ROY BLAKELEY
in the HAUNTED CAMP

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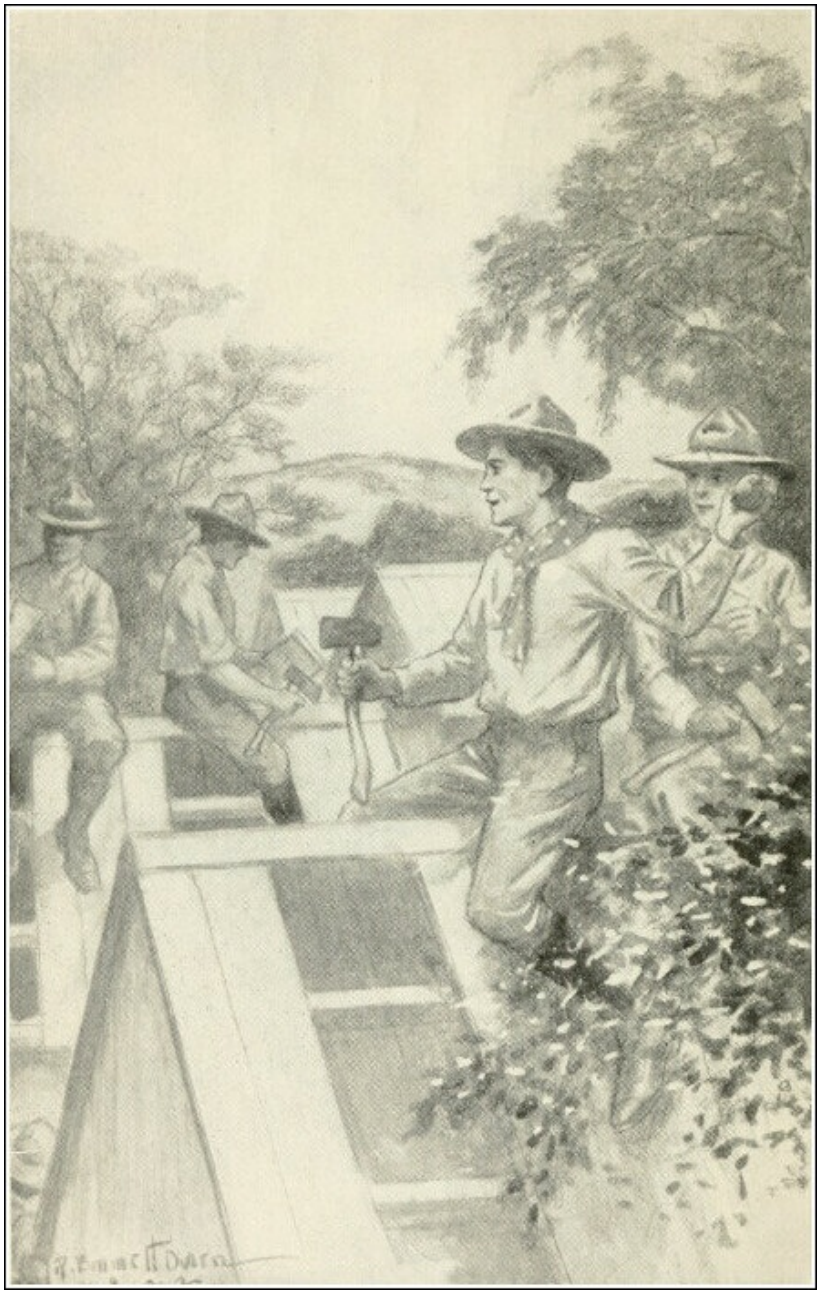

THE BOYS MINGLED SOME FUN WITH THEIR WORK.

ROY BLAKELEY
IN THE HAUNTED CAMP

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

AUTHOR OF
THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS

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ROY BLAKELEY IN THE HAUNTED CAMP

CHAPTER I
THE HOUSE IN THE LANE

One fine day in the merry month of August when the birds were singing in the trees and all the schools were closed and hikes and camping and ice cream cones were in season, and the chickens were congregated on the platform of the Hicksville, North Carolina, post office, something of far-reaching consequence happened.

On that day Joshua Hicks, postmaster-general of that thriving world centre, emerged from the post office, adjusted his octagon-shaped, steel-rimmed spectacles exactly half way down his long nose, held a certain large envelope at arm's length and contemplating it with an air of rueful perplexity said,

"Well—by—gum!"

Then he cocked his head to one side, then to the other, squinted first his right eye, then his left, and at last inquired, of the chickens, apparently,

"What—in—all—*cre-a-tion* is this?"

The chickens did not answer him; on the contrary they departed from the platform, seeing, perhaps, that there was no mail for them. With the exception of two persons the chickens were the only creatures that ever waited for the mail in Hicksville.

In the peacefulness of the Hicksville solitude the train could be heard rattling over the bridge and into the woods beyond, going straight about its business as if Hicksville did not exist.

It was no wonder that Joshua Hicks was astonished, for things like this did not happen in Hicksville every day. The last previous event had been a circus but that was nothing compared to the large envelope. For the address on this was as follows:

> To a lady in Hicksville, North Carolina, who lives in a white house with the end of the porch broken and with a dog that has a collar. Maybe there's a window broken.

In the upper left hand corner was written:

> If not delivered sometime or other return to W. Harris, scout, Raven Patrol 1st Bridgeboro New Jersey troop, Boy Scouts of America.

And at the lower right hand corner was the additional information:

P. S. There is a puddle outside the woodshed or a pail.

With such detailed information as this Uncle Sam, that world-renowned errand boy, could hardly do otherwise than deliver this formidable document. And thus it was that W. Harris, scout, had stopped a great train, which goes to show you what boy scouts can do.

Thinking no doubt that an envelope of such imposing dimensions containing such explicit descriptive matter was entitled to the honor of rural free delivery, the postmaster-general himself took off his spectacles, put on a large straw hat and started up the road.

He came presently to a small white house some distance up a lane, where a dog with a collar greeted him with a cordial wag of the tail.

That dog, in his humble abode, did not know that his fame had gone abroad and that his personal distinction of a collar was known in the sovereign commonwealth of New Jersey, not to mention the vast cosmopolitan centre of Bridgeboro, county seat so-called, because of the comfortable propensity of the people living there to spend their time sitting down. Perhaps it might more appropriately have been called the county couch, since the inhabitants were said to be forever in a kind of doze.

But if Bridgeboro, New Jersey, dozed, Hicksville, North Carolina, had the sleeping sickness. And it did not even walk in its sleep for not a soul was to be seen about the little white house nor anywhere else.

There was no doubt, however, of its being the house in question. A pillar at the end of the porch had rotted away and the roof over the little platform was tumbling down. A pane of glass was missing from the sitting room window.

But Joshua Hicks was not going to take any chances. So he playfully ruffled the dog's hair to make sure that the collar was around the animal's neck and having satisfied himself of this he strolled around in back of the house for an official inspection of the puddle or the pail. The United States government must be very thorough about these things; puddles especially....

There, sure enough, was the puddle, a perennial puddle, fed by a laughing, babbling, leaky drainpipe. Joshua Hicks dipped a finger in the mud and made sure of the puddle. He then looked for the pail, and not seeing it, put on his steel spectacles and glanced again at the envelope.

"A puddle *or* a pail," he said. "I reckon that's all right; it says *or* a pail."

He was going to knock on the kitchen door, but he bethought him to make a supplementary inspection of the tumbled down porch roof. There could be no two opinions about that; even a profiteering landlord would have admitted the condition. And finally Postmaster Hicks satisfied himself in the best of all ways of the condition of the window, and that was by cutting his finger on a fragment of broken glass.

Staunch and true as he was, he was ready to shed his blood for his country.

CHAPTER II
AN ECHO OF THE WAR

Having satisfied himself beyond all doubt that this little white house was the proper destination of the letter, Joshua Hicks administered an authoritative knock on the front door. The response came in the form of a queer little old lady, who wore a very expectant look, a look almost pathetically expectant. She was slight and wizened, and stood straight. But her face was deeply wrinkled and her hair was snowy white.

There was something about her trim, erect little figure and white locks and furrowed cheeks which aroused sympathy; it would be hard to say why. Perhaps it was because her brisk little form suggested that she worked hard, and her thin heavily veined hands and wrinkled face reminded one that she ought not to work hard. There was a certain something about her which suggested that she was fighting a brave fight and keeping a good heart. At all events she wore a cheery smile.

"Joshua," she said, "I was kinder hoping to see you over to-day. It's good of you to bring it yourself. I wanted to put my name on it so's you could get me the money in Centerville when you go."

"'Tain't your pension, Mis' Haskell," Joshua said. "Leastways, I never seen no pensions come like this before. It's like as if it wuz a letter turned inside out; all the writin' is on the outside."

"Jes' when I'm needing my pension most it don't come," she said, taking the big envelope. "When I saw you prowling around in back I thought you was the sheriff's man, mebbe. It give me a shock because—what's this?"

"Don't ask *me*, Mis' Haskell," said the postmaster. "It's for you, I'm certain sure of that, and that's all I can say."

With trembling hand and a look of pathetic fear and apprehension, the old lady started to tear open the envelope, saying the while, "You don't reckon W. Harris is one of them smart lawyers up New York way, do you, Joshua? I'm ready to get out when I have to. I've—I've stuck it out alone, I always said I could fight, but I can't fight the law, Joshua. They don't need to set no lawyers on me—they don't."

She opened the envelope, and unfolded a sheet of paper. It was old and faded and wrinkled. She glanced at it, then grasped the door jam with her thin, trembling hand, as if she feared she might fall.

"'Tain't the law, is it?" Joshua Hicks inquired.

"You better be gone, Joshua," she said. "No, it ain't the law—it's—it's

something else. It ain't the law, Joshua."

"Is it any trouble?" he asked.

She answered, strangely agitated, "No, 'tain't no trouble, Joshua."

"They ain't a goin' to stop sendin' you your pension?"

"Not as I know of, Joshua, but jes' I want to be alone. It ain't no trouble of money, Joshua, not this time...."

If it were no matter of money, then Joshua Hicks could not conjecture what in the world it was, for there were only two things in old Mrs. Haskell's life, and these were both concerned with money. One was the monthly receipt of her pension, for in her small way she had helped to make the world safe for democracy and all that sort of thing. The other was the mortgage and interest on her little home which the pension could not begin to take care of. Mrs. Haskell did not understand about this mortgage at all, but the most important part of it she did understand, and that was that pretty soon she was going to be put out. She did not have to be a financier or a lawyer to understand that. She had tried to beat this mortgage back by sewing and gardening and selling eggs, but the interest had grown faster than the potatoes, the pen was mightier than the needle and the mortgage had kept right on working while the chickens had taken a vacation.

The mortgage had beaten poor old Mrs. Haskell at every turn. It had bombarded her with notices and writs and summonses and things and she had lost the fight. She had a sort of armistice with this mortgage, but she knew there could be but one end to that armistice. The little war, a very heroic little war, was as good as over. The little white house had been made safe for the Liberty Realty Company.

For one brief, terrible moment, before the postmaster had departed, Mrs. Haskell had feared that perhaps she had done something lawless in connection with her little pension, signed her name in the wrong place perhaps, and that W. Harris with all his high sounding names, was some doughty governmental minion coming to apprehend her in true military fashion. But if the paper contained in the envelope dispelled that fear, at least it did not cheer her.

She returned into the house, her eyes brimming, the paper shaking in her poor old hand. She groped her way to an old haircloth armchair in her sitting room, and put on her spectacles. The moisture from her eyes dimmed the glasses and she had to take them off and wipe them before beginning to read.

She was quite alone in her little castle, or rather the Liberty Realty Company's little castle. She wanted to be alone. It was very quiet. Outside the birds could be heard twittering in the vine on the ramshackle little porch. The kettle sang cheerily in the kitchen. There was that musty indoor odor of the country homestead, the odor which soldier boys remembered and longed for in trenches and dugouts. And mingling with this was the fragrance of flowers

coming in through the open window. The dog with a collar strolled in, laid his head in the old lady's lap, looked up into her eyes and listened. There were only those two there, so she read the contents of the paper aloud.

Dear Old Mother:

I was hoping I might get down to Hicksville before we sail, but guess I can't. They don't tell us much here but it seems to be in the air that we'll sail in a day or two. Feeling pretty disappointed because I wanted to see you again and say good-bye and have just one good home-cooked meal. I'm sick of beans and black coffee. Don't worry, you'll hear from me in France. I don't suppose you'll be able to get the end of the porch fixed up, but try to get the window put in before winter. I meant to do that myself. Put a pail under the drain so the water won't flood under the woodshed. Tell Don to be a good watch dog and be sure to tie him outside at night.

I don't suppose you'll hear from me again till we get across. Don't worry, pretty soon it will all be over and I'll come marching home and you'll be telling people it was me that won the war and I'll be glad to get a good squint at my old N. C. hills. It will be over before you know it. Now you have to be brave, see? Just like you were when dad died. Remember what you said then? Now don't think this is good-bye just because I'm sailing but remember the Atlantic Ocean isn't a one way street. Just chalk that up on the wall, and speaking about oceans don't forget about the water by the woodshed and do what I told you. So now good-bye dear old Mum and don't worry, and I won't go near Paris like you said. Hicksville is good enough for me.

Your loving son.

Old Mrs. Haskell read this letter twice. She had to clean her glasses several times while doing so. Whatever of comfort the letter gave her was expressed in tears. She arose, a straight, wizened little figure. She went over to an old-fashioned whatnot which stood in the corner, opened a plush album which lay there and turned the pages till she came to a certain photograph. This she gazed at for fully five minutes, the dog standing patiently at her side. Then she took a postal card which had been laid between the two stiff cardboard leaves. This also she gazed at though it contained but few words. It bore a date of more than two years before. The printing, with its blank spaces filled, stated that the War Department regretted to inform her that her son Joseph Haskell had been killed in action on some date or other in the "operations" west of some place or

other.

She stooped down and patted the dog and he held up his head against the almost threadbare material of her poor gown.

“He did write after—all—he did—Don,” she sobbed. “He did—he wrote before he went—away. I don’t know who—W. Harris—I don’t understand it—but he *did* write. See?” The dog seemed to understand.

Mrs. Haskell dried her eyes with her kitchen apron, folded the letter, laid it with the post card, took a final pensive look at the photograph and clasped the heavy plush covers over all three. Then she sat down by the window and patted the dog with one thin hand while with the other she lifted the kitchen apron again to those poor old eyes. Thus they sat silently.

It was just an echo, a faint, belated echo of the great war....

CHAPTER III
A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

To know something of the circumstances which caused this letter to reach Mrs. Haskell like a ghost out of the past, we shall have to betake ourselves to Bennett's Fresh Confectionery and Ice Cream Parlor on Main Street in Bridgeboro, New Jersey. And that is by no means a bad sort of place to begin, for Bennett had the genial habit of filling an ice cream cone so that the cream stood up on top like the dome on the court house in Bridgeboro, and extended down into the apex, packed tight and hard.

It was long before the great sensation in Hicksville, and on a certain pleasant day early in vacation, that Roy Blakeley, leader of the Silver Fox Patrol, and several scouts of the First Bridgeboro Troop were lined up along Bennett's counter partaking of refreshment. To be exact, they had finished and were waiting for Walter, alias Pee-wee Harris to finish, for Pee-wee had the true scout thoroughness and went down to the very bottom of things.

"How is it you boys aren't off camping this summer?" Mr. Bennett asked sociably, as he leaned against the fixtures behind the counter.

"We should worry about camp this year," Roy said. "We've been fixing up our old railroad car for a meeting-place down by the river and we're going to stay home and earn some money to buy a rowboat and a canoe and start a kind of a camp of our own down there."

"We're going to build a float," Pee-wee said, digging with his spoon.

"Sure, and a sink," Roy said, "so we can wash our hands of Bridgeboro. We'll be dead to the world down there. We're going to lead the simple life like a lot of simps. We're going to catch salt fish in the salt marshes and everything. All we need is a treasury; you didn't happen to see one around anywhere, did you?"

"If I should happen to see a treasury I'll let you know," Mr. Bennett laughed.

"We need a standing capital," said Artie Van Arlen, leader of the Ravens.

"We wouldn't care if it was lying down as long as we had it," Roy said.

"We'd like some assessments," Pee-wee said.

"You mean assets," Doc Carson laughed.

"It's the same only different," said Roy.

"What we want is a few standing capitals, and some small letters and a couple of surpluses."

"Deficits are good; did you ever hear of those?" Pee-wee asked.

"We need about eighty-five cents and fifty dollars," Roy said. "I guess we'll start a drive only we haven't got any horse. Maybe we can catch some goldfish down there and sell them for old gold. We should worry."

Mr. Bennett said, "Well now, you scouts ought to be able to raise some funds. You seem to raise pretty nearly everything else."

"We raise the dickens," Grove Bronson said.

"We ought to be able to sell some stock," Roy said. "We've got some rolling stock down there—one car. Only it doesn't roll. Who wants to buy some stock in the Riverside Scout Camp? Watered stock, we dip it in the river."

"You don't know what watered stock is; you're so smart," Pee-wee sneered.

"Sure, it's milk," Roy said. "Right the first time, no sooner said than stung."

"Never laugh at poverty," Westy said, as all the party began to shout. "We're poor but dishonest."

"Sure," Roy ejaculated, "we wouldn't even steal a cent, that's why we haven't any sense; deny it if you dare."

"We can sell papers at the station," Westy said.

"Sure, the *Saturday Evening Post*," Roy said. "We can do golden deeds and get gold that way. We should bother our young lives. What care us, quoth we? We'll think of a way. All we need is fifty dollars to put tar-paper on the roof and a new cook stove in the car."

"Money talks," the kid shouted.

"Good night!" said Roy, "then we don't want any of it. You do enough talking in this troop."

"Are you fellows all one outfit?" asked a young man who had been leaning against the opposite counter, amused at their talk.

"United we stand, divided we sprawl," Roy said. "There are more of us, too, only they're not here. They're by the river."

"I can give you a chance to earn some money if you really want to," the young man said. "Do you think you could stick?"

"Our middle name is fly-paper," Roy informed him.

"Like camping?"

"Camping is named after us," Connie Bennett of the Elk Patrol said. "We'd rather camp than eat."

"No we wouldn't," vociferated Pee-wee Harris.

"What kind of hours?" Doc Carson of the Ravens inquired.

"The usual kind," Roy volunteered, and put it up to their new friend if this were not so. "The same kind we use in school, hey?" he added.

"Give him a chance to tell us what it is," said Westy Martin of Roy's

patrol. “We all started saying we’d like to earn some money; talk is cheap.”

“Sure, that’s why we use so much of it,” said Roy. “If it cost anything we couldn’t afford it.”

“Well,” said the young man, “I’ve got a job and I need help. It’s outdoors and it means camping and living rough. It means cooking our own meals. You could get a little money out of it; not much, but a little.”

Perhaps it was what the stranger said, perhaps the way he said it, but something caused them all to turn and stare at him.

He was a young fellow of about twenty-three or four and of very shabby appearance. The threadbare suit which he wore must have seen long service and either it had never been a very trim fit or he had lost flesh. His face, indeed, seemed to imply this, being thin and pale, and there was a kind of haunting look in his eyes.

But his demeanor was creditable, he seemed quite free of any taint of the shiftlessness which his appearance might have suggested, and his amusement at the scouts’ bantering nonsense was open and pleasant. Mr. Bennett contemplated him with just a tinge of dubiousness in his look. But the scouts liked him.

“What’s the nature of the work?” Mr. Bennett asked.

The young man seemed a trifle uneasy at being directly questioned but no one would have said it was more than the diffidence which any sensitive young fellow might show towards strangers.

“It’s taking down two or three buildings,” he said; “just shacks. My name is Blythe.”

“Here in town?”

“No, up at the old camp.”

“Oh, you mean Camp Merritt? I heard the government sold the whole shebang. What are they doing? Putting gangs to work up there?”

“I’ll help you tear down Camp Merritt!” Pee-wee shouted.

“No, they’re just giving the jobs out piecemeal,” the young man said amid the general laughter. “Anybody that wants to tear a building down can get permission. They give so much a building. I undertook three. If I could get some help and do it in a month or so I’d have a little money. I haven’t got anybody so far. I suppose that’s because it’s out of the way.”

“Oh, then you don’t work for the wrecking concern?” Mr. Bennett queried.

“Only that way,” the stranger said.

“You belong hereabouts?”

“N—no.”

“Anybody else working up there?”

“Not now.”

“I suppose these youngsters could get a commission to haul down several

buildings themselves if they wanted to?" Mr. Bennett inquired. "Cut out the middle man, huh?"

The young fellow seemed a trifle worried. "I—I didn't think of that," he said; "I guess they could. But I don't want much out of it myself," he added, in a voice that had almost a note of pleading in it; "and I picked out the easiest shacks. They'd—I'd be willing—they'd get most of the money. Beggars can't be choosers. I'm out of work—I——"

"And it's best for youngsters to have a boss, eh?" Mr. Bennett added, genially. "Well, I guess you're right. Somebody to keep them out of mischief."

The scouts and their new friend strolled out onto Main Street and, pausing there in a little group, continued talking.

"If you think we're the kind to get an idea from you and then go and use it and leave you out, you're mistaken," said Connie Bennett.

"The camp isn't mine," their new friend said, hesitatingly.

"No, but that particular job is yours," Westy Martin insisted, "and we're on that job, if we go there at all."

"That's a good argument," Pee-wee ejaculated.

"Are you staying up there?" Connie asked.

