

BILLY CORY

ADVENTURER

BY

PATTEN BEARD



PICTURES BY
ELEANOR MUSSEY YOUNG



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BILLY CORY





From around a tree trunk he watched

BILLY CORY ADVENTURER

BY

PATTEN BEARD



ILLUSTRATED BY

ELEANOR MUSSEY YOUNG

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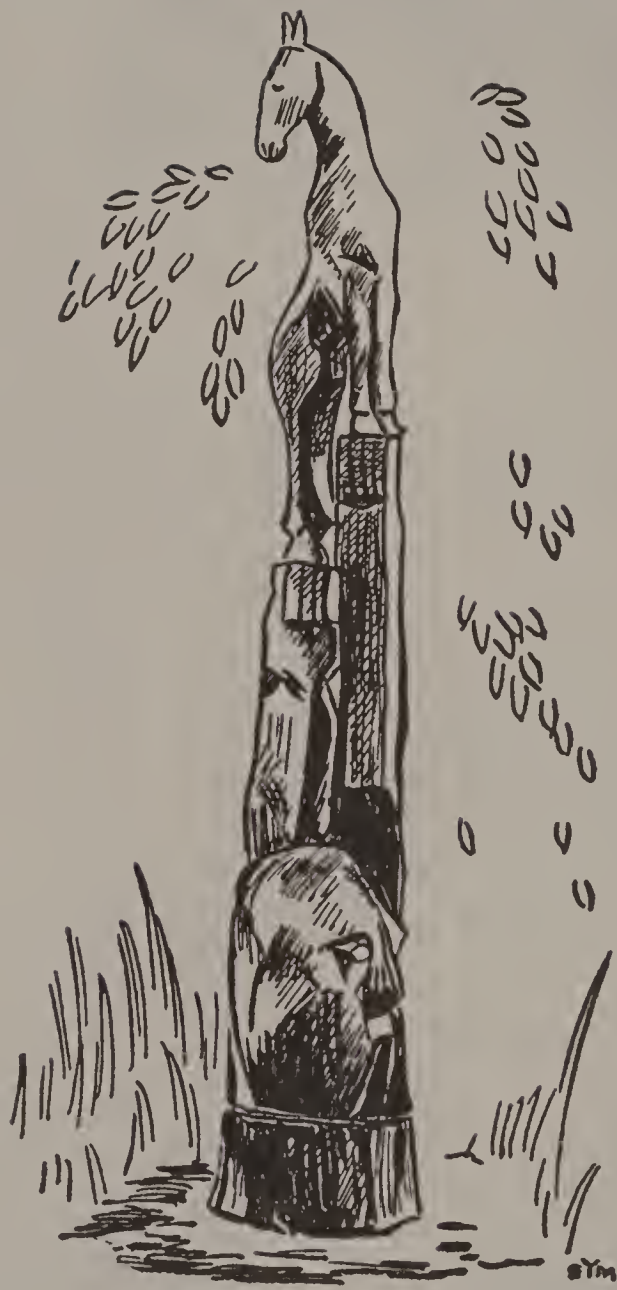
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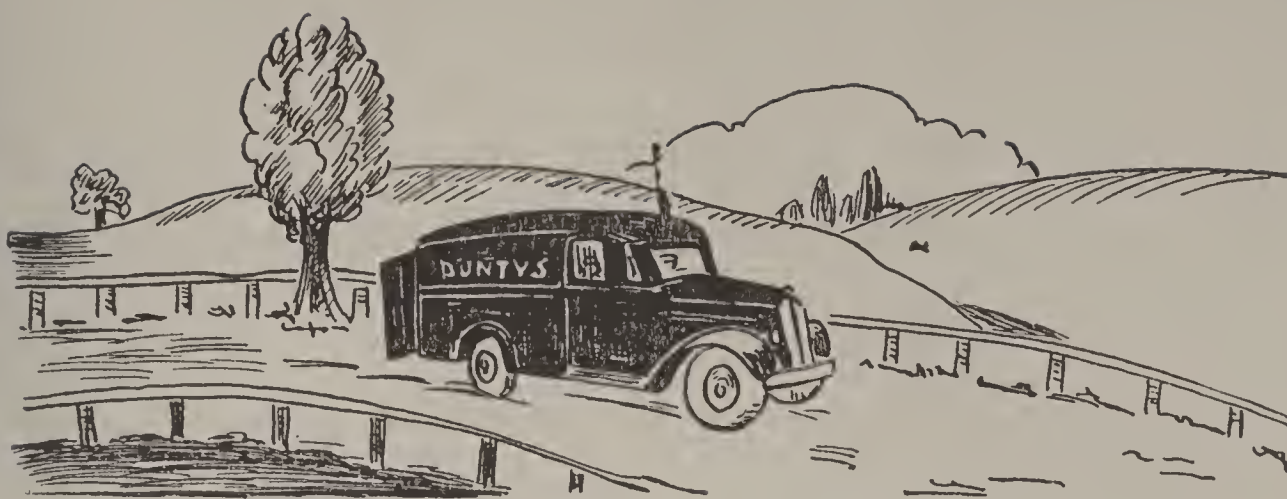
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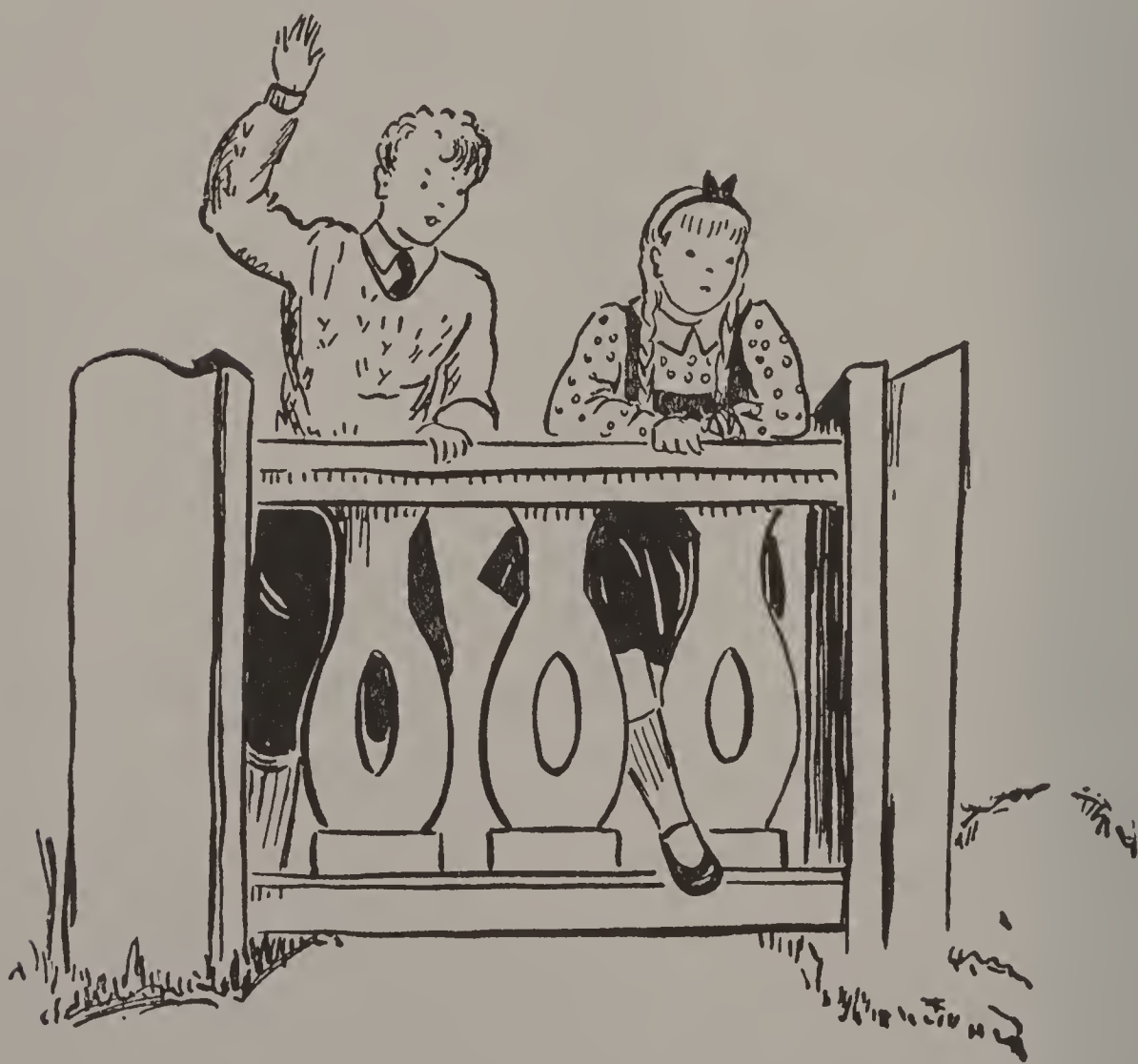


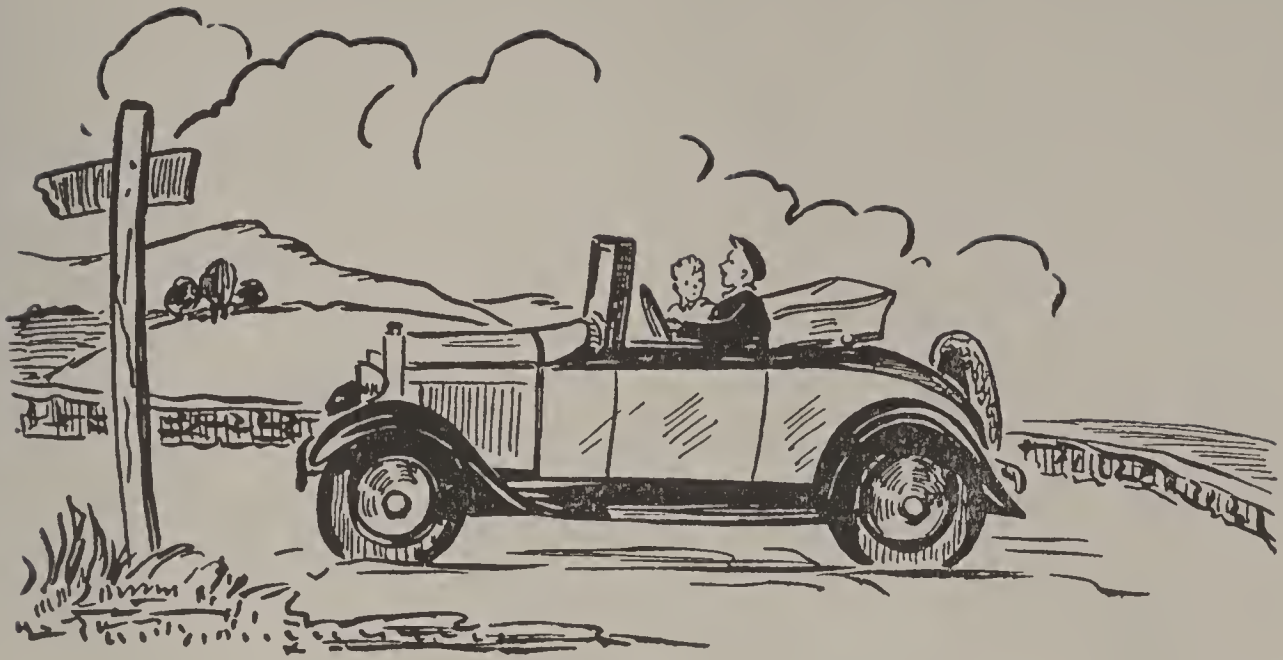
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TO
PETER MERRILL KNAPP



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Acknowledgment is also given to WHAT TO DO for permission to reprint "The Mysterious Paper" and "Billy Has a Hobby."



After the supper, the Treasure Chest was auctioned



THE WRONG BAG

“Good-bye, Dad. It’s fun to be going off on a trip all alone,” said Billy as the taxi stopped on the wharf of the West 42nd Street landing for the Hudson boat. “It’s an awfully good-looking bag you got me! Too bad it’s got that little scratch on it!”

“It may have more later when you’re a more experienced traveler,” Dad replied. “Check it as soon as you go on board. Follow the crowd. And remember—William Benson Cory! Don’t you forget and leave that bag anywhere! When Mother packed it last night, I put some very important papers into it for you to carry up to Uncle. They can’t be du-

plicated and they are worth a great deal. You have the key of the bag and it's locked, so they are safe, but you must hang on tight to the bag and not leave it, except to check it."

Billy nodded gravely. "I will," he promised. "It was good of you, Dad, to let me take this trip all on my own. Say, can you imagine *me* put under the care of the ship's officer the way Mother wanted to do? Me—twelve years old, Dad? I guess I know how to take care of myself, even if I never went this way before or saw Uncle's camp!"

They were waiting now for the gangplank to be put in place. The crowd was thick around them, until the boat came in.

"Your uncle will meet you at Hurley," repeated Father. "I've telegraphed him. If you should get into any mix-up, Billy, go to a man in uniform. You have the written directions—get off at Kingston Point and board the train there for West Hurley."

Billy grinned. "I know," he declared. "I'll telegraph you from Hurley. You and Mother will get it tonight, long before you're through packing to leave for Rangely tomorrow!"

After Dad's good-bye, Billy found himself among tourists, golf bags, tennis rackets, cameras, lunch packages, umbrellas, folded gocarts, hat boxes, and suitcases of all de-

scriptions. So thick was the crowd around the checking window that Billy could scarcely budge. The man in front of him bent down and placed his bag on the deck. Billy followed suit. It seemed everybody was doing it—it was useless to stand holding the bag.

The man ahead was tall, very tall. He wore a soft hat and a tweed suit. Billy was sure he had seen him somewhere. Yes, it was that villain in the movie he and Dad had been to see last night. Only the man *wasn't* that man—he somehow just *looked* like him! The line moved up. It kept slowly edging toward the window and Billy kept kicking his bag along. At least he thought it was his bag till that man ahead bent down and took up *his* bag. It looked exactly like Billy's, even to that scratch!

Billy was about to exclaim when he grabbed for the bag at his feet and saw that it was just like the stranger's. They must both have come from the same store. But on the one Billy hoisted toward the window, he could not see the familiar scratch.

“Say,” he said to the clerk. “Guess that man and I got our bags mixed. Mine had a scratch on it!”

The baggage man did not even hear him. “Next!” he said.

There was nothing to do but move along. Perhaps, after all, he had been mistaken. The bags might have become mixed on the floor—but it wasn't likely. He was troubled, as he watched the landing at 125th Street. He wondered whether he ought to do anything about it. In the meanwhile, he made a tour of the boat that left nothing undiscovered.

From lower deck to upper, Billy took in all there was to see—the enclosed glass space at the center of the boat, where pistons rose and fell in swishing green river water, and the rack of souvenirs and picture postals (where he bought several to send back to Mother and Dad). They were going to Rangely tomorrow with the Van Alstens; that was why Billy had been sent up to his uncle's camp in the Catskills. Uncle hadn't answered Dad's telegram but he was always at his studio working; besides he had just written Dad to send on those papers, registered mail, so they knew he must be there. Billy, himself, was taking the papers, and he felt very experienced and self-reliant as he pocketed ship's stationery for future use and made a third trip to the counter where chocolate bars were for sale.

He didn't want to think of that bag. It made him uneasy. The more he thought, the

more uneasy he became. He wanted to talk to somebody. He was lonely. But everyone was in a party, it seemed. And soda-pop in bottles, sandwiches, broiled chicken, and bananas began to appear on deck, for it was lunch hour. He drifted to the upper deck and hunted for a patch of shade.

He discovered a solitary camp chair on the rear end of the deck. He sat down and pretended to be interested in West Point fast disappearing into the landscape.

The men on the other side were talking. Bits of their talk drifted toward Billy, and though he was not curious, he could not help but overhear. They were talking about somebody called Bracket. And it was evident that one of the men disliked him dreadfully—he could say nothing good about him; he simply had no use for him *at all!*

In the discussion, Billy couldn't understand everything. He remembered the movie he and Dad had been to see last night as a parting bit of fun together. In it, there was that villain who didn't like somebody—and the hero had overheard a conversation, just like Billy here!

Being a hero, he had warned the man and prevented trouble, and Billy began to imagine himself in the role of hero, warning

Bracket. But as Bracket would have to be told what the villain looked like, Billy peeked around the camp chairs stacked up to make the shade—and whom should he see but the very man who had checked the bag so like his very own? He jumped to his feet. “Your bag didn’t have any scratch on it,” he cried. “It got mixed up with mine—I know it did! I want the one that belonged to me—”

But the men were getting up and moving away rapidly and they only looked at Billy as if they thought he was a joke.

“What’s the matter with that boy?” one of them exclaimed.

It made Billy feel very young indeed. He ran after them—but he could not catch them. Where they went to, he could not see. He tried to find them, more positive every moment that the bags *were* mixed up, thinking maybe they were after those papers with which Dad had trusted him! He hunted everywhere—he could not find those men, but a blue-uniformed officer was calling through a megaphone, Kingston Point Landing! Kings-ton Point! All-off-for-Catskills and points west! Get your baggage!”

It was Billy’s landing!

Well, he would go down and get the bag and look it over and see if it was a mistake.



"Kingston Point Landing! Kings-ton Point!"

He knew he should have done that before, only he'd been too busy pretending to be a "hero" like the man in the movies and his sense had deserted him in make-believe.

"Why was I such a goose?" he said to himself. When he had given in his check, the new and shining bag that was given him was *not* his! It did not open to his key!

He tried to get back to the window, but he couldn't! Besides, the gangplank was being hoisted, and right by the rope stood the man with the bag that belonged to Billy.

Billy managed to wiggle and squeeze past the persons in line, for he had to catch that man and *show him* that he didn't have the right bag! He had to confront him with it and yell maybe for an officer!

At last he was on the gangplank. The man was but a few steps ahead—and then, as luck would have it, up came two baggage men with a truck, heading straight for Billy. Some one pulled him out of the way and held him. He could see the two men ahead get into a blue sedan and slam the door. There was a second while they waited—

"Let me go," squealed Billy. "Somebody's got my bag!" But it was too late—they had *gone!*

There was nothing else to do but get into

the waiting train for West Hurley; the conductor asked him if he had lost his party. When he explained about the bag, the conductor said, "Well, you'll get it again; they'll find your address inside. They don't want your bag, son; they want *their own!*"

Since he was so positive about it, Billy could say nothing. He got onto the train miserably. His uncle would have to fix it up.

At West Hurley, the conductor saw him off the train with the bag, but his uncle had not yet come. Billy sat on the platform's rim, kicking the gravel and waiting impatiently. A bus marked *Woodstock* chugged and went off, and a series of cars with passengers and baggage followed. There was nobody left but the station master who came over.

Billy explained that he was waiting until someone came for him.

But time went on and his uncle did not come. When Billy asked if he could get a taxi, the station master laughed. "No, sir," he grinned, "not today. Today's the big Maverick Day! What, don't you know about Maverick? The artist colony gets it up every year in August; everybody goes in fancy rigs. They have an outdoor play and suppers around bonfires, and a dance in the evening. You ought to see it some day, son!"

“I’d like to,” said Billy. “But I don’t know if my uncle will take me. Oh, I ’most forgot. I have to telegraph.”

He did. And the station master began to close up. He didn’t know just what he was going to do about Billy, since there were no cars to be had, but just then, around the curve of road there came a blue sedan like the one that man had got into at Kingston Point! Billy rushed out upon the platform to see it.

It was not, however, the man with Billy’s bag; it was a young artist in masquerade! He had come to send off an express package of a magazine cover to a well-known magazine. The station master knew him; it developed that he was G. G. Whatell and that if Billy didn’t know about him, he ought to! Anyhow, he was friendly and concerned. “Well, you are in a fix, kid,” he said. “I’m going your way and I’ll give you a lift, but I’ll have to take you along to Maverick with me. I’ll take you to your uncle after supper and I’ll take you right along—hop in!”

It seemed the only thing to do, since there was a chance that his uncle might not have come down the mountain for his mail. Mail was held at the store and telegrams, Billy learned, were also held at the store till called

for, as it was too far up the mountain to deliver and his uncle had no phone!

It was good to be on the way and fun to be going to see the sights of that jolly show of Maverick! It was fun to be driving along with a pirate that looked exactly as if he had stepped out of Billy's copy of "Treasure Island." Billy confided to the friendly pirate all about *that bag*. It came about naturally, since the pirate had offered to open Billy's bag and fix him up a costume, but of course, Billy couldn't get the bag open.

"Funny thing is," declared Billy, "their car was just the same model as this. I'd know those men anywhere, if I should see them."

A loud honking interrupted him. He looked back as the car at their rear shot past. It was a blue sedan going at a great rate. Billy screamed, "Stop! Stop!" But it paid no attention. "Get 'em," he yelled. "That's the car, and they've got my bag with those papers!"

The blue sedan disappeared around a curve, even though Mr. Whatell was quick. As they turned the curve of road, out upon the narrow highway came an oxcart from a meadow. It had the right of way and they could not pass it, for it was too large! When, at last, the oxcart left the highway clear,

there was not a trace of that blue sedan in sight!

At the place where two roads met, going around Ashokan, one couldn't tell which way the blue sedan had taken. G. G. Whatell was a little inclined to laugh at Billy, when Billy got out and looked at the tracks on the road. There was nothing to be told from them, so he crawled back into the car. "Oh, blame that oxcart," he muttered. "We might as well give it up; you've *got* to go to Maverick, haven't you?"

"I have," replied the artist. "I have to auction off a joke—it's a treasure chest. And I have to join my group of friends who are all dressed up as I am like pirates. Different groups, you know, carry out different ideas. We'll fix you up in some sort of rig—you'd make a Young Pan all right! Would you like to pose for me while you're up here?"

He chatted on, trying to divert Billy. He and Billy's uncle had studied under the same master once, but they didn't know each other very well. He knew where his studio was and, occasionally, he ran across him.

"Maybe I can get word to him about you when we get to Maverick," he said. "You'll stick by me and we'll have supper with the crowd. Afterwards, I have to help dress

some of the players for the open-air performance. I'll show you where to find the car and you'll have to trot over to it and get in and wait till I come. It'll be dark, so you'd better observe everything carefully—I'll park near some bush or tree you can tell in the dark. Wish I had an extra searchlight but I need mine! You've a quick eye, Young Pan! You'll find the car all right."

Maverick was, it appeared, a lovely section of wooded mountainside, approached by a narrow entrance road. There a man, dressed as a highwayman, held up the car. "Hello, Bill Bones!" he cried. "Fork up fifty cents for the passenger you have who isn't in fancy dress! Everybody not in costume must pay!"

The car halted slowly. "I will not be held up!" retorted the artist, laughing. "Bang! Can't you see he is in masquerade—he's a *Regular Fellow*. And he's going to be Young Pan. I'm planning to paint him on a magazine cover—you'll see!"

He honked loudly.

"Go along with you," cried the highwayman. "You're a clever one, but *you* could afford fifty cents!" He let them pass and G. G. Whatell chuckled and shot forward.

Going along that mountain road they be-

gan to meet revelers. It was like a picture-book, only one never would meet so many different kinds of pictures all in one story! A van of gypsies in an old cart rattled along, and a picturesque gypsy followed on horseback.

Then came an Oriental dancer with a green snake made from a silk stocking. A wild, half-clad African savage stood holding a tall shield and bowed to Whatell as the car passed him. Hawaiian musicians waved and greeted him as a friend. Mary, with her little white woolly lamb tied to a blue ribbon, lifted her crook. "I know you!" she called. "Know you anywhere!"

