

**ROY BLAKELEY
UP IN THE AIR**

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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“SAY LISTEN,” PEE-WEE YELLED. “WE’RE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA AND THIS FELLER HERE ISN’T——”

ROY BLAKELEY
UP IN THE AIR

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of
THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
RUSSELL H. TANDY

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ROY BLAKELEY UP IN THE AIR

CHAPTER I

WE'RE BROKE

Now you're going to see how it's a good thing not to have fifty cents. Because anyway, Ben Maxwell had two dollars that he spent on the four of us—himself and Marvin Meeke who's a new kid in Bridgeboro, and Pee-wee and me, even if you say that Pee-wee counts one. If you multiply him by six he makes a boy scout. But anyway he's so short you can't do him by long division. So, like I said, Ben spent all he had on us taking us to the circus and we didn't have any money so we had a lot of fun.

We didn't have enough money that day (that's the day I'm going to tell you about) to go to Sunny Acres—Salina Swankey lives up there and she was going to have a great big time on account of Major Bigwing was going to land there and they were going to make a big fuss over him. So we wanted to see him but we took a hike instead, we should worry, because we got there just the same, not saying how—anyway we didn't pay fifty cents each to get in. We didn't pay anything and if you want to see what we did, come ahead, we don't care. But one thing, there's a lot about airplanes in this story and they drown Pee-wee's voice—that's one good thing about airplanes.

We started from my front porch to take a hike and all the time we were wishing we had the money to go to Sunny Acres; Pee-wee was yelling about it, so you'll hear him afterward. But no fooling, those people had an awful nerve charging fifty cents for a ticket to get in and see Major

Bigwing even if he is a famous aviator. Ice cream cones are famous too, but goodnight you can get ten small ones for fifty cents but on account of Pee-wee's appetite we usually get double deckers so that would only make five cones for a half a dollar. An aviator hasn't anything to do with ice cream cones, Ben said, and so I told him I'd believe it if I didn't see it and that fifty cents was a half a dollar just the same.

After that was settled I decided we should drown our troubles on a hike so right away Marvin Meeke wanted to know if we had to swim across the river or anything like that because he can't swim. So I told him no on account of he gets scared so easy, he's such a skinny fellow and little, and he has awful light hair. Anyway I even saw him jump when Pee-wee whispered one time and if you don't believe me you want to hear the kid whisper—maybe you'd jump too.

Then we thought how it would be nice to go on a left and right hike because I said that that way we'd be sure to come out somewhere and Ben agreed with me. But Pee-wee didn't. Right away he started an argument about it and he said that if we went right and left we'd come out from where we started or something like that, and I began to tease him and said that if we did that it wouldn't be where we started from, it would be the end.

So that was the time that Pee-wee whispered that it wasn't the end and Marvin jumped six feet into the air he was so frightened. Anyway it was the end of the morning because my mother called that lunch was ready and wanted to know if the bunch would stay too and Pee-wee said yes, that he'd stay. Ben and Marvin couldn't so they went away and promised to come back for the hike at one o'clock so's to

give the kid time to eat three helpings of dessert. That's one time I felt sorry for our cook.

Anyway my mother called up Mrs. Harris to tell her that the kid was going to stay for lunch and it was a good thing she did. It saved Pee-wee time—time to eat more and even at that we were fifteen minutes late before we started and if you subtract that from one o'clock you don't get any answer, but I should worry.

So now I got to end this chapter because my sister wants me to go downtown and give a message to a girl friend. Goodnight, I hate to do things like that and I wouldn't go except that this girl friend lives down in the other part of town and I have to pass Bennett's Confectionery on my way so I kind of make two trips in one.

Anyway I'll see you in the next chapter because that's where we start the hike. The first road we took was the left because it was the right one and if you don't believe me you can prove it by Pee-wee.

Now I'm going downtown and it won't take me long.

CHAPTER II

RIGHT AND LEFT

Well here I am back again and I'll stay until I tell you how we came to go up in the air. It wasn't Pee-wee's fault either and that's saying a whole lot because even if he's always up in the air himself that was the first time that Ben or Marvin or myself went with him. Anyway it started right after lunch and we had bread pudding for dessert so if you can multiply three helpings by Pee-wee why that'll be the answer to how everything went wrong.

Anyway I had two helpings of bread pudding and I heard my mother say that the cook hadn't made it as light as she usually does, so you can imagine how heavy I began to feel. Goodnight, I was wondering how I could go on that right and left hike until I happened to come out on the porch step and saw the kid sitting on the lower porch step eating a banana.

So I said, "What was the matter with the pudding, kid? Didn't you have enough?"

"Sure I did," Pee-wee answered taking a great big bite of the banana, "but your mother thought maybe I should have more because we're going to hike. We'll maybe be hungry before it's late afternoon she said and so I thought so too and I took the banana."

"You mean she knew you'd be hungry," I said. "Did she give you some sandwiches to take along or anything?"

"She wanted to but I said no because we'll be back from that hike maybe at four o'clock and we can stop at my house

and get some crullers because our cook makes them every Saturday,” the kid told me, swallowing the last of the banana.

“If you’re back from a right and left hike in three hours, you’re a good one,” I told him. “Maybe we’ll just about be going right on the left road at that time instead of stopping at your house and eating hot crullers. Besides the left road may not be the right road either, how do I know?”

“Is this going to be a sensible hike or isn’t it?” Pee-wee wanted to know. “Even I’ll change my mind about going if you start talking nonsense and you got to promise that you’ll take right roads when you say you’re going to take them and the left roads too.”

“Maybe the roads will have something to say about that,” I told him. “One thing I can promise you, kid—we can’t take a right road and a left road together. That’s an easy promise.”

“There you go right away just like I said you would,” said the kid. “Anyway you know what I mean—I mean you got to stick to whatever road you say you’re going to take and not act crazy all of a sudden and decide to cross lots or swim across the river or something like that.”

Just then Ben and Marvin came hurrying up street so I didn’t get a chance to string Pee-wee along for at least five minutes. It took us that long to get started because we couldn’t decide which way to turn first until the kid said to turn left, so that settled it—Ben and I took the road to the right.

“You’ll see how much fun you have going that way,” Pee-wee said, disgusted like. “If you’d go the way I said we could stop and have some fun at Stan’s place but no, the way you’re going we’ll have to tramp through the airport and gee whiz, that’s no fun, do you say that’s fun, Marvin?”

Marvin didn't know what to say so he didn't say anything. He just kind of grinned, bewildered like because he didn't know the airport from a hot dog up at Stan's place where the kid wanted to go.

So I said, "A hot dog's just as good at the airport as it is up at Stan's if not more so. Another thing, Marvin'll like to look at some of those planes flying in and out of the field. Jiminy, they've got some peachy planes down there now. One that I saw the other day could carry over twenty people. If the kid went along it would only carry ten. Anyway, it was a swell plane."

"My father knows an aviator to talk to," said Marvin kind of scared like. "Once he even rode in his plane, for nothing."

"Goodnight," I said, "that isn't any excuse to ride in a plane."

"Don't you listen to that fool, Marv," said the kid, taking Marvin's arm kind of protecting like. "He don't know anything anyhow about planes, so don't listen to him. Even he's so smart he's never been up in the air like I have because I know a real aviator, a feller named Lowden Klammer down at the airport and a couple of weeks ago when I was down there he promised he'd take me up the next time I came down, so do you say I don't know something about aviators?"

Ben smiled in that quiet kind of way he has and he gave me a poke in the ribs. So I said, "What'll he take up the next time you come down—the pieces?"

"The pieces of what?" Pee-wee shouted. "What are you talking about?"

"Whatever you'd like me to say—I don't care," I said.

So he got kind of peeved at that and he walked on ahead with Marvin, talking fast and loud like he always does. I didn't pay so much attention to what he was telling the kid because it was one of those nice summer days after a rainy spell when the trees look all nice and green and cool and I was looking around and wishing we could have gone in the opposite direction. That would take us to Salina Swankey's house—goodnight, it's some house, about forty rooms and a couple of dozen baths and it's sort of hidden in a big park with a big iron fence all around it. I'm talking about the Swankeys' house.

Anyway you can imagine why I was wishing we were going that way because it's so nice and cool there, but instead we were hiking toward the open meadows where the airport was. Jiminy, the sun is stronger there on a warm day than any other place on earth. That's the way it feels anyhow.

Another reason I was so anxious to go to Sunny Acres was on account of Major Bigwing who was going to be there that afternoon at two o'clock. Salina and her mother invited him to come and autograph his pictures for the benefit of the Blue Bird League—that's a swell club that the society girls in the country belong to. Salina's president of it.

She was the one to get up the entertainment for the Major and the money they took in was supposed to be given to some other society for blind horses or something like that. Maybe it was blind cats or dogs or even birds, how do I know? Anyway I wasn't thinking about that—I was just thinking how nice it would be to see that famous airman land in Swankeys' Park. And most of all I was thinking about how much I'd like to have the fifty cents that Salina was charging to get past the gate so a fellow could see him.

Goodnight, she's a burglar that girl. She advertised that she and the rest of the Blue Birds would serve refreshments as if that was worth fifty cents. But I should worry because who cares about refreshments when a feller like Bigwing is around.

Anyway I know I was as anxious as anything to see an aviator who could fly from Canada to Brazil in the time that he did. Goodnight, what a record! They say he even lost his compass. He should worry about compasses, huh?

So that's what I was thinking of while we were hiking in the sun toward the airport when Ben kind of nudged me and winked.

"Listen to the kid," he said with a kind of a chuckle. "He's trying to make Marvin believe that this Klammer gink is his second cousin or something."

So I said, "How *does* the kid know him anyhow?"

"He doesn't know him hardly at all," Ben laughed. "Klammer kind of hurt himself when he was making a landing one day last summer and Doctor Harris treated him a few times. That's how much the kid knows Klammer."

"Do you think I didn't hear what you said?" Pee-wee shouted back. "Even if I was talking I could hear you say how much I don't know Lowden Klammer and you're so smart I know him more than that because I talked to him twice when he was sitting in my father's waiting room and he *did* ask me to come down to the airport and even he promised to take me up in the air!"

"You don't have to go to the airport for that, kid," I said. "You're up in the air right now."

"Even I can prove he promised to take me up with him!" the kid screamed back. "I can prove it by my father's nurse

who was sitting at her desk right near where I was sitting with Klammer because she said she wished she was me, getting such a nice invitation and I'll leave it to her if she didn't say it!"

"Even so, I bet he's kind of forgotten all about you, kid," Ben said with that nice kind of smile he has. "Gosh, you don't expect a feller that meets so many people can remember everyone he gives an invitation to, do you?"

"Gee whiz, does that say he couldn't remember me by sight after I talked to him and made him laugh?" the kid wanted to know.

"He'd have to be near-sighted," I said, "but still I don't blame him for laughing. I've laughed at you myself, kid."

"Do you know what you're talking about—*near-sighted, laughing?*" the kid roared. "What's that got to do with Klammer asking me to go up in his plane, huh?"

"I don't know, kid," I told him. "Ask me another!"

Goodnight, I should worry about Klammer then! I was thinking about Bigwing, but you'll have to read the next chapter to hear how I *had* to worry about Klammer—and *how!*

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST MISTAKE

We went through the wrong end of the airport to begin with. Maybe that's the reason this hike came out all right. Anyway a fresh kind of a fellow with a face all smudged with dirt came up to us after we crawled under a little fence at the far end of the field.

“Say, where do you kids think you're going?” he yelled at us. “Don't you see that sign back there that says this ain't any entrance? Do youse want to be hit? Suppose a plane came taxying 'cross here and bumped into the whole lot of yiz—I spose it'd be the fault of the plane, hah?”

I looked down the field to where a couple of big planes stood. Their motors were going, trying them out I guess, because they didn't look as if they were in any hurry to take off. Even as far away from them as we were they made such a racket that we had to shout to each other to make ourselves heard.

So I said to the fellow, “Do we sound like we're all deaf and dumb that we couldn't hear a plane coming and besides do we look blind that we couldn't see it too? Goodnight, we've got good legs, the whole bunch of us and they do their duty when they have to.”

“Sure,” said Ben with that quiet chuckle he has, “and besides we didn't see any sign because it was knocked down or something because it's lying back there in the road. I'm the only one that saw it and it's lying upside down in a

puddle; I didn't even bother turning it around to see what it was."

"You're posilutely in the right, Ben," I said. "We're all right—everybody's right unless they're wrong and even a scout isn't supposed to obey signs that are lying in mud puddles."

"Say," said the fellow, "you think you're some smart boy sprout, don't you, hah? Next time maybe it won't be so well for you if the field cop finds you coming in under the fence."

"Do you say we didn't make a mistake coming in this end of the field and besides do you have to get so fresh talking to us like you are?" the kid yelled, warming up too. "Who do you think you are because you can't talk to us like that so impolite and all unless you got civil authority! Anyway we're not afraid of you because besides you had a right to tell us nice and friendly that it was dangerous to come in this end of the field."

"G'wan, I'll punch you in the nose, you little runt!" said the fellow, as fresh as could be. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and began wiping off some of the smudge he had around his eyes and nose. Then he said, "If you say any more I'll take the bunch of you myself and bounce you right off this field."

"Ha, ha," laughed the kid, in a kind of sneer, "I'd like to see you try it. You're nothing but a big bluff and it would take a bigger feller than you are to put us out of here and I'll leave it to Roy and Ben and Marvin if it wouldn't."

Marvin was scared to death, but Ben and I were warmed up so the kid was right when he left it to us. Jiminy, I could have gone on stringing that fellow all day. He was the kind to

get mad at the least little thing even if it wasn't his business to get mad and it was kind of a peeved way he had too.

So the fellow kept wiping off the dirt from his face and all the time he was sneering, sarcastic like, but you could see he was mad as could be. He kind of turned around to go down toward the main part of the field.

Then he said to Pee-wee, "Listen, little noise, for two cents I *would* try it to show you what a bluff *I ain't!* The only thing that keeps me from doing it is because I'm a big feller and it'd be a shame to take advantage of a little runt like you and your other noisy friends but I'll tell the field cop and let him do his duty. Then we'll see what's what." He turned his back and started to walk away then.

So I said, "Let's give old Sour-Face three hips and a couple of hurrahs! He can't even smile at himself!"

"Even you can't put us out of this field, even with the field cop because I know an aviator down here that I came to see who promised me he'd take me and my friends up in his plane," Pee-wee yelled. "I'll go and find him and I'll tell him and do you say you'll be able to do it then?"

"Tell that to somebody else," the fellow said sarcastic like. By that time he had almost all the dirt wiped from his face so he looked back and we got a good look at him and I'll always remember how I thought he had one of those faces that make you think of trouble.

Anyway he turned away from us again and went on and I threw a nice little bouquet after him. I said, "Good riddance to bad rubbish, Sour-Face!"

So I kind of heard Pee-wee give a groan like and then he said in a kind of painful whisper, "Do you know who that is?"

I said, “No, but even Santa Claus would have a better disposition than that no matter how hot the weather is.”

Pee-wee said, “*Shut up*, before you say any more!” He whispered, “That’s Lowden Klammer, *do you realize that?* Just now with the dirt all wiped off his face I recognized him—gee whiz!”

“Goodnight,” I said, and fainted on purpose. Then when I came to, I yelled, “So this is Klammer!”

Ben said, “Yes, but the trouble is, he didn’t even recognize the kid by sight.”

“He ought to get the brass medal for forgetting to remember the kid’s voice,” I said. “Goodnight, he’s the only person I ever heard of that forgot that.”

Even Marvin was giggling but poor Pee-wee couldn’t see the joke. He just stood there looking after Klammer as if he was looking at an explosion. Then he looked around at Ben and me scowling like anything.

“Now you’ve gone and done it calling him Sour-Face and talking to him so fresh and all,” he yelled. “Now he won’t take us up in the plane on account of you and even I’m going to tell him I apologize because I didn’t recognize him under all that dirt.”

Can you imagine that? That’s Pee-wee for you, forgetting how fresh he was too. But anyway, I was really disappointed because it was as hot as the dickens and the sky looked much cooler than any right or left hike that I’ve ever been on. Besides there was the chance of a perfectly free plane ride all shot to pieces.

So while Pee-wee was running like the dickens after Klammer to apologize, Ben and Marvin and I flumped down on the ground, tired and disgusted and warm.

Ben said, “Even if this hadn’t happened I wouldn’t like that feller, would you?”

I said, “No, maybe not! Anyway, if I had to do it over again, I’d wait until after the plane ride before I decided what I thought about him. But what’s the use of talking about it—we might as well talk about how we’re not going to be any cooler unless we get away from these meadows altogether.”

“Well, that’s what we’ll do as soon as Klammer doesn’t accept Pee-wee’s apology,” Ben said laughing.

“Yes, and we’ll go down to the river,” I said. “We’ll fall in, accidentally on purpose.”

CHAPTER IV

HOODOO?

That's one time Pee-wee had the laugh on us because he came running back grinning and all excited. Klammer was standing down the field where the kid had been talking to him and you could tell he was sort of waiting for something.

“Even he's going to take the whole bunch of us in his plane!” the kid shouted. “Even after we were so fresh to him and all he's accepted my apology and on account of he needs just about our weight in a new plane he's got to try out because he hasn't any baggage to take he's going to let us go!”

I said, “Do you think that's a compliment? Look the way they throw baggage around! How do we know that he won't do the same thing to us when he gets us up in the air?”

“Don't be such a fool!” said the kid. “Come on, because he's waiting and he has to start in five minutes and he's got to make a trial spin of fifteen minutes so we'll have a nice ride so isn't that something? Anyhow we were fresh too, you got to admit that—gee whiz!”

“Sure, but he started it, kid,” said Ben. “He wasn't what you'd call a gentleman either, taking our heads off like he did.”

“Gee whiz, is that anything when he asks us for a ride in a new plane for fifteen minutes and besides isn't it just the same as an apology when he asks us to come?” Pee-wee wanted to know.

“Sure,” I said, “you win the argument by a large minority. We like Klammer’s plane better than Klammer. Skyward we’ll go, quoth I. Come on, fellers.”

So that’s how we came to go up in the air with Klammer. Even if he didn’t pay much attention to us and took us up like baggage we didn’t care; it was a good way to get cool on a hot day. Besides we had a lot of fun.

It was a new type of plane and there were two mechanics besides the four of us that went along with Klammer. We each took a seat by a window and boy, what a breeze we got as that plane left the field. It was peachy.

So I was all settled for a fifteen minute breeze when the mechanic who sat opposite me said to the fellow sitting ahead of him, “Believe me, I don’t like being assigned to a job with Klammer.”

The fellow ahead looked up in the cockpit where Klammer was busy at the controls and he answered, “Neither do I like it—nobody does.”

Pee-wee heard them talking the same as I did and right away he said, “Why doesn’t anybody like to go with Klammer, huh? What’s the matter with him?”

The mechanic who first did the talking, looked over at the kid and grinned. He said, “If you want to know, kiddo—Klammer’s a crab and he has a swell head. But that wouldn’t make any difference about his flying; not with us fellers. It’s just that he’s a kind of hoodoo in the air—we get so we spot a pilot like that down at the field.”

“You said it,” said the other mechanic. “Some pilots fly and some don’t! That’s all there is to it.”

Right away Pee-wee was worried. “Gee whiz, do you mean he has accidents?”

“Plenty,” said the first mechanic. “None of them have been serious—just scratches that he’s got in bum landings. The trouble is he’s got such a swell head, he won’t listen to advice and that’s where he makes his mistakes. Maybe he wouldn’t be so bad if he listened to some of those who know more than he does.”

“Goodnight,” I said. “Then we’ve got a lot to look forward to, huh?”

“We’ve all got on parachutes,” the second mechanic said, laughing.

“Suppose the string on mine don’t work?” the kid wanted to know, all worried and excited. “Gee whiz, what then?”

The first mechanic laughed like everything and he said, “You’ll just bounce harder than the rest of us, that’s all.”

Just then I happened to notice that we were flying over the river and I said, “Maybe he’ll bounce in the river and out again. There’s worse places to go on a hot day. Think how nice and cool it must be down in the water, kid.”

“Is this a time to be fooling and talking nonsense?” the kid came back at me. “Maybe right now we’re in danger and even I’m sorry I came. Gee whiz, you fellers should have told us about Klammer,” he said to the mechanic. “How did I know he was a no-good pilot, huh? Gee whiz!”

“You’re more to be pitied than scolded,” I said. “I could tell right away that this Klammer is a lot of noise—I’ll leave it to Ben if we weren’t talking it over while you were begging for this ride.”

“You make me sick and disgusted!” the kid shouted so loud that Klammer stopped paying attention to himself long enough to turn around. But he couldn’t hear what we were saying on account of the noise and it was a good thing.

So then the mechanic whose name was Jack, said, “I guess you kids all got in here with your eyes open, didn’t you? I mean, Klammer didn’t urge you to come, did he?”

