

FICTION

Ellis Parker Butler

Swatty

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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SWATTY
A Story of Real Boys

By Ellis Parker Butler

With Illustrations

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

1920

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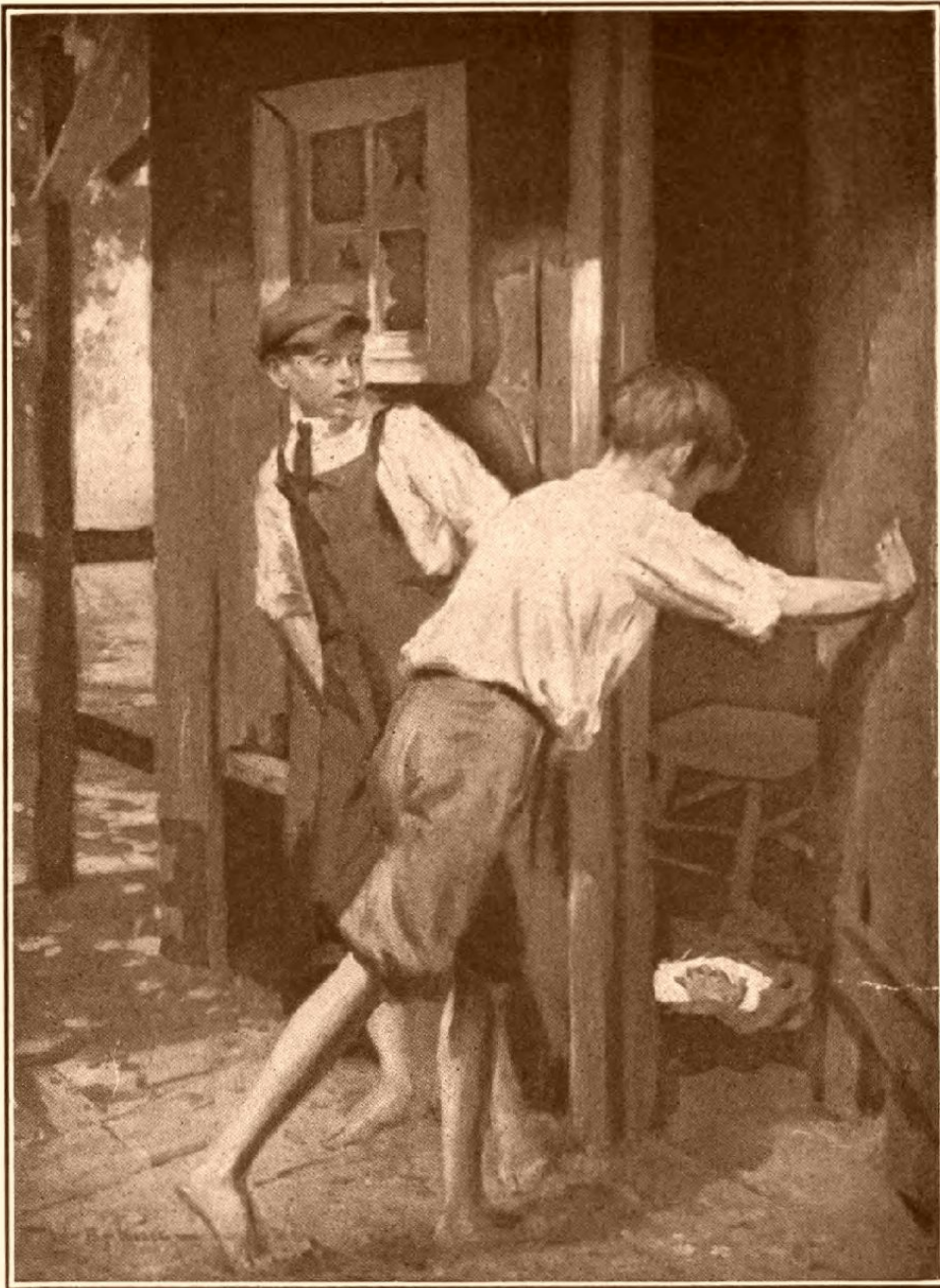
BY
ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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SWATTY JUST STOOD AND LOOKED (page 195)

TO FRED ERNST SCHMIDT

OF MUSCATINE, IOWA THE FAITHFUL COMPANION OF MY BOYHOOD THIS BOOK IS
MOST GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

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SWATTY

A STORY OF REAL BOYS

I. THE BIG RIVER

I guess if teachers always knew how lickings were going to turn out they wouldn't lick us fellows so much. I am thinking about Miss Murphy, the one that taught the room me and Swatty and Bony was in, and about the time she was going to lick Swatty. One of the times. There were plenty of others.

You see, me and Swatty and Bony is chums, and we go together mostly, but this was when we was in Miss Murphy's room. She's a good-looker, but she's a tartar, too, when it comes to licking.

The way of it was this: My sister Fan was mushy over Swatty's brother Herb and she didn't care who knew it, because they were engaged, and Fan was fixing up her things to get married in, and she wished I was a girl so I could be her flower girl at the wedding, but she didn't know what she'd do with me. She thought maybe she'd lock me in the cellar, she said, but she didn't mean it. She was always coddling me and Swatty. She'd cod us that way, and then she'd give us a dime or something. She was all right, and Swatty thought so too.

So then Fan and Herb had a fight, like girls and fellows always do have; but this was a good one. It was because Herb said maybe Fan would like to have Miss Murphy for a bridesmaid, and Fan got mad because Herb had gone with

Miss Murphy once. So then Fan wouldn't forgive Herb. Herb came over and fought for three evenings, and then Swatty brought a note from him to Fan, and I took one from Fan to Herb, and that was the end of it. The note I took had a ring in it, because I could feel it. Then Fan just moped around the house and cried some, and after a while Herb had to go and teach the eighth grade at school, because Professor Martin broke his leg on the ice the janitor ought to have scraped off the steps but didn't. So right away Herb began to get thick with Miss Murphy, but that didn't make any difference to me. As soon as a fellow hasn't got one girl he has another one, anyway, and I didn't blame Herb. I was just sorry for Fan. And I thought Herb was crazy to make up to a school-teacher, especially a tartar like Miss Murphy. She was an awful licker. She'd lick a fellow for anything.

Well, one day me and Swatty was going to school and we was talking at each other the way we always did, and I said he thought he was great, didn't he, because his brother was Miss Murphy's beau, and Miss Muiphy wouldn't lick him when his brother was her beau. I didn't mean anything, I just said it, but Swatty hauled off and hit me one and dared me to say that again. So I said it again, and all the fellows got around and yelled "Fight! Fight!" and I had to fight him. It would have been a pretty good fight if Miss Murphy hadn't come along. She jumped right at us and grabbed us both.

"Who started this fight?" she asked, hopping mad.

"He did," I said.

"Didn't neither!" said Swatty. "He did."

"Who struck the first blow?" says Miss Muiphy.

Well, everybody told her Swatty did, which was the truth, and she let me go.

"Just as I thought, you--you little bulldozer," she said, shaking him. "You've been getting entirely too uppish of late, young man. You think you can take advantage of--of circumstances; but I'll teach you a thing or two. Get into school there, and wash yourself, and see that you are in your seat when the bell rings."

So Swatty did it. Me and the Bony Highlander stayed out till the bell rung, and then we went in, too, and as we went past Swatty's desk he whispered, "She thinks she's going to lick me, but she ain't."

"Bet she does, if she said so," I says; and I bet she would, too. So did the Bony Highlander, because we knew she was the sort that would rather lick a fellow than not.

Well, that was in the morning, and they never lick at noon because the way some fellows wriggle and twist it takes a long time to lick them, and it would use up the noon hour. So they lick after school in the afternoon when there is plenty of time. So me and the Bony Highlander waited for Swatty, and we tried to scare him. We told him we bet Miss Murphy would make him holler, because she licked with a rawhide pony switch and whipped on the legs where the switch would wrap around and sting, but we couldn't get Swatty to even pretend he might holler. He said no teacher in the world could make him holler. We all said it. Or, I don't know whether the Bony Highlander said it or not. He'd never been licked in school. He wasn't the kind that gets licked, somehow. But he was a pretty nice fellow, anyway. We liked him just as well, but not as well as Swatty and me liked each other of course, because me and Swatty was cow-cousins.

Me and Swatty was both raised on the milk of the same cow, but it was Schwartzes' cow, and when I was being raised on it Herb Schwartz used to fetch the milk around, the way Swatty does now. I guess that's how Herb got to know Fan. But the Bony Highlander was just a kid that moved into the neighborhood.

His name wasn't really Bony Highlander, but we called him that because when he was reading a piece of poetry out of the Reader in school, and ought to have said "bonny Highlander," he said "bony Highlander." But we mostly called him Bony for short, like we called Schwartzy Swatty for short. He was all right, but he never started to do things; he just went along when we did them, and waited on the outside of the fence, and things like that.

Well, we waited on the corner for Swatty that afternoon until the bell rung but he didn't come, so we went along, and he was at school already, and after he had stayed in to be licked and Miss Murphy let him out, he told us why he went early. He knew where she kept her rawhide, in the closet at the end of the room on the shelf where the chalk boxes were, and he went early at noon and took his pocket-knife and cut the rawhide into little pieces about an inch long. He laid them all out on the shelf in a row, and he said he nearly died laughing when she went to pick it up and it was all in pieces. So Miss Murphy went to get another rawhide from another teacher, but everybody had gone home, and she told Swatty she would tend to him to-morrow.

"I'd rather have been licked to-day and then I'd be done with it," I said, but Swatty didn't say so.

"If you've got a licking," he said, "you've got it, and you can't ever un-get it, but I ain't ever going to get this one. I'll run away first."

"Ah, I bet you get it to-morrow," I said, and the Bony Highlander said so too.

"Bet I don't!" said Swatty. So we made a bet. I bet him my clay pipe against a nigger-shooter rubber he had.

So the next day was when we'd know, and at noon Swatty came over to my barn to get some oilcloth we had in the barn to put in his pants so the licking wouldn't hurt so much, and I guessed I would win the bet. But he couldn't fix the

oilcloth so it would do any good and let him sit down. He thought Miss Murphy would be onto it if he couldn't sit down. So he gave that up. So we went to school.

When school was nearly out Swatty got up and started to walk down his aisle and up the next, like he was going out for a drink, but Miss Murphy, who was doing an example on the blackboard for the B class, turned around and saw him.

"Where are you going?" she asked, like tacks in a bottle.

"Just to get a drink," said Swatty.

"You take your seat this instant!" said Miss Murphy, and when she said it, Swatty started to run; but she got there first and headed him off and grabbed him by the arm. He kicked at her shins, but she gave him a shake that made him see stars and marched him back to the end of the room. I thought she was going to take him to his seat, but she didn't.

Our schoolhouse has four rooms on a floor--two in front and two in back--and the hall comes in the middle, but it don't run all the way from front to back. In the middle in front on the second floor there is a little room with some books in it, and they call it the library room.

It has a window and three doors--one into the hall and one into our room, and one into the room across the hall. So Miss Murphy yanked Swatty into that room and locked all three doors. So she had him safe until she got ready to lick him. Then she was going to unlock the door and bring him out and do a good job, because she had a new rawhide all ready. I guess she made up her mind she'd lick him until he hollered that time.

So Swatty waited until school was out. Then he had to wait until Miss Murphy got rid of the ones she had kept in to write their names five hundred times, and things like that, but he didn't wait. He opened the window and looked out, and right below him was the peak roof of the porch. It wasn't very big, and it was slated, and if he slipped he'd be a goner and break a leg or something, but he got onto the window sill and hung down with his hands on the sill, and dropped. He dropped straddle of the roof and hung on the best way he could.

He said the only thing he thought about was what a fool he had been not to shut the window, but it was June and most of the windows were wide open anyway, and I guess Miss Murphy didn't notice. She unlocked the door and looked into the room and Swatty wasn't there. Then I guess she thought maybe somebody had come to the library room for a book and had let Swatty out. She never put her head out of the window at all. So she was beaten that time, and she went home.

So Swatty waited until the janitor had swept all the rooms and started to sweep the walk and he hollered to him. It is none of the janitor's business who gets licked or who don't, so he came up to the room and helped Swatty get in the window. He just laughed about it.

So the next day Swatty went to school just the same as always, but at noon he came over to my barn and Bony came with him. They generally came because I had to feed my rabbits at noon. This time Swatty sort of poked at the sawdust that was the floor of our barn and didn't say much. He most generally wore his hat on the back of his head, but this time he had it pulled down over his eyes and that was the way he did when he was getting ready to fight a fellow.

After a while he looked up.

"Are you fellows going to school this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "Ain't you?"

"Go and get licked? I guess not!" he said. "I'm going down to the river."

"What are you going to do down at the river?" Bony asked.

"Going to look at it; what you think I'm going to do?" said Swatty.

Well, looking at it wasn't a bad thing to do, because the river was away up, and when the Mississippi is up it is worth looking at. It looks twice as big and sort of rounded up in the middle, and all sorts of things floating down it--dead trees, and boxes, and logs, and dead pigs, and sometimes sheds and things. It generally gets up in June, and we always go down on Saturdays to see how she's getting along.

"She's higher than she ever was," said Swatty.

"Well, I guess she'll be mighty high by Saturday," said Bony.

"No, she won't," said Swatty, "because she's going to begin falling to-day, the paper says. Why don't you come along down with me?"

"Yes, and get licked for staying out of school!" I said.

"All right for you fellows, then!" said Swatty. "I'll be mad at you for good. If you were going to get licked I'd just want to do something so I could get licked too. Don't I always stick by you fellows? And when I'm going to get licked you go back on me. You're 'fraid-cats."

"Who's a 'fraid-cat?" I asked, for I don't let anybody call me that.

"You are!" said Swatty. "And so's Bony. You're afraid to stay out of school one afternoon. You're afraid to stay out the day the river hits high-water mark. You'll look nice, won't you, with just you and Bony and a lot of girls in school!"

"Who said we'd be the only kids there?" I asked.

"Who said it? Why, I said it. You don't think any kids will go to school this afternoon, do you? Everybody will be down at the levee--men and everybody. If the river don't drop this afternoon she'll go over the island levee. And you sit around in school like it was a common day! Why, it's like--like election, or Fourth of July, or something like that! It's worse than when the ice goes out."

Well, I never knew a boy to get licked for staying out of school when the ice was going out of the river. He gets kept in the next day, or something, but nobody can blame a boy for wanting to see the ice go out, not even a teacher. So I guessed I'd go with Swatty, if I could sneak it. Bony didn't want to go much, but he didn't like both of us to call him a 'fraid-cat, so he came. We climbed out of my barn window, because Swatty said we'd have to be careful; but I guess it wasn't much use, because if we had gone out of the back gate it would have done just as well, and if we had gone out of the front gate nobody would have thought anything but that we were going to school. We kept in the alley all the way down to Indian Creek, and Indian Creek was worth seeing, I tell you.

Mostly there is nothing in it but a little bit of water twisting along in the wet sand, away down in the bottom of the creek bed, but now the creek was full right up to the top, and there were rowboats moored in it. We played in the rowboats a while, until a man came and chased us away, and then we went down along the creek to the river. I tell you, she was some river!

She went rushing along, all big and muddy and foamy, and she was half covered with floating stuff--bark and whole haystacks and old trees and boards and boxes and things. It scared a fellow just to look at her. It made me feel the way a little baby feels when a big twelve-wheel mogul engine comes roaring up to the depot platform, only ten times as scary. It was like a whole ocean starting out to rush away somewhere. We just stood and looked at it, and pretty soon Swatty says, "Gosh!" Only he always says "Garsh!" And I said, "Gee!" That was all we said, and Bony didn't say anything. He just stepped backward three or four steps and looked frightened. That's the way you always feel when you see the old Mississippi on a rampage. You feel as if you ought to do something to stop it, and you know you can't--that nobody can. When it gets going it is going to keep right on. So we went down to the levee.

Well, there wasn't any levee! Our levee is just a long down-hill of sand, and it wasn't there. The river had backed clean up to the railroad tracks and was splashing against the second rail of the outside track, and at the down-river end of the levee it had gone under the tracks and was all over Front Street at the corner. The ferry dock, that was usually away down at the bottom of the levee, was tied right up close to the railroad track, and the ferry was tied in behind the steamboat warehouse, so she wouldn't wash away. The water was clean up over the floor of the steamboat warehouse, too, and nothing looked the way it used to look. It was worth forty lickings just to see how different everything was. We just stood and looked and couldn't believe it.

"Come on," said Swatty, all at once, "let's have some fun. Let's take off our shoes and stockings and have some fun."

We went across the street and asked a man if we could leave our shoes and stockings in his store, and he said we could, and then we went back and began to wade where the water wasn't very deep. There were a few other boys there, wading, and a lot of men standing around, looking at the water. Some would come down and look a while and then go away again, and all at once Swatty said, "Garsh! What if our fathers came down here!"

So we got away from there, quick. We went down below the steamboat warehouse, where the ferryboat was tied, because nobody was apt to come down there, and nobody did. We played on the ferryboat a while and then we got off her, and Swatty saw where somebody had fastened a lot of logs and bridge timbers to the railway track. I guess they were stuff some men had gone out in skiffs to catch as they floated by, before the river got so rampageous. The way they fastened them was to drive a spike in one end and tie a rope to that, and then tie the other end to the railway track. So Swatty said, "Come on! Let's have some fun with these logs and bridge timbers," or something like that; so we did. We walked on them, and some of them would sink under us, and then we would jump to another.

Well, there below the steamboat warehouse the water made an eddy, and the bark and foam and some sticks kept going around and around in the eddy, and pretty soon Swatty said: "Let's ride on these logs," and that was all right, too, because we could sit straddle of a log or a bridge timber and paddle with our feet. So we did that. Swatty cut three of them loose, and we each took a bridge timber, because they didn't turn over like the logs did, and we paddled around in the eddy and played we were steamboats. I was the "War Eagle," and Swatty was the "Mary Morton," and Bony was the "Centennial." We played that a long time and then we took boards for paddles, and we could go better that way so we played Indians in canoes, and I got on Swatty's timber and let mine go, which was all right because the timbers would just go around and around in the eddy. But Bony wouldn't get on with us, because he was afraid the timber would sink.

It got along to about five o'clock, and Bony said we had better go home. He was always the first to want to go home. He told Swatty that Swatty would be late going for his cow if he didn't start right away, but Swatty said he didn't care if the old cow never got home. He said it wouldn't hurt the old cow to wait a while, anyway. So we started to paddle around the eddy again, and that time we got almost too far out, I guess, and the end of the timber stuck out beyond the eddy into the swift water.

"Back her up! Quick!" Swatty yelled, and we both tried to back her with our board paddles, but it was too late. The swift water caught her on the side and swung her right out into the current. Gee, but she went! Right away she was half a block away from Bony and I began to cry, for there was no telling where she'd stop. You couldn't expect her to stop this side of St. Louis or New Orleans. So I began to cry, and I stooped down and hung onto the timber with both arms. It was all I could think of to do. But Swatty let on he wasn't scared at all. He tried to paddle toward shore, but there was so v much driftwood and stuff floating that he couldn't do it.

"Aw, shut up! Don't be a cry-baby!" he yelled at me. "This ain't nothing. Grab your paddle, and we'll paddle out to the Tow Head and we'll be all right."

The Tow Head is the big island in the river below town, but more to this side of the river than to the other side. It is shaped like a horseshoe, with the two ends down-stream. Me and Swatty knew it pretty well because sometimes we used to row down there. It was all trees except a strip of sand on each side, and in low water there used to be a sandbar below it. It looked like a good idea to get to the Tow Head if we could; but I was afraid to sit up so I just stayed the way I was. But Swatty paddled like a good fellow. I guess the current helped him some. In low water there are two channels, one on each side of the Tow Head, but when the river is on a rampage it don't care anything about channels--it just goes. But it kind of bends below town and I guess that helped Swatty.

He kept yelling at me not to be a 'fraid-cat and to paddle, but I didn't dare. So he paddled, and pretty soon I saw he was going to hit the Tow Head all right. That made me feel better and I kind of raised up on my hands and stopped crying, but when I looked I was scared worse than ever. It looked as if the Tow Head was coming up-stream like a big packet at full tilt. It didn't look as if we were floating down to it, but as if it was tearing up-stream toward us, and it was coming lickety-split. At its nose, where the water hit it, the river reared up in a big yellow wave, like the bow wave of a ship, and was cut into foam and spray where it hit the trees and then rushed away on either side like mad. So I saw Swatty had made a mistake in trying to land on the Tow Head.

There wasn't really any Tow Head to land on. The river was way up in the branches of the trees, and I guess the water was ten feet deep all over the Tow Head, or deeper, and rushing through the trees like it was crazy. But we didn't have time to think much about it. We just had time to be scared, and to see the old Tow Head come rushing and foaming at us, and then it sort of nabbed us, like a cat nabs a mouse. It was all a big swosh of water noises and a big swosh of tree branches being slashed by the water, and then me and Swatty was splashed all over, and the bridge timber banged into two trees and stuck. Swatty went off the timber like a stone out of a nigger-shooter, but I hung on. I've got a black and blue spot inside my leg yet, where it hit the edge of the timber. Right away the water began to surge over the timber like a giant pushing against me, and I saw I couldn't hang on there very long, so I reached up and grabbed a branch of one of the trees and hoisted myself up and got up in the tree. And there was Swatty! He wasn't in my tree, but he was in the tree next below mine.

"Garsh!" he said, and that was all he said right then. So I began to cry. It would make anybody cry to be there, up in a tree, with the whole Mississippi River rushing along under him, so near he could stick his toes down into it. It's an awful thing to think about. You can sit in a tree and look at a creek run under you and you don't care, but when the Mississippi is on a tear it is different. It's the biggest and strongest thing in the world, and there was all of it rushing along right under us, and the tree sort of waving back and forth.

So I cried.

"Aw, shut up!" Swatty said. "What are you crying about?"

Well, I guess we were in a pretty bad fix--worse than we thought we were. No boat there ever was could get at us where we were. No boat could come at that Tow Head the way we did and last a minute, because it would smash against the trees. And even if anybody knew where we were they couldn't get to us. Even if the strongest men in town tried to row a boat up-stream from below the Tow Head they couldn't get to us, because they couldn't row among the trees on it. So I cried.

"Shut up!" Swatty yelled at me. "Ain't it bad enough without you belling?"

So there we were.

When Bony saw us go out into the river he sat on his timber with his mouth open, and he couldn't even holler--he was so scared--and then he just paddled for shore and jumped off his timber and ran. He didn't know where he was running--he was just running away from there. He was scared stiff. When he come to, he was halfway home, and blubbering and panting, and then he sat down on a horse block and didn't know what to do. He thought we were drowned, sure. So he thought the best thing to do would be to not say anything about it. He was afraid. First he thought he would go home and act as if he had been at school and just stayed out playing a while, and not do anything else about it and let folks find out anyway they could; and then he thought that Mrs. Schwartz would miss Swatty when it was time to fetch the cow, and that she would come over to his house to see if Swatty was there, and he didn't know what else. So he thought he would go over to Swatty's house first and sort of keep Mrs. Schwartz from doing anything like that. So he went. He forgot he was in his bare feet, or that he had ever had shoes and stockings.

When he got to Swatty's house Mrs. Schwartz was on the front terrace in her calico dress and with a birch switch in her hand, looking for Swatty, because Swatty knew what time the cow ought to be fetched home. Bony went up to the steps.

"Do you want me to fetch the cow home, Mrs. Schwartz?" he asked.

"What for should you fetch the cow home?" said Mrs. Schwartz, as angry as could be.

"I thought maybe Swatty was late, and I didn't want to keep you waiting," he said.

"For why should you think he was late?" Mrs. Schwartz asked. She always talked in a funny way, because she was German.

"I thought maybe he was playing down at the river," said Bony. "Lots of boys were playing down there to-day."

"So!" said Mrs. Schwartz. "And he sends you home to get his cow, yes? He could get his own cows. I wait for him."

So then Bony didn't know what to say. He stood around. And after a while he said:

"Maybe he won't come home to get the cows."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Schwartz. "Maybe he's drowned," said Bony. "Maybe him and Georgie went down to the river and--and--"

So then *he* began to cry, and the first thing anybody knew he had me and Swatty drowned and our bodies floating down to St. Louis or New Orleans, and Mrs. Schwartz wringing her hands and hollering for Herb. So Herb come out on the porch, and Bony told him me and Swatty had floated away on a bridge timber and got drowned, and Herb got Mr. Schwartz out of the house, and then he come over to my house to tell my father, and my father and mother and Fan and all the Schwartzes and a lot of neighbors all went running down to the levee, and took the Bony Highlander with them to show them where we had got drowned from. So that was why Bony didn't go home, and why he got licked when he did get home.

By that time it wasn't dark but it was getting dark. Me and Swatty just hung onto our trees, and that was all we could do; but all our folks and most everybody in town got down to the levee, because Tim Mulligan at the waterworks pump-house blew the alarm whistle. The firemen all came, too, with their hose carts and ladder trucks, but most of the folks just went around saying it was too bad, but that it was hopeless. Even the mayor said it was hopeless. You see, nobody knew we were on Tow Head. They thought we were drowned in the river, like Bony said. So there wasn't anything to do, because it was too hopeless to do anything. The only thing to do was to wait until the river fell, in a couple of weeks or so, and then maybe they'd find what was left of me and Swatty down-river, where we'd be washed up, if we ever was.

Well, that was what everybody thought. My mother cried, and Mrs. Schwartz cried, and I guess most of the women cried, and the men looked mighty sober, and said what a pity it was so hopeless; but what could they do? Everybody was sober or crying, I guess, except Fan, and I guess she'd been so mad at Herb she just couldn't be anything but mad. She was so full of mad that it had to come out, so while everybody was crying and all she just flew up in the air and went over and gave Herb a good raking.

"Well!" she says. "And you call yourself a man! Do you mean to stand around here like a bump on a log and do nothing?" she says. "I'm glad I found out in time what a helpless ninny you are," or something like that. She gave it to him good, I tell you! "This trash," she says--meaning the mayor and the firemen and the city council and everybody--"I don't expect anything else from, but I once thought you had some gump." Or something like that. So Herb got red.

"Very well," he says, like a man ready to jump off the high school roof, "if you say so, I'll take a skiff and go out upon the river. You can't call me a 'fraid-cat, Fan. You'll never call me that." Or something like that, he said.

"Skiff indeed!" says Fan. "You'd have a nice picnic with a skiff, wouldn't you? Have some sense, Herbert Schwartz. What good is that ferryboat doing, tied up here?"

Well, that was what they done. At first Captain Hewitt didn't want to take the ferryboat out. He said it was hopeless, and that she was an old rotten hull, and that a log would go through her like a needle, and she'd sink, and she couldn't make headway up-stream against such a flood, and a lot more, but with all the folks in town there he couldn't keep that up long; so he went aboard and fired up, and sent up-town for Jerry Mason, who was the regular fireman. By that time it was dark enough for anybody, so Mr. Higgins, the steamboat agent, went and got the two flambeaux he uses when steamboats unload at night, and everybody that had a porch lantern with a reflector got that, and they put them all on the ferryboat. Flambeaux are big iron baskets on iron poles, and the poles are pointed at the bottom so they can be jabbed into the ground or a floor or anything. You fill the baskets with tar and wood and light them. So when that was all ready most of the firemen got aboard with their hooks, off the hook and ladder trucks, and a lot of other men got aboard with pike poles and grapple hooks, and Herb went up in the pilot house with Captain Hewitt, and they set out to find our bodies.

But me and Swatty wasn't bodies yet, we was still folks. We were feeling a little bit better, too, because Swatty found out that the tree he was in was a slippery elm tree, and he peeled off some slippery elm bark and chewed it, and he

tossed some over to me, and I chewed that. So we wondered how long a fellow could live on slippery elm bark, and if Swatty would have the tree peeled clean before the river went down. If he did we'd starve to death; but Swatty said that, as the water went down, more and more of the tree trunk would be above water and we could peel it and eat it. So we both felt better, only there was a dead something had caught in the tree branches and when the wind changed it didn't smell very good. It smelled worse than that, even. So about then we began to see the lights come out on shore, and pretty soon we saw the big, smoky light the flambeaux made. We thought it was a bonfire on shore up at town.

Well, I guess we'd have been bodies before anybody got to us, anyway, if we hadn't had some bad luck. Me and Swatty was there in our trees chewing away at slippery elm when all at once something big and black come slamming down onto the point of the Tow Head. It looked like a house, but I guess it was only a cow shed or something like that, that had got floated off the river bottoms by the flood. It came all of a sudden, and before we knew what had happened it hit the Tow Head point and banged into the tree I was on, and the water began to rush over it, and then all at once the tree I was on began to give. It began to topple. It went slow at first and then it went quicker, and it fell over against the tree Swatty was in, and the shed came bumping after it, and then Swatty's tree keeled over, too, and me and Swatty went down under, and the shed come grating over us--right over our heads and pushing our trees down into the water.

All I ever knew was that the next thing I knew I was slammed up against the side of the shed by the water and pushed against it like a big hand was pushing me, and I was fighting to get more out of the water, and then the shed sort of melted and went to pieces and I was holding onto a board and going down with the current between the trees of the Tow Head. Sometimes the board hit a tree, and sometimes it didn't, but I thought I was all over with, anyway, and then right ahead of me I saw the water rushing and roaring up against something.

I didn't know what it was, but it was a log raft the mill folks had put in behind the Tow Head so it wouldn't get washed away. It was in the inside of the horseshoe, and all across the front of it was driftwood and trash and old boards and everything, and that was what the water was splashing against, and before I knew it I was slammed up against it--me and my board. And what I slammed up against was the bridge timber I had been on before, or one like it. If I had slammed up against where it was just bark and driftwood I would have clawed at it a while and then gone under, I guess; but I crawled onto the timber and just lay there and tried to get the water out of my nose. It looked like half a mile of driftwood was jammed in between me and the log raft--jammed in and pushed together the way a flood can jam it and push it.

Well, that timber wasn't any place to be. The water rushed against it and over it, so I was getting ducked all the time, and I put out my hand and tried the drift stuff, but it didn't seem like it would hold me up, but there was one board that was on top of the stuff, and I tried that. I slid over onto it and it seemed all right, so I edged along it, and when I got to the end of the board the drift stuff seemed firmer and I got on my stomach and edged out onto it. It was firm enough, but not very firm, but on my stomach that way I covered a good deal of it at a time, and I sort of wiggled along, and the more I wiggled the firmer it got. It had to, with all the river pushing it, and the driftwood back of it pushing too.

So it took me about an hour to get to the log raft, and when I got to the edge logs, that are chained together, I was all scratched and sore and I just sat down and cried, because I knew Swatty was dead.

And all at once he said, "Hello, Georgie!" and there he was, crawling along the logs toward me. He said he went under when the tree fell over, and that he went under all the driftwood and come up through a hole in the raft. Maybe he did. There were holes enough in the raft. But I didn't get there that way.

Anyway, there he was, and that made me feel a lot better, and we crawled around the edge of the raft, because we wanted to get to the lower side.

Swatty said maybe we could push a log under the outside chain of logs and paddle to shore on it, but I wasn't going to do it. Only I wanted to see him do it if he did it. So we got to the lower edge of the raft, where it stuck out below the Tow Head, and just then along came the ferryboat. She was back-paddling and going as slow as she could, and she looked like an excursion with all the porch lamps and the flambeaux. So me and Swatty hollered, but I guess they saw us before we hollered. Everybody came over on our side and that tipped the ferry over a little, and a lot of the men threw ropes at us and held out their pike poles, and me and Swatty grabbed them and they yanked us aboard. So then she whistled five times and waited and whistled five times again, and so on, because that was the signal they was to make if they found our bodies, and they had found them, but they were alive yet. So then Herb made the captain whistle long and steady without stopping, so maybe they'd know we were alive yet. But nobody knew it, because nobody thought we would be.

Well, the old ferry let out so much steam whistling she couldn't go up-stream. I guess she couldn't anyway. So they ran her into the shore just where she was and tied her to a big tree, and when we got to the road there was Mother and Father and Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz in a livery rig, because they had followed the boat all the way down. And Fan was in the rig, too. So they all pawed me and Swatty over and saw how bad we was scratched and all, and said we was suffering from exhaustion, but we wasn't. We was only played out.

So then Herbert said, "All right!" and started to go away, and Fan said, "Herbert!"

"What is it?" he said.

"I want you to ride up-town with us," she said.

"No," he said, "I'll go back and help Captain Hewitt get the boat in shape. I guess I've done enough to show you I've some gump."

"But I *want* you to come," Fan says. "I want to talk to you."

So he came. Him and Fan sat on the front seat and drove and talked, and I guess their talk was all right, because they fixed everything up. And that was where Miss Murphy got left. Just because she wanted to lick Swatty she lost her beau. That's why I say I guess if teachers always knew how their lickings were going to turn out they wouldn't lick us fellows so much. Not when the fellow is the brother of their beau, anyway.

II. MAMIE'S FATHER

I guess this is a good time to tell about Mamie Little, because now you know who me and Swatty and Bony are. Mamie Little was my girl, only she didn't know it. Nobody knew it but me. It was a secret I had. That's the way a fellow has a girl at first: she's a secret and she don't know she's his girl. Sometimes she don't never get to know it and the fellow has to get another girl. But while he "has" her the fellow knows it, and it makes him feel bashful and uncomfortable and frightened when she is near by and it is pretty bully.

The reason I picked out Mamie Little for my girl was because she had the nicest eyes and nicest hair of any girl I ever saw and the way she swished her dress when she walked. She lived across the street from my house and mostly played with my sister Lucy. So when I played with Lucy I could play with Mamie Little, too, and nobody would think it was because she was my girl. They would think I was just playing with my sister.

Mamie Little had been my girl a good while like that, with nobody knowing it but me, and I guessed that pretty soon it would be time for me to fight Swatty or somebody about her and have her for my real girl, if she didn't mind; but just then Toady Williams came to town and he picked out Mamie Little to be his girl and didn't care who knew it. And Mamie Little didn't care who knew it.

Toady was a new kid in town, because his father had come to Riverbank to start a store. We never said Toady could be one of our crowd and we never wanted him to be, but he just joined on because he felt like it. That's the kind of boy he was. He thought anybody would be tickled to death to have him be around with them. He wasn't a fat boy, but he was a plump one, and his breeches always fit him so close they were like the skin on a horse; when he wrinkled they wrinkled. He wore shoes in summer. He looked all the time like company come to visit, and I guess that was one reason we didn't care for him much.

The reason we called him Toady was because of his eyes. They popped out like a frog's eyes, sort of like brown marbles, and the more he talked the more they popped out. When he talked he couldn't do anything else but talk. Swatty could lie on his stomach and chew an apple and play mumblety-peg and kick a hole in the sod with one toe and talk, all at one time, but Toady couldn't. He had to sit up straight and pop his eyes out. When he got started talking you could cut in and say, "Was your grandmother a monkey?" and he'd say, "Yes," as if he hadn't heard, and go right on talking. He wouldn't fight, like me and Swatty, and sometimes Bony, would. If you thought it was time to have a fight with him and pitched into him he would bend down and turn his back and let you mailer him until you got through. But, mostly, he would talk somehow so you wouldn't want to fight him. That's no way for a boy to talk. It's the way girls talk. Or preachers.

Toady didn't get Mamie Little for his girl the right way. He never said she *wasn't* his girl, he just said she *was*. The right way is that when the other fellows find out he has a girl they holler at him: "Mamie Little is Georgie's girl! Mamie Little is Georgie's girl!" And he has to get mad and fight them about it to prove it's a lie, but after he has fought enough to prove she isn't his girl, why, then she is his girl and he can have her for his girl and nobody hollers it at him. So then she is the one he chooses to kiss when they play "Post-Office" or "Copenhagen" at parties, and if he's got anything to give her he gives it to her, like snail shells or a better slate pencil than she has, and such things. So it's pretty nice, and you feel pretty good about it and are glad she's your girl.

Well, a short while before Toady Williams came to our town they had an election to see whether the state was to be prohibition or not, and all the school children whose fathers were prohibition paraded; so Mamie Little paraded because her father had the prohibition newspaper in Riverbank, and I paraded because Mamie did and my father didn't care whether there was prohibition or not. Swatty didn't parade because his father was a German tailor, and when he felt

like a glass of beer he wanted to have it, and every fall Swatty's mother made grape wine out of wild grapes that me and Swatty got from the vines in the bottom across the Mississippi. When they had the election, prohibition was elected all over the state, but not in Riverbank; but we had to have it in Riverbank because the state elected it.

Of course I was prohibition, because I had paraded and because Mamie Little was, but Swatty was antiprohibition. I didn't say a thing to make Swatty mad; all I said was: "Huh! You thought you was so smart, didn't you? You thought prohibition was going to get licked, but it was you got licked. Next time you won't be so smart. I guess you and your father feel pretty sick about it."

"Don't you say anything about my father!" Swatty said.

"I'll say he was licked, because he was licked," I said.

So Swatty pulled off his coat and I pulled off mine, and we had a good fight. He licked me because he always did; and when he was sitting on my ribs and had his knees on my arms so I couldn't do anything, he asked me if I had had enough, and I said I had. Because I had had.

"I guess I showed you how much the prohibitions can lick the anti-prohibitions!" he said.

"Let me up," I said.

"Are you prohibition?" he asked.

I said, "Yes, I am."

"All right!" he said, and he put his hand on my nose and pushed. He pushed my nose right into my face. I never had anything hurt like that did. I yelled, it hurt so much. I told him to stop.

"All right," he said, "if I stop what are you?"

I knew what he meant. He had already got me from being a Republican to being a Democrat that way once before. I wasn't thinking of Mamie Little; I was thinking of my nose. So I said:

"I'm an anti-prohibition. Now let me up. You 've busted my nose and some of my ribs, and I want to put some plantain on my eye before it swells up."

We felt of my ribs and couldn't find that any seemed busted, and my nose stopped hurting and came back into shape, so me and Swatty were better friends than we had ever been, because we were now both anti-prohibitions. We went around and made a lot of prohibitions into anti-prohibitions because Swatty showed me how to push a nose the way he pushed mine. But it didn't do much good, I guess. The election was over and, anyway, there were always more anti-prohibitions in Riverbank than there were prohibitions.

It was almost right away after that that me and Swatty and Bony met Mamie Little and Lucy one Saturday afternoon. Lucy is my sister, and they were going down-town. Me and Swatty and Bony were sitting on the curb telling whoppers; or I guess Swatty and Bony were, I was just telling some things that had happened to me sometime that I'd forgot until I happened to think them up just then.

Swatty was telling how he went up to Derlingport and his uncle introduced him to the man that had the government job of making up new swear words, when Mamie and Lucy came along. I said:

"Where are you going?"

"Down-town," Lucy said.

"Did Mother give you a nickel?" I asked, and I was sort of mad, because Mother owed me a nickel and hadn't paid me, because she said she didn't have one, and if she gave one to Lucy, why, all right for Mother!

"No, she didn't give me a nickel, Mr. Smarty!" Lucy said. "If you want to know so much, we're going down to Mr. Schwartz's shop to see if he'll let Mamie have a father."

I guess that would sound pretty funny if you didn't know what she meant. It was paper dolls.

Girls always play paper dolls, I guess; so Mamie and Lucy and all the girls played them; they got them out of the colored fashion plates in the magazines--brides and mothers and sons and daughters.

The trouble was that a good family has to have anyway one father in it, and the magazines didn't have colored fashion plates of fathers. They didn't have any fathers at all.

Some of the girls drew fathers on paper and painted them, but they looked pretty sick. I guess all the girls were jealous of Lucy because she was kind of Swatty's girl, and Swatty sort of borrowed an old colored tailor fashion plate out of his father's store and gave it to Lucy. So Lucy had the only real fathers that any of the girls had. She gave Mamie a couple of fathers out of the fashion plate, but they were the ones that had been standing partly behind other fathers and had mostly only one leg, or pieces cut out of their sides or something. They didn't make Mamie real happy, I guess, so she thought she'd try to get some good fathers. They were going down to ask Mr. Schwartz for a fashion plate.

Swatty was frightened right away, because he hadn't asked his father if he could have the old fashion plate but had just sort of borrowed it. So he said:

"What are you going to ask my father?"

"I'm going to tell him he gave you one for me," Lucy said, "and I'm going to ask him if he'll give me one for Mamie."

So then Swatty was scared.

"No, don't do it!" he said.

"I will, too, do it!" Lucy answered back. "I guess I know your father, and I guess my father buys clothes of him, and I guess we take milk of your mother, and I guess I will, too, ask him if I want to!"

Well, Swatty couldn't answer back because he had Lucy for his secret girl like I had Mamie Little.

So I got up and stood in front of Lucy and pushed her a little, because she wasn't my girl but only my sister, and I said:

"You will not do it. You go home!"

"You stop pushing me! I won't go home."

"Yes, you will, when I say so!" I said.

I was going to tell her that as soon as there were any more old fashion plates at Swatty's father's, Swatty would swi-- would get one for Mamie, but Lucy got mad because I just took hold of her arm too hard between my thumb and finger. She said I pinched her, but I did not; I just sort of took hold of her that way. She ran back a way and stuck out her tongue at me.

"Now, just for that, Mr. Smarty," she yelled, "I'm going to tell Mamie on you!"

"You just dare!" I started for her, but she skipped off.

"Mamie," she shouted, "you'll be mad when I tell you! Georgie Porgie is an anti-prohibition!" Mamie just stood and looked at me, because I'd said I'd always be a prohibition.

"Are you?" she asked.

If Swatty hadn't been right there I would have changed back to a prohibition again and it would have been all right, but he was there and I wasn't going to have him think I would change just on account of a girl. So I said:

"Uh, huh!"

"All right for you, Mr. Georgie! You needn't ever speak to me again as long as you live!" she said.

