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HENRY AND THE NIGHT CRAWLERS

When Henry came home from school one Friday late in September, he shook all his nickels and dimes and pennies out of a marble sack onto his bedspread. His expenses had been heavy and he knew he did not have much money left. The first thing he had done after finding Ribsy was to pay for his license and buy him a collar. Naturally he didn't want his dog to

eat from an old chipped dish, so he had spent sixty-nine cents for a red plastic dish with D O G printed on it. This nearly exhausted his savings. He had spent his silver dollar on the guppies and all his allowance to take care of them. Then he had sold the guppies for seven dollars and spent all seven for the tank and thermostat for the catfish.

At breakfast this morning his father had given him his weekly twenty-five cents. Besides that, he had six cents saved from last week's allowance. He also had a nickel he had found in the park. And then there was his Canadian dime. He could try to spend that but he hated to after keeping it almost a year. He might want to start a coin collection sometime. With the Canadian dime, he had forty-six cents, not counting nine cents he could get for three old milk bottles he had found in a vacant lot on the way home from school.

It was not enough.

Henry needed thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents plus forty-one cents for tax.

Henry needed all this money because he wanted to buy a football—a real football from a sporting goods store, not just a toy football from a department store. This time he wanted a genuine cowhide football stitched with nylon thread and laced with buckskin thongs. Every boy on Klickitat Street wanted one.

As Henry looked at the money spread out on his bed, he heard someone calling, “He-e-enry!”

Henry went to the front door. There on the front porch stood Scooter McCarthy. Henry was surprised, because Scooter didn’t often come to play with him. He was a fifth grader and bigger than Henry. Henry was even more surprised when he saw what

Scooter was holding—a real cowhide football stitched with nylon thread and laced with real buckskin thongs!

“Hi, Scoot,” said Henry. “Boy oh boy! Where did you get that football?”

“My grandmother sent it to me for my birthday,” answered Scooter.

“Your grandmother!” Henry could hardly believe it. “My grandmother sends me sweaters and socks.”

“My grandmother sends me keen presents. Come on out and throw some passes with me.”

Scooter pounded the football with his fist. It made a drumlike sound.

Henry could hardly wait to touch the leather. When the boys, followed by Ribs, went out to the sidewalk, Scooter ran up the street a way and threw the ball back to Henry. It hit some branches that overhung the sidewalk but Henry caught it anyway.

The ball felt just right. It was big and solid and smelled of new leather. Henry lovingly ran his hands over its surface before he sent it sailing back to Scooter. The ball hit the branch again.

"I know what," said Scooter. "If I went on the other side of the street and we threw it back and forth across the street, we wouldn't hit the trees." He tucked the ball under his arm as if he were running ninety yards for a touchdown and sprinted across the street.

Pow! The ball sailed into Henry's hands. It made a deep hollow sound, just the kind of sound a good football should make. Henry sent it back across the street. *Pow!* Scooter caught it. Back and forth the ball flew until Henry's hands began to tingle from the smack of leather against them.

"Throw it to me once more," called Scooter, "and then let's go down to the

empty lot and practice kicking.”

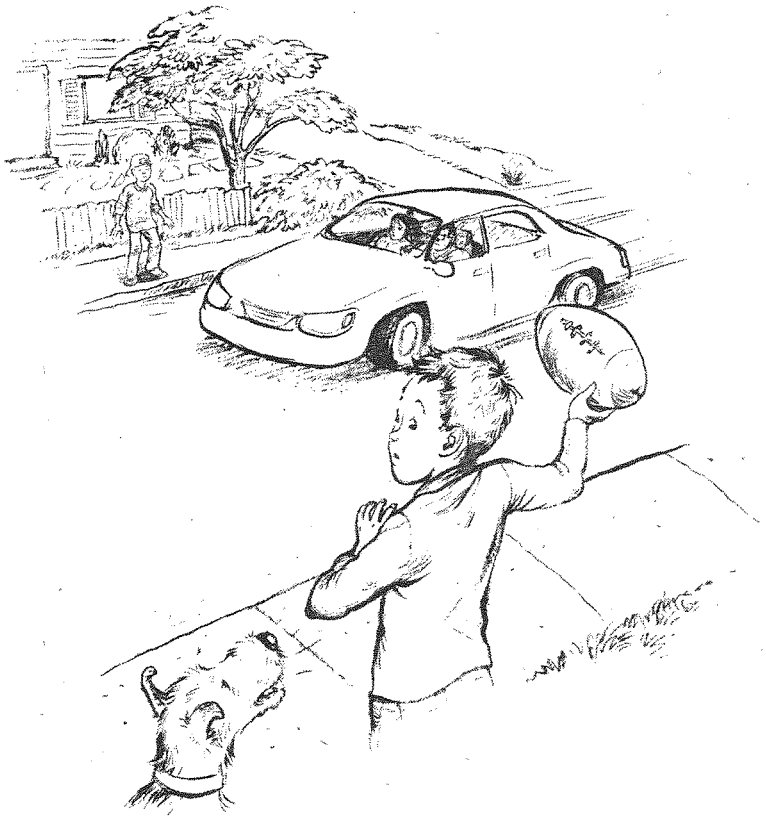
Henry wished he could carry the ball, but after all it did belong to Scooter. He gripped it firmly and drew it back over his shoulder. This time he was going to throw a perfect pass, the kind he had seen All-Americans make in newsreels.

