted," Pee-wee shouted. He meant evicted.

"We won't leave our home, we'll take it with us!" two or three of them began shouting.

"Those tracks are good all the way across Cat-tail Marsh," El Sawyer said, "because I walked the ties right down to the river."

"If they held you they ought to hold the car," I said. Crinkums, that fellow weighs about a ton. Then Hunt Ward (he's in the Elks) began singing:

I love, I love, I love my home,
But what'll we do with it?

Ralph Warner (he's in my patrol, he's got red hair), he said, "I promised my mother I'd never run away from home."

"But you didn't promise her that you wouldn't run away *in* your home, did you?" Doc wanted to know.

"That's a teckinality," Pee-wee shouted; "they use those in courts."

"You mean technicality," I told him; "shut up unless you've got a suggestion to make. We're here to decide how we're going to get somewhere else. There are a lot of obstacles. I move——"

"How are we going to move, that's what I'd like to know?" Dorry Benton shouted.

"Maybe Mr. Bennett will be able to give us a suggestion," the kid shouted.

"There you go again," I told him. "Will you forget about Bennett's and get down to business? How are we going to get this meeting place over to Van Schlessenhoff's field?"

"I was the one who made him say all right!" the kid piped up. "I made him laugh!"

"You're enough to make a weeping willow laugh," I told him. "You secured the field and it's nearly a half a mile away."

"All we've got to do is to get the car there," he said.

“Sure, that’s all,” I told him.

“The track is good,” Westy said.

“How about motive power?” Doc wanted to know.

“How about which?” they all shouted.

“I make a motion——” Pee-wee began screaming.

I said, “If you don’t keep still a minute, I’ll make a couple of motions and you’ll land under one of the seats. I want suggestions. If we can only manage to get this old car across Willow Place, the rest will be easy. It’s down hill all the way across the Sneezenbunker land right down to the marsh. If we get her as far as the marsh we’ll get her across all right.”

“The track down there wouldn’t hold a locomotive,” Westy said.

“We should worry about a locomotive,” I told him; “there are other ways. But how are we going to get her by Tony’s? And how about Slausen’s on Willow Place? Do you think they’re going to get out of the way if we toot a horn? Tony’s lunch wagon is all boarded up underneath, and you know what an ugly old grouch he is.”

“Maybe if we bought a lot of frankfurters from him,” our young hero said, “maybe then he’d—kind of—— That’s what you call diplomacy.”

“Diplomacy is what governments do,” Connie Bennett said. “Do you mean to say that England would do anything for the United States just because we bought a frankfurter for King George?”

“You’re crazy!” Pee-wee shot back at him. “Diplomacy is when you’re very nice and polite so as to get something you want.”

“Like two helpings of dessert,” I told him.

“But anyway, I know something better than diplomacy,” he shouted; “and that’s strategy.”

I said, “All right, as long as everybody’s shouting at once and we’re not getting anywhere, let’s go over to Tony’s and if we can’t dip him maybe we can strat him.”

So that’s the way it was, the first thing we did to get that car moved was to go over to Tony’s and each buy a frankfurter. There were twenty-four of us in there at once. Twenty-four frankfurters are a good many for one fellow—I don’t mean for one fellow to eat, but for one fellow to sell.

After that we asked Tony if he would just as soon let us take the boards away from underneath his wagon so that he could move the wagon away from over those old sunken, rusty tracks, just about seven or eight feet or so.

He said, “No mova. Gotta de license. No mova.”

Gee whiz, if that’s what you call diplomacy, I like arithmetic better, and that isn’t saying much.

CHAPTER V
WE GO OVER THE GROUND

The next night Mr. Ellsworth (he's our scoutmaster) came out early from the city so he could follow that track with us over to the river and say if he thought there was any chance of getting the car to the shore.

Tom Slade (he works in Temple Camp office) went with us. Before he was grown up he was in the Elk Patrol, but he's assistant scoutmaster now. He doesn't say much—he's like Pee-wee, only different. He started the Elk Patrol, I started the Silver Foxes, and I'll finish them, too, if they don't look out. Gee, you can't keep that bunch quiet. The Silver Fox Patrol is all right, only it hasn't got any muffler.

Mr. MacKeller went with us, too, that night. He's County Engineer. He's got dandy apple trees up at his house. He went so he could decide if the track was safe over the marsh. Because, gee whiz, we didn't want to break down and have our summer home in among a lot of cat-tails. I hate cats anyway. My sister has two of them.

We all met Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. MacKeller at the station and then we started following the old track. Some places we could hardly find the rails at all. We didn't stop at Tony's because Mr. Ellsworth said buying frankfurters wouldn't do any good. He said Tony's wasn't the worst part of our trouble; he said Slausen's Auto Repair Shop was worse, because it was a regular building.

After we got by Slausen's, the tracks were buried in the earth across the Sneezenbunker land. Some places they were as deep as an inch under the ground. But where that land began to slant down into the marsh the track came out good and plain. Before it got right into the marsh it ran along on an old kind of rotten trestle, and it ran all the way across the marsh on that. I guess that trestle was about three or four feet above the marsh. It's there yet, only you can't see it from the town on account of the high cat-tails all around.

That marsh sort of peters out into Van Schlessenhoff's field, right close to the river, and there the track is flat on the land again and in some places it's away under the grass.

Mr. MacKeller said he didn't know how we'd get the car over there, but he guessed the trestle across the marsh would hold it all right. He said even if it collapsed there probably wouldn't be much damage, only the car would be broken and we'd never get it away from there, and if we camped in it we'd be eaten up by mosquitoes.

"Good night," I told him; "if there's any eating to be done we want to be

the ones to do it."

He said that getting Tony's lunch wagon and Slausen's Auto Repair Shop out of the way wasn't the kind of work for an engineer. "That's a job for a strategist," he said.

Oh, boy, you should have heard Pee-wee shout. "*What did I tell you? What did I tell you?*" he began hollering.

Honest, I was afraid he'd tumble off the trestle into the marsh.

CHAPTER VI
SCOUT STRATEGY

Westy Martin (he's in my patrol; he's my special chum), he said, "The only way to do is to go to work systematically."

"Sister what?" Pee-wee shouted.

"Systematically," I told him; "that means without any help from our sisters. Now shut up."

"How long is it going to take to move that car all the way from the station over to the river? That's what *I'd* like to know," he shouted.

"About forty-eight hours and three months," I said. "If you'll give Westy a chance to speak, maybe he'll give us an idea."

We were all walking back up to town after our inspection of the old sunken tracks, and I could see that Westy was kind of silent; I mean I could hear that he was silent; I mean—you know what I mean—I should worry. Maybe you can't hear a fellow being silent. You can never hear Pee-wee being silent, that's one sure thing.

Westy was frowning just as if it was the end of vacation, and I knew he was thinking some thinks.

Pretty soon he said, "The two hardest things are getting the car past Tony's Lunch Wagon and past Slausen's Auto Repair Shop. After that it will be clear sailing—I mean rolling. I say let's have a big scout rally in Downing's lot. Let's have games and races and everything, and ask all the scout troops for miles and miles around, and everybody'll have to be good and hungry."

"That's easy!" Pee-wee shouted.

"Sure," Connie Bennett piped up. "We'll have the East Bridgeboro Troop over because there's a fat scout in that troop."

"I know the one you mean," Hunt Ward said. "He's shaped like a ferry boat."

I said, "Sure, and here's our own dear Pee-wee; he's a whole famine in himself. He wouldn't dare to look Hoover in the face."

"But what's the idea?" Dorry wanted to know.

"You started an argument and you haven't got any premises."

"Some highbrow," I told him.

"Sure, Downing's lot is the premises," our young hero piped up. "Premises is a place."

"I've hiked all over but I've never been to that place," I told him. "Can you get ice cream cones there?"

“Premises is the basis of an argument,” Westy said. “You choose your premises and stand on it.”

“A stepladder is good enough for me,” I said.

“Premises is real estate!” the kid fairly yelled. “Everybody knows that.”

“I don’t know it,” Punk Odell said, “and I’m everybody.”

“You mean you think you are,” Pee-wee shot back.

“Well,” I said, “what’s the difference whether it’s real estate or imitation estate? That isn’t finding out how we’re going to get the car past Tony’s, is it? Give Westy a chance to speak. Let’s have a large chunk of silence.”

That’s always the way it is with us. We never can decide anything because we all talk at once and we jump from one subject to another. Especially when Pee-wee’s along. Mr. Ellsworth (he’s our scoutmaster, he’s got a dandy dog), he says that silence is golden. But believe me, the Silver Foxes don’t bother about things that are golden. Speech is silver, and Pee-wee is Sterling.

Let’s see, where was I? Oh, I know. I was just starting to keep still so Westy could talk.

He said, “We’ll have a big rally and we’ll have signs up all around the field. All the scouts will have to be good and hungry.”

“That’s easy!” Pee-wee shouted.

Westy said, “We’ll have signs up all around saying *A SCOUT IS HUNGRY*, and things like that. We’ll have some poetry on big planks——”

“And when Tony sees all that,” Connie Bennett piped up, “and finds that we won’t go over and buy any eats from him, why, then he’ll move his wagon over to the lot and we’ll have a chance to move the car. It’s a bully idea if Pee-wee doesn’t weaken and spoil it all.”

“What are you talking about?” Pee-wee yelled. “I can go without anything to eat for—for an hour, if I have to!”

So we decided that we’d force Tony to move his lunch wagon by the force of our appetites. Maybe you’ve seen exhibitions of things that scouts can do by the power of deduction and all that, and how they can do things by united strength, and everybody admits they can make a lot of noise when they sing together. But I bet you never saw what they can do by concerted appetite—that means all being hungry at the same time.

You can move a house that way. Anyway, you can move a lunch wagon.

CHAPTER VII
THE INVITATION

Now this is the way we planned it out. We decided that if we could get the way cleared as far as the Sneezenbunker land it would be easy from there, because the car would roll down the grade and maybe all the way across Cat-tail Marsh. Then we'd have to think of some scheme to get it to the river.

"We won't cross our bridges till we come to them," Westy said.

"We're not going to take it across the river," the kid shouted.

"Crossing bridges is an expression," I told him. "It's the same as premises, only different."

So the next thing we had to think of was how to get the car past Slausen's Auto Repair Shop, because repair shops can't be moved like lunch wagons. And strategy doesn't go with men who keep garages.

So the next thing we did was to go and ask Mr. Slausen if he'd be willing to let us take down a few boards from his ramshackle old building just above where the tracks went through if we promised to put them up again.

"Maybe my father's going to get a flivver," Pee-wee piped up, "and maybe if I run it I'll have a smash-up, and I'll get you to fix it."

But that didn't go with Mr. Slausen. He said, very gruff like, "You kids better go home and study your lessons and not be trying to move railroad cars."

I said, "Scouts always keep their word, Mr. Slausen, and if we say we'll put the boards back up again, we will."

He said, "Well, I guess we won't take down any boards, so you better run along." And then he started to talk to a man and didn't pay any more attention to us.

Just as we were going out Connie Bennett said, "Well, we'll have to think of another way, that's all. It's got to be did somehow."

"Sure," I said; "scouts can always think of a way."

Mr. Slausen must have heard us, for he turned around and shouted after us, very cross, "I want you youngsters to keep away from here. Understand?"

Westy said, "Yes, sir."

"I don't know anything we can do," Dorry Benton said to me as we were going out.

"We'll think of a way," I said; "don't worry."

Now that's all there was to our call on Mr. Slausen, and it wasn't much, and nobody said anything important enough to remember, but what we said

made a lot of trouble for us just the same. You'll see.

"All we'd have to do would be to move his vulcanizing table," Westy said, "and we could run the car right through."

"Well, we should worry," I said. "We'll move Tony's Lunch Wagon, vulcanizing table and all, and then we can think about the next step."

"What do you mean, vulcanizing table?" Pee-wee shouted.

"The counter where he puts the inner tubes in doughnuts," I told him.

So then, as long as it was Saturday and we couldn't do any more that day, we decided to go up to my house and send invitations to all the troops in the different towns near Bridgeboro. Pee-wee wanted to go around like Paul Revere and notify them all, but I said no, because I knew he'd only end up in some candy store miles and miles from home.

This was the invitation we sent. It's kind of crazy, but what did we care, because in my patrol we're all crazy anyway. We ought to be called the Squirrels instead of the Silver Foxes, because we're all nutty.

Scouts, Attention!

Shoulder your trusty appetites and march to Bridgeboro on Saturday next, April 17th, to reënforce your brother scouts of the 1st Bridgeboro troop in a daring enterprise. Come hungry! Don't eat on the way! Rally in Downing's lot near Bridgeboro Station at 10 A. M.

Ask not the reason why
Here's but to do or die.
Hark to the battle-cry
Failure or apple pie!

Come, valiant comrades!

I guess when they got these invitations they thought we were all maniacs from Maine, hey? What did *we* care? Not in the least, quoth we.

After we got the invitations mailed we decided to forget the moving problem and go to the moving pictures. After that we went to the station and sat in the car a little while and talked. As long as we were so near we thought we might as well go over to Bennett's for cones, and as long as we were in there for cones we thought we might as well get some gumdrops. And as long as we were getting some gumdrops we thought we might as well get some molasses taffy for our young hero so as to stop him from talking. Believe me, that's one thing I like. I don't mean talking, I mean molasses taffy. I'm stuck on it. So is the tissue paper that comes around it. We got a nickel's worth of lemondrops, too, because yellow is our patrol color. We're always thinking of our patrol, that's one good thing about us.

CHAPTER VIII
RECONNOITERING

Now nothing happened the next week except going to school, and, gee whiz, there's no adventure in that. The best thing about school is Saturday because there isn't any. You can talk about Good Friday, but good Saturdays are good enough for me. Anyway, it's funny how great men always get born on holidays, like Washington and Lincoln. That's the thing I like best about those men—their birthdays. That's one thing I'm thankful for about Thanksgiving, too; it always comes on a holiday. But one thing I hate, and that is hop-toads.

So now that school is over for the week I'll tell you about the big rally. Wasn't that a quick week? Believe me, when I'm writing stories I take a hop, skip and a jump from one Saturday to another. Except in vacation.

That rally was a big success. By ten o'clock on Saturday morning there were seven troops, not counting our own, in Downing's lot ready to do or die. One came from East Bridgeboro, two came from Ennistown, one came from Northvale, one came from Little Valley, and two came from Sloan Hollow. There were seven troops and nineteen patrols. We have three patrols, so that makes twenty-two. There were a hundred and seventy-nine appetites altogether.

They all wanted to know what was the big idea, so I got up on a grocery box and made a speech. General Blakeley inspiring his troops. Oh, boy!

I said, "Scouts, that old railroad car over near the station belongs to us. It's our trooproom. It has to be moved on this old track down to the river. Tony Giovettioegleirotti, who keeps that lunch wagon, has defied us. We bought twenty-four frankfurters from him and he wouldn't move his wagon. So what are we going to do about it?"

"*Foil* him!" Pee-wee shouted.

"We haven't got any tinfoil," someone else hollered.

"Listen," I said; "everybody keep still. We're going to have games and scout pace races and things, but nothing to eat. Every scout has to promise that no matter how hungry he is, he won't go over and buy anything from Tony. I'm going to appoint a committee to go over there and keep smacking their lips, but——"

"I'll be on that committee!" Pee-wee shouted.

"You'll be on the ground if you don't keep still!" I told him. "You fellows are supposed to go over there in small detachments, kind of, and hang around,

and jingle the money in your pockets, and act as if you were hungry——"

"I can act that way!" Pee-wee shouted.

"Sure, just act natural," I told him. "You've had practice enough being hungry."

"What's the big idea?" somebody called out.

"The big idea is to mobilize all our appetites," I said. "When Tony sees this whole bunch of scouts—a hundred and seventy-nine appetites—and finds out that none of us is going to go over there and buy a single sandwich from him; when he finds that we spurn his pie, what will he do? He'll move his wagon over here. That's high strategy. It's so high you have to use a stepladder to get up to it. The scout appetite, when it acts in, what d'you call it, *unison* can move anything!"

"Sure it can!" they all yelled.

"But how are you going to move the car?" some scout or other wanted to know.

"You leave that to me," I told him. "What *you're* supposed to do is to get the way cleared. You're supposed to re—what d'you call it?—reconnoiter around Tony's and read the bill of fare that's pasted on the door, and jingle your money and kind of maybe smack your lips and look like the poor starving children in Europe. *But don't buy anything!* If you were to buy anything, even a single cheese sandwich, you'd be—you'd be Benedict Arnold——"

"Did he eat cheese sandwiches?" one of the crowd wanted to know.

"He was a traitor!" I shouted at him. "I don't know what he used to eat. Shut up."

"He was in favor of Switzerland, he ate Swiss cheese sandwiches," Brick Warner yelled.

"Will you shut up?" I hollered.

"It says in my History he swallowed his pride and wrote to Washington ——"

"Some appetite!" one of those fellows from East Bridgeboro yelled.

"Now I don't know what I was talking about," I said.

"You never did," a scout shouted at me.

I said, "Will you *listen*? If you all act in the right way and Tony finds that you're not going to buy anything from him, he'll move his wagon over here. Let him know you won't buy anything except on scout territory. See? He'll come across, you wait and see. All we have to do is hold out. The afternoon milk——"

"We don't want any milk," they all began screaming. "What do you think this is? A baby show?"

"I'm talking about a train," I shot back at them; "a milk train. Didn't you ever hear of a milk train?"

“I never knew milk came from a milk train,” Hunt Manners shouted.

“I thought it came from the milkman,” another fellow called.

I said, “Oh, sure, it comes from the Milky Way, just the same as germs come from Germany. You’re all so bright you ought to have dimmers.”

“Dinners——” Pee-wee yelled.

“There you go again,” I told him. “No, not dinners—*dimmers*! Listen, will you? The afternoon milk train gets here——”

“To-morrow morning,” a kid from Little Valley yelled.

“It isn’t as slow as they are in Little Valley,” I said; “it’ll be here at about four-sixty——”

“Five o’clock,” a scout piped up.

“Right the first time,” I said. “How did you guess?”

“What about it?” a lot of scouts wanted to know.

“This about it,” I said; “if the tracks are clear by that time Mr. Jenson, who is engineer on that train, is going to push the car——”

“He must be a strong man,” somebody shouted.

“Oh, sure,” I told him; “he’s so strong he wasn’t even born on a weak day. Now will you keep still a minute? He’s going to push the car with the locomotive over to this field while the train is being——”

“While it’s being milked,” another kid hollered.

Honest, that crowd was so crazy that a crazy quilt would turn green with envy, I said.

“Please listen and then everybody can talk at once. Your job is to inveigle ——”

“What do you mean, inveigle?” somebody hooted.

“Keep still,” I said; “inveigle is Latin for luring; you know what that is, don’t you? Your job is to get that lunch wagon over to this field by fair means or rainy means or any old means——”

“He doesn’t know *what* he means,” somebody yelled.

“And I’ll do the rest,” I told them. “Only you have to have the tracks clear by five o’clock this afternoon.”

“How are you going to get the car past that old garage?” somebody wanted to know.

“That’s another story,” I said. “You should worry about how we’re going to do that. We’ll find a way. Scouts are resourceful. There’s more than one way to kill a cat——”

“Scouts are supposed to be kind to animals,” one fellow shouted.

“I’m not talking about a real cat,” I said; “that’s just an expression. I’m talking about Mr. Slaus——”

Good night! Just then while I was talking I happened to look over to Slausen’s and there was Mr. Slausen standing in the back doorway watching us

and listening. Gee whiz, I guess he heard everything I said. Anyway, I should worry, because I didn't say anything that I was ashamed of. But just the same he had an awful funny look on his face.

