

JERRY TODD CAVEMAN



BY LEO EDWARDS

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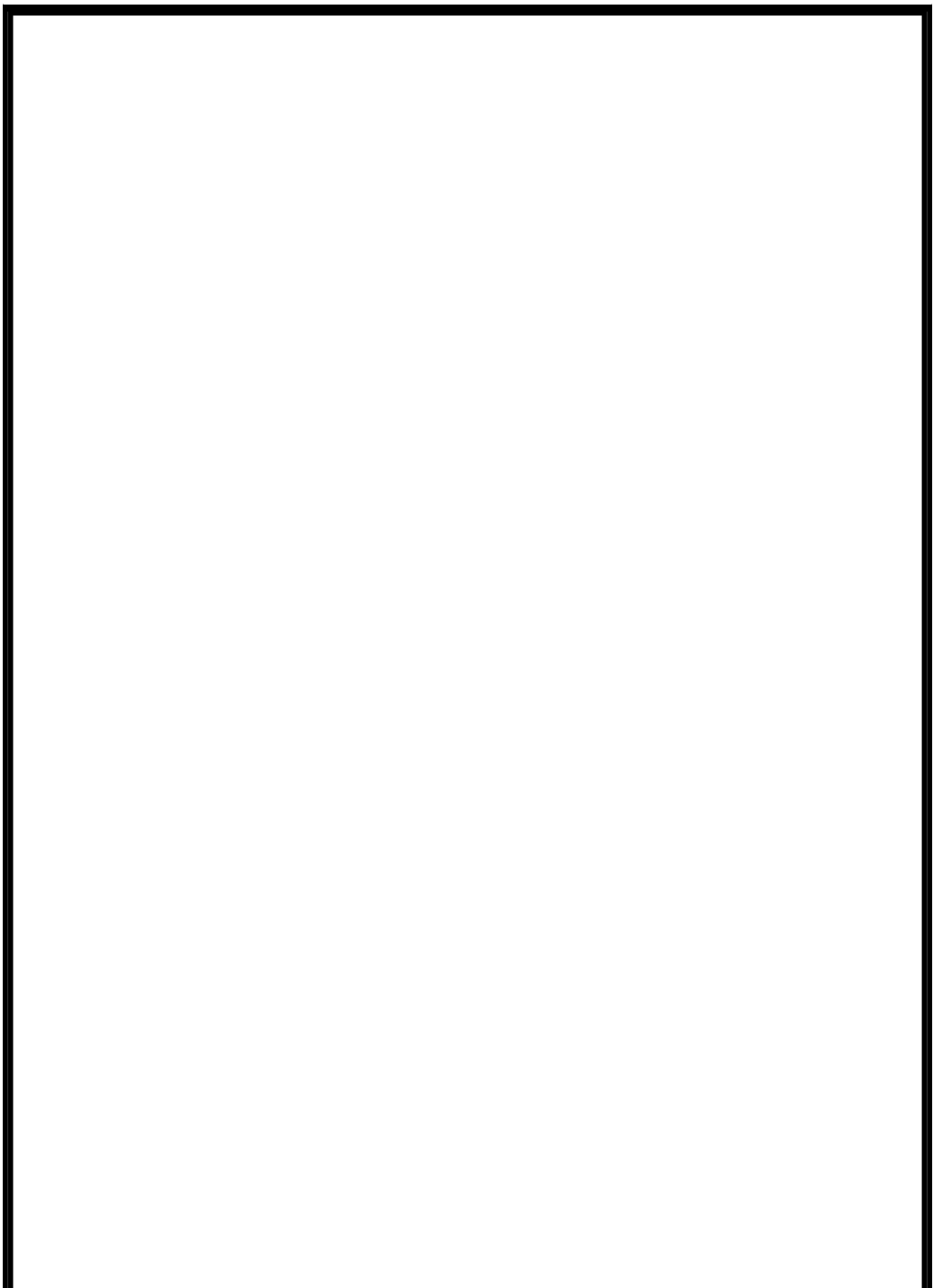
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JERRY TODD

CAVEMAN

By
LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

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He has big eyes, pleasing ways and three older sisters who inspect his ears each morning and in various ways take it upon themselves to see that he grows up in exactly the way that a neat younger brother should grow up. He's a fine lad. And because he is my pal as well I'm going to include him in the somewhat select group to which various books of mine have been dedicated. So here you are,



BILL SCHAEFER
(*old sock-in-the-wash*)

of Madison, Wisconsin. May you live long and daily grow
longer.

OUR CHATTER-BOX

Whenever I complete a new book I like to feel that it is going out into the world to provide wholesome entertainment for boys and girls and also add materially to my wide circle of young friends.

I try to put that friendly *something* into my books that will make the young readers want to write to me. I've always done that. So it isn't surprising that years ago, when I had but a few titles, boys and girls began writing to me, wanting me to know how dear my books were to them.

Now I receive thousands of letters yearly. And I have someone to help me handle these letters, as it would be impossible for me to answer each and every letter myself and write books at the same time.

All of the letters from old-timers, all of the important letters from new fans, all of the letters containing questions about the characters in my books, all of the letters asking personal advice, all of the letters containing poems, in fact, all of the letters of any importance whatsoever are turned over to me for attention. And I answer as many as I can. I'm sorry I can't answer them all.

And then, when these letters have been answered, I put them aside for use in a later "Chatter-Box," a department appearing in all of my books, in which I keep in personal touch with all of my young readers.

This is your department, boys and girls. To be represented, write me an outstanding letter; or send in a poem. If your poem is published you will receive a free autographed copy of the book in which the poem appears. We have sent out hundreds of autographed books and expect to send out hundreds more. The poems printed in this “Chatter-Box” will give you an idea of the kind we prefer.

And now let us dig into this big pile of letters and see what some of the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans have to say.

vii

LETTERS

“I have read all of your books, and ‘swell’ goes for every one—and how!” writes Chris Morley, Jr., Roslyn Heights, Long Island, N. Y., in applying for membership in our Freckled Goldfish club. “I am a Jerry and Poppy fan if there ever was one. I’m thirteen years old, which is the best age to be. When I read about Jerry in his Bob-Tailed Elephant book I thought of a plan. Being interested in marionettes I have given several small performances with some puppets. My plan is to make puppet copies of Jerry, Poppy and their friends and try out some of their dandy adventures. I think it’s a swell idea. Don’t you?”

Yes, sir, that *is* a grand and glorious idea. If I get time next summer I’m going to do it myself. If any of you fellows are interested, write to Chris at the address given.

And by the way, we're publishing complete addresses of all contributors so that the boys and girls interested in this department can write to one another.

Freckled Goldfish Howard Conley of 3309 Lansmere Rd., Cleveland, Ohio, writes to tell me how well he likes the Trigger Berg books. Howard makes the suggestion that we give the Sally Ann (Jerry's old boat) a new motor. Now that the boys have a new boat I hadn't thought much about the old Sally Ann, which played such an important part in the "Oak Island Treasure" and "Whispering Cave" books. But we may resurrect the old scow some time. And who knows but what we may give it a new motor, exactly as Howard has suggested. He concludes with the following:

"You sure have a swell reputation among the women as I heard my mom and a lady friend say that you must be a swell man to know."

Ahem! Maybe I hadn't better tell my wife about *that*.

"I have read thirteen Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books and still think they are the best books I ever read," writes Freckled Goldfish Edward Mackey, 3421 So. Oakley Ave., Chicago, Ill. "The book, The Talking Frog, was read over by me more than five times. It was my first book I read of your series. I have at least ten boys interested in your books. Whenever I get a new title I let them read it. My hobby is sports. I particularly like baseball. Did the Strickers find the second cave in Whispering Cave? In the Tittering Totem did Jerry give Mr. Hoenoddle the engine that Mr. Corbin invented?"

Glad to hear from you, Ed. And hope that you'll continue to find much pleasure in my books. The Strickers didn't find the inner cave in the Whispering Cave book. But they did get into the cave in Jerry Todd, Pirate. Mr. Corbin invented a carburetor, which Poppy tried out on a borrowed motor. This motor belonged to Art Davidson; and naturally the motor was returned to Art.

Having read my Purring Egg book, Bernard R. Feick, 5947 Chester Ave., Philadelphia, Pa., played a somewhat similar joke (the joke was on Jerry in the Egg book) on a small neighborhood boy who had a collection of turtles.

"One day," reports Bernard, "a small white egg was found in the turtle pen. But the egg was damaged before the young owner found it. This happened a second time. Then my chum and I concocted a scheme—we took a small wooden egg of the same size from a magic set and put it in with the turtles. Soon Junior glanced in the pen. Another egg! Whoopee! He proudly showed the wooden egg all over the neighborhood. And then, alas, he learned the truth about it."

David Schulhen, 3112 Portis Ave., St. Louis, Mo., wants to know what would happen if a Freckled Goldfish got the measles. I'm wondering myself. Also Dave tells me about his new American Boy subscription.

"I used to read old cheap magazines," writes Dave. "But now I read the American Boy. It sure is the horse's heels."

Did you know, Dave, that the American Boy serialized five of my books, Andy Blake, Whispering Mummy, Rose-Colored

Cat, Waltzing Hen and Purring Egg?

“If the Jerry Todd books aren’t the best books I’ve read (and I’ve read quite a few) I’ll eat my Sunday pants. And why are these books so interesting? The way you write them, just as if you were a boy yourself, and the little sayings and everything. I’m not a member of the Freckled Goldfish club, but want to join. Also I’m sending stamps for a ritual so that I can organize a club in my own neighborhood.”

Donald Goldberg, 1623 East 15th, Tulsa, Okla., is the writer of that letter. And now no doubt he has a thriving Freckled Goldfish club of his own, like so many other boys of his age.

Julia Ann Ryan, 3805 Jackson Ave., El Paso, Texas, writes at length to inquire if girls may join the Freckled Goldfish club. And the answer is, sure thing. In fact girls are at the head of some of our most successful branch clubs.

“I started reading your books about three years ago,” writes Julia Ann. “I borrowed the first four books from a boy living near me. I sure did like the books, so bought more. Two years ago a girl friend of mine brought the Galloping Snail to school. I read it and thought I would die laughing when Jerry and Poppy were trying to start the old car. A friend of mine didn’t care much about reading. But I got her started on the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books. I thought she wouldn’t stop until her eyes fell out, but they’re still in. My friends and I all talk Jerry’s ‘lingo.’”

ix

“Please send me a Freckled Goldfish card as fast as you can,” writes Robert Leibourtz, 2307 Ave. M, Brooklyn, N. Y. “One

time I was reading the Oak Island Treasure in school and snickered so loud that the teacher told me to shut up.”

The next letter was written jointly by Marion Rand and Lyman Carter of Eagle River, Wis., who begin by asking for Freckled Goldfish cards and buttons.

“We have many adventures like Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott,” the boys report. “Today we went into a spooky barn. A man was walking around in the barn and heard us. He was so scared he ran away. We play that we are Juvenile Jupiter Detectives.”

“At our school,” writes Freckled Goldfish Robert Rolley, 2906 58th Ave., Oakland, California, “we have a small paper and I had a whole page last time. The page was for Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy. The next time I’m going to have a second page on which I’ll advertise your books. Please send me a description of the Andy Blake books.”

Many thanks, Bob, for your mention of the Mummy book in your school paper. I like to see boys interest their comrades in my books, for that spreads the fun.

Andy Blake is a young man. So naturally his adventures are more grown-up in character. Still, he comes in contact with a number of younger boys, particularly in Pot of Gold, which I think is one of my best books. I’m trying hard to make these stories of interest to small boys as well as older ones. Try the Pot of Gold, Bob, and see how you like it.

Roy Atkinson, 6323 N. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill., gives a very interesting account of a secret room that he and his brothers built in their home. Also a drawing accompanies the letter,

giving the location of the secret chamber.

“We once had a big store room,” writes Roy. “But a carpenter changed this so that the store room became a small closet instead. This left a lot of space behind the closet. Then along comes clever little me with a saw. Presto! In no time at all we had a secret door in one of the closet walls. And didn’t we have fun after that! Oh, baby! We kept the secret for five months. Then, my brother having left the light on in there, the secret got out. What happened to Henny Bibbler in Editor-in-Grief? And why not have a Juvenile Jupiter Detective organization? My father is night editor of the Chicago Tribune.”

x

Henny’s all right, Roy. He and Jerry often get together, but I hardly felt it was necessary to include Henny in the Grief story. And some day we may have a nation-wide Juvenile Jupiter Detective organization, as you have suggested. Other fans have made the same suggestion.

“I am twelve years old and live in St. Petersburg, Florida, at 919 9th Ave. S.,” writes Henry Baynard, who further states that he met me when I read to the St. Petersburg children one Saturday morning in the public library. “I am very fond of your books. Won’t you please, in your next book, write about the gang having fun on motor cycles? I love motor cycles, and hope some day to have one of my own. Then maybe I’ll ride up to Wisconsin to see you!”

Henry further submits an outline for such a book as he suggests. He has called his story *The Wonderful Gift*. And I wish I could publish his outline complete, for it is very interesting; and you can bet your Sunday shirt that when I next go to St. Petersburg

to spend the winter I'll look him up, and add him to my big circle of boy pals down there. Briefly, the story starts with Jerry eating cookies in his home. The telephone rings; and Jerry learns that there is a big crate for him at the freight depot. Also Poppy has a similar crate. So Jerry and Poppy head for the freight depot, fighting the Strickers on the way with rotten eggs. The crates each contain a brand new motor cycle, the gift of Art Davidson, one of the chief characters in Tittering Totem. And so the tale runs on.

But let us drop the letters temporarily and read a few poems.

POEMS

A few weeks ago I introduced a new series of books featuring dogs and other animals with Tuffy Bean, a skylarking "purp" in the leading rôle. Though written for smaller children, these books are proving very popular with the older fans. In fact, here's a poem from a twelve-year-old Freckled Goldfish, Tom Mingey, 44 Fairview Ave., Lansdowne, Pa., in which special tribute is paid to Tuffy.

xi

Tribute to Tuffy

Can't anybody give Tuffy a break?

It's time he got it, too.

What do you think of his books?

Be like me and say he's "true-blue."

You don't hear much about Tuffy,
It's all Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott.
Give the little dog his due
And write about him a lot.

Tuffy Bean certainly is swell,
The way he catches those crooks.
And believe me, fellows, more than me will say,
"Thar's fun in them thar books."

Thanks, Tom. For years I've been wanting to write a series of books about a dog. I've always had dogs around me, and having given them and their kind a great deal of study, I felt that I could create dog stories of considerable interest. And now the new series has been launched, with three initial titles, Tuffy Bean's Puppy Days, Tuffy Bean's One-Ring Circus and Tuffy Bean at Funny-Bone Farm. These will be followed shortly by Tuffy Bean and the Lost Fortune, and then Tuffy Bean's Hunting Days. While Tuffy is the chief character, and tells the story himself, in the same manner that Jerry Todd tells his stories, the new books are full of interesting characters, including Tuffy's masters, his friends and the boys and girls with whom he comes in contact. These are stories of children and adults, told from a dog's viewpoint, and some splendid humor develops. I really feel that these new books are the best thing I have done. So, as I say, Tom, I'm very grateful to you for your tribute to Tuffy. He's my "baby." And I love him dearly.

Having mailed Tom an autographed copy of this book, another will be wrapped up for Freckled Goldfish Fred Haubold, 1816

N. Karlov, Chicago, Ill., who displays his poetical talents as follows:

Seven-League Stilts

Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd
Were good friends, though sort of odd.
Poppy was an advertiser;
Jerry was his chief adviser.

“Into the stilt business we will go,”
Said Poppy, with a kind of show.
“Our stilts will be a big surprise
For business men who advertise.”

Jerry said: “You must be crazy.”
But Poppy said: “Oh, don’t be lazy.
This afternoon we’ll get an order,
Even though we must go to the border.”

Then to Ashton they did go,
Their wonderful stilts to merchants to show.
They went to the store of Heckleberry,
Who had a nose as red as a cherry.

Poppy explained he had a trade booster,
But Heckleberry got red as a rooster.
He ordered them to get out quick,
Or else he’d chase ’em with a stick.

Then they went over to Mr. Kelly,

Who looked as though he liked jelly.
He greeted them with a kindly smile,
And listened to them all the while.

Poppy spilled his selling lingo,
And Jerry's eyes almost went bingo.
Mr. Kelly said: "That's fine!
Bring the stilts to-morrow at nine."

Uncle Donner went to the cemetery,
His only will (they thought) to bury.
If you want to find out if Crook Donner wilts,
Read "Poppy Ott's Seven-League Stilts."

Well, well, well! And here's another poem about Tuffy.
Evidently the "gang" likes him as well as I do. And by the way,
did you know that Bert Salg has drawn almost thirty pictures
for each of these new books? Pictures in each chapter! And
what pictures! But let's get to this poem, written by Walter
Frisbie, Jr., 188 Lawrence St., New Haven, Conn.

Tuffy's Golden Dream

"Oh, goodness me," said Tuffy Bean,
"What is this that I see?
It looks to me like robbers.
I wonder can it be."

"I wish it looked like dinner,"
Said little Cobby Bean.
"For if it looked like dinner

I'd be just mighty keen."

"But look!" said little Tuffy.

"They've gone up to the cave.
Now we must hide and watch them
And be very very brave.

"Now listen, Cobby, what they say,
'Tis 'open sesame!'
And look! The door comes open wide!
They've put bags in there. See?

"Now off they go way down the hill,
We'll go up quickly now.
We must get that door open,
But I don't know just how."

So then Tuffy and Cobby
Got up and went to see
If they could open up the door
By saying "sesame."

But being little puppies,
Of course they couldn't talk.
The only thing that they could do
Was just to growl and bark.

They found a rope and pulled it hard,
It opened up the door.
And there they saw big bags of gold,
All piled upon the floor.

"Let's get it quick and take it home,

The mortgage it will pay.”
“Oh, yes, let’s go,” said Cobby.
“We must go right away.”

They carried all the nuggets home,
It was hard work, not fun.
They worked and worked and never stopped
Till all the work was done.

But Mrs. Bean was not so pleased,
She wasn’t pleased at all.
There was a trick about the gold.
’Twas very tragical!

So Tuffy Bean and Cobby
Gave up their quest for gold
And lived like other little dogs,
At least so I’ve been told.

Gee-miny crickets! And here’s still another one about Tuffy,
written by Bob Allgeier, 203 Oakland Ave., Mountain Grove,
Missouri.

Tuffy

There is a dog named Tuffy Bean,
A nicer dog I ne’er have seen.
Cobby Bean is his brother,
In the cave they nearly smother
When Bouncing Bella released her stink,
The dogs ran out as quick as a wink,
Found a swell bottle of liniment,
And with it made the skunk repent.

That's Tuffy!

Tuffy and Cobby let out warbles
When they found the golden marbles,
Thinking they were solid gold
And for many dollars could be sold.
Old man Popover, the dirty thief!
In this book did come to grief.
Moonlit statues are in the scenery
Looking down upon the creamery
So'd Tuffy!

Our next poem was written by Bob McCaleb, Covington, Va. It's his statement that he read one of my early books in the American Boy, and he has some very pleasing things to say about my books as a whole. He collects autographed books, he tells me, so the book that is on its way to him will come in handy. Here's his poem:

xiv

I've read of a boy named Jerry Todd,
And did he make Bid Stricker hit the sod!
Oh, man!
Scoop, Red and Peg are his bosom chums,
And they don't sit around and suck their thumbs.
Oh, no!

Jerry and his pals are always on the go.
Sometimes in the Tutter canal they'll take a row,
And again when the weather is hot
With their bathing suits on in the water they'll sot.

This next poem, written by Norman Salshutz, 70 Hill St., Brooklyn, N. Y., is of a different type.

Old King Cole

Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
He washed his face in a broken bowl,
He combed his hair with a rocking chair,
Then went into the street for some fresh air.

He came in for breakfast at half-past eight,
He washed his soup and he drank his plate,
He drank his bread and he ate his milk,
And then put on his woolen cloak of silk.

He went out again at half-past ten,
Taking his umbrella and his little pen.
It started to rain cows and hogs,
And old King Cole was left in the fogs.

At last he reached home as tired as could be,
As cold as a hot-dog, as wet as a sea.
He went to lay down on his nice clean bed,
But laid himself down on the umbrella instead.

John F. Sears, 69 Grant Ave., White Plains, N. Y., is the author of the next one.

Chums

Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott
Are good detectives when they get hot.
But they are not the only ones—
There's Trigger Berg and all his chums.

I will mention them to you,

There's Tail Light, Slats and Friday, too.
Here's good advice for you and me,
Read Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree.

Accompanying the next poem is a fine long letter from
Bob Rubin, 5821 Larchwood Ave., Philadelphia, Pa. The
letter would interest you, for Bob's a clear-headed purposeful
boy. But we have space for only the poem. Here it is:

xv

The Battle of the Ages

This is the story of a battle of renown,
Which took place in the canal near Tutter town,
Between our heroes, the five pirates bold,
And the Strickers, the five's enemy of old.

The Strickers had raised from the canal, we know not how,
Something that belonged to the pirates, namely their scow,
Which four of the five used in many cases
To do many deeds and to go many places.

The fight began because the Strickers haughtily laughed
When they saw the five pirates sailing their raft,
Which they constructed to aid in lowering the enemy's
conceit
By recapturing the scow and forcing a retreat.

Our friends, who were clad in pirate attire,
Had mounted on their raft the inner tube of a tire.
This they used for their cannon, and for balls wads of clay,
While the enemy used pebbles in a heartless way.

But soon, with the majestic help of "slightly used" eggs

The Strickers were sent home with their “tails between their legs.”

Our friends, together with the scow, came unharmed from the fray.

Thus ended an exciting and eventful summer day.

Wow! I just got through reading a six-page letter. And pasted on the last page is a picture of the writer, Freckled Goldfish Harry James, 307 Brown St., Union City, N. J. It certainly is a peachy letter. Harry has traveled from California to New York, and tells me (ahem!) that nowhere in his travels has he found (ahem again!) the equal to our Jerry Todd books. Now, after that I just *had* to publish his poem. Here it is:

In a little town in Illinois
There lives six happy dandy boys,
They are the kind you like to meet,
And never show off on the street.

The first is Jerry Todd,
A fellow as fine as can be,
And though it may seem odd,
He's the one boy I'd dearly love to see.

The second is Howard Ellery,
Whose nickname is Scoop.
And when the Strickers get too fresh
He knocks them for a loop.

xvi

Then third comes Red Meyers,
Who of eating never tires.
Though he's a freckled runt with red hair,

When it comes to being loyal he's all there.

The fourth is Peg Shaw,

A boy as strong as an ox.

And it sure makes you hee-haw!

When the Strickers he does "box."

Fifth in the gang comes Rory Ringer,

From Hengland across the sea.

And 'e sure is a little 'umdinger,

For 'e's fine as 'e can be.

Now Jerry's friend is Poppy Ott,

And I'll say I sure like *him* a lot.

He's a wonderful mind, and uses it, too.

In fact there's hardly a thing he can't do.

Robert Frisch, 2608 Humboldt Ave. So., Minneapolis, Minn., tells about a school friend who dramatized *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy*. After that every boy in the room wanted to borrow the book. Here's a short poem that Robert wrote:

Jerry Todd

Jerry Todd, it is he,

Who writes those books so full of glee.

I bought the series one by one,

A lot of mystery and full of fun.

I hope Jerry will write more,

As I say, fun and mystery galore.

Use all the paper that you can

And have a copy for each little fan.

From J. R. Ferguson, Box 22, Stephenville, Texas, comes this one:

Did you ever hear of a frog that could talk?—
Or a puzzle room where ghosts would walk?
Jerry Todd had an adventure like this.
It is a book you will not want to miss.

Jerry helps a boy save an invention
And tries to solve the inventor's intention.
What is meant by ten and ten?
Why was the mill searched time and again?

Mystery, suspense, surprises and fun,
If you want it all get this one:

Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog.

And does that bring me to the bottom of my “poem” pile?
Oh, no! But I'll have to stop, going deeper into the pile
next time. In the meantime, why don't *you* get busy and write a
poem. If you strike an original theme your poem will go on the
top of the pile. And your reward will be an autographed copy
of the book in which the poem appears.

xvii

PICTURES

First, before I tell you something about the many pictures that
now come to hand, I want to tell you what Grosset & Dunlap

told me. It was to promise boys and girls, who sent me pictures of themselves, that they'd get one of my pictures in return. This was handled in New York. Now we learn that in many cases we sent pictures to fans who already had pictures—that naturally would happen with me handling some of the mail here and the rest of it going out of New York. So I've been asked to withdraw my promise, to avoid added confusion. And that's that. I hope it won't mean that I'll get any fewer pictures. For I'm making a mammoth collection of the snapshots sent to me. My own pictures, as mentioned, are of the professional type, very large and quite expensive to handle. They cost Grosset & Dunlap a great deal more than the price asked for them. If you want one, mail ten cents in stamps to Leo Edwards' Secretary, Grosset & Dunlap, 1140 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Right on the top of the pile (and believe me it *is* a pile!) is the picture of a boy in white ducks standing beside an airplane. This is Richard Steinlage, 2550 North Grand Blvd., St. Louis, Mo. Like so many other boys Dick aspires to become a pilot—and here's hoping that his ambitions are realized. He's much enthused over the new Tuffy Bean books—in fact he sent me a poem built around Tuffy. But I couldn't possibly find room for it.

Oh, boy! Here's another bird all lit up in white ducks. "Red" Claude Helwig is the name, and the address (write it down, girls, for he's mighty good looking) is 121 Moneta Way, San Francisco, Calif.

Next comes Kenneth Dorman, shown with a big "A" on his sweater. Durham Road, Bronxville, N. Y., is the address. Thanks, Ken. I bet you had a swell time up in Nova Scotia.

And what's going on here? Five boys, playing marbles; then, in another picture, two boys, and in a third picture a swarm of pigeons—or do pigeons come in herds? I see by the accompanying letter that the pictures were sent in by John McCaslin, 138 Payne St., Riverside, N. J. John thinks I ought to supply Jerry with a dog—which reminds me that I partly promised my young readers that there would be a dog in this story. But I couldn't bring him in, having nothing for him to do. I'm hoping though that I can give Jerry a dog very soon. In the meantime I have the new Tuffy Bean books for young dog lovers. John has a Goldfish club. That, I take it, explains the group picture. And what a funny look John has on his face in the other picture. I bet he's a swell little guy, all right.

John Tree of 61 Porterfield Place, Freemont, N. Y., sends two pictures of himself. And here again the white ducks have been brought out for the occasion. After that comes a beach picture of Victor C. Clark, 747 East Polk St., Phoenix, Arizona. In the background is Saltan Sea, Imperial Valley, Calif. And what's this? Another poem! Well, I certainly can't pass up this one.

A Boost for Jerry Todd

The books that Leo Edwards writes
 Are best for girls and boys,
 Be it Ott, Todd, Berg or Blake—
 It'll add much to your joys.

Of all the books I've ever read,
 Old Jerry takes the cake.
 All books, put side of his,
 Should be dumped in the lake.

I liked the Whispering Mummy,
That was one spooky tale,
And if you want a real good book
You'll find that it's on sale.

And then there comes the Cat book
In which the felines rest.
To get the cats out of the way
The gang sure did its best.

The Treasure of Oak Island
Is equally as funny.
And once the old clay scow was fixed
The boys sure earned the money.

The spooky prowling peril
In the tale of the Waltzing Hen—
Another peachy story
From Leo Edwards' pen.

I could tell of these swell stories
Forever and a day.
Just read one of the Jerry Todds—
It's proof of what I say.

A way to spend your money
That's really swell and nifty
Is, buy a book of Jerry Todd—
A very-well-spent fifty.

Getting back to the pictures, I have two here of Frank Thompson, 172 West St., New Haven, Conn. In the first picture Frank is shown with his father, sister Mary and dog

Rex. With him in the second picture are his mother, older brother and little sister. Here too is a poem, but not quite good enough for publication. Better luck next time, Frank. The drawing of the storekeeper who sells you your books is good.

Next we have a picture of a small Goldfish club. The organizer. Bill Ward, is shown in the middle—he sure wrote a swell letter. With him are Peter Cody (R.F.) and Champ Landgren (L.F.). Then comes a picture of George Prestwich, Jr., 104 Strawbridge Ave., Westmont, N. J. And after that a picture of a boy with glasses—it's George Sanford, 185 Hillside Ave., Hartford, Conn., who, like so many other fans, urges me to supply Jerry with a dog. Believe it or not there's about 168,942 words in George's letter—but I read it all and enjoyed every word of it. Here's a real boy—plays tricks on Hallowe'en, has had several “scraps,” and, to cap the climax, has had an affair of the heart. “I used to speak to her every time I got a chance,” writes George, “but she would tell me to shut up. I didn't mind that. She had blue eyes and was good looking.”

Poor Berner Kellough of 636 South 20th Ave., Maywood, Ill. His parents bought him a new suit, together with a new hat, and then made him pose for this picture. He tells me, in his letter, that, hating the hat, he threw it away. But it looks O.K. to me. With him in the picture is his pal Arthur.

I wish I had space to tell you about more of the pictures that I have here. But I've simply got to leave space for the usual club announcements. So the rest of the pictures will have to carry over till another Chatter-Box is in formation.

MUSICAL BEDBUGS

When you have read Jerry's story about the odd floating island that he and Sinbad visited you'll probably wonder what became of the musical bedbugs. I'm wondering myself! Did Sinbad grab a bottle of these marvelous bedbugs just before the island sank? If so, what became of the bedbugs? There's a riddle for you. And I'm going to put up ten autographed books for the ten best answers. Mark your letter Bedbug Contest and specify the particular book that you want; otherwise you'll receive a copy of the book in which your name appears as a prize winner.

SCHOOL CLUB

Do you belong to this club? It's easy to become a member. All you have to do is to take one of my books to school, induce he teacher to read it aloud or let you read it aloud, reporting the matter to me, after which your name will be included in the club file. This club has nothing to do with the big Freckled Goldfish club.

The names of all members were published in the "Chatter-Box" in Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig. Also the names of the prize winners were published. Here's the general plan: At the end of the first year the names of all club members were put "into the hat" and ten names drawn. Each of these ten boys and girls received an autographed copy of

Sacred Pig. At the end of the second year twenty names will be drawn, omitting the names of the earlier prize winners, and at the end of the third year thirty names will be drawn. Here is a fine chance for you to secure a free autographed book. And not only that, but if you take one of your Todd, Ott, Berg, Blake or Bean books to school, and it is read aloud, you'll provide fun for the whole room. That's something to think about.

"I had my teacher read one of your books to the class," reports Margaret Mary Howard, 601 S. Windsor Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif., "and the scholars liked the story so well that the teacher now reads your books entirely."

"I am a boy twelve years old and have read many of your books," reports Neal Schenet, 16 S. Chapel St., Elgin, Ill.

"When I am gloomy I pick up one of your books and—presto!—there is no more gloom. I just got Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake yesterday. My teacher is going to read it to my grade."

"My teacher read Editor-in-Grief to the class and, boy, did the kids laugh," reports Billy Howard, 200 Prospect St., Westfield, N. J. "Now the kids all want to borrow my Oak Island Treasure book."

"My teacher is now reading Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps," reports Patrick Perry, 719 W. Hull St., Denison, Texas. "To-day she read the part where Charley Robin tells Trigger and his gang about the lumber camp."

"I wish to enroll as a member in your School club," writes George Sentman, 4125 5th Ave., Moline, Ill. "I had a book report on Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief. The kids liked it so well

that they insisted on having the teacher read it. So I brought it to school. The kids got so crazy over the book that they asked the teacher to read it at recess. And she got so interested in the book herself that she actually did let them stay in at recess while she read to them! The kids bellowed so loud that the principal came tearing in to see what was going on. She too got interested in the book.”

This next letter isn’t from a club member, but it shows what happens when a good fan does take a book to school.

xxi

“I first found out about your interesting books,” writes M. Vincent Brockschmidt, Jr., 1039 Wells St., Cincinnati, Ohio, “when a friend of mine brought Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot to school to read to the class. Now I have ten Ott and Todd books.”

“This is to inform you,” reports Burt Cherney, 1234 N. 16th St., Philadelphia, Pa., “that I have fulfilled the requirements of the School club so put my name down on that list of yours. Here’s hoping that I’m one of the lucky ones to get an autographed book.”

“My teacher has read two of your books to the class,” reports Carroll Metzner, 233 Frank Ave., Racine, Wis. “I have all of the Todd, Ott, Berg and Blake books and almost all of the boys in the neighborhood have read them.”

“A month ago,” reports John Dillon, 156 Broad St., San Francisco, Calif., “a boy lent me a book named Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish. I enjoyed it very much and went to see

if my favorite book store had it—they had, and now I have all the Ott and Todd books. As soon as another one comes out I will run and get it. I also enjoy your Andy Blake and Trigger Berg books. I read in the books of your Freckled Goldfish club, which I am joining, and also I have the neighborhood boys interested in starting a branch club. I asked my teacher if I could start a club in the class and she said it was all right. So I asked her to read a Poppy Ott book to us and she read Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot.”

“I was tickled pink,” reports Nyman Tripp, Kibbie, Michigan, “when I received my Freckled Goldfish card and button. Our teacher read one of your books to us. It was the Stuttering Parrot book. Having read the Whispering Mummy book I wanted to organize a Juvenile Jupiter Detective club in Kibbie. But we didn’t have any mysteries to solve so we didn’t have any club. I’m going to organize a Freckled Goldfish club, having gotten two members already.”

“I took a Jerry Todd book to school and asked the teacher if she would read it aloud to the class. She said she would. The first book that she is going to read is Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog.” Thus reports Freckled Goldfish Charles Egner, 228 Main St., Emaus, Pa.

“After reading Editor-in-Grief,” reports Corinne Hayes, 306 Blackstone Ct., Sioux Falls, S. D., “I took the book to school and had my teacher read it to the class.”

xxii

So much for the School club. You see what the other fans are doing. So why don’t you take one of your favorite books to school and have it read aloud, thus entitling you to membership

in this club?

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

It may surprise you to learn that we have upwards of 10,000 members in our Freckled Goldfish club. In fact, by the time this book is published we may have close to 12,000 members. Yes, sir, our Goldfish club is something to talk about! On top of the general membership we have several hundred branch clubs, all of which are providing boys and girls with added fun. I have attended meetings of such clubs, and I want to tell you that the young organizers of these clubs know their stuff. A boy or girl who can get up a club like that, and make a success of it, is a real leader. And if you want to be a leader, here's your chance to show what you can do.

Poppy Ott started the club. He and Jerry had a similar club in their book, Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish. Even before the book was published informed young letter pals of mine were asking me if they could get up branch clubs. That gave me an idea. Why not organize a national club, calling it the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish, taking in members from coast to coast? "Fine!" said my publisher, when I presented the idea. So membership cards designed by Bert Salg were prepared, and soon the requests for membership began to roll in. Members then wanted pins. Which we provided. Then we published a little booklet, called a ritual, to help boys and girls who want to organize branch clubs.

To join the club simply observe the following rules:

- (1) Print your name plainly.
- (2) Supply your complete printed address.
- (3) Give your age.
- (4) Enclose two two-cent United States Postage stamps.
- (5) Address your letter to

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

Remember that each new member receives a unique membership card designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books. Containing a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish, together with our secret rules (the picture and the rules are printed on the card), each card also bears my own personal autograph. Also each member receives a club pin, thus distinguishing him as a Freckled Goldfish.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

As I say, many initial members wanted to organize branch clubs. Permission was granted in each case. And now we have a printed ritual which any boy who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be

without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given, word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a chapter. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps). Address all orders to Leo Edwards, Cambridge, Wisconsin.

CLUB NEWS

"I'm glad you enjoyed attending the meeting of our club," writes Betty Henszey, Oconomowoc, Wis. "The next morning at school a bunch of kids almost wrecked me for not telling them you were coming. They were at the high school for manual training, but would have come down in time to meet you if they had known about it."

"Our club is coming fine," reports Gold Fin Tom Lincoln, Bentonville, Arkansas. "We've had one regular meeting and one initiation. We don't want a big club. Six or seven members

will be enough.”

“As soon as I get my membership card,” reports Glen Whitaker, 4105 College Ave., Kansas City, Mo., “I am going to organize a branch club. I have three members including myself. The meetings, except initiations, will be held under our roomy back porch. The initiations will take place in the basement. I’m wild over your books.”

“I was recently made a member of the Freckled Goldfish club,” reports Edward Bennett, 12 McKinley St., Bronxville, N. Y. “It certainly is a dandy club. Now I’m sending stamps for a ritual so that I can organize a local club.”

“I’m writing to let you know how our chapter is getting along,” reports Charles Klein, 1931 East 29th St., Brooklyn, N. Y. “It’s working out swell. Instead of appointing myself Gold Fin I got the members together and then let them vote. In that way I was elected Gold Fin and Clem Carey Silver Fin. We have no Freckle Fin because we have only five members. However, we have a fine time. Seeing that we have no regular place like a barn or something like that for a club house each member gives a meeting at his home one night a week.”

xxiv

“I am the ‘Red’ in our gang,” reports Ralph Combs, Jr., 6254 Magnolia Ave., St. Louis, Mo. “For our club headquarters we use an old chicken house that was nicely cleaned out. We have four members so far. I have a dog named Pat and would like to know if he can be the mascot of the club.”

Sure thing, Ralph. I think that Pat will make a swell mascot.

“It has been a long time since I wrote to you, and plenty has happened since then,” reports Gold Fin Bob Halligan, 9201 107th Ave., Ozone Park, L. I., N. Y. “The first thing of importance was our second Hallowe’en party, one of the tickets of which is enclosed. I did all the printing at school. Not bad, eh? We took in five dollars, one of which was spent for prizes. Arguments frequently arose at our club meetings regarding who had and had not paid dues. So I printed a ‘due’ slip, and now we have no more arguments, as the slip of each member shows his standing. We now have seventeen dollars in the treasury. Not bad, considering that we spend something every week for refreshments.”

“We have started our club and hold our meetings in my room,” reports Everett Maloney, 119 E. 78th St., New York, N. Y. “On meeting nights I move everything out of the room except my bed, then we hang sheets on the walls and pull down the blinds, turning on a few lights which are all inside white sheets.”

Which will conclude our “Chatter-Box” for this time. But others will be coming along shortly. So, if you want to be represented, the thing to do is to write to me *right away*.

