Parker Shorts

six short stories

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Ghosts What Ain't

I wrote a story once about a little black boy whose name was Mose, and one Halloween he had just about the awfulest time any little black boy ever had in this world. There was a party at the cabin and his mammy sent him to get a pumpkin, to make a jack-o'-lantern. It was a mighty dark night and the little black boy had to go past the graveyard and through the wood and down the hollow, and when he reached the pumpkin patch he was scared almost white. He reached down to grab a pumpkin, and a great big headless ghost shouted at him to drop it-- that it was his head. Little black Mose was so scared the ghost was sorry for him and gave him some sound, comforting advice:

"Don't you ever be afraid of ghosts," the ghost told him, "because there ain't no ghosts."

So little black Mose started home and he picked up a stick.

"Leggo that; that's my leg!" an awful ghost voice said, and then that ghost told little black Mose the same thing:

"Don't you ever be scared of ghosts," that ghost said; "'cause there ain't no ghosts."

And presently, when he was going past the graveyard, he met all the ghosts in the world, holding a convention. There were millions of them, and every one told little black Mose the same thing: "Dey ain't no ghosts!" When little black Mose got back to the cabin, he was so scared he was blue-white, and everybody at the party told him he was a foolish little black Mose to be scared of ghosts, because, they told

him: "Dey ain't no ghosts!" Little black Mose allowed they were right, but when it came time to go to bed he just hung around and hung around and didn't want to go up there in the dark.

"Git erlong wid yo!" his mammy said. "What yo skeered ob when dey ain't no ghosts?"

"I ain't skeered ob no ghosts what am," little black Mose allowed.

"Den what am yo skeered ob?" his mammy asked.

"Nuffin'," said little black Mose; "but I jus' feel kinder oneasy about de ghosts what ain't."

Just like white folks! Just like white folks! We don't have any real ghosts to be afraid of, and so we spend half of our time inventing imaginary spooks.

I am as bad as any of you. According to my latest census I have on my staff just about five hundred and sixty-four ghosts what ain't that I have made for myself out of nothing. That is enough for one man, and a few over. Seventy-eight ghosts what ain't are enough to handicap any one. Three or four are enough to make an ordinary man miserable, and any more than that are a nuisance.

Jonah was a good example of a man with a ghost what ain't. I mean the Jonah who had to take a trip in a whale, whether he could get a lower berth or had to take Upper Ten and make the best of it.

By "ghosts what ain't" I mean the hesitations and fears we put on ourselves which prevent us from getting the best out of life and out of ourselves. They are the imaginary whiffenpoofs that make us side-step and hesitate and back away, just as Jonah tried to get out of that trip to Nineveh.

I don't think Jonah has had a fair deal. We call everybody with bad luck a Jonah, and everybody who brings bad luck a Jonah, and it isn't fair. Noah built the ark and, after the flood, got thoroughly and completely intoxicated, but we don't call every drunk a Noah. And then there was Solomon. Solomon built the temple and had one thousand wives, but we don't call every bigamist a Solomon.

But because poor Jonah happened to be a hoodoo once in his life, we can't forget it. As soon as I have time I am going to start a society to be called the Society for Giving Jonah a Fair Deal.

Now the real facts about Jonah are as follows: Jonah was in the prophet business, and his job was to go to wicked municipalities and howl calamity unless they reformed and behaved better. One day word came to Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry against it because its wickedness arose to heaven. Nineveh was actually worse than Greenwich Village pretends to be. By all accounts it was a tough joint and needed a reform administration, and Jonah seemed to be the right man to go there and start the campaign.

When he received his orders, Jonah should have put on his best clothes and mounted to the hurricane deck of a camel and loped to Nineveh in a hurry. Instead of doing that, he began to conjure up ghosts what ain't to frighten himself and make him afraid of the job.

"Now, what do I know about the camel?" he probably said to himself. "I may get a camel I never saw before--a perfect stranger of a camel --and it may slew its head around and bite a chunk out of my thigh and give me blood poisoning. Or it may shy at a jack-rabbit and throw me off and break my femur and tibia. Or it may stumble into a gopher hole and roll over on top of me and dislocate one of my spinal vertebrae, and then I would be in a nice fix, wouldn't I, with no chiropractics nearer than the twentieth century, A.D."

The chances were that, when Jonah went to hire a camel, he would find all the camels gone from the livery stable and have to ride a small tan-colored donkey; but a man with the ghost-what-ain't habit does not look on the hopeful side of things.

"Pshaw!" Jonah doubtless said; "I would never get to Nineveh anyway. Just look how a camel rolls and tosses its passengers. I'd be seasick before I went a mile. And even if I got to Nineveh, I bet the first man I spoke to would hit me on the head with a beer bottle."

In that way Jonah let his ghosts what ain't loom bigger and bigger until he was afraid to tackle the job, and he side-stepped to Joppa and got on a ship that was going to Tarshish--which was a miserable place to go to, any way you look at it--and, as I understand it, reading between the lines, Jonah was soon the seasickest man that ever turned pea-green around the gills. He was so seasick that he went down into the innermost part of the ship and entered a comatose condition and remained dead to the world until the sailors came down and poked him up. He was so sick he did not care what happened, and when the sailors suggested that he was a foreigner and a hoodoo and the cause of the storm he said:

"All right; take me up and throw me overboard." A man as seasick as Jonah would say that. So they took him up on deck and swung him three times and sang out "Heave ho!" and chucked him overboard, and a whale swallowed him.

Jonah was in the steerage of that whale three days and three nights, and according to all accounts the E-deck of a whale is a miserable place to be. There are almost no accommodations whatever--no electric lights, no hot or cold water, no bathtubs, not even a boy selling salted peanuts and magazines.

Very few of us have ever been inside of a live whale, even for a few minutes and when it was moored at the dock, but I am inclined to believe it is like being wrapped in a large piece of tripe on a dark midsummer night in a steam laundry. When at sea it is worse. The whale, while less eccentric than the flying fish and the porpoise, is a rough navigator, occasionally making three-mile nose-dives and wallowing like a pig in a creek. For three days and three nights Jonah stood all this, with nothing to read and no one to talk to, and no meals served in his room or out of it. He could not even sit with his feet on the window sill and watch the people go by. All he could do was to lie there and hope the whale did not get thirsty enough to drink eight barrels of ocean and drown him, and wonder when the gastric juices were going to begin to dissolve him. And then what happened? After three days and nights of it the whale "vomited Jonah out upon the dry land." I think being vomited by a fish is about as near the lowest limit of ignominy as a man can get; it is worse than being bit by a rabbit. And the end of it was that Jonah "arose, and went up to Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah," just as he had been told to go in the first place. Because Jonah allowed a ghost what ain't to scare him, he wasted three days and nights, was seasick, chucked overboard, whaled and vomited, lost the fare from Joppa to Tarshish, and could not even sell the motion-picture rights of the episode or collect damages from the whale.

I wish, when you have finished reading the books you feel you simply must read if you are going to be able to talk your share at the Fireside Club, you would take time some day to read the Book of Jonah.

It is one of the shortest books in the Bible, and full of nature study about whales and gourd vines and worms. It has adventure by sea and by land, and a wicked city and a king in sackcloth, and a whole lot of things. But the moral in it is that Jonah side-stepped a job

because he let a ghost what ain't scare him; and then, when he did do the job, it was too late, and Jehovah went back on Jonah and even created a worm to bite Jonah's gourd vine on the ankle and kill it.

The world is full of Jonahs. No man has a hoodoo thrust upon him or is a hoodoo by nature; but plenty of us create ghosts what ain't for ourselves and let them scare us out of happiness and success.

I met a young man a few days ago who is now one of the most successful, hard-hitting, direct-action sales managers in New York. He told me that a few years ago he was a failure. He was a will-coward; he was afraid of ghosts what ain't, and the ghost what ain't that he was afraid of was The Man He Had to See. Every possible customer was a ghost what ain't to him.

He said that one day his employer gave him a list of six or eight prospects to see, and he went down to Fourteenth Street and University Place to call on the first one. As he neared the place he thought, "What if the man is rude to me? What if he says, 'Get out of here, and get out quick!'? What if he won't even see me, and the office boy grins? That will hurt my feelings."

By the time he reached Fourteenth Street he had made a ghost what ain't out of that prospect and he was afraid of it. He stood on the opposite side of the street and hesitated, and his blood got more watery, and then he decided he might feel better after lunch.

It was only eleven o'clock, but the young man went to a restaurant. He ordered roast beef and mashed potatoes and pie and a cup of coffee. When he had eaten that, he still hated to call on the man, so he ordered another cup of coffee and some crackers and cheese and apple pie. And when he had eaten that, he was still afraid. The ghost what ain't was still with him. So he ordered a cigar and smoked it slowly-- dragged it out as long as he could. He spent two hours

there. Then he went back and stood on the walk across the street from his prospect's window and tried to work up his courage, and just when he thought he had it up, the prospect came to the window and looked out. Immediately the young man decided it would be better to call on a prospect on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street first.

The young man went up to One Hundred and Eighteenth Street, but his ghost what ain't was there before him. The young man was just as fearful of that prospect as of the other.

He told me he had it out with his ghost what ain't right there and then. He lined up at his side a genuine ghost--the fear that if he went back to the office of his employer at the end of the day with nothing done he would be fired--and he gritted his teeth and doubled up his fist and gave his ghost what ain't a punch in the midriff, and went back to Fourteenth Street and up the elevator and right into the office.

And the prospect he had been so much afraid of practically fell on his neck and kissed him and gave him such a big order it filled his order book and he had to write part of it on his cuff. When I saw the young man, he just loved to call on new prospects, and that ghost what ain't of his was as dead as Adam. This is not fiction; it is fact.

I know a girl who suffered miserably when she was invited to a Sorority reception because she did not know whether to wear a hat at the tea or not to wear one. Her ghost what ain't told her she had better stay at home and not risk being wrong; but she went, and she was the only female there without a hat. But she had a grand time. Whenever I am invited to a tea or reception or dinner or party of any sort, I am miserable for a week. I am afraid I will be bored, or I am afraid every man will be wearing a Tuxedo if I wear full evening dress, or that I will miss the eleven-thirty-four home, or get my feet wet, or something.

"Drat it!" I say to my wife. "Here's another dod-gasted invitation, but I'll be hanged if I go!"

"I wouldn't, either," she says sympathetically, "if I didn't want to."

"Well, I won't!" I say. "I won't go! It is a confounded nuisance to be eternally getting these invitations when I haven't any excuse to send for refusing them. But I won't go--"

And often I don't go. I cook up some excuse, such as that it is the anniversary of the day my great-great-grandfather cut his first tooth and that the family is celebrating it, and I stay at home. And I usually learn, afterward, that the affair was the best fun of anything that has happened in ten years.

I don't want to seem egotistic by dragging in all of my own ghosts what ain't, but I am better acquainted with mine than I am with yours. I always let five or six of them roost around me and fill me with hesitations and reluctances and procrastinations, until Opportunity gets tired waiting and puts on his pajamas and goes to bed.

I admit frankly that I am as sore as a pup that I am not uncomfortably rich and ten times as famous as I am, but I know why I am not. It does not worry me that I am not beautiful; but it does make me peevish with myself--now that I am fifty-one years old--to see the same old ghosts what ain't throwing the same old scares into me that have lessened my success ever since Fido was a pup.

My biggest ghost what ain't is a cringing reluctance to hear a harsh word, or to put myself in a position where I'll hear criticism. One of my little ghosts, for example, has always been the wicket window. I have gone up to William Dean Howells and patted him on the back, and I have told a joke to Roosevelt and laughed with him, and I have chatted with princes and princesses and earls and governors and

presidents as man to man without turning a hair; but when it comes to facing any kind of clerk through a wicket window, I gasp and turn pale and want to run away and hide in a bale of hay. When I approach a wicket window, I feel like a worm that is going to be squashed, and I look the way I feel. So the being behind the window immediately squashes me.

I might be one of the biggest newspaper men in the world right now but for my wicket-window ghost what ain't. I went down to the "Herald" office, just after I came to New York and while I still had a lot of hair, to ask for a job. But when I went into the lobby, I saw a whole row of wicket windows and I shivered and turned pale and went out and got a piffling little job elsewhere in a place where there were no wicket windows.

When a man feels a reluctance to do something he thinks he ought to do, it is a sign a ghost what ain't is getting the best of him, and he ought to eat a chunk of raw meat and give a war whoop and go and do that thing. If we once let these unreasoned ghosts what ain't get us scared there is no ending them. Before long we hesitate over everything and put things off because they are disagreeable, and we become mushy and flabby in the will. You may think you have no ghosts what ain't, but I dare you to ask your wife. She'll tell you!

If you read Stefansson's experiences in the Far North, and Robert Louis Stevenson and O'Brien on the South Sea Islands, you'll learn that the religions of the native are systems of taboo, or tabu, or tapu--according to the way they spell it. They are not "thou shalt" religions, but "be afraid to" religions.

First, the poor ignorants create a job lot of gods and then they imagine a couple of million things the gods don't want them to do. Nearly everything is taboo. If a man happens to comb his hair on the third Tuesday after a full moon, he may be breaking a taboo he

knows nothing about, but the punishment he has imagined for it is that his right arm will rot off at the shoulder. It must be evident, even to the least thoughtful of us, that this sort of thing cramps a man's style.

