THE POLICE STATION

There was a blue light outside the police station and a stout sergeant on duty at the desk. Roger looked at everything: the poster about Colorado beetles, the pictures of wanted criminals, the notices about bicycle safety. Since he couldn't read, he liked the picture of the Colorado beetle best. It looked very tasty.

'Well?' said the duty sergeant.

'We found this little boy last night,' said Bob. 'He don't know where he comes from. We thought we ought to bring him here.'

'I *do* know where I come from,' said Roger. 'I come from down under the market. There's a broken gutter behind the cheese stall and we had a nest in there. I was a rat,' he added, to make it clearer for the policeman.

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The sergeant gave him a long cold look.

'Did you know there's such an offence as wasting police time?' he said.

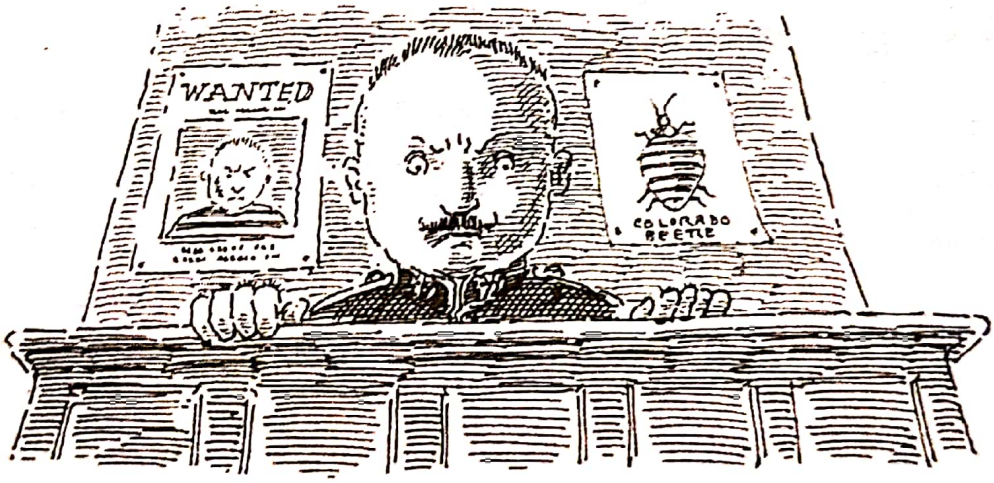
'No, he's confused,' said Bob, anxious to explain. 'That's all it is. He probably had a bang on the head. He'd forgotten his name and all.'

'I knows it now though,' said the boy. 'I'm Roger.'

'Surname?' asked the sergeant.

'My surname . . .' said Roger, then worked it out. 'My surname is Sur Roger,' he declared, nodding firmly. 'That's who I am all right.'

'And we been to the City Hall,' Joan said, 'but they couldn't help, and—'



'And you're the only other place we could think of,' said Bob.

'If he's had a bang on the head,' said the sergeant, tapping a pencil on the desk, 'he ought be took to the hospital.'

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'Ah, we didn't think of that,' said Joan.

Roger was watching the sergeant's hand.

'That's a nice patient,' he said to him.

'Eh?'

'That patient you got. You been chewing the flat end. I like chewing the pointy end first.'

The sergeant gaped, and then recovered his wits.

'Did you notice that?' he said. 'When I said *hospital*, he said *patient*. That proves it. He's had a bang on the head. Either that or he's an escaped lunatic. But in any case he ought to be at the hospital. We can't take him here, we haven't got the facilities for lunatics, and in any case he ain't committed an offence. Yet,' he added, glaring down at Roger.

