

The Flying Train Committee

In January our class started a project on The City. Mrs. Haver, our teacher, divided us up into committees by where we live. That way we could work at home. My committee was me, Jimmy Fargo, and Sheila. Our topic was Transportation. We decided to make my apartment the meeting place because I'm the only one of the three of us who's got his own bedroom. In a few weeks each committee has to hand in a booklet, a poster, and be ready to give an oral report.

The first day we got together after school we bought a yellow posterboard. Jimmy wanted a blue one but Sheila talked him out of it. "Yellow is a much brighter color," she explained. "Everything will show up on it. Blue is too dull."

Sheila thinks she's smarter than me and Jimmy put together-just because she's a girl! So right away she told us she would be in charge of our booklet and me and Jimmy could do most of the poster. As long as we check with her first, to make sure she likes our ideas. We agreed, since Sheila promised to do ten pages of written work and we would only do five.

After we bought the yellow posterboard we went to the library. We took out seven books on transportation. We wanted to learn all we could about speed, traffic congestion, and pollution. We arranged to meet on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons for the next two weeks.

Our first few committee meetings turned out like this: We got to my place by three-thirty, had a snack, then played with Dribble for another half hour. Sheila gave up on cooties when Fudge lost his front teeth. But it still isn't much fun to have her hanging around. She's always complaining that she got stuck with the worst possible committee. And that me and Jimmy fool more than we work. We only put up with her because we have no choice!

Sheila and Jimmy have to be home for supper before five-thirty. So at five o'clock we start cleaning up. We keep our equipment under my bed in a

shoe box. We have a set of Magic Markers, Elmer's glue, Scotch tape, a really sharp pair of scissors, and a container of silver sparkle.

Sheila carries our committee booklet back and forth with her. She doesn't trust us enough to leave it at my house! The posterboard fits under my bed, along with our supplies. We stack the library books on my desk. The reason I make sure we clean up good is that my mother told me if I left a mess we'd have to find some place else to work.

By our third meeting I told Jimmy and Sheila that I'd figured out the solution to New York City's traffic problems. "We have to get rid of the traffic," I said. "There shouldn't be any cars or buses or taxis allowed in the city. What we really need is a citywide monorail system."

"That's too expensive," Sheila said. "It sounds good but it's not practical."

"I disagree," I told Sheila. "It's very practical. Besides getting rid of traffic it'll get rid of air pollution and it'll get people where they're going a lot faster."

"But it's not practical, Peter," Sheila said again. "It costs too much."

I opened one of my books on transportation and read Sheila a quote. "A monorail system is the hope of the future." I cleared my throat and looked up.

"But we can't write a report just about the monorail," Sheila said. "We'll never be able to fill twenty written pages with that."

"We can write big," Jimmy suggested.

"No!" Sheila said. "I want a good mark on this project. Peter, you can write your five pages about the monorail system and how it works. Jimmy, you can write your five pages about pollution caused by transportation. And I'll write my ten pages on the history of transportation in the city." Sheila folded her arms and smiled. "Can I write big?" Jimmy asked.

"I don't care how big you write as long as you put your name on your five pages!" Sheila told him. "That's not fair!" Jimmy said. "This is supposed to be a group project. Why should I have to put my name on my five pages?"

"Then don't write BIG!" Sheila shouted.

"Okay, Okay . . . I'll write so small Mrs. Haver will need a microscope to see the letters."

"Very funny," Sheila said.

"Look," I told both of them, "I think all our written work should be in the same handwriting. That's the only fair way. Otherwise Mrs. Haver will know who did what. And it won't be a group project."

"Say, that's a good idea," Jimmy said. "Which one of us has the best handwriting?" Me and Jimmy looked at Sheila.

"Well, I do have a nice even script," Sheila said. "But if I'm going to copy over your written work you better give it to me by next Tuesday. Otherwise, I won't have enough time to do the job. And you two better get going on your poster." Sheila talked like she was the teacher and we were the kids.

Me and Jimmy designed the whole poster ourselves. We used the pros and cons of each kind of transportation. It was really clever. We divided a chart into land, sea, and air and we planned an illustration for each- with the airplane done in silver sparkle and the letters done in red and blue Magic Marker. We got halfway through the lettering that day. We also sketched in the ship, the plane, and the truck.

When Sheila saw it she asked, "Is that supposed to be a train?"

"No," I told her. "It's a truck."

"It doesn't look like one," she said.

"It will," Jimmy told her, "when it's finished."

"I hope so," Sheila said. "Because right now it looks like a flying train!" "That's because the ground's not under it yet," Jimmy said.

"Yeah," I agreed. "See, we've got to make it look like it's on a street. Right now it does kind of look like it's up in space."

"So does the ship," Sheila said.

"Well put some water lines around it," I told her. "And some clouds around the plane," Sheila said.

"Listen," Jimmy hollered, "did anybody ever tell you you're too bossy? This poster is ours! You do the booklet. Remember... that's the way you wanted it!"

"See... there you go again!" Sheila said. "You keep forgetting this is a committee. We're supposed to work together."

"Working together doesn't mean you give the orders and we carry them out," Jimmy said.

My feelings exactly! I thought.

Sheila didn't answer Jimmy. She picked up her things, got her coat, and left. "I hope she never comes back," Jimmy said.

"She'll be back," I told him. "We're her committee."

Jimmy laughed. "Yeah . . . we're all one happy committee!"

I put our poster under the bed, said good-bye to Jimmy, then washed up for supper.

My mother was being pretty nice about our committee meetings. She arranged to have Fudge play at Ralph's apartment on Tuesdays and at Jennie's on Thursdays. Sam has the chicken pox, so he can't play at all.

I was glad that next week would be our last committee meeting after school. I was sick of Sheila and I was getting sick of Transportation. Besides, now that I knew a monorail system was the only way to save our city I was getting upset that the mayor and all the other guys that run things at City Hall weren't doing anything about installing one. If *I* know that's the best method of city transportation how come *they* don't know it?

The next day when I came home from school I went into my bedroom to see Dribble like I always do. Fudge was in there, sitting on my bed.

"Why are you in my room?" I asked him. He smiled.

"You know you're not supposed to be in here. This is *my* room."

"Want to see?" Fudge said.

"See what?"

"Want to see?"

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

He jumped off my bed and crawled underneath it. He came out with our poster. He held it up. "See," he said. "Pretty!"