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I <u>The Intended Ghost Hunt</u>	1
II <u>Added Preparations</u>	11
III <u>In the House of Mystery</u>	23
IV <u>A Night of Surprises</u>	35
V <u>The Silver Skull</u>	47
VI <u>Green Handles and Blue Handles</u>	61
VII <u>The Singing Tree</u>	75
VIII <u>On the Enemy's Trail</u>	90
IX <u>The King of the Island</u>	104
X <u>Caveman Stuff</u>	114
XI <u>The Meeting of the Great</u>	129
XII <u>In the King's Court</u>	144
XIII <u>An Intensive Search</u>	157
XIV <u>The King Goes Hunting</u>	171
XV <u>Hidden Eyes</u>	183
XVI <u>A Strange Disappearance</u>	203
XVII <u>The Wooden Cow</u>	215
XVIII <u>Stinging Taunts</u>	228
XIX <u>Into the Earth</u>	240
XX <u>The Skull's Secret</u>	249

LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY

JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT

JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE

JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN

JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG

JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG

JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE

JERRY TODD, PIRATE

JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT

JERRY TODD, EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

POPPY OTT AND THE STUTTERING PARROT

POPPY OTT'S SEVEN-LEAGUE STILTS

POPPY OTT AND THE GALLOPING SNAIL

POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES

POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH

POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM

POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE

THE TRIGGER BERG SERIES

TRIGGER BERG AND THE TREASURE TREE

TRIGGER BERG AND HIS 700 MOUSE TRAPS

TRIGGER BERG AND THE SACRED PIG

THE ANDY BLAKE SERIES

ANDY BLAKE

ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER

ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE

ANDY BLAKE AND THE POT OF GOLD

THE TUFFY BEAN SERIES

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS

TUFFY BEAN'S ONE-RING CIRCUS

TUFFY BEAN AT FUNNY-BONE FARM

JERRY TODD, CAVEMAN

CHAPTER I THE INTENDED GHOST HUNT

It was a sunny summer's day. Just the right kind of a day for a swim. So I lit out for Red Meyers' house, intending to go from there to our new swimming hole on the edge of town. Oddly though Red's house was closed. And the same was true of little Rory Ringer's house in the same block.

Red and Rory are members of my lively gang. I've known Red all my life. When we were smaller we used to pitch rotten apples at each other over the back-yard fence. And never will I forget the day that he socked me with a pumpkin. Sweet essence of sauerkraut! But he got the worst of it in the end. For his ma had bought the big pumpkin for a Hallowe'en party. And what she did to the freckled family nest-egg when she found the wreckage of her prized party decoration in the gutter was nobody's business.

Like me, Red was born in Tutter, Illinois, which, I might add, is the swellest small town in the whole United States. My dad owns a brickyard while his dad, who has a glass eye and a Ford, runs a motion-picture theatre. The brickyard was started years ago by my Grandfather Todd, who, after the Civil

War, came back to Tutter with a medal, a peg-leg and a big ambition to organize a business of his own. Some day, I suppose, I'll be a brick maker like Dad, who learned the business from his father. But I'm too busy right now having a good time to think about future brick making. Still it will be fun when I do get to be a regular brick maker. For I have a swell dad. And I know that I'm going to enjoy working with him.

I might add, too, that I have a swell ma. And can she fry liver and onions! Um-yum-yum! The mere reference to it makes my mouth water. Loving her, I frequently wipe dishes for her. And often I make my own bed.

Red though, whose temper is as fiery as his hair, never made up a bed in his whole life. And if he were to offer his services with a dish towel I dare say his ma would faint. To hear her tell it he's the laziest boy in town. All he does, she says, in her fat puffing way, is to eat and track in mud.

A warm friend of Mother's, she often pops into our house to get the latest news. It's fun to listen to her. For she wheezes and squeaks even worse than her fat widowed sister, Mrs. Pansy Biggle, who runs a beauty parlor on School Street.

If you have read my book about the "Stuttering Parrot" you'll remember Aunt Pansy. Having lost her husband, who fell into the Illinois River and forgot to come up for air, she now lives at Red's house where she divides her time (so he says) between her beautifying business and bossing him around. It was her goofy parrot that caused us so much grief. I thought of the simple-acting parrot as I cut across the lawn to Rory's house. Little did I dream though, as I tripped over a

croquet arch, that I was soon to be messed up with the parrot in another wild adventure involving a blind ghost, a silver skull and, most amazing of all, an animated wooden cow.

As a matter of fact the parrot had already disappeared, and with it Cap'n Tinkertop's ring-tailed monkey, as I was to learn, with mounting surprise, later on.

Rory Ringer is the funniest kid that I ever listened to. Raised in England, he calls owls "howls" and hawks "awks." At school he keeps the reading class in an uproar. For you can readily imagine how such tangled-up pronunciations as "howls" and "awks" would be received by a bunch of lively American schoolboys. "Rory Ringer, the 'ick from the hupper hend of Hengland where the blasted bloomin' 'unters make 'atchet 'andles hout of bloody hoak." That's the kind of stuff we hung on him when he first came to town. But he didn't mind it, jolly little wart that he was. And now, as I say, he's one of my bosom pals. 4

Other members of my gang are Scoop Ellery, the leader, and big Peg Shaw. Also I have a chum by the name of Poppy Ott, around whom I have written a separate set of books. Good old Poppy! He and I have had piles of fun together. We've solved a number of odd mysteries, too, involving "Prancing Pancakes," "Gallopings Snails" and "Tittering Totems." Yes, sir, Poppy is a swell guy. And as smart as a whip. With his help I dare say that we would have solved the new mystery of the silver skull and singing tree a whole lot quicker than we did. But he couldn't help us, as I learned later on, for he was out of town.

Puzzled by my discoveries at Red's and Rory's homes, both of

which had the outward appearance of having been temporarily abandoned, I lit out for Scoop's house on Elm Street.

"Where's the 'atchet-'andle guy from the hupper hend of Hengland and his big-mouthed confederate?" I inquired, as I tumbled into the wood shed.

The leader, I then observed, as I coughed up a bug, was fooling around with a pair of old football shoes to the soles of which he had glued felt pads.

"I'm going ghost hunting," he explained, when I dismissed Red and Rory from my mind and started asking other natural questions.

5

"Ghost hunting!" Still, I told myself, as I curiously inspected one of the padded shoes, it was like Scoop, fun-loving, happy-go-lucky kid that he was, to think up a scheme like that.

He makes a swell leader. For he has a lot of peachy ideas. Which isn't saying though that all of his schemes work. Suffering cats! If you must know the truth of the matter he's gotten us into hot water more than once. But that's all right. Even Napoleon, capable leader that he was, made a few mistakes, as history admits.

Scoop then brought out another pair of padded shoes.

"They're for you, Jerry Todd," he said, handing them to me.

"And what am I supposed to do?" I cheerfully fell in with his crazy notion. "Hang to the ghost by the seat of its pants while you carve your initials on its windpipe?"

“This is a blind ghost,” he spoke gravely.

I thought, of course, that he was putting on. For he’s full of truck like that. Anyway, as everybody knows, there’s no such thing as a real ghost, blind or otherwise. So a dickey-bird hunt would have been less nonsensical. Still, I told myself, as I studied his sober face, he had something up his sleeve.

I was curious now.

6

“Is there a new ghost in the neighborhood?” I began to quizz him.

He nodded.

“Where does it hang out?” I further inquired, with mounting curiosity.

“In the old Grendow place.”

“Br-r-r-r!” I shivered, as I balanced myself on a stick of stove wood. “Don’t tell me that it’s the ghost of old Adam Grendow himself.”

It takes a lot of queer people to make a world. And if what I have heard about old Adam Grendow is true he undoubtedly was one of the queerest men that ever lived. An Englishman, like Rory, he had built himself a big rambling house on the edge of town. And there he had lived for years. Strange men frequented his place. But it was noticeable that the unknown visitors came at night. The neighbors wondered at this. And they further wondered, with mounting uneasiness, at the roving lights in the big house. Why, they asked among themselves in

awed whispers, did the odd master of the secluded place go nightly from the basement to the attic with a lamp in his hands? And what was the meaning of the eerie metallic sounds that occasionally reached the outside world through the open doors and windows?

Small wonder indeed that strange stories grew up about the stoop-shouldered, eagle-eyed master of Grendow Hall, as the place was called in true English custom. Some said he was an inventor of firearms, still in the employ of the English war department. His nightly callers were government agents. Other people in the neighborhood, of more imaginative turn of mind, declared that he was a wizard. His callers, they said, with frightened faces, were spirits from another world.

7

Not until he was killed in a motor-boat accident, following a wild midnight dash to Ashton, the county seat, was it learned that his only son was a notorious English counterfeiter. Caught in this country he was taken in hand by federal agents shortly after his father's tragic death. Though still in his early twenties he was conceded to be one of the cleverest engravers in the world. And great indeed was the relief of the agents concerned when the federal prison doors closed behind him.

All this I had heard from Dad. And I had heard, too, that for years the federal agents had tried to round up the prisoner's European accomplices. But no added arrests were made. Nor were any of the counterfeiting dies or coin presses ever confiscated.

The arrest that followed old Mr. Grendow's tragic death started whispers that he, too, had been engaged in the

8

manufacture and distribution of counterfeit money. This, the excited neighbors declared, fully explained the old man's odd nightly activities. His secret visitors, much less than being government agents or spirits, were merely confederates. It was learned though that these men were jug buyers. Instead of being rich, as the neighbors suspected, old Adam Grendow had to make jugs, like his father before him, to earn a living.

People had wondered why the Englishman had built his house over a clay deposit. But now they knew the truth of the matter. A search of the house, following its owner's accidental death, revealed a secret tunnel, through which the needed clay had been brought into the basement. Here, too, were many odd home-made pottery wheels. And a further search of the attic disclosed an immense stock of completed jugs.

Thus was the mystery of the roving lights cleared up.

The discovery of the machinery and completed jugs furnished material for much added excited talk among the neighbors. And it was known, too, that the federal agents had closed the place with definite disappointment. All efforts of theirs to connect the old jug maker's activities with those of his misguided son had failed. Nor did the officials succeed in gaining any incriminating admissions from the prisoner himself, either before or after his hastened trial.

Considering the fact that Grendow Hall had been closed for years, it isn't surprising that I stared at Scoop when I learned, as recorded, that he had been hanging around there on the sly. For it was still believed by the uneasy neighbors that the sinister unfrequented place, now sadly in need of repairs,

still held strange brooding secrets. For instance, what had become of the jug buyers? Why had they never come back? And why had the old man worked secretly?

Was it pride? Did he want his neighbors to think that he was a landed gentleman, like others of his kind across the Atlantic? Many of the neighbors thought so. Yet others, confident that the mystery had been only partially cleared up, still awaited exciting developments.

Well, the humorous thought now shoved itself at me, as I further balanced myself on the stick of stove wood, if Scoop had taken the mystery in hand, capable leader that he was for the most part, there undoubtedly would be plenty of “developments.”

Nor was it improbable that another Juvenile Jupiter Detective by the name of Jerry Todd would find himself in hot water up to his neck.

But that was all right with me. Scoop, I saw now, wouldn't have fixed up the padded shoes if he hadn't gotten track of something. And regardless of what the consequences would be if we set forth on another mystery-solving adventure, I was ready, as the saying is, to follow in his padded footsteps to the last ditch.

10

I kind of hoped though that I wouldn't land in the ditch on my snout.

11

CHAPTER II

ADDED PREPARATIONS

Did you ever hear of the Juvenile Jupiter Detective association? We never did until an old shyster by the name of Mr. Anson Arnoldsmitth came to town and sold us memberships in his organization at a dollar and a quarter a throw. He seemed like a nice old gentleman. So we believed every word he told us, even that crazy yarn of his about the mummy itch. It was learned later though that he was an old fraud. And so far as I know there is no real Juvenile Jupiter Detective association. But that doesn't keep us from doing real detecting, as my various books prove.

So now you know why I called myself a Juvenile Jupiter Detective in the preceding chapter.

Our chief competitor in the local detecting business is Bill Hadley, the Tutter marshal. Bill almost laughed his homely head off when he learned about our new detective badges. Boy detectives! Haw! haw! haw! That, he said, in his rough way, was his idea of a big joke. But we soon proved to him that boys were just as capable of solving mysteries as men. In fact, if it hadn't been for us I dare say that the mystery of the "Whispering Mummy," in which Mr. Arnoldsmitth was criminally involved, never would have been solved.

12

Next we got mixed up with a strange "Rose-Colored Cat." Here we recovered some very valuable pearls. Then came that memorable trip to Oak Island, where we helped to bury and

later recover what at that time we called the “Oak Island Treasure.”

This mystery solved, we tackled the weird case of the “Waltzing Hen.” Who was the strange yellow man who died so mysteriously in the Tutter hotel? A believer in transmigration, had he indeed turned into a yellow cat? And why did the odd brown hen waltz? We found out! Next we helped young Tom Ricks save his father’s invention, a “Talking Frog,” from thieving hands. Here is where we had our first experience with a “ghost.” Nor did any of us at the time, as we crouched breathlessly behind barred doors, suspect for a moment that the eerie gliding visitor on the outer porch wasn’t a sure-enough ghost. Gosh! From what we saw of it through the keyhole it sure looked ghostly enough to satisfy anybody. And even worse for me, it caught me outside of the house and ran me ragged.

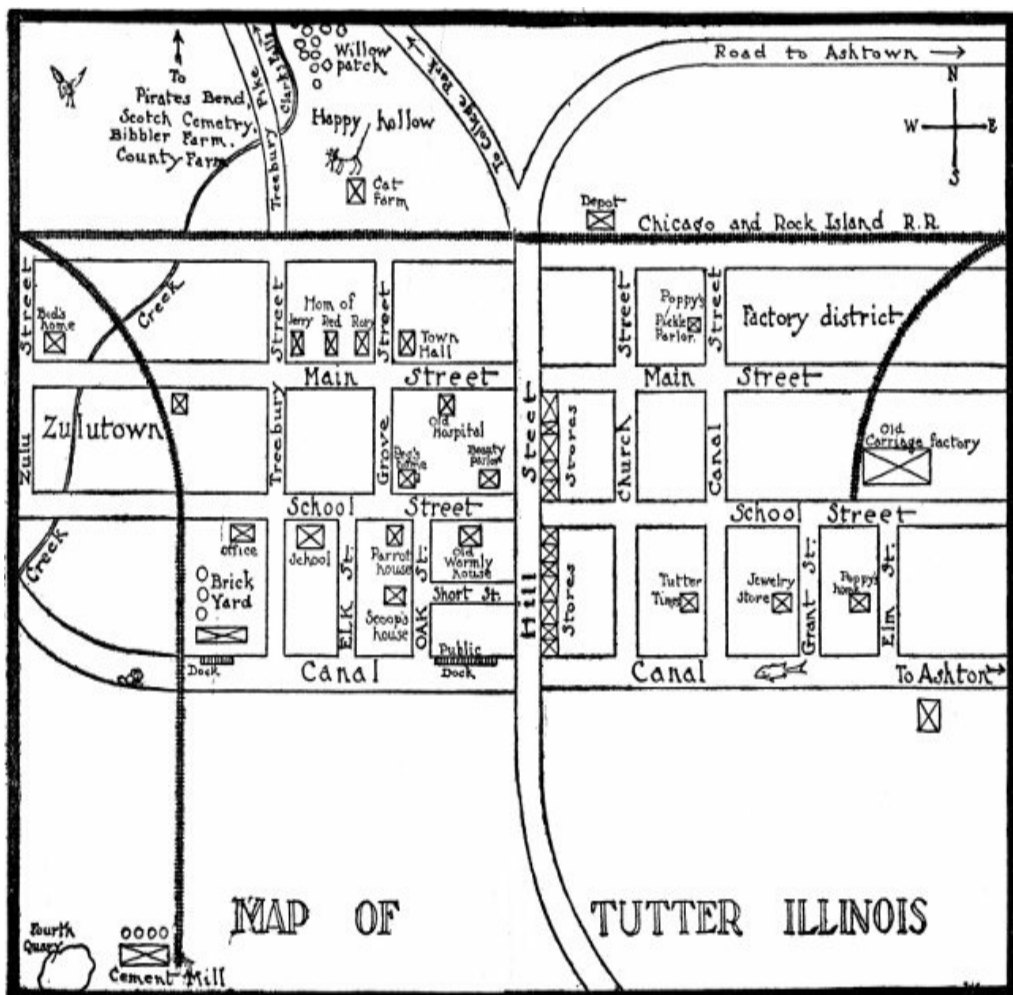
Then came the more nonsensical mystery of the million-dollar “Purring Egg,” with its bewildering hilarious tangles and final astounding surprises, and after that the strange case of the man with the sleeping toe. We found him living in a “Whispering Cave.” This case took us back to Oak Island, where the treasure that I have mentioned had been earlier buried and recovered.

13

Having solved the “Sleeping Toe” mystery, it was time, Scoop said, for a vacation. So he and I, together with Red and Peg, set out on a camping trip. Stopping overnight at an old abandoned tavern called The King’s Silver we learned things from a strange persecuted boy that literally raised the hair on our heads. It was in this same old tavern, with its queer hidden secrets dating back to colonial days, that we found the pirate

clothes used so effectively in our later sea battle with the enemy. To feel more like real pirates we gave ourselves pirate names such as Buzzard Bill the bloody butcher of the bounding billows (that was me), Wall-eyed Willy the wicked weasel of the wharves (that was Red), Hack-'em-up Hank the howling horror of the horizon (that was Scoop), and Cap'n Kidd (who was Peg). Talk about *fun*! Our “cannon” was a big sling-shot mounted in the middle of a raft. And for ammunition we used rotten eggs rolled in clay.

More recently we had solved the mystery of the “Bob-Tailed Elephant,” a case that had baffled detectives for months. Can you imagine a boy disappearing into thin air? Well, that’s what happened to Henny Bibbler. Even more astounding, the same thing happened to Red’s elephant.



MAP OF TUTTER ILLINOIS

Here again we proved our ability. But what a mess we got into when we tried publishing a newspaper. Suffering cats! Having survived this case, with its tangles and complications, I've made up my mind never to be a newspaper editor. Detecting is much safer. Still we had a lot of fun. And better still we were privileged to help an old man in distress, for which we had been promised a motor boat by his wealthy sister.

Peg, I might say here, is bigger than the rest of us. He eats more, I guess. Anyway he's a head taller than Scoop and I. Of the same age, we're all in the same grade at school, even Red and Rory, who share the distinction of being the smallest members of my gang.

But don't get the idea that they're any the less effective because of their abbreviated size. Red has gab enough for a giant. As for Rory, when once aroused he can fight wildcats. That's why we're considered the town's chief gang, having licked Bid Stricker's gang many times.

Bid lives in Zulutown, which is the name that the Tutter people have for the tough west-side section beyond Dad's brickyard. Chief in the opposing gang are Jimmy Stricker, Bid's cousin, and the two Mildens brothers, Chet and Hib. The concluding member, all Zuluites, is Jim Prater, whose mouth is so big that he has to put clothespins on it to keep from turning inside-out when he yawns. A crummy outfit, if you were to ask me. Jealous of us, because we're the smartest and have the best ideas, they like nothing better than to smash up our stuff. So don't be surprised if they show up later on in my story.

17

Scoop told me then, as we further fooled around in the wood shed, about a native south-sea islander, who, though blind, could detect the approach of enemies a rod away. Nature, in depriving him of his eyesight, had given him this added hearing. It was all a part of a book, Scoop said.

"But what's that got to do with padded shoes!" I inquired.

"As I told you," the leader resumed, "the ghost that we're going

to hunt to-night is blind. Very probably it, too, has double hearing. So if we expect to creep up on it and capture it the less noise we make the better.”

“I can’t go,” I spoke quickly.

“And why not?” came the disappointed inquiry.

“I’ve got to stay at home,” I grinned, “and teach the cat how to purr.”

“Whose cat?”

“Mine, of course.”

Scoop gave a funny little laugh.

“Then you haven’t heard?” he inquired.

“Heard what?” I countered.

18

“About Red and Rory. They left town this afternoon in a big rowboat with your cat, Red’s aunt’s parrot, Cap’n Tinkertop’s monkey, Peg’s dog and Mrs. Maloney’s goat.”

It was Scoop’s further story that Red and Rory were going to live in a cave, having gotten the idea from a book called The Flint Worker. And now undoubtedly they were halfway to Oak Island.



RED AND RORY WERE GOING TO LIVE IN A CAVE.

Gosh! This latest stunt of Red's was about the craziest thing that I ever had heard tell of. And for the life of me I couldn't comprehend why he had lugged along a boat load of dogs and cats, unless it was that he intended to roast them over an open fire in true caveman style. But the chances were, I saw, that he and Rory, who follows wherever Red leads, would have a peck of fun. And I suddenly wished that they had taken me along. For Oak Island, with its caves and hollows, is a darb of a place.

"If you must know the truth of the matter," Scoop then told me, when I freely expressed my feelings to him, "I really think that Red expects us to follow him. And we may in a few days. But we can't go now. For we've got a job on our hands."

"Tell me the truth," I sought his eyes. "Are you really going to hunt ghosts to-night?"

"Sure thing," he grinned. "And you're going with me."

19

"How about Peg?" I further inquired.

"It's only a small ghost," I was told. "So I think that the two of us can handle it without difficulty."

"How do you know it's small?"

"Because I saw it last night."

"In Grendow Hall?"

“Sure thing. It was sliding down the banister of the main staircase.”

Huh! As though I *would* believe that.

“And what were you doing?” I stiffened. “Playing leapfrog in the parlor?”

That brought a laugh.

“Didn’t you know Jerry, that the Strickers locked me in the old house yesterday afternoon?”

I shook my head.

“They caught me at the new swimming hole. Bid, it seems, had earlier seen lights in the old house. He thought it was ghosts prowling around. So to scare me he dumped me through a kitchen window. Worst of all he hid my clothes. So I had to stay there till dark. And it was then that I saw the blind kid.”

I heaved a sigh.

“Then it wasn’t a real ghost after all?” I spoke with relief.

“I thought it was a ghost at the start. But I changed my mind when it started sliding down the banister. No real ghost, I told myself sensibly, would do that. Besides I could tell from the slider’s actions that he was blind. Then, to my surprise, he disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. One minute he was standing at the head of the stairs, having suspected, I guess, that hidden eyes were watching him. And in the next minute he was gone. So I’m not so sure that he wasn’t a ghost

after all.”

“Boloney!” I scoffed.

A reflective look crossed Scoop’s face.

“Was there ever a little boy in the family, Jerry?”

“Not that I know of.”

“I wonder who he is,” came the added reflective remark.

“Probably some tramp,” I suggested.

“But why is he hiding there? And where did he come from?”

“You should have questioned him before he disappeared.”

“That’s a queer house, Jerry,” Scoop went on. “It has a queer history. And while it’s possible, as you say, that the kid is an ordinary tramp, I can’t shake off the feeling that he in some way is connected with the place. In any event it strikes me that it’s our duty as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives to investigate the matter. If he *is* a tramp the owner of the place ought to be notified. And if he belongs there, through some family connection, it will be interesting to find out why he’s there. It may be a case of buried treasure, Jerry, put there in some out-of-the-way place by the original owner. Think of that! Oh, baby! I can hardly wait till to-night.”

“Let’s go now,” I suggested, with similar eagerness.

“No,” the leader shook his head. “It will be best to creep up on

him in the dark. And with these shoes,” he indicated, “we can do it, too.”

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that he was goofy. For I could see no sense in wearing padded shoes. That was pure monkey-work. But he knew his stuff. So I decided to keep shut. Anyway it would be fun to pretend that the padded shoes were necessary.

We talked further about the old house, speculating on its probable secrets and wondering why the dead jug-maker’s relatives never had attempted to utilize or dispose of the property. And there were the jugs in the attic. They were worth considerable money, Scoop said. So the wonder was that tramps hadn’t appeared before this to steal them.

The more gab that we passed back and forth the more excited we became. Blind kids, we agreed, weren’t in the habit of running around the country alone. And least of all were they likely to be found in a place like this. The kid beyond all doubt had come here or had been brought here for a definite secret purpose. And it was our grim determination as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives to find out the facts of the case.

22

After which, very probably, if our services were no longer needed in Tutter, we would head for Oak Island to pay its new cave dwellers an extended visit. I could picture Red running around in a cat-skin breechcloth, or whatever you call it, with Aunt Pansy’s parrot perched on his bare shoulder. Regular Robinson Crusoe stuff. And there was the monkey and the goat.

Gee! I could hardly wait to join in the fun.

In separating, it was agreed between Scoop and I that we were to meet at his house at eight o'clock and then head directly for Grendow Hall on the edge of town. It was in this unfrequented locality that we had dammed a small creek, thus providing ourselves with a new swimming hole. And it was through here that Red and Rory had rowed that afternoon on their way to Oak Island.

CHAPTER III

IN THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

Mother acted surprised when I came home that evening without Red.

“I thought you knew,” said she, as she bustled back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room, “that he’s going to get his meals here during his parents’ absence?”

“Where are they?” I quizzed, wondering how long it would be before she missed the cat.

“Oh, Mr. Meyers got the notion into his head that his glass eye was too small for its socket. It jiggled, he said. So he and Mrs. Meyers have gone to Peoria in their Ford to have the eye changed.”

This explained why the house was deserted. And in the further conversation I learned that Mr. and Mrs. Ringer were spending the week end in Springfield, where Mr. Ringer, a chemist, was planning to launch some kind of a new cockroach powder that he had invented. Rory had been told to stay at home and manage the house. But instead of obeying orders he had let Red coax him away, as recorded. And now, no doubt, they were twiddling the faucets of the goat’s milk supply in preparation for their first outdoor meal.

Still, I couldn’t quite picture Red guzzling goat’s milk. For he has pink spasms every time his ma makes him

drink cow's milk. And everybody knows what a goat smells like!

Mother was all upset when she learned that her red-headed charge had temporarily separated himself from civilization. Having promised to take care of him during his parents' absence she was afraid that some dire calamity would befall him. I told her though that there was no cause for worry. Red, I said, was big enough to take care of himself. And if he found too many sand burs in the cave where he and Rory planned to set up housekeeping, they could easily put leather seats in their breechcloths.

I doubt though if Mother really knew what a breechcloth was. For she gave me a kind of dumb look. So to avoid possible complications I discreetly changed the subject.

Not until she went to supper that evening in a down-town restaurant did Aunt Pansy learn that both her red-headed nephew and her prized parrot had disappeared into the wilds of Oak Island. I heard afterwards that she fainted on top of a T-bone steak. In the confusion that followed someone turned in a fire alarm. Later they loaded her into a taxicab and brought her home, calling on Mother to take care of her. And wondering what the two would do when they learned that they both had lost pets, I lit out for Scoop's house.

"Where was the fire?" he inquired, as I tumbled into the yard where he and his kid brother were playing mumbly-peg beside a potted rubber plant.

"It wasn't a fire," I told him. "It was Aunt Pansy. Someone told

her in Mugger's restaurant that Red had eloped with her parrot. And she fainted in the gravy bowl."

"It must have been a big bowl," grinned Scoop.

"Red's having a swell time now," I nodded. "But I'd hate to be in his shoes when his aunt gets hold of him. Or his ma either, for that matter."

An advertisement in the local evening newspaper had attracted Scoop's attention.

"Read that," said he, handing me the newspaper.

I later made a copy of the advertisement. Here it is:

Lost, strayed or stolen—a small brindle donkey
answering to the name of Shoe Polish. Last seen in canal
tow-path between Haines Lock and Tutter. Reward.
Address Mrs. Antonio Carmel, R.F.D. No. 6.

"It's easy enough to figure out where the donkey disappeared to," commented Scoop, when I put the newspaper aside.

26

"But how in Sam Hill did Red get it into the rowboat?" I puzzled.

"Don't be silly. He probably rode it down the tow-path, or made it draw the loaded rowboat."

“By the time we get there,” I laughed, “he’ll have a whole menagerie in his cave.”

“Maybe,” Scoop laughed in turn, “he’s planning to cross the donkey with his aunt’s parrot and raise flying horses.”

“I bet he took the pig, too,” little Jim Ellery then spoke up.

“What pig?” Scoop stared.

“Why, I heard my pa tell about somebody’s pig that came up missing between here and Ashton. And it was a mamma pig, too, with ten little pigs.”

Scoop got my eye.

“Suffering cats!” he squawked.

Slipping the padded shoes under our arms we then started down the darkening street. Pretty soon we came to the canal that threads its way through Tutter, Ashton and other near-by towns. It was by way of this canal that Red and Rory had reached Oak Island, itself a small body of land in one of the canal’s biggest wide-waters. And it was on the bank of this canal, on the edge of town, that Adam Grendow had built his odd home.

I dare say you all know what a canal is. This one, with its tow-path, winding narrow channel and over-hanging foliage, had the usual number of locks for maintaining the proper water level. Wide-waters were provided every few miles to accommodate passing barges. East of Ashton, which in itself is ten miles east of Tutter, there is a natural wide-waters.

This small lake was a marsh before the canal was built. And what used to be an extensive wooded knoll in the middle of the marsh is now an island, high and rocky at one end and boggy at the other, with intervening hummocks and gullies.

Deriving its name from an outstanding tree, the island was recently purchased by a business associate of Dad's, who plans some day to erect a swell summer home in the maple grove on the sandy south shore. Then, I suppose, we'll have to find a new camping place. I'm hoping though that Mr. Cliffe, the new owner, delays the construction of his intended summer home for many years. For a sweller camping spot couldn't be imagined. In the first place it's wild and secluded. Few people ever go there. Now and then a passing tug stops to refill its water casks at the big spring on the rocky north shore. But that doesn't happen very often. Added seclusion is provided by the densely wooded mainland, where, as recorded in my "Pirate" book, we met with such amazing adventures in the old tavern. This lonely, glowering building still stands, exactly as we left it. And in the surrounding forest is the usual thicket of berry bushes. Truly a boy's paradise!

Years ago an odd old codger made his home on the island. People called him a hermit. He's gone now. But the cave that he hewed into the soft sandstone east of the spring still stands. It was here that Red and Rory intended to make their home. And as I thought of them taking command of the pleasant island the longing again crept over me to join them.

28

But I quickly dismissed these thoughts from my mind, and got down to business in regular Sherlock Holmes style, when, after a brisk walk of ten minutes, we came within sight of a

rambling, two-story gabled house at the opposite ends of which red-topped fireplace chimneys stood up above the roof peaks like odd furtive sentinels. For years these stony servants had stood there, unwarmed by either winter or summer fires, mindful of every human approach. They had seen us as we passed up and down the adjacent tow-path on our way to and from the new swimming hole. And often, no doubt, our natural boyish banter had disturbed their dignity. Now I could imagine that their stony eyes were filled with hatred as we guardedly turned in at the sagging gate. For they knew what was going on in our minds! And loyal to their departed master they were fearful, as they stood out against the diminishing light of the setting sun, that his long-hidden secrets would be revealed.

Stopping in the shadow of a scraggly lilac bush Scoop changed his shoes. I quietly did the same. And then, as the darkness further crowded in on us with a dank vapory touch, we guardedly circled to the back of the house and stopped before an open kitchen window.

29

“See anything?” I inquired, when the leader peeped inside.

“No,” was the curt reply.

The long-neglected yard was a tangle of trees and bushes, some of which had even shoved their leafy arms under the porch roof where we stood. And as I thought of the thousands of shadowy hiding places thus provided I couldn’t shake off the uneasy feeling that something beyond range of our eyes was covertly watching us. Was it indeed the fireplace chimneys? Still, my better sense triumphed, that was a crazy thought.

Then, as a twig cracked in the darkness, I almost jumped out of my skin.

“A rat,” Scoop spoke in an offhand way.

A rat! It sounded like an elephant to me; and I told him so.

“Don’t be silly,” he grunted, seemingly not the least bit afraid himself.

I wished then that we had brought Peg with us. For he is big and strong, as I say. And while I had no special fear of the blind kid himself, figuring that either Scoop or I could handle him alone, I still couldn’t shake off the increasingly uncomfortable feeling that something that wasn’t good for us was slowly but surely creeping in on us.

30

Then another twig cracked!

“If that’s a rat,” I told Scoop, ready to run whenever he gave the signal, “I’m a cross-eyed cockle bur.”

Even old strongheart looked kind of shaky at the thought.

“Let’s hide,” he suggested. And clutching my arm he drew me into the bushes.

But we didn’t stay there very long. For what do you know if a big tall thing with a vapory white body and burning eyeballs didn’t poke its hideous snout out of the bushes and “boo” at us.

Ghosts never did make a hit with me. And least of all did I care to get chummy with one that had the “booing” habit. So, instead

of “booing” playfully in return, as might have been ethical under the circumstances, I lit out lickety-cut for home sweet home.

But that ghost was a sticker. Having taken a shine to me he had no intention of letting me get away from him. I could hear him zipping along behind me. And every moment or two he “booed” against the back of my neck.

Instead of padded soles, what I needed now, I told myself, as I further sliced the evening air with my nose, was a pair of winged shoes like the Mercury geezer, and nothing else but.

31

Having taken the lead as usual Scoop suddenly stopped beside the tow-path gate.

“Down!” he yelled at me, as I whizzed by him all of a sudden.

I hadn’t the slightest idea why he wanted me to stop. But he’s smart, as I say. And figuring that he had hit on some scheme to save me from the persistent ghost, who now was prodding me in the seat of the pants with a pronged stick, I dropped on all fours.

Had the ghost been real it would have floated over me in true supernatural style. Instead it stumbled over me like an old cow. And did I ever grunt as its big feet socked me in the ribs. Ouch!

“It’s Peg Shaw,” Scoop told me, when I staggered to my feet. “I recognized him the moment I got a peek at him. And I took this way of getting even with him.”

Having taken a header into the weeds, old hefty looked kind of sheepish when he limped into sight with a sprig of burdock draped on one ear.

The “vapory white body,” I then learned, was just a plain bed sheet. And what I had mistaken for “burning eyeballs” was merely painted holes.

Which shows you to what extent a fellow can be fooled by his imagination.

32

The upset didn’t half repay Peg for the mean trick that he had played on us. And we should have taken a poke at him. But it’s hard to be bitter with an old pal. So Scoop and I generously forgave him.

We had just uncovered another mystery, we said, as we crowded together in the path. There was a blind boy hiding in the big house. And confident that he could throw some light on the secrets that still hung over the old place, it was our intention as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives to corral and quizz him.

“But I was told,” said Peg, “that you came here to hunt ghosts.”

“Huh!” grunted Scoop. “And I know who told you, too. It was that gabby kid brother of mine.”

“Good little Jim,” purred Peg, as he laughed at us with his eyes.

“And did he further tell you to get a sheet and scare us?”

“Oh, no,” our late ghost further purred. “That was my own

brilliant idea. You see,” he added nasally, putting his arms around us with exaggerated affection, “you two fellows are my best buddies. I love you both, like a hog loves swill. And rather than have your ghost hunt fail, I nobly decided to play ghost myself. It was my duty, I figured.”

Scoop gave him a shove.

33

“Oh, go lay an egg, you big windjammer.”

“*Windjammer!* That’s gratitude for you.”

And so the talk continued as we retraced our steps to the back porch.

“Who opened the window?” Peg inquired.

“The blind kid, I guess,” Scoop replied. “Anyway it was open yesterday afternoon.”

“Have you seen him?” Peg further inquired.

“Sure thing.”

“But who leads him around?”

“He leads himself,” informed Scoop, as he turned a flashlight into the kitchen.

The dusty floor, I observed, was covered with footprints.

“Some of them are mine,” acknowledged the leader, when the prints had been brought to his attention. “But the small ones

belong to the blind kid.”

“I can see a third set of footprints,” declared Peg, who has the sharpest eyes of any kid that I ever knew.

We then crawled through the window and examined the indicated prints more carefully.

“They certainly aren’t mine,” Scoop declared.

“Nor the blind kid’s,” I annexed.

“Queer,” muttered the leader.

“Maybe your blind boy is twins,” said Peg.

“I wonder.”

It’s fun to explore an old house. And I dare say that we would have been in this one long ago if the securely boarded windows hadn’t turned us back.

34

“Look!” breathed Peg, as he stopped in front of a big cupboard. “It’s full of dishes.”

“Oof!” gagged Scoop, further glancing around at the room’s contents. “Did you ever see a dustier mess of truck in all your life?”

“You’d be dusty, too,” I spoke up, “if you had been sitting here in solitude for the past twelve years.”

“Has the house been closed that long?”

“So Dad says. And he ought to know. For he was chairman of the committee, or whatever you call it, that took charge of things after the old man’s death.”

Peg got his eyes on a faded felt hat.

“Do you suppose,” said he, “that it was hung there by the dead man himself?”

“And why not?” I countered.

“Put it on,” urged Scoop.

“Oh, yah!” I drew back.

“Maybe it’s full of counterfeit money,” Peg suggested.

But when he gingerly shook the hat nothing fell out of it except a dead spider.

Scoop moved over to the door that connected the kitchen with the rest of the house.

“Are you ready?” he inquired.

“Sure thing,” replied Peg.

“All right then, let’s go.”

CHAPTER IV

A NIGHT OF SURPRISES

“If you were to ask me,” said Peg, as we turned into a wide wainscoted hall, “this is the juggiest place that *I* ever got into.”

Scoop was up in front with a flashlight.

“Jug making,” he informed, “was the old man’s chief occupation.”

“But what was his idea in parking the stuff all over his house?”

“The detectives did that.”

“What were they looking for?—molasses?”

“Dumb-bell! You know blamed well what they were looking for.”

“But who ever heard of anybody hiding counterfeit money in jugs?”

“Men of Adam Grendow’s type have been known to do queerer things.”

“And are there more jugs in the attic?”

“So I understand.”

Old hefty took my hand.

“What do you think of it, Jerry?” he laughed.

“Like you,” I told him, “I think it’s a juggy mess.”

We took a roundabout course to the front door, the glass panels of which, I noticed, had been covered with thick building paper to shut out the sunlight.

36

“Huh!” grunted Peg, giving the paper a yank. “No wonder we couldn’t see in from the outside.”

“Pipe down,” Scoop spoke uneasily.

“Let’s have your flashlight.”

“What for?”

“I want to see if there’s any footprints on the door sill.”

“I looked yesterday.”

“And what did you find?”

“Nothing.”

Peg then gave his attention to the wide staircase that led to the upper rooms.

“Where was it that the kid disappeared?” he inquired.

“Up there,” Scoop drove back the shadows with his flashlight.

“Humph! Let’s get a hammer and tap on the walls.”

