

## ~ CHAPTER THREE ~

### *Henry & the Night Crawlers*

WHEN Henry came home from school one Friday late in September, he shook all his nickels and dimes and pennies out of a marble sack onto his bedspread. His expenses had been heavy and he knew he did not have much money left. The first thing he had done after finding Ribsy was to pay for his license and buy him a collar. Naturally he didn't want his dog to eat from an old chipped dish, so he had spent sixty-nine cents for a red plastic dish with DOG printed on it. This nearly exhausted his savings.. He had spent his silver dollar on the guppies and all his allowance to take care of them. Then he had sold the guppies for seven dollars and spent all seven for the tank and thermostat for the catfish.

At breakfast this morning his father had given him his weekly twenty-five cents. Besides that, he had six cents saved from last week's allowance. He also had a nickel he had found in the park. And then there was his Canadian dime. He could try to spend that but he hated to after keeping it almost a year. He might want to start a coin collection sometime. With the Canadian dime, he had forty-six cents, not counting nine cents he could get for three old milk bottles he had found in a vacant lot on the way home from school.

It was not enough.

Henry needed thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents plus forty-one cents for tax.

Henry needed all this money because he wanted to buy a football-a real football from a sporting goods store, not just a toy football from a department store. This time he wanted a genuine cowhide football stitched with nylon thread and laced with buckskin thongs. Every boy on Klickitat Street wanted one.

As Henry looked at the money spread out on his bed, he heard someone calling, "He-e-enry!"

Henry went to the front door. There on the front porch stood Scooter McCarthy. Henry was surprised, because Scooter didn't often come to play with him. He was a fifth grader and bigger than Henry. Henry was even more surprised when he saw what Scooter was holding-a real cowhide football stitched with nylon thread and laced with real buckskin thongs!

"Hi, Scoot," said Henry. "Boy oh boy! Where did you get that football?"

"My grandmother sent it to me for my birthday," answered Scooter.

"Your grandmother!" Henry could hardly believe it. "My grandmother sends me sweaters and socks:"

"My grandmother sends me keen presents. Come on out and throw some passes with me."

Scooter pounded the football with his fist. It made a drumlike sound.

Henry could hardly wait to touch the leather. When the boys, followed by Ribsby, went out to the sidewalk, Scooter ran up the street a way and threw the ball back to Henry. It hit some branches that overhung the sidewalk but Henry caught it anyway. The ball felt just right. It was big and solid and smelled of new leather. Henry lovingly ran his hands over its surface before he sent it sailing back to Scooter. The ball hit the branch again.

"I know what," said Scooter. "If I went on the other side of the street and we threw it back and forth across the street, we wouldn't hit the trees." He tucked the ball under his arm as if he were running ninety yards for a touchdown and sprinted across the street.

*Pow!* The ball sailed into Henry's hands. It made a deep hollow sound, just the kind of sound a good football should make. Henry sent it back across the street. *Pow!* Scooter caught it. Back and forth the ball flew until Henry's hands began to tingle from the smack of leather against them.

"Throw it to me once more," called Scooter, "and then let's go down to the empty lot and practice kicking."

Henry wished he could carry the ball, but after all it did belong to Scooter. He gripped it firmly and drew it back over his shoulder. This time he was going to throw a perfect pass, the kind he had seen All-Americans make in newsreels.

As he started to bring his arm forward, Ribsby gave a sudden bark. Henry looked around at Ribsby, but his arm kept on going. The ball left his fingers.

At that instant a car whizzed around the corner. Scooter yelled, "Hey! Look out!"

It was too late. There was nothing Henry could do. The speeding car did not slow down, and for one terrible moment he thought the ball was going to hit the driver. Instead it sailed into the rear window, bounced against the closed window on the other side of the car, and then fell inside. The car raced on down the street and screeched around a corner on two wheels.

The football was gone!

The boys stared after the car. Henry was so surprised he stood there with his arm in the air. When he finally remembered to bring it down, he was still speechless.

"My football!" exclaimed Scooter. He stopped looking down the street after the departed car. He looked at Henry. "My ball is in that car," he said accusingly.

"Yeah, I guess it is." Henry was uncomfortable. "Maybe the man in the car will bring it back in a little while," he said hopefully.

"He'd better," said Scooter grimly.

The boys sat down on the curb to wait.

"Boy, I bet he was going eighty miles an hour!"  
said Henry.

