JOHNNY GOODTURN

By Charles R. Tanner

I am bothered by a dream.

It is one of those consecutive dreams, or maybe they call them repetitive dreams; anyway, it's one of the kind of dreams that you dream over and over again, each time a little different. I only started to worry about it a week or two ago, but I'm worrying more and more as the days go by. And it's such an inconsequential sort of a dream, too. Nothing frightening about it at all. I see a boy scout, sitting on a rock and telling me a story. That's all there is to it, a boy in a scout's cap and neckerchief, sitting on a rock and telling a story.

When I first dreamed this dream, it didn't make much sense, for it seem-ed that I had come in late, that the story was already half over when the dream commenced. And I woke up before the story was finished. But when I dreamed the dream again, a few days later, this young fellow was telling a different part of the same story. And gradually, over a period of several weeks, I have managed to piece the whole story together.

That is why I am worrying. You see, there is a significance to the story that the little fellow who is telling it doesn't seem to realize. It's a terribly important conclusion that I have drawn from what he has told me, but he doesn't seem to understand it at all—

Johnny Winstead, to give him credit, never really wanted to play hooky in the first place. He had al-ready seen a circus once, and if he didn't get to see one this year, it wouldn't be too great a tragedy. But Harold, big, slow minded, easy going Harold, his buddy, had never seen a circus. Never in his *hole life. And Harold was determined that he would see a circus this year, come what may.

If you knew Harold as Johnny knew him, you'd realize that Johnny just couldn't desert a pal at a time like this. You see, Harold's slowness would have gotten him into trouble in no time without Johnny there to watch over him and use his quick mind to sort of—well——explain things to anyone who might question them. So, when Johnny found that Harold had set his mind on playing hooky and going to the circus, come what may, Johnny was just duty-bound to play hooky too, and go along.

Now this circus wasn't in Bellevue, where Johnny and Harold lived. It was in Mason, about sixteen miles away, and you had to take a bus to get there, There were only three buses a day, one in the early morning, which took the men to work who lived in Bellevue and worked in Mason another at noon and the third about six in the evening. They could have taken the noon bus, but it would have gotten them to Mason only half an hour before the circus began; and was there ever a boy who didn't want to wander about the circus grounds for an, hour or two before the show began?

So Johnny planned it all as carefully as he could. The night before the circus, just before bedtime, he told Mrs. Meeker that he and Harold had been asked by their teacher to gather some wildflowers for painting class, that they had forgot tan to do it aid that they would get up early in the morning and gather some before they went to school.

Mrs. Meeker (who was their foster mother, and who ran "Mrs. Meeker 's Boarding Home for Orphan Boys"") promised to have some breakfast on the table for them, They retired secure in the belief that there'd he no trouble at least until they got back from the circus the next evening. And that time, to their minds, was so far in the future that it wasn't worth bothering about at all.

They got up ever so early. Johnny didn't remember ever getting up so early before. He woke up Harold—— and had a time of doing it, too. They ate their breakfast and crept out of the door as quietly as they could. They caught the bus and settled down in a seat and prepared to enjoy the ride. The bus hadn't gotten a mile out of town before they were sound asleep and catching up on the rest they'd lost by getting up so early.

They were awakened by a terrific bump. Johnny saw about a million stars and sat bolt upright and looked about him. Harold sat up, too, his eves big with wonder and fright. They noticed that a couple of men were barking at the driver to be careful, three or four were craning their necks to see behind to find out what had caused the bump, and One woman squeaked under the impression that she was screaming dramatically. But

the driver stoically continued on his way, his eves peering out into the darkness ahead.

The darkness! That was surprising. When the boys had fallen asleep, it had already been dawn, the sun had just about been ready to rise. Evidently some thick clouds had come up while they slept, for it was pretty dark now. Maybe it was foggy, too, for the bus' headlights didn't seem to penetrate very far.