“What for?” I inquired.

“Maybe we’ll find a secret panel.”

“I’ll tap you on the bean,” growled Scoop, “if you don’t put a muffler on that crazy gab of yours.”

But Peg was bound and determined to hunt for secret panels. If we could find one, he said, with a wise shake of his head, it would prove that the kid belonged here. In which case it would pay us to go easy with him.

37

“If you must know the truth of the matter,” Scoop then gave us a wider look at his plans, “I’ve had the feeling all along that the kid belonged here, through some family connection. My ghost talk was just a joke. What I had seen, I knew, was a real boy and not a ghost. But if we start banging around with a hammer, as you suggest, we’ll scare him away. And what I want to do instead is to corner him and get his story. Then, if he’s in trouble, as I think, we’ll get busy and help him.”

“But what if he turns out to be a bad egg?” Peg further held off.

“In that case,” Scoop spoke regretfully, “I suppose we’ll have to turn him over to the law.”

“All right,” old hefty finally gave in. “Let’s shove off.”

But we didn’t “shove” very far. For just then a key clicked in the lock of the front door.

Either something was coming into the house that didn’t make tracks or the blind kid was unlocking the door for the first time.

It was a scary situation, let me tell you. And for a moment or two we stood there like cabbage stalks, too frightened even to move. Then, as Scoop got a grip on his wits, he darted down the stairs.

“Quick!” he told us, pulling aside the dusty faded curtain of a small clothes closet. “Get in here.”

38

And it’s well, let me tell you, that we did hide in the closet. For the first voice that we heard, when the door finally swung back on its rusted hinges, was that of a man.

“There you are, Orion. I finally got it open. Now let’s have a light.”

The voice was strangely familiar to me. And then, as I grasped the truth of the bewildering situation, I almost kerflopped on the closet floor.

It was my own dad!

“That door,” he added, as he stepped inside, “hasn’t been unlocked for twelve years. In fact I had forgotten that I had the key until you mentioned it to-night.”

Orion! That sounded like a boy’s name to me. And very probably, I told myself, as my wits further acted up on me, it was the blind boy. But what was his object in bringing Dad here at this time of night? Was it to kick us out of this place?

Scoop thought so.

“Suffering cats!” he gurgled in my ear. “It’s your pa.”

“I know it,” I spoke weakly.

“Did you tell him that you were coming here to-night?”

“No.”

“Then how did the blind kid find it out?”

“You tell me,” I further struggled with my tangled wits,
“and I’ll tell you.”

39

Peg had his right eye glued to a hole in the curtain.

“If that kid’s blind,” said he, as a light sprang up, “I’ve got a keel on my floating rib.”

Scoop took a peek.

“That isn’t the blind kid,” he told us, in a wondering voice.

“Who is it?” I inquired.

“Search me.”

“Does he look like the blind kid?”

“He’s so much bigger that it’s hard for me to tell. But they both have the same kind of shiny black hair.”

“I bet a cookie they’re brothers,” I spoke excitedly.

“By George. I believe you’re right, Jerry.”

Having lit an old-fashioned lamp, the black-haired kid started

up the stairs, but stopped when Dad touched him lightly on the arm.

“How old are you, Orion?”

“Fourteen.”

“And how long has it been since you last saw your father?”

Having appropriated the hole in the curtain I was struck by the sad look that crept into the boy’s expressive face.

“I can’t remember him at all, Mr. Todd. For I was only two years old when they—they took him away. Mother told me afterwards that he had gone on a long journey. It would be many years, she said, before he returned. And I wondered at her tears. Then Kay was born.”

40

“The poor little fellow,” Dad spoke sympathetically.

“I know how you feel toward him, Mr. Todd. You think that his blindness handicaps him. But please don’t sympathize with him too much. For he likes to feel that he’s just as capable of taking care of himself as normal boys.”

“How long have you known the truth about your father?” Dad next inquired.

“Mother told me just before she died. Later I told Kay. We were alone then. And having no other place to go we came here, hoping that we’d find proof that our father had been imprisoned unjustly.”

“Have you communicated with him since your mother’s death?”

“No, sir.”

“Then what makes you think that he was imprisoned unjustly?”

“In the first place, if I am to believe my mother, he was a fine upright man, though too easy-going for his own good. He loved her, she said. And he also loved his home. So it seems impossible to me, Mr. Todd, that he could have done the things for which he was imprisoned.”

“The judge wouldn’t have sentenced him, my lad,” Dad spoke gravely, “if his guilt hadn’t been proved.”

41

The kid was all a-tremble now.

“The judge thought that my father was guilty. And so did the jury. But my mother believed to the last that he was innocent. He had sacrificed himself, she said, to shield someone else. At the time of the trial she begged him to tell the truth about his business relations with his father whom she had long distrusted. She knew that he had been here the night of the accident. For a ring was mailed to her from Ashton. That ring, Mr. Todd, was taken from my dead grandfather’s hand as he lay in the Ashton morgue. And it was my father himself who mailed the ring to my mother. Arrest, he knew, was certain. And later, when he was taken in hand, having gotten to New York ahead of the ring, he begged my mother to destroy it.”

Dad showed the amazement that he felt.

“But why wasn’t this brought up at the trial?”

“Simply because my father didn’t want it brought up. And now he’s in prison! Oh, Mr. Todd!” the boy’s voice arose.

42

“You can’t imagine how I feel. All my life I’ve longed for a dad like you. I wanted to be hugged and fooled with and cuffed around. You know what I mean. And then I learned the truth! My dad was a convict! But I won’t give up. I won’t. I won’t. My dad is innocent. He went to prison to shield his own father. And I’m going to prove it, too.”

Gee! He sure was a swell kid, all right. He had good stuff in him, too, as his manner showed. And he had a good look.

But I had no chance just then to get acquainted with him. And as I further peeped at him through the curtain I wondered how long it would be before Dad called us out of our hole.

He and the black-haired kid were holding hands now like old pals.

“I’ve got a boy of my own,” the elder spoke emotionally, “who undoubtedly would do the very same thing that you are doing if the law ever separated us. So I know how you feel. And if your father was imprisoned unjustly, as you say, I know how he feels, too. I want to help you, and intend to help you, in every way I can. Moreover I’m going to promise you the help of my son. For he’s that kind of a boy. That’s why I’m so proud of him. His mother had seven cat fits when he first began fooling around with his silver-plated detective badge. She was fearful that she’d lose him. But I had a lot of confidence in him. So I gave him a free hand. And now I’m glad that I did. For he has

turned out exactly as I wanted him to turn out. He's the soul of honor. And while he doesn't know it, I often go into his room at night and sit on the edge of his bed. I don't touch him. I just look down at him. My boy Jerry! And then I get down on my knees and silently thank God that he *is* my boy."

Gosh! I hadn't expected to hear anything like that. And while it added to my bewilderment, it further made me feel kind of silly.

Scoop snickered in the dark.

"The family wonder," he purred.

"The only time my pa ever talks that way," said Peg, "is when he wants me to saw some wood."

"Dad's all right," I spoke feelingly.

"I don't touch him," mimicked Scoop. "I just sit there on the edge of the bed and look down at him."

"Oh, shut up," I growled under my breath.

"You're just jealous," Peg told Scoop, "because your pa doesn't sit up nights and look at you."

"If he did," I put in, "he'd get a pain in his neck."

Dad pricked up his ears.

"What was that?" he inquired.

“I didn’t hear anything,” the boy listened in turn.

“It sounded like muffled voices to me.”

I thought that the jig was up, as the saying is. And I got ready to make a nice polite bow when Dad lifted the curtain. But the blind kid saved us.

44

“Hi, Orion,” he called from the head of the stairs.

“Hi, Kay,” the older brother’s face lit up, thus showing how dear they were to each other.

“Is Mr. Todd down there?”

“Sure thing,” Dad answered for himself.

“I know what you look like,” the little fellow spoke gleefully. “I can tell by your voice. You’re tall and thin. Fat men kind of rumble when they talk. So I know you aren’t fat. Besides your voice sounds high up. I think you’ve got brown hair. For most men with voices like yours have brown hair. And if your hair is brown you’ve got blue eyes.”

Dad was impressed by the kid’s smartness.

“How about my tonsils?” he laughed.

“They sound to me as though they need greasing,” the kid laughed in turn.

“Come down here,” urged Dad, “so that I can get a better look at you.”

“Shall I come down on my pony?”

“Sure thing.”

“All right. Grab me when I reach the bottom.”

And down the banister he came like a shot from a gun.

I never dreamed that blind kids could do stuff like that. And for a moment or two I was scared stiff. But he got down, all right, without breaking his neck.

45

“Give me a hug,” he told Dad.

And he got it, too, sunny-faced little rascal that he was.

“Did you know my daddy?” he then inquired.

“No,” Dad soberly shook his head.

“He’s in prison.”

“Mr. Todd knows about that, Kay,” the older boy spoke quietly.

“They put him in prison,” the little fellow resumed, “because he and my grandpa made counterfeit money. And if I can find it I’m going to spend it.”

“Do you know what happens to little boys who spend counterfeit money?” Dad laughed.

“Sure thing. If they spend it for candy they get the stomach ache.”

“You’re a fine little fellow,” praised Dad.

“And you’re a fine man,” the warm-hearted boy praised in turn.

“Did you go to sleep after I left?” the older brother then inquired.

“*Me?* I should say not. I’ve been too busy.”

“Doing what?” came the curious inquiry.

“Having fun.”

“Tell us about it.”

“Well, first of all a big boy hid in the bushes near the back door. I knew he was big by the way the bushes cracked. I was in the kitchen. But I stepped into the hall, out of sight, when two smaller boys came to the window. I heard them whispering. Then the big boy came out of the bushes and chased the small boys down the front path.”

46

“Three cheers for the big boy,” laughed Dad.

“His name was Peg.”

“And did you find out the names of the other boys?” Dad inquired, with a new note in his voice.

“Sure thing. When they ran down the path I followed them. Then they came back to the house. But I got here ahead of them. Jugs, jugs, jugs. Having crawled through the kitchen window, all they could talk about was jugs. The jugs didn’t bother me.

But Peg in particular had all kinds of trouble with them. They kept jumping up, he said, and biting him on the shins. One of the small boys had a flashlight. I could hear them talking about it. So I got out of sight. Presently they stopped at the front door. Then they came over to the stairs. And then——”

Gosh! I had the uncomfortable feeling, as the kid broke off, that something was going to drop. And, bu-lieve me, something did drop.

Laughing, he ran across the room to our hiding place and yanked down the curtain.

“There they are,” he cried gleefully. “That big one is Peg. The next one is Scoop. And the third one is Jerry.”

CHAPTER V

THE SILVER SKULL

Having learned that Peg was in the house, Dad, I think, had already jumped to the conclusion that I was there, too. So my sudden appearance on the scene didn't surprise him half as much as I had anticipated.

And laugh! Say, I never heard anybody laugh so hard in all my life. It tickled him pink, I guess, to think that three husky Juvenile Jupiter Detectives had been exposed by one little blind boy.

As for the exposed detectives themselves, a more humiliated trio, I venture to say, never stepped out of a closet. To add to our mortification Peg tripped over another jug. Those darn jugs! I'd see them in my dreams, I told myself. Then, as he got up, the curtain pole fell on him.

The blind kid in the meantime was putting on a victory dance in the middle of the floor.

"I found them," he cried over and over again, as he strutted back and forth like a little peacock. "I found them."

"Bully for you," Dad patted him on the back.

Huh! If he came near me, I told myself angrily, he'd get something besides a pat on the back. But I soon got over that grouchy feeling. For the kid had ways that I couldn't resist.

Gee! He was a regular little pippin. And pretty soon I had my right arm around his shoulders.

“Did you ever see a silver skull?” he inquired, raising his sunny face to mine.

“No,” I shook my head, trying not to notice the vacant look in his big black eyes.

“I’ve got one,” he told me, in his pleasant way.

“Where?”

“In my pocket,” he beamed.

Dad came over then with a kind of foolish look on his face.

“There’s an old saying,” he laughed, “that eavesdroppers never hear any good of themselves. But it worked the other way in this case.”

Dear old Dad!

“You have too good an opinion of me,” I spoke feelingly. “But I’ll always try to be the kind of a boy you think I am.”

That started Scoop off on some more of his nonsense.

“Boo-hoo!” he blubbered into his handkerchief. “I never could stand sentimental scenes. I’m too-o tender-hearted.”

But he straightened up in short order, let me tell you, when I planted my foot in the seat of his pants.

“Boo-hoo over that for a while,” I told him.

Orion had acted kind of hostile toward us at first. Thinking that we were spies, he even had threatened, with flashing eyes, to knock the stuffing out of us. Talk about *grit*! Boy, he had it by the ton. But he was all right now. For Dad had told him who we were.

Little monkey that he was, Kay then turned upside-down and started walking around the room on his hands.

“This is the way I empty my pockets,” he told us.

There was a shower of marbles and other boyish truck. But the thing he particularly wanted to find wasn’t there.

“That’s queer,” he spoke with a puzzled face, as he got back onto his feet.

“What’s queer?” Dad inquired, bending over the boy.

“I had something special in my pocket. And now I can’t find it.”

“What was it?”

“A ring.”

“It’s upstairs in my pillow,” Orion informed.

“But how did it get out of my pocket?” the little fellow further puzzled.

“I was afraid that you’d lose it. So I took it out of your pocket last night while you were sleeping.”

“Was it the ring,” Dad inquired earnestly, “that your father took from your dead grandfather’s hand in the Ashton morgue?”

50

“Yes, sir,” the boy spoke quietly.

“But if your father wanted the ring destroyed, why didn’t he get rid of it himself at the time he obtained it instead of mailing it to your mother?”

“I think he was afraid to destroy it.”

“And did he tell her, when she talked with him in his cell, that he had taken the ring from his dead parent’s hand as described?”

“No, sir. He simply instructed her, when the ring came, to throw it into the furnace and forget about it.”

“How then did she learn that he had mailed it to her?”

“Through an article in the Ashton newspaper.”

“By George!” cried Dad, with mounting excitement. “I recall now that there was an article about the missing ring in the Ashton newspaper. At the time it was believed by the police department and others concerned that the ring had been stolen by some unprincipled vandal. But your story throws new light on the mystery.”

Orion then spoke at considerable length.

“Trusting my father, and wanting to shield him in every way she could, my mother, I think, would have destroyed the ring when it arrived if she hadn’t noticed the post mark. Ashton, Illinois! She had good reason to remember the place. And suspecting then that there was some secret connection between my father’s unjust arrest and my grandfather’s tragic death, she sent to Ashton for particulars. It was in the newspaper that she received a short time later that she read about the missing ring. She knew then that my father had misrepresented things to her. He had told her that he was going to Montreal, having arranged to meet a wealthy coin collector there. But instead of going north he came west, to this very spot. Some strange mission that was to end in his own disgrace and his father’s tragic death brought him here. Then the two set out for Ashton in my grandfather’s fast motor boat. In the darkness they rammed into the Haines Lock. I’ve been there, Mr. Todd. And I’ve seen the place where they struck. So I’m not surprised that my grandfather was killed outright. It was later reported that he was alone in the wrecked boat. But no one saw the boat till after the crash occurred. So there’s no evidence that he was alone. To the contrary, as I say, I firmly believe, like my mother, who told me the complete story on her deathbed, that he was accompanied by my father, though what their motive could have been in heading for the county seat at that time of night is still a mystery to me. Nor have I been able to figure out where my father disappeared to after the fatal crash, unless it was that he was thrown into the canal. When arrested the bruised condition of his body caused much puzzled comment. The detectives never suspected though that he had gotten these bruises in the Tutter canal. Yet that was my

mother's belief. And now it's mine. The accident having occurred, he then watched his chance and secretly relieved the corpse of its ring. Oh, it was him all right," a new emphasis appeared in the boy's voice. "There can be no doubt of that. For outside of himself nobody living knew anything about the ring till he mentioned it to my mother."

"What do you know about your father's business?" Dad then inquired.

52

"Only what my mother told me. He was a skilled engraver by trade, she said, having learned the business from his father. And he also dealt in rare coins."

"Did your mother further tell you that many of the collectors to whom your father had sold supposedly valuable coins appeared against him at the trial?"

"Yes, sir," came the frank admission.

"Yet you still believe that he was imprisoned unjustly."

"I do," the boy spoke doggedly.

"In spite of the fact," pursued Dad, "that these collectors testified under oath that he had sold them counterfeit coins."

"The coins were counterfeit. I'll grant that. And my father sold them. But he didn't make them."

53

Dad placed a steady hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Don't you realize, Orion," the words were spoken gently,

“that the law deals alike with counterfeiter and accomplice?”

“My father was neither a counterfeiter nor an accomplice,” the boy maintained, with set lips.

Dad gave a hopeless gesture.

“But you’ve just admitted that he sold counterfeit coins.”

“He was a dupe.”

“What do you mean by that?” came the quick inquiry.

“He actually thought that the coins he handled were genuine.”

“Even so,” declared Dad, “he was an accomplice nevertheless.”

“It was my mother’s story that the coins came from England, where my father maintained a business address. He and another man worked together, one collecting the coins and the other selling them.”

“What was the other man’s name?”

“Lord Westervelt.”

“And was he arrested, too?”

“The detectives swore at the trial that there was no such person. My father, they maintained, had made the coins himself, using the name of Lord Westervelt as a blind. And as added proof they presented photographs of the company’s so-

called London office. It was merely an empty attic over a pawn shop.”

“I’m inclined to believe,” Dad spoke slowly, “that your father was a very mysterious man.”

“He was the victim of circumstances, sir, as well as a dupe.”

“Was your mother an English woman?”

“No, sir. She was born in America.”

“And where were you born?”

“In New York.”

“Evidently your father spent considerable time in this country.”

“He lived here.”

“But I was given to understand,” Dad spoke with surprise, “that he lived in England.”

“That isn’t the only thing about him, Mr. Todd, that the newspapers misrepresented. They further asserted that he had a criminal record in England. Which wasn’t true at all. As a matter of fact he hadn’t seen the shores of England since he was a boy of eighteen. At that time he and his father came to America. They first lived in Boston. Then, having learned his trade, my father moved to New York, after which my grandfather in turn came here.”

“When did your father start dealing in old coins?”

“Shortly after he and my mother were married.”

“And how long was that before he was arrested?”

“About four years.”

“How did he get started in the coin business?”

“He was passionately fond of old coins, my mother said. This brought him in contact with other collectors. He started exchanging coins. Then he sold a few to clear up some personal debts. That led him to believe that he could turn his hobby into a paying business. So he advertised for old coins in an English newspaper, which explains how he got in touch with Lord Westervelt. Later they made an agreement by the terms of which my father was to market the coins that the other man collected.”

“And whose suggestion was it that they maintain a London office?”

“Lord Westervelt’s. It would give the new firm prestige, he said.”

“Did he rent the attic that you mentioned a few moments ago?”

“No, sir. My father rented it by mail.”

“But Lord Westervelt was on the ground. Why then didn’t he rent it himself?”

“He was afraid, I guess, that the other noblemen with whom he hobnobbed would turn him down if they learned that he was

conducting a coin agency.”

“Poppy-cock! Like the detectives, I’m inclined to believe that there never was such a person as Lord Westervelt.”

56

“But my father received letters from him.”

“Letters probably that he wrote himself.”

But the kid wouldn’t give in.

“My mother died last April,” he then picked up his story from a new angle. “Having saved the ring, proof in itself of my father’s secret movements, she believed to the last that he had been imprisoned unjustly. He had sacrificed himself, she said, to shield his own father. Something came up. She couldn’t tell me what it was for she didn’t know. But he came here with all the speed that locomotives and steel rails possessed. Then, as you know, he and my grandfather set out in feverish haste for Ashton. But only one of them got there alive. Now I’m here to prove, if I can, that it was my grandfather who made the counterfeit coins and not my father, as the detectives maintained. From here the coins were sent to England where an agent of my grandfather’s who styled himself Lord Westervelt sent them on to my unsuspecting father. It took rare skill to make and treat these coins, many of which were supposed to be thousands of years old. But my grandfather possessed that skill.”

There was a short pause here.

“According to my mother, who resented his evil influence over my father, my grandfather was a greedy, tricky,

57

unscrupulous old man, ready even to sacrifice his own son if it would help him to carry out his unlawful schemes. It got too hot for him in England. That's why he came to America, finally hiding himself in this out-of-the-way place where he pretended to make jugs for a living. He was good at that, having learned the trade from his own parent. But he was an even better counterfeiter of rare coins. His jug making was just a blind. It was my mother who sent the detectives here. She did it to help my father, who, when faced with the secret facts that she had gathered, refused to help himself. But the detectives came back to her empty-handed. Then she got word that the place was closed. I think you wrote to her yourself, Mr. Todd. Anyway she gave me your name. That's why I looked you up to-night. And it was with the hope that you'd be able to help me that I brought you here to talk things over."

"I was dumfounded," acknowledged Dad, "when you first called on me. For I didn't know that your father had a family of children. Nor must you get the idea that I was particularly chummy with your grandfather. It's true that I closed the place after his funeral. But that was just a duty. Someone had to do it and I volunteered my services. As a matter of fact I knew very little about your grandparent. I heard things about him. And occasionally I saw him downtown. But I rarely stopped to talk with him, notwithstanding the fact that we were both manufacturers of clay products."

"My mother grew bitter as the trial progressed and my father refused to speak up in his own defense. She felt that he had turned against her. So she took me away. I was just a toddler then. When she returned to New York, another baby having been born in the meantime, the trial was over. Kay's

arrival brought back all of my mother's love for my father. But when she went to the jail, to beg forgiveness, the cell that she knew so well was empty. Her health was never the same after that. And she died begging me to devote my life, if necessary, to clearing the stain on my name. Her last prolonged illness ate up nearly all of her savings. Then came the funeral, to pay for which Kay and I had to sell the furniture. But we didn't mind that. For we already had planned to come here. So we made two bundles of our spare clothes and set out. Occasionally we got a ride. But we did plenty of walking, stopping here and there to earn our meals."

In the brief pause that followed the two brothers clasped hands.

"It was dusk when we got here last Monday afternoon," Orion resumed. "And never will I forget the shivery feeling that crept over me when we stole into the house through a boarded kitchen window. Br-r-r-r! The next morning we fixed up two rooms on the second floor. And there we set up housekeeping, using one room for a combined kitchen and dining room and the other for a bedroom. That was better, we figured, than trying to clean up the whole downstairs. For you can see what it's like. Besides, the second floor provided a better hiding place. Not that we had to hide. For the house really belongs to us. But we hated to let the neighbors know that we were here. Yesterday I carried two jugs all the way to Ashton, trading them for a loaf of bread and a can of dried beef. It was on this trip that I saw the place at the Haines Lock where my grandfather was killed. It was dark when I got home. And was I ever hungry! I kind of lost my appetite though when Kay told me that someone had been here. I dare say it was one of you fellows. But at the time I was scared stiff, thinking that

we were being shadowed.”

“You were,” laughed Scoop. “But not by the kind of detectives that you thought.”

“The difference between us and the other kind,” I then explained, in further assurance of our friendship, “is that we get innocent men *out* of jail while the other variety puts them *in*.”

That brought tears to the boy’s eyes. And he started to express his gratitude, but stopped when Kay came down the banister at the usual breakneck speed with a ring in his hand.

“Toot-toot!” he shrieked. “Clear the track for the Tutter express.”

60

Then, as he landed safely at the foot of the stairs, he tossed the ring to me.

“There you are, Jerry,” he cried, in his gleeful way. “There’s my silver skull.”

61

CHAPTER VI

GREEN HANDLES AND BLUE HANDLES

“And is *that* the ring that your father took from your dead grandfather’s hand in the Ashton morgue?” inquired Scoop, as the heavy silver circlet passed from hand to hand.

Orion nodded.

“It’s mine!” cried Kay, as he further danced around us. “My mother gave it to Orion when she died. And he gave it to me. It’s shaped like a skull. See? There’s the mouth. I can just get my little finger nail in it. That’s how I tell one end from the other. And there’s its eyes.”

“It looks to me like a pirate’s ring,” Peg offered his opinion.

“My grandfather wasn’t a pirate,” Orion spoke quietly. “But I’m convinced, from what my mother told me about him, that his secret activities were none the less illegal.”

“Were he and your mother ever on friendly terms?” Dad then inquired.

“No, sir,” Orion shook his head. “Having learned the truth about him through her own parents, who opposed the marriage, she would have nothing to do with him either before or after the ceremony.”

62

“Are your mother’s parents still living?” came the added inquiry.

“No, sir. They died several years ago.”

“Then you and Kay are alone in the world, except for your father.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What led your mother to believe that your grandfather was exerting an evil influence over your father, as mentioned a few moments ago?”

“My father had more than the average son’s love for his parents. And having lost his mother when he was a small boy all of this unbounded affection was centered in his father. Doubting my grandfather’s honesty, and fearful that the naturally easy-going son would turn out the same way, my mother tried to keep them apart. She learned though that they secretly exchanged letters. That angered her, the more so when my father stubbornly refused to surrender the letters that he had received. Instead he destroyed them. Then, out of a blue sky as it were, he learned that he was threatened with arrest. The coins that he had been handling were counterfeit. But instead of confiding in my mother he boarded the first west-bound train and came here, which proved to her satisfaction that he had learned that the counterfeit coins had been made here. My grandfather, she told me on her deathbed, had criminally enmeshed his own son to revenge himself on her. That was her theory. It sounds fanciful, I’ll grant. But I believe it nevertheless. And some day I hope to be able to prove it.”

“Now let us go back to the night that the ring was stolen,” Dad further probed the strange tangle. “We know how

your father obtained the ring. But what did you mean when you stated that he was afraid to destroy it?"

"It's a thing of vast importance, Mr. Todd. There can be no doubt of that. For the steps that my father took to secure it prove it. Its removal from my dead grandfather's hand very probably saved him from later scandal. Yet having obtained the ring, under circumstances that almost sicken me, my father was unwilling to destroy it. Its touch, I dare say, was like fire to him. But he kept it, intending probably to make some later secret use of it. He *wanted* to destroy it. But he didn't dare. And to prevent it from falling into unfriendly hands he mailed it to my mother. You know what happened when he arrived in New York. The expected arrest occurred. There was no chance then for my father to carry out his original plans. So he begged to have the incriminating ring destroyed. Nor does he know to this day that my mother secretly put it away, unwilling even to show it to the detectives on whom she later called for help."

Scoop held the ring at arm's length.

64

"Hi, old sock-in-the-wash," he spoke nonsensically to the sinister grinning emblem.

But of course there was no reply.

Peg then tried talking to the skull in hog Latin. Which amused Kay. But Orion, I noticed, was peculiarly sober.

"Please don't think I'm a crab, fellows," he spoke earnestly. "But I can't joke about the ring like you. For it's done too much harm to us. Its secrets meant more to my father than my mother's happiness. And to-day, as a result of his determined

silence, he's wearing stripes. A common convict! At first I thought I'd go to Atlanta, where he's imprisoned, and confront him with the ring, begging him to tell me the truth about it. But I finally decided to come here instead. For it was here that the mystery had taken root. I'd solve the mystery myself, I said grimly. Then, having obtained the proof of my dead grandfather's guilt, I'd go to the prison and force my father to tell his complete story. In that way I'd save him in spite of himself."

Orion paused briefly.

"It was easy to plan. But I've learned that mystery solving is a whole lot harder than I thought. With Kay's help I've ransacked the house from top to bottom. But all I've found is jugs. Some have green handles and some have blue handles. But they're all ordinary empty jugs. And when I say empty I mean empty. I've searched for engraving tools and dies. I've knocked holes in the plaster, after assuring myself that there isn't a partition or wall in the house with more than four inches of space behind it. I've pulled up floor boards. I even stuck my head into the big jug furnace in the cellar. But it is a jug furnace and nothing more. There's a tunnel down there leading to a clay deposit. I've been in this passageway a dozen times. There's plenty of bats down there. *And* how! But that's all. In fact I have been wholly unable to place my hands on a single thing that would suggest that my grandfather was anything but the honest old jug maker that he pretended to be. Jugs, jugs, jugs! Here he lived and here he made his crazy jugs, often firing his furnace the whole night long. The place is really more of a jug factory than a home."

It was a big disappointment to Peg to thus learn that there was no secret panel at the head of the stairs, as he had suspected. Nor was there anything mysterious about Kay's reported "disappearance." Sensing that he was being watched, as he scooted up and down the stairs, he had simply darted out of sight in his naturally quick way. And Scoop's fertile imagination had done the rest.

Now the little rascal got down and felt of my shoes.

"I wondered," said he, with a funny little grin on his face, "why they didn't squeak when you walked."

"I padded them," I explained, "to creep up on a ghost."

Told then that he himself was the supposed ghost he almost yipped his head off.

"Did you hear that, Orion?" he cried. "Scoop and Jerry thought that I was a ghost. But instead of capturing *me* I captured them."

Gee! He sure was the berries, all right.

"Let's take him home and keep him," I eagerly whispered in Dad's ear.

"I'd love to do that, Jerry," came the earnest reply. "But Mother might not be as willing as you and I."

"Anyway," I urged, "let's take him home for a week or two."

"How about his brother?"

“The more the merrier,” I laughed.

When told of our plan Kay was willing enough. For he had taken a great shine to Dad. But Orion shook his head.

“It’s mighty fine of you, Mr. Todd, to offer us a temporary home. And I feel just as grateful to you, too, Jerry. Just as your dad said, you’re a swell guy, and I don’t mean maybe. But now that I’m here I want to earn my own way if possible. And as long I can make a go of it I feel that Kay and I should stick together. So far I’ve done nothing but snoop around. But later on I’m going to straighten up things around here so we’ll be more comfortable. And it may be then, Mr. Todd, that I’ll tackle you for a job in your brickyard.”

67

“You’re pretty young for work of that kind,” declared Dad. “In fact I wouldn’t dare to take you on as a regular hand. It’s against the state law. But if you’ll stop in and see me next month I’ll try and find something for you to do that will enable you to get an education and earn your living at the same time.”

Scoop had one of the jugs in his arms.

“It’s got a snout like yours,” he told Peg.

“Yah,” was old hefty’s quick come-back, “and it’s just as empty as your head, too.”

“Listen to them!” laughed Kay. “They talk like a couple of nuts.”

“They are,” I confirmed cheerfully.

“Sure thing,” grinned Scoop. “We get that way from hanging around Jerry.”

His attention drawn to the scattered jugs Dad picked up two with different colored handles.

“Have you been able to figure out,” he asked Orion, “why some have green handles and some blue handles?”

“No, sir.”

68

“It may not mean a thing,” Dad spoke thoughtfully. “Still, your grandfather was a deep secretive man. So I’d keep this matter in mind if I were you.”

We then went through the entire house from top to bottom, starting at the dusty squatty attic, the gabled windows of which looked down on the canal, and ending in the cobwebby cellar, the principal feature of which, I learned, was a huge jug furnace. There were odd cumbersome machines here, resembling big misshapen tops, and an endless carrier belt on which the formed clay jugs had been delivered at the furnace door. The top-like machines, Dad said, were old-fashioned pottery wheels. And he tried to explain to us how they worked. But it was too blamed complicated for me. So I got Orion to show me the clay tunnel, to penetrate which we first had to drive back about a million bats.

“They come down the furnace chimney,” the young owner explained.

“What are you going to do to-morrow?” I inquired, as we emerged from the dank foul-smelling hole.

“Kay and I had planned to walk to Ashton with some more jugs. For we’re almost out of potatoes. And we need some flour, too.”

“But why don’t you trade in Tutter?” I inquired, thinking to myself that he was goofy to walk twenty miles to do his shopping when there were stores a few blocks away.

69

As soon as I said it I knew that I had pulled a boner. For his face got as red as a beet. But it wasn’t his nature to want to deceive me, however much my question had embarrassed the kid.

“I would trade in Tutter,” he spoke quietly, “if I had money to trade with. But having only jugs I have to go where jugs are acceptable.”

Gosh! I felt like two cents.

“Do you own a rowboat?” he then inquired.

“No,” I shook my head. “But I’m likely to become part owner of a motor boat in a day or two.”

“You’re lucky,” he spoke with glistening eyes.

I told him then about old Cassibaum Kepp and his wealthy sister.

“The promised boat should have been here several days ago,” I concluded. “But why did you ask me if I owned a rowboat?” I added.

“I thought if you did own one I might be able to borrow it, thus saving myself a long tiresome trip up and down the tow-path.”

“Hey, Scoop,” I then signaled to the leader.

“What do you want?” he inquired.

“Can Orion and I borrow your pa’s rowboat to-morrow?”

“Sure thing,” came the generous consent.

And told then that we were planning to row to Ashton with a boat load of jugs the leader volunteered to accompany us.

70

“Let’s make it an all-day trip,” Peg then suggested, with an ear-to-ear grin, “and take in Oak Island.”

“Where’s that?” Orion inquired.

“Four miles the other side of Ashton.”

“But why do you want to go there?” came the added inquiry.

Two of our chums, we then explained, had gone to the island to live in a cave. It was their intention to wear breechcloths and wooden sandals, just like the cavemen of ancient times that they had been reading about. Having started out with a boat load of animals, they had further picked up a donkey by the name of Shoe Polish and a mamma pig with ten little pigs. All of which, we wound up, was bound to provide a lot of fun.

Orion laughed.

“I believe I saw your chums when they passed here this afternoon. Having rigged up a towing harness for the goat they were trying to keep the animal in the middle of the tow-path. But the goat didn’t seem to comprehend what was expected of it. And the last I saw of them the kid with the funny talk was leading it.”

“Suffering cats!” squawked Scoop. “Do you mean to tell me that they were actually making the poor goat tow the boat?”

71

“Sure thing,” Orion further laughed. “And the one you call Red was seated on a pile of feather pillows with a big bunch of bananas in his lap.”

Feather pillows!

“I thought they were going to be regular cavemen,” I snorted, “and sleep on the floor.”

“Red always did have original ideas,” laughed Scoop.

Peg leaned forward with a sort of tense look on his face.

“Did I understand you to say,” he quizzed, “that Red had a whole bunch of bananas in his lap?”

Orion nodded.

“That settles it,” old hefty spoke emphatically. “Now we’ve *got* to go to Oak Island and take the bananas away from him. If we don’t the little glutton will eat himself to death.”

So it was arranged that we were to start out bright and early the following morning. Having loaded the boat with jugs as planned we'd later dispose of these in Ashton after which we'd head for Oak Island with its motley collection of dogs, cats, parrots, monkeys, goats, donkeys and pigs.

Of course, with the exception of the pigs, there was only one of each. But by the time the cat got crossed with the parrot and the goat with the monkey there'd be plenty of everything, I told myself, including four-legged woodpeckers and ring-tailed catfish.

72

Red's kingdom! The more I thought about it the more eager I was to get started.

"I can be here at four bells," I told Orion, "if that's all right with you."

"Four bells suits me fine," he agreed.

"When are you coming back?" Dad inquired. "To-morrow night?"

"We should," I nodded, thinking of the new job that we had on our hands.

I later spoke about this job to Orion.

"Your grandfather," I said, "was an old fox. So don't get the idea in your head that you're going to uncover his secret stuff in just a day or two. I should say not! It may take weeks. And it may take months. That's why I don't want to fool away too much time on Oak Island. But we'll succeed in the end, even if

we have to tear the old shack down board by board.”

We hadn’t known each other very long. But I could tell by his manner how much he liked me, and in such a short time.

“Gee, Jerry!” he spoke feelingly. “You’re a peachy guy.”

“Listen, bozo,” I yawned. “I’ve heard too much of that kind of truck to-night. So back up and shut up. If you don’t I’ll take a swing at you.”

73

Kay followed us to the gate.

“Good night, Jerry,” he pinched my hand.

“Good night,” I responded with equal warmth.

“We’ll be all ready to start when you get here in the morning.”

“O.K.”

“How about you, Mr. Todd?” the little fellow then inquired.

“Are you going with us?”

Dad separated himself from a deep stomachy sigh.

“Alas,” said he, “I have a brick factory to look after. So I guess you’ll have to excuse me this time.”

I then got my eyes on our car in the tow-path.

“Front seat,” I yelled, darting forward. And when I looked back Dad had Kay in his arms.

“I’m going to let you be my daddy,” the little fellow spoke trustfully, “until Orion and I get our own daddy out of jail. And then you can be my other daddy.”

Scoop and Peg did the usual fooling around in the back of the car as we drove into town. But Dad and I were peculiarly silent.

“Poor little Kay,” he murmured, as we put the car away for the night, Scoop and Peg having gotten out at their respective corners. “I fear his wistful dream will never come true.”

74

“And why not,” I inquired, with a businesslike air.

“In the first place, Jerry, I’m not so sure in my own mind that the boy’s father is as guiltless as their mother led them to believe. I think she was prejudiced against her father-in-law. She imagined things. Which isn’t saying though that the old jug maker was an angel. Far from it. You may uncover some queer truck in his home. But I doubt very much if things will work out as the brothers believe.”

“Evidently,” I spoke with dignity, “you haven’t much confidence in the Tutter Juvenile Jupiter Detective aggregation.”

And all the time I was wondering to myself why the tricky old jug maker had put green handles on some of his jugs and blue handles on the others.

I had thought of it all the way home. And I continued to think of it as I crawled into bed.

Green handles and *blue* handles. *Green* handles and *blue* handles. *Green* handles and——

Here I dropped asleep.

CHAPTER VII

THE SINGING TREE

TING-A-LING-A-LING-A-LING-A-LING!

Awakened by my chattering alarm clock I raised myself in bed and glanced around the darkened room.

Could it be possible, I asked myself sleepily, that it was nearing four o'clock already? It seemed like midnight to me.

But when I took a closer peek at the windows I observed that the sky was getting light in the east. So I rolled out of bed and jumped into my clothes, confident that one of the happiest and most eventful days of my life lay just ahead of me.

Golly Ned! There's no better fun in the whole world than the kind we had planned. Five bully good pals, full of bubbling pep and crazy skylarking songs; a big friendly rowboat filled with jugs; an almost endless winding canal with paralleling tenanted thickets and hidden retreats; frogs, snakes, mud hens and snapping turtles; beds of gorgeous white pond lilies; queer moss-covered locks in charge of grizzled gabby old men; and, in final, that wonderful secluded island with its secret caves, bubbling icy spring, mountainous wooded rock piles, deep gullies, dense clumps of oak, willow and hard maple, and, at the extreme west end, one of the snakiest and boggiest cat-tail marshes that I ever had seen.

