



CHAPTER 14

*In which is heard
a voice in the forest*

Jemmy could hear Prince Brat following in his tracks, step by step. He grimly pressed on.

Brambles, reaching out like cat's claws, tore at their fine garments. The forest trees rose all around them like prison bars.

Finally, Jemmy spun around. "Lay off! Go your own way!"

"This way suits me," said the prince.

"Well, don't follow me. I've no more idea than a gnat where I'm headin'."

"Silence," whispered the prince, with a turn of his head. "Hear that?"

They froze, the two of them.

A voice came wailing through the woods.

"Tunia! Pet-Pet-Petunia!"

And then a young woman appeared, barefoot and jangling with bracelets. She moved through the trees as quickly as a wood spirit.

"Pet-Pet-Petunia!"

She carried a coiled rope in one hand and held

outstretched in the other an amber chunk of comb honey.

"Come here, darlin'! Come to Betsy."

Suddenly, as if sensing a presence in the trees, she headed toward Jemmy and the prince.

"Petunia? You there, naughty rascal! Smell the honey? Come feast yourself, Pet!"

Jemmy didn't know what to make of this woman—girl, really. For as she drew closer, he reckoned she couldn't be more than fourteen or fifteen years old. He stepped out into full view, with the prince clinging to him like a shadow.

"Miss?"

She stopped short. "My eyes! Who are you?"

"Lost," said Jemmy. "Would you know which way to the river?"

"'Course I do. Ain't we headin' for the fair, me and Petunia? Have you seen him?"

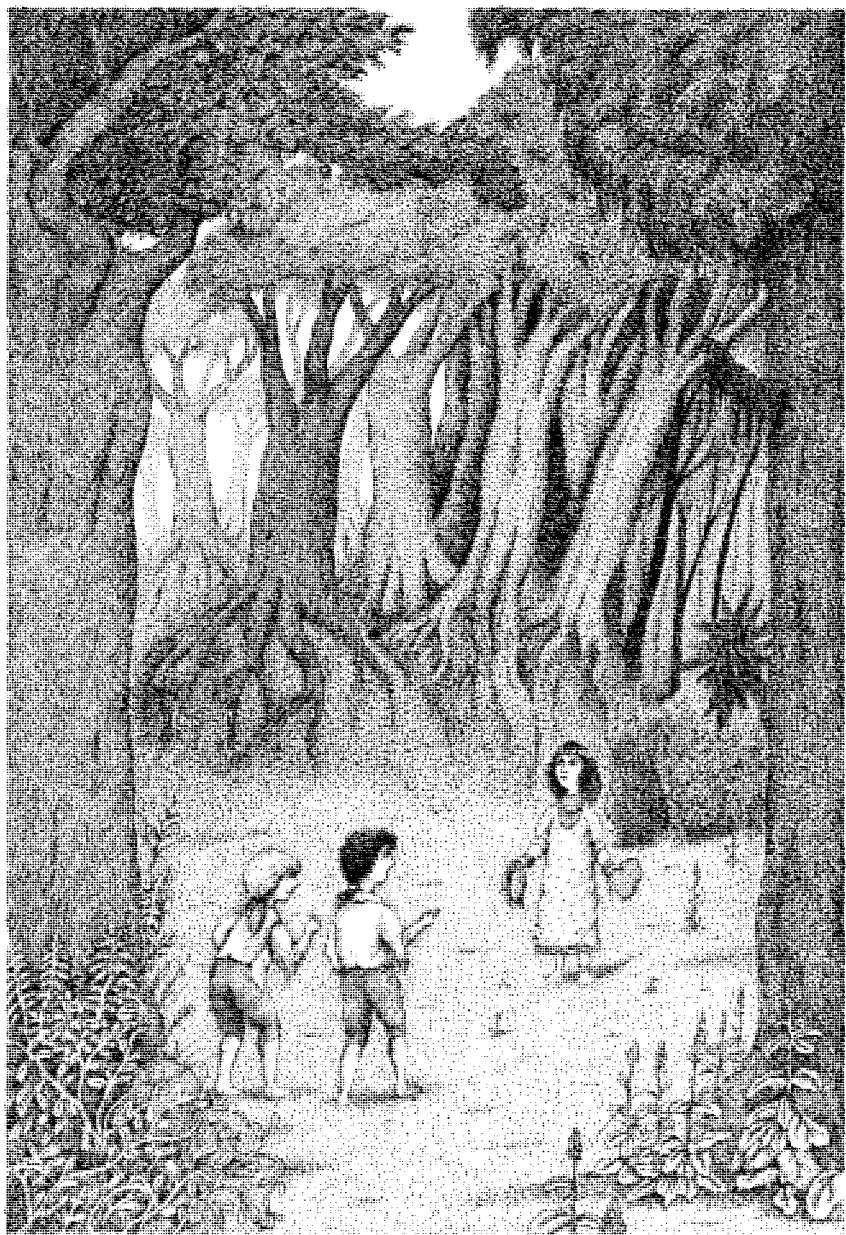
"Petunia?"

"Got loose, he did! My dancing bear. World famous!"

"Scared me out of my skin," Jemmy replied, and pointed. "Back there."

She turned on her heels and started off.

"Hey!" Jemmy shouted. "Where's the river!"



"Where it's always been. Due south!"

"Which way is south?"

Betsy paused to set her arm like a signpost.

"Straight on!"

"You certain?"

"Certain I'm certain. Didn't Pa always say I had a head like a compass, rest him in peace!"

And she was gone.

Their clothes were ripped to tatters by late morning when Jemmy and the prince caught sight of the sparkling river. And almost at once they dove back into cover.

Mounted on high-stepping horses, a pair of soldiers were advancing along the river road.

"They must be out searching for you," Jemmy whispered. "If they catch me with you, I'm done for!"

Prince Brat didn't seem to be listening. His eyes were fixed on the passing soldiers.

"Look here," Jemmy muttered impatiently. "I can't have you sticking to me like a barnacle. Ain't you had a snoutful o' running away? Go back with the soldiers!"

The prince shook his head. "Let them pass." And

then he added with the faintest of smiles, "This is the first time no one has had fits because I got my clothes grimy. The ladies keep me clean and starched as a pillowcase!"