One of the men wanted to get out. He rang the bell and then peered out into the dark uncertainly. He shouted to the driver: "Next stop's Burton Road, isn't it?'' The driver made no answer and the bus kept on going. Presently the man cried out, indig-nantly: "Hey! I want to get out at Burton Road!"

The driver turned around slowly, one hand still on the wheel, "This is an express, Mister!" he said, coldly. "Nobody gets off till the end of the line."

Immediately a half dozen people arose to protest. "We get off at Bor-den's Plant," one of them said, angrily. "What do you want to do, make us late for work?" Another insisted that he had to get off at Seton Road. The driver brushed aside their objections.

"This is an express," he repeated, and then somberly: "This is the Last Express! It goes to the end of the line."

The objections of the people ended suddenly. With pale drawn faces, they went back and sat down in their seats. The bus sped on through the dark.

Harold and Johnny had watched this intercourse between the driver and the passengers without paying a particular amount of attention to it. They hadn't intended to get oh until the end of the line, anyhow. The cir-cus grounds were less than a quarter of a mile from the bus garage (which was in Mason), so it wouldn't be a bad idea, if the driver would let them, to stay on after the bits left the end of the line and turned into the ga-rage. There they could get off and run over to the circus in less than a minute. So, secure in the knowledge that they, at least, couldn't be carried past their stop, they sat back in their seats and dozed, and presently they were asleep again.

When they awoke, the bus was empty. The people were gone, and the driver was gone and it still wasn't daylight. They peered out of the bus window. It dawned on them that they must be in the garage, for they could see a number of other busses and cars parked in a long row.

But after a moment, Johnny was aware that they were mistaken.

"This ain't the garage, Harold," he muttered. "We're out in the open! This looks like an old auto dump. Look at all the busted-up bus-ses. Gosh, where are we, anyhow?"

Harold peered out of the car window and stifled a whimper.

"We ain't lost, are we?" he queried. "We can find the circus, can't we? Gosh, maybe this is what the driver meant when he said this was the last express. He must've meant it was the last trip the bus was ever going to make."

"Well," said Johnny. "We can't sit here wondering about that. Let's start looking for the circus grounds."

They left the bus and started off through the curious twilight. It should have been broad daylight by now, but strangely, it wasn't. Off in one part of the sky, which Johnny immediately decided was the east, the sky was very bright, but the sun hadn't risen yet, apparently. When they left the auto dump, they came to a road that ran east and west, and Johnny decided that they had better go west. He knew there was no auto dump on the road between Bellevue and Mason, so he figured that they had been carried past Mason, and now they would have to back track until they came to that town.

So they started down the road, a little uncertain, but unable to decide on anything better to do. They walked and they walked down the road, with nothing to either side of them but ramshackle fences and moss-covered stone walls and untended fields and scraggly, dismal thickets.

The longer they walked, the darker it got, until at last they could barely see their way. They got more and more scared, they walked faster and faster in the hope of reaching Mason before the increasing darkness

became complete. They ran and ran through the gloom. At last they were crying and stumbling along, all out of breath, and it was pitch dark.

After long moments of blind panic, they threw themselves down on the side of the road and tried to rest a few minutes. Their sobs quieted, their breathing slowed, and with the quick recuperation of youngsters, they were back to normal. After a little while a curious lethargy stole over them and they fell sound asleep.

Now, this is the amazing part— when they awoke, they were lying on the side of the road on the outskirts of Bellevue, not more than ten blocks from their home! The sun was shin-ing brightly, high in the west, and the clock on the Presbyterian Church tower said 4:20.

So they got up and went back into town.

They had missed the circus somehow, they had missed the whole town of Mason, and here they were, back home, and it was almost supper time. There was a lump in Johnny's throat and Harold began to whimper in disappointment, but after that horrible trip back, it was a big relief to walk along the streets in the sun again.

They came to Mrs. Meeker's and stole in quietly. The other boys were just sitting down to supper, and Harold's and Johnny's seats were the only ones that were empty. They slip-ped into them and lowered their eyes while Mrs. Meeker said a quick grace. Then, before the boys could start the usual rush for the food, Mrs. Meeker rapped on the table with a spoon.