76

The island was almost a mile long. And what didn't grow there

or live there wasn't worth looking at. No wonder that Mr. Cliffe had paid twenty thousand dollars for it. And now, with its added pigs, parrot and other live truck, it constituted the kingdom, so to speak, of two aspiring young cave dwellers, whose probable antics, as they pranced around in their fluttering breechcloths, was doubtless worth traveling miles to see.

Mother and Dad were still sound asleep. But it wouldn't be right I figured to skin out without saying something to them. So I tiptoed into their room and gave Mother a kiss.

It took her several minutes to get the sleep out of her eyes.

"Goodness gracious!" she then lit into me, in her characteristic fussy way. "Did you just get home?"

"I just got up," I told her, with a grin.

"But where are you going at this time of night?" she further rubbed her eyes.

"It isn't night," I told her, with another big grin. "It's morning. And I'm going up the canal with the fellows."

She was wide awake now. And learning that I was headed for the fringe of civilization, where youths lived primitively in caves and drove back marauding hordes of ferocious wild rabbits with hand-hewed bludgeons, she quickly got into a kimono and crossed the hall.

"There, there, dearie," she spoke sympathetically, as she disappeared into the guest chamber. "Dry your tears. For

Jerry's going to the island this morning. So everything will be all right now."

I could hear something wheezing. It sounded like an overworked vacuum cleaner. Then I heard a gurgle.

"Quick!" the gurgle tapered off into a hollow gasp. "Hand me the smelling salts."

Suffering cats! It was Aunt Pansy.

"What's she doing here?" I inquired, when Mother scooted into the bathroom for the requested restorative.

"The poor woman! She's worried sick. So I asked her to stay here till her sister gets back from Peoria."

"When Red's around," I grunted, "she nags at him constantly. And when he's out of her sight she worries about him."

"Don't be silly," snapped Mother, as she nervously jiggled the bottles in the medicine cabinet. "It isn't Red that she's worrying about. It's her parrot."

Good night nurse! It certainly took a lot of funny people, I told myself, to make a world.

78

The vacuum cleaner was wheezing again, only this time it sounded as though it had stripped a cog.

"Oh, Mrs. Todd. You're *so* good to me. I don't know what I'd do without you. And Polly had such a pretty tail, too. I curled it every morning. And on Friday I doctored her eyes."

“There, there,” cooed Mother. “Don’t worry about it any longer. For Jerry will bring the parrot home with him.”

“Where did you get that idea?” I spoke up, kind of grumpy-like.

“But you must, you *must*,” the vacuum cleaner wheezed with added vigor. “If you don’t I’ll die of a broken heart.”

The old simpleton! It wasn’t any wonder, I told myself, that her husband had picked out the Illinois River to fish in instead of a shallow creek.

“How about the donkey?” I grunted, completely disgusted with her. “Do you want that, too?”

“What donkey?” she stared, as she tickled the end of her puffy pink nose with the glass stopper of the smelling-salts bottle.

Then, having been told that the ambitious cavemen had picked up a donkey on their way to the island, as well as eleven pigs, she took on worse than ever.

“Polly simply detests the smell of a pig. It makes her sick to her stomach. And to think that she has to endure *eleven* of them. Oh, oh, oh!”

79

Even Mother was disgusted now.

“Some women,” she sputtered, as she followed me down the stairs to the kitchen, the eastern sky in the meantime having turned from a dull gray to a brilliant pink, “would be better off if they put in their time fussing with babies instead of parrots.”

“And do you really want me to bring the parrot home?” I inquired, as I filled a bowl with cornflakes and smothered it with cream.

“I think you’d better. And ask Red if he knows anything about our cat. I can’t find hide nor hair of it.”

“What if he’s already made soup of it?” I grinned.

But it was her idea, I guess, that even famished cavemen drew the line on eating cat soup.

When I got up to leave she handed me a package.

“It’s your sweater,” she informed, “and a dish of baked beans. Also I put in some sandwiches and a small jar of pickles. Have a good time, Jerry. But try and get home as soon as you can. For you can see what I’ve got on my hands. And for mercy’s sake don’t put the parrot and the cat in the same end of the boat.”

“You’re a peach,” I told her, as I gave her a final smack.

80

Scoop and Peg were waiting for me at the corner of the block. One had two links of boloney and the other had a chocolate cake. On the way through town we stopped in Mugger’s all-night restaurant where the leader bought two dozen doughnuts. At the same time I bought a cherry pie. There was nothing like having plenty of food, we sensibly agreed. And learning that we could buy bacon here we further stocked up with that, too. Peg in the meantime had spent all of his money at the candy counter. And thus fortified against immediate starvation we staggered down the street, in the growing golden daylight, to

the canal dock.

But the boat that we were planning to use wasn't in its accustomed place.

"That's queer," said Scoop, as he peered up and down the canal.

"Maybe your father's out fishing," I suggested.

"No," the puzzled leader shook his head. "He was in bed when I left home. For I could hear him snoring."

"Look!" cried Peg. "Here's a broken boat lock."

Confident now that the boat had been stolen we awakened old Caleb Obed, who agreed, when he finally got the sleep rubbed out of his watery eyes, to rent us one of his fishing boats for seventy-five cents.

81

But when we stepped aside to count our money all we could scare up was a dime and three pennies.

"We'll pay you the balance when we get home," promised Scoop, eager to get started.

But old Caleb had been raised in Scotland.

"Nope," he flatly turned us down. "If you kain't pay fur the boat in advance you kain't have it. That's my rule with b'ys, as I told the tall Stricker lad yesterday afternoon when he tried to git a boat from me on tick. 'No, sir-ree,' says I firmly. 'You kain't work me that way. Fur I've bin worked by your kind

before. Either you pay fur the boat when you take it out,' says I, 'or you don't git it.' An' lackin' the necessary chink he went off without it. Of course," the old tight-wad tried to let us down as easy as possible, "I know that you b'ys are more dependable than the Stricker b'y. But rules is rules."

Rather than take the time to go home for more money I handed him my wrist watch.

"Keep that," I told him shortly, "till we get back."

"Um . . ." he gingerly fingered the time-piece, thinking I guess that I had snitched it. "Whar did you git it?"

"Dad gave it to me last Christmas."

"All right, b'ys," he finally consented, hoping no doubt that I'd never return to redeem the watch. "I'm willin' to hold this as a deposit. But if you break an oar I'm a-goin' to make you pay for that, too."

82

We got away from him as quickly as we could. Nor was it many minutes before we arrived at the rotten wooden dock where the old jug maker at one time had kept his fast motor boat.

"I thought you were going to be here at four bells," laughed Kay, as we pulled up beside the dock, on the edge of which was a row of jugs.

"We had trouble getting a boat," Scoop explained.

"What's the matter?" the little fellow grinned. "Did your pa

want to use the boat himself?”

“This is a rented boat. We got it from an old skinflint by the name of Caleb Obed. Our own boat was stolen last night.”

“What time is it?” I then inquired of Orion, as he came into sight with more jugs.

“Four-thirty,” he told me.

Peg was mulling something around in his mind, as the deep expression on his face proved.

“So Bid Stricker wanted to rent a boat, huh? I wonder if he’s gone to the island, too.”

In the added excited talk we agreed that it would pay us to get to the island as soon as possible. For Bid’s whole gang undoubtedly had all set out for there in the stolen boat. Outnumbered more than two to one, poor Red and Rory wouldn’t stand a chance. Their helplessness sickened me. For I love them both. And oh how I hate that tricky-minded Bid Stricker!

83

Having piled our grab under the back seat we hurriedly loaded the boat with jugs and set out in an easterly course for Ashton. Peg had the oars. And though he pulled on them till his eyes stuck out like peeled onions it seemed to me that we scarcely moved. Nor is that to be wondered at. For we had a load of probably a ton, including ourselves.

I had intended to sing all the way to Ashton. I thought I’d want to sing. But instead I sat in the prow of the boat looking

anxiously ahead.

Having tucked himself out Peg turned the oars over to Orion, who still occupied the rower's seat when we pulled into the lower water level of the Haines Lock.

"There's the spot," Orion pointed to one of the huge stone abutments, "where my grandfather was killed. See? The stone is cracked. That's where he struck it."

"How did it happen?" Scoop spoke curiously, as he continued to peer at the somber moss-covered masonry.

"It was an exceptionally dark night, as I understand it. And evidently he didn't realize that he was so close to the lock till he struck it."

Even if I had been in good spirits I think the sight of the cracked abutment would have sobered me. For my mind was full of the strange events that had preceded and followed the old jug maker's tragic death.

84

I dare say that every boy knows what a lock is. Almost all canals have them. It is by the aid of such devices that boats are raised or lowered to different water levels.

We had to be raised. For the canal was at least five feet higher on the other side of the lock. Nor would the stoop-shouldered old lock tender consent to put us through the lock in the regular manner until we gave him a couple of jugs.

"The state hain't maintainin' expensive locks," he growled at us, as he looked down at us from the lock wall, "to

accommodate rowboats.”

All he had to do was to close the huge winged gates behind us and turn on the water from the upper level. I could have done it myself. But I knew better than to try it. For he appeared to be a crusty old codger.

A quick change came over him though when he learned the nature of our cargo.

“Yesterday,” he eyed us in turn, “a strange boy stopped here to see the place whar ol’ Adam Grendow was killed. My wife told me about it when I got home.”

“I’m the boy,” Orion acknowledged.

“Um . . .” the gray eyes narrowed. “Must be that you have some purtic’lar interest in ol’ Adam’s affairs.”

85

“He was my grandfather,” Orion spoke quietly.

The old man bent closer.

“Your grandfather, hey? An’ be them some of his jugs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Um . . . I might ’a’ knowed it by the handles . . . Be you Harlow Grendow’s son?”

“Yes, sir,” came the low-voiced admission.

“I never met your pa,” the old lock tender then proceeded, with

visible agitation, “but I knowed your grandpa well. An’ it was a terrible shock to me when he was killed in my own dooryard . . . Is your pa still in prison?”

This time Orion winced.

“Yes, sir.”

“I wrote to him once. I had a message to deliver to him, I said. A sort of secret message. An’ I asked him to come here as soon as he got out of prison. But unless he comes fairly soon,” a weary worn look accompanied the words, “he may never get the message direct. Fur I’m gittin’ to be an ol’ man. You kin see how stooped I be. An’ my heart hain’t none too good. It thumps when I git excited. An’ I have to take medicine to quiet it.”

I’ll never forget the wistful, yearning, hopeful look that flooded Orion’s face as he stood there amid his jugs looking up at the agitated old lock tender.

86

“A message?” he repeated, as a thousand thoughts flashed through his mind. “Did I understand you to say that you have a secret message for my father?”

The old man nodded.

“It was reported that Adam Grendow was killed outright when he struck the abutment. But that hain’t so. He died in my arms. ‘I’m goin’, Joe,’ he told me, when I bent over him with a lantern. But when I started to move him he stopped me. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Leave me here. I won’t live many minutes. An’ I want to tell you somethin’.’ So I got down beside him an’ held him in my arms. ‘The singin’ tree! The singin’ tree!’ he said over an’

over ag'in. I thought his mind was wonderin'. An' ag'in I tried to move him. But as before he ordered me to stop. 'The singin' tree! The singin' tree! Harlow! Harlow! The singin' tree!' That was all. He was dead, I saw. So I left him there beside the wreckage of his boat an' summoned the coroner. Later a ring was taken from his hand in the Ashton morgue. No one around here ever found out whar the ring disappeared to. Nor was I ever able to figure out what he meant by his odd talk. Trees sometimes sigh in the wind. An' some kinds of evergreens whisper when a storm is brewing. But I never heard tell of a *singin' tree*. Nor did I ever expect to be tellin' this to anybody except the mentioned son hisself. But I'm an ol' man, as I say. I may be taken any day. So it's proper, I think, that you should receive the message in place of your pa. There was somethin' about a *singin' tree* that your grandpa wanted your pa to know about. As I say, it didn't make sense to me. An' probably it don't make sense to you. But Adam Grendow, who never did things without a purpose, wouldn't have talked that way if it wasn't important. So tell your pa about it jest as I have told it to you. Maybe he'll understand. . . . An' now if you'll set still I'll turn on the water an' put you through the lock. I didn't do it fur them other young scallawags that come through here last evenin' a-yippin' and a-yellin'. I made them lug their boat around the lock. The durn noisy brats! But I'll do it fur you, providin' you leave a couple of them jugs here."

He wanted the jugs, he said, for sorghum. And as we handed them up to him he curiously examined the handles, one of which was green and the other blue.

"A lot of people wondered," he spoke reminiscently, "why ol' Adam put green handles on some of his jugs and blue handles

on the others. But it's no mystery to me. He was a far better craftsman than ol' Ira Turner who worked fur him. An' not wantin' it said of him that he occasionally turned out jugs of poor quality he conceived the scheme of markin' all of *his* jugs with green handles and Ira's jugs with blue handles. I see you've given me one of each kind. But that's all right. I'd jest as soon have one of Ira's jugs. Fur me an' him is still good friends, though I don't take no stock in that latest invention of his. He quit jug makin' years ago. An' since then he's bin foolin' around with tin shears an' similar truck. When I was in Ashton yesterday gittin' one of my teeth filled the dentist, who belongs in the family, told me that Ira had gone away to work on his invention in secret. No one seems to know whar he is. But I bet a cookie he's hidin' in that cave on Oak Island. Fur he often went there to fish."

Gee-miny crickets! How many more people, I asked myself dizzily, as the talkative old man put the lock's huge water valves to work, had decided to locate on Oak Island?

88

Unless we got there in a hurry, I further told myself, we'd find ourselves confronted with a thriving new sub-division.

First on the list, if we were to believe the lock tender, was a silly old inventor by the name of Ira Turner. Next came Red and Rory. The Strickers, too, were headed for there. We now knew that to be a fact. For they of course were the "scallawags" that the lock tender had mentioned. And now the five of us were hurrying along in the same direction as fast as we could travel.

Having attained the upper level we tied our boat and went

89

ashore to get a drink. Also we filled up pockets with apples from a tree in the front yard. Orion, though, didn't fool around the apple tree very long. And having preceded us to the boat he told us, as we shoved off, that he had picked up more important information.

“My grandfather often came through here at night in his fast motor boat. The lock tender told me so. He thinks my grandfather kept the boat for that purpose. So he may have had a hidden hangout in Ashton. Or, more probably, in some lonely place the other side of Ashton. And that's where he was headed for the night that he was killed. The singing tree! It marks the place, fellows. See? So the thing for us to do, to learn where the coins were made, is to first spot the tree.”

A singing tree! Of all the crazy junk!

“What does it sing?” inquired Scoop, in his nonsensical way.
“Soprano or bass?”

But Orion was too busy with his own tumbling thoughts to reply.

It was ten-thirty when we pulled into Ashton, where still another surprise awaited us.

“Look!” cried Scoop, as we drew up beside the public dock.
“There's my boat.”

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE ENEMY'S TRAIL

“Goody! Goody!” cried little Kay, in his happy hilarious way, when he learned that the hated enemy had stopped overnight in Ashton. “Now we can beat them to the island.”

Peg acted dazed.

“Gosh!” he spoke weakly, as he further stared at the empty rowboat. “I never expected anything like *this* to happen.”

“Nor me either,” I dizzily took sides with him.

“And you’re sure, Scoop, that it’s your boat?” old hefty then inquired of the leader, as the two boats touched.

“Nothing else but,” came the confident reply. “For there’s my initials on the back seat.”

These initials I dare say will always be a reminder to me of one of the most embarrassing predicaments that I ever got into. So it isn’t surprising that the leader now grinned at me as he pointed them out to us. He and I had long wanted to explore an old abandoned cement tunnel in the hills west of town. So we set out one afternoon with the proper candles and other stuff, intending to spend the balance of the day underground. While I rowed the boat he whittled. Arriving in the vicinity of the tunnel we tied the boat to a tree and hurried to the yawning entrance. I noticed then that the tunnel had a kind

of strong smell. And later I had the misfortune to stumble over an old mean-tempered skunk. Phew! Hurrying home, with cotton in my nostrils, I had surprised Mother with a house full of guests. The Tutter Stitch and Chatter club was having its weakly conflagration. But the stitching and chattering stopped in a hurry, let me tell you, and a mighty squawk arose instead, when I percolated into the room. Women flew in all directions like chaff in a March gale. And it's Mother's disgusted story that she had to send everything in the house to the cleaner's, with the exception of the china doorknobs which she sterilized with carbolic acid. Nor do I know to this day where my clothes disappeared to. Dad carried them away on the end of a curtain pole. And that's the last I ever saw of them.

Scoop in the meantime had gotten his eyes on a little negro kid who sat on the edge of the sun-baked dock with a crooked willow fishing pole in his hands.

"Hey, Ebony. Wake up and get acquainted."

The little fellow slowly opened his eyes.

"Mah name hain't Ebony," he spoke sleepily. "An' Ah don't want to git 'quainted with you-all. For Ah's fishin'."

"What *is* your name?" laughed Scoop. "Snowball?"

92

"Mah name is Welcome John Henry Brown," came the drawn-out recital.

"*Welcome*, huh?" Scoop's eyes danced. "That's an odd name."

"Maybe his parents named him after the weekly pay check,"

grinned Orion.

“Ah hain’t got no parents,” the little fellow then informed. “Ah lives with mah gran’pappy, Ah does. See!” our attention was drawn to a clutter of shabby low-roofed dwellings on the south bank of the canal. “Dat’s whar Ah lives. Right over thar in dat yaller house. An’ dat’s mah gran’pappy hoin’ in de garden.”

“Is this a good place to fish?” Scoop continued the conversation.

“Ah don’t know yet.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Since sun-up.”

“Get any bites?”

“No, suh.”

“What kind of bait are you using?”

“Coolidge worms.”

“*Coolidge* worms?” Scoop repeated, with a puzzled face.

“That’s a new one on me. What kind of a worm is a Coolidge worm?”

“Mah gran’pappy calls ’em angleworms. See! Ah’s got a pocket full. But Mistah Ira Turner, who dun lives next doo’ to us an’ ’vents funny things, calls ’em Coolidge worms.”

“I’ve heard,” laughed Scoop, “that our early statesmen named a monument after the first President. And down in Springfield there’s a tomb named after Abraham Lincoln. But I never knew that the scientists had named a worm after Mr. Coolidge.”

“Mistah Turner dun say dat Mistah Coolidge allus use worms like dis when he goes fishin’. An’ dat’s why Mistah Turner calls ’em Coolidge worms.”

“Oh! . . .” Scoop’s face cleared up. “So that’s it, huh? . . . Do you fish here often?”

“Yes, suh. Ah dun fish heah all day yesterday.”

“And what did you catch?”

“Nothin’.”

“Well,” grinned the good-natured leader, “let’s hope that you have better luck to-morrow. For I’d hate to see you lose confidence in the place.”

“Does you-all live near heah?” the little darkey then decided to do some questioning of his own.

“No,” Scoop shook his head. “We live in Tutter.”

“Ah knows another boy who lives in Tutter. His name am Bid Stricker.”

“Did you see him this morning?” came the quick inquiry.

“No, suh. But Ah dun saw him one day last week when he

come over heah to visit his uncle. He threw a rock at me, he did.”

“*He* would,” I put in sourly.

It was a big relief to me, as you can imagine, to learn that Bid and his crummy gang had stopped overnight in Ashton. For I had pictured our two smaller chums in all kinds of pitiable plights. Moreover I had worried about the ten little pigs. For Bid is a born glutton. One time he and his hungry pack actually boiled an old owl in a wood shed in Happy Hollow. And they ate it, too—meaning the boiled owl, of course, and not the wood shed. So how the saliva would trickle down the conquerors’ chins when they learned that they had ten little pigs to work on. Um-yum-yum!

It was to prevent this probable slaughter, as well as to rescue Red and Rory, that I had wanted to hurry on to the island. In fact I had acted kind of frantic about it. But I was all right now, having learned that Bid, so to speak, was asleep at the switch. And how he’d rave when he discovered, upon his arrival at the dock, that the same trick that he had pulled on us in Tutter had been pulled on him here.

Left without a boat he’d either have to walk to the big wide-waters, and swim from there to the island, or borrow a boat from his uncle and proceed up the canal in the regular way. In either event it would take him several hours to overtake us. By that time we would be nicely fortified in our stronghold, like kings of old. And what a hot reception the invaders would get if they tried to force a landing. Oh, baby! Particularly would we lay for the hated leader himself. Spat,

spat, spat! Our clubs would land mercilessly on his shins. And having been licked to a fare-you-well he'd be only too glad to pull away from the island and stay away, thus leaving the two cavemen in undisputed possession of their property.

Scoop jumped into action.

“Pitch in, fellows,” he cried, “and help unload these jugs. For the sooner we get out of here the better.”

Jugs then flew in all directions.

“How far do we have to carry them?” I inquired of Orion.

“Just up the hill to the main street,” he informed.

Being the biggest of the bunch Peg was left in charge of the boats.

“Get some ammunition,” advised Scoop, as he further jiggled the jugs around. “And if the Strickers show up rock 'em to sleep.”

“Don't worry,” was old hefty's confident reply. “The boats will be here when you get back. And I'll be here, too.”

Gosh! It wouldn't take many fellows like him, I told myself, to make an army. And a feeling of deep appreciation stole over me as I stood there looking at him. Good old Peg! He sure was the cat's whiskers, all right.

Never having been here before little Kay wanted to follow us uptown. For he had ways of his own of enjoying new

surroundings. But we were afraid that he'd get messed up by one of the passing automobiles. So we whispered to Peg to call him back.

"Tell him," I suggested, "that you need him here."

But it wasn't easy to fool that bright-minded little rascal. I guess not! He knew why he was called back. He was in the way. But he made no complaint.

Patterning after the leader, who was now halfway up the hill, I started out with a jug under each bowed arm and also one in each hand. They were gallon jugs, too. And were they ever heavy! Oh, boy! As I look back I wonder how I ever got them to the top of the hill. But I did. More than that I made two trips up the hill, carrying four jugs each time. Which leads me to believe that in an emergency like that a fellow's strength is doubled.

Orion stopped in the store on the second trip. And I was surprised to learn, when he showed up, that all the elderly merchant had allowed him for the jugs was twenty cents apiece. That was only four dollars and eighty cents for the entire boat load.

"The old guy gypped you," I declared.

"I thought myself, Jerry," came the thoughtful reply, "that gallon jugs were worth more than twenty cents apiece. But that's the regular price, I learned."

"And do you have to take it out in trade?" inquired Scoop, as he kept pace with us.

“Sure thing.”

“But where are your groceries?”

“I’m going to stop and get them on the way home.”

“Any man’s crazy,” I grunted, “to make jugs for twenty cents apiece.”

“Maybe that’s the reason why old Mr. Turner quit,” laughed Scoop.

“By the way,” I inquired of Orion, “did you know, before you came here, that your grandfather had a helper?”

“No.”

“Maybe it will pay us to hunt up the old inventor and quiz him.”

“That’s what I intend to do.”

“I heard,” Scoop put in, “that your grandfather worked all night long in his basement. But if he chased up and down the canal nights, as you say, it must have been old Ira himself who kept the jug furnace going.”

“I didn’t say that my grandfather chased up and down the canal *every* night,” Orion corrected. “But he did it quite often, the lock tender told me.”

I can always tell when Scoop’s theorizer gets to acting upon him. For he sort of squints through his eyes like a

toad. And that's the way he looked now.

“So old Ira *quit* making jugs, huh, when your grandfather got killed! Um . . . He may have had a good reason for quitting. A *secret* reason, in fact. Had you thought of that, fellows?”

It was the lock tender's belief, as recorded, that the former jug maker had gone to Oak Island to perform some secret work on one of his inventions. But it was my belief now, as I linked my thoughts with Scoop's, that the old man had gone there to pry into his former employer's long-hidden secrets.

A singing-tree! Could it be possible, I asked myself, as we hurried down the hill to the dock, that there really was such a thing after all? And would we find it, and with it the suspected hidden counterfeit loot, on Oak Island?

Peg came running to meet us.

“Say, fellows,” he told us, with a grave face, “we're all wrong about that rowboat.”

“What do you mean?” Scoop spoke anxiously.

“It wasn't brought here by the Strickers.”

“Who did bring it here?” came the added quick inquiry.

“A man.”

“How do you know?”

Peg signaled to the little darkey boy.

“Hey, Welcome. Come over here for a moment or two. We want to talk to you.”

“Ah kain’t come. Ah’s fishin’.”

Peg held up a candy bar.

“It’s yours,” he promised, “if you’ll come over here, as I say, and tell us what you know about that ‘engine’ man.”

“What ‘engine’ man?” inquired Scoop, as the little kid got slowly to his bare feet and started toward us, his eyes riveted on the promised candy bar.

“Ask *him*,” grunted Peg.

I didn’t like the way old hefty was acting. It scared me.

“And is it your idea,” I asked him, with a sinking heart, “that the Strickers have gone on to the island in another boat?”

“It isn’t improbable,” he admitted, similarly depressed.

Scoop in the meantime had learned, as Peg had said, that the boat in question had been brought here by an “engine” man.

“And you’re sure,” the puzzled questioner persisted, “that it wasn’t Bid Stricker himself?”

“No, suh,” the little darkey shook his kinky head. “Ah knows it warn’t *him*. It was a ‘engine’ man.”

“But what do you mean by an ‘engine’ man?” Scoop spoke

impatiently.

“He dun told me dat he was a ‘engine’ man. Ah asks him whar he come from. He said he dun come from Chicago in a boat with a ‘engine’ in it. An’ he said he was a ‘engine’ man.”

100

“Do you mean an engineer?”

“No, suh. He warn’t no engineer. He was a ‘engine’ man.”

Scoop couldn’t have looked more helpless if he had suddenly found himself tied to the tail of a rampaging comet.

“Can you imagine what he means, fellows?”

“I think,” considered Orion, in his earnest way, “that he means a man who works on engines. Either a garage man or a boat man.”

“Dat’s it! Dat’s it!” the little fellow’s face lit up. “He’s a ‘engine’ man, like I dun tell you-all.”

So it was an “engine” man who had stolen the boat, instead of the suspected Strickers! Truly, I told myself, with renewed worries, things were getting more tangled up every minute.

It was our idea that the mysterious “engine” man, after tying the stolen rowboat to the dock, had skinned out. But further questioning brought out the fact that he had gone uptown to buy some food.

“He dun told me dat he’d give me a dollah if Ah’d row

101

his boat to Tutter, so dat he could go back to Chicago on de train,” the little darkey then proceeded, in his stupid drawling way. “But Ah’s dun got a dollah already. Mah Aunty dun give it to me fo’ mah birthday present.”

“Which way did he come from?” Scoop then inquired, with further reference to the mysterious boat man.

“Up dat way,” the little fellow pointed in the direction of the big wide-waters. “He warn’t used to rowin’ a boat, he said. For he’s a ‘engine’ man. But he didn’t have a engine. So he tried to git me to row the boat fo’ him.”

Told then that the boat in question had been stolen, the little fellows knees began to wobble.

“Ah didn’t steal it! Ah didn’t steal it!” he cried over and over again, with dilated eyes. And grabbing the coveted candy bar he disappeared in the direction of his home.

Scoop was the first one to break the silence that followed the little darkey’s hasty flight.

“It’s a cinch,” the leader put his wits to work, “that someone stole the rowboat. And I’m beginning to wonder now if it wasn’t the Strickers after all. For we know that they passed the Haines Lock many hours before us. This other geezer probably was coming down the canal in a motor boat. And for some unexplainable reason he turned the motor boat over to the Strickers, taking their boat in exchange.”

Gee-miny crickets gosh! I saw now what had happened. It came to me like a flash. And was I ever sick? Oh, oh,

oh! The motor boat that Bid had was *ours*. It was the boat that Mrs. Darbin had bought for us. Evidently she had hired a Chicago mechanic to deliver it to us. But Bid had gotten it instead. And now no doubt he was running it ragged.

We were waiting for the “engine” man when he came down the hill.

“Yes,” he acknowledged, when we started questioning him, “I just turned over a trim little outboard job to a group of boys under the leadership of Jerry Todd. I met them in the Oak Island wide-waters on my way to Tutter. And to accommodate them I exchanged boats. Now I have a ten-mile row ahead of me. But that’s all right. I’d do that any day in the week for a boy of Jerry Todd’s type.”

“And would it surprise you to learn,” I spoke quietly, “that I’m Jerry Todd?”

“*You?*” he laughed, in a sort of pleasant, likeable way. “Don’t try to kid me. I met Jerry Todd up the canal.”

“No,” I slowly shook my head. “That wasn’t Jerry Todd. I’m Jerry Todd.”

Told then that he had turned our boat over to our worst enemy, he offered, with a face that matched ours in length, to go back to the wide-waters with us and help us recover our property. But we had already decided to do that alone. *And* how! When the big moment came for us to even scores with Bid Stricker and the rest of his lying tribe, we didn’t want a man around to restrain us.

So he took our rented boat back to Tutter, promising to explain the situation to our parents, while we in turn grimly piled into the other boat, into which we had already loaded our grub, and started for the island.

CHAPTER IX

THE KING OF THE ISLAND

When I'm in good spirits I can be just as gabby as the next guy. Moreover I can be just as silly, too. But when a big problem like this comes along and socks me on the snout I like to be quiet.

The other fellows though seemed to be just as talkative as ever, particularly Peg, who, proud of his superior strength, insisted on doing all the rowing.

"Are there any tar trees on Oak Island?" he inquired, as the bright red roof of Ashton's most artistic slaughter house disappeared behind us in a haze of factory smoke and ragged bush tops.

"*Tar* trees?" repeated Scoop, with a wondering look on his face. "What in Sam Hill put that into your head?"

"Red has some feather pillows. And I was just thinking that we'd be sitting pretty if we could find some nice sticky tar trees on the island."

"It's against the law," informed Scoop, as he caught the drift of the other's meaning, "to tar and feather people, even such crummy trash as Bid Stricker and his lying gang."

105

"How about cherry-tree gum?" old hefty persisted, in his grim dogged way, as he dipped the oars in deep powerful strokes.

“Is there any law against that?”

“Not that I know of,” laughed Scoop, dragging his hands in the water.

“Then I’m hoping that this singing tree of ours turns out to be a nice big gooey sticky cherry tree.”

Kay and I were sitting together in the prow of the boat.

“Can you hear a pin drop, Jerry?” he inquired, as various thoughts ran through his active mind.

“Not always,” I confessed, wondering at the question.

“I can,” he affirmed. “I can hear everything that moves, even the wind.”

I jiggled my tongue.

“Did you hear that?” I laughed, as I slipped an arm around him.

“Sure thing,” he raised his sightless eyes to mine. “It was your tongue.”

“You’re a wonder,” I told him. And he could tell by the way I said it that I meant it.

“You have both eyes and ears, Jerry,” he then spoke quietly. “But I haven’t any eyes. So God, to be fair with me, put something extra in my ears. I don’t know what it is. But it warns me if I’m about to bump into a tree. I can *feel* the tree with my ears.”

“And is it your idea,” I asked him, as I got a line on his odd thoughts, “that this added hearing of yours will help us locate the singing tree?”

“If there’s a tree on the island that sings,” he spoke confidently, “I’ll find it.”

“Your grandfather called it a singing tree,” I told him. “But you mustn’t take that too literally. What he called singing is probably some kind of an odd noise.”

“But if it was a squeaky tree or a groaning tree, why didn’t he say so?”

“There are many kinds of noises besides squeaks and groans. And this one no doubt is a musical noise.”

“But how can a tree make a musical noise?” he puzzled.

“That,” I spoke shortly, “is the mystery.”

“Do you think that the tree makes the noise with its leaves?” he carried the subject farther.

“I’d sooner think that it had a hollow trunk. And when the wind blows in a certain way the trunk acts like a big whistle.”

“But then it would be a *whistling* tree. Besides, if the tree had a hollow trunk twelve years ago it probably is dead now.”

“In which event,” I concluded the conversation, “we’ll have to look for a singing stump.”

We were in a big forest now, the giant trees of which, as they crowded in on both sides of us with long leafy arms, actually made a tunnel of the winding water way. The shade felt good. For it was a warm day. And the woodsy smell that came out of the forest suggested all kinds of wild growing things.

I like stuff like that.

At Peg's suggestion we stopped here and ate our dinner, spreading out the baked beans and other truck on the grassy canal bank.

"I wish now," said Orion, as the food disappeared down our gullets, "that I had brought along my own stuff instead of leaving it at the grocery store. For we may need it before we get through with this job."

"We'll find plenty of food on the island," predicted Peg.

"Including a bunch of bananas," laughed Scoop.

"Let's hope," I spoke hungrily, "that Red had the good sense to hide the bananas before the Strickers showed up."

"If—" put in Peg meaningly, as he put on a sword-swallowing act with a pickle.

"If what?" Orion inquired.

"If there was any left to hide."

"Shucks!" added Orion. "No boy could get away with a whole

bunch of bananas in one day without help.”

Peg threw back his shaggy head and laughed in his hearty boisterous way.

“That’s *your* idea. But wait till you get acquainted with this red-headed chum of ours. You’ll be surprised!”

108

“*And* how,” annexed Scoop.

“Is he funny?” quizzed Kay.

“*I* think he’s crazy,” grunted Peg.

“Yes,” I shot back, “and if anybody else said that about him you’d be sore.”

For it’s a fact that Peg and Red, notwithstanding the difference in their sizes, think the world and all of each other.

“Oh,” compromised old hefty, with a meaningless gesture, “he’s all right. But he sure is a nut.”

“I’m anxious to get acquainted with him,” acknowledged Orion.

“And me, too,” put in Kay.

“You should have seen him when he was sitting on the totem pole,” I laughed, referring to one of our recent adventures.

“Golly Ned! He sure was a monkey.”

Peg got up and peered down the winding canal.

“The poor kid. I hope that the Strickers don’t mistreat him.”

While the rest of us were soberly gathering up the uneaten food Kay disappeared into a thicket where he found a clump of laden raspberry bushes.

“But how can you tell the ripe berries from the green ones?” I inquired, when he called me into the thicket.

109

“Why,” he laughed, “if they’re green I spit them out.”

Simple enough, all right!

Peg was ready to leave now.

“Come on, you berry hounds,” he sang out.

But when we stepped from the thicket into the tow-path the rowboat was nowhere in sight.

“Peg,” I called in amazement.

A familiar grinning face then popped up at the water’s edge.

“What’s the matter, Jerry?” came the laughing inquiry. “Did you lose us?”

While Kay and I were stuffing our faces in the berry patch the others, under Peg’s leadership, had covered the rowboat with leafy boughs. It didn’t look like a boat at all. So it isn’t surprising that I had been fooled by its supposed “disappearance.”

“The Strickers know that we’re on our way to the island,” old hefty then outlined his plans, as we got under way. “And very probably they’ve set up all kinds of traps for us. So nothing would please them any better than to have us force a landing, which is the one thing that we *aren’t* going to do—at least not now. I know how you feel, fellows. Like me you hate to delay the attack. For there’s no telling what kind of a pickle poor Red and Rory are in. But with so much at stake it’s far better to be safe than sorry. So I’m going to take the time to completely circle the island. And we can do it, too, with this hidden boat. At a distance we’ll look like a part of the wooded mainland itself. But we’ve got to move slowly. For a supposed drifting bush would excite the enemy’s suspicions in an instant. And thus warned of our presence in the wide-waters they’d take steps to further protect themselves against the expected attack, thus making it harder for us. I want to get a secret line on them if I can. I want to find out what they’re doing on the island and what they’re talking about. Then, when night comes, we’ll close in on them . . . Are you with me, fellows?”

Told that we were, he then dipped the oars with added vigor. Nor was it long before the big wide-waters came into sight. Gee! The huge mirror-like pond gave me a peculiar thrill. And I experienced still another happy thrill when the long wooded island came into view. Maybe I act kind of simple about Oak Island, but to me its trees seem greener than other trees and its slopes grassier. I suppose I feel that way about it because it has provided me with so much bully good fun. To me it’s the most wonderful outdoor place in the whole world. And I wished now, as we turned to the left into the wide-waters, that we could approach the island without interference.

But instead we had to follow the winding mainland at a snail's pace.

111

As seen from a distance the island appeared to be wholly deserted. Nor was there any sign of our motor boat. Which disappointed me. For I was anxious to get a look at it. Being one of its chief owners I naturally would! The stupid mechanic had spoken of it as an "outboard" job. That meant a boat with a motor fastened to the stern. But we didn't know yet how big the boat was or how fast it could travel.

Circling to the north, and hugging the wooded mainland as we planned, we presently arrived at the spot where we had launched the big "Pirate" raft with its memorable "cannon." Very probably, I told myself, as I further strained my eyes for some sight of the enemy, Bid had similar "cannons" concealed in the island's thickets. And just as machine-gun nests had been spotted during the World War by clever spies, who crawled daringly into the enemy's territory, so also did we intend to spot our opponent's hidden batteries, the better to plan our own intended attack.

But the enemy's activities were completely hidden by the island's dense foliage.

And now comes one of the brightest parts of my story. For what do you know if little Rory Ringer didn't come suddenly into sight in a path that led from the interior of the island to the rocky north shore. He was holding something to his mouth. From a distance it looked to me like a cow's horn. And then, as the thing gave a feeble gurgling squawk, I saw that it was indeed a cow's horn. As for the tooter himself, I actually

112

blushed as he stepped brazenly into the revealing sunlight. For he hadn't enough clothes on him to encumber an immodest katydid.

"The king!" he cried. "'Ere comes 'is 'ighness the king! Make way for the king."

Peg was dumfounded.

"Do you suppose," he spoke weakly, "that the Strickers are making him do that?"

Again I caught sight of a moving figure in the shadowy path. But this time it was a lop-eared, dreary-acting donkey. Fitted into a crude harness, made of twisted grapevines and other similar creepers, with a reed sunshade on its head, the patient animal was lazily pulling a two-wheeled cart. And what a cart! Boys often make queer contraptions, but never in all my born days had I seen anything to equal this. The cart's wheels were old misshapen grindstones. They revolved lop-sidedly on a crude wooden axle. Or maybe I should say that they *wabbled* on their axle. For they did a great deal more wabbling than anything else. And perched majestically on a rickety bough-canopied seat in the middle of the jouncing axle was the king of the island, all lit up in an ornamented baked clay crown, a cow-tooth necklace from which dangled some kind of a small skull, an oak-leaf tunic (I guess that's what you'd call it), cow-tooth anklets and hickory-bark sandals. Except for the flapping tunic and the mentioned decorations the young monarch's body was as bare as that of a newborn babe. His scepter was a calf's leg bone, to the top of which he had fastened a turtle's shell. And liking color, as is the privilege of most reigning

monarchs, he had tastefully touched up his bare skin here and there with berry stains and other vegetable saps. Also the canopied cart was decorated with pond lilies, cat-tails and other native truck.

