

Chapman Allen

**The Radio Boys at Mountain
Pass: or, The Midnight Call
for Assistance**



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Содержание

CHAPTER I – THE BEAR PURSUES	6
CHAPTER II – AN EXCITING CHASE	10
CHAPTER III – AN AMAZING DISCOVERY	13
CHAPTER IV – THE BULLY APPEARS	16
CHAPTER V – A STARTLING ACCUSATION	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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The Radio Boys The Midnight Call for Assistance

FOREWORD

By Jack Binns

In the first chapter of this volume there appears a statement by “Bob,” one of the Radio Boys, as follows: “Marconi is one of those fellows that can never rest satisfied with what’s been done up to date.” Perhaps no more concise summary of the driving force back of the men responsible for the tremendous development of radio could be made. It is just that refusal to be satisfied with what has been accomplished that has made wireless the greatest wonder development in the history of mankind. Although the radio boys in this case are but creatures of the author’s imagination, nevertheless they are typical of all the men who have taken part in bringing radio to its present stage. Even Marconi himself likes to take pride in the assertion that he too was at one time an amateur, because he insists that during his early experiments he was only a boy amateur tinkering with a little known subject. There is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in his claim, because the experiments that led to his success were made while he was a youth studying at the Bologna University in Italy. What is true of Marconi is equally true of all the others. We have only to think of a name prominent in the field of wireless, and then trace back the history of the man who bears it, and you will come to an enthusiastic amateur. There is another fascinating thing about wireless, and it is the fact that no matter how much work one may really expend in tinkering with it, and no matter how valuable the results, it does not seem like real work. This is aptly phrased by Joe in the book who says:

“I’d like to take it up as a regular profession. Think of what it must be for fellows like Armstrong and Edison, and De Forest and Marconi. I’ll bet they don’t think it’s work.” There is no doubt that Joe wins his bet.

Jack Binns

CHAPTER I – THE BEAR PURSUES

“Nothing to do till tomorrow!” sang out Bob Layton, as he came out of high school at Clintonia on Friday afternoon, his books slung over his shoulder, and bounded down the steps three at a time.

“And not much to do then, except just what we want to,” chimed in Joe Atwood, throwing his cap into the air and catching it deftly as it came down.

“You fellows do just love to work, don’t you?” put in Herb Fennington, with an air of self-righteousness that was belied by the merry twinkle in his eyes.

“Oh, we just dote on it,” replied Bob.

“Work is our middle name,” asserted Joe. “In fact we lie awake nights trying to conjure up something to do.”

“Regular pair of Work Hard twins – I don’t think,” declared Jimmy Plummer. “Now as for me – ”

“Yes?” said Herb, with an assumption of polite interest.

“As for me,” repeated Jimmy, not at all daunted by the incredulity in Herb’s tone, “I’ve been working like a horse all this season. A little more and I’ll be only skin and bone.”

As Jimmy was by all odds the fattest boy in school, this assertion was greeted by a roar of laughter.

“Now I know why you look like a string bean,” chuckled Joe.

“That explains why his clothes hang on him so loosely,” laughed Bob, pointing to Jimmy’s trousers which were so filled out that they resembled tights. “Jimmy, you may be an unconscious humorist, but you’re a humorist just the same.”

Jimmy glared at his tormentors and tried to look wan and haggard, but the attempt was not a pronounced success.

“All the same,” he protested, “Doc. Preston has been rushing us like the old Harry all this fall, and what with school work and home work and radio work – ”

“Radio!” interrupted Bob. “You don’t call that work, do you? Why it’s fun, the greatest fun in the world.”

“You bet it is,” chimed in Joe enthusiastically. “We never knew what real fun was until we took it up. Look at the adventures it’s brought us. If it hadn’t been for radio, we wouldn’t have won those Ferberton prizes; we wouldn’t have run down Dan Cassey and made him give back the mortgage he was trying to cheat Miss Berwick out of; and we wouldn’t have got back the money he nearly got away with when he knocked out Brandon Harvey.”

“Right you are,” agreed Bob. “And probably that boat our folks were on would have gone down with all on board if it hadn’t been for the radio message that brought help to it. And see the good it did for Larry and the experience we had in sending out from the broadcasting station in Newark!”

“I tell you, fellows, there’s nothing like radio in the universe!” agreed Jimmy.

“I’d like to take it up as a regular profession,” said Joe. “Think of what it must be for fellows like Armstrong and Edison and De Forest and Marconi. I’ll bet they don’t think it’s work. They’re eager to get at it in the morning and sorry to knock off at night. There’s no drudgery in a profession like that.”

“Speaking of Marconi,” remarked Herb, “I see that he’s just come over to America again on that yacht of his where he thought he heard signals that might have been from Mars. I wonder if he’s heard any more of them.”

“I don’t know,” replied Bob thoughtfully. “Though I’ve become so used to what seem to be almost miracles that I’m prepared for almost anything. At any rate, the only thing one can do nowadays is to keep an open mind and not say beforehand that anything is impossible. It would be great, wouldn’t it, if we could get in touch with another planet? And if we could with one, there doesn’t seem to be any reason why we couldn’t with all, that is if there’s life and intelligence on them. But after all, at

present that's only speculation. What interests me more just now is the discovery that Marconi is said to have made by which he is able to send out radio waves in one given direction."

"I hadn't heard of that," remarked Joe. "I thought they spread out equally in all directions and that anybody who had a receiving set could take them."

"So they have up to now," replied Bob. "But Marconi's one of those fellows that can never rest satisfied with what's been done up to date. That's what makes him great. I'm not exactly clear about this new idea of his, but the gist of it is that he throws a radio wave in a certain direction, much as a mirror throws a ray of light. He uses a reflector apparatus and the wave is caught at the receiving end on a horizontal metal standard. With a wave of only three and one half meters he has thrown a shaft nearly a hundred miles in just the direction he wanted it to go. The article I read said that he had some sort of semicircular reflector covered with wires that resembled a dish cut in half. When the open side is turned toward the receiving station he wants to reach, the signals are heard loud and clear. When the open part is turned away, the signals can't be heard. The whole idea is concentration. Just what a burning glass does with the rays of the sun, his device does with the radio waves. Marconi's a wizard, and that's all there is about it. There's no knowing what he may do next. But you can be sure that it'll be something new and valuable."