We make our own taboos in the same way; they are the mental hazards we create to ruin our game of life, just like the elm tree at the second hole of the old Flushing golf course. So many golfers have said, "I just know I'll hit that elm," and have done it so often in consequence, that now, when a golfer tees up at the second hole, the elm tree dodges--and gets hit just the same.

Our ghosts what ain't are the things we are afraid to do, or that we hesitate to go after with unafraid confidence. After the late big war the usual Congressional Investigating Committees were appointed, and doubtless they did, or will, stir up quite a lot of signs of left-handedness and error. But if the Government and all concerned had said, when we went into the war, "We'll do nothing, buy nothing, make nothing, and shoot nothing; we're afraid of being laughed at and criticized and investigated," it is probable that the Germans would now be playing pinochle in Paris and packing the Arc de Triomphe in straw to transport to Berlin.

If there are fifty million sane, able-bodied adults in the United States, I should estimate that at least forty-nine million are getting less happiness than they might, and all because they are afraid of from one to twenty ghosts what ain't apiece.

To say that one million men and women are free from ghosts what ain't is putting the figure mighty high. That would mean that there are a million men and women who, when they know what they want and deserve, go straight after it and get it, or try to get it. They are the captains of industry, the big men of the stage, the great pulpiteers, the great of all kinds. They don't say, "Well, I don't know! Maybe I'd

better not try it."

How many dinners and parties are we afraid to attend because we might not know a pickle fork from an oyster fork ? How many mothers-in-law need just one plain, straight word of caution ? There are husbands and wives going around for weeks at a time, both sulky and both grouchy, and getting worse every day, because both are afraid to have a plain, common-sense talk. Their ghost what ain't is the fear of quarreling, but a good old-fashioned hair-pulling, plate-throwing household row has more good points than most of us admit. It clears the atmosphere, improves the sale of crockery and, usually, ends in a kiss of reconciliation.

There is one thing sure--you won't get what you want unless you go after it. And there is another sure thing: if you go after a thing and don't get it, you are apt to get some other thing that is worth as much or more. Columbus went after India and did not get it. But he got America.

Next to wicket windows, my pet ghosts what ain't are editors. I am not afraid of editors, but I am afraid of what editors may say about what I have written for them. I am not much afraid of what an editor may write to me; but when I think I have to go to see an editor, I long to fall down-cellar and break a leg.

I am not afraid of a letter box. I can go up to any letter box and poke it in the ribs and slide a manuscript into it without a qualm; but I quiver like a delicate aspen leaf when I think an editor is going to have a face-to-face chance to tell me how rotten my story really is.

There is no reason for this. I know in my heart that editors are poor fish (because they often turn down manuscripts of mine that I know are superior to anything they ever saw before), but I fear them just as if they had real intelligence.

Take this article, for example. I should have written this six months ago and collected for it, but every time I thought of doing it I said: "No! Sid won't exactly like it; he'll send it back and ask me to change it, and that will hurt my feelings." So I have put it off and thought I would do it and thought I would not do it, and postponed other writing until I did write this, and wasted time doing nothing but feeling bad because I wasn't doing anything but feeling bad.

Now this article is written. Or almost written. Presently the editor will see it, and he will do one of three things: He will accept it as it is; or he will send it back to be improved, and then he will accept it; or he won't take it at all. That is all that can happen. I don't think he will read it and then come around and slay me with an axe. No editor has ever done that. Not yet. Although some may have wanted to. The point is that I might just as well have written this six months ago, had it over with, and gone on to new triumphs.

If I had not let my fear that the article might not be good enough become an oppressive bugaboo, haunting me every time I picked up a pencil or saw my typewriter, I might have been paid for the article six months ago, have bought a small new car five months ago, been killed through running it into a freight train four months ago, and my widow might have collected my insurance three months ago. Two months ago I might have qualified as a Grade-A angel, drawn my harp from the commissary, and be now learning to strum Old Dog Tray on the harp. And any author will tell you that being an angel is better than being an author.

It is all right to say, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," but my observations lead me to believe that a better maxim is, "Men of good sense go ahead and get things done, while fools hesitate."

Mrs. Jenny O'Jones is afraid to invite her friends to dinner lest they

notice that the butter knives are plated. For years she wants to give a dinner, but at night she dreams of plated butter knives--a ton of them--sitting on her chest. She frets and sours, and when her time comes to die she can't even die with any pleasure, because she thinks every one will know, now, that her butter spreaders were plated, and not solid.

On the other hand, Mrs. Susie O'Smith has no butter spreaders at all, but she doesn't let a ghost what ain't worry her.

"I'm going to give a dinner," she says, "butter spreaders or no butter spreaders."

The result is that everybody has a joyous time, and the guests think butter spreaders must be out of date and not used in London or on Fifth Avenue, and Mrs. Susie O'Smith becomes the social queen and can serve the tomatoes in the coal scuttle and get away with it.

Mrs. Timmy O'Toole, of Hoshawock, Ohio, was meaning to give a dinner once, and her grocer would not trust her for another pound of butter. That did not worry her; she gave the dinner without butter, and now the man who wants butter on his bread has to carry a pat in his tobacco can on his hip, when he goes to dinners, or go without butter.

There was a man named Cale J. Jiggers, of East Penrod, Indiana, who worked eighteen years without an increase of salary. Every year he said to himself, "I ought to have a raise; I've earned a raise; the boss can afford me a raise." Then his ghost what ain't loomed up and whispered, "But he might refuse you!" And poor old Jiggers worked eighteen more years and got to be round-shouldered and unhappy and unpleasant; and just before he was fired and sent to the poor-farm, the boss told him: "Cale, I'm sorry you have been such a failure. Eighteen years ago I did think of making you manager, but you always seemed so confounded meek and timid that I gave the job to

Hen Hawkins. When Hen wanted anything, he asked for it. He was a blamed nuisance to me, that way, and I made him half partner to hush him up."

Hen Hawkins had no business ghosts what ain't lurking in his head to say, "Boo! boo! bugger-boo!" to him when he had something to do.

So Hen Hawkins was happy? Not a bit of it! He had a society ghost what ain't. He went to a swell dinner once, and when he jerked open his napkin a bread roll cunningly hid in it skidded across the room and torpedoed a bowl of goldfish. Ever after that Hen Hawkins was afraid to dine in any restaurant that charged over five cents for a slice of pie, and he wouldn't visit even his grandmother during the asparagus and sweet corn and green pea seasons. His ghost what ain't was a fear that he would be mistaken for a boob at the table.

I don't have to tell you what your ghosts what ain't are. You know how many times they have handicapped you, these false timidities and hazy reluctances. Do you know the story of the small boy and the castor oil? One day a nice old gentleman met a small boy.

"My mamma gives me a penny every time I take a dose of castor oil," the small boy said proudly.

"That's nice," the old gentleman said. "And what do you do with your pennies?"

"My mamma saves them up to buy some more castor oil with," the intelligent child replied.

A few days later the small boy found a ten-dollar bill on the sidewalk. At sight of it he uttered a cry of joy; then he burst in to tears and bawled as hard as he could bawl. He stood there and howled and the tears ran down his face, and while he was giving vent to his sorrow in

a tone that could be heard for three blocks, another small boy came up and saw the ten-dollar bill.

"What are you crying for?" he asked him.

"Be-because I d-don't want to find that t-ten dollars," the child blubbered. "T-ten dollars w-will b-buy t-too much castor oil!"

So the other boy took the ten dollars and bought a catcher's mitt and a baseball and a bat and a pocketknife and a quarter's worth of molasses kisses and went to the movies nine times. When he ate the quarter's worth of molasses kisses, he was sick--awful sick--but he did not have to take even one spoonful of castor oil. His mother did not believe in medicine. And when the other boy--the castor-oil boy --reached home without the ten dollars his mother clasped him in her arms and said:

"Benny, dear! Aren't you glad? You won't ever have to take another drop of that horrid castor oil!

Sammy's mother was here today and she never gives Sammy any, and I'm never going to give you any again!"

If one ten-dollar bill is all you ever lost through letting your ghosts what ain't intimidate you out of doing what you planned to do or knew you ought to do, you are a lucky man. I am not that lucky. When I think how much time I have wasted and how many opportunities I have let slip because the Jonah strain in my ancestors crops up and kowtows to ghosts what ain't, I could go out behind the woodshed and weep--if I had a woodshed; but I haven't.

Millingham's Cat-Fooler

Ellis Parker Butler

The way Millingham happened to mention hose to me in the first place was that I had been reading about snakes and I was telling him--we were leaning on the fence that separates our gardens--that the reason there are so few snakes left in places where people live was because of cats. Snakes hate cats, because cats kill them.

I told Millingham that there is nothing a cat hates worse than a snake and, as people always have cats when they go pioneering into new places, it is not long until the cats have chased the snakes away, or killed them.

Millingham said yes, he had noticed that. He wiped his face with the back of his shirtsleeve--it was a hot day to be working in a garden --and asked me to look at the hose that lay on his lawn. So I looked at it.

"Well," said Millingham, "you know our cat."

I said yes, I knew his cat perfectly.

"Well," said Millingham, "one day when we first got that cat I got out that rubber hose and hitched it onto the faucet at the back of the house and stretched it out toward the garden, with the nozzle on the other end; that cat was sitting on the back steps as calm as you please. Just sitting there, you understand, happy and contented and thoughtless, licking her paws or maybe the fur on her wishbone.

Anyway, she was just sitting there. Purring. I guess she was purring and licking. So I went to the faucet and turned on the water and the moment the nozzle began to hiss--it was set to spray, you understand--the moment it began to hiss, that cat made one jump from the top step and landed on that hose close to the nozzle--"

"Fifty feet?" I asked, but not unkindly.

"Well, maybe she made two jumps of it," said Millingham, "but she landed on the hose with every claw out and her teeth bare and growling --you know how a cat growls when it is mad."

"I thought they yowled," I said.

"Yes. That's the word," said Millingham. "She yowled, and spat, and leaped and tried to bite the nozzle just back of the neck, and kill it. She thought it was a snake. You see, Brownson, it looked like a snake; to a cat a rubber hose looks like a snake--"

"Millingham," I said, "I have always admired you and believed you and considered you an honest, reliable neighbor, but--"

"But what?" he asked anxiously.

I shook my head and pointed to his hose. Then a thought came to me.

"I see!" I said. "The cat has bad eyes. It could not see very well. Of course, if a cat had cataracts, or pink eye, or something, it might think that hose of yours was a snake. I understand now. The cat was blind--nearly blind."

Millingham blushed. He was tanned a good deal, from working in the garden, but he blushed.

"Otherwise, Millingham," I said severely, "I cannot believe that any cat, even a crazy cat, could think for one moment that that hose was a snake."

Why, not even an Irish kitten that had never been away from the Emerald Isle (where there are no snakes) and who only knew of snakes by hearsay, or by reading some snake dealer's catalogue, would have believed Millingham's hose was a snake. It looked more like a caterpillar--a fifty-foot, water-haired caterpillar that had peeled off and blistered up and was squirting out water-hairs all along its length. Snake! A nice looking snake! Who ever saw a snake bound around every foot or so with old socks, pieces of kimono, and back breadths of the skirt Mr. Millingham's mother-in-law wore when she went to Boston to visit her husband's sister? Millingham's hose did not look like a snake, it looked like a boiled eel that was trying to be a fifty-foot national geyser park.

"No, Millingham," I said, "this time you have gone too far. You have lied to me. No cat would think that hose was a snake."

Millingham looked distressed.

"It--it was a new hose then," he said.

I said nothing. I detest people who qualify their stories with excuses and explanations.

"Very well, Brownson," Millingham said stiffly. "You need not believe me, but I will show you. I cannot have my word doubted. I will get a new hose and then I will show you that my word is not to be questioned."

"Word or no word, doubt or no doubt," I said stiffly, "it is time you bought a new hose. That hose of yours is a disgrace to the

neighborhood."

"You ought to know," said Millingham in an extremely unpleasant tone, "you use it more than I do."

This was exceedingly unkind of Millingham and I told him so. It is not my fault if his hose is in my yard most of the time. I borrow it only when I need it, and I carry it from his yard into mine, and if he does not want it in my yard he has a perfect right to carry it back whenever he chooses. I never hide it from him. I leave it in plain sight, wherever I used it last. I do not, as Millingham does, try to hide it, and I told him so.

"And as for that, Millingham," I said with dignity, "I am through with using your hose. Only yesterday evening I went to get it, supposing you had hung it properly over three pegs in your cellar--as I had a right to suppose--and, when I ran lightly down your cellar steps, the hose was there and I stepped on it and nearly broke my neck. I do not call a neighbor who leaves his hose in ambush on his dark cellar stairs a good neighbor; I call him an incipient murderer."

"Good!" said Millingham, but in a bitter tone. "Good! Now, perhaps, I may be able to use my own hose on my own lawn and garden once or twice a season, for one thing is sure, Brownson; never again shall you use my hose. When a man, no matter how good a neighbor he may be otherwise, calls me a prevaricator and an incipient murderer, I refuse to lend him my hose, even if it does look like a boiled eel."

He said the last word sarcastically and I knew then his feelings were hurt. Millingham is touchy. His temper is easily ruffled. That, and the kind of hose he harbors, are the things I like least about him.

