

You Keep *Ants*?

Once again Elmer's alarm went off with an ear-splitting shrill at 6 A.M. He rose promptly and began to dress, vaguely aware that something was not quite right. He puzzled over the odd feeling, but continued to get dressed.

"My ants!" he cried suddenly. "My ants are gone!"

Elmer stared at Bruno's bed. It was empty. It did not take him long to realize that Bruno's absence and the ants' disappearance were somehow related. He threw the door open and bolted into the hall.

About three doors away, Bruno was hurrying along with the large glass aquarium that contained Elmer's ant colony.

"What are you doing?" Elmer shrieked.

"Haven't you ever seen *Born Free*?" Bruno replied. "These poor creatures are in captivity. They deserve to be free."

"No!"

The racket was beginning to penetrate into the other rooms. Scrambling noises and cries of, "Hey, pipe down!" and "What the heck is going on out there?" could be heard all along the corridor.

"Freedom is their right," Bruno continued solemnly. "Go, go, little ants. The wide world awaits you." On that note, he dumped the contents of the aquarium onto the floor.

Elmer's face wrinkled up like that of a baby about to bawl. If Bruno hadn't been sure that he was doing something absolutely necessary, he would have felt terribly guilty.

Suddenly the door of room 205 burst open and hit the mess on the floor. Sand and ants flew all over the hall. Elmer let out a piercing scream.

"What did I do? What did I do?" asked Perry Elbert. "I just came out to see what was going on!"

"I'm going to see Mr. Sturgeon!" Elmer raged.

Perry was dumbfounded. "Please don't," he pleaded. "I didn't mean to open the door!"

From room 203 a shoe came flying into the hall. "Shut up out there!" yelled a voice. "It's only six-thirty!"

"They're getting away!" Elmer wailed. It was true. Ants were scurrying in every direction.

"What's going on?" asked a sleepy voice from 211.

"Stampede!" Bruno yelled. By this time he was enjoying himself immensely.

“All I did was open the door . . . ” Perry kept insisting.

More doors opened. In seconds every boy in Dormitory 2 was milling around in the general confusion. The hubbub was broken by Elmer’s half-crazed voice. “*Everyone stop!*” he commanded. “Don’t move! You’ll step on my ants!”

“You keep *ants?*” echoed a dozen voices.

“He’s an entomologist,” Bruno intoned. “His world is the insect world.”

“Help me!” Elmer pleaded. “Help me get them back into the aquarium!”

“*Born free,*” sang Bruno, “*as free as the wind blows . . .*”

In a short time a gang of pajama-clad boys were crawling around the halls after Elmer’s ants, using water glasses, toothbrush containers and even test tubes to collect them in.

“Elmer, Elmer, here’s three!”

“We’ve uncovered a whole bunch of them under the radiator!”

“Here, Elmer, here’s nine or ten.”

“Elmer, Elmer, there’s a crack in the floor and they’re going in there by the hundreds!”

“Be careful, stupid, you just stepped on one!”

“Elmer, about fifty have run up the wall and they’re going out the window!”

“Yecch!”

“Report nine dead in room 213. Arthur has a chameleon and he’s eating them!”

“Who’s clumsy? You stepped on three!”

When the dust settled, about fifty ants were present and accounted for; another thirty were proven dead. The rest, some five hundred and twenty, were still at large.

As the boys settled back to normal and began to dress for breakfast, Perry walked over to Elmer. “I only opened the door,” he implored. “I don’t even understand the bit about the ants.”