Here came a Chinese—there, a group of Indians. A prairie schooner rolled by; bull-fighters and Spanish ladies followed! Billy's eyes were wide and round like his mouth; he was having a grand time. He had already forgotten about his uncle, the bag, and the blue sedan. It was like Hollywood, and he decided to stick tight to G. G. Whatell, for there were lots of other pirates and—

"Hello!" another pirate called, and he found himself in the midst of G. G. Whatell's group. He explained Billy, and then he finished parking in the big meadow that was the parking ground.

“See,” he said to Billy. “We’re right here by this queer tree. You can see that by moonlight when you come down; you won’t be able to see the license number in the dark. But you’ll know the car, and the bag will be in it.”

“Sure,” Billy answered. Then they went off to a studio nearby and G. G. Whatell found a curly white sheepskin rug. They made Billy take off his coat and things, even stockings, and with big blanket-pins, G. G. Whatell pinned the woolly rug tight around Billy so it could not come off. It scratched, but he didn’t mind. He liked being fixed up in a costume like young Pan. Pan was the Greek deity of out-of-doors, he recalled, as he thought of the Greek myths his mother had read aloud. He wished she could see him now.

Somebody gave him a little tin flute to play, the kind that doesn’t make much noise. Somebody else put a wreath of grapevine around his curly head. They led him away toward the place where the smoke of bonfires and outdoor suppers was rising in the dusk of the woodland setting! It was corking fun! It was fun to go barefoot, too!

The Hawaiians strummed a melody, and Billy picked his way about, gathering sticks

of firewood while his pirate band made supper ready. Occasionally, he heard somebody exclaim how beautiful he was—and then he felt rather funny and looked sheepish. “*Me, beautiful,*” he snorted to himself. “Oh, gee!”

After the supper, the Treasure Chest was auctioned. It was some joke that Billy didn't quite understand, but it was fun. Everybody was full of jokes, and he was sorry when G. G. Whatell told him to “trot!” It was getting dark. They were getting ready for the play in the theatre beyond the high palings, and G. G. Whatell had to help. Billy had to go find the car and wait. Maverick was over for him—almost!

Slowly, he walked toward the car down the road that was so red and dusty. There were big busses there now, with great beetling eyes in the dark—long lights wavering from them as they backed and snorted. Everywhere gay revelers were going toward the theatre, and soon the road began to be deserted. The candy stand was closed. Nobody was around at all! And as Billy went down the little hill, he saw the weird shapes of cars like great black shadows everywhere! He knew where his car ought to be, for there was the queer tree! He opened a car door—in it was a hamper full of picnic dishes! He

tried the next. It was locked. He looked about—maybe it was the next! He opened the door in the dark and felt for the bag, and his hand met the familiar feel of its handle. He climbed in and covered himself with a rug that was on the back seat. He was cold.

The strumming of far-away orchestral instruments came to him, and then the orchestra broke into melody. Billy wished he was there seeing the play, but now, he knew, the artist would be coming soon to take him up to his uncle's. He hoped his uncle did know he was on the way, but Mr. Whatell probably had phoned him. He drowsed, waiting, until the music and the comfort of the big back seat of the car put him to sleep.

Then suddenly voices roused him. He thought at first it was Whatell coming, and he hid under the rug. It would be fun to cry, "*Heyoo*" and surprise his new friend.

But it was not the artist who came! It was the two men—the very same ones whom Billy had overheard on the boat that very day—the ones who had gone off with *his* bag!

He made himself quite flat against the seat, covered with the dark rug. The door of the car opened near the wheel. One man got in, and started the car. "Good night," he called. "I'm going after Bracket now!"

Billy felt suddenly very frightened and cold. It dawned on him then; he wasn't in G. G. Whatell's car. The villain must have parked his car after they had parked, probably close by! If that was so—then the bag that was on the floor of the car was the very bag Dad had handed him! *It was his!* And, here he was, like a real hero—with every likelihood of warning poor Bracket, if he kept his wits about him!

Anyway, if he couldn't warn Bracket, he could wait till the car slowed down, then grab *his* bag and run for the woods and hide—and get back to G. G. Whatell at Maverick! He was sure he had not been discovered.

The sedan passed over the rough road with some bumps. Billy wished it would stop short to let something pass, but it did not. He had to wait, clinging hard to the handle of the bag, making himself as small as possible on the floor of the car.

The man hummed some of the music Billy had heard the orchestra play. But he didn't drive fast. He seemed occupied with his thoughts. Once, he slowed down and lit a cigar, but there was no chance for Billy to make his get-away! The car went on. At last, Billy knew it was the state road, for the going became smooth. As he peered from

under the dark rug, he could see shapes of tall trees on either side of the roadway.

The car slowed down again, but this time, evidently, something had occasioned the quick application of the brakes.

From out there in the dark road came a loud voice. "Halt," it cried. "I am Blackballem, the highwayman!" A shot rang out!

In the dark, a horse pirouetted around the automobile and on it Billy could see the shadowy figure of a highwayman—it was Billy's chance to creep out while the owner of the car was being searched, of course. Billy thought he could make it, unobserved—then dash back to Maverick, with *his* bag.

He was so occupied edging toward the door that he missed what the men were saying. Perhaps somebody was trying to play a joke—he couldn't tell.

Softly, he felt for the handle of the car's door. It was the side near the bushes. The men were out there in the road. He couldn't hear what they said, but he thought that one of them must be angry.

Carefully, he placed a bare foot on the running board. The carriage rug would be a good thing to take with him in case he had to sleep in the woods, so he dragged it after him, holding tight to his precious bag. Then

something caught! In his hurry, he stumbled and fell flat! The bag made a big bump and Billy a loud falling thud!

The two men came running. The horse, evidently, was tied to a tree. Billy's venture had been nipped in the bud, for somebody caught hold of him!

"Didn't know you had a passenger!" the highwayman cried.

The man who was driving the car muttered something. "Here, you!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing with my bag?" He picked the bag from the roadway and held it, looking down at Billy in the dark.

"It's my bag," retorted Billy manfully.

"It is not!"

"It's mine, really," remarked the highwayman with a stage laugh! "Joke's on you, Famous Dramatist! A good situation for a comedy, staged on the state road, Woodstock!"

"Be quiet," roared the other man. "Enough of practical joking. *He* was the real thing—after my bag, too!"

"It's mine," Billy insisted, shivering. He tried to get hold of the bag. He was pushed away.

The highwayman roared in amusement. He was the same one who had taken the

tickets at Maverick entrance and, evidently, he had been trying to play a practical joke, for fun! He knew the man Billy had been with in the sedan. They were really friends.

“Explain yourself!” It was the highwayman. “Aren’t you the boy that Mr. Whatell was going to paint as Young Pan? It looks as if he dressed you up!”

“He did,” Billy replied, glad to be recognized in the flare of a flash light. “And I thought I was in his car waiting for him—only I got into the wrong car and got carried—”

“Why did you attempt to make off with the bag that was not yours? Why claim it, Pan? Do you need to have somebody’s bag that is not yours, quoth I?”

But Billy was in no mood for joking. “I’ll tell you all about it,” he said. “That—that man there is—is going to do something to Bracket—he’s on his way now! You must stop him!” And he poured forth the full story of his bag and the pursuit of it.

When he had finished, the highwayman could not stop laughing. The villain, too, roared. “Bracket,” he howled. “Boy, I’m writing a play—and he’s a character in my play! I’m going home now to revise my manuscript. It’s in my bag—and if this bag

proves, as you say, to be your bag, you will immediately have to account for my manuscript that's locked in my own bag and that happens to be important stuff! I have no copy of my play but *that!*”

He held the flash over Billy's bag. The highwayman forced the lock. It broke open, showing Mother's lovely lunch box right on top! Billy grabbed it. “Mine,” he yelled. “See—yours is back in G. G. Whatell's car at Maverick!”

The hero was triumphant! He crawled back into the car of the dramatist, holding tight to his bag. The car backed, the highwayman called, “Good night!” and they sped back to Maverick in silence. Billy only remarked that he was sorry he'd taken the man for a villain, and he told him about the movie he had seen.

They found Mr. Whatell with a lot of other people on the parking ground hunting for Billy! One of them was his uncle whom Mr. Whatell had somehow managed to reach!

The dramatist got his bag and shook hands with the hero, Billy. Mr. Whatell invited Billy to pose for him next day. His uncle said, “Where did you put his suit, Whatell?”

And Whatell said he'd bring it up next day.

“I've got enough in my bag without it,”

said Billy. "I like going without shoes—I do, Uncle!"

"Well, Nephew," returned his uncle, looking down at Billy sitting beside him on the front seat of the car and still wrapped in his woolly rug. "I should not call you exactly a goat, and I'm glad the papers are *quite safe!*"

"I said they would be," answered Billy with dignity. "Even a hero in a movie couldn't have done better than I did!"

"Sure, Billy," said his uncle. "You were a real hero—it takes a boy to get into such a scrape and get out of it the way you did. We'll have to write Dad tomorrow!"

"Tell him 'Billy and bag safe!'" suggested Billy. "And tell him you found me at the end of a perfect day—and my picture is going to be on a magazine cover sometime!"

And together, the two grinned as the car sped toward Uncle's camp.





THE RUMBLE SEAT

Just before his annual camp-school Billy went to visit Aunt Prescott. She lived out in California but the trip in Dad's automobile, known as the "Old Ark," had been uneventful. Mother and Dad had come along, but they left him for the time in Aunt Prescott's care.

Billy was lonely. The only thing he could think of to do was to pretend that he was practicing for the movies. Right there in California, he felt qualified to be a boy star.

“Look, look! Watch me!” Billy Cory waved to his aunt. She was coming down the path of stepping stones toward the famous lily pool in her beautiful garden. She had a basket of roses, just gathered, on her arm.

“Look,” he cried and he turned upon the soft velvet of the lawn to make a running jump, leaping clear over the width of the lily pool where the Japanese goldfish were. “Want to see me do it *again?*” he inquired with a grin.

Aunt Prescott rested the garden basket on the stone bench. “No, Billy,” she replied. “It isn’t quite safe. You might slip and go in. And you or the lilies or the goldfish might get broken.”

He laughed. “Aw!” he said. “I wouldn’t. I can do lots of stunts—want to see me walk on my hands or—or turn double somersaults? I can juggle balls too!”

But Aunt Prescott shook her head. “Not now,” she returned. “You see, Billy, I have to arrange these flowers and then I have to dress. I’m going out to lunch this noon with the Van Stines.

“It must be very dull for you with nobody to play with. I’m sorry I don’t know any boys, but you’ll be going to camp in two weeks, you know, and after that, why you’ll

be home again and Mother and Dad will want to find you well and whole when they get back from their trip. So just look out—and don't do any risky stunts."

"It would be nice to have something to do," said Billy. "It is lonely. But I *can* play in the tool house, can't I? If I had a motion-picture machine, I'd give movies there and post a notice at the General Store—and if I had a motion-picture camera, I could go right into the business and get a crowd together and—"

But here he was cut short, for a very large young man had suddenly appeared from the other side of the boxhedge and was lifting his hat to Aunt Prescott.

Billy started to disappear. But Aunt Prescott called to him. "Billy," she exclaimed, "here's somebody I want you to meet—somebody who really writes movies! You know," she said, to the large young man, "Billy is wild about the movies, Mr. Twain. You and he would be most congenial." She laughed.

"And just now," she said, "he has nobody to play with. He's just come to stay with me till camp opens and I don't happen to know any boys!"

"I'm a boy." Mr. Twain beamed as he shook hands. "I may be older than you but would you like to go off with me while your aunt is

away? I'm going to run over to Adolph Zeigler's—the big movie director's place in Bakersfield. I've a friend with me and the only seat vacant is the rumble. We might not be much company—” he hesitated. “But perhaps you'd like the ride. It's over the mountains—”

“A long ride,” said Aunt Prescott. “When would you be back?” She looked at Billy questioningly. “You see,” she said, “he must be back here by three-thirty. We have an appointment with the head of the camp down at Blue Lake.”

“That's so,” said Billy. *That* had to be.

But the stout young man grinned at Billy and understood. “Well, I think you can count on his getting back in time, Miss Prescott,” he said. “You can depend on *him*, if he gives his word, I'll wager. And I've got the best little sport model that there is. I'm taking over a script to Ziegler—I hope he'll take it. Ben Nealy—you know him—he's going with me; we have to talk things over en route. We've collaborated. You don't mind sitting on the rumble seat and keeping quiet, do you?” he asked of Billy. “It's a grand ride over the mountains! And you'll see lots of the country—pretty wild country, too! I've never been over that way before and I don't

know the road, but *I* guess we won't get lost—quite! Be back by three-thirty anyhow." He laughed.

That was how the adventure started—just like an everyday affair with Billy rushing back to the house for his sweater to carry along!

The little sport model was waiting at Aunt Prescott's drive near the house. It was a lovely soft yellow with a tan hood. Billy scrambled into the rumble seat with his sweater, resolving, as Aunt Prescott had whispered to him at the last, to be good and not chatter or ask too many questions.

"They want to talk, Billy," she had said. "You keep quiet back there in your seat—it's very nice of them to take you. I think you'll want to remember that they're going on business and have things to discuss on the way."

"Oh, I won't bother them," declared Billy and he had rushed off with the sweater.

So now, once introduced to the man who was Ben Nealy, Billy subsided on the rumble seat behind the high hood in which there was only a very small little window. He could hardly see Mr. Twain's hatless head or hear the rumble of Mr. Ben Nealy's deep voice. The engine purred. They were off!

It was ever so nice—ever so nice! And there was Billy who had in his secret heart that great ambition to become a movie man himself—there he was going—going—going—and every second was taking him toward a real movie director's own summer place!

Gee! It was luck!

It's such fun to rush over smooth roads, to pass lovely summer places, to see the fields, the woods; to hear the honk-honk of a gay little car, to be going up hills and over low-lying roads in the valley, places where the gay sport car went beside the river or rushed over a wooden bridge and played joyfully a passing game of tag with other cars!

But by and by the country began to be less inhabited. Villages were far away. Even houses seemed to stop. Even upland pasturelands gave way to wooded roads—usually untraveled roads.

The way grew steep up the mountain. No cars were passing either way. It was a wilderness of wooded mountain and desolate of habitation. Once in a while, there came lovely vistas of landscape, but for the most part the narrow rough road lay over steep up-climbs.

Once, on a downward grade, at the foot of some high place in the woods, Mr. Twain and

Ben Nealy got into a discussion over the road. Ben Nealy insisted on going one way—at some junction place—and Mr. Twain declared, “No, no.” They seemed to have quite a time over it. They got out and tried to see where things went to, but there was no guidepost at all.

Mr. Twain said, “Oh, follow our noses!” And he faced the way he wanted to go. And Ben Nealy faced the other and asked, “Which nose?”

Billy chuckled but he was keeping quiet and it was none of his business anyhow. He remembered his word at parting from Aunt Prescott.

They kept right on discussing. And then they flipped a penny and decided it.

Ben Nealy said, “Well, we’ll come to another road some time and then we’ll know where we’re headed.”

And Mr. Twain said, “Sure! You’ll see I was right—when in doubt, I always take the right turning!” And they laughed at the joke, though it wasn’t much to laugh at.

For a time, they went on. There was no turning.

The road was narrow and red of soil. The woods were wild. At the sides of the road were high banks where lovely ferns grew.

And the earth was sandy and red. Once Billy caught sight of a little bright red lizard scampering in his funny lizard way into the shelter of some stones and fern.

There was a spring where Mr. Twain got out and scooped up a drink from mossy stones. They had evidently almost forgotten about Billy on the rumble seat till Mr. Twain started to come back from the spring and then he sang out, "You thirsty back there?"

And Billy jumped down and ran and put his hands into the spring and got a drink. He wished he'd see a red lizard, so that he could catch it. He could take it back to Aunty to put in her rock garden—much nicer than Japanese goldfish! But there was no lizard and he had to scramble back into the rumble.

"We're lost," Mr. Twain called back to him. "But we'll soon find the right road—fun not to know what's what—something like an adventure!"

"Yes, I like adventures," squealed Billy, but his voice was lost in the gear-shifting. Up and up they went. Then down, down they went. And mountains loomed high above them. Red road. More little red lizards!

Then came a crossroads!

It came in the thick of a ferny wilderness of woods that was like a forest. The car



Billy ran and got a drink

halted. Ben Nealy leaped out on one side and Mr. Twain on the other—they were off a hundred yards or so to see if they could find traces of any fallen guidepost.

Billy sat for an instant in the rumble. And then he had a bright idea. It was “Lizards!” He would have time to catch one—maybe two!

On the side of the car nearest to the bank, he slipped down to the road in a twinkling. His handkerchief, thrust into his sweater pocket at leaving, was just the thing! Flip it over a lizard and there he was!

But the lizard that Bill saw led him a chase. And the chase went up the bank and into the dark depths of ferns and woods. And then he saw two lizards near each other and made for *them*. And just as the handkerchief descended—already rather the worse for red earth—it actually caught the two red lizards!

And then, at that very moment, a most awful sound came to Billy’s horrified ears! It was the sound of the little car rushing off as hard as it could go!

“Mr. Twain, Mr. Twain,” yelled Billy. But it did no good. The two had finally found out about the road. Thinking of that, they had not once remembered Billy—and if they had, they thought, of course, he was on the rumble

seat. They hadn't seen him get off to catch lizards.

Why had he done it?

And they'd not think of him again, probably, till they got to Bakersfield to Mr. Zeigler's! And how was Billy to get home and be there, as he said he would, at three-thirty? And how about making Mr. Twain upset over losing his passenger and worrying Aunt Prescott, which was the worst thing of all?

There was one thing to do: get home and then phone Mr. Twain at Mr. Zeigler's. But that wasn't easy. Gee! How could one do it—it was miles and *miles*, and there were no houses or anything like a railway! Nothing but forest—forest, ferns and red lizards—and silence!

There was not a sound now. He couldn't even tell where the sport car had gone.

When he reached the crossroads there was no trace of the car's wheels. Nor was there any guidepost to be found. Maybe Mr. Twain was still wondering about the road and was lost too. But anyhow, he hadn't missed Billy.

Billy looked at each road. It was safe to take the right, as Mr. Twain's preference was for that. Yet maybe they *had* gone on the other, as Mr. Nealy wanted always to go to the left! It was a puzzle!

So Billy put a hand into the pocket where he had exactly thirteen cents, and tossed a coin. It had an Indian head on it. It went "heads," too. That was for "right."

Up that road and down that road he went for a long distance. But he came to nothing. It was just woods. The two red lizards in his pocket handkerchief wiggled a lot. He wondered if he'd ever get them back home safe to Aunt Prescott's lovely summer estate with the rock garden and the famous lily pool. He'd have to—somehow—so on he went. If you keep going, you get somewhere—some-time!

It was discouraging, though.

But Billy was a sport. He didn't cry. He felt a bit like it once when the car had gone off and left him. But afterwards, he knew it was an adventure—a real one written with big letters too!

If you meet with *adventure*, you have to win; it means being a real hero. And Billy meant to be one, though he felt quite small and even younger than he was—very small and rather lonesome, there in that still mountain in the black woods where things cracked once in a while—where once a red fox ran across the road—where— What was *that*?

It was something coming!

Billy caught up a stone. It was his one defense.

Then from out the bushes near another crossroads, there leaped the startled figure of another boy! He had been crying. He was only partly dressed with trousers and undervest. As he saw Billy, he started to run away.

“Don’t go! Don’t go!” screamed Billy. He wanted to ask his way—there were lots of things that boy could tell him.

But the boy wouldn’t stop.

“Wait! Wait!” cried Billy. “Oh, wait!”

But the other boy darted up the bank again. There he turned. “I don’t dare,” he said. “They’ll catch me! I don’t want them to! And if you don’t get out of the road this minute, they’ll run right over *you*—” He gesticulated wildly. “Get out of the road,” he cried. “Get out,” he screamed, “quick! Don’t you know the Indians are coming?”

And he darted off into the deep woods again.

“Indians!” ejaculated Billy Cory. But he had no time to say more. Around the curve of the road they came with a wild rush and as they reached the place where Billy had been standing, they set up a wild yelling that was simply beyond anything Billy Cory had

ever imagined Indians could do, even at their best! From around a tree trunk he watched, his eyes popping out in amazement.

Nobody would have thought there were Indians in the woods nowadays. Indians had gone long ago except on reservations! But these were the kind he read about—the ones who lived in the old days.

They looked neither to right nor left—they rushed yelling through the woods.

They were gone!

At least Billy thought so. He peeked from around the tree trunk to see what more there might be, and then he came face to face with one Indian who made a grab for him and caught hold of his blouse. Billy tried to free himself. But it was no use.

“No, you don’t,” said the Indian in perfectly clear everyday English. “I’ve got you now!”

“You let me go! I’m lost. I’ve got to get home!”

“Yes, you’re lost all right,” returned the Indian. “I’ll let go, if you promise to march straight ahead of me where you belong.”

“I don’t belong to you,” snapped Billy. “I want to know my way home, I say.”

“The way home is straight where you belong,” growled the Indian, letting go with

one hand and brandishing a tomahawk with the other. "Now, young man—*walk!*"

"I'll do it because I have to," returned Billy, "but it's no fair. I only want to know the way home!"

"I suppose you were going there when I caught you hiding."

"You didn't catch me hiding!"

"Oh, well, we'll see about that when we get to the Chief!"

There was nothing to do but just to go on Indian file with the Indian tramping behind with the tomahawk! Billy wasn't going to be scared—this was *adventure!* And some way, he knew a hero—a real one—would escape and get home to Aunt Prescott, as he had promised, by three-thirty. He hoped the lizards were all right and not hurt in the pocket of his sweater. How he was going to get home seemed a problem.

"You needn't think you'll get any chance to hide *again,*" said the Indian, giving Billy a punch. "Trot right on, son!"

"I wasn't hiding. I got lost out of an automobile!"

"You did, did you?" There was sarcasm in the tone. "Maybe you'll be telling me soon you aren't scared of any bear and that you never saw one, and were never asked to do

stunts in its enclosure!" The Indian laughed.

"I wasn't," declared Billy.

"Well, they're looking everywhere for you anyhow," said the Indian.

"Mr. Twain and Mr. Nealy?" asked Billy hopefully.

The Indian roared. "Mr. Twain and Mr. Nealy," he repeated. "Mr. Zeigler is, and you know that well enough!"

Billy stopped short and faced him. "Is it movies you are doing?" he squealed delightedly. "I—I was going to Mr. Zeigler's house with Mr. Twain and Mr. Nealy and I got lost off the rumble seat of their car. *I did*, and I'll bet you got the wrong boy and are after the one that was crying back there in the woods. *I saw him!*" It was all clear now—the Indians were making a picture the other side of the wood and, somehow, Billy had been taken for the boy who had some part he was running away from—something about doing stunts with a bear! He laughed. "You don't have to make me go," he cried. "I want to see Mr. Zeigler; he'll help me!"

And then they came into a wide clearing. At one end was a man with a megaphone. Anybody'd know who he was—he was the big director, Adolph Zeigler! Gee!

