# Freddy and the Dragon

The 26th and Final Story in the Freddy the Pig Series

Walter R. Brooks

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# FREDDY AND THE DRAGON

Walter R. Brooks

*Illustrated by Kurt Wiese*

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# CHAPTER 1

Freddy, the pig, and Jinx, the black cat, in their cowboy clothes, were riding down through Main Street in Centerboro toward their home, on the Bean farm. Freddy was astride Cy, his western pony and Jinx rode Bill, the goat. Holding to the pommel of Freddy's saddle rode their friend, Samuel Jackson, the mole.

They had been on a riding trip through New England. They had seen the sights of Boston, had climbed Bunker Hill, and had visited Plymouth Rock and the House of Seven Gables and many other historic monuments. They had had a wonderful month, but now they were glad to be getting back into familiar territory. They were tired of towns where the streets were full of strangers; it was good to recognize the faces of friends in the crowds on the sidewalks. They waved at Mr. Metacarpus and Judge Willey and Mr. Howell, manager of Beller & Rohr's music store, and took off their hats to Mrs. Winfield Church and Miss Peebles.

Even Samuel lifted his hat, although he didn't know any of the townspeople. He hadn't had a hat when they started out, but he had wanted one, so they bought a red hat that they saw on a doll in a toyshop in Boston. It didn't fit very well, because a mole's head is a straight line from the tip of his nose to his shoulderblades, but they fastened it on with a rubber band. When he lifted it, it snapped back and hurt his nose. But he didn't mind. He wasn't going to be outdone in politeness by pigs and cats.

But, though he waved at the people he knew, Freddy wasn't very well satisfied with their response. Those that waved back did not seem to do so very enthusiastically, and a number of old acquaintances just stared and frowned and then turned away.

"What's the matter with everybody?" Freddy said. "I didn't expect them to dance and sing and strew rose petals in our path, but I did think they'd be glad to see us."

"That's gratitude for you," said Jinx. "We saved 'em from slavery, and this is the thanks we get." He was referring to the state-wide revolt of animals two years earlier, when an attempt had been made under the leadership of the rat, Simon, to take over the management of all the farms, and even of the government, from the humans. Owing to the work of Freddy and his friends, the revolt had been broken. Simon and his family had been exiled, and their human advisor, Mr. Herbert Garble, an old enemy of the Bean animals, sent to jail.

"I don't understand it," said Freddy. "I'll come back to town tomorrow and try to find out if there's anything wrong."

Once through Centerboro, they galloped swiftly on, and presently turned in at the Bean gate. Charles, the rooster, saw them first, and he hopped up on the fence and gave three loud excited crows. Usually he just crowed in the morning, to get everybody up and the farm work started, so when the three cows, and the dogs, and Hank, the old white horse, and the other animals heard him they dashed out into the barnyard to see what was going on. They gave a cheer, and rushed up to surround the returning travelers, and there was a lot of laughing and shouting and shaking of paws and claws and hoofs—and even of hands, when Mr. and Mrs. Bean came out to greet them. And then Mr. Benjamin Bean, Mr. Bean's uncle, came running down the stairs from the loft in the barn where he was secretly building his flying-saucer engine. He was more glad to see Freddy than any of the others, because it was Freddy who had defeated the foreign spies who had wanted to steal the plans for the engine. He pulled Freddy off his horse and hugged him and waltzed him around, and seemed speechless with gladness. There was nothing unusual about this, of course. Uncle Ben was practically speechless most of the time anyway; he almost never said a sentence more than two words long.

So then Mrs. Bean said: "Now come, animals; let Freddy get his breath. He and his friends have had a long ride today, and they're hot and dusty and tired. Suppose we break it up for now and let them clean up and get rested. Then tonight we can all meet in the barn, and they can tell us about their trip. And I'll bake a cake."

The crowd dispersed, and the travelers rode on up to the pig pen, where they took the saddles and bridles off Cy and Bill, who lay down in the shade and went to sleep. Samuel dove into the ground and disappeared, and Jinx and Freddy went inside. They took off their hats and their boots and their gun belts, and Freddy threw himself down on the bed and was asleep before Jinx had made up his mind where to lie down.

The cat looked at the foot of the bed. There was plenty of room, but when Freddy was tired his snores sounded like a four-engined plane taking off. The armchair wasn't good either. It looked comfortable, but Jinx remembered that there were a couple of broken springs which poked up through the seat and jabbed you just when you were getting settled. He finally curled up on the desk among the heaps of dusty papers.

Jinx had been asleep about half an hour when there was a light tap at the door. He lifted his head from his paws. He could hear whispering and giggling outside, and the tap came again. Freddy was still soundly—and rather noisily—asleep. Jinx jumped down and went over and shook him by the shoulder. "Freddy! Wake up! You've got company!"

Freddy sat up. "Who? Wha-what? Oh, it's you, Jinx. Well, but I don't consider you as company; you're just sort of part of the family. I don't—"

"At the door, you dope!" said the cat. "Someone knocking. You'd better see who it is."

Freddy got up, yawning, and opened the door.

There was a group of animals facing the door. They were huddled around a boy with a bicycle and trying to look at an envelope which he held in his hand. It was Charles who had tapped on the door with his beak, and with him were his wife, Henrietta, Georgie, the little brown dog, Hank, the old white horse, and the three cows: Mrs. Wiggins, Mrs. Wurzburger, and Mrs. Wogus. Also there were some assorted small animals, rabbits and squirrels and a skunk or two. They were all trying hard not to giggle.

Freddy knew the boy. His name was Jimmy Wiggs, and he lived in South Pharisee, which is between Clamville and Upper Cattawampus, below Centerboro. Once, when he had been there with Mr. Boomschmidt's circus, Freddy had helped Jimmy out. The boy had been putting on a circus of his own in his back yard, with a lot of his friends' pets, dogs and cats and rabbits, in coops. Jimmy's older brother, Jack, and some of *his* friends had come and made fun of the show and tried to raid it and break it up. But Freddy had borrowed a lion and some elephants and leopards from Mr. Boomschmidt and prepared a little surprise for Jack's gang. When the raiders had yanked open the doors of the coops and been confronted with real wild animals, roaring and snarling ferociously, instead of the fox terriers and kittens they had expected to chase away, they fled screaming. And the show had been a great success.

"Hello, Freddy," Jimmy said. "I've got a letter for you." He held up a white envelope.

Freddy couldn't reach it over the heads of all the animals crowded up around the door. Charles hopped up on the handlebars of Jimmy's bicycle and took the letter in his claw. But instead of passing it along to Freddy, he squinted at the address, first with one eye and then with the other. Then he burst into a crow of laughter. "That's right, Jimmy; that's what you said. That's the way it's addressed: 'Frederick Bean is queer.' " And all the smaller animals giggled.

Freddy had reached out a fore trotter for the letter, but now he drew it back. "If this is a gag," he said crossly, "it's a pretty feeble one. So if you'll excuse me, I'll go back and finish my nap."

But as he started to close the door, Jimmy said: "It isn't a gag, Freddy, honest. I was in Centerboro today, and I met Mrs. Peppercorn, and I told her I was coming

out to see you about something. So she asked me if I'd take along this note to you."

Freddy still didn't reach for it. "Mrs. Peppercorn would never send me a note with 'Frederick Bean is queer' written on it," he said.

"Well—it looks like that," said Jimmy apologetically.

Jinx had come to the door beside the pig. "Look at it, you dope," he said impatiently. "Look at it." And he reached out and took the envelope.

"Why, sure," he said. "Frederick Bean er . . . h'm . . . ha!" He stopped and grinned. "Well, it ain't spelled right, but it sure looks as if the old lady had your number, kid. 'Queer' it is. Boy it takes 'em a long time, but they get on to you in the end!"

"Let me look at that!" Freddy snatched the letter from the cat's claws.

Some of the rabbits were going around in a circle, a sort of war dance, giggling and chanting:

*"Frederick Bean is queer!*
*Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!*
*Alas, we greatly fear*
*That when the animals hear*
*That Frederick Bean is queer*
*They'll take him by the ear.*
*He'll shed a bitter tear*
*And shout: Oh dear, oh dear!—"*

"Shut up!" Freddy yelled. "All of you. *Shut up!* Don't you know anything? This is addressed to Frederick Bean, *Esquire!* Esquire, not 'is queer.' Esquire is a courtesy title, like Mister. Instead of addressing it to 'Mr. Frederick Bean,' she addressed it to 'Frederick Bean, Esquire.' It's a little more dignified that way, that's all."

"And, boy, you could use a little more dignity right now, pig," said the cat.

Freddy sniffed. He backed into the pig pen. "Come in, Jimmy," he said, and the three went in and closed the door.

Freddy opened the letter and glanced through it. "H'm," he said. "That's odd. Listen to this." And he read:

"'Dear Freddy:

It wasn't until you had gone through Centerboro that I heard that you were back from your vacation, and then it was too late to catch you. Will you come see me? I would ride out to the farm, but someone stole my

bicycle last Friday night. This is only the latest of a series of thefts and acts of vandalism which have kept the town stirred up for the past two weeks. The state troopers have been trying to find the criminals, but without success. I think I know the reason why. The case can be solved only by a special kind of detective, and I believe you are that kind. I will explain that remark when I see you. I will also explain why I say to you: Come soon! *For your own protection*, come soon!

Yours truly,
Mrs. A. A. Peppercorn.'"

"Now why do you suppose she said that—for my own protection?" Freddy demanded. "Have you got any idea, Jimmy?" He sat down on the bed and looked as if he might curl up and go to sleep again any minute.

The boy said: "No, I haven't. But I was only coming through Centerboro on my way to see you. I didn't talk to anybody but Mrs. Peppercorn, and I only spoke to her for a minute."

"I wonder if it has anything to do with the way people scowled at us in Centerboro this afternoon," Freddy said thoughtfully. "Have you heard anything, Jimmy—I mean about the Bean animals doing anything to make themselves unpopular or anything while we were away?"

"No. But people in South Pharisee don't take much interest in what goes on in Centerboro—they mostly gossip about their relatives or folks that live next door. Unless it's something big, like when you broke up the animal revolution."

Jinx said: "Maybe you aren't as popular as you think you are. You expected people to miss you. But maybe instead of shouting: 'Hooray! Hooray!' they just said: 'Oh, here's that darn pig back again. I'd forgotten what a dope he is.'"

Freddy paid no attention to this, and Jimmy said impatiently: "Look, Freddy, why sit around talking? If you want to know what's wrong, why don't you go down and see Mrs. Peppercorn?"

Freddy yawned. "I suppose you're right," he said reluctantly. "Come on, Jinx. And, Jimmy, ride along on your bicycle, and you can tell me what it is you want to see me about."

By this time most of the animals who had come up to the pig pen with Jimmy had gone away, but a few rabbits were still hanging around, and they began to prance in a circle, chanting: "Frederick Bean is queer," until Mrs. Wiggins, who had also remained, said: "Oh, be quiet!" and made a pass at them with her horns, which made them run off giggling.

The cow was Freddy's partner in the detective business.

"Anything wrong, Freddy?" she asked, as the pig and the cat began saddling Cy and Bill.

Freddy showed her the letter and told her about the scowls that had greeted him in Centerboro. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"Do you think Freddy needs protection?" Jimmy asked, and Jinx said: "Do you suppose we ought to call a meeting and talk it over?"

"Talk what over?" said the cow a little crossly. "Good grief, there's nothing to talk about. A couple of scowls and a letter. You know better than that, Freddy. Go get some facts. Suppose you come to me and say: 'What is two plus two?' And I say: 'Four.' I can answer that because you've given me all the facts. But suppose you say: 'What is two plus *something*?' And I ask you what 'something' is, and you say you don't know. Don't you see that's just what you're doing now? A couple of scowls plus a letter that you don't understand. If you'd only—"

"Yes, yes," Freddy interrupted, swinging into the saddle. "You tell me the rest tomorrow. O.K., Jinx? Jimmy?" And he started down through the barnyard.

As Cy and Bill trotted up the road to Centerboro, Jimmy pedaled along between them. "You remember, Freddy," he said, "a couple years ago when I had that circus, and Mr. Boomschmidt lent me some circus animals so we'd have a real show? Well, we've organized a baseball team this year, and we want to raise money for uniforms; and we thought maybe we could have another circus. Of course, we'll have to charge money—we thought, ten cents—this time, instead of bottle caps. And so it'll have to be a pretty good show. And we wondered if maybe Mr. Boomschmidt would lend us some of his animals."

"He would if he were here," Freddy said. "But he's out in Ohio now. He won't get to Centerboro before late September."

Jimmy said: "Oh," and they rode along for a time in silence.

"We might have a rodeo," Cy suggested. "Offer a prize for anybody that can stay on my back for a minute."

"A one-horse rodeo?" said Freddy. "It's not enough. Anyway, there might be some busted arms and legs, and that wouldn't do. . . ."

The others made several suggestions, but none of them was any good. They reached Centerboro and pulled up in front of Mrs. Peppercorn's gate.

"Well, thanks anyway, Freddy," said Jimmy gloomily. "Guess I'll ride along home now."

"Wait a minute," said the pig. "I've got a sort of an idea. . . ." He paused. "Let me think it over for a day or two. I'll ride over and see you when I've got something

definite."

Jimmy's face brightened. "I knew you'd think of something," he said. "I'll be waiting for you." And he rode off.

"What is this bright idea of yours?" Jinx asked as they went up the front walk.

"Haven't got any," said Freddy. "But I hated to see him look so downcast."

The cat sniffed. "He'll look downcaster when he finds that out."

"Oh, I'll think of something," said the pig, and rang the bell.

## CHAPTER 2

When Freddy had gone into the detective business, Mrs. Peppercorn had been one of his first clients. She had lost her spectacles. She had hunted all over the house for them. When Freddy was called in, he found them at once; they were up on her forehead where she had pushed them and forgotten them.

Mrs. Peppercorn never ceased to marvel at Freddy's cleverness in finding them so quickly. She told all her friends about it, and he got a number of cases in Centerboro because of it which he wouldn't otherwise have had.

She became very friendly with the Beans and their animals. Jinx frequently came down and took her to the movies, and she was the only person in Centerboro who would ride with Uncle Ben in his atomic-powered station wagon, which, when you stepped on the accelerator, frequently took thirty-foot bounds through the air. Also, she had accompanied Uncle Ben and the animals on that first trial run in his space ship, when he had tried to reach Mars.

She greeted Freddy and Jinx warmly, and took them into the living-room. A little old lady with a very red nose was sitting in a rocking-chair, sneezing. She looked *very* old.

"Aunt Min," said Mrs. Peppercorn, "this is Frederick Bean, the famous detective, and Mr. Jinx Bean, his associate. My aunt, Mrs. Talcum."

Mrs. Talcum gave one final tremendous sneeze and said: "Pleased to beet you."

"Sorry you have such a cold, ma'am," said Freddy politely.

"Hay fever," said Mrs. Peppercorn, and Mrs. Talcum said: "Cubs od every subber."

"Must be very trying," said Jinx sympathetically.

"Dot at all," said Mrs. Talcum. She rubbed her nose vigorously with her handkerchief, leaving it even redder than before. "Sdeezig is—a . . . a . . . a—*chew*! is very edjoyable. I biss it id the widder tibe. Always look forward to subber ad a good bout of sdeezig." She gave a cackling laugh which got mixed up with a fresh sneeze and ended in a magnificent "Cha-cha-*how*!"

"That's true," said Jinx politely. "I like a good sneeze myself."

Mrs. Talcum nodded. "Two hudred years ago," she said, "folks took sduff to *bake* 'eb sdeeze. Dew how to get edjoybedt out of life id those days. Do do what's cub over people today. Parties ad busic ad dadcig, whed there's just as buch fud id a good sdeezig fit."

"That's right," said Freddy. "The simple pleasures are the best."

"Hard to talk, though," said Jinx, "when you doze—I mean your nose—is

stopped up."

Mrs. Talcum shook her head. "Odly letters you cad't say are ed ad eb. Two out of tweddy-six. That aid buch."

"I'm going to take these gentlemen out and show them the garden, Aunt Min," said Mrs. Peppercorn, and Mrs. Talcum dismissed them with a wave of the hand and a double-barreled sneeze.

Mrs. Peppercorn's garden was a mess. Flower beds and plants were uprooted and trampled, and in the vegetable garden evidently peas and beans and corn had been picked and carried off. And there too the plants had been uprooted.

Freddy stared around in consternation. "Golly!" he said.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "And this is only one of half a dozen gardens that have been raided in the past week. Moreover, my bicycle has been stolen; Dr. Wintersip's house was broken into, and a pair of binoculars and a set of Dickens taken; a lot of canned goods were taken from Mrs. Winfield Church's cellar; somebody threw a stone through Mr. Beller's picture window. . . . Oh, that's not the half of it. And you see it's not just robbery, it's smashing and destroying things just for the sake of destroying 'em. And, Freddy, you've got to find out who's doing it."

"Me?" said the pig. "This is a job for the troopers."

Mrs. Peppercorn shook her head. "Look at the garden a little more closely," she said.

Freddy walked along between the rows. He bent down to see how the earth had been scooped and channeled by digging out the roots. And he knew what had happened. He knew what had done it.

"Look here," said Jinx, pointing down to several clear imprints of small hoofs.

"I don't need to," said Freddy. "A pig rooted up this garden."

The old lady nodded. "Yes. And the folks in town think they know what pig."

"You mean—*me*?" Freddy exclaimed. "But I've been . . . *you* don't think I—"

"No," she interrupted; "I don't think you did it. That's why I sent for you. That's why I say you're the one that's got to find out who did do it. You've got a lot of friends in town. But there are a lot of people who are kind of on the fence about you. They say: 'Oh, sure, he's smart all right. But don't forget: he's been in and out of our jail half a dozen times. And where there's smoke, there's fire.' "

"Why, sure, I've been in and out of jail. The sheriff's a friend of mine. When he invites me down for a week-end, I go. He sets a good table, and he's got a nice lot of prisoners, and we have a lot of fun. . . . Oh, I know, you mean that time I was arrested for stealing. But you know about that. Remember that man who pretended to be Mrs. Bean's long-lost brother, and she was going to give him a lot of money,

and I took it because I knew he was a crook? And then when we showed him up as an imposter, I gave the money back."

"You don't have to defend yourself to me, Freddy," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "But there are a lot of people who never got that story straight. All they remember is that you went to jail. And then when they find it's a pig that has been tearing up their gardens, they say: 'Aha! That Freddy, I bet!' "

"And here's another thing," she went on. "Last Friday night Mr. Schemerhorn was up in the Big Woods along the back road looking for a lost cow, and he looked out through the trees and saw, in the moonlight, a pig, carrying a heavy sack on his shoulders."

"If I'd stolen a lot of stuff in Centerboro, I wouldn't take it home along the back road," said Freddy. "That's way out of the way."

"Less traffic on the back road," put in Jinx. "And you could cut down through the woods and by the duck pond without being seen. It's not much longer."

"Yeah, but last Friday night we were a hundred miles from here, coming back from our trip."

"We can't prove it," said the cat. "After we got away from where folks knew us, everybody made such a fuss about our being talking animals that we ducked 'em, rode the back roads and cross-country. A few farmers stared at us, but how you going to get hold of them to give us an alibi?"

Mrs. Peppercorn nodded. "You see, it's serious, Freddy," she said. "Some pig is up to mischief, and you've got to find him before you get arrested. There's talk of that already."

"The only pigs around here besides me are my Cousin Ernest and his family, at the Macy farm," said Freddy. "Ernest sleeps most of the time; he couldn't stay awake long enough to get to Centerboro. And his son, Weedly—you remember Weedly, Mrs. P?—he's a good boy. He wouldn't do anything like this."

"It's not any local pig," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "But it's a pig that wants to get you into trouble. Have you made any pig enemies?"

Freddy shook his head, but Jinx said: "How about the pigs that came down into the woods from up north two years ago, to join the animals that revolted? Boy, they were a tough-looking gang!"

Freddy said they'd all gone back home after the revolt was broken up. "We drove 'em out—all those rangy cows and pigs and horses. They couldn't be around now. There's nothing for them to live on up in the woods."

"Maybe they're living on such gardens as Mrs. Peppercorn's," said the cat. "And they might have stayed on for revenge; they'd have it in for you, all right."

Mrs. Peppercorn said: "Someone raided Mrs. Lafayette Bingle's icebox the other night. A ham was taken."

Freddy frowned. "No matter how low he had sunk, no pig would take a ham," he said.

"I was thinking of the horses you just mentioned," Mrs. Peppercorn said. "It was a horse that kicked in Mrs. Bingle's back door when she was at the movies and raided the icebox. She showed me the hoof marks."

"And I suppose they blame Cy for that," said Jinx.

"Mrs. Bingle does."

"I'd like to look at those hoof marks," said Freddy suddenly. "You want to go over with me, Mrs. P.?" Mrs. Bingle lived just across the street.

"I do not!" said Mrs. Peppercorn. "Sarah Bingle and I never have hit it off very well, and specially now, since she's accusing you of burglary. You'd better go alone. And then come back and tell me what you've found out. Though I expect," she added with a grim smile, "that it will be only what it feels like to be hit over the head with a broom."

Freddy thought that that was probably so, but he set his teeth and went around the house and across the street and into Mrs. Bingle's yard. He was almost at the back door when from the garden a sharp voice called: "What are you doing on my property? Get out, or I'll call the police!"

Mrs. Bingle was a little old lady about the size of Mrs. Peppercorn, but where Mrs. Peppercorn had snapping black eyes and looked rather stern, Mrs. Bingle had greenish eyes and looked sour. The Bean animals were very fond of Mrs. Peppercorn, but nobody, Freddy thought, could be fond of Mrs. Bingle.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Freddy politely, "I'd like to look at the hoof marks on the back door. I'm on the trail of the burglars who broke into your house the other night."

"You're on your own trail then," said Mrs. Bingle. "I know you; you're that pig of Bean's, that's been breaking windows and stealing things all over town." She had a hoe, which she shook threateningly at him.

But Freddy had caught sight of the hoof marks on the door. "Then you'd better call the sheriff or the troopers right away and have me arrested. I'll stay right here, and I'll call my horse, so you can arrest him at the same time."

"You will, hey?" Her grip tightened on the hoe, and for a second Freddy thought she was going to swing it at him. Then she said vindictively: "That's exactly what I'm going to do," and she dropped the hoe and went into the house, slamming the door behind her. It didn't slam very well, because it hadn't been repaired and the lock and

one hinge were broken.

Freddy whistled for Cy, then he took a pencil and paper from his pocket, went up to the door, and made a full-sized sketch of the horseshoe mark. When Cy came around the corner of the house, Freddy showed it to him. "Mrs. Bingle says this is a print of your shoes. She says you kicked her back door in the other night."

Freddy was always surprised when Cy frowned. Some animals can frown, but horses usually don't. Cy did though, when he was puzzled or irritated. He did now.

"*My* shoe!" he exclaimed. "My shoes aren't more'n half the size of that great clodhopper!" He held up a foot, and of course it was true—the size of shoe Freddy had drawn would fit a big farm horse, not a small western pony like Cy.

After a few minutes a car drew up in front of the house, and then Mrs. Bingle and a state trooper came around to the back.

"There he is, officer!" Mrs. Bingle snapped. "You can see for yourself how he smashed my door. And that pig—he's the one that's been causing all this trouble in town. Arrest them at once!"

"Well now, ma'am," said the trooper, after he had looked at the door, and then had had Cy put his hind foot down on Freddy's drawing, "it couldn't have been this horse. You see?—his whole foot goes inside the outline of that shoe."

Mrs. Bingle sniffed. "You're kind of simple-minded for a policeman!" she said sarcastically. "Don't you suppose he's got sense enough to wear a different pair of shoes when he goes out burglarizing houses? He'd know the police'd compare the hoof marks with his own shoes."

"Horses' shoes are nailed on, ma'am," said the trooper. "You can't nail a big shoe to a small hoof."

Once this was pointed out, it was plain even to Mrs. Bingle that Cy could not have broken her door. But this did not discourage her. "Maybe so," she said. "Maybe so. But it ain't just my door. There's gardens been torn up and houses broke into all over town—money and jewelry stolen, and even some furniture. But the footprints are all of animals. Just think that over."

"I've heard some talk about it," said the trooper. "But do you seriously believe that there's a gang of animals behind all this raiding and vandalism?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" said Mrs. Bingle. "Just go around and ask some of the folks in town. They'll tell you who's doing it. It's those animals of William Bean's. And their leader is this pig here, Freddy. You arrest him now and you'll save yourself a lot of grief."