CHAPTER IX
NAPOLEON AND WATERLOO

Now as long as you couldn't be there to have any of the eats there's no use telling you about it. Because a scout is supposed to be kind. Anyway, I wouldn't want you to buy this story just because refreshments go with it. Because actions speak louder than frankfurters and pie and things, but, anyway, Tony came across just as I said he would. And that was when the plot began to get thicker.

We had running matches and jumping matches and sulphur matches and all kinds of games, and a lot of girls came and watched us, and Main Street was full of people watching us.

But nobody went over to Tony's. Sometimes scouts would kind of stroll over that way and look at the list of things pasted on the door and sort of jingle their money and then stroll back again. The field was all full of people just like at a carnival, and we put boards on grocery boxes for the girls to sit on and watch the big events. Pee-wee went over and told the girls about how he was a martyr like Nathan Hale because he couldn't eat any frankfurters and things—I mean Pee-wee. And they said he was *noble* and that they were all on our side.

Pretty soon, *good night*, over came Fritzie from Bennett's with popcorn and ice cream cones and things, and everybody began buying them, and that was too much for Tony. He wasn't going to stand there and see Germany conquer the world. So just then, oh, boy, Italy began getting ready to come into the war.

I called all the scouts together and I said, "Sh-h! We've won the day, only we have to beware of strategy. Tony is coming over here with a lot of sandwiches and things in a basket. Don't buy anything. Stand firm. Leave him to me."

Pretty soon over he came with a big basket under his arm, shouting, "All-a hotta, all-a hotta, fiver de cents, all-a hotta."

I went up to him and I said, "Have you got any soup?"

He said, "Buy-a de frank; all-a hotta."

Everybody began crowding around and asking for soup. I said, "You haven't got any counter for us to eat at. Some of us want soup. Others want soup. Still others prefer soup. Nothing doing."

He said, "All-a fresh-a."

I said, "I'm sorry, but we're tired and we want to eat sitting down. We can't eat soup out of brown paper."

After a while he saw there wasn't any use trying to peddle things around the field, so he went away and in a little while we saw him and his brother pulling down the boards from underneath the wagon. Oh, boy, but weren't we glad! He wasn't going to miss that chance. I guess he knew what we wanted all right. All the scouts began shouting, "*We've won, we've won!*" And the fellows in my troop went around telling all the others how they had done us a good turn. They all began calling me General Blakeley because I had managed it.

But one thing, girls are smarter than fellows, I have to admit that. Just you wait and see. Because something terrible is going to happen.

Pretty soon Tony's old lunch wagon came lumbering over toward us. There were about seven or eight men pushing it and Tony was holding onto the shaft to steer it. When we saw that, we all began shouting and yelling and a scout from East Bridgeboro jumped up on a grocery box and tied his scarf on the end of his scout staff and began calling:

"Hurrah, for General Blakeley! Hurrah for the young Napoleon of Bridgeboro! Three cheers for the hero of the battle of Downing's lot! All hail the conqueror of Tony Spaghetti! Three cheers for the greatest strategist of the age! *The car shall pass!*"

Believe me, we didn't do a thing but lay waste to that conquered territory! I bought three frankfurters to start. Vic Norris bought two slices of lemon pie, just to begin. Dorry Benton bought a whole cake. The counter inside that wagon was lined with victorious scouts, and others were waiting outside for their turns. Our young hero was opening his program with a ham sandwich and a piece of custard pie, and a cup of coffee. That was just the prologue.

Pretty soon over came the girls and one of them wanted to know what we were all shouting about. I know that girl; she's Professor Skybrow's daughter and she wears big spectacles. She's too smart to live, that girl is. She was in my class last term and she took all the merits in sight. She'd have taken the whole school if it hadn't been fastened down.

Pee-wee went up to her and tried to speak. He was trying to hold his cup of coffee and sandwich and his pie in two hands, and there was custard all over his face. He looked as if he'd been through a war.

"We've—we've won the war," he was trying to say. "Roy Blakeley planned the whole thing—he——"

"I'm the modern Napoleon," I said. "I've got General Pershing tearing his hair."

She said, "Did you ever study the battle of Waterloo?"

I said, "This is the battle of coffeeloo. We like that better than water. Will you have a piece of pie?"

She just stared at me and said, "And you consider yourself a strategist!"

"He's—he's the great mil—mil——" Pee-wee began, trying to talk and eat

a piece of pie at the same time. “He’s the greatest military genius of the age.”

She just looked through those big glasses, very smart and superior like, and she said, “If *I* were a general I wouldn’t be so stupid as to forget all about my reinforcements.”

“W-a-a—what d’ y’ mean—reinforcements?” Pee-wee blurted out, while the coffee and custard were trickling down off his chin. “Wha’ d’ y’ mean?”

She just said, “When is that train going to arrive that you are waiting for?”

“At exactly four-sixty—five o’clock,” I told her.

She said, “Well, then, Mr. Smarty, you timed your battle wrong. You made a blunder——”

“The pleasure is mine,” I said.

“And in order to hold this wagon here and keep the track clear till your friend Mr. Jenson comes, you have got to keep on eating for exactly two hours and forty minutes. If you can hold the fort that long you can move your car. *But you’ll have to keep eating all the time*.”

There was a dead silence.

“We—can—d-d-d-wit,” Pee-wee managed to blurt out, all the while spilling his coffee and munching his pie. “Scoutscam——”

Good night! I just stood there, and that girl kept looking right at me through those big glasses. She got ninety-nine in arithmetic, that girl did, and she wrote a poem that was in the newspaper, too.

Then she said, “You see, General Napoleon, you didn’t figure your campaign properly. If you had gotten the Girl Scouts to help you, perhaps you wouldn’t have found yourselves in this ghastly predicament.”

Those are just the words she used—*ghastly predicament*.

CHAPTER X
MINERVA SKYBROW TAKES COMMAND

"Hurrah for Joan of Arc!" one scout began shouting.

"What do we care?" Pee-wee managed to blurt out.

"We care a good deal," Westy said. "Our glorious leader is all right on the field of battle, but when it comes to planning a strategical move——"

"We can't go on eating for nearly three hours," a scout from the East Bridgeboro troop said. "We've got to get home sometime."

Minerva Skybrow (that was her name), she just looked at us and she said, "Oh, doubtless you'll think of a way; scouts are so smart. They're so resourceful."

One of the other girls said, "Yes, and they can do *anything* with their appetites, you know."

"Up to a certain point," Westy said.

"Upstrn put in—vncble," Pee-wee blurted. "Bth not insrmtble——"

I said, "Don't try to manage a cup of coffee, a sandwich and a piece of pie and the word insurmountable at the same time. It can't be did."

"I—cnsrmntble cern pnt——"

"Shut up," I said; "this is no time for words; this is a time for actions."

Gee whiz, I saw we were in a tight place and there was that girl just standing there staring at us through her big glasses. I bet she was just the kind of a girl that likes algebra. There were the old rusty railroad tracks clear at last right across the field as far as Slausen's. And there was Tony's Lunch Wagon a couple of hundred feet away from where it always stood. We knew he'd move it right back to its old place again as soon as there wasn't anything more doing in the field, because on account of his regular trade there, and besides there was a little flight of wooden steps built over there which just fitted in front of the door. And all his boards and things were there besides. There was a kind of a bulletin board there, too, with all the eats and things marked up on it. Jimmies, if he had been able to talk English maybe we could have argued with him, but we couldn't get anything into his head, not even with a crowbar.

Everybody knows that scouts have good appetites, and I can prove it by the cook up at Temple Camp, but gee williger, no scout can go on eating for over two hours; even Pee-wee couldn't. I saw the terrible mistake I had made. It was a military blunder.

I said to Tony, "How soon you go back?"

"Sooner no more de biz," he said.

“I’ll have one more sandwich,” said Westy.

“Can you make it two for the sake of the cause?” I asked him.

“Give me another plate of chowder,” Connie Bennett said. “You don’t hear a train in the distance, do you?”

One of the girls said, “Oh, *mercy*, it won’t be here till five o’clock. We’ll stay and let you know when it comes. Because, you know we really have *nothing* to do. We can’t run and jump and play ball, you know. We’re only girls, aren’t we, Minerva?”

I said, “Well, there’s only one thing for us to do. We’ve got to hold the fort ——”

“Can we hold the food? That’s the question,” some fellows shouted.

“Absypostvly,” Pee-wee blurted out. “Hip, hip——”

“Shut up,” I told him. “There’s only one thing for us to do and that is to work in platoons. Scouts will go into the wagon four at a time and eat at the counter. Nothing must be eaten except at the counter. As they come out they’ll be relieved by others. Don’t eat too fast. The train will be here in two hours. We can hold out. There is nothing else to do. The lunch wagon *must be held*. Somebody go over to the station and find out if the milk train is on time. Keep busy. Chowder is recommended, but scouts must use their judgment. *On to victory*. We can eat *forever*!”

“Make th wrld safe fr dmcrcy!” Pee-wee yelled.

“Forever!” a lot of them shouted.

“What’s two hours?”

“We can eat forever! Hurrah!”

Just then one of those Little Valley scouts came running back from the station. “The milk train is an hour and a half late!” he said.

“Oh, isn’t that just too *exasperating*?” said Minerva Skybrow.

CHAPTER XI
WE FIND A WAY

I said, “Good night, that ends it for us. We can’t keep this up for three hours and a half. There’s no use trying. We’re beaten.”

“Scouts beaten!” one of the girls said.

“Just the same way as Napoleon was beaten,” I said. “You think you’re so smart. Maybe you don’t know he was beaten because his reinforcements didn’t show up.”

“Don’t let’s give up,” Pee-wee shouted, just as he finished his last mouthful of pie.

Minerva Skybrow said, “Isn’t it nice how much you know about history?”

“Sure,” I said. “It’s just too cute. But my favorite studies are the multiplication table and the dining table. You’re so smart, maybe you can suggest something. You don’t expect to go on eating for three hours, do you? Even—even—General—even Foch couldn’t do that. And he’s greater than I am, I guess.”

She just said, “Oh, is he, *really*?”

“And so is Washington,” I said. Because I was good and mad.

“You mean he *was*,” she said. “He’s dead, you know.”

“If you can get us out of this scrape,” I said, “let’s see you do it.”

She just said, “Well, of course, if you admit that your appetites have failed you, and if you really want the Girl Scouts to tell you what is in your *own handbooks*, I’ll remind you of the value of mushrooms.”

“Oh, is that so?” I said. “I know all about mushrooms and I can tell a mushroom from a toadstool or a footstool or a piano-stool or any other kind of a stool. But that’s not going to keep this blamed wagon here, is it?”

She said, “Oh, isn’t it?”

“Well,” I said, “you’re so smart, you were always getting E plus in Miss Harrison’s class and you wrote a poem for the High School paper and all that, let’s see you keep this wagon here for three hours. Do you mean to tell me you and the rest of these girl scouts could go on eating for three hours?”

“No, but we could use our brains for three seconds,” she said.

“Maybe you think it’s easy to argue with a wop that doesn’t understand ten words of English. What would you do? You’re so smart. What would you do?”

She said, “Well, of course we’re only girls and we haven’t had the advantages of a Temple Camp, and we can only eat raspberry sundaes and banana splits. But if I were a smart, wonderful boy, head of a scout patrol and

had my face on the covers of a lot of books, and knew all about the boy scout handbook, *I'd* try to make this man understand that that dark spot underneath where his wagon stood is simply *filled* with mushrooms. I'd try to make him understand that the *best* mushrooms grow in the dark and damp places. And I'd tell him (because you know scouts know everything) that mushrooms are worth about seventy-five cents a pound. I'd do him a good turn. I'd show him how to dig them all up so as to get the spawn and everything, and I'd show him how to plant them in boxes. Then he'd have two beds of them. Perhaps all that would occupy him for the rest of the afternoon, and of course the wagon ——

"But then, I'm only a girl, and I can't *eat* my way to power and world dominion." That's just the way she talked. Honest.

I said, "Minerva Skybrow, you've got Joan of Arc beaten about 'steen dozen ways. I know that about mushrooms in the handbook; it comes right after Woodcraft. When I used to see you in Assembly I thought you were stuck up, and I know I'm always making fun of the girl scouts. But you've done us a good turn. Gee whiz, I always hated Miss Harrison, didn't you? Because she kept us in till five o'clock. I guess she didn't have any home. But, anyway, I have to admit you can play on the piano all right.

"And another thing I know about you, too: you started taking Italian in the Academic course. I bet you can speak Italian. I know the girl that used to sit next to you before you went to the High School; I pulled her on a sled once. You know the girl I mean. She was always eating chocolate. Believe me, I have to admit that you've got more sense than we have, and if you'll help us to keep this blamed wagon out of our path of glory till the milk train comes we're going to give a big racket in your honor when we get our car down to the field near the river, if we ever do.

"Honest, Minerva, to tell you the truth, we can't eat another thing, and I see that what counts most in the world is brains—brains and mushrooms. But, gee whiz, I like ice cream, too."

CHAPTER XII
THE GRAND DRIVE BEGINS

The next minute that girl started talking Italian to Tony, and, oh, boy, you should have seen him. Right away he got excited and wanted to dig up the whole earth. I guess she told him there was a gold mine where his wagon had been standing.

I don't know if you know much about mushrooms, but they're easy to raise and you can get a lot of money for them, and that's something that most scouts don't know about. All you need is a place that's kind of damp and dark, like under a car or a wagon or in a cellar that hasn't got any heat. It's a lot of fun raising them. Maybe that's why they call them fungi. Anyway, Minerva Skybrow put the fun in fungi for us all right, because now we have a dandy little mushroom patch under our car down by the river and the only competition we have in Bridgeboro is from Tony. We should worry.

Every Saturday morning people come down to Van Schlessenhoff's field to buy mushrooms from us. Only you've got to be careful, because if you eat the wrong kind of mushrooms, the first thing you know some fine day you'll wake up and find yourself dead. So you better read what the handbook says about them.

The kind we raise are dandy big ones and we call them the *Skybrow mushroom*, and they're known far and wide—all the way up as far as Main Street.

Now for the rest of that afternoon we helped Tony dig up mushrooms and plant them in boxes and spread more of them in the space where his wagon belonged, and Minerva Skybrow managed the whole business. I guess it must have been after six o'clock when we heard the milk train whistling, and, believe me, we were all pretty tired when it pulled into the station.

Minerva said, "Now isn't that better than just eating? You've won the day, you've kept the tracks clear, and you've done something worth while. You've done a good turn in the bargain."

"And when we start raising mushrooms ourselves," Pee-wee piped up, "we'll have something more to eat, too. Hey?" Jiminy, that's all that kid thinks about.

I said to Minerva, "You're so smart, maybe you can think of a way for us to get past Slausen's Repair Shop. Believe me, that's going to be some Hindenburg line. Maybe we can tell him to plant rubber bands and automobile tires will grow up. We should worry; we've done enough for one day."

Mr. Jenson, who is engineer on that milk train, was mighty nice. He said that scouts did him a good turn once, and so he was going to pay them back. While the men were loading the milk cans onto the train he ran his locomotive very slowly onto those old rusty tracks and the first thing we knew, *plunk*, he bunked right into our old car. Gee whiz, it looked good to see it move. It just gave a kind of a jerk.

Then he called down to us and said, "Now where do you want me to leave this de luxe Pullman Palace car?"

I said, "We want you to push it across Main Street, past where the lunch wagon usually stands, and right about to the middle of the field. That's as far as we can go to-day."

"You planning to go farther than that?" he asked us.

"Yes, but we have to think of a way," Westy called up to him.

Mr. Jenson began laughing and he said, "You kids'll have to do some tall thinking to get past that old building."

"That's all right," Westy said; "the human mind can move anything."

Mr. Jenson just said, "All right, over she goes."

Some of us got on the car and the others walked along and the girls stayed around, laughing. A couple of them got on the car, but most of them were kind of afraid, I guess. Maybe they thought it would never stop. Some men stood around watching and laughing, too. What did we care?

The locomotive pushed the car so slow that we could walk ahead of it. It hardly moved. We felt pretty important when we saw the gates go down across Main Street and people and automobiles waiting till we got past. Most of the scouts who had come from other towns had gone home and only our own troop and the girls and a few others were there. But a whole lot of people were standing around watching and laughing at our old ramshackle car. It went right over Tony's new mushroom farm, and then Mr. Jenson's fireman came down and we helped him haul a big piece of timber across the tracks about in the middle of the field, because the brakes on that car weren't much good.

Pretty soon the locomotive stopped and our old car just moved so slow that it hardly moved at all. Then, kerplunk, the wheels ran against the piece of timber, and the first stage of our what-d'you-call-it, memorable journey, was over.

After that we helped Tony get his lunch wagon back to where it belonged, and we all gave Mr. Jenson three cheers when the milk train pulled out. The boy scouts are all right, and you can see for yourself that you can do a lot by concerted appetite. But you need brains, too. And if it hadn't been for the Girl Scouts and the Erie Railroad, where would we be, I'd like to know? So that's why my favorite heroes are the Girl Scouts and the Erie Railroad. Maybe they're both kind of slow—I'm not saying—but good turns are what count.

CHAPTER XIII
AFTER THE BATTLE

So there we were with the first hard part of our big enterprise over, and the hardest part staring us in the face.

"We're past the first trench line, anyway," Westy said.

"Yes, but I'd like to know how we're going to get past that old repair shop," Connie put in. "That's what *I'd* like to know."

We were all sitting in the car resting before going home.

"You leave that to me," I said. "Where there's a will there's a way. I've got an idea."

"Have you got it with you?" Dorry Benton wanted to know.

"I'm not going to bother with that old grouch, Mr. Slausen," I said. "He's worse than a rainy Sunday, that man is."

"I'm glad I'm not his son," one of the fellows said.

"Believe me," I told them, "when it comes to picking out fathers I picked out a good one."

"Well, what's the idea?" one of them wanted to know.

"This is the idea," I said. "Two or three of us will go and see Mr. Downing, who owns the field and the blamed old garage and everything, and we'll tell him all about it and maybe he can make Mr. Slausen let us take down a few boards where the track runs through. Mr. Downing's a mighty nice man, I know that, because he gave a hundred dollars in the scout drive."

"Well, and suppose that fails?" Westy wanted to know.

I said, "Well, then, it means a lot of trouble; maybe we'll have to all get to work and take up the tracks and lay them to the left of the garage where they cross Willow Place."

"That will take us all summer," Charlie Seabury said.

"Well," I said, "we've got this far and will find a way to get the rest of the distance, that's sure. Where there's a will there's a way."

Just then in came Mr. Slausen, all of a sudden, kind of angry like.

"All tickets, please," I said. Because he made me think of a conductor.

He said, "Now see here, what are you youngsters doing here in this car?"

I said, "Is it a conundrum? How many guesses do we have? We're sitting in it."

"You'll have to clear out of here with this thing," he said. "You'll be in the way, and this is private property, you know."

"So is this car private property," I said.

"Well, it's on private land," he said.

"That's all right," I told him; "it's private property just the same. Even if it were on the moon it would be private property. It belongs to us. And the field doesn't belong to you, either. It belongs to Mr. Downing."

Just then several of the fellows started singing an old tune that we used to fit words to when we were travelling around the country in that car.

"We're on our way to the river,
We're on our way to the river,
We'd rather have this than a flivver.

We'll get there never fear,
And when we get there, we'll be there
And while we're here, we're here."

"Well, you'll have to clear out of here with this thing," he said. "I'll see your parents about it. I'll notify the police. I use all this land, you can't stay here."

"We don't intend to stay here," I said. "We're going to move down to the river, into Van Schlessenhoff's field. We're just stopping here. You should worry."