I felt pretty cheap. I tried to say something, and I couldn't think of anything to say, so I made a face at her and she made one at me, and then we were mad at each other and she went away. She went toward down-town, and Lucy skipped across the street and ran and went with her. And that was one reason Mamie was glad that Toady Williams had her for his girl when he came to town. She guessed I did not like it. And I didn't.

Mr. Schwartz said Mamie could have the fashion plate as soon as he was through with it, which would be at the end of the season when he got a new one. Lucy let me know that, all right! I guess it was on account of Lucy he promised to let Mamie have the fashion plate, because he was awful fond of Lucy.

Anyway, Mamie was mighty pleased to know she was going to have a good father.

When she played paper dolls with Lucy I used to sort of go over where they were and maybe stand there to see if Mamie was mad at me still. About all she said was how glad she'd be when she had a good father. I guess I heard her say it a hundred times, but she never let on she knew I was there at all. Sometimes I'd sort of drop an apple or something so it would fall where she could reach it, but she never paid any attention. The most she would do would be to pick up a one-legged father and say:

"'Where are you going, Mr. Reginald de Vere?' 'I'm going down-town to vote a while if you do not need me to take care of the baby.' 'Not at all, but I do hope you will show folks you are a prohibition. If I ever heard you were an anti-prohibition I would cut you up into mincemeat.'"

So then I most generally went away.

I got kind of sick of girls. I made up my mind they were no good anyway, and that I'd never have another one if I lived to be a million years old, and when I wrote notes to Mamie in school it wasn't any use because she always tore them up without reading them. It made me feel awful to have her so mean. Because she wasn't mean to Toady.

Well, it came to examination time and we began to be examined. Swatty and Bony and I didn't have to be examined in arithmetic until Thursday afternoon and neither did Lucy or Mamie, so Swatty and Bony and I thought we might as well go fishing that morning. We got our poles and some bait and started, and we went down Third Street and when we came to the railway track we cut across through Burman's lumber yard toward the river because that was the quickest way.

Burman's sawmill was the biggest one in Riverbank then. I guess you know how big those sawmills were. Great big red buildings with gravel roofs where they sawed the logs that came down the river in rafts, and where they made shingles, and the row of sheds where they dried the lumber with steam, and another big one where the planers were. There were hundreds and hundreds of piles of lumber, each one as tall as a house, and all the ground was made of sawdust and rattlings, because it was filled ground.

There were railway sidings here, and there were flat cars and boxcars being loaded.

Burman's sawmill and lumber yards were just under the bluff. Once there had been a brickyard there, and the bluff was cut down steep where they had dug clay. Across the street there was still a brickyard, with hundreds and hundreds of cords of wood, ready to be used to burn brick, and with the kilns loosely roofed over. Back toward the town was a sash and door factory, a pretty big building, and then some houses, and then the stores began. About the fifth store on one side was Swatty's father's tailor shop. It was a building all by itself, and it was one story high and frame, and it had a false front above the first story, with Swatty's father's name on it, and there was one window on the street.

Well, Swatty and Bony and me went through the lumber yard to the place where Burman's oil shed was.

The oil shed was right up against the bluff, almost at the railway, and it was up on stakes, so that it was safer. It was about as big as a kitchen, and was painted red and the floor and part of the and part of the stakes were soaked with oil, and the grass underneath was withered and oily because the oil had dripped and killed it.

Just as we got there we saw Slim Finnegan, who was in our class at school but ever so much older than we were, and he was under the oil shed smoking a corn cob pipe. His coat was on the grass beside him, and just as we got there he jumped up and began slamming at the grass with his coat, for the grass was afire. Before we could guess what happened, the flames seemed to run up the stakes like live animals, and all at once the whole bottom of the floor of the oil shed was afire.

Slim Finnegan gave one look at it, and tucked his coat under his arm and ran. There were piles and piles of lumber right there and he jumped in among them, and I guess he hid. We didn't see him any more.

Swatty ran for the sawmill. He shouted to the first man he saw before he was halfway to the sawmill, and the man hollered "Fire!" and ran for a hose wagon they had under a shed and began jerking it out, and Swatty ran on, shouting "Fire!"

It wasn't a second before all the men began piling out of the sawmill and came running from the lumber yards, and the mill whistle began blowing as hard as it could. It almost made you deaf when you were that close. Right away the whole place seemed to fill up with men, and they all had axes or hooks or whatever they ought to have had.

The mill whistle kept blowing without stopping, and in a minute the whistle on the sash and door factory joined in, and then the regular fire whistle on the waterworks started up. The oil house was just one big red flame that went up in the air and turned into the blackest kind of smoke. We saw the men with the mill's hose trying to throw water on the oil house, and every one was shouting at the tops of their voices. We saw men on top of the nearest lumber piles, but almost as soon as we saw them we saw them dodge away and climb down as quick as they could, and the next minute those lumber piles were afire on one side. They were red flames, and they climbed right up the sides of the piles and waved at the top.

Me and Swatty and Bony kept backing down the railway track as the fire got too hot for us. There were hundreds of people, but there were more than that in other parts of the neighborhood. Almost everybody in town came to the fire, because by this time dozens of lumber piles were afire, and the sawmill had set fire to the dry-sheds and the planer. You couldn't see the bluff at all, because there was just one big wall of flame in front of it. Whole boards went sailing right up into the air, burning as they went, and the blue smoke that blew over the town was full of pine cinders and burning pieces of wood. There never was such a fire in Riverbank. The ground seemed to burn, too, and it did, because it was sawdust and rattlings.

The brickyard burned--everything that could burn--and the bluff of yellow clay, there and beside the sawmill, was burned red, like brick--and the flat cars and the box cars all burned. It was an awful fire! Wet lumber in the newest piles burned as if it was dry. The railway bridge and two other bridges burned. At noon it was like evening, because the smoke hid the sun.

Me and Swatty and Bony kept backing away as the fire came toward us. Sometimes we would turn, and run. We backed away as far as ten city blocks would be, I guess, before we were where we did not have to back away any more. We forgot all about school, and about fishing, and about everything. It was the kind of fire where nobody thinks of going home until it is all over.

It was about two o'clock when the people in front and the firemen in front of them gave a sort of roar, as if they were a lot of animals, and everybody crowded back. The firemen on top of the sash and door factory ran from one edge of the roof to the other, looking down. Two of them jumped off. They were killed, but the others got down the ladders, and the next minute the factory and its oil house were all afire at once--just sort of spouted fire from all the windows as if the fire had been all fixed to break out that way.

Before you could turn around and then look back, the sash and door factory was one big, hot flame, and then the houses began to go. First one and then another caught fire.

We got crowded back until we were in the street right opposite to Swatty's father's tailor shop, and Swatty's father was on the front step of it shaking his hands in the air and shouting like a crazy man, but nobody paid any attention to

him. He was a little man and he had gray hair, but he was mostly bald. He didn't have a hat on and he looked pretty crazy standing there and shouting.

Well, we didn't know until afterward what he was shouting about, but I know now, so I might as well tell it. There was a cellar under his shop and it was full of barrels of whiskey. When prohibition was elected the saloons thought they would have to stop for a while and that then they could go ahead again, so they hunted for some place to hide the whiskey they owned, where it would be safe for a while, and Mr. Schwartz's cellar was one of the places they hid it in. What Swatty's father was trying to shout was that if his shop caught fire all the whiskey in the cellar might explode and the people standing around might be killed and the whole town burn up. I don't wonder he was sort of crazy about it. I guess Swatty felt sort of ashamed that his father was acting so crazy.

So then the house next to Swatty's father's shop caught fire, and the next minute the side of Swatty's father's shop began to smoke.

The policemen were sort of crowding us back all the time, but we would n't go back much, and all at once Mamie Little started out of the crowd and began to run toward Swatty's father's shop. But when she was halfway there the fire marshal just caught her by the arm and gave her a sort of twist and slung her back, and then the policeman nearest us caught her and jammed her back against me and Swatty. She was crying all the time; she kept moaning, "My father! My father!"

So just then Swatty's father ran out and grabbed the fire marshal by the arm and talked to him in German, because they were both German, and the fire marshal ran toward his firemen and shouted through his trumpet, and all the firemen up the street came running back, dragging all their hose and all shouting.

It was all wild and sort of crazy, and suddenly the fire marshal ran back to where the firemen were tugging at the heavy hose and shouting, and four firemen who were holding on to a nozzle pointed the stream into the air. It was worse than any rain you ever saw. It was just "whoosh!" and we were all soaked. So all the crowd hollered and screamed, and we all turned and ran, and all I knew was that I had hold of Mamie Little's hand and was helping her run. I was awful sorry for her because she was crying and her father was going to burn.

So Swatty said: "What's she crying for? Why don't she shut up?"

He meant Mamie Little. So I said:

"She can cry if she wants to! I'd like to see you try to stop her! She's crying because your father gave her his fashion plate and it's going to be burned up, and if you say much I'll lick you!"

So Swatty said: "If that's all she's crying for, come on. We'll get her old fashion plate for her." So I said to Mamie Little: "Stop being a baby and shut up, and we'll get your old fashion plate for you."

Swatty just cut in through the crowd, and me and Bony followed after him. He went up the side street, and we climbed over the fence into the yard of the corner house and cut across that yard and over another fence. That way we got to the back of Swatty's father's shop without any one stopping us. Bony kind of kept behind us.

It was mighty hot, because the house next door was all afire, but the firemen were keeping all their hose on the side of Swatty's father's shop, trying to keep it from burning. We crouched down and kept our backs to the fire so the heat wouldn't shrivel us, and we got to the back door and it wasn't locked. We went in. It was hot--like an oven--inside, and the noise of all the water on the side of the house was like thunder, only louder. The inside of the shop was like under a waterfall. You wouldn't think anything so wet could burn, but it did. Before we were halfway to the front window the fire began to eat into the shop along the floor. The water on that side just turned to steam and dried as fast as it ran down.

Bony began to cry, but we hadn't any time to stop. Swatty took him *by* the hand and jerked him along, and we got to the window and I grabbed the fashion plate. Then we couldn't go back because the shop was mostly afire and we would have been burned up. So then Bony got real scared and ran to the front door and threw it open, and a stream from a hose caught him and sent him head over heels back into the shop where it was burning; he was knocked unconscious because his head hit a table leg.

So I didn't know what to do. I guess I began to cry. I crouched down in the window because I couldn't get out at the door on account of the stream of water that was coming in there a hundred miles a minute, and I couldn't go back because the back of the shop was all afire now. But Swatty crawled on his hands and knees under the table where Bony was, where the fire was beginning to burn harder, and he grabbed Bony and yanked him along the floor back to the window. I guess I helped him jerk Bony onto the window shelf, but just then another stream of water busted the window in. The glass fell all around us and one piece cut Swatty on the hand, but he only said, "Jump! Jump!"

Maybe we would have jumped, but we didn't. The firemen had got to the back of the building and had turned the hose in at the back window, and just when Swatty said, "Jump!" the stream of water hit us like a board. It took us as if we were pieces of paper and slammed us out of the broken window and halfway across the street, and threw us head over heels in the mud, and the fashion plate, with Mamie Little's father, came flying with us.



OUT OF THE BROKEN WINDOW AND HALFWAY ACROSS THE STREET

So I crawled over to where the fashion plate was and took hold of it and began to drag it to where Mamie Little was. A policeman came and took me by the shoulder and lifted me up, but I couldn't stand, and that was the first I knew my ankle was sprained. But Swatty got up himself and sassed the policeman that came to get him. He told him he had a right to go into his father's own shop if he wanted to, and that if the policeman said much more he would go back again.

I guess the whiskey exploded all right. Three more houses burned before they stopped the fire, but we didn't see that because Bony ran all the way home, and somebody carried me to a wagon, and drove home with me, and Swatty's father got him and took him up the main street and waled him on the hotel corner with a half-burned shingle that had blown from the lumber fire.

The next day my ankle hurt pretty bad and I stayed in bed with linament on it and after school Lucy came up to see me. "Come on up in my room and play," I told her.

"No," she said, "I don't want to. I want to go down and play with Mamie Little; we're playing paper dolls. We're having lots of fun."

"Ho!" I said. "Paper dolls! They're no fun."

"They are, too," Lucy said. "And we've got to cut out Mamie's fathers. She's got a whole fashion plate full."

"Where'd she get them?" I asked, because I guessed right away what fashion plate it was.

"Why, Toady Williams gave them to her," Lucy said. "He got them out of the fire or somewhere and gave them to her. He's helping us cut them out."

Gee! I felt sore!

III. THE "DIVORCE"

After I got out of bed and went back to school I fought Toady Williams a couple of times, but it wasn't much good because he wouldn't fight back. All the good it did was to make Mamie Little tell Lucy I was a mean, bad boy and that she would never speak to me again as long as she lived. Once I almost told her that it was me that got the father fashion plate out of the fire and that Toady Williams didn't do anything but pick it up out of the

mud after I had got it for her, but I didn't tell her because then she would have thought I was sweet on her. That *would* have made me feel cheap.

It made me feel pretty mean, just the same, to see the way Toady Williams was playing with her all the time, when I had picked her out to be my secret girl. He gave her pencils and apples and everything and I guess she liked it. I wished I was grown up, so I could ride up on a bucking bronco and sling a lasso over Toady's head and jerk him into the dust. Then Mamie Little would say, "Hello, Georgie! Can I get up and ride behind you over the wild plains, because I don't want to have anything more to do with a 'fraidy-cat like Toady."

But it didn't seem as if anything like that was going to happen. Not for years, anyway.

One day Swatty came over to my yard and he said, "Say!" so I said, "Say what?" and he said, "Say, you know Herb's tricycle?" and I said I did. Herb was Swatty's brother that wanted to marry my sister Fan and he had got the tricycle a couple of years ago, when all the bicycles were high-wheel bicycles. He had got it for him and Fan to ride on, and it was a two-seat one--side-by-side seats--and after a few times Fan wouldn't ride on it because it made her as conspicuous as a pig on a flagpole. So Herb rode on it alone some, and with some other fellow some, but mostly he kept it chained up in Swatty's barn and said he would scalp Swatty and skin him alive if Swatty ever touched it.

So this day Swatty came over and he said, "What do you think!" because Herb said when he was married to Fan, Swatty could have the tricycle. You bet Swatty was tickled. So I asked him who would ride on it with him.

"Well--you will," he said. "And Bony. That's when I ain't taking somebody else."

He didn't say who else, but I knew, because I knew Swatty was having my sister Lucy for his secret girl.

"And part of the time," I said, "I can have it alone, can't I, Swatty?"

"It's my tricycle--" he started to say.

"It ain't yet," I told him, "and I guess if I go to work good and plenty it never will be, because if I want to I can think up how to make Fan mad at Herb again and then you wouldn't get it. And, anyway, if Lucy went to ride on it she might fall off and get hurt, so I guess I'd tell my mother not to let Lucy ride on it. Unless I could take it sometimes and find out that it was safe."

Because I guessed that if Mamie Little had a chance to ride on that tricycle with me she'd be pretty sick of that fat, old Toady Williams mighty quick. So me and Swatty fixed it up that way, that I was to have the tricycle part of the time and he was to have it part of the time. The only thing was to get Herb and Fan married off as soon as we could, and to look out that nothing turned up to scare them away from each other again like that Miss Murphy fuss did. It wasn't going to take much to scare Herb away. I knew that.

Well, I guess grown folks don't care whether they have a divorce or not, because they are always having them and so maybe they get used to having them and don't think much about it and are not ashamed to have them, but I guess a kid is always kind of ashamed when his folks get them. We never had one in our family but we had babies and I guess a kid feels about the same way when there is a divorce in his family as he does when there is a baby. It makes him feel pretty sick and ashamed and miserable. It ain't his fault but he feels like it was. He goes out the back gate and sneaks to school through the alley and when a kid sees him the kid says: "Ho! you had a baby at your house," and the kid that had the baby come to his house wishes he could sneak into a crack in the sidewalk or die or something.

I guess that's the way it is when you have a divorce at your house. It ain't your fault but you feel like it was and you don't have any of the fun of fighting and getting the divorce, like your folks do; you just have the feel-miserable part.

So one day about when the river began to fall again, only it was still mighty high, me and Swatty and Bony went up to Bony's room in Bony's house. It was muddy weather, in June, and I guess we had been wading in the mud or something so we knew Bony's mother wouldn't let us go upstairs to his room unless we washed our feet first, unless we sneaked it. So we sneaked it.

The reason we went up was so Bony could prove it that the Victor bicycle his father might maybe buy for him weighed only forty-five pounds. He had a catalogue to prove it with but it was up in his room, so we went up to get it. It proved it, all right. Swatty said that was pretty light for a bicycle to weigh, and I said it, too. So then we said a lot of more things about a lot of other things but mostly we talked about the bicycle, because Bony was going to let me and Swatty learn to ride on it if he got it. Swatty bet he could get right on it and ride right off as slick as a whistle because he had an uncle in Derlingport that had a dozen bicycles. So then Bony said he'd like to know why, if Swatty's uncle had that many, he didn't send Swatty one, and Swatty said maybe he would. We just kind of talked and let the mud dry on our feet and crack off onto the floor.

Well, in the floor in one place there was a hole and Bony showed us how he could look through it down into the dining-room and see what his mother was putting on the table for dinner whenever she was putting anything on. The hole was about as big around as a stovepipe and it had a tin business in it to keep the floor from catching afire because that was where the stovepipe from the dining-room stove came up through the floor to go into a drum to help heat Bony's room when it was winter. So we all looked down into Bony's stovepipe hole to see if it was like he said. And it was.

Just then Bony's father came into the diningroom. He had his hat on but it wasn't time for dinner or anything and he didn't come into the dining-room as if he was coming for dinner. He came in fast and threw his hat on the floor and pounded on the table twice with his fist. The dishes jumped and a milk pitcher fell over on its side and spilled the milk.

"Mary! Mary!" he shouted.

So Bony's mother came in from the kitchen. "Why, Henry!" she said; "what's the matter?"

"Matter? Matter?" he shouted. "I'll tell you what's the matter! I'll show you what's the matter! Look at this! Look at this, will you!"

Me and Swatty looked but Bony kind of drew back from the hole and his mother didn't look. I guess she didn't have to. I guess she knew what it was without looking. It was a bill, all right. Me and Swatty could see that but we didn't know what it was for--whether it was for a hat or a dress or what. So Bony's father threw the bill on the table and stood with one fist on the edge of the table and the other fist opening and shutting. Bony's mother had been paring potatoes or something, I guess. She wiped her hands on her apron but she didn't pick up the bill.

"Well?" she said.

"Of all the useless, idiotic, ill-timed, outrageous, unheard-of extravagance ever incurred by any brainless, gad-about, senseless, vain peacock of a woman--" Bony's father said.

"Henry! Stop right there!" Bony's mother said. "This time I will not listen to your abuse. Year after year I have put up with this browbeating. I go in rags, and if I so much as buy--"

"Rags!" Bony's father shouted. "Rags! You in rags? You dare taunt me with that, when you crowd enough on your back to support a dozen families? Rags? When from year's end to year's end I do nothing but struggle to pay your eternal bills!" Well, maybe I haven't got what Bony's father and mother said just the way they said it, but it was like that. So they had a good start and they went right on and pretty soon Bony's father was walking up and down the room, talking loud and pounding the table every time he passed it, and Bony's mother was sitting with a corner of her apron in each hand and the hands pressed to her cheeks. Her eyes were big and scary. So then Bony's father stopped in front of her and said a lot and she didn't talk back. So that made him mad and he took the tablecloth and jerked it and all the dishes fell on the floor and broke.

Bony just went to the bed and lay on his face and squeezed his hands into his ears. I guess he felt pretty mean. He was crying, but we didn't know that then. We found it out afterward.

So then, when all the dishes broke, Bony's mother sort of yelled and jumped up. Swatty said:

"Garsh! What's she going to do?"

But she didn't do anything like we thought she was going to. She bent down and picked up a dish that wasn't all smashed to pieces and put it on the table as easy as could be and then she untied her apron and folded it up and laid it over the back of a chair as neat as a pin. She looked at herself in the mirror in the sideboard and then walked around Bony's father and went toward the door into the hall.

"Where are you going?" Bony's father asked.

"Going?" she said, or something like that. "I'm going to see if I can't put a stop to this sort of thing. I have had enough years of it. I'm going to see Mr. Rascop."

Well, we knew who he was; he was a lawyer.

"Very well," said Bony's father, "go! I assure you you cannot get a divorce too quickly to suit me!"

I guess that when the loud noise stopped Bony thought the fight was over and listened again. Anyway he was listening now and he heard what they said.

"I thought that," said Bony's mother. "This is not the first time, by many, that I have thought it. You will be glad to be rid of me and I of you. My mother will be glad enough to have me with her. I shall, of course, take the boy."

"As you like!" said Bony's father.

"The boy" was Bony, so he began to blubber worse than ever. He was pretty much ashamed and when his folks began to talk quiet-like, without shouting, me and Swatty began to be ashamed, too. We felt the way you feel when there's just been a baby at your house--as if we hadn't ought to be there. So Swatty picked up his hat.

"Come on!" he said. "Let's go. It ain't no fun up here in Bony's room."

"Wait!" Bony whispered, like he was scared to be left there alone, so we waited. He came along with us.

We tiptoed downstairs and outdoors and I tell you it was good to get outside where there wasn't any divorce but just good spring mud and things. So Swatty whistled at a kid down the street but it was a kid Swatty had said he would lick if he caught him, so the kid ran.

Well, we sat down on the grass under the tree and me and Swatty talked pretty loud and fighty because Bony wasn't saying anything at all and was looking so earnest it made us feel sort of ashamed. He was thinking of the divorce. So me and Swatty talked fighty to each other to try and make Bony forget.

But Bony didn't laugh. He didn't even smile. So Swatty took some mud and stuck it on his nose and pretended it was medicine or something; to make Bony laugh. But Bony didn't laugh. I guess he felt pretty bad. Maybe a kid always feels that way when his folks are going to get divorced. So then Swatty said:

"Hey, George! this is the way I'll ride on Bony's bicycle when he gets it!"

So he pretended he was on a bicycle and he pretended to fall off all sorts of ways and to run into a tree and everything. Then I thought of something. I said:

"Say! if they get a divorce and Bony goes away we can't learn bicycle riding on his bicycle!"

We hadn't thought of that before and right away we forgot about whether Bony was feeling sick or not. We hadn't stopped to think that a divorce Bony's folks were getting would make a big difference like that to me and Swatty. It kind of brought us right into the divorce ourselves. Swatty looked frightened.

"Garsh! that's so!" he said. "We can't learn to ride on a bicycle that's in another town."

"And, say!" I said, frightened, "if Herb hears about it, and how married folks fight and get divorces over hat-bills and things he's going to be scared to marry Fan, because hat-bills are the things father scolds Fan most about. He'll ask Fan if she has hat-bills--"

"Garsh!" said Swatty again, "we've got to stop the divorce," only he said "diworce," because that was how he talked.

I thought so, too. If Bony's folks got one and Herb heard about it and got scared of marrying Fan, then Swatty wouldn't have the tricycle and I couldn't take Mamie Little riding on it and make fat, old Toady Williams look sick. So I thought like Swatty did, but I said:

"Well, how are you going to stop it?"

"If Bony was to get the diphtheria, and get it bad, that would stop it," he said.

I saw that was so. If Bony got the diphtheria, and got it bad, they wouldn't let him travel on the train, and so his mother couldn't go to his grandmother's and that would stop it. So I said:

"Yes, and while he was sick we could use his bicycle all the time. How's he going to get diphtheria?"

"Why, as easy as pie," Swatty said. "They've got it down at Marks's. All he's got to do is to go down there and sneak in and stand around in Billy Marks's bedroom until he gets it. Diphtheria is one of the easiest things you can get. Anybody can get it!"

It looked like a mighty good plan to me. Me and Swatty went on talking about it and the more we talked the better it was. We talked about how long it would be after Bony got exposed to it before he would really have it and Swatty said that wouldn't matter. All Bony would have to do would be to go right down to Marks's and get exposed and then hurry home and tell his mother. The divorce would stop right away and wouldn't have to wait until he was sick in bed before it stopped. So then I said that, anyway, Bony's father would send for the bicycle right away, because fathers always hurry up to get things when their boys are good and sick. It was all bully and fine and me and Swatty felt pretty good about it, but Bony spoke up.

"I ain't going to get diphtheria!" he said.

Well, that's the way some fellows are! You go and work your brains all to pieces thinking up things to help them out of their troubles and then they say something like that. We saw it wasn't any use to coax him. If we wanted to stop the divorce we would have to do it another way. I said:

"I know the preacher that Bony's mother goes to the church of."

"Well, what's that got to do with it?" Swatty asked.

"Well, couldn't we tell him about it and get him to stop the divorce? When Jim Carter wouldn't marry our cook my father told the Catholic priest and he made Jim Carter marry her as easy as pie."

"That's no good," Swatty said. "That was marrying. That's what priests and preachers are for--marrying folks together--they ain't for diworcing them apart again. If it was somebody I wanted to have married together of course I'd have thought of a preacher right away. You don't think I'm so dumb as not to have thought of that, do you? But this ain't marrying them together, it's keeping them married together; it's keeping them from diworcing apart." Then, all at once he said, "Garsh!"

"What are you garshing about?" I asked him.

"Garsh!" he said again. "I guess I am dumb! I guess I ought to let a mule kick me! I ought to have thought of it right off!"

"Thought of what, Swatty?"

"Why, the judge! You, talking about preachers and priests and all them and not thinking of the judge! It's a judge that always diworces people apart, ain't it? Well, what we've got to do is see the judge and tell him not to diworce Bony's folks apart!"

"Come on! We'll go see the judge and tell him not to divorce Bony's folks apart."

Well, I guess we didn't think when we started how we would do it. We just started.

When we got down to the court-house, where the judge stays, I didn't feel so much like doing it and Bony didn't feel like doing it at all. It was different when we got down there than it was when we were sitting on the grass under my apple tree. All along the front edge of the front porch of the court-house were big pillars and each pillar was as big around as twenty boys standing in a lump would be. So me and Bony we sort of peeked into the hall and went out on the porch again, but Swatty went right inside. So we sort of frowned at Swatty and shouted in a whisper: "Aw! come on, Swatty! Let's go home."

But Swatty spoke right out, as if he wasn't afraid of the court-house at all.

"Aw, come on!" he said. "What are you afraid of?"

I wouldn't have talked out loud like that for anything. His voice came back in echoes: "Aw-waw-come-um-um-on-non-non!" Like that. Every word he said said itself over and over that way.

But Swatty, when we didn't come, went down the hall and when he found an open door he went right in. He asked for the judge. We looked into the hall and we saw Swatty come out of the door he had gone in at and we saw him go up the wide stairs and push open the green door at the head of the stairs and go in. After a while he came out again and came downstairs and out on the porch.

"Did you see him?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I'd ought to have remembered that this was Saturday. Judges don't have court on Saturday; they go fishing."

So then Bony began to cry. He leaned against one of the big pillars and began to snigger like a little kid that's lost, and then he turned his face to the pillar and I guess he bawled to himself. I guess he had sort of thought Swatty would have everything fixed so there wouldn't be any divorce when he came from the judge's room and it disappointed him. So Swatty said: "Aw! shut up your bellerin'! We ain't going to let your folks get divorced, are we? You make me sick, acting like we was. I guess me and George knows what we are going to do, don't we, George?" So I says, "Yes; what is it?"

Well, Swatty knew just what we were going to do; and so did I, after he told me. We were going to go to the judge where he was fishing and tell him not to divorce Bony's folks. And that was all right because Bony's mother was afraid of the water and wouldn't ride in a rowboat and so even if she wanted to get divorced quick she couldn't be until the judge came back from fishing. So then I said:

"Aw! there ain't no fishing when the water is so high in the river!"

"Aw! who told you so much?" Swatty said. "You think you know all the kinds of fishing there is, don't you? Well, I guess you don't! I guess me and the judge knows more kinds of fishing than you do."

So we walked down to the river and Swatty told us. It was buffalo fishing you do with a pitchfork. I guess you know what kind of a fish a buffalo is. At first nobody ate buffalo fish but niggers, and they ate dogfish, too, but pretty soon the fishmarket men got so they shipped buffalo fish to Chicago and everywhere just like they shipped catfish. But nobody in our town ate them but niggers, because they tasted of mud. Maybe the Chicago people liked to taste mud.

Well, anyway, the buffalo fish eat grass or roots or something and in the spring, when the river is high and up over the bottoms, the buffalo fish swim up to wherever the edge of the river has gone in the grass and weeds and sometimes they swim in so close that their backs stick out of water and they sort of swim on their bellies in the mud--dozens and hundreds of them, big fat fellows. So then the farmer can't plough yet, because it is too muddy in the fields, and they get their farm wagons and some pitchforks and drive down to the river. Then they separate apart and wade out and come together again when' they are out about waist deep and they wade in toward shore and the buffalo fish are between them and the shore. Then the farmers go with a rush and the buffalo fish get scared. Some of them get so scared they try to swim right up on shore on their bellies, and some try to swim out into deep water, but whatever they try to do the farmers just pitchfork them up onto shore. Wagon loads of them! So, before the Chicago folks got to like buffalo fish, the farmers chopped the buffalo fish into bits and ploughed them into the ground to make things grow better, but now they mostly hauled them to town and sold them to the fishmarket men for one and one half cents a pound. So that was where the judge was. He was over to a farmer's named Shebberd, in Illinois, because he had never pitchforked buffalo fish before and he wanted to do it once and see what it was like.

Me and Swatty and Bony knew where Shebberd's was, because when you were over in Illinois you could get a drink of water there.

I guess it was almost a mile across the river and then it was almost five miles back to Shebberd's bottom land cornfield. We got a skiff at the boathouse and me and Swatty and Bony rowed across the river. The water was mighty high and the current was everywhere and not just in one place, and it was strong. Bony sat in the stem and me and Swatty rowed and we had to row almost straight up-stream. It was hard work. My wrists swelled up and got hot and tight but we kept thinking about the divorce we didn't want Bony's folks to get and we kept on rowing. Even with the

boat pointed almost straight up-stream we were about half a mile below where we started, when we reached the Illinois side and rowed in among the trees. It was easier there; not so much current.

It was fine rowing through the trees, seeing everything, and nothing looking like it usually does. We came to the First Slough and it was just water--like a road of water between the trees--and we kept on rowing and came to the Second Slough and the Third Slough and they were like that, too, and then we came out of the trees and we were in a whale of a lot of water. Bony said, "Oh!" and Swatty looked over his shoulder and said, "Garsh!" and stopped rowing. It looked like miles and miles of water--water we had never seen before--and all at once you felt little and lost and sort of frightened.

"Garsh!" Swatty said. "I was never here before."

"Where is it?" I asked.

Swatty looked all around.

"I don't know," he said. "I never heard of a place like this."

"Swatty!" I said.

"What?"

"Let's go home!"

I guess I sort of whined it, and so Bony began to cry. Swatty stood up and let his oars rest and looked all around. He looked anxious and when Swatty looked anxious it was time to be frightened. Anyway, I thought so.

When Swatty had looked all around and didn't know any more than he did before, he sat down and looked over the edge of the boat at the water. So I did it.

"What do you see, Swatty?" I asked, because I was afraid he saw something to be frightened of. But what he saw was little flecks of leaves and things floating by in the water the way dust floats in the sunlight, and the reason he looked was so he could see which way the current was running, because no matter where we were we wanted to row up-stream. We had gone into the woods below the bottom road and when the water was as high as it was now the bottom road either made a dam across the bottom or the water came over it like a waterfall or rushed through in a rapids nobody could row up. So Swatty knew we couldn't have passed the bottom road but must be below it somewhere and the place we wanted to be at was just where the bottom road hit the hill, so what we had to do--wherever we were then--was to row up-stream. So we rowed. We rowed I don't know how far and all at once Bony said:

"Look out! you're rowing into something!"

Me and Swatty backed water as quick as we could and looked over our shoulders. What we had nearly rowed into was a pile of sticks and a heap of dried grass. It was a good deal as if somebody had chucked a couple of forks full of hay on a lot of driftwood and set it adrift.

"There's something alive in it!" Bony sort of shivered.

Swatty looked and I looked.

"Mush-rat's house!" Swatty said right away, and it was. It was the kind the mush-rats make so that when a flood comes it will float and not sink, and there it was right out in the middle of the lake we were lost in.

Then all at once Swatty said: "Say!"

Gee, but he scared me!

"What, Swatty?" I asked.

"Say!" he said; "we're floating away from that mush-rat house and it ain't floating with us. I never heard of a mush-rat house out in the middle of a lake, with a current floating by, that didn't float with the current!"

"Are you scared, Swatty?" I asked, for if he was scared I didn't know what I would be.

"No, I ain't scared," he said, "but it ain't right. It ain't possible, that's all! I bet this is a haunted lake. I bet there is a haunted house around here, or an ol' witch, or something."

"Come on, let's get out of it, then. Let's row!"

I said.

"You bet I'll row!" Swatty said, and we did. We steered off to one side of the mush-rat's house and rowed hard. We had a good double-ender skiff, rounded bottom and not flat bottom, and we made her hump! All of a sudden Swatty's left oar came out of the oarlock and he nearly fell backwards into the bottom of the boat. He got up and slapped the oar back into the oarlock and we both rowed hard.

"We ain't moving!"

Bony said that. He was hanging onto the sides of the skiff with both hands, looking scared and white, and you never heard anybody say anything the way he said that! It was like he had seen a ghost. Me and Swatty stopped rowing and looked. About twenty feet away from us was that old mush-rat house and we could see a little ripple of water on the

upper side of it but it wasn't moving and we weren't floating away from it. There was the same kind of ripple against the bow of our boat.

We rowed again and we rowed hard and the skiff didn't move! There we were, out in the middle of that haunted lake, or whatever it was, and no bottom that you could reach with an oar, and we couldn't row up-stream and we didn't float downstream. And over yonder was a mush-rat's house just like we were. It sure looked like we were in a haunted lake and I didn't blame Bony for being scared and crying. I was scared myself. It looked like we were in a haunted lake we could not row out of and that we might have to stay there forever.

"Well, garsh!" Swatty said, "we rowed up here, we ought to be good and able to row back where we come from." So we swung the skiff around and rowed down-current. No good! We didn't move at all. Or we just moved a foot or two.

It wasn't like when you run up on a snag or a rock. It wasn't stiff like that. We floated all right but we couldn't go anywhere.

"Listen!" Swatty said.

Away off far we heard voices and splashing, sounding the way things sound when you hear them across water. Swatty shouted. "Hello!" he shouted, and his voice came back to him, "Lo-wo-wo!" in an echo, the way echoes do.

"All right!" he said. "Now we know where the Illinois hills are, anyway. That's the way they echo back at you, so they must be over there. And I bet those men splashing in the water are after buffalo with pitchforks. So that's where we want to row." That was pretty fine, wasn't it, when we couldn't row at all? I told Swatty so. I said we'd better shout and have the men come and get us. Swatty said they'd just think it was kids shouting for fun; and I guess that's what they did think, for we shouted and shouted, and when we quit we could still hear the men laughing and talking and splashing. So then Swatty sat down and put his head in his hands and thought. When we looked up he said:

"Do you believe in haunts and things?"

"I don't know," I said. "Do you?"

"I don't know, either," Swatty said. "Maybe I do and maybe I don't, but I know one thing: I ain't going to believe in them until I have to. I ain't going to believe this boat is 'witched here until I know it ain't stuck here some other way. I'm going to find out."

"How?" I asked.

"Well, if we're stuck we're stuck on something under the water and that's sure, and I'm going to skin off my clothes and find out."

So he did. I wouldn't have done it for a million dollars and I tried to make him not, but he did it. He took off his clothes and lowered himself over the side of the boat and said, garsh! how cold it was! So then he edged himself along, holding onto the side of the boat and all at once he swore.

"What?" me and Bony both asked at once.

"Bob wire!" he said, and he let go with one hand and felt down into the water. Then he took hold of the boat with both hands and felt along under the boat with his feet. "It's a post," he said. "It's a bob-wire fence."

So that was what it was. There was a bob-wire fence and we had rowed right on top of one of the posts and stuck there, on a nail or something, and the post was loose in the mud and gave when we rowed, so we couldn't wrench loose by rowing. And that was why the mush-rat house did not float downstream; it was caught on another post. So all at once Swatty said:

"I know where we are; we're in Shebberd's lower cornfield!" And that was where we were. The water had come up and covered it up to the tops of the bob-wire fence posts.

Well, Swatty's teeth were chattering but he wouldn't get right into the boat. He made me and Bony row while he was out, and I guess with the boat lighter it floated off the post easier, for it did float off. So then Swatty got in and dressed and we rowed toward the voices and the splashing.

It was Judge Hannan all right. He was pitch-forking buffalo fish with the Shebberds. He had on rubber hip boots and he was hot and having a good time. We rowed in close to where he was and watched them pitchfork awhile and then Swatty backwatered the skiff up to where the judge was standing and said:

"Say, mister judge!"

The judge leaned his hand on the stem of the boat and said:

"Yes, my lad, what is it?"

"Are you the judge that gives divorces?"

"I'm the one that don't give them unless I have to, son," the judge laughed. "Looking for one? You don't look as if you had reached that age and state yet."

"It ain't mine," Swatty said. "It's Bony's folkses. They're having a fight and they're going to get a divorce and me and Georgie and Bony don't want them to. So we rowed over to tell you not to give them one."

The judge felt in his pocket and got out his spectacles and put them on and looked at us. He asked which was Bony and then he knew who Bony was and that he knew Bony's folks. He said he did.

"And you don't want any divorces in your family, hey?" he said. "Why not?"

Bony didn't say anything, so Swatty started to tell about the bicycle, but before he got very far Bony just doubled over and put his head on his knees and began to beller like a real baby. So the judge stopped Swatty.

"Son," he said to Swatty, "I guess you've mistaken the proper legal grounds for not giving divorces. The desire of a youth to learn to ride one of the condemned things when he is related to the separating parties only by neighborhood is not sufficient to sway the court. But you, son," he said to Bony, "have got exactly the right idea. You've swayed this old, bald-headed court right down to the mud he's standing in and, so help me John Joseph Rogers! if those two parents of yours get a divorce it will only be over my dead body! Hey, Sheb! can these kids go up to your house and get some buttermilk?"

So I said I didn't like buttermilk and the judge said: "Caesar's ghost! I didn't mean get it for you; I meant get it for us!"

So we got it. So Bony's folks didn't get a divorce. Anyway, if they did they didn't separate apart from each other and that was all me and Swatty cared for because Herb Schwartz wouldn't be scared to marry Fan, and maybe we could hurry up the wedding and get the tricycle sooner.

IV. THE STUMP

Well, you never can tell how things are going to go in this world, I guess. I don't mean that I spent all my time thinking how getting the tricycle with two seats would make Mamie Little think more of me than she thought of Toady Williams, because I didn't. I had school and my chores and me and Swatty and Bony was building a capstan in our side yard, to pull up stumps and move houses if we wanted to, but once in a while I did think how I would ride up to Mamie Little's front gate on the tricycle and say, "Say! wanta take a ride?"

It looked as if it wouldn't be long before Herb and Fan got married, because they hadn't fought for a long while and Fan was embroidering towels by day and by night. One reason it all looked good was that Miss Murphy, who was my teacher and had had Herb for a while, had gone away for a while and Miss Carter was substituting for her in our room. So Fan needn't be jealous of Miss Murphy any more.

So I felt pretty good mostly but I was feeling pretty mean this day, because Swatty and Bony had been let out on time and Miss Carter had kept me in after school. I was feeling mean because they would be working on the capstan, and it was the day we thought we would get it finished and begin capstanning things with it, and I wouldn't be home when they got it done. I wanted to be there when they started to use it. So that made me feel mean one way, and teacher made me feel meaner, another way.

I liked Miss Carter better than any teacher I ever had. So all I did was not know my geography-lesson, or my arithmetic-lesson or my grammar-lesson, or my history, and I missed in spelling. I guess maybe I read all right, because she didn't say I didn't, but maybe she forgot to talk about that because she was so busy saying my deportment was bad and it was certainly an outrage that my copy-book was so poorly kept. So she kept me in to study, and it was four o'clock pretty soon, and she put her papers in her desk and shut down the lid and came back to my seat. Everybody else had gone home. I was sort of scared. I thought she was going to say her patience was exhausted and then whale me with the rawhide she kept in the closet.

But she didn't. She came back to where I was, and when she got to my seat she sat down in it beside me and I had to move over so she would have room. I guess I ought to have put my hands in my pockets, but of course I didn't know what she was going to do, and the first thing she did was to put her left hand on top of my hand and hold it, like that, on top of my desk. So I tried to pull it away, but she held on. So then she put her arm--her right arm--along the desk back of me, and I felt mighty mean. A boy don't like to be armed around that way, or his hand held like that.

"George," she said, "what is it? Why are you acting the way you are? Are you doing it to try to distress me?"

Well, I couldn't say anything to that, could I? I just looked at the top of the desk and moved my feet around.

"Tell me!" she said as if she wasn't mad at all but as if she was sorry. "I can't understand it. It is no use for you to pretend you can't learn your lessons, for I have seen that it is no trouble at all for you, when you want to. And you are such a naturally good, well-behaved boy at heart--why are you trying to act as if you were not? Are you doing it to distress me?"

I guess I sort of said "No!" I don't know what I did say. I felt pretty bad, with my hand held like that and her arm right there and liable to get around my shoulders the way she does to the girls when she's fond of them and they disappoint her and she has a talk with them and makes them cry.

"Then what is it, George?" she asked.