"But you're a prince!"

"Is my face dirty as yours?"

"You don't belong knockin' about outside the walls!"

Prince Brat gazed off into the distance. "Did you have lots of friends when you lived on the streets?"

"Heaps."

"Heaps—of course."

"And hardly a one of 'em wouldn't fight me over a bone. Go back. Your pa must be having double fits o' worry."

The prince answered with a flash of resentment. "I might as well be stuffed and hung on the wall like a stag's head—for all he notices me."

"You remind him often enough, with all your pranks. How long are you going to let him sweat and stew?"

"I don't know," declared the prince. "Maybe I'll never go back. This is the best time I ever had!"

"Gaw," Jemmy murmured.



CHAPTER 15

Of the Hot-Potato Man and other matters

The soldiers had passed by.

Following the river, Jemmy ventured toward the city. Prince Brat strode along beside him.

"Soon as I can, I aim to give you the slip," Jemmy warned. "You'll be on your own."

The prince said nothing.

The tide was low and they traveled out of sight of the road, below a grassy embankment. In the distance, against billowing white clouds, stood a jack-straw jumble of ships' masts.

"You *can* fend for your own self, can't you?" Jemmy asked suddenly.

"Of course I can!" answered the prince in a stinging voice. "I don't need flocks of servants to fetch and carry for me."

"It's settled, then."

"Settled! Skip off anytime you like."

With the tide out, a wide mud flat lay exposed. From long habit, Jemmy kept his eyes peeled for treasure. Sandpipers scattered like mice before him.

He spotted a barrel stave and pounced upon it.

"Trash," remarked the prince. "What are you doing?"

"Mudlarking."

"What?"

"I've got to eat, don't I? If I can collect enough driftwood, I can sell it as firewood."

The prince shrugged and walked on ahead. Jemmy gazed after him for a moment. What did a prince know about living off the streets? His meals had always appeared on China plates and silver trays as if by magic. Left to himself, he'd starve.

"It's not my worry," Jemmy muttered.

"What?"

"You, that's what. If you get hungry enough, you'll scramble back to the castle."

The prince glared back at Jemmy, and then stooped down to retrieve the broken leg of a chair from the mud. "Is this worth anything?"

Jemmy nodded. Before long, the two of them had collected three more barrel staves and the back of the chair.

Then Jemmy found something even more valuable to him—a bent and battered birdcage. He could go into business with that! Straightened out, it would hold rats.

They rounded a bend and the crack of a whip sounded in the air like a firecracker. Jemmy crawled up the embankment for a look.

A weary old coach was mired in a mudhole on the road. The coachman, looking just as old and rickety, held the reins of his two-horse team and cracked his whip in the air again.

"Pull, gents! Be good lads! It's me own fault, not leadin' you around this bog. Me eyesight ain't what it was, is it, old tars?"

Jemmy watched for another moment as the horses tried to pull the coach free. The coach was enameled blue, with yellow lettering painted on the door panel:

Capt. Harry Nips

HOT-POTATO MAN

Jemmy crawled over the embankment. A ride to the city would suit him fine.

"Sir? Would you take on a passenger? Here, let me set these barrel staves under the wheels."

"Don't mind if you do," said Captain Nips. "I'm late for the fair as it is."

Jemmy busied himself, laying a firm track for the wheels. Prince Brat watched from the edge of the embankment.

"You must be carrying a heavy load," Jemmy cried out. "Try again, Cap'n!"

The old man cracked his whip, the horses strained—and the coach rolled up out of the bog.

"Hop in, lad."

Jemmy opened the door and saw that the coach was heavily loaded with raw potatoes and a huge iron kettle. Jemmy settled himself as best he could, and the coach lurched forward.

At last, Jemmy thought, you're free of the prince! But he couldn't resist a backward glance.

Prince Brat was standing in the center of the road. He'd dropped his load of driftwood and merely gazed at the receding coach.

Jemmy straightened, and folded his arms. The prince wasn't his lookout any longer. But he'd stood there like a wounded bird. Blast him! A prince hadn't a cockeyed notion how to fend for himself.

"Stop, Cap'n!" Jemmy shouted. "We left me friend behind."

The hot-potato man pulled up on the reins. Jemmy leaned out a window. With an arm he motioned Prince Brat to come along.

For an instant, Jemmy thought he saw a smile flash across the prince's face. But it had vanished by

the time the heir to the throne joined him inside the coach.

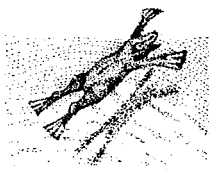
They rode in silence. Jemmy wondered what had possessed him to refer to Prince Brat as his friend. Friend? Cows would give beer first!

Then, minutes later, the coach rocked to a sudden halt.

"Stand and deliver!" came a shout.

A pair of highwaymen were training pistols on Captain Nips. Jemmy hardly had to peer out. The voice was familiar.

It was Hold-Your-Nose Billy. And Cutwater.



CHAPTER 16

*Wherein the prince
neither bawls nor bellows*

Jemmy felt a surge of the creeps.

Run for it? he wondered. Instead, he began to burrow out of sight under the loose heap of potatoes. "Remember," he whispered to the prince, "it's me they're after, not you. Tell 'em we split up. Tell 'em I swam the river."

Prince Brat merely looked at him.

The voices outside boomed.

"Stand and deliver, I said!"

"And I heard you," exclaimed Captain Nips. "Deliver what? Potatoes? Scurvy rascals! Help yourselves."

"Hang your potatoes!" roared Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "Deliver us some information and you can be off. We're after two runaway apprentices."

"Apprentice highwaymen?" Captain Nips scoffed.

"Our affair. Girl with a bear said she saw 'em streakin' for the river. You carryin' passengers?"

Jemmy pulled the iron kettle over his head.

A coach door was yanked open, and Jemmy could hear Cutwater's muffled cackle.

"Got one! The whipping boy, it is! Where's your master, eh?"

Jemmy held his breath. He had no reason to believe that the prince wouldn't betray him again.

There came a stiff pause.

And then Prince Brat said, "Swam the river."