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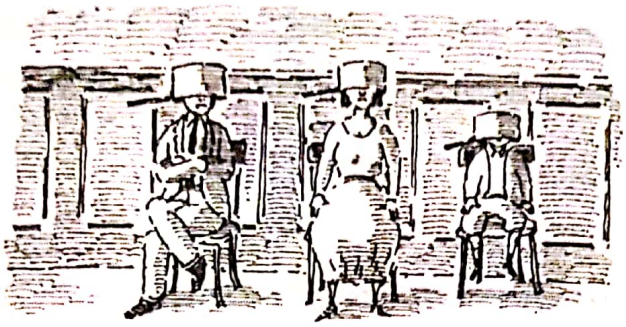

THE HOSPITAL

'No,' said the receptionist, 'he's not one of ours.'

They were very busy. People with broken legs or saucepans stuck on their heads sat waiting to be dealt with; doctors in white coats rushed about listening to heartbeats or taking temperatures; nurses emptied bedpans or bandaged cuts and grazes. It was the best place Roger had been in yet.

'But he might have had a bang on the head!' said Joan. 'Poor little boy, he thinks he was a rat!'

'H'mm,' said the receptionist, and wrote *rodent delusion* on a pink slip of paper.

'You got a lot of patients,' said Roger, looking with great interest at her desk.

'Got to be patient here,' she said, and passed the slip to the nearest doctor.

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That puzzled Roger, but he soon forgot it. The doctor was an important-looking man with a smart black beard, and he said, 'Follow me.' So Bob and Joan took Roger into the consulting room, and watched anxiously as the doctor examined him.

First he felt all round Roger's head.

'No cranial contusions,' said the doctor.

Roger was fascinated by the rubber tube the doctor had round his neck, and when the doctor put the two hooks on the end into his own ears and placed the other end against Roger's chest, he could hardly hold himself back. His mouth was watering so much that he dribbled.

'Good appetite?' the doctor asked.

'Very good indeed,' said Joan. 'In fact—'

'Good,' said the doctor, twiddling Roger's knees.

Joan thought she'd better keep quiet.

The doctor examined Roger all over, and seemed to find only a healthy little boy.

'So what's this rodent delusion?' he said finally.

'Well, he says he was a rat,' said Bob. 'He's convinced of it.'

'A rat, were you?' said the doctor. 'When did you stop being a rat, then?'

'When I turned into a boy,' said Roger.

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'Yes, I see. When was that?'

Roger twisted his lips. He looked at Bob for guidance, but the old man couldn't help, and neither could Joan.

'Dunno,' the boy said finally.

'And why did you stop being a rat?'

'Dunno.'

'Do you know what you are now?'

'I'm a boy.'

'That's right. And you're going to stay a boy, d'you hear?'

'Yes,' said Roger, nodding seriously.

'No more of this nonsense.'

'No.'

'Mustn't worry your . . .' the doctor hesitated. He'd been about to say 'your parents' but he looked at Bob and Joan again and said, 'Granny and Grandpa.'

Joan sat up a bit sharply. Roger looked puzzled. Bob took Joan's hand.

'He's no worry to us,' he said. 'As long as he's all right.'

'He's perfectly all right,' the doctor said. 'A normal healthy little boy.'

'But what should we do with him?' Joan said.

'Send him to school, of course,' said the doctor. 'Now I'm busy. Run along. Good day to you.'

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TRUTH

The Daily Scourge

PALACE MAKE-OVER!

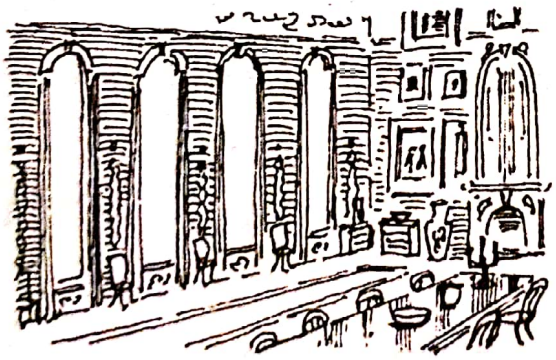
To celebrate the royal marriage, the palace is to be spectacularly redecorated.

OUT go fuddy-duddy antiques and dusty old pictures.