The stranger seemed pleased, even relieved. That uncertain, diffident smile hovered for a moment about his mouth. "I'd treat you right, that's sure," he said. "It's pretty hard for a fellow to get work. I just sort of stumbled into this ——"

"Well, I'm glad you stumbled into us, too," said Roy, a note of sympathy and sincerity in his voice that there was no mistaking. "We'll have to speak to our mothers and fathers, but don't you worry, we have them trained all right. We have cooking outfits and everything, too. We'll take a hike up there to-morrow. We'd like to make some money, but gee whiz, that isn't the only thing we care about. Camping and all that—that's what we like. Don't we, Westy?"

"Where can we find you up there?" Westy asked.

"You go up the Knickerbocker Road and right in through the old entrance," Blythe said. "The second shack you come to on your left is where I'm bunking. You'll see me around somewhere."

"You do your own cooking?" Artie Van Arlen asked him.

"Yes, but I'm not much of a cook," Blythe said. "I—I don't—I won't get anything till the work's finished——"

"You should worry about that," Roy said.

"I guess I can eat most anything," Blythe laughed.

"Can you eat as many as eleven?" Pee-wee demanded.

That same elusive, half-bashful, pleasant smile lingered on the stranger's lips again as he said, "—I guess—not——"

“Then I can beat you,” Pee-wee announced conclusively.

“Here comes the bus,” Westy said. “Do you go up in that?”

“I guess I’ll walk,” Blythe said.

“Well, we’ll be up there to-morrow, sure,” Doc Carson reassured him; “some of us anyway. Even if we don’t come to stay we’ll be up there, so you look for us.”

“I’m fair and square,” Blythe said. “When you come you can look the place over and then say——”

“You should worry about that,” Roy interrupted him.

“Maybe your people——”

“You leave our people to us,” Roy said. “My father believes in camping and fun—he inherits that from me. Scouts know how to pick out fathers all right.”

Their new friend smiled again, with a kind of simple pleasure at Roy’s nonsense. “I’ll look for you,” he said. Then they parted.

“He’s got some walk all the way up to Camp Merritt,” Doc Carson said. “Do you suppose he hasn’t any money?”

“Looks that way,” said Westy.

“I kind of like him,” Doc said. “I guess he’s in hard luck all right. I’m glad we met him.”

“I’m the one that did it,” Pee-wee shouted. “Didn’t I say for us all to go into Bennett’s? Now you see!”

“All we have to do is to follow you,” Roy said, “and adventures come around wanting to eat out of our hands.”

“And I—I’m the one to show you where there’s money too,” Pee-wee said. “I’m a capital or whatever you call it.”

“You’re the smallest capital *I* ever saw,” Roy said.

CHAPTER IV
PEE-WEE FIXES IT

The concerted assault which the scouts made upon their parents for permission to proceed with their plan ended in a compromise. Late that same afternoon Mr. Ellsworth, scoutmaster of the troop, drove up to the old camp in his auto and looked over the situation. He talked with Blythe also and was evidently not unfavorably impressed, for he returned to Bridgeboro quite converted to the enterprise.

"He's a queer kind of a duck," he said to Mr. Blakeley, referring to Blythe. "I think he's out of luck and rather discouraged. He doesn't say much. I think he took this job in desperation not knowing exactly how he was going to go ahead with it. He expects to get three hundred dollars for what he's undertaken. He means to divide evenly, he said, but of course that will leave him with only twelve dollars, if the whole troop goes up. He doesn't seem to have any grasp of things at all.

"I proposed to him that he keep one hundred dollars for himself and give the boys the other two hundred. This fellow has lost his grip and I doubt if he'll do much work, but of course it's his job. It's as much to help him as anything else that I'd like to see the troop go up there. It ought to be fun camping in the ramshackle old place; I'd rather like it myself."

"This Blythe, he doesn't belong around these parts, does he?" Mr. Blakeley asked.

"No, I believe not, but I think he's all right. I size him up for a disheartened member of the big army of unemployed who stumbled on this opportunity. He has a look in his eyes that goes to my heart. He needs to be out-of-doors, that's sure. If the troop doesn't give him a hand he'll have to pass it up. The boys want a little money and here's a good chance to earn it and do a good turn at the same time."

"You liked him, eh?" Mr. Blakeley asked.

"Yes, on the whole I did. He's an odd case and I can't altogether make him out, but I liked him. I don't think he's very well, for one thing."

"Well I guess it's a good chance for the boys," Mr. Blakeley said.

That, indeed, was the consensus of opinion of the men higher up and there was another demonstration of the remarkable power which the scouts had over their parents.

"We know how to manage them all right," said Pee-wee to Roy. "I told your father I'd see that you got back all safe; I told him to leave it to me."

Pee-wee's responsibilities, according to his own account, were many and various. He promised Doc Carson's mother that he would personally see to it that Doc wore his sweater at night. He gave his word to Mr. Hollister that Warde would not over-eat—Pee-wee was an authority on that subject. He distributed his promises and undertook obligation with a generosity that only a boy scout can show. He advised Mrs. Benton, Dorry's mother, not to worry, that her son should be the subject of his especial care.

He magnanimously volunteered to be responsible for the safety of the whole troop. And he announced that Mr. Ellsworth's judgment was the same as his own precisely.

With such assurances the troops' parents could not do otherwise than surrender unconditionally, and Pee-wee of the Ravens was the hero, the George Washington, of the expedition.

At all events he carried his little hatchet with him, and it pulled on his belt so that he had to be continually hoisting it up and tightening his belt so that before the expeditionary forces had gone far he looked not unlike a bolster tied in the middle.

CHAPTER V
PEE-WEE'S DISCOVERY

The next morning the troop started on their hike to the old camp. Excepting their tents they carried full camping equipment, blankets, cooking utensils, first aid kit, lanterns, changes of clothing, and plenty of those materials which Roy's magic could conjure into luscious edibles. The raw material for the delectable flipflop was there, cans groaning with egg-powder, raisins for plum-duff, savory bacon, rice enough for twenty weddings and chocolate enough to corner the market in chocolate sundaes. Cans of exasperated milk, as Pee-wee called it, swelled his duffel bag, and salt and pepper he also carried because, as Roy said, he was both fresh and full of pep. Carrots for hunter's stew were carried by the Elks because red was their patrol color. A can of lard dangled from the end of Dorry Benton's scout staff. Beans were the especial charge of Warde Hollister because he had come from Boston.

Most of the scouts had visited Camp Merritt during the war when it was seething with activity, and when watchful sentinels stood on every road of approach, challenging the visitor and demanding to see his pass. They had been familiar with the boys in khaki, strangers in New Jersey mostly, who filled the streets of Bridgeboro. But they had not visited the old camp since it had become a deserted village.

It seemed strange to them that the place which had so lately swarmed with life, and had a sort of flaunting air of martial energy and preparation, should have become the lonely biding place of one poor soul and that its only service now was to stand between that poor stricken derelict and starvation.

If they had taken their way up the Knickerbocker Road along which auto parties and pedestrians had once thronged to see the soldiers, they would have found the going easy, but instead they followed the river northward, for five or six miles, then cut through the country eastward which would bring them to the western extremity of the old camp.

In this last part of their journey they fell into an indistinct trail, much overgrown, running through an area of comparatively wild country. This, indeed, had been a beaten path between the camp and the villages to the west. It had known the tread of many an A. W. O. L.[1] soldier, yet it had not been altogether a secret path, but rather one of convenience. At all events it had been well clear of the main entrance on the Knickerbocker Road, and this conspicuous advantage had given it a certain popularity.

At the time of the boys' journey this path would probably have been

indistinguishable to any but scouts. It brought them soon to an old tumbled-down building which had never been more than a mere shack, and was now so utterly dilapidated that living in it would be quite out of the question. Some remnants of a roof remained in a few shreds of curled, rotten shingles, the foundation was intact, and the sides though bulging and full of gaping crevices were still standing.

"Oh look at the house, it's all ruined like Reims Cathedral," Pee-wee shouted. This, indeed, was its only point of resemblance to Reims Cathedral. "Come on inside," he continued, leading the way, "it's a dandy place, it's all caving in."

"I suppose they want about a thousand dollars a month rent for this place," said Westy Martin.

"Sure," said Roy, "it has all modern improvements, free shower-baths when it rains and everything."

Within, the place was dank and musty and cobwebs spread across the openings where the windows had been. Much broken glass and a couple of sash weights fastened to ends of rotten sash cord lay upon the floor. In the corner was a makeshift bed of straw, matted from age, damp and unwholesome. The place was in possession of spiders. Whole boards of the flooring had rotted, yielding like mud under the feet of the scouts.

"Some place," said Connie Bennett.

"Oh, here's a dime," Pee-wee shouted reaching under an open space in the flooring. "I can get a soda with that."

"Here's another," said Westy.

It seemed likely that some of the heroes who had made the world safe for democracy had beguiled their time playing craps before going forth to glory.

Suddenly Pee-wee shouted, "Oh look at this! I bet it has something to do with a spy! I bet it has secret papers in it! *Look what I found!*"

From under the edge of the rotten straw our observant young hero had pulled out an oilskin wallet. There were not many such places as this old ruin that did not yield up their treasures to Pee-wee. The veriest ash heap became a place of romance under his prying hand and inquisitive eye. This find was just one of those ordinary oilskin wallets which had held and protected many letters from mothers and sweethearts and which had been shot through and through in the trenches in France. Black spots of mildew were upon it and it had an oily, unpleasant odor.

"*I found it! I found it!*" Pee-wee vociferated, as the scouts all clustered about him eager to see.

"You're the greatest discoverer next to Christopher Columbus," Roy said. "Let's see what's inside it."

"Didn't I say to stop here?" Pee-wee demanded.

“You never thought you’d find an ice cream soda here,” Roy said.

“You never know where you’ll find one,” Pee-wee said in high excitement. “Didn’t I find a dime in a sewer-pipe?”

“That’s a nice place to find a soda,” Roy laughed. “Open the wallet and let’s see what’s in it.”

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[1] A. W. O. L.—Absent without leave.

CHAPTER VI
SUNDAY THE FOURTEENTH

Pressing about Pee-wee, the scouts read eagerly the contents of that old musty oilskin memento of the days when Camp Merritt was a seething community of boys in khaki. The big spiders lurked in their webs; the repulsive little slugs, made homeless by the lifting of a damp, rotten board, hurried frantically about on the floor; a single ray of sunlight penetrated through a crevice, a slanting, dusty line, and lit up a little area of the dim, musty place. But there was no sound, not even from the scouts, save only the voice of Westy Martin as he read that old, creased, damp, all but undecipherable letter:

Dear Old Mother:

I was hoping I might get down to Hicksville before we sail, but I guess I can't. They don't tell us much here but it seems to be in the air that we'll sail in a day or two. Feeling pretty disappointed because I wanted to see you again and say good-bye and have just one good home-cooked meal. I'm sick of beans and black coffee. Don't worry, you'll hear from me in France. I don't suppose you'll be able to get the end of the porch fixed up, but try to get the window put in before winter. I meant to do that myself. Put a pail under the drain so the water won't flood under the woodshed. Tell Don to be a good watch dog and be sure to tie him outside at night.

I don't suppose you'll hear from me again till we get across. Don't worry, pretty soon it will all be over and I'll come marching home and you'll be telling people it was me that won the war and I'll be glad to get a good squint at my old N. C. hills. It will be over before you know it. Now you have to be brave, see? Just like you were when dad died. Remember what you said then? Now don't think this is good-bye because I'm sailing but remember the Atlantic Ocean isn't a one way street. Just chalk that up on the wall, and speaking about oceans don't forget about the water by the woodshed and do what I told you. So now good-bye dear old Mum and don't worry, and I won't go near Paris like you said. Hicksville is good enough for me.

Your loving son.

There was something about this old missive which sobered the bantering troop of scouts and made even Pee-wee quiet and thoughtful.

"It's a letter he was going to send," Artie Van Arlen finally said.

"Who?" Doc Carson asked.

Artie shrugged his shoulders. "Somebody or other, that's all *we* know," he said. "We don't even know who he was going to send it to; there are a whole lot of dear old mothers."

"You said it," commented Roy.

"Let's see the other papers," one of the scouts said.

The only other contents of the wallet were a small paper with blanks filled in, and an engraved calling card. The paper with the blanks filled in was so smeared from long moisture that the written parts were undecipherable. The paper was evidently a leave of absence from camp. The name was utterly blurred out, but by studying the smeared writing in the space where the date had been written the scouts thought they could determine the date, or at least part of it. *Sun—1918* was all they could be sure of.

But fortunately the calling card appeared to confirm this date. It was a card of fine quality and beautifully engraved with the name of Helen Shirley Bates. In the lower left hand corner was engraved Woodcliff, New Jersey. On the back of the card was written in a free feminine hand *For dinner Sunday April 14th, 1918. One o'clock.*

"What do you make out of it? What does it mean? Who was he anyway?" the scouts, interrupting each other, asked, as these memorials of an unknown soldier boy were passed around from hand to hand and eagerly read.

Of all the scouts Westy Martin, of Roy's Patrol, was the soberest and most thoughtful. He had the most balance. Not that Roy did not have balance, but he never had much on hand because he was continually losing it.

"Whoever he was," Westy said, "it looks as if he got a leave of absence to go to the girl's house for dinner. Going this way would be a shortcut to Woodcliff. Maybe he was going to take the train up from New Milford."

"I guess he was going to mail the letter to his mother in New Milford, hey?" Hunt Ward of the Elks suggested.

"Yes, but why didn't he?" Doc Carson asked.

"It's a mystery," said Pee-wee. "Do you know what I'm going to do?"

"Break it to us gently," Roy said.

"Some day soon I'm going to hike to Woodcliff and see that girl and find out what that soldier's name is and I'm going to send the letter to his mother."

"What's the use of doing that?" Vic Norris asked. "The soldier has probably been home two years by now."

"I don't care," Pee-wee insisted; "the letter is to his mother and I'm going to see that she gets it."

“Are you going to get a soda while you’re up at Woodcliff?” Roy asked him.

“That’s all right,” Pee-wee said with great vehemence; “if you got a letter that went astray you’d want it, wouldn’t you?”

“You’re talking in chunks,” Roy said. “Go ahead and see the girl if you want to. I bet she’ll think you’re sweet. Only come ahead and let’s get to camp.”

“Unanimously carried by a large majority,” Dorry Benton said. “Mysteries aren’t going to buy tar-paper for our old car.”

“There might have been a thousand dollars in this wallet,” Pee-wee reminded them.

“Except for one thing,” Roy said.

“And what’s that?” Pee-wee asked.

“That there wasn’t,” Roy said. “Put it in your pocket and come on.”

Though they treated Pee-wee’s find as something of a joke and attached no significance to it, still the discovery of these old papers which had now no meaning for anybody kept recurring to them as they made their way to the old camp. But the consensus of opinion was that these old mildewed remnants of another time were unimportant.

“What good is a letter when the fellow who sent it is already home?” Doc Carson asked.

“What use is a leave of absence that expired two or three years ago?” Connie Bennett added.

“If that fellow’s away yet, he’s overstaying his leave, that’s sure,” said Roy.

“What good is a Sunday dinner that somebody ate a couple of years ago?” Doc queried.

“Maybe he’s up there eating it yet,” Will Dawson suggested.

“That’s the way our young hero would do,” said Roy.

“Do you mean to say it isn’t important—that dinner?” Pee-wee demanded.

“Sure, all dinners are important,” Roy said. “But one two years old isn’t much good. If it was only six months old I wouldn’t say anything, but *two years*——”

“You’re crazy!” vociferated Pee-wee.

“Sure,” said Roy, “one dinner is as important as another if not more so. Deny it if you can.”

“Anyway I’m going to see that girl,” Pee-wee said.

“At dinnertime?” Roy asked slyly.

“I’m going to find out who that fellow is, I’ve got his finger prints here, too, on this card——”

“G-o-o-d night,” laughed Roy. “The boy scout Sherlock Home Sweet

Holmes. I suppose you'll have that poor girl in Atlanta Penitentiary before you get through."

"Let's see the finger prints?" Westy asked.

Pee-wee showed him the card and there, sure enough, was a finger print on the face of it and two on the back. It looked as if someone with greasy hands had taken the card up as one usually holds a card....

CHAPTER VII
THEN AND NOW

Within ten or fifteen minutes more they were in the old camp. They entered the reservation territory at its western edge and cutting across soon came to the concrete road which runs north and south through the middle of the camp. This is the Knickerbocker Road which traversed the reservation territory before ever Camp Merritt was heard of, and bears its scanty traffic now through that pathetic scene of ruin and desolation. It is the one feature of the camp that was not of its temporary character.

Up this road through Dumont to the south, there once passed a never ceasing procession of autos, encountering guards and sentinels for a mile south of the camp. The atmosphere of military officialdom permeated the public approaches for miles in both directions.

If one were so fortunate as to have a pass, he could by dint of many stops and absurd inquiries and parleys, succeed in reaching the large gate posts on which was printed UNITED STATES RESERVATION. Through this the Knickerbocker Road, being especially privileged, passed without challenge, straight through the middle of the camp and out of its northern extremity, then through the pleasant little town of Haworth.

On either side of this road, within the confines of the camp, were board shacks of every size and variety. They were for every purpose conceivable and, large and small, they were all alike in this, that they had a makeshift, temporary look, and were a delight to the eye of the tried and true camper. They were all alike in this, too, that civilian patriots had charged twenty dollars a day to put them up. This was in odd contrast to the one poor, hapless soul who was to receive three hundred dollars for the work of tearing several of them down.

As the scouts, his one hope now, came up onto the central road and hiked southward toward the main entrance, they scrutinized the weather-beaten and windowless structures on either side for a sign of their friend. But no hint of any human presence was there, no suggestion of life of any kind, save a companionable windmill nearby, the moving wheel of which creaked cheerfully as if to assure these scout pilgrims that the scene of their destination was not altogether deserted. It seemed a kind of living, friendly thing, in that forlorn surrounding. What surging life it had witnessed, what hearty, reckless, resolute departures! One might fancy it saying as it revolved, “I have seen all, seen the boys come and go, and I alone am left in all this hollow desolation.”

The boys paused a moment to watch this lonely sentinel and listen to its creaking.

"That sound would give me the shudders at night, if I didn't know what caused it," one of them said.

"Shut your eyes, then listen," said Westy. "It sounds kind of spooky, huh?"

"Gee whiz, but this is a lonely place," Roy said. "It reminds you of Broadway, it's so different. It's a peach of a place to camp."

"I bet there are ghosts up here," Pee-wee said darkly.

"Sure, you'd better look around for finger prints," Roy said.

"Maybe that old windmill is haunted, hey?" our young hero suggested.

"It needs oil anyway," Roy said.

"You make me tired," said Pee-wee contemptuously. "A ghost can squeak, can't it?"

"Sure," said Roy, "if it's rusty."

But for all their banter the old windmill, perhaps because it was the only thing stirring, held them and sobered their thoughts as it would not have done elsewhere. Perhaps they felt a sort of consciousness of its lonely position and fancied it to be something human. It overlooked the obscure path along which they had come; how many forms in khaki had it seen stealing to or from the camp A. W. O. L.? How many truckloads of uproarious boys had it seen driven away? How many maimed and suffering brought back? Surely it had seen much that the most loyal citizens had not been permitted to see. A whimsical thought, perhaps, but what good fun it would be to climb up there and learn some dark and tragic secrets from this lonely old derelict, the only thing with any sign of life that Uncle Sam had left in that forlorn, deserted spot.

Had it any tragic secret? That seemed quite absurd. A creaky old windmill revolving to no purpose in that waste, because it had nothing else to do.

"*Listen!*" said Pee-wee. "Sh-h-h! I heard a noise—up there."

Captivated for the moment by their own mood, they all paused, listening. Then, not far off, a friendly voice accosted them. It was young Mr. Blythe coming to greet them. His face wore that uncertain, hovering smile, which had the effect of arousing pity. His eyes had an eager, startled look, like those of a frightened animal. He seemed backward, almost bashful, but his joy at seeing them was unmistakable and sincere.

"Better late than never," laughed Roy. "Here we are bag and baggage; we thought you were a spook or something...."

CHAPTER VIII
PEACE!

Blythe was bunking in one of the shacks which he had secured the privilege of tearing down and it was apparent to the scouts that his knowledge of camping was primitive. But Pee-wee, out of the greatness of his scout heart, volunteered to be his guide, philosopher, and friend in these matters.

"We'll show you how to do," he said. "If there's anything you don't understand you just come to me. I've got the camping badge and the pathfinder's badge, and the astronomer's badge——"

"He's an astronomer," interrupted Roy; "he knows all the movie stars."

"He sees everything in the sky," Hunt Ward added; "he's the one that put the see in sea-scout."

"Sure, and put the pie in pioneer scout too," Roy said. "He studied first aid and last aid and lemonade and everything. He's a scout in very high standing only he doesn't stand very high. You stick to him and you can't go wrong."

"Do you mean to say I haven't the badge for camping?" the diminutive Raven demanded as he unburdened himself of his various paraphernalia. "Do you mean to say I didn't study the heavens when I was a tenderfoot?"

"No wonder the stars went out," Roy said. "Here, take this bag of flour and put it over in the corner. You're in Camp Merritt now, you have to obey your superior officer. Here, take the spools of thread out of this coffee-pot and kick that big can over here, the one marked dynamite. I'm going to put the sugar in that. Anyone who takes any sugar without permission will be blown up by his patrol leader. *Look what you're doing!* Don't set the pickles on the chocolate. Hand me that bottle of ink before you spill it in the egg powder."

It was good to see Blythe laughing at Pee-wee's heroic effort to dispose of the commissary stores which his companions loaded upon him. It was a laugh of simple, genuine pleasure, almost childlike.

"Don't drop the fly-paper in the flour," Roy shouted to Pee-wee in frantic warning, as Pee-wee wrestled valiantly under the load of boxes, packages and cans. "Put the cork back in the molasses jug before it spills into the Indian meal."

"We'll have home brew," Westy said.

"You mean home glue," Roy answered. "*Look at him!* He's got the powdered cocoanut all over the bacon!"