"Well, you'll have to have this thing moved back," he said, very cross.

"Scouts don't move back," I said; "they move forward. The only thing that will stop us is the river. Excelsior! That's our middle name."

"That's what you pack china in," Pee-wee shouted.

"It means *Forward*," I said. "It's what somebody or other had on a banner, in a poem. Scouts don't have any reverse movement."

"Now you boys know you can't get past here," Mr. Slausen said. "What are you up to? How do you expect to get past here?"

"We should worry our young lives about how we're going to get past," I said. "Italy stood in our way—you saw what happened. This is the Berlin to Bagdad Railroad—branch of the Erie. We're going to subdue all the land between here and the river. We should sneeze at the Sneezenbunker land. We're going to make all the cats in Cat-tail Marsh pay an indemnity. Maybe you think you're more important than Belgium, but we'll go through you all right. You leave it to us. Food won the war so far, didn't it? Posolutely, quoth he.

"We haven't opened our next campaign yet, but, anyway, we're not too proud to fight. Please don't bother us now; we're planning our next big drive. We're going to make the world safe for the boy scouts. If the police and our parents know what's best for them they'll stay neutral."

“Do you want to make a treaty with us?” Connie piped up. “Come on over to Bennett’s and we’ll treat you to a treaty.”

Then we all began singing.

We’re here because we’re here,
We are not in despair;
And when we are no longer *here*
Why, maybe we’ll be there.

Mr. Slausen just went out and slammed the door. Gee whiz, that man can’t take a joke.

CHAPTER XIV
SOMETHING MISSING

Now I'm going to tell you all about what happened that night. Before dark Westy rode up to my house on his bicycle, because I had told him that I'd help him clean it up. We weren't thinking about the car, because we had decided that we'd go and see Mr. Downing the next morning; that would be Sunday.

We knew Mr. Downing took a lot of interest in the scouts, and we weren't worrying, because we thought he would fix things for us. The way we talked to Mr. Slausen is the only way you can talk to a man like that, because he's an old grouch. Everybody knows him.

Now out by the road in front of my house is a carriage step, and Westy and I sat on that while we cleaned up his bike and oiled it and greased it. We kept working there till it was nearly dark. He has a dandy big flashlight and we used that to light up places that we couldn't see very well.

Pretty soon the bike was all clean and the dirt was all on us. So we went in to wash up. I was the first to get through, so I went out on the porch and lay down on the swing seat.

Now there's a wide lawn between our house and the road. I ought to know because I mow it every week. That's where my sister and Harry Donnelle play tennis. He's a big fellow.

It was pretty nearly dark and I was waiting for Westy to come out. He was going to stay to supper at my house. My mother likes him a lot. But that night we didn't feel much like supper. While I was lying there an automobile passed along the road and stopped right in front of the house and somebody got out. I thought whoever it was was coming up to the house when I saw that person get in the car and ride away again.

Just then Westy came out and I said, "Somebody got out of a car down at the road."

He looked kind of funny for a second, then he said, "Let's go down."

His bicycle was leaning against the carriage step and a few tools and things were on the step.

I said, kind of anxious, "Are they all there?"

"I don't see my flashlight," he said.

I said, "Let's look around in the grass."

But we couldn't find it anywhere.

Gee, I didn't think anybody in an automobile would be so mean as to stop and pick up a thing like that. Maybe it was worth two or three dollars.

I said, “We shouldn’t have left the things out here, but, jiminies, I never thought anybody would be so mean as to stop and take a thing like that. If he had taken the bicycle it wouldn’t have seemed so bad.”

“Let’s run,” Westy said.

“I’m with you,” I told him.

He said, “It’s got my initials on, that’s one thing.”

We gathered up the stuff in a hurry and wheeled the bicycle in to the porch and then started along the road, going scout pace. We couldn’t use the bicycle because the tires were flat. There was one machine quite a way ahead of us. It turned into Main Street and we caught up with it a little because it had to go slow there.

About two blocks down Main Street it turned into Willow Place. If you look at the map I made you’ll see where that is. It went faster now and we were falling behind all the time.

Pretty soon Westy panted, “I know that car.”

“Whose is it?” I asked him.

“Wait a minute; you’ll see,” he said.

Just then it turned in and crossed the sidewalk and disappeared. Westy and I just stopped and stood there panting and staring at each other.

“What—do—you—know—about—that?” I just blurted out.

“Slausen’s,” he said, all out of breath.

“Sure,” I said; “that’s Charlie Slausen.”

CHAPTER XV
A SCOUT'S HONOR

I knew that fellow in school and I never had much use for him. He graduated when I was in the primary. At recess he used to take our marbles, just to make us mad. And after we started our troop he used to call us the boy sprouts. I guess he thought he was funny. Harry Domicile hasn't got much use for him either, and you bet your life Harry Domicile knows.

"Gee, I didn't think he'd do that," Westy said.

"Come ahead," I told him; "he won't get away with it anyway."

We went right up to the garage and I walked straight inside. The men had gone home and it was all dark except for the headlights on Charlie's car. It wasn't his, it was his father's. But he told all the girls it was his. He was just stepping out and I went right up to him, because Westy was so kind of ashamed that any one would do such a thing that he just couldn't speak of it. He's a dandy fellow, Westy is.

I said, "Will you please give us the flashlight that you took?"

"Hello, sprouts," he said; "what's troubling you now?" And he gave me a kind of a push, you know, just as if he was jollying me.

I said, "Will you please give me the flashlight you took?"

"Light? What light?" he said, very innocent like.

"The one you took from in front of my house," I said. "You'll either give it to me or I'll have you arrested. If you think I'm afraid of you, you're mistaken. And you can keep your hands off me, too. You better button your coat or you'll be stealing your own watch next."

He just began laughing.

"That's all right," I said; "I mean what I say."

He took the flashlight out of the car and said, "You don't mean this, do you?"

"Yes, I mean that," I said; "it's got this fellow's initials on, so you needn't try to make us think it's yours."

He just gave me a poke with it and kept on laughing. Gee, I was mad.

"Your hands remind me of tanglefoot flypaper," I said.

"Yes?" he just laughed. "Well, here's your old light. What's the matter with you kids? Can't you take a joke? I just wanted to see if you were good at tracking. You claim to be such great Buffalo Bills——"

I said, "Yes? Well, you've got Jesse James looking like a Sunday School teacher."

“I see you’re all right at trailing,” he said; “here take your light. I was giving you a test. What’s the matter with you?”

He was very easy and offhand like, but I could see he was kind of nervous.

He said, “And I suppose you’ll be telling the whole town about your great stunt.”

“Don’t worry,” I told him. “I’d be ashamed to remind the town that there’s such a fellow as you here. All we want is what belongs to us.”

He began digging down in his pocket, all the while saying, “Well, we’ll just keep it a little secret between ourselves and——”

I guess just then he found he didn’t have any money. Because he finished up by saying, “And we’ll have some ice cream sodas the first time I meet you on Main Street. Now how’s that?”

“Sure,” I said, “and we’ll put the spoons in our pockets when we get through.”

“Well, now, you’re not going to go round shouting, huh?” he said, kind of anxious.

Then for the first time Westy spoke. He said, “We promise not to tell anybody, if that’s what you mean. So you needn’t worry about that.”

“How about you, Kiddo?” Charlie Slausen asked.

“Oh, I promise,” I said.

“Well, then, let’s see if you’re as good at keeping your word as you are at tracking,” he said. “I thought you’d find me. Now it’s a go, is it? Not a word?”

“That’s what we told you,” I said. Gee whiz, I was so disgusted I could hardly speak to him.

“Climb out through that window,” he said.

Then for the first time I noticed that he had closed the big door.

“Go ahead,” he said; “I’ll come out after you.”

He was such a blamed peculiar kind of a fellow that we didn’t have any idea what he was up to. Whatever he did seemed to be kind of on the sly.

The window was on the side of the garage. After we had climbed through we started back up Willow Place. Pretty soon we saw a dark figure going across the street very quietly and we thought it must be him.

“I guess he doesn’t want his father to know he was using the car,” Westy said. “That’s why he sneaks out.”

“He had to come in with it, though,” I said.

Westy said, “Sure, but that isn’t any reason for him not watching his step when he goes away. He wasn’t going to show himself on Willow Place till he was sure no one was there.”

“Well, there’s no harm done,” I said. “We’ve got the flashlight.”

“Yes, and he’s got our promise,” said Westy.

“He needn’t lose any sleep over that,” I said. “A scout’s honor is to be

trusted—Law one, page thirty-four. Correct. Let’s go over and get a couple of sodas.”

CHAPTER XVI
TWO—SEVEN!

I went to bed early that night because I was good and tired. I don't know how long I had been asleep, but all of a sudden I was wide awake listening to the fire whistle. I guess it must have been the fire whistle that awakened me. I heard four blasts, because I counted them. That would mean the fire was 'way down South Bridgeboro. Then it started again, and I realized that I had only heard the end of it. I counted all the blasts this time. There were two, then seven. I said to myself, "That's somewhere near the station." I could hear the engine siren a long way off. Then I went to sleep again.

The next day was Sunday, and as long as I live I will never forget it. When I went down to breakfast there were my mother, father and sister Marjorie at the table. The sun was shining right through the bay window, and that made it seem like Sunday, because on Sundays we don't have breakfast till about the time the sun gets around there. It made it seem like Sunday, too, because my father had his smoking jacket on.

As soon as I sat down my father said, kind of offhand, "Did you hear the fire whistle last night, Roy?"

"Sure," I said; "I think it was near the station."

He said, "You didn't get up and go to it, eh?" He said that because I always go to fires. I stayed up all night when the High School burned down.

I said, "Have a heart. I was dead to the world all night. We had some job getting our car moved."

My mother said, "Why, of course."

Then my father said, kind of funny like, he said, "You got it moved all right, eh?"

"You bet we did," I said.

"And what's the next move?" he asked me, very nice and pleasant.

"To get it across Willow Place to the Sneezenbunker land," I told him. "I guess maybe we can do that next Saturday."

I don't know, but something in the way he looked made me feel awful funny. Then he pushed back his chair and looked straight at me and said, "Roy, Mr. Slausen's repair shop was burned to the ground last night. Did you boys have any altercation with Mr. Slausen yesterday?"

Gee, you could have knocked me down with a feather. "Burned to the ground?" I just stammered out.

He said, "Yes; nothing left of it." He looked awful funny.

My sister said, “I’m glad of it; he’s an old grizzly bear.”

“You had some words with him?” my father asked me.

“I guess there’s nobody in town who hasn’t had words with him,” my sister said.

“Just let me talk to Roy,” my father told her.

I said, “We were jollying him along because he was mad on account of our car being in the field. It wasn’t near his building, that’s one sure thing.”

“And you boys were planning to get the car past his building? You asked him if you could take some boards down?”

“Yes, we did,” I said; “and he said *no*.”

“Of course,” said my sister; “what did you expect him to say?”

“And you told him you’d think up some other way?” my father asked me.

Then I began to see what he was driving at I said, “If he thinks we had anything to do with his old shanty burning down, let him think so. Gee whiz, it wouldn’t make a decent bonfire. We got the car over to the field all right, and we’ll get it the rest of the way. I told him we’d think of a way, and we will.”

My father said, “Yes, but I don’t see what sort of plan you could make to get a railroad car through a building.”

I said, “Do you think I had anything to do with that old place burning down?”

He said, “No, of course I don’t. Such a thought is absurd. That is not the way of scouts.”

“You said it,” I told him.

Then he said, “Westy’s father called me up this morning, Roy, and told me about this fire. He said that Mr. Slausen had just called on him with another man who claimed to have seen you and Westy climbing out through a side window of the garage after dark last night.”

“What did Westy say?” I asked my father.

“Westy wasn’t home this morning,” my father said; “and that’s why his father called me up. He seemed to be very much concerned, but I told him, of course, that it was all nonsense, that you hadn’t done any such thing. I told him that if you had climbed out through a window you could doubtless explain it, but that he needn’t worry, because you hadn’t done any such thing. I’m afraid Mr. Slausen has lost his sense of reason——”

“He never had any,” my sister said.

“I should think not,” my mother put in, “Climbing out through the side window after the place had been closed! Who ever heard of such nonsense? The man is crazy.”

I just sat there and I didn’t say a word.

My father said, “Well, I believe Mr. Slausen is coming up here with this stranger this morning. I understand he has appealed to the police.”

“Why doesn’t he call out the army?” my sister wanted to know.

I said, “You mean I have to be arrested?” My father just laughed and said, “Why, certainly not. I’m very glad they’re coming——”

“I hope Duke bites them,” Marjorie said. Duke is our Airedale.

“I don’t see that that would do any good,” my father said, kind of smiling. “All Roy will have to do is to deny this, and I’ll do the rest. I just want you to say, Roy, that you didn’t climb out of any window of Mr. Slausen’s shop after dark or at any other time. I want you to face these gentlemen——”

“They’re not gentlemen,” my sister said; “they’re hyenas!”

My father just went on and said, “I want you to tell Mr. Slausen and anybody else who comes here with him that you didn’t do that and that you weren’t near his place. There’s nothing to be afraid of if you tell the truth.”

My sister said, “I hope you’re not going to let those men come in the parlor. Ugh!”

I just sat there, kind of saying *parlor, parlor, parlor* to myself. I didn’t know *what* to say. My father looked at me kind of funny.

Then I said, “I don’t see what it’s got to do with us, anyway, because the fire didn’t happen till two or three hours after——”

Then I stopped.

“After what, Roy?” my father said.

“After the time he said we were in there,” I kind of blurted out.

My father said, “That hasn’t anything to do with it. The point is that you weren’t there at all. There’s the beginning and the end of it. This man thinks you boys did the only thing you could do to get his old shop out of the way. He doesn’t know anything about scouts. There was a motive. That’s enough for him. And he thinks a couple of you sneaked into his place after dark and set fire to it. Now you didn’t, did you?”

“No, we didn’t,” I said, good and loud.

“Well, then,” my father said, “that’s all there is to it.”

CHAPTER XVII
SUSPENSE

That was the worst morning I ever spent. I didn't know what to do or what to say. But one thing I was sure of, and that was that I wasn't going to break my word no matter what happened. Because what's the use of having any law one if it doesn't mean what it says?

I kept wishing that those men would hurry up and come so the thing would be over with. I went out and sat on the steps of our garage and talked with James; he's our chauffeur. And all the while I kept looking off down the road to see if those men were coming. I felt awful funny. No matter what I did I couldn't stick to it. I felt kind of the same way as I feel just before examinations in school. I started picking dandelions on the lawn just so as to keep busy. Then I went around to the porch and sat in the swing seat and tried to read, but I couldn't.

After a while I saw a car coming up the hill and I knew it was the police car. I guess there wasn't much left of Mr. Slausen's car. I saw Chief O'Day in the car—I could tell him on account of his uniform—and there were several others, too. Now that I saw them I wasn't so nervous as I was before, because I knew it would soon be over with.

When they got out I saw there were five people—Chief O'Day, Mr. Slausen, another man, Westy and his father. I was kind of nervous when I saw them coming up the gravel walk, but, anyway, it kind of helped me to feel sure of myself.

Chief O'Day said, "Well, sir, your father home?"

I gave one look at Westy and then I didn't feel afraid any more at all. I knew he thought the same as I did, and I said to myself that no matter what happened we'd stick together.

My father took us all in the library and I stood in front of the mantelpiece.

Chief O'Day said, "Mr. Blakeley, your boy and this other boy seem to be mixed up in the fire that destroyed Mr. Slausen's shop last night."

My father just said, "Indeed?"

The chief said, "These two boys were seen climbing out of a window of the shop after dark last night. They were anxious to have the shop out of their way ——"

My father just said, "Oh, yes, I know all about that. We'd like to have a good many things out of our way. Let us get down to facts. Who saw these boys? That's the point."

Mr. Slausen said, “This young man is a friend of mine, Mr. Blakeley. He has worked for me. His name is Conroy. He saw your boy and this other youngster climb out of the side window of my place last night. This other youngster refuses to say anything.”

The chief said, “Of course you realize these boys have to give an account of themselves, Mr. Blakeley. Maybe this young fellow here is mistaken about seeing them, but——”

“He isn’t mistaken,” I said. I could just hear my own voice as if I was speaking all alone in the world, and I was awful nervous. “Westy and I climbed out of that window after dark last night, but we didn’t set fire to the place and we never thought about such a thing.”

“*You were there?*” my father said. Gee, he seemed to be all flustered. “What do you mean? You mean you were in Mr. Slausen’s shop after the place had been closed up and came out through a side window?”

I just said, “Yes, sir.”

For about half a minute nobody spoke at all, only Mr. Slausen kept drumming with his fingers on the arm of the chair.

Then the chief said, “What were you doing there?”

“I won’t tell you,” I said.

My father said, very sober like, “What do you mean, Roy? You won’t tell? This is a very serious matter. Tell Mr. O’Day what you went there for.”

I didn’t say anything; I just stood there.

My father just said, very anxious, “Well?”

The chief said, “You don’t want to rub up against the law, my boy.”

I said, “If you think you can scare me, you can’t. There are different laws. Maybe there are some that you don’t know anything about——”

Just then I heard footsteps on the porch and then the doorbell rang.

CHAPTER XVIII
MR. ELLSWORTH CALLS

That was Mr. Ellsworth, our scoutmaster. I guess he had heard all about it. I guess the whole town knew about it by that time. Trust them for that. He just sat down very quietly and listened. It made me feel good to see him there.

My father said, "I suppose you know about this, Mr. Ellsworth?"

Mr. Ellsworth said, "Why, yes, in a general way."

"You knew the boys were at the garage?" my father asked him.

He said, "N—no, I didn't know that. Have they found out how the fire started?"

"*Started?*" Mr. Slausen said, good and loud. "Can't you see how it started? You're the instigator of this car moving business, I suppose?"

Mr. Ellsworth said, awful funny, "Yes, I'm the evil genius."

"And I understand fires are part of this scout rigmarole," Mr. Slausen said.

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Ellsworth said; "we're all strong for the campfire. Had your place insured, I suppose, Mr. Slausen?"

"Lucky I did," he said.

"We just want to give these lads a chance to explain their presence there," Chief O'Day said.

Mr. Ellsworth just said, "Oh, I see."

I just looked straight at Mr. Ellsworth and I said, "I can't tell, Mr. Ellsworth, on account of a scout law. If Westy wants to tell, let him do it."

"Thanks. Nothing doing," said Westy.

"What is the law, Roy?" Mr. Ellsworth asked me, very kind and nice.

I said, "It's the one about a scout's honor being trusted."

My father was good and mad. He said, "I want to know all about this. I want to know what you boys were doing at Mr. Slausen's shop, climbing out of the window there after dark. We're going to get to the bottom of this."

I noticed that Westy's father didn't say anything, he just kept looking at Mr. Ellsworth. I didn't say anything. Neither did Westy. I could hear the big clock in the hall ticking.

"You boys don't want to go down to the station, do you?" the chief asked us.

"I should worry," I said. "We didn't set fire to the shop, I know that, and we can't tell you why we were there on account of a reason. What's the use of having scout laws if we don't pay any attention to them?"

My father started to speak, but Mr. Ellsworth said, "Just a minute. I can't

stand between you gentlemen and these boys, but so far as I am concerned I will not urge either of them to say anything more just now. I just wish to have it understood that I take no part in this business. If these boys were mine I would not require them to tell anything—just at present. There are some other things to be explained first.

"It is one of our scout laws that scouts must obey their parents. So much for that. It is up to you gentlemen. But if one scout law is to be obeyed, of course the others must be obeyed, too. These boys are in my troop. I have never known either one of them to lie. They seem to think their honor is involved. If you gentlemen, their fathers, insist on their talking, I hope they will obey their parents. But I ask you to think twice before you insist. I know these boys."

