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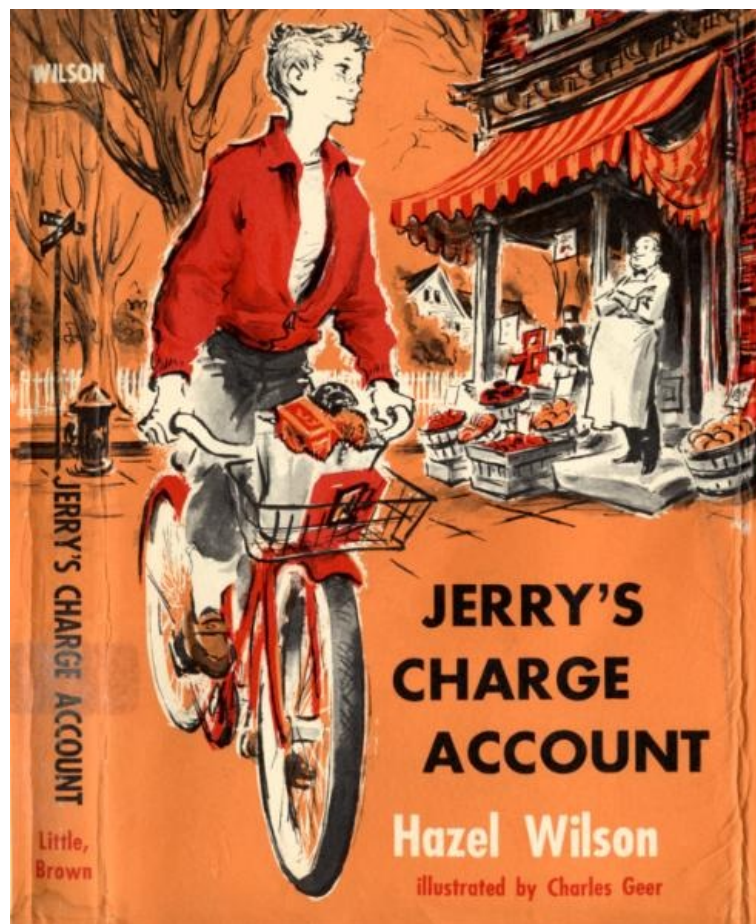
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JERRY'S CHARGE ACCOUNT ***



JERRY'S CHARGE ACCOUNT

by Hazel Wilson

Jerry Martin asked for it. If the candy in Mr. Bartlett's store hadn't looked so good to him, he wouldn't have started the charge account and he would have escaped all that worry and trouble.

The worst thing about it was that it was sort of fun, too. It was fun keeping his twin sister Cathy guessing, fun trying to keep his secret from the family, especially his little brother Andy.

So Jerry kept getting deeper and deeper into his predicament, like a man in

quicksand. The plain fact was, Jerry's father didn't approve of charge accounts, and Jerry wasn't likely to change his mind for him, candy or no candy. Then, when somebody broke into Mr. Bullfinch's house next door, the trouble became serious.

There is laughter and suspense, and a hidden lesson in this story of an impulsive boy and his true-to-life family.

Illustrated by
Charles Geer

BOOKS BY HAZEL WILSON

THE SURPRISE OF THEIR LIVES

TALL SHIPS

THE RED DORY

JERRY'S CHARGE ACCOUNT

Jerry's Charge Account



**JERRY'S
CHARGE
ACCOUNT**

by Hazel Wilson

with illustrations by Charles Geer

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

BOSTON · TORONTO

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**This book is affectionately dedicated to
Gregory and Kevin**

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Jerry's Charge Account

[Pg 3]

1

Charge It, Please

Jerry tried to be quiet, but he bumped into the one chair in the kitchen on his way to the kitchen cupboard. And it was not his fault that the cream pitcher fell when he took the sugarbowl from the shelf. Jerry made a quick and nice southpaw catch. Pretty good, he thought, for a right-

hander. He hadn't been able to use his right because it was holding the sugarbowl. He had dumped the sugar into a cereal dish and was busily pouring salt into the sugarbowl when his mother entered the kitchen.

"What on earth are you doing up so early on Saturday?" Mrs. Martin asked sleepily. "It's only half-past six."

Jerry's blue eyes begged his mother to share a joke with him. "I woke up and remembered it's April Fools' Day," he said and chuckled. "Can't you just see Dad's face when he tastes his coffee with two spoonfuls of salt in it instead of sugar?"

"No, Jerry," said his mother. "No. It wouldn't be at all funny to spoil your father's morning coffee. It would be tragic. Put the salt back, rinse out the sugarbowl, and refill it with sugar. And no more April-fooling with your father's breakfast." [Pg 4]

"Aw, I never can have any fun around here," Jerry complained. Salt spilled on the floor when he poured it from the sugarbowl back into the spout of the salt box.

"Sweep it up," ordered his mother, and Jerry had to get out the brush and dustpan.

When he went to the sink to rinse the sugarbowl, Jerry turned on the hot water so hard that he had to draw his hand back quickly or it would have been scalded. The sugarbowl fell in the sink and broke.

"Oh, dear! I need cast-iron dishes instead of china if you're to handle them," scolded Mrs. Martin.

"It just slipped out of my hands. I can mend it. That new glue I bought last week will mend china, glass, wood—anything. It says so on the tube."

Jerry looked so sorry for having broken the sugarbowl that his mother stopped being cross. "It was cracked anyway," she said consolingly. "Now go get dressed. As long as you're up you may as well stay up. Maybe I can get a little work out of you since you've got such an early start on the day."

Jerry groaned. What a dreary word—work! Just hearing it made him feel tired.

"I'll have pancakes ready in fifteen minutes," said his mother brightly. "With real maple syrup," she added.

Jerry could tell that she was tempting his appetite so he would not be tempted to go back to bed again. He did not mind. He was wide awake. It would be a novelty to have breakfast so early on a Saturday. Almost an April Fool joke on his mother. [Pg 5]

"And to think that last Saturday I could hardly get you out of bed at ten," said his mother as he left the kitchen.

At a little before nine Jerry had a broom in his hand. His orders were to sweep off the front steps. He went at it in a very leisurely manner. The sooner he finished the sooner his mother might give him some other chore to do. Even though Laura, the pleasant three-times-a-week maid, did most of the cleaning, Mrs. Martin believed her children should have a few household chores. Cathy, Jerry's twin sister, had to do the breakfast dishes on Saturdays, and even five-year-old Andy, the youngest member of the Martin family, was supposed to empty the wastebaskets.

Jerry's lazy broom finished the top step and began on the second. Then it occurred to him that it had been some time since he had investigated what was under the steps. He put down his broom while he knelt and applied one eye to one of the holes bored in the steps. The hole was big enough so if somebody dropped a dime just right it would go through. No dimes down there today.

As Jerry got to his feet he looked with approval at the big white clapboarded house where he lived. The morning sun made the small-paned windows shine. The Martin house was on the very edge of northwest Washington, D. C. It had been one of the original farmhouses when that part of Washington had been country, not city. Now there were houses all around, and it had been remodeled long before the Martins had bought it. Jerry's father and mother were proud of the old floorboards and wide fireplaces. Jerry especially liked the house because it had an attic and a big garage that had been a barn. [Pg 6]

As he picked up his broom again, his twin sister came to the door to shake a dustcloth. Also, he was sure, to check up on what he was doing.

"Cathy!" cried Jerry. "There's a great big spider crawling up your left leg."

Cathy did not let a yip out of her. "You can't April-fool me that easy," she said in a superior-sounding way that irritated Jerry.

Lately he and his twin often irritated each other. For one thing Cathy had recently developed an intense interest in how she looked, which seemed silly to Jerry.

"Better wipe that black off your left cheek," he said, and laughed when Cathy raised her hand to her cheek. "April Fool! Got you that time," he exulted.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" grumbled Cathy. "Half the time you don't even notice it when your face is dirty. To say nothing of your ears."

Jerry swished dirt off a step and changed the subject. "Have you fooled anybody yet this morning?" he asked.

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"Just Andy. I asked him if he knew that Bibsy had grown another head during the night, and he almost cried when he found I was April-fooling him. He said he had always wanted a two-headed cat. Then when I asked him if he had seen the alligator under the dining room table, he wouldn't look. He just said, 'What's a nalligator?' I told him it was like Mummy's handbag only much, much bigger, and he wants to see a real one. Mummy says we must take him to the zoo someday soon. But I can't remember seeing an alligator there, can you?"

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Cathy tossed her head, giving her pony tail a little exercise.

"Too bad you didn't say seal instead of alligator. There *are* seals at the zoo. Say, I wouldn't mind going to the zoo this forenoon. Even if we have to take Andy. Want to?"

"Nope. Mummy's taking me to town to buy a new dress for Easter." Cathy's eyes were bright with expectation.

It was beyond Jerry why Cathy should be pleased to waste good playing time in town buying a dress. She didn't used to be that way. She used to complain bitterly about having to change from blue jeans into a dress. She still liked wearing jeans, yet there came a shine in her eyes at even the mention of buying a new dress. Mummy said that eleven-going-on-twelve was getting to be a young lady. "Rats!" thought Jerry. It was silly for Cathy to begin to be young-lady-like when she could throw a baseball just about as well as a boy and sometimes better.

"Jerry!" called his mother from a front window. "I want you to run to the store for me. Right away."

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"Can't Cathy go?" Jerry really did not mind running (though he usually walked or rode his bike to the store) but it was a matter of principle with him to make a try at getting out of work.

"I have other things for Cathy to do," said Mrs. Martin and shut the window.

There were two steps still unswept but Jerry left them untouched by his lazy broom. After all, how could he be expected to do two things at once? He wished, not for the first time, that his mother would do her grocery shopping at the supermarket, which was far enough away so she would have to take the car. Instead, she mostly traded at Bartlett's, a small old-fashioned store three blocks from where the Martin family lived.

"There aren't many small grocery stores left and since we have one right in the neighborhood I like to patronize it," Jerry had heard his mother say. She liked stores where the owner came to wait on you. But Jerry suspected that one reason she traded at Bartlett's was because she thought it was good for a boy to run errands.

Going to the store was Jerry's chief chore. "Just because her grandfather had to chop wood and milk cows before breakfast when he was a boy, she thinks she should keep *me* busy," he

grumbled to himself as he went in the house. "Why do I have to go to the store? Bartlett delivers. Why can't she telephone her order and have it delivered?" [Pg 10]

He knew that the answer to that was more than his mother's desire to keep him busy. It was partly because she did not like to plan meals ahead. A brisk cold day might make her feel like having pork chops and hot applesauce for dinner. Or for a warm day, a platter of cold cuts and deviled eggs.

"It's just the day for calves' liver and bacon," she might say when Jerry got home from school in the afternoon. And she would send him to the store for a pound and a half of fresh calves' liver cut thin, "the way Mr. Bartlett knows I like it." A meal, his mother thought, should match her mood or the weather. She kept a few frozen vegetables on hand in case of need, but she much preferred fresh vegetables, freshly cut steaks and chops—fresh almost anything which could be bought fresh.

"I know it's a frozen food age but I still prefer my meat and vegetables fresh," Mrs. Martin often said. That meant a lot of trips to the store. Too many, Jerry thought. Especially on Saturdays, when she needed a lot of things.

His mother was in the kitchen mixing dough for doughnuts. Jerry was glad she made doughnuts instead of buying bakery ones. How good doughnuts tasted hot out of the fat! He wished a few of them were done so he could have two or three to eat on his way to the store.

"Want me to fry 'em for you and then go to the store?" he offered. [Pg 11]

"No. I need a carton of sour cream right away for my chocolate cake. And, let me see—five pounds of Idaho potatoes, two pounds of ground round steak—I feel like having meat loaf tonight—and two acorn squash, an avocado, a dozen oranges, and one loaf of white bread and one of whole wheat. Oh, and I've already telephoned and told Mr. Bartlett that you would be in to pick up a leg of lamb. He has spring lamb just in. You'll have to take your cart. There'll be too much for you to carry in your bicycle basket."

Jerry had felt lately that he was too old to be dragging home a cart filled with groceries. "How long will it be before Andy can take that old cart to the store? He can have it to keep any old time he'll take it to the store after groceries."

"You've only had it a year. Said you would be sure to use it for years. And you know Andy isn't nearly old enough to take a big cart out of the yard. Now run along. And don't stop to play on the way home."

Jerry got his cart out of the garage. The wheels squeaked but that didn't bother him. He met a couple of boys in his grade at school on his way to the store and arranged for baseball later.

Bartlett's store was on a street zoned only for houses, yet because the store had been there before the zoning law was passed it had been allowed to remain. The present proprietor was the third generation of Bartletts who had sold groceries there. He was a stout, pink-faced man, quite bald in front. Jerry said that Mr. Bartlett's forehead went way to the back of his head. When Jerry went in the store, Mr. Bartlett was waiting on a tall woman with a blue scarf over her head, and Bill, the clerk who put up orders, was tossing groceries into cartons, each carton for a customer. [Pg 12]

Jerry had to wait while the woman with the blue scarf decided what she would have for Sunday dinner. It seemed to take her a long time to make up her mind. After trying without much success to engage Bill in conversation, Jerry stood in front of the candy showcase next to the cash register and wished he had money with him besides the ten-dollar bill his mother had given him to pay for the groceries.

My, but the candy looked yummy! There were glass trays of round mints, pink, white, green, and yellow. And caramels, chocolate-covered nuts, coconut bonbons, chocolate nougats—nothing there Jerry didn't like. He looked at the candy yearningly.

Now the lady had decided on a sirloin steak, thank goodness. Another customer came in but Jerry would be next to be waited on. He would speak right up and say he was next if Mr. Bartlett started to wait on somebody else first, he decided.

The lady wearing the blue scarf reached into her handbag and got out her billfold. "I want to pay my March grocery bill," she said. She stood beside Jerry near the cash register while Mr. Bartlett was behind the counter giving her change. [Pg 13]

"Don't go off without your little bonus," said Mr. Bartlett. "My daddy and my granddaddy before him always gave folks a little bonus when they paid their bills."

Jerry saw Mr. Bartlett get out a half-pound pasteboard box. Saw him reach in the showcase and bring out enough candy to fill two rows in the box. Jerry had heard that Mr. Bartlett gave candy to charge customers when they paid their bills, but he had never before been in the store and seen it happen. The sight saddened him. For he knew that never for him would Mr. Bartlett fill a half-pound box of candy as a gift. The Martin family never charged groceries. They never charged anything. Mr. Martin believed in paying cash for everything. Even for a new car. He was funny that way. Jerry had never much minded until this minute when he saw a charge customer rewarded for being a charge customer.

"Wish we had a charge account. I wouldn't have to worry about losing money on the way home, if

we did," thought Jerry, remembering the tendency of loose change to fall out of his pocket when he jumped over hedges. "Besides, Mr. Bartlett must want people to have charge accounts or he wouldn't give them a bonus when they pay their bills. Stands to reason. He likes to have folks charge their groceries instead of paying cash, so a charge account must be a good thing. Wish my father thought so. If he were here and saw Mr. Bartlett hand over that free candy, he'd be bound to see it pays to charge your groceries."

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"Now, young man, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Bartlett. Jerry had been thinking so hard about the advantages of having a charge account that he had hard work remembering what his mother had sent him to the store for. But he managed to recollect all but the avocado. Jerry didn't like avocados so it was easy for him to forget that. It was while Mr. Bartlett was counting out a dozen oranges that Jerry had what he considered a very bright idea. There was a way he could convince his father that Bartlett's store was the one place where it didn't pay to pay cash.

"It won't be dishonest," Jerry argued to himself. "I won't be getting a cent out of it. Only a box of candy at the end of the month. And if we eat an awful lot and the bill is nice and big for April, maybe Mr. Bartlett will give me a pound box of candy instead of a half pound."

The plan that had popped into Jerry's mind was this—he would not pay for groceries for the month of April but charge them. He would keep in a safe place the money his mother gave him to pay for them. And the first day of May he would come in with it and pay the bill and be given a box of candy.

"When I take the candy home and pass the box to Dad, he'll see it's a good thing to charge our groceries," thought Jerry. The scene was so vivid in his mind that he could almost see his father taking a chocolate-covered almond.

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"I said that will be eight dollars and twenty-one cents," said Mr. Bartlett, a bit impatiently.

Jerry reached in his pocket and got out his mother's coin purse. He preferred carrying money loose in his pocket but she had said he could risk losing his own money that way, not hers. It was while he was opening the purse that he suddenly decided to try out his bright idea.

"Charge it, please," he said huskily.

"You folks opening a charge account?" asked Mr. Bartlett.

"Isn't that all right with you?"

"Sure. Sure. You've been trading with me for years. And your father's credit is good as gold, which is more than I can say for some." Mr. Bartlett made out a slip, which he put in the bag of groceries.

"He knows me and can tell I'm honest," thought Jerry happily, as he put the heavy bag of groceries in his cart. The grocery slip he took out of the bag and put in his pocket. "I must remember to save all the slips," he thought.

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Jerry was almost home when he remembered that his ten-dollar bill was still unbroken. And that he had to have change to give his mother before he could put the eight dollars and twenty-one cents the groceries cost in a safe hiding place. It was Mr. Bartlett's money, Jerry thought. Jerry would just be keeping the money for him until a month was up.