"Keep those things off me!" the victim shouted as the boxes and cans piled up on him. "Do you think I'm a freight car?"

As he stooped to pick up a box a can went rolling under Blythe's makeshift bed. As he reached for the can a bag of beans burst like a sky-rocket, pouring a shower down his neck and into his pockets and over the floor.

"*Now you see!*" he yelled. "The eggs are sliding down!"

"*Help, help!*" called several scouts.

Pee-wee picked up two cans of sardines and sacrificed a bag of rice. He gathered up rice and beans together, and a jar of jam went rolling on a career of foreign travel. All was confusion.

"*Time!*" he screamed.

"He asks for an armistice," Roy shouted.

"You mean a couple of dozen arms," Westy shrieked.

"If you put another thing on me I'll drop the eggs," Pee-wee screamed. "I'll drop them so that they—they—*bounce*, too."

This threat of frightfulness cowered his assailants.

"That's against international law," Roy shouted.

"I don't care, I'll do it!" Pee-wee yelled. "You pile one more thing on me and I'll——"

"Start an eggmarine campaign," Westy said.

"That's the first time I ever knew food to get the best of Pee-wee," Artie Van Arlen observed.

The diminutive mascot of the Raven Patrol having valiantly protected the eggs in one extended hand gradually divested himself of the mountain under which he had labored, and by a fine strategic move took a tactical position behind these defenses with the pasteboard box of eggs upraised in heroic and threatening defiance. The war had come to an end suddenly, like the World War.

"Unconditional surrender," Roy shouted.

"Do I get three helpings of stew for supper?" demanded the victor, by way of imposing an indemnity before he proceeded with disarmament.

"Sure, eggs won the war," Roy conceded.

As for Blythe, he was sitting on a grocery box in No Man's Land, laughing so hard that his sides ached. Their banter seemed a kind of tonic to him. And it was when he laughed and seemed so simple and childlike and so much one of them, that they found him so likable.

CHAPTER IX
AROUND THE FIRE

After this decisive conflict the period of reconstruction or rather the period of demolition, began auspiciously. It began with a grand feast cooked out-of-doors in the brass kettle which was the pride of Roy's life. That brass kettle stood upon a scout fireplace of stones, and from its interior a hunter's stew diffused its luscious fragrance to those who sat about, feeding the companionable fire. The scouts were quite masters of the situation, their coming must have been like a freshening breeze to the lonely visitant at the old deserted camp, and their fun and brisk efficiency and readiness seemed to give him a new life and afford him amusement which was expressed in that silent, likeable, yet haunting smile. It was not often that he laughed aloud and he talked but little, and then with a kind of diffidence that seemed odd in one so much their senior.

"I'm going to leave that kettle to my ancestors when I die," Roy said. "It's been all over and I've cooked everything in it except Cook's tours; it's travelled more than they have, anyway. It's been to Temple Camp and we fished it up from the bottom of the lake once and I guess as many as ten thousand wheat cakes have come out of that kettle. Hey, Pee-wee?"

"Nine thousand eight hundred is all Pee-wee can say for sure about," Westy said.

"Are you used to camping?" Doc Carson asked Blythe. "I thought maybe you liked this kind of thing because you came here."

"It was just that I was out of a job," Blythe said frankly. "Anything's better than nothing. I happened to wander in here and met a man with an auto. He works for the concern that's going to tear the camp down; a salvage concern. He got me this job. I don't suppose you'd call it a job, it's an assignment. I picked out the three buildings and they sent me a paper with the numbers on. I've only been here a couple of days. Yesterday was the only time I was in Bridgeboro. I was going to give it up. I didn't have any supplies and I didn't know who to get to help me—I was mighty glad that friend of yours came up yesterday and said he'd tell you fellows it was all right."

"He's our scoutmaster," said Pee-wee. "He's all right, only you've got to know how to manage him. We'll start in to-morrow morning and we'll show that savage concern all right. We'll show them what we can do."

"Maybe they won't be so savage," Roy said.

"Pee-wee can manage them," Westy observed.

“Oh sure, all you have to do is to know how to manage them,” commented Connie. “They can’t come too savage for our young hero.”

“He can even tame wild flowers,” Roy said; “lions—dandelions and tiger-lilies and everything. He eats them alive.”

“Speaking of eating, how about the stew?” Artie Van Arlen asked.

“It has to stew for an hour,” Roy said. “Somebody get out the tin plates; be prepared, that’s our motto. All the comforts of home. Where’s *your* home?” he asked Blythe in a sudden impulse.

“Oh I’m just a kind of a tramp,” Blythe said uneasily. “I guess I must have left home before I had my eyes open.”

“That was before you could walk,” Pee-wee reminded him.

“The last home I was in was in New York,” Blythe said. “It wasn’t mine.”

“I guess you’re like we are,” Westy said, noticing perhaps a little embarrassment in their friend’s manner, “our home is outdoors.”

“And believe me, the sky has all the tin roofs I ever saw beaten twenty ways,” observed Warde Hollister. That was pretty good for a new scout.

“Roofs are all right to slide down,” Pee-wee observed. “They’re all right as long as you’re not under them.”

“Believe me, we wouldn’t have the sky over us if we didn’t have to,” said Roy. “It’s a blamed nuisance when it rains. The trouble with the solar system is there are too many stars and planets and things in it. You can’t get out into the open.”

“What are you talking about?” Pee-wee retorted contemptuously.

“I’d get rid of all the stars, stationary stars, movie stars and all,” Roy said.

“Scouts are supposed to like the stars,” Pee-wee informed Blythe.

“Sure, if he had his own way he’d eat hunter’s stew out of the Big Dipper,” said Roy. “A lot he knows about the stars; he doesn’t even know that Mercury is named after a thermometer.”

“This bunch is crazy,” Pee-wee informed Blythe.

“That’s because we sleep under crazy quilts,” Roy said.

Blythe just sat there laughing, the silent, diffident pleasure in his countenance shown by the crackling, cheery blaze.

“What would you do if you didn’t have the North Star, I’d like to know?” Pee-wee demanded. “We’d be all roaming around lost in the woods, dead maybe.”

“I should worry about roaming around dead,” said Roy. “Do you think I’ve got the North Star?”

With a look of pitying contempt, Pee-wee turned from Roy to the more congenial bowl, now sizzling and bubbling on the fire. “It’s ready,” he said.

“Be prepared,” said Roy; “each one arm himself with a tin plate and after that every scout for himself. This is called a hunter’s stew because you have to

hunt for the meat in it, but it's got plenty of e-pluribus unions in it. The potatoes and dumplings go to the patrol leaders, carrots to first and second hand scouts; tenderfeet get nothing because the stew isn't tender enough...."

It was pleasant sitting there in the bright area surrounded by darkness, chatting and planning the work for the morrow, and eating hunter's stew, scout style, patent applied for. And notwithstanding the slurs which Roy had cast at the sky it was pleasant to see that vast bespangled blackness over head. In the solemn night the neighboring shacks were divested of their tawdry cheapness, the loose and flapping strips of tar-paper and the broken windows were not visible, and the buildings seemed clothed in a kind of sombre dignity—silent memorials of the boys who had made those old boards and rafters ring with their shouts and laughter. Not a sound was there now from all those barnlike remains of a life that was gone. Only the noise of the saw and the hammer would resound where once the stirring revelry echoed.

"You hear some funny sounds here at night, when the wind blows," Blythe remarked.

"Shh, listen; I hear something now," one of the scouts said.

"I heard that last night," said Blythe uneasily; "or else I dreamed it."

Westy, who had been poking up the fire, paused, his stick poised, listening. "It's over there," he said, pointing to the tall dark outline of the windmill.

"There isn't breeze enough to turn the fan," Doc Carson said.

"It sounds like someone groaning," said another.

From the neighborhood of that old tower, though perhaps farther off, they could not tell, came a sound almost human, a kind of moaning intermingled with a plaintive wail, pitched in a higher key.

"Spooky," Westy said.

"This is the kind of a place I like," said Connie.

"Only it's nice to have somebody here," Blythe admitted.

"That's all right, *we're* here," Pee-wee said.

They did not hear the sound again. If one were superstitious he might have conjured that sound into a crying of the ghost of some dead soldier haunting the old forsaken camp. But these scouts did not believe in ghosts.

They did, however, believe in hunter's stew and they forgot all else as they sat around their camp-fire in the quiet darkness, telling yarns, and amusing their new friend by jollying....

CHAPTER X
THE FALL OF SCOUT HARRIS

As a camping place, perhaps the old reservation would not have proved a spot to the heart of the woods lover, but it was sequestered and had about it that romance which attaches to deserted habitations that are not tainted by the sordid environments of city life. The old buildings had never been beautiful and it was only the atmosphere of a place deserted which gave them a sort of romantic character.

But Nature had not been forced to evacuate the camp area; trees and tiny patches of woodland had remained, and the things which scouts love and seek had reasserted their supremacy there after the last of the soldiers, and later the army of clerical workers, had gone away.

The result was a kind of jumble of man's hurried handiwork and Nature's persistence, and the place, for a while, was a novel, nay even a delightful, spot in which to camp.

In conference with Blythe, who seemed cheerfully agreeable to any plan, the troop decided that each patrol should have the task of demolishing a building, and should work under the supervision of its leader, with Blythe as a sort of general overseer.

The whole troop, however, bunked in a small fourth building because this would not be in process of razing. From the appearance of this little building it had been a sort of club or meeting place. The window glass was quite gone, as indeed was all the window glass in the camp. Near by was a good place for their camp and cook fire. The little shack had shelves on which the scouts kept their stores. They made beds of balsam, scout fashion, and slept both in and out-of-doors, as the weather dictated.

Roy was cook, as he always was on their troop enterprises. In his forages against the stronghold of Chocolate Drop, the professional cook at Temple Camp, he had learned much of the beloved art in which that grinning negro excelled. The unruly flipflop tossed in air, fluttered down into his greasy pan like a tamed bird. In Pee-wee's experiments it had a perverse habit of alighting on his head.

Roy's spirit, indeed, seemed to pass into his cookery and give it a flavor all its own. His bacon sizzled with joy. His coffee bubbled over with mirth. His turnovers wore a scout smile. His baked potatoes had his own twinkle in their eyes. His dumplings were indented with merry dimples like those in his own cheeks.

The morning after their arrival they set to work in real earnest. They had not a complete equipment of axes and saws, excepting their belt-axes, but as much of the work consisted of gathering and piling the lumber, and removing nails from it, there were implements enough for all. Some of the scouts worked above, loosening the boards from the roofs, while others on the ground pulled the tar-paper and nails from these and made an orderly pile of them.

Such was the nature of their work during the first two or three days and they found it strenuous but neither too difficult nor heavy. And work was relieved somewhat by the comedy element furnished by Pee-wee who rolled off a roof on one occasion while eating a sandwich.

"Take the nails out of him, pull the sandwich out of his hands, and pile him up with the boards," Roy called from a neighboring roof. "He's docked thirty cents for the time lost in rolling down."

"He ought to have an emergency brake," Westy suggested, as the young Raven clambered up to his place again, sandwich and all, and proceeded working with the sandwich in one hand and a hammer in the other.

"Didn't you say that's all roofs are good for?" Pee-wee vociferously demanded. "To roll off of?"

"To roll *down*, I said," Roy answered from his own perch among the beams of the next shack.

"Did you ever hear of anybody rolling up?" the young hero demanded.

"Sure," said Roy; "didn't you ever roll up and go to sleep? You never rolled *down*, and went to sleep, did you? That shows what you know about geometry."

"That's not geometry," Pee-wee shouted. "I took geometry last year."

"It's about time you put it back," Roy called.

"Look out or you'll take another tumble," Westy added.

"He didn't put the last one back yet," Roy observed.

"There goes your sandwich," another one of the Silver Foxes called with glee, as that precious remnant of Pee-wee's lunch went tumbling and separating down the slanting roof.

"Now you see what you made me do!" he fairly screamed.

"Food is coming down," Roy laughed.

This is a fair sample of the fun and banter which accompanied their work and helped to make it easy and pleasant. Occasionally a harmless missile, perchance a luscious fragment of some honorably discharged tomato, would float gracefully from roof to roof bathing the face of some unsuspecting toiler with the crimson hue of twilight. And once again the weather-stained old shacks would seem alive with merriment and laughter.

As for Blythe he witnessed this merry progress with simple, grateful pleasure. He had expected to see the work done, but he had not expected to see

it conjured by scout magic into a kind of play, nor the neighborhood of their joyous labor transformed into a scene of rustic comfort.

By the merest chance the scouts had come and seen and conquered, and presently the scene had that wholesome air of scout life about it. It seemed to poor Blythe as if he had awakened and found himself in fairyland, with a score or more of small brown gnomes climbing and scrambling about his domain, singing, jollying, planning, laughing, working, cooking, eating, kindling big camp-fires with odds and ends of wood, and telling such nonsensical yarns as he had never heard before. Pee-wee and Roy in particular amused him greatly. “Go on, make fun of him,” he would say to Roy. And then he would deliberately take sides with Pee-wee against the whole troop. But he was more prone to listen than to talk.

“Haven’t you got any adventures to tell?” Pee-wee asked him around camp-fire one night.

“Sure,” said Roy, “look in your pockets and see if you can’t find a couple.”

“I guess I’m not much of a hand for adventures,” Blythe laughed. “I like to hear about them though.”

“I’ll tell you some,” Pee-wee said. “I’ll tell you how I found a wallet——”

“And a dime,” Westy interrupted.

“Tell how you saved a fish from drowning at Temple Camp,” Roy said.

“Sure, that’s a fish story,” Connie piped up.

So Pee-wee launched forth recounting instances from his career of glory at Temple Camp, the boys prompting and jollying him, all to the simple delight of their new friend. His enjoyment seemed always an incentive to banter and nonsense....

CHAPTER XI
YOUNG MR. BLYTHE

It was soon apparent to the scouts that their coming had saved the enterprise for Blythe. He would not have been able to superintend the job with other helpers and even with the scouts he was rather their companion than their leader.

His attempts at sustained labor were pitiful. Yet he was never idle. But he moved from one unfinished task to another, never realizing apparently that each job he started was left undone. He was quite unequal to the harder part of the work, and the scouts, both kind and observant, could see that, and were content to let him gather and pile the fallen lumber and sometimes to rake up the smaller pieces for their evening fire, which he looked forward to with keen delight. What was the matter with him, they did not know. But this they did know, that he was their friend and that he took a kind of childish delight in their camping. He became excited easily and would sometimes seem almost at the point of crying. He would throw down his saw or hammer in a kind of despair.

But these traits were not noticeable except in the working hours and not always then. The boys kept up the fiction of his leadership, conferring with him and consulting him about everything. And with open hearts they took him into their scout life and liked him immensely.

The nearest they could get to a solution of his peculiarities was that he was not well and that a long course of unemployment and privation had resulted in his losing his grip. They took him as they found him, like the good scouts that they were, and their enterprise to earn a little money for improving their picturesque meeting-place at home seemed transformed into a collective, splendid good turn in which their scout loyalty shone like a light.

And so the days of strenuous, cheerful toil, and the nights around the companionable blaze, passed, and Blythe who seemed always fearful and apprehensive of something appeared to be haunted with a kind of dread that this remote and pleasant rustic life would come to an end.

“We won’t be finished next week?” he would say with a kind of simple air of wishing to put off that evil time. “You don’t think so, do you?” And Pee-wee would answer, “That’s all right, you leave it to me. I’ll fix it.”

And evidently he did succeed in fixing it, for it rained steadily for three days.

CHAPTER XII
THREE'S A COMPANY

And now, since the sun had reappeared and they had decided to take things a little easier, Pee-wee announced his intentions of going on a pilgrimage to Woodcliff to hunt up the mysterious Helen Shirley Bates, and to ascertain from her the address of her soldier friend whom she had entertained at dinner during the war. For it was on Pee-wee's conscience that the soldier who had lost his wallet had written a letter to his mother somewhere or other and that this had never reached its destination.

"Are you going to wear your Sunday uniform?" Roy asked. For Pee-wee kept a special suit of scout khaki for ceremonial occasions. Upon the sleeve of this were his merit badges.

On this notable pilgrimage, knowing the weakness of young ladies for official regalia, he wore also his canteen (empty), his scout axe—to hew his way into her presence perhaps—a coil of rope dangling from his belt, his scout scarf tied in the celebrated "raven knot" and his hat inside out as a reminder that he had not yet performed his daily good turn. Upon mailing the letter to its proper address, and not until then, would Scout Harris, R.P. F.B.T. B.S.A., put his hat on right side out. He also took some fudge which he had made as a tribute to his unknown Woodcliff friend. He was prepared to chop her to pieces or to give her candy, whichever the occasion required.

He was indeed a human quartermaster's department and in addition to this equipment he carried also somewhere in the depths of one of his pockets a scout note book wherein the good scout rule of "jotting down things seen by the way" was scrupulously obeyed. There were few wayside trifles that escaped Scout Harris' observant eye. A sample page from this record of his travels will give an idea of his thoroughness:

> August 10th. From Temple Camp to Catskill. Passed a worm also a piece of a ginger snap. Passed a smell like a kitchen. Found a rubber heel in the road. A dead bug was upside down in a puddle. Met a fence. Saw something that looked like a snake but it was a shoe-lace. Had a soda in Catskill. Had another—raspberry. Saw a flat tire as flat as a pancake and it started me thinking about pancakes.

And so on, and so on.

It was Roy whom Pee-wee chose to accompany him on his important mission. They had reached a point about fifty yards from the shacks, two of

which were well-nigh demolished, when they heard a voice and turning saw Warde Hollister drop from a rafter and come running toward them.

"How far is Woodcliff?" he asked, out of breath, and as if caught by a sudden idea.

"'Bout six or seven miles," Roy said. "We don't know just exactly where we're going except that it's somewhere around Woodcliff Lake."

"I might make my last test," Warde panted. "I just happened to think of it." He looked rather appealingly at Roy who was his patrol leader.

"Come ahead," said Roy, "I'm glad you thought of it."

"Have you got your note book?" Pee-wee vociferously demanded. "You've got to jot down everything you see and write a satisfactory description of it."

"Only the test says *alone or with another scout*." Warde said doubtfully. "What do you think? It would be a peach of a chance and I'm crazy to get my first class badge."

"The question is, are we to consider Pee-wee a scout?" Roy said, winking at Warde. "Is he a scout or a sprout?"

"It's just as you say, you're patrol leader," Warde laughed.

"Sure, it's all right," laughed Roy, "come ahead. I'd have asked you only I never thought about it."

"Have you got your note book?" Pee-wee again demanded.

"Yep," Warde laughed.

"Then you're all right," Pee-wee assured him. "It doesn't make any difference whether one scout goes with you or two."

With such high legal authority as this, Warde's mind was at rest. He was the newest scout in the troop and a member of Roy's patrol, the Silver Foxes. He had made a great hit in the troop and was immensely liked.

He had not been long enough a member of the Silver Fox patrol to have imbibed the spirit of freedom with its sprightly leader which the others so hilariously exhibited. The Silver Fox patrol was an institution altogether unique in scouting. One had to be half crazy (as the Ravens and Elks said) before one became a tried and true Silverplated Fox—warranted. The Silver Foxes had a spirit all their own—and they were welcome to it.

Warde had shown his mettle by his tests, and also he had shown his fine breeding and spirit by not pushing too aggressively into troop familiarity. If he was not yet a full-fledged scout, he was at least a fine type for a scout, and the uproarious Silver Foxes and their irrepressible leader were proud of him.

He had now, as he had said, but one test to take before becoming a first class scout. This meant more to him than it might have meant to another for he had obtrusively prepared himself to claim several merit badges of the more easily won sort, as soon as his first class rank should enable him to properly lay claim to these.

He was ahead of the game in fact, and hence the anxiety of his tone and manner when he ran after Pee-wee and Roy, hoping that here might be the chance of fulfilling the final requirement before the coveted first class badge should be his. None fully knew how much he had dreamed of the first class badge. His fine loyalty had kept him at work among them, but he had not been able to see those two fare forth without jumping at the chance.

The test on which his achievement hung is on the same page of the handbook with the picture of the badge he longed for:

> 4.—Make a round trip alone (or with another scout) to a point at least seven miles away (fourteen miles in all) going on foot or rowing a boat, and write a satisfactory account of the trip, and things observed.

Warde Hollister was not the one to strain the meaning of this. To him it meant just exactly what it said. And so he had asked his patrol leader if it would be all right for three to go instead of two. It was a small matter and of course it was all right, as any scoutmaster or National Scout Somebody-or-other would have agreed. The point is that Warde's thinking about it was very characteristic of him. In this instance he accepted his patrol leader's decision....

CHAPTER XIII
WARDE IS IN EARNEST

It was not likely that Warde Hollister would forget his note book, for his habit of keen observation and a knack he had for full and truthful description had won him the post of troop scribe which Artie Van Arlen's duties as Raven patrol leader had compelled him to relinquish.

"If it's seven miles there," said Warde, plainly elated at the thought of accompanying them, "all I'll have to do is to write my little description when I get back and there you are."

"A first class scout," said Pee-wee, quite as delighted as his friend.

"It says fourteen miles there and back," said Roy. "Maybe it'll be seven miles there but we don't know how far it will be back. Sometimes it's longer one way than another. You never can tell."

"You make me tired," said Pee-wee.

"All right, you're so clever," said Roy; "how far is ten miles?"

"How *far?*"

"That's what I said."

"You're crazy," Pee-wee shouted.

"Answer in the affirmative," said Roy. "There's a grasshopper, get out your note book.... Do you know what he did once?" he asked, turning to Warde. "He wouldn't jot down a fountain in Bronx Park because he didn't have a fountain pen——"

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

"He went into a store and asked for the handbook and when they told him they didn't have one he asked for the feetbook. He thinks the feetbook has got all the daring feats in it. He——"

"Don't you believe him," Pee-wee yelled.