By then Hold-Your-Nose Billy had ripped open the opposite coach door. Even through the kettle Jemmy imagined he could smell garlic.

"Swimmed the river! Faw! He'd need scales and fins."

Hardly a moment later, the kettle was grabbed off and Jemmy's head stood exposed.

"Here's the potato we're after!" Hold-Your-Nose Billy roared gleefully.

Jemmy and the prince were yanked out of the coach, and the big outlaw shouted to Captain Nips, "Throw me down your horsewhip, and drive on!"

Hanging on to each boy by the scruff of the neck, the highwaymen scrambled out of sight below the embankment.

Hold-Your-Nose Billy looked angry enough to throttle Jemmy on the spot.

"Tricked me, did you!" he bellowed. "Flummoxed me with your fancy quill-scratchin'!"

The game's up, Jemmy thought. He's tumbled that the ransom note ain't worth scat. But, trying to look as innocent as possible, he replied, "Sir?"

"A gold sack or two would have satisfied me and Cutwater," snarled the hairy outlaw. "Greedy ain't our middle name. But you! Raising the ante to a great cartload! Reckoned to slow us down, didn't you? It would be easier to drag around a dead horse! If we ain't lightfooted, we're caught. That was your scheme!"

What a pair of fools, Jemmy thought. That hadn't

been his scheme at all! "You've got it all wrong," he declared. "I swear it!"

"Aye, enough plunder to burden us directly to the gallows, eh?" Hold-Your-Nose Billy continued. "Well, here's a whipping you won't never forget!"

He snapped Captain Nip's whip in the air to get the feel of it.

"Here's the whipping boy," Cutwater put in. "You said it'll go powerful worse for us if we thrash the prince himself."

Hold-Your-Nose Billy nodded sharply. Cutwater upturned the prince, holding him by the ankles in the air. "Go to it, Billy."

Jemmy finally found his voice. "Lay down the whip," he commanded with a princely air. "Don't you have an ounce of sense between you?"

"Hold your gab!"

"Simpletons! You can just fill your pockets with plunder and be lightfooted as ever," Jemmy declared.

"Nobody flummoxes Hold-Your-Nose Billy and gets away with it!"

The whip snapped across the prince's back.

Jemmy held his breath. He knew what it felt like. He saw that Prince Brat had set his jaws, just as

Jemmy had always done—and not a sound escaped his lips.

"Harder!" Cutwater advised. "You didn't raise a peep out of him."

The big man let fly again.

"He must have a hide like an elephant," said Cutwater. "He don't feel a thing."

"He'll feel this!" Hold-Your-Nose Billy thundered, and the leather whistled through the air. The prince's jacket was being shredded.

"Bawl out!" Jemmy shouted. He'd dreamed of seeing the prince whipped, but now that it was happening he found no satisfaction in it. "Holler and cry out! I won't tell anyone!"

But Prince Brat only girded himself for the next blow.

From the top of the embankment came an outraged voice. Betsy and her dancing bear stood there.

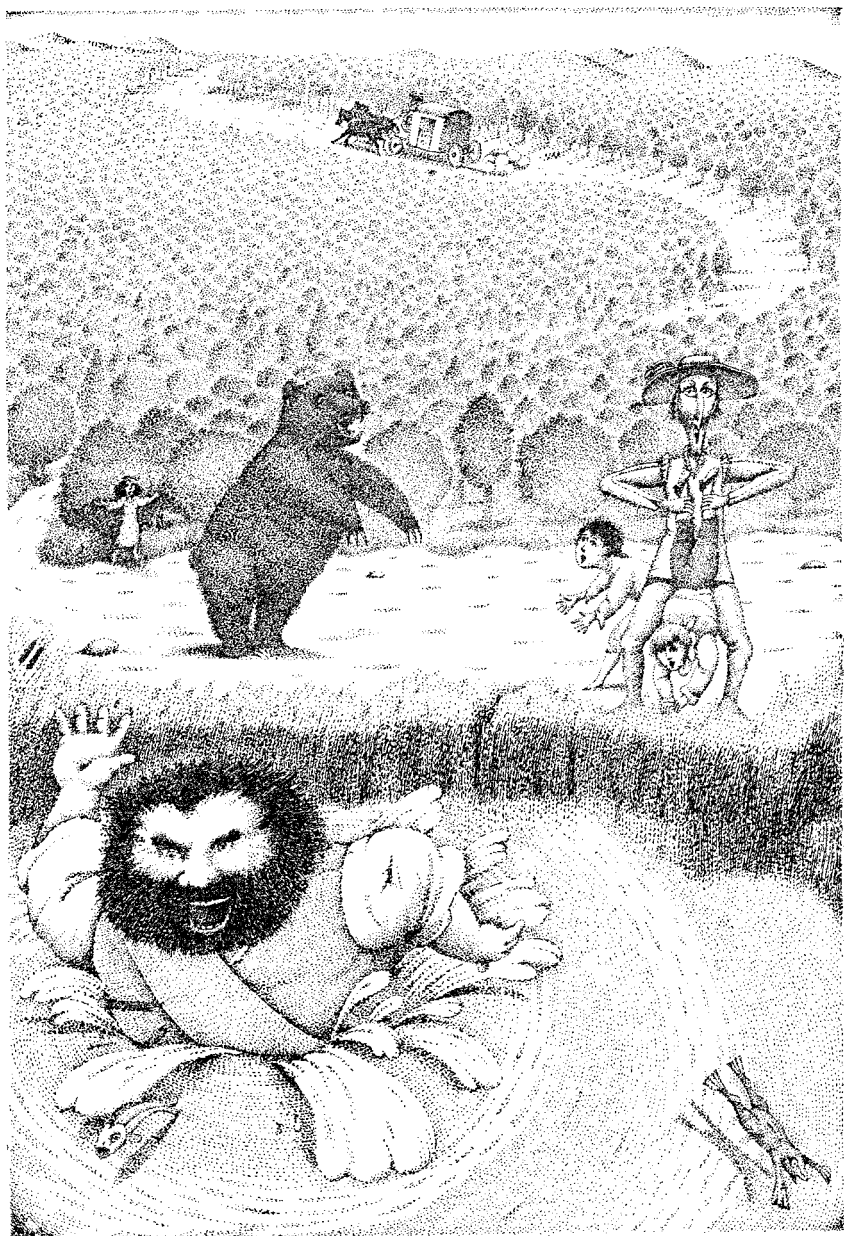
"Ruffian!" she cried out. "What are you doing to that poor boy?"