"He's a wonder," agreed Joe heartily. "And if he's the 'father of wireless,' we've got to admit that he has a good healthy baby. I'm going to try to get on friendly terms with that baby."

"We've already been introduced to it, if we haven't got much further," laughed Bob. "But say, fellows, what's the program for tomorrow?"

"Three square meals," was Jimmy's suggestion.

"Sure," agreed Herb. "Though in your run-down condition you ought to have at least six."

"He'll get them, don't worry," chaffed Joe, unmoved by the reproach in Jimmy's eyes.

"I was thinking – " Bob began.

"How do you get that way?" inquired Herb composedly.

"You'll never get that way," retorted Bob severely. "As I was saying when this lowbrow interrupted me, I was thinking that it might be a good idea to go nutting. The trees are full of nuts this year, and that frost we had a couple of nights ago will make it easy to get a raft of them. What do you say?"

"I say yes with a capital Y," replied Joe.

"Hits me just right," assented Herb.

"It's the cat's high hat," was the inelegant way that Jimmy phrased it.

"It's a go then," said Bob. "Come around to my house a little after eight tomorrow morning and we'll get an early start. Every fellow brings his own lunch, and we'll take some potatoes along to roast in the woods."

"Here's hoping it will be a dandy day," said Herb, as the boys parted at Bob's gate.

"It looks as though it were going to be," replied Bob, looking at the sky. "But after supper I'll tune in and get the weather report by radio."

"Anything you don't do by radio?" asked Joe, with a grin.

"Oh, I set my watch by the Arlington signal every night and a few other things," laughed Bob. "Fact is, I'm hanging around the receiving set every spare minute I have for fear I'll let something get by me. Radio has got me, and got me for fair."

The weather report was favorable and Bob slept in peace. And when he opened his eyes on the following morning he found that Uncle Sam's weather bureau had been right in this particular instance, for a lovelier fall morning, to his way of thinking, had never dawned.

He ate breakfast a little more quickly than usual, and had barely finished when the other radio boys were at his door loaded with lunches and ready to start. Jimmy especially was well furnished in the matter of provisions, for he carried two packages while the rest of the boys were content with one.

“Aren’t you afraid you’ll be hunchbacked carrying both those bales of goods?” asked Herb, with mock anxiety.

“Not a bit,” responded Jimmy cheerfully. “One of them is full of doughnuts, and I expect to eat them on the way. You see I was in such a hurry that I didn’t eat much of a breakfast – ”

“What?” exclaimed Bob.

“Can I believe my ears?” asked Herb plaintively.

“Say it again and say it slow,” urged Joe.

“I mean,” Jimmy hurried to correct himself, “not so much as I might have eaten. I had a bit of cereal – ”

“Catch on to that ‘bit,’” murmured Herb.

“And some bacon and eggs and a slice of cold meat from the roast last night and some hot rolls and – ”

“Outside of that you didn’t have anything to eat,” said Joe. “All right, Jimmy, old boy, we understand. But shake a leg now and let’s get under way. This is too fine a day to be spending it in a chinfest, and besides we can have plenty of that as we go along.”

The air was brisk and stimulating, with just enough warmth imparted by the sun to prevent its being cold, and a soft autumnal haze hung over the landscape and clothed it in mellow beauty. It was the kind of day when Nature is at her best and when it is good just to be alive.

The boys were like so many young colts turned out to pasture, and joked and jested as they went along. Laughter came easily to their lips and shone through their eyes, while the joy of youth ran through their veins and made them tingle to their finger-tips. Life was roseate and they had not a care in the world.

A walk of between two and three miles brought them to the woods for which they had set out. The forest covered a great many acres and was full of noble trees, chestnut, hickory, and many other varieties.

As Bob had said, the year had been an unusually good one for nuts, and the trees were loaded with them. The frost of a little time before had been just sufficient to make them ready to pick, and the ground was already strewn with the half-opened burrs of many that had been shaken from the trees. Others still hung to the boughs by so slender and brittle a thread that it was only necessary to hurl clubs up into the trees to have them come down in showers.

The boys had brought big bags along with them to carry the nuts they might gather, and before long these had most of the wrinkles spread out of them by the steadily accumulating collection of chestnuts that formed the bulk of their treasure, although they had a good many hickory nuts as well.

The active work gave them all an appetite, a thing that came to them very easily under almost any circumstances, and a little before noon they ceased for a while from gathering the nuts and bestirred themselves in gathering leaves and brushwood for a fire. Their bags were more than half full, and from what they had seen they knew they would have little trouble in finishing filling them up to the very drawing strings.

They gathered together a little cairn of rocks and built the fire inside of it, keeping it fed to such effect that before long the stones were at a white heat. Then they drew the fire away and on the heated stones roasted their potatoes and a large number of the chestnuts they had gathered. They had brought plenty of salt and butter along, and when at last the potatoes were done they seasoned them and ate them with a relish exceeding anything that would have attended the eating of them at a regular meal in their homes. An epicure might have complained of the smoky flavor, but to the boys, seated on the leaf-carpeted ground flecked with the sunlight that sifted through the trees, the food was simply ambrosial.

With the potatoes they dispatched the rest of the food they had brought along. Then, with a feeling of absolute content, they stretched out luxuriously on the ground and munched the roasted chestnuts in beatific indolence.

For an hour or two they rested there, and then Bob rose and stretched himself and called his reluctant friends to action.

“It would be a sin and a shame to go out of these woods without having our bags crammed to bursting,” he said. “Let’s get a hustle on, and just for variety let’s try another part of the woods.”

“All right,” assented Joe, while Herb and Jimmy, though more slowly, roused themselves.

They picked up their bags and moved from place to place, choosing those sections where the trees grew thickest and the outlook for nuts was most promising.