I said, “No, he didn’t even want us at all. We were lucky that we didn’t walk in here with black eyes, that’s how much Klammer liked us a few minutes ago. But don’t mind Pee-wee, he never opens his eyes anyway—not until he thinks he’s going to get in trouble. We ought to call him Kitten because....”

“Shut up!” yelled the kid. “Anyway, I guess you wanted to come as much as I did.”

“Sure, we did,” Ben spoke up. “That’s why we’re not getting excited about hoodoos or Klammer or anything else.”

“Not even parachute cords,” I said. “Better fellows than us have worried about them, so why should we? Besides, if we should fall, we’re sure to land some place and not knowing where saves a lot of worry beforehand. Am I right, Ben?”

“Absitively, Roy,” Ben said. “It’ll be the fall of a lifetime.”

You can imagine how worked up the kid was by that time. He did nothing but look from Klammer to the window, staring down as if he was measuring the distance. Then every couple of seconds he’d feel his parachute cord with that awful worried look on his face. I thought the other mechanic whose name was Charlie, was going to have hysterics on account of Pee-wee.

So he winked at me and he said, “Does your mother have insurance on you, kid?”

I said, “Sure, but it doesn’t count in case of airplane accidents—I heard her say that one day. She says they count it the same as suicide in the policy they have for me.”

Very solemn like, Ben said, “That’s just the kind my mother has for me.”

“Will you fellers keep still?” Pee-wee roared. “Even I know you’re just saying these things, but is it right to talk like that to a new feller like Marvin who’s never even been up in a plane before?”

Goodnight, we hadn’t thought about Marvin at all and I looked over Ben’s shoulder quick to where the little shrimp was sitting, but he was grinning all over. And what was more, you could tell he was having a lot of fun with the whole business.

He said to me, “I don’t get scared so you can talk nonsense all you want. Even if we did spill, I wouldn’t be scared ’cause I got a hunch I wouldn’t get hurt. Gosh, I like it.”

“That’s Pee-wee’s trouble,” I said. “He’ll be disappointed if we don’t spill—*on land!*”

Goodnight, I hardly got a chance to close my mouth, when all of a sudden everything got awful quiet inside that cabin. At first I thought maybe we had frightened the kid to death and that he had fainted or something. When I looked I saw that he was frightened enough, but he hadn’t fainted—he was too scared.

So then Charlie kind of whispered to Jack, “Klammer’s stalled all right.”

Jack got up quick then and went to the cockpit while we all sat as quiet as mice. The plane kept going just the same and Klammer steered her in circles. Charlie got up after a second and went to the cockpit too and the three fellows all began to talk excitedly.

Jack sat at the other controls and began working them but still there wasn't any noise from the motors. Goodnight, there's only two silences I know that you feel right away. One silence is the one that comes after a plane stalls in mid-air and the other one is the one that comes after Pee-wee stops talking. There's not much difference.

Anyway Klammer began to boss those two mechanics just like he tried to boss us. He yelled at them and went on like as if they didn't know anything. I can't tell you much about what went on because they wouldn't let any of us kids up there in the cockpit. All I know is that that stuck-up pilot wouldn't listen to what Jack or Charlie told him and that's what caused the trouble, just like they said it would.

Finally Charlie said, "Now you've gone and done it, Klammer. There's nothing we can do for you now. You'll just have to glide her down."

Klammer mumbled something under his breath, good and mad like.

Jack turned around and said, "Keep calm, kids. Looks as if we're going to make it pretty nicely. We'll glide around and get clear of these woods first."

"*Then what?*" Pee-wee asked as worried as could be. "Gee whiz, where'll we go after that, *huh?*"

"Is that a riddle?" I said. "Maybe if you're not in a hurry, we'll go calling on the birds."

CHAPTER V

WHAT A LANDING!

Maybe you don't think we weren't good and scared. For a second none of us said a word. Then we got clear of the woods and there below us was a nice sunny stretch of ground with a great big house in the center of it. There were lots of people down around it too and we could see that they were all looking up and watching us.

So Jack said, "This is luck. That's somebody's estate, so we'll glide for it. Here we go, kids!"

You can imagine how tight we sat. But it wasn't a second before I saw we were going to be all right and then I recognized the estate. That was all right too, because it was Sunny Acres.

So I said, "Goodnight magnolia! Whoever thought we'd get inside of Sunny Acres this way?"

Pee-wee looked out of the window and all the time he was shouting, "What are you talking about? What do you mean—*Sunny Acres*?"

I said, "Just now it looks as if Sunny Acres is coming up to meet us. Wow! Don't you feel nice and dizzy, kid?"

"How do I know how I feel and besides do you mean to tell me we're in Sunny Acres and we're going to land in Swankeys' house—I mean, land in front of Swankeys' house?" the kid yelled.

I said, "That's better. We've had enough trouble for two seconds without smashing through the Swankeys' house."

“Gee whiz,” said the kid, “now we don’t have to pay admission either because I don’t think Major Bigwing’s got here yet. I don’t see his plane, do you?”

“No,” I said, “not unless he’s hiding it under that girl that’s standing alongside of that table over there on the other side of the field.”

“That’s the refreshment table,” said the kid all excited. “They’re going to have cake and lemonade and sandwiches and ice cream.”

“Then that must be Salina Swankey standing alongside of the table,” I said. “She must know you’re coming, kid.”

“Don’t be a fool,” he came back. “I bet they’re wondering who we are and I bet they’re good and mad that it isn’t Bigwing’s Giant Gopher plane that’s coming because he’s good and late.”

“There’s a couple of cameramen running across the lawn,” said Ben.

Just then the wheels of the plane touched the ground and we taxied nice and easy across Swankeys’ smooth lawn. I guess there were about a hundred people and more that ran along with us until we stopped. Pee-wee was jumping up and down in his seat, he was so happy to think we got there before Bigwing and that we didn’t have to pay fifty cents. He kept saying what a joke it was on Salina Swankey.

Goodnight, what a crowd gathered around that plane! Klammer got to the door first while Pee-wee and the rest of us stood behind him. Then all of a sudden the cameramen pushed through the crowd and before we knew it they had taken our pictures. All in a second.

Another fellow pushed his way toward us and rushed up to Klammer with a pad and pencil in his hand. He was all

excited and he said, “This is luck, Maj. I was just on my way out of the gate when you came down. Thought you weren’t coming. Am late for press now so I’ll just ask you a few questions and be off—kids with you to help along the Blue Bird League benefit?”

“Say listen,” Pee-wee yelled, “we’re Boy Scouts of America and this feller here isn’t...”

“All right, kid,” the reporter laughed writing down on the pad as quick as anything. “Now, Maj, is there anything you’ve got to say about this business? You going to autograph some o’ your photographs so’s the Blue Bird League can sell ’em for the blind horses, eh? Well, that’s that. Glad to meet you, Maj.”

Just like that the reporter jotted some shorthand down in that pad and he didn’t look up at Klammer once excepting when he shook hands with him. Then it was just for a second and before Klammer or any of us could tell him it was a mistake he was gone. Charlie and Jack, the mechanics, couldn’t have explained anything, they were laughing so. Boy, what a joke.

And while they were doubled up laughing who should push up to Klammer but Salina Swankey and her girl friend, Birdie Blabbe. If you know any girls that are the gushy kind—you know, hysterical like all the time they’re talking and talking all the time at that? Well, if you know any like that then you know what Salina and her girl friend are like.

So just like I said they came gushing up to Klammer who was standing there with a lot of the grease still around his eyes and nose. Goodnight, he was a dumb looking fellow standing there the way he did and not knowing what it was all about. All he did was grin and look puzzled so can you

blame us for laughing too and not being able to tell Salina and her girl friend that she was mistaking Lowden Klammer, the hoodoo pilot, for the famous Major Bigwing.

While we were still laughing, Salina got a lot of photographs and held them out almost under Klammer's chin. Then right away, Birdie Blabbe pulled a long sheet of paper from somewhere and that was the time I almost passed out because I happened to remember that Birdie was famous in high school for writing essays and speeches like that so I knew what was coming.

I was right too because she started in to read to Klammer. In the screechy voice she has, she said, "Major Bigwing, we of the Blue Bird League welcome you to Sunny Acres. We _____"

That was the time the sound news cameramen got another picture and believe me that picture turned out to be some sound. Klammer was coughing and trying to explain, Birdie was reading the first lines of her speech of welcome, Salina was making funny gurgling noises and the rest of us were laughing like everything. So the cameramen rushed out of Sunny Acres and they found out too late that it wasn't Major Bigwing's picture they had taken.

When they got out of sight, we heard the sound of a plane in the sky overhead. We all looked up and we could see this great big plane circling around like as if the pilot was figuring out where he was going to land.

So Jack the mechanic stopped laughing long enough to say, "It's a Gopher all right—the big boy himself."

Anyway that started the kid and he yelled, "Here comes Major Bigwing—here comes Major Bigwing now, Miss Swankey, because it's a Gopher and Klammer's been trying

to tell you he wasn't the Major—we've all been trying to tell you but you wouldn't stop giggling long enough to let us, so now you know! Besides it shows you're not observant like a scout is because you'd see that Klammer doesn't look anything like those pictures you have even if he has got grease on his face and besides Bigwing has curly hair so that shows!"

Birdie Blabbe had hysterics right away but the crowd (and that included some of the girls of the Blue Bird League too) were shaking with laughter. They thought it was a fine joke you could tell and it made Salina so mad that she fainted for spite.

So like a couple of good scouts, Pee-wee and I ran across to the refreshment table to get some lemonade. Anyway it tasted so good that we kind of forgot about Salina. Besides she came to right away because it was only a fake faint so the kid and I helped ourselves to some of the cake and ice cream while we were there.

While we were eating it we watched Major Bigwing taxi across Swankeys' nice park. And then the fun began.

CHAPTER VI

UP IN THE AIR?

Goodnight, Salina was mad! The reporters were gone, the cameramen were gone and Major Bigwing was just coming. Birdie Blabbe wasn't in any condition to read another speech of welcome—she was too excited over the mistake she'd made with Klammer. So that's the reason Salina took it out on us four kids.

We were standing alongside of her when the Major came out of his cabin. He was alone and not like Klammer, needing a couple of mechanics along all the time. Believe me, Wigbig or Gibwig or whatever you call him, is some flyer and he doesn't need any help either. He never made any mistakes until Pee-wee made them for him.

Anyway, we were standing alongside of Salina like I told you, when the Major jumped down. So right away Pee-wee shouted, "Hurray for Bigwing! Hurray!"

So I shouted, "Three hips and a couple of hurrahs for Bingbig—I mean Bigwing!"

The Major was smiling but believe me, Salina wasn't. She couldn't even speak to him she was so mad. All she did was to look at Pee-wee and me as if she'd like to take our heads off. Then, her mother, Mrs. Soaring Swankey, came up and I could see right away that she had trouble in her eye.

But first she smiled at Bigwig and she said, "You're very welcome to Sunny Acres, my dear Major Bigwing. But you must forgive my daughter. She has had a trying time of it and is so agitated by the events of the last few minutes that she

can't find speech to explain the embarrassing position that these horrid boys and that unknown person over there have placed her in."

In case you don't guess it, "that unknown person" was Lowden Klammer. He and the mechanics had got the plane fixed all right because the motors were going and they were climbing up to the cabin when Mrs. Soaring Swankey said that. Believe me, I guess they were glad to go because Mrs. Swankey threatened to sue them and bawled them out something awful.

So as they were taking off, Charlie and Jack waved goodbye to us and we waved back because we were glad we weren't in any plane that Lowden Klammer was pilot of. Another thing we were happy to see Major Bingbing without it costing us a cent. We should worry if Salina and her mother were mad. We weren't.

So then Mrs. Soaring Swankey looked down at us like as if we were the dirt under the grass. After that she looked up and told Major Gibwig how the reporters had mistaken Klammer for him and the cameramen too. Then she said how we were imposters (I remember that word because I wrote it right down so I wouldn't forget it) and that we deliberately let the reporters and the cameramen get out of the gates without lifting a finger to stop them. Goodnight, if that's all we had to do it would have been easy.

"Could we talk when we were laughing so hard and besides would you let us explain about Klammer not being Wingbig, I mean Bigwing?" Pee-wee shouted at Mrs. Swankey. "Who wouldn't laugh at the way Salina was showing off to Klammer and the way that Birdie was giggling and acting like a fool! Could we help laughing, huh?"

Besides it shows how observant they're not when they mistake a homely looking feller like Klammer for Major Bigwing and another thing....

“Walter Harris, you horrid little boy, get right out of my sight!” Salina screamed. “All of you boys, *get out!*”

If you think we did get out, you're wrong because Major Wigbig just then happened to look at Pee-wee and the kid was so disappointed and scared that it was written all over his face. So he kind of smiled down at the kid then, nice and friendly.

He said, “Well, well, you seem to be in trouble with these people, eh kiddo?”

“You mean they're going to be in trouble on account of they didn't tell the newspaper feller to listen to me that Klammer wasn't you and now you'll see how his picture is in the paper tonight with your name underneath it. Gee whiz, do you say they won't get in trouble with the newspapers when the public starts to yell about that picture being a fake? Gee whiz, even *I'd* know you with a face full of grease I've seen your pictures so many times!”

Bigwig ruffled up the kid's curly hair kind of and started to laugh. The harder he laughed the more Mrs. Soaring Swankey turned up her nose and gave the kid black looks. Goodnight, her face got so it looked like as if a thunderstorm was going to break loose. And it did! Kind of, Salina was to blame too.

Anyway, Wigbig's photographs disappeared. Salina yelled out all of a sudden that she couldn't find them, but that she had them in her hand when Klammer was there. So we decided that she must have given them to him in her excitement and we found out later that she did. He was so

excited too that he didn't realize he had them until he got back to the airport, but that didn't do Salina any good nor Gigbig either. And it made Mrs. Soaring Swankey madder at Pee-wee and the rest of us. She kept looking through a funny looking pair of glasses at us—you know the kind that they have to hold up to their eyes to see through. They have a sort of little stick on them.

So to get down to brass tacks, there was nothing for Major Bingbing to do at Sunny Acres but drink lemonade with a lot of silly looking girls. He didn't like them you could tell that and he told us afterward that he didn't like lemonade either because it always made him sick. He only came there to sign his photographs so's they could sell them and send the money that they made to the blind horses and mules and cats and dogs.

So he said, "Well folks, I can't do any autographing for you today so I guess I had better go on, eh? Some other time perhaps. Or maybe you'd like me to send you some already autographed?"

"That's very kind, Major," said Mrs. Soaring Swankey, very haughty like, "but we wouldn't think of having you hop off so suddenly. A great celebrity like you doesn't visit Sunny Acres very often. After some refreshment we would be delighted to have you say a few words to our guests here. Also within an hour there will be some reporters here for the papers have already been notified of the unfortunate error and...."

"Does that mean we won't have our pictures in tonight's paper with Klammer and all, huh?" the kid butted right in.

"That means that I demand you boys leave here immediately!" said Mrs. Swankey with her voice all

trembling like and looking down through her glasses at the kid and then at us. “If I have to tell you again I shall report this matter to your scoutmaster whom I know very well.”

“Geeee whiz,” said Pee-wee, “we haven’t done anything and besides all we wanted to do was to wait and see Major Bigwing take off. Can’t we wait till then—gee whiz!”

I said, “Sure. Pee-wee’s right as he usually isn’t. We haven’t done anything but laugh and all we want to do is to see Major Gigbing take off. Am I right, Ben?”

Ben said, “Sure, you are. We’re all right.”

Even Marve got up nerve to say, “Sure, we are.”

Then all of a sudden, Wigbig said, “These kids *are* right, Mrs. Swankey. They haven’t done anything wrong that I can see and if you were a good sport you could see it too. You’re merely taking out your spite on them and there’s no need of it. You and your daughter just made a mistake that could have been laughed off as a corking good joke. Evidently corking good jokes aren’t dignified at Sunny Acres, so I’ll take these kids up in the air where they can laugh all they want. The sky’s the limit. You’ll pardon my hurrying away like this but I came to autograph photographs for the benefit of blind animals, not wait for reporters. Goodbye, Mrs. Swankey! Come on, kids—up in the clouds we’ll go! To laugh.”

We went—*and how!* Goodnight, we didn’t even bother to look back and see Mrs. Soaring Swankey staring at us through her funny glasses. But I bet she did because she was good and mad and she couldn’t say a word when the Major said that—she just bowed very stiff like and she was red in the face. So was Salina. Anyway I guess we better not ever

try and get in Sunny Acres again even if the President of the United States comes there to visit Mrs. Swankey.

But we should worry. We just piled in after Bigwig and boy, what a cabin that plane has! Right away I thought of a song to sing and Ben helped me with the words as we went along. So while the engine was warming up we sang it and this is the way it goes:

We went on a hike for a dare
We hiked and we didn't care where;
We passed the old mill
And we hiked down a hill;
And we landed way up in the air.

We went on adventures—oh my
I bet that you'll laugh till you cry;
We landed kerflop
When we came to a stop;
And next we were up in the sky.

And that was true too because when we sang the word “sky” we leaped kind of above Swankeys' swell house and first thing you knew we couldn't see it any more. That shows we were up in the sky so we started in to laugh.

CHAPTER VII

SAILING, SAILING

Oh boy, that was some plane! Lowden Klammer's was small like Pee-wee and made a lot of noise and mistakes. It didn't have such a nice roomy cabin either as Major Bigwig's.

The only thing I didn't like about the Gopher, we could hear each other talk. If I have to listen to Pee-wee, I'd rather listen to a couple of dozen propellers. At least you can hear them all at once, but with the kid you can depend on him going on forever. He doesn't need any switch or gas to start him off—he's his own self-starter, believe me.

So there the four of us sat in that nice cabin and after I took a good look around I said, "Give me a plane with a nice inside to it. I don't care if it has any outside or not."

Ben said, "That's right, Roy. The trouble with a plane that hasn't any outside to it—it might bunk into something and you'd never know it. If it gets into an air pocket, there's likely to be a lot of trouble."

"Sure, if they're anything like Pee-wee's pockets," I said.

"Pee-wee has a low visibility, only about two feet high," Ben said.

All the while Marve was laughing. He said, "Go on, keep it up."

"I hope Major Bigwig will keep it up," I told him. "Forced landings are bad on Pee-wee's appetite. It makes him eat more. By the time he got away from Mrs. Swankey's refreshments there wasn't enough left to feed that hungry

looking bunch of Bluebirds. Goodnight, they stood looking at the Major as if they'd like to gobble him up too."

"You make me sick and tired!" the kid shouted. "You can make fun of me all you want to but I won't listen to you talking any nonsense about the Major. He's been nice and all taking us up this way and sticking up for us in front of that cranky Mrs. Swankey so you should appreciate how it's an honor for him to take us along."

"Along, where?" I wanted to know.

"Along with him!" he roared back as mad as could be. "You know what I meant."

I said, "All right, kid. Just to show you how much I appreciate getting away from Mrs. Soaring Swankey, I want you to step up into that police booth or whatever you call it and ask General Thing-a-ma-jig if this plane has an outside. I didn't notice if it did or not we got in here so fast."

Ben said, "Sure, ask him if the earth is the second turn to our left."

"Any fool knows that we have to go down to get to the earth!" the kid roared.

So just then, Wigbig put the plane into a nose dive and I said, "Look out of the window alongside of you kid, and see the earth coming up. I'll leave it to Ben if it isn't."

Pee-wee just gave me a disgusted look because we were on an even keel again. So I said to him, "Go ahead, kid, ask Wigbig to stop somewhere so I can look for my baseball. Since we took that nose dive I can see a field down there. Maybe that's where I lost it."

"Lost what?" the kid wanted to know.

"My baseball," I told him. "Connie Bennet knocked a fielder with it and it never came down, honest."

“How do you know it’s the same field?” the kid roared.

I said, “I don’t, but one field’s as good as another if not more so. That tall building down there looks like a school. Tell Major Bigjig not to dump us down onto that. Go on, Sir Harris! I dare you to ask him what’ll happen if we run out of air.”

“You think you’re smart,” the kid came back at me.

“Besides it’s gasoline that makes the plane stay up—not air!”

“That shows how much you know about botany,” I said.

“I’ll leave it to Ben if this plane wouldn’t stay up without gas as long as you’re in it to furnish the air. Hey listen, kid, go on up and ask Major Wigjig how far it is to somewhere.”

All the while, Pee-wee was sitting very dignified like, the way he does when we talk nonsense. He said, “That shows how much of a lot of respect you haven’t got when a famous aviator takes you for a ride—how you want to show him what fools you are. Even you’d talk crazy if you were up in the air with Lindbergh.”

“Even if I went to the clothes-pole with Commander Byrd, I’d be blithe and gay,” I told him. “Go on up and ask him what’s the difference between a monoplane.”

“A monoplane and what?” the kid shouted.

“A monoplane and *how!*” I told him. “Take your feet off the velvet cushion and put them on the ground. Don’t you know how to be a little gentleman in a Goofey plane?”

I guess that hit Marv’s funny bone because he started laughing and shouting.

