

ROY BLAKELEY'S
HAPPY-GO-LUCKY HIKE

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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ROY BLAKELEY'S
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WE DID EVERYTHING BUT CATCH JOCK.

ROY BLAKELEY'S
HAPPY-GO-LUCKY HIKE

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

AUTHOR OF
THE TOM SLADE BOOKS, THE ROY BLAKELEY
BOOKS, THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS,
WESTY MARTIN, HERVEY
WILLETTS, ETC.

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ROY BLAKELEY'S HAPPY-GO-LUCKY HIKE

CHAPTER I

THE CAUSE OF IT ALL

Now you can get ready for a good laugh because I'm going to tell you about our famous Good Turn hike because it had so many turns in it. It's got a lot of names to it too, but that's the name I gave it and what I say *goes*, not saying where it goes to. If you want to see where it goes to, you better follow us, only you do it at your own risk and you won't get anything to eat because we've only got enough for four and one of them is Pee-wee Harris and he counts for six, so that's ten.

But anyway even if there are not so many eats, there are a lot of names to this hike, only you can't eat them, so what good are they? There were four of us that went, just counting human beings. There was one dog and he was a mut. After we got home, not saying what happened, Wig Weigand said we should name it the *Hike of the Merry Mut*—that shows how smart he is with all his fancy talk and everything. Vic Norris, he's in the Elks, he said we should call it the *Now you see it, now you don't Hike*. I told him if I used a name as long as that there wouldn't be any room for the story, and believe me it's going to take a lot of room—even as much as two towns and about five villages. Pee-wee Harris said we should call it the Hilarious Hike—he got that word out of the dictionary. I said, “I don't care, call it the *Harum-Scarum Hike* if you want to; we'll call it by all four names, what's the difference?”

“You can't have four names for one story,” he started yelling.

“Listen who's talking so soft and low,” I said. “You can have five helpings of dessert in one dinner because I can prove it by yourself.”

“That's different,” he shouted.

“Sure, it's the same only different,” Vic said.

“You can have as many names as you want to a story,” I told him; “you don't have to use them all.”

“You haven't got any sense,” the kid shouted.

“We're not going to use any of that either,” I said. “So now will you please kindly keep still till I find out if it's thundering in the sky?”

So then he shut up for about three seconds, maybe two. When Pee-wee keeps still it sounds like a graveyard all around. Anyway now I'm going to tell you about what happened, and I'm going to start like a bedtime story. It was a beautiful sunny morning when we all started out one afternoon to do

an especially big good turn like boy scouts are supposed to do every day—you don't have to do them at night, it doesn't say it in the handbook.

So now this is the start of the story about what really happened and you needn't write me any letter to find out if we're real boys—you'd think we were correct imitations the way some scouts down south especially out west keep writing me letters to know if I'm alive. Believe me, as soon as I'm dead I'll let you know. Any minute I'm likely to die laughing, especially in this story that's all true.

It starts with us needing five dollars and it ends with us needing three new stockings and one hat and an empty cartridge and a compass and two buttons off a scout shirt and a scarf and a piece of tin foil that chocolate came in and a hook that belonged on a rope and something to eat. Believe me we started at the bottom and worked our way down. If we had stayed out much longer there wouldn't have been anything left of us at all and we wouldn't have had to bother to come home. A tin cup too, we lost that. It was a kind of a rainbow hike because there was one scout from each patrol in our troop. There was a Silver Fox—I was that one. I'm the one that always gets up hikes, like Cook's Tours without any cooking. Vic Norris comes from the Elks and I don't blame him. I'd come from it too if I was in it. They're always going out somewhere with their mothers, that bunch. Wig Weigand, he's in the Ravens, his right name is Wigley—gee, what a name. We call him Wigwag because he's crazy about signalling. Pee-wee Harris is in the Chipmunks, if you want to make him mad call it the Chipskunks. Anyway it won't last long because there are only six of them and about ten of them are going to move away, what does he care? He can rob the cradle for some more. Most always when he gets new scouts he gets twins—two helpings. He got the idea from dinner. He's an after dinner speaker, also before dinner and after breakfast and before supper and just after lunch. His talking hours are from 6 A. M. to 6 A. M. He's all the time laying down the law and picking it up and carrying it around with him. He invented the Boy Scouts of America. Don't blame me, I didn't ask him to go along.

It was a beautiful sunny morning—it was the same sunny morning I told you about before. I was mowing our lawn, that was the second day after school closed. This summer, my sister's going to have a big garden and I won't have so much lawn to mow, but I'm going to get the dollar a week just the same. We got a dandy big lawn as long as you don't have to mow it. It was a beautiful sunny—now I have to go to lunch, then I'll tell you.

That straight line means I had lunch, so now it's a beautiful summer afternoon and I was mowing the lawn when all of a sudden I noticed a dog—he wasn't so big—watching me. I think he was about forty-second cousin

to a fox terrier. He was white and he had some black spots, and there was a big one on one side of his head, so it was black around one of his eyes and white around the other. Every time I started pushing the mower he kept dancing all around and when I stopped he'd come up and start sniffing at it. He would keep kind of dancing around in front of it, almost getting run over. "Will you get out of the way," I said to him. Jiminies, I couldn't chase him away. Every time I did he came back and started in again. I guess he never saw a lawn mower before.

All of a sudden along came a great big jelly doughnut with Pee-wee Harris behind it. "Will you please get on the outside of that so I can see you?" I asked him.

His mouth was so full he could hardly talk. He said, "What are you doing, mowing the lawn?"

I said, "No, I'm shovelling the wind off the grass. Ask me another."

That's the end of this chapter. When the next one starts you'll hear Pee-wee talking, so you can skip it if you want to.

CHAPTER II

LOST AND FOUND

He said, "What dog is that—is it yours?"

I said, "I think it's Tin-can-tin from Hollywood, the famous moving picture dog. If he don't get out of the way of the lawn mower he'll be a sausage; that's the kind of dogs *you* like best."

The dog started jumping up on Pee-wee. "There's a new member for your patrol," I told him. "Go on, take him away from here so I can mow the lawn."

"Where did you get him?" the head Chipmunk wanted to know.

"I didn't get him, he just showed up," I said. "Do you want him?"

All of a sudden the kid started shouting, "I know that dog, I know where he belongs! He belongs in Little Valley! Do you know that big white house with a sort of—kind of a—roof——"

"The one with the roof?" I said. "Sure, I know it; it has sides to it too; I think it has four sides. Anyway it has an inside and an outside; I know the one you mean. It stands on the ground. Is that the one you mean?"

"It's right near the Little Valley railroad station," he said. "And that shows how much of an observant scout I am because about a week ago I was coming by that house and I saw this dog there with a black place around his eye. It's the same black place, I can tell."

"Sure, he brought it with him," I said. "Did you think he'd leave it behind?"

"You can talk crazy all you want to," Pee-wee said. "But anyway that's the same dog that belongs in that big white house in Little Valley and I bet the people there are rich, and I bet they'd give us a reward for taking him back—because I know *positively sure* it's the same dog. Positively sure, I can recognize him."

"Go ahead and recognize him," I said, "only please get him away from this lawn mower or believe me you won't recognize him."

All the time the dog kept jumping up on both of us; he kept dancing around from one to the other. Then he'd start sniffing the lawn mower and jumping back away from it, waiting for me to start. Gee, I guess he thought he was playing a game.

"Let's take him back, hey?" Pee-wee said. "Let's hike over there today, and I'll be the one to say I observed him with my scout observation and if they give us a reward we'll divide it up. I'll show you just the house where

he belongs and that's the kind of things that boy scouts are supposed to do. Gee whiz, we have no right to keep him because you have no right to keep a thing—even if it's a diamond ring, you haven't—that comes to you even of its own accord, if it belongs to somebody else, I can prove it.”

“You mean you can prove that a diamond ring was running along the street?” I asked him.

“I can prove that you're crazy,” he shouted. “Will you hike over to Little Valley and take that dog back to its lawful owners without any crazy nonsense or not?”

“Not without crazy nonsense,” I told him. “I should worry about the dog. Please take him away so I can mow the lawn, if you like him so much. I've got a date to go on a hike this afternoon with Wig Weigand and Vic Norris if I ever get through here; this dog is crazy.”

“Why can't the four of us hike to Little Valley with him?” the kid said. “They'd give us a reward and I'll buy some eats for all of us and then we can hike back. Because I saw that dog with my own eyes, he was standing on the porch of that big white house with a man and he was smoking a cigar _____”

“That's enough for me,” I told him. “I don't want anything to do with dogs that smoke, not even if you saw him with somebody else's eyes. Will you please call him away, and go and take a hike with him or something? Take him around to your house, why don't you?”

“Because he belongs to somebody else,” Pee-wee shouted, “and as long as we know that we've got to return him—you ask Mr. Ellsworth. If we don't we're just like—like *thieves*.”

“Worse than that,” I told him. “If you don't get him away from here I'll be just like a murderer. He hasn't got sense enough to keep away from in front of the lawn mower. I guess he thinks it's a sausage machine and he wants to get into it.”

“What difference does it make where you hike to?” the kid wanted to know. “The kind of hikes that you take, they're not hikes at all anyway, flopping around the way you do. You walk about half a mile and then lie down on the grass and start jollyng each other and then you come home and call it a hike—gee whiz! Even you write all about it so all the fellers all over the country will know how crazy you are, even in Canada they know it. Now you've got a chance to do a good turn and to do a service and you won't do it.”

“Are scouts supposed to take money for a service?” I asked him. “You look in the handbook and see.”

“If somebody is going to give a reward you can take it,” he shouted. “If you return a dog to a great big house where there are rich people, won't they

give you a reward? That shows how much *you* know. And you got a right to take it too. Didn't Lindbergh get a reward for getting to Paris? He got twenty-five dollars, I mean thousands—so there! Sure we've got a right to take it. And I'll buy the eats, I'll buy them for the four of us. So will you ask Wig and Vic if they'll go?"

"Gee, you're more of a pest than the dog," I told him, "with your good turns and your big white house. Yes, if you'll take him away from here a little while so I can mow the lawn, I'll ask Wig and Vic if they'll go. We were going to hike up along the river to see them working on the new bridge and now you come along with your good turns!"

"You get dandy big sandwiches in Little Valley," the kid said.

I said, "All right, take the dog home with you and we'll stop for you about two o'clock. And I hope some day you get lost and nobody offers a reward for you, and believe me, I'll do a good turn by not finding you. I wish you'd go camping in the Sahara Desert and get kidnapped by a sheik who's starting off for Mars in an airplane. Will you please take the dog away before he eats up the lawn mower!" The only way to get rid of Pee-wee is to take him along.

Pee-wee went over to where the sidewalk is and started whistling and kind of running away and the dog went about half way over to him and then kind of he didn't know which way to go, and he just kept dancing, sort of. So then I picked up a piece of a flower pot and chucked it at him and he ran after it toward Pee-wee. I guess he thought it was roast beef. So then he decided to stay with Pee-wee. Jiminy crinkums, if I couldn't make up my mind what I wanted to do easier than that dog could—*good night!*

So long, I'll see you at one o'clock up at Pee-wee's.

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING CROSSES OUR PATH

Wig Weigand and Vic Norris said they didn't care where they went. One place is as good as another if not better, that's what Wig said. He said he would just as soon kid the life out of Pee-wee as do anything else. That's our favorite outdoor sport anyway, getting Pee-wee started. Vic said he knew the big white house in Little Valley and he kind of remembered seeing a white dog there. "It's that big white square house with the cupola," he said.

So then we all went around to Pee-wee's. He lives on Terrace Avenue and I wish he'd stay there. There's a Terrace Avenue in Los Angeles, because Dorry Benton was out there and I wish that was the one Pee-wee lived on. His father's a doctor, so that's the way you can tell the house, by the sign. Around by the garage it says

RABBITS FOR SALE ONE DOLLAR A PIECE

He sells them in pieces. I guess a whole rabbit would be two dollars, anyway nobody ever buys them. He had a carrier pigeon too and he took it up to Temple Camp last summer and tied a note to it and started it home and it hasn't got here yet. I guess it had a flat tire or something. Doctor Harris says he bet it went to Harrisburg by mistake. Gee, even his own father is laughing at him.

Pee-wee was sitting on the porch and the dog was tied by a rope to one of the posts and when he saw us he started barking and dancing up on his hind legs and pulling on the rope and kind of whining—he was the craziest dog *I* ever saw.

I said, "Come on, let's start. Are you going to keep him on that rope?"

He said, "No, I'm going to let him loose after we get out of Bridgeboro and he'll follow us."

"Can't lose him," Wig said.

Believe me, he was right. That crazy mut kept running back and jumping up on us all the way. "Will you have a heart and keep your feet on the ground!" I said to him. Little Valley is four miles and I bet he ran about twenty miles getting there. He'd run ahead about a couple of hundred feet, then all of a sudden he'd come running back and jump up on us, and then he'd go running ahead again.

After a while I said, "Believe me, this is some favor we're doing for Pee-wee, walking four miles, and they're good big ones too, just to return a dog to its owners."

"You're not doing it for me, you're doing it for the people that live in the big white house," the kid said. "You'll be glad enough to have some refreshments with the reward."

"You said it," Vic spoke up.

"Leave it to me," Pee-wee said.

"You mean the refreshments—leave them to you?" I asked him. "Hey, where do your true and tried friends come in, that help you to start a parade to take a dog home? Look at my two stockings and that one of Vic's, where your friend Tin-can-tin was biting them. And we've got three miles still to walk because here we are coming to Tattleboro Crossing."

"Sure and we've got to walk about nine miles out of the way on account of a freight train too," Vic said. "Look at that long train across the road, I think it's taking a nap there. Shall we sit down and wait or shall we go around it?"

"I wonder which is the shortest way around," Wig said.

"I guess they're each shorter than each other," I told him. "I know what that train is here for, it's waiting for the two-fifty-three passenger train to Bridgeboro to come along and pass it."

"We're not going to sit down!" Pee-wee shouted. "*No matter what*, we're not going to sit down. You do that and then you sprawl on the ground for the rest of the afternoon talking a lot of nonsense and you won't get up—I know how you do. Then right away you start jollyng. That's a rule, *you* can't sit down."

"You invented it," Vic said. "I think there's about twenty or thirty or forty or fifty or sixty or a couple of dozen million cars till you get to the engine and it's swampy that way too. You can't even see where the blamed thing ends, I bet it bunks into the ocean."

I said, "There are only about two thousand cars the other way. If we walked around maybe we'd get to Little Valley by last February. Let's go around the end of the train because maybe the passenger train will be delayed a few weeks on account of it being the Drearie Railroad."

So then we all started to walk along toward the end of the train so as to go around because you know how it is with freight trains, they fall asleep.

Wig said, "If you're about in the middle of a long train, which is the other end?"

"Are you going to start that crazy stuff?" Pee-wee wanted to know.

"It's not crazy stuff," I told him. "It's a very insensible question. One end must be the other end because if it wasn't there'd only be one end, and if

a train only has one end, how is it going to get anywhere—I'll leave it to Vic. Just the same as if a tree starts growing up in the air down toward its roots, you do it by long division. Where's the dog? Oh, here he is."

"Now I know we're never going to get there," Pee-wee said.

"I suspected it all the time," I told him. "We should have started there and then we wouldn't have had to go; that's where we made a mistake in geometry. Am I to blame because a freight train forty 'leven miles long gets in the way? If you didn't eat so much they wouldn't have to ship all these things from the West."

"Now I know you're all going to start being crazy," the kid shouted.

All of a sudden Wig said, "Here's a car that's open on both sides, let's go through it."

I guess we had walked about as far as ten cars when he noticed that. The freight car had a big door in the middle and it was wide open, and the one opposite it was wide open too. The car was empty.

"We better be quick about it, then," Vic said; "safety first."

Tin-can-tin was the first one across and he didn't go through the car, he went underneath it, and he stood on the other side barking. I gave Pee-wee a boost up in and then I went after him and just then the train gave a jerk and I could hear a whole lot of cars knocking together, and the door on the other side of our car rolled shut. It just happened to roll shut and I tried to open it. While I was doing that Wig and Vic climbed in the other one and the dog came jumping in after them—a lot he cared about running underneath the cars. So then like a lot of fools we all tried to roll it open instead of getting out again through the other one while there was a chance. In about a few seconds the train was going too fast for us to jump out. Wig wanted to do it but I said no, I wouldn't take a chance. "I don't care where I go as long as I don't go to my death," I said.

"Now what are we going to do?" Pee-wee said, very fearful like.

I said, "That's easy, we don't have to do anything, the train is doing all the work. Maybe if we could get the other door open the train wouldn't be going so fast on that side and we could get out."

"That's a good idea," Vic said.

"I'm the one that thought of it," I told him. "But maybe the train is going just as fast on one side as on the other; you never can tell with these freight trains."

"Are we all here?" Wig asked.

"Sure, dog and all," I said; "even Pee-wee. I don't know whether this train is going east or west, but it's bound to bunk into some ocean or other and stop sometime, that's one comfort. There's nothing to worry about, let's sit down."

“There’s nothing to sit on,” said Pee-wee.

“Look and see if there isn’t a floor to sit on,” I said; “if there isn’t we’re out of luck.”

Wig began stamping his foot. “Sure there’s a floor,” he said.

“Then we’re all right,” I told him; “our good turn can’t fall through.”

All the while the freight train was rattling along and making an awful lot of noise, and there we were sitting on the floor, it was so hard to stand up, and I started singing and Wig and Vic joined in and all the time Tin-can-tin was jumping around. I guess he thought it was fun getting a free ride, not saying where—he should worry.

This is what we were singing while Pee-wee looked good and worried and was kind of mad like:

I’m glad that this car has a floor,
A lot I don’t care for a door;
If I had to go round without touching the ground,
You bet that I’d be good and sore.

Anyway I told you this story was crazy.

CHAPTER IV

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG

Wig started singing, *We don't know where we're going but we're on our way*. The other door kept rolling open and shut but it didn't stay shut. There wasn't anything in the car but the floor and we sat on it. I tried to make the one door stay open but it wouldn't.

Vic said, "Let's calmly consider what we better do. I think we're going west and Little Valley is north."

"I don't see how we're going to make it this way," Wig said.

"I have an idea," I told them, "maybe we'll bunk into the passenger train and then we can get out. Things might be worse; as long as Little Valley stays where it is——"

"Instead of starting worrying you begin with a lot of nonsense," Pee-wee shouted at me.

I said, "All right, let's worry."

So then Wig and Vic and I kind of held our hands to our foreheads and looked very anxious like. "Funny nothing happens," Vic said, "let's worry a little harder. If that doesn't stop the train we'll try some more singing."

"That's a very good idea," I told him. "When I count three we'll all worry. Think of a merry-go-round how it keeps going and never gets anywhere, and it even plays music so light and carefree. Look at the Volga boatmen rushing along in Russia—they haven't got any freight train to carry them. We're in luck."

Vic said, "I always wanted to be a hobo when I grew up and now I'm one."

"We ought to all thank Pee-wee," I said.

"Sure, and Ring-ting-aling," Vic said.

"Suppose the train men come in here and see us?" the kid spoke up, kind of scared.

"How are they going to get in?" I asked him. "When they can get in we can get out, only they have to ask me politely."

"Suppose it keeps going all day!" the kid said.

"That's no worse than you," I told him. "Most of the time *you* keep going all day. You're the one that started this good turn. I was peacefully mowing my lawn when you came around with your black spot around the dog's eye and your big white house in Little Valley."

"Sure, and his reward," said Vic. "Don't forget the reward."

“I hope if we ever get there it will be five dollars,” I said. “That’ll be enough to buy us some eats. It looks now as if we’ll have to go by a detour through Chicago. Maybe somebody will get a reward for bringing *us* home. Maybe your father will give us a reward for keeping you away.”

All the while the freight train kept going kind of slow, but too fast for us to jump off. It made about as much noise as a couple of earthquakes. One time we went sliding across the floor, so I thought maybe it was going around a curve. All the time the one door kept rolling open and shut and making a big racket. The other one stayed shut. Wig said we better try to fix the one so it would stay open so we could jump out if the train stopped. I guess they fastened on the outside, those doors. There ought to be an egress, Wig said.

“A which?” I asked him. “Maybe Pee-wee’s got one with him, he carries so many things in his pockets.”

“A means of exit,” Wig said.

“You better look out, fooling with that door, or you’ll take a double header egress yourself,” I told him.

“I tell you what let’s do,” Vic said, “if it *should* bang shut and stay shut, then maybe we won’t know which one we came through...”

“As long as we know we’re in, what’s the difference?” I said. “Do we have to have any doors to tell us whether we’re on the inside or outside?”

He said, “Listen! This train is going along, isn’t it?”

“Oh how smart you are! How ever did you guess?” I said to him.

He said, “Listen, this train is going along. All right, we got in one side, didn’t we? That’s the side where the door is open. We were going to get out the other side where the door is shut.”

“Only we didn’t,” I said.

“We sure didn’t,” Wig said.

Vic said, “All right, when the train stops...”

“If it does,” I said.

“If it does,” Wig said.

“Will you shut up and listen!” Vic said. “If the train stops we want to get out on the same side as we were going to get out, don’t we? All right, let’s put a mark on the door, then we won’t have to walk all the way around the train.”

“Suppose that door doesn’t open,” I said. “Go ahead and put a mark on the door anyway if you want to. Here’s a piece of milk chocolate that I was going to eat, you can make a mark with that, and be sure to give it back to me. It may be years before I get anything more to eat.”

So he made a mark on the door we were supposed to go out through, and that was the door nearest to Little Valley. Maybe it was a good idea, as long

as he didn't use too much chocolate, because if we had to walk all the way around the train to get on that side, maybe we'd have to go through swamps and everything. Gee, you never know where those long freight trains end. That shows you how smart boys scouts are, always thinking ahead and everything. "Please give me back my chocolate," I said. Gee, you've got to watch out with that bunch, they were all born during a famine.

After a little while the train slowed down and then it stopped and Pee-wee started. The dog started too, jumping and barking. "Oh, it's stopped, it's stopped!" Pee-wee yelled. "Now we can get off!"

"Look!" I said to him, "it's stopped on a trestle. Do you think I'm going to get out and walk along on those crosspieces? No siree, safety first."

So then we all sat on the edge of the car, in the doorway, looking away down into a lake or something or other, it was a lot of water. I said, "If we had a line we could catch some fish if we only had some bait."

Wig said, "Sure and we could cook them in a pan if we only had a fire."

Vic said, "Sure and we could start a fire if we only had a match to light the twigs with if we only had some twigs."

So there we were with the train stopped and we couldn't get off, because the trestle was only about as wide as the train, maybe a little wider, but do you think I was going to jump down and walk along that thing—*nothing doing!*

"If it wasn't for that trestle we could hop down all right," Vic said.

"If it wasn't for that trestle you wouldn't be here," I told him. "There's nothing we can do except to start singing."

So then we started making up a lot of crazy stuff like this

We're sitting in a car
And we don't know where we are.

I'd jump if I was bold
But the water's good and cold.

Then all of a sudden the train started up again.

CHAPTER V

WE MAKE A NEW START

That was the time we didn't get off. "But we almost got off, so it isn't so bad," I said. "It's almost the same as getting off because we pretty near did it."

"Do you call that logic?" Pee-wee shouted.

"It's geometry," I told him. "We almost got off and that's better than not getting off at all—I'll leave it to Wig."

"Roy is right as I usually am," Wig said.

"Where are we now?" Pee-wee screamed. He screamed so loud that Tinpan-tin started barking. "Not *almost* where we are, *but where are we?* It shows what a fool you are!"

I said, "Scout Chipskunk, those are harsh words for a boy scout to use, and I'll always remember them if I don't forget them. If you almost do a thing, it's better than not almost doing it. It's two degrees better than not doing it at all. I'm thankful the trestle was there. Where would we be otherwise—such fine language I use. That's because I went to Princeton—to visit my grandmother. Deny it if you dare. Shall we start some more singing?"