In all, I was willing to put him down as the world's ninth and greatest wonder.

113

Yes, you guessed it. It was none other than little old Red Meyers himself. And much less than having been worsted by the invading Strickers, who either hadn't arrived yet or had mysteriously effaced themselves, he was the proud monarch of all he surveyed, including the mamma pig and her ten little pigs, who now respectfully brought up the tail-end of the amazing royal procession.

114

CHAPTER X

CAVEMAN STUFF

It was like Peg, fair-and-square kid that he was, to shoulder the entire blame for the valuable time that we had wasted in the wide-waters.

“I suggested the scheme,” he told us, as the dumfounded look on his face changed to one of sheepish chagrin. “So go ahead and razz me about it if you want to. I can stand it.”

But instead of razzing him, as he suggested, we tried to show him by our friendly actions that we had just as much confidence in his generalship as ever. And why not? Certainly, we argued, with reference to the added activities on the island, no one, not even General George Washington himself, could have foreseen any such development as *this*.

When it comes to upsetting the best-laid plans of mice and men, as the saying is, Fate has nothing on little old Red Meyers.

We had expected to find him in irons, a victim of the hard-boiled Stricker gang. But instead here he was riding around in state.

Such a kid!

“Let’s hope,” I spoke with mingled bewilderment and relief, as the royal procession moved on, “that the Strickers are safely cooped up in Bible Cave.”

Which, as you probably will recall, was the name that we had given to the roomy artificial cave in which we had found the scheming old Bible peddler. And it was for the reasons given in my book, of the same title, that we had called the huge inner cavern Whispering Cave.

Scoop scanned the island's irregular shoreline.

"But where's our motor boat?" he puzzled, thinking I guess that if the Strickers were there the boat ought to be there, too.

I had forgotten all about little Kay. And my heart went out to him now as I caught him straining his sensitive ears in the island's direction. Poor kid! The odd-sounding horn and accompanying boyish proclamation had puzzled him, as his manner showed. But he seemed to get a better grasp on the situation when the lively little pigs broke away from their grunting parent and ran squealing into the water.

"Now I know!" came the glad cry. "The boy with the horn is Rory. I can tell by his funny talk. And Red is riding in a cart. It has heavy stone wheels. I can hear them rumble. They wobble, too. There! I heard the goat. And that other tramping sound is the donkey. He's wheezing. So he must be pulling the heavy cart. He has big feet. I can tell by the way he puts them down. And Rory is bare-headed."

116

"But surely," I stared, "you can't hear *that*."

"It's the horn, Jerry," I was told. "It would have sounded different to me if there had been a cap peak or hat brim over it. Anyway," the little fellow laughed gaily, plainly pleased with his own smartness, "no regular caveman would wear a hat

unless it was raining. But the donkey has a hat. I can tell by the way he wheezes. The sound goes *down*, the hat brim acting as a deflector. And he's limping in his right front foot. *Thump thump, thump, thump*. Don't you see? One foot doesn't thump as loudly as the others. I *know* it's a front foot for an animal's front feet always sound different to me than its hind feet. And these sounds are further divided into *rights* and *lefts*."

Even Peg was staring now.

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked!" he cried.

"If you have any secrets," laughed Orion, "don't try to hide them from Kay. For he can see more with his ears than most people can with their eyes. He combines sounds with shrewd reasoning until a complete comprehensive picture is formed in his mind. For instance he knows that kings wear crowns. So he has a mental picture of Red with a crown on his head. A crown calls for other personal decorations. Regular kings wear diamonds. But cavemen know nothing about precious stones. Their ornaments are made of pebbles, shells, seeds, bits of wood and bones . . . Can you tell us, Kay," the voice softened, "what the king's necklace is made of?"

117

"It isn't pebbles," the little blind boy then reasoned things out in his own amazing way. "For pebbles are hard to hold together in a string unless they are pierced. And it takes a lot of skill to pierce a stone. It *could* be shells. They're easier to work with than pebbles. Still, the only shells that I've been able to find around here are tiny snails. And when strung together they wouldn't be visible from here. It isn't the right time of the year for seeds or nuts. So it's probably wood or bones. And from

what you've told me about Red I think he'd prefer bones. I know that I would myself."

Curious to learn how far he could go with his deductions I asked him then if the Strickers were indeed imprisoned in Bible Cave.

"I think," he spoke slowly, "that you'll find the cave empty. Not that I can *see* it with my ears. But your chums would hardly dare to leave it unguarded if it contained important prisoners. Their care-free actions suggest to me that they have the island to themselves. Besides if they knew where the motor boat was they'd be using it. For they're just fun-loving boys after all. This king stuff is a game. And what boy would take the time to make an old stone-wheeled cart when he had a swell motor boat to ride around in?"

118

Peg was too broad-minded to hold out against such sound logic as that.

"You're right," his ideas took a complete turn. "The Strickers are having too much fun with the motor boat to stop here and start a fight. That's what they intended to do. But they went on up the canal when they got the boat."

"And is it your intention," I inquired, "to follow them?"

"We may," he nodded. "But first I think we ought to go over to the island and pay our respects to Rubber Gullet the third. I dare say he'll be glad to see us. And it may be that he and his official horn tooter can tell us something about the enemy's movements."

“The king!” laughed Scoop, as he further reviewed the activities on the island. “Boy, I’d give a quarter if his ma could see him now.”

“Or his Aunt Pansy,” I put in maliciously, thinking of the pampered parrot.

Having rounded up the lively little pigs Rory then gave another toot on his improvised horn and started down the beach toward the cat-tail marsh.

“The king!” he cried again. “’Ere comes ’is ’ighness the king. Make way for the king.”

119

The donkey, as he moved along with drooping ears and lagging steps, appeared to be half asleep. But he woke up in a jiffy when one of the little pigs scooted between his front feet. There was a startled bray, as the frightened animal reared himself on his haunches. And then, as the grapevines snapped, up went the willow poles of the king’s cart and down behind went the poor king himself like a ton of lead.

I thought at first that the unseated monarch was pinned under the heavy mass. But presently he staggered to his feet. And was he ever wild-eyed! Oh, baby!

“Oggly aggly blub blub blub,” he screeched, signaling with his boney scepter.

Rory came running.

“What ’appened?” he inquired, hiding a grin.

“Oggly aggly blub blub blub,” again screeched the disheveled king, as he tugged at the southwest corner of his tattered tunic.

“Evidently,” laughed Peg, “the king has a language of his own.”

Rory was bowing now.

“I ’ope your gracious ’ighness will overlook my stupidity,” he spoke apologetically. “But I ’ave forgotten the meaning of hoggly haggly blub blub blub.”

Then, with the irritated monarch’s consent, he got out the island’s official primer, which appeared to be an engraved clay tablet carried under the cart’s heavy axle.

120

“Blub blub blub,” he repeated, running through the index. Then he brightened. “Now I know,” he cried. “It means ’arness.”

So he set to work, like the faithful flunky that he was, to repair the broken grapevine, while the king in turn stepped aside to pick a few necessary leaves for his sagging tunic.

“Snicky snacky put put put,” the monarch next demonstrated his familiarity with the island’s native tongue.

And dropping the harness Rory scuttled back to the informative primer.

“Put put put,” he again ran through the index. “Oh, yes.”

Dropping the primer he then disappeared behind the cart where he retrieved the fallen clay crown.

“It’s a wonder,” he commented, as he eased the requested crown into place, “that you didn’t ’arm it.”

“Blub blub blub,” reminded the exacting monarch.

“Yes, yes,” Rory scooted back to his interrupted work. “I’ll fix the ’arness just as soon as I can.”

But it took longer than he anticipated. And losing patience the king finally got up and walked away.

121

“Grabby hooky slop slop slop,” he called back over his shoulder, as he turned into the path leading to Bible Cave.

This, too, was officially recorded in the island’s primer, as Rory learned when he further consulted it.

“Yes, yes,” he spoke wearily, as he jumped from one job to another. “Grabby ’ooky slop slop slop. Yes, yes.”

The king in the meantime had passed out of sight.

“If slop slop slop is soup soup soup,” laughed Scoop, “old Rubber Gullet the third evidently wants it cooked in three different styles for his afternoon lunch.”

“*He* would,” grunted Peg.

“Poor Rory,” I put in. “He seems to be the official bugler, prime minister, chief harness maker, leading soup cooker and everything else combined.”

“Let’s go over and console him,” suggested Scoop.

The royal harness maker was still hard at work when we drew up beside him in the shallow water.

“‘Eavens!” he cried, jumping to his bare feet. “You gave me a bloomin’ scare that time. I thought it was the Strickers.”

“You’re lucky,” grunted Peg, as he stepped ashore, “that it wasn’t.”

122

“I saw them this morning when I went to the wide-waters to prepare the king’s bawth.”

Peg let out his burly neck.

“When you went down to the wide-waters to prepare *which*?” he quizzed blankly.

“The king’s bawth.”

Scoop acted for all the world as though he had swallowed his voice box.

“Suffering cats!” he finally got the organ back in place. “Do you have to wash the lazy little runt, too?”

Rory drew himself up like the true son of England that he was.

“It’s an honor,” he spoke loftily, “to hadminister to the personal wants of ’is ’ighness the king.”

“All right; all right,” grinned Scoop. “Have it your own way. But I know blamed well what would happen to the little shirker if he asked *me* to give him a bawth. At the very least he

wouldn't have to use any pink talcum powder when I got through with him."

"Who combs his hair?" Peg then quizzed, with dancing eyes.

"I do," came the proud admission.

"What with?—the backbone of a fish?"

"I use the royal comb of course."

"And who cooks his meals?"

"I do."

"It's nice," purred Peg, as he slipped us a wise wink, "to be a king."

123

"Like all cavemen," the royal chef then informed, "'is 'ighness 'as very simple tastes. So the cooking is easy."

Peg picked up the official primer.

"And did you make this, too?"

"No," the jack-of-all-trades shook his head. "That was made by 'is 'ighness 'isself."

"Iggly woggly do do do," read Peg.

"That means fried heggs. One do means one hegg and two do's means two heggs. Usually though it's five or six heggs. For 'is 'ighness is very fond of heggs. And right generously does 'e

praise me for the hexellent manner in which I prepare them for 'im."

Peg tackled another one.

"Icky snocky coo coo coo," he read.

"That," interpreted the royal valet, "means that 'is 'ighness wants me to brush 'is teeth."

"And *he* made up this new language himself?"

"The credit is all 'is."

"I thought so. . . . And what does pidgy idgy toot toot toot mean?"

"Pidgy hidgy toot toot toot?" the interpreter repeated, with a puzzled face. "Pidgy hidgy toot toot toot? Now, what *does* that mean?"

"There's a picture here of a foot."

"Oh, yes. Pidgy hidgy toot toot toot means that 'is 'ighness wants me to bathe 'is feet."

Peg gave the tablet a disgusted heave.

124

"Now," he grunted, "I know you *are* crazy."

Rory and Red are thicker than mush, as I say. But I couldn't make myself believe that the spunky little English kid would actually scrub his chum's feet. No, sir-ee! Besides, I had

detected a very perceptible twinkle in the depths of the young caveman's eyes, which proved to my satisfaction that he was putting on. And how he laughed when I exposed him.

"I guess I 'ad you hup a tree that time," he turned to Peg.

"Hup a tree is right," conceded old hefty, with a broad grin.

"To be a real caveman," Rory then told us, as we sat down on a log to talk things over, "we 'ad to 'ave a language of our own as well as a king. I told Red that 'e could be king. So now 'e makes hup the language while I do the hother work."

"And does pidgy idgy toot toot toot actually mean that you're supposed to wash his feet?" persisted Peg.

"Of course not," the words were accompanied by another jolly laugh. "It just means feet."

"But why do you have so many words?"

"That makes it 'arder."

"And in the same way does icky snocky coo coo coo mean teeth?"

"Sure thing. If I 'ave a lame foot I limp and say pidgy hidgy toot toot toot. That means that my bloomin' foot is on the 'ummer. But if I 'ave a pain in my jaw I 'old my cheek and say hicky snocky coo coo coo."

"Of all the crazy junk," I snorted.

“It *would* be crazy,” put in Peg, “if Red Meyers made it up.”

“It’s fun,” beamed Rory. “And if our parents will let us we’re going to stay ’ere till fall. By that time we’ll ’ave gourds to heat with instead of clay dishes. ’Aving made the dishes ’isself Red thinks they’re great. But I ’ate them. For the hedge of my saucer is so thick that I can’t get it in my mouth.”

“But whatever possessed you to run off with Mrs. Maloney’s goat and Aunt Pansy’s parrot?” I quizzed.

“All cavemen,” came the complacent reply, “’ave hanimals.”

“Yah,” I spoke heartlessly, “and I know a couple of cavemen who are going to have sore setters, too, when their parents get home.”

“But Mrs. Maloney *told* us that we could borrow ’er goat. And we asked Cap’n Tinkertop for ’is monkey, too.”

“Nevertheless,” I maintained, “you’re due for a calamity. And it’s well, let me tell you, that your parents can’t see you now or it would be a double calamity.”

He looked worried.

126

“What’s the matter?” he felt of his neck. “Is it dirty?”

“Don’t be a numskull,” I further blushed. “What you need, instead of a new language, is a pair of pants.”

“Pants!” he scoffed. “Whoever ’eard of a caveman wearing pants? You’ll be wanting to put slickers hon goldfish next.”

“When did you get here?” Peg then inquired.

“Late yesterday afternoon.”

“And is it true that you raided every farmyard that you passed?”

“Of course not.”

“But where did you get the donkey and the pigs?”

“Oh, they just followed us down the tow-path.”

“How lucky for you!” was the sarcastic comment.

“We thought that they’d go back when we harrived at the bloomin’ wide-waters. But hinstead they swam behind us to the island.”

“The *pigs*, too?” I stared.

“Sure thing.”

“Well,” I shrugged, “I hope that the judge believes you when you’re called upon to tell your story.”

“It’s no crime,” he retorted, “to talk nice to a ’og.”

“How many little ’ogs did you have in the boat?” inquired Peg, with narrowed eyes.

127

“Two,” came the unhesitating admission.

“Oh, ho! So *that’s* how you coaxed the old sow into the water.”

“They were such ’appy little ’ogs we thought we’d give them a boat ride.”

“How noble of you!”

I got my eyes on the up-ended cart.

“And where did you get the old grindstones?”

“Oh, Red found them hunder a pile of bones in back of the Hashton slaughter ’ouse.”

Told then that the hated Strickers had skinned out in our new motor boat, Rory looked kind of sick. He had heard the boat, he said, when it came down the canal from Steam Corners. But it passed before he got a look at it.

“Then you haven’t any idea,” I pressed, “how big it is?”

“No,” he shook his head.

“But where were you when the Strickers went back up the canal?” quizzed Peg.

“In the king’s pantry frying heggs.”

So far Orion and Kay had taken no part in the extended conversation. But now we called them over to the log and told their story.

“So,” concluded Scoop, who acted as spokesman, “we had a double purpose in coming here. We intended to help you and Red. And it’s our further plan to search the island for the

singing tree that the lock tender told us about.”

“Is it your hidea,” quizzed Rory, “that you’re going to find a cave near a tree with himitation money in it?”

128

“If we don’t,” Orion spoke for himself, with a grave face, “we’re going to be terribly disappointed.”

Rory laughed when he learned how we had sneaked into the wide-water.

“Red was kind of ’orrified when we first hoberved the Strickers this morning. But I told ’im that there was nothing to get hexcited about. If they tried to get funny with us, I said, you fellows would soon settle their ’ash. But I never hexpected you to show up in an outfit like *that*.”

“Camouflagé,” Peg spoke learnedly, “is an old naval strategy.”

Everything having been explained to the satisfaction of both sides we then set out in the direction of Bible Cave but stopped, amazed, when the donkey came tearing down the path with a weight on his tail.

Rory was back in character now.

“The king’s private messenger,” he spoke with dignity. And having retrieved the weight, which turned out to be a small clay tablet, he read the message aloud. “Digly dagly pep pep pep.”

Which, when translated, meant that the king wanted a banana—only Rory, in his English way, called it a “bananah.”

CHAPTER XI

THE MEETING OF THE GREAT

Kay examined the small clay tablet with his sensitive fingers.

“Did you make it?” he inquired of the hurrying prime minister.

But it was the latter’s rambling story that the tablet had been made by the ruling monarch himself.

“‘Is ’ighness,” then began the flowery long-winded recital, “is a very hintellectual personage. ’E ’as spent many hours studying the stars. It is ’is hintellectual hidea that they are separate worlds like ours, instead of mere fiery dots in the sky. We are living on the houtside of a great ball, ’e says, in ’is hintellectual way. And this ball, together with hothers of its kind, some of which are larger and some smaller, are moving together through space. It is a very learned theory and quite does away with the hold superstitious theory that the hearth is flat.”

“But what has that got to do with clay tablets?” grunted Peg.

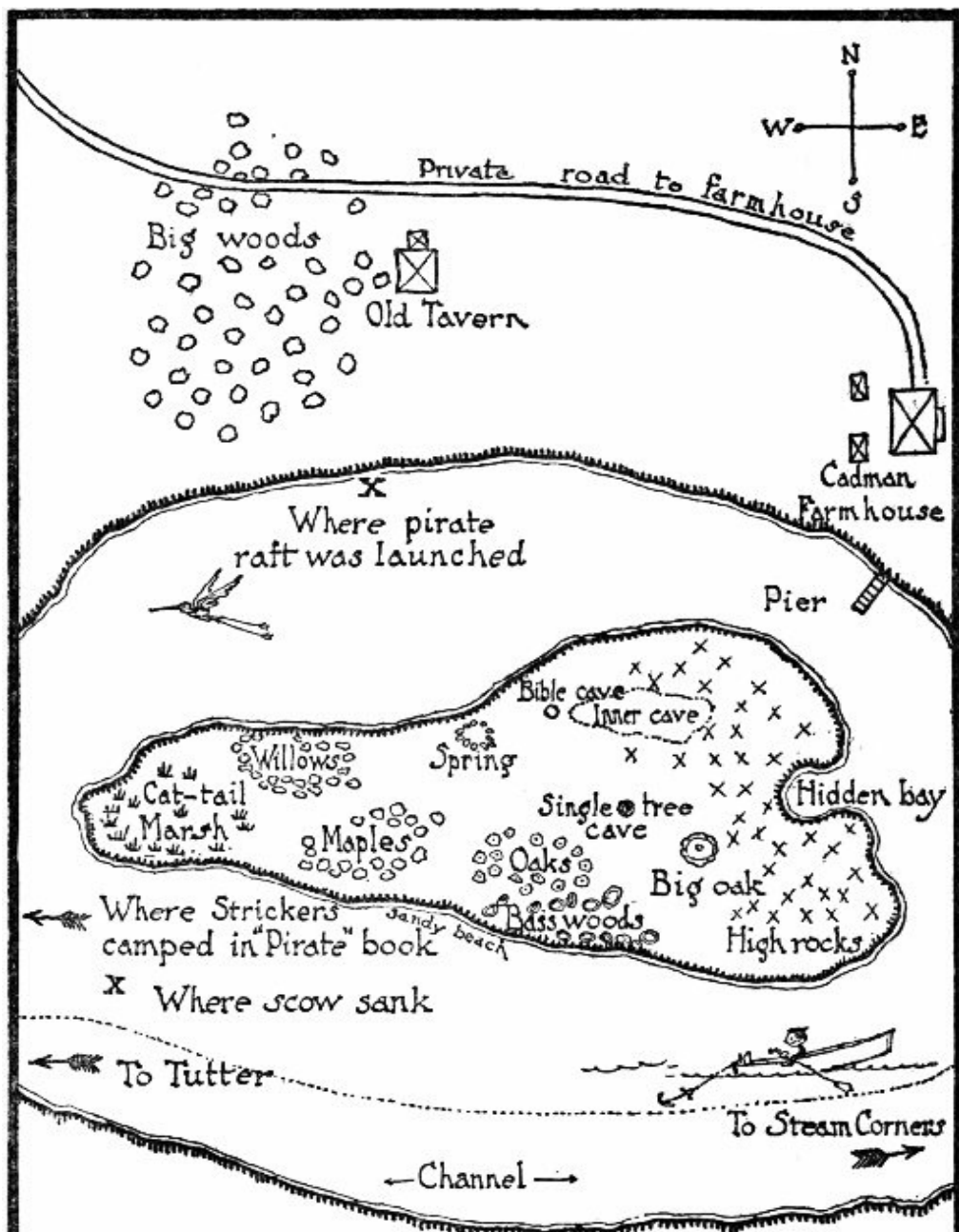
“It was through ’is learned hobobservation of the stars that ’is ’ighness discovered the secret of fire. ‘What would ’appen,’ he pondered, in ’is hintellectual way, ‘if one moving star grazed another?’ He hexperimented with sticks of dry wood, learning that when they were rubbed together they generated ’eat. Thus was born in ’is ’ighness’ hintellectual ’ead the great and himportant secret of fire creation. This hopened

hup the way to greater comforts in our kingdom. No longer do we 'ave to shiver in dark damp caves, a prey to roving beasts. For we 'ave both 'eat and light. Moreover we 'ave cooked food, which is heaten on dishes baked in the coals over which the food is prepared. These dishes and the mentioned tablet, together with others of its kind, are the hadded products of 'is 'ighness' great brain. The dishes and tablets alike are made of clay. 'E fashions them 'isself, in 'is own learned way, while I hattend the fire in which they are baked to rock-like 'ardness. In time we hexpect to 'ave a great national library containing row upon row of hilluminated tablets on which will be recorded, by 'is 'ighness 'isself, the complete 'istory of our country. And thus will posterity benefit by the great hintellectuality of our peerless ruler——”

“Rubber Gullet the third,” supplied Peg, with a grin.

The court historian drew himself up.

“I beg pardon,” he spoke frigidly.



Map of OAK ISLAND

“Isn’t that his name?” Peg pretended innocence.

132

“You will do well while you are in our kingdom to show our ruler the proper respect. Travelers from foreign countries ’ave been be’eaded for lesser hoffenses. Let that be a warning to you. And now, if you will wait ’ere in the houter court, I will proceed to the throne of Borealis the Brave and hadminister to ’is wants. After which I will dutifully hacquaint ’im with your presence in the kingdom.”

“*Ouch!*” Peg gave a comical protective gesture. “I guess that’s telling us where to get hoff hat.”

Bible cave, as you will note by the accompanying map, is located in the island’s hilly eastern section. Here the wash of many years has made numerous ravines, or gullies, in the rocky walls of which are odd niches and crevices. Having enlarged one of these niches for his own use, the early hermit had further altered the rocky walls of the selected gully so that it was possible for him to approach his underground dwelling either from the island’s summit or from the north shore.

Another similar gully, farther east, provided the great inner cavern that we had discovered with a natural

133

“window.” A mere slit of light, under an overhanging ledge, this “window” had later been buried in a landslide, so now the cavern’s only known opening was the inner doorway in Bible Cave. In other words, to enter the big natural cavern it was first necessary to pass through Bible Cave. And it was in the smaller artificial cave that Borealis the Brave had established his headquarters.

Having learned that there was one natural cavern on the island it was our belief now that there were more. For usually that's the way it is with caves. Where you find one you'll find several. And it was in one of these supposed hidden chambers that we hoped to find the proof of Orion's father's innocence. The locality of the hidden cavern was marked by an odd "singing" tree. And just as soon as possible we intended to set out in search of this remarkable tree. But, of course, we first had to gain the official consent of Carbolic Acid the Great, as Peg now called him.

The island I saw now, as we waited beside the bubbling rock-walled spring, was more beautiful and sweet-smelling than ever. For a recent cleansing shower had brought out all of the green that the trees and bushes possessed. Dainty flowers nodded at us from their cramped quarters in the rocks and bending over the spring was one of the biggest and hardiest ferns that I ever had seen. It seemed to be admiring itself in the icy water's mirror-like surface, while the falling water itself, as it escaped over the circular retaining wall, sounded like tiny tinkling bells.

Peg loves water cress. And having observed that the spring's winding outlet was full of the peppery green growth he set to work on it.

134

"Come on, gang," he called to us, wanting us to share in the treat.

"And you're sure," laughed Scoop, "that old Carbolic Acid isn't reserving it for his own hintellectual use?"

“We should worry about *him*,” old hefty spoke in his independent way.

Curious to learn what Red would do when we were brought into his royal presence I then suggested that we play our parts in the same faithful manner that the prime minister was playing his. For he was getting a lot of fun out of it. And why shouldn't we? Anyway, I argued in conclusion, it wasn't right for us to make a monkey of the pretended king simply because we were bigger and stronger.

“Don't worry,” grunted Peg, as he further stuffed his face beside the laden stream. “We couldn't make a monkey of *him* if we wanted to. For he was born that way.”

“Red's all right,” Scoop put in warmly. “And so is Rory.”

“Of course,” conceded old hefty. “And I'm willing to meet them halfway. But I'll be cow-kicked if I'm going to kiss Red's dirty feet just because he has a clay crown on his head.”

“Don't worry,” I laughed, “he'll have better sense than to suggest that.”

Scoop then observed a clay mug beside the spring.

135

“What's that hen-scratching on the side of it?” I inquired curiously, as the lop-sided tankard passed from hand to hand.

“It starts with a big B,” laughed Scoop. “So I guess it's the king's personal monogram.”

“Put it down!” screeched Peg, in a pretended panic. “If you

don't the hofficial hexecutioner is liable to 'ack your 'ead off with 'is 'ome-made 'atchet."

"Boy! It's heavy enough to sink a young battleship."

"Put it *down!*" old hefty further screeched.

"Yes, beautiful," purred Scoop.

That gave me an idea.

"If Red wants us to call him Borealis the Brave, let's give ourselves some names in return that will knock him dizzy."

"Goody! Goody!" cried little Kay. "That will be fun."

"All right," I slipped an arm around him. "Let's hear your name first."

"I'll be little Lord Fauntleroy," he bubbled with merriment.

"How about you?" I turned to Orion.

"Oh, I guess you better call me Julius Cæsar."

"I'm William Shakespeare," Peg struck a tragic pose.

"And I'm Jonah," annexed Scoop.

136

"Which Jonah?" I inquired.

"The one that built the big ark, of course. Where were you brung up?"

“Don’t be dumb,” I snorted, “Jonah wasn’t an ark builder. He’s the guy who swallowed the whale.”

“Sure thing,” spoke William Shakespeare authoritatively. “I was there when it happened.”

“Don’t forget,” I told him, “that you’re an Englishman. And in England things don’t happen. They ’appen.”

“Correct you are,” old hefty grinned.

Scoop caught my eye.

“And who are you?” he quizzed.

“I’m the guy who discovers things,” I stepped around in grand style.

“What kind of things?”

“Real estate mostly.”

“And did you make your biggest discovery in 1492?”

“Sure thing. I’m little old Christopher Columbus himself.”

“Boy!” laughed Scoop. “If we don’t give old Carbolic Acid a pain in the neck I miss my guess.”

“He and Rory have a swell scheme,” I agreed. “And they’re acting their parts to perfection. But from now on they’re going to have plenty of competition and nothing else but.”

Peg began to recite in a deep professional way.

A goat stood on the railroad track
Its heart was all a-flutter.
The fast express came tearing by—
Toot! Toot! Peanut butter.

“Don’t be simple,” I told him. “Shakespeare never wrote that.”

“What did he write!” came the grinning inquiry.

“Plays, of course.”

“Oh, yes! I remember now. He’s the bird who wrote Oleo and Joliet.”

“*Romeo and Juliet*,” I corrected.

Which brought on another oratorical deluge.

Methinks I see a dancing light,
Oh, pray what may it be?
But the skipper hanswered narry a woid—
He ’ad choked to death on a flea.

“*Woid!*” I snorted. “Is that your idea of the classical English dialect?”

And thus the nonsense continued until the prime minister again appeared in the path leading to Bible Cave.

He made a low bow.

“‘Is ’ighness the king ’as been properly hinformed of your presence within our borders. ’E is planning to grant you a brief yet courteous audience. In the meantime if you ’ave any gumdrops or candy bars on your person I’ll be pleased to deliver them to ’im, as tokens of your ’igh regard for ’im. Such is ’is own gracious suggestion.”

Peg shelled out.

My one and honly stick of gum,
 I would have chewed you hum-hum-hum
 If Borealis ’adn’t come
 Hand coaxed haway my stick of gum.

The prime minister looked kind of dizzy, the more so when the poet disclosed his professional identity.

“Go ’ence, my faithful varlet,” the visitor gestured grandly, “and inform your king that the great William Shakespeare ’imself hawaits without the castle door with two plays in one pocket, three in hanother, and seven dictionaries tucked in ’is boots.”

“And with him,” I stepped up, “are Julius Cæsar, Jonah the whale swallower, little Lord Fauntleroy and last but not least the world’s great real-estate discoverer, Christopher Columbus *in person*.”

But Rory was too good an actor himself to be floored by that.

“Our country is honored by your presence,” he bowed to us collectively. “And now I shall deliver this hodd token to ’is ’ighness and hinform ’im that you are ready to be

received in state.”

“Boy!” Scoop’s eyes danced, when we were alone. “This is getting good.”

“And if he asks you about your native country,” I laughed, “what are you going to tell his highness?”

“Ooi, ooi!” the speaker laid it off with his hands in true yiddish style. “Such a fine suit it is vot you are wearing, Meester King. But a better von can I sell you for two-ninety-eight with an extra pair of pants vat will fit like the paper on the wall and guaranteed not to rip, run, ravel, shrink, leak, loosen, fade or bag at the knees.”

“You’ll do,” I told him.

“And where do I hail from?” inquired Orion.

“Constantinople, if you can spell it. If you can’t make it Rome.”

“*I* am a little Henglish boy like Rory,” Lord Fauntleroy spoke for himself.

“Ah, ha!” Peg again ran off at the mouth. “A youthful countryman of mine. Come ’ither, my naïve-kneed stripling, and let me implant the kiss of national pride on your fair and chiseled brow.”

“And don’t forget,” Scoop checked up on me in turn, “that *you* hail from Genoa.”

“Where’s that?” I exposed my ignorance.

“For the love of mud! Don’t you know where you were born?”

“Sure thing. But where was it!”

“In Genoa, of course.”

“Anyway,” I added to the nonsense, “I know it wasn’t in Texas.”

“I’m not sure myself,” admitted Scoop, “whether Genoa is in Peoria or Portugal. But let’s play safe and call it Spain. For everybody knows that Chris married Queen Isabella.”

“Hel-lup!” I squawked. “I’ve got a wife and I didn’t know it.”

Rory then popped into sight.

“Borealis the Brave,” he bowed low, “will now receive you in state.”

The island’s paths and passageways were old stuff to me. For I had been here many times, as I say. And I knew just where we were headed for. But Orion’s face betrayed the mounting interest that he felt as we ascended the picturesque hill and turned to the left into Bible Cave ravine.

“How do you like it?” I inquired.

“It’s great,” he spoke enthusiastically.

I dropped behind and took Kay’s hand.

“I’ve been listening for the singing tree, Jerry,” he told me.
“But I haven’t heard anything yet.”

A big black cat scooted across our path.

“Did you hear that?” I laughed.

“What was it?—a squirrel?”

141

“The last time we were here we dumped a lot of cats and dogs on the island. The dogs swam ashore. But the cats, hating water, and having multiplied, are still here.”

“*And* how,” put in Peg, as three more wild-eyed yodlers scuttled around a bend in the ledge-like path.

“‘Is ’ighness is planning a grand moonlight cat ’unt,” the dignified prime minister then informed. “Already the bows and harrows ’ave been provided. And if you find favor in ’is ’ighness’ eyes, it may be that ’e will permit you to haccompany ’im into the Great Forest when the ’unt takes place.”

We then came within sight of the cave. And never, as long as I live, will I forget the scene that greeted our eyes. Favoring the sunlight, the king had provided a stone throne for himself in the cave’s entrance. Thus the overhanging rocks served as a sort of canopy, so necessary with all well regulated thrones. The stone dais, or whatever you call it, was covered with a blanket of leaves held together with big thorns. To one side stood a huge bludgeon, or club, such as a giant might have wielded. On the other side was the imperial bow, with which, according to the prime minister’s brief report, the sport-loving king was about to rid the island of its

142

multitudinous cats. Itself a pile of flat stones, the throne was covered with a bearskin rug—Mrs. Meyers’ best parlor rug, mind you!—and the receiving monarch’s further comfort was assured by the mentioned pillows, one of which served to soften the stone seat while the other was used as a foot rest. Ordinary cloth-covered pillows would have been out of place in a primitive scene like this. So the resourceful monarch (or his willing servant) had covered the pillows with a fabric of woven reeds, gathered in the island’s lowlands. One of the rocky walls beside the throne was decorated with a huge smelly cowskin while on the other wall hung the cow’s inner framework. Bones, bones, bones! I never saw so many bones in all my life. Truly, I told myself as I stared at the imposing spectacle, the monarch’s recent visit to the Ashton slaughter house had been a most productive one!

The parrot hung over the throne in a homemade willow cage. And below it hung the ringtailed monkey on a sort of trapeze affair. Also I caught a glimpse of the goat. And at sight of us Peg’s dog and my cat ran to meet us. But we had better sense than to recognize them. For this, it was to be remembered, was the imperial domain of Borealis the Brave. And all that was in it was his, including the ants and cockroaches.

He had worn a tunic on his earlier attempted tour of the island. But now he had an old fur cape draped around him. His bare skin, as it showed above and below the cape, was more colorful than ever. And as seen at short range the cow-tooth ornaments that he wore, to which had been added a pair of bracelets, gave him a decidedly primitive appearance.

Patterning after the long-faced prime minister we got down on

our knees and bent forward until our foreheads touched the ground. And there the lordly monarch of the island kept us until he ate six bananas, stopping gluttonously every few moments to say, digly dagly pep pep pep.



**THERE THE LORDLY MONARCH OF THE ISLAND KEPT US
UNTIL HE ATE SIX BANANAS.**

Then, having properly refreshed himself, he graciously permitted us to arise, after which the instructed prime minister brought us forward, one by one, and properly presented us.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE KING'S COURT

Evidently his royal highness Borealis the Brave didn't think much of us. For he kind of turned up his imperial nose at us as we stood there in front of him.

"Bicky bocky boo," he then signaled to the hovering prime minister with a lordly gesture.

After which the grave-faced official turned to us.

"'Is gracious 'ighness wants to know," came the interpretation, "if you belong to a tribe of hapes."

"What's a hape?" inquired Peg.

"Houtside of Hengland," I told him, to help the fun along, "a hape is an ape."

"Oh! . . ." he grinned.

"I'll grant that we look like hapes," Scoop then took the lead in the crazy conversation. "But please assure 'is 'ighness the king that we are indeed human beings like himself."

This message having been delivered to the monarch in his own primitive language, he next ordered us to be searched.

"'Is 'ighness wishes me to make certain," we were addressed collectively by the dignified court official,

“that you ’ave no concealed weapons. So please turn your pockets hinsideout for hinspection.”

Which we did.

“Bobby hooky tub,” the ruler greedily eyed the pile of pocketknives, marbles, candy bars and other truck.

The intelligent prime minister then selected all of the candy bars.

“Tubby hooky bob,” he spoke at the foot of the throne.

“Hooky tubby bob,” was the comprehensive reply.

“‘Is ’ighness,” the interpreter then turned to us, “as asked me to convey to you ’is ’earty appreciation for the candy bars. ’E will heat them, ’e says, at ’is leisure. If they please ’is royal palate ’e undoubtedly will let you bring ’im more. For ’is ’ighness is very kind in that respect. And now you may return these hother harticles to your pockets. But take care that you do not use the knives indiscreetly. For the king’s person is sacred. It is not to be violated. And should you seek to do ’im harm you would be be’eaded without mercy.”

“May we trim our own toenails?” Peg inquired humbly.

The prime minister turned gravely to the throne for instructions.

“Horky stewy pork,” came the fluent reply.

And thus did the gracious ruler consent to let us trim our toenails as we saw fit.

“‘Is ’ighness,” spoke the prime minister, with a low bow, “is very kind.”

“And we,” Scoop bowed in return, “are very grateful.”

“Putty wooty pink,” came from the throne.

“‘Is gracious ’ighness wants to know,” interpreted the ever-handly official, “if toenail trimming is a general custom in your country.”

This gave Scoop a fine chance to run off at the mouth.