"Boys," she said, "I think, before we start eating, that I ought to say a little something about your former companions, Harold and Johnny…"

She glanced at them as she said this, but her look was funny, as if she were looking right through them, and the other kids didn't even glance their way. Harold began to squirm, and Johnny felt a funny chill coming over him, for it began to be pretty plain that they were in for some novel kind of punishment for what they had done. What did she mean by calling them "former companions," for instance?

"I have set places for Johnny and Harold tonight," Mrs. Meeker went on. "For I wanted to talk to you about them, and tell you not to judge them too harshly, nor to look upon what happened to them as a punishment to your playmates. After tonight, you know, their places will not be set, and you will never see Johnny or Harold any more. Yet I think you will remember them always, because—" Mother Meeker choked and then she stopped talking and blew her nose and began to sob into her handkerchief.

Johnny and Harold felt awful. They got up and went over to Mrs. Meeker and tried to console her, but she never noticed them! It wasn't un-til a couple of the other kids came over and put their arms around her that she stopped crying. And never once did she even look at Johnny or Har-old. Neither did any of the fellows. Then it was that it dawned on Johnny what their punishment was going to be. Nobody was going to pay any attention to them until they had some— how or other expiated their crime of playing hooky and going to the circus!

They didn't stay to eat any supper. They went up to their room and tried to talk it over. There wasn't much to say. Harold said: "I can't stand it, Johnny," and cried a little, and John-fly said: "You'll have to, Harold. We did a wrong thing and we got caught, and now we gotta take what's coming to us." They sat moodily on the bed for awhile, and Harold sniffled. Pretty soon he said: "Let's go over to the scout meeting, anyhow. There'll be some fellows over there that don't know about this. Maybe they'll talk to us."

Johnny had forgotten about the scout meeting, but he accepted the suggestion with alacrity. It would be something to do to make their pun-ishment easier. They put on their neckerchiefs and caps (they couldn't afford entire uniforms), and started off for the church, in the basement of which the scout meetings were held. Nobody said goodbye to them, and Mrs. Meeker didn't even warn them to be home early, like she had always done before. Harold was sniffling again by the time they started up the street.

They entered the church basement, and most of the scouts were already there. They shouted "Hi, fellows," a little more boisterously than usual, and flung their caps on the pile with the others, ostentatiously. And— nobody noticed them! Johnny was a little pale as he stepped forward and slipped into one of the seats in the first row.

Mr. Shafer, the scoutmaster began to talk.

"Boys," he said, "this is one of the saddest meetings that we have ever had. Some people might try to point out the lessons that we can learn from this sad event, but I am in no mood for pointing out moral lessons. I know that our two former members, Johnny and Harold, were disobedient, but every healthy boy is, now and then. I would not have you feel that the terrible thing that has happened was a punishment for what they did, but I do want to show you that the scout's code is not a bunch of rules made up by adults to make things hard for you boys, but some things that are necessary to adhere to in order to get along in this world of ours in the proper way. Boys, this is a sad meeting, for we know that we'll never see Johnny and Harold any more, all because of that one little act of disobedience—"

His voice sort of trailed off, and he stopped talking. For almost a minute, the whole group was silent. There the other boys began to talk in low tones among themselves and Johnny and Harold sat meekly and gulped back their tears. It was the same thing here that it had been at the boarding home!

They went up to Mr. Shafer and tried to talk to him, but be wouldn't pay the slightest bit of attention to them. They tried to talk to some of the kids, but they were ignored most completely. Harold broke down and cried loudly, but nobody made any effort to comfort him. So at last they took up their caps and left the meeting.

They walked around to the back of the church and sat down on the bench under the old elm tree. Harold was still crying.

"They never done nothing like this before," he sobbed. "They never treated any of the other kids as mean as this."