"The next time the train stops I'm going to get off!" Pee-wee shouted.

"We'll be glad to be rid of you," I said.

"*No matter what*, I'm going to get off and go to Little Valley," he shouted.

"As long as Little Valley doesn't care, why should we?" I said. "What do you say we have a community sing?"

So then the train kept going and all of a sudden it slowed down quick like, and that other door went rolling shut and it stayed shut. So then we were in the dark almost. "Now we can't even see when we get to the Pacific Slope," I said. "Let's sing the Prisoner's Song." Then we all started singing every which way and the dog started barking.

"Even the dog can tell you're crazy," Pee-wee said.

After a little while the train stopped again. "Now would be our chance to get out if we could only open a door," I said. "If we could only get outside so as to open the door then maybe we'd be able to get out."

"I bet the blamed thing is going to start again," Wig said.

"How much do you bet?" I asked him.

He said, "If it starts I'll give you my jack-knife."

“If it doesn’t start you give it to me,” I said. “You lose it either way.”

Wig said, “If it doesn’t start I’ll give you my compass and if it does start I’ll give it to Vic.”

“That’s satisfaction,” I told him. “If it starts, Wig gives me something and if it doesn’t start, Vic gives me something; that’s fair and square all around.”

“Will you cut out being crazy with your nonsensical nonsense!” Pee-wee screamed at us. “Maybe it will start again like it did before and then where will we be?”

“I know the answer to that question,” I told him.

“Will you help me try to get the door open!” the kid shouted. All the while he was shaking it and juggling it—the one that had the chocolate mark on it. All of a sudden he kind of lifted it and then it rolled open. “While you’re standing around making crazy bets I opened it,” he said.

“You’re simply wonderful,” I told him. “Now the next thing to do is for us to have a meeting and decide whether we want to get out or not.”

“Will you get out while we’ve got the chance?” the kid yelled. “There you stand talking and all of a sudden any minute the train might start.”

Wig said, “That’s very true what Pee-wee says; we ought to consider that.”

“It’s a peach of an argument,” Vic said.

“I’m not talking about arguments!” the kid screamed. “I’m talking about doing something while we’ve got a chance to.”

“That would be the best time to do it,” Wig said.

All of a sudden the car gave a kind of a jump and there was a lot of rattling and clanking outside, and Pee-wee went sliding and almost fell kerflop. “*Now you see!*” he said. “I’m going to get off. Do you think I’m going to stay here and be a fool?”

I said, “He’s right, he might as well go somewhere else and be one. One place is as good as another if not worse. Come on, let’s get off.”

So then we all jumped down after Pee-wee, and the dog started barking and jumping up on us—gee, I guess he was having the time of his young life being taken home to his rightful owners. Anyway the train kept standing there, maybe it’s there yet for all I know.

I said, “Did we get out through the right door—the one with the chocolate mark on it?”

Pee-wee said, “Sure we did and so we have to keep going north. Maybe the train went four or five miles so we have to kind of go northwest. But we got out on the right side of the car to go to Little Valley, the opposite side from the side we got in on. Only we have to kind of, what-you-call-it, verge back.”

I said, "I don't know how to do that, I never *verged*."

"It means bend back, kind of," Pee-wee said. "As long as we know we're hiking north we'll sure get to Little Valley, so come on."

Off he started through the woods going northwest by his tin compass. After a little while we came to Daggett's mill, that's right near Bridgeboro where we started from. The kid stopped short all of a sudden and just stood there staring. He said, "What's Daggett's mill doing here?"

"Search me," I said. "I guess it's just out for a hike. You're the one that brought us here."

"We're coming back into Bridgeboro," he said. "How could we go south when we started north?"

"You have to be pretty smart to go in two directions at once," I told him.

Wig said, "I bet I know what we did; I bet that train went around a curve and we never knew it. That door was facing south instead of north when we got out. Now we've got to start all over again."

So then we went over to the country road and started again, hiking for Little Valley. That shows what a dandy story this is, it's even got two starts.

"Anyway we move in the best circles," Vic said.

"Sure, good big ones," Wig put in.

"Follow Pee-wee and you can't go right," I said.

On the country road was a sign and it was 0 miles to Nortonville—they've got a peach of a scout troop there. I knew it was ten miles only the 1 was rubbed off. I said, "Already we're in Nortonville because it says *no* miles, so we must have passed Little Valley about an hour ago, because Nortonville is six miles past Little Valley. Gee, every place is somewhere else on this hike."

"Will you come on and stop talking a lot of nonsense!" Pee-wee said. "Do you want to return the dog and get a reward or don't you?"

I said, "I'm looking around for Nortonville; I don't see it anywhere, do you? This is no miles where we are, I can tell by how tired I am. Look what it says on the sign. Do you say the state of New Jersey is a liar? Here we are in Nortonville, only I don't see it."

So then Wig and Vic and I started hunting around and lifting up stones and looking behind trees and everything while Pee-wee stood there good and mad. The dog kept running around too and sniffing—I guess he was trying to find Nortonville. Don't blame me, I told you this hike was crazy. So then, after Pee-wee was good and mad, we started along the road.

CHAPTER VI WELCOME HOME

Already we had walked about five miles to get four miles so we were out one mile. Wig said, "Good, we won't have to carry it with us. I guess Tin-pan-tin ran about forty miles so far."

"He should worry, he won't have to walk back," I said.

So then after about an hour and a half we came to Little Valley and we saw the big white house near the railroad station. Vic said at last we would get something to eat; he said nobody would give less than five dollars reward for bringing their dog home. Maybe people who lived in a big white house like that would even give ten.

We started up across the lawn and Pee-wee said, "Let me do the talking."

I said, "I never knew anybody yet who could stop you. As long as you'll let me do the eating I don't care. I wonder if there's a bakery in this burg."

Pee-wee had a leash and he fixed it to the dog's collar and started up the steps very bold like. The rest of us followed him. A lady came to the door and he said, "Here's your dog that we found in Bridgeboro where we live, and I knew he was yours on account of scouts having to be observant, and he's got a black spot around his eye—that's how I knew him, because once I saw him here."

I said, "Hey, lady, he's very hungry because he tried to eat a lawn mower. That was three or four hours ago and I guess he'd eat a couple of sewing machines by now."

The dog started jumping up on her and she backed away from him and she said, "Oh gracious goodness, we don't want him. I gave him to a peddler who said he'd give him a good home. He was here two or three weeks and he was *dreadful*. Don't let him loose whatever you do, or he'll run right in the house. Shh—*scamper*, go away, he's a perfect nuisance! We gave him away and we don't want him."

"*Gooood night!*" I said. "Please catch me while I faint."

The lady said, "I'm sorry and you're very *nice* boys, and very thoughtful, but we really don't want him, you know. Oh, I *do* wish we could get rid of him, for good and all. Scat—*scamper!* Don't you break loose and go in the house. Sss-cat with you!" She kept holding out her apron trying to keep the dog from scooting past her into the house, and all the while Pee-wee kept pulling him away from the front door.

He said, "Maybe he won't be so dreadful now because he's older and maybe he's got more sense. So don't you want him back for a reward just on account of the trouble we had because that's only fair and I bet he's worth a lot of money, I bet he is."

The lady said, "*A reward!* Oh, that's too *killing!* Why I'd give a reward for taking him away if I thought there was really any hope of getting rid of him. This is the second time he's been back here."

I said, "Hey, lady, we don't care which way we take him if we get a reward. If we don't get a reward we'll have to make him into hot dogs and eat him."

She said, "Well, you take him away and find him a good home, because there are lots of people who love dogs. You do that, and come and tell me, and I'll give you two dollars; now there." Then she went in the house and shut the door.

I said, "How about the grand champion fixer, P. Harris? Oh, sure, we'll get a reward! Now what are we going to do? And I'm getting hungry. Did you notice how glad she was to get the dog back? I thought she'd hug the life out of him. She likes him like I like arithmetic. Follow Pee-wee and you can't go wrong—but you'll go hungry."

"That shows how much resources you've got like scouts are supposed to have," Pee-wee said. "Haven't we got two dollars coming to us if we find him a home? Gee, that's easy."

"If I found a home I'd keep it for myself," I told him. "Look where we are, here in Little Valley with a dog we can't get rid of. Do you think I want to hike back to Bridgeboro without anything to eat first? A nice fix you've got us into with your good turns."

"There's lots of nice homes here," Pee-wee said. "Maybe we better go round ringing bells, hey? Maybe we better go round asking people. Now we've got a chance to earn two dollars."

All the time the dog kept jumping up on one and then the other of us. I guess he knew something was wrong. I said, "Don't you care, Tin-pan-tin, we'll find you a home." He started licking my hand just the same as if he knew what we were trying to do. We sat down on a carriage step in front of a house, and he sat down too and looked around with his tongue hanging out he was so warm. He looked all around just as if he was looking for a home, kind of as if he wanted to help too.

I said to Pee-wee, "Why don't you go and tell that lady that you'll take him to your home and then you'll get the two dollars."

"My father won't have any dogs," he said.

"I'd do it only my grandmother is scared of dogs, so I can't," Wig said.

I knew Vic couldn't because they've got a dandy big police dog at his house.

Poor Tin-can-tin, he kept looking at me and panting just like as if he hoped I could think up something. I said, "Anyway we might as well take a rest." So we stayed there on the carriage step, two of us facing the sidewalk and two of us facing the middle of the street, and the dog lay down; I guess he was tired, no wonder.

I said, "Let's count up the things we haven't got to eat, as long as we didn't get any reward."

"Let's figure out how we won't ride home," Wig said.

"Sure," I told him; "you've got to admit Pee-wee is generous. Look at all the cones and sodas and things that he's not going to buy. Remember how he was going to treat us all? *'I'll spend the reward and treat all of us.'* Believe me, I've got indigestion from all the things he didn't treat us to. Now we'll have to go stand in front of a bakery and inhale some refreshments."

Vic said, "The thing I like best that he didn't get us was a dozen crullers."

"Those were fine," Wig said.

"Don't you care," I told them, "he's going to treat us to a nice walk back to Bridgeboro. The gumdrops were good too; they're the best ones I ever didn't taste. *Oh boy*, I feel full of emptiness."

"Let's decide on something to do," Wig said.

"I decide unanimously to stay right here," I told him. "Let's sit here and rest and kid Pee-wee along."

"It shows what a fool you are," the kid said, "because one feller can't be unanimous. You think you're so smart using long words that you don't know what they mean. Unanimous means everybody. Even you're not a majority, even."

Vic said, "Now tell us something about arithmetic."

I said, "Sure, how many is a lot of onions?"

"Are we going to find a home for this dog or not?" the kid shouted. "Or are we going to sit around here fooling all afternoon?"

I said, "The answer is *yes* to both questions; we are not."

"What do you mean by *yes* and *we are not*?" he screamed at me.

"Am I to blame if you can't understand English?" I said to him. "*Yes* is a pronoun that qualifies the injunction to the adverb by the phrase *we are not*, meaning ain't it—I'll leave it to Wig. There's one good thing about school."

"What's that?" Vic wanted to know.

"It's closed," I told him; "no sooner said than stung."

"Come on and let's start trying to find a home for the dog," Vic said. "I want that two dollars, I'm getting hungry."

CHAPTER VII

AIN'T WE GOT FUN!

So then we started going around from one house to another asking the people if they wanted a nice dog. But nobody wanted any. In one house there was a little girl and she cried because her mother wouldn't let her have it. I guess we went to about ten houses; we got way up to the north end of the town where the paper mill is. So then we started back on the other side of the street.

We were just coming out of a house when we saw a man waiting for us and Tin-pan-tin started barking at him. I bet he knew that man was going to start a lot of trouble for us. He just kept barking at the man and we couldn't stop him. Gee, he knew all about him before the man spoke.

I said, "Hey, mister, have you got a nice home, because here's a dog that wants a home."

He said, "Where do you boys belong?"

"We're boy scouts and we belong in Bridgeboro and we're doing a good turn finding a home for this dog," Pee-wee shouted. "So do you want him, because he's nice and affectionate."

The man said, "You got a license for him? Because I'm a constable in this town and I got my orders to arrest anybody that's out on the public thoroughfares with a dog that ain't got no license." Then he grabbed Tin-pan-tin by the collar and started looking for the license tag.

I said, "Hey, mister, I guess he left it home on the dresser; maybe he got dressed in a hurry."

Wig said, "Maybe he sent it to the laundry, how do we know?"

Pee-wee started turning the dog's collar round and round, looking for the plate. He said, "What kind of a plate is it?"

"It's like a dinner plate, only different," I told him. "Hey, mister," I said, "don't mind him, he thinks it's a plate with a couple of helpings of dessert on it."

"Maybe it's only a saucer on account of him being such a small dog," Wig said.

I said, "Maybe he ate it, I wouldn't blame him, because we all remind ourselves of starving Russia."

The man said, "Well, you youngsters think it's so funny, I'll just let you see what it means to ignore the law that was printed for a reminder three days in the Little Valley Despatch, so's nobody'd have no excuse for having

in their care, possession and custody to wit, unregistered canines without tags for same.”

Wig said, “Gee, did we do all those things?”

“Hey, mister,” I said, “all we’re trying to do is find a home for him and he didn’t have any license tag when we found him, and maybe his new owner will get one. And we didn’t see the Little Valley newspaper because we don’t live here. So will you please let us try to find a home for him?”

“Anyway, he don’t belong to us,” Pee-wee spoke up, “and anyway, we didn’t know he was a canine, did we?”

Wig said, “Anyway, we won’t have him in our custody to wit, very long.”

I said, “Sure, no fooling, and the first cash register we see we’ll register him, won’t we Vic?”

The man said, “If you’re boy scouts you ought to know about not breaking the law, and I’ll learn you not to be fresh with officers. I reckon you youngsters think you can come from down Bridgeboro way over here to Little Valley and do as you please, settin’ up for city chaps with all your smart talk. Well now, I’ll show you Little Valley is on the map. If I wanted to haul you all in now I could do it and lock up the whole pack of you, dog and all, till the judge opens court in an hour or so. But I ain’t goin’ ter do that ’cause you’re youngsters. I’m going to give you a summons.”

“Even you don’t need to do *that*, if you don’t want to,” Pee-wee said.

All the time poor Tin-pan-tin kept barking at the constable and I had to grab hold of his collar to keep him away while the man wrote out the paper he was going to give us. He asked us our names and everything while he was writing. Then he tore the page out and gave it to me. We all stood watching him while he went back up to the next corner where I guess he came from and started turning the *Go* sign so the cars could start. Gee, by that time there were a lot of cars and the drivers were blowing their horns; I guess they were mad. So that shows you how boy scouts can stop traffic, they’re so smart, especially the ones I go with.



ALL THE TIME TIN-PAN-TIN KEPT BARKING AT THE CONSTABLE.

Pee-wee said, kind of scared, “*Now* what are we going to do? Now we’re in a lot of trouble. I bet we’ll get sent to jail, hey?”

“I hope they have eats in the jail,” Vic said.

That summons was made out on a blank that they use for automobile drivers. The constable wrote in how we had an unlicensed dog and it said we should go to the court where the justice of the peace was at five o'clock that afternoon. Pee-wee was afraid when he got there they wouldn't let him send word to his father. We had about an hour to wait so we went in a field and started playing mumbly-peg. We were not exactly scared, but jiminy crinkums, how did we know we were doing anything against the law trying to find a home for the dog?

When it was five o'clock we hiked over to the town hall; they have everything in there except airplane races—courts and church fairs and everything. There was a man that got caught speeding and he had to pay fifteen dollars—he was good and mad. Gee whiz, the things he said about Little Valley! That constable was there and he told the judge how another man parked in the wrong place and the judge made him pay two dollars.

Then he said, "Now how about these youngsters?" He meant us. He said, "Don't you boys know you have no right to have a dog about the streets without a license? I thought boy scouts knew all about such things. It's just as important to know the law about dogs as it is to know the law about shooting rabbits."

Pee-wee said, "I know all about rabbits because I sell them and boy scouts are supposed to do good turns so we're finding a home for this dog."

The judge said he could fine us ten dollars if he wanted to but he wouldn't as long as we paid for the dog's license and that was two dollars. He said we should come back with the two dollars in an hour. Wig started to say something but he was mad and he wouldn't listen. He said he'd let people know that they couldn't come from big places like Bridgeboro and disobey the law—he said everyone knew they couldn't go round with dogs without any license. Pee-wee started to say something but the judge pounded his desk with a hammer to make him shut up. Gee, we were glad to get out of there.

I said, "That's just like being dismissed from school—only different."

"A difference of two dollars," Vic said.

CHAPTER VIII

WHO SAID GOOD-BYE?

Pee-Wee walked ahead of us with Tin-pan-tin on the leash. He was as mad as could be (I mean Pee-wee), I knew it because he wasn't saying a word. He's just like a steam valve, Pee-wee is, when he gets mad. He rumbles and grumbles inside very quiet until somebody says something to him that he doesn't want to hear—then there's an explosion.

"If it wasn't for you and your dog," Wig said to him, "we'd be home now and ready to eat. Instead we're hunting up a home for the mut and even if we get the two dollars, what good is it going to do?"

"Think what a lot of good it's going to do the judge," I said. "Maybe he's got a lot of starving children home; we're already starved so it doesn't make any difference now. And if two dollars keeps us out of jail it's better than eating; ask Pee-wee."

The kid's face looked like the Niagara just before it goes over the rapids. "Sure," he yelled, "that's right, *ask Pee-wee*. If it wasn't for me and the dog—can he help it that he's a dog and can I help it that nobody wants to give him a home?"

"That question will be answered in tomorrow night's paper in the household column," I told him.

"That's all you can talk," he screamed, "is nonsense. Anyway if it wasn't for me—I even prevented Wig from telling the judge that we were mad about him accusing us of breaking the law when we didn't do it intentionally. If I didn't prevent him that time the judge would probably have fined us much more than two dollars for attempt of court."

"Contempt of court," Vic corrected him.

"Maybe attempt of court doesn't cost so much," I said.

"Who cares?" Pee-wee shouted back as we followed him across the street. "Is this any time to be talking about language when we've got so much to think of in an hour? It takes brains to think of things in a hurry and all you do is act like a pack of fools while I'm thinking what to do next."

I said, "How can you talk thus to your playmates, P. Harris! Even now our brains are worn out trying to think of some way to get you out of the sad plight that you got us into."

"See, you prove it yourself because nobody can have brains and talk like that," he said, thoroughly exasperated. "I heard my sister say that once; she said that's the way she felt about me."

All this time we were walking aimlessly (I got that word from Robin Hood; his aim was good) toward the upper end of Little Valley. We didn't have any idea what we were going to do when we got there but we were going just the same.

All of a sudden Pee-wee stopped short and turned around. "Well, can't you think where we are going? Do I have to do it all?"

"What have we got you for?" I asked. "Didn't you say we hadn't any brains?"

Wig said, "That's so too, he did say that."

Vic winked at me. "Well as long as we know it," he said, "we'll save ourselves the trouble of thinking about anything any more. From now on this matter is entirely up to Pee-wee. He's the brains of the organization—he admits it himself."

"I don't admit anything of the kind," the kid growled and so did Tin-pan-tin. "Haven't you ever heard that two heads are better than one, especially in a case like this?"

"Sure," I answered, "one from nothing leaves one and sometimes nothing."

"Talking of nothing," Vic said, "reminds me of Pee-wee...."

"Oh, shut up!" Pee-wee groaned, "You all make me sick and tired." He went to walk on again but Tin-pan-tin wanted to play and wouldn't move a step. Then he started to run around the kid's right leg and soon he got all twisted up with his leash.

Pee-wee leaned down and pushed the dog about in circles so as to unwind the leash and we all stood watching and smiling because he was so mad. You'd hardly believe it, but just the same we were good and worried, wondering what was going to happen if we didn't find the mut a home. Maybe you've heard that saying about a bright smile covering a heavy heart. Well that was me all over, I mean us.

Anyhow just as Pee-wee got the leash untied a very nice lady stepped past us. She was dressed like you see them in the fashion shows and when she put her hand up to fix something on her hat I noticed a great big diamond ring on her right hand that glittered like a new moon. She smiled at the kid too and was going to walk on when I got an inspiration and tapped Pee-wee's elbow with my foot very lightly and whispered to him, "Pst, now's your chance. *Ask her!*"

"Oh, lady," the kid called very polite and nice, "maybe you'd be interested in this dog. He's valuable and don't cost anything—I mean he won't cost you anything because I can't keep him and he's awful tame and gentle. And he needs a home worse than anything."

"Worse than we do," I said.

Wig spoke up, "If that could be possible."

The lady looked at poor Tin-pan-tin and shook her head as though she felt sorry for him. "Ah, he is homeless, then?" she said to Pee-wee.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered. "We're trying to find him one so we could get a reward of two dollars that we only have to pay it over to the judge for his license anyway so we're not making anything on him at all. He's made a lot of trouble for us—an awful lot."

"Don't give the lady a wrong impression of you, I told Pee-wee. "Tell her the trouble is you started out to do a good turn like the good little Chipskunk scout you are."

He glared at me. "Do you suppose everyone is as brainless as you are?" he yelled. "Everybody knows that's what scouts are for and you don't have to tell them—especially this lady."

I bowed very low. "Excuse me," I said. "I just thought you forgot it because it's the first time I ever remember that you didn't tell you were a boy scout and doing a good turn."

He gave me a very disgusted look and the lady smiled and said, "Now it's my turn to do a good turn then, isn't it?" She leaned over and picked up Tin-pan-tin in her arms as if he were worth a thousand dollars.

We all stood as if we were dumb; we were so surprised it took our voices away. That is, all of us except Pee-wee—nothing bothers his voice except food and that makes him talk more. He fairly shouted: "Are you going to take him home, lady?"

She laughed softly and said, "Not to my home, son, but to a very good home; a friend of mine. She's a lady that wants just the kind of a dog you say this one is—nice and affectionate and small. She's afraid of rough and tumbly dogs, having had one." Then she snuggled Tin-pan-tin in her arms and walked away.

I said, "He's not so bad after all, he doesn't even have to walk to his new home."

"No," Wig said, "and look at us!"

"Yes," I agreed, "just look. Hungry and tired and nothing to eat but our little Chipskunk's promises."

Pee-wee said, "You'll never get anything to eat by standing here when we should be on our way to collect our two dollars."

"That shows you're not honest," I said. "That two dollars isn't ours, it belongs to the judge."

"Anyway," he came back at me, "if we're resourceful we can get something to eat and you're fine scouts you are. How do you think our ancestors got food?"

“I don’t know about yours,” I answered, “and I never knew mine well enough to ask them.”

He started in to walk. “If we can’t get it any other way we can earn it, can’t we? I know lots of ways because I’m resourceful,” he threw at me over his shoulder.

“I can’t work on an empty stomach,” I told him.

Pee-wee was going scout pace by this time and we did too, so pretty soon we came to the big white house again. The kid went right on ahead of us and up on the porch and the lady was just coming out of the door shaking her head and looking very solemn.

“Oh goodness, oh my....” she started in to sort of cry to Pee-wee, when who should come out on the porch too but the diamond ring—I mean the lady and the diamond ring. She said to Pee-wee, “Why I hadn’t any idea, that the dog I took off your hands was the former resident here. And he seemed so nice and affectionate with me on the way up just as you said.” Then she turned to the lady of the big house and held out her hands like people do when they’re apologizing for something or when they want money—it doesn’t make any difference anyway—it’s all the same.

And the lady of the house said, “Of course I know you hadn’t any idea, my dear, and he is nice and affectionate. That’s the trouble—he’s too affectionate. He bowls one over and he’s a pest that way. You can imagine how it’s upset me....”

