

## TOUGH GUY

(A Short Story specially written for "The Listener")

JANIE and Tim stood looking disconsolately out of the window at the bright blue curve of the bay beneath. It was certainly not a sight to feel grumpy about, yet, at the moment, Janie and Tim were anything but happy. Just their luck for something to turn up and spoil their long-dreamed-of holiday at Chinaman's Beach.

The very name, to Janie and Tim's adventurous souls, spelt excitement and romance. Anything might happen here. And, now, everything was spoiled. Mother had asked Henry, their cousin, to spend his holidays with them.

Secretly Tim and Janie despised Henry. He was such a perfect little gentleman—too perfect. He never muddled his knees or tore his trousers. He never joined in their exciting games. He much preferred a book or poring over his collection of butterflies, of which Janie and Tim were openly scornful and secretly envious. Anyway, Henry did not belong in their gang, and now he had arrived down at Chinaman's Beach to spoil their precious holiday.

There was Mother now, bringing Henry along to them after showing him his room.

"Hello darlings, planning some new mischief?"

Mother's voice was gay — too gay. She knew how they felt about Henry.

"How would you like me to pack you a hamper and go off for a picnic somewhere?"

Janie and Tim brightened visibly.

"Oh, Mum, may we — anywhere we please?"

"Well, Chinaman's Beach is not very large—you can't get lost. Make up your minds while I go and pack your lunch."

Tim jumped down from the window-seat.

"I know, we'll play smugglers!"

Janie's eyes shone.

"Oh, Tim, how exciting! Let's go down to the caves at the end of the Bay."

They both turned on Henry, who stood a little aloof in the centre of the room. He was neatly dressed in a blue Norfolk suit, and his hair was smoothly brushed across his forehead.

"You'd better get out of those things," said Tim sarcastically. "You'll probably get your hands dirtied where we're going."

"I don't think I know the game you mentioned," Henry answered politely. "However, I'll be pleased to go along

with you — I might see some good specimens of butterflies on the way."

"Not where we're going," said Tim darkly.

Half an hour later they were on their way. Henry had changed into an old suit, but he still looked too neat to please Janie's and Tim's sporting taste, still they weren't going to let Henry spoil their fun—he could just tag along as best as he could.

A fifteen minutes' walk brought them to the caves at the end of the Bay. Here the land was lonely and uninhabited, and the grass grew coarse and stiff at the cliff's edge.

The children made for the largest of the caves, whose rugged entrance looked like a dark mouth cut in the face of the cliff.

One moment they were in the bright sunlight, the next moment the gloom of the cave closed about them. Tim and Janie shivered in ecstasy, and unconsciously they linked hands. Henry moved silently at their heels. The sunlight was diminishing like a pin-spot in the distance. A sudden sharp turn of the cave brought them into a deeper darkness. . . . Once they brushed against the cave's side, and it was dripping with moisture and clammy to their touch. . . .

Henry's voice sounded hollow in that winding tunnel.

"I suppose you know where we're going, Tim?"

Tim's voice held a forced confidence.

"Of course I do. Scared?"

"No," said Henry meekly.

Janie giggled—then stopped abruptly. The passage widened out here — and somewhere ahead of them — came the murmur of men's voices.

They stopped dead, fear halting their footsteps. Already they could see a yellowish glow ahead of them, like the reflection of a lamp.

The voices sounded louder now, and they could distinguish the words.

"Pretty good hidin' place, Jake. They'll never think of looking here in an 'undred years."

His unseen companion laughed; a deep ugly sound.

"Like to catch 'em try—I'd rip 'em up!"

Janie clutched at Tim's arms.

"Pirates!" she whispered through chattering teeth.

In a sudden panic, she turned to run, tripped over a block of stone, and came down with a crash. The sound seemed to fill the entire cave. They heard the startled exclamation of the men ahead — then heavy footsteps running towards them.

It was Henry who caught Janie's arm and pulled her to her feet. He pushed her towards the side of the cave where the wall was hollowed out in a small recess.

"Stay there, Janie," he said in an urgent whisper. "You, Tim, run for help. I'll hold them here. . . ."

The two children did not stop to question—or to wonder that Henry, of all people, should take command. They obeyed blindly. Janie, who was sobbing quietly beneath her breath, squeezed her small body into the recess, while Tim raced swiftly back towards the entrance of the cave.

When the two men came lumbering round the corner of the passage, holding a flickering tallow lamp above their heads, they beheld a strange sight. There, facing them in the middle of the passage, perfectly composed, his arms clasped behind his back, stood a small boy.