“Shift into second or you’ll skid,” I told him.

He said, “I was thinking how long Pee-wee’s legs would have to be if he put them on the ground.”

At that we all started laughing, because they'd have to be about a thousand feet long. I said, "The trouble with Pee-wee, his feet are too near his head, that's why he always feels like kicking himself. Now when I was up with Skinny McCord——"

"Now you're a fool—now you're lying!" Pee-wee shouted. "You want Marv to think you did a lot of things _____"

"When I was up with Skinny McCord——" I began again.

"Where and when were you up with Skinny McCord?" the kid yelled at me.

"Up in my attic," I told him. "No sooner said than stung. If you'd only not finish starting to speak before somebody else begins to finish getting ready to conclude to begin, you'd be better off."

"If you didn't make a noise like a dictionary, *you'd* be better off—showing off before Marv," the kid shot back at me.

That's what always makes the animal cracker mad—when we kid him. Especially if there's a new feller around. He turned around sideways in his seat after I said that and started looking out of the window.

"Keep your elbow in," I said to make him madder, "you might bunk it against a planet."

All of a sudden pretty soon something happened. We were flying not so very far from the tree tops that were scattered here and there over a bunch of fields. Beyond this one field was thick woods and while we were looking ahead and wondering what they'd look like when we were flying over

them, Pee-wee was staring down at the field. *Goodnight*, he scared the life out of us because he started shouting.

“*Look*, somebody got killed or wounded or something worse!” he was yelling. “Somebody—a man just toppled over in that field. *Look down there!*”

Most of the time when Pee-wee starts shouting, it’s a false alarm. That’s his middle name—seeing things. He saw a shark in Black Lake up at camp once, and it turned out to be a log.

Anyway, this time he was right because, honest, we saw that it was a man lying on the ground right in the field, close to the woods. We saw that much and we knew that the kid saw right for once. Then we didn’t see any more because in a second we were past the spot and over the woods. That’s how fast we were going. The next second it seemed we were past the woods even.

“Maybe he was shot, huh?” Pee-wee said. “He fell over quick kind of just like they do when they get shot in the movies.”

“Goodnight,” I said, “if he did that, why he must be dead by now. It’s a long walk from the movies to those fields down there. I’d fall over too—without being shot either!”

“You better not make a lot of nonsensical jokes about it either,” the kid said, very thoughtful like. “And right away, I’m going to tell Major Bigwing.”

“Ask him if he’s got a parachute handy and we’ll all go down in it and pursue the villyan,” I said to him.

CHAPTER VIII TO THE RESCUE

Pee-wee got it into his head that that man had been shot. He couldn't say that he heard any shooting because nobody could hear shooting in a plane. Goodnight, the motors in a Goofey plane make more noise than the guns in the World War all put together.

So being that Pee-wee couldn't say he heard any shooting he got a lot of satisfaction out of thinking that the man toppled over just like the villyans do when they're shot down in the movies. Anyway, one thing sure, we did see a man lying on the ground. But we didn't take the kid seriously about any shooting.

Just the same he jumped up and went up into the little place where the Major was sitting and he started shouting to him what he had just seen. Wigbig turned his head around then and we could see that he was just laughing at the kid. He kind of mussed up Pee-wee's hair and poked him in the nose. We could hear him laughing, even.

"Nothing doing?" we asked the kid when he came back down into the cabin. "What did he say?"

"He says we're seeing things," Pee-wee said, kind of grouched. "He said I've been reading dime novels."

"If you had a dime you'd buy an ice cream cone with it," I said.

"Is he going to land the plane?" Ben wanted to know.

"If he sees a good place to land he said he would," the kid said, "but I don't think he meant it—I think he was just

kidding me along—geee whiz, you fellers saw that man lying there so why don't you tell the Major because then he'd believe me and maybe we'd save a human life if we could hike back there and give him first aid. Geeee whiz, I'll be thinking about that all the time now!"

So that's how I came to go up and tell the Major that we all saw a man's body lying down in that field and that the kid was right. Wigbig got thoughtful right away then and he said, "Well, that's different. I'll turn around and see what the chances are for a landing. This is pretty lonely country around here—the kid is right. We can't see a man lying alone without at least trying to help him."

So we turned around and finally Bigwig decided on a place to land and pretty soon we taxied across a nice flat field. The woods were between us and the field where we had seen the man lying so we had that much to hike because the Major said that he was afraid to take a chance in landing there on account of it looked like as if it was a cornfield. Boy, a Goofey plane would have some spill in a cornfield.

We all piled out of the plane, even the Major because he said he'd like to come with us too. So we left the plane alone and started off toward the woods. There wasn't a house in sight and outside of Pee-wee there wasn't any noise. Now that things were going his way he was making a noise like a boy detective.

"You better let Marv or Ben or Roy stay and watch your plane, Major Bigwing, because even there may be a murderer lurking around waiting to make his escape or something. Geee whiz!"

I said, "How about you staying and playing watchman yourself? We can find a dead man without you."

“Do you mean to tell me that I can’t go along with you fellers when I was the one that discovered him falling?” he yelled back at me. “You ought to be the one to stay with the plane, then you can be all alone and there won’t be anybody around to listen to your nonsense.”

“Only the birds,” I said looking up at the sky where a flock of them were flying around. Then all of a sudden they flew away. “Now I won’t stay for spite.”

Major Bingbing laughed and he said, “I don’t blame you. It is awfully quiet around here and besides the plane doesn’t need any watching. She’s safe in this place.”

So we all went along to keep each other company and pretty soon we were in the woods. It was a funny kind of hike—hunting for a man that we saw fall over as if he was dead.

I said, “Maybe we ought to call this a dead man’s hike, huh?”

“One thing, we’ll all be dead tired when we get back to the plane,” Ben said. “I bet these woods are about four miles long, do you know that?”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said Major Wigbig kind of looking around. “Looks swampy in through those trees. Kind of deceiving when one looks at it from the air, eh?”

“Gee whiz,” said the kid, “I thought it was only a couple of blocks or so. If that man was wounded very bad I bet he’ll be dead now, huh?”

“We’ll hope not,” said the Major, “but if he is it won’t be your fault, kiddo. Your thought was in the right place, anyhow. But one dead man is better than five. I know this country around here pretty well and I’ve never seen but the one field that’s a safe place to land. They all look safe

enough from the air but we'd soon find out that they weren't if a row of young corn was the means of upsetting us."

"Pee-wee should worry," I said. "He'd crawl out of the wreck with an ear of corn in his mouth and a couple more under his arm. That would be his idea of a perfect wreck—one where he could come up eating."

"That shows what a fool you are and what crazy things you think of to say in front of Major Wingbing—I mean Major Bigwing!" he yelled. "Besides it shows what respect you haven't got for the dead when you can laugh and joke at such a time."

I said, "How do you know—maybe that's what killed the dead man."

"*What* killed him?" the kid wanted to know.

"Laughing," I said. "I've died laughing maybe a hundred times or more, I'll leave it to Ben."

"I'll say so," said Ben. "I've seen Roy pass right out from laughing."

"Correct, be seated," I said. "I've passed right out the door in school many times. The teacher wouldn't let me stay in the room because the class was in hysterics."

"Even in school he's a fool," the kid said very disgusted like to the Major.

Just the same the Major laughed—we all were laughing. All except Pee-wee. He was hiking along very dignified like the way he does when he thinks there's something mysterious and I keep fooling.

So we got talking about how far we were from Bridgeboro and Bigwig told us he thought it was about twenty miles. He didn't know the name of the place or anything but he said he

thought that it wasn't far to one of those little villages like, that are ten miles or so from a main highway.

So I said, "We should worry where the village is or the main highway either as long as we don't have to walk it. These woods are long enough to suit me and I'm not so pleased with them at that. Boy, what a quiet place."

Everybody agreed with me that time, even Pee-wee. There wasn't a sound and you could tell that hardly anybody ever walked through those woods. Even the moss alongside of the trail wasn't trampled in. Once in a while we could hear a hawk squawking up in the sky but that was all. It was kind of spooky.

That's why we all stopped short when we heard a sort of rustling noise in there between the trees. Major Wigbig walked in among the high ferns that grew on the edge of the swamp but he said he couldn't see anything. Believe me, we heard something though and we found out afterward that we didn't imagine it either!

So I said, "If that wasn't someone running, I've never been up in a Goofey plane today."

Wigbig said it was someone running. "But I guess that isn't any of our business after all, eh, kids? People have a right to run in a swamp as well as any place else. Might have been some country kid. And we haven't a whole lot of time either—I've got to take you kids back to Bridgeboro and still be at the Highville Airport at five o'clock."

It was going on for four o'clock then so believe me, we had to do some hiking to get to the cornfield and back through the woods again. That's why I said we should go scout pace so's the Major wouldn't be late. He was a good scout because he tried it too and he liked it.

In a few minutes we could see the sun shining through a great big opening in through the trees and we knew that it must be near the end of the woods. Anyway like I told you we were all kind of going scout pace, single file—Pee-wee was at the head of the line and I was last. Bigwig was in front of me and I guess not being used to going scout pace he kind of missed count and tripped and it made me stop because I would have fallen over him if I hadn't.

That's how I came to see that Winchester rifle lying half off and half on the trail just as if somebody had dropped it there. But what made me laugh was that the kid didn't see it and he was the first one on line. It was as plain as anything and the only reason I would have missed it if I hadn't stopped for Bingbing was because we were all running pretty close, one behind the other.

So I said to Pee-wee, "You get the gold-plated rake handle for observance this time, kid. Look at what Santa Claus left right under your nose almost and yet you didn't see it. You're the one that should have seen it—you're leader!"

By that time everybody had stopped again and Pee-wee came back and looked at the rifle as surprised as could be. "Geee whiz!" he said. "It's a rifle, huh?"

"No, you're wrong, kid," I said, "it's a fly swatter without the swat."

So Wigbig picked it up and looked at it and examined it and then he said, "This thing is minus four bullets. Who could be using a rifle in the woods this time of year? They're honest-to-goodness bullets too."

Right away Pee-wee looked like a detective and acted like one because he said in a very mysterious voice, "It's a clue—it's a clue! I bet it's the murderer's gun, I bet!"

I said, “You can’t bet twice in the same place. What murderer are you talking about—what murderer’s gun?”

“That shows how much you don’t know about reduction, I mean deduction!” he shouted. “Didn’t we see a man fall down in the field and didn’t I tell you that that’s the way they did when they got shot in the movies?”

“I heard you the first time,” I said, “but if that’s the way they do when they get shot in the movies I can’t see what it’s got to do with the rifle here in the woods. There’s a long, long trail a-winding....”

“Will you shut up and listen!” he yelled. Then in a very mysterious whisper he said, “I mean that gun—that rifle belongs I bet to the man who shot down the man in the field because there’s the field right out there so that’s deduction!”

So I said, “Well, I hope the farmer that owns that cornfield out there makes some deduction in the price of his corn after this mystery is over. I’m hungry and that’s all I care about deduction.”

We all started scout pace again and Bingbing carried the rifle. And as if he was my father or uncle or somebody the kid said to me, “Don’t do any more fooling because what do you think the Major thinks when you haven’t any more respect for a dead man than to talk about being hungry when we haven’t even found him yet! Gee whiz, show him how you can be serious for once.”

“Sure, I’m serious for once,” I said. “I’m as serious as can be about the deduction of corn.”

Then we came to the edge of the woods and the cornfield was full of corn. So in the next chapter you’ll read about the first dead man in the story. There’s two more come after that so hold on tight.

CHAPTER IX

REDUCTION!

We stood there at the edge of the cornfield looking all around. We couldn't see a dead man or a live one either excepting ourselves, but we could see a farm house and some barns and outhouses through a bunch of trees beyond the field. To the left the field sloped down a little to a nice big lake that kind of wound around past the woods and off toward the west.

So I said, "We see everything but a dead man. Maybe we were seeing things just because Pee-wee told us to see it, huh?"

Ben said, "I've been thinking of that myself. My father said there's a lot in that—the power of suggestion I think he calls it."

"That's a good suggestion," I said. "Now that we can't see anybody dead we might as well go over to that farmhouse and ask the farmer about deducting the corn. I think I see some cows over there too—maybe he'll deduct some milk for us if we tell him we're poor but dishonest."

"There you are!" Pee-wee yelled. "Right away you start in with your nonsense and talk nonsensical about deduction that hasn't anything to do with corn instead of hunting through the corn and all where a man that's shot could easily fall and nobody would see him by standing here and just stretching your necks—gee whiz!"

Marv crumpled up at my feet he was laughing so the way Pee-wee got excited. Bingbing was laughing too and he said,

“The little chap is right, boys—we couldn’t find anything by standing here. When one is flying low it’s easy enough to distinguish a man amongst this high corn, but it’s a different thing looking from here.”

So on account of Pee-wee’s deduction, Major Wigbig said we should each take a certain part of the field to search. I voted that I should take the path that went in the direction of the farmhouse so’s I could keep my mind on the deduction of corn. Pee-wee voted me down, but I should worry. I went anyhow.

We each started off and that includes me. I went through the hills of corn (I think that’s what you call them) and I looked up and down and in through every one I passed on either side, but I didn’t see anything that looked like a dead person. I felt more like being dead myself just so’s I could lie down—I was so tired, and it was so nice and cool looking off there where those trees were.

So after I had gone about a hundred blocks (that’s the way it felt to me anyway) I heard the kid shout kind of frightened like. Goodnight, as warm as I was I got gooseflesh up and down my spine. Then all of a sudden he yelled again.

“*Fellers! Major Bing—Bigwing!*” he called. “I—I see some—*something!*”

So in a flash we were all back at the edge of the field because we were afraid to go through on account of the farmer might have got mad at us upsetting his corn. We followed the kid through a narrow path and he wouldn’t say a word, only put his finger to his lips and walked on tiptoe like he does when he wants to keep us quiet. As serious as it was I could see that Bigwig could hardly keep his face straight the way Pee-wee was acting.

Then pretty soon Pee-wee stopped short and without turning around to us he put up his hand for us to stop too—just like a traffic officer. As spooky and all as it was, I couldn't help whispering to Marv who was right in front of me.

I said, "Move on green only."

Marv gave a little giggle, Ben and Bingbing who were behind me then, gave a chuckle, but the kid didn't turn around at all. He was leaning over and looking up through a row of corn very cautious like when all of a sudden he started wiggling his hand behind him for us to come.

So we all crowded around very quietly and he whispered, "*It's in through there!* He's lying over on his face and he's dead, I bet. Lean over like I did and you can see."

We leaned over like he told us and we could see a man's felt hat and the shoulder part of a dark coat. The rest of him was hidden by the corn stalks but I remember how I thought right away that the hat looked just as if it was pulled down over the man's head, the way he was lying there.



WE LEANED OVER AND SAW A MAN'S FELT HAT AND A
DARK COAT

Major Bingbing didn't stop to do any leaning over or anything though—he hurried right in between the corn hills and he didn't stop to bother whether he was stepping on any of them or not. We just stood there and watched him because I can tell you it wasn't any picnic to feel that you were looking at a murdered man.

Anyway we didn't have to wait very long because Bigwig got to the spot and just stood there looking down. All of a sudden he called to us quietly but he didn't turn around—he just waited until we came up to him.

So like always, Pee-wee was first in line and on his tiptoes. He touched the Major on the shoulder and then Bingwig stood aside and looked at us.

“Well boys, it's true,” he said very solemn like, “the poor fellow hasn't a spark of life in him—and what's more he never has had.”

“What do you mean?” the kid whispered and we all leaned over and looked.

“See for yourself,” Major Bingbing kind of chuckled. “The poor chap's been dead all his life and he's never known it—that's the sad part of it.”

I saw it first because I took the trouble to climb around the hill where the Major was standing and I came out at where the “dead man's” legs were sprawling. That way I got a good look at the side of his face and goodnight, it was the stuffiest face I ever saw. Goodnight, a human being couldn't have a face like that.

It wasn't a human being; it was a scarecrow.

CHAPTER X

MR. STUFFY

After I got over my hysterics and Ben and Marv and Bingbing had calmed down we turned Mr. Stuffy over. Pee-wee did nothing but stand there and scratch his head and say “*Geeee whizz!*”

So finally I said, “Is that the way to show respect to a murdered man? You should be bowing your chin, I mean your head—in shame.”

Just as I said that I happened to look at the leg of the dummy and I saw a bullet hole through the worn out trousers that he had on. It was all scorched around the place too so I stooped down and examined it and I saw what made him fall over. The stick he had been standing against had been splintered and the bullet went right on through the dummy’s leg. I found the splintered stick on the ground.

“Somebody’s used him for a bull’s eye, eh?” said the Major. “Well, he’s the best looking scarecrow I’ve ever seen.”

And he was too. We found out from the farmer afterward that he had been sold by a peddler who did nothing but make dummies and sold them to farmers for scarecrows. Boy, they’d fool you until you got right up to them because they even had hands and feet and a face and ears that were painted to look like as if they were human. Even the feet part looked natural like because they were made just the same shape, and the whole business was filled with some kind of stuff that I can’t remember the name of. Anyway it was all covered with

a sort of waterproof material so's it could stand out in the rain all right.

So when we had him standing up against another stick the way he had been before, we could see a man coming from the farmhouse straight toward the cornfield.

“He’s seen us,” said the Major, “and he thinks we’re a lot of trespassers.”

I said, “He’ll be surprised when he hears how Mr. Stuffy got shot in the movies—in the leg, I mean.”

Major Bingbig laughed. He said, “Just the same I’m glad that we have this rifle in evidence of our good intent in coming here.”

“Do you say that isn’t something—that it isn’t criminal to find a rifle that’s been discharged in the woods?” Pee-wee wanted to know.

“Do you get that by reduction?” I came back at him.

“Don’t I know you’re making fun of me and besides what are you talking about?” he yelled.

“The woods,” I said. “How do you know the rifle was discharged in the woods?”

“You’re crazy,” he said, good and mad. “You know I didn’t mean that it was discharged in the woods—I meant that it was a crime for the feller who discharged that rifle and left it in the woods. Do you say it doesn’t look as if that’s the rifle that the feller, whoever he is, used on this dummy?”

I said, “That’s the same thing I get by reduction, Sir Harris. I leave it to Ben.”

By that time the farmer came up to us and Wigbig told him the whole story. He was an awful nice man, that farmer, and he told us his name was Simpkins and that his farmhouse and fields and all were in the town of Drowsyville although

the village was about two miles away. The lake was drowsy too—I mean its name was Drowsy Lake.

So Mr. Simpkins gave Stuffy the once-over and he thought too that it must have been the same rifle that made the bullet hole in the scarecrow. He said he had seen a couple of boys earlier in the afternoon but that they were at the lake and it was too far away for him to tell what they were doing. Anyway he thought that it might have been them, and even though it struck him funny that we should have taken Stuffy for a wounded man or a dead man, he said he was sorry that we had to go to so much trouble and hike that long way through the woods.

Wigbig told him that was all right, that we didn't mind and he gave him the rifle too in case he should find out who it belonged to. So after Pee-wee gave him a speech about good turns and how it was our duty to help people even if they turned out to be dummies, we started back.

So after we had gone a little ways, why, Mr. Simpkins called after us that he appreciated our kind thought in doing what we did and that if he could repay us in some way any time, he'd be glad to. Jiminy, I didn't realize then how soon we'd have to make him stick to his word.

Bigwig was in a hurry so we hurried back again going scout pace almost the whole way. When we left the woods, we were all pretty warm and hungry and thirsty and as we went toward the plane we began talking of what we'd eat and drink at one of the airport refreshment stands.

“And gee whiz, I won't do any more hiking today, either,” said the kid. “We can take the bus from the airport.”

“You're not big enough,” I said.

“What are you talking about—I’m not big enough?” the kid wanted to know.

“To take the bus from the airport—it’ll take you,” I said. “No sooner said than....”

“Shut up, if you’re going to say stung!” Pee-wee shouted.

“I wasn’t,” I said, “I was going to say *won* that time. But talking about reduction—if it wasn’t for Major Wigbig being in such a hurry I could have made some of Simpkins’ corn look pretty miserable, not saying what I could have done to a glass of cold milk.”

The Major didn’t mind the way I changed his name around. Boy, he was a good sport—he laughed at everything. But there was one thing he didn’t laugh at and that was when we all got settled nice and comfortable in the cabin and he went straight on up into the cockpit.

Ben said, “Now for a nice cool ride.”

“Am I glad that we don’t have to walk twenty miles back to Bridgeboro,” I said and stretched myself out.

“Well, somebody’ll have to do some walking,” said the Major from where he was standing in the doorway. “Somebody’s been in this plane and has been monkeying around with the stick and the starter and I don’t know what all. I can’t fly with a broken stick and I can’t take the time to stop and look to see what’ll have to be done to it. I must keep that appointment at the Highville Airport at five o’clock!”

Just then a kid came along on a bike. He was riding over in the lane the other side of the field but when he saw the plane he came toward us.

I said, “Maybe this is the feller that’s been monkeying.”