"What did you do?" I yelled. "What did you do to our poster?" It was covered all over with scribbles in every color Magic Marker. It was ruined! *It was a mess and it was ruined.* I was ready to kill Fudge. I grabbed my poster and ran into the kitchen to show it to my mother. I could hardly speak.

"Look," I said, feeling a lump in my throat. "Just look at what he did to my poster." I felt tears come to my eyes but I didn't care. "How could you let him?" I asked my mother. "How? Don't you care about me?"

I threw the poster down and ran into my room. I slammed the door, took off my shoe, and flung it at the wall. It made a black mark where it hit. Well, so what!

Soon I heard my mother hollering-and then, Fudge crying. After a while my mother knocked on my bedroom door and called, "Peter, may I come in?"

I didn't answer.

She opened the door and walked over to my bed. She sat down next to me. "I'm very sorry," she said.

I still didn't say anything. "Peter," she began. I didn't look at her.

She touched my arm. "Peter...please listen..."

"Don't you see, Mom? I can't even do my homework without him messing it up. It just isn't fair! I wish he was never born. *Never!* I hate him!"

"You don't hate him," my mother said. "You just think you do."

"Don't tell me," I said. "I mean it. I really can't stand that kid!"

"You're angry," my mother told me. "I know that and I don't blame you. Fudge had no right to touch your poster. I spanked him."

"You did?" I asked. Fudge never gets spanked. My parents don't believe in spanking. "You really spanked him?" I asked again.

"Yes," my mother said.

"Hard?" I asked.

"On his backside," she told me. I thought that over.

"Peter. . . ." My mother put her arm around me. "I'll buy you a new posterboard tomorrow. It was really my fault. I should never have let him into your room."

"That's why I need a lock on my door," I said.

"I don't like locks on doors. We're a family. We don't have to lock each other out."

"If I had a lock Fudge wouldn't have gotten my poster!"

"It won't happen again," my mother promised.

I wanted to believe her, but really I didn't. Unless she tied him up I knew my brother would get into my room again.

The next day, while I was at school, my mother bought a new yellow posterboard. The hard part was explaining to Jimmy that we had to start all over again. He was a good sport about it. He said this time he'd make sure his truck didn't look like a flying train. And I said, this time I'd make pencil marks first so my letters didn't go uphill.

Our committee met that afternoon. Sheila didn't mention the last time. Neither did we. Me and Jimmy worked on the poster while Sheila copied our written work into the booklet. We'd be ready to give our oral report to the class on Monday. Not like some committees who hadn't even started yet!

By five o'clock we had finished our poster and Sheila was almost done with the cover for our booklet. Jimmy walked over and stood behind her, watching her work.

After a minute he yelled, "What do you think you're doing, Sheila?"

I got up from the floor and joined them at my desk. I took a look at the cover. It was pretty nice. It said:

TRANSPORTATION IN THE CITY

Under that it said:

BY SHEILA TUBMAN, PETER HATCHER, AND JAMES FARGO

And under that in small letters it said:

handwritten by miss sheila tubman

Now I knew why Jimmy was mad. "Oh no!" I said, holding my hand to my head. "How could you!" Sheila didn't say anything.

"It's not fair," I told her. "We didn't put our names on the poster!"

"But the cover's all done," Sheila said. "Can't you see that? I'll never get the letters so straight again. It looks perfect!"

"Oh no!" Jimmy shouted. "We're not handing the booklet in like that. I'll rip it up before I let you!"

He grabbed the booklet and threatened to tear it in half.

Sheila screamed. "You wouldn't! I'll kill you! Give it back to me, Jimmy Fargo!" She was ready to cry.

I knew Jimmy wouldn't tear it up but I didn't say so.

"Peter . . . make him give it back!"

"Will you take off that line about your handwriting?" I asked.

"I can't. It'll ruin the booklet."

"Then I think he should rip it up," I said.

Sheila stamped her foot. "Ooooh! I hate you both!"

"You don't really," I told her. "You just think you do."

"I know I do!" Sheila cried.

"That's because you're angry right now," I said. I couldn't help smiling.

Sheila jumped up and tried to get the booklet but Jimmy held it over his head and he's much taller than Sheila. She had no chance at all.

Finally she sat down and whispered, "I give up. You win. I'll take my name off."

"You promise?" Jimmy asked.

"I promise," Sheila said.

Jimmy set the booklet down on my desk in front of Sheila.

"Okay," he said. "Start."

"I'm not going to make a whole new cover," Sheila said. "What I'll do is turn this bottom line into a decoration." She picked up a Magic Marker and made little flowers out of the words. Soon, *handwritten by miss sheila tubman*, turned into sixteen small flowers. "There," Sheila said. "It's done."

"It looks pretty good," I told her.

"It would have looked better without those flowers," Jimmy said. "But at least it's fair now."

That night I showed my mother and father our new poster. They thought it was great. Especially our silver-sparkle airplane. My mother put the poster on top of the refrigerator so it would be safe until the next day, when I would take it to school.

Now I had nothing to worry about. Sheila had the booklet, the poster was safe, and our committee was finished before schedule. I went into my room to relax.

Fudge was sitting on the floor, near my bed. My shoe-box of supplies was in front of him. His face was a mess of Magic Marker colors and he was using my extra sharp scissors to snip away at his hair. And the hair he snipped was dropping into Dribble's bowl- which he had in front of him on the floor!

"See," he said. "See Fudge. Fudgie's a barber!"

That night I found out hair doesn't hurt my turtle. I picked off every strand from his shell. I cleaned out his bowl and washed off his rocks. He seemed happy.

Two things happened the next day. One was my mother had to take Fudge to the real barber to do something about his hair. He had plenty left in the back, but just about nothing in front and on top. The barber said there wasn't much he could do until the hair grew back. Between his fangs and his hair he was getting funnier looking every day.

The second was my father came home with a chain latch for my bedroom door. I could reach it when I stood on tip-toe, but that brother of mine couldn't reach it at all-no matter what!

Our committee was the first to give its report. Mrs. Haver said we did a super job. She liked our poster a lot. She thought the silver-sparkle airplane was the best. The only thing she asked us was, how come we included a picture of a flying train?

The TV Star

Aunt Linda is my mother's sister. She lives in Boston. Last week she had a baby girl. So now I have a new cousin. My mother decided to fly to Boston to see Aunt Linda and the new baby.