"We gotta figure out some way to stop them from acting like this," Johnny decided. "We gotta figure out how to make them like us again." He buried his chin in his hands and sat for awhile, looking at the lights in the basement windows.

"We ran away to the circus," be said thoughtfully. "A scout is obedient. We got all dirty on that trip back home. A scout is neat. We fell asleep two or three times, and we were late for the meeting. A scout is alert, and prompt. It'll take a lot of work to straighten things out, Harold."

He sat back and thought some more, and Harold's sobbing turned back to sniffling and gradually ceased. At last Johnny spoke again.

"We ain't scouts no more, Harold," he explained. "You heard him call us 'former members.' But if we act like good scouts, maybe some day they'll take us back in. And maybe Mrs. Meeker'll take us back in, too. So that's what we'll do, Harold. We'll just have to act like good scouts until they, uh—forgive us, like."

He thought some more.

"We can live in the kids' shack up on Prospect bill. And we'll come down town every day and do good turns. And we'll attend every one of the scouts' meetings, only we'll just sit in the back and say nothing. And then, some day they'll let us join up again. You just wait and see, Harold. They'll let us join up again."

So they decided that that was what they would do, and they started for Prospect Hill, where their gang had their shack, for it was getting late and they couldn't do much more, this night. They left the street and started up the path to the top of the bill, and after a while they noticed several other kids, climbing up the hill but avoiding the path.

"Who're those guys?" whispered Harold. "What're they climbing up through the weeds for?"

"I don't know who they are," con-fessed Johnny. "They ain't none of our gang, though, so I don't think they're up to much good."

After they had walked a little further, Harold said, "Look, there's Tobe Sutley."

Johnny looked, and sure enough, there was the leader of that tough gang from down by the creek. That made him peer closer and he noticed several more boys whom he could identify as members of the Clark

Street gang.

"Hey, they ain't got no business up on Prospect Hill," whispered Harold, excitedly. "That's our gang's hangout."

"They're up to something, that's a cinch," said Johnny. "We better follow them and see what they do."

So they took out after the stealthy fellows, and their path led them right to the top of the hill. As the Clark Street gang got close to the top, they began pulling up armfuls of dry weeds, and when they got to the top, they threw the weeds down against the walls of the shack that Johnny and his friends had gone to such trouble to build, a month or so before. Suddenly Johnny saw plainly what they were going to do.

As if to verify his realization, Tobe Sutley suddenly whispered, hoarsely: "Now, you fellows chase around and get some more brush, while I see if I can get a fire started."

"They're going to burn down the shack, Harold," cried Johnny, forgetful of the need for silence. "Come on, we got to stop them." He rushed forward, shouting, "Get away from that shack, you darned fools. What do you thing you're doing?"

He ran right out from under the protection of the trees, to where you could easily see him in the light of the dying day—but the Clark Streeters - didn't even notice him. Like the boys at Mrs. Meeker's, like the members of their troop, the Clark Streeters ig-nored them, and kept right on gathering up dry weeds to add to the pile by the shack.

Johnny was blind with rage. "I'll bet you'll notice this!" he cried, and snatching up a broken branch of a tree, he began laying it across the backs of the boys nearest to him.

They noticed that, I'll tell you. The first fellow he hit gave a yelp of sur-prise and whirled around with an oath. He acted as if he didn't see Johnny at all, but he did see the fel-low whom Johnny hit next, and who was just then rearing up from a ter-rific whack across the seat. They look-ed at each other for about as long as it would take you to take a deep breath, and then they lit into each other as if each though the other had been the aggressor. Johnny bounded away from them and began to whack at others of the gang.

Now Harold decided to take a hand. Harold, you'll remember, was bigger and slower than Johnny, and it took him a little while to get started, but once he started, his size told. Har-old waded in with his fists.