"Before he was in the scouts he used to be a radiator ornament on an automobile," Roy persisted. "There's a caterpillar, enter him up, Kid," he added.

"Up at Temple Camp," Pee-wee yelled in merciless retaliation, "they—they told him he could play on the veranda and he said he could only play on the harmonica!"

"I admit it," Roy said. "That was when I was a second-hand scout."

"They ought to be called the Nickel Foxes, that's what all the scouts up at Temple Camp say," Pee-wee shouted. "Because none of them ever have more than five cents."

“The Raving Ravens haven’t got any sense,” Roy came back. “Five is twice as good as nothing.”

“That shows how much you know about arithmetic,” Pee-wee retorted.

“It’s good the boss isn’t here,” Warde said, “or he’d laugh himself to death.” The boss was what they always called Blythe.

“Maybe you’ll say I didn’t discover *him*,” Pee-wee demanded.

“You’re the greatest discoverer next to Columbus, Ohio,” Roy said.

“Well anyway, whoever discovered him, I like him,” Warde said.

“Same here,” said Roy quite ready for any topic of conversation. “I can’t make him out but I like him.”

“He’s just down and out, sort of,” Warde said. “Maybe he’s been sick. That’s the way it seems to me. But he likes us and I like him. It’s fun to see him smile.”

“I wonder where he came from?” Roy asked, as they made their way across fields. “He never says anything about where he belongs or anything.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know,” Warde said.

“We shouldn’t worry about his history,” said Roy. “He’s all right and that’s enough. And he’s going up to Temple Camp with us if I can get him to.”

“I——” began Pee-wee.

“Sure, you discovered Temple Camp,” said Roy. “You discovered the North Pole and the South Pole and the clothes pole and the Atlantic Ocean and Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company and you’ve got them all down in your little book.”

“No joking,” said Warde. “I was——”

“I never joke,” said Roy, “except from Mondays to Saturdays, and on Sundays, morning, afternoon and evening.”

Warde tried again, “I was going to ask you about test four.”

“I’ll tell you about it,” said the irrepressible Pee-wee.

“How about writing the satisfactory account?”

“It doesn’t include worms and ginger snaps,” said Roy.

“But what’s the usual way?” Warde persisted.

Seeing his new member to be serious and knowing with what a fine conscience Warde sought every honor, Roy answered him with the best knowledge he had.

“This is the way Mr. Ellsworth says,” he answered. “You must describe everything that might be helpful to your troop or to other troops or to the whole country, maybe. That’s the way it is. Everything that’s important or unusual you must notice.

“Mostly Mr. Ellsworth or one of the local council in Bridgeboro goes over the ground and sees if the account is satisfactory. In some troops they don’t do that. If it’s just written up all right they say it’s all right and let it go at that. But

Mr. Ellsworth says it isn't just the description that counts; it's whether you notice everything. It isn't just knowing how to write. That's just being a good author. The other is being a good scout. See?"

"Some scouts think they are authors," said Pee-wee.

"The pleasure is mine," said Roy. "I'm going to keep on writing our adventures as long as I have any paper. Then I'm going to buy some more."

"I'm sorry for the fellow that buys the books," said Pee-wee.

"So am I," said Roy, "as long as you're in the books."

"That's what I meant," said Warde, trying to keep his companions on the subject. "The description is a scout test?"

"Anyway, it is in our troop," said Roy. "Some scoutmasters just take the description and if it's good they say all right. But Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Kinney, he's councilman, they're crazy about hiking. They usually take a sprint over the ground and most always they see something that the scout forgot to mention. That doesn't mean they'd turn him down though. You should worry, you'll get away with it all right."

Roy had no doubt of that, and Pee-wee had no doubt of anything which made for the glory of others. But they both noticed that during the rest of their hike Warde was watchful and preoccupied, occasionally jotting something down but oftener storing it in his clear, fine memory. He was taking no chances and they knew it. Here was his opportunity, he had grasped it just in the moment when it seemed to be passing from him, and he was resolved that before he laid his head upon his balsam couch that night he would be able to call himself a scout of the first class....

CHAPTER XIV
BAFFLED?

After a hike of about eight miles, part way across country and part way along roads, the three scouts reached the beautiful Woodcliff Lake which lies in a northwesterly direction from the old camp. Upon its shore they rested and ate the compact little lunch which they had brought. The afternoon sun flickered on the waters, the gentle slope across the lake was clad in the rich green of the midsummertime, not a boat was to be seen upon that clear forbidden expanse, and no sound was there in all the quiet country round about, save only the elated voice of an angler on the causeway as he pulled up his line with a fish wriggling on the end of it.

It is the duty of Woodcliff Lake to supply water to many thousands of homes and the quietude of its shores and water breathes a kind of cleanliness and purity, which imparts to the lake a character quite its own. An unique feature of it is the causeway which bisects it, forming twin lakes, as it seems to the nearby beholder. But from a distant elevation this straight clean roadway across the very center of the lake stands out in bold relief, having none of the appearance of a bridge nor yet of a dam. From this causeway people are permitted to fish and their good luck is contemplated enviously by auto parties passing to and fro.

The scouts had no difficulty in finding the home of Miss Helen Shirley Bates in this fair neighborhood. They were told to go up a road till they came to another road and to go up that road till they saw a gray house, etc., which direction brought them at last face to face with an electric button which Pee-wee pushed.

By the luck which he claimed to be his, a girl of perhaps nineteen or twenty came to the door, who proved to be none other than the young lady of the calling card. Here, however, Pee-wee's luck deserted him.

"We're boy scouts and this is your card," said the young spokesman. "Do you like fudge?" he added, producing also a specimen of his confectionery skill.

"Oh I just adore it," said the girl, "but where did you get my card? Won't you sit down?"

The scouts were glad to rest in the comfortable wicker chairs on the deep, shady porch, and here the girl listened to Pee-wee's graphic account of his finding of the old wallet. He explained that it was his regular custom to find things and that this need give her no surprise.

“But to think that it had my card in it,” she said; “and that it has been stuck away in that damp, spooky place for two years. I think it’s *just wonderful* for you to come and find me. And I think it’s lovely for you to want to send the letter to that soldier’s mother; oh I think it’s just *fine*.”

“Scouts have to do good turns,” Pee-wee said.

“It makes me feel as if I can just see that soldier now,” she said, reading the old letter. “And to think he was on his way here. But I just don’t know any more about him than you do because he never got here. I just don’t know a *single thing* about him.”

“Not even his name?” Warde asked, hopefully.

“Not even his name. You see, I’ll tell you how it was,” she continued, drawing her chair a little closer to them. “All the people around here used to have soldiers from camp to dinner on Sundays.”

“I know, they did that in Bridgeboro where we live,” said Warde. “We had a couple of them one Sunday.”

“We just sent word to the Y.M.C.A. that we would be glad to have two soldiers come. I sent my card because I thought that would be nicer. We did that several times, mother and I. And we never knew the names of the soldiers till they got here. The camp officials wouldn’t let us invite them by name. It was lots of fun to see what kind of boys came. Some of them belonged ’way, ’way out west. Once when we were expecting two, only one came. He said the other was going to hike here. But the other one never came. We *waited* and *waited* and *waited*, and then we had dinner.”

The boys’ hopes fell at this recital. The girl, too, seemed to take her inability to help them very much to heart. The boys all recalled now that patriotic custom of the wartime of inviting soldiers from the camp to enjoy a little interval of home life at week ends. The rule which prevented hospitable citizens from making choice of their guests gave the kindly custom the pleasant character of a game of chance. One never knew what one would draw out of the camp grab-bag.

“I—I never thought about that,” Roy said plainly disappointed.

“Do you remember the name of the soldier that did come?” Warde asked.

“No I don’t,” she confessed, regretfully. “You see we had two each Sunday for a while. I think it’s just too bad you can’t send the letter.”

“Maybe it doesn’t make so much difference,” said Warde. “He’s home by this time, or perhaps he never went over.”

But this did not impress her and she could only say, “Oh I think it’s just too bad. It’s such a *lovely* letter. I’d just like to see that home. I just feel as if I *can* see it—the broken window and all. And to think of all the trouble you have gone to. Oh I *wish* I could help you.”

“It’s all right,” Roy said; “you should worry.”

“Maybe you think we’re foiled,” said Pee-wee, “but that shows how much you know about scouts. As long as we’ve got a broken window and a dog that must have a collar because he’s supposed to be tied, to go by—and a puddle and some things.... Do you know what those things are? They’re clues.”

“Oh but you can *never* do it,” she said.

“Do you want to do a good turn?” Pee-wee asked.

“Indeed I do,” she said, anxiously.

“Do you know what a legal document is?”

“*Good night*,” said Roy. “You’re not going to get out a warrant for him?”

“That shows how much you know,” said Pee-wee. “I want a great big long envelope like a legal document comes in. Did you ever see a deed?”

“Sure,” said Roy, “a kind deed, I’ve done a lot of them.”

“Don’t you pay any attention to him,” said Miss Bates.

“I never do,” said Pee-wee; “he’s crazy, he belongs to a crazy patrol. If I can get an envelope big enough I’ll write everything on it that will help the post office people, and maybe they’ll be resourceful, hey?”

“I’ll give you the envelope my examination papers came in,” said the girl enthusiastically.

“Did you study rhetoric?” Pee-wee demanded.

“Yes, and I just *hate* it,” she said. “Just you wait a minute,” she added, going into the house. She presently reappeared with an envelope large enough to contain a brief history of the world on its outside, and together she and Pee-wee made up the detailed address which, in Pee-wee’s handwriting, was destined to astonish Postmaster Hiram Hicks, of Hicksville, North Carolina.

CHAPTER XV
WITHIN REACH

"Maybe she'll get it, you can't tell," Pee-wee said as they took their way back to camp, the big envelope stuck under his belt, like a death warrant carried by some awful dignitary of old. "Anyway I'm glad we came because it will make Warde a first class scout."

Pee-wee was strong for the scouts and the troop even though he looked with a kind of lofty scorn on the Silver Foxes. That Warde should become a first class scout was a matter of honest joy to him.

"It was a full seven miles all right," said Roy, referring to the distance mentioned in the test, "so I guess you're as good as in the first class. I'm good and tired, I know that. You gave them good measure."

"I bet you're proud," said Pee-wee.

"I bet I am," Warde answered. "I feel like a real scout now. A fellow isn't a real scout till he gets into the first class."

"Sprouts and scouts," said Roy.

"When you write up your account don't forget to put down about my talking to that girl," said Pee-wee.

"Oh I'll put everything down, don't you worry," said Warde, clearly elated at the thought that the coveted badge was as good as won. "Do you think I'm going to have Mr. E. going over the ground and putting anything over on me? Not so you'd notice it."

"I bet Blythe will be glad," said Roy.

"Oh boy! Won't he!" vociferated Pee-wee. "I can just see him smiling when I tell him about it," said Warde.

"He knows a lot about scouting since he met me," Pee-wee informed them. "Anyway, maybe we killed two birds with one stone, hey? Maybe that fellow's mother will get the letter and we know Warde is a first class scout."

"That shows what kind of a scout you are," said Roy; "throwing stones at birds."

"You're crazy," Pee-wee said, "that's an adverb."

"You mean a proverb," said Roy. "A lot you know about grammar; you don't know the difference between a proposition and an injunction. He thinks Boys' Life is a musical instrument because it's the scouts' official organ. You're lucky not to be wished onto the Ravens," he said to Warde.

"I'm a full scout, that's all I'm thinking of," Warde laughed.

"Well I'm an empty one," said Roy.

“Same here,” Pee-wee shouted.

“I’m glad to see you agree about something,” Warde laughed. He felt like laughing. He seemed to walk on air. “I’m an empty one, too,” he added. “Let’s hike back through Westwood and get something to eat there.”

“Carried by an unanimous majority,” said Roy.

It was just exactly like Warde Hollister to give himself up to frank elation at this achievement of full scouthood. For so he regarded it. He had been the only second class scout in the troop, and those words *second class* had not been pleasant to his ears. With him it was all or nothing. His thoughts were fixed on high.

To the natural enthusiasm of the new scout was added his own natural enthusiasm and fine, high spirit. He did not want to be a star scout; he must be an eagle scout. He did not want the bronze cross or the silver cross; he would win the gold cross. The tenderfoot and second class ranks were not steps *in* scouting, they were steps to scouting. And until now he had thought of himself as an outsider. He was wrong in this, of course, but that was Warde Hollister.

Since Warde was in the troop it was a kind of disgrace to the troop and to his patrol that he should not be a first class scout. So he thought. The tests in the handbook he had found not difficult to pass. In the case of this final one it was just a question of appropriate opportunity. Until this day he had scorned to lay down his work. For that also was a test. You see that all the tests are not in the handbook, and that is the trouble. Wherever a scout goes he bumps into tests which the very wise men who made the handbook never dreamed of.

To pass a test is one thing. To *stand* a test is something else.

Little Warde Hollister knew of the great test that awaited him.

CHAPTER XVI
RIGHT SIDE OUT

And so Warde Hollister, with the gateway leading to every merit badge and scout honor now thrown open to him, hiked back with his two companions, and was not weary, for there is no weariness when joy dances in the heart.

Their hike back took them through the pleasant town of Westwood where our young hero with his formidable envelope still stuck in his belt must have looked like an official come to read the riot act or a proclamation or, perchance, to demand a hostage. But they are a fearless race in Westwood and only smiled as the doughty hero passed through, and one inquisitive little girl asked her mother why he had his hat on inside out.

The bakery in Westwood was closed so they deferred their refreshment till they should reach the next village southward. Warde did not see much of the town for wherever he looked the first class scout badge seemed to be staring him in the face. It loomed up larger than towns and villages.

Their way took them now southward along the Kinderkamack Road with its high terraced houses to the right and to the left the low marshy land stretching away to the river. Along the road they had to pass several villages before reaching the point where it would be well to leave the road and cut through the country eastward to camp.

Into the post office of one of these places strode Scout Harris. He stamped his letter, dropped it through the slot, then having done his good turn he proceeded to turn his hat right side out, and his conscience was at rest.

So it happened that two or three days later old Mrs. Haskell, in her tumbling-down white house, read the letter which her soldier boy had written her more than two years before. Little did she dream as she laid this reverently away with that blunt, harsh notification of his death, that a scout had taken off his hat to her as scouts do across all those miles and miles of country....

CHAPTER XVII
A REVELATION

As Pee-wee turned from the mail slot he saw Warde and Roy gazing at a very antiquated bulletin board such as one seldom sees elsewhere than in a country post office.

These ancient bulletin boards bespeak the country as eloquently as do the hayfields. They seem never to be new. Articles lost but long since restored to their owners are still advertised on faded brittle paper, fastened by rusted thumb tacks of a bygone age. Strawberry festivals, with strawberries that have gone the way of all strawberries, are here announced. Auction sales and Red Cross drives long ended here proclaim themselves like ghosts out of the dead past. Letters waiting patiently for people whose names are on tombstones are here listed.

Pee-wee pressed his way between Warde and Roy and gazed at a notice by no means new which, partly overlapped by later notices, had caught the eyes of his two friends:

WANTED FOR MURDER
FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS

REWARD WILL BE PAID BY THE POLICE OF QUEBEC, CANADA, FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST AND CONVICTION OF CLAUDE DARRELL, ALIAS DARROW, ALIAS HICKEY JOE, ETC., ETC. WANTED FOR BURGLARY AND HOMICIDE.

Was last seen in New York, where he tried to enlist for military service. Hair brown and straight. Complexion dark. Eyes gray. Height 5 feet 10½ inches. Weight about 140 pounds. Teeth white and even. May seek work as gasfitter. When last seen wore a gray suit with double-breasted vest. Walks slightly sideways.

But it was not the reading matter on this notice which riveted the attention of the scouts and for a few moments held them speechless. Two pictures, one a front face, the other a profile, were there shown.

“What——” Pee-wee began, anxiously, hesitatingly, as if he dared not say what was in his mind.

“Yep,” said Warde, with a kind of cold resolve, as if one of them must express their common thought; “it’s him—it’s Blythe.”

Still neither Roy nor Pee-wee spoke, only stood there, gazing steadfastly at the pictures. The eyes in the full face picture were looking straight at them. There was the least suggestion of a smile on the mouth. It seemed as if Blythe might be saying in that simple, pleased way of his, “Congratulations, now you’re a regular scout.” Warde averted his gaze. He felt almost sickened. Then he looked at the pictures again, steadily, intensely.... He seemed only half conscious of Roy saying, “I’m going to ask the postmaster how long that’s been there.”

Then suddenly Roy felt the authority of his new scout, subordinate though that scout was. He felt Warde’s hand detaining him. “Ask him nothing,” he heard Warde say; “stay where you are.” Pee-wee felt this calm authority, too. Or rather this influence of one who is well poised and thoughtful.

And still, with spirits drooping, with the whole foundation of their happiness rudely knocked from under them as it seemed, they stood gazing at these pictures of their friend. This murderer. Here was another murder to add to that former one in Canada. The murder of all their hopes and plans.... The killing of a friendship.

They heard the man behind the lock-boxes come through the little gate. They heard the gate swing shut. They felt a presence near them.

“Well, what do you find to interest you, boys?” they heard a drawling voice ask.

“We were—we were just wishing that we had been at the strawberry festival—the one a year ago last June,” replied Warde Hollister.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE TEST

The three scouts took their way along the road in silence. Pee-wee was subdued and even Roy sobered. Warde alone seemed composed. Perhaps none of them had realized until now how much they had grown to like young Blythe. And this appalling revelation was the sequel, the end, of that merry, novel camping adventure. They were not fired by the dramatic character of their discovery; they were just cast down. *This* was what it had all come to....

Pee-wee was the first to regain some of his former spirit. “Just the same, maybe that fellow’s mother will get the letter,” said he; “so that’s one good thing. And later we’re going to Temple Camp, that’s another. And Warde is a first class scout, so gee whiz, we ought to be all good and glad, that’s sure.” But for all that, Pee-wee did not seem good and glad.

He tried again. “A fellow ought to be glad when he gets to be a first class scout, that’s one sure thing. Even if I were in the Silver Foxes I’d be glad. And anyway it’s good you had your fourteen mile hike to-day because now you can let Mr. Ellsworth and the local council know and he can go over the ground Sunday. That’s the way he usually does. You can write up your account to-morrow and the next day. Then you can try for any merit badge you want. I bet you’ll get a lot of them. I bet your father will be glad when you tell him you’re in the first class, hey?... I bet Roy will be proud, too,” he added.

Roy made no response, only walked along silently.

“There won’t be any badge, Kid,” said Warde kindly. “There isn’t going to be any account written of this. And Mr. Ellsworth isn’t going to go over the ground.... He isn’t going to see that picture.”

For a few moments none of them spoke. Several men raking hay in a nearby field waved to them, as people do to scouts, and the three waved their arms in answer, but there was not much enthusiasm in their act. The birds chirped among the bordering trees. A nimble little chipmunk paused upon a stone wall, looked at them pertly, and disappeared in a crevice of rock. And so they walked on, no one speaking.

“What do you mean?” Roy asked after a pause.

“Just that,” said Warde. “Mr. Ellsworth saw Blythe. He isn’t going to see that picture. I don’t care anything about the badge. Let’s not talk about it. It’s off.”

“Do you mean that we should protect that—that fellow?” Roy asked.

“I mean that this isn’t my test,” said Warde. “I mean I’m not going to claim

the badge. No one can make me claim it if I don't want to."

"That means that you want us to keep still about Blythe," Roy said. "You can't get around that. If you think I—if you think I care anything about five thousand dollars you're—then you're mistaken. My father wouldn't let me take any money I got that way.... But a scout is—he's supposed to——"

"He's supposed to watch his step," said Warde.

"Sure he is, Roy," piped up Pee-wee. "Gee, you can't deny that, Roy."

"He's supposed to know where he's at when it comes to something serious," said Warde. "He's supposed to look before he leaps——"

"You can't deny that, Roy," spoke the big heart of Pee-wee Harris. "He's supposed to look before he leaps."

Roy smiled. "Well, what are we going to do?" he asked.

"Are you asking me?" Warde queried.

"Sure, I'm asking you. It's Blythe's picture, isn't it?"

"You're patrol leader and I'm a second class scout," said Warde. "What do *you* say to do?"

"What do you mean, a second class scout?" Roy demanded, his voice full of feeling. "I don't want any better scouts in my patrol than you. I'm asking you what we're going to do."

"All right, I'll tell you," Warde said. "We're going to keep still until we're dead sure. We know what kind of a fellow Blythe is, and they don't, I mean the sheriff and police and those people. We know he's a good friend. Sometimes when you look at a picture it reminds you of someone, and the next time you look at it, it doesn't——"

"That's right, Roy," Pee-wee urged with great vehemence, "because once I thought a man looked like George Washington and afterwards I saw he didn't. So you see."

"We're not going to tell about this to-morrow and maybe not the next day," said Warde. "We're going to make *dead sure*. Then if we have to, we'll have to, that's all. Blythe isn't going to run away and I don't think they're likely to take that notice down for about forty-eleven years. We don't want Mr. Ellsworth blowing into that post office; not yet. I'm not worrying about my scout rank, that can wait too. I'm thinking about what we've lost—maybe. I'm not thinking about what I wanted to get. Everything—it looks like—everything is changed—all the fun and—what do I care about the old badge?"

Thus spoke Warde Hollister, second class scout.

CHAPTER XIX
THE DULL BLAZE

This was all very well, and his willing sacrifice of the coveted badge in the interest of friendship and loyalty showed Warde's character. But he and his two companions found small comfort in an excuse for delay. This was a serious business, a business for man's handling, and in their hearts they knew it. Yet on the other hand it seemed right, and due to their friend, that they should make assurance doubly sure.