Well, you can't blurt right out and say nothing is the matter only you don't feel like learning any old lessons or anything, can you? There wasn't anything the matter. I didn't have it in for teacher or anything. I just didn't feel like learning any lessons about then, and it was mean of teacher to let on I was doing things because I didn't like her or something. So I didn't say anything. I sort of scrooged down in my seat so she couldn't put her arm around me any more than it was.

"Is it Mamie Little?" she asked then, all of a sudden.

That was an awful mean thing to say, and I guess she knew it was, because when a fellow has a girl he don't want anybody to know it or talk about it. He'll fight any fellow that says it, but he can't fight his teacher when she says it.

"I think it must be Mamie Little, George," she said next, "because I have noticed you keep your eyes on her more than you do on your lessons."

That made me squirm, I guess! But that wasn't the worst. She wasn't hardly started.

"I don't blame you for liking Mamie, George," she said. "She is a sweet child and I love her, too, and I am glad you are fond of her; but don't you think she would like you better if you learned your lessons and behaved in a manner she could admire, instead of trying to attract her attention by smarty tricks? Don't you think a boy with your ability should try to impress her by his excellence rather than by his smarty tricks?"

Gee! I felt mean! Running a fellow's girl in on him like that! I was so ashamed all over that I couldn't move. I didn't dare to move even a finger. I couldn't do anything but swallow.

"Now, we won't say anything more about it," she said, and she patted my hand! "You know how much I like you, George, and how proud I usually am of you, and I think Mamie is fond of you, too. I don't think you need to be a smarty to attract her. If you don't care to do it for me, George, tell me you will try to learn your lessons and behave better on Mamie's account. You will, won't you? Say you will!"

I guess I tried to say I would, but I couldn't even swallow. I didn't know how I'd even get away from there, because Miss Carter might stay until I said I would or something, and I couldn't work my voice: it had dried up, I guess. But I didn't have to say anything. Miss Carter put her hand on my head and let it stay there a minute, and then she smiled and jumped up as if everything was fixed and I had said I would, and she said: "All right, George; you can go home." And I went, you bet.

Well, that settled Miss Carter with me! She had been one of the three women I thought were dandy, because the other two were my mother and my grandmother that everybody calls "Ladylove" because she is so dear, but after that I was done with Miss Carter. Anybody that would talk to a fellow about his girl as if she *was* his girl! I guessed maybe I would n't go back to school any more unless I could get transferred to another teacher's room.

So I felt pretty mean and sore and everything when I got home, and I started around to the side yard, where Swatty and Bony were finishing the capstan, and all at once my mother came to the end of the porch and pulled the vines aside and said:

"George, come here!"

I tried to think what I had done to make her say it like that, but I couldn't, only a fellow is always doing something, so it didn't matter much what it was. I went around and onto the porch.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"George," my mother said in the way they call severe, "Mrs. Martin was here."

"Yes'm," I said, for I didn't know what else to say, because I didn't know why Mrs. Martin had been there. I knew who Mrs. Martin was and where she lived, because she was the lady that had the lame boy that would never grow up but would always be about five years old. He was thirteen years old, and he played with a rag doll and always stayed in his yard, but sometimes he looked out between the fence-pickets. Sometimes when I went downtown on errands and got a nickel for it and bought some candy, I'd give him a piece when I went by, and so would Swatty and so would Bony. Sometimes he'd say, "Where you get that ball? I want it!" just like a little baby, and if we didn't give it to him, he'd cry, but we couldn't give him our ball, could we? So when we went by his house we hid anything he might cry for, so he wouldn't cry for it. That was all I knew about Mrs. Martin, only she was a widow and she was cross sometimes. Anyway, sometimes she looked cross.

"George," my mother said--and I guess she never spoke to me any sadder than she did then--"Mrs. Martin told me something I would never have believed of my boy. I have always thought you were a kind-hearted, considerate boy. Oh, George, why--why did you strike that poor, helpless little cripple?"

"I did not! I didn't do any such thing! It ain't so!" I said, because I knew she meant I had hit Sammy Martin.

My mother sort of threw out her hand.

"Don't!" she said. "It is enough without that. It is enough to be a bully without being a liar. Mrs. Martin has told me--"

"I ain't a liar!" I said, because I was so mad I could have cried. "If she said that, she's a liar; that's what she is!"

Well, I oughtn't to have called a lady that, or anybody, but I was so mad I didn't think. I wasn't thinking about how I said it, and when a fellow's mother looks at him the way my mother was looking at me, and won't believe him when he's telling the truth, what's he going to do? I guess my mother was feeling pretty bad herself or she wouldn't have said any such thing to me as that I was one. Because I wasn't one! Not about that! I had never hit Sammy Martin. I had never done anything to him but give him candy once in a while.

"George!" said my mother, and she was sad about it, as if she was now quite hopeless about me.

Then she went on, as quietly as if we were at a funeral:

"That poor child's mother came here to beg me to protect her child against you--to beg me to ask you not to harm him again! You called him to the fence and struck him across the face with a stick or a switch. Oh, don't deny it! She has seen you coax him to the fence before and give him candy, and when he came crying to her with a welt rising on his poor face, he told her you had done it. And I thought you were--I thought--"

So then she cried, and I couldn't do anything but stand there and feel--oh, I don't know how I felt! I guess I had never felt like that in my life. It wasn't so, and I knew it wasn't so, and nobody would ever believe it wasn't so. I couldn't do anything but stand there and wish I was dead or grown up or something. I just stood and looked down, and once in a while I blinked. So then, after a while, my mother wiped her eyes and walked past me without saying anything or looking at me and went into the house, and I stood there awhile and then I sort of turned and went to the edge of the porch and sneaked around to the back yard. It wasn't fair to think such things of me when they were not so, and I felt awful bad. I never wanted to see my mother again. So then Swatty saw me and shouted.

"Come on!" he yelled. "We've got her done! She's a dandy!"

So I ran to where the capstan was, and she was a dandy!

I guess you know what capstans are--the things they use in moving houses? In Riverbank they move a lot of houses, because people are always wanting to build other houses where houses already are, and you can't move a house without a capstan. They have them on boats, too, but not quite the same kind. The house-moving kind is like a square box, without sides. In the middle, up and down, is a kind of roller that the rope rolls onto, and the roller has to stick up above the top of the box so there can be a place to stick a pole into to turn the roller. When they move houses they set the capstan in the middle of the street a long way from the house, and carry a rope back and fasten it to the house, and then a horse that is fastened to the pole walks around and around the capstan, stepping over the rope every time he passes it, and winds up the rope, and that pulls the house. Only we didn't have any horse, so we thought maybe we'd use Swatty's cow. But we didn't. We turned the capstan ourselves. All the time we were making the capstan Swatty said the cow would turn it, but when we got it done he said:

"Who ever heard of a cow turning a capstan?"

"I did," I said. "In the Bible-book there is a picture of a cow turning a capstan."

"Well, that ain't the same thing," Swatty said. "That's a Bible-cow, and ours is part Alderney and part Holstein."

"And this isn't any cow-capstan, anyway," Bony said. "A cow couldn't work this capstan, because a cow has two toes, and she'd get the rope caught between her toes and fall and kill herself."

"Whose cow are you saying would fall and kill herself--my cow?" Swatty asked, the way he did when he meant: "Take it back or I'll lick you!" Then he says: "You'd better not say my cow would fall and kill herself. If my cow couldn't step over a rope without getting it between her toes, I'd take her and kill her."

"Aw, you would not!" I said.

"Yes, I would, too!" Swatty said. "We had a cow once that couldn't step over a rope without getting it between her toes, and my father took her down to the river and killed her. You needn't say we'd have a cow that can't step over a rope--"

"I never said it," I said.

"Well, if you didn't say it, who did say it, I'd like to know," Swatty asked. "Bony didn't say it and you'd better not say he said it, because he came over and helped me finish the capstan, and you stayed in school and let us do it."

"I didn't stay in school; I was kept in."

"Well, you say you was, but I don't have to believe it, do I?" Swatty said. "I don't have to believe everything you say just because I'm--because I'm in your yard, do I?"

Well, I saw Swatty wanted a fight, and I wanted a fight anyway. I felt like it. So I said; "Who are you calling a liar?"

I went up close to him, and he went up close to me; and then I pushed him and he pushed me back; and then I hit

him and he hit me back. And when he had me down and asked me if I had had enough and got off of me, we went ahead with the capstan. I wasn't hurt *anywhere* except on the inside of my cheek, where a tooth cut it.

The capstan was a good one. Swatty showed how it worked, and pushed the pole around, and it worked fine. So then I got my sled out of the barn, where it had been since last winter, and we took turns being pulled on the sled. So then we wished we had a house to move, but there wasn't any house or building we dared move. I bet we could have done it. So we looked for something we couldn't move without a capstan, so we could use the capstan to move it. There is no use having a capstan if you haven't anything to do with it. You might just as well not have made one. So I said:

"I'll tell you! Let's pull up the old stump that's in our front yard!"

"All right--let's!" Swatty said.

We had a lot of trees in our yard--a big silver poplar in the back yard that was twice as big around as a barrel, and a yellow-mellow apple, and a Benoni apple, and a black-heart cherry, and a row of pines leading down to the gate, and big maples inside the fence, and maybe some more. There were trees all over town, lots of them, and you would have thought there had always been trees, but I guess that isn't so. People planted them. When people came to Riverbank and made a town of it, they planted the trees because there were none when they came, and I guess they liked it better with trees growing than when it was all bare. I know my grandmother did.

My grandmother was an old, old woman, and she lived with us because the house had been built by my grandfather, and my grandfather had planted the trees. That was a long time before I was ever born. We called my grandmother "Ladylove," because I guess that is what my grandfather called her. Nobody ever called her anything else but Ladylove, not "Gran'ma" or anything like that.

I guess nobody ever loved trees the way she loved them. I guess she was always sorry she had come away from Pennsylvania where there are lots of trees and hills. Sometimes, early in the morning, she would come out on the porch and look up and say, "I lift up mine eyes to the hills!" and then she would sigh and shake her head. That was because there was no hills in Riverbank when she lifted? up her eyes from our porch, and I guess she was thinking of the hills in Pennsylvania, because when she was a girl and lived there, there were always hills to lift up her eyes to--hills that were covered with trees.

That was the way my grandmother Ladylove was, as old as old, and nobody ever loved trees the way she did. She liked boys too. She liked all the boys that ever came to play with me. She was the only one that never scolded me. Plenty of times when we had fresh cookies and nobody was to touch a single one until the next day, Ladylove would see us playing in the yard and she would come out with a china plate with a napkin on it piled up with cookies. Then she would say a verse of poetry and give us the cookies and go into the house just as happy as could be. Sometimes she would forget she had brought us any and would come right out with another plateful and say the poetry over again and be just as happy over that one as she was over the other.

When I said, "Let's pull the old stump that's in the front yard," I didn't think anything but that it would be a good thing to pull. I didn't even know it had ever *been* a tree; it had always been a stump since I was a little bit of a kid, anyway. It wasn't much of a stump any more. It was only about as high as my knee, and right at the ground it was only as big around as a man's knee. Once I had a little hatchet, but it wouldn't cut much, but I chopped the stump with it. I could only chop off a little splinter at a time, and I never got much off. It only made the stump raggedy at the top. It was just an old stump that wasn't worth anything and wasn't any good to anybody.

Swatty and Bony and me started to move the capstan into the front yard where the stump was. It was so heavy we could hardly wiggle it, so after we had moved it an inch or two I said:

"Aw! we can't move it!"

So Bony said the same thing; but Swatty stood and looked at the capstan awhile, and then he said: "Yes, we can move it, too! We can make it move itself."

"How can we?"

"You come ahead and I'll show you," he said; and he did. He drove a stake into the ground about as far as our capstan rope would reach, and fastened the rope to it. Then he made Bony turn the capstan pole, and that wound up the rope, and the capstan just had to move toward the stake. When we got it to the stake we knocked the stake out with an axe and put it in again farther along. That way we moved the capstan to where we wanted it. Swatty thought of how to do it.

So then we had the capstan in the front yard, and we tied the rope around the old stump and tried to pull it, but the capstan just moved up to the stump. So Swatty said he knew what was the matter and that we were all crazy because we didn't think of it before, and that all the house-movers, when they were moving houses, drove stakes in front of their capstans to keep them from moving, and stakes behind them to keep them from tipping up.

We got some stakes and did it. Swatty drove the stakes because he was strongest, and anyway, he knew how to swing an axe, because he had often studied how the circus roughnecks swung them. Anyway he said he had. He said

he had sat for over an hour and just studied how they swung axes at stakes and that then he asked one roughneck to let him try it, and he did, and he drove over a hundred. He said that while he was driving stakes Mr. Bamum came out of the big tent and watched him, and that he liked the way he was driving stakes so well that he offered him a hundred dollars a year just to drive stakes for the circus. So I asked Swatty if he took up the offer, and he said he did. He said he went with the circus all over the United States, driving stakes, and that he drove so many he got so he could drive a stake with one blow. So then he said he went to Mr. Bamum and asked him to pay him two hundred dollars a year, but Mr. Bamum said he couldn't afford it. He said Swatty was worth two hundred dollars a year but the show couldn't afford it. So, Swatty said, he came home. That's what Swatty said, but I didn't hardly believe it. But, anyway, we had to let him drive the stakes.

Well, the stump didn't come out as easy as we had thought it would. It was pretty rotten, and it pulled off piece by piece, but the inside was tough. Our rope was old, too, and broke nearly every time we tautened it. But it was good fun, anyway. We took turns turning the capstan pole. One would turn and the other would keep the rope on the stump and the other would be boss and shout, "Whoa! Get up! Whoa there, you!" A lot of boys came and looked through the picket fence and wished we would let them come in and help us capstan the stump, but we wouldn't. What's the use of having something somebody else hasn't got, if you are going to let them have it too?

Pretty soon we got the stump all pulled. There was only a hole where it had been and the rotted wood was scattered around on the grass, and we felt pretty good about it, because nobody wants old stumps sticking up in their yards. Swatty said maybe my father would give me a quarter for pulling the stump and I thought maybe he would, too. We all felt as if we had done something pretty fine, and I wished I could go and get my mother and have her come out and see how good our capstan was and have her say, "Why, that's fine, Georgie! I'll have your father give you a quarter when he comes home." But I remembered about Mrs. Martin. I remembered that my mother would probably never think anything I ever did again was any good at all. So I didn't call her.

Just then Ladylove--my grandmother--came out of the side door. She stood a moment on the top step, looking, and then she came down to the grass and started toward us. She had a plate in her hand, and there were graham crackers on it, because there were no cookies that day. I guess she heard us shouting and thought we would like some graham crackers, because we were boys.

As soon as I saw her I jumped and ran toward her, because she was some one we could show what we had done.

"Come here, Ladylove," I shouted. "Come on, we want to show you what we did with our capstan!"

"Yes! yes!" she said.

So I took the plate of crackers, and with the other hand I sort of steadied her elbow, because our yard wasn't very smooth and she didn't walk very steady or very fast. We came to where the capstan was, and she steadied herself with one hand on it.

"There!" I said. "See what we did, Ladylove! We pulled that old tree stump right out of the ground. We got rid of that old stump all right!"

Ladylove stood quiet so long that I got frightened. She looked up at the sky and when she looked down at me there were tears in her eyes. I could see them.

"My tree! My beautiful tree!" she said. "Ah, Georgie, could you kill my tree?" And then she closed her eyes and held out her hands and said:

*"Degenerate Douglas! Oh, the unworthy lord!
Whom mere despite of heart could so far please
To level with the dust a noble horde,
A brotherhood of venerable trees!"*

It wasn't a horde of trees at all, nothing but an old rotten stump and no good to anybody, but I felt awful bad about it as soon as she spoke that poetry--not because the old stump was any good but because my grandmother was so old and seemed to think so much of the old stump.

Me and Swatty and Bony just stood and didn't know what to say. We wished she had scolded us or something instead of feeling that way.

"Gone! Gone!" she said, letting her hands fall, as if that old stump was the only thing she ever cared for. "Gone!"

*"It is not now as it has been of yore;
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen
I now can see no more!"*

Well, we couldn't say anything, could we, when she felt like that? We could just feel mean. It didn't matter that we knew it was just an old, rotten, no good stump, because she thought it was a tree and that we had cut it down. She shook her head, and then:

*"Some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."*

So then she turned and walked away with her head bent down and the tears running down her cheeks, and I stood there with the plate of graham crackers in my hand and didn't know what to do or what to say, and Bony stood and looked kind of scared. I didn't dare look after my grandmother. I just felt mean and sneaky and ashamed and sort of miserable about everything, because I knew she thought I had done it when I knew I oughtn't to have done it. At the step of the side door she stopped and looked back and then went into the house, all old and sad-looking. I guessed I had broken her heart, she felt so bad about it.

So then Bony started to go home. He didn't say anything, but he sort of edged off as if he wanted to sneak away and get out of any trouble I was in. Swatty spoke right up.

"You come back here!" he said. "You come back, or I'll show you!"

I was glad to have anybody say anything, even that.

"Aw, I got to go home," Bony said. But he came back. He knew what Swatty would do to him if he didn't. So then Swatty made a face at the pieces of old stump.

"Garsh!" he said. "Garsh! who'd of thunk anybody cared for that old stump? We didn't know Ladylove cared that much for it, did we? Well, come on!"

"Come on where?" Bony sort of whined.

"Where do you think?" Swatty asked. "What do I care where? Anywhere we can get a tree to plant--that's where. We'll get a big tree, like those maple trees, and we'll fetch it here and plant it; that's what we'll do! I'll tell you what. We'll take the capstan rope and go out to the cow pasture and dig up a big tree and let my cow drag it here. We'll play she's a team of oxen."

Well, we got to fighting about who would drive the team of oxen and who would ride on the tree, and we forgot all about being ashamed of pulling up the stump. We took a spade and the axe, and went out to the pasture, but when we saw how big a big tree was, we guessed we'd get one that wasn't so big, and then we guessed we'd get one that wasn't as big as that, because Swatty said he didn't want his cow to strain herself pulling it. So the one we got wasn't very big, after all, but it was more of a tree than that old rotten stump was. It was a willow tree. We got a willow tree after we'd tried to dig up the roots of an elm tree. Swatty said that a willow tree didn't need any roots.

The cow didn't like pulling a tree very well, but she got used to it before we got home--only we couldn't ride on such a little tree. We had to take turns being the ox-driver. But we got home all right and dug a hole where the old stump had been, and we planted the tree. She looked bully. She looked almost like a real tree. So then I went into the house to get my grandmother, to show her, so she wouldn't feel so bad about the old stump.

I guess she had forgotten all about it. She was sitting by the window, reading the limber-backed psalm-book, and when I came in she looked up and smiled.

"Come on out in the yard, Ladylove," I said. "I want to show you what me and Bony and Swatty did."

She closed the psalm-book with her glasses inside and put the book on her sewing-table and went with me. I took her right to where the tree was.

"There!" I said. "Me and Bony and Swatty planted a new tree for you where that old stump was."

THE STUMP

My grandmother looked at the tree. Her eyes were full of tears again, but they weren't the kind that worried me. She held out a hand toward the tree and said some more poetry:

*"What plant we in this apple tree?
Buds, which the breath of summer days
Shall lengthen into leafy sprays;
Boughs, where the thrush with crimson breast
Shall haunt and sing and hide her nest.
We plant upon the sunny lea
A shadow for the noontide hour,
A shelter from the summer shower,
When we plant the apple tree."*

Well, it wasn't an apple tree, but I didn't care, and neither did Swatty or Bony. I was just glad because Ladylove was glad, and I guessed she knew it wasn't an apple tree, because when you use poetry you have to use the kind there is, and it don't always fit. But this one fitted close enough to show how happy Ladylove was. She was very happy, and when she had said the verses she laughed and kissed Swatty's hand, and then Bony's and then mine, and took her skirt in two hands and made us a curtsy and went away as happy as anything. I felt pretty good.

So just then my father came home, because it was supper-time. He came into the yard, and he walked across the grass to where we were. He looked sort of sober, the way fathers do when they want to know what their sons have been doing.

"What's that?" he asked, short.

"It's a capstan," I said. "Me and Bony and Swatty made it."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know. Maybe nothing."

"Hm! And what is this tree doing here?"

"Why--" I said, and then I didn't know what to say.

"Why, there was an old stump here," said Swatty, "and we pulled it up with the capstan, and Ladylove, she came out, and she felt pretty bad--" "She couldn't remember it wasn't a tree #ny more," said Bony.

"And so we went and got a tree and planted it for her," I said.

My father looked at me. Then he turned away. "Don't do any damage with that capstan thing," he said, and that was all.

Well, nobody said anything at supper, so after supper I went out and sat on the porch, and Herb Schwartz had come over to talk with Fan awhile and they were there too. So pretty soon my father came out and lighted a cigar and gave Herb one. Then my mother came out and I guessed I would go into the back yard or somewhere, because I knew she would tell my father about what Mrs. Martin had lied about me hurting her crazy boy. So I went and sat on the woodshed step awhile, because if my father was going to lick me he would do it out there anyway.

But he didn't come, so after a while I went around front again. I stopped by the vines at the end of the porch, because my father was talking.

"And I will tell you something else," he was saying. So he told them about the stump, and how we had pulled it up and then gone and got another tree because Ladylove felt so bad about it. "And Mrs. Martin nor any one else need tell me that a boy that would do that would torment a crippled child," my father said. "I think I know my son George fairly well. What did George say about it?"

"He said Mrs. Martin--lied," said my mother. "And she probably did," said my father. "Unintentionally but none the less wickedly. I am going to see her. I think she is going to apologize."

So I felt bully about that, and my father went down the walk and mother went into the house. I felt bully because father was right. Only I was n't the one that thought of planting the new tree. That was Swatty. But I guess I'd have thought of it if Swatty hadn't.

I was just going to go up on the porch when Fan said something. What she said was:

"Poor father! The way he lets Georgie behave and then stands up for him!"

"Why, Fan," Herb said, "you don't think George did anything of the sort Mrs. Martin said, do you?"

"I wouldn't put it beyond him," Fan said.

"That's not fair! That's unjust!" Herb said.

"Oh! I'm unfair, am I? I'm unjust, am I?" Fan flared up.

"You are if you say such things about George," Herb said, and he said it out flat, too, as if he meant it.

"Oh!" Fan said. "The last time I was jealous. Now I am unjust! I'm sure I thank you for your opinion of me--"

"And, now, Frances," said Herb, standing up because Fan was, "you are unfair and unjust to me. Either that or frivolous."

"Oh!" Fan cried out and she slung something on the porch that bounced and rolled. It came through the vines and to where I was, and I picked it up. It was her engagement ring, but she didn't care where it went, because she went slamming into the house, and Herb went stamping to the gate and out of the yard.

So I stood there and looked at the ring and felt pretty sick, because it was just because Herb thought I wasn't a liar and a mean cripple-torturer that he had stood up for me. And, just because I was n't, his wedding was off again and nobody could tell when me and Swatty would get his tricycle.



V. SCRATCH-CAT

Well, when mother heard that Herb and Fan had had another fight she was so hurt by it she just set down and cried and said, "Fan! Fan! I don't know what is going to become of you with that temper of yours, because Herbert Schwartz is one of the finest young men in the whole world and if you keep on you 'll delineate his affections away from you entirely forever," or something like that.

And it did look like it. Professor Martin's leg didn't get any better and he had to go over to the hospital at Chicago to have it broke again and fixed and Herb was made a regular professor at our school and principal of it, and every day he used to come into our room and talk awhile with Miss Carter, and walk home with her. I tell you it looked mighty bad for Fan, and I didn't blame Herb, because Miss Carter was nice. She was nice for a teacher, I mean, and sweet and pretty and everything.

Well, I had the engagement ring. I didn't know whether it was mine or whose it was, because Fan had thrown it away and Herb hadn't bothered to pick it up. So it looked as if it was mine, because finders is keepers. So I asked Swatty. So Swatty wanted to look at the ring and when he saw it had a diamond in it he said it was my ring, because Herb and Fan had thrown it away, but that half of it was his, because Herb was as much Swatty's brother as Fan was my sister, and if they had of had the fight on Herb's porch instead of Fan's porch, it would of been Swatty that found the ring. So we had it in pardnership and said we would keep it, because if Herb got engaged again to Fan or to Miss Carter or anybody we could trade it to him for his two-seat tricycle, maybe.

Bony was sitting there all the time, listening to us, so all at once he said:

"Ain't any of the ring going to be mine?"

The reason he said it was because most of the things we have we have sort of in cahoots, the three of us.

"Garsh, no, Bony," Swatty said. "We'd like to have you part own it but you ain't got no excuse to. Herb ain't your brother, and Fan ain't your sister, like they are mine and Georgie's, are they? You ain't related to the ring no way. We wish he was, don't we, Georgie? but he ain't."

Well, Bony was sort of mad at it, but it wasn't our fault. So then Swatty said to me:

"I ain't going to play with your sister any more."

"Why ain't you?" I asked him.

"Because I ain't," he said. "If my brother Herb ain't good enough for your sister Fan, then I ain't good enough to play with Lucy. And I won't." Well, I knew what he meant, even if he didn't say it out in words. He meant that he had been having Lucy for his secret girl, like I wanted to have Mamie Little for mine, and now he wasn't going to have her any more because Fan had been mean to Herb.

"Well, I don't blame you," I said. "I wouldn't either."

So none of us said anything for a while. Then all at once Bony said something.

"Say!" he said.

"Say it yourself and see how you like it," Swatty said.

"Why, say!" Bony said, getting red in the face and digging into the grass with his toe; "if--if you don't want to play with her, can I play with her?"

He meant with Lucy. He meant could he have Lucy for his girl if Swatty didn't want her any more, only he didn't say it right out, of course. So Swatty said he could. He said he didn't want her and Bony could have her.

"Well, then--" Bony said. "Well, then, I'd ought to be part owner of the ring."

So we talked it over and me and Swatty thought that would be all right, because if Bony wasn't a brother or sister of Herb or Fan he was going to have Lucy for his girl and Lucy was my sister and Fan's. So we told Bony he was third pardner in the ring.

I guess Bony felt pretty set up and proud to have a girl that Swatty had had, when he had never had any girl before. Right away he began to get mad when we said Lucy was his girl, and that's a good sign, because that's the way fellows feel.

But girls don't feel that way when they Have fellows. Right away they begin to wiggle their skirts when they walk, and want their mothers to curl their hair every day, and put fresh hair-bows on them. So they start right in saying how they hate the fellow that's their fellow; but they take slate pencils and apples and things from him when he gives them on the sly, and they begin writing notes to him in school, like "Don't you think you 're smart with your new shoes on," and things like that. So he feels pretty good after all, and gives her apples when nobody is looking, and pushes her around mean-like when anybody does look.

But she don't mind being pushed around, because that's one way she knows he's her fellow. So, when there is a party, she is the one he drops a pillow before, and if she don't kiss him, all right for her! But mostly she does. She lets

on that she hates it, but she don't. She likes it.

Well, I guess one reason Swatty was glad to get rid of Lucy was because Swatty didn't care for kissing games anyway, and it wasn't much fun for him to have a girl, because nobody hardly dared yell at him:

*"Swatty! Swatty! Swatty!
Lucy she is your girl!"*

He was too good a fighter. And half the fun of having a girl is getting mad because they yell it at you. And, anyway, Swatty was sort of rough to have Lucy for his girl, and she didn't like to have him for a fellow very much. As soon as school was out Swatty would begin clod fighting with the Graveyard Gang, or make a bee-line for the baseball lot, or get up a good fight. He never wanted to sort of walk on the edge of the sidewalk when the girls were walking on the middle of it, and cut up funny to make them look and giggle. It was boys he liked to push around, and not girls.

One reason Lucy didn't care much to have him for her fellow was because his father and mother were German, and none of the girls like a Dutchy for a fellow, because lots of Dutchies worked in the sawmills and couldn't talk good English. But Swatty's father didn't work in a sawmill; he was a tailor. But he was a Dutchy just the same, and when the fellows got mad at Swatty sometimes they would yell:

*"Dutchy! Dutchy!
Stuffed with straw
Can't say nothing but
'Yaw! yaw! yaw!'"*

Well, when I had time to think it over I thought it was funny that Swatty had let Bony have a third partnership in the engagement ring as easy as he had. And then one day I found out why it was. It shows how slick Swatty was to keep a secret or anything.

The vacation before the time I'm telling about--which was almost vacation time again--there was a new girl came to Riverbank. She lived in a little house across Main Street that had a picket fence and a yard that ran mostly down the gully toward Front Street, and the first I knew about her was one day when I had to go down town on an errand and went past her house.

I had on some new shoes, so I knew everybody would see them and be thinking of them, and I felt pretty mean; and when I went by the little house the girl was behind the picket fence, looking out. So I made a face at her, because it was none of her business if I did have on new shoes.

It was summer, of course, and hot; but the girl had on a woolen dress--red and black checks--and it fitted her pretty tight all over, and was too short and little, so that it was tight like skin, and her wrists stuck out too far. She was barefoot, too, and that was funny, because girls don't go barefoot. It was as funny to see her barefoot as to see me with shoes on.

I was going to yell something at her, but I didn't, I only made a face at her. But she didn't make one back at me. She just looked.

She wasn't like any girl in Riverbank that I ever saw. She was brown--almost like an Indian--but she had reddish cheeks, and her hair was as black as tar and cut short, like a boy's, only it was banged in front, and her bangs were so long they came down to her eyes, and were cut as straight as a string.

She stood behind the picket fence and just looked at me, and I didn't like it. Her eyes were like big black marbles and her mouth like a painted red. So I whistled and looked the other way and the first thing I knew she was out of the gate and after me. I tried to run, but she cornered me and took me by the hair and jerked me back and forth. I thought she was going to jerk my head off. So I pulled loose and ran, because no girl can jerk me around by the hair like that. So all she got for her smarty business was just a handful of hair or two. And who cares for a handful of hair?

Well, you bet I got even with her, all right! I never went past her house alone after that.

So that's the way she was. She stayed in her yard, and when a boy came along she would jump out and grab him by the hair, or slap him, and chase him away from in front of her house. She was a tartar, all right. She was like a spider that is always waiting and comes out and grabs flies; only what she grabbed wasn't flies--it was boys. So we all got afraid of her, and we didn't dast go past her house unless we were two or three together. And then we generally went round some other way. Except Swatty.

Because one day Swatty he went past her house, and she come out and was going to pull his hair, like she did the rest of us; and when she came at him he backed up against the fence, and when she reached out for his hair he hit her hand away with one hand and slapped her on the face good and plenty. He slapped her two or three times and dared her to touch him. So she didn't say anything, and Swatty didn't say anything, and they just stood there.

And pretty soon Swatty went on downtown. So she just stood there.

Well, me and Bony used to play with girls sometimes because they let us be the husbands and fathers, and boss them around and whip the children. So when we did Swatty used to come along. Mostly he would sit and whittle until

me and Bony got through, but sometimes he would be the policeman to arrest the husbands when they got drunk, or a pirate, or an Indian lurking to scalp the wives, or a 'rangatang to carry the children off.

I guess the girls wished he wouldn't come, because a 'rangatang is such an interruption to plain housekeeping, and pirates and policemen are an awful nuisance to mothers who want to bring up a peaceful family and don't want their husbands taken to jail just when the mud pies are cooked and dinner is ready. But they couldn't help it, because if they didn't let him me and Bony would go where Swatty went.

Well, one time when teacher kept Swatty in school to have the principal lick him, she went out to get the principal and locked Swatty in the room, and he climbed out of the window onto a maple tree branch and got away. So the principal licked him the next day. Anyway, the trees darkened the room all up, so they had the janitor cut down the two trees and they fell down the bank back of the schoolhouse.

So that day the leaves were only beginning to wither, and the branches of the trees made a bully place to play in. So Mamie Little and my sister and me and Bony went right out there after dinner and played house; and when Swatty had been licked, or whatever he had been kept in for, he came there too. We made houses among the branches and leaves, and were fathers and mothers; and Swatty had a lair and was a 'rangatang, and hung by his knees and swang from branch to branch.

It was pretty good fun, even if it was playing with girls, because it was a jungle, and me and Bony hunted the wild 'rangatang between meals; and we were playing along all right when I saw my sister standing and looking. I guess you know how a girl stands and looks--the way a cow does--when she don't like something. So I looked, and out in the street was the girl in the red and black check woolen dress. She was just standing and looking back at my sister. It made my sister mighty mad. I guess girls can look the things boys generally holler at each other. So my sister said:

"Bony, I don't want that girl to look at me!"

So Bony looked, and when he saw who was looking he said:

"Aw! let her look! Let her look, if she wants to. She ain't hurting anybody!"

So then my sister got awful mad. She stamped her foot.

"I *won't* let her look at me that way."

So she started on a run for the girl. She didn't get quite up to her. Before she got quite to her, the girl sort of flashed up to my sister. That was about all I could see. The next I saw, she was standing just where she had always been, and my sister was flopped down on the ground with her arms over her head, yelling bloody murder. So I jumped out of the tree and ran up to my sister. Her face was all scratched up. There were four long scratches on each side of her face where the girl had raked her with her claws. So Mamie Little came running too, and helped my sister up.

"If I was a boy," she said, "I wouldn't let anybody do that to my sister unless I was a 'fraid-cat."

"Aw! who's a 'fraid-cat?" I said. I wasn't no more 'fraid-cat than she was, but I guess J knew that girl.

So Mamie Little took my sister by the arm. "Come on," she said. "I guess everybody around here is a 'fraid-cat. You and me will be mad at them and stay mad for ever and ever!"

So I had to go. I wasn't going to hit the girl. I just thought I'd sort of push her away--only maybe a little rough--until I pushed her inside her gate, so I could show a smarty like Mamie Little who was a 'fraid-cat and who wasn't. I walked over to where the girl was, and she waited for me. All I had time to see was the girl's eyes turning to something like prickly black fire, and something plumped against me like a bag of flour shot out of a sling. It was as if her body hit against me everywhere at once. And then something grabbed my hair and yanked me, and I felt scratches burning on my face, and, somehow, I was on the ground, yelling and holding my arms above my head. The girl was standing where she had always been. I heard Mamie Little and my sister yelling:

"Scratch-Cat! Scratch-Cat!"

Swatty came on the run. He was pretty mad, because him and me was chums, and I was his cow-cousin and his double Dutch uncle, and he ran right past me and up to the girl. He gave her a push with his hand, and it sort of pushed her around; but she straightened up again and just looked at him.

"You scratch-cat!" he said, as mean as he knew how. "Who are you scratching around here, I'd like to know?"

I thought she'd jump on him and claw him, like she did me; but she didn't.

"I ain't going to hurt you," she said.

"You bet you ain't!" Swatty said. "'Cause why? 'Cause you darsent, that's why!" Only he said, "'Cors why?" like he always does.

She didn't say she did dare, and she didn't say she didn't dare. She said:

"Come over in my yard and play with me. Don't you play with them. I can play good."

So Swatty pushed her again, and she stepped back a step.

"Don't you play with girls!" she said. "You come and play with me."

"Aw! you're a girl too," Swatty said. "Go awrn home and play with yourself."

So he gave her another push. She looked as if she hadn't ever thought that she was a girl before. She said:

"I can beat you running. I can beat you jumping. I can beat you climbing trees. I can beat you skinning the cat. I can chin myself ten times more than you can. I can stand on my head longer than you can."

"Go awrn home!" Swatty said, and gave her another shove.

She stepped back again.

"Come on and play in my yard," she said again. "I can throw you any hold you want. I can fight you and lick you."

"Becors you're a scratch-cat," Swatty said, and pushed her again.

"I can lick you without scratching," the girl said. "Well, then, do it!" said Swatty. "Go on and do it, why don't you? I want to see you do it!"

So each time he said it he gave her a push.

"I won't!" she said. "I ain't going to fight you."

"You darsent!"

"I ain't going to!"

"You don't dare!"

"I ain't going to!"

So every time Swatty said anything he shoved her again, and pretty soon he had her pushed clear back against the fence of her yard, and he left her there and came back. We went on playing. But every once in a while we thought of her, and when we looked she was standing just where Swatty had left her.

Well, we found out her name was Dell Brown, because my father went to speak to her father about the way she scratched my sister. Her father's name was Reverend Brown; but he had adopted her because her folks died, and she was a sore trial, but no doubt willed by the Almighty. The Reverend Brown was a sort of preacher, and had an old white horse and drove around the country and preached wherever he thought they needed preaching. Mrs. Brown was a sort of invalid and old, like Reverend Brown was, and he was almost too old to adopt Dell Brown for his daughter. He had ought to have adopted her for his granddaughter when he was adopting.

So he said he would pray about it, and Mrs. Brown said she couldn't understand Dell Brown, hardly, why she had the fighting streak in her, because at home she was all love and affection to Mrs. Brown, and a word made the child weep. I guess Dell Brown had just so much fight in her and had to get it fought out. I guess she thought it was better to go out and fight than to fight Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Maybe she was sort of fond of them because they were funny and old and had adopted her. I guess she was like George Washington: she was good and nice, but she liked to fight.

Well, after while school started again. I kind of hated to go, because I always hate to, but more because I thought Dell Brown would go to school. So she did, and the first time she got me alone she took me by the hair and walloped me good. I hadn't done nothing to her, except maybe yell "Scratch-Cat!" at her sometimes when I was far enough away. So after that I didn't go to school very early, but kind of hung around until Dell Brown went in, and then I went in. I never told on her. If she says I did she tells what ain't so. It was Toady Williams.

Me and Swatty was kept in that day, like we 'most always were, and Bony was waiting outside. So Miss Murphy thought it wasn't any use talking to Dell Brown any more; it was time to rawhide her. She got the rawhide out of the closet, and told Dell Brown to come to the back of the room, and Dell Brown went. Miss Murphy put one hand on Dell Brown's shoulder, and lifted up the whip to switch her across the legs, and the next thing she did was to let out a scream, and you couldn't have believed her dress could be tom so in just a second if you hadn't seen it. Her hands were beginning to get red in streaks where Dell Brown had scratched them. So Dell Brown just threw Miss Murphy's hair switch on a desk, and stood there with her chest swelling in and out under her red and black checked dress, and Miss Murphy backed away and began winding her switch on her head again.

When Miss Murphy got her hair on, she went out and locked the door and got Professor Martin, the principal, who is her beau. He came in, and he was pretty mad. He grabbed Dell Brown and gave her a shake, and she flew at him like a cat and scratched him across the face. He slung her around, and she hit a desk and fell on the floor. It made her cry, and Professor Martin was scared of what he had done and went to pick her up. But when he stooped she clawed at him and scratched his other cheek, and he left her alone and told her to get up and go home, because she was expelled from school.

So Dell Brown got up, and held her hand to her side, and went and got her books and went home. But there was only one rib broke, and I guess it healed all right, because she was young and tough. But nobody whipped any more girls in school. I guess they thought it was safer to whip boys. They are more used to it, and their ribs ain't so brittle. Or maybe the school board stopped it. Professor Martin almost got fired because he had broken a rib for Scratch-Cat and he would of been fired only Scratch-Cat was such a ruffian, everybody said.

Well, of course the expelling didn't take, and Dell Brown came back after while, when Miss Murphy went away and Miss Carter came. She didn't fight much, because her rib was brittle yet, but she was cross all the time. It looked like she hated everybody and everybody hated her.

But one day Miss Carter was walking down the aisle and she had some flowers pinned on, and one dropped in the aisle, and Dell Brown picked it up and put it in a book. She used to open the book and look at the flower. She used to sit and look at Miss Carter, and you couldn't tell whether she was mad at her or not, because her face was so dark and her bangs so long that she always looked scowly. But I guess she wasn't mad, I guess she wanted Miss Carter to like her, but didn't know how to make her.

None of the girls played with Scratch-Cat because she scratched; and none of the boys played with her either, because they were afraid of her. As soon as school was out she would go home and play in her own yard. I guess she was pretty lonely.

Well, that was how it was up to the time I'm telling about, just before school closed, in June, and the weather was bully and warm. It made you want to do things. So on Saturday me and Swatty and Bony was sitting in my barn and talking about what we would do that afternoon. We thought of a lot of things, and said them, but, every time, Swatty said: "Aw! no, let's don't!" So we didn't. So then I said:

"I'll tell you what!"

"What?" Swatty asked.

"Pshaw, no!" I said. "It ain't no use. We couldn't get any. It ain't time for them yet."

"Aw! what are you talking about?" Swatty asked. "What ain't it time for?"

"Water-lilies," I said. "If it was time for waterlilies we could row up to the water-lily pond and get some water-lilies."

So then Swatty he talked up.

"Well, we could row up the river anyway, couldn't we?" he said--only he said "rowr" instead of "row," like he always does. "We could rowr up the river and get some pond-lily roots and sell them."

"Aw! who would buy old pond-lily roots?" Bony wanted to know.

Well, I thought at first that the reason Swatty said we could sell pond-lily roots was because once I had told him about a man or somebody who had made money getting pond-lily roots and selling them to people who wanted to raise pond-lilies in a tub in their gardens. But that was n't why he said it.

"Why, garsh! plenty of people would want to buy them," Swatty said. "I guess I ought to know. I guess I've got an uncle in Derlingport, ain't I? I guess he ought to know about pond-lily roots, oughtn't he?"

It looked like that ought to be so, because Derlingport is three times as big as Riverbank, and Swatty's uncle was older than any of us. But Bony said: "Aw! what does your old uncle know about pond-lily roots, anyway?"

"I guess he knows plenty about them," Swatty said. "I guess if you went up to Derlingport to visit him you'd see whether he knows anything about them or not! I bet my uncle is the richest man in Derlingport, and the reason he is is because once, when I was out pond-lilying, I sent him a pond-lily root and he grew it in a tub, and when folks saw it they wanted to grow some too. So my uncle he rowred up the river to a pond-lily pond, and he got some roots and sold them. First orff he only got a few and sold them; but pretty soon he had a hundred men getting pond-lily roots for him, and he had to build a pond-lily root elevator, like the grain elevator down on the levee, but ten times bigger."