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Jerry was reluctant to go back to Bartlett's store and ask to have his bill changed. He was sure Mr. Bartlett would think it odd, after he had charged the groceries.

"I'll have to walk way down to the shopping center," thought Jerry. Thinking about all the streets he would have to cross, with the trouble of getting the heavy cart up and down the curbs, Jerry was not so sure that starting a charge account had been such a good idea after all. He had a feeling that in a way he might have played sort of an April Fool joke on himself. But it was too late now to undo what he had done. He would feel like a ninny going back and telling Mr. Bartlett that he had decided to pay cash, that he had changed his mind about opening a charge account for the Martin family.

"I'll get my bill changed at the A & P," Jerry decided. And went so fast in that direction that the bag holding the potatoes fell out of the cart and broke and Jerry lost two of them down a sewer. After that he went more slowly, though he found it hard to make the heavy cart go downhill slowly. It made his arms ache holding it back.

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2

Change for a Ten-Dollar Bill

Having to drag a heavy cart with a big bag of groceries in it nearly a mile to the shopping center became considerable of a chore even before Jerry was halfway there.

"Lemme see," he thought as he bumped the cart down a curb. "I know I have to put away eight dollars and twenty-one cents for Mr. Bartlett. How much is that from ten dollars? That's the right change for Mummy."

Jerry had a pained look on his face as he tried to do the subtraction in his head. He was never any good in mental arithmetic. Give him a pencil in his hand and he could do pretty well at figuring. But his mind seemed to go blank when he had to carry and all that in his head. He reached in all his pockets but did not have a pencil. And he knew he had to ask for the right change.

Just then Jerry saw Carl Weston coming up the street. He was a classmate of Jerry's in the sixth grade. He wore thick-lensed glasses and was quite a brain. He'd be almost sure to have a pencil or a ballpoint pen. But Jerry asked him and he didn't, so Jerry gave him a line about being a whiz at arithmetic and said he bet Carl could say right off how much money you'd have left if you subtracted eight dollars and twenty-one cents from ten dollars.

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For a few seconds Jerry saw a human adding-machine at work. Then Carl said, "One dollar and seventy-nine cents, of course." He didn't add "Stupid," but he looked as if that were what he was thinking. Jerry didn't care. He knew a lot of important things Carl didn't know, such as baseball averages and who were the home-run kings for the past five years.

"Thanks, Carl. See you." And Jerry hurried off before Carl could ask just why he wanted to know the answer to that particular sum in subtraction. "One dollar and seventy-nine cents," Jerry kept saying to himself so he wouldn't forget.

There were long lines of shoppers at the checking-out counters at the A & P. Jerry had left his cart outside the store, thinking it not tactful to bring in a big bag of groceries he had bought in another store. He took his place in what he thought was the shortest line. Some woman had forgotten to have her bag of bananas weighed and that held up the line. The next woman wanted to cash a check and that had to be okayed by the manager. Jerry fidgeted. He saw that the woman ahead of the woman ahead of him had a cart so piled with groceries that she must be feeding a boardinghouse, or an awfully big family.

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It was all of fifteen minutes, but seemed twice as long, before Jerry reached the clerk behind the counter and asked for change.

"Sorry, but I'm short of change," said the young man behind the counter.

A wave of discouragement swept over Jerry. Perhaps storekeepers wouldn't give change to anybody who wasn't buying anything. But he had to get his ten-dollar bill changed. He didn't have the heart to wait in another line to see if another clerk might give him change. He went out. He would have to try another store.

He opened the door of the florist shop and backed out. The woman in charge there looked just too elegant to approach. At the hardware store he was told that he could have two fives for a ten if that would help him. It wouldn't, so Jerry still had his ten-dollar bill unchanged.

Here was the barbershop. One particular barber usually cut Jerry's hair. Jerry was glad to find that George was not busy.

"Thought I gave you a haircut less than a week ago," George greeted him. "Did you come in to get your head shaved? Be cooler, warm weather coming on."

Jerry explained that he was satisfied with the state of his crew cut. Rather timidly he asked to have his ten-dollar bill changed, told the exact change he had to have.

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"Guess I can oblige you, but Saturday's a bad day for change, with the banks closed all day," said George. He went to the cash register and counted out the change Jerry needed.

"Thank *you*," said Jerry with great heartiness.

Now to get home in a hurry. He went out to get his cart, which he had left outside the barbershop. A big red setter dog was pawing the bag of groceries. "Red! Get away from there!" Jerry yelled. With horror he saw that the dog had the leg of lamb in his strong jaws.

"Drop that, Red!" shouted Jerry. He ran and grabbed the other end of the leg of lamb and tried to get it away from the dog.

Red was a good-natured animal who often seemed to forget he was a dog, he so much wanted to be one of the boys. He especially enjoyed taking part in baseball games. He ran bases and barked as loud as any of the players could shout. Last Saturday Jerry might have made a home run if Red had not dashed in front of him so Jerry fell over him. Now Red thought a tug of war with a leg of lamb was a fine game.

Jerry pulled. The red setter braced his legs and pulled.

"You mean dog! Leggo! Leggo!" screamed Jerry.

The desperation in his voice finally had an effect on Red's tender heart. He let go of his end of the leg of lamb so suddenly that Jerry sat down hard. The leg of lamb fell in the dirt.

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Jerry brushed off bits of gravel from his Sunday dinner. Red's teeth marks didn't show unless you looked very closely. Jerry wrapped the leg of lamb in the torn paper bag. It was a lucky thing he had come out of the barbershop before Red had run off with it. "That dog is getting to be a nuisance," he thought. But he really liked Red and had often wished he were one of the Martin family instead of belonging to a neighbor.

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It was uphill most of the way home. Jerry got pretty tired of pulling his heavy cart. He wished he could think up a way of motorizing it, fix it up like sort of a four-wheeled motor scooter. Maybe put an engine on the back like an outboard motor. Such speculations helped pass the time, but he was tired before he got home.

It was disappointing to find that the doughnuts had been fried and put away. And Mrs. Martin, dressed for town, scolded Jerry soundly for being over an hour going to the store.

"I had to postpone making my cake," she said sharply, "for if Cathy and I are to get any shopping done and get back in time for lunch, we have to start. You'll have to look after Andy. Take him

with you but keep an eye on him if you go out with the boys."

"Other boys don't have to have their little brothers tagging along," complained Jerry.

"Don't try my patience too far or you won't go out at all."

Jerry saw a look in his mother's eyes that made him wary of making her any more displeased with him than she already was. [Pg 24]

"All right, I'll take him. If Red follows us to the park Andy can play with him and keep that big nuisance from trying to play ball with us."

Jerry was relieved when his mother unpacked the groceries and did not notice that anything unusual had happened to the leg of lamb.

"Where's my change?" she asked.

Jerry almost got out Mr. Bartlett's eight dollars and twenty-one cents. Hastily he switched his hand to another pocket for the one dollar and seventy-nine cents due his mother. He handed it over, his eyes downcast. For some reason he did not want to meet his mother's eye just then. Whenever she looked him straight in the eye, Jerry had always found it next to impossible to keep anything from her.

"Thank you for going to the store for me. But honestly, Jerry, you're too old for me to have to tell you every time not to stop and play on the way home," she said.

Play! So that was what she thought he had been doing. Little did she know how little like play it was. Jerry had to stifle the impulse to tell her all he had been through in the past hour and a half.

"Saturday's a busy time at the grocery stores," he said.

His mother let that pass for an excuse. She was in a hurry to be off. And Jerry could tell that his twin sister was pleased with his being stuck with looking after Andy while she was off admiring herself in store mirrors. [Pg 25]

"Don't let Andy lose his windbreaker," she warned in an almost grownup manner. Trying to button her jacket and hold on to her red patent leather handbag at the same time, she dropped the bag and its contents spilled on the floor.

With horror Jerry saw that Cathy had been carrying a lipstick of shiny gold-colored metal. "Don't tell me you've taken to using lipstick! You trying to look like a clown?"

"It's just from the dime store. To use if my lips get chapped. Take your foot off that, Jerry Martin. Oh, you've bent it," she cried.

"Want me to wipe away your tears?" taunted Jerry. That was his latest favorite remark. He said it whether it was appropriate or not, liking the sound of it and the reaction it drew from family and playmates. Now Cathy tossed her head and glared at him.

"I *was* sorry that Andy broke your model satellite but now I'm not."

"Who cares?"

"Make Jerry stop being so aggravating," Cathy begged her mother.

"Come on. We haven't time to try to reform your brother this morning. Be a good boy, Andy. Mind Jerry. Don't let your little brother out of your sight, Jerry."

Jerry was relieved when his mother and sister had gone. It gave him a chance to find a good hiding place for Mr. Bartlett's eight dollars and twenty-one cents. Somewhere up attic would be the best place, he decided. [Pg 26]

"You play with your blocks. I have to go up attic for a minute," Jerry told Andy.

"I'll go with you."

"No, you don't."

It took several minutes to get Andy so interested in his toys that he consented to be left while Jerry went up attic. Then he dashed up two flights of stairs. Now where should he hide the money? In the drawer of that old chest? No, his mother was forever cleaning out drawers. In one of the garment bags in which were hung out-of-season clothes? That might do. He would need the hiding place only for the month of April—before warm weather. Because it was a cool day it seemed to Jerry that it would be ages before anybody needed summer clothes. He put Mr. Bartlett's money in one of his mother's shoes, a white one he found in the bottom of one of the garment bags.



Jerry felt that he had been engaged in quite an enterprise. "And I've not gone to all this work just for myself," he argued in his mind as he zipped up the garment bag. "I'm doing it for the whole family. For I'm not going to hog the candy for myself. Course I may help myself to a piece or two when I get it. No, I'll bring the whole box home and pass it around," he decided generously. "And if Dad is convinced, and that box of free candy should convince him that it *is* a good thing to charge groceries at Bartlett's, we'll go on charging them. Every month. At the end of a year I bet we'll have gotten more than five pounds of free candy. Oh, boy!"

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Small footsteps sounded and there was Andy.

"Downstairs was lonesome," he said plaintively.

"Okay, I'm all through with what I was doing up here. I'll get my bat and ball and we'll go out."

"I'll play ball with you."

"Tell you what you can do, Andy. I'll let you hold my catcher's mitt when I'm not using it. And I'll throw you a few easy ones. You're old enough to begin to learn to play baseball."

Andy looked so pleased that Jerry's heart warmed to him. He decided that when Mr. Bartlett presented that box of candy, Andy should have the first pick.

"He can have his choice of any piece in the box," thought Jerry benevolently. And waited quite patiently while Andy came down the stairs slowly all the way like a grownup and not two feet on the same step like a baby. Sometimes Jerry did not mind having Andy tag along as much as he made out.

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3

P. T. A. Meeting

"Why did it have to be pleasant all week and then rain on Saturday?" thought Jerry unhappily the following Saturday. He watched the rain slant against the front windows for a while and then picked up the morning paper to reread the comics. "April showers may bring May flowers, but it's tough on baseball," he said to himself.

Andy came in the living room. He had a much folded and unfolded sheet of paper in his hand. "Help me learn my piece, will you, Jerry? I can read pictures but not hard words. But I know most of my piece. Cathy taught me."

Andy was to make his first public appearance at the P. T. A. meeting Monday evening. His kindergarten class was to perform a short play about Goldilocks and the three bears. Once a year

the Oakhurst elementary school put on a program by the pupils for the parents. This year Cathy was to sing in a girls' chorus and Jerry, one of a rhythm band, was to shake bells during the playing of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" by John Philip Sousa. Andy had an important part on the program. He was to speak a poem to introduce the play about Goldilocks. Miss Prouty, his teacher, called it the prologue. Andy called it his log piece.

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Jerry took the grimy piece of paper. "Let's hear it," he told Andy. "Shoot."

Andy stood with his legs far apart, his head tilted upward as if he were reading his "piece" from the ceiling. His usually merry face looked solemn, his dark eyes worried. Hardly above a whisper he recited:

We welcome you, dear parents,
And hope you'll like our play.
'Twas written by Miss Prouty's class
Just for the P. T. A.

"How could your class write a play when you don't even know how to write?" asked Jerry.

"I can print all my name," said Andy in his normal voice. "Miss Prouty says that part of writing is thinking and saying. So she read 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' to us three times. Then our class said it to her and she wrote it down. But she wrote my log piece by herself."

"You'd better say the first verse again and a lot louder," Jerry suggested. "Nobody will hear you if you don't speak good and loud."

So Andy said the first verse again good and loud. He made the phrase "Just for the P. T. A." sound like a football yell.

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"Good! That ought to wow 'em. Now say the next verse."

Again Andy's eyes sought the ceiling.

You may have heard the story
Of this girl with golden hair,
Who lost her way in a dark wood—

Andy could not remember what came next.

"Belonging to a bear," Jerry prompted. "I don't remember that the story said anything about Papa Bear owning the woods, but maybe he did. Go on, Andy."

Andy could not remember any of the last verse, so Jerry read it to him slowly.

I won't go on with the story,
For our play will now portray
What happened to little Goldilocks
The day she lost her way.

"Say it, Andy," urged Jerry.

Andy pouted. "I don't want to. I hate my log piece," he said fiercely. "I wanted to be the great big bear. I wanted to say, 'Who's been eating my porridge?' I can talk the loudest. But Ned Brooks is going to be the great big bear." Andy's lower lip quivered. He looked ready to bawl.

"Want to hear some keen poetry?" asked Jerry, hoping to cheer Andy.

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Andy showed no sign of wanting to but Jerry did not wait for encouragement. With a lilt of enjoyment in his voice he said a rhyme he had learned sometime—he could not remember when or where.

Gene, Gene—had a machine.
Joe, Joe—made it go.
Frank, Frank—turned the crank.
His mother came out and gave him a spank,
And threw him over a sandbank.

The last two lines Jerry said very rapidly, coming out good and strong on the word *sandbank*.

Like April weather Andy's stormy face turned sunny. "Say it again," he said delightedly.

Jerry obliged.

"Say it again," Andy begged when Jerry had finished the second time.

"Say, what do you think I am, a phonograph record?" asked Jerry. But he good-naturedly recited the rhyme a third time.

"I can say it," cried Andy. And he recited the rhyme without forgetting a word.

"Say, you can learn like a shot when you really want to," said Jerry admiringly.

"I don't think that's a nice poem to teach to Andy," said Cathy, who had come in and listened to

her small brother.

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"I'd like to know why not?" asked Jerry.

"Poetry should be beautiful," said Cathy dreamily. "Like that poem Miss Kitteridge read us day before yesterday.

"Life has loveliness to sell," quoted Cathy.

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"Blah! That stinks," said Jerry. "But I liked it when Miss Kitteridge read us 'Casey at the Bat.' That's *good* poetry."

"Not as good as poetry by Sara Teasdale."

"It is, too."

"It is not."

"There's no law that says that everybody has to like the same kind of poetry," said Mrs. Martin from the doorway. "You twins don't have to show dispositions to match the weather. Just because it's unpleasant you don't need to be. I want you to run to the store, Jerry, and get two pounds or a little over of haddock. I had intended to have cold roast beef for dinner but it's such a chilly day I think a good New England fish chowder will just hit the spot."

"But I went to the store this morning," protested Jerry.

"And you took time enough getting home with them to have grown the vegetables and slaughtered the meat."

Jerry looked at the floor. "I'll go," he said in a dull voice as if the burden of life was heavy.

With leaden feet Jerry went out to the garage for his bike. He had a five-dollar bill in his mother's coin purse and he was worrying about how he was going to get it changed. Every time his mother had asked him to go to the store all week Jerry had worried about getting the right change. This morning had been the worst. He had had to take his cart again and that had slowed him up. Then when he had walked in the rain all the long way to the shopping centre, George, the barber, had not been a bit obliging.

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George had been busy when Jerry had come in the barbershop. Nor did he look up when Jerry spoke to him, giving him a pleasant "Good morning." Of course Jerry had waited until George was not busy before asking him for change for a ten. Jerry needed only forty cents to take back to his mother this time. George had been very reluctant to change Jerry's bill.

"You're getting to be a nuisance, running in to get bills changed," George had complained. But he had given Jerry nine dollars in bills and a dollar in change for his ten.

Jerry dreaded to have to ask George for change twice the same day. He had never had to do that before. But where else could he get change? All the way to the store he worried.

Jerry was the only customer in Bartlett's store. And Mr. Bartlett did have some nice haddock. Jerry had hoped he would be out of fish but no such luck.

"Nasty day," said Mr. Bartlett, as he weighed the fish.

Jerry agreed. It seemed to him to be a particularly nasty day. He put the grocery slip in his pocket and hurried out of the store. Even the sight of the candy in the showcase had not lifted his spirits. The half pound of candy he might get when he paid the bill at the end of the month seemed a small reward for all he was going through to earn it. "Only three weeks to go," he told himself, putting the package of fish in his bicycle basket. But three weeks seemed a long time.

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Maybe it hadn't been a good idea, this charging business. But it was no good time to stop now. He would have no candy to present to his parents to prove the advantage of charging groceries at Bartlett's. No, having begun, Jerry had to see it through.