Billy raced for him. He rushed wildly past

a rough cabin surrounded by Indians. There were several motion picture men grinding away. They yelled at Billy to clear out. Somebody else grabbed him. But he got to Mr. Zeigler, as a hero should. "Mr. Twain and Mr. Nealy," he panted, "they were on the way to see you, Mr. Zeigler. They were going to your house in Bakersfield—and they took me in the rumble—and I got lost off—and I promised my Aunt Prescott to be home at three-thirty, if she'd let me go with them—and I'm awfully afraid everybody is worried at not knowing where I am—"

Mr. Zeigler looked his amazement. Then, "Stop," he cried. "I wonder if you are a boy that is a coward—or not? We had one here to do a part—a part with a tame bear, and not even a bad bear! But we have him in the enclosure all wired in and that blamed boy we had to act the little Indian just wouldn't go into the cage. He was a regular first-class coward of a boy—*he* won't make a Junior Cooglan ever! You want to try, if I promise to send you home afterwards in a car? It's a bargain and some money besides. Understand, son?"

Billy just grinned. "Lead me to the bear," he said. "I'd like to do it! Want me to do stunts too? Shall I do stunts? I can, you

know—I always wanted to be in a movie! Oh—what *do* you want me to do?”

“Get into the dress,” snapped Zeigler. “Then I’ll tell you. And I guess you’ll be all right and get home by three-thirty!”

As he was being made up like a real boy Indian, he learned that his part had belonged to Budge Summers who was afraid of the bear. And everybody laughed at Budge Summers for it, too. The bear was a big one—but he wouldn’t hurt one. They all said it. But Billy was so excited, he didn’t really mind what kind of a bear it was or anything!

They led him to the enclosure and put him in. It was a cage that was like the woods but wired in—that was all. And motion-picture men were in it.

Mr. Zeigler told Billy what to do and questioned him about stunts. And Billy told about the lily-pool and the somersaults and other of his accomplishments. He even demonstrated some.

Mr. Zeigler was delighted. “At it, boy!” he cried. “You’re great! Your style is just great! You’re miles ahead of that other one. You make good and I’ll run you in another cast. I’m glad the other one went away! Wise boy to run away and find *you!*”

Billy felt immensely proud!



Billy pretended to dance with him

And, say—the bear was fine! He was the nicest sort! He could dance and he let Billy leap over him, too. The motion-picture camera men got it all—the handsprings Billy turned—the somersaults—and then Billy showed how much he liked that bear and pretended to dance with him till Mr. Zeigler said it was enough. Afterwards, though, he tried some other stunts like letting Billy pet the bear as if it were a big dog and sit on his back and put his hand in his mouth. The bear evidently liked Billy. They almost dragged Billy away from him!

And when Billy came out of the cage, if there wasn't Mr. Twain coming along through the woods and Mr. Nealy, too! Both looked rather worried, but their faces broke into smiles as they saw Billy's rig. And how they did roar with laughter when they heard the story of his adventures.

“Getting red lizards, indeed! Hope you've got 'em, son,” said Jo Zeigler. “Have you?” And when they looked, there they were in the sweater pocket in the mussed-up handkerchief!

So then Mr. Zeigler wanted to have a picture of them on Billy's hand. They got the picture, but the lizards got away!

As for the little sport car that was Mr.

Twain's, it made no mistake as to the right road on the way home, and it went ever so fast—and Billy talked almost all the way, as they asked him no end of questions, and the two were lots of fun.

Mr. Zeigler had said he would send a check, and the check was to go for a motion-picture camera—and maybe there might be another chance to act for Mr. Zeigler and another check before camp time came!

It was all exciting. What fun to go back to Aunt Prescott and tell her how all Billy's stunts were recorded in real motion pictures!

They did get back at three-thirty—or maybe two minutes before, to be correct. Aunt was waiting for Billy with the car at the door. And when she heard about everything, she said, "Well, Billy, you are a hero! When I saw you jump over the round lily pool this morning, I felt sure you'd be a Douglas Fairbanks some day, but I didn't imagine it was going to be so soon!"

"You're not sorry I didn't bring the lizards?" asked Billy.

She laughed and shook her head. "Goldfishes are better," said she. "The lizards might not have liked the rock garden any more than Budge liked the idea of the bear."

And Mr. Twain's movie was accepted later.



BILLY AND A CASTLE

After three weeks in camp Billy and his parents returned East in the Old Ark.

Soon after their return its horn honked as it moved down the drive to the street; Dad was saying good-bye to Mother and Billy. He had to hurry to keep a business engagement with the man who had telephoned by long distance, and Billy's usual Saturday afternoon drive with Mother and Dad was spoiled.

“What am I to do with myself all alone this whole afternoon?” Billy tried to look cross, but grinned instead. “You ought to bring me something pretty nice, Dad, after spoiling my holiday. The gang’s all gone away!”

Dad looked sorry. “Maybe I’ll bring you a new auto—this year’s make!” he called back. “But I have to find the right kind of school property for my client. You can go look it up, if you want something to do. If you find anything, I’ll give you a ten-dollar bill!” Honk! Honk! He was *gone*.

A long afternoon lay ahead of Billy. In the evening there was Granny’s birthday party, but there was nothing to do, *now*. After a week of downpours, the sky was clear, cloudless, mild, and blue. The wind seemed in a hurry to reach far places. It was a day that made one long to go somewhere and do something! It was not a day to stay indoors and fix up a stamp collection—even though Billy’s hobby was one of an ardent collector.

Maybe Skippy Smith could go somewhere—Skip had a stamp that Billy wanted. Billy rushed to the telephone. “Hello, Skip—that you, old man! Are you busy? Do you want to go along with me? I have a dandy stamp to swap with you.”

The deep voice of Skippy's elder brother, George answered. "Why, hello yourself, Billy! Skippy's up at Lake Connover."

"I wanted Skippy to go on a hike." Billy's voice showed his disappointment. "I haven't anyone to play around with. My dad had a phone call from a client, some man who wants to buy school property to start a school. It seems as though I never wanted to go anywhere so much!"

"Come along with me," suggested George. "You tell your mother you'll stay the night at camp with Skippy. We'll get you home by ten-thirty tomorrow morning. Come on! I'm going over to the lake in ten minutes—in my little new second-hander. Come along; Skippy will be tickled."

Billy's heart bounded. Then he remembered Granny's birthday party! Dad was hurrying home for that, and, of course, he couldn't go to Lake Connover with George! "Say, I have an idea! I can't go all the way with you, but I can go part way, if you drop me near the trolley, so I can get back to Wherebee and home in time for supper! Could you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Then I'll be over," said Billy.

Mother looked a bit doubtful, when he

asked her, but she saw the shadow of disappointment pass over Billy's face.

"Son," she said, "I can depend on you to take good care of yourself. I suppose George knows all about cars. If you should have a blow-out or miss the trolley, telephone home. Have you money?"

Billy nodded and hugged Mother for letting him go. He met George and "The Cricket" and climbed up in the seat. He felt very grown-up with George, who talked to him as if he were his own age. He heard all about how George painted the Cricket, all the gossip of Austin's garage, whose car was the best, how much money George had—he was a little low, or he would have stopped and treated to a soda in Milford as they whizzed through. And in Bristol, Billy treated George to an ice cream.

Then George said, if they went a round-about road, they could go by way of Walnut Mountain. At the top, they could see Lake Connover. He would go that way, if Billy was willing. Billy was, so long as he could get that trolley back.

The Cricket climbed the hills with effort. They had to stop to cool off the engine. Then they saw the view. George pointed out the camp, a tiny speck by the blue mirror of

lakeside. "Lucky I can save on gas going down there. I'm sure short on gas. Maybe I'll have to drop you and let you hike it a ways into Salem to that trolley, old man. I don't want to buy gas in Salem. I can get it for less at the lake."

Billy assented with a grin, even though he didn't much relish being left on a road he didn't know. Mother didn't like to have him ask for rides, unless it was somebody he knew. "Salem *has* a trolley, hasn't it?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Then I can make it."

"Course you can. I'm sorry this had to happen." At a junction of four roads, George slowed down. "Here you are. I'll tell Skippy about that stamp you want. I'll remember—the Lindbergh one. He has *two*."

He opened the door of the Cricket just as a farm wagon slowed down to pass them, a shaggy dog barking on its seat beside a pleasant-looking man. "Say," George hailed the farm-cart, "are you going Salem way? Here's a boy who wants to get to the trolley."

The man pulled rein and nodded. "Goin' part way," he said. "Give you a lift as well as not."

So there was Billy sitting beside the dog

and the Cricket disappearing into the distance! They went a long way, winding about and about. They didn't talk much. After a while, the farmer stopped at another cross-road.

"Here you go," he announced. "I go t'other way. Now, if you're headed for the Salem trolley, son, you just go straight along, mind—no turns! Then you come to a pine wood—see? You go along. Then you come to two stone posts leading into the old Laverne Place—lions on them, you can't miss them—you turn in. There are no dogs or anything to bother there! The old place's been tight shut for years. You just go up the drive, and when you git to the house, there's a path across the fields. You go straight along, and you'll meet that Salem trolley sure as my dog's name is Buster!"

Billy turned up the road, whistling to keep himself company. It was lonely, but he remembered that when Byrd was a lad, *he* went all around the world *alone!* He thought of Lindbergh, too, on his great adventure—did *he* have company?

A red squirrel scolded from a branch. The wind played a lonesome melody in the branches of the tall pines in the pine wood; a hawk soared overhead with a cry; a little

green gartersnake wiggled across the muddy road. Then Billy caught sight of a brown hare. It jumped and ran. A tiny warbler hidden in leafage sang a lovely song.

On Billy tramped, till suddenly, he found himself at a bend of the road, facing two granite posts either side of a disused driveway. Two imposing stone lions guarded a heavy iron chain strung double between the posts. The overgrown drive led through a long avenue of pines. He could not see where it led—there was not a glimpse of the old Laverne Place!

Billy bent double under the chain. On all fours, he regarded the tangle. It reminded him, in its overgrown wildness, of pictures of Sleeping Beauty's wood in the picture book Dad gave him when he was little. Yes, it *was* like the road to some castle! He picked his way, wondering what this old Laverne Place must have been like once-upon-a-time! Billy imagined himself a knight in shining armor going to rescue somebody imprisoned in a castle. It was fun to think about, only such things didn't happen *nowadays!*

Then the road turned, and there stood Billy gaping with astonishment. It was a real castle, a great gray stone castle, towers and everything! It was as near a *real* castle as



It was a real castle

he had ever seen, even though it had no moat and really was just an imposing old country residence, forsaken now. Its road probably went by many turnings toward Salem.

It was funny, though, he thought, that nobody liked to live in it now—he would have jumped at the chance! The lower windows were all boarded; so were the great doors. Upstairs and in the towers, unboarded windows gazed blankly out with the unseeing gaze of a deserted home.

“Huh!” said Billy to himself. “Guess I have time to walk around it.” But as he started across the lawn, he heard—he *did* hear—a loud knocking somewhere! It sounded as though it came from inside the house. Somebody was pounding on the heavy oak door and calling, “Help!”

“What’s the matter?” Billy tiptoed over the muddy gravel and up the stone steps.

“Help!” came the voice of a boy through the door. “The door’s gone bad on me. The catch is rusty.”

First, they could not budge the door, swollen as it was by heavy rains. Then, suddenly, it swung open. It carried Billy with it into a dim passageway so quickly that he lost his balance. He sprawled on the floor at the feet of another boy.

The boy wore a brown sweater and shorts. His hair was dark and tangled. "Well, we did it," he cried. "Look out, now—quick! Get that door before it slams!" He made a quick grab at the door swinging back. It banged to, again, the key still outside. They were both prisoners!

In the dim passageway, Billy stopped pulling at the door. "We have to get a window open."

"You're welcome to try it," said the other boy. "Come on up—we'll see what we can do. It's too far to jump out of those windows, and there's no rope!"

At the end of the passageway, a dim light filtered from the great castle hall where a wide staircase led upward to a landing. It was damp and chilly. The great rooms echoed with their steps. "Gee! I guess we are in for it—and I wanted to get *out!*"

"We have to get out," yelled Billy, remembering Grandmother's birthday party, and his mother's anxiety, if he should stay imprisoned. "If this place does belong to *you*, why isn't there a hammer in it? I can get those windows up—if *you* cant!"

But the other boy only giggled weakly. "I don't mind seeing you do it," he said.

Well, that was *that!*

They had reached the wide castle stairway that led to a landing where a stained-glass window with armorial crests sent shafts of rainbow light into the great upper hall. "Now, don't you go smashing things," the boy warned Billy. "My uncle will be after you, if you do!"

Billy turned on him. "If you've got an uncle anywhere, bring him on," he cried. "Will he come and let us out? Does he know you're here? What do you mean by *your* owning this place?"

"Well, give me a chance!" The other boy sat down on the upper step of the stairway. Billy came back and balanced on the railing. "This place *does* belong to me. My grandmother left it to me in her will, but I was never here till today! You see, I haven't been around here and anyhow, it didn't come to me till just lately. This is the old Laverne Place. I'm named Laverne—Laverne Lewis. My great-grandmother was German. She married my great-grandfather—*he* was French. She was a countess—and she—I suppose she felt she wanted to live in a castle; so when they came to America, they built this—only I wasn't here then." He giggled.

"My uncle calls it my white elephant. A white elephant is something sort of useless;

'we don't know what to do with it, you see! We want to sell it, but it won't sell. If I had the money, I would go away to school. We live in the city, and came down here this morning to look at the elephant and then my uncle got a call to go to the city. He left me at the farm near here, and as I had the key, I just thought I'd peek in and look around. Then I got shut in with the key outside, and when I peeked out of a window, who should I see but *you* coming around toward the back! So *now* you know all about it."

"It's the limit," returned Billy. And he recounted his story.

Laverne laughed. "It isn't any use to try windows; you can't budge them. I hunted everywhere for a hammer. Even if we did get a window smashed open, what could we do—we couldn't climb down."

"It was lucky I came to keep you company," said Billy. "But you can't make *me* sit down and wait till your uncle gets back sometime tonight! It must be around four now, and I'm going to get out of here by five *anyhow!* When *do* you expect your uncle to come back and begin looking for you?"

Larry grinned. "I don't know."

"Talk of boarded-up places," said Billy. "If this doesn't beat all! We have a real

chance at treasure-hunting here. Don't you always read stories of finding treasure in a boarded-up place, to say nothing of a castle?"

"Well, if you want to hunt around, come along! We might try the towers, if we can find a way to get up into them! Maybe we'll find rope-ladders up there—or bags of gold—or—or something." Laverne's eyes were round, but they danced with mischief. "More likely we'll just come on a lot of precious old dust and dirt. I'm glad I have on my old togs!"

Above, a third story was much like the second. From chamber to vacant chamber, the two reconnoitered. They could find no stairway leading to the towers.

"I'm stumped," declared Laverne.

"Me, too," said Billy. "You wouldn't know there were any towers!"

"I've heard of stairs that let down," said Billy. "My aunt has some in her bungalow. You press a button, and the stairs to the attic let down."

"Bright boy! Let's look for a button!"

Yet, though they knocked the paneling everywhere and felt for buttons in the woodwork, they were unsuccessful.

Laverne stopped. "I'm stumped again. Do you suppose there might be a stair in a closet,

just because somebody liked to be mysterious?"

"There might!"

The great empty chambers echoed with opening and closing doors. Then, from where Billy had gone, there came a wild, happy yell.

Laverne came at a gallop. In what appeared to be a deep closet, first unnoticed, at the side of one of the great chambers, was a passageway. Old boxes of papers, packing boxes, were there deep in dust. "Some of your 'treasure'," Billy giggled as Laverne came up on him. "See the stair—let's go up!"

Yes! It was an iron stairway winding up under the towers, and they came up out of darkness to a glorious view of surrounding country, and looked right down on the rest of the castle! But there wasn't any rope ladder there! Some old-fashioned books were piled there and some packing boxes of old papers tied up with tape.

"It's fun to be up here an' look down," said Laverne. "I have another bright idea."

"Tell it!"

"Let us stay and starve here."

"I won't starve. I have a chocolate bar in my pocket—want some? I have a brighter idea than you!"

"What?"

“It’s about your white elephant. You want to sell, and my dad promised me ten dollars if I found a school location. It has to be suited to a prep school—see? Well, isn’t your elephant just *it*? It’d make a dandy prep school. We’ll get my dad and your uncle together, and you’ll sell it. You said you wanted to go to a boarding school, didn’t you?” Billy went on, his face flushed with excitement. “If I were rich, I’d come here and we’d have a bully time—the two of us together. I’m glad I met you anyway.”

Laverne grinned. “I like you, too,” he said.

“Maybe your dad will get rich. You’ll have a new auto, if I sell this, and he gets a fat commission!”

Billy nodded, picking at the papers that edged out of the packing box on which he was seated. “I want to get rich—some way—so I can come to school here with you.”

“Think of the things we could do,” said Laverne. “Boy, see the athletic field over there! See the dormitories downstairs—the classrooms and the auditorium and the gym.”

Billy ignored the suggestions. “Don’t I see it all?” he said, finally. “I might work my way through—shining the other fellows’ boots!”



"Think of the things we could do," said Laverne

“If I were rich, I’d ask you to come to my school!”

“It wouldn’t be yours, if you sold it!” Billy reminded him.

“Then sell something you have and *get* rich!”

“Um-hum—my stamp collection, maybe—”

“You interested in stamps, too? I just knew we liked the same things. But I wouldn’t sell mine—no, sir!”

“Me, either,” said Billy. “I know a boy—Skippy Smith—who bought an album from another fellow for three dollars—*cash*. The other fellow was just dumb—that stamp collection is some wonder, and valuable, too! I’m after some of Skip’s stamps—I’m going to try to get them in trade.” He kicked the packing box crossly.

A thick cloud of dust made him sneeze. “Cachoo-cachoo-cachoo!” He thought it so funny that he pretended to sneeze more and more violently. “CACHOO-OO-OO!” he went and just then the lid of the packing box cracked under his weight with a snap and let him down into depths of something soft and dusty.

He put out his hands to save himself. They touched some packages of old letters!

“I bet I got the treasure,” he yelled. “It might be *stamps—old stamps!* Look *here!*” He tore away the wrapping around the old letters and revealed strange old postmarks and foreign stamps. They had the imprint of castles and they were dated 1859.

Laverne looked amazed. “Must be granny’s old letters. Uncle said she knew lots of interesting people and had traveled a lot. If that’s so, Uncle wants to publish some of them.” He sat down beside Billy on the floor, and they began to look over the packages. There were stamps of all kinds—unusual rare ones!

“They’re mine,” said Laverne. “The letters are, too. Now, see here—we each keep the stamps we want! I’m giving you what *you* find because I like you. We’ll keep the letters in order and open the packages!”

“You’re a brick!”

The boys squealed with delight. They found the full series of the Hamburg castles—not all on letters, but in letters. Someone before them had been a collector too!

Laverne’s own pile had duplicates of Billy’s. They were so absorbed that they forgot they were imprisoned. They forgot that Billy wanted to get the trolley. They forgot everything else! Those boxes were simply a

treasure mine of old stamps! Why, some must have been worth anywhere from ten dollars to seventy—maybe more!

“I have a stamp catalog; we’ll look them up,” said Laverne. “I’m giving you this one, so you’ll be able to come to *my* prep school, Billy—I mean it.

“It’s a find. It’s worth all of \$250—Mesopotamia, 1913! I have another just like it.”

“Say—don’t you *give* it away.”

“I will too—to *you*—so you can come here to school.” Laverne grinned. “I bet we’ll find others to make up your full tuition. You *have* to come!”

“We’ll be pals!”

“Sure we will.”

But just then both boys started. They sat frozen like frightened rabbits. They looked at each other questioningly. Most *unmistakably*, a deep voice was heard speaking—and it came, without a doubt, from the passage where the stair led up to their tower!

“Your uncle?” asked Billy.

“No,” said Laverne. “What shall we do?”

But there was no chance to do anything, for there came a heavy tread on the stairs. They slid their stamps into their pockets and jumped to their feet. All around them lay the packages of old letters!

A tall man came up the stairs and confronted them. The two looked at him, not knowing what to say in their surprise. "Boys here?" he said pleasantly but with a start. "How appropriate! In fact, I had *already* seen boys here!" He laughed softly. "I've been seeing boys ever since I came inside this old Laverne Place," he called to somebody behind him.

That person peeped up the stair, and it was Billy's own dad! The man behind him must be his client.

"Why, Uncle!" said Laverne.

"I found your prep school, Dad," piped up Billy. "Hand over the ten-dollar bill!"

"I will," replied Dad solemnly. "Then *you* can tell me how you happen to be here."

"Then you can tell us if it's sold—we both want to come here to school together! I have—I have a stamp Laverne gave me to pay *part* tuition, Dad."

"We have lots of stamps, and Billy's going to have half of them." Laverne began to hold out the stamp for Uncle to see. "Granny's old letters, I think—the ones you wanted to find."

Uncle nodded. "You two can go over them and take the stamps. I knew she collected rare stamps too. There was quite a collection

in a big stamp album; I told you about it, Laverne. What's that pile of books there?"

He turned them over and brought to light a splendid old stamp album, hidden among them. "Granny used to like this tower. She made it a room where she could come and look off over the country and get away from other things. I imagine she had her boxes of letters brought here to look them over sometimes. And when the things were taken from the place—furniture—why nobody thought of looking up here, even if he knew of the secret stairway!"

"Let's see the album! Guess we did find a treasure, Bill! Was it your bright idea?"

"No, yours!"

They laughed.

But Dad put his hand on Billy's shoulder. "Young man," he said, "we'll come back, but now we must go! I've the Old Ark downstairs and there's room in it for two young men who are soon going to a new prep school—the best in the whole country, mind you!"

"Laverne's coming home with us?"

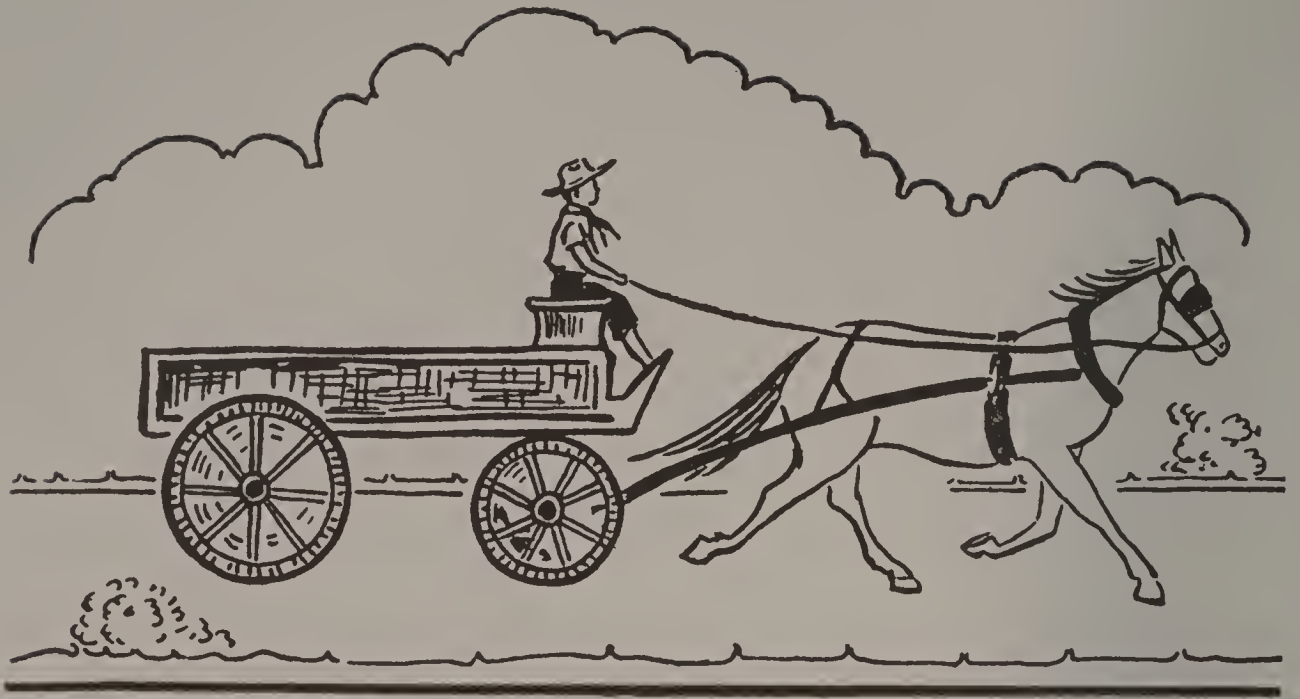
"As far as Salem, son! We'll ask him over next Saturday, or maybe I'll take you both here to play with stamps when we talk over the school project."