But it wasn’t—it was a kid that told us he lived in Drowsyville village and that he was just on his way from

there to the next town, called Saddleboro, where there was a carnival. Right away Bingbig looked as if he had an idea.

He said to the kid, “Couldn’t I get a bus from Saddleboro to Highville?”

The kid (not Pee-wee) said, “Sure.”

So Wigbig said, “I’ll give you five dollars if you give me a lift on your wheel to Saddleboro. Are you on?”

That kid was on, you can bet. So we all had to pile out of the cabin again and Wigbig apologized because he couldn’t take us back to Bridgeboro.

He said, “I shouldn’t have left the plane alone, I suppose.”

“Didn’t I tell you that before we started off!” the kid reminded him. “Even I wanted you to make Roy stay so did he do it? Gee whiz, it was a mistake and....”

“And you made the Major make the mistake,” I came back. “Who was it that started the rumpus when old Stuffy fell down in the field? If it hadn’t been for you none of us would have seen it—you and your murderer getting shot in the movies. Deny it if you dare!”

“No arguments, kids,” said Bingbing laughing. “It’s my fault—deny it if *you* dare! I could have locked up the cabin door as well as not and some kid just walked in and investigated, that’s all. No use talking whys and wherefores about it now. Your bus fare from Drowsyville will stand the four of you close onto three dollars, I guess. And considering the walk you’ll have back to the farm, you’re deserving of a couple more dollars for refreshment. I’m certain Farmer Simpkins will see that you’re given a lift down to the village. Now I don’t want any refusals because I feel responsible and if you happen to have any money yourselves—keep it. You can always use it. I’m going to give you eight dollars and

that leaves a wide margin for anything unforeseen. Are you on?"

"And how!" I said.

CHAPTER XI

WE EAT AND——

Eight dollars might seem a lot of money to some fellows and it seemed a lot to us then, but believe me, Bingbing knew what he was doing. It was worth eight dollars just to walk back through those woods again. Goodnight, we were all in when we came out in the cornfield.

It was six o'clock and a good half mile from the field up to the farmer's house. I think it took us an hour to walk that far; from the way I felt it seemed that long. Ben and Marvin and the kid dragged along more dead than anything.

You can imagine how surprised Farmer Simpkins looked when he came out and found us all flopped on his doorstep. I told him what had happened and asked him about giving us a lift down to Drowsyville village so's we could get a bus from there.

"Wa'al, wa'al," he said, "I'm jest as sorry as can be. My wife and daughter took the car to Saddleboro to the carnival, the trucks have gone to market and there ain't a pesky contraption 'round here to ride in 'ceptin th' wheelbarrows."

"Gee whiz," said Pee-wee, "what are we going to do?"

"Is it a riddle?" I said. "I wouldn't move from this porch for a firecracker."

"It's two mile to the village," said Farmer Simpkins. "Do yer want to walk it?"

"Not with my stomach and my feet," I said. "I'm posilutely so hungry and so tired...."

“Do you think you’re the only one!” the kid piped up. “Gee whiz, I’m so hungry and listen, mister, we’ve got money so will you let us buy some corn and some milk...”

“He wants reduction on them, mister,” I said, “and if you can’t give that to him, then deduction will be all right. Just as long as it’s corn and milk.”

Jiminy, I never met such a nice man as Farmer Simpkins. Right away he laughed and he apologized for not asking us if we were hungry and all like that. Then he said how we should telephone from his house and let our people know, because we were too tired to hike to the village that night.

So when we found out that everything was all right in Bridgeboro, why Farmer Simpkins gave us corn and bacon and butter and bread and cantaloupe. Then he gave us each a good heavy blanket and we hiked down beside the lake. Oh boy, what a place to camp!

While we were making a nice big campfire to cook the corn and bacon, Farmer Simpkins came down with a great big pail of ice cold milk. We had a hard job making him take money for all that stuff but at last he did because we told him we’d feel better about it. He sat around and watched us while we built a lean-to and he joked and talked and said he thought it was great how scouts could do so much.

That’s all the start that Pee-wee needed. He said, “Gee whiz, mister, this isn’t anything. We can do lots of things if we have to. Even we can go without starving in the wilderness for days because we know where to look for berries and herbs and things but we’re not doing it tonight because we’re too tired.”

I said, “Aren’t we supposed to be tired when we’re lost in the wilds and starving?”

“Shut up—did I say what we’d do if we *were* lost!” he came back at me. Then he began showing off to Farmer Simpkins again. “Even we’re never too tired to get up in the middle of the night and do a good turn, mister, so don’t mind these fellers. Gee whiz, even scouts go for days without sleep when they have to—that’s a scout law....”

“Not to sleep for days?” I wanted to know.

He gave me a black look and went on showing off. “Even there’s a scout law that we have to swear to, to be faithful to other people and help them in trouble. Gee whiz, no matter how bad the trouble is we got to help them!”

“Then help me,” I said, piteous like, “the lean-to will fall down on my head if you don’t.”

So that was the end of a perfect day.

CHAPTER XII

ACCOUNT OF PEE-WEE

We had some fun eating that corn and other stuff. Believe me, we were all half asleep by the time we had finished it. Ben and I sat talking after we cleaned up—Pee-wee fell right asleep after supper so he got out of that. Marv helped though but he curled up in his blanket as soon as we finished.

Anyway, like I told you, Ben and I sat talking a little while, it was so nice and cool there by the lake. It was quite dark too and the frogs were making a lot of noise. Still and all it's a noise that doesn't keep you from hearing other things. That's how we came to hear that funny rustling noise from the woods. It was just the same sound that you hear when someone is running kind of frightened like.

I got up and almost stumbled into the last of the campfire. It was dying down but it gleamed quite bright in the darkness and as I stood and looked over it toward the dark trees where the woods began I couldn't see anything.

“Goodnight, I wish I was a cat,” I said.

Ben got up then too and he said, “It wouldn't be a bad idea to be able to see through the darkness. You know, Roy, that noise was just like the one we heard this morning. Remember?”

I said, “Jiminy, that's right. But who could it be?”

“That's what I'd like to know. Kind of funny, huh? But, I don't know, it could be an animal.”

I don't know what happened to Pee-wee that time, but he woke up all of a sudden and sat up, rubbing his eyes. “What

animal are you talking about?" he wanted to know very sleepy like.

"One of the animal crackers," I said. "Go to sleep, you're having a nightmare, kid."

"You think you're smart," he came back at me. "I'm not having any nightmare and besides I heard that rustling noise kind of in my sleep. It woke me up I guess and then I heard all that you and Ben said so does that sound like a nightmare? Maybe it's an escaped wild animal from that carnival that's at Saddleboro, huh?"

"You're the only wild animal that's escaped," I said.

"And yet he says he hasn't had a nightmare," said Ben.

"Just the same I read once how an animal escaped from a circus and hid in the woods ten miles away," the kid roared. "A bunch of scouts discovered him creeping up and then running away into the woods again. They caught him so do you say the same thing couldn't happen to us?"

"Anything could happen to you, Sir Harris—in your mind," I said. "Now don't memorize any more fairy tales, but go to sleep like a good little boy. You'll be dreaming of snakes next."

So Ben and I started trampling out the fire and after that we buried the embers. All the time the kid was kind of looking around in the dark but I noticed that he didn't make any move to get up and look any further. And by the time we got the embers buried it was too dark to see each other so Pee-wee said he guessed he'd go to sleep again.

Ben and I didn't say anything but I knew he felt how lonesome and spooky it was too. We weren't scared by anything that Pee-wee said because, jiminy, we were too old to believe his fairy tales. But just the same it kind of made us

feel creepy after the fire was out. There wasn't even a light up at Farmer Simpkins'.

"He's gone to bed too," I said, just to say something.

"We might as well go too," said Ben.

So we did, but I lay a long time listening to the frogs and imagining every couple of minutes that I was hearing that rustling sound. Then I'd decide that it was only some leaves being stirred by the breeze and I'd laugh to myself sort of and think of Pee-wee's wild animal.

Goodnight, that kid's a riot when he gets going on anything like that. He can make himself believe more things than you ever heard of. Once up in camp he heard a bear roaring and it turned out to be a signboard that was loose, but he had the whole bunch of us out listening before Ben discovered what it really was.

After a while I got good and sleepy myself, listening to the whole three of them snoring. It was better than the frogs. Anyway I guess I fell asleep because I don't remember hearing anything after that snoring. The next thing I heard was Farmer Simpkins' voice and he was shaking us kind of to wake us up. He had a great big searchlight.

I sat up and I asked him what time it was. I don't know why—I didn't have any place I wanted to go exactly, except to go back to sleep. But he kept talking and talking and finally I was wide awake.

He said, "It's past midnight, son, and I hates t' wake you boys but I remembered what the little feller told me about what scouts are supposed t' do fer people in trouble so I sez t' myself I'll come straight here an' ask you boys t' hunt fer little Timmie Todd in th' woods."

“Who’s Timmie Todd?” the kid wanted to know, sitting up wide-awake all of a sudden like he did with Ben and me.

“Wa’al,” said Farmer Simpkins, stroking his beard very thoughtful like, “Timmie lives a mile frum me. His father’s gone t’ market and his mother jest phoned a little while back and got me out o’ bed t’ tell me that Timmie ain’t been home since noon. She didn’t tell his father thinkin’ the lad would come home fer supper, but he didn’t an’ another little feller what he plays with said Timmie took his father’s rifle out o’ the house and they’d been off together shootin’ birds. He’s ’bout ’leven years old.”

“Something tells me there’s going to be reduction in this story,” I said.

Pee-wee gave me a nice black look and he said, “Go on, mister. Did he kill any?”

“I guess not,” said Mr. Simpkins, “but he aimed at a couple and missed and then when he tried again at one that wuz flyin’ low he went and popped over the scarecrow. Jes like a flash he took to his heels and flew into the woods and thar he’s been all the time since. I guess that’s how he came to drop the rifle and when Mrs. Todd questioned Timmie’s little pal tonight, he said that Timmie killed a man what wuz standin’ in the cornfield, because they both saw him fall over. Timmie run into the woods and the other little feller run home where he lives near the Todds and he’s been too scared t’ tell anything till Mrs. Todd went thar tonight and asked him whar Timmie wuz.”

“Didn’t I tell you there was reduction?” I said.

“Is this a time to talk nonsense!” the kid came back at me. And then he said to the farmer, “You want us all to go and find him, huh? You sure he’s hiding in the woods, mister?”

“As sure as can be,” the farmer answered. “I told Mrs. Todd that you were a fine lot o’ boys and that it wuz yore duty t’ do things like this. The father of the other little feller is going t’ drive her up here soon’s he kin, so I thought ’twould be nice if yer could find Timmie ’fore she got here. Kind of s’prise her, heh?”

“Sure, even we’ll get him before you know it,” said the kid putting on his shoes. “You can lead the way mister, huh? Because we don’t know those woods so well and maybe if you went ahead kind of we’d be able to follow better and find him.”

“I’d like to do that, son,” said Mr. Simpkins, “but on account o’ rheumatiz I dasn’t go near them woods. They’re too damp and besides yore sech smart boys yer don’t need any leadin’ I guess. Yore jest tryin’ to be modest in askin’ me t’ come when yer knew yore able t’ do it without me, heh? Wa’al, here’s three flashlights what I brought fer yer—they’re good and powerful so’s yer kin penetrate the swamp. Yer kin call an’ tell Timmie that he didn’t kill any man ’t all.”

“Just Mr. Stuffy,” I said, putting on my shoes too.

Mr. Simpkins left us then because he couldn’t stand in the night air without getting “rheumatiz,” that’s what he said. He went back to the house to wait while we hunted for Timme and got nice and wet from the dew and the swamp. That’s what we got for being scouts and hanging around with Pee-wee.

I said, “*Even scouts go for days without sleep! Even they’ll get up in the middle of the night to do a good turn to help people in trouble. That’s a scout law! Who did I hear saying those very words a couple of hours ago?*”

“*Pee-wee!*” said Ben and Marv.

“Right,” I said, “you both go to the head of the class for that. It’s a good thing we got those eats from Mr. Simpkins before the kid started telling him how we could go for days without eating and not starve to death. Well, here’s one scout that can’t. *Even scouts can eat berries and herbs....*”

“If you think you’re funny, you’re not!” the kid yelled out in the still night air. I like that sentence, that’s why I wrote it. “Is it obeying scout laws to sit there and complain about finding a poor little feller like this Timmie is when gee whiz, maybe he’s sinking in the swamp or something? Even maybe he’s in quicksand and is dead for all we know so do you think it’s nice to make fun of me because I’m a good scout and want to do my duty?”

“Let’s have a large chunk of silence and start combing the woods for little Eva,” I said. “I’ll carry the comb.”

That made him madder than ever and he got up very dignified like and began flashing his light all around on the ground just like Sherlock Nobody Homes. “Are you coming or are you going to sit there all night?” he wanted to know. All the time he just stood in that one spot and Ben and I knew that he was kind of scared and waiting for us to lead the way.

Anyway we felt sorry for him and got up and started toward the woods. Marv and he walked in back and that made him more cheerful. And as soon as he feels cheerful he starts showing off.

“Gee whiz,” he said, “I knew I heard a noise or something when you and Ben were talking tonight. Do you bet it wasn’t Timmie that was sneaking around the edge of the woods that time and was afraid to come out?”

Ben and I gave each other a wink not to answer him so after he got tired of waiting, he bet Marv instead. All Marv did though was to giggle and that made him kind of mad.

“Just the same it’s a good thing everything happened this way because else who would go hunting for Timmie, huh?” he wanted to know very desperate like.

I didn’t answer him, but I said to Ben, “How long did it take little Eva to cross the ice?”

Ben said, “Gosh, Roy, I’m terrible in history and math—I can’t tell you. It took her quite a long time I guess.”

“You’re a couple of fools!” the kid grumbled. “Even I bet you don’t know what you’re talking about, do you?”

“No,” I said and just then we came to the edge of the woods. “Here’s hoping we find the kid’s wild animal.”

“You mean Timmie, and I know you’re just a fool,” Pee-wee hissed.

“Carried by a large minority,” I said. Then Ben and I flashed our lights all around and I stepped ahead, leading the way.

We didn’t fool any more after that because those woods seemed worse at night. If you’ve ever read anything about the Dismal Swamp you can subtract it a couple of times and then you’ll know what Drowsyville Swamp is like. It wasn’t any fun, I can tell you that.

CHAPTER XIII

LOOKING FOR TIMMIE

We called Timmie until we were hoarse, but all we got in answer was the croaking of the frogs and the clicking noise of crickets from out in the field. After that we moved further and further into the swampy part of the woods.

We all stuck together for quite a while and then Ben decided that it wasn't a good way. Pee-wee didn't like the idea but I guess he was ashamed to say so and he went with Marv like he was told while we took the swamp on the other side of the trail.

We didn't go very far in, but stayed as near the trail as we could. Every couple of seconds when we pushed back one of those crazy growing ferns or some other high swamp grass, we'd think that we'd found little Timmie, but each time we were fooled. Finally it began to make us cranky and besides we were pretty tired and sleepy.

So you can imagine how we jumped when we heard Pee-wee's voice yelling, "Come on, fellers! I—I found him! Gee whiz, I lost my light!"

Ben and I ran in the direction of the kid's voice as fast as we could. "That's just like him to lose the light," I said. "I wonder why Marv couldn't help him find it?"

"We'll find out soon enough," Ben said.

All the time Pee-wee kept shouting that he had found him and I kept yelling back that we were coming with our lights. I wondered though why we didn't hear Marv's voice at all. It seemed funny.

Anyway we found their tracks and pretty soon my light flashed on the kid's back. He looked around the minute I flashed it and smiled very triumphant like and we could see that he was holding onto somebody for all he was worth. Then all of a sudden I heard a chuckle and I saw Marv wriggle out from under Pee-wee's arm.

"Gee whiz, gee whiz!" the kid kept saying. He scratched his head and looked at Marv kind of puzzled like.

I said, "What's the idea, kid? Where is he? What's the matter?"

The kid just stood there looking at Marv though, kind of stupefied. Ben leaned down and picked up the flashlight—it was lying under a tree where he dropped it. And Marv was laughing so that he couldn't speak.

Finally the kid said, "I—I dropped my light and all the time I thought Marv was behind me but I guess he wasn't because anyway I went to look for the light again and I felt this feller kind of wriggle past me and right away I thought it was Timmie. Gee whiz, I couldn't see, it was so dark and besides Marv never said a word, he didn't even laugh till you fellers came. Gee whiz, how did I know in the dark that it was Marv I was holding onto all the time. Even when I called to you fellers he didn't say anything."

"I couldn't," Marv gulped. "I had hysterics inside like and I knew if I told you who I was, I'd flop to the ground I was so weak from laughing inside."

"Gee whiz, do you think that's a joke—do you think that's anything to get hysterics over?" the kid wanted to know, very insulted like. "Now I'm disgusted and besides I don't see why Mr. Simpkins picked on us to hunt for Timmie—gee whiz, he knows these woods and we don't. We don't even

know if there's quicksand or not and maybe we could even sink in it. Besides you'd think that Timmie would have more sense to know a scarecrow from a man and not be such a fool and hide."

"Listen to animal cracker," I said. "Listen to who's talking about telling the difference between a scarecrow and a man when he didn't even know himself."

"I won't even listen to you because how could I see a couple of hundred feet in the air!" he shot back at me.

"Anyway we've hunted and called and gee whiz, I'm tired!"

"Even scouts don't sometimes sleep for..." I began.

"Will you keep still about that and besides did I mean that I could do that?" he came back. "I meant older fellers could keep awake."

So we followed him out to the trail again. We stood there calling for a little while and Marv got calmed down enough to call too. But little Timmie wasn't anywhere in sight.

I said, "Shall we wade further into the mire and quicksand or shall we turn our steps back toward the cornfield like a true bunch of unfaithful scouts?"

"Do you mean to say we're unfaithful if we want to go back and sleep after we've been hunting for this crazy Timmie a couple of hours it seems to me?" Pee-wee wanted to know. "That shows how much of a lot you don't know about that scout law because it doesn't say you've got to go to such a lot of trouble to help people—gee whiz, they can't expect *too* much."

"Remember that tomorrow morning when you're hungry and chilly and want to buy some coffee from Mr. Simpkins for breakfast," said I. "Remember..."

"Are we going or not?" the kid wanted to know.

“*Timmie!*” I began shouting. “Timmie, we came to take you out of here!”

“We came to tell you that you didn’t shoot a man—you shot Mr. Simpkins’ scarecrow,” called Ben.

Then I kind of caught a glimpse of something moving in a tree down the trail. I leaned over and flashed my light in that direction and there, sure enough was somebody’s shoe hanging down from between the branches. So I pointed to it and gave Pee-wee the signal to keep quiet. He can do it sometimes, but it’s a hard job for him.

Anyway he kept quiet this time and just as if none of us had seen anything we strolled down to the tree. There we saw more than the shoe—we saw the whole fellow sitting up in the first limb and staring at us as if we were a lot of freaks.

“Do you mean that—that it was only Mr. Simpkins’ scarecrow that fell over in the cornfield?” he asked us.

I said, “Yes—yes. But you aren’t Ti—Timmie, are you?”

He said, “Sure, I am. Why?”

What a question that was! Pee-wee said, “Gee whiz!” and stared at the fellow till I thought he was going to stay in that position the rest of his life. Ben and Marv and I just stood there trying not to laugh and looking silly. Goodnight, we couldn’t help it.

Little Timmie only weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds and he was eleven years old. Circuses, carnivals, etc., please address him, One Ton—R. F. D.—Drowsyville, N. J.

CHAPTER XIV

SH! MYSTERY

We got “little Timmie” safely to his mother anyhow and after we refused a reward, why we left Farmer Simpkins’ house and started back to our lean-to by the lake. By that time we were kind of wide-awake and because there was a couple of cobs of corn left and some bacon the kid said we should make another fire and eat it up. What did we care for money? We could buy some more in the morning.

So that’s how we came to build another fire and pretty soon we were cooking the stuff. It was three o’clock in the morning and another day so why shouldn’t we be hungry? One excuse is as good as the other.

Anyway, we were just taking the stuff from the fire and I was getting all ready to butter a nice big ear for myself when Pee-wee pinched my arm.

He said, “Sh! I hear someone, don’t you?”

“No,” I said, “How can I hear anybody when you’re talking? What do you hear now?”

“Maybe it’s a wild animal,” Ben said.

I said, “It can’t be. Timmie—little Timmie is home in bed by now.”

“Shut up!” said the kid in a whisper. “I hear someone coming through the corn.”

“You’re wrong,” I said. “The name of that song is ‘Comin’ Thru The Rye’ or ‘Ba Ba Blacksheep.’”

“If you could hear what a fool you sound like,” he said, good and mad. “*Listen*, will you!”

“I’m all ears,” I said. “They’re too large for me.”