“We come from various countries,” he informed. “I am
Jonah the whale swallower, a Hebrew. In my country
toenails are not only clipped, in the usual Saturday-night
custom, but they are further placed on exhibition in the town
hall. Each year a prize is offered for the family having the
biggest and most artistic pile of toenails, after which the
accumulated toenails are auctioned off for chicken grit. I won
the prize three years in succession. My first award was a
leather noodle, the invention of a Scotchman. The second
award was a cast-iron shoestring. And the third award was a
hand-embroidered file for cleaning my back teeth. This year I
was disqualified because I had callouses on my heels, it being
a rule in my country that poor people, even whale swallowers,
shouldn’t support toenails and callouses, too. Shakespeare in
turn hails from Merrie England, where soap is so expensive
that half of the population doesn’t know whether it has toenails
or not. A common practice there is for the husband to scrape
his wife on the shins. If he leaves a mark he knows that he has
toenails and can act accordingly. It is considered very poor

form though for one husband to scrape another husband's wife on the shins. So the shin-scraping test is usually conducted with due precaution. Bachelors, I understand, scrape each other, while the children and maiden ladies play a game called London bridge is falling down. They stand on their toes to see the bridge fall and thus can usually tell if they have toenails. Once detected, toenails are trimmed in the prevailing fashion. Just now the Elizabethan trim is the vogue among the upper classes, though the new Sir Walter Raleigh trim is fast gaining flavor—I mean favor. The impartial queen herself trims her big toes one way and her little toes the other way. But the Loyalists as a rule adhere to the dignified Elizabethan trim while the Colonists favor the rugged saw-edged Sir Walter Raleigh trim. And there you are! Our gallant young companion here, Lord Fauntleroy himself, who also hails from England, and whose illustrious mother was once the rubber-backed lady in a troupe of traveling acrobats, reports that he spent the greater part of his boyhood with his toes in his mouth. A family accomplishment, as it were. Naturally he *would* get a nip now and then. In fact he nipped his toenails so much and so often that they got discouraged and quit growing. Which shows you what sensitive things toenails are. Take Cæsar's toenails for instance. You'd scarcely believe how he has to pamper them. And when I say *pamper* I mean *pamper*. P-a-m-p-e-r, pamper. A nice old Greek word meaning hamper with the first letter changed to 'p'. What happens when Cæsar has ice cream for dessert? Does it all go into his stomach? Oh, no. He gets half and his pampered toenails get the other half. And it's the same way with soup. That's why he limps. For the last soup was hotter than he thought. But then, as the old saying is, toenails must be served. As our genial friend Shakespeare has so aptly expressed it in one of his recent plays, the foot that rocks the

cradle has the biggest toenails. There are toenail and toenails. It is a subject of wide and learned discussion. Statesmen talk toenails. Lovers talk toenails. Husbands talk toenails. And so do their wives. Even housebreakers stop to politely discuss the all-important subject with their victims. My kingdom for a toenail! There you are. And again, give me a toenail or give me death. And still further, you can fool some of your toenails all of the time and all of your toenails some of the time but you can't fool all of your toenails all of the time. Even on the briny deep you hear the plaintive cry, water water all around me but not a toenail in sight except my own. I stood on the bridge at midnight! Thus began that famous old poem. *Stood* on the bridge at midnight. Stood—feet—toenails. See how vastly important they are? If I had a hundred toenails, cried the inspired patriot, willingly would I trim them all for the sake of my beloved country. Half a league, half a league, half a league onward. Change the league to leg and what have you? More toenails, of course. Toenails to the right of us and toenails to the left of us. And now listen to the amazing story of our good friend Christopher Columbus. He was born in Genoa. Even as a baby he had toenails. As he grew up they grew with him; the bigger the toes the bigger the toenails. When he went to Spain, to beg Queen Isabella to buy him a boat so that he could start out and discover things, he took his toenails with him. 'Who awaits without my castle door?' queried the queen, with a mouthful of pancakes. 'Christopher Columbus,' was the reply. 'Have you your toenails with you?' 'Yes,' came the doughty reply. 'Then enter and show me how to stand an egg on end.' After which, of course, the egg was fried. For Bella was a thrifty old girl. But the point is that Chris, had he carelessly left his toenails behind, never would have had a chance to show Queen Isabella how to stand an egg on end, thus proving that

the world was round. For Bella was very particular about her toenails. And *did she know her toenails!* Oh, baby! From that day to this Chris never has gone any place without his toenails. And when his final hour comes—when he lays there in the gathering gloom of the valley of death, a wan wasted figure with a hacking cough and a hole in his pajamas—his last words undoubtedly will be: All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to my scented toenails. Thus I have pointed out to you, your highness, how very important toenails are to all of us, to Jonah the whale swallower, to the illustrious Shakespeare, to his younger countryman, to Julius Cæsar and to Christopher Columbus. As for myself, I say simply, save the toenails and you save all. Your gracious highness we *do* trim our toenails. It is an old spinach custom. Without their daily trim our toenails would rise in sullen rebellion. But thanks to your kingly generosity that need not happen. You have said the word. We *can* trim our toenails as often as we wish. And so we are filled with great joy while you in turn are filled with bananas.”

Which, I venture to say, is the longest “toenail” speech on record. But much less than being exhausted the grinning monarch motioned for Shakespeare to approach the throne.

“Whicky snoot poo poo dip,” he commanded, with an airy flip of his scepter.

151

“What does he want to do?” old hefty inquired of the convenient prime minister. “Turn a flip-flop?”

“You are to recite. It is ’is ’ighness’ command.”

“Recite what?”

“Something from one of your famous plays, preferably the incomparable balcony scene where Romeo speaks from the moonlit garden to Juliet in the balcony.”

“But there isn’t any moonlight,” Peg further held off.

“‘Is ’ighness is waiting,” came the icy reminder.

“And do I have to take both parts?”

“Such is ‘is ’ighness’ command.”

The funny part is that Peg actually knew how the stuff ran, having had it packed into his head at school. But he made no attempt to recite it word for word.

And here’s what he did:

152

Soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It isn’t a candle; nor a flashlight; nor a headlight;
It is the east where the sun comes up,
 And Joliet—I mean Juliet is the sun itself.
Arise fair sun, come on and get up,
And take a crack at the envious moon,
Sock it in the jaw and do it blamed soon.
Already the moon is sick and pale with grief,
(I bet a cookie she ate too many green apples)
That thou her maid hath a better mug than she.
It is my lady! O, it is my love.
Ha-ha-ha-ha! He-he-he-he!
O, that I were a glove upon her hand
That I might wipe the powder from her cheek.

To which Juliet responded in a squeaky high-pitched voice:

O, Romeo! My Romeo! I've got a pain in my big toe.
Did you climb over the garden wall? Gracious goodness!
It's a wonder you didn't fall and break your neck.
What? You say it's made of rubber. Oh, my gosh!
You mean your *neck*! I thought you meant the garden wall.
Tee-hee-hee-hee-hee!

ROMEO:

With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls.
For stony limits cannot hold love out.
What are you chewing, baby? Lic'rice?

JULIET:

Oh, I'm nibbling on some cold liver.
Huh? No. Just liver. I never *did* like onions.
No. One time I ate an onion and it had a worm in it.
How do I *know*? Heavens! Couldn't I feel the blamed
 thing wiggle?
But you better look out how you bang around here,
 Handsome.
For if my pa sees you he'll put a tack in your tire.

ROMEO:

Alack! There lies more peril for me in thine eyes.
Than twenty tacks. . . . Gee, you look hot, baby.
There's nothing like Palmolive for that schoolgirl
 complexion.

JULIET:

I would not for the world my pa saw you here.
For the last guy he slugged died on the way to the hospital.

ROMEO:

154

I have night's cloak to hide me from your pa's eyes.
No, not a *nice* cloak. I said a night's cloak.
I mean it's so dark your pa can't see me.
Ouch! I just stepped in an old paint pail.
Some day, baby, you ought to get chummy with a rake
And clean up your back yard.

JULIET:

By whose directions found'st thou out this place?

ROMEO:

Be yourself, Julie. Be yourself.
I have a telephone book—you know that.

JULIET:

O, gentle Romeo. If thou does love me tell me so.
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won
I'll frown—wait a minute, Handsome, while I sneeze.
Ker-choo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay.
After which I'll hit the hay.

ROMEO:

Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That I love you from your heels to your hair.
Is it really red, baby? Or do you henna it?

JULIET:

O, swear not by the moon, the inconsistent moon.

Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO:

What shall I swear by?

JULIET:

155

Cut out the swearing. I don't like it.

It reminds me of my first husband.

Anyway, here comes the nurse.

NURSE:

Come to bed, dearie. I've mended the hole in the sheet.

JULIET:

I come anon. . . . Romeo, are you still there?

ROMEO:

Yah, baby. I'm sitting on the dog house.

JULIET:

My love! My life! My Romeo!

ROMEO:

It is my soul that calls upon my name.

How silver-sweet sounds love's tongues at night,

Like softest music to attending ear.

Bow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow!

JULIET:

Was that a cat?

ROMEO:

No, beloved, it was a pig.

JULIET:

Sweet! 'Tis almost morning, I would have thee go,
Before my pa gives you his toe.
And yet no further than a wanton's bird,
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Tweet! Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!
And with a silk thread plucks it back again.

ROMEO:

I wish I were that boid.

156

JULIET:

It wasn't a boid. It was a bird.

ROMEO:

Anyway it sounded to me like a boid.

JULIET:

So do I wish that you were a bird.
Yet I would kill thee with much caressing.
Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

ROMEO:

Nighty-night, Honey-bunch.

JULIET:

Nighty-night, Handsome. I'll be seein' you.
Toodle-oo!

Which concluded the entertainment for the afternoon.

For Borealis the Brave, as he had been known to do before

when he overloaded his stomach, and whose clay crown had skidded down his nose into his furry lap, was sound asleep on the imperial throne.

CHAPTER XIII

AN INTENSIVE SEARCH

Peg actually looked embarrassed.

“Gosh, fellows,” he spoke foolishly. “I put the king to sleep.”

“Evidently he thought you were telling him a bedtime story,” I laughed.

“Shakespeare the great entertainer,” jeered Scoop. “Haw, haw, haw!”

“I thought I was great,” grimaced Peg. “But I’ve got my doubts now.”

The parrot then came to life.

“Boloney!” it screeched, as it furiously attacked the wooden bars of its cage. “You’re full of boloney.”

Which to us was the funniest of all.

Having made the sleeping monarch as comfortable as possible the ever-attentive prime minister signaled to us to withdraw.

“The hentertainment will be resumed,” he spoke in his customary pompous manner, “when ’is ’ighness hawakens.”

“And what does he expect of me?” I quizzed curiously, as the parrot attacked the bars of its prison with renewed vigor.

“Is ’ighness is greatly hinterested in tales of the sea. And as one of its most hardent followers I dare say that you ’ave ’ad some hexperiences that will bear recounting.”

Gee! I was bubbling all over now.

“Has he ever heard of Sinbad?” I inquired, with dancing eyes.

“Sinbad?” the name was repeated reflectively.

“He was a sailor, like myself,” I informed, as my imagination jumped into high gear. “I met him one time in an Arabian port. At that time he had just returned from his eventful voyage to the valley of diamonds. While there he had heard about a strange floating island the eccentric ruler of which was known by the fanciful name of King Jig-a-lot. The kingdom was called the Land of Melody. Daring navigators had sighted this remarkable island in distant seas as it floated first in one direction and then in another. And the statements of these amazed seamen strengthened the story that all the inhabitants did, under the frisky ruler’s leadership, was to sing and dance. If a peasant drove a horse to market he danced all the way, as also did the horse. For everything here either danced or made musical sounds, including the bedbugs. And it was to secure a supply of these, for propagating purposes, that Sinbad and I set out on what proved to be the most amazing and hazardous voyage of our separate careers. A musical bedbug! Truly, we agreed, great wealth would be ours if we could introduce such a back-biter to civilization. The old moody, sleek-eyed, creep-up-and-grab-it type of bedbug would be thrown into the discard. Musical bedbugs would become the rage. For consider the many advantages of having a musical bedbug in the family.

Take the baby for instance. No longer would the busy mother have to sing it to sleep. The musical bedbugs would do that. In the same way grandpa's afternoon nap would be sweeter and the whole family's natural rest more peaceful and refreshing. Nor did we intend to stop there. By crossing the musical backbiters with common fleas we hoped to open a new world of happiness to dogs and cats. Humanity's greatest blessing! The musical bedbug would be that, we agreed, and more. And all the time we were sailing farther and farther into the great unknown, an adventure that I will be glad to recount in all of its amazing details if that is your monarch's desire."

To all of which the dignified prime minister gave an attentive ear.

159

"Aving met few sailors," he spoke earnestly, "I doubt very much if 'is 'ighness 'as ever 'eard of your friend Sinbad. So the haccount of your joint voyage to the Land of Melody will hundoubtedly intrigue 'is fancy very much. But let us retire now. For 'is 'ighness would be hexceedingly vexed should he hawaken and find us gaping at 'im. Court hetiquette forbids that."

So we backed into the path that led to the top of the hill.

160

"Where's Kay?" Orion spoke anxiously, when we were alone.

"Here I am," cried the little fellow from an over-hanging rock.

"What are you doing up there?"

"Searching for caves."

“But you ought to be more careful, Kay,” the older brother’s anxiety deepened. “Gosh! I don’t want to pick you up in pieces.”

That brought a merry laugh.

“I can climb rocks just as well as you can. I can do it just as fast, too.”

“And what did you find up there?” I inquired, when he dropped into the path beside me.

“Nothing,” was the short reply.

“Where’s the big cave that you told us about?” Orion then inquired.

“Over there,” I pointed.

“And you’re sure,” came the added intent inquiry, “that the stuff we’re looking for isn’t hidden in one of its side chambers?”

“It has no side chambers,” I informed. “It’s just a long sloping corridor ending in a pool.”

“Let’s go back and explore it,” Kay tugged eagerly at my hand.

But that would hardly be practical, I explained, until the king awakened. For his throne filled the whole mouth of the smaller cave.

“Oh, gee!” the little fellow persisted. “Don’t let the king stop us. I can easily climb over him.”

“The cave won’t run away,” I told him. “And there’s plenty of other things to explore in the meantime.”

“And did the hermit know that there was a big natural cave behind his smaller one?” Orion further inquired.

“No,” I shook my head. “We made that discovery when we were fooling around with old Joshua Jonathan Jacobs the Bible peddler.”

This led to an account of my odd adventure in the outer cave, where, as recorded, I had been startled by a seemingly whispering voice in the cave wall. What I had heard was the air from the inner cave whistling through a crack. And when this opening was enlarged we saw that a vast natural cavern lay beyond.

Kay now had a thoughtful look on his face.

“If one cave can *whisper*,” he spoke reflectively, “another one can easily *sing*.”

“But we aren’t in search of a singing cave,” corrected Orion. “What we hope to find is a singing tree.”

We set out then in two separate groups and explored the island from its highest rocky peak to its lowest dampest hollow. Kay and I were followed by the goat while the other fellows had the donkey for company. But the intensive search brought no results. There were trees wherever we turned. We saw hundreds of them as we roamed here and there. And we spotted several with hollow trunks, particularly along the sandy south shore. The native oaks here were freely sprinkled

with twisted basswoods. And farther west we ran into a grove of towering hard maples. Beyond that was a thicket of willows. We inspected them all, oaks, maples, basswoods and willows alike. But much less than singing to us they were as silent as the earth itself.

Orion brought up a good point while we were resting in the willow thicket.

“I can’t conceive, fellows, that we’ll find a cave down here. For the soil’s too boggy. To spot caves you’ve got to stick to the high ground. So let’s go back to the rock pile.”

But Peg was worn out.

“Let’s eat,” he offered the counter suggestion. “For I’m as hungry as a bear.”

“You and me both,” I took sides with him.

So we crossed the island to the north shore and built a fire, intending to cook our bacon on willow switches in true primitive style. But when we looked into the anchored boat the bacon and everything else had disappeared.

Peg was sore now.

163

“I didn’t mind giving up my gum and candy bars. But I’ll be cow-kicked if I’m going to let old Carbollic Acid walk off with my bacon. . . . Come on, gang.”

“Where are you going?” I inquired, as he started off in high dudgeon.

“Back to the cave to start a revolution.”

“You know what usually happens to revolutionists,” I reminded, “who yank kings off their thrones.”

“Huh! This king will be lucky if I don’t yank his head off, the contemptible little rubber gullet.”

“I hate to spoil the fun,” I still held back.

“Since when,” old hefty further snorted, “did you get the idea in your head that starving is fun?”

“You haven’t starved yet,” I told him. “And if you hold your horses it may be that the king will invite us to eat supper with him.”

“Eat our own bacon, huh?” came the sour comment.

“And why not? We’ll at least be saved the job of cooking it.”

Orion and Kay in the meantime had gone back to the rock pile to renew the search for the singing tree. For that to them was far more important than food. But they appeared kind of glum when I climbed the hill to help them.

A singing tree! They began to realize now how ridiculous the quest was. And doubt had entered their minds. Admittedly an old man in his dotage, the lock tender might have made up the story. Or it could have been the natural hallucination, or whatever you call it, of a dying man.

Still Orion wasn’t the kind of a boy to completely give up. No,

sir-ee! He appeared kind of downhearted now. And so did Kay. But they went back to work with renewed enthusiasm when I joined them.

“Where’s the rest of the gang?” Orion inquired.

“Scoop is over in the marsh looking for big bullfrogs,” I informed. “And Peg is pacing up and down the north shore.”

“What’s the matter with him?” the speaker grinned.

“The king snitched our grub. And old hefty is scared that he’ll starve.”

“It’s a wonder,” laughed Orion, “that he doesn’t make a raid on the king’s pantry.”

“That’s what he wants to do. But I made him promise to hold off till the king is awake. For I can’t make myself believe that Red would want us to go hungry, even in fun. And very probably when his supper is prepared he’ll invite us to join him.”

“That *will* be an honor,” laughed Orion.

165

“What do you think of him?” I then inquired.

“He seems to be a very interesting boy,” came the thoughtful reply. “Certainly he doesn’t lack for ideas.”

“The more you see of him,” I predicted loyally, “the better you’ll like him.”

“Rory’s funny.”

“*And* how.”

“I actually have to pinch myself when he’s talking to make sure that he isn’t a real prime minister or something. For he’s just as sober as a Vermont deacon.”

“Red hasn’t much ambition when it comes to sawing stove wood and stuff like that. But he’s the original busy little bee himself when he gets tangled up in a scheme like this. See the stuff he’s made already! Clay dishes and tablets and even a primitive cart. Boy, that *was* a job. And how he and Rory ever got that pile of bones here without sinking the boat is a mystery to me. But they did it. And now they’re planning a moonlight cat hunt. Which I predict will be the funniest thing of all. For when it comes to archery stuff Red can’t hit the broad side of a barn. And you know how quick cats are.”

Kay sniffed the air.

“I can smell wood smoke,” he told me.

“It’s our camp fire,” I explained.

“No,” he shook his head. “The smell comes from over there.”

166

I crept to the edge of the bluff.

“It’s the two cavemen,” I whispered over my shoulder.

“They’re cooking a big supper just as I expected. Um . . . Smell the bacon.”

“I can smell it,” Kay spoke with a puzzled face, “but I can’t hear it sizzle.”

“Cavemen,” I told him, “don’t use frying pans.”

“But how are they cooking it? On sticks?”

“Sure thing. And they’re baking a flock of eggs on a huge flat stone. I can see a boiled ham, too. Evidently they brought that with them. And right beside the ham is a pile of stuff that looks like parboiled nutmegs.”

Orion took a look.

“Those aren’t nutmegs.”

“What are they?” I strained my eyes.

“Home-made biscuits.”

“But biscuits aren’t that color,” I argued.

“They do look kind of dingy,” he admitted. “But maybe that’s the natural color of a caveman’s biscuits.”

And we had to eat them!

“Let’s hope,” I spoke weakly, “that they taste better than they look.”

As soon as the food was prepared the two busy cooks placed it in clumsy clay dishes on a huge flat stone which in turn was supported by four piles of smaller flat

stones. Other similar piles of stones served as seats, of which I counted seven. And in the middle of the improvised table was a clay urn filled with flowers.

“It’s hard to believe,” Orion voiced my own thoughts, as he lay beside me, “that they aren’t real cavemen.”

There was no difference now in their supposed rank. They were just a pair of fun-loving boys. And how we laughed when a hot coal socked poor Rory in the stomach.

“Houch!” he squawked, doubling up.

“Come on,” urged Red. “Let’s get the rest of the grub on the table, for I’m as hollow as some of those trees on the south shore.”

“I wish I had some hointment,” whined Rory, as he gingerly inspected his singed hide.

“Some what?”

“Hointment.”

“How do you spell it!”

“O-i-n-t-m-e-n-t, hointment.”

“You mean ointment.”

“Sure thing,” Rory patted his stomach. “That’s what I said.”

“Cavemen don’t use ointment,” came the superior comment.

“I would if I ’ad it,” came the bare-faced admission.

“Use some bacon grease.”

“It’s too ’ot.”

“Boloney!” screeched the parrot. “You’re full of boloney.”

“Who’s he talking to?” grinned Red.

168

“You,” was the ill-natured reply.

“Gosh! The biscuits are getting cold.”

“Well, I told you that you took them hoff the ’ot plate too soon.”

“Did the fellows see you when you snitched their stuff?”

“No.”

“Boy, I bet Peg was sore.”

“I wonder if ’e’s got any hointment?” mused Rory, with a longing look on his face.

“You and your hointment! . . . Hand me that custard pie and dry up.”

And so the amusing talk continued as the cooked food was transferred from the ’ot plate, as Rory called it, to the table and placed in separate clay dishes.

Red then got back into character.

“Whacky poppy strut strut strut,” he commanded from the throne, with the customary lordly gesture.

“Yes, your gracious ’ighness,” bowed the understanding court official, whose personal ailments now became a matter of minor importance. “I shall hinform the visitors that supper is being served in state in the royal dining room.”

Drumming us together, with an odd tambourine-like affair of his own manufacture, the pompous official then entered into a lengthy discourse on court etiquette.

“It is the custom ’ere,” we were told, “for the king to hadvance from ’is throne to the royal dining table while the favored guests stand at hattention. Therefore you will do likewise notwithstanding the hexisting customs in your own different countries. ’Aving seated ’isself ’is royal ’ighness will then graciously permit you to do likewise. ’E will then be served, after which the food will be passed to you in turn. But please do not become so hinterested in your food that you overlook the requirements of polite conversation. Remember, you are dining with ’is ’ighness the king, than which no greater honor can be shown you in this country. So be bright hand sparkling in your conversation. ’Is ’ighness prefers conversation of that type, even though he can’t hunderstand a word you say. Afterwards I will hacquaint ’im with the gist of your remarks. And now let us advance into the presence of the great and illustrious ruler, Borealis the Brave.”

169

Peg got my ear as we hurried down the rocky path.

“If the red-headed brat tries to get funny with us at the table I’m

going to sock him, king or no king.”

“Oh, no, you won’t,” I spoke confidently.

“I’m hungry, kid. And when I’ve got food in front of me *I* eat.”

“It won’t hurt you,” I argued, with further reference to the pretended king of the island, “to let him eat first. For he and Rory have done all the work. I saw them from the top of the hill. So let them have their fun.”

170

“We’re going to have biscuits,” put in Orion.

“Biscuits?” Peg repeated, as a quick change came over him.

“Do you mean home-made biscuits?”

“Sure thing. We saw them. Didn’t we, Jerry?”

“Nothing else but,” I affirmed.

“Home-made biscuits,” smacked Peg. “Um-yum-yum! And do I ever feel ashamed of myself for doubting Red’s sincerity. For *he* knows what I like. The little brick!”

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell the enthused biscuit lover that the prepared biscuits would probably turn out to be a whole lot “brickier” than their maker.

But I kept shut. And afterwards I was glad that I did.

Gee!

171

CHAPTER XIV

THE KING GOES HUNTING

“Boloney! Boloney!” screeched the sour-acting parrot, as we filed into the royal dining room, where the king majestically awaited us on his stone throne. “You’re full of boloney! Sloppy poppy dink dink dink. Docky wocky pap pap pap. Toot toot toot! BANG! Custard pie! Custard pie! BANG! You’re full of boloney. BANG!”

“And at every pop of the hero’s trusty six-shooter,” Peg snickered softly in my ear, “another redskin bit the dust.”

“BANG! BANG!” the celebration continued. “BANG! BANG! BANG!”

“Holt ’er, Newt?” Scoop snickered in turn. “She’s a-rearin’.”

The king motioned for silence.

“Snicky snacky pip pip pip,” he commanded from the throne.

But the ruffled parrot had no intention of being choked off by a mere king.

“Dry up, you big stiff. You’re full of boloney. BANG! BANG! BANG! Sloppy poppy dink dink dink. Docky wocky pap pap pap. Toot toot toot! BANG! Shot through the heart. BANG! Shot through the head. BANG! Shot through the gizzard. BANG! Let’s eat. BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!”

“Three cheers for the glorious Fourth of July,” Peg further snickered.

Kay had hold of my hand.

“Is the parrot actually making that funny noise, Jerry?” he spoke bewilderedly.

“Sure thing,” I replied.

“Gee! I thought something exploded.”

“Something will explode,” I predicted, “when Aunt Pansy arrives on the scene. For the parrot never learned that blood-curdling lingo from her. To the contrary she has spasms if it even gets its adjectives mixed up.”

“Red must have been reading to it out of a dime novel,” Scoop put in.

The king tapped authoritatively on the stony arm of his throne.

“Whoopy stoppy pot pot pot,” he commanded.

Following which the understanding prime minister approached the wicker cage with a piece of bacon.

“It is ’is ’ighness’ command,” the parrot was told, “that you heat this and shut hup.”

“Says you!” snapped the intelligent leering bird.

I thought that Peg would swallow his tonsils.

“Gee-miny crickets!” he snickered. “There’s going to be a hot time in the Meyers household when Polly the unrestrained and Aunt Pansy the emotional get together.”

173

The other animals were now broadcasting for their supper.

“Hee-haw! Hee-haw! Hee-haw!” brayed Shoe Polish, keeping time with his rope-like tail.

“Chit, chit, chit, chit, chit!” chattered the restless monkey.

“Baa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!” bleated the goat, in one long plaintive appeal.

“Bow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow!” barked the dog.

“We-we-we-we-we-we-we-we!” chorused the mamma pig and her ten little charges.

“Meow-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!” protested the cat, with a mournful accent.

Then, as the donkey tried to help himself to the prepared biscuits, the indignant prime minister took after him and drove him down the rocky path. At the same time we similarly dispersed the other loose broadcasters, figuring that they’d find plenty of suitable food if they searched for it, after which the returned prime minister led us gravely to our places at the table and handed us corresponding clay tablets.

“As a fitting tribute to ’is ’ighness,” came the pompous direction, “let us stand in our places and sing the first two verses of our national anthem.”

174

Which we did. And here it is:

Whoppy sloppy do do do,
Re re re, mi mi mi,
Sloppy whoppy fa fa fa,
Sol sol sol, la la la,
Te te te, do do do.

Pippy snippy do do do,
Te te te, la la la,
Snippy pippy sol sol sol,
Fa fa fa, mi mi mi,
Re re re, do do do.

The king in the meantime, having taken his place at the head of the table, we all sat down, after which the meal began.

“Um-yum-yum!” smacked Peg, as the platter of bacon came our way, the king of course having been served first by the hovering attendant.

Next came the eggs, then the boiled ham, then a dish of pickles and finally the biscuits.

Orion nudged me.

“Get your jaws tightened up, Jerry.”

“I never did care very much for biscuits,” I spoke softly in reply.

“But the king has taken one. So you’ll have to take one, too. For it might be risky to offend the king.”

“If I do take one,” I schemed, “I’m going to drop it under the table for the goat.”

“The poor goat!”

And all the time the discussed biscuits were getting closer to us.

“They look to me as though they had been rolled in the dirt,” I grunted.

“Sh-h-h-h! Here they are. Brace yourself, kid,” he warned me.

Then, to everybody’s surprise, the king arose with a grand air and passed his own biscuit to the surprised Peg.

It was the biggest biscuit of the lot. And despite its dingy dusty color old hefty eyed it hungrily.

“Burky lurky whang whang whang,” spoke the generous monarch, as he beamed at the favored guest.

Peg arose to the occasion.

“Muchy thanku um-yum-yum!” he recited nasally.

“Is ’ighness,” then spoke the ever-handy prime minister, “feels that special hattention is due you as the world’s greatest playwright. And so ’e ’as generously given hup ’is own biscuit in your honor.”

Peg bowed.

“Muchy thanky um-yum-yum!” he repeated.

“Whangy lurky burk burk burk,” came the beaming response.

Seating himself Peg then broke open the big biscuit. And out hopped a huge brown toad!

176

“HAW! HAW! HAW!” bellowed Borealis the Brave. “HAW! HAW! HAW!”

I don’t know to this day how the two tricky cavemen got the toad in the biscuit. But it certainly was a tremendous surprise to Peg, as his manner showed. I thought at first that his eyes would pop out of his head. Then, as the chummy released hopper started toward him, he took a complete back somersault.

“HAW! HAW! HAW!” further roared the royal trickster. “HAW! HAW! HAW!”

His face flaming now, Peg jumped to his feet. And grabbing the big custard pie that was to have been our final treat, he threw it squarely in the yapping monarch’s face.

“Haw-haw over that for a while, you flat-headed prune.”

But it took more than a custard pie to floor old Borealis the Brave.

“Gabby sloppy hip hip hip,” he bellowed at the top of his voice, as he clawed the pie filling out of his eyes. Then, to further relieve himself of the misapplied pastry, he coughed a piece of crust halfway across the ravine, where it was

promptly pounced upon by the hovering goat.

The castle guards came on the run.

“If your ’ighness so desires,” cried the gallant captain (enacting the part of a whole regiment), “the miscreant shall be be’eaded on the spot.”

177

Which brought a sneering jeer from the still furious miscreant himself.

“So’s your old man,” he spoke insolently.

Nor did he suspect that he was in any particular danger when the combined royal forces, under the king’s personal leadership, started pelting him with biscuits. He was soon to learn though that these biscuits had been specially prepared for the occasion. *And* how! They weren’t ordinary biscuits at all, but cleverly disguised missiles. One had contained a huge frog, as described. But the others were stuffed with slimy sloppy moss. And when I tell you that the aim of the attacking Royalists was almost perfect you can easily enough figure out what happened to poor Peg.

Nor did his natural grit aid him a bit. For what good is grit to a fellow when his eyes, ears, mouth, nose and everything else of a similar character is stuffed with sloppy moss? Gee! Having adjourned to the south shore for repairs, while the victorious Royalists in turn retreated into their cave, I thought he’d start back with an armful of rocks. But instead he dismissed the matter with one of his good-natured laughs. Which shows you what a well-balanced kid he is.

“I had my fun,” he told us, as he shook the moss out of his hair, “and so did Red. So what’s the use of fighting about it? For we’re all pals. Besides,” his face hardened, “we have a common enemy here in the canal. And the time to fight is when *he* shows up.”

“If—” I put in, as I glanced down the canal toward Steam Corners.

“If what?” came the grunt.

“If he really does show up.”

“He can’t get home without passing us. And it may be then that the breaks will be ours.”

Just before dark Kay and I walked around the island, stopping here and there to check up on the trees and rock formations. It was an interesting trip. And we had a lot of fun. But we knew no more about the location of the singing tree when we returned than we did when we started out.

The pompous prime minister stopped us in Bible Cave ravine.

“It is ’is ’ighness’ command that you are to meet ’im ’ere as soon as the moon harises.”

“And where is ’is ’ighness now?” I quizzed curiously.

“If you will proceed to the spring I think you’ll find him there with your friend, the heminent Mr. Shakespeare.”

“What are they doing?” I grinned. “Pulling each other’s

noses?”

But the dignified prime minister showed plainly by his manner that kings weren't in the habit of having their noses pulled, not even by famous playwrights.

179

“It is my hunderstanding,” the speaker drew himself up, “that the heminent Mr. Shakespeare is teaching 'is 'ighness 'ow to play a new game called 'eads I win and tails you lose.”

“And who's winning?” my grin persisted.

“The heminent Mr. Shakespeare,” came the cold reply.

In order to pursue their fascinating game the king and his grinning opponent had built a roaring fire. And there we find them matching clay coins, some of which weighed a pound a piece. These were deckles, we were told. It was further explained to us that a deckle was worth ten dockles and that it took ten dickies to make one dockle.

Having cleaned out the royal treasury Peg made a mountainous pile of his wealth beside the spring.

“Muchy toughy lucky,” he sympathized with the bankrupt ruler.

“Heap mutchy toughy lucky,” came the mournful reply.

“Tell him,” Peg then spoke to the disturbed prime minister, “to come back to-morrow morning. I'll lend him a peck of deckles and we'll do it all over again.”

Orion and Scoop had gone off in the rowboat. But they

180

hurried back to the island when the ever-active prime minister signaled to them with his improvised horn, thus announcing the beginning of the intended cat hunt. And with the armed king himself in the lead we then descended into what he and his dignitary called the Great Forest.

At the ruler's commands, as relayed to us through the interpreter, we spread out and beat the bushes, thus dislodging a number of wild-acting cats. But much less than picking them off one after another, as they shot by him, the royal hunter failed even to bag a single one.

It was all our fault, he grumbled, when we came in to check up on the kill. We either had driven the cats toward him too fast or too slow. And having shot away all of his arrows he then ordered us to spread out and retrieve them, so that the hunt could go on.

"I wish he'd let me do the shooting," said Kay, as we set out together with burning fagots.

"Do you mean to tell me," I stared, "that you could actually shoot a cat with a bow and arrow?"

"And why not?" he countered in his confident way.

"I doubt very much," I admitted, as we wound here and there through the thicket, "if I could do it myself. For cats are quicker than greased lightning."

He stopped, putting his hand on my arm.

"Do you hear anything, Jerry?" he inquired, with an intent look

on his face.

“No,” I told him nervously.

“I do,” he declared, with sharpened ears.

“What?” my uneasiness deepened.

“A cat. It’s over there in that bush,” he pointed. “I *know* it’s there. For I can hear it breathe. So what is there to prevent me from shooting it if I had the necessary bow and arrow?”

“I’d like to see you try it,” I told him, more impressed than ever by his amazing ability.

He threw a pebble into the bush.

“What did I tell you?” he cried, as a cat sprang from the bush and swiftly vanished through the trees into the interior of the moonlit island.

We then encountered Orion whose fagot like ours was almost out.

“How many arrows did you find?” he inquired.

“None,” I confessed.

“I found one,” he told us.

Kay then took the recovered arrow and hid it in his clothes.

“Now, if I can get hold of the king’s bow,” he told me, “I’ll

show you what I can do.”

Having revived the fire by the spring the busy prime minister was setting out a lunch when we got back. Nor did the waiting hunter, as he superintended the preparation of the refreshments, seem in any way upset over the fact that we came in empty-handed. Arrows just then were of much less importance to him than bananas and sandwiches.

“Whacky docky pin pin pin,” he spoke sharply from his place of authority beside the dancing flames.

182

“Yes, yes, your ’ighness,” the prime minister further jumped about. “I’m ’urrying just as fast as I can.”

The final banana having been taken from the wicker hamper on the donkey’s back, the gluttonous monarch then set to work, eating what he wanted himself and passing the rest along to us, after which, as added fuel was dumped onto the fire, he commanded me, through the hovering interpreter, to proceed with my promised story of the musical bedbugs.

And here’s the mess that I dished out to him as we circled the roaring fire in true primitive style.

183

CHAPTER XV

HIDDEN EYES

I dare say that the old moon blinked with wonderment as it peeked down at us through the twisted branches of the adjacent trees. It had seen many sights like this in its younger days. But the world had changed greatly since then.

Cavemen were a thing of the past, like fig-leaf kimonos and roving dinosaurs. Open woodland fires had given place to modern household furnaces and the once desired caves themselves had long since been turned over to bats and toads. Bludgeons had become polite walking sticks, and the lumbering stone-wheeled carts of primitive days had been replaced by fast-moving automobiles and even faster airplanes.

The old tom-tom of the forest, so important at gatherings of this kind, when the young cave sheiks and their sheikesses came by winding paths to make merry around the head flint-worker's marvelous fire, was gone forever. The radio and the jews-harp had taken the tom-tom's place. Advancing civilization had made wooden homes of the old sheltering trees. Out of the earth had come clay for building bricks and coal for fuel. Great cities had grown up, the factories of which now supplied mankind with every conceivable convenience and comfort, including hand-embroidered blankets for pet poodles.

And yet, with all of these wonders at hand, the pages of time, so to speak, had been miraculously turned back. And it was this

no doubt that now puzzled the curious watchful moon. Again the chief of the forest clan had called his half-naked tribesmen together that they might enjoy the comforts of his evening fire. And now the assembled cavemen were waiting, with expectant faces, for the story that one of the king's foreign visitors had promised to relate.

Dressed in odd tight-fitting garments called pants and shirts, these visitors had come from distant lands. They all spoke a strange language. Instead of sensibly saying pidgy idgy toot toot toot when referring to their feet they just said feet. Which of course was ridiculous. For pidgy idgy toot toot toot was the proper way of saying feet. It was so recorded in the official island primer as made by the hintellectual and authoritative king himself. But the gathered cavemen were too polite by nature, and too loyal to their beloved ruler, to ridicule the odd-talking visitors to their faces.

It was all acting of course. The cavemen were acting. And so were we. But at the time, as I have tried to picture, it seemed very real to me. Our half-naked hosts *were* cavemen. And we in turn were travelers from foreign countries, just as we represented.

185

“Sinbad,” I began, as a hush fell over the expectant group, the king himself having settled comfortably against the sprawled-out donkey, “is undoubtedly the greatest seafaring man of all times. His adventures far exceed those of Noah the ark builder or even those of our friend here, Jonah, the whale swallower. Nor are my own adventures as a whole worthy of comparison.

“Sinbad’s recorded voyages read like fiction. But I know that

these recordings are true. For he told me so himself, in his modest unassuming way, splendid fellow that he is, when he and I met for the first time in the port of Balsora, where he was living in a manner befitting his station. It was from here that he had earlier set out on his second recorded voyage, of which I am tempted to give detailed description, to better acquaint you with the native sagacity, the splendid fortitude and the exceptional daring of this remarkable man with whom I later set out in quest of the island of musical bedbugs. I dare say that Sinbad is now engaged in further adventuresome pursuits, all of which no doubt will be properly recorded. For he isn't the type of man to content himself with leisure, regardless of his means. Far from it! But this preliminary account of mine deals only with his second official voyage.

“He went to sea with several merchants, having bought himself a stock of trading goods which he hoped to dispose of profitably in foreign countries. After touching at several places he and his companions landed on an uninhabited island where they amused themselves in different ways. Sinbad, having taken his wine and provisions, sat down behind a tree and fell asleep. When he awoke he found that his companions were gone, and that the ship had sailed.

186

“Climbing to the top of a very high tree the stranded adventurer perceived at a distance an object that was very large and white. Descending to the ground he ran toward this strange-looking object, learning, as he approached it, that it was about fifty paces in circumference, quite round, with no perceptible opening, and as smooth as polished ivory.

“It was now almost sunset, but a quicker darkness than night

suddenly overcast the island. Looking up, Sinbad beheld with amazement a bird of enormous size, which had the appearance of a great cloud as it moved toward him. It was a bird called the roc, so large that it could carry away young elephants. Sinbad recognized it from descriptions that he had read of it and rightly conjectured that the large object that he had just inspected on the island was the creature's egg.

“As the bird approached the island Sinbad crept close to the giant egg. Thus he found himself under the great winged creature when it alighted. Its limbs were as large as tree trunks. And it was to one of these that the scheming sailor now tied himself firmly with his turban.

187

“The next morning the bird flew away, carrying Sinbad with it. He was borne so high that the earth disappeared from his sight and then was carried downward so swiftly that he lost consciousness. The bird in the meantime had alighted on the ground. And recovering his senses Sinbad quickly untied the cloth that bound him to the creature's limb. Almost instantly the bird took to its wings, bearing away in its huge beak a giant serpent.