“Better be a little careful,” warned Joe, after they had gone a considerable distance. “Part of this wood belongs to Buck Looker’s father, and perhaps he’d have some objection to our nutting here.”

“I don’t think any one would kick,” responded Bob. “Everybody around here regards the woods as common property, as far as nutting is concerned. Besides, there’s no way of telling, as far as I know, what section belongs to him and what to other people.”

“There’s something that will give us the tip,” remarked Herb, pointing through the trees to a clearing in which they saw a two-story cottage. “That house belongs to Mr. Looker, though nobody has lived in it for a long while and I guess he’s just letting it go to rack and ruin.”

The house did indeed look shaky and dilapidated. Some of the railing and boards of the low veranda had been broken in or rotted away, and the whole place bore the look of decay that comes to houses that for a long time have been destitute of occupants.

“Looks as if it would fall to pieces if you breathed on it,” said Herb.

“Old enough to have false teeth,” commented Jimmy. “I suppose Mr. Looker lets it stand simply because it’s cheaper than pulling it down.”

The boys gathered nuts for perhaps two hours longer, and then they had to stop because their bags would not hold any more. Jimmy was already groaning in anticipation of having to carry his home.

“That’ll weigh a ton by the time we get to Clintonia,” he grumbled, as he eyed it with considerable apprehension.

“Hard to please some people,” commented Herb. “You’d be kicking like a steer if you didn’t have any to carry, and now you’re sore because you’ve got enough to last all winter.”

“Might as well leave enough for other people,” said Jimmy, with a spasm of generosity.

“There are more nuts here than will ever be picked,” replied Herb. “For that matter, some other people are getting them now. I’ve heard them thrashing about in the brush for the last few minutes only a little way from here.”

“Funny we don’t hear voices then,” said Joe.

“Perhaps they’re deaf mutes,” suggested Jimmy, and adroitly ducked the pass that Joe made at him.

The noise persisted and seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. There was a crashing of bushes, as though some heavy body were being pushed through them.

“Seem to be making heavy weather of it,” commented Herb. “Don’t see why any one should make extra work for himself when there are plenty of paths through the woods. Now if – Look!”

His voice rose in a shout that startled his comrades.

They turned and looked in the direction of his pointing finger. And what they saw froze the blood in their veins.

A great shaggy bear had emerged from the brush into a path not more than a hundred feet away and was lumbering rapidly toward them!

CHAPTER II – AN EXCITING CHASE

For a single instant the boys stood motionless and silent, stupefied by the sudden apparition. Then, as though shocked by a galvanic battery, they woke to life.

“Quick!” shouted Bob. “To the bungalow! It’s our only chance!”

Like a flash he was off, followed by his comrades. Even Jimmy’s feet seemed winged, and they reached the porch in record time.

Frantically Bob grasped the knob of the front door. The door was locked. He threw himself against it, but his weight was not sufficient, and although the door groaned it refused to yield. He glanced at his comrades, surrounding him in a panting group, and then at the bear. The latter was still coming, and seemed to have increased his speed.

The roof of the veranda was supported by half a dozen wooden pillars.

“Shin up these!” shouted Bob, throwing his arms and legs about one and setting the example.

In a trice they were all climbing desperately. Fortunately they had not far to go, for the roof of the veranda was not high. But they felt as though they were in a nightmare, and although they were really making surprisingly good time, it seemed as though they would never get to the top.

Bob reached there first and swung himself over the roof. Not waiting a moment to rest, he rushed over to the post that Jimmy had chosen, reached over his hand and caught one of Jimmy’s wrists. There was a mad scramble and then Jimmy lay on the roof, gasping.

Joe and Herb needed no help, as they had reached the roof only a second later than Bob.

For the moment at least they were safe, and they sat panting and trying to get their breath.

And while with fast-beating hearts they are wondering how they are to escape from the monster below them, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who the radio boys were and what had been their adventures up to the time this story opens.

Bob Layton was the son of a prosperous chemist who was a leading citizen of the town of Clintonia, a wideawake, thriving, little city with a population of about ten thousand. The town was located on the banks of the Shagary River, and was about seventy-five miles from New York. Bob, at the time these incidents occurred, was in his sixteenth year. He was tall and well built, of rather dark complexion and frank, merry eyes that always looked straight at one. He was good in his studies and a leader in athletic sports among boys of his own age. He had a firm, decided character, and was always at his best in an emergency that demanded cool thinking and quick action.

His closest friend was Joe Atwood, whose father was a physician with a large practice. Joe was fair in complexion, while Bob was dark, and they differed in more than mere physical qualities. Joe had a fiery temper and was apt to speak or act first and think afterward, and Bob many times served as a brake on the impulsive temperament of his friend.

Herb Fennington was a year younger than Bob and Joe, and of a more indolent, easy-going disposition. He was full of fun and jokes and nobody could long have the blues when Herb was about.

A fourth member of the group was Jimmy Plummer, whose father was a carpenter and contractor and a highly respected citizen of the town. Jimmy was fat, red-faced and good-natured, with a special partiality for the good things of life. He had gained the nickname of “Doughnuts,” because of his fondness for that famous product of the kitchen, and did his best to deserve the name.

Besides the liking that drew the boys together, there was an added link in their interest in radio, which by its wonders had taken a firm hold on their youthful imaginations. In delving into the mysteries of this new and fascinating science, they had been greatly assisted by the kindly help afforded them by the Reverend Doctor Dale, the pastor of the Old First Church of Clintonia. His suggestions had been of immense value in helping them to master the elements of the science, and

whenever they got into a quandary they had no hesitation in appealing to him for help that was never refused.

What gave the boys an added stimulus was the offer by the member of Congress for the district in which Clintonia was situated of prizes for the best radio sets made by the boys themselves. The contest was open to all the boys residing in the Congressional district, and Bob, Joe, and Jimmy entered into it with enthusiasm. Herb, with his natural indolence, did not go into the competition and was sorry afterward that he had not. The first prize was a hundred dollars, and the second, fifty. To the boys this seemed a whole lot of money and well worth the winning.

