

My Brother the Bird

We live near Central Park. On nice days I like to play there after school. I'm allowed to walk over by myself as long as I'm going to be with friends. My mother doesn't want me hanging around the park alone.

For one thing, Jimmy Fargo has been mugged three times-twice for his bicycle and once for his money. Only he didn't have any to give the muggers.

I've never been mugged. But sooner or later I probably will be. My father's told me what to do. Give the muggers whatever they want and try not to get hit on the head.

Sometimes, after you're mugged, you get to go to police headquarters. You look at a bunch of pictures of crooks to see if you can recognize the guys that mugged you.

I think it would be neat to look at all those pictures. It's not that I want to get mugged, because that could be really scary. It's just that Jimmy Fargo's always talking about his visit to police headquarters.

My father got mugged once in a subway by two girls and a guy. They took his wallet and his briefcase. He still travels around by subways but my mother doesn't. She sticks to buses and taxis.

Both my mother and my father are always warning me never to talk to strangers in the park. Because a lot of dope-pushers hang around there. But taking dope is even dumber than smoking, so nobody's going to hook me!

We live on the west side of the park. If I want to get to the zoo and the pony carts I have to walk all the way through to the east side. Sometimes my mother walks across the park with Fudge. He likes the animals a lot. Especially the monkeys. He also likes the helium-filled balloons. But as soon as my mother buys him one he lets it go. I think he likes to see it float up in the sky. My mother says that's a waste of money and she's not going to buy him any more balloons until he promises not to let go.

On Sundays the park is closed to traffic and you can ride your bicycle all over without worrying about being run down by some crazy driver.

Even Fudge can ride. He has a little blue Toddle-Bike, a present from my father's client. And when he's riding he makes motorcycle noises. "Vroom-vroom-vroom!" he yells.

In the fall the leaves turn darker and drop off the trees. Sometimes there are big leaf piles on the ground. It's fun to jump around in them. I never saw bright red, yellow, and orange leaves until the day my father took us for a drive in the country. The reason the leaves don't turn bright colors in New York is the air pollution. And that's too bad. Because yellow and orange and red leaves really look neat!

One nice sunny afternoon I called for Jimmy Fargo and we went to the park. Jimmy is the only kid on my block who's in my class at school. Unless you count Sheila. And I don't! She lives in my building, on the tenth floor. Henry, the elevator operator, is always making jokes about me and Sheila.

He thinks we like each other. The truth is, I can't stand her. She's a real know-it-all. But I've discovered that most girls are!

The worst thing about Sheila is the way she's always trying to touch me. And when she does she yells, "Peter's got the cooties! Peter's got the cooties!" I don't believe in cooties anymore. When I was in second grade I used to examine myself to see if I had them. But I never found any. By fourth grade most kids give up on cooties. But not Sheila. She's still going strong. So I have to keep a safe distance from her.

My mother thinks Sheila is the greatest. "She's so smart," my mother says. "And someday she's going to be a real beauty." Now that's the funniest! Because Sheila looks a lot like the monkeys that Fudge is so crazy about. So maybe she'll look beautiful to some ape! *But never to me.*

Me and Jimmy have this special group of rocks where we like to play when we're in the park. We play secret agent up there. Jimmy can imitate all kinds of foreign accents. Probably because his father's a part-time actor. When he's not acting he teaches a class at City College.

Today, when we got to our rocks, who should be perched up there but Sheila. She was pretending to read a book. But I think she was just waiting for me and Jimmy. To find out what we'd do when we found her on our own personal rocks.

"Hey, Sheila," I said. "Those are our rocks."

"Says who?" she asked.

"Come on, Sheila," Jimmy said, climbing up. "You know, me and Peter hang out here."

"Too bad for you!" Sheila said.

"Oh, Sheila!" I shouted. "Go and find yourself another rock!"

"I like this one," she said, as if she owned the park. "So why don't you two go find another rock?"

Just then who should come tearing down the path but Fudge. My mother was right behind him hollering, "Fudgie... wait for Mommy!"

But when Fudge gets going he doesn't wait for anybody.

He was after some pigeons. "Birdie... here birdie," he called. That brother of mine loves birds.

But he can't get it through his head that the birds aren't about to let him catch them.

"Hi, Mom," I said.

My mother stopped running. "Peter! Am I glad to see you. I can't keep up with Fudge."

"Mrs. Hatcher... Mrs. Hatcher," Sheila called, scrambling down from our rock, "I'll watch Fudge for you. I'll take very good care of him. Can I, Mrs. Hatcher? Oh please!" Sheila jumped up and down and begged some more. Jimmy gave me an elbow in the ribs. He thought that my mother would let Sheila watch Fudge and then we'd be rid of her. We'd be free to play secret agent. But Jimmy didn't know that my mother would never trust Sheila with her dear little boy.

Fudge, in the meantime, was screaming. "Come back, birdies... come back to Fudgie!"

Then my mother did a strange thing. She checked her watch and said, "You know, I do have to run back to the apartment. I forgot to turn on the oven. Do you really think you could keep an eye on Fudge for just ten minutes?"

"Of course I can, Mrs. Hatcher," Sheila said. "I know all about babysitting from my sister."