One fact, and only one, did comfort them. Blythe wore no double-breasted vest; he wore no vest at all. But in the downward path of tramp life and poverty, the vest is very apt to disappear. Against this little gleam of forlorn hope was the fact that Blythe did wear a gray suit. And that suit was very old and shabby; as old as the notice with the picture, surely. For the rest, the printed description seemed all too accurate.

It was a preoccupied and downcast trio that made their way through the old reservation to the scene of their recent toil and pleasure. How familiar seemed the spot! How friendly, and abounding in pleasant memories of their odd camping adventure! Their companions were just getting through for the day. Doc Carson and Connie Bennett were shinnying down one of the corner uprights of a bare frame, several scouts were piling some odds and ends, and Blythe, anxious as usual to get the camp-fire started, was gathering chips and small bits of waste lumber for that purpose. He heard them coming and looked up smiling.

"We're going to have a big one to-night," he said.

"You said it," called Roy.

"A welcome home fire, hey?" said Blythe. Roy felt almost sick.

"You're just in time to cook supper," said Westy. "We were going to send a tracer after you. What news?"

"We'll tell you later," said Warde.

As he spoke, the "boss" walked toward Blythe's Bunk, as the scouts had named their little headquarters, and tumbled his gatherings near the fireplace. Warde tried to determine whether he did actually walk a little sideways. But he could not be sure. It is so easy to imagine these things, to see something when one is looking for it.

There were no secrets within the First Bridgeboro Troop and what the three scouts had seen was soon known to all the others. It completely overshadowed the finding of Miss Bates and the disappointment of Pee-wee at not

ascertaining the name and address of the unknown soldier. They did not talk freely about these things, chiefly because of their appalling discovery, and partly also because there was a certain constraint around the camp-fire that night.

The talk and banter which before had been so free and merry could not be kept up; they could not do it, try as they would. The conversation was not spontaneous, and the few pitiful attempts at joking were forced. Even Roy seemed to have lost his corklike buoyancy. And for Pee-wee, he could only sit gazing across the fire at Blythe with a kind of fearful fascination. Different, but equally intent, was the almost steady gaze of Warde Hollister. Roy noticed this; others noticed it.

Perhaps the only one who was quite at ease was the "boss" himself. "I'll tell you what Doctor Cawson did to-day," he said.

Edwin (Doc) Carson was in the Raven Patrol and was called Doc because he was the troop's official first aid scout. He was the son of a physician, which fact had doubtless helped to raise him to proficiency in that splendid part of scouting. It was one of Blythe's most noticeable characteristics that he got the names of the scouts confused in his mind. Almost the only name which he consistently pronounced correctly was Will Dawson. And he pronounced Carson the same as he pronounced Dawson.

Whether he really thought that Doc was a young physician it would be hard to say. His simple admiration of the scouts amounted to a kind of reverence, and he gave them credit for professional excellence in the case of all their honors. To him their merit badges meant that they were aviators, astronomers, chemists, and what not. And he always spoke of Doc Carson as "doctor."

"What?" asked Roy, half-heartedly.

"I found a robin under the flooring of the last shack," said Blythe in his usual simple way. "His wing was dragging open. I closed it up and carried him in my hand like you said about carrying a bird. I held him till the doctor came, and he said the wing wasn't broken, only strained. He stood him on a branch and in a little while he flew away."

"Why didn't you kill him and be done with it?" Warde asked.

Blythe just laughed. "I guess you don't mean that," he said.

"Righto," said Hunt Ward of the Elks.

Followed then an interval of silence, broken only by the mounting blaze. Everyone seemed to experience a little relaxation of the constraint. For a minute it seemed as if the spirits of the company rose. It was just for a moment.

Warde's gaze was fixed directly on Blythe, who seemed calm, content, and happy to be among them. He at least showed no constraint.

"I dare say that robin will be in Canada by morning," Warde said. "They

go as far north as Montreal before they turn south. Hey, Roy?"

"Some of them do," Roy said.

"There's a place I'd like to go to—Montreal," said Warde. "Ever been there, Blythey?"

"Montreal?" said Blythe. "Not as I know of."

"Toronto?"

Blythe shook his head. "Toronto's up near there, isn't it?" he asked.

Warde seemed on the point of asking more but apparently decided not to. "Who's going to tell a yarn?" he asked. "This is a kind of slow bunch to-night. How about you, Roy?"

CHAPTER XX
THE VOICE

The camp-fire had died, the last embers had been trodden out, the scouts had turned in for the night. A half dozen or so fresh air enthusiasts lay upon their couches of balsam under a big elm, through the high branches of which the stars looked down upon the weary toilers, dead to the world. For a precious interval at least they would feel no disappointment. It was well that they were tired that night.

They had not decided what they should do, but they knew they could not conceal a criminal and take money from him and count him their companion. They must do a detestable thing; they must go home and tell. They did not relish doing this, they *could* not relish it. They were not of the class of detectives. They were capable of feeling contemptible....

There, close to where they slept, were the results of their faithful labor. And there, too, were the dead embers of their cheerful fire around which they and their strange, likable companion, had gathered night after night. One shack had completely disappeared, another stood there in the darkness like a skeleton to mock them, the third was to have been tackled in dead earnest in the morning. Then would come the dividing of the money—oh, the whole thing would seem like a dream when they awakened.

Only Warde and Roy were abroad on that still night. They sat upon the sill of a shack rather more pretentious than the barnlike buildings all about, for it had been officers' quarters. There were even the rotten remnants of curtains in the windows, necessary no doubt to help defeat the Germans. The neighborhood was very quiet and very dark, save for the sounds caused by the breeze in those old wrecks of buildings. Every rusty hinge and loose board and creaky joint seemed to contribute to this dismal music. One might easily have imagined those dark, spectral structures to be tenanted by the ghosts of dead soldiers.

"Why didn't you mention Quebec?" Roy asked. "Why didn't you ask him if he had been there? That was the place named in the notice."

"That isn't what I was thinking about," Warde said. "I was reading in the old scout handbook[2] how you can tell where people come from by their talk. If a person belongs in Canada he'll say Monreal instead of Montreal. He'll say Tranto instead of Toronto."

"Yes?" urged Roy, hopefully.

"That's all," Warde said. "He doesn't talk as if he came from up that way.

But the notice didn't say he belonged there, it only said he was wanted there. The way he spoke about the robin was what got me. I can't make him out at all."

"I guess the picture's the principal thing," Roy said despairingly.

"The principal thing is to wait a day or so," said Warde; "and see what we can find out. It looks bad, that's sure. It's his picture as far as I can see. I don't see how we're going to take his measurement; we don't want to make him suspicious."

"It's funny how he never speaks about his past," said Roy.

"Anybody can see there's something funny about him," Warde said. "What he said about the robin makes me think that if he committed a murder he was probably crazy when he did it. Maybe he doesn't even remember that he did it."

"You can't say he's crazy," Roy protested.

"I know I like him," Warde said; "I just can't help it. I like him now. Maybe he isn't smart, but he's always thinking about us. He's for the scouts good and strong. Maybe it's because he's so simple and easy—maybe that's what makes me like him so much...."

For a few moments neither spoke. It seemed as if both were preoccupied by pleasant memories of their friend. Weak, uncertain, queer he may have been, and a failure into the bargain. Shabby and all that. But his smile haunted them now; he had been their comrade, their friend, their champion.

"Something always gets in the way when you try to swing a *big* good turn," Roy mused.

"It takes Pee-wee to manage the big ones," said Warde.

"Poor kid," Roy said.

Again neither spoke. A loose board creaked somewhere in the darkness. A crude little weathervane, the handiwork of some departed soldier, rattled nearby.

"*Listen*," said Roy. "Do you hear that voice again?"

As he spoke a long, discordant cry could be heard somewhere in the distance, ending in a spasmodic jerk. It was like nothing human. Yet strangely it suggested something human. As if some unearthly ghoul were trying to simulate the wailing of human anguish.... Then again it was quite grotesque, bearing no resemblance to the cry of a living thing.

"What do you suppose it is?" Warde asked.

"It's a—I don't know," said Roy doubtfully. "I never heard anything just like that before."

The sound was not continuous, but came at intervals.

"Do you know what I'd like to do?" said Warde. "I'd like to get just one good look at Blythe while he's lying asleep. I'd like to see his face calm and

still like in the picture. I'd like to see it when he isn't looking at me."

"That's easy," said Roy, caught by the idea. "Let's go. Maybe we can tell better."

They returned to their camp, as they called it, through the dismantled frame of the first shack, and past the sleepers under the big elm. Pee-wee was there, tied in a bowline knot, the official knot of the Raven patrol, sleeping the sleep of the righteous.

"If he should hear us, remember we're just turning in," said Roy.

"Have you got your flashlight?" Warde asked.

"Sure," Roy whispered. "Walk softly."

They entered the sleeping shack, "Blythe's Bunk," and tiptoed to the spot where Blythe usually lay. Then Roy turned on his light.

The two scouts stood appalled, speechless. Blythe's old shabby coat which he always folded and used as a pillow was there with the depression made by his head still in it. But Blythe had gone away....

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[2] Edition of 1910, containing much interesting and important matter omitted from subsequent editions.

CHAPTER XXI
THE DIAGONAL MARK

Warde had always his wits with him. "*Shh*, don't wake up the troop," he whispered. "Come outside."

"We'll need them all—alarm——" Roy whispered excitedly.

"Shut up and come outside," Warde whispered emphatically. He picked up Blythe's coat and, tiptoeing, led the way out into the night. "He hasn't gone away," he said more freely. "Don't you see this coat? Do you think he'd go away without his coat? Stick your flashlight here, *quick*; here's our chance."

Warde held the collar of the poor threadbare coat close to Roy's light. There, on the inside was sewn a little cloth square on which was printed:

DOMINION CLOTHING CO.
QUEBEC, CANADA.

"I see," Roy whispered, not knowing what he said.

"Give me the light and wait a second—shh," said Warde.

Before Roy knew it Warde had re-entered the shack and was folding and replacing the coat where he had found it. In a kind of daze Roy saw the bright spot near the empty balsam couch, saw his companion's quick, silent movements, saw the scouts lying asleep in the dim light. Then all was darkness within and he saw no more.

"Did you feel in the pockets?" Roy asked as they betook themselves through the darkness to a safe distance. He still whispered, though there was no need of it now. He was nervous, agitated.

"No, I'm not in that line of business," said Warde.

"I guess he's Claude Darrell all right," said Roy. "What shall we do? Try to find him? There's that voice again. Do you hear it? It's over there—west."

"Not find him but *follow* him," said Warde. "If we can."

"You stay here," said Roy; "give me the light, I'll track him." Roy was master here and Warde could only accede.

"What are we going to do when we find him?" Roy asked.

"We're going to find out what *he's* doing," Warde said.

Nimbly, as silently as a panther, Roy retraced his steps to the shack. For a few minutes Warde stood alone, waiting, conscious of Roy's experience and superiority in those more active arts of the scout. He had not the slightest knowledge in which direction Blythe had gone and his patrol leader was going to wrench this knowledge from the darkness. Off in the distance the unearthly

voice crooning and whining in the night. The very air seemed charged with something impending.

Presently Warde saw two quick flashes of the light, then two more. He was glad that he knew the Silver Fox patrol signs well enough to know the meaning of that one. It signified "*Come*."

"He went in his bare feet," said Roy; "look there. See?"

Upon the soft ground was the imprint of a bare heel with the additional imprint of a diagonal mark upon it. Perhaps Warde would not have recognized this for a heel print, nor the faint suggestions of another print two or three inches distant, for a toe print. But these were easily recognizable by Roy and they indicated the direction also.

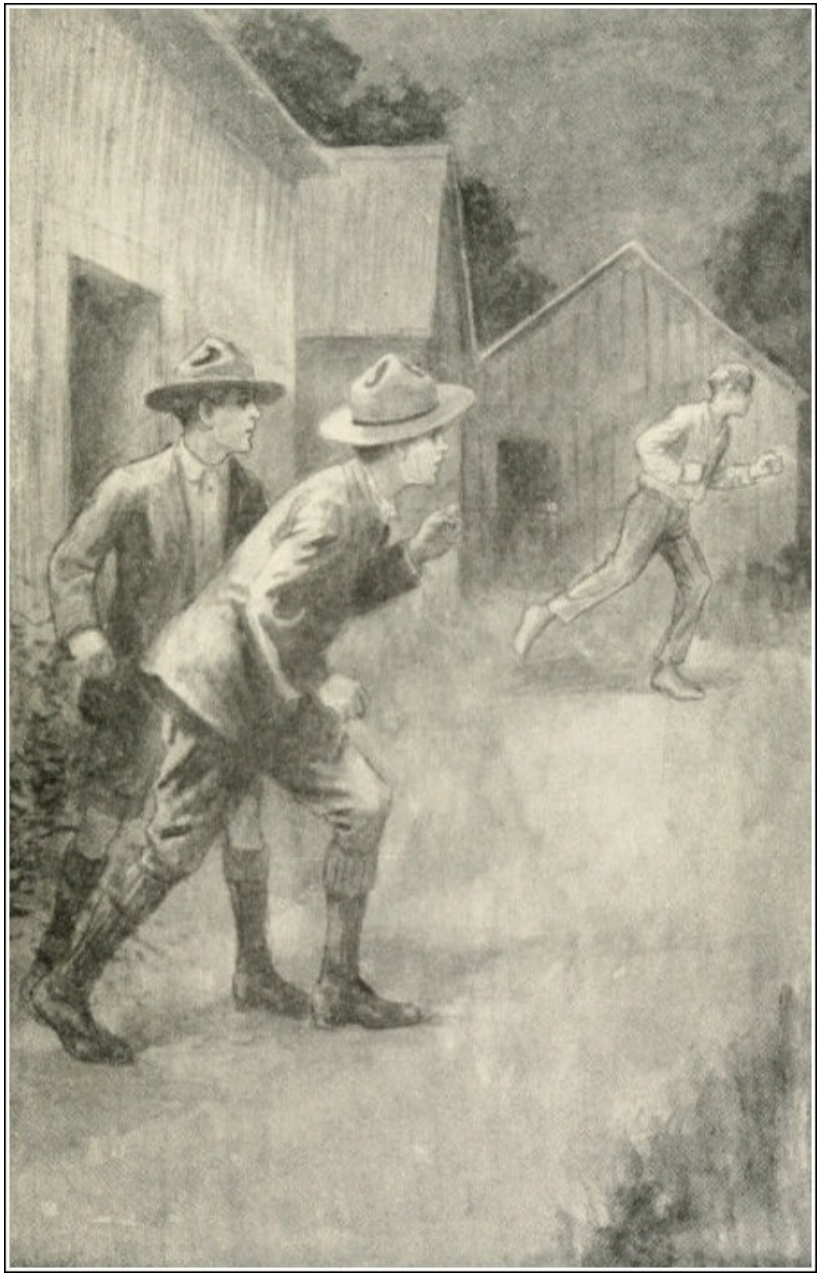
"I'm glad he didn't have his shoes on," he said. "Now we know he's got some kind of a scar on his foot. Come ahead, follow me."

Eight or ten of these prints, among many others which Roy did not pause to distinguish, brought them to the concrete road which runs through the old reservation, the Knickerbocker Road, as it is called. Here the leader of the Silver Foxes was baffled. There was no following footprints here.

They paused for a moment, considering. The white road stretched like a ribbon straight north and south. The temporary makeshift cross streets could be seen in black outline with their silent, ghostly, gloomy buildings, standing in more or less regular order. Here and there was an area of lesser darkness where some boarded side had fallen away revealing the fresher wood of the interiors.

The two scouts moved northward a little way along this permanent, central road, the backbone of the old camp. Still they could hear that strange, unearthly voice.

Suddenly out of the darkness near them sped a form. It crossed the road, entered one of the old buildings and hurriedly emerged, entering another. It seemed like some lost spirit of the night. It passed within ten feet of the scouts, never noticing them. It seemed intent with a kind of diabolical intentness. Meanwhile the voice continued, now mournful, now petulant, now clear, now modulated, according to the rising wind.



SUDDENLY OUT OF THE DARKNESS SPED A FORM.

The two scouts paused spellbound as if in a place haunted. The figure had disappeared but they could hear the patter of its running, and once or twice a

fleeting dark shadow. The breeze was freshening and conjuring every sound about the ramshackle buildings into spectral wailings. A fragment of glass falling from a window startled the listeners. Agitated, their nerves tense, they strained their eyes for glimpses of the hurrying apparition and listened to the ghostly concert.

"It's he," said Warde; "we've got to catch him. Do you think that sound is a tree toad? *Listen!*" He pulled his hat on tighter because of the rising wind.

"First I thought it was," Roy said. "But it isn't. They make funny noises but not like that. It's off there and up high. It's not any animal—or loose boards or anything like that. Come on."

Suddenly out of the blackness arose a piercing scream. Its echo resounded from the dried boards of some building and re-echoed from another as if its terror-stricken owner had three voices. It mingled with that wailing voice, distant, aloof. Then they heard human words, sounding strange and unhuman.

"*I'm coming! Wait, I'm coming!*"

It sounded farther and farther off until it was drowned in the distant moaning.

"*It's he*," Warde whispered, his voice tense.

"I know where it is; come on," said Roy.

CHAPTER XXII
THE BANSHEE

"What does it mean, anyway?" Warde asked, as he followed Roy, breathless and in suspense. "What are we going to do? Has he got some—some—accomplice——"

"Follow me," was all that Roy said.

"The troop—if we're in danger——"

"Never mind the troop; follow me."

Silently Roy sped along into an overgrown cross street, cutting through the doorless wreck of the Y. M. C. A. shack, over the litter within, and out on the opposite side. A tall, spectral shadow soon confronted them, whence emanated that ghostly voice, loud and beseeching, as they approached. Their nearness to it dispelled any thought of its being the inanimate sounds of wind-stirred wreckage or of some unknown living creature. It moaned and cried like no voice they had ever heard before. Yet it was strangely human. The crying of that fleeing, bewildered apparition was silent now, and there seemed a note of gloomy solace in the low, plaintive strain.

"Come ahead," said Roy resolutely, "follow me. Not scared, are you?"

He ascended the narrow, metal ladder of the windmill, Warde following. Upon the top was a tiny platform, and here he turned on his flashlight. Crouched in a heap was their friend Blythe. He was in a state of frantic agitation, his whole form trembling like a leaf. His head was bowed; he clutched something in his two hands. From it dangled a cord. Several burned matches lay near him and wisps and little masses of woven straw littered the miniature aerial platform.

Roy turned his light above to that part of the superstructure which revolved with the wind, enabling the winged wheel to keep in favorable position for revolving. The moaning voice was very near now, within arm's reach almost, and at that close range was divested of its ghostly suggestiveness.

"Look," Roy whispered, directing his light upward. There upon the movable framework was something that looked like a cigar-box. It was so placed as always to catch the breeze from the revolving fan.

"I know what it is," said Roy; "hold this light while I take it down."

He seemed to know that there was no peace for that distracted, crouching figure, as long as the weird voice from that compact little mechanism was audible. He stood upon the framework and, reaching up, dislodged the harmless box. A last dying wail accompanied his act. Then the big winged fan

revolved silently above them in the dark night.

"Blythey," cried Roy gently; "look up. It's just Warde and me. What's the matter? Tell us, can't you? What's the trouble?"

"I've got her—I can see her—she called me——" was all Blythe could say. "Did you hear her call—loud? I knew—I came—no—*no!*" he fairly screamed, as Warde tried to lift his head and discover what he held. "I came back—back to life—I was dead—you would have buried me—can't you see I'm alive—you—scouts——"

His head shook, he clutched at his breast, the hand which Roy tried to grasp trembled and was like ice. The two scouts saw that there was no use talking with him. The wretched creature was out of his senses. Huddling in a posture of abject terror he clutched the object which he held tighter against his breast, his head bowed and shaking, his whole form in convulsion.

"Do you know where you are, Blythey?" Warde asked.

"In the lower field—where they're making hay," Blythe answered.

They tried no more at questioning him.

"We want you to come with us, Blythey," Roy said. His voice was friendly, kindly, albeit he was himself disturbed and fearful. For neither of the boys knew what this pathetic, demon-haunted creature might do next.

"We're your friends," Warde added. "Can't you get up and come with us—and go to bed. Don't you remember all about camp-fire, and Pee-wee, and all the fun we had? There isn't any voice now, it's gone away."

But for all their kindness and resolve to help him, they felt certain qualms, both of conscience and of fear. The all too conclusive proof that he was a fugitive and that his hands and disordered brain were red with blood were strengthened by this uncanny adventure.

To them the vision that he had seen, the voice that had lured him and brought him to this pitiful state were the face and voice of his victim—a woman. He had seen her, as such wretched, remorseful creatures ever do....

The big fan revolving silently above them in the brisk wind seemed almost to bespeak a kind of quiet satisfaction that it had brought his crime back home to him, and laid him low there upon that ghostly tower.

It was not without a feeling of relief that the two scouts heard the cheering voices of their comrades approaching through the darkness. They had been aroused, no doubt, by the piercing scream of Blythe.

"I'll go down," said Roy; "you stay up here, don't leave him alone."

At the foot of the ladder the leader of the Silver Foxes waited for the members of the troop. It was good to see them approach. In the darkness he could just distinguish their hurriedly donned and incomplete raiment. He saw their looks of fear and inquiry, saw the almost panic agitation in Pee-wee's round face and sleepy eyes.

“It’s all right,” Roy said, trying to control his jerky, nervous speech.

“Where’s Warde?”

“Shh, he’s all right—Blythe—Blythe is up there—he’s in a kind of fit—he’s crazy—he’s the—he’s the one, all right—he’s Darrell—shh, *wait*—don’t go up. Do you see this? It’s one of those banshees Harry Donnelle told us about—the kind the soldiers used to put up in the windmills in Flanders. That’s what’s been making the noise. It sort of—you know—spoke to him—that’s what I think....”