As he started to bring his arm forward, Ribsy gave a sudden bark. Henry looked around at Ribsy, but his arm kept on going. The ball left his fingers.

At that instant a car whizzed around the corner.

Scooter yelled, “Hey! Look out!”

It was too late. There was nothing Henry could do. The speeding car did not slow down, and for one terrible moment he thought the ball was going to hit the driver. Instead it sailed into the rear window, bounced against the closed window on the other side of the car, and then fell inside.



The car raced on down the street and screeched around a corner on two wheels.

The football was gone!

The boys stared after the car. Henry was so surprised he stood there with his arm in the air. When he finally remembered to bring it down, he was still speechless.

"My football!" exclaimed Scooter. He stopped looking down the street after the departed car. He looked at Henry. "My ball is in that car," he said accusingly.

"Yeah, I guess it is." Henry was uncomfortable. "Maybe the man in the car will bring it back in a little while," he said hopefully.

"He'd better," said Scooter grimly.

The boys sat down on the curb to wait.

"Boy, I bet he was going eighty miles an hour!" said Henry.

"I couldn't even see his license plates."

"He ought to be arrested," said Henry, who was anxious to talk about anything but Scooter's football.

"He might kill somebody," said Scooter.

The boys waited and waited. The longer they waited, the more angry Scooter looked. "I don't think that car is going to come back," he said finally. "It's all your fault. You threw the ball."

"Yes, I know," admitted Henry, "but it

wasn't my fault that Ribsy barked and that old car came by just then."

"You shouldn't have thrown it." Scooter scowled darkly.

"I couldn't help it." Henry scowled back. "I didn't even see the car until after I threw the ball. I couldn't catch it after I had thrown it, could I?"

"I don't care! You would have heard the car coming if that dumb dog of yours hadn't made so much noise. He wasn't even barking at anything. You lost my new ball and you're going to have to buy me a new one. If you don't I'll—I'll . . ." Scooter wasn't quite sure what he would do, so he didn't finish the sentence.

Henry didn't know what to say. It did not seem right that he was to blame. Still, half an hour ago Scooter had a new football. Now it was gone and Henry had been the last one to touch it.

"I have forty-six cents and three milk

bottles you could have," said Henry hopefully. He hated to see that football disappear almost as much as Scooter did.

"That isn't enough," said Scooter. "You'll have to buy me a new football before next Saturday or I'll tell my dad and he'll tell your dad and then you'll really get it."

Henry suspected Scooter was right. He probably would get it. Once when he had accidentally broken another boy's roller skate, his father had given him a talking to and then made him spend his allowance to have it fixed. "OK," he said. "I'll get you a new football. I don't know how but I guess I'll manage."

Henry turned and went slowly into the house. Ribsby followed him. "Now see what you've done," Henry said. "And after I spent my football money for your license and your collar and your dish, too." Ribsby hung his head.

Now Henry was just twice as far from owning a real cowhide football with nylon stitching and buckskin lacings as he had been half an hour ago. He was quiet the rest of the afternoon and all through dinner. He was thinking.

"How about another piece of gingerbread?" his father asked.

"No, thank you," said Henry absent-mindedly. "May I be excused, please?"

"Why, Henry, don't you feel well?" Mrs. Huggins was surprised. Henry usually ate two pieces of gingerbread and a third if she let him.

"Oh sure, I feel all right," said Henry and went out to sit on the front steps. Ribsy lay on the step below and dozed with his head on Henry's foot.

"Good old Ribsy, even if you did get me into trouble," said Henry.

He listened to the wish-click, wish-click

of the water sprinkler next door and wondered how he was going to earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents in one week. He thought and thought.

He could collect old tinfoil. No, that would take too long. Junk men didn't want the little wads of tinfoil that came from old cigarette packs. They wanted big pieces that were too hard to find.

Maybe he could ask the neighbors for old papers and magazines. No, he had already collected all he could find for a school paper drive the week before. Besides, the junk men paid only half a cent a pound.

He could open a lemonade stand by the park, but lemonade stands were just kid stuff. Mothers and fathers were the only people who really spent any money for lemonade.

He could charge fifty cents for mowing lawns. That would be a dollar for two lawns.

He would have to mow twenty-eight lawns to earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents. Even if he could get twenty-eight lawns to mow, he didn't see how he could find time after school.

As the evening grew darker, Henry still sat on the steps thinking and listening to the whish-click, whish-click of the water sprinkler. Whish-click, whish-click. Then Mr. Hector Grumbie, who lived next door, came out of the house and shut off the water. Henry liked Mr. Grumbie but he wasn't so sure about Mrs. Grumbie. She sprinkled Doggie-B-Gone on her shrubbery, and Ribsy disliked the smell very much.

Henry noticed that Mr. Grumbie had a flashlight in one hand and a quart fruit jar in the other. Mr. Grumbie set the jar on the sidewalk, tiptoed onto the lawn, flashed his light on the grass, bent over, and pounced

on something. Then he picked it up and put it into the jar. It was too dark for Henry to see what it was.

The next time Mr. Grumbie pounced, he didn't put anything into the jar. Henry heard him mutter, "Oops, that one got away."

Henry couldn't stand it any longer. He had to know what Mr. Grumbie was doing. He walked across his own lawn and peered over the rosebushes.

"If you come any closer," said Mr. Grumbie, "you'd better tiptoe. I don't want to scare them away."