The next afternoon I left my office a little earlier than usual and hurried to Westcote--which is our town--and to the local hardware store,

because I meant to show Millingham that I did not care a hang whether he was angry or not--that I could easily afford to support a hose of my own. I meant, when Millingham reached home, to have him see me in my garden indolently spraying my radishes and lettuce and pole beans with a handsome new hose with a brand-new glittering nozzle in my hand. Then, if he asked to borrow it, I would say carelessly, "No, Millingham, good neighbors neither borrow nor lend." That would crush him. I would then add, nonchalantly, "By the way, I thought you were going to buy a new hose. I don't see it," and that would practically drive him into the ground, because Millingham is one of those men who put off doing things.

Unfortunately, when I entered the hardware store, Millingham was already there. He was standing at the counter, tapping on it nervously with his fingers and glancing over his shoulder toward the door. When he saw me he colored and seemed to stiffen, but I walked right up to where he stood, because the hardware man was approaching him behind the counter.

"I want to buy some hose," I said in a firm strong voice, "show me some."

"Now, hold on!" said Millingham stubbornly in an unpleasant tone: "I was here first. I demand to be waited on first."

"What can I show you?" asked the hardware man politely.

"I want hose," said Millingham. "Garden hose."

"Then" said the hardware man, sighing deeply, "I can attend to you both at once. Step back here, please."

"I prefer," said Millingham, "to have the hose brought here. I have been standing here ten minutes and it is my turn to be waited on."

He cast a meaning glance my way to indicate that I was an annoying interloper. The hardware man--his name is Kutz--shook his head gloomily.

"You'll both have to come to the place where the hose is kept," said he. "We have a good many kinds of hose."

Millingham seemed surprised. I was surprised myself. Of course I don't know anything about hose except that it is hollow, but I always thought it was all pretty much alike. I concealed my feelings, however.

"Of course," I said, "anyone ought to know there are different kinds of hose. There's black hose and red hose and nearly white hose. This gentleman is no doubt ignorant of them, but I'm not. I will go with you to look at the hose."

"Don't think you're so all-fired smart, Brownson," said Millingham rudely. "I know more about hose than you do. Show us what you have, Mr. Kutz," and he walked toward the space at the rear of the store where the hose was kept. I followed him.

"Well, here's the hose," said Kutz, in the tone of a man with a hard job ahead of him. "What kind of hose did you say you wanted?"

Millingham stared around with a puzzled look. There were coils and coils of hose reaching to the wall on both sides. They didn't look very different from each other and neither of us seemed to have an answer ready.

"What kind of hose did you want?" repeated Mr. Kutz, as if hose were the bane of his existence. "Do you want half-inch hose or three-quarter-inch hose or inch hose? I got 'em all. Do you want 25-foot lengths or 50-foot lengths or hose cut off in lengths just to suit you?

I stood back and waited. That man Millingham makes me sick. There he was pretending to know all about hose and cats and snakes--pretending to be a real hose expert--and he stood like a ninny with his mouth open staring at the piles of hose.

"We're waiting, Millingham," I said sarcastically.

"There are different kinds of hose, too," said Mr. Kutz. "There is wrapped hose and you can get it in 5-ply and 6-ply and 7-ply, according to how much you want to pay for it. And there is molded hose, which isn't made in layers but is made quite differently. Did you think you wanted wrapped hose or molded hose? What with the kinds and qualities and the lengths and the sizes, I have got about 57 varieties of hose. I have got enough money tied up in different kinds of hose to stock a pretty fair hardware store. Did you decide what kind you'd like to look at?"

Millingham cleared his throat.

"Now," he said trying to seem as if he knew something about hose, "let me see! How many kinds of 3/4-inch hose have you?"

"I got eight," said Mr. Kutz doggedly. Do you want to look at 3/4-inch hose?"

"I--now--" said Millingham trivially. "I want--"

He hesitated.

"Millingham," I said sternly. "Stop it! You can't fool me and you can't fool Mr. Kutz and you can't fool anybody. You don't know a thing about hose, and you know it, but I know the kind of hose you want."

"What kind?" said Mr. Kutz indifferently.

"He wants," I said, "the kind that looks like a snake."

"Hey?" Mr. Kutz asked.

"He wants the kind that looks like a snake," I repeated.

Millingham blushed but Mr. Kutz sighed.

"Like a half-inch snake, or a three-quarter inch snake, or an inch snake? he asked. "He ought to know; I don't. How long? A 25-foot snake or a 50-foot snake, or a by-the-foot snake? Black rubber or cotton or --"

We were right back where we began.

"He wants a hose that looks like a snake a cat will jump on and try to kill," I said. "A large female cat with gray stripes. Have you got that kind of hose?"

Mr. Kutz looked at me blankly.

"I got half-inch hose in rubber or cotton, five-ply, six-ply--"

He was going on with the list and had got to three-quarter inch hose, six-ply, when I left the store. Millingham was still there. At five o'clock his wife came over and asked me if I knew where he was-- that she had expected him home early--and when she telephoned to Mr. Kutz's store Millingham was still there, trying to buy hose.

The next evening I went over to borrow Millingham's hose--we never remain at outs very long--and he met me on the back porch. He was inclined to be on his dignity.

"Brownson," he said, "last night you doubted my word when I said my cat thought my hose was a snake. Now I will show you that I told the

truth. I will show you that it is rash for any man to doubt my word. Martha, please bring out the cat!"

Mrs. Millingham brought the cat to the back door and Millingham took it and held it by the neck. The new hose was on the lawn, and he turned on the faucet. Instantly, almost, the water sprayed from the nozzle with a hissing sound. Instantly he released the cat. Instantly the cat dashed toward the nozzle and leaped upon the hose, biting it with her teeth and yowling in a low but intense manner. I turned to Millingham and extended my hand.

"Millingham, "I said frankly, "I apologize."

That was a year ago. Millingham says the reason the rubber has peeled off his hose in strips, like the bark of a sycamore tree, is because I leave it lying on my lawn in all kinds of weather, and that the reason it leaks at every pore is because I let the hose kink when I am using it. I say it is because he bought cheap hose.

I was telling him last night, across the fence. Talking hose is the only way I can keep him from talking about his new baby.

"When I buy a hose," I said, "I shall use common sense. Buying a hose because it looks like a snake may be well enough, but it is not my way. I have no cat, and if I had, I would not care whether it thought my hose was a snake or not. I do not want a hose that, in a few weeks, is peeled and blistered and leaking at a thousand kinks."

"Just the same, Brownson," said Milling-ham, "I made you eat your words. My cat did think the hose was a snake. She did jump on it and bite it--"

My wife looked up from where she was weeding the radishes.

"Don't quarrel," said she, and just then Mrs. Millingham came to her back door.

"Oh, Mrs. Brownson," she said, as she saw my wife. "Have you any catnip in the house? Our little precious has a pain and I haven't been able to find our catnip since Augustus used it to oil the new hose--"

Instantly I knew the truth. This man Millingham had wilfully deceived me. He had smeared the new hose with catnip. I looked him straight in the eye.

"Cats!" I said "Snakes! Hose! Catnip!"

He cringed.

"Millingham," I said, and then I paused. I was going to say there were other snakes than striped ones; that there were snakes who would deceive their neighbors, making them think a hose smeared with catnip was an innocent hose that deceived a cat. I was going to say some bitterly sarcastic things that would crush Millingham as he deserved to be crushed, but I did not. It had been a hot, dry week.

"Millingham," I said, "that was a good joke. It was an excellent, clever, brilliant joke. May I borrow your hose for an hour or so?"

By Permission

We have printed Mr. Butler's story in this convenient edition for all commuters and other gardeners whether they are buyers or lenders of hose.

Draw from this tale whatever lesson you choose. "Don't borrow garden hose of your neighbors; buy a hose for yourself." "Don't try to

deceive your friends; you will always get found out." "Don't make the mistake of thinking all garden hose is alike." Most of all, don't fail to get and read at once our little book

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The Boiled Ham Mystery

Ellis Parker Butler

Our Detective Club was having its regular Thursday afternoon meeting in our yard, but it was not much of a meeting because only two of us were there, and we had no mysteries to solve anyway. Dot Carver had been away with her family, visiting Dot's uncle, so Betty Bliss and I were alone.

"Well, Inspector," Betty said, "there doesn't seem to be any crime today, so we might as well read a little more in The Mystery of Hedge Hill."

That was the mystery story Betty's father had picked for us to read, and when we had no crimes or mysteries of our own to solve, we took turns reading chapters of it at our meetings. So I found our place in the book, and I had just begun to read when Dot Carver came running into the yard--and was she excited!

"Girls! Girls!" she cried, almost out of breath. "We've got a real crime. There were burglars at our house. They broke in while we were at Uncle George's. They pried the kitchen door open--"

"Jimmied," said Betty Bliss. "They jimmied the door. Remember you are a detective, Inspector Carver, and please use the proper terms."

For a moment Dot looked at Betty as if she did not know what she was talking about.

"Oh!" she said then. "Jimmied. All right--they jimmied the back door

open. And they stole a ham--"

"A what?" Betty asked.

"A ham," said Dot. "A boiled ham--a whole boiled ham out of the refrigerator."

Betty got to her feet.

"Inspectors," she said, "this is a serious matter. We shall have to look into this. Was anything else taken, Inspector Carver?"

"Well, I should say so!" exclaimed Dot. "They just about emptied the refrigerator, and they took three cans of evaporated cream, and five cans of soup, and every bit of sugar we had in the house, and--"

"You will make a list of the missing articles, Inspector Carver," Betty said.

"We have no time to lose now; we must proceed to the scene of the crime."

"There are two policemen there now," Dot said. "Father telephoned the minute we got home. They are at a loss."

"At a what?" I asked.

"At a loss," Dot repeated. "Like all the policemen in the mystery books we have read. They can't find any clues, and they haven't an idea who the burglars were, and they say they don't see much chance of ever discovering the criminals. They say that the loot was all food, and the criminals will eat the food. If the loot was jewels, it might be traced through pawn shops, but when food is eaten it is gone."

"There would be the evaporated cream cans," I suggested. "They

can't eat them."

"But what good are empty cans when you haven't got them?" Dot asked. "There are thousands of empty tin cans. You can't prove anything by empty cans, especially when you don't know where they are."

Betty Bliss was waiting impatiently.

"Hadn't we better stop arguing, and proceed to the scene of the crime without delay?" she asked. "What the police say, or think, does not interest us."

So we went to Dot's house. The two policemen were still there, but they were just leaving, and it was easy to see they did not think there was much chance of discovering the burglars.

"Tramps," one of them said to the other, as they passed us on the way to their car, "and probably a hundred miles away by now."

And that did seem possible and even likely, because the Carvers did not know when the burglary had taken place. They had been away several days, and the kitchen might have been broken into just after they left. It would have been perfectly easy for tramps to come to the back door and, finding no one at home, break in. I told Betty so. She gave me a harsh look.

"Inspector," she said, "it is too early to form theories. Remember Rule Seven of the Detective Club: 'Facts first, theories later.' There will be time enough for theories when we have gathered more facts."

Of course I felt squelched. I said, "I'm sorry, Superintendent," because every real detective knows it is silly to form theories until quite a lot of facts have been gathered and clues found, and we

hadn't even looked for clues yet.

"If we are just going to say 'tramps' every time we have a case," Betty said, "we might as well not be a Detective Club. If tramps were guilty of this boiled ham crime, it is our duty to prove they were guilty, and not just guess at it." So we went to work, and I must say it was about the most unproductive work any three detectives ever undertook. Dot's father and mother were there, of course, but they did not make fun of us, as some grown-ups might have done.

"Go to it, girls," Mrs. Carver said. "I think it was tramps, but see what you can discover. We'll never see that boiled ham again--that's been eaten by now--so there's no use offering a reward for its discovery and return, but I'll offer you five dollars' reward if you can show me who did steal the ham. Your Club can buy books with the money."

"The kitchen door was open when you got home?" Betty Bliss asked.

"Closed, but the lock pried off," said Mr. Carver. "The screen door had been hooked, but was jimmied open, and the wooden door was jimmied, as you can see. And perhaps this will be a lesson to my wife not to feed every tramp that comes to the door. You are altogether too kind-hearted, Millie."

"But, John," said Dot's mother, "I just can't send hungry men away when we have food to spare, and times are so hard. Not all the men are to blame for being idle. So many of them want work, and can't find it."

"You are a good woman, Millie," Mr. Carver said, "but I don't like to have our house broken into, for all that."

Betty Bliss had been examining the doors. Almost anything could have been used to jimmy them--a chisel, or a screw driver, or the

edge of a hatchet--and there were no fingerprints. Of course, there were no footprints, because the burglar could have come to the door by the foot path without leaving any.

"And there was nothing stolen but food?" Betty asked.

"Nothing," Dot's mother said. "The thief doesn't seem to have gone anywhere but into the kitchen. Not a thing but food was taken."

"Someone who was hungry," Betty said, "but that's not much of a clue. Were there any signs that the thief ate anything while he was in the kitchen, Mrs. Carver?"

"No," Dot's mother said. "You mean ham-grease on the table, or a greasy knife? No. They just took--"

She stopped short and cried, "What is that child eating?"

Dot's baby brother, Eddie, was in a kiddie coop out on the back porch. He was about two years old, and the back porch was where he played most of the time because it was clean and sunny. There was a rug for him to sit and roll on, and beyond the kiddie coop a box with a hinged lid, to hold his toys when he was not using them. Mrs. Carver had dumped him there when they got home, and now Eddie was standing in the kiddie coop, holding to the edge with one hand and, in the other hand, he had a chicken bone--a leg bone--and he was chewing on it although it had no meat

"The idea! That dirty bone!" Mrs. Carver cried, and she took the bone and threw it as far as she could. She wiped Eddie's hand and mouth, and gave him a toy cat from the box, and he never uttered a whimper.