The trooper scratched his head. "Don't seem to me you have much of a case, ma'am. This horse—"

"There's another horse out at Beans'," she said. "You go out and measure his shoe. And while you're about it, search the place. You just dig around out there, and if you don't find a lot of stolen goods, I'm much mistaken." She started to go in the back door, then she turned. "And if you find that ham, you bring it straight back here; 'tain't going to be a meal for a lot of policemen." Then she went in and slammed the door so hard that it fell all to pieces.

Freddy swung into the saddle, but the trooper put his hand on the rein. "I understand you been out of town for a spell?"

"That's right," said Freddy. "But I can't prove where I've been. We were on back roads mostly, this last week."

The trooper frowned. "Well, it doesn't look too good for you, and that's a fact. I'll have to ask you to come in for questioning. I'm not arresting you, you understand. You come down now, and I'll go out to the farm later."

Freddy walked Cy to the street. Jinx, mounted on Bill, was waiting. "Come on, cat," said Freddy, as the trooper got into his car and motioned them to precede him. "Down to troop headquarters. They're going to put us to the torture and make us confess all our crimes."

"Third degree, eh?" said Jinx with a grin. "Good! Always wanted to know how that worked."

They jogged on down the street ahead of the police car.

# CHAPTER 3

So Freddy and Jinx were taken to the troop headquarters, and there they were questioned closely about their movements during the past week. The questioner was a Lieutenant Sparrow, and he didn't look much like his name, for he was a big, tough, red-faced man with a roaring voice. He yelled and stormed at them, and he said that if they didn't confess, he would have Freddy beaten up and he would hang Jinx up by the tail and pull his whiskers out one by one.

But the animals knew all about Lieutenant Sparrow. In spite of his rough, tough ways, he was the kindest hearted of men and, as people said, wouldn't hurt a fly. Indeed, this was literally true. He wouldn't allow a fly-swatter in the place, and if a fly did get in, he would open the screen door and call all the other troopers, and they would carefully shoo it out. He was really a very nice man.

So Freddy said: "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, but we haven't been anywhere near Centerboro while all this has been going on. We can't prove it. On the other hand, nobody can prove we were."

The lieutenant quieted down. "That's where you're wrong, pig," he said. "There's folks right here in town that'll swear they saw you—and doing a lot of mischief, too. You claim it's some other pig." He shook his head. "I'm going to have to do something about it before long. Luckily for you, there haven't been any warrants sworn out for your arrest yet. But there's plenty of talk. If it wasn't that you have some good friends like the sheriff, and Mrs. Winfield Church, and Mrs. Peppercorn, there'd be a mob on its way out to lynch you by this time."

"Gee whiz!" said Jinx. "Is that straight, Lieut?"

The trooper nodded. "There's been talk of it. Of course, we'd prevent it if we could. But we might not even know about it until it was all over. Frankly, I'd feel a lot better about it if someone would swear out a warrant for you and we had you in jail. You'd be safe there."

"You don't really believe we did all those things, then?" Freddy asked.

"Who else could have done 'em? Where else around here is there a bunch of animals smart enough? But in this country a man is supposed to be innocent until he's proved guilty. So if you ain't going to confess, I'll have to let you go. But keep away from Centerboro. And don't leave the farm. I want you where I can lay my hand on you, if I want to pull you in."

Freddy and Jinx were pretty discouraged as they rode away. They reported to Mrs. Peppercorn, and got a description of her bicycle to give to the A.B.I., the Animal Bureau of Investigation. Freddy said he thought it ought to be easy to find as

it was the only lady's bicycle in Centerboro. Mrs. Peppercorn and her aunt came out on the porch to say good-by to them, and as they rode off Mrs. Peppercorn waved her hankerchief, and Mrs. Talcum wished them good-luck with a heavy barrage of sneezes.

The head of the A.B.I. was a robin, Mr. J. J. Pomeroy. Freddy, since his return, hadn't had a chance to see him, but now as soon as he got back to the farm he went to the big tree at the side of the house and rapped on the trunk.

The Pomeroys lived on one of the lower branches, and as Freddy looked up, Mrs. Pomeroy stuck her head over the edge of the nest. "Hello, Freddy," she said. "It's nice to see you back. Did you have a good trip?"

"Fine," said Freddy. "But we've run into plenty of trouble here at home."

"Oh, you mean that bull," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Bull?" said Freddy. "What bull?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? Nobody knows where he came from. And he must hide out in the woods somewhere. He doesn't belong to anybody around here. He's just about terrorized the countryside—knocking down fences and chicken coops, and chasing other animals. He even ripped down a lot of barbed-wire fence at Witherspoons' last night. That's where J. J. is now—up there investigating."

"Does he know about the trouble in Centerboro?" Freddy asked.

"We've heard about it. But he's been too busy with that bull to do much, and we figured you'd probably catch the pig that seems to be behind it all, when you got back."

"Set a pig to catch a pig, eh?" said Freddy. "Well, be seeing you. Come on, Jinx."

They rode up toward the woods, crossed the brook, and then swung off to the right into a hayfield that bordered the land belonging to Mr. Witherspoon. They saw at once that a section of the barbed-wire fence between the Witherspoon and the Bean farms had been ripped out. And an enormous black bull with a ring in his nose was calmly eating the uncut hay on the Bean side of the fence. He was trampling down a lot more grass than he was eating.

The two friends pulled up. "Golly," said Jinx, "Mr. Bean'll pop his suspender buttons when he sees this. But we better go down and tell him."

Freddy said: "No; I think we'd better handle it ourselves. You know Mr. Bean. He'll go right up to that bull and try to put a rope through the ring in his nose. And the bull will go for him."

"But Mr. Bean has a shotgun."

"I wouldn't want to try to stop that bull with a shotgun," Freddy said. "Come on,

let's talk to him. We can dodge if he rushes us."

They rode up along the fence. The bull lifted his head. "Well, well," he boomed, "ain't you cute little fellers! Part of old Bean's trained menagerie, I expect. Well, come along; plenty for all."

"That's Mr. Bean's hay you're eating," said Freddy.

"You wouldn't want to stop me, would you?" said the bull. Then he gave a great roaring laugh. "Come up closer. I won't hurt you. I want to see those duds you got on. Regular cowboy suits, ain't they? And I suppose you came out to round me up and drive me away, hey? I suppose I ought to go before I get hurt." He pretended to shiver with fear, and then broke out into his roaring laugh again. He reminded Freddy a lot of Lieutenant Sparrow.

A robin flew down and perched on the pommel of Freddy's saddle. "Look out for this fellow, Freddy," he said; "he can be mean. He drove Mr. Witherspoon's horse, Jerry, out of his stable this morning and ate up his measure of oats, and then he broke open the oat bin and ate a lot more, before coming out and tearing down the fence."

"Hello, J. J.," said Freddy. "Where was Mr. Witherspoon all this time?"

"The bull chased him into the house. He took a couple of shots at him with his deer rifle, but missed both times. Then I guess the bull thought he'd better beat it, so he came over here, out of range."

"Maybe I could rope him," said Freddy, touching the rope that was looped over his pommel.

"No, no, that's too dangerous," said Mr. Pomeroy. He emphasized his remarks by taking off his spectacles with one claw and shaking them at Freddy. "You get a rope on him, and he'll drag Cy all over the meadow. Ruin a lot more good hay, too. You'd better go back and tell Mr. Bean."

"If I got the noose around his foot and tripped him, it might work," Freddy said.

"What would you do with him then?" Jinx asked; and Freddy said glumly: "I don't know."

Mr. Pomeroy put his spectacles on. "I'll fly down with you," he said, and sprang into the air, to light on a fencepost some distance off.

The bull had been edging closer, trying to overhear the conversation. Now he said: "What are you two little squirts up to, hey? You ain't goin' to sick that robin on to me, are you? My land, I'm all over gooseflesh!" And he laughed his big roaring laugh, so that he shook all over.

"'Squirts,' eh?" said Freddy to himself. "That gives me an idea. Jinx," he said aloud, "watch out." He had a cap pistol in the holster on one side and a water pistol

on the other. The latter held nearly a pint, and he kept it filled with strong perfume. He had found that most people—and animals too—would almost rather be shot than drenched with cheap perfume. He pulled it out, pointed it at the bull, and squeezed.

Three seconds later he and Jinx were riding for their lives, with the bull thundering a few yards behind them. They had entered the hayfield through a gap in the fence. The gap could be closed by a heavy bar which slid into slots on the fence posts. They had closed this when they came into the field, but as it was only about three feet from the ground, Cy and Bill, who had had some practice in jumping, sailed over it easily. But the bull, who was no jumper, checked; and before he could get his horns under it and work it out, they were over the brook and almost in the barnyard. So the bull went back to the hay.

Freddy didn't tell Mr. Bean right away about the bull. He was afraid that Mr. Bean would go up there, and he'd get awful mad when he saw the hay all trampled, and then maybe he'd do something foolish, like trying to drive the bull away, or putting a rope through the ring in his nose. That bull wasn't anybody to monkey with.

There was a lot of commotion in the barnyard. Hank, the old white horse, had been arrested—or at least he had been taken away by state troopers, who wanted him in Centerboro for questioning. The Beans and the farm animals were pretty upset, but Freddy wasn't specially worried. Hank's shoes were about the same size as the ones that had kicked in Mrs. Bingle's door, but even if they fitted, there would probably be plenty of proof that he hadn't left the stable that night. Hank didn't go in much for society and seldom went out in the evening.

As head of the A.B.I., Mr. Pomeroy employed a large number of operatives. They were mostly birds and smaller animals, and a good many were bumblebees. A bumblebee can blunder around close to people, and listen to conversations, without being specially noticed. Nobody thinks that bumblebees know anything. But that's where they're wrong. Bumblebees are smart; they make very good detectives.

But in spite of maintaining such a big staff, the A.B.I. hadn't found out much about the bull. Nobody could find out who he belonged to, or where he'd come from. He roamed around the countryside, breaking into barns and knocking down fences to get what he wanted to eat—mostly at night. If dogs chased him, he turned around and charged them, but he never did them any harm, even when he could have. He had cornered one of the Macys—farmers who lived across the shallow valley below the Bean farm—behind the barn. The man had nothing but a stick, and the bull could have tossed and trampled him if he'd wanted to, but he just gave a great bellowing laugh and turned around and trotted off.

"He thinks it's a joke to scare people," Mr. Pomeroy said. "Mostly he's pretty

good-natured. But he was mad today. Good thing he didn't catch you."

"Are there any animals around that he's friendly with?" Freddy asked. "I just wonder if we can tie him in with all this trouble they're having in Centerboro."

"I've heard something about that," said the robin. "But the town's out of our territory. We're strictly a rural force; our job is to keep crime off the Bean farm."

"Well, it's to protect the innocent on the Bean farm too, isn't it?" said Jinx. "And nearly everybody in Centerboro thinks we're the ones behind all those robberies. There's even been talk of lynching Freddy. And that's why they've taken Hank away." And he told about what had happened in Centerboro.

"Dear me," said Mr. Pomeroy, "I had no idea things were as bad as that. We'll get on to it right away. A horse and a pig, eh? Well, some of the boys have reported seeing this bull talking to a pig up on the back road. A couple of times in the early evening."

"They didn't think it was me, did they—the pig?" Freddy asked.

"Oh, no," said the robin. "The description was quite different. This pig wasn't nearly as—ha, h'm—well, I mean to say, he was—"

"You mean he wasn't as fat as Freddy, don't you?" Jinx asked.

"I wasn't putting it that way," said Mr. Pomeroy with dignity. "I was about to say that he wasn't as well nourished. He was rangy, tough-looking. We figured he was just a tramp."

"If they saw him more than once, he isn't likely to be a tramp, just passing through. Did they hear what was said?"

"Weren't close enough. But they heard the bull's name. The pig said: 'Hi, Percy,' when they met."

"Percy!" Freddy exclaimed delightedly. "Oh, boy!"

"Good, eh?" said Mr. Pomeroy. "He isn't what I'd call a sensitive type, but I bet he's sensitive about that. I thought Mrs. P. and I might go up and kid him a little—about that, and the perfumery. Maybe we could get him to leave."

"It's worth trying," Freddy said. "But don't forget the Centerboro business. I don't want to be lynched."

"Cheer up, Freddy," said the cat. "We'll all come, if you are. And the farm's going to seem kind of tame to us after all our adventures on the road. A good lynching might liven things up."

Mr. Pomeroy looked a little shocked. "I think things will be lively enough without having your friends lynched, Jinx," he said. And to Freddy: "I'll get on to it right away. And I'll warn everybody to watch for Mrs. Peppercorn's bicycle. A lady's bicycle, blue with a white stripe, right?"

“Right,” said Freddy. “Come along, Jinx; let’s go talk to Uncle Ben.”

# CHAPTER 4

They climbed the stairs to the loft over the stable where Uncle Ben was hard at work on the flying-saucer engine. He nodded and said: "Good trip?" and went on with his work.

Freddy said: "Yes, but that can wait. There are a couple of things I need advice about." Uncle Ben nodded, and Freddy went on to tell him about the bull. "We've got to drive him away, somehow," he said. "Do you think if we dug a pit and covered it with brush, the way we did that time for the wildcat—"

Uncle Ben chuckled. They had caught the wildcat all right, but they had also caught Mr. Bean in the trap. Fortunately, it had all turned out well.

But then Uncle Ben shook his head. "Better idea," he said, and began figuring with a pencil on a bit of paper.

Freddy knew it was no use asking questions. Uncle Ben never said more than two words if he could help it. If he had an idea how to get rid of the bull, Freddy would learn about it in time.

Finally Uncle Ben folded up the paper and put it in his pocket. "Ride to Centerboro?" he asked, and Freddy said: "Sure."

The three went down and got into Uncle Ben's station wagon. This vehicle didn't look like much, but Uncle Ben had put an atomic engine into it, and when he just pressed lightly on the accelerator it seemed to gather its wheels under it and bound off down the road like a rabbit. Half the time it was in the air. It wasn't very hard on tires.

The Centerboro road wasn't very wide; it was winding, and today there was quite a lot of traffic. They had to go slow, and pretty soon even slower, when they got behind a farm truck that was only doing twenty miles an hour. Uncle Ben turned to his passengers and pointed to a button on the dashboard.

"New," he said. "For passing."

He dropped a little way back of the truck, and then pressed the button. Two stubby wings, or rather fins, snapped out on the sides of the car. Then Uncle Ben stepped on the accelerator, and the car bounded forward and up. It soared right over the truck, landed on the road ahead of it, and then Uncle Ben pressed another button and the fins snapped back in, and they were rolling along the road again.

"Lot safer, eh?" said Uncle Ben.

Jinx was clinging to the seat with all four sets of claws. "That's what *you* think," he said crossly. He never did enjoy riding with Uncle Ben.

"Why, sure it's safer," said Freddy. "You try to pass on this narrow road, and

you have to pull out into the other lane. And suppose some other car suddenly shows up ahead, coming toward you. Big smash."

Jinx sniffed.

They overtook and passed a number of other cars in the same way before getting into town. They went to the hardware store, and Uncle Ben bought several coils of half-inch rope, which he put in the back of the station wagon. Then they drove to the state police headquarters, to see what had been done with Hank.

Lieutenant Sparrow wasn't there, but the man at the desk told them they could go talk to Hank if they wanted to. He was out in the stable where the troopers had kept their mounts, when they still rode horses.

When would he be released? Freddy wanted to know. The trooper wasn't sure; it was up to the Lieutenant. So they went out.

Hank was tied up, but he seemed to be well looked after. The stable was clean, and there was a heap of nice-looking hay in the manger which he was munching on. He looked round and said hello gloomily.

"Nice place you've got here," said Jinx.

"It's all right, I suppose," Hank said. "But 'tain't very homey."

"Well, it isn't your home," said Freddy. "At least, I hope it isn't going to be. What did they do—give you the third degree?"

"Took me to look at that old woman's back door. My hoof was the right size but the shoe was different. Not so heavy and a different pattern. The man said, maybe I changed my shoes before I went out to burgle houses. I said: 'Look at my hoof, mister. I've been wearing these shoes for the past two years. Ain't had 'em off.' He looked and kinda grunted. 'Well,' he says, 'maybe so. But I guess we'll hold you a day or two, anyway.' Don't seem as if he knew much about shoes."

"They can't keep you here if they don't arrest you," said Freddy. "And you aren't under arrest."

"Well, maybe I better stay anyway. They want to ask me some more questions: 'Where were you at nine o'clock last Friday night?' and so on. I already told 'em I was home Friday night, and every other night in the week. *You* know, Freddy, I don't hardly ever go out at night. I got this rheumatism in my off-hind leg, and the night air's bad for it."

"Well, if they want to ask you more questions, I suppose you'd better stay another day or so. They'll only send for you again. Eh, Jinx?"

"Sure. I know the kind of questions. Are you happy in your home life? Get enough to eat? Do you think that fat pig, Freddy, is a criminal? Why do you think so? Does he steal from Mr. Bean? Does he—"

"O.K.," Freddy interrupted. "Come on, Jinx, Uncle Ben has to get back. So long, Hank," he said. "If they don't let you go by the day after tomorrow, we'll come down and get you."

In the station wagon they bounded back to the farm, and Uncle Ben took the rope up to his shop. Freddy and Jinx, who had left Cy and Bill saddled in the barn, got on and rode up to see how the perfumed bull was getting on.

He wasn't in sight, but in the woods to the west of the Witherspoon fields a great chattering of birds and squirrels was going on. As they rode closer to them they caught sight of the bull, walking restlessly about among the trees. Swooping above him, a number of birds were making remarks: "Lovely, lovely smell!" "Mmm, *mm*! Doesn't he smell good!" "Sweet as a flower bed!" And similar remarks, calculated to infuriate the bull, who was completely at their mercy.

Pretty soon Mr. Pomeroy flew out and lit on Cy's head. "Well, we drove him out of the hayfield," he said. "It was Mrs. P.'s idea. We got all our friends to come up. We've had a barrel of fun. But we can't drive him away. He just gets in the thick brush where we can't go near him. Of course, the squirrels have helped—making nyah-nyah noises, and calling him sissy and fancy pants. He's pretty mad. But what should we do now, Freddy?"

"Uncle Ben's figuring out something. You just keep the bull out of the hay until Uncle Ben's plan gets working."

"What is it?" asked the robin.

"Gosh, I don't know. You can't get anything out of Uncle Ben until he's ready. But don't forget that Centerboro stuff. And Mrs. Peppercorn's bicycle."

"I've already sent a dozen of my best operatives down there," said Mr. Pomeroy.

"Good," Freddy said. "Keep 'em jumping."

He and Jinx were still up there, listening to the birds and giggling at the deep grumblings of the bull, when the station wagon came bounding up. In it were Uncle Ben and Mr. Bean. They came to the gap in the fence and beckoned the animals to come down to them.

"Where's the bull?" said Mr. Bean. "Can he see us here?"

Freddy said he was in the thick brush up among the trees. "I don't think he can see us."

Mr. Bean slid the bar aside so they could ride through, then replaced it. "Follow along," he said, and climbed back in beside Uncle Ben. They went along the edge of the woods until they came to a place where the trees grew thinner and there was less underbrush. Uncle Ben pointed and stopped the car. He and Mr. Bean got out and

pulled out the rope, which Uncle Ben had knotted into a sort of heavy net, about eight feet square. They dragged the net over to two trees, which stood about six feet apart.

"Now, Freddy," said Mr. Bean, "s'pose you can go in there and get that bull to chase you out between these two trees?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddy. But he could feel his tail coming uncurled, as it always did when he was scared. For suppose the bull could run faster than Cy could? He could lift horse and rider and toss them right over his back. And those horns . . . Freddy decided not to think about the horns.

The two men tied light ropes to the corners of the net on one side. Then they threw a rope up over a limb on each of the trees, about eight feet high. They tied these ropes, and now the net hung down, filling all the space between the trees. Then they tied ropes to the lower corners, threw the ends over limbs, and hauled the lower edges up. They held onto these second ropes, and stood each behind his tree, so that the bull wouldn't see them.

Freddy saw the plan. "But won't he notice the net?" he asked.

"Not when he's charging," said Mr. Bean. "His nose will be right close to the ground; he won't look up. Go in and get him."

Freddy shivered. "How about it, Cy?" he asked the pony.

"What can we lose?" said Cy. "Nothing but a couple of legs."

Jinx reined Bill up closer. "Look, Freddy, let me do this job, will you? That's pretty rough ground in there, and a goat's more sure-footed than a horse. If Cy stumbles—"

"Aw, go polish your whiskers, cat!" Cy interrupted. "You don't think that bull would pay any attention to an insignificant little squeech like you, do you? Why, he wouldn't even—"

"That's enough, Cy," Freddy cut in. He looked down at Jinx. "That's very good of you, Jinx—a very handsome offer. But it is I whom Mr. Bean has selected for this mission, and it is I who must carry it out, dangerous though it be." He held his head high and looked off into the distance as he said this. Then he looked down at Jinx with a sad smile and put his fore trotter on the cat's shoulder. "And if I do not return," he said, "do not weep for me. Remember only this: I did my duty."

"Come on, Freddy," said Mr. Bean. "Don't be all day."

Freddy looked reproachfully at him, then turned his mount and rode into the woods. He looked almost too noble for words. But his tail was completely uncurled.

When he got closer to the bull, however, and could see him moving about in the thickest of the underbrush, he began to recover. The time for action had come. It

was then that he was always at his best. It was the waiting that got him down.

He could hear the birds twittering their insults, could see the flash of wings as they swooped down close to the unhappy animal. The squirrels were at it too, trying to drop nuts on his nose; a cheer went up whenever there was a hit. Of course the nuts didn't hurt, but the bull had never before been attacked like this. He could no more fight them off than a man can fight off a cloud of mosquitoes. He bellowed with rage.

"Hey, bull," Freddy shouted. "I've got some more perfume for you. Come on out, and let me squirt it on your other side. Boy, you'll be more popular than ever. Come on, sweetie pie. My, you do smell good!"

The bull came slowly toward him, smashing through the brush. He lowered his head, pawed the ground, and snorted. Freddy settled himself in the saddle, and felt Cy get set to whirl and dash off.

"Maybe I can get some ribbons to tie in your hair, too," said Freddy. "Come on, Percy."

Instead of charging, the bull lifted his head. "How did you know my name?" he demanded.

"You mean your name really *is* Percy?" Freddy said. "Well, what do you know! I just thought it sort of fitted you. Well well, wait till the birds hear that! Hey, J. J.—" But then the bull charged.

Cy reared up on his hind legs, swung around and ran. Freddy crouched low in the saddle. He could hear the enraged snorts behind him; they seemed so close that he expected any moment to feel the pony lifted up under him by those sharp horns. But he didn't look around. He felt that if he saw that great black head with the wicked little eyes so close behind, he would faint and fall right out of the saddle.

And then Freddy and Cy shot between the trees behind which Uncle Ben and Mr. Bean were hiding. There was a sort of scrunch and rattle of ropes, and a bellow from the bull, and he pulled Cy up and turned. The second that Freddy passed between the trees, the two men had let go the ropes that held up the lower corners of the heavy net. It fell like a curtain, and the bull plunged into it. Before he could free himself, the men had loosened the ropes holding the net's upper corners, the whole thing came down, and the men wound their captive up in it.

"We'll take him down and put him in the box stall next to Hank's stall in the stable," said Mr. Bean.

Uncle Ben said: "How?"

"H'm," Mr. Bean said; "'tain't so easy. You got power enough in the station wagon to hook on and drag him down. But that don't seem hardly bein' kind to

animals, like I've always tried to be, even when they acted up."

"He's got a ring in his nose, Mr. Bean," Freddy said.

"Why, so he has," said Mr. Bean. He untied one of the corner ropes and, reaching through the net, knotted it to the ring in the bull's nose. It wasn't easy to untangle the animal from the net and at the same time keep hold of the rope, but they managed it. And then, after they'd got the net back in the car, Uncle Ben drove off, and Mr. Bean led the bull down to the stable. They tied him in the box stall, shook him down some hay, locked the door, and left him.

# CHAPTER 5

The following morning there was news from Centerboro. The A.B.I. detectives whom Mr. Pomeroy had sent into town returned full of information. The birds had flown all over town, listening to conversations, and the bumblebees had bumbled in and out of windows, and sat on people's hats; and although a lot of what they heard wasn't important, some of it was.