"Do you think I want my son arrested?" my father said.

"A great many innocent people have been arrested before now, Mr. Blakeley. I'm not thinking of that. They put Columbus in chains, you know," Mr. Ellsworth said, kind of laughing.

Just then Mr. Martin (that's Westy's father) spoke up. He said, "I think I'll stand with my boy and Mr. Ellsworth in this matter. If you men are here to press the matter I'm here to see it through. I think perhaps we'll all be the gainers, my friend Mr. Slausen included, if we respect these boys' wishes. What next, Chief? Shall we all go down to the station? That was a very good point you made, Mr. Ellsworth, about putting Columbus in chains. Be careful not to say a word, Westy, my boy. Are you going down to the station with us, Mr. Blakeley?"

CHAPTER XIX
SERVICE

Gee whiz, I don't know what I would have done if my father had insisted on my telling all about it. What would *you* have done? If there are two scout laws and you have to break one in order to obey the other, what can you do about it? There's a sticker for you.

But, anyway, one good thing, my father has a lot of respect for Mr. Ellsworth. And when he saw how Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Martin stood, oh, boy, he was with us. But, gee whiz, I felt sorry for my mother on account of her having a convict for a son. She cried and hugged me and everything when we started away, and my sister made a big fuss, too. That was because I had never been a convict before.

Now I'll tell you what I think. I don't how much Mr. Ellsworth knew, and I don't know how much Mr. Martin knew, but they knew something about Charlie Slausen. I mean they knew what kind of a fellow he was. Maybe they thought he had something to do with the fire, and maybe they thought the facts would come out. I don't know what they thought. All I know is what happened.

Down at the station we were held for a hearing the next day. They didn't keep us there, but they patrolled us or paroled us or whatever you call it, in the custody of our parents. We agreed that we wouldn't run away. Gee whiz, why should we run away? There's plenty of fun in Bridgeboro.

As soon as Westy and I were alone together I said, "What are we going to do? We have to tell when the case comes up. We can't refuse to tell the judge what we were there for."

He said, "Maybe it would be all right for us to say we saw Charlie Slausen there. We needn't say what we went there for."

"Then they'll say *he* set fire to the place," I said, "and I don't believe he did. Just because everybody always thinks the worst about him, that isn't saying that he'd do a thing like that, he's always needing money, that fellow is, and right away they'll say he started the fire maybe to get the insurance on his car."

"He doesn't own it," Westy said.

"Maybe he does," I told him. "How do *we* know? I'm not going to tell anybody he was there unless I have to. Let them find it out."

"We'll have to tell everything to-morrow," Westy said.

I said, "I'm not thinking of to-morrow. I'm thinking of to-day. If we have

to tell he was there, it will look bad for him. If he tells himself it won't look so bad."

Westy said, "A tall chance we stand of getting him to tell."

I said, "Well, if they force it out of us it will look bad for him."

"How do you think the fire started?" Westy asked me.

"How do I know?" I said. "Maybe he dropped a match or something. But he isn't so bad that he'd burn the place down on purpose, I know that. I'd like to know what your father and Mr. Ellsworth think. I bet they think he did it. I bet the reason they were willing for us not to talk to-day was because they think that if nobody says anything yet, they can prove something against him. Hey? I bet they've got some plans for to-morrow."

"What are we going to do this afternoon?" Westy wanted to know.

"I'm going to help clear away the stuff," I told him.

"Good idea," he said. "Let's round up all the troop."

We called up most of the fellows and we went to see those who didn't have 'phones, and we fixed it up to all go up to Willow Place in the afternoon and help. That was some afternoon. The wreckage of the shop was all over the sidewalk and the place looked like Thanksgiving dinner when Pee-wee Harris gets through with it. We started helping the men to haul boards and stuff, and parts of cars, away from the walk, and raking out the middle of the streets so as not to leave any nails and broken window glass for autos to run over. We might better be doing that than be out hiking in the woods, that's what I told them.

About the middle of the afternoon Charlie Slausen came over. He seemed awful worried, kind of. He called Westy and me aside and asked us if we had told anybody about the night before.

I said, "No, we haven't. We got away with it so far, lucky for us, but when the judge starts asking us questions to-morrow, we'll have to tell. We can't lie to him. If they ask us if we saw anybody at the shop we'll have to say we did, and they can make us tell everything that happened if they want to."

He said, "You didn't tell them anything about seeing me?"

"No," I told him, "because I thought they'd start thinking you set fire to the place and we know you didn't."

"My father thinks you did," he said.

"Let him think so," I told him; "we should worry. All I'm afraid of is that they'll make us tell about meeting you here, and then they'll say it's funny you didn't come out right away after the fire and say so yourself. We've got things fixed till to-morrow, but everything will come out then."

He said, "You kids are a couple of bully little scouts. Come over here; I want to talk to you."

"I don't mind," I said.

CHAPTER XX
A PROMISE

The rest of the scouts in the troop were working away, getting the street cleaned, and I guess they didn't notice us. We went back across the field to our old railroad car, and I said, "Come ahead in; nobody'll bother us in here."

It smelled kind of smoky inside, I suppose on account of the fire. One of the doors was open so the smoke that blew in hadn't gone out. It was kind of dusty and dingy, too. The old plush seats were all full of dust. But, anyway, we didn't care, because it was our car and we liked it better than a Pullman car. It seemed awful quiet and nice in there; you know how it seems on Sunday afternoons.

Charlie said, "You've got it mighty nice in here."

"This car has caused us a lot of worry and trouble," Westy said. "But things will be all right when we get it down by the river."

"You can move it across Willow Place all right now," Charlie said. "All you need is power."

"You leave that to us," I told him. "The engineer on the milk train is a good friend of ours. But, anyway, we're not thinking about the car now."

He said, "You boys are aces up."

"We've done the best we could so far," I told him. "Gee whiz, we don't want to get anybody in trouble."

He just said, "You see how it is with me; I'm up against it. Your fathers trust you, but mine doesn't trust me. I know I've done some blamed fool things, but I wouldn't burn a building down—why, that's arson. I could be sent up for ten years for that. But the people of this old burg are just waiting to get something on me. If my father knew I was here last night, that would be enough for him. See?"

Westy said, "Well, he knows *we* were here last night and that seems to be enough for him, too."

"Yes, but how about to-morrow?" Charlie asked us. "All you kids have to do to clear yourselves is to spill all you know. The flashlight business is bad enough, then on top of that if you say you saw me here and that I was here when you left, that will look bad, won't it? You remember when I damaged my flivver last year? The old man was sore because he thought I was just trying to stick the insurance company for fifty or so. That's him all over—suspicious. He's always looking for trouble. He isn't like your fathers."

Gee, I knew that well enough, but I didn't say so. Because a fellow isn't to

blame on account of the kind of a father he has wished onto him.

"So you see how it is," he said; "and it's got me good and worried. I didn't eat any breakfast and I didn't eat any dinner. I was going up to see you fellows, but then I thought I wouldn't, because your folks don't like me and it might make them suspicious. Everybody's against me."

He looked out of the window as if he were afraid some of the fellows would come over. Honest, I felt sorry for him; I just couldn't help it.

I said, "Don't worry. I know that bunch. They won't stop till they get the whole street looking like Spotless Town."

He said, "So there it is. My father knows I need money. A tall chance I'd have of getting any from him; you'd have to chloroform him before he'd give up a postage stamp. That's him. You know what an old grouch he is. Once I shouted some crazy nonsense about burning the place down; I was just mad, that's all. But you see how it is."

It seemed funny to me, because at my house we never had any fights or anything, and I saw how my mother and sister were right because those Slausens were different kind of people from us.

He said, "All you kids have to do to cook my goose for me is to shout out that you left me here last night. If they don't send me to jail I'll have to beat it out west. You kept your mouths shut so far, and I've got to hand it to you, because you're a couple of A-1 little scouts. But the question is, can you stand the strain? We're the only three that know anything. Are you game? Will you stick? Or do I have to beat it to-night? It all hangs on you. If you say I was here when you left—you won't tell them that, will you? You won't let anybody force it out of you? Judge, lawyers, scoutleaders——"

"You mean scoutmaster," Westy said.

"You won't tell *anybody*—in the court or anywhere?"

Gee, I felt sorry for him, because I could see he was terribly worried. I knew nobody had any use for him, and I thought that maybe already Mr. Ellsworth had some suspicions about him.

"Give me your promise," he said, "both of you. Nobody can force you to talk if you don't want to—can they? All you fellows came here to-day to help clear up. That shows you've got the right stuff in you. Won't you help a friend out? I'm not asking you to do anything but just keep your mouths shut. You're not afraid of O'Day and that bunch, are you? Now's the time to show if you're really *scouts*."

I said, "A scout is supposed to help people in trouble, I don't deny that. But we don't know anything about the law. If the judge says we have to tell, I suppose we'll have to tell. But, anyway, there's one thing I want to ask you. I know you got caught doing some things—you know what I mean. And I know a lot of people think—but, anyway, I want to ask you this, and I'll promise not

to tell your answer. Did you set fire to the shop or didn't you?"

He just looked straight at me and he said, "As sure as I'm sitting here in this old car *I didn't*. Do you want me to swear? I took your flashlight——"

"I'm not thinking about that," I told him. "That won't keep me from believing you. I'm just asking you to tell me honest and true if you did or not."

"As sure as I'm sitting here, I didn't," he said, good and loud.

"Then how do you think it started?" Westy asked him. "Do you think *somebody* did it?"

"Sure somebody did it," he said. "Didn't they find some match ends near the cotton waste that burned up?" he said.

"I didn't know that," I told him.

"But what good does that do me?" he wanted to know.

I said, "Well, we'll help you out."

"*On the level?*" he shouted. "You won't say a word? You'll be good scouts and keep your mouths shut?"

"That shows how much you know about scouts," I told him. "They never keep their mouths shut. But, anyway, we'll do something better than that. *We'll find out who set fire to the shop.* That's the kind of things we're supposed to do. If you say honest and true that you *didn't*, we'll say honest and true that we'll *find out who did*. What do you suppose *we* care about courts, and judges, and keeping our mouths shut? Gee whiz, there's not much fun in that. You said last night we were good at tracking. All right, then, you leave it to us."

CHAPTER XXI
FOOTPRINTS

"Now we're in for it," Westy said. "Now you put your foot in it."

"Put my foot in what?" I asked him.

"A lot we can do between now and ten o'clock to-morrow morning," he said; "even if it's true that somebody set fire to the place. How are we going to solve the thing between now and to-morrow morning? He doesn't take any stock in that and I don't blame him. I bet he'll beat it to-night."

"I bet he won't," I said. "He didn't have money enough last night to buy us a couple of sodas. I'd like to know where he'll beat it to."

"He's good and sore at us," Westy said.

"I should worry," I told him; "he knows we won't tell till we're asked. How could we promise to refuse to tell if the judge makes us? A lot you know about courts. The only court you know anything about is a tennis court. If we don't answer questions we'll get in trouble ourselves, and how is that going to help him? He didn't do it, I could see that. Only he can't afford to have people know he was there. He's in bad with everybody. Probably now they're trying to trace his movements yesterday. Even Mr. Ellsworth thinks he's no good. We don't know what they're up to."

"Well, how do we know anybody set fire to the shop?" Westy wanted to know.

"How do we know who left these match ends all around the floor of this car—and these cigarette butts?"

You ought to have seen Westy stare.

"I don't smoke and you don't smoke and none of us fellows smoke. Well then, how did these ends of cigarettes get here? Somebody was in this car last night. Don't you suppose I noticed that before I asked him about how the fire started? Believe me, I'm not taking Charlie Slausen's word for much. But I'll tell you this, he isn't as bad as people think he is. What do you suppose Chief O'Day cares who he sends to jail as long as his name gets into the newspapers? '*Clever catch by Bridgeboro's chief*' that's all *he's* thinking about. He isn't smart enough to catch cold, even."

"Well, what are we going to do?" Westy asked me.

"Now you're talking," I said. "First we're going to go over and help the rest of the fellows. When we get through and they have all gone home, we're coming back here. Then we're going to start. We don't want any one to know about this but ourselves."

By about five o'clock all the members of the troop had gone home and Westy and I went back over to the car.

I said, "As long as we know there was some one here last night the next thing to do is to see if we can find any footprints."

In the ground, just at the foot of the step, we found a couple printed there just as plain as day.

"This is a cinch," Westy said.

"Easier than keeping our mouths shut," I told him.

Now those footprints went in a straight line over to where the shop had stood and there we lost them on account of the stuff that was all strewn around there. But under where the window had been we found a lot of footprints. I guess some of them were our own. But there weren't any except right there, and I suppose that was on account of the sidewalk on Willow Place being so near.

Westy said, "If anybody sneaked into the shop I bet he didn't go along the street when he came out, especially if the fire was already started."

I said, "Well then, he must have crossed the street and hit into the Sneezenbunker land. If you look at the map I made you'll see how everything was around there."

So then we went across the street and looked at the edge of the field where it ran along by the sidewalk. Westy was standing in the field right between the two rusty old tracks and he called, "Here's a footprint good and plain."

Good night, we were in luck. Somebody had started walking the tracks toward the river. We couldn't find footprints in the hard earth between the tracks, where they ran across the Sneezenbunker land, but when the tracks began getting into the low, damp ground toward Cat-tail Marsh, we could see the prints just as plain as writing.

Over the marsh the old tracks run on a kind of trestle and we had to walk the ties. There were no footprints, exactly, on the ties, but there were little chunks of mud on some of them. We were on the track of somebody, all right.

There were no more footprints when we got to Van Schlessenhoff's field because the tracks run through the grass there. But there was no place to go down that way except to the river, and there wasn't any building anywhere about except the little shack that the men use when they go rail shooting in the fall. That little shack is on Mr. Van Schlessenhoff's field and I guess it's about a couple of hundred feet from the tracks. It's right close by the river.

We stopped where we were on the tracks and Westy said, "What shall we do? Go over to the shack?"

It was beginning to get dark now and it seemed pretty lonesome down there. It's a dandy spot, down there by the river. The town seems a long distance away. You can only just see the top of the High School through the

trees. I should worry, I wouldn't care if I couldn't see any of it. I was glad we were going to have our old car down there. It was awful still, except for the frogs croaking, and the crickets in the field.

I didn't exactly want to go over to that shack and I guess Westy felt the same way. I'm not afraid of tramps but, gee whiz, I'm not especially stuck on bandits. And there were a lot of those around lately, shooting up automobiles.

"Well, we're here and we've got to go over," I said, "or else what was the use of coming down here? There's somebody in that shack, I bet."

We went over toward the shack, and tiptoed when we got close to it, so as not to make a bit of noise. The door was shut and there wasn't any window. We came right close to the boards and held our breath and listened....

CHAPTER XXII
IN THE SHACK

Westy said, “Sh-h, do you hear anything inside?”

We both stood there listening, but there wasn’t a sound.

I said, “If it’s a bandit what will we do?”

“Shall I open the door?” he whispered.

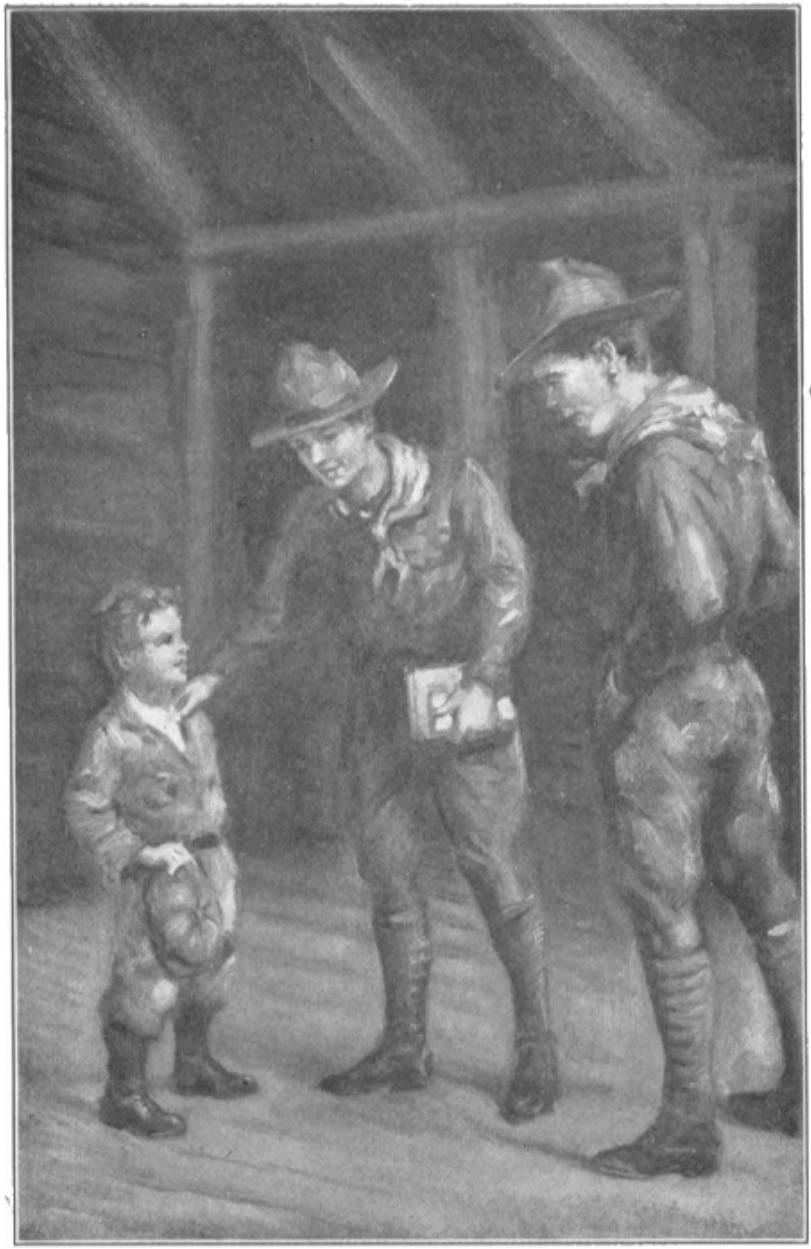
He opened the door ever so little and we peeked in.

“Nothing there,” I said.

“Sh-h, yes, there is,” Westy whispered. “Look.”

Over in the corner was something that looked like a bag, and as I looked at it I saw it was a person. It was a kid, about ten years old I guess. He had a gray suit on. He was sound asleep.

“Some bandit,” Westy said. “Who is it, do you know?”



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I said, “Search me. That’s a funny looking outfit he’s got on. Shall we wake him up?”

Westy said, “Sure.”

So we began shaking him and pretty soon he opened his eyes and began gaping and staring. I guess the kid must have thought he was dreaming because he curled up again. Then when I spoke he gave another yawn and sat up and began rubbing his eyes and staring at us. His hair was all mussed up and he reached for his hat, kind of half awake. Then I saw that his hat and his suit were both made out of the same kind of stuff, muslin sort of. I saw his shoes were awful thick, too. His suit was all wrinkled and it didn't fit him very well and he looked awful funny.

He was good and scared when he found he was really awake and that there was somebody there. All of a sudden he stood up and he looked as if he was going to make a break for the door. Then I saw that his trousers came almost down to his ankles.

I said, "You needn't be scared; we're not going to hurt you."

He said, "I wouldn' leave yer take me back."

I said, "Take you back where?"

We saw he was trying to edge around to the door, so Westy stood there so he couldn't get out. It was awful dark and damp in there. There were spider-webs all around inside, and you could smell the earth. I lifted up the board he had been lying on and there were all worms under it and slugs that went scooting around.