"I'll only be gone for the weekend," my mother told me.

I was sitting on her bed watching her pack. "I know," I said.

"Daddy will take care of you and Fudge."

"I know," I said again.

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" she asked me.

"Sure. Why not?"

"Will you help Daddy with Fudge?"

"Sure, Mom. Don't worry."

"I'm not worrying. It's just that Daddy is so ... well, you know ... he doesn't know much about taking care of children." Then she closed her suitcase.

"We'll be fine, Mom," I said. I was really looking forward to the weekend. My father doesn't care about keeping things neat. He never examines me to see if I'm clean. And he lets me stay up late at night.

On Friday morning all four of us rode down in the elevator to say good-bye to my mother.

Henry looked at the suitcase. "You going away, Mr. Hatcher?" he asked.

My mother answered. "No, I am, Henry. My sister just had her first baby. I'm flying to Boston for the weekend... to help out."

"New baby," Fudge said. "Baby baby baby."

Nobody paid any attention to him. Sometimes my brother just talks to hear the sound of his own voice.

"Have a nice visit, Mrs. Hatcher," Henry told my mother when we reached the lobby.

"Thank you, Henry," my mother said. "Keep an eye on my family for me."

"Will do, Mrs. Hatcher," Henry said, giving my father a wink.

Outside my father hailed a taxi. He put the suitcase in first, then held the door for my mother. When she was settled in the cab my father said, "Don't worry about us. We'll be just fine."

"Just fine... just fine, Mommy," Fudge yelled. "Bye, Mom. See you Sunday," I said.

My mother blew us kisses. Then her cab drove away.

My father sighed while Fudge jumped up and down calling, "Bye, Mommy... bye bye bye!"

I had no school that day. The teachers were at a special meeting. So my father said he'd take me and Fudge to the office with him.

My father's office is in a huge building made of almost all glass. It's really a busy place. You never see people just sitting quietly at desks. Everyone's always rushing around. A person could get lost in there. My father has a private office and his own secretary. Her name is Janet and she's very pretty. I especially like her hair. It's thick and black. She has the longest eyelashes I've ever seen. Once I heard my mother say, "Janet must have to get up at the crack of dawn to put on her face." My father just laughed when my mother said it.

Janet's seen me before but this was her first meeting with Fudge. I was glad his hair was finally growing back. I explained right off about his teeth. "He'll look a lot better when he's older," I said.

"He knocked out his front two, but when he's six or seven he'll get new ones."

"See," Fudge said, opening his mouth. "All gone."

My father said, "Janet, the boys are going to be here for the morning. Can you amuse them while I clear up some work?"

"Certainly, Mr. Hatcher," Janet said. "You go ahead into your office and I'll take the boys on a tour of the rest of the agency."

As soon as my father went into his private office Janet took out her pocketbook. She reached in and came up with a hairbrush, some lipstick, and a bag of crackers. "Want some?" she asked me and Fudge.

"Okay," I said, taking a handful. Fudge did the same. The crackers were shaped like little goldfish. I nibbled while Janet fixed herself up. She had a

big folding mirror in her desk drawer. She set it on top of her desk and went to work on herself. When she was finished she looked exactly the same as when we came in. But I guess she didn't think so because she said, "That's much better." Then she put all her stuff away and took me by one hand and Fudge by the other.

We walked down a long hall through a doorway and into another section of the agency. We came to a room where there were a bunch of kids with mothers. I guess there were at least fifty of them. Most of the kids were kind of small, like Fudge. Some were crying.

"Is this a nursery school or what?" I asked Janet.

She laughed. "They're here to try out for the new Toddle-Bike commercial."

"You mean they all want to be the kid who rides the Toddle-Bike on TV?"

"Yes. At least their mothers want them to be picked," Janet said. "But we can only use one."

"You mean only one out of all these kids is going to be picked?" "That's right," Janet said. "Who picks him?" I asked.

"Your father and Mr. Denberg are doing it. But of course Mr. Vincent, the president of the Toddle-Bike company, has to approve."

Just then a door opened and a secretary came out. "Next," she called to the waiting kids. "My Murray's next!" a mother said.

"Oh no he's not!" another mother called. "Sally is next."

"Ladies . . . please! You'll all have a turn," the secretary said.

Murray got to be next. He was a little redheaded kid. He wasn't in the other room for two minutes when the door opened and a big man with a cigar in his mouth came out. "No, no, no!" he shouted.

"He's not the type at all."

Murray was crying. His mother yelled at the big man. "What do you know, anyway? You wouldn't know a treasure if you found one!" She shook her fist at him.

Janet whispered to me. "That's Mr. Vincent, the president of Toddle-Bike."

Mr. Vincent walked to the center of the room. He looked around at all the kids. When he looked over at us he pointed and called. "There he is! That's the kid I want!"

I thought he meant me. I got excited. I could just see myself on TV riding the Toddle-Bike. All my friends would turn on their sets and say, "Hey, look! There's Peter."

While I was thinking about what fun it would be Mr. Vincent came over to us and grabbed Fudge.

He lifted him up. "Perfect!" he cried. "He's perfect."

The mothers who were waiting packed up their kids and left right away.

Mr. Vincent took off with Fudge in his arms. Janet chased him. She called, "But, Mr. Vincent . . . you don't understand. . . ."

I ran after Janet.

Mr. Vincent carried Fudge into the other room. He announced, "I found him myself! The perfect kid to ride the Toddle-Bike in my new commercial."

Mr. Vincent put Fudge down and took the cigar out of his mouth. There were two other men in the room. One of them was Mr. Denberg. The other one was my father.

"Hi, Daddy," Fudge said.

"George," my father told Mr. Vincent, "this is my son! He's no actor or model. He can't make your Toddle-Bike commercial."

"He doesn't have to be an actor or a model. He's perfect the way he is!" Mr. Vincent insisted.

"Now look, George ... we want to make the best possible commercial for your company. But Fudge can't be the boy to ride the Toddle-Bike."

"Now you listen, Hatcher!" Mr. Vincent raised his voice.

I wondered why he called my father Hatcher-just like Mr. Yarby did.

Mr. Vincent pointed to Fudge. "Either that kid rides my Toddle-Bike or I take my account to another advertising agency. It's that simple."