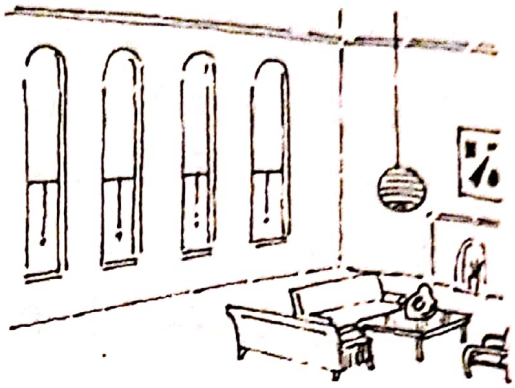
IN come designer furniture and a new, bright, up-to-the-minute look.

The redecoration is being carried out by attractive blonde, Sophie Trend-Butcher, 23, the brilliant young designer. The wallpaper is being hand-printed in gold.

While the work is being carried on in the palace, the royal family is staying at the Hotel Splendifico.



The old...



...and the cool

THE SCOURGE SAYS:

Yes, the redecoration is costing a fortune.

Yes, the money is coming from you and me.

BUT THIS IS OUR ROYAL FAMILY!

For Heaven's sake, where is our national pride?

We have the finest designers and craftspeople in the world – and here is a chance to show what they can really do.

And don't let's forget Prince Richard and his radiant bride-to-be.

Are they supposed to live in a museum?

Let's get behind the royal family in their attempt to bring the palace up to date!

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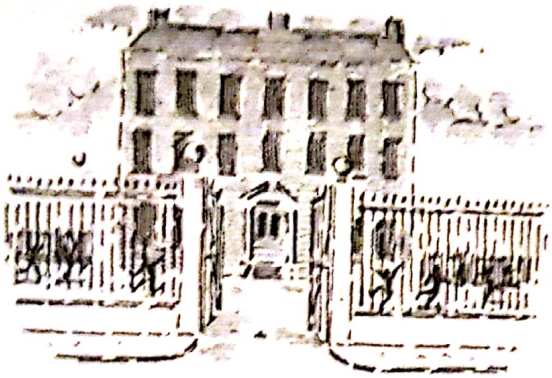

SCHOOL

Since they hadn't had any luck, Bob and Joan took the little boy back home with them. He was perfectly content to trot along holding their hands, looking this way and that, for all the world as though he did belong to them.

'Granny and Grandpa,' said Joan scornfully.

'Well, that's not so bad,' said Bob. 'He might have thought *we* were rats, and all.'

'But what are we going to do with him?'

'Blowed if I know. But I don't want to spend another day trailing about and getting nowhere. I shall have to work late tonight, and I'm blooming tired.'

Roger didn't eat his bedclothes that night, though Joan thought the wooden bed-posts looked a little gnawed, and there was a damp splinter or two under his pillow the next morning.

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'There's a good boy,' she said, cooking him some porridge on the range. 'You eat this and I'll take you down the school.'

Bob stayed at home to catch up with his cobbling. 'Listen carefully and do what the teacher says,' the old man told him. 'That's the way to learn.'

The school was a big building smelling of children. Roger liked it at once. There were boys and girls running about outside and throwing balls and fighting each other and shouting, and he thought this would be a fine place to spend a day.

'But you're not in fact his, er, any relation at all?' said the Head doubtfully to Joan as she stood holding Roger's hand in front of his desk.

'No. But we're looking after him for the time being, and the doctor said we had to bring him to school,' she said.

'I see,' said the Head. 'Well, Roger, how old are you?'

'Three weeks,' said Roger.

'Don't be silly now. That's not a good way to start. If you were only three weeks old you'd still be a baby. How old are you? Answer me properly this time.'

Roger shifted uneasily and looked up at Joan.

'He's not sure,' she said. 'I think he's lost his mem-

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ory, poor lamb. He wouldn't know a thing like that.'

