



A short story by Leo Schoof, Kelmscott, Western Australia

## Bad Company

Jason and Ivan had a day off from school. Apparently the teachers had a one day conference. Dad was at work and Mum was at a craft morning. They pretended they had all their homework finished for the next day and wondered what to do next. Both boys never did very well at school. In fact they hated school. They could not see any use for all that hard work. Their father had always warned them and encouraged them to do their best. He often quoted to them the well known text from Proverbs where it says “*go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise*”. The teacher at school also continually warned them and urged them to improve otherwise they would get bad reports. But Jason and Ivan did not care. They wanted to do their own thing. Life is so short. So why take everything so serious? As a result they got into all sorts of mischief. When their parents thought they were in their room upstairs doing their homework for school they often climbed down the rope they had fixed to their windowsill. And once they were free they roamed around the town and secretly lit up their cigarettes. They knew they were not allowed to smoke, and certainly not at home. And at school it was also strictly forbidden. They also knew very well how bad it was for their health. But who cares? That was their sinful attitude.

One day after the evening meal they had climbed down to ground level once more. There was still at least an hour of daylight left. They decided to walk along the main street of their little town. At the end of the street they saw a man half hidden under the overhanging branches of a willow tree. He was slightly coloured but they could not make out his nationality. Ivan, the younger of the two, straight away felt uneasy about that man. He thought this man was a real creep. He looked like



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someone who had just been released from goal. He had a really wicked expression in his eyes. But Jason appreciated the contact and had a friendly conversation with the man even though Ivan tried to get him away from him. But Jason would not listen to his younger brother. The man, whose name was Frank, asked if they had anything to do for school.

“No”, they both lied, “we have finished all our homework”.

“Well, if you have nothing better to do”, Frank said, “why don’t you come with me? I can show you a few things”.

“What do you mean with that?” asked Ivan, who was becoming quite worried by now. He started to have regrets about their evening escape through the window.

“You’ll find out”, Frank responded and then he asked the boys: “Shall I teach you a few things?”

“What do you mean with a few things?” asked Ivan while he anxiously whispered in his older brother’s ear “let’s get away from that wicked man. I don’t trust him at all”. But Jason wouldn’t listen to his younger brother. He was keen to have an adventure and this man seemed just the right person for that, he thought. His conscience was warning him but he pushed all good thoughts aside and just wanted to do what felt good.

“You see that ginger cat over there?” Frank asked the boys.

“Let’s see if we can catch it”.

“That is our neighbour’s cat”, the boys both shouted to Frank.

But before they were able to avoid it Frank had already grabbed the cat by the tail, swung it around and threw it into the river. The poor little animal struggled and tried to reach the other side. Ivan wanted to jump after the cat but Jason reminded him how deep the river was and that Ivan couldn’t even



swim. In his eagerness to help the poor creature Ivan had forgotten all about that. The cat was scared and kept on trying to



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reach dry land. But all its struggling was in vain. After a while it gave up and the poor thing drowned.

Frank was quite excited about it and thought it was a good joke. But Ivan felt guilty about getting involved with this cruel man. He was very angry about what had just happened. He was also very sad for the cat and for the neighbours for he knew how much they loved their cat. He almost had tears in his eyes. He did not trust Frank at all and he was keen to go home as quickly as possible. Even Jason did not think it was very funny at all. He also started to think about home and how they had always been taught to have respect for God's creatures. But the pull of the wicked one was too strong for him. In the meantime their cruel companion already looked around for the next opportunity for some fun. Ah, ah, there he saw some more cats. There were quite a few cats in the neighbourhood. He quickly grabbed a couple of cats and gave one to Jason to hold for a while. Frank then quickly tied some string around the tail of the cat he was holding. Then he took the other cat over from Jason and tied the two tails together. As soon as he let them go both cats struggled to free themselves but of course they couldn't. They raced off to the other side of the road. A car coming from the opposite direction suddenly had to swerve to avoid the two cats. The driver probably did not even see what it was that was crossing the road. In his effort to miss the racing objects the car nearly hit a tree. This even added to Frank's fun. But now both boys had enough of this so called fun. They were truly shocked. The boys whispered to each other: "Shall we quickly try and get away from this cruel man before we get involved in something worse?" But before they had a chance to think about it some more Frank urged them to watch for the next bit of fun. There he saw another cat and he quickly grabbed it by the scruff of the neck. He took a little bottle out of his pocket. "What's that?" Ivan asked. "You'll see", Frank responded. He took the cap of



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the bottle and then poured petrol all over the cat and put a match to the struggling cat. Ivan was terrified and couldn't bear to look. He thought it was so awful and so very, very cruel. What a terribly wicked man Frank was. They should try and get away from him. In the meantime the burning cat was screaming with pain and fled in terror. It panicked and didn't know where it was going. She ran into nearby fields and rolled over and over in agony. Obviously it was in great pain and was suffering greatly.