My father looked at Mr. Denberg,

"It's your decision, Warren," Mr. Denberg told my father. "I don't want to be the one to tell you what to do."

My father picked up Fudge and held him on his lap. "Would you like to ride the Toddle-Bike, Fudge? It's just like the one you have at home."

"Why are you asking him?" I said. "What does he know about making commercials?"

My father acted like he'd forgotten I was even around. "I'm thinking, Peter," he said. "Please be quiet."

"Well, Hatcher," Mr. Vincent said. "What'll it be? This kid of yours or do I move to another agency?"

I remembered how my father lost the Juicy-O account because of Fudge. Now maybe he'd lose this one too. And I don't think he can afford that.

Finally my father said, "All right, George. You can use him ... on one condition, though."

"What's that, Hatcher?" Mr. Vincent asked.

"The commercial has to be made this afternoon. After today my son Fudge won't be available."

"That's fine with me, Hatcher," Mr. Vincent said.

"Is he going to get paid?" I asked my father.

"I'll worry about that, Peter," my father said. That probably meant yes. He'd be paid and have lots of money in the bank.

I'd have nothing. And some day I'd have to borrow from him. No-wait a minute-never! I'll never borrow money from Fudge. I'll starve first!

"Can I at least watch when you make the commercial?" I asked.

"Certainly," my father said. "You can watch the whole thing."

I turned to Mr. Denberg. "Will Fudge be famous?" I asked.

"No, not famous . . . but a lot of people will think he looks familiar," Mr. Denberg said.

I turned to Mr. Vincent. "Do you know he has no front top teeth?"

"That's part of his charm," Mr. Vincent said.

"And he cut off all his hair two months ago."

"Well, he looks fine now," Mr. Vincent said.

"And he can't even talk in long sentences yet," I told everyone in the room.

"He doesn't have to say a word," Mr. Vincent told me.

I couldn't think of any other reason why Mr. Vincent shouldn't use Fudge in his Toddle-Bike commercial. It was settled. Soon Fudge would be a famous television star and I would be plain old Peter Hatcher -fourth grade nothing.

"Let's begin right after lunch," Mr. Denberg said. "We should get it filmed in about two hours."

While my father and Mr. Denberg worked out all the arrangements I asked Janet where the men's room was.

She walked me to it. I told her thank you and that she didn't have to wait. I'd find my own way back.

When I was safely inside I looked at myself in the mirror. *I wish Fudge had never been born, I thought. Everything good always happens to him! If he had to be born I wish he could be nine or ten-like me. Then Mr. Vincent wouldn't want him to be the one to ride the Toddle-Bike in his commercial.*

Janet sent down to the coffee shop for some sandwiches and drinks. After we ate we all walked to another section of the agency where the cameras were set up. A make-believe street scene was the background. The Toddle-Bike was shiny red. My father told Fudge all he had to do was ride it around. Fudge liked that. He zoomed all over the place. "Vroom-vroom-vroom," he called.

My father, Mr. Vincent, and Janet sat on folding chairs and watched the action. I sat on the floor, at my father's side. Mr. Denberg was the director. He said, "Okay, Fudge . . . we're ready to begin now. You ride the Toddle-Bike where I tell you to and I'll take a picture of you doing it ... all right?"

"No," Fudge said.

"What does he mean, Hatcher?" Mr. Vincent asked. "Why did he say no?"

My father groaned. "Look, George . . . using Fudge was your idea-not mine."

Mr. Denberg tried again. "Okay, Fudge . . . this is it. . . ."

The cameraman said, "Start riding this way . . . ready, set, go!" Fudge sat there on the Toddle-Bike. But he wouldn't pedal. "Come on, kid ... let's go!" the cameraman called. "No. Don't want to!" Fudge answered.

"What's with this kid, Mr. Hatcher?" the cameraman asked.

"Fudge," my father said, "do what the nice man tells you to."

"No! Don't have to!"

Janet whispered to my father. "How about some cookies, Mr. Hatcher?"

"Good idea, Janet," my father told her.

"I have some Oreos right here," she said, patting her pocketbook. "Shall I give them to him?"

"One at a time," my father said.

Janet walked across the room to Fudge. He was still sitting on the Toddle-Bike. "If you do what the nice man says, you can have a cookie," Janet told him.

"Show me," Fudge said.

Janet held up a box of Oreos. *She was really well prepared, I thought. She must eat all day long, what with the crackers shaped like goldfish and a whole box of Oreos too.* I wondered what else she had in that pocketbook.

"Give me," Fudge said.

Janet held up one cookie. Fudge reached for it, but Janet didn't let him get it.

"If you do what the nice man says you can have an Oreo. Maybe even two or three Oreos."

"First cookie," Fudge said.

"First do what the nice man says," Janet told him.

"No! First cookie!"

"Give him one, Janet," Mr. Denberg called.

"We haven't got all day to fool around." Janet gave Fudge one Oreo. He ate it up.

"Okay, lad ... all ready now?" the cameraman said. "You ride over to me." Fudge didn't do it.

Mr. Vincent was losing his patience. "Hatcher," he hollered. "You get that son of yours to ride my Toddle-Bike or I'm taking my whole account away from you and your agency!"

"Must I remind you, George . . . using Fudge was your idea-not mine!" my father said.

"Forget about whose idea it was, Hatcher. He's your kid. You better get through to him . . . now!"

"I have an idea," my father said. He walked to a corner of the room and beckoned to the others. Mr. Denberg and Mr. Vincent gathered around him, along with the cameraman and Janet. They looked like a bunch of football players huddled together talking about the next play.

Soon my father called me. "Peter . . . would you join us, please?"

"Sure, dad," I said. "What is it?"

"Peter ... we want you to ride the Toddle-Bike for us. To show Fudge how it's done."

"But he already knows how to ride," I said. "Didn't you see him zooming around?"

"He won't do it for the cameras, though," my father explained. "So we need your help."

"Will I be in the commercial too?" I asked.

"Well, the Toddle-Bike is really for very young children," Mr. Denberg said. "Otherwise we'd have you do it in a minute."

I got the message. It was like buying the shoes and like at Dr. Brown's office. They were going to use me to get Fudge to do what they wanted him to. I wondered how anybody would ever manage my brother without my help.

I walked over to Fudge and told him I was going to ride the Toddle-Bike. "Get off," I said.

Fudge held onto the bike. "No . . . mine!"

"It's not yours," my father told him.

