

Bobby went red. How stupid of him to have let out that he had told his mother! 'Well,' he said at last, rather awkwardly, 'Mother likes to know everything, you see. She's only got me, and . . .'

'Don't make silly excuses,' said Podge. 'You know very well you don't tell your mother everything - and you only blabbed about us because you thought she'd like to know that you, her precious boy, were among the six Put-Em-Rights!' This was absolutely true, but Bobby was not going to admit it.

'You're disgusting,' said Sally. 'You can't be trusted! I shan't wear my button any more if you go round telling the whole village what P E R means.'

'And I don't think your mother ought to have listened to the talk between the grandmother and Mrs Pepper,' said Amanda.

'Don't let's quarrel,' said Yolande, anxiously.

'I'm sorry I told my mother about us,' said Bobby, afraid that the others would turn him out of the band. 'I didn't think. I haven't told anyone else at all. Honestly, I haven't.'

'We can't possibly help anyone if they know we're setting about putting things right,' said Sally. 'It might put their backs up against us. I think, Bobby, you ought to take on this job yourself. The Peppers wouldn't like any of us

knowing about Alf being in prison, and you can say that your mother told you.'

Bobby didn't in the least want the job. But he thought he had better say he would take it on and try to get back into the others' good books. So he nodded.

'All right. I'll have a shot at it. I could take some soup or something to the old lady. And I could dig a bit of Mrs Pepper's garden for her. Since her husband has been away, I expect there has been no one to do it.'

'I dare say my mother would take Mrs Pepper on for a few jobs in the house,' said Podge. 'That would help a bit in the money line. And those twins could easily do a bit of fruit-picking now. My father wants the plums picked.'

'I'll tell them,' said Bobby, seeing himself suddenly as a perfect saint, bringing light and help to a sad household. 'I'll get my mother to make the soup or something today.'

Amanda soon disappeared, rushing off to help Francie with the house. Yolande wished she could go with her, but Amanda seemed to think it was her job and nobody else's. She and Francie had entirely finished the sitting-room and kitchen now, and were starting on the bedrooms. Francie knew how to work, in spite of her laziness, and had taught Amanda all kinds of things about cleaning a house thoroughly.