"Scare what away?" asked Henry.

"Night crawlers," said Mr. Grumbie.

"Night crawlers!" exclaimed Henry. "What are night crawlers?"

"Worms," said Mr. Grumbie. "Great big worms. Do you mean to say you've lived here all these years and never seen a night crawler?"



"No, I haven't," answered Henry. "How big are they?"

"Oh, about seven to ten inches long."

"Golly!" Henry could hardly believe it. "Ten inches long! I didn't know worms came that big."

"Here's one." Mr. Grumbie swooped and held up a worm in the beam of his flashlight. It was a big fat worm. It was at

least nine inches long and as big around as a pencil.

"Wow!" said Henry. It was hard to believe, but there it was. Mr. Grumbie put it into the jar.

"Do you use them to catch fish?" asked Henry.

"That's right." Mr. Grumbie pounced again.

"What kind of fish?"

"Some kinds of trout, salmon, perch, catfish—different kinds of fish. I'm going salmon fishing in the Columbia River in the morning."

Henry thought this over. "Do you always catch worms at night?"

"Yes. They only come out at night when the ground is wet. I give the lawn a good soaking so they'll come up to the top. Then I turn on the light and grab them quick before they have a chance to pull back into the ground."

Mrs. Grumbie stepped out on the porch and called to her husband. "Hector, if you expect me to have a lunch ready for you to take fishing at three o'clock in the morning, you'd better go to the store for a loaf of bread right now before it closes."

"All right. In a minute." As his wife went back into the house, Mr. Grumbie said to Henry, "How would you like to earn some money?"

"Catching worms? I'll say I would!"

"I'll pay you a penny apiece for every night crawler you catch."

"Golly," said Henry. "A penny apiece! How many do you want?"

"As many as you can catch. If I can't use them, some of the other men can." He handed Henry the jar and the flashlight, got into his car, and drove away.

A penny apiece! There were one hundred pennies in a dollar, so it would take one thousand three hundred and ninety-five

worms to pay for the football. And forty-one worms for the tax!

Henry went around the rosebushes and tiptoed across the grass. Because of the Doggie-B-Gone, Ribsy stayed on his own side of the rosebushes. Henry turned on the flashlight and sure enough, there on the grass was the end of a big fat worm. But when Henry bent to pick it up, it was gone.

He tiptoed farther across the grass and turned on the light again. This time he moved faster. He grabbed the end of the cold slippery worm. The other end was already in the ground. Henry pulled and the worm pulled. The worm stretched. It grew longer and thinner until it snapped out of Henry's hand and disappeared into the ground.

"Ugh!" said Henry.

The next time he moved still faster. He pounced on the worm before either end had



a chance to get in the ground. He caught it! That's one penny, he thought.

After that it was easier. He caught most of the worms on the first pounce. Pretty soon he had caught sixty-two worms. Then he discovered he was running out of worms. Either he had caught all of Mr. Grumbie's

worms or they had felt him walking around on the ground and had retired for the night. And he hadn't earned enough to pay for the football.

Just as Henry was wondering where he could find more worms, Mr. Grumbie came back from the store. "I caught sixty-two worms for you," said Henry.

"Sixty-two! That's great!" Mr. Grumbie reached into his pants pocket and brought out a handful of change. He picked out a fifty-cent piece, a dime, and two pennies and gave them to Henry.

"Thank you," said Henry politely. He wished he had caught more worms.

Mr. Grumbie started to go into the house and then stopped. "Say, Shorty," he said to Henry, who was going back through the rosebushes, "I'll tell you what you can do. Sunday morning I'm going fishing with a bunch of men from my lodge. Quite a

few of us are going and we can use all the worms you can catch. Tomorrow night you get someone to help you and catch enough for all of us."

"Sure," said Henry eagerly. "I'll catch hundreds of worms for you."

"Swell! We can use them," answered Mr. Grumbie as he went into the house.

Henry sat down on his front steps again. Because he needed so much money, he knew he would have to catch all the worms himself. That meant he would need a lot of wet lawn. His mother would be pleased, even surprised, to have him water the lawn, but his lawn and the Grumbies' lawn wouldn't be enough. Maybe he could ask all the people on the street to water their yards Saturday evening. However, if he did that, Beezus and Robert and the other kids would ask what he was doing. Henry was afraid they would want to earn money

catching worms, too. He knew Beezus would want to. She was the kind of girl who would like catching worms.

Henry sat on the steps wishing he had acres and acres of wet lawn. He thought and thought about millions of wet green blades of grass with big fat worms peeping out from under them. The park! Of course, that was it! It was only a few blocks away and because September had been unusually warm this year, the grass in the park was watered every day. If his mother would let him stay up later than nine o'clock, he knew he could catch enough worms to pay for the football.

Henry went into the living room where his mother was knitting an Argyle sock.

"Mom, could I stay up later tomorrow night?" Henry told his mother the whole story.

Mrs. Huggins put down the sock.

"Henry," she sighed, "how do you manage to get yourself into such messes?"

"Well, gee," said Henry, "I didn't do anything. I just threw this football and . . ."

"Yes, you told me," his mother interrupted. "Yes, you may stay up tomorrow night, but for goodness' sake, Henry, after this do be careful with other people's belongings."