"Kickie," he said, trying to say "Kitty," and he hugged the toy cat; and then he said "Chiggie," but no one paid any attention to that.

"Where in the world did he get that dirty bone?" Mrs. Carver wondered. "It does seem as if you had to watch a child every minute. What was it you asked me, Betty? Oh, yes--I was saying the thief did not stop to eat anything in the kitchen. He must have just gathered all he could put into a bag or something, and then hurried away."

Betty checked the list of stolen articles, and then went into the kitchen pantry.

"I think it was one man working alone, Inspector Carver," she said to Dot. "You will observe that a great many cans of food remain on the shelves, which two men with two bags could have taken. I think one man with one bag worked here."

"And not a very strong man," I said, "or else he had a very small bag to store the loot in. Perhaps he was weak from hunger, and not strong enough to carry much of a load."

And meant to come back, Dot suggested. Betty was looking at what remained on the shelves. She took down a large tin can, removed the lid, and peered into the can.

"Coffee," she said. "A can full to the top with coffee. That's odd, Inspector."

"Why? What do you mean, Superintendent Bliss?" I asked.

"I mean that it is odd, if the burglar was a tramp, that he did not take this coffee," Betty said, and she turned to Mrs. Carver. "Perhaps you had some other coffee?" she asked.

"No," Dot's mother said. "We buy one can at a time, to have it fresh. That is all the coffee we had when we went away. I'm sure of that, Betty."

"I can't help thinking it is odd," Betty said, frowning a little. "If the burglar was a tramp, why did he leave coffee? Coffee is the one thing a tramp would be sure to take. Coffee is a thing a tramp can always use."

"And he took sugar and evaporated cream, Betty--I mean, Superintendent," I said.

"Exactly so, Inspector," Betty agreed. "A tramp would have taken the coffee. So what do you deduce from that?"

"I don't know," I answered. "What do I deduce from it, Superintendent?"

"What I would deduce from it," Betty said, "is that the thief must have been someone that already had enough coffee. He took sugar and he took cream, and both of those are used with coffee, but he did not take coffee. If he had enough coffee at home, he must have had a home, and tramps don't have homes."

"Perhaps he drank only tea," Dot suggested.

"Don't be silly," Betty said, but I could not see that what Dot had said was especially silly, except that the tea in the tea canister-- as Betty pointed out--had not been touched any more than the coffee had.

There was nothing more to investigate in the kitchen, and it did not seem to me that we had discovered much in the way of clues, except that the coffee had not been taken. There were no bits of cloth torn from coats, or fingerprints, or any of the clues that detectives in good mystery stories discover to trace the criminal by. So we went out on the back porch, and looked again at the marks where the doors had been jimmied.

Betty Bliss studied the jimmy marks so long that I was sure she was learning something, and I expected to hear her say, "Look at this, Inspector! This was done by a left-handed man, using an oyster knife with two scratches on it; all we need is to find a left-handed man with a damaged oyster knife," or something clever like that, but she did not.

These marks don't mean anything to me," she said. "Anyone could have made them. Well--"

Mr. Carver, who had been upstairs changing his clothes, came down then; and on his way out to the garage to attend to the car and get out the rest of the luggage, he stopped a moment.

"How goes it, Super?" he asked. "Are you hot on the trail? Anything to report yet?"

"I'm afraid not--yet," Betty said. "We haven't had much time to think it over. I'll--I'll keep you posted, sir."

That was good detective stuff--just like in a book. Whenever a detective hasn't anything to report, he always says he will keep somebody posted, or says it is not desirable to disclose the facts at that time. So Mr. Carver said he wished us good luck, and he went to the garage. Dot was looking toward the weedy vacant lots that spread out back of our row of houses.

"There are Dick and Arthur," she said, and she lifted her voice and shrilled "Oo-oo!" at them, and they turned and saw us. Dick raised his arm and waved at us, and Art called, "Hello! Come here!" and I said, "Let's see what they are doing."

Dot's mother came from the kitchen.

"Wait, Dot," she said. "I want you to unpack the suitcases, and change your dress before you go with the girls. She'll be with you in half an hour, Betty, or sooner."

So Betty and I went out the back way, and through the weeds, to where the boys were. They had their air rifles and had been shooting.

"I thought this was your Detective Club meeting afternoon," Art said. "What's the matter? Why aren't you meeting? Did the Club quit?"

"It did not," Betty declared. "We were working on a case."

She would have gone on to tell about it, I suppose, but my eye lighted on the thing the boys had been shooting at. It was tied on the upper end of a tall mullein stalk, and was red and blue and green.

"What on earth is that?" I asked, for it did not look like anything I had ever seen before. I walked toward it.

"Hey! Come away from that!" Dick shouted. "That's our target." But I wanted to see what it was, and Betty came with me. I guess she was curious, too.

"For the land's sake!" I exclaimed, taking the queer object in my hand. "It's a parrot."

"It's a dead parrot," Betty exclaimed.

"It's a stuffed parrot," Art said.

"Where's its head?" I asked.

"It didn't have any head," Dick said. "That's all there was of it when we found it. I don't know that it ever had any head."

"Certainly it did," Betty said. "Every parrot has a head to begin with. It had a head when it was stuffed. Who would stuff a headless parrot?"

"She's a regular Sherlock Holmes, isn't she, Dick?" Art laughed. "Quick as a wink, Betty is--the minute she sees a headless parrot, she says, 'It had a head!' Marvelous, what?"

"Amazing, old top," Dick chaffed. "Wonderful brains these lady detectives have."

"Oh, quit it!" Betty twisted the sick-looking parrot around on its string. "Anyway we're as good detectives as you are marksmen; you don't seem to have hit this very often."

So the upshot of it was that the four of us took turns shooting at the headless parrot, and we did hit it once in a while. Betty and I hit it as often as Dick and Art did, too, and we were busy shooting when Dot came out of her yard. The moment she was near us, she saw the parrot.

"Here!" she cried. "Stop that! Where did you get our parrot?"

"What do you mean 'your parrot?' Art asked her.

"That's Eddie's parrot, our baby's parrot," Dot said, pulling it loose from the mullein stalk. "It belonged to great-grandmother Carver, and when it died she had it stuffed--years and years ago. Eddie plays with it; he loves it best of anything. He calls it his 'chiggy'--his chicken."

"Where's its head?" I asked Dot.

"Head? It never had a head, not as long as I can remember. You don't think we would let Eddie play with it if it had a beak on it, do you?

He'd hurt himself."

Dot was clinging to the headless parrot as if she was afraid the boys might take it away from her. It surely was a crazy-looking bird, with no head, and its long bright-hued tail feathers crumpled and bent, and some of the stuffing sticking out at the neck. Betty Bliss stood there, looking at the stuffed parrot and frowning a little, as she always did when she was thinking hard.

"Dick," she asked suddenly, "where did you find this parrot?"

"Why, there," said Dick, pointing. "Right there in the path. It was just lying there, and I picked it up. Do you think I stole it?"

"No, I don't," Betty answered, and she took the parrot from Dot. "It is dry now; was it wet when you picked it up?"

"No," said Dick, and he asked, "Why?"

"It rained yesterday morning. If the parrot had been in the path night before last, it would be wet. But it is dry, so it must have been dropped there last night. Dot, where did you keep the parrot?"

"In the toy box on the back porch," Dot told Betty. "Always. So anyone could hand it to Eddie when he was put in the kiddie coop. Why do you ask that, Betty?"

"I'm thinking, Dot. I believe this parrot is a clue. Because if it isn't, I'd like you to tell me how it came to be out here on the path to Shantytown when it ought to be in Eddie's toy box."

"Somebody took it, of course," I said. "It certainly did not walk here, or fly here."

"All right, Inspector," agreed Betty in her most detective manner.

"Then tell me this--who would steal a miserable old headless parrot like this? And if anyone was crazy enough to steal it, why would he throw it away where anyone could find it?"

"He wouldn't do either," I said.

"But I'll tell you what might have happened," Art said. "Some kid may have been snooping around Dot's yard, and opened that toy box; and he may have taken this moth-eaten bird, and maybe kicked it up this path until he got tired of it, and just left it where we found it."

"An eight- or nine-year-old boy?" Betty asked.

"Well, maybe," Art said, not quite sure what Betty was getting at. "How do I know how old he was?"

"I know he wasn't a boy of that age, if I know anything about boys," Betty told him. "A boy like that, after he had kicked the parrot around, would tear it open to see what was inside of it. They always do. And a girl would have taken it all the way home because the feathers are pretty. And a man would not have stolen anything so worthless, when there was a box full of good toys."

"Betty!" I cried. "You mean a baby took it?"

"Well, there was the chicken bone in the kiddie coop," Betty said. "Dot's mother is the cleanest of all clean people; she would never let an old chicken bone be in Eddie's kiddie coop, would she?"

"She certainly would not," Dot declared. "The rug, and the floor of the porch, have to be as clean as a new pin before Mother will let Eddie play there. Why, she even washed the bars of the kiddie coop itself after that other baby had been in it."

"Other baby?" Betty Bliss asked sharply. "What other baby?"

"Why--" Dot began, and then her eyes got as big as saucers. "Betty," she cried, "is that what you have been thinking all the while? Did you know there had been a Shantytown baby in that kiddie coop-- Gypsy Joe's baby?"

"I don't know who Gypsy Joe is," Betty answered. "I never heard of any Gypsy Joe. All I guessed was that whoever broke into your house had a baby with him--or her; and that the baby was chewing on a chicken bone; and that the burglar put the baby in the kiddie coop while he worked, and gave the baby this old parrot to keep it quiet."

"But that would be Gypsy Joe," Dot exclaimed. "He lives in Shantytown, and last week he did come to our house by this path, and he did bring his baby because his wife is very, very sick. He asked for work, Betty, and Mother let him beat our rugs, and he did put his baby in Eddie's kiddie coop while he worked. Yes, Mother did give the baby the parrot to play with that day, because the poor child cried."

"How long ago was that?"

"It was just before we went on this trip," Dot said. And then, "Oh! How awful! Mother told Gypsy Joe he could come back yesterday for the pay because she had no small bills the day he was here--only ten dollars--and we were not home when he came! Nobody remembered a thing about it. Betty, did--did Gypsy Joe steal that ham?"

Betty nodded. She didn't look very happy over her findings. We all went back to Dot's house then, and we caught Mr. Carver just as he was getting into his car to go downtown for sugar and evaporated cream and, I suppose, a ham. Betty told him what we were afraid the clues of the chicken bone and the headless parrot led to, and Mr.

Carver had us all get into his car.

"I don't go around accusing people of burglary without someone to back me up," he said.

We were a little crowded in the car, but we did not mind that; and Mr. Carver drove to Shantytown and found the shack Gypsy Joe lived in, and he went inside while we waited in the car. When he came out, he looked very solemn.

"He confessed," he said. "I saw the ham--what is left of it. We won't say anything to the police about this, Betty, I guess. It was our fault, anyway, for forgetting to pay Gypsy Joe before we went away. He's a sick man, besides, Gypsy Joe is, and that wife of his is very, very sick. The fellow was desperate, I think. He broke down and wept, Betty. It is his first law-breaking, he says."

"Oh!" said Betty.

"So we'll let him off this time, if it is all the same to you, Superintendent," said Mr. Carver.

"Well, of course, we just detect for fun," Betty told him.

"That may be," Mr. Carver answered, "but if you can solve all cases as cleverly as you solved this one, I would hate to be a criminal and have you after me in earnest. You don't mind if I drive around by my doctor's, do you? I'd like to have him take care of that woman. And I want to send them a few groceries--she shouldn't be eating ham. And here's your five-dollar reward. You earned it."

And that was very spiffy, of course, but it wasn't the best. When Mr. Carver went in to see the doctor, who should speak up but Dick Price.

"Betty," he said--the same Dick who had sneered at our Detective Club!--"I'll say you are not so bad at this detective business. How about letting Art and me join the Detective Club?"

And was Betty proud? Oh, girl!

The Detective Club

Ellis Parker Butler

Now, I am going to tell this exactly as it happened and then you can decide whether you think Betty Bliss was a clever detective or not.

It began in Betty's living room right here in Westcote, and there were five of us in it. I was there--my name is Madge--and of course Betty was there, and so was Dorothy Carter. The two boys were Dick Prince who lives next door to Betty, and Arthur Dane who lives next beyond Dick. We all live in the same neighborhood and in Tenth Street, so we had formed the Tenth Street Reading Circle, and we were reading detective mystery stories together. One of us read a chapter, and then another read a chapter, and so on.

So this evening we were reading the last of The Mystery of the Golden Puffin, which is a pretty good story, and Betty Bliss said, "I'd love to be a detective. All my life I've wanted to be a detective."

This was so. I remembered when Betty coaxed me to go with her to see Mr. Cassidy, the Chief of Detectives in Westcote, and he told us a lot of things about detecting, and Betty said then she wished she could be a detective.

"Yes," I said, "and I remember when Mr. Cassidy put the handcuffs on us. I was glad when he took them off again."

"But he did say girls could be detectives--when they grew up," Betty said. "There are lots of women detectives."

"Women, maybe," said Dick Prince scornfully. "But a lot of good, girl detectives would be!"

