

CLASSICS TO GO
**JERRY TODD AND
THE TALKING FROG**



LEO EDWARDS

Jerry Todd

And the Talking Frog

Leo Edwards

JERRY TODD SAYS:

When I started writing this book, I thought of calling it: JERRY TODD AND THE PUZZLE ROOM MYSTERY. But Scoop told me that wasn't the proper title. "There is more in the book about the talking frog than there is about the puzzle room," he pointed out. "So why don't you call it JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG?"

So it was our leader, you see, who gave this book its title.

Like my other books, this is a fun-mystery-adventure story. The "fun" part is where we peddle the spy's beauty soap. Bubbles of Beauty, let me tell you, was very wonderful soap! At first we couldn't believe that it would do all of the amazing things that Mr. Posselwait claimed for it. But that is where we got a surprise!

There is a ghost in this story. B-r-r-r-r! At midnight it comes to the old haunted house, walking on the porches. Creepy, I'll tell the world. We kept the doors locked. For we were all alone in the brick house, Scoop and I and Peg and our new chum, Tom Ricks. It was to help our new chum that we braved the perils of the haunted house. You see, a puzzle maker had met with a strange death in the brick house, and that is what made it haunted.

"Ten and ten." That was the Bible's secret. What was "ten and ten"? Why did the ghost come nightly to the inventor's home? We found out, but it took us many exciting days to solve the mystery.

Yes, if you like a spooky, shivery, mysterious story, you surely will enjoy this book, my fifth one.

Here are the titles of my five books in their order:

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY

JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT

JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE

JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN

JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG

My sixth book will be JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG. This dodo egg, taken from King Tut's tomb, was more than three thousand years old. The Tutter newspaper called it the "million-dollar egg." Could it be rejuvenated? One man said so. The story of what happened when the egg was "rejuvenated" makes mighty good reading for a boy who likes a book packed full of chuckles and mysterious tangles.

our friend,
JERRY TODD.

OUR CHATTER-BOX

When I started writing books for boys (this is Leo Edwards speaking) I was practically unknown in the story-writing world. Never having heard of me, boys didn't know whether to buy my books or not. The titles, featuring Whispering Mummies and Purring Eggs, seemed kind of silly to a lot of young readers. But to-day hundreds of thousands of boys look forward to my new titles. If the books are slow in coming, a goodly portion of these hundreds of thousands of "fans" write and tell me about it. Also they jack me up if things aren't so-so. And, happier for me, they pat me on the back (verbally) if they like my stuff. I never tire of reading these bully good letters. And I was tickled pink when my publisher told me that I could incorporate a few of these letters in a "Chatter-Box." An experiment, the first "Chatter-Box" appeared in my sixteenth book. And so popular has this department become (it is made up almost wholly of letters, poems and miscellaneous contributions from boys and girls who read my books) that now I have been given the pleasing job of supplying my earlier books with brief "Chatter-Boxes." Writers of accepted poems, built around the characters in my books, or featuring some boyish interest, win prizes. And, of course, it is pleasing to other boys to see their letters in print. If you have written me a letter I may have used it in another "Chatter-Box." Or if you are contemplating a letter, why not write it to-day? It may be just the letter I need for one of the big "Chatter-Boxes" in my new books. It may even give me an idea, for my books, which will bring millions of added laughs into the world

LETTERS

"I have read every book you published, including the Trigger Berg books," writes Philip Horsting of Brooklyn, N. Y., "and I like them all. Trigger Berg can get into mischief faster than any boy I know. I think that the 'Chatter-Box' is a very good idea and while I'm writing this letter my aunt is reading the latest 'Chatter-Box' right now."

"I just read *Andy Blake's Secret Service*," writes Bill Hopwood of Primos, Pa., "and there's something in the book I don't understand. When Eddie Garry's uncle, with whom Eddie was living, told Andy that the latter's father was his younger brother, and Eddie's father's twin, how come that Andy's name is Blake and Eddie's name is Garry? Did Andy's father go under a false name?"