Saturday was an anxious day for Henry. He wanted to avoid Scooter, but he also wanted to go to the park to make sure the grass was being watered. Unfortunately, he had to pass Scooter's house to reach the park. He walked on the other side of the street, but Scooter was in his front yard tightening the chain on his bicycle.

He shook his fist at Henry and yelled, "You get me that ball or I'll fix you!"

"You and who else?" Henry yelled back and kept on going. When he reached the

park he was relieved to hear the swish of the sprinklers and see water spraying over the grass. He would earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents before he went to bed that night.

That evening Henry didn't wait for dessert. He borrowed his father's flashlight and several old mayonnaise jars and ran down the hill to the park. It was a warm night and the tennis courts and swimming pool were floodlighted. It was only beginning to get dark, but Henry hoped it might be dark enough under the bushes to start catching worms. He couldn't afford to waste time.

He passed the playground where he heard the children's shouts and the clank and clang of the rings and swings. Henry didn't stop. He had work to do. He went to the edge of the park where there were no lights and turned on his flashlight. Sure enough, there in the grass under a bush was

a night crawler. Henry nabbed it and put it into his jar. Then he caught another. He caught worm after worm. Four hundred thirty-one, four hundred thirty-two, four hundred thirty-three. Henry was tired of pouncing. Henry was tired of worms.

When the lights of the swimming pool went off, Henry was still working. By the time that the lights at the tennis courts went off, Henry was very, very tired of worms. But he kept on. When he had added the one thousand one hundred and third worm to his collection he heard someone calling, "Henry! Henry! Where are you?" It was his mother.

"Here I am." As Henry stood up to rest his aching back, he saw his mother and father walking along the path.

"My goodness, Henry," Mrs. Huggins exclaimed. "Haven't you caught those worms yet? You can't stay out in the park alone all night."

"But Mom, I don't have enough worms to pay for Scooter's football. And I promised to get him a new one this week. I have one thousand one hundred and three worms and I need to catch one thousand three hundred and thirty-one altogether. I had some money saved and I earned some last night."

"Let's see. He needs two hundred and twenty-eight more. It shouldn't take long to catch them," Mr. Huggins said to Mrs. Huggins. "After all, he promised. Let's help him."

So Henry and his mother and father bent and pounced together. Henry felt a little uncomfortable to see his mother catching worms, but he was very, very glad when the one thousand three hundred and thirty-first worm was in the jar. He took his jars of worms to Mr. Grumbie, who paid him thirteen dollars and thirty-one cents. As Henry watched him turn the night crawlers into a box of dirt so they would live until

Sunday, he thought he never wanted to see another worm.

He felt the money in his pocket. "I guess this ought to take care of old Scooter," he said and, wishing he could spend it on a football for himself, he went home to bed.

Sunday morning Henry lay on his stomach on the living-room floor reading the funny papers. Usually he woke up early and read the funnies before his mother and father were awake, but this morning he was so tired from catching worms that he slept later than usual.

The doorbell rang and Mr. Huggins, who was reading the sports section and drinking coffee, put down his paper and answered the door.

Henry heard a strange man ask, "Excuse me, could you tell me who owns this football?"

Henry didn't wait for his father to answer. He ran to the door.



The man was holding Scooter's real cowhide football, stitched with nylon thread and laced with buckskin thongs!

"Golly!" said Henry. "That's the football I lost for Scooter McCarthy."

The man handed it to Henry. "I'm sorry I couldn't stop when the ball landed in my car. I had to take my wife to the hospital in a hurry. I would have returned it sooner, but I couldn't leave the kids."

"That's OK," said Henry. "Gee, thanks for bringing it back."

When the man had gone, Henry showed the football to his father. "See, Dad," he said, "this is the kind of football I'm going to buy with my night crawler money." Then he tucked the football under his arm as if he were running ninety yards for a touchdown and sprinted down the street to Scooter's house.

4

THE GREEN CHRISTMAS

Henry was glad he sat in the row by the windows in Room Four, because he could watch for snowflakes. Even though his father said they would probably have a green Christmas this year, Henry still hoped for snow. He was pretty sure the package hidden behind some boxes in the garage was the sled he wanted, a real Flexible Flyer.

While he sat at his desk looking out at the clouds for signs of snow, he was listening to Miss Roop talk about the Christmas operetta and thinking he had taken part in enough school plays for one semester.

In September he had been Second Indian in a play for the Westward Expansion Unit. That hadn't been too bad. He had stuck an old feather out of a duster in his hair and worn an auto robe his mother let him take to school. It was an easy part, because all he had to say was "Ugh!" First Indian and Third Indian also said "Ugh!" It really hadn't mattered which Indian said "Ugh!" Once all three said it at the same time.

Then in November Robert came down with mumps just before Book Week. At the last minute Henry had to wear a long cotton beard and read Robert's part, one of the seven dwarfs in a play called *Storyland Favorites Come to Life*. It was not a play

that appealed to Henry, but at least he did not have to memorize any lines or do much practicing, because there wasn't time. During the performance he had to stop reading several times in order to take pieces of his beard out of his mouth.

His worst part had been in a Parent Teacher program for National Brush Your Teeth Week. Henry had been really disgusted that day. He had to wear his best trousers and a white shirt to school and he had to stay clean all day. Then he missed practicing with his football, because the meeting was after school. Worst of all, he had to stand up in front of all the mothers and teachers, bow, and recite:

I am Sir Cuspid,
My job is to bite.
Brush me twice daily
To keep me so white.