"Laverne," cried Billy. "Some luck I don't

have to find the trolley! Come on—I'm ready! Dad, can I stop on the way home and buy a big box of candy for Grandmother with part of that ten dollars you owe me?"

And they all chuckled.





BILLY AND THE GYPSIES

Soon after the adventure in the castle Billy's family went to the country. Each summer Mother spent a few weeks at the farm. Billy wanted to have Laverne—Larry for short—visit him. So it was arranged.

It was just after Mother telephoned from Woodville, long distance, to Mrs. Kelley. "Be careful to keep the cottage locked. Mrs. Chandler where I am staying just lost all her old silver, a valuable necklace, and other things. She thinks the gypsies took them. They can't trace them. It may be they took the road to Holbrook. Look out."

Mrs. Kelley was locking the windows. She came on Billy, adding the last touches of bandanna and wide straw hat to his toilet. He was going to the station five miles away—Holbrook Junction—to meet Larry, who was coming on the up-train that noon. He was coming for a whole two weeks' visit.

“Too bad Mom and Dad took the car,” mused Billy. “I have to hitch up Peg an' go after him! I'm going now, Mrs. Kelley—good-bye!”

Yes, too bad the new car had gone to Mrs. Chandler's Garden Club meeting! But Billy found Pegasus in the field and hitched him to the old express wagon. He had never used that wagon before. Usually he rode Peg. But it was all right. Mr. Daniels had given him permission—any time.

“I know you're responsible,” Mr. Daniels said. “You can be trusted, Billy. Any time—you just take Peg; it's all right.”

So the express cart with Billy on its front seat jogged off down the wood road toward Holbrook Junction. The road went on to Woodville. But the road was too bad for an automobile—just a rough country road through woods. He never met anybody.

As Billy had passed the general store, a mile from the Cory cottage, George, the

clerk, had been out in front. "Don't go off with those gypsies," yelled George by way of joke. "If you want huckleberries today, I have some—"

Billy nodded. In his pocket was twenty-five cents for those huckleberries. Mother had told him to bring them home. There was also ten cents for lemon soda to treat Larry when they stopped on the way home.

"Get your fortune told—" called George. But Peg trotted so nimbly and fast that there was no time to think up an appropriate word to fling back, so Billy flapped the reins.

He turned into the short cut to the station by way of that rather lonely road to get there a bit ahead of train time—to be quite sure to be there when Larry came. Whoop-la—there'd be something doing all right when *Larry* came. Billy's thoughts danced.

And then, looking ahead, he caught sight of something bright through the bushes at the side of the road. It was a gypsy wagon loaded up with all manner of gypsy household stuff! There were two men and two women. They were talking heatedly. One of the men had something in one hand—it looked like a heavy bundle. They seemed surprised to see a wagon coming up that deserted road.

"I tella nice fortune, young man!" cried



It was a gypsy wagon

one of the women. She wore great gold earrings. She had ever so many skirts on, all different colors. "I tella fine fortune—"

But Billy shook his head. "Get up, Peg," he said.

But—but as luck would have it, he had to stop! The rear wheel of the express cart had sounded queer—but Billy supposed it all right. Its axle was loose. And just after Billy had passed the gypsies, the nut rolled off into the soft road.

In a twinkling, he had the nut in his hand. But he could not get it back on the wheel properly. There was nothing to do but call back to the gypsies—"Say, can you lend a hand?"

The man who had the bundle spoke to the other. And, taking his time, the other ambled over to Billy on the road. "I fix him," he said. And he took the nut and put it back. Billy stood watching.

"Pay," said the man, giving the wheel a final kick with his heavy boot. He held out a dirty palm.

Well, nobody Billy had ever met on the road in dad's car *ever* took money for helping in road trouble. But he fished in his pocket and took out the quarter. "Sorry," he said. "It's all I got."

But the gypsy woman who told fortunes had come up. "I bet you gotta fine fortune in your hand," she ingratiated. "Cross my palm with silver—I tell you all. Don' you wanta know all of the fine fortune I tell you?" she asked, laying a dark hand on Billy's shoulder. It had many gold rings. But it was dirty.

From under the hand, Billy slid out. He climbed to the wagon seat. "I don't believe in fortunes," he said. "And I've only got ten cents—you don't tell fortunes for *that!*"

"Sure, sure!" she insisted. "I tella your fortune! Letta see—you gotta fine one, *I bet!*"

Billy grinned. The fun of it came over him. He pulled the ten cents from his pocket and crossed her hand, gravely, bending down from the high wagon seat.

Her fingers were on his wrist. He laughed. "Pitch in," he said.

"Long, long life, young man," whispered the gypsy. "Much travel. You geta married sometime. Be careful—never trusta dark, dark frien'—Money?—you get money all right!—You getta other things too—You be somebody some day—see! You finda something pretty nice too—I don' know what—But you watch out. You vera lucky. Bright

young man. Something good coming your way—I bet—” He was looking at Peg, shaking his tail at a fly. He felt a pressure on his wrist, soft. “You be rich, vera rich, vera lucky,” the gypsy woman said. “Now, that’s all I tella you for a dime—You get money—come back—I tella you *all!*”

“Thank you,” he said. He lifted the long whip from its socket. “If she doesn’t let me go, I’ve got the whip,” he thought. “Peg will go fast—”

But she fell back, and as he turned his head he saw her going back to the gypsy wagon. He caught sight, also, of two of the gypsies turning into the woods. One was the man who carried that lumpy package. What were they doing there? But Billy dismissed it. He wanted to put space between himself and them. They were a tricky lot. They might want to steal Peg—but, of course, with Billy on the seat, and the whip—oh, they couldn’t try that! The wheel was all right now—Peg galloped on at a fast trot. What was that? The whistle of the up-train! He mustn’t miss it!

He came out by the turning to Holbrook Junction just in time. There was the train slowing down! There—there was *Larry!*

“Hi, there!” squealed Billy. “Here I am!”

Larry came running. "Some turnout," he cried. "Wait. I have to see to my trunk—do you take it?"

"Guess you'd better send it up by Wilson. He'll take it. I kinda thought we'd go take a drive before going straight home. We don't want to be bothered with the trunk. Wait; I'll help." He found Wilson. It was arranged. The two climbed onto the broad seat of the cart. Larry disposed of his overcoat. He held a package in his hand. "This is my lunch," he said. "Father's housekeeper made me take it. I'll wager she put something good inside, but I hate to eat on a train when I'm by myself—I have something for you, Billy—in my trunk—You'll like it! I brought my stamp album: we can do it nights. I got a whole lot to swap off with you—"

"I know what you brought me," giggled Billy delightedly. "Candy—chocolates—"

"Dad sent 'm—I brought you—Oh, you *wait*—"

Peg backed. They were jogging homeward. Billy pulled the reins. "Who-a!" he said. "Now—see here, we got to decide what we'll do. Suppose we make that lunch a picnic—say what?—Say we go somewhere nice and eat it an' take a nice drive? Where to?"

"Dunno—anywhere—"

“We have a lot of time,” said Billy, and looked mechanically at the wrist that held his watch. It was *gone!* That light-fingered gypsy! She did it—he knew when, too!

“Say, Larry,” he exclaimed. “My watch—the watch Uncle Billy gave me for my Christmas—it’s gone! There was a gypsy an’ she wanted to tell my fortune—an’ I let her—an’ she took it! I’m going straight back there an’ get it *back!* It was a swell silver watch—She took it while I was watching Peg an’ thinking about that silly stuff she told me!”

“Huh, she won’t give it back,” said Larry. “But we can go—”

So Peg dashed down the road they had come over. And they talked over the gypsies.

“You’ll have to be careful,” Larry cautioned. “You can pretend you dropped your watch. Don’t accuse her. Maybe she’ll be afraid to keep it and give it back—”

But when they reached the spot, not a gypsy was there!

Well, the watch was gone, that was all. Too bad. Too bad.

“I hear a brook around here,” said Billy. “I’m going to give Peg a drink. There’s a little pail in the back. We could eat your lunch here, too,” he suggested. “It’s pretty here. We can sit right on this seat and eat.

Then we can decide what to do next. Wish we could drive over to Woodville where Mom and Dad are. It's a garden party—kind of all-day one, I guess. But I'm not dressed up to go, and I wasn't asked, anyhow—*only* Mrs. Chandler has a lake in her place, and boats, and if we could go, we could go rowing—”

Larry was undoing the wonderful box of lunch. From it, Billy's eyes looked casually to the ground. Something held his gaze. What was it? Why, it looked like a sparkling dewdrop catching the sun; it wasn't, though — He was out of the cart. He bent down. “Larry,” he cried. “See what I have—it's a ring—a *diamond!*” He was all excitement. “Wish they'd dropped my watch instead,” he cried. “You take care of this. Put it somewhere safe—I'll take the pail and get the drink for Peg.”

Larry was busy setting out the lunch on the seat of the express cart. My, but it looked good: stuffed deviled eggs, ham sandwiches, nuts, an apple and an orange, a chocolate bar, two small chocolate cakes! He put the ring in his purse. “Hurry up,” he sighed. “I'm hungry—” That ring was worth something—must have been taken as Billy's watch was—Oh, gypsies always were light-fingered. *They'd* find the owner—sure!

But here, Billy came back from the brook. He held a finger to his lips. He did not carry the pail. "Sh-h—" he cautioned. "Come along! Leave Peg. Come an' help me—Be awful quiet!—Sh-h—I found somethin'—I—guess we got more'n the ring!—I dunno. Hurry!"

"What'd you find?" inquired Larry in hushed voice as he followed Billy, beckoning from the bushes that led into the woods.

"Sh-h—" cautioned Billy. "Dunno—just looks as if they'd hidden something. That's all. I'll bet that was what they were jabbering about when I came along. Might be they knew the Woodville police were out after them an' they didn't want to have anything found in their cart. They could bury it. And afterward they could go back after it. My, I wish my watch was there—" He made a very cautious step. He stopped and looked about. "I thought it was here," he said. "No—here—Here it is!" He turned and looked all about. He listened with finger to his lips.

There was not a sound. Only the tinkle of the brook in the hollow came to them in liquid notes of a little waterfall over the stones. It was quite thick woods. The ferns grew high. Billy pointed. Larry looked. It was the print of a large boot on the soft soil of the damp

earth where gray moss grew on a stone and shiny wintergreen leaves glistened. There was a stone near, a big stone.

Larry looked. "I don't see anything," he whispered. "Go ahead, Sherlock Holmes— Yes, I know. I *am* being still— Hark!"

They stopped short and listened. But it was only some wild creature like a rabbit or a fox.

Billy bent down. Again he pointed. "There were some threads from a bit of sacking," he said. "I saw 'em. They made me think of the package that gypsy man had when I came on them having that row about something—"

He pointed to the stone. It had clearly been carried to a place where it did *not* belong. There was a pile of stones a little way off. And, anyway, he could see that the whole earth right there had been dug up lately. And the wintergreen over it wasn't rooted—and the stone *had* come from the other place.

"I just stubbed my toe on it," explained Billy, "going for the water. Then I waited. It hurt. An' I happened to look down—an' I *saw*— Bet they hid something here! Let's lift that stone. Looks like a marker, to me! Right by the tree, too—to mark the place!"

Larry tugged. Billy helped. They pushed. They moved it a bit. Once in a while they

started, stopped, listened. But there were no other sounds—no footsteps, no cracking twigs.

Nor was there anyone passing on that lonely wood road. They knew Peg was all right. Once in a while Billy peeped to see, stopping in efforts to move the stone. It was heavy—whew—but they got it rolled off. They actually did!

“Dig,” said Billy. And the two fell to it like wild creatures unearthing a cache. They had to use their hands. Billy tried using the pail, but it was no good. It was evident the earth had been stamped down, too. It was loose earth with bits of fern in it—red berries that had gone in with the earth and small stones.

“See there!”

Yes, there it was, unmistakable—a bit of old sacking! Something very hard under there! Again they fell to digging.

And covered with dirt—yes, it was the package—it must be—the thing that gypsy man had held in his hand!

Billy’s heart pounded.

Trickles of moisture stood out on Larry’s forehead. His cheeks were flushed.

They said not a word. They lifted it out together! It was heavy, a dirty package of something very heavy, all tied up tight with



They lifted it out together

strong cord. Billy motioned to Larry. They put it down. They fixed it all as before—even to rolling the stone back carefully. They stopped and listened.

The wood was quite quiet. The stone was just as they had found it—no one would have known. They had put other stones in the open hole and covered them. It must look all right—if the gypsies did come there—if they did meet them going back—well, they mustn't suspect Larry or Billy. That was it!

Then, between the two, they managed to get the heavy bundle to the express cart.

“Have to hide it,” said Billy. “Suppose we can get it under the seat? The seat lifts up.”

There was all the lunch! Larry hustled it back in the box, all mussed up. They lifted up the seat. They got the package of gypsy loot in there. The seat went down over it!

Whew! They wiped their hot faces and dirty hands. “Guess we'd better move on,” said Billy in a whisper.

Larry kept looking around. He was afraid they'd meet the gypsies. “If we do, we'll just go as fast as we can, Billy—I say,” he said under his breath, “do you know where to report this—” He clung to the lunch box. “Hadn't we better go straight back to your house?” he questioned.

Right then they came to the main highway. It was not so lonely. They slowed down. "Yea-a," returned Billy, "I know what to do—" He drove on. "I'll stop at the General Store an' let George put the stuff in the safe—" He looked at Larry for approval. "What say?" he asked. "I have to get the huckleberries for the pie there. George'll tell me what to do. An' he'll charge the berries."

They slowed Peg at the General Store. "Whoa!" called Billy. My, but it was a relief to know they had reached that safe destination and that the seat under the two held something nobody even suspected!

Larry stayed outside, holding the reins. Billy went inside. He seemed a long time. Then he came out with George. George's eyes were incredulous and round.

"Hello, Larry," he greeted. "Glad to see you back! If you'll get off that seat, now, I'll take what's there for me!"

The automobile party that was buying soda pop and drinking it with straws never even dreamed anything unusual was happening!

Then Billy came out with two soda-water bottles. "Which do you like—sarsaparilla or ginger?" he asked. "You can go wash up in the store. I *did*. Let's go over there by the

bridge an' eat. George is going to telephone—we'd better wait," he said meaningly.

So Larry went and washed up. George told him that they were waiting for the Holbrook sheriff to come. He said he'd be over in his car right away.

The two climbed down on the rocks by the bridge that crossed the Holbrook River. It was cool there—but not exactly a picnic place.

Larry laid the lunch out on the stones. They divided it evenly. They counted out for the apple. Larry got it.

"Say," said Billy, reflectively. "It's luck that we got away with it. They might've come back."

"Supposing they'd come when we were unearthing it!" There was a thrill in that.

"They got my watch—I'm glad I got what they stole," mused Billy. "Uncle Billy gave me that watch. I wanted it a long time—and it's gone!"

"Too bad," said Larry. He was eating the last nut. "Forget it. We're going to have a lot of sport together—we two," he said. "I vote for a swim—"

"Me, too—but we gotta go home first—Oh, here he is!"

It was Mr. Freeburg, the sheriff. He sat

down on the rock beside them. "Smart kids," he said. "I took a look at the contents of that package you found, young men; it's the silver they stole from Woodville.

"They tried to hide it so they could get safe by us till they were examined. They came through here. I got them. Just been all through their crazy cart. But I let them go just before I heard from you. Bet they're on their way back to dig up their plunder now!" he laughed. "I couldn't hold 'em," he said. "There wasn't anything there but their own stuff."

He put his hand into his pocket. "You lost a watch, Bill?" he asked. "I found this tucked in there—does it by any chance happen to be yours?" He held it out.

Billy gave a little happy cry. He caught the watch. "Sure," he exclaimed joyously. "Never expected to see it again—say—she told me I'd find something! She told me I'd be lucky! But she didn't know what she was telling me, *did* she?"

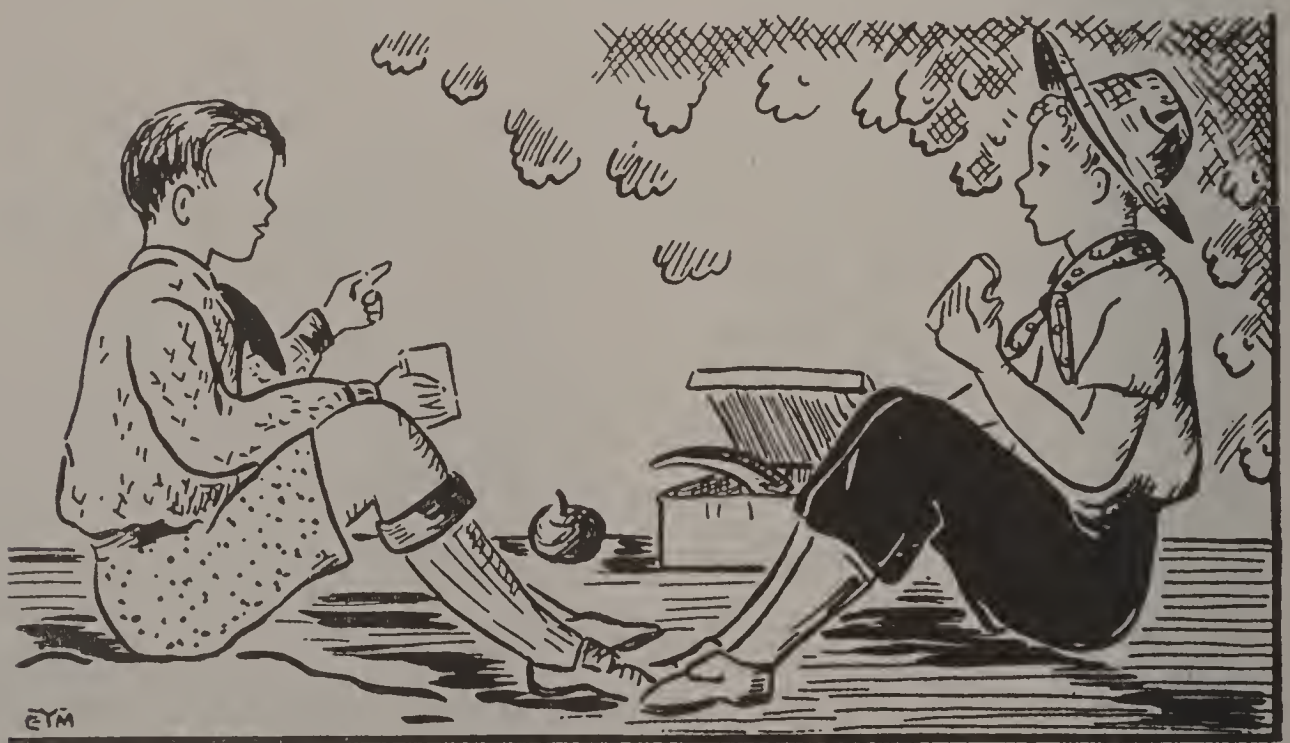
They all laughed.

"Guess most of that silver belongs to that place up where your mother and dad have gone," said Mr. Freeburg. "It's got their initials on it. The necklace is there, too! I just 'phoned over. They were pleased over

the news. I just said two smart young men found it—didn't say *who!*” He chuckled.

“Don't know if you'd condescend to take the reward,” he went on. “Mrs. Chandler offered me a lot for you. I said, ‘They aren't the kind that'll take money—I expect.’” He paused. “Billy,” he said, “I did let on who it was. And she said, ‘Well—well!—I shall ask him and his friend over here and just give them both the time of their lives. We'll have to fix that up!’”

The two grinned at the prospect. “I told you I wanted to take you there, Larry,” cried Billy. “There's a lake and rowboats!—Say, I'm glad I got my watch back! Guess we better get Peg and go along home! The trunk must be there. I want to find out what's in it that you brought *me!*”





A STOLEN CAR

Billy's next adventure was that of detective. And like all the others, it came when he least expected such a thing to occur.

Uncle William's shining new car stopped in front of the Cory family's drive. "Bo-hawnk! Bo-hawnk! Bo-hawnk!" went the brand-new horn proudly.

Billy Cory came running out of the side door of the porch, a blue rubber kitchen apron of his mother's tied around his chest.

“Oh, Uncle Will,” he cried joyously. “It’s the best car you’ve ever had. I want to see how it goes!”

Uncle Will beamed down at Billy. “Where are the folks? I came to show it to them.”

“All gone,” answered Billy. “They just went off in our old ark on a shopping trip to Kensington. Mother wanted me to go and there was room, only I knew she wanted to take her friend, Mrs. Stivers. The twins had to go to be kept out of mischief and Ben filled in like a sardine filling. So I stayed home and—now, I get rewarded, don’t I?”

Uncle Will grinned. “Sure, Billy. Hop in!”

But Billy stopped short, trying to untie the rubber strings of the apron. “I forgot. There are the lunch dishes and I said I’d do ’em. Suppose the folks got back first!”

“Lock up and do them when you get back,” said Uncle Will. “We’ll take a little spin to Wherebee and be back by three o’clock. They can’t get home till five anyhow! I have some business to attend to, and what do you say we get some ice cream while we’re over there and celebrate the new car?”

Billy grinned. Then he dashed back to the house, and after a vigorous slamming of windows, he came dashing out again, carrying a brown paper bag.

“Say, Uncle Will, Mother’s been wanting to take back a pair of shoes she bought for me at a shop in Wherebee. I have to select another pair; could we do that today?”

Uncle Will nodded, and Billy tossed the brown paper bag with the shoes into the back seat, where they fell on the floor of the sedan. And then—Bo-hawnk! bo-hawnk!—the shining new car started off with a soft purr of the engine. They were going down the paved road toward Gilder’s Corners and the post road to Wherebee!

“This new model is just about right,” said Billy. “There aren’t many of them around here—but if I could choose, I’d take this, just as you have, Uncle!”

“It’s the best outside the big fellows,” Uncle Will replied contentedly, watching the road ahead. Here they passed a red-roofed gas station, there a log-cabin lunch room, and farther on a wayside booth where the sign proclaimed, “Hot Dogs.”

“Are we going to change the shoes first or have ice cream?” asked Billy.

“Shoes can wait, can’t they? What kind shall it be, Billy?”

Billy reflected. “If you’re going to celebrate very much, Uncle, George’s, that place in Wherebee, where we go for ice cream, has

a mixture of strawberries and nuts and all kinds of things—I forget what they call it.” He lapsed into silence for a moment, as he gazed at the landscape with its hurrying cars. “You know, Uncle, I know what I’m going to be when I grow up. I just decided!”