Anyway, I listened and I didn’t start eating my corn like I should have. That’s the sad part of it. Pee-wee had almost all of his gobbled up, Marv had started on his and Ben was doing pretty well with what he had. So by the time I got through listening to please the kid, and was ready to eat mine, why a man came walking right into the glow of our campfire.

Goodnight, he was the most hoboish looking hobo that I ever saw. He was as thin as Ben and just about the same size and the way he looked at the corn I was going to eat—well, I couldn’t eat it, with him looking, that’s all.

“I’m sorry tuh disturb yuh, boys,” he said, kind of quiet like. “I jest wonder if yuh cud gimme a bite to eat and let me sleep under your shack tonight? I’d think I was havin’ a party tuh do that.”

“Gee whiz, give him your corn, Roy,” said the kid, very generous like. “If you do that I’ll sleep with you under your blanket and let him have the one Mr. Simpkins gave me, huh?”



“GEE WHIZ, GIVE HIM YOUR CORN, ROY” SAID THE
KID, VERY GENEROUS LIKE.

I kind of gave the hobo a glance and I saw that he looked pretty clean—only his clothes were ragged. So I gave him my corn and believe me, I wanted it as bad as he did, I bet but I couldn't say anything to the kid. Anyway, he got the blanket too and after he ate some bacon and drank some of the milk, he crawled in the lean-to and was snoring like everything by the time I rolled up with Pee-wee.

“He's got a nice, honest face for a hobo,” said the kid. “I could tell it right away.”

I said, “I hope so, because all our things are lying on top of the little box that Mr. Simpkins gave us to carry the stuff down in. I put yours there too.”

“Gee whiz,” said the kid, “I got fifty cents in my pockets and that compass my mother gave me last Christmas.”

“I thought you thought he had a nice, honest face,” I said.

“Sure, I think so,” he came right back. “I just meant that I hoped you didn't let them fall out when you put my things there, that's all.”

“Well, Ben's got that eight dollars in his pockets that Wigbig gave us beside two cents of his own. I got a quarter and Marv's got a baseball. Altogether that makes eight dollars and a baseball. We should worry about the future!”

“Even we'll buy cream for our coffee in the morning, huh?” Pee-wee said, thinking of eats right away.

“Keep quiet,” I said. “Think of the eats I almost didn't get a few minutes ago and you starting to talk about breakfast! Do you think I've got a stomach like Mr. Stuff?”

We went to sleep then and I only woke up once and then it was because Ben stumbled over my foot. When I asked him what was the matter he said he just got too warm and had taken off his slip-on sweater and was putting it over on the

box with the rest of the things. After that we slept till morning.

When I woke up the sun was shining in my face, but there was a nice cool breeze with it. Marv and the kid were still sound asleep but I couldn't see Ben or the hobo and so I sat up.

Just then, Ben popped his head inside. "I've just been washing down at the lake," he said. Then, kind of puzzled like he looked toward the box. "Didn't I get up in the night and put my sweater there?"

"I thought you did," I said. "Isn't it there?"

"Gosh, no. I'm pretty sure I wasn't dreaming and put it any place else."

"Where's Mr. Nought?" I wanted to know.

"Who? Oh, that hobo—gosh, I forgot all about him, you know that? I don't see him anywhere—he probably went off about his own business."

"Look in your pockets and you'll soon know if it was his own business," I said. "Look in all our pockets!"

After Ben looked through our pockets I could tell by the way he looked up, why Mr. Nought was an early riser. "Even Marv's baseball is gone," he said.

That got Pee-wee up like a shot. "Do—do you mean to tell me that that man has robbed us?" he shouted in his morning voice. "Do you mean to tell me that he robbed me of my compass and my fifty cents?"

"What are you kicking about?" I said. "Ben and I've lost a dollar each and counting that eight dollars, goodnight, you should grumble about a compass when we've been robbed of all our money! Besides a hobo needs a compass more than

you do—he’s *got* to know where he’s going and you don’t have to!”

“I bet that compass cost more than eight dollars and besides do you say we don’t need it when we’re twenty miles from Bridgeboro and haven’t the carfare to get there?” Pee-wee shouted.

“Speak louder, I can’t hear you,” I said. “And while you’re still broadcasting, let me remind you that Mr. Nought had a nice, honest face for a hobo—oh yes, he did not!”

“There was something touching about him,” said Ben with a wink. “That’s why Pee-wee made you give up your corn and crowded you out of the blanket the rest of the night.”

“That’s what I like about the kid,” I said. “He lets other people be so generous—even we’ll buy cream for our coffee.”

“Do you say we can’t?” the kid shouted. “Who says we can’t?”

“Nobody,” I said, “but what’ll we use for money?”

“Haven’t you got resources or anything?”

“Nope, not even a package of chewing gum in my pocket,” I said.

That set Marv off and baseball or no baseball he was having a lot of fun listening. Then Ben started off mumbling something about how he’d track that hobo if he never tracked anything else in his life. Believe me, I knew we’d never see or hear from Mr. Nought again. And I was right.

We were all washed and dressed when Ben came running back around the edge of the field. He had a coat in his hand and kind of swung it back and forth as he came.

“This is all I found of Pee-wee’s friend,” he said. “Gosh, he must have gone before dawn because his tracks show it.

And I found this coat behind a tree just as you go in the woods. It was thrown in a heap.”

“He should worry about a ragged old coat when he’s got a nice slip-on sweater, huh?” I said. “Did you find any money in the pockets, ha, ha?”

Ben laughed. “I didn’t think to look,” he said and made out he was searching the pockets. He brought out a small piece of paper and was going to throw it away when the kid took it from him.

“Let me see what it is because maybe it’s a clue,” he said, opening it up very important like.

“Like all your clues,” I said, and watched him spread the piece of torn paper out. His nose and forehead wrinkled all up as if he was puzzled. “Begin at the end, you won’t have so far to go.”

“Listen, fellers,” he said all excited, “read that and see if there’s anything to laugh at!”

So he handed it to me and at first I couldn’t read it because the paper was so wrinkled and worn the way it had been folded. It was written in a very light ink too and that didn’t make it so easy to read. Anyway there was only a piece of it, but boy, it was the kind of a note that Pee-wee likes to read.

Here’s what it said:

Harold is where he should have been long ago. You were wise in letting me put an end to him and don’t worry that he’ll get free. Put him in sack and weighted the whole business as per instructions. Had quite a fight to overpower him, but triumphed and give you my word that

Drowsyville Lake won't give up the ghost. He's good there forever I guess and maybe

That's all there was of it, but it was enough for Pee-wee. He took it from me right away. "I'm the one that saved it because Ben wouldn't have bothered looking at it even," he said. "Gee whiz, you can't say that that doesn't sound like a criminal's note—I bet that hobo's murdered somebody—that Harold feller—for his money and put him in that sack like he says and let him go down to the bottom of the lake. Drowsyville Lake, he says—why, it's this lake he means, huh?"

"It must be unless there's two of them," I said. "Now what are you going to do with that note? Buy our breakfast?"

"Gee whiz, we better go right up to Mr. Simpkins and show it to him," said the kid mysteriously. "I bet he'll want to phone to the Drowsyville constable right away, huh?"

"And we won't get any breakfast till afternoon," I said.

"Can't you stop thinking about eating till we get help to a poor murdered feller that's been thrown in the lake?" he wanted to know.

I said, "If that feller's been in the lake as long as that note looks as if it's been in that coat pocket, why he doesn't need any help by now. He's probably one of those blades of marsh grass that are growing up beside the bank there."

"Is that how much respect you got for a—a feller like this Harold that's been cruelly murdered by a thief of a hobo..."

"Who looks as if he has a nice, honest face," I said.

"Shut up! Do you have to say that so many times and besides do you say I'm not sorry that it happened!" the kid screamed. "Gee whiz, we all make mistakes, but anyhow

maybe you don't know what'll happen about this note. Maybe this feller even has a reward out for him like they do when people disappear."

"I wish *you'd* disappear," I said. "The only way to do it, is to take you along so I suppose we might as well go up to Simpkins' and get the long arm of the law working. Now we'll have to answer a lot of questions that we don't know the answer to. All this has to happen when I haven't even got a safety pin in my pocket."

"Just the same won't it pay if we get a reward?" the kid wanted to know. "There's most always rewards when fellers have been missing all the years that this feller must be, huh?"

"What good will the coffee I get tomorrow, do me today?" I came back at him.

"What are you talking about anyhow?" he shouted.

"Breakfast," I said. "Ask me another."

So then we walked up the path to Farmer Simpkins' house and Pee-wee carried the mysterious note. Boy, what a day that was!

CHAPTER XV

INTERIOR WITNESSES

Jiminy, all my worries about breakfast were for nothing because we had a swell lot of eats at Simpkins'. Mr. Simpkins heard our story about Mr. Nought and he got all excited like I said he would and he called up the Drowsyville constable. While he was doing this Mrs. Simpkins made us pancakes and besides we had eggs and biscuits.

After that was over I crawled to the telephone and called up my father and told him that I was in a strange city where I was poor but dishonest and needed some money and clothes right away if not sooner. So then Pee-wee called up his father and while he was waiting for central to give him the number, Mr. Slickem, the constable, came in.

After he read the note he told us that we would have to stay right on Mr. Simpkins' property until the lake was dragged and the body found. He said we would be held as material witnesses or something like that because we were the only ones that saw Mr. Nought face to face.

"He's the murderer—sure's yer live," said Mr. Slickem. "You youngsters stay right here so's I kin call on yer in case I catch that vile rascal of a hobo."

So after Pee-wee heard that he said to his mother over the phone, "Even we may have to stay on Farmer Simpkins' property for years because they're going to drag the whole lake for that Harold feller I told you about. Besides the constable says we got to be interior witnesses too in case he

catches that hobo. What? No, I don't know—it's some kind of a witness that they have in mysterious cases like this."

"Inferior witnesses," I called to him.

"Shut up!" he roared. "No, I didn't say that to you, Mom. I was talking to that fool of a Roy Blakeley. All right. Goodbye!"

"Goodnight," I said, when he came out onto the porch where we all were. "Now all we got to do is to sit around for days or months or years and be immaterial witnesses. What else can we do besides look at the lake and the cornfield, Mr. Slickem?"

"Yer kin come down t' the village fer a spell if yuh want ter," he said, as if he was doing us a great favor. "Yer not prisoners't all—jest want yer 'round in case anythin' pops along that's important. Remember though, don't none of you boys mention what's in this note—not to a soul!"

So after he told us to kind of keep sentinel that night in case Mr. Nought should sneak back again, he left in his flivver for the village again. Boy, that was his first big case in fifteen years, Mr. Simpkins said, and I guess he wanted to get down to the firehouse and tell everybody about it.

So while we were waiting for some money and clothes to come from Bridgeboro we decided we'd go back to the lake and make a better lean-to. As long as we were going to stay until they dragged the lake we might as well fix up a nice place to kid Pee-wee in. That's the way I felt about it and I'm glad we did that because by the time they let us go home, it seemed as if it had been years that we were there, just like the kid told his mother.

Anyway, we were good interior witnesses, if I do say it myself.

CHAPTER XVI

I'M LAUGHING

That afternoon, John, Harris' chauffeur, drove down through Simpkins' lane. He had clothes and eats in the back of that car for all of us, enough to last for a week and he said that after Mrs. Harris had loaded the kid's things in she gave him orders to stop at each of our houses where our mothers filled it up still more.

"Now you kids shouldn't be hungry," he said. "There's good, nourishing food for all of you and no reason why you have to fill up on a lot of candy and soda and all that trash. Your mothers all got their heads together this morning and that's what they said. It'll keep you busy and out of mischief to cook it and keep your camp in order and I guess if the truth is known they're glad to get rid of you like this for a week or so."

I said, "The same to you, John. Something tells me that all this talk about filling up on good nourishing food so's that we don't have to buy candy and soda and all that trash, means something. It means that you haven't brought along much spending money for us, huh? Break the sad news gently and don't keep me in suspenders."

"You guessed right," said John, laughing as if it was a great big joke. "They don't want you to get sick like you usually do."

"Gee whiz," said the kid, kind of worried, "do you mean to tell me my mother didn't send me any money so's I could buy a cone or a hot dog once in a while—gee whiz!"

“Once in a while?” I said. “You mean once a minute.”

John laughed and he said, “Exactly, you admit you don’t know how to spend money yourselves. That’s why Mrs. Harris decided that fifty cents was a fair amount for Walter, fifty cents was the limit donated by Mrs. Blakeley, twenty-five cents came from Mrs. Meeke for her son, Marvin, and a dollar for Ben from Mrs. Maxwell because he’s the biggest of the bunch.”

“Gee whiz,” said Pee-wee, good and peeved, “how about when we get ready to come home—how about it, huh? Gee whiz, do they expect us to make that stingy little bit stretch a whole week or more and—and——”

“We’ll buy fifty cents’ worth of gum and make that stretch,” I said to John.

“Either that or stretch our imagination,” said Ben.

“Gosh, do we have to walk twenty miles or so home?” Marv piped up.

John grinned and he said, “No. All you kids have to do when this inquiry or whatever they call it, is over, is to phone straight to the Harris home in Bridgeboro and little John will be up here after you in a couple of hours. You’ll have a nice comfortable ride home and it won’t cost you a cent. That’s what your mothers decided.”

“*Geeeee* whiz!” Pee-wee yelled disgusted. “That’s no fair, do you say it is, fellers? Do you say you can have any fun riding twenty miles in a car that belongs to my father and his chauffeur driving it even? Do you say that’s any fun?”

John laughed—he was a good sport. He said, “It’s not any fun, but it’s cheaper in the long run. Remember kids, soon’s you’re ready to come home—telephone! I’ll get up here in a jiffy.”

So he went away laughing because he knew we were disappointed with such a little bit of spending money and he knew the kid was wild to think his mother should say we could come home with John when we were ready. Not that he isn't a nice feller; he just won't let the kid (or any of us when he's in charge) fool and carry on in the car or stop at any of the refreshment stands. So that's why none of us were keen about riding home with John.

"Anyway he didn't say that my mother or your mothers said that we *had* to ride home with John so I got an inspiration," the kid yelled. "Just now I happened to think that John said we could call when we got ready so we can fool them—not fool them exactly. I mean kind of surprise them because we'll ask Farmer Simpkins can we work for him and we can earn our bus fare and maybe something extra so's we'll have fun going home, huh? Do you say that isn't a dandy scheme?"

"I say that working isn't a dandy scheme at all but it's better than sitting like a lot of dummies going home with John," I said. "When does Mr. Simpkins find out that we're going to work for him?"

"Right away—even this minute because if we have to go home in a couple of days we want to have some money, don't we?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know—do we?" I said. "If you want to start right in this minute—go ahead. Ben and I want to have a swim and I bet Marv does too. Anyway after the way we hiked yesterday and the way we tracked little Timmie last night, little Roy doesn't feel like working today, bus fare or no bus fare."

"Neither does little Ben," said Big Ben.

“Gosh, if we have to work hard, I’d rather wait until tomorrow too,” Marv said.

I said, “Carried by a large minority. Now kid, are you with us and against work?”

“That shows what a lot of business inspiration you haven’t got,” said the kid, disgusted. “Maybe even we won’t be here only a couple of days so do you say we shouldn’t be prepared and start right in working now so’s we could be earning money from now on? You’ll like it all right when you get the money I bet.”

“We’d rather see you get the money for this afternoon, that shows how generous we are,” I said flopping down in the grass. “Now run along, animal cracker, so’s you can get back and make lunch for us before you start work. As long as you feel so much like working you might as well start the afternoon right.”

“You won’t lie there laughing about it if we all of a sudden was able to go home and we didn’t have any money?” the kid shouted at me.

“I’d start in laughing right now if that happened,” I said, “because we could finish our right and left hike that we started yesterday. We only took two left turns to the right and that isn’t much for a right and left hike. I’d laugh myself to death if we had to hike over twenty miles to Bridgeboro, *positutely!*”

“Even go on and laugh yourself to death,” the kid came back at me. “Just the same I’m going up to Simpkins’ and say I want to work right now and maybe you won’t laugh yourself to death when you see tonight how I made a couple of dollars—anyway a dollar I bet, while you fellers lie

around on the grass like tramps. Even I got business inspiration and that's more than you have."

"Keep it, kid—we're good-hearted; we don't want it," I said.

"What are you talking about?" he wanted to know. "What do you mean you don't want—what?"

"Whatever *you're* talking about, I don't care," I said. "Where you going, Sir Harris?"

"Simpkins', and it'd be a good thing for..." he began.

"Tell Mr. Simpkins if he can give us work we'll think it over tomorrow morning," I yelled after the kid. "Tell him we're making no promises. There's no need of all of us working as long as you're so crazy to do it. Hurry back so's you can get lunch for us, kid!"

"Even I'll take my time and maybe when I tell you how much I'm going to earn you won't laugh and talk so much nonsense because like my mother says the feller that laughs last lass laft ... uh ... lafts lats.... geeee whiz! I'm disgusted!"

"Merry Christmas!" I said.

So we all laughed first and last and turned over in the nice, cool grass to wait for the kid to come back and get lunch.

CHAPTER XVII

NOBODY WORKS—BUT—

After a while the kid came down the lane carrying a great big basket. Maybe it wasn't so terribly big but it looked that way alongside of the kid. Anyway, when he got by the camp he set it down and he was warm and perspiring.

He said, "Gee whiz, haven't any of you fellers made lunch yet because I'm hungry and besides I've got to start working in a little while so's I can make a half a day's pay!"

I said, "How much is a half a day's pay, kid, and what's the basket for? Are you supposed to lie down in it and sleep when you're tired?"

"That basket's for corn, you crazy fool!" shouted Pee-wee. "And on account of it hasn't been a very good season, Farmer Simpkins can't pay us any more than fifty cents for a half day so if you fellers want to start tomorrow you can only work a half a day because he can't afford any more than that. So do you want to start in this afternoon because gee whiz, you ought to in case we have to go home in a day or so because it takes one fifty for us to get home on account of the two different buses we got to take—I figured it all out."

I said, "Posilutely I don't want to work this afternoon and maybe no other afternoon. Ben and Marv and I will talk it over after we have a swim, but the way I see it now I'd rather have some fun hiking to Bridgeboro instead of working a whole afternoon for fifty cents. What are you supposed to do—pick corn?"

“Sure, and do you say it’s so hard when all I’ve got to do is to throw the corn into that basket?” the kid wanted to know. “Gee whiz, I don’t see how you fellers can be so lazy!”

That was just to make us work along with him, but believe me it didn’t work. The kid hates to work alone and I don’t blame him, but we should worry about work on a nice summer’s day when we could go swimming instead. Besides we expected Mr. Slickem and the whole village of Drowsyville to come up and drag the lake that afternoon so you can bet we didn’t want to miss anything. And Pee-wee didn’t feel so ambitious when we reminded him of that—I guess he kind of forgot about it for the time being. That’s the way the kid is.

“Anyway, I’ll be right near where I can see things and besides I’m an interior witness so do you say I haven’t a right to stop picking corn in case the constable wants me to answer questions or identify something, huh?” he wanted to know.

“That’s all right, kid,” I said, “Ben and Marv and I can do all that. You just stick to the corn and we’ll stick to the lake.”

You can bet he was sorry he ever said anything about working that afternoon because I could tell by the scowl on his face. When things happen Pee-wee likes to be right on the spot and not five hundred yards away picking corn. So while we were kidding him about it and getting lunch ready, a couple of girls riding on bikes came around the edge of the field. When they saw us they changed their minds about going up the lane and came right into our lunch almost. Then they got off their bikes.

“Oh, how perfectly lovely this camp is,” said the taller girl who had red hair and a boyish haircut. “My name’s Dotty Todd and my girl friend is Susan Strong.”

So I said, “What of it? My name is Larry Lighthouse and that microbe that you see over there with the frying pan in his hand is Tom Thumb. When he stands up straight he answers to the name of Pee-wee Harris. The big feller cooking the coffee is Jack the Giant....”

“Oh, aren’t you fresh!” said the girls. “Nevertheless,” said Dotty Todd, “I think Pee-wee just fits that little fellow. He’s cute!”

“My name is Walter Harris!” the kid shouted shaking the bacon all over the frying pan. “Besides we can’t ask you to have lunch with us because we only got enough for ourselves for a week and we haven’t hardly any spending money and we don’t know how long we’re going to be here so don’t stay around if you think you’re going to get anything to eat here!”

I said, “Excuse him, girls, he doesn’t know any better. He saw some cannibals in a movie once and that’s where he got his manners. That’s where he got his appetite too, I’ll leave it to Ben.”

“Anyway we’re going to stay around this lake whether you want us to or not,” said Susan Strong who was big and had a deep voice for a girl. “We know all about you boys finding a note in that tramp’s coat pocket. Constable Slickem won’t be here until after three o’clock because they had to send to Saddleboro for things to drag the lake.”

“Geeee whiz!” said the kid. “That’s some police force in Drowsyville, I don’t think. After the way he told us not to say anything about that note or coat or anything here a couple of girls are talking about it already.”