Sheila's sister Libby is in seventh grade. She's about as beautiful as Sheila. The only difference is, she's bigger.

My mother hesitated. "I don't know," she said. "I've never left Fudge before." She looked at me.

"Peter. . . ."

"What?"

"Will you and Jimmy help Sheila watch Fudge while I run home for a minute?"

"Oh, Mom! Do we have to?"

"Please, Peter. I'll be right back. I'll feel better if all three of you are watching him."

"What do you say?" I asked Jimmy.

"Sure," he answered. "Why not?"

"But I'm in charge of Fudgie, aren't I?" Sheila asked my mother.

"Well, I guess so," my mother said to Sheila. "You probably do know more about baby-sitting. Why don't you all take Fudge over to the playground? Then I'll know where to find you."

"Swell, Mrs. Hatcher!" Sheila said. "Don't you worry. Fudgie will be just fine."

My mother turned to Fudge. "Now you be a good boy for ten minutes. Mommy will be right back. Okay?"

"Good boy!" Fudge said. "Good... good... good..."

As soon as my mother was gone Fudge took off. "Can't catch me!" he hollered. "Can't catch Fudgie,"

"Go get him, Sheila," I said. "You're in charge, remember?"

Me and Jimmy horsed around while Sheila ran after Fudge.

When she caught him we decided we'd better go to the playground like my mother said. It was a lot easier to keep an eye on him in a smaller place. Any-way, Fudge likes to climb on the jungle gym and that way he can't get lost.

As soon as we got to the playground Sheila started chasing me. "Peter's got the cooties! Peter's got the cooties!" she yelled.

"Cut that out!" I said.

So she chased Jimmy. "Jimmy's got the cooties! Jimmy's got the cooties!"

Me and Jimmy decided to fight back. So what if she's a girl? She started it! We grabbed her by the arms. She squirmed and tried to get away from us, but we wouldn't let go. We hollered really loud.

"Sheila's got the cooties! Sheila's got the cooties!"

All three of us were so busy fooling around that we didn't notice Fudge up on the jungle gym until he called. "Pee-tah . . . Pee-tah. . . ." That's how he says my name.

"What?" I asked.

"See . . . see. . . ." Fudge flapped his arms around. "Fudgie's a birdie! Fudgie's a birdie! Fly, birdie. . . fly..."

That crazy kid! I thought, running to the jungle gym with Jimmy and Sheila right behind me.

But it was too late. Fudge already found out he didn't have wings. He fell to the ground. He was screaming and crying and his face was a mess of blood. I couldn't even tell where the blood was coming from at first. Then Jimmy handed me his handkerchief. I don't know how clean it was but it was better than nothing. I mopped some blood off Fudge's face.

Sheila cried, "It wasn't my fault. Honest, it wasn't."

"Oh shut up!" I told her.

"He's really a mess," Jimmy said, inspecting Fudge. "And his teeth are gone too."

"What are you talking about?" I asked Jimmy.

"Look in his mouth," Jimmy said. "Now, while he's screaming. See . . . he's got a big space where he used to have his front teeth."

"Oh no!" Sheila screamed. "He's right! Fudgie's teeth are gone!" Fudge stopped crying for a minute. "All gone?" he asked.

"Open your mouth wide," I said.

He did and I looked in. It was true. His top two front teeth were missing.

"My mother's going to kill you, Sheila!" I said. Was I glad I wasn't left in charge of my brother. Sheila cried louder. "But it was an accident. He did it himself . . . himself. . . ."

"You better find his teeth," I said.

"Where should I look?" Sheila asked.

"On the ground, stupid!"

Sheila crawled around looking for Fudge's teeth while I tried to clean him up some more.

"See," Fudge said, showing me all his wounds. "Boo-boo here. And here. More boo-boo here." His knees and elbows were all scraped up.

"I'm going to get your mother," Jimmy hollered, running out of the playground.

"Good idea!" I called.

"I just can't find them," Sheila said. "Well, keep looking!" I yelled.

"Honestly, Peter, there aren't any teeth here!"

"All gone?" Fudge asked again.

"Not all," I told him. "Just two."

Fudge started to scream. "Want my teeth! Want my teeth!"

Jimmy must have met my mother on her way back to the park because it only took about two minutes for her to get there. By that time a whole crowd of kids had gathered around us. Most of them were crawling on the ground like Sheila, looking for Fudge's teeth.

My mother picked up Fudge. "Oh my baby! My precious! My little love!" She kissed him all over.

"Show Mommy where it hurts."

Fudge showed her all his boo-boos. Then he said, "All gone!"

"What's all gone?" my mother asked.

"His top two front teeth" I said.

"Oh no!" my mother cried. "Oh, my poor little angel!"

Sheila sniffled and said, "I just can't find them, Mrs. Hatcher. I've looked everywhere but Fudge's teeth are gone!"

"He must have swallowed them," my mother said, looking into Fudge's mouth.

"Oh, Mrs. Hatcher! How awful. I'm sorry... I'm really very sorry," Sheila cried. "What will happen to him?"