"I couldn't even see his license plates."

"He ought to be arrested," said Henry, who was anxious to talk about anything but Scooter's football.

"He might kill somebody," said Scooter.

The boys waited and waited. The longer they waited, the more -angry Scooter looked. "I don't think that car is going to come back," he said finally. "It's all your fault. You threw the ball."

"Yes, I know," admitted Henry, "but it wasn't my fault that Ribsy barked and that old car came by just then."

"You shouldn't have thrown it." Scooter scowled darkly.

I couldn't help it." Henry scowled back. "I didn't even see the car until after I threw the ball. I couldn't catch it after I had thrown it, could I

"I don't care! You would have heard the car coming if that dumb dog of yours hadn't made so much noise. He wasn't even barking at anything. You lost my new ball and you're going to have to buy me a new one. If you don't I'll-I'll Scooter wasn't quite sure what he would do, so he didn't finish the sentence.

Henry didn't know what to say. It did not seem right that he was to blame. Still, half an hour ago Scooter had a new football. Now it was gone and Henry had been the last one to touch it.

"I have forty-six cents and three milk bottles you could have," said Henry hopefully. He hated to see that football disappear almost as much as Scooter did.

"That isn't enough," said Scooter. "You'll have to buy me a new football before next Saturday or I'll tell my dad and he'll tell your dad and then you'll really get it."

Henry suspected Scooter was right. He probably would get it. Once when he had accidentally broken another boy's roller skate, his father had given him a talking to and then made him spend his allowance to have it fixed. "O.K." he said. "I'll get you a new football. I don't know how but I guess I'll manage."

Henry turned and went slowly into the house. Ribsy followed him. "Now see what you've done," Henry said. "And after I spent my football money for your license and your collar and your dish, too." Ribsy hung his head.

Now Henry was just twice as far from owning a real cowhide football with nylon stitching and buckskin lacings as he had been half an hour ago. He was quiet the rest of the afternoon and all through dinner. He was thinking.

"How about another piece of gingerbread?" his father asked.

"No, thank you," said Henry absent-mindedly. "May I be excused, please?"

"Why, Henry, don't you feel well?" Mrs. Huggins was surprised. Henry usually ate two pieces of gingerbread and a third if she let him.

"Oh sure, I feel all right," said Henry and went out to sit on the front steps. Ribsy lay on the step below and dozed with his head on Henry's foot.

"Good old Ribsy, even if you did get me into trouble," said Henry.

He listened to the wish-click, wish-click of the water sprinkler next door and wondered how he was going to earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents in one week. He thought and thought.

He could collect old tin foil. No, that would take too long. Junk men didn't want the little wads of tin foil that came from old cigarette packs. They wanted big pieces that were too hard to find.

Maybe he could ask the neighbors for old papers and magazines. No, he had already collected all he could find for a school paper drive the week before. Besides, the junk men paid only half a cent a pound.

He could open a lemonade stand by the park, but lemonade stands were just kid stuff. Mothers and fathers were the only people who really spent any money for lemonade. He could charge fifty cents for mowing lawns. That would be a dollar for two lawns. He would have to mow twenty-eight lawns to earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents. Even if he could get twenty-eight lawns to mow, he didn't see how he could find time after school.

As the evening grew darker, Henry still sat on the steps thinking and listening -L 0 the wish-click, wish-click of the water sprinkler. Wish-click, wish-click. Then Mr. Hector Grumbie, who lived next door, came out of the house and shut off the water. Henry liked Mr. Grumbie but he wasn't so sure about Mrs. Grumbie. She sprinkled Doggie-B-Gone on her shrubbery, and Ribsby disliked the smell very much.

Henry noticed that Mr. Grumble had a flashlight in one hand and a quart fruit jar in the other. Mr. Grumbie set the jar on the sidewalk, tiptoed onto the lawn, flashed his light on the grass, bent over, and pounced on something. Then he picked it up and put it into the jar. It was too dark for Henry to see what it was.

The next time Mr. Grumbie pounced, he didn't put anything into the jar. Henry heard him mutter, "Oops, that one got away."

Henry couldn't stand it any longer. He had to know what Mr. Grumbie was doing. He walked across his own lawn and peered over the rosebushes.

"If you come any closer," said Mr. Grumbie, "you'd better tiptoe. I don't want to scare them away.

"Worms," said Mr. Grumbie. "Great big worms. Do you mean to say you've lived here all these years and never seen a night crawler?"

