Butler Ellis Parker

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Содержание

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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 codding 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 J une 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 sploshing 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 bellering?"

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 box cars 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 corncob 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.

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 Markses. All he's got to do is to go down there and sneak in and stand around in Billy Markses 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 Markses 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 diworce 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 diworced, 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 diworces?"

"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 diworce 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 mistooken 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 capstaning 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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.