Much had to do with the feeling against Freddy. Mr. Pomeroy, having listened to the reports, figured that two thirds of the people in Centerboro thought that Freddy, with some of the rest of the Bean animals, was responsible for the robberies and damage, and therefore should be arrested and jailed. Many of these, realizing that there wasn't enough evidence against him to prove him guilty, thought the easiest way to get rid of him was to get a crowd together and go out and lynch him.

But some of the most important people in town, who knew Freddy and liked him, were sure that he was innocent. In an interview in the *Sentinel*, Mr. Weezer, President of the Centerboro Bank, had this to say: "Frederick Bean is President of the First Animal Bank, a most reputable and financially sound institution. It is unthinkable that a person of his standing, whether man or pig, should go about tearing up gardens and stealing hams."

"You think that because he is a banker, he is incapable of committing a crime?" the interviewer asked.

"Sir," said Mr. Weezer, "when a banker commits a crime, it is a big crime, a first-class crime, a crime on a scale with his standing in the community."

Many other solid citizens thought as he did.

The most important item, however, was a report of a conversation between Mr. Beller and Mr. Rohr, owners of the music store, and Mr. Howell, their manager. It was overheard by Horace, a bumblebee, and Mr. Pomeroy's star operative. It was like this: Horace had gone into Beller & Rohr's to listen to some new records that had come in. He was very fond of music. But as soon as the customer for whom they were playing the records left, the three men began talking excitedly. It seems that a letter had come that morning, and they could not agree what to do about it. It began without any "Gentlemen" or "Dear Sirs" or anything.

> "Mr. Beller's picture window was smashed the other night. There has been some robberies and lot of vandelism around town and all through the county. Maybe you had better pay us so your store window won't get smashed and your gardens tore up and your houses busted into. Our

service costs $1 per week, $50 per year in advance. If you want to hire us, take $50 in $5 bills and put them in an envelope. Before nine o'clock tomorrow night drive out the west road, take the back road that runs between the Big Woods and the Bean woods. Just before you come to the end of the Big Woods a stone wall begins on your right. Lay the envelope down on the corner of the wall and go home.

The Otesaraga Pertective Association.

PS. Come alone, and don't tell the sheriff or the police, or your window may get busted."

"He misspelled 'vandalism,'" said Mr. Rohr.

"And 'protective,'" said Mr. Beller.

Mr. Howell said: "It's up near the Bean farm. Do you suppose that Freddy really *is* back of all this?"

The others agreed firmly that they did not. "This letter was written by a man—probably a racketeer from some big city. It sounds like a big city racket—selling protection that way. Anyway, Freddy's a good speller."

"With all the hoof marks that have been found, there must be animals in it too," said Mr. Rohr.

Mr. Beller said: "We'd better give 'em the fifty dollars. You know what it's going to cost to replace the picture window out at my house? And this store window is more'n twice as big. Will you take the money out tonight, Rohr?"

"Sure," said Mr. Rohr.

When Freddy heard about this, he called a meeting in the cow barn. The three cows, the two dogs, Jinx, Charles and his daughter, Chiquita, Samuel Jackson, Cy, Bill, and Sniffy Wilson, the skunk, were there. Also, of course, Mr. Pomeroy.

The head of the A.B.I. first gave his report. Then Freddy told his story: "This is perhaps the most dangerous situation we have ever faced. I do not mean merely for myself. All of us appear to be under suspicion. And if this lynching business gets beyond the talking stage; if a mob really comes out here . . . well, I'll tell you one thing that would happen. Mr. Bean would try to protect us, and they would shoot him.

"No, my friends, we've got to find who's back of these robberies and smashings. And this racket of paying for protection. I'm pretty sure that it's all one gang and that there's a pig in it, and a horse. And a man in it too, because it must have been a man who wrote that letter. No animal would misspell words the way that fellow did.

"This money Beller & Rohr are going to pay them gives us a chance. We'll have someone hiding up beside that stone wall tonight, and we'll find out who takes the money. Who do you suggest should go, J. J.?"

The robin took his spectacles off and tapped them reflectively on his beak. "Trouble is," he said, "most of my boys work best in daylight. Birds and bumblebees can't see much after dark, and rabbits, though they can get around all right, are too easy to spot in the dark. I'd suggest Jinx. He's black and he moves quiet, and he can see pretty well at night."

"Hey, now wait a minute," said the cat. "You think I'm going up and tackle an armed gangster with my bare claws? Uh-uh."

"You don't have to tackle him," said Mrs. Wiggins. "You just watch and follow where he goes."

Charles, the rooster, pushed forward. "I volunteer for this service!" he said. He looked around at the other animals. "My friends," he said, "you know me. You know what a stout heart beats beneath this feathered bosom." He whacked on his chest with a claw, which gave him a fit of coughing. When he had recovered, he went on: "In the face of danger let cats and rabbits quail; a rooster knows no fear. This is a task for which boldness and high courage are needed. I say nothing against our friend, Jinx. But remember that 'Jinx' rhymes with 'slinks.' He slinks, he lurks, he trembles. Has he ever fought anything bigger than a mouse? While I, my friends—I who stand here before you—"

He stopped suddenly, for Chiquita reached out and tugged his tail feathers. "Daddy," she said, "Mother's coming."

Charles's beak opened and shut a few times as if he was still speaking, but no words came out. And Henrietta came into the barn.

Charles didn't say any more. Henrietta didn't approve of his speeches, which were very noble and high-sounding, and which he would make on the slightest excuse. He wasn't by any means a coward, but when he got going he was apt to brag about his bravery. Henrietta thought it sounded silly, and she didn't like to have a silly husband.

Now when she saw Charles at the center of the group, she looked around suspiciously. "He been sounding off again?" she demanded.

"No, no," said Freddy. "We were just discussing another matter. I'll explain it to you."

"H'm," she said thoughtfully. "Thought I heard his voice as I was coming in." She glared at her husband, who, with sidelong look and drooping tail feathers, was certainly the picture of guilt. Then, as if having made up her mind, she gave a short

nod and walked toward him. "Better box his ears anyway."

But Charles turned and ducked swiftly out between Sniffy Wilson and Georgie, the little brown dog, who closed up to prevent Henrietta from pursuing him.

"Now that that's over," said Freddy, "—how about it, Jinx?"

"Oh, all right," said the cat. "I'll go. I thought you expected me to grab this guy and take the money away from him."

"I don't think he's working alone," said Mr. Pomeroy. "There must be a gang, and my guess is there's a man at the head of it, not an animal. We want to find out where their headquarters is. So your job is to follow and see where he goes."

"Do you think this bull is one of 'em?" Sniffy Wilson asked.

"Maybe we can find out," said Freddy. "I think we've got something we can trade for his information."

"You mean his freedom?" Samuel Jackson demanded. "Turn him loose? He's too dangerous. I say he's too dangerous."

"No. Come on, let's go in and talk to him."

They trooped out of the cow barn and followed Freddy into the stable. At the far end, in the box stall, the bull was muttering and grumbling to himself in a voice that sounded like distant thunder.

Mrs. Wogus put her mouth close to Mrs. Wiggins's ear. "He grumbles the way Father used to," she whispered. "Remember?"

Mrs. Wiggins nodded. "Father *was* kind of a complainer," she replied. "Dear, dear, I wonder where he is now?" For the father of these three cows had been a discontented animal. He had gotten tired of farm life, and when his children were grown up and provided for—though grumpy, he had been fond of them and anxious about their future—he had run away and never been heard from again. This was some years before they had come to the Bean farm.

"Phew!" Sniffy Wilson exclaimed. "He sure is fragrant!" He wrinkled up his nose disgustedly. Skunks are very sensitive.

Although the bull was tied by his nose ring, and in addition the front of the stall was built of heavy bars of wood, a few inches apart, the animals at first rather hung back. Only the mole seemed eager to have a close look. He ran forward and got up on his hind legs and looked through the bars.

"Hey, you!" he said. "You smell terrible flowery. You goin' to a party? I say, you goin' to a party?"

The bull didn't turn round. He gave an irritated snort. "I been rolling in a posy bed," he growled.

"It'll be some party," said Georgie. "I'm glad I'm not invited."

The animals had moved closer, and Freddy went up to the door. "Hey, Percy," he said.

"Percy!" Mrs. Wogus muttered in a startled voice. And then the bull turned his head, and the three cows saw his face.

"Father!" they exclaimed. Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Wogus stared at him incredulously, but Mrs. Wurzburger, with a low moo, fell over in a dead faint. Charles, who stood beside her, came near being fallen on and squashed.

The animals paid no attention to her as they crowded up to the stall. She quite often threw such a faint as this, and, as Mrs. Wiggins said, she came out of it quicker if you let her alone than if you fussed over her.

The bull stared at the cows. "You claim you are . . . h'm . . . yes, there's a familiar look. Well, so what? What do you expect me to do for you?"

"Not a thing, Father; not a thing," said Mrs. Wogus, turning away.

But Mrs. Wiggins said: "You looked after us when we were little, Father. But when we were old enough to look after ourselves you went away and left us. After Mr. Bean came up to that farm near Oswego where we all lived, and bought us, you never looked us up. You never sent us even a postcard. We don't expect anything from you, Father. And you mustn't expect anything from us."

The bull threw up his head and gave a loud roaring laugh. "Good for you, daughter," he said, "good for you. You and I'll get along."

But Mrs. Wurzburger, who had come to and staggered to her feet, began to cry. "Oh, Father," she sobbed, "aren't you glad to see us? Don't you care anything for your own girls, whom you haven't seen in so many years? Your three little darlings, you used to call us."

"Well, you ain't very little now," said Percy. "Nor darling, neither. And I don't know which one you are, and if I did, I wouldn't know what your name was, because I never did know which was which."

At this Mrs. Wurzburger boohooed louder than ever. Cows make an awful rumpus when they laugh or cry, and it made the animals' ears ring. Freddy motioned Mrs. Wogus to take her outside. When she had been led back to the cow barn, and her bawling sounded in the stable only like the cheering at a distant baseball game, Mrs. Wiggins said: "Instead of us just walking out, Father, it's only fair to give you a chance. Isn't there anything you have to say to us?"

The bull looked at her and wrinkled up his forehead as if in thought. "I dunno," he said. "I dunno what to say. I remember what you were like when you were little —cute little critters. But now . . . it's a long time. . . . Here's three strangers claimin' I'm their father, and I don't even know their faces. What do you expect—that I'm

going to dance with joy?" And he shook his head and turned his back.

The cows looked at each other and then walked slowly out. Freddy said: "Reluctant as I am to intrude on this touching family scene, I've a proposition for you, Percy. I take it you don't like going around all perfumed up like a French poodle at a garden party."

"Going around where?" the bull grumbled.

"Well, that's so," said the pig. "You're locked up tight right now. But maybe I could fix that too. Suppose I took you out and scrubbed that perfumery off you. And in return you tell me some things I want to know."

The bull turned and grinned at him and shook his head. "There's so many things you don't know, if I started now I'd be still talking ten years later. Why, you don't even know what time it is!"

Freddy grinned back. He rather liked the bull. "I have no wish," he said, "to share with you the vast wealth of knowledge stored up in that magnificent brain. All I want is answers to a few simple questions. For instance: who's the head of your gang, and where's your headquarters?"

"Gang?" said the bull. "What gang?" His look of artificial innocence wouldn't have fooled a grasshopper.

Freddy said: "We know more about you than you think. However, I'm in no hurry. Think it over. We can keep you here indefinitely. And when your perfume begins to wear off, I'll come and give you a fresh squirt."

Freddy motioned the other animals to leave, and when they were outside, he said to Mr. Pomeroy: "Keep after him, J. J."

The robin nodded, and a few minutes later a squad of sparrows went into the stable and perched on the top of the box stall. And they sang:

*"Oh . . . mercy!*
*Here's our Percy!*
*Ain't he delicious! Ain't he a treat!*
*When in good humor he*
*Soaks in perfumery;*
*That's why he smells so lovely and sweet."*

# CHAPTER 6

After leaving Percy, Freddy went upstairs to see Uncle Ben, and told him about Jimmy Wiggs's problem. Uncle Ben thought for a minute, then he said: "Atomic merry-go-round?"

Freddy shook his head. "They'd be afraid of it. They'd be afraid it would get going so fast that they'd be all thrown out of it. Like your station wagon."

Uncle Ben nodded. "Might, too," he said.

Then he drew a sheet of paper toward him and began to draw. As Freddy watched, a long shape began to appear—something between a lizard and a snake. "A dragon!" Freddy exclaimed. "That sure would draw a crowd. But there aren't any dragons any more, Uncle Ben."

"Make one," said Uncle Ben. He began to draw the dragon's feet. There seemed to be four feet up near his head, and they were pig's trotters, and there were four halfway down, and they were dog's feet, and there were four more close to the tail—cat's feet.

"Twelve feet?" Freddy asked. "Did dragons have twelve feet?"

"This one will," said Uncle Ben. He sometimes talked more freely to Freddy than to other people.

"But you mean . . . you're going to make him for us? And I suppose you mean that I'll be inside him, and maybe Robert in the middle, and Jinx at the tail. But what's this fire and smoke coming out of his nostrils? You can't make that, can you?"

"Sure."

"But our feet will show. People'll know who we are inside him."

Uncle Ben shook his head and sketched a dragon's claw with three long scaly talons. "Tie 'em on your feet," he said.

Freddy would have liked to ask a lot more questions, but he knew that Uncle Ben didn't like to make explanations. So he said: "Oh, that will be wonderful, Uncle Ben. When will it be ready? We'll have to practice a lot with it before the show."

"Ready next Saturday," said Uncle Ben, and Freddy thanked him again and left.

He went down and talked to the bull again, but could get nothing out of him. "I have nothing to say," the bull said. And he added: "I'm gettin' to kind of like this smell." He laughed.

Freddy was just leaving the barn when Hank walked in. "Walked up from Centerboro," the horse said. "They asked me a lot of questions but they couldn't get nothin' out of me. You know, I can act pretty dumb when I want to."

"Don't think you needed to much," said the pig. "Seeing you didn't know

anything about the burglary anyway."

"Mebbe," said Hank. "But I was kinda special dumb. One of the cops, he said: 'If those Bean animals are all as stupid as this one, they haven't got the brains to be a gang.' So maybe if we just all act terrible dumb . . ."

Freddy shook his head. "Lots of people know you aren't dumb, Hank."

The horse went over to the water trough and took a drink. Then he lifted his nose and sniffed. "Why, Freddy, you been fixin' the place up for my homecoming? Got it all smelling so nice with that perfumery you know I like. That's right nice of you."

"H'm," said Freddy, "I forgot you liked that terrible stuff. But 'twasn't for you. You got company." He jerked his head toward the box stall.

Hank went and peered in. "Too dark—can't see," he said. Then at a low bass grumble he started back. "Land sakes, what is it—a lion?"

So Freddy told him all about Percy, and that he was the long-lost father of the three cows. Hank was outraged to hear of Percy's lack of interest in his children.

"Well, of all things!" he said. "Whoever heard of such a father. Three of the nicest girls in the county. He ought to be proud of 'em!"

"Well, he isn't. But he must have some decent feelings. Maybe you can work on him."

That night Jinx went up to the back road and hid on the stone wall where Mr. Rohr was to leave the money. He lay right on the wall, in a crevice between two stones, and he was so black that even in the twilight you could have come right up to him and thought he was just a soft velvety shadow. He kept his eyes just a hairsbreadth open, so they wouldn't shine.

Cats like lying perfectly still. Jinx never twitched a whisker from the time he got there at eight o'clock until nine-thirty, when he heard the clump of approaching horse hoofs.

They came closer, closer, then stopped, and the cat heard the rustle of paper as the envelope was picked up. Then he opened his eyes. And what he saw made every hair on his back stand up, and his tail got as big as a bottle brush, and with a screech he leaped three feet in the air and tore off through the woods toward home.

For what he saw was a high-shouldered man in a cloak, mounted on a horse. But the man had no head. At least he had one, but it wasn't on his shoulders; it was carried on the horn of the saddle in front of him.

Unknown to Jinx, Freddy had come up and was hiding in the woods below the road, and although he was some distance off, he saw the whole thing, for it was not yet entirely dark. He saw the headless horseman stop at the corner of the wall and

reach for the envelope. Then there was the screech as Jinx exploded from the wall, and startled the horseman so that he jerked sideways and dropped his head. It fell with a thump to the ground.

Freddy was terrified of this apparition. There was a tradition of a headless horseman up on the back road. Mr. Bean sometimes told the story on winter nights when they were sitting round the fire, cracking nuts and drinking cider. Yet nobody alive had ever seen it. It was always somebody's grandfather, eighty years ago. Though Zenas Witherspoon claimed to have seen it when he was a boy, returning from a dance. Still, nobody thought of the back road any more as being haunted. It was used very little, but Freddy had been up there many times at night and had never thought anything about it.

But he thought about it now all right. He shivered until the bush he was hiding behind shivered with him, as he watched the creature climb stiffly down from the saddle and fumble on the ground for his head. "How can you see to find your head if it has fallen off?" he wondered. But the apparition managed it somehow, and he climbed back on the horse, tucked Mr. Rohr's envelope somewhere inside his cloak, balanced the head again on the saddle horn, and rode off.

Now what seemed strange to Freddy was that he did not turn and ride back toward Centerboro; he rode on toward the west. And that road didn't go anywhere specially. Follow it far enough and it just petered out into a grass track. But before that, a mile or so after passing Mr. Margarine's land, it crossed another road, a dirt road that ran north around the west end of Otesaraga Lake and up to an Indian village. These were Otesaraga Indians, and good friends of Freddy's. The pig was sure that they would not be involved in any racket to sell to house-owners protection from damage to their property.

But where was this ghost going? Freddy knew that he ought to follow it. He had seen it take the money, and he didn't really think that any spook would be mixed up in that kind of a racket. It must be a man. But how could a man without a head ride a horse, holding his head balanced on the pommel before him? Freddy's common sense told him that there must be some reasonable explanation. But there was the evidence of his eyes, the apparition itself, urging his horse from a walk into a trot as he went on up the road.

All Freddy had to do was trot on after him. He struggled out to the road and really did try to follow. But his legs wouldn't obey him. At sight of that figure on horseback, with nothing above the shoulders—Freddy gave a groan and slumped down into the grass at the side of the road.

Jinx was waiting for him when he got back to the pig pen. They just looked at

each other. There didn't seem to be much to say. After a minute they went in and lay down and went to sleep.

In the morning, of course, they had to consult with Mr. Pomeroy, and it wasn't long before the story of how they had seen the money carried off by a ghost was all over the farm. Along about noon two rabbits came in to see Freddy. They were rabbits Numbers 17 and 41, who lived up above the duck pond in the Bean woods. They said they had seen the headless horseman on the back road several times, once on a bicycle. Also, they had seen other animals who were strangers to them. They had seen a very tough-looking pig several times.

"The ducks have seen that man, too," said No. 41. "My mother heard them talking about it."

So Freddy and Jinx went up to the duck pond. Alice and Emma, like two white powder puffs on a looking-glass, moved slowly toward them, quacking greetings. But before they could reach the bank, their Uncle Wesley, a pompous old duck, stepped out from under a dock leaf, where he had been sitting in the shade, and held up a warning foot. "If you please," he said haughtily, "my nieces are not at home to you gentlemen."

"Not at home!" Jinx exclaimed. "Well, they're right there on their home pond. What's the matter with you, Wes—you need glasses or something?"

"By 'not at home,'" said the duck, "I mean that they will not hold any communication with you. If you will have it," he added snippily, "I have instructed them to have nothing to do with either of you. Is that quite plain?"

Freddy and Jinx stared at each other. Jinx winked, and Freddy said meekly: "May we ask, respected sir, what has brought you to this decision?"

"Your own criminal actions," Uncle Wesley replied. "I understand that even now they have warrants out for your arrest in Centerboro."

At this Jinx sprang. He pounced on Uncle Wesley and held him down with his fore paws. "In that case," he said, "one more criminal action, like a small murder, won't make much difference, hey, Freddy? What'll I do—wrap that long yellow bill of his around his neck?"

"Alice! Emma!" Uncle Wesley quacked excitedly. "Retire to the other side of the pond!"

But his nieces no longer felt the awe of him that they once had, and also they were a little worried at what Jinx might do. They swam to the bank and climbed out. "Oh, please don't, Jinx! . . . Remember, he's our uncle and we love him. . . . He doesn't really think you're guilty. . . ."

"Do too!" muttered Wesley.

Freddy grinned. "Good for you, Wes," he said. "First time I ever knew you to stick to your guns."

"Well, I think maybe you are," said the duck.

"Let him up, Jinx," said Freddy. "Look, Wes; you don't really think we've joined up with a lot of gangsters, do you?"

"Some pig has. I've seen him at night on the back road."

"That's the trouble with being a pig," Freddy said. He meant that to most people and other animals, one pig looks very like another. "Well," he went on, "I assure you that we have had nothing to do with this trouble. We've got to find the real criminals. We came up here to get some information. I understand you've seen a headless horseman, or a headless bicyclist. Was it on the back road?"

"A horseman," said Alice. "Not on the back road—we never go up there. It was twice we saw him—wasn't it, sister?—riding down along the brook."

"He had no head on his shoulders," said Emma. "We thought it very odd."

"Odd!" Jinx exclaimed.

"Well, unusual anyway," said Emma. "We were quite puzzled."

"But he did have a head, sister," said Alice; "we decided afterwards—remember? But he had it sort of in front of him on the saddle."

Freddy and Jinx looked at each other. "And you—you weren't frightened?" the pig asked.

"Frightened? Why, no, there was nothing frightening about him," said Emma. "Dear me, he seemed most well behaved. It just struck us that it was—well, as I said, an unusual way to wear a head."

"Unhandy," said Alice.

Jinx let out a long sigh. "That's one way of looking at it," he said. "Well, what do you say, pig?" They looked silently at each other and then turned back home.

# CHAPTER 7

Uncle Ben couldn't stand the smell of the perfume which came seeping up through the floorboards into his workshop from the box stall below, so he got Mr. Bean to tie the bull out back of the barn. There were some mice and a number of beetles, and a couple of hoptoads that lived there, and they moved out right away. They couldn't stand it either.

The birds kept pestering Percy about how sweet he smelled. They flew around him, perched on fence posts, and made fun of him and yelled all day long. He was mad and he snarled and growled at them, but there wasn't anything he could do. And when Freddy came out and offered again to scrub the perfume off if he would tell who the head of his gang was, and where their headquarters was, he refused again flatly. They argued, and finally they both got mad and yelled at each other, and Freddy squirted him again with the perfume pistol. This was a different kind of perfume from the first kind, but it was just as awful. The combination of two kinds of cheap perfume was so terrible that it drove the birds away.

Late that afternoon Samuel Jackson came to see Freddy. "You're not getting anywhere with that bull," he said. "I think you need some help. I say you need some help."

"If you've got any ideas," said the pig, "trot 'em out."

So they talked for a while, and then Samuel went down to the stable. When he got to the corner of the stable, he dove right into the ground. Moles can move almost as fast under the grass roots as they can on top; they have large flat front feet, turned sideways, so that they can really swim along in the soil. The only thing that shows is a little ridge in the grass behind them. Percy didn't notice this ridge as it came toward him; most people wouldn't.

When Samuel had got up almost to the fence post to which the bull was tied he stopped and said; "Percy!" He had a very deep voice for a mole.

The bull lifted his head and looked around. There was no one anywhere near. "Now I'm beginning to hear things!" he grumbled.

"Percy!" said Samuel again, and this time the bull said: "Yeah? Where are you?"

"Percy!" said the mole severely, "You cannot see me. I am inside you. I am the voice of your conscience."

"My conscience!" Percy exclaimed. He thought a minute. "It's funny I never heard you before."

"You have never been so wicked before," said Samuel. "You have been rough and rude; you have been a loud-mouthed bully; but you have never been a member

of a criminal gang."

Percy looked all around. There was no one in sight. The voice, he thought, *must* be coming from inside him.

"Hey, look," the bull said. "How come I never heard of you before? I didn't even know I had a conscience. Rats! I think you're just a noise in my head."

"I am," said Samuel. "The noise of your conscience."

The bull thought a moment. "If that's so," he said, "why didn't you say anything when I went off and left my daughters? When I tossed old Briggs over the fence? When I busted into Witherspoon's oat bin?"

"I'm not a very strong and active conscience," said Samuel. "You wouldn't expect to have an active one, would you—a fellow like you? But there are some things even a weak conscience can't take. I say there's some things even I can't take. Like becoming a gangster."

Of course Samuel wasn't sure that Percy was a member of the gang that was causing all the trouble, but he thought it was a pretty safe bet. And as it turned out, he was right.