Yes, Bill, when Andy's father ran away from home, determined never to have anything more to do with his own people, he dropped the name of Garry and took the name of Blake. By rights, we should call Andy by his true name. But he prefers to keep the name he has known all his life. So we'll continue to speak of him as Andy Blake instead of Andy Garry.

"Not long ago," writes Dub Moritin of Dallas, Texas, "I was reading one of your Jerry Todd books and I saw where you had a Freckled Goldfish club. Gee, Mr. Edwards, I sure would like to join! The boys call me Dub. If you want to call me that, it's OK with me. I have six Todd and two Ott books. I save my weekly spending money and if I haven't enough Mom gives me the rest. For both Mom and Dad are crazy about your books. I am sending the two two-cent stamps to join your club."

"I am trying to get another boy besides myself to join the Freckled Goldfish club," writes Charles F. Spiro of Yonkers, N. Y. "I told him what an honor it was to be a Freckled

Goldfish. The kids living near me use the number thirteen for a danger cry just like Jerry and his gang.”

“Some day I’m going to break a rotten egg to see how it smells,” writes John F. McIntyre of Natchez, Miss. “Then I can prove it to my brother who is a dummy and said Jerry and Poppy wasn’t any account. Gr-r-r-r! I feel like biting his head off. If I did it wouldn’t be anything gone. Is it very easy to write a book? If so, would you please tell me how to do it? I am joining the Freckled Goldfish lodge to get my name in the big book.”

Well, John, I don’t know what you’re going to prove by breaking a rotten egg. But if you’ll gain anything by it, in proving to your older brother that Jerry and Poppy are worth-while pals, go ahead. I assure you that it would be very hard indeed for a small boy to write a book. We have to live a good many years, and [x]learn a lot about the world and its ways, before we can write interesting books. But if you want to get some pointers on story writing see my first “Chatter-Box” in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem*.

“The boys around my neighborhood were always talking about how spooky and funny your books were,” writes Carl A. Swanson of Minneapolis, Minn. “I never had read one of your books. But I decided to read one to see if it was as good as my friends had said. Boy, was it ever hot! It was *Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish*. I just got *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem* Saturday and I laughed so much Sunday reading it that both my grandmother and my dad started reading it.”

“I would like to join the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish,” writes Mortimer A. Stiller of New York, N. Y. “Jerry, Poppy and Trigger are my best pals. I agree with whoever said: ‘He that loveth a book will never want a

faithful friend,' only, of course, I find more than one friend in your books. Your latest idea of having a 'Chatter-Box' in each book is great. As I live in the city the only thing that I can do that you mention is to start a local Goldfish chapter, so please send me the necessary booklets."

"I have just finished reading *Andy Blake's Comet Coaster*," writes Jack Pattee of Chicago, Ill. "I liked the book very much but I like Jerry Todd better. Before I read *Andy Blake* I read *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps*. That was a swell book, only it didn't have a mystery. I have a friend, Jerry O'Neil, and he told me that he wrote to you and you are going to put his letter in the 'Chatter-Box' in *Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief*. I am a Freckled Goldfish and I read most of your books. I have a small black dog named Gertie who likes gumdrops, candy and chocolate doughnuts."

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

Out of my book, *Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish*, has grown our great Freckled Goldfish lodge, membership in which is open to all boys and girls who are interested in my books. Thousands of readers have joined the club. We have peachy membership cards (designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of my books) and fancy buttons. Also for members who want to organize branch clubs (hundreds are in successful operation, providing boys and girls with added fun) we have rituals.

To join (and to be a loyal Jerry Todd fan I think you ought to join), please observe these simple rules:

- (1) Write (or print) your name plainly.
- (2) Supply your complete printed address.

(3) Give your age.

(4) Enclose two two-cent postage stamps (for card and button).

(5) Address your letter to

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

LOCAL CHAPTERS

To help young organizers we have produced a printed ritual, which any member who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given word for word. Naturally, these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any member's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a chapter. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps). Address all orders to Leo Edwards, Cambridge, Wisconsin.