We couldn’t hear the rest of what she said because Tin-pan-tin started barking somewhere in the house and it drowned out everything else. The barking came nearer and nearer like an express locomotive’s whistle when it comes to a railroad crossing—only the barking was much worse. And then came the mut himself tearing through the doorway as if his tail were afire and he leapt against the lady of the house and she fell against the porch rail and knocked a big flower box to the ground.

She started to cry for real then and I grabbed hold of Tin-pan-tin in my arms and started for the path to the street and Wig and Vic came too. When I looked back Pee-wee was down on his hands and knees helping her pick up the pieces.

After a while he got through and caught up to us, wearing a nice big scowl. “What’s the idea running away like that?” he asked.

“I didn’t run,” I corrected him, “I just walked away as fast as I could.”

Wig said, “Sure, because it’s proper to leave a lady alone in her grief.”

“It’s more proper to be chivalrous, isn’t it, and help a lady not to cry?”

“Well, as long as you helped her and can’t find any fault with yourself, then neither will we,” I answered.

The dog started barking again and began wriggling to get out of my arms so I handed him over to Pee-wee. “There,” I said, “take the cause of all our troubles and find him a home all by yourself.” I really meant what I said then because he was a trouble, but when Pee-wee took him he looked back at me so pitiful like that I felt sorry.

The kid said, “Just the same when I was helping the lady pick up the flower pot she promised the reward if we find a home for the dog. If I ran away like you did we wouldn’t get it, maybe. Now all we have to do is go to a few more houses.”

“What could be easier?” I asked.

“Nothing,” Wig answered, “except finding a home for Tin-pan-tin.”

CHAPTER IX

A BIRD OF A BARGAIN

We walked on back through Broadway (that's the main street in Little Valley) and we were all pretty quiet because we were hungry. Maybe you don't know that it's hard to think on an empty stomach and if you can't think you can't talk, especially the scouts in my troop. And that afternoon with the dog was the only time we weren't talking—even Pee-wee wasn't and more than five minutes must have passed without anyone saying a word.

Finally the kid spoke up and said, "If we don't get rid of him (meaning the dog), I'll have to telephone my father."

"And tell him we send our best wishes from the Little Valley jail where we have a nice room with a sudden exposure—I mean southern exposure," I said.

"Only the service is very poor," Wig said, "because they can't afford bell-hops."

"Do you think I'd see you all go to jail if I can prevent it on account of me wanting to do a good turn? Do you think I'm mean, do you?" the kid screamed.

Very seriously I said, "No indeed, Pee-wee. As one of the great men of something or other once said, 'You're nothing if not mean'—that wasn't it—it was, 'you're nobody but not mean,' oh, I can't remember it exactly and anyway I mean that you're not mean. You're a true and tried friend."

He smiled that time and didn't get mad. "Anyway," he said, "I wouldn't let you go to jail and I wouldn't let you go hungry either—not exactly. We'll get something to eat somewhere, *you'll see!*"

Vic said, "I'll put that under my daily kind thoughts column when I get home. It says kind thoughts are mental nourishment."

"That's all right," Wig said, "but it doesn't help us toward getting anything to eat. Still, come to think of it, who wouldn't starve gladly for our little hero of good turns that always turn out wrong."

All of a sudden we heard a loud scream and it sounded like a lady. Then a voice laughed and laughed—it was more like a cackle than a laugh and very weird besides. Finally it stopped and we could hear another lady's voice talking loud too inside of the house that we were passing. It was a little house painted brown with darker brown trimming and the porch steps needed fixing.

The front door stood open and it didn't have any screen door either. So we kept standing there trying to look in and wondering what the noise was about when the screaming started in again even louder than before.

Pee-wee said, "Now what do you suppose is the matter?"

"The only way to find out is for you to go in," I answered.

"Gee, I'd like to," Pee-wee said, all eaten up with curiosity. And no sooner had he said that than the cackly voice screamed from one of the upper windows, "*You old fool!*"

"She's a perfect lady," I said, laughing. "Do you hear what she just called you, Pee-wee? I'd make her apologize, I would."

"How do you know she was talking to me?" he roared. "Couldn't she mean that for someone in the house or for you or Vic or Wig even? Why would she just pick on me when you're here too?"

"It's because you're so big and handsome, Pee-wee," Wig told him, "and no one can help noticing you."

"Or hearing you," I said.

"*You crazy old fool!*" the voice screamed again.

"Ha, ha," Pee-wee laughed, "that's the time you were heard and she even said you were crazy and you are, most of the time!"

"*Help, help!*" came a cry from the back of the house.

Oh boy, but you should have heard Tin-pan-tin bark. He wriggled and jumped out of Pee-wee's hands, leash and all, running up the porch steps and through the open doorway and into the house. Whew, talk about speed! He certainly went it and the kid went after him like a streak of lightning.

Wig and Vic and I stood looking through the open doorway and we didn't know what to do. The dog was still barking and the woman was screaming and we could hear Pee-wee's voice above all the noise. The whole neighborhood was peeking out of windows and doors and some stood on their porches. I guess everybody in Little Valley heard it.

"Maybe we ought to go in," I said. "He might be in danger."

"Not as long as we can hear his voice he isn't," Wig said. "Even though we are scouts we haven't any business running in people's houses because we hear a call for help; we have to be sure what kind of help they need first. Pee-wee had the dog for an excuse."

There wasn't any cause for worry either for it was only a little while before we heard Pee-wee calling from one of the windows, "Hey," he yelled, "Wait a few seconds and I'll be with you. I've got a big surprise and the lady here will give the dog a home and besides I got a good bargain." Then he disappeared from the window and everything got quiet again.

"Has anyone a fan?" I asked. The three of us flopped down on the curb completely flabbergasted and we took turns fanning each other.

“What more of a bargain could he get than to see the last of poor Tin-pan-tin?” Wig asked.

We didn’t have long to wait and find out because soon Pee-wee came out carrying a great, big traveling bag and behind him came a stout, elderly lady, smiling and talking to him.

They stood on the porch a few minutes and we could hear Tin-pan-tin barking in the house like anything. He was tied up—we knew that because he wouldn’t ever have let Pee-wee go away from him otherwise. You could tell that the mut was crazy about the kid—you know how dogs are.

So finally Pee-wee came down the steps and the stout lady called good-bye and went in the house. And the bag was as big as the kid; you’d laugh if you had seen him. It was one of those bags that are made to carry dogs and cats in—you know what I mean. They have wire netting on the sides so’s the animals can get air.

I asked him, “What’s your line now, Scout Harris? Furs or knitted wear and if so, how many?”

He put the bag down on the sidewalk and frowned. “Neither, Smarty,” he answered. “But it’s a swell bargain, I can tell you and if it wasn’t that the lady was afraid it would kill her every time she wanted to keep it clean why she’d never have given it away. Besides it’s valuable too because a man that used to board with the lady owned it and he didn’t have any money so he left it there for payment. It does tricks and everything.”

I moved the bag along the sidewalk with my shoe, “What is it, a baby seal?” I asked.

“Maybe it’s a tiger cub,” said Vic as he leaned over and looked through the netting. “All I can see is a couple of fiery looking eyes.”

Pee-wee laughed and laughed and as he did we heard the same cackly voice laugh too. The more Pee-wee laughed the louder the cackly one laughed and then we knew for sure it must be coming from the bag.

“Oh I know,” I said, “it’s a baby hyena.”

Pee-wee just doubled up and he yelled, “Guess again, Roy! Guess again!”

Before I got a chance to say anything the bag screamed, “*Guess again, Roy! You old fool!*”

“As I live, *a parrot!*” I managed to say and fell up against Vic, I was so surprised.

“What next!” Wig said.

“It’s a peacherino,” Pee-wee admitted between his spasms of laughter. “Only it’s quite wild and the lady said we must be careful to keep it warm and I can make a lot of money for my patrol with it. She even gave me the

little rubber ball that it plays tricks with.” He took the ball out of his pocket as if it was a gold nugget.

“Excuse me while I faint,” I said. “Pee-wee’s next appearance with his trained parrot will be received by Little Valley with much applause.”

“Now I know,” Wig said, “how heart disease develops.”

“So do I,” Vic agreed. “I’ve got it already.”

CHAPTER X

THE WORLD'S ONE AND ONLY

I said to Pee-wee, "Now that we've got the parrot...."

"His name is Jock," Pee-wee said.

"Oh," I said, "As I was saying, now that we've got Jock, what are we going to do with him—use him for mock turkey?"

"We might as well," Wig said. "It's bad enough to be hungry ourselves without getting someone else to feed. Besides, parrots are particular what they eat and on a hike like this when you don't get what Pee-wee promises we're lucky to even get what he doesn't promise."

"There's no sense to such talk," Pee-wee screamed. "We're not going to use him for mock turkey either and neither do any of you have to worry about feeding him." He drew out of his pocket a little package and held it up and laughed, "The lady gave me his food too, *see!*"

"What about us?" Vic asked him, "are we supposed to have a light lunch on parrot seed now?"

"Can't you wait a few minutes until I get that two dollars and pay it to the judge so we won't have to go to jail?" he yelled. "Then we'll be ready to eat and we'll have lots of money to eat with too because I got a fine plan and the lady taught me how to make Jock do his stunts."

I said, "There's only one question I'd like to ask and that's what, when and how?"

"It's like this," he said. "Jock's going to do his tricks and we'll charge a nickel for a set of tricks. On account of it being supertime nearly and not much people are around I thought I'd go from house to house and ask each one if they want to see a parrot do tricks for a nickel. It'll be a fine stunt because it saves people from going out of their houses for entertainment and besides it saves us overhead expenses if we should have had to hire some place to give the show in. I might even have to charge less than a nickel—I hope not, but sometimes you have to do that to get business."

"You have quite a head," I said to him, "as heads go"

Vic said, "Only Pee-wee's goes too much."

Well, we minded the parrot while Pee-wee went up to the big house. I should have said that Jock minded us—in fact very much; he couldn't have liked our company at all. We couldn't hear ourselves talk, which is very unusual but it's true, because Jock screamed and went on something terrible. Anyhow it got so bad we had to walk up and down the street with him to

keep him quiet. He kept quiet then, as still as a mouse—he liked action, that bird did.

So then we waited and walked and walked and waited and finally Pee-wee came back and we all went around to the town hall. We went in bag and all but the bird kept quiet and the judge and constable were there all alone. I suppose they were waiting for that two dollars before they ate supper, maybe it even paid for their supper, I don't know except that it didn't pay for ours.

Anyway Pee-wee handed him the money and told him who he gave the dog to and the judge grumbled something about not letting it happen again and then we left the place. All that time I was holding the bag and he hadn't said a word and I told Vic I guessed he must have had experience with courtrooms and knew it was one place where he had to keep his mouth shut and not answer back.

Anyway the minute we got outside he started in with his chattering so I handed him right over to Pee-wee and then we stopped for a minute to decide which house we'd go in first. While we were standing there Jock began to sort of growl very low and then he yelled out his favorite piece of poetry, "You old fool!" just as the constable walked down the steps of the hall and passed us.

He heard Jock all right but he wasn't sure where it came from or even if we had said it and meant it for him. I could see he would like to have put the blame on us but he was puzzled and eyed us very suspiciously and went on without saying anything.

We walked on then too and Pee-wee was snickering and giggling so that the bag shook in his hands as if he had chills. Gee, it was enough to make anybody laugh, especially the way that old crank of a constable kept turning back every once in a while and looking at us; then we'd walk along looking very serious and as soon as his back was turned we'd all start laughing again. I bet he'd have given a whole lot to know what it was all about.

Then he turned a corner and we went on for about two blocks and finally Pee-wee decided on a house to go to first. Before he rang the bell he opened the bag on the porch and took out a little stick and Jock jumped right out on it.

A lady in a big pink apron came to the door and Pee-wee said, "Excuse me, lady, because I'm only going to take a few minutes of your time...."

I said, "Yes, lady, excuse him because he only got that talk from magazine peddlers and he doesn't know any other."

He just looked at me, you know what kind of a look, and then he went on and said, "I've got a trained parrot, lady, and it's the only parrot in captivity that does such tricks and if you want to see him do them why it

will only cost you a nickel that we're trying to earn because we're boy scouts from Bridgeboro and we want to earn money for supper."

The lady smiled and said it was cheap at half that price and Pee-wee got on his knees on the porch floor and put Jock down too. Then the lady's two children came to the door and there we all stood watching.

First Pee-wee took the little rubber ball out of his pocket and said to Jock in a low voice, "*One, boy!*" and Jock sat up straight on the little stick and said low too, "*K.O.*"

Then Pee-wee threw the ball to him and open went Jock's mouth and *zip*, just like that he caught the ball. Twice he did that trick and the children clapped their hands and laughed and the woman said he was very intelligent even if he was homely.

After that the kid took the stick from under him and went back and forth across the porch holding it low while Jock jumped over it. Then the other tricks were acrobatic sort of where Pee-wee would hold the stick up and the bird would hold on first with one leg and then the other and swing himself around and then he'd jump a regular somersault and land right on the stick again as fine as anything.

Then they all clapped some more and the kid asked Jock what he had to say and he said, "*Thank you.*" And that concluded the performance, as they say in the movies.

Well we certainly had luck and even though we were getting hungrier by the minute everyone was very nice and Jock was a big hit, I can tell you. It wasn't seven o'clock yet and we had four dollars and thirty cents already and I could see a swell big dinner with all the trimmings without even shutting my eyes.

We came to a nice big brick house with a big tree in front of it on the sidewalk and we decided that we wouldn't go to any more after that one. We had enough money to get us a dollar supper apiece and ten cents more added to the thirty would give us a double-decker ice cream cone on the way home. We had it all planned out.

Well, the brick house had a lot of ladies visiting there and they all came out on the porch and the lady who lived there, her name was Mrs. Going, and she didn't go at all while we were there, you can ask Wig if you don't believe me. Anyhow, they all were nice too and they said they would watch Jock while they were waiting for a man to bring some chickens to the house because they were going to have a fried chicken supper. You can just imagine how good that sounded to us in our weakened condition.

Anyway, the ladies were all pleased with Jock's tricks and Pee-wee had made a hit too. He always does for some reason—especially with ladies and

girls. I told him I guessed it was because it was their nature to feel sorry for helpless creatures and those that were feeble-minded.

So finally that was over and I was glad, we all were in fact because we were good and tired and I could see that Jock was too because he began getting very chatty. That meant he might start calling names and so we put him back in the bag or tried to anyhow.

There were little places fitted inside the bag for Jock's drinking cup and seed cup and Pee-wee gave me the drinking cup to fill up with fresh water while he watched the bird. So I went into the kitchen and got it filled and came back out again just as Pee-wee was trying to put Jock back in his roost and he wasn't doing a thing but call the kid names. The ladies had all gone in the house again and it was a good thing.

I said, "Now's your chance to teach Jock how to be a model scout. Every time he says anything like that teach him a couple of words from the scout oath and it won't be long before he'd qualify as a tenderfoot and then you'd have another Chipskunk added to your patrol."

"I can see where Mr. Ellsworth puts up with one parrot but I can't see how he's going to put up with another one too," Wig said.

"Who d'ye mean, *me*?" the kid screamed.

CHAPTER XI

ALL UP IN THE AIR

“If not why not,” I said.

He yelled, “I’ll tell you if it wasn’t for me....”

Jock started flapping his wings and wouldn’t go in the bag and there was Pee-wee trying to argue with me and hold onto Jock at the same time which couldn’t be done. Anybody that knows Pee-wee can tell you that when he argues he does nothing else but argue and so he has to put his mind on arguing if he wants to argue right. So that was the way it was because he was trying to hold fast to Jock and he couldn’t because he was arguing with me.

Anyway Jock got right out from under Pee-wee’s hand and he flew up on the porch rail and when he saw the kid make a leap after him he flew down on the lawn. Pee-wee rushed down the steps and made a grab for him there but Jock flew out on the sidewalk and then on up on the telephone pole.

The kid went after him like a shot out of a cannon and it was lucky he had spiked shoes on. Anyway he had a hard job because the nearer Pee-wee would get the further away Jock would move, higher and higher. He was screaming too and calling out things to the kid and the kid was trying to shush him and coaxing him to come down. But it was no go.

All the neighborhood was looking on and Vic and Wig and I were standing underneath him on the sidewalk. The ladies visiting Mrs. Going were giving Pee-wee lots of advice while Jock was giving him a piece of his mind.

He was out of breath and perspiring and mad. And he told Jock if he didn’t come down he’d shoot him down only that he was a boy scout and couldn’t because he had to protect birds. Well, boy scouts didn’t mean a thing in that bird’s life because he flew to the very top of the pole and in a few minutes the kid was almost there too and he reached up to pull himself near enough to grab Jock.

“Now’s your chance,” I yelled.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” he yelled back at me.

He reached up with one arm, holding on to the pole with the other one and as his hand touched Jock, the bird bent his head down quick and Pee-wee let out an awful scream. Then he put his finger in his mouth.

“Oh, the mean old bird has bitten that nice boy!” one of Mrs. Going’s ladies said.

“Yes and I’d like to *bite him* too,” Pee-wee said, and I believe he meant it.

“We’ll all bite him,” I said, “when we get him down here.”

But Jock didn’t care what Pee-wee wanted to do to him and he didn’t care about us either because he flew out of reach and was swinging merrily on one of the telephone wires. He was having the time of his life.

“Now what am I going to do?” Pee-wee asked me in a very disgusted voice.

“Well,” I said, “while I’m thinking what you should do you better hold onto that pole, otherwise you won’t be able to do anything at all.”

“Is that supposed to be a riddle?” he yelled.

I said, “No, it’s just that you’d be a riddle if you ever dropped to the sidewalk from where you are now.”

Vic said, “Roy’s right. Hold onto the pole until we find something else for you to do, otherwise you won’t hear yourself talk when you strike *terra firma*.”

Wig said, “Translated into English that means the more firmer the less terror.”

“Gee,” Pee-wee screamed, “you’re a smart bunch all right, standing there telling me how to do nothing. No wonder you can’t tell me nothing when you’re not doing nothing yourselves.”

“I said, “Sure, in this case nothing from nothing leaves absolutely nothing.”

Pee-wee looked down in the roadway as if he was thinking. Finally he said, “Hey, Roy, get me a stick—a big one, I’ll see if I can coax him back as if he was going to do his tricks. Maybe I can get him better that way than chasing him.”

So while we were hunting around Mrs. Going’s back yard for a stick we could see a couple of girls coming up the street and they stopped when they saw Pee-wee. “Oh, isn’t he just too cute,” one said. She had a dimple in her chin.

Pee-wee looked down at her and frowned. He said, “I don’t feel cute, I can tell you that and any minute I’m likely to get tired holding on and then I’ll be unconscious.”

“Oh no,” the other girl said. She had dark hair.

“We won’t let anything happen to you. We’re girl scouts and can do things in emergencies.”

“Ha, ha,” Pee-wee laughed. “Could you climb up this pole after a parrot like I just did and hold on as long as I’m holding on? I betcha you couldn’t

—I betcha *anything* you couldn't.”

“I bet we *could*” said the dimple in her chin. “I have a merit badge for rescuing a robin and her nest out of a tree in our back yard when a cat was attacking it—isn't that right, Mother?” She spoke to Mrs. Going.

Her mother said she was right and then we were introduced to the girls—Pee-wee too even if he was up on the pole. Yetta Going was the girl with the dimple in her chin and her girl friend's name was Susie Snicker. They were very nice girls.

So then we threw Pee-wee a big stick that we found and he began talking nice to Jock. It didn't make any difference to the bird what kind of a way the kid talked—he just wouldn't stop swinging on the wire and he started turning somersaults and landing on the wire again just like he did for Pee-wee on the little stick. Then he held on with one leg and then the other, giving a regular performance. If Pee-wee had been on terra firma he would have taken up a collection; he's got a head for business if it's not good for anything else.

Everybody was laughing and enjoying it but the kid. So when Jock heard that it wasn't long before he began calling names and to punish him like, Pee-wee made a move with the stick like he was going to hit the wire and push the bird off. You couldn't frighten that parrot with anything—he only screamed more and swung around the wire so hard that we heard something snap and from there he flew to the big tree in front of the house and on the very edge of a big heavy branch where the electric wires crossed. We all held our breath because he started doing his stunts there too.

All of a sudden I got an idea. I said, “Hey, Pee-wee, did the lady you got the parrot from say he liked anything special—such as what he liked to eat or anything?”

“Gee,” Pee-wee yelled, “at last you did think of something after all the damage has been done. Sure, he likes lots of things, she said, but he specially likes apples and she told me he'll do a lot for an apple.”

So I asked Mrs. Going if she would give me a piece of an apple and she said yes. So I got the bag and put it under the tree where Jock was and I held up my hand with the apple in it till I caught his eye. Then I dropped it inside the bag and made out I was walking away.

It wasn't long before Jock got curious and before I could count ten he made one swoop and went into the bag after the apple. Then I turned around quick as anything and shut it with a snap. *Whew*, wasn't I glad that was over.

We got Pee-wee down to earth once more—he says *we* didn't get him down at all because he brought himself down—and then we were invited to sit up on the porch for a few minutes and talk to the girls while Pee-wee was cooling off. He could cool off much easier than before he went up the pole

because he had lost two buttons off his shirt in the meantime and it was open at the neck—but he should worry as long as it was summertime.

So Mrs. Going came out on the porch then and said to Yetta, “Oh dear, I don’t know what we’re going to do! The man hasn’t come with the chickens and here is it almost six thirty.”

Yetta said, “Can’t you telephone him, Mother?”

Mrs. Going shook her head and said, “I’ve tried to, but the ’phone seems to be out of order.”

I said to Pee-wee “*Good night*, strike one for Jock.”

CHAPTER XII IN AGAIN, OUT AGAIN

I said to Mrs. Going, "On account of Jock making all the trouble we'll go and get them for you if you want us to."

"That's too kind of you," she said, "but I have to have them in fifteen minutes *anyway* and I'm afraid the poor man's been sick again, he has very poor health and he's selling out his chicken farm. The last four chickens he had he's promised to me. If you boys are willing to go, then you can stay for supper with us. We can manage to divide some way, can't we, Yetta? You girls will have to go along with the boys and show them the way."

So we started off and Pee-wee carried the bag along because he said he wouldn't take any chances leaving Jock in case he got noisy again. Anyway he was quiet and I guess that was because he was chewing on his apple.

I said to Yetta, "How far is it to this chicken farm?"

She said, "There won't be any more chickens on the farm after we get ours. It isn't far—only about ten minutes walk from our house."

I said, "Then after we take the chickens away would you say it won't be a chicken farm any longer?"

The girls laughed and Pee-wee said, "Any fool could think up a question like that."

Wig said, "That's all very true, Kid Harris, but it isn't *any* fool that can think of the answer."

"Well, what's the answer then?" he screamed.

"As long as there's a few feathers left it'll still be a chicken farm, won't it," I said.

"Didn't I tell you he was a fool!" the kid yelled. "Anybody can ask a question when they know the answer. It's easy when you don't have to guess and besides it was a crazy answer, it didn't have any sense to it. Couldn't you think of anything crazier than that?"

"Sure, *you*," I told him.

"I told you I was right," he yelled. "You'd have to be crazy to think that I'm crazy."

I said, "Talking about farms, the one we're passing right now is a truck farm. Now, bright boy, what do they raise on truck farms?"

"Hey," he said, "you can call me crazy all you like but I'm not a lunatic anyway and you can't jolly me about everything. What do you think I am, *a fool*? Asking me what they raise on a truck farm. Ha, ha, I can laugh now

because I know they don't raise trucks on farms; they come from factories where they make 'em, *see!*"

Vic said, "I bet you could read and write when you were six months old, couldn't you?"

Wig said, "Sure, he could but the paper was upside down that's all. Nobody else could read what he read or read what he wrote either."

Susie said, "Oh, *please*, boys! Don't tease him so."