The two men stopped dead at the sight, then one of them broke into a loud guffaw.

"Well, strike me pink, Jake, look what we've got 'ere!"

The other man's laughter held a more sinister note.

"A sneak, eh? We know what to do with sneaks, don't we, Bill?"

He came close and caught Henry's shoulder in his heavy hand.

With a quick movement, Henry slipped aside. He turned and faced them.

"None of that rough stuff, you guys, or I'll knock those ugly dials of yours together!"

The men halted from sheer surprise, then both broke into loud laughter.

"Well, can you beat that? The cheek of the brat!"

Henry's voice was menacing.

"If you come a step nearer, you four-flush hoboes, I'll drill a hole in you with my gat!" His hand went to his coat pocket. . . .

In the shadow of the recess, Janie held her breath, too astonished and fascinated to be frightened.

One of the men took a step forward and seized Henry's arms.

"Don't try your furrin' language on us, young 'un, we're going to tie you up nice and proper so you can't talk."

Henry struggled fiercely.

"Nix on that, you small-town tramps!"

But the two men soon had the small struggling figure under control, and producing a rope, they proceeded to truss him up. They were so intent on their job that they did not hear stealthy footsteps approaching, and next minute there was a torch flashed on their faces and an authoritative voice ordered them to put up their hands.

With a sob of relief Janie darted out from her hiding-place, but it was not to Tim she flew and the couple of burly villagers who held the thieves, but to Henry who was already struggling out of his bonds.

The adventure was even more magnificent than Janie and Tim guessed. The swag that the thieves were hiding proved to be some valuable silver that had been stolen in the neighbourhood, and £50 was being offered as a reward for its return.

There was a very proud moment when the local police officer handed over the reward to Henry—and Henry, with royal magnanimity, insisted on halving it with Janie and Tim.

After all the excitement had simmered down, Janie said to Henry.

"Henry, I've been meaning to ask you ever since the other day—where did you get all that funny talk?"

Henry smiled, and even if it was a bit superior, it was a very friendly smile. He knew now they were friends.

"Why, Janie, don't tell me you have never seen an American movie? It had them guessing for a bit, didn't it?"

### For Your Entertainment

#### SUNDAY

- 1YA: 5.30 p.m. *Children's Song Service*
- 2YA: 5.30 p.m. *Children's Song Service, conducted by Uncle William, assisted by 2YA Song Service Choir*
- 3YA: 5.30 p.m. *Children's Song Service, conducted by Rev. G. R. Harris, assisted by Addington Methodist Sunday School Choir*
- 4YA: 5.30 p.m. *Big Brother Bill's Song Service*

#### MONDAY

- 1YA: 5 p.m. *Exhibition feature*
- 2YA: 5 p.m. *Talk by Ebor*
- 3YA: 5 p.m. *Stamp Club*
- 4YA: 5 p.m. *Nature Night*

#### TUESDAY

- 3YA: 5 p.m. *Tiny Tot's Corner and Centennial Boys' Band*
- 4YA: 5 p.m. *Mr. Swim Man*
- 2YH: 5.45 p.m. *David and Dawn and the Sea-Fairies*
- 4YZ: 5.30 p.m. *David and Dawn in Fairyland*

### From the ZB Stations

"The Enchanted Orchard": All Stations at 5.15 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays

"Uncle Tom and his Children's Choir": All Stations at 11 a.m. on Sundays (9 a.m. at 1ZB Auckland)

"The Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen": All Stations at 6.15 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

#### WEDNESDAY

- 4YA: 5 p.m. *Travel Man*
- 4YZ: 5.30 p.m. *Coral Cave*

#### THURSDAY

- 1YA: 5 p.m. *Exhibition feature*
- 2YA: 5 p.m. *Special Anzac Day session*
- 3YA: 5 p.m. *Anzac Day programme*
- 4YA: 5 p.m. *Mouth Organ Band and Mr. Stampman*

#### FRIDAY

- 1YA: 5 p.m. *David and Dawn in Fairyland*
- 3YA: 5 p.m. *Niccolo, Puzzle Pie, Book Lady and Nancybow*
- 4YA: 5 p.m. *Botany Club*
- 4YZ: 5.30 p.m. *Mystery Island*

#### SATURDAY

- 4YA: 5 p.m. *How to Make Club*
- 2YH: 5.45 p.m. *Westward Hol*