"He'll be all right, Sheila," my mother said. "I'm sure it was an accident. Nobody's blaming you." Sheila started bawling again.

My mother said, "Let's go home now."

I thought my mother was being pretty easy on Sheila. After all, she was left in charge. When we got home Mom washed Fudge's cuts and scrapes with peroxide. Then she called Dr. Cone. He told her to take Fudge to our dentist. So my mother called Dr. Brown's office and made an appointment for the next day.

When that was done she gave Fudge some socks to play with. I went into the kitchen to have a glass of juice. My mother followed me. "Peter Warren Hatcher!" she said. "I'm sorry that I can't trust you for just ten minutes!"

"Me?" I asked. "Trust me? What's this got to do with me?"

My mother raised her voice. "I left your brother with you for ten minutes and just look at what happened. I'm disgusted with you!"

"It was Sheila's fault," I said. "You said Sheila was in charge. So how come you're mad at me and not at Sheila?"

"I just am!" my mother shouted.

I ran to my room and slammed the door. I watched Dribble walk around on his favorite rock. "My mother's the meanest mother in the whole world!" I told my turtle. "She loves Fudge more than me. She doesn't even love me anymore. She doesn't even like me. Maybe I'm not her real son. Maybe somebody left me in a basket on her doorstep. My real mother's probably a beautiful princess. I'll bet she'd like to have me back. Nobody needs me around here... that's for sure!"

I didn't eat much supper that night and I had a lot of trouble falling asleep.

The next morning my mother came into my room and sat down on my bed. I didn't look at her. "Peter," she said. I didn't answer.

"Peter, I said some things yesterday that I didn't really mean."

I looked at her. "Honest?" I asked.

"Yes... you see ... I was very upset over Fudge's accident and I had to blame somebody. So I picked on you."

"Yes," I said. "You sure did."

"It wasn't your fault though. I know that. It was an accident. It could have happened even if I had been in the playground myself."

"He wanted to fly," I said. "He thought he was a bird."

"I don't think he'll try to fly again," my mother said.

"Me neither," I told her.

Then we both laughed and I knew she was my real mother after all.

The Birthday Bash

I got used to the way Fudge looked without his top front teeth. He looked like a very small first grader. Dr. Brown, our dentist, said he'd have to wait until he was six or seven to get his grown-up teeth. I started calling him Fang because when he smiles all you can see are the top two side teeth next to the big space. So it looks like he has fangs.

My mother didn't like that. "I want you to stop calling him Fang," she told me.

"What should I call him?" I asked. "Farley Drexel?"

"Just plain Fudge will be fine," my mother said.

"What's wrong with Farley Drexel?" I asked. "How come you named him that if you don't like it?"

"I like it fine," my mother said. "But right now we call him Fudge. Not Farley... not Drexel... and *not* Fang!"

"What's wrong with Fang?" I asked. "I think it sounds neat."

"Fang is an insult!"

"Oh... come on, Mom! He doesn't even know what a fang is!"

"But I know, Peter. And *I* don't like it."

"Okay... okay..." I promised never to call my brother Fang again.

But secretly, whenever I look at him, I think it. *My brother, Fang Hatcher!* Nobody can stop me from thinking. My mind is my own.

Fudge is going to be three years old. My mother said he should have a birthday party with some of his friends. He plays with three other little kids who live in our building. There's Jennie, Ralph, and Sam. My mother invited them to Fudge's party. Grandma said she'd come over to help. My father couldn't make it. He had a Saturday business appointment. I wanted to go to Jimmy Fargo's but my mother said she needed me to supervise the games. The kids were invited from one until two-thirty.

"That's only an hour and a half," my mother reminded me. "That's not so bad, is it, Peter?"

"I don't know yet," I told her. "Ask me later."

The kitchen table was set up for the party. The cloth and napkins and paper plates and cups all matched. They had pictures of Superman on them.

Right before party time Grandma tried to change Fudge into his new suit. But he screamed his head off about it.

"No suit! No suit! NO ... NO ... NO!"

My mother tried to reason with him. "It's your birthday, Fudgie. All your friends are coming. You want to look like a big boy, don't you?" While she was talking to him she managed to get him into his shirt and pants. But he wouldn't let her put on his shoes. He kicked and carried on until my mother and grandmother were both black and blue. Finally they decided as long as he was in his suit his feet didn't matter. So he wore his old bedroom slippers.

Ralph arrived first. He's really fat. And he isn't even four years old. He doesn't say much either. He grunts and grabs a lot, though. Usually his mouth is stuffed full of something.

So the first thing Ralph did was wander into the kitchen. He looked around for something to eat. But Grandma was guarding the place. She kept telling him "No ... No ... must wait until the other children come."

Jennie arrived next. She was wearing little white gloves and party shoes. She even carried a pocketbook. Besides that she had on dirty jeans and an old sweater. Her mother apologized for her clothes but said she couldn't do anything with Jennie lately-especially since she had taken to biting.

"What does she bite?" I asked, thinking about furniture or toys or stuff like that.

"She bites people," Jennie's mother said. "But you don't have to worry about it unless her teeth go through the skin. Otherwise it's perfectly safe."