"Gee-my-nentily!" Bony said. "Ten times bigger! Gee!"

"Ho! that ain't nothing!" Swatty said. "That was when he was just beginning to start out. He's got ten of them elevators now, and--he's got almost ten trillion-billion pond-lily roots in them. He's got a railway switch and a steamboat dock to each elevator, and when he ships pond-lily roots he ships them by the trainload. Only, when he sells them in Dubuque or Keorkuk, he ships them by the boatload."

"Gee-my-nentily!" said Bony again. "Come on! Let's--"

"Well, I guess so!" said Swatty. "I guess it's no wonder he's the richest man in Derlingport! And I can just go and visit him any time I want to. I can go visit him and take a bath right in his china bathtub."

"Aw! go on!" I said. "He ain't got a china bathtub!"

"Yes, sir! just like a tea-cup."

"Gosh!" Bony said. "Did you take a bath in it?"

"Garsh, no!" said Swatty. "Do you think I'd go taking bath-tub baths when I didn't have to? When I visit him my uncle lets me do just what I want to. I don't have to wash my feet, or take a bath, or go for a cow, or fetch in wood--"

"Who fetches in the wood?" Bony asked.

"Nobody," Swatty said. "My uncle don't burn sawmill slabs or cord wood. He burns coal."

"Well, somebody has to fetch in the coal, don't he?" I wanted to know.

"Well, I guess not!" said Swatty. "He--he has a--a bridge built right over the top of his house, so he can run a railroad over it, and he has a big iron box on top of his house under the bridge, and the railroad hawls the cars of coal right up on top of the roof and dumps the coal into the iron box, and it runs down the chimbleys right into the stove." Well, me and Bony didn't say nothing. We just sat there and thought what we thought.

"And he's got a road scooped out under his house for a railroad to run on," Swatty said, "and there is a train of cars under the house, and when my uncle, or anybody, shakes the grate the ashes fall right down an iron pipe into the cars."

"Come on!" I said. "Come on! Let's go somewhere."

So Swatty looked at me; but I hadn't said he was a liar or anything, so there was nothing to fight about. If I had wanted to I could have said I had an uncle somewhere that didn't bother with dirty old coal and ashes at all, but had his own natural gas well and used natural gas; but my nose was sore yet from the last time Swatty had pushed it into my face, so I didn't say it.

We went down to the boat-house and hired a skiff and rowed up the river to the pond-lily pond. The river was pretty low and it was muddy on the bank of the river--over knee-deep in mud. Swatty got out over the bow of the skiff to pull it up on the mud, so the wash from any steamboat would n't send it adrift, and he went in over the knees of his pants, so we thought we had better undress in the skiff, and we did. It felt bully to be undressed outdoors again.

I guess you know how the lily-pond is. On one side is the railroad and on the other side is the river; but between the pond and the river is narrow sand, with willows on it--bush willows. It makes a bank all around the lower end of the pond-lily pond and ends at the railroad. So me and Bony and Swatty talked it over, and thought we'd better not leave our clothes in the skiff, because somebody might steal them. First we thought we'd hide them in the willows, and then we thought we'd carry them around by the sand spit to the railroad, because the pond-lily roots were over by the railroad more. So we did. We walked around to the railroad and left our clothes there, and waded in. Swatty went first.

It was pretty tough. You went into the mud pretty deep, and there were plants that had scratch-els on them, and the lily plants and the arrow-leaf plants were so thick you could hardly wade. They were all around the shore for two or three rods, and you couldn't see over them. They rustled like corn when we pushed through them. But we knew there was a big clear place in the middle of the pond, so we waded on out to it. It was the place where I learned to swim. It wasn't over head anywhere.

Well, Swatty came to the open place first, and he stopped and said:

"There's somebody out there."

Me and Bony peeked, and there was. Right off we saw who it was--it was Scratch-Cat. She was in where the water was under-arm deep, and she was sort of crying, she was so mad. Then we saw what she was trying to do--she was trying to learn herself to swim. It was enough to make anybody laugh.

It looked like she had been at it a long time, for she was so cold she was shivering. We were near enough to her to see that the black spot on her arm was a mole and not a leaf or a vaccination, and we could see her shiver as plain as could be. The way she was learning herself to swim was this: she put her hands out in front of her and sort of jumped off her feet and then kicked and pounded the water and went down under. I guess you know how that feels. You can't get your head above water when you are that deep unless you stand up; so you paw in the mud, and get scared because you can't get to your feet. Dell Brown would come up scared to death, and spit and blow, and sort of cry, and shiver, and then she would do it all again.

I guess it was pretty tough. Every time she went down she must have got scratched up by the weeds with scratchels on them--some kind of smartweed--and she was scared and chilly. It was mighty funny. I guess I laughed out aloud.

Anyway, all at once she saw Swatty and us. She ducked like a shot, until only her head was out of water, and me and Bony laughed. But Swatty didn't. He pushed me and Bony back and said: "Hey! Scratch-Cat! Wait; I'll show you how to swim." Only, he said, "I'll show you how to swim," the way he always says "show."

So he slid his hands out on the water and turned on his side and swam towards where she was. He didn't mean nothing. All he meant was to show her how to swim, because she would never learn the way she was trying. But Scratch-Cat turned and held her arms straight out in front of her and hurried for the shore, pushing the weeds away with her hands.

Swatty kept telling her to wait, and once he came up to her, and she turned and hammered him with her fists, crazy mad, and he let her go on. The weeds must have scratched her pretty bad, ripping through them that way; but she got to the railway track and began putting her clothes on fast. So Swatty said: "Garsh! I bet she gets our clothes and hides them or something!"

So me and Swatty and Bony hurried to where our clothes were and dressed. We got most of our duds on and were putting on the rest, when we heard somebody yelling. It was a woman, and she was over on the river road, across a cornfield from where we were, and she was yelling like she was being murdered. I was mighty scared. All I thought of was that whoever was murdering her would murder her and then come over and murder us.

I guess Bony thought the same thing, for he got white and started to run down the railway bank toward our skiff. So

I started after him. But Swatty he started to run the other way, down the bank to the cornfield, towards where the woman was screaming. He rolled under the bob-wire fence and started down between the com rows as hard as he could go. Me and Bony stopped and looked, and then we went after him, only slower. When we got deep into the com we got more scared. We didn't like to be so far from where Swatty was, with a woman screaming like that and being murdered. So I hurried up, and Bony came along, blubbering. I told him to shut up.

We came to the edge of the cornfield and stopped. It was Miss Carter, our teacher, and a tramp had her by the throat, trying to make her stop her yelling. And just then Swatty jumped on the tramp. He had a rock, and he lammed at the tramp with it and hit him on the arm. So then Miss Carter went limp and stopped yelling, and fell in a pile on the road, because the tramp let go of her and she fainted.

The road was all tramped up and covered with walked-on flowers Miss Carter had been getting; but the tramp reached around and grabbed Swatty and got him by the neck and began to pound his head. Me and Bony crouched down and looked between the boards of the cornfield fence, because we was too scared to run away.

Swatty done the best he could, but it wasn't much use. He was getting killed, I guess. But all at once Scratch-Cat came a-sailing out of the cornfield and lit on the tramp with both hands.

When her eight claws came raking down his face he let loose of Swatty and grabbed for Scratch-Cat; but she wasn't where he grabbed. She was standing away, with her hands clawed and her head sort of pointed at him, ready to jump again. So Swatty picked up the rock and slung it, and caught him in the back of the neck. He hollered like a bull and turned, and Scratch-Cat went at him and raked him on the side of his face. He lammed at her, and I guess he caught her on her brittle rib, because she hollered.

She didn't care what happened, I guess, when he hit her brittle rib, so she went right at him, and Swatty made a dive for his legs and got a hold on them. The tramp fought good and hard. He went down, but he kept on fighting; and Swatty hollered for me to get a rock and whack the tramp on the head with it. Maybe I would have. I don't know. Just then a top buggy came around the bend of the road, and the tramp showed all he was worth and beat off Swatty and Scratch-Cat and cut into the woods. We heard him cracking the brush as he scooted, and that was all we knew about him.

Well, the man in the top buggy was Herb Schwartz. So he got out and picked up Miss Carter and fetched her to, and Swatty told him what had happened. So Herb went to where Scratch-Cat was sitting on the side of the road, with her hand where her brittle rib had busted. So Swatty went over there too.

"Garsh! I'd of been killed if you hadn't come!" he said. But she stood up and looked at him.

"What'd you come swimming at me when I was naked for?" she said, and she was as mad as hops. I guess her rib hurt her and made her sort of crazy mad, and Swatty was the first one that came near her, so she picked on him. "Why'd you dare?" she screeched at him. "I'll show you not to!"--or something like that.

So she went for him. She didn't scratch, either; she used her fists. She fought like crazy, and got her leg back of his, and threw him and piled on top of him. He had to fight as hard as he knew how to, and it was all right, because she wasn't a girl--she was something crazy mad. It was a quick fight and a good one, and then Herb Schwartz grabbed Scratch-Cat by the shoulder and pulled her off Swatty; but that didn't matter, because the fight was over anyhow. Swatty had said: "Enough! I won't do it again!"

Well, as soon as Herb had stood Scratch-Cat up, she turned white and fell down. She had fainted. It was a good deal of a mess-up. Miss Carter had got hysterical, and was laughing and crying so she couldn't put her hair up where it had fell down, and Scratch-Cat was stretched out fainted, and I guess Herb Schwartz was never so busy in his life before. He sent me and Bony and Swatty over to the pond-lily pond for a hatful of water, and while we were gone he hugged Miss Carter until she wasn't hysterical, because I guess that was what she needed to cure her, and then he soused Scratch-Cat with the water and she came around all right. So he took Miss Carter and Scratch-Cat back to town in the top buggy, and me and Swatty and Bony went back to our skiff and rowed home.

Swatty was pretty quiet. I guess he thought Herb and Miss Carter would tell all over town how he had been licked by a girl; but he told me and Bony he would kill us if we told it, so we didn't. But neither did Herb or Miss Carter. The reason was that Scratch-Cat told them not to tell she had been fighting. Herb told Swatty that Scratch-Cat had asked them not to.

After a while Scratch-Cat's brittle rib healed up again and she didn't have to stay in bed, and I was going down-town on an errand past her house, and I saw Swatty in her yard. They were playing mum-bledy-peg. So after that she played with me and Bony and Swatty, and pretty soon with Mamie Little and my sister and the other girls, and she was almost the one they liked best.

So one day Swatty said to me:

"Don't you ever darst yell at me that Scratch-Cat is my girl!"

"Aw! I never yelled it!" I said.

"You better not!" he said. "Because she ain't." So then I knew she was.

VI. THE CARDINAL'S SIGNET RING

Well, for about a day I guess Bony thought he was about the smartest kid that ever lived. Anyhow, he acted that way and the reason was that his house had been burgled and mine and Swatty's houses hadn't been. But that wasn't our fault.

Swatty didn't say much because he thought maybe the burglar would come around and burglar his house and then he would be as good as Bony. But the burglar didn't go to any more houses, and me and Swatty got pretty sick and tired of hearing Bony bragging about the burglar climbing right in at his window and almost falling over his bed, and about how--if he had wakened up--he would have gone into his father's room and got his father's shotgun and shot the burglar.

We got pretty sick of hearing about the reward Bony's father had offered, and about how the policemen came to the house and looked at Bony's bedroom window and everything and wrote it all down.

"Garsh!" Swatty said; "it ain't nothing to brag about to be burgled! The way you talk you'd think nobody in the world could be burgled but you. If I wanted to I could write to my uncle in Derlingport and he'd send down a burglar to burglar my house in a minute. And he'd burglar Georgie's house, too. And my uncle would send down a real burglar, too."

That was a good one on Bony, because the newspaper said the policemen said the burglar that bur-gled Bony's house wasn't a real burglar but only "local talent."

"Well--well--" Bony said, "well, if your uncle can send down so many real burglars, why don't he do it, and not leave you sitting there talking about what he can do all the time?"

"Aw! if you say much more about your old burglar I will write to my uncle to send some down," Swatty said.

"Aw! and if you did he wouldn't get nothing! What'd he get at your house? I bet he wouldn't get any cardinal's signet ring."

Well, I guess that made Swatty pretty mad. I guess we had heard about all we wanted to hear about that old signet ring, so Swatty started to go away, and he said to me:

"Come on! he thinks there ain't nothing in the world but that old signet ring. I bet it was brass, anyway."

But the cardinal's signet ring wasn't brass, because it said in the newspaper it was gold.

I guess I knew plenty about that signet ring before the burglar ever got it, because once Bony told us about it when we were at his house and he would have showed it to us, only his mother would not let him.

It had been in the family from generation unto generation. So when Bony's mother would not let us see it because her hands were in the dough and boys are too careless, Bony told us what it was like and said he guessed it was worth a million dollars, or maybe a hundred, anyway, because it was solid gold and had a red, carved stone in it, and the cardinal had given it to his son, and he had given it to his son, and it had always been in the family. So I said:

"Aw! 't ain't so! Because cardinals couldn't give anything to their sons; they don't have any sons to give anything to."

"Well, this cardinal gave this ring to his son, so he did," Bony said. "This cardinal had a son."

"No, he didn't!" I said. "I guess I know about cardinals. They don't have any sons. They can't have sons. That's the law."

Well, Bony didn't know what to say, because he knew I was right, because I read a lot of books and he don't. So, if it hadn't been for Swatty I don't know what we would have done about it. I guess me and Bony would have been mad at each other forever, or had a fight or something, but Swatty had just been listening and spoke up.

"Aw!" he said; "that ain't nothing to fight about. The cardinal's signet ring could be an heirloom from generation to generation and the cardinal needn't have any son either. He could give it to his grandson, couldn't he?"

"Of course he could!" Bony said. "That's what he did."

"Sure he did!" said Swatty. "That's how all cardinals do. When they want to start an heirloom going they look around for a son to give it to, and when they haven't any sons they give the heirloom to their grandsons."

Well, the burglary was about Monday of the last week of school, and about Tuesday we were sick and tired of it--me

and Swatty was--but we didn't know how to shut Bony up, because we couldn't have burglars come to our houses just because we wished they would. So Tuesday after school when I went home my sister Fan was out in the side yard, where the vines grow on the porch, and she was down on her hands and knees.

Fan had been looking pretty sick for a good while and it was because Herb had gone back on her, or her on him. I felt mighty sorry for her, even if she was my sister, and mother said she was worried and that the only thing to cheer Fan up would be to send her somewhere, far from the scene. So Fan had said she would go.

So there she was on her knees in the grass and when she saw me she said, "Georgie!"

"What?" I said.

"Georgie," she said, "I lost a ring here--one with just one diamond in it--"

"I know. The ring Herb gave you."

"Yes. If you find it for me, George," she said, "I'll give you--I'll give you ten dollars."

Well, I tried to divide three into ten, and you can't do it, so I said:

"Maybe I can find it for fifteen dollars," because that would be five dollars apiece for me and Swatty and Bony.

Fan looked at me, and then said, "Very well, find it if you can, please."

And that wasn't like Fan, because what she would mostly say, would be, "You little imp, you know where that ring is! You get it this instant or father will attend to you."

So I knew she was pretty sick about Herb.

Well, as soon as Fan said that I skipped out the back way, over to Swatty's, and asked him for the ring, because we had had it in partnership, and I had let him have it awhile. I told him what I wanted it for and he said:

"I ain't got it. I thought you or Bony had it; I gave it to Bony."

So we went over to Bony's house, and the minute we said "ring" he was scared stiff. "It was stole," he said. "The burglar stole it out of my pants pocket, but I didn't say nothing because I guessed the police would get it back again." So that was a nice one, wasn't it? So me and Swatty were mad at Bony and we wouldn't talk to him or let him play with us unless we got the ring back, and none of the policemen caught Bony's burglar. Bony's father printed a reward of fifty dollars in the newspaper, but my father said that whoever caught the burglar would n't be half as lucky if he caught him as he would if he ever got fifty dollars out of Bony's father, because my father would be blessed if he believed Bony's father had ever seen fifty dollars at one time. So maybe the policemen knew that. Anyway, they did not catch the burglar. I guess folks thought he would never be caught, and he never would have been if it hadn't been for me and Swatty and Mamie Little. I guess he would never have been caught if Mamie Little had known how to spell "sulphur."

The burglar got plenty of other things from Bony's house, too, but the signet ring is the thing I'm telling about because it was the signet ring that helped Swatty to catch the burglar. That and Mamie Little, only Mamie Little didn't know she helped until I told her, and then she didn't understand any better than she did about the sulphur bag. I guess nobody will know unless I tell it. So I'll tell it.

Thursday afternoon I went past Mamie Little's yard about five o'clock and she was trying to fix up a couple of old boxes to make a playhouse and I leaned on the fence and was glad I was there, because nobody else was there to see me. So I said: "Aw! that's no way to make a playhouse out of boxes!"

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I know it ain't. I want this one on top of the other one but I can't lift it."

"I bet I could lift it!" I said.

"I know you could," she said. "Boys are stronger than girls."

"If you don't tell anybody," I said, "I'll come in and lift it for you."

So I went in and lifted it, and she was glad. She said it made a dandy upstairs for her playhouse, and she said boys were fine, because they were so strong. So I felt pretty good. So she took a hammer and began to nail some nails, to make shelves and things, and I told her girls didn't know how to nail, and she said she knew they didn't.

So I took the hammer, and just then I saw Swatty coming. So I threw down the hammer mighty quick and said:

"I got to go now. My mother wants me, but if you want me to I'll come over Saturday and we'll fix up the playhouse nice."

So she did want me to; and I said I'd come and I felt gladder than I had ever felt before, and I dodged behind the lilac bushes and got out of her yard the back way, and Swatty did not see me. So that was all right.

Well, I guess there was diphtheria or scarlet fever or something in town then and, anyway, my mother and lots of the kids' mothers made us wear sulphur bags. That was so we wouldn't catch it, whatever it was. They were little bags about as big as a watch, and there was sulphur in them and aseophidity, or asophedeta, or asofidity, or whatever you spell it.

It smells pretty rank but it keeps away whatever you might catch.

Well, going to school Swatty met me and he said:

"Say, let's go fishing down the Slough, tomorrow."

"I can't, Swatty," I said, because I wanted to do what I had said I would do for Mamie Little, only I didn't want to tell Swatty that, so I said: "I've got to stay home and work."

"Pshaw!" Swatty said, only he said it "Pshawr!" like he always does. "If you can't go I won't go, either! If you can't go I'm going to stay home and split the wood I ought to split."

"Well, I can't go," I said. So we went into the schoolhouse and into our room. Mamie Little was there. She had just hung up her hat and she was standing by her desk, nearly across the room, and she looked fine, her cheeks were so red and her eyes were kind of sparkly. There were only one or two there besides us.

So, while she was standing by her desk she sort of picked at her dress on her chest a couple of times the way I had been picking at my shirt front, and I was glad to think she had a sulphur bag, too, like I had. It was nice to think we both had the same, only she didn't know I had one.

So I whistled a little whistle--"Wheet!"--and she looked at me. I guess she smiled at me. I felt mighty brave. So I started with the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, pointing at my eye for "I," and rubbing my hands across each other for "h" and I spelled out "I have a" and she nodded her head at each word to show she knew what I was spelling. So I spelled out "sulphur," because what I wanted to tell her was "I have a sulphur bag, too," but when I got to "sulph" she shook her head and I had to begin again, because she couldn't understand.

I was standing up and she was standing up and she was standing so she looked right at me, and I spelled and spelled. Sometimes I began at the beginning and spelled "I have sulph" and sometimes I spelled "sulphur" over and over, but she just shook her head each time and smiled and waited. She was awfully interested, and more and more scholars came in, and pretty soon they were all watching me and trying to spell what I was spelling, but nobody did, I guess. Mamie Little got awfully interested and she was mighty eager to find out what I was trying to spell. Then, all at once, I knew why she couldn't tell; it was because she didn't have any sulphur bag on. So, all at once, I felt mighty cheap! There she was, thinking I had something awfully important I was trying to tell her, and she didn't have a sulphur bag, and I was making a fool of her before the whole school, because what would she think of me telling her I had a sulphur bag if she didn't have one? And making such a fuss about it, as if it was something wonderful like telling her her father was dead, or something.

Then, all of sudden, I remembered I was going to her yard the next day, to help her with her playhouse, and I felt worse than ever. The first thing she would want to know would be what I had tried to spell out, and if I told her she would think I was crazy to make so much fuss about such a thing, and if I did not tell her she would be mad at me forever and maybe talk about me to the other girls. I couldn't bear to think about it and I couldn't help thinking about it. So, after school, I hurried away as fast as I could, and when Swatty caught up with me I told him I had changed my mind and that I would go fishing with him. So that is how Mamie Little helped catch Bony's burglar. If it hadn't been for Mamie Little not knowing how to spell "sulphur" I wouldn't have gone fishing, and Swatty wouldn't have gone either, and the burglar wouldn't have been caught.

So Saturday morning I got in enough wood for all day and it wasn't much, because it was summer and the kitchen wood was all I had to get in. Then I hunted up a new tin can, because when we get through fishing we always throw the old one into the Slough, because by that time the worms that are left are pretty bad. Sometimes, if the can has been in the sun, they are even worse than that. So I got a new can and went around to the other side of the barn and the spade was there yet, from the last time I had dug worms, so I dug some more.

Just then Swatty came into the yard and he was ready to start. So my mother came to the back door with some sandwiches and things in a box, and I said:

"Aw! I don't want to carry a big box like that! Aw! I just want a couple of sandwiches in my pocket!"

"Georgie!" she said. "You take this box! You'll be glad enough of everything that's in it!"

Me and Swatty went up over the hill and down past the Catholic church to South Riverbank and we stopped at the pump on the corner and had a good drink and cooled off our feet in the mud under the pump spout, because the sidewalks were hot.

The water in the Slough wasn't high and it wasn't low. Once the Slough ran through to the river at this end but now it was all filled in with sawdust from the sawmill, and a big conveyor blowpipe kept blowing more sawdust into the Slough from the mill, and all the surface of the Slough was floating sawdust. Then, a little further along, it was water-lily leaves. Then, further along, it was plain Slough for miles and miles and miles.

The water was three or four feet down from the top of the bank and the bank was covered with pretty good grass, and all along the Slough there was a path worn, because kids and fellows had fished in the Slough ever since there was a Riverbank, and before that the Indians had fished in it, I guess. Everywhere, close to the edge of the bank in the shade of the trees, there were places worn smooth-like an old chair seat--where fellows had sat and fished for years and years until they were regular fishing places. When you saw one of them you knew it was a good fishing place and that

there was a bent root, all worn smooth and sometimes almost worn in two, part way down the bank, to rest your feet on.

It was all quiet and still, like a fishing place should be, except for the "urr-urr" of the mills away off, or the "caw caw!" of crows or, once in a while, somebody knocking the ashes out of a pipe against a root, across the Slough or a little splash when somebody caught a fish. Then everything would be quiet again.

So me and Swatty walked along down the path, because we thought we would go as far as we had ever been, or farther, this time. Once we stopped and ate 'most all of my lunch. It was nine o'clock but we were mighty hungry. Then we went on.

We got two or three miles down the Slough and most of the fishing places were empty there and I wanted to stop but Swatty said: "Aw! come on! Let's go on down to the point!" so we went.

The point wasn't much of a point but you felt more out in the Slough when you were on it. There was a big water maple at the end of it, with fine roots to sit on, and I sat on some of the roots and fished and Swatty sat on some others and fished. It was good and hot and the Slough smelled warm and weedy and we liked it, because that was part of the regular fishing smell. There was just a little ripple and the corks bobbed up and down gently and we set our poles among the roots and just leaned back and felt good. Over across the Slough was another point, but more rounded and bigger, and it was green and cool looking, with grass and three big elms on it, and back in the fields a cow's bell jingled once in a while, and the crows cawed, and the sawmill hummed away off in the distance, and it got hotter and hotter. I watched my cork until it seemed to lose itself in the ripples and my eyes got sleepier and sleepier and, the next thing I knew, I woke up and Swatty wasn't there! Neither was my cork!

The first thing I did was give my pole a yank and out came a jim-dandy goggle-eye sunfish, just about as good as I ever caught. I held him so the stickers wouldn't sting me and got the hook out of him and strung him on a piece of twine and I was tying the string to a root so the goggle-eye would be in the water when somebody down the Slough a ways hawked, clearing the tobacco out of his throat, and I looked around and saw Swatty coming back to the point, not making any noise. He held up a finger for me to be quiet and then he climbed out onto the roots of the maple and sat down.

"I caught a dandy goggle-eye, Swatty," I whispered.

He leaned over toward me.

"Don't make any noise!" he whispered. "Bony is over on that point."

I looked and I saw him. It was pretty far across the Slough and Bony couldn't hear us if we whispered.

"Well, he can't hear us, can he?" I whispered back.

"No," Swatty said and then he climbed over beside me and sat on a root. "There's a man down there," he said and he pointed.

"I heard him spit." I whispered. I began to feel scary because there was n't any use for Swatty to be so whispery unless there was something to feel scary at, was there?

"He's got Bony's father's signet ring," Swatty whispered. "Anyway, I guess he's got it. He's got a ring like what Bony says his father's ring is like. He's fishing and he's got the ring on his thumb."

Well, then I knew what Swatty had done. While I was asleep he had sneaked down to see what luck the man was having and he had seen the ring.

"Gee!" I said.

Swatty sat awhile with his forehead wrinkled and looked at the Slough and he was thinking.

"Garsh!" he said; "I'd like to be the one to get that fifty dollars. I wish I knew for certain it is Bony's father's ring. Fifty dollars is a lot of money. If I had it I'd put it in the bank."

"What bank?" I asked him. "The Savings Bank or the Riverbank National?"

"I guess maybe I'd put half in one and half in the other," Swatty said. "Then if one bank busted I'd have half left, anyway."

"Well, if one did bust maybe you'd get some of your money back," I said. "My father had money in a bank once and it busted and he got part of it back."

"That's so," Swatty said. "If I put in twenty-five and the bank busted maybe I'd get back fifteen of it. That would be forty dollars I'd have, even if the bank did bust. I'd like to have it."

So we sat there awhile and the crows cawed and the cowbell jingled and it was quiet, but we didn't catch any more fish.

"If we hadn't got mad at Bony he would be over here," Swatty said after a while.

"Well, what if he was?" I said.

"Well, he could sneak up and see if that ring is his father's ring, couldn't he?" said Swatty.

"Well, then," I said, "why don't you call to him to come over?"

As soon as I said it I knew it wasn't much to say, because it was two or three miles back to the end of the Slough and four or six miles Bony would have to go to get around to us, and he wouldn't come anyway because he'd think maybe we wanted to lick him or something. And if we shouted what we wanted him for, the burglar would hear us and would get away from there mighty quick.

"I'm going over and get Bony."

"How are you going to get him?" I asked.

"I'm going to row over," he said. "You stay here and watch that man and I'll go over and get Bony." Well, I guessed that if he said he would, he'd find some way to row over whether there was a boat or not, because that was the way Swatty was. When he wanted to do anything he did it. So I looked down the Slough and I could see the end of the man's fishpole sticking out over the water and his cork floating and Swatty climbed onto the bank and took his fishpole and went up the Slough. He had to go pretty far before he found a boat and the boat he found was not much good. It was an old flatboat and one end was busted some and it was water-logged. Swatty had to stay away up in one end to keep the busted end out of water and he paddled the best he could with a piece of fence board. He paddled out to the middle of the Slough and stopped there and pretended to fish a while and then he paddled a little nearer Bony and pretended to fish a while longer, and then he paddled to shore near where Bony was and got out of the flatboat and went up to Bony. For a while they sat together and I guessed Swatty was talking to Bony about the ring and the fifty dollars and the man, and coaxing Bony to come to our side of the Slough and see if it was his father's ring the man had on his thumb.

So all the time I kept looking three ways--at Bony and Swatty, and at my cork, and at the end of the man's fishpole--and all at once when I looked the man's fishpole wasn't there. It was gone!

So I looked harder, but it was gone, no matter how hard I looked. So then I knew Swatty would give me a whale of a licking if he came back and found out I had let the man get away while he was fetching Bony, and I climbed off the root and up the bank and I was just starting to run, to go where the man had been, when I saw him. He was right in the middle of the path near where he had been fishing and he was bent down with his back toward me, picking up fish, because the string he had had them strung on had broken. He was stringing them again and as he picked them up I could see the ring on his thumb.

Pretty soon he had all his fish strung again and then he straightened up and took a chew of tobacco and looked up into a tree that was right there, and I looked up and saw he had put his fishpole up the tree, so I guessed maybe he fished there pretty often, or was coming back sometime. So then he slouched off. I watched him.

He was big but he wasn't very old. Maybe he was twenty or thirty. His clothes were pretty old and faded and he looked lazy in the arms and legs and when he walked he walked tired. He went down the path a ways and then he climbed over the fence there was along there and I went across the path and watched him from behind another tree. It was a ploughed field there and he walked in a furrow clear across the field to the road that was on the other side and climbed over another fence. So I climbed up on my fence and watched to see where he would go. There were three little houses across the road and he went into the one on the end toward town. So then I guessed that was where he lived and I got down off my fence and went back to the point.

Swatty and Bony were in the boat and Swatty was paddling it as well as he could but it was only halfway across. Then, all at once, Swatty began to paddle harder. He paddled as hard as he could and then, I guess, he said something to Bony and Bony began to bail out the boat as fast as he could. Then Bony began to cry. I could hear him where I was and Swatty shouted at him and looked over his shoulder to see how far he had to paddle. Then Swatty dropped his paddle stick and began to bail with his hat like he was crazy. And before I could see it, almost, the old, rotten flatboat took a dive and Swatty and Bony were in the water. Bony yelled and went under but Swatty came right up, spitting water and kicking out with his hands. It was a good thing he was barefoot.

Well, Swatty looked all around as soon as he got the water out of his eyes but he couldn't see Bony. So he dived for him.

There's one place nobody ever swims and that is the Slough. All you have to do is to look down into it anywhere and you know why. All you see when you look down is seaweed--tons and oceans of it--all tangled and twisty, and old trees and branches sticking around in it to get caught onto. When the Slough is low you can't row on it because the seaweed grabs your oars and holds on like it was some mean man trying to drown your boat. It scares you. And all in among the seaweed are tough weeds and water-lily stems and water vines. There have been plenty of boys drowned in the Slough, I guess. So Bony had got caught in the weeds and vines and things.

Pretty soon Swatty came to the top but he didn't have Bony, but his arms were covered with seaweed. He spit out water and scraped the seaweed off his arms and then he took his nose in his hand and dived again. That time he got him. He got him by one leg and he swam for shore dragging Bony behind him and the seaweed strung out behind Bony. His head was all covered with it.

I was crying pretty hard, I guess. So Swatty told me to shut up and he turned Bony over on his back and began scraping the seaweed off his face, and Bony's face was scratched a good deal from the rough weeds and maybe from where I had dragged him up the bank on his face. I thought he was dead but Swatty didn't. He leaned down and listened to Bony's heart and said all he needed was to be pumped out. So he started to pump him out.

Swatty got down on his knees a-straddle of Bony and took Bony's hands in his and pumped him the way he had heard you ought to pump a drowned person. He pushed Bony's arms clear back until they touched the ground over his head and then he drew them forward until they touched the ground again, and he kept right at it. Every once in a while Swatty would shake his head to shake the water out of his ears but he went right on pumping. So I stood and blubbered.

Well, no water pumped out of Bony. Swatty pumped and pumped but no water came out of Bony's mouth and pretty soon Swatty stopped and took a couple of deep breaths.

"Garsh!" he said; "I thought he would pump easier than that!"

So he pumped him again a few times and then stopped again. It looked as if it wasn't any use.

"I know what's the matter," Swatty said. "We've got to prime him. There ain't enough water in him to start unless he's primed. When our cistern is low at home we have to prime it before the water starts pumping up, and that's what we've got to do."

Well, I guessed that was so. Our cistern pump was that way too. So I took my bait can and washed it out good and clean and got a can of water and I primed Bony. I poured a little water in Bony's mouth and Swatty pumped.

"Prime him some more," Swatty said.

So I primed him some more. It didn't seem to do any good.

"Aw, prime him a lot!" Swatty said, so I poured all the water I had in the can into Bony's mouth and went and got some more.

"Keep on!" Swatty said. "He'll start pretty soon. We've got to get the water pumped out of him."

So I was priming Bony again when somebody behind us said:

"What are you trying to do to that boy?"

I looked around, and Swatty looked around. It was the man with the ring on his thumb.

"He's drowned," Swatty said, "and we're trying to pump him out."

The man took ahold of Swatty's shoulder and threw him almost into the fence. He stooped down and grabbed Bony and threw him across a big maple root, face down, and began to pump and pretty soon Bony began to pump out. The man pumped him pretty dry and then he put him in the sun and began to rub him good and after a while Bony opened his eyes. To see him open his eyes was one of the best things I ever saw. I was mighty glad I had helped to undrown him.

Bony was pretty much wilted. Me and Swatty didn't know how we would ever get him home but we didn't have to.

"About one more can of water in this kid and he would have been gone for good," the man said. "Now, you help him onto my back and I'll get him home for you."

We got Bony onto his back and Bony hung around his neck and the man held Bony's legs under his arms. He climbed the fence with him that way and started off across the ploughed field and me and Swatty went after him. We didn't even think about taking our fishpoles along. We went across the field and the man stopped at his house and called his mother and she gave Bony some whiskey in hot water while the man went over to a farmer's house and got a team and a wagon. So, while he was gone Swatty said to Bony:

"Is it?"

He meant the cardinal's signet ring, and was it it.

"Yes, it's it," Bony said, but not very loud. He was pretty much drowned yet.

So we all went back to town in the farmer's wagon; me and Bony and Swatty and the man and the farmer kid that was driving. So Swatty sat with the farmer kid and talked to him.

"That man saved Bony's life," Swatty said. "Who is he?"

"Him? He's Lazy Joe," the farmer kid said. "He's Lazy Joe Mulligan. He don't do nothing but fish and loaf."

So then Swatty knew who the burglar was.

We drove up to town and Swatty told the farmer kid where to drive and pretty soon we came to Bony's house. The man, Lazy Joe Mulligan, looked pretty funny, you bet, when we drove right up to the house he had burgled. He put his hand in his pocket and when he pulled it out the ring was gone.

"Come on!" Swatty said to me.

"Where to?" I asked him.

"Down to Bony's father's to get that fifty dollars," Swatty said. So we went.

Well, I guess we forgot to tell Bony's father about Bony being drowned and pumped out. We just told him we had the burglar up at his house and that we wanted the fifty dollars, and he rushed out and up the street and got a policeman and hurried to his house. Lazy Joe was there yet, telling Bony's mother how he had pumped Bony out, but the farmer kid was n't there, because Bony's mother had sent him down to get Bony's father. She wanted Bony's father to give Lazy Joe five dollars or something for pumping Bony out.

Then me and Swatty and Bony's father and the policeman came in and Bony's father was saying: "Officer, arrest him! He's the man that stole my property," while Bony's mother was saying: "Edward, give him five dollars or something! He's the man that saved your son's life."

"How is that?" asked Bony's father, and he was pretty much mixed; "I thought this was the burglar."

"He is the burglar," said Swatty. "He's got the cardinal's ring in his pocket right now. I seen it, and Georgie seen it, and Bony seen it."

Then Lazy Joe didn't know what to say. Then he said:

"I'll give everything back."

So that was how they fixed it. Bony's father saved fifty-five dollars. He saved the five dollars he ought to have given Lazy Joe for saving Bony's life and he saved the fifty dollars he ought to have given Swatty. So all me and Swatty knew next was that we were out on the street and we didn't have anything to show for catching the burglar. All we had was what Bony's father said. What he said was:

"Get out of here, you little rats! Be thankful you haven't my child's death on your shoulders!"

Well, I was going, but Swatty stood right there.

"No, sir!" he said. "I won't go. You can cheat us out of fifty dollars reward, maybe, but you've got to give back the diamond ring this burglar has that belongs to Herb and Fan. You got to give that back, because it ain't yours."

"Have you got a ring like that?" the policeman asked Lazy Joe.

"Yes," he said, and he took it out of one of his pockets. So Swatty took it and we skipped out. We went right over to my house, because it was dark by now, and I went to Fan and told her we had her ring for her. I didn't know what I would say when she asked me where I got it, but she didn't ask. She just went to her drawer and got out fifteen dollars and gave it to me and didn't say anything. Only when I went out of the room I heard her bed creak sudden, and I knew she had sort of thrown herself down on it, broken-hearted, like in a novel.

VII. THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Well, it looked like that vacation would be a sort of nice one--at the beginning of it, anyway--because Fan had taken mother's advice and gone over to Chicago to visit Aunt Beatrice, and Mamie Little had gone down to Betzville to be on her uncle's farm awhile, because it would do her good.

When Fan went she went in a closed carriage as far as the depot, because she was so pale and peaked she didn't want anybody to see her and have Herb hear of it. She sent him his ring back, I guess, before she went.

I thought it was pretty mean that Fan had to be mostly sick like that, while Herb was as well as ever and having a good time with Miss Carter, as far as I knew, but it wasn't any of my business. Mother said she guessed Fan would get over it, because she was young yet and, goodness knew! there wasn't so much difference between one man and another, but that if people like Bony's mother didn't stop coming over and talking about it she would go mad. And I guess that was so because Bony's mother is some talker. I've heard her talk.

I heard her talk about Fan one day, and it made me sick. And then she talked about Bony, and it made me sicker.

I was sitting on the edge of our porch waiting for Swatty and Bony. I was tying a piece of salt pork on the bottom of my foot to keep from getting the "lockjaw, because I had stepped on a rusty nail, and I thought maybe I had better scrape some of the sand out of the nail hole before I put the pork on, so it would heal quicker, and I was scraping it out with my barlow knife. That's how I happened to be sitting on the edge of the porch; but Bony's mother and my mother were at the other end of the porch. So then Bony's mother said:

"No, I have never used a switch on my son. I have never struck him with my hand, nor has his father. We don't believe in it. We use moral suasion." That means they jaw Bony. They corner him up somewhere and jaw him until he

blubbers, the way the teachers jaw the girls when they get too big to paddle, and then Bony's mother blubbers and makes Bony kiss her and say that now he will be a better and truer boy and keep the Ten Commandments and not smoke com silk any more. Or whatever it is.

So my mother didn't say anything because when she thinks I need it she wales me good. Anyway, I'd rather be waled ten times a day than be moral-suasioned like Bony, and so would Swatty, and so would all the kids, and so would Bony. But my mother didn't say anything because Bony's mother was a caller and you don't fight with callers until after they've got you so perfectly exasperated you just have to speak your mind.

So Bony's mother said:

"Yes, indeed!" and she said it the way women say things when they 're being stylish. "Yes, indeed! the rod implants fear in the child, and we should rule by love. My child shall never know fear. The normal child never knows fear."

Well, that's when I almost laughed out loud. Such a smarty, sitting there and letting on she knew anything about boys! Say, I guess she never was a boy! "Normal boys never know fear!" She must have thought she was in heaven, talking about kid angels and not about boys!

Boys are always afraid of something. Even Swatty used to be afraid of that old witch, Mrs. Groogs. We other boys used to go across the street from where she lived and holler:

*"Old Mother Groogsy, oh!
Lost her needle and couldn't sew!
Old Mother Groogsy, oh!
Lost her nee-dul and could-dent sew!
Old Mu-uth-er Gur-roog-sy, oh!
Lu-ost her nee-eedul and ku-uld-dent sew!"*

And then we'd throw clods at her shanty until she came out with a stick or broom--mostly it was the cane she used to walk with--and then we'd all throw clods at her at once and run. It made her pretty mad. But Swatty made her maddest. He knew a German rhyme he could say pretty fast, and he'd say it and she would get so mad she would shake all over.

Well, one day when we were all sort of teasing her like that, and Swatty was with us, she came out with a sword. It was a horse soldier's sword, a saber, and it was so big she could hardly lift it, but she could with both hands, and she came right at us across the street, swinging it around her head. If it had hit us it would have killed us, but we ran. So after that whenever she came out she would have the sword, but we weren't afraid of her when we were together. It was when one of us alone had to go anywhere near her shanty. We wouldn't do it. We'd go 'round.

Well, she was one of the things we were afraid of, but the new street got her away from there. The new street went right through where her shanty was, so they tore the shanty down, and after that we weren't afraid of her any more, because she was gone.

So this day--it was Saturday--I was sitting on the porch fixing my foot when Swatty came over, like he said he would. Bony was with him, but he waited in the alley because he knew his mother was at my house. I got around the corner of the house without my mother seeing I was limping much, so she didn't call me back, and when we got to the alley Bony was there all right, with a shovel he had borrowed out of their coal bin while his mother wasn't home. It was to go ahead and make another room in our cave with. I could walk pretty good, but I had to walk on the toe end of one of my feet to keep the heel off the ground because the nail hole was in the palm of my foot. We got to our cave all right.

Our cave was a good one, it was the best one I ever saw anybody make. It was in the clay bank at the side of Squaw Creek up where there are no more Irish shanties or geese and where the creek bed is gravelly instead of sandy. We found the place one day when we were explorers, exploring the creek to its headwaters, only we stopped when we got to this place and turned pirates and began digging the cave. We didn't do much that day, but the next chance we got Swatty had us go up and dig again. We dug a little every time we went up until the hole was big enough for us all to get in, and then Swatty said we'd keep right on digging until it was big enough to live in.