You never saw a gang of reputedly tough kids act so funny. They kept right on acting as if they didn't see Harold or Johnny, either one. Several of them, when they got hit, acted like they were scared out of a year's growth. And the ones that didn't act scared seemed to think that one of their own gang had hit them. And after a few minutes, a snarling, bawl-ing gang of rowdies turned tail and began plunging down the hill as if the top of the hill was haunted and a gang of ghosts were after them. And Johnny and Harold stood on the hill and laughed for the first time since they had taken the bus, early that morning.

"I guess that's our good deed for today," chuckled Johnny, at last. "We sure saved the kids' shack for 'em. Maybe they won't let us be members of the troop any more, but they sure ought to be glad for what we did for them."

They sat back and talked about the fight for awhile, and then they got tired and so they went into the shack and lay down and went to sleep.

Whenever a cartoonist draws a picture of a boy scout doing a good deed, he pictures him helping an old lady across the street. Whenever somebody is writing about boy scouts' good deeds, they always seem to think that they consist mostly of helping old ladies across the street. This is silly, of course, but that is probably the reason that, next day, when Johnny and Harold started down to the town center to see what good deeds they could do for the day, there was a sort of vague idea in the back of their minds that they might be able to spend the day helping old ladies across the street.

And, sure enough, right in front of the court house, was old Mrs. Blakeslee, near sighted as an owl in the day time, getting ready to fumble her way across Main Street. They might not have done anything about it, for Mrs. Blakeslee had managed pretty well by herself for a good many years, but just as they drew near to her and she stepped off the curb, there came a great big truck swinging out of North Street and bearing right

down on her.

They hardly had time to think. Johnny rushed out and grabbed Mrs. Blakeslee and rushed her on across the street. Harold, without even thinking, jumped out in front of the truck and tried to push it back. And he did! The truck squeaked and protested, but it stopped dead in its tracks, backed up a yard or so, and stood there with its rear wheels spin-ning and grinding into the dirt, until Harold let it go. Then it was on its way, with its white-faced, swearing driver staring back through the rear-view mirror as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

And little Mrs. Blakeslee squealed once and then leaned against a fire hydrant as if she were very much out of breath.

"How did I do that?" queried Har-old as Johnny rejoined him. "Did you see what I did, Johnny? How did I do that?"

"Gosh!" muttered Johnny. "Gosh, Harold, I don't know. You must be stronger than you think. But if you're that strong, it ought to help us when we start doing good turns for people, oughtn't it?" Harold, who was seldom praised for the things he did, puffed up like a pouter pigeon. "I'll do other things, too. Just you wait and see."

They walked along, enthusiasm high as a result of their first success, and their eyes were alert t. see if there was anything else they could do to help people. And that was how they managed to spy old Mr. Harris, digging in his orchard.

Mr. Harris was an old bachelor. He had inherited an awful lot of land, back in the early part of the century, but the depression and ill health and other things too numerous to mention had caused his fortune to dwindle until now all that he had was this house with about an acre of ground in the back, and rheumatism. He kept himself alive by raising garden truck, and he lived on what he raised, and what meat the neighbors brought him. He was over seventy; and there he was, rheumatism and all, trying to dig up the ground for his garden. Johnny looked at Harold, and they grinned and went back to where he was digging.

There were a couple of extra spades in the little shed against the house and Johnny and Harold took them up and began to dig, behind Mr. Harris. He dug along in a straight line, as if he had a plow, and they dug along, too, each digging a line behind and to the right of him. When he had dug all the way down to the fence and looked back to see how much he had accomplished, his eyes were a sight to behold. lie pushed back his old hat and scratched his head, and his eyes almost popped out. Then, after a moment or two, he shrugged and started to dig again.

If you had been on a bench out-side of the post office that evening, where Mr. Harris often sat and talked with other old-timers, you'd have noticed a most wonderful change in him. He had a look on his face that was almost youthful.

"Spaded up me garden this mornin', I did," he announced, impressively. "Did a darn good job of it, too. Guess I musta just felt like workin', 'cause I never did see a job go off as smooth as that'n. Had the whole thing spaded up by 'leven o'clock. Ain't done so much nor felt so chipper for fifteen year. Guess there's life in the old dog yet, fellers."