But Fudge wouldn't move for anything. He closed his eyes and screamed. Can he scream loud when he tries!

So my father had to pull him off the Toddle-Bike. Fudge kicked and kept screaming and I'll bet Mr. Vincent was sorry that he ever spotted my brother in the first place.

I got on the Toddle-Bike. It was so small my knees practically touched the ground. But I managed to ride it around just where the cameraman told me to.

"See how nice Peter can ride the Toddle-Bike," Janet said. "Here, Peter... come have an Oreo. You did that so well you can have two or three if you want."

Fudge stopped screaming. "ME!" he said.

"What?" my father asked him.

"Me... ride... me!"

"You can't ride as well as Peter can," Mr. Denberg said.

"Can so," Fudge told him.

"I don't think so," Mr. Denberg said.

"You already had a turn. You didn't do what I told you to do."

"ME!"

"You want to try again?" my father asked.

"Again," Fudge said. "Again again again."

"Well ... I don't know," Mr. Denberg said.

"Well. . . ." Mr. Vincent said, chewing on his cigar.

"Well. . . ." the cameraman said, scratching his head.

"Please!" Fudge begged.

I never heard my brother say *please* before.

Mr. Denberg said, "Okay . . . we'll give you one more chance."

Fudge ran to the Toddle-Bike. I got off and he jumped on.

"Now?" he asked Mr. Denberg.

"Now," Mr. Denberg said.

"Ride this way, Fudge... over here... toward me."

Fudge did as he was told. "Just like Pee-tah," he said. "See... just like Pee-tah!"

Janet gave me a kiss on my cheek. "You saved the day, Peter Hatcher!" she said.

When she wasn't looking I wiped off my face. Her kiss was too juicy.

Just Another Rainy Day

The next day it rained. My father asked me how I'd like to go to the movies.

"Just me?" I asked.

"No. All three of us," he said.

"Fudge is very young to go," I said. "Don't you think so?"

"Maybe. But I can't think of anything else to do with him. And that will take up a few hours."

"You could give him some socks," I suggested. "You know how he loves to play with your socks."

"Socks won't last the whole afternoon," my father said. "That's why I thought of the movies."

"What'll we see, Dad?"

My father checked his *New York* magazine. " *A Bear's Life* is playing in the neighborhood. How does that sound?"

"What's it about?" I asked.

"A bear's life, I guess," my father said. "It's rated G."

I was thinking of a good Western with lots of action or else a picture rated R where you can't get in if you're under seventeen unless you're with your parents. But my father had made up his mind. *A Bear's Life* it was.

I suggested that my father get Fudge cleaned up. Because by then he was looking kind of messy. I don't think my father even put him into his pajamas last night. He's been wearing the same polo shirt ever since my mother left yesterday morning.

By one o'clock we were ready to go. All three of us wore our raincoats and rubbers and my father took his big, black umbrella. One thing about New York-it's hard to get a cab when it's raining. But the movie theater wasn't very far away. My father said the walk would do us all good. There were a lot of puddles. It was really pouring. I like to walk in the rain. Especially if it isn't too cold out. It feels nice when it wets your face.

I jumped over the puddles. My father avoided them too. But not Fudge. He jumped right into every one and splashed around like a little duck. By the time we got to the movie theater the bottoms of his pants were soaked. My father took him into the men's room. He stuffed a bunch of paper towels up each pant leg so Fudge wouldn't have to sit around wet. At first Fudge complained. But when my father bought him a big box of popcorn he forgot about his stuffed pants.

Right after we got settled in our seats a big boy sat down in front of Fudge, so he had to change seats with my father. Now he was on the aisle, I was in the middle, and my father was on my other side.

When the lights dimmed Fudge said, "Ohhh... dark."

I told him, "Be quiet. You can't talk in the movies."

"Okay, Pee-tah," he said.

That's when he started throwing his popcorn. At first I didn't notice but I wondered why the people in front of us were turning around every second. Then I heard Fudge whisper, "Pow-pow-pow!" and I saw him throw a handful of popcorn.

I poked my father. "He's throwing his popcorn," I whispered.

My father reached across me and tapped Fudge on the leg. "If you throw one more piece I'm going to take it away from you."

"No throw!" Fudge said very loud.

"Shush. . . ." the people in front of us said. "Shush!" Fudge said back to them.

"You see," I told my father, "he's too young for the movies. He doesn't understand."

But from the moment the first bear came on the screen Fudge sat still and watched. And after a while I forgot all about him and concentrated on the movie. It was much better than I thought it would be. It showed all these bear cubs and how they live.

I'm not sure when I realized Fudge was gone. I guess it was when I turned to ask him if he had any popcorn left. I had already finished mine and was still hungry. I was really surprised to see he wasn't there. I mean, one minute he was sitting right next to me and the next minute he was gone.

"Hey, Dad," I whispered to my father. "He's gone."

"What?" my father said.

"Fudge isn't in his seat."

My father looked over. "Where did he go?"

"I don't know. I just noticed he was gone."

"Let me out, Peter. I'll find him."

"Should I come too?" I asked.

"No . . . you can sit here and watch the rest of the picture. He's probably wandering around by the candy counter."

I stood up to let my father out. I wondered what my mother would think if she knew Fudge was lost in the movies.

A few minutes later the picture stopped-right in the middle of a scene. The sound track trailed off like a broken record. All the lights came on. The audience let out a groan. Some kids called, "Boo... boo,"

Then my father and two ushers and a man in a suit came over to me. "He was sitting right here," my father told them, pointing to the empty seat on the aisle.

"Well," the man in the suit said, "we've checked the rest rooms and the office. He's not behind the candy counter. We'll have to search the theater." He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen . . . may I have your attention please. We'll continue with our film in one moment. But first we have to find a three-year-old boy answering to the name of Fudge."

Some people laughed when the man said his name. I guess *Fudge* does sound funny if you're not used to it. I thought, *Maybe he's been kidnapped! Would my mother be mad. That crazy kid! You can't even take him to the movies.* Then I thought, *Who'd want to kidnap him, anyway?*

"What should I do, Dad?" I said.

"Why don't you walk up and down this aisle and call him, Peter."

"Okay," I said.

"Here, Fudge," I called, starting down my aisle. I sounded like I was calling a dog. "Come on out, Fudge."