If Roy had remembered some of the sprightly tales which their friend Lieutenant Donnelle had brought from France, he might have saved himself and his companion much fearful perplexity on that dark momentous night.

Or if they had ever been in Holland or Flanders they might have known of those novel toys, the handiwork of ingenious youngsters, that moan and wail and even pour forth their uncanny laughter when strategically placed on the tops of windmills. American soldier boys, chafing under enforced idleness in trenches and dugouts, would often beguile their time making these miniature calliopes to catch the wind. And it is not out of reason to surmise that many a warrior in the war-torn regions was startled and confounded by the aerial lamentations of these harmless little boxes of wires and crude whistles.

A cigar box, a few strips of wire, and some odds and ends of willow wood suffice for the manufacture of the Flanders banshee. There is now an American banshee with all modern improvements (patent not applied for) invented and controlled by Pee-wee Harris. But that is not a part of the present story.

CHAPTER XXIII
AFTER THE STORM

The expected difficulty of getting Blythe down from his strange refuge was much simplified by his own demeanor. When his agitation subsided he became as docile as a lamb, seeming quite willing to place himself in the scouts' hands. He seemed utterly exhausted and bewildered. With this exception he showed no trace of what he had been through, and appeared not to remember it.

When they asked him to get up, he stared at Roy's flashlight for a moment as if puzzled, then rose saying not a word. In the glare of the light one of the scouts lifted a small locket that dangled on a cord around Blythe's neck, and several of the boys looked at it. Blythe either did not know what they did, or he did not care. At all events he did not object. This seemed odd to them considering how he had clutched the thing before.

They saw that it was quite useless to question him about the matches and the wisps of straw or about why the sounds had meant anything to him. They wondered whether indeed that ghostly calling had aroused anything in his crippled memory or whether its significance was only in his disordered mind.

They got him down the ladder and he accompanied them meekly to their little camp, hanging his head, and never speaking. Westy Martin, who clasped his arm, noticed that it still trembled, but otherwise he gave no sign of his hallucination and insane agitation. They pitied him, of course, but they could not repress a certain repugnance to him. Rational or not, a murderer is not a pleasant thing.... Their hearty liking for him, which had grown into a kind of affection, passed now to a feeling of pity.

Before they reached the camp he made the one remark which broke his otherwise meek silence. On passing the shack on which they had last been working, he said, "That's where I found the robin, under that floor. Hollender thought I would kill it. He thinks I'm that kind." Then he laughed. Warde said nothing.

They got him back to his couch, where he almost immediately fell sound asleep. After ten minutes or so, when Roy entered to look at his bare heel in the brightness of his flashlight, he was breathing heavily, wrapped in the sleep of utter exhaustion and oblivion. The diagonal mark seen in his foot imprint was plainly noticeable as a scar on his heel. Doc Carson felt his pulse and it was almost normal.

There seemed no likelihood of his trying to escape that night. His composure, they thought, might have been intended to throw them off their

guard; but his deep, sonorous sleep rang true; it was as good as a cordon of sentinels. But for the scouts there was yet no sleep and they raked together a few chips from the scene of their former happiness and sat about the poor disconsolate little blaze talking in undertones, trying to decide what they had better do. Of one thing they were resolved, and that was that the county authorities in Bridgeboro should be informed that this Blythe was none other than Claude Darrell....

CHAPTER XXIV
THE WARNING

They talked late and their decision before turning in was that the three patrol leaders, Roy, Connie Bennett and Arthur Van Arlen should go to Bridgeboro late in the afternoon and tell their scoutmaster, Mr. Ellsworth, of their discovery. They chose the emissaries with the intention of putting the responsibility upon their leaders where it belonged, and also with the thought of having the three patrols participate equally in what seemed an odious thing, view it as they would.

Pee-wee voiced the general sentiment when he said, “Gee, something is all the time happening to prove he’s the one they’re after, and then all of a sudden something happens so as to kind of make us like him and trust him more. Anyway, I think he didn’t know what he was doing, and I like him and I’m not afraid to say so.” And he added, “The Silver Foxes are crazy if it comes to that.”

“They’re crazy about you, Kid,” Roy said in forced good humor and ruffling his hair for him.

In the morning, to their utter astonishment, Blythe arose as usual, gathered chips for the breakfast fire, and sat among them, drinking his coffee, and eating the bacon which Roy had cooked, as if nothing had happened.

He seemed to expect the usual entertainment of wit and wisdom from Roy and Pee-wee, and he smiled in his old way when Roy said with a poor attempt at mirth, “Let’s finish up the egg powder, we’ll all scramble for scrambled eggs.” Blythe heard only the pleasantry, but to the others the reminder that it was their last breakfast there was cheering.

Altogether they were not at all satisfied with themselves though they knew that what they were going to do was nothing less than their plain duty. Their new friendship, their fine plans of a helpful turn, bringing pleasure and profit, had ended in a sordid mess. Duties are funny things....

They had no heart for work that morning, but it was easier to work than to do nothing. The three messengers wished not to go to Bridgeboro until afternoon because their scoutmaster would be there then. They would feel easier and less contemptible telling this thing to him than to the authorities.

After breakfast Blythe was the first at work. His energy was never equal to his willingness, but on this morning, perhaps because the others seemed half-hearted, he was up on the roof of the third shack ripping off boards before they were well started. Others followed him up working at the edge of the roof. Roy

began lifting and hauling away the loosened floorboards below. Most of the troop busied themselves clearing up the site of the second shack. The work proceeded silently, almost gloomily.

The work had been going on in this way for about an hour when one of the scouts working down at the edge of the roof called to Blythe who was up at the peak that the roof beneath him was sagging.

The fact was that the uprights within the shack had been too soon removed, which put a strain upon the all too slender horizontal timber which they had supported. This had been pieced mid-way, an instance of hasty and flimsy construction, and the weight of Blythe at this point caused the strip to sag.

The slanting timbers which formed the framework of the roof, running from the peak down to the sides, were being dislodged at their lower ends by the scouts, which operation, of course, withdrew their support from the horizontal beam on which Blythe was working. He acknowledged the warning by springing the beam with his weight, at which an ominous sound of straining and splitting was heard.

“Look out up there,” Roy called from below.

“Get off there Blythey—*quick*!” another shouted.

“Climb down here,” another suggested.

Perhaps Blythe did not think as quickly as others think. Perhaps he did not value his poor life as others value their lives. Who shall say? In any case he did not descend by one of the slanting strips. In another moment the timber under him was splitting and giving way at the cleated join, and sagging threateningly. Then came the loud sound of final splitting and breaking away, and a deep sagging preceding the complete break.

A few brief seconds remained for Blythe to decide what he should do. He might still descend to safety as his companions had suggested. The increasing sound of splitting, and the sagging, warned him to quick decision. Instead of moving he looked directly beneath him where Roy was.

“What’s the matter?” he called down.

“My foot is caught under the flooring,” Roy said.

A ripping and rending, and then the buckling of the broken pieces of timber followed. The whole flimsy structure on which Blythe clung trembling in air....

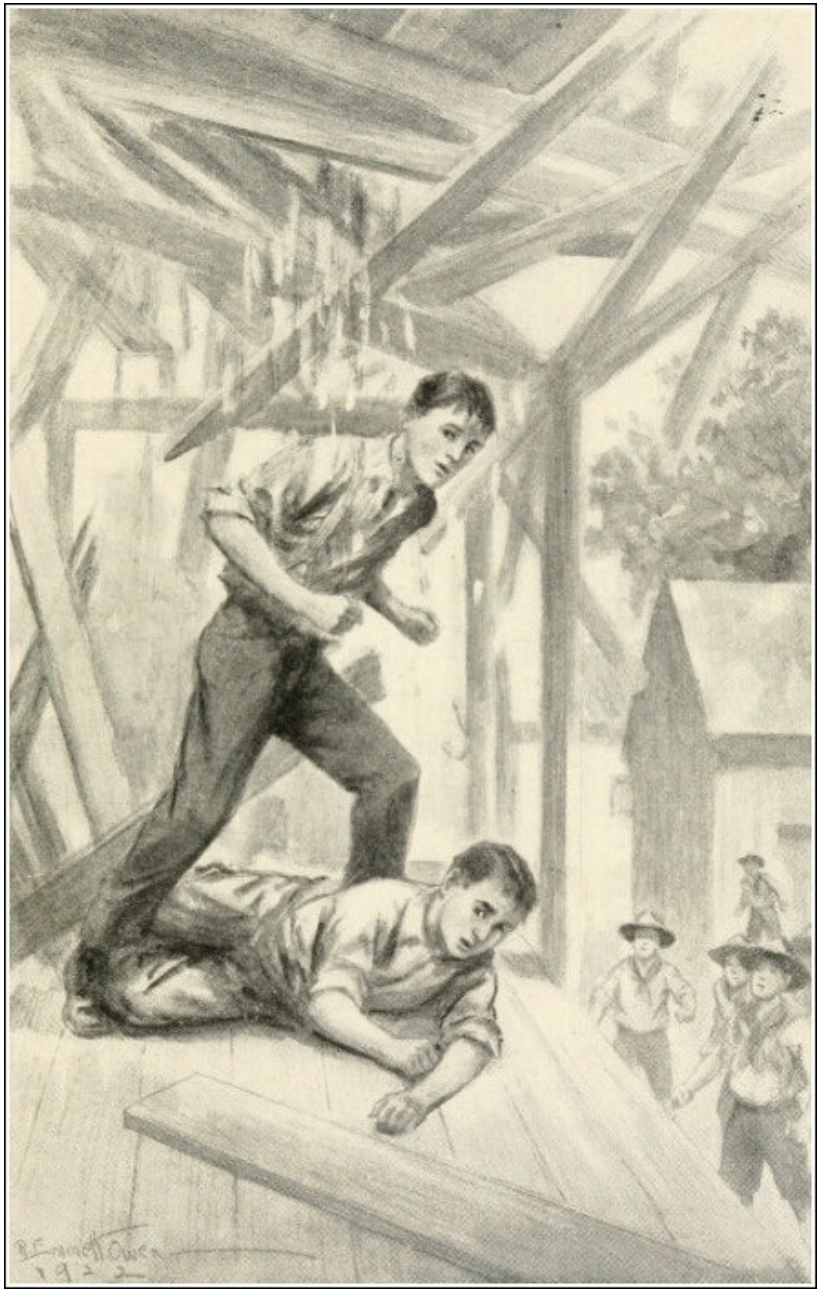
CHAPTER XXV
THE GOOD TURN

What happened then, happened like a flash of lightning. For a brief second they saw Blythe hanging from the collapsing structure. Then they saw him let go. Perhaps they did not know the full significance of Roy's predicament. They thought Blythe stark mad.

He struck the flooring with a thud, drew his breath and grabbed his ankle in a sudden twinge of pain, stood, fell again with an exclamation of agony, then dragged himself to his hands and knees, and pulled Roy to the ground. Bracing his own back above the prostrate form he waited, the cords standing out on his arms like ropes. He gulped and jerked his head as if to shake away the agony that seemed killing him. His body was well clear of the small form beneath him. And thus he waited, one second, two seconds,—

And then with an appalling sound of splitting timbers the whole structure collapsed and fell upon him.

So suddenly did this happen that Blythe had scarcely braced himself over Roy's body when both were buried under the fallen debris. Nor had the scouts at the edge of the roof wholly escaped; several who had not jumped quickly enough and far enough received slight cuts and bruises from the falling timbers.



ROY AND BLYTHE WERE CAUGHT IN THE FALLING TIMBERS

Scrambling to their feet they called to the victims who were pinned unseen beneath the wreckage, starting at the same time to haul away the debris. There

was no answer from beneath.

"What did he do? What did he do it for?" one asked.

"Why didn't Roy get from under?"

"Search me; hurry up, pull the stuff off them."

"Blythe is crazy."

"Sure he is."

"He didn't think fast enough; he's not to blame. Hurry up."

"Roy was crazy, you mean."

They worked frantically pulling away the fallen boards and beams, Grove Bronson with a handkerchief wound around his bleeding hand, Wig Weigand with a great bruise on his forehead. Pee-wee strove like a giant. Soon the form of Blythe was revealed, braced by his hands and knees, and Roy lying prostrate beneath him.

"How are you?" one of the scouts called.

"All right," Roy answered; "my foot is caught under the flooring."

"Blythe all right? How about you, Blythey?"

Blythe did not answer. He seemed immovable, like a figure of stone. His bare arms gave the impression of a taut rope. A heavy timber which they lifted from across his back, where it had lain like a seesaw, must have all but broken his spine. A rusted nail in it had torn his poor, shabby coat almost in twain, and there was blood on the flannel shirt beneath it. Blood was flowing freely from a wound in his head and dripping down from his neck like water off a roof.

They turned back his coat collar to see if there might be a cut on his neck and there, confronting them, was the little cloth label containing the name of the clothing store in Quebec. It shocked the scouts to see that in the very moment of their friend's supreme heroism.

"Blythe? Are you all right? Speak? Stand up, can't you?"

He neither moved nor spoke. He seemed transformed into an iron brace. Across the calves of his legs lay a heavy timber, which had cut his trousers and which must almost have crushed his legs when it fell. As they lifted it blood trickled away. They noticed that he moved both feet spasmodically as if they had been asleep. There could have been no circulation there, for the timber across his legs had acted like a great tourniquet.

He remained immovable, silent, until the scouts had released Roy's foot and helped him out from under that human roof. That roof, at least, had not collapsed. Bruised and bleeding as Blythe was, he remained in his attitude of Herculean resistance as if he had died and become petrified there.

Then he spoke, his voice weak but tense, "Is he all right?"

"Yes, I'm all right," said Roy; "how about you?"

Blythe did not answer. He drew himself to his feet, reeled, clutched at Westy who stood nearest, and fell to the ground insensible.

Just at that moment Warde Hollister noticed something, and without speaking indicated it to one or two others. It was a trifling coincidence and held his glance and thought for but a second. On an end of fallen beam which protruded from the wreckage sat a robin with head cocked sideways watching the stricken, unconscious hero.

It seemed odd that right in that minute of his heroic abandonment, his companions should be reminded of his villainy and of his gentleness....

CHAPTER XXVI
MR. FERRETT'S TRIUMPH

Roy's injury was but a strained ankle. For a moment he seemed dazed and unable to realize what had happened. That the whole collapsed roof had been held above him by superhuman effort of Blythe only dawned on him when he saw the bleeding, unconscious form of his friend lying clear of the wreckage, Doc Carson kneeling by him, the others standing silently about. It did occur to Roy, as odd thoughts do come in tense moments, how pleased and content Blythe would be could he but know that "Doctor Cawson" was in attendance. His faith in scout first aid was so great, so flattering....

They made sure that his back was not broken and that his heart action was not dangerously weak. Doc bathed the streaked hair and sterilized the cut which he thought was not necessarily mortal.

"Someone will have to get a doctor," he said. He seemed the calmest one present. "Hustle to Dumont or Haworth, one of you, and get to a 'phone. If you can find a doctor send him, but anyway call up Bridgeboro; call up the hospital and tell them someone is hurt up here."

Roy was starting but Artie Van Arlen pulled him back. "It's all you can do to limp," he said. "I'll go."

"If it's a hospital emergency call, the police will come," Westy warned.

"Never mind," said Doc, "get to a 'phone, that's all I care about. And hustle."

Before he had finished speaking Artie was gone. Several of them watched his fleeting form, moving with steady, easy speed down the smooth white road. The patter of his shoes sounded farther and farther off until the sound died altogether, and the hurrying figure grew smaller and smaller as if it were going down the scale from patrol leader to tenderfoot. They saw his hat blow off and that he did not pause to recover it. Then he passed between the old gateposts where the sentinels had once stood, and disappeared in a turn of the road. There were houses a little beyond that point.

Under Doc's direction the scouts worked three boards under Blythe's own balsam couch and carried this to where he lay. They got him onto it and bore it gently into the camping shack, out of the glaring sunlight. There, in Blythe's Bunk, the only home he knew, they laid him gently down and at Doc's request those who were not needed went out. The victim lay quite unconscious, his face ghastly pale and with a look of being polished caused perhaps by the water which Doc Carson kept applying.

The wet, matted hair, too, gave him a ghastly, unhuman look. But Doc said that his pulse was fair and that the blood was not flowing too profusely. That was all he would say. With the true spirit of one who ministers he seemed to have forgotten all else except that Blythe was stricken.

Outside the air seemed tense, the scouts standing about in little groups, waiting. Their suspense was shown in the occasional glances which they gave up the road. They spoke in undertones, their talk was forced and charged with nervous tension. A kind of foreboding dwelt among them.

"They'll find out everything now," one said. "Should we maybe hide his coat?"

"We have no right to do that," said another.

"It's out of our hands now," Westy said.

Then spoke Pee-wee Harris out of his staunch, sturdy little heart, "I don't care—I don't care what you say—he didn't do it. Lots of people look like other people. Because anyway I know he didn't do it. Remember about that robin."

"How about the label, Kid?"

Pee-wee had not time to answer this poser for along the road came the ambulance, pell-mell. Surely, the boys thought, Artie could not have spoken of Blythe's identity over the 'phone, yet following the ambulance came the touring car of Bridgeboro's police department with the chief in it, the policeman chauffeur, a couple of other men, and county detective Ferrett. A couple of other cars, too, came lagging behind, in deference to the speed laws, doubtless lured thither by the sonorous gong of the ambulance and the imposing official display.

Pretty soon Artie came along scout pace. The scene of the pleasant little scout camp was presently overrun by aimless sojourners in private cars, who gathered about awaiting the actions of the high and mighty.

The surgeon in spotless white examined Blythe and said little. When one of the scouts ventured to ask him if the injuries would prove fatal he said, "Not necessarily."

"Who is this fellow anyway?" the Bridgeboro chief asked.

"He's a fellow that's hurt," Doc Carson answered rather dryly.

"Belong around here?"

"He was working here and we were helping him," Westy said.

"What's his name?"

"Blythe."

"What do you boys know about this chap?"

No one answered this question. The boys felt nervous, uncertain what to say. The one person present who was quite oblivious to all this official nonsense at such a time was the one whom it most concerned, Blythe. He lay

stark upon his balsam couch with the blessing of unconsciousness upon him. The surgeon, with a few words and much quiet show of efficiency, knelt by him, heedless of these official busybodies. What hint he had of possible crime none could say. But they were like vultures.

"Where's the fire department?" Warde Hollister ventured to ask a brother scout.

At this point the surgeon with gentle deftness removed the victim's faded, threadbare coat, and threw it upon the ground. With the promptness of sudden discovery county detective Ferrett picked it up. He held it distastefully, as one holds a thing infected. To the boys his act seemed like an insult to the poor worn rag with its tear, caused by the falling beam, and its brown bloodstain. But none of them spoke. Roy, in particular, watched the official with keen interest.

"Dominion—Dominion Clothing Company," they heard him say; "Quebec, Canada."

There followed an awful pause. That would have been the time for the scouts to speak. But none spoke.

"Hold on a minute," they heard Mr. Ferrett say, just as two men were about to lift the canvas stretcher which they had slipped under Blythe's body; "just a moment."

He took from his pocket a sort of huge wallet, and fumbling among its multifarious contents pulled out an old faded paper, which he opened. Roy and Westy, who stood nearest to him could read it plainly enough and see two pictures, profile and front face, which it displayed:

WANTED FOR MURDER
FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS

REWARD WILL BE PAID BY THE POLICE OF QUEBEC, CANADA, FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST AND CONVICTION OF CLAUDE DARRELL, ALIAS DARROW, ALIAS HICKY JOE, ETC., ETC. WANTED FOR

BURGLARY AND HOMICIDE.

Was last seen in New York where he tried to enlist for military service. Hair brown and straight. Complexion dark. Eyes gray. Height 5 feet 10½ inches. Weight about 140 pounds. Teeth white and even. May seek work as gasfitter. When last seen wore a gray suit with double breasted vest. Walks slightly sideways.

“Here’s our bird all right,” said Detective Ferrett with a cold vulgarity which made the scouts’ blood boil. “This is that Quebec chap, wanted for murder. Here’s an easy five thousand. Look at this, Chief; look at these pictures and then look at that face. O. K.? This is him or I’m a dub. Just wait till I measure this chap.”

“Oh, you’ll do nothing of the sort,” said the surgeon briskly, and apparently not at all interested in Blythe’s history or identity. “He’s not going to walk away. Just stand out of the way, gentlemen, this is an ambulance call.”

A thrill of admiration passed through several of the scouts as they heard this. “I’d—I’d—anyway I’d rather be a doctor than a detective,” Pee-wee whispered.

“Well, it’s all down on the paper here,” said Detective Ferrett. “We’ve got him dead to rights. Aim for a goose and you hit a gander. This fellow’s a red-handed thug from Canada. They’ve had the alarm out for him a couple of years. You kids never knew that, hey?” And by way of a pleasantry he hit Roy a rap with his bulging wallet. “We’ll measure him up down yonder. The face is enough, but these specifications will clinch it.”

“If you’re after specifications,” said Roy, “you might as well put down that he’s got a scar on his left heel. It’s an old one, about ten years old. And we’re glad you were the one to discover him and you’re welcome to your old five thousand dollars. We don’t want it, do we, Westy?”

CHAPTER XXVII
SCOUT LAW NUMBER TWO

Then the scene of all their good times and of their broken hopes was quiet again, the ambulance and its attendant throng was gone, and the scouts were alone.

"Can you hike home with your ankle like that?" Grove Bronson asked Roy.

"Sure, we can take our time. If we get home by evening it's all right."

"It's going to be moonlight here to-night—full moon," Westy said.

"Let's get the cooking things packed first," Connie Bennett said. "Then we'll clear up."

"We might stay for one more camp-fire," Hunt Ward suggested, half-heartedly.

"It wouldn't seem the same," Artie said.