CLUB NEWS

"We have eleven members in our Pool," writes Gold Fin Samuel Ferguson of Philadelphia, Pa., "and at almost every

meeting we have visitors. I am enclosing a cipher code that we use in writing secret messages.”

Also it is Sam’s suggestion that we have a booklet printed giving an official Freckled Goldfish secret code, then members can write to one another in secret. How many members of our club would like to possess such a booklet? Let me know as soon as possible. And if there is sufficient demand, we may produce one. But you fellows have got to show me that there *is* a demand for the booklet before we go ahead with it. Another boy suggested that we have such a booklet and then print part of “Our Chatter-Box” in code. How does that strike you?

“We now have a Freckled Goldfish song, yells, a jazz band composed of tin cans and our Pool is decorated swell,” writes Gold Fin Francis Smith of Chambersburg, Pa. “Also we have two goldfish, named Leo and Freckles.”

I suppose I ought to send my namesake a present. What do you want, Francis, a box of goldfish food or an angleworm?

Nancy Hannemann of Chicago, Ill., is, I think, our youngest member. Giving her age as two, she confesses that the letter of application was written by her brother, also a Freckled Goldfish.

“I have been a Freckled Goldfish for several months,” writes C. B. Andrews of Oklahoma City, Okla. “It is a secret and mysterious order, but nothing secret and mysterious has been done yet. So I suggest that you write to each member, telling him to join with other local members and do mysterious good turns. For example, suppose some poor old lady in your neighborhood has a birthday. Early in the morning before she is up and around, leave a couple of goldfish at her door with a card reading: ‘With the

compliments of the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish.' That would be pleasantly mysterious."

Which, *I* think, is a corking good suggestion.

The three happiest boys in Yankton, South Dakota, are Dan Schenk (G. F.), Joe Dowling (S. F.) and Bob Seeley (F. F.). Not only have these boys organized a successful Pool, but they have swell rotographed letterheads. The reproduction of the "fish" is almost as good as Salg could do himself. Dan advises that the Pool has its meetings in an attic. Boy, I bet they have fun!

"Our Freckled Goldfish club," writes Ernest Smith of Alhambra, Calif., "has an orchestra consisting of a violin, saxophone, a jazzophone and a harmonica. All of the boys playing in the orchestra are Freckled Goldfish."

LEO'S PICTURE

And had you heard, gang, about the marvelous piece of "art" that you can get by sending ten cents in stamps to Grosset & Dunlap, 1140 Broadway, New York, N. Y. Yah, the "art" referred to is Leo's picture—and what a wonderful bargain! Only ten cents for such a marvelous picture!

CHAPTER I

THE BOY IN THE TREE

I got into the bushes quick as scat. Biting hard on my breath, sort of. For right there in front of our eyes was a regular old gee-whacker of a dinosaur. Bigger than the town water tower and the Methodist Church steeple put together. I tell you it was risky for us.

My chum got ready with his trusty bow and arrow.

“Do you think you can hit him in the heart?” I said, excited-like, squinting ahead to where the dinosaur was dragging his slimy body out of the pond.

Scoop Ellery’s face was rigid.

“Got to,” he said, steady-like. “If I miss, he’ll turn on us and kill us both.”

“It’s a lucky thing for Red and Peg,” I said, thinking of my other chums, “that they aren’t in it.”

“They’ll miss us,” said Scoop, “if we get killed.”

My thoughts took a crazy jump.

“Why not aim for a tickly spot in his ribs,” I snickered, pointing to the dinosaur, “and let him giggle himself to death?”

“Sh-h-h-h!” cautioned Scoop, putting out a hand. “He’s listening. The wind is blowing that way. He smells us.”

“What of it?” I grinned. “We don’t smell bad.”

“Keep still,” scowled Scoop, “while I aim.”

Bing! went the bow cord. My eyes followed the arrow. It struck. The old dinosaur angrily tooted his horn. But he didn’t drop dead. For his hide was sixteen inches thick.