“Sinbad saw now that he was in a deep valley, the sides of which were too steep to be climbed. As he walked up and down in despair he noticed that the ground was covered with diamonds of enormous size. But he soon saw other objects of much less agreeable appearance. Immense serpents were peeping out of holes on every side. When night came he took shelter in a cave, the entrance of which he guarded with the largest stones that he could find, but the hissing of the serpents entirely deprived him of sleep.

“When day returned, the serpents returned to their holes, after which Sinbad came out of his cave with extreme fear. He thought that the serpents would surround and devour him, but instead they just eyed him from their holes. Walking until he became weary he then sat down and fell asleep. A falling object awakened him. Beside him lay a large piece of fresh meat. Presently he saw several other similar pieces. 188

“He knew then that he was a prisoner in the famous valley of diamonds, out of which no human being had ever come alive. Visiting diamond merchants had long followed the practice of throwing pieces of meat into the valley, expecting the eagles that infested the locality to pounce upon the flesh to which diamonds quite often adhered.

“Ever anxious to further enrich himself, and having decided on a means of escape, Sinbad then hastened to pick up some of the largest diamonds that he could find, which he put into a leather bag, fastening the container to his girdle, after which he selected the largest piece of flesh in the valley and tied it to his back with the ever-useful turban. Then he lay face downward to await developments.

“He had observed many eagles at a distance. Presently one of the largest of these birds pounced upon the meat and thus was the scheming sailor borne a second time through the air to the eagle’s nest on the top of a near-by mountain. 189

“At sight of the returned eagle the merchants assembled there began shouting, as was their custom. And when they had forced the bird to quit its prey, one of the diamond gatherers came eagerly to the nest. Great indeed was the man’s amazement to

find Sinbad sitting there. Having told his remarkable story the fortunate adventurer opened his bag. The diamonds thus revealed brought a cry of mingled admiration and envy from the experienced merchant, who admitted that he never had seen gems of larger size or finer luster.

“Staying in the mountains as long as their provisions allowed, the diamond merchants then got their gems together and left the place, taking Sinbad with them. In due time they reached the port of Roha. At that place Sinbad exchanged some of his diamonds for other merchandise and went on to Balsora, where, as I say, I met him in an inn near the water front.”

At this point my story was interrupted by the king of the island.

“Ticky tacky zip zip zip,” he commented genially, as he brushed a cloud of mosquitoes from his bare back with the donkey’s long ear.

190

The usually grave-faced prime minister was smiling now.

“‘Is ’ighness,” came the interpretation, “wishes me to compliment you on your story.”

“I’m glad to learn,” I beamed, “that he likes it.”

“‘E doesn’t hunderstand a word of it. But ’e is ’ighly hintrigued, as ’is manner shows, by the brisk movements of your hupper jaw.”

Which was something!

“Everywhere I went in Balsora,” I then resumed, picking my

words like an experienced navigator, “I heard mention of the returned sailor’s marvelous adventures in the valley of diamonds. He had saved the largest and choicest of his findings, I was told. And like the impressed inhabitants themselves a great curiosity possessed me to see these incomparable gems, for which, according to report, the ruling caliph had already offered seven chests of gold.

“But Sinbad had all the gold that he needed. And having respectfully declined the royal offer he was about to set sail from Balsora when I first met him, word having been brought to him by a trusted retainer that the insistent ruler intended to take possession of the coveted diamonds by force if his offer was further refused. So it was to save his diamonds, which he had hidden in a jar of olive oil, as well as to invite further characteristic adventures, that Sinbad now intended to secretly set sail for the Land of Melody, where, if fortune further favored him, he intended to get together a sizeable lot of musical bedbugs for later commercial purposes.

191

“I was amazed when he confidentially disclosed his plans to me. For I had come to associate him, outstanding adventurer that he was, with treasures of the finest sort. It seemed impossible to me at first that he was sincere in wanting to establish himself in his native country as a fancier of rare bedbugs. It seemed ridiculous. Yet I saw that he was indeed sincere in all that he proposed. More than that he convinced me of the great commercial possibilities in his unusual scheme. So, having taken a fancy to him, as he in turn had to me, due to our similar tastes, I set sail with him in the dead of night, the concealed diamonds having been entrusted to the same faithful servant who had so cleverly penetrated the scheming caliph’s

unworthy intentions.

“It was learned later that we missed the royal agents by a bare thirty minutes. And great indeed was the defeated ruler’s rage when his chagrined agents returned to him empty-handed. Port-masters throughout the country were then ordered to be on the lookout for the defiant seaman, who, had he been caught, undoubtedly would have been thrown into prison and kept there, under constant torture, until the whereabouts of the coveted gems was disclosed.

192

“But Sinbad was too wise in the ways of his country to stop at any of the established ports. Instead he ordered the vessel turned due east, for it was in this general direction that the marvelous floating island was most often seen. What kept it afloat, in defiance to the known natural laws, and what propelled it first in one direction and then in another, but always afar from charted courses, was the prevailing mystery of the age. And it was to solve this mystery, as well as to establish himself in the perfected bedbug business, that Sinbad had set sail at such great expense, the vessel having been specially chartered for the occasion.

“The captain had appeared very pleasant in port. But now his true nature came out. A rascal of the deepest dye, and aided by a crew of the same stamp, he had entered upon the voyage solely to rob Sinbad at sea and further force the latter to reveal the location of the marvelous valley of diamonds.

“Loyal to the diamond merchants who had befriended him, Sinbad refused to give up his secrets. And quietly launching one of the ship’s sturdy life-boats he and I quickly

193

got together ample provisions for a minor voyage and put to sea. What became of the rascally captain and his crew I do not know. Nor do I care. But it is Sinbad's theory that they were lost in a terrific gale that later swept that portion of the sea. If so they met with a deserved fate. Endangered ourselves by the mountainous waves, we finally landed with great rejoicing upon an uncharted island of remarkably lofty vegetation. The trees reached into the clouds and from their invisible tops came strange unintelligible sounds. Sinbad had heard that the islands in this locality were frequently inhabited by evil spirits. And satisfied that we'd be far safer on the ocean we set about to construct a raft of driftwood, our own boat having been wrecked beyond repair.

“To hold the accumulated driftwood together we used native creepers. Nor did we learn till later that these supposed cord-like creepers were really hairs from the tail of a giant horse. The remainder of our provisions having been lashed to the improvised raft, to assure their safety in rough weather, we then pushed off, having satisfied ourselves, from signs that we had observed on the island, that we were not far from the land of our quest. The birds here had a far sweeter song than the similar birds of our own respective countries. And we had further observed a beach crab which at times broke into an awkward prancing gait. Setting our course by the birds, and followed by the waltzing crab, as we now called the odd-acting creature, which evidently had become separated from others of its kind, we thus set forth on the final lap of our eventful voyage, marveling more than ever at the immensity of the island's vegetation. We had detected the outline of an odd-shaped mountain in landing, but learned now, with mounting alarm, that what we had mistaken for a mountain was really a

gigantic horse, with legs as big as the tree-like limbs of the mighty roc that earlier had served Sinbad so excellently. The thunderous neighing of this remarkable horse threw us flat on our faces, almost deafening us. And to add to our plight the supposed creepers with which the timbers of the raft were held together became living serpents, after the fashion of immersed hairs taken from horses' tails. We were indeed in a most terrible predicament. And I gave myself up for lost.

“With the hideous serpents writhing and twisting under our feet, and with no escape open to us except the shark-infested sea itself, we then crouched in added fear as a number of small rope ladders dropped out of the clouds. Down these ladders came tiny odd-dressed creatures, some of them but a foot in height, who, after assuring us of their friendship, raised us into the clouds with a gigantic hoist of their own contrivance. These pigmies, of which we saw many thousands, lived wholly on the horse's broad back, where amid the pole-like hairs they had built their homes and palaces. Even stranger, they had painlessly tunneled into the horse's hide and down into its bowels and legs. The animal's whole interior had been exploited and great quantities of food fat and minerals thus obtained. We were told by the friendly king of an immense mushroom bed in the horse's right eyeball, while in the left eyeball a completely equipped gymnasium had been set up for the benefit of the pigmy children, who further put in many happy hours sliding down the smooth spiral passageways in the animal's ribs. The blood vessels leading out of the huge heart were used to propel turbines which in turn furnished power for drilling, pumping, weaving and grain grinding.

194

“The great horse was wholly unable to think for itself,

195

the clever pigmies, who called themselves Mitoes and whose language was not unfamiliar to Sinbad, having long ago tapped its vital nerve centers. We were shown a keyboard, through the operation of which the horse was made to eat, drink, neigh, walk, sleep and even swim. The great animal's complete subjection to the will of its tiny exploiters was pitiable to us. Yet there seemed to be nothing but the kindest of feeling on both sides. And during the time that we were guests of the pigmy king, accommodations having been provided for us in the great city square, it was noticeable that the mammoth slave was shown every possible consideration. For instance the kingdom's complete force of doctors turned out one night to repair a bursted blood vessel. The work was done with the utmost gentleness, the patient itself later neighing its appreciation.

“Told that we were in search of the Land of Melody the informed pigmy king then offered to take us there, after which the operator at the keyboard set the great horse into motion. Higher and higher arose the sea around the animal's mammoth legs. And when it could no longer walk with comfort the operator set it to swimming.

196

“Presently we caught sight of a large wooded island, which we were told was the marvelous floating kingdom itself. Nor was its motive power nearly as mysterious as we had imagined. What appeared to be an island was really the back of an enormous turtle, which, like the giant horse, had long ago ceased to have a mind of its own. It was made to move about as its masters saw fit. And so immense was it that the crevices in its shell seemed like deep valleys. Here trees and similar vegetation had taken root. And it was in one of these wooded

valleys that the accommodating pigmies proposed to lower us, promising, if they happened to be in the vicinity in a week or two, to pick us up and deliver us on the mainland.

“Having wisely waited until dark to lower us onto the island, the pigmies then went their way, advising us, in the interests of our safety, to say nothing about our friendship with them to the islanders, and least of all to disclose the source of our transportation to the island. Ill feeling, we were told, had long existed between the inhabitants of the two remarkable kingdoms, the lower one of which would naturally look with suspicion upon any strangers brought there by the other one. Having subdued the giant horse, the pigmies, by virtue of their lofty position, felt that they were the superiors. But the cultured islanders regarded their tiny unmusical rivals as boastful savages, maintaining that life on a turtle’s back, where every action was marked by proper rhythm and harmony, was far preferable to life on a horse’s back where for the most part nothing was visible to the inhabitants except the hairy back of the horse itself and enveloping mist-laden clouds.

197

“Sinbad and I had no desire to enter into the odd controversy. We were here to get musical bedbugs, not to discuss the relative merits of turtles’ and horses’ backs. So a plan of complete silence was agreed upon, as the pigmy leader had so graciously suggested.

“Having been properly lowered into one of the island’s deep wooded valleys, we watched the shadowy form of the giant horse disappear in the darkness, after which we took ourselves down a winding path which brought us to the cabin of a woodcutter. The forest that stretched out on all sides of us

198

was full of odd tinkling sounds. Nor did we suspect that we were surrounded by a swarm of hungry mosquitoes till one of the insects ceased tinkling and lit on my nose. Then, as we knocked on the woodcutter's door, a huge bat flew over us, its wings vibrating like the pipes of an organ. More beautiful sounds I never had heard in all my life.

“The awakened woodcutter, of our own size, came dancing with a candle to the door, followed by his dancing wife and their three dancing children. Instead of talking to us, they sang. The family cat, too, came dancing to meet us, followed by a dancing dog.

“The pigmy king had told us something about the islanders' language. So we got along fairly well with the dancing woodcutter and his light-footed family, though it took us several days to accustom ourselves to the islanders' habits. It seemed odd to us that people should become so possessed of an idea like this that they even danced while they ate. But the greatest dancer of all was the jolly, stout-waisted king himself, who, when he learned of our presence on the island, sent one of his finely-appointed carriages to convey us to the royal palace. The horses danced all the way as also did the coachman, whose feet beat a constant tattoo on the carriage top. Nearing the castle we encountered a funeral procession. And imagine our amazement to see the casket of the departed one jiggling in a spring-like contrivance between two dancing donkeys. Only by the tones of the mourners' voices was it known that they were bowed with grief.

“At the castle we were greeted by dancing throne attendants who guided us past dancing princes and

princesses into the presence of the dancing monarch himself. Dressed in the elaborate robes of his office, with a magnificent jeweled crown fastened to his head, he presented a most amazing and never-to-be-forgotten figure as he danced around us with his dancing court in the background.

“The islanders marveled that we could stand still while those about us were dancing. And they felt of us to make sure that we were alive. It seemed inconceivable to them that a race of people could exist without dancing. In our separate countries, we stated, partly with words and partly with gestures, dancing was practiced but never to this extent.

“The royal orchestra was composed wholly of animals. There was a dancing donkey who took the place of the usual bass viol. A goat bleated like a trombone. There were monkeys, roosters, cats, geese, horses, and cows, all of whose voices had been tuned to the proper pitch. In all it was the most amazingly composed orchestra that I ever had seen. But the music was beyond criticism. At the feast that followed, the king beat time with his feet, as did his courtiers. All wiggled in their seats, while behind us danced the attending servants.

“During the elaborate feast the king complained of an itchy back. He had been bit, he said, by a bedbug. Which gave us our chance. We would gladly rid the island of its bedbugs, we said, intending of course to bottle them and later take them away with us. To facilitate our work the king then gave us a royal commission, which entitled us to hunt for bugs under all of the beds in the kingdom.

“Here too, as on the great horse, we were shown the control

board by means of which the movements of the subjected turtle were regulated. Through no lead of ours the pigmies were then brought into the conversation. They were a ridiculous uncouth lot, we were told, who felt that it was the height of achievement to live on a horse's back. To all of which we gave polite attention, hopeful that our earlier benefactors would remember to call for us as promised, and little dreaming of the dreadful calamity that was soon to befall both self-centered kingdoms.

“We had already found several bedbugs in the woodcutter's cabin. And in the ensuing days we gathered more here and there, taking particular pains to search the king's bed, to better convince him of our faithful industry. As we had anticipated the collected bedbugs had most delightful musical qualities. And assured of our later success, as bedbug fanciers, we began to long for the return of the pigmies.

201

“But instead of coming peacefully in the darkness, as they had promised, they came openly with arrows and other implements of war, having gotten the mistaken idea in their heads that we were ridding the island of bedbugs to make better fighters of its soldiers. And then ensued the strangest battle of all times, the great horse, on the pigmies' side, kicking at the enormous turtle, while the latter in turn, loyal to its musical subduers, bit huge chunks of flesh from the horse's flanks. In the ensuing confusion the operator of the great horse punched the wrong key, thus causing the massive creature to roll over, while the equally confused operator of the turtle pressed the key that started the creature to hiccoughing. In no time at all the king's castle and all the buildings about it were shaken to the ground. Trees were uprooted. And to add to the calamity the misdirected turtle then

completely submerged.

“The only two to escape from the island alive, Sinbad and I floated for days on one of the castle doors. Finally a delirium caused by hunger and thirst overcame us. Nor did we know that we had been picked up by a passing vessel until we regained our senses in the port of Balsora, then in polite mourning over the recent death of the unprincipled caliph. Thus was it possible for Sinbad to remain in safety in his native land. As for the musical bedbugs——”

202

My story broke off here, and we all sprang white-faced to our feet, as a piercing agonized scream struck our ears.

Then we caught sight of Kay, who, having taken the king's bow, had slipped away to shoot a cat.

But what he had shot instead was a man. A spy, in fact. We later found the prowler's cap. And there in the sand were his footprints.

203

CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

“And did you know,” Scoop inquired of Kay, in a queer voice, as the spy’s cloth cap passed from hand to hand, “that there was a man hiding in the thicket when you shot into it?”

“Sure thing,” came the matter-of-fact reply.

“But why didn’t you tell us about it?” the leader frowned.

“Then we could have captured him.”

“I wanted to show Jerry what I could do.”

“Where did you hit him?” I then inquired.

“Well,” the word was accompanied by a self-expressive grin, “I’m not *sure* that I hit what I aimed at. But if I did he isn’t sitting down.”

Peg fingered the cap.

“It certainly isn’t a kid’s cap,” he declared.

“See if there’s a name on the inside leather band,” suggested Orion.

Peg shook his head.

“It’s an old cap, as you can see. And even the dealer’s name has been ripped out.”

“That probably was done for a purpose,” declared Scoop, in his penetrative manner.

Peg searched the leader’s eyes.

“What do you mean?” came the slow inquiry.

“Well,” retorted Scoop, “spies usually try to conceal their identity, don’t they?”

“Huh! I’d sooner think that the guy, whoever he is, picked up this old cap in some rag-bag.”

“It smells like it,” I turned up my nose.

“What are we going to do with it?” old hefty then inquired, as he further gingerly fingered the soiled headpiece.

“Keep it of course,” was Scoop’s reply, “till we find the guy who slipped out from under it.”

“All right,” grinned old hefty, giving the cap a toss. “You can have it.”

I caught it and handed it to Kay.

“Maybe you can tell us more about it,” I suggested, wondering to what extent his amazing powers of deduction would aid him here.

He turned the cap around in his hands.

“It has a musty smell, which proves, as Peg just said,

that it was picked up in some rag-bag or similar place. And I am of the opinion that it hasn't been in use for more than a few hours. For caps have distinctive smells to me. Take Orion's cap for instance. I can pick it out like a flash. You couldn't fool me if you mixed it with a thousand caps. But this cap has only the slightest trace of a human smell. Then, too, it would have lost its musty odor if it had been in use very long. For caps are worn in an airy place. The spy lost it because it was too big for him, further proving that he picked it up. For if he had bought it, and had had it fitted to his head, he wouldn't have lost it so easily. Struck by my arrow, he gave a pained jump. And off fell the cap."

"Then you really believe," mused Scoop, more impressed than ever by the blind boy's remarkable reasoning, "that the spy picked up the cap either in Ashton or Steam Corners?"

"Yes," the word was accompanied by a grave nod.

"It probably came from Ashton," I put in.

"What prompts you to say that?" inquired Scoop, searching my face.

"You mustn't overlook the fact," I reminded, "that there's an old inventor hiding on this island."

The leader's expression changed.

"By George!" he cried. "I had forgotten all about *him*. . . . Have you seen anything of him, Red, since you've been here?"

Thus addressed, the king of the island accommodatingly

stepped out of character.

“Seen anything of who?” came the counter inquiry.

“Old Ira Turner, the Ashton inventor?”

“I never heard of him,” Red grunted.

Told then that the former jug maker had supposedly come to the island to secretly perfect an invention of his, the chief caveman shook his red head.

206

“If he’s here, fellows, as you think, he’s got a hole that he hides in. For it’s a fact that I haven’t seen hide nor hair of him. . . . What’s he working on anyway!—a banana skin with four-wheeled brakes?”

But Scoop was in no mood for joking.

“If the old geezer *is* here, and he’s hiding in a secret hole as you say, it’s safe to bet that this is the hole we’re looking for.”

“But why did he crawl out of his hole to spy on us?” I puzzled.

“Wanting the island to himself,” reasoned Scoop, “he naturally would resent our appearance here. And so he crawled out of his hole to get a line on us, intending probably to scare us away.”

I was struck by the intense look on Kay’s expressive face.

“No, fellows,” the blind boy shook his head. “It couldn’t have been the old inventor himself.”

“And why not!” pressed Scoop, as a peculiar silence overcame the rest of us.

“According to what the lock tender told us the old inventor has been here for some time. But the man who dropped this cap—and it *was* a man, as his footprints prove—came here since dark from either Ashton or Steam Corners.”

“Then you think there are two men on the island?” considered Scoop.

207

“The new owner of this cap is here. We know that to be a fact. But we have no proof that the old inventor is here as well.”

We then set out and searched the shore, keeping together for safety. But we found no sign of a rowboat, nor even the marks of one, concluding, at the end of the unsuccessful search, that the spy either had waded to the island or had swum across one-handed with his clothes in the air.

We were thankful for the revealing moonlight. Without it I dare say that we would have shivered our shoes loose. For the world is freely sprinkled with evil-minded men. And somehow the belief clung to us that no man, with the right feeling toward us, would have crept up on us that way.

So hard up for clothes that he had to reach into a rag-bag, he had come here for some unknown secret purpose. Finding the island inhabited he had crept up on us to learn who we were. And then, having been clipped in the seat of the pants with a sharp arrow, he had ran away.

Now no doubt he was brooding over his injury, trying to

decide in his evil mind how best to get rid of us and avenge himself for the hurt at the same time.

208

It was a bad situation for us. And a queer helpless feeling stole over me as we went back to the cave, the inner door of which had been earlier blocked with rocks to keep out the bats that infested the lower chamber.

I've told you what my ideas were regarding the mentioned inventor. And the wonder was to me now that I had so completely forgotten about the old geezer. But the still walled-up entrance proved conclusively that he wasn't hiding in the big cavern. Nor had the capless newcomer disappeared in that direction.

Was the spy lurking in one of the thickets outside of Bible Cave? And was he planning to creep up on us with evil intent as soon as we settled for the night? I wondered, with mounting uneasiness, as I peered into the shadowy ravine.

But who was he? And what was his purpose in coming here so secretly? Could it be possible that he too was mixed up in the strange tangle? And had he come here, in pattern of the probably informed old inventor, to help himself to the counterfeit coins and coin-making machinery that supposedly was hidden here?

Had I given further probing thought to one of the simple things that Kay had told us about the cap that we picked up, I dare say that the truth of the amazing situation would have come to me then and there. For I've had a lot of experience in putting stuff of that kind together, as my long list of books

209

prove. But it wasn't until after long hours of deadening worry and constantly increasing peril that the facts came out.

Kay's nose was almost as sharp as his remarkable ears. All human beings, he told us, had a different smell. And it was his added statement that he could tell, by his sensitive nose, if a room had been recently occupied.

But there was no such smell in the sealed cavern. There were many odd animal smells in there, we were told, as the expert sniffer pressed his nose to a crack in the rocks. But that was all. And satisfied now that we'd have to search elsewhere for the supposed hidden counterfeiting chamber, we decided to leave the big cave closed until the peril that hung over us was lightened. As Scoop said, in good leadership, it was much easier to guard one opening than two. And while we felt confident that the big cavern's only entrance was through our smaller cave, the unobstructed opening nevertheless would be a constant worry to us. We knew a great deal about the island's caves. But we didn't know everything. So we proposed to play safe.

I further puzzled over the old inventor as I lay down beside Red on a bed of leaves, Peg having told us, in his sturdy dependable way, that he'd stand guard till midnight. And my thoughts also wandered to the Strickers. Gee! It certainly was a tough break for us when they got hold of our new motor boat. They'd hardly dare to wreck it. Still the treatment that it would receive at their inexperienced hands wouldn't benefit it any. And I was hopeful, as my restless thoughts carried me along, that we'd soon have a chance to close in on them and repay them for their trickery.

Were they spending the night in Steam Corners? Or were they camped near the wide-waters? Unless they had money in their pockets they couldn't run the boat very far. And to that point it wouldn't be at all surprising, I told myself, that they'd abandon it when their money was gone and hoof it for home.

It was to be hoped though that they'd come back down the canal, thus giving us a chance to fight it out with them. Golly Ned! That *would* be fun. And best of all would be the coat of cherry gum and feathers that we had waiting for them.

Red thoughtfully took his ma's fur rug inside, which softened our bed on the cave floor. And in his good-natured way he further allowed me a corner of the biggest pillow.

"How do you like my cart, Jerry?" he quizzed, in his gabby way.

"I'd hate to ride in it myself," I told him. "But I suppose it's all right for cavemen."

211

"Boy! I bet your eyeballs loosened up when you first saw us."

"*And* how," I admitted.

"HAW! HAW! HAW!" he expressed his satisfaction in the usual bellowing way.

"Shut up and go to sleep," growled Scoop, from the other side of the cave.

"Dicky docky tick tick tick," was the former monarch's further contribution to the conversation.

“And what does that mean?” Scoop wanted to know.

“You tell him, Rory.”

“‘Is gracious ’ighness,’ came the characteristic interpretation, “wishes me to hinform you that you ’ave bats hin your belfry.”

“Anyway,” laughed Scoop, “I’m glad it isn’t ’awks.”

“You *would* say that,” grumbled Rory.

“What became of your clothes?” I then inquired of the pleasing little English kid.

“Why, we’re wearing them of course.”

“Don’t be simple,” I grunted. “I mean your pants and shirts.”

“Having no further need of them,” Red then put in, “we burned them up.”

“But how are you going to get home?”

“We aren’t going home,” he declared.

“Oh, yah? Maybe your Aunt Pansy will have something to say about that?”

“*Ouch!*” he gave a comical squawk. “Why bring her up?”

“When I left her,” I spoke heartlessly, “she had a bottle of smelling salts in one hand and a razor strap in the other.”

“Which further convinces me,” came the jolly care-free laugh, “that we’re better off here. Eh, Rory?”

“Nothing helse but.”

“We’ve already planted gourds down by the spring, which will simplify the dish problem when the blamed things start bearing. And next spring we’re going to raise watermelons.”

“Ain’t that something!” chuckled Scoop.

“You ought to hire Mrs. Carmel to hoe them for you,” I put in maliciously.

“Who’s Mrs. Carmel?” came the curious inquiry.

“The strong-armed Italian woman,” I informed cheerfully, “who owns the donkey.”

“What donkey?” came the added puzzled inquiry.

“Why, Shoe Polish of course.”

“*Him?* Suffering cats! We thought he was a wild jackass. Didn’t we, Rory?”

“You’ll find out,” I predicted, “that it’s the donkey’s mistress who’s wild instead of the animal itself.”

“Honest, Jerry, you can think of the *most* unpleasant things to talk about.”

“Where did you get that fur cape?” I further checked up

on him.

“Oh,” came the off-hand reply, “it’s an old one of Aunt Pansy’s.”

“*Old* one?” I repeated. “It looks to me like the one that your rich uncle bought her in Paris.”

“Well, what of it? If it’s good enough for her it certainly ought to be good enough for me.”

I got his warty hand and pinched it.

“You’re a funny little squirt, Red,” I spoke feelingly. “But I like you. I wouldn’t change you if I could. And I honestly hope that you get out of this mess with a whole hide.”

“I usually do,” he grinned, squeezing my hand in return.

At his request I then quietly told him the complete story of the silver skull and supposed singing tree. Orion and Kay, I declared, were swell boys. And not only was it our duty as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, but a privilege as well, to help them clear the stain from their father’s name. By so doing we’d shift the guilt to their grandparent. But it was better to place the guilt where it belonged than to have it rest on the shoulders of an innocent man.

It was hard for Red to believe that a man with a family would willingly go to prison to protect his father’s reputation. But that was the case, I declared, however strange it sounded. After which, the others having dropped into silence, we fell asleep.

True to his promise Peg stood guard till midnight. Then Scoop got up. I thought I'd be next. But when it came time for me to relieve the leader I was sleeping so soundly that he hadn't the heart to disturb me. So he turned the watch over to Kay instead.

What happened after that we could only guess at. For Kay wasn't there to talk to us when we awakened at sunrise. Instead he had strangely disappeared while we lay sleeping. Either he had gone away of his own accord or he had been quietly taken away.

And with him had vanished the spy's cap.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WOODEN COW

Orion was frantic.

“Kay!” he cried, running wildly from the cave. “Kay! Where are you? Answer me. *Kay!* Where are you?”

Thus aroused, the ill-natured parrot began another rasping tirade.

“Boloney!” it screeched, as it attacked the bars of its cage. “You’re full of boloney.”

Up popped the king’s red head.

“Sloppy guppy top top top,” he commanded, in his usual lordly manner.

Which of course brought the ever-faithful prime minister to life.

“‘Is ’ighness,” began the sleepy interpreter, turning to me, “wishes me to——”

But that’s as far as he got.

“That kind of nonsense,” I spoke sharply, as I shied a rock at the gabby parrot to choke it off, “was all right a few hours ago. But it’s out of place now. So get up and shut up.”

“BANG! BANG! BANG!” exploded the furious ruffled bird.
“And down went the dirty cur with a bullet in his heart.”

“Is breakfast ready?” Red then inquired, in his own natural way.

216

“There’ll be no breakfast around here,” I declared, with a sick heart, “till we find Kay.”

Orion in the meantime had run past the chattering monkey to the spring.

“Kay!” we heard him shouting, the tone of his voice betraying the fearful anxiety that he felt. “Why don’t you answer me, Kay? Where are you?”

Red’s eyes were as big as teacups now.

“Has the little kid disappeared?”

I nodded.

“When did it happen?” came the added inquiry.

“Nobody knows. He went on duty at two o’clock. And when we woke up a few moments ago he was gone.”

Our eyes then turned instinctively to the barrier in the mouth of the big cavern. And an icy shiver crept over me as I thought of the helpless blind boy being dragged into the dank lightless hole. But so far as we could see the piled-up rocks hadn’t been disturbed.

Later we took the barrier down and searched the long sloping corridor from one end to the other, hopeful that we'd discover a break in the dripping stone walls. Scoop had a long stout stick with which he probed the various wall crevices that he encountered, while we in turn peeked under the numerous low-hanging ledges, thus satisfying ourselves in the end that the cavern's only natural outlet was through Bible Cave.

Owl Pool, at the lower end of the Giant's Gallery, as we now called the long sloping corridor, had a peculiar sinister inky look as we stood beside it, having unsuccessfully searched its sandy shores for telltale footprints. This water, we believed, was on a level with the outside canal, which suggested a submerged entrance. But it was out of the question to think that the spy had used this in whisking his helpless prisoner out of sight.

Kay was nowhere in the cavern. We made sure of that. So we turned away from the pool, with its great rocky dome, and started back toward the daylight. What few bats were here had been trapped in the cavern by the mentioned landslide. And I had the feeling, as the smoke from our torches grew heavy over our heads, that the foul mouse-like creatures would soon perish.

Throughout the unsuccessful search our voices had echoed eerily in the winding corridor and lower cathedral-like chamber. There especially we had been struck by the ghostly sounds that came back to us. The place seemed like a tomb. It's damp stagnant air filled me with constant shivers. And the island itself, hitherto so pleasant to me, was now a place of

terror.

A hideous peril had taken root here. Poor little Kay had fallen into its clutches. And I had the feeling that unless we hurried away we too would meet with a like fate.

218

But we couldn't go without our little chum. That would have been cowardly. So we kept on with the search, both underground, as I have described, and above ground, fine-combing the island from one end to the other. But the only response to our repeated cries was the echo of our own frantic voices.

Orion was crying now.

"I suppose you think I'm a baby, fellows," he looked up at us with swimming eyes. "But I can't help it. I've had to watch over Kay all my life. Therefore he's a whole lot dearer to me than most brothers. Now I've lost him! He's in trouble. And I can't help him."

I put a hand on his arm.

"I know how you feel, Orion," I spoke earnestly. "For I love him, too. He's the swellest little kid that I ever met. And I can't conceive that any man, however evil-minded, would have the heart to mistreat him. So things may not be as dark as you imagine."

I talked that way to cheer him up. But deep down in my own heart I was worried sick.

Scoop took me aside.

"I'm beginning to wonder, Jerry, if there isn't some connection between the kid's unusual restlessness last night and his later disappearance."

219

"What do you mean?" I spoke quickly, with an added thumping of my heart.

"He was awake when I got up at midnight to relieve Peg. And he was still awake at two o'clock. I didn't think much of it at the time. For I was kind of restless myself. But I'm convinced now that he stayed awake on purpose."

"There's nothing very remarkable about that," I grunted.

"The point is, Jerry, that he *wanted* to relieve me. That's why he stayed awake, asking me to let him take your place. At least that's my theory. And if I'm correct I'm going to advance the added belief that he further wanted to disappear."

"You're crazy," I told him.

"I expected you to say that," was the quiet rejoinder. "For like Orion you're all wrapped up in the belief that the kid was dragged off by the spy. I thought so myself at first. But I can see now what a wabby theory that is. The spy might have crept up on you or I. But that couldn't have happened with Kay. For his ears seemingly are a hundred times sharper than ours. No, Jerry, the kid wasn't surprised as you think. To the contrary he waited until I was asleep, then grabbing the spy's cap he skinned out of his own accord."

"You bewilder me," I cried, as I drew a hand across my forehead.

220

“To tell the truth,” came the frank admission, “I’m bewildered myself. For I can see no sensible motive in the kid’s actions. But these actions speak for themselves. He planned his own disappearance. I’m dead sure of that. Though why he did it, as I say, and where he is now, is a complete riddle to me.”

Something clicked in my head.

“I know!” I cried, with a burst of excitement. “He’s gone away with the cap to prove some new theory that came to him after we turned in last night. That accounts for his restlessness. He kept *thinking* and *thinking*. There’s magic in that brain of his. You know that as well as I do. And if we could put our hand on him now I dare say that we’d know the truth about the singing tree and everything else.”

Scoop’s face reflected the bewilderment that he felt.

“But why didn’t he take us into his confidence?” came the puzzled inquiry.

I couldn’t answer that.

“The singing tree!” I then spoke reflectively. “We believe it marks the location of a hidden cave. And if Kay *has* found the tree, as I think, he’s now in the cave. But where’s the old inventor? And the spy? Are they there, too? And have they made a prisoner of our chum? Or will he later turn up unharmed?”

221

“I was just on the point of sending for the county sheriff,” Scoop interrupted my train of thoughts. “But I think now that we better hold off for a day or two.”

“Yes,” I agreed, as my reflective mood continued, “let us wait and see what happens.”

And, *bu*-lieve me, plenty happened!

We then talked Orion out of his worries, pointing out to him how capable Kay was of taking care of himself. He wasn’t the kind of a kid, we argued, to run head-long into danger. And very probably he’d turn up in a few hours without a scratch.

Then along came the old lock tender.

At first sight of him, as he stepped ashore with shaky trembling limbs, I thought that he was stark mad. For a wilder-looking man I never had seen. But his talk seemed sensible enough. And after a moment or two I lost my fear of him.

“Um . . .” he mumbled characteristically, as we crossed the beach to greet him. “I see you got here all right.”

“Yes, sir,” Scoop took the lead in the conversation.

“Sell your jugs?”

“Yes, sir.”

222

“Git the money fur ’em?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How much?”

“Twenty cents apiece.”

“Got any left?”

“Sure thing.”

“How many?”

“Oh,” Scoop shot a side glance at us, “three or four hundred I guess.”

“Mixed handles?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wa-al,” the word was accompanied by a peculiar flicker of the speaker’s noticeably greedy eyes, “if you want to do business with me I’ll gladly take the green ones off your hands.”

Scoop was surprised.

“All of them?” he spoke slowly.

“All of the green ones,” specified the buyer. “But I don’t keer a rap fur the blue ones.”

“Why not?”

“Humph!” came the expressive grunt, as the speaker, whose lower jaw never rested, spit expertly at a passing grasshopper. “Jest as I told you at the lock thar’s a world of diff’rence between the jugs that ol’ Adam made hisself an’ the flimsy imitations that his workman turned out. An’ havin’ made up my mind to bottle all of my sorghum in gallon jugs I want the best.”

“Do you make your own sorghum?” queried the crafty leader.

“If I didn’t,” growled the old man, “I don’t know whar I’d git it. Fur they hain’t nobody else ’round here who knows how to make it.”

“How much do you charge for it?”

“A dollar an’ a quarter a gallon.”

“Do you get your jugs back?”

“Sometimes.”

“And you’re prepared to pay cash for all of the green handled jugs that we’ve got?”

“Exactly,” the expert spitter further reduced the grasshopper population.

“Two hundred jugs, Mr. Haines,” Scoop spoke slowly, “is a lot of jugs.”

“Not to a man who turns out the wad of sorghum that I do.”

“But if you’re in need of the jugs, why didn’t you tell us about it yesterday?”

“That’s exactly what I should ’a’ done,” the old man agreed.

“But I jest didn’t think about it.”

“How soon do you want the jugs?”

“Right away, if I kin git ’em.”

“Well, suppose you wait here,” the leader suggested, with a meaning glance in our direction, “while my chums and I talk it over.”

But the old man was in a hurry.

“They hain’t nothin’ to talk over,” he spoke nervously. “You’ve got the jugs an’ I’ve got the jack. So let’s git down to business.”

“But *I* can’t sell you the jugs, Mr. Haines. They belong to the two Grendow boys. Only one of the brothers is here. So you better give us time to hunt up the other one and see what he says.”

224

Which of course was just a trick of Scoop’s to get away so that we could talk things over. And wondering what he had up his sleeve we followed him across the island, the impatient jug buyer having been instructed to wait in his boat till we returned.

Scoop stopped when we came to the spring.

“The old fraud!” he gave a jeering laugh. “We ought to break one of the jugs over his head. But I suppose we’ve got to humor him instead if we hope to find out what he knows. Him and his sorghum! Haw, haw, haw! That’s a likely story. And how nicely he swallowed the bait when I asked him if he *always* got his sorghum jugs back. You heard what he said. He got them back *sometimes*. That being the case why should he be so blamed particular about his jugs? And why should he be in such a hurry for them when the sugar cane that he’s raising

won't be ripe till October?"

"He acts kind of crazy," I put in uneasily.

"Men of his greedy stamp often do," declared Scoop, "when they get their sticky hands on a hidden fortune."

"Then you think," cried Orion, with swelling eyes, "that he's found the counterfeit loot?"

225

"Either that," declared the capable leader, "or he knows where the loot is. And it was the green-handled jug that he got from us yesterday morning that put him wise. Now he wants the rest of the green-handled jugs. Why? There's only one answer, fellows. They are the key to the mystery, including the singing tree and everything else."

In the added excited talk it was agreed that one of us should go back to Tutter with the scheming old jug buyer to load him up. And in counting out, in the regular way, this job fell to Orion.

I knew how he felt. He hated to leave the island until he was sure that his little brother was safe. But the other job was vastly important. So he got into the boat with his elderly companion and rowed away, having gotten detailed instructions from the clever leader.

What was the secret of the green-handled jugs? I wondered, as we hurried back to Bible Cave to prepare a light lunch, the various animals in the meantime, with the exception of the monkey and the parrot, having spread out over the island. It was Orion's big hope that the mystery would soon be cleared up and the stain thus removed from his father's name. But to me

it seemed that the tangle was more complex than ever. And I found myself wondering, with a peculiar uneasy feeling, what would happen next.

During the time that we had been away from the cave someone informed on our movements had made an arrow of small stones in the cave entrance. And great was our wonderment as we encountered other similar arrows leading in the end to a rocky gully on the island's eastern border.