“We don’t know what was in the note,” said Dotty Todd very airish like; “we just guessed that it must be something awful because Susan and I met the constable after he left Simpkins’ this morning and he told us that they had to get busy and get on the track of a tramp. Then he told us how it happened and the way that mean tramp robbed you and all.”

“Even so we won’t tell you what was in that note because we promised that constable we wouldn’t and besides he didn’t tell you so neither will we!” the kid told them.

“What a perky little dear you are,” said Dotty, very sarcastic.

“Just the same I won’t tell you,” said Pee-wee, “but it was a dandy mistake how we came here and then invited that tramp to stay here last night. Even if we were robbed do you say it isn’t better to have no money and to discover how a murder’s been committed? Maybe a couple of years ago it happened but do you say that isn’t better to find it out now than never?”

Susan and Dotty were giggling like everything. Susan stopped first and she said, “We thought it must have been a murder or something terrible like that so that’s why we came here to see you. A couple of years ago, a man by the name of Ed Berry disappeared. He and a brother had a farm up Saddleboro way and his brother offered a hundred dollars reward for anyone that would find him dead or alive. Dot and I thought maybe he was lost in the lake but nobody else thought so and they never did anything about it.”

“Gee whiz, this feller in the note isn’t Ed,” said the kid, disappointed like.

So I said, “Well, take your basket then and get to work picking corn, kid. It’s after twelve o’clock and as long as

we're not going to get any reward you might as well start in earning that fifty cents."

Ben said, "Do you think if you had another basket you'd make a dollar?"

"Make it yourself!" yelled the kid. Just the same he picked up the basket and went off toward the corn.

After that we treated the girls to some lunch anyway and we sat where the kid could see us but where he couldn't speak to us.

CHAPTER XVIII

POOR PEE-WEE

The girls did the dishes and while they were busy we slipped back in the woods and got on our bathing suits. So then they said that they'd take us for a row around the lake in Mr. Simpkins' rowboat.

I said, "Goodnight, what an imagination!"

"We're not fooling," said Dotty. "Mr. Simpkins keeps a rowboat hidden under the long grass that reaches out over the bank there. He's given Susan and me permission to use it whenever we want to and he just hides it under the bank so that my brother, Timmie, won't get it and drown himself or something worse. You know he and Susan's brother Orville, are the boys that were so naughty yesterday. I'm so glad you boys found him last night—my mother was worried to death. Just think of it—he confessed after he got home that he had been so frightened thinking he shot a man that he tried to start the engine of a great big plane that he found deserted in the field beyond these woods."

"So," Ben said, "he didn't get started, huh?"

"No, he couldn't make anything of that mechanism, he's such a little fellow," said Dotty. "He said he gave up trying and ran back into the woods to hide again. It must have been the plane you boys came in."

"It was," I said, "and Timmie's the reason why we're far, far away from home today acting as immaterial witnesses on account of a mysterious unanimous note we found in a hobo's coat pocket."

Dotty laughed but she said she was sorry and that's why she and Susan had gone on their bikes to that field where Bigwig left his Goofey plane. They wanted to see if it was still there, but it wasn't and we found out later that Wigbig sent a couple of mechanics down from the Highville airport early that morning and they fixed it up in an hour and flew back in it. So that was one mystery cleared up anyway.

The next mystery was how the kid stuck at picking corn as long as he did because he was standing in the sun and you could tell he was warm. So to make him feel warmer Ben and I took turns in the boat to stand up and yell to him how cool we were in our bathing suits. Then we'd stick one foot in the water and tell him it was just right.

Marv said, "Tell him the water gets like ice when the sun goes down."

So I did and the kid kind of hid himself and made out he didn't hear me. He heard Marv and the girls laughing though because he picked up the basket and walked over to the other side of the field where it wasn't so sunny and where he couldn't hear us any more.

Then Ben and I rowed the boat out of sight of the field and off into a cove that ran into the woods like. I have to tell you that we couldn't see our camping place from there either, on account of something that happened. Goodnight, we didn't think about seeing anything then because it was nice and shady and while we were swimming around, the girls were pulling out those long strands of swamp grass and trying to make baskets with them. All of us were just killing time until Constable Slickem and the crowd came along.

You know how quick the time goes when you're flopping around on a summer's afternoon like that. Well, that's the

way the time went that day and jiminy, a couple of hours passed before we realized it. In a way it seemed only a little while had passed when we could hear the kid's voice from around the bend.

“My,” said Susan, “if we didn't know that was Walter, I'd never believe my ears!”

“It seems almost impossible for such a big voice to come out of such a little fellow,” said Dot. “Are you sure it's he?”

Ben said, “In a few minutes you won't be in doubt. There's nobody that can convince you as well as Pee-wee does.”

Marv said, “Maybe he's afraid that the water'll get too cold before sundown.”

“Maybe the corn stopped growing,” I said.

Anyway we answered the kid and started rowing back. All the time Pee-wee kept yelling more as if he was mad than anything else. But I didn't pay any attention to it because you can't sometimes tell by the sound of his voice, what is the matter.

We soon found out, believe me. When we swung that old tub around the bend there was the kid as large as life, swinging his arms back and forth and with a scowl on his face that meant something. I didn't let myself get excited because he gets that way lots of times and it doesn't mean a thing. But this time it did.

He was yelling, “Now you'll see—now you'll see what happens on account of leaving this place all alone while I'm working under the hot sun and you lazy fellers are out there loafing around instead of staying here and watching that things don't get stolen! Gee whiz, you can't say it's my fault because can I work and watch this camp down here?”

“What’s the matter?” Dotty spoke up all excited too.

“You *better* ask what’s the matter!” the kid came back at her. “It’s always trouble when a couple of girls butt into fellers’ business—geee whiz, if you two hadn’t come along this wouldn’t have happened I bet!”

“What’s the matter, kid?” I asked him. “Did the camp go out for a walk?”

“That’s right—start talking nonsense!” he screamed while we were pushing the boat in to shore. “It’s worse than if the camp took a walk because somebody’s been here while you were out loafing and I was working and took away our food and even the cooking kit so do you feel like fooling now, huh? Geeee whizz, can you laugh at that, huh?”

I said, “No, I can’t even cry! Just excuse me while I faint, girls!”

So I have to end this chapter now because I have to faint every time I think of that afternoon. I’ll come to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIX

TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP

I came to in a second because Pee-wee said, “Even I can’t find any footprints and all they left was the clothes John brought us and a few scraps!”

Ben said, “Gosh, do we have to eat our clothes now?”

I said, “Didn’t they even leave a dish for us to eat?”

“I told you they took my nice cooking kit—dishes and all!” he roared. “Geeee whiz, my mother paid fifteen dollars for that so I bet I’ll get it when I get home. And that box of eats they took too!”

“Oh my, we have so many tramps coming and going this time of year,” said Dotty. “It’s worse this year than any and it isn’t safe to leave anything unprotected where they’re liable to be.”

“That shows how observant you are when you didn’t think of it before instead of making these fellers stay here where they could watch!” Pee-wee yelled at the girls. “Do you say you didn’t lure them out on that lake and up to the cove because even they wouldn’t have known Mr. Simpkins had a rowboat hid under that bank if you didn’t tell us?”

It struck the girls too funny to get mad. All they could do was laugh. But Ben and Marv and I looked around and saw sure enough that our cooking kit and eats were gone. There wasn’t even a dish but one lucky thing our little spending money was still in our clothes that we had left hanging on the limb of a tree right on the edge of the woods. And the kid was right, we couldn’t find a footprint.

“Did you hear any cars stop?” Susan Strong wanted to know. “There’s been tramps come along in rickety old Fords too and they’re the ones that take the most sometimes.”

“Sure, I heard cars out from the road, but do you suppose I could stop and look at who was stopping?” the kid wanted to know.

“Maybe not,” said Susan, “but you said something before about us not being observant so I thought perhaps you were yourself.”

Oh, what a one that was! The kid frowned like everything but he didn’t say anything back to Susan. “Even I got so warm and tired from the sun and on account of us being up so late last night I guess I got sleepy and I fell asleep for a little while,” he said to Ben and me. “When I woke up I got so scared, I came running down here—I don’t know why. Gee whiz!”

I felt sorry for him then. Jiminy, that’s one thing about the kid, he never lies about anything. He didn’t have to tell us he fell asleep—we wouldn’t ever have found it out. But that’s Pee-wee all over; when it comes down to it, he’ll always share the blame.

“Never mind, Walter,” said Dotty as nice as could be, “we’re all to blame for that matter. But whoever it was, they never took away those things except in a car. And it was someone that knew you had those things here—someone who’s been spying on you from the woods. It can be done you know.”

We agreed with Dotty and we were just thinking about going up to Simpkins’ house to tell them when we saw a bunch of cars turn into the lane up above. They kept coming

straight on down so I knew who it was. Pee-wee began jumping up and down.

“It’s the constable!” he yelled. “Gee whiz, now we can ask him to chase that hobo whoever he is because we can go along and trail him, huh? Now we’ll maybe get our cooking kit and our eats.”

“It’s a great big maybe,” Dotty whispered to me. “If I know anything about Mr. Slickem he won’t do any chasing now. He wouldn’t do it for the President because he can only do one thing at a time. Just now he’s all keyed up about this mysterious note and this lake business whatever it is.”

Dotty was right about Slickem. He listened kind of impatient like while we were telling him how all our stuff was stolen and he kept pulling at the little beard he has. Then when we got finished he shook his head very sad like.

“We’ll hev ter see what kin be done ’bout this here burglary business,” he said. “Jes’ now I gotta superintend these fellers what I hired frum Saddleboro ter drag th’ lake ’n thet’s more important right away.”

So Farmer Simpkins came along then and he was as nice as could be and he said, “I’m thet sorry yore havin’ so much hard luck an’ all. But don’t worry ’bout food—I’ll see thet yer not goin’ hungry—any o’ yer.”

So we didn’t start to worry then and it’s a good thing, because we made up for it later on. Pee-wee did anyway—he does the worrying for the bunch.

CHAPTER XX

POOR HAROLD!

If you've ever stuck around when a lake is being dragged you'll know how long it takes. If you do, then multiply that time by six or seven or eight and then you'll have the exact time it takes the Drowsyvillites to do it, especially when Constable Slickem superintends the job.

But we should worry—we didn't have to do it and I'm glad now that we didn't. All we did was flop around in the grass and watch Slickem twist his little beard. Dotty Todd's mother was there—even little Timmie. So was Susan's mother and brother there and they all brought lunch. I guess they knew Slickem pretty well.

Anyway they offered us some but we didn't take any and told them that Mr. Simpkins would give us enough stuff for supper. Pee-wee took four doughnuts from Mrs. Strong though—he said he couldn't resist them. Jiminy, he needed them because the sun had gone down and they were still dragging that lake for all they were worth and boy, we were getting good and hungry.

Everybody was so interested that they were afraid to leave and go home for supper in case they did find this mysterious body in the bag that Slickem had told them about. Every once in a while different people would look at us as if we were heroes and the kid was all puffed up about it.

“They know we were the ones that discovered this,” he whispered to me once.

I said, “You mean you were the one—I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you discovering that note. I’d be home eating a nice hot supper.”

“Do you say I shouldn’t have reported such a terrible murder to the law?” the kid wanted to know. “Do you say it’s right to know about a note like that and not say anything about it?”

I said, “Whoever’s down in that lake in a bag full of rocks and things, it won’t help them now. They’re better off to stay there if you ask me because ten chances to one they’ll never catch the Deadeye Dick that did it!”

“That shows what a lot of civil respect you haven’t got!” said the kid very indignant like. “That shows what would happen if you ever got to be a constable—geeee whiz!”

“He’s only teasing you, Walter,” said Mrs. Todd very sweet like. You could see she liked the kid, too. “I’m sure when Roy sees what a benefit a discovery like this is to the community, he won’t tease you any more. You were very brave and I have a feeling this is the work of these awful tramps that we’re bothered with so much.”

“Anyway, I’m not sorry I was observant about that note,” the kid boasted now that Mrs. Todd had started the ball rolling. “Even I’ll remember what he looked like, that tramp, so’s I’ll recognize him if I ever bunk into him!”

Ben said, “What did he look like, kid?”

Pee-wee looked kind of puzzled and he sort of scratched his head. “He had kind of a dark face and dark hair I think and his clothes were all rags.”

“Not when he left here his clothes weren’t,” I said. “He had on Ben’s nice new sweater, remember that. His dark face and dark hair might have been just plain dirt too or else it

was because he stood in the dark. I had about as good a look at him as any of you and I wouldn't know him again if I fell all over him. Jiminy, he didn't even say more than a half a dozen words, either."

"Geeee whiz, but just the same you can't tell me I wouldn't recognize him because even I just remember that he had a big mouth," said the kid. "Even that shows how observant I am and if I ever see him again, he won't get away so easy."

"They're a-watchin' out fer a feller with a blue slip-on sweater jes' like th' young man said it wuz," said Mr. Simpkins. "Saddleboro and all them places are lookin' out fer him but there ain't been no reports that they got him. My 'pinion is, he's an old hand at th' game an' he'll hide back in the swamp thar til th' excitement dies down, then he'll make tracks fer one o' th' big towns ter spend the money he stole. Mebbe he's got a partner—it's likely."

"Just the same I bet I'd recognize him," said the kid. "I'd kind of get one of those in—institutions—you know, one of those feelings when you know a thing is true."

"Intuitions you mean, huh kid?" asked Ben.

"Sure, that's what I meant and that's what I'd feel," the kid said very serious. "I'd know him again the minute I saw him."

So after we found out about that we talked about the cooking kit and the eats and wondered if it was the same hobo that stole them. I suppose we thought about it more because the sun was all gone then and the dew was settling on the grass. I began to think of how long ago it would have been that I ate supper if I was home.

“Maybe they’ll give up now and begin again in the morning,” said Pee-wee. “Gee whiz, I’m so hungry I don’t know what to do.”

“You’re more to be pitied than scolded,” I said, “but you can blame yourself. That note’s another one of your dandy mistakes—Slickem’s made everybody mistake supertime on account of it.”

“I’m a famine and that’s no mistake,” said Ben. “It’s getting chilly and I crave hot food.”

Marv said, “Gosh, I feel all kind of shrunk, I’m so hungry.”

“Sure,” I said, “we’re all shrinking. And who’s the cause of this terrible state of affairs? Answer in one breath, please!”

“PEE-WEE!” we all shouted.

That would have started things again only that we heard the men shouting and then Slickem yelled, “Bring ’er in!”

“They’ve got something, looks ter me,” said Mr. Simpkins.

So saying we all rose and we soon found out that they did have something—even more than that! We all gathered around Slickem when they brought the bag in on one of the boats. It looked like one of these big potato bags and it was just dripping water and as heavy as anything when the men lifted it to the ground.

“Can’t be much more’n rocks left in it by this time an’ ’ording to the note,” said the constable very official like. “Don’t take long a-lyin’ in th’ water.”

So to make it quick and not keep you in suspense, Mr. Slickem turned to the crowd a few minutes later and he said, “Wa’al folks, guess we hain’t got the pore feller yet—we jes’

picked up a cat in that bag, that's all. Some cat what somebody had ter git rid of I guess. Bag's chock full o' rocks as if they meant fer thet cat ter stay put." He kind of chuckled, but we could tell he was mad. "Kind o' disappointin' ter hev ter work like this an' find nothin'."

Just then, Dotty Todd said to him, "Why—why that must be our cat—I mean my aunt Cynthia's cat that Father drowned for her a few years ago. He got so old and was very cross and sometimes he would even claw her, but she was so fond of him she couldn't bear to part with him until Father just took him away by force. Aunt Cynthia lives in Saddleboro."

"You're right, Dotty," Mrs. Todd spoke up right away. "I'd almost forgotten about it. That was Harold—certainly!"

"That wuz—*who*?" asked Mr. Slickem very quick like.

"Harold, was his name, constable," said Mrs. Todd. "Mr. Todd's sister Cynthia gives her pets very odd names sometimes. I mean they're odd for animals to have—especially cats."

"I reckon so," said the constable and he took something out of his pocket and held it out in front of Mrs. Todd and Dotty. "Kin yer read this and recognize th' handwritin'?"

Everything was still as could be for a little while. Pee-wee got fidgeting around from one foot to the other and I was getting hungrier by the second.

Finally Mrs. Todd looked up and smiled, "Why," said she, "that's part of a letter my husband started to write to his sister the night after he buried Harold in Drowsyville Lake. He didn't finish it because she called us by phone and he was able to tell her about it that way. I remember it all now—he

stuck the letter into a pocket while he was standing at the phone talking.”

“And that same summer you gave Father’s coat to a tramp that came along, remember, Mother?” Dotty asked kind of hysterical like.

“That’s so,” said Mrs. Todd.

“Wa’al,” said the constable giving us a sort of cloudy look, “I guess we hed all th’ work fer nothin’ an’ all the expense besides! Jes’ goes ter show yer that you cain’t believe all yer see ’specially when it comes from a lot o’ fool boys. Thar ain’t any mystery—thar ain’t nothin’ but jes’ a no-account cat!”

I don’t know what they did with Harold—I was too hysterical to see or hear or do anything else. All I remember was that everybody started going away and the constable told us we better be making tracks for home in the morning, where we should have been instead of putting them to so much trouble.

So I said, “Don’t blame it on anybody but Animal Cracker, mister. He was the one....”

“Is that the way to treat a feller—is that the way you’re my friend!” the kid roared. “Do you say that’s being a scout when I did what I thought was....”

“Begin at the end, kid,” I said. “You won’t have so far to go!”

“Shut up!” he came back at me. “I’m disgusted with the whole bunch of you.”

So with that, the cars all went away and even Farmer Simpkins hurried up to his house to tell his wife about poor Harold. We could hear him laughing to himself all the way up the lane and while the kid sat down in the wet grass with

his chin in his hand and a scowl on his face, Ben and Marv and I just looked at each other.

And a good time was had by all.

CHAPTER XXI

WE LAUGH HA, HA

“Come on,” Pee-wee said after a while. “Mr. Simpkins promised us some food so let’s go up. We’ll pay him with our spending money, huh?”

I said, “Poor Harold’s taken my appetite away. I’d rather nibble on the few clothes that the hobo left us.”

Marv said, “Are you going to call up Bridgeboro tonight then?”

“Do you think I’m a quitter?” the kid wanted to know. “Do you think I’d call up my mother to have the chauffeur come and ride us home like as if we’re a lot of babies? Gee whiz, do you think I haven’t any more resources than that because I won’t call for help no matter what! Even I’ll surprise my mother that I can make fifty cents stretch and walk home.”

“The shock wouldn’t be good for her,” I said.

“What are you talking about?” the kid wanted to know.

“About making the fifty cents stretch and walk home,” I said. “It’s bad enough to see you come in, but fifty cents....”

“Now you *are* a fool!” he said disgusted. “Are you coming to ask for something to eat or not?”

I said, “Sure, but remember poor Harold and lower your voice. We’ll follow the leader all the way to the house.”

That’s how we came to all go in Simpkins’ house by the kitchen window. One after the other we landed on the floor in the kitchen but Mrs. Simpkins only laughed. She didn’t care how much we carried on and neither did Mr. Simpkins

and he was nicer to us than ever and they showed they felt sorry that we had so much hard luck.

Anyway we had a nice supper and Mrs. Simpkins made us eat it right there in the kitchen. She said it was no use for us to carry anything down to our camp now. Neither would they take any money for our eats so we told them we'd pick some corn in the morning and do some chores to pay it back.

"Maybe we could earn enough to buy a wheelbarrow," said Ben, fooling. "We could take turns—Marv and Roy ride together, and the kid and I. I've got my special license."

Farmer Simpkins laughed but I could see he was thinking, kind of. But he didn't say anything about it and I forgot too because we helped Mrs. Simpkins with the dishes and then hiked back to our nice little lean-to.

It was almost dark then so we didn't make any campfire. Besides, the moon was coming out and it wasn't a bit cool. There was a nice warm breeze so we walked around the edge of the cornfield a little bit.

Pee-wee was looking up at the moon over his right shoulder and he said, "When we start back tomorrow we got to plan things out sensible—we can't do any fooling when we hike that long way without any money to speak of."

"I'm willing not to speak about it at all," I said. "But we ought to give three hips and a couple of hurrahs for you, kid! I didn't think you'd be willing to hoof it."

"Even I'm not a quitter," said the kid still staring at the moon. "Gee whiz, even something might happen that we won't have to hike it—do you say something can't happen?"

"Something *will* happen," I said, "if you don't stop blinking at that new moon over your right shoulder."

"You're just sus—suspicious...."

“Superstitious,” I said. “Now take a demerit for that.”

“Anyway, do you think I believe such things?” he wanted to know. “Once I let a cat that was coal black cross right in front of me and gee whiz, nothing happened to me. He got killed though by a truck a few hours later right in front of our house but it wasn’t my fault!”

“Poor Harold!” I said. “Poor, poor Harold!”