"No business of yours," snarled Cutwater.

"Stop it!"

But Hold-Your-Nose Billy raised the whip again. The next thing Jemmy knew, the girl had slipped the rope from around the bear's neck.

"Sic 'em, Petunia! Go get 'em!"





CHAPTER 17

Petunia to the rescue

The bear came snarling down the embankment.

Rising on its hind legs, it bared its teeth and bel-
lowed out a thunderclap of a roar.

Cutwater dropped the prince and was off like a greyhound. Hold-Your-Nose Billy, his eyes round as snowballs, went charging off into the river. He raised a great splash, and if he didn't know how to swim, he learned—instantly.

Jemmy had reared back, but now Betsy gave a whistle and the bear stopped in its tracks.

"Good boy, Petunia! That'll do, darlin'." She slipped the rope back around the bear's neck. Then she bent over the prince. "The lowdown bullies! Laying stripes on a boy's back!"

With the bear sniffing him, Prince Brat didn't move a muscle. "Rein in your beast," he whispered stiffly.

"Oh, don't be afraid of Petunia. Gentle as a kitten, he is. Here, let me tend to your poor hide."

"No."

"Give us a look."

"Thank you, no!" the prince exclaimed.

"Lumme! Ain't you the brave one! Must sting something dreadful."

Jemmy watched the prince slowly raise himself off the mud flat. He felt a growing amazement. Prince Brat a brave one? It didn't seem possible. But gaw! There was a cast-iron streak of pluck in him.

The prince moved his arms and shoulders. He winced, but then began to brush himself off.

"Steady on your legs?" Jemmy asked.

"Steady."

"You should have yelled and bellowed. That's what they wanted to hear."

"And humble myself?" muttered the prince.
"You never did."

Jemmy gazed at him for a thoughtful moment. Then he indicated the two highwaymen. Cutwater had vanished, and Hold-Your-Nose Billy was trying to keep from drowning. "Let's be on our way. They're sure to be back after us."

"Not if you travel with me," said Betsy. "Me and Petunia."

Jemmy found the horsewhip where Hold-Your-Nose Billy had dropped it. Betsy and the bear had already started up the embankment, and the boys followed.

"Lawks," whispered Jemmy. "Ain't we a puckered sight, the both of us! Torn up and scruffy. At least, no one'll take you for a prince."

Not far off lay the coach on its side.

"Hanged if I caught sight of that steep rise off to the side of the road," explained Captain Nips. "Tipped us over, as you see."

"Either your horses need spectacles," said Betsy, "or you do."

Together with Petunia, they lifted and pushed and righted the coach. They piled in and were off.

Betsy and her dancing bear rode inside with the prince. Jemmy decided to sit with Captain Nips to watch for road hazards.

They reached the city without further incident, except for being stopped by soldiers. The king's men were clearly looking for the vanished prince, but when a bear poked its head out the door window, the soldiers stepped back and quickly waved the coach on.



CHAPTER 18

Of assorted events in which the plot thickens thicker

As soon as the wheels rattled on cobbled streets, Jemmy felt an immense sense of relief. This was his turf, the city, and he knew more places to hide than a rat.

Approaching the waterside fairgrounds, he saw prisoners in chains being marched aboard a convict ship. It lay in sharp contrast to the festive stalls and banners of the fair.

Captain Nips eased the coach between a seller of live fowl and a juggler tossing colored balls into the bright noonday air.

"Thanks for the jolly ride, hot-potato man," said Betsy. "Come along, Petunia. Let's fetch us a crowd and earn a copper or two."

Jemmy collected his battered birdcage.

"Don't rush off, lad," said Captain Nips, hauling out a canvas load of firewood from under the seat. "Ain't I been listening to your stomach rumbling-bumbling for the last hour? Do me the kindness of

filling the kettle at the pump. Soon as the potatoes are boiled up, we'll feast, eh?"

Anxious as he was to be on his way, Jemmy hesitated. He *was* powerful hungry.

Then Captain Nips laid a coin in his hand. "And while you're at it, stop off at the cow lady, the both of you, and get yourselves a couple of mugs to drink."

Jemmy picked up the handle of the kettle. But almost at once Prince Brat snatched it out of his hands. "I'll do that."

"You?" Jemmy replied. "It's servant's work."

"Then who'd take me for a prince, toting water?" He smiled. He laughed. "I've never been allowed to carry anything! Not in my entire life."

Jemmy led the way. He'd never regarded fetching and carrying as a privilege. Princes and such-like were hard to fathom! But the sound of merriment lingered in his head. He'd never before heard Prince Brat laugh.

They dodged acrobats and a stilt walker and a harp player. Through the hubbub came a great squeaky voice.

"Jemmy! Rat-catchin' Jemmy!"

Turning, Jemmy spied a tall boy wearing a checked cap. It was Smudge tending a sawdust pit

squared off by a board fence—a dog-and-rat pit. Beside him stood a stack of rat-filled cages and a black terrier leashed to a post.

"By gigs, it *is* you, Jemmy!" said Smudge. "Reckon you call the king by his first name these days."

"Hello, Smudge. You give up mudlarking?"

"I've come up in the world, ain't I? Same as you, Jemmy. How do you like me dog? Best rat-fighter you ever saw."

With a practiced eye, Jemmy surveyed the cages. "But those rats look tame enough to eat off your hand."

"Best I could afford. Catch me some castle rats and I'll make a special feature. The king's own rats!"

"Not my line o' work in the castle, Smudge."

"It's not true you're whipping boy, is it?"

Jemmy felt a flush of embarrassment and dodged the question. "I've learned to read and write."

"Naw!"

"The bottom truth. I've read many a book from beginning to end."

"What's in 'em?"

"All nature o' things. I can do sums, too."