That was what we thought of right at first, but we forgot it. We had had enough cave digging, I guess. Swatty said: "Aw, garsh! come on and make a good cave!" but we didn't want to. We wanted to smoke com silk and talk and be comfortable. So Swatty went outside and climbed up the bank; but pretty soon he came sliding down the bank. He made the silence sign and motioned us to come with him. He looked good and scared. So we all climbed up the bank and looked.

The grass and weeds came right to the edge of the bank and from the edge they stretched away over a big field. All around the field were trees, edging it in, but that wasn't what Swatty wanted us to see.

Away over in one corner of the field the Graveyard Gang was playing One Old Cat.

So that was where we were. The old Squaw Creek had turned and twisted until it went right into the part of the edge of town where the Graveyard Gang kids lived, and we had dug our cave right in a place where we had never dared to go. Gee, I was scared!

We were always scared of the Graveyard Gang. They had to come down to our school, and there were a lot of them and mostly bigger than we were and we generally fought after school, but it was only sometimes that they could catch us and mauler us, because we could throw clods at them and then skip into our yards where we lived, and they couldn't come after us. But what they always tried to do was to get some of us cornered off and chase us out toward the cemetery way. If they got us out there they could surround us and mauler the life out of us. And they would.

So me and Bony saw that our cave was a pretty good thing. If the Graveyard Gang got us cornered off and we had to run out their way they would think they had us, but we would just run and slide down to our cave and then we could fight them until they had enough or we had killed them all. So every day that we went to the cave we took up stones, and we dug and dug. It was a dandy cave. It was big enough to stand up in, and we made a stove out of old iron and made a hole up through the ceiling for the smoke to go out, and we had some potatoes and things so we could stand a long siege. We worked at it nearly all vacation. Swatty showed us how to make a door, and we made it and we painted the outside with wet clay so the door would look like the side of the bank but it didn't. It did some, but not much.

Well, when school began again we began having clod fights with the Graveyard Gang again and some of them were pretty tough fights. Once, Swatty said, when me and Bony wasn't with him some of the Graveyard kids cornered him off and chased him all the way out to their part of town, but he dodged and went behind some bushes and got to the cave and hid there until night, and they never found him. So we knew the cave was a good thing to have. So this day I'm telling about we went right up the creek to our cave and the minute we got there Swatty stopped short.

"Somebody has been here!" he said.

The door of the cave was busted in and was off one of its hinges. Our stove was all kicked over and the table we had made was busted down and everything we had was all kicked around. We guessed the Graveyard Gang had found us out, so Swatty and me and Bony went to work and fixed up the door and mended the stove. We didn't know when they would come back.

They came back quick enough. The first we heard was them talking at the top of the bank, and then all of them slid down. I guess they wanted to stop when they got to the cave mouth, but Swatty was in the door of the cave and he had his pockets full of our throwing stones, and he leaned out and let them have them. They yelled and slid right on down to the creek.

Bony began to cry.

Well, there were about twelve of the Graveyard Gang down there in the creek. They got together and talked about how they would get us and then they began throwing stones. I tried to help Swatty stone them, but the door was too narrow, and he told me to stay inside and hand him stones to throw. He threw as fast as he could and sometimes he hit a Graveyard kid and sometimes he missed, but one kid can't hardly throw against twelve, and pretty soon a stone hit Swatty on the forehead just on his eyebrow. He put up his hand to feel the place and another hit him on the crazy bone, and he came inside and lay down on the floor of the cave and hugged his elbow and rocked himself and groaned. I guess it hurt him pretty bad. Bony just stood and bellered: "Oh, I want to go home! I want to go home!"

I went to the door and began to throw stones, but I was so mad I couldn't aim straight. Swatty sat up and rocked himself and hugged his elbow.

"Shut the door!" he howled at me. "Come in and shut the door! Shut the door!"

So I did. I wasn't much afraid of being hit, but I knew the door shut right away, so I shut it. The minute it was shut the stones hit against it like hail. The Graveyard Gang cheered, but it didn't do them any good; the little throwing stones couldn't break the door and they couldn't throw big ones up that far.

In a little while Swatty was just rubbing his elbow and he got up and helped me brace the door shut with the shovel and things. His forehead was swelled up like an egg, but he didn't mind that.

"There!" he said. "This shows it was a good thing we have a cave," and I guessed he was right. He went over and made Bony stop blubbering. He made him stop by telling him to hurry and build a fire in the stove because maybe we might have to stay there a week or even longer, and we'd have to cook potatoes to live on or else starve to death. So Bony forgot to cry and started to make a fire.

Between the boards of our door we could see out through the crack and we could see that the Graveyard Gang didn't know what to do next to get us. Once in a while they threw a stone or two but that didn't hurt us. And then they did the thing that chased us out.

I guess it was about five o'clock by then. We thought it was later because it was getting dark, but we couldn't see that there was a big storm coming up. It was coming up back of us and was hiding the sun. All at once there was thunder, and then the stove began to smoke out into the cave. Then the whole cave began to fill with smoke.

I coughed, and me and Bony thought the wind was blowing the smoke down the chimney, but Swatty went to the stove and kicked the top off and began scattering the wood and coals over the floor to put out the fire. Some of the Graveyard Gang had put something over the top of our chimney so that the smoke would come into the cave and smoke us out.

Well, that was all right. We kicked the fire out and that ought to have stopped the smoke but it didn't. The smoke came in worse than ever, and then Swatty knew what was the matter. The Graveyard Gang was filling our chimney with burning grass or straw or something and then stopping the top of the chimney so the smoke would come down into the cave.

The smoke got so thick we couldn't see and we couldn't breathe. Swatty looked out of the door cracks and there were eight or nine of the Graveyard Gang down there in the creek laying for us, but what could we do? We couldn't stay in the cave and be suffocated to death, could we? So what we had to do we had to do mighty quick.

Swatty threw open the cave door. He had picked up a stick and he sort of waved it over his head. Bony was blubbering again and I couldn't see very well for the smoke in my eyes, and neither could Swatty, I guess, but Swatty waved the stick and shouted:

"Come on, now!" he shouted. "We've got 'em surrounded! Charge 'em! We've got 'em now!"

Well, the Graveyard kids looked up at the top of the other bank and Swatty started to slide down the bank right at them, and me and Bony we started to slide down, and the Graveyard kids turned and ran up the creek. I guess they were scared that Swatty had seen a lot more of our kids coming. Anyway, they ran about half a block and then they saw there was just Swatty and Bony and me and that we were climbing up the other bank to get away, and they came for us.

We didn't have much of a start. We didn't know exactly where we were. We ran where the running was easiest, and pretty soon we came to a fence and climbed over and we were in a road. We turned and ran up the road, and the first of the Graveyard kids was piling over the fence already so we just let out our legs and ran! Even Bony stopped crying. He just turned white and scared-looking and ran. He ran so fast he ran in front of us and we could hardly keep up with him.

The whole Graveyard Gang was after us now, shouting and running and pretty soon we knew where we were--we were on the Four Mile Road because off in the distance we could see the big red building of the Poor Farm. We knew that building pretty well because it is one of the places we kept away from because they keep the crazy folks there. You never know when a crazy man will cut you open with a knife or something.

We didn't have time to think of that scare then, we were so scared of what would happen to us if the Graveyard kids caught us. I guess we didn't think of the Poor Farm crazy folks at all.

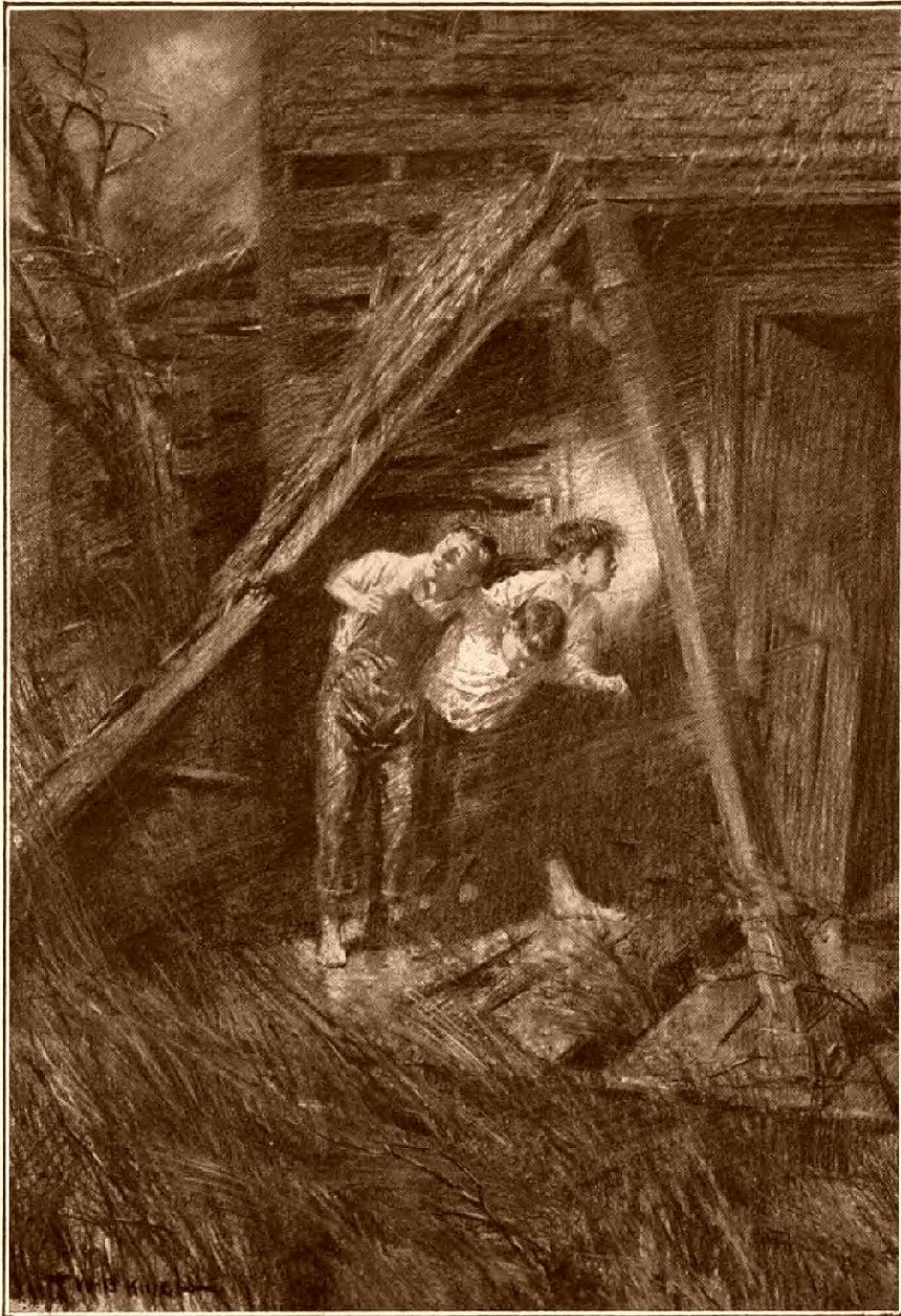
So pretty soon Bony began to drop back, and we caught up with him. It was thundering and lightning hard now and the wind was blowing the way it does just before a big storm--big whoofs that throw up the dust in thick waves and make the trees bend low down and shake the leaves out of them--and Bony was crying again. Swatty shouted at him, but we couldn't hear what he was saying, the wind and the thunder and trees made so much noise. I looked back and saw that the Graveyard kids were right after us and then--Bony fell down!

He didn't fall flat. He fell half and took half a step and then turned and fell sideways, and when he tried to get up he couldn't. I ran a little bit before I stopped, but Swatty stopped short and when I looked back he was trying to drag Bony up again. There was an awful flash of lightning, one of the kind you can't see for a minute after, and then a bang like a thousand cannon, only keener, and a big tree at the side of the road just split in two and one half fell across the road. I guess maybe I cried a little, but I didn't stop to do it; I ran back to Swatty and Bony and grabbed hold of Bony's other arm and helped Swatty drag him.

I don't know what happened to the Graveyard Gang. I guess they got scared of the storm and went home but we didn't think of that then, All we thought of was to get Bony away in a hurry. It was awful! The lightning and thunder were just glare, glare, glare! and bang, bang, bang! and no rest in between, and the wind was bending the trees almost down to the ground and holding them there stiff, not swaying. I was just belling and yanking Bony by the arm and saying, "Oh, come on, Bony! Oh, come on, Bony!" over and over. Swatty was shouting at me all the time, but I couldn't tell what he was saying, but he pulled more at his arm of Bony than I pulled at mine, and then I saw he was taking him off the road, because there was a house right where we were and he wanted to get him to the house.

Just when we got Bony onto the porch of the house it began to rain. It didn't rain down, it rained straight across, like the lines on writing paper, and it didn't rain a little--it rained all the rain there ever was or will be, I guess. The rain came into that porch like water shot out of a fire hose nozzle, just swish-swash against the front of the house and then up to your ankles on the rotten floor of the porch. And then, when there was a white flash of lightning I saw where we were. We were on the porch of the Haunted House!





WE WERE ON THE PORCH OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE

All the kids knew about the Haunted House. The way I knew about it was because we used to go out the Four Mile Road nutting and then we used to see it. Anybody would know it was a haunted house just by looking at it. The glass in the windows was all gone and boards, any old boards, were nailed across the windows, and the doors were either nailed up or broken in and hanging crooked on one hinge. The paint was all off and the chimneys had toppled over and the bricks and mortar were all scattered down the roof and some on the porch roof. The shingles were all curled up and there were bare patches where they had blown off.

It was a big house, two stories and a half, and there was a porch all across the front, but at one corner the porch post had rotted down so that the porch roof sagged almost to the floor there, and the rest of the roof was all skewish. The floor of the porch where we were was all dry-rotted and some of the boards were gone, and the grass and weeds grew up through the floor everywhere. The yard was all weeds, as high as a man, and tangled blackberry bushes, and at night, so Swatty and all the kids said, something white used to come to the windows and stand there, and you could

hear moans. It was a haunted house all right. All the boys knew that and all the boys kept away from it. And there we were, right on the porch and the rain just drowning us.

"Come on, we got to get him inside," Swatty said, and he took hold of Bony again.

I didn't want to. It was bad enough to be on the porch of a haunted house or anywhere near it, but the thunder and lightning and rain and wind and everything made all things kind of different than on other days. It wasn't like real; it was like dreams. It was like the end of the world, when you don't think what you do but just do it; and so I took hold of Bony and helped.

We got Bony to the front door and into the hall of the house. In there it was so black we couldn't see except when the lightning flashed, and then we couldn't see much. The rain was blowing in at the door and running down the hall. The old house shook and trembled. A brick or something rolled down the roof and thumped on the porch roof.

We got Bony into a dry corner of the hall and let him sit on the floor and Swatty tried to feel Bony's leg to see if it was broken or what, and while he was doing that there came a big crash and the rain stopped coming in at the front door. It was the porch roof. It had blown down the rest of the way, shutting up the door and shutting us in. But we didn't know then that we were shut in. We were just frightened by the noise. We thought maybe the house had been struck by lightning.

Well, after that it was darker in the house than ever. We didn't get the light from the lightning through the door any more, and we only got it through the cracks between the boards at the windows. We just stood there, me and Swatty, and Bony on the floor, and listened to the storm and the water swashing against the house and to the old house creaking and grating, and Bony moaned over his ankle and cried because of everything. I was just plain scared. I just stood and got more and more scared. I tried to listen whether the creaking and grating was the house or ghosts, and I listened so hard my ears seemed to reach out. I didn't dare to breathe. Pretty soon I was too scared for any use. I said, "Swatty!"

"What?" he answered back.

"I'm scared," I said.

Well, then Bony began to beller loud.

"Aw, shut up!" Swatty told him. "I'm scared, too, ain't I? Feel my wrist," he says to me, "it's all goose flesh, ain't it? That's how scared I am, but it don't do any good to beller about it."

So we just stayed there. Bony held on to Swatty's ankle with one hand and I sort of edged over so I was close to Swatty, and we just waited, because that was all there was to do. So after a while the storm let up. It rained a little yet, but the thunder and lightning stopped. The wind blew some, but not so much. It was pretty dark in the house. We knew it must be getting toward night.

"I guess we can go now," Swatty said, and I was glad of it. We boosted Bony up so he could hobble on one leg between us and we went to the front door. Well, we couldn't get out!

And that wasn't the worst of it; every other way out was boarded up! We went all around the first floor and tried all the windows and the back door and they were all boarded up. We were fastened tight into the Haunted House.

It was pretty bad going into the dark rooms, one after another, not knowing whether something would jump out at you, and I guess me and Bony wouldn't have done it if Swatty hadn't made us. But there wasn't any way out, and that wasn't the worst. There wasn't even a little piece of board to pry the boards off the windows. There, wasn't a loose brick or anything. Nothing but dust, and maybe a couple of pieces of paper.

"What'll we do?" I asked, awfully scared. "Garsh! I don't know!" Swatty said. "We got to get out somehow. We'll starve to death here if we don't. We got to get something to pry off a board from a window."

Well, there wasn't anything to pry one off with. Not down where we were. So Swatty said, all of a sudden:

"Come on! I'm going to see if there's anything we can get upstairs."

"Aw, no, Swatty!" I begged. "Don't go up there! I don't want to go up!"

"Well, you don't have to, do you?" he said. "I didn't ask you to. I said I was going."

So he went alone, and I stayed down with Bony. We were all alone in the dark down there and Swatty went up the stairs. He went up a step at a time and then stopped and listened, and then he went up another step and listened. Pretty soon he got to the top of the stairs and then we heard him going from one room to smother and feeling with his foot for a board or something that would do to pry our way out. Then we didn't hear him for a minute, I guess.

Pretty soon he came to the head of the stairs. He leaned over the balusters.

"Hey! George! Come on up," he said in a whisper. "There ain't nothing up here. I want to go up in the attic."

Bony wouldn't go. Swatty had to come down and talk to him like a Dutch uncle and tell him what he thought of him, and then he blubbered while we were helping him up the stairs. He said it was all right for us to go up because if anything--he didn't say a ghost, because he was afraid to, but that was what he meant--jumped out at us we could run,

but he couldn't because his ankle was sprained. But we got him up all right.

We got him up and I stayed with him at the head of the stairs, and Swatty went and opened the attic stair door. He opened it, and then he stood there a second. Even where I was I could hear it. It was like a groan--like a long, sick sort of groan--and it was from up there in the attic. I turned so stiff and cold I couldn't open or shut my lips. I couldn't breathe. I was like ice, numb and cold all over except my hair pulled upward all over my head. A ghost could have come and put its cold hand on me and I couldn't have moved.

"Oh! Oh--!" came that long moan from up in the attic. Bony stood up, and his ankle gave way and he fell down the stairs--all the way to the bottom.

He stayed there, just calling out, "Swatty, Swatty!" over and over.

It was dark there now, dead dark. All at once I screamed. Something had touched me on the arm.

"Aw, shut up!" Swatty said, because it was Swatty that had touched me. "Shut up and don't be a baby! I've got to go up there, and you've got to go up with me."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to go up there alone," he said. "That's why if you want to know."

"What do you want to go up for, anyway?"

"Well, you won't go up alone, will you? And Bony won't go up alone, will he? Somebody's got to go up and see if there's anything up there we can pry our way out with. Come on! That noise ain't nothin' but the wind, or maybe an owl, or something else." So I had to go. I made Swatty go first, and he went up the attic stairs real slow, and I didn't crowd him any, you bet! At the top of the stairs he stopped short. So I stopped short.

"What's the matter?" I whispered. Swatty stood still.

"There's something up here or somebody--something alive," he whispered back in terror.

And there was! Between the moans I could hear it breathe, a long breath, like "Ah-ah!" So the next thing I knew I was down two flights of stairs at the front door, trying to scratch my way through the porch roof with my finger nails, and Bony was hanging onto my legs, and we were both scared stiff. I guess it wasn't so long after we heard something breathe in the attic, about a second after, maybe. And I couldn't scratch my way out. So I began to yell: "Swatty! Oh, Swatty! Come here; why don't you come here? Oh, Swatty, come!" And Bony yelled too. We both did. I guess we both cried, we were so scared and frightened and afraid. Shut in a haunted house like that and something moaning and breathing in the attic! Anybody would be scared. Anybody but Swatty.

Afterward, the next time we got together after Bony's ankle was well and after the manager of the Poor Farm had given us each a watch and chain for what we did, Swatty said he wasn't scared when he heard the groaner breathe, because he had heard his folks's cow when it had the colic, and that was the way the cow groaned and breathed when it had it. Anyway, when I ran away from him and left him alone he stood and listened, and then he went up the last step and listened again. It was black up there. So he said, "Who's there?" and waited and the groaning kept on. So he walked right over toward where the groaning kept coming from. He walked slowly, pushing one foot ahead of him and holding out both hands, because the floor might not be all there, and all at once his foot hit something hard and cold. He was barefoot, like all of us.

It might have been a snake. It might have been anything, for all Swatty knew, but he bent down and felt it with his hand. I wouldn't have done it for a million dollars, and Bony wouldn't have done it for ten million dollars! No, sir! So at first Swatty thought it was an old scythe blade somebody had left there, and he was mighty glad anyway, because it would do to pry the boards off a window and let us out, but when he tried to pick it up it was held onto.

Well, I guess I might as well say it right out. It was a sword, and it was Mrs. Groogs's sword, and it was old Mrs. Groogs that was holding onto the other end of the sword and lying there and groaning and breathing! It was her son's sword, and he had been killed in the war Grant and Lincoln and Swatty's father had been in, and when she ran away from the Poor Farm and they couldn't find out where she had gone, that was all she took and that was where she went to die--there in the attic of the Haunted House. She went there because she was kind of crazy and thought the mother of a son that had died for his country oughtn't to die in the Poor House. But she didn't die in it, either, because the Woman's Relief Corps rented a room for her and the city gave her Outside Support again.

So if it hadn't been for us Mrs. Groogs would have starved to death in the Haunted House, and if it hadn't been for her and her sword maybe we would have starved to death in it. So I guess it was all right.

So that time none of us got licked when we got home. Swatty didn't because his father was a G.A.R. and Mrs. Groogs was a G.A.R.-ess, and I didn't because my folks were glad I hadn't been struck by lightning, and Bony didn't because his folks were moral suasion. They jawed him.

VIII. WASTED EFFORT

Well, a good many things happened that vacation. Fan stayed over at Chicago and Herb Schwartz began studying to be a lawyer in Judge Hannan's law office. Miss Carter went off to a school somewhere but I don't know whether she was teaching or learning. Mamie Little was down at Betzville, on a farm, and Lucy never did tag along with us anyway, so it looked as if me and Swatty and Bony was going to have one of the best vacations we ever had. We used to go up to our cave and work on it. Scratch-Cat went with us mostly, but we didn't count her for a girl. So it looked pretty good.

Me and Swatty and Bony liked vacation because we never did have time to do all we wanted to do when school kept. What we wanted to do most was to finish up our cave in the clay bank up Squaw Creek. The Graveyard Gang had chased us away from it, but that was all right when vacation came because the Graveyard Gang kids all have to go to work when school is over. Some of them work for the farmers on the Island, and some work in the sawmills. So we went up and looked at the cave.

The cave was all right. The Graveyard Gang had fixed up the door and made it look better, and the stove was there, and they had made another room to the cave, in behind, only it wasn't all dug out yet. So me and Swatty and Bony and Scratch-Cat thought we would finish digging the new room and then, maybe, we would get a Gatling gun or something and put it in the cave, so we could hold the fort when school began again and the Graveyard Gang tried to chase us out again. Swatty said maybe his uncle would give him a Gatling gun for his birthday if he wrote to Derlingport and asked him. So me and Bony thought that sounded good, and we went ahead and dug at the cave.

Well, it looked like we was going to have the best vacation we ever had. I guess we ought to have known that when everything looked so bully something was going to spoil it all. It was too good to be right. Swatty's mother's cow went dry, and Swatty didn't have to go home early to get her from the pasture so he could deliver the milk around to the neighbors, and that was too good to be right; and Bony sort of stopped bawling at every little thing, and that wasn't like him. We ought to have knowed something was going to happen.

It was too nice. Most always, in vacation, my mother made me and my sister wash and wipe the dinner dishes at noon, and it didn't do any good to drop plates and break them, or whine, or get a bad headache all of a sudden; I had to wipe. There ought to be a law so boys couldn't wipe dishes, but there ain't; so about all I could ever do was to wipe them as mean as I could and leave the butter between the tines of the forks when my sister didn't wash it all out.

Well, when this vacation came I thought I'd have to start in wiping the doggone dishes again; but I didn't. My mother got back the hired girl we had off and on. Her name was Annie Dombacher and she was a strong girl and a happy one, and she didn't care any more for work than shucks. She could wash and wipe dishes and enjoy it, so maybe she was crazy; but what did I care if she was? She pitched in and even carried in her own wood, and made a jar of cookies every two days. I thought it was bully. I ought to have knowed better. I ought to have knowed that mothers don't get hired girls that will carry in the wood and everything unless they've got something mean they are going to do to a fellow pretty soon.

The first thing that happened was Bony. Me and Swatty had got so we didn't hardly think of Bony as a cry-baby any more, and here all at once he was different. He used to come yelling and "yoo-ooing" to meet us, and then one noon he come sort of sneaking, like a dog you've told to go home and thrown a stone at. He come up to us, mighty quiet and looking pretty sick, and didn't say nothing.

"What's the matter, Bony?" Swatty asked.

"Nothing. You 'tend your own business, can't you?" he answered back.

But it wasn't scrappy the way he said it; it was whiny.

So I started to say something, but Swatty stopped me.

"Aw! let him be!" he said. "If he wants to be a whine-cat let him be one. What do we care?"

So we let him. He came along to the cave with us and dug; but he didn't seem to have no fun. It wouldn't have taken much to make him blubber. He acted ashamed, that's what!

Well, that was one day, and the next morning he was just as bad. We teased him some that morning, but he took it and never jawed back. Then he went down to the creek to get a drink, and me and Swatty talked about him. Bony's father and mother fought a good deal with their jaws sometimes, like when we thought Bony's father was going across the river to kill himself and we went to keep him from it, and me and Swatty decided there must be a big fight going on at Bony's house, because that always makes a fellow feel cheap and mean. So we said we wouldn't tease him about it. So Bony came back and we dug awhile and went home to dinner.

And the next thing was that Mamie Little came back from Betzville and began playing with Lucy and Toady Williams again, and that made me feel mean. And then Fan came back from Chicago.

So, one day after dinner I had to go for an errand for my mother, and when I came back Swatty and Bony hadn't come yet, but Mamie Little was at our house waiting for my sister. She was on the front terrace braiding the grass where it was long. So I picked some grass and made a ball of it and threw it at her and she said to stop, and I got some more and was going to throw it at her, and I felt pretty good, because she said: "Oh, George! now don't!" but just then my father came out of the house, so I stopped. I had thought he had gone already. I stood and didn't do anything until he went by, and then I happened to think I had left my nigger-shooter on my bureau in my room and I went to get it.

I went into the house and up the stairs on the jump and busted into my room, and then stopped mighty short because my mother was in my room. She was at my bureau and had a drawer pulled out and was taking out some of my clothes. So I grabbed my nigger-shooter off the bureau and was going to go mighty quick, because mothers always think of something for you to do when they see you.

"George," she said, "you are going over to your Aunt Nell's to stay a week or two. I'll get your clothes all ready, and I want you to be a good boy while you're there and be as little trouble as possible."

"Aw, gee!" I said. "What do I have to go over there for?"

It made me sick, because Aunt Nell is always trying to do right by me when I'm over there and combing my hair and making me wash my feet before I go to bed and everything. So I said:

"Aw, gee! I don't want to!"

My mother went right on taking clothes out of my bureau.

"I'm going to tell you something, Georgie, and then perhaps you will be more reasonable. You and Lucy are going to Aunt Nell's because there is a little new baby coming here. Now, will you be a good boy and say nothing more?"

"Yes'm," I said, and I got out of the room pretty quick. I tiptoed down the stairs and stood at the bottom. I didn't know whether to go out or not. Bony and Swatty were out there now, and Mamie Little and Scratch-Cat, and I didn't know how I would dare talk to them. I sort of felt like they would see it in my face. If they did I would feel so mean I'd die.

I guess you know how a fellow feels about it. Any fellow would almost rather go to jail than have a baby come to his house. The fellows yell at him, "Aw, Georgie, you got a baby at your house." And he knows it is so and he can't tell them they're liars.

But just then my mother came out of my room and said: "Georgie!"

So I got out of the front door in a hurry. I was afraid she was going to say something about it again. Women don't know any better; they'll say anything right out and think it is all right and don't care how a fellow feels sick to hear it. So I skipped. I went down to the front gate, and Swatty and Bony and Mamie Little and Scratch-Cat were there. Bony was off to one side, looking sick, and Swatty was "Awing" at Mamie Little about something, but I felt too mean and cheap to "Aw!" back at him, like I ought to have done. I let him "Aw!" I got as far away from Mamie Little as I could and went over and sat by Bony and Scratch-Cat.

Well, all at once I guessed maybe I knew what was the matter with Bony, because I felt just like the way he had been acting. So I said:

"Say, Bony, are you going to have a baby at your house?"

He got sort of red and didn't dare look at me. Then he began to cry, mad-like.

"I don't care!" he blubbered out. "If you tell anybody I'll lick you, I will, I don't care who you are! I'll--I'll shoot you. I'll kill you!" Scratch-Cat didn't laugh. She just said, "Oh!" So I knew that was it. So just then Mamie Little called out, "Oh, Georgie." But I just hollered, "Aw, shut up!" So I said: "Aw, come on, Swatty, let's go up to the cave."

Well, just then my sister came out of the house. She had on a clean dress, and she came hippety-hopping down the walk as happy as could be and happier. She came right down to where Swatty was teasing Mamie Little, and she said:

"Mamie! Mamie! What do you think? We're going to have a little new baby!"

Well, I got up and climbed over the fence and ran. I don't know how I ever got over a fence so quick--pickets and all--but I did, and I ran up the street with my hands over my ears. I knew Swatty knew and Mamie Little knew and that they were thinking: "Ho! Georgie is going to have a new baby at his house." And I was trying to run away. When I came to the corner I dodged behind it, and stopped.

Almost right away Bony came and Swatty came right after him, and Scratch-Cat after Swatty, but we made her go back again. We didn't want any girls around at all. Swatty was almost as sore as me and Bony was. He just threw himself down on the grass and said, "Garsh!"

"Well, you don't need to go and blame me," I said. "I ain't the only one. Bony's going to have one at his house, too."

So then Swatty sat up.

"Aw, garsh!" he said. "You and Bony's always spoiling all our fun. I ought to have knowed what was the matter with him, and now you 'll be the same way. You bet I don't have no babies coming to my house, making everybody grouchy. But you and Bony don't care; you don't care how you spoil the fun."

Bony didn't say anything, but it made me mad. "Well, it ain't my fault, is it?" I asked. "I don't want no baby to come to my house, do I? I didn't order it from the doctor, did I?"

"What doctor?" Swatty asked. "What has a doctor got to do with it?"

"Well, a doctor brings it, don't he?" I asked.

"No, he don't!" Swatty said. "A stork brings it."

"My mother told me so a million times, and I guess she knows, don't she?"

"Aw! That's in Germany," I said. "I know that, I guess. In Germany a stork brings it, but how can it in the United States where there ain't no storks? Did you ever see a stork in the United States?"

"Well, no," Swatty had to say, because he didn't. "Well, you've seen plenty of doctors in the United States, haven't you?" I asked.

"Yes," Swatty had to say, because he had. He saw Doctor Miller almost every day, starting out or coming back with his old gray mare. He was our doctor and Bony's folks' doctor, but Swatty's folks had Doctor Benz, because they were German and water-curers. Doctor Miller was a big-piller. So Swatty had to say yes.

"Well," I said, "don't that prove it?" Of course it did. Swatty had to say it did. So he said:

"Well, garsh! if doctors bring them in the United States I guess I would n't be sitting around whining if I was you and Bony. I know what I'd do!"

"What would you do?" I asked.

"I wouldn't let a doctor bring any, that's what I wouldn't do," said Swatty. "I'd find out what doctor was going to bring it, and I'd fix him all right, you bet your boots!"

"Well, Doctor Miller is going to bring them, if anybody does," I said. "He's our doctor and he's Bony's doctor, ain't he? What can me and Bony do, I'd like to know?"

"Well, I could help you, couldn't I?" Swatty wanted to know. "I would n't have to go back on you just because Doctor Miller isn't our doctor, would I?"

"Well, what would we do, then?" I asked, but you bet I felt a whole lot better; if Swatty was willing to help us it was different. He was a good helper. Bony looked better, too.

Swatty pulled a handful of grass and fooled with it and I could see he was thinking mighty hard.

"We've got the cave, ain't we?" he said after while. "Well, then, all we've got to do is to get Doctor Miller and put him in the cave and keep him there, and then he can't do anything about it, can he?"

Of course that was so. I wouldn't have thought of it, and Bony would n't, but Swatty thought of it in less than a minute. But right away I thought of how hard it would be to do. If Doctor Miller had been a kid it would have been easy, but he was a man and he was a mighty big man, too. He was bigger around than any man in town, I guess, and almost as tall.

I asked Swatty, and he said of course we couldn't grab Doctor Miller and push him a mile or so out to the cave and boost him up the clay bank and into the cave.

"We've got to think out a plan," he said, only he said "plam," like he always does, and "gart," instead of "got." So we thought, and it wasn't any use. So Swatty said we might as well go out to the cave and do some work and think out there. So we went.

The more I thought the more I couldn't think of anything. All I could think of was how big Doctor Miller was, and I guess Bony thought the same thing. I thought of his whiskers, too.

You're always kind of scared of a doctor, almost like you're scared of a minister. They ain't like common folks. Common folks are just men, except when they are your fathers; but ministers and doctors are men and something else, and Doctor Miller was more doctory than any other doctor in town. That was why so many folks had him. He had red-brown whiskers and nothing on his chin or upper lip, and his whiskers were not stiff and tough like whiskers generally are, but smooth and silky and fluffy. He laughed a lot, too, and was always smiling, but he knew all about your insides better than you did. It is creepy to see a man smiling so much and feel that he knows more about you than you do yourself. And so you were mighty scared of him.

Well, we didn't think of anything, and I went home feeling pretty mean and went in the alley way and my mother was keeping supper for me and had my things and sister's all ready for us to go over to Aunt Nell's and after supper she kissed us and we went. She gave me a dollar and she gave Sis fifty cents, and she hugged us a long time before she let us go.

The next morning Aunt Nell started right in on me. She made me go upstairs and brush my hair again and looked at

my finger nails and in my ears, and then said I didn't look as well as usual and wanted to know if I slept well. I got away as soon as I could and went up to the cave. Swatty and Bony was there already, digging at the roof of the back room of the cave.

"What you doing that for?" I asked. "If you dig up there much more the roof will bust through."

"Well, ain't that what we want it to do?" Swatty asked.

"Why do we?" I asked back.

"You come on and help us work," he said, "and I'll tell you why."

So I helped them work and Swatty told me he had thought of a bully plan. I wouldn't have thought of it in a thousand years. I had stayed awake all night--or anyway almost half an hour--trying to think how we could get Doctor Miller into the cave, and all I could think of was grabbing him somehow and tying ropes to him and yanking him up to the door of the cave, and I knew we couldn't do it, because we weren't strong enough. But Swatty had thought it all out, like he always does. I might have known he would.

We went ahead and dug at the roof of the cave, and pretty soon we dug through to daylight. It took us all day and the dirt we got we spaded into the tunnel between the two rooms and filled it up good and solid, except a short way out of the front room. The next day we worked hard, too. We dug out more of the roof of the back room, and then worked on the door of the cave so we could fasten it up sound and quick when we got the doctor in it. We took the stove out and everything else he could use to dig with, and when we had to go home for supper we had it all ready. Swatty said so.

Well, all of us knew Jake Hines, the doctor's hired man, and he was foreman of Fearless Hose Company No. 2, and every night he went over to the hose-house and played cards after he got his work done at the doctor's. I went to bed about nine o'clock, but I left my clothes on, and when I thought it was midnight I got up and went downstairs and went out into the alley. Swatty was there already, sitting in the shadow of Doc Miller's manure box, but Bony hadn't come, so we guessed he was a 'fraid-cat and didn't dare. So we went ahead without him.

The doctor's old gray mare was standing with her head at the little square window, and Swatty got on the manure box and climbed in. He opened the stable door and I went in after him. The old mare looked around at us, but she didn't make any trouble, and Swatty untied the halter strap and we led her out into the alley. We led her across the public square, and down into the creek and then up the creek to where our cave was. She came right along as easy as anything and we got her up the bank and to where we had caved in the roof of the back cave. She didn't want to go down there. I guess she thought it was kind of funny to be taken into a hole like that, but a doctor's horse is used to being out at night and to going into all sorts of places, and at last she set her front feet and slid down. It was pretty steep, but she went down easy. Swatty tied the halter strap to one of her front feet and we left her there.

We went back home and I went to bed. I was pretty scared. I thought the doctor would get up in the morning and see his mare was gone and would get a lot of people and police and there would be crowds hunting the mare. I had pretty bad dreams. I dreamed I was hung about eight times for horse stealing.

When I got up in the morning I was mighty sick of it, you bet. I made up my mind I wouldn't do any more, no matter how many babies the doctor brought to our house. I would stay at Aunt Nell's and let on I didn't know anything about gray mares or anything. I was through.

So about nine o'clock, Swatty came to Aunt Nell's to get me, and he was just hopping, he was so tickled.

"Garsh!" he said. "It's better than I ever thort it would be. I came through the alley and Jake Hines was sitting on the manure box waiting for the mare to come home. And what do you think?"

"What?" I asked.

"He said he would give me a quarter if I found the mare," Swatty said. "He said he guessed he had left the stable door open and she had wandered away and maybe she would come back, but if I hunted around and found her and brought her back he would give me a quarter. So I'm hunting around for her."

Well, I didn't feel so bad. Bony came and said it wasn't because he was scared that he didn't come out last night, but because he had gone to sleep and hadn't waked up. So Swatty talked some more and we all felt fine. We seen it was bully. So I took my dollar, like we had fixed it for me to do, and I bought some bread and some butter and some things to eat while Swatty and Bony went out to the cave. We didn't want Doctor Miller to starve to death while we had him locked in the cave because that would be murder. So I took what I had bought to the cave and we put it where the doctor could see it, and then we went down to the doctor's house. It was about ten o'clock. We went to the front door and rung the bell and Mrs. Miller came to the door.

"Is Doctor Miller at home?" Swatty asked.

She said he was, and Swatty told her we had found his horse, and she said she would tell him. He came right out. He looked sort of jolly and he said: "Well, boys, I suppose you are looking for a reward. Did you bring old Jenny home?"

"No, sir," Swatty said. "We would of but we couldn't. We couldn't get her out of the hole."

So he wanted to know what hole and Swatty told him. He told him we had a cave up the creek and that it looked like the old mare had walked on top of the cave and fell through. He asked if she was hurt and we said she wasn't, we guessed, but she wouldn't come out for us. He got his hat.

"Come on," he said; "I'll see about it."

Well, he took us out the back way to the stable and yelled for Jake, and Jake came.

"Jake," he said, "these boys have found Jenny, and she's fallen into a hole and they can't get her out."

"All right," Jake said; "I'll go with them."

You could have knocked me over with a feather. We hadn't thought of that. The doctor started to go back to the house. Then he stopped.

"Just wait a minute," he said. "I think I'll go with you. If the mare is hurt, I may be able to attend to her right there."

When the doctor came out with his medicine case we started, and me and Swatty pretended to be eager to hurry up. Bony sort of held back behind. The doctor talked to us a lot. He was sort of happy and good-natured about it, like fat men are, and joked some how far it was. We took him out the Graveyard Road and down into the creek bottom and showed him the mouth of our cave up the bank.

"Well, well," he said. "This is mountain climbing indeed! If I had much of this to do I'd be a smaller and a better man."

He made me carry his medicine case so he could use both hands, and I went first. Then Jake came and then the doctor, and then Swatty and then Bony. When we got to the door of the cave I stopped and Jake looked in.

"Where's the mare?" he said. "I don't see no mare."

He turned to look back and the doctor was just behind him, panting pretty hard.

"What?" the doctor asked, and he stepped up. I started to say it was the back cave the mare was in, but just then the doctor bumped against me and went sort of down on his knees. It was as dark as pitch. Swatty had slammed the door shut against the doctor and jolted him into the cave, and me and Jake with him. I heard Swatty fastening the cave door, and there we were--me and the doctor and Jake. We were locked in the cave.

I was the first one to know what Swatty had done, and I pounded on the door and hollered for them to let us out, but they didn't do it. Jake was just standing and saying:

"I'll be dumed! I'll be dumed!"

"What does this mean?" Doctor Miller asked.

I didn't know what to say, I was so scared. But I didn't have to say anything. Jake said it.

"I know mighty well what this means, Doc," he said. "This is some of Tom Foley's work, this is. He's been trying to get me out of the foremanship of Fearless Hose No. 2 for the last three years, and we've got the annual election to-night. He knows mighty well if I ain't there to-night he can put it over on me, and this is his game. I'm mighty sorry you got drug into it, Doc; but I'll make him suffer for this when I get out!"

He struck a match and saw the food I had brought. He kept striking more matches and looking around the cave.

"Yes, by Susan!" he said. "Look at the food. This is Foley's work--the great big mush! He thinks this is a good joke. I'll show him! Son," he said to me, "did Foley talk to you?"

"No, sir," I said.

"I knew it!" Jake said. "It's that Swatty kid. He's a terror, he is. Well, son, don't you mind; we'll mighty soon get out of here."

I felt a whole lot better. But I guess the doctor didn't.