'He looks about nine,' said the Head. 'He can go in Mrs Cribbins's class. She won't stand any nonsense.'

A bell rang loudly and all the children stopped running and shouting and fighting and came inside. Roger was disappointed that the fun seemed to have stopped, but he sat where the teacher told him to, next to a boy with a runny nose.

'Now get out your pencils,' said Mrs Cribbins, 'and we'll have some arithmetic.'

Roger hadn't got a pencil, of course, or he'd have eaten it already. So he just watched as the other children took out theirs, and he knew he'd learned another word: *arithmetic* meant *snack*.

But to his absolute amazement the other children put the tasty ends of their pencils onto pieces of paper and drew lines with them. Roger had no idea you could do that, and he was so surprised and delighted that he laughed out loud.

'What's the joke?' snapped Mrs Cribbins. 'What's so funny? Eh?'

'They're making lines with their patients!' Roger said, eager to share his discovery.

'You're playing a dangerous game with *my* patience,' said Mrs Cribbins. 'Haven't you got a pencil?'

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'No,' said Roger.

Mrs Cribbins couldn't believe that any pupil would come to school so badly prepared, and thought he was being cheeky.

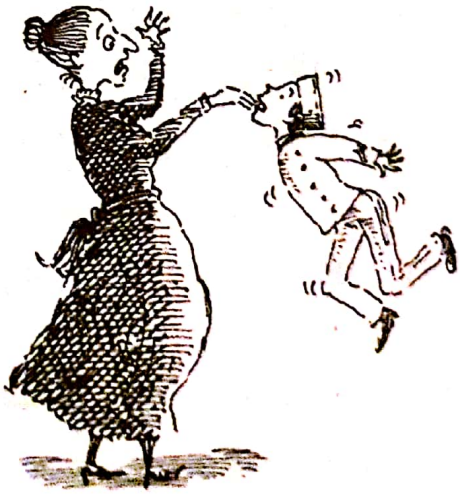
'Go and stand in the corner,' she snapped.

Roger was happy to do that. He could smile at all the other children. But she made him face the wall, and that wasn't so interesting. And then the boy with the runny nose found a rubber band in his pocket and flicked it hard at Roger's neck.

Mrs Cribbins's back was turned, so naturally when Roger shouted and jumped and rubbed his neck she thought he was being naughty.

'I'm warning you,' she said, 'one more piece of nonsense and you're going to the Head.'

All the other children were enjoying it no end, and as soon as she turned away, someone else flicked another rubber band. Roger shouted again, and spun round to find Mrs Cribbins making for him with her hand raised.



Whether she would have smacked him or not no-one knew, because she didn't get any closer. Roger, seeing a threat, leapt up to bite her hand.

He got a good mouthful of it and shook hard, and Mrs

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Cribbins shrieked and whacked him with her other hand, and the two of them struggled back and forth while the other children gasped with delight. Of course, the more she struggled, the more frightened Roger became and the tighter he bit, until at last she tugged her hand away. Roger, wild-eyed, was trembling and panting with his back to the wall, and no-one was laughing any more.

'Right,' said Mrs Cribbins, 'that's it for you, my lad.'

The door opened. There was the Head.

'What is all this noise?' he demanded.

'Look!' said Mrs Cribbins, holding up her hand. 'Look what this child has done! He's drawn blood! I'm bleeding!'

Actually she had to squeeze quite hard to force a drop of blood out, but it was real blood, sure enough.

The room was full of wide-open eyes, staring at the Head, at Mrs Cribbins, at Roger.

The Head seemed to get bigger and bigger, and Roger to get smaller and smaller.

'Come with me,' said the Head in a dangerous voice.

All the children knew that voice. It was the voice that meant he was going to use the cane. He didn't use it very often but the occasions when he did were terrifying. There would be a deep silence over the

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whole school, and a sick feeling in everyone's stomach, and no-one would dare to look at the victim before he went into the dreadful place where he'd be beaten, or to speak to him after he came out, sniffling and limping. And everyone would be quiet and unhappy for a day or so afterwards.