They had all realized that. Dorry Benton laid aside the several tools that he had gathered up and looked about as if wondering what to do next.

"He saved your life," Will Dawson said to Roy.

"Do you think I don't know that?" Roy replied, a little catch in his voice.

"Maybe if you—sort of—you know, if you save a life, maybe it makes up for taking one——" El Sawyer said. But it was plain that he did not quite believe that.

"He didn't do it," Pee-wee said stoutly. "Do you think I don't know? I don't care what—he didn't do it. He likes us an—and—I—I like him—I——"

"Don't, Kid, please don't," said Roy.

"Didn't I say we were going to have two desserts that day I stalked a hop-toad up at Temple Camp, and wasn't I right?" Pee-wee persisted. "So there. I can always tell. And if a fellow saved my life I wouldn't let anybody say he was a murderer, I wouldn't."

"You're a little brick, Kid," said Roy.

"A scout has got to be loyal, hasn't he?" Pee-wee shouted. "Let's hear you deny that. You can bet your life I wouldn't have any murderers saving my life. I don't care about the Dominion Clothing Company or anybody else. If you say he killed anybody, *he didn't;* that's all I say. A scout has tuition."

"You mean intuition, Kid?" Westy laughed.

"I don't care about signs or anything," Pee-wee stoutly protested; "and I don't care for detectives either. Do you think I can't tell a murderer? Everything can turn out to be something different, can't it? I can prove it by the movies."

Warde Hollister stepped up to him and slapped his shoulder. “You’re one bully little scout, Kid,” he said. Warde seemed almost converted by Pee-wee’s inspiring, unreasoning loyalty.

“Sometimes I agree with you, Kid,” he said. “And then again——”

“I agree with myself all the time,” Pee-wee said; “and I don’t care who agrees with me.”

“One thing I’m glad of,” Westy said, “and that is that somebody else gets the money; let them have all the credit, too. We had our fun while it lasted,” he added wistfully. “And I’m glad Warde didn’t count that trip for his first class badge. I’m glad we don’t have anything to do with the bad side of it. It seems now just as if a friend had died, that’s all.”

“I kind of hope he does die,” Grove Bronson said.

“Just after being a hero,” Connie added.

This was too much for Roy. It brought poor Blythe’s heroism and his own rescue home to him with vivid force, his eyes filled and everything about the old familiar scene glistened.

“Come on, let’s get ready,” he finally said. “Let’s get away from here.”

They could not share Pee-wee’s staunch conviction; they doubted whether Pee-wee really did agree with himself in this matter. But they admired him none the less for that.

Disconsolately they set about clearing up and gathering their belongings. It seemed strange that one so quiet and unobtrusive as poor Blythe could be so keenly missed. Now that he was gone they could see nothing but pathetic reminders of him, the old grocery box he sat on at camp-fire, the box in which he put old nails; above all, the windmill where he had suffered that inexplicable brainstorm in the night. As for Roy, who owed his life to their strange friend, he could not regain any measure of his former spirits, nor even put a brave front to the disappointment as the others did. He limped about, silent and crestfallen.

In the mid-afternoon they started on their hike back to Bridgeboro, a cheerless group. Before going out between the old gateposts they turned for a last glimpse of the scene of their pleasant camping and working adventure. Only a few uprights of one shack remained. The accident had done the work of a day in ten seconds. There was the charred area where their mighty fire had been. And further off was the gaunt tower of the windmill, its big fan revolving slowly, the only remaining thing suggestive of life in the desolated camp.

“I suppose we could get the money for our work, maybe,” Westy said.

“We don’t want any money,” said Hunt Ward of the Elks. “All I want is to get back to our old car down by the river. We don’t want any rewards and we don’t want any pay and we don’t want any merits or rank badges or anything

on account of being here."

"It seems kind of like a dream now," Artie said.

"You never can tell how some dreams will come out," said Pee-wee. "Once I had a dream that I was a murderer and when I woke up I found I wasn't a murderer at all."

"That's one thing we like about you," said Roy with a poor attempt at his old bantering spirit.

"What's that?" Pee-wee asked.

"That you're not a murderer."

"I always said you were not," Westy added.

"No friend of ours is a murderer," Pee-wee said.

"I guess we'll have to go back to raising mushrooms now," Will Dawson observed. "Anyway, I'm glad we've got our old car to go to."

"Same here," said Vic Norris of the Elks.

They walked along for a little in silence.

"Will they hang him, I wonder?" Doc Carson asked.

"He must have been out of his head when he did it," one answered.

"He was out of his head when he *didn't* do it, you mean," insisted Pee-wee. "Do you think the Silver Foxes commit murders just because they're out of their heads? That's no good of an argument. Do you mean to tell me," he shouted, turning suddenly upon Roy; "do you mean to tell me that the fellow who saved your life like that would kill people?"

"Just because I like you, that doesn't prove that I'm out of my head, does it?" Roy asked with a kind of wistful humor.

"Sure it does," said Pee-wee, "because you say a friend of yours kills people. If it wasn't for him you wouldn't be limping now, so that proves the kind of a fellow he is. I don't mean he made you limp, but he made you stay alive so you could limp, and he doesn't even know that you thank him for it either——"

"Don't, Kid——" Roy began; he could hardly speak. "I do——"

"All right then," Pee-wee concluded. "Didn't I tell you I was going to find that girl, and didn't I find her? Didn't I send that letter? Didn't I say that scout up at Temple Camp would get well? Couldn't I always tell when we were going to have apple dumplings? And you go and believe an old picture and a lot of specific vacations or whatever you call them. You'd better read Law Two in the handbook about being loyal—you're such a fine patrol leader—you act more like a patrol wagon!"

"What do you mean I can't be loyal?" Roy demanded, his eyes glistening. "The fellows——"

"I don't care about the troop," Pee-wee interrupted. "I'm talking about you and the fellow that saved your life." He paused in the road and stood facing

Roy; a funny little round-faced figure he was, with eyes blazing. “You’ve got to say, is he a murderer or not? You’ve got to say it. Yes or no? And these fellows—your own patrol—they can prove what you say——”

Roy was almost sobbing. Pee-wee certainly held the floor—or the road.

“The men—Mr. Ferrett—they know better than we do, Kid. Blythe is the one whose picture——”

“You say yes or no,” Pee-wee demanded in a voice of thunder. “They lifted him off where you were caught and so now you’re alive and you can *speak*. Is he a murderer or isn’t he?”

Roy was going to pieces. The little scout whom he had always found it so easy to jolly, towered over him. The tiny Raven was become a giant. “I—no he —*no he isn’t*—he isn’t, Kid,” Roy stammered.

Without another word Pee-wee hooked his duffel bag to the end of his scout staff, after the fashion of a Swiss peasant, and carrying the staff over his shoulder, marched on ahead like a conquering hero, as if he preferred not to be seen hiking with such people....

CHAPTER XXVIII
HOME SWEET HOME

The sturdy little scout did not long walk alone. Roy, visibly affected, limped ahead, rapped him on the shoulder without saying a word, and hobbled along at his side. And presently Warde Hollister, quiet, thoughtful, and always somewhat a puzzle to the other scouts, joined them. “I’m with you, Kiddo,” he said. Pee-wee did not appear to care who was with him and who was not. His own stout little scout heart was with him, and that was enough.

And so these three who had taken the hike to Woodcliff, and discovered the tell-tale notice, and mailed the formidable envelope to somebody or other, they knew not whom, trudged along together now, and the resolute, loyal, unreasoning spirit of Pee-wee Harris was like a contagion, giving the others hope where indeed there seemed no hope, and diffusing something like cheer.

And noticing them, Westy said to Vic Norris of the Elks, “He’s a funny fellow, Warde; it always seems as if he thinks more than he speaks.”

“He never speaks till he’s sure,” Vic said.

The late afternoon sun was glinting up the river and bathing the patched roof of their old ramshackle railroad car in flickering tints of gold, as they made their way across the field to their quaint headquarters down by the shore in Bridgeboro. The tide was full, the unsightly mud banks hidden; it seemed as if their beloved familiar river had donned its best array to meet them. It rippled against the grassy shore in a kind of song of welcome. The birds were busy in the neighboring willow tree, and a fish flopped out of the glittering water as if to remind them that some of the pleasures of vacation time were left to them.

“Hello, old car!” said El Sawyer of the Ravens, as he tossed the duffel bag through a broken window. “I hope we have enough in the treasury to get that window put in.”

“We should worry,” said Roy.

“There’s a lot of fun not having any money,” said Pee-wee.

“We ought to have plenty of fun then,” said Westy. “This old car has got the County Poorhouse turning green with envy.”

“They have a lot of fun in the poorhouse, they whittle things with sticks,” Pee-wee said. “If you always have fun no matter what, that shows you’re an optomotrist.”

“You mean an optimist,” Doc Carson said.

“Let’s leave our stuff here and go home,” said Connie. “Then we can start in to-morrow.”

“Off with the new love, on with the old,” said Artie.

“There’s no place like this old car,” said Westy.

“Except Temple Camp,” two or three spoke up.

“And under Roy’s kitchen steps, that’s a good place,” said Pee-wee.

“Well, here we are anyway,” said Westy.

“We’re here because we’re here,” said Roy with just a glint of his wonted buoyant spirits.

“You can’t deny that,” Pee-wee challenged.

There was no denying that, and the old patched-up car, relic of a bygone age of railroading, seemed to breathe the atmosphere of home to them. Even the dusty odor of its threadbare velvet seats seemed to welcome them.

They spent that night in their homes; there was much to tell their parents. Several of them went to see Mr. Ellsworth, and they were not disappointed to learn that he believed the authorities were right, that Blythe was Claude Darrell. They had expected this. The only scout who could draw his mighty sword against the scoutmaster and the whole town was Pee-wee Harris, and he was at home and asleep. Mr. Ellsworth praised his scouts for abandoning all thought of gain from their unhappy adventure. “Just start all over again,” he said. So they resolved to do that.

The next day county detective Ferrett took a hop, skip and a jump into fame. Upon the front page of the Bridgeboro Evening Record was the following headliner:

MURDERER FOUND IN SCOUT CAMP.
SENSATIONAL SEQUEL TO BOY SCOUT
ENTERPRISE IN OLD CAMP MERRITT.

Claude Darrell, a Canadian fugitive of many aliases, was discovered yesterday by County Detective Slicksby Ferrett in old Camp Merritt where he was found working with a troop of local scouts, tearing down some of the old buildings of the wartime concentration camp. Darrell is wanted in Quebec for burglary and murder.

His discovery and prompt identification by Detective Ferrett was due to an alarm sent to Bridgeboro of an accident at the old camp.

The information being uncertain, local police officials and the county officer accompanied the ambulance to the camp, where it was found that the young man, who is a stranger to the scouts, had sustained injuries to his head and body. The hospital officials say that he will recover.

His injuries were caused by the falling of a roof. The fellow was

of a rough appearance, his clothing in the last stages of shabbiness.

Detective Ferrett's skill and long experience enabled him to judge at once that the fellow was of the criminal class. He had been palming himself off on the youngsters as an unfortunate, out of work, and they had been helping him.

An inspection of his coat label and comparison of his face with a police alarm picture which the detective had, enabled him to make the identification. Owing to the almost emaciated condition of the fugitive and to his injury, it has not been possible to verify the identification by measurements, but there seems no doubt that he is the man wanted by the Canadian authorities.

These have been notified and Dominion detectives will visit Bridgeboro as soon as the patient has fully regained consciousness and it is possible to compel him to confront those who know him face to face.

Detective Ferrett, whose skill and shrewdness and remarkable memory enabled him to bring this brutal criminal within the reach of justice, warns parents not to let their children play in spots unfrequented by their elders, because of the numerous thugs and desperate characters cast adrift by the war and the present period of unemployment. These, he says, are usually to be found on the outskirts of small towns. Many of them come from New York. They pretend to be fond of camping and so lure and then rob their adventure loving victims....

There was considerable more of this nonsensical twaddle. It was the silly custom of the Bridgeboro Record to make heroes of the town and county officials, and soberly to print the rubbish which they uttered for the pleasure of seeing their names in print.

"Can you beat that?" Westy asked.

"Outskirts of towns!" said Dorry. "Why we met him in Bennett's Candy Store!"

"He calls us children," said Pee-wee.

"Now that you speak of it," said Warde Hollister, "it seems funny that he should have gone right into stores in Bridgeboro."

"Parents should be warned against letting their children go into candy stores," said Roy.

The next day it appeared that the doctors of Bridgeboro were not quite equal to coping with poor Blythe's case, and the Bridgeboro Record stated that a specialist from New York had been summoned to determine whether the desperate scoundrel was feigning unconsciousness in order to baffle the

authorities. It appeared that not only thugs and bandits, but occasionally a surgeon who knew his business, came from New York.

And then something happened....

CHAPTER XXIX
A DISCOVERY

The doctor from New York discovered something which the eagle eye of Detective Ferrett had not discovered. And which the Bridgeboro doctors had not discovered. It was nothing new. It was just two or three tiny cracks in the skull of the fugitive criminal, not far from the rapidly healing cut which he received in his deed of heroism. It might have been two or three years old, the doctor said. He seemed keenly interested in it.

As a consequence of this, Detective Ferrett and a young doctor from the hospital called at the homes of several of the older scouts and questioned them about Blythe's demeanor at camp. The boys had tried to tell the detective of their companion's peculiarities but he had not condescended to listen. He listened now. And the outcome of all this business was another article in the Bridgeboro Record:

CRIMINAL TENDENCIES CAUSED BY CRACKED SKULL?

> A delicate operation was performed yesterday on the skull of Darrell, the Canadian fugitive who is recovering from injuries in the Bridgeboro hospital. The shaving of the hair from his head for the purpose of dressing a slight wound received on the day of his capture was the means of revealing a small damage to the skull, evidently caused by a previous accident. It was found that the crushed area of bone caused a depression deep enough to press upon the brain which might account for his mental state which is said to be abnormal.
>
> Darrell has been subject to occasional fits of depression and is said to have become easily excited. The present indications are that the operation was successful. The patient is resting easily and talks more rationally than at any time since his capture. A police guard is being kept at his bedside and it is the intention of the authorities to question him when he is able to submit to such examination.
>
> County Detective Ferrett, whose skill is responsible for the capture of Darrell where he was in hiding at Camp Merritt, thinks that the damage to his skull may very likely have been caused by a blow received in an altercation at the time he killed his victim.

And so a few days elapsed, and the poor helpless victim was surrounded by officials enough, both local and Canadian, to capture the whole hospital. But

the victim, pale and swathed and bandaged, had the advantage of them, and they could only wait. Old Mother Nature cannot be hurried by the law. Much of the time Blythe slept. Then, one fine day, he asked for Roy and Pee-wee. They asked him what he wanted of Roy and Pee-wee and he said he wanted to hear them jolly each other....

CHAPTER XXX
THE VISIT

"I guess we ought to have a rehearsal, hey?" laughed Roy.

"We don't need any rehearsal," said Pee-wee; "when we get there you just start jollying me and I'll answer you back. I don't care what you say, you can say anything you want. I'll say a lot of things about the Silver Foxes, hey? And you knock the Ravens; knock them good and hard, I don't care. Call me a raving Raven because that always made him laugh."

"Don't worry," Roy said, "he only has to look at you to laugh."

"Shall I wear all my stuff so you can make fun of me?" Pee-wee asked.

"Have a heart," said Roy, "you don't want to kill him."

"Let's ask Warde to go too," said Pee-wee, "because he—I kind of think he doesn't believe Blythe is a criminal. Maybe the others think so, but he doesn't—that's what I think. And you don't because you said so." Then he added anxiously, "Do you?"

"I—I guess not, Kid," Roy answered doubtfully. He was almost ashamed to say this, seeing the sturdy little champion at his side.

"We'll get Warde," Pee-wee said, "because he likes Warde, and Warde's pretty good at jollying me, too. And that'll be good because we're the three that stick up for Blythe, hey? And if any of those men say anything there'll be three of us to answer them."

"They won't let us stay long, Kid," Roy said.

"I don't care, anyway we'll see him; and I'm going to tell him that the three of us know he's innocent."

"No, don't tell him that, Kid," said Roy more thoughtfully. "Let's not speak about that. If he's innocent——"

"What do you mean, *if*?" Pee-wee asked.

"I mean it looks bad for him, Kid," said Roy frankly. "If his brain wasn't just right, then it wasn't so bad. See? He's the one that did it, you saw the pictures, Kid, and the label on his coat. But if he didn't know all about what he was doing then it wasn't so bad. The grown people know best, Kid. But that isn't saying we can't be friends with him."

"You go back on what you said?" Pee-wee demanded grimly.

"Oh, I don't know, Kid," Roy answered, nettled and annoyed; "let's not talk about it. We're going to see him anyway. Come on, let's get Warde, that's a good idea."

Without another word Pee-wee turned up the next corner toward his home.

“Aren’t you going, Kid?” Roy called.

“Go ahead,” said Pee-wee, never turning, “I’ll be there. I know the way.”

Roy watched the sturdy little figure trudging along the side street. He knew that Pee-wee was both angry and disgusted; he could tell by his walk. But the Raven mascot was not too preoccupied with his mighty wrath to forget to tip his scout hat to a lady whom he passed. He observed all the scout laws and rules. There were no two ways about anything with Pee-wee. Loyalty meant more than just friendship. It meant confidence, faith.

This staunchness somewhat daunted Roy. It made him feel not quite sure of himself; a little ashamed. But after all it was just Pee-wee’s way; his faith was so strong that he shut his eyes to facts.

Roy went down to the river and got Warde and together they started for the hospital. Warde was glad to go. He said little, for that was his habit. He was quiet and thoughtful.

“That kid almost has me thinking that everybody’s mistaken,” said Roy.

“How?”

“Oh, he’s so dead sure about everything. Don’t you suppose I can be grateful to Blythe even if he—even if he’s crazy.”

“What do you mean, crazy?”

“Oh, I mean even if he committed a murder if that’s the way you want to put it. He did, didn’t he?”

“Guess so.”

“Probably he was crazy when he did it.... Wasn’t he?”

“Guess so.”

At the hospital they were shown into the public ward at the door of which sat a policeman. That was to show that Blythe was under arrest. He was likely to escape! He lay upon his cot, his head swathed in bandages, his eyes hollow, his face white. He moved his eyes and smiled at the scouts without moving his head. It was the same old smile, simple and companionable, as if he were of their own age and one of them. All in a rush it took them back to old Camp Merritt.

“Doctor Cawson,” he said, just above a whisper. “Did he come too? He’d like to see me now, eh?”

“No, he didn’t come, boss,” said Warde; “but Pee-wee’s coming. I guess he stopped to do a good turn. Better?”

“Weak yet,” their friend said, reaching a white hand out, which each of the boys shook gently. “Your foot all right?” he asked Roy.

“Sure, only I can’t run yet,” Roy said. “I should worry. I’ve got to thank *you*, that’s one sure thing.”

There was an awkward pause; the scouts did not know what to say. They wondered if their friend knew of the dreadful accusation. They felt that

whatever they said or did would be wrong in that spotless, silent place, which was subject to rules and customs that they did not understand. Finally, with furtive glances at the nurses, they ventured to sit upon the edge of the cot. Then they felt easier and more at home.

Despite his weakness and pallor and the appalling look which his bandages gave him, there was something pleasant and wholesome in the victim's look which the scouts had not seen before. Stricken and helpless though he was, he did not seem peculiar.

"I hurt my foot when I was a kid," he said in a weak voice; "I stepped on a scythe. I couldn't walk for two months."

"Your left foot?" Roy asked.

"My left heel, the scar's there now."

"I know," Roy said.

This was the first time that their queer friend had ever spoken of his early life. He smiled again, that pleasant, companionable smile.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"I—tell us about it," Roy said.

"I stepped on a scythe in the hayfield. I thought I told Doctor Cawson."

"No, you never told him," said Warde, gently.

"That's funny," their friend said.

There followed a pause. The victim lay quite still. The boys did not know whether they should go or not.

"I know how you found it out," Blythe said. "It was when I went up on the windmill, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," said Roy. "You were in your bare feet."

There was another pause. Blythe seemed meditating. The boys were uncomfortable. Nurses came and went. One took the victim's temperature. He watched her as she went away. Finally he spoke.

CHAPTER XXXI
HARK, THE CONQUERING HERO COMES!

He spoke as if it were the most commonplace matter that he was telling, “I told them that my brother tried to kill me and they don’t believe it.”

Roy looked at Warde, dumbfounded.

“They don’t believe anything,” Blythe said, weakly.

“We believe you; tell us about it?” Warde said. “Did your brother kill someone?”

“No, but he tried to kill me. Didn’t I tell you?”

“No, you never told us,” Warde said, gently. “Tell us now.”

“It was at Camp Merritt.”

“What do you mean? When?”

Blythe closed his eyes and lay for a few moments, silent. It seemed as if he slept. The boys looked at each other, puzzled. The invalid opened his eyes and smiled.

“Did you pick up all the sticks?” he asked.

“Yes, we did,” Warde said. “Tell us about your brother; we’re all friends.”

“Friends and comrades,” Blythe said faintly.

“That’s it, you said it,” Roy assured him.

“He tried to kill me,” Blythe said.

“Why did he try to do that—Blythey?” Roy asked. “We’re your friends; tell us all about it. You remember better than you used to?”

“I thought I told you,” the invalid said simply. “They’re going to take me to Canada next week. I’ve got to be tried for something. They think I only dreamed that my brother tried to kill me. I would rather stay here with you. Can’t you tell them, so I can stay here? I want to stay. We were all like a kind of a family—telling yarns. You know me. They have a conspiracy here. You know all about me, you tell them. If you ask them to give me back the—the—locket, they will. It has her picture?”

“Whose picture—Blythey?”

“My mother’s, *you* know. You know how I went up and got it. You’re my friends and I’m yours——”

“Yes, you are,” Roy said, his eyes glistening.