“Oh, why did we get sucked in by this man?”  
The boys then saw that the burning cat went straight towards a farmer's hayshed, jumped all over the dry hay and within seconds the whole shed was alight. Frank thought it was very funny and laughed. But Ivan was terrified and felt very guilty for getting involved with Frank in the first place. Even Jason was very subdued. “Look what you have done now”, he said to Frank but when he looked around Frank was nowhere to be seen. He had quickly disappeared. What else could the boys do than quietly go home. And that's what they did. They were not as boisterous and happy as when they left home through the window of their bedroom. No, instead they were both very quiet and feeling guilty. They were not very proud of themselves. Jason, who is normally very talkative, didn't have much to say on the way home. Both boys had to continually think of those poor cats. One cat drowned and died a cruel death and they had no idea what happened to the other two cats. And what agony the burning cat must have suffered before it finally died in the fire of the haystack on that farm. The sun had nearly set in the evening sky and the fire lit up the buildings on the farm. The whole sky was aglow. In the distance they could already hear the sirens of the fire brigade. In this little town the fire brigade was manned by volunteers. So some fathers and other young



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men left their families to join the fire truck. Some of them would have had to leave their lovely evening meal. And another father probably had to quickly interrupt the game he was playing with his little son. They all rushed out when they received the alarming message on the telephone. They left the comfort of their own homes and without any thought to themselves they jumped into the fire engine and rushed towards the fire. And all that because of some stupid wicked joke played by Frank. He thought it was very funny. Would he still think it was funny now? The boys didn't know for Frank was not only wicked but he also proved to be a coward. He was nowhere to be seen and he left all the explaining to the young boys.

Later that evening a policeman came to interview the children.

“What are we going to say?” they all said.

“Just simply tell the truth, of course”, Dad said. “That is always the best way”. And that is what they did.

The next day a representative from an insurance company also came to speak with the children and asked them to tell him all they could remember. This man explained how this fire would cost the insurance company many thousands of dollars. And that all because of some wicked joke. The boys felt bad about having been involved with Frank. They were very, very sorry.



Just when they thought this was the last of the interviews there was another knock on the door. There was a man and a lady who also wanted to find out what had happened. They said they came from the RSPCA. “What does that mean?” said Ivan. “RSPCA is short for Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals”, his father explained. The boys had to tell their story all over again to the RSPCA Inspectors. They





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explained that Frank would be in real trouble if they could find him. They also said that they work together with the police. So somehow they were quite confident of finding Frank. The lady explained how cruel it is to attack a defenceless little animal. They can't speak up for themselves. That's why we use advertising material with pictures of badly treated animals. Each year the RSPCA receives about 3000 complaints about cruelty to animals in Western Australia. They want to encourage members of the public to report cases of cruelty. The RSPCA relies on the public to be the eyes and ears within the community. They hope members of the public will report any animal welfare concerns.

Jason and Ivan listened attentively to what these RSPCA Inspectors had to say.

After the Inspectors left their father reminded them of the importance to keep away from bad company. It can get you into real trouble as you have experienced now. And, more importantly, it dishonours God's Name.

Dad also had a few things to say about their smoking. It is not only a filthy habit but, more importantly, it is a killer. It is not without any reason that all cigarette packets have to display the warning "SMOKING KILLS". And killing is against the sixth commandment they were reminded by their parents. Dad also said that he was not very impressed about them secretly climbing out of the window when the parents thought they were busy doing their homework. This time the boys listened respectfully and promised to be more obedient. They also had to promise to be more serious about their school work.

"With God's help you can do it", Dad said.

"You know what, Dad?" Jason said: "When I leave school I think I would like to help these inspectors of the RSPCA. Maybe I can then somehow pay back for the wrong we did".



SpindleWorks 



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“That is a marvellous idea”, Dad said.

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