I thought, poor old Fudge! *He can't even bite back since he hasn't got any top front teeth.* I looked at Jennie. She seemed so innocent. It was hard to believe she was a vampire.

Sam came last. He carried a big present for Fudge but he was crying. "It's just a stage he's going through," his mother explained. "Everything scares him. Especially birthday parties. But he'll be fine. Won't you, Sam?"

Sam grabbed onto his mother's leg and screamed, "Take me home! Take me home!" Somehow, Sam's mother untangled herself from Sam's grip and left.

So at five after one we were ready to begin. We had an eater, a biter, and a crier. I thought that two-thirty would never come. I also thought my mother was slightly crazy for dreaming up the party in the first place. "Doesn't Fudge have any normal friends?" I whispered.

"There's nothing wrong with Fudgie's friends!" my mother whispered back. "All small children are like that."

Grandma got them seated around the kitchen table. She put a party hat on each kid's head. Sam screamed, "Get it off! Get it off!" But the others wore their hats and didn't complain. My mother snapped a picture of them with her new camera.

Then Grandma turned off the lights and my mother lit the candles on Fudge's cake. It had chocolate frosting and big yellow roses. I led the singing of "Happy Birthday." My mother carried the cake across the kitchen to the party table and set it down in front of Fudge.

Sam cried, "Too dark! Too dark!" So Grandma had to turn on the kitchen lights before Fudge blew out his candles. When he was finished blowing he reached out and grabbed a rose off his cake. He shoved it into his mouth.

"Oh, Fudge!" my mother said. "Look what you did."

But Grandma said, "It's his birthday. He can do whatever he wants!" So Fudge reached over and grabbed a second rose.

I guess fat Ralph couldn't stand seeing Fudge eat those yellow roses because he grabbed one, too.

By that time the cake looked pretty messy. My mother, finally coming to her senses, took the cake away and sliced it up.

Each kid got a Dixie Cup, a small piece of cake, and some milk. But Jennie hollered, "Where's my rose? Want one too!" Because her slice of birthday cake didn't happen to have one.

My mother explained that the roses were only decorations and there weren't enough to go around.

Jennie seemed to accept that. But when Grandma stood over her to help open her Dixie, Jennie bit her on the hand.

"She bit me!" Grandma cried.

"Did it break the skin?" my mother asked.

"No ... I don't think so," Grandma said, checking.

"Good. Then it's nothing to worry about," my mother told her.

Grandma went into the bathroom to put some medicine on it anyway. She wasn't taking any chances. Ralph was the first one to finish his food.

"More . . . more . . . more!" he sang, holding up his empty plate.

"I don't think you should give him any more," I whispered to my mother. "Look how fat he is now!"

"Oh, Peter . . . this is a party. Let him eat whatever he wants."

"Okay," I said. "Why should I care how fat he gets?"

My mother served Ralph a second piece of cake. He threw up right after he finished it. Me and Grandma took the kids into the living room while my mother cleaned up the mess.

Grandma told Fudge he could open his presents while his friends watched. Jennie brought him a musical jack-in-the-box. When you turn the handle around it plays "Pop Goes the Weasel." When you reach the part of the song about Pop, the top opens and a funny clown jumps up. Fudge loved it. He clapped his hands and laughed and laughed. But Sam started to scream, "No! No more. Take it away!"

He hid his face in his hands and wouldn't look up until Grandma promised to put the jack-in-the-box in another room.

Fudge opened Ralph's present next. It was a little windup car that ran all over the floor. I kind of liked it myself. So did Ralph. Because he grabbed it away from Fudge and said, "MINE."

"No!" Fudge shouted. "MINE."

When my mother heard the racket she ran in from the kitchen. She explained to Ralph that he had brought the car to Fudge because it was *his* birthday. But Ralph wouldn't listen. I guess my mother was afraid he might throw up again, and this time on the living room rug. So she begged Fudge to let Ralph play with the car for a few minutes. But Ralph kept screaming it

was *his* car. So Fudge started to cry. Finally, my mother took the car away and said, "Let's see what Sam brought you."

Fudge liked that idea. He forgot about the little car as he ripped the paper and ribbon off Sam's package. It turned out to be a big picture dictionary. The same kind the Yarbys brought me a couple of months ago. Fudge got mad when he saw it.

"No!" he yelled. "NO MORE BOOK!" He threw it across the room.

"Fudge! That's terrible," my mother said. "You mustn't do that to the nice book."

"No book!" Fudge said.

Sam cried, "He doesn't like it. He doesn't like my present. I want to go home ... I want to go home!"

Grandma tried to comfort Sam while my mother picked up the book. She gathered the wrapping paper and ribbons and cards together. Fudge didn't even look at any of the birthday cards. Oh well, he can't read, so I guess it doesn't make any difference.

"Peter," my mother said, "let's start the games . . . now . . . quick!"

I checked the time. I hoped the party was almost over. But no, it was only one-thirty. Still an hour to go. I went into my room where I had blown up a lot of balloons. My mother has this party book and it says three-year-olds like to dance around with balloons. When I got back to the living room Mom started the record player and I handed each kid a balloon.