"Might as well get killed for a sheep as a lamb," Jerry thought, riding through a puddle on his way to the shopping center. It was a remark he had heard his father make, and seemed somehow appropriate.

Jerry had to wait and wait before George would notice him.

"Don't tell me you've come again for change!" George cried. "I won't give it to you."

"Please, just this one time," Jerry pleaded. "I have to have it. Honest."

Grumbling, George went to the cash register and changed the bill. Then he took Jerry firmly by the shoulder. "Out you go and stay out. I don't want to see hide nor hair of you again until you need your next haircut. Understand?"

Jerry understood. He realized that getting bills changed at the barbershop was over.

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Jerry was not his usual buoyant self over the weekend. His mother thought he might be getting a cold and gave him vitamin pills and made him drink extra orange juice. She knew something was troubling him but could not get out of him what it was. Jerry shut a door of communication between them. He found it lonely, having to be on his guard against blurting out his secret.

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At a little after seven on Monday evening, the whole Martin family piled in the car to go to the P. T. A. meeting. It was unusual for the children to go to a P. T. A. but not for Mr. and Mrs. Martin. Jerry and Cathy insisted that their parents go to the meetings, for a count was made and the class represented by the most parents got an award. Now that Andy was in kindergarten both parents stood up when the count was for Miss Prouty's room. And Mr. and Mrs. Martin stood up to be counted twice for the sixth grade.

All the Martins but Andy took seats near the front of the auditorium. He had to go immediately behind scenes on the stage, since the play he was to be in was to come first on the program. That was in order to allow the parents of the kindergartners to take them home early if they so wished.

Andy had looked a bit pale when he left his family.

"I hope he's not so excited he'll throw up," Cathy said worriedly. "He looks pretty scared."

"Scared? Andy scared? Of course he's not scared," said Jerry stoutly, though he knew very well that Andy really was scared and was only defending him. [Pg 39]

"Anyway, he knows his piece," said Cathy. "He said it over to me three times before dinner and didn't make a mistake."

Before the curtain went up, Miss Kurtz, the principal, made a short speech about giving parents an opportunity to share in the school activities of their children. She spoke about the importance of creativity, a long word Jerry did not quite understand, but thought meant making up things. Then the curtain rose and there was the bears' house. Only it didn't have any upstairs. Goldilocks wasn't there yet but the porridge was on the table in a big, a medium, and a tiny bowl. And here came Andy, walking stiffly to the front of the stage. He looked very small.

Jerry saw that his father and mother looked anxious, as anxious as Jerry felt. "Come on, Andy. Say it and get it over with," Jerry muttered.

"Sh-sh," said Cathy.

The audience looked at Andy and Andy looked at them. Seconds passed. Andy did not utter a word.

From behind scenes Miss Prouty prompted him.

"We welcome you, dear parents," she said in a voice barely audible to the audience.

Andy's lips did not move. His face looked frozen in fright. He just stood there. [Pg 40]

Miss Prouty prompted him again. Still Andy did not open his mouth. Some boy near the back of the hall clapped. That sound seemed to wake Andy from his trance of fear. He raised his head and gave the audience a large, beaming smile. Then Andy spoke his piece.

Gene, Gene—had a machine.
Joe, Joe—made it go.
Frank, Frank—turned the crank.
His mother came out and gave him a spank
And threw him over a sandbank.

Andy spoke up nice and loud and then made a bow. Apparently he did not realize that he had spoken the wrong piece.

The auditorium suddenly rocked with laughter. Miss Prouty shooed Andy off the stage and apologized for him. Then she spoke the "Dear parents" poem herself.

Cathy just had time to whisper angrily to Jerry, "It's all your fault—you taught him that awful rhyme," before Andy came to sit with his family. He did not seem at all upset and apparently enjoyed the program, though he yawned a few times before it was over.

Everybody said it had been a good program. In the car going home, Mr. Martin said he could hear Cathy's voice above the other girls', sweet as a bird. And Mrs. Martin said that Jerry had rung his bells exactly on time and very nicely. They carefully avoided mentioning anything about Andy's piece. [Pg 41]

They were just getting out of the car when Andy broke into loud wails of extreme sorrow.

"I said the wrong piece," he sobbed. "I said the wrong piece and everybody laughed at me."

"Never you mind, son. Folks enjoy a good laugh," said Mr. Martin.

"There, there!" Andy's mother soothed him. "We all make mistakes. He's getting a delayed reaction," she told the others. "And it's long past his bedtime."

Jerry really felt sorry for Andy. "Tell you what, Andy, I promise I'll take you to the zoo next Saturday. You'll like that, won't you?"

"I don't want to see the loud animals. I want to go see the quiet ones," said Andy, sniffing though his sobs had ceased.

"Okay, I'll take you to the Museum of Natural History," agreed Jerry, understanding that by "loud" Andy meant alive and by "quiet" he meant stuffed animals.

"Ned Brooks hollered so loud my ears hurt. He sounded like this. 'Who's been eating *my* porridge?'" Andy bellowed the words so loud that his mother put her hands over her ears.

"Sometimes I think I would prefer quiet children," she said.

Andy began speaking for Baby Bear, his voice tiny. He was in high spirits again. Jerry wished that all his fret and worry about the charge account and getting change could disappear as easily as Andy's sorrow. During the P. T. A. meeting Jerry had pushed his worries to the background of his thoughts. Now he found them right up front again. The next time his mother sent him to the store, where was he to go to get change now that George the barber had failed him? [Pg 42]

The family drank hot chocolate and ate cookies in the kitchen before going to bed. The half-melted marshmallows on top gave Andy a white mustache before his mother wiped his face with a napkin. He got in her lap and snuggled against her while she sipped her chocolate. When you were little like Andy you were easily forgiven for almost anything, Jerry thought, his conscience troubled about the charge account.

Jerry was finishing his second cup of hot chocolate when an easy solution to the change problem dawned on him. He had made several trips to the store this week and each time put away Mr. Bartlett's money in bills and small change. There must be money enough up attic in that white shoe to change a five and probably a ten. Yes, Jerry was sure he could change a ten. "I can make my own change," he thought happily. And suddenly the charge account seemed a good scheme again.

"You look mighty pleased with yourself, Jerry," said his mother.

"I just thought of something."

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"What?" asked Cathy.

"I'll tell you sometime," Jerry promised.

"Why does Jerry have to act so darned mysterious lately?" Cathy complained to her mother.

"A boy has a right to keep a few things to himself," said Mrs. Martin.

Jerry was grateful to his mother for taking his part. "When I get that candy from Bartlett's," he thought, "I won't forget that I've promised the first piece to Andy. But my mother will get the next piece."

Jerry thought of his mother reaching in the box for a pink mint and smiled.

"You're up to something. I can tell it by the way you look," remarked Cathy.

He would have to be on his guard against Cathy, Jerry realized. Up till now he had found it almost impossible to keep a secret from his twin sister.

"Want me to wipe away your tears?" he jibed. It seemed mean to say something on purpose to make Cathy mad but that would take her mind off being curious.

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4

No Safe Hiding Place

The next week was not as trying to Jerry as the week before, now that he was able to make change up attic. Yet it grew increasingly difficult to dodge Cathy. Time after time she caught up with him either coming up or going down the attic stairs.

"What are you doing up attic?" she kept asking.

"Nothing," he would say. Or, "Don't you wish you knew?" He even told her that she would know all there was to know about it in less than a month, that is, if there were anything to know. This last statement was the truth, though Cathy did not believe him. She kept hounding him.

On Saturday, though it was a good day for baseball, Jerry remembered his promise to take Andy to see the "quiet" animals. Since their mother did not have time to drive them to town, they took a bus. It was a short walk from the bus stop to the Museum of Natural History, one of the buildings of the Smithsonian Institution, but Jerry knew the way.

Although the Smithsonian had just opened, there were already two big buses unloading at the front door. *East Liverpool*, the signs on the buses said. That was in Ohio, Jerry told his small brother. And the big boys and girls getting out of the buses were doubtless members of a high school graduating class on a tour of Washington.

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"People come from all over the United States to see Washington, especially this time of year when the cherry blossoms are out," said Jerry. "Guess they wish they were like us and lived here." It suddenly seemed pretty nice to Jerry to live in a city so important that it was visited by people from all parts of the country.

"I'd rather live out West with the cowboys," said Andy. He never would believe that ever so many people out West were not cowboys or Indians.

Before going to see the stuffed animals Andy wanted to take a look at his favorite dinosaur. There were other dinosaurs in the exhibit but Andy always devoted himself to the one nearest the entrance. "Dip," he called the enormous skeleton, though its full name was *Diplodocus*. Jerry was interested in reading that the bones of this dinosaur had been found out in Utah and that it was seventy feet long and twelve feet high. Andy did not care about details.

"Good old Dip!" said Andy, and gazed at his bony friend with great satisfaction.

The boys lingered a long time looking at the "quiet" animals. Andy wished that he could have one of the two bear cubs to take home with him, now that he was too old to play with Teddy bears. He also thought it would be fun to learn to ride a tame buffalo.

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"You can't tame a buffalo," said Jerry.

"I could," said Andy with complete confidence. "Now I want to see the Indians."

The boys looked at displays of Indians doing a snake dance, Indians weaving baskets, grinding corn, weaving rugs, playing games—or just standing, being Indians.

"Where did they find so many Indians to stuff?" asked Andy.

Jerry barely stopped himself from giving a loud ha-ha. He decided not to laugh at his little brother. After seeing so many stuffed animals it was a natural thing for Andy to think the Indians were also stuffed. They certainly looked real.

"They don't stuff people," Jerry explained kindly. "The Indians are sort of statues, only some of them have more clothes on."

Andy seemed a bit disappointed that they were not real Indians.

After a quick trip upstairs to see an enormous whale, Jerry and Andy were through with the museum. Having had nothing to eat since breakfast, they were naturally half-starved, so, although it was now only eleven-thirty, they decided to have lunch. Their mother had given them lunch money. There was no lunchroom near the museum. They had to walk way up to Pennsylvania Avenue before they found a cafeteria. Then they had a satisfying lunch of hamburgers, milk, lemon pie, and chocolate layer cake.

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Being downtown gave both boys a sort of holiday feeling and they were in no hurry to go home. For Jerry it was a reprieve from his worry about the charge account, which by now had become a burden. Once having picked it up, he had to go on carrying it. Here in town with Andy, the weight seemed less heavy.

"While we're so near, we may as well go take a look at the cherry blossoms," suggested Jerry.

Andy did not much care about flowers he was not allowed to pick but he let himself be persuaded. On their way to the Tidal Basin, where the cherry blossoms were, they were not far from the Washington Monument, with its circle of flags blowing in the breeze. Andy teased to go up in the Monument but Jerry said there were too many people waiting in line.

"We'll do it some other time," he promised.

It pleased Andy that he was doing something with Jerry again. He took big steps to match Jerry's.

Near the Tidal Basin there were people taking pictures of each other under the flowering trees. Along the path close to the water, men, women, and young people were walking. There, the cherry trees bent over the basin to see themselves reflected in the quiet depths.

Andy sniffed the air. "Smells nice," he said.

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Jerry could understand why so many people came to Washington to see the cherry blossoms. "They're really something," he said.

"The pinky trees look like strawberry ice cream cones," said Andy, which for him was high praise. Strawberry was his favorite ice cream.

It was nearly four before Jerry and Andy got home. The house next door to theirs had been vacant so long that they were surprised to see a moving van in front of it.

"Well, what do you know? Somebody must have bought the house. Wonder what they'll be like," mused Jerry.

They stood and watched the movers take in a long green sofa, a table, and several cartons.

"I want something to eat," said Andy.

So did Jerry. It was a long time since lunch. "What can we have to eat?" he called to his mother just as soon as he was in the back door. He and Andy went looking for their mother and found her sitting by a window in the living room, which overlooked the house next door. She was watching the moving.

"We saw all the quiet animals and Dip and the pretend Indians," Andy informed his mother. "I'm hungry."

"You can have cookies and a glass of milk but don't touch the cake. That's for dessert tonight."

"Where's Cathy?" Jerry thought to ask.

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"Seems as if she said something about looking for something up attic," said Mrs. Martin.

Jerry forgot his hunger. It seemed to him a sneaky thing for Cathy to do, to go searching the attic while he was out of the house. Had she found Mr. Bartlett's money? If she had she would have been downstairs with it. But any second she might find it. Jerry rushed for the stairs.

Breathless, he arrived at the top of the second flight.

The attic was unfinished—low under the two gables. Against one of the high walls hung a row of garment bags. Mr. Bartlett's money was in the third one. Jerry tried to keep from looking at it. Cathy was smart enough to watch where he was looking. She was busy tossing stuff out of the bottom drawer of an old chest of drawers.

"What do you think you're doing?" Jerry asked her.

"Mummy's going to house-clean up here Monday. I'm helping by clearing out drawers."

"You mean you're snooping around to see what you can find."

Cathy stopped pawing in the drawer. "So you *are* hiding something up here. I knew it. I knew it."

Too late Jerry realized he had said too much. He had made Cathy more suspicious of him than ever.

Cathy picked the stuff up off the floor—it was mostly cloth saved for mending and for rags—and crammed it in the drawer, shutting it crookedly. She blinked her blue eyes at Jerry. "Tell me what you're hiding up here. Cross my heart I won't tell on you."

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It irritated Jerry to have Cathy blink her eyes at him.

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"Whatever gave you the idea I was hiding anything up here or anywhere?"

"I'd tell you if I had something to hide."

"Yeah! You would not."

"I would, too. You're mean. You're the meanest boy I ever knew."

"I'd a darn sight rather be mean than snoopy. You're just a sneaky snooper, that's what you are."

"I hate you."

"See if I care."

Cathy's eyes blazed with blue fire. Then Jerry was surprised to see them fill with tears. She got to her feet and rushed toward the stairs.

"Want me to wipe away your tears?" called Jerry, as she clattered down the stairs. The instant the words were out, he was a little ashamed of them. He had not meant to make her cry. Why did she have to cry so easy? She hadn't used to.

Jerry couldn't figure out what had gotten into Cathy lately. All this caring about how she looked. All this fussing about clothes. And the way she blinked her eyes at boys. It was enough to make a person sick. Less than a year ago he had heard Cathy say that girls who used powder and lipstick were dopes. Now she herself was carrying a lipstick in her handbag. Jerry guessed she had not

sunk so low she used eye makeup but he wouldn't put it past her almost any time. Not long ago he and Cathy had liked to do the same things, liked the same things. Now they didn't even agree about movies. Cathy actually didn't mind love in a picture. She even liked pictures in which the hero kissed a girl, and Jerry could hardly bear to see a cowboy kiss a horse. Jerry missed the Cathy he used to know. The way she was now made him mad.

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One thing was sure. The attic was no longer a safe place for Mr. Bartlett's money. Not with Cathy snooping around, for she was a good finder. Jerry went to the garment bag, got the money out of the white shoe—my but there was getting to be a lot—and put the bills in one pants pocket and crammed the silver into another. He would have to find another hiding place. But where?

Jerry went downstairs. Cathy had joined her mother and Andy at the window. They were watching the movers.

"Usually you can get an idea about what people are like by their furniture," Jerry heard his mother say, "but I never saw such a conglomeration go into any house. Our new neighbor's name is Bullfinch and he's a retired college professor. His having a lot of books I can understand but why a jungle gym? He doesn't have any children. There are just he and his wife."

Jerry would have avoided being near the family until he had found a new hiding place for Mr. Bartlett's money if Cathy had not exclaimed, "Look at that! Assorted sizes of cages."

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Jerry had to come and look, too, then. He saw one of the movers going in the house next door with a small gilded cage in one hand and a picture frame in the other. After him came the other moving man with a cage so large it was all he could carry.

"The smaller one could be for a bird but what on earth could the big one be for?" Mrs. Martin was puzzled.

"Maybe he has a chimp for a pet," Jerry contributed.

"Heaven forbid!" gasped his mother.

"But chimps are wonderful pets. Remember reading about that chimp that does finger painting? Her owner sells the pictures. Actually gets real money for them. That's more than old Andy gets for *his* finger painting," said Jerry.

"Not if I wanted to," said Andy.

Several large oil paintings were carried into the house next door, but they were too far away for Jerry to judge if they had been painted by a chimp. He guessed not. Pictures painted by chimps weren't usually put in heavy gold frames. In went a tall grandfather clock, a full-length mirror with a gold eagle on top, an immense old-fashioned roll-top desk.

"I never saw such a mixture of good antiques and trash," said Mrs. Martin.

"Say," said Jerry, "if Mr. Bullfinch does have a chimp for a pet, maybe Andy and I can teach him finger painting. Then if we sold the pictures Mr. Bullfinch would give us part of the money."

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Cathy made a noise that showed what she thought of that idea.

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"You and your schemes!" said Mrs. Martin. She turned away from the window and smiled at Jerry. Then one of those especially noticing looks came over her face. "What on earth do you have in your pants pocket that drags it down? You shouldn't stuff heavy things in your pockets. You'll tear them and they're hard to mend."

The next thing would be to ask him to take out whatever was weighing down his pocket. Jerry could sense it coming. "I just thought of something," he cried, and rushed from the living room. A few seconds later the back door slammed behind him. He had made it safely outdoors.