"How do you know?" Betty Bliss demanded. "Just because there never have been any girl detectives, you say that. I'll tell you what would be fun," she went on in the enthusiastic way she sometimes does. "A Detective Club. To do real detecting. Just the five of us."

"Not for me," said Dick Prince who thinks he is smart. "I don't go into any detective club with girls. If it came to real detecting, you girls would make a mess of it."

"All right, then," said Betty Bliss, tossing her head, "you boys needn't come in! We girls will be the Detective Club. We'll make it a sort of Scotland Yard, Madge, like the one in London. I'll be Superintendent, and you and Dot can be Inspectors."

"We'd better not call it Scotland Yard," Dot said. "If we solve a lot of cases and get to be famous all over the world, we wouldn't want anybody to think we were the London Scotland Yard, and give that Scotland Yard the credit, would we?"

"Listen to them!" jeered Dick Prince. "Famous! Wow!"

"We can call ourselves Tenth Street Yard," said Betty, paying no attention to Dick. "That's where we are--on Tenth Street."

So that was what we decided to call our detective club, and we made Betty Bliss the Superintendent and Dot and me Inspectors, while the boys joked about it. But Betty was in earnest.

"You wait," she said. "One of these days there'll be a crime in Westcote, and Tenth Street Yard will do some detecting, and maybe you'll be surprised."

We did not know how soon a crime was to be reported in our very own neighborhood, or that in a few hours we would be busy studying clues-- if any--and working on our first case under the direction of Superintendent Betty Bliss. Although Betty did most of the detecting, I am bound to say.

The crime was discovered the next morning. Betty had asked Dot and me to go over to her house and play croquet. We got there as she was finishing breakfast and we went out of the house together, but the minute Betty saw the lawn she stopped short.

"Oh, piffle!" she exclaimed with vexation. "No croquet this morning, girls."

The wickets were all pulled up and laid together on a lawn chair because Silas, the man-of-all-work for the block, was just getting ready to cut the grass. He was oiling his mower, but he looked up and saw us.

"I reckon I busted up your croquet game for this mornin', Miss Betty," he said in his queer whining voice, as he wiped his chocolate-brown face with the back of his hand. "I hates like pizen to spoil folks' fun, but a hard-workin' man's got to work when he's due to work. Anyhow 'twon't be but an hour or so before I gets this lawn trimmed up all nice an' salubrious--an' den you-all kin have dat croquet game."

"Oh, well, we'll do something else now," Betty said. "Let's go over and play at Dick's--shall we?"

So we went around through the gates into Dick Prince's yard, and before we reached the back porch where the mallets were kept, we saw Dick and Arthur.

"Betty," Dick said, "we were just going to get you. If you want to be a

detective, here's your chance. Woof is gone. Someone stole him. He's gone as clean as a whistle--not a hide nor hair of him left."

Arthur Dane pointed to the doghouse, the big kennel to which Woof was always chained.

"He's gone all right," he said. "We came out to feed him and he was gone. Stolen. And more than one man was needed to steal him--I say it would take three or four men to get away with Woof."

Betty was already on her way to the doghouse, and Dot and I were close behind her. Betty stopped before she readied the kennel and looked at Dick.

"What have you done about it?" she asked. "You weren't coming for me first, were you? Didn't you tell the police?"

"Yes," Dick said. "I did that the very first thing. I went in and asked them to send up a cop and one is on the way now. He'll be here any minute. But you talk so much about wanting to be a detective that I thought I'd give you a chance."

One glance at the big doghouse standing at the side of the Prince garage was enough to show Betty that the splendid Belgian police dog was gone. When he was in the kennel, he always came out to greet Betty and Dot and me because he liked us. He would jump to meet us, pulling at the chain that fastened him and barking his joy, but now there was only the empty kennel. A tin plate with a dog biscuit and a ration of dog food was on the smooth sandy ground, the biscuit and the food untouched, showing that Woof had been gone when Dick and Arthur put the plate there.

Before Betty could make any closer inspection, the policeman came and Dick's mother came from the house. She spoke to the

policeman, and he touched his cap and said, "Good morning, Mrs. Prince." He was the cheery red-faced officer who patrolled our part of town and we all knew him to speak to. He drew his notebook from his pocket, and pushed his cap to the back of his head, and began asking questions, jotting down the answers in the notebook.

"Name of owner?" asked Officer Murphy. "What breed of dog? What color? Any special marks on him? What is the value of the dog?"

He asked a couple of dozen such questions, and Dick answered them. He said that Woof had cost fifty dollars as a pup, and that he was now full grown and worth over a hundred dollars.

"And that's important," said Officer Murphy. "The police have no time to chase mutts, but a hundred-dollar dog is a serious matter. A dog worth under fifty dollars would be petty larceny, but one hundred dollars makes it grand larceny, and I shouldn't wonder if the whole detective force would be after the thief."

"I hope you find him. He's a good dog," said Dick Prince.

"We'll do our best," said Officer Murphy, putting his notebook in his pocket, "but these dog stealers is mighty slick. You see how it is -- they come in an automobile and pop the dog into it by night, and by mornin' they can be a couple of hundred miles away--and who knows where to look for the dog?"

"Isn't there anything else we can do?" Dick asked, and Officer Murphy turned to Mrs. Prince.

"You might advertise, ma'am," he said. "Like 'Fifty dollars reward will be paid for the return of a Belgian police dog,' and so on. Dog thieves steal dogs for the money they can get, and they don't care whose. Often if 'No questions asked' is put into the advertisement, it

hastens the return of the animal. That's often the best way to get a dog back."

"But, Mr. Murphy," asked Betty, "don't the detectives look for clues and follow them and find dogs?"

"Well, young lady," said Officer Murphy as he prepared to go, "I daresay the detective force does the best it can, but what sort of a clue would there be when a dog is picked up and hustled away? Not any, I'm thinkin'. We do the best we can. So good day to you."

With that Officer Murphy went away and Mrs. Prince went into the house to telephone an advertisement to the paper, as I supposed, and Betty Bliss turned to Dick and Arthur.

"If you boys want to join the detective club," she said, "now is your chance. We're not going to play detective, we're really going to detect. We're going to find Woof, and we're going to find who stole him. Do you want to join Tenth Street Yard, or don't you?"

"Yes?" Dick spoke just as scornfully as the night before. "How are you going to do anything? There's nothing to do anything with. Murphy said so. There's no clue to start with--no footprints, or fingerprints, or anything. Art and I will keep out of it."

Well, there did not seem to be anything to begin with. The empty doghouse couldn't talk, and the dog--where was he? But Inspector Betty Bliss of Tenth Street Yard had already turned her back on Dick and Arthur, and she was examining the empty kennel.

"Look here, Inspector," she said to Dot. "I want you to look at this chain. It has been cut."

Dot and I and the two boys went to look at the short piece of chain still

hanging from the staple in the doghouse.

"Yes, we saw that," Dick said. "We saw that, as soon as we saw that Woof was gone. That don't help us; they had to cut the chain to get Woof loose. That staple wouldn't come out."

"It may not mean anything," Betty said, "but maybe it might. How would you say the chain was cut, Art?"

Arthur bent down and looked at the severed link.

"You can see it was not filed," said Betty. "If it had been filed, we could see the scratches a file always makes. I did not think it would be filed--a file makes a noise, and the noise might have awakened someone in the house. The thief would not want to make a noise."

"You're right," Arthur said. "It was not filed, Betty."

"And it was not broken," said Betty. "You can see that none of the links are worn--it is a new chain and strong."

"It was cut, Betty," I said. "Anyone can see that."

"And cut with nippers, or pincers, or whatever people use to cut chains with," Betty said. "Don't you think so, Dick?"

"That's right," Dick admitted.

"So if we could discover who had the nippers, we would know who cut the chain and stole Woof."

"Sure!" said Dick. "And there are only about five million pairs of nippers in the United States. Ten million, I'll bet you."

"Well, anyway," said Betty, rising, "that cuts down the possible

suspects about one half, because only a man or a boy would use nippers and cut a chain. A girl or a woman wouldn't."

"A girl or a woman wouldn't steal a dog--not a big dog like Woof," said Dot. "If a woman stole a dog, it would be a small dog."

"Right you are, Inspector," said Betty. "We must look for a man or a boy. Now, why was the chain cut?"

"Why, to steal the dog, you poor simpleton," laughed Dick. "Why else would he cut the chain?"

Betty looked at Dick in such a funny way that he colored.

"I may be a simpleton," Betty said, "but I seem to remember that there was a snap-hook on the other end of the chain--a hook that snapped into the ring on Woof's collar. All anyone had to do was to unsnap the hook. Now, please tell me why the thief cut the chain close to the kennel when all he had to do was unsnap the hook from the collar? You can tell me that, Inspector Madge."

"Can I?" I said, but I couldn't.

"The thief wanted the chain," suggested Betty. "You know Woof, Inspector. You couldn't keep Woof tied with a rope--he chews right through a rope. This thief knew you couldn't tie a big dog with a rope and expect to keep him. So he needed the chain. And doesn't that mean that the thief was not a professional dog stealer such as Officer Murphy was talking about?"

"Why does it?" Arthur asked.

"Because I think that a professional dog stealer would be prepared and have a chain. He would have unsnapped this chain from Woof's

collar and snapped on his own."

"Betty," I said, "you are a wonder."

"Please call me Superintendent when you address me, Inspector," Betty said, and Arthur laughed.

"I'll say you are pretty good, anyway, Superintendent," he said. "I wouldn't have thought of the snap-hook in a million years. What else do you see, Miss Sherlock Holmes?"

"There's something I don't see," said Betty. "And sometimes what you don't see is as important as what you do see. I don't see any claw scratches on the ground in front of the kennel. What does Woof do when any stranger tries to take him anywhere, Dick?"

"He drags back," Dick admitted. "It takes a stout fellow to pull him."

"And his claws leave scratches," said Betty. "There are no scratches here, so we must deduce one of two things--either he was carried away, or he went willingly. He couldn't have been carried away by strangers or he would have barked, so he must have gone willingly with someone he knew and was friendly with."

"Someone could have chloroformed him, Betty," I said.

"No, Inspector," said Betty. "No one could have gotten close enough to Woof to chloroform him. He would have barked. Did he bark last night?"

"No," Dick said. "He didn't bark, and he is the very barkingest dog in this town."

"My opinion is that he was taken by someone he would follow willingly," Betty went on. "Now, who knew Woof that well?"

"There's the butcher boy," suggested Arthur. "He comes every day. He brings a bone for Woof now and then."

"Jimmy Schluter? He would never steal a dog," said Betty. "Who else, Dick?"

"There's Ed Dawson, the grocer's boy. And the iceman. And Charlie Wong, the laundryman. And Nick, the vegetable man."

"No!" Betty shook her head. "I don't believe they'd steal a dog. Anybody else?"

"I can't think of anyone," Dick told her.

"Then it seems as if we had come to two dead ends," said Betty gravely. "They don't join. Woof was stolen by someone he knew, but no one he knew would steal him."

"Betty, you're a scream," Dot said. "You sound like a book detective. All you need now is to say 'But I could do with a bite to eat, Inspector.' They always say that."

"I've had my breakfast," Betty said. She was not in a mood to joke. She stood looking at the doghouse, going over the clues one by one again. "I can't see where I was wrong," she remarked presently. "There must be someone else who knew Woof and was friendly with him. Try to think, Dick."

All Dick could think of was some of the boys we all play with now and then, but we knew they would not steal a dog. It did look as if Betty had come to a dead end, and Dick said, "Girl detectives!" in a sort of "I told you so" way, but even that did not fuss Betty and suddenly she said "Ah!"

"Did you think of something?" I asked.

"I think our next step in this investigation will take us some distance from the scene of the crime. Inspector," Betty said seriously. "Dick, do you think your mother will let you have the car this morning?"

"I'll ask her," Dick said, giving Arthur a queer smile. "I sort of bent a mudguard yesterday, and Father did not think that was so good; but if you want it for detective work, Mother might let me take it."

Dick's mother came to the kitchen door when he had spoken to her. She said she did not think we ought to go far in the car, that amateur detectives should be able to do their detecting without running around in automobiles, and I saw that she did not take Betty's detective ability at all seriously. But Dick came to Betty's aid.

"Oh, Mother! Please!" he begged, and Mrs. Prince said, "Very well, but do drive carefully and don't go far."

So we three members of Tenth Street Yard, and Dick and Arthur, piled into the car, and Dick drove where Betty told him to go. We went across town to the section where a few small houses, that were hardly more than shacks, stood near the swamp.

"Silas's house!" Dick exclaimed. "You're right, Betty; he does know Woof. I never thought of Silas coming to cut the lawn every week. She's some detective, Arthur."

"Listen!" Betty ordered.

The car made some noise, but even while we were quite a distance from Silas's shack we heard a dog barking--an unhappy dog.

"Woof!" came the deep bark, and then a pause and again "Woof!"

and this was repeated again and again. The barking came from inside Silas's shack--a dog saying that he did not want to be shut in, and that he wanted his master.

We piled out of the car as soon as Dick stopped it. Betty did not bother about dignity; she ran to the shack, but its window was too high, so she pulled up a box, and the three girls of Tenth Street Yard climbed onto it and looked in at the window. A dog was there, and a big dog, too, but he was not Woof. He was a huge rough-haired mongrel, tied by a rope to the leg of a bed--not in the least like the stolen dog!

Well, I wish you could have seen Betty's face! She had been so sure that we would see Woof. She certainly was a crestfallen girl. I wanted to say something, but I could not think of anything particularly comforting to say, so we all got into the car again and Dick drove us home.