It was hard work though, and made the harder by the obstacles put in their way by Buck Looker, the bully of the town, assisted by Carl Lutz and Terry Mooney, two of his cronies almost as worthless as himself. Buck tried to wreck Bob's aerial and got a richly deserved thrashing in consequence. Later on the trio tried to steal Jimmy's set, but the radio boys got it back in a way that brought a good deal of discomfiture to the Looker crowd.

While the radio sets were in the making, an exciting incident occurred in town that drew the boys into a series of adventures. An automobile running wild and dashing through the windows of a paint and hardware store in the town gave Bob and Joe an opportunity to rescue the occupant, a Miss Nellie Berwick, and to learn her story of having been swindled out of some property by a rascal. How by the means of radio they got on the track of the scoundrel and forced him to make restitution, how they overcame all the machinations of their enemies and came out ahead in the competition, is told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys' First Wireless; Or, Winning the Ferberton Prize."

Shortly after Bob had won the first prize and Joe the second, the radio boys went down to Ocean Point on the seacoast to spend the summer. A colony had been established there by several of the Clintonia families, including those of the radio boys, and they had great fun on the beach and in the surf. Here too they made marked advances in their knowledge of radio, in which they were greatly helped by Brandon Harvey, the wireless operator at the Ocean Point sending station. How they repaid this by pursuing and capturing the man who had assaulted him and looted the safe at the station, what exciting adventures they met with in the pursuit and capture, how their knowledge of radio enabled them to send help to a ship in peril on which their own families were voyaging, are told in the second volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys At Ocean Point; Or, The Message that Saved the Ship."

Their summer at Ocean Point was further marked by a gallant rescue of two young vaudeville performers who had been run down by reckless thieves in a stolen motor boat. How they finally brought these men to justice, how they managed to bring congenial employment to a crippled friend, and how in doing this they found scope for their own talents in the fascinating work of radio broadcasting, are told in the third volume of this series entitled: "The Radio Boys At the Sending Station; Or, Making Good in the Wireless Room."

And now to return to the boys, who found themselves in the woods on the roof of the porch of the cottage where they had taken refuge from the pursuit of the bear.

That refuge promised to be only a temporary one and exceedingly precarious. The roof was none too strongly built in the first place, and had fallen into decay from stress of weather and lack of repairs. Already there was an ominous creaking as it sagged crazily under the weight of the four boys.

Beneath them was the bear, who looked up at them, his jaws slavering and his little red eyes flaming. He was an enormous beast, capable of tearing any one of them in pieces if he once got them within his clutches.

"If we only had a gun!" groaned Bob, as a terrifying rumbling came from the throat of the bear.

"I'd rather have a stick of dynamite to throw at his feet and blow him into kingdom come," muttered Joe, as he gingerly shifted his position to find a more solid support than the part of the roof that was sagging under him.

“If wishes were horses, beggars might ride,” remarked Herb. “The question is what are we going to do?”

“Seems to me the question is what is the bear going to do?” put in Jimmy.

“What he’ll do is plenty,” said Joe. “He’s got us trapped good and proper, and the next move is up to him.”

The bear himself seemed to be in something of a quandary as to what that next move was to be. He paced clumsily up and down before the veranda while he was making up his mind. But to the boys’ dismay there was no sign that he was inclined to relinquish the prey that was so nearly within his reach.

Finally he seemed to come to a decision. He moved from one to the other of the pillars supporting the veranda roof, sniffing at each as if calculating which was the strongest. Then to the horror of the boys he threw his paws about one of the pillars and commenced to climb.

“He’s coming up!” cried Bob, and even as he spoke they could see the shaggy hair of the beast’s head come in sight on a level with the porch roof. “Up on the other roof, fellows! Maybe he can’t follow us there.”

The roof of the house proper extended over the side and front of the second story and there were several protruding points that offered support to the feet and hands. In addition there were shutters to the windows, the tops of which reached nearly to the roof.

There was a wild scramble for whatever support came nearest to hand. How the boys did it they could not for the life of them remember afterwards, but somehow, with the spur given to them by the knowledge that the bear was close behind, they got up on the roof of the house, their clothes torn and their fingers bruised and bleeding.

“Let’s go along the roof toward the back of the house,” panted Joe. “There may be an extension kitchen there on which we can drop and then from there to the ground. It may not be so easy for the bear to get down after us as it has been to get up.”

They followed this suggestion at once and made their way as rapidly as possible across the shaky roof. It would have been more prudent of them to have left some interval between them, but they were so excited that they did not think of that and crowded close on one another’s heels.

Suddenly a shout rose from Bob.

“Back, fellows!” he cried. “The roof’s caving in!”

But the warning came too late. There was an ominous cracking and splintering, and then with a roar a section of the roof collapsed, carrying the boys down with it.

CHAPTER III – AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

There was a chorus of shouts as the boys felt themselves falling, followed by a heavy thud as they brought up on the floor of the attic in a blinding cloud of dust and plaster.

They had been so close together that they all came down in a heap, in a waving confusion of arms and legs.

Fortunately the distance had been only a few feet, but it was enough to knock the breath out of them, especially out of Jimmy, who had the misfortune of finding himself at the bottom of the heap.

For a minute or two they were too dazed by the suddenness of the fall to speak coherently, or in fact to speak at all. Then gradually they disentangled themselves and got to their feet.

Their first sensation had been that of alarm and the second of shock. But after they had in some measure recovered from these, there came a third sensation of immense relief.

For what had seemed at first a disaster revealed itself as a blessing in disguise when they realized that at least they had escaped from their pursuer. They were inside the house and had a number of ways of escape through the doors or windows available to them. The tables had been turned, and now it was the bear that was at a disadvantage.

They rubbed their eyes to get the dust out of them, and had barely begun to see clearly when they heard a voice calling from outside the house. The accents were foreign and they could not catch clearly what was said, but the words, whatever they were, were promptly followed by a scratching and clawing that seemed to indicate that the bear was sliding down one of the pillars of the porch to the ground.

“We must warn him!” cried Bob. “The bear will get him, sure!”