CHAPTER XXII

I'M EVEN SURPRISED

The hobo left us our blankets too, so we didn't have anything to worry about that night. We had a pretty good sleep with the exception of me and that was on account of Pee-wee rolling all around and giving me a kick every once in a while. He said he was dreaming that he was playing football, so that's enough.

Anyway, he was the first one up in the morning and he's so peaceful that he wakes everybody else up too. First he whistled and then he began to yell that we should get up because he was hungry. So I rolled up his blanket and threw it at him and as I was rolling over on my other ear to get forty winks more I heard him say that if we weren't up when he came back from washing at the lake, he'd bother us until we did get up.

Jiminy, it seemed like as if he had just gone when I heard him let out a terrible yell. It woke me up so quick that I sat straight up. So did Ben and Marv.

We all said together, "Now what?"

"Maybe they forgot to put poor Harold back in his watery grave," I said.

So right then the kid gave another yell and we could hear him running toward the lean-to, lickety split. Boy, I held my breath to hear what he was yelling because he was so out of breath we could hardly understand him.

He was yelling. "It's on the—the bank, fellers! Gee whiz, oh my—it's on the bank!"

“I haven’t any money on the bank or in the bank,” I said just as he came into the lean-to.

But that’s one time he didn’t even hear me fooling. He was too excited and he yelled, “It’s honest and true a dead—a something that’s been in the water a long time I guess. Gee whiz, it’s been washed up on the bank!”

We went down with him and we didn’t have to go all the way to see that he wasn’t dreaming or seeing things that time. It wasn’t even a dandy mistake—it was really true, but none of us did more than give a glance from where we were standing. Jiminy, it was enough to give us the creeps.

So we got dressed and all hurried up to Simpkins’ together. Ben said, “Dragging the lake did that I bet.”

“Maybe poor Harold will solve some mystery after all,” I said.

And I was right because we let Farmer Simpkins take charge of that business. He had to get old Slickem up from the village again and all that so we did a lot of chores around and even picked corn. Believe me, I was glad to be working that morning and you can bet that none of us went anywhere near the lean-to until after it was all over. Then we only went to clear up.

So as I told you we were busy out in the field and we kept our backs turned to the lake. Anyway we couldn’t see or hear what was going on because we were way over on the other side. The only thing I knew was that an awful lot of cars kept coming and going and finally a car came speeding from Saddleboro way and turned into the lane.

It was almost noontime then and a little later we gathered up the baskets and went up to the house. We were all as

hungry as could be and wanted to eat early so's we could start back home that afternoon.

“We'll walk five miles maybe and stop and get some supper and then find some place where we can roll up for the night, huh?” the kid said. “Maybe some nice farmer like Mr. Simpkins would let us make a lean-to or sleep up in his haymow, huh?”

I said, “Why talk about tonight?—I could sleep in a haymow right now.”

Anyway, Mrs. Simpkins let us wash up in the back yard and she said when we finished that to come into the kitchen because she would have dinner all ready. So it wasn't five minutes before we all piled into the kitchen and who should be standing there all smiles but old Slickem himself and another strange man and Mr. Simpkins.

So right away, Mr. Simpkins said, “Mr. Slickem wants to know who made that discovery this morning?”

“Little Animal Cracker here did,” I said. “Why? He didn't make any more mistakes, did he?”

“Not 't all!” said Mr. Slickem in a very pleasant voice. “In fact, this gentlemen here, Mr. Luke Berry, wants to thank him fer discoverin' th' long lost body o' his brother, Ed. He jes' identified poor Ed by a signet ring what the unlucky feller allus wore. Guess he must o' drowned fishin' for somethin'?”

Luke guessed that maybe his brother did and then he shook hands with the kid and said, “Mebbe yuh don't know I had a reward fer my brother, dead or alive, eh? Wa'al, I did and bein's yore th' fust one ter discover the pore feller, yer the one ter git it I s'pose an' I'm mighty obleeged t' you.”

So just like that, Mr. Luke Berry took out his wallet and while funny little figures kept jumping up and down before my eyes, he peeled off a hundred dollar bill and handed it to the kid. After Mr. Berry went, Ben and Marv and I all fell into the chairs.

Boy, how Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins laughed. She said, “I d’clare every cloud has a good bright linin’ fer you boys!”

“*For us!*” I said, and laughed ha ha. “You mean for Sir Harris Animal Cracker. Ben and Marv and I are just a lot of dubs when it comes to earning rewards. All we do is to stand by and see them handed out to the kid. But what care we—we’re poor but dishonest and a shaithful heart beats beneath a fabby chest!”

“That shows what a lot you fellers don’t know about me!” the kid yelled. “Even I wouldn’t think of keeping all this reward for myself because weren’t you all in on that and didn’t we all discover it sort of? Gee whiz, if I didn’t go down to the lake first then Ben or you or Marv would have, so what’s the difference, huh?”

“United we stand, divided we sprawl, kid!” I said. “Now that that’s settled—when do we kill the fatted calf? Do we eat *a la* or *oola* on our way home and if we get a taxi, why not, or even suppose we do?”

“Now don’t start any nonsense because I want to talk serious about this money,” said the kid. “I’ll keep it and get it changed in Drowsyville or some other place along the road. Even I’ll give you fellers five dollars each so do you think that’s fair because I’ll have to buy a new cooking kit and all because my mother won’t buy me another one this year I bet and I’ll need it because won’t we go on more hikes, so do you say it isn’t yours kind of too?”

“I thought there’d be a hitch in it,” said Ben. “Don’t you say so, Roy?”

I said, “Ben, I’m not capable of saying anything. I don’t even know if my heart would hold out long enough for me to sit down and eat Mrs. Simpkins’ dinner. I’m just flabbergasted by Pee-wee’s big-hearted offer! That’s the reason my own heart feels so small.”

“All right!” the kid yelled. “If you think I’m so stingy that you can start right in and make fun of me, I’ll give you each ten dollars so do you say that isn’t enough when I wouldn’t even have to give you fellers anything by rights if I didn’t have to?”

“Ah,” I said, very dignified like and waving my hand, “the little gentleman on the right, makes an offer of ten dollars! *Ten dollars! Think of it, gentlemen! Ten dollars!* What am I offered—going up, going up?”

“Even I’ll have to give you fifteen, I suppose, the way you make me look like a monkey!” Pee-wee yelled.

“Going up?” Ben hollered.

Even Marv piped up, “Going up?”

So I said, “Ah—the gentleman on the right will bid me twenty dollars! I can see it by the generous look in his bright cat’s eyes—I mean his bright blue eyes! Twenty dollars I am bid! Going, going—*gone!*” Then I slammed my fist down on Mrs. Simpkins’ table and she had to sit down she was laughing so.

“Even I won’t have anything left,” said the kid, as mad as could be.

“Then that’s twice as much as we’ll have left,” I said.

So we all sat down and ate dinner.

CHAPTER XXIII

LISTEN TO THIS

When we finished eating, Farmer Simpkins sat back in his chair. He kind of looked up and down the table at each of us and then he said, "I've been a-thinkin', boys—yer kin do as yer like 'bout that reward money 'cause tain't any o' my business. But if I wuz all o' yer, I'd wait till yer got home and let yer pas settle that. So keep it jes as Mr. Berry handed it ter th' little feller 'cause I got an idee that won't be any expense ter yer a-goin' home."

"That's what I like," I said. "Good ideas."

"Wa'al, this one ain't so bad if I do say it myself," said Mr. Simpkins. "I got an old Hunkajunk tourin' car out in one o' th' barns what's been layin' thar, I don't know how long. She'll run 'bout one hundred mile more 'fore she gives out altogether, that's how I reckon it, and she got oil and gas enough in her ter take you fellers home if yer ride her slow and easy. She cain't stand ter go more'n ten or fifteen mile an hour on account uv her radiator. It biles over and sometimes it goes dry but that's all th' trouble you'll hev with her an' she'll git yer home. I had her standin' back in th' barn waitin' fer some junk man ter cart her away an' when I heerd young Maxwell say las' night that he had a special license I got an idee thet yer could take her yourselves."

"And how!" said Ben. "Boy, that's a great idea!"

"Gee whiz, maybe even we can make it last longer after we take it home, huh?" the kid wanted to know, starting to

economize right away. “Maybe we can fix it up so’s we could ride around home in it afterward, huh?”

“I should think you’d have more respect for your home,” I said. “A Hunkajunk’s place is in the street.”

“And furthermore,” said Ben, giving me the wink, “if I prolong poor old Hunkajunk’s life a little longer the way I did my dear old Lizzie, why Pee-wee’s got to stop grouching about how much of that reward he’s giving us.”

Well the kid promised and we were all as happy as could be because after dinner we went out and looked over the Hunkajunk and it didn’t look so bad. I’ve seen worse—in the Bridgeboro dumps. Anyway, it was a very old model and it needed paint but Ben said it started up fine, so that’s all we cared about.

So after we cleared up our lean-to and packed what few clothes we had into the car, Marv and I piled into the back seat. It was nice and roomy and I felt just like sprawling out after working so hard all morning. The kid, though, wanted to sit with Ben so’s he could watch him drive the old bus. Then we said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins and they wished us luck and said we didn’t owe them anything at all and would we come to see them sometime. We promised we would and we will too—sometime when we’re feeling real Drowsyvillish. Whatever that is.

Anyway, we drove out of Simpkins’ barnyard with a bang. Two bangs in fact. The radiator started to bang and we had to slow down. Then Pee-wee banged about all the spending money we didn’t have to spend, but we didn’t go any slower for him. We didn’t even listen for a while.

Finally he said, “We got two dollars and a quarter in spending money between the four of us so we ought to be

able to get a nice supper for fifty cents somewhere and have twenty-five cents left over in case we get thirsty afterward.”

I said, “Station E-A-T-S is broadcasting.”

Ben said, “Let him rave. He always can figure out how to spend our money, how about it, Roy?”

“You’re positively right, Ben,” I said. “But he’s perfectly harmless—he just figures and we do the rest.”

“Just the same, I’ll show you how I’m not stingy with that hundred dollars because even I won’t ask my father—I’ll give you each twenty-five dollars so we’ll all have alike, huh?”

“That’s the stuff,” said Ben. “After we leave Drowsyville, Mr. Simpkins said that we have to ride another country road for a few miles before we come to the turnpike. It’s all through woods too, he said.”

“Can I steer the car until we come to the highway?” the kid wanted to know in a very sweet and gentle voice.

“Honest, Ben, I’ll be as careful as anything.”

I said, “That depends on how careful anything is. I don’t like the idea of two innocent lives like Marv’s and mine being blasted on the back seat here. We ought to have parachutes anyway—this bus makes more noise than a Goofey plane any day.”

Marv was sprawled out on the seat and he was so sleepy he didn’t care whose life was blasted. He just grinned and said, “Gee, I bet Pee-wee’s feet wouldn’t even touch the clutch.”

“Even they will if I kind of sit way on the edge of the seat,” the kid said right off. “So will you let me drive through that country road until we come to the highway, Ben?”

Ben said yes to get rid of the kid's pestering, I guess. Anyway, I forgot all about the whole business because I curled up on the seat and fell asleep and Marv was snoring on the floor. We should worry about the noisy Hunkajunk or Pee-wee then. We slept all the way through Drowsyville and when we turned into that country road the kid took the wheel and we started bumping along from that time on.

We bumped so hard that I rolled off the seat and landed kerflop, right on top of Marv. Finally we scrambled back on the seat and watched how Pee-wee couldn't drive straight. Jiminy, we were all over that road and no matter how much Ben told him a certain way to hold the wheel he didn't do it. First we were on one side of the road and then on the other.

I said, "I told you this would be a left and right hike going home. We must be speeding at least two and a half miles an hour."

Ben said, "Two and a quarter to be exact. The speedometer's broken. Anyway, we won't arrested for running pedestrians up the side street."

So just as Ben said that a man dressed in a hunter's suit with his cap pulled down over his eyes and carrying a rifle, crossed the road in front of the car. He just kind of glanced toward us but that was all and he had started up a little lane when a big collie dog ran out from between the trees and came plunk right into the Hunkajunk.

Boy, he didn't even give a yelp, it happened so quick, and we all jumped out of that car as quick as we could. The kid felt so bad he almost cried because we could see that the poor dog never knew what struck him. Then we happened to remember about the man and when we looked up the lane he was standing there watching.

Pee-wee said, “Gee whiz, mister, we’ve killed your dog and I didn’t mean to. Even I could swear that I didn’t see him come out of there and we were going so slow that he would have had time to run out of the way.”

The man shook his head and said, “I know. It’s too bad, but you couldn’t help it.”

“Gee whiz, I bet he’s a awful valuable dog, huh mister?” Pee-wee said. “I have a cousin who’s got a collie puppy and already he’s worth a hundred and fifty dollars—gee whiz, I wouldn’t have killed such a valuable dog on purpose.”

“That’s what that dog is worth—a hundred and fifty bucks,” the man said kind of low and sad.



“THAT’S WHAT THE DOG IS WORTH—A HUNDRED AND FIFTY BUCKS,” THE MAN SAID.

“Geeee whiz!” said the kid. “I’m terrible sorry, mister—even I bet he was a good pal to you, huh? My cousin’s dog’s

a good pal and he said he wouldn't part with him for no money, he's such a pal. Gee whiz, I feel so bad."

"I know and so do I," said the man sort of soft. "But a feller can't always afford to buy another pal like he was. A hundred and fifty bucks is a whole lot of money for me now. I'll miss him terrible."

"Gee whiz!" said Pee-wee and his hand went down to his pocket. "Gee whiz, even I haven't got a hundred and fifty dollars, mister. I only have a hundred that I just got for a reward for discovering a man that was drowned for two years in the lake."

The man came forward then and he said, "Well, I hate to take it from you, kid, but I got to have another pal and I'll take the hundred bucks and call it square. It's a bargain for a good dog like that."

Even as sorry as I felt about the dog I got mad at Pee-wee handing over that good hundred dollars. And jiminy, it happened so quick that we hardly knew it. The man put that nice crisp bill in his pocket and smiled kind of at the kid, then he started away.

So I said, "What about your dog, mister?" He kind of turned and he said, "I wonder if you boys would mind burying him under the trees there somewhere. I don't like tuh do it myself—I'm too soft hearted."

So we said we would and he disappeared in the lane but after a few minutes we heard a rickety old car starting up and soon it came out of the lane and turned out in front of where we were standing. The man who'd had the dog was driving it and alongside of him sat another man who looked kind of ragged and funny. Anyway they both smiled at us very sad and before we knew it they were out of sight, car and all.

“They were hunting, I bet, with their pal,” said the kid, drying the corner of his eye with his sleeve.

I said, “Come to think of it—it’s a funny time of year for fellers to be hunting, isn’t it? Against the law, that’s what it is!”

“Gosh,” said Ben, “that’s right!”

“Did you notice they had a lot of stuff packed in the back of that Ford?” Marv said.

“Gee whiz, how can I notice anything after I killed a nice, valuable dog like this and then have to give away that whole hundred dollars—*geeeee whizzz!*” Pee-wee said with a great big sigh.

“Why did you give it away?” Ben said. “It wasn’t your fault and no matter how bad you feel about it, I don’t think you should have had to pay for him. I bet he wouldn’t have even asked you if you hadn’t started in that story about your cousin’s valuable puppy.”

“That did the trick,” I said. “That shows how much the kid knows about botany—he gives our reward away just as if it was ten cents!”

“I can’t believe that he gave away that whole hundred yet!” said Ben. “Did you put it into that feller’s hand, kid—honest?”

“Gee whiz, why didn’t you fellers say I shouldn’t have—why didn’t you say something before he went away, huh?” the kid wanted to know. “Do you say I would have done it if you said I shouldn’t——”

“Come on,” I said, “let’s bury the dog.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THIS IS SERIOUS

We picked up the poor dog and carried it over under the trees. Then while we were deciding what to do next and who was going to do it, we heard a car come rumbling down the road from Drowsyville. All we could see was dust until they got real close to us.

Pee-wee said, "Let's stop whoever it is and ask them do they want to bury him—gee whiz, I hate to do it."

I said, "So does everybody else, kid. But luck is with you maybe—they're going to stop."

Just then they did stop and a man leaned out of the window and all of a sudden I recognized old Slickem, the constable. He recognized us too and before we got a chance to speak a door of his flivver opened and out stepped Dotty Todd and Susan Strong.

So I said, "What's the matter?"

Mr. Constable Slickem got out of the car then too and he said, "Wa'al, I guess. Did yer see anythin' of two fellers in a noisy Ford that seemed in a hurry ter git away?"

"Maybe one of them had on a hunter's suit and a cap," Dotty said. "Did you see one of them dressed that way?"

So I said, "Sure—why?"

"Wa'al, I'm going ter git hot on their trail, by cracky, becuz they're nothin' but them two tramps what's been hot-footin' it 'round here and makin' all this trouble," said the constable. "While all that 'citement wuz up ter Simpkins' this mornin' they got in Strong's house and took Mr. Strong's

huntin' suit and rifle 'long with some other things. Then jes' as they were gittin' ready ter go way, Orville cum home with Timmie and the villains told the kids that they wuz jes lookin' fer work."

"Yes, and Orville's so stupid he never told my mother anything about it until a little while ago," Susan said.

"Wa'al, I guess it'll learn him a lesson. He might o' known what they wuz."

"He wouldn't even have known what they were," said Susan. "None of us would have known except that my father would have gone upstairs for something from his room. Then he would have known. But it was on account of King that Orville finally thought of it and told us. King is getting so old—he's blind and oh, we should have given the poor animal chloroform to put him out of his misery long ago. But none of us had the heart to do it. He was such a pet, but he's been suffering terribly and now I wish I knew he was dead and out of his misery instead of suffering and wandering where we can't help him."

"King is their pet collie dog," said Dotty. "You see Orville finally told about those awful men when Mrs. Strong asked the boys if they knew where the dog was. Then Susan's brother told how the poor animal followed the Ford when it went down the road and that was all they had seen of him. And the worst of it is—Timmie declares that one of the men is the same tramp that Father's old coat went to a couple of years ago!"

"Do you mean to tell me it's the coat that I found the note in—the note about that cat?" Pee-wee wanted to know.

Dotty smiled. "Yes, Timmie said he remembers that man because he had such a big mouth when he smiled. It looked

that way to him, I suppose he meant. Nevertheless, Timmie's got a memory that I've never known to fail."

"So has Pee-wee," I said. "Listen, can you girls identify this dog that Pee-wee didn't mean to run into a few minutes ago and which he gave a man with a big mouth a hundred dollars for because he felt so sorry that he had lost his best pal?"

We led the girls over to the tree and after Susan took one look, she said, "Why, it's King! Poor, poor King!"

I didn't say anything at all. In fact I felt it coming on ever since Susan began talking, so I climbed up on the back seat of the Hunkajunk and I dropped dead.

CHAPTER XXV

SHE FLIES—LIKE FUN

Maybe you wouldn't believe it, but I haven't been the same since. I'm crazier than ever just on account of that hundred dollars that Pee-wee let fly out of his hand. It makes me crazy to even think of it.

Anyway, we were crazy for a long time after the constable and the girls had gone. They took the poor dog with them and Susan told Pee-wee not to grieve any more because King was better off. She seemed pleased to know that he didn't cry or anything. It was all for the best, that's what she said.

So when they were out of sight I said, "Each time something happens we get poorer and poorer. It might be the best for poor King and Susan, but it's pretty hard on us, eh kid?"

"Now don't start anything—gee whiz," he said. "I even feel like tearing my hair out, I'm so mad to think I was such a fool. Gee whiz, how could that feller be such a faker and a liar, huh? Gee whiz, how could he see me give over all that money when he knew that dog wasn't his?"

"You led him right along and gave him the idea, kid," I said. "I'm not kidding you this time, but it's a fact. Now that I remember what you said to him I can sort of see how he didn't think anything of it at first. Then when you mentioned about your cousin he got a bright look on his face."

"And a bright idea for getting something more that didn't belong to him," said Ben. "I bet any money that my nice slip-on sweater is in the back of that Lizzie right now."

“And my baseball,” piped Marv. “Gee, I’m the only one that didn’t lose much, huh?”

“You lost twenty-five dollars the same as the rest of us,” I said. “That money was as good as in our hands except that Pee-wee had it in his pocket.”

“There you go—there you go and here it isn’t five minutes ago you said you wouldn’t kid me!” the kid roared. “Even you can’t keep your word for five minutes so that shows!”

“And you can’t keep a hundred dollar bill five hours,” I said. “Deny it if you dare!”

He just gave me a very dark look and got up in the seat beside Ben. Then the Hunkajunk started off with another blast and the first thing you know we were moving along. That was a surprise to me every time because you’d have to wonder just to look at that car how it got started and after it was started how it kept on going. But it did just the same.

Then after a few more hours we were out on the turnpike and believe me, that looked good to all of us. Marv said, “I bet we’ll be home soon.”