226

Convinced now that we'd find our missing chum at the end of the trail, I got ready to grab him, fun-loving little rascal that he was, when he popped laughingly into sight. But what we found in the gully instead was a life-sized wooden cow.

Rocks had been piled around it to hide it. But we soon discovered it, having plainly been led here for that purpose. And did our eyes ever pop out as the complete form came into sight!

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" gasped Scoop, as he gingerly felt of the creature's carved head. "A wooden cow! What do you know about that?"

Red took a peek.

"It's even got faucets," he told us.

"And a tail," annexed Peg.

Rory then thumped the wooden stomach.

"It's 'ollow," he informed.

Scoop turned one of the pivoted wooden ears.

“Listen, fellows!” he cried, leaning forward. “It’s got machinery in it.”

227

To our added amazement the cow then began to shake its jointed life-like tail and roll its glassy eyes, after which, the other ear having been turned, the whole side opened up trapdoor fashion.

And out flew a million flies!

228

CHAPTER XVIII

STINGING TAUNTS

Peg went off to search the gully walls, hopeful that he'd find the hidden cave. And then, as a motor boat came within hearing, we hurriedly covered the cow with leafy boughs and hoofed it down the hill to the south shore.

"What do you make of it, Jerry?" inquired the leader, when we came to a pause.

"What?" I grunted.

"The wooden cow."

"I'm just wondering," I spoke uneasily, as an old fairy tale ran through my head, "if we haven't pulled the same kind of a boner that the kids did who peeked into Pandora's box."

"Flies!" Scoop spoke reflectively. "Millions of flies!"

There was a short pause.

"It *could* be," he added, as his thoughts took definite shape.

"Could be what?" I queried eagerly.

"A fly trap."

A fly trap! And then, as the leader and I stared into each other's blank eyes, the same thought struck us both.

This was the invention that we had heard about!

229

But where was the old inventor himself? And why had he so peculiarly led us to his crazy contraption? Was it involved in the mystery? Or had the odd trail been laid by Kay after all, as we had suspected at the start?

“I wish now,” Scoop spoke thoughtfully, “that we had taken the time while we were in Ashton to find out more about the old inventor. And I should have brought up the subject when the lock tender was here. But I never thought of it.”

Barnyard flies are particularly bad around cows. And probably the inventor had had that in mind in shaping his trap. But I couldn't make myself believe that flies would be attracted to the trap purely because of its cow-like shape. It was my idea, as gained from general observation, that a fly would light on anything that had the right smell or taste. So a barrel-shaped trap, or for that matter a trap of any shape, would have been just as effective.

And yet the inventor had spent a great deal of time and much money to mould his fly trap in the exact shape of a full-grown cow. I wondered humorously if he'd next try to trap fleas with a wooden dog and chicken mites with a wooden hen.

It was a great idea all right!

I had earlier jumped to the conclusion that the former jug maker had come to the island to lift the long-hidden counterfeit loot. But now it would seem that he had come here as reported to perfect his unusual invention. Which gave me something more to wonder about. In fact I was still wondering

230

about it when a trim green craft with a flying green-and-white pennant came into sight from the direction of Steam Corners.

It was Bid Stricker and his crummy gang!

They were scooting along in our property like the wind. And never had I heard a sweeter running motor or seen a prettier boat.

It had been our intention to fight them when they showed up. But I saw now that we hadn't a chance in the world. For if we started out in our clumsy old rowboat they'd run rings around us.

They saw us on the south shore. And turning to the right they left the channel and swept by us as lordly-like as you please.

And how they jeered!

We could hear them. And, *bu*-lieve me, what they handed us was a plenty. But they couldn't hear us on account of the motor. So after a few furious yells we shut up.

Bid finally stopped the motor a few rods from shore.

"Well, well," he beamed, letting on that he had just discovered us, "if here isn't my old friend monkey-face."

He meant Red.

231

"I'd rather look like a monkey," flared brick-top, "than you."

"Why don't you have your face lifted," came the genial

suggestion, “and put it on a pig where it belongs?”

“Boy, you’ll think your face has been lifted with a pile-driver when I get a crack at you.”

“Tut-tut, little one,” the words were accompanied by a lofty gesture. “That’s no way for you to talk to your superior. You must remember that I’m the big shot in this outfit.”

“Yah, half-shot.”

“I could eat you in two bites, weakling.”

“If you did you’d have more brains in your stomach than in your head.”

Gosh! That was a hot one all right.

“I suppose,” Bid then started off on a new track, as his gang clustered around him like a lot of grinning baboons, “that it’s quite a treat for you birds to look at your own boat.”

“Show them how easy the motor starts,” suggested Jum Prater.

“That’s an idea,” nodded Bid.

We watched him coil a rope on the motor’s shiny top.

“The starting rope having been placed in position,” he then demonstrated for our benefit, in regular instruction-book style, “the next step is to put the carburetor lever in the ‘choke’ position.”

“I wish you’d choke,” growled Peg, with flashing eyes.

“After which,” the genial demonstration was resumed, “the spark lever is put in the halfway position.”

“Maybe you better explain to them what the spark lever is,” prompted Hib Milden.

“Oh, yes! You see, fellows, the spark is advanced or retarded with this little lever that I have in my hand. Notice how nicely it works. Isn’t that cunning? Such a pretty little lever, too. Nickel-plated and everything. Now, for starting, we put the lever here. Dear me, it’s got a drop of oil on it. I’ll have to wipe it off. But when we want to go fast—and you should see us when we’re feeling real devilish!—we put it here. . . . Do you follow me?”

“Don’t worry,” gritted Peg. “We’ll follow you all right. And what you’ll get when we catch up with you will be just too bad for you.”

Bid turned to his leering gang.

“I don’t believe they’re a bit interested in what I’m telling them,” he complained.

“Jerry is,” Hib spoke again. “For I can tell by the sweet look on his face.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” cried Bid, pretending amazement, “that Jerry is here, too? The one and only Jerry Todd whom I impersonated so cleverly yesterday morning? Well, well! So he is. Come on out, you dear sweet onion top, and I’ll give you a

kiss.”

“I’ll meet you halfway,” I dared.

“Yes, you *would* like to see me get my feet wet.”

“Why don’t you try it?” put in Red. “Maybe if you soak your feet long enough you’ll find that pair of socks that you lost last winter.”

“You don’t mean socks, dearie, you mean callouses. Boy, I’m hard.”

“Yah, on top.”

“Show them how the release charger works,” prompted Jum.

“Oh, yes! I almost forgot about the release charger. And like the spark lever it’s such a ducky little release charger, too. You turn it this way. See? Then you jiggle this cunning little pin in the carburetor, to provide plenty of gasoline in the mixing chamber, and pull the rope.”

“Let me pull it,” begged Jum.

Bid now had his eyes on the pennant. And when he spoke he had the voice of a bull.

“What’s that?” he pointed with an accusing finger.

“What’s what?” Jum’s big mouth began to sag at the corners.

“That spot,” came the added bellow.

“I don’t see any spot,” cringed Jum.

“*You* wouldn’t. But it’s there nevertheless. A great big naughty old fly speck! Right in the middle of our pretty little pennant, too. Get busy this instant, you careless slob, and wash it off. And then throw out that grain of sand between your feet. For I’m not going to have this nice little boat cluttered up with sand and fly specks.”

234

Which was supposed to be funny. But it wasn’t funny to us. I guess not! And having started the motor, with a light flip of the rope, off they went like the jeering jackasses that they were.

We thought that they’d head for home. But instead, after circling around, they started back toward Steam Corners.

We saw them several times after that. And slowly it percolated into our heads that they were hanging around for us to go home, after which they intended to land on the island and have a good time.

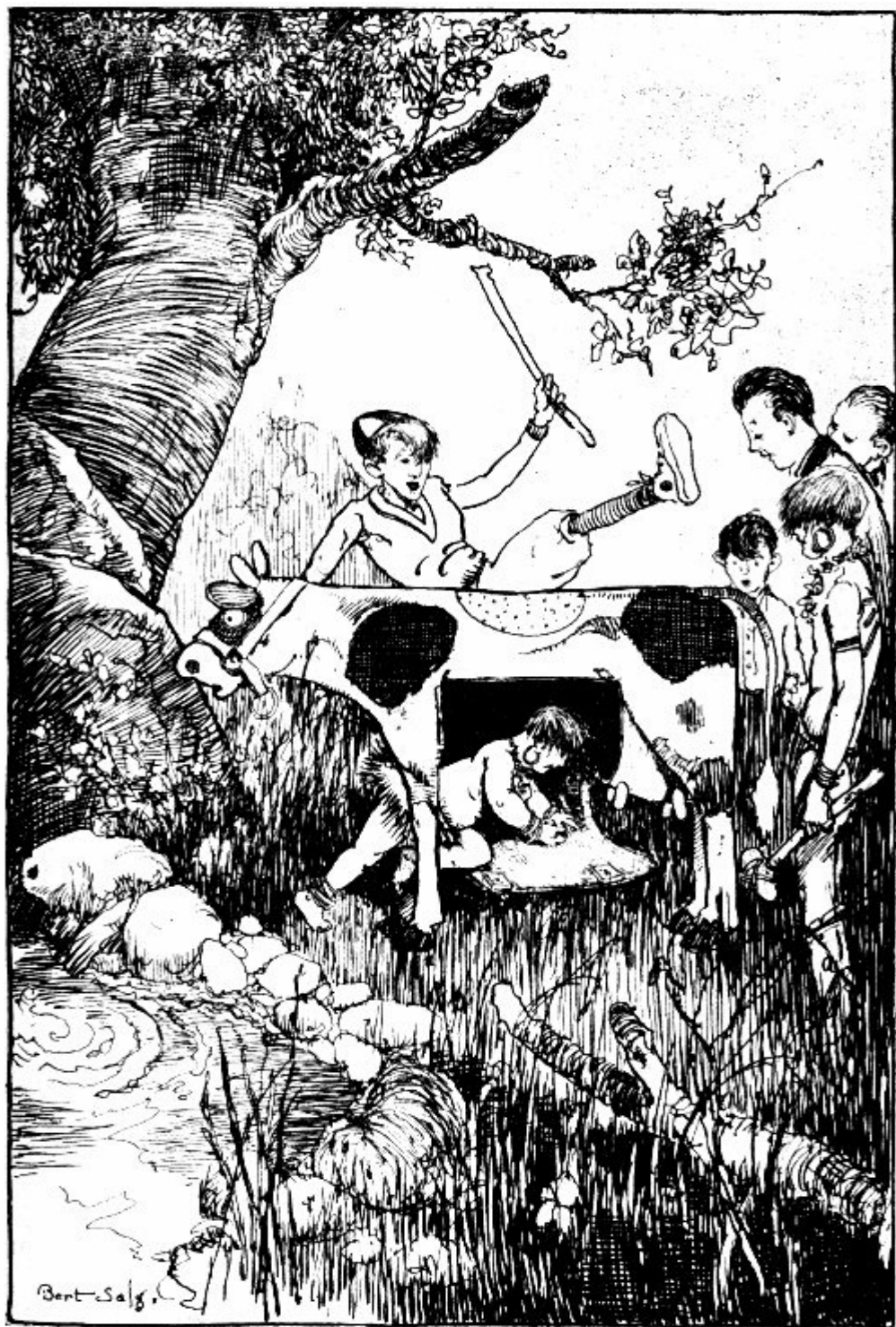
So, to accommodate them, and gain our own ends at the same time, we got our stuff together and piled it into the rowboat, after which we lugged the big wooden cow down the hill and stood it beside the spring.

As Peg said, in good generalship, if the ancient Greeks could outwit the Trojans with a wooden horse we certainly ought to succeed as well with a wooden cow. And it was further decided that Red, being the smallest, was to bide in the cow’s stomach, while the rest of us waited for him down the canal.

The cow of course would fill the Strickers with

wonderment. And having hauled it into their camp in pattern of the Trojans they'd make a big fuss over it, never dreaming that it contained a spy. Nor would anything happen if they turned the creature's wooden ears, as Scoop had done. For Red could easily hold the ears from the inside. It's true that the body was filled with fly holes. But these were barely noticeable. So we couldn't see that the hider was in any particular danger. And what a fine chance he'd have to jeer at the outwitted enemy when he got possession of the motor boat!

We were ready to leave now. So we opened up the cow's stomach and Red crawled inside, getting his orders to stay there until the camp had quieted down for the night. With his painted skin and everything he looked kind of funny. And I had the feeling too, as I shook hands with him, that he looked kind of shaky. But he didn't back down.



**WE OPENED UP THE COW'S STOMACH AND RED CRAWLED
INSIDE.**

Good old Red! I've seen the time that I longed to knock his block off. For his tricks aren't always funny. But I told myself now that he was a hero, as deserving even of a place in history as the Trojans themselves.

"Let's hope," he grumbled, as he pulled his bare toes out of the cow's gears, "that I don't have to stay in here very long. For I have a hunch that it's going to be blamed hot when the door's closed.

"Don't worry about that," soothed Peg. "For it's nice and shady here. Besides it will soon be dark."

236

"What are you going to have for supper?" came the hungry inquiry.

"Bacon and eggs."

"Bacon and eggs! Um-yum-yum! Let's eat now."

But Peg was in a hurry to get away.

"We'll be watching for you, Red, old kid. So don't fail us. And when you get there you'll find plenty to eat."

It never would do, I realized, to let the hated Strickers get their hands on Aunt Polly's parrot, so I took it with us.

"BANG!" it exploded, as we loaded it into the boat. "You're full of boloney. BANG!"

The donkey was watching us with mournful eyes, having sensed from our actions that we were getting ready to leave. And when we pushed off without him he started to follow us, but soon turned back and disappeared into the bushes, where we could hear the old sow shrilly lecturing her family.

Orion, I knew, never would have left the island without his kid brother. And I felt kind of guilty as we pulled out. Still, I told myself, in justification of our course, we weren't leaving for good. We expected to be back in a few hours. After which it was to be hoped that the mystery surrounding the vanished one would soon be cleared up.

The Strickers were watching us from a distance. And to fool them into thinking that we were all in the boat we erected a pole with one of the pink sofa pillows on it. This was supposed to be Red. But when we passed into the canal we took the pole down and used the pillow to sit on. For the island and its accompanying wide-waters were now out of sight.

237

In another one of my books I told about an old log house on the south bank of the canal, between the big wide-waters and Ashton. And it was here that we stopped and cooked supper.

The sun was resting in the treetops now. Pretty soon the shadows of early evening came creeping in on us. And then came the heavier darkness, with the accompanying moon.

Peg struck a match and peeked at his watch.

“Nine o'clock,” he told us shortly.

After what seemed a million years to me he struck another

match.

“What time is it now?” I inquired anxiously.

“A quarter of ten.”

Scoop took my hand.

“What’s the matter, Jerry? Are you worried?”

“Kind of,” I admitted, as I further watched the bend in the canal around which it was expected that the motor boat and its triumphant driver would show up any minute.

“There’s nothing to worry about now,” grunted Peg.

“Just the same,” I shrugged, “I’ll be glad when I hear the boat coming down the canal.”

238

“Boy! It sure is a nifty little scow all right.”

“And you’re sure that Red can start it?” my uneasiness persisted.

“Of course. For he’s a natural-born mechanic.”

“That isn’t what his mother told him the day he took the family clock apart,” laughed Scoop.

“Are his parents still in Peoria?” Peg then inquired of me.

“So I understand.”

“Gosh! I bet they’d come home in a jiffy if they knew that the

family pride was trickling around the landscape in a fur petticoat.”

“Don’t deceive yourself,” I told him. “With telephone wires spread all over the state, Aunt Pansy very efficiently broadcasted the bad news many hours ago.”

“In which case,” nodded Peg; “we’re likely to see Papa Meyers any minute.”

“Sh-h-h-h!” breathed Scoop, pointing down the moonlit tow-path. “Here he comes now.”

Peg jumped to his feet.

“That isn’t Mr. Meyers,” came the glad cry. “It’s Orion.”

Having solved the mystery of the green-handled jugs our new chum had started afoot for the island to tell us the grand and glorious news.

But some of the stuff that he dished out to us, when we ran to meet him, wasn’t good news at all. Gee-miny crickets gosh! I should say it wasn’t.

239

I never got such a sickening shock in all my life. As for Peg he couldn’t have been whiter if he lay in his coffin.

Stopping at a farmhouse to get a drink the walker had been told by the well owner, who in turn had gotten the news over the rural telephone, that a gang of boys on Oak Island were dancing around a huge fire on the south shore.

And in the middle of the fire was a big wooden cow!

CHAPTER XIX

INTO THE EARTH

We piled into the rowboat as tight as we could and started down the moonlit canal. Nor did we pay any attention to Orion when he began razzing us for deserting his blind brother. This younger brother was the older one's chief care 'tis true. But we also had our own lifelong chum to think about. And right now that was more important to us than anything else.

Poor little Red! He wasn't much to look at. But it certainly wouldn't improve his appearance, I told myself, with a sinking heart, to be baked inside of a wooden cow. And unless we got to the island in a hurry, to squirt water, there wouldn't be enough left of him to fasten a pair of wings to.

Having grabbed the oars, as usual, Peg almost pulled the lining out of his heels.

"It's all my fault, fellows," he mumbled over and over again, with a tragic face. "For I was the one who suggested it. And if we lose him I'll never forgive myself."

Scoop sniffed the air.

"Somebody's burning an old rag," he told us.

241

Peg's lips whitened.

"Please!" he begged, in a choked voice.

“If it *is* a rag,” I sniffed in turn, “it certainly isn’t Red. For he didn’t have enough clothes on him to stink up an ant’s bay window.”

Scoop took another sniff.

“Maybe it’s toenails,” he supplemented.

Peg brandished an oar.

“One more crack like that,” he threatened, “and I’ll bend this oar over your head.”

But he dropped the oar in a jiffy when the drone of a motor boat struck his ears.

“Oh, fellows!” came the glad cry. “It’s him! It’s Red! It’s our little chum! Here he comes! I can see him! It’s him! It’s Red! It’s him!”

And so it was for a fact.

“What a relief,” I told the grinning newcomer, holding my head, as he drew up beside us with an expert flourish.

“Well,” came the characteristic cocky greeting, “here I am.”

“We thought you were being parboiled on both sides,” I told him.

“Poor old banjo eyes,” he sighed, referring to the burned fly trap. “She’s nothing but a memory now.”

“How’s your face?” I then inquired. “Is it clean?”

“Did you ever see it when it wasn’t?” he picked a chunk of something from the end of his freckled nose and dropped it noisily into the canal.

242

“Then for heaven’s sake lean over and let Peg kiss you. For he almost coughed up his last year’s underwear when he heard that the cow was prancing around in the middle of a bonfire.”

“You’ll have so many loose teeth prancing around in your mouth that *you* won’t be able to cough,” growled old hefty, “if you don’t dry up.”

But that kind of talk didn’t scare me.

“Do you think you’re able to tell your story now?” I inquired of the cocky newcomer. “Or do you want to eat and then talk?”

“*Eat?*” he made a wry face. “I should say not.”

“What’s the matter?” I further inquired. “Did you lose your appetite when the Strikers put you on the fire?”

“I’ve already had my supper,” he declared, to my surprise.

“Where?” I quizzed.

“In the cave of course.”

I thought he meant Bible Cave.

“Who did you eat with? The Strikers?”

“You’d be surprised,” he laughed.

“But you haven’t told us yet,” Peg put in, “how you escaped from the wooden cow.”

“I didn’t escape. I just opened the trapdoor and slid out.”

243

“When?”

“Shortly after you fellows left the island.”

“Then you weren’t in the cow when the Strickers put it on the fire!”

“Of course not.”

“Well,” a relieved sigh accompanied the word, “I’m naturally glad to hear that. But I still don’t understand why you got out of the cow so soon.”

“I had to get out. For it had a bee in it.”

“Honey,” Scoop quizzed genially, “or bumble?”

“Honey.”

“How disappointing!”

“I knew as soon as I got my eye on the bee that we weren’t going to get along together. For it had a sort of mean unsociable distrustful look. So I very generously turned over the whole shebang to it, tail and all. After which I sat down beside the spring to soak my hot feet.”

“Oof!” gagged Scoop. “I’ve had my last drink out of *that* spring.”

“You and me both,” I gagged in pattern.

“Presently,” the unruffled narrator resumed, “I heard light footsteps. And thinking that it was the Strickers I got up——”

“To run,” I supplied pleasantly.

He gave a snort.

“*Me* run from that crummy outfit? I should say not.”

244

“Well,” pressed Peg, with an impatient gesture, “what *did* you do? Coax the bee to change places with you?”

“I got up and braced myself for a fight, determined to lick the whole outfit single-handed.”

“The hero!” I breathed.

“Please don’t brag on me so openly, Jerry. For I’m trying hard to step down and make people believe that I’m just a plain unassuming little boy after all.”

Scoop pretended that he was gasping for air.

“Quick!” he gurgled, holding his head. “Fan me with a brick before I faint.”

Peg was on needles and pins.

“Please cut out the nonsense,” he begged, “and tell us exactly what happened.”

“Well, as I was saying, I got up in my usual courageous way to face the enemy single-handed. It was a case of do or die. And you know me! But I was deprived by fate of the anticipated victory. For it wasn’t the Strickers after all.”

“I bet a cookie it was Shoe Polish,” I put in.

“Shoe Polish your granny! It was none other than little Kay himself.”

That brought Orion into the conversation.

“Then you’ve seen him?” came the glad cry. “And you know where he is?”

“Sure thing. He and I had supper together in the cave under the singing tree.”

245

I sank weakly into my seat.

“You win,” I told him.

“But why did you leave him behind?” Orion followed up, with anxious eyes.

Red was peculiarly silent now.

“Tell me,” begged the frantic older brother. “Please.”

“I’m afraid to tell you.”

“Then he’s injured?” came the wild despairing cry.

“No,” Red slowly shook his head. “He’s all right. But he isn’t alone. That’s why he stayed in the cave, telling me to hunt you up as quickly as I could.”

Tying our rowboat to a clump of bushes on the south canal bank we then piled into the motor boat and started back to the moonlit island, Red telling us, on the way, how the Strickers had been scared away by the inventor.

“We thought the old guy was hidden in the cave under the singing tree. But instead he left the island to spend a few days in Steam Corners. And was he ever furious when he pulled into the wide-waters to-night and found his pet invention lighting up the scenery. The Strickers tried to escape in the motor boat, but forgot to turn on the gasoline. And to evade capture they jumped overboard, swimming to the mainland.”

We met them in the shadowy tow-path, stringing along like a bunch of half-drowned rats. It was now our time to jeer. And, *bu-lieve* me, they got it hot and heavy. Confiscating our rowboat they beat it for home as fast as they could go. And for days they hid themselves in their own part of town, fearful that we would corner them and apply the threatened cherry gum and feathers. But I doubt if we ever do that, however pleasing it is to talk about. For they had been mighty careful with our new boat. And while we’ll probably never forgive them for the mean trick that they played on us, we soon ceased to begrudge them the fun that they had with the swell little craft. It’s a good thing sometimes, as I’ve learned, to be generous with one’s enemies as well as with friends.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Arriving at the island we found the old inventor in tears. He had spent his last dollar, he confessed, as he poked in the still glowing coals, to perfect the destroyed invention. But his grief lightened when we told him what a big success the trap was. Even though it was surrounded by rocks, we enthused, it had attracted millions of flies. And we promised to try and raise money for him when we got home so that he could continue his work.

The wooden cow, he said, would probably never gain wide use in this country. But he expected it to sell big in places where the dreaded tsetse fly existed. This fly, we learned, was one of Africa's most numerous and most dangerous insect pests. It carried the dreaded "sleeping sickness" germs, which killed large herds of native cattle. In some places the farmers had to completely dress their cattle in overalls to protect them from the dreadful pest. Already attempts had been made to devise an efficient cow-shaped fly trap, as it was known that the dangerous fly sought its victims entirely by sight. And naturally the old jug maker thought that he had the best device of all.

247

The later reunion between the two brothers was a touching one. And I saw then, as they flew into each other's arms, that they'd never consent to a permanent separation. So I abandoned all hope of ever having Kay for an adopted brother. But that's all right. I'll always have him for a pal. And he's the kind of a pal that I can love with my whole heart. That's the way he feels toward me. And that's the way I'll always feel toward him.

“Good old Jerry,” he murmured, squeezing my hand.

And then without another word he led us up the hill. At the top was an ordinary-looking tree, which, we were told, was the long sought singing tree. Below it was a natural cavern, the air of which on a hot day expanded, causing the tree, whose porous roots and trunk penetrated the opening, to give off an odd singing sound.

248

Which clears up *that* point.

Beside the trunk of the tree was a huge balanced rock, which had the appearance of having rested undisturbed for ages. But it readily rolled back when Kay pushed on it, thus disclosing a yawning black opening in the ground.

The little blind boy needed no light himself to guide his steps. But to make it easier for us to follow him he turned on a flashlight, cautioning us, as we started one by one down an aged wooden ladder of seemingly endless length, to watch out for broken rungs.

Then, having arrived safely at the foot of the long ladder, we were led down a natural passageway, the lower end of which was blocked by a rusted iron door.

My heart was pounding like sixty. For I knew that strange revealments lay just ahead of us.

Only an iron door now lay between us and a complete solution of the mystery.

249

CHAPTER XX

THE SKULL'S SECRET

Kay stood with his back against the closed iron door.

“When I was just a little fellow,” he spoke directly to his brother, in a slow even voice, “I used to wonder if God was as good as people said. He hadn’t been very good to me, I thought, in depriving me of my eyesight. But I know now that He *is* good. And He’s particularly good to boys in trouble. He’s been watching over us all the time, guiding us here and there. And now, most wonderful of all, He’s made our dream come true.”

I put an arm around Orion to steady him. For he was trembling like a reed in the wind.

“Then you mean,” his voice faltered emotionally, “that—that the man you shot is—is——”

“Yes,” Kay nodded soberly. “We thought he was a spy. And we drew an ugly picture of him, crediting him with all kinds of evil intentions. But he isn’t a spy, Orion. To the contrary he’s one of the kindest men in the whole world, and also one of the most unfortunate.”

“It’s your father,” I gently told Orion, as he still weaved in my arms.

“Yes,” he spoke with difficulty, “I understand that.”

Then he brushed me aside.

“I want to see him, Kay. Please take me to him now.”

Red would have followed them into the room beyond the iron door if old hefty hadn't grabbed him by the topknot and yanked him back.

“What's the big idea?” sputtered the indignant little bantam.

“There are times, Red, as you ought to realize without being told, when people near and dear to each other like to be alone.”

“Huh!” the word was accompanied by an insolent gesture.
“You talk like a preacher.”

The meeting between Orion and his father undoubtedly was a joyous one. Yet it was tintured with sadness, too, reviving as it did old unhappy memories. Besides, Harlow Grendow was not a free man. To the contrary, having escaped from prison, he was a fugitive, liable at any minute to be surrounded by his dogged pursuers and dragged back to his cell.

Only when he was entirely alone did he feel safe. And fear spread over his haggard drawn face in spite of himself when we were brought into the extensive rocky chamber where he lay, a wasted trembling figure, on a makeshift bed. I thought then that he was dying. And beyond all doubt he would have died had he been reimprisoned. But instead, when he later went to the state's attorney with his whole story, thus gaining for himself the country's sympathy and his later freedom, he was placed in a government hospital

from which he soon expects to emerge a vindicated man of renewed health.

In their wide-spread account of the amazing affair the newspapers published pictures of the room in which the reunion between father and son took place. (Thank heaven no pictures were printed of Red and Rory!) It was a natural cavern, the reports agreed, discovered years ago by the crooked-minded Englishman and used by him thereafter as a counterfeiting den. The rusted dies found here were promptly confiscated by the summoned federal agents, and the punch-press and power unit broken into bits. Moreover the grasping lock tender lost all of his green-handled jugs, as did also the Ashton merchant, for imbedded in the thick bottom of the jugs were close-set piles of brand new counterfeit dimes. No wonder that the old lock tender was willing to buy all of the green-handled jugs at the price asked, when, having broken one by accident, thus releasing a flood of long-hidden coins, he knew that each of the marked jugs contained approximately forty dollars in dimes. Two hundred jugs at forty dollars apiece is a lot of money! Orion got wise to the jugs' secret when he saw the impatient buyer crack one open on the way home.

Poor Mr. Haines! He might have known that the counterfeit money would get him into trouble. But greed got the best of him I guess. He wanted to enrich himself overnight. But now, as I say, all he has left is the fragments of the few jugs that he opened.

252

Realizing that the recovered coins were counterfeit, and knowing the history of their undoubted maker, he should have reported his findings to the proper authorities, thus clearing up

the identity of the supposed “jug buyers” who came in the darkness to receive the coins prepared for them, but who, following the counterfeiter’s tragic death, fled the country.

To-day the dead man’s home is a vastly different place. Instead of peeping furtively through shielding trees and bushes it rests at ease in the center of a wide green lawn. The cleaned windows beam with friendliness. And the sentinel-like chimneys seem to doze in the hot afternoon sun like contented old men. The lower tunnel has been walled off and the jug furnace dismantled. For Orion and Kay want no signs of their grandparent’s dual activities to show down there. Even the old pottery wheels have been piled in a dark corner and covered with burlap.

A man of fine character himself, Harlow Grendow never knew that his beloved parent was a counterfeiter of international reputation until the blow fell. The son had often noticed the odd silver ring that the elder wore, but little dreamed that this ring was the emblem of a strange unity between three of the most notorious counterfeiters of all times. One was killed by pursuing officers, while the other two, Adam Grendow himself and a scoundrel posing as Lord Westervelt, separated, one hiding in England while the other similarly hid in America.

253

Lord Westervelt conceived the scheme of manufacturing spurious rare coins. There was vastly more profit in that, he told his willing accomplice when they got together in Boston, than in counterfeiting ordinary coins. Until then Adam Grendow had specialized in dimes. But now he turned to the duplication of worn rare coins, after which, by the workings of

a strange unexplainable Fate, the well-meaning son and the tricky English agent came together. Thus the coins made in the Oak Island cavern came finally into the hands of the counterfeiter's own unsuspecting son.

During one of his trips to America, the English agent looked up his associate, liquor loosening his tongue.

254

Thus the younger man learned the facts about the supposedly rare coins. Harlow Grendow was further shown a ring similar to the one worn by his own father. Having disclosed the secret of the ring the drunken law-breaker admitted that his arrest was certain. So young Grendow hastened to Tutter to have the story substantiated by his parent and if necessary aid the latter in making his escape to South America. Thus did the horrified jug maker learn for the first time that he and his own son were linked together in the incriminating tangle.

It was the hot-headed daughter-in-law's belief, as recorded, that the unscrupulous parent had wilfully drawn the easy-going son into the affair. But that was untrue. As a matter of fact Adam Grendow loved his son dearly. And wanting to make amends for his misspent life, the broken old counterfeiter started for Oak Island to destroy the dies that he had made. Then the accident occurred. Nor is it difficult to comprehend why the ring was made to disappear and also why the imprisoned son refused to speak up in his own defense. Had he told his story few people would have believed in his innocence. He realized that. And so he kept silent, thus shielding the memory of his misguided parent.

Having made his escape from prison he came back to the locality to destroy the evidence that he knew existed in a

255

secret cavern on Oak Island. And by another strange turn of Fate his two sons preceded him to the island by just a few hours. Struck lightly by Kay's arrow, the supposed spy had fled to the island's summit, where the little blind boy later found him searching for the concealed cavern. The meeting undoubtedly was an emotional one. But I have never been given full particulars. So I'll say nothing more about it here.

The later joint search disclosed the hidden fly trap, to which we were led by the fun-loving blind boy's arrows. Then the cavern itself was located, after which, the father having finally agreed to tell his complete story to the government officials, Kay had gone in quest of his brother, learning from Red that Orion and the rest of us had left the island.

Shown the cavern under the "singing tree," Red later got possession of the motor boat, as described, and started after us. And the rest you know.

"But what made you think that the supposed spy was our own father?" Orion inquired that memorable night of his sunny-faced younger brother, as we stood in a circle around the exhausted prisoner's bed.

Kay laughed in his jolly way.

"Oh, I have a lot of funny ideas. Things just pop into my head. And it *was* odd, I kept telling myself over and over again, that the spy had lost his cap so easily. Even if it was too big for him, I reasoned, it should have stuck on his head, unless——"

And there the little fellow paused.

“Unless what?” pressed the older brother.

256

“Unless the wearer’s head had been shaved smooth in the regular prison custom.”

To-day, as I say, the two brothers are pleasantly situated in their reconditioned home. And soon now they expect to welcome their father, who, during the time of his unjust imprisonment, had fallen heir to a small English fortune. So the boys have plenty of money. And once their father returns their happiness will be complete.

As for Red and Rory, the less said about their later domestic difficulties the better. Having been told various and sundry things by the justly indignant parents, who arrived at the island later that night with extra clothes and the official family razor straps, I dare say that the two young cavemen will forever put aside their prehistoric ambitions. But they often talk about the fun that they had on Oak Island, though it’s noticeable that Red is very careful to keep his trap shut around his aunt.

Poor Aunt Pansy! Hearing that we were back in town she came running to the dock for her precious parrot. But instead of screeching with delight at sight of her, as she expected, the ill-natured bird bit her ear, telling her that she was full of boloney.

It’s her indignant story now that her two-hundred-dollar fur cape has fleas. It also has an unpleasant greasy smell, she declares. And every time she mentions it she glares at Red.

But he’s used to truck like that.

257

The donkey and pigs, of course, were driven off by their

indignant owners. And in much the same way Cap'n Tinkertop got his monkey back. Also the goat was returned to its accommodating owner. Thus far no one in Tutter seems willing to finance the old inventor, who knew nothing about the hidden dimes. I retrieved my watch from old Caleb Obed. We're using our peachy new motor boat every day. And so my story draws to a close.

Next comes JERRY TODD AND THE FLYING FLAPDOODLE. Yes, we actually get into the air in this amazing story. But what a goofy craft we had. It was well named the "Flying Flapdoodle."

The first time we tried it out it turned a complete somersault, dumping its jiggly old inventor into a mud hole. When he got the mud out of his eyes he furiously kicked a hole in the calico rudder. After which the ship sailed perfectly—almost!

Was it true that the world was about to come to an end? And would the fanatical religious leader's dream of actually flying to heaven in a motored glider be realized? We wondered, amazed by the chain of bewildering events that preceded the grand "take-off," while our more practical-minded parents openly ridiculed the idea.

Then, just as the old Bible student had predicted, came the faint bell-like blast of Gabriel's horn. High in the air, mind you. And as a result the town's hitherto jeering inhabitants were thrown into a panic.

A mighty exciting story this, packed with skylarking giggles and odd creepy mystery involving spirits and ghosts. A flying story

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261

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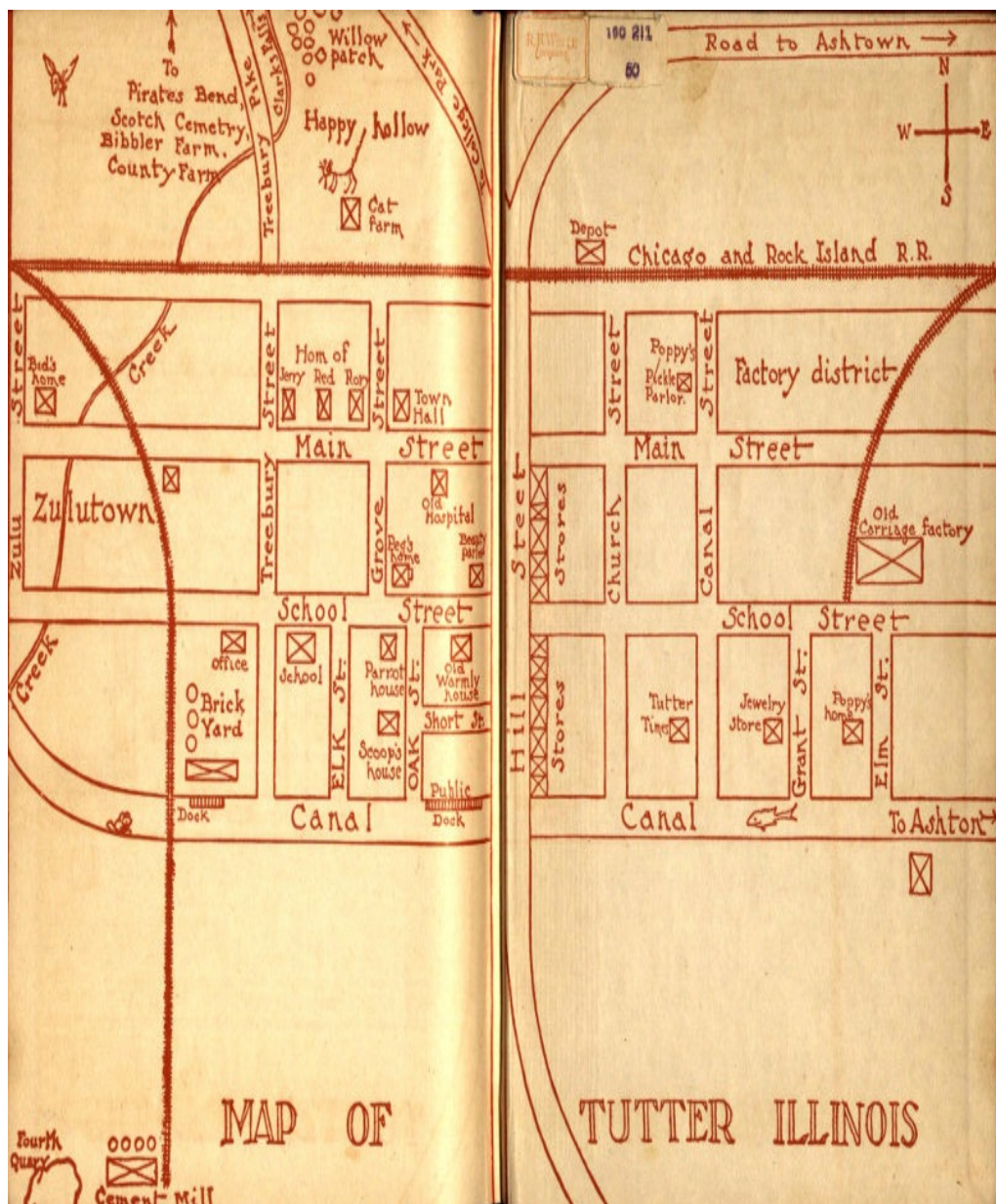
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[The end of *Jerry Todd--Caveman* by Edward Edson Lee]