And now Roger was going to be caned, and everyone knew it but him.

He thought the Head was taking him away from the cruel woman who'd frightened him, so he smiled up at him and said, 'You can make lines on paper with them things. I thought they was called patients at first but they got other names too. I never knew you could make lines with 'em.'

All the children sat open-mouthed. How could this new boy dare to speak to the Head in this familiar friendly way? It was the cheekiest thing they'd ever heard. Some of them felt shocked, and some felt gleeful at the thought of the extra punishment he'd surely get, and some felt admiration.

'This way,' said the Head.

Roger followed.

Silence fell over the classroom. Mrs Cribbins ran some water over her hand and dried it on her handkerchief and took a plaster from her handbag and carefully placed it over the bite, and the children watched her solemnly without making a sound.

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Then, just as she was opening her mouth to tell them to turn back to their work, there came a wild scream from down the corridor.

No-one had ever heard a scream like that. When a boy went to be caned, he tried as hard as he could to make no noise at all, and some of the toughest ones managed to stop themselves even from whimpering, and were greatly admired for it. But not even the most babyish victim would have screamed as long and as wildly as Roger was screaming. The sound seemed to drill into everyone's head and scrape round and round in their skulls. Some of them put their hands over their ears.

Those who didn't block off the sound soon heard other sounds too: the Head's voice raised in anger, furniture crashing, doors banging, footsteps running down the corridor – it was the most exciting arithmetic lesson they'd ever had.

'Look, he's running away!' shouted a girl, and pointed out at the schoolyard.

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Roger was racing for the gate, with the Head in red-faced pursuit. All the children crowded to the window to watch, ignoring Mrs Cribbins's efforts to make them sit down. They jumped and clapped and laughed with shocked delight as Roger fought and screamed and bit and kicked and finally tore himself free, leaving the Head flailing at the empty air behind him.

Then Roger scrambled up and over the gate in a second or so, and vanished round the corner.

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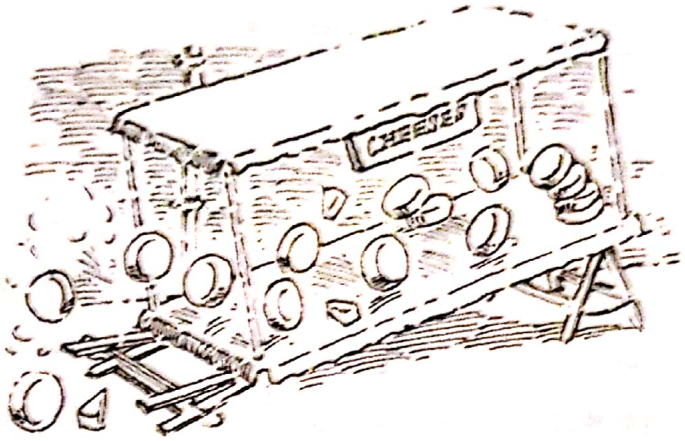

No Escape

Roger ran in terror through the streets and alleys till he came to the market-place, where he ran up and down between the stalls, looking this way and that, and gulping and shaking with sobs. His face was wet and his nose was running and he looked a thorough mess.

Finally he got down on all fours and crawled under the cheese stall and made for the drainpipe in the corner; but that was a bad mistake. He wasn't quite as small as he thought he was, and before he knew what was happening, he'd knocked away one

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of the trestles holding the stall up.

At once the whole top fell down. Cheeses rolled, slid, flopped and bounced in all directions. Somehow, every dog in the area suddenly learned that there was free cheese in the market-place, and within seconds a yapping, barking mob was making for the overturned stall. Roger was terrified of dogs, and when he saw them coming he screamed and cowered in the corner, where it was easy to catch him.

And five minutes later Roger was in the police station again.