Smudge was impressed. "Ain't that a wonder! I never heard of a rat-catcher could read and write

and do sums. It don't fit. Don't forget your old friends when you grow up to be duke or something."

"I aim to go back to the sewers," replied Jemmy stiffly. "I'll catch you some rats first chance."

But even as he said it, Jemmy felt a bleak discomfort. He would miss the shelves of books he'd left behind in the castle. In the sewers, he hadn't been aware of his own ignorance. He saw no choice now but to return. But he realized that he'd lost his taste for ignorance.

Smudge was saying, "Who's the cove?"

"What?"

"Your pal."

"This is—" Jemmy caught himself. He began to stammer. "I mean, this is—"

The prince answered for him. "Friend-O'-Jemmy's the name."

"Then Friend-O'-Jemmy'll do." Smudge put out his hand to shake.

Jemmy caught Prince Brat's momentary confusion. "He never shakes hands."

"Of course I do," said the prince with a quick grin. He took Smudge's hand. "Glad to shake your hand, Smudge."

"Likewise."

And Jemmy dragged the prince away. Smudge had committed a terrible offense: no one was allowed to shake hands with a prince. "Why did you do that?"

"Because I've never shaken hands before."

"He could be hung for less!"

The prince was staring at his hand. "It felt friendly . . . trusting. I may introduce the practice at court when I become king."

Jemmy's ears pricked up. King, is it? he thought. So it was just bluster that you might never go back to the castle. Gaw, I hope you don't want to learn to catch rats first.

Moments later they came to a stout old woman with hands as gnarled as tree roots. Beside her, munching grass, stood a cow with a brass ring in its nose.

"New milk!" the cow lady called out. "New milk, fresh from the cow! Best in the land! New milk!"

Jemmy handed over the coin. The milk lady fished two mugs out of a tub of water, sat on a stool, and began to milk the cow directly into the mugs. Her aim was as skilled as an archer's.

"Have you heard the earful?" she asked. "Our prince has been abducticated. Imagine!"

"Imagine," the prince replied coolly. She was looking directly at him.

"Our darlin' poor king!" she went on. "Weepin' his royal eyes out, no doubt. Though why he'd spring a tear for the little toad, I don't know. A mighty terror, they say, is Prince Brat. Pity us the day *he* becomes king, eh?"

She handed over the pair of mugs. Jemmy drank the warm milk down in unbroken gulps. But then he noticed the prince standing motionless, a vague, unseeing look in his eyes. For certain he knew everyone called him Prince Brat behind his back, didn't he?

"Drink up, lad," said the cow lady. "My stars, I've never seen such rags on a boy. They look like castoffs from the old-clothes man." She gave out a joking laugh. "Drink up before you scare off business."

The prince drained the mug and shuffled away.

As they filled the potato kettle at the pump, he looked at Jemmy. "Treasonous old woman. I could have her tongue ripped off for lying."

But there was no steam in his voice. Taking a whipping was bad enough, but to learn that his sub-

jects dreaded the day he'd grow up and become king had deeply shaken him.

"She meant no harm," Jemmy murmured, keeping his eyes alert for soldiers.

"Is that what they call me—Prince Brat?"

Jemmy nodded.

"Does everyone hate me?"

"More'n likely."

"What about you?"

Jemmy hesitated for a moment. "I did. But maybe I don't." Jemmy couldn't sort out his feelings. "The pot's full. Let's go."

It took the two of them to carry the iron kettle, now full of water. They passed a magician with a bald head, a street fiddler, and an umbrella seller, his wares opened around his feet like black silken mushrooms. Suddenly there loomed up a soldier on horseback, his eyes on the search.

There was nothing to do but brazen it out. Jemmy took a tighter grip on the handle, but was ready to fly if he had to. The soldier passed by with only the merest glance.

What was he looking for, a prince in fine velvets and a crown cocked on his head? Was it clothes that made a prince, Jemmy wondered, just as rags made a street boy? He had a notion that the prince

felt secretly disappointed not to be recognized by any of his subjects. Wasn't he getting his head stuffed with surprises!

Before long, potatoes were boiling in the pot. Not far off, Betsy had drawn a crowd with Petunia, now balancing a gentleman's hat on his nose. And then the bear began passing the hat for tips.

Jemmy no longer felt the slightest concern about the soldiers. He had no doubt that Hold-Your-Nose Billy would trace him and the prince to the fair. Hadn't they fallen into the company of a girl with a trained bear? Where else would she be going?

Finally, Captain Nips began spearing boiled potatoes, and Betsy returned with Petunia.

"We could eat a bushel!" she exclaimed, jingling a handful of coins.

"Courtesy to fellow artistes," said Captain Nips, refusing the money. He split open a pair of plump potatoes. "Salt and pepper?"

