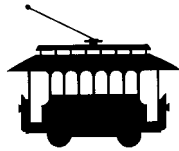


# THE WISH EXPRESS



## CHAPTER ONE

**G**OES FIVE TIMES and three to carry," muttered Berens, chewing his pencil gloomily. "Jinks! That can't be right 'cause there couldn't be a third of a man left!" For a few minutes the pencil squeaked busily—then bang! flew the lesson book into the corner so suddenly that Rags, the Skye terrier, woke with a jump.

"What good are divisions?" scowled Berens, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

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R—uff, r—uff, r—uff,” barked Rags sharply, which in plain doggish meant “No good whatever!” (what do you think about this?)

“I don’t believe other little boys have as many lessons as I have,” continued Berens crossly, drumming his fingers on the window pane. “Anyhow, home is a poky old place. I wish, I just wish I was SOMEWHERE ELSE and SOME ONE ELSE—I just—Oh! Oh! Ouch!” Something had bitten him sharply.

“Ki-yi-i!” yelped Rags in the same breath.

The next minute Berens was jerked into the air, out of the window, up over all the chimneys and housetops. Whi-z! Whi-r! he went spinning through the sky. He tried to think, but his head might just as well have been a huckleberry pudding for all the good it was to him, only ’twas full of multiplication and division signs ’stead of huckleberries.

“Oh, where, where am I going?” he gasped in dismay as he went dipping and ducking through the clouds.

“Most extrawdinree! Most extrawdinree!” exclaimed a sharp voice from somewhere just

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above. "But it all comes of division—I always knew no good would ever come of division. Now, why can't those stupid two-legs be satisfied with whole things? But no, they are forever dividing their apples and pies and pencils—catch me dividing my bones and biscuits!"

There was something familiar about this voice and Berens, brushing aside a cloud that had settled stuffily upon his head, peered up and caught sight of Rags sprawling though the air a few feet above him.

"Of course," Rags was saying now in a grieved voice, "being a Skye terrier I might have expected to find myself skied sooner or later and perhaps I shall get used to it in time, but I shouldn't wonder if it would take a dog age!"

For a few moments the two whizzed on in silence, Berens too surprised to speak. He had always thought Rags could talk if he wanted to, but it really took one a little while to get used to the idea of it.

"Wonder what one eats in these parts?" continued Rags at last in a depressed voice. "Gives me the sky-blues to think of it!"

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“Maybe there are sky-bones,” called Berens hopefully, emerging from a gray cloud and careening along beside Rags.

“What! You here?” cried Rags delightedly. “Well, thank my dog star for that!”

They surely looked comical, sweethearts, as they blew along—Rags with his legs set stiffly, his ears plastered tightly back against his head, while his hair puffed out for all the world like the petals of a huge chrysanthemum. Berens spraddled along after him like an ungainly bird.

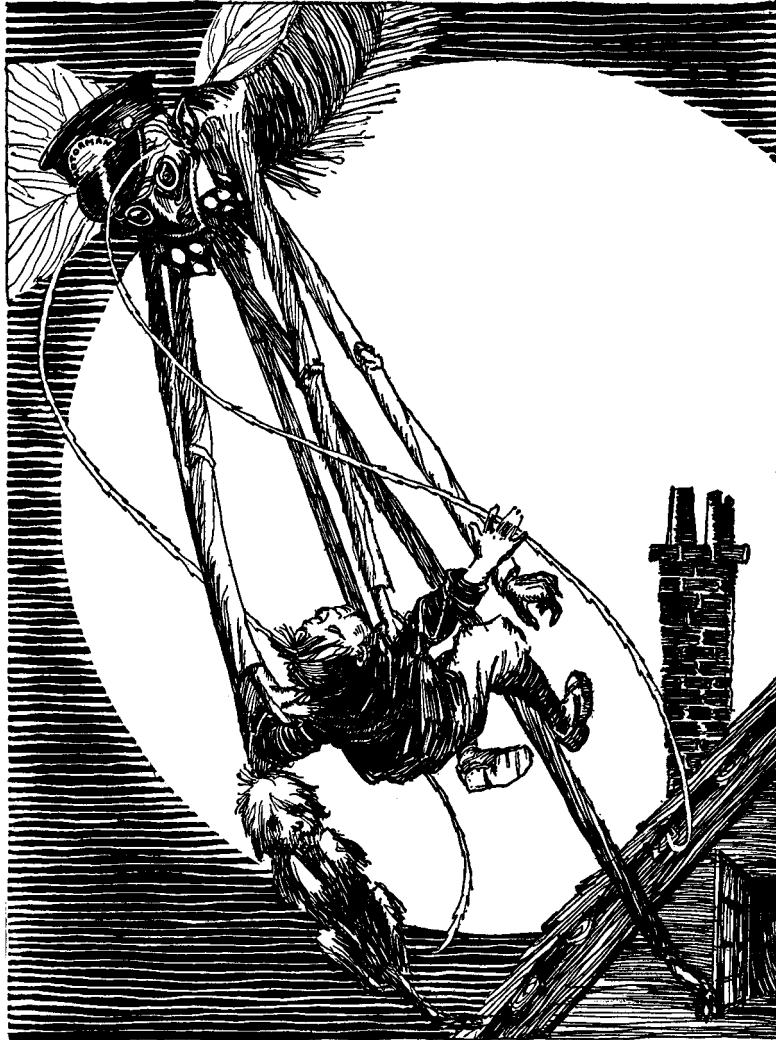
“But what shall we do?” asked Berens breathlessly.