Pee-wee said, "They're not teasing me, they only think they are. Only girls can be teased and not know it because they can't think as quick as boys."

Susie Snicker laughed and said, "*Is that so!* Well, we'll see about that, Walter Harris."

You can always tell when a girl is mad if she says *is that so*. They most always say it laughing and you'll think they're as happy as anything, but they're not because I know. So I said to Susie, "Is that a promise?" and she said, "I should say *it is*." *Didn't* I tell you she was mad?

We got to the farmhouse and Pee-wee left the bag on the lawn, then we went up to the door and knocked. Yetta knocked and so did Pee-wee and the farmer's wife came hurrying to the door and when she saw Yetta she said, "Oh, Miss Yetta, I'm so sorry but my husband's been laid up again all afternoon and we couldn't get anyone to come and kill the chickens until just now a neighbor came and offered to do it. So he's around there in back now."

Yetta said, "That's all right. These boy scouts came with us and they're going to carry them home."

"Are the chickens just now being killed?" Pee-wee asked.

"Yes," the farmer's wife said, "you can go back if you want to."

The girls sort of screamed and Susie said, "Oh my goodness, I couldn't watch anything like *that* at all!"

Pee-wee said, "Yes, but you don't mind watching them cook or eating them, do you?"

Susie said, "You're mean to say that. There's a good deal of difference in seeing them killed and seeing them after they're killed."

I said, "Sure the difference is before and after. Before they're fresh chicken and after they're fried chicken. That makes two different things altogether, so the girls are right and Pee-wee's wrong as he usually is."

Pee-wee said, "You'd have to say that anyhow to act smart in front of the girls."

So the girls went in the house to wait for us and we started for the back of the house when we heard Pee-wee yell, "Hey, *look!*" He was pointing

over on the lawn to where the bag was and it had toppled over on the grass and was wide open and Jock was *gone*!

Pee-wee yelled, "Now who did *that*?"

"Maybe he unlocked it and walked away," Wig said. "You never can tell."

"Now I know," I told them, "why is evaporated milk."

"Is there any logic to that?" Pee-wee yelled. "What's evaporated milk got to do with Jock getting out of the bag so mysterious and disappearing?"

I said, "It's like this, the minute you put evaporated milk in anything it's no longer evaporated milk, is it? So then the milk has evaporated and it's not even milk any more and when we put Jock in the bag he evaporated and it's all the same because the bag is leather and comes from a cow and evaporated milk comes from a cow too. So it's six of one and fourteen of the other."

So then we examined the bag and we decided that Jock must have pushed the bag over when he tried to get out and it must have happened while our backs were turned and we were talking to the farmer's wife. Anyway I remembered all of a sudden that when Jock flew from the tree into the bag I was so excited that I only pushed the sides together quick and it couldn't have snapped good and neither did I push down the other things on each end—you know what I mean, they're on all traveling bags. So you can see it wasn't hard for Jock to get out when he wasn't locked in at all.

Just as Pee-wee was getting all set to give me a bawling out why we heard the chickens squawking and going on awful. I said, "Come on back and see what's going on and forget about Jock. He was only a nuisance anyhow so maybe it's good riddance."

"At the speed he goes," Wig said, "he must be in Bridgeboro now."

"It's easy for you to talk," Pee-wee said, "because you don't care, but I do because I liked him and he's a very valuable bird, that lady said, and you don't get expensive birds like that every day."

I said, "No, you're right, only on Saturdays and holidays."

"*Shut up!*" he yelled. "How do you know but what we'd get rich from his tricks? Why look at all the money we made here in a couple of hours! I could have given shows in my tent at home and I bet we'd be famous in Bridgeboro just on account of Jock."

I said, "Since when did you need anybody else to make you famous in Bridgeboro? You're as well known as the postoffice."

Pee-wee said, "Well it doesn't hurt to be a little *famouser*, then, does it?"

Wig said, "Say, where was you brang up?"

"You all make me sick and tired," the kid told us. "There I went and got a valuable bird that does swell tricks and everything and could make a lot of

money for us and Roy lets him escape and now you don't even care that he's gone. Gee whiz, you don't know a good thing when you see it at all, but I do."

Vic said, "That's your hard luck. If you can see it, that's enough."

CHAPTER XIII

GONE AND I DON'T FORGET

We went back to watch the chickens and the man who was the neighbor came running up to us all excited. "Say," he yelled, "there's a great big hawk or something that just flew in the chicken coop and it's attacking the chickens so I'm going to get a gun!" He ran toward the farmer's house and we ran toward the coop.

Well, in between clouds of dust that was like thick smoke we could see the *hawk* but it wasn't a great big one. It had green and red feathers and it was screaming and talking and chasing the chickens all around and a couple of them were lying on the ground and there wasn't enough chicken left on them to fry, because the hawk's name was Jock.

So Pee-wee and I ran in the coop to save the other two and from then on the fun began. We did everything but catch Jock and he did everything but catch us. He flew in the chicken house and out again and all around the coop, not counting the times he flew around us snapping at our hands as we reached up to grab him.

Then he landed on a big rooster and another rooster landed on him and before we got the three separated my scarf got mixed up with them and the only way I recognized it afterward was by the threads—they were blue. So finally after the rooster at the bottom of the pile took his leave, he passed out with Jock's permission and we made a leap to save the other one and while I grabbed the rooster by the legs the kid made a grab for Jock and got him by the neck.

You can imagine how nice we looked coming out of that chicken coop covered with feathers and all the other signs of a battle. I said, "It looks like a featherbed factory exploded."

Wig said, "If it wasn't for the scout hat I'd have thought Pee-wee was one of the roosters. He walks like one."

I said, "Maybe it *is* one of the roosters imitating Pee-wee for all we know. If he crows in a few minutes we'll know it *isn't* Pee-wee."

All this time Pee-wee was so out of breath from the fight that he couldn't talk and he was holding Jock tight in his arms and as mad as could be. He yelled, "I'll talk all right and you won't hear me crow either, you won't hear anything until I put this pest back so he can't get out again. I'm doing it myself and then I'll be sure he can't escape because that's what I get for having other people do things."

I said, "That's right, Sprout Harris, put him in so he can't crawl out through the keyhole. You could even stuff that up too—with your finger."

The farmer's wife and Yetta and Susie had seen the whole thing from the back windows and as soon as the air was cleared of feathers they came out and the kid came back with Jock all locked up safe in the bag.

Yetta said, "My mother'll have a fit I know. Whatever am I going to tell her and with all our company too!"

Pee-wee said, "Who said you had to tell her anything? Boy Scouts aren't cowards and we tell the truth about everything and it wasn't your fault, was it? It was ours for bringing Jock along and I'm not afraid to tell the truth to your mother because it was an accident and people can't help accidents, can they? Anyway I'll tell her and I'll pay the lady for the chickens Jock killed because it's fair I should."

I said, "I should so say."

Susie said, "What on earth is she going to give them to eat, Yetta?"

Yetta said, "I don't know."

Pee-wee said, "Haven't you got any canned sardines in the house or beans or things like that?"

I said, "Maybe your mother saves pieces of dried cheese in a covered dish on the second shelf of the kitchen pantry that she keeps to grate up for macaroni and spaghetti like my mother does! If she does you can use it for a welsh rarebit. My sister says it goes in a rush—not the welsh rarebit, but the company and you can get it up in a hurry, that's what she means."

"Sure," Pee-wee said, "anybody can be resourceful like boy scouts if they want to."

Then Pee-wee gave the farmer's wife a dollar apiece for the chickens and that was four dollars because the chicken I rescued, Jock had torn him here and there where he had flown at him and it wouldn't be nice to take back to Mrs. Going. So very sadly we watched the kid pay the four dollars for something we were going to eat but didn't. Then we went back to the Going house to break the bad news and I was wishing and so was Pee-wee that the Goings would either be going or gone.

When we got back to the house who was standing up on the porch but our old friend the constable and he had another man with him. I said to Pee-wee, "Maybe he's come to arrest us for not having a license for Jock."

Wig said, "I'm not sure but I think you have to have a license to talk in Little Valley, that's why I'm not saying anything."

Yetta and Susie went inside to spread the glad tidings and the constable said to Pee-wee, "So you're back, eh?"

I said, "Yes—back and forth."

The man with the constable said to Pee-wee, "Is that the parrot?" He looked down at the bag.

Pee-wee said, "Sure, how do you know?"

I said, "Look out for him, he may be Houdini for all we know."

The man didn't pay any attention except to Pee-wee and he said, "The parrot belongs to me and I paid the lady you got it from so now I can take it back with me. Can't I, Constable?"

The constable turned up the corner of his mouth like and said, "Reckon yer can. Nothin' ter stop yer as far as I know. It's yourn."

"Hey," Pee-wee yelled and he was mad, "it's not fair for you to take him now, because he owes me money already for a lot of damage he's done. I don't even know, I might have to pay damages to the telephone company because he got up on the phone wire and put it out of order."

The constable stepped up and took the bag away from Pee-wee and he said, "See here, young feller, we can't help about any damage he did while you had him. The lady that gave him to you hadn't any business to give him away. She didn't own the parrot in the eyes of the law. She had this here man's written promise he would come back on a certain day and claim it upon payment of his debt to her. But she didn't wait fer him ter come because she didn't think he'd be likely to come back. In a way I could even hold you fer receiving stolen goods."

"G-o-o-d-n-i-g-h-t!" I yelled.

Poor Pee-wee looked as if he'd like to drop. Then the man said, "Well, constable, I'd never make such a charge against the kid. He didn't know. It doesn't matter anyhow now that I've got Jock all right."

When Jock heard his master say his name he yelled and called, "Hello, Fred!" And the man called back, "Hello, Jock, you *old fool!*"

So now you can see it wasn't poor Jock's fault that he called people names and wasn't a good scout. His own master started him off wrong in the beginning.

CHAPTER XIV SOME SMOKE

So then Jock went away with his master. It was the last we ever saw of them. Pee-wee was the only one of us that felt sorry. I said, "We'll wait before we go in and apologize to Mrs. Going about the chickens. We'll wait until Pee-wee's grief is spent."

"You haven't any heart," the kid said. "I get to liking birds and things but you don't. You're hard-hearted."

"You're mistaken," I said, "I've just a hard-hearted manner. If you could see my heart, though, you wouldn't think so. It's like a sponge it's so soft. And the holes are the dents you put in it while I watch you spend your grief. *Boo-hoo!*" I put my head on Vic's shoulder and shook like anything.

"Don't be such a fool," the little Chipmunk said. "You're laughing, don't I know it? You haven't any heart at all, just like I said. It isn't even like a sponge."

I said, "Why, you don't do me an injustice at all! It's true. My heart isn't like a sponge, oh, it isn't. It's better—it's like sponge cake. If it wasn't for my heart nobody'd ever thought of sponge cake. They got it from me."

"You're crazy," he yelled. "You're simply crazy!"

I said, "Now you sound better. Did you spend your grief?"

Wig said, "Sure he did and four dollars besides."

"You're right Wig," I said. "We've only got forty cents now. Pee-wee gave four dollars for a lot of chicken bones and here we haven't got a bone for ourselves."

"We won't be invited for sardines, either," Vic said.

I said, "Think what the poor fish will miss."

"What will they miss?" Pee-wee wanted to know.

"U.S. and Company, us of course," I said. "Almost any sardine would give his life to be eaten by boy scouts. Especially by the leader of the Chipskunk patrol."

Just then a siren started blowing. I thought it was the eight o'clock siren in Bridgeboro. It wasn't though, because it kept getting louder. I said, "Maybe that means we should eat—sort of a dinner whistle, huh?"

Vic said, "I've been thinking of eats so long now that I couldn't eat if it was put in front of me. I'm all filled up with the thoughts of it."

I said, "How many thoughts does it take to get filled up with?"

Pee-wee said, "It would only take one to fill you up, because you're full of hot air before you start thinking anyhow."

"Thanks for them kind words, brother sprout," I said. "I'll do the same for you."

That siren was shrieking like anything. Then someone began hammering on the Little Valley fire ring a few blocks away. Everybody came out on their porches. So did the Goings. They were so interested in where the fire was that nobody spoke about the chickens. Gee, I was glad of that fire.

Yetta began counting the strikes and they counted up to six. She said, "Oh, it's on lower Prospect. Let's go."

Susie Snicker said, "Yes. Let's."

I said, "*Sure. Let's!*"

So we all let's and we went. While we were running down the street the fire engine started out from the block above. They have volunteer firemen in Little Valley and you ought to see them run and try to get to the engine on time. One man came out with a coffee cup in his hand—he lived three doors down from the Goings'. He drank it up and then he ran back and laid it on the porch step and dashed across the lawn.

Another man who had come out in front of his house in his car was in a bathing suit. I guess he was taking his family to the beach. Anyway he got so excited he jumped out and started to run down the street. His wife must have seen him for she came running out of the house then and ran after him and handed him a rubber coat.

Everybody in Little Valley goes to the fires. The cars all follow the engine and the hook and ladder truck wherever they go. And all the time they keep honking the horns. Gee, what a noise. You'd think it was a parade.

We stopped where the engine stopped. That was in front of Black's Barber Shop. It was a yellow frame building with two upper floors. One floor was empty; it looked as if it was used to store things in. The top floor had printer's signs in the three windows across the front of the building.

JOB PRINTING

but it didn't have any name on it.

Vic and Wig stayed with the girls but the kid and I pushed past the people and we got right by the barber shop door. That was just as the fire chief came along. He looked up and down the building and so did we. There wasn't any fire there, then.

But when I looked up the second time I saw a little smoke coming out of the one second story window. I yelled, "Look!" and I pointed up there.

The fire chief called the men and they went into the building lickety-split, axes and lanterns and everything. Then the rest began dragging the hose over the sidewalk.

All this time the barber shop's customers stayed in their chairs. I don't know but I think they must have thought the firemen were just giving a demonstration. They do that so much in Little Valley, Yetta told us, that no one knows if there's a real fire or not.

Anyway, our friend the constable began to show how smart he was by pushing the people away from the *threatened area*. (I got that from the newspaper one time. It should only be used where there's a very big fire, but I should worry. It's almost like the word congregation and that means a lot of people together, so what's the difference?)

Well, we were pushed back too. Almost into the alleyway that runs alongside and to the back of the building. The fire chief came out then and yelled to the barber, "Hey, ain't you guys ever going to move?"

In two minutes that barber shop was as empty as my stomach. Nothing could be emptier than that. Then the barber said to the chief, "How did I know there was a fire?"

The chief said, "Say, didn't youse call that alarm over the 'phone?"

The barber said, "No. I didn't know anything about it and no one 'phoned from my shop. I know it."

The chief scratched his head and looked up. The smoke was still coming out of the window, but not so much as before. I whispered to Pee-wee, "Come on, Kid. Let's sneak around through the alley. We'll go up the back way and see what's what."

Pee-wee looked at me kind of scared. He said, "Suppose it's a bomb in there or something. That chief is puzzled, you can tell that. Suppose the building should explode or something?"

I pulled him by the arm and we got to the back of the building. I said, "Even if there's an explosion we can circumvent it."

The kid said, "How?"

I said, "We have so much air in us from being empty that nothing could blow us up any more than we are. We'd just float. That's how they came to get the dirigible idea—lighter than air. An aviator was so hungry he floated right out of his airplane and landed safely."

Pee-wee said, "Even in danger you haven't any sense."

I kept pulling him by the arm and we found a back door that was open and inside was a stairway. So we went up. It was awful dark, kind of spooky like, and when I got to the second floor I looked back to see if the kid was behind me. He was halfway up the stairs only and he was stooping as if he had picked something up.

I said, “Hey, what did you find? Yesterday or tomorrow?”

He said, “*Sh-sh, shush!* Somebody might hear us.

Then he came up on tiptoe and we went to the front part of the house. We looked in the door and the firemen had all gone. All except the fire-chief and he was there picking up a lot of sawdust by the armful and throwing it out of the window into the alley.

The fire chief looked at us and he didn’t seem to mind it that we were there. So I said, “Was there a fire?”

He said, “Just some sawdust, that’s all. Somebody discovered it and threw water on it before we came. That’s what made it smoke. S’funny the barber didn’t know anything. I wonder who tried to put it out?”

I said, “What about the printer upstairs? Maybe he gave the alarm and then tried to put it out himself.”

“No,” the chief said, “they’re not up there. We knocked but no one answered and when we tried the door it was locked. There’s two of them. They live there too—keep to themselves and work for Bridgeboro places mostly. The barber hardly knows them or sees them except when they pay the rent. S’funny though, he didn’t hear nothing.”

Pee-wee said, “I bet it’s a mystery.”

“There’s no mystery about the fire,” the chief said. “Sawdust can easily take fire in summer. But it’s a mystery who sent in the alarm and who threw water on it. Maybe someone in a hurry to go somewhere, I don’t know. I won’t worry about it anyhow.”

So he went on down the stairs and I followed him. When I got out of the building I saw that Pee-wee wasn’t behind me. I didn’t get worried because I knew that what the chief said had him going.

Outside of eating there’s nothing Pee-wee likes so much as mystery.

CHAPTER XV ON ACCOUNT OF THE BACK STAIRS

Vic and Wig and the girls were standing across the street, waiting. All the people had evaporated. The street was as quiet as could be. So I went over. I said, "Well, we put the fire out. Did you notice me with the chief?"

Yetta said, "Yes, you were very noticeable. Where's Walter?"

I said, "Oh, I left him investigating the cause of the fire and who put it out besides us."

Vic said, "Are you feeling well, Roy?"

"If I felt any better," I said, "I'd be sick in bed. Why?"

He said, "You talk as if you were feeling delirious."

"You're mistaken," I told him. "I always save that to kid Pee-wee with."

Then the kid came out of the building and crossed over. I said, "Talking of bad omens, here comes Pee-wee."

Wig said, "Yes, that's true. His middle name is hard-luck."

"I heard everything you said," Pee-wee yelled. "Don't think I didn't."

I said, "So, here you are. I was wondering where you were. I thought maybe the chief didn't see you and accidentally threw you out in the alley with the rest of the sawdust."

"Do you mean that's what you think I am?" He screamed. "Do you mean I'm a lot of sawdust?"

"Posilutely, no," I said. "Not a lot of it, just a little pile of it, that's all."

He said, "You think you're so smart, while you were thinking up a lot of nonsense to say to me I was using my eyes and my head."

I said, "Remarkable. Just for exercise or were you trying them out?"

Wig said, "A little practice like that every day and he'll do something big some day."

The girls laughed and the kid got good and mad. "You all make me sick and tired," he shouted. "Just the same there *was* something mysterious about that fire alarm. No one knows who sent it in."

I said, "Excuse me, didn't I hear that before?"

He said to me, "If you'll only get sense and listen! I didn't have a chance to tell you while we were in the building, but I found on the back stairway—a wallet."

I said, "The wallet must have found the back stairway very heavy. Anyway, do you mean it?"

He said, "Sure. It's thick with bills."

“*Good night*,” I said, “How much?”

“*Four thousand dollars*,” he said. “Honest! Crispy, brand new twenty dollar bills!”

“Goodness, gracious Agnes,” I said.

“Cross my heart,” he shouted. “I counted it.”

Yetta said, “Let’s see it.”

Pee-wee said, “No, not here. I’ve got a reason. We can go down the block where we won’t be seen from the building. There’s mystery about this whole thing, there is. It’s got a whole lot connected to it and I found out something else. That shows how observant I am!”

“*Sh-sh*,” I said. We were walking down the block. “*Sh-sh*, we must walk quietly. You should always do that with mystery. It’s just as important to keep shushing too. Now the plot thickens.”

“Shut up!” the kid said, very low.

I said, “If it wasn’t summer I’d feel just like little Eva crossing the ice. We’re crossing in front of an ice-wagon.”

So we got out of sight of the building and came to an empty lot. There weren’t any houses near there. Just the same the kid looked all around to make sure no one was looking. So we counted out the money and the girls wanted to count then, too. Then we examined the wallet but there wasn’t anything else in it. No papers or anything.



WE COUNTED OUT THE MONEY AND THE GIRLS WANTED TO COUNT, TOO.

Pee-wee said to me, “Remember that fire chief said those printers weren’t home and they even tried the door?”

I said, “Yes, yes, go on.”

“Well,” he said, “I investigated after you went down with the chief. I knew there was something funny in printers’ carrying all that money in a wallet. Especially poor printers like you’d think they’d be living in such a place.”

“Aha,” I said, “Sherlock Nobody Homes.”

He said, “Keep still, will you? I sneaked up the back stairs to the third floor and I could see fresh mud that went right up to the door.”

I said, “Maybe they stole some beauty clay out of the barber shop and spilled it.”

“Will you *keep still!*” he yelled. “It was mud I tell you, mud from the back yard! So I sneaked up and listened at the door and I could hear two men talking very low. It was so low I couldn’t hear what they said.”

“Maybe it was sweet and low,” I said.

“Go on, Walter,” Yetta said, very perky like.

“I peeked through the keyhole,” the kid said, “and I saw them. They were sitting at a table and on the table was two guns. I could see the men’s faces too. They look like bandits and I bet they *are* bandits. I bet that printer

business is only a bluff and that's their den. Didn't the chief say the barber never heard them or saw them except when they paid their rent? If they did printing he'd hear some noise, all right. So that shows you I'm right."

Wig said, "What makes a bandit look like a bandit? That's what I'd like to know."

"Before you go crazy again," Pee-wee yelled, "we better tell someone about it. Especially about the wallet."

"Yes," Yetta said, "it's best. Report it to the police. You'll have to. Even if nothing comes of the mystery part of it it's better to let the law take care of the wallet."

I said, "Who's the law, the constable?"

She said, "Yes."

Wig said, "Gee, do we have to see *him* again!"

"No," Pee-wee said, "you leave it all to me. I'll do the talking. I was the one to find it because I'm observant."

I said, "Now that we know you're observant—Go ahead, the pleasure's all mine."

"It's better I should," Pee-wee said. "I'll tell him how I heard the men whispering when they made believe to the firemen that they were out. You see they didn't want anyone to see their den so they wouldn't let them in. And they gave the fire alarm from some place I bet. They tried to put it out because they didn't want a whole lot of people to see them if they could help it. I've figured it all out and when I tell the constable I bet he'll think they're suspicious characters."

Vic said, "Don't forget he was suspicious of us, too. We might have to be witnesses."

"Oh my," Wig groaned, "on an empty stomach?"

I said, "No, on the witness stand."

"Shut up and come on," Pee-wee shouted. "We'll be here all night if we don't hurry. Don't you think I'm as hungry as you are?"

"It couldn't be possible," I said.

"Don't scouts have to uphold the law?" he screamed. "Isn't that a scout's first duty? Doesn't it come before eating or anything?"

Wig said, "Just before mealtime."

I said, "It would be all right if we were sure it was just before mealtime, but is it?"

Pee-wee said, "We'll have some hot dogs right after we tell the constable."

"Is that a promise, P. Harris?" I asked.

He said, "Sure. Come on."

So we walked on to see the constable once more. The girls went home. Pee-wee told them it wasn't any place for girls. They shouldn't get mixed up with bandits. He said they might get to shooting or something, you never could tell.

Wig said, "I don't think the girls liked being chased away."

Pee-wee said, "What do they think—do they think we can be bothered with them now? Girls are all that way. They want to be in on things like this and then when they are they scream and get hysterical. Gee whiz, they're a nuisance."

I said, "Believe me, P. Harris, *you're* a nuisance today. Everything you've found, the dog and the parrot, have brought us trouble. If the wallet turns out the same way you can't pick up a stone on the rest of this hike without my permission. Do you hear?"

"Do you think I'm deaf?" he shouted.

"Now that that's settled," I said, "we'll have a little song."

"The songs you sing are all crazy," he said.