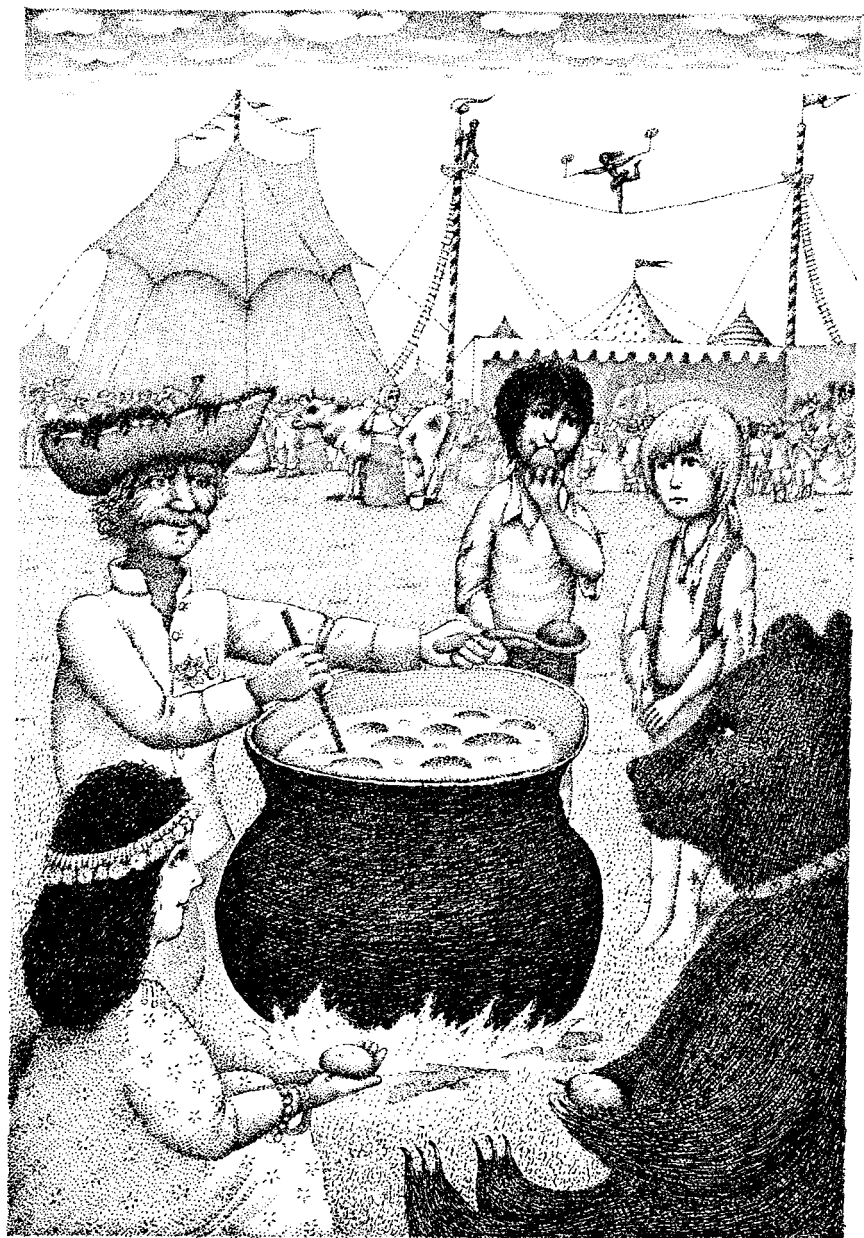
"Pepper for me, salt for Petunia."

Captain Nips reached into one coat pocket for a pinch of salt, and into the other for pepper.

"Salt for me," said Jemmy.

"And you?" Captain Nips asked the prince.

The heir to the throne balked for a moment, and Jemmy knew why. He'd certainly never eaten a po-



tato before. In the castle, roots were regarded as peasant food. "I—I don't know," the prince stammered.

"When in doubt, salt," chuckled Captain Nips. And then he began calling out to the passing crowd: "Hot-hot-hot potatoes! Captain Nips' hot-hot potatoes!"

Jemmy gorged himself, anxious to be off and not certain when he would eat again. The prince nibbled at first, with his fingers, and then threw his royal pride to the winds. He bit off whole mouthfuls.

A ballad seller was working his way through the crowd, crying out his wares. He waved a bamboo pole with long paper streamers fluttering from the tip.

"Three yards of songs, a copper! Old songs, new songs! Sing 'em yourself! Ten verses of 'Poor Pitiful Polly'—will make you weep! Sixteen verses of that notable highwayman Hold-Your-Nose Billy!"

Jemmy's ears pricked up as the ballad seller began singing a sample of his merchandise.

*"Hold-Your-Nose Billy, a wild man is he,
Hang him from a gallows tree.
Here he comes, there he goes:
Don't forget to hold your nose."*

The street song had once amused Jemmy. But now he only sharpened his eyes.

He wiped his hands on his sleeves and turned to Captain Nips. "Thanks for the grub, sir."

"Where are you off to?" asked Betsy. "Here's the place to put a jingle in your pockets. Can't you turn cartwheels or something?"

"I catch rats," Jemmy said simply.

"Rats?" Betsy made a face. "What on earth for?"

"There's good money in sewer rats. The meaner, the better."

"My eyes!" exclaimed Betsy. "Don't you get bit?"

"Many a time," said Jemmy.

Captain Nips cocked an ear. "What's that running patterer yelling about?"

A crowlike voice pierced the air. And then the news seller appeared, his tongue wagging like a bell clapper, a bundle of broadsides under his arm.

"PRINCE SOLD TO GYPSIES! THE TRUE AND
GENUINE FACTS! INK STILL WET! WHIPPING
BOY CHARGED WITH DASTARDLY SCHEME!
KING OFFERS REWARD FOR THE UNSPEAKABLE
RASCAL! DEAD OR ALIVE! FULL DESCRIPTION!
GET YOUR COPY! KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED
AND CATCH THE REWARD!"

The running patterer was selling his broadsides almost as fast as he could yell.

The facts were cockeyed, but Jemmy grabbed his birdcage, backed off—and was gone.



CHAPTER 19

*Being a full account
of the happenings
in the dark sewers*

Jemmy headed for the only safe place he knew—the sewers. He scrambled along the docks.

And the prince dogged him every step of the way.

Jemmy turned on him like a cornered rat. "Ain't you done enough? You've got a price put on my head! Go home, and go to blazes!"

"But you're my friend," the prince stated, as if he were issuing a royal decree.

"Don't count on it!" replied Jemmy.

He started down stone steps to the river, but the prince stopped him with a sudden, urgent yelp.

"Look!"

Looming up on the cobbled wayside came the

hulk of Hold-Your-Nose Billy, with Cutwater following as close as a cow's tail.

Jemmy didn't wait to be spotted. But it was too late. The big outlaw, his hair and beard looking bonfire red under the bright sun, gave a distant yell and altered course.

Jemmy and the prince took the stairs in leaps. The tide was coming in and the mud flat had shrunk to the width of a path.

Jemmy led the way through a tarred forest of wharf pilings and over a derelict river barge. He leaped off into shallow water. He could already see the great brick mouth of a main sewer.

"Don't leave footprints in the mud!" he warned.

They splashed along the water's edge—and were there.

The arched sewer stood tall enough for a horse and rider. Jemmy leaped the mud and was in.

But the prince balked. "It's black as night in there!"

"Jump! Quick!"

The prince steeled himself and made the leap. Jemmy advanced into the tunnel, but the prince held back.