They rushed down the stairs to the ground floor and looked through one of the front windows. At a few yards’ distance stood a man, short and stocky and of a swarthy complexion. A bandana handkerchief was wound around his head and earrings dangled from his ears.

As they looked, the great body of the bear dropped from the lower part of the pillar to the ground, and the beast turned and rushed toward the man.

“He’ll be killed!” yelled Joe, in great apprehension. “Killed right before our eyes! Why doesn’t he run? Can it be that he is blind?”

They all shouted in unison to warn the newcomer of his danger.

Then an amazing thing happened. The man not only stood his ground, but advanced toward the bear. The huge brute reared on his hind legs and threw his great paws over the man’s shoulders. But even while the boys shuddered at the nearness of the tragedy that seemed about to be enacted, the man laughed joyously and passed his hand caressingly over the shaggy head and playfully pulled one of the brute’s ears.

The boys looked at each other in amazement. The look gradually changed from one of wonderment to one of sheepishness. Then Bob turned the lock of the front door, threw it open and stepped out on the porch.

“Hello there!” he called.

The man turned around and looked at him in surprise. It was evident that he had not known until that moment that there was anybody in the house.

“Hello, you’sel!” he replied, with a smile that showed a row of gleaming white teeth.

“Is that your bear?” inquired Bob, while his comrades, who had also come out on the porch, taking care, however, to leave the door open in case a quick retreat should seem desirable, clustered about him.

“Sure data mya bear,” was the response. “He verra gooda bear. He dance an’ maka tricks while I sing and we maka lota da mon. Mya name Tony Moretto. I coma from da Italy two, nearly tree years ago. I spika da Inglis good,” he continued, with evident pride in his accomplishments.

“Doesn’t he ever get cross and ugly?” asked Bob. “He looks as though he could eat you in two mouthfuls.”

“What dat?” asked Tony, in a tone of aggrieved surprise. “Bruno get ugly? Nevair! He verra tame.” And to prove it, he thrust his hand into the bear’s mouth and took hold of his tongue.

Instead of this evoking any protest, Bruno took it as part of a game, and acted just as a big good-natured mastiff might while romping with his master.

“You see,” said Tony, with evident pride. “He lova me. I show you how he minda me.”

He gave a word or two of command and began a monotonous chant, to the notes of which the bear began to dance with an agility that was surprising in so clumsy an animal. Then he lay down and played dead, turned somersaults and went through his whole repertoire of tricks for the edification of the boys, who looked on with very different emotions from those they had felt only a little while before.

“What I tella you?” said Tony complacently. “Bruno verra nice bear.”

“What made him chase us then?” asked Joe. “We thought he was going to eat us alive.”

“He chasa you?” said Tony, in surprise. “No, no. You mus’ be mistake. He wan’ to maka frens – to playa wi’ you. Dat’ ees it. He tink eet was a game.”

“I wish we’d known that half an hour ago,” murmured Joe to his companions. “It would have saved us a whole lot of trouble.”

“How did he come to get away from you?” asked Herb.

“I verra tired,” answered Tony. “I go sleepa in de woods. When I waka up I no finda him. He hunt for grub in da woods. Den he seea you and try to maka frens wi’ you.”

He took a chain from his pocket and fastened it to a collar on the bear’s neck.

“Coma, Bruno,” he said. “We go now.”

“Wait,” called Bob, and he and his companions emptied their pockets of what loose change they had and pressed it on the Italian, who at first shook his head.

“No,” he said. “Bruno maka you much trubbeel.”

“Never mind that,” replied Bob. “You’ve given us a good show, and this will buy some grub for Bruno. He’s a good old sport, and we don’t bear him any malice, even if he did give us the scare of our lives.”

He was so insistent that Tony finally pocketed the money, and with a smile and another flash of his white teeth trudged off through the woods with Bruno lumbering along clumsily beside him.

The boys watched the pair until they were out of sight and then turned and looked at each other. Then the comical aspect of the whole affair appealed to them and they burst into inextinguishable laughter.

“Stung!” cried Bob, when at last he could get his breath. “Stung good and plenty.”

“Running away like all possessed when the bear was only lonely and wanted company,” gasped Joe, wiping his eyes.

“He lova us, he wanta maka frens with us,” chuckled Herb, and again they went into convulsions of mirth.

“Well, fellows,” said Bob, when they had regained some degree of composure, “there’s no doubt but that the joke is on us. But, after all, we’ve nothing to reproach ourselves for, because we’re not mind readers and couldn’t be supposed to know Bruno’s intentions when he came galloping toward us. There isn’t a man on earth who wouldn’t have done just as we did under the circumstances.”

“We can’t say we haven’t had excitement enough for one day,” remarked Jimmy. “Gee, I feel as though I’d been drawn through a knothole. When you fellows came down on me in the attic, I felt sure that you’d drive me through the floor.”

“We showed good judgment in letting you fall first,” said Joe, with a grin. “It was as good as falling on a rubber cushion.”

“I guess I was born to be the goat,” sighed Jimmy. “I’ll bet I’m black and blue all over.”

“It’s a safe bet that we’re all pretty tired and sore,” said Bob. “And that’s too bad too, for we’ve got a lot of work to do before we leave this old shebang. And we won’t have any more than time to do it, for it’s getting on pretty late in the afternoon.”

“What do you mean?” asked Herb. “Seems to me we’ve worked hard enough for one day.”

“All the same we’ve got to fix up that roof before we go,” explained Bob. “It wouldn’t be fair to leave it open to the wind and rain after we smashed it in.”

“I tell you what!” exclaimed Herb, struck with a bright idea. “Jimmy’s the one to do that to the queen’s taste. He’s had a lot of experience in his father’s carpenter shop, and he could make a far better job of it than any of us could. It’ll be a real treat to see him go at it.”

“Sure,” said Jimmy sarcastically. “Just the thing. I told you that I was the goat. But all the same don’t you try to hold your breath till you see me do it.”