"You're positively mistaken," I said. "This song is very insensible, to say the least. It's dedicated to you." I sang,

"This good turn hike is very long,
It's Pee-wee's fault; he's always wrong."

"You'd have to put me in it," he said, "but I don't care—there isn't any sense to it."

Wig and Vic and I started singing it just the same and the kid got so disgusted he wouldn't walk with us. Anyway we kept it up till we got to the town hall.

CHAPTER XVI

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?

When we got inside there wasn't anybody there but the janitor. He was sweeping up the floor. I said, "Let's watch him close. Maybe he's sweeping up fines."

Pee-wee said, "Hey, mister, can you tell us where the police force is?"

I said, "If he lives on a hill, then the hill upholds the law, doesn't it?"

The man said, "If you mean the constable, he's probably playing cards in the fire-house." Then he went on sweeping.

Wig said, "This town is well taken care of."

I said, "I should so say. Come on. Onward to the constable."

Then we walked to the fire-house and believe me we were tired and hungry. We passed a bakery and I looked in the window. There were jelly doughnuts and cream puffs and chocolate eclairs all sitting nice on fancy white plates. I could have gone in there and bought some except for a very good reason—the store was closed. Don't you think that's a dandy reason?

It was the same way with all the stores there. All that prevented us from going in was the Yale locks. Nothing was open. It wasn't only about twenty minutes to nine and everything was closed. It was so quiet I said I could hear the grass growing and the flowers flowering. Vic said if it was a little lighter we might see the robins robbing. Anyway it was quiet. I was wishing I was in Bennett's keeping a nice big soda company.

We got to the fire-house and there was the poor constable slowly dying from hard work. He was playing pinochle on a table alongside the hook and ladder truck. Believe me, the law didn't hang very heavy on his hands. He was playing cards with some of the volunteers.

Pee-wee went over to him but we stayed by the door. The kid told him he had something important to tell him. He gave the kid that same suspicious look and finally he decided to get up.

Then Pee-wee told him in a low voice what he found. The constable listened and looked and looked and listened and then looked back to Pee-wee again. Then he looked at the wallet and glanced inside. He didn't count it, maybe he didn't know how to count. I don't know. Anyway he put it inside his pocket. Then he walked out with us.

Pee-wee winked at me kind of and so I winked back. That meant that as a policeman the constable would have made a fine gardener.

Finally he said, "Come ter think on it, them fellers never asked fer any work in Little Valley. None that I know of anyhow. It does look purty queer, come ter think on it."

Pee-wee said, "It's good I'm observant and noticed that mud too."

I said, "I'll be glad when this is over. The plot is thickening with mud."

"Have you got a gun?" Pee-wee asked the constable.

"Two of 'em," the constable told him.

I said, "One for the bandits."

"Will we have to go up there with you?" the kid wanted to know, kind of scared.

"Sure," the constable said, "we'll have ter do this right. I'll keep the wallet and you go up first and ask them if they lost anything. I'll wait on the stairs below. If there's any danger you cough loud once."

I said, "Maybe he won't be able to. He'll be so frightened he'll swallow the cough before he coughs."

The constable said, "Bosh! What's to git frightened about? Ain't you scouts supposed ter be brave? Besides I'm right near yer in case yer git scared."

Pee-wee wasn't exactly scared. He looked as if he'd lost his last friend. Gee, I felt sorry for the little shrimp.

Finally he said, "Say, don't you think I ought to take one of your guns?"

"Naw," the constable said, "yer won't need one. D'ye think them bandits would shoot a kid like you?"

Pee-wee said, "Just the same, bandits know that boy scouts uphold the law. They know that we sort of have authority. Maybe they'll suspect me right away and kidnap me or something."

"Calm yourself," said I. "You won't have to face the enemy alone."

"Do you think I'm afraid?" Pee-wee yelled. "Do you think I'm a coward?"

I said, "I should say not. You may be everything else I've called you but you're sure not a coward."

The kid said, "I'm not afraid of them, exactly. It's the guns."

"Who wouldn't be?" I said. "There's safety-pins in numbers. Everybody knows that. So I'll go with you, kid."

Vic and Wag wanted to go too but the brave constable said no. He said it would be too many. So we came to the building and the barber shop was closed. There were two big cars parked at the curb and the top floor was all lighted up.

I said, "Maybe this is the night of the bandits' ball."

The constable said, "You kids just act like as if nothing was wrong. Tell them you found a wallet during the fire excitement. Say the firemen told you

nobody was home so you gave it to the police and they kin claim it. Say you wuz jest passin' by on yer way home and cuz yer saw the lights yer stopped in ter tell them."

"That sounds pretty good," I said, "I hope it sounds as good to them as it does to me."

Pee-wee said, "It's because you're nervous. Come on, Roy," he said.

Believe me, there's nothing small about the kid except his size. We went in; I went first and then Pee-wee came next. The constable was the last on line. He was a very brave man.

There were voices upstairs—we could hear loud talking. I was glad. You never feel so nervous where people are talking loud. I was nervous all right, I won't say I wasn't because, jiminy crinkums, no matter what that constable said some bandits wouldn't care if we were kids or not. They'll shoot wild to escape sometimes.

Anyway we left them at the second landing and went on up alone. It was dark. I went up making as much noise as I could. I did that so they wouldn't think we were sneaking.

Before I got to the top step I could see that the upper hall was all light because the door was standing open. There was a man standing near it with his hat on, sort of pushed back on his head. He was talking to another man who had a hat on too. He stood a little further inside.

Gee, my heart stood still. Suppose they were making a getaway? But then I saw that they weren't acting so very excited and I motioned to Pee-wee to come on. I made some more noise with my feet and the men looked out into the hall. They smiled, kind of. Then the man with his hat pushed back said, "You're just a little bit too late, kids."

I said, "Late? For what?"

He said, "The birds have flown. We only got one and he don't amount to much."

I was puzzled all right. I was starting to wonder who the men were and how they knew what we came for. Then some more men came to the door and that made five altogether. So when one of the men looked out at me I knew, because he was Mr. Abel Sloothe of the Bridgeboro police. He's county detective, and he knows my father and Pee-wee's father too.

He smiled at me. Gee, wasn't I glad to see him there! He said, "This would have been a fine catch, wouldn't it, Roy?"

I said, "Yes, sir." I didn't know what he was talking about.

Just then we heard girls' voices say, "Why, *hello*, boys!"

I looked up and *g-o-o-d night magnolia!* Who was standing in back of Mr. Sloothe and the other detectives but Yetta Going and Susie Snicker!

It's just like my mother says! She says, you're likely to find girls almost everywhere nowadays.

CHAPTER XVII

YETTA AND SUSIE TRIUMPH

Pee-wee spoke up first. He said, "What are you two doing here?"

Yetta and Susie looked at each other and giggled. Yetta touched Mr. Sloothe on the arm, then. She said, "You tell the scouts what we're doing here, won't you, Mr. Sloothe?"

You should have heard her saying that! I don't blame Pee-wee for getting mad at girls sometimes. They love to sound important. Anyhow Yetta did; she gave me a pain. I wished she had sneezed or tripped or got something in her throat so's she'd have a coughing fit. Partly these are Pee-wee's wishes—they're not all mine.

Mr. Sloothe said, "Why, don't the boys know all?"

Yetta said, "No. We didn't know ourselves for sure. Not until we got home. Then we called you up."

Mr. Sloothe said, "Oh, I see. Well, kids, it seems these girls are very clever detectives. After you boys showed them the money and while they were counting it, Miss Going became suspicious of the unusual stiffness of the bills. Her suspicions were aroused still more because the wallet contained nothing but twenty dollar bills.

"Now almost every person in the county has been warned lately of the twenty dollar counterfeit bills. And the papers have published how a good many merchants have been fooled with them.

"So when Miss Going handed you back the money she kept out one of the twenties. When she got home her parents confirmed her suspicions. They called us up and just as luck would have it, some federal men were at headquarters. So we came right up here."

"Were the men gone?" Pee-wee asked.

Mr. Sloothe grinned. He said, "Yes. They must have had some warning. Either that or it was just good luck for them that they decided to go. If you had warned the constable in time we'd have nabbed the whole outfit. As it is we got some of their stuff. They had a truck around in the back alley and they had already moved out some things.

"But the one bird we caught was just carrying a trunk full of evidence into the hall. As we nabbed him the rest of the men started down the stairs but the truck got away through the alley and into the next street. The troopers got a good start after them so they couldn't get very far. Those birds

have emergency places to hide in and I dare say that's where they're heading for."

I said, "What about the one you caught?"

Mr. Sloothe said, "He was just employed to help in the moving. They only hired him for the job but he's locked up anyhow as a material witness. He told us there's five men in the gang."

Pee-wee said, "Have they gone toward Bridgeboro?"

Mr. Sloothe said, "That's where they went all right. They'll hide somewhere between here and there. Most likely they dodged down a back road. We'll keep our men ready and the troopers will stick around the roads."

"*G-e-e-e-whiz!*" Pee-wee sputtered. "Why didn't we know that was counterfeit money!" Then he scowled like at the girls and they giggled some more. So he said to them, "If you suspected it was counterfeit money why didn't you say something? Do you think you help the law by thinking you're so smart that you should keep it to yourselves? If you had told me we could have circumvented them from escaping. Now they've escaped and it's all happened for nothing, so you're not so smart after all. You mixed things up, so why didn't you tell us, huh?"

Yetta raised one of her eyebrows way up, like you see girls do. She said, "You told Susie and I that boys could think quicker than girls. So I guessed you thought quick and knew it was counterfeit and didn't want to tell us. But I wanted to make sure too, that's the reason I sneaked out the twenty dollar bill."

"Yes, you did!" Pee-wee growled. "You're fine girl scouts, *you are*, when you don't help boy scouts. That's what you're supposed to do, *help*. Instead you wanted all the credit and you let important criminals escape, didn't she, Mr. Sloothe?"

The kid was so mad that the detectives all laughed. Mr. Sloothe said, "Never mind, Kid Harris, your intentions were good, only you were a little slow. After this don't lose any time when you find a good clue. And four thousand dollars in crispy bills that's found in such a ramshackle place as this is a pretty good clue. Especially under the circumstances in which you found it."

"Sure," Pee-wee said. "If it wasn't for me finding the wallet and all nobody'd have known about them. Now you know and you've got clues. So you got something and if it wasn't for me you wouldn't. It's because I'm observant."

Susie laughed and said, "That's the very reason we didn't say anything to you, Walter Harris!"

"What very reason?" the kid wanted to know.

“Why,” she said, “a scout that’s as observant as you are shouldn’t have to be told things. You should be observant enough to know without being told.”

Pee-wee said, “Anyway you didn’t do it all. Mrs. Going had to help you. Anyone can do things when someone else tells them to.”

Gee, everyone was laughing so, nobody could talk. The girls had triumphed over him and he couldn’t stand it. He’d die if he couldn’t have the last word. He wouldn’t admit he was wrong.

I happened to remember then that we left the constable on the second floor protected by our brother scouts. So I went to turn around to call and there were Vic and Wig standing right behind us. I said, “When did you come up?”

Wig said, “Soon’s we heard the girls and Mr. Sloothe. We knew it was all right, then.”

Pee-wee yelled, “Where’s the constable?”

I said, “With his two guns.”

Vic laughed. He said, “When I heard Mr. Sloothe I told the constable who was up here. So he gave me the wallet to give to him and said he guessed he wouldn’t be needed any more. When he was going down the stairs he said if anyone wanted him he’d be at the fire-house.”

You should have heard Mr. Sloothe laugh. So did the others. Believe me, that constable will never go looking for trouble. He looks the other way.

I said, “There’s one thing he’s not afraid of, though.”

Pee-wee said, “What’s that?”

I said, “He’s not afraid of tracking unlicensed canines—if they’re muzzled.”

CHAPTER XVIII

WHERE'S THE ROCK?

Mr. Sloothe and the detectives were going to stay there for awhile. They had to check up or something like that. Anyway we had to be going, that was sure. It was after nine o'clock.

So when we got down to the street there was a fog coming up. I said, "Do we use the forty cents to eat with or do we get a bus to Bridgeboro?"

"We eat," said Pee-wee.

"We eat," said Wig.

"We eat," said Vic.

I said, "Carried. We eat."

"Where?" Vic asked. "Everything's closed in Little Valley."

Pee-wee said, "I know a place. Remember the one I told you about—the place with the dandy sandwiches?"

"After all that's happened, how can I remember anything!" I said.

He said, "After we leave Little Valley it's on the road—they have all kinds of sandwiches."

I said, "Right on the road?"

He said, "Shut up. No. It's a stand. Maybe because it's so late we could get a reduction. Maybe we could get them for a nickel. They have hot dogs too and soda and candy."

"For a nickel?" I asked.

"We'll let Pee-wee do the talking," Wig said. "He gets reductions on everything. Even the four thousand dollar wallet he found was reduced to nothing."

"Are you going to start about that?" he shouted. "Even if they weren't caught it doesn't say they *won't* be! And if they are it'll be through me."

I said, "I believe it. Almost anything can happen through you."

By the time we got to the railroad station we couldn't see Little Valley for the fog. It was awful thick and hung very low. Over in the swamps the frogs were making a racket.

I said, "Can frogs see through the fog?"

Wig said, "Maybe the fog can see through the frogs."

"That's right," I said. "It's a good one for our little hero. If frogs can see through the fog and the fog can see through the frogs how many frogs see through the fog."

“Say,” Pee-wee yelled, “do you want to drive me crazy? You can talk the most nonsensical nonsense.”

“I know some better nonsense than that, P. Harris,” I said. “Do you know what makes a petrified tree?”

“It’s something to make me mad, I know, but I’m not going to let you get me mad. What’s the answer, huh?”

“’Tis said the wind makes them rock,” said I. “Ask me another!”

“You’re just a plain fool!” he said, in a sort of growl.

“You didn’t get mad for two seconds,” I said. “You’re doing very well, except for your language.”

“It’s a good thing Jock wasn’t around you very long,” Wig told him. “He was a bad example.”

We walked on pretty quietly for awhile. The fog was getting thicker all the time. The only thing we could see was the road. Here and there the lights just blinked. We had to keep very close to the ditch on account of cars. We couldn’t hear them or see them until they were almost on top of us.

Vic said, “Where is this sandwich place?”

“In a few minutes we come to the path,” the kid said, “then we cross lots. It’s on the back road—Little Valley Avenue.”

“G-o-o-d night!” I said. “How can you find a path in this fog? We can’t even see the grass.”

Pee-wee said, “*Don’t tell me!* I can find that path with my eyes shut. Haven’t I been there skeenteen million times? Fogs don’t bother true scouts. I’m like the pioneers—I go by instinct.”

Wig said, “Maybe the pioneers never saw a fog and maybe if they did they got lost in them. How do you know?”

“That shows how much you know,” he told him. “Uncle Jeb says instinct seldom fails a true scout.”

I said, “I never doubt what Uncle Jeb says. He’s always right. But the true scout he was telling you about was Buffalo Bill and never P. Harris.”

“Do you mean to say I’m not a true scout?” he yelled. “Do you mean to say there can’t be two Buffalo Bills?”

“Sure there can,” I said. “Little Bill the son of Big Bill and Big Bill, himself. *Two Bills.*”

He said, “Don’t think you’re funny, besides you didn’t answer me if you could deny I was a true scout!”

I said, “As far as I know you are. But then I’m not with you all the time as far as I know.”

“Hey,” Vic said, “When are we coming to that path?”

“It may be years,” I said to him.

Pee-wee said, “We’re there any minute now. I’m watching all the time.”

“The fog or the path?” I asked him.

“I don’t answer your silly questions any more. It’s no use.”

“Atta scout!” I said. “Who is it that keeps the sandwich place?”

“An awful nice feller,” he answered. “His name’s Tony. He likes me to come too. He treats me fine.”

“I would too,” I said, “if I was in the sandwich and candy business.”

“Gosh,” Wig said, “the mention of food drives me distracted.”

“Dis—what?” I asked.

“Distracted,” he said.

I said, “Is that on the map?”

“Gee-whiz,” Pee-wee said, “that means insane, sort of. You don’t know hardly any big words at all, do you? I don’t know how you go through school.”

“That’s easy,” I said. “I go through the front door and I go through the classrooms. Finally I go through the basement and out the side door. I go through the whole building.”

Pee-wee said, “I think this is about where the path is.”

“You think?” I said. “What business have you to *think* on such a froggy night? You’ve got to be sure.”

Vic said, “Yes, why does he have to think? I thought he said that he was a true scout.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t think it *wasn’t*, did I?” he shouted.

I said, “Sh-sh, the fog might hear you and get foggier. What do we have to do, tell the path to come and get us?”

“You’re crazy,” he yelled, a little lower. “I’ll find it in a minute. I know it because it has a small rock just as you turn in and on it is an ad that says

EAT
AT
POLLY’S PORRIDGE POT
NORTONVILLE,
N. J.”

That’s about the way he showed us it was, anyway.

Then he said, “I ate there once. It was swell.” He walked on a few steps and then shouted, “There’s a path here, but it hasn’t any rock. It must be a little further down.”

“Can’t you get another rock,” I asked.

Wig said, “We might as well go right on home. We’ll be going out of our way—a couple of blocks on that path, won’t we?”

The kid said, “Don’t start being a quitter. It’s only three blocks across lots and anyway it brings us nearer home when we do get to Bridgeboro.”

We must have gone about fifteen or twenty feet further when we saw the rock. It was in a ditch. Probably some driver had taken it from the path to keep his car from rolling when he changed a tire. Anyway it was in the ditch and right near it was a path.

So we took that path and the fog got worse. Every once in a while Pee-wee had to get down and feel around to see if we were still on it, it was so dark. There was weeds and tall grass in some places; I could feel it brush my face every once in a while. Then we seemed to be turning a curve, sort of. Anyway we were still on the path.

Then we stepped right out of the path onto an asphalt road. “Is this it?” we unanimously asked Pee-wee.

Pee-wee said, “Nope. Just one more block across. This road is a dead end.”

“Reminds me of our hikes with you,” I said.

“Why?” he wanted to know.

I said, “Because we’re dead at the end of them. We’re dead from being walked so much. We’re dead from starvation—could anything be *deader*?”

Vic said, “You’re right. We are. We’re objects of pity.”

I said, “That’s the only thing I won’t get at home. My sister says if I want pity I can look for it in the dictionary.”

CHAPTER XIX

PEE-WEE STEPS IN THE FOG

We walked more than one block. It seemed like a dozen to me. My feet were so tired I lost control of them, absolutely. They just went where I went and that was all.

There was a terrible lot of silence. I had a feeling that Pee-wee's instinct had deserted him. And by the silence I knew that Vic and Wig felt the same way.

We were sort of going down hill like, very gradually. The fog was just the same. That isn't saying much because of all the fogs I ever saw that fog was the worst. Anyway, we were going down hill and we weren't passing any more tall grass. At first we passed a tree here and there and then they were closer together.

"Say," Wig said, "do you know we're in a woods some place?"

The kid stopped and so did we. He said, "G-e-e-e, whiz, I guess you're right. So we are."

Vic said, "Don't you pass through woods to that Tony's place?"

"I never did before," the kid answered.

I said, "Maybe they built these woods since you were here last."

Wig said, "Do you think you took the wrong path that time?"

Pee-wee said, "I don't see how I could have. We took the one nearest where the rock was."

Vic said, "Well, whoever put it in the ditch could have rolled it down from the first path you discovered. It wouldn't have been much trouble for a man to roll it. This must be the wrong path, huh?"

The kid said, "Gee whiz, I hope not. By rights Tony's place should be here. Considering how long we've been walking, it should. I wonder where Tony is?"

"Shall we call him?" I said. "Maybe the fog swallowed him up, stand and all."

Pee-wee said, "He *should* be *here*."

Vic got kind of mad. He said, "He should be but he isn't. So what are we going to do about it? We can't stand here all night wondering why he isn't here!"

Poor Pee-wee never said a word. I guess he felt cheap that he'd walked us all that way on the wrong path for nothing. He knew Wig and Vic were peeved; he wasn't sure about me. But I wasn't.

Maybe you can't understand that. You'd think I would be when Vic and Wig were. But there's something about that kid, oh, I don't know. It's just that I can't ever really get mad at him. No matter how I jolly him he doesn't get really mad either. Maybe that's the reason I didn't that night.

Anyway I felt sorry for him. So I said, "Hey Chipskunk, old scout. Cheer up. Mistakes happen to the worst scouts, I mean the best. If we missed the path to Tony's maybe this path leads to Jake's or Mike's, I don't care. We'll keep on this path till we strike a road or a street—we should worry what it is. The woods can't last forever. United we stand, divided we sprawl! Let's go!" Vic and Wig yelled, "Righto! Let's go!"

So we started and began walking lockstep. It was the slowest lockstep we ever walked, believe me. The path was so narrow and it was so dark we couldn't see each other.

Finally we came to a clearing like. We tried to see what we could see but it was too dark. The kid was first in line and he held his hand out in front of him. He said, "I'm touching wood—it's shingles—it's a shack I think."

I let go and felt around too. My hand touched a window casing and it felt moldy and wet and there wasn't any window-pane in it. I said, "I think it's a deserted summer shack. That's what I think."

By that time Vic and Wig were exploring too. Vic said, "Here's another window. It hasn't any pane."

I said, "We shouldn't complain, as long as the window doesn't."

The kid said, "I wonder if it's haunted!"

Jiminy, you can't beat him. Every empty house in the United States is haunted if you'll believe Pee-wee.

I said, "Maybe it's haunted by summer."

Wig said, "Say I just felt a door knob and the door is standing partly open."

"I bet it's haunted," Pee-wee said.

"So are you," I told him.

Vic said, "What do you want us to do, Kid. Cry about it?"

"Do you bet I won't go in there all alone?" he yelled. "Do you bet I'm afraid?"

"I bet there's something loose in your head. That's what I bet. If it makes you happy, *go in alone*," I said.

"Don't cry if the ghost gets a hold of you," Wig said.

"Hey," the kid said, "Anytime I'd cry about a thing like that. I'm not afraid of ghosts or anything."

Vic said, "Look and see if you can find some matches and a lantern in there. I wish we could light our way out of this place."

Wig said, “After you and the ghost get through talking call us in. Maybe there’s some stale crackers lying around.”

I said, “Yes and maybe there’s a few inches of soda left in some empty bottles. You might even find a petrified hot dog in the kitchen sink.”

Vic said, “If there had been any eats left around they won’t be there if the place is haunted.”

“Why?” the kid wanted to know.

“What do you suppose the ghost lives on?” Vic said.

Wig said, “He’s better off than we are. Petrified hot dogs are better than a mouthful of fog.”

“One good thing about fog,” I said, “you don’t have to chew it.”

Pee-wee said, “You’re all crazy. Do you think I won’t go in?”

“What’s holding you back?” I said. “What do you want us to do, give you a send-off?”

“Here I go!” he yelled.

I said, “Bon voyage!”

So in he walked and slammed the door behind him. The next second there was a terrible scream. Vic and Wig and I stood stark still with fright. It wasn’t any make-believe scream—it was something that meant no fooling.

Then we heard the kid’s voice. He cried, “*Help!*”

CHAPTER XX

A LIGHT

My hand was on that door knob the next second. Just as I got the door open he yelled, “Don’t move, Roy! Don’t step inside the door! I’m all right now.”

I yelled, “Why? What’s the matter?”

“Because,” he shouted, “it’s no shack left at all. It must have been burned—all except the front. It’s just the foundation. I fell right into it soon’s as I closed the door. Look out! You’ll get hurt if you’re not careful!”

“All right,” I shouted, “never mind about me getting hurt. Are *you* hurt?”

“No,” he answered. “Maybe bruised but that’s all. The place is full of water. It’s chock full of mud too.”

I said, “Where did you fall? Under the door?”

“Yes,” he said. “I’m climbing up now.”