But they just stood there looking at me. I thought, *either the guy who wrote that party book is crazy or I am.*

"Show them how, Peter," my mother said. "Take a balloon and demonstrate."

I felt like one of the world's great living fools dancing around with a balloon, but it worked. As soon as the kids saw me doing it, they started dancing too. And the more they danced the more they liked it. Until Jennie's balloon popped. That nearly scared Sam right out of his mind. He started yelling and crying. Fortunately I had blown up two dozen balloons. I was hoping they'd dance around the rest of the afternoon.

Fudge got the idea of jumping up and down on the furniture. The others liked that too. So instead of dancing with their balloons, that's what

they did. And soon they were running from room to room, yelling and laughing and having a great time.

Then the doorbell rang. It was Mrs. Rudder. She lives in the apartment right under us. She wanted to know what was going on. She said it sounded like her ceiling was about to crash in on her any second.

My mother explained that Fudge was having a little birthday party and wouldn't she like to stay for a piece of cake? Sometimes my mother is really clever! So Grandma entertained Mrs. Rudder in the kitchen while Fudge and his buddies jumped up and down on his new bed.

It was delivered this morning. Fudge hasn't even slept in it yet. So naturally when my mother found out what they were up to, she was mad. "Stop it right now!" she said.

"New bed ... big boy!" Fudge told her. Was he proud!

"You won't have a new-big-boy-bed for long if you don't stop jumping on it," my mother told him. "I know . . . let's all sit down on the floor and hear a nice story." My mother selected a picture book from Fudge's bookshelf.

"I heard that one!" Jennie said when she saw the cover.

"All right," my mother told her, "Let's hear this one." She held up another book. "I heard that one too," Jennie said.

I think my mother was starting to lose her patience. But she chose a third book and said, "Well all enjoy this one even if we know it by heart. And if we do know it by heart . . . well, we can say it together."

That's just what Jennie did. And when my mother skipped a page by mistake Jennie was right there to remind her. If you ask me, my mother felt like biting Jennie by that time!

When the story was over it was two o'clock and Ralph was sound asleep on the floor. My mother told me to put him up on Fudge's new bed while she took the rest of the children back to the living room.

I tried and tried but I couldn't lift Ralph. He must weigh a ton. So I left him sleeping on Fudge's floor and closed the door so he wouldn't hear any noise. On my way back to the living room I wished the others would fall asleep too.

"Peter," my mother suggested, "why don't you show them Dribble?"

"Mom, Dribble's my pet." You don't go around using a pet to entertain a bunch of little kids. Didn't my mother know that?

"Please, Peter," my mother said. "We've still got half an hour left and I don't know what to do with them anymore."

"Dribble!" Fudge hollered. "Dribble . . . Dribble . . . Dribble!"

I guess Sam and Jennie liked the way that sounded because they started to shout, "Dribble . . . Dribble . . . Dribble!" even though they didn't know what they were talking about.

"Oh ... all right," I said. "I'll show you Dribble. But you've got to promise to be very quiet. You mustn't make a sound. You might scare him . . . okay?"

They all said "Okay." My mother went into the kitchen to chat with Grandma and Mrs. Rudder. I went into my room and came back carrying Dribble in his bowl. I put my finger over my lips to remind Fudge and his friends to be quiet. It worked. At first nobody said a word.

I put Dribble down on a table. Fudge and Sam and Jennie stood over his bowl. "Oh . . . turtle!" Jennie said.

"Yes, Dribble's a turtle. My turtle," I said in a soft voice.

"See . . . see," Fudge whispered. "They can all see," I told Fudge. "Nice turtle," Sam said.

I wondered why he wasn't afraid this time. "What does Dribble do?" Jennie asked.

"Do? He doesn't do anything special," I said. "He's a turtle. He does turtle things."

"Like what?" Jennie asked.

What was with this kid, anyway? "Well," I said, "he swims around a little and he sleeps on his rock and he eats."

"Does he make?" Jennie asked.

"Make?" I said. "Make a tinkle?"

"Oh, that. Well, sure. I guess so."

Jennie laughed. So did Sam and Fudge.

"I make tinkles too. Want to see?" Jennie asked. "No," I said.

"See . . . see," Fudge laughed, pointing at Jennie.

Jennie had a big smile on her face. Next thing I knew there was a puddle on the rug.

"Mom!" I hollered. "Come quick!"

My mother dashed in from the kitchen. "What, Peter? What is it?" "Just look at what Jennie did." I said.

"What is that?" my mother asked, eyeing the puddle. "She made one on the floor," I said. "And on purpose!"

"Oh, Jennie!" my mother cried. "You didn't!" "Did too," Jennie said.

"That was very naughty!" my mother told her. "You come with me." She scooped up Jennie and carried her into the bathroom.

After that Mom mopped up the puddle.

Finally the doorbell rang. It was two-thirty. The party was over. I could hardly believe it. I was beginning to think it would never end.

First Ralph's mother came. She had to wake him up to get him out of the apartment. I guess even she couldn't carry him.

Next Jennie's mother came. Mom gave her Jennie's wet pants in a Baggie. That was all she had to do. Jennie's mother was plenty embarrassed.