“What?” Uncle Will shot ahead of the slow car that was blocking the way. He dashed ahead of a big van. Then Billy got a chance to answer. “A detective, that’s what!”

Uncle Will smiled. “Well, Billy, I’ve noticed that you usually observe keenly and quickly. You can reason. So you’re not going to turn into a professor like me!”

“It would be fun to be a detective,” mused Billy. “I think—I might do it—”

Uncle Will did not answer. They were getting into traffic. Uncle Will was intent on his driving. And Billy got interested in the traffic, too. “There, there!” he exclaimed. “Saw a car just like yours, Uncle! Same year and same color! It’s gone now. That shows I can see things quickly—detectives have to!”

But the car had gone. Uncle Will never even noticed it. Professors mightn’t, but future detective Billy was testing his powers of observation; it was a training he was just now giving himself. He would look hard at

something and then try to remember all its details. This was like a game and was fun.

Uncle Will, however, stopped at the junction to await the green light. Then on they went. And, at last, turning from Main Street, they went to George's, the ice cream place.

The celebration was all it should have been in honor of the new car. Then Uncle said, "Billy, wouldn't you like to order something else? You stay here and watch the car. Jim Bradley, an old pal of mine, has a shop just two doors down the street and I want to see him."

He was gone. Billy went to the counter, where he slid up to a high stool and began to converse with Tony over the counter as to which to try next. It was a most absorbing topic, for Tony was eloquent. Billy had cast an eye at the curb on leaving his table. The car was there. And then he forgot it entirely.

A man came in and had iced coffee and went out. Then Billy looked for the car. Strange, it seemed to have moved. He didn't quite remember where they had parked, but he thought they had left the car nearer the door. Well, he must be mistaken. The car was there. He decided that his ability to observe correctly needed more training; a

true detective should have been able to mark the very spot when asked.

Billy dismissed detective business and began on Tony's new and luscious mixture—pineapple and whipped cream, and cherries! And the ice cream was green! Tony had arranged the dish as only an artist would; the cherries looked like red flowers in a soft green garden, and the crushed golden pineapple against the green background looked too good to eat!

“Um-yum.” That was about all Billy said till Uncle appeared.

“We'd better get back, young man. Have to go to the shoe shop, haven't we?”

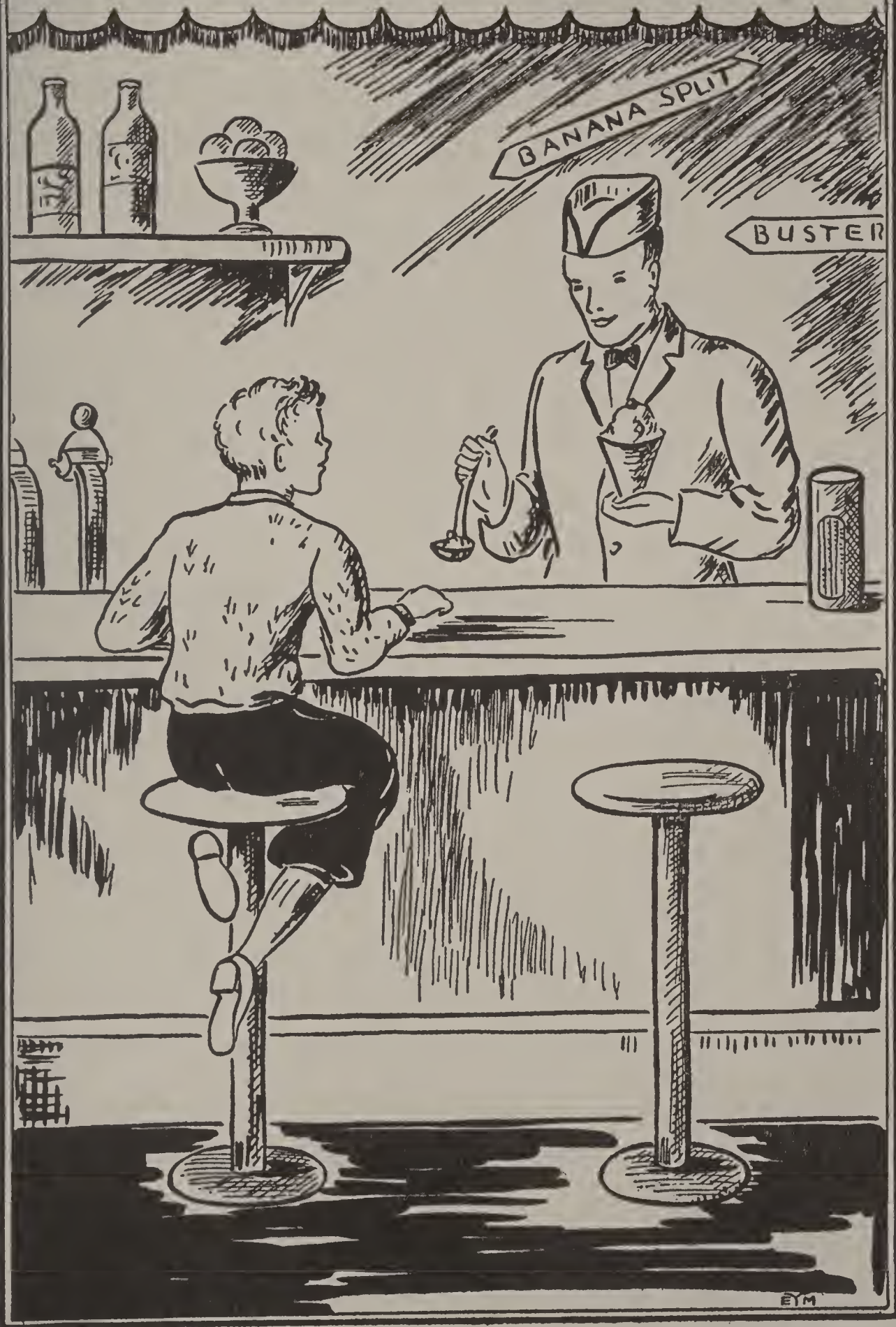
And so Billy disposed of what was left and Uncle paid the check. And they opened the door of the sedan at the curbing and Uncle started off.

“This doesn't seem like your car,” said Billy, as they sped down High Street. “Bet you got the wrong car, Uncle Will!”

Uncle laughed. “Same car you came in,” he said, “only you've had too much ice cream to see straight, maybe, Billy!”

They were going full speed now, on the post road again, and Billy leaned far back over the seat and peered down at the flooring where he had tossed the brown-paper

5 FRESH FRUIT



Tony had arranged the dish as only an artist would

bag with the shoes in it. They were nearing the corner where they turned for the shoe shop. Billy lurched at the turning and got a full glimpse of the floor. "The shoe bag isn't here; *it isn't*," he insisted. "I put it there in the back! I knew you had the wrong car."

Uncle slowed down. "All right, if you really think you're a Sherlock Holmes, Billy, you hop out and look for the bag. If it was stolen—why, you find out who took your shoes. There's the chance of being a detective for you! I bet you'll find them—just look a little closer."

But Billy was already out of the car looking at the license number. "I told you so, Uncle Will. You're not in your own car at all! I said so the minute we got in! You come and look for yourself!"

It was so! Uncle turned around, and they hurried back to town. He was sure that Jim Bradley, his old pal, had played a practical joke on him, substituting a car of the same make and color in place of the one which, he had just been boasting, was the best car anywhere. He wasn't in the least concerned, for he was sure he'd find Jim Bradley grinning and waiting their return. He always had been a practical joker—even from a boy.

But when they reached there—no! Jim Bradley looked actually worried. “Honest,” he said. “I never did it. What happened is that some guy liked the looks of your car better’n his and he stole yours. You get the police!”

By this time Uncle Will was excited. He rushed to the telephone, while Billy waited in the car, his eyes roving over the shop windows. In one there stood crockery—a table set with it! Suddenly, he remembered the unwashed dishes that Mother would find, if he did not hurry home.

Uncle came back. “Billy, I have to go to the police station. So you’d better take the bus and go on home, for your Mother will worry, if she doesn’t find you when she gets there.”

“All right,” said Billy. “I hope you get the car, Uncle—wish I could help you.”

He watched Uncle Will back and turn and then he lost him in the traffic as he started for the corner where the bus always stopped. There was no bus there. And while waiting, what should come along but Bunty’s Store wagon from his very own town? He waved frantically, and the driver saw him and slowed down. “Want a lift home?” he asked.

It didn’t take Billy long to scramble up

beside him. Nor did it take long to tell his story.

“By Jove,” cried the driver. “I saw a car like that over by the Square not a half hour ago!”

Without a word more, he turned around and put on speed.

And as they came to the Square Billy, looking ahead, cried, “There! There! Oh, it’s going—catch it! That’s it! Hurry!”

He had even forgotten about the unwashed dinner dishes at home! He was beginning his career as a detective.

They raced after the car that looked like Uncle Will’s new one, Billy clinging tight to the side of the delivery car’s high seat, the driver of Bunty’s wagon honking wildly. Far ahead they caught occasional glimpses of the car they were pursuing, and at last they began to gain on it. And then it rolled up a perfectly respectable driveway that belonged to a neat white bungalow and stopped short. Out of it there emerged a nicely dressed lady and a gentleman in knickers. And when Billy looked at the license, it was not Uncle Will’s car at all—moreover, it was last year’s model!

So much for that!

The driver of Bunty’s delivery car laughed.

He thought it a good joke. "Too bad, but anyhow, you can't say we didn't try it! Come on, we have to get back now. Cars get stolen every day, and I guess your Uncle has insurance."

"Not yet," said Billy, gloomily. "He was going to, but he always puts things off."

The delivery car rattled on up the post-road now, and it was going at a mild rate past the Do-Drop-Inn when Billy suddenly yelled, "Oh, there it goes!"

Bunty's driver nearly skidded into the gutter as he gazed at the car flying in opposite direction past them. There it was—this year's model, *exactly the thing!* They couldn't see the license number, it went so fast. In it was a man—perhaps the one who'd stolen it.

And in less time than it takes to tell it, Bunty's delivery wagon was on the chase again! The driver backed, and they were in hot pursuit!

It was an exciting ride. But the car ahead had considerable gain and it remained ahead, as the delivery wagon was often held up by trucks and trolley cars that insisted on stopping at the very moment when they might have caught up. Up one hill, and down another they raced and through Wherebee

again! Close on the tracks of the other car they followed! Out of Wherebee and straight ahead to Chesterton they went—almost clear there, too!

And then the driver of the car ahead stopped short. He rolled into a gas station and stopped!

“You’ve got our car,” squealed Billy. “Hand it over!”

The man looked surprised, then angry. “I have not. I live in Chesterton, don’t I, Jim?” He turned to the man at the gas station. “Is this my own car or isn’t it?”

“It’s yours,” said Jim dryly. “What do those two take you for, anyhow?”

It wasn’t Uncle’s car. It had a little set of initials on the doors! Nor was it his license number.

Billy apologized. He told them about his uncle’s car. “And if you should see it,” he said, “be sure to phone the police station at Wherebee!”

They promised.

The delivery car turned foolishly, backed, and was on its homeward way again. And the clock on a building they passed proclaimed that it was now quarter past four!

Into Billy’s mind then flitted the thought of his mother’s home-coming—a kitchen up-

set with unwashed dinner dishes and the table, full of dinner dishes! As for Bunty's driver, he was silent. Doubtless, as he put on speed, he thought of all the work he had waiting to be done. Then, just out of Where-bee again, suddenly there was a report. Bang! They had a puncture!

Right ahead lay a repair shop connected with a garage. *That* was luck anyhow!

As the repair man came to them, Billy slid from the seat of the delivery car. A good detective always keeps his eyes open, and Billy sauntered toward the garage nearby. He always liked to look at cars. He made his way slowly across its front, looking in. It was dark and cool in there and smelled of automobiles and oil and gas.

But, gracious! As he came around the side of the garage, not expecting anything *at all*, there, if you please, stood Uncle Will's nice new car as real as life. A mechanic was fussing over it. It *was* Uncle Will's car! It had his license number!

Billy gasped. He rushed forward and laid a hand on the door-handle. "Where did you get this car?" he demanded. "It's the car that belongs to my Uncle William—Mr. Cory! And you took it!"

The mechanic paid no attention.

“It’s ours,” stated Billy. “We could have you arrested.”

“ ’Tisn’t!” retorted the mechanic. “I just drove it out of this very garage an hour ago. And I just came back from Wherebee in the same car I drove over in. And this is it. Go chase yourself!”

“It’s our license number,” retorted Billy hotly. “Look-a-here! Maybe you didn’t steal it—maybe the cars got somehow mixed up! Did you—did you stop at George’s Ice Cream Parlor in Wherebee? I—I thought that a car stopped there and a man came in while I was eating ice cream at the counter, talking to Tony!”

The mechanic slapped his soiled overalls. “I did that,” he said. “I had iced coffee and a sandwich. Were you the boy sitting at the counter petting ice cream with a spoon?”

“I was!” shouted Billy. “We’d better phone the police at Wherebee. Gee, Uncle will be happy to get his own car back!”

He rushed to the inside of the car and drew out the paper bag with his shoes in it. “See, my shoes!” he cried. “I’ll try ’em on, if you don’t believe me.”

They both laughed. And then together, they went to the waiting room at the gas station where there was a telephone. “I found



There stood Uncle Will's nice new car

Uncle's car!" Billy called to the astonished driver of Bunty's wagon. "It's right here—around the corner—and it wasn't stolen! One of the mechanics here parked in front of George's Ice Cream Parlor when we were there and he'd driven in from here in a new car of the same make, same color, same year—see? He didn't know he'd taken anything that wasn't his—he never even noticed the license plate!"

And then he scurried to the telephone where the mechanic was giving an account of himself. "You talk to 'em," he said. "Your uncle is on the wire!"

And so it was Billy who convinced them that all was just a mix-up. Uncle William's voice came over the wire. "Some detective you are, Billy. I'll be right over with the other car. You wait!"

So Bunty's driver drove off and Billy waited.

It took Uncle exactly fifteen minutes to make it. Amid laughter, they drove off again in Uncle Will's nice new car, none the worse for its adventure. The shoes returned home with Billy unchanged. That would have to wait for another drive, Uncle said—and another celebration.

"Well, Billy, you're a smart boy," he said

for the forty-eleventh time. "You certainly have some eyes in your head and you know how to use them. How was it that you noticed any difference in the two cars? I can't think of any even now!"

Billy giggled. "If I tell you, you'll call me Sherlock Holmes," he said. "It was the clock."

"The clock!" Uncle smiled. "They both looked alike to me!"

"They were alike." Again Billy giggled. "You see, Uncle, my wrist watch you gave me—it is always the *right* time! I keep it going Daylight Saving. The other car was Standard! I knew the time by my watch. And then, too—the shoe-bag was missing and—and your windshield wasn't dirty and the other car's *was!*"

Uncle Will nodded his head. "Billy," he said, "you'll never be a professor like me—you'll probably be head of the detective force sometime and have an international reputation! I'm the most grateful uncle that any boy ever had, and you shall invite your gang and we'll *all* go to Wherebee—or some place much nicer and have a real time together! If it wasn't for what you did, why just think what I should have lost!"

All over him, Billy felt warm and happy.

He was glad of the training he'd been giving himself in observation! And, then, too, a detective is never baffled; he does not easily give up!

It was a quarter to five by Billy's wrist watch when Uncle drove to the curb in front of the Cory home. The Old Ark that was the Cory automobile had not yet reached home. There was still time to race through the dishwashing! And when he had done that, he set the table. At quarter to six there was a rumble on the drive that led to the Cory's garage and a loud honking announced the Old Ark's return home with the family!

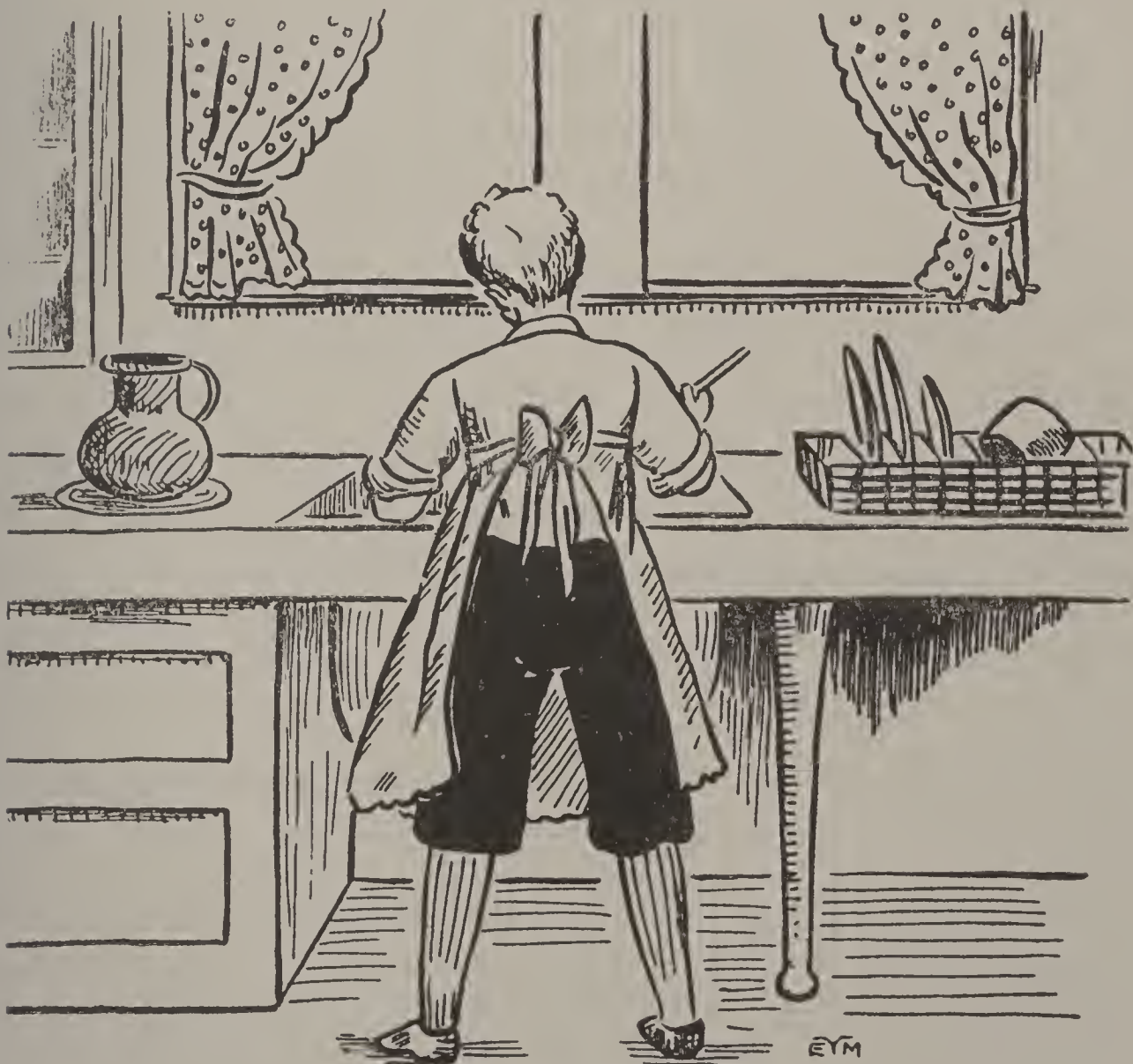
Billy raced out of the kitchen door. "Oh, say," he yelled. "I have something to tell all of you! Come on in quick! Uncle Will came over and took me out in his new car—it's a beaut! But it was stolen! Only it wasn't quite stolen! Bunty's delivery cart driver and I chased all around after cars and then we got a puncture—and then I looked around and I found Uncle's car myself! I was a regular detective story in myself!"

Mother looked at Billy, and then, as she came into the cool dining room, she saw all that he had done. She opened her arms and hugged him. "You're just the best boy," she said, "and I *know* you'll be a credit to the

detective force some day. But hurry up and tell us what happened!”

Billy, chest out, kitchen apron around his neck, launched into a dramatic rendering of all that had occurred since he was left at home to do the dinner dishes. And he—he *almost* believed he wore a detective’s badge when he patted his coat lapel at the end of the long story. “Say, Mom, don’t you really think your son will make a detective soon?”

And Mom said, “Billy, I think you belong on the force right now.”





A MYSTERIOUS PAPER

One afternoon Billy was sitting in the living room at home. Father was out of town on a business trip. Mother had a dinner engagement and was going to leave Billy for the evening. He didn't care much as he was deep in a story of adventure—a real mystery.

He was following the story with his mouth wide open and he could hardly take time to lift his eyes from the printed page. He had just reached the exciting moment when the pearl necklace had been stolen and he could not wait to find out who was the guilty one.

He placed a forefinger on the page to keep his place and he looked up from his book. He was aware that Mother was saying something she considered very important. This something was about Father—Billy was to tell Father something as soon as he came home. So Billy disengaged his attention from his story and concentrated on Mother's words as far as he was able. "What's that you said, Mother?" he inquired. "I didn't hear—"

"Well," returned Mother, "I wish you would not spend your time reading those improbable stories, Billy! What good does it do you? I was just saying that I left a note on a bit of paper here. You haven't been listening! I'll tell you now. I want you to give this bit of paper with my note upon it to Father the instant he comes home this evening. It's very important, so listen carefully. You're the only one of the family at home here and you must act with that in mind. I'm trying to make you realize how important it is and how much we all depend on you. I've just let Martha go to her sister's and I'm going to be over at Mrs. Benton's this evening. Martha will give you your tea—she wants to get off early. So you'll be alone till your father comes."

Billy wiggled his leg over the arm of the chair, thus getting greater comfort to face further instructions. "I'm listening, Mother," he said. "I'll do it."

"The paper, I'll put right here," Mother went on. "There's a message on it for your father—very, very important indeed, Billy! Mr. Stow, Father's partner, is going out of town: as soon as your father comes in he is to telephone to the number on this slip of paper. It's an unusually important business deal they have on hand. Even Father's secretary at the office doesn't know about this, so you mustn't lose time, and above all you mustn't forget!"

"All right," returned Billy. "I won't—I mean I will be sure to remember—depend on it!" His eyes sought out the printed page, but he lifted them carefully to see her take a bit of paper from the telephone pad and place it carefully on the large library table. It was a blue telephone pad—a blue slip of paper.

"Yes, Mother," he repeated. "I heard it all. Dad's train will not be in before eight. I know—it's coming from Chicago. Just the instant he sets foot inside this door, I'll swoop down on him and tell him to call that number quick as lightning!"

He returned to his story. "So long," he called. "Don't worry!" He didn't even bother to get up and look at the paper that lay on the flat table-top desk. It could stay there till his father came. It was perfectly safe there. "Yes, I understand. If I should forget—but I won't—it will mean an awful loss to Dad and the company. All right—I know—I know—"

But Mother still stood beside the desk. "Billy," she went on, "there are other directions on the reverse of the slip of paper. Of course, Father will see them, but you can call his attention to that. He'll want to know what the message says. No need to bother you with it. That's all!"

"If Dad wants to know more, he can call you at the Benton's, can't he?" Billy felt very foresighted, but maybe it was safe to know what to do in case Dad wanted other information.

