

CHAPTER 3

Saturday Matinee Movies

Saturday mornings were movie time for kids in the 1950s, and our local theater carried all the popular kid flicks; Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Lash LaRue, Abbott & Costello, to mention a few. A cartoon, a newsreel about world events, and a cliffhanger serial from some older movie, such as Buck Rogers, usually preceded each movie. We'd get there early in hopes of getting good seats and to be first in line at the snack bar. The cost for a movie was ten cents for children, twelve and under, increasing to twenty-five cents by the late '50s. Fifteen cents would buy popcorn and a drink, and if you felt rich, you could buy most candy selections for a nickel.

One Saturday in the summer of 1954, our theater showed a movie classic from 1943, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* with Lon Chaney, Jr. and Bela Lugosi. All of us wanted to see this movie real bad. Mouth's brother had seen it and told him about the blood and guts and that it scared him so bad he wet his pants. Of course, we didn't believe him, but it made us want to see that flick even more. Now in order to get to go, we had to be really good the week before and maybe even earn enough money to pay our own way. If there was a movie that I really wanted to

see, I was always especially good that week. The big threat from my mom and dad forever loomed, “If you don’t behave, you are not going to the movie on Saturday.” My parents would supply the quarter for the movie, popcorn, and a drink, but I had to use my own money for candy.

For *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, I almost didn’t get to go. I had to beg my parents because my mom was afraid that I’d get too scared. I boasted, “My sister would get scared and cry but not me.” After three days of being really good and extra polite, my mother backed down and let me go, and was I excited! Not everyone was so lucky, Mouth was grounded, Bouncy didn’t have the money, and Tank’s over-protective mother wouldn’t let him go. The rest of us left early to be first in line.

As we made our way to the theater in the town center, Gabby grabbed two apples from a neighbor’s tree, which was very close to the sidewalk. “What are you going to do with those apples? They’re not ripe,” stated Seeds. “They’ll make you sick.”

“I don’t care, I like them green. Want one?” Seeds shrugged him off. Gabby ate most of one apple and then tossed both of them over a fence as we walked along the sidewalk.

Twitch was in the lead and started carefully stepping over the cracks in the sidewalk. He was playing Step-on-a-Crack-and-Break-Your-Mother’s-Back. He looked at the rest of us and started calling the names of anyone who stepped on a crack. He’d holler, “You just broke your mother’s back.”

Well, none of us would dare think of causing such a calamity, so we all joined in the game. This caused us to pick up the pace, and soon Booger said, “I don’t know why y’all are in such a hurry to get to the theater. They won’t let anyone in until just before the movie starts.”

Speedy responded, “Come on, Booger. Keep up, or we won’t ask you

to go next time. You're always so slow, and I bet you've broken your mother's back ten times already."

"Hey, wait. I'm coming, and don't say that about my mother," whined Booger.

When we got to the theater, a line was already forming in front of the ticket window, but the line moved fast, and then everyone started to gather in front of the theater doors. We each bought a ticket and joined the herd at the doors. Gabby squeezed in between two girls and wormed his way forward. Speedy and Twitch followed close behind. "Hey, stop pushing and don't cut in line. We were here before you," said a large girl with curls.

Speedy replied, "I'm sorry, but this is an emergency. You see the little guy leading the way?"

The girl said, "Yes."

"Well, he ate two green apples on the way here, and he's got a bad case of the runs," explained Speedy.

Twitch chimed in, "Me, too."

The doors opened, and Gabby, Speedy, and Twitch raced to the snack bar. Limpy, Seeds, Booger, and Marbles raced to the door leading into the theater auditorium. They always liked to sit as close to the screen as they could. They would stake out their seats and then take turns visiting the snack bar. The rest of us went to the snack bar line first and were happy to take up seats near the rear of the theater.

I got my usual small popcorn, small drink, and Jujubes and joined in with the others to search for seats. I usually got Jujubes because they would last for the entire movie. We lucked out and got great seats in the center about fifteen rows from the rear. Most kids passed by these seats looking for a place near the front. If they couldn't find any, they returned

to empty seats nearer the rear. Limpy, Seeds, Booger, and Marbles were about seven rows in front of us, so Gabby and Speedy tossed popcorn and other items at their heads. They hit Marbles in the head a couple of times, and a boy in the row behind him got a little popcorn in his hair, as well. Both turned but didn't suspect us, since we, except Twitch, pretended to be interested in the rear of the theater.

Marbles shouted, "Cut it out, Twitch." The boy behind him yelled the same. Twitch started to protest but instead slid down into the seat to make himself less conspicuous. Almost immediately, the lights dimmed, and everyone cheered and forgot about less important things. The cartoon lit up the screen, and the audience hollered and cheered for the Tom & Jerry cartoon that was unfolding on the movie screen.