The invalid closed his eyes and lay as if asleep. The two scouts waited, but the eyes did not reopen. So they arose quietly and left the ward. They had been told they could not stay long. They were deeply affected and bewildered. Blythe was different, but *how* different they could not say. He just seemed

different. He had spoken with simple frankness of things he had never mentioned before. He was *changed*.

This fact and what he had said, and the stillness of the place, and the queer odor in the ward and corridor, and the noiselessness of their own footfalls on the rubber covered hall, awed the two scouts to such a degree that they longed for the free open air where they could talk.

It was with some trepidation that they encountered at the head of the stairway the police guard talking with Detective Ferrett.

"Well, how do you find him?" the county official asked in gruff good humor. He at least seemed not at all awed by the solemnity of the place.

"Does he have to go to Canada?" Roy asked. "Does he have to go soon?"

"Yes, siree. Been telling you about his brother?"

"Is it true?" Roy asked.

"Na-a-h! He either hasn't come to his senses yet or he's bluffing. He's going back to Quebec to a dope-house or else to the gallows. How'd *you* like to go to the gallows, hey?" he added as a pleasantry.

"You're—you're *sure* he's the one?" Roy asked, in pitiful despair.

"Well now what do *you* think? You saw the pictures, huh? He's the chap, says you. Been trying to string you, huh? He rang that brother in on me yesterday."

"He wants the locket you took from him," said Roy.

"Oh, does he? Well, wouldn't that be nice?"

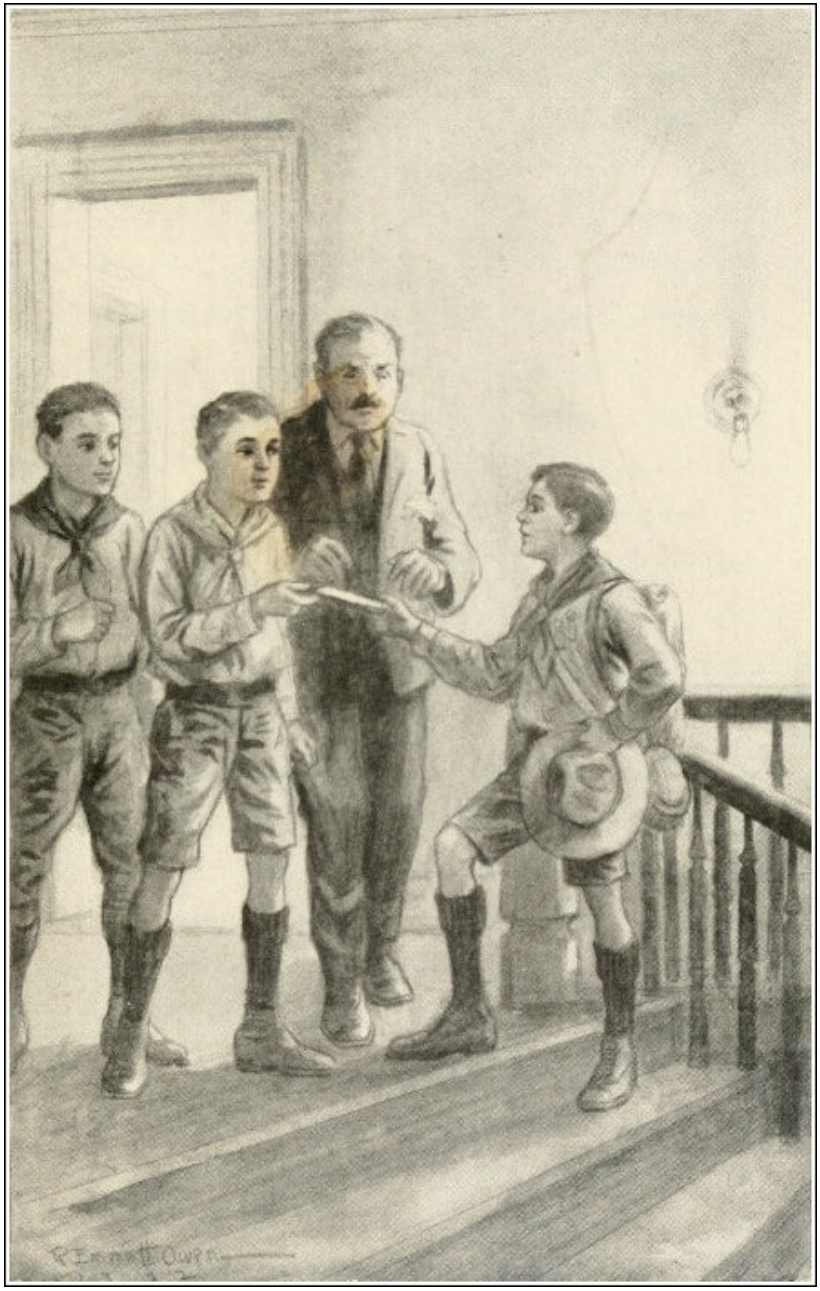
"If it helps him to get better and helps him—maybe—to sleep——"

"Well now, you run home and say you had a call on him, and look out who you make friends with next time."

They were just about to start down the stairs, heavy-hearted with that last pathetic memory of their friend to carry in their minds, when looking down the broad stairway, they beheld a strange sight. A diminutive figure was ascending the steps.

He wore the full scout regalia, including all sundries and accessories, and the sight of him as he came trudging up carried the others back to that day when they had taken their memorable hike to Woodcliff. For stuck under his belt like some awful document of authority was an envelope of goodly dimensions, and his countenance wore a look calculated to strike terror to the stoutest heart.

Thus ascended the doughty little knight of the Good Turn, and several nurses watched him amusedly from the foot of the broad stair....



“HERE, READ THIS LETTER,” SAID PEE-WEE TO ROY.

CHAPTER XXXII
RETURN OF THE GOOD TURN

"You think you're so smart," said Pee-wee, including the men as well as his scout comrades in his scathing rebuke. "It shows how much you know about good turns and scout laws and things. Maybe you think *I* haven't got any specific vacations[3]. Here, read this letter and look at the pictures. Then you better go home and read scout law Number Two. Did you start jollying yet?"

As Roy drew a folded sheet from the envelope several pictures fell to the floor. One of these was an unmounted cabinet photo, the others were exceptionally good amateur prints. As County Detective Ferrett gathered these up he scrutinized the photograph with sudden interest.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Oh, I got it," said Pee-wee mysteriously. "You're a detective, you ought to know specific vacations when you see them."

County detective Ferrett was not one to be either polite or ceremonious where his professional interests were concerned. He therefore snatched the letter from Roy's hands and proceeded to read it with eager interest.

It was only by crowding around him that the boys could read it. But in his sudden interest in the letter the shrewd official had released the pictures to their rightful owner and the eyes of Warde and Roy were riveted upon these in speechless consternation.

One showed the very sweet face of a woman, and as the boys looked at this they were conscious of having seen that face somewhere before. Two others showed country scenes, including a house. They were the kind of scenes that amateur photographers love to take; scenes with a homely familiarity about them—a woman sitting in a rocking chair on a porch, a dog skilfully caught by the camera in the moment of his resting his paws upon a fence, a back door with a churn standing near. Commonplace things, the last subjects that an artist would choose, but scenes that have a way of reaching the heart and recalling fond memories.

But out of the professionally taken photo there looked straight at the boys eyes, oh, how familiar, how friendly, how companionable. And upon the mouth hovered that little smile that they knew, oh, so well. It seemed, yes it seemed that if Roy were to start jollying Pee-wee then and there, that smile would broaden. It was the picture of Blythey, their friend. It seemed to say, "Let's start the camp-fire."

The handwriting of the letter was small and shaky. The missive read:

Dear Unknown Friend:—

The letter you sent me came to me. It was brought to me by the postmaster. In the big town not so far from here there are boys in brown suits and they call them scouts. A neighbor of mine says you must be one of those because they are all over the country.

It is so kind how you thought to send the letter. I would like to know where you got it. It made me very sad to read it because it was written to me by my son Joe, who was killed in the war. He was killed near Reims. I wish I could know all about it but nobody can find out for me.

He went from Camp Merritt in April 1918 and Mr. Hicks who is postmaster here has a big map on the wall in his store and he says that Bridgeboro (which is written near your name on the envelope) is near Camp Merritt, so perhaps you found the letter. I guess so for it is so old and looks as if it had been in the weather, but it is very, very dear to me. So, my dear young friend, who are so kind, you can say to yourself that you made me see my boy once more just the same as if he came back. I think that will make you happy. It made me sad but it made me happy too. It seems as if I have a letter from both of you and I will never see you but you are both with me in my trouble and loneliness.

I would like you to come here sometime and see the home where my boy grew up but I have much trouble and fear that soon I must go to the Home in Barnardsville, there to end my days. But these pictures taken by my boy will show you his home that I must now lose and his dog now twelve years old; poor dog, I do not know where he will go when I go to the Home.

My dear boy saved his life when he was your age as I suppose, and do you know how? By running to him when he was caught in a thrasher and my boy stepped on a scythe as he ran and he was many weeks in bed while I nursed him. It seemed hardest of all that I could not nurse him when he died. He was a brave boy and so gentle and kind to me and to everyone, even the animals, and he was so noble and good to me after his father died.

So you see, my dear young friend, I have lost much, even more than I tell you and I say there are sorrows worse than death so you will be a pride and comfort as you grow up, for I have known what an undutiful son is too. But I think of my brave, noble boy that died in France and you brought him back to me for a few minutes when I sat reading his letter. So I shall always love these scout boys on account of you and would like to read about them but my eyes are

not very strong.

And now I say good-bye to you, my dear young friend and often I will think of you after I go to the Home.

Mrs. Mary Haskell Hicksville,
North Carolina.

The quiet of Hicksville, North Carolina, could have been no deeper than the stillness which prevailed when the scouts finished reading this letter. They seemed to feel that if they moved or spoke it would destroy a spell and prove this whole amazing business a dream. Within the ward the voice of some patient could be heard in petulant complaint. Nurses with silent tread, moved in and out of the apartment. An auto horn could be heard tooting somewhere in the distance. But Warde and Roy were in Hicksville, North Carolina.

Warde was the first to speak. Modest, as he always was, he now uttered a thought which had lingered in his mind for many days. “Now I know why he said ‘*Doctor Cawson*,’” he observed quietly. “He belongs in the south. I know why he didn’t say *Tranto* and *Monreal*; it was because he never lived in those places. But of course, that doesn’t prove anything, I guess.”

“It proves something about *you*,” said Roy proudly. Oh, he could afford to be generous and happy!

“We don’t need any proof,” said Pee-wee; “haven’t we got proof enough? What more do you want? Now what have you all got to say? You’re so smart!”

No one had anything to say, not even Detective Ferrett. All he could do was whistle perplexedly. The overworked, thin, trembling arm of poor Mrs. Haskell had reached out and dealt him a knockout blow, under the exclusive auspices of Pee-wee Harris, mascot of the raving Ravens, scout of the first class, master of good turns, defender and exponent of good scout law Number Two, First Bridgeboro, New Jersey, Troop, Boy Scouts of America!

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[3] Specifications he probably meant.

CHAPTER XXXIII
THE MYSTERY

It was many days before all the bits of this strange puzzle were put together and the full truth revealed. As the condition of the invalid improved his memory returned to him. This wonderful effect of the operation on his skull was noticeable first in the recollection of trifles and disconnected events in his life. Usually he got these confused at first but each item in the marvelous catalogue of the brain was finally put in its right place.

His piecing together the events of his life was like the gathering up of the broken pieces of a bowl and the successful reconstruction of it by patiently fitting in the fragments here and there. It was a marvel and a delight to the scouts who visited him constantly, to watch him searching for things in the darkness, as one might say, and bringing them home to patch together the broken picture of his past.

But how came that injury, discovered by the merest chance, which had wrapped his early life in a blackness like the blackness of night? Haskell never told of this connectedly, for he could neither speak of it or think of it without becoming greatly agitated. And that tragic occurrence was never made known to his aged mother.

But these were the facts which were gradually brought into the light. Joe Haskell and his brother had been twins. Long before their father died Bob Haskell had done much to bring shame and worry to the veteran who had fought in the confederate cause, and whose end was hastened by his dishonest, worthless son.

Hicksville proved too small for this enterprising scamp who, after rifling the cash drawer in the railroad station, withdrew from these scenes of limited opportunity to spread his wings in the great metropolis of New York.

Joe and his mother never heard of him again. The stunted affections and criminal tendencies of the one son seemed compensated for in the other, who remained the dutiful and loving companion and support of his mother until the great war called him. He received his training at a southern camp and was later transferred to Camp Merritt, which was an embarkation camp. Had it not been for a certain occurrence he would have sailed with the swarms of boys who went across in the spring and summer of 1918. But he never went to France.

On a pleasant Sunday morning in April of that year, Joe Blythe started for Woodcliff to dine at the home of a family he did not know—the home and family of Miss Bates. As we know, he never reached that hospitable roof. We

do know, however, that in an isolated shack in the woods not far from camp were found his wallet containing his leave of absence, an unmailed letter to his mother, and Miss Bates' card.

How came he to that shack? It was in a bypath sometimes followed by soldiers, he said. He said he paused there to get out of a shower. This statement was at least partly verified by the authorities who secured reports that it did rain on that day.

Joe Blythe said that in that shack he met his brother, shabby, desperate. Did the brother know that Joe was a soldier in the camp? Very likely. Was he lying in wait for him in that secluded spot? That also seems probable. That his brother attacked him, hitting him with an old sash-weight, is certain. Who shall say what actually transpired between these brothers in that lonely spot?

But the proven facts of Bob Haskell's career are these. He escaped from Canada after committing burglary and a brutal murder. He tried at one American recruiting station after another to find safety in military service, and was rejected as unfit wherever he applied.

Neither Joe nor anyone else knows what was in the mind of this defective, desperate, frantic wretch when he sought the neighborhood of Camp Merritt. No one knows whether the horrible plan which he executed had been previously conceived.

But this is certain, that he struck his brother on the head and laid him low and took from him not only his uniform but his memory as well. One thing he did not take, because he did not want it, and that was a little trinket containing their mother's picture which Joe had always worn.

We may picture Joe Haskell lying in that dank, musty shack, bleeding, unconscious, for hours. How long he lay there no man shall say. We may picture him wandering forth, in an ill-fitting suit of civilian clothes, demented, broken, dazed. Of his wanderings, likewise, who shall tell the full truth? He visited a place called Blytheville and took the name of Blythe. He visited great cities, so he said. He was in the west. He was in jail for vagrancy. He watched some cows for a farmer. He remembered nothing of his past. He was sheltered by the Salvation Army somewhere. He was a wanderer over the country.

And so in time he wandered to New York. There he fell in with men who were interested in demolishing the old camp. Probably they had no faith in him. They did not reckon that he would fall in with a troop of scouts who, in the good cause of pitying friendship, would make the old shacks of the deserted reservation echo to the sound of their saws and hammers, and the music of their merry laughter.

And the brother?

April in the terrible year of 1918 was the month of all months when troops were sent abroad by the thousands, half equipped, untrained, as fast as the

speeding transports could carry them. It was a time of weakening hope, of misgivings, of confusion and frantic hurry. Men, men, men, whether they were soldiers or not, so only that they were men! Few know of the frenzied haste in the embarkation camp those days. Few will ever realize how near the war came to being lost.

For Bob Haskell there was no returning consciousness and only the silent records of the War Department could speak for him, reporting his supreme sacrifice under a name but a part of which was his own. That he lived in camp as his brother for at least a few hours in that time of unquestioning rush and inevitable disorder seems probable enough. That he fell in the fighting, under the name of Joseph Haskell, we know.

So at least the uniform which he stole was not dishonored. And since he paid for his crime with his own life, and in the way that he preferred, may we not follow his brother's good example and let his checkered memory rest in peace? Joe never told his mother more than this, that it must have been his brother who was killed in France. She never knew who struck him down.

Another episode is not so easily explained, for it is bound up with Joe Haskell's mental condition while he was with the scouts. That is the episode of the windmill. About that he seemed to remember but little. No doubt the calling of the voice which he thought was his mother's was a pure hallucination. It was like a little flash of light in his darkness. Yet it might have been that the peculiar sounds aroused certain memories.

One very strange fact, however, is certain, and that is that he did find the trinket with his mother's picture on that lonely, wind-swept tower. The voice which had called him had not mocked and deceived him. How came that little trinket there?

The only answer that we have to this question is the theory of Pee-wee Harris, wearer of the stalking badge, and, as his very nickname shows, the friend of birds. He claimed that a wren, or one of the mischievous, pilfering birds of that group had carried the locket to its nest in the old windmill. It is true that certain birds carry such glittering trifles to their nests and it is well known that wrens forage in old buildings and often build in windmills. There were a few wisps of straw to give color to Pee-wee's ingenious theory.

But when it comes to building, Pee-wee himself is a master builder of castles in the air.

And there you are.

CHAPTER XXXIV
SEEIN' THINGS

On a certain fair day in the autumn Joshua Hicks stood in the doorway of the Hicksville post office and contemplated the chickens which were congregated on the store platform waiting for the mail. He looked as if he had been standing there uninterruptedly since we last saw him. His octagon-shaped spectacles were exactly half way down his nose, and his nose was just as long as it was on the day we made his acquaintance—if anything, a little longer. He was waiting for the big daily event in Hicksville, the arrival of the train.

But a bigger event than that was to arouse Hicksville. When the train arrived a solitary figure got out, a young man with a suitcase, who waved his hand familiarly to Joshua and called, "Hello, Josh," as he strode away up the road.

For a minute Josh could only stare and say, "By gum." Then he took off his spectacles and wiped them as if they were responsible for the strange thing he had seen. But this, when he replaced them, only made the hurrying figure stand out clearer to his vision.

"Marthy," said he, re-entering the post office and addressing his daughter, "I jes' seed a ghost; as sure as I'm standin' here, Marthy, I seed the ghost of Joey Haskell. It got off the train jes' as sure as I'm standin' here, Marthy, and called out ter me and went up the road. I seed it plain."

"Same as you seed the goblins in Hiram Berry's cornfield before prohibition," said Marthy, who was not to be startled out of her rustic calm by any of her father's visions. And she continued sorting the mail which consisted of a newspaper and two letters.

"If folks is dead and yer see 'em, it's sperits, ain't it?" Joshua demanded.

"If folks is dead they don't come to Hicksville, I reckon," said the girl.

One might suppose that Hicksville would be just the very place folks would go to, if they were dead. Be that as it may the young man was no ghost. He was just a little pale, and he looked as if he might have known much suffering, but he was no ghost.

Up the little lane he went where goldenrod was blooming and where some of the birds that had beaten him on the journey southward were flitting and chirping in the trees. A little brook that bordered the narrow, fragrant way seemed hurrying along at his side, laughing in its pebbly bed, as if to give him a welcome home. Straight ahead he went till he came to the little white house. In the tiny front window hung a small faded square of cloth which might once

have been red, and in the center of this was a crude homemade star of gold, but all the pristine brightness had gone from it.

The young man opened the door, laid down his suitcase, stepped into the little sitting room, and taking down the tattered, faded symbol called out, "What's this doing here? If that isn't like Hicksville! The war over two years and——"

Just then the astonished and frightened face of a little, wizened old lady appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"*Mother!*"

Then in another moment he was helping the trembling form to a chair and laughing and stroking the gray hair and putting his arm around that thin, wrinkled neck.

It was almost too much for her. She looked at him with a kind of terror in her poor old eyes, as if she thought he was not real, and she clung to him as if she were drowning.

"It's all right, Muddy," he laughed, kissing her and making a fine joke of her bewilderment; "feel of me; here, pinch me. Ouch! See how real I am? I'm hungry too, if anybody should ask you. I think I'll go up to Ruth Jillett's house for supper——"

She only clung to him tighter—and cried a little more. "You was always thinking of Ruth first," she said. "Joey, my eyes is not what they wuz, I've seen you so much when I was alone here—in all the trouble—you wouldn't fool me—Joey?"

For answer she got such a hug as no ghost could ever give. "Of course, if you'd rather believe the Government than your own eyes.... Why here's Sport! Hello, Sport, I'll leave it to you," he added, reaching down and patting the dog whose tail was going like a pendulum. "Here's a woman that doesn't——"

"Joey, you mustn't say that—you—you——"

"All right, old Muddy, then admit that I am me."

"I don't understand—I—Joey——"

Another hug, "Of course, you don't. You're just two years out of date. You've been living among the dead and you think everybody's dead and I'm going to——"

"You're not going to Ruth Jillett's, Joey——"

"Well, I certainly will if you don't get me some supper. How about that, Sport? Here I am come home a rich man with three hundred dollars in my pocket, and no supper."

"Joey, if I had only known I'd have made a meat pie. I won't believe you're real till I see you eat, Joey." That would be a good test.

"We won't eat here many more times——"

"Oh yes, we will. I've got three hundred dollars, and two hundred of it

belongs to some boy scouts. They made me take it as a loan. We're going to stay right here and I'm going to get a job in Cartersburgh and I'm coming home every night—so as to be near Ruth. Hey, Sport."

Poor old Mrs. Haskell only clung tighter to him. And Sport looked up, and kept looking, as if he did not understand at all.

And so, as the evening drew on, these two, mother and son, sat in the little kitchen of their old home and talked while Joe ate his supper; a very good supper indeed for a "sperit." And since it was a matter of eating, may we not fancy that the staunch spirit of Pee-wee Harris of the raving Ravens was with them as they talked late into the night? And when Joey Haskell jollied his poor old mother (as he did most shamefully) may we not picture that diminutive scout saying in high disgust, "You think you're smart, don't you?"

And yet, you know, you will hear it said that nothing ever happens in Hicksville....

THE END

[The end of *Roy Blakeley in the Haunted Camp* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]