"I ain't a gangster!" said the bull indignantly. "We've just been having some fun, busting up things, and maybe swiping a little stuff—"

"And smashing property and making people pay money so you won't smash it up worse," said Samuel.

"Well, I didn't really like that idea of Jack's, making people pay so we wouldn't smash their windows and—" He stopped. "What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Get information out of me?"

"I don't need it," said Samuel. "I'm your conscience—remember? I know everything you've ever done."

"Oh . . ." said the bull. "Sure . . . well, if you're my conscience you must be right. Only . . . I don't *feel* like a gangster."

"I'm your conscience," said the mole. "I ought to know better than you do."

"Yeah," said Percy. "That could be. . . . I suppose you got some idea of reformin' me."

Samuel said: "No-o-o. You ain't as bad as that. Anyway, you know what you ought to do as well as I do."

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't," said the bull. "Anyway, my conscience is supposed to tell me what to do, ain't it?"

"O.K.," said Samuel. "This is what I say to do. Quit the gang. You can stay here and live in the cow barn, probably—there's lots of room, and your daughters will keep house for you. That, of course, is merely a suggestion. But besides that, you

must tell the police who the head of your gang is, and where his headquarters is."

"That's a pretty large order," Percy said. "Couldn't I just tell you, and then it would be just between us."

Samuel hesitated. That would be a way of getting what he wanted to know, all right. But the bull was no fool; if his conscience didn't know these facts, then it wasn't his conscience. "No point telling me what I know," said the mole. "You must tell the police, so they can put an end to the crime wave. Or maybe you could tell that detective fellow, Freddy. He seems to like you. I say he likes you."

"Yeah," said Percy. "Yeah. But suppose I won't?"

"Then I'll keep on bothering you," Samuel replied.

"You mean like now—calling me a gangster and all?"

"Twenty-four hours a day," said Samuel firmly.

"Gosh!" said the bull. "That's kind of tough. Let me think about it for a spell."

"O.K.," said Samuel. "I'll be back in a little while." And he curled up in the burrow and took a nap.

After a while he woke up. He couldn't see the bull, of course, but he could hear his jaws chumping slowly on his cud. He said: "Well, here I am again. I say, here I am again."

The bull groaned. "Ain't you ever going to let me alone?" he said.

"I'd be a pretty poor conscience if I did," said Samuel. "You know what would happen, don't you? I say you know what would happen? You'd just fall deeper and deeper into crime, and then maybe you'd murder somebody, and they'd take you and shoot you."

"Maybe they'd just put me in prison," said the bull.

"You'd take up too much room," Samuel replied. "Easier to shoot you. Well, what are you going to do?"

"I got to think about it a little more," said Percy.

"O.K., you think and I'll talk." And the mole went on to tell about how mean and cheap it was to go around destroying property, and how joining up with gangsters was bad and wrong, and he went on for an hour or more. The bull didn't say anything, just groaned once or twice.

"If I'm going to break this guy down," Samuel said to himself, "I've got to have help. Might have to talk for a couple of days. And I'm getting sleepy again. I'll keep on for a while, and then I'll go get Cousin Leonard to come help me."

But he didn't have to get help, for after another half-hour the bull gave up. "I can't *stand* this!" he bellowed suddenly. And then in a lower voice he said: "I don't want to be a crook and a gangster. What do you want me to do?"

"It isn't what I *want* you to do," said the mole; "it's what you *ought* to do."

"You mean like telling that pig about Jack and everything?"

"Sure."

"How do I know you'll quit picking on me if I do?" said the bull suspiciously. "Maybe you'll think of some other things I've done, and you'll keep on trying to make me ashamed of myself about them, too."

"No," said Samuel, "I told you I wasn't awful particular. All your rampagin' round and bustin' things up is mostly just high spirits. And tryin' to scare folks. No, no, you know what I mean well enough. I say, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah," said Percy, "I guess I do. Hey, you," he called to a passing sparrow, "go get that pig to come here, will you? Freddy."

So pretty soon Freddy came and asked the bull what he wanted.

"You said you'd scrub this awful-smelling stuff off me if I'd tell you some things," Percy said. "Well, I'll take you up on that."

"H'm," said Freddy. "What changed your mind?"

"To tell you the truth," said the bull, "my conscience has been bothering me. I've always been kind of a rough, noisy guy, but I can see that this hookin' up with racketeers is wrong. My conscience won't stand for it, and that's the truth. I guess if I want to keep my conscience quiet I've got to reform."

"Well, that's fine," said Freddy. "How are you going to begin?"

"Well, you'll want to get rid of this guy Jack. I'll tell you about him. But first, would you mind scrubbing the perfume off just one side of me? I can stand one of those smells, but the combination of the two is terrible."

So Freddy got the hose and some soap and a scrubbrush, and scrubbed off one side of Percy. And while he was working, Percy told him his story.

It seemed that this racketeer from the city, Jack, had retired and bought himself a rough little hill farm up on the edge of the Adirondacks.

"He didn't retire very far," said Freddy, "if he's still going on with this racket of selling protection."

"Well," said the bull, "you know how it is when a man retires. He fools around in the garden, and sits around and doesn't know what to do with himself, and then he decides he needs a hobby. So, being as it's the only business he knows, he goes back into the same business. That's what Jack did."

"But how come he picked on this locality?" Freddy asked.

"Well, he bought some animals along with this farm—me and some pigs and horses and others like that. And he wasn't any kind of a farmer, so most of us never got enough to eat. So when we heard about this animal revolution which started

down here a couple of years ago, we joined up and came down. When the revolt got busted up, we went back home again. But we told Jack about it, and he thought it might be fun for a bunch of us to come down again and start a kind of a reign of terror. Jack and some of 'em holed up in that old cave at the west end of the lake.

"But I didn't know he'd gone in for a regular racketeer job like selling protection. I don't like that stuff. I ain't seen him for a week or more—I kind of went off on my own a while ago. I get more fun in breakin' windows; I don't see much fun in getting some guy to pay you *not* to break his windows."

"Percy," said Samuel from under the grass roots. "I'm ashamed of you. Oh sure, it makes a nice smash when you heave a rock through a window. But the poor guy that owns the house—he's the one that has to pay to get it fixed. You ought to pay for your own fun, not make someone else pay for it."

"Oh gosh, you again!" muttered the bull. "Did you hear that, Freddy?"

"I didn't hear anything," said the pig.

"I thought probably not," said Percy. "It's just my conscience again."

"I don't *expect* to make a gentleman of you," said the mole. "But I don't want you to behave like a nasty little boy."

"Who said I wasn't a gentleman?" the bull demanded.

Samuel was silent, and Freddy said: "Nobody said anything, did they? Go on, tell me more about this Jack."

"Not much to tell," said Percy. "As to this headless horseman you've talked about, it must be some trick of Jack's. Only it can't be Jack, because he hasn't got a detachable head."

The other members of the gang included several pigs, two horses, a mink named Thurlow, and a black-and-tan dog named Cornelius. Jack was also expecting a friend named Gimpy Jones because he limped. Mr. Jones was an accomplished burglar, though most of his burglaries he did not do himself; he had a black snake whom he had trained to crawl in open windows and pick up small objects, such as money or watches or jewelry, and bring them out to him. They had never been caught. Freddy got a few more facts, and then he hosed Percy off and left him in the sun to dry.

"Tomorrow," he said to himself, "I'll go up and scout around that old cave."

# CHAPTER 8

A number of things happened the next morning to postpone Freddy's proposed scouting trip. For during the night the Bean garden had been raided—trampled and uprooted. Some tools in a shed—saws and planes and chisels and hammers—had been stolen. Mr. Bean called the troopers, who came and looked for clues. They found nothing but hoof prints of horses and pigs. They questioned Freddy and Cy and Hank, and wanted to arrest them; but Mr. Bean would not make a complaint against them. "Whoever did this," he said, "it was not my animals. I know them, and they are not criminals. You will have to look elsewhere for the guilty parties."

"They'll be arrested before long, whether you want 'em to be or not," said the trooper. "Another thing: there were two more demands for money made yesterday against business houses. Mr. Metacarpus, manager of the Busy Bee Department Store, had a letter asking for one hundred dollars to protect his show windows. And Gorflinger's drug store, the same. They were to put the money in an envelope and bring it up your back road, same as Mr. Rohr did. Everybody says it must be your animals."

Mr. Bean just shook his head. "Not my animals," he said.

"I can tell you who it is," said Freddy, and he told the trooper what Percy had told him. Unfortunately, he also told what he and Jinx had seen—the apparition of a headless horseman.

The man just laughed. "Headless horseman, eh?" he said. "You ought to be able to think up a better one than that."

"There's an old story about a headless horseman up on the back road. My grandfather used to tell about folks seeing him," said Mr. Bean. "I don't say I believe it, but maybe somebody's using it to scare people off."

"Sure, sure," said the trooper. "Maybe this Jack guy, maybe he heard this story, and maybe he's got a detachable head, and so he figured this would be a good place to do a little robbery and racketeering, because if folks saw him they'd run, instead of shooting at him. Look, you bring me in his head, and after I've had a talk with it, maybe I'll believe your story." He looked sternly at Freddy. "But I'm not going to give you much time. There's complaints enough against you now, so I'd ought to run you in right now. And I would if I didn't know Mr. Bean here. But we can't hold off much longer. You're lucky in your friends, young pig. So far Judge Willey has refused four times to issue a warrant for your arrest. But he can't keep on doing it."

"All right," said Freddy. "But how about investigating that cave?"

"That's where those animals holed up two years ago," said the trooper. "Sure, I

remember. Well, I'll have a look at it. But I know what I'll find—one big nothing."

He got in his car. "I'll be seeing you," he said menacingly, and drove off.

Mr. Bean slapped Freddy on the shoulder. "I'll stand by you," he said, and turned back to the house.

Some of the other animals had come up, and Freddy looked around at them. "The police are against us," he said. "We'll have to tackle this gang ourselves."

"Hey, Freddy," said Rabbit No. 12, coming around the corner of the barn, "that bull—he's all upset about something. He keeps calling for somebody named Constance. Maybe you'd better go see what's the matter."

"Constance?" said Freddy. "There isn't anybody around here named—" He broke off and laughed. "Oh, I think I've got it. O.K., I'll see to it." He went off and hunted up Samuel Jackson.

"Percy wants you," he said. "He's calling for his conscience."

"What for?" said the mole. "I thought I had him all fixed up."

Freddy said he didn't know, and Samuel said: "All right, I'll go see what's wrong." He went to the corner of the barn and dove into the tunnel he had made up to the post where Percy was tied.

Freddy kept out of sight and listened.

"Well, well, I'm here," said Samuel. "What is it you want? I say what is it you want?"

"About time you were here," grumbled the bull. "I thought consciences were supposed to be on the job twenty-four hours a day."

"Uh-uh," said the mole. "Not if they're pretty sure folks are going to behave themselves. We have to sleep *some* time."

"Well, can't say I've missed you," said Percy. "But I want to talk to you just the same."

"What you been up to now?" the mole asked.

"That's just it—I haven't been up to anything," the bull retorted. "But you said—well, you said I wasn't a gentleman," he added resentfully.

"Phooey!" Samuel said. "You team up with gangsters and expect to be a gentleman. You ain't one anyway."

"That's just it. Why ain't I? I told that detective all about Jack. I haven't busted any fences or chased anybody since."

"How could you?" Samuel asked. "You've been tied up by the nose ring since Mr. Bean trapped you."

"I could have been rude to visitors," said Percy. "And goodness knows every animal on the farm has been around here to look at me."

"Yeah. That's to your credit. But you've always been a roughneck. You're never mean; you're always good-natured. That's all to the good. But your manners aren't so hot. And would you say you're always considerate of other folks' feelings?"

"Sure, I consider 'em. But it depends on how they act whether I consider they're offensive or not."

"Yeah, and then you try to scare 'em to death," said Samuel. "That isn't gentlemanly, when they're smaller than you."

"I see what you mean," said Percy. "But that's easy enough to quit doing. What I want—well, I'd like to have kind of polished manners—you know? I'm bigger than most everybody else, and I'd ought to act nicer on that account. Do you suppose there's anybody who could sort of show me how to be, kind of, refined like?"

"What's all the rush to be gentlemanly all of a sudden?" Samuel asked. "You never said, or even thought, anything about it before."

"How do you know what I thought? Anyway, nobody ever said I wasn't a gentleman before. And you never said anything either. Where were you all the time?"

"I guess maybe I've been sort of lax," said the mole. "Still and all, I didn't see there was much I could do with you. You were always a rowdy."

"I've lived a rough life," said Percy. "That farm of old Briggs where I was born—they were mean to all their animals. And you know what that place of Jack's is like. And yet even when I was a little calf I think I always wanted to be a gentleman. I brought up the girls ladylike, didn't I? Well, I don't like to have them looking down on their old father because he's a no good bum. I'd like to do something about it." He thought a minute. "Also, I'd like to be free—not tied up like a criminal. But I realize I'll have to prove I've got some manners first."

"Letting you loose is up to Mr. Bean," said the mole. "As for better manners—there you'll have to do it yourself. It's all up to you. I say, it's up to you."

They talked a little longer, and then Samuel went back to his home burrow, down near the First Animal Bank. But first he told Freddy, and Freddy talked to his friends and to Mr. Pomeroy, and pretty soon all the animals on the farm knew that Percy wanted to have better manners. And they all agreed to help him.

So pretty soon Rabbit No. 12 came hopping past Percy. He stopped and bowed low. "Good afternoon, sir," he said. "A lovely day, is it not?"

Percy lowered his head and looked at him and made a sound that sounded like "Mmph!"

Then Jinx came by. "Sir," he said, "it is a pleasure to see you looking so well. I trust that you are going to enjoy your stay among us. We are all, you might say, one big happy family, and I venture to hope that you'll take the prominent place among

us which you so well deserve."

"Phooey!" said Percy.

Jinx went back to Freddy. "I think we need a little more help from Brother Jackson," he said. "And how about getting the ducks down? If anybody can bring out the gentleman in him—if there is any to bring out—they can."

So Samuel came back to his post as Percy's conscience, and after a while the two ducks, Alice and Emma, came waddling along with their most ladylike waddle.

They stopped close to the fence post. "Why, dear me," said Alice, "why who is this handsome stranger?" She came closer to the bull. "How do you do? I don't think we've met, have we? Are you a guest of the Beans'?"

"Yeah, I guess you can call it that," said Percy. "They got me tied up by the nose."

"Dear, dear, how confining," said Emma. "But I daresay that is only temporary. May we introduce ourselves? I am Emma, and this is my sister, Alice. We are ducks."

"Yeah?" said the bull. "I didn't think you were alligators."

Samuel cut in. "Watch it, Percy," he said warningly. "I say, watch it!"

The ducks didn't appear to have heard the admonition, and Percy said quickly: "Excuse me, ladies. I didn't mean to be rude. Sometimes my lower nature kind of gets on top, and then I talk kind of rough. I'm very happy to meet you."

"That's very gracious of you," Alice said. "When you are released from what is, I am sure, only a temporary captivity, we will be delighted to welcome you at our home. We live on a pond, you know, which most of the animals use as a swimming-pool in summer. Do you enjoy bathing?"

"I enjoyed it when that pig, Freddy, washed off the perfume he squirted on me," said Percy. "I never was a great hand for taking baths."

Samuel cleared his throat.

"It's very refreshing in hot weather," said Emma. "And I'm sure you'll enjoy meeting and having a chat with our Uncle Wesley. He is elderly now, of course, but he has traveled widely and has had many interesting experiences. He is very wise in the ways of the world."

The bull gave a snort. "Any time I have to amuse myself with chatting with an elderly duck—" he began, contemptuously.

"Watch it!" said Samuel.

"—I always find myself amazed at the breadth of his experience," continued Percy, changing his tone quickly. "I shall be delighted to meet your distinguished uncle."

"Thank you," said Alice. "We shall look forward to seeing you."

"Ta ta, girls," said Percy. And he heard one of them say as they waddled on: "A pleasant person! What charm!"

"Well, conscience," said the bull, who was plainly pleased with himself, "how about it? Did I do all right?"

"Not bad for a start," said the mole. "I'm not so sure about that 'ta ta' business. A little on the vulgar side. You could have said: 'Good afternoon, ladies!' "

Pretty soon Mrs. Wiggins came along.

"Well, daughter," said Percy, "come to see how your old father's getting along? You're looking very well today."

"You've changed your tune since the last time I saw you," said Mrs. Wiggins. Like most cows, she was inclined to be rather outspoken.

"Yes, I guess I have," he said. "I guess I was cross at being roped up and perfumed."

"And I understand you want to quit this gang you came down here with," said the cow, "and become a law-abiding citizen."

"That's right."

Mrs. Wiggins looked doubtful. "You used to be nice," she said. "But you got to roistering around and bragging that you could lick any animal in the neighborhood, and then you ran away, and now you're in with this criminal. How can we believe you've really had a change of heart?"

"I know," said the bull sadly. "But I've been here and seen how nice things are on this farm. And it's only today my conscience began to bother me. Said I was no gentleman. Well, I guess I haven't been one."

"You *guess*!" Mrs. Wiggins exclaimed. "You know perfectly well you haven't been. Oh, you know how to be one. But that makes it all the worse."

Percy nodded sadly. "I never thought I wasn't a gentleman any more until my conscience got to nagging me. But how can I prove I'm a gentleman if I'm tied up? Not by soft-talkin' a lot of cats and ducks."

"You've got to prove you're gentle," said Mrs. Wiggins. "You've always kept your promises. Will you give me your word not to go in for any rough stuff if I can get Mr. Bean to untie you?"

Percy promised eagerly, and the cow went off to talk with Freddy. So the pig came and got right in and sat down beside the bull and engaged him in conversation. Freddy was an entertaining talker, even more so than most pigs, who are known for their witty conversation; and although he was pretty nervous and always ready to jump, soon they became really interested in each other. They were having a very

pleasant time when Mr. Bean came around the corner of the barn.

"What in tarnation!" he exclaimed. "Freddy, come away from that critter. He'll h'ist you right over the barn."

"He's perfectly safe," said Freddy, and he explained about Percy and his conscience, and his desire to be gentlemanly and not tied up.

"I got a lot of respect for your opinion, Freddy," said Mr. Bean. "But this fellow is a smart fence-breaker. If he gets away again we'll never catch him."

"He'd like to stay here, if you'll let him," said the pig. "You see, the three cows are his long-lost daughters. At least, he's their long-lost father."

Well, of course, that altered the case and Mr. Bean said he would take a chance. And he untied the rope from Percy's nose ring.

"Esteemed sir," said Percy, bowing low, "you have my eternal gratitude." He bowed again to Freddy. "And to you, sir, my warmest thanks." Then he walked on to where Mr. Pomeroy was sitting on a fence post. "You have, on occasion, sir," he said, "twitted me with my lack of manners. I trust that my deportment today may have altered your opinion."

Mr. Pomeroy adjusted his spectacles on his beak. "Sir," he said, "I have only admiration for the grace and delicacy of your behavior. I apologize most profoundly for the twittings."

"I'll be darned," he said later to Mrs. Pomeroy, "if I was going to be outdone in elegance by a tough old bull."

So Percy went on and lay down in the shade.

# CHAPTER 9

Percy was so polite to all the animals, indeed so much the gentleman, that Mr. Bean fixed it up for him to live in the cow barn with his daughters. Jinx and some of the other animals were rather doubtful about his being given so much freedom. "He'll break out again," they said. "You just wait." But Freddy and Mr. Pomeroy were both convinced of his good intentions. As far as they knew, while he had smashed up things, he had never harmed anybody. "He doesn't like Jack's gangster methods," said Samuel. "And he doesn't like his conscience getting after him. I'll keep him in line. I say I'll keep him in line." So two or three times a day he would walk along under the grass to where Percy was standing and give him a short lecture on etiquette.

The news that day from Centerboro was bad. Mr. Metacarpus and Mr. Gorflinger had each left an envelope containing $100 on the stone wall on the back road. Several other requests for money had been received. Just before daylight that morning the headless horseman had galloped up Main Street and then back down again, and a good many people, roused by the sound of hoof beats, had run to the windows and seen him. They were scared good. That night, and for weeks afterwards, the streets were deserted after dark. No one wanted to meet that terrifying apparition.

Along in the morning the sheriff came driving into the barnyard in his rattletrap old car. "Hey, you!" he called to Freddy, who was just coming down from Uncle Ben's workshop, where he had been inspecting the frame of the dragon. It was made of wire and could be collapsed like an accordion. Later it would be covered with painted cloth, and the head attached.

"Hi, sheriff," said the pig. They were old friends.

"Freddy," said the sheriff, "I got to take you in. I got a warrant for your arrest."

"Oh dear," said Freddy. "I suppose I'll have to go. I guess I waited around here too long. Who swore out the warrant?"

"Well, folks finally got around to thinkin' that you ought to be in jail. There was a line-up in front of Judge Willey's office door this morning, all waiting to accuse you. But Mrs. Peppercorn, she sort of elbowed her way up to the front, and she was the one responsible."

"Mrs. Peppercorn!" Freddy exclaimed. "Why she's a good friend; she wouldn't do that."

"She did, though," said the sheriff.

"Well, gosh," said Freddy dejectedly, "when my friends begin to turn on me, I

might as well give up. All right, I'll go quietly."

"Better take a look at the warrant first," said the sheriff, holding out the paper. And he looked steadily at Freddy and winked.

Freddy took it reluctantly. "Well, I don't see what difference—" he began. "Hey," he said suddenly, "this is made out for Frederick J. Bean."

"Well, isn't that your name?"

"It's my name," said the pig, "but there isn't any J in it. I haven't got a middle name."

"No J, hey?" said the sheriff. "Well then, it don't seem as if you're the party mentioned in the warrant. But that's the way Mrs. Peppercorn gave it."

Freddy began to catch on. "She must know—" he began, then stopped. "If I'm not Frederick J. Bean, then you can't arrest me on this warrant, can you?"

"Don't see how," said the sheriff. "You're Frederick Bean—different person entirely. You know any pig by that name? No? Well, I'll just have to look for him." He started his engine, then he leaned out. "Just in case there was some mistake," he said, "and some of those folks got warrants swore out for Frederick without the J—well, you still got that little sailor suit you wore once? You looked real nice in it." And he backed out into the road.

Freddy had in the back room of the pig pen a lot of disguises which he used in his detective work. There were a great number of suits and dresses, all carefully hung on hangers, and any number of hats. There was a whole drawer full of beards. He thought he had better get into one quick, before the sheriff came back with a real warrant.

But even before he did that, there was something more important to see to. He hunted up Jinx. "Look, cat," he said, "that headless man has his headquarters in the cave, up near the west end of the lake. He headed that way after he picked up Mr. Rohr's money and scared you into the screeching screamies."

"Yeah?" said the cat. "I suppose you weren't so scared that your legs gave out and let you fall flat on your face."

"Maybe we'd better not go into that," said Freddy. "The point is, somebody has got to sneak into that cave and try to find out what goes on. You remember when Simon and Mr. Garble and the other revolutionists had their headquarters there, we never got very far in. There's a big rock at the back of the cave, and behind that there's an opening, and you go up some sort of steps into another room where Garble hung out. But there may be more ways in and out, and there may be more rooms. If we want to drive 'em out we ought to know about it. Now you—"

"Stop right there!" Jinx interrupted. "If you want somebody to go cave

exploring, you hire yourself another boy."

Freddy said he was thinking of the Webbs, and after a little discussion Jinx agreed to go see them and arrange it, while Freddy got into a disguise.

Jinx went into the cow barn and asked the cows if the Webbs were home. The Webbs were two spiders who lived in the barn roof. But they were not like most spiders, who are usually home bodies. They had gone on that first famous trip of the animals to Florida, and it had given them a taste for travel. They had even taken a trip to Hollywood, the story of which has been told elsewhere. Nowadays they seldom went so far. But when they felt like going, they would get Mr. Pomeroy to fly them out to the state road, and then they would climb a tree and drop into a passing automobile. They had hitchhiked this way all over the east.

"They're home," said Mrs. Wiggins. "Mrs. Webb has had a bad cold, and she's been taking it easy for a few days. Webb wove her a hammock—you can see it up in that corner—and most of the time she's been swinging in it. My land, a couple of swings in a thing like that and I'd be as seasick as a cat."

"Cats don't get seasick," said Jinx, not very truthfully.

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," replied the cow. "I've never gone sailing with a cat. It's just an expression my mother used to use."

"You've never gone sailing, comma, semicolon, period," said Jinx. "So let's just drop the subject.—Hey, Webb," he called. "Come down a minute."