When I got down to the first row and called, "Here, Fudge," he popped out at me. He scared me so bad I yelled, "Ooooh... "

"Hi, Pee-tah," he said.

"Hey ... I found him," I called. "I found him ... I found him . . . here he is!" Then I turned to my brother. "You dope! What are you doing way down here? And why are you sitting on the floor?"

"Wanted to touch the bears," Fudge said.

"But bears are all gone." He spread out his arms and said, "All gone" again.

My father and the ushers and the man in the suit ran to us. "Fudge," my father said, scooping him up.

"Are you all right?"

"He wanted to pet the bears," I said. "Can you beat that?"

"Well, I guess we can continue with the picture now," the man in the suit said. He cupped his hands around his mouth again. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Our young man has been found safe and sound. Now we return to the conclusion of *A Bear's Life*."

My father carried Fudge back to our seats. He held him on his lap for the rest of the show. I guess he wasn't taking any more chances!

Later, when we got home, my father explained to Fudge that movies are like TV. "It's just a picture. There's nothing to touch."

Fudge listened, but I don't know whether he believed my father. I had the feeling he still thought those bears were in the theater somewhere. I made up my mind that I would never take my little brother to the movies. Never! At least not until he was nine or ten.

My father said he was going to cook us something special for dinner. To celebrate Finding Fudge in the Movies. I thought that was really strange. Because as far as I know my father can't cook anything.

He doesn't even know where my mother keeps the peanut butter, the dishes, or the pots and pans.

Lucky for him I was there to show him. "What are you going to cook, Dad?"

"A super-duper omelet," he said.

"Omelet? I'm not sure me and Fudge like omelets."

"You'll like this one," my father said, humming as he gathered his ingredients together. "Get me a big frying pan, Peter."

"Okay," I said. I gave it to him. He melted some butter in it.

"What's going in the super-duper omelet?" I asked while Fudge sat on the floor banging two pot covers together.

"Well, the eggs, of course," my father said. "Omelets are made of eggs." "And what else?" I asked.

"Oh ... I think I'll make a mushroom omelet."

"Eggs and mushrooms?" I said.

"Yes, you'll love it!"

"I'm not so sure."

"You'll see, Peter," my father said.

I set up the table while my father cooked. I even put Fudge in his booster chair. When the omelet was done my father brought it to us. He was still humming.

"That's some big omelet!" I said, when I saw it. It filled up the whole frying pan. "How many eggs did you use?"

"About a dozen," my father said.

"Mom only cooks one at a time," I told him.

"When you taste this you'll know why I used them all up."

"You mean it's that good?" I asked.

"Go on," my father said as he served me. "Taste it."

I took a bite. It was awful! The worst thing I ever ate in my life. But my father was standing there, grinning at me. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Well?" he said.

"It's nice," I told him, swallowing a chunk whole. I washed it down with a glass of milk.

"You see . . . your mother ought to experiment more. Then you'd learn to eat a lot of different things."

"I don't think Mom ever made me a mushroom omelet," I said.

My father put some on Fudge's plate. Then he served himself. Fudge shoved a lot into his mouth at once. I waited, figuring he'd choke on it. Instead he said, "Oh... good!"

My father beamed. Fudge wasn't smart enough to fool my father. So he must have really liked it. But a kid that can eat flowers and swallow teeth wouldn't know much about omelets anyway.

Then my father sat down and tasted his super-duper concoction. *He* not only choked on it. *He* spit it out! "Oh no," he said. "This is awful. Something went wrong. Maybe the eggs are rotten."

"Mom just bought them on Thursday," I said.

"Maybe it's the mushrooms, then," my father said.

"Maybe it's how you cooked it," I suggested.

My father jumped up from the table and threw the mushroom omelet into the garbage. Fudge started to cry. "Want more . . . MORE!"

"No," my father told him. "It wasn't any good."

Fudge screamed, "EAT IT OR WEAR IT ... EAT IT OR WEAR IT!" He flung his spoon across the room. It hit my mother's favorite plant. The dirt spilled all over the kitchen floor.

"Now you stop that!" my father yelled at Fudge. "I'm going to make us nice peanut butter sandwiches. Then *you're* going to have a bath! Your mommy's coming home tomorrow and we're going to show her how well Daddy managed all by himself! Peter... where does your mother hide the peanut butter?"

After supper my father bathed Fudge. The only thing he decided not to do were the dishes. He stacked them in the sink and left them for my mother.

On Sunday afternoon we drove out to the airport to meet my mother's plane. On the way there my father said wouldn't it be fun if we kept all the things we did over the weekend a secret-just between the three of us-kind of a man's secret. I agreed not to say a word. And my mother was so glad to see us that she didn't even mention the dirty dishes in the sink.

Six weeks later we were watching TV one night when the new Toddle-Bike commercial came on.

"That's me," Fudge said.

My mother looked up from the book she was reading. "He does look like you, Fudge, but that's not really you."

"Oh yes," Fudge said. "That's me . . . see. . . ." My mother squinted and looked harder. "You know, Warren," she told my father, "he really does look like Fudge." Then she laughed. "Imagine another little boy like Fudgie!"

"It's Fudge all right!" I said.

"It's Fudge all right!" my brother repeated.

"We didn't tell you, dear," my father said. "We thought you'd like to be surprised. But that is Fudge." "WHAT?" my mother said, like she couldn't believe it.

"You see, Mom," I began. "Remember that weekend you went to visit Aunt Linda?" Then I stopped and thought about all the things my mother didn't know-

Like the puddles Fudge splashed in. And the paper towels up his pants.

And how he wanted to touch the bears. And the mushroom omelet.

And Mr. Vincent and his big cigar.

And Janet and her goldfish crackers.

And I looked at my father and I started to laugh. So did he.

Dribble!

I will never forget Friday, May tenth. It's the most important day of my life. It didn't start out that way. It started out ordinary. I went to school. I ate my lunch. I had gym. And then I walked home from school with Jimmy Fargo. We planned to meet at our special rock in the park as soon as we changed our clothes.

In the elevator I told Henry I was glad summer was coming. Henry said he was too. When I got out at my floor I walked down the hall and opened the door to my apartment I took off my jacket and hung it in the closet. I put my books on the hall table next to my mother's purse. I went straight to my room to change my clothes and check Dribble.