“Do?,” jerked Rags dubiously. “Well, my mother always said, ‘When in doubt wag your tail,’ but I don’t see how we can wag our tails with the wind blowing at this rate.”

“Nonsense!” began Berens crossly, when down almost upon their heads whirled a gigantic bug—oh, a frightful, fearful—oh, a terrible bug! It had nineteen arms and seventeen legs. Its nineteen arms ended in nineteen yellow serviceable cotton gloves and its seventeen legs in

THE WISH EXPRESS

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## T H € W I S H € X P R € S S

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seventeen common-sense shoes, which was extremely fortunate, for otherwise there would have been no distinguishing between its arms and legs. Jauntily upon its head perched a motorman's cap. With its twelfth cotton glove it seized Rags by the ear and with its sixteenth it grasped Berens by the hair (which was very unpleasant).

"Come on!" cried the bug, and working the rest of its arms and legs like ferryboat paddles, progressed through the air at a terrific speed. There was not much for Berens and Rags to do under the circumstances except come, and it was mighty scaresome coming at that.

"My eyelashes! My eyelashes!" wheezed the bug irritably, "we shall miss the WISH!"

"Miss the which?" snapped Rags, trying to squirm 'round and get a better view of the strange creature.

"Did you say witch?" gasped Berens in alarm.

"The question is which," croaked the bug disagreeably. "Wish or witch? As it happens, young man, I said WISH, wish, wish, WISH!"

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“Oh, dear,” groaned Berens in a low tone to Rags, “it’s pulling my hair frightfully and I never heard of missing a wish and isn’t it disagreeable?”

“My ear, oh, my ear!” moaned Rags in concert. “I shall be hard of hearing after this, I know!”

Faster and faster whirred the three through the sky. At last, Berens ventured a polite question. “Please, sir,” said he breathlessly, “where are we?”

“Up in the air,” replied the bug shortly. After a long pause it continued. “You made a wish, didn’t you? Well, a wish always goes up, doesn’t it—couldn’t possibly go down, you know—and people who make wishes are bound to go up in the air sooner or later and here you are. That’s all! But what’s the use of making a wish and then missing it? Besides, you brought me all the way from Europe where I was most exceedingly occupied,” he grumbled crossly.

“Would you mind very much telling us your name?” shouted Berens, for the wind was blowing so hard that otherwise he would not have been heard.

## T H € W I S H € X P R € S S

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“You might have asked me before,” shouted the Bug in reply, “but one cannot expect manners from wishers!” Then, without diminishing its speed in the least, it took its second serviceable cotton glove and snatched off its cap, croaking:

“Oh, I’m a bug of great renown,  
I roam the country up and down,  
I’m sometimes here and sometimes there,  
But pretty generally everywhere—  
For I’m the Dissatisfied Bug, you see—  
Dissatisfied Bug—three groans for me!”

“I bit you,” he added jocularly.

“Was that YOU?” cried Berens, remembering the sharp bite he had received just before being jerked into the air.

“Oh!” groaned Rags, “you bit me, too!”

The bug paid no attention to this.

“Hello!” it exclaimed suddenly. “There she is!” and plunged at top speed into a purple cloud.