Jiminy crinkums, but I was frightened for a second. I leaned down and felt over the door sill and put my hand out where I felt the space begin. Vic and Wig were right in back holding onto me so we could all pull the kid together.

He told me each step up he made. The sides were very wet and slippery and covered with mold, he said. Finally I felt his hand touch mine. Gee, I was mighty glad that nothing worse had happened.

It wasn’t any trouble getting him over. He was a sight I guess, if we could have seen him. But I could feel that he was sopping wet. He’d lost his tin cup and his compass and his hat. He should worry though, as long as it wasn’t his leg or his arm or something like that.

One thing, the fog was lifting and through the trees we could see a faint light. I said, “A light, a light! We’ll hike to the light. What do you say, brother scouts?”

We walked toward the light. We could see so much better and another thing we knew we weren’t walking away from Bridgeboro this time.

The kid was miserable. His feet did nothing but slip-slop along in his oozy shoes and when I put my arm on his shoulder he felt as if he had fallen in a river. Even though I felt sorry for him I had to laugh.

So we came nearer and nearer to the light and the fog was getting higher all the time. Then to our left we saw another light glinting through the trees too. I said, “Maybe that’s a street. Let’s walk there first.”

So we did and pretty soon there weren't any trees. We were standing on the bank and looking down into the *river*. And the light we had seen was across the river.

"How did we get here?" Pee-wee asked.

"Is that a riddle?" I said.

He said, "Gee-whiz, I can't figure it out."

"Don't talk about figures," I said, "I like to forget about them when I'm on such a merry hike as this one has been so far."

Wig said, "Well if Pee-wee can't figure out how we got here, I can. We took a circular path that time and went right around and crossed the road again. That's what we get for jollying him so much. We do so much talking that we forget what direction we're walking in. We simply crossed the road and on down here to the river. That's all."

"I'm glad it is," I said. "Shall we ask at the lighted shack in the woods for the shortest way home? Maybe there's a path without going back through the woods."

"Sure," Pee-wee said, "let's ask them." As he went to step forward his shoes went *EEK!*

Some day the four of us are going to hike back and see if we can find that path we took. I'd just like to find out how we did that to go all around and come out where we went in. It's sort of a mystery, Pee-wee says.

One thing though, I won't hike it if Pee-wee has any good turns to do in Little Valley.

CHAPTER XXI

SNEEZES AND SNORTS

We didn't have much to say going toward that shack. It was a good thing too. I'm glad I had sense enough to keep still and leave Pee-wee alone for five minutes.

Before we got within twenty feet of it I had a feeling that something was wrong. For one thing the windows were down tight and so were the yellow shades. That struck me funny because it was awfully warm. Then we got close to the window. The light was in the front room and one of the shades didn't fit very close to the window. Sort of hung away.

I said, "Hey, kid, see if you can peek in where that shade is away from the window."

He stepped up and looked. He turned his head first one way then another to get a better look. Then he put his hand back of him for us to keep still. He stayed that way for a few minutes and then came sneaking back as quietly as anything.

Jimmy, you ought to have seen his face. In the shadow he looked like a ghost, he was so pale. He leaned over to me and I could hardly hear him, he talked so low. He said, "They're the same ones."

I said, "What ones?"

He pointed at the shack. He said, "The *counterfeiters*."

I whispered it to Vic and he passed it on to Wig. I said to the kid, "What makes you so sure?"

"Didn't I recognize the two men through the keyhole? These are the same ones, positively. There's three others and that makes five just like Mr. Sloothe said there were!" He was all out of breath, he was so excited.

Then we all moved out of the light and got behind a big tree. We had to plan something, that was sure. I said, "If we're sure it's them, two of us will have to go and phone from somewhere and get the police. The other two of us should stay here in case they try and get away."

Vic said, "Did you see anything else, kid?"

"Sure. They were sitting around a table talking," he told us. "Then one of the men got up and took out a gun. He showed it to one of the others and they passed it around. They all looked at it and they gave it back to the man and he sat down again."

"Could you hear anything they said?" Wig wanted to know.

“No,” the kid answered, “Except words like yes and no. Maybe if I put my ear close to the window I could hear more, huh? That would be good evidence.”

I said, “No, you better not. I think the gun is enough and as long as you’re sure it’s the same two men.”

Pee-wee said, “Say, I’ll just listen for two minutes more. I’ll get more evidence, maybe. I’d like to hear what counterfeiters talk about.”

“They talk about counterfeiting, I suppose,” I said. “Come on, we’ve got to do something!”

“All right,” he said, “I’ll just listen one second more.” He started back for the window before we could stop him.

“Can you beat him!” I said to Vic and Wig. “He’s about the snoopest kid I ever knew.”

His clothes were all muddy and damp; you’d think he’d want to get home as quick as he could. But no, there he stood, his ear up against the window-pane listening. He didn’t move and we were getting nervous by the minute. I suppose he stood there like that for three minutes anyway, but it seemed like thirty to us.

Finally he moved a little. I thought, *now* he’s found out enough. The next minute, though, he sneezed as loud as could be. His head banged against the window—gee, what a noise.

Well, he ran toward us like lightning and we all ran too. I yelled, “Follow me so we don’t lose each other!”

The door of the shack opened and the men ran out with their guns all ready. When they saw Pee-wee they came after us. Believe me, I never ran so fast in my life. We didn’t know where we were going. We went stumbling and knocking against trees and stumps and everything.

The men had flashlights so they could see where they were going and we couldn’t. Everytime they flashed them we sort of ducked, but Pee-wee kept us back. His shoes were so heavy with water that it was hard for him to run. He was falling half the time too.

Once his left foot sunk right in some mud and I had to run back and pull him out. That time the counterfeiters gained. Wig said to me, “We’ll have to find a place and hide or we’re going to get caught!”

I said, “Where?”

“Wherever we can!” he answered.

Then I dragged the kid along with me so he wouldn’t slip again. All of a sudden we got out of the woods. Right in front of us was a big barn. Way beyond that was the farmhouse, but it was all dark. I guess everyone was in bed.

I said, “Gee, this is lucky.”

Pee-wee said, “We’ll hide in the barn, huh? Maybe they won’t dare come out of the woods after us.”

So we got to the barn. The kid ran in first, then Vic and myself. We didn’t know it then, but poor Wig got his foot caught in some brambles right at the edge of the wood. He couldn’t get it loose right away and he didn’t cry out because he thought it was better for one to get caught than all of us.

After we were safely inside the kid said, “We must throw ourselves flat wherever we land. They did that in the war. *Sh-sh!*”

Vic and I ran to the back of the barn and we threw ourselves flat all right—we almost drowned or smothered in a big stack of hay, we sank so far in. Anyway, we kept hold of each other and we could hardly breathe and I was wondering where Pee-wee had thrown himself flat.

Then we heard low rumblings like and then a terrible rattling, like something heavy shaking the barn. Vic and I looked out very cautiously. The barn door was wide open—that was our fault—we hadn’t closed it behind us. Outside two of the counterfeiterers were standing with their flashlights.

The next thing we saw was a big bull racing through the open doorway. Lying flat on his back was Pee-wee holding on to his horns as tight as could be. When they got outside the bull made a leap and the kid went rolling off as if he were a feather. If I hadn’t been so scared I would have died from laughing. Vic was shaking alongside of me, he said he couldn’t help it.

Anyway, one of the counterfeiterers chased the bull away and the other one picked Pee-wee up and brushed him off. I could tell the kid wasn’t hurt.

Believe me, Vic and I didn’t know what to do. We didn’t have much time to think about it because one of the men came in the barn and looked all around with his flashlight. You can bet we pushed way in.

The man said, “I guess there *were* only two of them.”

The other man outside said, “All right then, come on before the farmer gets wise.”

So then they went out and everything got quiet—all except the bull. I looked out and I could see his dark shadow pass the barn door every once in a while. He was racing around the barnyard snorting like anything. We didn’t hear voices any more.

Vic and I got out of there as quickly as we could. There wasn’t a sign of Pee-wee or Wig or the men. I said, “We’ll have to get to the farmhouse and phone.” So we began to run.

Vic said, “I don’t think they’ll do anything to them at all. Look how nice they helped Pee-wee up and all! I only think they wanted to capture them so’s not to be given away. They think Pee-wee heard their plans, I guess.”

“Anyway,” I said, “we’ll make sure they won’t hurt them. We’ll get help quick!”

I was thinking all kinds of things. That maybe they'd kidnap the kid and Wig. Or torture them even, so's they wouldn't tell. But then it was good we weren't caught because there wouldn't have been anyone to get help.

When we got near the farmhouse, a light went on downstairs. A man came out the back door. He was the farmer and when he saw us he stopped. I called to him and told him not to be afraid and about all that had happened. That it was just his bull that was making all the noise now.

He told us his name was Mr. Everett and that we were in Riverdale and that his farm was Riverdale Farm. He was awfully nice, that man was. He listened to me while I told how the counterfeiters had captured Pee-wee and Wig. So then he took us in his house.

He called upstairs to his wife and pretty soon she came down and then his two sons came into the room. He introduced us to them. One was twelve years old and his name was Todd and the other one was fourteen and his name was Jerry.

So then I got the Bridgeboro police on the 'phone and told them who I was and all about our discovering the men. I couldn't tell them where the shack was on account of it being in the woods and near the river. So Mr. Everett told me to tell the police to come to his farm and we could take them right from there.

Oh boy, wasn't I glad that they'd soon come! Bridgeboro is only a few minutes ride from Riverdale and I knew it wouldn't take them long. I kept wondering what Pee-wee and Wig were doing and what was being done to them. Vic was telling the Everett boys how Pee-wee had fallen into the foundation in the woods.

"Is Pee-wee the little one that was captured by the counterfeiters?" Todd asked.

I said, "Yes, and I'd like to bet before we get there that he'll have them laughing with his crazy talk."

Vic said, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

CHAPTER XXII

THIS BELONGS TO WIG

In a few minutes we walked down from the farm to the road to watch for the detectives. Jerry and Todd came along and I was glad because they cheered us up. I liked them right away. So did Vic. They were so interested in all that had happened, especially about Pee-wee and Wig, and they made us promise to bring them back to the farm before we went home.

I was hoping they'd be alive to *bring* back, because it seemed so long before the detectives came. Lots could have happened to them in that time. Anyway, I suppose I was so nervous that it seemed longer than it was.

Finally I heard a chug-chug sound and from Little Valley way came a state trooper. Almost at the same time two came from the direction of Bridgeboro and back of them were two cars with the detectives. I never saw so many officers at one time. It was like an overflow.

Mr. Sloothe was there and he told us we could ride on the running board up to the farm. We left the cars there and it was planned that Vic and I should lead the way. We were to go along the river because they said no one was likely to figure on that direction—that meant the counterfeiter.

Todd and Jerry had to stay behind and I could see they were sorry. Todd said he wished he was a scout. I told him I'd remember that and tell Pee-wee. So we went along the banks of the river and Mr. Sloothe was right behind us. He said it was serious business and their capture depended on us not losing our heads. He said, "You see what happened when Young Harris sneezed! Too many cooks——"

I said, "You mean too many scouts."

He laughed and said no, that we made the mistake twice of waiting. I said, "I know that now. But tell that to Pee-wee too. We waited for him."

We had to be quiet after that. It would have been hard on Pee-wee but I didn't mind it so much. Except that the nearer we got the more I began to think of all kinds of crazy things happening to the kid and Wig.

Then we came opposite the place with the lights across the river. That meant we were almost there. So Mr. Sloothe said that Vic and I should sneak in and two of the troopers would be right in back of us and if the men were outside the shack we were to run right back to the river. But he didn't figure on that, he said, most likely they would stick inside. He said as long as they had Pee-wee and Wig they wouldn't expect anyone.

We were to hide behind a good big tree not within a hundred yards. If everything was all right I was to make a noise like a frog—I suggested that myself. I told Mr. Sloothe the only one who could do it better was Pee-wee and the reason for that was he did it every time he talked.

So Vic and I stood behind the same tree where we had been before when Pee-wee sneezed. The troopers were lying flat on the ground on either side of us. That was in case the counterfeiter used their flashlights. Mr. Sloothe said they wouldn't be so ready to use guns with Pee-wee and Wig there and besides they weren't like regular bandits.

Everything was quiet so I cautiously peeked out. The shack was lighted up like before. But there wasn't a sign nor a sound of anyone. Then I got a dandy idea. It was to squeak like a chipmunk—Pee-wee's patrol call. So I did it quite softly to make it sound natural. Vic patted me on the shoulder right afterward so I was sure that it sounded all right.

After awhile I did it again. Then I saw Pee-wee's shadow on the shade. He stood there like that for a few minutes, then he lifted it up and looked out.

Then the light went out in the shack and I saw a flashlight moving around inside like. It moved to the window where Pee-wee had been looking out and I saw then that it was Wig. He held it up to his face so I could see. Then he flashed it across the kid's face.

I kept watching and I saw that he was keeping the light steadily in front of himself. Then he flashed it quickly up to his right shoulder and back again with a longer flash and another short one. Again three long flashes, a little stop, a short one and two long ones. Then he brought it back in front again—in position.

Just like that I knew he had signalled my name, *Roy*. I knew then there would be something more. So I stood still and waited. Then he started again and the flashes spelled out

KID AND I ALL ALONE LOCKED IN THREE MEN
TOOK BUS TO BRIDGEBORO TO HIRE CAR, THEY'RE
COMING BACK IN FIFTEEN MINUTES NOW.
OTHER TWO MEN ARE WAITING OUT NEAR ROAD.

That was all. I told the troopers what Wig had flashed and they got up. By that time the detectives were all sneaking around and in a few minutes they surrounded the place. One of the troopers started to jimmy open the window.

Pee-wee was the first to slip out—you might know. After him came Wig and I said to Vic as he landed safely on the ground, I said, "We can't shout

but let's whisper three cheers for Wigwag Weigand, the silveriest fox of the Sterling Silver Fox Patrol, 1st Bridgeboro Troop, B.S.A. Here goes!"

And we did. That was the most quiet three cheers you ever didn't hear. The only thing that heard it was a leaf that fell out of the tree on my face.

Just the same we meant what we whispered.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO MORE CHIPMUNKS

After that Mr. Sloothe told us to go back home. He walked as far as the river bank with us, then he went back. We didn't go off the bank into the river—we just walked alongside of it. Anyhow Mr. Sloothe said they were going to surprise the men and they did. It was all over Bridgeboro next day and the papers were full of the story. We were mentioned too, especially Wig and Pee-wee. The only thing that wasn't mentioned was the bull.

We started off for the farm like I promised I would. I asked Pee-wee what bandits talked about. He said, "*G-e-e-whiz*, it's too bad they were criminals because they were awful nice to talk to. They helped me up off the ground that time the bull threw me...."

I said, "Think of the fun he had throwing you after the years you've been throwing him."

"Are you starting that already?" he shouted.

"You wouldn't talk so funny about it if it had been yourself. You'd have been scared just like I was. Gee-whiz, I went and threw myself flat just like I told Vic and you to do. I must have thrown myself flat right into his stall in the dark and flat on top of him. He was lying down and he jumped up before I knew where I was. The only thing I could do then was to hold on because he started right away to chase around the barn and make terrible noises with his nose like. Anyway I was so scared I hardly remember anything until the man picked me up."

Wig said, "That's twice you told about him picking you up."

"Can't you wait a minute?" the kid said. "He brushed me off, then. He even asked me if I was hurt. Then he went to Wig and helped untangle his foot and they said they'd have to keep us until morning after they escaped. They asked me if there were any more of us and I said no."

"You told a lie," I said. "A scout must be truthful."

"In that case it isn't a lie," he shouted. "You can ask Mr. Ellsworth if in that case it's a lie. If it is it's a white one and I told it to save Vic and you. Besides, I helped the law by telling it, didn't I?"

"I'll say you did," I told him. "Maybe when we get to the farmhouse you can call up Yetta and Susie. You can tell them you captured their counterfeiters."

"Do you think I care about them?" he yelled. "Let them read it in the paper tomorrow. That's better—besides, it'll sound more important."

“What did the men say to you and Wig?” Vic asked him.

“They took us to the shack,” the kid said. “Then we just sat down in the front room and the three men said they’d take a bus and go to Bridgeboro—on the outskirts and get a car from someone they knew there. They were going to drive it back and up into the woods here some place. They said they’d only be gone about three quarters of an hour.

“The other two men stayed with us for a half hour and they said they were going down the path to meet their pals in case any troopers were following them. The one man that helped me up that time—I guess he thought we were scared because he said not to be frightened—they’d be back in twenty minutes. And they were gone about five minutes when I heard the chipmunk squeak.”

Wig said, “They were nice to us, all right. They were even laughing at Pee-wee.”

I said, “I don’t blame them.”

“Gee whiz,” the kid said, “I wonder what time it is?”

“It must be later than that,” I said.

“No fooling,” he said, “everyone will wonder where we are.”

I said, “My mother knows that wherever I am, it’s your fault.”

“That’s right, blame it on me,” he shouted. “Do you say everything didn’t happen for the best?”

“I’m too weak to argue,” I answered. “All I can think of is the food we didn’t get yet.”

Wig said, “Don’t get downhearted, Roy. Breakfast will be ready when we get home.”

When we came to the farm we stopped in for a few minutes to introduce Pee-wee and Wig. Mr. Everett told us we did a fine service and he said from then on he was for the Boy Scouts of America.

One word from anybody about the scouts and Pee-wee talks as he pleases. He said to Mr. Everett, “Maybe you’ll let Todd and Jerry come in, huh? I’ll come up myself and get them next Friday night. I’ll introduce them to Mr. Ellsworth and I’ll teach them this week how to qualify.”

Mr. and Mrs. Everett laughed. I said, “Don’t blame me. It’s all because Todd told me he’d like to be a scout. That’s all you need to get Pee-wee started. Besides, his little Chipmunks are all moving away and if Todd and Jerry don’t join there’ll be nothing left of the Chipmunk Patrol but the Chip.”

“Meaning Pee-wee,” Vic said.

Mr. Everett said, “Well, you have a lot of good fun as well as a lot of good work. I guess it’s a very good organization.”

I said, “Believe me, Mr. Everett, there’s none any gooder. You can ask Pee-wee. He can tell you that’s how he got the idea of being so good at good turns.”

Pee-wee said, “That shows how much you know, because if a good turn doesn’t come out right when you do it, it’s sure to come out right some other way afterward—like it did today.”

Well, before we left, Pee-wee had it all fixed to come back to Riverdale Farm on Tuesday and teach Todd and Jerry what he knew about scouting.

I said, “That will take about three minutes to be exact.”

“You think you’re so smart,” Pee-wee yelled, “but maybe I *can* teach what I know about scouting in three minutes. That’s because I know what I should say and I don’t have to stop in between.”

“You’re wonderful,” I said.

Wig said, “That’s what Mr. Ellsworth calls efficiency. He doesn’t even waste a minute to breathe.”

I said, “He does his breathing before and after talking.”

After we got outside the door, Mrs. Everett called, “Just a minute! Which one of you boys will mail a letter for me on the way down?”

Pee-wee said, “I will,” before we had a chance to open our mouths. So he ran back, and came out again tucking the letter into his pocket.

I said, “You’d better keep that in your hand, Sir Harris. If there’s any more good turns turning your way tonight, you might forget it.”

“Did you *have* to say that!” he shouted.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALL IS LOST

Wig said, "It's almost eleven o'clock. We might as well ride home now. There won't be any stands open. We'll wait for a bus."

There wasn't a bus in sight. I said, "We'll hike to Riverdale limits while we're waiting for one."

Vic said, "Talking about eating—that's not all I'll get home."

Pee-wee said, "So will I, but I'm not kicking."

"I wouldn't either, if I were you," I said. "We're the ones to do it. Why, in one day you've lured us into jail—*almost*. We've been near death and now starvation is creeping upon us. For all I know, it may be here now!"

"Will you keep still about that!" he screamed. "You only remember what I *don't do*, don't you? You never remember what I *do* do, do you?"

"How can I forget," I said, "when you're always reminding me."

The limits of Riverdale were two blocks away after we reached the highway. We had to walk along in the road because there aren't any sidewalks there. That town hasn't many sidewalks anyway. They should worry—I guess they must think dirt is cheap.

The lights were out all along the highway where we were walking and when we got to the limits we could see they were out down further too, for about two blocks. There wasn't a soul around. Gee, it was gloomy. I said to Vic, "These limits are the limit, don't you think so?"

"Positively the limit," he said.

I said, "If these limits are the limit, do you think they'd have to be limited?"

Pee-wee said, "Even after the scare we've had tonight, it doesn't put any sense into your head. Gee whiz, I never heard so much nonsense as you think up. Can't you ask a fellow something sensible?"

"Sure," I said. "Maybe Vic can answer this: why are goldfish gold?"

"That shows how much you know," the kid butted in. "They're not gold at all—not really gold. They're more reddish. I know that much!"

"All right," I said, "what makes them reddish, then?"

"You can't fool me," he shouted. "I know. They're born that way, that's why."

"You take a demerit," I said. "They're red because they're sunburned from swimming in glass bowls."

"You make me sick!" he said.

I said, "Well, now that we are at the limits, we might as well sit down and wait for the bus. They run any time between now and tomorrow night. They're almost always late."

So we sat down on the grass alongside of the road with the ditch at our feet. The grass was wet from the fog but we should worry, we were tired. Pee-wee didn't care either, he said. He was so used to feeling damp that he'd feel out of place if he was dry. So we sat down.

After we sat down I noticed something standing across the road; in a little way from the road. It's really the beginning of the street that goes down to the Riverdale business section. I kept looking at it and wondering what it was. Finally I made out the shape of it in the dark. It was a mailbox.

I said to the kid, "Gee, it's a good thing I happened to see that. Go and mail Mrs. Everett's letter."

So Pee-wee went over to the box to mail it. Then we heard something rumbling way up the road. Vic got up and looked. He said, "I think it's the bus."

I called to Pee-wee, "Hurry up! Have you got the forty cents all right?"

He stopped and put his hand in his pocket and then he said, "Sure. I've got it safe in my hand with the letter."

So we could just about see him raise the thing where you put the letters in and all of a sudden he yelled, "*G-e-e whiz! That's fine!*"

"What's the matter *now*?" I called.

He said, "I'm not sure, but I think I dropped the forty cents—in the mailbox with the letter."

"*G-o-o-o-d night Magnolia!*" I said.

Wig said, "Are you sure?"

We all hurried over to him. He said, "Sure, I'm sure. It went somewhere. It just dropped out of my hand when I put the letter in."

I said, "How was it you didn't drop in too?"

Vic said, "Maybe it rolled on the ground. Did you hear it?"

The kid didn't say anything. He just stood still and stared on the ground. So we all got down on our hands and knees and hunted around. We didn't find a cent. Then we got up.

I said, "Could you hear it go inside of the letterbox?"

He said, "I think so. Anyway, something rattled inside."

"It might have been your head," I said.

Well the bus came down the road. It was all lighted up nice and there was only one passenger inside. As it got near the bus driver looked over at us and stopped. I said, "Where to?" He said, "Bridgeboro." I said, "Go ahead!"

He laughed and went on. We stood there watching the bus as it turned around the curve in the road. Then we couldn't see it any more. Gee, it was lonely!

Way down the business street of Riverdale was a little light, but where we were it was pitch dark. To the left, ahead of us, the land was narrow and it sort of rolled down gradually until it met the river. To the right, was a high grassy bank—almost like a hill. There weren't any houses around there, either.

A few minutes afterward the kid piped up. He said, "What are we going to do, now?"

I said, "That's your fault!"

CHAPTER XXV

MYSTERY

He said, “You got me to mail the letter, didn’t you? Why didn’t you help me? I wouldn’t have dropped the money then!”

I said, “Maybe you’re right. We should have carried it together and mailed it together. That would have made it a special delivery letter.”