But Mother shook her head. "No," she returned. "No need. Anyway, you couldn't, for the Benton's telephone is out of order. The paper is enough."

After seeing Mother to the door and into the waiting taxi, since the Old Ark was at the garage. Billy returned to the book with its story of the lost pearl necklace. He read

till it was time to light the lamp. Then when he could see no more, he rose from the arm-chair and began to think about his supper. He hoped Martha had some of the chocolate cake that he liked—he thought he might go to the kitchen and ask Martha to be sure to give him some.

She was there in the kitchen, already dressed in her best and ready to go off as soon as Billy's supper was out of the way. "Will you be liking your tea in the library on a tray, Master Billy?" she inquired. "I can put it there beside the open fire. It will be more cosy-like being by yourself, maybe. I always say, 'Give me an open fire and a tray when I'm by myself. You can eat a bit and enjoy a bit.'"

Billy went back to the library. He threw himself down upon the couch before the fire, right in front of the library table. He was in pursuit of the thief whom he thought had the necklace when the library door was opened. Being deep in the story, he didn't notice who had opened it. Subconsciously, he was aware of Martha's presence moving about. He knew she set his tray down somewhere and that she left. And he was not aware of anything more till the grandfather clock in the hall struck eight in chimes.



He threw himself down upon the couch

“Oh, goodness,” he exclaimed aloud to himself. “Oh, my! I forgot supper was there—chocolate cake too!” Yes, there it was on the library table—cold toasted sandwich, lettuce, cake, baked apple and cream and a pitcher of milk. My, but it did look good! Martha must have gone by now, locking the kitchen entry door with her keys. He was alone. It felt queer to be alone—the clock ticking, the fire snapping, the cat rubbing up to his legs because it, too, feels the loneliness.

Billy bent down and petted Methuselah, sleek and black and purring. “All by ourselves,” he said aloud. “Now, I’m going to eat—run away, and sit by the fire.”

He propped his story book against the lamp on the library table. He had to take Methuselah down from the table. Methuselah wasn’t hungry, but he did love to walk all over the table—cats always seemed to like to do that.

Billy munched as he ate. And at last, the chocolate cake was all gone and the milk pitcher was empty. All that remained of the cold toasted chicken sandwich was a crumb or two on an empty plate.

When alone, Billy usually helped by taking his tray into the kitchen, so he rose and carried it in there and came back.

The house seemed unusually still. Soon he was back on the couch with Methuselah curled close to him. The two kept each other company. The story progressed and the plot thickened. Billy hadn't yet found out who took the pearl necklace. He was so busy following the clues of the mystery story that he really was surprised when the front door opened and shut with a bang and his father walked into the library. It was already after ten!

But Billy remembered. He jumped efficiently to the situation. "Hullo, Dad," he greeted. "Say, before you take your overcoat off, there's a paper Mom left on the library table for you. She said I was to tell you the instant you landed. You're to call up the number right now: and there's a message about it written on the back of the telephone sheet—a little blue paper—on the library table!"

Billy raced to the table ahead of his father in his eagerness to show which paper it was, but that bit of paper was not there!

"Where is it?" Father inquired. "I don't see any blue paper. What did you do with it?"

"Why, I didn't touch it," Billy gasped. "Mom put it right there. She's gone to the

Benton's. She has gone somewhere with them. She said it was no good to call her because their telephone was out. She said it was *all* there on the paper—what you were to do. Somebody called her. I don't know who."

Father was searching on the table, upsetting the pen tray, looking under books. Billy was on all fours under the library table and yet nowhere was there any slip of blue paper.

"It must be here somewhere!" exclaimed Billy. "It must, Dad. I haven't touched it. Mom put it right there in plain sight. Nobody but Martha and Methuselah have been in this room and the message couldn't just get up and walk off by itself, you know."

They went through the library wastebasket, but the blue paper slip was not there either. It was Mr. Cory who asked about Martha. "You don't suppose Cook or Martha took it, do you—clearing up?" he suggested.

Billy shook his head, "Nope!" he explained. "Cook was out and Martha just came in here with my tray and then she went to her sister's. I'll go and call her sister's."

Although he reached Martha, she knew nothing of the slip, although she did say she had seen it on the table when she brought in

the tray. Mother was not to be reached at all, because the line was out of order.

“You have no idea what was on the paper?” Mr. Cory questioned of Billy again. “I’ll have to send to get a car at the garage and drive over to the Benton’s after Mother,” he said. “If we can’t find that paper, it means a terrible delay. It is such a long drive into the country. Billy, do help me! Try to think what you did when you were here alone. You might absentmindedly have put that slip into your book as a book-marker. Let’s see your book!”

Father lost Billy’s place in the mystery story, but there really was no bit of blue pad paper there at all. It was just the queerest thing ever—a real mystery. Where had that paper gone? If it had been a string of pearls, perhaps they would have been able to suspect somebody. But here at home, who *was* there? Who would take a paper like that anyhow? Who would want it? Could anybody have slipped in while Billy was reading and gone off with it unnoticed? All this and more raced through Billy’s thoughts as the two ransacked every cranny of the large library, Billy repeating always, “But it must be here, Dad—it must!”

Then the telephone bell rang. It was about

the call Dad should have made. They were asking him questions and Dad didn't know the answer! Billy sat transfixed upon the library couch, paying no heed to what was being said on the wire. He was thinking back, trying to solve the mystery of that blue slip! It had been right there. He had been reading with Methuselah on the couch next to him. Then of course, Martha had come in with the tray and put it right on the library table. He moved toward the table for the tenth time and lifted the scarf that ran across it. Why was the scarf wet? Maybe the tray was wet on its bottom part when Martha brought it in with the supper. Good gracious! That was an idea: suppose you put a tray down on top of a bit of blue paper and the under side of the tray was wet enough to make the library table runner wet—suppose—Oh, it was worth looking into. The slip might stick to the under side of the tray.

With a suppressed whoop, Billy Cory rushed out to the kitchen with Methuselah hopefully at his heels, expecting to be let out. But he was not thinking of the cat. There stood the tray on the white porcelain table. It took but a moment for Billy to run a hand underneath it. His hand met the



His hand met the feel of a slip of paper

feel of a slip of paper adhering to the wet under side of the supper tray!

He rushed back to the library waving it. "I found it! I solved the mystery," he yelled to astonished Mr. Cory. "Here it is, Dad. It was stuck to the under part of my supper tray! I knew I could solve a mystery. Give me time!"

When finally Father had conveyed the necessary information over the wire, he looked relieved. He hung up and came over to where Billy sat on the couch gazing into the glowing coals of the fire. "Son," he said, "that's all right now. A few more minutes and it might have spelt financial loss to us all! Smart lad, Billy! How on earth did you solve the mystery?"

Billy grinned. "Been reading mystery stories," he replied. "Mom doesn't want me to. She says they're a waste of time. But I say they do make you think and reason and put two and two together, so I just went back over all that had happened about the blue paper and I reasoned till I found the solution of the mystery!"

"Well, we'll have to read some good one aloud to Mother, won't we?" Father answered. "Guess it's bedtime now. Time to turn in."

Billy yawned. Methuselah was sound asleep on Billy's lap. But Billy's forefinger still marked a passage in the book he had been reading. "Say, Dad," he asked, "since I did solve a mystery and since I did do my duty like a hero, what say you let me sit up till Mom comes. I want to finish this chapter."

And when Mother came back from her evening, there was Billy still deep in his story.





BILLY HAS A HOBBY

Like most boys, Billy Cory had a hobby. But his hobby developed into a very exciting adventure.

“How much does it cost?” Billy asked as he fingered the loose change in his trousers pocket. He had exactly forty-nine cents.

He had pushed open the door of the shabby second-hand shop on Water Street with only the idea of looking around. Billy Cory was “collecting.”

The man in charge of the shop seemed to know nothing. His boss, he said, had gone out. He looked at the large Oriental plaque Billy indicated as being possibly within his purchase. "Oh," the shopkeeper replied to Billy's inquiry, "you can have *that* for dollar fifty, very cheap. Shall I wrap it up?"

Billy shook his head. "Not now. Maybe later."

"Better now," urged the man, "gen-u-ine antique."

But Billy Cory had gone. What was the use of dickering if it cost all that? They'd never go down to forty-nine cents. Anyway, why should he, Billy Cory, be possessed with a desire to own that queer old plaque? But he did want it. He knew that. Collectors are like this—they just want things they see to add to their collections.

As Billy burst through the side door of his own house and came upon his mother pattering over her house plants at the dining room window, she turned to him with a smile. "You have the look of having found a new bit for your collection, Billy," she joshed. "What is it this time, a Colonial candlestick or a sugar bowl?"

Billy put his arm about her. "You can read my thoughts, can't you, Mom? But it's noth-

ing. I just saw something at that little old shop on Water Street. I came home from school that way. I just love to see the things in their window; they change every day. Sometimes they have very nice things too, even though they hardly ever know their real value. I could make a lot on some if I could buy sometimes—" he paused. "This time I saw a wonderful old Chinese plate. I'd like that."

Mother put a hand on Billy's shoulder. "Well, son, I'm glad you didn't waste your money on it," she comforted. "You need your allowance for other things. That last glass bottle was really nothing. And the old book you brought home—there must be ever so many others like them. Why don't you get a more sensible hobby?"

Billy shook his head. "I like to run things down, Mom," he defended. "Finding things is interesting. You read about them and you learn a lot. And what if I don't strike anything awfully valuable, I like doing it! Really, Mom, I've got a good start on a museum."

"I wish you were more practical," sighed his mother. But there it ended. Billy raced up the stair to his own room. He was still longing for that Chinese plaque, queer thing! It *would* look nice right over there on the

shelf of his mantle with the other treasures that were his very own; the queer old book of 1789; the Colonial candlestick; the cracked Lowestoft sugar bowl; the pewter snuff box; the odd carved shell from the West Indies; and the wooden shoes Aunt Prescott had brought him from Holland.

“If Mom doesn’t quite understand, my art teacher at school does,” said Billy to himself. She said she liked to “collect” too. Why go and buy a pair of rubbers when a queer old Oriental plaque down in a musty second-hand shop on Water Street was so much more important?

This ramble of thoughts was in Billy Cory’s mind as he stood before the mantle surveying his treasures. But he was called from below. Sister’s voice in the hall: “Bill, Mother wants you downstairs. Mrs. Overman is here. It is something about your old Lowestoft sugar bowl.”

Slowly Billy descended to the living room. He greeted the caller and waited for further information. He guessed that he knew what she wanted. She was after that sugar bowl, for when she had told him what it really was—he didn’t know till then—she had wanted it.

Of course, she was after it again. It

matched some old things she already had that had belonged to her great-great-grandmother.

“It’s one of my special treasures,” he protested to Mrs. Overman. “Really, I don’t believe I’d ever be able to get another.”

Yet the price she offered made Billy hold his breath.

Soon the deal was made. He wrapped up the sugar bowl and admiringly showed the bills to his mother, who, of course, insisted on his getting the needed rubbers right off. She even seemed to think Mrs. Overman was over-generous.

So under pretext of going out to buy the rubbers, Billy escaped from home. Yes, he’d get them, he’d promised Mother. But he’d also run down to Water Street and buy that queer old plaque. Goodness, wasn’t this luck! Much nicer to have the plaque than the sugar bowl! No, he’d never, never sell that plaque if he bought it. Wouldn’t Miss Carson be crazy over it! She could tell him all about it.

He lost no time in buying his treasure and the rubbers. But he didn’t show the former to Mother. He carried it, in its newspaper wrapping, up to his own den and stood it upon his mantle shelf!



He lost no time in buying his treasure

“It sure is a beauty!” said Billy to himself. “Greenish ground like jade.” Miss Carson talked a lot about jade. She had taught Billy the color of jade pottery with its strange, varied colors and the design of raised enamel figures. “I’ll bet that’s worth something,” Billy went on to himself. “I found something this time all right!”

Then he had a bright thought. “Why wait for Miss Carson? Couldn’t the man at the Museum tell him all about it right now? It was only four-thirty and he could reach the Museum by five.

It did not take long for Billy to wrap up his treasure carefully and rush out the back way toward the bus that went past the city Museum. He had spent many of his afternoons there, wandering about. He already knew some of the guards.

But it was really almost closing time as Billy got there. And the guard refused to let him in. Although Billy undid the plaque and showed what the urgency of his errand was, the guard refused and pointed to the clock.

Luck, for the second time that day, was, nevertheless, on the side of Billy Cory. For at that very moment a tall man in gray came from a hidden doorway and saw Billy with

his great Oriental plaque, begging the guard for something. He stopped. What was that lad up to with such an antique? He paused.

“What is it, son?” he asked. “It’s just closing time. Where did you get *that*?”

He referred to the big Chinese plaque in tones of great respect. He almost sounded as though he thought Billy had no business to have it.

Billy defended himself. “I just wanted to ask somebody about my plaque,” he explained. “It belongs to a collection I’m making.”

The man bent over the treasure. He examined it very carefully for several seconds. He listened attentively to Billy’s account of his collection and the acquisition of this last treasure. He invited Billy back into his office right in face of the fact that the guard was closing up and the clock indicated past five.

When they were in the office he explained. “Yes, this is a treasure indeed, it really is! Famille Vert,” he said. It was old Chinese, probably late Seventeenth century or early Eighteenth, a rare specimen. But since the art had been much cheapened in the Eighties, it was easy to understand how Billy had secured this. “There’s a great deal that has

no actual value, young man," the director of the Museum explained. "Somehow, though, you just hit it! It's worth a good deal. It is at least 200 years old. Do you want to sell it?"

Billy Cory's heart pounded. And the sum that the director offered was huge. He really wanted it. He said he knew they'd vote to buy it, for sure. Maybe they could make it a bit more. In the gathering dimness of the afternoon he led Billy upstairs to the hall where the antique Chinese potteries stood upon their glass shelves, glorious in coloring and design.

It was then that Billy knew what he was going to do. "I think," he said, "I'd like to give this to the Museum. I can come here and see it, you know. It only cost me a dollar-fifty and I couldn't make all that money on it and feel right. Besides, I'd be so proud to be able to give a real thing to the Museum! Even if I just had luck, I'd like to make it count that way!"

Together they put the great Chinese antique in the safekeeping of an inner room that the director unlocked. The director expressed his thanks most graciously and said the other directors would also. Then he added, "If ever you want to go further with

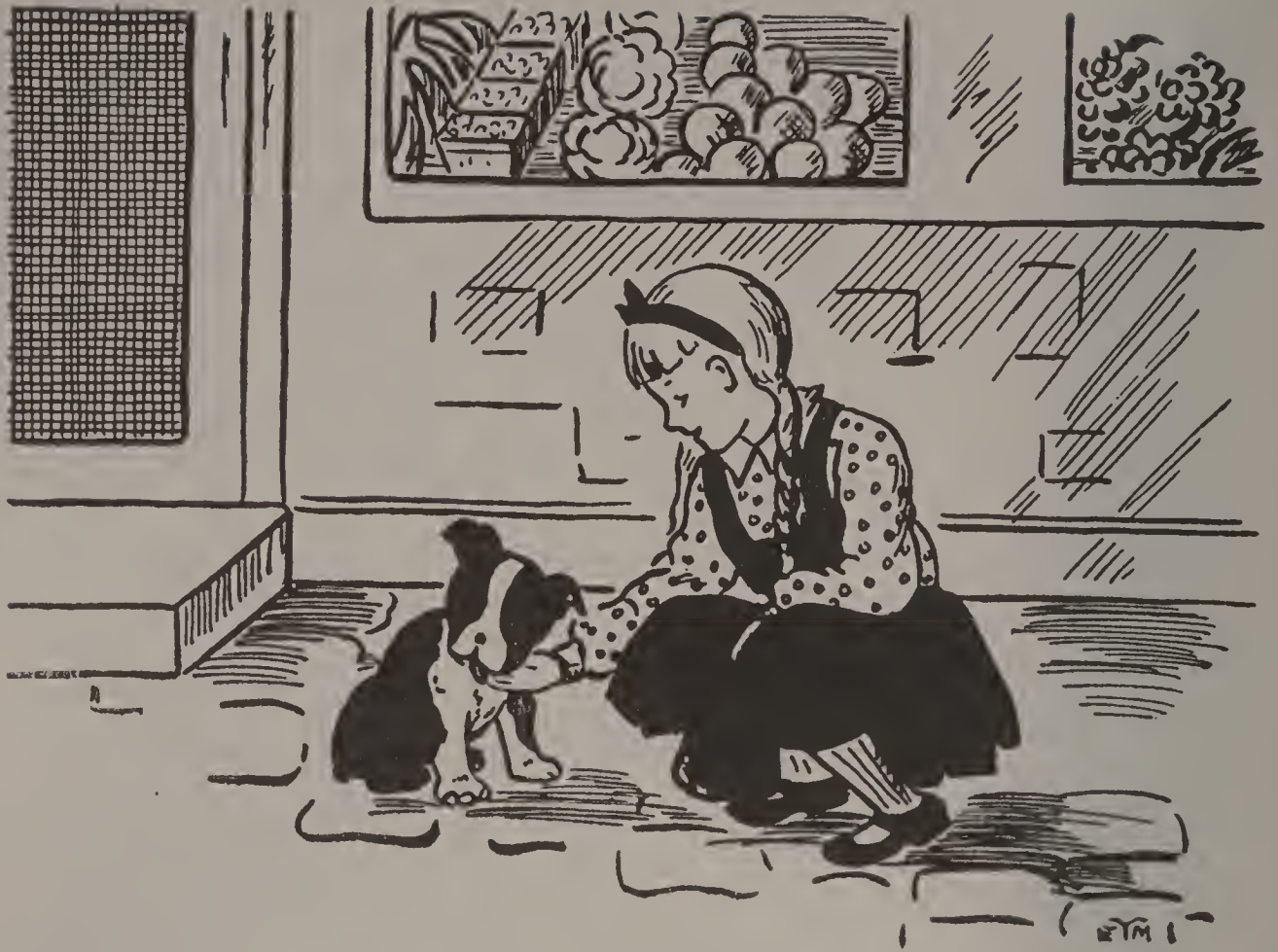
your collection, you have chosen an interesting hobby. I have something to suggest. Now, how would you like to come here Saturday mornings and afternoons and work at little odd jobs? We need a boy whose interests lead him in such a direction. You might even work up, and you surely would learn much that would be of help to you in your own private collecting."

There wasn't much to say except, "I'd like it, sir. I'll come." Then the two walked together to the director's waiting car and he dropped Billy at his very own door just as the family was finishing the soup course.

Sister's eyes were big as she heard the story. As for Mother and Father, what they said was: "That was just luck, but it *was* fine! Great! We congratulate you!"

"I got my old galoshes too, Mom." And he added, "Want to come with me Saturday and see my plaque in the Museum? Won't Miss Carson be interested!"





A BIRTHDAY

Billy Cory had a sister. Usually, she was as deeply concerned in her own doings as Billy was in his. Yet always the two were on terms of real affection and usually at Christmas, birthday, and other holiday times they shared the family bond that brought the two together. Thus Billy Cory's birthday became not so much an adventure for him as for his sister Anne, who wanted to give him a suitable present.

It happened this way:

Mother gave a farewell hug to Anne while

Billy ran back into the house to get the lunch box Father had forgotten. "Anne, dear," said Mother, "I'm afraid we can't get back in time for Billy's birthday—without Father and me, you'll have to be the one to make the day a happy one for Billy!"

But Billy came dashing back from the pantry with the lunch box. The motor at the curb purred and while Billy waved again to his father, Mother gave Anne's hand a reassuring squeeze. Dad and Mom were off! Down the street went the car, leaving Anne and Billy beside the gate.

Inside the house was Mrs. Kelley, come to do the housework in Martha's vacation. Neither Billy nor Anne knew Mrs. Kelley. And it seemed unusually lonely as they turned to go back into the seemingly vacant house that was home. The convention to which Dad and Mom were bound was a long way off. It meant an absence of ten long days, as Mother had hinted, probably longer. And the two just had each other, and Mrs. Kelley.

As they went to school that morning, Anne said, "You know, Billy, they won't be back for the nineteenth. But I'm going to take Mother's place. We'll have a party, don't you worry!"

And Billy replied: "Um-hum. But I don't care about any party. There's just one thing I want and I'm not going to get it. So nothing else matters much."

Anne made no reply. She knew what it was—a dog. When Billy broached the subject, Father always said, "Yes, some time, when I can get you the right kind." Uncle Bill was going to see to it. But Uncle Bill lived in California.

"I know what I'm going to get," pursued Billy. "I shall have a new suit from Dad, a ten-dollar bill from Uncle, or a check. Mother'll give me a new sweater and a pair of Sunday shoes. I don't want any party if I *can't have a dog!*"

Anne sighed. It was no use to say anything. She had already said all there was to say. And anyway, Billy kept repeating, "I don't want *any* birthday unless I get a dog!" He added this time, "If I got a dog, he could go with me on my paper route and help carry papers; I could teach him tricks. He'd fetch our mail from the postman; he could ride in the Old Ark or the new one and take care of it for Dad when Dad left it. He'd be a watch dog for Mom here at home. *You'd* like him, too. What's the use of getting presents of clothes on one's birthday? I don't care about

clothes, I get 'em all the time. I want a dog!"

They walked on toward school without any more conversation. Conversation was useless.

Yet the idea of it pursued Anne.

She had only three dollars to her name—oh, yes, and thirteen cents left from last month's allowance. And that would hardly buy a dog.

As Anne pondered, it seemed hopeless to buy a birthday present for Billy, since there appeared to be nothing Billy desired except a dog. She could not buy a toy dog for a joke. No, that would be dreadful. Nor did Billy need a new necktie. Candy—what's *candy*? And cake—what's a mere cake?

While helping to set the supper table, Anne consulted Mrs. Kelley. She renewed the subject while helping to make beds mornings before school. At this time Billy was off with his papers. He had started in business. He was saving to buy a bicycle. Always, Anne thought about that dog Billy wanted so much. And it was always one day nearer to the birthday!

At a pet shop she stopped to examine puppies. They cost far more than she could hope to pay. Twenty-five dollars was just dirt cheap, the man said. An Airedale, or a Scot-

tie, or a Shepherd, or a Boston bull—all of them cost so much! “I’ll think it over,” said Anne to the shopkeeper, and she backed out of the shop where a gaudy macaw screeched after her derisively.

Everywhere Anne went she saw dogs—running around the street, on leash with their masters, barking at cats in yards, yapping from parked car windows, on porches sunning themselves, gnawing bones by back porches. And every dog evidently belonged to somebody who valued him.

Then on the radio one time, she tried for a contest. She didn’t get the dog that was the prize. But soon after she heard on the radio about the Bide-a-Wee Dog Home. She telephoned them. At the time it appeared that they had no Scottie, or Boston bull, or Shepherd, or Airedale. They said they only had three dogs, each of them not yet ready to be taken out. The remainder had been placed, but if any new ones came in they’d let Anne know. And she heard nothing. Maybe, Anne considered, they thought that a girl wasn’t responsible enough to take out a pet if not backed by her mother or father.

Mother’s friend, Mrs. Wolcott, heard about Anne’s dilemma. She met Anne one day and drove her home from school in her car—the



At a pet shop she stopped to examine puppies

day Billy stayed for ball practice in the school yard. Mrs. Wolcott said, "I do believe, Anne, that I know some people who have a bull pup. They're going out of town and they want to find a home for it. Billy'd love that dog. I'm sure your father would approve. We'll run right over and look at it!"