The kids called him Sir Cuspidor for a long time after that.

Now Miss Roop was telling the class that the Christmas operetta was called *A Visit to Santa Claus*. It was about a mother and father and their two children who visited Santa Claus at the North Pole on Christmas Eve. Henry thought it was a dumb play. In the end it turned out that the little boy had dreamed the whole thing. Henry disliked stories that ended by being someone's dream.

Miss Roop said, "Since the whole school is giving the operetta, there won't be parts for everyone in our room."

That's good, thought Henry. He slid way down in his seat so Miss Roop wouldn't notice him when she assigned parts.

Miss Roop continued. "Richard, Arthur, Ralph, and David will be four of Santa Claus's reindeer. The other four will be

chosen from Room Five.” So far Henry was safe! He stayed down in his seat just to be sure. “Mary Jane, you are to have the part of the Dancing Doll. Beezus—uh, I mean Beatrice, you will be the Rag Doll.” Girls’ parts. Henry felt a little safer. “Robert, you will be the Big Brown Dog,” Miss Roop went on. All the children laughed.

“Gr-r-r-r. Arf! Arf!” said Robert. The children laughed again.

When Miss Roop started to hand out the parts, Henry decided she had come to the end of the list. He sat up straight in his seat and looked out of the window at the sky. It looked darker. There might be snow before Christmas after all. He was glad he wouldn’t have to stay in after school to rehearse *A Visit to Santa Claus*. He wanted to make snowmen and throw snowballs, since, of course, his mother and father would not give him the Flexible Flyer until Christmas.

When he had his sled, he wanted to coast on the Thirty-third Street hill.

Miss Roop, holding one part in her hand, stood in front of the class again and smiled in Henry's direction. Just in case she was smiling at him, Henry quickly slid down in his seat again.

She *was* smiling at him. She said, "And the best part of all goes to Henry Huggins. Henry, you are the shortest boy in Room Four, so you are to have the part of Timmy, the little boy who dreams the whole story." The class shouted with laughter.

A little boy! It was worse than anything Henry had imagined. He could never live down the part of a little boy! Sir Cuspid had been bad enough, but a little boy—the kids would never stop teasing him. "Miss Roop," he said desperately, "there're lots of littler kids in the lower grades. Couldn't one of them have the part?"



"No, Henry. All the second and third grade boys are needed for the chorus of polar bears and the first grade boys are too little to learn so many lines." She handed Henry his part. So many carbons had been typed at one time that the thin paper was almost too blurry to read.

Henry made out:

ACT I. The scene is Timmy's bedroom. Timmy is wearing pajamas. Enter Timmy's mother.

TIMMY'S MOTHER: Hurry up and get into bed, Timmy. This is Christmas Eve and good little boys should be asleep when Santa Claus comes.

TIMMY: Yes, Mother. (Timmy gets into bed. His mother tucks him in and kisses him good night.)

TIMMY'S MOTHER: Good night, Timmy. Pleasant dreams. (Goes out and shuts door.)

TIMMY: Ho hum. My, I am sleepy! I wonder what Santa Claus will have for me in his pack. I think—I— will—try—to— stay—awake. (Falls asleep.)

Henry groaned. It was even worse than he had expected. Pajamas! Good-night kiss! Did they think he was going to stand up there on the stage in front of all the girls in the school in his pajamas? And be kissed by some dumb old eighth grade girl who was supposed to be his mother? It was horrible even to think about.

He had to find a way out! Already Robert was whispering across the aisle, "Hey, Little Boy!"

Henry ignored him. Maybe if he did stretching exercises for a whole hour every morning he would grow fast enough to outgrow the part. No, that wouldn't work. There wasn't time. He would have to think of something else.

During the rest of the afternoon Henry had trouble keeping his mind on Social Studies. He was too busy trying to find a way out of playing Timmy, the Little Boy. When the last bell rang, he grabbed his beanie and raincoat from the cloakroom. He was first out of Room Four and first out of the school building.

Ribs was waiting under the fir tree out of the rain. "Come on, Ribsy," Henry yelled, "let's keep ahead of the rest of the kids!"

But he wasn't quite fast enough. Beezus and Robert and Scooter were right behind him. "Hi there, Timmy!" they yelled. "How's the Little Boy?" Then they began to chant, "Henry is a Little Boy! Henry is a Little Boy!"

Henry slowed down. "Aw, shut up!" he yelled back. "You think you're smart, but you're not. You're just an old Rag Doll and a Brown Dog. And I'll bet Scooter is

something dumb, too!"

"You wouldn't catch me being in any old operetta," said Scooter loftily. "I'm on the stage crew. I get to pull the curtain and turn on the lights and paint the scenery and stuff."

Mary Jane came skipping down the street, jumping across the puddles on the sidewalk. "Here comes the old Dancing Doll!" yelled Henry.

"Yes." Mary Jane smiled proudly. "I'll wear my new ballet slippers and my pink taffeta party dress and have my hair curled."

The other children were disappointed. They couldn't tease Mary Jane if she wanted to be a Dancing Doll. It gave Henry an idea. He waited until Scooter said, "I'll bet the Little Boy will look real cute in his pajamas. Are you going to wear the kind with feet in them, Little Boy?"

"Aw, you're just jealous because you

don't have an important part like I have. I have the most important part in the whole operetta!"