The spider spun a long strand down and landed on the cat's nose, where he bounced up and down a few times until the cat sneezed, then he ran quickly back up to be out of the way.

"Darn you, Webb!" Jinx exclaimed. "Why do you *do* that? You *know* my nose is ticklish!"

Mrs. Webb leaned out of her hammock and laughed. She had a rather pleasant face for a spider.

"Sorry, cat," said Mr. Webb. "What can I do for you?"

So Jinx explained what was wanted. "We'll fly you up there. There won't be any danger for you. A spider can go where an animal would be noticed."

Mr. Webb said sure, he'd go; and just then Mrs. Webb came down on a long strand beside him.

"If you're going exploring, I'm going with you," she said firmly.

"Now, Mother," Mr. Webb said, "you ought to be back in that hammock and not galloping around down here."

"Pshaw!" said Mrs. Webb. "I was kind of upset yesterday; we had that big grasshopper for dinner the day before. But I've just felt kind of lazy today; that's

why I didn't get up. Look, I'm as spry as I ever was." And to prove it she dropped down onto the barn floor and danced a jig.

Very few people have ever seen a spider dance a jig; indeed very few spiders can dance jigs. When they have parties they dance old-fashioned, very slow dances like minuets. I don't know where Mrs. Webb had picked up dancing. Perhaps in Hollywood.

So Mr. Webb gave in, and they got Mr. Pomeroy and hung onto his tail feathers while he flew them up to the entrance to the cave, which was on the hillside to the left of the road going up to the Indian village.

They had expected to explore the cave by walking in along the roof or ceiling. This is the best way to explore a strange house where there may be danger. Of course, some people can't do it. But the roof of the cave bristled with stone icicles, which Mr. Webb explained were called stalactites. There were some of these same icicle things sticking up from the floor, but not so many. So they crept in, following a sort of path which led back to the opening behind the rock.

Here was the room where Simon, the rat, and Mr. Garble had holed up, but there was nothing in it now but some empty pop bottles. At the far end was a wide opening. They went through it, and were in a huge hall. It was cold and very dark, but they could make out big whitish stalagmites and rock formations all about them. Even a man with a flashlight would have had trouble exploring such a place without getting lost. But the Webbs had a way of their own of doing these things. They spun a strand of web out behind them as they went on, and they could always follow it back to the starting-place.

There seemed to be a sort of path winding in among the strange rock shapes, but just as they were starting down it, a pig with a flashlight in his mouth came trotting along it. They froze, and he went by without seeing them. After that they decided to take a route parallel to the path. They didn't want to be stepped on, or even seen.

A while after that they saw firelight reflected on a stalagmite that looked like a huge stone candle some distance off. They made toward it, and presently were peering in at a room which seemed to have been fitted out as living-quarters. There were rugs on part of the floor, there was a cot, an easy chair, and a bookcase with a set of Dickens in it—probably the same set that had been stolen from Dr. Wintersip's house. In a hollow in the center of the floor there was a fire burning—for the cave was chilly. The smoke went straight up, and Mr. Webb said he thought he could see, high up in the roof, a speck of daylight. "It is probably a natural chimney," he said, "otherwise the smoke would fill the room."

In another sort of room there was a horse and a man grooming him. There were sacks of oats and a pile of hay in the corner. The Webbs looked carefully at the man—a short dark fellow with a crooked nose and beady black eyes—but they didn't go in.

They explored a good deal of the cave, though there were so many passages and halls and rooms that it would have taken a week to do it all. The entire hill seemed to be hollow. They found arrowheads and stone implements and Indian pottery in one of the rooms, and in another some bones with curved teeth six inches long, which Mr. Webb said must have been those of some prehistoric animal. They also found a way out of the cave on the west side of the hill. It was masked by thick bushes and evidently had not been used for some time, since there were no broken twigs to be seen.

It was nearly dark by the time they had followed their strand of web back to the big hall. In exploring they had gone, of course, by a roundabout route, and they had to go back the same way. They were pretty tired, too. Even if you have eight legs it is tiring to walk and climb steadily nearly all day.

Mr. Pomeroy was waiting for them. He had stayed near the cave entrance for fear of missing anything that went on, but no one had come in or gone out, and he had been pretty bored. He had killed the time by catching and eating a number of green inchworms that were on near-by trees. He didn't specially care for inchworms, and they always disagreed with him, but there was nothing else to do. He was sorry for it that night, though.

# CHAPTER 10

Freddy spent some time selecting a disguise. His favorite one was a long shapeless dress, which he wore with a shawl over his head in the character of an old Irishwoman. It was a good disguise because it concealed his feet and his long pig's nose. With it, he used his idea of an Irish brogue. It wouldn't have fooled an Irishman for a minute, but it was good enough for local use.

But the dress was not much good for moving about the roads, and he felt sure that he'd have to take trips to Centerboro, and to the cave, and perhaps to the Indian village. So he put on the sailor suit that the sheriff had mentioned. It was white, and had long pants which were wide at the bottom, a wide collar, and a round hat with a black ribbon that had on it in gold letters: H.M.S. Inscrutable. At least that's what Freddy said it was. It had belonged to Mr. Bean when he was a little boy.

When he had it on, he looked at himself in the glass. "Really," he thought, "I'm quite a nice-looking child. Perhaps a little on the plump side, but that's no fault." He certainly did fill out that sailor suit. Some people might have called him downright fat. But Freddy was used to seeing himself in the glass, and so he didn't notice specially how tight the suit was. You know how that is yourself.

"But I'll have to get somebody to adopt me," he said to himself, "in case the police get to asking questions." So he went to the back door of the farmhouse and tapped.

Mrs. Bean came out, and he explained what he wanted.

"Well now, Freddy," she said, "I'm afraid it wouldn't do to tell folks you're our grandchild from down east. Because everybody around here knows we haven't any grandchildren."

She kept her hand over her mouth while she talked, and Freddy said: "What's the matter, Mrs. Bean; you got a toothache?"

She was holding her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing, because Freddy really did look pretty funny in the sailor suit. But she didn't want to hurt his feelings, so she said: "No, I was just thinking—that was Mr. Bean's suit, you know—and I was thinking how he'd look in it now." So then she took her hand down and had a good laugh, and Freddy laughed with her.

On the way up to the pig pen to get his bicycle, Freddy met Jinx. The cat stopped short. "Ahoy, shipmate!" he shouted. "Ahoy and a yo heave ho! Whither away? Off for a life on the roaring deep and a cruise on the bounding main?" And he stood up on his hind legs and hitched up imaginary trousers and danced a few steps

of a hornpipe.

"Keep still, you dope!" said Freddy. "I'm in disguise, and I don't want everybody talking about it."

"Maybe you are," said the cat, "but if you expect to pass for a sailor, you'd better hang a set of those false whiskers you've got around that long jaw. To me you look like a pig in a sailor suit."

"Don't be silly," said Freddy. "This is a kid's suit, not a regular sailor's outfit. I've got an idea. Want to ride down to Mrs. Peppercorn's with me? On my bicycle, I mean. Can't ride Cy in this suit."

"What's your idea?" the cat asked.

But Freddy wouldn't tell him. Jinx didn't like riding on Freddy's handlebars much. The last time he had done it, Freddy had hit a stone and fallen off, and Jinx had been pitched into a muddy ditch. But, like all cats, he was curious, so he said he'd go.

On the ride into town they didn't see anybody they knew. A few cars passed them, but nobody noticed them, except a little girl in one crowded car who yelled: "Oh, Ma, look at the cat!" and her mother slapped her and said: "Shut up!" They were not nice people, and I am glad they don't come into this story.

So they went to Mrs. Peppercorn's. She said: "The police have been here looking for you, Freddy. And I don't think that's a very good disguise. You look all right from the back, but if everybody's hunting for a pig, one look at your face and you're sunk."

"Well," said Freddy, "I thought if I could get somebody to say I was their grandson who had come to stay with them for the summer—oh, I don't mean you, Mrs. Peppercorn. Everybody in town would know all about your relatives. But I was thinking of Mrs. Talcum. . . ." He looked hopefully at Mrs. Peppercorn's aunt.

"I'd be quite willing to adopt you, Freddy," said the old lady, suppressing a sneeze. "But if sobebody looks at you closely ad sees that you're really dot a little boy, dod't you thig it will seeb fuddy to theb that I have a pig for a gradchild? Ah—ahchow!"

"Yes," he said, "but suppose I have hay fever, too. It could run in the family, couldn't it? And I can keep a handkerchief up to my nose all the time. Then nobody would notice."

"That's a smart idea," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "You can have that little back room upstairs when you're in town. And you'll ride your bicycle to and from the farm. Your being there a lot will look all right, because I've spent a lot of time there myself."

"How about talkig? asked Mrs. Talcum. "Ad sdeezig?"

"I can hold my nose with my handkerchief so my talk will sound as if I was plugged up. And I think I can do a pretty good sneeze. How's this?" And he gave an imitation sneeze which nearly blew Mrs. Peppercorn out of her chair. But, of course, she wasn't very big.

"Splendid!" Mrs. Talcum exclaimed. "You are by gradsud, Peppercord Talcub." And she went on to say that he had come from Syracuse to spend the summer with his grandmother and his distant cousin, Mrs. Peppercorn. He suffered from hay fever, which was hereditary in the Talcum family, and was called Peppy for short. Mrs. Talcum was so pleased with her invitation that she sneezed eight times in a row.

"There are several little boys on this street," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "Wouldn't he be expected to want to play with them?"

"Their mothers wouldn't let them when they find out that this kind of hay fever is catching," Freddy said, "or if they think it's a cold."

"You seem to have thought of everything," Mrs. Peppercorn said. "But hiding out like this isn't going to solve your problem. If the police won't believe in the animals in the cave, you've got to capture them yourself."

"I've got an idea about that," said the pig. And this time he really did have one. "If I can stay out of jail for a few days, I think I can work it."

So for the next few days he worked hard at being Mrs. Talcum's grandson, Peppercorn Talcum. He rode his bicycle around town, and went to the movies, and bought ice cream sodas, keeping his handkerchief up to his nose all the time, and after a while people didn't notice him specially any more. That is, they didn't look at him carefully, as they would at a stranger. He was just one of them, Peppy Talcum. He could have left the handkerchief at home and probably nobody would have looked at him much.

In the meantime more gardens were torn up and more houses burglarized and windows smashed, and six more people had received letters telling them to leave money on the stone wall on the back road. The troopers had hidden out there one night, hoping to catch the gangsters, but when the headless horseman came riding along, they had left in almost as much of a hurry as Jinx had. They had also gone up to the cave, but they hadn't taken a ball of string along and had gotten hopelessly lost five minutes after entering the big hall. It had taken them three hours to get out, and they had seen nothing of the rooms the Webbs had seen. Naturally they reported that Freddy had made up the whole story about the cave being headquarters of a gang.

The troopers hunted all over for Freddy. They searched the houses of all his

friends in Centerboro. They even searched Mrs. Peppercorn's house from cellar to attic. While they were searching the cellar, Freddy sat on the top of the cellar stairs, making suggestions. They didn't pay any attention to him and kept away from him as much as possible, because he sneezed a lot and they didn't want to catch his cold.

Freddy rode out to the farm several times and had long talks with the Webbs. They drew a map for him of the big hall in the cave, and of the rooms off it—there were many passages and rooms that they had not been able to explore. But of course the route a spider takes in exploring can't be followed by an animal as big as a pig. However, they were able to draw in the main path by which the horse and his rider reached the rooms they used, and, also, from the back entrance they had discovered, a winding route by which the same rooms could be reached. This route was apparently not used by or even known to the gang.

Freddy didn't know just what use the map would be. At a general meeting of all the animals, a number, led by Charles, had been for an immediate attack on the cave. But the clearer heads among them were against it. The Webbs had seen a shotgun, and the man who had been grooming the horse had a pistol sticking in his pocket. "If we can't get rid of them any other way," Mrs. Wiggin said, "we'll have to go in and fight 'em. But with those guns, and in those narrow passages, the guns would have the advantage. They must come out pretty often. Let's try first picking them off one by one. And let's start with this headless horseman. I know I haven't seen him, and I know he's pretty scary, but Alice and Emma weren't afraid of him. Good land, I'm not going to be scared of a ghost that can't even scare a duck!"

"He's collecting all this money," Hank said. "What use would a ghost have for money?"

"There ain't any such thing as ghosts," said Samuel Jackson. "He's a fake. I say he's a fake."

"You didn't see him," Jinx said.

"That's right," said Freddy. "He scared me good. But look at it this way: either he's a ghost or he isn't. If he is, all he can do is scare people; he can't hit 'em or shoot 'em or anything. So if a ghost can scare me, why can't I put on a false face and scare a ghost?

"Or say he isn't a ghost. Then he's a man. And if we can't scare him, we can rush him and maybe capture him. My dragon will be ready tomorrow. Robert and Jinx and I can practice and get used to working it in the afternoon, and then we'll take it up on the back road and try it out on the headless horseman. Hank and the cows and Cy and Bill and the bigger animals can hide near by in the woods in case there's trouble. Percy says he'll come; he doesn't want anything more to do with

Jack, he says, and the sooner he's driven out of the neighborhood, the better he'll be pleased."

Having made his arrangements, Freddy rode his bicycle back to Centerboro. He spent the evening talking about poetry with Mrs. Peppercorn. He recited for her some of his longer and more elegant poems, particularly the new one about the eyebrows.

*"Upon the face the eyebrows sit,*
*They really add a lot to it,*
*Giving expression to the eyes.*
*When lifted, they express surprise;*
*When lowered, anger's the expression;*
*But halfway lowered, the impression*
*Is doubt, unsureness, or depression.*
*A snooty look, full of disdain*
*You can most easily obtain*
*By lifting one brow very high*
*Leaving the other close to the eye.*
*With such expressions, though, the fact is*
*It's wise to keep in constant practice*
*Before a mirror, or some friend*
*Upon whom you feel you can depend*
*Not to get a fit of giggling*
*When your eyebrows start to wiggling.*
*A well-trained eyebrow is a treasure*
*Giving its owner joy and pleasure.*
*Whether middle, low, or highbrows,*
*You can't exist without your eyebrows;*
*Whether lower or upper crust,*
*You see that eyebrows are a must.*
*The eyebrows too deserve our praise*
*For helping us in other ways.*
*When perspiration beads the forehead*
*Without the eyebrows 'twould be horrid,*
*Like eavestroughs they protect the eyes*
*Which smarting drops would otherwise*
*Run into; you'd see nothing plain*
*And jump around and yell with pain.*
*I guess they've other uses, too,*
*But I don't really care. Do you?"*

Mrs. Peppercorn also wrote poetry, but her poetry was different. She said: "What is there so smart about using words that have been used as rhymes a thousand times, like 'love' and 'dove' and 'eyes' and 'sighs'? I make my poems out

of rhymes that have never been used before." And she rewrote old familiar poems, like this one, which began:

*"Beneath the spreading chestnut tree*
*There stands the village smithy.*
*The smith's a mighty man, b'gee;*
*He comes from New York Cithy."*

She had written several versions of this famous old poem, which was her favorite. Freddy enjoyed her ingenuity, but he said that if she'd write straight rhymes she'd probably become a successful poet. Even the Centerboro *Guardian* refused to print her things.

That evening Freddy proposed a contest: that they should both compose a short poem to Mrs. Talcum. His own ran:

*"Mrs. Talcum has a red red nose*
*She begins to blow in June*
*But though she blows and blows and blows,*
*She cannot blow a tune."*

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Peppercorn. "That's just a poor parody of:

*'My love is like a red red rose*
*That sweetly blows in June.'*

"Now I'd do it this way:

*My Aunt Min sneezes through her nose*
*Both morning, night, and noon.*
*Even when back in Syracose*
*I know just what she's doon."*

Mrs. Talcum cackled and sneezed at their efforts, and then said she'd try one. After some time, and leaving out the sneezes, it was this:

*"Though a very good fre'd is Freddy the pig,*
*As a poet I caddot ha'd hib a thi'g.*
*I dod't dare say buch agaidst Bissis Peppercord*
*Because she's providig bed ad board."*

Mrs. Peppercorn said that was very good for a first try, and went out and brought in some ginger ale. The prickly bubbles rising under her nose made Mrs. Talcum sneeze worse than ever. Freddy suspected that she made the sneezes louder

and more explosive than was called for.

Then Freddy rose and proposed a toast.

*"Hip hooray for Mrs. Talcum.*
*In our homes she's always walcum."*

This inspired Mrs. Talcum to renewed poetic effort. She said:

*"Though I ab dot a clever pig,*
*Ad cad write poebs or dadce or si'g,*
*There's wud thig I cad do with ease:*
*I cad sdeeze ad sdeeze ad sdeeze ad sdeeze."*

And then she sneezed fourteen times in a row, which, as far as I know, constitutes a record.

So they passed a very pleasant evening, and all went to bed at ten o'clock.

# CHAPTER 11

Uncle Ben had certainly done a fine job on the dragon. Except for the head, it consisted of a collapsible wire framework, covered with cloth, on which Mrs. Bean had helped by sewing hundreds and hundreds of green scales, cut out of some kind of plastic. The head was something like an alligator's, only much more ferocious, with horns and a very evil grin. Inside it Uncle Ben had built a small stove in which a fire could be kept with a handful of charcoal. When Freddy wanted smoke and flames to come out of the dragon's nostrils, which were really the stove's chimney, he had a supply of grass and leaves and waste paper, and he could throw a little of this on the fire and blow on it through a little tube, and the dragon would breathe smoke and flame. For special effects, there were some small pieces of inner tube cut up. Rubber burns with thick black smoke and a terrible smell; Uncle Ben thought this would be extremely pleasing.

Uncle Ben backed the station wagon into the stable, and he and Freddy and Robert brought the dragon downstairs and loaded it in. Hank was out taking a walk, so there was no one to see them. Jinx got in, and they took Samuel Jackson along, as he wandered into the stable while they were loading, and they didn't want him talking. Of course, they swore him to secrecy.

They went up in the back pasture where no one could see them, and there practiced being a dragon. It was really quite easy. Freddy could see out through slits in the head, and the other two had nothing to do but watch the ground and follow the leader. By jumping from side to side, Jinx could make the dragon lash his tail. They lit a fire in the little stove, and Freddy threw on some dry grass and blew through the tube. Uncle Ben was very pleased with the effect, which was really quite dreadful.

There was a place in the framework of the dragon between Freddy and Robert which made a comfortable seat for Samuel, so they let him ride along. Freddy thought he might be useful.

They practiced until they could handle the dragon very well even on rough ground, and by then it was getting toward sundown, so they packed up again and drove out the back road and turned right up along the west end of the lake until they had passed the mouth of the cave. They hid the station wagon behind some bushes, and posted Jinx where he could watch whoever entered or left the cave. Then they got the dragon out and lit the fire in his head.

Two people were to leave money on the stone wall on the back road that evening: Mrs. Church and Mr. Muszkiski, who ran the movie theatre. The troopers were supposed to go up there and hide and try to catch the headless horseman, but

they had seen the apparition once, and when it came time to go they all had bad headaches and had to go lie down.

Lieutenant Sparrow couldn't go; he had to stay on duty. I don't suppose you can blame any of them; a headless man on horseback isn't anything one wants to see twice.

But the sheriff went. He and Percy and Hank and the three cows and Bill and Cy were all hidden in the woods on the south side of the road opposite the stone wall. He didn't believe in the ghost theory very much. "Anyway," he said, "I've never seen a ghost. This may be the only chance I'll ever get to see one." He called up Mrs. Winfield Church and asked her if she didn't want to go along.

Mrs. Church had a lot of money. She lived in a big rambling house on the best street in Centerboro, and was a great friend of Freddy's, and particularly of Mrs. Wiggins. You could often see her big car with the chauffeur sitting in the front seat drawn up before the cow barn while she was inside chatting with Mrs. Wiggins.

Mrs. Church said she'd go. "I've never seen a ghost either," she said. "I suppose it would scare me. But I enjoy being scared—that's why I read detective stories. This headless gentleman ought to be good for a real bone-shaking shudder. It'll be worth the money."

Up by the cave nothing happened for some time. The sun began to go down and the light among the trees got dimmer and dimmer. Jinx, lying out along the branch of a spruce tree, saw a pig come trotting up the road. Nobody, Jinx thought, could possibly take him for Freddy. He was a tough-looking, rangy animal, and his mouth curled up at the sides in a sly, mean grin. Freddy's face, on the contrary, always wore an amiable expression.

He turned up the hill to the cave mouth, which was about fifty yards above the road, and went in. "He didn't have the envelopes in his mouth," Jinx thought, "so he maybe was just scouting to see if the road is clear for the headless horseman."

Freddy, who had caught a glimpse of the pig through the slits in the dragon's head, slipped out of his place and crawled up toward the road to get a closer view. And just then the horse and his terrible rider appeared in the door of the cave.

The horse was big—more like a farm horse than a saddle horse, and on his back sat the tall headless rider, wrapped in a long blue cloak. The right hand balanced his head on the saddle horn; the left one held the rein. Jinx's fur rose all along his back and his tail puffed up to three times its size as he scrambled down the tree and ran to get into the tail of the dragon.

The rider started down the slope. Freddy, trying to make himself invisible as he crawled toward the dragon, tripped over a branch and came down heavily with his

long nose in the dirt. "Get in the head, you lunatic!" Jinx whispered as he passed him. "What are you doing out here?"

Freddy wasn't doing anything. He couldn't, for the apparition was almost on the road now and Freddy was in plain sight if he moved. But Uncle Ben had been standing by. He saw that there was only one thing to be done. He ducked under and took Freddy's place in the dragon's head. "Come on," he said. And then the creature crawled out from the bushes to meet the horseman.

The horse didn't notice the dragon as it crawled out on to the road. But the rider did—at least Freddy, from behind his tree, thought that his head must have—for he pulled up sharply. Uncle Ben blew up his fire, and threw in some dry grass and a few pieces of old inner tube. Then he blew it up again, and sparks and flames and black evil-smelling smoke puffed out of the dragon's nostrils. For a moment the horse stood trembling. Then he reared, bucked, and plunged. The horseman's head fell with a thump to the ground. He pulled at the rein, but by this time the horse was unmanageable. And when the dragon crawled close and again blew twin jets of fire and smoke at him, he swung round and bolted off down the road. The rider clung tight, but his cloak flapped out behind him and finally blew off—and there was no longer a tall headless horseman, but a very short one with a perfectly visible head.

"He'll go by the back road," Freddy said. "The gang will be waiting for him." He picked up the head and looked at it. "Look," he said. "It's a bowling ball with a wig glued to it and features painted on." He ran down the road and looked at the cloak. "He's got a sort of framework built up to bring his shoulders even with the top of his head," he said.

"I wonder if he had a gun," said Robert. "He might have shot Uncle Ben."

"I suppose he might have suspected the dragon," said Freddy, "but I knew we'd scare the horse, and he'd be too busy with him to shoot anything. Come on; let's load up and see what happened on the back road."

So they collapsed the dragon and loaded him into the station wagon, and Uncle Ben drove them bounding down around into the back road. At the stone wall he braked with screeching tires. They could make out in the dusk Mrs. Church and the sheriff and the animals, all standing looking down at a horse who was lying in the ditch.

"What happened?" Freddy asked.

"My gracious," said Mrs. Church, "you should have seen it! This man comes tearing down the road on his horse, and Percy here charged him. Regular football tackle. Sent the horse into the ditch and knocked the rider thirty feet into the air. When he came down he was running, and we couldn't catch him in the dark under

the trees. He got away." She patted the bull on the shoulder. She didn't seem at all afraid of him. "That certainly was a fine tackle," she said. "Didn't hurt him, either; didn't use your horns."

"Wouldn't want to hurt an old comrade," said Percy.

"You did, though," said the horse in a weak voice. "I'm wounded."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Church. "We've looked you all over, and there's not even a scratch."

The horse made no effort to get up. "I think I sprained something," he said in a weak voice.

"You sprained your luck, old boy," said the bull. "Come on, get up. You going to take him down to the farm, Freddy?"

"Down to troop headquarters in Centerboro," said the pig. "I promised to bring them the headless horseman's head, and now, by golly, I've got it."

They all went to Centerboro. The troopers locked up the horse in the stable where Hank had been confined. Then they had Jinx tell his story. Freddy didn't go in because of the warrants out for his arrest. They looked the head and the cloak over and said "Yeah" and "Uh-huh," but it was plain they didn't believe much of it. "Dragon, hey?" said Lieutenant Sparrow, and he laughed the roaring laugh which was so much like Percy's, except that the lieutenant got as red in the face as a tomato. They wouldn't even go out and look at the dragon.