Yet Anne again had bad luck. For when the two reached the house that day, they found the family had already left and the puppy had been given away! Anne almost cried with disappointment.

But Mrs. Wolcott was very kind. She gave Anne a box of candy. She was going out of town herself. She tried to be comforting. She said she had to go tomorrow and was going out of town, but that if she got back before the nineteenth, she'd surely telephone Anne and hunt up a dog for Billy's birthday. But she'd want to know all about the dog before they bought it. One should. She could promise nothing definite. But she hoped she might help.

There too nothing happened. She may have been rushed and she probably forgot all about Billy's birthday. She had much to do in the city. Anne couldn't blame her for forgetting.

Meanwhile, the nineteenth was very near.

Mrs. Kelley made a cake. Anne ordered ice cream. And secretly, Anne invited all Billy's gang to a supper "surprise." It was only two days before the birthday. All Billy ever said was, "I wish I had a dog."

Presents for Billy came from Father and Mother, in Anne's care. These were locked in Father's study closet. Anne had the key. Meandering through shops after school trying to find a birthday gift for Billy, all Anne found was a china dog on a penholder for Billy's desk. He'd like that. But it was not at all like having a real dog.

She bought a new pencil box with *Billy Cory* in gilt letters printed upon it. He'd like that too. And there were other trinkets—a boat-model to be made and an airplane. Billy loved so to whittle and carve models.

Then after school one day, when time was very short, she put on her hat and went out. She told Mrs. Kelley she was going to look in at the pet shop again. She felt very blue.

Down Main Street trudged Anne, just to look in at the pet shop and see if they might come down in price or charge a dog. In that case, when Dad returned, he might help pay for it. And there was still her allowance to draw on.

Then, as she walked down Main Street,

what should she see but a puppy—a bull pup too! He was a dear. As Anne watched him, it was evident that he was not with anyone. In fact, he behaved as if lost. Her heart beat wildly as she came nearer to him. “Come here. Come, puppy!” she called in accents of friendly concern meant to interest the dog and give him confidence. “Come, good doggie! Nice doggie! Good dog!”

Of course he came. What little lost dog would not? He put out a red tongue and tried to lick Anne’s hand. She was right in front of Wilkin’s Grocery Store when this happened. And seeing Anne with the puppy, one of the Wilkin’s clerks came out. He knew Anne, for the Corys traded there.

It appeared that he had been watching that puppy. “Huh!” he said. “*He* doesn’t belong around here—I guess his folks lost him or maybe they just went off an’ left him. He’s been hanging ’round here a long time. Maybe he got lost from some car. He won’t go away—been around here a whole day. I gave him some dog biscuit yesterday. If you want a dog, you’d better take him!”

So Anne bought some dog biscuit and promptly fed the puppy. He wore no license. And she took him home. Billy fortunately was off with the gang. Mrs. Kelley helped

her wash the pup. They dried him nicely with a rough towel. And Anne made a bed for him in the room over the garage. Since Father had the car, Billy was not likely to go there. He'd never suspect, and Anne's secret was safe.

Of course, Anne was supposed to notify the police and find out if anybody had lost him. This she did, but there was no report of a missing bull pup, so there was still a happy prospect that nobody might claim the dog. He was sleeping in the garage. He was really very hungry and tired. And he made no sound. The police said they'd let Anne know if they found the owner, and meanwhile she might keep the pup.

Next morning was the birthday morning. No call had come from police headquarters to claim the puppy. Anne felt happy and anticipated the party—with both the little dog and his gang to greet Billy. He would have the loveliest surprise.

But it was not safe to tell Billy yet. She gave him the pencil box and the boat models and he liked them. He didn't even look for a dog.

But if Anne had not heard from the police department by the time of the party, she could give Billy the dog and tell him she

hoped they could keep him; and if not, there'd surely be a dog when Dad came home.

Anne could scarcely wait for school to be out that day. She raced home. Mrs. Kelley met her sadly, shaking her head, her eyes filling with tears. "I'm sorry, Miss Anne," she said. "They come for the puppy while you were at school, the po-lice did, leastways they called up. Then a man with a car came. The chauffeur came in an' got him from the garage an' took him off. Poor dear! He didn't want to go either—"

Anne swallowed hard. But if it had to happen, better happen that way. She dashed up to her room and tried not to cry. It must never be known to Billy—all this!

But Mrs. Kelley was talking: "Sure, I told 'm all about it," she said, following Anne. "He said it was orders he should take the dog an' his master'd call and pay you for finding him—a reward, he said. But I told him as how you'd wanted a dog for your brother's birthday an' how this one had just walked into your arms, Miss Anne—an' you trying to make a happy birthday for Master Billy! And his folks 'way off too far to come an' get him the only birthday present he really wanted!"

But here the full account of the sad happening had to stop. For there was the unmistakable rush of Billy's steps on the back porch. He was happy. He caught a glimpse of the party table and they had to shut the door and tell him the rest—a "little party with his gang." He really liked it. He ran up to get dressed. "A party!" he cried. But they shooed him back to his room.

Not long after, Fatty Williams arrived, Sam, Mark, Buddy and all the rest. Each had some manner of gift. But none had brought a dog. And as for Anne, she hurried about fixing things and trying hard not to remember the puppy. She laid the snappers on the table. She put candy and nuts where they belonged. She lit the cake.

Upstairs the gang was having a grand time playing some game Uncle had sent—or maybe it was Aunt Prescott. Suddenly the doorbell rang and because Mrs. Kelley was in the kitchen, Anne answered the doorbell.

At the door was a gentleman. It was just dusk and in the low hall light Anne did not recognize him. He held a squirming brown bull puppy in his arms. It was the pup, red tongue and all!

"Oh," said Anne, a lump in her throat, "I really don't want any reward for taking care

of him—it was fun. I thought maybe he didn't have any home and was lost, you see! I wouldn't take anything from you. Please—I don't want my brother to see! Don't let the dog bark, *please!* Just take him away. I'm so sorry—”

But the gentleman laughed. “I didn't exactly come for that,” he said. “My man told me the story of your brother's wanting a dog. I'm a friend of Mrs. Wolcott's too. This is the dog she tried to get for you long ago. Its master gave him to me when he left town. I just took him to give him a home. And he was lost. Now, I think he ought to belong to you and your brother. I'm sure the pup will like you better than he does me! I want you to have him for your brother's birthday. I hope I'm not too late!”

“Oh, I do want him,” breathed Anne with a happy gasp of joy. “Oh, yes, we will make him happy. And my brother'll just be so happy! Oh, thank you!”

“He'll be happy all right,” returned the gentleman, “and I really find him a care. I have no yard—he'd only run off and get lost and probably come to you again, I'm sure.” He laughed. “I'm as happy as you to find a home for him,” he said. Then he was gone.

Anne rushed into the kitchen with the pup

in her arms. "Sh-h!" she said to Mrs. Kelley. "The pup is ours. He just came back. Let's put him in the dining room and call Billy and the boys!"

"Billy, time for the cake," called Anne.

The gang came with a rush. But it was Billy who opened the dining room door and saw the bull pup. "For *me*?" he screamed delightedly. "Oh, Anne, how grand! From you? Oh, you gave me the only present I really wanted. I'll never forget this birthday, never! Oh, thank you, thank you, Anne!" And while the puppy licked his hands, Billy petted him.

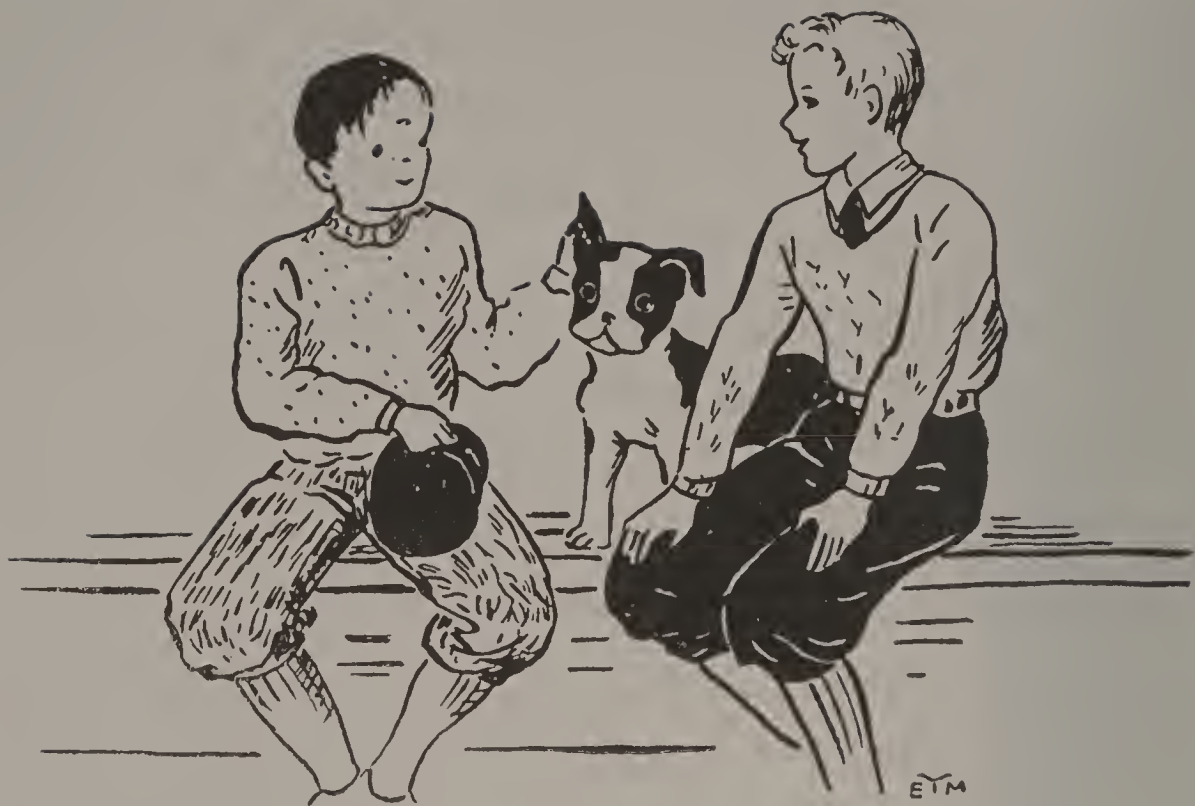
There were joyous barkings and wild yells from the gang.

"What'll I call him?" Billy asked of Anne.

"Buster," said Anne. "That's his name already. Don't give him too much cake—at least not any more than you can help. I have a box of dog biscuit for you to give him."

Oh, it certainly was a happy birthday all right!

And maybe Buster was even happier than Billy, though probably Anne was happiest of them all.



A LOST TREASURE

It would indeed be fine if we could all find treasures. Many boys have found treasures, but none of their stories is stranger than the story of how Billy Cory found his treasure.

“I’ll look out for everything! Mrs. Wilson will be over,” repeated Billy, smiling reassuringly up at the back seat where Mother looked down, a bit anxiously. She hadn’t wanted to leave, but she and Father together owned the place that was home now, and it was to help home that she had gone away. Dad was in Hampton and had telegraphed for her.

“Don’t you worry!” said Billy. “Everything will be all right!”

The bus started in a blur of noise. He stood, waving, until it became a mere speck on the horizon. He was all alone now. Mrs. Wilson would stay with him till Mother got back, and he wondered when she would be over. Slowly he turned up the driveway and climbed the hill toward the house, while Buster, with his tail down, followed at his heels.

He tried to whistle, but—the whistle died down. It looked as if their home were just as good as *gone!* Grandfather Cory had left the place to Father, but it had been willed to him by a strange old man, a friend of his whose son had run away to sea and disappeared. Grandfather's will had said that if the son ever came back, the house would belong rightfully to him.

Indirectly, yet certainly, Father had just heard that the son of the strange old man was living. He had been located and Grandfather Cory's will had said that the place was to be his if he were ever found. It was hard, but it was fair!

It meant that Billy must go to Hampton to live. There would be no more good times with the gang and they had just built the cabin on Round Top, too.

As he unlocked the kitchen door the tele-

phone rang. Billy burst into the kitchen and caught up the receiver. The room seemed strange and lonesome, even though Sport, the cat, was still curled up in the rocker where they had left her a few minutes before. "Hello!" he called. "Oh, Mrs. Wilson! Mom's *just* gone. If you're coming over soon, I'd like to go on a hike up Round Top with the gang. Mom said I could go. I won't go till you come—but they're going to start pretty soon." He waited, listening to the voice on the other end of the wire. "What? What's *that!* You—you can't come?"

He stopped in dismay. There was nobody else whom he could get to come and stay. He knew, because his mother had tried. "Never mind," he said into the mouthpiece. "I'll manage to find someone. Of course, *you* can't help things happening to you that way!"

For a moment he stood looking blankly out of the window—down the hill, across the road, over the buckwheat field that made a red carpet at the foot of Round Top. What a day for a hike up there! "Forget it," he said to himself. "You have to stay here and look after things. There isn't anybody else to feed the stock and to watch for the incubator chicks to hatch."

He went to the red rocker and scratched the cat under her ears so that she purred. But the cat was no company. He wondered what to do. He saw the dishes stacked by the sink and he took the pan and began washing them. "Mom likes to keep things looking nice," he thought. "I'll do it, too."

Then he glanced at the stove. He took off the lids and put on coal. He was putting them back when Buster's tail began to wag very hard, and Billy looked out and saw Shorty coming up the path.

"Say, I can't go," he cried. "Hike it without me—but, say! I'm all alone here and I wish you'd come back and stay tonight! Can you?"

"What do you suppose you are—a watchdog?" Shorty retorted. "Can't you lock up the house and let Buster take care of it?"

Billy shook his head. "Mrs. Wilson just called she couldn't come. She has to go down to Liston to stay with her daughter there. I can't go and leave the place. I've got some chicks hatching."

"Too bad!" murmured Shorty. "I tell you what—I'm going to stay with you. The gang's down at Mark Henderson's, and I'm going to call them and get them to come up here."

“It’s stupid for you—hanging out here with me,” said Billy. “There’s nothing much to do!”

“Got any eats?” asked Shorty. “They’d help.”

“Come on and see!” Billy led the way into the pantry.

“They’re having swell eats up there on Round Top,” Shorty said. “Roger has Frankfurters for the whole gang. And Mark Henderson’s mother made a chocolate cake. M-m. You got any?”

The cake box was empty.

“Mrs. Wilson was to have cooked things,” said Billy. “I can’t find anything—you see, Mom left so suddenly she didn’t have time to get things ready. I guess there isn’t any chocolate cake—” Then, because he wanted to please Shorty, who had given up so much for him, he suggested, “I can make some though. I’ve seen Mom do it, lots of times.” Billy hunted for the cook book but could not find it.

“Never mind,” he said. “I know what goes into it. We’ll have a layer cake with fudge filling!”

The yellow bowl was brought out, and Shorty tied an apron around Billy’s waist, while they howled with laughter. “Oh, you



Shorty tied an apron around Billy's waist

cook!" Shorty grinned. "Say, when the gang knows we had a *whole* cake for just us two, won't they wish they had stayed with us? I bet for supper I could cook Frankfurters, too, if I had 'em!"

"You butter the pans and get the flour, Short!"

So Shorty went off to the pantry, where he picked up the first jar he saw. Billy took the lid off and sniffed. "You think that's flour?" he asked doubtfully.

"Sure!" Shorty put a finger into the jar and licked it reflectively.

But the mixture did not thicken as it should. It took more cups than Billy's mother ever used. Yet it went into the cake pans. And the two started the fudge. Every few minutes they peeked at the cake. "Funny looking *cake!*" mused Shorty after some time had passed.

"Oh, it's all right," Billy answered, though inwardly a bit doubtful. "Look out, Short! That fudge filling's scorched! I can tell by the smell!" He dumped the pans on the bread board. The mixture surely was queer—not a bit like cake! "I knew something was the matter with that flour," Billy defended himself. "I bet it was something else and not flour at all!"

Shorty's face wore a deep frown. "The filling *is* gone," he announced. "Let's see your cake. Gee, it looks like a custard gone to seed!"

"What do they make custard out of?" asked Billy. "Eggs and milk? Well, I put 'em in here. But it's all thick and tough!"

Shorty put the burned fudge pan into the sink and ran water into it. "I bet that what we thought was flour was cornstarch!" In spite of himself he grinned. So did Billy. "Tough luck," he said. "Nothin' to do—nothin' to eat!" They wandered out upon the porch to sit on the steps by Buster.

"Have you heard anything at all about what's going on in Hampton?" Shorty inquired. "Is that man really alive? I mean the man whose father owned this house."

Billy nodded and went on chewing the end of a grass stem. "Guess so!" he answered.

"Did Ned Smiffin down at the store ever tell *you* any funny stories about that—that queer old man who built this house?" asked Shorty. "He did *me*!"

"Yea-a," returned Billy. "I asked my dad about it. He said he guessed it was just a story."

"About that man having a treasure?"

Billy wagged his head.

“He said it was buried right around *here*,” declared Shorty, rubbing Buster’s silky ears.

“Wish it was! We’ll need it, goodness knows, if we lose everything!” said Billy.

“Maybe we could find it!”

“How should Ned Smiffin know?”

“Well, he says he saw it when he was a kid—that queer old man showed it to him. Ned Smiffin says he saw it—lots and lots of money all in a big black tin box—but after the old man died it never was found. Let’s look for it,” Shorty suggested. “You can’t tell—there might be something to it!”

“Where would we look?”

It took quite a bit of time to decide. After that, with pick and spade, they made the rounds of the orchard. Buster, tied to the house, kept guard, though they did not go far. They upturned big stones; they investigated a mound in the orchard; they worked very hard. “Might be here!” one of them would suggest. “Or here!” the other would say. By this time they were not only beginning to believe whole-heartedly in the existence of the treasure, but they were confident that they would find it.

“How about letting the gang in on this?” Shorty asked. “What do you think?”

Billy thought the others might help.

The two boys hunted until dusk, then they left the shovel and the pick and went into the house to forage for supper. Over a hot dish of canned beans they continued to talk about the treasure. Shorty was of the opinion that they could spend the evening hunting in the house. "It might be inside," he insisted. "It might, you know." He looked about. "Better lock up tight tonight," he added.

They locked up tight and let Buster loose outdoors. But a catch on the hall window was not right—a screw was missing.

The wind, too, was coming up, and it looked as though a storm was on its way. The wind sang in the chimney. The blinds rattled. Shorty started at every new sound. "What's that?" he kept asking. "What's that noise, Billy?"

They listened. First, it was a mouse in the pantry; then it was a queer sound outside somewhere. "Buster's scratching on the porch with his claws," Billy suggested. "Or maybe the wind's doing it."

"Sounds like footsteps to me," said Shorty. "Do you suppose somebody saw us digging for the treasure?"

"Shucks!" said Billy. "You're just jumpy!" Shorty subsided.

But the noises continued. They grew stranger and more frequent. Shorty's eyes were wide. "I know somebody's outside," he insisted.

"Buster's on guard," answered Billy. But though he went to the door and whistled, Buster did not come!

"He's gone off hunting rabbits," declared Shorty. "Lots of good Buster is!"

"Then I'm going to see what's up!" said Billy suddenly. "I'm the one who's left here to look out for things. You stay here!" He was out of the door before his chum could stop him.

Shorty stood in the doorway, straining his eyes to catch another glimpse of Billy as he disappeared in the darkness. He thought he saw an outline of a figure that dashed from the depths of the dark clump of cedars below the house. He could not see what it was. Then, unmistakably, there was the sound of a scuffle.

And then came Billy's call: "Short! Short! Short!"

It was a cry for help! In an instant Shorty forgot everything else and dashed after Billy into the blackness down by the cedars on the hill.

To Shorty as he dashed off to help Billy

it seemed evident that someone must have watched them as they hunted for treasure that afternoon.

Shorty's heart thumped wildly—his one thought was to get to Billy. His foot slipped. He tripped over something that moved. He started to pick himself up—his hand encountered something furry. It was Buster's cold nose that touched his cheek!

At that moment he heard Billy's voice. "Oh, you fellows! You thought you'd get something on us! You didn't though!" Derisive squeals went up from the gang. "We did, too! We saw you, lookin' in at the window!"

"Well, we might've known it was you," came from Shorty. "But there was a reason why we had a right to get jumpy. We know something, Billy and I do. *We* did something this afternoon—something *you'd* like to know about!"

"So did we do something," yelled Fatty Brown. "*We* roasted hot dogs! We had chocolate cake!"

"So did we have chocolate cake. Didn't we, Billy?" Shorty squealed.

And Billy, overcome with laughter, declared, between giggles, "Sure! Oh, you ought to have seen *our* cake! Some cake,

that! I'll bet yours wasn't like it! You ought to've been around! You missed it, you did!"

"A whole cake—fudge fillin', too!" said Shorty. "Eh, Billy?"

"Oh, was that what you did—just stuff cake?" Roger sniffed. "We did somethin' worth while! *We* started a chimney for our gang's cabin—that's what *we* did!"

"Say, Billy, you sure missed it!" exclaimed Brownie Bates. "An' I'll bet you did something here besides eat cake!"

"Who said we ate cake?" Shorty inquired. "Did anybody?"

"You got any *left*?"

"Come on in out of the storm," suggested Billy.

"We just came over to put little Billy to bed!" declared Phil Wilson. "We're going to stay with him all night, so's to see nothing happens to him. We planned it all there in our cabin on Round Top, and as many as could just came along. Some had to go home—James J. and his pal—an' the rest. But we came over to make it hot for Billy an' Shorty, 'cause they backed out."

"They did not back out," put in Roger. "We came along to give Billy a good time. An' we wanted to see if we could get him worked up over noises. Gee! When Buster

was out on the porch and scratching hard, I thought I'd perish! Beany began thumpin' with his foot so that you wouldn't think somebody friendly was patting Buster."

The gang howled over the joke. "Say, you an' Short, what've you been doing anyhow?" Roger asked. "You goin' to get to keep on living here, Billy Cory?"

"Don't know," Billy Cory answered. "Things look pretty tough just now. Dad wants to do the right thing, of course. But say, *that's* what is bothering me; suppose we found something here in this lot—or somewhere 'round this place? Would it be ours or that man's—if he got things?"

"What would you find?" Roger inquired.

"You wait an' I'll tell you," Billy answered as he led the way into the kitchen. "Look out and wipe your feet, there! I'm housekeeper here! No rough-house now!" he urged. "What do you say that I get some apples and we pop corn? You just wait till you hear about it! Don't you let on, Short! Don't you do it!"

"What do you take me for?" retorted Shorty. "Look out, Roger! That chair belongs to the cat!" There was a wild hubbub as the gang settled itself.

“Now,” said Billy, trying to look impressive, “you all know how things are here. Well, Shorty came along just after Mom went, and he said if I wasn’t goin’ on the hike, he wasn’t either—good old Short! We got to talking. He says that Ned Smiffin told him that there was a box of treasure maybe buried ’round here!” He paused. “Now then, what’d you say if *we’d* be the ones to find it? And if we did, wouldn’t it be *ours*?”

“Sure, it’d belong to us!” Roger and Fatty insisted.

“Sure,” echoed the rest.

“It wouldn’t go with the house?”

They were sure it would not. “You don’t have to own a desert island to go there an’ find treasure, do you?” demanded Beany.