"Whew, that was a narrow escape!" he thought. But he felt Mr. Bartlett's money as not only a heavy weight in his pocket but on his mind. "I won't dare take it back in the house, with Cathy sniffing all over the place. Even if she wasn't, the money wouldn't be safe up attic, not after my mother gets to house-cleaning up there. She doesn't miss a thing. And the cellar would be no good. My father is always hunting around down there for screws and paint and stuff he's put away and can't remember where. But what the heck am I going to do with Mr. Bartlett's money now?"

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5

New Neighbors

Jerry thought of burying Mr. Bartlett's money somewhere in the yard. He gave up that idea when he considered the complication of digging it up every time he came back from the store and had to make change. Besides, this time of year his mother was likely to be planting flowers all over the place.

Jerry decided he might as well watch the moving in next door while he was trying to think of a safe hiding place for Mr. Bartlett's money. Better keep out of sight from the front window of his house, though. Jerry climbed the picket fence that separated his yard from Mr. Bullfinch's. Then, crouching low, he ran from bush to bush and took his stand in front of a weigela bush that screened him from being seen by his family.

The movers were big, brawny men. Jerry saw them lift a huge wardrobe as if it were light as a feather. Nearly as light, anyway. As they took it in the house, a man came out. He was tall and thin and slightly stooped, with a thatch of silver-gray hair. Must be Mr. Bullfinch, Jerry thought, and wondered if he shouldn't leave before being asked to. Jerry had learned that you never can tell about people wanting you or not wanting you in their yards.

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Mr. Bullfinch saw Jerry and walked toward him. He smiled with his whole face, especially his

eyes, and Jerry smiled back a bit shyly. "I like to watch people moving in," Jerry said.

"So do I except when I'm the one being moved. Live around here, do you? Seems a pleasant neighborhood."

"Next door. It *is* a nice neighborhood. A few cranky people on this street but not many. Say, what a whopper of a chair!"

The movers had taken an enormous brown leather chair out of the van and were taking it in the front door.

"I have to tell them where I want it put. Come on in," Mr. Bullfinch invited Jerry.

Jerry always enjoyed going in a strange house. He tagged after Mr. Bullfinch as he directed the movers to deposit the big chair in front of the fireplace in the den.

"Some chair! Is it for you to sit in?" asked Jerry.

"It's a remarkable chair. It does tricks. Runs by electricity," said Mr. Bullfinch, taking an electric cord from the seat and unwinding it. He looked around and found an outlet and put in the plug. "Want to try it out?" he asked Jerry. "Sit down in the chair and press the button on the right arm and see what happens."

Jerry was not at all sure he wanted to try out the tricks of the chair. "I don't know if I have time right now," he said. Mr. Bullfinch did not look like the sort of man who would install an electric chair, the kind they have in penitentiaries, in his house and begin to execute his neighbors the first day he moved in. Still, better be safe than sorry, Jerry reasoned.

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"I'll show you how it works," said Mr. Bullfinch, sitting down in the chair. He pressed a button to the right, and the back of the chair went down and the part that hung down in front came up, making what looked like a narrow cot.

"That's not half of it," said Mr. Bullfinch, punching another button.

Jerry gasped as the right arm of the chair swung over and began to rub Mr. Bullfinch's stomach while the whole contraption jerked up and down.

"Takes plenty of power to do that," said Mr. Bullfinch from his reclining position. "I shudder to think of what my electric bill will be if I use it often." He laughed heartily. "It tickles." Then he pushed the button that stopped the jerking and massaging and the one that made the chair regain its chair-like appearance. And there was Mr. Bullfinch sitting up again, looking just the same except that his hair was a little ruffled.

"It's supposed to reduce you if you're too fat and build you up if you're too thin. It's an exerciser and health builder. Trade name for it is the Excello. Believe I'll call it the Bumper. It does thump and bump a bit, you know. Now do you want to try it?"

It was nice of Mr. Bullfinch to forget that Jerry had just said he didn't have time to try it out. Jerry warmed to his new neighbor. So now he sat in the big chair and pushed the buttons, roaring with laughter when the right arm of the chair began to massage his stomach.

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"You have hardly enough middle to rub," said Mr. Bullfinch. He didn't hurry Jerry. He let him try out the chair for as long as he wanted to.

When Jerry got up out of the chair the paper bag containing all of Mr. Bartlett's change fell from his pocket. The bag broke and the money rolled in all directions.

Mr. Bullfinch helped Jerry pick up the money. Not having another paper bag at hand, Mr. Bullfinch gave Jerry a worn tobacco pouch to put the money in. He did not ask why Jerry happened to be carrying so much money in his pocket.

"Ever go to auctions?" asked Mr. Bullfinch, as Jerry crammed the tobacco pouch in his pants pocket. The pocket tore slightly. His mother would be after him for that, Jerry thought worriedly.

"Double darn!" said Jerry. "I'm not talking to you—I'm just sorry I tore my pocket," Jerry said to Mr. Bullfinch.

"Well, 'double darn' seems an appropriate remark for a torn pocket," said Mr. Bullfinch. "Did you say you'd ever been to an auction?"

Jerry hadn't and said so.

"Auctions are my hobby," said Mr. Bullfinch. "People need to have a hobby when they retire and mine is auctions. Greatest sport I know of. Course you're likely to pick up a few things you haven't any immediate need for but at least you get something for your money. Mrs. Bullfinch scolds me sometimes for what I buy but I can't resist the fun of bidding. Up to a point, that is. I set myself a limit on what I'll spend at an auction. Guess I do get stuck with some strange objects once in a while. You should have seen Mrs. Bullfinch's face when I brought home a job lot of empty cages."

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"Don't you have pets to put in any of them?" Jerry's face showed his disappointment. If not a chimp he had hoped for a parrot or at least a canary.

"Not a one," said Mr. Bullfinch. "Guess I'll have to wait till they auction off some of the animals in the Washington zoo."

"They'll never do that."

"I was only joking. Do you have any pets?"

"Just a cat named Bibsy because she has a white front. Like a bib, you know."

"Well, if I see a mouse around here I hope you'll lend me Bibsy."

"I will." Jerry sensed that Mr. Bullfinch thought it was time for him to be leaving. And Jerry was about to when a woman screamed loud as a fire siren.

"My wife!" cried Mr. Bullfinch and rushed toward the back of the house, Jerry following him.

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Out in the kitchen, standing on a high stool, was Mrs. Bullfinch. She was a small plump woman wearing a pink apron. She looked terrified. [Pg 62]

"A spider!" she gasped. "I had a broom and was making sure there were no spiders around the ceiling when the biggest spider I've ever seen in my life ran down the broom handle. It ran right across my arm." She shuddered till the stool she was standing on shook. "I brushed it off. It was horrible. I didn't see where it went but it's in this room somewhere. And I won't get off this stool until it's found and killed."

"Better get down, dear," said her husband. "There are two of us here to protect you." He looked around the room for the spider, opening cupboard doors to see if it had run in a cupboard. "It's taken off for parts unknown by this time," he said soothingly. "Come on, get down. You'll want to tell the movers where to put the piano."

"It's still in this room. I know it. If I get down it might run up my leg. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

She was pretty heavy for that stool, Jerry thought, expecting one of its legs to crack any minute. She's like Little Miss Muffett, afraid of spiders—only she climbed a stool instead of being frightened away. He glanced down at the broom on the floor where Mrs. Bullfinch had thrown it. A large hairy spider was just crawling out of the broomstraws.

Jerry had never moved more quickly. Three steps and he had brought his foot down hard. Jerry did not enjoy killing even a spider but this time it seemed necessary, though he carefully refrained from looking at the dead insect. [Pg 63]

"Good boy!" said Mr. Bullfinch.

Mrs. Bullfinch, with a little help from her husband, got down from the stool. She thanked Jerry earnestly and effusively.

"I'll not forget this. Someday I hope to do something for you. You don't know how obliged to you I am. That spider might have killed me."

Jerry did not think that the spider had been the kind that would have a bite that killed. Being thought a hero was pleasant, however. "Think nothing of it," he said, looking more cocky than modest in spite of his words.

"Where you want the pianer?" shouted one of the movers, and Mrs. Bullfinch bustled off to the living room.

There did not seem to be any reason for Jerry to stay any longer. He had a feeling that Mr. Bullfinch, though still very polite, had things he wanted to see to. So Jerry murmured something about having to get home and Mr. Bullfinch told him again that he was indebted to him for killing the spider.

"I never knew anybody as afraid of spiders as Mrs. Bullfinch," he said. "Everybody has something he's afraid of, I guess. With Mrs. Bullfinch it's spiders."

Jerry didn't know if he should leave by the back or the front door but Mr. Bullfinch led the way to the front. Jerry admired the grandfather clock in the front hall. On the glass above its face there was a painted globe in pale green and yellow. Jerry had almost reached the front door when the clock struck five—long, solemn sounds of great dignity.

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"That sure is a big clock," said Jerry.

"I didn't buy that at an auction, it was in the family," said Mr. Bullfinch. "When I was a little boy I once hid inside when we were playing hide and seek. That was the time I stopped the clock," he chuckled.

Suddenly Jerry thought of a safe hiding place for Mr. Bartlett's money. What Mr. Bullfinch had said about hiding in the clock had given him the idea.

"Say," he said with barely controlled excitement, "would you mind if I kept the money I have on me in your clock?"

Mr. Bartlett gave Jerry a long appraising look. Then his eyes lit up in one of his nice smiles. "Not at all. Not at all," he said cordially.

"I may need to come and get some out or put some in now and then. If that would not be making too much trouble."

"Not at all. Not at all. Come any time you like. I've never run a bank before. New experience for me."

Jerry could tell that Mr. Bullfinch was almost making fun of him. Never mind, he was letting him keep Mr. Bartlett's money in the bottom of the clock. And how grateful Jerry was to Mr. Bullfinch for not asking any embarrassing questions about the money! Even before he had shut the clock door on Mr. Bartlett's money and had started for home, Jerry had decided that he liked his new neighbor, Mr. Bullfinch. He liked him a lot.

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6

"The Stars and Stripes Forever"

Jerry found it a relief not to have to worry about Cathy's snooping, now that he was keeping Mr. Bartlett's money next door in the grandfather clock. The only trouble was that stopping off at the Bullfinches' on his way home often took considerable time. If Mr. Bullfinch had been to an auction—and besides attending a weekly auction in town he now and then went to one in nearby Maryland or Virginia—Jerry always had to be shown what treasure Mr. Bullfinch had acquired. One day it was a worn Oriental rug, another, an incomplete set of fine English porcelain. The prize purchase as far as Jerry was concerned was an old-fashioned phonograph with a horn like a big blue morning glory flower. Jerry's father had a hi-fi which made records sound as if the musicians were right in the same room with you, but Jerry enjoyed the faintly mechanical sound that accompanied music played on the old phonograph. It was like preferring canned peaches to fresh ones. Nice for a change anyway.

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Jerry liked to stay at the Bullfinches' long enough to listen to a record or two. He was not so happy about being delayed by Mrs. Bullfinch. She was a great talker. She told Jerry very much more than he cared to know about her family, Mr. Bullfinch's family, and every college town they had lived in while Mr. Bullfinch was teaching. He had, it seemed, been a Latin teacher until the demand for Latin had grown so small that he had thought best to switch to teaching English.

"It was teaching Freshman English that turned his hair gray," said Mrs. Bullfinch. "Having so many students come to college without knowing how to write a grammatical sentence was a great sorrow to him."

Jerry's opinion was that Mr. Bullfinch's hair had turned gray from old age. Mrs. Bullfinch's hair was gray, too, and she hadn't taught Freshman English. Jerry would have asked her what had turned her hair gray if he had not been afraid it would have been too long a story. Not that Jerry

disliked Mrs. Bullfinch even though she was long-winded. She was kind and she made good cookies. Jerry usually went home from the Bullfinch house munching an oatmeal cookie.

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"You took long enough getting back from the store to have gone and come back twice," scolded Jerry's mother an afternoon when he had stopped to play "The Stars and Stripes Forever" on Mr. Bullfinch's phonograph on his way home from the store. It was Jerry's favorite record, with John Philip Sousa leading his own band. One reason Jerry liked this particular march was because he had shaken bells to it in the rhythm band at school. Next summer Jerry was going to take lessons playing a horn. He had already picked out the instrument he wanted to learn to play, a giant tuba in Kitt's music store downtown. By fall he would be ready to play in the junior high band.

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Jerry was thinking of playing in a band and was not paying much attention to his mother's scolding, when she said something that shocked him into alertness.

"Next time I want something from the store in a hurry, I'll send Cathy," she said.

"Honest, next time I'll come home like the wind," Jerry promised. It wouldn't do at all to have Cathy go to the store. Mr. Bartlett knew her. He might ask her if she wanted the groceries charged before she got the money out to pay for them. And good-by then to Jerry's secret charge account. "You said running errands was my chore," he reminded his mother. "You haven't heard me gripe about having to go to the store, have you?"

"Not recently," his mother acknowledged. "It's something to have you so willing. But why can't you come right home with the groceries? Now I was going to make Bavarian cream for dessert tonight but you're too late getting back with the whipping cream."

"I'm sorry." Jerry really was. He was very fond of Bavarian cream.

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"Let's see. I have a box of gingerbread mix. And I can make applesauce while it's baking."

"That will be swell," said Jerry.

"Go find Cathy, will you, Jerry? I wouldn't be surprised if you found her somewhere with her nose in a book. Tell her to come and peel the apples for me."

Jerry was glad to get away from his mother just then. It was not hard to find Cathy. She was on the window seat in the living room. Jerry could see the book jacket of the book she was reading. It was *Going Steady* and had a picture of a boy and a girl gazing fondly at each other while skating. Cathy was not old enough to go steady—Jerry had heard his mother say so—and it made Jerry sick that his twin sister liked to read all that guff about having dates with boys and things like that. Now a horse story, or a dog story—they were good reading. So were books about rockets, planets, dinosaurs, Abraham Lincoln, and ever so many other interesting subjects. Cathy liked to read good books like that, too, Jerry had to acknowledge, but she also had developed an interest in books that had falling in love in them, an interest Jerry not only did not share but despised.

"Lift your big blue eyes from that lousy book," said Jerry in a mocking voice. "Mummy wants you to come out in the kitchen and peel apples."

Cathy put down her book reluctantly. Her eyes were dreamy. She sighed. "I suppose it's a girl's duty to help her mother," she said.

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She got to her feet and glided out of the room, walking as nearly as she could like a movie star whose latest picture she had seen at the neighborhood theater the previous Saturday afternoon.

Jerry picked up *Going Steady* and examined the cover more closely. He threw it down. "Cathy must have rocks in her head to like a book like that," he thought.

The clock on the living room mantel struck the half hour. Five-thirty. Jerry had an hour to kill before time for dinner. What was there to do? A wave of irritation against Cathy swept over him. She ought to be sharing all this work and worry about the charge account. A year ago he could have confided in her safely. She could have been counted on both to keep the secret and to help him. They always stuck together, he and Cathy, until she had changed. Now half the time she acted as if she were against him. Look at the way she had snooped around the attic like a bum detective. If she had found the money she would have very likely said it was her duty to tell on him. Jerry almost never could know in advance how she was going to act. Almost he did not like her any more.

Jerry went down to the recreation room and turned on the television.

"Send two box tops and twenty-five cents and you will receive—"

"Nuts!" cried Jerry, turning it off. He didn't want to listen to kid stuff. It seemed long ago that he had sent box tops and money away for secret rings and pasteboard telescopes.

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He went to the bookshelves and took down *Black Beauty*. He had read it before but he didn't mind reading it again. He liked the book because he felt it showed just how a horse thought. He read until he was called to dinner.

Two days later Jerry ran into real trouble. It was nearly six and he had just come home from playing ball, when his mother said he had barely time to run to the store for a pound of cheddar cheese before the store closed. And the smallest she had was a five-dollar bill. Jerry took his bike and determined to get back in a hurry. No stopping to listen to a record this time, even if Mr. Bullfinch had bought some new old ones Jerry would like to hear.

Not more than ten minutes after leaving the house, Jerry was ringing the Bullfinch doorbell. He would rush in, get his change, and be home in a jiffy. But nobody answered the bell. Jerry rang again, with his finger pressed on the bell hard. He could hear the bell ring inside. Still nobody came to the door.

"But they're always home this time of day," Jerry worried. He decided it was no use to keep on ringing the bell. "They should have told me they weren't going to be home," he thought, yet he really knew there was no reason why they should. But he had to get in to change his five-dollar bill. He just had to.

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"They'll probably be here any minute now," Jerry tried to reassure himself. "It's past time for Mrs. Bullfinch to be getting dinner." But what if the Bullfinches had been invited out to dinner? Jerry groaned at the thought. What could he do?

"I have to get in." That was the thought that kept repeating itself in his mind, the thought that sent him around the house testing every window he could reach to see if he could find one unlocked. "They told me to come in any time, didn't they?" Jerry argued with himself.

At last Jerry found a cellar window unlocked. He pushed and it swung in over an empty coalbin. The Bullfinches had an oil furnace but Jerry could see by the coal dust that there had once been coal in that bin.

"I'll be bound to get my pants dirty but I guess it will brush off."