"I was there," said Uncle Ben. "All true." But, of course, not being much of a talker, and also because he was an inventor who fooled around with atomic engines and such, the police weren't inclined to believe him either.

Mrs. Church and the sheriff, only having seen the second part of the horseman's flight, couldn't testify to what had happened at the cave.

"This man that came galloping down the road—you didn't know him?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Never saw him before," they said. "A little man with a crooked nose and beady, black eyes."

"That was Jack," said Percy.

"Quiet, you!" shouted the Lieutenant. "Don't you realize, sheriff and ma'am, that he may be a perfectly innocent person, out for a ride in the cool of the evening?"

"Not at the rate they were going," said the sheriff.

"They were scared blue," said Mrs. Church.

The Lieutenant paid no attention. "And you deliberately set this bull on them," he said. "I warn you, if this man complains, you may be in for serious trouble."

"Phooey," said the sheriff. "I'll bet sixty-four dollars and thirty cents against that

box of paper clips that you'll never get a complaint."

"Why sixty-four thirty?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Because that's all I've got in my pocket," said the sheriff. "Give me a couple days and I'll make it five hundred."

"We are not allowed to bet," said the Lieutenant sourly.

"Lucky for you," the sheriff replied. "You'd be out a box of clips."

They argued for a while, and at last, at the insistence of the sheriff and Mrs. Church, the Lieutenant agreed to go up and make a more thorough search of the cave.

"In the morning," he said.

"Why not now?" said Jinx. "It'll be just as dark in the cave in the morning. We have the map of it, so you can find your way." And he explained that the map had been made by two spiders, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, who had explored the cave for them.

"Spiders!" and Lieutenant Sparrow went off into his great laugh again, and all the other troopers laughed with him. They roared and howled and slapped their thighs. "Spiders! He's got a map a spider made for him! How about it, Loot, you going to turn over the command to a spider?"

Mrs. Church drew herself up. "You're all very funny," she said. "But I've paid a hundred dollars to this gangster to keep from having my windows smashed, and a lot of others have done the same. You've got evidence that he's been living in the cave. Sheriff, if Lieutenant Sparrow won't act, I suggest you swear in some deputies and look over that cave yourself."

"Just what I was goin' to suggest, ma'am," said the sheriff. "I've got twenty prisoners down at the jail now; they're all nice boys—most of 'em burglars, too, which are specially good at hunting around in the dark. I'll go back and swear 'em in and we'll go up and through that cave with a fine tooth comb."

But Lieutenant Sparrow didn't like that idea. "No, no, sheriff," he said, "there's half a dozen of our boys here all ready to go. No need to bother you. We'll start right away." He got up. "Now you all go along to your homes and leave it all to us. We'll take care of it. And," he added with a laugh, "I don't think we'll need any spider's advice either."

# CHAPTER 12

Freddy and Jinx spent that night at Mrs. Peppercorn's. After breakfast they sat on the front steps. They were talking about how they were going to get rid of Jack, but every time somebody went by, Freddy would scratch Jinx's ears and say: "Are you my good kitty-cat?" or something like that, and Jinx would growl and mutter that he'd like to get his claws into that long nose. But he didn't dare say anything out loud, because they had to pretend that Freddy was just a little boy playing with a cat.

Pretty soon a kitten came walking along the sidewalk. She stopped at the gate and looked up at Freddy and Jinx a minute, and then she turned in and walked straight up to them.

"Can you purr?" she asked the cat.

"Can I purr!" Jinx exclaimed. "I'm a cat, ain't I? What do you think I do—bellow?"

"Well, I'm a cat too, or will be when I grow up. But I can't purr. And I thought maybe you could show me how."

"Why you just—you just purr, that's all. Like this." And Jinx gave a specially loud purr. Freddy could feel the front steps under him vibrate.

"My gracious, I wish I could do that!" The kitten moved closer to Jinx. "You see, I belong to Mrs. Twitch, the cook at the hotel—Mr. Ollie Groper's hotel. She likes me to sit on her lap, but it makes her feel sad that I don't purr. I *want* to purr, but I just can't. Listen now—I'll try."

Both animals put their ears close to the kitten, then shook their heads. "Can't hear a thing," said Freddy.

"That's it," said the kitten. "I try and try and nothing comes through. Do you suppose you could give me purring lessons?" she said, looking up hopefully at Jinx.

"Well . . ." said Jinx. "I don't know. . . . I'm not a very good teacher. And then maybe even if I was—maybe your purrer isn't any good. Besides, I'm pretty busy —"

"I could pay you," said the kitten. "Not with mice, but—"

"Never touch the things," said Jinx gruffly.

"I don't either," said the kitten; "I'm afraid of them. But Mrs. Twitch is good to me; she gives me all the cream that's left in those little bottles they put on the tables with the coffee, and any leftovers. My goodness, yesterday she gave me a whole serving of creamed codfish—enough for five cats. So I could give you lots of good things to eat. Will you do it?"

Jinx licked his chops thoughtfully. "Well," he said, "I can try. But I don't promise anything, you understand. You *did* say cream, didn't you?"

So it was arranged that he should go down to the hotel to give his first purring lesson that afternoon.

Freddy rode out to the farm on his bicycle. He didn't bother to hold the handkerchief up to his nose except when he passed someone he knew on the road. On the way across the barnyard he met the bull. Percy was not in the fenced-in enclosure behind the barn; he seemed to be free to roam at will. When he saw Freddy, he stopped and bowed.

"My dear sir," he said, "what a pleasure! I trust you are having success in your detective work."

"Not much," said the pig. "We haven't caught your pal Jack yet."

"Ah," said the bull. "But you will, sir; you will. I have every confidence in your brilliant deductive powers. I have heard much of them in the past few days."

"Why, thank you," said Freddy, slightly overcome by this gracious speech from one who had been such a tough talker only a short time ago. He thought it might be a good idea to have Samuel Jackson become the conscience of several other animals in the neighborhood.

Percy nodded toward the cow barn. "My new residence," he said. "Won't you step in for a moment? My daughters will be pleased to see you. After you, sir," he added.

So Freddy did, and was greeted warmly by the cows. Mr. Pomeroy had stopped in earlier to report on the goings-on at the cave. The troopers weren't getting much of anywhere with their exploration. They had banged around and yelled and flashed their flashlights, but although two of them had come out in the morning for breakfast, the other four had not appeared. Voices could be heard shouting once in a while, but the echoes were so confusing that it was impossible to tell where the sounds came from. And the two that came out had not found any of the rooms occupied by the gangsters.

"I suppose they'll find their way out some time," said Freddy. "Maybe they'll get into a shooting match with Jack. He must have gone back in there."

"He'd have gone back for his money," said Percy. "All those envelopes he's been collecting—he must have nearly a thousand dollars. But now that his headless disguise is discovered, and you've found his hideout, he'll probably head for home."

"How about the others with him?" Mrs. Wiggins asked. "You said there was another horse and some pigs."

"Yeah. Old Dutch—he's the horse, a mean old critter. And there's a dog,

Cornelius, and three pigs—they're so tough and badly brought up I don't think they've even got any names. And there's Thurlow."

"The weasel?"

"No," said Percy, "he's a mink. And you go slow if you meet him. He's just plain vicious."

"Well, if the troopers don't find them—" Freddy said, "and it looks as if they wouldn't—we can let the dragon go in after them. But I don't see what we can do now."

So Freddy rode back to town. He got to Mrs. Peppercorn's just as Jinx was returning from giving his first purring lesson.

"Boy, that's a bright little tad, that kitten," the cat said. "She's going to have a good rich purr that'd be a comfort to any cook she sits on the lap of. Can't hear it yet, of course, but you can feel the vibration if you put a paw on her throat.

"Say, you remember Ollie Groper, fellow that runs the hotel? Well, he recognized me when he came into the kitchen, and what do you suppose he said?"

"I can imagine," said Freddy with a grin. Mr. Groper loved long words, and he was known as a man who couldn't say: "How are you?" without putting in a dozen six-syllable words.

"Well, I memorized it," said Jinx. "'Well, if it isn't my ancient feline associate! What balmy Hesperidean zephyr has wafted you hither? And which of the many luxurious forms of nourishment which this caravansery offers its clientele may I be privileged to prepare for your delectation?' I didn't know whether to get mad or not."

"I hope you didn't. He was just saying he was glad to see you and would you like something to eat."

"Yeah?" said Jinx. "Well, he did pour me out a nice saucer of cream, so maybe he meant it. After I gave my lesson I went and sat in the lounge for a while. Nice big plush chairs they got. I like to watch the people. Gee whiz, they think cats are crazy. . . ." He shook his head. "There was one guy came in and registered—little guy with a limp. He had a suitcase and another bag, and the bag had holes in it—can you beat that. I don't mean it was torn or worn out or anything; the holes were in a pattern at each end. They—"

"Gimpy Jones!" said Freddy suddenly.

"Quit interruptin', will you?" said Jinx. "These holes—"

"They were so the snake could breathe," said Freddy. "You remember, Percy told us about a friend of this Jack's called Gimpy Jones because he limped? And he had a black snake trained to go into windows and pick out jewelry? Well this must

be the man."

"And the snake was in the bag!"

"Sure. And that means more trouble for us. More burglaries, and probably you'll be arrested. Because cats can get in open windows and swipe things."

Jinx jumped up. "What are we waiting for? The guy went up to his room and left his bags, and then came right down and got in his car and drove off. My guess is he's gone up to the cave to find this Jack. Now's our chance."

Neither pigs nor cats are afraid of snakes, particularly the non-poisonous black snakes, which some people even keep as pets. The two friends hurried down to the hotel. There was no one in the office, and after a glance at the register where they found that Mr. Jones had been put in No. 17, they ran upstairs.

No. 17 was unlocked. Inside, on the bed, were the suitcase and the bag. Freddy snapped back the fastener on the bag and pulled it open. Inside, the snake was curled up on a small cushion. Freddy put his head in and seized him by the neck and dragged him out on the floor. Then Jinx grabbed his tail, and working fast they tied him quickly into a double square knot.

When Freddy had been with Boomschmidt's Circus there had been a trained snake who had a very amusing stunt. He would allow the spectators to tie him into knots, and then he would get out of them again. The only knot he couldn't get out of was this one. So Freddy put his sailor hat on again and hooked the snake over one arm like a large black pretzel and they went down and out the front door and nobody saw them at all.

Of course the snake wriggled a lot, and he kept calling: "Help! Help!" But when a snake raises his voice above a whisper it usually turns into a hiss, so all anybody could hear was a sort of "Hssp! Hssp!" Nobody but Jinx and Freddy heard it.

Freddy didn't think Mrs. Peppercorn would want a snake in the house, so he rode his bicycle out to the farm, with Jinx on the handlebars and the snake still struggling hopelessly to get out of the knot.

"Hey look, kid," he said to Freddy, "loosen up this knot a little, will you? It makes my stomach ache. And what's it all about anyway? Where are you taking me?"

"Your stomach will just have to make the best of it till we get where we're going," Freddy said. "You're a burglar. We're going to lock you up. Then we're going to catch your friend Gimpy and lock him up."

The snake gave a wiggle which would have been a shrug of the shoulders, if he had had any shoulders, and if he hadn't been tied in a knot. "I couldn't care less," he said. "You know what Gimpy gave me for supper last night? Stale bread pudding!

Me that was brought up on frogs and centipedes and caterpillars—"

"Hey," cut in Jinx, "shut up that talk about eating centipedes, will you? You want to spoil my supper?"

"That reminds me," said the snake. "If you lock me up, what are you going to give me for supper? How about a nice fat mouse, hey?" And he winked at Freddy.

Freddy grinned at him suddenly, showing all his teeth. "How'd you like to *be* supper?" he asked.

The snake gave him an astonished and terrified look. "Oh-oh!" he said. "I thought you were a kid in a sailor suit. You're not a little boy—you're a pig!"

Pigs have been known to eat snakes, and snakes are naturally afraid of them. Nobody said anything till they reached the farm.

They hung the snake on a peg in the barn.

"What are you going to do with him?" Jinx asked as they walked across the barnyard.

"I'm not going to eat him for supper, if that's what you're thinking," said the pig. "If we shut him up in that old rattrap, it seems kind of mean, and we'll have to feed him. Buy hamburger, I suppose. I'm not going to run around catching centipedes at my age. And yet if we release him, he'll just go back to that Jones man and more burglaries."

"He didn't seem very crazy about Jones," said Jinx.

Freddy said: "If we could get him to join us, the way Percy did. . . . That Samuel Jackson is clever; maybe he could work on him."

"I don't suppose a snake has a conscience," said the cat. "If he has, it's a pretty sluggish one."

"Maybe Samuel will have an angle," said Freddy. "Let's talk to him."

An hour or so later Jinx and Freddy were hiding behind a corner of the barn, listening. Samuel came trotting along. He gave them a wink and went into the barn. They heard him say:

"Hey, what are you doing up there?"

"Starving," the snake whispered.

"H'm," said the mole, "I thought snakes only had to eat once every two months or something."

"Not when they're fed on stale bread pudding," said the snake. "This guy I work for, he doesn't feed me good any more. Just stale leftovers."

"Ah, yes," said Samuel. "Jones—isn't that the fellow? I know him. He's a burglar. I say he's a burglar."

"You know him, eh? Then you know it's me does all the burgling and him that

gets the cash. 'Twasn't that way at first. It used to be steak most every day, and mice on Sundays and holidays. I haven't had even a teensy-weensy frog for six months."

"I take it then you don't specially relish your present occupation?" said Samuel.

"Come again?" said the snake.

It occurred to Samuel that snakes don't have much education. "You don't like your job?" he said.

"Well, yes and no," said the snake. "You always like something you can do well. And I tell you, I'm good. Say there's an upstairs window open. If I can't climb to it, Gimpy lifts me on a pole. I crawl in and up on the dresser and feel around. I can pick a diamond bracelet out of a bunch of costume junk just by feel. Boy, do I know diamonds!"

"Yeah," said the mole, "but what does all this skill get you?"

"You got me there," the snake said. "Say, you wouldn't have a few beetles about you, would you? I'm starved."

"Sorry," Samuel said. "I couldn't get 'em up to you if I did."

"No, I suppose not. There used to be some little green beetles when I was a little fellow. What fun my brothers and I had hunting them! Tasty too. Ah, that was the life—hunting bugs through the long grass, and then sleeping on a sun-warmed rock."

"Better than spending nine tenths of your life in a dark, musty old bag, eh?" said the mole. "Mister, I think you're kind of a sucker."

The snake didn't say anything for a while. Then he said slowly: "Yeah, I suppose I am. . . . Sure, I am! . . . You know we snakes are neat people. And he hasn't dusted that old bag out for me in six months. . . . Well, what do you think I should do?"

"'Tain't for me to advise you," said Samuel. "But there are some nice residential sites for snakes up on Margarine's land, beyond the woods. Plenty of bugs of all kinds. That is, if you can persuade Freddy that you'd like to give up the burglary business and live as a private citizen. Only, let the mice and rabbits alone. They've got a protective association up there. And while one rabbit is no trouble, fifty rabbits together can be a bad headache for a snake."

"It would be nice," said the snake reflectively, "to have a real home of my own —go in and out when I felt like it. . . . O.K., go get that pig. I'll talk to him."

# CHAPTER 13

When Gimpy got up to the cave and found it full of state troopers, he decided not to try to find Jack. He drove back to the hotel. There, finding the bag open and the snake gone, he didn't stay long either. The maid hadn't been in to make his bed yet, so he could only think it was the police who had searched his room and let the snake out. He didn't even bother to hunt for him. He had been thinking of retiring from business anyway, and this seemed like the right time. He got in his car and drove out of the story.

After Samuel left, Freddy had a talk with the snake. He seemed sincere in his desire to have a real home and live a normal snake's life. But it is very hard to tell when a snake is sincere. Freddy could size up animals and people pretty well, but he admitted that snakes were beyond him. He said they always looked as if they were lying, even when they were telling the truth, because even in repose their faces always had a kind of sly smile. So Freddy untied him and gave him some grasshoppers and then put him in the old rattrap.

"I've got to think about it awhile before I let you go," he said. "You just sit quiet and think about your sins."

That night Freddy slept in the box stall next to Hank. He didn't dare go home to the pig pen, for the police had visited it several times, and if they came again and found a boy in a sailor suit in Freddy's bed, it would certainly make them suspicious. In the morning, hearing voices in the cow barn, he went in and found Percy chatting with a number of field mice who had become so enchanted with his polished manners that they called on him three or four times a day. Field mice are very impressionable, and although they haven't any better manners than anyone else, they appreciate the social graces.

Later more and more mice came, until Freddy was afraid that Percy's polish would crack under the strain, and so he had Jinx chase them away.

Mrs. Wiggins had just had a report from Mr. Pomeroy. No new outrages had taken place in Centerboro during the night, and the hunt for Freddy was still on. A man had been knocked down and robbed by a pig on the Centerboro road, and armed men were searching the countryside for him.

Mrs. Wiggins said: "Haven't you been kind of forgetting Jimmy Wiggs? He was here yesterday looking for you. Said he couldn't find you anywhere, and you'd promised to help with his circus. The circus is day after tomorrow, and I'm afraid he thinks you've run off and forgotten him. He was almost crying about it."

"Gee whiz!" Freddy exclaimed. "I've been so busy. . . . I'll ride over to South

Pharisee and see him right away."

He didn't take Jinx with him, because he knew the police would recognize the cat, but he took Samuel Jackson, for he had an idea that the mole could be useful at the circus. He had a long talk with Jimmy, who was delighted to see him, and arrangements were made for the dragon's appearance. They went to the local printer and gave an order for some posters. Jimmy said he'd see that they were put up in Centerboro, Tushville, Clamville, Upper Cattawampus and Gomorrah Center, as well as South Pharisee. . . . Samuel's suggestions were a great help. Then Freddy rode back to the farm.

When he got there, Mr. and Mrs. Bean were on the back porch, and around them on the grass were most of the farm animals, with Lieutenant Sparrow of the state police. Freddy got his handkerchief up to his nose and went up to them.

Of course, the sailor suit was pretty conspicuous and the Lieutenant caught sight of him at once. "Hey, you!" he called. "Come here a minute."

Freddy went slowly, wiping his nose and dragging his feet. The Lieutenant sat down on the edge of the porch and he grabbed Freddy under the arms and lifted him up beside him. But he didn't let go.

"Golly, you're too fat, boy," he said. "Ticklish, are you?" And he wiggled his fingers.

Freddy was indeed ticklish. But the knowledge of the warrant for his arrest probably even now in the Lieutenant's pocket kept him from squirming and giggling. He managed to summon up a tremendous sneeze that broke the trooper's hold on him.

"You let be be!" he whined. "You ought to be ashabed to pick od little boys! I'll sdeeze od you ad give you by cold!"

The Lieutenant drew back. "Why I know you, just like I know everybody in Centerboro. You're Peppercorn Talcum, staying at old Mrs. Peppercorn's with your grandmother. And you've got hay fever. Just like she told me, it runs in the family."

"Sure, I got hay fever, ad a cold od top of it, too," Freddy said. "You wadda catch by cold, I dod't care." And he sneezed again at the trooper.

The latter moved back a little more, but he reached out and stuck a finger into Freddy's ribs. "Tickely-tickely!" he said.

Freddy forgot he was a little boy for a minute. "Oh, don't be so silly!" he said. Then he remembered. "You stop it!" he whined. "I'll tell by gradbother, you big bully, you!"

The Lieutenant gave his big roaring laugh. "And I suppose she'd come sneeze at me and blow me away, hey? Well, well, I'd better not pester you. Just wanted to ask

if you'd seen that smart pig, Freddy, anywhere today."

"Do, I have'dt, ad if I had I would't tell you," said Freddy crossly. He was afraid that if the Lieutenant liked children, he might pick him up and take him on his lap, and then he would certainly discover what he was; so he acted as mean and whiney as possible.

The Lieutenant shrugged his shoulders and turned to Mr. Bean. "Well, as I told you, six of my men went in that cave last night, and only two have come out. There's dozens of rooms and big halls and passages winding every which way; the whole hill must be hollow. There's four men lost in there, and even when you hear one of 'em yell a long way off, you don't dare go in after him for fear of getting lost yourself. Their flashlights must be dead by this time, too, so they're in the dark. That's why I want a map. Your pig said there was one, made by spiders, but of course I don't believe that. But whoever made it, I've got to see it and get my boys out of there before they starve to death."

Mr. Bean looked at his animals. "Any of you know about this map?"

"Sure," said Mrs. Wiggins. "It's tacked up in the cow barn. But it's just spider webs stuck on a piece of paper. Freddy lettered in some of the places. You'll have to be awful careful of it."

"Maybe I ought to get a spider to go along and show me the way," said the Lieutenant, and roared with laughter. But he took the map and handled it very carefully, and got in his car and drove off.

When he'd gone, Freddy said: "We'd better take the Webbs up to the cave to help. You know they said there were a lot of passages they didn't explore, and that explains why they didn't find where the pigs and the dog lived. And the other horse. And with all those troopers yelling around in the cave, I'll bet Jack and the rest of 'em have gone deeper in, so they won't be found."

When they went in the cow barn to get the spiders, Percy was grumbling to himself over something, and Freddy asked what was the matter.

"Oh," said the bull, "it's these animals—some of 'em, specially that rooster Charles. They've started calling me Perce. And there's nothing I hate worse than being called Perce. It's so undignified."

"Oh, I think you've gotten it wrong," said the pig. "I think it's because they like you. They're getting used to you, and you're one of 'em. My name's Frederick, but everybody calls me Freddy."

"But can I be called Perce and still be a gentleman?"

"Oh, I think so. It's how you act to them, not how they act to you, that makes you a gentleman."

"Mmmm," the bull rumbled. "But that rooster. He's so darn patronizing."

"He is to everybody," said Freddy. "But he's a good fellow. We all overlook that way of his, because we know he'll stick by us if there's trouble."

"Well, if you say so," said Percy doubtfully. But he stopped grumbling.

Freddy, with Jinx on the handlebars and the Webbs on his hat, rode up to within a short distance of the cave. Then they hid the bicycle in the bushes and climbed around the hill to the opening into the cave on the west side that the spiders had found.

"The web we spun is still here," said Mr. Webb, "if you want to go in a ways."

"It's pretty dark," said Freddy.

"I know the way in the dark even without the web," said the spider. "It's not far to the room that had the fire in it. Jinx can see some; I'll ride on his ear and direct him. You can catch hold of his tail and follow."

Freddy could think of only one more objection. "Won't I get my sailor suit all dirty?"

"There's no dirt. It's all white limestone."

So they went in. In a few minutes they saw the reflected flicker of the fire. They crept up to the door and looked in. Seated in the doorway with his back to them was Jack. He had a shotgun on his knees, and opposite him, seated on the floor, were two troopers. Their guns were still in the holsters but their hands were clasped behind their heads. They looked very unhappy.

"Jump him," said Mr. Webb in Jinx's ear, and swung off on to the wall. Jinx looked at Freddy, and Freddy nodded, and then Freddy jammed his sailor hat tight down over his ears and dove at Jack's back and sent him sprawling into the middle of the room. At the same moment, Jinx landed on the man's head, digging in with all his claws. Jack gave a screech, his gun fell to the floor where one of the troopers grabbed it; the other trooper snapped handcuffs on Jack's wrists.

Freddy's hat had come off, and the first trooper stared at him. "Hey," he said, "you're that pig, Freddy. You're under arrest."

"What are you talking about?" Freddy said. "I just rescued you and helped you catch the crook that's been causing all the trouble around here."

"Yeah," said the man, "that's to your credit. When you go to prison you'll probably get some time off for that. But I got to take you in, all the same."

"Take me in to where?"

"Jail, of course."

"And how you going to get me there?" Freddy asked. "You know the way out of this place?"

"No, but you'll show us the way."

"Not if you're going to arrest me," said Freddy.

"I'm sorry," the trooper said. "We're grateful for your helping us. But it's my duty to arrest you, and I've got to do it." And he reached for his gun.

Jinx and Freddy ducked quickly out of the door. Freddy felt his ear tickle as Mr. Webb dropped down on it.

"The Lieutenant has the map now," said Jinx. "He'll get 'em out all right."

"Oh sure, they're perfectly safe," said the pig. "Now if you Webbs are willing, I think you ought to explore some more of the cave. Try to find the other lost troopers, and also the living-quarters of the rest of the gang. There are a couple of pigs and a dog and a horse, I think. We'll send J. J. Pomeroy for you here tonight."