“That’s what I say,” cried Shorty. “And Ned Smiffin says he saw the box once when he was a kid. He says it *is* true! He says other people know it. When that man’s son went off—you know he ran away from home ’cause his dad wanted him to go into an office an’ work—and *he* wanted to go off to sea an’ have adventures—well, he never came back. And the old man was ever so cut up. He began getting queer. He lived all alone—only a housekeeper to look after things. An’ he went in for reading fortunes

by the stars—an' he'd never want to see anybody—an' he'd spend most of his time out in a study that was out in our shed then. He was ever so interested in history and things like that; he had lots of queer books—the kind most people don't read. And Ned Smiffin says once when he was little, he came over the fields and he was pickin' berries—and he looked 'round an' he saw that funny old man with a tin box under his arm—”

“What sort of a box?” Beany wanted to know.

“Can't you hear? He said a tin box, didn't he?” said Roger.

“Go on,” ordered Roger. “What then?”

“Well, the funny old man called to him. He said, ‘What will I do with it? What will I do with it? He will never come back—never—never! I think a heap of it, and the folks down there in the village—they wouldn't understand. It's worth a lot—but nobody shall get it! What'll I do with it?’ ”

“Oh, gee!” murmured Roger.

“An' Ned Smiffin says that he began digging—”

“*Where?*”

“Down in the orchard by the fence where the berries grow—”

“*We* hunted there,” said Shorty, “but we

didn't find anything!" He took up the story. "Ned Smiffin said he *saw* the money! He told his father and his father went an' looked, but nobody ever found it—and nobody ever knew what happened to that box!"

"We'll get it," Roger said. "Say, it's awful late. We ought to put Billy Cory to bed!"

Billy wagged his head. "Little fellows like you ought to've been in dreamland long ago," he retorted. "We'd better pile in now, so's we can get up an' at things tomorrow early. You got to go home an' do your chores, I suppose? But you can come 'long back and we'll hunt! I'll bet with all of us there'll be something doing!"

Then, just as they were starting for bed, Buster began barking.

"Huh?" Billy paused as he lifted the stove lids to put coal into the stove before going upstairs. "What'd you say about Buster's not being a good watchdog, Short? Listen there!"

The dog stood up with his paws on the window sill, then ran to the door and whined to be let out.

Then he began to bark again. The gang peered through the dark window back of Shorty. Billy fixed the stove drafts, locked the cellarway door. He came up behind

Beany. "There's something doing—for sure this time," he declared. "Buster is no fool dog! *Somebody is around!*"

"Oh, likely somebody down on the road—maybe another dog," suggested Phil.

"Not that bark!" declared Billy. "No, sir! That bark means something! I've got to see what's up!"

"What'd you do, if it was somebody?" asked Roger.

"What business has anybody to be 'round at this time of night?" exclaimed Phil. "Say, fellows, did you see *that?*"

The gang drew closer to the window. They even flung it up and leaned out so that the rain beat upon their faces.

"Light's moving down there."

"'Tisn't a *lantern!*"

"Say! It's a man!"

"Sure! It's a man!"

"Hadn't you better open the door an' let Buster out, Billy?" Roger asked. "He'd go for anybody!"

"Some of us had better go along, don't you think?" said Shorty.

Billy unbolted the kitchen door and took a firm hold on Buster's collar. "All right," he said. "Anybody want to come with me? I don't mind going alone!"

Buster grew more excited—it seemed as if something very strange must be happening.

Drawing their coat collars up, they stepped out into the storm after Billy—Shorty, Roger, Phil.

“It’s an automobile!” cried Shorty.

“Somebody’s yelling!” said Roger.

“Listen!” insisted Billy.

But Buster’s voice drowned out all other sounds.

“Let the dog loose!” commanded Roger.

“Go on, let him loose!” echoed Shorty.

“Don’t you do it!” Phil contradicted.

“Something might happen to him!”

“I know what I’m going to do, you!” said Billy. “Nobody need tell me! This is my place! Buster and I are here to see to things! If anything’s happening down there, Buster and I go down and find out about it! Do you suppose my dad would be afraid, if anybody needed help? I’m going down there to see what’s up, fellows! You can go on back into the house!”

“It’s sort of wet,” Phil suggested weakly.

“You don’t need to make trouble for yourself!” said Roger.

“Oh, you guys go on back,” sniffed Shorty.

“You can telephone the police, if anything

should happen. Come along, Buster, old man! Here, Billy, I'll take hold of the other side of his collar. *Come on!*"

It was dark going down the hill. Billy and Shorty could scarcely distinguish the familiar outlines of grass and bushes upon the slope. Buster tugged at his collar, pulling the boys after him.

There was no light at the foot of the hill now. Voices could be heard—excited talk. The boys halted. "Quiet, Buster!" ordered Billy. Then he called, "Hey, what are you doing down there?"

Buster growled.

"What's up?" cried Shorty.

"We're ditched! Got any light?" a man's deep voice answered. "Is there a house anywhere near? Don't know where in thunder I am!"

"Anybody hurt?" called Billy.

"Came near it! Can you get a lantern?"

"Look out, Buster! Be quiet! It's all right!" Billy cried. "We'll get one!" He turned to Shorty.

"You go an' get it, Shorty." They had walked on and were now near the dark bulk of a big open touring car. There was a woman inside. A little child was crying.

The dark, heavy form of a man loomed

up in the gloom. "Where's the house?" he demanded. "Guess you'll have to take us in over night. No getting out of this without help. We're soaked through! Got off the right road, I guess. Where are we anyway? Are we anywhere near Reilly?"

Shorty laughed. "'Bout's near as the moon," he said. "I don't know where the lantern is, Billy," he expostulated.

"You go an' get it," the man exclaimed, coming over to Billy. "Ask your folks if they can take my wife and me—it'll do if we can just get shelter. Hurry, boy!"

Billy hesitated. "Guess you'd better come along with us," he said. "The folks aren't home; I'm the one that's lookin' after the place—me and the gang are up there. 'Course I don't know who I'm takin' in," he added, "but my Dad never would turn anybody down if he needed help. You can have my room. It's all right, Buster. Stop!"

The man took the carriage rug and two bags from the car. His wife carried the child who had stopped crying. Billy with Shorty and Buster led the way toward the house.

They walked on in the wind. They came to the kitchen porch where the gang drew back, staring, open-mouthed.

"Their car ran into a ditch," explained

Billy briefly. "They want a lantern—can you find it?" He took a candle from the high old-fashioned mantel shelf under which the modern range had been placed. "I'll show you the room," he said to the woman. Her dark ulster was dripping.

"Thank you so much," she murmured. "The baby's very cross. I hope I can get him to sleep."

The gang went for the lantern. Shorty arranged chairs in front of the stove where the rug could be dried. The man threw his coat over the rug. Then he stood looking about the place curiously. Shorty watched him. His eyes rested on the old chimney piece with its high shelf, upon the corner cupboard, the cellar door close by. He seemed to have forgotten Shorty altogether, so intent was he on his surroundings.

The gang came back, and after that went to the barn to hunt further. And then Billy returned.

"Maybe it's down cellar. I'll go and look for the lantern. Perhaps I can find it!" Billy exclaimed. He went to the cellar door. Shorty followed him.

At the foot of the stairs, the door fast behind them, Billy paused. "I had to take 'em in, Shorty, didn't I?" he asked. "You couldn't

turn a woman away with a baby. I guess they're not crooks. He seems all right. I'm sure Dad would never have said 'No!' A lot of old junk was brought in here just before Dad left. It came in from the shed where it was stored. Dad sold the stuff. Perhaps the lantern's back of it on that hook."

They did not find it.

"When I was alone there—that man sure acted queer," Shorty answered. "He looked around at everything mighty sharp. If he wasn't on the level and knew where anything was in the place, he could've fixed it up all right like this!"

Billy sniffed. "He told a straight story," he insisted. "He got off the road—going to Reilly. That's at least twenty miles from Hampton. It was easy to do without lights when his batteries gave out."

"Hope so," returned Shorty. "He looks funny to *me*. Did you see his *hand*?"

"What'd you expect? 'Course it was dirty!"

Neither was the lantern hidden in the dark behind the stairs. "Honest, now, Short—no kidding! They're on the level. They're no crooks. What was the matter with his hand?"

"You can look for yourself," Shorty

snapped. "If you don't think of something then—well, you needn't. There's the lantern. There *it is* back of the funny old desk! Queer place to have a desk—in the cellar!"

"Dad put that stuff here last week," said Billy. "The second-hand man in Palen was going to call for it. It was some stuff that used to be out in the shed."

"Might have belonged to that queer old man," suggested Shorty. He began examining it, pulling down the lid, drawing out its drawers.

"Oh, my Dad's been all over it," said Billy. "He'd have found anything if it was *there!*" He lit the lantern and then came over to where Shorty poked through the pigeon-holes. "Come on!"

"Wait a minute!"

"Oh, come along, you!"

Shorty reluctantly slammed the lid of the queer old secretary. "Nothing doing," he said.

"Course not—that was Granddaddy's desk. Dad knows all about it."

Shorty followed Billy. "You look at his *hand*," he whispered before Billy opened the kitchen door.

As the stranger took the lantern, Billy saw his hand. As Short had intimated, it *was*

queer. It was tattooed in blue markings—a ship with a star over it.

The man saw Billy's surprised look. "I ran away to sea," he said, turning toward the door. "*That's* where I got that! Maybe you would be interested to know that I've dropped right into the very house where I used to live when I was a lad. I never knew till I'd come inside. Some changes—I haven't seen the place for over twenty years! That comes of getting off the road in a storm—batteries all gave out. Well, I must go fix her up, for the storm's going down." The door slammed after him.

"By Jiminy!" exclaimed Shorty. "Supposing he *does* look around for his father's box of money?"

"I suppose he'd have a right to it, if he came on it," mused Billy. "Maybe he might know about it—maybe he mightn't. He was away when all that happened."

Roger came yawning into the room. "Say!" he cried. "The fellows couldn't find that lantern."

"Where are they?"

"Turned in upstairs. Some of them are in the attic. What's up?"

"We've got *somebody* here," Billy whispered. "It's the man my Dad was going to

see after he'd seen the lawyer—old Wheeler's son!"

"Not *him!*"

Billy nodded. "It must be."

"Whew! What're you goin' to do about it?"

"Nothin' anybody can do now," returned Billy, "except get him out of the house in the morning. There's no treasure up there in my room. The only thing I think much about is my Grandfather Hudson's old bed with those funny round knobby posts. He can't go off with *that*. We'll just watch and when he's gone we'll look around here. Now, you and Mark can go up into the attic. There's a bed up there. Shorty can have the dining room couch, and Buster'n I'll be the ones to stay here where we can look after things an' know what's going on. My, aren't you tired? It's almost two o'clock in the morning!"

"All right! I'll turn in," Roger yawned. "If you don't wake me up in the morning, I'll sleep till nobody knows when. Be sure to wake me, won't you?"

"I'll hang around till he comes back and goes to bed," said Shorty. "What's that?"

Billy cocked his ear. "Up in my room, something's tumbled down somewhere!"

“Suppose *she*’s doing anything funny?”

“What could *she* do?”

They were on the stairs, listening.

“Better go and see,” Billy cried. “I’ll just go ask what’s up an’ take a peek.”

Shorty ran up the stairs behind him. Billy knocked at the door. “Anything the matter?” he inquired in his most polite manner. “I heard something fall—did the baby tumble?”

Shorty gave him a poke in the ribs. He chuckled. “Gee,” he whispered, “one on you! A baby making a noise like that! *That* wasn’t any baby!”

“Of course not,” Billy whispered back. “Sh!”

The door opened.

The woman had taken off her long cloak and wore a brown dress. She was smiling as she held the door open. “No, nothing’s the matter,” she said.

“I thought I heard something fall,” Billy excused himself.

“Yes,” she replied, with a gesture that took in the old four-poster with its round knobs atop each post, “the baby took a fancy for the big balls, as he calls them. He’s strong for a three-year-old. He stood right up when I was not looking and managed to

unscrew one of the heavy tops. That's what fell."

Surprise flashed over Billy's face. "Why—" he began. Then he stopped short.

"Maybe you'll screw it tight again," she suggested. "I will give the baby something else to think about while you do it. He's going to cry if he is not allowed to play with it."

She picked up the baby together with his toy dog. And she carried them off to the further side of the room and began playing with the baby to divert him.

Billy examined the ball-like top of the bed post.

Shorty, standing just outside in the hall, saw him take the round ornament and examine it. He seemed, for a moment, intent on looking *inside* the bed post. The mother was intent upon the child.

Suddenly Billy bent forward. "Short," he called.

Shorty came quickly.

"Look here," whispered Billy under his breath. "Don't let *her* see you—" He put his hand into the lower opening in the bed post where there was a kind of round hiding place and drew out a strange old-fashioned watch and chain. It was wrapped in a piece of yellowed paper that had writing on it. He

gave Shorty a quick surprised look. "Here it goes back," he called aloud toward the further end of the room to the woman. "I'll bet that ball top can't come off *again!*"

She thanked him.

Billy shut the door carefully. He and Shorty went down the hallway in a kind of daze, the watch in Billy's pocket, safe. Coming downstairs, they met the man returning from his car. They said, "Good-night."

In the kitchen, Billy locked the door. Then he took the watch and paper from his pocket and bent close to the lamp while Shorty hung over him excitedly. "We sure found something," said Billy. "Funny, I always thought those posts were turned solid. It must have been a hiding place for jewels! Let's see the writing." He tried to decipher it. "Can you make it out, Short? Look! It's Grandfather Cory's writing. I've seen it in a book he gave Dad."

Shorty puzzled over it. "I have it," he exclaimed. "I think I have it. It says, '*Look in the secret compartment and give what you find to Thomas.*'"

"My!" exclaimed Shorty. "Where's there any secret compartment? Do you suppose *that* means our treasure?"

"It might be that Grandfather Cory's

friend did leave him that box of money—” mused Billy. “It seems to go with that scrap of paper. What say we wake up the gang and show this to ’em?”

“Awfully late,” said Shorty. “I don’t believe *anything’d* ever wake ’em up! And, anyhow, we couldn’t go knocking around with those people upstairs. They’d catch on—a bunch of us like that, looking all over for a secret compartment. We’ve got to wait till those people go and lie low till we get ’em out of here.”

“Well,” Billy said, “what gets me is where there is a secret compartment—or whether or not it’s here now! The house has been done over. A secret compartment might be a panel that’d been sealed up! Who’s going to get at it unless some baby comes and knocks into it the way that little boy upstairs did? *We* never knew about that hiding place in the bed post! Mom told me the posts were turned solid. Dad couldn’t have known about it!”

“Well, maybe it was luck you took into the house when you let that baby in,” grinned Shorty.

“You couldn’t ’ve let him stay out in that storm,” retorted Billy. “Nobody that had a home would do *that!*”

“I can’t think where there’d be any secret compartments,” Shorty said. “We can’t hunt any more now. Come on to bed. Wait till *they* go!”

“Pshaw! Let’s think! I’m not sleepy!” Billy exclaimed. “Say, Shorty, how about that old secretary down cellar?”

“You said your Dad had been all through it.”

“Well, he didn’t know about the jewel-hiding-place in the bed post—”

Shorty thought.

“We’d better look now,” Billy urged. “Everybody’s asleep! They might hang around tomorrow or maybe snoop around. Besides that, the man down in Palen might come to get that old junk Dad sold him. It’d have to go—” He found a flashlight. “Lucky I didn’t remember this when that man asked for the lantern,” he said. “I’d have given it to him to use.” They went carefully down cellar. Buster was shut out-of-doors.

“Funny—the secret places they used to have to put things,” Shorty mused.

“They had to—didn’t have safes! Hope we find that compartment.”

“Gee! Hope we do.”

The two stood before the old secretary. It was dark in the cellar. Outside it seemed as

if the storm had abated, but it certainly was queer down cellar at that time of night—and hunting for a mysterious something called a secret compartment!

“I didn’t see anything when I looked at it,” explained Shorty.

“Well, I could look all day—I don’t see anything.” Billy nodded.

“Let’s take out the drawers and look behind ’em.”

But there was nothing there.

Carefully Billy felt all over inside the desk. “N. G.!” he exclaimed, bringing out his hand dirty with the thick dust of many years’ storage in the shed.

Below the top that let down was a closet for odds and ends. “I looked there, too,” said Shorty. “Nothing doing there.”

Billy felt it over. Shorty seemed right.

The two sat down upon an inverted wooden box and looked at the secretary. “It looks as if it might have a secret place,” Billy said, thoughtfully. “Dad *told* me Grandfather Cory once used this desk. Funny! Do you suppose we could get that rubbish out of the way and look at it from the side? There might be some concealed compartment at the side.”

“Can you tell by rapping the wood?” asked Shorty.

But they could not tell, though they rapped many places and poked many others.

“Press down here.”

“It’s no good!”

“Sometimes you pull ’em out, I think.”

The two pulled at the old desk where it seemed to offer anything to pull.

“Nothing doing!”

“Come on up to bed!”

“No, sir! You run along. I’m seeing this through,” Billy declared. “I haven’t finished with it yet. I’m going to feel all over it, and go all over every *inch* of it!” He ran his thumb under the front opening where there was simply no suggestion of anything at all but a narrow panel that seemed the base of the desk. “I’ll bet there’s something here,” he cried. “Look! It might be, Short!”

“It might.”

There was no way to pull. There might be a hidden spring somewhere. The panel was about ten inches high. It took in the entire baseboard around the desk. It might be only that.

Suddenly, under Billy’s finger—*something moved!* The two boys started back in astonishment. Before them, there had opened out a real secret compartment! The panel had let down!

Billy grasped the flash and bent over it. "Gee Whittaker!" he ejaculated. "Gee Whittaker! Did you ever?"

There, in the compartment, stood a large black box about eighteen inches long. Upon the top a long envelope had been placed. There was nothing else there!

Billy drew out the box and the envelope. The envelope was sealed. It was directed to Dad. The box had a small key. It was heavy—that box! *Might* be the very money box they had hoped to find! They turned the key and lifted the lid—there lay coins—strange coins—*the box was full of them!* It was the treasure!

"Say, wouldn't the gang be upset if they thought we'd gone and found it all alone?"

"Yea-a—but they wanted to go to sleep and we—we kept at it!"

"What'll they say when they know?"

"They'll wish they had stayed awake, I'll bet!"

The two sat gloating over the treasure.

"Queer-looking money," said Shorty.

"What'll you do with it?"

"Don't know. If it really belongs to us, maybe we can buy back the home! I'd hate to lose this old place—I don't want to go off and leave you and the gang. No fun living

in a city," sighed Billy. "This ought to belong to you and me—we found it." Billy had been turning over in his hands the sealed envelope that was addressed to Dad. "I can't open it," he said. "That's Dad's business."

"Looks as if it might be a legal document," mused Shorty. "Do you suppose it could have been a will that your grandfather made later than that other?"

"Might be! You never can tell," mused Billy. "Gee! What's that? Buster's barking fit to kill! You don't suppose somebody else's gone an' gotten ditched?" He caught up the box and the envelope. He stopped short. "The safest place for these is right here," he decided. And he put them back and closed the panel. The two rushed upstairs. Now, surely, there was something coming up the driveway! It was a car honking. Buster barked wildly around it. It stopped.

Billy and Shorty peered into the night. The storm had cleared. The moon was out. By its light who should get down from the car but *Mom! Sure, Mom!* Of all things at this time of night—*Mom!*

Billy rushed to the door shouting, "Mother! Mother!" He swung the door wide and ran into her arms. "*How* did you get back?"

She laughed. Uncle Ned came into the room. "She came back with me in my car," he laughed. "There was no train—and she wanted to get back right away after seeing the lawyer. You aren't going to feel bad about having to leave this place, are you, Billy? It's going to go to that man—that's all legal. The will stands."

"Say! Say!" panted Billy in his excitement. "Mom! Listen! He's upstairs in my room—that man is—now!" He laughed wildly. "He was ditched with his car. I was looking after things and I ran out to see what was up—and he and his wife an' their baby came up here. Then, listen, Mom! That baby got hold of the big ball on top of my bed post—the one at the top of the bed—I mean the head—see! It—it *unscrewed*. I heard it fall on the floor an' went up—and what did I find but a hiding place under the knob and *this watch and this paper!*" He held them out, jumping about wildly, knowing nothing that he did.

Uncle Ned looked at them, astonished. "My father's writing, Anne," he said, turning to Mom. "He must have put that there in his illness. Mother left us shortly after. It was meant for her to find."

"But that's not all," gasped Shorty. "We

found—the secret compartment—yes, we did—Billy and I—we found it! There's a box of money—and a queer envelope, too!"

"Mom! Mom! Come on down and see it," cried Billy. "Come along! Oh, I'm so glad you came home just now!"

"Oh, Billy, I couldn't wait to get back," declared Mother. "But I know you've taken care of everything splendidly—and, think, dear, of this! It's wonderful!"

They filed down to the old desk. Billy pressed the panel. It opened. He drew out the box and the envelope. Mother caught her breath!

Uncle Ned took the things. "His old box of coins!" he said. "And it looks like a will!" His face showed his astonishment as he slit the envelope. "A later will," he announced. "I always said there was one, Anne!"

"Grandfather left it for Dad," said Uncle Ned. "We never found it, though we'd heard the story. The collection is very valuable. Old Mr. Wheeler loved your grandfather. He said he wanted the coins to be his. Now, they are Dad's, but I think he'll want you to have them—you found them!"

It seemed too good to be true—home really theirs! And a treasure too!

Uncle Ned led the way upstairs. Finally

everybody was in bed. It was hard to go to sleep.

Billy woke at sunrise. He jumped softly out of bed. "Surprise Mom!" he said to himself. He splashed in the basin and hurried downstairs where the cat slept, curled up in Mother's red rocker. How different everything looked now that Mother was home! It wasn't lonely any more! And they were not going to give up their home. It was theirs! He smiled at the thought of last night and whistled softly. Buster came, wagging his good-morning.

Billy filled the coal hod—that funny old secretary looked at him through the grayness of the cellar. He filled the stove; he fixed the drafts; he put the cereal on to cook in the double boiler.

A footfall on the stairs! It was Mr. Wheeler come down to telephone for help at the garage. "Family come home last night?" he asked.

"Mother and Uncle Ned," Billy explained. "Guess you were going to meet my Dad in Hampton. Well, maybe you'd like to know—last night—just luck—Short and I found a later will. Uncle Ned says it changes everything—I hope you don't feel bad. Course I want to keep my home!"

Mr. Wheeler paused on his way to the telephone. He looked astonished. But he looked amused also. "Boy," he said. "I might as well tell you—I never wanted this place. My home suits me, and I'm glad to have things settled." He turned to the telephone. "Have to go down to the car now."

Mother came downstairs. She laughed happily at Billy's surprise. "Still looking?" she said.

"Guess the gang had better wake up an' hear the news," answered Billy. He was above in a jiffy. "Wake up!" he cried. "Short an' I found that treasure!"

"Gosh!—you didn't!" came a chorus of voices.

Fatty and the rest of the bunch came running from the attic. "What's the row?" they asked.

"What'll you do with the treasure?" they demanded. "Old coins like that—must be valuable!"

"Hooray!" squealed Beany. "Hooray for Billy!"

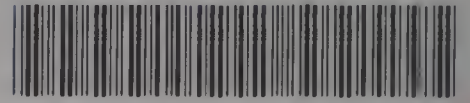
"Say we celebrate with a hike up to Round Top?"

Mother came down the hall and paused at the open door. "Hooray!" she cried. "Hooray for the treasure hunters!"





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