Now, I suppose every car makes its own special sort of noise. A good detective probably knows that, and almost every dog knows the noise made by its owner's car. Anyway, as we rolled into the Prince driveway, a dog barked in Arthur Dane's father's garage that stood close beside the Prince garage, and there was no mistaking that bark--it was Woof's bark.

Betty said nothing, but Art and Dick laughed. Dick opened the door of the garage and there stood Woof, the chain still attached to his collar, wagging his tail with joy.

I think that Betty, just at first, was almost angry. The red suffused her face, anyway, but Dick calmed her down.

"Don't be sore, Betty," he said. "We played a trick on you, but you win anyway."

"I win?" Betty asked.

"You do," Dick said. "To trick you was hardly fair play. Art and I got Officer Murphy to take part in it, just for a joke. Mother knew, too. But every deduction you made was correct, and just as true of me as it was of Silas. Woof does know me, I did cut the chain, Woof did follow me without being dragged. And--"

"And, after all," I said, "Betty did discover where Woof was without your telling her, didn't she?"

"Yes," said Dick. And then, after a moment's pause, he said, "Yes, Inspector," and Mrs. Prince came to the door with a plate of freshly cooked doughnuts. When he saw the doughnuts, Dick said, just like a real Scotland Yard mystery story, "I think, Superintendent, we could all do with a bite to eat."

He was right, and we did have a bite to eat. Just like real detectives.

The Great American Pie Company

Ellis Parker Butler

If you take a pie and cut it in two, the track of your knife will represent the course of Mud River through the town of Gloning, and that part of the pie to the left of your knife will be the East Side, while the part to the right will be the West Side. Away out on the edge of the pie, where the town fritters away into the fields and shanties on the East Side, dwells Mrs. Deacon, and a fatter, better-natured creature never trod the crust of the earth or made the crust of a pie. Being in reduced circumstances, owing to the inability of Mr. Deacon to appreciate the beneficial effects of work, Mrs. Deacon turned her famous baking ability to account, and in a small way began selling her excellent homemade pies to those who liked a superior article. In time Mrs. Deacon established a considerable trade among the people of Gloning, and Mr. Deacon was wrested from his customary seat on the back steps to make daily delivery trips with the Deacon home-made pies.

Ephraim Deacon was a deep thinker and philosopher. He was above his environment, or at least he felt so, and while waiting for opportunity to approach and give his talents full vent he scorned labor. So he sat around a good deal, and jawed a good deal, and smoked.

But if you will return to your plate of Gloning you will see on the pie, far over on the West Side, where the scallops lap over the edge of the

plate, a little spot that is burned a bit too brown. This is the home of Mrs. Phineas Doolittle, as base and servile an imitator as ever infringed on another person's monopoly. For, seeing and hearing of the success of Mrs. Deacon's pies, Mrs. Doolittle put a few extra pieces of hickory in her stove, got out her rolling-pin, and became a competitor, even to making Mr. Doolittle deliver her pies. The Deacon pies had sold readily at ten cents; three for a quarter. The Doolittle pie entered the field at eight cents; three for twenty cents.

Mrs. Deacon stood this as long as possible, and then she decided to stand it no longer--unless she had to.

"Eph, you good-for-nothin' lazy animal," she remarked to her husband one morning, as she started him on his rounds, "if you was a man, I'd send you over to talk to that Doolittle woman; but you ain't, so it ain't no use sendin' you. But if you meet up with that lazy, good-for-nothin' husband of hers, you give him a piece o' my mind, an' let him know what I think o' them what comes stealin' away my business, an' breakin' down prices, which I don't wonder at, her pies not bein' in the same class as mine, as everybody knows. If you was any good, you'd mash his head in for him, just to show her what I think of them. But there! Like as not, if you do catch up with him, you two will sit an' gossip like two old grannies, which is all you are good for, either of you.

Being thus admonished, Eph Deacon set forth to deliver his pies.

As he reached the bridge over Mud River, Phinny Doolittle, with a basket of pies on each arm, started to cross the bridge from the opposite side, and the two men--if Mrs. Deacon will allow me--met in the middle of the bridge, and with a common impulse put down their baskets and wiped their brows.

"Howdy, Phin! Blame hot day today, hey?" remarked Eph.

"Howdy! Howdy, Eph!" replied Phineas; "'tis so--some smatterin' o' warmth in the air, ain't it?"

"Dunno as I know if I ever knew one much hotter," said Eph. "How's the pie business over your way?"

"Well, now," said Phin, "'t ain't what you'd call good, nor't ain't what you'd call bad. I dunno what I would call it, unless I'd call it 'bout fair to middlin'. How's it over your way?"

"Well," Eph said, "I dunno. I ain't got no real cause to complain, I reckon; but it does seem as if prices on pies was gittin' too low to make it worth while fer a man to keep his woman over a hot stove a day like this. It don't seem right fer folks to break into business an' cut the liver out of prices."

"Oh, now, Eph!" Phin expostulated, "you ain't got no just cause fer to say that. A man's got to do something to git started, ain't he?"

"If we're goin' to fight this out," said Eph, calmly, "I move we adjourn over yon into the shade an' set down to it. This ain't no question fer to settle in no two shakes of a ram's tail, Phineas, an' we mought as well settle it right now an' git shet of it."

"I dassay you're right in that, Eph," Phineas agreed; "an' we'll jest kite over yonder an' set down an' figure the whole blame business out, so 's we won't have to bother about it no more."

Chapter Two

When the two men were comfortably settled in the shade and had lighted their pipes, Eph, as the senior in the trade and the party with a complaint, opened his mouth to speak; but before the words came

forth, Phineas outflanked him and let fly a thunderbolt.

"Eph," he said, "you got to lower down your pie prices to even up with what mine are."

Eph looked at his companion in astonishment.

"Lower down my prices!" he ejaculated. "You be crazy, Phin; plum crazy! Don't I give a bigger pie an' a better pie than what you do?"

"Well, then," remarked Phineas, with a sly twinkle in his eye, "how do you reckon I can h'ist my prices up any? Mebby you think I can git ten cents fer a small, mean pie whiles you ask ten cents fer a big, good one? My idee is that if we want to run along nice an' smooth, an' not have no trouble, what we want to do is to git together an' go in cahoots, an' then it don't make no difference what we sell at."

"I'm ag'in' trusts," said Eph, coldly.

"So'm I," said Phineas. "Who said anything about trusts? All we want is to even things up a bit. Fust thing you know, you'll git mad an' cut your prices down to eight cents, an' I'll have to drop to six; an' you'll come to six, an' I'll go to four; an' you'll go to four, an' I'll sell pies at two; an' you'll put your pies down to two cents, an' blame my hide if I don't give pies away. Dog me if I don't!"

Eph looked worried.

"Oh, come now, Phin," he said anxiously, "you won't up an' do that, will you?"

"Dog me if I don't!" Phin repeated stubbornly.

Eph arose and shook his fist at Phineas.

"You old ijit!" he yelled. "I'll teach ye!" And bending over, he seized a large, soft pie and slapped it down over the head of the seated Phineas. In a moment the two men were standing face to face, fists clenched, and breath coming short and fast, each waiting for the other to strike the first blow.

But neither struck. Eph's eyes fell to Phineas's shoulder, where a large fragment of pie had lodged. Phineas moved slightly and the pie fragment wavered, tottered, and--Eph reached out his hand quickly to catch it, and Phineas dodged and, closing in, grasped him around the waist and pulled down. Eph sank upon his knees and Phineas followed him, and the two men, nose to nose, eye to eye, looked at each other and grinned.

"If we're goin' to fight this thing out," said Eph, "let's go over in the shade an' set down. It's too blame hot fer wrastlin'."

Chapter Three

"I reckon you see now how your plan would work out," said Phineas; "we'd give away nigh on to a thousand pies, an' all because we didn't use hoss sense. I'm ag'in' trusts, same as you. I'd vote any day to down any o' them big fellers, but a little private agreement between gentlemen don't hurt nobody. What I say is, git together an' fix on a fair price an' stick to it."

"Jest what I say," said Eph. "You lift your price up to ten cents --"

"Never in this green world," said Phineas. "Contrariwise, you drop your grade of pie down equal to mine, an' put your price down to eight cents.

"Not so long as I live!" said Eph.

"Well, then," said Phineas, "it stands this way. If we leave our prices as they be, it means fight an' loss to us both, an' we won't change 'em, so what's to be done?"

Eph looked out over the river gloomily.

"Dog me if I know," he sighed.

"There's just one thing," said Phineas. "We got to form a stock company, you an' me, an' put all our earnings together, an' then, every so often, divide up even. Then if I sell more pies because mine are eight cents, you'll git your half of all I sell; an' if you sell more because your pies are bigger an' better, I'll get my share of what you sell. An' when things git goin' all right, we'll raise up the price all around--say, my pies to ten cents an' yours to twelve; an' bein' in cahoots, there won't be nobody to say we sha'n't do it, an' we'll lay aside that extra profit to build up the business."

"Phineas," said Eph, solemnly, "it's a wonder I didn't think o' that myself."

"Ain't it, now?" asked Phineas. "But I've give this thing some thought, an' I ain't begun to tell you where it ends. I wanted to see how you took to it before I let it all out on you."

Eph leaned forward eagerly.

"Go on," he said. "Let it out on me now."

"When the only two homemade pie-makers git together like we'll be," said Phineas, triumphantly, "I'd like to know who'll stop us from liftin' up the price. Huh! Them that don't like to pay our prices, they can eat bakers' pies an' welcome."

"I know some folks in this town," Eph said, "that wouldn't eat bakers' pies if they had to pay twenty-five cents apiece for homemade. "He paused to consider this pregnant statement, and then added: "But I reckon the bakers would git away a heap of our trade if we begun liftin' our prices much."

Phineas's eyes snapped.

"They would, hey?" he said, laughing. "Mebby they would an' mebby they wouldn't. What do you suppose we'd be doin' with that surplus we'd accumulate? Come strawberry season, we'd up an' buy every strawberry that come to Gloning. We'd pay more than anybody could afford to, an' add the difference to our strawberry-pie price, because we'd have the only strawberry pies in town. An' what strawberries we couldn't use right off we'd can for winter pies. An' as other fruits come in, we'd buy them up the same way. But we wouldn't be mean. We'd open a fruit-store an' sell folks fruit at a good high price if they'd sign an agreement not to use any fer pie. An' in a little while the bakers would git sick an' sell out their shops to us fer almost nothin'. An' then we'd go into the bakin' business big."

"We'd bake cakes an' bread then," said Eph, eagerly.

"Cakes an' bread an' doughnuts an' buns an' everything," said Phineas, with enthusiasm. "We'll git one big bake-shop an' save on expenses, an' shove up the price of stuff a little, an' just coin money."

"We'd ought to git at it quick," said Eph. "We'd oughtn't to waste no time. What do you reckon would be a good name fer the company?"

"I've fixed that all up," said Phineas. "We'll call it the American Pie Company, Incorporated; an' bein' as only you an' me will be in it, we'll each have to be officers."

"I'm goin' to be president," exclaimed Eph, with all the eagerness of a boy.

"All right, Eph," said Phineas. "We don't want to have no more fights, an' I want to do what's right, so you can be president. I'll be treasurer."

Eph thought for a minute. He knew Phineas well.

"I want to do what's right, too," he said at last. "You can be president. I'll be treasurer."

"I guess mebby we'd better take turns bein' treasurer," suggested Phineas.

"All right," said Eph; "I want my turn first."

Chapter Four

When the two men had settled the treasurer question, they smoked awhile in silence, each lost in thought; and as they thought their brows clouded.

"Say, Eph," said Phineas at length, "what be you thinkin' that makes you look so glum?"

Eph shook his head sadly.

"I been lookin' ahead, Phin," he said--"'way ahead. An' I see a snag. I don't hold it ag'in' you, Phin; but the thing won't pan out."

"What--what you run up ag'in', Eph?" asked Phineas, solicitously.

"Fruit," said Eph, dolefully. "Loads of it. Phin, what if we do gather in all the fruit that comes to town? Ain't there just dead loads an' loads o' fruit in these here United States? An' the minute we git to puttin' up

the price, it'll git noised about, an' Dagos an' Guinnies'll pile in here with fruit an' cut under us." He sighed. "'Twas a good business while it lasted, Phin; but it didn't last long."

Phineas lay back on the grass and laughed long and squeakily.

"Is that all the farther ahead you looked, Eph Deacon?" he asked when he had recovered his breath. "Any old fool ought to know that the second year we was in business we'd buy up all the fruit in the United States."

Eph's face cleared and he smiled again, but Phineas's face clouded.

"What worried me, Eph," he said, "was 'bout payin' sich high prices for fruit as them blame farmers would likely ask. Ner I won't stand it, neither. Will you?"

"Not by a blame sight, Phin," said Eph. "I won't let nobody downtrod me. But," he asked anxiously, "how you goin' to stop it?"

Phineas dug his heel in the soft turf.

"We got to buy out the farms," he announced decisively, "an' hire the farmers to run 'em."

"Think we can afford it, Phin?" asked Eph. "We don't want to go puttin' our money into nothin' losing?"

"We got to afford it," said Phin. "We're in this thing so deep now we can't go back. An' we'll need part o' the farms, anyhow, fer our wheat."

"Our wheat?" said Eph, puzzled. "Be we goin' to sell wheat, Phin?"