Ben said, “I bet we won’t.” And he pointed to a signpost on the right hand side of the road. It said:

BRIDGEBORO—19 mi

So very blithe and gay I said, “What’s nineteen miles in a nineteen-sixteen Hunkajunk town car? Any town that wants it can have it after we get home—I’ll leave it to Pee-wee.”

“Do you mean to tell me that we’ve only gone two miles in all that time that we’ve been going?” the kid wanted to know.

I said, “Sure. The Hunkajunk is like a Ferris wheel—you keep going and going but you don’t get any place to speak

of.”

“Even maybe that sign isn’t right,” said the kid as if he couldn’t believe it. “After how long it took us from Farmer Simpkins’ down to Drowsyville and then from there all the way to here I bet it’s more than what that sign says, I bet it is. If it is, why, gee whiz, we won’t get home tonight, maybe.”

Ben said, “Maybe not. What do you care as long as the radiator doesn’t boil over?”

“What’s that got to do with us getting home tonight?” the kid wanted to know.

“Everything,” said Ben. “If we go fast it’ll boil over and we’ll have to stop and let her cool down and then we won’t get home. If we go slow, we won’t get there either, so we might as well not worry about it.”

I said, “You’re right, Ben. That makes all the difference in the world about not getting home tonight.”

“Are you fellers fools, because what are you talking about?” the kid shouted back at me. “What are you talking about—what makes all the difference in the world about not getting home, huh?”

“The radiator,” I said. “No sooner said....”

“I’m sick and tired of hearing you say that!” he screamed at me. “Can’t you think of something else to say?”

“Now look at what you’ve done, kid,” said Ben stopping the car all of a sudden. “You’ve yelled so hard the radiator’s starting to boil.”

“Do you mean to tell me I believe I could do that because—gee whiz, there’s a refreshment stand down the road. Let’s go down and stop there, huh, because I think it says something on that sign about dinners? Gee whiz, it must be almost supertime, huh?”

“Yes, but don’t forget we’ve only got two dollars and a quarter between us,” said Ben. “Keep saying it to yourself the whole time you’re eating or else you’ll forget it.”

“And while you’re thinking, for a change,” I said, “keep your eyes open for a man with a big mouth. He might come along and take your plate away from under you and tell you that he needs the food for his starving canary bird.”

“Shut up!” roared the kid. “Do you think I wouldn’t know him if I saw him again—after all that’s happened, do you say I wouldn’t recognize him now? Even didn’t I look right in his face when I handed him that hundred dollars?”

“That shows how observant I am,” I said.

“I won’t even talk to you,” said Pee-wee.

So I said, “Don’t mention it.” After that we went over to the refreshment stand and had something to eat—two hot dogs and a cone each.

Pee-wee said to the lady, “Didn’t I see something about dinner on that sign?”

“Candy dinner—five cents,” smiled the lady.

So Pee-wee said, “Anyway, we can stop at another stand if we get hungry, huh?”

“Yes,” I said, “and about twelve o’clock tonight we’ll have empty stomachs and no money. Ain’t we got fun!”

CHAPTER XXVI

FOGHORN

It was even before twelve o'clock and we didn't have a cent between the four of us. The kid had pestered us until he spent our last twenty cents on a bag of peanuts and a bag of popcorn. And I was hungry!

We kept chewing on peanuts and popcorn and tried to make believe that we were getting filled up. Anyway a fog started to come up and it gave us something to talk about for a little while.

Then Ben said, "We might as well keep on going because we'll never find a place to sleep tonight. Not with all this dampness in the ground."

I said, "How about the car? Marv and I can stretch out on the floor, you can stretch out on the back seat here and the kid can wrap himself around the wheel and let his feet rest on the seat."

The kid was too busy to give me any comeback about that; he was trying to put sixteen peanuts and an oval of popcorn into his mouth at once.

But Ben said, "It's a good idea, Roy. We'll wait until we see a signpost. I'd just like to know where we are before we stop."

"Posilutely," I said, "we can't be too careful. We might stop at some wicked hamlet and Pee-wee'll be forced to give away his last mouthful of popcorn."

"We should worry about Pee-wee or hamlets either," said Ben. "I'm so tired I could wrap *myself* around the wheel for

that matter. Keep your eye out for a signpost or a right hand turn, kid!”

Pee-wee turned his head to Ben in a way that meant yes, because he had already started on a fresh piece of popcorn. Anyway, he kept watch and boy, that fog got thicker by the minute. Every time we thought we were coming to an arc light it turned out to be a car going in the opposite direction. Finally we did come to a light and Ben sent the kid out in the road to hunt around for a signpost.

“Look under the light—they usually have them around there,” Ben told him.

So after Pee-wee was gone about what seemed hours, we all yelled and pretty soon he came back. “I got all mixed up,” he said. “Even I thought for the longest while that the sign said ten miles to Drowsyville this way and after a while I saw that it didn’t. It was pointing the other way.”

“You’re certainly a big help, kid,” said Ben. “Are we coming or going or if we aren’t, why aren’t we?”

“I just told you that the sign said that Drowsyville is ten miles behind us!” the kid yelled.

“We’re glad to hear that,” I said. “We could hear you just as well as if you didn’t say a word. Drive on, Ben.”

“I think we better,” said Ben, kind of worried. “The next time I stop you get out and look, Roy. There’s no use taking chances in a fog like this. I like to be certain.”

So I said, “Certainly.” Then we began to speed along at more than five miles an hour and I was getting dizzy.

All of a sudden, Pee-wee said, “Here’s a turn here, Ben, so you better turn!”

Ben said, “Are you sure?”

“Sure,” said the kid.

He said it so sure that Ben forgot about chances and turned. That is, he thought he turned. He just swung the wheel around and before any of us could say “ouch” we bumped and I felt myself go whizzing through the air kind of and then I rolled over a couple of times in some wet grass before I stopped.

When I looked up I saw the kid and he was on the other side of a fence peeking through at me. He said, “Gee whiz, Roy—are you hurt? I’m not.”

I said, “I’m not hurt—I’m just slightly indisposed and I feel like staying in this grass for spite. Where’s Marv and Ben?”

“Ben and I both fell out on this side of the fence. He’s all right and gee whiz, Marv’s sitting inside that car laughing like a fool because he never even budged from where he was sitting.”

So while I was trying to pick myself up, Ben said, “It’s a good thing we weren’t going any faster. And while we’re on the subject, take a look at a good wreck.”

“The car?” I said.

“No, a hunk of junk. All that’s left of it is the back seat and the engine.”

“All right,” I said. “Where do we go from here?”

“To sleep,” said Ben. “We’ll all try it back there anyhow. And you needn’t be afraid—I won’t make any more right hand turns for Pee-wee.”

CHAPTER XXVII

MY MISTAKE

I woke up thinking it was the sun shining in my face, but when I opened my eyes I found it was only a farmer. He was peeking over the fence and looking in at us all huddled up in the back of that car.

He said, "Had quite a spill, hey?"

So I said, "Yes, and here we are."

So then Ben woke up and he said, "I hope we didn't damage your fence, mister. We got caught in the fog and I thought it was a turn."

"You mean Pee-wee thought it was," said I very sprightly.

And that woke Pee-wee right up because he said, "Shut up! Blame it on me, that's right!"

The kid said that in a great big voice and it made the farmer sit up and take notice. After he looked us over he gave the whole wreck a very careful study. Ben said, "Do you suppose he's trying to find a part of the body that's whole and fit to use?"

I said, "We should worry what he's trying to find as long as we didn't damage his fence. We just bumped into that telegraph pole, Ben, and it shoved us back for spite, that's all."

So after a while the farmer came around and rested his elbow on the part where the door had been ripped from its hinges. He said, "This here's an old model of them Hunkajunk's, eh?"

“It’s a very old model now, mister,” I said, “If we laugh it’ll drop to pieces.”

“Jes’ th’ same it’s a car thet’s got a fine engine in it,” said the farmer very thoughtful. “I see yer didn’t hurt the engine one bit, eh? Fine’s ever, ’pears ter me.”

“Sure,” I said, “but we can’t ride home on the engine. What’ll we use for a steering wheel?”

“Oh,” said the man, “yer cain’t use it fer sight-seein’ purposes agin, that’s sure.”

“I should worry,” I said. “We’ve seen enough sights since we had the bus as it is.

“Wa’al, ef ye ain’t crazy ’bout keepin’ whut’s left o’ this I might take it and let it go fer a dollar or so fer what iron it has,” the farmer said. “Mebbe I kin git rid o’ it right away and mebbe not.”

So I said, “Well, if you think you can get a dollar or so, what can you give us? We could use a wheelbarrow if you’ve got one. How many miles to Bridgeboro, mister?”

“Ten,” he said and then: “I’ll give ye a wheelbarrow ter carry yer things in and a dollar ter boot. How’s that, eh?”

Jiminy, it sounded like a million dollars to us when we were without a cent and our stomachs empty. So we all said yes and then the farmer walked away across the field to his house.

“All we have to do when the farmer gives us the wheelbarrow is to push it ten miles to Bridgeboro, huh?” Ben asked solemn like.

“That’s all we have to do,” I said. “We always wanted to get up and hike at sunrise and now we have our wish.”

“But not with a wheelbarrow,” said Ben. “That dollar sounds better to me than anything.”

“Four cups of coffee and four hot dogs—gee whiz,” Pee-wee yelled as the farmer came across the field pushing the wheelbarrow before him. “If we got two extra ones we could break them in half and divide them up.”

“I’d like to break you in half,” I said, “Come on, kid. Marv and I ride the first mile, you and Ben the next and so on.”

“Even can’t you wait until we can stop some place and eat first?” he wanted to know. “Gee whiz, I’m weak—I’ve got to eat first.”

So Marv and I weakened and we made it up to sit in the wheelbarrow as soon as we were finished at the first refreshment stand we came to. And it’s a good thing we did make it up, believe me, because we had gone about a mile only when the wheel underneath began jingling and wriggling.

“He stung us on this,” Ben said. “This is all ready to fall apart and he made us think we were getting a bargain.”

“He’d sting a bee,” I said; “I could tell it by the look on his face. He’s the kind that would cheat his own mother and I bet we’ll find out that I’m right.”

And we did find it out while we were drinking our coffee. We stopped at a place where the kid had been before and his credit is so good there that they even let us read the paper. Ben was looking it over while we were all chewing on a second hot dog (on Pee-wee’s credit).

All of a sudden he opened the paper to a middle page and under the Drowsyville news there was an ad:

MOTORS
WILL PAY TEN DOLLARS CASH
FOR NINETEEN SIXTEEN

MODELS—HUNKAJUNK SPECIALS.
GEORGE’S IRON AND JUNK SHOP.

Ben said, “That old skinflint! I bet he knew it all the time. Ten dollars! If we’d known that we could have ditched the thing right there in Drowsyville.”

“And gee whiz, I’d have that hundred dollars and....” the kid began.

“You’d keep right on having it,” I said. “It’s just as well you gave it to Mr. Nought because it wouldn’t do us any good. Now we haven’t any money and nothing to fight about and everybody’s happy. Now ask me another, Animal Cracker?”

“You think you’re smart,” he came back at me. “Just the same don’t forget I have to pay this feller back for these extra hot dogs so you each owe me ten cents and don’t say you forgot about it tomorrow.”

So right on top of that we had another hot dog just to keep things snappy and lively. We began arguing again and before we realized it we had two ice cream cones each. Then Pee-wee began to figure out how much he’d owe the refreshment man and he went crazy.

Didn’t I tell you that everybody was happy?

CHAPTER XXVIII

LUCK

An hour later we still had eight miles to go to Bridgeboro, but I didn't care one way or the other. The wheelbarrow had just lost its wheel and we were all sitting down on the side of a ditch and wishing we were home. We looked like a lot of magpies, whatever they look like.

Anyway, when we were getting pretty despondent (I got that word from Ben and I think it's a good one), along came a little kid with an express wagon. It didn't look much better than our wheelbarrow except that the express wagon had all its wheels.

So I quick whispered to the kid, "Now's your chance to try some of your arguments out on a kid your own size. Tell him how a wheelbarrow has an advantage over his express wagon."

"Do you mean to say I'm not bigger than that shrimp?" the kid wanted to know. "Gee whiz, he's only a baby!"

"Now's your chance, kid," Ben whispered.

So Pee-wee said, "I'd rather have my wheelbarrow than your express wagon any day because I can get more in it. So do you say you'd want it because even I wouldn't let my own brother have it——"

I said, "Pity the brother that the kid would have, huh Ben?"

"You said it," Ben said.

So the little kid looked at us kind of puzzled like and then he looked at Pee-wee. "What's the wheel doing off it, hah?"

Gee, I never saw a wheelbarrow before that didn't have a wheel!"

"That's why I like it because it isn't like every other wheelbarrow," said the kid, working good and hard for us. "I put the wheel up in the scoop part to make it look nice so do you say it doesn't look nice?"

"Sure," said the little kid, interested. "How do you make it go then if you don't have any wheel?"

"Even you shouldn't try to make it go—just push it along or else it'll show how much of a lot you don't know about wheelbarrows!" the kid roared.

So just about the time when he almost conquered the express wagon for us we heard a voice say, "Well, if it isn't blithe, smiling Roy and the little boy with the big megaphone voice and the rest of the gang!"

We turned around and there in a nice, big car sat Major Bingbing. Jiminy, that car traveled so quiet we never even heard it come along. So I said, "Boy, but we're glad to see you if you're going down to Bridgeboro, Major Wigbig!"

He laughed like anything and he said, "You bet we're going past Bridgeboro—we're going to the airport. My plane's down there being repaired. You boys are out awfully early, aren't you?"

I said, "You're right, Major Wingbig. We're out more than that too—we're out a hundred dollars and only last night I dropped dead from the shock. It's a long, sad story, and we're just on our way home from Drowsyville since that day you deserted us for a bike. Pee-wee's been making mistakes ever since!"

"I might have known you would talk like that to Major Bingbing—excuse me, Major Bigwing—even I hear him

talking your name so many different ways that I forget which is right!” the kid explained with a roar. “It shows what a lot of respect he hasn’t got for any army aviator that he can twist your name around, besides don’t believe him that I’ve been making mistakes because they made one too on account of selling the Hunkajunk engine for a dollar and a wheelbarrow when they could have got ten dollars for it in George’s junk store in Drowsyville! So do you say that isn’t a big mistake?”

“I hope to tell you,” laughed the major. “All right, kids. Pile your stuff in and jump in yourselves. We’ll deposit you on your respective doorsteps and I guess you’ll be glad to get there.”

So we grabbed our stuff out of the wheelbarrow and told the little kid he could have it with our best wishes. He just stared at us as if we were all crazy or something and when we drove off in Major Bigwig’s swell Mackard car he kept blinking and blinking after us until we couldn’t see him any more. Then we began to tell Bingbing of our adventures.

“And now you’re on the home run, eh?” he said when we finished. “Goodness, you kids *have* been up in the air since I left you.”

“And how!” I said. “Ever since we landed and found out that the murdered man was Mr. Stuffy we haven’t come down to earth. Jiminy, the kid’s done nothing but make discoveries and mistakes and getting us all up in the air.”

“Just the same you ought to be glad that I could get credit for you at that stand so’s you could eat those cones and hot dogs!” the kid yelled very plainly. “So do you call that grav—I mean gratitude to act like this?”

“That’s what this hike reminds me of,” I said.

“How can you call it a hike when we’re riding in a Mackard car and besides what does it remind you of?” he wanted to know.

I said, “Gravitation—we’ve all been gravitating toward the crazy house and the poor house and now we’re gravitating home.”

“Even I wouldn’t let a smart aviator like Major Bigwing see what a fool I was by talking such nonsense,” whispered the kid.

“Who lives on Terrace Avenue?” Bingbing wanted to know all of a sudden.

“The animal cracker,” I said. “Are we taking him home first?”

“Yep,” said Bigwig, “we’ll drop you off according to size. Here goes!”

So we rolled up Harris’ driveway and dumped off the microbe, bag and baggage, and I called out when we were driving away, “Farewell, Sir Harris! Good riddance!”

“Maybe you don’t think I’m glad to get rid of you because do you think....”

That’s all we could hear him say because in a minute we were down at Marv’s house and then because Ben lived on the next block he went next. I just got in the house in time to hear the telephone ring.

CHAPTER XXIX

A BARGAIN

My father came out in the hall and he said, “Why, hello son! I’m glad to see you home! Walter’s waiting on the wire and says he wants to speak to you about something very important.”

“Goodnight,” I said. “That pest! Now what, I wonder!”

But I didn’t have long to wonder because I went right away and answered. I said, “A whole day’s rest would do your voice a lot of good, kid! What do you want now?”

“Even I won’t get mad at the fresh way you’re talking to me because my mother just told me something important from Drowsyville that she heard a little while ago!” he yelled over the phone.

I said, “If it’s just the same to you, you can shout out your back window and I could hear you just as well up here without any phone! If you talk in a whisper I could hear you!”

“All right,” he shouted a little lower. “Even I couldn’t wait to tell you what it’s about so I told the cook to keep my breakfast warm a couple of seconds. So you’ll never guess what Farmer Simpkins phoned my mother.”

“That Ed Berry turned up alive and now you have to pay his brother back the hundred dollars reward he gave you?” I asked him. “Maybe Santa Claus will leave our presents there next Christmas or something, is that what it is?”

“Are you going to stand there and talk like a fool so’s I can’t tell you!” he roared, forgetting himself.

I said, “I’m sitting down now and I changed the phone to my other ear. I’ll never be the same again! Hurry up, I smell pancakes cooking in the kitchen so that means the cook knows I’m home too.”

“All right,” said the kid, “Farmer Simpkins told my mother that they captured those two tramps. Even they got the money they stole from us because those fellers didn’t have a chance to spend it on account of the way they were speeding to get away from the cops and all. Even they found my cooking kit and all our eats so do you say that Drowsyville’s got such a bad police force because Mr. Simpkins said that Mr. Slickem chased them himself? Do you say we aren’t lucky that we’re going to get everything back that they stole from us—even the hundred dollars! Gee whiz, I think that’s dandy, don’t you?”

“The hundred dollars is dandy for you,” I said, “but what about us?”

“Didn’t I say I’d give you twenty-five dollars each so what are you kicking about?” he wanted to know. “Even you’ll each get it as soon as I can go up there and get those things only remember how you got extra cones and hot dogs so that’s twenty-four dollars and sixty cents and do you say that isn’t fair?”

I said, “You remind me of that farmer we gave the Hunkajunk motor to—you’re a regular old skinflint and more than that!”

“Gee whiz, nothing I do seems to please you fellers any more!” he hollered. “Even you won’t pay for what you ate out of that money I’ll give you so do you say it’s fair that I should take it out of mine and you don’t have to take it out of yours?”

“I don’t hear you,” I said. “Now I’m going to eat my breakfast, so scoot!”

“Listen, Roy,” he yelled, “gee whiz, I’ll take nothing out of that money if you’ll ride up to Drowsyville so’s we can get those things. John says he’ll take me today any time I want to go so do you say you’ll go?”

“Goodnight, I don’t want to see Drowsyville for ten years—anyway ten hours,” I said.

“All right,” he said, “then you’ll go tomorrow, huh? Maybe I’ll treat you too if John’ll stop at some stands, so you come because he likes you and he’ll stop for you, huh?”

“Yes! Scoot!” I yelled. “For the last time, *I’m going to eat my breakfast!*”

“So am I!” he roared.

So I heard him put down the receiver and I put down ours too. And I laughed all the way into the breakfast room to think what a nice, crazy kid Pee-wee is anyway. He’s a pest and all that, but I’d bet anybody that his heart’s as big as his voice and that’s the biggest you ever could hear.

So just when I was thinking all these nice things about the kid, the telephone rang again. I didn’t pay any attention to it because I was eating my breakfast and it tasted too good to listen to anything.

But pretty soon my father walked into the room and he said, “That was Walter again, son. He told me not to disturb you because he knew you’d be eating your breakfast.”

I said, “That’s the first good thing he’s done in days. Now what does he want?”

My father laughed, “Oh come now,” he said, “Walter’s a fine little chap. He just wanted me to tell you that John and he will be over in the car right after breakfast and that John

promises faithfully he'll have you back here by noontime again."

"Jiminy, what's the idea? He said tomorrow when I talked to him."

"I know—he told me that too, but he said the plans were suddenly changed, for Mrs. Harris told him that he must have misunderstood her about her first report of some tramps. He said you know about all this business. At any rate, it seems that contrary to previous reports only one hundred dollars was found on those disreputable gentlemen and that, obviously, belongs to Walter. But what he stressed was another amount of eight dollars that couldn't be found upon these knights of the road. That's what Walter was worried about. He said he decided to have John take you boys right away, for Walter fears that if you wait until tomorrow the hundred dollars might also disappear."

"Goodnight," I said, "no wonder I'm a nervous wreck!"

So I had to swallow my breakfast whole, but I swallowed it with a smile. But you can see for yourself what I have to put up with when Pee-wee gets something into his head.

THE END

[The end of *Roy Blakeley Up in the Air* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]