“We’ll all go at it,” declared Bob. “And we’ll get it done in jig time. Probably it won’t be done like cabinet work, but we can make it reasonably tight and snug just the same. Come along now and let’s get busy.”

They picked themselves up and made their way to the attic and set to work. They were hampered at first by lack of tools, but search of the house brought to light a couple of rusty hammers and saws, and they managed to make a fairly good job of it. At least they had made it secure against rain or snow, and that was all they could hope to do under the circumstances.

The sun was getting low in the western sky as they were putting in the last nails. Suddenly Herb stopped and listened.

“Who’s that calling?” he asked.

CHAPTER IV – THE BULLY APPEARS

Joe went to a window in the side of the attic and peered out. Then he gave a low whistle.

“What’s the game?” inquired Bob curiously.

“It’s Buck Looker and his gang,” replied his chum. “How in the world did they happen to get here just at this minute? Five minutes more and we’d have been gone.”

“Now I suppose it will all come out about the bear,” said Herb regretfully. “I was hoping we could keep that to ourselves.”

“Perhaps it’s just as well,” said Bob thoughtfully. “We’d have to explain anyhow how we came to fall through the roof, and of course we’d tell the truth about it. What we’ve done now is only a makeshift job, and we’ll have to get some carpenter to make a perfect thing of it at our expense. That’s the only fair thing to do.”

“Hello, up there!” came a voice from below, which they recognized as Buck Looker’s. “Who’s up there and what are you doing?”

Bob, who had come up to Joe’s side, thrust his head out of the window.

“Some of my friends and myself are here,” he answered. “We broke through the roof of the house and we’ve just been fixing it up.”

“Broke through the roof!” came in a gasp from below. “What business did you have on the roof of my house? You’re going to get into trouble for this.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Bob. “We’re not worrying much about it.”

“Well, you’d better worry,” growled Buck truculently. “You come right down and get out of my house as fast as your legs can carry you or I’ll – I’ll – ”

“Yes,” said Bob quietly, “go right ahead with what you were going to say, Buck Looker. You’ll do what?”

Buck hesitated, for there was a note in Bob’s voice that he did not like.

“You’ll see what I’ll do,” he blustered. “You get right out of my house.”

“Now listen, Buck Looker,” replied Bob. “We’re going to get out of this house for just two reasons. The first is that there’s nothing especially attractive to keep us here, and the second is that we’ve finished our work and were just about to go anyway. But don’t fool yourself into thinking that we’re going because you tell us to. If your father told us to, we’d have to, because it’s his property. But it isn’t yours and what you say doesn’t interest us a little bit. Get that?”

There was a growling response, of which they did not catch the words, and Bob turned to his companions.

“Come along, fellows,” he said. “Let’s go down and see what this terrible man-eater and his cronies are going to do to us.”

“I only wish they’d give us an excuse for pitching into them,” said Joe. “I’ve been aching to give Buck Looker a licking ever since that time Mr. Preston came along and stopped us.”

“No chance,” laughed Bob. “Buck is prudent enough when any one comes face to face with him. As a long distance fighter he’s a wonder, but he wilts fast enough when a scrap seems coming.”

The radio boys brushed off their clothes, restored the tools to their places, and went downstairs and out on the front porch, where they found the bully and his friends in close conversation.

“It’s time you got out of here!” exclaimed Buck. “My father will have something to say about this, and maybe he’ll have you all arrested for burglary.”

At this the boys could not help laughing, and Buck’s face grew red with fury, while a venomous light glowed in his mean eyes.

“You’ll laugh out of the other side of your mouths when you find yourselves in jail,” he shouted.

“Now look here,” burst out Joe, taking a step toward him, “you’ve gone quite far enough. You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I’ll give you what I’ve owed you ever since Mr. Preston came between us. And there’s no Mr. Preston here now.”

Bob put a restraining hand on his friend’s arm.

“Easy, Joe,” he counseled.

Then he turned to the bully.

“We don’t owe you any explanation, Buck Looker,” he said, “but we do owe one to your father, and you can tell him what we say. We were chased by a bear who had wandered away from his master. We chose this house for safety because it was the only place at hand and we couldn’t do anything else. First we got up on the roof of the porch, but the bear came after us there and we had to take to the roof of the house itself. While we were going across it, part of it caved in and let us down into the attic. Afterward we tried to repair the damage for the time, and you can tell your father that we will pay whatever is necessary to make the roof as good as it was before.”

“Chased by a bear!” repeated Buck, with a sneer. “That’s a likely story. There hasn’t been a bear around these parts for a hundred years. Tell that to the marines.”

“I suppose that means that I’m telling a falsehood,” said Bob, his eyes taking on a steely glint.

“I didn’t say that,” muttered Buck, as he stole a glance at Bob’s clenched fist. “But you can tell that to my father and see if he believes it.”

“He can believe it or not as he sees fit,” replied Bob. “Come along, fellows.”

“Just notice that we’re going of our own accord,” put in Joe, as he prepared to follow his friend down the steps. “Don’t you want to throw us off the porch or any little thing like that?” he inquired politely, pausing a moment for an answer.

But the only answer was a snarl, and the radio boys left the bully there and went on to the place a little way off where they had dropped their bags when the bear came upon them.

Jimmy, who was in the van, suddenly gave a cry of dismay.

“The bags are gone!” he exclaimed. “I dropped mine right here, and now there are no signs of it.”

“And mine was close by this tree,” cried Herb. “That’s gone too.”

They hunted about for a few minutes, but the search was fruitless.

“Look here!” exclaimed Joe, at last. “Those bags didn’t walk away of their own accord. Somebody’s taken them.”

“And after working all day to fill them!” groaned Jimmy.

“Say, fellows,” said Bob. “The only ones that have been around here have probably been Buck Looker and his gang. There’s the answer.”

“But they didn’t have any bags with them,” interposed Herb.

“They could have hidden them, intending to come back after dark and get them,” replied Bob. “I’m going to question them anyway. Buck Looker isn’t going to put anything like that over on us.”

“They’ll only lie out of it,” prophesied Jimmy pessimistically.