"Shortstop and Cowboy, you shouldn't eat your popcorn so fast. Y'all won't have any left for the movie," suggested Smarty. He was older and more mature and sometimes offered words of wisdom to us younger guys. We didn't mind, and we slowed our pace a bit to save some for the main feature.

After the cartoon, a newsreel came on featuring something about President Eisenhower. The politics didn't really interest us, but we actually watched carefully, hoping to see someone get shot or something cool like that. The newsreel finished, and the cheering once again erupted throughout the theater. The theater went dark, and boos started, projectiles flew over the seats, and some kids tossed empty containers. Then suddenly, Flash Gordon's name appeared across the screen. After more cheering, the theater became quiet as the short cliffhanger began with fast action, intrigue, and no romance. As the movie progressed, the theater was abuzz with sounds of cheers, boos, and gasps as Flash Gordon performed his wizardry against the villain. Then, just as the villain seemed

to be conquering our hero, across the screen flashed a sentence, "To be continued next week." And the theater was once again filled with boos, but not for long. Credits began to scroll across the screen as scary music played for the feature film, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*.

The music sent chills down my back, but I watched, along with about a hundred other kids, with great anticipation for the appearance of the monsters. Since the movie had a story line to develop, some parts of the movie didn't keep everyone's interest. As a result some kids started acting up and throwing stuff, but the ushers patrolled the aisles to calm things down. It wasn't uncommon to see one or more kids being escorted out of the theater because of some infraction. None of us ever acted bad enough, or rather got caught acting bad enough, to get thrown out. When Frankenstein and the Wolf Man appeared, gasps were heard, especially from the girls. As the action began to build, Speedy left his seat and entered the row of seats behind Limpy, Seeds, Booger, and Marbles. He took a seat behind them.

"What on earth is he doing down there?" asked Smarty.

"I bet he's up to no good," I said, and I was right. As the monsters appeared and the tension on the screen mounted, Speedy's head disappeared below the seat back, and in a few minutes, Booger flew upward out of the seat, screaming. Popcorn and candy flew along with him.

"Wow, I've never seen Booger move so fast," commented Shortstop. Limpy and Marbles seemed to be trying to calm Booger down as Seeds and other kids looked around to see the cause of the commotion. Kids in the rows in front of us began to rise from their seats like a tidal wave moving to the rear of the theater. Then Speedy emerged from under the seat in front of us to slowly and inconspicuously take up his seat on our row. Naturally, ushers came with their flashlights to investigate, but

everything had settled down by the time they arrived. Booger didn't seem to have a clue about what had happened, and our entire row worked hard not to laugh so we wouldn't draw attention to ourselves. No one tattled, and after a brief look around, the ushers left.

The movie was fantastic, and we talked about our favorite scenes as we made our way back to Sharp Street. "Booger, why are you carrying that popcorn box like that?" questioned Shortstop.

"Oh, no reason," Booger stated.

"Well, you should move it, you look funny."

"I'm playing a game."

"It looks weird holding it down there."

The subject quickly changed. "Hey, where was all the blood and guts that Mouth's brother said was in the movie? I didn't see any."

"I think he was just pulling Mouth's leg, but it was still scary."

"Yeah, it was really cool to see them fight."

Gabby asked Booger, "What happened to you during the movie? I thought you were imitating Flash Gordon and trying to fly right through the roof."

"You're so funny!" Booger said, irritated. "Which one of you guys grabbed my legs? It was at a really scary part, and you made me miss it."

All of us started laughing, but I thought Speedy and Gabby were going to bust a gut. They laughed and laughed until they couldn't walk anymore.

"You think it's really funny, don't you? I'm going to get you next time. Just wait and see, and you owe me for popcorn and candy, too," complained Booger.

Speedy and Gabby were laughing hysterically so they didn't respond, but Booger seemed to have figured out the guilty party, primarily because

of their laughter. They laughed most of the way home about one thing or another. They often entertained each other that way. Booger said nothing more about it.

Back in our neighborhood, we were getting ready to go to our homes, when Speedy grabbed the popcorn box out of Booger's hands. "Hey, stop! Give it back!" shouted Booger.

"Booger, did you spill your drink or wet your pants?" asked Limpy. "You're all wet."

"I spelled my drink."

"You wet your pants," taunted Speedy.

"So that's what I smelled during the movie," complained Marbles with indignation.

The laughter and teasing resumed, so Booger protests weren't heard by anyone. As the taunting continued, he ran home as fast as his feet would carry him. The rest of us eventually went home, as well, to report in to our wardens.

This seemed to be a requirement for most of us. Moms and dads, but mostly moms, wanted to know about the movie; if anyone misbehaved; who we saw there; how much junk we ate, etc. We also had to change our clothes because going to the movies required us to dress in school clothes. So before we could go out to play, we had to change into play clothes.

