

'And you must be the new arrival,' said another, looking at Barnaby, who was lying flat against the top of his cage. 'Look at you, you're floating!'

Barnaby stared at him and thought about happier times, like the day Captain W. E. Johns kicked a football past Henry into the goal in their back garden.

'Ah, don't look so miserable,' said the man. 'We've put something very special in here, just for you.'

Inside the Portakabin, Barnaby was astonished to see that a mattress had been nailed to the ceiling in the corner, just like Alistair had done when he was a baby. The very sight of it made him long for home.

'Is it a David Jones Bellissimo plush medium mattress?' he asked hopefully.

'No, it's from the Argos economy line,' replied the man, releasing the boy from his cage. 'But it should do the trick.'

'What a curious place,' said Francis when they were alone, gazing out at the mansion where the President of Ireland lived.

'Look over there,' said Delilah, pointing at the big top, which had been constructed in the centre of the park with a sign that proclaimed **FREAKITUDE!** It was surrounded by caricatures of various strange-looking individuals, none of whom bore any resemblance to the people currently

being held captive. 'That's where they'll parade us like . . . like . . .'

'Like freaks,' said Jeremy, sitting down in a corner and burying his face in his flippers.

Later that night, however, after dinner, something unexpected took place. Captain Hoseason had been invited to dine with the President, who was intending to give him a stern lecture in two languages on how much he disapproved of what he was doing, and the freaks were gathered in a corner of the room playing cards, with Barnaby watching the action from above and trying not to shout out when he saw that someone had a particularly good hand. It was in the middle of a game of poker that they heard a curious scraping sound coming from the keyhole.

'What's that?' asked Jeremy in fright.

They made their way back to their respective cages as the scraping continued – until finally the lock gave way and the door was flung open to reveal an elderly man; the same man who had thrown himself at Captain Hoseason earlier in the day.

'Hell's bells!' cried the man triumphantly. 'I did it!'

'Who are you?' asked Liam McGonagall.

'Shush, keep your voices down,' he said, poking his head back out of the door and looking around nervously. 'Is everyone here?'