'Who's that?' said the sergeant, as the constable came back to report his arrest. 'Little boy in a page's uniform? Let me look at him.'

Roger was crouching in the corner when the sergeant opened the cell door, and as soon as he saw daylight he tried to dart out, but the sergeant grabbed him.

'Ah, I thought it was you,' he said. 'Born trouble-maker, you are. As soon as I heard the words "market" and "cheese", I remembered you, just like that. Good thing I made a record of your address. See how your old auntie and uncle feel about coming down here to bail you out.'

When Bob arrived, he wasn't pleased at all.

'Well, Sergeant?' he said, across the counter.

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'What's the boy done? Last thing I knew, he was at school.'

'Ah,' said the sergeant triumphantly, 'well he ain't any more. And he's in real trouble, your lad. Mayhem and criminal damage. I shouldn't wonder if it amounted to riot. Bring him out, Constable.'

'Riot? How can one little boy have a riot all on his own?'

The constable came out with Roger firmly in his grip. As soon as the boy saw Bob, he smiled up with happy relief.

'Ah, I was worried,' he said. 'It was all because I started to worry. But I wouldn't have got worried if the Head hadn't hit me.'

'He hit you?' said Bob. 'Why?'

'I don't know. It's mysterious,' said Roger. 'She just called him a Head, but he wasn't only a head. I thought he was just a head, on a table maybe, or he might have had a little stand, and I wanted to see it work. But he had arms and legs and everything. And I didn't know what he was going to do. He made me bend over and I thought he was going to play leapfrog like I seen 'em in the playground, only suddenly whoosh! He hit my tail with a blooming stick! Ooh, that hurt awful. I wished he *was* a head with no arms and legs, then he wouldn't be able to hurt boys like that. So I ran away and I got in a

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muddle with the cheese. Then they caught me and put me in that room in there. Can we go now?'

'Sergeant, this ain't a desperate criminal,' said Bob. 'This is a little boy who don't know what's what. You ain't going to use the whole majesty of the law to punish a little boy for a bit of mischief, are you?'

'What about the damage to my stall?' demanded the cheesemonger, who had just arrived. 'And all my cheeses! Who's going to pay for them?'

Bob's heart sank. 'I suppose I'll have to pay for the damage,' he said. 'Make up the account and send it to me. I'm not a rich man, mind.'

'Sergeant,' said the constable, 'ain't this the boy who had some tale about being a rat?'

'Yes,' said Roger eagerly. 'I had a tail all right. It was a good 'un.'

'Be quiet,' said the sergeant sternly. 'Rats don't belong in decent society. They ought to be exterminated.'

Roger didn't know what exterminated meant, of course, but he didn't like the sound of it. He clung tight to Bob and said nothing.

They agreed that Bob would pay for the cheese, and that Roger would behave himself in future.

'And if I see you back here,' the sergeant said, 'you'll be in terrible trouble. Don't you forget it.'

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The Daily Scourge

SIX OF THE BEST

Six MPs are standing out against the proposal to ban the cane in schools.

'It made me the man I am!' claimed Sir Bernard Brute, MP. 'Children today are getting out of control. They must be beaten hard and often.'

Sir Bernard Brute, MP, demonstrating the strength of his convictions

Some teachers claim that the cane has no place in the caring and compassionate society they want to bring about.

'It is a relic of the Middle Ages,' said a teacher yesterday. 'We no longer need to rely on torture to encourage good behaviour.'

But other teachers disagree.

'There is a hard core of violent hooligans in our schools,' said Mr George Hackett, Head of St Lawrence's Primary School. 'If we take away the cane, we will leave teachers without the power to defend themselves.'

THE SCOURGE SAYS:

KEEP ON WHACKING!

These feeble so-called 'experts' who say that the cane is cruel are helping no-one.

A quick smack never did any child any harm.

And in today's schools there are some little brutes and bullies who could do with a taste of the cane to keep them in order.

Support the six of the best!

Vote in our readers' poll on *page 10.*

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