Sam's mother came last. But he didn't want to go home. Now that he was used to us I guess he liked us. He cried, "More party . . . MORE!"

"Another time," his mother said, dragging him out of our apartment by the arm.

My mother flopped down in a chair. Grandma brought her two aspirins and a glass of water. "Here, dear," she said. "Maybe these will help."

My mother swallowed the pills. She held her head.

"Three is kind of young for a party," I told my mother. "Peter Warren Hatcher . . ." my mother began. "Yes?" I asked.

"You are absolutely right!"

I flopped down next to my mother. She put her arm around me. Then we both watched Fudge work his new jack-in-the-box.

Later, when my father came home, he said, "How did Fudge's party go?" My mother and I looked at each other and we laughed.

Fang Hits Town

Fudge liked his new bed a lot. There was just one problem. He fell out of it every night. By the fourth night my mother and father got smart. They pushed the bed against the wall and surrounded the other side with chairs. Now there was no place for Fudge to fall.

But every morning my mother found him curled up in one of the chairs. My father said they could have saved their money, since Fudge was so happy sleeping in an old chair!

On Saturday we had to go to the dentist. He wanted to check Fudge's mouth again. To make sure everything healed all right since his flying experience. Dr. Brown is an old friend of my father's. They went to school together. He's always saying he takes special good care of me and Fudge because we're chips off the old block (the old block being my father). His office is on the other side of the park. It's near Madison Avenue. My mother said we'd make a day of it. And wouldn't that be fun!

"I'd rather go to the movies with Jimmy Fargo," I told her.

"But we'll have such a good time," my mother said. "The three of us will go out for lunch and then we'll get new shoes for you and Fudge."

"I've been out to lunch with Fudge," I reminded her.

"He's growing up, Peter. He knows how to behave now."

"I'd still rather go to the movies with Jimmy."

"Well, you're coming with me. And that's that!"

I wasn't looking forward to my day. And Saturday is always the best day of the week. Every Saturday morning I dean out Dribble's bowl. Sometimes, if Fudge is very good, I let him watch. I do it in the bathroom. First I take Dribble out of his bowl and let him crawl around in the tub. I'm afraid to put him down on the floor-somebody might step on him. But in the tub I know he's safe.

Next, I take the rocks out of his bowl and wash them. The last thing I do is wash the bowl itself. I really scrub it. I even rinse it two or three times to

make sure all the soap is out. When I'm done with that I put the rocks back in and fill it with just the right amount of water. After I put Dribble back in his bowl I feed him. Usually he goes right to sleep on his favorite rock. I guess running around in the bathtub really makes my turtle tired.

Today, I finished with Dribble just in time. My mother was rushing, mumbling about getting us to Dr. Brown's office in time for our appointment.

When we were outside we took the crosstown bus, then walked a few blocks to his office.

As soon as the nurse saw Fudge she said, "How's my favorite patient?" She gave him a hug and a little book to read. To me she said, "Good morning, Peter."

It burns me up the way people treat Fudge. He's not so special. He's just little, that's all! But some day he's going to be nine years old too. I can't wait until he is. Then he'll know there's nothing so great about him after all.

Soon the nurse said, "Fudge, Dr. Brown is ready for you. Come with me now." Fudge took the nurse's hand. Dr. Brown has this rule about mothers in the examining room with kids-they're not allowed! Mothers are a big problem, Dr. Brown told me once. I agreed.

I looked through a *National Geographic* magazine while I waited. After a few minutes the nurse came out and whispered something to my mother. I looked up, wondering what the big secret was.

Then my mother said, "Peter, Dr. Brown would like you to help him with Fudge."

"Help him?" I said. "I'm no dentist!"

The nurse said, "Peter, dear ... if you'll just come with me I'm sure everything will work out fine." So I went with the nurse. "What do I have to do?" I asked her.

"Oh, not much. Dr. Brown just wants you to show Fudge how you open your mouth and how he checks your teeth."

"What do I have to do that for?" I asked. "I don't need a checkup yet. I just had one last month."

"Your brother won't open his mouth this morning," the nurse whispered.

"He won't?" I whispered back. "No, he won't!" she said again.

I thought that was pretty funny. I never considered refusing to open my mouth at the dentist's office.

When he says "Open"-I open!

When we reached the examining room Fudge was sitting in the big chair. He had a towel around his neck and he looked all ready for action.

Dr. Brown was showing him lots of little things and explaining what he does with each one. Fudge kept nodding but he wouldn't open his mouth.

"A... Peter!" Dr. Brown said when he saw me. "Would you open your mouth so I can count your teeth?"

That's what he tells little kids he's doing-counting their teeth. Little kids will believe anything!

I went along with Dr. Brown's joke. I opened my mouth very wide. Much wider than when I'm the real patient. He put his mirror in and said, "Wonderful teeth. Just beautiful. A regular chip off the old block. Such a shame your brother can't open his mouth the way you do."

"Can so," Fudge said.

"No," Dr. Brown told him, "you can't open your mouth nearly as good as Peter."

"Can so ... see!" Fudge opened his mouth.

"No, I'm sorry, Fudge," Dr. Brown said, "it's still not as good as Peter."