"Don't be funny!" Scooter laughed. "I wouldn't learn all those lines and run around in front of a bunch of people in my pajamas for a million trillion dollars!"

It was a good idea but it didn't work. Henry would have to think of something else. Maybe he could pretend to be sick. No, that wouldn't do. His mother would make him go to bed and if it did happen to snow, he would have to stay in the house while all the other children were out sliding on the Thirty-third Street hill.

By the time Henry reached his house on Klickitat Street, he decided to say nothing about the operetta to his mother and father until he could work things out. He said hello to his mother, who was writing a letter on the typewriter, and then he went

into the kitchen to fix himself a snack of peanut butter, jam, and pickle relish on graham crackers. He spread a cracker with peanut butter and gave it to Ribsy. Then he leaned against the refrigerator to munch and think.

Tap-tap-tap went the typewriter. Henry fixed himself another cracker. Tap-tap-tap. He heard his mother pull the sheet of paper out of the machine. Then he heard her go into the bedroom. The typewriter—that was it!

“Hey, Mom, can I use the typewriter?”

“*May* I use the typewriter.”

“May I use the typewriter?” asked Henry patiently.

“Yes, Henry, but don’t pound too hard.”

Henry gulped down his graham cracker with peanut butter, jam, and pickle relish. He wiped his fingers on the seat of his jeans and went into the living room. There he sat down at the desk, took a sheet of paper

from the drawer, and put it into the typewriter. He thought a while and then began to type. He didn't make the typewriter go tap-tap-tap the way his mother did. He made only one tap at a time and then, after a long pause while he looked for the right letter, he made another tap. He had to remind himself to push the extra key to make capital letters.

Henry worked a long time. Fortunately his mother did not pay any attention to his typing. Tap. Tap. Tap. At last it was finished. Henry pulled the paper out of the typewriter and read:

dEar mlss rrOOP?

P^l/zeasee xcuze henry from the oppar
~~øparr~~ Play/HE Has to mucj workk todo
at homeç.

yYourz turly.

MRs, hUggins

Somehow it didn't look the way he had thought it would. The capitals were not in the right places. He knew *much* wasn't spelled with a *j* or *yours* with a *z*. His fingers had just put themselves on the wrong keys. Henry tore his letter into little pieces and threw them in the fireplace. He ran another piece of paper into the typewriter and started again. Tap. Tap. Tap. When the second letter was finished, it read:

DEar misS rOop.

P PLease ezcude Henry Fro m the
play? eH has ~~too~~ too much wwork too
doat home.

YYours turly/
mRs, hUggins

Henry studied it. Those capitals again. He pushed the thing too soon or not soon enough. And who ever heard of a word like *ezcude*? Or *doat*? His fingers just didn't

hit the right keys. No, the letter was not a finished product. Henry tore this one up, too, and threw it in the fireplace. He would have to think of something else.

When rehearsals started after school the next day, Henry still had not thought of a way out.

Miss Roop said that today the children would read their parts, but by next week they must have them memorized. "Henry, you and Alice are on the stage first," she directed. Alice was the eighth grade girl who was to play the part of Timmy's mother. "Come on, Henry, don't waste time."

Henry slouched up the steps to the stage. He pulled his crumpled part out of his hip pocket and looked at it. He decided to pretend he couldn't read it. Maybe if he read everything wrong, Miss Roop would give someone else the part.

Alice read, "Hurry up and get into bed,

Timmy. This is Christmas Eve and good little boys should be asleep when Santa Claus comes."

Henry held the paper almost against his nose. He frowned and squinted. He didn't say, "Yes, Mother." He said, after scowling and twisting the paper around, "Yeah, Ma."

"Henry Huggins!" Miss Roop interrupted. "You read what is typed on that paper!"

"Well, gee whiz, Miss Roop, it's so blurry I can hardly see what it says."

"Bring your part to me."

Henry slouched off the stage and handed it to her. "Now Henry, it isn't as blurred as all that. However, since you have such a long part you had better trade with me."

Well, that's that, thought Henry. None of his ideas seemed to work.

"Continue," ordered Miss Roop.

The operetta proceeded. It seemed to Henry that it took a long time to go

through it. The music teacher played the music for the songs they were supposed to learn by next week. Henry discovered that in the second act he was supposed to stand in the center of the stage and sing a song all by himself. It went:

Hurrah for Santa! Hurrah for Saint
Nick!

He comes from the North with
reindeer and sleigh,
Riding on clouds up high in the sky
With a pack full of toys so children
can play.

It was the dumbest song Henry had ever heard. Hurrah for Santa! It was just plain stupid. He felt a little better when he learned that Robert had to sing an even dumber song called "Woof, Woof, I'm a Big Brown Dog."