Jerry was half in and half out of the window before he realized that he could not go on with it. He could not make himself break in the Bullfinch house. He needed to get in. He kept telling himself that probably the Bullfinches would not mind a bit, yet he still couldn't bring himself to going in a neighbor's house like a burglar.

"Don't be a sissy. What are you scared of? Nobody's going to find out. And if they did. I'm not going to hurt a thing."

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It was no use. Jerry could not argue himself into even innocent housebreaking. As he was swinging his legs off the windowsill, he heard music, familiar music, "The Stars and Stripes Forever." While he had been fussing and fretting at the cellar window, the Bullfinches must have come home and Mr. Bullfinch had put on the Sousa record.

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Jerry carefully pulled the cellar window shut and ran to the front door again. Again he pushed the bell. Again he listened. No footsteps coming toward the door. And the music had stopped. But Jerry had heard it. He knew he had heard it. Somebody must be there. Then why didn't somebody come to let him in? Giving up ringing the bell, Jerry knocked. He even kicked the door. No response to that either. "If they're there they've decided not to let me in," Jerry reasoned.

"But they like me. They wouldn't do a thing like that. I'll go and see if their car is in the garage and then I'll know for sure if they're home. I might not have heard the car come in while I was on the other side of the house."

Jerry hurried out to the garage. The garage door was open. No car. It was obvious that the Bullfinches were still not home.

"But I could have sworn I heard somebody inside playing 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.'" Jerry wondered if he had imagined he had heard the band music.

"Nobody's home," said a small voice. And there was Andy just outside the Bullfinch yard.

"Don't you suppose I know it?" barked Jerry.

Andy ran off as a car came up the street and stopped with a screech of brakes in front of the Bullfinch house. Here were Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch home at last.

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They were sorry to have kept Jerry waiting for them to get home. Mr. Bullfinch showed Jerry where he kept an extra key behind the mailbox, so if Jerry needed to get in again when they were not home, he could.

"It isn't every boy I would trust," said Mr. Bullfinch.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch had been to an auction in Georgetown. They had bought a pair of hand-wrought andirons shaped like little lighthouses, but Jerry did not stop to admire them. As soon as he had changed the five-dollar bill he was off like a shot.

Mrs. Martin had the electric mixer going but she could scold above the noise. "Now you're home with the cheese too late for me to make cheese sauce for the broccoli. I'm at the end of my patience. Where on earth have you been? Why didn't you come straight home from the store?"

"He stops off on his way home to see the Bullfinches," said Cathy, getting ice cubes out of the refrigerator to put in the water pitcher. "I've seen him go in."

"Tattletale!" snarled Jerry.

"Just saying where you've seen a person isn't tattling, is it, Mother?"

"You shoot off your mouth too much," accused Jerry.

"Well, what do you *do* over at the Bullfinches'?"

"None of your business."

Mrs. Martin shut off the mixer. "I wish you two could be in the same room without starting a cat and dog fight. Go get Andy out of the bathroom, Jerry. He came home looking as if he'd been in a coal mine and I sent him in to take a shower. Help him get dressed in a hurry. Dinner is about ready to dish up."

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Jerry was glad his mother had her mind partly on dinner or she might have insisted on knowing what he did over at the Bullfinches'. He sighed. It was all getting too complicated. He certainly would be thankful when the month of the charge account was over.

The Martins were eating dessert—it was lemon pudding with meringue on top, one of Jerry's favorite desserts—when the doorbell rang.

"I'll go," said Jerry, pushing back his chair.

It was Mr. Bullfinch at the door. And the way he looked at Jerry made him feel all shriveled up inside. Mr. Bullfinch looked taller to Jerry than usual. His gray eyes were like steel. He had the tobacco pouch in his hand.

"Mrs. Bullfinch and I don't want you to keep this at our house any longer," he said coldly. "I'm unpleasantly surprised at you, Jerry. I didn't size you up as a boy who would break into a neighbor's house. It's not that I mind having you go in. It's the sneaky way you went in through the cellar window."

"But I didn't—"

"Oh, yes, you did. There was coal dust on the rug in my den. Though that I might not have noticed if you hadn't broken the record."

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"What record? I tell you I didn't break any record."

"I would be willing to overlook it if you'd told me when I got home. You might have known I would put two and two together. I'm not sure it's not my duty to report you to the police. I won't this time, for the sake of your parents if nothing more. And you won't find the key to the house behind the mailbox. I gave permission to use the key to a boy I thought I could trust."

Jerry rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes as Mr. Bullfinch went down the steps and the walk. Never had he felt so unjustly accused. Nor so helpless about defending himself. Mr. Bullfinch was so sure Jerry had been in the house and didn't dare say so because of the broken record. Record! Now Jerry was sure he had not been imagining hearing music while he had been sitting on the sill of the cellar window. Somebody *had* been in there playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever" on the phonograph. But who? And where had he gone to so quickly before the Bullfinches got home? It was almost enough to make Jerry believe in spirits.

On his way back to the dining room, Jerry slipped the tobacco pouch under the cushion of a big chair in the living room. No time for now to find a safer hiding place.

"Who was it?" asked Mr. Martin, as Jerry took his place at the table again.

"Mr. Bullfinch. He returned something I'd left at his house." Jerry's eyes were on his plate.

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"What did you leave over there?"

Count on Cathy to want to know all of his business. "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," Jerry told her.

"I can whistle," Andy suddenly boasted. "I can whistle real good. Want to hear me?"

Without waiting for the wishes of his family to be expressed, Andy pursed up his lips and whistled. He still was not much of a whistler, yet from the shrill piping emerged a faint resemblance to a few bars of "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

A great light dawned on Jerry. Andy at the scene of the crime. Coal dust on Andy. And now the clincher, his whistling "The Stars and Stripes Forever." It had been Andy in the Bullfinch house. Jerry was as sure of it as of the nose on his face. "While I was out looking in the garage he would have just had time to get out of the house," Jerry thought. "I'll make him tell. It's not fair for me to be blamed for something he did. Mr. Bullfinch won't be hard on Andy. He'll think he's too little to know better."

"I guess we won't have any more whistling at the dinner table," Mr. Martin reproved Andy gently.

Andy looked as well-scrubbed and innocent as a perfect angel. Or a nearly perfect angel, Jerry thought. Jerry remembered how Andy would shut up like a clam about something he knew he should not have done.

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"He can be like a can of sardines. You can't get a thing out of him unless you have a key," thought Jerry. And he wondered how he was going to pry the truth out of his little brother.

Working on Andy

Jerry wanted to shake the truth out of Andy before the little boy's bedtime. But Andy followed his mother and Cathy to the kitchen after dinner and conversed with them all the time they were doing the dinner dishes. He had a long story about how a boy had been so bad that morning in kindergarten that the teacher made him sit in a chair all the time the others were playing a hopping and singing game.

"I could have hopped the highest. I'm a good hopper. Not a grasshopper, just a hopper. Want to see me hop?"

"So it was you who were the bad boy. What did you do that was naughty?" asked his mother.

"Nothing. I didn't say it was me. Anyway, Tommy Jenks joggled my arm or I wouldn't have thrown a crayon at him. I didn't mean to hit him in the eye. Lots of times I throw things and they don't hit anybody."

"And that's the truth," remarked Jerry, who had stalked Andy to the kitchen. Andy's confession encouraged Jerry. If he owned up so easy about throwing a crayon, it would be a cinch to get him to acknowledge that he had been inside the Bullfinch house before dinner. "Come on up to my room," Jerry invited him. "I've got something to show you."

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But it seemed that Andy didn't want to be shown anything just then. Usually Jerry tried to keep Andy out of his room instead of inviting him in. "He's not so dumb," thought Jerry.

Andy proved very hard to corner. Jerry could not get him alone until Andy was in the bathroom, brushing his teeth before going to bed. Then Andy tried to get rid of him.

"It's not polite to come in the bathroom when somebody's here. Mummy said so."

"Listen," said Jerry. "You listen to me, Andy Martin."

"What you want?"

"I want you to own up to breaking that record over at the Bullfinch house."

"What record?" Andy's voice was slightly muffled by toothpaste.

"You know as well as I do. 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.'"

Andy spit in the sink. There was a trace of toothpaste at the left corner of his mouth. His eyes were innocent. A bit puzzled maybe but unclouded by guilt. "I can't read the names on records."

"But you were whistling it at dinner."

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Andy hung up his toothbrush. He tried to get past Jerry but Jerry grabbed him. It was like holding a small wild animal but Jerry held on. "Nobody's going to be hard on you, Andy. I *know* you were in the Bullfinch house playing that record." [Pg 84]

"Nobody knows where I am but me," said Andy.

"How did you get all that coal dust on you? You got it crawling in the window into the Bullfinch coalbin, didn't you?"

"I have a mineral collection that has a piece of coal in it. Some of the black must have rubbed off on me. That must have been it. I'm a very dirty boy. Every speck of dirt sticks to me. Mummy said so. She says I'm as dirty as a pig. Is a pig dirtier than a skunk, Jerry?"

Jerry said he thought that skunks weren't usually dirty.

"Remember that time we were out in the car and Daddy said he smelled skunk? Phew! It was an awful smell."

"Andy," called his mother from the foot of the stairs. "You get to bed. Double quick now."

"Jerry won't let me."

"Stop bothering your little brother, Jerry. Come on down. I'm sure you have homework to do."

Andy slid out of Jerry's hold and ran down the hall. "You can't catch me," he yelled.

Jerry didn't try. Sometimes Andy was more slippery than an eel, he thought dolefully. Getting him to confess that he had been in the Bullfinch house would have to wait till tomorrow. [Pg 85]

The next morning Jerry woke up feeling heavy in spirit. He still had the secret of the charge account on his mind and now there was the added weight of Mr. Bullfinch's disappointment in him. Jerry had not realized how much he had valued Mr. Bullfinch's approval until he had lost it.

"I'll just have to make Andy tell," thought Jerry, as he dressed in a hurry after his mother had called him twice.

When Jerry came downstairs, his father was just leaving for work. Jerry heard the front door close. Cathy was alone in the dining room eating her cereal. She looked so cheerful Jerry could hardly stand it.

"Don't sit down, you might hurt your head," she greeted him. Ridiculous remarks were popular with the sixth grade right now and she was trying out one she had heard recently.

"Think that's funny? It stinks."

"I was just trying to be pleasant. Mummy especially asked me to try to be pleasant to you even when you were aggravating. And you certainly *are* aggravating."

"Shut up!"

"Well, you needn't take my head off."

"You might be better-looking if I could."

"Jerry! Cathy!" Mrs. Martin came in from the kitchen with a platter of scrambled eggs and bacon. "I'm glad your father left before he had to hear such bickering. He wouldn't stand for it, and neither will I. Either be civil to each other or don't speak."

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"Suits me," said Jerry. "I'll be tickled to death if Cathy stops ya-ka-ta-yaking."

"He's just awful." Cathy's blue eyes appealed to her mother for sympathy.

"Want me to wipe away your tears?" jibed her twin brother.

"Eat your bacon and eggs. I trust and hope you'll both feel better when you've had your breakfast," said their mother. "I don't know what's gotten into you two lately. Always at each other and you used to be as close to each other as the two sides of a pair of shears."

"Bet I always had the sharpest edge," mumbled Jerry.

"That's enough from you, young man."

When his mother spoke in that tone of voice, Jerry thought it best to keep still and tend to what he was doing. He took a large mouthful of scrambled eggs. They were good scrambled eggs. His mother sure knew how to fix them.

Mrs. Martin looked at Andy's vacant chair. "Oh, dear, that child's not down yet. He dawdles so getting dressed."

"He's coming," said Jerry, as they heard a thump that was Andy jumping down the last two steps of the front stairs.

In came Andy, an imaginary pistol in each hand. "Bang!" he cried, shooting his mother. "Bang! Bang! You're all dead. Aren't there any pancakes?"

"Come eat your cereal. I'm keeping your eggs and bacon hot for you out in the kitchen," said his mother. "Tuck your napkin under your chin. I don't want you to spill milk on your clean shirt. You should be thankful you have such a good breakfast. Plenty of children would be glad to have less."

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"I'm not plenty of children. I'm me." Andy looked up and met Jerry's accusing gaze with a wide smile. Andy never remembered yesterday's mischief. Each day was brand-new to Andy.

"It will be harder than ever to get him to own up to what he did over at the Bullfinches'," thought Jerry.

Andy knew the way to school and usually Jerry walked to school with boys his own age while Andy poked along alone or with one of his fellow kindergartners. But today when Andy had kissed his mother good-by and had come out the back door, Jerry was waiting for him.

"I've got to hurry. I don't want to be late," said Andy, whose lateness had seldom worried him before.

"We've got loads of time. Now, look here, Andy. I'm in a jam and you're the only one who can help me."

Being talked to as his big brother's equal pleased Andy. "What you want me to do?"

Jerry described vividly how unjustly Mr. Bullfinch had blamed him for getting into his house and breaking the Sousa record. "He's awfully down on me now," said Jerry. "Do you think it's fair for me to be blamed for something I didn't do?"

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"Just tell him somebody else must have done it," suggested Andy.

"I did but he didn't believe me."

"Then he's a bad, bad man."

"It burns me up to be blamed for something I didn't do. You wouldn't like to be blamed for breaking a window if Tommy Jenks did it, would you, Andy?"

"Tommy and I can't throw a ball hard enough to break a window."

"I give up," cried Jerry. "I might have known you wouldn't lift a finger to get me out of trouble. Save your own skin, that's all you care about. And I was meaning to give you something nice when I get it," said Jerry, thinking of the candy he would receive from Bartlett's store.

"What were you going to give me?"

"Never you mind. Whatever it is, you won't get any."

"Please, Jerry."

"Nope."

"I didn't mean to break that old record. It wasn't my fault. It slipped right out of my hand," remarked Andy.

Jerry breathed a sigh of relief. Andy's resolution not to tell had begun to give. "I'll go right to the door with you if you'll fess up to Mr. Bullfinch what you did," he offered.

Andy was not in the mood for an early morning call on Mr. Bullfinch. It took a lot of persuasion and the gift of two large rubber bands, an old campaign button, and two feet or so of good string before Andy let Jerry take him by the hand and lead him to the Bullfinch front door.

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"You ring the bell," said Jerry. He knew Andy liked to ring doorbells.

Andy did not care to ring Mr. Bullfinch's bell just then. Jerry pressed it hard. He hoped Mr. Bullfinch would answer the bell in a hurry before Andy changed his mind about telling.

"I'll tell him I'll help you pay for the record," said Jerry.

"I don't want to pay money for an old broken record. It's no good," said Andy, trying to pull away from Jerry.

Just then Mr. Bullfinch opened the front door. He was wearing a dark blue bathrobe with a red plaid collar. He looked sleepy and not at all pleased to see his visitors.

"Did you have to come so early?" he inquired.

"It's almost time for school. Andy has something he wants to tell you."

"No, I don't," said Andy.

"Come on, Andy, you promised you'd tell."

"I've changed my mind."

"I wish you'd say whatever you came to say and be off. I find small boys hard to take before I have a cup of coffee," said Mr. Bullfinch.

"I'll give you the first nickel I find rolling uphill. Or downhill either," Jerry promised Andy. "Go on, tell him." Jerry gave Andy a gentle poke in the back.

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Andy looked up at Mr. Bullfinch. "You shouldn't leave your cellar window unlocked. A real burglar might have gotten in instead of me. And that record must have been cracked. I dropped it very easy, honest," said Andy in a rush of words. "It wasn't Jerry, it was me," he added.

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Mr. Bullfinch stopped looking displeased. "Well," he said, not sounding at all cross with Andy, "I must say I admire a young fellow who will step right up and confess he's been into a little mischief."

"Little mischief!" thought Jerry. Last night at the door Mr. Bullfinch had sounded as if he had

considered getting into his house a real crime. Still, Jerry was glad Mr. Bullfinch was not being hard on Andy.

"Good-by," said Andy.

"Just a minute," said Mr. Bullfinch. "When something is broken it has to be paid for. I think you owe me something for that record, even if you think it was cracked."

"I'll help pay for it," offered Jerry, without great enthusiasm.

"I'm saving my money to buy a space helmet," said Andy.

"Let's see," mused Mr. Bullfinch. "How are you boys at mowing lawns?"

"Not bad," said Jerry, not remembering that his mother often remarked that it was like pulling teeth to get him to mow their lawn.

"I can't mow but I can rake real good," said Andy.

"Then if you'll come over after school this afternoon and take care of my lawn, we'll call it quits," said Mr. Bullfinch. "And I owe you an apology, Jerry, for misjudging you. Sorry I had the wrong Martin boy by the ear. I hope you'll bring back that little something you've been keeping over here."

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"I may at that," said Jerry.

Mr. Bullfinch looked at Andy sternly. "It's wrong to go into a house when nobody's home. Don't you let me hear of your doing that again."

"I won't," promised Andy, giving Mr. Bullfinch one of his beaming smiles that showed his dimple.

"Come on, Andy, we can't stand here all day or we'll be late for school. I'll be seeing you," Jerry told Mr. Bullfinch, glad that they were friends again.