"Follow me! We'll be lucky if they didn't catch sight of us!"

The prince stood terrified of the darkness ahead. He had turned dead white.

Jemmy made a grab and yanked the prince after him. "You'll get me caught!"

"I'm—I'm scared, Jemmy!"

"Don't fret about the dark! There are rats in here. Even grown men are scared of 'em! Hang on to me."

Deeper and deeper, darker and darker, they sloshed through the cavernous sewer. The gutters of the city overhead had dried, but old rain seeped and dripped from the glazed brick walls.

Soon the mouth had receded to little more than a pinhole of light, and Jemmy stopped to catch his breath. "Blacker'n a stack of black cats in here, ain't it? We should come to another passage before long. They'll never find us. Ease off my arm! You'll break it."

"Jemmy." Hardly above a breath, the prince's voice was stiff with fear.

Jemmy? Not Jemmy-From-The-Streets? Not boy? The wonder of it. Jemmy thought. Like we was old knockabout friends of the streets.

"I wish I were like you," muttered the prince.

Jemmy was amazed. "Like *me*!"

"You're not afraid of anything."

"'Course I am. I'm afraid your pa'll hang me!"

"Not likely."

Jemmy gave a small snort. "Not likely, unless you give away my hiding place down here."

"Do you think I'd do that, Jemmy?"

"I don't know. Let's keep moving."

As they edged along the wet walls, Jemmy gave his reply a second thought. He'd wronged the prince. This wasn't the same Prince Brat who'd run away the night before, bored with his own meanness and haughtiness and cruelty. "Reckon I do trust you," said Jemmy.

And the prince replied, "I won't go back to the castle unless you go with me."

"Gaw!"

The main sewer branched off, and Jemmy had to stop to get his bearings. Careful, he thought. That passage to the left leads to the brewery. You could get eaten alive! Keep to the right branch.

In the hollowness of the sewer there came a soft scurrying of feet, and then a distinct squeaking sound. The prince's fingers locked on Jemmy's arm like a manacle.

"Nothing but a rat," Jemmy said. "Two of 'em. But nothing to worry about yet. Dark ain't so bad if

you know what's in it. Like off to the left. So hang on to me."

The prince's voice was almost inaudible. "What's to the left?"

"A brewery overhead. They empty their used-up grain down the sewer, and the rats feed and breed by the hundreds. Grow big as street cats. And short-tempered! They'll swarm all over you and hang on by their teeth."

Still clinging to the birdcage, Jemmy continued feeling his way along. He wondered how he'd ever felt at home in these dank, smelly sewers. Then a sudden flicker of light from a side passage stopped him. He peered down the tunnel and saw a figure with a candle fixed to the stiff bill of his cap. A rat-catcher! He could see a cage full of squealing rats.

He entered the passage, and the man looked up.

"Who goes there?"

"Didn't mean to give you a scare," Jemmy whispered.

"This is no place for boys!"

The man's full voice boomed and echoed through the sewers, and Jemmy took a quick look behind.

"Hold it down, sir!" he said softly. And then he thought he recognized the rat-catcher. "Ain't you Ol' Johnny Tosher?"

With the candle glowing from his hat bill, the man bent forward.

"I declare! Is that you, Jemmy?"

"It is."

"Ain't you grown since you left the sewers!"

"I'd be obliged if you'd snuff out your candle, sir. There's bloodthirsty ruffians after us."

"Speak up," said the old man, cupping a hand to his ear. "Is it true you've got taken up by the king himself? That's the gossip. What are you doin' back in the sewers?"

"Running for our lives!"

"Eh?"

"Your candle'll give us away."

"What's that?"

"You'd do us a kindness to pinch it out."

"Speak up, lad. Now you're a king's little gentleman, they learn you to talk in whispers? Come back for a visit, have you! Oh, your pa'd be proud." He gave the top of Jemmy's head a pat. "They say you're Prince Brat's own whipping boy." Suddenly the rat-catcher straightened. "Who's there?"

Looming up in the yellow glow stood an immense hairy figure and a rattleboned man.

Jemmy's heart stopped cold.

"What the blazes!" roared Hold-Your-Nose Billy.

"They flummoxed us, Cutwater! That one ain't the prince! It's the other!"

"I heard!" Cutwater cried out. "We whipped the prince himself! Worse'n common murder, you said!"

"Aye, the king'll skin us alive by inches!"

"Mercy on us!"

"But not if he don't find out!"

Both lurched forward to grab the boys. Jemmy swung the birdcage, knocking the candle flying. The flame sputtered out in the murky water, and the sewer was thrown into sudden darkness.

"Run for it!" Jemmy yelled out.

"I got one!" cackled Cutwater.

"That's me you got!" bellowed the rat-catcher. "Scurvy riffraff! Who are you?"

Jemmy flattened himself against the wall, and found the prince already there. He heard a splash and a curse as Hold-Your-Nose Billy must have tumbled over Cutwater and the rat-catcher.

In an urgent whisper, the prince asked, "Which way?"

Jemmy made an instant decision. The villains might be able to run them down in this smaller side channel. Back to the main sewer!

He gave the prince's sleeve a quick tug, and the prince reached out for Jemmy's hand.

Off they went, linked together, while the outlaws untangled themselves.

"Which way did they go?" cried out Cutwater.

"Listen for 'em!"

Jemmy froze. He didn't breathe. He waited. And he became suddenly aware of the prince's hand clasped in his own. His first impulse was to withdraw his fingers, but the prince was hanging on for dear life. It was the same as a handshake, and he remembered the prince's own words. It felt friendly and trusting. But, gaw! The wonder of it. Shaking hands with Prince Brat.

"Stop where you stand!" warned Hold-Your-Nose Billy.

"Wherever you are, we'll catch you!" added Cutwater. "You'll never make it out!"

"Which way is out?" snapped the big outlaw.

"The same way you came in," answered the rat-catcher. "Put your back to the breeze from the main sewer."

That was wrong! Good Ol' Tosher, Jemmy thought. He meant to send them off in the opposite direction.



Jemmy tugged on the prince's hand, and they scuttled along the wall toward freedom. A moment later, Jemmy could feel a stronger breeze, and he knew that they were in the main sewer again.