Johnny and Harold would have liked to have heard him, I'm sure, but they were hallway across town, just then, doing another good deed.

There was a fellow down at the YMCA named Charley Windhorst. Charley was a bully, not from any in-herent streak of meanness, but simply because he had never been beaten. He was just about the toughest fighter in town, and nobody would ever have tried to box him at the V if it hadn't been for his habit of challeng-ing somebody and then making his life a misery for him until he accepted the challenge. Last week he had chal-lenged Burt Slater and Burt had accepted, realizing that the only way to get Charley to leave him alone was to take his drubbing and get it over with.

So here were Johnny and Harold, at the Y, secure in the knowledge that nobody would pay them the slightest bit of attention if Harold stepped into the ring and helped Burt with a poke or two now and then.

That was just what they did, and after two rounds, Charley went down with an extra hard clip to the jaw which Harold gave him. When the two left the Y, Charley was clasping the hand of Burt Slater, and swearing

eternal friendship, and the fellows around the ring were cheering Charley and saying that he was the best loser they ever watched. Johnny and Harold were chalking up one more good deed for tile day.

Now that, in brief, tells the story that the boy scout in my dream has been telling to me. I've pieced it to-gether from five or six dreams, but I'm pretty sure the sequence is about right. The first five or six dreams I had didn't mean very much to me; but then, one day, I was down at Schneider s grocery and I heard Mrs. Blakeslee reciting, probably for tile fortieth time, her miraculous escape from being run down by a truck. The neighbor she was telling it to laughed wisely. "I guess Johnny Goodturn had you in tow," she said. "That musta been his good turn for the day."

That name startled me, and I stepped up and began to question the woman. Well, it turned out that there's a sort of legend springing up in }3ellevue, a legend of a ghostly boy scout who goes about town doing good deeds of the sort that you'd ex-pect a boy scout to do. I made a quiet investigation, and the more I found out, the more disturbed I got. I've got a list of a couple of dozen deeds that have occurred in town recently that are awfully hard to explain Fore instance, old Mr. Harris has done more work in his garden this year than any two healthy men could be expected to do. And there's the mira-cle of Mrs. Kemp's house-cleaning, which did itself in a single night. And then there were the shoes which rich Clara Salter threw away in spite of the fact that they were almost new, and which miraculously appeared on the feet of little Nancy Andrews, halfway across town, who hadn't had a new pair of shoes for a year.

Just the other day I was caught down town with only a dime in my pocket, and the bus fare back home is fifteen cents. Now I am willing to swear that I had spent every cent ex-cept that dime, but when I felt in my pocket, there was a nickel with it, and I was spared a long and tiring walk.

It wasn't until I checked up on these things that I began to worry. You see, I guessed right away what had happened. I saw that Johnny didn't understand things at all. That is the reason I said I was worried when I started this story, and that is the reason I'm writing this.

I've learned all I could about Johnny Goodturn—and about Johnny Winstead, too. I know how he used to go down to Grady's drug store and read certain magazines, and I'm hop-ing he still does. If he reads this story, as I'm pretty sure he will, I've got this to say to him:

Johnny, there was a bus accident on the road from Bellevue to Mason last month. It was a terrible accident, and seventeen grown-ups and two boys were killed instantly. Now I know this will be a terrible shock to you but—you and Harold were the boys. If only you hadn't been asleep when the bus got to the end of the line, I expect you'd have found out about it then. But somehow you were overlooked and so you found your way back to Bellevue.

Bellevue needs you and your good turns, Johnny, but it isn't fair to keep you. Nobody wants to punish you, and nobody wants to keep you from your beloved scouts. But you've been transferred to another troop, and you must take your place in that heavenly scout troop, where your membership is in good standing and only awaiting your arrival.

Somehow I feel that, once you've learned this, you'll leave Bellevue and find your way to your new home. And—I hope that some day I'll be seeing you, and Harold, too.

So long, fellows.

THE END