Andy chattered happily on the way to school. Nothing got Andy down, Jerry thought, envying his carefree little brother. He should be feeling relieved about getting his guilt off his chest. But Andy had not seemed at all downhearted before. "Anyway, I got it out of him," Jerry thought with satisfaction. Yet Jerry was grateful to Andy. He had known him to be far more stubborn.

"Only nine more days before I get that candy from Bartlett's," Jerry thought. "And when I do, Andy not only gets the first piece; I don't care if he takes a whole handful."

Jerry noticed that Andy almost had to run to keep up with him. He slowed down. Jerry felt like being very nice to Andy even if it meant that they would be late for school.

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8

The Auction

"School going all right, Jerry?" asked his father.

Jerry was at the dining room table after dinner doing homework. He had a list of geography questions and was supposed to write down the answers. That meant either looking them up in the book or asking his father. Jerry's dad knew a good deal about geography, yet after answering a few questions he was likely to say, "How can you expect to learn if you don't find out for yourself?" He seemed to be in a good humor tonight. Jerry thought he might be good for answers to at least three questions of the ten.

"I'm pretty sure I'm not failing anything at school," said Jerry.

"Glad to hear it. I thought you've looked lately as if something were worrying you. If your arithmetic is giving you trouble again, maybe I can give you a little help."

"Arithmetic's not so hard after you get the hang of it. I got a hundred in an arithmetic test day before yesterday."

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"Good for you. Keep up the good work. I expect you to be good college material, you know, and that's not too many years ahead."

The words "college material" weighed Jerry's spirits. It seemed such a long stretch of school before he would be ready for college. And all that time he would be expected to do good work, good the rest of this term in order to be good in junior high, even better in junior high to be good in high school, and then you had to be a regular whiz on wheels in senior high to be good college material. So much excellence expected of him made Jerry feel tired.

"Guess I'll do the rest of this tomorrow morning before school," he said.

"Finish it now," ordered his father. "You know you never have time to do homework before school."

"Could be a first time," said Jerry, but he bent over his paper again. "What are the chief products of Central America?" he asked.

"That's rather a large question," said Mr. Martin. "Let's see."

While his father was calling to mind the products of Central America, Jerry was thinking of the pleasant fact that there were only a few more days before he could settle the bill at Bartlett's store. And what a relief it would be to have that charge account off his mind! Jerry thought how surprised his father would be if he knew the cause of his improvement in arithmetic. Jerry had not realized at first that all that adding and subtracting when he made change was helping his arithmetic, but now he could tell that he could add and subtract much faster. After bringing his mother the wrong change just once and having to pretend to go back to the store when he went only as far as Mr. Bullfinch's, Jerry had learned that it paid to be accurate.

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"Bananas, coffee, and some silver," said Mr. Martin.

With difficulty Jerry's mind came back to geography. But he had forgotten which question he had asked his father. "Is that the answer to number four?" he asked.

"If you can't keep your mind on your work I'm not going to help you. Look up your own answers. How can you expect to learn if you don't find out for yourself?" Mr. Martin took the evening paper into the living room.

Cathy, who was sitting at the other end of the dining room table reading, looked up and laughed. "You didn't get much out of Daddy this time, did you?"

Jerry saw that the jacket of the book Cathy was reading had a picture of a girl and a boy walking together, with the boy carrying a lot of books. Hers as well as his, Jerry guessed. Catch him carrying a girl's books. "I suppose you have your homework all done," he snarled at Cathy.

"Of course, bird-brain."

"Bird-brain! If I have the brains of a bird you haven't any more than a—than a cockroach," said Jerry, which was the worst he could think of to say just then.

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"Boys aren't supposed to be so rude to girls. You're the limit. The utter, utter limit."

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"Who says so?"

"I say so."

"You!" Jerry packed so much scorn into the word that Cathy looked at him in surprise.

"What's eating you lately?" she asked.

Jerry gathered his books and papers together. If Cathy began being nice to him for a change he might find himself confiding to her. It had made him uneasy to be alone with her ever since he had started that charge account business. He would be safer now up in his own room.

"I can't study here where you keep jawing at me," he complained.

"Well, I like that. I hardly opened my mouth and now you—"

"Like it or lump it," cried Jerry from the doorway. "Today is Thursday," thought Jerry, as he ran upstairs. "Monday will be the first. That will be the day. All I have to do is hold out till the first of the week."

On Friday, Mrs. Martin for once did not need anything at the store. Of course she had a big order for Saturday morning. So much that she thought of taking the car, with Jerry going along to help with the carrying, but Jerry said he could manage perfectly well with his cart.

"No sense wasting gas when you have me to go to the store for you," he said.

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"Are you sure you're feeling all right?" asked his mother. "I can't think what has gotten in to you to be so obliging. But it's nice to have a boy so willing to run errands," she said, giving Jerry the grocery list. "Sure you can manage?"

Jerry was sure.

When he stopped by at the Bullfinches' on his way back from the store—he had to get change from a twenty this time—Mr. Bullfinch was getting ready to go to an auction out in Rockville.

"How'd you like to come with me?" he invited Jerry. Mr. Bullfinch had been especially cordial to him lately as if to make up for having suspected him of housebreaking. "If you've never been to an auction you might find it interesting."

Jerry liked the idea. He said he would be right back as soon as he took the groceries home and asked his mother if he could go.

"Fine. Hope you can go. I'll be glad of your company," said Mr. Bullfinch.

Ten minutes later Jerry and Mr. Bullfinch were on their way to Rockville. Jerry had never ridden in Mr. Bullfinch's car before. It was not the car that was jerky, Jerry discovered, but Mr. Bullfinch. Still, he was a careful driver except when he got to talking. Then he seemed to forget his was not the only car on the road and the other cars honked at him. Yet Mr. Bullfinch was good at missing the other cars. At the very edge of collision he was a marvelous driver. Jerry held on to the door pull most of the time.

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It was not a long drive to Rockville. They made it by five after ten, Jerry noticed by a clock over a bank near where Mr. Bullfinch parked the car.

"This is one of the smaller auction houses," explained Mr. Bullfinch, as he led the way into a place that looked to Jerry like a secondhand furniture store. "But sometimes the most interesting items are put up at small auctions."

Jerry jingled the small change in his pocket. His entire wealth at the moment was forty-seven cents, hardly enough to buy either a usual or unusual item. He noticed that Mr. Bullfinch looked less calm and dignified than usual. There was a gleam of excitement in his eyes, an intensity in his voice. Jerry could tell that Mr. Bullfinch felt the same about auctions as Jerry did about going to baseball games out at Griffith Stadium.

Folding chairs had been set up in the middle of the big room where the auction was being held. Furniture and stuff was jammed all around, even at the back of the platform where the auctioneer stood. He was a thick-set, big-mouthed man wearing a blue and red plaid sport shirt.

"That's Jim Bean. He always puts on a good show," said Mr. Bullfinch.

As Mr. Bullfinch and Jerry took seats in the back row, the auctioneer was holding up a table lamp.

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"Now here is something really beautiful," he was saying in a slightly hoarse yet persuasive voice. "This lamp has a base of real Chinese porcelain. Old Chinese porcelain and that's the most valuable, as all of you here know. Probably should be in a museum. Shade's a bit worn but it's easy enough to get one of those. Now I hope I'm going to hear a starting bid of ten for this exquisite piece of antique Chinese porcelain. Worth every cent of fifty or more but I'm willing to start it at ten."

"One dollar," said Mr. Bullfinch.

"That bid," said the auctioneer, "was too low for me to hear."

"Two," snapped a lady in the front row.

A man two seats to the left of Jerry held up a finger.

"Three I'm bid. Who will make it five?" said Mr. Bean.

"Three-fifty," said Mr. Bullfinch.

"Come, come," said Mr. Bean, "I can't accept bids of peanuts. Three-fifty I'm offered. We're just starting, folks. Do I hear five?"

Jerry could not tell for sure but somebody in the front row must have indicated a bid of five, for

now Mr. Bean was droning, "Five I have. Who will make it ten? Worth many times more. Five I have for this museum piece. Five I have."

The lamp was going to be sold for five, Jerry thought, when Mr. Bullfinch sat up straight and snapped, "Six!" His eyes shone. He was really enjoying himself.

It was like a game, Jerry thought, and wished he dared risk a bid. Better not, he decided, for there was always the chance that nobody would bid higher and he would be stuck with something he did not want and could not pay for. Better be on the safe side and let Mr. Bullfinch do the bidding. That was almost as much fun as doing it himself.

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The lamp was finally sold to the lady in the front row who had first bid against Mr. Bullfinch. Sold to her for nine dollars, which Mr. Bean said was giving it away.

"Glad I didn't get it. We already have too many lamps," Mr. Bullfinch said in a low voice to Jerry, which proved that he had been bidding for the sport of it.

Mr. Bullfinch did not open his mouth when the next few items were sold. After starting the ball rolling he was content to let others keep it rolling for a while. Besides, a bed, two French chairs, and a worn oriental rug were not unusual enough to interest him. Such items came up, he explained to Jerry, at nearly every auction held in Washington or its suburbs. But when Mr. Bean was handed a large cage with a large bird in it by one of his helpers, Mr. Bullfinch sat up straight on the edge of his chair again.

"Never knew a parrot to be auctioned off before," he told Jerry.

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"Diplomat leaving the country says, 'Sell everything,' and that included this handsome bird. Speaks Spanish, they tell me. Wish Polly would oblige us by saying something in Spanish, but he—I understand it's a male—is too shy to speak before strangers. He's been well taken care of. Wonderful gloss to his feathers," praised Mr. Bean. "Beautiful color. Give an accent to any décor, modern or traditional, besides being a wonderful pet. Now who is going to be the lucky owner of this gorgeous bird?"

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Jerry was surprised that Mr. Bullfinch did not begin the bidding, which started at a disgusting low of fifty cents. Mr. Bullfinch did not speak until the bidding rose to three dollars. Then, "Five dollars," he said in a firm voice that dared anybody to bid higher. Since nobody did, the parrot was Mr. Bullfinch's for five dollars.

"Guess I could have had it for four," Mr. Bullfinch said to Jerry. "Thought it would go to seven."

Jerry was very glad that Mr. Bullfinch's had been the winning bid. It would be interesting to have a Spanish-speaking parrot next door, though Jerry would have bid for the parrot himself if he had had the money. The only pet the Martin family had was Bibsy. "Wish we had a parrot," thought Jerry.

Jerry rather lost interest in the auction after the high spot of selling the parrot. Mr. Bullfinch put

in a bid once in a while but let his bid be topped.

Since Mr. Bullfinch already had a parrot cage, he could keep one cage in the house and the other out in the yard, Jerry was thinking, as a mahogany sewing table was lifted to the auctioneer's platform. Neither Jerry nor Mr. Bullfinch was interested in mahogany sewing tables. Jerry's eyes wandered. He hardly heard Mr. Bean praise the sewing table and accept the first bid. Jerry turned his head and looked around and there was Bill Ellis, a classmate of Jerry's in the sixth. The man beside him was his father. Jerry had seen him enough times to recognize him.

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Bill saw Jerry and grinned and Jerry put up a hand in greeting.

"Sold for three dollars to the young man in the red jacket in the back row," said the auctioneer.

Horrified, Jerry realized that his raised arm had been interpreted as a bid and that he had just bought a mahogany sewing table. "I don't want it. It was a mistake," he wanted to say, but before he could get the words out, Mr. Bean was extolling the beauties of a large oil painting. Jerry had missed his chance to speak up.

"Be a nice present for your mother," said Mr. Bullfinch.

Jerry was sunk in despair. He thought that if you bought something at an auction you had to keep it. What was he going to do when he and Mr. Bullfinch went up to the desk near the door where you paid and what you had bought was brought out to you?

"Forty-seven cents isn't any three dollars," thought Jerry dismally. Nor did he have any more at home.

Suddenly Jerry thought of a place where there was plenty of ready money. In Mr. Bullfinch's grandfather clock. Suppose he told the man at the desk that he did not have enough money on him but would be right back with some. Then he could borrow enough to pay for the sewing table—minus forty-seven cents. Of course it was Mr. Bartlett's money, not his, but as soon as he got back from paying for the sewing table Jerry could go around the neighborhood and get a lawn or two to mow and get money to pay back to Mr. Bartlett. But suppose nobody wanted a lawn mowed? And how would he get back and forth between Rockville and Washington? On a bus, maybe.

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"I believe I've had about enough of this," said Mr. Bullfinch, and he led the way to the desk where the paying for and delivery of goods took place.

Jerry did a lot of thinking as he followed Mr. Bullfinch. He remembered reading a story about a man who worked in a bank and took money, expecting to pay it back, only he couldn't. If Jerry borrowed some of Mr. Bartlett's money, that wouldn't be much different from what the man in the bank did. And he had gone to jail.

"Anyway, it wouldn't be honest," thought Jerry, and knew he couldn't get money to pay for the sewing table that way. What the man at the desk would say to him when he had to confess he couldn't pay, Jerry dreaded to find out.

Mr. Bullfinch paid for his parrot. Jerry moved up toward the desk. He was pale behind his freckles. He could see a man bringing over the mahogany sewing table. Just then, somebody touched Jerry's arm.

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"I'll give you a dollar more than you paid for that sewing table," said a woman in a red hat.

Color rushed back into Jerry's face. He beamed at the woman. "Pay the man three dollars and you can have it," he said.

On their way out to the car—and Mr. Bullfinch very kindly let Jerry carry the cage with the parrot in it—Mr. Bullfinch explained that it would have been quite all right for Jerry to have made a dollar on the sewing table. "If somebody offers you more than you have paid it's all right to take it. But what made you decide you didn't want the little sewing table?"

"My mother has a sewing table," said Jerry.

"Good thing then you got rid of it," said Mr. Bullfinch. "Sometimes I'm not so lucky at getting rid of something I've bought and don't need. I get a bit carried away when I get to bidding."

Mr. Bullfinch looked calm and dignified again, but Jerry remembered how thrilled he had looked at the auction.

"Did you enjoy going to an auction?" asked Mr. Bullfinch.

"I enjoyed most of it," said Jerry. But nobody would ever know, he thought, slightly swinging the heavy cage, how relieved he had been to get rid of that mahogany sewing table. He rather wished now, though, that he had accepted that extra dollar.

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As Good as a Watchdog

It was time for lunch when Jerry got back from the auction. He was eating his second big waffle and his fourth sausage—the Martins always had an especially good lunch on Saturdays since it was the one weekday they were all home to lunch—when there was a knock at the back door.

Mr. Martin went to the door, and the family heard him say cordially, "Come right in."

Into the dining room came Mr. Bullfinch, parrot cage in hand. The parrot was head-down, holding onto the perch with his feet.

"He speaks Spanish," Jerry said, although he had already informed his family of that fact. "Make him say something in Spanish, Mr. Bullfinch."

Mr. Bullfinch refused to sit down but he did put the parrot cage on a chair. "Say '*Buenos días*,'" he urged the parrot. "That is 'Good day' or 'How do you do' in Spanish," he explained. But the parrot said nothing in any language.

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By this time Jerry and Andy were kneeling on the floor by the cage. "Pretty Polly. Polly want a cracker?" crooned Andy. [Pg 109]

"He's not a she, he's a he," said Jerry.

"Don't put your finger near the cage. He might bite," Mrs. Martin warned Andy.

"He wouldn't bite *me*. Parrots like me," said Andy.

"Where did you ever get acquainted with a parrot?" asked Cathy, who had come over to admire the big green bird.

"Somewheres."

"You just dreamed you did." Cathy gave her small brother a hug, against which he pretended to struggle. He bumped into the cage and the parrot gave a loud squawk.

"Look out," cried Mrs. Martin.

"I've come to ask a big favor," said Mr. Bullfinch in his polite voice. "I didn't realize until I got home that my wife is violently allergic to parrots. She had a severe sneezing fit when it had not been in the house more than five minutes. So, I'll have to dispose of the bird. Fine specimen it is, too. Well, it's too late now to get a 'for sale' notice in the paper before Monday, and if I keep the bird in the house until then my wife might have an asthma attack. Would it be too much of an imposition for me to ask you to keep the parrot over here until Monday?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Mr. Martin heartily.

"I'm not sure we could trust Bibsy to let the parrot alone. You know how it is with birds and cats, [Pg 110]

Mr. Bullfinch," said Mrs. Martin.

"Say, do you think any cat could get the best of a bird with a beak on him like that?" cried Jerry. "Anyway, Bibsy is good about leaving birds alone. You know she is. Besides, having a parrot who can speak Spanish in the house will teach us a little Spanish. I heard you say that the reason people in the United States are so poor at speaking foreign languages is because they don't start young enough to learn one. Here's our chance."

"The amount of Spanish you'd learn from a parrot over a week end won't be likely to make you very proficient in the language," said Mrs. Martin. Then she turned to Mr. Bullfinch and told him she would be glad to keep the parrot until Monday. "But only till Monday," she said, looking at Jerry.

After Mr. Bullfinch had expressed his thanks and left, all three of the Martin children begged their mother to buy the parrot from Mr. Bullfinch. Jerry rashly promised all his allowance for May. Cathy wouldn't go as far as that but she would spare a dollar. And Andy trotted off for his piggy bank to contribute his pennies.