Noses to the breeze, they could make a run for the river. But in his sudden elation, Jemmy banged into the wall with the birdcage.

His hair rose. The clatter was loud enough to wake the dead. Or bring the villains running.

Jemmy made an abrupt turn, pulling the prince deeper into the main sewer. And he whispered, "They'll see us against daylight before we can get out. More holes than wormwood down here. We'll duck into another side tunnel. But if we break loose, don't lose your bearings. The brewery's dead ahead."

The sound of feet sloshing through the water silenced them. Jemmy felt desperately for the mouth of a side tunnel. But Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater had already rushed out into the main sewer.

"Which way, Billy?" muttered Cutwater.

Jemmy flattened himself against the grave-cold wall, but the prince seemed suddenly to rebel at being chased down like a sewer rat. He yanked the birdcage out of Jemmy's hand and flung it with all his might.

It banged and clattered off the bricks.

In the direction of the brewery.

"What's that?" cried out Cutwater.

"Them is what! Put your back to the breeze. Straight on!"

They barged ahead. Only moments later Ol' Tosher appeared across the great sewer, a fresh candle lit on the bill of his cap.

And then Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater came flying back.

"I'm bit! I'm bit!"

"Help!"

Grain-fed rats were swarming over the two of them, nipping and biting and clinging like leeches. In the light of the candle, Cutwater waved his arms wildly. He screeched and the hairy outlaw bel-
lowed.

"I declare," said the prince. "They look like they're wearing fur coats."



CHAPTER 20

*In which the sun shines
and we learn what befell
the whipping boy, the prince,
and everyone else*

Standing in the clear sunshine, the prince breathed in the sweet, fresh air. Then he looked Jemmy squarely in the eyes. "We're going back to the castle."

"Not me! Your pa's put a price on this head o' mine. No, thank you, Prince! I don't fancy doing a jig from the end of a rope."

"Where will you hide for the rest of your life? In the sewers? I'd have them searched, end to end."

Gaw, what a fool he'd been to let the prince in on his best hiding place! Jemmy was on the verge of running—but where to? How far would he get?

"You said you trusted me," declared the prince. "But I can see you didn't mean it."

"I meant it—up to a point."

"Then follow me." It was a command.

Jemmy swallowed hard, and followed. They weren't at the castle gates yet. He'd think of something!

The prince led him back onto the fairgrounds and searched out Betsy and the hot-potato man.

"You've served your prince nobly," he announced.

"What are you talking about, lad?" replied Captain Nips. "Hot-hot-hot potatoes!"

"The king has offered a reward for the whipping boy. Here he stands. Turn him in."

And Jemmy stood dumfounded. He felt betrayed. "Gaw!"

Betsy flashed her eyes. "Turn Jemmy in? I'll do no such thing."

"I command it!"

"Who are you to command anything!"

"I'm—I'm Prince Brat."

"Ha!"

Run for it, Jemmy thought.

Deeply wounded, he gave the prince a last, blazing look. The prince returned a quick, playful wink. It befuddled Jemmy for an instant. And then, in a flash, Jemmy saw that for the first time the prince was up to a kindly piece of mischief.

"Head to toe, he's Prince Brat," said Jemmy. "Better do what he says or he'll have you boiled in oil."

Jemmy had to wait with Betsy, Petunia, and Captain Nips while the prince was alone with the king.

Finally, a pair of golden doors were opened and the group was ushered into the throne room.

The king sat with his legs crossed and the merest flicker of a smile on his lips.

Betsy bowed low, and Captain Nips did the best he could.

"The reward is yours," the king announced, and then he turned to the prince. "What about the bear? Came to your rescue, did he?"

"Couldn't we give him the title of Official Dancing Bear to Your Royal Majesty, Papa? He'd draw crowds wherever he went."

"Done."

Betsy and Captain Nips were dismissed.

Jemmy now stood alone—it seemed hours—while the king gazed at him. He began to feel a noose tightening around his neck.

"You ought to be whipped."

"Yes, My Lord."

"Prince Horace has caused enough mischief to wear out the hides of a dozen whipping boys. He tells me it's thanks to you that he's back, sound and safe. The king thanks you."

Jemmy took a small breath.

"You are placed under the prince's protection under one condition. He has sworn to do his lessons, blow out his night candle, and otherwise behave himself."

Jemmy's eyes flicked to the prince. Gaw! he thought. You must want me for a friend awful bad to promise all that. So help me, if it's a friend you ran off looking for, it's a friend you found!

"Dismissed, both of you," said the king. "But do change out of those smelly clothes."

Retreating toward the golden doors, the prince beside him, Jemmy felt a sparkle rise into his eyes. "You got me off without so much as a single whack," he whispered.

"I couldn't bear all the yowling and bellowing."

"I wouldn't yowl and bellow."

"But *I* would, Jemmy!" And Jemmy caught the twinkle in his eyes.

Almost at the doors, they were stopped by the king's voice. "One more thing!" The king broke into a smile you could warm your hands over. "If

you boys decide to run away again, take me with you."

In the days that followed, ballad sellers began to cry out new and final verses to the notorious life of Hold-Your-Nose Billy and his partner, Cutwater.

An old rat-catcher had seen them flee from the sewer. And he'd seen them stow away aboard a ship raising its sails for a long voyage. It was a convict ship bound for a speck of an island in distant waters. A convict island.



Note

Readers often write to ask if a story is true. This tale is a work of the imagination, but the most surprising part of it is true.

Some royal households of past centuries did keep whipping boys to suffer the punishments due a misbehaving prince. History is alive with lunacies and injustices.

As Jemmy would say, "Gaw!"

Before **SID FLEISCHMAN**

became a fiction writer, he worked as a professional magician and a newspaperman. In 1987 he was awarded the Newbery Medal for *THE WHIPPING BOY*. His other books for young readers include *BO & MZZZ MAD*, *JIM UGLY*, *THE MIDNIGHT HORSE*, and *THE SCAREBIRD*. The father of three children (one of whom is the writer Paul Fleischman), Mr. Fleischman lives in Santa Monica, California.