“Shut up!” he screamed. “You make me do everything and when something goes wrong, you blame it on me.”

Wig said, “I noticed that you almost fell over yourself to get that letter from Mrs. Everett.”

“Sure, I did,” he yelled. “Why did I, huh? Because I’m a good scout and I’m chivalrous.”

I said, “You’re more to be pitied than scolded.”

“It’s getting late,” he finally said, “what will we do?”

“Is that a riddle?” I said.

Vic said, “I’ve got an idea. Don’t they collect the mail in Bridgeboro at eleven fifteen?”

Wig said, “Sure, they do.”

“Well,” Vic said, “they must collect here about eleven then. We haven’t seen anyone go down yet.”

We looked to see if the collection hours were printed on the box card. They weren’t, though. Someone had torn it away. The kid looked up and down the road, then he flopped down. He said, “We’ll sit down here and wait. When the mailman comes along I’ll just tell him how I dropped the forty cents in the box and he’ll give it to me.”

“The rest is easy,” I said. And we all sat down.

“Anyway, maybe we won’t have long to wait,” the kid said.

Wig said, “Don’t worry, we won’t wait long.”

Pee-wee said, “We can wait a little longer—we can take the chance that he hasn’t been here.”

Wig said. “You mean *you* will take the chance. Not we.”

“What do you mean?” the kid shouted.

I said, “He means if the mailman doesn’t come before if not sooner, why, we’ll go hiking it back to Bridgeboro, merrily, merrily. You can wait here all night—you can take the chance.”

“That’s being a quitter,” he said.

“Not after eleven o’clock P. X.,” Vic said. “In fact we should have quit six hours ago.”

“Do you say that isn’t being a quitter?” he screamed.

“You invited us to go to Little Valley, didn’t you?” I said. “That makes us your company. So is that the way to talk to your company? And company should be allowed to go home when they feel like it. Your manners are very bad.”

He was so mad he couldn’t speak. He just sat there staring up at the mailbox. Vic and Wig stretched out on the grass and made out they were snoring. I flopped down too, but I kept watching the kid out of the corner of my eye.

First thing you know I felt a drop of rain fall on my face. Then another and pretty soon they came so fast I couldn’t count them. Wig and Vic and I all jumped up together.

Pee-wee looked at us, kind of sad like. He said, “It’s raining, isn’t it?”

I said, “No. That’s my tears. I’m crying because you won’t let me go home.”

“Don’t be such a fool,” he said. Then he got up too.

I said, “Suppose we sing a little song?”

Wig said, “Sure. What’ll we sing?”

I said, “Listen first, then all together....”

“The road is long and very wide,
For forty cents we all could ride.”

So we sang it while Pee-wee looked on. We were getting nice and wet. But we kept it up. Finally he got so mad he said, “You’re singing but you’re not doing anything to get out of the rain.”

I said, “We’re waiting for you to find a place for us?”

Then a truck came rattling down the road. It wasn’t very big—just noisy. Like Pee-wee. It went right past us and the headlights were very bright. I saw a sign on the windshield that said,

NO RIDERS

I said, “That means us too. It’s a good thing we weren’t asking them for a ride.”

So it went past but I noticed that two men were sitting up front and one sitting in the back. It was a half-covered truck. None of them saw us standing there. It was too dark—besides they weren’t looking our way.

About a half a block away it stopped. So we stepped out in the road and watched. The man that was sitting in the back got out and the two that had

been in the front walked around and stood watching while the one man began pulling something out of the back of the truck. Then they started laughing.

We couldn't see them very well because the only light we could see them by was the tail light of the truck. But we could see well enough to know that what the man pulled out was as big as himself, if not bigger. All the time they kept laughing.

Pee-wee said, "I wonder what's so funny?"

"I'd tell you to go and find out," I said, "but you'll only say I'm blaming it on you, afterward."

Vic said, "Yes. We've had enough of bandits and everything that goes with it."

So the man took it and sort of swung around and pitched it down the little hilly place that meets the river. They all laughed more than ever at that and one man slapped the other one on the back. Then the whole three of them walked around the truck and got in front. Then they started off toward Bridgeboro.

Pee-wee said, "There's some mystery about that. What did they throw?"

"Are you going to ask me to climb down and find out?" I wanted to know.

"Do you know what I think," the kid said, in a kind of whisper. "I think they're murderers, that's what I think. And what they threw over was a dead body. It was big—just the size of a human being. Maybe a lady even, that they robbed first and then killed. I bet anything it was."

"Gee," I said, "you'd think you'd been reading Deadshot Desmond. What next?"

"I haven't been reading anything," he said, "but that's the way murderers do. It *does* happen just like we saw them do it."

It kept on raining—it wouldn't stop for even us. Maybe that's why I began to feel chilly. Anyway no one said a word because we were all thinking about what Pee-wee had just said. I know I got feeling chilly right after I started thinking about it.

Suppose he *was* right? Believe me, I was wondering.

CHAPTER XXVI

SH-SH!

“Suppose we go down there?” Pee-wee finally said.

Vic said, “Wasn’t it because you were snoopy that we got into trouble before?”

“This is different,” the kid said. “We saw the murderers drive away with our own eyes, didn’t we?”

“I know they didn’t drive away with mine,” I said. “I can see as good as ever. Besides, we don’t know that they’re murderers.”

“We saw them drive away,” he said again, “and they stopped especially in that spot because it was dark. If we find the body we’ll have to notify the Bridgeboro police again.”

I said, “Hey, have a heart! Mr. Sloothe will be getting sick and tired of seeing us. He was even sick of us an hour ago—what would he be again?”

Vic said, “Talking about getting sick and tired of anything, I’m sick and tired of getting so wet.”

Jiminy crinkums, we were wet. But we walked down the road and stopped where the truck had stopped. I told Pee-wee we only did it to please him. I was a little nervous though. It did look mysterious in a way—especially that they would stop where it was so dark when they would have had only one more block to go where the lights were on.

What would they throw like that, anyway? We stood and looked down the hill. It was black as pitch and we couldn’t see anything there at all. Pee-wee was alongside of me. He got up on his tip-toes and whispered in my ear. He said, “Remember how they laughed and how they slapped the one man on the back?”

“What about it?” I asked him.

He said, “They did that to praise him because he robbed and killed the lady. The reason they laughed was because it was a joke to them. They don’t think anything of murder at all—you could see that. So that shows they were cold-blooded murderers, doesn’t it? We ought to find out.”

I said, “Keep still! You make me nervous!”

Wig said, “If we don’t go down that kid will be miserable.”

Vic said, “When we come up we’ll look like mudpies.”

“Pee-wee should worry,” I said, “he looks like a small-sized one now.”

So we went down carefully keeping near one another all the time. All we picked up was mud. Three times my right foot sunk into the ground—right

up over my ankle.

I said, "We'd better be careful that we don't walk into the river—backwards."

Pee-wee said, "*Sh—sh!*"

"Shush yourself," I said. Gee, he makes me nervous at a time like that. He does nothing but shush. He thinks it makes it more mysterious I guess.

Anyway we looked all over that hill. We even looked twice in some places. Near the bottom I picked up a broken oar that someone had pitched up from the river. I held it up to Pee-wee. I said, "Do you think this is it, *oar* don't you?"

He said in a very low voice, "Haven't you any respect for the dead?"

I said, "No. Not as long as you can talk."

So then we came right to the river's edge. There wasn't anything on the hill—that was sure. I was too wet to feel comfortable but the rain was warm and it was falling very quietly. I could hear the water splashing very lightly against the bank. Outside of that we didn't hear a sound.

We stared out over the river. It didn't seem quite so dark out there as it was up on the road. Of course we couldn't see far out—just a little way, say about fifty yards. I happened to look in one place where an old tree grew out of the water. Just there the river turned and the land stretched out to meet it. So as I said before, I kept looking at that tree.

Do you know how that is to keep looking at something for a long time? Then after you've been looking for awhile you realize there's something peculiar about it? Well, that's what I did—I realized all of a sudden that there was something peculiar about it. Not with the tree, but something underneath the tree, bobbing about in the water. It was a grayish color, sort of, and it looked just like a woman floating out there.

I was so frightened I could hardly say, "*Look!*" I pointed out to the place. They all looked and no one spoke. Then, just like that, Pee-wee had his shoes off and was in the water.

He went like anything and he was out by that tree before I could take a good breath. I kept holding off so long I had to, finally.

Then Pee-wee started to laugh. He laughed and he laughed. I wanted to laugh too, but I wanted to know what I was laughing about first. I said, "What's up?"

He said, "*April fool!*"

Vic said, "How do you mean—April fool?"

"Gee whiz," the kid shouted, "it's a joke. I'm bringing it in."

Wig said, "What is it? I'm all ears."

"It's one of those police traffic booths, that's what it is," the kid told us. "It must have been sort of spite work that those men stole it and threw it

here. That's why they were laughing, I bet."

Vic said, "I hope you're right this time, anyway. You've guessed enough, goodness knows."

He climbed up on the bank dripping and trying to drag the booth too. So we helped him and got it up all right. It was as light as a feather, and was just the light framework of a brand new one. Just one of the window casings had been cut through but there wasn't any glass in it. It hadn't even been shingled.

I said, "Sir Harris, you've done a noble deed just now. You've rescued the beginning of the law from the briny deep. Now that you've rescued it what are we going to do with it?"

So we pulled the booth up the hill anyhow. When we got it on the roadway it was easy enough to shove it along. While we were doing that I got a peach of an idea.

I'll tell you about it in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXVII

GOOD-BYE MAILMAN

I said, "What do you say we use this thing ourselves?"

"How?" Vic asked.

"We'll take it up to the mailbox," I told him, "and wait inside of it until the mailman comes. It'll dry us a little. And look at poor Pee-wee! He weighs about five hundred pounds now with the water he's carrying around in his clothes."

Wig said, "That's a dandy idea. Very good indeed!"

I said, "Sure. All my ideas are good if not better. While we're in there we won't get any wetter—that's a cinch."

Pee-wee was shivering and his teeth were chattering. He said, "Zh-zh-oor, Z'z goo-oo-d i-i-dee-a."

I said, "If the mailman doesn't show up we'll stay there until someone gives us a ride. We can't walk in this rain."

We started up the road to the mailbox again and as we came around the curve I saw a small truck standing right by it. Then a man walked over from the mailbox and jumped into the truck and started toward us. I said, "Quick, Pee-wee! It's the mailman in the mail truck!"

So we stood out in the road and began shouting to him before he got up to us. He was going fast and he poked his head out and waved his hand for us to get out of the way. He shouted, "No rides, kids! I'm late now!"

Then he stopped on the gas and went past us like lightning. Vic and Wig and I all fell over on each other. I said, "*We should go down*; oh yes we should! We should have stayed where we were instead of listening to Mysterious Harris, here. We should have kept watch instead of hunting for a murdered person that turned out to be a stolen police traffic booth."

"You didn't *have* to go down!" the kid shouted. "You didnnn—ddn ... Oh, shut up!"

Vic said, "I wonder if our forty cents is in the mailman's pocket?"

"Only the mailbox knows that," I said.

Wig said, "Now we'll have to wait inside this booth. My temperature is slowly dropping to zero—I'm getting so wet."

So we pushed it over on the other side of the road and into the ditch. We fitted like a lot of sardines when we all got inside of it. But we were out of the rain. In five minutes we were getting dry.

Pee-wee said, “I wonder where this came from? Do you think we ought to put it back?”

“One question after another, please,” I said. “In answer to the first, why should *you* wonder where it came from? The man that took it should wonder about that. You’ve got enough to wonder about, already. And to your second question, did you mean we ought to put it back in the river?”

Vic said, “Maybe it comes from Little Valley. We’ll carry it back there.”

“Not so’s you’ll notice it,” I said.

Wig said, “I couldn’t carry myself back.”

“You all make me sick!” the kid yelled in my ear.

“Do you take me for a speaking tube?” I asked him.

He said, “Gee whiz, you’d think I was riding all day the way you fellers talk. I’m as tired as anybody—even tireder.”

“That must mean worse than tired, huh?” I said.

“What’s worse?” he shouted.

“Remember,” I said, “we’re all under one roof. I could hear you just as well if you didn’t speak at all.”

I put my head way out of the window. There wasn’t even one car coming along. I said, “While we’re waiting for a ride, we might as well not sit down. We could if there wasn’t any more room.”

“Do you know what you were just talking about?” the kid shouted.

I said, “No, do you?”

“I told you, you didn’t have any sense,” he screamed.

I looked down at my feet and I said, “My goodness, this booth hasn’t any floor in it, has it?”

Wig and Vic shuffled their feet all over and very seriously said, “No.”

I said, “All right. That’s settled. But if it had a floor, what would we be standing on, then?”

“You’re getting crazier all the time,” the kid screamed. “I know why you said that—you said it to make me mad again. I’m not such a fool though, that I don’t know we’d be standing on wood if it had a floor in it.”

“Wrong,” I said, “the very first time. We wouldn’t be standing on wood at all.”

“What else could we stand on, then?” he shouted, as mad as could be.

“We’d be standing on our feet,” I said. “Deny it if you dare.”

“I won’t listen to you any more,” he growled. “Not till you’ve got some sense.”

“That may be years,” I said.

He said, “I don’t care.”

“Let’s talk about mystery,” Vic said. “That’s Pee-wee’s favorite dish.”

Pee-wee said, "I'm through with mystery and bandits and everything—even counterfeiters."

"That's sad," I said. "What'll I do when you don't say shush any more? The old place won't seem like home."

"I'm not listening to you," he said.

I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't think you were."

We all stopped talking then and we heard the funniest noise. It was a creak, creak sort of sound. When we first heard it, it was far off, like. Then it came nearer and in between the creak, creak it sounded like someone whistling very low and steady, *wh-eee-eee-eee*. Just like that it was, all the way.

I said, "Maybe it's a rocking chair with a mocking bird in it, rocking to Bridgeboro."

"*Sh-sh-sh!*" Pee-wee said. He was trying to listen and he leaned out of the window to see what he could see.

We all began to laugh. I said, "Hip, hip and a couple of hurrahs! Pee-wee wasn't mysterious for five minutes. Now he's shushing again."

"Shut up, will you?" he yelled. "How do you expect me to hear!"

"Members of the Silver-plated Foxes," I said, "we'll have a large chunk of silence! Our honored gust, I mean guest, of the Chipskunk patrol wants silence!"

Vic said, "Do you want it right away?"

Wig said, "Maybe he'd rather have it sent."

"*Listen!*" the kid shouted.

Vic and Wig and I put our hands to our ears. Then we all tried to look out of the window at once and our heads were squeezed as tight as anything. Pee-wee's head was underneath on the very bottom and mine was on top.

I said, "We better be careful and not try to pull our heads in all at once or Pee-wee'll have to go home without his."

Gee, he looked funny underneath there. His jaw was pushed down tight against the little window sill. That's the reason he couldn't talk. Otherwise you'd have heard him. None of us could see anything that way so I moved.

When we got our heads back inside, I looked out again to see what the creak, creak was. There was a little light moving our way. I couldn't tell what it was because the curve in the road sort of hid it.

"Can't you see what it is, yet?" the kid wanted to know.

"I'm not sure," I said, "but I think it's a nineteen seventeen Ford and a lightning bug's driving it."

"You're a bug," he said, "you're simply crazy!"

"Listen," I said. "It'll soon be here!"

It kept going creak, creak and whistling *wh-eee-eee-ee*. Jiminy, it was funny. We couldn't figure out what it was at all. It wasn't spooky; it was funny.

I looked out and then the rest did too. So that time my head was on the bottom of the pile and the kid's on top. And around the curve came the little light, flickering.

Pee-wee yelled, "It's a peanut stand!"

I tried to say, "The world is shaved," but I couldn't. My jaw just banged on the window sill and no sound came from me at all. That was because Pee-wee was talking on top.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PEANUTS

A little Italian man was pushing it along. He had a pipe in his mouth and he was walking as slow and as nice as if the sun was shining.

I said, "Shall I ask him to give us a ride?"

"Where would we ride?" the kid asked.

"On top of the peanuts," I told him.

"Gee whiz," he said, "I wish we could have some."

"Maybe if we talk to him," Wig said, "he'll wait till the next mail's collected. There might be a chance that the mailman didn't get the whole forty."

Pee-wee said, "Don't talk crazy. Do you think he'd wait?"

"You can never tell," I said, "what a peanut man will do."

Vic said, "Let's stay in the booth and go up to meet him."

I said, "That's a dandy idea."

Pee-wee said, "How can we do that?"

I said, "We'll just walk along with it. Shove it like. It'll take time, but what do we care for time. We've had lots of it, already."

Wig said, "We'll have to shove together. Like marking time."

"It's going to be nonsense," Pee-wee said. "I can see that."

"No, you'll hear it," I corrected him.

Anyway we got started. We got it out on the road and when I counted three we all shoved together. Vic and I pushed forward with our hands on the narrow window sill. We sort of carried it along with us.

I bet we were going slower than a snail. But we were having fun. Even Pee-wee got laughing every time we jumped up to shove the old thing further along.

The peanut man didn't notice the booth at first. He was busy looking at his peanuts. But finally he did see us. He stopped his stand and shoved his cap back on his head. I don't think he thought we were really moving at first.

Then as we came nearer to him, I knew he couldn't see our faces very well inside the booth on account of the road being dark. All he could see was that the booth was moving. Believe me, he was puzzled all right.

Vic whispered, "Don't talk loud. He thinks this booth is a spirit or something."

I said, "It is. The spirit of the law."

“*Sh-sh!*” Pee-wee added.

Wig said, “Can’t we make it do stunts like—something funny?”

Vic said, “Sure. Roy and I can lift it up by the window sill and then you two make it bounce up in the back.”

“Like a dancing bear,” Pee-wee giggled.

“A dancing booth,” I said.

So we did. We shoved and jumped and did everything with it that we could think of. And the poor peanut man knocked out his pipe against the roaster and put it in his pocket.

Then we got quite near to him. We were still making it dance like, but we didn’t say a word. If you could have seen his face it would make you laugh. Gee, we were all doubled up inside of that thing.

So then he finally moved away from his stand—backing away from us. All of a sudden he yelled something in Italian and he ran like anything down the road.



ALL OF A SUDDEN HE RAN LIKE EVERYTHING DOWN THE ROAD.

We got out as quickly as we could. Pee-wee yelled after him to come back, that we were only kidding him. I yelled too, but he never once turned around. He just kept right on going.

Pee-wee ran down the road a way to see if he could get him. But he came back all out of breath and said he had disappeared.

Then the rain stopped and up behind a big cloud the moon was peeking out. Soon it came out full and everything got brighter around us. I said, “Well, we might as well go home now.”

Wig said, “What about the peanut stand?”

We looked at it. There it was in the middle of that lonely road, whistling and roasting away. Oh boy, didn’t those peanuts smell good? They were sure, yum, yum! All piled in little bags so neatly—one after the other.

All we could do was look.

CHAPTER XXIX

WE MAKE A VOW

I said, “We can’t leave this standing here in the road. Somebody will steal it. Then the poor Italian *will* be out his stand.”

Vic said, “We’ll have to take it to Bridgeboro with us and turn it in to the police station. That’s if we don’t see him again.”

I said, “We must have scared him, all right.”

“Gee,” Vic said, “I didn’t think we’d look that spooky.”

Wig said, “Who’s going to wheel it?”

I said, “I will. I’ve got to watch the peanuts on account of Pee-wee. You can’t tell but what he might be tempted in his starving condition. So it’s my duty to see him remain a true scout.”

“Do you accuse me of being a weak thief?” Pee-wee wanted to know. “Do you say I would take that poor man’s peanuts even if I am hungry? Do you think I can’t look out for myself and know I’d be stealing if I took them?”

I said, “You may not take a whole lot—but you may be tempted to taste one. And to take one is as bad as taking the whole stand full. I’ll leave it to Vic.”

Vic said, “Righto! We’ll make a solemn vow not to touch one peanut, even if it falls to the ground. We’ll just pick it up and put it back again.”

“I don’t have to make any vow,” Pee-wee shouted. “I’m a true boy scout and that means I can be trusted without making silly vows like yours. Do you say I can’t?”

“I’d say any of us could,” I said, “if starvation wasn’t staring us in the face or behind our backs or whichever way it stares. Anyway, I heard a doctor say one time that starvation makes thieves of honest men.”

“We’re not men, we’re scouts,” Pee-wee growled at us.

I said, “Very well then, starvation makes thieves of scouts and men—we all get hungry—what’s the difference? So to go back to the end where I started from we must take a solemn vow not to eat one peanut because it wouldn’t be honest. We’ll make a solemn vow that starvation won’t make thieves of us even if we are starving.”

Vic said, “Let’s hold up our right hands and make the vow. Repeat after me. We solemnly vow....”

“Are you going to hold up your hand or not?” I said to the kid.

“What happens if I don’t?” he asked.

I said, "Then you must stay here until the temptation is out of sight (meaning the peanut stand). Then you can walk on alone."

"You make me sick," he screamed. "You try to make a fool of me all the time!" Then he raised his hand.

"That we will not touch one peanut," Vic went on very solemnly, "and we solemnly vow to deliver this into the proper hands intact."

"I'll vow all that you say," I said to Vic, "but I refuse to have anything to do with tacks in my hands. They always stick my fingers."

Pee-wee said, "I never knew anyone as dumb as you are. You don't know anything but nonsense. You can't even understand good English."

"You don't do me an injustice," I said, "I can pronounce words differently than anyone else. It's a gift. I said thank you when I wasn't an hour old, but nobody could understand me, so that wasn't my fault."

So I pushed the stand along and made Pee-wee march ahead, right in front of it. I told him he had it the best of any of us, because he could smell the peanuts roasting there better than anywhere else. That was because the wind was blowing from the west and it blew that nice, delicious peanut smell all around him.

Vic was marching on the left and Wig to the right of the stand. The little kerosene light flickered up and down and back and forth in the breeze. The wheels went creaking along and the roaster was whistling.

I said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we owned this stand? It must be nice in summer to just push it along like this nice and easy and go to the circus and all the fairs."

The kid yelled back, "Maybe if the Italian doesn't call for it, maybe the police will give it back to us. We could make a lot of money, even in Bridgeboro."

Wig said, "Sure. Just like you were going to do with Jock. We made a lot of money, all right. We made so much that you had to throw it away."

"Always you're reminding me of things," Pee-wee shot back. "I suppose you never make mistakes."

Wig said, "Sure I do. Not all in one day, though. I divide them up so I won't get tired of myself."

"What difference does that make?" the kid shouted. "They're mistakes just the same and anyhow if you make them all in one day like I did today it's better. They're over with that day and you don't have to think of making any more."

I said, "Did I understand you to say, 'like I did today'?"

"Sure. What about it?" he wanted to know.

I said, "Only that I must remind you that *I did* is past tense. Today isn't over until we say goodnight. So you can't finish saying I did, till you're in

bed. The only time you're not making mistakes is when you're asleep. Even then I bet you get your dreams mixed up."

"Gee whiz," he said, and turned around looking at me over the peanut stand. "You certainly are smart. Maybe you'll make a mistake yourself before we get home."

I said, "Better things than that have happened to me. I should worry as long as I don't mistake an empty foundation for a haunted shack."

"It could have been you," he shot back, "just as well as me. If you had gone in first you would have fallen in, you can't say you wouldn't!"

Wig said, "Do you think Roy would be so stupid? He knows enough to feel his way in a dark, deserted shack. He would have felt that space before he stepped there."

Pee-wee said, "That's right. Stick up for him just because he's your patrol leader. But that doesn't make him any smarter. How could he feel a space?"

I said, "That's easy. When you put your hand out or your head and don't feel anything touching it, then that's space. But the trouble with you is, that when you do that you can't feel anything. That's where the law of gravitation comes in. Space plus space are space."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" he said.