"Sell wheat?" said Phin, with disgust "No such fools. Won't we need

all the wheat this country can grow to keep our big flour-mills runnin'? When we own all the flour-mills in the country, it stands to reason we'll have to own all the wheat, don't it?"

Eph looked at his companion with open mouth.

"Mills!" he ejaculated. "What fer do we want to own all the mills?"

Phineas waved his hand in the air.

"'Tain't 'want to,'" he said decisively, "it's 'have to.' I didn't say we'd buy all the mills, because I thought you'd surely see fer yourself that we'd have to buy them."

"Now, I ain't kickin', Phin," said Eph, in a conciliating tone; "if you say buy the mills, we'll buy 'em. I'm ready an' willin' any time you are. All I ask is, Why? That's all I ask--Why?"

"Well, sir," explained Phineas, "if our bakery here puts up the price of bread, the outside bakeries will ship in bread, if we don't buy out the outside bakeries. An' once we start, we've got to buy out every bakery in the country. An' when we do that we've got to own all the mills, so no one else can get any flour to start bakin'. An' to keep anybody else from startin' mills, we've got to own all the wheat-belt. It's only right to be on the safe side, Eph." Eph crossed his knees and smoked silently, nodding his head slowly the while.

"I dassay you're right, Phin," he admitted at length; "but you ain't far-seein' enough. S'pose--just s'pose, fer instance--it come time to ship a lot o' flour from our mills to our bakeries, an' them lumber fellers up North wouldn't furnish timber to supply our barrel-factories.

Phineas laughed.

"We'd use sacks," he said shortly.

"Well," said Eph, "s'pose--just s'pose, fer instance--that 'bout the time we needed cotton to run our cloth-mills to make sacks fer our flour--" He paused. "We would run our own cloth-mills, wouldn't we, Phin?" he asked.

"Surely, surely," replied Phineas.

"All right," continued Eph. "S'pose them cotton-growers down South an' them timber-growers up North wouldn't let us have no cotton or no timber. What then?"

Phineas nodded that he comprehended the wisdom of the deduction.

"You're right, Eph," he said. American Pie has got to buy out the timber-belt an' the cotton-belt. I'm glad you thought of it. It shows you take an interest in the business, even if you did interrup' me when I was thinkin' on a mighty important point."

"What's that?" asked Eph.

"We got to buy out the railroads," said Phineas. "Once we own them, we can get proper freight rates."

"Ain't you afraid mebby some of them foreign countries'll ship in flour or fruit or crackers?" asked Eph.

How can they when we put the tariff up, like we will?" asked Phineas. "Course, while we're buyin' up these other things, we've got to buy up Congress."

"Phin!" exclaimed Eph, suddenly, "we'll have a dickens of a tax-bill to pay."

"We'll swear off our taxes," said Phineas, shortly.

Eph relapsed into meditation.

"Why, Phin," he said at length, "we'll be as good as bosses of these United States, won't we?"

"Surely we will," Phin replied. "Do you suppose I'm doin' all this work an' takin' all this worry just fer the money? What do I care fer a few millions more or less, Eph, when I've got millions an' millions? What I want is power. I want to have this here nation so that when I say, 'Come!' it will come, an' when I say, 'Go!' it will go, an' when I say, 'Dance!' it will dance.

He stood up and inflated his thin breast, and tapped it with his forefinger.

"Eph," he said, "with this here American Pie Company goin', you an' me can go an' say to them big trust men, 'Eat dirt,' an' they'll eat it an' be glad to git off so easy. We can--"

He paused and glanced up the road uneasily. He shaded his eyes and looked closely at the distant figure of a stout woman who was waddling in their direction.

"Skip!" he exclaimed; "here comes your wife!"

Eph rolled over and made a dash on his hands and knees for his basket of pies. Phineas was already walking rapidly up the road.

Chapter Five

The stout woman was not Mrs. Deacon. She turned off the street before the truant pie-men had gone many steps, and they returned to the grass beside the bridge. For some reason they were not so

jubilantly hopeful.

"Dog it!" said Eph, as they seated themselves in the shade, "I wish t' goodness I hadn't mashed that pie on you, Phin. I don't know what on earth I'm goin' to say to her about it. She's pesky stingy with her pies these days."

"Same way up to my house," said Phineas; "but that'll all be different when we get the American Pie Company goin'. I guess we'll likely have pie every day then, hey? An' not have nobody's nails in our hair, neither."

"Speakin' of nails," said Eph, but not enthusiastically, "think we'd better make our own nails. We'll need a lot of 'em, to crate up pies an' bread to ship."

"Yes," said Phineas; "an' we'll just take over the steel business while we're about. We'll have a department to do buildin'; there ain't any use payin' other folks a big profit to build our mills, an' we might as well do buildin' fer other folks. An' we'll need steel rails fer our railroads."

Eph began to grow enthusiastic again.

"We'd ought to build our own injines, too," he suggested.

"An' run our own stores to sell our bread an' pies in every town, said Phin.

"An' our own cannin' factories to can our fruit," said Eph.

"An' our own can-factories to make the cans," added Phin.

"We'll have our own tin- an' iron-mines, of course," said Eph. "An' our

own printin'-shops fer labels an' advertisin' an' showbills."

"Better buy out the magazines an' newspapers. We can use 'em," said Phin.

"Yes," agreed Eph, "an' have our own paper-mills."

"Certainly," said Phineas, "there's good money in all them. We'll make more than them that's runnin' of 'em now. We'll economize on help."

"That's right," said Eph. "By consolidatin' we can do away with one-third of the help. We'll have a whoppin' big pay-roll as it is."

"Well," said Phineas, "you've got to pay fair wages where you have to depend on your help."

"Fair wages is all right," said Eph; "but nowadays they want the whole hog. You don't hear of nothin' but labor unions an' strikes. If you an' me put our money into a big thing like American Pie, we take all the risk and then the laborin' men want all the profits. It ain't square."

"No, it ain't," said Phineas.

"An' if you don't pay them more than you can afford they strike right at your busiest time. They could put us out of business in one year. First the farmers would strike at harvest, an' all our fruit an' wheat would go to rot. Then the flour-mill hands would strike an' the wheat get wormy an' no good. Then the bakers would strike, an' no bread in the country--we'd most likely be lynched by the mobs."

Eph thought deeply for a while, and the more he thought the more doleful he became.

"Phineas," he said, at length, "I don't know how you feel about it, but I

think this American Pie business is 'most too risky to put our money into."

Phineas had also been thinking, and his face offered no encouragement.

"Eph," he said, "you're right there. If our farmers an' millers an' bakers did strike, an' folks starved to death, we'd like as not be impeached an' tried for treason or something, an' put in jail fer life, if our necks wasn't broke by a rope. I like money, but not so much as to have that happen."

"Neither do I, " said Eph; "an' I been thinkin' of another thing. Could we get our old women to go into this thing? My wife ain't so far-sighted as I be; an' just at first, until we made a million or two, we'd have to sort o' depend on them to do the bakin'."

"Well, now that you put it right at me," said Phineas, "I dunno as my wife would take right up with it, either. She seems bound to do just the contrary to what I want her to do. But I dunno as I'd care to put money into anything while these here labor unions keep actin' up."

"I dunno as I would, either," said Eph. "I guess mebby we'd better let this thing lay over till the labor unions sort of play out. What say?"

"I reckon you're right," agreed Phineas. "I guess we'd better mosey along with these here pies, too."

The two men arose from their shady seats, and Phineas swung his baskets upon his arms, but Eph seemed to be considering a delicate question.

"That their pie I mashed," he said at length--"I dunno what to say to my wife about it. She'll like to take my scalp off when she finds out I'm

ten cents shy."

"Dog me, if I ain't glad it wasn't my pie," said Phin, heartily.

Eph coughed.

"You don't reckon as mebby you could give me the loan of a dime till tomorrow, could you, Phin?" he asked.

Phineas grinned.

"Well, now, Eph," he said, "I'd give it you in a minute if so be I had it; but I swan t' gracious, I ain't got a cent to my name."

The Locked Drawer Mystery

Ellis Parker Butler

That afternoon Dick Prince and Art Dane could not come to the meeting of our Detective Club because they had to attend a meeting of the sports committee at the high school. They said they might come later. There was nothing for us to detect that week so we settled down on Dot Carver's porch to read a few chapters of a mystery story.

"You read a chapter first, Madge," Betty Bliss said, handing me the book, and I had just opened it when I saw a girl stop at the front gate. She hesitated, looked at us uncertainly, then opened the gate and came up the walk. She was no one we knew. She was a plain-looking girl, quite simply dressed and old enough to be through high school, but what we all noticed first was the unhappy and worried look on her face.

"Please excuse me," she said, looking up at us from the bottom of the porch steps, "but is this Mrs. Carver's house? I went to Mrs. Bliss's house and she told me to come here. I'm looking for some girls who have a detective club."

Betty Bliss was out of her chair and at the head of the steps in an instant.

"This is the Detective Club," she said in the businesslike way she always speaks when she is being Superintendent Bliss of our Detective Club.

"The Club is in session this afternoon. Is there anything we can do for you?"

The girl seemed surprised.

"Why--" she said, "I thought you would be older than you are. The Detective Club I mean is the one that, I have been told, has been solving several mysteries--"

"We are the Club," said Betty Bliss. "I don't know of any other in town. This is Inspector Carver and this is Inspector Turner, and I am Superintendent Bliss. If we can be of any help to you we will be glad to serve you."

"I'm afraid I can't pay anything," the girl said as if she hated to have to say it. "You see, I haven't any money--not much, anyway--"

"That," said Betty Bliss, "does not make the slightest difference in the world to us. We almost never detect for money. May I suggest that you come up and tell us what we can do for you?"

Betty said that in her grandest way, but she smiled as soon as she had said it and Betty has a nice friendly smile. The girl did not smile, but she came up the steps and took one of the chairs.

"I don't know whether you can do anything for me," she said, "but I am in trouble--just awful trouble--and I didn't know who else to go to. I've been--well--I've been accused of being a thief, and I don't know how to prove I'm not. It--"

She stopped and hid her face in her hands. I thought she was going to cry, but she managed not to. After a minute or so she got control of herself and only wiped her eyes.

"It's a dreadful thing to be called a thief," she said, "and for me it is worse than for almost anyone because it means that, for me, everything is ended, and just when I am getting started."

"Tell us about it," I began, but Betty Bliss stopped me.

"If you please, Inspector Madge, I will question our client," Betty said. And to the girl, "Kindly give us all the facts you can--name, age, circumstances of the crime, with all the details."

"My name is Mary Sloane," the girl said, twisting her hands. "I'm sixteen now, and I'm an orphan. When I was two years old they took m e into Saint Elizabeth's Orphan Asylum, and a week ago I got through there--we have to leave when we are sixteen years old. They get work for us, or put us in someone's home. Mrs. Joseph Branch took me."

"I know of Mrs. Branch," Betty said. "She is an important club woman. She is managing the Willing Hand Rummage Shop for the Town Aid Society now, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Mary Sloane, "and she was so good to me at first, and so kind. She gave me a nice room upstairs in her house, not really an attic. I thought I would be so happy there--I don't mind doing housework, or washing dishes, or such things. But she has three servants already and she said I was to be her secretary if I could do the work."

"I should think she would need a secretary, being in so many clubs and all," Dot Carver put in, but Betty said, "Inspector! Please!" and Dot shut up.

"Of course, I was pleased," Mary Sloane went on. "I thought it would be fine, and so it was until this happened. Mrs. Branch is spending

most of her time at the Rummage Shop just now and she took me down there to help her. Every afternoon. Some evenings. They are sending out hundreds of appeals for money, or old clothes, or anything the Rummage Shop can use, and I addressed envelopes. I write a good hand. Well--"

"Please continue, Miss Sloane," Betty said.

"Mrs. Branch handles all the money," the girl said. "She is president and treasurer."

"And she accused you of stealing the money!" I exclaimed. Betty Bliss frowned at me.

"No, not that," Miss Sloane said, "not exactly. Not much money, anyway. If you'll let me tell you?"

She looked at Betty Bliss and Betty nodded.

"That is just what we want," she said, "and the inspectors will please not interrupt. Go on, Miss Sloane."

"It was postage stamps mostly," Mary Sloane said. "You see, there were about a thousand envelopes ready to mail the first day I went there--they use two cent stamps--and Mrs. Branch gave me forty dollars and told me to go to the post office and get two thousand stamps, and I did. There were one hundred in a sheet--that made twenty sheets of stamps. She took the money out of the drawer."

"One moment, please, said Betty. What drawer?"

"The drawer of her table--she has a table she uses as a desk. Anyway, she gave me half the stamps to stick on the envelopes, and she put the rest in the drawer--ten sheets, twenty dollars worth. There

was some small change in the drawer--petty cash, she called it--and a few loose postage stamps, perhaps three dollars worth, three-cent ones and fives. Then she locked the drawer."

"Did she always keep the drawer locked?" Betty asked.

"Always," said Mary Sloane, "and kept the key in her handbag. She never let anyone else unlock the drawer--so she says. When stamps were needed, Mrs. Branch unlocked the drawer and took them out and gave them to us."

"Who is 'us'?" asked Betty.

"There are three or four girls who work there part of the time-- society girls--giving their time free. Mrs. Branch would never think they would steal."

"Anyone else work there?" Betty asked.