The first thing I noticed was my chain latch. It was unhooked. My bedroom door was open. And there was a chair smack in the middle of my doorway. I nearly tumbled over it. I ran to my dresser to check Dribble. He wasn't there! His bowl with the rocks and water was there-but Dribble was gone.

I got really scared. I thought, *Maybe he died while I was at school and I didn't know about it.* So I rushed into the kitchen and hollered, "Mom . . . where's Dribble?" My mother was baking something.

My brother sat on the kitchen floor, banging pots and pans together. "Be quiet!" I yelled at Fudge. "I can't hear anything with all that noise."

"What did you say, Peter?" my mother asked me.

"I said I can't find Dribble. Where is he?"

"You mean he's not in his bowl?" my mother asked. I shook my head.

"Oh dear!" my mother said. "I hope he's not crawling around somewhere. You know I don't like the way he smells. I'm going to have a look in the bedrooms. You check in here, Peter."

My mother hurried off. I looked at my brother. He was smiling. "Fudge, do you know where Dribble is?" I asked calmly.

Fudge kept smiling.

"Did you take him? Did you, Fudge?" I asked not so calmly. Fudge giggled and covered his mouth with his hands.

I yelled. "Where is he? What did you do with my turtle?"

No answer from Fudge. He banged his pots and pans together again. I yanked the pots out of his hand. I tried to speak softly. "Now tell me where Dribble is. Just tell me where my turtle is. I won't be mad if you tell me. Come on, Fudge . . . please."

Fudge looked up at me. "In tummy," he said.

"What do you mean, in tummy?" I asked, narrowing my eyes. "Dribble in tummy!" He repeated.

"What tummy?" I shouted at my brother.

"This one," Fudge said, rubbing his stomach. "Dribble in this tummy! Right here!"

I decided to go along with his game. "Okay. How did he get in there, Fudge?" I asked.

Fudge stood up. He jumped up and down and sang out, "I ATE HIM... ATE HIM... ATE HIM!"

Then he ran out of the room.

My mother came back into the kitchen. "Well, I just can't find him anywhere," she said. "I looked in all the dresser drawers and the bathroom cabinets and the shower and the tub and. . . ."

"Mom," I said, shaking my head. "How could you?"

"How could I what, Peter?" Mom asked.

"How could you let him do it?"

"Let who do what, Peter?" Mom asked.

"LET FUDGE EAT DRIBBLE!" I screamed.

My mother started to mix whatever she was baking. "Don't be silly, Peter," she said. "Dribble is a turtle."

"HE ATE DRIBBLE!" I insisted.

"*Peter Warren Hatcher!* STOP SAYING THAT!" Mom hollered.

"Well, ask him. Go ahead and ask him," I told her.

Fudge was standing in the kitchen doorway with a big grin on his face. My mother picked him up and patted his head. "Fudgie," she said to him, "tell Mommy where brother's turtle is."

"In tummy," Fudge said.

"What tummy?" Mom asked. "MINE!" Fudge laughed.

My mother put Fudge down on the kitchen counter where he couldn't get away from her. "Oh, you're fooling Mommy . . . right?"

"No fool!" Fudge said.

My mother turned very pale. "You really ate your brother's turtle?" Big smile from Fudge.

"YOU MEAN THAT YOU PUT HIM IN YOUR MOUTH AND CHEWED HIM UP ... LIKE THIS?" Mom made believe she was chewing.

"No," Fudge said.

A smile of relief crossed my mother's face. "Of course you didn't. It's just a joke." She put Fudge down on the floor and gave me a *look*.

Fudge babbled. "No chew. No chew. Gulp... gulp... all gone turtle. own Fudge's tummy." Me and my mother stared at Fudge. "You didn't!" Mom said. "Did so!" Fudge said.

"No!" Mom shouted.

"Yes!" Fudge shouted back.

"Yes?" Mom asked weakly, holding onto a chair with both hands. "Yes!" Fudge beamed.

My mother moaned and picked up my brother. "Oh no! My angel! My precious little baby! OH...NO..."

My mother didn't stop to think about my turtle. She didn't even give Dribble a thought. She didn't even stop to wonder how my turtle liked being swallowed by my brother. She ran to the phone with Fudge tucked under one arm. I followed. Mom dialed the operator and cried, "Oh help! This is an emergency. My baby ate a turtle . . . STOP THAT LAUGHING," my mother told the operator. "Send an ambulance right away; 25 West 68th Street."

Mom hung up. She didn't look too well. Tears were running down her face. She put Fudge down on the floor. I couldn't understand why she was so upset. Fudge seemed just fine.

"Help me, Peter," Mom begged. "Get me blankets."

I ran into my brother's room. I grabbed two blankets from Fudge's bed. He was following me around with that silly grin on his face. I felt like giving

him a pinch. How could he stand there looking so happy when he had my turtle inside him?

I delivered the blankets to my mother. She wrapped Fudge up in them and ran to the front door.

I followed and grabbed her purse from the hall table. I figured she'd be glad I thought of that.

Out in the hall I pressed the elevator buzzer. We had to wait a few minutes. Mom paced up and down in front of the elevator. Fudge was cradled in her arms. He sucked his fingers and made that slurping noise I like. But all I could think of was Dribble.

Finally, the elevator got to our floor. There were three people in it besides Henry. "This is an emergency," Mom wailed. "The ambulance is waiting downstairs. Please hurry!"

"Yes, Mrs. Hatcher. Of course," Henry said. "I'll run her down just as fast as I can. No other stops."

Someone poked me in the back. I turned around. It was Mrs. Rudder. "What's the matter?" she whispered.

"It's my brother," I whispered back. "He ate my turtle."

Mrs. Rudder whispered *that* to the man next to her and *he* whispered it to the lady next to *him* who whispered it to Henry. I faced front and pretended I didn't hear anything.

My mother turned around with Fudge in her arms and said, "That's not funny. Not funny at all!"

But Fudge said, "Funny, funny, funny Fudgie!" Everybody laughed. Everybody except my mother.

The elevator door opened. Two men, dressed in white, were waiting with a stretcher. "This the baby?" one of them asked.

"Yes. Yes, it is," Mom sobbed.

"Don't worry, lady. We'll be to the hospital in no time. "

"Come, Peter," my mother said, tugging at my sleeve. "We're going to ride in the ambulance with Fudge."

My mother and I climbed into the back of the blue ambulance. I was never in one before. It was neat.