“We can see from the way they talk and act whether they are lying or not,” returned Bob. “At any rate I’m going to take a chance.”

They all went back rapidly toward the house, and reached there just in time to see Buck and his cronies vanishing around the back.

“They’ve seen us coming and tried to dodge,” cried Joe.

“That won’t do them any good,” replied Bob, quickening his speed. “We can beat them running any day.”

The truth of his words was quickly demonstrated when they drew up abreast of the three, who slowed to a walk when they saw it was no use trying to evade their pursuers.

“What are you running away for?” queried Bob, as he stepped in front of Buck.

“None of your business,” answered Buck snapishly. “I might ask you what you are running for.”

“And if you did, I’d tell you mighty quick,” answered Bob. “I was running after you to ask you what you did with the bags of nuts you found under the trees.”

Buck tried to put on a look of surprise, but the attempt was a failure.

“I – I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he stammered.

Every tone and every look betrayed that he was not telling the truth, and Bob went straight to the point.

“Yes, you do,” he retorted. “You know perfectly well what I’m talking about. You found those bags under the trees where we had dropped them when the bear chased us, and you’ve hidden them somewhere intending to come back for them later. We’ve got you dead to rights, and you’d better come across and come across quick.”

Buck hesitated a moment, but the look in Bob’s eyes told him what was in store for him if he refused, and again he concluded that discretion was the better part of valor.

“Oh, were those yours?” he said, with an affectation of surprise. “We did find a few nuts and laid them aside for the owners if they should come back for them. I had forgotten all about it.”

“It’s too bad that your memory is so poor,” remarked Bob grimly. “Suppose you come along and show us where you laid them aside so carefully for their owners.”

Again Buck hesitated and seemed inclined to refuse, but the menace in Bob’s eyes had not lessened, and he reluctantly shuffled back to the woods in front of the house and pointed out a hollow tree.

“There you’ll find your old nuts,” he snarled viciously. “That is, if they are yours. Ten to one they belong to somebody else.” And with this Parthian shot, which the boys disregarded in their eagerness to regain their property, he slunk away, followed by Lutz and Mooney, the discomfited faces of the three of them as black as thunder clouds.

CHAPTER V – A STARTLING ACCUSATION

Elated and triumphant, the radio boys shouldered their bags and set out for home.

“This is the end of a perfect day,” chanted Joe, as they trudged along, tired in body but light in heart.

“For us perhaps, but not for Buck and his crowd,” chuckled Herb.

“And those sneak thieves were the fellows who were talking about burglars,” laughed Jimmy.

The sun had gone down before the radio boys left the woods, and it was full night by the time they reached their homes and disburdened themselves of their load of nuts.

“I was going to ask you fellows to come around tonight and listen in on the broadcasting concert,” said Bob, as they reached his gate; “but I guess our folks will be so much excited about the bear that they can’t talk or think of anything else.”

“That’s bearly possible,” chuckled Herb, and grinned at the indignation of his companions at the pun.

“But I think there’ll be something doing at church tomorrow on the subject of radio,” continued Bob. “You fellows must be sure to be there. I heard Doctor Dale talking about it to father.”

“I’ll be there if I can wake up in time,” said Jimmy. “But just now I feel as if I could sleep through the next twenty-four hours straight. I’ll be like one of the seven sleepers of Pegasus.”

“Ephesus, I guess you mean,” laughed Bob. “Pegasus was a horse.”

“Is that so?” replied Jimmy. “Well, that’s a horse on me. Don’t hit me,” he begged, as Bob made a pass at him. “I’m stiff and sore all over, without having that big ham of yours land on me.”

Bob laughed and went up the steps, while the others made their ways to their respective homes not many doors away.

As they had anticipated, the telling of the adventures that they had gone through that day was listened to with breathless interest by all the members of their families. At places in the story there was laughter, but more frequently there were exclamations of alarm mingled with great relief that they had come through safely.

“I tell you,” said Bob, as he finished telling of the matter to his parents. “I felt mighty cheap to think that I had run like mad from a bear that, as the Italian said, was simply trying to ‘maka frens’ with me.”

“It was rather amusing after it was all over,” assented his father, with a smile. “But after all you were very wise to act as you did. It isn’t by any means certain that the bear would have been as friendly with you as he was with his master, and resistance of any kind might have awakened all his savage instincts. I am very doubtful about the bear thinking it was only a game when he was climbing up after you. But even if he did, you had no reason to suppose it. For all you knew he might have escaped from a circus or menagerie and might have been ready to tear you in pieces.”

“That was my first thought; that is, as soon as I could think calmly about anything,” answered Bob. “But, after all, a miss is as good as a mile, and he didn’t get us. He came mighty near it though.”

“The most serious outcome of the whole thing will probably be the matter of the broken roof,” said Mr. Layton meditatively. “It will probably cost considerable to put it in perfect shape again. But, after all, that doesn’t count for anything as long as you boys weren’t hurt. I’ll see Looker about it on Monday and fix the matter up with him.”

“And of course the fathers of the other fellows will chip in on the expense,” said Bob. “I’d like to hear what Buck is telling his father about it tonight,” he continued, with a grin. “By the time he gets through, we’ll have pulled the whole house down.”

The next morning all the boys were at church in time for the morning service, even Jimmy, who walked very stiffly and smelled strongly of arnica.

“You fellows needn’t sniff as though I had the plague,” he protested, as his friends lifted their nostrils inquiringly. “I was the fellow who was underneath when you fell on me like a thousand of brick. You got off easy, while I had all the worst of it. But then I’m used to that,” he concluded, sighing heavily.

“Cheer up, old boy,” said Joe, clapping him on the back, at which poor Jimmy winced. “The first hundred years is the worst. After that you won’t mind it. But now we’d better get in if we want to sit together, for there’s a bigger congregation here than usual.”

Doctor Dale, the friend and counselor of the boys in radio, as in many other things, was in the pulpit. He was a very eloquent preacher and was always sure of a good congregation. But as Joe had said, the church was even fuller than usual that morning, and there was a general stir of expectancy, as though something unusual was in prospect.