"No, I haven't," answered Henry. "How big are they?"

"Oh, about seven to ten inches long."

"Golly!" Henry could hardly believe it. "Ten inches long! I didn't know worms came that big." "Here's one." Mr. Grumble swooped and held up a worm in the beam of his flashlight. It was a big fat worm. It was at least nine inches long and as big around as a pencil.

"Wow!" said Henry. It was hard to believe, but there it was. Mr. Grumbie put it into the jar.

"Do you use them to catch fish?" asked Henry. "That's right." Mr. Grumbie pounced again. "What kind. of fish?"

"Some kinds of trout, salmon, perch, catfish- different kinds of fish. I'm going salmon fishing in the Columbia River in the morning."

Henry thought this over. "Do you always catch worms at night?"

"Yes. They only come out at night when the ground is wet. I give the lawn a good soaking so they'll come up to the top. Then I turn on the light and grab them quick before they have a chance to pull back into the ground."

Mrs. Grumbie stepped out on the porch and called to her husband. "Hector, if you expect me to have a lunch ready for you to take fishing at three o'clock in the morning, you'd better go to the store for a loaf of bread right now before it closes."

"All right. In a minute." As his wife went back into the house, Mr. Grumbie said to Henry, "How would you like to earn some money?"

"Catching worms? I'll say I would!"

"I'll pay you a penny apiece for every night crawler you catch."

"Golly," said Henry. "A penny apiece! How many do you want?"

"As many as you can catch. If I can't use them, some of the other men can." He handed Henry the jar and the flashlight, got into his car, and drove away.

A penny apiece! There were one hundred pennies in a dollar, so it would take one thousand three hundred and ninety-five worms to pay for the football. And forty-one worms for the tax!

Henry went around the rosebushes and tiptoed across the grass. Because of the Doggie-B-Gone, Ribsby stayed on his own side of the rosebushes. Henry turned on the flashlight and sure enough, there on the grass was the end of a big fat worm. But when Henry bent to pick it up, it was gone.

He tiptoed farther across the grass and turned on the light again. This time he moved faster. He grabbed the end of the cold slippery worm. The other end was already in the ground. Henry pulled and the worm pulled. The worm stretched. It grew longer and thinner until it snapped out of Henry's hand and disappeared into the ground. "Ugh!" said Henry.

The next time he moved still faster. He pounced on the worm before either end had a chance to get in the ground. He caught it! That's one penny, he thought.

After that it was easier. He caught most of the worms on the first pounce. pretty soon he had caught sixty-two worms. Then he discovered he was running out of worms. Either he had caught all of Mr. Grumbie's worms or they had felt him walking around on the ground and had retired for the night. And he hadn't earned enough to pay for the football.

Just as Henry was wondering where he could find more worms, Mr. Grumbie came back from the store. "I caught sixty-two worms for you," said Henry

"Sixty-two! That's great!" Mr. Grumble reached into his pants pocket and brought out a handful of change. He picked out a fifty-cent piece, a dime, and two pennies and gave them to Henry.

"Thank you," said Henry politely. He wished he had caught more worms.

Mr. Grumbie started to go into the house and then stopped. "Say, Shorty," he said to Henry, who was going back through the rosebushes, "I'll tell you what you can do. Sunday morning I'm going fishing with a bunch of men from my lodge. Quite a few of us are going and we can use all the worms you can catch. Tomorrow night you get someone to help you and catch enough for all of us."

"Sure," said Henry eagerly. "I'll catch hundreds of worms for you."

"Swell! We can use them," answered Mr. Grumbie as he went into the house.

Henry sat down on his front steps again. Because he needed so much money, he knew he would have to catch all the worms himself. That meant he would need a lot of wet lawn. His mother would be pleased, even surprised, to have him water the lawn, but his lawn and the Grumbie's lawn wouldn't be enough. Maybe he could ask all the people on the street to water their yards Saturday evening. However, if he did that, Beezus and Robert and the other kids would ask what he was doing. Henry was afraid they would want to earn money catching worms, too. He knew Beezus would want to. She was the kind of girl who would like catching worms.

Henry sat on the steps wishing he had acres and acres of wet lawn. He thought and thought about millions of wet green blades of grass with big fat worms peeping out from under them. The park! Of course, that was it! It was only a few blocks away and because September had been unusually warm this year, the grass in the park was watered every day. If his mother would let him stay up later than nine o'clock, he knew he could catch enough worms to pay for the football.