We were lost! Scoop said so. And without arguing the matter I went lickety-cut for a tree.

“Come on!” I yipped over my shoulder. “He’s after us.”

Up the tree I went monkey-fashion. And when I straddled a limb and squinted down, there was the old dinosaur chewing my footprints off the tree trunk.

“How much longer have we got to live?” I panted.

“Two minutes and fifteen seconds,” informed Scoop, who, of course, had followed me into the tree.

“I can’t die that quick,” I told him. “For I’m all out of wind.”

But he was squinting down at the dinosaur and seemed not to hear me.

“He’s got his trunk coiled around the tree,” he said. “Feel it shake! He’s pulling it up by the roots.”

“Wait a minute; wait a minute,” I said, motioning the other down. “You’re getting things muddled. A dinosaur hasn’t got a trunk. This must be a hairy elephant.”

“Climb higher,” cried Scoop. “He’s reaching for us.”

So up we went.

All of a sudden I heard some one go, "Hem-m-m!" And what do you know if there wasn't another boy in the top of the tree! A stranger. About our age.

"You had me guessing," he said, grinning good-natured-like. "I thought at first you were crazy."

Staring, I finally managed to get my tongue unhooked.

"Where'd you come from?" I bit off, letting my face go dark. For he didn't belong in our dinosaur game. And I wanted him to know it.

Instead of answering, he inquired pleasantly:

"Was that a cow that chased you up the tree?"

"Huh!" I grunted, letting myself go stiff. "Do you suppose we'd run from a cow?"

"It made a noise like a cow," he grinned, "when you shot it with your toy bow and arrow."

"It's a dinosaur," I scowled.

His grin spread wider.

"And it was a dodo bird," he said, "that picked me up by the seat of the pants and dropped me in the top of this tree."

Well, that kind of took my breath. And I glared at him for a moment or two. Then his steady, friendly grin put me to laughing.

"I saw you coming through the woods," he said after a moment. "I couldn't quite figure out what you were doing.

So I climbed up here to watch."

Something poked a green snout from the stranger's right-hand coat pocket.

"Are you after frogs, too?" he inquired, following my eyes.

"Frogs?" I repeated, staring harder at the squirming pocket.

He pointed down to the pond in the ravine.

"It's full of frogs," he told me. "Big fellows. See?" and producing an old lunker of a bullfrog he held it up.

"Hello!" he said.

"K-k-kroak!" responded the frog.

The boy laughed.

"Perfect," he said, patting the frog on the head. "Now say it in Chinese. *Hello!*"

"K-k-kroak!"

The grinning eyes looked into mine.

"Would you like to hear him say it in Yiddish?"

"I'd like to make a meal of his fried legs," I returned.

"You can have him," the other offered. Then, without another word, he let himself down limb by limb, scooting in the direction of town, a mile away.

Scoop gave a queer throat sound and came out of his thoughts.

“That’s the new kid,” he said.

“You talk like you know him.”

“I know of him. He belongs to the new family in the old Matson house. Ricks is the name on the mailbox. There’s a man and a woman and this boy in the family—only the woman is a Miss Polly Ricks, and not the boy’s mother. The mother is dead, I guess.”

Then my chum told me how his pa was the administrator of the Matson estate; and, of course, it was through Mr. Ellery, a Tutter storekeeper, that the new family had rented the long-vacant house where Mr. Matson, a queer old man, had been murdered for his money. It is a lonely brick house on the edge of town. The front yard is full of pine trees, just like a cemetery. And when the wind blows the pines whisper strange stories about the murder and about the vanished body.

It is no place for people to live. Everybody in Tutter says so. And I wondered why this new Ricks family had picked out such a lonely, spooky home.

It was a queer move for them to make.

We talked it over and exchanged opinions on the way into town. And when we came to the grove of pine trees, Scoop took me through a hole in the hedge and pointed out a brand new lock on the barn door.

A queer, droning sound weighted the air. I called the other’s attention to it.