"Better make it tomorrow night," said Mr. Webb. "There's an awful lot more to that cave than we've seen."

So the two friends started down the hill. And suddenly Freddy, noticing a movement in the brush, pounced.

To see a pig pounce is something; to see a pig pounce who's dressed up as a little boy in a sailor suit is indeed something. Jinx said afterwards that no cat could have leaped more nimbly and accurately at a mouse than Freddy did. And Freddy came up with a brown, short-legged, weasel-like animal in his strong jaws. An animal that struggled and tried viciously to claw and bite his captor.

"Hey, a mink!" Jinx exclaimed. "I bet it's that Thurlow that Percy said was one of the gang. Watch those teeth, boy. A mink is meaner than a weasel."

Freddy couldn't talk with his mouth full of mink. He nodded. Then as the animal continued to struggle more wildly than ever, he scrunched him fairly hard between his long jaws. That put an end to the struggles for a minute or two. But when they got out the bicycle and rode back to the farm, Freddy had to scrunch him half a dozen more times.

At the barn they got some cord and tied Thurlow up so he couldn't move. Then Freddy went in and borrowed Mrs. Bean's hairbrush. He called all the animals together, and then he took Thurlow across his knee and gave him a good sound spanking with the brush.

This was a smart thing for Freddy to do. The Beans wouldn't want to keep a mink shut up in a cage, and they wouldn't dare let him go, because in revenge he would probably raid the henhouse some night and eat up half of Charles and Henrietta's daughters. But Freddy knew that while a mink is ferocious and vicious, he has a fierce pride. To publicly spank a mink shames him so that he cannot ever again bear to see those who have looked on at his punishment. As Hank said:

“You’ve drawed his poison. Cut him loose now and he’ll slink off and you’ll never see him again.”

But Freddy was taking no chances. He kept Thurlow tied up, and two days later when Uncle Ben drove them over to South Pharisee, he took the mink and released him just west of Clamville. None of them ever saw him again.

# CHAPTER 14

The posters advertising Jimmy Wiggs's circus were tacked up all over the county. The dragon, of course, was the chief attraction, although there was a unicorn (this was Cy with a broom handle fastened to his head); a spotted leopard hound from Arabia (Jimmy's fox terrier with a few extra dots of shoe-blacking); an abominable snowman (a friend of Jimmy's dressed in a polar-bear skin); and other similar animals. There was also a ghost who told fortunes. He occupied a small tent containing a chair and table; he himself was invisible. He was, of course, Samuel Jackson, under the grass beneath the table.

All these curiosities were described in the poster, but the main thing was the dragon. He was described as 1,126 years old (which is young for a dragon), his forefathers having for thousands of years occupied the old family cave at the west end of Otesaraga Lake. He was not a prisoner, had not been captured, but had been persuaded by Jimmy, who had met him on the back road one afternoon, to come over and give an exhibition of fire-breathing for the circus. He was willing to do this because he liked boys, not, he hastened to explain, as his forefathers had, served with melted butter and apple sauce on the side, but he liked their company. He was therefore not dangerous and did not eat children, though he sometimes snapped at bad parents. Boys were advised to keep away from his nose, as he breathed fire and they might get their pants singed.

The posters aroused a great deal of curiosity, and from early morning on the day of the circus the roads to South Pharisee were jammed with cars, bicycles, and animals. Mr. Bean hitched up Hank and drove Mrs. Bean, the chickens, and ducks over in the buggy. A great many people from Centerboro went. Even Mrs. Peppercorn, though she still had not recovered her bicycle, begged a ride for herself and Mrs. Talcum in Mrs. Church's big car. Mrs. Talcum's sneezes embarrassed the chauffeur, for they sounded like backfires, or as if something was the matter with the engine, and he was proud of keeping the car in perfect shape. He grumbled about it later to Mrs. Church, who said: "This car is not to be sneezed at," and went off into a gale of laughter. But the chauffeur didn't even smile.

All the Bean animals went. Most of them had accounts in the First Animal Bank, and drew out ten cents for a ticket. Those who had no money borrowed from those who did. But when they got there Mr. Bean insisted on buying them all tickets himself. He also bought them all popcorn. Even each of the mice—Eek, Eeny, Quik, and Cousin Augustus—had a bag to himself. The mice didn't see much of the show. When they had eaten all they could, they were too stuffed to move, and they just lay

down among the kernels in the bags and went to sleep.

The dragon was to make four appearances: at 11:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m. At 11:00 exactly Jimmy threw open the barndoor and announced in a loud voice: "Ladies and gentlemen, Beelzebub, the dragon of Otesaraga Lake!" And the dragon crawled slowly out. He was indeed a horrid sight, with his long ferocious snout, his long body with the dark green scales, and his twelve clawed feet. He stood there for a moment, lashing his tail as Jinx jumped from side to side inside him.

The audience drew back in alarm, with a gasp of amazement, but Jimmy put his hand on the dragon's head. "Do not be afraid, ladies and gentlemen," he announced. "I assure you he is quite harmless. You boys, let me advise you, however, not to pick on him. He has a short temper. And I wouldn't advise you to try to pet him. He does not like to be petted or to have his ears scratched. How about breathing a little fire, Beelzebub?" And the dragon obliged. Freddy threw some dry grass on the coals and blew, and flames and smoke shot out of the dragon's mouth and nostrils.

So then Jimmy led the dragon around through the back yard and the vacant lot next door, which was the fair grounds. Once Jimmy's older brother, who was sort of a smart aleck, sneaked up and stuck a pin in the dragon. He really stuck the pin into Freddy. The dragon turned his front end quickly with a squeal of rage (which some people might have thought sounded a good deal like a pig's squeal) and blew a blast of fire and smoke at the boy. It didn't burn him, but his clothes smelled horribly of burning rubber for a month.

Around by the entrance gate Lieutenant Sparrow was just paying admission for himself and his ten-year-old boy, Jefferson. The Lieutenant saw the dragon and hesitated. "Jeff," he said, "it says on the poster that this creature sometimes snaps at bad parents. Do you—well, I'm a good parent, ain't I?"

"Oh, sure, Pop," said the boy. "Come on, I won't let him nip you."

As the dragon went by, the crowd drew back to a respectful distance. Freddy had been afraid that some of the bolder and more curious spectators might want to come up and pull the dragon's tail or poke him in the ribs. But they all edged back as he went by, though they stared hard with their mouths open. Every time he blew out a puff of fire and smoke, the crowd gasped, and moved back a step. And then with a last lash of his tail Beelzebub disappeared again into the barn, and Jimmy closed the door.

"Next appearance at two p.m.," he announced.

The crowd was much bigger than Jimmy had anticipated. And while those that had seen Beelzebub's first appearance all stayed to see him again, new arrivals were pushing steadily through the gate. Among them were the sheriff and all the prisoners

from the Centerboro jail. The sheriff always took the prisoners to circuses and clambakes and other entertainments; he did this partly because he liked such things himself, and partly because he said it kept the prisoners happy. Indeed, he had one of the most popular jails in the state.

The people milled around, looked at the other exhibits, sat on the grass and ate their lunches, and a good many lined up to go into the tent where Astro the Magnificent, the Invisible Prophet from Outer Space—otherwise Samuel Jackson, the mole—was telling fortunes.

Of course, since Samuel was under the grass beneath the table in the tent, he couldn't see who came in. But Jimmy Wiggs, who knew everybody in South Pharisee, and Mr. Pomeroy, who as head of the A.B.I., knew a great deal about everybody in Centerboro, wandered around and watched who went in. Then they went to a hole in the ground at the back of the tent, and Samuel, who had started his tunnel there to get into the tent, poked his nose out, and they would tell him something about the person who was waiting to have his fortune told. So Samuel really hit the high spots on those. Of course, there were a lot of people from Clamville and other places that neither Mr. Pomeroy nor Jimmy knew. But Samuel had a good line, and everybody was satisfied, and a good many were amazed, at the fortunes told them.

What usually happened was this; when the person who wanted his fortune told went into the tent and saw nobody there, even though Professor Astro had been advertised as invisible, he looked around, shrugged his shoulders, and started back out.

Then Samuel would say in his deep voice: "Don't you want your fortune told, Mr. Smith?" Or whatever his name was, because by this time the mole had got back from the hole at the edge of the tent, and had been told the customer's name. The person would come back and look around, and he'd look under the table, and maybe he'd run outside and see who was outside the tent. But even if he did see Jimmy and the robin, it was plain that they hadn't asked the question. So he went back in, and Samuel asked him to sit down in the chair. Then he got his fortune told.

Percy was one of the first visitors to the tent. He was too big to get inside, so he just poked his head and shoulders in. "Hey," he said, "ain't there anyone here?"

"Certainly, I'm here," said Samuel. "Don't the posters say I'm invisible?"

The bull said: "Say, your voice sounds kind of familiar. Yeah, I know who you are; you're my conscience. He was invisible, too."

Samuel thought it was better not to try to fool Percy. He might go around talking to other animals, and there were a number on the farm who knew about his

conscience stunt.

"Sure, I'm your conscience," he said. "But I've got a lot of spare time, now you're behaving so well. Isn't any reason why I shouldn't come over and give Jimmy a hand with his show, is there?"

"Well, I don't know. I supposed your job with me was twenty-four hours a day."

"I got to have a little time off, haven't I? Specially when you're behaving yourself, like you've been lately. You're being a gentleman most all the time; I just sit around with nothing to do."

"We-ell," said Percy thoughtfully, "I suppose it shows you're satisfied with me. So maybe it's all right. Only, if I did something that was out of line, I wouldn't want my conscience to be somewhere else."

"Don't worry," said the mole, "I'm keeping an eye on you. I say I'm keeping an eye on you."

Percy said: "O.K. Let's skip the fortune, eh? It's too much like me telling my own. And I wouldn't like that. So long." And he backed out of the tent.

The next customer was Mrs. Winfield Church. She was a very rich woman, and she was covered with jewelry, none of which was real. It was all glass. For, she said, why should she spend a lot of money on diamonds when for fifty cents in the five-and-ten she could get as much glitter and sparkle as she could for twenty thousand dollars on Fifth Avenue?

She swept in and seated herself in the chair. Then she looked round. "Invisible Prophet from Outer Space, hey?" she said. "Well, where are you, prophet?"

"Right here, ma'am," said Samuel. "I say I'm right here."

Mrs. Church looked under the table and the chair. "Where's here?" she asked.

"Right on the table in front of you."

She swept her arm across the table. "Nonsense!" she said. "There's nothing on the table."

"Oh yes there is," said Samuel. "I am."

It is hard to tell the direction from which a sound comes. If the mole hadn't said he was on the table, Mrs. Church might have located his voice under it. But because he said he was on it, the voice seemed to come from there.

"There's some trick about this," she said. She lifted the table and chair and moved them around to see if there were any wires running down through the legs, and she examined the inside of the tent carefully. She didn't notice the little ridge the mole had made in the grass when he had burrowed in, because he had been careful to keep it as low as possible. So she sat down again.

"See here," she said. "I hear you talk, and you claim you're on the table, but I

can't see you. That doesn't make sense."

"Why does it have to?" the mole asked.

"Why, because . . . well, then it isn't true."

"Then why are you talking to me? Look, don't you want your fortune told?" Samuel asked.

"No," she said, "I know what my fortune is going to be. I want to know how you work this trick. I'll give you fifty dollars if you'll show me. I'd like to work it at our church fair next Saturday."

"I don't believe you could work it even if I did show you how it's done," said the mole, grinning as he thought of Mrs. Church trying to burrow under the grass roots. "Still, if you want to give fifty dollars toward Jimmy Wiggs' baseball-suit fund, I'll call on you in Centerboro the first of the week and tell you the secret. Maybe," he said, "I'll come to the fair and tell fortunes for you. If affairs in outer space don't call me home before that," he added.

Most of Samuel's customers were like this; he spent more time arguing with them than telling their fortunes. He told Miss Peebles: "I see for you a long journey, across the water. Very soon, I think. To a country where they do not speak English, where when they want to say 'yes,' they say 'wee.' Only I don't think they spell it w-e-e. I think it is spelt o-u-i. At any rate, a curious custom. I wonder—could that country be France? Yes, I think so. I say I think you are going to France."

Everybody in Centerboro knew that Miss Peebles was going to Paris that summer. But what bothered her was how word of it had got to outer space. Evidently she believed that Samuel was really the invisible prophet from outer space, and she tried very hard to find out how he had learned of her plans. He did think of telling her that a little bird had told him, referring to Mr. Pomeroy, but instead he just said that everything about earthly life was known to the Great Minds of outer space, so of course they knew all about her.

The sheriff and the prisoners from the Centerboro jail came together. The sheriff went in first. But he turned around and came right out again. "Ain't anybody there," he said.

"Come back here!" Samuel shouted.

The sheriff went in again. "Who said that?" he asked.

"I did," said the mole. "You came in here to have your fortune told by the invisible prophet, didn't you? Well, you can't see him if he's invisible, can you? What did you expect to see—an old man with long white whiskers?"

"Have you got long white whiskers?" the sheriff asked.

"I don't know. I've never seen myself, even in a mirror. How could I, if I'm

invisible?"

"You could feel them."

"I haven't any fingers," said Samuel. "I'm just a voice. Do you want your fortune told?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the sheriff. "There's no fun knowing what's going to happen to you. No surprises. I've got some of my boys out here. I'd like to have you give them some good fortunes."

His boys were the prisoners from the jail. The first one in was Bloody Mike.

"Aha!" said Samuel. "You're a criminal. I say you're a criminal."

"I didn't come in here to be called names," said Mike, looking around at the tent and tipping up the table and chair to look for wires. "Besides, everybody knows that anyway."

"Everybody doesn't know what I'm going to tell you about your future, though," said the mole. "I, the Invisible Prophet of Outer Space, have seen your future in the stars, and a grim one it is."

Mike didn't seem impressed. "Look," he said, "are you really invisible?"

"What do *you* think?" said Samuel.

"Well, it looks like it. I can't see you inside the tent, yet your voice is inside, I'll swear. Say, could you teach me the trick? It would be useful in my profession." His profession, of course, was that of a burglar.

"It would take you twenty years of hard study to attain to proficiency in vanishment," said Samuel.

"How's that?"

"To learn how to be invisible, to vanish," Samuel said.

"'Twould be worth it, at that," said Mike. "Where can I get in touch with you?"

Samuel laughed. "My friend," he said, "when I leave here tonight I shall go straight up through the Milky Way, past stars and galaxies, to the farthest edge of the universe. My home there is a star a million times brighter than your sun, yet so far away that its light cannot even be seen from earth."

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "Quite a walk," he said. "Maybe you better get started. And how about that future of mine?"

Samuel said: "You're due to get out of jail in a few weeks, I think. But the next time the police pick you up, the judge is going to give you a good long sentence. Twenty years. How do you like that?"

"Will it be in the Centerboro jail?" Mike asked anxiously.

"Yes."

Mike gave a roar of delighted laughter. "Boy, that's the best news you could

have given me!" He rushed out to tell the others.

Samuel predicted years in jail for all the prisoners, and they were naturally all greatly pleased. For to a hard-working burglar, a sentence of several months at the Centerboro jail was like a long vacation at the seaside. It was, as I have said, the most popular jail in the state. To be sentenced to it was similar to being elected to an exclusive club. When a prisoner was released, the first evening he was almost sure to go force the lock on somebody's house door, or open a window as noisily as possible, and wait till the police came for him, so that he could go before Judge Willey in the morning and plead guilty and be sent back for another month or two. Some of them gave themselves up and pleaded guilty to crimes they had not committed, just to get back in the jail.

The Centerboro people were very proud of their jail. They often gave parties for the prisoners, who were always heartily welcomed at such things as church suppers and grange dances. Some of the prisoners who had children of their own at home always attended the P.T.A. meetings, and made many useful suggestions.

Everybody was surprised that Mrs. Underdunk came to the circus. I guess probably she was bored sitting around alone in her big house in Centerboro, for nobody went to see her much after her brother, Mr. Garble, was sent to the penitentiary for conspiring with Simon, the rat, to take over the government. When she came into the tent, she had to sit for some time while Mr. Pomeroy gave Samuel the dope on her at the hole outside the tent. Finally she got up.

"Well!" she said. "If nobody's coming to tell my fortune, I'm going out and get my money back."

Samuel had just returned. "Maybe that's the best thing you could do, ma'am," he said. "I always hate to bring bad news, and the reports on you aren't so good."

"Reports!" She sniffed. "What reports could you have about me? And who are you, anyhow? Are you ashamed to come out and show yourself?"

"Not ashamed, ma'am. I stay invisible because I don't want to scare you to death. If I was to appear to you—well, instead of hair I've got a lot of little green snakes. My eyes are bright red. My mouth is two feet wide, and my teeth are six inches long, and I keep 'em filed as sharp as needles. My ears—"

"Stop talking nonsense!" she snapped. "I know who you are. You're that disgusting pig from the Bean farm outside Centerboro. You're a thief and a cheat. You're talking from outside through a microphone that you've rigged up in here, and I'm going to find it." And she picked up the chair and brought it down hard on the table, smashing it to pieces. Then she began pulling the pieces apart, looking for concealed wires.

Samuel backed hastily out and told Mr. Pomeroy what was going on. "She stepped on me once," he said, "and pretty soon she'll begin tearing up the grass and find my burrow."

Mr. Pomeroy got the sheriff who went right into the tent.

"Come, come, ma'am," he said; "this is no way to act. If you don't like the fortune that was told you, I suppose you can ask for your money back. But you hadn't ought to smash things up."

"I haven't had any fortune told, but I know what it was going to be, and I know who was going to tell it." Mrs. Underdunk was so mad that she went right on pulling the table to pieces. "It is that pig of Bean's, and if you were doing your duty, sheriff, you'd be out hunting for him now instead of pestering me. Go on about your business."

"Ma'am," said the sheriff quietly, "there is no pig here, and there ain't any pig that has anything to do with this fortune-telling. As to my duty: my duty is to arrest people that are causing ructions, and you're causing plenty. I don't want to arrest you. But you're not only destroyin' property—namely, this here chair and table—but you are destroyin' fun. These folks out here have all come to this circus to have fun, and you're tryin' to break it up. To me, spoilin' other folks' fun is a lot more serious than damagin' their property. I ain't never arrested a lady before, but—"

"Oh, get out of here!" exclaimed Mrs. Underdunk, and made a swing at him with the table leg.

The sheriff backed off. "She's too much for me," he muttered.

Mr. Pomeroy had gone to Jimmy Wiggs, and after a short consultation with the three parts of the dragon, the barn door rolled open ten minutes ahead of the scheduled time, and the dragon walked out.

He made straight for the fortune-telling tent.

Mrs. Underdunk had arrived after the dragon's first appearance, so she had never seen him. She had done so many mean tricks to Freddy in the past—indeed had conspired with her brother to have him killed—that Freddy was glad of the chance to throw a good scare into her. So the dragon poked his nose into the tent. Mrs. Underdunk gave a yell. Then Freddy threw a handful of cut-up paper and a lot of pieces of rubber in the little stove and blew hard three times. The dragon gave three snorts, and fire came out of his nostrils on the first one, along with bits of burning paper, but I don't think Mrs. Underdunk noticed them, for the second and third snorts were thick black smoke that filled the tent and smelled awful.

Mrs. Underdunk started another yell, but it turned into a cough. The dragon backed out, and the sheriff ran in and picked her up, coughing and with her face all

black from the smoke, and carried her out to her car. And her chauffeur drove her home.

So Jimmy brought down another chair and table from the house, and Samuel crept into his burrow and went into business again.

# CHAPTER 15

The circus was a great success. Many people who had come early stayed right through until after the dragon's last appearance at eight o'clock. It was late in the afternoon before Mrs. Peppercorn and Mrs. Talcum got to see the dragon. When the dragon saw them he went toward them, snorting fire and smoke.

"By good'ess!" said Mrs. Talcum. "He's got worse hay fever thad I have!"

She went over and patted him on the shoulder, and then she gave two good resounding sneezes. And the dragon jumped both times, and then laid his head right down on the ground in front of Mrs. Talcum, so that his chin was in the grass, as if to show that he acknowledged her as the better sneezer. Mrs. Talcum patted him again and said: "You're very polite, but you kdow very well you're a great deal better thad I ab at this busidess."

She and Mrs. Peppercorn walked away. "Rebarkably gifted creature," she remarked. "I wish I could sdeeze like that."

"I'm glad you can't," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "As long as you're occupying my guest room. Set fire to the window curtains."

"Be haddy getting a fire goi'g id the kitched ra'ge," replied her aunt.

The circus made quite a lot of money, but still not enough for the baseball uniforms. But when Mrs. Church heard this, she said she'd be glad to make up the amount. "And what's more," she said, "I'll come to your first game and cheer for South Pharisee."

Jimmy Wiggs was delighted, and when they had collapsed the dragon and were packing it into the back of Uncle Ben's station wagon, he said to Freddy: "This is the second time you've taken a lot of trouble to help me out, and I don't know how to thank you for it, but if you ever need any help that our club can give you—and there's fifteen of us—you just send word, and we'll jump on our bikes and be over at the Bean farm in half an hour. Whether it's a school day or not."

When they got back home most of the animals, who had left the circus earlier, were in the cow barn, listening to Mrs. Pomeroy, who was reporting on the news that the A.B.I. operative had brought back from Centerboro. Jack had been brought up before Judge Willey, and his trial had been set for early in September. Then he had been released on $1,000 bail.

"Bail? What's that?" asked Mrs. Wogus.

Mrs. Pomeroy explained that somebody had handed $1,000 to the judge. This would be returned to him if Jack showed up for his trial. But if he didn't show up, the money would be forfeited and would go to the town or the county, she wasn't

sure which. Mr. E. H. Anderson, a real-estate dealer, had put up the money.

"Wow!" said Freddy. "There's something crooked about that."

"I think you're right," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "Anderson's a crook. We all remember how he tried to steal that hotel up on the lake, and how you stopped him."

"When they searched Jack did they find all the money he had collected in those envelopes?" Jinx asked.

"I think not."

"Then it's up in the cave somewhere," said the pig. "He collected a lot more than a thousand dollars. My guess is Jack has made a deal with Anderson so he'll be free to go up and collect it. Then he'll give Anderson his thousand and a little more, and beat it with the rest. Anything been heard from the Webbs?"

"No. But until they come out and report, we've got to put a strong guard on the entrance to the cave so we can grab Jack if he comes up to get his money, or stop those other animals from coming out. Those two troopers are still lost somewhere in the cave, too. Their flashlights will be gone by this time, and they can't possibly move around without them. They'll starve if we don't get them out somehow."

"We'd better all go up to the cave," Freddy said, "so that if the Webbs have found anything, we'll be ready to plan right off what to do."

So after explaining where they were going to Mr. Bean, the animals started up past the duck pond to cut into the back road and get up to the cave. Uncle Ben, with the dragon still in the station wagon, drove around by road. He thought the dragon might be useful.

Seeing the procession passing the duck pond, the ducks paddled ashore to find out what was going on. Even Uncle Wesley came out from under the dock leaf where he usually sat to exchange polite and gentlemanly words with Percy. When they found out the purpose of the expedition, Emma said: "It's dark. By the time you get there, it will be night. Why don't you wait until morning?"

Freddy explained. "We're keeping a watch there round the clock in case the Webbs come out with some information for us. Who's on tonight, Mrs. P.?"

"Uncle Solomon. He'll be on until daylight, and then Mr. Pomeroy will take over."

Uncle Solomon was a small screech owl. Many of the animals avoided him because he was always correcting their English or criticizing their incorrect use of words. Freddy rather liked him.

"Well, if you're going up to the cave," Emma said, "I'm going along."

"Quite right, sister," Alice said. "So am I."

"Nonsense!" said Uncle Wesley. "Roaming the roads at this time of night! I absolutely forbid—"

Alice interrupted him. "We're sorry to go against your wishes, dear Uncle Wesley," she said, "but we are resolved. We are going."

"We were members of the original expedition to Florida," said Emma. "I see nearly all the members of that expedition here. When the Bean animals march, we march with them. It would be to our everlasting shame if we were to stay behind."

Freddy thought they were making an unnecessary point, since they would be of little help in catching the gangsters; nevertheless he admired their courage. "Of course you're coming," he said.

Uncle Wesley quacked indignantly for a minute or two, then went back under his burdock leaf and stuck his head under his wing.

Up at the east end of the lake they all concealed themselves along the road, by the path which led up to the cave. They got the dragon out, and Freddy built a small fire in him in case he would be needed.