I said, "What are you doing here? Where did you come from, anyway?"

He said, "If you don't tell them, if you don't take me back I'll—I'll give you—as much as a thousand dollars."

I said, "Thanks. You haven't got it with you, have you?"

"I'm—I'm going to get it," he said. "If you tell—if you take me back—you'll only get three hundred dollars."

I said, "Three hundred dollars is nothing. I wouldn't take you back for less than five thousand including the war tax. We accept your proposition. Now tell us where you came from. You don't belong in Bridgeboro?"

Poor little kid, he was so scared he was trembling all over. "If I tell you, you'll take me back," he said. He looked at me as if he thought I was crazy. Gee whiz, I guess he was right.

Westy said, "You came from some home or other?"

"Are you going to tell?" the kid asked us, good and scared.

"What home?" Westy asked him. "The Boys' Home up in Willisville?"

"I wouldn't go back there," the kid said. "I'll give you as much as a thousand dollars——"

Gee whiz, he was a generous kid. I said, "Give us a cigarette, will you?"

Good night, he pulled about three packages out of his pocket. He was a walking cigar store. Some of the cigarettes were loose and all crunched up. I took one of them and stuck it in my mouth.

Westy said, kind of surprised, “What are you doing?”

I said, “We should worry. We’re criminals, aren’t we? We’re up for arson and we’re out on patrol or parole or whatever you call it. We’re going from bad to worse. Got a match, kid?”

Oh, boy! He dug his hand into his pocket and fished out about a hundred. They fell all over the floor.

I said, “You’ve got matches enough here to set the river on fire.”

Pretty soon out came a big pasteboard box like matches come in. It was half full, and matches went falling out of it, all over the ground.

I said, “The next time you empty your pockets, kid, you’d better stand in a bath tub. You don’t carry a fire extinguisher with you, do you? What are you digging for now? The thousand dollars?”

“I got a cigar,” the kid said; “but it’s busted.”

I said, “You don’t happen to have a couple of corn-cob pipes, do you? Do you give out certificates with tobacco? Look at this, Westy,” I said. “Here’s about a thousand dollars’ worth of matches right here. This kid is a whole sulphur mine. Where are you going to get the thousand dollars, kid?” I asked him.

“I’m—I’m going to invent a submarine,” he said.

“Good night!” I said, going through his pockets for more matches. “That’s a good idea. Under the water is about the safest place for you. I hope you carry fire insurance. You started a peach of a fire last night, didn’t you?”

“I can start a bigger one than that,” he said.

Just then I hauled out from one of his pockets a book. The cover was all broken off it and it was all loose and torn. The title-page said SKYHIGH SAM AND HIS SUBMARINE.

“Who’s this fellow?” I said.

“That’s a funny name for a kid that goes down in a submarine—Skyhigh.”

“He used to have a balloon,” the poor kid said.

I said, “Well, anyway, you’ve got him beat on matches. You started a bigger fire than *he* ever did, that’s one thing. What’s your name?”

“Sam,” he said.

“Cigarette Sam and his Famous Fire,” I said. “You’ve got Skyhigh beaten twenty ways. You’re a *real* hero. Come on, let’s go get something to eat. Do you know how to eat? Never mind the matches. We’ll send a couple of men down here with a wagon to get them.”

“Do I have to go back?” the poor little kid wanted to know.

“You stick to us,” I said. “We’ve got a wild, savage railroad car that has never been tamed. You were in it last night. Did I guess right? That railroad car has had more adventures than all Skyhigh’s submarines and airships put together. That car can’t be kept in a domestic state. It can’t even be kept in the

state of New Jersey. If you want real adventures come with us. Only I tell you beforehand it's a wild life. Now what do you say?"

Gee whiz, the poor kid looked at me as if he thought I was crazy. Maybe I am, but what's the difference? You can have a lot of fun when you're crazy.

CHAPTER XXIII
ADVENTURES OF CIGARETTE SAM

The poor kid was willing to go with us because I guess he thought we were a couple of wild adventurers. As soon as he saw we were all right and believed in pirates and highwaymen and things, he was with us. He saw we were strong for the SKYHIGH SAM SERIES too, and so he knew it would be all right to trust us. I told him that he was even greater than Skyhigh Sam. That wasn't saying much, but he thought it was.

On the way up and after we got to the car we found out all about the poor little duffer. He said he had started out from the Boys' Home up in Willisville. He said that some people had sent a lot of books there for the kids, and that was how Skyhigh Sam got into the Boys' Home.

It's too bad they didn't keep him there.

That poor kid sneaked out one night and started off to conquer the world with fifty cents a lady gave him. He had Skyhigh Sam with him. Then he bought four packs of cigarettes and a big box of matches. He picked up a cigar in the street, too.

He walked to Bridgeboro in the night and nobody stopped him. He didn't know where he was going, but anyway he was going to invent a submarine. After that he was going to sell it to the government—that's what he told us.

That first night he crawled through a place where one of the boards was broken under Tony's Lunch Wagon. He said he was pretty hungry. That's just like great inventors. He said there were all toadstools under the wagon. Maybe if he had been a scout he would have known that the kind under there were good to eat. Even raw they're better than nothing. But anyway he didn't eat any. And he was good and hungry. He could hear people above him in the wagon, and he knew they were eating. I guess he saw it was a hard life starting out to be an inventor.

The next morning he didn't dare to go out because he was afraid some one would see him and send him back to the Home. So he stayed there all day. In the night he heard some good news. He heard that he was worth three hundred dollars. He heard them talking up in the lunch wagon about a kid running away from the Home up in Willisville and he heard them say how three hundred dollars' reward was offered to any one who brought him back. I guess the poor kid never knew he was worth so much money. I guess up to then he thought he wasn't worth more than about nineteen cents, wholesale.

He was pretty hungry, but he decided that he'd stay there till he thought of

a good submarine, for then he'd get a thousand dollars, on account of the government always paying that much to Skyhigh Sam for inventions. He told us that if he could get the thousand dollars before anybody found him around there, then he could give that to anybody that found him and they'd keep still because a thousand dollars is better than three hundred. Poor little kid, you can laugh, but honest, that's just what he told us.

Pretty soon came the terrible moment in his career. I got that out of the movies—*terrible moment in his career*. Tony moved the lunch wagon away and the first thing our brave young hero knew there he was right out in the light of day. By that you can see he was up against the housing problem, too.

Anyway he showed more sense than Skyhigh Sam ever had. He took off his funny looking orphan asylum jacket, so nobody would notice him, and while everybody was laughing and shouting over in the field, on account of Tony moving over, he picked up a part of a sandwich that somebody had thrown away, and I guess it tasted pretty good to him.

After that he went over to the station and hid under the platform of the freight house. He was a greater inventor than Edison because Edison never even did that. Gee whiz, it's a wonder he didn't set the freight house on fire. All the while he kept watching our car being moved and I bet he wished he could come out and be with us, poor little kid. Believe me, we could have used his appetite that afternoon if we had only known.

After the circus was all over and we fellows left the car to go home, he sneaked over and went into it. He picked up some odds and ends of sandwiches and things that were left around after the terrible battle. I hope he got the cheese sandwich that I dropped by accident, because it was a dandy one—good and thick.

I asked him how he liked the car when he first went inside it and he said it was like a castle. Believe me, it's more like an insane asylum half the time. He said he played it was a submarine and when it began to get dark he made believe it was going down, down, under the ocean. Gee, he's an awful funny kid. Even now he talks that way.

Anyway, then he started smoking cigarettes. I guess he ate them alive. After a while the submarine came up and there was a big British ship right near. That was Slausen's Auto Repair Shop. If he only could have torpedoed the shop it would have saved a lot of trouble, but he decided that he'd set fire to it instead. He didn't exactly decide that he would, but he did just the same. Actions speak louder than thoughts.

He went over and climbed into the shop through the window, Skyhigh Sam, cigarettes, matches and all. Underneath the work bench was some nice cotton waste and he lay down on that and went to sleep. He must have been there when we were there, but he was dead to the world. I guess maybe he was

dreaming about submarines and things.

He said he didn't know what time it was when he woke up, but he was hungry. He said it was all dark all around. He said it smelled like kerosene. No wonder. Gee, I've slept on balsam and moss and all kinds of things, but I never slept on cotton waste. So then, *g-o-o-d night,* he struck a match!

And pretty soon after that was when I heard the fire whistle.

CHAPTER XXIV
THE THREE OF US

That was the match! Talk about your baseball matches and your rowing matches. That was the world renowned parlor match. The great inventor got out just in time, with his ammunition. You know the rest.

He didn't know how much depended on our finding him and on his telling the truth. But anyway, he didn't seem to know about it being so serious to set a building on fire—I knew we wouldn't have any trouble making him say what he did. Gee, he seemed to like to tell about it.

We were sitting in the car after dark on that Sunday night, when he told us about his career of glory. He didn't tell us the way I told it to you. We had to keep asking him questions and that's how we got it out of him. He was an awful funny kid. When he made believe about something he talked as if that thing just really happened. He said we could be partners with him in his new submarine if we wanted to.

I said, "Thanks just the same, but I've got the Silver Fox patrol on my hands and that's enough." Believe me, that's a whole world war in itself.

He said we'd divide up the thousand dollars.

"Sure," I told him, "and we'll buy a couple of tons of matches."

He seemed to think that now we were friends with him he'd never have to go back to the Home.

He asked us, "Are we going to live in this car?"

I said, "You've got in with a tribe of wild scouts. Do you know what they are? They inhabit the marshes and the woods and the candy stores and ice cream parlors——"

"We have ice cream every Sunday," he piped up. "But only one helping. We have doughnuts, too. Do they inhabit the river?" he wanted to know.

"Who? The doughnuts?" I asked him. "Not the ones around here. They inhabit the bakery stores."

He said, "After I invent that submarine I'm going to invent an engine."

Westy said, "What do you say we invent some supper?"

So then Westy and I went out on the platform of the car. We told the inventor to stay inside.

I said, "What are we going to do about this kid? I don't want to take him to my house because I don't want anybody to know yet. But if we go home to supper and leave him here he'll invent a way to escape."

"Or else he'll set fire to the car," Westy said.

“Once we hand this kid over,” I said, “that lets us out of the arson business and it also lets Charlie Slausen out. And we’ll get three hundred dollars’ reward, too, for finding the inventor.”

“I don’t care anything about that,” Westy said; “and I’m not worrying so much about our being accused. It’s all going to fall on Charlie when they make us talk.”

“Believe me,” I told him, “when they see this kid and his box of matches that will let Charlie out. I guess they won’t ask us any questions.”

Westy said, “What shall we do? Take him to court in the morning?”

“Sure,” I said, “matches and all. It won’t make any difference who didn’t start the fire as long as they know who did. You leave it to me, my father’s uncle on my mother’s side was a lawyer. What we have to do is to keep the inventor under cover till to-morrow.”

“I hate like the dickens to see him go back to the Home,” Westy said.

“You leave that to me, too,” I told him. “I’m an inventor. Come on over to Tony’s and we’ll get some eats for the poor kid.”

Westy stayed in the car with him while I went over. I got some soup in a pail and I got some sandwiches and a big piece of pie, and a hole with a doughnut around it to remind the kid of home sweet home. When I saw the way he could eat I nearly fainted. After he got through the only thing that was left was the hole in the doughnut—*good night*!

After a while I said, “Now you’re going to sleep here in this submarine to-night. We’re going to shut the doors so the water won’t come in. We’re going to leave one window open so in case the water comes in it can get out again. You’re supposed to sleep here and guard the place against whales. Understand? We’re going to go and see if we can find some ships to sink. You’re supposed to stay here till we get back. If you wake up stay right here and we’ll be back early in the morning. If there isn’t enough water to go down in, you’ll find some in the water cooler. If you want to make believe you’re on a desert isle, step out in the aisle. But don’t go till we get back because we’re going to plan a big attack on the Court House to-morrow morning and we want you with us.”

“I’ll bring the matches, hey?” he said, “and we’ll——”

“Thanks,” I told him; “we’ll take care of the matches. Let’s have them, please. They may get wet under the ocean. You roll up on the seat and go to sleep, and maybe to-morrow we’ll elect you king.” He was asleep before we left him.

“One thing I’m thankful for,” said Westy, as we started home.

“What’s that?” I asked him.

“That the new Court House is fire-proof,” he said.

CHAPTER XXV
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

We knew well enough he'd sleep all night.

"I kind of like him," Westy said while we were on our way home; "I don't know what it is but there's something about him I kind of like. I wish he didn't have to go back to Willisville."

"He's a funny little duffer," I said. "There'll be some surprise when we stand him up in front of Recorder Van Wort in the morning."

"Maybe they'll send him up for being a firebug," Westy said.

"A firebug?" I said. "He's a whole menagerie."

He said, "Well, I'm going to cut up through Terrace Place. I'll be at the car at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. You be there as soon as you can get there."

"I'll be there by eight," I told him. "You stop on your way and get him some breakfast from Tony's."

On the way up the hill to my house (we live up on Blakeley's Hill, it's dandy up there) I began to find out what people were thinking about the fire. Maybe you think just on account of the Silver Fox Patrol being so famous in the history of the world that Bridgeboro (that's where I live) is a great big place. Believe me, it isn't big enough to hold the Silver Fox Patrol. If Hoboken was about the size of an elephant, Bridgeboro would be about as big as Pee-wee. So that shows you. There are only two candy stores in Bridgeboro and one of them is no good. Bridgeboro is so slow and tired it has to be sitting down all the time; that's why they call it the county seat.

So everybody knows all about everybody else in Bridgeboro. They're good scouts, they're observant. Harry Donnelle says it takes a song three years to get from New York to Bridgeboro, even if it's fast music. Anyway we've got a dandy river in Bridgeboro only it doesn't stay there, it just passes through. Gee, I don't blame it.

Mr. Dallman, he was standing in front of his drug store (don't ever buy a soda in there whatever you do), he said to me, "Well, you kids have got yourselves in trouble, haven't you? What's the matter? Young Slausen been using you?"

From that I saw that people were suspecting him and not us. Gee whiz, that's the way it is when you have a bad name.

I said, "Westy Martin and I were the ones who had to go to the station. We're the ones that are accused if anybody is."

"Yes, but you kids never started that fire," he said. "You're just protecting somebody. They'll have young Slausen behind the bars by this time tomorrow. He and Bert Waring are a good pair. I guess young Waring wanted to see his Buick burned up all right. Charlie'll clear up a couple of hundred dollars or so on his little flivver. I hope he'll pay me the three dollars he owes me when he gets his insurance. What were you kids doing in there, anyway?"

I said, "If I tell you will you promise not to tell anybody?"

"It's none of *my* concern," he said.

"Well, we were standing in there," I said. "So now you know what we were doing in there."

He kind of laughed and he said, "Well, you youngsters want to be careful and tell the truth or Chief O'Day will have the whole lot of you in the lockup."

"Is that so?" I said, kind of mad. "If I couldn't find out who did a thing any better than he does I'd get a job as commander-in-chief of a kindergarten. He's a regular Sherlock Nobody Holmes."

"He'll put young Slausen where he belongs," Mr. Dallman said; "he sees through this whole business."

"Oh, sure," I said, "he sees so fine that he can't even see three hundred dollars right under his feet. Good night, I'm going home."

I guess it was about nine o'clock when I got to the house. I was kind of anxious because I didn't know what to say about where I had been to supper. There wasn't anybody around and I was just starting upstairs when I heard my father call me. I went down again and I saw him in the library. He was sitting there in the dark. I felt awful funny, kind of, because it seemed as if he was feeling bad. I kind of knew it was on account of me. He was just sitting in the big leather chair by the library table. He was smoking a cigar and the light in that cigar was all the light there was.

He said, "You've been at Westy's, I suppose?" Because I often stay there Sunday nights to tea.

I said, "I had supper with Westy." And right away I was kind of sorry because it was true the way I meant it but it wasn't true the way *he* meant it.

I said, "Where's Mamsy and Marjorie?" (That's what I call my mother—Mamsy.)

He said, "They went to church and then to some meeting. Sit down, Roy."

Then he didn't speak for about a minute. The big clock out in the hall sounded awful loud.

CHAPTER XXVI
IN THE DARK

I didn't know what to say so I said, "Are you waiting for them?"

He said, "No, I was waiting for you, Roy. I wanted to speak to you." Then he said how I never made him worry any but how he had been worrying that day. He said, "I was hoping you would be here to take a little stroll this afternoon."

I said, "I was helping clear up—at Slausens." Lots of times I go for a walk with him Sundays, because he doesn't care about the machines.

Then he said how he had been worrying a lot because nobody belonging to him had ever been arrested. He said that morning was the first time he had ever seen inside the police station and it made him feel ashamed. He said, "You know you're under arrest, you and Westy, just the same as if you were in a cell." He said, "You understand that, don't you, Roy?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "It's only because I'm a rich man and they know who I am and trust me that you have been free to-day. The same with Westy." He said, "I would rather have bought Mr. Slausen's shop, I would rather have bought the whole field from Mr. Downing, than to think that you——"

"You don't think that, do you?" I asked him.

He said, "I do not, Roy. I would rather have thrown up a bungalow for you scouts down by the river than to think so. And you know I would have done it, too, gladly. No son of mine needs to burn down property——"

I said, "Then why do you talk about it?" I just started to cry, I couldn't help it. "It isn't a question of needing to," I said. "We wouldn't do it, anyway—we wouldn't."

He said, "I'm glad to hear you say that, Roy."

"Mr. Ellsworth knows we wouldn't," I said. "Fellows that have good names don't need to worry," I told him. "They're safe. It's only in crazy stories that scouts get suspected of committing crimes and things. We should worry. It's the people that haven't got good names that have to look out. Suppose I told you a lie once, then you'd think I was telling you one now, and that wouldn't be fair."

He said, "It would be natural, Roy."

I said, "Well, if a fellow doesn't tell lies, then people have got a right to believe him, haven't they? Like Mr. Ellsworth does. If you say I have to tell what we were doing in the garage, then I have to tell. Gee, I admit that. But

I've got a reason not to tell and you'll know to-morrow. Chief O'Day isn't as smart as he thinks he is, I know that much."

For about a minute my father didn't say anything and I could hear the big clock ticking. I could hear the crickets outside, too, so that's a sign school would be closing soon. No wonder everybody likes crickets.

Then my father said, "Roy, I want you to know I trust you." He said, "I waited here for you to tell you that." Then he said how I never told him a lie and how that was like putting money in the bank, kind of. Because now I could draw on that. He said now he had to believe me and believe everything was all right, just because I had a right to be trusted. And he said when I asked for him to let me keep still about it, he had to say yes because my credit was good. He said he had to trust me and believe me now. He said even *if* he wanted to know why we were in Slausen's, still he'd have to do the way I wanted, and let me keep still, because I had kind of like a lot of honor saved up. When he talked like that it made me feel awful sorry for Charlie Slausen. But anyway, one thing, my father wouldn't think a fellow ought to get in trouble for something he didn't do, even if that fellow wasn't much good. He's fair and square, my father is.

He said, "I'm going to leave everything to you, Roy, because we've always been on the square with each other." That's just what he said. Then he said, "Only I want you to remember that you must tell the full truth to Judge Van Wort." He said, "You will be under oath. You must tell all you know. To try to protect the guilty is a crime. You know that, don't you?"

Gee whiz, I wondered how much he knew about Charlie Slausen. Everybody in town seemed to have it in for him.

Then my father said, "You and Westy will clear yourselves, of course. I'm not worrying about that. But I want you to stand up bravely and tell everything you know. I don't want you to be nervous. I'll be there. I couldn't go to the city till this thing is settled."

"It'll be settled all right," I told him.

He said, "Remember, you must tell *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*."