Fudge knelt on a cot and peered out through the window. He waved at the crowd of people that had gathered on the sidewalk.

One of the attendants sat in back with us. The other one was driving. "What seems to be the trouble, lady?" the attendant asked. "This kid looks pretty healthy to me."

"He swallowed a turtle," my mother whispered. "He did WHAT?" the attendant asked. "Ate my turtle. That's what!" I told him.

My mother covered her face with her hanky and started to cry again.

"Hey, Joe!" the attendant called to the driver. "Make it snappy . . . *this* one swallowed a turtle!"

"That's not funny!" Mom insisted. I didn't think so either, considering it was my turtle!

We arrived at the back door of the hospital. Fudge was whisked away by two nurses. My mother ran after him. "You wait here, young man," another nurse called to me, pointing to a bench.

I sat down on the hard, wooden bench. I didn't have anything to do. There weren't any books or magazines spread out, like when I go to Dr. Cone's office. So I watched the clock and read all the signs on the walls. I found out I was in the emergency section of the hospital.

After a while the nurse came back. She gave me some paper and crayons. "Here you are. Be a good boy and draw some pictures. Your mother will be out soon."

I wondered if she knew about Dribble and that's why she was trying to be nice to me. I didn't feel like drawing any pictures. I wondered what they were doing to Fudge in there. Maybe he wasn't such a bad little guy after all. I remembered that Jimmy Fargo's little cousin once swallowed the most valuable rock from Jimmy's collection. And my mother told me that when I was a little kid I swallowed a quarter. Still ... a quarter's not like a turtle!

I watched the clock on the wall for an hour and ten minutes. Then a door opened and my mother stepped out with Dr. Cone. I was surprised to see him. I didn't know he worked in the hospital.

"Hello, Peter," he said.

"Hello, Dr. Cone. Did you get my turtle?"

"Not yet, Peter," he said. "But I do have something to show you. Here are some X-rays of your brother."

I studied the X-rays as Dr. Cone pointed things out to me.

"You see," he said. "There's your turtle . . . right there."

I looked hard. "Will Dribble be in there forever?" I asked.

"No. Definitely not! We'll get him out. We gave Fudge some medicine already. That should do the trick nicely."

"What kind of medicine?" I asked. "What trick?"

"Castor oil, Peter," my mother said. "Fudge took castor oil. And milk of magnesia. And prune juice too. Lots of that. All those things will help to get Dribble out of Fudge's tummy."

"We just have to wait," Dr. Cone said. "Probably until tomorrow or the day after. Fudge will have to spend the night here. But I don't think he's going to be swallowing anything that he isn't supposed to be swallowing from now on."

"How about Dribble?" I asked. "Will Dribble be all right?" My mother and Dr. Cone looked at each other. I knew the answer before he shook his head and said, "I think you may have to get a new turtle, Peter."

"I don't want a new turtle!" I said. Tears came to my eyes. I was embarrassed and wiped them away with the back of my hand. Then my nose started to run and I had to sniffle. "I want Dribble," I said. "That's the only turtle I want."

My mother took me home in a taxi. She told me my father was on his way to the hospital to be with Fudge. When we got home she made me lamb chops for dinner, but I wasn't very hungry.

My father came home late that night. I was still up. My father looked gloomy. He whispered to my mother, "Not yet . . . nothing yet."

The next day was Saturday. No school. I spent the whole day in the hospital waiting room. There were plenty of people around. And magazines and books too. It wasn't like the hard bench in the emergency hallway. It was more like a living room. I told everybody that my brother ate my turtle.

They looked at me kind of funny. But nobody ever said they were sorry to hear about my turtle. Never once.

My mother joined me for supper in the hospital coffee shop. I ordered a hamburger but I left most of it. Because right in the middle of supper my mother told me that if the medicine didn't work soon Fudge might have to have an operation to get Dribble out of him. My mother didn't eat anything.

That night my grandmother came to stay with me. My mother and father stayed at the hospital with Fudge. Things were pretty dreary at home. Every hour the phone rang. It was my mother calling from the hospital with a report.

"Not yet ... I see," Grandma repeated. "Nothing happening yet."

I was miserable. I was lonely. Grandma didn't notice. I even missed Fudge banging his pots and pans together. In the middle of the night the phone rang again. It woke me up and I crept out into the hallway to hear what was going on.

Grandma shouted, "Whoopee! It's out! Good news at last."

She hung up and turned to me. "The medicine has finally worked, Peter. All that castor oil and milk of magnesia and prune juice finally worked. The turtle is out!"

"Alive or dead?" I asked.

"PETER WARREN HATCHER, WHAT A QUESTION!" Grandma shouted.

So my brother no longer had a turtle inside of him. And I no longer had a turtle! I didn't like Fudge as much as I thought I did before the phone rang.

The next morning Fudge came home from the hospital. My father carried him into the apartment. My mother's arms were loaded with presents. All for Fudge! My mother put the presents down and kissed him. She said, "Fudgie can have anything he wants. Anything at all. Mommy's so happy her baby's all better!"

It was disgusting. Presents and kisses and attention for Fudge. I couldn't even look at him. He was having fun! He probably wasn't even sorry he ate my turtle.

That night my father came home with the biggest box of all. It wasn't wrapped up or anything but I knew it was another present. I turned away from my father.

"Peter," he said. "This box is a surprise for you!"

"Well, I don't want another turtle," I said. "Don't think you can make me feel better with another turtle . . . because you can't."

"Who said anything about a turtle, son?" Dad asked. "You see, Peter, your mother and I think you've been a good sport about the whole situation. After all, Dribble *was* your pet."

I looked up. Could I be hearing right? Did they really remember about me and Dribble? I put my hand inside the box. I felt something warm and soft and furry. I knew it was a dog, but I pretended to be surprised when he jumped up on my lap and licked me.

Fudge cried, "Ohhh... doggie! See... doggie!" He ran right over and grabbed my dog's tail.

"Fudge," my father said, taking him away. "This is your brother's dog. Maybe someday you'll have a dog of your own. But this one belongs to Peter. Do you understand?"

Fudge nodded. "Pee-tah's dog."

"That's right," my father said. "Peter's dog!" Then he turned to me. "And just to be sure, son," he said, "we got a dog that's going to grow quite big. *Much* too big for your brother to swallow!"

We all laughed. My dog was neat.

I named him Turtle ... to remind me.