“Machinery,” said Scoop, nodding toward the east wing of the big barn. “Not farm machinery,” he explained, “but

lathes for turning steel, and drillers. Pa helped unload the truck."

"Mr. Ricks must be a machinist," I said.

"I have a hunch," said Scoop, "that he's an inventor."

CHAPTER II

THE TALKING FROG

The following Monday morning the new boy started to school, entering our grade. And in the days that immediately followed I came to like Tom Ricks a lot. For he was the right sort. And soon we were visiting back and forth, playing in my yard one night and in his the next.

Scoop, of course, shared in our games, as did Red Meyers and Peg Shaw, my other chums. For I never would throw down an old friend for a new one. And it was during one of our trips to the old Matson place that we learned about the talking frog.

For Mr. Ricks, an inventor as Scoop had surmised, was working on a very wonderful radio toy. Tom called it an electro-mechanical frog.

We had promised our new chum that we wouldn't breathe a word about the talking frog to any one else. For a Chicago radio company had spies searching for Mr. Ricks. These people knew that the inventor was working on a radio toy, and it was their evil intention to steal the invention, the same as they had stolen a simplified radio transmitter that Mr. Ricks had designed and built in his little Chicago workshop. It was to save the new invention from being stolen from him that he was now hiding in our inland town, where he could work undisturbed.

"A Milwaukee company is interested in Pa's invention," Tom told us, "and if he can make the frog say, 'Hello!' or make it repeat any other single word, they'll pay him twenty-five thousand dollars for the idea and develop it in their laboratories."

Grinning, he added:

"So you can see what I had in my mind that day in the tree. I frequently get frogs for Pa, to guide him in tuning the tone bars. For the toy, of course, must sound like a real frog or it won't be a complete success."

"And you say the mechanical frog actually talks?" said Scoop, who had been eagerly taking in each word.

"Sometimes it does," said Tom. "But you can't depend on it. You see it isn't perfected." There was a short pause. "I tell you what: Come out to-night after supper and I'll try and coax Pa to let you see it. I'll explain to him that he can trust you to keep his secret."

"Hot dog!" cried Peg Shaw, thinking of the fun we were going to have listening to the talking frog.

This was on Friday. And directly after supper Scoop and I and Peg headed for Tom's house. Red couldn't go. He had queer spots all over his back. Not knowing whether it was scarlet fever or mosquito bites, his mother was keeping him in the house until the doctor had seen him.

"You fellows are lucky," he told us, when we called for him.

"*You* will be lucky," his mother told him sharply, "if you escape an attack of scarlet fever. For there's dozens of cases over in Ashton. And you were there last week."

“Aw!... I haven’t got a fever. Please let me go, Ma.”

“You’ll go to bed,” his mother threatened, “if you don’t keep still.”

We had met Aunt Polly in the times that we had been at Tom’s house, but never had we seen Mr. Ricks until tonight. He was considerably taller than his sister, and older, with stooped shoulders and faded blue eyes that looked meekly at one over the top of small, steel-rimmed spectacles.

Tom introduced us. But he had to speak to his father several times and shake him by the shoulder to make the old gentleman put aside his book. It was a book on inventions, I noticed.

“Oh, yes; yes, indeed,” said Mr. Ricks, vague-like, giving us a limp handclasp without actually seeing us. “Very glad to meet you. Very glad, of course. Um.... Now whar did I leave off?” and plunk! went his nose into the big book.

Later we came to know how very absent-minded he was, and how queer in a lot of his actions; but I am going to tell you about it here, before I go deeper into my story, else you might not fully understand what follows.

For instance, he never seemed able to quit thinking about his inventions. Even while eating his meals an idea would come to him, and there he would sit with his fork halfway to his mouth, his eyes making invisible drawings of things in the air. And you would be talking with him about the weather, or about fishing, and right in the middle of a sentence he would mumble: “Now if I file the end sharp, I bet it’ll work easier an’ won’t bind,” or, “Um.... I bet I’ve got one tooth too many in that thar gear.”