I said, "Believe me, they'll get the biggest dose of the truth they ever had."

Then he said he was going to bed and that he wasn't going to worry about it at all, and he wasn't going to think about it, because I was a scout and maybe I knew what was best, and anyway he knew I'd tell the truth, so he should worry about that.

But just the same he stayed downstairs there in the dark for a couple of hours. Because a long time after, I could hear him winding the big grandfather's clock down in the hall. Then I could hear his footsteps on the stairs. He came up awful slow like.

CHAPTER XXVII
ON OUR WAY

If all the lessons in algebra were like that hearing, or whatever you call it, I'd be satisfied, because there wasn't any. That was the day that Westy and I got sentenced to three hundred dollars' reward. So if you were looking forward to seeing us get sent to prison for four or five years, you get left. I bet you're sorry.

Anyway I'll tell you about it. Good and early Westy and I went down to the submarine to get the inventor. He was the one that invented sleep all right, that kid. He was sprawled all over the floor under one of the seats, dead to the wicked world.

Westy said, "He's sleeping even sounder than when we left him last night."

"Why shouldn't he?" I said. "Look at the practice he's had all night. Look where his feet are; all over the plush seat of our slightly used twin six Packard touring car."

Westy said, "You mean slightly abused. What shall we do? Wake him up? Get hold of his neck, will you, and haul him out?"

We hauled him out but it didn't do any good.

"Roll him up the aisle," I said.

We tried that and it didn't do any good.

"You get hold of his legs," Westy said, "and I'll get hold of his neck and we'll swing him like a hammock."

"That only rocks him to sleep more," I said. "There's nothing to do but wait for the next earthquake."

"That may be a hundred years," Westy said. "Maybe when we move the car across Willow Place he'll wake up. We'll tell Mr. Jenson to give it a good hard bump."

"That will be next Saturday," I said. "Maybe if the kid were only awake he could invent a way to wake himself up."

"Let's try once more," I said. "Scouts never give up."

"They never wake up, you mean," Westy said.

"You don't call this a scout, do you?" I asked him. "If he is he ought to be in the dormouse patrol. They're always supposed to be asleep."

"If we get him started once," Westy said, "there'll be an epidemic of scouting up in the Willisville Home. It's the only kind of an epidemic they haven't had up there."

I began poking him and shouting, "Wake up, inventor, Skyhigh Sam is

waiting to shoot you through his new patented million dollar cannon."

Pretty soon he opened one eye and shut it again. "If he opens it again prop it open," I said. "Pull on his leg, that's right."

After a while we brought him to, little by little.

I said, "Did you have a good sleep? Sleepy Hollow hasn't got anything on you. Get up and eat. Don't you want to go and see Recorder Van Wort? He's the bandit that takes all the money away from automobile speeders that come here with New York licenses. He lives in a cave in the Court House."

He said, "Where's my matches?"

I said, "Never mind, after this we're going to have you carry a gasoline torch to light you to bed when you sleep in cotton waste. Stand up and pull your belt down from your neck. Here, pull your jacket down, too. Now you look like the Wayhighman of Willisville. If Skyhigh Sam could see you now he'd go and invent a moving stairway for the equator just for spite. Are you hungry?"

He wasn't exactly hungry, but he drank two cups of coffee and ate three boiled eggs from Tony's just to show he wasn't mad. Then he was ready to go after the bandits.

"What would they do if we jumped our patrol?" I asked Westy.

He said, "You mean parole. I suppose they'd jump after us."

I said, "I wouldn't jump it. I'd scout pace it if I did anything."

He said, "The *Bridgeboro Record* will have the whole thing to-night. I bet they have me down as Roy Martin and you as Westy Blakeley. That's the way they usually do."

The kid said, "Are we going to see that bandit? Has he got a sword?"

I said, "You stick to us and maybe you'll grow up to be a nice train robber."

He said, "We'll rob mail cars, hey?"

"Sure," I said, "and female cars, too. All kinds, take your pick."

He said, "If we live on that car can I be the captain of it?"

I said, "You can be the brakeman. That's the man that breaks all the windows."

"If Mrs. Carlson, from the Home, comes we'll take her a prisoner, hey?" he said.

Poor little kid, I felt sorry for him because he didn't seem to think he was ever going back to the Home, and all the while we knew he'd have to. It made us feel kind of mean.

I said, "I never started a world war against a Boys' Home, inventor, but now that we're friends we'll stay friends, you can bet."

"Maybe I'll give you that box of matches," he said.

I said, "Thanks. Give me the book, too, and we'll start a bonfire."

He said, “We’ll blow up that Court House.”

I said, “We’re more likely to get blown up ourselves when we get there if we don’t hustle.”

It was about quarter to ten and we were on our way to the Court House. It seemed awful funny to be away from school; there weren’t any fellows around at all. The rest of the scouts in our troop were all in school.

I said to Westy, “If we don’t have to go to the penitentiary, maybe we’ll be out in time to go to school this afternoon—out of the frying pan into the fire.”

“I haven’t given up hope of the penitentiary,” Westy said.

“While there’s life there’s soap,” I said. “We’ll have to get our mothers to write us notes to our teachers, saying we had to stay away on account of being accused of a crime, and that we’ll try not to be late the next time.”

“What do you mean? The next time we commit a crime?” he wanted to know.

I said, “The next time I’m out on patrol—I mean parole—I hope it will be on a Wednesday on account of matinee at the Lyric.”

The inventor said, “I haven’t got any mother, so maybe if I have to have a letter maybe one of your mothers will write it, hey?”

Gee whiz, I just looked at Westy and he just kind of looked at me, but neither one of us said anything.

“Don’t you worry, inventor,” I said; “we’ve got mothers enough to go round; never you mind.”

He said, “Maybe if they don’t like me they wouldn’t give me a letter, hey? Maybe they won’t.”

CHAPTER XXVIII
“FINDINGS, KEEPINGS”

Now comes the big court scene. It’s short, that’s one good thing. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. I guess that’s why they called it a hearing. No wonder you couldn’t hear it, because there wasn’t anything to hear.

Recorder Van Wort sat behind a desk up on a platform and he was hammering with a mallet. He said everybody should keep still.

I whispered to Westy, “That’s a good idea, having that mallet. I think I’ll get one for our patrol meetings.”

“You’d better get an ax,” he said, under his breath.

Recorder Van Wort was making a man pay twenty-five dollars for stopping his automobile in the wrong place in front of a fire hydrant.

I whispered to Westy, “That would be a good place for the inventor to park, in front of a fire hydrant.”

Westy kind of giggled and Recorder Van Wort began pounding with his mallet.

I said, “Keep still; the first thing you know he’ll throw it at you.”

That room was full of people and I could see my father sitting with Mr. Martin. I could see Mr. Slausen, too, sitting on the other side of the room, and Charlie alongside of him. One thing, I was glad Charlie hadn’t run away. But he looked mighty scared and nervous as he sat there. No wonder, because he knew that as soon as we told about seeing him in the garage every one would suspect him. I guess he knew no one would believe him if he denied he had been there. I guess he was afraid of what might happen after Recorder Van Wort got through with us. We weren’t afraid on account of ourselves, but I felt awful sorry for that fellow.

Westy and I and the inventor sat down in the back seat, and it made me feel as if I had failed in arithmetic. That’s what Miss Munson calls a punishment. Gee whiz, in the movies that’s the seat I like best. Mr. Ellsworth came over and spoke to us, very serious. He didn’t know the kid was with us. I guess he couldn’t see him on account of not having a telescope. In the seat the poor little kid looked about as big as Bridgeboro on the map of the world.

Mr. Ellsworth whispered, “Boys, you mustn’t be afraid; you mustn’t be afraid of the recorder——”

I said, “Do you think I’m afraid of him just because he’s got a mallet? I should worry. I’m sorry I didn’t wear my belt-ax.”

He didn’t laugh, he just put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Your

fathers and I have trusted you. We know that you're not guilty——"

"Yes, and you think you know who is," Westy whispered.

"Sh-h," I said.

"You boys, you scouts, wouldn't shield a guilty man?" Mr. Ellsworth whispered.

I had to laugh when I thought of the inventor as a man.

Mr. Ellsworth whispered, "You needn't be afraid, just tell the truth. Tell why you were there and who you saw, if anybody, and—and—if it should appear that that person——"

Just then he had to stop whispering on account of the judge pounding with his mallet. Anyway, from what he said I knew that they were trying to wish that fire on Charlie Slausen, and I knew that poor fellow would be in a dickens of a fix when they began to ask him a lot of questions. Maybe they couldn't send him to jail yet, but, anyway, they could hold him for the grand jury. Gee, I wouldn't want to be held for that jury, I don't care how grand it is. One thing, if they found out Charlie was in there and knew that there were match ends near the cotton waste, that would look pretty bad for him, because he knew enough about that place not to throw match ends into the cotton waste.

I guess it was about ten minutes before our case was called, because Judge Van Wort delivered a lecture and told all about what he was going to do to people who broke the law. He said he was going to put a stop to a lot of things. I whispered to Westy that he ought to be on the High School nine, he was such a good shortstop.

Pretty soon, oh, boy, he said something to Jack Morse (he's a cop), and Mr. Morse called out:

"Wesleigh Martin and Roy Blakeley! Step down."

Gee whiz, then I felt kind of nervous. I knew everybody was looking at us. I could just *feel* my father looking at me. Recorder Van Wort, he didn't seem to care; he just started reading some papers.

"Come ahead," I whispered to the kid; "nobody's going to hurt you." He looked awful funny and little as he went down front with Westy and me.

There were a couple of cops down there in front of the desk. Mr. Brownell was down there, too. He's public persecutor, or whatever they call him. His son's in my class. The recorder just kept on reading the papers while we all stood there. The kid was good and scared, I guess.

Pretty soon the recorder laid down the papers and said, "Are you Roy Blakeley?"

I said, "Yes, sir." Gee, I was trembling a little.

Then he said, "Are you Wesleigh Martin?"

Westy said, "Yes, sir."

Then he looked kind of funny and he said. "And who is this boy?"

I was kind of nervous, all right, but I spoke up. I said, “This is the one who set fire to Mr. Slausen’s repair shop. He didn’t do it on purpose, so——”

The judge said, “What do you mean?”

I pulled out of my pocket the big box of matches and the book about Sam and his submarine, and I laid them on the judge’s desk. All around I could just kind of *feel* people staring and moving in their seats.

I said, “We found traces of him in our car—we found match ends and cigarettes. And we tracked him to Mr. Slausen’s shop.”

“So *that’s* what you were doing there, eh?” Mr. Brownell said.

The judge just said, “Let him tell his story.” I said, “We tracked him to the shop and from there we tracked him to the river. We found him asleep in the shack down there. That big box of matches belongs to him, so does the book. He admits he fell asleep in the shop, on the cotton waste, and he struck a match there——”

“Do I have to get hung?” the poor little kid cried.

I said, “He comes from the Willisville Home. He’s the kid they’ve been offering three hundred dollars’ reward for, but he’s worth more than that, that’s one sure thing——”

Then everybody began to laugh and the judge started pounding with his mallet. He said, to the kid, “Is all this true?”

“And I’m going to invent a submarine and get a thousand dollars,” the kid piped up. “These boys said I could be their partner.”

Then the judge started to ask him questions, nice and kind sort of, so as not to scare him. And everybody craned their necks and listened. I could see Charlie Slausen and he was smiling; he smiled right straight at me. I guess he saw the worst was over now, no matter what happened.

Gee whiz, nobody could say they didn’t believe that little fellow. He didn’t know how to lie, and besides he didn’t even seem to know it was wrong what he had done. So that way the judge got out of him the whole story, how he had bunked under Tony’s Lunch Wagon and all. The kid said, “So now can I be a bandit?”

The judge just said, “Well, here’s the cause of the fire, and that’s all there is to it.”

I said, “And if Chief O’Day had started to find out the way we did, he’d have been the one to discover it instead of us. You have to look for signs before you look for people. You’re supposed to make up your mind when you get through and not before you start.”

The judge said, kind of laughing, “But you must remember the chief isn’t a boy scout, so you’ll have to forgive him. And you boys will get three hundred dollars, it seems.”

“A lot we care about that,” I said. “We want this little fellow to stay with

us. Findings is keepings; everybody knows that's the rule. We've got a lot of room up at our house. I should worry about three hundred dollars. And we've got a private alarm and fire extinguishers and everything, so it's all right. And my sister likes kids, too, but she hates caterpillars. Most everything I want ——"

Good night, that was as far as I got. All of a sudden, who should I see but my mother, right there, putting her arms around me, and all that, and giving the inventor a good hug. She said he should go home with her and be a bandit—that's just what she said. Gee whiz, I guess the kid thought a cyclone struck him.

Mr. Brownell said, "Look out for the matches."

My mother said, "He shall have an electric light."

"Will it have a handle to turn it out?" the kid piped up.

The judge said he didn't know but he would remand (that means *put*) the inventor in the custody of my mother till they heard from the Home. Gee whiz, I never even knew my mother was there until that minute.

The kid said to my mother, "And I'll take you in my new car down in the field."

"Good night," I said to Westy; "the bandit has taken the car."

Outside a whole lot of people crowded around and wanted to get a look at the inventor. He was some famous inventor, all right. He was clutching his box of matches in one hand and Submarine Sam in the other, and he looked about as big as a speck. My father was there, and, oh, gee, but he looked happy. He said, "We'd have a famous inventor and a famous discoverer in the house." Maybe he meant my mother, hey?

There were a lot of ladies around our auto, and gee, but that old Cadillac looked big on account of the inventor looking so little. He sat in the middle of the back seat with my mother. Everybody was crazy about him. That's the way it is with girls—they're crazy about people who have had adventures.

I said to Westy, "The inventor started as a poor boy under Tony's Lunch Wagon, and now look, he has the world at his feet. They go crazy about bandits."

"Look," Westy whispered to me.

I was just going to step into the car when I looked where he pointed, and there, standing all by himself, quite a ways off, was Charlie Slausen. He looked as if maybe he was waiting to speak to us, only didn't dare to come up where all the people were.

"Go ahead," I said to our chauffeur; "we'll walk up. You've got a heavy enough load with the inventor."

After the car had started off we went over to where Charlie was standing. He looked awful funny, his eyes kind of, I don't know——

I said, “Well, what they don’t know won’t hurt them. We didn’t get you in dutch, did we? Didn’t I tell you to leave it to us?”

He just began patting me on the shoulder and he kind of put his other arm around Westy’s shoulder.

“We were lucky they didn’t ask us anything more,” Westy said.

I said, “We’re always lucky, we are. We were born on the seventh day of the seventh month, and we always eat seven helpings of dessert.”

He started across the way with his arms over our shoulders, and, gee whiz, we had to go.

“Where are we going?” Westy wanted to know.

“We’re going to get those sodas,” Charlie said. “How about it?”

“Nobody can stand up and say he ever saw me refuse a soda,” I said.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE STANDING ARMY SITTING DOWN

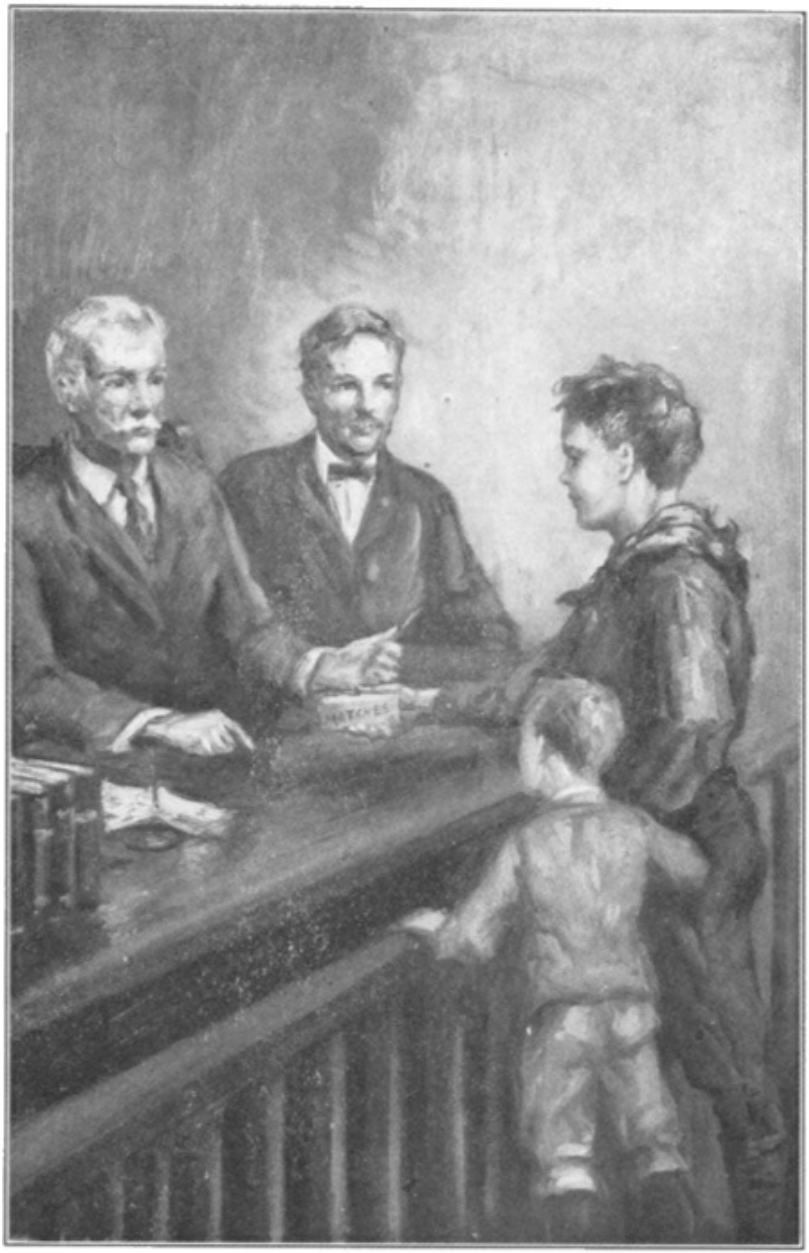
So that's the story of how the inventor came into our young lives, matches, Submarine Sam and all. He gave up smoking the day after he started it; I guess it interfered with his inventions. Anyway, it was only an experiment, that's what my father says, and he says all great inventors have to make experiments. His right name that we got from the Home was Alexis Alexander Sparks. It was so long that we decided to cut it up and use it in pieces. My mother called him Alexis, my sister called him Al, Harry Domicile called him Madam X, and most of the troop called him Sparksey. Mr. Ellsworth called him A.A.S.—always after submarines. My mother is a matron of that Home and she fixed it so we could send him back when we wanted to. But we never wanted to. The only person in Bridgeboro who calls him by his full name is Minerva Skybrow, because it reminds her of the history of Greece. Gee whiz, I don't want to be reminded about that. History and practical bookkeeping—*good night*. I like unpractical bookkeeping better. Anyway, Alexander the Great conquered Bridgeboro, and as long as we're talking about wars and things, I'll tell you about the Siege of Cat-tail Marsh. That's what comes next, and you don't get it in school. Don't you care.

Now before I tell you about the horrible things that happened in our innocent young lives I'll get rid of the two other patrols in our troop so we won't have to be bothered with them. One patrol is enough, that's what I say. Especially the Silver Fox Patrol—that's mine. But one scout from the raving Ravens we got wished on us and that was Pee-wee Harris. I guess you know him. If you don't you're lucky.