"Mom, could I stay up later tomorrow night?" Henry told his mother the whole story.

Mrs. Huggins put down the sock. "Henry," she sighed, "how do you manage to get yourself into such messes?"

"Well, gee," said Henry, "I didn't do anything. I just threw this football and ..."

"Yes, you told me," his mother interrupted. "Yes, you may stay up tomorrow night, but for goodness' sake, Henry, after this do be careful with other people's belongings."

Saturday was an anxious day for Henry. He wanted to avoid Scooter, but he also wanted to go to the park to make sure the grass was being watered. Unfortunately, he had to pass Scooter's house to reach the park. He walked on the other side of the street, but Scooter was in his front yard tightening the chain on his bicycle.

He shook his fist at Henry and yelled, "You get me that ball or I'll fix you!"

"You and who else?" Henry yelled back and kept on going. When he reached the park he was relieved to hear the swish of the sprinklers and see water spraying over the grass. He would earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents before he went to bed that night.

That evening Henry didn't wait for dessert. He borrowed his father's flashlight and several old mayonnaise jars and ran down the hill to the park. It was a warm night and the tennis courts and swimming pool were floodlighted. It was only beginning to get dark, but Henry hoped it might be dark enough under the bushes to start catching worms. He couldn't afford to waste time.

He passed the playground where he heard the children's shouts and the clank and clang of the rings and swings. Henry didn't stop. He had work to do. He went to the edge of the park where there were no lights and turned on his flashlight. Sure enough, there in the grass under a bush was a night crawler. Henry nabbed it and put it into his jar. Then he caught another. He caught worm after worm. Four hundred thirty-one, four hundred thirty-two, four hundred thirty-three. Henry was tired of pouncing. Henry was tired of worms.

When the lights of the swimming pool went off, Henry was still working. By the time that the lights at the tennis courts went A, Henry was very, very tired of worm, s. But he

kept on. When he had added the one thousand one hundred and third worm to his collection he heard someone calling, "Henry! Henry! Where are you?" It was his mother.

"Here I am." As Henry stood up to rest *his aching* back, he saw his mother and father walking along the path.

"My goodness, Henry," Mrs. Huggins exclaimed. Haven't you caught those worms yet? You can't stay out in the park alone all night."

"But Mom, I don't have enough worms to pay for Scooter's football. And I promised to get him a new one this week. I have one thousand one hundred and three worms and I need to catch one thousand three hundred and thirty-one altogether. I had some money saved and I earned some last night."

"Let's see. He needs two hundred and twenty-eight more. It shouldn't take long to catch them," Mr. Huggins said to Mrs. Huggins. "After all, he promised. Let's help him."

So Henry and his mother and father bent and pounced together. Henry felt a little uncomfortable to see his mother catching worms, but he was very, very glad when the one thousand three hundred and thirty-first worm was in the jar. He took his jars of worms to Mr. Grumbie, who paid him thirteen dollars and thirty-one cents. As Henry watched him turn the night crawlers into a box of dirt so they would live until Sunday, he thought he never wanted to see another worm.

He felt the money in his pocket. "I guess this ought to take care of old Scooter," he said and, wishing he could spend it on a football for himself, he went home to bed.

Sunday morning Henry lay on his stomach on the living-room floor reading the funny papers. Usually he woke up early and read the funnies before his mother and father were awake, but this morning he was so tired from catching worms that he slept later than usual.

The doorbell rang and Mr. Huggins, who was reading the sports section and drinking coffee, put down his paper and answered the door.

Henry heard a strange man ask, "Excuse me, could you tell me who owns this football?"

Henry didn't wait for his father to answer. He ran to the door.

The man was holding Scooter's real cowhide football, stitched with nylon thread and laced with buckskin thongs!

"Golly!" said Henry. "That's the football I lost for Scooter McCarthy."

The man handed it to Henry. "I'm sorry I couldn't stop when the ball landed in my car. I had to take my wife to the hospital in a hurry. I would have returned it sooner, but I couldn't leave the kids."

"That's O.K.," said Henry. "Gee, thanks for bringing it back."

When the man had gone, Henry showed the football to his father. "See, Dad," he said, "this is the kind of football I'm going to buy with my night crawler money." Then he tucked the football under his arm as if he were running ninety yards for a touchdown and sprinted down the street to Scooter's house.