The attention of the boys was attracted at once by a small disk-like contrivance right in front of the preacher’s desk. It had never been there before. They recognized it at once as a microphone, but to the majority of the audience its purpose was a complete mystery, and many curious glances were fixed upon it.

There were the customary preliminary services, and then Doctor Dale came forward to the desk.

“Before beginning my sermon this morning,” he said, “I want to explain what will seem to some an unusual departure from custom, but which I hope will justify itself to such an extent as to become a regular feature of our service.

“There is no reason why the benefits of that service should be confined to the persons gathered within these four walls. There are thousands outside who by the means of radio, that most wonderful invention of the present century, can hear every word of this service just as readily as you who are seated in the pews. The prayers, the hymns, the organ music, the sermon, the benediction – they can hear it all. The only thing they will miss will be the privilege of putting their money in the collection plate.”

He paused for a moment, and a smile rippled over the congregation.

“I have said,” he resumed, “that they can hear it. And if they can hear it, they ought to hear it – that is if they want to. This is no new or untried idea. It is being carried out today in Pittsburgh, Washington, and other cities. The pulpit becomes a religious broadcasting station, from which the service is carried over an area of hundreds of miles. Everybody within that area who has a receiving set can hear it if they wish. In some cases it is estimated that more than two hundred thousand people are enjoying at the same moment the same religious service. You can see at once what that means in immeasurably extending the usefulness and influence of the church.

“Now it has occurred to me that we might do here what is being done elsewhere on a larger scale. So, after a conference with the officials of the church, an adequate sending set has been installed in the loft of the building. What is said here is sent from this microphone to the loft, where it is flung out into the ether. Arrangements have been made with a number of churches in this county, too poor and small to have a regular pastor, by which they have installed loud speaker receiving sets in their buildings. At this moment there are a dozen scattered congregations where the people have gathered to worship, and where at this moment they are hearing everything that is said just as plainly as you do.

“And in addition to that,” he went on, “in hundreds, perhaps thousands of homes, people who cannot go to church because of illness or some other reason are listening to this service. The sick, the crippled, the blind – think of what it means to have the church brought to them when they cannot go to the church. You in the pews are the visible congregation. But outside these walls there is today an invisible congregation many times greater, to whom this service is bringing its message of help and healing.”

With this prelude, Doctor Dale announced his text and preached his sermon, which, if anything, was more eloquent than usual. It seemed as if he were inspired by preaching to the greatest audience that he had ever had in his whole career, and the audience in the pews also felt a thrill as they thought

of the invisible listeners miles and miles away. It seemed as though the natural were being brought into close connection with the supernatural, and the impression produced was most powerful.

If the doctor had had any misgivings as to the attitude of his people toward this new departure, these were quickly dissipated by the cordial congratulations and approval that were expressed after the service was over and he moved about among them. It was the universal opinion that a great advance had been made and that the innovation had come to stay.

The radio boys had been intensely interested in this new application of their favorite study, and after the sermon they went up into the loft and examined the apparatus that had been used in sending. It was a vacuum tube set with two tubes and power enough to send messages out over the whole county. It had been set up by Dr. Dale himself, and that was proof enough for the boys that it had worked perfectly in sending out the morning service.

“What will radio do next?” asked Bob, as the boys were walking homeward.

“What won’t it do next is the way you ought to put it,” suggested Joe. “It seems as if there were no limit. There are no such things as space and distance any more. Radio has wiped them out completely.”

“That’s true,” chimed in Herb. “The earth used to be a monstrous big thing twenty-five thousand miles round. Now it’s getting to be no bigger than an orange.”

“What a fuss they made when it was proved that one could travel around the world in eighty days,” said Jimmy. “But radio can go round the earth more than seven times in a single second. Just about the time it takes to strike a match.”

“Gee, but I’m glad we weren’t born a hundred years ago,” remarked Bob. “What a lot of things we would have missed. Automobiles, locomotives, telegraph, telephone, phonograph, electric light – ”

“Yes,” interrupted Joe, “and radio would have been the worst miss of all.”

“They’re doing in the colleges now, too, something very like what the doctor did in the pulpit this morning,” said Bob. “In Union College and Tufts and a lot of others the professors are giving their lectures by radio. Talk about University Extension courses! Radio will beat them all hollow. Think of a professor lecturing to an audience of fifty thousand, instead of the hundred or so that are gathered in his classroom. And think of the thousands of young fellows who are crazy to go to college and haven’t the money to do it with. They can keep on working and get their college education at home. I tell you what, fellows, Mr. Brandon was right the other day when he said that the surface of radio had only been scratched so far.”

The next day at school the boys found that the story of their experience with the bear had had wide circulation, chiefly through the activity of Buck Looker, who took care at the same time, however, to express his belief that nothing of the kind had happened. There was a good deal of good-natured joking, and the boys in self-defense had to explain the whole thing in all its details.

At recess their story received unexpected confirmation, for there, just outside the school yard, was Tony putting Bruno, the bear, through his tricks while a breathlessly interested crowd gathered about the pair. Tony grinned at the boys when he saw them and Jimmy asserted that Bruno grinned too, but the rest of the radio boys thought that that was due to Jimmy’s excess of imagination.

A noticeable feature of the school work that day was the scarcity of pupils. All the classes were more or less sparsely attended, and the teachers were called to a conference with Mr. Preston, the principal.

“What do you suppose the powwow of the teachers was all about?” asked Bob, as the boys were going home after the session of the school was ended.

“About so many fellows being away,” replied Joe, who, as his father was the leading physician of the town, was better informed than were his friends as to the situation. “Dad says there’s an awful lot of sickness in the town. He’s kept busy day and night, and scarcely has time to breathe.”

“I wonder what the reason is,” remarked Herb.

“Dad thinks the water supply may have something to do with it,” answered Joe. “He says there’s a regular epidemic of typhoid fever, and that usually comes from impure water. He’s called the attention of the town council and the engineers of the reservoir to the matter, and they’re going to have an investigation. Dad says it may even be necessary to close the schools for a time.”

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