But first I have to get you across Willow Place over to the Sneezenbunker land. The next Saturday Mr. Jenson's locomotive gave our car another shove right across where the repair shop had stood, and it went across Willow Place fine and dandy, because we had dug the old tracks out and sort of cleared the way. Mr. Jenson said he wouldn't push the car any further because he thought the trestle over the marsh wasn't safe. He said he wasn't going to take any chances. We said, "All right, every little bit counts." So there was our home sweet home on the Sneezenbunker land, and the Sneezenbunkers didn't care, because there weren't any of them any more anyway. They were all dead. The Trust Company owns that land, and I said I guessed they'd trust us there because that was their business. They told my father it would be all right. But, gee whiz, we wanted to get down by the river. I said, "Foiled again, but what

care we? We'll stay here till something happens."

The next thing that happened the Ravens and the Elks (they've got forty-two merit badges, the Elks), they started up to Temple Camp; that's where we always go in the summer. My patrol decided to stay home until August, anyway, and camp in the old car and try to get it moved down to the river. Pee-wee is in the Ravens, but he's got about as much patrol spirit as a stray cat. He belongs everywhere, especially where there are eats. No one patrol can hold that kid. He said he was going to stay with us.



ROY HANDED THE BOX OF MATCHES TO THE JUDGE

I said, “You can’t do that on account of your patrol; they’ll have to vote on it.”

They voted on it all right, and every single one of them voted for him to

stay. Elected by a large unanimity, hey? It wasn't a vote; it was a census.

I said, "What do you fellows think the Silver Fox Patrol is? A Salvation Army Home? Haven't we got enough on our hands with Alexander the Great?"

That's all they cared about. Jiminies, my patrol is easy.

So the ones that were left in Bridgeboro were the following, only they weren't much of a following, because every one of them goes his own way:

First comes me—I mean I—correct. I'm patrol leader. If you want to know what I look like, look on the cover of this book. Maybe you think I'm always happy like that, but, believe me, if you had to manage that bunch you'd look sad. That picture was taken just after I got through subduing a strawberry sundae. Life is not all joy, quoth he; that's what I say.

If I should die Westy Martin would inherit my throne. He's kind of sober, that fellow is. He's got eleven merit badges. He's assistant. Next comes Dorry Benton. I wouldn't say anything against him only he's very saving. He does six good turns every Monday, and then he doesn't have to bother for the rest of the week. His favorite fruit is mashed potatoes. Next comes Huntley Manners —Bad Manners, that's what we call him. He's got the bronze cross. They've got a parrot up at his house. Gee whiz, I guess the parrot doesn't get a chance to talk much with him there. Then comes Charlie Seabury. Then comes Brick Warner, he's got red hair. Ralph Warner is his brother—it isn't his fault. They're twins. Last but not least comes Alexis Alexander Sparks, S. B.—scout bandit.

Then comes Pee-wee Harris, last but the most of all. But he isn't in my patrol. Thank goodness for that.

So now you know the brave warriors who stood the Siege of Cat-tail Marsh and took possession of the Bridgeboro River. You can just imagine us sitting there in the car, after the other two patrols have started for camp. Little we knew what was going to happen. And a lot we cared.

CHAPTER XXX
PEE-WEE IN ACTION

We had some fun in that car while it was on the Sneezenbunker land, and two or three of the fellows said maybe it wouldn't be so bad to keep it there. That was because it wasn't so far from Bennett's. But most of them said it was too near the center of civilization. Gee whiz, that was the first time I ever heard anybody call Main Street, Bridgeboro, the center of civilization.

I said, "I vote for Van Schlessenhoff's field down near the river."

Dorry Benton said, "I vote for it, too. But how are we going to get the car down there? That's the question."

"We can carry it by a vote," Hunt Manners said.

"We ought to be able to carry a vote, we've got two platforms," I told him.

Westy said, "Maybe if Mr. Jenson thinks the old trestle isn't strong enough, still he might be willing to give the car a start if we're not in it. It isn't the car he's thinking about, it's we fellows. Then we can walk down afterwards."

Gee whiz, I had never thought of that before. We got kind of used to having our meeting place there on the Sneezenbunker land, and it wasn't so bad. But now that we got to thinking about the river, good night, we couldn't get the idea out of our heads.

I said, "Let's go down to the river and look around and decide how we'll have things down there, in case we can get the car moved. Maybe we can use the shack where we found the inventor, as a kind of a branch headquarters."

"Can we catch fish down at that river?" the kid wanted to know.

I told him, "Sure, we can catch canned salmon and fishballs and baseballs and everything. When we go down there we'll let the fish know we're coming, we'll drop them a line."

So then we all started along the tracks down to the river to kind of look around down there and make plans.

I said, "I hope the field is still down there; I hope Mr. Van Schlessenhoff didn't put it in the market. Anyway, the river won't be there."

"What are you talking about?" Pee-wee yelled.

"I'm talking about whether ice cream should be fried or roasted," I said.

"You're crazy," he shouted.

"I admit it," I told him. "If I wasn't I wouldn't be talking to you."

"Why won't the river be there?" he began shouting.

"Because it flows past Bridgeboro," I told him. "Did you ever hear of a

river staying in one place? It takes an east-westerly course and flows into New York Bay. You learn that in the third grade."

"You're so smart—where does it rise?" he yelled.

I said, "It rises in the morning, that's more than you do."

"What do you mean, in the morning?" he fairly yelled.

"In the northwestern part of the morning," I said. "That's why a river has a bed. You rise from your bed, don't you? Posilutely. That shows your ignorance. I suppose you don't even know that Great Neck is south of Rubber Neck."

"You're crazy!" he yelled. "You think you're funny, don't you?"

Gee whiz, that's my favorite outdoor sport, jollying Pee-wee.

Now that afternoon that we followed the tracks down to the river it wasn't so easy as it was on that Saturday that Mr. Ellsworth went with us, nor on that Sunday that Westy and I followed the old rails down there, tracking the inventor. The reason for that was that it was a couple of months later, and a couple of months make a big difference with cat-tails, because they grow even faster than cats. Now pretty soon you'll see how the cat-tails turned out to be tales of adventure—you just wait and see.

That Saturday when we first followed the old tracks across the marsh the cat-tails were not so high and we could see, kind of, how the trestle was built underneath the tracks. The tracks were just high enough to be out of the marsh. And the cat-tails were just a little above the tracks. They grow awful thick, cat-tails do. I know all about them, because we pick them and dry them and sell them for punk sticks to drive mosquitoes away. We get a nickel a bunch for them—no war tax.

Now where the old tracks go across the marsh they are on a wooden trestle part way, and the rest of the way the trestle is sort of solid. Some places you can look down and see the marsh underneath and some places it's solid so you can't do that. It's a kind of a ramshackle thing, because it was never used for passengers, but only to haul lumber and stuff that came up the river in scows and barges.

Even in the beginning I guess the whole thing was just kind of thrown together. Anyway, the old tracks were all half rusted away. The old line was just about good enough to support that old-fashioned car of ours and that's about all, except in the place where the trestle was solid; I guess it was stronger there. Anyway, the mosquitoes down there are strong enough. Don't say a word. They carry machine guns, those mosquitoes. But in the field close to the river it's dandy.

So now I'm going to start another chapter. I bet you think the trestle is going to break down under our car—I bet you're hoping it will.

Just you wait.

CHAPTER XXXI
SLIGHT MOMENTUM

The afternoon that I'm telling you about was a couple of weeks after the other two patrols went up to Temple Camp. They went on the Fourth of July. They went off on the Fourth, that's what we said.

By that time the cat-tails down in the marsh were all grown up thick and tall, and when we got past the Sneezenbunker land where the marsh begins, we had to just push our way through them because the trestle was sort of buried in them. They were so tall that they were up to our heads. Where the trestle was open they grew right up between the tracks, and we had to watch where we were going to keep from walking off the trestle.

Now that framework trestle ran down about as far as the middle of the marsh, where the marsh was deepest, and there the wood under the tracks was solid. There was marshy stuff, like moss, kind of, growing between the cracks in the boards, and the cat-tails were close in all around so we could hardly see what was under us. It was like that for maybe five hundred feet or so, and then the tracks were on a trestle again till they ran onto the solid land of Van Schlessenhoff's field.

We spent a couple of hours down there in Van Schlessenhoff's field, digging the earth away from the old tracks. Now those tracks ended right close to the river.

But we didn't want the car to go quite as far as that, so we spent the rest of the day fixing up a kind of a thing to stop the car. We dug holes and planted big heavy beams, and then put other beams down slantingways, just the way bumpers are built in the terminal of the railroad.

The next afternoon we waited for the milk train. I said to Mr. Jenson, "We've got the tracks all cleared and dug out for our car and we want you to give it a shove," I said. "We built a bumper down by the river so as to be sure the car will stop if the brakes don't work, because the brakes are not much good."

He said, "Suppose the trestle collapses?"

I said, "That's up to us. We'll stay off the car till it stops. Safety first. If we lose the car it will be our fault and we won't blame you."

He said, "I haven't got much faith in that old trestle. It's all up and down like a scenic railroad in an amusement park. It's all spongy underneath it."

I said, "But we'll promise to stay off the car till it stops."

He said, "Well, and suppose the marsh should flood like it always does in

the summer. What then? You'll be under water."

"We'll shut the windows and the doors," Alexis piped up; "and we'll have a tube going up to the top."

"Sure," I said, "we'll take a couple of tubes of tooth paste with us."

"Twenty thousand leagues under the marsh," Charlie Seabury shouted.

I said, "When we once get past the marsh everything will be all right. The tracks go a little up hill through the field, and that field is never flooded. We'll be high and dry there."

"It was under water three years ago in the spring freshets," Mr. Jenson said.

"It wasn't up to our knees," Westy told him. "And it went down in a couple of days."

I said, "We should worry about Van Schlessenhoff's field being flooded. The water would never come up to the floor of the car anyway. Besides, the freshets aren't as fresh as they used to be. They wouldn't put anything like that over on us."

Mr. Jenson just laughed and he said, "They'd put it over you because you'd be underneath. There are a lot of floods up the line this summer."

"Let them stay there," I said. "Only will you please give our car a shove for us?"

Then we all started to shout, "Ah, please, Mr. Jenson." "Go ahead, Mr. Jenson." "We'll do something for you some day, Mr. Jenson."

He just sat there in the window of his locomotive kind of laughing, as if he couldn't make up his mind. We kept shouting at him good and loud, because the men were making so much racket loading milk cans onto the train.

After a while he said, "Well, if you'll promise not to yell if the trestle breaks down, and if you'll stay off the car till it stops, I'll give it a shove for you."

I said, "Give it a good shove so it will go all the way. We built a bumper down there to stop it, so it's all right."

He said, "Well, we won't trust too much to the bumper. If your car goes into the river, that's an end of it."

"We'll start a mermaid patrol," Pee-wee shouted.

So then Mr. Jenson sent a brakeman over to see if the brakes on the car were any good. We knew they were kind of broken; I guess that's why they called them brakes. We couldn't tell whether they'd stop the car, because the car was already stopped. We'd have to start it to find out whether they'd stop it. The brakeman said maybe they'd work all right on slight momentum.

"Slight momentum—what's that?" Pee-wee shouted.

"It's Latin for going slow," I told him; "it's the way your tongue goes—not."

“Slight momentum means not much headway,” Westy said. Some highbrow.

I said, “If it means going slow I should think it would be *footway* and not *headway*.”

“Maybe it will be downway instead of upway,” Dorry Benton said.

“We should worry,” I told him. “We’ll never save any money with the car as near Bennett’s as this.”

Westy said, “Nothing ventured, nothing had.”

“All right,” we all shouted, “let’s go!”

So that was the beginning of the big adventure. Before so very long we had Alice in Wonderland tearing her hair from jealousy. We had Submarine Sam beaten twenty ways. We had the Arabian Nights knocked out in the first inning. We were lost, strayed or stolen. Also mislaid, misled, mishapped, misguided, mistaken and a few other things. Anyway, we were *missed*.

CHAPTER XXXII
BZZZZZZ

Now you'd better look on the map I made. Maybe it isn't much good, but it's better than the map of Europe. Our car was over about in the middle of the Sneezenbunker land. Because we didn't want to take the reward from the Orphan Home for finding the inventor, my father said we could offer Tony fifty dollars to move his wagon for a little while. Fifty dollars would buy five hundred sandwiches. It would buy a thousand pieces of pie. We didn't have any trouble with Tony that time.

Now Mr. Jenson moved his locomotive very slowly past where Slausen's used to stand, and right across Willow Place. It pushed our car ever so little. The brakeman stood on the front platform of our car and stopped it with the brakes. He said they worked pretty good. Then the locomotive pushed the car about a couple of hundred feet so as to give it a good start, and then backed away from it.

We all stood there shouting, "Hurrah!" "All aboard for Van Schlessenhoff's field!"

The brakeman was the only one on the car. Now this is just exactly what happened. The car moved along into the marsh and pretty soon we could only see the upper part of it on account of the cat-tails. When it got to about the middle of the marsh it stopped. We followed along the tracks and when we got to where the car was, the brakeman said he had slowed it down because the trestle was shaky and he was afraid it would give way. He had slowed the car down too much and it had stopped. He said he was sorry, but he had to go back to his train.

So there was our car, right in the middle of Cat-tail Marsh, with the cat-tails growing up close all around it, and the mosquitoes mobilizing for a grand drive. We knew Mr. Jenson couldn't help us any more, because that trestle would never hold his big locomotive.

"This is a nice fix we're in," Westy said. "We'll be eaten up here."

"What do we care?" Pee-wee shouted. As long as there was some question of eats it didn't make any difference to him where we were.

I said, "I'm not talking about you eating; I'm talking about the mosquitoes. Wait till the sun goes down, there'll be nothing left of us, if we stay here."

"Well, let's be thankful the car didn't go down, anyway," one of the fellows said.

"Sure, it might be worse," another one of them shouted.

I said, “Oh, sure, this is a fine place for a scout headquarters. There’s only one better place that I know of and that’s on top of a volcano.”

“Can we go on top of a volcano?” the inventor wanted to know.

“Not this afternoon,” I told him.

“This is a dickens of a place to spend the summer,” they all began saying. “What are we going to do? We can’t get the car either way now. It might just as well have broken through the trestle and gone down into the marsh. It’s no good to us here.”

“I say let’s leave it here and come on up to Temple Camp,” Hunt Manners said. “We’ve had trouble enough with it. Let it stay here and rot.”

I said, “Don’t let’s get discouraged. Consider the busy little mosquitoes. See how happy they are.”

“Sure,” Westy said; “and so would we be if we were in their shoes.”

“In their *shoes*?” Pee-wee yelled.

“They ought to wear rubbers down here,” I said. “Let’s have a meeting of the general staff to decide what we’ll do. We’re in the midst of the enemies.”

Dorry Benton said, “I vote that we go inside and shut the doors and the windows. S—lap! There’s one.”

All around we could hear bzzzzzzz, bzzzzz——

I said, “S—*lap*! There goes another.”

“Bzzzzzz—sl—*ap*!” Gee whiz, that was all I could hear. We looked like a class in physical training.

“Come on inside,” I said. “This is getting terrible.”

It wasn’t so bad inside with the doors and windows shut. We chased some of them out and killed a lot of others. It was our lives against theirs.

“Don’t give them any quarter,” one fellow shouted.

“Don’t give them even a dime,” I said.

“Don’t give them a cent,” Pee-wee shouted, slapping at them right and left.

Talk about the Huns! Oh, boy!

After a terrible massacre we got most of them out of the car. Then we sat down to talk about what we had better do. We were in a pretty bad fix, that was sure. It looked as if that was the end of our dear old car, anyway for a meeting place in the summer, because we couldn’t stand against an army of several million billions. A scout is brave, but——

It was quite late in the afternoon and we were getting hungry. The mosquitoes had finished their supper. I hope they enjoyed it. Pretty soon it began to rain outside and the wind began to blow. One good thing, it blew the mosquitoes away. That hour or so that we spent in the car behind closed doors is known in scout history as the Siege of Cat-tail Marsh. And, believe me, we didn’t like it very much. I’m not so stuck on history anyway.

CHAPTER XXXIII
WE SEPARATE

"One thing sure, I won't desert this car," Pee-wee said. "It's our car and I'm going to stick to it. I'm not going to leave it here to rot after all the fun we've had in it."

I said, "You're welcome to take it with you for all I care. Maybe you know some new kind of strategy to move it. I don't see that our appetites are going to do us any good down here. Here's the car in the middle of the marsh and that's all there is to it. If there should happen to be an earthquake maybe that would move it."

"Let's have an earthquake," the inventor piped up.

"Maybe when the earth revolves a little it will start the car, hey?" Pee-wee shouted. "Maybe if we wait till to-morrow morning——"

"Suppose it starts it back and we bunk into Tony's lunch wagon?" Dorry Benton said.

"The earth is moving the other way," Pee-wee shouted.

Westy said, "Well, here's an end to all our fine plans, that's sure. I don't see what we can do. In the winter it won't be so bad down here, but now—s—*lap*, there's another."

"He must have come in through the glass," I said.

Then, just to make the fellows feel good, I started singing:

> We started down to the river
> But fate is very—is very—is very——

"Harsh!" Westy shouted.

"Correct," I said.

> We started down to the river,
> But fate is very harsh.
> We started out for the, what-d'you call it, promised land,
> And got stuck in the middle of the marsh.

But, gee whiz, they didn't feel like singing, I could see that. Pee-wee shouted, because that kid would be happy in the bottom of a well, but the rest of them just kept still and looked grouchy.

"It's raining, too," one of them said.

"It always rains in vacation," another began grumbling.

"Vacations and Saturdays," another said.

"Come on home; that's the end of our plans," Dorry said. "I'm sorry we didn't go up to Temple Camp with the others. I bet they'll be good and mad when they see where the car is."

I said, "A scout is supposed to be cheerful; let's laugh, ha, ha!"

"I tell you what let's do," Pee-wee said. "Let's camp here all night."

"What good will that do?" one of the fellows wanted to know.

I said, "Well, I'm not going home in all this rain, anyway. We're here and I'm going to stay here till it holds up."

"That will be in about two weeks," one of them said.

"I'll go and tell our mothers and fathers and I'll get some eats," Pee-wee shouted. "And I'll get some games and——"

"Ah, give us a rest," Bad Manners said.

I said, "Isn't it nice, we're all such optimists?"

"Where did you get that word?" one of them grumbled.

"That means a man that tests your eyes," Pee-wee shouted.

"You mean an optometrist," Westy said.

I said, "What's the use of grouching? We're here because we're here. Can you deny that? Is it our fault if the car didn't go all the way? You fellows make me sick. Look at the inventor; he'd be happy on top of a volcano."

"No wonder," Westy said. "That's because a volcano is on fire."

"Fire's better than rain, anyway," one of them said.

"Oh, is that so?" I shot back at him. "If it wasn't for rain there wouldn't be any good fishing."

"A lot of fish we'll catch here," Will Dawson said.

"And another thing," I said, "look at Queen Victoria; she reigned for fifty years and she didn't get mad. That shows you women are better than men. Maybe Minerva Skybrow could think of a way for us to get the car out of here."

"Sure, maybe she'll talk Italian to the cat-tails," Ralph Warner said.

"Maybe she could get the mosquitoes to move, she was so successful with Tony," Charlie Seabury began grouching.

"I wish school would open," Dorry Benton said.

I said, "Do you take back that remark?"

"A lot of fun we'll have here," somebody else started grumbling.

Pee-wee said, "Just the same, I bet we'll have some more adventures. I saw a yellow dog running east last night, and that's a sign we'll have more adventures. The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide; that's what it says in my copy book."

I said, "You've got the right idea, Kid. A car may be down, but it's never out."

"Well, *I'm* going out," Hunt Manners said. "I'm going home."

"So am I," Charlie Seabury said, very grumpy like.