We were pretty tired, you can bet, but the night turned out to be so nice we didn't mind it. We kept on going along and soon we would be in North Bridgeboro. It was so bright we could see the river winding away from us.

As you come down the hill to North Bridgeboro there's houses on the left side of the road too. You can see the whole of Bridgeboro from there and the lights look nice late at night. All the houses we passed were dark.

When you get to the bottom of the hill there aren't any houses for quite a way—except little shacks here and there. That's because it's low and swampy and in the spring it's quite wet sometimes. That's the reason hardly anyone lives there.

So anyhow we got to the bottom of the hill and we were talking about how we should have 'phoned home from Everett's farm and didn't.

While we were talking I saw a man come out of one of the shacks in the middle of the swamps. I was still pushing the peanut stand and it was making as much noise as ever.

The man stood a few minutes watching us. Then he came running toward us. He was waving his hands and yelling something. But he was too far away from us then, to hear what he was saying.

So we all stood and waited for him to come.

CHAPTER XXX

PEE-WEE'S FATAL PROMISE

As he got near us we could hear him better. He was saying, “*My bee-nuts, my bee-nuts! Give-a me my bee-nutz!*”

I said, “G-o-od night, the cat’s come back!”

Vic said, “We have with us this evening, the peanut man.”

Well, he came up to us and he was wringing his hands as if he were crying. He looked at each of us for a long while. Then he looked at me. I suppose it was because I was pushing his stand.

He said, “You try-a to steal-a my stand, huh?”

I said, “Mister Peanut Man, you’re absitively mistaken. I was taking it to the Bridgeboro police.”

He said, “What for you take-a to da cops, huh?”

I said, “We didn’t know where you lived, did we? We had to take it off the road or somebody *would* steal it. You shouldn’t have run away.”

Pee-wee said, “Hey, mister, you shouldn’t have been scared at us. We were only fooling and besides we wouldn’t steal because we’re boy scouts. And scouts don’t steal.”

First he looked at Pee-wee and then he looked at me. I said, “Sure, that’s right. We’re boy scouts. So’s the little shrimp and the reason he doesn’t look like one now is because he lost his scout hat a few hours ago. That’s because he was snoopy.”

“Ah-a,” the peanut man said, “the leetle-a shreemp! You no want-a steal my bee-nutz, yes?”

Pee-wee said, “We don’t want to steal your peanuts—we don’t like them much anyway—not now. We don’t steal anything!”

“Ah-a,” he said, “I see. You no like-a bee-nutz, huh?”

I said, “We don’t steal, that’s what we’re trying to tell you. Only the shrimp gets things mixed up when he talks.”

“Will you stop calling me a shrimp?” Pee-wee threw at me.

I said, “When you talk to foreigners you have to talk plain. He couldn’t understand if I called you Pee-wee, could he?”

“You have to have an excuse,” he said.

So as to make the peanut man understand, I showed him how we take the scout oath and all that. I told him that meant we wouldn’t steal either. So finally it dawned on him that we weren’t going to steal his peanuts. And the only thing I couldn’t make him understand was that we *did* like peanuts. He

kept repeating what the kid said that we didn't like them much anyhow and he thought that meant we didn't.

Then I explained to him how we were in that police booth trying to keep out of the rain. After awhile I made him understand that. Finally Pee-wee said to me, "We'll show him what good scouts we are. We'll push his stand over to his house for him. Then we'll go inside for five minutes—that'll mean we are friendly to him. That will be a good turn and it will show him once and for all that we didn't mean any harm by scaring him."

I said, "All right, have it your own way."

Pee-wee said, "Maybe he'll give us a reward after I push it over for him. Maybe he'll give us a couple of bags. You can't tell."

So Pee-wee started to show him that he'd push the stand over to his house. He seemed to like that and he smiled and called the kid, "One fine-a da shreemp!"

We tramped across the swampy place and all the way the kid kept chattering to the Italian as if he was making him understand every word. The man kept shaking his head and whacking Pee-wee on the back as if it was all a big joke.

I heard Pee-wee say, "Sure, boy scouts are supposed to help and do all they can. We're even supposed to help *you*. If we go in your house that means we like you and that we didn't mean you any harm."

"Dats-a fine-a shreemp!" he yelled, clapping the kid on the back so hard that he jumped in the air. "Den you help-a me, huh?"

"Sure we will," Pee-wee said.

Vic said, "I hope that isn't a rash promise."

"You keep-a da promise, huh?" the man asked.

"I'll say we do," the kid answered.

We were up to his door by that time and a baby was crying inside. Gee, what a cry. It sounded like the echo from the lion house in the zoo. The peanut man laughed. He said, "Listen to dat. Dat-a my keed. He terrible keed—cry like anyteeng. My wife-a she's out. You help-a me and keep-a de promise, huh? You mind-a my keed a leetle, yes?"

I said, "*Goodnight!* Pee-wee's made another mistake!"

Gee, wasn't that kid in a pickle. We were all laughing and he didn't know what to say. Finally he said, "Hey, mister, you know it's late. We have to go home."

"Sure teeng," the man said, "only leetle while you mind-a my keed. When I put-a my stand away, den I come back."

"Where do you put your stand?" Pee-wee wanted to know.

"Right-a over dere," the man told him. He pointed to a barn that was over on the right hand side of the road—the way we had just come.

“Gee whiz,” Pee-wee said, “why didn’t you tell me you kept it there? I wouldn’t have pushed it over here. I thought you kept it by your house. You shouldn’t have let me push it here when it was right there near where we were standing.”

“Ah-a,” the Italian said, “I tink you like-a to push—you want-a to push for joke, huh?”

“Oh, sure,” Pee-wee growled. “It’s a big joke all right. You’re the only one knows it though.”

Vic and Wig and I could hardly keep still. And Pee-wee knew it—that’s what made him so mad. The man said, “Come! I show you da keed. And you watch-a da spaghett, maybe yes? Eeet cooks for da sup’.”

“What next?” Wig whispered.

So he made us all go in. It was only a little place—three rooms. He took us back to the kitchen and there was the baby in the highchair banging on it with a big spoon and crying like anything. On the stove was a big pot full of spaghetti. It was cooking and didn’t that smell good!

He told us to sit down and then he took the baby and handed it to Pee-wee. All I say is you should have seen that! The baby cried more and the kid’s face looked like a dreary day.

In the first place he didn’t know how to hold the baby. Its head was where its feet should have been. So the peanut man showed him how and the kid held it so stiffly you’d think it had frozen in his arms that way.

Then the man stirred the spaghetti around in the pot and he told the kid to do it like that until he came back. Then he went out of the house and as soon as we heard the stand go creaking over the swamps we all burst out laughing. All except Pee-wee.

He just stood there and looked at us—oh, an awful look. And the crying baby was hanging on his arm and hitting the poor kid’s head as if it were a drum.

Jiminy, we just couldn’t stop laughing, he looked so serious and so funny. Finally he couldn’t stand it any longer. He walked over and put the baby back in the highchair.

I said, “Hip, hip and a couple of hurrahs for our little Nursemaid Harris!”

“That’s all right,” he shouted, “but you were a baby once, weren’t you?”

CHAPTER XXXI

ROCK-A-BYE-BABY

That baby certainly could yell. I said, “Hey kid, you better walk up and down with it!”

“Why don’t you rock it?” Wig asked.

“Why don’t you do something?” Pee-wee wanted to know. “Why don’t you do something besides telling me what to do? You came here as well as I did.”

I said, “Yes, but we didn’t promise anything. That’s sure.”

“G-e-e-whiz,” he said. “Did I know it was going to be like this, did I? Didn’t I just say that for it to be like a good turn? How did I know?”

I said, “That’ll teach you to always think before you promise. A promise can mean anything.”

Vic said, “Stir up the spaghetti, kid. It’ll burn.” We all straightened our faces when he looked at us. He just glared. Then he said, “It’s no wonder you can’t stir it yourselves. I’ve got enough to do minding that cranky baby.”

I said, “I know. We feel sorry for you but a good scout is as good as his word. And you promised to mind the baby and stir the spaghetti.”

“I didn’t promise to mind the spaghetti—I mean the baby!” he yelled. “I just made a promise to help him, that’s all.”

I said, “You made a promise just the same. A good scout....”

“Shut up, will you?” he screamed. He walked over to the stove and stirred the spaghetti, but he was mad.

While he was still stirring it the baby let out a terrible yell. I said, “Does baby like spaghetti?”

“You sound like a fool!” he yelled from the stove.

Vic said, “Maybe it wants some.”

Wig said, “Give it some.”

Pee-wee lifted a long string of it out of the pot and put it over on the baby’s tray. The baby stopped crying and clapped its hands.

“See!” I said. “I could mind it better than you.”

“Why don’t you then?” he snapped.

I said, “Because it’s *your* promise.”

He said, “Gee whiz, you’re rubbing it in.”

Wig said, “We only like to see a good scout....”

“You all make me sick,” he said.

Then the baby cried some more. The kid looked at me and said, “Now what shall I do?”

I said, “Take it out and sit in the rocking chair and sing it a lullaby.”

“Sing one yourself,” he said.

So I sang rock-a-bye-baby and for a few minutes it stopped. It even laughed at me, but I didn’t get mad. Then Vic and Wig and I all sang it over and over again.

I guess it got tired of our singing. Anyway, it cried worse than before, so Pee-wee went over to it and started rattling its chair. He said to me, “See if that man’s coming back yet? Gee, this is awful!”

Vic said, “A scout must be cheerful.”

“Sure,” he said, “it’s easy for you to sit there and say that.”

Wig said, “Say, the baby liked that one string of spaghetti you gave it before.”

“That’s right,” the kid said. “Maybe it will keep still for good with a whole plateful, huh?”

I said, “Whatever you think best for baby is all right for me.”

So then he went over to the closet and hunted around. Then he came out with a dish and he went to the stove and started to fill it up. The baby stopped a little and watched him.

Wig said, “See! That’s what the kid wants. It’s hungry.”

Pee-wee said, “Who’s doing this?”

I said, “Go on, kid. You’re doing fine. I’ll tell Mr. Ellsworth you ought to get a Girl Scout’s merit badge for Home Nursing.”

The kid said, “Is that so? You won’t tell anyone about this at all—you shouldn’t, do you hear? Because this promise was a mistake—I didn’t know how it was going to turn out.”

I said, “You’re a fine scout, you are! Are you ashamed of it that you’re minding a poor Italian’s baby? That’s one of the best good turns you’ve done today. I’m ashamed on you, P. Harris. I only wish my sister could see you now.”

“That’s it,” he said. “You’re always making fun of me for it. Don’t I know how your sister would laugh if she could see me? That’s what makes me mad.”

He had filled the dish while he was talking to me and then he started walking across the floor with it balanced in his hand. A piece of the spaghetti slipped out and before any of us could help him, he had stepped on it and slid.

Well, he slid about three feet and kerflop, he went down on the floor! When we got a look at him there was spaghetti hanging all over him. He was covered with it.

That baby started to laugh and it didn't cry again while we were there. We were all doubled up, but Pee-wee wasn't in on it at all.

He picked himself up and got rid of the spaghetti. Finally he said, "Now, *that's all!* I'm not going to be a fool any more. One of you can be if you want to."

I was looking out of the window then and I saw the peanut man coming back. So I said, "Don't get discouraged, kid, your time's up anyway. Here comes the peanut man now."

Pee-wee said, "It's about time."

Wig said, "Gee, doesn't that spaghetti smell good?"

It did smell good to us and the longer we stayed the hungrier we were getting. Pee-wee said, "You can't tell, he might invite us to have some. I did him a good favor just now."

Vic said, "I thought you were the one who wouldn't take a reward for doing good turns?"

"Is that taking exactly a reward?" he shouted. "Is it taking a reward for us to eat a dishful of spaghetti?"

I said, "Four dishes full, to be exact."

CHAPTER XXXII FOUR TOO MANY

So the man came in and when he saw the baby laughing he smiled. He said to Pee-wee, “You fine-a shreemp to take-a da care of my keed. Make-a laugh too! Dat’s fine!”

Pee-wee poked me. He said, “See, he’s pleased. Now maybe he’ll ask us to have some!”

I said, “Yes. Maybe.”

Pee-wee said, “That’s you all the time. Be nice to him like I am. You can’t tell what he might do.”

I said, “Sure. He might ask *me* to mind the baby this time. It doesn’t pay to be too nice to a peanut man.”

Vic heard what we were saying so he leaned over and said, “Come on. Let’s start for home!”

Pee-wee looked at him. Then he said, “That’s why none of you fellers get anything. Just when we get some place where we can eat after waiting all this time—and my father even says the only ones who know how to cook spaghetti are Italians—why, you cry to go home. It would just be our luck to miss this nice spaghetti dinner on account of you or Roy or Wig.”

I said, “He didn’t ask us to stay, yet!”

The kid said, “He will though. Italians are very polite to company. They always ask you to eat with them.”

I said, “Well, he better ask us soon or I’m going. I’ll have two appetites—one for breakfast and my usual one—the one I’ve had since I started on this....”

“Merry hike,” Wig finished for me.

Pee-wee said, “just have patience. He’ll ask us any minute. While we’re waiting I’ll be nice to him. You watch!”

So then he went over to the peanut man who was stirring the spaghetti. He said, “Hey, mister, didn’t I watch that spaghetti nice for you—and your baby, too?”

“Sure teeng,” the man said, and he smiled. He looked down at Pee-wee. Then he said, “You like-a my house, huh?”

“Sure, it’s fine,” the kid told him. “It’s nice. Say, mister, when’s your wife coming home?”

“Next day,” the man said, “she go by her ma-ma. She seeck!”

“Oh, I see,” the kid said. “Gee whiz, you cook a lot of spaghetti at one time, don’t you?”

I said to Vic, “That was a hint.”

The man said, “Sure teeng. I like-a spaghett. You like-a spaghett, too?”

The kid didn’t want to seem too anxious. He waited a little. Then he said, “Oh, a little.”

The man said, “Ah-a. A leetle. Me like-a eet beeg. You no like-a so much, den?”

Pee-wee looked scared. “Sure, I do,” he said. “*We all do.*”

The man sort of shook his head. He said, “Only leetle well!”

Pee-wee shouted, “No. A whole lot.”

“Ah-a. You make-a beeg noise for a leetle shreemp!”

Pee-wee said, “Sure. I’m strong—my voice and all. I can even help you carry that spaghetti pot too if you want me to do it.”

“Sure,” the man said. “You help-a me get de sup’, huh?”

Pee-wee said, “I love to help get the supper.”

I said, “It’s the only time he does help.”

The kid said to me, “Will you shut up before you put your foot in it and spoil it for the whole bunch of us?”

I said, “Don’t worry. I always leave that to you.”

So he helped the man with the big spaghetti pot and we sat and watched him. They put it over on a little table. Then the man said, “I feex de table, now. Soon we eet!”

Pee-wee looked at Wig and Vic and I all sitting there along the wall and he grinned. He did more than that—he winked. As much as to say he had conquered.

The man started to put the table cloth on and the kid rushed to help him. Then he went to the closet and got out the dishes and some knives and big spoons. Pee-wee fairly grabbed the plates out of his hand.

We were having fun watching him. Then the man put the knives and spoons together—a knife and a spoon at each place. The kid went around after him with the plates and put one down and then another and altogether it made five places.

As Pee-wee passed me, he said, “We eat!”

Then the man said, “You have-a de sup’, too?”

Pee-wee said, “Last night we did!”

“Ah-a. Last night!”

I said to Pee-wee, “I bet he doesn’t know what you mean! You can’t talk Bridgeboro to him and expect he’ll understand!”

“Don’t you think I know what I’m saying,” he growled. “He’s as smart as you are.”

I said, "That's not saying much for the peanut man."

The fire siren was blowing down in Bridgeboro and kept up for quite a while. I said, "I'm glad we're not in Little Valley."

Wig said, "We ought to make a vow not to go to any more fires, either."

Vic said, "Righto!"

Pee-wee said, "Do you think I'd say no! I've been stung enough, don't you think I know it?"

Well we didn't care about any more fires. We were only thinking of the spaghetti. Pee-wee sat down where he could see the table. I guess he wanted to see how he would look sitting down to eat once more. It had been such a long time he'd have to rehearse it.

So while we sat waiting we heard voices outside talking in Italian. The peanut man got up and went to the door. He said, "Ah-a!"

I said, "I wish he wouldn't say that. It sounds as if he was making fun of us."

Vic said, "Ah-a!"

Pee-wee said, "Is it nice to make fun of a poor Italian that's nice to you?"

Then the door was opened and four Italian men walked in. They were all talking and laughing. The peanut man said something to them about us because they smiled—especially at the kid.

Then they took off their coats and put them in another room. When they came out they each had a chair. The peanut man took a chair too. I thought maybe they were going to play Marching through Jerusalem.

Anyway they put the chairs up to the table and sat down. The peanut man carried the spaghetti pot over and then he sat down. Then they began to eat.

Well, we all sat as if we were glued. I thought if I tried to talk I'd get hysterical. Vic finally said we would go. Pee-wee got up and walked like a statue just coming to life, and the peanut man just waved his hand and said something I couldn't understand. After that he kept eating.

We got outside somehow and we walked across the swamps and on the road again. I said, "Well..."

"Don't say it," Pee-wee screamed, "because I know what you're going to say!"

I said, "Well, it'll be a lovely evening if it doesn't rain before morning."

Wig said, "Yes. I was thinking the same thing."

CHAPTER XXXIII WE EAT—ALMOST

All the way down to Bridgeboro the siren kept shrieking. We could hear the engines clanging and there seemed to be a lot of excitement. I said, "There must be a big fire, but we should worry. There's twenty-four hours in a day and we've been hiking twenty-eight."

The houses were all lighted up and you could see people were excited. I said, "In one way it's nice to be so tired. You can just walk along and let everything burn."

Wig said, "All except the spagh...."

"You're starting in," the kid said.

I said, "Where?"

Wig said, "We won't remind him of the past."

So we walked down through Main Street and everyone was out. It was like the middle of the day, everything was so noisy. But when I looked up at the bank clock it was a quarter to one.

"Oh boy," I said, "It's nice and late."

Wig said, "All we have to say is that we were with the shreemp!"

The kid said, "Don't be so funny. What'll I say, then?"

I said, "You won't have to say a word. You always speak for yourself."

We were passing Bulk's Restaurant then and Mr. Bulk was standing out in front looking up Main Street just like everyone else was doing. He's a good friend of Pee-wee's and mine—in fact, he's very nice to all our troop. He has an eye for business.

So Pee-wee said, "Hullo, Mr. Bulk. We're just getting back from a hike."

Mr. Bulk looked at us and laughed. He said, "My, what a time to get back from a hike!"

I said, "This was called an Everything But hike, Mr. Bulk. We did everything but eat."

Pee-wee said, "He thinks he's funny, Mr. Bulk. We are a little hungry but it's account of accidents we've had."

I said, "Right. One after another."

Mr. Bulk kind of scratched his head. He looked for a minute, then he said, "So you're starved, eh?"

I said, "Yes, but we haven't any money. Pee-wee's had about fifty rewards today only he didn't get them. So we're poor but dishonest!"

Mr. Bulk laughed. He said, “Now let me see. You know there was a banquet of the fire chiefs in my place tonight. They were entertaining the chief from New York. Well, they all assembled and my waiters served them and left. So I was alone. Just after they started to eat, the fire siren began so they had to go. It was only a little one so they soon came back.

“When they were seated once more it blew again. So they left and as it’s been blowing ever since they haven’t come back. The chief called up to call it off. A man was just telling me that it’s a firebug’s work and they’re tracing him now. I hope they get him.”

“Aren’t they coming back to the banquet?” Pee-wee wanted to know. “Not even the New York chief?”

“No,” Mr. Bulk said. “He wants to see our Bridgeboro men handling all these little blazes, I guess. It’s ruined the dinner—everything’s cold, I guess, so I was going to suggest that you boys finish up what hasn’t been touched. It’s a shame to waste good food!”

We all shouted unanimously, “It won’t be wasted.”

The telephone rang inside the door then and so Mr. Bulk hurried inside. We all followed him in. Oh boy, but that table looked good enough to eat! Better—much better than spaghetti!

While we stood there I heard Mr. Bulk say, “Yes? Why, that’s terrible! Yes, I’ll be right up!”

So he turned away from the phone and he said, “I’m sorry, boys, but I’ll have to go right home and lock up here. The house next door to mine is ablaze and my wife just phoned me to come up and look out for our valuables in case our house should go too. So I’ll have to postpone my offer much as I hate wasting that food. I’ll give it to you some other day and it’ll be a nice hot dinner!”

We marched out the way we just came in and Mr. Bulk locked the door behind him and said goodnight.

I said *goodnight* too!

CHAPTER XXXIV A PARTING SHOT

It didn't matter whether we laughed or not that time. We were just as uncomfortable no matter what we did. So we decided to go straight home.

Just as we started to cross the street we heard a car honking like anything. So we looked up and there was Dr. Harris' car parked at the curb. Dr. Harris was sitting in the driver's seat and alongside of him was Mr. Blakeley, my father.

"*G-o-o-d night Magnolia!*" I said. "We don't have to wait until we get home. The fun starts right here."

So we walked over to the car and I said, "Don't all speak at once!"

Dr. Harris had to laugh then, but my father didn't. He said, "Can you give an account of yourself?"

I said, "Posilutely. We were on a good-for-nothing hike with Pee-wee."

"I knew it! I knew it!" the kid shouted. "I knew I'd be blamed."

Dr. Harris said, "Calm down, Son! Don't get so excited. You can save all that energy for your mother. She's the one that wants an explanation." Pee-wee said, "She'll have to let me eat first, then."

So Dr. Harris said, "Climb in, boys. We'll drop Vic and Wig off first. Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Weigand are frantic. They've been 'phoning our house for a couple of hours."

Vic and Wig both said, "Umph!"

I said, "That's unanimous! Carried by a large minority!"

Then the car started off and Vic and Wig and I were sitting in the back. Pee-wee was sitting on one of the little side seats. He wouldn't sit with us till we got sense, he said.

So my father began talking to Dr. Harris and I knew everything would be all right then. I said to Vic and Wig, "We'll compare how much we eat between now and Monday. We'll make a vow that whoever eats the most will be the leader of the next hike."

Pee-wee said, "You won't see me tomorrow to compare anything because I won't come out at all. I'll be eating all day long—I won't even stop for meal times—I mean after meal times."

"That makes you leader, then," I said, "because I have to stop and wait for five minutes at least, between each meal."

So we said a tearful farewell to Vic and Wig and hoped for the worst. Then we came to our house and I got out quick. Pee-wee called me back.

I said, "What do you want?"

He said, "I just found an all day sucker that I didn't know I had."

"Where did you find it?" I asked him.

"In the pocket of the car," he said. "I hid it there one day last spring. Want a bite?"

I said, "Isn't it bad enough that I'm starving on account of you, without letting you poison me?"

He took a bite and then he made a terrible face. Finally he said, "Gee whiz, this tastes awful! It's been near oil or something."

I said, "What did I tell you? You would have poisoned me! After everything else that's happened you ought to be careful."

"Who ought to be careful?" he shouted. "Didn't you say when you were mowing the lawn this afternoon that you were going to take a hike *anyhow*?"

I said, "We did, anyhow."

He said, "It was your fault about the letter that I dropped the forty cents...."

Dr. Harris started the car and said goodnight. And after the car went away I could hear the kid's voice. So I walked into the house with my father.

Before my mother could say anything to me I told her how I hadn't anything to eat since lunchtime. So she said, "Well, it isn't good to eat anything hearty at this hour of night, Roy. You better take crackers and milk."

After all the food we didn't eat—crackers and milk! So I said I should worry, anyhow it's another day and in a few more hours we'll have breakfast.

THE END

[The end of *Roy Blakeley's Happy-go-lucky Hike* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]