"Get out? How'll we get out?" he wanted to know. "If your friend Foley fixed this up, you may be sure he did not expect you to get out to-night. And I've got to get out. I've got two important cases, and I must get out."

"Oh, we'll get out, Doc," said Jake. And he lit another match.

He looked at the door and tried it, butting into it with his shoulder. But we had fixed it dandy. It didn't give at all. It was like butting a rock. He tried it awhile, and then he said, but not so gay: "Well, we'll have to dig out."

"Then, Jake, let us dig," said the doctor. And they dug. I dug too, but mostly I only pretended to dig. It was dark in there and you couldn't see, and clay isn't anything to dig with your fingers. Jake and the doctor had pocket knives, but you know how much you can dig with a pocket knife. But they had the right idea. They didn't try to dig through the tunnel, like me and Swatty thought they would. They dug around the door.

Well, when Swatty and Bony had locked us in they went and sat on the bank across the creek to see what would happen. Nothing happened. Then Swatty got to thinking. He didn't worry about Jake, because Jake was a hired man and nobody ever knew when he would get home; but he knew my aunt would want to know where I was. That made him think of Mrs. Miller, and she would want to know where the doctor was. He was mighty worried. We had thought that maybe we could keep the doctor in the cave a couple of weeks until everything was all right, but he knew right

away that me and Jake and the doctor couldn't live on the food I had put in the cave, and he knew my aunt would start out to find where I was, and Mrs. Miller to find out where Doctor Miller was. He was mighty worried, and he didn't know what to do. So he didn't do anything.

It turned out like he thought it would. My aunt was mad when I did not come home to dinner, and madder when I didn't come home to supper, but when I didn't come home at all she was worried almost crazy and she got my father to go hunt for me. He hunted awhile, and then he got some other men to hunt for me, because he had to go home.

They hunted all night. Along toward morning the hunters who were hunting for me ran into the hunters who were hunting for Doctor Miller. They had Swatty with them, because Mrs. Miller had said Swatty had come to the house and the doctor had gone away with him. They were trying to make Swatty tell where the doctor went, but he wouldn't. He just let on like he was crying and said he didn't know.

Well, the hunters who were hunting for Doctor Miller had just started out, because Mrs. Miller hadn't got worried until toward morning, because she thought he was attending to his business. But toward morning my father and Bony's father came to his house, and it was at their houses Mrs. Miller thought Doctor Miller was. So she was frightened and got some men to hunt him.

I guess I went to sleep about ten or eleven o'clock that night while Jake find Doctor Miller were still digging. I woke up all of a sudden and there I was in the cave, and the door open and men coming in and Doctor Miller brushing off his hands. Him and Jake had almost dug a way out, but the hunters had got Swatty to tell where we were. So about the first thing I heard was a man saying:

"Where's that Swatty? Don't let him get away!"

But he had got. We didn't see him for about a week. He went over into Illinois and got a job with a farmer.

Well, all the way home Jake kept talking about Tom Foley and what he would do to him, and when the hunters heard it they laughed like sixty and said it was the best joke they ever heard. They said they would have to hand it to Foley--he was a dandy. So I guess they told Foley so. I guess he listened to them and didn't let on, only said he didn't do it, and of course they didn't believe him, because he had been elected foreman of Fearless Hose No. 2, like Jake had said he would be. So Foley got sort of proud of it and let them think. So me and Bony and Swatty never got anything, except Swatty got licked for being away for a week, and that was all right; it was worth it for the fun we had.

But the worst of it was that all of it wasn't any use. We had gone to all the work for nothing. We had caved up the wrong doctor. We ought to have caved up Doctor Wilmeyer and Doctor Brown. Because while we had Doctor Miller caved up, and thought we had everything fine and dandy, it was Doctor Wilmeyer and Doctor Brown who were the ones all the time. When we got home from the cave with the hunters there was a new baby at our house and one at Bony's house, and they had brought them. And that wasn't the worst--they were both girls. So we had done worse than nothing, because if we had left Doctor Miller alone he might, anyway, have brought boys.

IX. THE MURDERERS

Well, when we came to find out about it the new babies at my and Bony's houses weren't near as hard to bear as we had thought they would be. One reason was because they came at vacation time, when we didn't have to go to school, and the other was that they didn't make us take them out in baby carriages like we was afraid they would. One thing was that they was too fresh yet, and the other was that they wouldn't trust them to such young hoodlums anyway.

At our house Fan spent most of her time loving the new kid, and Lucy and Mamie Little didn't do much but hang around and coax to hold the baby a minute, and Toady Williams just hung around and waited for Mamie Little to come out and play. I guessed that I would never have anything to do with Mamie Little again, but that when I got a new girl it would be a different kind, like Scratch-Cat. I wished I hadn't got religion, or anything that I'd got because of Mamie Little.

A lot of us got religion at once, because that's how you usually get it. It makes it easier and you don't feel so foolish going up front.

Well, they had this revival at our church the winter before the vacation I'm telling about. When they had it I was having Mamie Little for my secret girl and she went up in front, so I got religion and went up in front too. But you see I'd ought to have waited, because it made me feel a lot worse about murdering a man. Or maybe it didn't. I guess Swatty

felt almost as bad as I did. We both felt awful bad. Swatty didn't go to our church, he went to the German Lutheran church, and nobody in that church ever got religion, they just had it. At our church we didn't have it until we got it, and mostly we got it when there was a revival meeting, and that was when I got it.

So, I guess it was a lot worse for me when the thing happened that I'm going to tell you, because I had religion and Swatty hadn't.

Well, the way it happened was this way: I'm awfully croupy. I don't know anybody that's as croupy as I am, so they rub hot goose grease on me when I get to honking and then make me swallow a lot out of a spoon, and that was all right when I was little enough so they could hold my nose, but after I got big Mother said she wouldn't struggle with me another time, and she changed and gave me a dime a spoonful. So I took the old stuff because if I hadn't took it Father would have licked me, and I'd have had to take it anyway. So I got a dime a spoonful. So I bought a target rifle with the money, when I had enough, and then the rifle got broke and I couldn't get it fixed until my mother gave me three dollars because I had been such a good boy when the new baby came.

So then all the kids were coming over to my yard to shoot all the time--Swatty and Bony and the whole lot of them--and we shot at tin cans and things against the barn, but we weren't any of us very good shooters. I guess Swatty was the best. Or maybe I was about as good as he was.

That was all right, and I guess nobody cared anything, only Mother was always putting her head out of the window and saying, "Boys, do be careful with that gun!" So one day Swatty come over, like he always does, and he says, "Say! we can't shoot the rifle any more!" And I says, "Why can't we?" And Swatty says, "They made a law that we can't." And I says, "Who made a law that we can't?" And Swatty says, "The city council made a law that nobody can shoot inside the city limits."

So I guessed they had, because that winter they had made a law we couldn't slide down Third Street hill, and if they made a law like that they might make almost any kind of a law. So Swatty says, "If we want to shoot we've got to go outside the city limits." And I said--I don't know what I said but I guess I said that was so.

So, anyway, we didn't shoot in my yard any more, and that wasn't our fault but the fault of the city council. So that was one of the things we thought of after we killed the man; but it didn't seem to make us feel much better, like you'd think it would. I guess there wasn't anything could make us feel better. Nobody wants to be hanged unless he has to be, I guess.

Well, it was vacation time, anyway, and we didn't want to shoot all the time because part of the time we wanted to do something else. Only when we wanted to go rowing on the river we took the rifle along anyway, because sometimes we rowed up beyond the city limits and then it was all right to shoot if we wanted to.

So one day me and Swatty and Bony we went up the river in a skiff. We always hired a skiff from old Higgins because it was ten cents an hour or three hours for a quarter from him, and Rogers charged ten cents straight. So when we got into the skiff and Higgins gave us the oars he said, "Well, boys, have a good time, but don't shoot anybody with that cannon." And we said, all right, we wouldn't. We took turns rowing, like we always did, and pretty soon we got to the Slough, and we rowed in and shot at turtles awhile, and then Bony said, "Gee! the mosquitoes are eating me up," and they were eating all of us up, so we floated out onto the river and just floated. We threw the bailing can over and shot at it until it went down, and just about then we were going past the old shanty boat, and we began to shoot at that.

It was up on the mud and partly sunk into it and the hull was so rotten you could kick a hole in it, and it wasn't anybody's anyway. Everybody had thrown stones at the windows in the side and broken them and nobody cared, I guess; but nobody had broken all the windows in the end toward the river, because that end was toward the river, so we shot at the windows. At first we couldn't hit them and we drifted below, but we rowed back again and in closer and then we all hit them. We hit them a lot of times, until they were all smashed out, and we began to say who had hit the most times, and Swatty said, "Let's go ashore and see who is the best shot. I bet I am." So we went.

So we shot at cans and things, and Swatty was the best shot, and then nobody said anything but we just thought we'd go on the shanty boat for fun. We climbed up on the little front deck, and Bony was first, and Swatty was next, and then I come. So Bony pushed the door open and looked in, and he stood there looking in and didn't move, and then, all at once he made a sound--well, I don't know what kind of sound it was. It was a frightened sound. I guess it was like the sound a rabbit makes when you step on it by mistake. And then he turned, and his face was so scary it frightened me and Swatty and we turned and jumped off the front deck onto the railroad bank; but Bony jumped sideways off the deck and landed on the cracked crust that was over the mud the shanty boat was stuck in. He went right through the crust and over his knees in the mud, but me and Swatty was so scared we started to run down the railroad track as fast as we could.

Pretty soon we stopped, because the sand between the ties was full of sandburs, and then we didn't know what we were running for, so we looked back. Bony was sort of swimming on top of the mud crust and he was crying as hard as he could cry, but not loud. He was trying to get away from the shanty boat as fast as he could, and every time he got a foot out of the mud and tried to step he broke through the crust again, so he sort of laid on the crust and bellied along.

He looked like an alligator swimming in the mud, and he was crying like an alligator, too. Only I guess it is crocodiles that cry. Bony was trying to get to the skiff, and Swatty knew that if Bony got there before we did he would get in the skiff and go home and leave us. So we picked the sandburs out of our feet and tried to hurry, but Bony got to the skiff and got in and pushed off.

We ran and hollered, but he didn't stop. He was so frightened that the oars jumped out from between the pins almost every time he pulled on them, and he was crying hard; but he rowed the boat pretty fast because he was working his arms so hard. Swatty and me hollered at him and told him what we would do to him if he didn't come back, but it didn't do any good. He was too scared. All he wanted to do was to get away.

Well, we tried to throw stones at him, to bring him back, but we couldn't throw that far and we just stood and watched him row down-river as hard as he could.

"Say, what do you think he saw in there?" Swatty said after while.

"I don't know what he saw," I said. "What do you think he saw?"

"I don't know what he saw, but I'm going to see what he saw," Swatty said.

Swatty was always like that. If anybody saw anything he wanted to see it too.

"I ain't afraid to see it," he said.

"Well, I ain't afraid if you ain't afraid," I said.

So we climbed up on the deck of the shanty house again. We climbed up careful and went to the door and peeked in.

As soon as I had the first peek I turned, and jumped off the deck and started to run, but Swatty just stood and looked. I hollered at him. I guess I was crying, too.

"Swatty! Swatty, come on! Oh, Swatty, come on, Swatty!" I hollered.

He turned his head and looked at me and then he looked back into the shanty boat. All he said to me was, "Shut up!"

I guess you know what we saw when we looked into the shanty boat. There was almost a whole page about it in the paper later on. He--the man--was lying there on the floor of the shanty boat in the broken bottles and straw and the dry mud that had sifted in when the river was high. He was lying on his face with his feet to the door and he was sort of crumpled up with one hand stretched out. He was dead. One side of his face was up and there was blood from the place in his forehead where he had been shot. It was on the floor.

I didn't dare run away without Swatty, because I guess I was as scared as Bony had been, and I didn't dare go back to the shanty boat, so I just stood, and all at once I began to shake all over, the same as a wet kitten shakes in cold weather. I couldn't help shaking. I felt pretty sick. But most of all I was scared.

I thought Swatty was going to stand there forever, looking into the shanty boat, but pretty soon he went inside, and that shows he's as brave as he always brags he is. I wouldn't have gone in for a million billion quadrillion dollars. In a minute he come out and he dropped off the end of the deck and sort of crouched low. He kept crouched low as he come up the railroad bank, and he crouched low when he dodged down the other side, so I crouched low, too, and went down the other side of the railroad bank. And when Swatty come up to me I saw he was scared, too, but he wasn't scared the way I was. I was just scared because I'd seen a dead man, but Swatty was frightened.

There was a lot of tall ragweed and a pile of railroad ties in the bottom of the cut along side the railroad track, and Swatty went right in close to the pile of ties where the ragweed hid everything and he sat down there. He looked pretty frightened.

"Well," he said, "we killed him."

That was the first I'd thought that we'd killed the dead man; but the minute Swatty said it I knew we had killed him by shooting through the windows of the shanty boat. I couldn't shake any more than I had been shaking so I just kept on shaking like I had been, but I got sicker at my stomach. When I was through being sick Swatty he got mad.

"Stop shaking like that!" he said. "We've gone and done it and we've got to think what we're going to do about it. Stop shaking and help me think."

"I c-c-c-can't stop sh-sh-sh-shaking!" I said. "I w-w-w-would if I c-c-c-could, w-w-w-wouldn't I?"

"Well, you've got to stop shaking," Swatty said. "If you go shaking all around town like that everybody will know we did it. If you don't stop shaking I'll lick you!"

I began to cry. I didn't cry because Swatty said he'd lick me but because I just had to cry. So Swatty tried to make me stop shivering. He took the backbone of my neck in his thumb and fingers and pinched it hard, because you can stop hiccoughs that way; but it didn't do any good. So he got madder.

"What are you shaking for, anyway?" he asked. "I ain't shaking."

"W-well, y-y-you h-h-haven't got r-r-religion," I said. "It's w-w-worse for anybody that's g-g-g-got r-r-religion to kill anybody."

Well, he hauled off and hit me. He hit me in the jaw, and then he said what I wouldn't let anybody say about my

getting religion, and I fought him. Then we stopped fighting and I was still shaking, but not so bad.

"Yah! Little sissy boy got religion!" he said. "Little sissy boy went and got religion 'cause he's stuck on Mamie Little!"

Well, that did make me mad! I lit into him, and we had another good fight, and pretty soon he said, "Nuff!" and I stopped. So I started to tell him what I'd do to him if he ever said that again. I was crying, I guess.

"That's all right," he said; "I just said it on purpose. I just said it to make you fight. You ain't shaking now." And I wasn't. I'd got so mad I forgot to shake. So, as Swatty had just said what he said on purpose, I didn't care. So I stopped crying.

"Now you've got some sense," Swatty said. "Don't you get that way again. We don't want to get hung, do we?"

I hadn't thought of that. Of course they would hang us if they found out we'd killed the man in the shanty boat, and it made us pretty sober. I guess I began to cry again.

"Oh, shut up!" Swatty said. "If you're going to blubber all the time, and not try to help, I wish I'd killed that man all by myself. You shut up and try to help me think what to do, or I'll go and tell everybody you killed him."

"You won't do it!" I said.

"Yes, I will," he said back. "And I'll prove it on you. You didn't look at that man and I did, and I know what kind of a man he is."

"What kind of a man is he?" I asked.

"He's a tough kind," Swatty said. "And if you don't shut up your bawling I'll say you and him got into an argument about religion, and you shot him because he wouldn't come and join in with you and get it. And folks will believe that, because you've just got it, and there ain't any other reason why any of us should kill him. I haven't got religion, have I?"

"Well," I said, for I saw Swatty could do like he said, "what are we going to do, anyway?"

"We've got to keep from getting arrested and put into jail and hung," Swatty said. "I don't know how, but we've got to. We've got to be careful, and not let anybody know we shot that man. If they find it out they'll hang us sure."

"We didn't mean to shoot him," I said. "We had a right to shoot outside the city limits."

"We didn't have a right to shoot anybody," said Swatty. "We had a right to see if there was anybody in the shanty boat before we shot at it. We'll all three be hung if they find out we did it."

Well, I had an idea just then, but I didn't say it to Swatty. I didn't really think it, it just come. I knew as soon as I thought it that I wouldn't be so mean, and I knew Swatty wouldn't either. But it would have been easy enough for me and Swatty to say Bony did it. We was two to one. Maybe I would have said it if I hadn't got religion. But it made me feel better for a while to think that I'd thought it and hadn't said it. So the next thing I thought was that it would be mighty noble and true and religious if I'd go to the mayor or somebody and just say: "I killed a man up there at the old shanty boat on the river, but nobody is to blame but me. Swatty ain't and Bony ain't, so go ahead and hang me. I did it, and it was my target rifle." But I thought that if I was going to be hung I'd not feel as lonesome if Swatty and Bony got hung too. Anyway, Swatty started to talk, and I forgot it.

"If Bony hadn't gone off with the skiff," he said, "we'd be all right. We'd get in the skiff and row out to the middle of the river and lay flat in it, and nobody would see us. We could float down the river as far as we wanted to and hide in a cane-brake or somewhere. Or maybe, we'd row up the Missouri and hide in the Rocky Mountains. If they got after us we could turn bandits or something."

"You could," I said, "but I couldn't."

"I forgot you'd got religion," he said. "You'd have to start a ranch. But we can't do that, because Bony went off with the skiff."

What we decided was that nobody would be apt to find the dead man that day. Maybe they'd never find him. Unless somebody like us happened to go into the old shanty boat he might never get found, and then, the next spring, when the Mississippi had her spring flood, or that same fall, if the water got high enough, we could come up and float the old shanty boat out of the mud and take her out in the river and sink her. We talked over a lot of things, and the more we talked the more it didn't seem so bad. It looked as if we had a chance not to get hung, after all.

I wanted to cut across the cornfield to the hill and go home that way, so that if anybody saw us they'd think we had been up in the woods and not near the shanty boat, but Swatty said that wouldn't do because our footprints would show in the cornfield, and detectives would trace us by them if they started out to find who murdered the man. He said it would be more innocent to go right down the railroad track, and if anybody asked us anything to say we hadn't been as far up as the shanty boat, and that Bony had got a stomach ache or something and gone home first with the boat. So we did that. We walked down the track. We talked about the murder all the time, and the more we talked the surer we were nobody would think we did it.

Well, we got to my gate all right, and Swatty and me crossed our hearts we wouldn't say anything about killing the man, and I tried to think how I'd act so nobody at home would think anything different than they always did, and I went into the house. It was pretty late. They were eating supper. So I went in and sat down, and Father scolded me a little for being late, like he does nearly every day, and then he said something else.

"Son," he said, "after supper you'll get that target rifle of yours and turn it over to me."

Well, I almost jumped out of my skin, I was so scared.

"Now, you needn't begin any of that," he said. "I mean what I say. Do you know who was shot today?"

I was so scared I couldn't swallow my piece of meat. I choked on it.

"No, sir!" I said, pretty weakly.

"Well, Benny Judge shot his little sister," said my father. "Only by the greatest luck she wasn't killed. As it is she has a bullet in her arm. Now, mind! I want that rifle."

Well, I was glad and I was scared stiff, too.

I had left the target rifle on the rocks up by the shanty boat. I began to shake again because I knew somebody would find the target rifle and it had my initials on it, and when they found the dead man they would know I killed him. I guess my teeth chattered. Anyway I couldn't think of anything at all. I just wished I was dead, because after supper Father would want the rifle, and I didn't have it, and some one would find it and I would be hung.

Then Mother saw me shake, and she said, "What's the matter? Are you cold?"

"Y-y-yes'm," I said. Well, it wasn't a lie. I was sort of cold.

"Father, the poor child is sick," Mother said. "See him chatter his teeth."

So Father looked at me. "Malaria," he said. So he asked me if I had been up to the Slough, because he had been reading in a magazine about Slough mosquitoes biting you and giving you malaria. I didn't know what to say. It didn't look good to say I had been up there so near the old shanty boat, and I didn't like to lie about it, because I was on probation for getting religion. So I didn't say anything. I just shivered and chattered my teeth.

"Huh!" my father said. "I knew well enough something was the matter with that boy when he got religion. He's had this malaria spell coming on. Put him to bed and give him a big dose of quinine." And then he said to me, "Just let me catch you up near that Slough again, understand? Get to bed, and quick! This family is just one thing after another!"

I got to bed pretty quick and Mother gave me one of the big capsules. She heated the scorched blanket at the kitchen stove and wrapped me up in it and put all the bed covers she could find on top of me. I started to sweat right away. So she said, "If you want anything I'll leave the door open and you can call me," and she went down again. She told Father she guessed I was pretty sick because I looked like it, and all he said was, "Huh! boys!" And I guessed he was right, and I made up my mind to live a better and truer life, but I kept thinking of the man we had killed. I never sweat so much in my life.

All at once the doorbell rang and I sat right up in bed. I thought the police had come for me. But it wasn't the police; it was something just as bad--almost. It was old Higgins, the skiff man. He was talking to Father. He asked him if I had got home all right. So Father said I had, and I was sick and in bed. Then old Higgins said, "Well, I don't know what to make of it. Nobody brought my skiff back. Your boy and two other boys hired it off of me, and when it got late and they didn't bring it back I got frightened. You ask him where he left my skiff, and if they lost it somebody's got to pay me back for it." Well, I was mighty scared. I guessed Bony had been so scared he had upset the skiff and got drowned, and maybe me and Swatty would get hung for that, too, though we did throw rocks at Bony to try to get him to come back. But, anyway, me and Swatty would have to tell why Bony had gone off in the skiff alone, and then they would know everything, and take us to jail and hang us. I crawled down under the covers and pretended to be asleep, but it wasn't any use, because Father shook me by the shoulder.

"Now, what?" he said, cross. "Here's Higgins, the skiff man, and he says you hired a skiff and didn't bring it back. What's the meaning of all this? And are you putting on this malaria on this account? Explain, young man!"

So I sat up and I said, "Bony took it."

"Come, now, explain!" my father said.

"Well, we was up the river," I said, "and me and Swatty and Bony got out of the skiff and--and we went ashore. So--so--then me and Swatty, we run down the railroad track a little way and--and when we looked back Bony was going to get into the skiff, and we hollered for him to wait for us, but he wouldn't. He got into it and rowed away."

"And left you there?"

"Yes, sir."

I guess he didn't believe it. I guess he thought I was just trying to put it onto Bony, to get out of it myself. He forgot I'd got religion, I guess. So he snapped his fingers the way he does when he's mad.

"Get out of that bed and get into your clothes and make haste about it!" he said, and I said, "Yes, sir!" and I got out

of bed right away. I dressed quick.

Mother cried because it was wrong to make a sick boy dress and go over to Bony's house out of a sweat and I'd catch pneumonia; but I had to go. So nobody said anything on the way over, except Mr. Higgins tried to talk about what nice weather we were having, but Father wouldn't talk. I didn't like to go, because--well, I thought all Bony's folks would be crying because he was drowned when we got there; but of course if you think about it, they wouldn't know. So when we got to their house they weren't crying, but Mr. Booth--he was Bony's father--just come to the door in his socks and said, "Well, what is it now?" because I was there, and he knew something was the matter or I wouldn't be there with my father. So Father said, "Did your son come home?"

"Yes, he come home," Mr. Booth said, "but he ain't well, and Ma put him to bed."

I was glad he wasn't drowned, anyway. Unless he'd told about the dead man, and then maybe it wouldn't have been so bad if he had been drowned. So Father and Mr. Higgins told about the skiff, and Mr. Booth sent Bony's ma to up ask Bony. Pretty soon she came down.

"He's pretty sick," she said. "He's complaining of pains in his arms and back and he's shaking like he had the ague; but I hope not, because his temp'ature ain't high. I guess maybe he caught a chill. And he tied the skiff under the creek bridge. He left the oars in it. But he shall never again play with those two boys! Never again! The idea of them running off and leaving my poor child to row home all alone!"

Well, that was a lie, but I wasn't sore at Bony because he's a coward and it was better for him to tell a lie like that than to blab about the dead man. Anyway, a fellow has to tell some lies until he gets religion. After that it's different.

"So you've been lying to me again!" Father said to me, but I didn't say anything. Saying it was a lie didn't make it a lie, and all he could do was lick me, anyway. But he didn't lick me, because he thought maybe I did have malaria because I'd got religion. I guess that was what he thought. So Mr. Higgins said, "Never mind, I'll get the skiff, but it will be about a dollar." So Father paid him and said he would take it out of my allowance; but he hardly ever paid me my allowance, anyway, so that was all right. He just gave me an allowance so he could say he wouldn't pay it to me, I guess. Anyway, we went home.

Well, I stayed awake for hours, thinking about the murder and what we had better do about it, but maybe it was only a few minutes, and the next morning Swatty came over before I was out of bed. He waited for me in the side yard until I come down.

"Well," he said, "have you thought of anything to do?"

I hadn't thought of anything except maybe I'd better go to the minister and tell him all about it. So Swatty said if I did that he would knock my head off, and I knew he would, if he could.

"Well, have you thought of anything, then?" I asked him.

So he told me he had sat up all night thinking about it. He said he had paced the floor with his hands behind him and his brow knotted in thought throughout the still hours of the night until cockcrow. I thought he was lying, but I didn't tell him so. I told him I went to sleep, and I told him about Bony and Mr. Higgins. I told him about the rifle we had left on the rocks. He said that complicated matters, but we would have to make the best of it.

Then he showed me the braided horsehair bridle he had in his pocket that his uncle had brought back from Texas, and the wooden tobacco pipe he had in the other pocket. He said we might have gone to Texas, only somebody in Texas might recognize the bridle and know it was the one his uncle had had, and then know him and connect him up with the murder in the shanty boat, so we would go to Montana or maybe New Mexico. He was n't sure which we would go to, but that it would be better to start right away.

Well, I didn't like to leave home and never come back until I was a big man with a beard, and the murder was forgotten about, but it seemed the only thing to do. I talked and Swatty talked, and it seemed the only way we could keep from being hung, because "murder will out," as it says in our reader. I only had twenty-five cents that I hadn't paid Mr. Higgins for the skiff, and Swatty only had fourteen cents. We knew that was n't nearly enough money. We didn't know what Bony had, but afterward we found he only had a dime. But Swatty said we could get work to do in some of the places we would get to, and we could steal green com and roast it--only he would have to steal it, because it wouldn't be right for me.

We thought the best thing to do would be to start out of our back gate and go due west, and keep going west until we came to Montana or New Mexico, or wherever we got to, only we had to get the rifle first, because if we left it, it would be evidence against us, and anyway we might kill some game with it. We had it all fixed up how we would do, and just then Bony came over the back fence, and we told it all over again. We didn't think he would go with us, but he said he would.

So we talked it all over, and it wasn't like any other time we had ever talked anything over. Most times we just talked about running away but we didn't mean it, but this time it was a mighty serious thing and we meant it. Other times when we talked we were afraid to run away, but this time we were afraid not to. It was almost noon when we got ready to go, and just as we were going Mother saw us and called us back. She asked me if we were going to the woods, and we

were, so I said we were, and she said we oughtn't to go without lunch, so she made us sandwiches, and we were glad to have them. I said "Good-bye, Mother," and she said "Good-bye, son," and she didn't know that maybe it was the last time she'd ever say it to me, but I knew it because maybe she would grow old and die before I ever came back.

Well, we started off. We didn't talk much--even Swatty didn't. We went past his barn, and he went in to say good-bye to his dog, but we didn't dare take him along, because somebody might know us by him, so he whined and cried when we went away. We didn't say anything much until we got to the city limits and then Swatty said, "Well, anyway, now the town police can't touch us, because we are out of town, and they can't touch anybody out of town", and Bony began to cry.

But he didn't cry loud--he just sort of sniggered to himself and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. I guess maybe I cried, too, but not very loud, either.

If it hadn't been for being hung I would have gone back, and I would have told the minister all about killing the man, because I kept thinking about Mamie Little and that some other boy would play with her and grow up and marry her, and maybe I'd never see her again, even if he didn't marry her. Swatty was the only one that didn't cry a little. He didn't have to, because he let on to be mad at us for being mushies, and he swore instead. He swore at me and Bony, and I could have kept from crying, too, if I could have sworn, but I couldn't because I gave it up when I got religion.

After we got beyond the houses that are beyond the city limits we went across the vacant lots and across the old fair grounds and down over the hill. We got down to the river road and climbed over the fence and got under the bob-wire fence on the other side of the road and went through the cornfield. We forgot about our footprints.

When we got to the edge of the cornfield Bony wouldn't go any farther. He was scared to go any nearer the dead man. Swatty and me crawled under the wires and went across the railroad track, and before we were across them we dodged back into the cut alongside the track, and Swatty dropped flat in the weeds. So I dropped flat, too. The reason was that there were eight or ten men on the front deck of the shanty house, and I don't know how many more inside.

They had found the man we had murdered.

We just lay there and held our breath. I couldn't think of anything, I was so scared again. I just remembered how "murder will out," and how a murderer will always come back to where he murdered anybody, and that there we were, and that as soon as they saw us they'd know we were the murderers, because we had come back. I don't know what Swatty was doing, and I didn't know what I was doing, but I guess as soon as I was able I started to try to dig a hole in the railroad embankment with my finger nails, to crawl into and hide, because that was what I was doing when I heard the men come up the other side of the embankment.

They were coming up from the shanty boat, and one of the men was saying, "Steady now! Keep that door level, can't you?" So I couldn't dig any more. My fingers wouldn't work. My arms and legs felt as if they were full of cold ice water, and I couldn't lift up my hands to put my hat on tighter, which I wanted to do because I could feel my hair lifting up and lifting my hat up. I didn't think about being hung or anything, but just how awful it would be if the men let the door tip and rolled the murdered man down on top of us. I guess I ought to have thought of how innocent I was, but I didn't. I didn't even think of being religious. I just felt my backbone creep and my hair lift up and my arms and legs get colder and colder.

We heard the men carrying the dead man away. I couldn't move, and I guess I would never have dared to move again if it hadn't been for Swatty. As soon as we couldn't hear the men any more Swatty lifted his head and crawled up the embankment and looked. I wouldn't have done it for a million billion quadrillion dollars. He looked, and when he saw they weren't thinking of us, but were all looking at the dead man on the door and going away from us down the railroad track he scabbled up the rest of the embankment and scabbled across the track and down the other side. He was back right away, with the target rifle, and then he told me to get up and get away from there, but I couldn't get up. So he kicked me two or three times hard, and when he kicked me on my hip bone I got mad and forgot to be so scared and got up. We ran through the cornfield and got Bony, and all three of us got across the road and ran up the hillside into the woods as hard as we could run.

I don't know how many miles we ran. We ran until we had to fall down because our legs wouldn't work any more. We sat in the bushes awhile and rested, and then we went on, but we walked mostly. We only ran once in a while. We came to a road we didn't know, but it went sort of west; and we went on down that road a long way and that night we slept in a haystack--not because it was cold but to be hid. The next morning we went on again, and before noon we were mighty hungry. Bony was hungriest, and he cried a lot, and I cried a little, but Swatty was willing to fight us whenever we wanted to stop and rest too long, because it wasn't safe yet. We were a long way from Arizona or Montana or wherever we were going, and it was just about the time the sheriff and everybody would start out to find us if they thought we were the murderers. We just plugged along and felt mean and tired, and I thought about Mother and Mamie Little a lot. I felt so bad I almost didn't care if they did catch me and hang me. That's the way Bony felt, too, but Swatty kept us going.

Swatty went up to a house about supper time and asked for some bread and butter, and he got it and brought part of it to us. Then he made us go on, because he said we ought to get as far from that house as we could after we'd been

seen there. So we went until I was ready to die, and we found a hayrick in a field and we were just going to hide in it when three men on horseback and some in a buggy--two more--came up the road and saw us and shouted at us.

Well, we knew it was all up. The men started to climb over the fence, and we walked toward them because we knew we couldn't get away, and it was just as well to be hung as to be shot trying to run away. I guess it was the most awful feeling I ever had in my life.

When we got up to them one of the men was Swatty's father and another was my minister. As soon as Swatty got there his father took him by the collar of his coat, and shook him and hit him on the side of the head and told him what he thought of him for running away and making so much trouble; but when he let go of him Swatty just dropped down on the grass and shut his eyes, because he was so played out that all he had to be was shook, and he went unconscious. So Bony started to cry and the minister said, "Shame!" and then Swatty's father got red in the face, and dropped on his knees beside Swatty and picked him up and kissed him. He cried. It was the first time I ever saw a man cry.

So then I guessed I'd confess the whole thing to my minister, and I did. The other men were all trying to get Swatty to open his eyes and my minister listened to me. He listened to all of it--all about the murder and all. Then he put his hand on my shoulder, and he said, "You poor boy! And you thought I was hunting you down?" And I said, "How long will it be before they hang us?" And he said, "George, I hope you will never be hung, because that man wasn't murdered. He was a suicide, and he wrote a letter about it before he went to do it." So I started to say how glad I was and, when I come to, I was at a farmhouse and my minister was trying to get me to drink some milk.

So after while we went home. Father wasn't there, because he was out with some other folks hunting for us, but Mother and Fan and a lot of people were, and my minister told them all about it, and the women all cried to think of us three all alone with a murder on our minds and our legs tired, I guess, and not much to eat. But I was so tired I didn't care. I was so tired I didn't care who was there. I was so tired I was n't even glad I wasn't a murderer. Then somebody came out from behind the women where she had been, where they wouldn't notice her much, and she didn't look at me or anybody. She just said:

"Well, I guess I'll go home now."

"Why, Mamie Little, have you been waiting up all this while?" my mother said. "You should be in bed, child."

So she didn't look at me, and I didn't look at her. She just went home. But then I knew I was glad I wasn't a murderer. Because I knew that Mamie Little wouldn't have thought I'd got religion very good if all I'd got let me go around murdering men in shanty boats. And I didn't want Mamie Little to think that about me, because--well, I didn't know why, I just thought it.

X. SLIM FINNEGAN

Well, I guess the nearest Swatty ever came to having a lot of money was the time Mr. Murphy got it and Swatty didn't. It was a thousand and five hundred dollars, and if Swatty didn't get it Mamie Little ought to have had it; and if Mamie Little didn't get it I ought to have had it; but we didn't any of us get it, because Mr. Murphy got it.

I told you about the time Mamie Little got mad at me because I had been prohibition and changed over to anti-prohibition because Swatty could lick me, and about how her father had the prohibition newspaper. Well, he kept publishing in his newspaper that the saloons ought to be closed; so one day somebody blew up Mr. Little's house with dynamite--only it was gunpowder. But they called it dynamite. They called the men that blew up the house the dynamiters. They blew up two other houses, too, and that was why Mr. Murphy was in town. He was a detective. He came and worked in the sawmill, and nobody knew he was a detective until he got the money me or Swatty or Mamie Little ought to have had.

Me and Swatty and Bony was sitting on the empty manure bin back of our barn, smoking cornsilk cigarettes, and that reminded us of the time we were up the river smoking driftwood grapevine cigarettes, when we saw Slim Finnegan steal the gunpowder, and we got to talking about it.

"Well, if anybody ever finds out Slim Finnegan stole it he won't stab me!" Swatty said; "because he wouldn't think I told on him, because I ain't prohibition and I never was; and I guess Slim and everybody knows it."

So that made me and Bony feel pretty scared, because everybody knew Slim Finnegan was a stabber. He'd just as

soon stab you as not. I don't remember whether he ever had stabbed anybody; but I guess he had, because everybody said so. Anyway, he was always showing us the knife he stabbed fellers with when he wanted to stab them, and he said he'd stab any of us for two cents. The knife had a staghorn handle and a six-inch blade, with a curve in it and a spring in the back that, when you pressed it, snapped the blade open all ready to stab with.

Once, when he met me when I was alone, he grabbed me by the neck and backed me against a fence post, and pulled out the knife and opened it. I bellered and said: "Aw, lemme alone, Slim! I never done nothin' to you!" And he said he knew mighty well I hadn't and that I'd better not try to, because he was a stabber, and if I did anything he didn't like he'd cut my heart out and leave it sticking to the fence post with the knife in it, to show fellers not to monkey with Slim Finnegan. So I said I'd never, never do anything he didn't want me to, and please to let me go. So he said, well, he guessed he'd stab me, anyway, while he had me; and he put the point of his knife against my stomach and leaned up against me, so that all he had to do was lean a little harder against the handle of the knife and I'd be stabbed.

I thought I was going to be killed, sure. I held my breath, and my bones felt like water; and just then he laughed at me and bumped my head against the post three times and threw me down on the grass and went away.

That was before me and Swatty and Bony saw him set the lumber yard afire too. After we saw him set the lumber yard afire we were all more scared of him than ever; even Swatty was scared of him, and said so. When we saw him set the lumber yard afire Slim was in our class at school; but he was twice as big as anybody in our room, because he only went to school when he wanted to and he didn't want to very often; and after the fire he quit going to school. I guess he went bumming for a while.

The first I knew about Slim Finnegan was when I was a little bit of a kid and not big enough to ride belly buster or knee gut on a sled or slide down the big hills. I had a high sled and rode on it sitting down, and rode from the sidewalk into the gutter, and things like that. So my father got me a new sled on my birthday, a clipper sled with half-round irons, and it was painted red and was named Dexter. I took it out on the hill where the big kids were sliding and tried to ride belly buster on it, which is lying flat on your stomach and steering with both feet, like knee gut is lying on one knee and steering with the other foot, but the runners on my sled were so slick that when I put the sled down it slid away before I could get onto it.

So I was trying that when Slim Finnegan came up. I hadn't ever seen him before, but he acted nice and said the way I was trying to get onto the sled wasn't the right way and he would show me how. So he took my sled and ran away and belly busted onto it. He went down the hill like a flash. I watched him until I couldn't tell which was Slim and which was some other feller, away down the hill, and then I couldn't tell any one from any other, and I waited for him to come back. One feller came up the hill, and then another and dozens came up, but Slim didn't come back with my sled; and after a while I began to blubber the way kids do, and a girl I didn't know took me by the arm and led me home, saying, "Don't cry, Georgie! Don't cry, Georgie!" all the way.

So the girl told my mother somebody had stolen my sled, and that was the first I knew it was stolen. When my father came home he asked me what the boy was like that took my sled and I told him, and he went out and after a long time he came back and he had my sled. It was all painted over with fresh drab paint except where my father had scraped the paint off to show that it was my sled. He said: "That drunken Finnegan's dirty son stole it!" So that was the first I knew of Slim Finnegan.

When I got old enough to play away from the house I mighty soon knew that Slim Finnegan was the feller that would sneak up on us little kids when we were playing marbles and grab up our marbles and steal them and, if we said anything, twist our arms behind us until we yelled. He was the one that would sit in the long grass out in the field when we played ball and, if the ball came near him, grab it up and put it in his pocket and laugh at us. He was the one that, if he came on us when we were fishing, would throw our worm can in the Slough and take the fish we had caught, and then swear at us. He was a sneak and a thief and a tough, and his father was a tough and a drunkard; and it wasn't safe to send your washing to Mrs. Finnegan because sometimes she got drunk and didn't do it for a week, and sometimes it didn't all come back.

Well, Swatty said that Slim Finnegan wouldn't stab him, because he was anti-prohibition and Slim was too; so Bony thought maybe he'd better turn anti-prohibition, and he did. And I hoped Slim knew I had turned, but I was afraid he didn't.

Well, one day that spring--but pretty late--me and Swatty and Bony went down to the levee and hired a skiff from Higgins like we always did; and we rowed across the Mississippi to the Illinois shore above the old ferry landing. I guess maybe we were after turtle eggs; so when we saw the shore was all mud Swatty said:

"Let's row up to the head of the Slough and row down the Slough."

"What for?" I asked him.

"Oh, just for cod!" he says. So we did.

We rowed up to the place where the Slough branches off from the river, and there was a good deal of water in the Slough yet, so we rowed down the Slough until we came almost to the ferry road, and then we thought we would stop

and get some grapevine driftwood to smoke, and we did. We rowed to the shore of the Slough and got out and found plenty of driftwood where it had lodged against the bushes and tree roots, and we lit up and smoked and sat awhile just doing that.

Then Swatty said: "Come on! Let's go over to that sand by the powder house and see if there are any turtle eggs there yet."

That was a good place for turtle eggs, because the sand was hotter there sooner than anywhere else. It was a sort of cleared place without many trees or bushes, all soft sand and not very far from the ferry road. So we walked along down the Slough and pretty soon we came to a skiff pulled up on the shore. I was nearest, so I jumped into it; but Swatty didn't. He said:

"Garsh! You'd better get out of that skiff. Some feller has just left that skiff there, because his footprints on the bow seat ain't dry yet. If he came back and seen us playing in his skiff he'd like as not give us good and plenty!"

And that was right, because when a feller rows over from town or anywhere he don't like kids to fool with his skiff; because if the skiff got away how could he get back to town? So if they catch you in their skiffs they bat you a good one. So I got out of the skiff and Swatty went on ahead, and me and Bony followed; and we come to the sandy place by the powder house.

A powder house is a little square shack about as big as a closet, covered with sheet iron and painted red for danger. This was the only one on the Illinois side, but there were two more on the Iowa side, up the river from town a good ways; and the reason they were so far from town was because the wholesale grocers sold powder, but the city didn't allow them to keep any inside the city limits. When they sold some they sent over to get it. The powder houses were painted with big letters to say Danger! and that nobody must shoot at them or build a fire near them, or they might explode. So that was why this one was in the middle of the sandy place sand can't burn like grass does.

So we come through the bushes to where we could see the powder house and we all stopped short right there, for there was Slim Finnegan coming out of the powder house with a bag over his shoulder, with what anybody could tell was an iron powder keg in it. As soon as we saw him he saw us and we dodged back into the bushes and ran. We ran pretty far, and then we stopped and listened and didn't hear anything; so we hid down behind a log and waited. We knew that if Slim Finnegan found us he'd stab us or something. Anyway, we thought he would. Me and Bony did. I guess Swatty did too.