"Go ahead," I told them. "We should worry. Pee-wee and the inventor and I are going to stay here."

"I'm going to stay, too," Westy said.

"I'm going home to get supper and go to the movies," Dorry said, with a black look on his face.

"Give my regards to Charlie Chaplin," I said.

Hunt Manners said, very cross, "Come on, fellows. Let's go up to Bennett's and get some sodas. Want to go, Pee-wee?"

I looked at the kid. Gee whiz, that was the hardest moment in his life. He stood between love and duty; I mean between love and more love.

"Go ahead," he said. "I saw a yellow dog going east last night, and that means we're going to have more adventures. Anyway, I can go with you and get a soda and then come back."

Jiminies, I had to laugh.

"I'm through with this old shack; come on," Tom Warner said.

"The pleasure is mine," I told him. "So long."

"We're going to have adventures, ain't we?" the inventor piped up.

"I don't know," I said, "but we're going to have a game of checkers anyway."

"I'm with you," Will Dawson said.

I said, "All right, there are five of us and we'll challenge the world."

"That's us," Westy said.

"That's me, too," the inventor shouted. "I hope we get in a lot of danger, hey?"

"Don't lose your lives playing checkers," Hunt Manners said.

"Don't risk your young lives up at the Lyric Theatre," I told him. "Be careful when you're crossing Main Street."

"Don't let the mosquitoes eat you up," Charlie Seabury said.

"Thanks," I told him. "Look out you don't get run over by a baby carriage."

"We're going to start for Temple Camp in the morning," Dorry said, very grouchy.

"Just tell them that you saw us," I said.

"Tell them we wouldn't desert the old car in the marsh," Westy shouted after them.

"I'm through with it," another one of them said.

"We're going to stick to our wounded comrade in No Man's Land. Hey?" Pee-wee said. Gee, that was a good name for Cat-tail Marsh.

So that's the way it was. Will Dawson, Westy, Pee-wee, the inventor and I stayed down in the car, only Pee-wee went up with the others because he was

going to tell our mothers and get some eats and things. We told him to get games and hooks, too. As long as there wasn't anything better to do, and it was raining and blowing, we thought we might as well camp in the old car that night. We knew there wouldn't be much doing, but, gee whiz, I'm tired of the movies.

The others went back along the trestle, Pee-wee with them, and we could see them when they got out from among the cat-tails and started up across the Sneezenbunker land. It was raining hard and it was getting dark and we could see the little lights shining on Main Street. It was nice and cozy in that old car. Maybe it wasn't a good place for it, I'm not saying, and maybe it wouldn't be any use there, especially in the summer, but anyway, we were going to have one last night in it.

"Will he come back?" the inventor asked me.

"Who? Pee-wee?" I said. "You bet he will. He's not missing anything; not even a soda."

"Can I watch you play checkers?" the kid wanted to know.

"You bet!" I told him.

"I hope it rains all night. Don't you?" he asked me.

"Sure thing," I said.

"I like water better than fire. Don't you?" he wanted to know.

"You're changing," I said.

He went over and sat with his face plastered against one of the windows, watching for Pee-wee. The rain was just dripping down outside the windows. The kid's nose was flat against the pane.

Pretty soon he shouted, "I see him! Here he comes!"

Away up on the Sneezenbunker land we could see a black speck coming toward us through all the rain. In a couple of minutes it got down to the edge of the marsh and we couldn't see it any more on account of the cat-tails.

CHAPTER XXXIV
ONE ENDING

Now if you want to stick to those fellows, go ahead and do it. I'm not stopping you. This story has two endings and you can choose whichever one you please. I should worry. If you want to stay with us and watch us play checkers, all right. If you want to go with them, all right.

First I'll tell you their ending of the story. They stopped at Bennett's and had sodas, and Charlie Seabury bought some gumdrops. After supper they went down to the Lyric Theatre and they stopped with Dorry while he bought a bell for his bicycle. After the excitement of buying the bell was over, they stopped in the library and Hunt Manners got "Kidnaped," by Stevenson. He should have got slapped on the wrist instead of kidnaped.

Then they went on down to the Lyric and stood on the line for twenty minutes. When they got in they saw "The Cowboy's Vengeance." Oh, they had a wild time that night. That cowboy had troubles of his own. But one thing, he killed eleven train robbers. Maybe you'll say our poor old car that was marooned in the marsh didn't have any pep compared to that train going through the Rocky Mountains. But you cannot sometimes always tell.

That's one ending to this story. Now comes the other one.

CHAPTER XXXV
CEDAR

One thing I'll tell you. If you ever see a yellow dog going east, prepare for the worst. That's all.

We cooked some eats on the old stove in the corner of the car that night and they tasted good. After that we fixed two of the seats facing each other and sat in them, watching the rain. We jollied Pee-wee and talked about stalking and merit badges and told riddles. After that we played checkers and when we all got good and sleepy we fixed the seats into berths. The way you make a berth is to lift a seat out and lay it lengthwise across two other seats. We made five berths that way. Then we went to sleep.

Now I couldn't see just exactly what happened because I was asleep. But I found out afterwards. I thought I heard funny kinds of noises in the night, but that old car had so many creaks in it that it was like a full orchestra whenever the wind blew.

Anyway, when I woke up in the morning and looked out of the window, I thought I was in Noah's Ark. I was so surprised that I couldn't do anything but just stare. *We were floating down the river!* That's just as true as that I'm sitting on the window seat in my room, writing. *We were floating down the river*. You can ask anybody in Bridgeboro.

I gave Westy a shake and said, "Wake up and look out of the window! Hurry up! *Westy!*"

In a half a minute we were all staring out of the window.

Will Dawson said, "Are we dreaming or not?"

I said, "I wouldn't say for sure that I'm awake, but I *think* I am. Either that or I've gone crazy reading 'Alice in Wonderland.' *Look!* There's the park! We're about half a mile down the river."

The inventor started shouting, "Oh, good, good, good! I'm glad. Maybe we'll go across the ocean! Will we?"

"Nothing would surprise me," Westy said. "I hope we'll meet Sinbad, the sailor."

"This car wouldn't float," Will Dawson said.

"It *wouldn't*" I said; "but it *does*."

"Open the window and look out," Westy said.

"What did I tell you about yellow dogs?" Pee-wee shouted.

"Can I be the captain?" the inventor wanted to know. "Is it a ship?"

"Either that or an insane asylum," I said.

“Look out of the window,” Westy said. “I see what happened. Come on, let’s look out from one of the doors. I know what happened all right!”

We threw open three or four windows and looked down. Then he ran for one of the doors and looked out. The car was on something, that was sure.

“It’s an old scow,” Westy said. “Look!”

I looked down from the car door just as Westy jumped down. He said, “It’s an old scow just as sure as you live. It was part of the solid part of the trestle. See how the old tracks are broken? What—do—you—know—about—that?”

He pulled off a chip of wood and threw it up to me. “Cedar,” he said; “smell it.”

I saw just how it was. The car was standing on an old scow. The old rusty tracks were twisted and broken off and stuck out over the end. In five seconds we were all down on the deck of it, staring around.

Westy said, “Did you smell it? It’s cedar.”

And just then I remembered about something we had read in a scouts’ book about trees. Westy knows all the different kinds of wood; he’s crazy about trees. This is it, copied right out of the book:

> Cedar is the wood most valuable for the hulls of vessels. When kept under water its freshness is everlasting. While other woods rot away this soft, spongy wood that yields so readily to the ax or the jack-knife, defies the decaying effects of water, its soft fiber swelling and toughening even in ordinary dampness. Time is powerless to rot it when it is in its natural element.

“What happened?” I asked him, because he seemed to know more about it than I did.

He said, “That’s easy to see. The creek flooded the marsh last night. The solid part of the trestle that we noticed was just several old scows. I guess this was the only one made of cedar. Anyway, it rose with the water and broke the old tracks and floated away. It’s lucky the car wasn’t half on one scow and half on another.”

“I’m always lucky, I am!” Pee-wee shouted.

“I guess that’s because the dog was good and yellow,” I said. “If he had been orange color, goodness only knows what might have happened.”

“Stick to this old car and you can’t go wrong,” Will Dawson said.

“You said it,” I told him.

“Now we can be pirates, hey?” the inventor said.

“Sure,” I said. “You climb up and get inside the car. The first thing you know you’ll fall in the water, and the water around here is very wet.”

“Didn’t I say stick to the car?” Pee-wee wanted to know.

“Oh, you’re just the little hero,” I told him. “If we all get drowned we’ll have to thank you.”

“*Drowned?* What are you talking about?” he said. “If you’re afraid——”

“Anybody that’s afraid can get out and walk,” I said. “We’ve got a private car and a private yacht too. We’re a rich patrol. I don’t think we’ll notice that crowd up at Temple Camp any more. We’ve got Submarine Sam looking like a mamma’s boy. A life on the ocean wave for us.”

“We’re going sideways,” Westy said.

“Frontways and sideways, what do we care?” I said.

“Railroad travel is all right, but ocean travel for me,” Will said.

“What are you kicking about?” Pee-wee yelled. “We’ve got both.”

“If a stray airplane would only drop on us now we’d be happy,” I said.

“You want too much,” Pee-wee shouted. “We can’t have *everything*.”

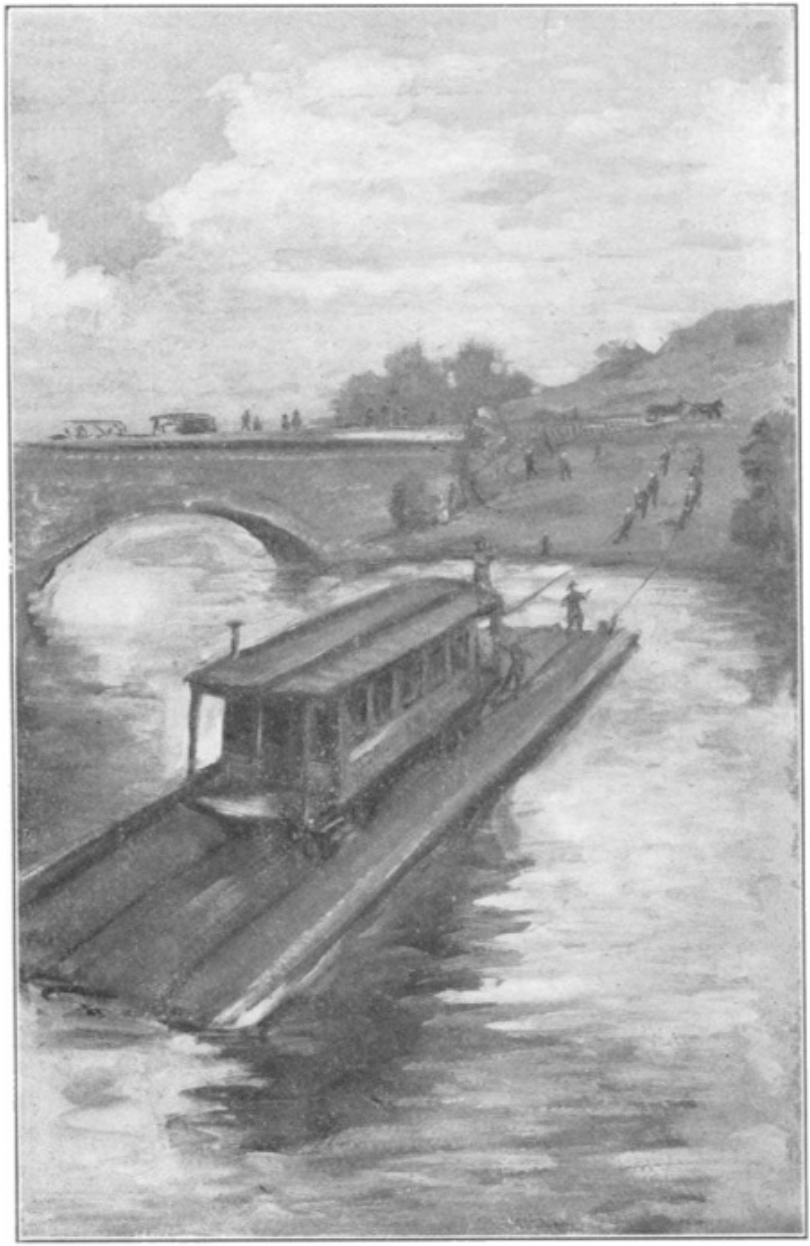
CHAPTER XXXVI
THE OTHER ENDING

Now if you want to know all about that, I mean what happened, you can find it in the Bridgeboro paper of the next day. Even newspaper reporters came from New York to find out about it. And they had articles and pictures and everything.

That was the first time in a good many years that the creek had backed up into the marsh. Always that creek flows into the river. But the river was so full that it made the creek back up, and I should worry about all that business, because this is vacation and I'm not thinking about geography. If the creek wanted to back up it's none of my business. That's between the creek and the river and the uncivil engineers, and I wouldn't trouble my young life about it.

But, anyway, once a long time ago when a creek ran through that marsh there were some scows there. Some people called them barges. Anyway, they were canal boats. They used four of those to lay the tracks across when they ran the line up to town. The other three were pretty rotten, but the one that was made out of cedar was all right. The marsh kept the seams tight. As long as the hull was tight nothing could keep it down when the water rose. It would take more than those old rusty tracks to press it under water. Lucky for us our car was right on it. Afterwards they found that the other three barges had water in them up to the level of the water outside, and when the water rose it flowed right into them and they stayed on the bottom. That shows what cedar is.

So you see we got our car out of the marsh all right and when something goes wrong it's better not to begin grouching till the next day—that's what I say. Wait a couple of days, that's better. Even if you wait a year it won't do any harm.



SOME MEN THREW US A ROPE AND PULLED US ASHORE.

It was a dandy bright morning and the tide was just about full. We went drifting around the bend, just as nice as could be, flopping around this way and that, and I guess we must have looked pretty funny from the shore. Anyway,

nobody saw us till we got to the Court House grounds. The Court House lawn runs right down to the river, and there are trees there and benches. The county jail is there, too, and the prisoners can see the river—a lot of good it does them. I'm glad I'm not a convict, that's one thing. But, gee whiz, I came near to being one. The only reason I'm not one is because I didn't commit a crime.

Now as we passed by there, who should we see sprawling under a tree near the shore but the five deserters from my patrol, Dorry Benton, Bad Manners, Charlie Seabury and the Warner twins.

I said, "Look at those five deserters, will you?"

The inventor wanted to know what a deserter was. "It's a fellow that eats two helpings of dessert," I told him.

"Give them a call," Westy said; "they don't see us."

We all started shouting together, and then they looked up.

Good night!

"What do you call that?" one of them yelled. "Look what's going by, will you!"

I shouted, "Good morning, it's a beautiful afternoon this evening, isn't it? Have you done your good turns yet?"

They all jumped up and stood on the shore, staring.

"What in the dickens——" one of them began.

"Will you look at that!" another one said.

"Where did you fellows come from?" Charlie Seabury called. "How did you get that car on a boat?"

"You forget we have brains," I shouted, "even if we do belong in the same patrol with you. We're just going for a little sail; we'll be back in a couple of months. How did you like the movies?"

"Well—I'll—be—jiggered!" Hunt Manners shouted, just staring at us.

I said, "Oh, don't be jiggered so early in the morning. We're just making a strategic retreat from Cat-tail Marsh while the mosquitoes are having breakfast. You know what strategy is, don't you? You've heard of that?"

"We're going across the ocean," the inventor called.

"They'll bump into the bridge at Hanley's Crossing," I heard one of them say to another.

"What do we care for a few bumps?" Will Dawson called. "Did you enjoy your sodas? So sorry we couldn't join you, but our ship was sailing."

"That shows what you get for not taking my advice," Pee-wee screamed at them. "You stick to me and you'll have adventures. You said you were disgusted with this old car. Now you see! It's good I didn't go to Temple Camp with the Ravens. Now you see! Ya-ha, ya-ha!"

"We can rave all right without the Ravens," I said.

"Where are you going?" Dorry Benton called.

“Oh, we’re not particular,” I called back. “We’re going till we stop and then we won’t go any further. It’s so dull hanging around Bridgeboro. We should worry where we’re going.”

“We don’t know where we’re going but we’re on our way,” Will shouted at them.

“I’m captain,” the inventor shouted.

By that time we had drifted past them and it was too far to call and they just stood there, gaping. It was awful funny to see them.

They knew that we couldn’t get any further than Hanky’s Crossing because the tide was too high for us to go under the bridge there, and I knew they’d hike down there as fast as their legs would take them.

Sure enough, they were there waiting for us when we came flopping along. And a lot of other people were there, too. Gee whiz, everybody had heard about us by that time. We floated right up against the bridge—bump. And then some men threw us a rope and we fastened it to the old barge and they pulled us ashore. Everybody stared at us like the natives stared at Columbus Ohio when he landed on San Salvador.

We just walked ashore and I didn’t pay any attention to that bunch of quitters and I said, “This seems to be a nice place. We take possession of it in the name of the Boy Scouts of America. Are there any ice cream stores here?”

“This is Hanley’s Crossing,” a little girl spoke up.

I said, “It’s all right; wrap it up and we’ll take it home.”

Oh, boy, some excitement! We told our story and you ought to have seen everybody stare, especially those five fellows. I guess they envied us, all right.

I said, “It serves you fellows right for leaving us. We should have stayed all separated together. Now you see what comes from not having a scout smile. The face with the smile wins. You should apologize to the next rainstorm you see. While there’s life there’s adventure.”

“Do you think we’d let a marsh foil us?” Pee-wee said.

“Do you think we’d desert the poor, defenseless cat-tails for an ice cream soda?” Will said.

“You never can tell where a game of checkers will end,” said Westy.

“Or a car,” I said.

“If we have to go through fire and water we’ll win,” Pee-wee said.

“Hurrah for the silver-plated foxes!” I shouted.

Everybody stood around staring at us and laughing.

A man said, “Well, the bridge stopped you.”

“That’s different,” I told him.

He said, “Oh, I see.”

“Whatever happens is all right,” I said “Let’s hear you deny that.”

Pee-wee said, “Adventures are things that happen that aren’t supposed to

happen."

I said, "Sure. Some people follow adventures, but adventures follow us. That's because we're scouts."

"We always have adventures," Pee-wee said.

"Have you got any with you?" a fellow that was standing there wanted to know.

"We'll have some more by to-morrow," I told him. "Call and inspect our stock. Have you got any scouts down here?"

One of the men who was laughing said, "Not a one."

"You're lucky," I told him.

He said, "Well, you kids had quite an experience."

"That's nothing," Pee-wee said. "You don't call that an experience. That was just a ride."

"Worse things than that are going to happen," the inventor piped up.

But not in this story, believe me. One fire and one flood are enough. Another chapter and we might have a world war and an earthquake—that's what my sister said. She said adventures are all the time waiting for us. "Let them wait," I told her; "what do we care?" My father said one good thing about us, anyway, and that is we don't shoot people like Submarine Sam does in the book. We shoot the chutes, that's about all we ever shoot. But just the same, we have a lot of fun. In the next story I'll tell you how we got lost in a ferris wheel.

But I can't bother to tell you now how we got our car back to Van Schlessenhoff's field, for we've got enough on our hands getting our mushroom farm started down there by the river, and besides, we've got to go to Temple Camp. We've got to get up there in time for the lake carnival. Maybe I'll tell you about that, too. Gee whiz, I know a lot of things to tell you. And I bet you'll be surprised how we got our old car back to the field.

Anyway, I'll tell you this much now. When we did get it back there we chained it down and built a stockade around it and blocked the wheels and locked the brakes and put paper weights on the roof.

Safety first. That's what I say.

THE END

[The end of *Roy Blakeley. Lost, Strayed or Stolen* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]