"I better run after Mr. Bullfinch and tell him he needn't phone in that ad for the newspaper," said Jerry.

"You'll do no such thing," said his mother. "I agreed to keep the parrot over the week end. I meant over the week end and no longer."

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When their mother spoke in that tone of voice, her children had learned it was no use to argue.

"I've always wanted a parrot for a pet and here is a good chance to get one and you turn it down," grumbled Jerry.

"What's the parrot's name?" asked Mr. Martin.

Jerry didn't know. "Can you ask him what his name is in Spanish?" he asked his father.

Mr. Martin didn't think that would do much good but he could and did ask the parrot in Spanish what his name was.

There was no response from the parrot.

"Guess you'll have to give him a name," said Mr. Martin.

"Let's call him Pete," suggested Andy.

"Pete's not a Spanish name. He ought to have a Spanish name," said Cathy.

"I think Pedro's the Spanish for Pete," said Jerry, remembering a story he had read about a Spanish donkey.

They agreed on Pedro. They all addressed the parrot by name but he only glared at them with his beady eyes and kept silent.

"Maybe he's dumb," said Andy.

"Maybe he's too young to know how to talk," said Cathy.

"He's not that young," said Jerry.

They were eating dessert—pineapple upside-down cake—when the parrot beat his wings and said in a strong, hoarse voice, "*Caramba!*"

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"What does that mean?" Jerry asked his father.

"It's a Spanish word that they use the same way we say 'Gosh!'"

"*Caramba!*" repeated Jerry.

"*Caramba!*" Andy tried to say, only it came out more like "*Carimba!*" The way he said it made it sound like a swear word.

"Oh, dear, I hope that bird won't teach the children any bad language," said Mrs. Martin.

"I somehow doubt if he'll teach them to swear in Spanish over the week end," said Mr. Martin, with a twinkle in his eye.

Then there began an argument about where the parrot's cage should be hung. Cathy said it should be in her room because the parrot's color would go so well with her bedspread and curtains. Jerry said that naturally the cage should be in his room. He had known the parrot longest, hadn't he?

"He likes me best. I know he does," declared Andy. "I want him to sleep with me."

"Maybe the recreation room would be more appropriate," suggested Mr. Martin.

Mrs. Martin knew where there was a big hook which could be screwed in over one of the windows. "You can spend as much time down there with him as you want to," she told the children.

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"If we turn the TV on good and loud, that might teach him a little English," said Jerry. "We teach him English. He teaches us Spanish."

"Fair enough," said Mr. Martin.

Later in the afternoon Jerry was taking his time about mowing the lawn, and wishing there was stuff to put on grass to make it stop growing instead of all that fertilizer his father put on to make it grow, when his mother called and asked him to run to the store for a package of raisins. She wanted to make raisin sauce for the ham they were having for dinner that night.

Jerry never minded having to stop mowing the lawn. Now if his father had a power mower that would be different. But Jerry's father refused to buy a power mower until he decided that Jerry was old enough to run it. In Jerry's opinion, he was old enough now. He threw down the despised hand lawn mower and started for the store, walking, not taking his bike this time. His mother was in no immediate hurry for the raisins and Jerry was certainly in no hurry to finish mowing the lawn.

This probably would be his last trip to the store before the happy time of going to pay the bill on Monday, Jerry thought, making a slight detour in order to jump two low hedges in a neighbor's yard. Over without touching, he was pleased to note. May Day would mean the end of all that rigmarole of the secret charge account. And what a relief that would be! In his thoughts Jerry had shied away from applying the word deceit to his charging groceries and keeping Mr. Bartlett's money over at the Bullfinches', but he had not been able to get away from an uneasy feeling about what he had been doing. It was his nature to be open and aboveboard. The past month had been a strain.

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"Now it's all over but the payoff," thought Jerry, waiting for Mr. Bartlett to make out the grocery slip. The candy in the showcase next to the cash register looked luscious. Jerry wondered how many pieces there were in a half pound and thought of asking but decided against it. Jerry was still hopeful that Mr. Bartlett would at least make it a heavy half pound when the bill was paid.

This time Jerry had to get only change for half a dollar from the grandfather clock. He stopped to visit a few minutes with Mr. Bullfinch, who had a fireplace fire burning in his den.

"Had a man here last week to give the furnace its summer hookup," said Mr. Bullfinch. "Should have had more sense. I forgot that it's possible to half roast and half freeze on the same day. This morning felt like June and this afternoon's more like March. That's Washington spring weather for you."

Jerry agreed that the weather had turned chilly. He watched the flames lick the charcoal briquets in the fireplace.

Mr. Bullfinch had a grate shaped like a cradle in his fireplace and burned charcoal or coal instead of logs. It would be a wonderful fire for a cook-out, Jerry thought. Only he guessed that if you cooked a meal over an open fire indoors, it should be called a cook-in.

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Mr. Bullfinch inquired after the parrot's health, and Jerry said that as far as he could tell, it was good. Jerry said he had wheeled the television set over so the parrot could watch the ball game.

"I would have been looking at it, too, if I hadn't had to mow the lawn and then go to the store."

"I can see that you are a busy lad," sympathized Mr. Bullfinch.

"I probably won't be over here so often after Monday," said Jerry, after replacing the tobacco pouch in the grandfather clock.

"That so? We shall miss having you run in every day or so. Hope you won't be too much of a stranger."

Mr. Bullfinch did not ask why Jerry's visits would be less frequent after Monday. That was one of the nice things about Mr. Bullfinch, his showing no curiosity about Jerry's affairs. Jerry was so grateful to him for not asking embarrassing questions that he found it hard not to break down and tell him all about the charge account. But that was a temptation Jerry had already successfully resisted several times and he now did again.

"After I get the candy Monday I'll give him some and tell him all about it," Jerry vowed.

Jerry was pleased to find his father finishing mowing the lawn.

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"At the rate you were going I thought you might not get it done before dark," his father greeted him.

That was the way parents were. Instead of being grateful for what you had done, they bawled you out for not finishing the last bit. "I would have done it," said Jerry.

Jerry raked up the grass clippings before he took the box of raisins in to his mother. "Where's Cathy?" he asked.

"I think she's down looking at TV."

Jerry ran down to the recreation room. The TV had been turned off. Cathy was standing close to Pedro's cage.

"Cathy. Cathy. Cathy," she repeated. "Say Cathy."

Jerry was indignant. While he had been hard at work on the lawn and then running to the store, Cathy had been trying to teach the parrot to say her name.

"You quit that," ordered Jerry.

"I'd like to know why."

Jerry did not come right out and say that he wanted Pedro to say *his* name first.

"Seems pretty conceited for you to think your name is the most important word in the English language," he said. "Pretty conceited. Naturally Pedro should learn the most important words first."

"What *is* the most important word in the English language?" asked Cathy.

"That depends."

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"Depends on what?"

"If you could answer as many questions as you can ask, you'd be more than half bright."

"Jerry Martin, are you calling me a moron? You know I get better grades in school than you do."

"Who called you a moron?"

"You did."

"I did not. I didn't say how much more than half bright you'd be if you could answer as many questions as you ask."

"You're—you're impossible."

Jerry turned the television on. As a singing commercial came on, the parrot laughed a raucous laugh.

"Say, he may not know how to speak English but that parrot's got sense," said Jerry admiringly.

A door above opened. "Jerry," called his mother from upstairs, "you come right up here and get that snake off the hall table."

"It's only a little green snake I found when I was cutting the grass," grumbled Jerry. "I was going to catch flies for it. It's a perfectly harmless snake."

"Snakes—ugh!" said Cathy.

"Say, what's got into you? I've seen you let a little green garter snake wind around your wrist like a bracelet."

"I did, didn't I?" Cathy was suddenly on Jerry's level again. Then she looked up at her reflection in a mirror over the television set and smoothed her hair at the sides. "I used to do a lot of silly things when I was young," she said.

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She seemed to be insinuating that she was more grownup than Jerry, even though they were twins. Jerry was furious with her. He was angry because they were no longer the companions they used to be, though he did not realize it. He missed the old Cathy, who reappeared only now and then. They were so seldom really together nowadays and it had not been long ago that they had been two against anything or anybody which threatened one of them.

"I wouldn't be a girl for a million dollars," he said. "Little pats of powder, Little daubs of paint, Make a little girly Look like what she ain't," he quoted.

"Why Jerry Martin, I wouldn't think of using rouge. Mummy wouldn't let me if I wanted to."

"Cathy," called her mother from upstairs. "Come set the table for dinner."

Cathy, with one of her movie-queen looks, sailed past Jerry and went upstairs.

"Girls are nuts," Jerry said.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Pedro.

"You *are* a smart bird," said Jerry and tried in vain to teach the parrot to say "Jerry." Pedro said "*Caramba*" again and a few Spanish words Jerry did not understand, but that was all.

He certainly was a handsome bird. Jerry looked at him with affection. "Give you time and you'll learn to speak English," said Jerry. And, "Gosh, I wish you really belonged to me." Then, having been called twice, Jerry went up to dinner.

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Jerry went to the neighborhood movie that night with his mother and Cathy, so he was later getting to bed than usual. He was dropping off to sleep when he heard what he thought was a car backfiring outside. Then, at the very edge of sleep again, Jerry smelled smoke. He rushed to the window. By moonlight he could see the Bullfinch house almost as plain as day. There was smoke coming out of the chimney. There was also smoke rising from the roof.

"Fire!" bawled Jerry. "Fire!" he shouted all the way down the stairs.

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"The Bullfinch house is on fire!" he yelled at the door of the living room where his father and mother were sitting.

"What?" cried his father.

"Is this one of your ideas of a joke?" asked his mother.

Jerry did not stop. The front door slammed behind him. "Fire!" he kept shouting all the way to the Bullfinch house, as if a phonograph needle had been stuck at that word in a record.

"I've got to get that grocery money out of there. I've got to," Jerry thought, so excited and driven that he did not know he was shivering with cold.

Jerry rang the Bullfinch doorbell hard with one hand while he pounded on the door with the other.

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Mr. Bullfinch came to the door. He looked only a little excited.

"Your house is on fire!" cried Jerry.

"I know. I know. I've called the fire department," said Mr. Bullfinch. "Won't you come in?" he asked politely, as if it were not strange to invite a person to come in a burning house.

Jerry was glad to get Mr. Bartlett's money safe in two pockets of his pajamas. There was too much of it for one.

"Want me to help carry out things?" he asked Mr. Bullfinch.

Mrs. Bullfinch was fluttering about, wondering what should be saved first, when sirens screeched and fire engines arrived on the scene.

By this time a small crowd had gathered to watch the fire. Jerry's mother brought out a jacket for him to put on over his pajamas. He was glad of its warmth and also because he could transfer Mr. Bartlett's money into larger pockets where bulges would not be so conspicuous.

It was not much of a fire. It was soon out. All that had burned was part of the eaves near the chimney. Jerry heard his father ask Mr. Bullfinch if he knew how the fire had started. And Mr. Bullfinch seemed slightly embarrassed as he explained what he thought must have happened.

"I have only my own carelessness to blame," said Mr. Bullfinch. "You see, I burn charcoal in the fireplace in my den. I keep a big sack of charcoal briquets out in the garage. Well, soon after I put fresh charcoal on the fire—I often read late you know—there was a sharp series of bangs and I realized what had happened."

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Then all that banging hadn't been a car backfiring, thought Jerry.

"There is a shelf in the garage over the sack of charcoal," Mr. Bullfinch continued, "and there was a box of cartridges on the shelf. It must be that a few cartridges spilled into the charcoal and they went off when I put them on the fire. Lucky they fired up the chimney instead of in the room. Loosened a few bricks in the chimney and burned a bit of the eaves. No great damage, I'm thankful to say."

"That's the most unusual cause of a fire I ever heard of," said Mr. Martin.

"I don't want the fire to be out so soon," mourned Andy, who had been waked up to come to the fire.

"I'd better get that child to bed," said Mr. Martin.

Jerry would have followed his father but Mr. Bullfinch wanted to thank him for coming over to rescue them, even though they had not needed to be rescued. "But if I hadn't still been up you might have saved our lives," he told Jerry. Then he told Jerry something else that filled Jerry's heart with joy. Jerry was so grateful he could hardly speak.

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Jerry kept his cause of gratitude to himself until the family were in the kitchen having a bite to eat.

"Mr. Bullfinch has given Pedro to me," he said, putting a thick layer of grape marmalade and peanut butter on a slice of bread. "A five-dollar parrot and he's worth much more than that and Mr. Bullfinch gave him to me for almost saving his life."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Martin.

"Fire!" bawled a loud hoarse voice from the cellar.

"It's Pedro. He's said his first English word." Jerry was beaming with pride. "He'll be as good as a watchdog. Don't miners sometimes take parrots into mines with them to warn them against poisonous fumes?"

"A canary I've heard of—not a parrot," said Mr. Martin. "And we're really in very little danger from poisonous fumes. But I guess we can't risk offending a neighbor by refusing a gift."

"Taking care of a parrot can be a lot of work," said Mrs. Martin.

"I'll help," offered Cathy. And Jerry was grateful to her.

"Fire!" the parrot kept bawling. "Fire!"

"Go down and put something over his cage or we'll not get any sleep," Jerry's mother told him. "Yes, you can keep him. I might have known when I saw that parrot come into the house that he would stay."

As Jerry galloped down the stairs to the recreation room with a scarf to put over Pedro's cage, he wondered if he would have hurried quite as fast over to the Bullfinch house if it had not been for the money in the grandfather clock. He had slipped in and put it back there before coming home. Fire was not likely to strike twice in the same house, he had thought.

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Pedro was making gentle, clucking noises.

"Good night, old bird," said Jerry, after he had put the scarf over the cage. "I wonder if parrots eat candy," he thought on his way upstairs to bed. "When I get that candy from Mr. Bartlett tomorrow I'm going to try Pedro on a piece of a lime mint. They're almost the same color as the feathers near his throat."

Joy of ownership of a handsome green parrot made Jerry's steps light on the stairs. He went to bed by moonlight. There seemed to be a glow on everything.

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10

May Day

"How nice that today is pleasant, so you can have your May Day exercises outdoors," Mrs. Martin said, as she bustled about getting her children's breakfast on the table.

"Did you finish hemming my dress?" asked Cathy. She was to be crowned May Queen and was so worried about looking exactly right that she could hardly eat her breakfast.

"It's all packed in a suit box," said Mrs. Martin. "I put in Andy's costume under it. Be surer of getting there if you carry it."

"Do I have to wear that silly sash?" Andy was to help wind the Maypole and was to wear yellow cambric shorts, a white blouse, and a yellow sash around his middle.

"You must dress as your teacher told you to," said his mother. "Be careful with that glass of milk, Andy."

Jerry was thankful that his only part in the May Day festival was to help seat the parents. And that all he had to wear different from usual was an armband. Jerry's mind was not on the May Day exercises. He had something far more important to think about. Today was the day he had so long looked forward to. Today he would pay the bill at Bartlett's store. The store wouldn't be open early enough so he could tend to it before school, but the minute he could get away from the May Day exercises that afternoon he would race to Mr. Bullfinch's, get the money from the grandfather clock, and go pay the bill. Thinking of the candy that would then be presented to him made Jerry grin.

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"You're looking mighty pleased with yourself this morning, Jerry," said his mother, passing him the bacon.

"Who? Me? It's Cathy who's the big shot today. Hi, Queenie! You feeling squeamy?" he teased his sister. "Won't you look like something—all dressed up like a circus horse, with a tinfoil crown on your head? Yes, your majesty. No, your majesty. After this you'll expect everybody to bow down to you. Not me. I'm not forgetting this is a democracy."

"All I hope is that you won't do anything at the exercises that will disgrace the family," said Cathy.

"Call me a disgrace to the family, do you? Well, I like that."

"There isn't time for you two to squabble. You should be leaving for school in less than five minutes," said Mrs. Martin.

"I won't say a word if Cathy'll leave me alone," said Jerry.

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"I leave you alone! Why it was you who started—"

"I don't care who started what. It's finished," said Mrs. Martin with firmness.

Jerry gave Cathy a mocking smile. He was really proud that she had been chosen May Queen. He would never let on to her all the votes he had rounded up for her. Not Jerry. He kept it a dark secret that he thought her the prettiest girl in their class. No need of making her more stuck on her looks than she already was.

Lessons at school were brief that day. By ten-thirty, four boys from the sixth grade were helping the custodian put up the Maypole. Then there were two chairs from the principal's office to be draped with gold-colored cambric, throne chairs for the King and Queen. As soon as lunch period was over, Jerry helped carry chairs from the cafeteria out to the yard, where they were arranged in rows facing the throne. The exercises were to begin at one, but a few parents came before all the chairs were in place.

A phonograph on a table behind a tree furnished music for winding the Maypole. Jerry, standing with his classmates behind the chairs—there were chairs only for the parents—saw that Andy looked very earnest and a little scared. He got to going the wrong way once but was quickly turned around by his kindergarten teacher. Jerry was glad for Andy's sake when the Maypole dance was over.

Now came the crowning of the King and Queen. Cathy wore a white billowy dress and her mother's pearl necklace. She was flushed and her eyes shone.

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"What a little charmer she will be in a few years," Jerry heard one of the mothers say.