After we had waited what seemed like a couple of hours--but I guess it was about half a minute--Swatty put his head up above the log and looked, and didn't see anything. Then he got up and went round the log and started to go back to the powder house. Bony didn't say anything, because he was too scared, but I yelled, "Swatty! Swatty!" in a whisper, because I wanted him to come back; but he just turned and motioned us to be still, and he went on. He walked as careful as he could. Pretty soon he came back and dropped down behind the log again.

"It's Slim Finnegan, all right," he said--only he said "orl right," like he always does; "and he's stealing a keg of powder"--only he said it sort of like "keg of powder."

"What'd you see, Swatty?" I whispered.

"I seen him shift the bag from one shoulder to the other," Swatty said, "and I could see the ridges on the keg, all right! If we wanted to we could tell the police and they'd put him in jail."

"Aw, don't, Swatty!" I said. "If you do that he'll wait until he gets out and then he'll stab all of us. Aw, don't tell the police, Swatty!"

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," Swatty said. "I ain't made up my mind yet what I'll do. I ain't afraid of his old stabbin' knife, I tell you that! He can't scare me! There ain't any Slim Finnegan that ever lived could scare me. If he pulled his old frog stabber on me I'd--"

He stopped short and I saw him put out one hand and grab the log, and his face looked like a dead man's, and then I looked up from the callus I was fixing on my foot and I saw Slim Finnegan too. He was standing right in front of us with a pistol in his hand and the pistol was pointed right at us. He had a mean-looking face, sort of foxy and sort of sneery, and now it had a sort of grin on it, and it was ugly. It was the kind of grin he had when he twisted a little kid's arm and made him scream. He was just like he always was, sort of muddy-haired and yellowfaced and slouchy in the shoulders, and tobacco juice in the corners of his mouth. He looked just the way he always looked when he was going to have some fun hurting somebody.

I felt pretty sick, I felt hot in the stomach, as if a bullet had already made a hot hole there. I sort of twitched in different places as each place got to thinking it was the place the bullet was going to hit. I don't know what Bony did; I had all I wanted to do without thinking of anybody else. All of a sudden Slim opened his dirty mouth and swore at us the worst anybody ever heard.

"Get up out of there, you"--something--"rats!" he said in the meanest voice he had. "Get up!"

So we got up.

"You get along there, now!" he ordered, swearing some more; and he waved us where to go.

We didn't say a word, not even Swatty. We just went; and instead of thinking I felt the bullet coming into my stomach I thought I felt it coming into the joints of my back. I put my hand behind me to sort of help stop it if it came. That way he sent us through the brush to the sandy place. He walked us toward the powder house, and then, all at once, he shouted at us to throw down our grapevine cigarettes. He asked us if we wanted to blow him to hell. So we threw them down.

Then he came up to me and hit me on the side of the head and knocked me down in the sand, and threw Bony on top of me, and slapped Swatty so he staggered; but Swatty didn't fall. He swore back at Slim, and Slim slapped him again and knocked him down. For a million dollars I would n't have sworn back at a stabber that had a pistol; but that's how Swatty is. Anyway, he was the only one of us that could swear good enough to make it worth while swearing back.

Well, Slim had left the door of the powder house open and when he had us all knocked down he came over and kicked at us, and I was the one he kicked. He swore all the time, a steady stream, and it was the thoroughest swearing I ever heard. It sounded like business. Then he jerked Swatty up and slung him toward the powder house and slung him inside, and then he took me and Bony and slung us the same way. He slung us all into the powder house.

"I'll teach you to go blattin' about me when you see me!" he said. "Dirty little rats! I'll learn you a lesson! You 'll never come your sneakin' spy in' on me again! You'll have enough when I get through with you this time. You want to know what I'm goin' to do with you?"

Well, we did sort of want to know, but we didn't say so.

"I'm goin' to lock you in there," he said; "and I'm goin' to leave you in there to starve, like the dirty sneaks you are. I'll teach you to go tellin' lies about me! You'd go and say I stole that can of powder, wouldn't you? Well, I didn't steal it--see? I bought it. I bought it and they sent me over to get it. It's none of your business, anyway. You sneakin' rats!"

Bony started to cry. Slim told him to shut up, and he did. He scowled at us.

"No, by"--something--he said, swearing; "starving is too good for tattle-tellin' rats like you. Somebody might come and let you out. I know what I'm goin' to do to you. I'm goin' to lock you in and then I'm goin' to set a fire and blow you to a million pieces. I'll blow you up, like the sneakin' rats you are!"

I can't make it sound the way it sounded to us, because I can't swear the way he did. He swore, to show he meant it, and then he slammed the iron-covered door and we heard the iron bar scrape as he put it across the door, and we heard the padlock click into the staple. We were in the dark, darker dark than I was ever in before. Bony began to cry sort of funny, like a sick animal with a voice that was too weak to cry very good. All I can remember was that I put out my hands and felt Swatty and hung onto his coat with both hands.

I hung on and held my breath and waited for the explosion to come. We heard Slim cracking sticks across his knee; we could hear the sticks snap. Then we heard him piling the sticks against the outside of the powder house, and pretty soon we heard scratch! scratch!--like a match on a box. It was the hardest waiting for anything I ever did. Waiting to be blown up is always like that, I guess.

The place where he was piling the sticks was one of the front corners of the powder house, and there wasn't so very much powder in the house, and what there was was in different piles, for the different kinds and sizes of kegs. All of a sudden Swatty pushed my hands off him and stooped down and began feeling on the floor in the corner where the fire was going to be. There were four or five little kegs of powder in that corner and Swatty began picking them up and putting them on one of the other piles that was not so near the corner. I guess nobody but Swatty would have thought of doing that; but when he started I started, too, and we moved the powder as fast as we could. Then the door opened.

Slim had taken off the padlock and the iron bar so quietly we hadn't heard him, and when he opened the door he caught us shifting the kegs.

"Come out of there!" he said. "Now you know what I'll do to you if you go telling about me. If I ever hear you have mentioned my name, or if you ever say it to each other, I'll get you and bring you over here and finish this job right!"

Well, we guessed he'd do it.

"I'd have done it now," he said, "only I don't want to blow up powder that don't belong to me. And here's the keg I had," he said, throwing one into the powder house. "Now, you get! And if you ever say a word you 'll know what 'll happen to you. Get!"

We ran. We ran like scared deer, and all I wanted to do was to get as far away as I could. We ran a long way up the Slough and then Swatty stopped, and I stopped because he stopped, but Bony kept on running.

"Come on!" I said to Swatty. "What you stopping for?"

"Hide in there," he said, pointing to some bushes. "I'll come back."

He crouched Indian fashion and went toward the Slough and out of sight. It was quite awhile before he came back.

"Garsh, he's a liar!" he said when he came back. "That keg of powder he stole wasn't the one he put back. He's got that one in his skiff yet. It was another one he put back."

"Swatty, you ain't goin' to tell on him, are you?" I asked.

"You bet I ain't!" he said. "I just wanted to know. You bet I ain't going to tell; if I did he'd stab us in a minute."

Well, I guess we waited round an hour before we went home, and then we were mighty glad there was any of us left to go home, because we had all thought we were going to be blown into such little pieces nobody would ever find any of us again.

Now about the dynamiters: After I had marched in the prohibition parade because Mamie Little's father was a prohibition man--there was prohibition in Iowa, all over, and for a while Riverbank didn't have any saloons because it was against the law. So Slim Finnegan's father got a shanty boat and started a saloon on it across the river, where there wasn't prohibition; and Slim helped tend bar, and then other bumboats started, and pretty soon I guess folks got tired of that and the saloons started up again in Riverbank, so people could get drunk without having to hire a skiff and go across the river.

So three or four or five men made up their minds they would stop the saloons again, and they started in to do it. Mamie Little's father was one of them, because he printed the newspaper that wanted the saloons closed; so one night three or four of the men's houses were blown up with gunpowder, but the fuse went out on the other keg, so it didn't blow up its house. But three of them were blown up. That was about three months after me and Swatty and Bony saw Slim Finnegan steal the keg of powder; and right away we thought of that and that Slim Finnegan was one of the men that blew up the houses.

Gee! We was scared! All we could think of was that now Slim Finnegan would come round and stab us, so we wouldn't tell on him. One whole afternoon we hid in the old box stall in my barn and didn't dare talk above a whisper; and we had my target rifle, because if Slim came we were going to sell our lives dearly.

But that was afterward. We went to see the blown-up houses first--right after breakfast the morning after the night they were blown up--and they were all pretty bad. Everybody said it was a miracle nobody was killed, and how Mamie Little and her folks walked across the bare rafters and got out, and everything like that. So then the mayor offered five hundred dollars reward and the governor offered a thousand dollars more; and there was a big meeting downtown one night and everybody gave money to hire detectives to catch the dynamiters.

There were lots of detectives came to Riverbank; I guess maybe there were a thousand. Everybody said it would be just a little while before the dynamiters were all caught and sent to prison; but pretty soon everybody began saying the detectives were no good, and that Mr. Murphy, who was the one the committee had hired, was just pretending it was worth while to detect, and that he would never get the dynamiters, and that all he was staying in Riverbank for was to get the money the committee paid him every week. All he found out, I guess, was that the dynamite was gunpowder and that some of it was stole from the powder house across the river and some from the powder houses up the river. But me and Swatty and Bony knew who stole it. That's why we were scared.

And you bet we were mighty scared! We made a fort in the hayloft of my barn, with loopholes to shoot my target rifle through, so we could flee to it if Slim Finnegan came round, and pop him from behind the fort before he could stab us. Swatty got us to do that. He was going to show us how to fix the barn stairs with each step on a hinge so when we pulled a rope the steps would drop and make a slide, so that whenever Slim tried to come up the steps he would get just part way and then slide down again; but when we tried to pry the treads of the steps loose the nails were rusted and the treads split; so we thought we'd better not.

We got up a signal word--only it was Swatty thought of it--so that when any of us saw Slim we could say it, and we'd know we had to run for shelter to our fort. The word was Vamoose! But it was too long, so Swatty shortened it. He made it Vam!

We did everything we could to get ready not to be stabbed. We made daggers out of some kitchen knives I got in my kitchen, and Swatty showed us how to do it while me and Bony turned the grindstone. We sharpened them on both edges and made points on them and tied string round the handles in loops, so we could hang them on our suspender buttons and let them hang down inside our pants. Swatty showed me how to carry my target rifle stuck down one pants leg, too, so it wouldn't be visible. It made me walk stiff-legged, like I was lame, but Swatty said that was a good thing--it would throw Slim Finnegan off his guard. Swatty showed us how to stand back to back when Slim Finnegan attacked us, so we would have a dagger in each direction and he couldn't stab us in the backs.

Whenever we could we got together and Swatty told us new ways to keep from being stabbed, because he said he knew a feller in Derlingport--where he had visited once--who was fixed just like we were, with a big feller after him; and Swatty remembered other things he had done. He didn't remember them all at once, but every day he remembered a new one. When he remembered them we did them. One of them was to rub our knee joints with sewing-machine oil, so they would be limber and we could run like a deer when Slim Finnegan took after us. Before he got through Swatty remembered a lot of things like that. We did them.

Well, after a while I guess we sort of forgot about Slim Finnegan, because he didn't come round to stab us. Maybe it was because Swatty couldn't remember any more of the things the feller in Derlingport had done, and maybe it was

because school began again. We sort of turned the fort in my hayloft into a dressing room for a circus. Swatty was ringmaster. So then Bony's birthday started to come and his mother thought she'd have a party for him, because they had a new parlor carpet and had had the dining-room papered. So she had it.

At first Bony said he wasn't going to his party, because there would be girls there and they would want to play kissing games; but Swatty said, Aw! he wasn't afraid to kiss all the girls there were in the world! and that if Bony would go to the party he would go too. So I said if Bony and Swatty would go I would go. I said, Aw! I bet I wasn't afraid to kiss all the girls in the world, either! only I bet I wouldn't kiss Mamie Little if she asked me a million times, because she was mad at me. So we went to Bony's party.

It was a pretty good party. Right at first it wasn't much because the girls sat on one side of the room and tried to keep their white dresses from getting wrinkled, and the boys sat on the other side. It wouldn't have been any fun at all, that first part, only Swatty had brought some beans in his pocket and we had some fun shooting them at the girls with our thumbs. Every once in a while Bony's mother would come in from the kitchen and clap her hands and say:

"Come, now! We must all have a good time! All you boys and girls think of a game and play it. Bony"--only she called him Harold--"I'm surprised you don't start a game!"

So then Bony wished he hadn't come to his party. So after a while Bony's mother said to the cook:

"Well, Maggie, we'd better give them the refreshments now, instead of later; they won't liven up until they are fed."

We went into the dining-room and all sat round the big table, and we began to have a good time. Us kids would get up and sneak round and steal a girl's cake or something, and she would holler and be mad; and then we started in to pull their hair-bows, and maybe their hair a little, and they would slap at us and scold and giggle. They pretended they didn't like it; but they did. So pretty soon some of them got up and chased us round the table, and after the ice cream it turned out we were playing tag; and Bony's mother said:

"Heaven save the furniture! But, anyway, I'm glad they've waked up!"

Well, I didn't pull Mamie Little's hair, or anything. I guess I wanted to, but I sort of didn't dare. All she did was to make a face at me once across the table, and when I threw a little piece of cake at her she brushed it off her dress and said:

"I consider that very rude!"

So then we went into the parlor again and got to playing kissing games--Copenhagen and post-office, and games like that. So then we played pillow. I guess the girls like it because there isn't so much game and there is more kissing, and I guess the boys don't care because by the time you get to playing pillow they're used to it. You take a sofa pillow and drop it in front of the girl you want to kiss and drop on your knees, and she drops on her knees and then she kisses you. Then she takes the pillow and drops it in front of the fellow she wants to kiss next, and she kneels on it, and she kisses him. So I guess Kate White dropped the pillow in front of me and kissed me; and then I took the pillow and looked round the row of chairs.

I saw Mamie Little and she looked as if she was trying to look as if she didn't want me to drop the pillow in front of her, but really did want me to. I didn't know what to do. Toady Williams was in the next chair to Mamie Little. I guess maybe I wanted Mamie Little to kiss me, but I was sort of scared to put the pillow in front of her. I got sort of hot. So, all of a sudden, I dropped the pillow right in front of her and plumped down on my knees. Everybody laughed and clapped their hands, except Toady Williams.

But Mamie Little didn't plump down on her knees in front of me. She stuck her chin in the air and said:

"No; thank you."

I guess I got hotter than I ever was in my life. I was burning hot. And I guess I was pretty mad. I got up and held the pillow by one corner.

"All right for you, then!" I said; and all I thought of was to make her sorry for making me look silly before the whole crowd. "All right for you! I know who dynamited your house, and now I won't tell!"

Well, right away she got down on her knees. She took the pillow from me and got down on her knees on it. So I kneeled down on it, too, and she let me kiss her on the cheek. It was the softest cheek I ever kissed, I guess. So then she got up, and took the pillow and looked around the circle for a boy to drop it in front of, and when she didn't drop it in front of Toady Williams the very first thing, I felt fine. Swatty leaned over to me and said:

"Garsh! Now you done it!"

"Well," I said back, "I got a right to tell if I want to, haven't I?"

"No, you hain't," Swatty said. "If you tell then Slim Finnegan will stab the whole three of us."

"Well, let him stab!" I said, because that was how I felt just then, because Mamie Little had not put the pillow down in front of Toady Williams but in front of Bony, and that didn't mean much, because it only meant that she wanted Bony to have it next, because he would give it to Lucy. So, when he went to kiss Mamie she turned her head and he hardly got any kiss at all, and she had let me kiss her fair and solid. So I felt pretty good. I felt as if she was going to be my girl

again. And I guess she was, because when somebody put the pillow in front of her again, she came right to me with it, and that time it was a good kiss too. I felt great!

When us boys was getting our hats, when the party was over, Swatty came up to me.

"If you tell her I'm going to lick you," he said.

"All right--lick!" I said. "I ain't afraid of your lickings. Lick all you want to. I told her I'd tell and you nor nobody else can't make me a liar!"

So Mamie Little waited for me at the front door, and when I came out I knew she had waited so I could walk home with her, and I did.

"Well, I'm glad we aren't mad any more," she said when we were walking along.

"Ah! who was mad? I wasn't mad," I said. "Well, I ain't mad now," she said. "Who was it blew up our house?"

"Oh, somebody!" I said.

We walked a little way and then she said:

"Who blew up our house?"

"Slim Finnegan," I said.

"How do you know he did?" she said.

"Because me and Swatty and Bony saw him steal the powder to do it with," I told her, "We was over in Illinois and we saw him steal it from the powder house that's over there."

So we talked about that and when we got home to her house she told me to come up on the porch, and I did; and then she opened the door and called for her father, and he came to the door.

"Papa, this is Georgie," she said; "and he knows who blew up our house."

Well, he took me inside the house and asked me to tell all about it, and I told him, and Mamie sat in a chair and listened to me tell it. When he had asked me everything he could think of he went to the door with me and said:

"George, you are a fine boy!"

I said:

"Yes, sir!" and then I said, "Good-bye, Mamie!" And she said:

"I don't like that mean old Toady Williams." So I went home.

That evening Mr. Murphy, the detective, came up to my house and Mr. Little came with him; and Mr. Murphy asked me all the questions Mr. Little had asked, and a lot more, and I told him all about Slim Finnegan. He asked where Swatty and Bony lived and how to get to their houses. So then Mr. Murphy said:

"If the boy is telling the truth this may be more important than we imagined. I have thought for some time that the reason Slim Finnegan left town was because he knew something of this affair."

So I guess that was the reason Slim Finnegan hadn't come around to stab us--he wasn't in Riverbank. I guess it was a month more before they found him down in Oklahoma and fetched him back to Riverbank because me and Swatty and Bony had oathed that he had stolen the keg of powder. Petty larceny was what it was called. That was what they arrested him for.

Well, come to find out, Slim Finnegan hadn't blown up anything, and it wasn't even his keg of powder that done it. He had stole the powder to load a shotgun with, to go hunting, and he showed Mr. Murphy the dry powder keg, with most of the powder in it yet. So he wasn't the dynamiter, after all.

But his father was. Mr. Murphy gave Slim Finnegan three degrees and said to him, "I guess you know who blew up the houses and if you don't tell I'll send you to the penitentiary for twenty years," and Slim Finnegan--the mean sneak--told that his father and two other men had done it, and they were arrested and went to prison.

So me and Swatty and Bony talked about which of us ought to have the one-thousand-five-hundred-dollars reward, and we made up our minds that Swatty ought to have it because he was the one that went back and saw that Slim Finnegan was really stealing a keg of powder, and that if Swatty didn't get it I ought to have it, because I was the one that told Mamie Little, and that if I didn't get it Mamie Little ought to have it, because if it hadn't been for her I never would have told.

But none of us got it. Mr. Murphy got it. The only thing Swatty and Bony got was that they didn't get stabbed. And I got Mamie Little back for my secret girl again.



XI. "THIEF! THIEF!"

While Mamie Little's father's house was getting fixed up, after being dynamited, they went someplace else to live, and the only people that lived across the street from us were the Burtons. There weren't any Burtons to play with, because the only children they had was Tom Burton, who was older than my sister Fan, and that summer he began taking Fan to ride with the dandy horses and carriage the Burtons' hired man took care of.

The Burtons' hired man's name was Jimmy, and everybody called him that except Mrs. Burton--she called him James. I guess Jimmy was forty years old. Or maybe he was fifty, or thirty-five, or something. He was thin and balder than hired men generally are, and his only bad habit was putting angle worms in a pickle bottle and setting the bottle in the sun to dissolve the worms into angle-worm oil for his rheumatism in the winter; but summer was when the worms were, so he had to get a lot of worms in the summer to last through the winter.

Well, Jimmy had been with the Burtons six years and Annie, our hired girl, had been with us on and off, for five years. I guess everybody thought she hadn't any other name at all until one evening when Jimmy came over and knocked at the back door and asked Mother if Miss Dombacher was home. She wasn't, because she had gone to the Evangelical Lutheran Church; but after that Jimmy used to come over, and Annie would put two chairs out in the? yard under the apple tree and they would sit and talk. Or Jimmy would talk. He would talk and talk and talk, and every once in a while Annie would say, "Yes," and, after she learned it, "No." So, after a couple of years, Jimmy began to hold Annie's hand when he talked to her, and in a couple of years more they got engaged. I guess they liked each other.

I was in our dining-room one day, looking to see if Annie had put any fresh cookies in the jar in the closet, when I heard my mother say, "Oh, Annie!" in the kitchen, as if she was sorry about something. So then Annie said:

"I bin sorry to go away, too, ma'am, but it is right everybody should get married once or twice."

"I know," my mother said; "but I don't know what I will ever do without you, Annie."

So then Annie cried, and there were no cookies, so I went out.

Well, it was like this: Jimmy had been saving his money ever since Annie came to our house and now he had enough to get married on and buy a couple of acres; so they were going to be married, and he was going to leave the Burtons and raise garden stuff and peddle it. Annie was going to raise chickens and sell eggs, and they would have a cow and sell milk.

So now I come to the story part of the story. I guess what the story is about is that sometimes it is a good thing for a fellow to have a girl, because if Mamie Little hadn't been my girl maybe Jimmy and Annie would never have been married.

There were two parts about the story. One was that a circus was coming to town and me and Swatty weren't going; the other was that the schoolhouse wore out and they built a new one.

The night before the circus was coming there was going to be a reception in the dandy big new schoolhouse to raise money for a library. Everybody was going to go, and I guess everybody old enough was going to take his girl. Anyway me and Swatty and Bony got to talking about taking girls to parties and receptions and things, and the first thing you know we said we'd do it.

I guess I said Swatty was afraid, and Swatty dared me back, and we both dared Bony, and so we wouldn't any of us take the dare. So Bony asked Lucy and she said she'd go with him if my mother would let her. When Bony told me I didn't believe him, but I asked Lucy and she said Bony had asked her, and that Mamie Little was as mad as mad because I hadn't asked Mamie. So I said:

"Aw! How could I ask her when I hain't seen her yet?"

"You could, too, see her, if you wanted to," Lucy said. "You could see her every minute of every day, if you wasn't a 'fraid-cat."

"T ain't so. I'm not a 'fraid-cat!" I said.

"T is so, and you are! 'Fraidie-cat! You ain't going to take Mamie Little, and you're her fellow!"

"I am, too, going to take her!" I said back.

But I wasn't going to take Mamie Little. I wouldn't have asked her for a million dollars. But I didn't have to ask her. I met her that afternoon. She was on the other side of the street and I just went along as if I didn't see her. So she called across: "Oo-oo! Georgie! You know!"

"Aw! What do I know?" I asked back.

"You know! The reception!" she said. Well, I just went along and didn't say anything. But that evening when I got home my mother said:

"I hear you are getting to be quite a beau, Georgie."

I didn't know what she meant, so I said, "Huh?"

"Mrs. Little called this afternoon," my mother said, "and she told me you had asked Mamie Little to go to the new school reception with you. That's very nice."

I didn't say anything. It was Lucy, and I was mighty mad at her for telling Mamie Little I was going to take her; but I was kind of glad, too. I thought, "Well, anyway, Swatty and Bony are going to take girls."

The reception was the next night, so when Swatty and Bony came over the next afternoon I told them I was going to take Mamie Little, and Swatty said that was right, everybody was going to take a girl.

So I asked him who he was going to take, because he had never let on he had a girl.

"Garsh!" he said, "I ain't going to take any girl!"

That made me sick. Me and Bony had stood right up like men and had asked girls, and Swatty had promised he would take one, and now he was backing out. So I said:

"Aw! You said you would take one!"

"Well, don't I know it?" Swatty said. "Of course I said I would, but I forgot."

"What did you forget?" I asked.

"I forgot I was married," Swatty said.

We were all sitting under our apple tree, out in the yard, and it was a good thing we were not sitting on a roof, because I would have fell off and killed myself, I was so surprised.

"Aw! When was you married?" I said.

"That time I went to Derlingport to visit my uncle," Swatty said.

"Aw! Who did you marry?"

"A girl," he said.

"Well, if you married a girl why didn't you ever tell us about it before?"

"Garsh! I can't remember everything that happened when I was in Derlingport, can I? Mebbe I forgot I was married."

"Aw, pshaw!" I said. "What did you want to go and get married for, Swatty?"

"Well, I couldn't help it, could I?" he asked.

"You don't think I'd go and get married if I could help it, do you? My--my uncle made me."

"Why did he make you?" asked Bony.

"Because my aunt had a felon on her finger. She had a felon on her finger and it almost killed her to dam stockings, so my uncle said if I wore any more holes in my stockings I'd have to get a wife of my own to dam them."

So then we asked Swatty what his wife was like, and he told us a lot about her. She was an Indian princess, and when you first looked at her she looked all right, but pretty soon you saw she had a tomahawk in her belt and the edge of it was all dried over with blood, because she had had eight other husbands before Swatty, and she had got mad at all of them and had killed them and scalped them. She had an album on her parlor table, but instead of photographs in it she had the scalps of her husbands.

Swatty said there was just room in the scalp album for one more scalp, and that every once in a while when he was at her house having his stockings darned she would look at his head and kind of sigh.

Well, we talked it over, and Swatty made us promise never to tell any one he had been married, because if his mother knew it she would take him out in the stable and wale him with a strap. He said that was why he didn't dare take any girl to the new school reception, because if his wife heard of it she would be jealous and she would come down and tomahawk him and maybe kill him. And if she didn't kill him his mother would notice his scalp was gone, the next time she washed his head, and would wale him anyway.

Well, my mother helped me dress for the reception, and then she gave me twenty cents to spend. I had five cents of my own she didn't know about. So that was all right.

It was dark already. I went along, kind of dragging my hand along the pickets of the fences and wishing I was dead or something, and it got darker and darker. The new house Mamie Little lived in was away out over Grimes's Hill, and when I got to the door Mr. Little and Mrs. Little and Mamie were just getting ready to come out, and Mr. Little said: "Well! Here is our cavalier!"

Mamie and me walked in front, and it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be, but I kept feeling sort of chilly when I thought of going into the reception with Mamie. But before we got to the schoolhouse Mamie said to me:

"Say, Georgie! Don't you want a ticket for the circus?"

I said aw, I didn't want to take her ticket away from her; but she said she had one too, because her father was editor of the paper and he got them complimentary.

As soon as we got to the reception Mrs. Little said: "Now, you children run along and enjoy yourselves."

Mamie said, right away: "Shall we get some ice cream first?"

I said that would be all right, because mebbe people wouldn't notice I was with Mamie Little and think I brought her. So we sat down at a table and a girl took our order and brought us strawberry and vanilla--big dishes--and passed us the cake and we took two pieces of cake apiece.

That was all right; but when we were eating Swatty and Bony came past and said: "Ho, Georgie! He brought a girl!"

That was all right for Bony! He had sneaked out of bringing a girl, and that was mighty mean, after he had gone and got me to bring one. I said I'd fix him when I got him, and he was scared, too! So then we ate our ice cream slow, to make it last longer, and I forgot how mean I felt because I had brought a girl, when whoever was opposite us got through and asked how much he owed.

"Let me see!" the girl said. "Two ice creams at ten cents is twenty cents, and two pieces of cake. That makes thirty cents."

Well, I almost rammed my spoon down my throat! I had never thought about the cake being extra, and we had had four pieces, and that made twenty cents, and the ice cream was twenty cents so it made forty cents all together, and twenty-five cents was all the money I had! I was so scared my throat sort of closed up on me. I guess my face got as red as fire, and I leaned forward and took a big bite of cake, so Mamie Little would n't see how red my face was, and then I choked on the cake! I guess I never was so choked in my life. And I put a paper napkin up to my face and went out into the hall.

I guess Mamie Little sat there at the table; I don't know. As soon as I was out in the hall I knew what I was going to do. I squeezed in among the people and got to the door and skipped.

As soon as I got home my father asked me did I take Mamie Little home; so I didn't say anything. I went right upstairs to bed. After while my father came up and asked me again if I had gone home with Mamie Little, so I said I hadn't; I said I didn't want to. I said her folks could take her home if they wanted to. So Father said he had a mind to lick me; but he didn't. So I guess Mamie Little got home all right. It wouldn't have helped her home if my father had licked me, but that's the way fathers are.

The next morning, about four o'clock, me and Swatty and Bony went down to see the circus unload. We saw it. And then we went up to the circus grounds and saw the tent go up and everything. So Bony said:

"Aw! Don't you wish you was going to the circus?"

So I said he needn't be so smart, that I was going, because I had a ticket. So then I remembered that I had the twenty cents my mother had given me to buy the ice cream with, only I hadn't spent it because I came away so quick. So I told Swatty he could have the ticket, because I had twenty-five cents to get into the circus with. So Swatty was glad. He said he'd be my Dutch uncle as long as I lived, and that the first dollar he saw rolling uphill he'd pay me back, if he could catch it.

Well, we walked downtown with the parade and saw it, and walked back to the circus grounds with it. Me and Swatty and Bony was the first to go into the tent. We were right up against the rope when the ticket taker let it down. So we hurried right through, because a lot of folks was pushing behind us. The ticket taker yelled something at us, but I didn't hear what it was and we scooted for the menagerie tent.

When we were looking at the ostriches in their cage Swatty got close beside me and said: "Lookee here!"

I looked down, and he had his ticket in his hand yet, because that was why the ticket taker had yelled at us. Swatty had sneaked in without giving his ticket.

"What did you do that for?" I said.

"Because I'm hungry," he said.

"You can't eat your ticket," I said.

"You wait and you'll see," he said, so then we went into the big tent and we climbed up to the top row. When we poked our heads out we could see right down where the ticket taker was taking tickets and all the people were crowding to get in. Right down below us on the ground a bum, or tent man, was asleep on his face with his arm under his head. His coat was beside him. He was breathing hard.

So then Swatty leaned out as far as he could and waved the ticket he had, and called out who wanted to buy a ticket for a quarter. That was just like Swatty anyhow. He was pretty slick. So pretty soon a man said he'd buy the ticket, and he tossed a quarter up to Swatty. With a quarter we could get enough peanuts to keep alive until supper time.

Me and Swatty and Bony was just going to draw our heads in when we saw Jimmy and Annie. I was going to yell at them when I saw something that made me forget to yell. Swatty saw it, too.

There was a man standing by the ropes that made the narrow place people had to go through, but he was outside of the ropes on our side, and just when Jimmy came opposite him and got a step past him his hand went out like a flash

and something dropped on the ground and the bum slid out his hand and grabbed what had dropped, and slid it under the coat and went on pretending he was asleep. The man by the ropes had picked Jimmy's wallet out of his pocket.

Well, I didn't know it, but Jimmy had all the money he was going to buy a farm with in that wallet. It was circus day, and he didn't dare leave it at home, because of thieves; so he brought it with him.

I didn't think of anything to do, and neither did Bony, but Swatty did. He looked down, and then slid one leg and then the other over the wall of the tent and hung there a second and looked down. He hand-over-handed a reach or two and then gave himself a sort of push and let go. He came down right on the bum's head, straddle of his neck, and yelled: "Police! Police!" Only he yelled it "Porlice! Porlice!" like he always says it. I guess the bum was surprised, but he reached up and grabbed Swatty.

It wasn't a fair fight, Swatty against a man, but it was a good one while it lasted. Everybody on the top seats stuck their heads out and yelled, and everybody down where Swatty was came running. One of the town cops was first--the cross-eyed one--and he leveled a lick at the bum with his club and caught Swatty across his breeches, and Swatty yelled and let go of the bum. He could fight one bum but he couldn't fight a cross-eyed policeman with a club, too.

The minute the bum got loose he dived under the tent. We saw him scutter along under the seats, and then we saw him come out away down the side of the tent and scoot. The cross-eyed cop started after him, but he never got him.

Swatty didn't run. He just stood on the bum's coat, with his feet spread out, and in a minute Jimmy and a lot of folks were crowded around him. Then he lifted up the coat. We could see it all. Under the coat was Jimmy's wallet and about six more. Jimmy just dropped on his wallet and hugged it. He sort of blubbered and didn't know what to do, so he kissed Swatty, and Swatty hit out at him and hit him in the chest.

By that time a circus man in uniform had come up. He had a big hickory club, peeled, and he pushed into the crowd. Behind him were four or five more circus men, but they had tent stakes.

"What's this row?" he asked.

Somebody started to tell him. The man that took the wallet from Jimmy was right there, and he turned away. So I shouted out:

"Hey, mister! there's the man that took it."

The circus man looked around and the thief started to hurry. He didn't have a chance to hurry much. The circus man made one jump for him and caught him by the collar and gave one jerk, and the thief's coat and vest came off and his shirt ripped right off him. The other circus men were on him. If it had been me it would have killed me, but I guess he was tough.

When I turned around Mr. Little was standing right back of me. He had come up to see what it all was, so he could put it in his paper. When he saw it was me that had yelled, he said:

"Why, hello, it's our gallant cavalier! These hard seats are no place for a lady's man; come on over in the reserved seats."

"I can't," I said, "I've got to wait for Swatty." He didn't know who Swatty was, so I told him. So when Swatty came in we went over into the reserved seats, right in front of the middle ring. So Mr. Little asked Swatty all about it, and Swatty told him, and Mr. Little wrote it down and went downtown to his paper with it. He told Mrs. Little to take good care of the three heroes. He meant me and Swatty and Bony.

So Jimmy and Annie got married. All Mamie Little ever said about my going home was:

"I guess you think you were pretty smart, going home and letting Papa take me home and pay for the ice cream!"

But that didn't hurt me any. Girls are always saying things like that.

XII. THE RED AVENGERS

Well, vacation got over, and school started again, and me and Swatty and Bony got promoted into the A Class in Miss Carter's room, and so did Mamie Little and Scratch-Cat. Lucy got promoted into the B Class in Miss Carter's room, and she hated Miss Carter. I guess the reason was because Miss Carter got in love with Herb Schwartz when Fan was mad at him.

Anyway Miss Carter heard Lucy tell somebody that if Fan wanted Herb Miss Carter would never have got him, and that anybody could catch a second-hand fellow that a body had thrown away, so Miss Carter and Lucy didn't like each

other. But I guess it was Lucy's fault, because I always liked Miss Carter all right. Most always.

So school started again. Professor Martin came back with only a limp in his leg and Herb Schwartz stopped being a professor and was in Judge Hannan's law office all the time. He began smoking a curved pipe and wearing spectacles and his hair pompadour, because he would pretty soon be a lawyer, and he kept on going with Miss Carter, but I didn't care, because Fan had stopped dying of love. She was going with Tom Burton.

We liked Tom Burton good enough--me and Swatty and Bony did--until the time Dad Veeek's barn burned, but after that we didn't. We had it in for him after that.

I guess old Dad Veeek was a cabinet maker or something. Anyway, he used to work in his barn with a saw and a plane and he made a lot of shavings. His barn was level, but to make it level it had to be up on posts at the hind end because it was on a side hill, and that made a kind of cave under it, and sometimes me and Bony and Swatty, when we got tired playing in the creek, or it was raining, or we got cold skating, would go up there and maybe smoke com silk or maybe just talk. So we got all the shavings old Dad Veeek swept out of his barn, and we made a kind of nest under the barn, and we called it that--the Nest.

Dad Veeek did not like to have us under his barn, because when we smoked com silk the smoke would go up between the boards of the floor and he would come out and chase us. He didn't like us much, anyway, for any boys, because there were grapevines between his barn and his house and he thought maybe when we thought he wasn't around we crawled through the fence and took some grapes. And we did. But only when they were ripe and we happened to be over there.

So one night his barn burned down.

I guess that don't sound like much, but it was a good deal more than it sounds like. You don't know about Toady Williams and the Red Avengers and the fire insurance inspector yet. The fire insurance inspector was a man who came over from Chicago and said old Dad Veeek had set the barn afire to get the insurance money, and said he guessed he would put old Dad Veeek in jail for it, because there was too much of that sort of thing just now, and it was time to learn somebody a lesson. And I guess nobody would have cared much if it hadn't been for Mrs. old Dad Veeek.

The reason my mother felt sorry for Mrs. old Dad Veeek was because when my mother was a little girl Mrs. old Dad Veeek's name was Tilly, and she worked for my mother's mother, and now she was a dear old lady and it was too bad her husband was going to jail. So she thought somebody ought to bestir themselves.

Well, while my mother and the Ladies' Aid were bestirring themselves me and Bony and Swatty and Toady Williams were out in our barn, and I felt pretty bad, because it was tough to have my mother bestirring herself about that barn fire when the chances were that I would be one she would bestir into jail if she kept old Dad Veeek out. Now you know that much, you can see why we felt pretty sick out there in my barn.

It was winter when old Dad Veeek's barn burned down, and it was about nine o'clock at night. I was going to bed because I had been skating all day. I wore boots to skate in, like all the fellows, and my boots kind of wrinkled around the ankles and they rubbed my ankles until they were raw. So about eight o'clock I said, "Aw, come on, Swatty! Let's go home!" but he wouldn't.

"Well, if you won't go home with me I'm going up to the Nest and I'll wait for you up there," I said.

So then Toady came up, and he asked where I was going and I told him I was going to the Nest, and he said he was going to skate some more, but Swatty and Bony said, "All right, we'll go up with you awhile." They didn't take off their skates. They walked up the hill to the barn on their skates and we sat awhile in the Nest under old Dad Veeek's barn and smoked some com-silk cigarettes. Then Swatty and Bony wanted to skate some more, and they did and after a while I went home. Gee! but there was a raw spot on my ankle when I got my boot off! I was sitting on the edge of my bed looking at it, about nine o'clock, when the fire-house bell rang. Right away my mother came into my room and said:

"George, there is a fire across the Square, and I think it is Mr. Veeek's barn. You can go if you want to."

I hid my raw ankle, because if my mother knew it was so bad she would n't let me skate any more until it got well, and I pulled on my boot and went to the fire.

There was a pretty big crowd there already and the barn was burning bully. I found Swatty first and then we found Bony, and we watched until the fire burned out, and then we went home.

The next day was Sunday, and when I got up I told my mother I had a headache, like I always told her Sunday mornings; but I had to go to Sunday school just the same. After dinner I went over to the ruins, and Swatty and Bony and Toady and a lot of folks were there. It was good to see and smell. When we got tired we went back to my yard, and it was too cold to go into the barn, so we went up to my room. As soon as the door was shut Swatty sat down on the edge of my bed and said:

"Well, men, the Red Avengers have been true to their oath! The enemy's property lies in ruins!" You see it was like this: Me and Swatty and Toady and Bony were the Red Avengers. Maybe you never read the book--"The Red Avengers, or The Boy Heroes of the Trail"--but it is a bully book. It's a dime lib'ry, and if it hadn't been for Toady we would never have had it. There was one thing about Toady that was pretty good--he had lots of books. Dime lib'ry

books. He got the new ones as fast as they were printed, and he read them behind his geography at school, and it was because he had them that we got to read "The Red Avengers." The Chief of the Red Avengers was a boy named Dick, and when he was a young and tender nursling his fond parents took him out West and they started a ranch that covered almost a whole state. They had millions of cattle, but a lot of Mexicans came and burned the ranch and Dick's parents were burned to death and Dick only escaped by creeping into the chaparral and hiding until he grew up into a sturdy youthhood. So then the Mexicans had divided up the ranch and had built houses and barns and things, and when Dick asked for the ranch back they laughed at him. So he got together a lot of true and faithful youths and started the Red Avengers of the Trail and whenever they came to one of the Mexican houses or barns they burned it down. Whenever anybody did anything mean to anybody in the band of the Red Avengers, Dick wrote a note saying the mean person's house would be burned at a certain minute, and the note would appear mysteriously on the door of the house. And the house burned down just as the Red Avengers said it would, and right on the minute.

So me and Swatty and Bony we started a Red Avengers band. We swore a solemn oath never to divulge the secrets of the band or to tell what any of us did, and to follow the orders of the Chief, whate'er might betide. We had an election for Chief, and me and Swatty and Bony each got one vote, so we made Swatty the Chief. Swatty made us make him. So I was elected Secretary and Bony was elected Treasurer. The Secretary had to write the vengeance warnings and keep track of them in a memorandum book, so we wouldn't forget who we were going to be revenged on. The Treasurer didn't have anything to do. It was an easy job.

We did all that one day out in our barn, and, just when we had the Red Avengers all fixed up, in came Toady. He wanted the dime lib'ry back.

"Aw! come on, Toady!" Swatty said. "Let us keep it! You don't want it!"

"Yes, I want it," said Toady.

"All right for you, then, Toady!" Swatty said. "I was going to tell you something, but if you're going to be that mean I won't."

"What was it?" he asked.

"It's all right what it was!" said Swatty. "You'll never know! Think we'd tell you when you want your old dime lib'ry back? We won't ever tell him, will we, George? Will we, Bony?"

So we said no, we wouldn't.

So then Toady looked at us and his eyes popped out; but Swatty threw "The Red Avengers" book at him.

"Take it!" he said. "We don't want it anyway. We know everything that's in it and we don't need it. Only, if your house burns down you'll know why. Garsh! here we were all ready to make you one of the band, and give you the oath, and elect you--what were we going to elect him, George?" "Librarian," I said.

"Yah!" said Swatty, as if Toady made him sick. "That's the kind of a fellow you are!"

So Toady didn't know what to do. He picked up the dime lib'ry and stood looking. So Swatty didn't pay any attention to him. He said to me:

"Seckertary, write in the Book of Doom that the first house the Red Avengers will burn down will be Toady Williams's house, because he's a stingy-cat and took his tom, old, no-good dime lib'ry away from us!"

Toady looked awhile. Then he said:

"Oh, I didn't know you were going to make me a librarian. I didn't know you were going to do that. What do I have to do if I'm Librarian?"