While they were doing this they heard faintly a horn or bugle being blown at regular intervals. "It's the troopers," said Freddy. "They're trying to locate the two lost men. They've got a copy of the Webbs' map, and they go in as far as that will take them and blow. But in all that maze of passages and halls nobody could tell where the sound was coming from. Maybe those two guys are so far in they can't even hear it."

Presently a dim little something flitted noiselessly through the dusk and lit on a branch above them. "Dear me," said Uncle Solomon in his precise voice. "What are you all hiding from? I may say you're making a very poor job of it." And he laughed his cold little rippling laugh.

"Have the Webbs come out yet?" Freddy asked. He was not going to be drawn into an argument if he could help it.

"Mrs. Webb has come out," said Uncle Solomon, "and she has talked with me, and she has gone in again."

"Did they find the troopers?" Mrs. Wiggins asked.

"Yes. The two men are lost in a maze of passages in the north side of the hill. They are exhausted, and they have no light and no food. But there is a little underground stream of water, and they are lying beside it. Mrs. Webb thinks they have given up hope. But if you take a flashlight, she can guide you to them."

"But where's Webb?" Freddy asked.

"She's gone to find out. When that gangster, Jack, came back here—"

"He's *here*?" Freddy interrupted. "In the cave?"

"You should have watched him more carefully when he was released. But I suppose one cannot expect animals to take the ordinary precautions which even the dullest bird would automatically think of."

"We'll discuss the difference between animals and birds some other time," Freddy said. "In the meantime you might ponder over why very silly people are sometimes called bird-brains. Now what else did the Webbs find out?"

"At the back of the room in which Jack was living," Uncle Solomon said, "there was what appeared to be a straight wall. In reality it is a sort of screen of rock, behind which a passage opens. Off that passage are several rooms. In one there were two pigs, in another a dog and a horse. In the latter room was a hole in the wall, and in the hole was a shoe box. The Webbs got into the box. It was full of money and jewelry.

"So Webb stayed to keep an eye on the money, and Mrs. Webb came out to report. Then she went back in to—"

He was interrupted by a clatter of hoofs at the cave entrance. A man on a horse came pitching down the path to the road. He wrenched the horse's head around to the right and spurred him to a fast gallop. It was not the horse the headless man had ridden, nor was it apparently the same horseman, for this one was short and had a head. Then the lights of Uncle Ben's station wagon went on, and they saw it was Jack, with a shoe box under his arm.

With a series of tremendous bangs, which sounded like battleships saluting one another, Uncle Ben's engine started. In two seconds the wagon was out on the road and bounding after the flying horseman. Percy was just behind it, galloping hard, head down, tail up. And behind him again, Hank and the three cows. On a rough dirt road Uncle Ben didn't dare let his engine out full; it might have hit a bump and turned a double somersault. But he caught up rapidly. And when Jack came to the turn and swung into the back road, he touched the button, the stubby fins shot out, and he sailed right over the horseman's head. Having gained the lead he slowed down quickly, braked, and swung the car across the road.

With the bull and Hank closing in behind him, and the car blocking the road ahead, there was only one thing for Jack to do. He pulled up, swung sharp right, and turned down through the Bean woods.

There was no room for the station wagon between the trees. The cows didn't try to follow. Percy and Hank followed for a couple of hundred yards, but Jack kept gaining, and pretty soon they could no longer hear the swish and crackle of brush pushed aside that told where the horse was. They turned and went back.

It was a pretty disconsolate crew that gathered on the road below the cave.

Jack and the money were gone; there was no sign of the Webbs when they shone their flashlights on the branch overhanging the cave entrance, which they had selected as their meeting place with Uncle Solomon. And the screech owl himself had disappeared.

After they had discussed it for a few minutes, Freddy said: "Well, there are only the two pigs left in there now, and the dog. I vote we go in and get them. We can't do anything about the lost troopers till the Webbs get back."

"Those pigs are nasty fighters," said Percy. "And so is the dog. We can lick 'em all right, but somebody is going to get hurt. Suppose we do it this way." And he outlined the scheme.

The others agreed, and they got the dragon out and fired him up, and he followed the bull into the cave. Behind came the other animals, in case there was a fight after all. Even Alice and Emma went in. Only Charles stayed outside and flew with some difficulty up onto the branch over the entrance, to meet Mrs. Webb when she came out.

Percy had a flashlight in his mouth. He knew the way. But when they got to the room where Jack had lived, all the animals except Percy lay down and tried to look as much like furniture as possible. The dragon stayed there too. But Percy went on into the passage back of the screen. Back in the big hall they could hear the bugle blowing faintly. Percy thought it was lucky they hadn't run into the troopers' search party.

When he got nearly to the room where the pigs lived, the bull called to them. "Hey, Eddie! Pete! Cornelius!"

A long snout poked out of the opening. "Percy, that you? Where you been all this time? You was the first to run out on us, but now Thurlow's gone, and Gimpy didn't show up, and the two horses and Jack are gone."

Percy went in and turned off his flashlight. A candle on the shelf gave a feeble light. He saw the old sacks and blankets the three animals had been sleeping on, and the dirt on the floor. He sniffed. "Don't you ever clean this place out?"

"What's the matter with it?" said Eddie. "Little untidy, maybe, but what do you expect in a black hole like this?"

"What's become of everybody?" Pete asked. "Jack was back for a minute tonight, but all he said was to sit tight and not worry. But if I ever saw a worried guy, Jack is it."

"He's got good reason," said the bull. "He picked a poor spot in this cave to set up his headquarters. Do you know what has been living in this cave for the past three or four thousand years? Dragons."

"Dragons!" Pete exclaimed. "Who are you trying to kid? There's no such things as dragons."

"That's what *you* think," replied the bull. "Where do you suppose all these stories of dragons came from? You think somebody could make up such a thing as a dragon? Dragons used to be plentiful, I can tell you, a thousand years ago. But then people invented firearms, and the dragons had to go back into deep caves and hiding-places in the rocks. They don't come out much any more. With all these high-powered rifles people have got, a dragon wouldn't stand a chance. . . ."

"Ah, phooey!" said the other pig coming to the door. "Dragons! That's for kids!"

"Yeah?" Percy said. "Well, I can tell you there's at least one dragon in this cave —maybe more. But I've seen one myself. If you want to see him, just stick around, that's all. You'll see him, all right, and maybe he'll be the last thing you ever do see. Well, I just came in to warn you. I don't care to stay here any longer. I understand he's eaten up two troopers already."

He stopped and appeared to listen.

"What do you hear?" inquired Eddie with some anxiety.

Actually Percy had been listening for the voice of his conscience. He had told a number of good round lies about the dragon, and although they were told in a good cause, he thought his conscience might have something to say about it. But his conscience was silent.

"Just thought I heard a rustling out in the passage," said Percy. "Probably bats. But my duty's done: I've warned you. I'm surprised you haven't seen the fellow. They say he's lived in this cave for over a thousand years, and he knows all these passages as you know the bottom of your trough. Patrols 'em, too. Snorting out fire and smoke. If you'll take the advice of an old friend, you'll beat it for home. That's where Jack went when he saw him. Well, so long." And he backed out.

The three animals looked at one another doubtfully.

"Sounds to me as if old Perce was seein' black spots before his eyes," said Pete.

"Yeah," said Cornelius. "But I never knew him to be scairt of anything before."

"Dragons!" said Eddie. His tone was contemptuous, but it was a little uncertain, too.

There was a rustling and scratching outside in the passage. They knew it was not Percy, whose hoofs they had heard retreating through the other room. They looked at the door fearfully. And then a long horrid head was poked into the room. They cowered in the corners while the dragon, apparently not seeing them, snorted three times. The sparks flew, the black smoke puffed out, filling the room. Then the head

was gone, and dimly they saw the long body with the green scales moving past the door up the passage.

When the rustling had died away they looked at one another.

"The way out is clear now," said Cornelius. His tail was between his legs.

The pigs didn't say anything for a minute. Then Eddie said: "What are we waiting for?"

And they began to run, passing the Bean animals without seeing them, out of the cave and northward, toward the homes they had come from.

# CHAPTER 16

The animals and Uncle Ben had come back out onto the road and had got the dragon packed into the station wagon, when Charles called down from his branch that Mrs. Webb had reappeared. "She says she can't find Webb."

Charles flew down, and Mrs. Webb spun herself down on to Freddy's ear. "There's no sign of him," she said. "I think he's in the shoe box. I think he stayed with the money, so that he could come back and tell us where Jack hides it."

"He may be miles away by this time," said Freddy.

"It might take him a long time to get back," the spider said. "You know how we travel. But I know he wouldn't have stayed in those dirty rooms any longer than he had to. He was brought up to be neat. Dirt makes him uncomfortable."

Freddy thought of the pigs' room in the cave. "It makes me ashamed of being a pig, sometimes," he said, "when I see how some of them live."

"If I've heard Webb say the same thing about spiders once, I've heard him a thousand times," said Mrs. Webb. "Dusty old holes and corners some of 'em pick out to live in! Never wash. Webb slides down to the water trough a dozen times a day to wash his face and feelers."

Freddy, who although he washed his face every morning, was apt to forget it during the rest of the day, decided to change the subject. But at that moment Uncle Solomon's high little laugh came rippling down to them from overhead.

"Well, my clever friends," he said, "I suppose you have succeeded in tracking the gangster, Jack, to his new hideout, as I believe you call it."

"You know perfectly well we haven't," said Mrs. Wiggins, "or we wouldn't be waiting here. We're trying to decide what to do."

"Perhaps I can assist you," said the owl. "By a simple process of reasoning it should be easy to determine his present whereabouts. Dear me, animals are very slow thinkers."

"Animals can't fly," said Freddy. "You want us to think that you worked it all out in your head where he is. But the simple fact is that while we couldn't keep up with him, you flew over the treetops and watched him. That's how you know where he is."

"That is true," Uncle Solomon said. "Yet had any of you had the capacity for putting two and two together, you should have found where he is without my assistance."

"Oh, quit trying to show off how smart you are," Jinx said angrily. "You didn't even put one and one together. You just flew after him and watched where he went.

Well, where is it? You going to keep us here all night while you squawk about your wonderful brain?"

"It is not that my brain is wonderful," the owl said, "but that yours are so dull. I wished merely to point out to you—"

"Look, dustmop," the cat said, "are you going to tell us where he is, or am I going to climb up there and claw some sense into you? Make up your mind."

"I wouldn't be here, Jinx," said the owl softly.

"Probably not. But I know where your nest is, and I can climb up to that. How about it?"

Uncle Solomon said rather sulkily: "He's at Anderson's. E. H. Anderson. He got off his horse at the edge of town and told it to go home—he'd be back in a few days. Then he walked to Anderson's."

The owl evidently intended to explain that they could have guessed without his help how Jack would make for Mr. Anderson's, but at that moment two troopers, one carrying a bugle, appeared at the cave entrance.

They saw movement in the road, turned their flashlights on the group, then came down.

"What goes on here?" Then the trooper caught sight of Uncle Ben and said more politely: "Evenin', Mr. Bean."

"Found your men," Uncle Ben said. He went over to Freddy and put out his hand, and Mrs. Webb jumped onto it. Then he showed her to the troopers. "She found 'em."

"She?" said the first trooper, whose name was Joe.

"Mrs. Webb. Friend of the Bean family."

Mrs. Webb made a sort of curtsey, which was easy to do because she had eight legs.

Joe wrinkled up his nose in an expression combining amazement and disgust. He didn't like spiders. "Pleased to—uh—meet you, ma'am," he muttered.

"Likewise," said the other man, whose name was Walt. And touched his hat.

Hank stepped forward. "You boys know me, I guess," he said. "If you was the ones that asked me all those questions—you all look the same in them hats. Anyhow, as Mr. Benjamin says, Mrs. Webb and her husband found where your two friends are. She can guide you to them. They're pretty tired and hungry, but they've had water. You will guide them, won't you, Mrs. Webb?" He put his ear down close to the spider.

"Why, yes, I s'pose I'd ought to. I hate to think of those poor fellows lying there starving in that dark cave. But I hate worse to think of Webb in that shoe box. Still, I

wouldn't be much help in fighting gangsters, would I?"

Walt, who was not afraid of spiders, had put his ear down close to Mrs. Webb too. "Hey!" he exclaimed delightedly. "She really can talk! Listen to her, Joe."

Joe backed off.

"But what does she mean about fighting gangsters?" Walt asked.

So the animals explained about how Jack had come up and got the box with the money and—probably—Mr. Webb in it, and had gone to Anderson's house.

Joe said: "Walt, you go in with your spider friend and get the boys out. I'll go with these folks down to Anderson's and see what there is to the story."

So Mrs. Webb climbed up Walt's arm and sat on top of his ear, trying not to tickle, as she gave him directions.

"I'd feel safer," said Walt, "if I had a ball of string to play out behind us, so we'd be sure to find our way back. You certain you know the way in and out?"

"Shine your flashlight on that bough over the cave door," said Mrs. Webb. "Move it a little. There, see something like a fine wire that leads into the cave? See the light shine on it?"

"A spider web," Walt said.

"That's your ball of string," said the spider. "Mr. Webb and I went in spinning, and we came out following the strand we'd spun. We'll get them and get back all right."

Joe started up to get the police car, which was parked a little way up the road, and all the animals that could piled into the station wagon.

As Walt, flashlight in hand, went into the cave door, he turned back for a moment. "Hey, Joe," he called. "This little lady says if you find that shoe box, handle it kind of careful. She doesn't want her husband squashed."

"We'll be careful," Joe called back, and the animals chimed in: "Don't worry, Mrs. W. Take it easy. We'll bring Webb back with every leg and feeler in place."

Joe started off first in the police car. The animals were slower getting loaded into the station wagon. The larger animals were following on foot.

As he watched Joe's tail lights getting smaller and smaller up the road, Freddy said: "If he gets there first, he'll try to go in alone, and Jack'll go out the back door and get away."

"Hold tight," said Uncle Ben. He stepped on the accelerator and threw the car into eighth gear. With a roar like an intercontinental rocket it streaked up the road. Round two bends, and there was the police car ahead. Uncle Ben didn't try to pass; he jumped right over Joe. Then he braked and pulled across the road.

Joe stopped and got out and came up to the station wagon. "What kind of

driving do you call that?" he demanded. "I ought to give you a ticket."

"Go ahead," said Uncle Ben.

Freddy started to explain, but Robert whispered to him to keep out of it. "There's still a warrant out for your arrest," he said, "and you can't tell about this fellow; he might think he ought to take you in." So then he told the trooper why they had stopped him. "You may need all of us to catch this guy. He's tricky."

Joe saw the sense in that. "O.K.," he said. "You know Anderson's house? Yes? I'll park beyond it and you stop this side. Can't you drive that thing any quieter? They'll think we're bringing up artillery."

"Not driving ahead," Uncle Ben said. "But—funny thing. In reverse, can't even hear her purr."

"Then you'd better turn around when we hit his street," Joe said, "and back into position."

In the driveway beside Mr. Anderson's house there was a powerful car, headed toward the street. Its lights were on and the engine was running. There was no one in it. But there was something funny about one of the headlights. A little black spot kept moving up and down over the front of it, over the glass.

The bigger animals had gone around behind some of the other houses to take up their places in the back yard, and Uncle Ben and some of the others had lugged the dragon around back of the garage and were getting ready for action.

Alice and Emma had stayed in the station wagon. Then Alice noticed the black spot moving over the headlight.

"Emma!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that—couldn't that be Mr. Webb?"

"Of course," said Emma. And without hesitation the two ducks hopped to the ground and waddled over to the car.

"No, it's not Mr. Webb," said Alice. "This one's got yellow stripes, and his legs are longer."

But the spider waved his front legs at them, and as they came closer he hopped on to Alice's head.

"Name of Weaver, ma'am," he said in a hoarse voice. "You friends of Webb's?"

"Yes," said Alice. "Are you?"

"Never saw him before in my life, but we spiders stick together. He left a message for you. Said he heard you comin', and if I could attract your attention, I was to tell you these guys are running out. They're beating it for Canada—at least one of 'em is. I don't know about Anderson. Maybe he thinks the cops won't have anything on him if the other guy gets away. But they'll be out in a few minutes."

Joe had moved up and was crouched by the porch with a pistol in his hand.

When a duck came and told him that a spider had told her that the two men were planning to leave at once for Canada, he just shook his head bewilderedly.

"Don't you believe me?" Alice asked.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "I'll believe anything now. Ducks and spiders! Who's President of the United States—a centipede?"

He got up and walked up on the porch and rang the front door bell. A front window curtain moved slightly, then after a minute Mr. Anderson came to the door.

"Why, good evening, officer. Come in. What can I do for you?"

They went into the front room and sat down.

"Well, sir," said Joe, "that racketeer who has been hiding out in the cave up on the lake has been seen hanging around your house. I'd like to make sure that he didn't get in. Do you mind if I have a look around?"

"Not at all, officer," said Mr. Anderson genially. "Help yourself."

So Joe started toward the door which led into the dining-room.

Out in the back yard the animals were hiding behind the shrubbery. The dragon was behind the garage. The back door opened quietly, and Jack slipped out. He had a shoe box under his arm. He ran lightly down the steps and made for the car.

But the dragon was ahead of him. It came prancing out from behind the garage, its tail lashing furiously. It got between Jack and the car, and as the gangster approached it blew flames and a thick cloud of oily smoke, which enveloped him. Freddy had soaked some rags in oil for this special occasion, and the fire really singed Jack.

Jack yelled and tugged at a pistol in his pocket, but the animals had come up. Percy lowered his huge head almost gently, scooped the gangster up, and tossed him high over his back. Jack fell flat on the grass, the wind knocked out of him. The pistol flew into a flower bed; the shoe box opened, and bills were scattered on the grass.

Mrs. Wogus sat down on Jack to keep him quiet, and the others examined the contents of the shoe box. There was no sign of Mr. Webb.

"Doesn't seem to me that there's very much money here," said Freddy. "Not all of it, anyway. They must have divided it up, and I'll bet Anderson took the biggest share. Jack probably had to give it to him, to pay for help in escaping. We'd better search the house."

The animals made a rush for the back door. They came into the kitchen just as Joe came into it from the dining-room.

"Here, here," said the trooper, "you can't pile in here like this."

They told him about the shoe box.

"Can't help it," he said. "We've got nothing against Mr. Anderson. This Jack was hiding out in his kitchen, but there's no proof Anderson knew about it. You'll have to go out."

"You can arrest us later if you want to," said Freddy. "We know the money's here. If we go now, we'll never get it back."

There was a crash outside. Joe looked out the window and saw that Mrs. Wiggins, Mrs. Wurzburger, and Percy had got their horns under Anderson's car and turned it on its side. A minute later Mrs. Wiggins' head appeared in the door. "Anderson can't get away now," she said.

Joe didn't know what to do. The animals were all over the house now, pulling out bureau drawers, opening boxes, and ripping up mattresses. He gave a groan. His hand went to his gun, but dropped away again. He couldn't control this mob with a gun. And probably they were right. Only if they didn't find the money, everybody would be in trouble. Anderson would certainly make a complaint, and it might stick. He decided to go out and put handcuffs on Jack anyway. At least he wouldn't have to see what was going on.

But Mr. Anderson stopped him in the front hall. "See here, officer," he said, "you'll have to clear these animals out of here. I know nothing about that man, never saw him before. I don't believe he was even *in* the house. He was probably hiding on the back porch, waiting for a chance to steal my car. I left it out there with the engine running."

"I can't handle this mob, Mr. Anderson," Joe replied. "They're Bean's animals, William F. Bean, lives out the other side of town. You can sue him for any damage they do. You could call up troop headquarters; they'll send some more men, and then we can drive them out."

"I can do better than that," said Mr. Anderson. He went to a drawer and pulled out a pistol. "Man has a right to protect his own home." He went into the front room. Mrs. Wiggins had turned over an overstuffed chair and was ripping it up with one horn, to see if anything was hidden in the lining. Georgie and Robert were pulling books out of the bookcase to see if anything was behind them. Alice and Emma were poking their bills around in a ripped-up cushion, and Bill, the goat, and Sniffy Wilson, the skunk, were rolling up the rug and looking for loose boards in the floor.

The second that Mr. Anderson appeared in the doorway with the gun in his hand, and before he had time to raise it, Bill went for him. He had a pretty short run for a take-off, but he hit dead center. With a "Whosh," Mr. Anderson doubled up, and at the same moment Mrs. Wiggins, with a sweep of her right horn, knocked the gun out of his hand.

Freddy and Jinx had been poking around in the kitchen. They had examined cupboards and shelves, and had then looked into the refrigerator.

"Nothing much here," said the pig. "Couple cartons of milk, bacon, cans of fruit, lettuce, and stuff. That's a big box of sausages up there." He wrinkled up his nose, for the idea of sausage is naturally not appealing to a pig.

"Funny, that spider web on the sausage box," Jinx said. "I didn't suppose spiders ever lived in an ice box."

"A web? Where? Oh, I see," Freddy said. "Hey, wait a minute! Let's have a look at those sausages." He pulled the box down and they took off the cover.

There were no sausages in the box. Instead, it was nearly full of bills—fives and tens and twenties—with some jewelry on top. And on top of the jewelry lay a small black spider. He waved a feeble foreleg at them.

"Webb!" Freddy exclaimed. "You must be frozen. Let's carry him over by the stove, Jinx." So they carried box and all over to the stove. Mr. Webb recovered quickly in the warmth. "Boy," he exclaimed, "was it cold in there! Did you ever try to spin in a refrigerator? No, I suppose not. Tell me, is Mother all right?"

They assured him of Mrs. Webb's safety, and told him she had gone to the rescue of the two lost troopers. Then they carried the box into the front room.

Mr. Anderson was just getting off the floor, and the animals, under the gun of the trooper, had moved back. Freddy spread the contents of the box out on a table.

"This was in Anderson's refrigerator," he said. "Perhaps Mr. Anderson would like to explain how it got there."

Mr. Anderson had nothing to say. His eyes slid around to the door, but Joe's gun was pointed at him now.

"I guess you'd better come with me," said Joe, and went over and snapped handcuffs on his wrists.

Jack was still in the back yard. "He got sort of restless," said Mrs. Wogus, "so I called Father to help me." Percy had apologized handsomely for any discomfort he might cause Jack, but when he sat down on him too, the gangster wasn't restless any more. In fact, when Joe came out to put him in the police car, he had to be almost carried.

So they took the two crooks down and locked them up, and in due course they were tried and sentenced and went to the penitentiary. The money and jewelry was given back to its owners, and the set of Dickens was returned to Dr. Wintersip.

There had been quite a large reward for the return of the stolen property, and everybody decided that the Webbs should have it. At a ceremony at Mr. Muszkiski's movie theater the reward was presented. On a white cloth on a table on

the stage the two spiders sat side by side. Mr. Weezer, the bank president, made the presentation. There was uproarious applause. Then Mr. Weezer asked the Webbs if they'd care to tell the audience what they proposed to do with so much money. He put his ear down close to the table and listened for some time. Then he stood up.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "as you know, Mr. and Mrs. Webb are fond of travel. They have been pretty well all over the country. But, as they say, they have always had to hitchhike. Their custom is to drop in a car that is going in their direction, but often the cars turn off, and before they can get down, they have been carried miles out of their way.

"They have always wanted to visit Montreal and Quebec. But with this money they intend to hire a car, and a chauffeur, of course, to drive them there. They can think of no better way of spending the money."

So that was what they did. Naturally, the newspapers picked it up, and all along the way they were met by deputations of city officials and congratulated and invited to banquets. In Canada they were dined and feted, and they even went to Ottawa for an official reception. They had a wonderful time. When they got home Lieutenant Sparrow invited them to come down to troop headquarters for a special citation. He was very much moved, and would have liked to pat them both on the heads, but then he looked at the size of his hands and changed his mind.

There was a ceremony too at the Bean farm. Percy was given a hand-lettered scroll, prepared by Uncle Ben, which read:

> This is to certify to all animals, birds, and bugs on the Bean farm, to Mr. and Mrs. Bean, Mr. Benjamin Bean, Mr. Walter Brooks, and all other interested parties, that Percy, the bull, is a gentleman, and is hereafter to be so treated and considered. Any infraction of this rule will be severely punished.

Jinx continued to go down to Centerboro twice a week to give the hotel kitten purring lessons. At last reports it was thought to have been overdone, as she now purred so loud that the stove lids rattled.

But they never did recover Mrs. Peppercorn's bicycle.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by Kurt Wiese (1887-1974) have been omitted from this etext.

[The end of *Freddy and the Dragon* by Walter Rollin Brooks]