So Fudge opened his mouth really wide. "Count teeth!" he said. "Count Fudgie's teeth!"

"Well. . . ." Dr. Brown pretended to think about it.

"COUNT!" Fudge shouted.

"Well. . . ." Dr. Brown said again, scratching his head. "I guess as long as you're here I might as well count your teeth." So he checked Fudge's mouth.

When he was through Fudge said, "See ... see ... just like Pee-tah."

"Yes," Dr. Brown said, smiling. "I can see that. You're just like Peter." He gave me a wink.

I liked the way Dr. Brown tricked Fudge into opening his mouth. So when he was through examining him I whispered, "Couldn't you make Fudge some false teeth... until his grown-up ones come in?"

"No. He'll just have to wait," Dr. Brown said. "But he looks like he has fangs," I told him.

"You'd better not say that in front of your mother," Dr. Brown said.

"I know it. She's not too big on fangs!"

Dr. Brown thanked me for helping him. My mother made another appointment for Fudge. The nurse kissed my brother good-bye and we left.

"That wasn't so bad, was it, Peter?" my mother said.

"It could have been worse," I admitted.

We headed for Bloomingdale's, where we get our shoes. There are five salesmen in the children's shoe department. Two of them my mother doesn't like. She thinks they don't measure my feet carefully. That all they care about is selling shoes, even if they don't have the right sizes in stock. The other ones my mother thinks are okay. There's one she likes a lot. His name is Mr. Berman. I like him too- because he's funny. He usually makes believe that the right shoe goes on the left foot or that Fudge's shoes are really for me. Anyway, when Mr. Berman waits on us, buying shoes is almost fun.

Today Mr. Berman spotted us right away. He always remembers our name. "Well, if it isn't the Hatcher boys," he said.

"In the flesh," I told him.

Fudge opened his mouth for Mr. Berman. "See... see ... all gone!"

"His teeth," my mother explained to Mr. Berman. "He knocked out his top two front teeth."

"Well, congratulations!" Mr. Berman said. "That calls for a celebration." He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out two lollipops. He handed one to me and one to Fudge.

"Ohhh," Fudge said. "Lolly!"

Mine was root beer flavored. I hate root beer. But I thanked Mr. Berman anyway. "I'll save it for after lunch," I told him, handing it to my mother. She put it into her purse. Fudge got a lemon lolly. He ripped off the paper and started sucking right away.

"Now then . . . what'll it be, boys?" Mr. Berman asked.

My mother answered. "Brown-and-white saddles for Fudge and loafers for Peter."

"Okay, Peter . . . let's see how those feet have grown."

I slipped out of my old shoes and stood up. I stuck my left foot into Mr. Berman's foot measure. Then he turned it around and I put my right foot in. That's another reason why my mother thinks Mr. Berman is good at selling shoes. He measures both feet. Some other salesmen only measure one. My mother says feet can be different sizes, even on the same person. And it's important to make sure the size fits the biggest foot.

"What color loafers, Peter?" Mr. Berman asked.

"Brown," I said. "Same as my old ones."

When Mr. Berman went into the back to look for shoes for me my mother noticed the hole in the toe of my sock.

"Oh, Peter! Why didn't you tell me you had a hole in your sock?"

"I didn't know I had one," I said.

"Oh . . . I'm so embarrassed!"

"It's my sock, Mom. Why should you be embarrassed?" I asked.

"Well, it looks terrible. I mean, to come shopping for shoes with a hole in your sock! That's just awful. Can't you hide it a little?"

"Where should I hide it?"

"Try to get the hole in between your toes, so it doesn't show," my mother said.

I wiggled my sock around trying to rearrange my hole. My mother sure worries about silly things!

Mr. Berman came out with two pairs of loafers. He likes to try different sizes to make sure I'm getting the right one. One pair was much too big. The other pair fit fine.

"Wear or wrap?" Mr. Berman asked my mother.

"Wrap, please," she said. "We'll wear the old ones home."

I have never been allowed to wear new shoes home from the store. Don't ask me why. But my mother always has the new pair wrapped up and I can't wear them until the next day.

When I was finished Mr. Berman untied Fudge's shoes and measured his feet.

"Brown-and-white saddle shoes," my mother reminded him.

Mr. Berman went into the back and returned with two shoe boxes. But when he opened the first box and Fudge saw the saddle shoes he said, "No!"

"No what?" my mother asked him.

"No shoes!" Fudge said. He started kicking his feet.

"Don't be silly, Fudgie! You need new shoes," my mother told him.

"NO! NO! NO!" he hollered. Everybody in the shoe department looked over at us.

"Here's the perfect size," Mr. Berman told Fudge, holding up one shoe. "Wait till you see how nice these new shoes will feel."

Fudge kicked some more. It was impossible for Mr. Berman to get the shoes on his feet. He screamed, "No shoes! NO! NO! NO!"

My mother grabbed hold of him but he was wiggling all around. He managed to give Mr. Berman a kick in the face. Lucky for him Fudge only had on socks.

"Now look, Fudge," my mother said, "you must get new shoes. Your old ones are too small. So what kind do you want?"