"Yeah! A snake charmer," Jerry thought. He knew though that that was not the kind of charmer meant. Jerry did not want Cathy to charm anybody, especially boys. It made him mad if he saw her look moony at a boy. "Mush" was what Jerry called a certain way some of the girls and boys looked at each other. It was definitely not for him.

Jerry managed to slip away before the exercises were quite over. A spring song by the combined fourth and fifth grades rang in his ears as he left the schoolyard. Everybody would be free to go home at the end of the song, but Jerry wanted to get a head start. He wanted to surprise the family with the box of candy the minute they got home.

He ran all the way to the Bullfinches'. "In an awful hurry. See you later," he said, rushing in and grabbing the tobacco pouch of money from the grandfather clock. Then he was off for the store, running as if chased.

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Mr. Bartlett, for once, was alone in the store.

"I came to pay the bill," gasped Jerry, and he emptied the contents of the tobacco pouch on the counter.

"Bring the bill with you?" asked Mr. Bartlett.

What bill? Jerry did not know anything about a bill. But he had saved all the grocery slips. He had gone over to the Bullfinches' the night before and added and added. He was sure the money was the right amount.

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Mr. Bartlett looked up the amount due in a ledger. He was a bit grumpy about having to count so much chicken feed, as he called it, as he counted the change. "It's all here," he said finally.

For an awful moment Jerry was afraid he was not going to get a bonus for paying the bill. It was with enormous relief that he saw Mr. Bartlett reach for a half-pound pasteboard box.

"It was a fair-sized bill and I'll give you a full half pound," said Mr. Bartlett. "Anything you prefer?"

Jerry said he would like a few pink and green mints. With pleasure he watched Mr. Bartlett arrange a row of varicolored mints and fill up the rest of the box with chocolates—so full that the cover would hardly go down.

Jerry thanked Mr. Bartlett with great heartiness. Fond though he was of candy, Jerry didn't take even as much as a taste on the way home. He would show it to his mother and Cathy and Andy but he would save it untouched until his father got home from work.

"I wanted to prove to you that having a charge account pays off," he would tell his father, offering him the open box, after Andy had had the first piece—Jerry remembered that Andy was to have the first piece. "Where else can you get something for nothing except by charging your groceries at Bartlett's store?" That was what Jerry would say to his father. Or something else that might occur to him later. His father would be sure to see the advantage of charging groceries as soon as he cast an eye on all that free candy.

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Jerry whistled gaily most of the way back from the store. "Bet you can't guess what I have," he cried, as he opened the kitchen door and saw his mother and Cathy sitting at the kitchen table. Further cheerful words died in his throat when he saw that both his mother and Cathy had been crying.

"What's the matter?" Could something terrible have happened to his father? Or to Andy? What awful thing could make his mother and Cathy look so sad? There were envelopes and letters on the table. His mother had been opening her mail. The bad news must have come in a letter, then.

"Is Grandma Martin sick again?" Jerry asked.

His mother sobbed, and Jerry couldn't remember ever seeing his mother cry. "How could you,

Jerry? How could you do such a dreadful thing?"

"He didn't do it. I know he didn't do it!" cried Cathy. "Tell her you didn't do it, Jerry. Tell her it must be a mistake."

"To think that a son of mine would be a thief!" said Jerry's mother. And the face she turned toward him was full of hurt and disappointment. It tore Jerry inside.

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"I haven't done anything. Anything wrong," he said.

"You stand there and tell me that you haven't been charging groceries at Bartlett's store for a month?"

"Sure I did but—"

"Oh, Jerry!" Cathy burst into tears.

"What did you do with the money?" demanded Jerry's mother. "Mischievous can be forgiven but stealing is a crime. When I opened an envelope and found a bill for the month of April from Bartlett's store, I hoped against hope that there must be a mistake. But now you confess you've been deceiving me and charging the groceries that I gave you money to pay for. I never thought I would be so ashamed of you, Jerry Martin." The look she gave him was worse than a blow.

So she thought him a thief—was ashamed of him—believed the worst of him before giving him a chance to explain. Jerry felt such a deep hurt he felt like crying but he wasn't going to let anybody see him cry. And if that was what his mother thought of him, he wasn't going to stay around here. Not after she had looked at him as if she wished he did not belong in her family.

Jerry slammed the box of candy so hard on the table that the cover opened and some of the candy fell out.

"I paid the bill with the money. Ask Mr. Bartlett if you don't believe me. I was going to surprise you by showing you the bonus he gives for charging a month's groceries. I didn't spend a cent of your old money. I—" Jerry suddenly could not endure being there a second longer. He rushed out, slamming the door behind him.

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Rage sent Jerry hurrying down his street and out to Massachusetts Avenue. He was so hurt and angry he could hardly see straight. He would run away from home. He would leave Washington. He would go somewhere a long way off. He would go where nobody would be likely to accuse him unjustly of being a thief. He walked rapidly, almost running in his hurry to leave home.

Where should he go? Jerry did not have even the bus fare to go to town, let alone get out of the city. But he had two feet, didn't he? Maybe after he decided where he was going he would hitchhike. Jerry knew his mother disapproved of hitchhiking but why should he pay any attention to that now, after she had believed him to be a thief? Jerry made no effort, however, to hitch a ride. He walked and walked.

There were azaleas in bloom in some of the yards he passed. Bushes of faded lilacs. Bright beds of tulips and pansies. Jerry did not notice them. He was in no mood to enjoy flowers. He was about a mile from home when he remembered hearing a guest say to his mother, "Florida is really delightful in the spring. And after the winter visitors have left the prices go down."

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Jerry thought it might be a good idea to go where the prices had gone down. Be easier for him to earn enough to live on. A lot of people went fishing off the coast of Florida. Maybe he could help out on some fishing boat. Jerry liked to fish and he liked boats. That idea appealed to him. But he realized that it was a long, long way to Florida from Washington, D. C. It was even a long way—five miles at least—from Jerry's house to Memorial Bridge, over which he would cross the Potomac into the state of Virginia.

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As Jerry went along the part of Massachusetts Avenue which has many foreign embassies, it occurred to him that he might be seeing Washington for the last time. So he looked hard at the white Venezuelan Embassy and at the red brick British Embassy. Those were his two favorites, and he wanted to remember how they looked.

There were several circles to go around and a bridge to cross over Rock Creek Park before Jerry was anywhere near Memorial Bridge. He missed his direction a little when he left Massachusetts Avenue, but he was finally in sight of the Lincoln Memorial and the bridge was near.

Jerry yielded to an impulse to take a last look at the Lincoln Memorial. He climbed the steps and stood and gazed up at the seated figure of Abraham Lincoln, with so much sadness and kindness in his face.

Having paid his respects to Abraham Lincoln, it didn't seem quite right to be leaving town without doing the same by George Washington. Weary though his legs were, Jerry trudged over to the Washington Monument.

There were not many people waiting in line to go up in the Monument. Jerry was the only one who walked up instead of riding to the top in the elevator. Jerry did not know why he wanted to climb all those eight hundred and ninety-eight steps, but he did. He did a lot of thinking and remembering on his way up. That was the way you did when you were leaving home, he guessed. He thought of school and home and playing baseball—things like that. And some about George Washington. Jerry greatly admired all he had read about him. He was glad they had named the capital of the United States for Washington.

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Jerry had been at the top of the Monument many times, yet it was always a thrill to go from window to window and see each scene below. From this one he could see the Capitol and the greenish dome of the Library of Congress. From another window he looked down on a crowded part of the city. Jerry thought that if he knew just where to look, he might see the hospital where he had been born.

The window that overlooked the White House was one of Jerry's favorite views. He remembered Easter Mondays when he had gone to roll eggs on the White House lawn. He remembered a time when he was five, younger than Andy—a time when he had gotten separated from his mother—had been lost. A Girl Scout had taken him to a place where lost children waited to be claimed. A lady played games with them while they waited, but a few of the children had cried. Jerry had not cried. He somehow felt more like crying now. And even more lost.

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Well, he must be on his way. He would take the elevator down, for he felt his legs would not last for all of those steps going down. Yet he was reluctant to leave the top of the Monument. Each window gave a picture postcard view of the city he was leaving. It was up here that he was really saying good-bye to Washington, D. C.

Why did he have to think just then of the honesty of Lincoln? Or of how Washington had stayed with his soldiers through the hardships of the winter at Valley Forge? They were not men who had run away from the hard things of life. Jerry tried to close his mind against thoughts of Lincoln and Washington. They were dead and gone and had nothing to do with him. It was no use. It had been a mistake, Jerry realized now, to revisit the Memorial and the Monument. Something in both places had pulled against his wanting to run away. Suddenly Jerry realized that he couldn't do it. He no longer even wanted to run away. He wanted to go home.

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11

Welcome Home!

It was growing dark by the time Jerry reached home. By now his family would know for sure that he was no thief, but Jerry knew it was possible that his father would be angry about the charge account, in spite of the free box of candy. For a moment Jerry hesitated outside the door. Then he squared his shoulders and went in.

The whole family were in the kitchen. Jerry saw every eye turned toward him—every face light up with relief.

"Hi, Jerry, where've you been?" cried Andy.

"I told you he'd come back," said Cathy.

Jerry was so grateful to Cathy for having believed in him even when things looked bad that he thought he would never again tease her about reading lovey-dovey books or admiring herself in mirrors.

"Oh, Jerry!" cried his mother.

Jerry read the relief and welcome in her face—the love for him. He found that he was no longer angry with his mother. Somewhere on the long, long walk, his anger had died. He could understand that it had been no wonder she had believed the worst of him—getting that bill in the mail and all.

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"Got anything to eat?" he asked her.

"We were too worried to eat. None of us has had a bite of dinner." Mrs. Martin rushed to the stove and clattered pots and pans as she put things on to reheat.

His father's clear blue eyes were on Jerry. "After dinner," he said, "you and I will have a little talk."

Jerry did not look forward to that talk, yet it took more than dread to spoil his appetite. His mother said that the onions and asparagus were not as good as when they had been freshly cooked more than two hours ago. But they tasted fine to Jerry. Nor did he mind that the pot roast and rolls were reheated. He slathered butter on three rolls and would have eaten a fourth if he had not seen the necessity of saving room for a piece of apple pie.

Only Andy bothered Jerry with questions while he was eating. "Where did you go?" he asked.

"To the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, if you must know," said Jerry. "I walked up but I rode down in the Monument."

"Is that all you did?" asked Andy.

"I just walked around."

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"Walking around gave you a good appetite," said Mr. Martin, as he cut another slice of pot roast for Jerry's plate. "A good thing you don't walk around five or six hours every day or I might not be able to pay the grocery bill." [Pg 141]

Jerry winced. He knew his father meant paying cash for groceries, not a grocery bill. His father did not have bills—never charged things. Looking at his father's firm mouth and chin, Jerry wondered how he could have expected to win his father over to having a charge account. Parents were the way they were and stayed that way. Especially his father. It would take much more than half a pound of candy to make him change his mind about charge accounts, Jerry now fully realized.

Mr. Martin said he and Jerry would have their talk down in the recreation room. Jerry noticed his mother and Cathy looked worried. Maybe they expected his father to give him a beating. Jerry was a little worried about that prospect himself.

Jerry saw Pedro watching them as he and his father sat down on the sofa.

"Has Pedro talked any more?" Jerry asked.

"Stop gawking at that parrot and pay attention to me," said Jerry's father.

"Yes, sir."

"You had your mother worried sick."

Jerry said he was sorry.

"Did you stay out so long on purpose to worry her?"

Jerry said that had not been the reason at all. He confessed that he had intended to run away to Florida but had changed his mind and come home. [Pg 142]

Mr. Martin's sternness softened. "A good many boys run away from home," he said. "The luckiest ones are those who come back before they have run too far. It was this charge account business you were running away from, wasn't it?"

"Partly." Jerry could not tell his father that his mother's lack of belief in his honesty had had more to do with his running away. Jerry did not want to remember how his mother had looked at him. He hoped never to bring an expression like that to her face again.

"The worst thing about your scheme for the charge account was that you were handling money that belonged to somebody else without his permission," said Jerry's father.

"You mean Mr. Bartlett. It was his money but I don't see why—"

"It was not then Mr. Bartlett's money but mine. You contracted a debt in my name and withheld money that had been entrusted to you."

The way his father put it made Jerry feel that he had done something nearly bad enough for him to be put in jail.

"I was just trying to prove that it pays to have a charge account at Bartlett's," said Jerry.

"You knew very well that I don't have charge accounts or intend to have them."

"What's the sin about charging things?"

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"No sin, of course. I didn't say it was. It's a person's right to charge anything he wants to. And my right to pay cash, since I prefer to do business that way."

"I guess that wasn't a good idea of mine," said Jerry.

"Mr. Bartlett is a little to blame for what you did," said Mr. Martin. "I went to his store and told him in no uncertain terms that I did not think it fair for a storekeeper to reward credit customers and do nothing for even better cash customers."

"So is he going to stop giving candy to people when they pay their bills?"

"No. He says he's sentimental about that old family custom. But he saw the justice of my argument. He has decided to give the equivalent of a two per cent discount in produce to any customer whose cash receipts for a month are more than fifty dollars."

"What does that mean—in produce?"

"Well, it could be a bag of potatoes or a box of candy. That's entirely up to your mother."

"Not bad. Not bad at all," said Jerry.

"You can wipe that self-satisfied expression right off your face, young man," said Jerry's father. "Taking things in your own hands and deciding what I should do with *my* money was wrong and you know it. You do know it, don't you?"

Jerry said he could see now that it had not been the right thing to do.

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"When I think of all the time and effort you put in for half a pound of candy—well, I can only hope that someday you'll work as hard at something useful."

Jerry wished his father would hurry up and say what his punishment was to be.

"Considering that there are extenuating circumstances, I am letting you off easy," said his father. "No baseball games for you for the rest of the season. Either at the ball park or on television."

"Not even the World Series on television?"

"Not even the World Series."

The punishment did not seem light to Jerry. He was crushed. "Can't I even play baseball?"

Jerry's father considered the question. "Suppose we confine the restriction to looking at professional baseball."

Jerry sighed in relief. That was not quite as bad. "What are you going to do with that box of candy?" he dared ask.

"I suppose you expected to gorge yourself on it."

"I was going to pass it around," said Jerry. "And take a few pieces over to the Bullfinches. He's been awfully nice to me."

"As long as you have it, you may as well pass the candy around," said Mr. Martin. "But remember. Don't you ever do such a deceitful thing again, Jerry Martin."

"I won't. Honest."

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In the cage by the window, the big green parrot flapped his wings.

"Sometimes he does that when he's getting ready to talk," said Jerry.

The parrot remarked something in Spanish which Jerry did not understand. Then he said "Jerry" quite clearly. "Jerry!" he called in his loud, hoarse voice. "Jerry!"

The subdued look on Jerry's face was replaced by a broad smile. "I'm the first one in this family he's called by name," he said to his father.

"It's a good name," said Mr. Martin. "Your Grandfather Martin's name. He made it a name to be proud of. See that you keep it that way."

Jerry said he certainly would try. He really meant to. He and his father went back upstairs together. Weary though he was, Jerry felt the relief of having that charge account business off his shoulders. In spite of being deprived of his beloved ball games, he felt more lighthearted than he had for weeks. First, he would pass the candy box to Andy and then to the rest of the family. Then, before taking some over to the Bullfinches', he would take a green mint down to Pedro.

"If he doesn't like it, I'll eat it myself," thought Jerry.

THE Surprise OF THEIR LIVES

by Hazel Wilson

This book contains the amazing story of Mary Jo and James Dunham, who lived on Morning Street in Portland, Maine, with their father and mother and small sister Ellen.

You wouldn't expect much out of the ordinary to happen to the Dunhams. They went about their happy life—having birthdays and Halloween parties, going to school and staying after, getting into barrels and the mouths of cannons, quarreling and scolding sometimes, but being fond of each other always underneath—as if it would be that way forever.

But you would be reckoning without Lizzie Atkins and scarlet fever if you thought the sea would always stay calm with only a few ripples for the Dunhams. In fact, it was mostly due to Lizzie, whom some parents forbade their children to play with, that Mary Jo and James received just about the biggest surprise that could happen to anyone.

This is not the place to tell what the surprise was. You will have to read the book to find out.

Drawings and jacket by
Robert Henneberger



(Hazel Wilson photo by Lange)

HAZEL WILSON

Mrs. Wilson has written several stories with the background of her native State of Maine. Among them are *THE SURPRISE OF THEIR LIVES*, about the amazing adventure of a boy and girl in the days when ocean liners docked at Portland, and *TALL SHIPS*, an exciting tale of impressment and sea battles during the War of 1812.

In 1956, Mrs. Wilson's work for children and books, as librarian, teacher, and author, was recognized by her own college, Bates, in Maine, which awarded her its honorary degree of Master of Arts.

For *JERRY'S CHARGE ACCOUNT*, she has moved her background to what is now her home city,

Washington, D.C. Readers will discover that this background plays an important part in helping Jerry work out his difficulties.

Transcriber's Notes

Moved some illustrations to avoid breaking up the text. Corrected mismatched quotes.

On page 30, changed "his legs for apart" to "his legs far apart".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JERRY'S CHARGE ACCOUNT ***

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