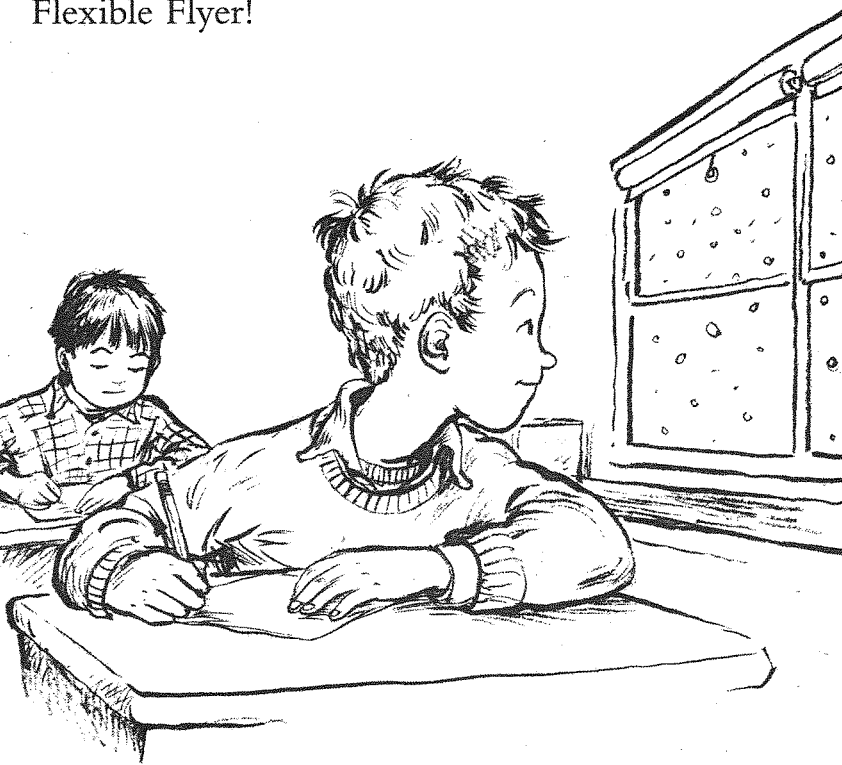
As Christmas drew near, Henry became

more and more discouraged. Everybody in Glenwood School called him Little Boy. His mother and father found out about his part in the play, because Mary Jane told her mother and she told Henry's mother. He had to learn his lines and recite them every evening while his father looked at the part and prompted him. He scarcely had time to go out to the garage to peek at the Flexible Flyer package.

Mrs. Huggins went downtown to buy him a pair of new pajamas to wear in the first act. They were made of pink-and-blue-and-white-striped flannel. Henry felt that any pajamas were bad enough—but pink-and-blue pajamas! He didn't even like to think about them.

Henry swallowed hard every morning. He hoped his throat might be a little bit sore but it never was. Finally he gave up. There was no way out. Now all he wanted was to get it over.

One afternoon during fifth period Henry looked out of the window and saw a few feathery snowflakes drifting down. They were so light he wasn't sure at first. When Miss Roop wasn't looking, he leaned over closer to the window. It was snow, all right! It wasn't going to be a green Christmas after all! Now he would get to use his Flexible Flyer!



The rest of the class soon noticed the snow, too, and everyone began to whisper. Miss Roop smiled and pretended not to hear. As soon as the bell rang, the children all scrambled for their wraps and rushed out to see the snow—all except those who had parts in the operetta. They took their wraps from the cloakroom and went to the auditorium.

The auditorium was a busy place. In one corner of the room, mothers from the Parent Teacher Association were altering costumes for the polar bear chorus. Henry remembered those white suits. He had worn one when he had been an Easter bunny in a spring program. Now the mothers were ripping off the long ears and fuzzy tails, and were sewing on short ears and straight tails to change the suits into polar bear costumes.

The stage crew was at work. Some of the

eighth grade boys were turning different-colored lights on and off. At the back of the stage, Scooter, standing on a board laid across two stepladders, was painting scenery with green paint.

Henry sat down to wait for his turn, while Mary Jane and Beezus rehearsed their dance, and Robert, wearing his dog suit, practiced walking on all fours.

Henry waited and waited. He sat on the hard auditorium chair and looked out of the window at the snowflakes. He could hear the other kids laughing and yelling outside, so he knew there must be enough snow for snowballs. He wished his turn would come so he could leave. Now the tin soldiers were practicing their steps. At the end of their song and dance one of the stage crew threw a basketball across the stage in front of them. It was supposed to look like a cannonball, and the tin soldiers were supposed

to fall over with one leg in the air. Miss Roop didn't like the way they fell and she made them do it over several times.

Henry wandered up on the stage behind the tin soldiers to watch Scooter paint scenery. "What're you supposed to be painting?" he asked him.

"Trees," answered Scooter. "With real paint."

"Where did you get it?"

"A fellow in my room's father has a paint store and he gave it to us."

Just then Henry heard a bark. It sounded like Ribsy. It *was* Ribsy. He bounded in through the door of the auditorium, ran up the steps to the stage, and wormed his way behind the row of tin soldiers to get to Henry. He shook himself and wagged his tail.

"Well, Ribsy, old boy!" said Henry. "Did you get tired of waiting out in the

cold?" Ribsy shook himself again. Henry patted him. "Why, Ribs, you're all wet! It must be snowing hard."

"He's a dumb-looking dog," said Scooter.

"Aw, he is not. He's a smart dog. Aren't you, Ribsy?"

"I'll bet he can't climb a stepladder like my dog can," said Scooter.

"I'll bet he can. Call him and see."

Scooter looked down at the dog. "Here, Ribsy," he called. "Come on, boy." Ribsy looked at him and then at Henry.

"Go on," said Henry. "Up the ladder." He pointed to the ladder. Ribsy put one paw on the bottom step. "Atta boy, go on!" Ribsy carefully put a paw on the next step. "Good dog!" said Henry, urging him on.

"Come on, Ribsy," coaxed Scooter. Ribsy cautiously made his way up to the board on top of the stepladders.