I don't know why my mother bothered to talk to him like he was a regular person. Because when Fudge gets himself into a temper tantrum he doesn't listen to anything. By that time he had thrown himself onto the floor where he beat his fists against the rug.

"What kind do you want, Fudge? Because we're not leaving here until you have new shoes!" my mother said, like she meant it.

I figured we'd be there for the rest of the day . . . or maybe the week! How could my mother have been embarrassed over a little hole in my sock and then act like nothing much was happening when her other son was on the floor yelling and screaming and carrying on!

"I'm going to count to three," my mother told Fudge. "And then I want you to tell me which shoes you want. Ready? One... two... three..."

Fudge sat up. "Like Pee-tah's!" he said.

I smiled. I guess the kid really looks up to me. He even wants to wear the same kind of shoes. But everybody knows you can't buy loafers for such a little guy.

"They don't come in your size," Mr. Berman told Fudge.

"YES! YES! YES! LIKE PEE-TAH'S!" Fudge hollered.

Mr. Berman held up his hands and looked at my mother, as if to say, I give up.

But my mother said, "I have an idea." She motioned for me and Mr. Berman to come closer.

I had the feeling I wasn't going to like her idea. But I listened anyway. "I think we'll have to play a little joke on Fudge," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well . . . suppose Mr. Berman brings out a pair of saddle shoes in your size and. . ."

"Oh no!" I said. "You're not going to get me to wear saddle shoes. Never!"

"Let me finish," my mother said. "Mr. Berman can bring them out and you can try them on and then Fudge will think that's what you're getting. But when we leave we'll take the loafers."

"That's mean," I said. "You're taking advantage of him."

"Since when do you worry about that?" my mother asked.

"Since now," I told her.

"Look, Peter," my mother said, checking her watch, "it's twelve o'clock. I'm starved."

"Me too," I said.

"Well then, if you ever want to get some lunch let's try my idea."

"Okay . . . okay," I said.

I sat back in my chair while Mr. Berman hurried to the stockroom again. Fudge looked up at me from his position on the floor.

"Like Pee-tah's!" he said.

"Yeah . . . sure, Fudge," I told him.

Mr. Berman came back with a pair of brown-and-white saddle shoes in my size. I tried them on. Did they look ugly!

"See Peter's nice saddle shoes," my mother said.

"Now Fudgie tries on his nice saddle shoes." Fudge let Mr. Berman get him into his new pair of shoes.

"See," he said. "See... like Pee-tah's." He held up a foot.

"That's right, Fudge," I said. "Just like mine." You sure can fool little kids easy!

"Wear or wrap?" Mr. Berman asked my mother, while Fudge walked around in his new shoes.

"Wrap, of course!" she said.

I wondered what my mother would tell Fudge tomorrow when I wore my new loafers. Oh well, that really wasn't my worry. It was her idea!

When Fudge was back in his old shoes and our package was ready, Mr. Berman gave my brother a striped balloon. He offered one to me too. I refused. How could he think a person in fourth grade might want a shoe store balloon?

"That wasn't so terrible, was it, Peter?" my mother said, as we left the store.

"It wasn't?" I asked.

"Well, it could have been worse!" my mother said.

"I suppose," I answered.

We went to Hamburger Heaven for lunch. We sat in a booth. Fudge tossed his balloon around while my mother ordered for him and then for herself. I ordered my own lunch—a hamburger with everything on it and a chocolate milk shake. Fudge was getting a kiddie special, meaning a hamburger without the roll, some mashed potatoes, and a side order of green peas.

When our lunch was served my mother cut Fudge's hamburger into tiny pieces which he shoved into his mouth with his fingers. Then she handed him a spoon and told him to eat his mashed potatoes. But instead of eating them he smeared them on the wall. "See," he said.

"I thought you told me he wouldn't behave like that anymore!" I said to my mother.

"Fudgie! That's naughty. You stop it right now," my mother said.

But Fudge sang, "Eat it or wear it!" and he dumped the whole dish of peas over his head.

I laughed. I couldn't help it. He looked so silly with the peas falling from his hair. And when I eat and laugh at the same time I choke. So I choked on my pickle and my mother had to whack me on the back, which gave Fudge another chance to spread mashed potatoes on the wall.

That's when the waitress asked my mother did we want anything else.

"No thank you," my mother said. "We have more than enough now!" She wiped off the wall with her napkin and told Fudge he was very, very naughty.

"Not me," Fudge said. "Not me!"

"Yes, you!" my mother told him. "Why can't you eat like Peter? See how nice Peter eats?"

Fudge didn't say anything. He just stuck his fork into his balloon. It popped and he screamed. "All gone! Want more balloon! MORE."

"Shut up!" I told him. "Can't you ever act human?" "That's enough, Peter!" my mother said.

She should have slugged him. That would teach that brother of mine how to behave in Hamburger Heaven!

We took a cab home. Fudge fell asleep on the way. He had his fingers in his mouth and made his slurping noise. My mother whispered to me, "Our day wasn't that bad, was it, Peter?" I didn't answer.

I just looked out the taxi window and decided that I would never spend a day with Farley Drexel Hatcher again.