"Why, you keep charge of the library," I said. "You take an oath to keep and preserve it, in that starch box over there."

"And then you can be one of the band and take the oath, and if anybody is mean to you we'll burn their houses down," said Swatty. So Toady said all right, he would be Librarian, and we gave him the oath, and he put "The Red Avengers" in the starch box, and we held a council. We talked about whose houses the Red Avengers ought to burn down first.

I guess we all thought about Miss Carter first, because she had kept us in school after hours that very afternoon; but she lived in a boarding house and we couldn't burn down her room without burning down the rest of the house, so we thought we would just record her in the book and wait until she got married sometime, and had a house of her own, and then burn that down. We thought of everybody, but the one we thought was the meanest was old Dad Vëek. So we wrote his name at the top of the list in my memorandum book, and we said we'd burn his barn, and that we would do it at nine of night on the eighteenth of December. I wrote the letter of warning that was to be stabbed onto his door with a dagger, because I was Secretary, and I wrote the date of revenge in the memorandum book, and we all went out and over to Vëek's barn.

We hid in the dead weeds at the side of the road and drew straws to see which of the Red Avengers had to go up and dagger the warning onto old Dad Vëek's barn, and Bony drew the fatal straw; but of course he was afraid to do it,

so Swatty did it. He sneaked through the fence into Vek's yard and up to the barn door. He didn't have a dagger, so he took a sort of splinter and ran it through the warning and stuck the point in a crack in the door, and scooted back to us. It was a daring deed, worthy of our fearless Chief, and we received him with silent cheers, because we had scarce hoped he would return from his perilous mission alive. (That's from the dime lib'ry book.)

Well, that was pretty good, and we felt bully. I guess we would have gone ahead and put up some more warnings another day, but it turned cold that night and the skating got good and we forgot to be Red Avengers. You can't be everything all the time. We didn't think any more about it until the day after the fire. That was the Sunday we were up in my room and Swatty said:

"Well, men, the Red Avengers have been true to their oath! The enemy's property lies in ruins!"

So I said:

"Yes, Chief, I carried out the orders of the band to the fullest. My trusty torch has laid the vermin's dwelling low."

"You?" said Swatty. "You didn't do it. I did it." Toady was sitting on the window sill, and Bony was in a chair looking at a magazine. Toady just sat and popped his eyes at us.

"Aw, now!" he said, "you didn't burn that barn down, either of you. You're just fooling."

Well, I guess that was a little too much for anybody to say, especially when he was a member of the Red Avengers himself.

"I did, too!" I said. "I took my oath to do it, and I did it. Do you think I'd take my oath to do it, and then not do it? Of course I burned it down, when I said I would!"

"Of course you would," said Swatty. "If you took your oath to burn down Vek's barn you'd do it. Only I was the one that took the oath; you wasn't. Toady had better not say I'd take an oath and then not do it! When you trust a job to the Chief of the Red Avengers it'll be done. At nine of night I sneaked up to old Dad Vek's barn--"

"Ho! Nine!" I said. "Well, no wonder! No wonder you thought you did it, sneaking up at nine! Now I know why you thought you did it, when I was the one that really did it! Why, I wouldn't wait until nine when I had promised to set a barn afire at nine. I'd be afraid I might not get the match lit in time, or something. I was there at a quarter of nine, and I had the barn on fire long before nine." Swatty kind of looked at me.

"Oh!" he said. "Whereabouts did you set the fire going?"

I thought a minute.

"Around at the far side, away from the road, Chief," I said.

"Well, then, no wonder!" said Swatty. "That's why I didn't see you doing it. I set the side toward the road burning. So I guess I was the one that set the barn afire first, because it would take you a long time to go around the barn to the other side."

"Maybe we both set it afire at the same time," I said.

"All right, maybe we did," Swatty said. "Because," I said, "I ain't going to be cheated out of having set it afire by you or anybody, Swatty, when I went to all the trouble I did."

"I know," said Swatty, "but you can't say I didn't set it afire, either, because when I was walking down to the creek from the West I turned my ankle and had to take my skates off and limp home. Ain't that so, Bony?" Bony said yes, it was. "And Bony thought I had really sprained my ankle," said Swatty, "but you know what I was up to. Throw 'em all off the track! Be alone so I could do the deed!"

"Well, I guess we both did it at the same time," I said, and Swatty said he guessed we did, so that settled it. But when Swatty got ready to go home I whispered to him:

"You didn't really do it, did you?"

"No," he said, "I just wanted to make Toady and Bony think I did. I was in my kitchen putting amica on my ankle. Did you really do it?"

"Of course I didn't!" I said. "I was up here in my bedroom looking at my raw ankle. But we won't let on."

"Sure not!" said Swatty.

Well, pretty soon some of the fellows or somebody began saying maybe old Dad Vek would have to go to jail for setting his own barn afire, like I told you in the beginning. Then, after while, I heard my mother say to my father, that some of the Ladies' Aid ladies were bestirring themselves because they were sure that old Dad Vek wouldn't set his own barn afire, and they had asked Tom Burton to help them and he was helping. But one day we were up in my barn--me and Swatty and Bony--and Toady came up.

He came up the stairs far enough to see into the hayloft, then he stopped and when we saw him he came on up. I said:

"Hello, Toady!"

"Hello!" he said.

"What do you want?" I asked, because he hadn't been playing with us much.

"Oh, I just thought I'd get my dime lib'ry," he said. "You don't want it any more, do you?"

"No, we don't want it," I said, and he went to the starch box and got it, and he came over to where we were, and he said: "I guess you have n't set any more barns afire, have you?"

"What barns?" Swatty asked.

"Well, you did set one afire, didn't you?" said Toady. "You and George set Vëek's afire, didn't you?"

Swatty stood up then, all right! He stood up and folded his fists.

"Who said we set Vëek's barn afire?" he asked, and he was pretty mad. But I wasn't; I was just scared. It's incendiaryism, or something like that, if you set a barn afire, and you get sent to reform school for life.

"Who said it? I didn't say it," said Toady. "You said it. You and George said you did."

Well, of course I hadn't been lying when I told Toady and Swatty and Bony how I had set Dad Vëek's barn afire, but I had just been fooling. So I said:

"Aw! I never said no such thing! I never either said I set it afire. Swatty said he set it afire. I couldn't have set it afire, because I was sitting on my bed when it got afire."

So Swatty got mad. I guess he wanted to lick somebody, but he didn't know whether to lick me or to lick Toady.

"Aw! I never either said I set it afire!" he said. "If anybody set it afire George did, because I was home, putting arnica on me, when the fire started."

"Well, you said you did," I said. "You said so right up in my room. You did so."

"I did not! You said you did."

"I did not! I never said anything like it. If anybody said he set Vëek's barn afire, Swatty said it."

"Aw! I did not!" Swatty said. "You said it. You said it. You said you took a torch, and went around to the far side and set the barn afire. I heard you say it. And you said I couldn't have set the barn afire because you had it all afire before I got there. Didn't he say that, Toady?"

Well, I guess Toady knew mighty well that if he was going to get mallered for saying either of us said it he had better say I said it, because Swatty could lick any of us. So he said I did say it.

So I went for him and mallered him as much as I could. I got so mad I cried, and I guess I kicked him. Not Swatty, Toady. So when I got tired I was still mad, and I sat down on a box and cried. Then Toady sneaked over to the stairs and went part way down, and just before he was out of sight he looked back.

"Cry-baby!" he said, and that meant me. Then he said: "All right, you'd better look out! You both said you did it, and you both said you said it, and Dad Vëek's got that Red Avengers' notice you fastened on his barn door and Tom Burton knows all about it."

Gee, we were scared! I was so scared I didn't throw anything at Toady, and Swatty was so scared he just said: "Garsh!" and stood there. Well, me and Swatty we talked it over.

We knew we hadn't set the barn afire, but we knew we had said we had, and we knew old Dad Vëek would do 'most anything to keep out of jail, and that my mother and the Ladies' Aid ladies were bestirring. So then we knew why Toady had come up to get us to say again we had done it; he was one of the Red Avengers and unless we said we had set the barn afire ourselves all the Red Avengers would be sent to reform school, and he wanted to get out of it and had gone and told Tom Burton about us and the Red Avengers and that we had set the barn afire.

"Garsh!" said Swatty, "he took the memorandum book you had old Vëek's barn wrote down at the top of the list of!"

And he had! So Bony sort of doubled down in his corner and cried, but me and Swatty sat down on a box to think and talk and see what we had better do.

Well, the way Tom Burton had gone to work to help my mother and the Ladies' Aid ladies who were bestirring themselves, was this: He found out that the reason old Dad Vëek had so much insurance was because he was a slow worker, and sometimes he had the barn almost full of stuff he was working on, and then it was worth as much as it was insured for. So that helped some. Then old Dad Vëek showed him the Red Avengers' warning Swatty had fastened on his barn door, and that was pretty bad, because the time it said the barn would burn down was the time it did burn.

I guess he might have thought it was some men or something, if it hadn't been for the name of the Red Avengers. It sounded like boys. So Tom Burton found out there was a dime lib'ry named "The Red Avengers," because one was hanging in Toady Williams's father's store window, and then he knew it was boys. So he asked Toady Williams if he knew anything about it, and Toady went and told him. He told him me and Swatty and Bony was the Red Avengers and that we had set the barn afire.

We found all that out mighty soon, because it wasn't half an hour after Toady went out of the barn before Tom

Burton came up. The tattle-tale had gone right to him.

Tom Burton came up and he stood and talked to us. He told us he knew all about the Red Avengers and that he had our memorandum book with Dad Vëek's name in it and everything, and that he knew who had written the memorandum book, and the notice that was daggered on Dad Vëek's door, and everything, and he asked us which one of us done it. Gee, I was scared! But none of us said anything. Maybe we were too scared to.

So then he said, "All right! it will only be a little while before all will be known, and the one that did it will surely be sent to reform school, so the other two, that didn't do it, had better tell on the one that did do it."

But none of us said anything. So he talked awhile and then he went away. Me and Bony didn't say anything.

"Garsh!" Swatty said. "It's mighty bad."

Me and Bony didn't say anything yet. We was too scared. Bony began to blubber.

"You don't need to cry," Swatty told him. "You ain't going to be sent to reform school. You didn't do it."

"Well--well," Bony blubbered. "You and Georgie didn't do it, either."

"Well, it don't matter whether we did it or didn't do it," Swatty said. "We wrote down that we were going to do it, and they've got the warning and the memorandum book, and we both said we'd done it ourselves, and we both said the other had done it, and I guess they'll send us to reform school." Bony kept on blubbering, so we told him he had better go home if he was a cry-baby, and he went. So then Swatty said:

"I guess it ain't much use; but we've got to say, no matter how they ask us, that we ain't the Red Avengers."

"That'd be a lie," I said.

"Well, no, it wouldn't," said Swatty, "because there won't be any Red Avengers, and we'll say, 'No, we ain't!' and that'll be the truth, because we won't be then. We'll bust up the Red Avengers right now."

So we took a vote and voted that we were not the Red Avengers any more and that we never had been the Red Avengers. So that settled that, but it didn't make us feel much better. We sat and thought awhile and then Swatty said:

"I know! Georgie, you can ask Fan to tell Tom Burton to let us go free."

"Aw! that won't do any good," I said.

And I didn't think it would, but Swatty said it was our only chance, so I said I would ask Fan, and I did. I hated to, but I did it.

XIII. THE ICE GOES OUT

First, of course, I made Fan promise she would never tell, hope to die and cross her heart, and she promised, and then I told her all about the Red Avengers and how, if we did set Dad Vëek's barn afire we didn't mean to, and she said she would talk to Tom Burton about it, but she said Tom Burton was stubborn and she would have to wait until she had the right chance. She was nicer than she had ever been to me.

"Have you told anybody else?" she asked me.

"No," I said.

"Did Swatty tell his brother Herbert?" she asked.

"No. Nobody has told anybody," I said.

Well, me and Swatty felt pretty bad and scared and sick, and one reason was that Bony stopped playing with us. His father found out about the Red Avengers and made him promise he wouldn't play with me and Swatty any more because we were bad boys and would ruin Bony. So we never expected to play with Bony again, but we did, and this was how it happened.

Bony's father and mother used to fight like everybody else, and about bills, because they were having a fight like that when Bony's father took the shotgun and went away from home. I guess it was a hat Bony's mother had bought that was the worst, but Bony wasn't sure. He said they began to fight when the grocery bill came and fought harder and harder the more bills there were, but it wasn't until the hat bill came that Bony's father stopped sassing back, and got solemn and quiet and said that sometimes he felt that it was no use trying to keep up the struggle against poverty and starvation, and that sometimes when these evidences of extravagance came in he felt just like going off somewhere by himself and ending everything. So then Bony's mother said, "Oh! nonsense!" and pretty soon Bony's father got his

shotgun and went out of the house.

So Bony just sat there in the room expecting every minute to hear the shotgun and to run out and see his father dead in the stable. He sat there and pretended to be studying his geography lesson for Monday, but all he was doing was listening to hear the shot. It was a mighty mean job, I guess, sitting there listening like that, and waiting to hear his father kill himself; but he didn't hear anything.

So pretty soon he shut up his hook and sort of tiptoed out of the house, but he did not dare go near the stable. He didn't know what to do. He went out on the front steps and stood there, and pretty soon he saw me and Swatty at the corner, and he waved to us and came running, and we waited for him.

It was January, but it wasn't cold because we were having a thaw. It was good snow to make snowballs of, so when Bony started to come toward us we made a few snowballs and just threw them at him. I guess we hit him five or six times, but he didn't beller for us to stop, like he usually does; he put his arm in front of his face and came right on. When he got too close for us to throw at him any more we stopped and then we saw he was crying.

"Aw, shut up and don't be a baby!" Swatty said; "we didn't hurt you." But Bony kept right on bawling. He didn't bawl the way a cowardly-calf bawls when he gets hurt, he bawled like--well, I guess he bawled like a fellow bawls when his father has gone off with a shotgun to shoot himself. So then we didn't tell him to shut up any more. Swatty said:

"What's the matter, Bony?"

So then Bony put his arm up against a tree and cried into it, and after he had cried awhile he said:

"My--my fath-father's out in the barn sh-shooting himself with his shotgun!"

"He ain't neither!" Swatty said, and I said it too.

"He is, too, killing himself!" Bony said, and he blubbered at the same time. "You needn't think, just because your fath-fathers don't kill themselves, nobody else's father never kik-kills himself! My fa-father said he'd kik-kill himself, and if he said so he w-will!"

"Aw! He ain't neither killing himself in the barn!" Swatty said, and I guess that made Bony mad, because it was like saying Bony's father was a liar, or that Bony was, anyway. Mostly Bony wouldn't fight, no matter what you said, because he's a cow-ardy-calf; but I guess when a fellow's father is killing himself in a barn or anywhere he don't care what happens to him, so Bony was so mad he forgot how easy Swatty could lick him, and he sort of howled like a cat when you step on its tail and he pitched into Swatty with both fists. So Swatty had to lick him. He licked him good. So when Swatty had him down and was sitting on him, Swatty said:

"Now is your father killing himself in the barn?"

"Yes, he is!" Bony blubbered, and then we knew that Bony's father was really going to kill himself, because if Bony hadn't been pretty sure he would have said he wasn't, because he knew how Swatty can push a fellow's nose into his face with the bottom of his hand when he has got him down and he don't say what Swatty wants him to say. So we knew it must be pretty serious. So Swatty didn't push Bony's nose, but he said:

"Well, your father ain't killing himself in the barn, because he went by here a little while ago with his shotgun. How do you know he's going to kill himself?"

"I know it because him and Mother was fighting over bills, and he said he would," Bony said.

So then Swatty said, aw! he didn't believe anybody would kill himself because he was fighting over bills. He said he didn't believe any grown-up man would fight over a little thing like bills; so that made me mad, and I said, aw! any man would fight over bills, and that my father did, and that my father was a better man than Swatty's father any day in the week and could lick Swatty's father any time they wanted to try it. And that was true, and Swatty knew it, because my father was bigger than his father and not so old. So Swatty said, aw! well, his oldest brother could lick my father, anyway. So I said he'd better try it if he wanted to find out, and Swatty said, Aw! And I guess that's all we said about that.

Anyway, it didn't seem to make Bony feel any better that his father had taken his shotgun and had gone off somewhere else to kill himself instead of killing himself right at home in the barn. He kept right on with a kind of whine-blubber, even when Swatty and me were jawing, so Swatty said:

"Aw! what you bellerin' about?"

"I'll--I'll beller if I want to," Bony said. "I guess you'd beller if your father was going to kill himself, you would."

"I would not so!" Swatty said. "What's the use of bellerin' when you can't do nothing about it? If he's going to kill himself, he's going to, and you can't help it. If my father was going to do what you said your father was going to do I'd let him do it, and I wouldn't spoil everybody's fun by bawling about it. I'd just go ahead and play like nothing was going to happen, until I had to go in and dress for the funeral."

Well, I guess that wasn't a very good thing for Swatty to say, because it made Bony blubber more than ever. So then Swatty got sore and disgusted and he said:

"Aw! shut up, then, and we'll go and find your father and take the shotgun away from him, if you 're going to be a baby about it!"

That's the way Swatty always is; me or Bony would never think of going and taking a shotgun away from a father that wanted to kill himself, and if we did think of it we would never dare to do it; but Swatty wouldn't care who he took a shotgun away from if he got mad because somebody bellered about nothing. So we knew he'd do it if we went along. So we went along.

When we saw Bony's father go by with the shotgun he was going toward downtown, so me and Bony and Swatty started toward downtown, and we talked about where Bony's father would probably go to kill himself if he didn't want to kill himself in his barn, and none of us thought he would go downtown to do it because somebody might see him start to do it and stop him. So we talked about it and we made up our minds we would go over into the Illinois bottom, across the Mississippi, because a man once went over there to kill himself, and did it and nobody bothered him while he was doing it or knew about it until afterward.

Of course the ferry wasn't running, but it was easy enough for Bony's father to get across the river because the ice was frozen and the river was closed and he could go over on the ice.

We went down to the river. There was a good deal of water on the ice in some places, and the snow was mushy everywhere on it and it was pretty bad walking. I guess you know what the river is like when it is closed. There is a lot of snow on it because nobody shovels it off, and they couldn't if they tried, because the river is three quarters of a mile wide there, and there's no place to shovel the snow to, and it's just as good right where it is as it would be anywhere else.

But before the thaw comes the snow blows off some of the smooth places and banks up against the rough places on the ice in drifts. The river don't freeze over all at once--the ice floats down and jams and stops and the bare places between freeze over; but when the ice jams, it crumples up on the edges and makes ridges, and it is where the ridges are that the snow banks up into drifts. Sometimes the drifts are all around a smooth sheet of ice, and then when the snow begins to melt, the smooth ice turns into a sort of pond, and maybe the water on top of the ice is an inch deep and maybe it is more.

Here and there there are air holes, because I guess a river has to breathe like anybody else and the air holes are where it breathes. They are different sizes.

Well, the road across the river on the ice is always crooked. The farmers over in Illinois make the road to bring over cordwood and hay and stuff, because they can bring it over on the ice free and it costs twenty-five cents a load when the ferry is running.

So the first farmer that dares drive across on the ice starts out from the Illinois shore, and he starts straight, but pretty soon he has to curve around a drift, and then he has to curve around an air hole, and then he has to go around a piece of ice that looks thin, and by the time he has got to town he has made a crooked road; and the next farmer drives in the same path, because the first farmer's horses' shoes have roughed it up a little and made it easier to travel.

So that is how the road gets made, and before very long it gets to be quite a road. It gets dark and dirty from the horses and the dirt off the cordwood and maybe some coal the farmers take home, and there are wisps of hay all along, rubbed off loads when they passed other teams.

By the time the thaw comes, a good deal of the river in front of town gets so you know how it looks, just like the town itself. The wood road goes zigzagging across, and maybe--if it is a cold winter--the trotting-horse men have a speed track on the ice that is different from the wood road and marked off to show a mile. Wagon loads of waste stuff get dumped on the ice in piles and maybe a dozen or two dozen dead horses. You get so you know how it looks, and you get to feeling as if the river had always been frozen over and had always looked like that. Maybe you have names for things, so anybody like Swatty or Bony knows what you mean when you say: "You know, where the wood road comes nearest to the horseshoe air hole."

Well, it was pretty mushy when we started across the river. It was warm, too, warm enough to make us sweat; but there was a good breeze blowing from the Illinois shore and it wasn't as warm as it might have been. But, anyway, it was warm. Swatty showed us where to go. He went first and we went behind him, and pretty soon we were far off the wood road because wherever there was a drier place he went that way.

When we got out toward the middle of the river, away from the town dirt, I wished we hadn't come. Out there the ice hadn't been cut up by being skated on, and there were whole big places where the ice was perfectly smooth and green and clear, and with the snow water on top of it we couldn't tell whether it was ice or air hole. We had to walk on the snow close to the ridges, because there we knew there was ice under us, even if we did wade through slush up to our knees. It was scary enough for anybody and Bony began to cry.

I guess we would have gone back if it hadn't been for Swatty, and even Swatty didn't tell Bony to shut up and stop crying. I guess Swatty felt pretty scared himself. You couldn't see anybody on the ice anywhere; we were the only ones. I guess everybody was afraid to go on the ice, it was getting so rotten. That's what I thought then, but it wasn't

the reason; Swatty knew the real reason, but he didn't tell us then because he was afraid we would be more scared than we were. Nobody was on the ice because they were afraid it might go out any minute.

So all Swatty did was to say, "Hurry up!" because he was afraid if we didn't hurry up maybe the ice would go out before we got across, and nobody likes to get drowned in ice water.

So pretty soon we came to a place where there wasn't any snow and where there were no ridges--nothing but clear ice with water on it, and the wind making little ripples. Bony cried, and I said, "Aw! let's go back, Swatty!" because you couldn't tell whether it was ice under that water or air hole. Swatty looked all around, but he couldn't see any way to get to Illinois but to cross right over. Neither could any of us. So Swatty said:

"All right for you! You and Bony can let his father kill himself if you want to; but I won't, and when I get back I'll lick you both."

Well, we didn't care if he did lick us. We'd rather be licked than be drowned. So Swatty said:

"Aw! Come on! I wouldn't have come if I thought you were a couple of cry-baby cowardy-calves. I'll dare you to come!"

But we didn't. So Swatty said:

"I double tribble dare you, and whoever don't take the dare is a sooner!"

Well, a sooner was the worst thing anybody could call you; even Bony would fight if you called him a sooner, but we didn't care what he called us; but just then we heard a gun go off over in the woods, and before either of us could stop him Bony started. He ran right out on the wet ice, crying and blubbing, and he fell down in the water and got up again and ran on. Every little while he would fall down, but he would get right up and run again. The water was almost up to his knees, but he didn't care. I guess he kind of liked his father and wanted to get to him.

Swatty shouted and told him to stop and come back, or anyway to wait for us, but Bony ran right on. Swatty shouted:

"Hey, Bony! come back, I was only fooling! Your father ain't going to kill himself."

Because Swatty knew Bony's father wasn't going to kill himself, but he was afraid Bony would be drowned. He just wanted us to cross the river because nobody had ever crossed it when the ice was so rotten and we would be the first that ever did it, and he knew we wouldn't do it unless we thought we were going to save Bony's father, or something. So all we could do was to go after Bony, and we did. We waded through the water after Bony, and I was glad Bony had gone first because we were sure there was no air hole where Bony had been ahead of us.

But I made Swatty give me his hand anyway. I didn't like it much. I didn't like it any.

Well, we got across, and before we got across Bony had reached the shore ice. It was pretty rotten and it rubbered down under him, and if he hadn't been running so fast I guess he would have broken through. Then he stopped and looked, because between him and the shore was a wide open space--no ice, nothing but water. He just stopped and looked, and then looked back at us and then he ran to the edge of the ice, and it broke under him and he was in water up to his arms. It was because there was a long sandbar reached out from the shore there; if not he would have been drowned. So he walked through the water about half a block and me and Swatty went after him. Gee, it was cold!

When we got ashore Bony was up in the woods and we could hear him shouting, "Papa! Papa!" and crying, too. It was kind of a sick shout, part cry and part shout. It sounded like "Pwaw-pwa! Uh-uh! Pwaw-pa!" and then "Pwaw-pwa! Pwaw-pwa!" and then "Uh-uh-uh!" like a little kid cries when it has lost a penny it meant to get candy with and has cried all the way home.

All of a sudden we heard the shotgun again. It was toward down-river and not near us at all. Bony heard it, too, and he stopped to listen and we caught up with him. I guess he was as good as crazy, because when we got to him he started to run, and he ran right into a grapevine tangle and began pulling and pushing through it, although he could have taken ten steps and have gone around it. I guess he must have liked his father a lot to get so crazy about him. Swatty went right after him. He swore at him in German and told him that the way was to go out on the shore where the sand was, so he could run faster. So Bony went and we went, too, and we all ran.

We didn't say much. Swatty kept telling Bony what kind of a fool he was for thinking his father was going to kill himself, and Bony kept sobbing and running. I guess maybe I cried a little, too. I felt kind of--I don't know--frightened, I guess. So then we got around the bend, and all at once we saw Bony's father.

He was out on the ice. When we saw him first he was about as far out on the ice as two blocks would be, and he had on his rubber boots and his hunting coat, and it looked bulged around the pockets, so me and Swatty knew he had been hunting and had got two rabbits, or maybe three. We guessed that what had happened was that when he got sick of fighting about bills he went hunting, to forget about it, because Swatty's father--when he felt that way--went down to his tailor shop and sewed coats or pants, and when my father felt that way he would go out and split wood or maybe clean out the barn. But I guess Bony's father thought he'd go hunting. I guess maybe he thought he'd like to kill something.

When we saw him out on the ice he was walking fast, or sort of running, going toward the Iowa shore, but that wasn't what scared us. What scared us was that the ice was moving!

We didn't see it at first. Bony was yelling at his father, and his father heard him and turned and looked back, and then started to run toward us. Where we were, at the bend, the ice came close in to the high bank and on the ice there was a limb of a big tree. Somebody had made a fire under it and it was partly burned. Bony ran up and down the bank looking for a good place to climb down, but Swatty was going to slide down right there and let his feet get on that old dead limb. But when Bony's father saw Bony running up and down he shouted to Jim, "Back! Back!" Swatty looked at Bony's father to see why he was shouting that. Then he looked down at the old limb again. It had moved along!

Well, you bet he was frightened for a minute! He wasn't thinking of the ice, he was thinking of that dead branch, and for a dead branch to start and move like that isn't natural. He felt the way you feel when you go to pick up a stick and it is a live snake. For a minute he just stood and held his breath and was scared, and then he saw it wasn't the dead limb that was moving but the ice, and he grabbed my arm and pointed. And just then the fire-whistle on the waterworks over in town began to blow.

That was a sure sign the ice was going out, It was to let folks know so they could come down and see the ice go out because, you bet, it is worth seeing. You can't tell what the ice will do when it starts to go out.

So then we knew the ice must be going out faster on the Iowa side than on our side. What Bony's father was trying to say and do was to tell us to keep off the ice, and to get off it himself; but he did not have to tell us much because before he got close enough for us to hear him much the ice was making such a noise we couldn't hear him at all. And he couldn't get off! The ice began to pile up against the upper side of the bend, shearing itself off and sliding on top of itself and leaving a big open space below the bend.

Well, I guess Bony cried then! And he had something to cry about that time. His father came running as near as he could to us, but it wasn't very near, because the ice near shore was cracking up into big pieces. He ran up-stream on the ice, shouting to us all the time, but the ice was going downstream, and at last it floated down so there was an air hole opposite us and he had to stop. I say he had to stop, but he kept going, because the ice carried him on down the river. He looked all around, and then waved his arm at us and started to run toward the Tow Head.

The Tow Head is a big island in the river but nearer Iowa than Illinois, where we were. The wind was pushing the ice over that way, and I guess he thought maybe he could get off the ice on the Tow Head if he could get there before the ice carried him by.

Bony's father ran around the air hole and kept running up and across, and he ran hard; but by that time the ice was going pretty fast, so me and Swatty and Bony got down to the sand and ran down-stream as fast as we could. Or maybe not as fast as we could; we kept even with Bony's father. He was running up-stream but he was going downstream all the time.

Pretty soon the old race track the men had made on the ice went by, and then the end of the wood road went by. It was funny to think that me and Bony and Swatty were running one way and Bony's father the other way, and that we kept right opposite each other. But it wasn't very funny, because we all thought Bony's father would be drowned.

Well, the ice went past the Tow Head. It went past before Bony's father was halfway to the Tow Head, and he stopped running and stood still. Then he turned and started to run toward us again.

On our side of the river the water between the shore and the ice was getting wider and wider, because the river was wider here and because the wind was blowing the ice toward the Iowa shore. If I had been Bony's father I would have run for the Iowa shore because the ice was pushing up against it, but it would have been foolish because the Tow Head was like a knife and split all the ice as it came to it. Nobody could get across from where Bony's father was to the Iowa shore, but I did not think of that. But Bony's father did. So did Swatty. He said so afterward. He said he would have done just what Bony's father did.

Bony was crying, of course, and he was running in front, because he wanted to see his father drowned if he was drowned, I guess. I was next, but Swatty was behind because he had stopped to look, and that was the way we were when we came to the mouth of the First Slough. The ice was rubbery, but Bony and me ran across and up the bank and in through the woods--you have to, there--and kept right on as soon as we came out on the shore.

Bony's father was getting nearer and nearer, but the stretch of water was getting wider. It was too wide for anybody to swim, of course. I felt kind of sick. I don't know why--I guess it was because I thought, all at once, that I was running like that just to see a man drown in the river, and it made me sick. I shouted to Bony, but he kept on running and then I looked at Bony's father.

He was still running, but he had his hand in the air and he was waving a white handkerchief, and then he put it in his pocket and just ran. Pretty soon I looked back for Swatty, and I saw him!

He wasn't on the shore. He--but that's what Swatty is like. He was in a skiff, rowing as hard as he could toward the ice!

Bony and me had run across the First Slough without thinking of anything but hurrying up, but Swatty, when he

came to the Slough, thought, "Well, if anybody has a boat around here they would haul it into the Slough where the river ice wouldn't sweep it away or crush it." So he just took a look, and there was a skiff. It was hauled up under a tree and padlocked to the tree. It looked as if it was there for good and all, but when Swatty looked at the boat the chain was just stapled into the boat and all he did was pry out the staple with a piece of driftwood. There were no oarlocks, but you can make a thole pin with a piece of wood, and that was what Swatty did. He made thole pins with pieces of driftwood and he pried the skiff down to the ice and slid it to the river, and then he jumped in and began rowing with two pieces of driftwood for oars.

I shouted to Bony and he stopped, and we turned back and ran. Swatty was n't trying to keep up with the ice, he was trying to get to it any way he could, and he was having a pretty hard time of it. First one thole pin broke and then the other and he had to paddle. I thought he'd never reach the ice.



I THOUGHT HE'D NEVER REACH THE ICE

Even Bony stopped crying.

Well, Swatty got to the ice, but he couldn't land on it. He just sort of hugged it with the boat, and Bony and me had to run again to keep even with him. Then Bony's father came to the edge of the ice and tried it carefully with his foot, but it was firm because all the weak ice had been scraped off at the bend. So all he did was to get into the boat. It was easy. Then he took one of the pieces of driftwood and helped Swatty paddle.

So then everything was all right and Bony's father wasn't drowned or hadn't shot himself or anything, so Bony began to cry again.

It took us a long time to get the boat back where it belonged and a longer time to walk back to opposite the town. It was dark when we got there and the ice was still going by, and we knew it might be a week before we could get across the river again; but all at once we heard a rifle or a shotgun across the river, and then Bony's father fired his, and that let them know he was all right. So then we all worked and built a big driftwood fire and when it was burning we walked in front of it—one, two, three, four, and then back again: one, two, three, four. We hoped they could see there were four of us and that we were all right.

And they did, because right away somebody shot off a pistol—one, two, three, four. That meant they knew there were four of us.

Well, it was two days before we could get across the river again, but we got our meals at a house up on the bluff and slept in their barn, and it was good enough fun.

When Bony got home his father said:

"Mother, look at this young hero! If it hadn't been for those boys I would be dead this minute. Now, stop crying over him, and go and make him the biggest lemon meringue pie he ever saw!"

So I guess Bony felt all right. But when I got home Mother said:

"Well, thank goodness you 're back! That child--Mamie Little--has pestered the life out of me ever since you went away. For mercy's sake, run over and tell her you're home again!"

That was all right, but the best was that Bony's father wasn't mad at us any more and he talked with us about Dad Veeek's barn. He was pretty solemn about it, and when we had told him all we wanted to he said it looked serious, but he would help us all he could, and the first thing he did was to go to Judge Hannan's office and see Herb Schwartz. So he found that Herb was already bestirring himself, but when Bony's father talked to him he said he would bestir himself more than ever.

XIV. HERB BESTIRS

Well, the first thing Herb Schwartz did was to ask me and Swatty to go down to Judge Hannan's office after school one day and we went. Bony didn't go because Herb didn't want him to, and when we went in the office Herb was sitting at a desk and he turned around in his chair and told us to sit down. So we did. We thought maybe the first thing he would tell us was that we were doomed and plumb goners, and how many years we'd have to be in reform school, but he didn't. He looked at me and said:

"Well, George, how is your sister Frances?"

"She's pretty good, I guess," I told him.

"That's nice," he said. "And how do you like having that Burton fellow of hers bestirring himself around to put you in reform school."

"I don't know," I said. "I guess I don't like it very well."

"I shouldn't think you would," he said. "But I suppose your sister Frances likes it."

"She does not!" I said.

"That's strange," he said. "She thinks you are a totally depraved young reprobate, don't she? It seems to me that the last conversation I had with her she said that, or words to that effect. I supposed she was the one that set that Burton fellow on you."

"No, she didn't!" I said. "My mother did."

"Oh! your mother did, did she?" Herb asked, but he grinned.

"No, she didn't either," I said. "All she did was to get Tom Burton to bestir himself, so Dad Veeek wouldn't go to jail or anything. She didn't know he was going to bestir himself against me and Swatty. My mother don't want me to go to reform school. And Fan don't."

So then Herb asked Swatty if, for goodness' sake! he couldn't sit still without knocking his heels against his chair. Then he said to me:

"Is it possible that your sister believes you are capable of regeneration?"

"I don't know what it is," I told him, "but I guess so."

"I mean," Herb said, "she thinks there may be some good in you after all, does she?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

So then he laughed and shook his head as if it was funny. I guess I knew why. I guess it was because the reason Fan had thrown his ring at him was because he said I was some good and she said I wasn't, and now she thought the way he thought.

Then Herb sobered up and asked about the fire and we told him everything, even about the Red Avengers. He asked questions and we answered them, and he seemed to know almost more about it than we did. He knew about what we told Toady Williams when we were just bragging and that we had bragged that we had set the barn afire.

"But that was just pretend," I said.

"A mighty bad kind of pretend," Herb said, and he asked us some more questions. He would look at some papers on his desk and then ask some more questions. When he got through asking he said: "Well, if the case has to go into court Mr. Rascop will defend you two young rascals, and if the case comes before Judge Hannan I think you'll have every chance that can be hoped for, but I don't like the looks of things. Judge Hannan knows what boys are, but if the

case goes before some old stiff it is going to be hard to make him think your brag to Toady Williams was just pure brag. At the best it looks as if one of you two must have dropped a com-silk cigarette stub in the shavings. You two had better walk straight and keep out of trouble from now on. I'll do what I can for you."

So we went out and we were pretty scared. We didn't say much. We just walked along for a while. Then Swatty said:

"Say! I know who wrote all those questions Herb asked us."

"Who did?" I asked him.

"Fan did," he said, "because I saw what Herb was reading from, and I saw the last page and it said, 'Yours humbly, Frances.'"

So that was how Herb knew so much about it, because I had told Fan and she had told Herb in the letter. At first I was pretty mad that she should be a tattle-tale but then I guessed that was how she was bestirring herself, because it didn't do any good to bestir with Tom Burton.

When I got home it was almost supper time but Fan came to the front porch when she heard me and asked me if I had seen Herb, and all about it, and I told her.

"Well, Georgie," she said, "I'll stick by you through thick and thin," and then she began to cry and ran into the house, and I went in and mother stopped me in the hall.

"George," she said, "this is a terrible affair and I don't know what will be the end of it, but if I could give my life to keep you from harm I would gladly do so. And, whatever comes of it, you must be tender to Fan, because she quarreled with Herb because of you and now she has quarreled with Tom, and she loves you very much," or something like that.

So I felt pretty mean, because a boy don't like that kind of talk, and when I went upstairs and Lucy was coming down I gave her a push. She said: "You stop that! Are you and Swatty going to reform school?"

"None of your business," I told her.

"Oh! you don't need to think I'd ask you, smarty!" she said. "I don't care. I only asked you because Mamie Little asked me to ask you."

So then I felt how awful it would be to go to reform school and everything and I went up to my room and cried on my bed. I was up there, but mostly done crying, when my father came up. He put his hand on me and said:

"Here, now! None of this, old sport. Buck up! We'll get you out of this all right, some way. Come on down to supper."

So then he kissed me. He hadn't kissed me for a long time before that, because men don't, but it was all right this time. I went down to supper like he said.

Well, Herb and my father and Swatty and me had a meeting nearly every night in our dining-room and talked about how we were getting along, but we weren't getting along very much. The only thing that got along was Fan, and she was making up to Herb again. She would come into the dining-room and sit and talk to Herb and father, but she couldn't fool me. She was making up to Herb all right. I could see that.

Well, one day Tom Burton came over to our house and Fan and Tom Burton had a regular row. It was a dandy. And that settled Tom, I guess. He never came to our house again.

Me and Swatty had to go to school just the same as ever. I wished, if they were going to send us to reform school they would go ahead and do it, because Miss Carter began to get mean to us. Professor Martin was back and nearly every day Miss Carter kept us in school and Professor Martin came in and talked to her while she kept us in. Mostly they walked home together, because me and Swatty saw them.

Well, me and Swatty had been sort of mad at Bony, like I told you, but you can't keep mad always, and we started to letting him be with us again. So one day me and Swatty and Bony got out of school late, because Miss Carter had kept us in, and Scratch-Cat had been kept in, too. We all came out of the schoolhouse together. It was almost spring again and Bony had some marbles he had bought, so we said:

"Let's play marbles."

Scratch-Cat didn't want to.

"Well, you don't have to," Swatty told her. "You're a girl, anyway. What do you want to play?"

"I don't want to play anything," she said. "I've got a better game than a play-game, and you can be in it if you want to."

"What is it, then?" Swatty asked.

"Secret society," Scratch-Cat said. "I thought it all up in school to-day and it's Gypsies. Swatty will be the king and I'll be the queen, and Georgie and Bony can be princes, and we 'll take an oath to be mean to Miss Carter or anybody that keeps us in school or anything. We'll think up things to do to them, and when Miss Carter and Professor Martin are married we'll steal their children and raise them to be gypsies--"

"Aw!" I said, "they ain't going to be married."

"Yes, they are!" Scratch-Cat said. "Because I saw him kiss her. He kissed her in the cloak room almost before I was out of it, just now."

"Well, we ain't going to be secret gypsies or any secret society," Bony said, "because me and Swatty and Bony have one already."

"No, we haven't," Swatty said.

"We have, too!" Bony said. "We've got the Red Aven--"

He stopped pretty short, you bet.

"No, we haven't," Swatty said again. "We never had. We had a meeting and voted that there wouldn't be any Red Avengers any more and that there never had been."

"But--but you couldn't," Bony said.

"Yes, we could," Swatty said. "We started it and I guess we had a right to stop it. Me and Georgie we voted on it. There never was any Red Avengers. And I'll lick anybody that says there was."

"But--but don't we have to be true to the oath any more?" Bony asked.

"Pooh, no!" Swatty said. "When there ain't any Red Avengers there ain't any Red Avengers' oath, or nothing."

"And can't anybody put me in state's prison for saying what the oath says I mustn't tell about any Red Avenger?" asked Bony.

"No, sir!" said Swatty. "That oath is a dead oath and don't count no more."

"Well, then," Bony said. "Toady did it!"

"Did what?" Swatty asked.

"Toady set the barn afire," Bony said, still pretty scared. "I couldn't tell, because I took oath not to tell on any Red Avenger, but if there ain't any oath Toady did it. I saw him. He had a pack of real cigarettes and he didn't dare smoke while he was skating because Miss Carter was skating on the creek, too.

"So I guess Toady thought he would go up to the Nest to have a smoke," Bony went on, "and I was going home. So when we got up to the Nest he asked me if I wanted to smoke a real cigarette, and I said I didn't. So Toady lit one and threw down the match, and it set the shavings afire. So he tried to stamp the fire out, but it spread too fast, and so he ran, and I ran, and when we looked back the barn was all afire. So he said that if I ever told he would have me sent to state's prison for breaking the Red Avengers' oath and telling on a fellow comrade. But he did it, and I saw him do it."

Well, Swatty got up and gave a yell and he had to hit some one, so he hit Scratch-Cat, and she went for him and they had a good fight, but Swatty was laughing all the time, and he didn't fight as hard as he mostly did. When they got through fighting they shook hands, and we all went down to Herb's and he listened to what we had to tell him.

That ended it, except that he sent the engagement ring back to Fan in a letter and she kept it, and Mr. Williams, who was Toady's father, moved out of town mighty quick and took Toady with him, because Herb telephoned him right away and I guess he thought he had better do it.

So that's all. Me and Swatty didn't go to reform school. We didn't go anywhere. The only others that went anywhere were Herb and Fan. They went on a marriage trip, or whatever you call it.

THE END