"Good old Ribsy!" said Henry. "See, I

told you he could do it!"

Pleased with himself, Ribsy looked down at his master, wagged his tail, and said, "Woof!"

"You be quiet!" ordered Henry in a loud whisper. "If Miss Roop hears you, she'll throw you out!"

Ribsy sat down on the board and looked around the auditorium.

"Beat it!" said Scooter. "Can't you see I have work to do?"

"Here, Ribsy!" whispered Henry. "You don't want Miss Roop to see you, do you?"

Ribsy liked sitting on the board.

"See, I told you he was a dumb dog." Scooter picked up his can of paint and stepped over Ribsy. He set the can down and went on painting treetops.

"Come on, Ribsy!"

"Aw, he's too dumb to go down the ladder."

"He is not! Here, Ribsy!"

Ribsy stood up and sniffed at the can of paint. "Here, Ribsy! Come on down," begged Henry, looking up at his dog. "Come on, you old dog. I'll catch it if Miss Roop sees you."

Miss Roop clapped her hands for attention, the music ceased, and the tin soldiers stopped falling down.

"How did that dog get in here?" she demanded.

"I don't know," answered Henry. "I guess he just walked in."

"Well, take him out!"

Henry did not move.

"Quickly, Henry! We have a lot to do this afternoon."

"Gee whiz, Miss Roop, I'm trying to take him out but he won't come down."

"I'll carry him down, Miss Roop," offered Scooter. "I don't think he knows

how to go down a ladder.”

Henry glared at Scooter.

“No, he’s too heavy to carry down a ladder. You might fall,” said Miss Roop.

Just then Ribsy sat down to scratch behind his left ear. Thump. Thump. Thump. His hind leg bumped against the can of paint. The can tipped. Scooter yelled. Ribsy barked.

“Henry! Look out!” screamed Miss Roop.

The can fell over and green paint poured down over Henry.

“Glub!” said Henry as he heard Miss Roop run up onto the stage. He heard her but he couldn’t see her. He had to keep his eyes shut. The cold, oily paint was dribbling down his face and neck. He could feel it dripping off his ears.

Miss Roop made a squeaking noise. Then Henry could feel her rubbing his head with something made of cloth.



“Run and get some paper towels!” she called to the other children. She wiped away at his face. “I knew I shouldn’t have let those boys use real paint. They should have used poster paint. It would have washed off.



Oh dear, I’m afraid your shirt is ruined.”

Henry heard Ribsy barking. When he could see again he found all the tin soldiers

and polar bears and P.T.A. mothers crowded around him. Miss Roop began to scrub his hair with paper towels. "Oh, that's all right," he said to Miss Roop. "It's an old shirt anyway." The towels she was wiping him with felt scratchy on his ears and neck.

Ribsy continued to bark and to pace back and forth across the board as he looked down at his master.

"Quiet, Ribsy!" ordered Henry.

Ribsy stopped barking and looked anxiously at the floor. Then he looked at Henry. Before Henry realized what was happening, Ribsy leaped from the board, sailed over the heads of several tin soldiers and polar bears, and landed on all fours in the puddle of paint. He skidded and sat down.

"Ribsy!" groaned Henry. Then he said to Scooter, "See, he was smart enough to get down by himself."

The dog began to bark and run around Henry. He left a circle of green footprints on the floor of the stage.

"Oh, Henry," wailed Miss Roop and then said sharply, "Scooter, take that dog out of the building! And carry him. I don't want any green footprints in the halls!"

"Yes, Miss Roop." Scooter lugged the barking dog away.

Mary Jane squirmed through the crowd to look at Henry. "Henry Huggins!" she exclaimed. "Wait till your mother sees you! Your hair is green and so is your skin!"

Beezus laughed. "Henry, your face looks just like a green apple!"

"Henry, I'm afraid this isn't going to come off for a long time," said Miss Roop.

Someone handed Henry a mirror. "Golly!" breathed Henry. He stared into the mirror. His hair and eyebrows were pale green. His face was all green at the

forehead and streaked with green toward his chin. His ears were green all over. "Jeepers! Green ears!" He couldn't take his eyes off the mirror. Secretly he thought he looked fascinating. Like a leprechaun in a fairy tale. Now maybe the kids would stop calling him Little Boy! That gave him an idea.

"Miss Roop, I can't be in the operetta when I'm all green, can I?" he asked hopefully.

Miss Roop sighed. "No, Henry, I guess you can't." She looked at him. Then she smiled. "I'll give your part to someone else and you can play the part of the Green Elf! Now run along home."

The Green Elf! That was a good part. The Green Elf turned somersaults and didn't have to say anything.

Henry put on his raincoat and beanie and went out into the snow. It was deep enough

to scrunch under his feet. He scooped up a handful and threw it at Ribsy, who was waiting under the fir tree. The snow would



be just right for coasting on the Thirty-third Street hill when his mother and father surprised him with the Flexible Flyer at Christmas. In the meantime he would make a snowman on the front lawn. Maybe he would make a whole snow family. Even a snow dog.

“Good old Ribsy. I don’t know how I’d ever get along without you.” He took out his handkerchief and wiped green paint from his dog’s tail.

Then Henry followed a set of big footprints in the snow. He took big steps and carefully put his feet into the marks someone else had made in the snow. “Jeepers!” he exclaimed. “I’m going to have a green Christmas and a white Christmas at the same time. Won’t Mom be surprised?”