The next afternoon we all gathered to play baseball in the large lot across from my house. Bouncy, Tank, and Mouth wanted to know all about the movie. They were especially interested in knowing about the fight between the two monsters. We all chimed in with bits and pieces about the movie, telling about our favorite parts. Gabby started laughing again as he told about Booger jumping high out of his seat at a scary part, and the laughter was contagious, except for Booger. Gabby went

on telling them about how Booger walked home from the movies with a box of popcorn held in front of his pants, and when Speedy grabbed the box out of Booger's hand, we could see that Booger had peed in his pants. Again the teasing of Booger went on for some time.

As the laughter died down, I said, "Booger, what's that on the back of your leg?"

"Oh, nothing," he replied.

"It's all red and looks like it's beginning to bruise," Speedy commented.

"I fell last night. My favorite part of the movie was..." and he proceeded to change the subject from him back to the movie. We left the matter alone, but later after Booger left for home, Limpy told us that when he went home to change clothes after the movie, he heard yelling and crying coming from Booger's house.

"I could hear Booger's dad yelling and hitting him, and then I could hear Booger crying and yelling to please stop. He kept saying, 'I'm sorry,' over and over again while his dad hit him."

"Poor Booger! I wonder why he was being punished," Seeds said.

"I wonder if it had anything to do with him peeing in his pants," Speedy mused.

"The bruises sure look bad. I couldn't imagine my dad hitting me and causing a bruise," noted Bouncy.

We milled around for a while talking about various things, and trying to forget all about Booger's problem. Suddenly, Bouncy started running and jumping.

"What the heck are you doing?" exclaimed Twitch.

"Catching June bugs. Come on. They're really beginning to swarm!" replied Bouncy. With that announcement, Seeds ran into his nearby house to get some jars and thread, and we all joined Bouncy leaping

around the yard like crazy people.

The June bugs were large, green, and abundant in the summer. We'd catch the bugs in our hands and place them in a jar until we had enough for everyone. Then we'd cut a twenty-foot length of thread and tie one end to a back leg of the bug. Sometimes we'd team up and help each other tie the thread. When everyone was ready, we'd spread out and begin spinning the string around our heads with the bugs on the outer end. This encouraged the bugs to attempt to fly, making a noise with their wings. As we picked up speed and got our bugs flying at full throttle, we'd move in on an opponent to begin June bug aerial combat.

"I got you good!" exclaimed Seeds, as Bouncy's bug fell towards the ground. Bouncy retreated backwards several yards and continued to fly his bug around his head to revive it from the collision with Seeds' bug. He was successful and raced in to attack Seeds who was now part of a large circle including Smarty, Shortstop, and Mouth. They were circling their bugs around their heads and trying to avoid contact with each other's bugs. Bouncy joined the group next to Seeds, and the other boys spread out, enlarging the circle to include him.

Speedy, Twitch, and I were having an aerial war of our own. We flew our bugs down, up, around and around almost as if it was choreographed. We laughed excitedly as we came very close to hitting each other's bugs many times. As we flew, Gabby entered the battle and almost immediately our stings became irreversibly entangled in midair. The bugs collided, and we jerked and pulled trying to untangle them. We couldn't free them, and all four bugs plunged quickly to their death in a heap on the ground. The other guys soon had a similar outcome, and that day's June bug aerial combat ended as it did most other days, disastrous and quick.

Limpy stayed out of the fray and continued to fly his bug in graceful maneuvers until it ceased making noise and died on the end of the string. We looked for more June bugs. There were plenty, but before we caught them, it was time for supper.

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“Aerial June bug combat,” Sam said laughing. “Girls would never have thought of such a thing.”

Clay smiled. “Unfortunately, we couldn’t catch birds. Boy, wouldn’t that have been some battle with crows tied to the end of a twenty-foot string.”

“Crazy boys,” she commented, shaking her head.

“Did you ever see *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*?”

“No, I never saw that one, but I remember the movies on Saturday, and I remember the boys acting up. I guess that’s a universal thing with boys. I didn’t get to go often, but I’d go when I visited my cousin in Austin. She was really into the movie thing back then, just like you and your tribe.”

“I loved Saturday movies. We rarely went when school was in session, but we rarely missed a Saturday movie during the summer. Sometimes we were mischievous, but all-in-all, we were pretty well behaved.”

“Mischievous but well behaved. Isn’t that an oxymoron?” Sam laughed. “Speedy was definitely mischievous, but he was also quite clever.”

“Yeah, he was, and I’ve got a lot more stories about Speedy and Gabby’s antics.”

Sam sat quietly for a few moments. “You know, Booger’s father should have been reported to the authorities. Poor little guy.”

“I hated the way Booger’s father treated him, but there wasn’t anything any of us could do about it. It all happened inside his house. Unfortunately, there’s more about that coming up.”