

H. E. Todd "Bobby Brewster's Hiccups"

(p. 22-25)

WHAT'S THE USE?

«Who are you»? – asked Bobby.

«We're your new sneakers of course», – was the reply.

«And you really can talk»? – asked Bobby.

«Certainly we can», – they said together. «Didn't you hear us in the shop asking you to buy us»?

«I *thought* I did», – answered Bobby, «but then I decided that I must be imagining voices.»

«Well, you were wrong», - said right foot. «What's the use of our having tongues if we can't talk»?

«I didn't think of that», – said Bobby.

«No, and there's something else you haven't thought of», – said left sneaker. «Don't you realise that if you tie us too tight you make us tongue-tied and we can't talk? Please be more careful in future».

«I certainly will», – said Bobby.

«And one more thing you must be careful about», - added right sneaker, «be sure to hold our tongues up straight whilst you tie our laces. Otherwise they slip down and fold over and become tongue twisters».

«I will take great care», – Bobby assured them. Then he started to laugh.

«What's so funny»? – asked left sneaker. «Whilst on the subject of tongues», – he explained, «I was just thinking that when my mother asks me a question which I fail to answer at once she often says: «Haven't you got a tongue in your head»?»

«So what»? – asked right sneaker.

«Well, I suppose if you don't answer me I shall have to say "Haven't you got a tongue in your foot?" –said Bobby still laughing heartily. But the sneakers didn't seem to see the joke.

Then Bobby decided that he would give them each a name so that he would know which foot he was talking to. He thought of twin-sounding names like Tim and Tom, but they were too ordinary for such remarkable sneakers. Then he had an idea.

«In the shop I thought that you looked very snappy sneakers», – he said, «and now I am wearing you with my white T shirt and blue jeans I have a really snazzy outfit. In future I will call right sneaker Snappy and left sneaker Snazzy. How about that»?

«Not bad», – said right sneaker, «but I want to be called Snazzy and not Snappy».

«Well you can't», - said left foot, «because I'm Snazzy».

Then they started squabbling and kicking at each other, which hurt Bobby's toes, so he cried: «Enough of that, I'm going to toss up. Heads-Snappy right, Snazzy left. Tails the other way round». His penny came down heads.

«That's not fair», – cried right foot.

«Don't be snappy, Snappy», – said Bobby, which made him and Snazzy laugh, but Snappy didn't find it at all funny.

He soon got over his tantrums and during the rest of the holiday Snappy Sneaker and Snazzy Sneaker proved to be most useful. The Brewsters went for several long country walks, and Bobby's father always carried a map because he prided himself on his map reading. But somehow or other they often seemed to get lost until Snappy and Snazzy took matters in hand.

Once, during a rest, when Bobby was sitting all by himself, Snappy said to him «We don't think much of your father's map reading. Next time you are lost leave it to us and we will tell you the way to go».

Sure enough, at the next cross paths Mr Brewster stood looking at his map and scratching his head. Bobby ran out of earshot and Snappy and Snazzy said together: «Tell him to turn right, then second path left and third path right and in two miles from there you will reach your farm».

Bobby ran back with the instructions, which proved to be correct. His mother and father were most impressed and said that he must have a «Very well developed sense of direction».

A FACE IN THE DARK

Mr Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, was returning his school late one night, on the outskirts of the hill station of Simla. From before Kipling's time, the school had been run on English public school lines and the boys, most of them from wealthy Indian families, wore blazers, caps and ties. *Life* magazine, in a feature on India, had once called it the 'Eton of the East'. Mr Oliver had been teaching in the school for several years.

The Simla Bazaar, with its cinemas and restaurants, was about three miles from the school and Mr Oliver, a bachelor, usually strolled into the town in the evening, returning after dark, when he would take a short cut through the pine forest.

When there was a strong wind, the pine trees made sad, eerie sounds that kept most people to the main road. But Mr Oliver was not a nervous or imaginative man. He carried a torch and its gleam – the batteries were running down – moved fitfully down the narrow forest path. When its flickering light fell on the figure of a boy, who was sitting alone on a rock, Mr Oliver stopped. Boys were not supposed to be out after dark.

"What are you doing out here, boy?" – asked Mr Oliver sharply, moving closer so that he could recognize the miscreant. But even as he approached the boy, Mr Oliver sensed that something was wrong. The boy appeared to be crying. His head hung down, he held his face in his hands, and his body shook convulsively. It was a strange, soundless weeping and Mr Oliver felt distinctly uneasy.

"Well, what's the matter?" – he asked, his anger giving way to concern. "What are you crying for?" – The boy would not answer or look up. His body continued to be racked with silent sobbing. "Come on, boy, you shouldn't be out here at this hour. Tell me the trouble. Look up!" The boy looked up. He took his hands from his face and looked up at teacher. The light from Mr Oliver's torch fell on the boy's face – if you could call it a face.

It had no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It was just a round smooth head – with a school cap on top of it! And that's where the story should end. But for Mr Oliver it did not end here.

The torch fell from his trembling hand. He turned and scrambled down the path, running blindly through the trees and calling for help. He was still running towards the school buildings when he saw a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. Mr Oliver stumbled up to the watchman, gasping for breath. "What is it, sahib?" – asked the watchman. "Has there been an accident? Why are you running?"

"I saw something – something horrible – a boy weeping in the forest - and he had no face!"

"No face, sahib?"

"No eyes, nose, mouth – nothing!"

"Do you mean it was like this, sahib?" – asked the watchman and raised the lamp to his own face. The watchman had no eyes, no ears, no features at all – not even an eyebrow! And that's when the wind blew the lamp out.