"Mrs. Overman, a rather elderly lady who is the paid manager," said the girl, "and a man named Comus Tooks, but I never saw him. He is the janitor and comes to clean up after we are gone."

"And all the money that is taken in at the shop is put in the drawer in Mrs. Branch's table?" Betty asked.

"Oh, no!" said Mary Sloane. "The money that the Rummage Shop takes in from selling things goes into the cash register, and that is most of the money. The cash register is always locked and no money was ever missing from it. The money that goes into the table drawer is money that people donate to help the shop along--mostly checks--and the petty cash Mrs. Branch needs to spend for small items the shop needs. The money from the cash register is put into the bank every day."

"Yes, I think I understand that," said Betty. "And you say you are accused of stealing? Tell us about that."

"Everything was all right until today," Mary Sloane said, trying hard to control her voice. "I've been helping Mrs. Branch just one week, and once a week she counts the stamps and the money in the drawer and balances her accounts. And today she said three dollars and forty cents were missing. She said no one could have taken it but me--"

At that Mary Sloane had to stop and hide her face in her hands again.

"Mrs. Branch said she couldn't keep me," she went on brokenly. "She said she couldn't have a petty thief about, and that I'd have to go back to the orphanage. And nobody will want me now--nobody!"

"Does Mrs. Overman, the manager of the Rummage Shop, think you took the money?" Betty Bliss asked.

"I don't know," said Mary Sloane. "She didn't say anything--I don't know whether she knows anything about it. Perhaps Mrs. Branch did not tell anyone there, but she'll tell them at the orphanage."

"Betty," I broke out, "I don't believe this girl took the money. I don't! She wouldn't come to us if--"

"When we are on a case you will kindly address me as Superintendent Bliss, Inspector Turner," said Betty severely, and did I feel my face getting red! "And why, Miss Sloane," she asked, "is Mrs. Branch so sure you are guilty?"

"Because I was the only one who could have taken it," said Mary Sloane. "Mrs. Branch always kept the key to the table drawer in her handbag, and I was the only one that was ever near her handbag alone. Mrs. Branch was always going to the front of the shop to talk

with Mrs. Overman, or with some lady that came in, and she would leave her handbag on the table. It was always there within reach of my hand."

"And the others--the society girls?"

"They were never there alone--I was always there when they were. I was the only person that could have taken the key from the handbag to open the drawer."

"I see!" said Betty thoughtfully. "And your claim is, of course, that you took nothing from the drawer--that you never opened it?"

"I never, never had the key in my hand! I never touched it! I never opened Mrs. Branch's handbag!" cried Mary Sloane. "I wouldn't do such a thing."

"But I suppose," said Betty, "you have some theory about the missing money--or stamps?"

"Yes, I have," said Mary Sloane. "I think Mrs. Branch made a mistake. I think she counted wrong. Or maybe she took out some money or stamps and forgot about it--forgot to make a memorandum of it. I told her so."

"Did that please her?" asked Betty with a smile.

"Oh, she was so angry!" exclaimed Mary Sloane. "She said she never made such mistakes and that I was impertinent to suggest such a thing. She said that in all the years she had been connected with clubs and associations and charities she had never made an error of a single cent."

"Superintendent Bliss--" I began.

"Never mind, Inspector Madge," Betty said.

"I know what you are going to say. But if Mrs. Branch has, this time, made an error in her accounting it does not help Miss Sloane any. No one, I am sure, could convince Mrs. Blanch that she made a mistake in her accounts. Certainly we girls could not. Miss Sloane, was the key an ordinary key? Could anyone open the lock of the drawer with a hairpin, for instance?"

"No," said Mary Sloane promptly. "It was a patent lock--one of those with wiggly keys--what do they call them ? No one could pick a lock like that."

"In other words, Miss Sloane," said Betty, "you are positive that no one could open the drawer without the key, and you are just as positive that no one but you or Mrs. Branch could have had possession of the key."

"Yes," said Mary Sloane, "I'm positive."

"Good!" Betty exclaimed. "That makes it very much simpler. Inspectors, I think the case is solved."

"Solved!" Dot ejaculated. "But I don't see--"

"Of course you do, Dot!" I said. "Betty--I mean, Superintendent Bliss--means that Mrs. Branch did make a mistake in her figures. But," I said, "I don't see how you are going to show her that she did, Superintendent Bliss. If she's so sure--"

But Betty was not really paying any attention to us. She was frowning, deep in thought, and when she spoke it was to Mary Sloane.

"Just what did Mrs. Branch tell you to do when she accused you?"

Betty asked her. "Did she tell you to get your things from her house and go back to the orphanage?"

"Yes, she did," said Mary Sloane. "She said she did not want me to spend another night in her house. But I had heard the girls at the Rummage Shop--the society girls who came to help Mrs. Branch--talking about you and your Detective Club, and I thought I would come to you first. It was all I could think of to do."

"And quite right," said Betty, "but what will you do now?"

"I don't know," said Mary Sloane helplessly. "I'll have to get my clothes and go back to the orphanage, I suppose. I'll have to tell them."

"You have nowhere else to go?"

"No other place in the world," said the girl forlornly.

"No place where you can spend a night--or perhaps two nights?"

"No place," said Mary Sloane.

"Well, you're not going back to that orphanage tonight with the story that you are accused of being a thief," said Betty Bliss positively. "Inspector Dot, will you ask your mother--or, no! I'll ask mine. I'm going to use your telephone, Dot."

With that Betty went into the house and we others sat silent on the porch, waiting for her to come out. We heard her voice, but could not distinguish the words. It seemed to take Betty longer than was necessary and we wondered if she were having to argue with her mother, but when she came out again she seemed very much pleased.

"Mother was glad to be asked to give you a room for a night or two,

Miss Sloane," Betty said, "and when you get your clothes from Mrs. Branch's, you can take them right to our house--you know where that is because you stopped there on your way here. Mother will be there to welcome you. And," she said to us, "I telephoned to the high school and got Art and Dick on the wire, and they'll be here as soon as possible. They were just through with their meeting and were coming anyway. And I think, Miss Sloane, that you had better go to Mrs. Branch's at once and get your belongings. Mother will be expecting you."

Mary Sloane seemed almost overwhelmed by this. I honestly believe she would have kissed Betty's hand. There were tears in her eyes and she could not speak, but Betty assumed her most official manner.

"Our further instructions, Miss Sloane," she said, "are to avoid any controversy with Mrs. Branch if she happens to be there. I mean, don't quarrel with her. If she says anything unkind--but I don't think she will--just be silent. At the most just say, 'I am not a thief, Mrs. Branch.'"

"She wouldn't be there now," said Mary Sloane. "She'd be at the Rummage Shop now."

"So much the better," said Betty. "And don't be downhearted. Everything will be all right."

So Mary Sloane thanked us again and again and started on her way to get her clothes from Mrs. Branch's, and as soon as she was out of hearing Betty was all business again.

"Now then," she said, "we'll have to get busy. Inspectors, do either of you know Mrs. Overman, the manager of the Rummage Shop?"

"I don't," I said, and Dot said, "I don't," in the same moment of time.

"Then we'll have to find someone who does," declared Betty. "Dot, do you suppose your mother knows her?"

"She might," Dot said. "I know that Mother sometimes takes bundles to the Rummage Shop and no doubt she meets Mrs. Overman when she goes there. Shall I ask her?"

"Asking your mother if she knows Mrs. Overman seems to be indicated, Inspector," said Betty with a smile, and Dot went into the house. She came out in a minute or two with Mrs. Carver, who seemed pleased to be of service to us.

"Another mystery?" she smiled. "Dot asked me if I knew Mrs. Overman at the Rummage Shop. I do know her very well, much more than by merely meeting her there. As a matter of fact, Betty, she and I are members of the same church and have worked together in the Aid for many years. I'm sure you are not thinking she has done anything wrong; she is a lovely person, very kind and sweet."

"No, Mrs. Carver," Betty said, "we only want her help in removing suspicion from a person we believe is wrongly accused. We only want you to tell her who we are, and that we are not really just three silly girls."

"Certainly, I'll do that," said Mrs. Carver. "I'll telephone her now. Shall I tell her you are coming to see her?"

"Yes, please," Betty said, and in a few minutes Mrs. Carver told us it would be all right--Mrs. Overman would be glad to see us.

Before Mrs. Carver had gone into the house Dick Prince and Art Dane came, all keyed up and excited by the news that we had another mystery case on our hands.

"What is it this time?" Art asked. "Tell us what we have to do--we are all excited and raring to go! It must be something wild and woolly if you girls have to send for us. You're so smart you usually think you can get along just as well without any help from us."

"That's right!" Dick laughed. "It just shows. When it comes to a real mystery the ladies have to call on the good old manly brains to solve it."

"Really!" said Betty Bliss, a little huffed by their teasing. "We girls are very stupid, aren't we? Well, the mystery is solved, if you care to know it."

"It is?" asked Dick, quite naturally surprised. "And what was the mystery then?"

"Stolen money and stamps," said Betty. "They were kept in a locked drawer with only one key, and only two persons had access to the key, and neither one of them stole the money and stamps."

"The drawer was pried open," said Art. And at the same time Dick said, "Someone broke open the drawer."

"Wrong, both of you," said Betty, and as briefly as possible she told them about Mary Sloane and Mrs. Branch and the missing stamps and money--it might have been either, or both.

"And you know who took the money?" Dick asked.

"Of course," Betty said. "There is only one person who could have taken it."

"Not Mary Sloane?"

"Certainly not."

"And not Mrs. Branch?"

"Don't be silly!" said Betty.

"And Mrs. Branch did not make a mistake in counting?" asked Dick.

"She says not," Betty answered.

"But see here!" exclaimed Art. "This is like one of those locked room mysteries--every door and window locked and bolted on the inside, and yet the man in the room murdered. If nobody had a key to the drawer--"

"We're wasting time, Inspector," said Betty. "The afternoon is passing and we have quite a little to do. Any of you who have any cast-off clothes, or other rummage stuff, will please go and get it and we will all meet in front of my house in fifteen minutes. We are going to make a donation to the Rummage Shop."

In less than half an hour we were at the Rummage Shop and each of us had a nice little bundle to give Mrs. Overman.

There were two or three customers in the shop but they thought nothing of us, unless they thought we were five merry young people bringing donations. Mrs. Branch and her society helpers had gone home.

When Mrs. Overman had attended to her customers she came to us, and Dot told her who we were, and Betty explained that we were the Detective Club and that we were working on the case and what the case was. Mrs. Overman was a lovely person. This was the first she had heard of Mary Sloane having been accused of theft, and that

proved that Mrs. Branch was not really cruel-hearted--otherwise she would have told Mrs. Overman. Evidently Mrs. Branch did not want to be any harsher with Mary Sloane than she felt she had to be.

Mrs. Overman was as sorry for Mary as we were. She said she had thought Mary was a dear girl and that she would help us in any way she could.

"We would like to go to the back of the shop to inspect the scene of the crime, please," Betty said, and Mrs. Overman led us there. The small table was just as Mary had described it, and Betty knelt down and examined it carefully--the slender legs, the top made of one smooth board, and the single drawer safely locked. Then she turned and looked at the walls of the room.

"Inspectors," Betty told us, "this is excellent! Here one can see and not be seen." She pointed to the rows of men's overcoats and women's coats and dresses hanging on racks at the far side of the room. "Inspectors Dane and Prince," she continued, speaking to Art and Dick, "there are some jobs that we girls really should not do, but you can do them if you are willing. One evening may be enough, or it may take several evenings, but you can be out of here in time to do your homework and get to bed."

"Out of here?" Dick asked. "You want us to hide here?"

"Yes," said Betty, "the only way to clear Mary Sloane is to catch the real thief, and I believe we can if Mrs. Overman is willing to let you boys hide behind those coats and keep watch."

"Quite willing," Mrs. Overman assured her.

Art and Dick were eager to try it, so Betty and Dot and I went home, and when Mrs. Overman closed the shop and locked the door she left

the boys hidden behind the coats.

In less than half an hour they heard a key turning in the front door lock, heard the door open and close, and Comus Tooks, the janitor, entered. He got a pail of damp sawdust and sprinkled it on the floor and began to sweep. He swept from the front toward the rear and, when he came to the small table, he stopped and stood the broom against the wall.

Art and Dick, peering out, saw him clearly. He reached into his pocket, drew out a hefty pocketknife, and opened the biggest blade. He pushed the blade in between the top of the table and the top edge of the drawer front, making a crack a quarter of an inch wide--and then he turned the table upside down!

The rest was easy. All he had to do was tilt the table a little and shake it, and the loose change and the stamps slid out onto the floor. He bent down and began picking this up, putting some of the change and some of the stamps into his pocket and some back in the drawer.

Then Art and Dick stepped out from among the coats.

"That will do, Comus," Art said.

The janitor gave him one scared look and ran for the front door. He did not stop to lock it. Perhaps he never did stop--he was never seen in our town again.

The boys left the pocketknife in the crack above the desk drawer, locked the shop, and came up to Betty's to report. She telephoned to Mrs. Branch immediately, and Mrs. Branch apologized to Mary Sloane and took her back, and everything was all right again.

"But, Betty," I asked, "how did you ever figure it out? How did you ever guess that Comus Tooks got the stamps out of the drawer that way?"

"Inspector Madge," Betty said, "don't you ever dare tell anyone, but that's how I got some money out of my own little table, the morning of the day Mary Sloane came to us. I keep change there--locked up, you know--and I had mislaid the key."